

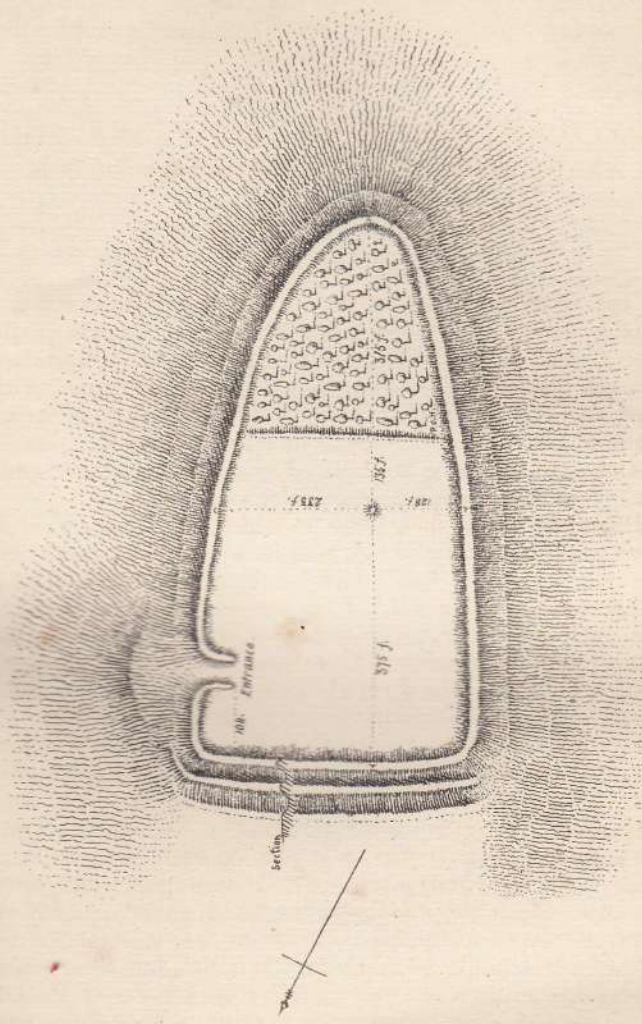
ON  
HILL FORTRESSES, SLING-STONES, AND OTHER  
ANTIQUITIES IN SOUTH-EASTERN DEVON.

BY PETER ORLANDO HUTCHINSON.

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IN the summer of 1861 the Archaeological Association of London visited Exeter, and on the 22nd of August in that year I read before them a paper on "The Hill Fortresses, Tumuli, and some other Antiquities of Eastern Devon." Since that time I have had the opportunity of looking up and examining several other objects of interest scattered over this portion of the county, not noticed in my former paper, and it is to these that I wish now to call your attention.

DUMPDON.—The first place to which I will advert is the great camp of Dumpdon. It will do well to begin with, as it lies only two miles and a half northward from the town in which we are assembled. I am not aware that any plan of this camp has been published. In figure and size it very much resembles Hembury Fort, though not quite so long it is a little broader. The form of the hill on which it stands is very like that of Hembury, being a sort of promontory with the point tending to the south. The north end in both is defended by bold earthworks cut right across the ridge of the hill. This is the broadest part of each camp, and from which they gradually contract to a rounded point. About one-third of the pointed end of Dumpdon is planted with beech trees, the space being shut in by a modern hedge run transversely across the area. Near the middle of the camp, namely, at 450 feet from the south point, and 128 from the west agger, is a mound which might be taken for a tumulus, but I understand it was thrown up a few years ago by the officers of the Ordnance Survey, as an object to assist them in the triangulation of the country, similar ones having been erected on several of the neighbouring hills. Across this mound the width of the camp is 361 feet; the whole length of the area is 825 feet; the elevation of the hill is 879 feet above the sea level. The



DUMPDON, NEAR HONITON.



circumvallation consists of two aggers with a ditch between them, like Sidbury Castle, the sides of the hill being very steep. At the north end the ground is level as at Hembury, and here there are two aggers and two ditches; from the top of the first to the top of the second, across the intervening ditch, the measurement is 86 feet. At the north-east corner, or, to be more exact, at 108 feet south of that point, is the original entrance. I wish to direct your notice to this entrance, because it is different in principle from any that we find in the other hill fortresses hereabout. In most cases the entrance is little else than a gap left in the surrounding earthworks, which of course bespeaks great rudeness of construction. Here, however, we see that the agger is inflected, and carried nearly 100 feet back into the body of the camp, so as to form a sort of passage or avenue, up which an enemy could not venture without being exposed to the spears or other missiles of the defenders on either hand inside. We here discover some advance over the simple entries before alluded to, and perhaps a first trace in the science of fortification; and this may perhaps indicate that this hill fortress, or at all events this entrance, may not be so ancient as some of the others. I have failed to satisfy myself as to the derivation of the word Dumpdon.

**WIDWORTHY CAMP.**—Some three or four miles eastward from Honiton, on Widworthy Hill, nearly a mile south of the church of that place, are the remains of a circular camp. Some writers have just alluded to it, and have spoken of it as destroyed; but this is not the case, for it still exists in the middle of a plantation. On walking over it I found it to measure 90 paces north and south, and 92 at right angles to this direction: allowing two feet six inches to a step, it is an oval approaching to a circle whose diameters are 225 by 230 feet.

**CASTLE WOOD.**—A few hundred yards in a westerly direction from Widworthy church, on a small hill, there are the traces of an earthwork, the nature of which is only conjecture. Some have thought it an advanced post in connection with the camp on the top of the hill in British times; others that it may have been a castellum of the Roman period, placed near the Ikenild, much used by that people, which runs east and west through Wilmington, and employed as a place for protection and for military supplies; and still others have conjectured that in later times the De Widworthy family may have had a mediæval castle on that spot. The place is called "Castle Wood," but the area is not a circle, as some

have described it, but rather an irregular triangle. The north side is nearly straight, and measures 103 feet; the west nearly straight, and measures 90; whilst the south and east sides are portions of a circle, or the south-east angle is very much rounded off. The extent of these two sides is 142 feet. All that remains is a flat area surrounded by a terrace some feet lower, which perhaps occupies the course of the enclosing ditch.

GREYSTONE, &c.—Whilst in this valley I must not omit to mention the Hoarstone or Greystone that stands on the north side of the road, at about half a mile west of the village of Wilmington, and almost exactly opposite the entrance gate of Widworthy Court, the seat of Sir Edward Elton, Bart. This mass of stone stands about four feet out of the ground, though formerly higher. Great antiquity has always been attached to it. Some writers have classed it as a Druidical monument, and others as a Roman milestone or way-mark. Further west on this road, and on the north side of it, there turns off a branch called "Drummer Stone Lane;" and at about fifty yards up this lane, on the left or west side going up, there is a stone to which similar traditions attach. This stone is now very small, as if it had been broken, being only 16 or 18 inches out of the ground. The country people will tell you that a regiment of soldiers was once passing that way, and that a drummer of the regiment, worn out by sickness or fatigue, sat down and died by the side of that stone, a circumstance to which it owes its present name. Of course this is a modern story.

STOCKLAND GREAT CASTLE.—On Stockland Hill, north of Widworthy, lies Stockland Great Castle. The public road runs east and west right through the middle of it, and this diameter measures 810 feet. The north and south diameter, consisting of the south half, 340 feet, width of the road 42, north half, 513, make together 895 feet. The vallum of the southern half has been entirely destroyed, and replaced by modern hedges; so that this portion presents only the appearance of an oblong square field. At its eastern end there is a long narrow plot of ground occupying the place of the former vallum. The northern half is of irregular form, and it is supposed that it has been altered or added to since its original construction. The land is under tillage, and if there were ever an elevated spot for the commander's tent, it must have been levelled and obliterated. No charcoal or vitrified stones attract the attention now, though they were formerly met with in this camp. A thumb-stone or scraper, being a





circular disc of flint nearly the size of a penny, was found here by Mr. Heineken, of Sidmouth. It has been stated that Athelstan posted himself here in 937, when the Danes entered the river Axe, but whom he overcame and destroyed in the valley below; seven Saxon earls, slain in the engagement, were afterwards buried at Axminster. Having observed that some of our local writers speak of sling-stones as being met with in this place, and that a rude earthen jar filled with them had been discovered, sufficient inducement was held out to search for them. On my last visit the land had been recently ploughed, and the search was not long. They were easily seen at a glance, because they were so different from all the stones of the soil of the district. It may be here remarked, that if the sling-stones were the same in shape and size as the natural stones found on the spot they could not be distinguished from them, and no discovery could be made; and that if these natural stones of the place were round, globular, or spherical, there would be no need to fetch stones from a distance, because the slingers would only have to stoop down and pick up the pebbles under their feet. Now, the stones of this district are all sharp and angular; the geological formation is the greensand. Perhaps it would be well if every archæologist were something of a geologist; for the sciences assist each other, as if not he may overlook important points in his pursuit, and may run the risk of arriving at false conclusions. In the greensand of Stockland Hill the plough turns up angular pieces of chert and sandstone of a buff brown colour, mixed with sharp flints from the outliers of the chalk in the neighbourhood; so that if oval grey beach pebbles are seen, about the size of a pigeon's egg or a small hen's egg, they are so obvious as to attract the eye in a moment. The ancient Britons, or Romans, or Saxons, or some other people who have now passed away, gathered them on the sea shore at Beer or Seaton, where they had been rounded by the action of the waves, and stored them up in the camp for use against their enemies. From the period when David took five smooth stones out of the brook down to the battle of Cressy, and later, the sling continued to be an engine of war. For geological reasons it would be useless to look for sling-stones at Woodbury Castle, or Belbury Castle on Ottery West Hill, or anywhere where the stratum of Budleigh Salterton pebbles exists. From the place where this pebble bed crops out in the face of the cliff at Budleigh Salterton, I have traced these materials of an ancient sea beach along Woodbury Hill, away in a north-easterly direction near Taun-



ton, Glastonbury, Dursley, Worcester, Broomsgrove, Birmingham, Lichfield, Normacott, in the Potteries, and so on; not far from most of these places traces reveal themselves, and possibly they might be occasionally detected through Yorkshire to the mouth of the Tees, or in a north-westerly course towards Chester. As the pebbles of this stratum are well suited to the purpose, the slingers had got what they required on the spot. I have looked for sling-stones in some of the hill fortresses on the Haldon range, but observing that, though most of the flints are mere splinters, still many of them are spherical, I at once gave up the search.

But at Sidbury Castle, in March, 1864, a hoard of sling-stones was discovered, and as I was the first on the spot after the workmen had disturbed them, I can speak with confidence.\* Some labourers were employed, I am sorry to say, to break up the ground too near the camp, and to bring a part of the south-west flank of the hill into cultivation. In digging against the outside slope of the inner agger they came upon a sort of cavern which was packed full of round pebbles; there may have been as many as would have filled one or two wheelbarrows. This deposit was, in fact, the stock of ammunition belonging to some warrior who dwelt there. In the geological maps Sidbury Castle Hill is marked as belonging to the greensand formation, but it is capped, like most of the hills in this neighbourhood, with a thick stratum of yellow clay mixed with sharp splinters of chert or angular flints,—and these angular flints constitute a marked feature and a well known character in the stones of the district. Hence it is, that when the men dug into this hoard, and began to scatter the smooth round pebbles, the circumstance immediately attracted their attention. One of them said to me, “We could see in a minute that those stones didn’t belong to this hill;” and another added, “I should say they came from Sidmouth beach.” I lay some stress upon the particulars of this discovery, because they assist us in the search in other places. It has been said that sling-stones have been found in Hembury Fort, but whenever I have been there the area has not been under tillage, but so overgrown with grass and furze that the search would have been hopeless. Whilst we are again speaking of Hembury Fort, I beg to remind you that in the Itineraries of Antoninus and Richard of Cirencester there is mention made of a Roman station called Moridunum, lying between Durnovaria, or Dorchester, on the east, and

\* Communicated by me to the *Exeter Gazette*, April 9th, 1864.

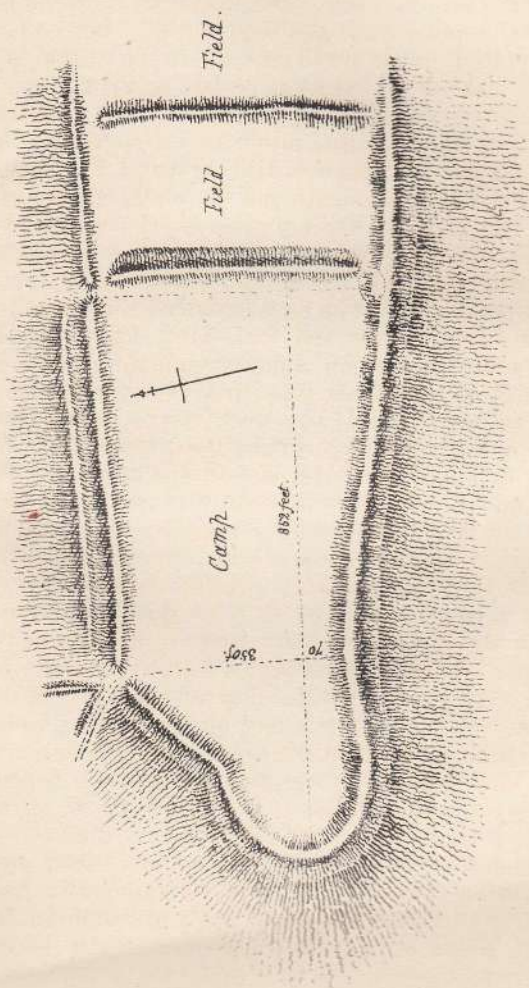
Isca, or Exeter, on the west, and situated at 36 M.P. or Roman miles from Dorchester, and 15 from Exeter. The site of this station has been altogether lost; but during the past century or more, many laudable endeavours have been made to re-discover it. Several places have been suggested, but they have all been gradually abandoned in favour of the claims of Dumpdon, and Hembury, near Honiton, and High Peak Hill, a mile and a half west of Sidmouth, on a cliff overhanging the sea, on which hill there are the remains of a strong fortress, the greater part of which has fallen away and been removed. Both Hembury and High Peak tally with the Itineraries, and are at the required distance from Exeter. The word Moridunum is said to be a Latinisation of the more ancient British form, Môr-y-dun, signifying a town or fortress upon a hill by the sea. Here the first syllable Môr means the sea, and consequently fixes the situation on the coast. Camden, Gale, Stukeley, and others whose names and authority we have been taught to respect, all accept this derivation, and consequently fix the lost station by the sea; and in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* for February, 1849, there is an article of mine on this subject, in which I contend for High Peak Hill, because this camp meets all the particulars of the Itineraries and of our best writers. However, two or three years ago, when I was sitting alone one day, a new light flashed across my mind. Why, thought I, should Môr-y-dun have been the original British word? why not More-y-dun? I presume it was only guess or conjecture that suggested the first syllable Môr, the sea, to Camden and his followers. The word More simply means great, and gets rid of the maritime position altogether; and if we are permitted to use our independent judgment the name More-y-dun, standing for the Great Castle, or Town, or Hill Fortress, will well apply to Hembury Fort. Within recent times two or three Devonshire antiquarians of high standing have been inclined to think that Moridunum may have been at Hembury, but they have offered no new reading, nor any reason for so doing. If I have lately adopted this view it has been done as the result of reflection, and I suggest a new derivation for your acceptance.

STOCKLAND LITTLE CASTLE.—About a quarter of a mile or more to the north of Stockland Great Castle, already described, lies Stockland Little Castle; it is nearly a circle in figure, being 372 feet north-west by south-east, and 331 in the opposite direction. The agger is from eight to ten feet high, and composed of earth and stones mixed; but on the inside it is made of dry stones carefully piled up, and in some places



with tolerable regularity, like a wall. Whether this is really ancient and original work, or whether it was only done about 1820 to 1830, when the land was first brought into cultivation, is a question for consideration, and should not be overlooked. On the east side of the area, against the agger or hedge, there lies a large heap of loose angular flints, which look as if they had been thrown there when the land was cleared. It is said that this camp was connected by a road with the larger one. The surrounding fosse has been entirely filled up, except a small portion on the north side, where the vallum is tolerably perfect, and here the agger is 35 feet on the slope.

HOCKSDON, OR HAWKSDOWN HILL CASTLE.—From Stockland, some eight or nine miles, in a direction to the east of south, stands Hawksdown Hill, crowned by a camp, which looks down upon Axmouth and the whole estuary of the river Axe. The hill forms a sort of promontory pointing to the west; it is high and steep, and a sort of natural hollow or chasin on the north-west flank makes its inaccessibility more complete at that point. Those who have described this camp as enclosed with a triple vallum and fosse must have been labouring under a false impression. Like Dumpdon, and Sidbury Castle, and most of the others, it is enclosed by two aggers with a ditch between them. The work is the most perfect at the east end, where the slope of the agger is fifty feet. The whole length of the interior area is 852 feet, 466 wide at the east end, and 420 about two-thirds towards the west, beyond which the figure contracts to a rounded point. At the south-east corner there is a heap of rough flints, apparently thrown there by the labourers when clearing the land. At this place and at the north-east point there are gaps, but the most likely spot for the original entrance seems to be towards the north-west, just where the camp begins to contract, and where there is still a steep path outside. Beyond the east end the ground is level, where there is a field about 200 feet wide; at the further side of this field there is a hedge run across the ridge of the hill. It may be a question whether this hedge occupies the place of an old out-work, thrown up as an additional defence to the fortress itself. There was no difficulty in finding sling-stones scattered about the recently tilled ground any more than at Stockland. The soil of the district is the same, and all the natural stones and flints are angular, so that the smooth, round, or egg-shaped pebbles, which had probably come from Seaton beach, were discerned at a glance. Before I leave the subject of sling-stones I would beg to impress upon my hearers, that if any of them visit these places, and



HAWKSDOWN HILL CAMP, AXMOUTH.



see them lying on the ground, not to take them away. I have brought away a few for a certain purpose; they are valuable for the sake of illustrating my subject, but beyond that they are much more interesting on the spot where the ancient Britons, or the Romans, or the Saxons left them.

SEATON DOWN.—Returning from Hawksdown Hill across the valley of the Axe, about two miles westwards, we light upon Seaton Down. Suppose a person travelling on the road between Exeter and Lyme. On the crown of the hill just before descending to Colyford, there is a sort of spur that runs away north on the left hand side; at its furthest end, where it is in its wild state, a ditch and agger have been carried east and west across the ridge, extending to the length of 770 feet. The slope of the agger is 33 feet. The ditch is on the south side, towards the mouth of the river Axe, as if an invading enemy were expected from that quarter. As if this defence were not enough, a second of a similar nature had been begun 466 feet to the rear of it, 130 feet long, and left unfinished. These works are very similar in their nature and object to those which traverse the ground at the Three Horseshoes, presently to be mentioned, and seem to have been intended to guard the road, and to oppose the passage of an enemy coming up from the valley of the river Axe. The completion of the second vallum was relinquished, perhaps, because the makers may have been attacked and driven out, or, perhaps, because the invaders may have marched off in another direction. Possibly these things may have occurred in 937, when Athelstan successfully opposed an inroad of the Danes in the valley below.

HONEYDITCHES.—A mile south of Seaton Down lies Honeyditches, or Hannaditches. On the east side of the road there is a long, narrow, curved field leading to a square field, in which latter are the remains of an extensive Roman villa. The long, narrow field is supposed to have been the original approach to the villa. The foundations of walls, crossing each other at right angles, begin close under the hedge at the top of the field, to the width of 40 feet north and south, and run downwards toward the east 145 feet. In the field above this there are some great pits, as if they had been reservoirs of water for the use of the house. About 200 feet below the villa, connected apparently by a drain or a wall, there is a rough piece of ground, measuring 48 by 56 feet. These places had been examined before by Sir Walter Trevelyan, the owner of the land; but Mr. Heineken and myself turned up some large, thick tiles, an inch and a quarter thick, eleven

inches wide, but of uncertain length, as they were broken. The under edge had been chipped or bevelled off by the workman when he bedded them; and as they were mostly found apparently at the bottom of a cavity measuring about two feet by three, accompanied by traces of charcoal, it is supposed they had formed some portion of a furnace, oven, or hypocaust. We also found flanged roof tiles, and mortar mixed with pounded brick. Besides these evidences of Roman occupation, many evidences of much later occupation have been discovered, especially in the upper part near the hedge, such as mediæval tiles, thin pieces of lias from the cliffs towards Lyme, where the lias crops out, with holes through for the pegs by which they were fixed to the roof; also pieces of roofing slate, with holes for the pegs; and this is probably a still later evidence than the thin pieces of lias used for the same purpose. One fragment of tile is impressed with groups of parallel lines with traces of letters. It is curious that the two groups of lines on this fragment are not parallel to each other, but converge to a point; and the letters on the space between them converge to a point too; that is, they begin large and diminish towards the end. The first portion looks somewhat like the letters **Mar**, the rest being broken off. A friend suggests that perhaps there may have been a chapel or ecclesiastical building there during the middle ages, and that possibly the word may be intended for **Maria**.

But most of our old writers on Devonshire antiquities speak of Honeyditches as an old camp nearly circular, but unfinished on its western side, and that perhaps it was thrown up by the Danes when they landed in the memorable year 937, as before observed. From the situation of the place that now goes by that name, and from the objects exhumed there, no one can infer that this was a Danish camp, or anything of that nature. The conclusion therefore at which we may arrive is this, that the original Honeyditches (the old camp) was somewhere else in the neighbourhood, probably not far off, and that the name has been shifted or transferred from one place to another. Possibly it may have been on Coochill or Little Coochill, half a mile south-west, on the crown of which there is a peculiarly shaped field bearing traces of a fortified position. Quantities of stones were dug up and removed from this spot in or about 1862, and one of the men employed in so doing declared that the stones lay in lines as if they had been thrown into trenches and covered over, or followed the course of walls. Or it may have been on some hill nearer to the mouth of the river Axe; for some speak of



it as having been at about three quarters of a mile from that spot, whereas Coochill is nearly double that distance.

**EARTHWORKS.**—In my paper read before the Archæological Association at Exeter in 1861, as before observed, I mentioned the traces of a ditch and agger behind the Three Horseshoes, a wayside inn on the road from Honiton through Roncombe Gate to Colyford. It begins in a field behind the inn, and runs northward for more than 1000 feet to the declivity of the hill, where it turns eastward by a rounded corner. At that time this is all I knew of it; but since then opportunities have occurred of examining a continuation in the opposite direction for nearly another 1000 feet, until it approaches the valley on that side. On consideration this must appear a very remarkable work. If we trace it from the north end at the rounded corner, which is nearly in front of Blackbury Castle, it runs in a direction somewhat to the west of south for about 2000 feet, right through the position of the Three Horseshoes, though at this spot of course it is obliterated, but the ridge is continued in the fields below. An old man living near, who recollected the land in its wild state before it had been brought into cultivation, declared in my hearing that at that period the ridge was from twelve to fifteen feet high, and that the ditch was on the east side of it—that is, the side towards Colyford. At first this appeared very strange, because it put the ditch on the inside of the corner. On reconsideration, this vallum could not have formed any part of an ancient camp. It had been drawn across the top of the hill at right angles to the public road; and the ditch being on the east side, or the side of the enemy, may lead to the inference that this work was made for the purpose of keeping at bay or checking the advance of some force expected from the valley of the Axe. As it is just opposite Blackbury Castle, possibly it may have been thrown up by the occupiers of that camp; perhaps by the Britons to resist the Romans; perhaps by the Saxons to resist the Danes; and it might be at the same time when the similar intrenchments were drawn across Seaton Down.

I may here observe that the field opposite the Horseshoes is called "Chapel Close." A few paces from the west hedge, and at 72 from the north one, the plough had often been obstructed with stones, so an excavation was made, June 17th, 1862. I saw the south-west corner of a building laid bare. The walls were three feet thick. Perhaps some mediæval chapel may have stood there. The next field, on the west of this is known as "Chapel Meadow;" and near the

middle of this, and not far from the road, stones and traces of walls have been met with.

**IRON PITS.**—Several of our local writers have spoken of the existence of pits of various sizes and depths met with on the wild tops of many of the high hills in this neighbourhood, but they all seem to speak from hearsay only. I am happy to say I can speak with more confidence. Where these pits have not been obliterated in the process of cultivation, they occur on the Blackdown range of hills, Ottery East Hill (just over Lincombe Farm), on Dunkeswell Common, and other places. The nearest spot to Honiton that I know of is a short distance beyond Woolford Lodge, and of these I will speak more particularly. The way to find them from Honiton is this: Go to Coombe Rawley; then ascend the hill towards Woolford Lodge, and pass the entrance gate; a little way beyond this the four-mile stone from Honiton is seen on the right hand side, and a few score yards beyond this is a four-cross way. Go straight on. Take the second field on the left. The field is full of fern and furze, still in its wild state. The pits occur mostly along its northern side. They are of various sizes, very irregular, and mostly close together. Though their sides were perpendicular when first dug, they have fallen in by time and become sloping. Some are very large. As an instance I may mention, that being once there with a friend and a one-horse carriage, and not wishing to court the idle curiosity of passers by, we led the horse and carriage down into the bottom of one of them, whilst we made an examination, and we were all quite out of sight to any person near. In the geological maps all these hills are described as of the greensand formation; but above the greensand there is the usual stratum of flints and clay, and above this a subsoil bed in which the iron ore is found. It is what is called surface iron. It may seem rather strange that they should have sunk so many separate pits: one would have thought that it would have been better to have begun at one end, and to have dug onwards straight through. It is in these places that the ore is found: the smelting operation was performed elsewhere. Great quantities of scoria and cinders have been discovered at different spots of the Blackdown district, showing where this process was performed. There is a large heap at Clivehayes Farm, Churchstaunton: a quantity once existed at Bowerhayes Farm, near Dunkeswell Abbey; some more in a field at Tidborough, near Hemyock; and in less quantities at Kentisbeer, Culmstock, Uffculm, and so on.