

Wayland's Smithy and the White Horse.

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I.

THE celebrated monument known as Wayland's Smithy is situated in the parish of Ashbury. It is known as Wayland's Smithy, or Wayland Smith (Lysons, *Berks*, p. 215); in a charter of King Edred of the year 955 (Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus*, V. 331, No. 1172) this place is mentioned as a boundary mark under the name of 'Welandes Smiththan.' The term 'Wayland Smith's Cave' appears to be incorrect. Lysons (l.c.) describes it as 'a considerable tumulus, commonly called Wayland-Smith; over which are, irregularly scattered, several of the large stones called Sarsden stones found in that neighbourhood; three of the largest having a fourth laid on them in the manner of the British cromlechs. It is most probable that this tumulus is British.' In 1738 Francis Wise ('A letter to Mr. Mead concerning some antiquities in Berkshire, etc.') said, 'I find sufficient authorities to convince me that it must be Danish,' in fact, the tomb of Baegsceg, one of the Danish kings killed in the Battle of Ashdown in 871.

The engravings in Lysons's *Berkshire* (opp. p. 215) shows a partially denuded tumulus, with the capstone of the eastern transept of the chamber exposed. On plate I, fig. 12, of Akerman's *Archæological Index* (1847), the same part of the dolmen is shown, more or less, as it is to-day. That Lysons's drawing does not give the monument in anything approaching its original form, was proved by excavations made in it in 1919-20. A plan made by Aubrey in 1640 shows a ring of stones surrounding the dolmen; some excavations were made here in 1919-20 by Mr. H. W. J. d'Almaine with the object of testing Aubrey's plan; and some highly interesting facts were revealed as a result.

At the present day the 'dolmen' consists of two transepts lying east and west, approached from the south by a passage

which is now formed by four stones on the east side and five on the west; the plan in the *Archæological Index*, shows four stones on each side, those on the eastern side being represented in positions differing from those of to-day. Outside this passage, at its southern end, are four fallen façade stones: Akerman's plan shows two only. Of the transept capstones, only one—the eastern—remains in position. That of the western transept lies on the ground on the north side of the transept it once covered. Next to it, and opposite the entrance passage, is a third, and smaller, capstone; and next to this again, is a fourth. Whether there was ever a third chamber is uncertain from the present state of the monument; but the position of two stones at the N.W. corner of the eastern transept, and the presence of four capstones, makes it probable that there was. Besides this, Akerman's plan shows a third chamber, narrower than the other two, if it may be called a chamber; for its narrowness suggests that it may be a continuation of the entrance passage into the mound; the remains, however, do not warrant this suggestion. We do not know how much stone has been removed, 'a large quantity of stone having been carted away some years since [1847] to build a barn.' (*Archæological Index*, p. 27.) The length of the monument in its present state, from the façade to the central north capstone, is about 25 feet. The passage lies nearly N.N.W. by S.S.E. The original construction of the whole monument, as revealed by the excavations, was as follows¹: It consisted of two mounds, one made to cover the dolmen, and a later mound covering the first. The first mound was constructed thus: a surface of rammed chalk was prepared and covered with stones; the spaces between the stones were then filled with chalk and earth. Outside this mound, at a distance of about 10 feet, a shallow fosse was dug. This mound terminated at a point 90 feet from the south end of the dolmen; two stones were set up at the northern end. It is probable that the dolmen was covered with earth as high as the central capstone. The south end was formed by a façade of four upright

¹ This description is based on notes taken by myself in June, 1920, on the spot, during the progress of the excavations.

stones set in a wall made of flint and chalk. The second mound was laid on the top of the first ; it consisted of a layer of Sarsen boulders and flints set in a bed of chalk. Along the base, a line of upright stones was set to harmonize it with the already existing southern façade ; this is the ring of stones marked on Aubrey's plan. It appears that this second mound ended at a point some 30 feet north of the termination of the earlier mound ; at this point, portion of a curved line of smallish stones was found, suggesting that the peristalith curved here for the termination of the mound. The following objects were found during the excavations : (1) outside the N.W. corner of the fosse of the first mound, a skeleton of the Neolithic period, in a crouching position, which may have been buried after the raising of the second mound ; (2) one piece of Bronze Age pottery ; (3) four flint flakes ; (4) two iron currency bars, of c. 50 B.C., near one of the façade stones, and now in the British Museum ; (5) two fragments of pottery, of c. 50 B.C., near the eastern peristalith ; and two fragments of pottery, of the same date, near the skeleton ; (6) a fragment of a horn of *Bos longifrons* ; (7) several flakes of Sarsen stone. It is probable that the monument belongs to the close of the Neolithic period.

The origin of the name 'Wayland Smith' or 'Wayland's Smithy' is a difficult problem. An attempted solution of it is given by Col. W. Hind in the *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal*, 1920, XXV., pp. 63, 599 ; this will be noticed later. That the name was old at the time when King Edred's Charter was granted (955), there can be no doubt from its use as a well-known landmark : 'on thæt wide geat be eastan Welandes Smiththan,' 'on that wide gap to the east of "Wayland Smith."' It is, of course, just possible to suppose that the White Horse provided the northern people who knew the name Weland, with a reason for calling the Neolithic tomb by the name of the northern Vulcan. Such a subject, however, can only be approached by speculation ; which, however interesting, is of no archæological value.

II.

A was made a lang, lang time ago
 Wi' a good dale o' labour and pains
 By King Alfred the Great, when he spwiled their consate,
 And caddled thay wosbirds the Danes.

BERKSHIRE BALLAD.

IT is not improbable that the old ballad, of which the second verse is quoted above, supplied the antiquaries of the eighteenth century with the idea of ascribing the White Horse to King Alfred, and making it 'a monument of the West Saxons, made in memory of a great victory obtained over the Danes, A.D. 871' [*i.e.* at the battle of Aescesdun], as Francis Wise thought in his 'letter to Mr. Mead concerning some antiquities in Berkshire' (1738). It is true that the standard of the Saxons bore upon it the representation of a horse; but the Saxon horse and the White Horse are so different in appearance that it can hardly be supposed that the one represents the other. It is known that the White Horse was in existence in 1072 (*Observations on the White Horse of Berkshire*, by W. J. Thoms, in *Archæologia*, xxxi, 289); and it is now generally recognized that it was in existence long before that date. As far back as 1813, Lysons thought that 'it appears to be of great antiquity, and more likely to have been a work of the Britons than, as it has been usually supposed, a memorial for Alfred's victory over the Danes.' (*Berks*, p. 215). It may be suggested, however, that King Alfred found the Horse overgrown with weeds, and caused it to be 'scoured.' There are in existence at least seven coins of earlier date than B.C. 50, which bear representations of an animal resembling the White Horse; one of them was found in Weycock field, Waltham St. Lawrence. The dates of these coins range from 60-100 B.C. It may be surmised from them that the White Horse was existing at this period. In 1776 a Keltic shield-boss and spear-head were found by a workman digging chalk on White Horse hill (exhibited to the Archæological Institute in 1849 and described in the *Catalogue of Antiquities exhibited* in the Proceedings for that year). The date of these is probably 250-200 B.C. In the Ashmolean Museum there is a

Keltic button, enamelled in green and red, found on White Horse hill, and of the same date as the preceding. It is not, I think, an impossible suggestion, that these objects are connected with the people who cut the White Horse ; and it can hardly be doubted that there is a connexion between the horses on the coins and the horse on the chalk. From which I feel disposed to assign a provisional date of 250-200 B.C. for the White Horse. It is not likely to be of later date, and it may be earlier ; but there does not appear to be any evidence for an earlier date.

It has been suggested that this figure—which Camden described as ‘ I know not what shape of a white horse ’—is not a horse at all, but a dragon, *i.e.*, a primeval Saurian monster. This idea has been put forward recently by Lord Wyfold in his interesting little book on *The Upper Thames Valley* (1923)². He thinks that the remains of a monster (such as *Ceteosaurus Oxoniensis*, from Enslow) may have been found by prehistoric men, and represented by them in the chalk ; and says, ‘ anybody looking at the beak, the eye, the elongated body and tail of this curious figure must realize that it could never have been intended for a horse.’ *Quot capita tot sententiae : suus cuique mos est.* A study of the coins in plate VII (figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13) and in fig. 147 of the *British Museum Guide to the Antiquities of the Early Iron Age* should leave the observer with no doubt that figures there are horses ; and that, by analogy, the ‘ White Horse ’ is a horse. One of Lord Wyfold’s arguments is derived from the so-called barrow ‘ Dragon Hill ’ ; and he suggests that the local legend of King (St.) George killing the dragon on its summit may have arisen from an encounter between very early men and a surviving saurian. Much as one would like to believe this, I fear we have no warrant for so doing ; man did not appear on the earth till towards the close of the Tertiary Era ; and in England perhaps not till much later ; at any rate, no traces of man’s handiwork prior to the Neolithic period are recorded from this part of Berkshire. The era of the saurians is the Mesozoic, and it is not likely that during the

² My father suggested to me some nine years ago that the Horse was perhaps a dragon.

lapse of half of one geological period and the greater part of the succeeding period, these monsters should have survived. Yet it is not utterly impossible ; and it is a more reasonable suggestion than that of Col. Hind (*loc. cit.*) who says the dragon legend is, of course, parallel to that of St. George and the Dragon. The Sun (St. George) slays the Dragon (Night) and rescues the beautiful maiden (the Earth). This connection with the Dragon strengthens and completes the (*lege., my.*) identification of the White Horse of the Berkshire Downs with Granie the White Horse of the Sun God.' It is likely that the White Horse has some religious meaning ; and there is no reason why it should not be connected with sun-worship. But if we are to examine it as archæologists, we must keep from speculation. There is no evidence for its origin ; that such a monument was for religious purposes is a suggestion warranted both by archæological and anthropological research ; but, beyond that, we cannot go. It may have been cut for a variety of purposes ; but it is not within the province of the archæologist to speculate on them, or, at any rate, to *put his speculations in print as facts.*

P.S.—An article in a recent number of *Country Life*, by Mr.

H. J. Massingham, which I read since writing the foregoing, compares the White Horse to an ichthyosaurus, of all creatures. *Quodcunque mihi ostendis sic, incredulus odi.*

[The writer of the above article is the son of a former vicar of Stanford-in-the-Vale, and has migrated to the Kenya Colony, whither his father has also gone. It is pleasant to know that although he has taken up his residence so far away, he is still interested in Berkshire antiquities, although he is separated from important libraries and new books.—THE EDITOR.]