

AN EXCAVATION AT COMBE HILL CAMP NEAR EASTBOURNE

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THE Eastbourne Natural History and Archaeological Society must count themselves very fortunate in their first essay in excavation at finding an unexpectedly interesting quantity of pottery sherds hitherto unknown in such an amount in Sussex or apparently in a similar situation elsewhere in Britain.

The excavation at Combe Hill, which is 600 ft. up on the Downs about three miles north-west of Eastbourne Pier, was undertaken to obtain confirmation of Dr. Curwen's plan of the site made by percussion, when he concluded it was a Neolithic causewayed camp (*Archaeology of Sussex*, by E. Cecil Curwen, pp. 75 and 95).

By permission of Dr. Curwen, a copy of a portion of his map is shown with the area excavated imposed upon it (Fig. 1). His help and advice have been much appreciated.

To begin the excavation a section was cut across the westernmost ditch of the inner circle of entrenchments and extended northwards. All the finds came from this ditch except a few sherds of Early Iron Age or Romano-British found near the surface at other openings.

The structure of the area worked over, which had never been disturbed since the camp was made, under present estimates about four thousand years ago, was quite straightforward. The ditch was about 3 ft. deep originally, and had silted up about 1 ft. on the rampart side and half that on the opposite side before it had been occupied as a habitation (Fig. 2).

North of the ditch was a causeway of undisturbed natural chalk about 12 ft. wide, and then another ditch which was investigated but was only a foot deep and barren of pottery except for a few sherds of Early Iron

Age or Romano-British just under the sods. It had been filled with flints but contained no struck flakes. The causeway was bared in case there were post-holes, but none were found. The crest of the rampart alongside

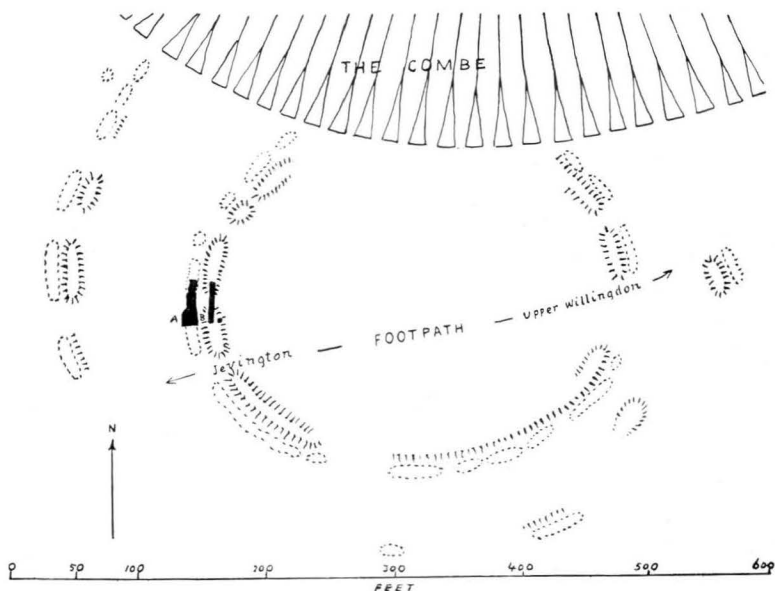


FIG. 1. SKETCH-MAP OF COMBE HILL CAMP

(From Dr. E. C. Curwen's plan in *Prehistoric Sussex*.)

the excavations was bared 6 ft. wide and 30 ft. lengthways to test for post-holes of a gateway or stockade, but there were no signs of any.

All the work, with the exception of removing the sods, was done by trowel in approximately 3-in. spits, and by careful stratification it was expected more light might be thrown on the question whether Neolithic B occupation was later than or contemporary with Neolithic A.

As it turned out the pottery was all of Neolithic B type and had no affinity with the Neolithic A lugged and carinated ware found at the Trundle and Whitehawk except for the few sherds mentioned in Professor

Piggott's report and illustrated in *S.A.C.* LXXVII. 78. Otherwise it is quite new to Sussex, though two sherds of Neolithic pottery are shown at Lewes Museum from Selmeston and Newhaven within a few miles of Combe Hill; but they are of a heavier 'Peterborough' type (*Antiq. Journ.* XIV. 134 and *S.A.C.* LXXX). There is also a similar sherd found by Maitland near Friston of which I can find no account.

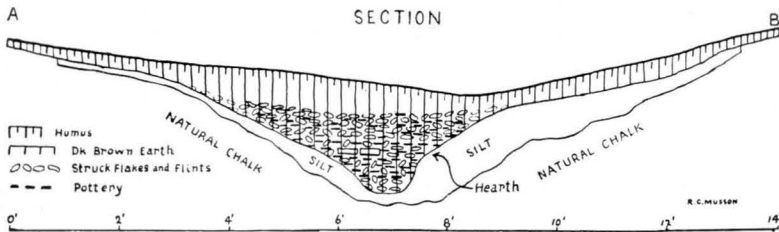


FIG. 2. SECTION THROUGH DITCH AT A-B ON FIG. 1

On examination the sherds were found to compare most closely with the pottery from Ebbsfleet illustrated in Burchall and Piggott's article in the *Antiquaries Journal*, XIX (1929), p. 418, and, unless Neolithic A pottery is found in future excavations on this site, this may be the first place where a causewayed camp has been primarily occupied by a Neolithic B people.

The pottery was all a dark brown flint-gritted ware and caused surprise at first as the plain sherds seemed to be exactly like the Early Iron Age pottery we had been finding on the 'Celtic fields' during the summer. A visit was made to Lewes, and it was found very difficult to distinguish it from the sherds excavated by Budgen, Gray, and Parsons in the 'Celtic fields' near Alfriston in 1931, though the shapes and decoration showed it was not the same pottery. Presumably the similarity of paste must be accounted for by both being made in the same district from local materials, though separated by fifteen hundred years or more. I am indebted to Mr. Pyddoke, the Curator of the Sussex Archaeological Society's Museum, for his help in this matter.

The different types of rims and decoration are shown in Fig. 3. Throughout this report the two numbers separated by an oblique line show the approximate distance below the surface of the ground that the objects were found; thus 9/12 means between 9 and 12 in. below the surface of the sods. Plate I shows photographs of the most interesting pieces, giving a better idea of the texture and ornamentation than drawings.

In addition to the pottery there was a great quantity of flint flakes. All those with a well-marked bulb of percussion and a prepared striking platform were saved and totalled over 400; so it is evident that the occupants of this trench filled in their time with flint knapping.

The area excavated being small, it does not seem necessary to reproduce the plan of the working in greater detail than is shown in Fig. 1, but a section of the trench is shown for future reference. It will be noticed that a hearth is shown because at that level two flat pieces of tabular flint set close together were found with a small heap of bones close to and the broken piece of quern stone a little farther away. There was charcoal around and underneath the flat slabs, though not in great quantity, and in fact charcoal was found at four levels, as shown by the summary below.

<i>Approx. level below surface in inches</i>	<i>Early Iron Age or R.B. potsherds</i>	<i>Neolithic potsherds</i>	<i>Struck flints</i>	<i>Bones: teeth</i>	<i>Bits of charcoal</i>
1/3	4		11		
3/6	23		72		
6/9		100	137		
9/12		234	63	Few	Few
12/15		260	94	"	"
15/18		217	20	"	"
18/21		101	22	"	"

There is, of course, the possibility that the two flat slabs of flint were set close together to form a base, about 9 in. square, for a wooden pillar to support some kind of roof, but no decayed matter was found that would suggest a post.

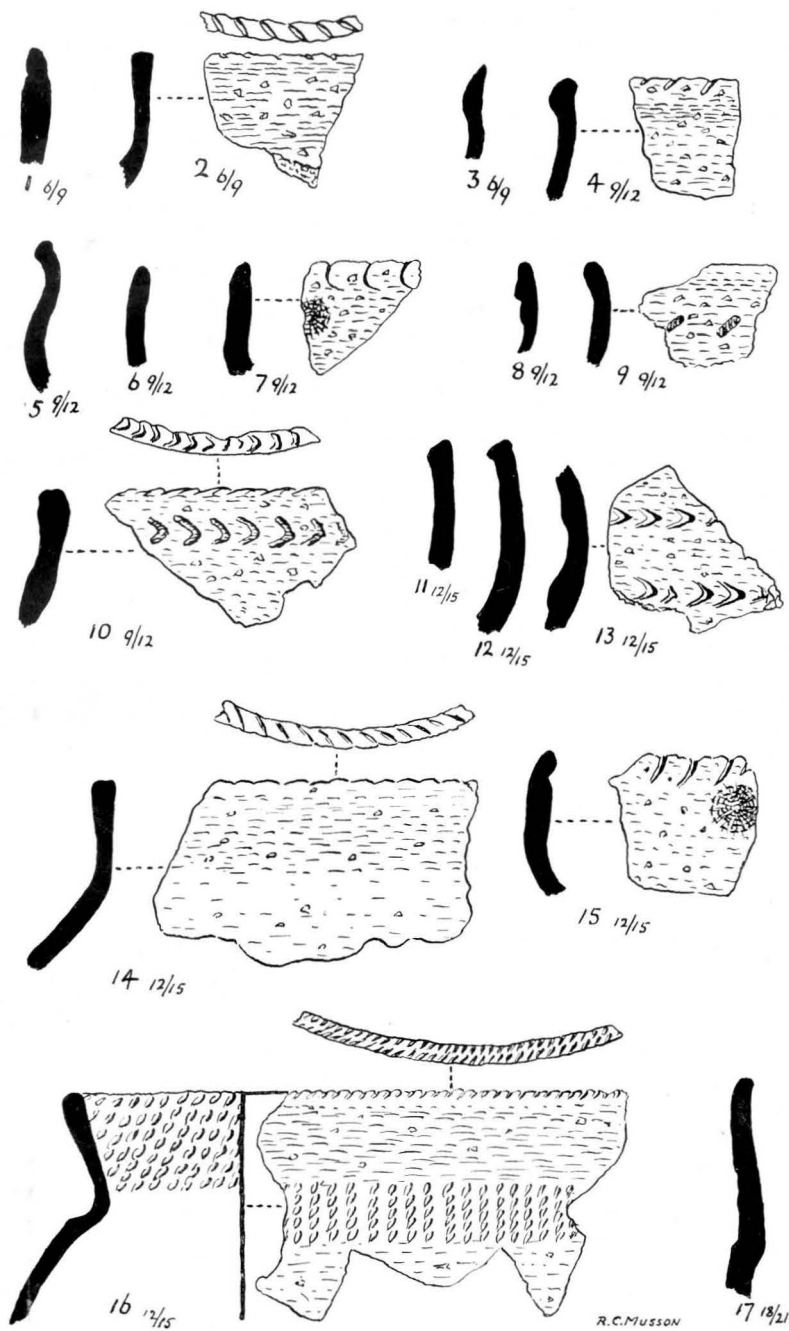


FIG. 3. COMBE HILL: NEOLITHIC POTTERY, SECTIONS ($\frac{1}{2}$)

In conclusion we offer our grateful thanks to those who made the excavation possible: H.M. Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Public Buildings, the County Borough of Eastbourne, the owners, and Mr. Councillor Pyle, the tenant of the ground. Also to Professor Stuart Piggott, Dr. Wilfrid Jackson, and Mr. Maby for their reports.

Among the helpers special mention must be made of J. H. Heap, who worked continuously throughout, also C. L. Morris, A. E. Mould, R. E. Poole, A. Wearn, and the Misses Ash, Cooper, and Everest, who attended whenever freedom from duties made it possible.

THE FINDS

Comment on the Pottery

BY PROFESSOR STUART PIGGOTT, B.LITT., F.S.A.

The pottery from the excavations in the Combe Hill 'Causewayed Camp' is of great interest and raises several points of importance not only to Sussex pre-history but to that of Britain as a whole. As Mr. Musson's report makes clear, the thousand or so sherds found in the filling of the section of ditch excavated form a homogeneous group, quite distinct from anything previously regarded as characteristic of these causewayed enclosures in either Sussex or Wessex, but with significant parallels elsewhere in south-east England.

The hard, thin, flint-gritted ware is consistent throughout the group and in texture and general character is surprisingly similar to Iron Age A fabrics in southern England. The forms comprise vessels with thin, straight, or slightly thickened, rims and, in the absence of flat base fragments, round-bottomed pots may be assumed. Decoration is sparse and simple, consisting of incisions frequently made with a finger-nail and often running in an oblique series across the rim; widely spaced but deep impressions of a finger-tip, usually in a concave neck; ornament of impressed cord in parallel vertical or oblique lines; and herring-bone incisions

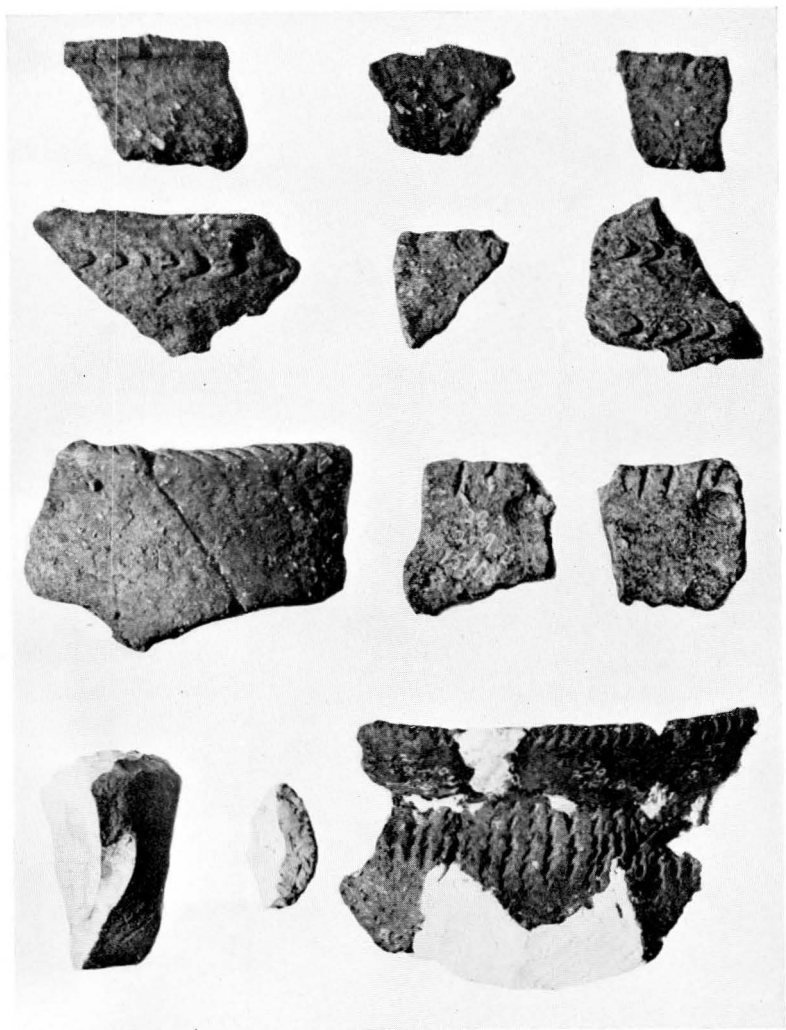


PLATE I. COMBE HILL: NEOLITHIC POTTERY (3)

perhaps made with a finger-nail. In all respects the Combe Hill pottery is paralleled, as Mr. Musson realized at an early stage, by that from an ancient land surface beneath peat in the bed of the Ebbsfleet river in Kent.¹ To this may be added another vessel of plain gritty ware with deep finger-tip pits in a hollow neck from the submerged land-surface at Clacton-on-Sea, Essex,² and sherds from the causewayed camp of Whitehawk, fifteen miles west of Combe Hill, regarded at the time of their discovery as 'hybrid' Windmill Hill/Peterborough Neolithic wares.³ Finally, it should be noted that wares approximating to the Ebbsfleet type occur in the Neolithic ritual and burial sites at Dorchester-on-Thames.⁴

In describing the Ebbsfleet pottery in 1939 I pointed out that while it had many features linking it with the Peterborough group of British Neolithic wares, as known from the classic discoveries at the type-site and from bowls such as those from Mortlake and Hedsor, it nevertheless stood apart from these by reason of its restrained ornament and undeveloped rim profiles. On the other hand, the Ebbsfleet sherds presented closer parallels to the Scandinavian 'dwelling-place' pottery than did the developed Peterborough styles, and, while derivation from that region seemed unlikely, both groups should come fairly near to a common relatively unspecialized stem. I therefore suggested that in Ebbsfleet Ware we might recognize the earliest manifestation of what was to become the Peterborough style.

The new material from Combe Hill in no way alters these conclusions, but provides welcome additional information. We can now regard Ebbsfleet Ware as something more than an isolated Kentish phenomenon, and recognize instead a pottery type spread from Essex to east Sussex and there (as the Whitehawk evidence

¹ Burchall and Piggott in *Antiq. Journ.* xix (1939), 405-20.

² Warren, Piggott, Clark, &c., in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* II (1936), 189.

³ Piggott in *Antiq. Journ.* xiv (1934), 116-19; *S.A.C.* (1936), LXXX.

⁴ Referred to in advance of publication by the courtesy of the excavator, Mr. R. J. C. Atkinson. It is possible that the sherds from the well-known site of Grovehurst in Kent may also be a form of Ebbsfleet Ware (*Arch. Journ.* LXXXVIII (1931), 137-8).

shows) broadly contemporary with the Windmill Hill culture and earlier than Beakers. But at Whitehawk the Ebbsfleet sherds were a minority among a huge mass of Neolithic pottery of the Windmill Hill class, whereas at Combe Hill no Windmill Hill type pottery is present, and we must conclude that the occupiers, if not the builders, of the earthwork were makers of Ebbsfleet Ware, presumably sharing other elements of the Neolithic cultures outside the Windmill Hill group and best characterized by Peterborough pottery.

The probable affinities of those cultures with the persisting Mesolithic hunter-fisher tradition of northern Europe have been pointed out in recent years,¹ and they certainly represent a group quite distinct from the Neolithic cultures within the 'Western' pottery series such as that of Windmill Hill. The causewayed camps in southern England are, in all examples save that of Combe Hill, of the Windmill Hill culture, and are generally regarded as an integral part of it, though admittedly lacking in any of the continental Neolithic cultures likely to be ancestral. Where such earthworks do occur, however, is in the Michelsberg culture of the Lower and Middle Rhine—the product of an eastward movement of 'Western' Neolithic Folk parallel to that producing our own Windmill Hill culture, but taking on a distinctive form as the result of the incorporation of elements to be derived from local Mesolithic traditions. At Dorchester-on-Thames and other sites (Stonehenge, for instance) ditched enclosures in the causewayed camp manner can now be recognized as the products of cultures outside the Windmill Hill group, and of ultimate Mesolithic ancestry. The Combe Hill evidence, then, may make us less certain of the original cultural affinities of our causewayed camps, and poses the question as to whether they were a feature adopted by the makers of Windmill Hill pottery from other contemporary communities in southern England. The antler-combs for skin preparing found in the camps

¹ Council for British Archaeology, *Survey and Policy* (1948), 30; Piggott, *British Prehistory* (1949), 97–8.

again have their continental parallels in the Michelsberg Culture,¹ and one from Schleswig-Holstein may indeed be Mesolithic.² They could be considered as another example of cultural borrowing. More evidence from Combe Hill may strengthen or confute such tentative suggestions.

Animal Bones and Shells

BY J. WILFRID JACKSON, D.Sc., F.S.A., F.G.S.

- 9/12. *Ox*. Fragment of the proximal end of shank-bone (metacarpal). Distal half of shank-bone (metacarpal); small and slender. Fragments of teeth and numerous chips of bone.
- 12/15. *Ox*. Part of calcaneum, and several chips of bone. Two teeth (lower molars), also numerous chips of bone and horn-core fragment.
- Pig*. Loose tooth.
- 15/18. *Ox*. Fragments of bone; one indeterminate (? part of animal skull).
- 18/21. *Ox*. Proximal end of radius.

The collection is far too small for conclusions to be drawn. Only two animals seem to be represented, ox and pig. The absence of sheep should be noted.

Shells

- 1/3. *Hellicella caperata* (Mont.) Land snail.
Trichia hispida (L.). " "
- 3/6. *Pomatias elegans* (Müll.). " "
Helicigona lapicida (L.). " "
- 6/9. *Pomatias elegans* (Müll.). " "
Helix nemoralis (L.). " "
- 9/12. *Pomatias elegans* (Müll.). " "
Cardium edule Linné. Edible marine cockle.
Helix hortensis (Müll.). Land snail.
Trichia striolata (C. Pfeiff.). " "
- 12/15. *Pomatias elegans* (Müll.). " "
Helix nemoralis (L.). " "
Cardium edule Linné. Edible marine cockle.
- 18/21. *Pomatias elegans* (Müll.). Land snail.
Helix nemoralis (L.). " "
Helix hortensis (Müll.). " "
Goniodiscus rotundatus (Müll.). " "

¹ Childe in *Arch. Journ.* LXXXVIII (1931), 56. There are chronological objections to deriving the British Windmill Hill culture from that of Michelsberg (J. Hawkes in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 1 (1935), 127).

² Schwantes, *Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins*, 1 (1939), 142.

Pomatias elegans (formerly *Cyclostoma*) is restricted to calcareous districts and lives among leaves and loose earth. It is locally common. I have found it round about Lewes, &c. Occurs on lime and chalk soils north to Westmorland. Found in Pleistocene and Holocene deposits.

Helicigona lapicida, found especially on calcareous soils north to Yorkshire. Pleistocene and Holocene, as well as recent.

The other land species are common forms and widely distributed.

Two examples of *Helix nemoralis* are interesting in being rather large. Conditions must have been good.

Cardium edule (common edible cockle). This may have been brought from the sea-shore for food or for adding to the paste for pottery making. I have often seen shell debris in potsherds.

By the way, *G. rotundatus*, *H. lapicida*, *H. nemoralis*, and *P. elegans* have been recorded from the Cissbury Flint-mines.

Ancient Charcoals

BY J. CECIL MABY, B.Sc., A.R.C.S., F.R.A.S.

- 9/12. *Corylus* sp. (Hazel). Branch wood.
 Crataegus sp. (Hawthorn). Branch wood.
 Fraxinus sp. (Ash). Sap-wood from large branch.
 12/15. *Fraxinus* sp. (Ash). " "
 15/18. *Corylus* sp. (Hazel). Branch wood.
 Crataegus sp. (Hawthorn). Branch wood.
 Fraxinus sp. (Ash). Sap-wood from large branch.
 18/21. *Corylus* sp. (Hazel). Branch wood.
 Crataegus sp. (Hawthorn). Branch wood.
 Fraxinus sp. (Ash). Sap-wood from large branch.

Shows same three species throughout, suggesting stability of local tree flora and/or commonality of usage. Likely to be only firewood ('brushwood'), though the ash specimens seem to have come from the sap-wood of large branches or even boles of one or more feet in diameter, judging by radius or curvature of rings.

The ash is a change from common oak, which with hazel and hawthorn is more usual, and is of some interest here to that extent.

Flint Implements

Layer 12/15. Only two implements were found. An end-scraper $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. long by $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. at the broad end. There is a small prepared striking platform with bulb and scar at the narrow end and upright flaking right across the broad end, which is half an inch in height. The crust has not been removed from nearly half the top side of the scraper. (Plate I.)

Layer 9/12. A leaf-shaped arrowhead $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long by $\frac{5}{8}$ in. wide. Fine secondary flaking both sides, though very slight on one side, which is very flat. Greatest thickness is $\frac{1}{8}$ in. in the centre. (Plate I.)

Grain-rubbers

Layer 12/15. A piece of a bottom stone with the top side worn to a very smooth surface was made of dark red ferruginous sandstone. It is understood similar stone is to be found at Falmer and also that stone of a like nature has been seen about 4 ft. below ground about a mile south of Combe Hill.

Layer 9/12. An upper rubber of similar but coarser stone was roughly circular, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter by 2 in. thick, and very convenient to hold in one hand. It was perfectly flat on one side.