

From **Rev. Sabine Baring - Gould's** book entitled **Cliff Castles and Cave Dwellings of Europe**. [Sesley, London, 1911] (Chapter 3).

*[Erratum - in my **Topographies** chapter on my website ([pollfaoitalamh.ie](http://pollfaoitalamh.ie)) Sabine (a man) is quoted as being female. This is incorrect and it was the result of my lack of biographical checking at an early stage of the research project. This correction now needs to be made to my text, as it currently stands online, and also as part of the editing to be done during the final stage of finishing that text].*

### **Souterrains in Cornwall:**

In Cornwall, moreover, there are what are locally called **fogous**. These are either excavated in the rock with passages leading to the sea or to houses, or else they are built of stone slabs standing erect, parallel and covered with other slabs leading to chambers similarly constructed, and all buried under turf or sand. Of the former description there is a very interesting example at **Porthcothan** in **S. Ervan**; of the latter the most remarkable is at **Trelowaren**. The former may have been excavated by smugglers. An interesting account of the excavation of two caves at **Archerfield, in Haddingtonshire**, is given in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for 1909. Both caves are natural, but one had been walled up in front, with a doorway and window and with oven; both had paved hearths in the centre, and there was evidence that they had been tenanted some time after the Roman occupation of Britain, as among the fragments of pottery found was some Samian ware. It would appear that both had been inhabited simultaneously, but not consecutively, for a lengthy period, and no doubt can exist that they were mere rock refuges.

### **Irish Souterrains:**

In a note to the article **[above]** we read: "On the coast of **Island Magee (Ireland)** there is a cave, south of the **Gobbins**, which has been frequently used as a place of refuge. So late as 1798 it was inhabited by outlaws, who constructed a kind of fortification at the entrance, the remains of which still exist." [Footnote: **Cree (J. R.)**, "Excavation of Two Caves," in "**Proceedings of the Soc. of Arch. of Scotland**," Edin., 1909, vol. xliii.]

### **Scottish Souterrains:**

A cave in the Isle of Egg, one of the Hebrides, has a very narrow entrance, through which one can creep only upon hands and knees, but it rises steeply within and soon becomes lofty, and runs into the bowels of the rock for 225 feet. The stony, pebbly bottom of this cavern was for long strewn with the bones of men, women and children, the relics of the ancient inhabitants of, the island, two hundred in number, of whose destruction the following account is given. "The Macdonalds, of the Isle of Egg, a people dependent on Clanranald, had done some injury to the Lord of Macleod. The tradition of the isle says that it was by a personal attack on the chieftain, in which his back was broken; but that of the two other isles bears that the injury was offered by two or three of the Macleods, who, landing upon Egg and behaving insolently towards the islanders, were bound hand and foot, and turned adrift in a boat, which the winds safely conducted to Skye. To avenge the offence given, Macleod sailed with such a body of men as rendered resistance hopeless. The natives, fearing his vengeance, concealed themselves in the cavern; and, after strict search, the Macleods went on board their galleys after doing what mischief they could, concluding the inhabitants had left the isle. But next morning they espied from their vessels a man upon the island, and immediately landing again, they traced his retreat by means of a light snow on the ground to the cavern. Macleod then summoned the subterranean garrison, and demanded that the inhabitants who had offended him should

be delivered up. This was peremptorily refused. The chieftain thereupon caused his people to divert the course of a rill of water, which, falling over the mouth of the cave, would have prevented his purposed vengeance. He then kindled at the entrance of the cavern a large fire, and maintained it until all within were destroyed by suffocation.” [Footnote: **Lockhart's** “Life of Sir Walter Scott,” Edin., 1844, p.285.]

[NB Consider the above reference to a souterrain on Scotland's the Isle of Egg in the context of my article/piece on my website ([pollfaoitalamh.ie](http://pollfaoitalamh.ie)] under the Work Desk Section called ***St. Kilda and the Outer Hebrides to Dingle, the Blaskets and Beyond: Souterrains in the Lives of the Common People and the Words of a Forgotten World***...especially in the context of the word **Scalabhad / Sgalabhad**].

### **Icelandic souterrains**

In Iceland there were underground retreats, as we learn from the **same Saga** (which Icelandic Saga?) that tells us of those in **Aquitaine**. Orvar Odd found a king's daughter concealed in one. So, also, a very large one in Ireland is spoken of in the **Landnama Bok**.

### **Dene Holes (Dane's Holes? or Den Holes?) as English Souterrains, Mines, Quarries or something other?**

In England we have, both in **Essex and in Kent**, subterranean passages and chambers very similar to those described in **Picardy and in Aquitaine**. These also are excavated in the chalk. They are the so-called Dene Holes, of which there are many in **Darenth Wood and near Chislehurst**, and they have given occasion to a lively controversy. Some have supposed them to be retreats of the Druids, some that they were places of refuge during the invasions of the Saxons first, and then of the Danes, and others again contend that they were merely quarries for the excavation of chalk to burn into lime.

***(note that in Irish folklore and place-names we have in some localities the words Dane's Rath used to describe ringforts and Dane's Holes used for souterrains).***

Here is an account of the **Dene Hole at Chislehurst** by Mr. W. J. Nichols. [Footnote: **Nichols (W. J.)**, “The Chislehurst Caves,” **Journal of the Archaeological Association**, Dec. 1903.] “At the foot of the hill is a gap, which is the present entrance to the caves. A guide meets us here, who, unlocking a door, and switching on the electric light, introduces the visitor to a gallery or tunnel, about 150 feet long, 10 feet to 12 feet high, and with a width of 12 feet to 15 feet, narrowing to about 7 feet at the roof. This, and the galleries so far explored, have been cut through the chalk bed, at a depth of about 6 feet below the Thanet sand which covers it. At the end of the gallery, extending both right and left, are passages of like character. These again open into others so numerous that the visitor is fairly bewildered, and loses all idea of the direction in which he is travelling. The effect of the coloured electric lamps on the old chalk walling is remarkably beautiful. Proceeding on our way we get beyond the range of the electric lamps. Here candles or hand-lamps are lighted; and we pass, in Cimmerian gloom, through a succession of galleries of various dimensions, some of which, being only 4 feet wide and 5 feet high, are possibly of earlier construction than those already described. There is one gallery of the last-mentioned height and width 63 feet long, with several sharp turns which formerly terminated in a chamber about 12 feet high and 10 feet wide, and a like length, and near it is a seat cut into an angle of the walling. At no great distance from this chamber and near a Dene-hole shaft is a short gallery, at the end of which is a shaft originally level with the flooring, but now bricked round and further protected by an iron cover. On removing the cover and lowering a lamp, a well of excellent workmanship is discovered. Owing to the quantity of material thrown down from time to time by explorers, its present depth is no more than 43 feet. Further progress is made, and presently we notice a streak of daylight some distance ahead; here we find that we have reached the foot of a shaft 85 feet deep, which, though

now partly covered in, had its mouth in what is at the present time the garden of a modern villa.”

There are **numerous other Dene Holes or Danes' Pits at East Tilbury, Crayford, and Little Thurrock**. As to the theory that they were places of Druidical worship, we may dismiss it as not deserving serious consideration.

At East Tilbury the entrance to the Danes' pit is from above, by narrow passages that widen and communicate with several apartments, all of regular forms. One of these pits consists of a shaft descending to chambers arranged like a six-foiled flower. The shaft is 3 feet in diameter and 85 feet deep. This may be likened to one at **Doüe-la-Fontaine (Maine et Loire)**, where a descent is made under a private house into an area from which radiate on all sides chambers, some of which contain tombs.

That these Dene Holes were used as hiding-places when the sails of the Danish Vikings appeared on the horizon is probable enough, but originally they were chalk quarries—some very ancient—for British coins have been found in them. The existence of old lime-kilns near the **Chislehurst caves** places their origin beyond a doubt. Chalk was largely exported in early times from the Thames to Zealand, whence it was passed through the Low Countries and used in dressing the fields. Altars to Nethalennia, the patroness of the chalk quarries, have been found in the sand on the coast of Zealand; some bear votive inscriptions from dealers in British chalk, and **Pliny**, writing of the finer quality of chalk (argentina) employed by silversmiths, obtained from pits sunk like wells, with narrow mouths, to the depth of a hundred feet, whence they branch out like the adits of mines, adds, “**Hoc maxime Britannia utitur.**” [Footnote: **Roach Smith**, *Collectanea Antiqua*, vi. p. 243, “**British Archaeological Assoc. Journal**,” N.S., ix.-x. (1903 and 1904).]

**Addendum:**

Are certain **subterranea in Yorkshire, England**, as described in the article referenced below, classifiable as souterrains? See **Raistrick, A. and Holmes, P.F.** (1962) The Archaeology of Malham Moor in **Field Studies**, Vol.1, no.4, pp. 14-17. If not, then why not?