

SUSSEX ON THE EVE OF THE ROMAN CONQUEST

BY A. E. WILSON, F.S.A.

DURING the first half of the first century B.C. many groups of settlers pushed their way into the south-east of Britain. Recent studies of their pottery, coinage, metal-work, and jewellery are helping to build up the story of the years which preceded the Roman invasion of A.D. 43. In 1936 Mr. Derek Allen read an important paper before the International Numismatic Congress on British Tin Coinage of the Iron Age (*Transactions of the International Numismatic Congress, 1936*, pp. 351-7). His main conclusions were: (1) that a pre-Belgic Iron Age A people produced the tin coins in Britain; (2) that their prototype came from the lands occupied by the Sequani in Central Gaul; (3) that they circulated in Britain in the years following 85 B.C. at the same time as the *imported* gold coins of the Bellovaci; (4) that, on the arrival of the Belgae, gold coins replaced them; (5) but they lasted somewhat longer in districts where Iron Age A culture survived.

At the Caburn nine tin coins¹ are the only pre-Roman coins found in all the excavations including the 147 pits cleared by either General Pitt-Rivers or Dr. E. Cecil Curwen. The Caburn coins belong to the first of the two groups into which Mr. Allen divides the British tin coins. They bear on the obverse a distinct attempt to portray the human face and on the reverse a few lines suggesting a bull. The distribution map, based on Mr. Derek Allen's, shows that the coins appear in greatest numbers along the banks of the Thames and throughout southern Britain, mainly in the south-east. The find-spots of the Gallic prototype are amongst non-Belgic tribes, especially the Carnutes, the Turoni, the Bitrugi, the Aedui, and the Sequani. The British imitations are

¹ Fig. 1: Tin coins from the Caburn.

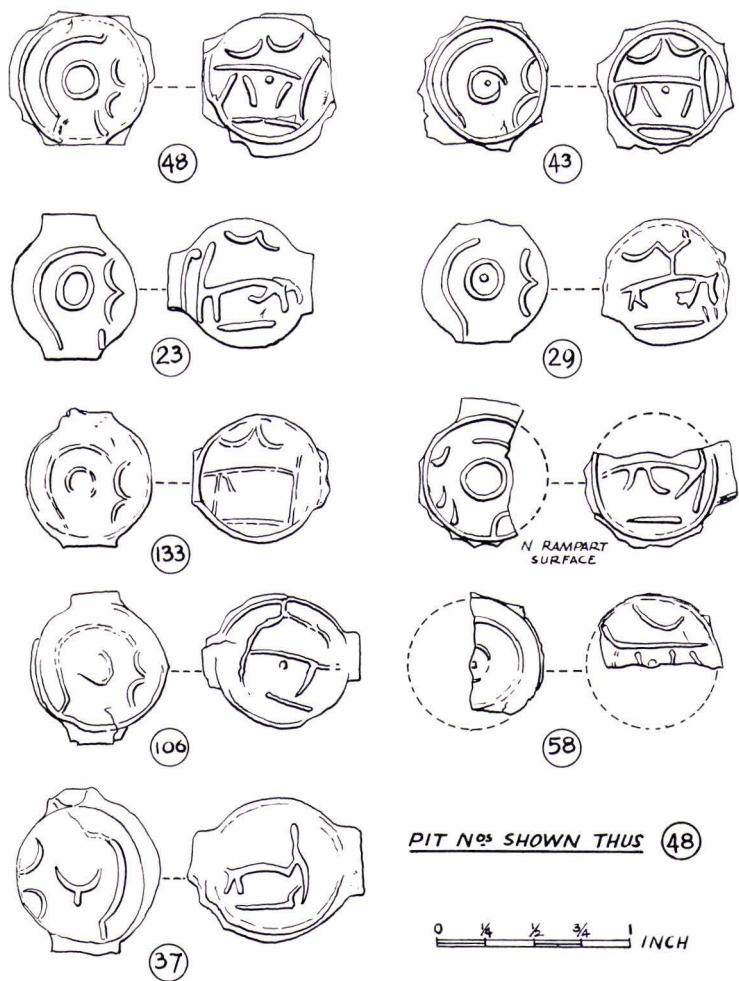


FIG. 1. TIN COINS FROM THE CABURN

therefore most likely to have been made among a non-Belgic people.

Mr. Allen, in the same paper and in his paper on the Belgic coins of Britain (*Archaeologia*, xc. 1 sqq.), calls attention to the distribution of the *imported* gold coins of the Bellovaci. In particular he mentions (a) Thanet and the coast as far inland as London, (b) Oldbury and

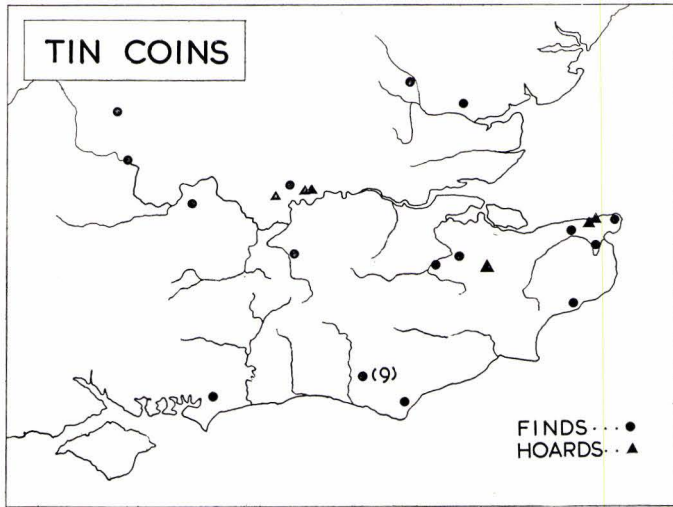


FIG. 2. DISTRIBUTION OF THE EARLIER TYPE OF TIN COINS IN SOUTH-EAST BRITAIN. (Another such coin has recently been found at South Malling, near Lewes.)

the Kentish forts spread along the greensand ridge, immediately north of the Weald. These coins came by trade before the Belgic invasions into the same two areas where the first class of the barbarous tin coins is found. The coins of the Bellovaci at Oldbury correspond to the tin coins at the Caburn—two Iron Age hill-forts which have many points of interest in common. Neither at Oldbury nor the Caburn have any later pre-Roman coins come to light though the pottery evidence shows that both forts were occupied until the Roman invasion of A.D. 43.

Professor Ward Perkins, the excavator of Oldbury, discussing the first phase of its fortification says, 'The

structure was of the simplest. Heaps of earth taken from the ditch were piled one on top of another to form a bank, and to cap this further material was then added from behind the line of the rampart. A section 12 ft. wide proved conclusively the absence of any postholes for a revetment. No signs of any palisade were found.

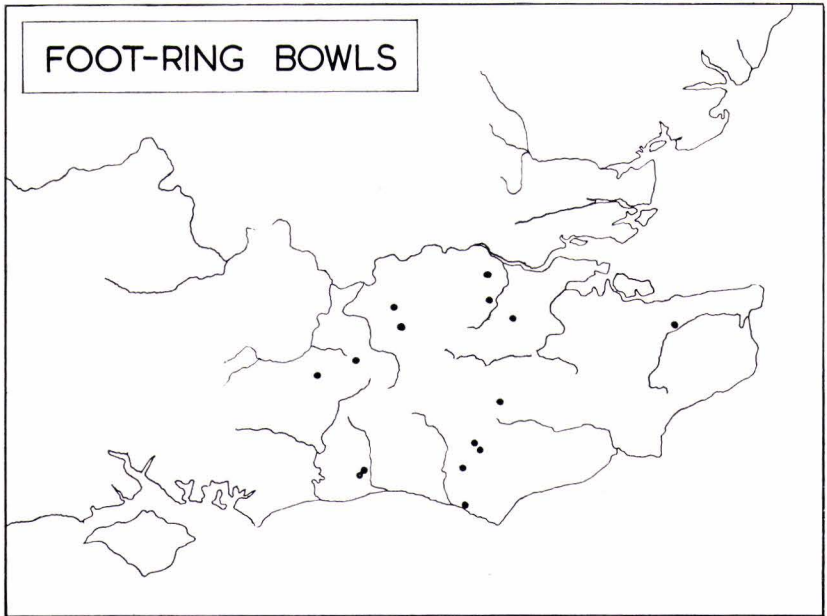


FIG. 3

The ditch is of steeply cut V-shaped section with a small counterscarp bank'. The Caburn showed similar features for its first rampart and ditch (*S.A.C.* LXXIX. 174).

At Oldbury there is a marked contrast between the pottery of this first stage and that of the second. 'The pottery associated with the primary rampart is remarkably uniform. Most of the recognizable vessels belong to a form already (1938) recognized at Crayford. They were there described as squat pedestal base vessels, but they would possibly better be termed "foot-ring bowls". The rim section of these foot-ring bowls is S-curved but

otherwise featureless. These foot-ring bowls are widely distributed in the area under discussion:

In Kent—Bigberry (where they belong to a pre-Belgic cultural substratum that is strongly represented on this site), Crayford, Hulbury, Oldbury.

In Surrey—Ewell (Purberry Shot), Hascombe, Holmbury, Walton Hill.

In Sussex—The Caburn, Findon Park, Horsted Keynes, Little Horsted Lane, Park Brow, Saxonbury.'

At the Caburn sufficient sherds to form a complete vessel came from pit 58. With them in the pit was one of the tin coins. This shows that this style of pottery, derived according to Professor Hawkes from Marnian pedestal-base jars introduced to Sussex about 250 B.C., was in use after 100 B.C. In pit 106, with another of the tin coins, were the sherds of the haematite-coated cordoned bowl with chevron ornament sharply incised after baking. Professor Hawkes suggested that this bowl came from Wessex and acted as one of the prototypes of Caburn I ware in the years following 300 B.C. Dr. Kathleen Kenyon has questioned this derivation on stylistic grounds, suggesting an analogy with the bead-rim pottery of Maiden Castle B pottery. As the sherds of this bowl from pit 106 do not show signs of much rolling and weathering after breakage, it seems improbable that they came from a pot made 200 years earlier than the tin coin. If the association of both the foot-ring jar and the haematite-coated cordoned bowl with the tin coins in these two pits can be accepted as a proof of contemporaneity, then it would suggest that the first occupation and the subsequent first fortification of the Caburn may belong to a later date than that claimed for them and that the haematite bowl was not one of the prototypes for Caburn I ware but was contemporary with South-eastern B pottery.

About 75 B.C. the Belgae made their first settlements in Britain in Essex, East Kent, and along the Thames river banks, but had little influence on the greensand ridge, west of the Medway. There the users of the foot-ring bowls had established themselves.

About 50 B.C., under pressure of Caesar's conquest of Gaul, another group of the Belgae moved under Commius into the Hampshire Basin and spread inland, fanning out into West Sussex. The Belgic tribes settled down into tribal kingdoms—the Catuvellauni, the Trino-

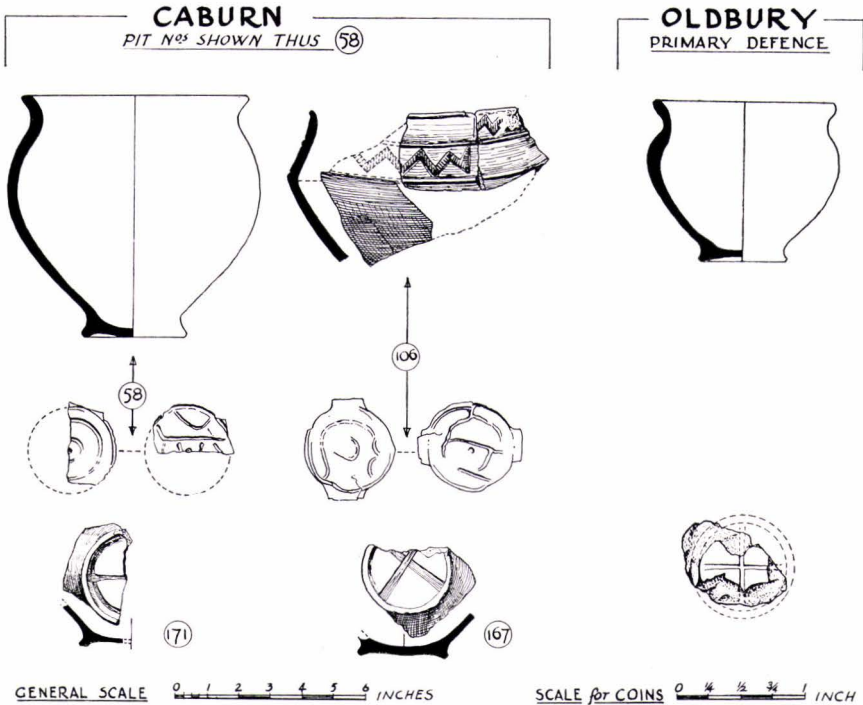


FIG. 4. FOOT-RING JARS; TIN COINS; AND CROSS BASES

vantes, the Cantii, and the Atrebates. These tribes surrounded the area where the users of the foot-ring bowls had established themselves (Fig. 5).

Throughout this area a different culture was asserting itself. To it Professor Ward Perkins has given the name South-eastern B. Its pottery has several distinctive characteristics. The 'omphalos-base' bowls contrast sharply with the pedestal bases of the Belgic jars and with the foot-rings of the Cissbury Wealden culture which had spread from Sussex throughout the Weald to

reach the Thames in Surrey and West Kent (with a single outlier at Bigberry along the greensand ridge). Other features of associated pottery are the curvilinear decoration consisting of 'eyebrows' or interlocking swags with small impressed circles at the junctions. This

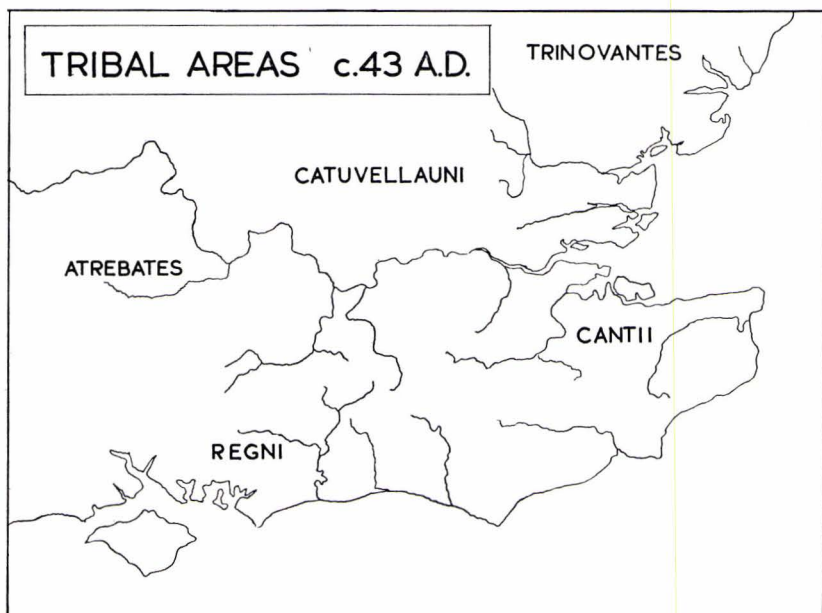


FIG. 5. (It is doubtful if there was a tribe called Regni. The term Regnum applies more correctly to the districts placed under the rule of Cogidumnus after the Conquest.)

decoration may be incised, painted, rouletted, or sometimes both incised and painted. Mr. Sheppard Frere discussed 'Some Aspects of Iron Age and Romano-British Culture in the Wealden Area' in *Arch. Journ.* CI. 50-67. With his permission I publish his distribution map of South-eastern B omphalos bases. It tallies closely with that of the tin coins for the south-east area and indicates two points of entry, the Thames Valley and mid-Sussex, presumably the Ouse Valley. A closer study of the pottery from four sites—Horsted Keynes, Crayford, the Caburn, and Oldbury helps towards an

appreciation of the dating and significance of the South-eastern B culture.

At Horsted Keynes the late Commander Hardy recovered from a ditch in the brickworks in Freshfield Lane a mass of pottery showing all of the characteristics

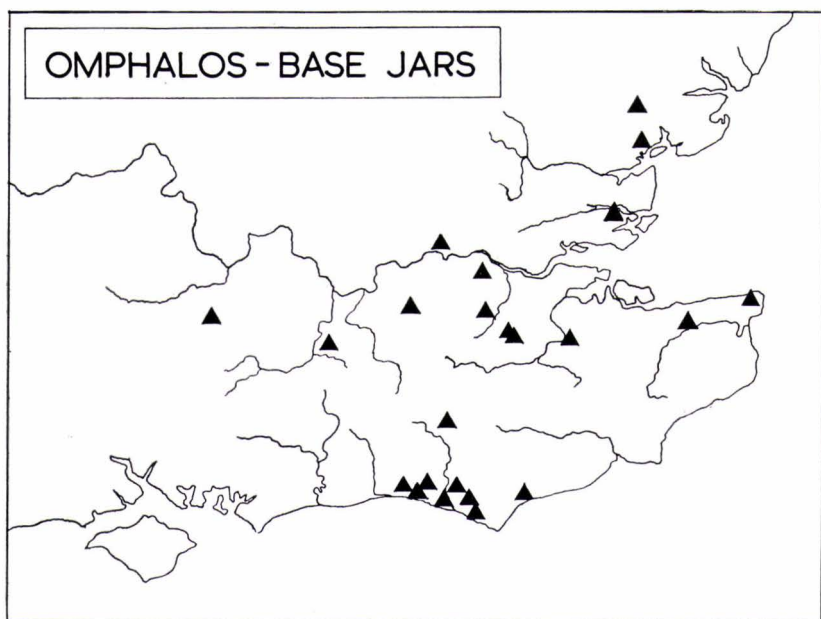


FIG. 6

of South-eastern B ware together with part of a Samian cup Form 27 (c. A.D. 50–75) and an imitation butt-beaker and some other wares (*S.A.C.* LXXVIII. 253 ff.). The swag decoration and stamp circles appear not only on bowls with omphalos bases and foot-ring bases but also on larger wide-bellied pots with narrow necks. As Professor Ward Perkins contends (*Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* 1938, p. 167) the group is preponderantly South-eastern B in character, but the presence of the Samian cup and the imitation butt-beaker indicates its survival into Roman times.

At Crayford the foot-ring bowls were found alongside

South-eastern B wares, coarse Late Iron Age A wares, and Belgic wares. These associations again give a hint of the date for South-eastern B pottery. The Crayford examples include plain omphalos-base bowl, interlocking swag ornament on foot-ring bowl, stamped circle ornament, and S-profile foot-ring jars with chevron ornament (not a Sussex feature).

From the Caburn there is one omphalos base, but there are several examples of the eyebrow pattern on the foot-ring bowls. These elements are by no means a dominant factor in Caburn II pottery, which evinces to a much greater extent decoration by shallow groove tooling in curvilinear lines together with shallow tooled dots. The Glynde chalk pit at the foot of the Caburn has yielded a number of good examples of foot-ring bowls with eyebrow decoration, here published for the first time and deposited in Barbican House Museum.¹ At Oldbury there are a number of plain foot-ring bowls and one omphalos base, but no known examples of swag or stamped circle decoration. This type of pottery is associated with the first rampart and ditch. The Belgae had reached the site by the time of the second fortification.

Professor Hawkes summed up: 'It looks then as if at some time within a century before the Roman Conquest there was an intrusion into east and central Sussex of people who introduced omphalos bowls and the idea of "eyebrow" pattern, and extended the latter to the dumpy-pedestal pots (foot-ring bowls) there current, by fusion with the Sussex population that made them.' He emphasized the fact that the distinguishing mark of this eyebrow pattern was its geometrical regularity enhanced often by the stamped circles. Notable examples are the bowls or jars from Little Horsted, Horsted Keynes, Saltdean, Crayford, and Langenhoe.² The stamped circlets and the interlocking swag (even more than the simple eyebrow) are powerfully reminiscent of the Glastonbury pottery. There exist good reasons for

¹ Fig. 9: South-eastern B pottery from Glynde Chalkpit.

² Figs. 7 and 8: Examples of South-eastern B and allied wares.

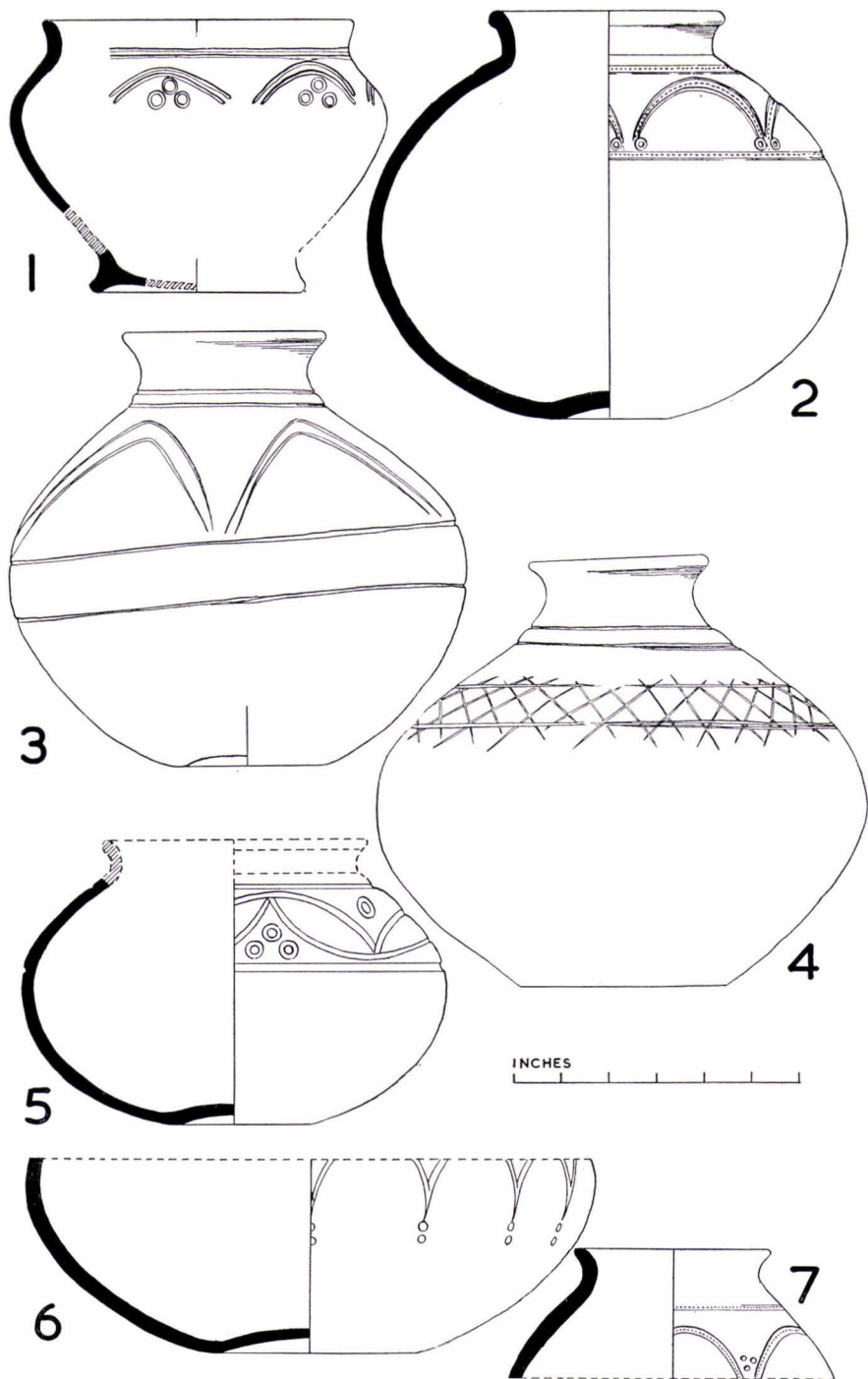


FIG. 7. SOUTH-EASTERN B AND ALLIED WARES. 1, Little Horsted; 2, Saltdean; 3, Plaxtol; 4, Asham; 5, Langenhoe; 6 and 7, Horsted Keynes

linking this form of decoration to Brittany. It is worth noting that all three features—omphalos base, eyebrow pattern, and stamp circles are found in Bavaria and the Rhineland in La Tène I times (Déchelette, III, p. 1475,

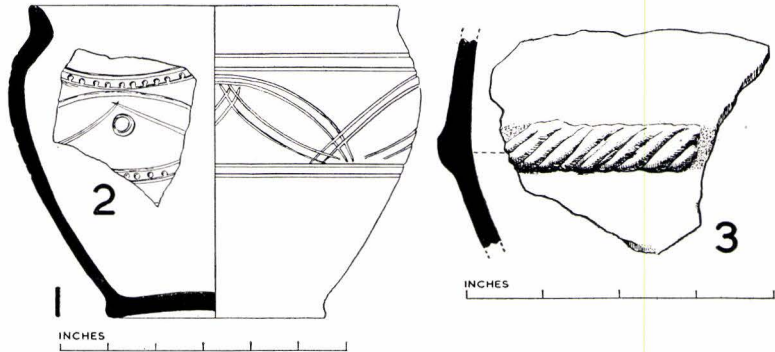


FIG. 8. SOUTH-EASTERN B AND ALLIED WARES. 1 and 2, Crayford; 3, Horsted Keynes

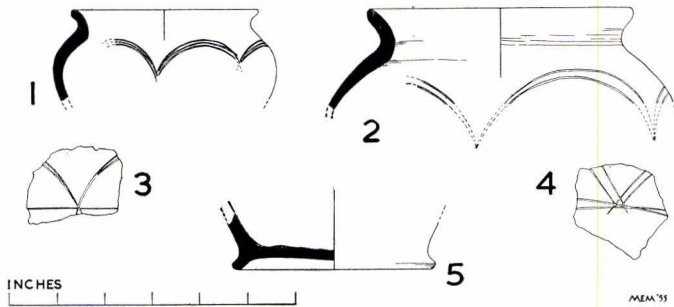


FIG. 9. SOUTH-EASTERN B POTTERY FROM GLYNDE CHALKPIT

fig. 670, and p. 1477, fig. 673). With these omphalos bowls in Bavaria and the Rhineland is found pottery with incised and stamped decorations and zones of arcs, groups of circles, and chevrons. The invasion of the Cimbri and Teutones displaced the Sequani from the Rhineland part of their territory just before 100 B.C. May, therefore, the use of tin coins copied from the Sequani and the use of these forms of decoration have a common source among the Sequani?

Another group associated with this South-eastern B pottery consists of the 'Asham' pots¹ 'with their narrow mouth with out-curling lip, low belly, sweeping shoulder and flat base' (S. S. Frere, *Arch. Journ.* ci. 59). At Horsted Keynes these were found with swag decoration incised, painted, or both incised and painted on their shoulders. At Plaxtol (near Oldbury) and Fetter Lane, London, pots of similar shape, but with omphalos bases, carry the swag decoration.² In Sussex, again associated with South-eastern B pottery, are a number of vessels with raised bands or cordons, applied to the girth of the pots. These cordons carry ornament of finger-tip impress, slashing, or cable-twist. Some have treated this as a survival or revival of Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age technique. Frere suggests a more reasonable explanation. The local potters knew the cordon of the contemporary Belgic wheel-turned pottery of Kent. As they did not use a wheel they applied a cruder cordon and pressed it home with thumb and finger and then experimented with ornamentation. The Asham and the cordoned types of pottery are confined to the Sussex portion of the South-eastern B area. In the Surrey and Kent portion Patchgrove and Ashford types of pottery take their place.

Recent exploration of the iron-mining area around Sedlescombe and Crowhurst has brought to light the fact that the iron-workers there about the middle of the first century A.D. were using pottery of South-eastern B type including Asham pots together with Belgic and early Roman pottery. Messrs. Straker and Lucas (*S.A.C.* LXXIX. 224) found on the Crowhurst Bloomery site South-eastern B pottery, Roman pottery, and pottery of Swarling (Eastern Belgic) type. The nearness to the harbour at Bulverhythe and to Kent explains the presence of Swarling type. In 1949 Mr. Lucas explored another bloomery in Crowhurst Parish at Bynes Farm. Among the late first-century Roman pottery were sherds 'of smooth dark soft ware' with 'ornament of cordons and hatch bands'. At Footlands Farm, Sedles-

¹ Fig. 7, no. 4.

² Fig. 7, no. 3.

combe, on an iron-working site, Mrs. Eileen Chown found among Roman ware sherds of at least eighteen Iron Age pots, several of Asham shape. Six have the swag pattern and groups of painted spots. Nine more probably had painted swags.

Both Evans and Derek Allen call attention to certain

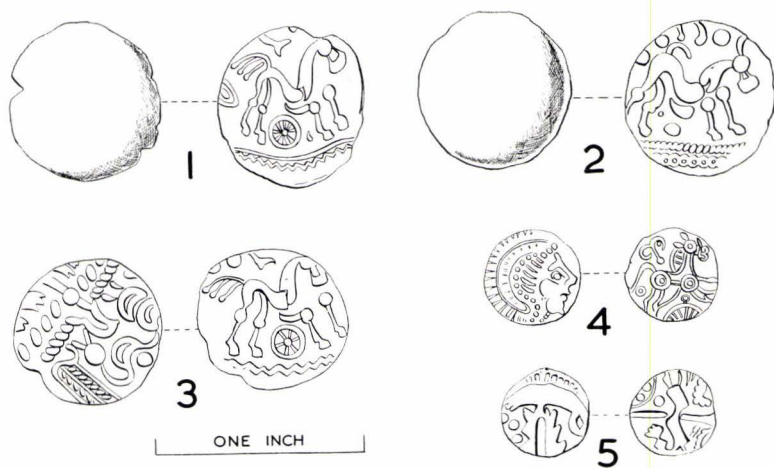


FIG. 10. TYPES OF UNINSCRIBED 'BELGIC' COINS. 1, B10; 2, B8; 3, B9; 4, F11; 5, E8

pre-Roman gold and silver coins which they regard as Ashdown Forest or Sussex types. They are uninscribed and their weight and the degeneracy of ornament suggest they come late in the series of gold coins, probably contemporary with some of the inscribed gold coins of the surrounding Belgic kings. In discussing Evans Types B8, 9, 10, and 12, Derek Allen says that though most of the coins (B8) are still imported, a few (B9 and 10) are struck in Britain. These native-made coins are of a type which originates on the Sussex coast, while one stater found at Ightham and another at Maidstone have affinities with a small Sussex and Ashdown Forest group (B12). Evans, in discussing the Maidstone coin, suggests that the type was struck in Kent or Sussex and compares it with uninscribed type E8. He associates

with these—his Ashdown Forest type—some silver coins (F11 and 12). At Lancing Down silver coins of F11 and 12 are associated with the coins of Verica and Tincommius.

Is it possible to find means of communication through the 'impenetrable' weald so beloved of the geographers? During recent years there have appeared a number of notes by Mr. I. D. Margary and Mr. Graham on pre-Roman tracks of the Wealden area. In the map I have pieced together the suggested tracks with the sites from which there is evidence for the use of South-eastern B, Asham, or slashed cordoned pottery.¹ If we accept the Pilgrims' Way through Surrey and Kent and a ridgeway along the South Downs as main routes of communication for the distribution from east to west, it remains to find suitable north-to-south routes to link these well-known tracks.

One such north-to-south track (*Surrey Arch. Soc. Col.* XLIX. 20) descends from the North Downs from the area of the Cray (Crayford pottery) to the west of Titsey Park, across Limsfield Common to Dry Hill Camp where it passes through the camp from north gate to south gate (*S.N.Q.* XI. 62–64) to Danehill. Near Freshfield it passes the brickfield where Commander Hardy found the Horsted Keynes pottery. It then continues to reach the South Downs near Westmeston (Middleton Track). It ascends the scarp face as a terrace way to give access to the ridgeway near the Borner village cemetery site (S.E.B. cinerary urn with eyebrow pattern and omphalos base) and Saltdean. The ridgeway would give access to the Caburn, Glynde Chalkpit, Asham, and Charleston Brow.

Another track, farther to the west (*S.N.Q.* XI. 78), came from the North Downs near Oxted Tunnel from Tanridge, through Felbridge to enter Sussex and continue through Kingscote, across Selsfield Common, and thence alongside the Iron Age Camp at Philpots in West Hoathly, and so approximately along the later Roman road to Clayton and the South Downs.

¹ Fig. 11.

A third track from the North Downs crosses the Pilgrims' Way just westwards of Wrotham and leads southwards to Oldbury Camp, past Ivy Hatch (near Plaxtol where South-eastern B pottery has been found), through Tonbridge and Southborough to High Rocks, Tunbridge Wells, where there exists an Iron Age camp

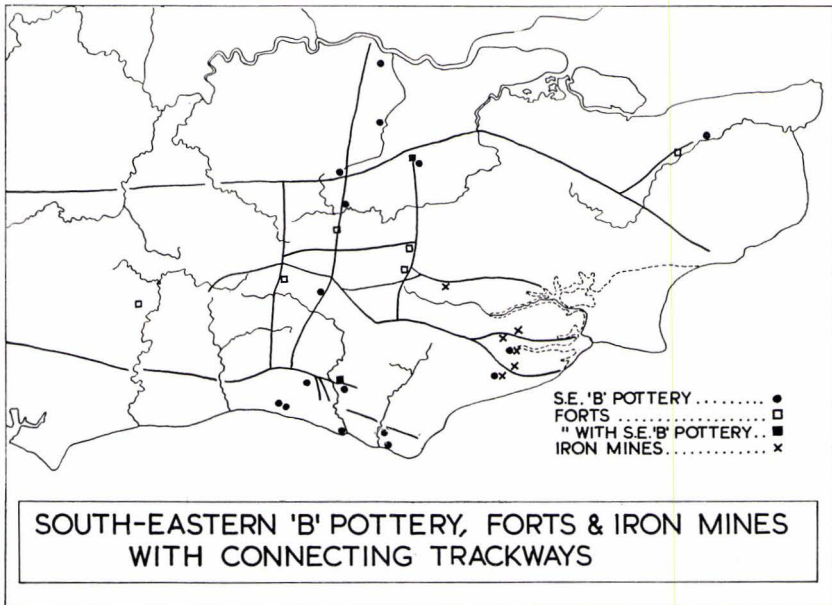


FIG. 11

with characteristics similar to Oldbury and the Caburn. The track then goes to Frant and very close to Saxonbury (*S.A.C.* LXXI. 223). It can thence be traced as far as Cross-in-Hand. At Saxonbury it crosses one of the Wealden ridgeways which to the east passes through the Ticehurst iron-mining area which has yielded South-eastern B pottery. Near Cross-in-Hand it crosses another ridgeway which leads to Dallington ironworks, from which similar pottery has come, and to the works in the Crowhurst-Sedlescombe-Battle area already discussed.

In West Sussex the story is different. Professor Colingwood wrote in the first volume of *The Oxford History*

of England: 'but now the old hillfort of The Trundle was evacuated and a new city NOVIOMAGUS was built in the plain on the site of Chichester'. He attributed this move to Commius and the Western Belgic invasion of c. 50 B.C. If this were the case the area within the walls of Chichester should have yielded pottery, coins, brooches, &c., of the types used by the Belgae during the century from 50 B.C. to the time of the Roman invasion of A.D. 43. During the last seven years Miss Pilmer, Miss Collinson, and Mr. Collins have helped me to sort all the finds from within the city walls. Miss Pilmer has made a complete analysis of these finds in her M.Litt. thesis for Durham University. The only Belgic coin known from the city is one of Cunobelinus found in a pit with Roman material. From the neighbouring Selsey Plain very many Belgic coins are recorded including:

1. Uninscribed gold staters of Evans Types A3, B6, 7, 9, 10, D7, E1.
2. Uninscribed quarter-staters of Evans Types D4, E1, 2, 8, 10.
3. 93 staters or quarter-staters of Tincommius.
4. Quarter-staters of Epillus.
5. Staters of Verica.
6. 14 quarter-staters of Verica (1st issue).
7. 9 quarter-staters of Verica (2nd issue).
8. 4 quarter-staters of Verica (3rd issue).
9. A few silver and copper coins of Verica.

Bognor Regis has also yielded coins of Tincommius and Verica. The map (Fig. 12) shows the distribution of the coins of Verica.

The generally accepted dates for the reign of Tincommius are from c. 20 B.C. to c. A.D. 5. His successor for a short time was Epillus. Then Verica occupied the throne from c. A.D. 10 until the disturbances which preceded the Roman Conquest. The coins of Tincommius show strong Roman influence both in their designs and in their lettering. The *Monumentum Ancyranum* (A.D. 14) mentions him as a contemporary of Dubnovellaunus of Kent.

Verica also was a son of Commius. His three issues

consist of three types of coins—staters, quarter-staters, and silver pieces. The first issue resemble closely those of his brother Tincommius. The second has the title REX and the third has either a vine-leaf, a head copied from Tiberius, or a seated figure. Derek Allen regarded the vine-leaf as a reply to the ear of corn on some of Cunobelin's coins.

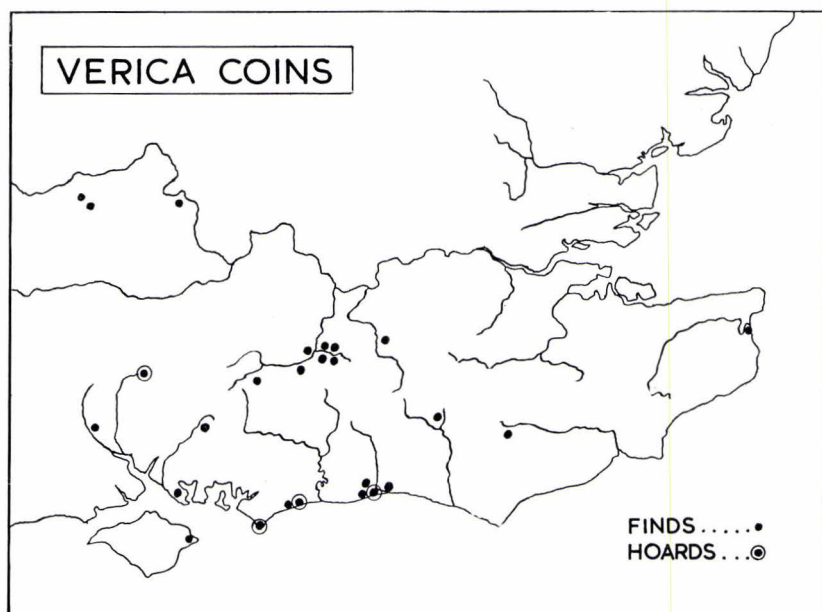


FIG. 12

With all these coins in the neighbourhood it seems strange that none should have come from Chichester if it were the Belgic capital.

A number of sites within the city have provided examples of imported Belgic pottery (the County Hall, the West St. Post Office, Marks and Spencers, a trial trench at the corner of East St. and St. John's St., the garden of East Pallant House). The types include Terra Nigra platters, Terra Rubra platters, butt-beakers, and flagons (Miss Pilmer's report on these will appear in a subsequent article), but there seems little or no local

made pottery of the surrounding countryside. Moreover, in every case where the stratification was known, the pottery was found with well-known early Roman types. There are three recorded mid-first-century brooches of Colchester type, but in each case they were associated with Roman pottery.

Belgic pottery with bead rims, pedestal bases, and the well-known Belgic tarmac-burnished surface has been found not only on the Selsey Plain but along the coastal and downland strips as far as the Adur Valley, especially from such sites as Shepherds Garden in Arundel Park, Lancing Down, Steyning, and Kingston Buci. At Lancing Down Temple site there were associated with uninscribed silver coins, coins of Verica and a mid-first-century brooch.

In the summer of 1954, beneath the remains of the Roman villa at Sidlesham on the Selsey Peninsula, we began to expose a ditch which has yielded from its first silt many examples of Belgic pottery both imported and locally made. When work ceased for the season some 90 ft. of the ditch running from east to west had been exposed and a right-angled corner with about 20 ft. running from north to south. It looks, therefore, as though the ditch will form an enclosure. The upper layer sealing the ditch before the villa was built included Roman pottery of first-century type.

The distribution maps published by Mr. Derek Allen in *Archaeologia*, xc. 1 sqq., support his argument that on the eve of the Roman Conquest Cunobelinus had conquered from Epillus the Kingdom of Kent. With the help of Epaticcus he was trying to add the whole of south-east Britain to his kingdom. By A.D. 43 Cunobelinus was dead and his kingdom was divided between his sons Caratacus and Togodumnus (Dio Cassius IX, 19-23). Suetonius (Gaius XIV) tells of troubles in the lands of Cunobelinus in A.D. 40. One son, Adminius, had fled to Gaul and appealed to Caligula to intervene in the wars going on in Britain. There seems every reason to identify the Bericos who had fled to Rome in A.D. 43 (Dio Cassius IX, 19) with Verica. It was under these

very unsettled circumstances that both Oldbury and the Caburn received their second fortification.

These two sets of defences have certain characteristics in common which mark them off from other fortifications of similar date in Britain:

1. They guard promontory sites and need strong defences on one side only.
2. Their entrances are thrown over to the flank of the exposed spur and so are partially guarded by a very steep slope on one side—the defenders' right hand.
3. They have an unusually wide flat ditch similar to a group of Picardy forts explored by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1939 (see distribution map in *Archaeologia*, xc. 140).
4. The entrances have a special outwork to make the approaches more defensible on the left-hand side for the defenders.

Mr. Money's report on his excavations at High Rocks, Tunbridge Wells, shows similar characteristics there and the few sherds of pottery from the site might well be of South-eastern B type.

These three camps are in the area proved by the pottery and late uninscribed coins to be of a different culture from the surrounding Belgic tribes—an area under violent dispute between the sons of Cunobelinus and Verica at the time when appeals to Caligula and Claudius gave the excuse for the Roman invasion of Britain in A.D. 43.

Acknowledgements. I have to thank my daughter, Miss Clare Wilson, for help in preparing the maps, and Mr. Mitchell for his drawings of pottery, coins, and maps.