

Extract from:

## **The Village that Died for England**

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### Chapter 9, The Squire's Last Stand

SHORTLY AFTER THE Armistice of November 1918, there was amused speculation in the *Tank Corps Journal* about possible 'uses for tanks in peace time': farmers might put them into service as tractors or threshing machines; they might be redeployed as trouser presses, or used by the post office to deliver its notoriously slow telegrams. Some post-war showman should suspend a tank in the air, attach seats to its rotating tracks, and charge sixpence a ride on the 'Tank Roundabout'.

The Tank Corps had been known from the start for its 'Esprit de Tank', but its demobilised veterans really did make ingenious attempts to cash in on their redundant but still charismatic machines. The *Tank Corps Journal* published a verse tribute to Major Moffat of Thames Ditton, a veteran who had placed an advertisement in *The Times*, announcing his plans to set up 'joy-ride tanks' at a seaside resort and inviting 'several Ex Tank Corps Officers or others with capital' to join him in this experimental enterprise. So the tank, which in some versions is said to have been first inspired by the sight of the big wheel at Earls Court, finally proved its affinity with the vulgar exhilarations of Weymouth Sands.

Meanwhile Army manoeuvres constituted one of the big public attractions of those post-war years, proving that tanks could be compelling even in their absence. In September 1923, when the Battle of Bindon Hill was at full heat, the Press was following manoeuvres on the chalk of the South Downs and paying particular attention to the way in which the military overcame a new 'problem in mimic warfare'. It had been judged impracticable to 'introduce a real tank into the lanes and hedgerows of Sussex', so their place was taken 'by a screen almost like a piece of theatrical scenery, in the creation of which the military has displayed an unsuspected talent for decorative painting'.

These simulated tanks were silent, so the crews were 'required to create a din approximating to that of a tank in action, and for this purpose the Army supplies them with rattles and motor horns and various other noise-creating devices ... There is thus to be seen and heard advancing over the Downs the plain spectacle of a painted screen, borne by a party of men creating many varieties of din supplied by nature and artifice.' The *Sunday Times* admitted that the result was not at all 'like a herd of elephants', in the simile said to have been used by one tank officer as he sailed into battle during the war, but the show was energetically presented nonetheless: 'While apologetically grinning at the painted pretence, Tommy conscientiously and vociferously fulfils his instructions to sound like a tank.'

Howe sound he may have been on elephants, Herbert Weld had never really grasped the imaginative force of the tank. As he looked out over his estate from Lulworth Castle, he had seen the ironclad engines parked on his land only as mechanical despoilers: the very opposite of anything that might be counted patriotic or cultured. But although it was partly thanks to base economic pragmatism that the tanks held their ground at Lulworth, they also demonstrated a far more positive power of attraction. This was already evident by August 1923, when an officer at Bovington – the one who described Bindon Hill as a natural firing butt – informed the *Bournemouth Daily Echo* that holidaymakers had found the tanks at Lulworth 'an additional attraction to the natural holiday charms of the district', and that the firing range was already drawing quite a crowd: 'Recently, while a demonstration was in progress the crowd of trippers watching it became so large that two lorry loads of troops had to be sent to Lulworth from Bovington to help in forming a cordon to keep them out of danger.' Herbert Weld replied bluntly

that while 'a few trippers might be attracted by an occasional tank demonstration ... the vast majority of holiday visitors would prefer that these displays should take place elsewhere'. But he was to be defeated as the tank went on to establish itself as a genuinely popular tourist attraction.

By the mid-Twenties the main camp at Bovington had acquired some of the features of a true historical site. No longer just an eyesore of mud, Nissen huts and rusting hulks, 'Tintown' was starting to claim a cultural significance of its own. Most of the tanks that had been brought back from the Western Front to litter the heath at Bovington were broken up for scrap metal, but a number were identified as interesting examples for early design and set aside for preservation. By November 1919, the *Tanks Corps Journal* was describing what it called a 'Tank Museum': 'In a small railed off enclosure near the Tank Schools there is a very interesting collection of Tanks, every type being represented from the Mk.I to the latest infantry carrier. "Little Willie", the original experimental tank, made in the early days, is also present.'

Visiting Bovington in 1923, Rudyard Kipling is said to have remarked on these rusting hulks, suggesting that they should at least be housed under a roof. Soon afterwards, they were moved to an open-sided shed in the Driving and Maintenance School, which made occasional use of them as educational curiosities. By 1926, the redesignation of this collection of rescued scrap-iron was complete:

Those who knew Bovington in 1919 and 1920 will remember the mass of derelict tanks which at that time strewed the heath around the Camp. These have mostly been converted into scrap and removed, and the heath has, in parts at least, resumed its native bleakness. There is, however, still a small patch immediately north of the Driving and Maintenance School which is reminiscent of those days. It is an area of about an acre surrounded by a broken fence, and contains the remains of some twenty-six tanks. Blackberries grow among them in profusion, and often a rabbit may be found. In wet weather it is partly a lake. This is the Tank Museum.

As support grew in the villages, the tank park over at Lulworth emerged as a place of surreal dynamism where onlookers could cheer as the habituated orders of the ancient regime were affronted. Long before the Franklin Viewpoint was built, the tank park had become a popular roadside attraction, a fairground full of bangs and smoke set off against the static tranquillity of the deer park on the other side of Herbert Weld's wall. Here was avant-garde action and excitement rather than landscaped privacy, church and poetic contemplation of trees.

The tank park placed a rival bid for all the qualities that had previously belonged on the other side of Herbert Weld's wall. Lulworth Park could appeal to the nation's sense of heritage, but the tank would upstage it as the futuristic spirit of progress – a vanguard force blasting its way through the idylls of class power. It could be embraced as a great inconveniencer of squires, a breaker of deference, and an excellent machine for affronting self-appointed spokesmen of 'local opinion' like Mr Rayner Goddard KC.

The park might still be presented as the organic centre of the agricultural round, but the tanks added their own explosive displays to the dwindled calendar of rustic festivity. The picturesque appreciation of the Dorset coast had been set on its modern course by George III, the 'patriot king'; but, as the proudest British invention of the Great War, the new war machine had more recently also been hailed as a 'patriot tank'. This had been part of Lieutenant-Colonel Broad's case for the Lulworth gunnery school at the Inquiry of 1925, when he described the tank not as a bloodthirsty monster but as 'a great saver of life', which made it possible for twenty well-trained and protected soldiers to do a job that had previously demanded two hundred far more dangerously exposed ones.

The tank even commandeered the paraphernalia of the Royal Visit. King George V was Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Tank Corps, and when he visited Bovington in April 1928 he went over to the gunnery range at Lulworth, where he watched various displays before himself donning 'the distinctive headdress of the Tank Corps', clambered into a tank and started blasting away at Bindon Hill. Lulworth Castle had once provided refuge for a frightened French monarch, but the gunnery school had its exotic foreign visitors too. In March 1928, King Amanullah and Queen Surayya of Afghanistan were welcomed to England on a state visit. Surviving film shows these remote and long-suffering monarchs proceeding through a grimly metallic England full of war machines and armament factories, with the Grand National and Greenwich Observatory thrown in for light relief. King Amanullah tries out a semi-automatic rifle at the BSA factory in Birmingham. He drives a new Rolls Royce at the factory in Derby and inspects warships at Portsmouth. On 20 March, the party came to the gunnery school at Lulworth, where they watched an old Mark V Star tank crash through a bush in a primitive demonstration of cross-country versatility. The King of Afghanistan then climbed into a modern Vickers tank for a ride.

As it trailed clouds of populist glory over the slopes and heaths of Dorset, the tank founded a new fellowship of the underdog and proved that patriotism need not be tied to a patrician imagery of hedgerows, chalk and turf. Brow-beaten trippers and anti-picturesque locals alike were welcome to embrace the modernist imagery of the new Behemoth. The tank park offered a way of winning the rural class struggle by means other than those sanctioned by the progressive theorists of political emancipation. As for Mr Weld's sadly disturbed eighteenth-century park, the literateurs of Tintown knew how to wring a joke from the conflict between the tank park and that place over the wall. One ditty in the *Tank Corps Journal*, printed a few weeks before a 'futurist' ode beginning 'Crash ... Rattle', was called 'We'll All Go A-Tanking today'. It imagined tanks male and female coquetting like promenading paramours as they trundled around in their 'tank park', eventually falling upon each other with clanking intimacy to beget that characteristic vehicle of modern tourism, 'a Ford'. A photograph from a few years later, perhaps 1928, goes even further; it shows a tank demonstrating its superior powers against the towers of a mock, but decidedly Lulworth-like, castle.

### **The Curse of Tutankhamun**

Mr Herbert Weld could ignore much of this gathering trend as he sat in his lofty castle, studying interim reports of the excavation he was funding at the Babylonian site of ancient Kish, or writing articles about the waters of the Blue Nile and their potential for irrigation purposes. After weighing up the likely Egyptian response to the Sudanese exploitation of the waters on which both countries depended, he suggested, with a sweep of his explorer's hand, that the best outcome would probably be to take a sizeable area of Uganda and create a 'separate administrative unit', to be governed with due Egyptian involvement.

By the end of that year, however, this man, who thought nothing of rearranging Africa with a few confident strokes of the imperialist pen, had been overtaken by such a catastrophic sequence of events that, sixty years later, some of East Lulworth's village elders were still reaching into the supernatural for explanations. It was said that the castle ghost, known as 'the Grey Lady', had been much seen in those years, an omen that boded ill for the Welds, and that Herbert was the victim of the 'Curse of Tutankhamun'. This mystic phenomenon, which became something of a popular cult in the Twenties, had already placed an occult charge in the mosquito bite that finished off Lord Carnarvon, and sent a python into Howard Carter's Egyptian residence to devour his pet canary. It now came for the archaeological squire of Lulworth on the mistaken

assumption that he also had been present when Carter's expedition opened Tutankhamun's tomb in 1923.

At the end of 1928 Weld's young wife Theodora suddenly fell ill and died on Christmas Eve. Stricken by this unexpected blow, the squire had other difficulties too. He had spent large amounts of money modernising the castle, restoring its furniture and fitting it with the latest in central heating, but tax and death duties were pressing. As a staunch Tory, Herbert Weld knew that Lloyd George and his Liberal government 'had the honour of being the pioneer' of the 'extortionate taxation' that had 'denuded the country of its most cherished treasures and bled agriculture white by cutting off at its source its necessary capital'. And now that Stanley Baldwin's Tory government had given way to the second Labour administration of Ramsay MacDonald, he could only regret that there was 'no prospect in the future of any government action that will not be for the worse'. In April 1929, arrangements were made for Sotheby's to dispose of both the early fourteenth-century Luttrell Psalter, which the Weld trustees had deposited with the British Museum some thirty years before, and the fifteenth-century Bedford Book of Hours which was also among the most valuable heirlooms of Lulworth Castle.

This must have seemed trouble enough, but the Great War had also planted the wholly unexpected 'booby trap' into which Lulworth's retired big game hunter was to fall only three days before those famous illuminated manuscripts were due to go under the hammer on 29 July 1929. As a result of an unexpected 'legal pitfall' discovered by the British Museum's lawyers, Herbert was informed that all the heirlooms and 'chattels' in Lulworth Castle were apparently the property of Mrs Mary Angela Noyes, wife of the poet Alfred Noyes.

As Mr Weld pointed out, this outcome was the very opposite of that intended by the ancestors. In 1869, the furniture, pictures, manuscripts and books had been settled 'for the use and enjoyment of the person entitled to the hereditaments in such a way that they should always go as heirlooms with the Castle', but, as was now discovered, an old law upset this precautionary measure, demanding that the heirlooms go to the heir mentioned in the entail who first reached the age of twenty-one. The heir in question had been killed in action during the War, dying, as Herbert explained, 'with three lives between him and the enjoyment of the property' and his widow, now remarried, was Mrs Alfred Noyes. Weld took his case through the courts, but his Appeal was rejected only a few hours before the sale. So he lost his heirlooms and his right to dispose of the 'chattels' in the castle – including many pieces of furniture that he claimed to have 'rescued out of old lumber rooms' and restored at a cost of thousands, only to find that they too formed part of 'the "inheritance" of Mrs Noyes'.

Colonel Sir Joseph Weld remembered an uncle telling him that Herbert could probably have come to terms with Mrs Noyes, but that this possibility was snuffed out by his 'terribly rude' sisters, who wrote 'the most disgusting letters' cursing this accidental heiress. Herbert returned to Lulworth in dismay and, with the taxman pressing, instructed Savills to sell approximately a third of the Weld estate at auction: East Lulworth would be retained, but offers were to be invited on numerous cottages and farms in outlying villages like Wool, Winfrith Newburgh and East Chaldon, and great tracts of farmland reaching right up on to the downs and cliffs west of Lulworth Cove.

Further catastrophe struck on the morning of Thursday, 29 August 1929. As the story goes, Weld had just finished breakfasting in the castle with his secretary and his Scottish estate manager. They may have discussed the approaching sale, reported in that very morning's edition of *The Times*. But their conversation was suddenly interrupted by a servant girl, Fanny Simons, who had looked up to see flames pouring out from a top floor window in one of the castle's towers. The

neighbourhood was alerted by a footman, who rang the medieval time-bell at the top of the castle, and Weld joined his hastily arrayed estate workers in trying to confine the blaze to its source in a linen room. When the fire extinguishers ran out they formed a line up the staircase and tried pass up water in buckets, but 'the smoke was too dense and Mr Weld and those with him had to retreat'.

The fire brigades arrived from Dorchester, Weymouth, Swanage and Poole, but they too were thwarted. The water, drawn from a tank under the rose garden, ran out just as the blaze had been brought under control, and fire broke through again while nearby wells were found and quickly exhausted. As a fire chief would later explain, 'every pond and pool in the district' was tried without avail. A fire engine sent down to Lulworth Cove to get sea water got stuck in a ditch, and an attempt was made to get a continuous hose up from the sea by stationing three fire engines along the road to Arish Mell Gap – a 'policy of desperation' that was thwarted by low pressure and also by the fact that the different fire brigades were equipped with non-standardised hoses that could not be connected together.

So the castle burned. Two firemen were rushed to hospital in Dorchester with terrible injuries: they had suffered such a shower of red-hot lead from the collapsing roof that 'their shoulders looked as if they were wearing an extra cape of metal over their uniforms'. The famous 'King's Room', which was reported to have been 'one of the most complete apartments of period furniture in the world' was destroyed early on – a reporter claimed to have stood in the hall and watched the magnificent four poster bed in which George III had slept blazing like 'a bonfire'. By the end of the day the whole building had been gutted.

All sorts of people rallied round to join the estate workers in rescuing the contested heirlooms and chattels: Roman Catholic priests, holiday-makers, and the 'whole village of East Lulworth' led by Mr Doddington, who would later provide Weld with a bed for the night. Valiant assistance was also provided by thirty-six Girl Guides from Bournemouth who happened to be camping in Lulworth Park. They were reported to have distinguished themselves by bravely 'dashing in' to carry out books and 'light articles of furniture and personal belongings'. As the Captain of their troops reported, 'Our girls have been absolutely splendid ... They gave chocolate to the firemen and now they are doing picket duty by the salvaged goods.'

The *Daily Mirror* took an aerial photograph of the smoking castle and spread it over the entire front page, and most papers featured a picture of Herbert Weld, the distraught 78-year-old squire. There he was, from the *Daily Herald* to the *Daily Telegraph*, with his peaked yachting cap and a monocle firmly gripped in one eye. But if some papers used a library picture, left over from their coverage of Cowes, others showed the elderly squire of Lulworth on the fatal day itself. *The Times* caught him seated in plus fours on a Regency chair with rescued furniture, paintings and tapestries heaped on the grass around him, staring ahead as the blaze brought exquisite eighteenth-century ceilings crashing down on three centuries of Weld history. According to the *Western Gazette*, he stood 'a little apart from the crowd that had gathered, watching the flames enveloping the upper parts of the building, and declining to listen to those who, solicitous of his welfare, urged him to come farther away from the spray of the hose, the smoke and falling stones'. The *Bournemouth Daily Echo* went further, suggesting that 'Perhaps the most pathetic sight was the lonely figure of Mr Herbert Weld, the owner, looking on resignedly at the gradual destruction of his home ... When I saw him he was standing alone ... smoking a cigarette and looking up wistfully at the belching flames and smoke.' In later paragraphs, sub-titled 'Mr Weld's Emotion', it claimed that Weld had to be 'dragged by Girl Guides from the steps of the castle up which he kept running as the flames grew greater. "My castle", he cried despairingly – 'it is ruined!'"

Driven back on to their guidebooks, the reporters claimed, repeatedly, that the house had been built in the patriotic year of 1588, and many insisted, quite wrongly, that the Welds had been there ever since. They counted up the Royal visits, and mentioned the special interest of the chapel, from which furniture and even the altar had been removed when the fire threatened to spread. As a Labour paper, the *Daily Herald* was inclined to stress 'the tremendous efforts' of the fire brigades, but there was no hint of resentment in its observation that Lulworth Castle had been 'in the same family for centuries', and it infiltrated no ironic inflection into the voice of the neighbour who explained that 'People in the village are very much upset by the calamity, as Mr Weld is a deeply-loved personality. He lost his wife only a while ago.' The Dorset County Chronicle contrasted the 'thrilling scenes' of the conflagration with the happier memory of the last big event at Lulworth Park: a grand fete, which the South Dorset Conservative and Unionist Association had held here two summers previously. 'Then the chief figures in a wonderful scene in front of the Castle were Mr Weld, a most hospitable and kindly host, and his wife, a gracious and charming hostess.'

A few people in East Lulworth still remember that ruinous day. Gazing off into the middle distance, they see bedding being hurled from the upper windows, and blue and gold curtains fluttering in the smoke-filled wind. They remember the obliterated ballroom, the famous King's bed, canopied, as one recalls, to look 'like St Pauls', and bloodsoaked bandages scattered on the lawn after the injured firemen had been taken away. Some remember the fire as the 'end of a dynasty', while others report a more personal sense of loss, like the former housemaid who remarked 'I felt it was my home being burned.' One man is still a little ashamed of the 'sheer relief' with which he realised he would 'not have to deliver coal to the castle any more'.

Letters testify to the pious spirit in which the Welds sought consolation in the unknowable nature of the Lord's ways, and also to the shock felt by local estate workers. One missive, addressed in large copperplate hand to 'Mrs Weld' by a retainer called Sargeant, seems to sum up the sense of fatal ruin:

I feel this terrible tragedy most keenly, for my whole life has been devoted to the service of the family, and I love every bit of the Estate. It is all like parting with my very own! I had intended to write a week or two ago, to offer you and young Mr Weld my deep sympathy at the most unexpected tragedy of the Heirlooms, which, with the parting with so much more of the Estate by sale, was a great sorrow to me, and now comes this further crushing blow! I feel deeply for you and all the family – poor Mr Herbert Weld – it is too tragic for words ... We have frequently said in the office that by the time young Mr Weld succeeded there would be nothing left but the Mansion and contents and now even these have gone!

There is no evidence to suggest that the fire had any cause other than the one Herbert Weld offered the *Daily Mail*: 'I think that an electric light wire fused. For many years the castle had had its own supply.' But the elderly squire had suffered an extraordinary coincidence of disasters, and it is hardly surprising that the memory of the fire is still attended by rumour. One since-retired worker in the castle's restoration expressed the suspicion he shared with his colleagues: 'Weldy probably set fire to it,' he opined, adding that Tory squires were more or less above the law in those days, and he must have needed the insurance money. Colonel Sir Joseph Weld, who was to inherit the estate on Herbert's death, would give no quarter to this scurrilous idea, but he remembered being told that the insurance assessor who worked on the Lulworth claim (and who was said to have been on the scene surprisingly soon after the fire broke out) was in later years sentenced to the maximum term for fire-raising offences committed in league with the corrupt head of the London Fire Brigade. Colonel Sir Joseph added that the castle had been seriously underinsured,

for £37,000, as he remembered, while the lowest estimate for its restoration came to £120,000. So the money was used to pay off other debts.

### Tanks in the Park

It was on the day Herbert Weld's castle burned that the tanks made their triumphant entrance into Lulworth Park. Weld had wasted no time alerting the fire brigades of South Dorset by telephone, but the Royal Tank Corps also received a call for urgent assistance. The detachment of fourteen men, who hurried round from the gunnery school, included the man who was then chief gunnery instructor, Colonel Carter, and also Major Darwell. The *Universe*, a Catholic paper, was pleased to see these black-bereted men working in co-operation with the Girl Guides. 'With flames raging around them, the men threw books from the library shelves out of the window, and the girls carried them away to safety.'<sup>32</sup> The pictorial Press also gave prominence to these tank soldiers. Not content with printing a photo of two black-bereted soldiers standing guard over salvaged valuables on the lawn, the *Illustrated London News* also featured the armoured car in which they had arrived – a swart, large-wheeled metal machine parked on the grass in front of the smoking castle. The *Graphic* miscaptioned its picture, describing the vehicle as 'a tank'. Like the Girl Guides, the tank men were later commended by the head of the Dorchester fire brigade. It is reasonable to assume they were also included in the profuse thanks that Herbert Weld extended to all his helpers through the local papers.

As that emblematic picture demonstrated, the Royal Tank Corps had finally penetrated the deer park; and on Saturday, 31 August, Mr Weld had further reason to be grateful to its soldiers as they joined him in defending his gutted castle against a horde of invading trippers. It had been bad enough on the day of the fire, when crowds had turned up to watch the disaster. The *Bournemouth Daily Echo's* reporter had declared 'the scene now is one that would impress a cinema audience': sightseers had come from all over the district, and hundreds of cars and motor-cycles were parked in the immediate vicinity of the castle. These uninvited spectators stood 'gazing in silent and sympathetic wonder', finding the heat so intense that many were reported to have discarded their outer garments.

By the weekend the castle had been wired off behind 'Danger' signs, partly on account of the still unopened strong room exposed at its centre, but the sightseers came rushing back in even greater numbers. Herbert Weld had retreated to London, leaving his abandoned castle in the hands of the Royal Tank Corps, which placed sentries at all the entrances to Lulworth Park, and also at the various houses, inns and village halls into which the salvaged valuables had been crammed. These guards refused entry to the gawping masses, and evicted the considerable number who scaled the park wall in order to catch a glimpse of the smouldering ruins. Mr Weld's miseries can scarcely have been mitigated by the reminder, provided by a correspondent to *The Times*, that Gainsborough had visited Lulworth Castle on one of his sketching tours and 'found inspiration in its neighbourhood for one of the best known of his landscapes', namely 'The Market Cart'.

The disputed heirlooms and 'chattels' had been burned free of any obligation, legal or otherwise, that might tie them to Lulworth Castle, and more sales were to follow as Mrs Noyes exercised her claim – including one in which the Welds of Lulworth felt it wise to employ an anonymous agent to buy back certain ancestral portraits 'as the Noyes were certain to be there and would run us up if they saw a member of the family bidding'. Herbert Weld's aggrieved account of his fate, published in *Country Life*, drew counterfire from a distant relation who, as one of Mrs Alfred Noyes's trustees, was plainly incensed by his claim that Lulworth Castle had been 'stripped' of its treasures and furnitures: 'Discussion of personal affairs in the Press would, I am sure, be as

distasteful to my cousin, Mr Herbert Weld, as to myself.'

'It will be bad if it is left to bide,' so one old villager had remarked of the ruin; but Weld was not a man to give up easily. When full-scale restoration proved impractical, he scaled down his plans and tried to have an apartment built for himself in the relatively undamaged basement rooms beneath the castle terrace. He is said to have spent some £3,000 having a new floor laid and fitting the place out with fireplaces and doors, so there was never any question of his 'kennelling' in those dark rooms like the 'worthless Arabs' he had once seen squatting in forgotten ancient Greek tombs in the Cyrene. But this scheme came to nothing too. The builders had tried to stop the rain leaking into this opulent bunker but no amount of pitch would do the job: Herbert reputedly stepped into several inches of water on his first visit, and promptly went off to rent himself a house in West Lulworth. From there, he carried on with plans to increase the sorely taxed Weld estate's income from the holiday trade. He opened fee-charging public lavatories and, in 1930, installed the never less than hugely profitable car park above Lulworth Cove. He ran a lucrative double trade down at Arish Mell Gap – opening it to visitors who probably didn't even notice that he was also selling off the scenic shingle to builders by the truckload.

Lulworth Park declined gently through the Thirties. Many estate workers lost their jobs at this time and moved on, sometimes with considerable bitterness; and the park lost much of its well-tended grandeur. Peacocks still wandered about, but many of the more opulent features – the great walks and wooded vistas, the richly flowered lawns – were in decline by July 1939, when the Dorset Federation of Women's Institutes mounted an ambitious historical pageant in Lulworth Park. 'The Spirit of Dorset', which reads like a dramatised Wessex variant of Puck of Pook's Hill, was enacted on the tree-lined lawns behind the ruined castle, and Thomas Weld's chapel was incorporated as a charming background feature.

Set in a Celtic hilltop village the most revealing episode showed the subjection of Celtic Dorset by Vespasian's Roman forces. It opened with a pastoral view of Durotrigean women spinning, scraping hides and potting while their men stand about slinging stones. Two huntsmen then enter with a stag, which is placed on the village altar stone and dedicated by a Druid to the 'Great Ones'. The men dance round the altar stone, and a procession of girls carries branches of may through the scene; but this archaic idyll collapses as the Roman assault begins. As true Dorset men, the *Durotriges* would never have surrendered were it not for a low act of treachery, but their chief is slain, and the invaders enter the fort to offer the 'men of this Downland' the prosperity that only the Roman state can bring: 'Submit yourselves, and live, free men.' The Druid kneels to pick up a handful of native Dorset earth, which he hands to the Roman General in a gesture of submission. Speaking as one true Dorset man to another, the Roman General insists on honouring the British dead; indeed, in a magnanimous gesture, informed like the rest of this episode by Sir Mortimer Wheeler's recent discoveries at Maiden Castle, he urges the survivors to 'Take up your brave dead and bury them beside the gate they have so gallantly defended.'

The pageant was acted by locals organised through Dorset's various Women's Institutes – except, that is, for the victorious Roman soldiers, who were kindly provided by the Commanding Officer of the Lulworth gunnery school. The script leaves no doubt those Romans would eventually be seen to have conquered Old England for the better; and, with the Second World War only a few weeks away, who was to say anything else of the Royal Tank Corps soldiers who played them? By that time, the Lulworth gunnery school was on a new lease, dated from Christmas Day 1937 and extending for ninety-nine years.