Reminding ‘Round-the-Down’

TOPOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY SETTLEMENT AND LAND-USE AT SOUTHERHAM, NEAR LEOES

by Gail Vines & Frances Price

Archaeological and documentary evidence, taken together, suggests the enduring significance of a subtle downland feature on the steep southern slope of the Malling-Caburn Downs. Named ‘Round-the-Down’ on the 1873 Ordnance Survey map, this small rounded hill is one of the few local landforms still noted by today’s cartographers. The site of an Early-Bronze-Age barrow constructed alongside prehistoric fields, it retained a distinct identity well beyond prehistoric times. Within the settlement of Southerham, throughout the rise and fall of a peasant community, it became the focal point of a common field and a network of trackways, traces of which remain today. Thus the barrow and its hill may have helped to define a landscape that remained in cultivation over four millennia.

TOPOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT OF SOUTHERHAM

Surprisingly, perhaps, there seems to be no agreed name for the distinctive outlier of the South Downs, just east of Lewes. Even the local antiquary Hadrian Allcroft offered description rather than place-name, writing of:

‘the isolated lump of Downs lying directly east of Lewes, anciently to all intents an island cut off from the rest of the world by the streams and marshes of the Ouse and Glynde Reach’.

Geologist Gideon Mantell knew it as the Cliff Hills, reflecting his interest in the fossils of the early chalk pits along the river, as did Thomas Horsfield who referred to ‘that singularly isolated mass of Downs known as the Cliffe hills’. T. C. Woodman, some 70 years on, concurred; this ‘detached piece of the Downs’, he wrote in his guide to the South Downs, is ‘often spoken of by the general name of “the Cliff Hills”’. From another perspective, the Reverend Edward Boys Ellman, vicar of Berwick and grandson of John Ellman of Glynde, called it the Glynde Hills. Recently, English Nature, from its office in the county town, invented the name Lewes Downs to describe the site of its National Nature Reserve on the Caburn and adjoining SSSI downland, evidently unaware of local tradition. Meanwhile, contemporary scholarly usage focuses on the Caburn; in his excavation reports, archaeologist Michael Allen referred to the Malling-Caburn Downs, but Caburn block and Caburn massif are more widely adopted.1

Thus, today, this block of downland is best known for the Caburn, the prominent conical hill on its south-eastern flank. A popular destination for walkers and paragliders today, the hill and its prehistoric earthwork were eulogised by William Hay of Glyndebourne in his epic poem, Mount Caburn. Over the past 120 years, the Caburn has been the focus of repeated archaeological excavations, beginning with the pioneering work of Augustus Lane Fox (who later took the surname Pitt Rivers, for reasons of inheritance). Naturalists too have long valued this hill — Gilbert White, for one, commented on its ‘fierce’ wild bees — and in 1983 it won official recognition as a designated National Nature Reserve. Recently, its long history as a special place has been celebrated in works of art and in a popular booklet, Five Thousand Midsummer Days, produced by Malcolm Emery of English Nature in collaboration with archaeologists Sue Hamilton and Peter Drewett.2

The enduring appeal of the Caburn has, however, diverted attention from other features within this outlier. If, as Sue Hamilton has commented, Sussex as a whole is notable for its ‘series of closely juxtaposing resource zones, which are the outcome of the varied topography, geology and vegetation of the Downs and Wealden strata’, the Caburn block exemplifies this phenomenon on a fine scale. It ‘seems to present us with a miniature sample of the whole range’, wrote Woodman; ‘there is nothing to be found on the Downs that cannot be discovered here….’. To some extent, at least, this relatively modest geographical feature can serve as

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a test-bed for landscape-centred analyses of early settlement and land-use patterns in the eastern South Downs.3

Roughly circular and some 3 km in diameter — ‘there is a charming drive on low ground all round it, about nine miles,’ observed Woodman — the outlier offered easy access to dry trackways across downland hills with sheltered valleys. Its south-facing slopes on the Lower Chalk bore light but loess-enriched soils which, once cleared of trees and scrub, were attractive to early farmers. At its north-eastern foot, woodland probably persisted on the Gault clay at Ringmer — the site of the Broyle, a medieval park that served as common land. Most importantly, perhaps, the Ouse and its tributary Glynde Reach provided transport routes, fisheries, fowling, reeds and osiers, as well as wet meadows perhaps capable of supporting domestic livestock as early as the Neolithic. On the fringes of this block, three sites offered both sheltered valleys and river frontage: Malling Down and its Coombe on the western flank; Glynde, to the south-east, below the Caburn; and, on the south-western edge, Southerham.4

LANDSCAPES OF SOUTHERHAM
The site of Southerham, the focus of this paper, offered in many ways an ideal situation for early settlement. Strategically positioned between the tidal river and the downs, Southerham lay on the spring-line, where beds of Melbourn rock overlie the clay of the Plenus Marls, and the settlement has long had an independent water supply. Today, two licensed abstraction points are situated in the valley. Southerham’s position — in a sheltered valley opening into the Ouse valley on the southwest — appeared to have been ‘in every way adapted to be the home of an independent tribe’, opined Lane Fox.5

Yet its physical context has been much altered in recent years, obscuring much of the early settlement pattern. In 1846–7 the Lewes-Hastings and Lewes-Newhaven railway lines were laid through its brookland. In 1976, the A27 east–west trunk road sliced through its fields, demolishing several buildings. Even more of its once-favoured agricultural land was destroyed during a chalk-extraction boom that began in the middle of the 19th century and continued until the last Southerham pit closed in 1981. Today, Southerham’s quartet of disused quarries function variously as a portal to the Cuifail road tunnel, an industrial estate, a recycling depot specializing in CFC-filled fridges, and an unofficial motorcycle circuit, while just off the A27, a portion
of the old highway has become a designated transit site for travellers. Former landscapes of Southerham are thus particularly elusive.

A hint of the landforms that once distinguished this place, however, comes from an oblique aerial photograph taken on 5 November 1947 (Fig. 1). Quarrying had only just begun to eat away at one landmark — a substantial ridge of Lower Chalk, marked as the Snower on the 1873 OS map (Fig. 2). Running roughly east-west, the ridge provided a southerly closure to Oxteddle Bottom and the settlement site of Southerham, and also offered a vantage point over the river, which bends round it.

The railway cutting — slicing through the ridge’s western end — is visible today from the riverside footpath along the eastern bank of the Ouse. Other remnants of the Snower fringe the vast Southerham Grey Pit, south of the A27 and north of the railway line connecting Lewes and Glynde. These exposures reveal its geomorphology: a top bed of harder, blocky Zig Zag Chalk over softer West Melbury Marly Clay. The pit itself, which boasts an abundance of ammonites and is also rich in fossil lobsters and fish, has won international recognition as a GSSP (global stratotype section and point) for its unparalleled exposure of sediments laid down some 95 million years ago, and classified as the Lower Chalk (Cenomanian) of the Upper Cretaceous. Machine Bottom Pit, north of the A27, continues the succession into the Upper Cenomanian; together, the pits provide an excellent exposure of the entire Cenomanian stage.¹

Round-the-Down, the site of an Early-Bronze-Age round barrow, is also evident on this image. This small hill lies midway up the steep, south-facing slope, and on the standard geological map appears as a circle of Upper Chalk, isolated by a thin valley of ‘Head’ created through periglacial erosion. Below, moving down the slope, lies first a band of transitional Melbourn Rock, then Lower Chalk. A more precise mapping of the region, not yet published, identifies the hill’s Upper Chalk as Holywell Nodular Chalk (re-categorised as Middle, rather than Upper, Chalk), and the Lower Chalk as the Plenus Marls.⁷

Marked as ‘Round-the-Down’ on the current OS map — but earlier, the Round Down or Little Down — this place may serve as a marker of both continuity and change within the landscape of Southerham. As one of only a dozen place-names still assigned to the hills and valleys of the Malling-Caburn block as a whole, its survival as a site deemed worthy of naming is all the more striking given that the honour is now virtually posthumous. The hill itself has been almost entirely quarried away.

I: ROUND-THE-DOWN IN PREHISTORY

THE BARROW AND ITS SETTING

In his survey of Sussex barrows, Leslie Grinsell described the earthwork on Round-the-Down as
a bowl barrow with ditch, measuring 20 paces in diameter and two feet in height, and noted that in 1930 it was under plough. Little is known of its contents. The primary burial pit had been opened many years earlier, and its contents dispersed without record.⁸

Despite the lack of archaeological evidence, however, there are grounds for speculating that the construction on Round-the-Down may have been particularly notable in its day. As a round monument on a roundish hill, it may perhaps have exemplified a Bronze-Age preoccupation with circularity.⁹ In that respect, its significance may have been enhanced by its proximity to, and prospect of, the Upper and Lower Rise (earlier ‘Rye’, from OE, e.g. island) — two distinctive rounded hills of Gault and Lower Chalk rising more than 20 metres from the Ouse valley. In addition, the barrow’s distinctive location — on its own small hill halfway up the south-facing downland slope — made it particularly visible, perhaps more so than any other funerary monument of similar age within the block. Easily seen throughout the Ouse valley south of Lewes, its orientation may have been primarily to the river valley below, and to a range of vantage points within Southerham itself. Within its own downland block, it is visible from the north-west (near the present golf club house), from above and to the east, at the nearby Late-Bronze-Age cross-ridge dyke of Ranscombe (300 m to the east) and the Iron-Age site of the Caburn (1 km to the east). Round-the-Down is also a notable landmark when viewed from high ground to the west (for instance, from Kingston Ridge or from St Anne’s churchyard at the top of Lewes High Street).

Some 30 years ago, the Rugby Cement Company was granted permission to extend its pit, threatening the barrow. Between 1973 and 1975, it was excavated by Lewes Archaeological Group under the direction of Richard Lewis (Fig. 3). Although no written report was prepared, the finds and their context have been recently reinterpreted, providing insights into early land-use here. In the barrow itself, Lewis recovered fragments of bone, probably from an adult male, as well as sherds of collared urns and food vessels typically associated with burial sites of the Early Bronze Age.¹⁰

THE PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE
During the Bronze Age, more than a dozen round barrows were created on this block of downland including one of the richest burial assemblages found in Sussex (Fig. 4). Extensive field systems, some of which are believed to date to the Bronze Age, are still visible on the slopes of Oxtedde and Bible Bottom.¹¹

Despite such signs of Bronze-Age activity, no settlement site has yet been discovered on the Caburn block. The presence of an Early-Bronze-Age Beaker settlement near Round-the-Down, however, is suggested by Michael Allen’s study of the ditch fill of the barrow, and colluvial deposits just below the excavated barrow. Allen’s analyses,
charting the changing distributions of snail species, indicate that mature woodland covered much of what is now Southerham in later Mesolithic and early Neolithic times, followed by a marked shift towards grassland turf. Allen suggests that the large number of late-Beaker sherds in this predominantly grassland section could indicate that people were living ‘in the immediate vicinity’ by the Early Bronze Age.¹²

Chris Butler has argued that the barrow at Round-the-Down might have been positioned near a field boundary. This conclusion is supported by Allen’s findings, which indicate that tillage of the slopes around Round-the-Down began at the time of the barrow-building and continued through the Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval periods. Allen’s evidence also indicates, however, that Round-the-Down itself was not tilled in prehistoric times, reflecting, he suggests, its symbolic significance. It seems possible that its geological status may also have helped to set the hill apart.

To the south of the barrow, the chalk ridge of the Snower, with the meandering river snaking round its south-western shoulder, may have been a particularly notable landmark in the Bronze Age, when watery places seemed to hold a special allure. No barrows have been recorded on the long-ploughed hill, but during roadworks in 1976 a Bronze-Age cremation was discovered at its northern foot. The place-name Snower (earlier Sudnore, Snoors) probably derives from OE ora, for a ridge shaped like an upturned punt, with flat land at the summit and a sloping end (or two). Place-name scholar Ann Cole has suggested that ora is a Latin loan word associated with areas of early settlement. Features so named were often conspicuous landmarks and many stood beside Roman or pre-Roman routes, major cross-roads or river crossings.¹³

Thus it is intriguing to note that Roman trackways, and a possible river-crossing, have been sited near the Snower. In his comprehensive treatise on Roman roads, Ivan Margary concluded, as had Hadrian Allcroft before him, that there was probably a river-crossing at Southerham, perhaps located near the present railway bridge. At this point, the Cockshut flows into the River Ouse, and shallows often occur at a confluence. A crossing here may have formed a vital link in a route-way pre-dating the Roman era, running from Kingston Ridge via Southerham through Southerham and across the outlier to points south and east.¹⁴

Near Round-the-Down, archaeological excavations during roadworks on the A27 revealed part of a long-standing Romano-British farmstead occupied from the first century AD until the late 4th century. Although Owen Bedwin names the locality Ranscombe Hill, the site fell within what became the common field of Southerham and lay some 250 m to the south-west of Round-the-Down. Much of the site, Bedwin suggested, had already been destroyed by earlier road building and he was unable to discover its full extent. But the Romano-British farmstead may have extended south of the old road, where C.F. Knight-Farr is reported to have found Romano-British pottery in a ploughed field — likely to have been the Lower Laine of Ranscombe as mapped in 1822. Bedwin did, however, find a marker of arable agriculture, a ‘corn-drying oven’, which could have been used to dry grain for storage, malting or milling. Destruction of the site may have begun in 1819, when the road from Southerham to Ranscombe opposite Henge Lane was altered, ‘being made lower down the bank to ease the hill, and where it joined the old road at the corner the bank was pared down’, wrote the Reverend Ellman, adding that:

‘This exposed the sites of two pits cut out in the chalk, and filled up with earth. I used to fancy that these were graves, and have wondered whether they could have anything to do with murders committed there’.¹⁵

II: ROUND-THE-DOWN IN SOUTHERHAM

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

In the post-Roman era, the Malling-Caburn Downs probably lay within the late Saxon tribal region of Mealllingas, or ‘Mealla’s people’, later ‘Malling’ from the Old English ending, ingas, referring to a community, prefixed by the leader’s personal name. Below Malling Down, what seems to have been an extensive Anglo-Saxon cemetery dating from the late 5th to 6th centuries has been partially excavated on several occasions, starting in 1830, when roadworks on Malling Hill exposed skeletons inspected by Gideon Mantell. Estimated by Gabor Thomas to have contained 100 graves or more,
the cemetery may have extended from the lower slopes of Malling Down to a Stoneham field west of the A26 to Uckfield — near the line of a Roman road that ran from London to Malling Down — underlining the early significance of the eastern bank of the Ouse.¹⁶

By perhaps the 8th century, these downs became incorporated within the Archbishop of Canterbury’s extensive South Malling estate. This estate stretched from South Malling through Uckfield, Framfield, Mayfield and Wadhurst to Lamberhurst on the Kent border and was assessed in the Domesday Book as having been an 80-hide unit before 1066. The fact that this large landholding was so named points to South Malling’s status as a ‘central place’ in the Saxon period, and a minster church was established here.

Southerham, less than two miles to the south, formed a frontier of sorts: its southern boundary, the river Ouse, also marked the southernmost extent of the entire South Malling estate as well as the Hundred of Loxfield.¹⁷ A custumal from c. 1285, surviving as a 15th-century copy in the library of Canterbury Cathedral, and a similar text from an original document from 1305–6, suggests that a community of some three dozen adults and their children tilled land and grazed livestock in the borgh or tithing of ‘Suthram’. Throughout this period (1285-1305), Southerham was evidently a small piece in the jigsaw, a part of what Glanville Jones has influentially called a ‘multiple estate’, referring to the entire estate of South Malling. Offering varied resources of down, brook and field, Southerham was one of several borghs within the archbishop’s estate classified as ‘without the wood’, including Wellingham, Gote and Ashton, all now part of Ringmer parish. Other borghs, such as Framfield, Uckfield and Mayfield in the Weald,
were ‘within the wood’.\textsuperscript{18}

At Southerham in 1285, three free tenants, including a knight and a prior, rented meadowland. Three further freeholders, Juliana (Gillian) at Dene, and her sisters Agnes and Lettice (Joy), held a sheepwalk containing about 24 acres of land and 1\(\frac{1}{2}\) acres of meadow and pasture for 8 beasts containing 3 acres. For this they paid 20 shillings, and owed a variety of works, including a share in making and repairing the bread oven of Malling.

Arable land at Southerham was held by servile peasants. Twenty-four named individuals were allocated a total of 14\(\frac{1}{4}\) virgates of arable land — amounting perhaps to between 145 and 174 acres, if a virgate here covered between 10 to 12 acres.\textsuperscript{19} Another rental list in the 1285 custumal — which featured all but seven of these virgaters, and included four additional names — recorded rents paid on small holdings of an acre or two on \textit{terre montane}, translated as downland and amounting to just over 41 acres in all. Taken together, these peasant arable holdings at Southerham may have totalled some 200 acres, although it is difficult to know whether the custumal’s ‘virgates’ and ‘acres’ can be translated even roughly into statute acres. Five hundred years later, Southerham Farm included a modest 135 acres of arable land.\textsuperscript{20}

The 1285 custumal suggests that Southerham was largely populated by personally unfree bondmen of various sorts. Virtually all of the tenants holding virgates and acres in \textit{terre montane} were explicitly identified as \textit{neifs}, from Latin \textit{nativi}, indicating that they are born to their unfree status and could not escape it. In Southerham, the custumal also named three \textit{cottars}, with tiny holdings, as tenants of the Lord Archbishop; six other cots, many of them built-on, were leased by \textit{neifs}. The relatively lowly status of Southerham’s inhabitants is confirmed by their attendance, a century later in 1382, at a \textit{hallmoot} at Stoneham; this term was typically applied to a court held by ecclesiastical lords for their \textit{villein} tenants.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1285, Southerham held a substantial proportion of the available labour-force for the southern portion of the archbishop’s estate. The peasantry at Southerham paid rents in cash or produce, and also owed work to several parts of the archbishop’s estate including Stoneham, Gote and \textit{Thakwisse}, as well as enjoying common rights to woodland at the Broyle.\textsuperscript{22} These interconnections are reflected in the settlement’s Old English name, with \textit{south}er...marking its more southerly location in relation to Norlington and Middleham across the downs, now absorbed into the parish of Ringmer. At the same time, \textit{hamm} acknowledged its position on the downland edge, sloping down to the Ouse; the place-name element can variously indicate land in a river bend, or hemmed in by water or marsh, or a piece of valley bottom land surrounded by higher ground — and all these interpretations could apply here.\textsuperscript{23}

Southerham’s virgaters also provided labour to the demesne arable immediately to the east, called ‘Rammescombe’ — probably ‘ram’s valley’ from OE \textit{ramm} and \textit{cumb}, although by the late 18th century Paul Dunvan, in his history of Lewes, noted that ‘Ramscomb’ was ‘generally written and pronounced Ramscombe’.\textsuperscript{24} In the late 13th and early 14th centuries, the place-name apparently referred to a relatively small demesne farm within the archbishop’s estate.\textsuperscript{25} It gave its name to an independent manorial entity embracing Southerham only after 1543, when the forced dispersal of the manor of South Malling into secular hands began (see below). In 1285, by contrast, Ramscombe seems to have functioned largely as a southern site for barns housing livestock and storing grain; the peasants of Southerham were charged with drawing out the dung of Ramscombe, with roofing one half of its barley grange (using rods harvested at Stoneham) and with cutting its meadows and bringing in the hay.\textsuperscript{26}

A century on, Ramscombe’s modest contribution to the demesne arable was documented in an inquisition of 1398, which recorded that the archbishop then held just 70 acres of arable land at Ramscombe, as compared to 400 acres at the fertile arable demesne of Stoneham, supplemented by 32 acres near the college of secular canons at South Malling.\textsuperscript{27}

Below the arable fields of both Southerham and Ramscombe, which descend no lower than the 5-metre contour, stretched extensive brooks — a local Sussex name for riparian grazing marsh. The early division of this wetland between Southerham and the demesne of Ramscombe is uncertain, and in the late 13\textsuperscript{th} century the settlement’s brooks may have been more extensive than those recorded by the estate maps from the mid-18th and early 19th centuries. For instance, the 1285 custumal included under the \textit{borgh} of Southerham a 15-acre meadow at ‘Wydeham’, just north of the junction of Glynde...
Reach with the Ouse, and lay further east than the brooks later assigned to Southerham.\textsuperscript{28}

During the late middle ages, as sea levels rose, prized meadows apparently became increasingly prone to flooding throughout the year, severely reducing their value for livestock. In response, Brandon has argued, the archbishop converted 400 acres of meadow at Southerham into a permanent and valuable fishery known as the 

\textit{Brodewater}, intended for the exclusive use of the Lord or his tenants. The 1398 inquisition refers to a private (\textit{i.e.}, not common) fishery called \textit{Brodewater} and \textit{Sothrambrok} of unspecified dimensions but worth 100 shillings a year — rivalling the 400-acre arable holding at Stoneham valued at 133 shillings, and contrasting with Ranscombe’s arable valued at just 23 shillings. In 1435 and 1444, Ranscombe manor rolls recorded expenses paid to farmers who supplied the archbishop with pike, bream, tench, roach and perch — all denizens of muddy-bottomed, slow-flowing rivers.\textsuperscript{29}

The resulting loss of riparian meadowland to year-round floodwaters may have lessened the viability of smallholdings at Southerham, reducing tenants’ ability to harvest hay to feed stock over winter. And despite the proximity of rich fisheries, there is little sign of a common fishery near Southerham within the archbishop’s estate. In January 1508, a special water court was convened to judge a man charged with destroying the lord’s fish.\textsuperscript{30}

These circumstances perhaps help to explain the evident decline of Southerham, which features in several scholarly catalogues of ‘shrunken’ villages.\textsuperscript{31} Signs of the settlement’s decline were apparent in 1504 at the \textit{hallmoot} of Stoneham, when the messuage and barn of John Rede in Southerham was said to be ‘defective and ruinous in walls and roofing’. In 1507, Thomas Sheperd’s barn was ruinous for lack of underpinning. In 1509, John Rede had still not rebuilt his building, now burnt, but by October 1510 he had made a start. In 1511 the barn of Thomas Homewod was ruinous in walls and roofing, and so was the barn of John Rede. By 1512 the building of Alice Stonnyng was ruinous in roofing, as was Thomas Dorege’s; meanwhile, John Rede’s building had collapsed. In October 1512 the authorities’ patience had run out, and John Rede’s messuage was seized into the lord’s hand.\textsuperscript{32}

By the 1530s, the ‘ancient’ chapel at Southerham, of unknown date and dedicated to St Mary Magdalen, had apparently fallen into disrepair, and probably disuse, and in 1549 was let as a ‘message sometime the chapel of Sothram’. When this building was destroyed in 1837, a skeleton -‘probably the founder’- was reputedly found embedded in the north wall.\textsuperscript{33}

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\textbf{SOUTHERHAM IN THE 1543 SURVEY} & \\
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During the early 16th century, under Archbishop Wareham’s tenure (1503–1532), the manor of Ranscombe remained demesne land held by the archbishop, although let to tenant farmers. Southerham, by contrast, offered arable, meadow and downland held in common as well as individual holdings. It extended north along the eastern bank of the Ouse towards Cliffe, with a boundary at the ‘common watering ground’ near the end of South Street where Cliffe parish meets Southerham within the parish of South Malling. The flooded brookland of Broadwater continued to provide valuable fisheries. \\
With substantial portions of the South Malling estate soon to pass into private hands, the Archbishop of Canterbury commissioned a survey of the manor of Ranscombe, carried out in 1543.\textsuperscript{34} This revealing document described a common down, four acres of common brook and a common field of 78 acres at Southerham. This allocation of common land probably represented the shrunken remains of a common field system that once embraced much of the tillable land in Southerham. Also prominently featured in this survey was the Snower, Southerham’s distinctive, low-lying chalk ridge.\textsuperscript{35} If, as seems likely, medieval Southerham once had at least two open fields, the extensive, south-facing slope of the Snower may have formed the second field. In the 1543 survey, it was divided up into several holdings, and was served by droveways. Traces of these field boundaries persist today, marked by ditch and hedge. \\
Out of 14 named individuals with holdings at Southerham in 1543, the chief landholder was Thomas Lucas, who held 87 acres copyhold, and one acre freehold. By the 16th century, as the feudal nature of tenure in Southerham, as elsewhere, had begun to crumble, the descendants of the villeins had become copyholders. In Southerham in 1543, virtually all land was held in this fashion; in the survey, only five parcels of land amounting to just a few acres of land were held as freehold, in addition
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to Wydeham and another parcel of brookland.

Thomas Lucas also had a dwelling house, the timber-framed core of which probably remains, under a Georgian brick frontage, as the offices of a firm of architects. The building, north of the ‘king’s highway’ from Glynde to Lewes and slightly to the west of the main valley bottom, apparently avoids the periodic flooding which in exceptionally wet years threatens the Victorian farm buildings (now converted into housing), as surface water flows down Ox teddle Bottom after heavy rains have saturated the chalk aquifer.36

In 1543, no other dwellings were specifically mentioned at Southerham. The survey gave details of a total of nine barns with gardens or crofts attached, situated north and south of the king’s highway. In the survey, Round-the-Down was called the ‘little downe’ or ‘lyteldowne’, and was circled by the common field, with a drove-way providing access to the down from the brooks to the south. The survey recounted: ‘At the east end of the said droveway, and in the middle of the foresaid common field of Soutram there is a certain piece of Layland called the little downe containing by estimation 4 acres and lyeth in common to all the tenents.’ The common field system was clearly in transition, with two tenants holding large, amalgamated blocks within it: Thomas Lucas held 9 acres called Lampersland and 15 acres called Haierdene, while the heirs of John Reed had 8 acres called Cold Cote; a further block of 7 acres was claimed as demesne by the lord of the manor of Ranscombe.

With the breakup of the architect’s estate, and as letters patent granted to Sir John Gage the manor of Ranscombe and the fishery of ‘Brodewater in Mallying, Southerham and Bedynham’, disputes over land intensified. In 1553, Gage was embroiled in a legal dispute with William Wood and George Myller over the limits of Broadwater, ‘otherwise the Brodewater of Southram otherwise the Brookes of Southram’. The cutting of the Ouse outlet at Newhaven around 1539 apparently transformed part of Broadwater into grass-covered dry land, and Wood, who held a 50-year lease of the manor of Ranscombe granted to his father by the archbishop in 1536, wished to graze his cattle there. One witness testified that Broadwater, the fishing place of Southerham, extended over 480 acres and had never belonged to Ranscombe. Moreover, it was recalled that in previous years the waters had risen up to the hedge between the arable and the brooks, enabling fish to be caught in nets tied to the hedges. Ultimately, Wood won the right to graze 20 acres, with the proviso that were they ever to flood again, Gage might fish or fowl upon them.37

Between 1550 and 1650, throughout eastern Sussex, tenantry acreage was increasingly consolidated into fewer hands, and common land enclosed and held individually. In 1596 a carpenter, William Storer of Southover, was engaged in such consolidation in Southerham. In 1627 his son Thomas Storer held 172 out of 220 arable acres in Southerham; in 1650, Thomas’s son, William Storer, apparently held virtually all of Southerham’s arable land. By 1734, the estate, now known as Southerham Farm and including a timber wharf, had descended to William Storer’s nephew, Dr Richard Russell, who in that year paid Sir William Gage £250 to enfranchise the copyhold tenure.38

ROUND-THE-DOWN INTO MODERN TIMES

At Round-the-Down, the barrow and its hill persisted as a notable feature in the landscape throughout the gradual enclosure of arable land at Southerham, and by the 18th century, ‘little downe’ had become the ‘round down’ on the first estate map — surveyed in c. 1762 for William Kempe, and on a slightly later c. 1770 map, pinpointing the remaining copyhold fields.39

Round Down persisted as a field-name on estate maps of Southerham made for its subsequent owner, Lord Gage, dating from 1799 and 1822, which indicated an enclosed field of three and a half acres (Fig. 5). Round Down also featured as a discrete field (measuring 3 acres, 2 rods and 17 perches and down to ‘grass’) on an undated Figg map that postdated the arrival of the railway c. 1846. When the hill was first tilled remains uncertain, but a survey of ‘Southram Farm’ thought to date from the late 18th century listed Round Down as sown with wheat. In 1826, with 477 acres, including arable and downland, at Southerham farmed by William Stunt, Round Down measured 3 acres and 2 roods and was ‘pasture’.40

Curving round the Round Down were two remnants of the 1543 common field, aptly named Upper and Lower Hollow Fields. Beneath the down lay the remaining core of the common field, the 20-acre ‘Great Laine’. ‘Laine’ was ‘a local name given to certain tracts of arable land at the foot of the Sussex downs’ and typically indicated a common field (Fig. 6).41
Fig. 5 Southerham Farm and Ranscombe Farm: field boundaries from the Gage estate maps of 1799 and 1822. The barrow lay within a small enclosure called Round Down.
Fig. 6 Field-names and buildings at Southerham in 1822. Only two chalk quarries exist within Southerham at this time, both along the river.
On the Gage estate maps, a dwelling still marked as ‘the chapel’ stood next to ‘the Green’, bounded by wet ditches running into the brooks. Nearby were two ponds and an orchard, producing (in 1730) a variety of apples, pears, walnuts and filberts. In the early 18th century, a riverside croft called the Pith was deemed suitable for shipbuilding.

Despite the creation of the Newhaven cut in the mid-16th century, flooding continued to trouble graziers over the intervening centuries. Eventually, more than two centuries later, attempts were made to improve drainage by straightening the river. After an act of 1791 the Trustees of the Ouse Lower Navigation made several long cuts, including the Poolbar Cut at Southerham and the Ranscombe Cut, which seemed to have succeeded in reducing winter flooding.

As the brooks were drained, by the late 18th century and early 19th century, chalk quarrying had evidently become an important small-scale local industry. On the 1762 Kempe estate map, a small quarry and lime kiln at Southerham corner had joined a substantial pit at the end of South Street, now at the southern portal of the Cuilfail Tunnel. In 1822 this pit, the largest quarry in Southerham, was labelled ‘Hillman’ on the Gage estate map; it was leased to four Hillmans, all bargemen, in 1811. Thus in the early 19th century, the chalk industry was still confined to the river cliffs, away from valuable arable land. Small-scale quarrying at the fringes of Southerham, at pits along the river, dates from at least the reign of Edward IV (1460-1483), when chalk was obtained from a ‘quarry of the cliffs of Southram near Lewes’ for making mortar.

By the 1851 census, Southerham had a toll gate, supervised by a 50-year-old widow and her 21-year-old daughter-in-law, both called Mary Ann Moore (and portrayed in a surviving photograph). The cottage was also home to one-year-old Orris and three-year-old Trayton and their uncle, 19-year-old Edward Funnell, who worked as a rail labourer. Beershop keepers Thomas and Mirria Seal also lived at Southerham. In 1851, the farm was tenanted by Robert Wright Stunt, 37, his wife, Susannah Elizabeth (who died six years later, aged 35), their three children, and a 16-year-old unmarried female servant. (Thomas Stunt of Bexhill, Robert’s grandfather, had leased Southerham Farm from Gage in 1805; his second son, William Stunt, also farmed at Southerham, and died in 1840 aged 68.) In 1851 Robert Stunt employed 14 people, but at that time Southerham held just three additional households: a 37-year-old agricultural labourer and his wife and five children, a blacksmith and his wife, and a shepherd and wife with three daughters and two sons, both also shepherds.

During Robert Stunt’s tenure at Southerham, the quarrying of the pit just below the Round Down probably began. A ‘gray chalk pit’ extending a little over an acre — just north of the road in the centre of Southerham — appeared on the undated Figg map c. 1846. Another map of the Gage estates, dated 1855, surveyor unknown, showed a still-small pit being worked there. Thus chalk quarrying in the Great Laine, the arable heartland of Southerham, began only around the middle of the 19th century, when the Lower Chalk became a valuable ingredient in cement, and the proximity of the railway made industrial-scale exploitation profitable. By the early 20th century, probably after the First World War, quarrymen had set to work on the Lower Chalk of the Snower, which was ultimately to be transformed into one of the district’s biggest pits (Fig. 7).
Closed in 1978, this pit in the Snower, now called Southerham Grey Pit, narrowly escaped becoming a landfill site in 1990. Other field-names highlighted further resources, including holts — suggesting managed plantations of a single species — and shaws above Oxteddle Bottom and the Old Eye along the river bend, enclosed by ditches and banks. Southerham also had its Hempshalls, providing fibre for rope and cloth, as well as brookland osiers for basketry and hurdles. Even Leech Brook may once have yielded a useful harvest.

The Gage estate maps of Southerham (373 acres) and Ranscombe (630 acres) offer the last insight into naming practices that were decidedly local. As map-making became a national enterprise, the Ordnance Survey perhaps inadvertently altered ancient names at a stroke. When the 1873 25" OS map was published, the Round Down had become Round-the-Down, just as Southerham’s Oxsettle Bottom became Oxteddle Bottom and Ramscombe became Ranscombe. In addition, new field-names appeared, acknowledging the substantial chalk quarry appearing in the former Great Laine; today, a fragment of what was once the medieval common field is officially ‘Machine Bottom’. The pit itself is a recycling centre for fridges, cars and computers as well as a designated geological site of international importance.

Field boundaries and landholdings have changed markedly in recent years, as enclosures have been enlarged and rationalised, and land sold in lots. A large part of what was Southerham — its downs as far as the golf course, and the valley of Oxteddle, as well as Ranscombe’s Bible Bottom — is now in the care of the Sussex Wildlife Trust. Because the trust already has a reserve on the outlier, at Malling Down, its new acquisition has officially become part of Malling Down too.

In the 21st century, Round-the-Down has lost its ‘tumulus’ mark — even though Lewis’s excavated site is still there, spared by the quarriers after all. Unwittingly perhaps, the mappers too have allowed the place-name to persist, to serve as a signpost to the rich history of the intimate terrain of the eastern South Downs.

III: DEFINING LANDSCAPES

BOUNDARIES IN THE MAKING

The south-facing downland slopes above and below Round-the-Down supported arable crops in a finely balanced economy, in which livestock — sustained, in turn, on downland and brooks — helped to restore fertility to arable land on thin chalk soils. In this integrated landscape, a reliance on a mosaic of topographical resources may have fostered relatively stable patterns of land-use.

On the Caburn block, long-standing boundaries parcel out the hills and valleys and wetlands among a few major landholdings. The division of key resources can still be read in the landscape. At the northwestern end of Southerham in Oxtedle Bottom lie the remains of the curious earthwork now known as the Bible — and earlier attributed to the Devil. Its shape, likened to the pages of an open book, may have resulted from its status as a resource shared between Southerham and Ranscombe, as indicated on the Gage estate maps of 1799 and 1822 (Fig. 5).

Also shared by these estates were the putative ‘ox-stalls’ that straddled a common boundary in Oxteddle Bottom. Described by Hadrian Allcroft, who estimated accommodation for more than 20 beasts, the earthwork is still visible on the southern side of the valley, in which arable land was allocated to both estates. Called ‘Oxynsetyn’ in 1445 and 1462, and ‘Oxenseaton’ in 1543, the name may derive from landseten, denoting ‘land in occupation or possession’ or ‘cultivated land’. Roberts and Wrathmell cite a 10th-century document describing the custom, when setting a gebur or farmer on the land, that he be given ‘to land setene’ — that is, a modest outfit of livestock and arable land. However, Allcroft favoured the local belief that the ox-stall earthwork itself gave its name to the valley, and concluded that the name derived from oxena-saetum, ‘at the ox-stalls’, an interpretation which Mawer and Stenton did not apparently discount.

Dividing these two estates, a straight boundary ditch and bank also persists on the southern slope of Oxteddle Bottom, as do Gage boundary stones, in sandstone or granite, usually inscribed ‘LG’ or ‘G’, along modern fence lines that honour the old outer bounds of the manor of Ranscombe.

TRACKWAYS AND DROVE-WAYS

Because pre-modern farmers needed to exploit the full range of resources available in the landscape, the positioning of trackways allowing access to those resources may reflect enduring constraints.
in the landscape. Until the construction of the A27 bypass less than 30 years ago, a main road from Lewes ran directly through Southerham. In 1595, Southerham (but not Ranscombe) appeared on John Norden’s printed map of Sussex, not least, perhaps, because it served as a landmark for the traveller, by river and road. The settlement continued to feature on subsequent printed maps, though re-designated as Southerham ‘Farm’ by the late 18th century.

A wealth of trackways fed off the main road, notably the surviving route past farm buildings

Fig. 8. Aerial photograph taken 22 January 1947 shows Henge Lane below Round-the-Down, as well as the drove-way from Ranscombe into Oxteddele Bottom, and Ranscombe cross-ridge dyke. English Heritage (NMR) RAF Photography CPE/UK/1947 frame 3043.
into Oxteddle valley, which featured in the 1543 survey as ‘the lane leading from the chapel at Southerham to the Oxenceton’. A further high route — perhaps preferable to the main riverside road in a wet winter — ran up Chapel Hill and then along the cliff to drop steeply down into Southerham, and is shown on the first edition 1"-mile OS map of 1813.

The drove-way to Round-the-Down cited in the 1543 survey, and the drove-way leading up to the chalk ridge of Sudnore/Snoors/Snower and shown on the 1762 estate map, are probably lost to quarrying. One survives, however, to the south, just below the A27. This holloway — deeply-cut and coppice-flanked and shown on Bedwin’s excavation map as a farm track — slopes down to rich grazing land along the river, the brooks. Now called Brook Lane, it was known as Henge Lane through at least the 16th to the 19th centuries, perhaps from Old English *henge*, ‘sloping’ (Fig. 8). Henge itself seemed to name a place within the brooklands, for it featured as a landmark in the 1543 deed of exchange between Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and Sir John Gage, which included a description of the bounds of the manor of Ranscombe. On the Gage estate maps, the lane formed the south-eastern boundary of Southerham, marking the (unequal) division of brookland with neighbouring Ranscombe.

As a long-standing route allowing the seasonal movement of livestock to and from downland and brookland pasture, Henge Lane merits further investigation. Its southerly orientation, towards the round ‘island’ of the Lower Rise in the valley below, hints at a possible prehistoric significance. Both a Bronze-Age funerary urn and Bedwin’s Romano-British farmstead finds lay within 50 metres of its junction with the original highway from Southerham to Ranscombe. Furthermore, the *ora* landmark, the Snower, slopes away to the east at Henge Lane, perhaps signposting this route-way to Anglo-Saxon users of the landscape. In 1670 it was well-enough known in the community to serve as a meeting place for 500 religious dissenters gathered there for an illegal open-air service led by the dissenting preacher Henry Godman. Indicated on Richard Budgen’s map of 1724 as a southerly route at right angles to the Lewes-Glynde road, the holloway also featured prominently on both the 1783 Yeakell and Gardner’s map and Gardner and Gream’s map of 1795 (Fig. 2). In the middle of the 19th century, the Reverend Ellman remembered the:

lane leading down to the marsh, which used to have a very bad reputation. Many were afraid to pass the spot at night. The lane was said to be haunted, a ghost in the shape of a woman without a head would (it was said) often appear at the top of the lane.\(^{49}\)

**PREHISTORIC AFFINITIES**

Three hundred metres to the east of Round-the-Down lies the Ranscombe cross-ridge dyke, dated to the early 1st millennium BC. Such linear banks and ditches were once regarded as ‘covered ways’ or as features associated with trackways, and indeed, a long-standing track- or drove-way did once run alongside the western end of the cross-ridge dyke. Now ploughed out in its middle reaches, the track still runs from Ranscombe Farm up the downs and descends into Oxteddle Bottom near the present-day concrete dewpond (Fig. 8).\(^{50}\)

More recently, however, cross-ridge dykes have been reinterpreted as marking the extent of large territorial blocks linked to the grazing of livestock or more locally defining the limits of arable and settlement space. They may indicate a formalisation and reorganisation of land divisions at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. At Ranscombe, as far back as topographical documentation extends — thus since at least the 16th century — the cross-ridge dyke has roughly marked the southernmost extent of Ranscombe’s ‘sheep down’, while arable land lay on the slopes below.\(^{51}\)

At its eastern end, the earthwork abuts a major medieval boundary, shared by the manor of Ranscombe and the parish of South Malling (neighbouring on Glynde parish). This boundary also formed a parliamentary constituency boundary from 1885 until 20th-century rationalizations.\(^{52}\) It is marked today by a fence line and Gage boundary stones. At its western end, the cross-ridge dyke approaches the boundary between Southerham and Ranscombe.

These boundaries need not be older than medieval in date. Yet traces of prehistoric markers of place could perhaps have persisted here, albeit in much modified form, in settlement, manorial, parish and estate bounds. As David Field argues, many such linear features appear to divide up valley areas in the same way that tithings did in
the medieval period. Perhaps these divisions have a profound time-depth, reflected today in the lack of a local name for the outlier as a whole.

Visually, both Southerham and Ranscombe (and indeed Glynde) form coherent entities — natural arenas separated from each other by the lie of the land.

Southerham’s south-eastern boundary with Ranscombe, for instance — a field called Coldcote in 1543 — lies on rising ground that ends abruptly as it meets a steep, wooded combe, ‘Ranscombe Holt’, which constitutes one of the three distinctive combes of the manor. The divisions of the two Gage estates as mapped in 1799 and 1822 respect these topographical framings, giving these places a sense of coherence even today. It seems possible that the builders of the Bronze-Age monuments in this landscape — Round-the-Down barrow and the cross-ridge dyke — were influenced by similar considerations.

**CONCLUSION**

Round-the-Down, a prominent small hill protruding from a south-facing downland slope, seems to have been cleared in preparation for the construction of a burial mound in the Early Bronze Age. Perched on its mini-down, the round barrow must have been a particularly striking feature in the landscape. The surrounding slopes were evidently tilled at this time, and throughout the Iron Age and beyond. Yet Round-the-Down itself was not ploughed by early farmers.

Throughout most of the Romano-British era, farmers tilled land below the barrow, where a farmstead was sited. By medieval times, a *borgh* or tithing existed at Southerham, probably encompassing both the site of the Round-the-Down barrow and its surrounding fields. In the 1540s, the barrow and its down retained a distinct identity as the ‘little downe’, while the encircling agricultural land was farmed communally as the common field of Southerham. In the 1700s and early 1800s, farming continued round the enclosed ‘Round Down’, which had itself begun to be tilled. Large-scale chalk quarrying began in the mid-1800s, considerably reducing the barrow site in the late 1970s. None the less, this place continues to resist oblivion. Still featured on the modern Ordnance Survey, the name ‘Round-the-Down’ endures as a reminder of a ‘special place’. A combination of archaeological and historical evidence supports the possibility that the Bronze-Age barrow and its low round hill persisted as a distinctive site, while the surrounding slopes remained in virtually continuous cultivation.

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**NOTES**

**Abbreviations**

ESRO East Sussex Record Office
PRO Public Record Office (now National Archives)
SAC Sussex Archaeological Collections
SMR Sites and Monuments Record


5. Southerham’s water supply: R. G. Mortimore, pers. comm.; Lane Fox, 424.


8. L. V. Grinsell, ‘Sussex barrows’, *SAC* 75 (1934), 216–75; his notation for the barrow was 54 SW, no. 41.


21. An early reference to the *hallmoot* of Stoneham in South Malling is dated 1382 (Lambeth Palace library ED 970); a record of the *hallmoot* at Stoneham in 1398 is found in PRO B 145/269. Court rolls of the *hallmoot* of Stoneham in South Malling between November 1451 to September 1460 from the Bodleian library could shed further light on Southerham’s changing status during the later medieval period (Oxford Bodleian Library MS Rolls Sussex 3, copies at ESRO AMS/6569/3).

22. Redwood & Wilson, 1958, 111.


Redwood & Wilson, 108.


Redwood & Wilson, 106; the meadow of Wydeham was held by Sir William de Etchingham, lord of Beddingham, as a free tenant of the archbishop’s manor for a yearly rent of 10 shillings. Long tenanted by the lords of Beddingham manor, it passed to the Windsors (ESRO GLY/986) and subsequently the Glynde estate, still at an annual rent of 10 shillings paid to the lord of the manor of Ranscombe (e.g. from 1758, ESRO SAS/G/17, ‘Wideham Brooks’, now 26 acres).


PRO SC2/206/34, microfilm held in ESRO, XA77: 1507, 1508, 1510, 1511, 152, 1512, 171, 179.


Redwood & Wilson, 137; 1508 water court, PRO SC 2/206/81–81v.


PRO SC2/206/34, microfilm held in ESRO, XA77: 1507, 71v; 1509, 124v; 1510, 135; 1511, 152; 1512, 171, 179.


ESRO SAS/G/ACC 921.

In 1543 the chalk ridge was called Sudnore (also Soughmore, ESRO SAS/G34/4 and Southnore, ESRO SAS/G34/5, both 1539) and latterly the Snoors (1799 estate map ESRO SAS/ACC/2236) and finally the Snoors (1799 estate map ESRO SAS/ACC/2236) and finally the Sowiers (OS 1878).

Architect Nick Wiseman, pers. comm.; flooding, Angela Snelgar, Southerham Farm, pers. comm.

Gage’s letters patent, ESRO SAS/G19/5; Broadwater dispute: ESRO SAS/G8/11; SAS/G8/50; Newhaven cut, Brandon SAC 109, 99; outcome, 1536, ESRO SAS/G8/7.


Map c. 1762, ESRO AMS 3428; c.1770 ESRO ACC 3412/3/685.

ESRO SAS/ACC 1236, map by Thomas Budgen; ESRO SAS G/ACC 929, map by William Figg; undated Figg map c. 1846 ESRO ACC 3412/3/685; survey of Southerham Farm ESRO SAS/G708; 1826 survey, ESRO SAS/G11/33. On the 25" OS map of 1873, Round-the-Down and its tumulus was primarily rough pasture (2.783 acres), but containing an oblong of arable covering 0.623 acres.


ESRO SAS/G34/131.


Hillmans: ESRO SAS/G/ACC 1282; chalk quarry in reign of Edward IV: Page, 1907, 231.

The photograph of Southerham tollhouse and its women keepers, thought to date from the 1870s, is published in Judy Middleton’s *Lewes in Old Photographs* (Stroud: Alan Sutton 1990) 69. The toll road was established by an Act of Parliament of 1759 (32 Geo II c87). 1851 census: HO 107/1643308; 1805 lease of Southerham Farm: ESRO SAS/G/ACC 1265.

Undated Figg map c. 1846: ESRO ACC 3412/3/685; on this map, the pit at Southerham corner had reached 3 acres, 3 roods and 38 perches while at South Street the pit covered 1a.2r.37p.1855 map: ESRO AMS 3460.


Bedwin, SAC 116; *henge*, Mawer & Stenton, 354; deed of exchange ESRO SAS/G/8/9a.


