

◆ Analytical survey and landscape context of Saxonbury hillfort, Rotherfield, East Sussex

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The results of an analytical survey of Saxonbury hillfort are reported and include the presence of a probable prehistoric field system. A possible re-interpretation of earlier excavation results is offered, as is some consideration of the relationship with nearby iron production sites.

LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND PRESENT LAND USE

Saxonbury Hillfort is centred at TQ57783294, in Rotherfield civil parish and Wealden District, East Sussex (Fig. 1). It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, number 1014525 (which also includes the 19th century tower in the centre of the hillfort), is recorded on the East Sussex HER as MES 4795, and lies within both an Archaeological Notification Area: Saxonbury, and the Registered Park or Garden of Eridge Park, 1000265, II'.

It is situated on undivided Tunbridge Wells Sand, part of the High Weald formation. Numerous fault lines transect the area, one of which lies to the immediate south-west of the hill. To the south of this fault lies an area of Wadhurst Clay, and the hill itself is ringed on all other sides by a narrow outcrop of clay. Numerous streams rise from the slopes below Saxonbury Hill and feed into tributaries of the Medway and Rother. A small stream running about 500m to the west of the hill joins a complex arising from chalybeate springs some 1km to the north-west.

The hillfort was constructed on a high point at 203m OD; the topographical position is shown in Fig. 2. There is an extensive view to the north-west over the Low Weald to the North Downs, but to the north and north-east the view is interrupted in the middle distance by the high point (171m OD) of Whitehill. There are interrupted views to east and west along the ridge of the High Weald, but views to the south are limited by the ridge which now bears the settlements of Crowborough and Rotherfield, including the high point of Crowborough Beacon at c. 210m OD.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The name 'Saxonbury' is first mentioned as *Sockburie* on a plan of Rotherfield Manor dated 1597 (ESRO ABE/ACC363/111). Only later was any connection made between the place-name and the Saxons. The hillfort is depicted on a map drawn by Richard Budgen c. 1724, and an estate map drawn by William Budgen c. 1800 (ESRO ABE/ACC 6300/1) shows a track around the interior of the hillfort, and an arc of trees, presumably deliberately planted specimens, on the north-western, northern, eastern and south-eastern slopes of Saxonbury Hill below the earthworks of the enclosure. In 1835 Saxonbury was described thus:

In Eridge Park are the remains of a military station of the Saxon invaders of the country, which still retains the name Saxonbury Hill. On the summit of this hill (from whence the cliffs of Dover may be seen) are to be traced the remains of an ancient fortification; the fosse is still plainly discernible, enclosing an area of about two acres, from whence there is but one outlet. The apex of the hill within is formed of a strongly compacted body of stone, brought hither from a distance, on which doubtless was created some strong military edifice. (Horsfield 1835 [1974], 406).

This 'compacted body of stone' will be further discussed below.

The first recorded archaeological intervention is that of S. E. Winbolt, who subjected the site to limited excavation in 1929 (Winbolt 1930), and his overall plan is reproduced as Fig. 3. Trenches across the bounding earthworks indicated the height of the present top of the inner bank above the original depth of the ditch of 6ft 5in (1.96m), and the height

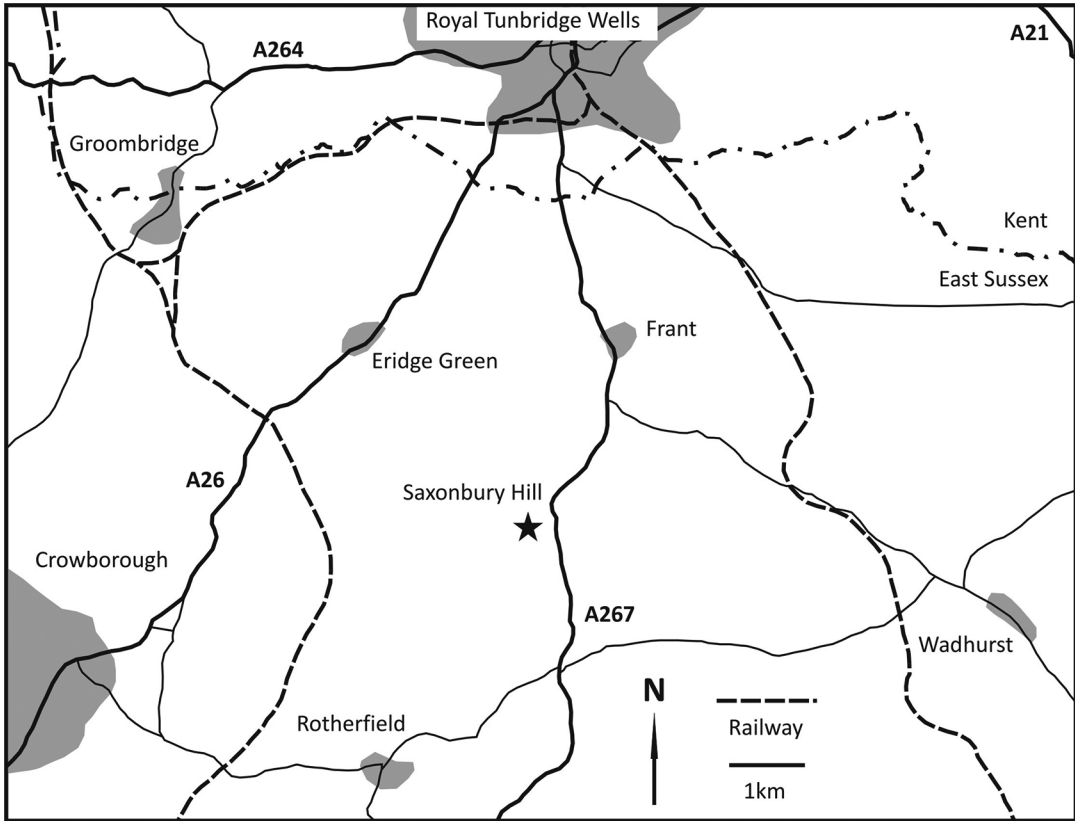


Fig. 1. Location of Saxonbury Hill.

of the present top of the outer bank above the same point of 4ft 8in (1.42m). The inner bank was composed of large stones and earth, there is nothing in the description to suggest a sand bank with stone revetment, the ditch was round-bottomed, and there is no mention of the structure of the outer bank.

Trenches within the interior, and further excavation in early 1930, produced results that are sufficiently controversial to require some consideration. Winbolt considered that he had found a dry stone walled, ovoid enclosure, some 230ft (70m) x 93ft (28m), which underlay the north-western leg of the inner bank and thus predated construction of the hillfort. He was clearly surprised by this finding and excavated a considerable portion, but eventually suggested a date only slightly earlier than the main hillfort, which he assigned to the Early Iron Age, and drew comparison with an apparently similar inner enclosure at Wolstonbury.

However, this comparison is somewhat far-fetched. Excavation of Wolstonbury (Curwen 1930) did locate an inner ovoid enclosure, but it was marked simply by a wide, shallow ditch containing a few sherds of pottery tentatively assigned to La Tène I and II (Early/Middle Iron Age) and some from a single Romano-British vessel. No information is given regarding the position of the pottery within the ditch fills, but Curwen considered that the ditched enclosure dated to that period, although he noted similarities to Neolithic monuments.

Without any section drawings (not unusual for the period), it is difficult fully to understand Winbolt's findings at Saxonbury. He describes a dry stone wall 16ft 6in (4.8m) wide built over a few inches of 'yellow sand, which had become whiter from long saturation', and which in turn lay on sandstone bedrock. The lowest course was of large stones, and those of the upper courses, which leaned inwards up the slope, decreased in size. The whole

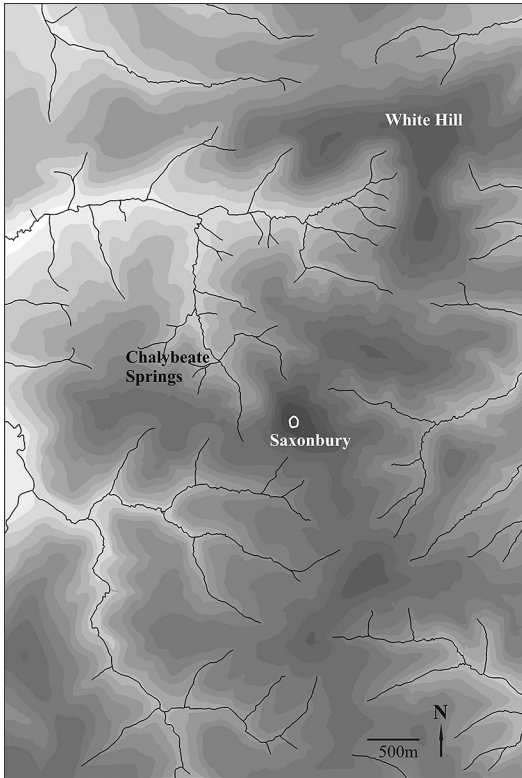


Fig. 2. Topographical position of Saxonbury Hillfort. Contours are shown at 10m intervals with land below 60m OD left white.

had been constructed around a level plateau of natural rock and was buried by 4–6in (0.10–0.15m) of sandy soil. Trench D revealed a further structure, called the Diagonal Wall, the foundations of which underlay the dry stone wall

The later excavation investigated the relationship between the dry stone wall and the bank of the hillfort at the north-western terminus of the former. Two trenches were excavated, of which one revealed no trace of the wall but was considered to have been placed outside its curve; unfortunately, the exact position of these trenches is not indicated. The second trench located the wall apparently underlying the southern side of the inner bank, and Winbolt was convinced that the wall pre-dated the bank. Large stones 'heading under the vallum' were also noted east and west of the two trenches, presumably on the surface, but the distance from the trenches is not given. Any gaps were explained as resulting from disturbance

related to planting rhododendrons during the 19th century.

However, the published photographs of the dry stone wall are unconvincing. The clearest (Winbolt 1930, fig 8) shows the foundations of the Diagonal Wall appearing as a surface of slabs which could have been deliberately laid, but the dry stone wall seems in this and other photographs like a very rough accumulation of pieces of sandstone, possibly even a rubble-filled ditch.

Horsfield (1835 [1974], 406) and Winbolt (1930) both considered there to have been a structure within the hillfort, but it is by no means certain that what they observed was man-made. Sloping blocks at the edge of an outcrop of sandstone could have resulted from frost-shatter, enhancing the natural tendency of this rock to cleave into slabs; during the survey it was noted that the root boles of several upturned trees within and outside the hillfort contained large, apparently squared, blocks. Even if man-made, this feature may not necessarily be of an early date. Its apparent underlying of the inner edge of the inner bank could result from a later feature being buried by material slumping from an unrevetted sand bank. Laying out of drives and construction of the central tower, partly made of local sandstone, in 1828, together with planting of a large number of rhododendrons in about 1880, would have caused considerable disturbance of the shallow topsoil and underlying bedrock, and this may have led to misinterpretation of the archaeological findings.

If the Dry Stone Wall is not prehistoric, the nature and early date of the Diagonal Wall are also called into question. The latter feature appears to have been a single layer of slabs of stone which, once its stratigraphic relationship with the Dry Stone Wall becomes suspect, may well have been one of the paths laid out during the late 18–20th century use of the interior of the hillfort as a feature within a pleasure park.

In summary, the evidence for a major construct underlying and therefore pre-dating the inner bank of the hillfort should be regarded with some suspicion. It is worth noting that in 1996 Canterbury Archaeological Trust undertook a watching brief at Saxonbury when a trench for electrical cabling was excavated on a line close to that of the present path from the entrance to the tower (Shand 1996). Despite passing through the putative line of the early enclosure, this trench revealed no sign of the

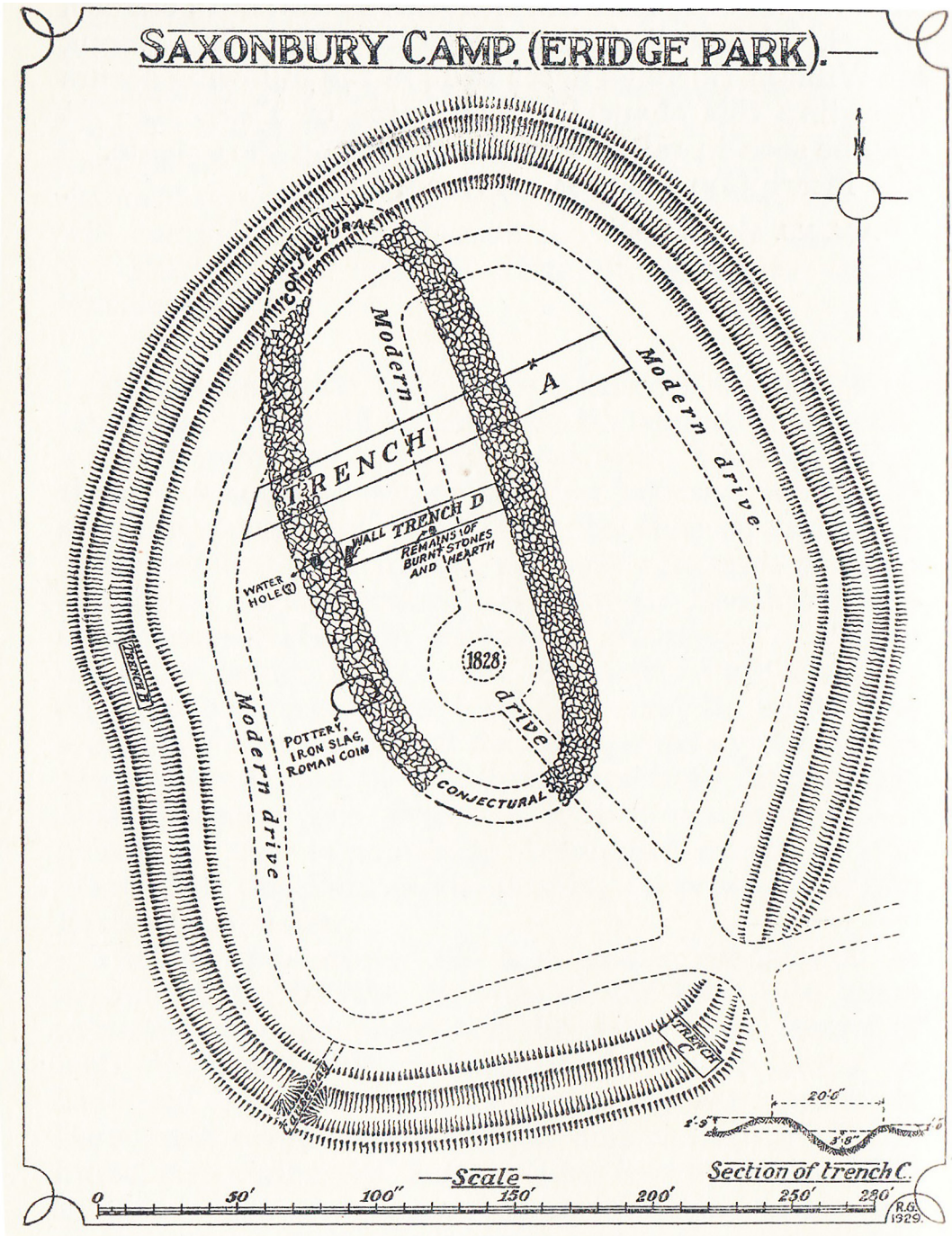


Fig. 3. Plan of the survey and excavations by S. E. Winbolt drawn by Robert Gurd (from Winbolt 1930, figure 1).

so-called dry stone wall noted by Winbolt (1930) or, indeed, any archaeological features or finds. The geology recorded in the 40cm deep trench was of 10–20cm humic sandy topsoil overlying Tunbridge Wells Sand containing fragments of sandstone.

Two areas of burning were located by Winbolt (1930), one of which, a hearth in Trench D, was associated with burnt stones, charcoal and slag. Further amounts of slag, from either iron production or working, formed part of a dump of material south-west of the dry stone wall close to the tower, together with Iron Age pottery. More iron slag and charcoal were found in a large deposit of clay in a pocket close to the Diagonal Wall also in trench D, but any relationship with the hearth in the same trench is unclear. Winbolt considered a site he had located in Colesgrove Wood, south-east of Saxonbury, to be contemporary with ironworking at the hillfort (Winbolt 1929a). Some of the La Tène III pottery is reported as having crushed iron slag as temper (Winbolt 1929b).

Pottery was recovered from a number of locations. The dump described above contained sherds assigned to the La Tène III period dated by Winbolt to 150 BC–43 AD and extending into the Roman period, and also a coin of either Vespasian or Titus (AD 69–81). Further La Tène III pottery was found during the later excavation to clarify the relative positions of the dry stone wall and the inner bank. This pottery has been reassessed as appears below.

ANALYTICAL SURVEY

SURVEY METHOD

The Level 3 analytical survey was undertaken using an amended version of the tape and offset methodology (Bowden 1999, 62–3). Two ‘fixed points’ were created close to the centre of the interior of the enclosure. The points were far enough from the tower to ensure that an assumed magnetic field emanating from equipment within the tower would not interfere with compass measurements. From these ‘fixed points’ tapes were run to points on the top of the inner bank, their alignment measured by compass, and the overall accuracy checked by triangulation. Offset tapes were then placed at right angles to base tapes laid between the points on the inner bank. Additionally, points on the inner bank were located by GPS (Garmin 62st).

SURVEY RESULTS

Results of the analytical survey are shown in Fig. 4. The earliest earthworks visible comprise a number of very slight lynchets (a1–a6) which appear to be overlain by the outer enclosure bank and thus to pre-date the hillfort. Although they could not be seen within the interior of the enclosure, their positions and alignments suggest that they may have formed part of a rectilinear arrangement draped over the top of the hill. If this interpretation is correct, the most likely explanation is that these earthworks form part of a field system of unknown extent dating to either the Bronze Age or the Early/Middle Iron Age.

The present entrance through the enclosure earthworks is modern, but appears to be in the position of the original. The surfaced track leading from the exterior to the central tower probably results from the landscaping of the area during the 19th century (*see below*). The inner bank (b) to the north curves around the terminus of the inner ditch, and the outer bank fades some way north of the entrance. The inner ditch is somewhat deeper and more sharply defined, and may have been cleaned out to enhance the visibility of the entrance. This arrangement seems unlikely to reflect the original design, and may also result from later landscaping.

A ramp (c) has been constructed across the banks and ditch; the reason for this and the date of the ramp remain uncertain, but the ramp is clearly not part of the original build.

At the north-east corner a slight bank (d) approaches and ends at the outer bank; the phasing at this point is unclear and, although on a similar alignment, the difference in construction suggests that it is not part of the earlier field system. In the same area one of a number of probable lynchets (e) runs for a short distance parallel to the outer bank.

For most of the eastern side of the monument the inner bank is relatively slight when viewed from the interior of the enclosure, but is accompanied by a large and, for most of its length, sharply cut ditch up to 1.5m deep. This is in turn surrounded by a slight, and very abraded, outer bank, and there is no vestige remaining of any outer ditch. The nature of the ditch relative to the two banks again encourages some suspicion that it may have been cleaned out in recent centuries. At one point (f) access to the interior, probably by vehicles, has resulted in damage to the inner bank.

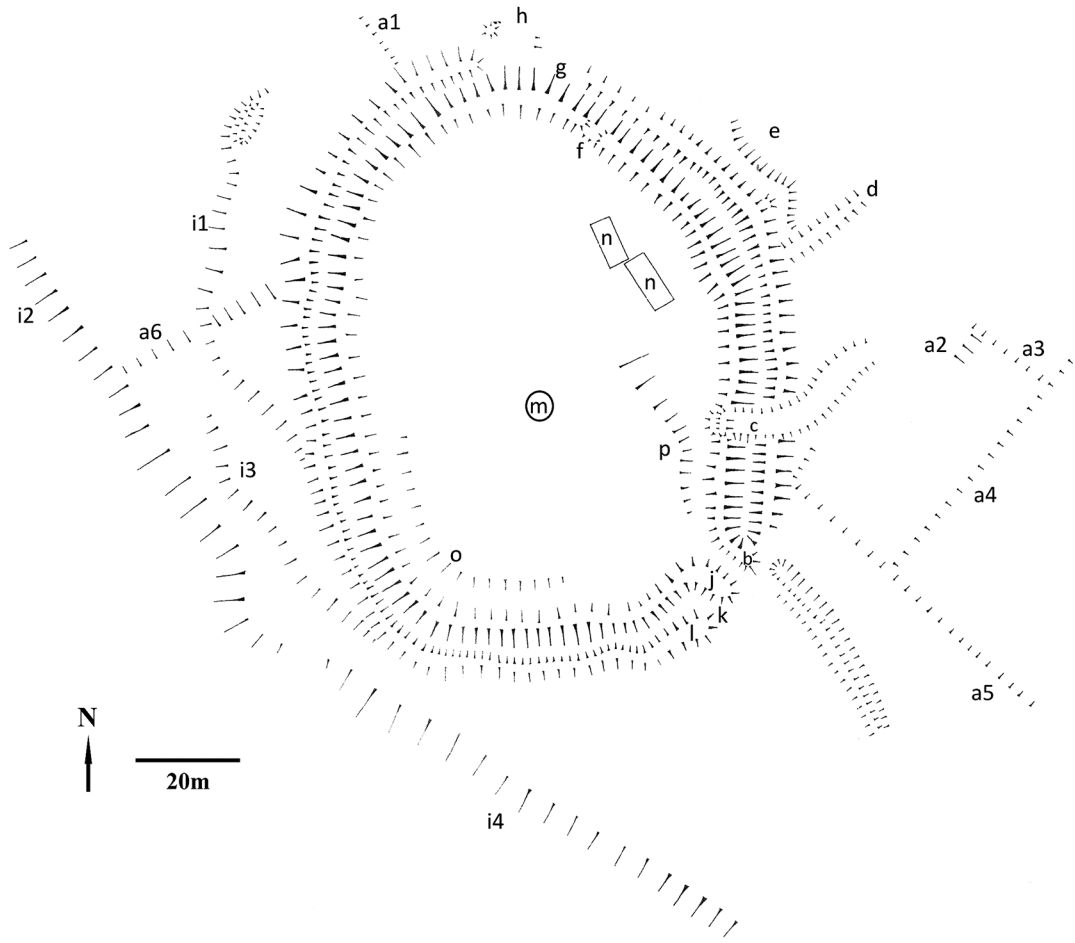


Fig. 4. Results of an analytical survey of earthworks on Saxonbury Hill.

At the northernmost point of the enclosure the outer bank and the outer side of the ditch have been destroyed above ground by a modern track (g), and in this area there is also evidence of quarrying (h), presumably for building stone. Farther west the enclosing complex of two banks with an intervening ditch continues around the western side of the hillfort.

West of the enclosure there are a number of lynchets (i1–i4), some quite substantial though very abraded, which do not appear to form a coherent pattern but clearly post-date the early field system (a1–a6). These may be medieval in origin, but consideration of the likely date depends on the date and extent of Eridge Park. If Saxonbury Hill lay within the medieval deer park, agriculture would be

relatively unlikely while the park was in use, and these lynchets may date either prior to emparkment or to the post-medieval period, but before the 18th and 19th century landscaping of the area.

The banks and ditch continue around the south-west corner of the hillfort and along a short distance, but here the line of the ditch (k) also turns to run parallel with it. The impression gained is that this arrangement results from modern disturbance and, as on northern side of the entrance, does not reflect the original design.

The dominant feature within the hillfort is the central tower (m). The main body of the tower is constructed of brick with a sandstone base, door frame and quoins. Over the door is the date 1828. On the ground close to the tower are a number of

pieces of brickwork and carved blocks of sandstone, presumably discarded during the renovations of 1997. Two rectangular depressions (n) in the north-eastern quadrant of the enclosure may relate to the work undertaken by Winbolt, although they do not correspond to the positions of trenches shown in his excavations plan (Fig. 3; Winbolt 1930, fig 1). A slight scarp (o) running inside and parallel to the inner rampart in the south-western quadrant probably marks the path or drive shown on both Budgen's map of c. 1800 and the plan of Winbolt's excavations (Fig. 3). A larger scarp (p) in the south-eastern quadrant is probably natural in origin.

POTTERY FROM EXCAVATION BY S. E. WINBOLT

Pottery from the excavations by S. E. Winbolt (Winbolt 1930) has been deposited at Tunbridge Wells Museum and at Barbican House, Lewes. The pottery in Lewes includes a note stating that it represents only a sample of that found, whilst the amount held in Tunbridge Wells is small enough to suggest that it, too, represents only a portion of the original assemblage. The sherds held at Tunbridge Wells Museum were examined by Mike Seager Thomas, who considered that the pottery spanned the Middle and Late Iron Ages, with fabrics similar to those found at Hascombe hillfort, Surrey (Seager Thomas 2010). Although no sherds clearly derived from saucepan pots, a form diagnostic of the Middle Iron Age, were present, the fabrics indicated a bias towards that period. There were no pieces that necessarily dated to the Romano-British period, and no examples of iron slag having been used for tempering.

This information contrasts with the original description of the pottery as La Tène III (Winbolt 1930), which would place it within the Late Iron Age and, unless later pottery was not included in the assemblage retained, suggests that activity did not continue into the Romano-British period. The lack of any iron slag within the fabrics, as reported by Winbolt, also removes proof of the date of iron production on site, although the likely contemporaneity of industrial activity with the period of pottery deposition remains.

DISCUSSION

PRE-HILLFORT ACTIVITY

The present sandy soils of the High Weald are likely to have been covered during prehistoric periods

by relatively fertile and light-brown earths and possibly deposits of *loess*, conducive to early arable use. However, evidence of use during the Neolithic period is limited. 'Prehistoric' flints have been found on the west side of Saxonbury Hill, but it is not clear whether or not they could be assigned to any particular period (Al Oswald *pers. comm.*).

There is clear evidence of Early Bronze Age activity on the Ashdown ridge in the form of barrows; examples have been identified north of the Four Counties Carpark (MES 5184 and MES 15402) (TQ 467311) and west of Castle Hill (MES 8597) (TQ 463294). An Early Bronze Age flint-working site was found on Lightlands Farm, Eridge (TQ 558334; MES 3274), and finds reportedly included barbed and tanged arrowheads (Winbolt 1938), which would suggest activity during the Beaker period. A single sherd of pottery dating to the Beaker period, and now in Tunbridge Wells Museum, may have come from Eridge Park, but the provenance is not totally reliable (Ian Beavis *pers. comm.*). Lynchets which may represent boundaries of rectilinear field systems have been found on the Ashdown ridge, notably on aerial photographs of an area near King's Standing Clump (MES 2838).

The slight lynchets underlying the earthwork complex surrounding Saxonbury hillfort are probably part of a field system, but without further evidence it is not possible to assign them to either the Bronze Age or the Iron Age, though the former period seems more likely. They clearly predate construction of the hillfort, and indicate that the area had previously been under arable production. Winbolt's excavations (1930) failed to note the presence of any brown earths overlying the Tunbridge Wells Sands and underlying the hillfort earthworks. While this may simply have been an oversight, prehistoric clearance of vegetation and ploughing may have started the podzolisation process. What is certain is that this locus, in terms of access and view-shed, had been known for some time when a suitable location for the enclosure was being sought.

Water from chalybeate springs contains ferrous and manganese salts, among others, and has been considered to have curative properties since at least the early 17th century. Whether the unusual taste was noticed in prehistory and might have influenced early activity, or even the location of the hillfort, cannot be known.

THE ROLE OF HILLFORTS

Hillforts are iconic monuments and their purpose still excites debate. Early interpretations that these enclosures were constructed solely for military concerns, and that changes in design could be explained simply in terms of changing forms of offensive warfare, have been largely discounted. They have been associated with a range of other manifestations of power – the ability and right to separate a portion of land with massive earthworks, the power over labour required to build the ramparts, particularly in areas of hard rock, and the theatricality of presenting those approaching with a level line of ramparts set against the skyline, and/or complex multi-layer entrances, have all been discussed (for example Bowden and McOmish 1987; 1989). More recently, an attempt has been made to weave these disparate strands of thought together, recognising that warfare is itself a heavily formalised and ritualised pursuit (Armit 2007). A further view on this line is that, although hillforts themselves may not have been physically involved in warfare, their presence may have had a deterrent effect through their display of power, warfare itself being limited to raiding, skirmishing and small-scale, formalised combat (James 2007).

Recognition of a changing role for these sites over the 1st millennium BC may lead to the view that warfare was less important as a reason for the construction of hillforts in Early Iron Age / Middle Iron Age Wessex (Lock 2011). Arguing against any assumption that warfare, on any scale, was endemic, or that people lived in a state of constant fear and insecurity, Lock emphasises the importance of communal enterprises to bring social cohesion to the scattered families in small-scale agricultural societies. He asks for an understanding of ‘how the social mediation of individual emotion can interplay with the material world creating the circumstances for daily practices including construction projects’. In contrast, recent work at Fin Cop (Derbyshire) has produced evidence of a possible punitive massacre of women and children at an unfinished Middle Iron Age hillfort dated 440–410 BC (Waddington 2012). Evidence of trauma on skeletons recovered from the Late Iron Age hillfort of Maiden Castle attest wounds received by the same individual on a number of occasions over a period of time, and suggests that by late in the period individuals could be involved in multiple violent episodes (Redfern 2011).

While the term ‘hillfort’ is a generic description for enclosures with multiple and changing uses, it is probably now of little use; these same enclosures mark special places, visibly and permanently, in a manner suited to an increasingly complex and, probably, aggressive society. They celebrate stages in the multi-factorial development of tribalism and statehood, and, though not necessarily primarily defensive in their genesis, they came to be understood as indicators of power in a militarised society.

A consideration of other hillforts in Eastern Sussex may assist in ascertaining the economic and socio-political contexts within which this location was put to use. The hillforts in Sussex have been studied, and a relationship noted between their date and their landscape position, resulting in a discussion of concerns which changed over time (Hamilton and Manley 1997). The earliest hillforts are found in peripheral positions on the edges of the chalk of the South Downs, looking over either the coastal plain or the Low Weald, and are dated to the Late Bronze Age, some continuing in use into the Early Iron Age or later. Wolstonbury and Ditchling Beacon are set on the scarp edge of the South Downs with visibility over the Low Weald to the Ashdown Ridge, whilst three others, Seaford Head, Belle Tout and Castle Hill (Newhaven), are coastal sites. These enclosures have, in general, rather slight ramparts, but do exhibit a choice of position which produced a strong visual impact from the direction of approach. They show little sign of permanent occupation, but a major concern appears to have been one of viewing and evaluating specific portions of the landscape.

By the Middle Iron Age this concern seems to have changed, and with it the location of some of the new hillforts. Centrally placed to dominate blocks of downland defined by major river valleys, they show signs of more intensive activity and can be described as ‘dramatically inscribed regional landmarks for scattered downland communities’ (Hamilton and Manley 1997). However, hillforts in this position do not occur in Eastern Sussex, where the downs narrow towards Beachy Head, and there is no longer a coastal plain east of Brighton. Here, hillforts dated, with varying degrees of security, to the Late Iron Age (although most may originate earlier) are concentrated in the High Weald. Garden Hill has produced Middle Iron Age pottery from low down in the ditch silts, but the greater portion of the evidence dates to the Late

Iron Age and Romano-British periods, when iron production seems to have provided its economic base (Money 1977). High Rocks has Middle and Late Iron Age pottery, possibly associated with the first enclosure, and refortification appears to have taken place also during the Late Iron Age (Money 1968; Cunliffe 1991). Philpots has produced no secure dating evidence, but the site is considered from its morphological similarity to Garden Hill and High Rocks to be similar in date (Hamilton and Manley 1997).

In a study of hillforts in south-east England (Hamilton and Manley 2001) contrast is drawn between Middle Iron Age examples which ‘physically monumentalise topographic landmarks’, providing a focus for local, dispersed communities, and Late Iron Age hillforts, which may have related to power structures based on changed economic bases. Although the view from Saxonbury Hill is limited to an arc around the north-west across the Low Weald to the North Downs, the hill itself has a strikingly distinguishable cone shape when viewed from that direction. It is seen clearly from Dry Hill Camp (Surrey), a large (10ha) undated but probably Iron Age enclosure on a ridge in the Low Weald, and, less distinctly, from the North Downs hillfort War Coppice (also known as Cardinal’s Cap). In this respect Saxonbury meets the observed criteria for the Middle Iron Age, particularly in terms of movement across the Low Weald, an area rich in the increasingly utilised resource of iron ore. A similar role within an expanding use of ore sources from the Wadhurst Clay may partly underpin continuity in use of the site into the Late Iron Age. It may be relevant in terms of continuity that the Roman road from London, through an iron-producing area to the present site of Lewes, passes 2km to the east of Dry Hill, utilising the same ridge, before gaining the heights of the High Weald some 10km west of Saxonbury (Margary 1965, 124–162).

HILLFORTS AND IRON-WORKING

The association, if any, between hillforts and iron working is far from clear, and may well have changed over time. A number of Wealden hillforts have produced evidence of iron production or working, pre-eminent among which is Garden Hill (Money 1977), where a smelting furnace and a forging hearth, together with large amounts of slag, have been dated to the 1st century BC. Iron working is also evidenced at High Rocks (Money 1968), in the

ditch at Hascombe (Winbolt 1932), at Dry Hill Camp (Winbolt and Margary 1933) – both Surrey – and at Piper’s Copse, where the presence of ore and a hearth suggest primary production, probably in the Late Iron Age (Winbolt 1935; Kenyon 1969). Unfortunately, in some cases differentiation between slag from primary production and slag from secondary forging activity has not been recorded, and samples were not routinely retained. Elsewhere, it has been argued that iron production in the immediate area could have supported the economy of hillforts. The wealth generated at a primary production site at Cracwcellt (Merioneth) may well have underpinned that of the nearby Late Iron Age hillfort at Bryn y Castell (although both smelting furnaces and smithing hearths were also found within the hillfort) and others in the Dolgellau valley (Crew 1998). Recent excavation of a site near Michelmersh, Hants (de’Athe 2013) located a pit containing furnace bottoms from a non-slag tapping, slag-pit furnace, together with slag and ore and Early Iron Age pottery. Trace element analysis of the slag showed close similarities with artefacts from Danebury hillfort, indicating close linkage (Girbal 2010). In the south-east, a similar relationship has been suggested between the iron production site at Brooklands and the hillfort of St George’s Hill (Hanworth and Tomalin 1977), and ‘iron working debris’ was also found within that hillfort (Lowther 1949). At Hascombe and Holmbury, re-assessment of the pottery (Seager Thomas 2010) indicates that the main phase of activity at the hillforts was during the Middle Iron Age, whilst Anstiebury continued in use into the Romano-British period. Small assemblages of both bloomery and smithing slags in Iron Age and Romano-British contexts at Wickhurst Green (Horsham, West Sussex) (Margetts 2013; forthcoming) may indicate production economically related to any of these nearby hillforts.

It has been argued that, since evidence of forging is found on small farmstead sites, there was no centralised control over production, which should instead be regarded as heterarchical (Ehrenreicht 1991). In Surrey a smithing hearth was located at the unenclosed settlement at Purberry Shot, Ewell, together with bloomery slag (Lowther 1946–7). However, the process of iron production may well have been regarded differently, and have had a varying position in local economies throughout the period.

The two parts of iron production, smelting and smithing, may be undertaken by different specialists on different sites, or may be a combined operation, but whilst tin and copper had been smelted for bronze production, the processes of smithing – forging, hammering, welding, annealing, tempering and quenching – were novel. Metalworking may be seen as having metaphorical connections with other facets of life and, in the case of iron, links between smelting and the agricultural cycle have been suggested (Hingley 1997, 10–12). Old materials may be incorporated in new furnaces to emphasise continuity (Herbert 1993, 36), and pottery found within the furnace fabric at Brooklands, Weybridge, has been interpreted in this light (Herbert 1993). Ethnographic studies suggest that smelting iron was a gendered activity. On African iron-working sites furnaces may be anthropomorphised into personifications of fertile women by decorating them with ‘breasts’ or scarification designs (Herbert 1993, 32), and the male smelters and forgers might be banned from sexual relations with their wives because such congress would be regarded as adulterous (Haaland 2004). Given such considerations, the production of what was later to become a mundane metal, iron, may have been undertaken at Saxonbury, as in other hillforts, because such places had been constructed at loci considered significant within their local landscapes. Those who undertook the work were involved in processes dangerous and risky both for practical reasons and, probably, because of their symbolic links with agricultural and human fertility, procreation and death; more than just craft specialists, they were possessors of occult knowledge (Budd and Taylor 1995).

An ironworking site in Scalands Wood (TQ52392770, [Tebbutt 1981]) produced a single sherd of an ‘eyebrow’ vessel indicating a date in the Late Iron Age. Closer to Saxonbury, in Eridge Park, fieldwalking has produced a considerable assemblage of pottery and iron slag from a small area centred at TQ575339 (Money 1979, MES 3281). This pottery, now in Tunbridge Wells Museum, has been assessed by Mike Seager Thomas and, while most dates to the Late Iron Age and Romano-British period, a small amount comes from the Middle Iron Age. Although this ironworking site appears to have remained in use longer than Saxonbury hillfort, the periods of use of the two sites clearly overlap, and an economic link between the two places seems probable.

Any consideration of the nature of putative relationships between hillforts and iron production or working must be speculative, but it seems unlikely that those who could require the construction of such major monuments would not have taken at least an interest in the resource, given the value of iron and its potential use in trading networks. Indeed, comparison has been made between the human qualities required by a smith – strength, stamina and good judgment – and those required for leadership (Giles 2007).

With only limited excavation of the interior of most hillforts, it is dangerous to generalise, but it is notable that at Bryn y Castell and Garden Hill both smelting and smithing took place within the enclosure, a practice which entailed carrying heavy materials over some distance. On hillforts and non-hillfort sites, evidence of metalworking is frequently found away from the main areas of settlement, and often near entrances (Cleere 1997; Crew 1986; Fasham 1985; Henderson 1992; Wainwright 1979). The hearth found in the ditch at Hascombe is in a similarly liminal zone, for either practical or cosmological reasons, and iron slag found in the ditches at Dry Hill may indicate ironworking outside the excavation area, or deposition of debris in pits or ditches, a common phenomenon of the Iron Age and early Romano-British period (Hingley 2006).

The organisation of the iron industry during the Iron Age, again, may well have changed over time. Early and Middle Iron Age hillforts with views into the Low Weald – Harting Beacon, Chanctonbury, Holmbury, Hascombe, War Coppice, Oldbury (Kent), Dry Hill and Saxonbury – may have been sited to enable their occupants to watch over ore extraction (and possibly processing) and charcoal production within their own zones of influence. In a segmented society this would have been a role, as indeed would building a hillfort, for which groups came together in a larger unit. Smelting, smithing and the making of tools and weapons could then have been undertaken by each of the groups, in either the hillfort or at farmsteads in the locality, and surplus production could have been available for trade. Control over the process would have been strongly, if not totally, dependent on ‘control’ of the specialist, with his knowledge and skill. Given everything we believe about the way in which metal production was regarded by the community at large, it is difficult not to think that the smelter and the smith were highly respected and feared. That they

were allied with power, military, perhaps but more probably religious, seems inescapable.

As the Iron Age progressed, those determining the location of hillforts seem to have lost interest in the Low Weald. By this time iron production appear to have increased (although it must be borne in mind that very few prehistoric bloomeries are well dated), and the skills needed, although still respected, were more widespread. With an increasingly tribal society, and warfare between tribes, weapons smiths are likely to have been associated with individual chieftains – their skills too valuable to share. Iron production on farmsteads, either with a proportion sent to the

now distant hillforts as part of a tribute system, or the total due to the chieftain for redistribution, would seem better suited to this more polarised and hierarchical society.

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to Lord Abergavenny for permission to undertake this work on his land, and to Pat Stallwood of the Eridge Park Estate for facilitating access. Ian Beavis, Curator at Tunbridge Wells Museum, made the prehistoric pottery held there available for study, and Emma O'Connor fulfilled the same role for the Sussex Archaeological Society's portion of the assemblage held at Barbican House, Lewes. Mike Seager Thomas assessed all the surviving pottery from excavations by Samuel Edward Winbolt and from fieldwalking in Eridge Park; thanks are due to all these.

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