RESEARCHES AND DISCOVERIES IN KENT

SOME PRE-ROMAN SITES AT CLIFFE

The Middle Acheulian axes and *ficron* found on the north-west foreshore[1] included three axes which were given to the Guildhall Museum, Rochester. Mr D.B. Kelly commented that hand-axes are most commonly found in the gravels of river terraces such as Barnfield pit, Swanscombe, and are normally to be regarded as water-borne debris carried for varying distances over a vast span of years, though at some sites such as Swanscombe and Cuxton they had probably moved not very far. The largest axe in a coloured photograph of the finds appears to have been stained in gravels.

The suggestion that the objects among flints and chalk pebbles originated from the area of the local canal quarry has caused questions concerning the existence of the canal, but it is clear in written evidence.[2] Acheulian hunters in the area could have made hand-axes in a few minutes to cut up their prey. However, no gravels on the upland fringe are mentioned in records. Chalk for reinforcement of sea-walls was obtained from various suppliers before and after the operation of the Cliffe quarry, and in some years the contractors were proprietors of a chalk wharf in Northfleet. Possibly one or more of the axes found on the shore were brought with chalk and flints from upriver sites.

In marsh sites, the unusual fibrous layers under water at N.G.R. TQ 73267798 and 75127789 were compared with Bronze Age debris near Ely and were estimated to have been at O.D. −5 feet.[3] The

[1] *Arch. Cant.*, xcix (1983), 281.

[2] In *Arch. Cant.*, xcix (1983) the dates 1793–1830 were derived from Dr B. Cracknell's unpublished thesis on alluvial marshland of the lower Thames. In the Kent Archives Office, minutes of the Commissioners for Sewers (S/NK SM7–9) refer to the canal in 1793–95 and record from 1795 to the 1820s a man associated with the route as the recipient of contracts to supply chalk to the Commissioners. The quarry and canal were shown on the Tithe Map of 1840.

[3] *Arch. Cant.*, xcix (1983), 282.

comparison with Ely was unfortunate. The O.D. level was derived from a tortuous process of comparing levels of the water table between north-east Cliffe and the nearest reference point of the 1960s, at the Creek. Subsequently the Water Authority revised data for marsh O.D. levels, and the estimate of O.D. −5 feet should be ignored in any re-examination of the layers.

The Iron Age

In the conservation area of the village, a large apparently Celtic stone stood at the southern end until recent years (when it was moved to the front of 56 Swingate Avenue). Also in N.G.R. TQ 7376, two Morinic gold staters were found in 1869 and 1902; the O.S. cards describe the coins as Evans type B.8, Allen's Gallo-Belgic E. A short distance to the east Mr D. Rixson's Celtic coin was in topsoil at N.G.R. TQ 7476, and Mr B. Ashby found two Celtic AE coins at N.G.R. TQ 743763.[4]

In the pre-Roman Iron Age persistent Thames transgression has been dated by scientific methods in south Essex, estimating the inundation from *c.* 620 B.C. to A.D. 80.[5] On the other hand the probability of marsh paths in A.D. 43[6] and seasonal occupation on low mounds above wetland does not appear to have been investigated by excavations on a significant scale. Relevant material in Cliffe was found by chance in three areas of marsh.

During erosion of the Black Shore[7] Mr G. Randall recovered the base of a large pedestal urn from a smashed cremation group in the foreshore. At the edge of the salt marsh, I found part of a pedestal urn beside a vestige of reed floor which contained briquetage, the skull of a small horned sheep, a chalk loom-weight, and three roughly-made examples of foot-ring pottery, one of which had been perforated in the middle of the base. Dr Monaghan noted several examples of pottery which dated from A.D. 40/50[8] among thousands of sherds eroded from the site. On the foreshore the base of a partly carbonised log boat was photographed, and the perforated, trapezoidal stone anchor slab shown to staff of the National Maritime

[4] *Arch. Cant.*, ciii (1986), 252.

[5] R.J.H. Devoy, 'Post-glacial environmental Change and Man in the Thames Estuary', in (Ed.) F.H. Thompson, *Archaeology and coastal Change*, London, 1980, 134–48.

[6] According to Cassius Dio.

[7] *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxi (1966), lv.

[8] J. Monaghan, *Upchurch and Thameside Roman Pottery: A ceramic Typology for northern Kent, first to third Centuries A.D.*, BAR British Series 173, Oxford, 1987.

Museum, who considered these finds typical of the Iron Age. (The anchor slab has been given to Rochester Museum.)

The cremation group from Wharf Farm[9] was examined by Dr Monaghan, who dated the grave urn to A.D. 40–70, and a butt beaker A.D. 40/50–70.

The small cemetery at John's Hope[10] included a pedestal urn and barrel-shaped jar, described by an Ashmolean curator as pre-Roman forms. The brooches found by Randall were dated last year, when some examples were erroneously summarised as 'late 1st century' in a report on the site. In fact Mr D.B. Kelly found the collection includes two Nauheim derivatives, pre-Roman to pre-Flavian; one Langton Down type, pre-Roman to pre-Flavian; and two penannular brooches of Fowler's type C, pre-Roman to first century A.D. (but may continue longer). 'Two worn Greek coins of the 1st century B.C.' were re-examined by Dr Howgego, who identified one as a coin of Antoninus Pius, the other as a coin of Massalia, similar to SNG Copenhagen no. 738, which is dated to the late third century B.C.

The marsh environment

The modern 'Fort lake', from Cliffe Fort almost to the uplands, was found by excavators of clay to contain thicker peat beds than the other lakes of Cliffe and Higham, and the layer at levels resembling Tilbury V[11] was as high as O.D. +0.5m. The upper peat deposits were in places over 1 m. in thickness, at levels similar to Tilbury IV and V. Swampy conditions seem to have been probable in the Iron Age. Mr E. Parsons and other excavators of the area said some of the highest levels included residual reeds and blackened straw, presumably former flotsam. Two small Romano-British groups of pottery in the area were peripheral, and there were no indications of Iron Age or Romano-British industrial sites or buildings. Peat deposits were intersected by channels of blue-grey clay before deposition of increasingly brown clay over all the earlier layers.

Hasted's *History of Kent* (first edition) describes the zone as part of 'Warwick's salt marsh' in 1695. In the same year George Russell omitted that salt marsh from his detailed map of Cliffe Level. Mudge 1801 clearly shows the large area of salt marshes divided by runnels

[9] The site was indicated in 1964 to the Ordnance Survey by Mr L. Batchelor and confirmed by Mr J. Dockwray at N.G.R. TQ 74337700.

[10] *Arch. Cant.*, civ (1987), 377.

[11] Devoy, *op. cit.*

and creeks. At high water spring tides the entire saltings would have been flooded to the Cliffe uplands and to the west of Higham Causeway. The recorded frequency of inundation from this reach of the Thames to 1953 is a measure of the unusual force of spring tides (augmented by storm surges) contending with the flow of fresh flood water from upriver in the rapidly narrowing width of the estuary.

It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that these geographical factors have been persistent in periods before sea-walling and records of the rise in sea levels. The river may often have been 'ponded back' in the vicinity of west Cliffe and Higham, and in the early first century A.D. the local geography seems relevant to the Claudian invasion.

Dio refers to the Britons retreating to 'the River Thames, at a point where it enters the sea and forms a large pool at high tide.' They crossed the marshes 'knowing the firm ground and the fords with much precision, and crossed the river without difficulty'. Mr Patrick Thornhill[12] has already published his hypothesis of a crossing near the broad estuary east of Lower Hope Point, and a possible approach on the approximate line of the medieval causeway. Here it is suggested that the British crossing of marshes on the way to East Tilbury was located on paths and fords to the west and perhaps the north-east of former regular flooding between the lowlands of west Cliffe and Higham.

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ROBERT HUTCHINGS

[12] *Arch. Cant.*, xcii (1976), 119–28.