

The Hill Andrew SSF

*Why hop ye so high ye hills?
This is God's hill in which
It pleaseth Him to dwell.*

Dawn! Watching from near the summit of the Hill.

Tucked away just below the summit, where the land slopes gently down to the brook, the Monastery at Glasshampton appears to rise out of the slope and face the rising sun across the hills along the Severn River. The Monastery has seen many sunrises, but she is a newcomer and the sun has risen over the Hill such countless times, and together, sun and hill have watched the changes for millennia. Many have watched these changes.

The first man to stand to watch the sunrise from the Hill, peering through trees growing here, had spent the dark night making use of the shelters of overhanging rocks by the creek, providing necessary water and, with the fire kept going through the night, keeping at bay the wolves and other beasts. Closer to the Big River were more rock shelters, but the water in the Big River could come up suddenly, and when the river was low, unknown groups could make their way across and attack and kill a whole family. It was better to stay away from the Big River and find a home near the small streams encircling the Hill. On its slopes some herbs could be found, from the trees could be gathered leaves and nuts, and a lookout kept for the movements of potentially unfriendly people, or where birds, animals or plants for food might be found.

The later watchers of the dawn became skilled at planting crops and keeping a few animals behind fences. Within the fences they had learned how to build shelters, at first by roofing a pit, and later raising walls of round houses. They preferred to build these houses a little away from the creeks. People seemed to die more quickly, especially young children when the family lived too close to the creeks. Near the creeks and swamps must surely be the places of evil spirits. The summit must be left for the good spirit, or for the god himself who would come down into, or may have lived in the large trees which grew there, were never destroyed by wind or lightning and were too strong to be cut with even the best stone axe.

As the centuries went by there were always different people trying to push across the two river crossings on the Big River. People on the hill made sure they had friends watching the river who would send messages back, by smoke or sending a runner, and the people of the hill would go to the river with others from other settlements to fight these people who were surely coming to take the land and hunt the animals which belonged to the people here.

People came from the other direction too, from where the sun went down, especially from the northwest. These did not come to take the land or kill but came to talk about the good spirits in the trees on the Hill and how to be safe

from the bad spirits of the streams and swamps. They showed how the green plant with white fruit was a sign from god and that their wise men used it to speak with the god. Others also came from the west, teaching how to make tools and how to find and use iron and tin. They also talked about god. They said he did not live in trees but in heaven. They said He died on the cross and He was called Christ. They were very clever people, and they showed crosses they had made as a sign of this God which had decorations on them.

There were people who came, neither across the Big River, nor from the West but had come up the river or down along its bank on this side. By this time the people living around the Hill had made strong weapons and put metal covers on their bodies; they fought these men but they had stronger weapons and had strong metal on their bodies. But they did not kill the people on this side; instead they said they too would teach the people good ways. They made better houses and farms and stopped stealing, fighting and killing.

Life was peaceful around the Hill for a long time, then these people called Romans, went away. Later there were all sorts of people trying to cross the Big River. Some were called Danes, some Saxons who came in different tribes. They fought their way across in the end and many of the people ran away to the west and those who stayed had to work hard for the newcomers. These people took all the land and built big houses. Then some of their wise men came and they also talked about Christ and the cross. But their cross looked different and other things were different. They built a house for their Christ-God just over the brook on that high cliff to the north. Several wise men lived there. Watermills were made in the creek at the bottom of the hill. They said the Hill belonged to one man and only he could use it or say who could use it. A lot of trees were cut down. Standing on the hill it was possible to see quite long distances. Much of the Hill had crops growing, cattle and horses grazing on it. Later another group of people came and built bigger houses and made servants of the people who had lived here before. A different person was called 'Lord' of the Hill. All this changing was quite unnecessary.

When these people came who liked to build big houses, of course they wanted to build on the top of the Hill. They did not have the good wisdom of not building on the summit. Especially they forgot how stupid it was to build where there was no water. The gods were offended. Two of the big houses were burned down in big fires.

Now the Hill looks at the people living on the side of the Hill, though not on top. What will they do, the Hill wonders?

The Wisdom of the Hill is that where people live is not a space to be filled, it is a place to be used; the place is not any building: it is the Hill. The Place on the Hill has a history as long as men and women have lived here. The Hill has been associated with domestic life, growing food, husbandry, birth and death, spiritual search, druidic, celtic, roman, benedictine, puritan, franciscan; intellectual search, botanical, agricultural, historical, language, the arts, and above all the Hill has ever been a place of watching and expectation.

WATCH

Looking towards the past persuades the ongoing use of space: watching towards the future will choose a progressive use of place. The former use of the Hill, whether ancient or recent, shows us a continuity of the human search for meaning nurturing a watch for the future.

As each sunrise brings a new day; so each day brings new needs, new opportunities and shows new ways, for those who choose life on the hill and those who stay a while. *f*