

ON THE  
MILITARY EARTHWORKS OF THE SOUTHDOWNS,

WITH A MORE ENLARGED ACCOUNT OF CISSBURY,  
ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL OF THEM.

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THE Military Earthworks, which are occasionally met with in traversing the Southdowns, and which are probably connected with an *early*, if not the *very earliest* known history of the county, stand prominently forward to invite the consideration and inquiry of the Sussex Archæologist. I call these Earthworks *military*, because, though a few of them *might have been*, and I am disposed to think *were*, of Druidical origin, the generally received opinion is, that the greater part of them were formed for the purposes of military encampment and fortification.

Of these earthworks, some are situated on the northern ridge of the Downs; no doubt as places of refuge and defence against invaders, from what is now called "the Weald" of Sussex; others occur more to the south, being obviously so placed as a protection against hostile attacks from the sea coast; while two or three are to be found in situations about midway between these two; probably as additional places of retreat, or as links of communication.

Viewed in a military light, these earthworks are precisely in the position, in which we should expect to find them. For not only are they so arranged as to form a regular chain of hill forts; but their situation, on some of the most prominent eminences of these Downs, naturally affords not only all the requisites for military observation, but also the strongest points of defence, that could well be met with on these chalk hills.

With regard to those found on some of the most northern elevations of the Downs; we have, beginning at the western

extremity of the county, the earthworks of Heyshot, near Midhurst, which measure in circuit about half a mile. Next occur those of Chenkbury, near Steyning, the area inclosed by which is about two furlongs in diameter. Then those of the Devil's Dyke near Poynings, the ramparts of which are about a mile in circumference. Then those of Wolstanbury, a projecting hill immediately above Hurstperpoint, the area of which is about a furlong in diameter. Then those of Ditchling Hill, the ramparts of which measure about 60 rods by 50. The old via, up the northern face of the Downs, which must have been formed at a very early period, as an approach to this earthwork from the Weald, still exists, except the lower part, destroyed by the formation of a chalk-pit. Much of it is very deeply cut, the earth being thrown out so as to form a very bold and secure vallum on the north side of it. Its width at the bottom is about four feet. About half way up the hill this via turns off to the west in a most remarkable manner, and after being carried round a lofty mound formed by the earth, heaped up in the centre, during the process of its formation, comes into the direct via again, about twenty yards higher up. And, lastly, occur the earthworks of Mount Cauburn, above Ringmer, which, though they are scarcely three furlongs in circumference, are constructed with a double vallum, the outer being broader and deeper than the inner, and having its innermost rampart rising very bold and high. Near to this, on the same hill, is another earthwork of much larger dimensions, the outlines of the ramparts of which are now very faintly to be traced, but of which enough remains to enable us to discover what was its original structure and shape.

With regard to those earthworks situated on the southern eminences towards the sea coast, we have, commencing from the west, first, the earthworks of the Broil, near Chichester, which are constructed as an additional outer fortification to this city, on the north side, at that time the most accessible, and consequently most open to attack. The form is that of two sides of a square, each side being a mile in length. Next are those of Highdown Hill, in Ferring (omitting for the present those of Burpham, near Arundel), the area of which measures 300 by about 180 feet. Then those of Cissbury, near Findon, which are by far the largest and most striking of

these earthworks, a more particular description and history of which I shall presently give. Then those of White Hawk Hill, above Brighton, which have a triple vallum. Of this many parts were levelled by the formation of the Brighton race-course, at the southern extremity of which it was unfortunately situated, but of which a sufficiency still remains to show its form, and that it inclosed an area of about five acres, the outermost trench of this earthwork being about three quarters of a mile in circumference. Then come those of the Castle Hill at Newhaven, which inclose an area of about six acres; and those of the Castle at Seaford, which are situated on a hill opposite to this, and which inclose an area of about twelve acres. There is also a similar earthwork on a hill near to Birling Gap, inclosing a high and also isolated portion of the cliff, the circumference of which measures about three quarters of a mile. There are also two earthworks in the parish of Telscombe, which, though they are at present in a very imperfect state, appear to have been once strongly fortified, each containing from twelve to fifteen acres.

Of the intermediate range, we have the earthworks of Chilgrove and Bowhill, the former of small dimensions, but having a very distinct double vallum; the latter much larger, and on the apex of a very prominent hill, inclosing an area of about fifteen acres. Near to these, but on the opposite side of the valley of Singleton, are the earthworks of the Trundle, above Goodwood, the diameter of the area of which is about two furlongs, and which has a double vallum. The last are those of Hollingbury Castle, which are situated about midway between Ditchling and White Hawk Hill, on the old road from Ditchling to Brighton, which is erroneously supposed to be a Roman road. This earthwork is, in many respects, very similar to that of the Trundle, having a double vallum, the ramparts of which are thrown up very high. The area inclosed is about six acres.

There is also a hill rising immediately above the valley of the Arun at North Stoke, still called Camp Hill, upon the summit of which may be faintly traced the remains of an ancient earthwork, the greater part of which has been levelled by the plough. This is supposed to have been connected with the extensive military vallations in the adjoining parish of

Burpham, to which I have already alluded, and which appear to me to belong to a range evidently constructed for the defence of the valleys of the tide rivers, by the intervention of which the continuous line of the Downs is occasionally broken. Those of Newhaven and Seaford may be considered as falling under this class.

The remains of earthworks also exist at Selsey, close to the churchyard, and at Hardham, near Pulborough, the former of which is circular and the latter square. That at Hardham is considered to be the exact "ad decimam" point on the Roman via from Regnum to Dorking. But of these I shall not say more, my subject confining me to the ancient earthworks of the Downs.

The hills on which these earthworks are placed are elevated very considerably above the ordinary level of the Downs, and are from 600 to 900 feet above the level of the sea.

The portæ of these fortified posts are, for the most part, still very distinctly to be traced. Those on the northern ridge of the Downs are on the east, west, and south; those on the southern ridge, on the east, west, and north sides. The situation of the portæ in the intermediate range differs in all. Those of Bowhill are to the east, west, and south; and those of the Trundle to the east, west, and north; while those of Hollingbury, differing from all the others, are double to the east and west, and single on the south sides, the double portæ being about fifty-five yards from each other.

With regard to the date of these earthworks, it is, like their history generally, involved in much uncertainty. But little is known on this important point beyond what we are enabled to gather from their shape, or perhaps their names. Tacitus describes the British under Caractacus as occupying fortified posts on high hills; and he tells us farther, that wherever this general found these eminences easy of access, he blocked up the posts with dry walls.<sup>1</sup> (V. Annal. lib. xii, ch. 33.) This, then, is the earliest allusion we have to these ancient fortresses. No instance, however, of this kind of wall occurs on any part of the Southdowns. Probably, in the absence

<sup>1</sup> The dry masonry of the ancient British fortress on a hill above Weston-super-Mare in Somersetshire, commonly called "Worle Hill," is an instance of this kind of defence. Are the stones on Saxonbury Hill the remains of an ancient British fortress of this sort?

of stone, ramparts of earth may have been substituted for them. We know that the fortifications of the ancient Britons were circular, or as near to that shape as the circumstances of their particular locality admitted. To them, then, we attribute the earthworks of the hill above Chilgrove; of the Trundle; of Heyshot; of Chenkbury; of Cissbury; of Highdown Hill, as far as we can judge of its form, this being one of the most irregular earthworks on the Downs; of Wolstanbury; of Hollingbury;<sup>2</sup> of Whitehawk Hill; of Cauburn; as well as those of Newhaven, Seaford, and Birling Gap. We also know, that the fortified encampments of the Romans were square;<sup>3</sup> to them, then, we attribute the construction of those situated at the Broil, and on Ditchling Hill; and also the southern fortification on Mount Cauburn, as well as that of Telscombe, which are now, or which were originally, square, but the form of some of which has been altered, by the angles having been rounded off at a later period, probably by the Saxons, after they fell into their possession; for I incline myself to the opinion, that neither the Saxons nor the Danes originated any earthworks in this country. The attacks of the Danes were generally by predatory incursion, and they seldom left their ships long; and as to the Saxons, they availed themselves of those already formed to their hands, altering the shape of such as were not in accordance with their habits. And hence arises the difficulty of speaking with any degree of certainty on the date of some of these earthworks, judging from their shape alone.

But this does not apply to Cissbury, a description of which remarkable and interesting fort I shall now proceed to give, noting at the same time some errors which historians, both ancient and modern, have fallen into in the accounts given of it.

Even at this distant period, its present aspect shows it to have undergone but little change; and on this account much of the difficulty which presents itself in investigating others,

<sup>2</sup> This earthwork has hitherto been represented as square, but by a very careful admeasurement and inspection, I am able to pronounce its shape to be decidedly circular.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the mode by which the Romans fortified their encampments, by means of stout stakes fixed as on the top of the agger, v. Procopius. In forming a ditch across the encampment at Hardham, some of the parts of these palisades which had been driven into the ground were discovered, blackened by age.

from the alteration which time and circumstances have wrought in them, is in this case thus removed.

This extensive earthwork incloses an area of about sixty acres, and has a single vallum, varying in depth from eight to twelve feet, according to the nature of the apex of the hill, the oval shape of which it necessarily follows, and a rampart of considerable width and height. The approaches to it were by roads formed on the east, south, and north sides of this hill. Of these, that on the south side, towards the sea coast, was the principal means of access, the road running to the east being, as I shall presently show, apparently a pass to the Roman station at Lancing; and that to the north intended to connect this point with the earthwork at Chenbury, from which it is distant about two miles, and with the Weald. The different passes through the entrenchment connected with these roads are still very perfect.

I shall now proceed to notice some of the misrepresentations connected with the history of this Hill Fort, to which I have already alluded; and first of that connected with its name "Cissbury."

Camden asserts this name to have been obtained from Cissa, the second in succession of the line of South Saxon Kings. "Hard by," says that generally accurate antiquary and topographer, speaking, in his 'Britannia,' of Offington, of which estate Cissbury is parcel, "hard by there is a fort compassed about with a bank rudely cast up; wherewith the inhabitants are persuaded that Cæsar entrenched and fortified his camp: but Cissbury, the name of the place, doth plainly shew and testify that it was the work of Cissa." Rapin followed the opinion of Camden.

That Cissbury might have been occupied by Cissa, during some period of his unusually long reign, seems very probable; and that, from some cause or other not recorded, it received from him its present name, appears likely. The sound seems, as Camden says, to guarantee the fact; but that it was first built or fortified by Cissa, is altogether a mistake; there being abundant evidence of its existence some centuries before the time of Cissa.

In proof of this, I need only refer to the evidence which it still bears of Roman occupation. In the centre of the fort the

foundations of a *prætorium* are still to be traced under the soil in a very dry season; and to the east it was apparently connected by a road with the important Roman station, discovered in the year 1828, on Lancing Down, about two miles from Cissbury. This Way, a considerable portion of which is now to be seen, is, much of it, fortified by a rampart on the north side of it. For though it is supposed to have been constructed for the express purpose of a communication with the wells of Applesham (from which place alone, as far as we can at present judge, water in sufficient quantity could have been obtained for the use of the fort), still Applesham could not well have been reached, without passing Lancing Hill. It appears then very probable, that for the purpose of securing a sufficient supply from this source, the Roman *Prætor* abandoned Cissbury, and took up his station on Lancing Hill: the remains of a tessellated pavement and other relics of a superior kind, discovered on this hill, plainly showing that it was not the station of the explorer of the district, as has been supposed, but a *prætorian villa*.

To this evidence of the Roman occupation of Cissbury we may add the fact of many Roman coins, and some Roman pottery of a very curious kind, having been found in the garden and paddock of Mr. Wyatt, at the foot of the hill; and also the remarkable circumstance of about three quarters of an acre of land, sloping immediately from about the centre of the south side of the fosse, and sheltered on the east and west sides by rising hills, being called within the memory of persons now living "the Vineyard," a spot which must strike every one visiting this interesting locality as peculiarly well adapted to the culture of the vine, which the Romans are supposed to have first introduced into this country. I am well aware that this is a disputed point, and will refer those who wish for farther information upon it to the papers of Pegge and Daines Barrington, which are to be found in some of the early numbers of the 'Archæologia.' This, connected with Cissbury, is, I believe, the only instance of the name being retained in Sussex. In Worcestershire it is by no means uncommon for fields in the immediate vicinity of Roman stations to be called "the Vines," or "the Vineyards."

So far, then, we have, I think, satisfactory proof of Cissbury having been occupied as a Roman station some centuries before the time of Cissa.

In determining that it was not of Roman formation, but of much earlier date, and therefore that the tradition of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Cissbury, to which Camden alludes, is altogether erroneous, I need only refer to the circumstance, that we have no historical evidence to show that Cæsar himself, or any part of the army which, during his sojourn in this country, he personally commanded, were at any time within the limits of this county. But in addition to this, we have the fact of the circular shape of this earthwork, which determines it not to have been of Roman construction. Nor is there the slightest reason for supposing, that the form of the vallum and agger were ever different from what they now are. I have examined the whole with the greatest minuteness, and have been unable to discover the slightest trace of Saxon alteration. It must then have been of ancient British formation; and happily there is much both of internal and external evidence, to support us in arriving at such a conclusion.

For, in the first place, on the western slope of the area inclosed by the vallum there are a considerable number of excavations, at the distance of about twelve feet from each other, the outermost of which appear in some measure to range in a line with the vallum; but the innermost to be placed irregularly. These excavations are all of them circular, but differ much in their size, varying in diameter from twelve to about twenty-five feet at the surface, and varying also in their depth.

That they were not intended as reservoirs for water, as has been conjectured, and which at first a casual observer might imagine to have been the case, their position in the fort, as well as the situation of this fort upon the summit of a high chalk hill, at once convinces us. That they were intimately connected with the first formation of the fort itself is very evident; but to what purpose were they originally applied? Cartwright, in the very brief description which he gives of this interesting relic of antiquity, suggests that they were the "site of rude huts; and this circumstance," he adds, "and the



appearance of burnt bones and fragments of vessels of unbaked clay, which have been found in the neighbourhood, are considered as indications of ancient British origin."

It is true, we learn from the earliest writers on Britain, that the habitations of its first inhabitants were huts, covered sometimes with skins, at other times with branches of trees or turf; and that where the dryness of the situation would admit of it, the dwellings which they so protected from the inclemency of the weather, were *holes only*, made in the ground, and so arranged as to be near each other, the whole being protected by a slight embankment of earth. Still this description will not apply, as they cannot be called slight embankments. What then were they? No doubt "*Ponds*," or as Dr. Stukely called them, "*Dishbarrows*"—those "holy, consecrated recesses," as Governor Pownal calls them, formed for the special purpose of forwarding the celebration of the religious ceremonies of the ancient Britons, during their sojourn in these hill forts.<sup>4</sup> Barrows of the same kind, but much fewer in number, are to be found within the inclosures of the Trundle, Wolstonbury, and Hollingbury, and in the immediate neighbourhood of others.

Upon the whole, then, there can, I think, be no doubt that Cissbury is an ancient British fortress, and that I have rightly placed it in that class. The subsequent Roman occupation probably arose from the defeat and dispossession of its earlier possessors, as the result of some of the conflicts which took place during their hostile excursions from the great forest of Anderida, which was their stronghold, or perhaps after the reduction of the province of the Regni, and the submission of Cogidunus to the Roman sway, under Vespasian.

As to the probable period of Cissa's connection with this fort, Sussex, we know, was one of the most inconsiderable of the kingdoms forming the Saxon heptarchy. From the Saxon annals we learn, that Ella was its first king; that upon the decline of the power of Hengist, having been invited to this country, he landed with three of his sons, of whom Cissa was the youngest, in the year 476, at Cymenshore, supposed to be Wittering, near Chichester; that after many struggles,

<sup>4</sup> On the north and south sides of Stonehenge, just within the vallum, are two circular holes similar to those at Cissbury.

attended with varied success and much bloodshed, he succeeded in driving the Britons back into the great Forest, till, in the year 491, having determined to annihilate them, he laid siege to Andredcester, probably Pevensey; and not succeeding in his operations against it, he immediately assumed the title of king of Sussex.

In this war Cissa is supposed, as one of his father's generals, to have possessed himself of Cissbury, during his march eastwards, from Cymenshore to Anderida. But if dates are to be depended upon at this early and uncertain period, this could not have been the case; nor, indeed, could he have then held command in his father's army. According to the best historical evidences, Cissa succeeded his father in the kingdom of Sussex in the year 514, and is recorded to have held the kingdom 75, or, as Stow says, 76 years. Had he then been no more than a year old when he accompanied his father to this country (which was not very likely to be the case, for in a warlike expedition, why should Ella have encumbered himself with the charge of a mere infant), he must, at his death, have attained the age of 116 years; and if we make him old enough to command an army at that time, his age at his decease must have been patriarchal indeed! There can, however, be no doubt that incorrect dates have involved this very interesting epoch in the history of our county in much confusion.

As, then, Cissa's connection with Cissbury must have been at some later period of his life, I would suggest, that, having succeeded his father in the sovereignty of Sussex, he established himself, as we know, in the western part of it; and, finding Chichester already fortified to his hands, he made it the capital of his new dynasty, changing its name from Regnum to Cissan Ceaster. Cissa's was a peaceful reign. Disgusted, probably, with war and all its attendant horrors, from what he must have witnessed when young, he appears to have yielded without opposition when hostilely pressed upon by neighbouring powers. The views of the Saxons, like those of the Romans, tended more to an extension of power, than to the increase of the blessings of civilized life; and it is not to be wondered at, that of the military doings of the South Saxons, during the reign of Cissa and his imme-

diate successors, beyond the fact of their being confined principally to the defensive, we know nothing. But this is sufficient for our purpose. For this it was that led him so thoroughly to repair the fortifications of Chichester, that he is said by Camden and others to have rebuilt it. And as this would be his western stronghold, so Cissbury would offer an eligible post, already strongly fortified both by nature and by art, as a place of defence towards the centre; commanding an uninterrupted view of the coast from Beachy Head to Selsey Bill, and also of the Portus Adurni of the Romans, from which foreign invasion was most to be dreaded. And having adopted this as a military fort, he would naturally give his own name to it, as, upon taking possession of Regnum, he had done to that fortified city.

One word in conclusion, on those earthworks to which I have alluded as, in my opinion, possessing strong claims to be considered of Druidical origin. I refer to the earthworks of Cauburn and Whitehawk Hill. Others may have possessed similar pretensions, and more particularly Hollingbury, in the vallum, and within the inclosure of which portions of Druidical stones are still to be found; and at the southernmost of its two most western portæ, the remains of an upright stone of this kind still stands, projecting a little above the sod, precisely in the position of the two stones at the entrance of the passage of the vallum at Stonehenge. The greater part of them are circular—a circle being the ancient hieroglyphic for the Deity. The discovery by Dr. Mantell of several ancient British remains on the hill, where the fort is situated, may also be adduced as indicating its origin. A similar remark may be made as to the Trundle, within the inclosure of which I can personally testify that fragments of ancient British pottery have been exposed to view, wherever the turf is removed from the surface.

Mount Cauburn, however, appears to me to possess all the requisites of places of Druidical worship. It is constructed with a double vallum, corresponding with the double row of stones at Stonehenge; and the mound of earth thrown up within the ramparts corresponds precisely with the Gorseddaû, or sacred hillock, from which the Druids of the higher order