

INTERIM REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION OF A LATE BRONZE AGE HOMESTEAD IN WESTON WOOD, ALBURY, SURREY*

BY

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THE Late Bronze Age homestead in Weston Wood, Albury, Surrey,[†] is still being investigated, so this is in the nature of an interim statement. The full report will be published later. The site is on the Albury Park Estate near Guildford, and is being dug by kind permission of the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland for the Surrey Archæological Society, with a research grant from the Prehistoric Society.

The homestead is on the main prehistoric trackway through Surrey (later known as the Pilgrims' Way), which avoids the wealden clays and follows the North Downs from Kent through Guildford to Farnham and on to Salisbury Plain. At this point the track is divided, part being on the greensand hills from Shere through Weston Wood and St. Martha's Hill. Weston Wood is as easily accessible today, being on the A25 main Dorking/Guildford road, and just opposite the Silent Pool. Entrance is through a disused brick-yard where the road rises steeply to Newlands Corner on the chalk downs. The site is above a sand quarry. In the Geological Survey this area is described as 'sand with much scattered carstone.' It is a desirable place for a residence, being dry, on Lower Greensand, on a flattened area on the wooded hill slope, and sheltered from the prevailing west winds. There is a spring below. It rises on the Gault, from which, no doubt, clay was obtained for pot-making. To the north are the chalk downs for good flint, and a geologically recent coombe deposit in the valley provided broken patinated flint for some very crude tools. To the south is the Tillingbourne River for fish.

Weston Wood is being quarried away fast. The site is immediately above the sand pit. No trace could be seen from the surface. Simple flake tools exposed by the bulldozer were similar to those found on many of Surrey's greensand hills. But a hammer-stone suggested that further investigation might be rewarding—and then coarse gritted pottery was found.

THE EXCAVATION

The rescue excavation has been in progress now for three years, 1961-63, and has barely managed to keep ahead of the bulldozer. Finds are limited to shadows in the sand, to flint tools, and to pottery which is friable and has lost the upper surface in this slightly acid

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† Nat. Grid Ref. TQ (51) 053485.

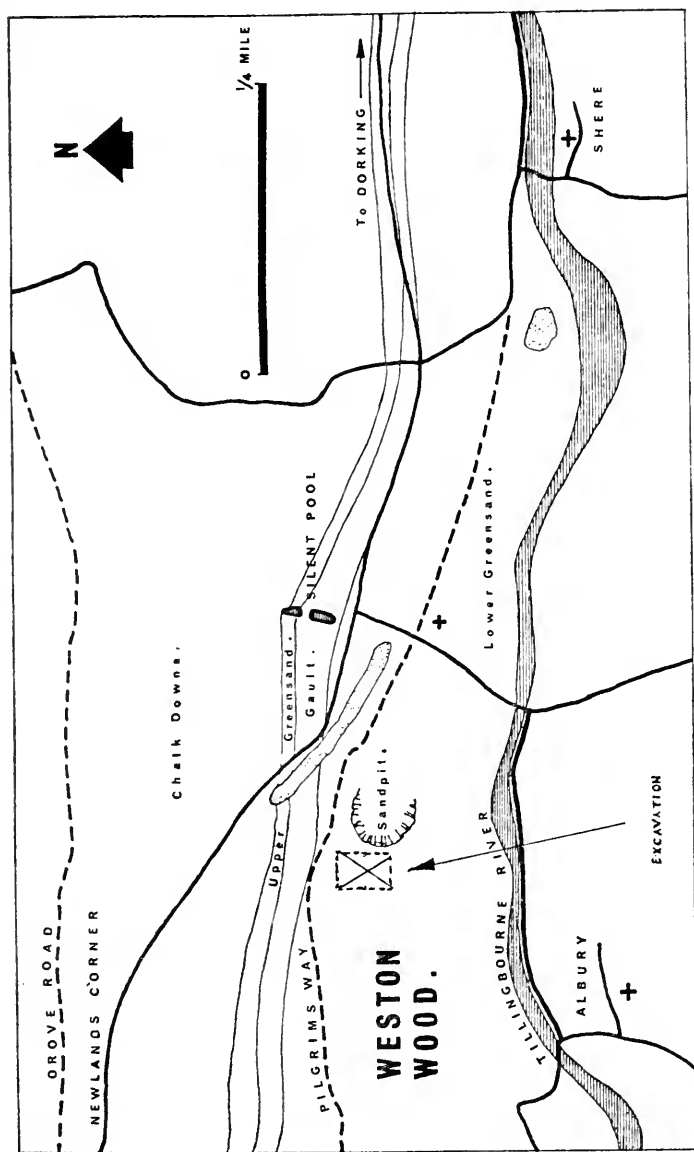


FIG. 1.—SKETCH MAP OF WESTON WOOD.

Based on Crown copyright Geological Survey Map by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

soil. The pH averages 6.057 in the natural sand, and 6.225 in the brown occupation layer which is everywhere 18 inches below the forest surface. Dr. I. Cornwall suggests that the soil is not as acid as heathland because here it has probably always been forest. Preliminary analysis of some of the charcoal from the site shows hazel and oak, with several sloe seeds from the pit. It is at present a very mixed planted forest—oak, beech, sweet chestnut, fir and rhododendron, with bracken beneath.

During 1961 investigation was in the bulldozed area. Subsequently trenches were extended into the forest, where the only disturbance of the occupation level had been by tree roots. Throughout, a 16-foot grid has been set out, and, after removal of the top foot of forest, the area has been scraped with trowels. A simple technique for taking plastic skins of features has been evolved. Experiments have also been made using the local Gault clay from the valley below to make and bake Late Bronze Age type pottery.

The plan (Fig. 2) shows that there is possibly a circular house (E5/6)² of 20 feet diameter, with central packed post hole, and containing also in a pit, a large pot which could be dated to the Late Bronze Age. Round this house were ranged two small cultivated plots (DE/3/4 and GH/5/6). All this was within the bulldozed area. To the south was an area of hearths (BC5/6/7), and this was divided by a straight shallow trackway or ditch from a smaller circular structure containing a quern. Outside (D8) was a concentration of pottery and a copper ingot. A second ingot was well removed (F9) and not associated with pottery. Further into the wood and slightly uphill was a working floor levelled in the sand (A11/12). This contained concentrations of pottery, heavy flint tools, and at the further end, a storage pit with a pot and grain.

The pottery is, with the exception of about thirty pieces, of the Late Bronze Age. The site seems to have much in common with Plumpton Plain Site B,³ Minnis Bay⁴ and Farnham, Green Lane.⁵ The radio-carbon date for the grain gives a date of 510 B.C. \pm 110.⁶ This date at the latter end of the Late Bronze Age fits well with a possible triangular loom weight, and some of the finer harder wares.

The House. The plan of the circular structure (EF6) is incomplete because of the bulldozer, and the occupation layer had been preserved only under a tree stump. This had protected the central packed post hole, two pits and the bases of the outer ring of post holes to the south. These were 4 feet apart and joined by a shallow trench. There may have been a porch to the north. The pits were basin shaped, 3 feet across and 18 inches deep with three or four pieces of carstone at the bottom. One was empty, and the other

² This and subsequent reference numbers refer to the co-ordinates on the plan.

³ Hawkes, C.F.C., *P.P.S.*, I (1935), 39–59.

⁴ Worsfold, F. H., *P.P.S.*, IX (1943), 28–47.

⁵ *Preh. Farnh.*, 183–202.

⁶ Measurement done by Prof. H. Godwin of the Department of Botany, University of Cambridge.

contained the large storage pot with unusual punched design. It was complete on one side only. The other pieces were in the central post hole. The bronze awl was found here, a tiny pottery 'egg cup' and two spindle whorls. There was no hearth in this house.

The Plots. The furrows of the two small rectangular plots (DE/3/4 and GH5/6) equidistant from the house to the east and north, showed as broad lines of disturbed sand in the sand (Plate V(a)). They were just over one foot apart, which compares with the Gwythian⁷ fields. Cultivated only once, each plot was essentially the same, about 23 feet by 28 feet. The furrows ended straight; there was no turning (Plate V(a)). One end was deep and square, the other end of the plot had shallow furrows. The profiles were V-shaped with a perpendicular side always on the same side. In some places they were 3 inches or 4 inches deep, and in others 8 inches. Because these plots were at bulldozer level they cannot archæologically be connected with the Late Bronze Age house. It is probable that they are not modern, made since bulldozing and ranged round the tree, because the head forester assures us that only one plot had been dug above the quarry in his time, and this had been larger and further east. There is, however, evidence connecting the furrows with the house. The North plot has a deliberately shortened side, and the inside furrow of the South plot is 2 feet shorter than the rest, thereby leaving a wider way between the plots and in a direct line from the house porch to the spring below. The implement used to make the furrow is unknown. Two adjoining furrows were plotted from above, and with the long sections and cross sections were submitted to Professor Steensberg of Copenhagen. He thought it likely that the furrows had been cut with a spade. A study of the plastic skin of the profiles does show the mark left by the back push of the spade.

The Track cut straight through the site (Z5 to H9). It showed as a 4 foot-wide brown ribbon in the natural sand. In section it was 1 foot deep in the centre. Sometimes there were pieces of carstone on its edge and sometimes they had fallen in. The filling was brown occupation floor. Where there had been no occupation it was filled with light forest soil and was more difficult to follow. In the cooking area there were fires on its edge.

The Quern (C8) was in a circular structure 12 feet in diameter with a central post hole and well packed outer post holes 4 feet apart (Plate V(b)). The rubber was in position. It weighed 18 pounds. The quern was constructed of five pieces of carstone. There was a very small rubbing base with a fluted apron in front. On either side was an upright which served to guide the rubber and also to anchor a heavily grooved carstone beneath. The problem of stabilizing the quern in the sand had not even then been solved. The whole was

⁷ Megaw, J. V. S., Thomas, A. C. and Waiiles, B., *Proc. West Cornwall Field Club*, II, 5 (1961), 200-15.

bedded in small carstone pieces with ineffectual small wedges all round. There seems no parallel for this ingenious device.

The Working Floor. This rectangular floor (A10-A11) had been levelled in the hillside. It had four fires on one side, a pit at the farther end, and several pots in pieces. The flint tools here were heavy working tools.

The Pit (A12). The most interesting feature here was the pit. It was 4 feet across and 18 inches deep. It showed up as a grey area in a podsol. Excavation was carried out with difficulty as the pit became waterlogged after every shower—an unusual feature on this greensand hill. It was found that this pit had been dug, possibly in error, in one of the few clay pockets. At the bottom of the pit was a storage pot on its side, with grain. Above were bases of two other pots. The entire contents of the pit were sifted through small strainers under water, and grain, a few waterlogged pieces of wood and some twisted fibre rope was recovered. The rope is made of a flax or hemp fibre. As nothing else was found in the pit it had only begun to be used for rubbish.

THE FINDS

The Grain. The grain has been studied by Professor A. H. Bunting of the Department of Agricultural Botany, University of Reading. Several types were mixed in the pit. The final report is not yet to hand but an interim statement says:—

From the pit filling and lining were recovered approximately 430 cc. of carbonised plant remains. This was largely carbonised cereal grains, together with charcoal fragments. 20 cc. of this material was examined by Dr. Hans Helbeck of the National Museum, Copenhagen. The cereal grains were approximately two-thirds barley (*Hordeum* species) and one-third wheat (*Triticum* species). The absence of spikelet parts and the poor preservation of these grains prevented a close identification of the wheat or barley species. The asymmetrical form of many of the barley grains showed it to be a six-rowed variety. Most, if not all, of this barley was the hulled type: very few of the grains may be of the naked form. The dimension of the wheat grains indicate that *Triticum dicoccum* (emmer) was most probably present. The cereals, therefore, are what could be expected from a site of this age.

The Pottery. The pottery recovered from the site amounts to over 3,000 sherds, of which very few are later than the Bronze Age, and from which it is hoped to make partial reconstructions of a dozen pots.* The general standard of potting is not high. Only a few of the pieces show signs of slip or burnishing. A large number of wasters have been found, some in a post hole in the house and some on the working floor. The pottery has for convenience been divided into two groups—the coarse heavy storage-pot ware, and other, finer wares; but both types were intermixed on the site.

*Thanks are especially due to Winifred Phillips for detailed analysis of the pottery.

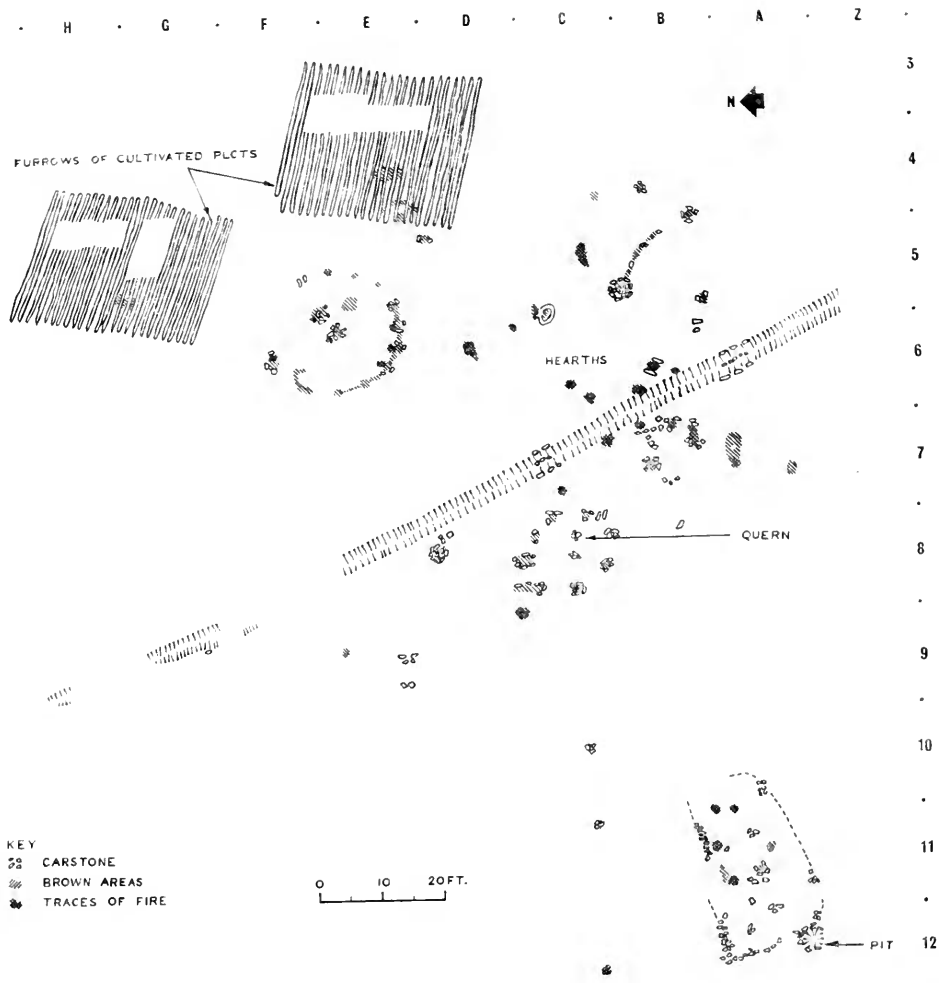


FIG. 2.—PLAN OF EXCAVATION AT WESTON WOOD.

The storage-pot ware is of coarse pinkish clay with heavy crushed burnt-flint tempering. It is poorly fired and fairly thick throughout. Shapes include buckets of varying sizes with flattened rims and splayed bases. They are typical of the Farnham, Green Lane, ware. The pot illustrated (Plate VI(b)) was outside the quern structure. The lower half only had survived. It had been deliberately filled with carstone. Like the Wreclesham urn⁸ it was found standing upright. The flat centre of the base was missing, and from the appearance of the edges seems to have disappeared in antiquity. A similar smaller pot came from the working floor. Decoration on these storage pots is rare, but throughout the site are sherds punched with a stick. In the pot in the first house some of the holes perforated the pottery, as can be seen in other Surrey sites such as the Sunningdale Barrow.⁹ A similar stick-embossed decoration was on the large storage pot on the working floor, but none of these holes perforated the pottery; this is paralleled in an unpublished urn from Latch Farm in Dorset.

The second group of pottery is thinner, harder ware, ranging in colour from red to brown, with some black vessels, some of which appear to be slightly burnished (Plate VI(a)). There is generally a higher standard of potting with finer crushed grit used in tempering. There is a greater variety of shape in this group from small bowls to shouldered jars, some with finger dimpling on the shoulders. There is a variety of rims (simple, everted, rolled over, expanded) while the bases are still flat. Professor Hawkes¹⁰ regards everted rims, often slightly flattened, to be a recurring feature of transitional Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age sites in Sussex and adds that shouldered vessels from Newhaven and other sites are difficult to distinguish from the following Early Iron Age types. Here we find these types close to Late Bronze Age storage pots. The drinking bowl illustrated (Plate VI(a)) is burnished inside. Others similar come from Farnham and Carshalton. There are carinated bowls as from St. Martha's¹¹ and Minnis Bay,¹² and shouldered jars, well-fired with finger impression decoration exactly on the shoulder, as from New Barn Down.¹³ Two clay spindle whorls were on the house floor.

Metal. Two pieces of copper ingot were found widely scattered, and a bronze awl. The copper is of relatively high purity. It must have come from afar via the trade route. Similar pieces of ingot have been found at Banstead,¹⁴ but not associated with pottery. The broken awl was found in the top of the storage pot in the house. Examination by Mr. A. Stubbington of Farnborough showed that there was some porosity. The evidence suggested that it had been hot-forged from a cast rod, and lightly cold-worked after the major forming operation to make a hardened, wear-resisting, tapering

⁸ *Preh. Farnh.*, 180-2.

⁹ *Sy.A.C.*, XXXV (1924), 17-23.

¹⁰ *Sx.A.C.*, LXXX (1939), 269-92.

¹¹ *Sy.A.C.*, XLIII (1935), 114.

¹² Worsfold, F. H., *loc. cit.*

¹³ Curwen, E. C., *Sx.A.C.*, LXXV (1934), 137-70.

¹⁴ *Sy.A.C.*, XLVII (1941), 95-8.

point. It would seem that it had been made by an inexperienced person who did not stir the hot bronze with a green stick to remove the oxygen, and so the awl broke.

It should perhaps be mentioned here that there is as yet no evidence for metal working on the site. Very thick pottery which had been subjected to great heat (over 800° C.) and might have been crucible, showed no sign of metal under X-ray, when tested by Dr. R. F. Tylecote.

Flint. Other implements are of flint. These tools are in excellent condition and are unpatinated. It is essentially a flake industry of mesolithic tradition. So far only three microliths have been found. All flint had been imported onto the site, and everywhere is associated with occupation floors. Of 1,200 pieces of flint so far analysed, half was waste material; and of the rest two-fifths were used flakes and three-fifths unused flakes. Of the used flakes very few had secondary working. Two-thirds of the tools had cortex left on. A very few rough tools had been struck from broken patinated flint from the coombe deposit in the valley below. Few core tools have been found. They come mainly from the working floor, and consists of cleavers, and chisel with petit tranchet point. There was also a punch made from a natural round flint. It is unchipped, so presumably was used for embossing some soft material. Quite a number of tools seem to have been used by a left-handed person.

CONCLUSION

This site appears to have been occupied for a very short period, perhaps a year, at the latter end of the Late Bronze Age. The date of c. 510 B.C. accords well with transitional pottery, and the coarse storage wares and fine burnished bowls can be paralleled on Early Iron Age sites in Surrey. The association of copper ingots with a domestic site is rare in Surrey.

As an occupation site it is small compared with the Sussex farmsteads of Plumpton Plain¹⁵ and Itford Hill.¹⁶ The excavation is therefore continuing some 100 feet to the South on the same contour. An occupation floor has been located at the same depth, 18 inches. It is a carstone floor 6 inches deep, packed with burnt flint, pot boilers, coarse pottery with Farnham-type pinched-out bases, and waste flakes. Around are various shallow pits, filled with ashes and pottery sherds. This promising area is still being investigated, and will be reported in detail later.

The finds are deposited in Guildford Museum, together with the plastic skins.

Thanks are due to Surrey Archæological Society for providing the tools, to the many volunteers who have helped to scrape away the sands of time, and to the scientists and other experts who are

¹⁵ Hawkes, C. F. C., *P.P.S.*, I (1935), 39-59.

¹⁶ Burstow, G. P., and Holleymen, G. A., *P.P.S.*, XXIII (1957), 167-212.

analysing the finds. Without their help there would have been no record of the first Late Bronze Age homestead to have been found in Surrey.

APPENDIX

PLASTIC SKIN

This technique was demonstrated in Holland. Great difficulty was experienced in procuring the emulsion in England. The problem was put to Anthony Clark who aimed to find a satisfactory non-toxic emulsion, which would be readily available in a do-it-yourself shop, and which would be simple to use. He has succeeded. Polybond is the plastic emulsion. It is miscible with water, non-toxic, and fireproof. First a 50% solution is sprayed thickly with a Flit gun on to the prepared section. This is left to dry. This consolidates the sand face ready for the next operation—of painting the whole section with neat Polybond. When dry, this is painted again and immediately 18-inch strips of muslin are laid on and painted on. The milky plastic becomes transparent when dry and then can be peeled off. The face of the section is attached, in reverse, to the muslin, and the various colours and stratification preserved for further study. Details of the furrows and a section of the grain storage pit have been thus saved and are in Guildford Museum.



(a) WESTON WOOD: FURROWS. D4.



(b) WESTON WOOD: QUERN.



(a) WESTON WOOD: BURNISHED BOWL. C9.



(b) WESTON WOOD: STORAGE POT. C8.