

THE 115th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 25th September 2019

Present:- Keith McClellan – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

1) Chairman's Report

Keith said that Jill has done past and future History posters for the Church Harvest Festival. He had gone to the Northamptonshire Heritage Forum meeting, and a similar one at Bicester of the museum area there that we are hoping to join to see if we can get any speakers for next year.

2) Secretary's Report.

Peter said that he had since our last meeting he had hosted two Village talks. The first was for a resident of the Almshouses, who is very interested in their history, and is planning to write a book to commemorate the 200th anniversary of their opening in 2022.

The second tour was for two New Zealanders visiting England with the surname Mayo, descendants of Alfred Richard Mayo, an Aynho soldier, who emigrated to New Zealand in the 1860s. They found the names of nine Mayos on gravestones in our churchyard.

He also briefly met four Americans, one of whom said in emails that she wanted to go on the same walk that her ancestors who lived at Souldern Manor had taken in 1858 from Souldern to Aynho Village. However he got a message that they regretted that they would be unable to do the walk.

3) Keith introduced Andrea Gladden to talk about **Rainsborough, The Iron Age Fort**

Andrea said that she had lived for many years on the farm that included the whole site of the Rainsborough Fort in its territory. Many such sites existed in England in the Iron Age, which ran from about 800 B. C. until Roman times. She showed photos, one of Maiden Castle in Dorset, a much bigger one than ours, and another closer to here In Swalcliffe, a few miles west of Banbury. There have been others at Hempton and Shotteswell, but none of these is as well preserved as ours. Andrea then showed several views of Rainsborough, from the eastern side, north & south sides and the Iron Age entrance on the western side. There was also a view across the Cherwell Valley.

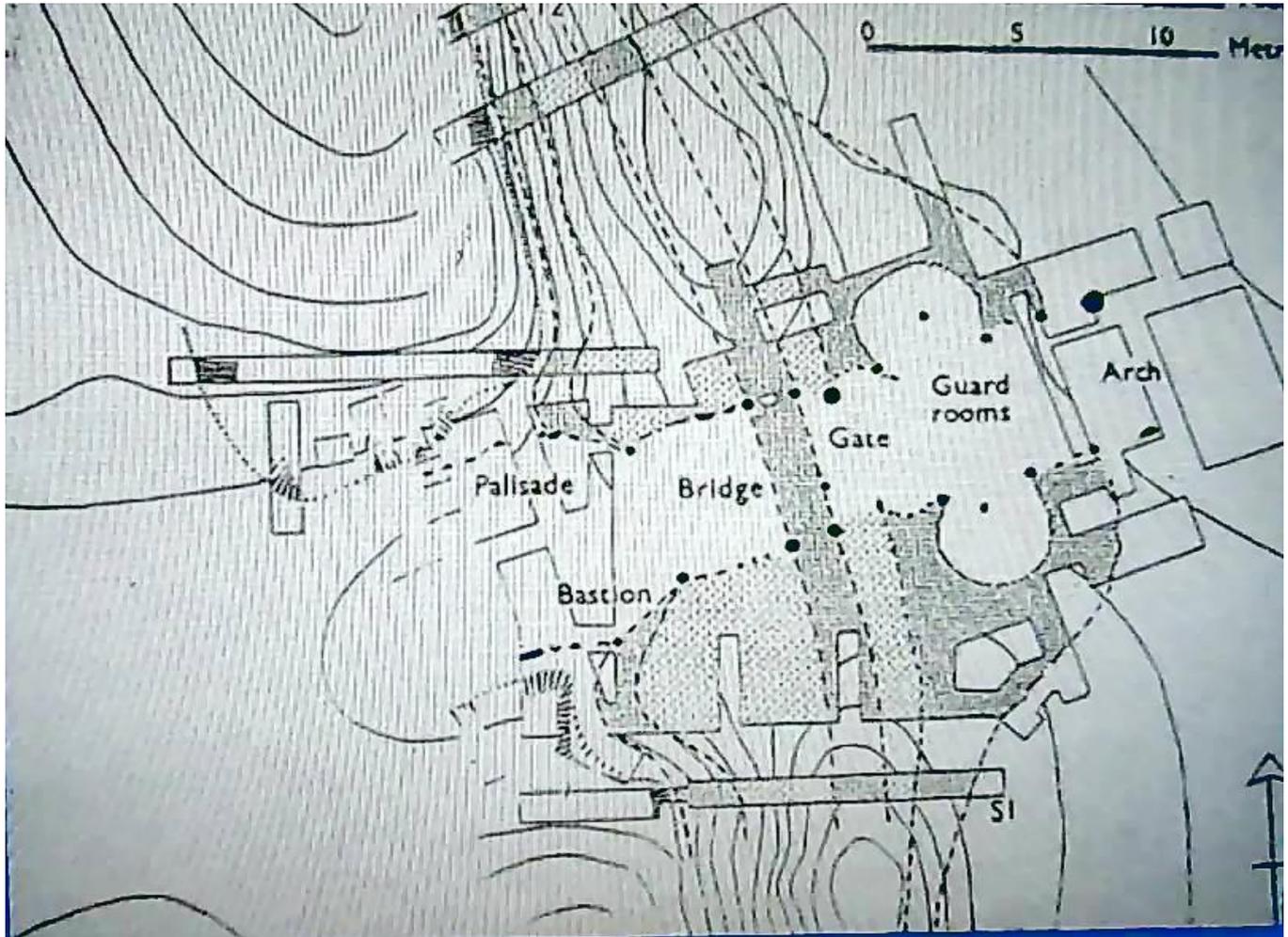
Altogether there have been recorded incidents of 1,224 hill forts in England. Most were built on hill tops, and well defended with wooden walls, surrounded by quite deep ditches, about ten feet deep to make it difficult for other tribes to attack them. Walkways inside the palisades may have been covered by wooden roofs to protect the soldiers.

Anything wooden would have long since disappeared, and the ditches today are not very deep, but as this is a recognised scientific site, it has not been ploughed over with modern vehicles, so it is one of the best preserved locally.

Andrea showed a plan of the entrances. Later there was evidence of Roman activity. In particular just to the north of the site may have been a Roman villa, almost exactly in a straight line with the villa found at Croughton.

Excavations took place in 1961 and 1965 by Oxford University Archaeology Department. All the finds from these are held in the Ashmolean Museum. Several phases of occupation were found, firstly around 600 B. C., before the first fort was built. A fort was built in the 5th century B. C. She showed a plan of the excavation. There were ramparts, gates and a bridge across. It must have been a quite substantial place, and it was important strategically, probably because it overlooked the Cherwell Valley. Inside it was quite flat, with round houses. It lasted until the 4th century B. C., when it was attacked and burned down.

A second fort was built on the same site about 200 years later. A picture from the Excavation Report of this showed that it had a causeway of limestone flags, flanked by palisades. All the banks were built up with stone walls and timber bastions. Over the causeway was a bridge joining



The Extract from the Excavations Report of Rainsborough Camp Fort in 1965

the two sides of the ramparts. A ladder led up to this bridge. Behind the gates were sentry boxes on either side. Beyond them was a garden, an archway and a pair of gates that may have formed the rear end of the passage.

The guard room was about ten feet deep, and had a central post and roof supports. The roof was probably made of banks from the fires. Burnt timber and charred earth are clear evidence that that the structure had been destroyed by fire, and the south garden contained various bones from all parts of the body including a skull, with injuries that may have been the cause of deaths.

Remains were broken pots, a bronze ring, a bone needle and comb, and an iron spear-head.

Another picture showed the typical round houses, with a pointed roof, which were common in those times, some being big enough to hold as many as fifty families, although most were much smaller. Animals such as sheep, goats and pigs would have been kept inside as well.

Finally of course no one knows if the camp or fort had a name, because no records go back that far. It is only in fairly recent times that this one has been called Rainsborough Camp, after Colonel Rainsborough, who opposed the King to the south-east of Banbury in the 1640s Civil War.

4) Forthcoming Meetings

Wednesday 30th October – **Oxford Castle & Prison from Oxanfora to Malmaison by Alistair Duncan**

Wednesday 27th November – **A G M** - plus a talk by Peter Cole on **Twenty Things you don't know about Peter Cole.**