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EXCAVATION OF THE IRON AGE CAMP AT SQUERRYES, WESTERHAM

By the late NANCY PIERCY FOX, B.A., F.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

It was learnt in 1960 that a big tree-felling programme was in progress at Squerries, Westerham; and it was decided to excavate the Iron Age Camp, following a visit by myself and Mr. R. F. Jessup, F.S.A., in the late autumn. Excavation commenced on 29th March, 1961, under the auspices of the Kent Archæological Society. Permission for the work was given by the landowner, Major J. B. O'B. Ward; the Forestry Commission, who had leased the land; and by the Ministry of Works, who made a grant towards the cost. The Kent Archæological Society also made a grant. I was assisted by Dr. M. W. Thompson of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments; Mr. P. J. Tester, F.S.A.; Dr. D. L. Clarke; and Mr. D. B. Kelly, B.A., A.M.A.

THE SITE

Before the excavation commenced, the interior of the Camp, which has an area of about 18 acres¹ and which is sited on the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand, had been cleared of trees and dense undergrowth as part of a tree-felling programme on the Squerries Estate. This was a tremendous help to the excavation, and visitors were fortunate in being able to see the Camp as a whole for the first time in many centuries.

Squerries Camp is sited on a hump-backed headland joined to the main escarpment of the Hythe Beds by an isthmus or neck of flat ground. The defences were planned to suit the topography—those across the flat neck or isthmus being different in character from the defences around the headland, but both used the sandstone and chert of the Hythe Beds for defensive cresting and revetting. Two banks and one ditch cross the flat isthmus to form a strategic defence of military value. Around the headland a steep scarp slope was cut and revetted. This slope continued without interruption into a steep ditch with an outer bank. The outer bank commands the lower slopes of the headland.

Sections were cut through both types of defence—the isthmus section being supervised by Dr. D. L. Clarke, and the headland section by Mr. P. J. Tester and Mr. D. B. Kelly.

¹ N. Piercy Fox, *Arch. Cant.*, lxxi (1957), 243-5.

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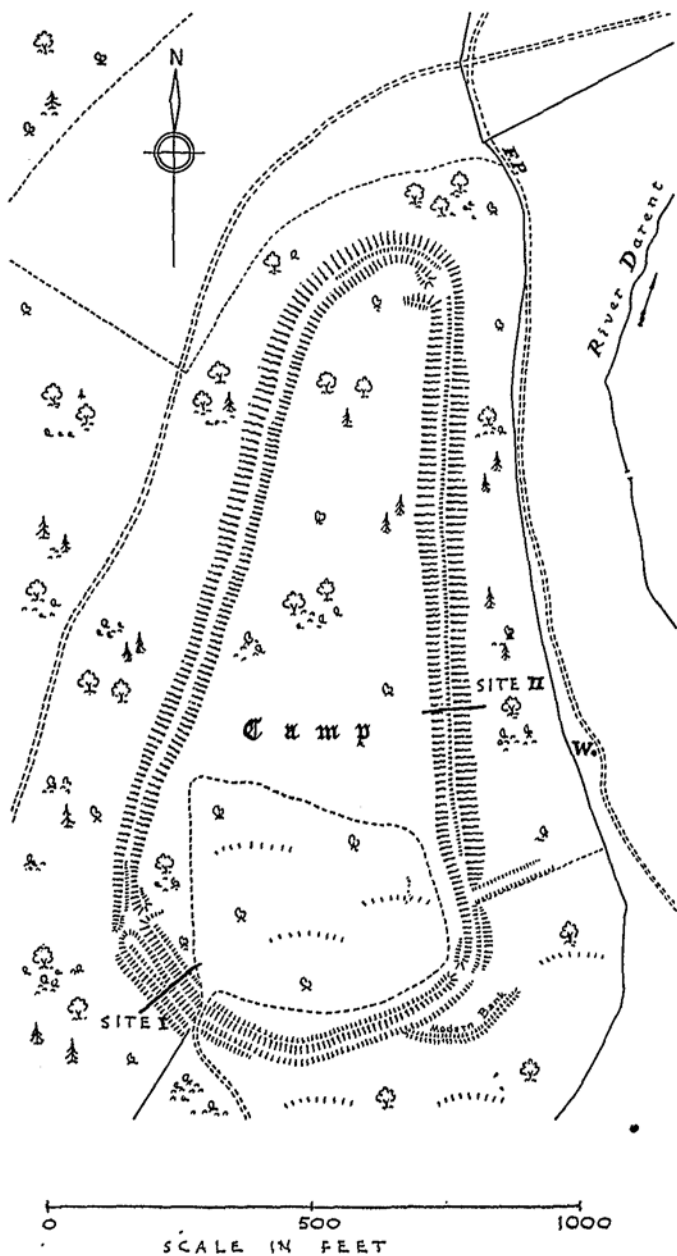


FIG. 1. Plan of Camp.

SITE II

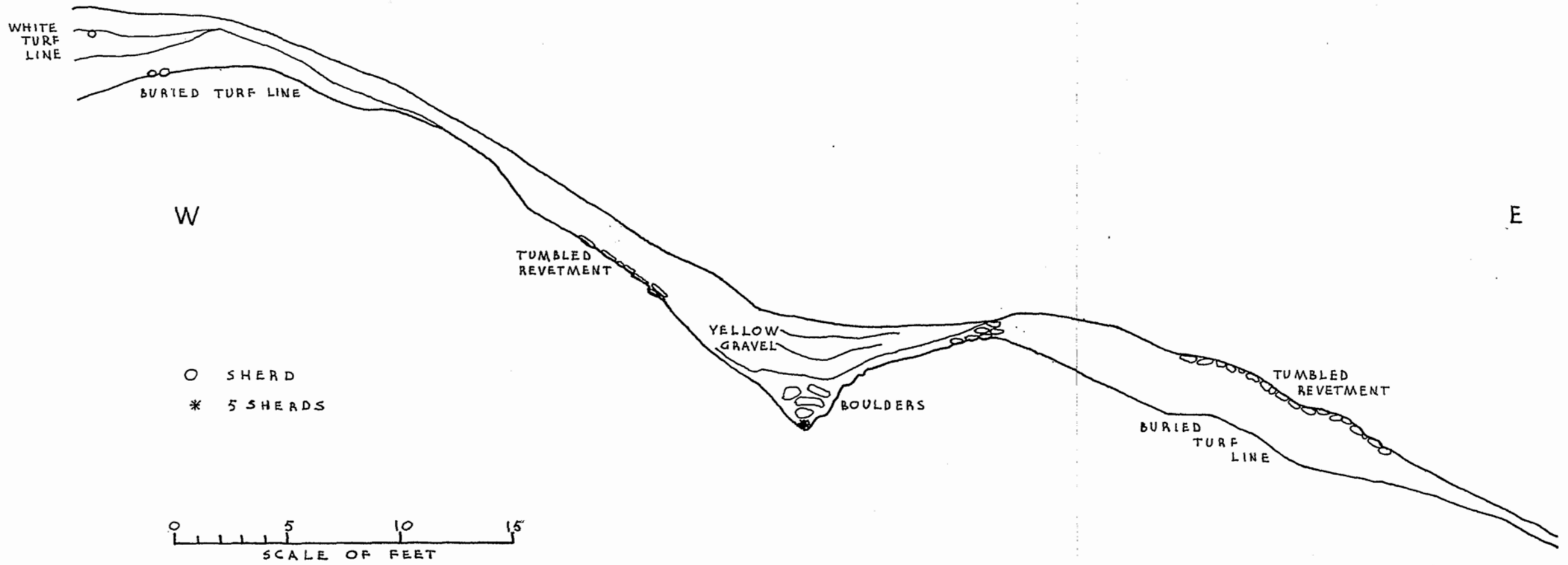


FIG. 3. Section through Site II.

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THE EXCAVATION

The ramparts were built of yellow sandy gravel containing stones.

Site I—The Isthmus

The section cut through the defences showed a V-shaped ditch 28 ft. wide, cut to a depth of 9 ft. below the natural level and two banks, with revetting and cresting. The present height of the inner bank is 4 ft., and the outer bank 3 ft. above the natural level. The distance between crests is 44 ft. There were no post-holes—turf was used as bonding. There was tumbled revetting and cresting in the ditch. The inner bank showed a prominent white turf line.

Site II—The Headland

The section showed a small bank above a steeply-cut V-shaped ditch. Below this was the second, much greater, outer bank. The steep slope or the crest above had been revetted with slabs of stone. The ditch contained tumbled revetting. Five sherds were found in the very bottom of the ditch on the natural surface in this section, and these five sherds could date the defences, which are all of one period. The dating of the sherds is unfortunately not easy—Professor Sheppard Frere suggests the first century B.C. Several Iron Age sherds were found in an extension of this section, and medieval sherds from an extension of the isthmus section.

The paucity of finds posed the question where to look next for datable evidence? The gateways were not yet accessible for excavation, and in view of the tree-planting programme of the Forestry Commission, it was decided to strip a large area of the interior of the Camp mechanically. Nothing whatsoever was found, and the clean sand was seen undisturbed over the whole area examined. This suggests that the Camp was built as a stronghold, but very little used.

Finally, an area adjoining the spring below the Camp was examined, and this site produced a few Romano-British sherds and a small quantity of medieval sherds, but nothing of Iron Age date.

Summarizing the results, we now know that the defences were of two types—a bi-vallate system on the flat isthmus constructed by throwing the spoil upwards from the ditch; and, around the headland, a steep scarp slope with ditch and outer bank constructed by throwing the spoil downwards from the scarp slope and the ditch. Because of the outer bank, this system can also be described as bi-vallate.

Both types of defence were laid out as one whole and may belong to the Second B phase of the Iron Age. The important Westerham hoard of Iron Age gold coins was found near the Camp. The hoard contained Gallo-Belgic A and C coins, and the later British A (Westerham type) coins which date the hoard to the period c. 90 B.C.

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The period of Squerryes is the Second B phase of the Iron Age, and there is no Belgic influence. It was probably built by Iron A or B groups coming from North Gaul and settling in Kent. It is probably just a little later than Keston.

APPENDIX

POLLEN ANALYSIS

By PROFESSOR J. W. DIMBLEBY, B.Sc., M.A., D.Phil.

The place chosen for sampling was in a section of the inner bank on the south-east side of the Camp. There was an immature humus-iron podzol preserved beneath about 20 in. of orange gravel. The surface of the buried soil contained numerous flecks of charcoal.

A series of samples was taken at one-inch intervals, starting in the base of the bank and extending through the buried surface down to the C horizon of the buried soil. Samples were analysed as follows:

- (a) The three lowermost samples in the base of the bank;
- (b) The three uppermost samples in the buried soil;
- (c) Thereafter alternate samples (i.e. at 2-in. intervals) down to a depth of 15 in. below the buried surface.

Pollen was present only in low quantities, except for the buried surface itself; even here there was a great preponderance of fern spores which, being relatively resistant to decomposition, tend to be proportionately over-represented in soils of high microbiological activity.

The pollen in the buried surface falls into two main categories:

- (a) Cultivation pollen, viz. pollen of grasses (including a trace of cereal pollen) and of weeds of cultivation (Plantain, *Liguliflorae* and others, including nettle);
- (b) Pollen of scrub woodland, mainly hazel, but with some oak and also bracken. The abundant spores of other forms, probably also originate in this vegetation type, though their relative importance is not to be gauged by their percentage.

The likely interpretation of such a pollen spectrum is that cultivation had been taking place in clearings in woodland. This woodland perhaps contained remnants of original high forest, but at this time consisted mainly of hazel, as a result of removal of the overstorey species by fire, grazing, felling, or a combination of all three. It is not possible to estimate the size of the clearings, because the relative proportions of woodland and herbaceous pollen would vary according to the position of the point of sampling, whether it was central or marginal in the clearing. This we cannot know.



Photo: Dr. E. V. Piercy Fox

A. Site I, Section of Ramparts.



Photo: Dr. E. V. Piercy Fox

B. Site I, Section of Ditch.



Photo: Dr. E. V. Piercy Fox
A. Site II, Ditch, showing fallen Revetting.



Photo: Dr. E. V. Piercy Fox
B. Site II, steep Bank with Revetting.

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Throughout the analyses the trees represented in the pollen spectra were oak and alder, with a little birch. There was no trace of lime or elm, indicating a date later than Sub-boreal. Though beech was not represented either, a Sub-Atlantic date seems certain, and the high representation of hazel would point to an early stage of that period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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