

Council for British Archaeology

REGIONAL GROUP XIII—(CORNWALL, DEVON, GLOUCESTER AND SOMERSET)

PROTECTION OF EARTHWORKS.

NOTES FOR GUIDANCE OF MEMBERS.

1. *What are earthworks?*

'Earthwork' is a general term used by archaeologists for any artificial construction that does not superficially include masonry: they are of all periods and their grassy covering conceals structures of diverse character. Most familiar in our region are the round barrows of the Bronze Age, the banks and ditches of the hill-forts of the Early Iron Age, and the steep high mounds of the Norman motte castles. In many areas in the West, stone is more readily obtainable than earth, and accordingly earthworks are here replaced by constructions of dry-stone: examples of such 'stone-works' are cairns, both long and round, as on Cotswold and Mendip; hut circles and pounds, as on Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor.

2. *Why should they be preserved?*

All man's handiwork tells us something about its maker, and earthworks, in their several categories, are in this way sources of the pre-history and early history of the region. For example, their distribution shows where man lived in successive ages, and their contents, revealed by scientific excavation, shows how the different communities who built them lived, or with what rites they buried their dead. We maintain that the means of acquiring knowledge about the past, either now or in the future, should not be hastily or carelessly destroyed in the present.

3. *How the State protects earthworks.*

The Ministry of Works has an Ancient Monuments Division charged with the care of antiquities. Some sites of national importance are actually in their custody, being excavated if necessary, kept in repair and made accessible to the public; an example in our region is the native village site at Chysauster. Other sites worthy of preservation are placed by the Ministry on their *Schedule*. The owner of each 'Scheduled Ancient Monument' is informed officially that it may not be altered (i.e. damaged) in any way without the permission of the Ministry, upon penalty. The Schedule is published by H.M. Stationery Office; the sites are listed in it county by county.

4. *The present danger to earthworks.*

There is a great need for increased food production, and the Ministry of Agriculture is offering grants to enable more land to be brought into cultivation. In our region, such 'marginal' land is mainly moorland of a height well suited for settlement by early man and on which, therefore, many earthworks and 'stoneworks' occur. The coming of tractor-powered tools—such as the multiple plough, the disc harrow, the bull-dozer, the grab or shovel—makes destruction of earthwork a relatively easy matter. Such work is often carried out by contractors who lack the country man's knowledge of and respect for familiar features of the landscape.

5. *Action that should be taken by individuals.*

Before any action is taken, it is necessary to make quite sure that the earthwork threatened is a genuine antiquity. It is suggested that the appropriate section of the Victoria County History or of Methuen's County Archaeologies should be consulted, as well as the Ordnance Survey maps.

(A) For a 'Scheduled Monument'.

Damage, or intention to damage, should be reported, *with full details*, either to the County Correspondent of the Ministry or direct to the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Works, Lambeth Bridge House, London, S.E.1.

The County Correspondents in our region are :

Cornwall—Mr. G. Penrose, The County Museum and Institution, Truro.

Devon—Miss C. Radford, Strand End, Topsham.

Gloucester—Mr. T. Overbury, Rodney Lodge, Rodney Road, Cheltenham.

Somerset—The Rev. Dom. A. Watkin, Downside Abbey, Stratton-on-the-Fosse.

It may also be advisable to remind the owner of his responsibilities for a Scheduled Monument under the Ancient Monuments Act.

(B) For an earthwork that is not scheduled.

Damage may often be done to a site because the owner does not realize its interest, or even know of its existence. A personal approach in such cases may easily avert damage or destruction.

Public opinion is a restraining factor, and a letter in the local newspaper is usually an effective way of arousing interest in a threatened site.

The secretary of the local Archæological Society should be informed and, in some cases, the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments at the Ministry of Works, who may be able to arrange for an earthwork to be placed on the Schedule without delay.

6. *Action that may be taken by a local Archæological Society.*

Local Societies can help in bringing this matter to the notice of their members, either by circulating this memorandum or by printing parts of it in their Proceedings. In order that the Scheduled Monuments in their district are generally known to the members, the County List might also be printed, with annual additions, on the lines of that done by the Ancient Monuments Committee of the Devonshire Association. A new edition of the Schedule is being prepared.

A Society might be able to establish friendly relationship with the County Agricultural Executive Committee, which is responsible, with the owners in some cases, for deciding what land is to be re-claimed; in this way it might be

possible to arrange that the site of important earthworks be avoided.

In the case of damage, a local Society could support any action taken by its members, particularly in writing to the press.

7. *Action by the Council for British Archæology.*

The Council is pledged *inter alia* 'to seek collectively and through its constituent organizations to safeguard all kinds of archæological material and to urge the strengthening of existing measures for the care and preservation of ancient and historic buildings, monuments and antiquities'.

Specific cases of major damage, needing action on a national scale, and/or a discussion of policy, should be brought to the attention of the Council, either by the Societies' representatives at the Council meetings or, preferably in the first instance, at the meeting of the Executive Committee, by the Regional Group representative, at present Lady (Aileen) Fox, M.A., F.S.A., of University College of the South West, Exeter.

AILEEN FOX (*Convener*).

GROUP XIII.

July, 1949.