

BRITISH MOATED OPPIDUM NEAR
STAPLEHURST.

WHEN our Archæological Society met at Cranbrook, in July, 1873, a letter appeared in *The South Eastern Gazette* calling attention to an apparently unnoticed, yet remarkable, earthwork, in the immediate vicinity of Staplehurst, on the road to Cranbrook. The earthwork remained without further record until the present autumn, when Mr. Humphry Wickham invited me to accompany him to see it.

It is due to the anonymous writer of the letter, to give a portion of his communication, for he is correct in his appreciation of the character of the earthwork, as well as in his knowledge of its features and surrounding facts. He writes :—

“When at about Knox Bridge, say at a mile beyond Staplehurst, across the fields to the right, they (the members of the Society) would find, still almost as perfect as when thrown up, an excellent specimen of the moated strongholds of our pre-Roman ancestors. The moat is of about thirty feet wide, and three hundred yards in circumference; the interior is wholly covered with wood, to which the little fortlet probably owes its preservation. It is within a few yards of a branch of the Staplehurst mill stream, from which the moat could be filled. The whole of the excavated earth was thrown up to form the rampart, which is some fifteen feet high. When, some few years since, the moat was cleared out, many of the stump ends of the trees were found, with which the inner edge had been palisaded round, in the manner described by Cæsar and Strabo. These, thus preserved between mud and water, shewed that the palisades had leaned forward over the moat, as they do in a New Zealand pah, or the moated stockade of the Fijian Islanders. (See Williams’s *Fiji and Fijians*.)*

* *South Eastern Gazette*, July 19th, 1873.

We were fortunate in securing the attendance and assistance of Mr. Foreman of Lovehurst Farm, who pointed out to us the position of the palisades, which he himself had noticed during an exceptionally dry summer. Thirty feet is perhaps too wide a space for the water, even in winter, and I should think twenty would be nearer the real extent. We estimated the breadth on the day of our visit (September 4th, 1879), at about fifteen feet. The interior of this *oppidum*, or *oppidulum*, is bowl-shaped, smooth, and symmetrical, apparently, as when constructed. Mr. Foreman assured us that it was entirely without a road over the moat; the present entrance having been made by himself. It must, therefore, have been entered over a bridge of trees or planks, such as could easily have been laid down, and as easily removed. In the same field was a very similar earthwork, but smaller, which was levelled some years since. Our friend, the anonymous writer, expresses a hope that this, yet so perfect, being the property of Saint Bartholomew's Hospital, may be preserved; but the other had like ownership, and that did not save it from destruction.

This fortified dwelling is a rare and valuable addition to the British earthworks in Kent. There may be a few more never yet fully explored and recorded; but in compactness, size, and good preservation, this may be considered unique.