

THE SITE OF MORIDUNUM.

BY P. O. HUTCHINSON.

(Read at Crediton, July, 1882.)

AT page 300, vol. xxxvii., of the *Journal of the Archaeological Association*, there is an excellent and an interesting article by our member, Mr. J. B. Davidson, M.A., "On the Twelfth and Fifteenth Itinera of Antoninus." Although this article is printed in the yearly volume of another society, I wish to make some remarks on a kindred subject here, and even to reply to some of the theories there propounded. These points involve the question of the disputed site of the Roman station Moridunum; and that the site really was and still is disputed will fully appear when I say that Camden, Gale, Musgrave, Stukeley, the Bishop of Cloyne, Sir R. C. Hoare, Salmon, and Borlase place it at Seaton, near the south-east corner of Devon, misled by the supposed authority of an imaginary derivation. Horseley places it at Eggardun, nine miles from Dorchester; Baxter at Topsham, strange to say, only four miles from Exeter; some French writer (whose name I will omit), still more strangely, but probably by mistake, puts it at Salcombe Regis, a mile east of Sidmouth; the late Mr. J. Davidson at Hembury Fort; his son, in the article alluded to above, at Honiton; and myself—but stop! We must take things consecutively.

This subject is familiar to me; for in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for February, 1849, there is a long dissertation by me on the site of Moridunum. Of course I had to go over all the accustomed authorities bearing upon this controversy, such as the Itineraries, and a certain group of old writers; and had to remember that Môr-y-dun was the early Keltic orthography—Môr, as any Welsh dictionary will show, meaning the sea; y, the article; and dun, din, or dinas, a hill—

fortress or stronghold—and that Moridunum is the Latinization thereof. There were three fixed points in the investigation which seemed to demand implicit obedience: First, that “the lost station” should be at about thirty-six Roman miles from Durnovaria or Dorchester, on the east; second, that, according to the Itineraries, it should be fifteen from Isca or Exeter, on the west; and third, that the hill be on the sea-coast, as laid down by Dr. Gale in the following words: “Môr Britannis, est mare; et super collem (Dunum), juxta mare, eminet hoc oppidum.”

From a long and an intimate knowledge of Sidmouth and the neighbourhood my early attention had been drawn to the second hill westward from the town, whose base is washed by the sea, and whose towering summit, according to the Ordnance Survey, attains a height of 513·9 feet. The first hill is Peak Hill, with a height of 489 feet; and the second, to which I allude, is known as High Peak. The upper part of this commanding height is occupied by the remains of bold entrenchments. By the annual wearing away of the soil, the greater portion has fallen into the sea. What remains of the great agger is 50 feet on the slope. In 1848, on the outside exposed face of the agger, I discovered the edge of a stratum of oak charcoal, as if signal-fires had once been lighted there, and the burnt-out remains subsequently buried by heightening the agger; and in another place I met with some bones of animals sticking out to view, and pulled them out, but proceeded no further, not suspecting that there was a deposit there. In 1871 Mr. Aubrey Strahan, of the Geological Survey, was examining the top of the hill for geological purposes, when he came upon the same bed of bones, now more exposed than when I had first seen them, after the long interval of twenty-three years. He mentioned the circumstance to the Rev. R. Kirwan, who made an examination of the spot, with very interesting results. Quietly, deliberately, more at leisure, and more satisfactorily, I several times followed up the work, and extracted jaws, teeth, cores of horns, &c., of the *Bos longifrons*; vertebræ of three different size animals; femur of a quadruped as large as a hare; part of the lower jaw and teeth of a pig; and last, though not least, among the organic remains the bones of a bird about the bigness of a pheasant or barn-door fowl, the bone core of the spur still attached to the leg. The best of these I sent to the Exeter Museum; also one or two spherical white quartz pebbles, as large as the marbles commonly used by boys, and similar to what have been occasionally met with in middens

and burial-places, the uses of which are not exactly ascertained. Mr. Kirwan and myself further met with many fragments of common red pottery, about the quality of flower-pots. These vessels had been turned on the wheel, but instead of being smooth on the outside, they were mostly encircled with rings or notches, like the shallow teeth of a saw, or the ridges of the planks of a boat. In this they somewhat resembled certain Saxon pottery, but this point is not insisted on. These various objects were all confusedly mixed together in a quantity of discoloured soil of the hill, ashes and charcoal, pebbles like the sling-stones so frequently met with in this neighbourhood, and notably in the deposit in the artificial cave on Sidbury Castle camp in March, 1864, and fragments of stone that had been split by heat. It was plain that all this constituted the remains of a refuse heap. Judging by all the circumstances of the case, it appeared most reasonable to suppose that the materials of the heap had been originally within the area of the camp; that the whole had been shovelled on to the top of the surrounding agger; and then, as if the agger had been repaired and heightened, about two feet of brown earth had been thrown up over the rubbish, where all this deposit had remained undisturbed and unknown for sundry centuries, until accident and the eroding effects of the elements revealed it to view.

There is no doubt that this position on High Peak Hill was at one period a place of considerable importance; and as it agreed in all three points above enumerated—namely, the right distances from Durnovaria on the one hand, and Isca on the other, together with its position on the coast—I contended, in the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, that this hill fortress occupied the site of Moridunum. For twenty years I adhered to this sentiment, when one day it suddenly flashed across my mind, that possibly the first syllable Môr, the sea, in the word Môr-y-dun, may originally have been More, an adjective meaning great; thus making the compound word More-y-dun simply "The Great Castle," or "The Great Hill Fortress." This of course would ignore the maritime position altogether, notwithstanding the array of great names above mentioned that had given it their support; and whilst wavering in this incertitude, it could not be forgotten that the remarkable station of Hembury Fort stood at the required distances, but twelve miles inland. It was once suggested to me that the form More-y-dun was not good modern Welsh, whatever grammatical propriety it may have had in ancient Keltic. It was observed that the

adjective "more" ought not to precede the noun "dun," but rather, ought to follow it; that More-dun would be bad Keltic, but that Dun-more would be good. I referred the point to a Welshman, but he could only argue the question on modern grounds, and he reduced the old forms into the present dialect of his native tongue. Thus, "more" would be "mawr," and "dun" would be "dinas;" and it would be more in accordance with the above rule—the validity of which he recognized, subject perhaps to some modifications, if not exceptions—to say Dinas-mawr, rather than Mawr-dinas; but he spoke of the current Welsh of the day, and would not venture to argue on the remote usages of early Keltic.

Despite the honoured names of Camden and his followers, I found myself from that time forward involuntarily relinquishing the sea coast, and settling down upon that remarkable station west of Honiton, composed of Hembury Fort proper, together with its adjunct or outwork, the long promontory occupied by Bushy Knap and Buckerell Knap. Every examination of this promontory, the importance of which has been strangely overlooked by our local antiquaries, leads to the conviction that it was originally part and parcel of one great military position. The entrenched camp on the highest point was the citadel or keep, whilst the works on the promontory were like the outer bailey with its barbican of a mediæval castle. A careful survey of all the features of the situation makes it plain that they are parts of one great whole. Standing at the south point of the camp or citadel, upwards of 800 feet above the level of the sea, and looking towards the noonday sun, Hembury Fort House is at the spectator's feet; and then glancing away towards the south-east, the entire length of this tongue of land is easily discerned, where the trees are not too thick, with the earthworks of Buckerell Knap, and beyond that the mound with the clump of trees known as Bushy Knap. The tongue, trenched round, proceeds to a point a quarter of a mile further; and here it is so near the great road between Honiton and Exeter, which occupies the line of the old Icknild, that it may with reason have been called on it, as the Itineraries say that Moridunum was. Imagining the country free from modern hedges, but rather in a state of open moor, as it probably was in Roman times, and as the tops of the hills are still, it is not too much to assume that from Bushy Knap vehicles, horsemen, foot soldiers, and even individuals, could have been seen passing along the Icknild.

In August, 1861, I read a paper on the subject of "Hem-

bury Fort" and some other hill stations, at a meeting in Exeter. I take the following from my diary :

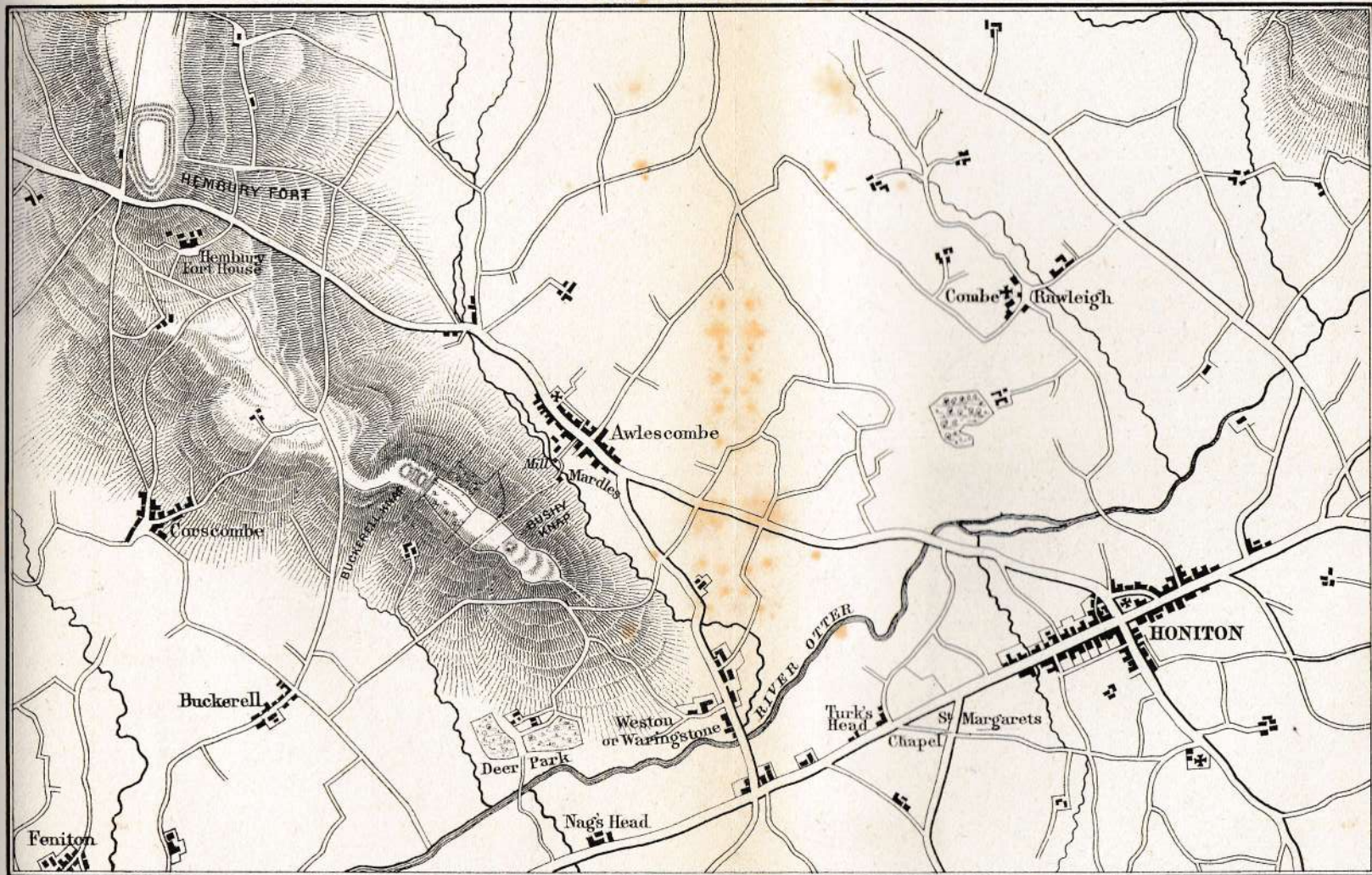
"Mon. Aug. 19 [1861.] Meeting of the Archæological Association in Exeter. Went in to join them, taking my paper on the 'Hill Fortresses, Tumuli, and some other antiquities of Eastern Devon,' and some of my illustrations. The papers will be read, and a temporary Museum is formed in the Ball-room close to the New London Inn. Went there and saw all my objects of antiquity and drawings safe. . . .

"Th. Aug. 22. This evening I read my paper, Mr. Pettigrew, the Vice-President, in the chair."

The plan of Buckerell Knap, however, which I then used, and which was afterwards published in the *Journal*, I now condemn as faulty, having by subsequent visits made more accurate surveys. The Map accompanying these observations is double the size of the Ordnance scale; namely, two inches to a mile instead of one. Mr. Heineken, of Sidmouth, and myself, have made several expeditions together to these regions, and have been in the habit of at once jotting down our observations on them in our note-books. Mr. Heineken writes, June 6th, 1859 :

"The Knap is a long narrow tongue of land, well fortified naturally, but evidently, in addition, scarped all round. The mound at the southern end is evidently artificial: has been trenched round, and is about 13 feet high from its rise from the natural surface, and 230 feet in diameter, as near as could be measured by the tape, from margin to margin. The position is an admirable one, as it quite commands the road from Hembury to Honiton—that from Honiton to Exeter, and the roads descending the hills above Honiton from Dorchester and Stockland, and the coast from Exeter to Sidmouth. We then walked along the whole of the ridge. At the narrowest part, just out of the present copse, a ditch is cut right through, as a defence. There is then a rhomboidal mound, say 130 feet, trenched round; and at the extreme point, towards Hembury, another larger and higher—say 200 feet, of a somewhat oval shape, also trenched round. The view from this is very fine and panoramic, bounded by the Blackdowns towards Hembury and Honiton, and by Ottery East Hill to Harford Beacon. It then extends to Woodbury, and to Haldon Hills (?) If there was any connection between this and Hembury, it would be along a ridge lower down in a hollow, trending towards Hembury Fort House. On the Ordnance a road runs in this direction. All these mounds have depressions in their centres, as if they had been examined. I remember old Mr. Hughes, of Honiton, once saying that a tradition existed of there having been a large block of stone, supposed sacrificial, there; but

TO ACCOMPANY THE PAPER ON "THE SITE OF MORIDUNUM," BY PETER ORLANDO HUTCHINSON.



we on several occasions have enquired about it without avail. The large house below [on the south] is occupied by the Steward to the Hon. Colin Lindsay, the owner of the Knap and of Deer Park. It would seem that the enemy was expected from the Honiton side; that Bushy Knap formed the first defence; and the defences increased in number and difficulty to Buckerell Knap, which is also much higher."

My own remarks, under the same date, are the following :

"Mon. June 6, 1859. Mr. Heineken and myself resolved to visit Hembury Fort, distant [from Sidmouth] nearly twelve miles. We started at nine, passing through Sidbury. We pulled up at Hunter's Lodge, [on Honiton Hill,] and took some observations with the sympiesometer, to ascertain the height of the hill, which, however, has been levelled from Sidmouth, and found to be 800 feet. Made steep descent; and crossing the Honiton road, passed Weston, or Waringstone, to Awlescombe. Here we got out to see the church. The village was full of flags and holiday people; and as they were now all in church, we altered our plans. We explored Bushy Knap and Buckerell Knap. The former is an immense mound or tumulus at the southern point of the hill, which we climbed in spite of the heat, on which some trees grow, and from which a fine extent of country is seen; the latter is the northern, and higher end of the hill, rising like a mound about 200 feet in diameter, surrounded by an earthwork, and having other earthworks south of it across the hill to dispute the approach. These places look strongly, as if they had been outposts connected with Hembury Fort. . . . We went into the church. . . . We then made for Hembury Fort. . . . This is a wonderful camp. It is a long square with the corners rounded off, and the southern end more pointed, and having a circular place, as if a beacon had been there. The length from north to south is 1085 ft.; width across the middle, 285 ft.; and nearer the north end, 330 ft., from the tops of the aggers.* We measured from the top of the inner agger at the north end to the bottom of the fosse, [with a surveyor's tape,] and made it 57 feet. On the west side, from the top of the inner agger to the top of the second, 85 feet. Sidmouth tower is only 75. The camp is surrounded by three aggers with their ditches. Across the middle of the interior area run two hedges or earthworks, the purpose of which is disputed. There is a mound in the middle of the south one. The entrance was at the west; perhaps another at the north-east. A Roman iron Lar was found here in 1801. I should like to know what has become of it. We varied our route home by taking the lane on the south-west, which is straight, and perhaps occupies the line of a Roman road. We passed Lower Cheriton, Feniton, climbed up Ottery East Hill, passed Hunter's Lodge, Sidbury, &c., and got back by nine, having been out twelve hours."

* There is a plan of Hembury Fort in SHORR's *Antiq. Devon.* p. 85; and a better in the *Jour. Arch. Assoc.* Mar. 1862.

In August, 1860, Mr. Heineken writes :—

“A road just below the Turk’s Head leads off to Awlescombe and Hembury Fort. On Buckerell Knap, about a mile from the great road, and that to Awlescombe, there are two tumuli, the southern one [Bushy Knap] large and trenched. Could this have been the station—mutatio—for Moridunum—Hembury Fort? and if so, might not this have been the station in the Iter? On a point east of the Knap is an estate called Mar-dles—query Mor. Near Payhembury is an estate, Morden; query, Mor-dun? in Latin Mor-i-du-num. There is also an estate, Uggerton; query, Agger-ton? If the above be correct we have the British name Mordun; the Roman Agger-ton; and Saxon Hem or Hen (old) bury, all existing close to the place at the present day.”

The last visit to the promontory or tongue of land had opened up so novel a view of the theories connected with “the lost station,” that we desired to make a further examination; so we went.

“Monday, May 8th, 1871.—Mr. Heineken and myself wished once more to examine Bushy Knap and Buckerell Knap, which hill has all the appearance of being an outwork like a promontory in advance of Hembury Fort, overlooking the Icknild between Honiton and Exeter. We drove through Sidbury to the top of Honiton Hill. We got out at the six-mile stone, and walked a few score yards eastward over the heath to revisit the three barrows opened in 1869.* We went on and made a short cut to Awlescombe, by crossing the great road a mile west of Honiton. We discussed our sandwiches in a shady place near the Mill at Mardles, and then mounted the flank of the hill. This peculiar hill is a long narrow ridge, and seems to have been regularly fortified by an earthwork all round. I took several measurements, and in my History of Sidmouth,† I have made a more correct plan than my former one of June 6, 1859, which in 1862 appeared in the *Journal of the Archaeological Association*. Some writers say there was a sacrificial stone on this hill.‡ We renewed our enquiries, but no one ever heard of it. The defences at the north end are certainly very peculiar and interesting. If this place became untenable the garrison would retire upon Hembury Fort along the ridge, discernible nearly all the way.”

The above remarks are confined to an examination of the promontory. In October, 1862, Mr. Samuel Chick drove me over to the Blackdowns in his gig to hunt for Iron Pits, and we drove up into the interior of Hembury Fort. At this moment the late Mr. Venn, the owner, whom I had known

* *Trans. Devon. Assoc.* xii. 127.

† In MS. in five vols. 4to, and destined for the Exeter Free Library.

‡ *Notes on Antiq. Devon.* p. 14.

before, entered on horseback at the north-east corner. During conversation I remarked that unless the grass covering the area of the camp were ploughed up, it would be hopeless to try and discover any relics of antiquity. He replied that some years before it had been in tillage, and that both corn and potatoes had been grown there. The returns, however, had been so slender that the ground had been allowed to go back into grass. The following extract I also take from my Diary :

“Monday, August 24th, 1874.—After an interval of fifteen years to the very day, as it happened by mere chance, Mr. Heineken and myself went over to Hembury Fort, and to the village of Payhembury. We were there on the 24th of August, 1859. . . . Mr. H. and myself took a good ramble beyond the north end, which we had scarcely examined before. The level field on the north of the camp was perhaps a likely fighting ground ; and an examination here, if the place were ploughed, might reveal something interesting. There are some stones which may be the remains of a tumulus in the middle of this field. One of the western aggers runs up to nothing against the west flank of this field. Mr. Heineken suggested as to whether a sort of sallyport existed there, and whether there was not a retreat back into the camp along the bottom of the fosse by a kind of covert way at this point. The heaps and inequalities (below the aggers on the south-west side) . . . were where attempts had been made to dig scythe stones, as they do in the Blackdown Hills above Kentisbeare. A man took a year's lease for £10 of the late Mr. Venn, and, luckily for him (the man), he struck upon a good vein of stone, and took out £40 worth of scythe-stones in a week. . . . We returned back into the camp at the north-east corner, but there is no defined road there now. This series of aggers all along the north end are bold, and really grand to look at. They struck me to-day more forcibly than before. Every visitor to this place ought to examine and contemplate them. We took no measurements, as we measured everything carefully with the tape fifteen summers ago. . . . This hill, as open common, has been claimed by Mr. Drewe, of Grange, and by Mr. Porter, of Hembury Fort House. Three lawsuits have arisen out of this claim ; but they have been given in favour of the Venn family. The Venns own, with few intervals, nearly all the land between this and Payhembury.”

Mr. Davidson, in his learned and very instructive paper, places Moridunum at the spot now occupied by the town of Honiton. If this locality had been so occupied by the Romans, it might be expected that some trace of the presence of that people would have been met with. Roman coins, or some other proof of Roman occupation, have been detected at a series of places dotted in an orle or great circle at a few

miles distance all round this town as a central point; such, for instance, as at Sidmouth, Aylesbear, Tallaton, Hembury, Yarcombe, Wadeford, Heathstock, Membury, Dalwood, Axminster, Kilminster, Colyton, Uplyme, Seaton, Honeyditches, and Branscombe; but after all the digging for the foundations of houses, and all the deep trenching for sewers or otherwise, I have not been able to learn, after enquiry made, that the smallest relic of anything of Roman origin or make has ever been brought to light within the area of Honiton. I merely mention this as a coincidence. The only relic from Hembury Fort is the Roman Lar, but there is no trenching there that might lead to discovery, and no disturbance of the soil that could unearth ancient remains. Still less has there ever been anything of the kind on the long promontory; and its archaeological features have been entirely overlooked by our local students. These remarks, in the present state of our knowledge, will sufficiently explain why I do not know how to adopt the theory that Moridunum was at Honiton. Another obstacle raised against the claims of Hembury Fort is, that it lies too far off the Icknild Street to be called on it, as implied in the Itineraries; but by including the long promontory, as I do, to be embodied as part and parcel of a comprehensive whole, I at once remove this objection. If we draw an oval ring fence all round the promontory and the camp of Hembury, we shall have a long narrow figure, measuring not much less than two miles in extent, and that is what I assign as having been the great station of Moridunum, whose southern end was so near the Icknild that for all military purposes and all practical purposes it was on it.

I conclude by remarking that this question will not be settled to-day. All that those who are in the pursuit of truth can do is to place their convictions and the result of their researches on record; but it will rest with others, after due consideration, to say where the greatest weight of the evidence may lie.

NOTE.—It is due to Mr. Heineken, one of the members of this Association, to state that he claims for Dumpdon very strong pretensions for having been the lost station in question. This camp is very nearly the same shape, and contains very nearly the same area as Hembury. It stands on a conical hill, 879 feet above the level of the sea, at a distance of two miles N.N.E. from Honiton, and is so placed in respect to several roads and thoroughfares passing by it and through the country in various directions as to suggest that it was not only a place of great importance, if indeed it were not the very station now sought for.