

Felday Bulletin

The World War I camp at Felday

Anecdotal evidence has reported on the existence of a prisoner of war camp within the Iron Age enclosure at Felday. The Iron Age enclosure was last surveyed in 1985 by Dave Field, when the existence of the prisoner of war camp was noted, though no written records had been evidenced at that time.

It was the removal of the invasive rhododendrons which gave us the opportunity to survey the the Iron Age hill fort above Holmbury St Mary.

The rhododendrons were polluting the watercourse and the Friends of the Hurtwood dealt with their removal. This left the hilltop bare of ground cover.

Very little is known of World War 1 prisoner of war camps and there are very few examples surviving so the site is of some importance, and of interest to English Heritage.

Keith Winser and Ken Waters, both raised in Holmbury St Mary, knew of the existence of the camp. Local tales suggested it may have interned Germans in the Second World War but we were lucky to be given copies of a statement and drawing made by a local resident, Beattie Ede. Pat Nicolaysen, remembered by many of you, interviewed Beattie in 1986 and recorded her memories. The drawing became the basis of our investigations and, by probing the ground, we discovered evidence of building platforms in concrete and stone seemingly matching her plan.



1 Beattie Ede's memory

The WW1 POW camp at Felday is known locally and is noted on the Surrey HER (HER 15518) but does not appear to have been recorded on any of the known national lists. It has been described, by local historian Margaret Bird, as a civilian internment camp for prisoners, thought locally to have been Italian (although this seems unlikely), who were employed in the local timber industry. The identification as either a POW camp or an internment camp required clarification. Post-holes, timber slots, concrete foundations for a

kitchen block, floors and drains are mentioned and the site is also described in a recent survey of part of the Hurtwood (Bannister 2003). We also discovered the concrete base of the generator house.



Figure 2 Rose and Jen measure the generator base

Reference to the Swiss Federal Archive also disclosed contemporary reports of the camp, done for the Red Cross and the Germans.

“Extract of report dated 16th October 1917

16th October, 1917.

Monsieur le Ministre,

I have the honour to submit a report covering a visit of inspection to the Prisoners' of War Working Camp at HOLMBURY ST. MARY, nr. Dorking, Surrey, on October 11th, 1917. This Camp was opened on August 24th, 1917.

DIRECTION. *The Commandant is Lieut K.H. Thorneycroft. Dr. Cory, a medical practitioner at Shore, about 5 miles distant, is camp physician.*

PRISONERS. *There are at present 147 German military prisoners in the camp, including the Camp Leader Feldwebel Meerbutte and 4 Unteroffiziere.*

DESCRIPTION OF CAMP *The Camp is healthily situated on high ground, and is surrounded by pine woods. The prisoners have, until lately, been under canvas, but they have now built huts, into which the last batch of men were moving on the day of my visit. The huts are of the regulation army type - length 18 metres, width 4.75 metres, height at the side 2.35 metres, height at the gable 3.65 metres. The roofs are of wood, covered with rubberised felt.*

Each hut is capable of holding 30 men. Stoves for heating are now being put in, and the Commandant informed me that the lighting will be supplied from an acetylene plant. Each man has the usual bed-board and trestle bed and four blankets. Two dining huts are in course of construction. In the meantime the prisoners take their meals in a marquee tent. “

The new plan of the area showing the camp within the Iron Age enclosure

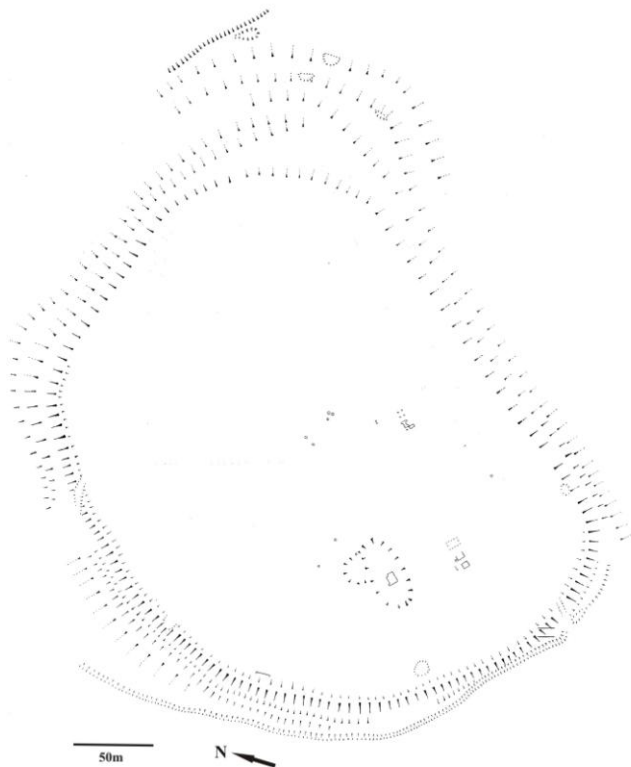


Figure 3 Iron Age enclosure with camp location

This photo is of the 60th Royal Defence Corps., outside the Royal Oak in Holmbury St Mary, who were responsible for preparing the camp in 1917.

A full report on the camp is being written with a view to publication in the near future.



Figure 4 60th Royal Defence Corps.

References:

Bannister, NR (2003) *The Eastern Hurtwood, Holmbury and Felday: historic landscape survey*, Report prepared for the Hurtwood Control Trust

Field, D (1989) Felday, Holmbury St Mary: an earthwork enclosure of the 1st century AD, *Surrey Archaeol Coll* **79**, 99-116

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