Pen Pils

Number of separate enclosures.

1

(To be returned)

This margin may *not* be written on.

SUBJECT.

28 AUG 188

Ancient Monuments

-

Pen Pits

MEMORANDA.

The Secretary

The enclosed letter has been left here by Mr. Sotheron, Bookseller, of no. 36, Piccadilly.

W.J.

28 Aug. '84.

General Pitt Rivers

for any observations

W.J.

28 Aug. 84

a. M. P. A

Report on Pen Pits

Copy

Office of Works
A 8977
7. Nov. 1883.

Ancient Monuments Protection

General Pitt Rivers

Duties of the Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

Memoranda.

First Comment.

I am certainly of opinion that the Excavation of such pits and other similar work is distinctly such as would come under the head of the official Duties of the Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

There is a point raised by General Pitt Rivers which may be of some importance in the future viz: the defraying of the expense of such examinations by the Inspector himself.

General Pitt Rivers's successor may be a poor man and unable to do such work at his own expense. I think therefore that in future such examinations as are made should be paid for out of public money. But in that case the

Inspector would have to seek the authority of the Board before commencing operations, as to the cost of which he would have to furnish an estimate.

A.B.M
Nov/83.

Commr.

But if the work should be such as the Board could not authorize, it will still be open to General Pitt Rivers to conduct the investigations at his own cost, in which case although the investigations would be private as far as cost is concerned the time so employed would be distinctly reckoned as devoted to official work.

G.S.L. Nov. 30. 83.

General Pitt Rivers
to see
A.B.M.
Nov. 30. 83

Seen and returned to the Secretary
Dec 11. 1883. A. Pitt Rivers

Copy.

Ancient Monument Department
Office of Works.
6. Nov. 1883.
PR Box 2 | P2

Secretary,

During the last fortnight I have been engaged in making excavations in the collection of Pits commonly known as Pen pits near Stourton on the borders of Wilts, Dorset, and Somerset.

These pits ever since the time of Camden who mentions them in his Brittania have formed a subject of warm dispute amongst Antiquaries up to the present time, some affirming that they were ~~only~~ merely quarries for obtaining stone for millstones (querns), others believing them to be the remains of habitations. Learned papers have been written in favour of the latter hypothesis. and it has been supposed that a portion of them should be placed under the protection of Government

As the collection of pits has been estimated at 20,000, implying a population of something like 100,000 people, the ~~collec~~ existence of a prehistoric town of such a size would ~~completely revolutionize our~~ materially alter preconceived ideas as to the social condition of the Britons previous to the time of the Romans. The pits are being rapidly destroyed for obtaining stones for road making and before all trace of

them is obliterated, it appeared to me desirable that an attempt should be made to ascertain by means of excavation which of these hypotheses is the correct one.

A Committee of the Somersetshire Archaeological Society ~~with which I was connected~~ made some excavations a few years ago which resulted in their reporting that the evidence was in favour of quarries, but several of the Committee appended riders to the Report expressing their dissent from this view, and it was not ~~favourably~~ generally accepted in the locality.

Under these circumstances I decided to make a complete section through the hill laying bare the undisturbed rock and cutting through the pits to ascertain whether any sufficiently reliable evidence could be obtained to set at rest a ~~the~~ question which has so long been regarded as the crux of antiquaries.

The result has been to confirm fully the report of the Committee of the Somerset Archaeological Society and

made to obtain stone for querns, six of which, unfinished and cast aside as useless were found in one of the pits. Not a fragment of pottery or any signs of human habitation have been found in any of the excavations made by me.

I am therefore of opinion that there is no evidence which would justify me in recommending that any portion of these pits should be placed under the protection of the Ancient Monuments Act.

My object in now in bringing the subject to your notice is to request a decision from the First Commissioner of Works as to whether I may consider my time officially employed whilst making these investigations.

As regards the expense of the excavations I consider my salary with any addition from my private purse that I may think it desirable to make, is amply sufficient to cover the cost of such excavations.

But as my time is in a great measure

I would ask to be informed whether an inquiry of this nature bearing on the ~~nature~~ selection of the monuments to be recommended for the protection of Government, is to be considered part of my ~~duty~~ duties.

I would observe that my reason for postponing reference to you until after the investigation had been completed, was in order that I might be able to state whether or not the inquiry had been conclusive. Excavations of this kind are often inconclusive, and I did not think it advisable to refer a question relating to my duties as the Inspector of Ancient Monuments until practical results had been obtained.

I have the honour to be
Sir
Your obedient servant
A. Pitt Rivers
Lieut General
Inspector of Ancient Monuments

Penpils.

Nov 5th 1913

Secretary

During the last fortnight I have been engaged in making excavations in the collection of Pits commonly known as Pen Pits near Stourton on the borders of Wilts Dorset & Somerset.

These pits were since the time of Camden the ancestors of Britain became famed in subject of warm dispute among Antiquarians up to the present time. Some affirming that they were merely pitsaws for obtaining stone for shell stones (pearls) others believing them to be the remains of habitations, and Camden himself had been written in favour upto later hypothesis as the collection of pits has been estimated at 20,000 implying a population of something like 100 000 people. The existence of a prehistoric town of such a size would completely revolutionize our ideas of the social condition of the Britons previous to their subjugation by the Romans. The pits are being rapidly destroyed for obtaining stone for road making purposes and before all trace of them is obliterated it appears to be desirable that an attempt should be made to ascertain by means of excavations which of the hypotheses is the correct one.

A committee of the Somersetshire Archaeological society with which I am connected made some excavations a few days ago which resulted in the report that the evidence was in favour of pitsaws but several of the committee offered doubts to the

to the report confirming their descent from the main and it was not purely accepted in the locality.

Under these circumstances I decided to make a complete section through the hill layers have the undertaken such a costly thorough the pits to ascertain whether any ~~[illegible]~~ sufficient of reliable evidence could be obtained to set at rest the question said his to say he repeated in the crux of Antiquarian.

The result has been to confirm fully the report of the Committee of Druid archaeological Society & there that the pits were undoubtedly made to obtain stone for flint queries sake of their unfamiliarity & cast aside in order were found in the of the pits not a fragment of pottery or any sight of human habitation have been found in any of the excavations made (in).

I am therefore of opinion that there is no evidence there would justify me in recommending that any further of the pits should be placed under the Committee of Druid Monuments are.

My object in now in bringing this subject to Your Lordship to request a decision from the first Commissioner of Works in to letter I may consider my time officially employed in thus making these investigations as regards the expense of the excavations. I consider my salary with any addition from my friends fund that I may think it desirable to make in simply sufficient to cover the cost of such excavations. But as my time is in a great measure under the control of the Government. I would ask to be informed whether an inquiry of this nature

bearing on the nature of the monuments to be recommended for ~~preservation~~ the protection of Government is to be considered part of my duties.

I would observe that my reason ~~for~~ for postponing reference to this ~~in the matter~~ while after the investigation had been completed was in order that I might be able to state results as to the ~~investigation~~ inquiry had been conclusive.

Excavations ~~investigation~~ of this ~~kind~~ Kind are often inconclusive and I did not think it ~~desirable~~ advisable to refer a question relating to my duties in the Superintendency of ancient monuments until ~~it had been ascertained results the spend had a certain result~~. My practical results ~~could be~~ had been obtained.

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your obedient servant —