

A DISCIPLE OF THE DRUIDS

THE BEALE POSTE MSS.

By JOHN H. EVANS, F.S.A.

THE title of this paper contains a word at which all modern archæologists blanch, for the Druid Myth bedevilled and dominated antiquarian research for a long period, and delayed a true appreciation of many of our problems in prehistory. The intense interest displayed in the Druids and their religion was not the least remarkable of the complex influences which the Romantic Movement exercised upon taste and thought in the century which falls between 1720 and 1820. The white-robed Druid with his romantic appurtenances, the golden sickle, the mistletoe, the sunrise sacrifice in the charmed circle of hoary stones, and behind the deep and gloomy wood, has entirely faded from the archæological scene, and the study has now fallen into complete neglect, a brilliant exception being Mr. T. D. Kendrick's book *The Druids*, 1927. That the researches of the Rev. Beale Poste into (among many other things) the West Kent Megaliths should at every point be saturated with the Druid spirit is not surprising when we consider that it was during the actual writing of his *The Military Antiquities of Kent* that (Mr. Kendrick tells us) "Dr. Joseph Anderson noticed the significance of the entries for the stone circles in the early indexes of *Archæologia* ; in 1809 it was simply, Stones, Circles of, but in 1844 this was altered to Stones, Circles of, v. Druids."

It is not clear why this magnum opus never saw the printer's ink, for a 4-page, closely printed "Advertisement" promised marvellously well, for Poste was in the habit of giving value for money, and the entranced reader was invited to follow the history of our County from geologic ages to the Dutch War, with a Dictionary of Kenticisms thrown in. The failure to publish is all the more remarkable, for an imposing List of Subscribers, enclosed with the "Advertisement," shows that the Author had collected most of the Nobility, Clergy and Gentry of the County in addition to its Antiquaries. Poste was by habit a generous donor of his views, for another "Advertisement," this time of *A Report of the Discoveries at St. Faith's Church, Maidstone*, also includes an account of "some important antiquities of the town," including a carving of an unusual symbolization of the Virgin Mary, and an inscribed Romano-British spear head, together with two representations of ancient British chariots, and a dissertation on Anglo-Saxon sepulture. Something, indeed, to suit the most diverse tastes.

Beale Poste was born in 1793, of an old Kentish family, his father being William Poste, of Hayle Farm, near Maidstone.¹ Through his maternal grandmother he was descended from another old Kentish family, the Beales, who had previously held Hayle Farm for many generations. Poste entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and took his degree in 1819, proceeding from the University to the curacy of Stowting. But his active clerical life was short, for after holding curacies at High Halden and Hilstead he retired early in life to his little estate of Bydews, near Maidstone. Here he spent a quiet life, not only as an antiquary but also as a naturalist, entertaining many archaeological friends of county and national eminence. He contributed many papers to the Numismatic Society, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and to the earlier volumes of the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*. The note published by Roach Smith in his *Collectanea Antiqua* entitled "On the Invasion of Julius Caesar," was taken from the unpublished *Military Antiquities*. Many of his Papers were expanded into his *The Coins of Cunobeline and of the Ancient Britons*, published in 1853, and in the same year appeared his *Britannic Researches*, which contains an able discussion on Richard of Cirencester's *De Situ Britanniae*. Of this Roach Smith writes, "To any unbiased jury of archæologists it must tend to a verdict fatal to the genuineness of this once accepted work."² The volume, *Britannia Antiqua*, followed in 1857.

Poste was a Foundation Member of our Society, and was a member of its Council until his death in 1871. It is a little remarkable that no obituary of him appears in *Archæologia Cantiana*. A complete list of his Papers in the Transactions is given here :

"Observations on the supposed site of ancient Roman Maidstone,"
I. 154.

"Ancient Rochester, or Durobrivæ, viewed as the site of a Roman
Camp and Station," II, 65.

"Discovery of a Roman-British Cemetery at Westborough,
Maidstone," II, 143.

¹ Many of these details have been taken from the 2nd volume of Roach Smith's *Retrospections, Social and Archæological*.

² C. R. Smith, *Retrospections*, II, 18. Smith was writing in 1886, long after the forgery had been exposed. He is generally listed amongst the majority of mid-Victorian antiquaries who accepted it as authentic. The *De Situ* had first been called in question by John Hodgson in 1827, but it was not until the fifties and sixties that scholars changed their earlier views. Thus Thomas Wright accepted the Work in 1857, but had changed his mind by 1861. It is to the credit of Poste that he rejects Bertram in 1853 for the definitive repudiation did not come until 1866 and 1869 with the publication of the classic Papers of B. B. Woodward and J. E. B. Mayor. Yet the mischief still prevails for F. F. Smith in his *History of Rochester* (1928) quotes Richard alone on the subject of Roman Kent!

“Symbolism of the Blessed Virgin in former ages as represented by an ancient carving at Maidstone,” IV, 113.

It is through the kindness of our Curator, Mr. L. R. A. Grove, of Maidstone Museum, that I have been enabled to inspect the Beale Poste Manuscripts. They take the form, for the most part, of roughly bound quarto notebooks, but there are also other Papers, and many sketches and drawings. Ten of these notebooks are devoted to the *Military Antiquities*, and it is here proposed to review briefly Volume III of these, which constitutes Section III of the book, and bears the sub-title “Cromlechs and Tumuli.” Like the others it is a quarto notebook, roughly stitched together, and encased in brown wrapping paper, and contains 231 sheets of paper, many of them being half, quarter and slip size insertions. The calligraphy is the typical Italian hand of the early nineteenth century, and varies considerably in quality, a reflection, perhaps, of the moods of the writer and of the time at his disposal. The date of this particular volume may be fixed within a few years, for in it he inserts a copy of a letter written by him to C. Roach Smith in March, 1848, while later he pleads that Faussett’s *Inventorium Sepulchrale* should be published. As it actually was published in 1856 (by Roach Smith) it is clear that these notes were written before then. A date of between 1850 and 1855 is indicated, but many of the researches described were carried out in 1841 and 1842.

Military Antiquities of Kent. Section III, being Volume III of the Beale Poste MSS.

CROMLECHS AND TUMULI

Pages 1-8. The book opens with a general introduction to the Kentish Megaliths. The writer mentions that “Coldrum has been brought to notice recently,” ascribes Kits Coty House to Categern, and a “low tumulus found at the foot of a side bank” at Horsted, to Horsa. Nevertheless, he calls them all “cromlechs,” “tumuli,” or, generically, “Druidical Remains.” He suggests that the name Coldrum means “Gael-Dun,” and that some of the chiefs of the Belgic Gauls were interred there. He then writes that all types of monuments are “very frequently considered” to be connected with “the superstitions of the Druids” for worship in Serpentine Temples or for assembly. Others will not allow anything of this kind; but the Author hopes to be able to reconcile both views as to “adopt either opinion exclusively would be contradictory to the results of actual exploration as well as to the testimony of ancient authors.” Serpentine Temples he considers were for worship, circles for worship and sepulture, and cromlechs for sepulture, but not always exclusively so. Originally they were tombs but in course of time became connected with

A DISCIPLE OF THE DRUIDS

“sacrificial offerings and the worship of heathen deities, originating from the idea that places of interment were haunted by the spirits of the deceased.”

Pages 9-57. Missing.

Pages 58-62. Concerned with a discussion of the natural history of “sarsdens” (i.e. sarzens) or greywethers. He remarks that frequently such sandstone blocks are nearly square, “having 2 sides parallel and a third at right angles to them, the 4th generally irregular.” He rejects the notion that some sarzens have been artificially worked and then gives a piece of amusing if useful advice, “Among its other properties this species of stone being exceedingly slippery, cloth or list shoes are recommended when examining collections of Druidical rocks which are composed of it to prevent serious accident. Particularly as these rocks are frequently in inclined positions difficult to stand upon.”

Pages 63-67. A list of the “principal Cromlechs in the Kingdom.”

Pages 68-70. Missing.

Pages 71-74. Discussion as to how stones were moved and cap-stones lifted.

Pages 75, 76. Introduction to the Aylesford district, the beauty of which leads him to believe that it must have been “one of the favourite retreats of the Druids.”

Pages 77-83. A description of Kits Coty House. He devotes some attention to the cup-holes in the roof-stone, one of which was reputed to be always miraculously filled with water, and shows that this was connected to another by a hidden channel, which can be proved by using a “pliant wand.” (A pliant wand will remind many of us of quite other things than archæological research.) He then recounts a scrap of folk-lore, “A Giantess had two sons who were employed in building Churches, herself being occupied in collecting stones and bringing them in her apron. They had only one hammer between them which they threw from one to another from Church to Church as they wanted it. At last it fell upon one and killed him. The Giantess in her concern dropped the stone she was carrying and left it in the place where it now lies.” This was the “The General’s Tombstone,” a huge prostrate monolith which once lay some 70 to 80 yards to the N.W. of Kits Coty House; Poste calls it “The Altar Stone,” and tells us that a tenant of the land, Bentham, had it buried in 1787. (The “stone-carrying Giants” story is a far-travelled tale, and it is interesting to know that it reached Kent. Although I have collected the traditions and folk-lore of the Medway Megaliths,¹ I had not come across this story. The accepted story of the end of “The General’s Tombstone” is that Thomas Costen blew it up with gunpowder in 1867. Perhaps it was resuscitated for its final destruction.) He mentions that the

¹ *Folk-Lore*, LVII, 36 (1946).

barrow of Kits Coty as shown by Stukeley "can scarcely be traced." A very pregnant observation now follows to the effect that as flint arrow-heads are found in association with megaliths elsewhere they may have been built "many ages" B.C., and that Kits Coty House was originally built as a tomb for a Druid, and then re-used to receive the body of Categern, killed in the battle of Aylesford, in A.D. 455. (Three influences are here working in his mind. There is first the pre-Romantic Lambardic notion that Kits Coty was the tomb of Categern, and this struggles with the all-pervading Druid Myth; then a glimmering of the new idea that megaliths were built long ages B.C., i.e. presumably Stone Age, and Poste seems to infer that there were Druids then. Mr. Kendrick believes that there were Druids in Gaul in 350 B.C.)

Pages 84-91. The Lower Kits Coty. He rejects both Hasted's and Thorpe's account of the destruction of this monument, and himself believes that some small sepulchral cavity gave way, and the weather did the rest. He ignores Stukeley's drawing and plan, and briefly mentions his own ideas as to its original appearance, which he states will be better understood from the plans. (Thorpe's account was correct, and is amply confirmed in Ayleway's letter to Stukeley of 1722, of which Poste knew nothing. One wonders which of the seven wonderful reconstructions which Poste produced himself would have been finally adopted for the printed work. See comments under "Sketches and Plans.")

Pages 92-94. Devoted to a group of sarzens near Kits Coty House, which he believed once formed a Druidical Circle.

Pages 95-96. This section describes a Karnedd, or sepulchral tumulus, discovered in 1830-31, near Kits Coty House. It was a shallow bowl 16 ft. 6 in. wide, excavated in the earth, so that the centre was 1 ft. deeper than the circumference. The body was laid in the centre and then the whole was covered with 10 tons of flints (*sic*) and turfed over. Also describes pits 10 ft. wide and 10 ft. deep found in the same locality. (The "Karnedd" seems never to have been put on record. The pits are the same as those described by Wright in *The Wanderings of an Antiquary*, 1854, 177.)

Pages 97-102. Deals with a large tumulus near Blue Bell Hill, a perfect oval 30 yds. by 16 yds. and 13/15 ft. high. On it and around it were found some 220 Roman coins, from Claudian to Gratian, and also nearby much Roman debris, including potsherds, stone-work, building materials, and cornice and flue tiles with many metallic objects, all in the possession of Thomas Charles of Chillington Manor, Maidstone. He believes that this was a Roman cemetery, with funereal monuments. (Charles reported this discovery to C. Roach Smith, and it appears in *Archæologia*, XXX, 536. See also *Arch. Journ.*, 1, 264.)

Page 103. Discusses Roman Roads around Aylesford.

Pages 104-109. Mentions Roman pottery finds in the Medway marshes at Upchurch, and connects this place by a Roman Way with Aylesford via Warren Farm, Westfield Sole, Queensdown Warren, Hartlip and Breach Farm.

Page 109. The White Horse Stone. Four versions of the origin of the name of this standing sarzen are given here :

1. That upon it fell the White Horse banner of the Saxons at the battle of Aylesford.
2. That when the sun cast a shadow upon it in a certain way it resembled a white horse.
3. That upon it the Druids sacrificed a white horse.
4. One who rode a white horse was killed near it.

(This is the original White Horse Stone destroyed sometime before 1834. The various theories as to its name demonstrate that the "legend" of the Stone was not fixed at the beginning of the nineteenth century ; obviously it was literary in origin and late in date.)

Page 110. The British Tomb. (This is Smythe's Megalith, discovered in 1822. Poste gives no additional information.)

Page 111. Upper White Horse Stone. (This is the "successor" Stone which has inherited the legend of the former. No information from Poste.)

Page 112. Discusses an alleged Roman Well near Warren Farm.

Pages 113-116. The Cussington Circle. An account of the stones which once existed at Cossington, and of other single stones and sarzen groups in the vicinity. To Poste all these were Druidic.

Pages 117-122. Toddington or Tottenden Manor House. The stones at and near the farm are dealt with here. He believes that the D.B. Totintune equates with "Todten-tuna, the village of the slain." He records that a sack-full of human bones was found near the Coffin Stones in 1838-39, and expresses a belief that Lord Poyning's Chapel (St. Michael or St. Stephen) *t. Rich. II*, replaced an earlier oratory erected by the Christian Britons after their victory at Aylesford. There is also an interesting record of the field-names around Kits Coty House, and of owners and tenants.

Page 123. Druidical Circle and Altar Stone near Toddington or Tottenden Manor House.

Pages 124-126. Druidical Remains at Spring-head, Tottenden. He believes that this was the Druidical Headquarters, and that both a Dracontium and Via Sacra once existed here.

Pages 127-131. Hengist's Battle, A.D. 455. A long discussion of the Saxon campaign of the mid-fifth century.

Pages 132-135. Aylesford. He mentions Roman and British

antiquities dredged from the river in 1824, and then deals with the name of Aylesford.

Pages 136-137. Romano-British town of Aiglessa or Eccles. Deals with the D.B. Manor of Aiglessa and its supposed Roman origin. There is here a copy of a letter dated March, 1848, and addressed to C. Roach Smith describing Roman remains found at Eccles.

Page 137. Continuation. Mentions the battle of Farnham between Eadmund Ironside and the Danes in 1016, which he locates at Preston.

Pages 138-153. Horsa's Grave near Horsted. A long discussion on this vexed subject, but throwing no new light on it. When he visited Horsted in November, 1841, he could only find one person who knew anything of the matter, and he had been a guide some thirty years before, bringing persons up from the Dockyard and Rochester to view the spot. He disagrees with both Thorpe and Colebrooke who both stated that a heap of flints marked the site of the (megalithic) tomb, and instead indicates a small round tumulus 9 ft. in diameter and 18-20 in. high as being the grave. Although he at first states that nobody at Horsted knew anything of Horsa he now writes that the local legend is that a battle, beginning further down the valley (i.e. nearer Chatham) ended here in the death of "old King Horsted." Poste does make the reasonable observation that Horsted may only mean a place for pasturing horses, and cites the analogous Cowsted and Oxteds in support. As regards Thorpe's famous Map (*Customale Roffense*, 70) he states that this was really made by Tracey of Brompton and that Thorpe never visited the place. The discovery of swords, etc., in this locality is mentioned, and of a gold coin, "turned up by the moles 30 years since of which the size was nearly that of a penny piece. This was sold by a Mrs. Swan, a Woodman's Wife, to a Jew for 35s."

Pages 154-173. Addington Circles. He begins a long discussion with the just remark that the plans and descriptions of Colebrooke are almost completely worthless. He gives a valuable piece of information to the effect that the two dissociated stones in the corner of the wood near the Long Barrow were removed from their original positions when the Park road was widened and deepened in 1827, and he says that they once lay where the Avenue crossed the road. (This means, as we should expect, that they once formed part of the circuit of the S.E. part of the peristalith.) He makes the naive statement that as no antiquaries ever resided at Addington less of tradition about the stones has been collected than otherwise would have been the case, and that in Colebrooke's time the local people regarded them as a collection of rocks. (Colebrooke soon supplied the want, for he set going the story that the Britons retreated here after their defeat at Aylesford, and here they buried Categern. The tail-end of this "tradition" can be

heard from the villagers of Trottescliffe to-day when they tell the visitor that a "Black Prince" is buried at Coldrum.)

Pages 174-188. *Druidical Remains at Coldrum.* A factual description of this monument which Poste visited in 1842 and 1844, and of which he made several valuable plans and sketches, the earliest which we have of Coldrum. Evidently the structure was then very much as it is to-day, except that several stones of the peristalith were hidden by turf and have only been revealed at intervals since. He also records the discovery of two "sculls" in the terrace, near the Chamber, one in 1804 and the other in 1825. Coldrum is then reconstructed as a monument of three "cromlechs" (chambers) enclosed in a heart-shaped peristalith, and he considers it to have been a Dracontium, or Serpent Temple. Various single stones and sarzen groups in the vicinity are noted, a group at Park Barn being blown to pieces in 1823-4, and another nearby group destroyed "13 or 14 years since."

Pages 188-196. *Druidical Establishments supposed formerly at Birling.* *Druidical antiquities at Birling Place, and Circles at Woodgate in Ryarsh Parish.*

He notes that Birling Church stands on an ancient tumulus, and that the church fabric contains "Druidical Stones." He then describes various groups and single sarzen stones, which he assumes once formed "cromlechs" and "circles," but he cautiously adds, "the Reader must bear in mind that all this on the spot speaks but little to the eye." He showed great industry in tracing such large numbers of stones—he mentions 50 in one field alone—but an actual survey of these would have been more valuable than his fanciful reconstructions.

Pages 196-205. *The two main Establishments of the Druids and their Headquarters on the right and left Banks of the River.*

The divisions of the megalithic remains in West Kent into two groups, one around Kits Coty House and the other in the Addington-Coldrum district is noted and he assumes that they represent two centres of Druidical worship. He once again asserts that cromlechs were originally monuments to the principal Druids and princes, and that they were all at one time surrounded by circles of stones. The two "Headquarters" he thinks represent the two ancient kingdoms of Kent.

Page 206. *Collections of Rocks and Druidical remains to the Westward of those above described in Kent.*

Isolated sarzens in other parts of the county are briefly noted here.

Pages 207-211. *Barrows or Tumuli.* "These are usually classed into 10 or 11 heads, as the Bell Barrow, the long Barrow, the boat Barrow, the Druid's Barrow (four forms) the Pond Barrow, the Cone Barrow and the Broad Barrow." Barrows in West Kent are briefly noted, and he notes that not all Barrows are funereal, some being erected

to serve as signalling points. There is a short discussion on the practice of cremation.

Pages 212-227. The Faussett Papers. He was allowed to examine the then unpublished MSS. of Faussett's *Inventorium Sepulchrale*, which he discusses very thoroughly. (His hope that these valuable records of tumulus opening would be published was realized in 1856.)

Pages 228-231. Tumuli at and near Aldington Knoll. Describes a "semilunar" tumulus near Aldington which he again connects with the Druids.

THE SKETCHES AND PLANS

A portfolio of some fifty-seven sketches and plans seems closely associated with this third Volume of the MSS., and many of them were evidently intended to illustrate it. They are of all sizes, some being in pencil and others in ink; the plans are drawn with great care and are based upon exact and detailed measurements of their subjects, while the sketches show an artistic aptitude and an eye for proportion and perspective. I have ventured to number them and have prepared a List which has been returned to Mr. Grove with the MSS.

The first eight are concerned with Coldrum, and the first confronts us with a most remarkable "reconstruction" of this monument which here has a heart-shaped enclosure of stones, with three "cromlechs" or "altars" inside it. Two others are sketches of the structure taken from the East, the most familiar view of Coldrum; a sawpit is shown in the foreground, on the margin of the road, and the whole monument was evidently much overgrown at this time. No. 4 is a sketch of the view from the West, and No. 5 is a double drawing, the top half being a very detailed plan of the capstone of Kits Coty House showing even the cup-holes, while at the bottom is again displayed the delightful reconstruction of Coldrum. Two others are rough drafts of the Survey, which led to the final plan, perhaps the most important drawing in the collection and one of great interest to modern archæologists for it antedates by some thirty-four years the hitherto earliest Survey of Coldrum, that of Petrie, made in 1878. It has been carefully drawn, and shows the position of the skull find of 1825; we are now assured that Coldrum a century ago was in much the same condition as to-day, and all the vague references made since as to its previous state can be disregarded.

The next twelve of the collection are concerned with the Lower Kits Coty or The Countless Stones, and include plans and isometric views of the stones. But there are no less than seven plans and sketches of reconstructions; the favourite appears to be that of a circle enclosing a "double cromlech" and a "Standing Stone," but another shows only a circle with the huge Standing Stone. Fantastic as these flights

A DISCIPLE OF THE DRUIDS

of fancy are we cannot but be impressed with the admirable execution of the drawings; through them shines something of the urgent keenness of the man whose meticulous care in measuring every stone is oddly matched with the untrammelled imagination of his "reconstructions."

In the four drawings devoted to the Addington Long Barrow is one of a large scale Survey which equals anything which has been produced since, but his reconstruction shows the obsessional circle from which ran an "avenue." Nine factual plans and views of the smaller Addington group follow. No. 35 of the series well illustrates Poste's devotion to factual detail for here we have various aspects of Kits Coty House with many exact measurements. Two charming little sketches illustrate the Coffin Stone with top-hatted horsemen around it, and the White Horse Stone with several antiquarian friends regarding it, and no doubt expanding upon it. Several drawings deal with the Tottington Stones, the last, No. 44, showing the stones arranged in a very snake-like formation, evidently a Dracontium, or Serpent Temple, in this very heart of the Druidical Headquarters. Nos. 45 and 46 are sketch-maps of the Aylesford district.

Five drawings devoted to Horsa's Grave follow, the first being based upon, or a copy of, that published by Thorpe, but showing the spots where two swords were discovered in 1751 and 1811. The other four are charming drawings of the same scene, a tree with the "heap of flints" on one side and a small bun-like "tumulus" on the other. To either one of these has the "Tomb" of the great Horsa degenerated. The next sheet shows plans of Walmer and Bigberry Camps, and another such is divided into three panels. The top gives two views of the "Pillar Stone of Addington Circle," the middle a plan of Charlton Camp, and the lower a copy of part of Evelyn's Map of the Medway. The last three drawings in this collection are purely imaginative. One shows a marvellously constructed "Druidical Temple" and the other two reconstructions of the Birling sarzen groups as a Dracontium.

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