

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2018

**Colwall
Village
Society**

Revealing Our Heritage

Please find two more 'Malvern Factsheets' that were donated by Marion Percy. The first is rather dated in places!

A RIDGE TOP WALK

It is easy to walk up on to the Malvern Hills. Roads climb the sides of the northern hills to around 900 feet giving access to many car parking areas from which gently inclined tracks and pathways lead to the ridge top and summits. To climb up out of the town, on foot, requires a more determined effort, however, because it is immediately above Great Malvern that the slopes are at their steepest and the tops at their highest.

Numerous wide tracks cater for the needs of most visitors seeking the summits, but for those willing to be slightly more venturesome, there are many lesser paths and approaches along, around and over the hills that provide an almost endless variety of scenes and aspects and, for those who seek it, a degree of solitude.

The southern hills, beyond British Camp, are lower but less easily approached by road and hence are generally less frequented by the casual visitor, but if they lack the grandeur of the higher summits at the northern end they more than amply compensate with their gentler terrain and their softer outlines.

The Malvern Hills were made for walking, whether it be a casual stroll or a more determined trek, the rewards are the same – breath-taking panoramic views across surely as wide a stretch of English countryside as can anywhere be obtained other than from the air. It is that feeling of being up and above the workaday world below, looking down on it and yet apart from it, where the air blows clean and clear, the birds sing and the turf springs beneath the feet, that has a very special appeal.

The most obvious challenge is to walk the ridge from one end to the other and, provided one's transport is suitably arranged (public transport is not very helpful here, but a willing friend with a car to meet you at the end is all that is needed) this is a fine day's activity. The description given here is of a ridge-top walk, but there are many hillside options also to be taken that can provide welcome shelter if the wind blows too strongly, if the sun blazes with unwanted fervour or if one wishes to concentrate the attention on only part of the wide panorama at a time.



From North Malvern Clock Tower the track up on to North Hill is signposted. Rocky and steep, it nevertheless gains height quickly, the ugly scars of massive quarrying are soon left behind, and a deviation across grass-covered slopes to the left will soon bring one to the 1307 ft. high summit. From there the view down on to the town is as breath-taking as it is sudden.

Across the deep wide gulf of Green Valley, which leads up from the centre of Great Malvern, beckons the highest summit - that of Worcestershire Beacon. The easier route is to deviate to the right round the head of Green Valley along a broad level track (Lady Howard de Walden Drive - originally constructed for that local, late Victorian

ladyship's carriage and pair!) that skirts the lesser and intervening summit of Sugar Loaf (1,150 ft.). The top of Worcestershire Beacon (1,395 ft.) is rocky but, unlike North Hill, lacks a feeling of remoteness. It is approached by many paths and crowned by a toposcope (indicating the direction and distance of all that is to be seen on the clearest of days - and even some which cannot), a triangulation pillar and, more refreshingly, a cafe. Here was the site of one of the Armada warning bonfires that blazed out across Britain in 1588 and it has seen many a celebration bonfire since, the most recent being for the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

The route ahead and the descent towards the Wyche Cutting is along a wide pedestrian highway, although a venturesome walker can descend on the eastern side into the wild cragginess of Rushy Valley and on past Earnslaw Quarry Lake before ascending once more through the trees to rejoin the main track at the Gold Mine where an enterprising but unlucky 18th century businessman frittered away a fortune in fruitless prospecting.

The Wyche Cutting, where a road breaks through the crest of the hill by way of a steep sided cut through hard rock, takes its name from an ancient salt way that crossed the hills at this point en-route from Droitwich towards South Wales. From here, the ridge top continues in an unbroken succession of minor summits on the highest of which, overlooking the Holy Well, are the despoiled remains of two supposed Bronze Age burial chambers. It is here that the massive terraced earthworks, like gigantic steps around the slopes of the Herefordshire Beacon come fully into view.

Towards Wynd's Point (where once lived Jenny Lind, the famous Swedish singer) there are signs of increasing public pressure, with several car parks and made-up footpaths, as one approaches the only main road crossing of the hills. So great indeed is the press of human feet around British Camp that the main routes to the top of the Herefordshire Beacon (1,114 ft.) are picked out with tarmacadam pavements and concrete steps to help combat the increasingly severe problem of soil erosion that has removed much of the natural grass cover of this popular and spectacular piece of hillside. Encircling the top of this hill is one of the finest examples of an Iron Age hill fort to be found in western Britain. Constructed by several generations of hill-top dwellers more than 2,000 years ago, it marks the site of an ancient British town whose inhabitants lived on this exposed but waterless site surrounded by a magnificent set of defensive ramparts and ditches. The setting is further enhanced by a reservoir in a natural hollow above the surviving medieval buildings of Little Malvern Priory that nestle in the trees below the hill.

Clutters (or Giant's Cave, cut into a volcanic outcrop of rock, is a minor curiosity along the route below Hangman's Hill (was there ever a gibbet here?) where the Red Earl's Dyke (or Shire Ditch) runs prominently along the hill-crest. In addition to being the traditional boundary line between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, this 13th century earthwork was, in its time, more significantly a demarcation line constructed in settlement of a dispute between the then red-headed Earl of Gloucester and Bishop of Hereford over the extent of their respective hunting forests.

At Swinyard Hill (850 ft.) the characteristic whale-backed shape of the Malvern Ridge reasserts itself (at a lower level now) to terminate most abruptly in the only remaining working hill quarry (The Gullet) a still valuable source of high quality road metal and a site of considerable geological interest. A descent through the quarry is potentially dangerous and should be avoided in favour of alternative paths either left onto Castlemorton Common below, or to the right through the woods to the edge of Eastnor Park. At the summit of Swinyard Hill if the wind is blowing from an easterly quarter hang gliding enthusiasts will frequently gather to launch themselves into flight and a safe (?) descent onto the common. The recent popularity of this fascinating spectator sport has brought an added pressure to Castlemorton Common which has a number of sites of considerable interest to naturalists besides providing valuable open grazing land to many of the smallholders in the vicinity.

The Obelisk, a 19th century needle-shaped memorial to members of the Somers-Cocks family of Eastnor Castle (well hidden in the trees to the west), is the most conspicuous feature of Eastnor Park,- where herds of red and fallow deer roam wild. Above the Park stands Midsummer Hill (937 ft.) incongruously capped with an ugly concrete shelter but sharing with its lower neighbour, Hollybush Hill, another Iron age Hill Fort site whose ramparts, part hidden in the trees, are less spectacular than those of British Camp. Yet as a result of a series of archaeological digs a few years ago on this site much more is known about the everyday lives of the ancient British inhabitants here. Hollybush Hill was, for several centuries more than 2,000 years ago home of many successive generations of pastoral and agricultural folk who engaged in trade with people across much of southern and western Britain. At Holly-Bush a narrow track crosses the hills which, it has been suggested, was cut by a glacial tongue of ice several tens of thousands of years ago. Beyond are the twin peaks of Raggedstone Hill (840 ft.) - legend still maintains that a person is cursed if the shadow of the hill falls upon him - then the delightfully remote hamlet of White Leaved Oak where meet the three counties of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.

Finally, the last and loneliest summit of all - Chase End Hill (637 ft.) before the descent into north-west Gloucestershire, down to Bromsberrow village.

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JOHN MASEFIELD



John Masefield was born in Ledbury on 1st June, 1878, and the Herefordshire scene was to have a profound influence upon his work. The childhood impressions of his native countryside and its people remained vividly in his memory until his death in 1967 at the age of 89.

"We considered ourselves descendants of the Silures," he wrote. "We had amongst us a tall, slow long-headed race, almost a race apart ... even in my childhood I felt that these tall, slow long-headed men could only be the product of the soil and countryside, and that they belonged to the soil in all its fertility and tenacity."

"Some of them when they spoke were like the earth speaking. Perhaps only a few ages of the world impress such men, brought up in such a scene and working on the land. The fields glowed with abundance; even when bare they looked like mighty flesh."

As a very young child Masefield was deeply aware of the beauty surrounding him: "I was sure that a greater life was near us, in dreams I sometimes seemed to enter a part of it. When I was little more than five years old, I entered that greater life. I found suddenly that I could imagine imaginary beings complete in every detail, with every faculty and possession. From that wonderful hour I had a life for myself, better than any life of men ..."

"Certain sorrows then crushed my power to enter that life. However, the power returned to me later, not for always but at intervals."

The certain sorrows that Masefield describes was the death of his parents while he was still so young and probably the homesickness he felt when sent away to boarding school at Warwick.

At the age of 13 he joined HMS Conway on the Mersey to train as a merchant marine officer and later spent time in great sailing ships.

At seventeen he went to America and worked in a New York livery stable, saloon and carpet factory. During this period he began to read large amounts of poetry and prose.

Masefield described New York as "that dazzling, beautiful exciting city with such a sparkle in her air and in her people." He found suddenly that while walking in an uptown part of the East side the faculty of mental story-telling had returned to him and that this was accompanied by a resurrection of his inner life.

Shortly after the celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 he returned to England and became a journalist in London, writing for any editor who would pay him. Though suffering from a serious illness and not expected to live long, he attempted story and verse writing.

He found it bitter, thwarting work and time passed slowly in a continual toil of writing and reading. After several years of experiment, learning his craft by trial and error, he began to write novels and plays.

While in London he met W. B. Yeats and spent many happy hours talking into the early hours of the morning with Yeats and his friends.

In 1911 at the age of 30 Masefield felt that he could no longer tolerate living in London and he moved to the Chiltern hamlet of Great Hampden.

The year 1911 was the most memorable in Masefield's life as a poet, for in it he produced the first of his great narrative poems, written in a mood of feverish creativeness. "The Everlasting Mercy" astounded the literary world with its vigour and realistic style.

Other extended poems followed, the most popular being "Reynard the Fox" a narrative rich in detail describing a day's fox-hunting in the countryside around Ledbury. It is a poem of plain people in plain language and has reached many readers who care little for poetry as such.

Perhaps Masefield's best poem, viewed from the aspect of technique, is "Dauber", the conflicts experienced by an artist who joins a sailing ship and is despised by the crew.

Masefield was prolific in his output, recording the whole gamut of human affairs -the mistakes of passion and lust in "The Widow in the Bye Street," the tragic clash of contending lovers in "The Daffodil Fields." Outstanding is the play "The Tragedy of Nan" which shows us a lonely heroine driven to distraction by a cruel society; murdering her faithless lover, she commits suicide in rising flood water. Though the public knows little of his plays, Masefield is a dramatist of national importance, sadly neglected.

Probably his finest work is not the narratives, striking and colourful as they are, but the lyrics and sonnets in which his ceaseless quest for beauty, the love of the English countryside and his brooding upon man and his fate are the most frequently recurring subjects. He was a poet who crystallised the power and beauty of the earth and sea; few others have given us so vital a range of images in verse and prose.

Above all he is a great story teller - easily read and enjoyed by a wide public. Nothing could have been more fitting than his appointment as Poet Laureate in 1930 by Ramsay MacDonald. The premier positions in poetry and music were held then by two sons of our soil - Elgar as Master of the King's Musick and Masefield as Poet Laureate.

It is arguable that they were the last musician and poet to reach the vast majority of people. It is certain that they drew from the Malvern Country an inner strength, an indefinable spiritual energy.

Peter Smith.

Changes to Rules affecting the Colwall Village Society Database

As you may have heard, a new set of rules called the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) will come into force on 25th May 2018. The rules will apply to Colwall Village Society because we wish to keep a database in order to communicate with you. To be able to comply with the new rules, we need each individual member to grant permission for us to hold your personal details (e.g. name, address, email, telephone number) on our database.

To that end the Membership Secretary has produced a 'CVS Membership Record' form. We are therefore asking that you complete this form at the AGM giving us permission to hold your details. Our current databases will be erased, so from then on, **without your permission, we will not be able to contact you.** If you cannot attend the AGM then we will email or post the form to you and ask you to return a completed and signed copy to Liz Hill. Her details are:

Email: cvsmember@colwall.info

Future Talks

23rd April 2018

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by
'The Design and Planning of the new Colwall
Village School'
by Joyce Clifford

NOTE: THIS MEETING IS AT THE SCHOOL

10th September 2018.

Directing the 'Antiques Road Show' at Eastnor Castle
by Mike Jackson

21st January 2019.

Julia Goldsmith of Catcher Media – Film on Hop
Picking in Herefordshire

+ Q&A session on hop-picking.

(all part of the 'Life through a Lens' project based on the
photographic archive of Derek Evans.)

From the Editor

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