

# PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

**Cambridge Antiquarian Society,**

4 JULY, 1901, TO 7 AUGUST, 1902,

WITH

**Communications**

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

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1901—1902.

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All meetings this year were held in the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology.

Monday, 28 October 1901, at 8.30 p.m.

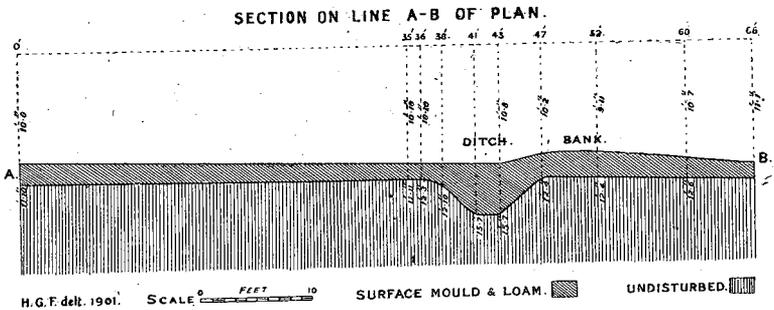
Mr GRAY, President, in the Chair.

Professor HUGHES read the following note (communicated by Mr H. G. FORDHAM):

NOTE ON A SUPPOSED ROMANO-BRITISH  
 SETTLEMENT AT ODSEY.

In the autumn of 1899, in digging the foundation of a wall on the north-east side of the kitchen garden at Odsey, in the extreme south-western point of Cambridgeshire, a section across a ditch and bank was exposed, of which a drawing to scale is given below.

Almost exactly similar sections of ditches and ramparts are figured by the late General Pitt Rivers in his great work on



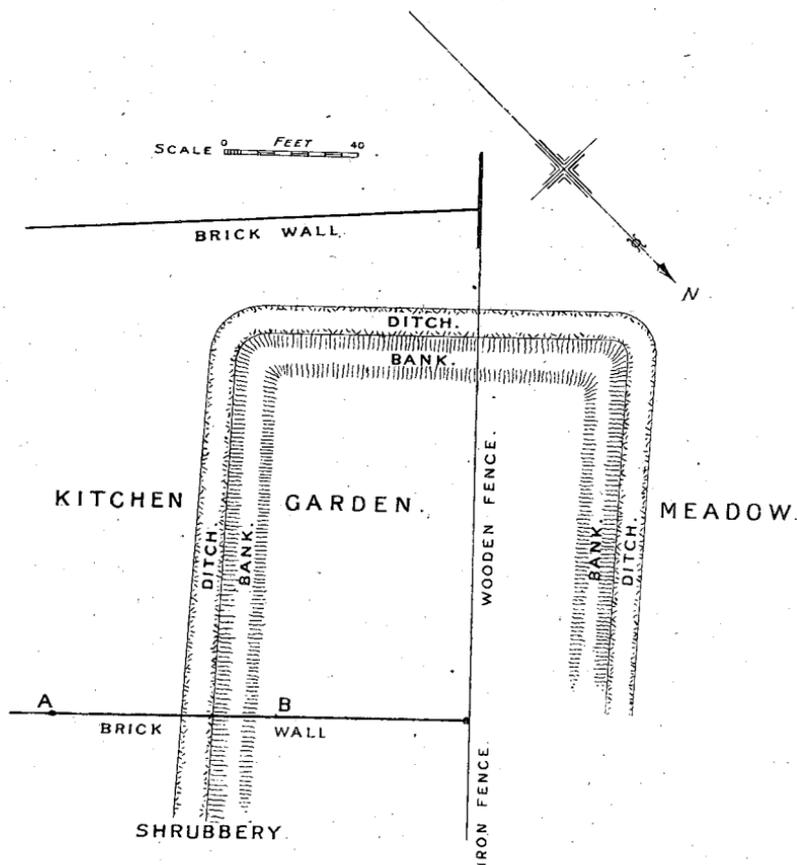
the excavations undertaken by him in Cranborne Chase, near Rushmore, on the borders of Dorset and Wilts. Good examples of these sections are shown in Plates III. and IV. of Vol. I. (1887), referring to ground plans (Plates II. and III.) of a Romano-British village, Woodcuts Common, Dorset, in the same volume.

Before the kitchen-garden was laid out, and its boundary walls built at Odsey, there was a fairly well-defined bank, forming three sides of a rectangular space measuring about 100 feet by 120 feet within the bank. The fourth side (that on the north-east) had disappeared. The whole enclosure was situated in a meadow on ground sloping slightly towards the north, and mostly within the area of the new garden. A little further to the north, on the same slope, are the present farm-buildings, some parts of which, if not themselves of any great antiquity, contain, at all events, ancient materials.

At the present time only so much of the remains of the bank are extant and traceable on the surface as lie outside the area of the garden, the rest having been destroyed in levelling for the garden. A sketch-plan of the bank, with the ditch as assumed to exist alongside it from the evidence obtained of its relative position where both are cut by the section (A—B), is given by way of illustration on a small scale.

For the purpose of obtaining a sound foundation for the wall the earth and chalky loam and rubble with which the

ditch was filled, and of which the bank, so far as it now remains in its degraded form, was made, were cut through down to the



H. G. F. delt. 1901.

solid chalk. Both slopes of the ditch and the bottom were shown to be clean cut in the rock. The slopes were at an angle of  $41^\circ$ , the depth from the present ground line measured about 5 ft., and from the surface of the solid chalk 3 ft. 3 inches; the extreme widths were, at the surface of the rock 11 feet, and at the bottom of the ditch 2 feet.

The ditch was filled up with earth mixed with a certain quantity of chalk, forming a compact material of a light brown

colour; the bank contained the chalk thrown from the ditch, apparently, mixed with some soil. Nothing of any interest was found in the sections made for the foundations of the garden walls, nor in any of the levelling necessary for laying out the garden itself, a few broken fragments of bones and portions of apparently modern tiles being the only adventitious substances in the sub-soil<sup>1</sup>.

There is nothing improbable in the idea of a very early settlement at Odsey. The locality gives its name to a Hertfordshire Hundred, although it is itself now just within the borders of Cambridgeshire, and here one may assume that the Hundred Moot was held. Situated in a shallow valley on the outcrop of the chalk, a little above the horizon of the Melbourn Rock, and 250 feet above sea-level, with the Icknield Way bounding it on the south-east, and a number of well-defined barrows on the adjacent hills, it is not an unlikely place for a village of the Romano-British period. Adjoining the present farm buildings is a deep pit or hollow which may have been a pond<sup>2</sup>, and on both sides of the shallow valley in which this depression exists are traces on the present surface of banks, hollows, and pits, which may probably some of them have belonged to an early period.

Such a ditch as is here found, with the corresponding bank supporting a timber palisade, would be effective for defensive purposes at the period to which they are attributed, and there seems no other probable object for which so wide and deep a ditch could have been cut, especially as no surface drainage of any consequence could ever have been necessary on so dry a soil. In every respect the ditch and bank resemble those examined in so much detail by General Pitt Rivers in Dorsetshire, where the situation and underlying rock formation are closely comparable to those at Odsey.

Although the conclusion that there was a centre of population here in late prehistoric times seems a sound one, Odsey

<sup>1</sup> An iron arrow-head has, however, since been found and will, it is hoped, be described later.

<sup>2</sup> See *History of Hertfordshire: Hundred of Odsey*, by J. E. Cussans: London, 1873, Fo., p. 6, note.

appears never to have been in any sense a populous place. Forming a narrow extension of the parish of Guilden Morden jutting out into Hertfordshire, it is first known in historic times as a Manor or Grange belonging to the Bedfordshire Abbey of Warden, of the annual value at the dissolution of the monasteries, when it passed into the hands of John Sewster (1543), of £6. 0s. 10d. There is no documentary evidence as to its ownership from that time till 1705. It was then sold for £1600 by Thomas Fountaine and John Duckett, both of Lincoln's Inn, to Robert Chester, of Cockenhatch. In 1722 Chester sold the estate to William, Duke of Devonshire, for £2310, by whom a house, cottages and stables were built, and a racing establishment was maintained in connection with the Odsey race-course, which lay in the parish of Kelshall, Herts., on Kelshall Heath, on the south-east side of the Icknield Way. This course is marked on most of the county maps of Hertfordshire, published in the 18th century, and regular race-meetings were held there. The property was sold to Edward King Fordham and George Fordham by the then Duke of Devonshire in 1793 for £3600, and has remained in the Fordham family since that date.

The Manor is described in the particulars of the sale of 1793 as a "manor within itself," and has presumably always remained in the hands of the lord; at all events it has never in recent times had any tenants.

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