

A Note on the New Forest from the Archaeological Angle

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THIS note is written for the convenience of those who have not access to the works on the subject. It concerns itself only with some of the larger and more obvious objects of archaeological interest in the area of the New Forest. The most obvious evidence of prehistoric man are the tumuli or barrows, which, in fact, may be found all over the Forest in one form or another, and on which very little work has been done other than robbing. The soil conditions in the area are such that excavation is extremely difficult and not likely to be as rewarding as in a chalk country, the acidity of the soil destroying most buried objects and the marks left by the roots of vegetation being very confusing.

The largest concentration of barrows is in the S.E. of the area, particularly on Beaulieu Heath (East), and there was another concentration on Beaulieu Heath (West) where the aerodrome now is. If a leisurely inspection of the barrows on Beaulieu Heath (East) is undertaken, the viewer will be struck by the variety of the types of construction of the barrows, some round, others like a headless Trafalgar Square lion, etc. The Nodes barrows themselves are a good example, consisting of a large barrow and two oblong ones with a common ditch. Please note that the large barrow in the middle of the heath is a rifle butt formed by placing part of one barrow on top of another.

Half-way between Hill Top and Holbury and just south of the road are two distinctive barrows consisting of a central mound and a berm surrounded by an internal ditch and an external bank. There are three other larger examples of this type at the north end of Setley Plain close to Brockenhurst, of which two are excellent specimens, one abutting on the other, the third being about 100 yards to the south. It is believed these five are the only specimens of this type in the Forest. There is a large barrow and two smaller ones at the south end of Setley Plain, also a large barrow on Fritham cricket ground. Some small barrows are so situated that they would be useful as boundary marks or guide posts, and they were possibly of white gravel when first erected.

There is an ancient bank running down Setley Plain from the place where the Pennington road emerges on to the Forest at Shirley Holmes and ending near the railway just south of Brockenhurst, and there is another running in a northerly direction from near Holbury on the east side of Beaulieu Heath (East) and ending near the road opposite to the Nodes barrows. Both these banks enclose what amounts to a barrow field (there are isolated barrows outside, as well, in both localities) and it is tempting to think that the banks were originally connected and enclosed an enclave or beach-head, consisting of Lymington and Beaulieu. As an item of interest King Henry VIII exchanged the manor of Holbury for that of Nutting Hill (Notting Hill, London, W.); possibly the owner of Nutting Hill had little option.

There are a number of earthworks in the New Forest. Buckland Rings, Lymington, was excavated by Professor Hawkes in 1935 and dated by him to about 50 B.C. It is of the triple bank and ditch type (H.F.C. *Proc.* XIII, pt. 2). The castle at Burley is of the single bank and ditch type and is in a very commanding position with regard to probable ancient trade-routes,

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the ponds in the castle and the cartway to the west were made by gravel-seekers when making a rifle range in the valley below.

Frankenbury or Godmanescap, near Fordingbridge, is the largest fortified camp in the New Forest and encloses 11 acres. On the south and west sides the natural scarp of the hill defends it, but on the east and north sides there is a large bank and ditch, while Gough's Camden's *Britannia* stated it to be 'double trencht' on one side.

Castle Piece in Roe Wood, north of the main road to the east of the Picket Post, contains about $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres and is surrounded by a considerable bank and ditch, recently completely replanted over. It is a very interesting earthwork as in spite of its sizeable bank it is on the falling slope of a hill; the banks at the S.W. corner are nearly straight for a short distance and form an approximate right-angled corner, the rest of the bank being on a curve without any definite corners. It may possibly have had some connection with the ford a short distance below it either as a guardhouse or customs post or both.

Ampress is a defended site on the bank of the Lymington River just below Buckland Rings. It is roughly rectangular, with the Passford Brook to the north flowing through an inlet known as Ampress Hole. On the landward sides, i.e. west and south, it had always been considered to have been defended by a bank and ditch, but about 1938 Wellworthy's sank a horizontal cylindrical tank into the ground at right angles to the bank and just outside the southern end of the western side, and in doing so exposed the section of another large bank outside the visible ditch. The western bank has now been built over, but it is hoped to investigate the ground to the south, which is still open, to ascertain what the fortifications there consisted of. There is also a riverside earthwork at Exbury on the Beaulieu River.

There are four small enclosures of unknown use but of very similar type which should be considered as a special class of earthwork. They are rectangular, surrounded by a low bank and ditch with one entrance, roughly of the order of 100 feet square. They are sited on the flat areas of eminences, usually with the downward slope of a hill on one side: it will be noticed that if it were not for the present woods they all have an outlook of considerable extent to the north or west.

They are as follows: Denny Wait, near Matley Bridge on the Lyndhurst-Beaulieu road; Church Place, Ashurst, near Deerleap, Hounslow-Beaulieu road; Church Yard, Sloden, near western end of Sloden Wood; Studley Castle, near Bramshaw Beacon.

Church Yard, Sloden, was investigated by Mr Heywood Sumner in 1915, but he obtained no 'finds' of any sort, nor were there any traces of post holes. From his excavation across the ditch and bank, he estimated the original vertical depth from the top of the bank to the bottom of the ditch to be 7ft. 3ins. This earthwork has a modern cart track running across its centre (E.-W.). If there was a track from the Romano-British potteries to the west, as the writer believes, this earthwork would have been on its natural course, on the crest of the ridge, whether this should suggest that these earthworks are later than A.D. 400 is, at present, anybody's guess.

There are multitudinous banks and systems of banks in the Forest, so that it is proposed to draw attention to two of the largest only. These are the Bishop's Dyke and Lyndhurst Deer Park. The Bishop's Dyke is the subject of many colourful theories as to its origin, the nicest is that the Bishop was told he could have as much land as he could crawl round on his hands and knees during Mass. The area enclosed by the Dyke is known as the Bishop of Winchester's Purlieu, and was only returned to the Crown in comparatively recent times.

HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

The water from the area of the Purlieu flows out at the S.E. end of the enclosure at Pig Bush Passage as the Shepton Water and joins up with the Beaulieu River near the North Gate of the Beaulieu Estate. Anybody who braves the brambles to follow its course will notice that from its junction with Wort's Gutter, coming from Furzey Lodge, to the Beaulieu River it follows a straight course. The explanation of this unusual procedure for a Forest stream is to be found in a document of the reign of King Henry III regularising an encroachment by the monks of Beaulieu on the Forest, and giving their new boundary as 'Wort's Gutter to where it joins with the ditch caused to be dug by my uncle Richard (I) to drain the Bailywyke of Lyndhurst'. There is a stone bridge across this ditch. Just outside the Dyke and to the S.W. of Pig Bush Passage is a large long eminence of sand which the writer believes to be Rowbarrow and which is a mesolithic site (H.F.C. *Proc.* XIV, pt. 2). Not very far away to the S.W. lies Woodfidley, where the rain comes from; its name is derived from Wulf-Hyde-Ley as quoted in ancient documents.

Lyndhurst Deer Park and its extent and boundaries are from time to time a matter of discussion. The writer's ideas on the subject are embodied on the accompanying sketch-plan, but are merely a suggestion as to the western limit of the deer parks, the remaining boundaries being fairly straightforward. The only fresh point introduced into the discussion being the fact that the Ridge bank does, in fact, turn at right angles above Row Beech, and descends nearly to the Lyndhurst-Beaulieu road before becoming confused. A more detailed explanation follows to make the sketch plan easier to understand.

LYNDHURST DEER PARK

6in. O.W. LXXII N.E. S.W. N.W.

The banks shewn on the above maps still exist and are in a fair state of preservation, the inner bank being the most damaged and giving the impression of greater antiquity than the outer bank (The Ridge). Both banks have a ditch on the inner side and in the least damaged portions are far bigger than anything necessary to contain horses or cattle and so, presumably, were intended to enclose deer, assuming they were surmounted by a stockade. The western end of the ridge or outer bank in its northern portion turns southward to Roe Beech House with a definite corner at the summit of the Ridge and a spread bank with a ditch to the east running down the slope nearly to the road. This would seem to indicate that the western bank of the enclosure followed the line of the present N.W. boundary bank of Pondhead Inclosure.

The S.W. extremities of the existing banks as shewn on the maps meet at the S.E. corner of Park Ground Inclosure, assuming that the inner bank continued along the S.E. side of this Inclosure, which it appears to have done. The banks round Park Ground Inclosure are very robust except between the Pound at Clay Hill and Beechen Lane although the corner at Beechen Lane is complete. The western bank of Park Ground Inclosure does not form the boundary of the present Inclosure N. of the Pound, but continues close to the E. of the houses till close to the 'Crown and Stirrup' and then turns and rejoins the present Inclosure boundary. The bank along the N.W. side of Pondhead Inclosure is no larger than the average inclosure bank but has cultivation to N.W. and the undergrowth on the S.E. side is fairly dense and it is difficult to get a good view of it.

The junction of the banks at the S.E. corner of Park Ground Inclosure is mutilated and confused and it is possible that the outer (Ridge) bank continued in a direct line as the present

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S.W. Inclosure bank, although it has obviously at some time curved round slightly to N.W. to join the Inclosure bank at the present S.E. corner: this is one of the main difficulties in deciding how the banks were originally placed. It does not seem probable that there was an enclosure between the inner and outer banks as their ditches are both on the same or inner side, it is more reasonable to suppose that the outer bank was an enlargement of the area previously enclosed by the inner bank. If this is correct, and they join at or about Roe Beech House on the north and at the S.E. corner of Park Ground Inclosure on the south, they presumably enjoyed a common western boundary, and the obvious though purely conjectural boundary is the bank running from the S.E. corner of Park Ground Inclosure N.W. to the Lymington road, thence north to the 'Crown and Stirrup', then in a N.E. direction to Roe Beech House.

Some of the books on the New Forest :

Heywood Sumner, 'Ancient Earthworks of the New Forest', *Book of Gorley*.

Dr J. P. Williams-Freeman, *An Introduction to Field Archaeology as illustrated by Hampshire*.

Lewis on the New Forest.

William Gilpin edited by Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, Bart., *Remarks on Forest Scenery*.

J. R. Wise, *The New Forest*.

F. E. Kenchington, *The Commoner's New Forest*.

Forestry Commission, *Guide to the New Forest*.