



TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
Newbury
District Field Club

VOL. VIII No. 3

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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION OF RICHARD
JEFFERIES (1940, pp216-226)

By L. V. Grinsell

I.—INTRODUCTION

The majority of the writings of Richard Jefferies deal with the chalk downs of north Wiltshire and west Berkshire and that part of the White Horse Vale which lies to the north, between Swindon and White Horse Hill.

Between the ages of 17 and about 26 he showed considerable interest in local archaeology and topography, and some years afterwards wrote as follows :—

"When I took an interest in archaeological matters—an interest long since extinct—I considered that a part of an army known to have marched in a certain direction during the Civil War must have visited a town¹ in which I was interested. But I exhausted every mode of research in vain; there was no evidence of it.....Some years afterwards, when my interest had ceased, and I had put such enquiries for ever aside I was reading in the British Museum. Presently I returned my book to the shelf, and then slowly walked along the curving wall lined with volumes, looking to see if I could light on anything to amuse me. I took out a volume for a glance; it opened itself at a certain page, and there was the information I had so long sought—a reprint of an old pamphlet describing the visit of the army to the town in the Civil War. So chance answered the question in the course of time."—*Story of my Heart*, 1883, chap. 10.

His work, excluding fiction, may be divided into the following phases : —

Phase	Age	Date	Chief Publications with archaeological references.
I. Main Interests Topography and Archaeology	18-26	1866-74	Articles in local newspapers on the country around Swindon. (Reprinted in 1896 as <i>Jefferies' Land</i>). <i>Memoir of the Goddards of North Wiltshire</i> Swindon, its History and Antiquities (<i>WiltsArch. Mag.</i> , 1874).
II Main Interests Natural History	26-33	1874-81	<i>Wild Life in a Southern County</i> ; <i>Round about a Great Estate</i> ; <i>Greene Ferne Farm</i> (novel).
III Main Interest. Philosophy	33-38	1881-87	<i>Story of my Heart</i>

¹ Probably Swindon—L.V.G.

In this paper we are largely concerned with Phase I, when his literary powers were immature, and it should be stated at the outset that his fame rests chiefly on the literary work he did after his archaeological phase had ceased. None the less, his archaeological writings merit our serious attention and they were a remarkable achievement for one so young. His most important archaeological discovery was of the probable stone circle opposite Dayhouse Farm. He found this while still in his 'teens or early twenties. At the same farm he • also discovered a lady, Miss Baden, the owner's daughter, who was later to be his wife.

II. EXTRACTS FROM JEFFERIES' WRITINGS.

The chief archaeological references in Jefferies' writings are as follow :—

Phase I. 1866-1874.

1866 (*North Wilts Herald*). *A Strange Story* (Reprinted in G. Toplis, *Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*, 1896). An immature article, written when he was only 17 or 18. Uffington Castle, the White Horse, and Dragon Hill are mentioned, but with archaeological inaccuracies.

1867-72. (*North Wilts Herald* and *Swindon Advertiser*). A series of articles on the archaeology and topography of Swindon and its environs, reprinted in 1896 under the title of *Jefferies' Land: a History of Swindon and its Environs*, edited by Grace Toplis.

The only copy I have seen is the large paper edition,² of which only 50 copies were printed, that in the British Museum being No. 49. It is a beautiful production.

This work shows considerable research and intimate knowledge of the area between Swindon, Avebury and White Horse Hill. The following references are to this edition : — p. 15. (Quoting from Aubrey's *Wiltshire Collections*, p. 193):—

“*Mem.*—At Brome, near Swindon, in a pasture ground, near the house, stands up a great stone, *q.* Sarsden, called Longstone, about 10 feet high, more or less : which I take to be the remayner of a Druidish Temple; in the ground below are many stones in a right line, thus : OOOOOO.” p. 16. “The stone seems to have disappeared, but to this day the field is known as Longstone Field. ... A similar stone is said to have once stood in Burderop Park.”

pp. 82-107. *Upper Upham*. (Description of the house and surroundings), On p. 83 is an account of the finding of what may have been a Roman pavement near here.

pp. 108-132. *Liddington Wick*—

p. 112. “High above the village towers Liddington Hill, well-known to dwellers in the locality, and conspicuous to all from the Folly, or group of trees at one end, and the well-marked ‘castle’ or entrenchment at the other. Liddington Camp is usually considered as Roman, but it may nevertheless have afforded defence to both Briton and Roman, Saxon and Dane. . . .” “Flint digging has been carried

on within the entrenchment, and resulted in the discovery of numerous coins, said to be Roman, spear-heads and arrow-heads, together with pieces of rusty iron, now of no particular form, but supposed to be broken sword-blades.”

pp. 113-121. *Wanborough*. Roman coins and leaden coffin.

pp. 122-3. Account of *Ashbary*, mentioning derivation of the name, and Anglo-Saxon charter.

pp. 123-6. *Woolston*. Contains a good account of the White Horse; refers to the Alfred tradition and the scouring of 1857, and Hughes' *Scouring of the White Horse*.

pp. 126-8. *Ashdown*, an account of the battle.

pp. 128-130. *Wayland Smith's Cave*. He refers to the well-known tradition and quotes *Kenilioorth*, but his description is archaeologically unsound.

p. 130. *The Blowing Stone*.

p. 130. *Uffington*.

pp. 130-1. *Dragon's Mound*, with the well-known tradition.

p. 131. *Wantage*.

pp. 134-5. *Coate probable Stone Circle*. “There may be seen on the left side of Dayhouse Lane, exactly opposite the entrance to a pen on Dayhouse Farm, five Sarsden stones, much sunk in the ground, but forming a semi-circle of which the lane is the base-line or tangent. There was a sixth upon the edge of the lane, but it was blown up and removed, in order to make the road more serviceable, a few years ago. Whether this was or was not one of those circles known as Druidical, cannot now be determined, but it wears that appearance.”

Jefferies then describes the three stones in the adjoining field, south of the farmhouse.

p. 138. *Chisledon*. “There is a place here known as Blackman a Barrow.” Jeff cries was married in Chisledon church, which he here describes.

p. 139. *Liddington and Barbury Camps*.

pp. 142-3. *Barbury Camp* (the main account).

The following extract refers to the country generally :

p. 144. “The place, so to say, is alive with the dead. Not a step can be taken “which does not lead to some token of antiquity. Turn up the turf and you shall find coins, arrow-heads, and bones. . . . Ascend the downs and pause in astonishment before the vast fortifications of a former era.”

p. 146. “Tumuli accompany the Ridge Way the whole course of its length.”

pp. 166-177. *Avebury*.

² A copy of the ordinary edition, limited to 350 copies, has just come into my hands

pp. 177-8. *Silbury*.

1873. *Memoir of the Goddards of North Wiltshire*. pp. 27-8. *Upham*.

p. 28. " Mr. Frampton has a collection of coins found upon the estate ; among them is a British gold coin of the antepgraphic period, exhibiting the lowest form of the debased stater, in a rude horse and detached wheel; it is slightly convex on one side and concave on the other ..."

(A similar account is given in *Jefferies' Land*, 1896, p. 100; but here he says, perhaps in error, that the coin had two chariot wheels, one above and the other beneath the horse).

During this time Jefferies was living, and had nearly always lived, at Coate; and it is interesting to note that while he was living there his writings on that part of the country were very factual and showed little of the deep sentiment which is revealed in his later works.

Phase II. 1874-1881.

About 1877 Jefferies moved to London. It has been said that he learned the message of the country by coming to the town, and it is evident that his absence from his native district made his heart grow fonder. From now on his writings became less factual, and more contemplative and reminiscent, while his literary powers were maturing.

As Jefferies' later works have appeared in several editions, with varying pagination, chapter references only are given here.

1879. Wild Life in a Southern County.

Chap. I. *Liddington Castle*. " The most commanding down is crowned with the grassy mound and trenches of an ancient earthwork, from whence there is a noble view of hill and plain. The inner slope of the green fosse is inclined at an angle pleasant to recline on, with the head just below the edge, in the summer sunshine. . . . There is the happy hum of bees—who love the hills—as they speed by laden with their golden harvest, a drowsy warmth, and the delicious odour of wild thyme. Behind the fosse sinks, and the rampart rises high and steep— two butterflies are wheeling in uncertain flight over the summit. It is only necessary to raise the head a little way, and the cool breeze refreshes the cheek—cool at this height while the plains beneath glow under the heat."

Chapter II includes a discussion, too long to quote, of the ancient garrison and water supply of Liddington Castle.

" There are no traces remaining of any covered way or hollow dyke leading down the slope in the direction of the spring; but some such traces do seem to exhibit themselves in two places—at the rear of the earthwork along the ridge of the hill, and down the steepest and shortest ascent.

Condition of the Downs in Earlier Times.

" There is a tradition still that they were in the olden times almost covered with wood. I have tried to fix this tradition—to focus it and give it definite shape ; but, like a mist visible from a distance yet unseen when you are actually in it, it refuses to be grasped. Still, there it is. The old people say that the king—they have no idea which king—could follow the chase for some forty miles across these hills, through a

succession of copses, woods and straggling covers, forming a great forest. To look now from the top of the rampart over the rolling hills, the idea is difficult to admit at first."

Jefferies then spends the next two pages elaborating this point.

Ancient Cultivations.

" To find the signs of ancient fields, look for them from a distance as you approach along the slope; then you will see squares and parallelograms dimly defined upon the sward by slightly raised and narrow banks, green with the grass that has grown over them for so many centuries. . . . They have the appearance sometimes of shallow terraces raised one above the other, rising with the slope of the down. . . But when I come to think of the ancient tillage in the terraces upon the barren slopes, I find it difficult to see how, with their rude implements, the men of those times could have procured any sustenance from their soil, unless I suppose the conditions different."

Chapter III. *The Ridgeway*.

" A broad green track runs for many a long, long mile across the downs, now following the ridges, now winding past at the foot of a grassy slope, then stretching away through cornfield and fallow. . . . You may walk for twenty miles along it over the hills. . . The origin of the track goes back into the dimmest antiquity. . . . Plough and harrow press hard on the ancient track, and yet dare not encroach upon it. With varying width, from twenty to fifty yards, it runs like a green riband through the sea of corn—a width that allows a flock of sheep to travel easily side by side, spread abroad, and snatch a bite as they pass. Dry shallow trenches full of weeds, and low narrow mounds, green also, divide it from the arable land, and on these now and then grow storm-stunted hawthorn bushes, gnarled and aged. On the' banks the wild thyme grows in great bunches, emitting an exquisite fragrance—luxurious cushions these to rest upon beneath the shade of the hawthorn, listening to the gentle rustle of the wheat as the wind rushes over it."

Jefferies describes the course of the Ridgeway from Uffington Castle westwards across Chisledon Plain as far as Barbury Castle and the two barrows on the lower ground to N.E. :—

" Above on the summit is another ancient camp, and below two more turf-grown tumuli, low and shaped like an inverted bowl. . . . Many more have been ploughed down, doubtless, in the course of the years; sometimes still, as the share travels through the soil, there is a sudden jerk, and a scraping sound of iron against stone. The ploughman eagerly tears away the earth, and moves the stone to find a thin jar, as he thinks—in fact, a funeral urn. . . . He is imbued with the idea of finding hidden treasure, and breaks the urn, to pieces to discover-nothing. ..."

The description of the Ridgeway, from which these extracts have been taken, shows Jefferies at his best : it could have been written by no-one else.

1880. *Greene Ferne Farm*, a Novel, the scenes of which are set in the country between White Horse Hill and the Marlborough Downs.

Chap. V. Reference to " th' Cas'l," evidently Liddington Castle. Chap. VI. " They reached some low underwood—nut-tree and hawthorn and thick bramble, overtopped by some stunted beeches, with but two or three firs among them. Passing round the small copse they came to an opening, and in the dimness saw some large grey stones inside. . . . " There is a dolmen under the trees," he said. These are Grey Wethers," she said in a low tone. " And no doubt what you call the dolmen is the Cave."

The monument in question is almost certainly Wayland's Smithy, which is in a beech copse among which were formerly a few firs. The bramble was cleared away some twenty or thirty years ago. Edward Thomas, in chapter I of his *Richard Jefferies*, is in error in identifying it with the Devil's Den or the chambered long barrow on Man ton Down.

1860. *Round about a Great Estate.*

Chap. I. " The great house at Okebourne Chase stands in the midst of the park, and from the southern windows no dwellings are visible. Near at hand the trees appear isolated, but far away insensibly gather together, and above them rises the distant down crowned with four tumuli."

(The great house may be Upper Upham, and the tumuli are the Four Barrows on Sugar Hill).

Phase III. 1881-1887.

In 1881 Jefferies became seriously ill, and apart from a few short spells he was a sick man from this date until his death in 1887, before he was 39. Much of his literary output during these years was dictated to his wife when he was too weak to hold a pen; yet some of his best work was done during this time.

1883. *The Story of my Heart' My Autobiography.*

The inspiration for this, one of his finest works, came to him largely during his walks and meditations on and around Liddington Hill, with its camp and tumuli not far distant.

Chap. I. *Liddington Castle.*

There was a hill to which I used to resort at such periods. . . Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire, ... By the time I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. There was an intrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse I walked round it slowly to recover breath. On the south-western side there was a spot where the outer bank had partially slipped, leaving a gap. There the view was over a broad plain, beautiful with wheat, and inclosed by a perfect amphitheatre of green hills. ... I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. . . ."

Chap. II. *The Man in the Tumulus.* " There were grass-grown tumuli on the hills to which of old I used to walk, sit down at the foot of one of them, and think. Some warrior had been interred there in the ante-historic times.....I felt at the moment that I was like the spirit of the man whose body was interred in the tumulus; I could understand and feel his existence the same as my own. He was as real to me two thousand years after interment as those I had seen in the body. . . . As my thought could slip back the twenty centuries in a moment to the forest-days when he hurled the spear, or shot with the bow, hunting the deer, and could return again as swiftly to this moment, so his spirit could endure from then till now, and the time was nothing. . . . Two thousand years ! Summer after summer the blue butterflies had visited the mound, the thyme had flowered, the wind sighed in the grass. . . . Nothing has to come; it is now. Now is eternity; now is the immortal life. Here this moment, by this tumulus, on earth, now; I exist in it. The years, -the centuries, the cycles are absolutely nothing ; it is only a moment since this tumulus was

raised ; in a thousand years more it will still be only a moment. To the soul there is no past and no future, . . . To me the man interred in the tumulus is living now as I live. ..."

1887. (Probably his last essay). *My Old Village.* (Printed in *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889).

" The walnut trees are dead at home. They gave such a thick shade when the fruit was juicy ripe, and the hoods cracked as they fell; they peeled as easy as taking off a glove; the sweetest and nuttiest of fruit. It was delicious to sit there with a great volume of Sir Walter Scott, half in sunshine, half in shade, dreaming of *Kenilworth* and Wayland Smith's Cave; only the difficulty was to balance the luxuries, when to peel the walnuts and when to read the book, and how to adjust oneself to perfection so as to get the exact amount of sunshine and shadow. Too much luxury."

III.—NOTES ON THE SITES DESCRIBED BY JEFFERIES

1. *Liddington Castle.* 6" O.S. Wilts XXIII N.W.

On the Ordnance Survey's obelisk at the eastern end of the vallum has been fixed a tablet with the following inscription :

LIDDINGTON HILL

**The Hill Beloved of Richard Jefferies
and Alfred Williams.**

The earthwork has been described by Mr. A. D. Passmore (*W.A.M.*, xxxviii, 576-584) and Mr. C. F. C. Hawkes, who refers it to Iron Age A (*Antiquity*, V, 97). Liddington Hill has yielded remains of Early Iron Age (*W.A.M.*, xliii, 343-4), Romano- British (*W.A.M.*, xli, 39), and and xlv, 195) and Saxon times (*W.A.M.*, xlvi, 173). From the centre of the hill-fort, Mr. Passmore has obtained a fine barbed and tanged arrow-head, 64 mm. long (*Fig. 63*). In *W.A.M.*, xlvii, 517-520, is a general article on Liddington by J. Lee Osborn.

2. *The Tumuli near Liddington Castle.* 6" O.S. Wilts XXIII NW/NE.

Fig. 63—Arrow-head from Liddington Castle
[Photograph by fciW permission of Mr. A. D. Passmore]

It would be interesting to determine with certainty which tumulus inspired Jefferies to write Chap. II of *The Story of my Heart*. It was evidently one very near to Liddington Castle. The little mound immediately south of the castle, marked as tumulus on O.S., is almost certainly not one. It looks like a pillow-mound and is opposite a break in the vallum. Jefferies would probably not have taken that for a tumulus. The nearest barrows are a small bowl-barrow a mile south of the camp (Wilts XXIII NW), and a large bowl-barrow a mile S.E. thereof (Wilts XXIII NE). The former was most likely where Jefferies sat and meditated.

Jefferies lacked the instinct for sociability, and had hardly any friends. It has been said that apart from his wife the only person he ever befriended was " the man in the tumulus " !

3. *Ancient Cultivations.*

There are two strip-lynchets on the northern slope of Liddington Hill (Wilts XVI SW) just beneath the castle, but the best group in the Jefferies country is on Bishopstone downs (Wilts XVI SE). There are some Celtic Fields at Upper Upham (Wilts XXIII NE).

4. *The Coate Stone Circle.*

This was a great find of Jefferies, but as he described it only in a newspaper article (later reprinted by Grace Toplis in *Jefferies' Land*, 1896), it passed almost unnoticed and apparently failed to attract the attention of any archaeologist. The circle was found independently by Mr. A. D. Passmore some twenty years later, who described it with a plan in *W.A.M.*, xxvii, 1893, three years before Jefferies' newspaper articles were reprinted. The circle has every appearance of being a genuine stone circle, although the stones are all recumbent. The site is marked as a stone circle on 5th Edn., 1" O.S. Map, Swindon and Devizes, No. 112.

5. *Other stones, perhaps megalithic.*

(a) *Broome.* The site of this stone is marked on 6" O.S. Wilts XV SE. Mr. A. D. Passmore states that the hole in which the stone stood was visible in 1926 (*W.A.M.*, xlv, p. 84).

(b) *Coate* (south of stone circle). The three stones described by Jefferies are marked on 6" O.S. Wilts XVI SW. See also *W.A.M.*, xxvii, pp. 172-3 (A. D. Passmore).

6. *The Ridgeway.*

Jefferies' description of the Ridgeway is probably the finest ever written. In its passage across the country of which Jefferies wrote, the Ridgeway crosses two low-lying plains—those of Wanborough and Chisledon, and between these it runs almost at the foot of Liddington Hill; so that the term Ridgeway is really a misnomer for its course hereabouts.

7. *The Uninscribed British Coin.*

It is possible that Jefferies' accounts refer to a debased copy of the gold stater of Philip of Macedon found near the tumulus one-third of a mile N.W. of Aldbourne Warren Farm, formerly in the collection of Mr. F. Frampton, from whom it passed into the hands of Mr. William Morris, of the *Swindon Advertiser*. Jefferies was on the staff of that paper about 1870. For details and a photograph of this coin (*Fig. 64*), I am indebted to Mr. A. D. Passmore, of Wanborough. Other uninscribed British coins have been found in the vicinity (*W.A.M.* xxxviii, 637)

8. *Condition of the Downs in Earlier Times.*

The full exposition in chap. 2 of *Wild Life in a Southern County* should be read in connection with this important subject. Jefferies' contention was that in earlier times (exactly when he did not state) the downs were in some areas more or less covered with woodland. He may well have been right in regard to the areas where the chalk is covered with clay-with-flints. J. Orr (*Agriculture in Berkshire*, 1918, p. 26) pointed out the frequency of place-names such as Ashmansworth, Ashbury, Ashdown,

Ashridge, etc., in some parts of the downs, and suggested that ash woods may have existed where the chalk downs were covered with clay-with-flints. The subject has recently been discussed by Sir Cyril Fox in *Personality of Britain*, 3rd Edn., 1938, p. 51.



Fig. 64—Uninscribed British coin found near Aldbourne Warren Farm
[Photograph by kind permission of Mr. A. D. Passmore]

9. *Wayland's Smithy and other sites on the Berkshire Downs.*

I have not written any notes on these sites as they have recently been fully described in my *White Horse Hill* (St. Catherine's Press Ltd., 1939).

IV.—CONCLUSIONS.

What conclusions follow from this short study of the country of Richard Jefferies? It must be admitted that his writings do not contain much of any great importance to the study of archaeology. Yet anyone studying the archaeology of the Berks-Wilts border cannot wisely ignore his works. They help us to realise the essential unity of the region between Chisledon and White Horse Hill, which is unaffected by the presence of a county boundary, and might be obscured if we always had to take our archaeology in county doses.

Other things being equal, one who has read Jefferies must have a fuller appreciation and better understanding of the Jefferies country than one who has not, and is to that extent better fitted to make a study of its topographical and archaeological features.