

SOME HITHERTO UNRECORDED HILL FORTRESSES NEAR ASHBURTON.

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HAD this subject been undertaken by one of our members versed in archæology, and accustomed to view ancient remains of different ages, and erected for various purposes, we might expect that his experience and learning would throw some ray of light through the darkness which obscures the origin and use of the many hill forts, castles, rings, or by whatever name the earthworks may be called, which crown so many of our hills in the South Hams and other parts of the county. But in the absence of such a paper, I can simply place on record in the *Transactions* of our Association the existence and present state of five such remains, fast passing from view, two of which are only remembered by a few seniors of our town, among whom is Mr. Robert Tucker; another scarcely traceable, as year by year the plough levels its ramparts and fills its ditches; whilst the others are so hidden in dense woods that few know even of their whereabouts. I shall confine my remarks to these five, because I have been unable to find them recorded in any works where similar remains are mentioned; but at the same time I shall not overlook a few facts, which I leave for others to judge whether or not they bear on the subject.

Camps on Ashburton Down.—On an elevated and exposed heath, known as Ashburton and Storms down, but formerly "Estdowne," a great part of which is now enclosed and planted, existed, within the memory of the present generation, as far as I have been able to discover, two enclosures, each formed by a ditch. One seems to have surrounded the western crest of the hill behind Alston plantation, the other the eastern crest on Storms down, about half a mile distant. They commanded an extensive view of the road from Ilington to Ashburton—thought by some to have been the early

highway between Exeter and Plymouth, passing over the high lands of Hennock and Bovey rather than the low country taken by the present road near Stover, which must have been unfit for a highway until extensively drained. I find an entry among the receipts in the Ashburton churchwardens' account for the year 1523, as follows: "xiii^d from the gift of William Leer of Witton in satisfaction for ploughing the King's way (regie vie) leading from Owlecombe towards Ayssheberton above the Estdowne on the east side of the aforesaid Witton," which seems to point to the road then being of some importance. Toward the south-east the whole of the low, rich lands between Newton Abbot and Totnes, with Denbury down and its entrenched summit, are spread out as a map below, whilst from west to north the range of moor hills from Brent Hill to Haytor Rocks is commanded.

Place Wood, or Tower Hill Castle.—About a mile north-east of Ashburton rises a steep hill known as Tower Hill, in fact, a spur of Ashburton Down, traversed by the above-mentioned road to Ilsington, on the highest point of which, and adjoining the road, can still be traced, by the undulations of the ground, the remains of an ancient fosse, in two fields called Castle Parks, surrounded on two sides by Place Wood and Whiddon Cliff Copse. This spot, once a hill fort, but by whom used there is no lingering tradition to tell, commands on the south-east much the same view as those on Ashburton Down, but toward the south and west the whole of the valley between Ashburton and the moor is full in view, as well as the course of an ancient pathway down the side of the hill to lanes now almost disused, leading, without passing through Ashburton, to fords on the Dart on the Plymouth highway, and probably once the continuation of the same western road mentioned above, and still, as is not uncommon, remaining to the public as a footpath right. The farm in the valley below the castle, toward the south-east, is called Balland—perhaps connected with Bel, or Bal, the Mars of the British, and so the "Champ de Mars" of the castle.

Boro Wood Camp.—About a mile and a half north of Ashburton, and separated from Tower Hill and its adjoining woods by a stream now called the Yeo, but formerly the Ashburn, from which, doubtless, the town took its name, is Boro Wood. Lysons says that Boro in Celtic meant an enclosure or fort; and at the highest part of this wood there

is such a boro, or enclosure, formed by a ridge of stones from twelve to twenty feet wide, acting as a rampart, having no ditch on the outside, but so placed as to take advantage of the crest of the hill. The thickness of the coppice prevents its being seen as a whole, and therefore its exact size and shape are almost unknown, but from measuring the circumference I calculate it to contain four acres; whilst on the east, facing Tower Hill Castle, are found traces of an entrance guarded by heaps of stones, perhaps once a warder's lodge similar to those described by Mr. Spence Bate as existing in some enclosures near the Erm. The part toward the north-west, where the ground is level, is protected by a double ridge of stone, having a narrow way between; and probably, as large stones were scarce and wood plenty, a stockade was added to the defence of this boro: the same cause, doubtless, accounts for the absence of any hut circles such as are found in similar enclosures on the moor.

From its centre a fine view is obtained of the valley in which Ashburton stands, as well as the ways leading into it from all sides. If this was the site of a British village, as its name implies, then the cairns at Ausewell Rocks, the highest point of the hill of which Boro Wood is a spur, mark the place of burial of the tribe.

I must add that between Boro Wood and Tower Hill Castle there is a place on the Yeo called Belford, doubtless the ancient ford, or way, across the morass dedicated to Bel, as the more modern bridge just below, known as Cuttyford Bridge, is to the mediæval Saint Christopher, for whom Cutty is the abbreviation.

A spindle whorl was once found among the stones of the rampart.

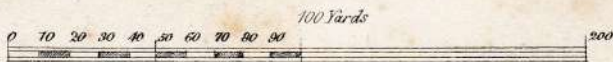
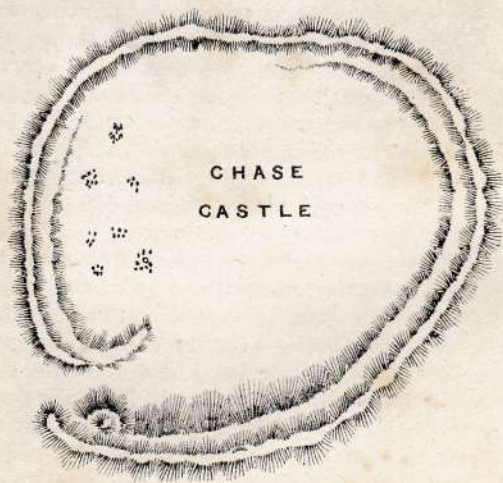
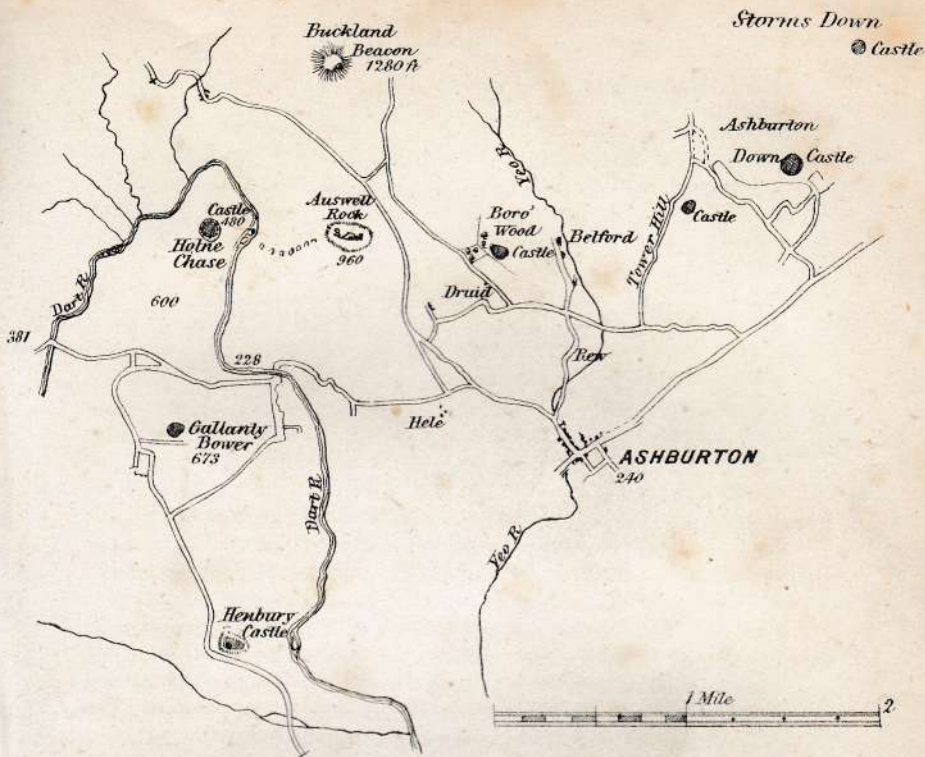
Holne Chase Castle.—On the peninsula of Holne Chase, surrounded on three sides by the deep valley of the Dart, and 200 feet above the river, completely shut off from the view of all the other forts by a high ridge, we find a very perfect entrenchment, which quite answers the description given by Cæsar of a Celtic place of retreat and refuge. It is commonly called a Roman Camp, but for what reason I have been unable to discover.

It consists of a perfect fosse, between thirty and forty feet wide, but varying from three to twelve feet in depth in its present state, having an agger inside for about three-fourths of its circumference, that part toward the south commanded by the hill being the strongest, enclosing a space of rather

more than two acres and three-quarters. The entrance is at the south-west corner, and is of curious construction, consisting of a gap in the agger, the fosse at that part disappearing, one end of the agger curling back about sixty feet into the enclosure, so as to form a passage, through which an enemy must pass exposed to the missiles of the defenders on either hand; whilst in the depth of the opposite end of the agger, which at this place is twelve feet high, there is a circular excavation lined with a dry wall, having its opening toward the entrance, probably a warder's lodge; it is twenty-two feet in diameter at the top, and was, perhaps, once covered. This entrance, with the exception of the warder's lodge, in some measure resembles the description given of that at Dumpton Castle by Mr. Hutchinson, in a paper read before this Association at Honiton, in 1868, where he remarks: "In most cases the entrance is little else than a gap left in the surrounding earthworks, which, of course, bespeaks great rudeness of construction. * * * We here discover some advance over the simple entries, and, perhaps, a first trace in the science of fortification; and this may indicate that this hill fortress, or at all events this entrance, may not be so ancient as some of the others." We thus see that the Chase Castle is an advance on Dumpton Castle in the art of fortification.

Small heaps of stones are scattered about the space within, consisting of very angular quartzose rock and carboniferous slate, of which the hill is composed; but among them are some flat and round pebbles, which must have been brought from the river below, but for what purpose I cannot guess, as they are too large for sling-stones, being from seven to twelve pounds in weight.

In 1870 Sir Bouchier Wrey's gamekeeper, whilst digging out a rabbit from a clutter of rocks between the camp and the river, came upon about a dozen iron weapons, resembling heavy spear-heads, twenty-four inches long and two inches broad, tapering to a point at one end, whilst the other was bent round to receive a shaft. A specimen of iron from one was sent, with a description, to the Museum of Practical Geology by Mr. Ormerod, for an opinion as to whether the iron was ancient or not. In reply, Mr. Recks says: "There seems no evidence to prove that the iron of which these implements are made is of any great antiquity. It appears to be ordinary wrought or malleable iron, and exhibits a fibrous structure at the fractured end. The surface is covered with a thick coating of hydrous peroxide of iron, which is



crystallized in some of the cavities. The time required for this oxidation of the metal must depend on the conditions to which it has been exposed, but might, under favourable circumstances, be effected in a comparatively short time, and certainly does not by itself bespeak any high antiquity."

It is not for me to connect these weapons in any way with the camp. I only record the fact of their discovery; but they may probably have been forged during some rebellion.

Before concluding this notice of the unrecorded encampments, I would add that the well-known Hembury Castle, near Buckfastleigh, said to be Danish, is situate at the southern end or spur of the same hill as the Chase Castle, but two and a half miles distant, the ridge of the Chase preventing one being visible from the other. Hembury is a very large enclosure, formed mostly by the hill being scarped on the steep side toward the river, while the other is protected by a fosse twenty feet deep and a heavy agger, enclosing more than seven acres; at one side, within the camp, is a large mound, protected by a fosse, which commands the whole camp and neighbourhood, and is called Danes Castle.

Some years ago flint implements were found in an adjoining field, which are, or were, in the possession of Mr. Bastard, at Buckland Court. A tradition in the neighbourhood makes this a Danish stronghold, and the terror of the district, said at last to have been captured by the stratagem of some British, or most probably Saxon, women.

On the highest point of the ridge between Hembury and Holne Chase, and overlooking the roads between Ashburton and Holne, we find a clump of fir trees, known as Gallant Bower, and heaps of earth that may once have been earthworks. Thus we find a chain of camps between the moor and the fertile valleys of the Dart, having Denbury Down on the east, and Hembury on the west.