

THE WAR COPPICE, CATERHAM, SURREY.

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THE hill now known as War Coppice, in Caterham, is usually considered, and I think with good reason, to be the site of an intrenched camp, or fort. What remains, although not very extensive, is, I think, sufficiently well marked to leave little doubt as to its origin and uses.

On the north towards Caterham, we find a double vallum, extending for about 150 yards. The inner rampart is from 12 to 15 feet above the foss, which was probably 6 or 8 feet wide, while the outer rampart on the inside is only 6 to 8 feet high, sloping considerably, in some places as much as 12 or 14 feet on the outside.

These ramparts describe the segment of a circular, or elliptical, enclosure; towards the west they seem to fall into, or at least to touch, the ancient road known as the Pilgrim's Way, to which I shall have occasion to refer. From this point its course becomes somewhat obscure, probably owing to agricultural operations; but it may, I think, be traced in the line of the steep bank, which is shown on the parish map, the ditch having probably been filled in by throwing in the second or lower vallum; and then it proceeded to the south, where its course has been lost by cutting away the hill-side for the chalk-pit. The whole of the south and south-east portions have been lost in the same way by excavations for chalk, the vallum terminating on the eastern extremity, at an abrupt and steep precipice.

Assuming that this supposition is tolerably accurate,

the original camp would have occupied a space of from 20 to 25 acres, which is about the usual quantity of land enclosed in such fortresses.

I have looked in vain for any distinct traces of a sally-port; probably it was on that part of the circumference which was destroyed in the south; possibly it may have been in the line of the road which is now used by the chalk-diggers.

No traces of human habitation have, as I believe, ever been observed within or near the camp. If, as we suppose, it was of British origin, we ought to find in, or near it, flint arrow-heads and weapons, as at Maiden Bower, Herts, and Cissbury and Chanctonbury, in Sussex. Probably a more careful search may bring some of these things to light.

The reasons for concluding that this was a British fort may be shortly stated. That it was a fort of some kind is clear. The steep ramparts and the deep foss could not have been required for agricultural purposes. It must have cost much labour to make them, and we must believe that the enclosure was completed towards the west and south, for otherwise the labour and expense of constructing the portions which remain would have been wasted.

That it was not a Roman camp may be inferred from the entire absence of any objects of Roman workmanship, from its position on the top of a hill, remote from water, and at that date without fuel, and from its circular form—all which circumstances seem to militate against the belief in its Roman origin.

That it was a British fort seems highly probable, from its being found exactly in such a situation as the Britons are usually understood to have chosen; and still more from the circumstance that it was placed immediately in the line of the Pilgrim's Way, which there can be little doubt was an ancient British track-way, and that, too, just at the most important strategical point; viz., where it commanded two extensive valleys, and where it was also intersected by the old Stane Street, which is believed to have been another British track-way, and on which

stood the fort of Anstie Bury, recently visited by our Society, and described by Mr. Godwin-Austen in our Proceedings.

The course of the Pilgrim's Way has now been traced at broken intervals for a considerable distance; but at this spot, and for some distance east and west, its continuity is well marked. It passes immediately beneath, or rather winds round, the north-eastern extremity of the camp; and the camp must then have completely commanded the access by this important road.

It has been usual to consider this road merely as a passage-road for pilgrims coming from Winchester and the West of England to make their offerings at Becket's shrine in Canterbury Cathedral. Mr. Leveson-Gower, in his memoir upon Titsey, has suggested, however, that it was an ancient British road. I have long held the same opinion. I believe that it existed in pre-Roman times, and very possibly before London, Winchester, or Canterbury, were founded.

It is particularly worthy of notice, that in several places in the course of this road (so far, at least, as it has been determined in this county), or at convenient distances from it, we meet with Roman villas, or other traces of Roman occupation. These occur, in almost a direct line from west to east, at Hilbury, Farley Heath, Albury, Walton-on-the-Hill, Gatton, Pendhill, and Titsey, and I believe in some other places.

The presence of these remains, however, may be very well accounted for without attributing the road to the Romans. We know that it was not one of the great roads described in the Itinerary of Antoninus. We have abundant reason, as I shall presently attempt to show, to believe that before the Roman occupation, the Britons must have had a road in this direction. We know also that the Romans, like all other invaders, made what use they could of existing roads; and as this road was throughout just on the verge of the great Andred forest, which abounded with red deer, and other beasts of chase, we can hardly doubt that the villas which were on, or near it, were hunting-lodges — places of resort

for the patricians of that day, just as Scotch deer forests now are for our own.

In Dean Stanley's very interesting work, entitled, "Historical Memorials of Canterbury," the author has inserted a notice of this road, by Mr. Albert Way, in which he says,—“It is difficult to explain the preference shown, as it would appear, by the pilgrims of later times for a route which avoided the towns, villages, and more populous districts, while a road for the most part is found at no great distance pursuing its course through them, parallel to that of the secluded Pilgrim's Path.” And he suggests that this may have been owing to the feeling of insecurity existing in times of misrule and distrust, when, “as in the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath, in the days of Joel, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways.” I am unable to accept this view. The pilgrims whose course Chaucer has described in his beautiful poem certainly exhibited no preference for by-ways and secluded roads; nor is it likely that travellers bound upon so pious an errand as a pilgrimage to St. Thomas, could possibly be exposed to violence or robbery in any town, or village, in England.

When this road was used by the pilgrims, no parallel road existed; and it can hardly be said that even in our own days any road is to be found running due east and west through the Weald valley. Indeed, on a slight glance at the map, it will be evident that the course of this way, at this spot and as far as we know it in this county, was as nearly as possible in a straight line from Winchester to Canterbury. But however this may be, we may be quite certain that the road was made, not by, or for, the West country pilgrims, but long before Becket's murder, and long before the Weald towns and villages had an existence, and that its course was originally determined by geological conditions; for, as we may regard it as certain that the pursuits and occupations of every people, and thus, to a certain extent, their character and dispositions, are influenced by the geological conditions of the country which they inhabit; so also, the same

conditions must, in the earlier ages at least, have had an important influence on the course of roads, and incidentally upon the route, and fortunes of armies, and thus occasionally of kingdoms and states.

The Pilgrim's Way may perhaps furnish an illustration of the truth of this observation. We have abundant evidence, from various ancient chronicles and records, that long before, and until long after, the Norman Conquest, the great valley of the Weald was covered with a thick, almost impenetrable forest; and this evidence is strikingly confirmed by the absence of any Celtic remains, or of any monuments or towns of very great antiquity within the district.

At the date of the Saxon invasion under Ella in 477, and of the Danish under Hasten in 893, this wood of Andred, or Andred's leage or territory, is described. It is said to have been 120 miles long from east to west, by 30 broad, which, in truth, is a very accurate estimate. It is spoken of as a great wood, as a "*locus incius*," an impenetrable or impassable place; and Ethelward says that the Danes, having landed at *Limene* in 893, proceeded "*pedentim*," step by step, to attack the West Saxons in Hants and Berkshire, and that they passed by "*latebras cujusdam sylvæ immanis*,"—the lurking-places of a certain vast forest.

The passage from east to west through the Weald valley was not only then difficult, if not impossible, but it was dangerous also, for peaceful pilgrims at least; since it was the resort of robbers and outlaws, a sort of South country Sherwood. The Anglo-Saxon word for a robber was, in fact, *Weald-genge*, a farer, or dweller, in the Weald. We have no longer that term; and possibly the same meaning may be expressed by our word outlaw, A.-S. *out-leage*, a dweller or frequenter of districts lying outside the læge, or settled territory.

Such being the condition of this district, it is evident that, until a comparatively recent period, it was impassable by travellers. But as long as the South and West districts of England were inhabited, it was essential that there should be a communication from

east to west; and as this could not possibly be found in the forest, it was found, just as we find it in the Pilgrim's Way, on the verge of the forest; and it is worthy of notice, that Colonel Lane Fox has lately described a somewhat similar road running east and west along the northern slope of the South Downs, about halfway down the hill-side. Portions of this ancient track-way I have lately seen in the hills north of Folkstone.

In the map lately published by the Geological Society, and, indeed, in any geological map, the valley of the Weald is shown to consist of certain clays, sands, and marls, which are well adapted for the growth of thick underwood and large trees; and thus, until a comparatively very recent period, this district was covered by the dense forest alluded to in the old chronicles; and the task of cutting a practicable road through this, would at any time have been great, but in those days impossible. The chalk-hills, however, which border the Weald on both sides present no such obstacles. The ancient Britons found a road ready made, or rather could dispense with a road when travelling on the short, elastic turf which covers the chalk wolds, or downs. The Romans coming after them, and, in due time, the pilgrims succeeding the Romans, availed themselves of the same advantages, preferring, very naturally, "*stare*," or rather "*ambulare super antiquas vias*," to the labour and expense of cutting a new road through a thick forest.

I trust that this digression may not be looked upon as altogether irrelevant. The camp commands the road, and the road leads to and from the camp, and the history of either can hardly fail to have some bearing upon that of the other.

In investigating the history of any ancient work, it is of great importance to have regard to the name by which it is, or was, formerly known, as well as the names of places in the neighbourhood. We may be certain that almost every local name had, at one time or other, some distinct and well-understood meaning. I confess, how-

ever, that the names by which this camp is known, do not appear to me to throw any light on its origin, and history. The little wood south of the vallum was in Aubrey's time known as *War Coppice*. I say in Aubrey's time, because when I have asked some of the old inhabitants of the neighbourhood about it, they hardly seemed to know it by that name; and but for the inquiries of visitors and antiquaries, I believe that this name would have become quite obsolete. However that may be, it seems highly improbable that this name was intended to designate this place as having been a camp, or the scene of any military operations. I do not think it has ever been usual to apply the epithet "*war*" to any field, or place, as having been either historically, or traditionally, the site of a siege or battle, and still less is it likely that such a name should be given to a little wood or coppice; if given at all, it would be applied to the whole district. A war in a coppice is like a storm in a butter-boat.

So much for the word *war*; the second epithet, *coppice*, seems to be equally inapplicable. *Coppice* is not an Anglo-Saxon word; it is comparatively modern, derived from the Norman-French *coupiz*, from *couper*, to cut, because the underwood was cut, as it still is, at stated times.

But it may be asked, if the word *war* does not refer to any military operations, what does it mean, and why was it used? May not the original name have been *Warwick Coppice*?

The lands immediately adjoining to the west, and continuously with this wood, are now, and have long been, known as *Warwick Wold Farm* and *Warwick Wold* or *Down*. They form part of the same estate with the coppice; and it seems probable that the coppice also was originally known as *Warwick Coppice*, and that the word *Warwick* has been shortened, or corrupted, into *War*.

It is said that the hill has sometimes been known as the *Cardinal's Cap*. It is mentioned by that name in Manning and Bray's "*History of Surrey*;" but I have

met with no attempt to explain the meaning of it, nor do I think that it is known to the country people.

It seems not at all unlikely that the name of the village in which the camp is situate may have some reference to this work. May not *Caterham* have been originally *Casterham*, the dwelling-place or town near the old castle? I certainly know of no instance of a contraction of *Ceaster* or *Caster* into *Cater*; but it is by no means improbable, as it would so easily be formed, one letter, *s*, only being omitted. The place is not mentioned in Domesday, nor in the Codex, and therefore we have no ancient authority either one way or other. There are, however, many towns in England which take their names from their neighbourhood to old castles or camps,—as *Caster-ton*, *Castleton*, *Chester-ford*, *Castle Acre*, &c. Nor is it any objection to this hypothesis that the fortress was of British origin, while the name is Anglo-Saxon, and that the word *Ceaster* is usually found to designate a Roman settlement or fort. When a party of Anglo-Saxon squatters took possession of this district, they would adopt a title from their own language, without stopping to inquire if the fortress was of Roman or British construction.

The Rev. Isaac Taylor, in his late work, entitled “Names and Places,” observes as to Caterham, that it may perhaps be referred to the Celtic *Cath*, *battle*. Notwithstanding the weight which this able writer’s opinion justly carries with it, it seems to me that this derivation cannot be accepted. *Ham* is beyond all question an *Anglo-Saxon* suffix, and it is extremely unusual to find it tacked on to a Celtic prefix. The names of the several parishes in the immediate neighbourhood are all purely Anglo-Saxon, and three of these have the last syllable in *ham*.

Chelsham clearly derives its name from the bed of pebbles on which it stands, *Cysel* being the *Anglo-Saxon* word for a pebble, as in *Chelsfield*, and *Chislehurst*. *Warlingham*, and *Woldingham*, may very probably be Saxon patronymics, having reference to the tribes, or families, of Wealdings, and Waldings, or Woldings; and, applying the rule *noscitur a sociis*, which is as useful in philology

as in other matters, I think we may reasonably conclude that Caterham is a pure Anglo-Saxon word.

Upon the whole, then, it seems reasonable to conclude that this ruined fort, or camp, was a British fort, standing on an ancient British track-way,—that the names War Coppice and Cardinal's Cap are trivial and meaningless, and that Caterham is a name descriptive of the proximity of this village to the more ancient camp.
