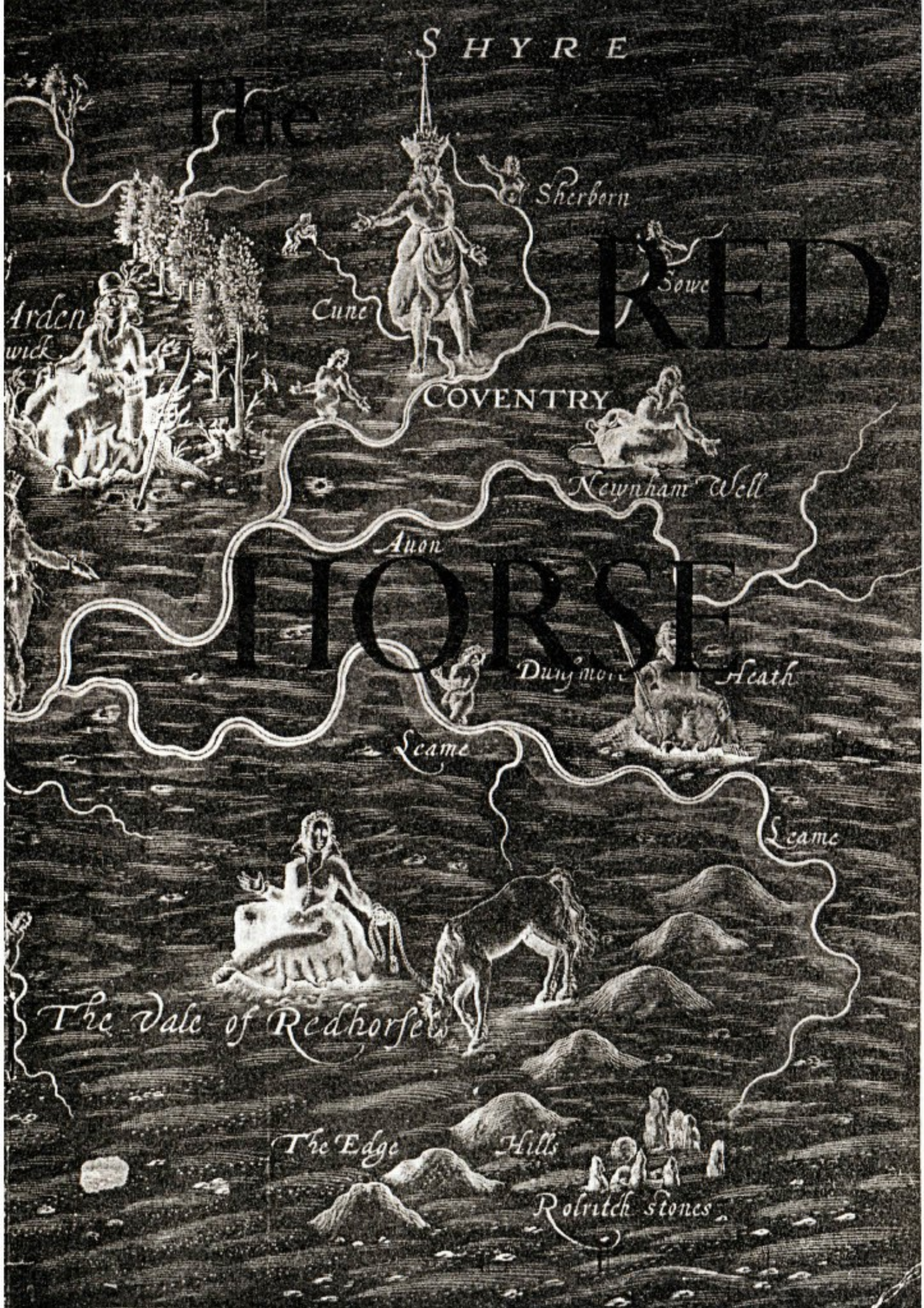
SHYRE
Ile
Sherborn
RED
Sowe
Arden
wick
Cune
COVENTRY
Newnham Well
Auon
HORSE
Heath
Leame
Leame
The Vale of Redhorse
The Edge
Hills
Rolvitch stones

Cover : Map from Drayton's Polyolbion 1612
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THE RED HORSE OF TYSOE

W. G. MILLER & K. A. CARRDUS

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

1965

1—INTRODUCTION

It is general knowledge that there have been two Red Horses of Tysoe. In 1800 the Rev. George Miller's father watched the landlord of Sunrising Inn plough out the old Red Horse, and then cut a smaller one in Sunrising Covert. The site of the old figure has been forgotten, and the place where the newer horse was cut is now overgrown with large trees. The site of the old figure will soon be covered with established trees, as the whole Edgehill scarp south of Sunrising has been afforested.

Many people have wondered if it would be possible to re-trace and re-cut the Red Horse, but one glance at the slope shows that this is a hopeless task. Between the lines of trees is dense grass, bramble and furze. The marlstone rock is so far below the surface that the figure cannot have been "carved into the limestone" (as the Victoria County History so imaginatively suggests), but must have been made by removing the turf and exposing the light brown loam. Within a very few years, the grass and brambles and furze return, and the Horse has vanished without trace. The Red Horse was lost in 1800, and is lost for ever.

And yet, to the archaeologist, 165 years is a moment of time. If the horse was scoured annually, for at least two hundred years, and possibly for a thousand or more years, then it is inconceivable that no trace should remain. Even if the slope had been ploughed over, the composition of the soil must be sufficiently different for a vegetation mark to show—if only one knew where to look.

The evidence of the guide-books and maps before 1800 is vague, or only precise enough to be contradictory. But the Enclosure Award of 1798, which finished the Red Horse, did give a clear indication that Red Horse Hill is the rounded slope between Lower and Middle Tysoe which is now called The Hangings. In September, 1964, a photograph of this slope revealed a patch of lighter vegetation which looked like a horse's head, neck and body. Aerial photographs taken six months later confirmed these details, showed the position of the legs and tail, and enabled the size to be calculated.

These photographs contained some astonishing discoveries: the horse was six times as big as the measurements given by Gough; and no less than three horses had been cut on this slope:

1. An enormous galloping horse, nearly 100 yards long and 70 yards high, which must be the original figure which gave the name to Red Horse Vale.
2. Another large figure, two-thirds the size of the original, cut on the slope just in front of the first.
3. A small figure, about 18 yards long and with short legs, facing in the opposite direction, and cut just north of the second horse.

These light patches on the aerial colour transparencies were valuable evidence that the outline might yet be recovered. Yet more proof was needed that these were the original shapes of the three successive cuttings. The history of hill figures is such a tissue of chicanery, pseudo archaeology and genuine practical joking, folkloristic fantasy and myth-making mummery, that this opportunity of applying genuine science to an untouched site was not to be missed.

In July, 1965, the Director of the Institute of Archaeology, London University, agreed to undertake a preliminary investigation on the site, to find out if the vegetation pattern was in fact the trace of a vanished hill figure. In the following month, soil tests were made and an extensive ecological survey was carried out, and the results were sufficiently encouraging to warrant a more detailed investigation in the early summer of 1966.

It remains to be seen whether these "ghost outlines" can be scientifically verified. But they do make historical sense, for the following reasons :

(a) Ten months after the outlines were discovered, the site was confirmed by the discovery of Stephen Godson's map of 1796, which pinpointed the hill figure on The Hangings;

(b) Horse One corresponds with Camden's and Dugdale's description of it, and Horse Three with Wise's and Gough's measurements.

To complete the story; we know that in 1800 Simon Nicholls bought Sunrising Farm from the Marquess of Northampton and promptly ploughed up the Third Horse, as a token that this was the end of the peasant obligation of scouring it annually. And that in the following year, finding that his inn lost the profits from the sale of cakes and ale at the Palm Sunday jollification, Nicholls cut a small figure as an inn-sign, just south of Sunrising Inn.

This Fourth Horse was only seventeen feet long, and was presumably cut in an alcoholic haze, for the only drawing of it shows a happily inebriated pantomime horse with human feet.

There is a strong and reliable tradition in Tysoe that there was another Horse cut out on Spring Hill by Mr. Savory, but that he deliberately obliterated it, round about the year 1910, because he was exasperated by the number of visitors asking to see it.

It seems therefore that there have been Five Red Horses of Tysoe.

The following chapters tell the story of their discovery, and documentary evidence for their existence, and the history and purpose behind them.

2—THE SEARCH

Of the Five Red Horses of Tysoe, we know the shape and dimensions of four. We can only guess when they were cut and how long they lasted. We can make reasonable suggestions about their history and purpose, and we can follow the confused trail left by the historians and myth-makers. We can even reconcile the conflicting accounts given by the local people : all the living memory refers to Horses Four and Five, the little horses near Sunrising Inn; any tradition of the Great Horses comes from Dugdale or some Warwickshire guide book, at second hand.

Intermittent and desultory work over the last four years has enabled us to unravel this confused story; it has taken us to libraries, record offices, and map rooms; it has subjected us to the gorse and brambles on the slopes of Edgehill, digging trenches, making soil

tests and vegetation surveys, measuring the growth of trees; we have taken photographs from the ground and the air, and wasted hours in dark rooms; and we have been exposed to the wit of locals who assured us that the horse would not run away.

We began our search in 1961 with the information contained in Marples' "White Horses and other Hill Figures." Like him, we were puzzled by the discrepancies in the various accounts, and we admired his ingenuity in commenting on the "rudeness" of the figure and his attempts to twist Gough's measurements to fit the only known picture of the Horse. The evidence of the maps was little better, as the scale was so small and the site of the Horse was vaguely indicated.

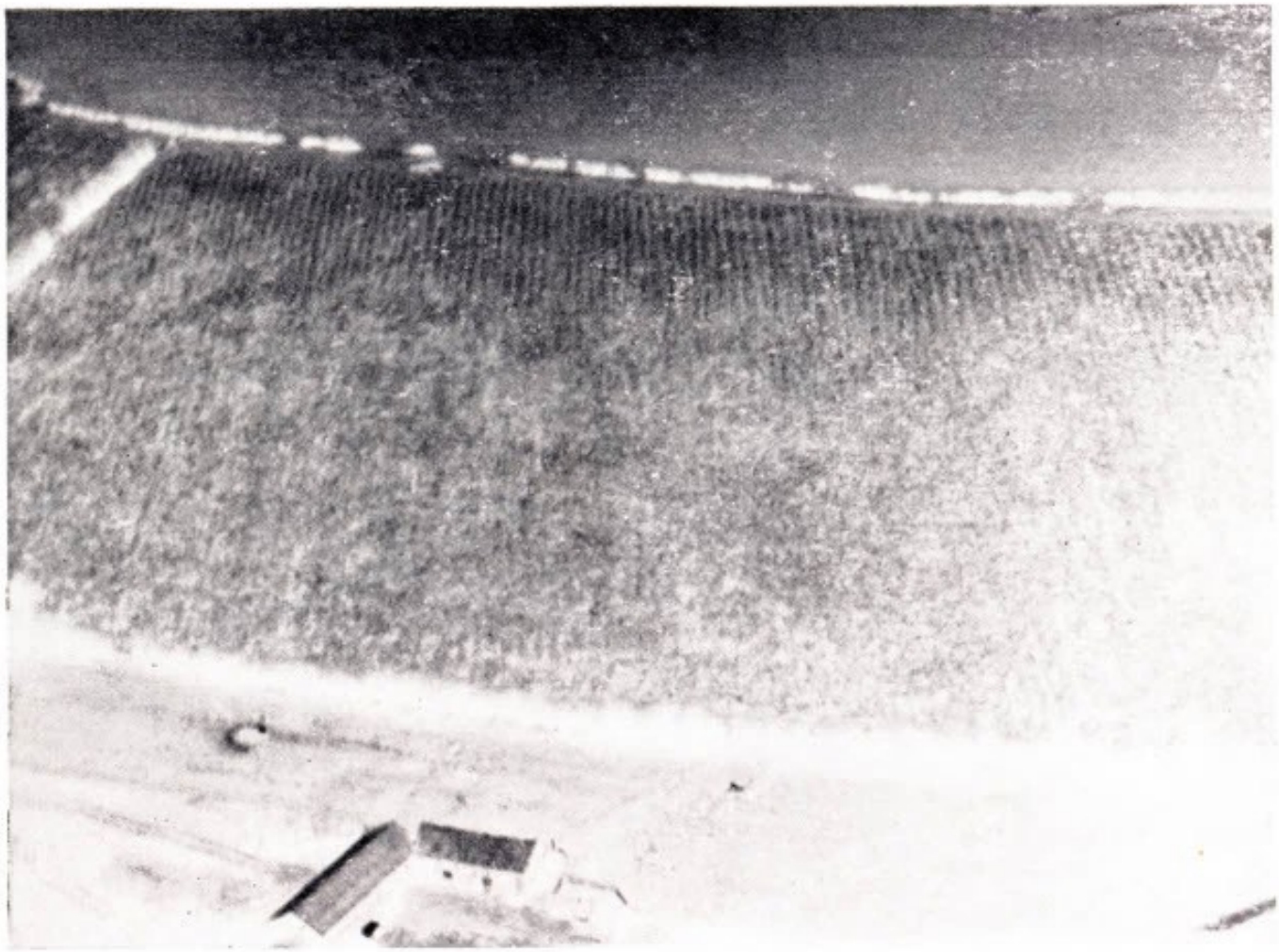
J. A. Forster, K. A. Carrdus and W. G. Miller then consulted all the available evidence and decided that the most probable site was immediately to the north of the Red Road. A preliminary survey showed that the site had recently been planted with small trees, mainly larch. This afforestation has greatly complicated the search, and vice versa, but it made the task doubly urgent, for in a few years the hill-figure would be completely lost under the roots of well-established trees. However, there was some hope, as vegetation patterns could be seen on the slope, which might have been caused by the annual scouring of the figure. In the summer of 1961 photographs were taken from ground and air, and a trench was dug across the most likely-looking vegetation mark. Nothing was found.

The second attempt was made in 1963/4 by S. G. Wildman and W. G. Miller. As excavation had yielded no results, Mr. Wildman tried the technique of measuring tree growth, assuming that the trees on the disturbed soil of the Horse would grow taller than the trees on the surrounding land. In the bleak winter the two men carried out the tedious task of measuring the new growth on 1,100 trees, and Mr. Wildman plotted the positions of the trees with more than average growth. From this he constructed a hypothetical outline of the Horse. The method was ingenious, but felt to be inconclusive, as there are many ways of joining up a series of dots.

The third attempt may be called Professor Ashby's dig. In 1964 Mr. Carrdus was given a large-scale map of Tysoe, 1796, which clearly showed the position of the Red Horse on Old Lodge Hill, half a mile south of the site of the previous attempts. The name Tysoe has been suggested as meaning Tiw's-hoh, or a spur of hillside dedicated to the god Tiw. This hill is the finest of the spurs projecting from the escarpment, by far the most likely "hoh" for Tiw's Red Horse. This clue seemed certain to be correct when it was found that the map had been drawn by Professor Arthur Ashby, the most learned local historian, who would almost certainly have received the information from his father, Joseph Ashby, who must have been shown the site by people who had actually seen the Horse before 1800.

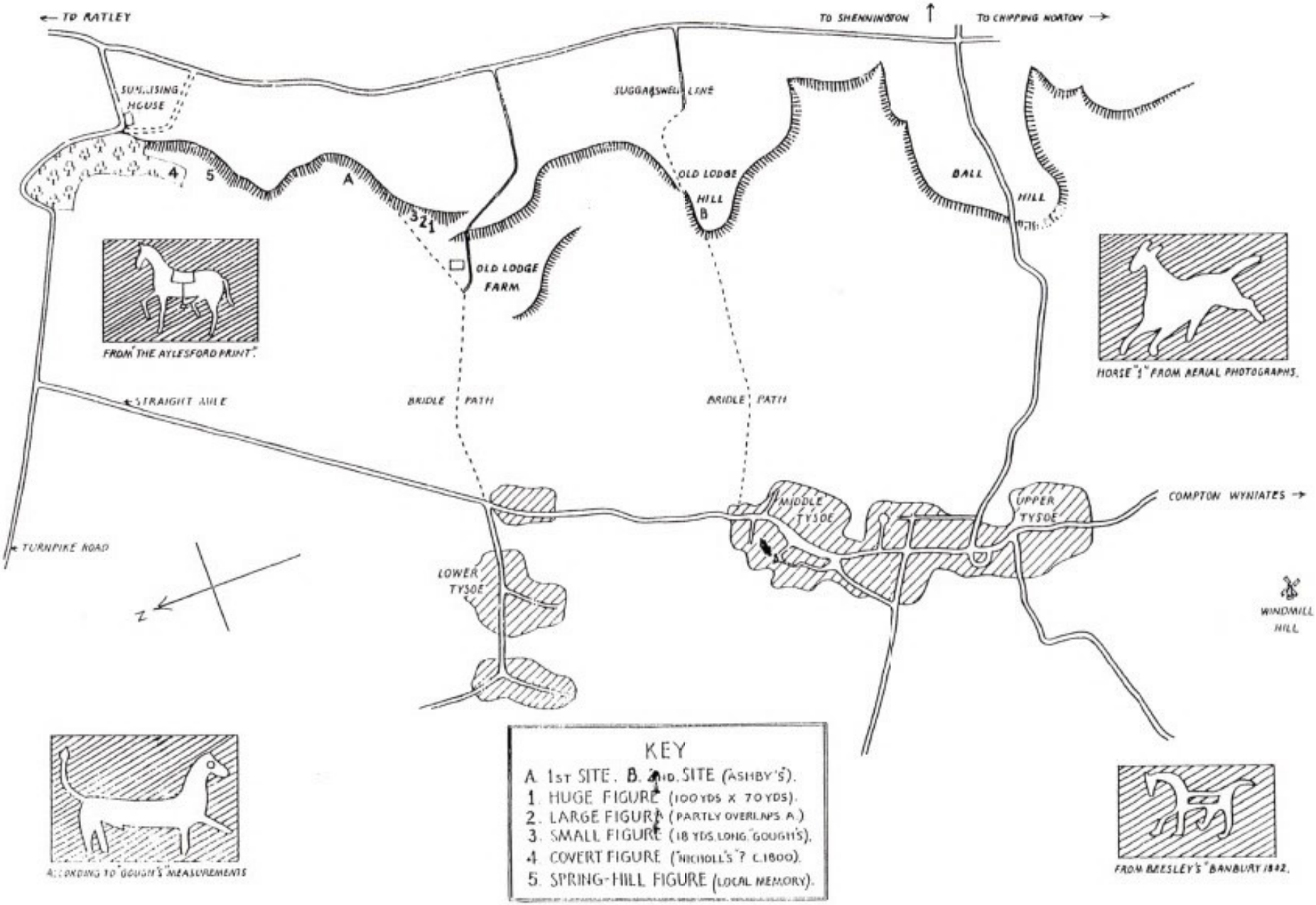
Five trenches were dug, and a few fossils and shards of Roman pottery were discovered, but there was no sign of a hill-figure.

However, this eliminating work had some value, and our attention was directed to the area between Spring Hill on the north and Old Lodge Hill on the south.



UNTOUCHED AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF HORSE No. 1 DARK ON LIGHT

TOUCHED-UP AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF SAME SITE FOR COMPARISON
HORSES 2 AND 3 INDICATED BY DOTTED LINES


← TO RATLEY
TO SHENNINGTON
TO CHIPPING NORTON →
SUNRISING HOUSE
SUGGARSWELL LANE
OLD LODGE HILL
BALL HILL
A
B
1
2
3
4
5
OLD LODGE FARM
FROM "THE AYLESFORD PRINT".
HORSE "1" FROM AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS.
STRAIGHT MILE
BRIDLE PATH
BRIDLE PATH
COMPTON WYNIATES →
MIDDLE TYSOE
UPPER TYSOE
LOWER TYSOE
TURNPIKE ROAD
N
WINDMILL HILL
KEY
A. 1ST SITE. B. 2ND. SITE (ASHBY'S).
1. HUGE FIGURE (100 YDS X 70 YDS).
2. LARGE FIGURE (PARTLY OVERLAPS A.)
3. SMALL FIGURE (18 YDS. LONG. "GOUGH'S").
4. COVERT FIGURE ("NICHOLL'S"? C.1800).
5. SPRING-HILL FIGURE (LOCAL MEMORY).
ACCORDING TO "GOUGH'S" MEASUREMENTS
FROM BEESLEY'S "BANBURY 1842.

(1) We decided that the figure must have been cut on The Hangings, directly above Old Lodge Farm (which is 800 yards north of Old Lodge Hill).
The Enclosure Award of 1796 mentioned Red Horse Hill, but the name was not marked on the accompanying map. The only clue was to "certain houses and gardens under the Red Horse Hill," and the only buildings marked were directly below the Hangings.

(2) Mr. Miller took some photographs of the whole escarpment, using various coloured filters, and on one print he found a white mark like a chess knight, the head and neck of a horse, directly above Old Lodge Farm on the Hangings.

(3) Reference to The Red Horse was found in Jervoise Clarke's Estate Book, based on the survey by John Snape in 1774, in which the Red Horse was used as a landmark to indicate Shoots, small strips of land, which corresponded to the run of the furrows directly below the Hangings, and so confirmed that this was Red Horse Hill.

These three discoveries gave new life to the search. The more we studied the hillside, the clearer the vegetation pattern became; it varied with the light, time of day and growth of the vegetation, but the head and neck of the horse were clearly visible, the line of the back and the body could be traced without difficulty, but the legs and tail could only be guessed at. The site was watched from September until the following April, when Mr. Carrdus's air photographs were taken, which revealed the outline of a solid hill figure, 285 feet long and 195 feet high.

Two months later the site was confirmed by the discovery of Stephen Godson's map, and the leading archaeologist in the country was asked if it was possible to verify these outlines.

3—DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Some account must now be given of the hours of research in libraries in Oxford, Warwick, Birmingham and London, to say nothing of the midnight candles burnt in Banbury and Tysoe.

It may be said at once that as the Horse disappeared in 1800, nothing written after that date is of any value, and even the accounts written before 1800 are conflicting and confusing. No one thought it worth while to draw a picture of the Horse, to mark its position accurately or even to measure its proportions. Either it was recognised as a pagan relic, better glossed over, or it was thought of as a rustic mummery beneath the notice of the educated.

The earliest reference to Red Horse Vale comes from the cartographer John Speed in 1606. He put "corn as the chiefest commodity grown in the county whereof the Red Horse Vale yieldeth most abundantly, woots in great plentie; woods and iron, though the producer of one will be the destruction of the other." Woots is the dialectal spelling of oats.

The figure itself was first mentioned by Camden, in his last edition of Britannia, 1607. Three years later Holland translated the passage thus : "Of the redy soil here come the names of Rodway and Rodley; yea, and a great part of the very Vale is thereupon termed the vale of Red Horse, of the shape of a horse cut out in a red hill by the country people hard by Pillerton." Note that Pillerton is four miles away from Edgehill, and that Camden presumably travelling along the Fosse Way north of Pillerton could see the horse from that distance. Camden also recognised the horse as having some connection with a folk festival, that it was not an official work of art.

In 1612, the Warwickshire poet and friend of Shakespeare, Michael Drayton, complains that whereas the White Horse is famous :

> My Red-horse of you all contemned lies,
> The fault is not in me, but in the wretched time,
> On whom, upon good cause, I may well lay the crime,
> Which as all noble things, so mee it does neglect."

The most reliable early reference comes from Sir William Dugdale, who must have seen the figure at the Battle of Edgehill, and was commissioned to record the nation's treasures in case the Iconoclasts started smashing them. His familiar account of the Tysoe Icon is : "Within the precinct of that Mannour of Tishoe now belonging to the Earl of Northampton (but antiently to the family of Stafford as I have showed), there is cut upon the side of Edgehill the proportion of a Horse in a very large forme; which by reason of the ruddy colour of the earth is called the Red Horse, and giveth denomination to that fruitful and pleasant country thereabouts, commonly called the Vale of the Red Horse : the trenches of which ground where the shape of the said Horse is so cut out, being yearly scoured by a Free-holder in this Lordship, who holds certain la. there by that service." We may be sure that Dugdale was given this information by Northampton, and that it is authentic, but no trace of the deeds of Red Horse Farm has yet been found. It is also probable that Dugdale is the last to record the ancient Great Horse. which did not survive the Civil War, and that all future references are to the smaller horse which was only 55 feet long.

Coming closer to home, we have a reference to the horse by Celia Fiennes, that intrepid horsewoman, who compared it to the Uffington Monster : "We went by Eshum (Evesham) and the Vale of the Red Horse, being a Vale of great extent, the earth is all red. its a very rich Country for corn and fruites and woodes; its called the Vale of Eshum or of the Red Horse from a red horse cut on some of the hills about it, and the Earth all looking red the horse lookes so as that of the white horse vale . . . "

None of the early maps of Warwickshire gave the position of the hill-figure. The first cartographer to mention it was Beighton in 1725, but the scale of his map was too small to indicate the site precisely. Kitchen in 1750 and Cary in 1787 also show the figure, south of Sunrising and east of Tysoe, but it could be anywhere in half-a-mile on the hillside.

The next references were produced by a squabble between two clergymen, the Rev. Francis Wise and the Rev. Wm. Asplin. Wise decided that the Uffington Horse was a war memorial, and con-

nected it with Alfred's victory over the Danes at Ashdown in 871. The Vicar of Banbury, Wm. Asplin, attacked Wise's pamphlet with a masterly piece of satire, "The Impertinence and Imposture of Modern Antiquaries Displayed." Wise maintained that the White Horse was white because of the colour of the Saxon standard; Asplin replied: "A good horse was never of a bad colour. That other Nag of Renown from whom the Vale of Red Horse is denominated, happens to be red only because he is cut in a ruddy soil. Whoever will have such sort of horse must be content with such sort of colour as the country affords." Asplin also mocked the outline of the Uffington horse: "Though he has resemblance enough to be called a horse as properly as any other quadruped, yet I cannot say he is a perfect picture of a horse. For a horse that had lain so long at grass, carries no body at all; insomuch that should he take up hill, were I upon the back of him, I should be under terrible apprehensions he would slip through his girth."

Wise must have visited Tysoe to inspect the Nag of Renown, and he produced his celebrated legend that a retainer of the Earl of Warwick had cut the figure in memory of the bloodiest battle ever fought in the Wars of the Roses, Towton Field, Palm Sunday, 1461. There is no foundation in history or probability for this ridiculous story, and it is high time that the story was put down as firmly as Warwick destroyed his horse. However, Wise does say that the Red Horse is "vastly inferior to the Uffington horse in every respect, in its design, dimensions, fabrick and situation, being hardly visible at a distance. The whole betrays itself to be the work of a later age and more rude workmen." This suggests that Wise saw a different animal from the one recorded by Camden and Dugdale.

Two more clergymen supply our next reference. In 1756 Bishop Pocock recorded that the horse had its tail held up, and eleven years later the Rev. Jago, in his heroic poem "Edgehill," suggested that the horse was a boundary mark or a sign of Saxon rule and Celtic slavery:

> "And Tysoe's wondrous theme, the martial Horse,
> Carved on the yielding turf, armorial sign of
> Hengist, Saxon Chief! Studious to preserve
> The fav'rite form, the treach'rous conquerors,
> Their vassal tribes compel with festive rites
> Its fading figure yearly to renew
> And to the neighb'ring vale impart its name."

The next mention is in Jervoise Clarke's estate book of 1774, and then comes the vital reference to Red Horse Hill in the Tysoe Enclosure Award of 1798: "One other plot of land called Butts at Show Hill Hollow, Show Hill, Red Horse Hill . . . on the remaining part of the South by certain Houses and Gardens under the Red Horse Hill." This undoubtedly means that the Red Horse was carved upon the Hangings, and Stephen Godson's map of 1796 does show a horse symbol in this very position, on the slope just above Old Lodge Farm.

Richard Gough measured the figure, and published these dimensions in his additions to Camden's Britannia, 1806: croup to chest, 34 feet; shoulder to ears, under jaw to bottom of chest, 10 feet; shoulder to ground, 16 feet or 57 hands; length of off-foreleg 12

feet; length of near foreleg 9 feet; hindlegs 10 feet; belly 19½ feet; sheath 8 feet; tail, more like a lion's, 18 feet; width of each leg 1 foot; diameter of the eye 1 foot 2 inches long.

It is typical of the confusion in the evidence that Gough's measurements and comments do not coincide with Godson's drawing of it ten years before. However, Gough does say that it is about a mile from the inn, cut in the side of a hill, fronting Tysoe Church. And he adds that a farm of £60 per annum called Red Horse Farm, belonging to Lord Northampton, is subject on pain of forfeiture to the charge of scouring it anew, at which time the people who assist are treated with cakes and ale.

Among the Marquess of Northampton's papers at Castle Ashby is a terrier, a detailed list of tenancies and large-scale maps, which was made by John Spyers in 1765-71. Among the tenants in Upper Tysoe appears the name of Elizabeth Tarver, Red Horse Farm, and the accompanying map shows that Red Horse Farm is the modern Dinsdale Farm. The farmhouse has been destroyed, and the older deeds of the farm—which should include the scouring clause—have still to be traced.

The inevitable mystery and confusion surrounds the disappearance of the horse. The Marquess of Northampton's agent, Mr. Scriven, said that when Simon Nicholls bought Sunrising House and Farm in 1800, he ploughed up the Red Horse. The Rev. George Miller's father maintained that Nicholls was so dismayed by his loss in the sale of drink and food, as the Palm Sunday festival was so brought to an end, that he cut another figure of a Red Horse just near his house, and so attempted to revive the traditional Edgehill Wake, an event commemorated with much mirth, and many of the neighbouring gentry attending to witness the scene. Beesley measured the figure in 1842, and gave its length as 17 feet; in 1892 Ribton Turner said that the figure was about ten yards long, by a gate near Edgehill House, which is the modern name for Sunrising Windle in 1906 said the figure no longer existed, but Cox in 1914 says that it does. Apparently in 1907 there was a proposal to scour it once more, and the question was debated in the Press, but got no further. A few years later it was obliterated by the landowner, Mr. Savory, who was exasperated at the number of visitors asking to see it.

Finally, we arrive at the recollections of local residents, who actually saw a Horse when they were young. It did not take long to find people who remember the Horse in the trees of Sunrising Covert, but after a while we found that older people in the village could remember a second horse cut on the open ground of Spring Hill, just south of the trees in Sunrising Covert. This second figure is reliably attested by Mr. J. Smith, who worked at Sunrising House, and Mrs. Wright, who taught at Tysoe School.

The documentary evidence is so confused, and the folk memory is so unreliable, that we can only assume that the Horse changed site at least three times, and changed its shape even more often. As the figure was cut simply by removing the turf, it could vanish in two or three years, and its outline may well have altered so much that the conflicting eye-witnesses all could be telling the truth.

4—HILL FIGURES IN GENERAL: THEIR HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Hill figures are to be found in various parts of the world, but England can claim by far the greatest number. Of nearly 50 assorted figures in this country, 17 are white horses, and 11 of these are found in Wiltshire. Only four horses are known to have been cut outside the chalk country, and the Kilburn Horse on the Hambledon Hills in Yorkshire shows how expensive it is to whiten a non-white horse.

The history of all these hill-figures is obscure. Even the best documented horses have undergone complete changes of shape. The Uffington Horse was first recorded about 1080, but a recent aerial photograph shows that the present duck-billed weasel is very different from the original shaping. Historically, the next figures are the lost giants of Plymouth (1486), the giant of Cambridge (1605), Tysoe's Red Horse (1607), the Whiteleaf Cross, which can be seen from the train near Princes Risborough (1742), the Cerne Giant (1764), and the Long Man of Wilmington (1779). Most of the remaining hill figures are follies or attempts to improve the landscape in the 18th and 19th centuries. More recently, regimental badges have been carved on the hills at Chiselbury, Wilts, and there is an 8 feet high inscription thought to date from about 1960.

What is the purpose of these figures? We can dismiss the landscape gardening figures, and the one or two which are suspected of being obscene jests, undergraduate rags or the pranks of debauched noblemen. Leaving aside the giants, which are not likely to be the immense figures in which the Ancient Britons burned alive their human sacrifices, and the white crosses, which may be Christian or pre-Christian symbols—the question is, why were so many horses carved on the English hillsides?

The Red Horse of Tysoe provides several most valuable clues to the answer to this problem. It was scoured every year, on Palm Sunday; i.e., it had some connection with a Spring and Sunrising Festival. The hills to the north are called Spring and Sunrising. We are told that Tysoe means a spur of land dedicated to the Saxon god Tiu. Red Horse Hill is magnetic east of Tysoe Church; an axial line through the church points directly at the hill figure, at the skyline over which the sun would rise at the vernal equinox.

All this evidence suggests that the enormous solid figure of the Horse, nearly an acre in extent, was scoured by the Saxon farmers as a Spring jollification, and as a magic ritual to ensure a good summer and a fine crop. If one goes beyond this sober hypothesis, one lands in a bog of folkloristic nonsense with the Corn-Spirit as a Horse, the goddess Epona as a divine mare, the ritual slaughter of horses and blood-broth ceremonies. It is not impious to say that we hope our forefathers were not so silly.

A. E. MASSEY & SON,
PRINTERS, LEAMINGTON.


SHYRE
TAMWORTH
Borne
Tame
Tame
Ancor
The old forrest of
Now the Woodland of
Shyre
Cole
Rea
Blyth
WAR WICK
PARTE
Arrow
OF
WARWICK
Aline
SHYRE
WORSTER
SHYRE
Auon
Stowre