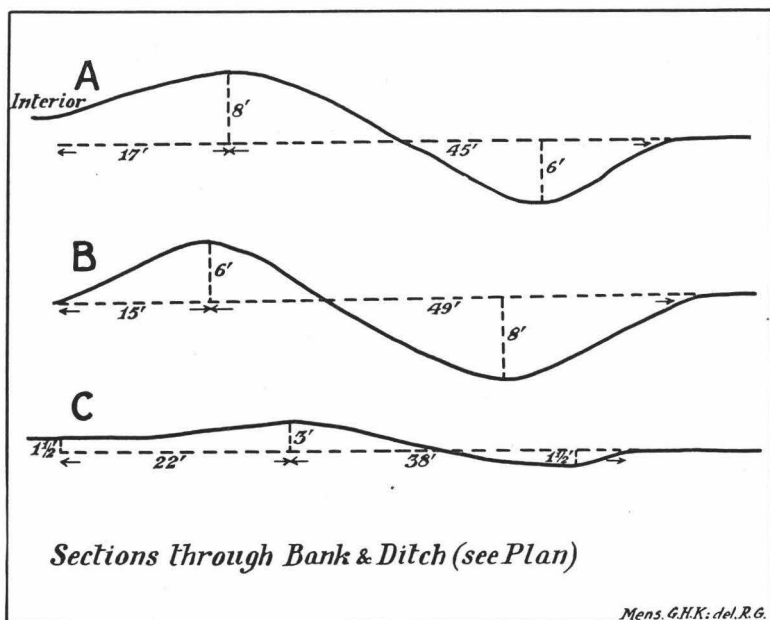


AN EARLY IRON AGE CAMP IN PIPER'S COPSE, KIRDFORD

BY S. E. WINBOLT

It is seldom that a practically complete earthwork of considerable size (330 ft. by 270 ft.) so successfully evades the notice of local archaeologists as this in Piper's Copse, Kirdford. Very few can have known, and these were strangely reticent about it. A. H. Allcroft, who missed very little in Sussex, was not cognizant of it (*Earthworks of England*). Yet it is plotted in (not quite accurately) on an O.S. 6 in. sheet; and I have since discovered (in *Surrey A.C.*) that H. F. Napper knew of its existence in 1888, though the context shows that he regarded it as Roman, and on this hypothesis assumed a Roman road from Henly Hill to Rowhook. A search for this along the suggested line has been quite unrewarded. We have some excuse, however, for missing it, as it is in a peculiarly remote district and completely hidden by hazels; and except when these are cut, once in about twelve years, no one except a keeper in search of fox-earths is likely to see any part of the bank, and certainly not to view the work as a whole. The case of the Chichester Roman amphitheatre is quite another story; for, though plotted in on no map, it stands up boldly in a field quite close to the city wall, and moreover is traversed by a public footpath which ascends the west bank, descends into the arena, and then goes over the east bank. It is amazing that it was not identified before and put on the map, through all these centuries. The existence of an earthwork in Piper's Copse was reported to me in 1934 by the Misses Farmer, of Loxwood, with an indirect suggestion that it was of neolithic date. With the permission of Lord Leconfield, Mr. G. H. Kenyon and I set about investigating. The openings of an old fox-earth into the bank showed burnt clay and charcoal, and a moderate amount of

spade work brought us down on to a red-burnt hearth, 9 ft. from the inner edge of the bank (at the point marked in the plan) and 4 ft. from the surface. Scattered about on the hearth were six fragments of, apparently, E.I.A. pottery of La Tène III (possibly II) type, and a neat flint flake, and there were a number of nodules of local (puddingstone) iron ore, some burnt,



some unburnt. Close by, inside the area, were big chunks of ore, either on the surface or just below it. A hearth, probably of the latest period of the Early Iron Age (say, the last century B.C.), had been made, as in cases recorded elsewhere, well in the slope of the bank. It is probable that an examination of the bank would prove the existence of several other such hearths. There are, however, very few, if any, places in such a close-planted area where digging can be done: nowhere on the inner floor can one see more than a few feet ahead. But should funds and labour become available at the right time, i.e. when the undergrowth is cut three or four

years hence, the bank should be tested, and the fosse trenched in the few places where there is a comparatively clear run. There is now no obvious entrance visible, but it was probably in the south-east portion where the bank has apparently been shovelled down into the ditch and where the modern path enters the camp. This also would demand investigation. The evidence at present is, of course, exiguous, but the nature of the earthwork, a hearth, the pottery in association, and the fact that the surrounding country is rich in iron ore (though of a moderate quality), having been worked in four furnaces of sixteenth-century date, seems to be fairly conclusive for an E.I.A. date for the camp. This note is written so that, if Mr. Kenyon and I fail to tackle the job, other intending excavators in future may know what to expect.

The situation of the camp, about two miles east of the lower slopes of Blackdown and on the Wealden level (c. 125 ft.), makes it exceptional. We know of Wealden camps on heights, e.g. Saxonbury and Dry Hill, where iron was worked; and there are others on the heights fringing the Weald, e.g. Holmbury and Hascombe, where iron was worked. In the latter case an iron hearth was made in the south fosse and into the bank (*Surrey A.C.* XL. 89). Piper's Copse is the only place in Sussex known to me where such a camp is situated on low ground. Here, however, there was the advantage of a fairly copious stream close outside the camp. Hascombe, the nearest E.I.A. camp, is just six miles away to the north-north-east. One hardly sees why a camp should have been made here for any other reason than for exploiting the local iron ore. The small size ($1\frac{1}{5}$ acres) seems to preclude any idea of an ordinary township. Hascombe and Holmbury are better situated and very much bigger—the former $5\frac{3}{4}$ acres. Both these have some Roman-British remains; and it is not altogether surprising that Roman-British shards have also been found at Piper's Copse. The shape of the camp, a rough ovoid, was deliberate, i.e. not determined, as so often on hill-tops, by the nature of the ground: for, though along the north-

west side defensive advantage was taken of the steep slope to the stream, there was nothing in the levels elsewhere to prevent the defences from being constructed on any predetermined plan, circular or rectangular. It is on a kind of promontory, but there was room to make the camp any shape desired. The oval was chosen, as for the earlier camp at Saxonbury. For a camp of so small an area the bank and ditch are not inconsiderable, the average height of the crown of bank from the bottom of ditch now being 14 ft. (having been originally as much, perhaps, as 18 ft. or more), and the measure through bank and ditch averaging 62ft., precisely the same as that at Hascombe (*Surrey A.C.* XI. 85). Piper's Copse may have been purely business premises; if so, it is probably unique.

ADDENDUM

(August, 1936.) Since the above was written, the bank and fosse have been dug through, Mr. G. H. Kenyon kindly supplying the labour, at a point where the base of the bank gave a measurement of 25 ft. 6 in., and the top of the fosse in the same horizontal line 29 ft. 8 in. This cut was close east of Section A on plan. No dating evidence was found, but it is clear that both sides of the fosse were dug out in two steps each, very much as was the case with the fosse at Hascombe, probably to ease the work of men carrying baskets of earth. The bank was 5 ft. 10 in. high, and the fosse 6 ft. 3 in. deep. Digging at a spot, close S. of Hearth on plan, in the area revealed points of interest. The water table was very high, only 18 in. down at the end of April, 1936. About a hundred fragments of pots were found evenly spread over 6 square yards, at depths varying from 12 to 19 in., and these, mysteriously enough, were a 'mixed bag of medieval (mostly) and Roman-British'. Many of them were beneath a layer of stones, themselves just below the surface. There was also charcoal from beech, common oak, and hawthorn (J. C. Maby) under the stones, and close by lumps of baked clay and cooked

puddingstones. The laid stones—puddingstone, winklestone, and sandstone—were in a line 6–7 ft. long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide, and appear to have been laid over earlier debris as stepping-stones over a very wet place. The geology here is: 17 in. of clay top soil, below which is sand—very bad land agriculturally. Mr. F. H. Edmunds reports that the iron ore is typical 'shrave', 'a Pleistocene deposit, formed partly from gravel derived from the Hastings Beds, and partly as a "bog ore". It is usually overlain by a few feet of re-sorted clay'. It contained 'sufficient iron to smelt in the old Wealden Bloomeries'. Mr. Kenyon has carefully examined the sharply falling stream-bank which forms the west side of the camp and continues for half a mile south. It is cut into irregular shelves and hollows, which appear to be diggings for the puddingstone ore, of what date it is difficult to say. So far, the scanty evidence seems to suggest iron working in Early Iron, Roman-British, and Mediæval times.

A party of the Sussex Archæological Society, with Dr. Eliot Curwen, has visited the site, and a few friends have subscribed a small excavation fund. Further work will be done as soon as labour is available and woodland conditions permit, and I hope in my next report to have better evidence for the various periods suggested.