

THE BEACON SYSTEM IN HAMPSHIRE.

BY H. T. WHITE, Assoc. M.Inst.C.E.

It is probably from Lord Macaulay's magnificent fragment, *The Armada*, written in 1832, that most of us first learned of the system, used in olden times, of transmitting signals by beacon fires lighted on hills, and it is also probable that few of us have ever read anything else on the subject. The historians have almost entirely omitted any reference to such a system, except the older ones, such as Camden and Strutt, and these latter say but little. Nothing which deals entirely with the beacon system in England has been written, except four papers published at different dates in the *Journal of the Society of Antiquaries*,¹ and paragraphs in the various encyclopædias, beginning with the *Penny Encyclopædia* of 1835. And this is not by any means from want of material, or want of importance in the subject, for, from the early part of the 14th century onward, the State Papers and Records contain orders and instructions as to beacons extending over more than 300 years. The idea of signalling by a fire lighted on a hill is, of course, an extremely old one. We read in *Jeremiah* vi, 1, of "a sign of fire" to be set up as a warning of coming evil, and "a beacon upon the top of a mountain" is mentioned in *Isaiah* xxx, 17. A very famous occasion on which beacons were used was at the fall of the city of Troy, when the news was transmitted to Argos, a distance of 320 miles, during a single night, as graphically described by Æschylus in his *Agamemnon*.² The use of beacons by the Romans during the later Empire is recorded, when signals were sent from Tarsus to Constantinople so frequently as to become a nuisance to the Emperor, and he commanded them to be discontinued.³

That the Romans made use of beacons in Britain we do not know. The Pharos, at Dover, was a navigation light only, and of their use here at all in early times a pretty considerable search has revealed little evidence. Camden, in his *Magna Britannia*, indeed says that beacons were used during the Saxon Heptarchy, and correctly derives the word from the Anglo-Saxon "beacnian" = to beckon, but he does not give any evidence to corroborate the statement. The evidence of place-names does not help us much. There are several in which the word beacon seems to occur, but some of these come from the personal name Beca, and we are left with "Beaconsfield," in Bucks., only, and it first appears in 1184. That the Saxons did signal the approach of enemies from overseas by the use of beacons is by no means unlikely, for one of the

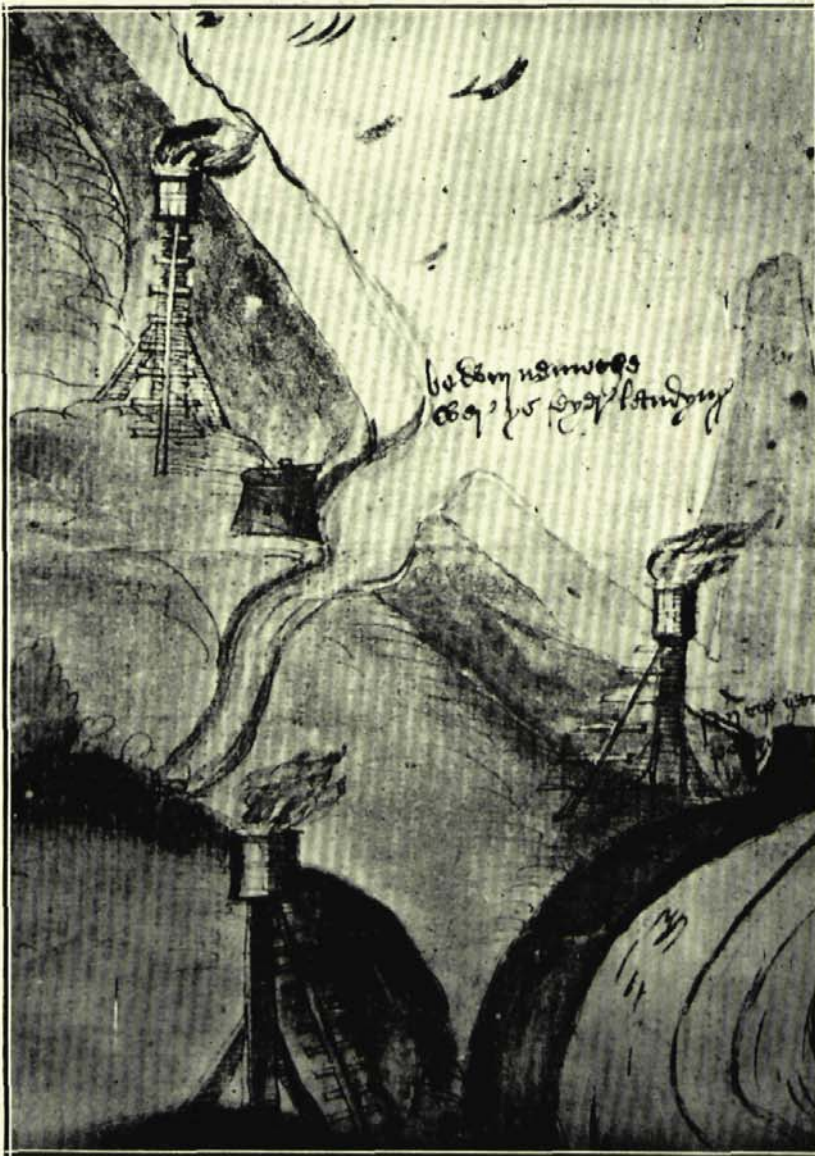
¹ *Archæologia*, vols. i, xiii, xv, xxxiv.

² *Agamemnon*, lines 221—318.

³ *Theophanes Continuator*, p. 197.



THE BEACON SITES OF HAMPSHIRE. THE DOTTED LINES SHOW THEIR INTER-VISIBILITY. Scale 4 miles to 1 inch



PORTION OF DORSET COAST, SHEWING BEACONS

Cott. MSS., Aug. I., Vol. I, cnts. 31, 33

[To face page 252]

duties of the "cote-setla," or cottager living by the coast, was to keep the "sae-wearde," or sea watch,¹ and to signal the approach of danger at night by lighting a fire on the nearest hill was a method which would be readily thought of even if the tradition had not been handed down from previous ages.

So far, therefore, we can only conjecture the use of beacons; and it is not till we reach the reign of Edward II that we get upon firm ground and find an actual record of the institution of beacons for the defence of the country, and the place where they were then set up was the Isle of Wight, and therefore we get a sure starting point for the history of the Hampshire beacons. This earliest record appears in the form of the report of an Inquisition held at Shide, in the Isle of Wight, in the year 1324, to take steps for the defence of the country, and the immediate cause which instigated the enquiry was the fear on the part of the King of the return from France of his Queen, Isabella, who was in secret conspiracy with the barons who were opposing the King at home.

The state of affairs is quaintly described in Caxton's *Cronycles of the Londe of Englod*, printed in 1480, as follows:—"Whenne Kȳg Edward herde telle that Quene Isabell and Edward hir sone wolde come into Englund wyth many aliens and with hem that were oute lawed oute of Englund for hir rebelnesse, he was sore adrad to be put adowne and lese his kyngdome. Werfor he ordeyned to kepe hys castelles in Walys as wel as in Englund with vitailles ād hyr apparaille, and let kepe his River, and also y^e see costes, wherof the v Portes token to kepe hem and also the see. And at the feest of decollacyon of seynt Johan baptist, the citezeins of London sent to the Kȳg to Porchestre an hondert men-of-armes And furthermore he ordeyned by his patent lres and cōmañded to make a fyre upō eueri hye hille besides the riuers (and in lowe contrees for to make hye bekenes of tymbre that yf it so were that the aliens came into the lād by nyght) that men sholde tēde y^e bekenes that the contre might be warned and come and mette hir ennemyes."

The above-mentioned Inquisition was held before John de la Hoese and John de Insula, who are described as keepers of the ports, shores, and maritime lands in the Isle of Wight, and it took place at "Schidhambrigge" on the Monday after the festival of St. Peter in Chains in the year 1324 (Aug. 1st). The report giving the measures taken for the "defence of the island in time of war" is in Latin, and is among the parchments preserved in the Public Record Office. The Latin version is printed in Worsley's *Isle of Wight*, published in 1781, and an abstract in English is in the *Calendar of Miscellaneous Inquisitions*, Vol. II.²

¹ Rectitudines Sing. Pers.

² Cal. Inq. Misc., File 99 (10).

The part which concerns us enumerates the various beacon sites in the Island, and they are described as being such as "have been of old." No fewer than 31 sites are mentioned, and the watch for both night and day is carefully specified.

There is considerable difficulty in identifying the sites. The parchment is badly stained, and some of the names are quite illegible; but Worsley has apparently deciphered more of the names than the experts of the Record Office, when making their abstract, published in 1916. So possibly the document has deteriorated since Worsley examined it. On the other hand, some of Worsley's readings are not borne out in the case of names, which are even now reasonably clear.

In the list below the R.O. reading is given first, and Worsley's in a bracket with a query where it seems to be incorrect. Where there is any certainty, the modern name is given in a second bracket.

The list begins: "In the liberty of Freskewatere there is one fire (*ignis*) on Scharpenorde and watch should be kept by 3 men by night and by two men by day. There is another fire on Hetdone, watches to be as above."

The other sites are—

In the Hundred of Este Medine

- (1) Below the bridge on Puttokesdone (Pintohestone?) (Nettleston, near St. Helen), to be watched by 4 men by night and 2 by day.
- (2) Near St. Helen's, at Yarneforde ? (Yarnesforde) (Yarbridge), watches as above.
- (3) At Sandham on Rodesburghe (Sandham on Rotirburgh) now illegible (Sandown on Rowbury), watches as above.
- (4) At Schencling on the hill above la chyne (at Schenehundred on the hill and above la Chyne) (Shanklin), watch 2 by night, 100 by day.
- (5) On Smeredone (Smeredone) (Smerdown),¹ watch 4 by night and 2 by day.
- (6) At la . . . (at L. Hinis), watch 2 by night and one by day.
- (7) At la Wytedich by Apuldercame (at la Wytedich at Apuldurcombe), watch 3 by night and one by day.
- (8) At Nywetone at la Wirdde (at Nywetone at la Wirdet) (Niton), 3 by night and 2 by day.

¹ Isaac Taylor's Map, 1759. Map by Milner.

- (9) At Athertone on Beredone (at Athertone on Bertedone), watches as above.
- (10) At Staundone (Staundene) (Standen), watches 2 by night and 1 by day.
- (11) At Woditone at la Ode (Woditone at le Coe) (Wootton at Cowes), 4 by night and 2 by day.
- (12) At Wyppingham on Rodmeresdone (at Werpingham on Rodmeresdone) (Whippingham), watches 3 by night and 2 by day.
- (13) At la Ryde (at la Rye) (Ryde), watches 6 by night and 2 by day.

In the hundred of Weste Medine

- (1) On Chaledone (on Chaledon) (Chale Down), watches 4 by night and 2 by day.
- (2) At Atherfelde (Atherpewe) (Atherfield), watches as above.
- (3) On L...kedone (Lourkedone), watches as above.
- (4) At La Wyrde (la Wyrde), watches as above.
- (5) (on Bertelmeworth) (Elmsworth), watches as above.
- (6) At Lusburghe (Lusburgh), watches as above.
- (7) At Gerth holl (Gerthell), watches as above.
- (8) At Hamstede (at Hamstede) (Hamstead), watches as above.
- (9) At Havedburghe (at Havedburgh), watches as above.
- (10) At Thornheye (at Thorneheye) (Thorness), watches as above.
- (11) At la Roghelonde (at Ferthelonde), watches as above.
- (12) (at Hertepoll), watches as above.
- (13) At Wyghtberg (at Wyghtberg) (Carisbrook ?), watches as before.
- (14) (at Lavendone) (Lemerstone), watches as above.
- (15) At Emedone (at Emedone), watches as above.
- (16) (at Holebergh), watches as before.

This is an exceedingly interesting list, and it furnishes several problems in identification for the place-name authorities of the Island. The extraordinary number of beacon sites for an area no larger than the Isle of Wight is, of course, remarkable. Presumably, the Island was thickly garrisoned with troops, and it was determined to spread any alarm with no shadow of delay. In

any case, this careful preparation saved the Island from invasion for when Queen Isabella returned to England as an enemy of the King, she landed at Orwell, in Essex.

The first order to the mainland seems to have been that issued in Dec., 1325, from Bury St. Edmunds to John de Roche and Walter Wodelok to array all the men of the county of Southampton pursuant to the Statute of Winchester, and to see that beacons be erected, and watchmen and sentinels placed in all proper stations.

This was followed in 1326 by an Ordinance of the King, that "men living near the sea-coast light signals of fire or make other effective signs," on the approach of an enemy.¹ As translated, this order runs as follows: "The King to his beloved and faithful arrayers of men-at-arms, both horse and foot, in accordance with the Statute recently made at Wynton, and confirmed in our Parliament assembled at Westminster in the octave of St. Martin last past, to be made and carried out in the County of Kent. Greeting. Although it is contained in our former commission to you on the above matter that certain men shall be assigned by you as a watch of foot soldiers in all places where it appears necessary to you, on the coast of the county, where such watch has formerly been kept: and that the said watch have a signal of fire, or of other effective means, which can be seen from afar, so that men of the neighbouring parts may be able to betake themselves to the fire or other signal in the night, if need be, and that all and singular who hold land in the aforesaid county shall continue to make contributions for the said watchers in that county. Moreover, we have learned from a complaint of the men of that county that they have hitherto given up the making of contributions for these watchers and further that they are exceedingly burdensome, seeing that the necessity of such a watch does not exist. We, wishing to hold these men blameless in this respect, command you that you on no account distraint upon the said men for making contributions of this kind to the watchers, as is reported, and that you do not molest them, in this matter, in any way. We wish, nevertheless, that the men of this county living on the sea coast, as often as there shall be need, shall light such signals, so that others, from their light, may be able to do whatever may pertain to the safety of those parts, and this, you shall diligently arrange with all speed. Given at Claryndon, Aug. 10th."

"In the same manner it is commanded to the arrayers of men-at-arms in the counties named below, viz., Devon, Somerset, Cornwall, Southampton, Dorset."

The arrayers for the County of Southampton in the year 1326 were John de Tichebourn and John de Bokelond.

¹ Rymer's *Foedera*, 20 Ed. II.

From this date onward similar orders occur from time to time, sometimes addressed to the County of Southampton, and sometimes the same order goes to the group of southern counties enumerated above. In the reign of Edward III we find orders in 1337, 1338, 1346, 1352, 1372, and 1376. In 1337 the heading is: "Concerning the making of common signals by fire against hostile attacks," and it is addressed by the King to his beloved and faithful Bartholomew de Insula and his associates, guardians of the maritime parts of the County of Southampton.¹ Again, in Aug., 1338, from Kenyngton, the King sent to the Sheriff of the County of Southampton an order *re* the "making of signals of fire upon hills." This order begins as follows: "Having recently learned that certain foreigners, having collected an immense multitude of galleys and ships (*galearum et navium*), both on the sea and in certain foreign ports, intend to do upon us and ours, what evil and harm they can, both on land and sea, we instruct you to cause to be made the common signal by fire upon hills, or in some other manner, in the said county, where, and as often as seems best to you, and as has usually been done in similar cases."

This order was sent, *mutatis mutandis*, to all the Sheriffs of England.²

In 1372 the word "beacon" is first introduced into the Latin ordinance, for, as we have seen above, the Latin scribes had failed to find a word in that language which represented the old English word other than "signal by fire" (*signum per ignem*).

This order is addressed by the King to arrayers of men-at-arms, of arms, of hobelers,³ and of archers in the County of Kent, and commands that "common signals by fire on hills and high places, called 'Beknes,' shall be made where and as shall seem best." This order also went to the southern counties and to the constable of Carisbrook Castle (Caresbrok), in the Isle of Wight.⁴

Various orders to other counties appear during the next two reigns. One, in the reign of Edward IV, in 1468, issued by the King himself from Dogmersfield, is a general order to the Sheriffs concerning "the keeping of wards and watches, the truce with France having expired." The order runs: "We assign to you the placing of such wards and watches, and the signals called 'Bekyns' in such places in your county, most suitable for the same, and as has been the custom of old; and the supervising and repair; and, where necessary, the provision of new."⁵

¹ Rymer, 2 Ed. III.

² Close Rolls, 12 Ed. III.

³ Hobeler, Latin *hobelarius*, was a light horseman, i.e., one who rode a hobby.

⁴ Rymer, 46 Ed. III.

⁵ Rymer, 7 Ed. IV.

The interest in the beacons, no doubt, varied directly with the threat of danger from our almost constant enemies across the Channel. In 1486, when there was a probability of war between Charles VIII of France and Maximilian, King of the Romans, Henry VII, fearing that the navies which would be at sea might possibly damage our coasts, issued an order for the reinstatement of the beacons. By this date English had, at least, partially, come into use in State declarations, and it will be interesting to quote the original of the above order. The greeting at the beginning and the final injunction to the Sheriffs is in Latin; the quaint English of the proclamation is as follows:—¹

"Forasmuch as the King, our Sovereign Lord Henry the Seventh, by the Grace of God King of England and of France and Lord of Irlond hath credible informacion that there is lik to be open werre had, moved, and stered, as well by water as by Lond, betwene hys Cousyn, Charles of Fraunce on the oon Partie, and hys Cousyn, the King of Romannys oon the other Partie, wheruppon great Navys of both Parties byth in Rigging redye to be sette into the See, wer thurgh Hurte and Prejudice by the Riotouse demeanyng of the said Navyes myght sodenly growe unto this his Realme, and to his Subgetts of the same, if no remedie wer in that behalf foresene, ordyned and provyded, which God defend. Our said Sovereigne Lord, not willing any such Hurte or Prejudice to ensue unto this his said Realme, ne unto any of his said Subgetts, willeth, chargeth and straitly commaundith all and everych of his said Subgettis, that they and every of them kepe watche and warde uppon the costes of the See, where nede shuld require, and that all Bekyns and other Tokyns uppon the same Costes be made redie to be sette on Fyre and to Warne all his said Subgettis to be redie and to come and Defend this his said Realme and his said Subgettes, if nede be, according to their Duteis, in maner and fourme as in old tyme, in like case, hath ben used and accustomed." This proved to be an unnecessary precaution, for no danger from the suspected source ever arose.

From this time onwards orders re beacons frequently occur in the State Papers, and the system becomes more and more organised and co-ordinated.

In Nov., 1536, an instruction ran as follows: "Beacons. First a barrel of pitch and tar with flax, for a beacon to be set on fire when enemies enter those parts, and then every man resort to his captain, and the captains send to one another, and set forward to the first fire; and bells to be rung."²

¹ Rymer, 3 Hen. VII.

² Gairdner's "Letters and Papers of the time of Henry VIII."

In April, 1539, we get a side-light upon the system, from which we can estimate how effective it was as a discouragement to possible invaders from abroad.

Marillac, writing to Montmorency, the Constable of France, says: "Five or six ships do nothing but circle round the Kingdom in order to explore and correspond, if need be, by fires with those who watch by night upon certain 'gardes' of wood, lately erected, so that no foreign vessel could show itself, without the whole country being warned."¹

In the same year we get a very flattering testimony to the vigilance of the defenders of the Isle of Wight.

In March, 1539, William, Earl of Southampton, and William Lord St. John, who were responsible for the organisation of the defence of the county, wrote to Thomas Cromwell, then Chancellor, as follows: "The people of the Isle of Wight are all, both gentlemen and others, well minded to defend their country and make themselves daily more ready." They "keep their beacons they have set up already on every hill, right well"²

Apparently the beacon system, installed by Edward II 200 years before, had impressed the people of the Island, and they evidently realised their importance as an outpost upon whom the rest of the country depended.

In Oct., 1544, the Privy Council wrote to Lord St. John as follows³:—"That speedy knowledge may be had of ships of enemies and yet the country not troubled more than necessary, your Lordship shall order two beacons to be set together from the Downs to the Isle of Wight in such places as shall be thought meet and watchmen appointed to them, with orders to fire the one if they see at least 10 sail of enemies. The county shall not move upon sight of one fire in one place, but when two fires are made they shall repair to the coasts, and the watchmen shall not fire both beacons unless they see the enemies land."

We begin to see here, what becomes more and more apparent later on, that the system had its weak points; for instance, false or premature alarms were likely, and also the watching of the beacons became more and more a burden to the locality where they were placed.

There was a further caution in an instruction *re* musters sent out in the same year⁴: "Dwellers near the sea to notice ships of enemies hovering near the coast or preparing to land," as enemies may "make a face of landing, when they mind it not"; and order is given not to be over-hasty in firing of beacons.

¹ Cal. State Papers, Ap. 1539.

² Cal. State Papers, Mar., 1539.

³ *Ibid.*, Oct., 1544.

⁴ Cal. State Papers, July, 1544.

Early in the following year much more elaborate instructions were sent out, which carried the organisation of the system a good deal farther. This was an order from the Privy Council of Jan. 12th, 1545, which gave instructions as follows¹:

"(1) Below in the valleys, next the sea, place three beacons, where all three may be seen from the place of the next three. (2) On adjoining hills place two beacons visible both to seaward and landward. (3) Inland, in places where the beacons on the hills may be seen, and the inner parts of the shire warned, set one beacon. (4) Appoint wise and vigilant persons to watch and keep the said beacons by turns. (5) Neither two nor three of the beacons in the valleys to be lighted, except by the special persons in charge, and the watchmen on the hills, both on the coast and inland taking heed not to be deceived by other fires, to take warning, those inland from those on the coast, and those on the coast from those in the valleys. (6) On the appearance of any number of ships, one of the three beacons in the valleys shall be fired and those in charge of other beacons in the valleys shall thereupon fire one of theirs. (7) If an army approach the coast within four miles, the keeper of the beacons in the valley next the place where the landing is likely, shall fire two of his three beacons, and the watchers on the hill next to that shall fire one of their two beacons; whereupon, the men of that part of the shire shall resort to a place appointed by the Lord Lieutenant (altered by Wriothesley to 'by such as the King's M^{tie}, by his letters hath appointed to have the special charge of that shire, till His Highness shall further determine his pleasure in that behalf.') (8) When the keepers of the three beacons in the valley see the enemy land in greater number than the men assembled there can resist, they shall in haste fire all their three beacons; whereupon both beacons on the next hill must be fired, and then one of each of the other pairs upon the coast hills, and all inland beacons, and every man shall resort towards the hill where the two beacons burn. (9) It must be foreseen that no beacons are fired upon the firing of beacons and assembling of people in any other shire than before is expressed."

In May, 1545, there was issued a further caution to those in charge of the south coast defences, namely²: "Cnowlege to be geven in the countre that the men shall nott ryse to defende the coste exsepte that they see to ffyerres to borne at once, and that the wache men sett no beken affyer exsepte it be well knone that thar be X saylle of Frenche on the cost."

At this time we get a further interesting side light upon the efficiency of the system as a means of getting the forces of the

¹ Cal. State Papers, Jan., 1545.

² Cal. State Papers, May, 1545.

country together in a short space of time.¹ Van der Delft, the Ambassador of Charles V, Emperor of Germany, writing to his sovereign in June, 1545, says: "By means of beacons the English say that they can anywhere muster 25,000 to 30,000 men in two hours, and they are confident in their strength and delighted to see their enemy near."

From this statement of the Ambassador we may probably infer that some patriotic Englishman was drawing the long bow with a view to impressing the foreigner with due respect to the country's readiness against attack. The word which needs modification is, no doubt, "anywhere." What quite possibly the warning of the beacons did was to assemble the 25,000 to 30,000 men at their respective places of muster in their hundreds or fifties. The work of transporting the whole force to the coast would occupy a much longer time, even within one county such as Hampshire.

That the maintaining and watching of the beacons was of the nature of an emergency measure is shown by the frequent orders for the discharge of the watch, which now begin to appear. This, no doubt, happened when there was no threat of invasion from abroad, and, latterly, the watch was regularly discontinued during the winter months. We have to remember that in those days of small ships, propelled by sails, the stormy seas round our coasts offered a very effective protection against invasion; and, further, even if a landing should have been made, roads, hopelessly impassable through mud, would prove a very real barrier against the progress of an armed force inland.

In June, 1546, letters were addressed by the Privy Council to all the "Sherifes, Justices of Peax, and Commissioners for the Becons in al the Shires for discharge of the Becon watche, and the reducing of the watche according to the Statute of Winchestre, to have special regarde to the ydle sorte of people and vacaboundes and lykewise to the inferior sorte now returneing from the Campe, that they lyve in ordre and in cace of breche thereof to be punished in tyme."²

The Statute of Winchester referred to above was made in 1285, and it enacted: "For the more surety of the country, the King hath commanded that in great towns being walled, the gates shall be closed from the sun-setting until the sun-rising . . . and that from henceforth all watches be made, as it hath been used in times past, that is to wit, from the day of the Ascension until the day of St. Michael, in every city by 16 men at every gate; in every borough, 12 men, every township of the open country 6 or 4, according to the number of the inhabitants of the township

¹ Cal. State Papers, June, 1545.

² Acts of P.C., June, 1540.

... and if any stranger do pass by them, he shall be arrested until morning, and if no suspicion attach to him, he shall go free." ¹

The need for vigilance during the summer months, however, remained, or was increased during that century of change and endeavour ushered in by the Reformation. With the accession of the boy king, Edward VI, we find an order from the King to the Sheriffs to see the beacons duly set up and watched, and to repress unlawful assemblies. It was dated May, 1548, and ran as follows: "Trustie and welbeloved, we greate you well— And whereas we have given order by our Treasurer to the special men and justices of peace of the sheres next adioyning to the sea cost that the same shall erect their beacons for warning given to the inland sheres tassemble themselfe and to . . . for defence as occassion shall serve. Thinking it expedient that the Inland countreyes shuld have your beacons also in a redines with watchers to fyre the same for warning giving, we by thadvice of our derest uncle, the Duke of Somerset, Governour of our Person and Protectour of our realmes, d'nions, and subjects, and the consent of our privie counsell, require you, the Sheriefs and Justices of Peace of that our countie of . . . to conferre togethere and according to such orders as heretofore wer given you, as well in the tyme of our dearest father of most famous memorie, as sithens also by us with thadvice aforesaid to take such directions amounge you as the beacons may be set up and watched in the same place of that shere that they wer last in, and that also the force of the shere may be redie to marche forward under the conduct of mete captaynes to the defense of such place as the beacons of thother counties about shall give warning, wherin you must follow the . . . heretofore to you for your proceadinge in that behalf . . . that in case upon any occasion ye send fourth or prepare yourselfe to go with men for defense of the sea cost as before ye set fourth those men that be most hable, wel-furnisshed and weaponed and also viii dayes vittell with them or money to serve them for that tyme. And in the mean season that all thinges may be in good order at home we require you to have a good eye and a speciall regard to the doings of the comon people and in case of any misdemeanors, unlawfull assemblies, riotte and breaking of the peace to give orders for the stay or reformacōn of the same with all diligence, not suffering anie suche notable misdemeanors to remayne any tyme unpunished, and for the better avoyding thereof to take order that clothiers and all other artificers and such other as have servaunts by convenient or otherwise kepe the same in labour, good order and obedience accordinglie and herunto we eftsones pray you to have an earnest respect, thimportaunce of the thing no less requiring." ²

¹ Stubb's *Select Charters*.

² Cal. State Papers, May, 1548. S.P. 10.

The beacon system was evidently looked upon as a very important part of the defence of the country, and those responsible gave it constant thought, and did whatever was possible to bring it to perfection.

As regards Hampshire, we get information of the perfection to which the system was brought from the State Papers of 1560, which contain in full the "Orders taken at Wynchester by the Lord St. John and the reste of the Justices of the Peace in the countie of South^t the XIIIth Daye of Maye Anno Regine Elizabeth Secundo, as followeth—Firste, it is agreed there shalbe sett three beacons upon the white cliff in the eaoste parte of the Isle of Wight next to the foreland at St. Ellen's poynt, and three other beacons in the weste parte of the Isle upon one other suche hill.

"Item. Burnyng but one of them upon the said hilles or upon either of them shalbe taken but for warnyng to the sea coasts in the shire next adioyneing to call said helpe to them without fyereng of beacons.

"And burnyng twoe beacons together of the three standing upon one of the said hilles shalbe warning to the shires next adioneng to fyere one of their two beacons, which single beacon so fyered shall warne all the beacons of Hampshire, Wiltshire Dorsett and Sussex to fyere a single beacon to call all these shires together with speed.

"And burnynge all three beacons together upon one of the said two hills or upon bothe, shalbe warnenge to the shires next adioynenge to fyere two beacons to call Oxefordshire, Gloucestershire, Barkeshire and Somersetshire to the place appointed to ayde the other shires.

"And if any nombre of straunge shippes drawe to the sea coast in sight without any fyer made in the Isle of Wight, then to burn the single beacons, where the said ships shalbe seen to draw unto and thother two shires next adioyneng to that coast may burne their beacons warne the Isle of Wight to repaire to the coaste to their place appointed.

"And if so greate a fleet of straunge shippes shall fortune to be dyscryed and seen drawe to the coaste without any fyer made in the Isle of Wight, so as the nombre of them shalbe demyde to stronge for the shire to deffende, then to fyer twoe beacons, where the shippes shalbe seen, as thother shires may doe the like to make repaire to the place appointed.

"Uppon the fyereng of one of the beacons upon Bymbrege Downe the Beacons of Saynt Ellen's shalbe fyered.

"Item, to give the Capten of Portsmowthe warnenge that the fyereng of these beacons is but a warneng to the Isle of Wight and Portsmowthe only.

"Item, if the beacons standinge upon the sea coasts right over against Portsmowthe be fyered, then Portsmowthe to fyer for their further ayde.

"Item, yt is further agreed that the beacons shalbe presently furnyshed with wood sufficient readye to be fyered upon any occasyon and wood layed by for mayneteynenge the fyer and that the said beacons shalbe presentlie watched viz. in the daye tyme with two honeste and substanciall p'sones and in the nyght with three at the least, and then they shall not be fyered at any tyme with-out the consent of some Justyce of peace or some other gentleman or honest dyscreef man next adioynenge.

"If ye keepe the laste appointment, whiche was 300 men out of everye shire upon the firste fyere, making 2400 men yt shalbe verely well, and for them I shall consider amonge others. And sendinge oute of everye shire 700 more, which will make toward 6000 men shall doe verely well, and Hampshire shalbe first readie and in the place of service, readie for the ayde of the residue.

"And if this do not agree with your laste order, then wryte to me agayne y^r mynde, and I will followe."¹

This, it will be seen, was a local application of the system laid down in the order of 1545, with beacons in threes at the coast, in twos on the hills adjoining, and singly on the hills inland. It will be noticed also that a very large portion of the south of England, viz., from Sussex to Dorset on the coast, and inland as far as Somerset, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire, took its warning from the Isle of Wight, and the musters made in eight counties were to march to the defence of the south coast. With regard to the number of men available, we learn elsewhere that the total number appointed to repair to Portsmouth for defence of the coast was 16,000.²

In spite of threats of invasion from abroad, the beacon system was still subject to suspension during the winter, for in Dec., 1580, we find an order from Whitehall to the "Sheriffe, Sir Richard Norton Kt. and the reste of the Justices of the Countie of South'ton," by which they are required, "as well in consideracion of the extremetie and sharpenes of the wether, as for that their L'ships see no furdre cause to contynue the watche of the Beacons, that they geve order to cesse the said watche fourthwith, so to remayne until upon furdre occasion this may receive other order from their Lordships."

¹ Cal. State Papers, May, 1560. S.P. 12.

² See State Papers, Eliz., July, 1588.

After at least 250 years' experience upon the part of the inhabitants of the southern counties, we can well believe that the system was clearly understood by the time that it was put to the supreme test, when the Spanish Armada hove in sight in July, 1588, and we may be confident in hoping that the 6,000 Hampshire men, counted upon by Lord St. John, mustered promptly at the call of the beacons, and that the county was, as he hoped, "the first readie."

Although the great attempt on the part of Spain was defeated so decisively, the danger from abroad still remained, and foreign ports were kept under constant watch so that any gathering of ships might be noted. The beacon system was therefore maintained, and we get various Privy Council orders during the remainder of the reign of Elizabeth and the reigns of the Stuarts for the reinstatement of the beacons and the watch, usually in the spring, and for their discontinuance at the approach of winter.

As an example of such renewed instructions may be quoted the letter to the Justices for the Watche of the Beacons from the Dept. Lieut^t, dated from New Alresford, Sept., 1625 :—¹

"After our hartie comandacōn, whereas wee have Receaved L^tres from the right ho^{ble} Lordes of his Mat^{ties} moste ho^{ble} privie Councell for the present puttinge in readines of all the fforges of this Countie of South^t and for the watche of the Beacons wthin the said Countye and speedie Repayringe the same, these are therefore by vertue of the said Letters and Deputy Leivenancye to praye and require you pⁿtlie vppon the receipt hereof to cause all the Beacons wthin your Devision to be repayed and made vpp and good store of woode to be layed by to repayre, maynteyne and renewe them and to cause them to be forthwth diligentlie watched by three or fower discreete and sufficient men, as allsoe to appoynte certain honest and substantiall householders nere dwelling vnto the Beacons to oversee the saide watches that they be dulle and orderlye performed and that one of them be allwayes p^sent at the chaunge and settinge of everie watche to give direcon vnto the watchmen howe to holde their watches and what to doe vppon the sight of anye Beacon or Beacons fyred accordinge to suche orders and instruccōns as wee herewth sende you. And soe wee bid you ffarewell.

"Yo^r very lovinge ffriende."

"Imprimis, the fyinge of any one Beacon in the Isle of Wighte vppon what hill soever is but a warning vnto the mayne that a ffeete is discovered, the like is if 2, 3, or 4 single Beacons bee fyred vppon severall hills in the Wighte, for all that is taken

¹ Cal. State Papers, Sept., 1625.

but one Beacon and noe Beacon on the mayne shall fyer vppon the sighte of those single beacons, but the watche of the Beacons discoveringe anye or all of those single Beacons fyled shall p'ntlie give notice thereof vnto the next Justice of Peace or vnto suche p'son or p'sons as the saide Justice hath appoynted to Receave that notice, w^{ch} Justice or other p'son or p'sons soe appoynted well assuringe themselves of the fyinge anye one Beacon in the Wighte shall wth all speede sende forth by the horse poste notice thereof vnto all the Collonells, Cap^{tns}, Soldiers, Boate-masters, Marriners in the countrie.

" The fyinge anye 2 Beacons together in the Wighte vppon anye of the hills or the fyinge of 2 Beacons vppon all the hills, for all is one as aforesaide, shalbe a warninge vnto the mayne to fyer one of their Beacons, the w^{ch} shall not be fyled w^{thout} the knowledge or consent of the Justice or other officer as aforesaide.

" And vppon the fyinge anye one Beacon in the mayne, all the Beacons in the mayne are likewise to fyer one, w^{ch} shalbe a warninge vnto the Collonells and Cap^{tns} speedelie to marche their companies vnto their gen'all Rendezvouze and the fyinge of their single Beacons is a warninge vnto the Cap^{tns} of the Shires adioyninge appoynted to seconde this countie, to arme their Companies and to drawe them vnto their Rendezvouze in their owne Countrie.

" The fyinge of three Beacons together vppon anye hill in the Wighte shalbe a warninge to the mayne to fyer 2 of their Beacons throughe the Sheire and a like warninge to transporte wth all speede into the Islande the fforces appoynted for the same. And the fyinge of those twoe Beacons throughe the Sheire is allsoe a warninge vnto the Sheires adioyninge to drawe their fforces vnto the places of Rendezvouze in this Sheire appoynted them. And lastlie the fyinge of all III Beacons vppon the sev'all hills in the Sheire is a warninge vnto the whole Kingdome that the enemye is soe stronglie invaded that the fforces of this Sheire wth the aydes appoynted are not able to resiste them."

It will be noticed that the system has now been extended in its scope, and we get three beacons on the inland hills, where formerly were two only, and the firing of all three together on these hills is to call up the whole kingdom.

A little later the beacon system of the Isle of Wight was again the subject of government action, as we find from instructions issued to the militia of the Isle of Wight in May, 1651.

These run as follow :—

“ Imprimis, upon the discovery at either of the Forelands, or at any other watch of the Island of ten shipps and soe to twenty making towards the Island out of the roadway, then the searcher to hange up the gare¹ to inform the centoner.

“ Item. Upon notice thereof, the centoner to repaire to the sea-side, and yf he find those shipps bound for land in the island and they thought to be enemies, then to give notice to the captaine of the island or, in his absence, to his deputie, and the centoner to raise his companie, and to send to as many of the next centoners for to raise their companies, as shall be thought fit for the hinderance of their landing, by raising the gare, by ringinge all the church bells, and alsoe by sending about all the hoblers to give the alarum to all companies to repaire to the rendezvous, and to stay untill they have further order.

“ Item. Yf the watch at the forelands . . . discover a greater fleet of shipping making towards the island out of the roade way, the centoner is to repaire to the sea-side and yf he find them enemies . . . to give notice to the captain of the island that order may be given for the firing of the beacons.

“ Item. Upon the firing of a beacon, yf yt be in the East Medine then all the centoners there are to repaire with the severall companies towards Bradinge Downe and there to expect further direction, and all the companies in West Medine to St. George's Downe.

“ And yf the beacon be fired in West Medine, then all companies there to repair toward Yarborrowes and all the companies in East Medine to repair to Avington Downe, and there to receive further directions from the Governor.

“ Especial care is to be taken both in having the beacons well searched, warded and watched and a sufficient quantity of wode to lay by them, if occasion serve.”²

After this date the system appears to have fallen into decay, and the State Papers, so far as printed, yield no further information on the matter. That the system had its defects is evident from various complaints which arose from time to time, and the burden to the countryside, which the provision of a continual watch proved to be, grew more and more irksome. As the beacons formed part of the provision for the defence of the Kingdom, the order for their erection came from the King or by the King's Commission, but the maintenance of them was placed upon the locality in which the beacon was, in early times on the hundred, and latterly on the shire, and the necessary funds appear finally to have been raised by a local rate.

¹ Gare — spear. I can find no reference anywhere to the hanging up of a spear being taken as a warning. A query in *Notes and Queries* produced no reply.

² Worsley's I. of W. appendix, No. XVII.

There was a complaint from Symonsboroughe, in Dorset, that "Whereas for 30 years past the towns of Chidwich, Marshud and Betscomb, adjoyning as neare to the seacoast as they be, did usually keep watche by their turnes at the beacons and were contributory to all chardges incident to that service, they have lately refused to contynue the same, whereby the burthen is wholly laied on that parishe of Symonsborough alone, being to greate for them to susteyne." This was in 1596.¹ In the following year "divers parishes in Norfolke refused to paie the watch money for the beacons, because the lawe and custome of the countie doth appoint in what sorte the beacons ought to be watched and by whome, wee have thought good to refer the ordering of theis matters to you,"² *i.e.*, to Sir Ed. Cleeve, Kt. and Commissioners.

Coming back to our own county, in May, 1639, there was a complaint from West Bere³ about the supply of wood, *viz.*, "The inhabitants of the hundred of Buddlesgate, Hants, did by their petition complain that whereas time out of mind a beacon on a hill adjoining the forest of West Bere has always been built and repaired by petitioners out of the said forest, whilst the same was in his Majesty's hands, and since in the hands of the Earl of Portland; but, being commanded by the direction from the Lords in December last to repair and watch the beacons, they as formerly, cut wood upon the forest to repair the beacon, whereupon Sir William Waller, who is now possessed of the forest, has commenced 28 several suits against so many inhabitants of that hundred not only to the discontinuance of his Majesty's Service but to the great charge and vexation of petitioners." The reply of the Council was that Sir William "should be required either to permit the felling of wood in the forest for the reparation of the beacon as formerly, and make stay of all suits on that account, or else to attend at the Council Board to answer the same, the third sitting in next term."⁴

As to the actual cost of the beacon watch, we get some light from various sources, but not very much. In the accounts of the Churchwardens of Eltham, in Kent, for the year 1566, occur the following items—"paid for watchinge the beacon at Shuttters Hill vs." In 1568—"paid to the becon at Shuttters Hill, 10th yr—x.s.

pd. to the becone in the xj th yeare	x.s.
pd. to Richard Bori for the beacone in the xij th yeare	xxxs.

¹ Acts of P.C., March, 1596—7.

² Acts of P.C., July, 1597.

³ Now Ashley, the beacon was on Farley Mount.

⁴ For enquiry re supply of wood to Toot Hill Beacon see Liveing's records of Romsey Abbey.

1572.

Item to Mr. Bromhead, constapell of the hundred for watching
the beacon vjs. iiijd.

1574. Itm. paid to John Petley
for making the becon

ijs. & iiijd.¹

In the year 1630 the people of Suffolk got very much behind in their payments for watching their beacons, for one, George Annis, had due to him wages for two years watching the beacon of Yaxeley. The amount is not stated, but John friend and Wm. Kempe, of Dunwich, had twenty-eight pounds ten shillings owing to them, and the total arrears were said to be about "Thre hundreth pounds."

A petition is made to the Lord Lieut^t of the county that "yo^r Lo^{pp}e wilbe pleased to express more fully that terme of giuinge order for these monyes, wee conceivinge noe other order to be in o^r power to rayse the same, then by giuinge o^r warrants to the High Constables for levijinge the monies, the which when wee shall be authorized by yo^r Lo^{pp}e directions, wee shall not fayle to putt it in operation."²

From the above records it would appear that the method of obtaining funds and materials for the maintenance of the beacons varied from one county to another according to local custom. No doubt in early times, when there was, periodically, considerable danger of the landing on the south coast of a foreign enemy, the inhabitants were only too glad to give of their time and substance to so obvious a precaution. It was chiefly in later times, when the danger was less urgent, that troubles as to the cost of maintenance arose.

Besides the question of cost to the community, there was another drawback in the beacon system, namely, that there was a danger that they might be prematurely or maliciously fired, and the country thrown into confusion without cause. This, indeed, happened on various occasions, and was the subject of enquiry. Owing to a false alarm, the beacon on Portsdown was twice, in 1560 and 1579,³ unnecessarily fired and enquiries held.

In 1545 it is reported that "the King's Subjects of the city of Worcester, upon a second firing of the beacons of Oxfordshire, set forward towards Portismowthe and got to Wantage before warned to return, as there is no present danger."⁴ As regards malicious firing, the beacons in the north were fired during the insurrection led by Robert Aske in 1536, and the insurgents thus called together; and even in Hampshire there was a plot, albeit a very mild one, to fire the beacons round the Meon Valley

¹ *Archæologia*, vol. xxxiv.

² Cal. State Papers, May, 1630.

³ The alarm in 1579 was caused by some hunters trying to smoke a badger out of his earth. See Losely MSS., Nov. 28, 1579.

⁴ Cal. State Papers, July, 1545.

in order to call attention to the lack of food. This plot, in 1586, was thoroughly investigated, and lists appear in the State Papers giving the names of the participants and the particular beacons which each man was told off to fire. This is very useful to us in identifying sites. Incidentally, it was never carried out, being by "y^e watchinge of the beacons and God's good providence prevented." What duty the firing of the beacons imposed upon those liable for military service, that is, in earlier times, at least, men from 16 to 60 years of age, we have partly seen already. An order of Charles I, in Sept., 1625, entitled "Direcons to Collonells," makes this still clearer, and also gives the positions of the general rendezvous for Hants. After directions for the mustering of the forces, the order proceeds: "You shall cause every Captⁿ. of your Regiment to appoint a Rendz. for his company in some convenient place neere where the same is rayzed, and in the way toward the gen'all Rendz. for that regiment, and he shall also charge his said officers appointed in every p'ishe to bring those soldiers comitted unto their chardge uppon notice of firing of the first beacon in the Wight unto the said Rendz., where he wth the rest of his officers must be readie to receive them, and from thence uppon the firing of the first beacon on the mayne to march them unto the place of gen'all Rendezvous appointed for that regiment.

"The gen'all Rendezvous for the Regiments of Basingstoake, Kingsclere and Andover is the Block of the heath called Sparshott Block, neere Romsey. For the New fforrest, Hurst Castle; for the Regiments of Allton and Portsdowne, the Isle of Portsmouth; for the Regiment of ffawley, Gosport." ¹

And preparation to meet invasion was carried even farther than this, for we find, at a somewhat later date, that test-musters were arranged. The beacons were fired, presumably without warning to the inhabitants of the district, and those liable for service were to hurry to their rendezvous as in case of a real alarm. Defaulters and any "persons refactorie" were to be bound over to answer their contempt before the Privy Council.

There is a record of such a test being arranged in Devon in Nov., 1638.

We can now turn to the second part of our subject, namely, the determination of the sites of the beacons which were used in the schemes created under the various orders quoted above.

We have seen that in the time of Edward II the Isle of Wight was provided with as many as 31 beacon stations, but subsequent orders say nothing about sites, except that they mention the key positions at the east and west ends of the

¹ State Papers Domestic, 1625.

Island, from which warnings are to start. These were on Bembridge Down, in the east, the highest point of which is 343 feet above ordnance datum, and on High Down, in the west, between Freshwater Bay and the Needles, at an elevation of 345 feet. There were other sites on the Island, which will be mentioned later.

For the position of the beacons on the mainland we must go to the old maps. Hampshire seems to be particularly well off in respect of the preservation of old maps, and one finds that the earlier the date the more interest is taken in the beacon sites, in fact, some of the earliest cartographers draw a picture of the beacon, with flames included, in every spot where a beacon was placed.

Map I.

The most beautiful of the old maps is a manuscript one, now in the MSS. Room of the British Museum, which was made by John Norden in 1595 and presented to Queen Elizabeth. It is described as "a Chorographically description of the Seuerall Shires and Islands of Middlesex, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Hamshire, Weighte, Gurnesey, Jarsey, performed by the traveyle and view of John Norden."

The "Beacons or Beaukens" are shewn in this map by three upright marks, the centre one being the highest. Rather strangely, there are no sites shewn on the Island; on the mainland, starting from the south-west, they are as follow:—

(1) **Selthorn.** This is in the New Forest, and is called also Setthorn, Selbone, Selborne, or Sway beacon. It seems to have been situated about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles S.W. of Brockenhurst, at the eastern point of "Set Thorns Inclosure," as marked on the 1 inch Ordnance map, at an elevation of 199 feet.

(2) On the mound at Malwood Castle (300 feet).

(3) About $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles W. of Hythe, perhaps on Applemore Hill (106 feet); but there is a Beacon Hill on the Ordnance map half-a-mile S. of Marchwood Church (elevation not given).

(4) About $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles N.E. of Bitterne. This was probably on Moorhill, just S. of West End (267 feet). On the 6 inch Ordnance map "Telegraph Hill" is marked at this spot, but this refers to the Admiralty semaphore system of a much later date.

(5) On Portsdown, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles N. of Cosham (409 feet).

(6) One mile N. of Chilworth, either Chilworth Clump (301 feet), or Toot Hill (276 feet).

(7) On Butser (889 feet).

(8) Two beacons, two miles N.W. of Exton (659 feet), also called Lomer Beacon.

(9) On Farley Mount (515 feet).

(10) Popham Beacons (522 feet), also called Patow Beacons.

- (11) Beacon Hill, about three miles N.E. of Crondall (600 feet), two beacons.
- (12) About half-a-mile N.W. of Farleigh Wallop (684 feet).
- (13) Beacon Hill, Burghclere (859 feet), two beacons.

Map II.

Among the Cottonian MSS. in the British Museum there is a sketch map of the Isle of Wight, of about the same date as the last, which shows beacon sites as follows:—

- (1) On Bembridge Down.
- (2) On the Down between Nunwell and Ashey.
- (3) On the same Down farther W.
- (4) On the same Down, near Standon.
- (5) On the Down between "Shinklyng" and "Appledorcome."
- (6) On the Down above St. Lawrence.
- (7) In Chale Bay, on the Cliff, opposite Kingston.
- (8) On a Down between "Chelerton" (Chillerton) and Newport (one-third of a mile from the former).
- (9) At "Casbroke."
- (10) On the Down between "Broke" and Calborne, about half-way.
- (11) On Freshwater Down.

This is a very interesting list, for, no doubt, these are some of the 31 old beacon sites which were in use in the time of Edward II. A closer study of the elevations of the land would probably show their exact situations.

Map III.

Hampshire described and divided, by John Speede, date about 1610, gives:—

- (1) Selborne Beacon (in the New Forest=Selthorn).
- (2) Patow Beacons, =Popham.

Map IV.

Hampshire, by T. Kitchen, 1753, shows:—

- (1) Selbone, in New Forest=Selthorn.
- (2) Lomer Beacon, one mile N.W. of Exton.

Map V.

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, by Isaac Taylor, 1759.

- (1) Isle of Wight, Smerdown Beacon, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles S.W. of Shanklin Church; $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles E. of Appuldurcombe House.
- (2) On Freshwater Down.
- (3) *Mainland*. Sway Beacon=Selthorn.
- (4) Burley Beacon, in New Forest.
- (5) Lower Beacon=Lomer, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles N.W. of Exton Church.
- (6) Beacon Hill, on Farley Mount.
- (7) Popham Beacon.
- (8) Beacon Hill, two miles E. by N. of Crondall.

Map VI.

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, by Thos. Milne, 1788 to 1790; published by W. Faden in 1791.

- (1) Beacon Hill, one mile N.W. of Exton.
- (2) Beacon Hill, three-quarters of a mile W.N.W. of Dibden.
- (3) Beacon, Farley Mount.
- (4) Beacon Camp, Burghclere.
- (5) Popham Beacons.
- (6) Smar Down, three-quarters of a mile W. of Wroxall, Isle of Wight.

Map VII.

Hampshire, by W. Faden, 1796.

- (1) Beacon, three-quarters of a mile W. of Shanklin, Isle of Wight.
- (2) Beacon Hill, one mile N.W. of Dibden.
- (3) Beacon Hill, on Farley Mount.
- (4) Popham Beacons.
- (5) Beacon Camp, Burghclere.

Map VIII.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight, by T. Milne, 1791.

- (1) Beacon, about one mile S.W. of Shanklin Church.
- (2) Beacon Hill, $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles W. of Warnford.
- (3) Beacon Hill, $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles N.W. of Hythe.
- (4) Beacon Hill, on Farley Mount.
- (5) Popham Beacon.

Map IX.

Map of the County of Southampton, by W. C. and J. Greenwood and W. L. Kentish, 1826.

- (1) Beacon, on Freshwater Down.
- (2) Burley Beacon, in New Forest.
- (3) Beacon Hill Farm, near Warnford.
- (4) Beacon Hill, half-mile S.S.W. of Chilcomb.
- (5) Popham Beacon.
- (6) Beacon Hill, Burghclere.
- (7) Farnham Beacon.

Map X.

Map of Hampshire, by C. Saxton, corrected by P. Lea. No date given, but belonging to 18th century.

- (1) Selbone Beacon, New Forest, N. of "Roydon."
- (2) Lomer Beacon, N.E. of Exton.
- (3) Patowe Beacons, S.W. of Popham.

Map XI.

Hantonia sive South hantonensis Comitatus, vulgo Hanishire.
No date or name of cartographer; 18th century.

- (1) Selborne Beacon, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles E. of "Raydon."
- (2) Beacon, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles N. of North Stonham.
- (3) Patow Beacons, $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles W.S.W. of Popham.

The above series of maps includes all the important ones in the British Museum Library. Possibly there may be others in Winchester.

The first maps produced by the Ordnance Survey are dated 1826—7, and are to the scale of 1 inch to the mile.

Map XII.

The beacon sites there shown are :—

- (1) Chale Down, Isle of Wight.
- (2) Freshwater Down, Isle of Wight.
- (3) Burley Beacon, one mile W. of Burley Village, New Forest.
- (4) Beacon Hill, three-quarters of a mile N.W. of Dibden Church.
- (5) Bushy Beacon, a little to the E. of Sarisbury Green.
- (6) Beacon Hill, $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles W. of Warnford.
- (7) Popham Beacon.
- (8) Beacon Hill, Burghclere.
- (9) Farnham Beacon, $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles E.N.E. of Crondall.

Map XIII.

As the final modern authority, we may take the six-inch to the mile Ordnance Survey, issued in 1858, but it is disappointing, as many undoubted beacon sites have not been mentioned.

In the Isle of Wight the only beacon site marked is on Freshwater Down, at 483 feet above sea level, and there is a place called Beacon Alley marked on the E. side of Blake Down, nearly a mile S.W. of Godshill.

On the mainland we find :—

- (1) Burley Beacon, @ 246 feet.
- (2) Bush-hill Beacon, near Sarisbury, 185 feet.
- (3) Exton Beacon, 660 feet.
- (4) Farley Mount, Beacon Hill, 515 feet.
- (5) Popham Beacons, 543 feet.
- (6) Crondall Beacon, 578 feet.
- (7) Burghclere, Beacon Hill, 858 feet.

This seems to exhaust the evidence to be obtained from maps, as far as the British Museum Library is concerned; but further sites are referred to in the plot mentioned on page 270. The beacons mentioned in the report of the plot, as being those by the firing of which the countryside was to be raised, are as follow:—"Bernett Beacons," which were to be fired by two men, living respectively at Selbourne and Hartley Mauditt; "Heydowne Beacons," to be fired by a man from Hartley Mauditt; "Exon Beacons," to be fired by a man from Wickham; "Crondall Beacon," to be fired by a man from Hartley Mauditt; "Basswaye Beacon," to be fired by a man from Sheet, near Petersfield; and "St. Rooke Hill," in Sussex, now Trundle Hill, near Goodwood, which was to be fired by a man from Woolbeding.

The "Exon" (Exton) and the Crondall Beacons we already know. The Bernett Beacons were evidently on Barnet-side, near Priors' Dean, the highest point of which is 781 feet. The other two, Heydowne and Basswaye, present considerable difficulty. There are, no doubt, several places locally known as "High Down" within, say, ten miles of Hartley Mauditt; ten miles was the distance the man who fired the Crondall Beacon had to go; but the map gives no help in this direction. As regards "Basswaye," the word looks rather suspicious, as if it may be incorrectly spelt; the reading of the original is quite plain, and cannot be rendered otherwise. It is possible that it may refer to a second beacon site in Sussex, which is marked on the map about a mile north of North Marden, and which is within a reasonable distance of Sheet; but again the map does not help as regards the name. A further difficulty is that beacons, other than those we have identified in Hampshire, do not appear to be needed, unless it be that some local elevations, not easy to detect from the map alone, may have obscured the main beacon of the district from a certain area, and therefore a further beacon became necessary.

We are now in a position to consider the system as a whole, and we can, by a careful study of the elevation contours on the Ordnance map, see pretty definitely the range of visibility of each of the beacons. We need not consider partial alarms, when the Isle of Wight watchers fired only one or two of their beacons. It will be more interesting to see what would be the sequence of firing when the Island people had convinced themselves that the enemy was in force and meant to land, and therefore decided that the warning must be sent far and wide, and fired all three beacons.

It is to be noted that the watchers at one end of the Island could not see the beacons at the other. It seems probable therefore that the beacon, which we have found in several maps

under the name of Smerdown, situated on the down between Shanklin and Wroxall, at an elevation of 773 feet, was used as a communication between Bembridge Down and Freshwater Down, as it would be visible from both.

The three beacons at either end of the Island would be seen by the watchers on Portsdown, 409 feet, and on Farley Mount, 515 feet, as well as by the row of coast line beacons—Burley, 246 feet; Selthorn, 199 feet; Malwood, 300 feet; Dibden, 100 feet; Toothill, 276 feet; Bitterne, 267 feet; Sarisbury, 185 feet; if it is true that these were all used at one time, and were not alternatives used at different periods.

The beacon on Portsdown would be picked up by the watchers on Butser, 889 feet, and equally well, in clear weather, from Exton, 660 feet. The next step was to the Barnet beacon, 807 feet, from which either Butser or Exton would be seen; in fact, it seems likely that Butser was not in the regular scheme, as it only appears as a beacon site on one map, and that the earliest. From Barnet the signal would go to Crondall, 578 feet, right on the confines of the county, and thence would be carried on into Surrey. It should be noted that the Exton beacon would not be visible from Crondall, hence the necessity for the beacon on Barnet. The other northward chain, that on the west of the county, is simpler, for Farley Mount, 515 feet, is visible from Popham, 522 feet, and Popham from Burghclere, 858 feet, and from Farleigh Wallop, and these four would warn the whole of the intervening area. As regards the Burghclere beacon, we are told by Camden that it gave warning to Cuckhamsley beacon, in Berkshire, which seems to be the only site in that county. From these 19 beacon sites the county would, undoubtedly, be efficiently warned of coming danger, and, as we have seen, by their means the warning was to be passed on to the surrounding counties of Sussex, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Somersetshire, and Dorset, and, perhaps, Worcestershire. Surrey appears to have been linked up with the Kentish scheme, which was well developed, particularly in its northern part, which had to defend the estuary of the Thames and the approach to London.

Finally, as to the actual form of the beacons, we learn from Lord Coke's *Fourth Institutes of the Laws of England*, dated 1644, that: "Before the reign of Edward III there were but stacks of wood set upon high places, which were fired when the coming of enemies were (*sic*) descried, but in his reign pitch boxes, as now they be, were, instead of those stacks of wood, set up and this properly is a beacon."

Among the Cottonian MSS. in the British Museum is a manuscript map of the Dorset coast from Poole to Lyme Regis,

exceedingly incorrectly drawn, but it shows most pictorially all of the beacons erected on that coast, and there are 20 of them in this short stretch. A beacon consists of a square baulk of timber, sometimes let into the ground, sometimes fixed on a frame with "spurs" or supports on all four sides. On the top is a circular receptacle, presumably of metal, out of which, on the map, the flames are flickering, and to reach which a rough ladder, made of a single bar with cross pieces nailed on to it, is reared against the main support. We get further evidence of the usual form of a beacon from various coats-of-arms. One such is, or was, to be seen in Burton Dassett Church, Warwickshire (which is said to have belonged to the Belknap family),¹ and on a brass taken from Netley Abbey is a representation of four beacons, which have the same general form as those on the Dorset map.² There was another form, the Cresset type, used on churches and castles, one of which remained till recently on the church tower of Monken Hadley, Herts.

The fact that the beacon fire was thus of such limited dimensions accounts, no doubt, for the number of beacon sites we have found on the South Hants coast, for the range of visibility of such a fire would not be very great. In the Hampshire scheme, as sketched out above, the greatest range is from Freshwater Down to Farley Mount, which is 28 miles as the crow flies; but Chilworth Clump, where a beacon is marked in Norden's map, comes almost in the direct line between the two, so that very probably an intermediate station was used in this case. The distances between the other main beacons range from 14½ miles downwards, and even at such a range it would only be possible for the signal to be seen in clear weather, and the system was thus, to a great extent, a fair weather one; but not entirely so, because there were hobelers in attendance to carry the alarm, whenever the weather was such that the beacon fire would not be visible. A hobeler was a light horseman, or the man who rode a hobby or nag. The fact that the system of warning by beacons was only to be relied upon in fine weather does not make it as useless as we should think it nowadays, for in those days it was not the custom to wage war or especially not to carry out invasions in the winter. We have seen that for this reason the beacon watch was withdrawn, usually about the end of the year.

All the above is concerned with the planning and preparation of the system; of its actual working and success in the time of genuine alarm, no record appears to have been preserved. Records of false alarms and malicious use have been mentioned, and we have some evidence that they acted as a deterrent in the border

¹ *Archæologia*, vol. i, 1770.

² *Archæologia*, vol. xv, 1806.

warfare between England and Scotland. When the beacons flared the raiders knew it was time to go home. But, to come back to where we started, how the system worked in July, 1588, and how many men mustered at the coast, we, from historical records, do not know, so that we may take Macaulay's brilliant account as largely fact, or as a flight of poetic genius, according as we feel disposed. What we do know, however, from a Privy Council note is that what the defenders of the county hoped to do was to muster, in the course of a few hours, 17,000 men at Harwich, 16,000 at Portsmouth, 17,000 at Plymouth, and 11,000 at Falmouth, and in this the men "of the wide vale of Trent" and the "burghers of Carlisle" could be of little use.