

Antiquity

A Quarterly Review of Archaeology

VOL. IV No. 15

SEPTEMBER 1930

Editorial Notes

USUALLY we devote these opening pages to comments upon current events of general interest rather than to the record of actual occurrences. There are times, however, 'between seasons', when the current is a little sluggish—when the work of one season is over and that of the next not ready for consideration. There is no lack of activity in the archaeological world this summer, rather the opposite; but the work of excavation does not as a rule begin until June or July, and we go to press before even the principal achievements are known and revealed. We propose therefore to vary the theme by describing an aeroplane tour we took last June, for the purpose of looking at some promising sites at a time of year when they might be expected to show up well. We apologize for the slight but inevitable intrusion of the personal element imposed by the character of the narrative.



The tour originated in a suggestion by Captain H. J. Andrews and was carried out in his Blackburn Blue Bird, a two-seater aeroplane which proved admirably adapted for the purpose. Captain Andrews flew it, and it says much for the reliability of modern air-craft that from start to finish there was not the slightest hint of engine-trouble, or any other kind of hitch. The fact that we could sit side by side and compare notes verbally was also a distinct advantage.

ANTIQUITY

We started from Heston aerodrome (London) on Friday afternoon, 20 June. The first night we slept at Brough on Humber. Next day we flew along Hadrian's Wall to Carlisle and slept at Longtown. The day after we followed the western route (Roman and modern) to Glasgow, did some exploration of Roman sites in Perthshire and returned, by the Roman eastern route, to York and so on to Brough again. On Monday we returned thence to London. About 70 ancient sites were looked at, many of them being new discoveries of the pilot's or the observer's, and we followed Roman roads whenever possible in preference to modern ones or railways. The chances of discovering new sites were thus increased, and the actual number of sites seen, both new and old, was naturally greater than it would otherwise have been.



The first discovery was made near Gravenhurst, in Bedfordshire, not far south of Cardington where the airship was moored. Captain Andrews observed a very plain 'crop-mark' in a cornfield, consisting of a small square within a circle. Curiously enough this very object had been discovered on the ground on 8 June by a reader of ANTIQUITY, and again, on 17 June, by an officer of the Royal Air Force. The plan is not unlike that of the Roman signal-stations on the Yorkshire coast; but no such signal-stations have yet been reported inland. In plan the coastal signal stations consist of a circle surrounding a square with rounded corners, but the Gravenhurst square has most distinctly angular corners. Its age and purpose must remain doubtful for the present.



Thence we flew northwards to our main objective, the Roman town of Durobrivae. (The site is in Huntingdonshire, in the extreme northwest corner of the county; the modern village of Castor lies in Northamptonshire just across the Nene). Here we made the most remarkable discovery of the tour. We saw the plan of the Roman town, with its streets and some of its houses plainly outlined in the corn. It was what we hoped for, but more than we had dared to expect. We knew that the area of the town was planted with corn; but so is Verulam, and we had flown over Verulam about half an hour earlier and seen nothing. Here at Castor we saw a plan as clear as that similarly revealed in 1928 at Caistor, Norfolk. It was all the more valuable because it was quite a different plan. But there was even more than

EDITORIAL NOTES

this. Just north across the rivulet, well outside the plainly visible ramparts, was outlined in the corn the plan of a fine Roman camp, complete with rounded corners and, on the north side, no less than four parallel ditches. It reminded one of the fort at Ardoch in Perthshire which we visited two days later. Such a camp must surely belong to the 1st century, the period of the Roman conquest of England. Its survival through the Roman period—when the whole site was covered with pottery kilns—and through the vicissitudes of subsequent history, to be revealed thus as shadow in the corn is surely one of the most romantic episodes of modern discovery. It is also a new historical fact of prime importance to students.



On Saturday we flew from the Humber past York to those remarkable earthen circles, five in all, on Hutton Moor and near Thornbrough. They have frequently been described (see British Association Excursions Handbook, Leeds meeting, 1927), and it has been suggested that they may have contained 'Woodhenges', but although some of them were under corn, we could see no signs of post- or stone-holes. We drew a blank at the Devil's Arrows, nor did the adjacent Roman town of Aldborough, the tribal town of the Brigantes in Roman times, reveal much. We saw one or two possible long barrows, and a few minor sites, and after filling up at Cramlington flew along the Roman wall to Carlisle.



To profit most by the overhead view it is necessary to know the local topography as only the groundsmen can learn it—on foot. Such knowledge we had not got; so that, although the flight was a valuable prelude to the Pilgrimage we were shortly to make, under expert guidance (see pp. 358–61), we fear that we missed much through ignorance. Captain Andrews spotted a new four-sided enclosure on Matfen Moor, and we both had a good look at the remarkable cultivation-banks near Housesteads and Great Chesters. Air-photographs, however, are needed fully to elucidate them, and we shall await with great expectations those which are being taken of the whole length of the Roman Wall by the Royal Air Force.



We landed in a field near Longtown to fill up, and then set out for Scotland. We flew round Burnswark in Dumfriesshire, that remarkable

ANTIQUITY

flat-topped hill which the Romans besieged. We thought we saw traces of a circumvallation, but a subsequent visit on foot proved that they were quite illusory, and that in such cases (as contrasted with crop-sites) ground-work is essential to check air-observation. (The last word on the subject has been said by Mr R. G. Collingwood in the *Trans. of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway N.H. and A.Soc.*, 1926.



After reaching Lockerbie it began to rain and got very hazy ; so, as we had to cross some high ground before reaching Renfrew and we wanted to have a good view, we returned to our field at Longtown and slept that night in the town. Next morning we followed the Roman road up Annandale across the pass by the Devil's Beef-tub into Clydesdale. It was plainly visible throughout, and beyond the camp at Clyde Burn we got several hints as to its further course which await an opportunity for investigation on the ground.



We proceeded by Renfrew into Perthshire, flying over Ardoch and along the Gask ridge. The Roman fort at Grassy Walls near Perth (described in 1771 by General Roy, but correctly placed on the map in 1917 by Mr Graham Callander) was only partially visible, but the western side coincided exactly with Mr Callander's published plan; air-photographs are promised. We had a look at Inchtuthill and Cleaven Dyke to the northeast of it—an earthen rampart between two ditches and a Roman work surely—but could see no signs of its continuation in either direction.



We were equally unsuccessful in seeing anything fresh at Carpow and Crichton Hill, where Roman forts must have existed ; but this proves nothing. The fort at Newstead near Melrose was also invisible, though it has been excavated with the greatest care and thoroughness by Mr James Curle. Cappuck and Channelkirk were also unremunerative, though both forts are proven beyond any shadow of doubt. Pennymuir and Makendon were visible but needed a low light to do justice to their intricacies. Under such favourable conditions they would give splendid results ; and one hopes that air-photographs of them may one day be secured. The native camp on Woden Law was a fine sight, and it too should be photographed, together with the Roman road winding over its shoulder.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Continuing southwards we flew several times round the magnificent oppidum of the Brigantes at Stanwick, which we hope to explore thoroughly on foot later on. On Monday morning we visited a site near Hibaldstow, where over an area of 100 acres Roman pottery and building-remains are abundant. It has been located recently by Mr C. W. Phillips, following up certain earlier clues ; and it seems that there was a walled Roman town there. We saw what might be the outline of two lengths of the Wall, but the site as a whole was disappointing. Later we flew along King Lud's entrenchments, an earthwork of the Grim's ditch type, and then southwards along Sewestern Lane, whose junction with Ermine Street proved to consist of a straight section of causeway, clearly of Roman age. After another look at Castor, which increased our admiration, we flew slowly in the teeth of a 40-mile wind to Irchester, another Roman town, only to find that there was nothing at all to be seen of the plan. We saw some barrow-circles between Goldington and Howbury, near Bedford ; we satisfied ourselves that from the air no more could be seen of the eastern end of Grim's ditch near Berkhamsted, and finally we had a last stroke of luck in rediscovering Stukeley's so-called Roman camp on Greenfield Common, just south of Staines reservoir.



There is no room for a summary, but the moral is obvious. The young archaeologist who wants to make discoveries must join a flying-club and learn to fly. Not until then will the harvest be reaped. Our tour sufficed to show that England is still, for the archaeological aviator, an almost unexplored country.



Subsequently we had the pleasure of taking part in the Pilgrimage of four days along the Roman Wall. (An account by Sir George Macdonald is printed on pp. 358-61). The weather was perfect, like the organization. To do a leisurely tour of this kind in good company, where it was possible to 'talk shop' continuously from morn till far on into the night, was a rare delight. The Wall itself is the key to the military history of Roman Britain. During the present century intensive excavation of the most rigidly scientific kind has solved many of the major problems. The solution of the remainder is in competent hands and is proceeding apace. Here 'digging for knowledge' is the normal incentive which controls all excavation. So long as there remain gaps in our knowledge that can be filled by these methods of

ANTIQUITY

enquiry, the study of Roman Britain will retain that virility which it most certainly possesses at the present moment. One kept wishing that Professor Haverfield, who planted so many of the seeds now bearing fruit, had lived to take part in the Pilgrimage.



That at such a time the Wall should be threatened with virtual destruction by a company promoter is almost inconceivable. But that the danger is still a real one is clear from Sir George Macdonald's remarks on p. 361. When one who has held a high position in the service of the State speaks out so plainly, it is time for every educated person to rally to his support. We ask our readers to do so in the proper way, by writing to their Member and by adopting all constitutional means of opposition. The issue is a clear-cut one, of private greed versus national honour. British archaeologists must not allow this supreme act of vandalism to be perpetrated under any conditions whatsoever.



In the present number we insert an appeal, which we cordially support, on behalf of the campaigns Miss Caton-Thompson is preparing in the Fayyum and the Libyan oases. Miss Caton-Thompson needs no introduction to the readers of her article on Zimbabwe (ANTIQUITY, December 1929) and her earlier one on prehistoric remains in the Fayyum (September 1927).



We hope our readers will bear with us if we also make a special appeal for funds to support the Colchester excavations described on pp. 362-4. These are concerned not with the Roman town but with the earlier native British capital of Cunobelin. The work is necessitated by the construction of a by-pass road, and, like Caerleon, is of an s.o.s. character. There has, indeed, been a cry of 'all hands to the spades' this summer; and the work is being directed by Mr J. P. Bushe-Fox, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, H.M. Office of Works. The important address, however, is that of THE COLCHESTER EXCAVATION COMMITTEE, Barclays Bank, Colchester, and the time to use it is NOW! Work will of necessity be carried on continuously.

The results already to hand show, as was only to be expected, that this is one of the great sites of the kingdom.