

A WINTER WALK IN THE NEW FOREST

BY HEYWOOD SUMNER, F.S.A.

Proverbial ethics appear to be contradictory; or, perhaps I should say, dual. Like a coin with an obverse different from the reverse, that together combine to denote currency of one denomination in money; so proverbs with opposing legends may present two different sides of accepted value in wisdom.

For example, take proverbs that advise us to be single-minded. "Between two stools you come to the ground"; "If you run after two hares you catch neither"; and the warning of Mr. Facing-both-ways against the vain pursuit of "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds."

But, on the other side, proverbs tell us that "Two are better than one," and advise us "to have two strings to our bow," and not "to put all our eggs into one basket." Evidently such proverbial ethics are opposed. Obverse and reverse.

Now, at the outset of this paper, I desire to confess that I am not single-minded; that I wish to sit securely on two stools; to run after two hares and to catch both, and to face both ways, namely, Topographical ways and Archæological ways, in the following pages; and yet hope that, after such confession, the result may obtain absolution from descendants of "the gentle reader" of a hundred years ago. "So mote it be."

The time is winter. The place on the northern side of the New Forest. The dramatis persona, an old gentleman.

Winter has its own especial charm for perambulation in the Forest. The bare, deciduous trees reveal exquisite tracery of branch and twig, surmounted by a veil of varied tinted buds. Green mosses of vivid hues mingle with the grey fur of lichens on bole and trunk and bough. Far vistas open out through woodland withered undergrowth, and (blessed exemption) there are no flies to torment the pilgrim.

The northern side of the Forest adjoins my home, and here, as they say of ghosts, I walk—alone for preference, when bent on hide-and-seek, that is to say, seeking for ancient sites hidden in the soil. I like the absolute freedom of being alone when I am fossicking about for uncertain discovery of this or that; one is more free to turn aside, haver, seek and fail to find, yet to return home not wholly dissatisfied, because such negative results will be of future value in narrowing the area to be searched. "Thank the Lord for solitude" is my grace before walk, to-day, when I want to locate and to estimate some Forest sites of which I have been informed. One, a small, oval enclosure at the eastern end of Pinnick. The others, doubtful, near Rakes Brakes Bottom.

Accordingly I cross Ibsley Common, which is a detached ridge and plain of plateau gravel rising 257 feet above the sea, and stretching from Mockbeggar to Ogden's Purliëu; descend to Digden bog, snipe-haunted; across Ill bridge spanning Docken's

water with sawn-log treads;¹ up through holly thickets to the eastern corner of Appleslade; then downhill through the old oaks and glades of Redshoot to Greenford Bottom, where the brook meanders down an open, waterlogged valley towards Linford; then uphill over boggy slopes, and through dense thickets, wherein grow strange old holly trees, pollarded and re-grown with fantastic variations; on and up, until the boggy ground ceases at the foot of an abrupt ramp, above which is firm ground with better growth. Near here is the first sought-for site. Here, or hereabouts. Now the *dramatis persona* goes very slow—questing, and questing, across the woodland floor of fallen leaves, windfall branches, brambles and fern stubble beneath a crowd of oaks until, at length, a low continuous rise on the woodland floor is spotted, and a small oval enclosure found (20 paces long by 16 paces wide), with a long pace-wide gap entrance on the south side above Akercombe Bottom; surrounded by a wasted bank about 1 foot 6 inches high above a silted-up outside ditch, measuring 15 feet over-all. This little earthwork is unrecorded, until now; its discovery is owing to information received from Mrs. T. G. Longstaff and her family on picnic bent.

And here I lout and apologise for intrusion, the said family believe—nay, they know that this enclosure is a fairy ring; they must never read the prosaic attribution following.

On the western bank of the enclosure an old oak and a holly tree grow, self-sown, that suggest a vague anterior date for the enclosure. These trees can scarcely be less than 300 years old.

They must have been allowed to grow after this enclosure had been made—as I think it was—for a pannage-feeding pig-pound. It is too large, too far from habitation, and too consolidated in its earthwork for a bee-garden. If it was used as a pig-pound we may restore it in our mind's eye with a "hedge," *i.e.*, stockade on the top of the surrounding bank,² of which the slight elevation and over-all measurement suggest keeping in stock, not keeping out wolves, as its purpose. J. E. Harting considers that wolves became extinct in England in the time of Henry VII, 1485-1509—which perhaps gives us another clue to an approximate date for the site, *i.e.*, not much earlier than the sixteenth century.

In William Gilpin's "Remarks on Forest Scenery," 1st edition, 1794, Vol. II, p. 112, et seq., there is an interesting account of the methods by which a forest swineherd reduced his pannage-feeding pigs to perfect obedience—methods perhaps traditional, as suggested in my illustration. Thus, the swineherd made a little pound, with fenced shelter around, and fern bedding afloor, and then collected all the acorns he could find, and laid

¹ Ill bridge is named in the Forest Perambulation of Charles II.

² Sixteenth century presentment relating to Ridley "encoppicement," item, "for divers and many young oaks felled for stakes for the hedge."



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The Fairy Ring Pound in Pinnick - restored & explained.

them in heaps within the pound. Then, in the evening, sounding his horn, he drove his pigs into the pound where they found (without seeking) heaps of acorns and comfortable bedding. Next evening the swineherd again blew his horn, but his pigs no longer required to be driven, they obeyed his summons, they associated the sound of the horn with acorns galore and comfy bedding, and thus the habit of returning to the pound every evening became impressed on pig minds.

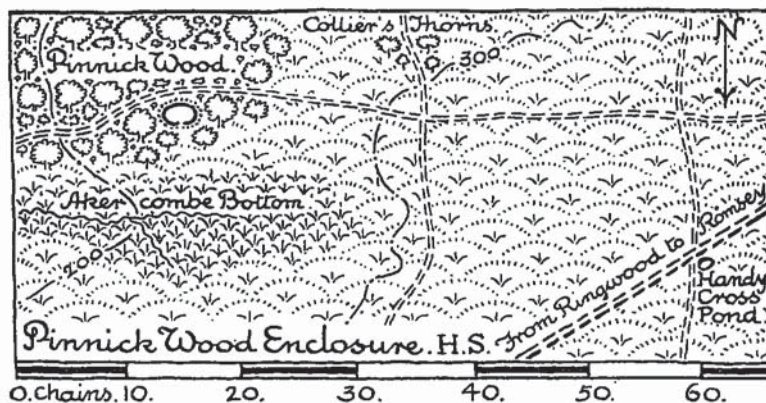
Probably Mediæval is my inscription for this earthwork. Why? May not these self-sown trees have grown on a derelict Roman or British earthwork? Why Mediæval?

Because the over-all measurements of comparable Roman or British earthworks are always larger than this.

Because the over-all measurement of this earthwork compares with those of Mediæval "encoppicement" examples at Ridley and Old Sloden.¹

Because the bank of this earthwork is only semi-consolidated with the adjacent soil; ancient earthworks belonging to the earlier periods aforesaid are wholly consolidated.

The site was well chosen, on a spur of plateau gravel outlying the Handy-cross Pond ridge, facing south, with water near by in Akercombe Bottom, which latter name testifies to this place having been noted for plenty of acorn pannage "time along."



New Forest soil has advantages and disadvantages, amongst the latter an excavator must include the bone-destroying acids that percolate through its soil. Excepting burnt bones, no bones are found on ancient sites here, so we have no knowledge of cattle or pigs kept by our New Forest forefathers, and only pony shoes (found on the Pottery sites) to indicate the small size of Romano-British ponies. On the chalk of Cranborne Chase, 12 miles distant, bones are fairly well preserved in the sub-soil.

¹ See "Ancient Earthworks of the New Forest," by the writer.

We do know from General Pitt-Rivers' excavations there, on Romano-British sites, that their pigs were taller at the shoulder but shorter in the back than our cross-bred pig, and that they retained many of the wild-boar characteristics; but there is a great gap between the end of the 4th century A.D. and Mediæval times, only partially bridged by scribal illustration, wherein the pigs delineated seem still to comply with such type of high-shouldered rather short-backed pig.

My next point is Holly Hatch, about three miles distant, where stands a lone keeper's cottage, near which are the other two sites that I want to investigate. My way goes through Roe Wood Inclosure; along the ride running south to north that crosses the broad consolidated entrenchments of a small camp, called Castle Piece, belonging to the class of pre-Roman earthworks that Dr. J. P. Williams-Freeman¹ names "Woodland Ringworks"; across the track from Roe cottage to Bratley; through the cut clearances of Scots pine in Milkham Inclosure, and out into the open expanse of Broomy Plain, whence there is a glorious prospect over Cranborne Chase, and the district to the west and north-west where three counties meet, namely Hants, Wilts and Dorset.

So far, through all these woodland solitudes, not a single deer has been seen, where, only a few years ago deer would have been seen in numbers. I have seen a herd of 29 deer in Greenford Bottom, and have seen and heard a bellowing stag with attendant hinds in the rutting season, ringing round and round through underwood near Castle Piece, and the following tale of "Veiv of Deere," here, in 1908, will further shew the difference in this respect between then and now. My son Humphrey, and I, were walking home from Greenford, after a morning spent in watching the deer-hounds hunting around Pinnick, Redshoat, Roe and Milkham; we returned through Appleslade, on the chance of seeing some of the disturbed deer—as we did—four does got up, and preceded us through the wood; then, as we crossed Rockford Common, we spied a buck, near Paddy Bussy's firs, who leisurely disappeared over the brow of the hill, we following, to be rewarded by a view of five bucks, all standing at gaze on the top of a little knap in Roden's Bottom.² They regarded our advent with unconcern, and only after they had fulfilled their curiosity moved from the knap towards the Linwood road. We were evidently set down as harmless. My son then went to the left, I to the right—both of us now unseen by the deer—with intention to drive them off Rockford on to Ibsley Common, in which we were successful, for when we emerged in view, they stotted off across the heather and sweet-gale in Digden Bottom, crossed Docken's water rather reluctantly, then paused in the

¹ "Field Archæology in Hampshire," p. 30.

² RODENSHINED, Perambulation of Edward I. RODENSBOTTOM of Charles II. cf. "Topographical Remarks on the New Forest," by Percival Lewis, p. 174, et seq.

further bog, and again stood at gaze; my son then made for Newlands bridge, while the bucks and I watched each other. After a time they turned, picked their way across the bog, and went up the hill towards Newlands; here they were headed by my son, who, at the same time, put up three does who were lying in the heather, and then the little herd of eight deer crossed Whitefield Plain, to the great surprise of the commoners' ponies, one of which reared violently and repeatedly, shaking his shackled fore-legs at the intruders, but the deer took no heed, and trotted on to the top of Little Chibden Bottom. Here they stopped, and again stood at gaze. Now, our project was to head them into Great Chibden Bottom towards Cuckoo Hill. But this was too much. The bucks seemed to decide that they had been playing long enough with us, and trotted straight away, followed by cantering does, across the plain to Leadenhall, down Ladywell Droke, and thence out of sight, despite our desperate efforts to head them. Thus ended our private "Veiw of Deere in the New fforest," January 20, 1908, while mine, December 9, 1924, had (so far) resulted in not a single deer having been seen. It should be noted that such decrease in the New Forest deer is not due to adverse natural conditions, but to buckshot, the deer being now shot down to a prescribed limit in number.

Well, after this reminiscent halt by the way, I must get on over the plain; past Broomy Lodge; then downhill through Broomy Inclosure, with oak canopy above and fern undergrowth; then, as open daylight beyond the track distance begins to foretell the end of the wood, cock-crow and dog-bark tell that habitation is nigh. Holly Hatch cottage to wit, standing trim and homely beside the way from Broomy to Fritham, on the northern verge of the Inclosure. It radiates well-being, and a high standard of up-keep, maintaining lonely credit to both Crown and keeper.

"A mound that rises above the bracken undergrowth of Holly Hatch, on the left hand side of the bottom ride before you come to the hollies," is my direction for the first supposed site here; that leads me without check to the spot. A mound riddled by rabbits and their scrapes, the up-turn of which proclaims at once its natural origin. This mound is one of many scattered over this district of Eocene formation, where predominant sand in a soil patch lying amid surrounding clay has retarded its denudation beneath the elements, for clay denudes more rapidly than sand. Sometimes these sand hillocks assume the appearance of a barrow, for example, "Black Barrow" and "Purlieu Pound," lower down in the Docken's valley; sometimes of continuous scarps or ramps, for example, in Eyeworth Wood, where such natural formations misled J. R. Wise ("The New Forest," p. 222) when he wrote: "On the north-east side of the wood are the remains of a fine Roman camp, the agger and vallum being in one place nearly complete." Again, on the western side of "Pipers Weight," and around "Lucas Castle," may be found

such continuous scarps or ramps that are formed by natural causes, *i.e.*, soil as affected by subærial denudation. *Ex uno disce omnes*, I forbear multiplying examples. They are many throughout this district.

"Outside Old Sloden, above Rakes Brakes Bottom, there is a rabbit bury with black earth up-turned." Such is my further direction for the second of the supposed sites near here: if the up-turn had included potsherds, I should have had better hope of finding an unrecorded Roman kiln site, but, notwithstanding, it is a likely place, as there is a Roman kiln site close by inside Old Sloden, which I excavated in 1920. So with hope, and caution, I skirt round the boggy edges of the bottom up to the hillside crowned by old trees.

Here, at length, I have a present-day "Veiw of Deere"—four bucks lying just outside the wood beside some holly trees. We go through the usual ritual. *Dramatis persona* stock still. Deer disturbed, at gaze, curious and undecided, but eventually moving off to a further distance, then stopping and again looking back at the stock-still figure, when suddenly they come to a conclusion, and spring across the brake into the fringe of thickets beside the bog, leaving a sense of vacancy in the forest scene when they have gone.

On going up to the place where the bucks were lying, the soft soil bears the impress of where they lay; close by are rabbit-holes, and grey-black sandy scrapes, behold the very place for which I was seeking—"a rabbit bury with black earth up-turned outside Old Sloden"; but, alas, inspection shews that the scrapes are of natural grey-black sandy soil mixed with pebble-stones, not of greasy black soil mixed with potsherds; and, again, I have to add to my list of searches in vain. This grey-black sandy soil occurs in patches throughout the Forest, and the colour seems to be due to the occasional black humus of the top soil. The black relics of decay are often difficult to differentiate from those of burnt stuff.

With one hit and two misses as my record to-day, I plod up to the top of the hill in order to see how Fritham Plain has recovered from the heath fires of recent years, when many fine outlying hollies were burnt here, besides old furze brakes. Furze that has been thus burnt, generally shoots at the root in a year's time. Not so old furze brakes—which are sometimes finally destroyed by a fire—perhaps because through long occupancy their land-patch has become "furze-sick"—a foresters' term for land-patches on which furze brakes have died of old age, without subsequent renewal by natural regeneration. The black desolation left by such fires is a dismal sight, and the damage done seems to be irreparable, but the holly stools generally survive notwithstanding; their trunks and charred boughs will be cut and sold for fuel; then, in a few years, young holly shoots will be springing up around blackened stools, and in time there will again be holly

bushes crowded with glistening foliage and coral berries. Not so with Scots pine, if their foliage is burnt, or even scorched, they are done for; they never try again. They die, sulking.

Such come-by-mischance fuel is bought from the Crown by adjacent foresters, who supply local demand for firewood. Many loads of this charred holly-wood have kept my home fires burning for the last three years. When sapless and thoroughly dry, holly-wood is fine fuel; it is very close in grain, burns evenly, and gives out great heat; but, unlike ash-wood fuel, it is not fit for burning at once, whereas ash may be cut to-day, and will give a blazing fire to-morrow. Oak, like holly, needs keeping for two or three years before burning. Elm burns badly at any time, gives out little heat, and smells unpleasantly in the wood-basket. Scots pine varies, it may be good or it may be bad, it may spit sparks and splutter. The only cedar that I have burnt, spluttered and popped in an agitating manner, but had a most pleasant smell. Apple-wood also is sweet-smelling when burnt, but needs long keeping before burning.

Such is my experience of wood fuel, burnt here during twenty-one years past—wherein naught else has been burnt in our grates—excepting in the kitchen.

And now my steps turn homewards, along the wooded ridge of Old Sloden; over minor earthworks which I have described and illustrated in "The Ancient Earthworks of the New Forest"; down the steep western bluff; across the open heath towards Hasley, where the track mounts and descends a sandy knoll; here it has been curiously channelled by the recent heavy rain (1.47 inches fell on December 15, 1924). The track is aligned on each side by sandy banks, now indented by drumming raindrops into a mottled grey surface, while down the track the rushing rain-water had deposited a smooth white course of washed silver sand, current-bedded, with marks of miniature swirls and eddies scored on its surface, crisp and fresh, as though chased by a fluent tool. It was really too beautiful to be trodden underfoot.

On, beyond, on the northern side of Hasley Inclosure, there is another sandy knoll of which the sand is bright orange in colour, containing fragments of ironstone limonite, a concretionary natural product of sand indurated with iron, which sometimes forms around roots in the subsoil, and when in time such roots have decayed and wasted away, ironstone tubes remain to provoke question.

Near here, outside the eastern end of Hasley Inclosure, there are extensive remains of rambling pits and hollows with up-turned mounds adjoining, that may have been made for obtaining ironstone, or heathstone as it is locally called; a stone that was evidently valued by the Romans, for it is constantly found on Roman sites throughout this part of Britain. They used it for the cheeks of hypocaust and kiln furnaces, and for the lining of flues exposed to great heat, because it does not splinter

under such conditions; it burns from orange-brown to wine-red under the action of continuous fire. Similar, though lesser, pit diggings may be found on other hilltops near here, notably on the summit of a sugar-loaf hill that rises above Purliu Pound bog in Ogden's Purliu, and at "Pits" on Ibsley Common, where we know that these diggings date back, at least, to Mediæval times by the name given to this place in New Forest Perambulations of Edward I, "Putts in Merkynggeslade," and of Charles II, "The Pits," and infer that heathstone was the material sought for, by present-day experience that this stone may still be found here.

Such sites as these are both intriguing and baffling to one who trusts excavation to provide documents—things that teach. There are no indications anywhere among these humps and hollows to direct the excavator's spade; yet there must be chance castaway relics buried beneath these great widespread diggings that would tell us when, and by whom, they were originally made. Ah! if only one had mole sense! An excavator, nowadays, is only half-equipped for his job. He has only two senses that help him, namely, sight, sharpened by experience, and feel, at the end of his delving prong tines; but he has lost the sense that guides the burrowing mole. "Old mole! canst work i' th' earth so fast?" He receives no wireless, subterranean messages as does the mole—such sense is atrophied in him by disuse—as is the sense of sight in old mole.

This atrophy of a sense by disuse—one that is not required for livelihood—may be comparatively gauged by considering our sense of smell, and a mole's sense of sight.

We do not depend on our sense of smell in order to procure livelihood. Indeed, if we entirely lost this sense we should not be crippled in dealing with daily life. We should be in danger of undetected gas escapes, but otherwise, if we lived in town, we should perhaps gain, in being immune from street smells; if we lived in country we certainly should lose stray pleasures of scent, year in and year out, but our livelihood would not be threatened. Result, our sense of smell is atrophied.

A mole neither uses or depends on sight in order to procure his livelihood. He lives in darkness, and, though he has eyes, they are so small, hidden in fur, and unused, that his sense of sight does not convey more than apprehension of daylight as opposed to darkness. He depends solely upon his reception and understanding of wireless, subterranean messages for his livelihood, coupled, I should suppose, with an acute sense of feel. Result, a mole's sense of sight is atrophied.

Now compare our sense of sight, on which we have depended for livelihood for countless centuries, with that of a mole. Our sight that ranges from scanning the far horizon to reading small print, and that guides our hands and feet, and informs our minds, all day long, day by day, far and near. If a mole could think,

and could appreciate the far-reaching gifts that our sight confers (and which it has lost), might not such thoughtful mole claim for balance against this loss his own far-reaching equipment in the sense and appreciation of smell?

As our sense of sight is—compared with that of a mole; so is a mole's sense of smell—compared with ours.

Such comparison suggests a surrounding subterranean distance charged with wireless messages, directions and calls which we do not apprehend, but which a mole does, and which guide him in procuring his livelihood.

Now this mole sense—this apprehension of subterranean messages—and their interpretation, is the sense that an excavator always longs for.

If only he could receive and interpret faint messages from long-buried relics! Whining below ground around their forgotten graves! Thin, wailing cries—"Save, oh! Save! we are here—here—and here—and have been buried for centuries, do bring us to the light of day, and we shall help to re-create the Past."

But their S.O.S. is not received—though, maybe, ever repeated, yet certainly never heard.

I wonder! Excavation is a young science, and excavators (despite appearances) must share the attribute. When this science, and those who try to serve it are older, who knows? Such servitors may then be learning to receive and to apprehend messages that now pass by unreceived, unapprehended. I wonder!

Thus musing and walking in undisturbed reverie for two long miles, the *dramatis persona* skirts Hasley Inclosure, crosses the wasting gullies of Ogden's Purlieu, and mounts the plain of Ibsley Common, that is now transfigured by the brief radiance of a wintry sunset. Then descends the green trackway leading down to the Avon valley, to cultivation, and to Cuckoo Hill, in time for tea; with "Thank the Lord for company"—in anticipation, as grace after walk.

January 7th, 1925.