

ANTIQUITIES OF THE CHILTERN HILLS,

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There is a certain celebrity attached to the name of the Chiltern Hundreds, nominally those of Stoke, Desborough, and Burnham, from the fact that a seat in the Lower House of Parliament is vacated by accepting the Stewardship of the said Hundreds. The Stewardship has this efficacy, because it is still held as a Royal Appointment ; and indicates the time when this forest tract of hill-country required the appointment of Two Knights or Wardens, to act on behalf of the King, for the protection of his liege subjects dwelling in or travelling through these parts. Thus it was an office, speaking more favourably for the Royal care, extended over the subject, than for the security and moral condition of the Chiltern country. The necessity of such a Stewardship implies too clearly a degree of wildness, violence, and lawlessness existing in this unreclaimed part of the country.

But the same wild and woodland features which secured for the Chilterns the unenviable notoriety of the Royal Stewardship, favoured also another purpose, for which this line of country was distinguished. This was the amusement of hunting pursued by the Royal Masters of the Chiltern Knights or Stewards. Here might the beasts of chase be found in abundance, undisturbed by the cultivation of the land, unmolested by the busy haunts of men, alike hateful and hostile to the wild boar and other like animals *ferae naturae*.

That Edward the Third, and his chivalrous son, the Black Prince, frequented this country, is well authenticated by the fact, that in the town of Princes Risborough the Black Prince held a Castle and Demesne, the foundations of the Castle being at this day visible near the church: whilst another seeming indication of the presence of these great personages among the Chiltern Hills, is afforded by the amusing and unpoetical stanza, which imputes to an ancestor of the long-descended family of Hampden, the loss of three manors at once, in consequence of an early outbreak of antiregal independence of cha-

racter, in the shape of a blow administered by the Hampden to the Prince. The stanza is as follows :

"Tring, Wing, and Ivinghoe,
Hampden did forego,
For the striking of a blow,
Right glad to escape so."

But whilst we may believe that the King visited the house of Hampden, and perhaps joined him in a friendly hunting excursion, the fact that the manors in question could not have been thus confiscated because they never had belonged to the Hampden estate, leaves us in the conviction, that there was no such stain upon the loyalty of John Hampden's ancestor, and that he was a better subject than his calumniator was a poet.

The occasional visits of Royal persons to the sequestered haunts of the Chilterns appear also indicated by the significant names of many places among them. Thus we have King's Wood, near St. Leonard's, with King's Ash, and King's Gate, King's Beech, also a venerable tree in the valley below Hampden House, may have witnessed the time when the Monarch partook of his twelve o'clock dinner under its shade, literally "recubans sub tegmine fagi."

Of the Chiltern Hills as a natural feature of the country, those who know them may well speak with pleasure; for it is this district of varied scenery that adds a picturesque quality to the generally monotonous county of Bucks. Taking their rise in Cambridgeshire, and there known as the Gog-Magog Hills, this chain of heights runs through Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, and entering this county by Ivinghoe, at a very fine elevation, runs across in a south-west direction, and leaves it at Chinnor in Oxfordshire. Through Oxfordshire, the Chilterns pursue their course with the same bearing, and in a line but little broken or varied; until after receiving the Thames from the Yale of Oxford, at Goring and Streatly, the change at once their course, and running due westward, form the line of the Berkshire Chilterns, on one of which, near Newbury, is incised the gigantic and rude figure of a horse, well known round all that country.

But if Buckinghamshire falls in for but a narrow section of these conspicuous hills, it receives its full share of their characteristic beauty or boldness. Viewed from the Vale of Aylesbury or of Thame, the appearance of the

hills is that of a high rampart of table-land, of very uniform level, its front to the vale here green with downy turf, there clothed with native and characteristic beechen wood. The escarpment of this high land is very often broken into deep recesses, and penetrated by vallies in some cases, as at Tring, Wendover, and Risborough, running through the chain eastward into the sloping country within the Range. Viewed in profile, the hills present a series of lofty slopes, and bold brows or headlands, some of very sharp descent, and turfed, others covered with hanging woods, in which are found the box and juniper, as well as the ash, oak, and beech. These eminences, attaining the height of 910 feet above the sea level, are all distinguished by that roundness of outline which the Geologist recognizes as peculiar to the chalk formation, of which the Chilterns form a distinguished example: although within the range, at about four miles from the summit, runs a line of hard sandstone boulders, claiming no kindred with the great masses in which they are embedded. It may be observed further, that this platform of high land, showing invariably its steepest face on the north-west limit, is penetrated by vallies running into it at intervals from the plain which carry off its waters. It is at the opening of the vallies or among the declivities of the hills, that there are found those hanging woods and wild glades, which have gained for such spots as Velvet Lawn or Bledlow, their well deserved name for picturesque beauty. Within the high rampart of the hills slopes gently down, for many a mile to the south-eastwards, what may be termed the Chiltern country. It forms a high but undulating tract of hill, vale, and wood, in which the upland Hamlets, with "secure delight," have invited and might still invite the visits of a Milton and in which quiet and picturesque farms, country towns and villages, seated generally by the brook in the vale, a few pleasant with some noble mansions, may claim for the district a character for cheerful rural beauty. Assuredly, from an acquaintance of some years with this country, the writer can promise the lovers of good exercise, fine air, and pleasant scenery, many an agreeable walk or ride over the open commons, or through the shady lanes and fertile fields of this variegated hill country. Let the scenery of Marlow, Missenden, Penn, and Wycombe attest that this is no undue partiality.

Viewed, however, in an antiquarian light, the Chiltern district cannot compare with other counties of older civilization, or more directly Feudal or Ecclesiastical Associations. We have near this spot indeed, the ancient and interesting mansions of Hampden and Chequers; and on the lofty eminence of Ashridge, its noble pile: but we can boast no ruined Castles like Herstmonceaux, or Bodiam, nor any Abbeys like Tintern or Fountains. For of the ancient foundations of Great Missenden and Wycombe, I am not aware that any vestiges remain, beyond those written records which the page of history has rescued from oblivion. The Churches, too, of the Chiltern country are not of a very ancient order, but are for the most part fair specimens of the Architecture of their day.

It is to a much earlier age that the chief Antiquities of the Chilterns belong — an age so remote that the conflict once raging in this neighbourhood, between King and Parliament, Cavalier and Roundhead, appears an event of comparatively recent occurrence; and, perhaps, had those learned Antiquaries, Sir R. C. Hoare, and the Rev. Edward Duke, of Wiltshire, bestowed as much attention on Buckinghamshire Barrows as on the mysterious relics of Salisbury Plain, some connected and even satisfactory theory might have been prepounded of the old-world history of these parts.

True it is, however, that the Chiltern Forest, forming a strong and impenetrable country, abounds with evidence of the care once bestowed by its inhabitants on camp and fortification. They were a warlike people, who once on these natural ramparts were driven, in self-defence, to study their rude art of war. Whilst in honour probably of some Chieftain slain in battle, many a Barrow, or Sepulchral Tumulus, rises in the solitary place, a durable monument indeed of death and sepulture; but no memorial of the name or deeds of him who was consigned to the "narrow dwelling-place" within. Singularly striking for the most part is the situation of the "lonely Barrow" on some deserted plain or lofty eminence, whence we may imagine the spirit of the dead surveying the wide spread scene of his former power or enjoyments — a scene now overlooked by the earthen memorial of his mortality.

Many such Barrows exist among the Chiltern Hills. Of these there are remarkable instances on the west side of Bledlow Down. On the western foot of Lodge Hill in

Saunderton parish, are two conspicuous Barrows. In the same parish, near Slough, are three Barrows, two of them having been recently opened with no result. There is a single Barrow on White-leaf Hill, another on the Down above Wendover, another on Ivinghoe Beacon. In Hampden Park, and in a wood adjoining are three Barrows of great size, and very interesting character, large enough to have formed like that above Velvet Lawn, the base of a Keep or Tower. That such earthen mounds are British places of interment, is the received opinion. A very ancient authority, Herodotus, speaks of this kind of sepulture as a Scythian or Celtic mode of burial. He terms them from the manner of their formation, Χαμματα—Herod, iv. 71.

It is probable that the other considerable earth works of this district may be attributed to the Britons and Romans, and as *tradition* goes, to the Saxons and Danes. We possess in proof of the former assertion, the square camp of the Roman close by the circular work of the Briton, the two forming rival positions, or camps of observation. Thus at Tottenhoe, on the borders of this county and Bedfordshire, there is a circular work of Ditch and Rampart, whilst close at hand is a large square or rectangular Fortification, called Maiden Bower, which is probably the Roman work, and which reminds the Antiquary of a similar strong-hold near Dorchester, in Dorset, there called Maiden *Castle*. Proceeding along the Chilterns, from the eastward, we find works of similar aspect, as on the hill near Aldbury, in Herts. At Hawridge, near Chesham, is a very strong circular embankment, with deep fosse and well-defined entrance. It is now occupied by a farm-house, and doubtless was made use of for a moated mansion long after its original purpose was fulfilled. Again, nearly in a line between Chesham and Berkhamstead, stand in close vicinity a circular and a rectangular camp; or, as it is believed, British and Roman Posts. At Cholesbury, near Tring, is a very extensive camp or fortified Village, of circular form, with deep moat and lofty rampart, in one side of which stands the Parish Church. The earthen mound is here overgrown with trees, and within its circuit are cultivated lands, of a size to justify the opinion that this was rather a stronghold for *residence* than a work for warlike purposes.

It would be tedious to mention the relics of this nature

scattered thickly about the recesses of the Chiltern Hills. Mysterious walls and dykes meet the observant eye in the woods near Missenden, and around St. Leonard's, the moat filled with water, and the lines towering among the trees with a regularity of design, that speaks of some strong force employed, and important purpose to be fulfilled, in the operation. On a lofty eminence, within sight of Princes Risborough, named Long Down, we meet with another fortification or camp; now, however, devoted to the purposes of a Religion benignly contrasting with the Heathen rites, once connected with the spot; for the place itself and the wood in which it is partly hidden, form part of the Glebe of Hampden Rectory, and the wood is probably called from that circumstance "Pulpit Wood." Again, the traveller from High to West Wycombe, may observe on his left hand the irregular outline of an ancient stronghold, described in the Ordnance map as a "Danish" camp. And at any rate he cannot fail to notice the fine situation and commanding strength of the earthwork on West Wycombe Hill. This interesting work is circular. The agger is very clearly defined, and within its girdle stands the Parish Church, as once did the ancient village, although for purposes of shelter or of water, or both, it has since quietly sunk down into the valley below.

Arriving at the interesting country around Velvet Lawn, and examining the features of its picturesque hills, we observe a Mound of massive size, situated on a spur of the Chilterns, yet commanding very finely the surrounding country. The name of this conspicuous work is Kimble Castle. The tradition concerning it, is, that it was the Hold of Cunobeline, or Cymbeline, a British King, and that an action was fought in this neighbourhood between the sons of the British Chieftain and the Roman General, Aulus Plautius, in which one of the British Princes named Togodumnus, was slain. The facts that the ancient name of Kimble is Cynebel, or Cunobel — that there are funeral Barrows near the spot — and that history attests that such an action was fought in this vicinity — appear to give much weight to a tradition which certainly invests Kimble Castle, or as it is sometimes called, Belinuss Castle, with no common interest. An inspection of the spot will not disappoint, either the lover of nature, or the student of the ancient history of our country. We have, too, in the parish of Princes Risborough, vestiges of camp

and barrow, from both which coins, urns, and other relics, have been taken. The Malt, or *Mort* Hills, are traditionally burial places; whilst Horsenden, or Horsa's dwelling, and the Cross of Whiteleaf, point rather to Saxon than to Celtic times.

That the Roman legions ever penetrated the surrounding hills, is more than even an Antiquary can conjecture; though the Hamlet of Speen may possibly derive its name, as Speen in Berkshire is supposed to do, from the Roman Spina. It is still a thorny nook in the woods. Nor is it unlikely that the Icknield way, pursuing its persevering course to the westward, along the lower eminence of the Chilterns, would be overlooked by so good a judge of roads as the Roman Conqueror. For the Icknield was, I presume, an ancient British Trackway from East to West, and may have been so called from the Icenii, from whose territory it takes its rise.

But I must hasten to conclude this paper, with a few remarks on one of the chief mysteries left us from the olden time in the keeping of the Chiltern Hills. Mystery certainly envelopes the origin, and a solemn awe is felt by the country folk in the presence of a work passing by the ominous name of Grimsdyke, *i.e.* the foss or ditch of Grim. The name itself is ancient. It occurs in a charter granted by Edmund Earl of Cornwall, in the reign of King Henry the Third, to his Monastery of Bonhommes, at Ashridge in Bucks, and describes the course of a way, as leading "usque ad quoddam fossatum quod dicitur Grymes ditch" —*Clutterbuck's Herts*, vol. i., p. 291. The name is also found in Scotland as descriptive of a similar work. It is there called Graham's Graeme's or Grim's dyke, and is believed to have been executed by Lolius Urbicus. It is an immense ditch, averaging 40 feet in width, and stretching from sea to sea. By the country people it is commonly asserted that the Chiltern Grim's Dyke runs round the world, for the notion of German or Atlantic oceans is but imperfectly presented to their minds; or, at least, the Great Dyke is more than a match for the sea, and like the Sea Serpent, drags its length along beneath the surface. Certain it is, that the extent of country traversed by the Dyke is very great, and the labour of moving so great a mass of earth could only have been undertaken when whole tribes turned out to break the ground, nothing daunted by the difficulty of moving soil with their fingers, or at best

a wooden spade and wicker-basket. The course of this singular Bank or Ditch is very devious. In is met with in Berkshire, near Streatly, and is traced for a considerable distance. It appears on the Chilterns in Oxfordshire, near Watlington. In this county it has been tracked from Bradenham, whence it runs in bold outline through woods to Lacey Green, forming the boundary of Princes Risborough parish. Thence, turning at right angles, it maintains its conspicuous course, by Redland End, through Hampden Park, where, again turning sharply round, it runs near Hampden House, and onwards by some lofty Barrows, towards Great Missenden. Crossing the valley, we find the well known features of our old friend near King's Ash, in Wendover parish; then passing through woods near St. Leonards, it passes in bold relief over Wigginton Common, and is met with in full preservation above Berkhamstead, in Herts; and crossing the valley northwards at that point stretches over Berkhamstead, Common towards Ashridge.

The main feature of the Dyke consists in its *course*, kept carefully within the platform of the high ground, and generally, when it approaches the outer face of the hills, maintaining a uniform distance from the summit. But for what purpose all this labour? Did this line of embankment serve to connect the Strong Holds of West Wycombe, Cholesbury, and Maiden Bower, not far from which it runs? Or, if a Military Work, would it leave the summit of the hill undefended, and follow the weaker positions, being itself a line of defence too long to be held by troops, without the aid of towers and forts in close connection, such as distinguish the Northern Wall of Severus? Let us then conceive that this work, so massive and continuous, was a territorial line, the boundary of tribes or nations. Let us suppose that its singular appearance and unknown origin have gained it the name it bears. Let us suggest that the name is not a translation of Severus into Grim, as some suppose, but rather, that like other mysterious works, as the Devil's Causeway, or the Devil's Bridge, our Dyke owes its name to the superstition which assigns such matters at once to a supernatural origin; and that the aid of the magician or wizard was necessary for the digging of so deep, so long a trench, for Grima is the Saxon for magician. And with this clue, we may fairly interpret Grimsdyke as the Ditch of the Wizard.

Consistently with such an origin concerning this said Dyke, many and curious traditions are afloat. It is a weird, or wizard spot, upon its hank nothing of good omen happens. I have been told in perfect good faith, by one who dwelt near it, that on Grimsdyke the unhappy Jane Shore perished, being starved to death by King Richard's order, a baker being also put to death for his compassion in offering her a penny loaf. A curious connexion in which to find an historic name, and showing how great names and tragic events are rumoured amongst the people, though often, as in this case, in a distorted shape. That fairies make fun or make mischief, that ghosts and spectres have peculiar liberty on the soil of the Dyke, is the current belief of the country gossips.

I must, however, take my leave of my subject, by confessing that my tale can boast no fairy charm, but that I am content if this simple record of facts and features of the Chiltern Hills may serve to excite interest upon its subject, and direct the researches of more persevering enquirers.