

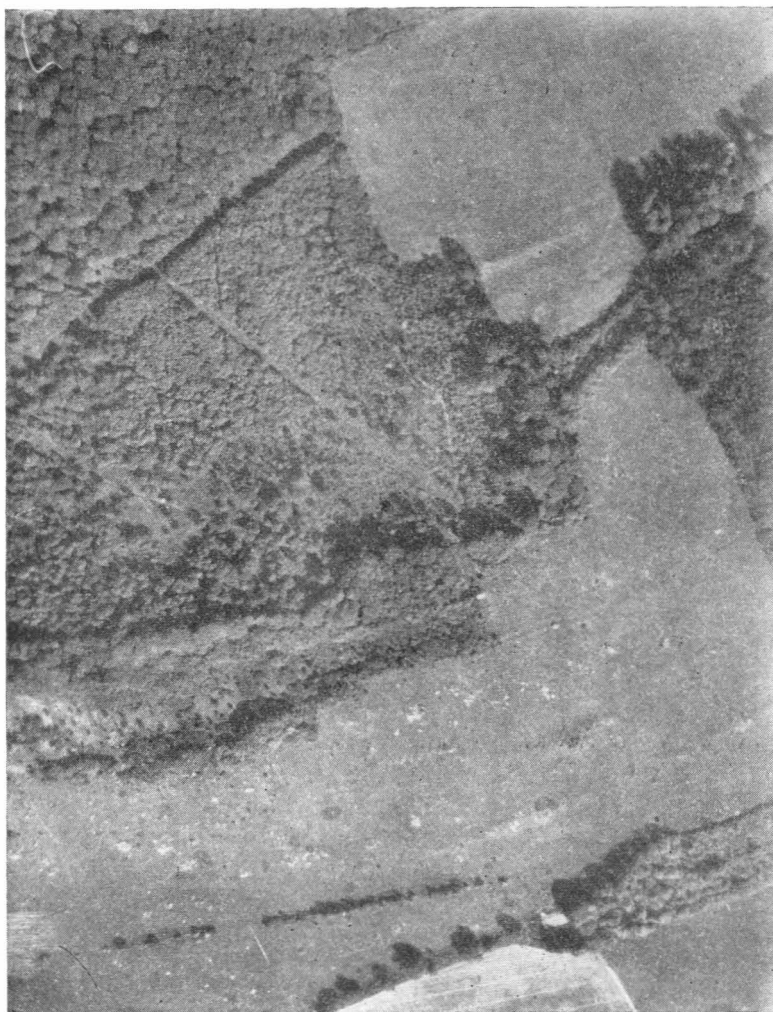
# A LATE CELTIC SETTLEMENT ON NORE HILL, EARTHAM.

---

BY S. E. WINBOLT.

---

NORE HILL, Eartham, Sussex, proves to be the site of an extensive Late Celtic and Roman farming settlement. How it can have kept its secret so long is hard to imagine. The explanation is probably that it is remote from ordinary roads. Its west flank is hardly visible at all from the nearest road, that between Halnaker and Up Waltham, and unless you take to paths and the line of Stane Street over the north end of Long Down and through Eartham Wood towards Gumber Farm, you are not likely to have a fair view of the hill. It was on one of my frequent walks along Stane Street, four or five years ago, that the light revealed two or three banks on the hill, and I registered a determination to investigate them on the earliest opportunity. This did not come till September, 1930, when, having been supplied (at my suggestion), by the kindness of Mr. I. D. Margary, with a set of air photographs of the hill, I went to check the comparatively few but corroborative indications which came out in the photographs. These were easily identified, but I was surprised to find much more than was hinted at by the photographs. Walking up and down and to and fro for four hours on a sunny afternoon, I found banks and lynchets and ways here, there and everywhere. I paced out most of them, plotted them in on a rough plan of the hill made from the Eartham-Duncton road, and found in mole casts and rabbit scratchings quite enough sherds of Iron Age pottery, and pieces of iron slag of the same character as I had



*By permission of Mr. I. D. Margary.*

AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF SOUTH END OF NORE HILL.

found at Saxonbury Camp to be sure of the general date of this elaborate lay-out of the hillside. These results I next checked with the aid of the air photographs, which, besides adding a few banks I had not noticed, gave me a more correct idea of the curves and general conformation of the hillside. I then traced out a plan of the hill from the photographs, and, armed with this and assisted by Mr. C. F. Gregory (of Brighton Grammar School), I spent a long day of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  hours measuring the enclosures and searching for and finding more pottery and iron slag. Next I brought to bear on the problem the 25 in. O.S. map (Sussex W. Sheet, XLIX., 10), with a view to plotting in on them the ancient earthworks. And last (no doubt it should have been first), I consulted the landowner, Sir William Bird, of Eartham, a member of the Sussex Archaeological Society, as to publication of an account of my discovery. To this and to future excavation he cordially agreed. The volumes of the *S.A.C.* have not a single mention of Nore Hill; Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, perhaps the most prominent exponent of Celtic hill settlements and of photography as an aid to their detection, disclaimed any knowledge of it; and Dr. Cecil Curwen, author of *Prehistoric Sussex*, was of the same mind as Mr. Crawford. Dr. Eliot Curwen, however, tells me he was aware of these earthworks.

Nore Hill, a southern outlier of the South Downs, is close to (north-east of) Eartham, and its western base is about half-a-mile south-east of Stane Street at its nearest point. With an Early Iron Age settlement on the Trundle to the west, Celtic fields (as described by Dr. Eliot and Dr. Cecil Curwen in *S.A.C.*, Vol. LXI., pp. 23 *sq.*) on Rewell Hill to the east, on Kithurst Hill, and at Findon Park, still farther east (*Antiquaries Journal*, October, 1928), and with numerous other signs of Celtic occupation on the South Downs, it is not at all surprising that Nore Hill should have been tilled by Celts (probably Brythonic, not Belgic) in pre-Roman and Roman times. A chalk soil might not perhaps seem favourable to agriculture,



but a trowel was enough to prove that somehow or other they seem to have left a depth of 7 or 8 inches—and in places more—of black workable mould, before the turf grew over it after they had migrated elsewhere. The hilltop (about 470 ft.) is a place of wide and beautiful prospect. The long views are southwards over the flats to the sea, near Bognor and south-west to Chichester and the Isle of Wight beyond; the western view is closed by Halnaker Hill, with its disused windmill, a well-known land and sea mark, a little to the north of which the Neolithic and Iron Age Trundle stands out like a mountain; while to the north the Stane Street valley opens up as far as Gumber Farm. These southward-looking open spurs of the Downs were naturally attractive to the Celtic peasants.

The meaning of "Nore" suggested by the editors of *Place-Names of Sussex*, is: Ore, Ofer = bank, with affixed N, and this seems better than any other etymology proposed, for it fits many of the numerous Nores and Nowers. Like Nore Hill, Eartham, the Nore near Cranleigh and the Nower near Dorking (recently presented to the town of Dorking), are separate hills standing slightly away or projecting from a range. (A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1843, seeks with faint success to connect the word with the Latin *noverca*.) Our Nore Hill was so-called at least as early as 1740 (Overton's Map of Sussex).

The Plan to a large extent explains itself, but some brief description will be helpful. Along the length of its west side, the hill is divided horizontally by two long lines, a terrace way at or near the top, and a long lynchet, now mostly obscured by trees, near the bottom of the slope. From the bottom of the valley, shown in the bottom frame of the Plan, the four modern fields slope up very gently to the long lynchet. From below these shows up, in the grass, part of a (? Celtic) field boundary (31). The length of the lower lynchet is roughly about 1440 yds., and of the top terrace way about 1430 yds.; and they are separated by a space of about 380 yds. at either end, and of about 310 yds. at

the narrowest. The terrace, or double-lynchet way, is a good specimen of its class. It is about 10 ft. wide, and in parts worn hollow by use, with a short sharp slope above it (eastward) and a similar slope below it (westward). At the northern end it is somewhat spoilt, being silted up by soil from above; but it is well seen where south of enclosure 8 a way between two banks runs into it at right angles through a gap in the trees, which have for a good distance encroached on it and overrun it, and incidentally preserved it. Above 16, 23 and 24, where it begins to descend the south side of the hill, it is quite clear. It continues, I think, inside the trees above 25 and 26, and straight ahead inside a hedgerow along the west side of Slindon Park, whence, in all likelihood, it made for the coast at Bognor, between Eastergate and Westergate (hence perhaps the names), more or less on the line of the present Bognor road. At its northern end the terrace way seems to continue across a broad col (where German prisoners were encamped in the war) to a point on Stane Street where two cross tracks intersect, at the beginning (south-west end) of the open land of Gumber Farm. While walking along it one is reminded forcibly of stretches of the prehistoric way along the North Downs which later became the Pilgrims' Way. In section it is exactly what is shown in the diagram on Plate V. (opp. p. 28), in *S.A.C.*, Vol. LXI., representing the way descending Rewell Hill towards Fairmile Bottom. It is similar to, but narrower than similarly constructed Roman ways on the South and Wiltshire Downs.

Above (east of) the north end of the terrace way there are at least five field enclosures, 4, 5 and 6 being among trees. I am not sure of the opposite banks of No. 1, but Nos. 2-6 are quite clear. No. 3 is specially interesting because there is plenty of Late Celtic pottery to be found in the rabbit scratchings—characteristic rough red or grey material gritted with pounded flint. In ten minutes I collected 15 fragments of this, and 4 of pottery which is Roman in

character, as well as pieces of Celtic iron slag resembling slag from other Celtic sites. In the corner is a pond, 45 yards in circumference as measured along the top of the bank, which is higher on the lower side. I see no reason why it should not be ancient, i.e. coeval with the banks, especially as pottery sherds are in evidence near it. There is at least one roundish depression in this field which should be dug. It will be noticed that all the lynchets of these fields slope either west or north, and this arrangement continues south until we reach those between 12 and 15 and 12 and 14, after which the inclines are west or south. It is possible that Nos. 7 and 27 were enclosures, separated longitudinally by the steep slope of the hill in this part. A slight lynchet runs below 27, and farther south seems to continue after a gap as that above 28-30. The straight line of sparse bushes west of (below) the faint lynchet and continuing to 29 seems to be the remains of an ancient hedge (planted on a negative lynchet), which later probably separated the disused fields above from those below it. Is this the survival of a Saxon boundary? Close to (west of) Eartham (or Ertham) is the supposed site of ancient Saxon earthworks (*S.A.C.*, XVIII., 187). There is a somewhat worn-down but perfectly obvious circular burial mound (J) between the two lowest lynchets, measuring 54 yards round the (?) ditchless base. From the line of bushes up to the middle of field 6 runs a broad bank (not a lynchet) in length about 240 yards, while on the other side of field 8 is a way between two banks, not quite so long. Field 10 does not appear to be completely bounded on the west or lower side. The south boundary of field 11 is the last northward-sloping lynchet; No. 12 is at the top longitudinally, its south lynchet sloping south, like that between 13 and 15. Fields 28 and 29 have as west (or lower) boundary the bush line on a lynchet; field 28 appears to have no north boundary. Fields 29, 17, 16, 18, 19, 20 are situated north of a terrace way up the hill; 19 and 20 being in woodland. I have

not yet made out their north boundaries. The nature of this terrace way is best seen between 18 and 21—a narrowish level way in the middle of the slope of a bank. Between 29 and 30 is a triple lynchet, the top big, the lower two slight. The lynchet above 30 is a bold one, and this, like many others on the hill, suggests a long period of farming; centuries were probably needed to produce so pronounced a result. No. 22, above the long terrace way, has on the north a faint lynchet; its original has been disregarded since 21 and 22 became one field. Probably the south part of 22 is to be found in the woodland. On the south side of 22, 24 and 30 is a long hedgerow dividing the hillside at its south end. Between 24 and 25, at least, it obscures a southward-sloping lynchet, and probably a hollow way on the top of it. To the east of 21 is a big westward-sloping lynchet, revealed in the air photograph, the relation of which to other lynchets has not yet been explored.

Last, on the top of the hill in the woodland east of the long terrace way, Sir William Bird (the owner) pointed out to me some features which he had long thought wanted explanation. I spent a long afternoon in investigating these. They seem to represent six dwellings and a large and two small burial mounds. Beginning at the south end: A is the remains of a peculiarly-shaped dwelling with thick dry wall of flint, now demolished nearly to ground level; its circuit measures 30 yards. Some 20 yards north of this is B, an oval depression with remains of a similar flint wall, 20 yards in circuit. About 14 yards east of B is a big circular burial mound (C), consisting of outer bank, fosse inside the bank, and a level central area, the top of which is below the top of the bank. It measures 30 yards round the fosse, and the overall diameter is about 20 yards. The bank and fosse are interrupted by the causeway entrance on the east side. Beeches now grow round it, but it still commands a fine view of the sea. About 20 yards farther north is a long oval dwelling (D) of the same type as the others, with



north-south axis of 14 yards. A southward-sloping lynchet (now faint) intervenes, and then we reach E, a smaller oval walled depression near a big beech, 19 yards in circuit. Dwellings F and G are well marked. In shape they are irregular circles, F measuring 32 yards, and G 28 yards, in circumference. Near them appear to be two more tumuli, H and I. The dwellings represent the habitation nucleus of a settlement, of date unknown at present. The three tumuli on the top of the hill were probably made after the dwellings were disused.

Thus the plan shows at least two dozen enclosures definitely bounded by ancient banks. Their number and comparative regularity combine to make Nore Hill remarkable among known Celtic hill settlements, and suggest Roman ownership with Celtic farm labour. The fields are mostly small, on the average rough squares of about 100 yards. The main communication north-south was the top terrace way, while up the slope the ways south of 8, of 16 and 17, and of 22, 24 and 30, were the main lateral ways. The boundaries are all negative lynchets with the exception of those north and south of No. 8, and the long positive lynchet near the bottom of the hill, representing the general western or lower limit of Celtic ploughing; No. 31 is exceptional.

There is, of course, much work to be done on Nore Hill in excavating the dwellings and burial mounds, in searching for further enclosures in the woods, and in digging trenches in some of the enclosures for relics of occupation, especially store and rubbish pits, to date the limits of occupation. At present sherds have been found mainly at the north-east end, above the terrace way, but I have found pottery and iron slag here and there widely over the area, right down to the lowest lynchet. There are also suggestive indications in the air photographs which demand spade work, notably a small square lying athwart the line of bushes south-west of 27, and a nearly circular figure in the corner between 12, 13 and 15, where the

soil is very spongy—possibly the remains of a pond. Water, of course, could be had only from ponds. It seems likely that iron was smelted, probably in a small way, on the hill; suitable iron ore seems to have been obtained from the lower greensand in the neighbourhood of Fittleworth and Petworth. Such implements as knives and crowbars would be forged on the spot.