

Geoffrey Winthrop Young and *Bevis*. A talk by Jean Saunders for the RJS meeting held at the Museum on 10 May 2014.

I shall be telling you Geoffrey Winthrop Young's story: his love of mountaineering, writing, teaching, map-making and of *Bevis*.

It seems that a lot of relevant information came into the Society's hands at once. It is a bit like waiting for a bus and then several turn up together. First of all the Society acquired a single letter from Geoffrey Winthrop Young addressed to Samuel Looker that we found in the Looker collection that mentioned his maps for *Bevis*; then there was a bundle of letters and maps acquired this year at auction from Hugoe Matthews' collection, and finally a book that Phyllis Treitel gave me about a month ago written by J B Jones that mentions his correspondence with Young.

It is well-worth reading Mark Daniel's article in our *Journal* No 3 (Spring 1994) entitled 'The Bevis Country' as this was based on the correspondence that Hugoe Matthews acquired from Young's daughter, Marcia. (Distribute copies)

But first of all, you need a potted biography of Geoffrey Winthrop Young. He was a mountaineer, poet, teacher, and the author of several notable books on mountaineering. He was born in London on 25 October 1876 (RJ would have been nearly 28 then – around the time he left Swindon). Geoffrey was the third of four children born to Sir George Young, third baronet, and Alice Eacy Kennedy, daughter of a Dublin physician. I tried to trace Geoffrey's middle name Winthrop but couldn't find a family connection so I think that he double-barrelled his name as an affectation. Young was educated at Marlborough College – I have no idea if he knew that he was in Jefferies' country at the time – and then he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied classics (BA 1898, MA 1902). He was awarded the chancellor's medal for English verse in 1897 and 1898. He then studied French and German in Europe, including a period in Geneva and a year at Jena University (1899–1900).

Geoffrey Young was one of the most famous British mountaineers before the First World War. He began climbing mountains as an undergraduate at Trinity and, when there, he wrote a book called *The Roof-Climber's Guide to Trinity*, in part a parody of early alpine guidebooks, in part a useful reference work for those, like him, who were keen to clamber up Cambridge's highest spires!

He taught at various schools. In 1902 he was appointed tutor in modern languages at Eton College but was dismissed three years later for a homosexual liaison, and became an HM inspector of secondary schools. Although he enjoyed this work, he resigned abruptly in 1913. Evidently, his diaries during these years record the tension between his public life and his private pleasures in the homosexual underworlds of Berlin, Paris, and Soho.

His many notable first ascents in the Alps included several ridges in the Zermatt district that became known after him as Younggrat. In 1907 he began organizing climbing retreats during Easter at the Pen y Pass hostel in Snowdonia, and this annual event brought together leading British climbers for many years. Many of his companions and pupils died climbing, and he personally recovered the bodies of several friends. George Mallory, who disappeared on Everest in 1924, was one of his protégés.

Young served in Belgium and France as a war correspondent for the *Daily News* in 1914, and his dispatches were collected in *From the Trenches*. Later that year he founded and commanded the Friends' Ambulance Unit in Flanders, and served mostly at Ypres. The following year he joined the first British ambulance unit for Italy, which he commanded until January 1919. He was severely wounded on 31 August 1917 at the battle of Monte San Gabriele, and his left leg was amputated above the knee. He was mentioned in dispatches and received the order of Leopold from Belgium. He was a member of the Légion d'honneur of France. He received the order of the crown of Italy, and the British campaign medal.

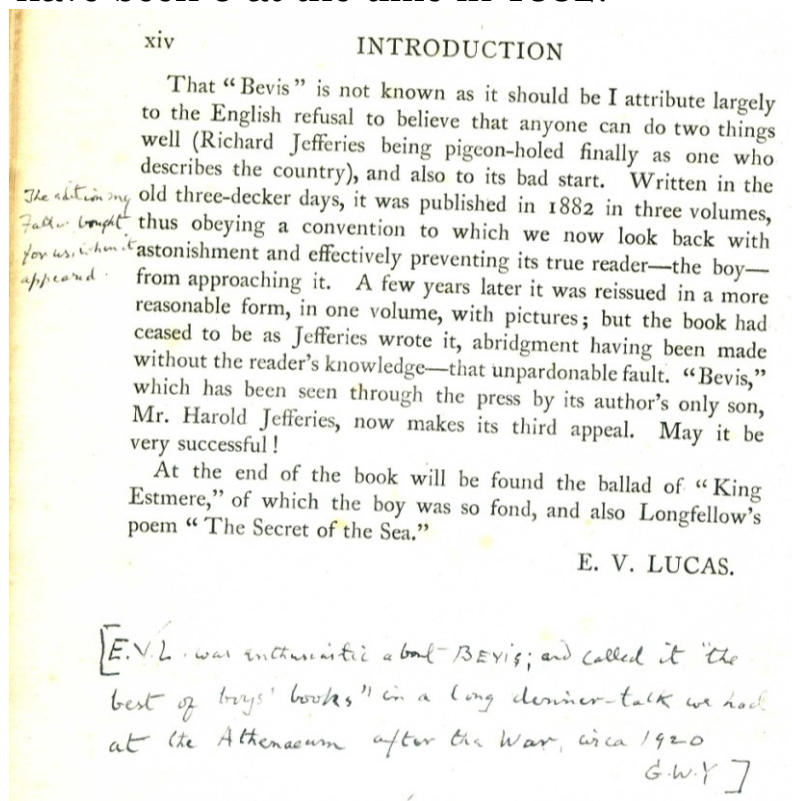
After the war Young continued to write and to climb with only one leg. He published many books that inspired the next generation of mountaineers. Most inspirational were his climbs with a custom-designed peg-leg. He finally resolved to give up climbing while on the summit of Zinal Rothorn in 1935 and lived to tell the tale.

Young married Eleanor Slingsby in 1918 and they had a son and a daughter, Marcia, who drew the map for *Bevis* that we shall see later. Later in life Young referred to himself as an 'elderly celebrity, second-class'. He cut an imposing figure, with his bushy moustache, pipe, monocle, fedora or beret, and cascading cloak. In common with Jefferies, he admired vitality above all else, and contemporaries were impressed by his forceful personality. His personal finances were often precarious. He died

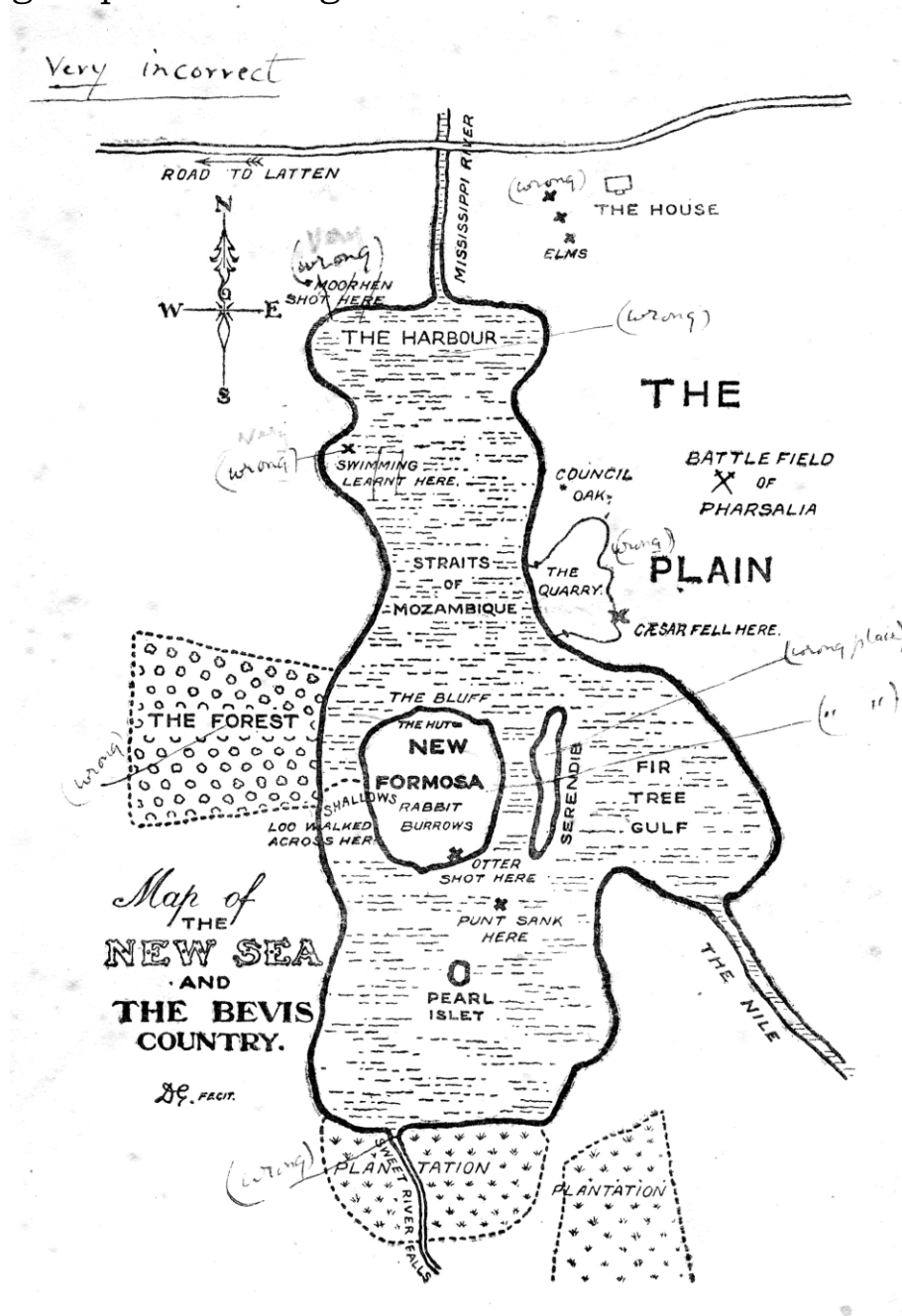
of stomach cancer in 1958 just before his 88th birthday. His ashes were scattered on the peaks above Pen y Pass.



So now our story of Geoffrey Winthrop Young begins. It was the map in his 1904 Duckworth copy of *Bevis* that started it all. There are pencilled notes in the margins everywhere. *Bevis* was clearly a novel that Young had known since a small child as he writes in the book that his father had bought the first edition – the old three-decker- “for us, when it appeared” although he would only have been 5 at the time in 1882.



Young had taken exception to David Garnett's map that was published in the book. Young described it as "very incorrect" and he was also concerned that Jefferies had portrayed an inaccurate topography in his descriptions of Bevis' land. Here is the offending map with Young's notes:



David Garnett's map – he was aged about 12 when he drew this.

Young's letter to Samuel Looker dated 18th March 1947 explains all. By the way, all the correspondence covers just over 2 months. Young writes:

**12 HOLLAND STREET,
LONDON, W.8.
TELEPHONE, WESTERN 8883.
18/III/47**

Dear Sir,

I have read of your special interest in the Jefferies papers.

I made a close study of BEVIS. And I suggested to E.V.

Lucas, soon after he published the second one-volume edition, with the amusing but terribly misleading map, made by a young friend, that there should be a better map. He urged me to make it, when we were together in the first war. I used some leisure during the second, to construct it .

The text, closely examined, is full of indications, even of measurements. From evidences, I am inclined to think that Jefferies, who was fond of making maps, did originally make one in detail, of this half imaginary Bevis country. He had it in mind when he wrote the book. But I think he may have previously destroyed the actual map, since there are one or two very curious blunders, which an actual map would have corrected at once.

I have also made a chart of the house; and of the 'Mississippi'; and the Lake, the Battlefield and The Walk fall into three divisions of the main map.

I am only mentioning this, in case there may be a reissue of what E.V.L. called the 'best boys' book in the world', in the centenary years, and it may be desired to include a map, or maps, for the modern very map-minded younger folk. In this event, my maps would be entirely at your disposal. and I should be glad to present them, in return for all the pleasure the book has given me, and scores of boys; to whom it has been the usual gift.

Yours very truly

G. Winthrop Young

The reply from Looker was, of course, very encouraging:

The Book Nook,
South Green,
Billericay,
Essex.
20.3.47.

Dear Sir,

It is really exceedingly kind of you to write about the *Bevis*' map and chart. They sound most interesting and certainly Jefferies himself would have been delighted to know that, after he was gone, he would have such loyal and devoted friends.

You will be interested to hear that I am now engaged in editing all of Jefferies' works (with the exception of the first three father jejune novels, *Scarlet Shawl*, *Restless Human Hearts* and *World's End*) I have already done the introductions and sets of notes for six of them and the rest will follow during 1948-49 I hope. *The Life of the Fields*, the first one to be issued in this series, should be out this late Spring. Lutterworth Press are my publishers and I am sending your letter on to them, as, when *Bevis* is reached (not till 1948 probably) nothing would give me greater pleasure than to include such a map and chart.

I have the charming edition by E.V. Lucas. In fact, in my Jefferies' collection, I have most of his reprints. I will write to you again, if I might, when I have some more definite news.

You will be interested to hear that Constables are to issue very shortly (this spring) my edition of *The Story of My Heart* including, as well as the usual text, Jefferies first draft, never before printed, which differs in many respects from the published version. I have also edited from my collection a full length volume of hitherto unprinted essays, some of which are equal in quality to anything he ever wrote.

This volume I hope will be published towards the end of the year by Lutterworth.

I believe I had the pleasure, some while ago, of reading some of your own work on mountaineering. Your name is very familiar to me.

I appreciate very deeply the courtesy of your letter, and hope to be able to use the map.

In return, if you would like to see my Jefferies' collection, which is quite unique I believe and comprehensive, I should be very pleased indeed to show it to you.

Yours sincerely.
(Samuel J. Looker).
editor of Jefferies' England etc,etc.

Young had also written to Gerald Duckworth & Co as well as to Looker. The publishers replied on 24 April to Young's offer of 21st April to send them a map for a new edition of the book. The letter said simply that they "will bear the map in mind when we come to prepare a fresh edition of *Bevis*." However, Duckworth never re-issued *Bevis* and it wasn't until Eyre and Spottiswood published *Bevis* in 1948 that the Young map appeared albeit that it was drawn by his daughter Marcia Winthrop-Young, who was also responsible for passing on her father's fine collection of letters and drawings to Hugoe Matthews in 1992.

True to his word, Looker sent a copy of Young's letter to his publishers at Lutterworth Press who were far more encouraging. [Read letter].

JTO/D

April 3, 1947.

Dear Mr. Winthrop Young,

Mr. Samuel Looker has very kindly allowed us to see your letter to him about BEVIS. We shall certainly be including this book in our uniform edition of Jefferies' works edited by Mr. Looker, and shall be proud indeed if we may really have your maps - as Jefferies himself would have been proud. Our only doubt is whether we can get the book out in time for the centenary we have eight Jefferies books scheduled for production between now and then, and, as you can guess, they represent a terrific whack out of our very, very meagre quota of paper (even if we can get our quota made, which is less than likely), and paper is by no means the worst of our problems these days.

May I take this opportunity of adding a personal note? The Alps being among my major passions, the name of Winthrop Young has always been one that I have held in reverence. I wish I could hope one day to have a Winthrop Young Climbing Book to add to the Lutterworth List, but do realize how indissolubly you must be bound to your other publishers. Still, there's no harm in dreaming!

Yours sincerely, for LUTTERWORTH

J. T. Oliver

Book Editor.

However, *Bevis* was never published by Lutterworth, but I wonder what gems of wood engravings and drawings we might have seen by Agnes Miller Parker if she had been invited to illustrate the book as she had the other Lutterworth/Looker editions.

The next letter in the files is dated 16th April 1947 from Looker to Young. Looker writes: "In response to your question as to a problem (or problems) in Jefferies' topography, there is a man, a friend of mine, who probably knows more about Jefferies' topographical problems than anyone in England. This is Mr J B Jones, 18 St Margaret's Road, Swindon, Wiltshire. He if anyone will be likely to be able to tell you what you want to know regarding a topographical query in *Bevis*. Mr Jones was responsible for placing the monument of a sarsen stone on the Downs near Swindon, to the memory of Jefferies and he is a very knowledgeable person indeed."

Young must have written straight away to J B Jones who recounts the time in his own book entitled *Words From High Swindon* (published by The Swindon Press Limited in 1951). J B Jones writes on page 76 that "the most interesting instance I have met with of the kind (ie Jefferies' covering up locations to throw readers off the track as to the whereabouts of places mentioned in his works) was where a traveller of international reputation (i.e Young) asked me recently to correct a map of Coate Water for him. He had never visited Coate, but was mightily attracted by Jefferies' *Bevis*: had been for years. His map based faithfully on the book's text actually showed the Mississippi, that is, Cole, flowing away from the Thames and climbing into the reservoir by the front dam! His other attempts to follow *Bevis* round the lake were hopelessly at variance with reality. When I explained that Jefferies' topography was unreliable, most likely intentionally so, my correspondent was very annoyed. 'Years of scrutiny,' said he, 'never revealed to me that while the Nile and Sweetwater ran into the pond, the Mississippi ran out.'"

So now to the Jones/Young period. Young's maps were based on reading *Bevis*. As Jones points out, Young never visited Coate. However, I wonder if he had as a boy whilst at Marlborough College. Young drew maps of Coate Water, Coate Farm itself, the Battle of Pharsalia and Mark and *Bevis*'s journey. But he doesn't part with his maps immediately and asks Jones questions. Jones first letter is dated 19 April 1947. He writes:

Young obviously asks questions about the farm itself and is pre-occupied by the double hedge mentioned in *Bevis* as Jones replies on Apr. 23 [19]47

- (i) There is not, nor was there, such a mound with double hazel hedge all round the water. There is a simple single hedge, and hazel, bordering the south & west side of the water, but none whatever on the eastern side. The hedges referred to in the battle are end-on to the lake.
- (ii) R.J. places the house in *Bevis* in exactly the position in which it was actually situated.
- (iii) The inside geography of R.J.'s home is difficult to describe in words as the house is very rambling. Photographs, even of the outside, would, I think, be more helpful, and I enclose one or two with pencilled indications, & also of the Long pond. Neither these nor the guidebook accompanying do I wish returned. [I have no idea what guide book JB Jones is talking about.]

As to the inside of his home more particularly, you can get good ideas from Edward Thomas's Biography, & from *Wild Life in a Southern County*, chapters 7, 8, & 9. But you will know these books well.

With regard to the picture on p.31 of Guidebook, the bay window shows the sitting room. The front door is showing. The thatched (older) portion of the home, at p.40, to the length of the home, just shows at E. End. A twisting staircase leads from the back of the house to the 2nd floor, hence to the attic level, there conveniently east to west, that to the west leads to R.J.'s bedroom. I am afraid that this is an awful muddle, not so is the house itself.

In your first letter you mention pp. 60-63 as mixing up "east" and "west". I have looked at Lucas' one volume edition but I cannot find mention of the terms.

These are the photographs he supplied that have his comments on the back:



Photo by]

JEFFERIES' BIRTHPLACE, COATE.

[T. H. SIMONS



Five days later, Jones sent Young some sketches of the interior of Coate Farm. He writes that he "went to see the Coate Water bailiff this morning (28 April) who lives at the farm & got from him these indications of the interior of R.J.'s house. It was all done very quickly & roughly, but it is as accurate as is possible."

There are sketches of all three floors of the house, but they are very feint. The first, which you can make out, is of the ground floor and it marks an "office" that would have been in the corner of this room by the door to the cottage. This room was also L-shaped and it marks also the point where Farmer Iden in *Amaryllis* rested his head by the fire place and left a dent. The position of the "dairy" and "cosy living room" are reversed and wrong!

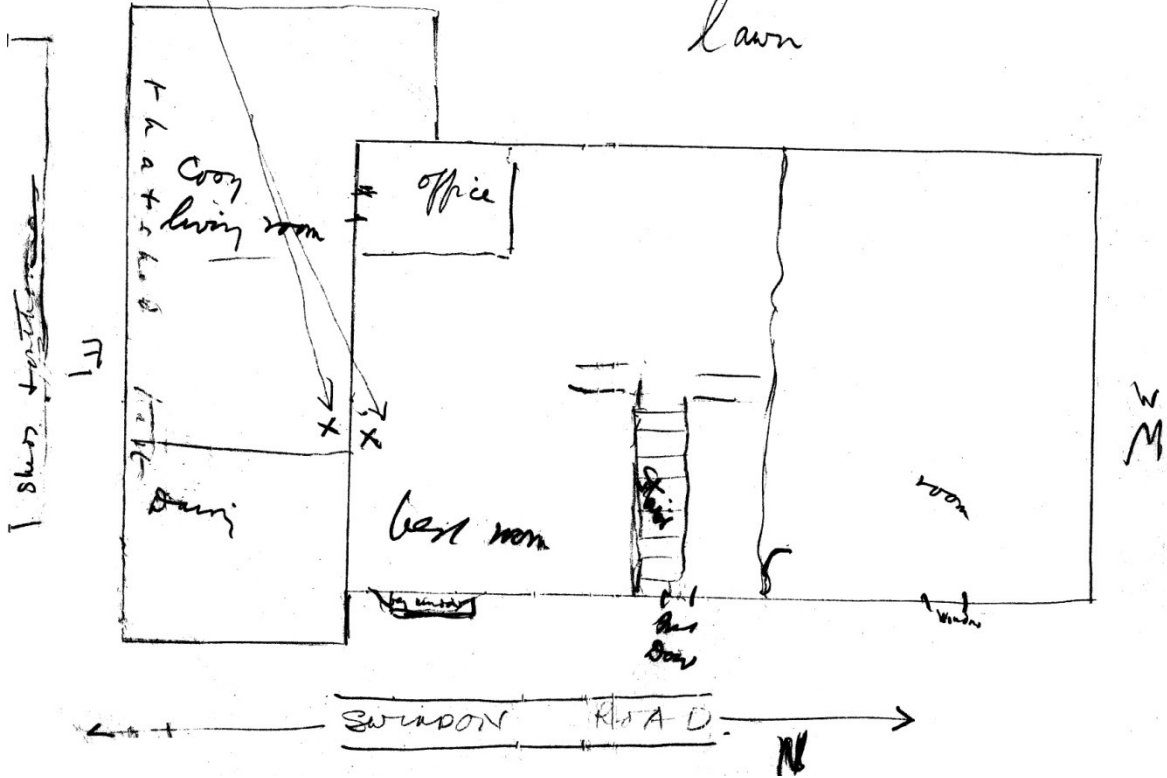
Where P.J.'s father's
greasy hand notes.
(2 positions for this)

S

hulking tree

Ground Floor (1)

Lawn



By April 30th, just 2 days after the last letter, J B Jones sends Young a sketch with some notes. I believe it is intended to explain how Bevis and Mark could have got lost on their walk when they thought that they were circumnavigating the New Sea and ended up at the witches cottage in Hodson. These are his notes:

± is the site of the beech tree with exposed roots

m is the hedge which goes N & S.

Many older trees at n.

... the dotted line from Fir Tree Gulf westward to its turn to the Chalk Cliff, etc. & so home. Gives the boys' actual route on a map to scale.

.._._. is what they intended to do, but failed.

In a sense the route they actually followed from the present bird sanctuary to the beech (x) is a mental reflex of what was in their minds. Very roughly of course. In other words when they were at X they thought that they were at X! Then they caught sight of the New Sea. I went to the beech this afternoon to verify a possible view from there of the N.S. Not if you stand with your back touching the beech, but an arrow-flight's distance into the field brings it into view.

R.J. was constitutionally incapable of accurate topographical description, or he intentionally altered almost every item. Same with all his books! To trace how accurately for long is impossible. And it must be remembered that he wrote *Bevis* at Surbiton & did not keep in touch with his native scenery or visiting it.

Sincerely yours

J.B. Jones

The double hedge is R.J's invention. There is a single hedge around the lake except on the Eastern side where there is none,

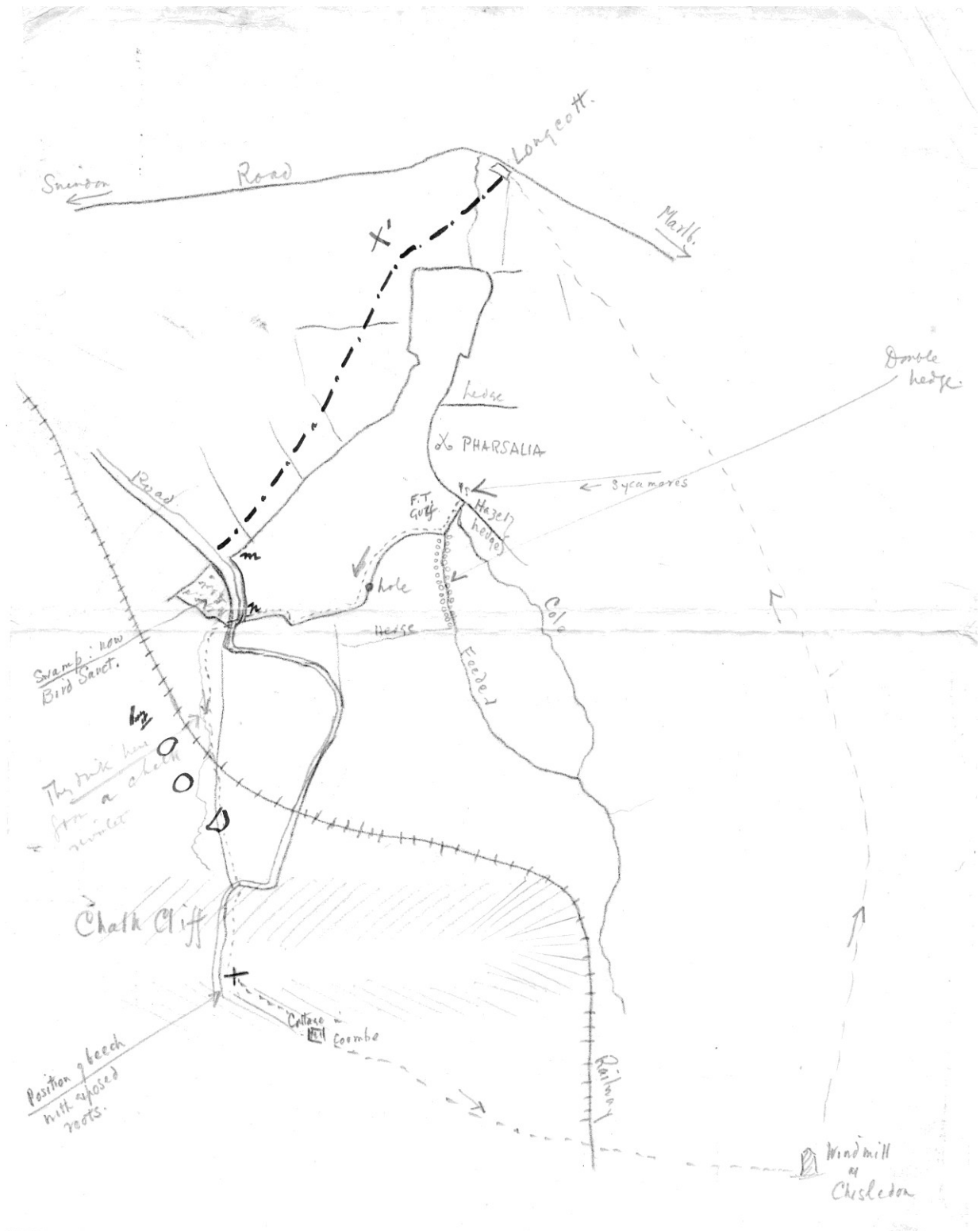
...

Details They travel W. From Fir Tree Gulf + the Bird Sanct. (as we call it too). They go between the hedge & the shore, i.e. the N.S., was to their right.

"Now which way was the Sea?" said M. "It was that side," he said, holding out his right hand.

"Yes, it was" said B. "It was on the right; now that would be East" [I TAKE IT HERE THAT HE INDICATED AN EAST DIRECTION, by a motion of the hand] "So if we go E. We must be right."

And all the time he has also in his mind that roughly E. route marked -.-.-. on sketch map, to which he is intending to follow. They now try to go E. by compass but make a mess of the business owing to the trees in the wood. But all the time, they thought they were going along the route -.-.-.-



[illegible]

Jones replies on May 1 [19]47 with these comments:

15

Sheds, stalls, woodpile, dairy etc must all go round to the E. end of the house. There is no courtyard where you have placed one, there is the orchard site with garden E & S of it.

[The same goes for] the kitchen where you have placed it: at any rate there is no W door.

Summer house should be moved to just under the second “b” in rhubarb. Mulberry tree is right. The large N. window is in that marked under pa in path, & is not where you have put it. The field track to the quarry (for sand) runs in the opposite direction from the house down to the E. side of the Longpond, half way down it. In fact your “field path to Longpond” is the sand route. The lane is on the E. side of the house (known as day House lane).

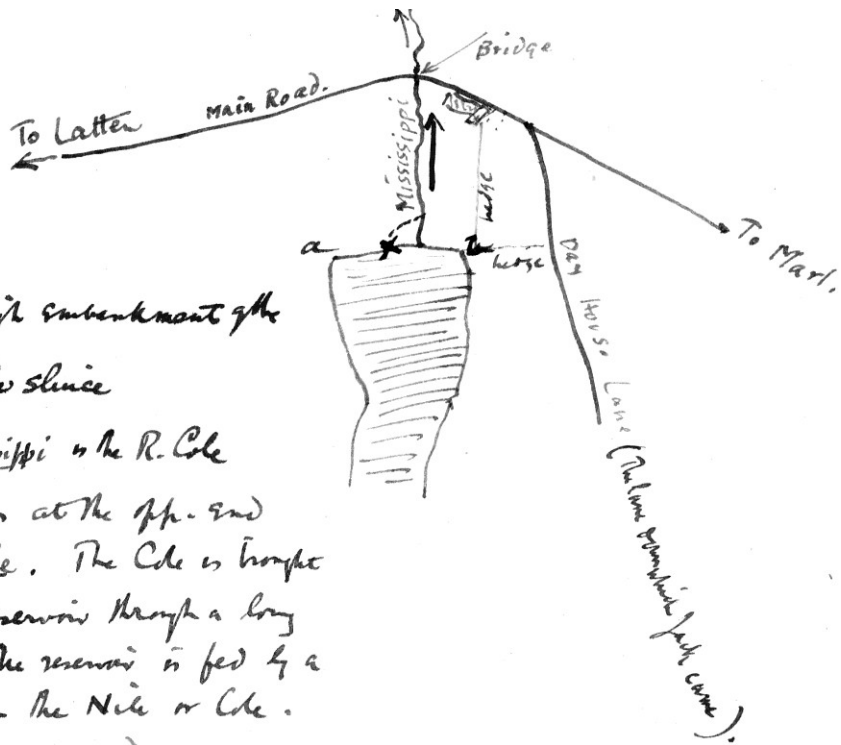
Hedge all round the Longpond is RJ’s invention & there are no double mounds.

Jefferies house is an extremely narrow one.

On the other side of this page is a map of the part in question & that with the help of the notes above will clarify matters best. I ought to say that the premises enclosed by the ha-ha are greatly larger in area than they should be as compared with e.g. the Home Field.

Jack’s farm was at Chiseldon; Calais is RJ’s punning allusion to Calley’s (cottages). Calley was the local land owner. Wood Lane is south of the beech with exposed roots.....”

Jones supplies a series of diagrams to explain more



a is the high embankment of the
reservoir

x is the sluice

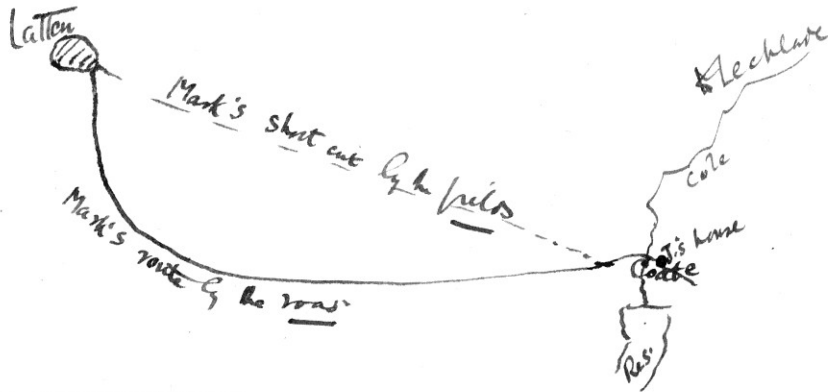
The Mississippi is the R. Cole

which enters at the opp. end
as the Nile. The Cole is brought
under the reservoir through a long
culvert. The reservoir is fed by a
feeder from the Nile or Cole.
(described in booklet)

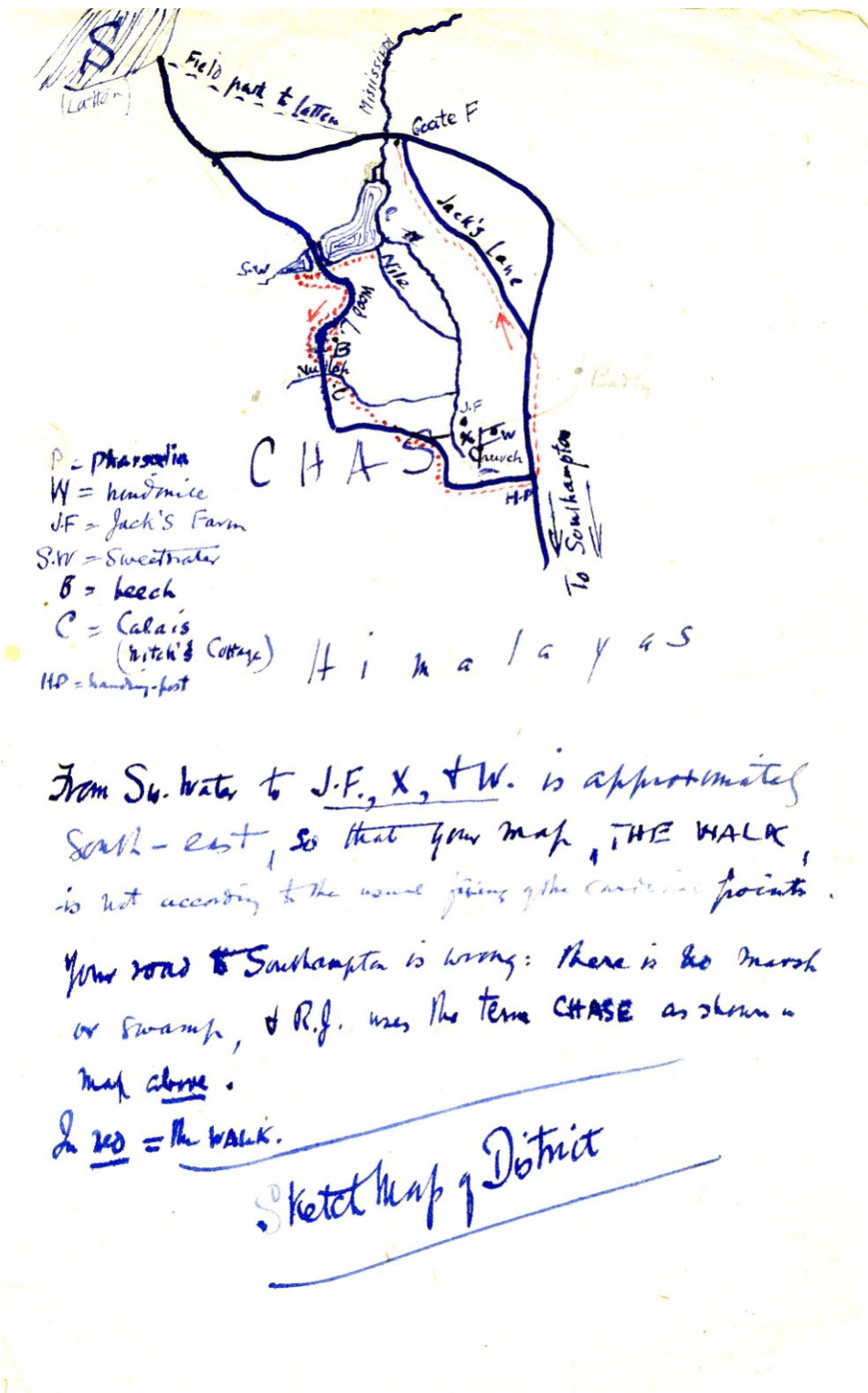
Cote should be Cote.

Wood Lane was not the same as Jack's Lane.

To explain Mark's arrival at Cote from L.



Could you give me the chapter in which "the lane crossed the bridge": you denote it by "c".



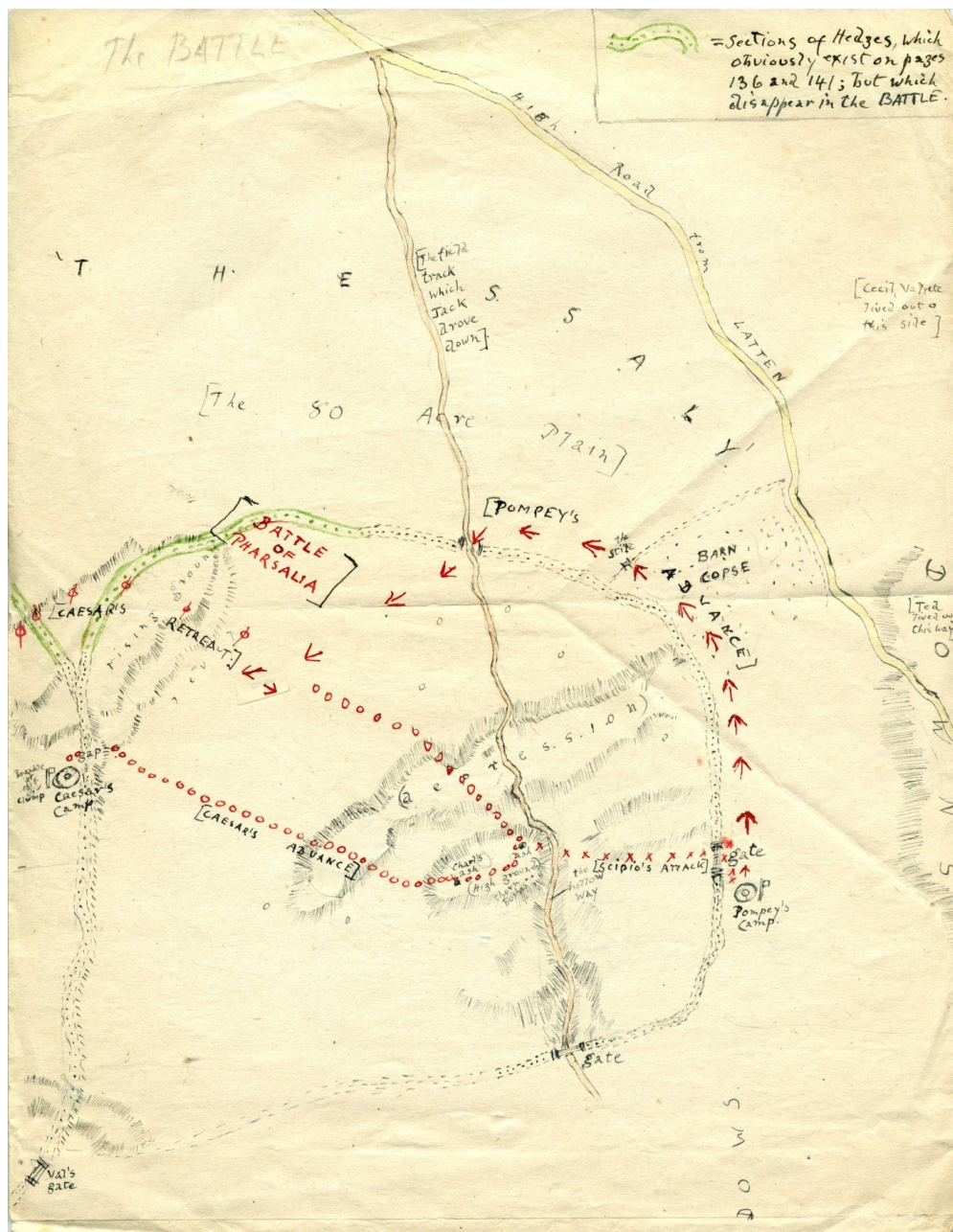
It would appear that Young was clearly annoyed that his maps and real life were so different and seemed irritated that Jefferies should have misled him so!

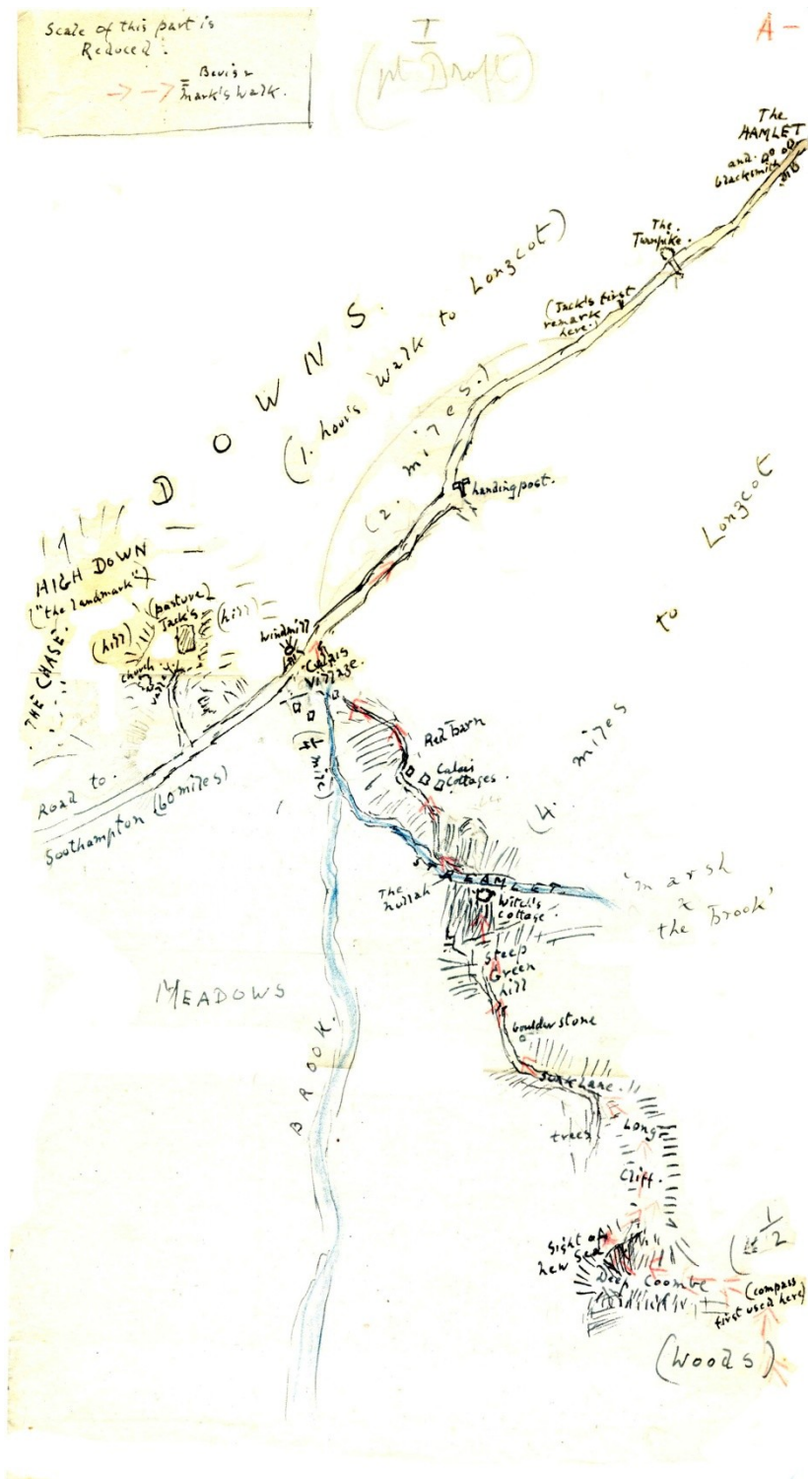
In a letter dated 6 May 1947, Jones points out that "Jefferies never intended in any of his writings to be topographically

accurate.. he was always the irresponsible artist, never a photographer". Jones also pointed out that *Bevis* was not written til after he left Coate. There then follows about another five letters where Jones attempts to answer Young's questions.

You really need to look at Young's map. They don't reproduce very well in a slide, but here are some:

First the battle of Pharsalia:





Then Mark and Bevis's journey where they end up at the witches cottage and finally his map of the New Sea.



