

THE COAST OF HAMPSHIRE.

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I AM not sure that of late years the interest of our inland country has not led our Club rather to neglect our Coast. Yet it seems with interest not only in its natural history, but in its archaeology and its history.

Of its botany and marine zoology I am not competent to speak, though I should like to know if the wild seakale and spinach still grow where they did in the sixties—the wild tulip at Porchester is I know no longer wild. Nor do I know more of its geology than is involved in its archaeological problems.

It is so easy now to run down on bicycle or car to practically any part of the seashore that it might interest the Club to be reminded of the many points of antiquarian interest that are worth further study as we take the coast from Hayling Island to Bournemouth.

The student of paleoliths has classical hunting grounds in the gravel cliffs near Bournemouth and Hill Head, and the region round Portsmouth Harbour has yielded such a variety of forms to one local enthusiast, as well as supposed “squats” or kitchen middens and even pile dwellings of various alleged dates to more than one amateur, that one feels that that region, and the raised beach near Fareham, would be worth the careful study of some authoritative specialist well versed in the geological questions of the rises and falls of the sea level, as well as in the recent advances in the study of flint implements which leave the ordinary amateur positively dazed. Here is a field for any budding Reid-Moir in the Club.

This brings one to the question of the connexion of the Isle of Wight with the mainland in Neolithic or even Bronze Age times—which Sir William Boyd-Dawkins so strongly supported in the *Victoria County History*. Was there in recent times a watershed between the head of the then Solent River flowing west and the Southampton Water—Spithead River flowing east running across from Lepe to Egypt Point? Are the traditions both in the Island and the New Forest of carts having been used to bring tin and stone to and fro quite without foundation? No new light has, I am afraid, been thrown upon the question by the excavations for Southampton Docks, but the tendency of geologists is to put the sinking of the land and the cutting of the Straits of Dover later and later, and if they could assure us from the gravel or other evidence that the Bronze Age land route was possible, more than one archaeological point, such as the great number of the barrows along its line and on the Forest heaths, would be explained.

We know that in the early Iron Age numerous landings were made in S. Britain and probably several on our coast, though so

far only Hengistbury has been proved by excavation to be one of these settlements. It is not very likely that they will be found by chance—iron objects such as weapons do not last in salt water conditions as well as bronze, and pottery is likely to be overlooked.

There is no specific form of a seafarers' camp, though the "peninsular fort" made by cutting off a spit of land by a single bank and ditch across the isthmus is the most natural way of entrenching against land attack—the boats being hauled upon the beach. We have five such peninsular "forts" on the coast; one at Portchester outside the Roman and Norman castles, one cutting off the whole of Hamble Common, with the east end of the ditch where it joins the river big enough to harbour boats, though this may of course be a modern enlargement (it was used in my boyhood for lobster ponds), another cutting off Clausentum (Bitterne Manor) by two straight banks and ditches which in their recent condition are of course Roman, but may well have succeeded a British settlement, another at Exbury near the mouth of the Beaulieu River, and the fifth at Ampress near Lymington with a very wide ditch from the river to the mouth of a brook which looks as if it had been artificially enlarged to form a small dock called Ampress Hole. All these, except Clausentum, are presumably of Iron Age, though it is impossible to exclude Saxon or Danish use or construction. At Hengistbury are the well-known Double Dykes, two very large contiguous banks and ditches. They cut off about a square mile of the Head and should therefore be called "cross-neck dykes" rather than a "peninsular fort." If they are contemporary with the settlement just behind them which was excavated in 1911 or 1912, they belong to our earliest Iron Age. Lastly, at the extreme east end of our coast on Hayling Island on the edge of the Chichester inlet is the enclosed Earthwork Camp of Tunourbury. Now that it has been proved that the neighbouring part of Sussex was occupied by a Belgic tribe, it would be extremely interesting if excavation could date it—especially as it has a suggestion of the irregular pentagonal form like Silchester and Chichester itself. All these suggest seafarers' landing camps; the fine strong triple camp of Buckland Rings about five hundred yards inland from Ampress with its entrance looking towards it, and the hardly traceable four-acre camp mentioned in Gough's *Camden* and now occupied by the grounds of Ravens' Court House, are, of course, not seafarers' landing camps; they are *holding* camps, undoubtedly connected with the haven of Lymington River, though whether put up by the attackers or defenders it is impossible at present to say.

Roman Clausentum and Roman Portchester I need not enlarge upon, except to say that Portchester is by far the best preserved Roman fort in Britain, but the Roman harbour at Lepe just west

of Stone Point is not sufficiently known. It is now a marshy meadow silted up with its mouth barred by shingle, but the Roman road down to it has been traced in detail by Mr. Ingleton Sanders in our *Proceedings*. It was probably the harbour to which the stone for Beaulieu Abbey was brought from Binstead in the Isle of Wight, and the pits in Pit Wood on the north side of it no doubt supplied the ballast for the return journey. Whether it was the harbour from which Sir Nigel Loring sailed in the 14th century with the White Company, or whether the mouth of the Beaulieu River had already taken its place I cannot say. It is a delightful piece of our coast, and the Club ought to visit it.

There is no evidence on our coast of where Cerdic and Cynric landed at Cerdicsora. Calshot is nothing but a guess and, in my opinion, a very bad one. Eling or Totton would be a far snugger place for their three boats, and Mr. Crawford's suggestion that they marched thence to victory at Charford by the Cloven Way is a very taking one. I strongly recommend the walkers of the Club to follow his footsteps as set out in his paper in *Antiquity* of December 1931.

Of the Saxon 'burhs' garrisoned as strong places against the Danes by Alfred the Great there were three on our coast—Porchester, where he no doubt took over the Roman fortress as he did in other places, Southampton, where the burh was doubtless the Saxon settlement round St. Mary's Church, and Twynham (now Christchurch), where it probably was identical with the later borough. No trace of the Saxon fortifications has, however, been recognised at any of these places.

That Alfred built and designed—for he was his own Naval Architect—his famous new ships to overpower the Danes at Southampton there can be no doubt; probably the shipyards on the Itchen are the lineal descendants of his. His was the first English Royal Navy, unless we count as such the fleet of Carausius, the British usurper of the Roman imperial throne.

That Alfred's naval victory over the Danes with his new ships was in the Solent is historical, though the tradition that the old wreck in the Hamble River was one of the Danish ships has, alas! to be abandoned in the light of our member Mr. R. C. Anderson's investigations last spring and autumn neap tides. She turns out to be nearly certainly the *Grace Dieu*, the biggest ship of her day, built by Henry V at Southampton in 1418 and recorded to have been laid up in the Hamble and accidentally burnt there in 1439.—R.I.P.

The Norman castles defending our ports at Porchester, Southampton and Twynham need not detain us, but the defences of our coast in Henry VIII's reign would be an interesting subject well worth working up.

Early in his reign the French fleet had burnt a small fishing village called Brighthelmstone in Sussex and a good Hampshire man, Sir John Wallop who commanded the Channel Fleet, was ordered to make reprisals. He did so with such vigour—he landed, destroyed their shipping and burnt twenty-one of their towns and villages—that he is said to have added a new word to the English language by the way he walloped the French!

Henry VIII built a chain of stone castles round our coast, as well as five in the Isle of Wight, and furnished them with artillery, two of which remain as picturesque round towers. They were Lumps Castle (?), Southsea Castle, St. Andrew's Castle on Hamble Common of which only a platform remains; Netley Castle built with stone from the Abbey and now a private house, Calshot Castle built with stone from Beaulieu Abbey, and Hurst Castle west of Lymington which was still in commission up to the late war. The best known in the Island were the two on either side of the mouth of the Medina, the noise of whose guns gave the name to the town of Cowes.

The two great cows that in loud thunder roar
This on the Eastern that on the western shore.

That on the western shore is now the site of the Royal Yacht Squadron Club House.

Finally there was the Beacon system. The Club will remember the paper in Vol. X, Part 3, of our *Proceedings* by Mr. H. T. White—the first thorough investigation of the Beacon system in any part of England, and it is so interesting that I hope you will forgive me for summarising it.

A Beacon system of some sort existed in Alfred the Great's time. The Beacons, "as they have been of old," were reorganised by Edward II when he was expecting an invasion by Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer.

But it was Henry VIII that elaborated the system that was in use in the time of the Spanish Armada. His Beacons were barrels of tar with flax set on a massive square balk of timber called the Beacon Tree, supported by four struts and got at by a pole ladder with crossbars such as one sees occasionally in coats of arms, and I imagine they were fired by day to act as smoke signals as well as by night, after the manner of Moses.

Henry VIII established three sets or lines; the first were officially called the Beacons "in the valleys next the sea." We will call them the shore line. Their positions have not been worked out; probably they were at or very near the sites of the coastguard stations established or re-established for the prevention of smuggling early in the last century. Each of these Shore Stations had a group of *three* Beacons, and each was visible from the group next it on either side along the shore and from the Beacons of the second line.

This second line—the Coast Hill Line—was placed on hills a few miles inland, visible from each other and from the next line on high hills inland, and of course able to watch the Shore Line. They were at Burley, Setthorn Beacon at Sway, Malwood in the New Forest, Dibden, Toot Hill near Romsey, Chilworth, Moor Hill near Bitterne, Bushey Beacon above Sarisbury Green, and on Portsdown Hill : each of these had *two* tar-barrel Beacons.

The next line was that of the inland Beacons. These, were on high hills visible all over the country. In the south of the county, Farley Mount, Lomer (now called Corhampton Beacon) and Butser Hill. Further north were Burghclere Beacon, Patow (now called Popham Beacon) and Farley Wallop, and in the north-east Barnet Beacon, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles N.E. of Petersfield, and Crondall Beacon.

The western inland Beacons could be seen from Beacon Hill near Bulford in Wilts, while Burghclere was taken up by Cuchamsley on the Berkshire Downs, and northward Burghclere, Farley Wallop and Crondall Beacons could be seen from the Thames Valley. To the eastward along the South Downs, Harting Beacon and St. Rooks Hill (the "Trundle" near Goodwood) could take and spread the warning, and they could also see the Beacons on the Isle of Wight. Thus the network spread over the whole country.

The rules laid down as to calling up assistance to repel landings and to prevent false alarms were very clear and strict.

On the appearance of any number of ships, *one* of the three Beacons of the Shore Station that saw them was to be fired, and all the rest of the Shore Line was to take up the signal and fire one of theirs. This was evidently a "look-out" warning for everybody.

"If any army approach the coast within four miles the keeper of the shore beacons 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 his two beacons : whereupon the men of that part of the shire shall resort to a place appointed by the officer in charge of the shire." This was evidently the first stage to resist raids. The next was that, "when the keepers of the Shore Beacons see the enemy land in greater numbers than the men assembled there can resist, they shall in haste fire all their three Beacons, whereupon both the Beacons on the next hill shall be fired, and then one of each of the other pairs upon the coast hills, and all inland Beacons ; and every man shall resort to the hill where the two Beacons burn."

Later comes a warning that knowledge shall be given in the county that the men shall not rise to defend the coast "except that they see two fires to burn at once, and that the watchmen set no

Beacon afire except that it be well known that there be ten sail of the French upon the coast."

I need not go into means of calling the other counties of Wilts, Dorset and Sussex to our aid, or of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Gloucester and Somerset to resist invasion of the coast of Hampshire.

That the system was effective is shewn by the report of the Emperor Charles V's ambassador in Edward VI's reign that "By means of beacons the English say they can any where muster 25 to 30 thousand men in two hours, and they are confident in their strength and delighted to see their enemy near." I am afraid His Excellency must have been bluffed, for we know that the actual numbers to be mustered in a few hours to defend Portsmouth against the Armada thirty years later was only 16,000! However bluffing then, as now, was a court card in the game of diplomacy.

There is one more feature of our coast which must not be forgotten—the old Salterns. They exist everywhere along the seaside and up our estuaries, generally as a flat sea marsh known only by their name. Three "salt pans" are recorded and valued in Domesday Book at Eling, Dibden and Hordle, but it was in the Middle Ages when all the great houses killed off their cattle in the autumn and salted them down for winter use, that they flourished most, and the traffic inland is marked by the numerous Saltways and Salters' Lanes that are found in old maps and still survive.

Mr. Heywood Sumner has mapped and described two of them in his *Earthworks of the New Forest*—the great one near Lymington which is said to have paid £50,000 in duty to the Exchequer in one year in the 18th century, and the smaller one west of Needsore Point at the mouth of the Beaulieu River. Probably it served the Abbey. But the most ancient in our county was only discovered about two years ago near Warsash by the finding of a large quantity of broken red pottery of peculiar and unknown character to any of us who saw it, but now recognised as identical with that found in the mysterious Red Hills on the Essex coast, and these are now accepted as being Roman Salterns.

One could go on almost indefinitely pottering about the byways of archaeology and history that abound upon our coast—the formation of the bars across the rivers, the silting up of old harbours, the alteration of the coastline, the old quays, the coasting trade, the smugglers' lanes, the famous shipbuilding yards and a host of others; but I hope I have said enough to remind my fellow-members that in addition to its charm and beauty our quiet coast possesses a wealth of objects both of natural history and antiquity which it is the object of our Club to explore.