

A Prehistoric Village Site at Knighton Hill, Compton Beauchamp.

By STUART PIGGOTT.

THE road which runs from the little village of Compton Beauchamp to the Ridgeway on the Downs near Wayland Smith's Cave, marked on the Ordnance Survey as Knighton Hill, passes on the east of a large chalk pit at a point just below the crest of the hill. The section exposed on the western edge of the pit shows that it has cut through a remarkable series of pits dug in the solid chalk, varying in size from one foot six inches to six feet in depth. Four of the six pits exposed are shallow and irregular while the remaining two are six feet deep, and almost square, with flat floors of undisturbed chalk. The pits are now completely filled with mould and chalk rubble, and on the face of this pieces of rough pottery, bone and charcoal can be seen.

During three visits in August, 1926, my father and I were able to make an interesting collection, which throws considerable light on the makers and inhabitants of the pits.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PITS.

Pits 1 and 2.—Pit 1 is a small shallow pit, but one of the most productive. It is about two feet six inches deep and some three feet in diameter and is contiguous with Pit 2, which is about the same size. In Pit 1, I found, by picking from the exposed face and by working back about six inches with a pocket knife, more than two dozen pieces of a large vessel of rough pottery. Being softer and more friable than the surrounding clayey rubble the sherds were difficult to get out intact, but enough was obtained to give an idea of the general characteristics of the vessel, including two rim-fragments which joined, showing a plain rim with no overturning, and an original diameter of about eighteen inches. The sherds were found together near the bottom of the pit. Pit 2 yielded similar sherds.

The bones from the first pit, found in association with the pottery and charcoal, comprised the right half of the lower jaw of a small sheep, two other skull fragments (sheep ?), left half of upper jaw of a wild boar, head of a femur (?) and several nondescript bones.

Pit 3.—Measures six feet deep by four feet six inches across the flat bottom. The left side is vertical, but the right slopes gradually inwards towards the bottom. The lower half of this pit was examined by my father in a similar manner to Pit 1. The usual rough pottery was found, and also two fragments of well-made, wheel-turned wares; one a rim-fragment, too small to give the original diameter, with a plain rim without recurving, in light red smooth ware, and, apparently, by its thinness (5mm.) belonging to a fine vessel; and the other a piece of black burnished ware, with a reddish tinge in one corner, 7mm. thick.

Resting on the flat floor, about in the middle, a number of pieces of "sarsen stones" were found, burnt, and in association with a great deal of charcoal, which seems to point to a hearth site. Part of the upper jaw and the incisor of a small sheep were found near the hearth.

Pit 4.—The second of the two large pits. It measures six feet in depth by four feet six inches across the bottom. As in Pit 3 the left side is vertical and the right side slopes inwards until one foot from the bottom, where it forms a curious step projecting one foot from the side. Owing to lack of time this pit and pits 5 and 6 were not thoroughly examined, but rough sherds and some sheeps' teeth and bones (one, found near the top, was partly burnt), and a boiling stone cracked by fire were found. There was a quantity of charcoal in the filling of this pit.

Pits 5 and 6.—Two shallow irregular pits, about one foot six inches deep and from three feet to four feet across. The usual rough sherds were found, and also a piece of greyish red ware, wheel-turned, was found.

CONCLUSIONS.

From the facts at our disposal we may reasonably draw two main conclusions. Firstly, that the digging of the chalk

pit has cut through, and thus exposed in section, a part of an ancient dwelling site consisting of pits dug into the solid chalk, and in one case at least furnished with a hearth, similar in many ways to that prehistoric village discovered and described by by Mr. Garnet Wolseley at Park Brow, Cissbury, Sussex.

Secondly, that the village or dwelling site flourished at some period anterior to the Roman Occupation of Britain. Not one piece of definitely Roman ware nor a single Roman coin have been found, while the datable pottery finds, small though they are, suggest the Early Iron Age. The position of the site argues well for a pre-Roman date, being near to the Neolithic monument of Wayland Smith's Cave, the Early Iron Age hill-fort of Uffington Castle, and the great prehistoric main road, the Ridgeway.