

Ruborough Camp,

IN THE PARISH OF BROOMFIELD, SOMERSET.

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

AS far as I have been able to ascertain, there is very little literary matter appertaining to Ruborough Camp in existence, beyond some interesting and amusing superstitions and traditions which will be quoted at the end of this paper. Antiquaries of the past have doubtless attempted to expound on the age of this camp, merely from external appearances, and possibly from the chance discoveries of a few surface "finds;" but the relics required for reliable evidence of the date of construction can only be obtained by systematic excavations¹. However, for archæological explorations at Ruborough, we may have to wait some time.

Ruborough appears to be the most usual name for this camp, and is the spelling adopted by the Ordnance Survey; but it is also styled "Rowberrow," "Rowborough," and "Rorborough;" it is also frequently spoken of as "Ruborough Castle," and is known, locally, as "The Money Field."

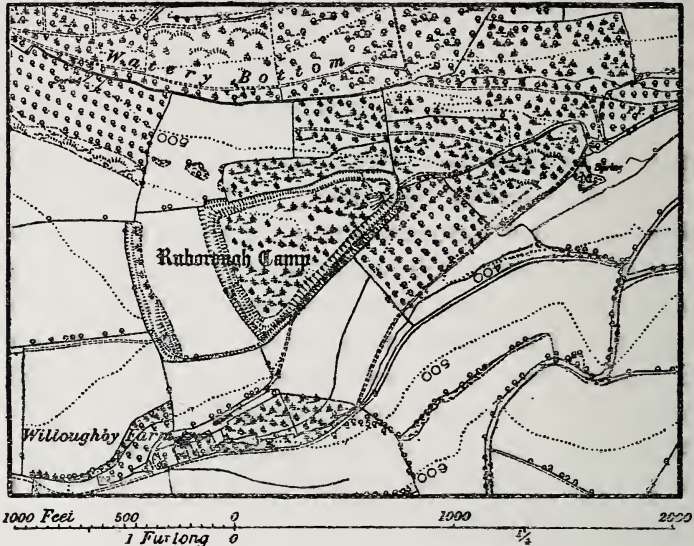
I do not purpose to dilate on any possible connection there may have been between Ruborough² and neighbouring earth-

1. Mr. W. B. Broadmead has made the assertion that "Ruborough Camp, like most others in Somerset, is of British origin, and of far greater antiquity than A.D. 938," (the date of the battle of Brunanburh—the subject that was under discussion. *Som. and Dor. Notes & Queries*, vol. i, No. 198, p. 137).

2. "Ancient Trackways in England," by J. H. Spencer. (*The Antiquary*, vol. xx, 1889, p. 98).

works, such as Douseborough, or Danesborough, on the Quantocks,³ Cothelstone, Norton Fitzwarren, or Castle Neroche,⁴ for the majority of them have not been properly examined, and our investigations are therefore not yet ripe for any comparisons to be made.

Ruborough Camp, in the Royal Hundred of Andersfield, and standing on a spur of the Quantocks, is $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles due north



MAP OF RUBOROUGH CAMP, AND ADJACENT COUNTRY.

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

(The vertical marginal lines of the Map points upwards to the true North.)

of Taunton, as the crow flies,⁵ one mile N.N.E. of Broomfield⁶ Church, and nine furlongs from Holwell Cavern, which is in a west-by-north direction. The middle of the camp through

3. Five-and-a-quarter miles west of Ruborough, in a direct line.
4. *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xlix, pt. ii, pp. 23-53.
5. All my distances are as the crow flies.
6. "Brunafella" in Domesday; "Brunefeld" the best reading of the MSS. of William of Malmesbury.

which the 600 feet contour-line runs, is only 275 yards from Willoughby Farm.

The greatest peculiarity about Ruborough and that which makes it of particular interest, is its design, being of triangular shape, one of the rarest forms taken by the entrenchments of Britain. Roughly, it forms an isosceles triangle, with a slightly rounded base on the south-west—length in a direct line about 720 feet. The maximum length of the camp from base to apex is about 930 feet. The south-east side of the camp, 970 feet in length, deviates less from the straight line than the N.N.W. side, which is about 910 feet in length. The earthworks enclosing the camp consist of a vallum, fosse, and outer bank. The vallum averages as much as 18 feet above the surface of the silting of the fosse, and is, therefore, of considerable strength. It is highest near the acute angle, on the N.E., where it measures, *on the slope*, about 35 feet from the top of the vallum to the surface of the silting of the fosse. At the *base* of the triangle, the width from the crest of the vallum to the outer bank averages 55 feet, the intervening fosse being about 14 feet wide⁷.

The chief entrance to the camp appears to have existed at the base, and there *may* have been another at the rounded 'apex' on the north-east. The margin of the outer bank all round loses itself in continuation of the steep escarpment on either side of the camp, the descent in both cases being about 150 feet. Along both these 'bottoms,' or valleys, small streams run, bounding the spur of the eminence on which the camp is situated. These valleys and streams, again, are bounded on the N.N.W. by Wind Down, with its conspicuous clump on the top, in one part 800 feet above sea-level; and on the south-east by the range on which Lydeard Cross is situated, at nearly the same elevation as Wind Down.

On the west-by-south the camp is bounded by a line of

7. I made these measurements on the ground.

earthworks, some 660 feet in length, at a distance of 100 paces from the base of the triangle. This entrenchment consists of an inner vallum, (at present about two or three yards in height, and 13 yards in width at base), and a fosse to the west seven yards wide, with a berme between them about eight yards in width. There is a modern causeway here at about 32 paces from the southern end of the outwork. This outer work was no doubt intended to serve as an extra protection against accessibility to the camp on its weakest side.

Excluding the ground to the west of the camp itself bounded by this outwork, Ruborough Camp embraces an area of about twenty-seven acres, and is entirely covered by firs.

Nature provided a plentiful supply of water here. In the ravine, at four hundred yards from the centre of the camp in a north-westerly direction, is a strong spring from which Bridgwater, I am told, is largely supplied with water. There is another spring at a distance of four hundred and fifty yards in the bottom on the east. Water however appears to have been obtained much nearer, as Mr. W. B. Broadmead has recorded that "from the camp an underground passage, about one hundred yards in length, led to a spring of water on the side of the hill; the mouth of this passage is now closed."⁸

Collinson and Phelps in their histories of Somerset do not mention Ruborough. Pitt-Rivers⁹ and Scarth¹⁰ however have both recorded it in their Maps of Ancient Somerset.

Ruborough would appear to present an illustration of the *Castra trigona* of Vegetius, an authority who is generally regarded as trustworthy, having been an officer of high rank in the Roman army and a strict disciplinarian. He flourished during the reign of Valentinian at the close of the third century, A.D. Ruborough may therefore have been constructed in accordance with the rules laid down in Vegetius'

8. *Som. and Dor. Notes and Queries*, vol. i, No. 198, p. 137.

9. "Excavations in Cranborne Chase," vol. iii, Pl. clx.

10. *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxiv, 1878, pt. ii, p. 1.

treatise, *De Re Militari*, its peculiar form having been adopted by reason of the natural features of its site.

Phelps notices and figures a triangular camp at Merehead on the Mendips, near Leighton, situated at the southern extremity of a ravine which intersects the ridge of Mendip and an outlet made for the waters of Cranmere. Since Phelps published his history (1839), the earthworks enclosing this camp have evidently become much reduced in height. He speaks of the vallum being of considerable strength on the east—its weakest side; whereas during a recent visit to the site, I found the vallum in no part exceeding four feet in height and it was in most parts entirely overgrown by hedges,¹¹ so that the casual observer and stranger into the neighbourhood would have much difficulty in tracing the limits of the camp, which covers an area of about six acres.¹² The Roman Road from *Ad Axium* over the Mendips to Old Sarum passes close to the west and south of Merehead Camp.

Phelps also mentions and figures a large camp, of somewhat triangular form and some sixty acres in extent, at Tedbury, two miles north-west of Frome, and one mile east of Mells. Elm Church is quite near the most acute angle of this triangular camp—across the valley and to the north-east.¹³ It likewise stands on a triangular point of land, between two ravines which unite at the north-eastern angle, as at Ruborough.

In another respect, Tedbury Camp is precisely like Ruborough. The precincts of the base of the triangle at the western end are fairly level with the adjoining land, and this part is protected by a strong vallum, two hundred and fifty yards in

11. I should probably have wasted some time in discovering the camp, had I not received full verbal directions from the owner of the property, Sir Richard Paget, Bart., of Cranmore Hall, a V.P. of this Society.

12. This tends to emphasize the importance of describing all ancient sites as far as possible, before natural causes and agriculture further deface them.

13. The smaller camp of Wadbury is close to Tedbury and between it and Mells.

length, extending from one ravine to the other. This close resemblance between Ruborough and Tedbury is important. It should also be recorded that Ruborough, Tedbury and Merehead camps all have entrances about the middle of the base of the triangle.

Tedbury has produced quern-stones, certain undescribed 'implements,' and also coins¹⁴ of the Roman Emperors. Scarth has recorded that Roman coins and querns have been found at Ruborough. Hence another similarity between Tedbury and Ruborough. The Rev. J. W. Collins wrote in 1857 that "a turquoise ring or seal, set in solid gold, is said to have been found in Ruborough camp, about one hundred years ago, by a labourer, who immediately after left the neighbourhood. It is also reported that a solid bar of gold and various pieces of armour were found there; but this account is even more uncertain than that concerning the ring or seal."¹⁵

By the way, Phelps engraves and briefly describes Dolebury Camp, near Rowborough Church. Needless to say, this refers to the parish of Rowberrow-on-Mendip. Ruborough must also be distinguished from "the Rowboroughs," localised by the Rev. F. Warre on Bagborough Hill, and popularly called "Will's Neck." "On the top of Bagborough Hill are several cairns," wrote Mr. Warre, "commonly called 'the Rowboroughs,' which most likely mark the place where the slain were buried. A Roman coin was found near these cairns" (before 1850).¹⁶

Sigwell (Six Wells) Camp, in the parish of Compton Pauncefoot, South Somerset, is another instance of a camp of triangular form,—in this case nearly equilateral. Like those above mentioned, it occupies the spur of a hill, which has been converted into a camp by means of a ditch, about sixty feet wide, uniting two ravines which join at the obtuse angle

14. *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. XXIV, i, p. 74.

15. *Journ., Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, vol. XIII, 1857, p. 297.

16. *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. I, pt. ii, p. 43, and vol. XXIV, pt. ii, p. 18.

of the camp on the north-west. This ditch forms the base of the triangle. The rampart, if it ever had one, has been destroyed. Professor Rolleston and General Pitt-Rivers, in 1877, excavated a twin-barrow near this small camp; and a round barrow two hundred feet from the centre of the camp to the west, the western ravine separating them. These excavations have been recorded in the *Proceedings*, Vol. xxiv, ii, pp. 75-88, and, with three plates of illustrations, in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, November, 1878. The round barrow being proved to be of the Bronze Age, it was reasonable to conjecture that the camp was abandoned at some time previous to the termination of the Bronze period. But no excavations, as far as I am aware, have been conducted in the camp; the Rev. J. A. Bennett however, found, in 1878, presumably on the surface, a quantity of flint flakes, scrapers, and two finely-chipped flint arrowheads of the "kite-shaped" class, one of which is translucent; also a piece of ornamented bone, apparently a small portion of the side of a bone weaving-comb, similar to those which have been frequently found in the Glastonbury Lake Village.¹⁷ These objects, with others forming part of Mr. Bennett's collection, were presented to Taunton Museum, by Mrs. Bennett, in 1891.

In order that this paper may be made more complete, it will be desirable to quote a few words concerning Ruborough Camp in Saxon times. "Part of the Quantocks was connected at an early date with Somerton, and especially the fortified part of Ruborough. This we know from the Hundred Rolls. So that it is quite possible that the Saxon King Ina held in his own hands this camp of Ruborough. In Saxon times this part of Quantock was included in the royal forest, and Ruborough paid so much to the royal *firma* at Somerton. It was in royal hands up to the days of King John."¹⁸

In the Hundred Rolls, *temp.* Ed. I, "Dum Canntok foresta

17. *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xlviii, ii, pp. 111-117.

18. "The Land of Quantock," by Rev. W. H. P. Greswell, 1903, p. 50.

fruit," it is recorded that a certain royal payment was made for a *porcheria* at Roborough in Broomfield parish.¹⁹

The Rev. W. H. P. Greswell makes mention of "Ruborough or Roborough Castle" in one or two places in his paper on "The Quantocks and their Place-Names."²⁰

In 1857, the Rev. J. W. Collins gave the British Archaeological Association the following traditions and memoranda in relation to Ruborough Camp :—

"From the circumstance of the valuable relics, said to have been found in the field, the enclosure of the camp is called by the residents in the neighbourhood, 'The Money Field;' and the commonly reported tradition is, that 'underneath the surface is an iron castle full of gold and silver, guarded by gnomes and spirits.' On my first visit to the camp, about ten years ago, I was informed by a labourer then working in the enclosure, 'that there was more treasure under his feet than was contained in the palaces of all the kings in the world.' I inquired of him how he knew this, and he replied that he was always told so by aged persons, and that the gipsies had told him so; and that the precious things found in the field proved the truth of it. 'Why, then,' I asked, 'do you not dig in the field till you come to the castle and make yourself rich from the treasures in it?' 'Ah, sir,' he answered, 'I wish I could; but there is only one iron door to the castle, and I know not where to find it; and it can only be found at full moon.' As I felt interested by his information, I now inquired how these things could be known; and he then related the following amusing tradition, which I will relate as nearly as I can in his own words :—

19. *Op. cit.*, p. 59; and *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. XLVI, pt. ii, p. 141. *Porcheria* = a place where the King's swine were collected.

20. *Proc., Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. XLVI, pt. ii, pp. 125-148.

“My father told me that, when he was a boy, a doctor Farrer lived in the parish, who was an uncommon book-learned man, and that he found out from his books how to go into the castle. In the day before the full of the moon, the doctor went over the field with a two-year-old shoot of hazel in his hand, and when he came over the door the stick stood upright of itself, in the ground. When he had marked the place, he went home to prepare for going down to the castle ; and in the middle of the night he came back to the place he had marked, with his servant and the tools he wanted for digging ; and he took also a Bible in his hand. ‘Now,’ said the doctor to his servant, ‘do you dig out the earth from the circle I have made ; and if you do as I tell you we shall be made this night the richest persons in the world. And this is what I tell you : do you dig on till you strike the spade on the iron door of the castle, and then whatever you hear, or whatever you see, don’t speak a word for your life’s sake ; for if you do we shall lose all power of getting into the castle, and your life will be in danger.’ The servant went on digging, whilst the doctor stood on the brink, with the Bible in his hand. At last the servant’s spade struck on the iron door, and at once horrible groans and shrieks and cries were heard underground in the castle, and spirits of all sorts began to come out at the door, ready to carry away the poor servant. And now he was so terrified that he forgot his master’s order, and cried out, ‘Lord, have mercy on my soul !’ and then one of the spirits caught hold of his leg, and would have carried him off, but the doctor put down the Bible on his head, and, keeping the book there, dragged him out of the pit with the other hand. ‘But, sir,’ concluded the aged labourer, ‘the pit was at once closed up ; and the door, I believe, is changed, as no one has been able to find it since.’

“The above story has been since told me by many of the poor inhabitants of the neighbourhood ; and, indeed, I have fallen in with some labourers who have themselves dug at the

full of the moon with the hope of finding the iron door, 'but were,' they said, 'obliged to give their labour up from the mournful sounds they heard.' These sounds really come, I conjecture by their account, from the wind murmuring as it does, 'most musical, most melancholy,' among the pines and other trees that grow around."