

EXTRACT FROM "THE DOVER ROAD"

BY

CHARLES G. HARPER.

" Caesar deployed his forces along the ridge of the Downs facing the road, the river, and the enemy, who had entrenchments on the further side of the river immediately fronting him and others advancing diagonally toward the road which they crossed on the northern hilltop at Bridge, ending at a point slightly to the north-east of the place where Bekesbourne Station stands now. Caesar's first object was to reach the water in the valley, there to refresh his horses, and a forward cavalry movement was made with this object.

But this advance precipitated the battle that was imminent, for the Britons, who held the opposite ridge in force, rushed down the slope to the water-side, and furiously attacked the Roman horse. Exhausted though they were by a waterless night march, the Roman cavalry met the assault, and, repelling it, drove the enemy back into the woods. This cavalry charge was followed by a general advance into the dense thickets, into which, excellently suited, both by nature and by art, for defence, the Britons had retired. Here they fought in small bands, protected by mounds and trenches and by felled trees cunningly interlaced. One of these oppida remains in Bourne Park, on the summit of Bridge Hill and beside the Watling Street which, until 1829, was identical with the Dover Road. In that year a slight deviation was made to the left over the hilltop for about two hundred yards' length of roadway, and in the course of cutting through the hill a number of Roman urns and skulls were discovered at a depth of five feet. The circular earthwork of the redoubt still remains in very good preservation, surrounded with trees, the successors of those which covered the hill when the Britons and Romans contended/here. The place is known locally as /together "Old England's Hole", and tradition has it that here

the Britons made their last stand. Tradition is not lightly to be put aside at any time, but when it is supported by Caesar's own words it deserves all respect. "Being repulsed," he writes, "they withdrew themselves into the woods, and reached a place which they had prepared before, having closed all approaches to it by felled timber." The soldiers of the Seventh Legion, however, soon captured this stronghold. Throwing up a mound against it, they advanced, holding their shields over their heads in the formation known as "the tortoise", and drove out the defenders at the sword's point. This was the last place to hold out that day. Everywhere the Britons were dislodged, and numbers of them slain. The survivors withdrew further into the woodlands that surrounded Caer Caint, and Caesar, suspecting ambushes in those unknown forests, forbade pursuit.

It was evening before the last fighting was done. The battle had raged on a front extending for three miles, from Bekebourne to Kingston, and it now remained encamped for the night, and to fortify against a possible surprise the ridge which Caesar held. And so, before the exhausted soldiery could lie down to rest after the incessant labours of two days and nights, they threw up the lines of entrenchments that still, after a lapse of more than nineteen hundred years, remain distinct upon Barham Downs."

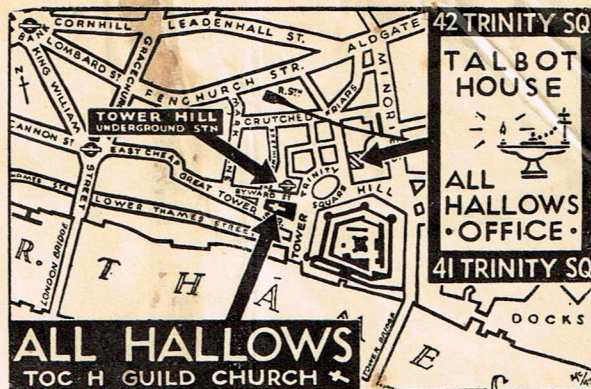
(Pages 312/314.)

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WAKEFIELD HOUSE
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12th July 1961.

Dear Colonel Graham,

None of your three guests
can quite forget the kindness you displayed by
taking us towards England's Old Hole.

I gladly promised to send you an extract
from "The Dover Road" by Charles H. Harper, printed
by Chapman & Hall in 1895. You will not find it
easy to obtain. I therefore send the extract with
our thanks. I feel it ought to be far better known.

Plainly some previous proprietor decided that
the stair which led directly to the Hole should be
removed, and entry thus debarred. Presumably no
right of way exists. Harper himself had plainly
found the Hole, and writes as if it could, in '95,
be easily and readily approached. Alas, this ease
of access has been lost. Only through an ancient
villager with a good memory, a few years back, did
we succeed in finding it at all. Surely a site
which once has borne this name should be preserved
and open to all pilgrims - unless, indeed, the
site is incorrect.

Yours sincerely,

Colonel R.H. Graham RAMC.,
The Lodge,
Bridge,
Kent.

Philip Clayton

Why not join ToCH? We'd welcome you!

Old England's Hole

AMONG the many reports of the attempts of the villagers of Bridge to draw attention to the danger to life and limb caused by motor traffic, I noticed (in a B.B.C. South East radio programme) a reference to Old England's Hole, the "earthwork" just inside the Bourne Park boundary not many yards above the park entrance.

The claim that this spot was where the Britons put up their last stand against the Roman invaders has often been challenged and yet a former Rector of Bridge, in "Cæsar in Kent," produced a good deal of evidence that the claim is justified. That this primitive earthwork should have been considered a formidable obstacle to a trained army is almost incredible to those of us more familiar with modern warfare.

"They, few in number, defended it from the woods and prevented our men from entering the fortifications," wrote Cæsar. "The soldiers of the Seventh Legion, however, having formed a tortoise and thrown up a mound against the fortifications, took the place and drove them from the woods, a few wounds having been received."

Not many of the motorists who speed up and down Bridge Hill, and possibly not many of the villagers who go in fear of their lives, are likely to spare a thought for Old England's Hole, even if they know it is there.