

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Custom-Scrubs or Roman Tump

by W. St. C. Baddeley
1923, Vol. 45, 87-90

© The Society and the Author(s)

CUSTOM-SCRUBS OR ROMAN TUMP

(NR. PAINSWICK).

By ST. CLAIR BADDELEY.

(ONE PLATE).

IF we betake ourselves far up the green and thickly wooded Slad valley as far as Down-Hill Farm towering up midway between the ridge of Bull's Cross (W) and that carrying the ancient Calf-way by Througham with its scattered train of tumuli, we perforce easily notice a rather bold wooded peninsula that projects from the high plateau. It is (but for a level patch or two) covered with timber, and is known by the name of The Scrubs or Custom-Scrubs.¹ From its summit, nearing 800 feet, it commands probably one of the grandest views in the entire county. Over Bull's Cross, from it, on a clear day, may easily be descried the wooded crest of May Hill beyond the Forest of Dene. Signal-fires, by night, could (if needed) have been seen from one to the other. Below lies a deep, pastured Combe dividing it from the rival Catwood; and it is called Piedmont on the O.S. The main valley itself turns westward round towards Steanbridge (1273, *Stenebrugg'*) on the left hand, but it also passes northward (mounting), sharp round towards Dillay, up on the right, and leads finally to Famish Hill.

Such a lofty and isolated tongue or promontory is a rarity within Cotteswold. Although formerly belonging to Painswick Manor, Custom-Scrubs bordered upon that of Bisley, which latter manor just included the neighbouring or Nottingham Scrubs. This (incidentally), belonged to and took name from an owner Sir William Nottingham, Chief Baron of the Exchequer (1483), of

¹ Probably the name harks back to a manorial license to take brush-wood.

Cirencester fame. A stone cottage or so lords a couple of small platforms (now used as potato and cabbage plots), some fifty feet short of the actual summit. This last is crowned with bramble-woodland leading to the open plateau-fields of Sydenham's farm. Immediately adjoining N to the upper platform, and upon the woody flank of the dropping plateau, is an old quarry; and signs are evident beyond it of the lines of an earthwork of a rather indefinite kind.

In (c) 1799-1801, while men were here getting stone, perhaps, to build local cottages, they found two Romano-British Anaglyphs, worked in triangular-headed niches, so as each of them to represent a tiny classic temple. Each likewise contained a standing male figure. One of them was inscribed (upon its gable-edge) with the name of "Mars Olludius," while the other bore a dedication to the God Romulus, as well as the names, both of its donor Velloepius and of its maker, Juventinus. They were first described by Lysons (cf. *Reliquiæ Brit. Rom.* pars. 2, table 28, figs. 5, 7), and long afterwards by the present writer in the *Transactions* of this Society (1906) xxix, 173-80; so there is no need to detail them here.

The not unnatural (if cautiously proffered), suggestion arising from intimacy with the site, together with consideration of these peculiarly sacred "finds," is that here at least, probably we have one of those special sites selected and set apart by official interpreters of the will of the War-God, Mars, in Romano-British days, and in whose honour certain of his devotees here once made their vows and set up these (and doubtless many other) votive tokens. For, in 1851, yet another, though in style an inferior, little votive figure of a warrior-God (now in Cirencester Museum) (measuring eighteen inches in height), was found; it seems likely that similar (Bisley) finds now in the British Museum may have come also from here.

Nor is such a spot likely to have merely pertained to a

private, or family, Cult. No remains attributable to a farm or to a villa are known to have been met with nearer to it than Bisley on one side and Climperwell and Witcombe and Painswick (*Ifold*) on the other. The site however, possesses wells of water, also the streamlet in the vale below; so that it may have been a British cult-centre in yet earlier than Roman days. What gives us pause, however, is the question, how (and why) should the Roman War-God's Temple have become established here in Roman days, situated as the spot is, far within the purely Civil region where villa-life and all its local industries prevailed for at least two and a half centuries.¹ For, these Anaglyphs and the "Dedicatio" to Romulus belong obviously to the late third century A.D., or to the time of Diocletian and Maxentius. Moreover, to the same period and purpose belong at least some of the several small altars that long since were found at Bisley, and others found no further off in 1781 (c.) than at King's Stanley. From these facts, coupled with the presence of many barrows, long and round, along the ancient tracks (nowadays roads), that here traverse the plateau, we become assured of some very special importance having been attached to this portion of it during long pre-Roman periods by other warlike peoples. We incline therefore to suggest that this site possibly retained associations with War and its Gods, considerably antedating the advent of the Roman, and that later it became simply Romanised.

There is one further feature deserving remark. From beside Down Farm on the rising western ridge (opposite to it), descends what can be no modern track, in one single steep and direct line. It then strikes and crosses the vale-stream at the foot of the aforesaid Roman Tump,

¹ It is needful to remind the reader that when Glevum was given status and development c. A.D. 97-8, this region had long been secured in peace by the permanent Depot of the Legion at Caerleon.

or Custom-Scrubs. This inclined track-way (c.) 7 ft. wide, is finely stoned, though long since covered with turf; but whether or not an antiquity so great can be claimed for it as to connect it with the (possibly) Temple-platform up above, and opposite to it, or not, we cannot declare.¹ We will merely remark that it is an unusual feature to find such a characteristic track in so remote and wild a spot leading from what can never have been, in modern centuries, but a very small farm. Further, its direct character resembles that so clearly marked in the two ancient roads at neighbouring Painswick known as Lower Wick Street, or Stepping-stone Lane; and Tybby-well; neither of which can be regarded of origin other than Romano-British of the Villa period. The same applies, of course, to the direct and steep continuation of Tybby-well (called Greenhouse Lane) leading over Bull's Cross to Stanbridge and up Stancombe on to Roman Bisley itself and thus passing across the Slad valley within but half a mile west of the site which forms the subject of this note.

¹ There are, however, other interesting indications upon the open slope of pasture beneath Custom Scrubs, that will not fail to be noticed by the field archaeologist, or the airman, who traverses the Slad valley.