The Bedfordshire Region in the First Millenium B.C.

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In attempting to survey the evidence for the first millenium B.C. in Bedfordshire, one is faced with numerous difficulties. The objects by which we can date the period are limited, and are often old and ill-recorded finds, deposited in the county's museums. Many were found by chance during railway construction or mineral extraction, often in the last century. Excavation has been limited and tends to focus our attention on small areas, rather than present an over-all picture. Aerial photography, though widely used in the county, still largely awaits interpretation, though useful starts have been made on ring ditches in the Ouse valley and in the survey by the Ampthill Archaeological Society.[1]

Lying on the boundary between eastern and midland England, Bedfordshire can be expected to have received influences from both areas. The more so since in the north our county is cut by a mighty river, the Ouse, connecting the Jurassic Way of central England with the Wash, and affording a navigable routeway to the Continent; whilst in the south the Icknield Way also connects Wessex by way of the Chilterns, to Norfolk and the channel coast. The prehistory of Bedfordshire is the story of the interplay between east and south-west.

If we accept a long chronology, then the first millenium B.C. dawned during a period of prolonged agricultural activity, when the only new inventions were the products of the bronze founders, who copied the occasional new imports from the continent, including rivetted buckets and cauldrons. Whilst only a pottery copy of a cauldron has been found within the county (at Leagrave), the rim of a bronze and iron cauldron was excavated at Letchworth a few years ago. The bronze founders' work is best represented by the hoard of about sixty late bronze age axes found at Wymington in 1860, many of which are now lost, and similar hoards from New Bradwell and Akeley, further west along the Ouse in Buckinghamshire.[2] Single finds are well represented in the Toddington area, and in eastern Bedfordshire. Such metal work tends to be viewed in isolation, but field walking particularly on the watershed between the Ouse and the Nene, south of Wymington, shows extensive areas of occupation, without pottery, which may relate to prehistoric settlement contemporary with the bronzes.

Pottery continues in the late Deverel-Rimbury tradition, with barrel urns like those from Toddington and tall situlate vessels from a number of sites throughout the county.[3]

Intensive field walking in north Bedfordshire has revealed evidence of numerous possible early first millenium sites, but until excavation takes place, positive identification is impossible. In the south the pre-war rescue excavation of a linear ditch and enclosure at Totternhoe provides the best evidence for small farming settlements on the Chiltern scarp. It has been dated to about 700 B.C. on the evidence of a bronze vase-headed pin of late Urnfield type, and high shouldered pottery of hard, flint gritted fabric.[4] The pin could, however, be a century or more earlier. A jar containing wheat points to some arable farming close by, and this is supported by recent excavations of a neighbouring open settlement with a circular hut (7m in diameter), with drying racks and shallow pits.[5]

Worthington Smith recorded a group of twenty-four hut depressions on the north-facing slope of Blows Downs at Dunstable and observed the destruction of two of them. The hut floors had been cut back into the hillside, to a depth of about 1m on the uphill side, as at Itford Hill in Sussex. A male burial lay on the floor of one of the huts.[6] A trial excavation of the site by G.C. Dunning in 1929 proved inconclusive.[7]

The apparent open nature of all these sites suggests that arable farming may have been carried out on the chalk uplands, with cattle in the valley bottoms and sheep on the open grassland. At Streatley the first phase of Dray's Ditches consisted of two parallel flat-bottomed ditches some 3m wide and 1m deep, which ran from east to west for at least a kilometre across the Icknield belt, and possibly acted as a ranch boundary, the gap between the ditches providing an access road. One ditch contained a sherd of Deverel-Rimbury pot-

tery. Samples of wheat and barley from the pre-fort phase at Ravensburgh Castle, and the wheat from Totternhoe (above), together with fragments of saddle querns from Puddlehill, all indicate that grain was being produced early in the first millenium B.C. Figures from nearby sites at Ivinghoe Beacon and Pitstone (Bucks) show that 59% and 37% of the stock at those sites were cattle, with 31% and 50% sheep respectively. 7% and 6% pigs indicate the probable presence of woodland close by.

At Cople in the Ouse valley a ring ditch 30m x 27m contained the limestone footings of a rectangular chamber 3.5m wide and at least 4m long, containing the last remnants of a peat-fuelled funeral pyre with cremated human remains. A small barrow was probably piled over the crematorium, and the whole is reminiscent of similar cremation barrows in Friesland, dated to not later than 600 B.C.[8] Two inhumation burials were added to the barrow later. This might be seen as renewed contact with the southern Netherlands in the first half of the first millenium, and those working on the Ouse ring ditches may well find it profitable to look east for some of their origins.

By about 600 B.C. Ivinghoe Beacon, to the south-west of our county, was defended by an irregular ditch and double wooden palisade. The construction was crude to say the least and suggested to the excavator that it was the work of people not familiar with the local environment. Within the enclosure were small circular and rectangular huts, their floors scattered with pieces of flint-gritted pottery with finger-tip decoration, whilst spindle whorls and loom weights signified the weaving of wool from the sheep.[9] We have already noted that 90% of the animal bones from the site were cattle or sheep, but only 0.4% were red deer, thus indicating that the community were self-supporting, seldom needing to hunt for food. The small area of the defended hilltop, only 2.2 ha, was determined by the shape of the hill. But why, one may ask, was it necessary to defend it at all? If an enclosure for cattle was needed a wooden stockade would have sufficed; but to dig ditches and erect a double palisade filled with chalk rubble, seems a very determined effort at self preservation: the setting up of a small 'feudal castle' by an overlord with sufficient power to command the necessary labourers involved in its construction. There is no evidence for large scale movements of people from the Continent at this time, so we should probably see Ivinghoe either as an expression of the agrandisement of a local chieftain, or the response by the community to localised warfare. But hillforts were a new phenomenon and Ivinghoe is amongst the earliest in Britain. Where did the idea come from? Certainly not from across the North Sea in the Low Countries where the sand dunes of North Holland and Frisia were unsuitable for this kind of construction, and the *terpen* (artificial islands of turves) first built above the flood level of the surrounding water meadows in the 6th century B.C., were not usually defensive. Indeed the total lack of forts in the northern Netherlands is repeated in eastern England where only three forts are known east of Cambridge. Yet the idea hardly came from Wessex where most forts are likely to be later in date. Could it be a native development, perhaps based on information supplied by itinerant metalsmiths who had traded further east on the continent?

The irregularity of the wooden palisade at Ivinghoe is repeated again at Dray's Ditches, Streatley (Phase 2) where more than 100m of palisade holes were excavated in 1972. The double row of posts wandered drunkenly in a roughly east-west direction, clearly no marking-out line having been used. The three massive V-shaped ditches that ran approximately parallel to the stockade were in contrast laid out with care and precision. It was argued in 1961 that Dray's Ditches earthworks, together with similar dykes in the eastern Chilterns formed territorial boundaries of the earliest iron age.[10] The same view still holds good, though there is some conflict in relating the other eastern Chiltern forts to the series, since they appear on present evidence to be too late, unless, as at Ravensburgh it is possible to distinguish a pre-fortification stage in their existence.

The later Bedfordshire forts fall into three distinct groups, which to some extent may reflect the date of their construction perhaps in the fourth century B.C. Along the south are the Icknield Way forts on the chalk, Maiden Bower at Sewell, Sharpenhoe Clapper, Ravensburgh Castle near Hexton, and possibly Waulud's Bank at Leagrave (where the neolithic site was refortified in part during the iron age). All these forts fit into the territorial pattern mentioned above and seem to exist quite apart from the great Wessex and Western groups in the rest of Britain. On the greensand of south-west Bedfordshire are the Ouzel forts of Danesborough near Bow Brickhill and the destroyed Craddock's Camp at Heath and

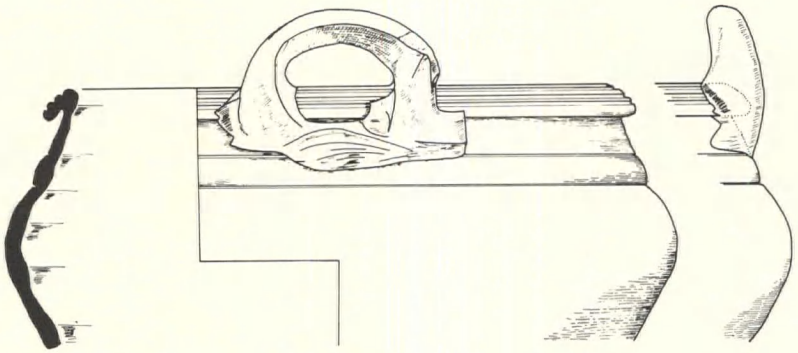

Fig 1 Late Iron Age pottery cauldron from Willow Way, Leagrave. (scale ¼).

Reach with perhaps another, also destroyed, at Billington. Strategically placed on the greensand above the Ivel valley are the three Sandy forts, Galley Hill, Caesar's Camp and Sandy Lodge. They can hardly all be contemporaneous and must bear witness to a long period of continuity. On the chalky boulder clay on the western side of the Ivel valley aerial photographs have revealed a probable fort on a spur north-west of Shefford. In complete isolation north of the Ouse, and also on chalky boulder clay is a probable fort underlying the medieval moated site of Mowsbury at Ravensden. The very presence of a moat at Mowsbury suggests that any iron age ditches would have been water-filled for most of the year.

Where the Icknield forts have been excavated they show a remarkably similar picture of development. Often there is evidence of an unditched palisaded enclosure, perhaps as early as 500 B.C. clearly defining an area connected with farming. This was followed about 400 B.C. by the construction of forts with Hollingbury type ramparts (double rows of posts, often laced together for added strength and filled with turf and chalk). Maiden Bower, Ravensburgh Castle and Wilbury Hill (Letchworth) all show the same pattern, and each is fronted by a flat bottomed ditch with almost vertical sides. In each of the excavated sites, with the exception of Ravensburgh, there is clear evidence of destruction and slaughter a little after 400 B.C. At Maiden Bower mutilated burials and slingstones have been found in the bottom of the ditch,[11] as well as a man's burial at the gate; at Wilbury Hill the palisade was burnt and a burial thrown into the ditch, and a few miles further east at Arbury Banks (Ashwell) and the War Ditches (Cherry Hinton) the same story of massacre and burning is repeated with the subsequent abandonment of the fort. I have suggested elsewhere that in considering who caused this havoc along the Icknield Way, we have two obvious choices, either attack from outside the region, or attack from within.[12] If outside, then we should expect to see a clear change in the material culture of the fourth century in the eastern Chilterns.

In the Thames valley and Chilterns angular bowls make a dramatic appearance around 400 B.C. and have been found in excavations at Ravensburgh, Maiden Bower and Puddlehill. Together with La Tene I daggers and brooches Dennis Harding sees the arrival of the angular bowl as evidence of an intrusive population in south-eastern England.[13] It might be possible to see the sudden spurt of hillfort building around 400 B.C. as a local and hostile response to new arrivals, but the rapid adoption of their new pottery styles suggest that by the time the newcomers had reached the Chilterns their numbers had dwindled and they were allowed to settle peacefully amongst the native population, where the pottery and brooches were produced locally.

A La Tène Ib brooch of insular manufacture has been found at Ravensburgh. At Puddlehill (Houghton Regis) Matthews has shown that pottery of iron age 'B' type makes a sudden appearance after a break of 70 or 80 years[14] – a break which probably begins with the destruction of Maiden Bower, but a break which is too long to suggest that people with a 'B' tradition were responsible: rather that they were moving into an area apparently abandoned and ready for recolonisation.

The alternative is to look for the cause of the massacres within the region. Only at Ravensburgh has excavation failed to find evidence of slaughter

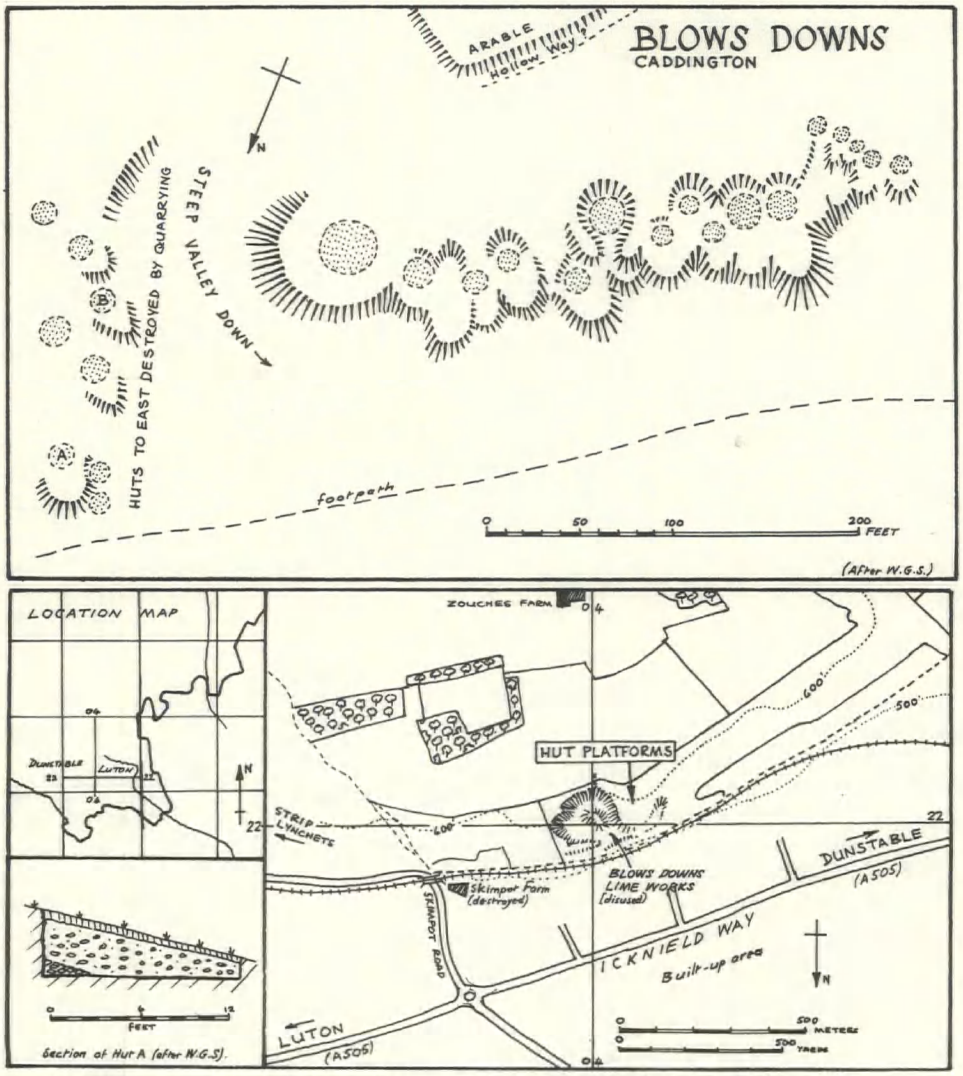

Fig 2 The location and plans of the hut circles at Blows Downs, Caddington.

and burning. Indeed the ditches seem to have been cleared out about 350 B.C. and the whole site given a face lift, with some renewed timber lacing on the western side. Ravensburgh is the largest and strongest fort in eastern England, and it is possible that at this time it was exerting its strength to gain control of all the Icknield forts in the eastern Chilterns. Assuming this bid for power took place around 380 B.C., it is possible for the makers of iron age 'B' pottery to appear in the west of our region around 300 B.C. By that time Ravensburgh, too, had ceased to function as a defensive centre, and we may assume that open village and farm life was dominant once again. There is some evidence to suggest that the Ravensburgh folk confined their attentions to the eastern Chilterns, and having removed any possible danger from Maiden Bower on their western flank, chose to remain east of the still effective Dray's Ditches.

Little can be said of the Ouzel forts. Craddocks has been destroyed to make a golf course, but its description 'like Maiden Bower' suggests a univallate plateau fort offering a corral for cattle, whilst Danesborough though unexcavated, is small and compact with massive univallate earthworks, and an extensive system of ranch boundaries (largely unmapped and recently and wantonly destroyed to make another golf course) that must

again indicate stock rearing and collection. Both forts are high on the greensand, and overlook the Ouzel valley with its lush watermeadows, and the Great Ouse beyond: an area totally lacking in forts for some 30 km until Rainsborough and Hunsbury are reached on the jurassic ridge to the west. This void of forts spreads north and east of the greensand to the East Anglian coast, and must represent a thinly populated territory whose way of life had no use for hilltop fortifications. One assumes that arable farming may have predominated amidst the forest land. Forts were useful places for securing large herds of cattle. Without cattle forts were not required.

Similarly the Ivel forts dominate the end of the lower greensand ridge and are the last before the Ivel and Ouse reach the sea. Equally they are the first for continental traffic passing up river to the Chilterns and the Icknield Way. Without excavation their priority is uncertain, but Caesar's Camp with its contour fortification looks early, and Galley Hill late, even contemporary with Roman settlement in the area. The unfinished Sandy Lodge fort could fit anywhere in the sequence, but is typologically early. Chance finds suggest that all were in use, even if only temporarily, in the late iron age, and this is likely to be true, also, of the probable fort discovered by aerial photography at Shefford, close to the princely burial vaults at Stanfordbury.

One may ponder on the closeness of the three Sandy hillforts to one another, each overlooking the luxuriant Ivel pastures. Did they represent successive market centres or religious focii? The large number of late iron age coins from Sandy suggests either considerable trade or votive offerings.

Iron age pottery in our area has been recently reviewed by Simco, Harding, Cunliffe and Hawkes [15] and a pattern is now beginning to emerge. The large situlate jars of the late bronze age had evolved by the sixth century B.C. into large, wide shouldered jars with rounded profiles, often with finger tip decoration on the rim. The clay tended to be coarse and flint gritted. Examples are found throughout the county, noticeably at Kempston, Sandy and Puddlehill. Similar situlate pots continue into the fifth century, together with new 'flower pot' shapes, but sand tempered fabrics begin to replace the shell gritting. On the chalk of the south hand-made carinated bowls appear, becoming more angular and often with pedestal bases by 400 B.C. The quality of these bowls

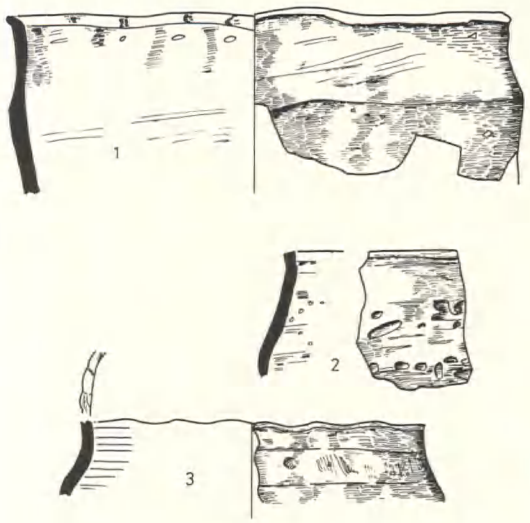

Fig 3 Pottery from the hut circles at Blows Downs, Caddington. (scale ¼).

also improves. They tend to be orange, grey or black in colour, are frequently burnished and have incised geometric decoration, which sometimes includes a white paste inlay.

Early in the fourth century B.C. the angular bowls in Bedfordshire suddenly cease, but the less exotic domestic wares continue, their smooth sandy fabric taking on a squat shape, sometimes with a bead rim. The better pots are burnished and decorated with spirals, the poorer have random or vertical striations like those from Eggington. One group emerges with thick vertical handles on the body of the pots. These barrel-shaped vessels occur widely over the counties of Leicester, Northampton, Bedford and Cambridge, and continue for the next century, during which time more emphasis is placed on burnished wares and various late La Tène traits are copied, particularly cordons and simple pedestal bases.

The main stimulus for trade in the middle iron age must have been surplus agricultural produce, both grain and animals. Such a surplus made it possible to employ the artisans occupied in all branches of metal working, carpentry, pottery making, and so on. During this period there is evidence from all over southern Britain that sheep were replacing cattle as the dominant animals,[16] possibly due to the massive forest clearance caused by hillfort building, which led to the formation of much new arable and pasture

land more suited to sheep than oxen, the latter being essentially woodland browsing animals. More sheep meant wool for clothing, and loom weights and weaving combs from Bedfordshire support this: both occurred in Hut 10 at Puddlehill. On the same chalk-hill site at this time sheep outnumbered cattle by three to one.

The picture may have been different in the Ouse valley where watermeadows were better suited to cattle. Aerial photographs show a wealth of farmstead sites which may be datable to this period, including one at Bromham with the familiar Little Woodbury style 'antennae' at its entrance.

With the opening up of the countryside we might expect the appearance of the typical small square Celtic fields. None are known for certain in the Chilterns nor are any recorded in East Anglia. One gets the impression that Celtic fields did not exist in eastern England, though I have not made an exhaustive study of aerial photographs which may reveal such features in the river valleys. I have already suggested that one reason for hillforts was to provide cattle corral facilities, and that lack of forts in eastern England might mean lack of cattle. There can be little doubt that on the chalk hills of the eastern Chilterns and in Cambridgeshire strip-lynchets, usually considered to be of Anglo-Saxon date or later, were already being worked in the middle iron age, if not earlier. The best evidence for date comes from Ravensburgh Castle where lynchets occur on all the steep slopes around the fort (2km from the nearest Saxon village) and stop abruptly on either side of an iron age trackway that runs from the south-eastern entrance of the fort to the Burwell spring in the valley below. Flat plateau land outside the northern entrance to the fort may have been used as pasture. Excavation evidence would suggest a late date in the iron age for the Ravensburgh fields. Other lynchets associated with iron age occupation in some form or other occur at Knocking Hoe and Deacon Hill near Pegsdon,[17] and at Bradgers Hill, Luton (probably the longest series in Britain, and unscheduled). Back in 1923 Sir Cyril Fox was writing:

> that terrace cultivation is in some districts older than the Anglo-Saxon period is probable; the cultivation of our chalk downland doubtless commenced in the bronze age; and such a system as that at Cople Hill (Ickleton, Cambs) seems to require an antiquity greater than an Anglo-Saxon origin can give.[18]

Salt was an important commodity, particularly for the preservation of meat, and supplies from the Red Hills of East Anglia probably reached our region via the Icknield Way (and perhaps its branch, the Salt Way?). Metal working, especially iron, was a cottage industry practised all over the county, but particularly in the north on the jurassic limestone, where field walking has revealed numerous hearths and slag deposits.[19] Actual iron objects are less common, possibly since many were melted down and reused, but a variety of tools like hoes and wood-saws are known from Bedfordshire.

For the greater part of the iron age the local population lived either on farms or in small nucleated hamlets, supported by an agricultural economy. Excavated evidence for such settlement of the middle iron age in Bedfordshire is limited to two sites, at Harrold and Houghton Regis. However, this does allow us to recognise that the riverine and chalk-hill models are both very similar. Sadly the records from Harrold are far from satisfactory, due to the death of the excavator before the completion of his work.

At that site there seems to have been a small hamlet of wattle and daub huts with cobbled floors, situated on a gravel hill, a kilometre north of the Ouse. Coarse gritted pots, some decorated with twig-brush lines, and others with lugs for suspension above the fire, were found close to a circular clay oven. Weaving and leather-working were practised. Near the hut was a large winnowing hollow and grain storage pits, as well as rotary querns for grinding the grain. Amongst animals cattle, sheep and pigs are reported, together with horse and dog: specific numbers are not known. Shallow ditches divided the hamlet and surrounding fields, but details of dating and plans are not available.[20]

By far the most extensively examined hamlet complex has been excavated on Puddlehill north-west of Houghton Regis. From the late bronze age through to Roman times the hilltop witnessed almost continuous occupation.[21] Briefly, the earliest iron age structure (c 600–500 B.C.) included a circular hut about 9m in diameter containing a shallow storage pit and a domed clay oven. Nearby were two rectangular barns or granaries. None of these seem to have been enclosed in any way. Later a crude circular shelter or working hollow was set up. A storage pit of about the same date had been filled with rubbish including a horse's skull and the skeleton of a girl, a feature of possible ritual importance.[22] Between 500 and 400 B.C. the character of the site changed and three penanular wooden enclosures were con-

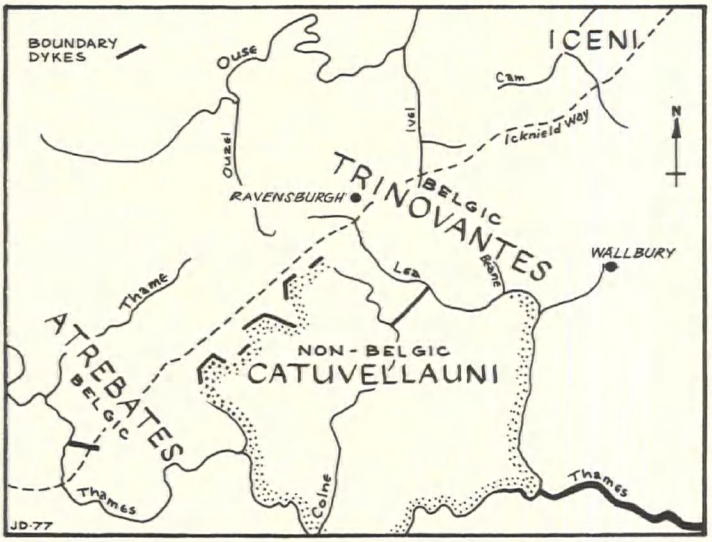

Fig 4 Hypothetical boundary of the Catuvellauni, based on the earliest coin evidence and Chiltern Grim's Ditch.

structed measuring 11½m, 9¾m and 4¾m across respectively. Footing trenches held a circle of massive timbers, broken by remarkably wide entrances of 5½m, 4½m and 3m. Internal features were few and make their interpretation as huts extremely unlikely. The massive nature of the woodwork and wide entrances surely indicates that these structures were used for cattle penning and selection, with a hearth for branding. Two post holes inside one of the enclosures would have carried heavy gates for diverting cattle to left or right. There is no proof that all three enclosures were absolutely contemporary.

There is a break of nearly a century in the Puddlehill story here, but when occupation begins again around 300 B.C. there has been a complete change in priorities. Gone are the cattle corrals and in their place a rectangular enclosure some 83m by 49m surrounds ten grain storage pits. Cereal production has taken over, and cattle are probably of secondary importance, although they still play a viable part in the economy. Soon three small and not very substantial huts were constructed, surrounded by a continuous ditch – a useful feature for keeping children and young animals close to home, without obscuring the view with a fence, and perhaps also suggesting a shortage of suitable timber close at hand. Large rounded jars, often burnished were being used in the houses as well as rotary querns for grinding corn and ovens for cooking it.

A further continuous sub-rectangular ditch was dug during the late second century with four large grain storage pits huddled in the centre, with room for huts beside them, though no traces of such had survived.

By 100 B.C. Puddlehill had returned to cattle husbandry. A final rectangular enclosure was dug on top of the hill, its entrance again narrowed by a line of posts which restricted the entry or exit of cattle along a path about a metre wide (the excavator's 46cm does not allow for natural weathering of the ditch sides). An almost identical restricting gate for cattle was found at Totternhoe[23] and the feature is common at Fengate near Peterborough.

An outstanding problem for most of the iron age is the apparent lack of burials that have been found, in complete contrast to the preceding bronze age. It is generally assumed that bodies were cremated and their ashes scattered. The 'crematorium' at Cople supports this theory, but few similar sites have been found in Britain. Numerous fragments of unburnt human bones found scattered within hillforts and on settlement sites suggest a scant respect for the dead, even cannibalism, but it may give a clue to the method of disposal. Ever since excavations at Little Woodbury first revealed small four-post structures, these have usually been interpreted as granaries. There are anthropological parallels to suggest that these were in fact platforms on which the dead were exposed, until they decomposed and fell to the ground to be scattered by the dogs. Here the dead observed the living and their familiarity gave rise to the apparent lack of respect when they eventually disintegrated and completed their journey

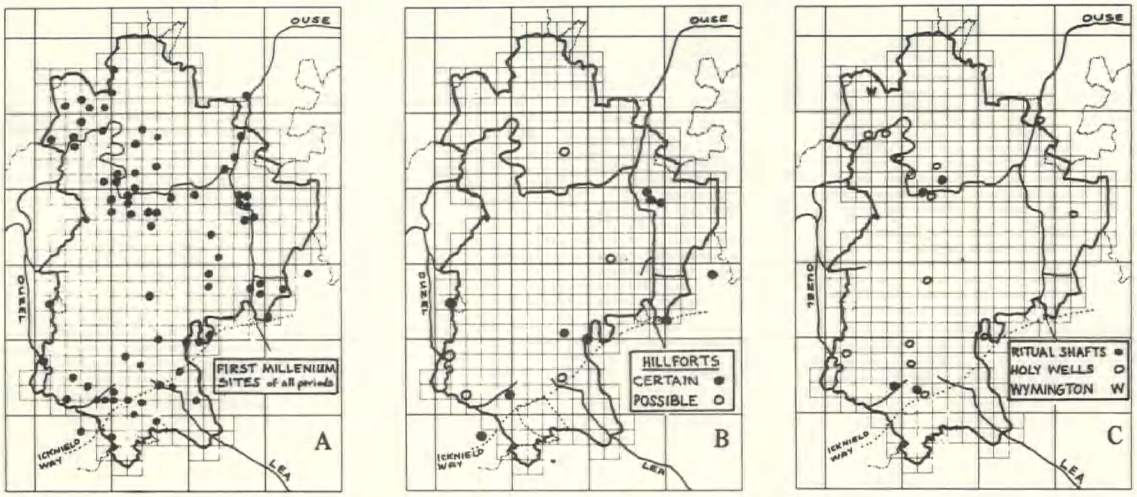

Fig 5 The First Millenium B.C. in Bedfordshire.
- A The distribution of first millenium B.C. sites of all periods.
- B Hillforts in Bedfordshire.
- C Ritual shafts, holy wells, and other sacred sites.

to the next world. There are exceptions of course – the flexed burial with pots from Eggington,[24] and the crouched burials from Harrold.[25] This latter is not a normal burial method of the Celtic world, but is characteristic of the Arras culture of east Yorkshire. The unaccompanied extended burials already noted at Cople must also be recalled.

At Maiden Bower the mass burial of some fifty people at the southern gate, commemorated above by a cist containing leg bones, has recently been reviewed by Christopher Hawkes[26] and can be seen as one of the series of massacres of about 400 B.C.

A little before 100 B.C. the first Belgic immigrants from the Somme were reaching Britain by way of the Thames mouth and Essex estuaries. In the eastern Chilterns and south Bedfordshire the native iron age population were already unified as a tribal group, perhaps as a result of the Ravensburgh take-over of the fourth century.

The initial Belgic immigrants seem to have had little effect on Bedfordshire, but the distribution of the later Gallo-Belgic A coins, shows a distinct enclave of secondary settlement in north-western Hertfordshire, western Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, lying west of the Ravensburgh 'alliance'.[27] These gold coins remained in circulation in the area until about 70 B.C., by which time they had become clipped and worn. Pottery of Ann Birchall's earliest Belgic coarse-wares is found in the same area with examples from Puddlehill and Harrold amongst others. In the areas of primary Belgic settlement in Kent hillforts adopted the wide flat-bottomed ditches of Fecamp type, and it has been suggested that these can be recognised in Essex at Pitchbury and Witham. The writer has long described the broad, flat ditch at the unfinished Sharpenhoe hillfort in south-east Bedfordshire as of Fécamp type, and perhaps this suggestion should now be recognised.[28]

From about 70 B.C. a wide arc of Gallo-Belgic E coins runs across Bedfordshire, extending from Essex to south Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, which suggests that a unity may have developed along the Icknield Way, perhaps allowing for trading between neighbouring tribal groups and presumably indicating that the Icknield Belt had to some extent accepted the Belgic way of life. Could these tribes in the Icknield arc be the tribes who surrendered to Caesar?[29] We know their names but not their location. Only to the south of our county in Herts and southern Essex are Belgic coins lacking. Here was the territory of the native Catuvellauni who resisted all things Belgic, and were to remain at loggerheads with the strongest tribe in south-east Britain, the powerful Belgic Trinovantes, for a number of decades to come.

It is hard to tell from the coins whether our southern Bedfordshire hillforts lay within the territory of the Catuvellauni or that of the

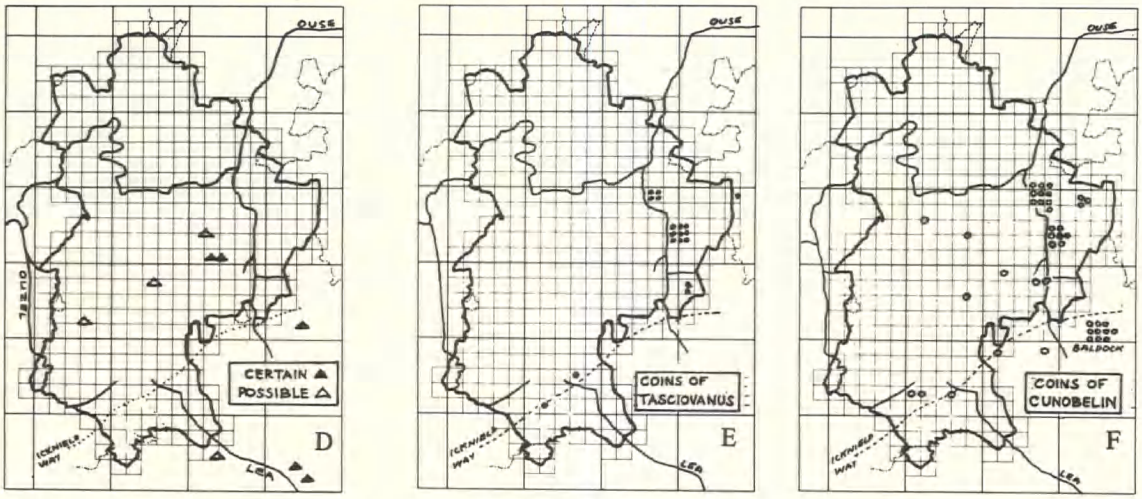

Fig 5 The First Millenium B.C. in Bedfordshire
D Late pre-Roman Iron Age burials of the 'Welwyn type'.
E Coins of Tasciovanus.
F Coins of Cunobelin.

users of Gallo-Belgic E coins. Although these coins were in use along the Icknield Way, the relationship between their users and the Catuvellauni to the south is not known. It may have been firm, but need not have been hostile. I have written elsewhere of the Chiltern Grim's Ditch[30] as a territorial, though not defensive, boundary, scalloping around the heavy clay lands of the western Chilterns. Once it is accepted that the Catuvellauni were not the all powerful Belgic tribe of popular archaeological mythology, nor were they great hillfort builders, but they were nevertheless of determined native stock who demanded respect for their territory, then perhaps we can see the Chiltern Grim's Ditch as a deliberate deliniation of the extent of their territory in those areas where it adjoined the lands of the earlier Gallo-Belgic A enclave to the north-west. That the Grim's Ditch seems to end at Dunstable may suggest that the territory to the north-east was more friendly towards the Catuvellauni, or may even have belonged to them.

The eastern boundary of the Catuvellauni has long been disputed, though it has been generally accepted that it was probably along the Lea or its tributary the Beane. The latter river valley would certainly be supported by the distribution of the British L silver coinage, spreading over east Herts and west Essex, and coinciding with the area of 'rich' Welwyn type burials. Development in this area Rodwell sees as marking the growing strength of the Trinovantes who had recently formed an alliance with Caesar.[31]

It is worth stressing the absence of hillforts in Catuvellaunian territory south of the Icknield Way. Cholesbury, The Aubreys and the smaller Whelpley Hill are all situated on the heavier clay soils of the Chilterns. All are ring works on relatively flat plateaus, and the two former have additional defences on their southern sides. Only at Cholesbury have excavations taken place (in 1932) and shown the fort to be of two phases, the second undeniably Belgic, but the first was considered by Christopher Hawkes to be 'entirely non-Belgic', and 'distinctively native in tradition'.[32]

At Maiden Bower in south Bedfordshire the plateau fort seems to have been reused – the ditch was recut and the chalk taken from it piled into a dump on top of the former rampart. Without excavation it cannot be established when this happened, but on analogy with Ravensburgh Castle, where the defences have been extensively studied, shortly before the mid-first century B.C. seems very likely. At Ravensburgh the site was similarly refortified with a V-shaped ditch and glacis rampart. A new ungated entrance was pushed through the rampart at the south-east corner to give access to the spring, and extensive lines of massive post holes would suggest cattle pens inside the fort. The great size and strength of Ravensburgh (it

encloses 9 ha.) single it out as of major importance in eastern England. The great dry valleys on three sides and marshy land around the Burwell spring make it almost impregnable, and one cannot help wondering if this was not the stronghold used by the native chieftain Cassivellaunus of the Catuvellauni, who was to challenge Caesar in 55 and 54 B.C. The original identification of Cassivellaunus' headquarters at Wheathampstead is no longer tenable and Hawkes makes the point that the only other serious contender, Wallbury in Essex, is too close to Trinovantian territory to fit Caesar's record.[33] Cholesbury and The Aubreys fail to fit Caesar's description. There is no doubt that the refortification at Ravensburgh was short lived, and that the ramparts were subsequently slighted and burnt.[34]

During the third quarter of the first century B.C. the Trinovantes seem to have been dominant not only in Essex but in north-east Hertfordshire and central Bedfordshire, arcing northwards round the territory of the Catuvellauni. Then followed the sudden rise to power of the Catuvellauni under Tasciovanus (c. 20 B.C. to A.D.10) with his brief expansion eastwards to Camulodunum upon the death or removal (?) of Addedomaros. This annexing of Trinovantian lands was for a brief period only, and the Trinovantian king Dubnovellaunos was soon to regain the former territory, leaving Tasciovanus to concentrate on the area around Verulamium and to the north. Not later than A.D.10 Cunobelinus appeared in Camulodunum minting gold coins, and soon afterwards he set up a second mint at Verulamium producing coins inscribed on their backs TASC. FIL. Whether he was Trinovantian, Catuvellaunian or neither by birth need not concern us.[35] He was to remain king of the unified territory of the Trinovantes and Catuvellauni as it expanded northwards across our county and into Northamptonshire, until his death on the eve of the Claudian conquest.

Away from the hillforts, life in Bedfordshire continued with little change. Farms were scattered across the county, particularly on the river gravels and limestone of the north-west. Only a few have been excavated, usually due to quarrying, as at Wyboston and Bromham.[36] The biggest change was in the appearance of wheel-turned pottery of La Tène III type which swept the south-east of England, and also in metalwork. Since these have recently been discussed by Miss Simco[37] I shall only remark on certain other features which seem to me relevant.

Princely burials have been found in eastern Bedfordshire at Old Warden and Stanfordbury (near Shefford) with possible sites at Maulden Moor and Woburn, whilst the main distribution of this type of rich burial is concentrated in eastern Hertfordshire around Welwyn and Hertford, and perhaps at Harpenden. David Peacock has shown that the earliest of these burial groups, those containing Dressel I amphorae can be dated to the years 50-10 B.C. and must indicate a concentration of wealthy Trinovantians in the area, possibly centred on Braughing.[38] None of the graves in the Welwyn area can be dated after 10 B.C. and this suggests that about that time and at the instigation of Addedomaros, the centre of Trinovantian power moved east to Camulodunum, a more logical area for the development of trade with Rome and the Mediterranean. Only one of the Bedfordshire graves belonged for certain to the Dressel I group. The two Stanfordbury vaults and the Maulden Moor burials contain samian and are likely to date to the first half of the first century A.D. Stanfordbury vault A is dated on the evidence of samian cups to around A.D. 35-45, whilst vault B cannot be more closely dated than 10 B.C. – A.D.50.[39] The precise number of burials from Old Warden is uncertain since the finds were made in the middle of the last century. Two, or even three, burials produced the famous bronze mirror dated to early in the first century A.D.[40] as well as a bronze mounted bucket and two turned-shale vases of pedestal urn type, a Dressel I amphora and coins. There was also a second mirror, now lost. Clearly one of the Old Warden burials was early, and presumably began a burial tradition in the area that was to continue with the later mirror burial. Dressel I amphorae were also found at Woburn Abbey (1833) but there are no details of associated finds. A probable burial at Felmersham has produced some of the finest pieces of Celtic art found in our area: cattle and fish heads which can be dated stylistically to early in the first century A.D.[41]

What do these rich burials mean? Certainly that by the end of the first century B.C. the Catuvellauni were so well established in eastern Bedfordshire that they had developed at least one market centre in the Ivel valley. This may have been a successor to the Shefford hillfort, and perhaps closer to Biggleswade, where we have a considerable concentration of coins (9) of Tasciovanus. Aerial photography also shows a small Roman villa at Stanfordbury, indicating a later

progression from fort, via princely burial vaults to eventual stately home. A small group of Tasciovanus' coins (4) come from Sandy, yet with minor exceptions along the Icknield Way, the rest of the county is devoid of them. The story is repeated when Tasciovanus' probable son Cunobelinus succeeded him. But the concentration of coins now swings to Sandy (11), with only 7 at Biggleswade, but 10 further south at Baldock, and all on a line later followed by Ermine Street, and probably indicating that this Ivel valley route was already well established.

Clearly it is eastern Bedfordshire that was being opened up in the late Iron age, leaving the west as a cultural backwater, an enclave of older iron age traditions. Even the decline of the Icknield Way as a major routeway seems to be heralded. It may be significant that it was not adopted as a Roman road.

But if the east was progressing ultimately towards Romanisation, the west was resting on its Celtic nationalism. A phenomenon that developed in west Bedfordshire in the late iron age and lasted well into the Roman period (if not beyond it) was a preoccupation with Celtic religion, particularly that aspect concerned with the digging of ritual shafts. Lack of temple structures in Britain has led us to look for evidence of Celtic worship beside natural springs and in groves of sacred trees. These must certainly have played a part, and it is just possible that survivals still exist in folk memory in our country today: Jeremiah's Tree at Streatley, perhaps? The hoard of late bronze age axes from Wymington were found close to the head of a spring. Shafts, pits and wells can be seen as man's attempt to make contact with the underworld.[42] They occur in south-eastern Britain, mainly in areas where no caves exist to make the job of gaining underground access easier. Many shafts may have begun as wells, but their function changes when they ceased to be needed, failed to find water, or their supply dried up. Some shafts were dug close to natural springs, and clearly were not needed for water supply (at Sewell for example). The shafts were often carefully lined, and contained varied deposits of votive offerings. In Bedfordshire shafts have been recognised at Bedford (about 50),[43] Biddenham, Sewell and perhaps Dunstable. At Biddenham[44] the shaft was 10m deep and contained a human skeleton, a mutilated Roman statue and altar slab, bones of horse, ox, dogs, pig and fox and fragments of about fifty Roman pots. At Sewell[45] the shaft was considerably deeper, about 36m, and was packed with human and animal bones, pottery, Roman tiles and sandstone blocks and charred wood. At Dunstable[46] a disused Roman well may also have been used as a ritual shaft when it was no longer needed, towards the end of the third century A.D. The well was 27.5m deep, and its contents again comprised human bones including a skull, animal bones, pottery, metalwork and fruit. In each case skulls, representing the cult of the human head, dogs and fruit are particularly significant.

Cremation burial became common during the last century B.C. the ashes frequently being placed in pedestal urns, which in turn seem to have been buried in small family plots. In Bedfordshire such urns have usually been found by chance, and Miss Simco has listed a number in her paper on the iron age in the Bedford area.[47] To these one may add urns from the Arlesey–Stotfold area, Limbury (hamlet of Luton) and Pegsdon. The most typical cemetery group is that from Hill Grounds, Kempston where one series of twenty-three pots were found in a saucer depression in 1889, and another ten in a circle in 1913. Some of the pots are known to be Anglo-Saxon, but a contemporary water-colour shows a number of iron age urns amongst them. Inhumation burials are not known, but it is probable that some corpses continued to be exposed in the earlier iron age manner, particularly in western Bedfordshire where cremation urns seem to be lacking. This cremation 'blank' is not quite complimentary to the ritual shaft distribution, but it may reflect an area where the new burial rites were not compatible with the old beliefs, nor acceptable to their worshippers.

In conclusion the picture one can draw of our county on the eve of the Roman conquest is still one of an agricultural community farming in family units, with few real signs of nucleation, though the concentration of coins at Biggleswade and Sandy suggest that sizeable market settlements may be found in those areas. The hillforts were probably unoccupied by this time, though Maiden Bower has produced late Belgic pottery and the Roman name for Dunstable – *Durocobrivis* may be interpreted as 'the walled town of the joined bridges' – meaningless unless it refers to the fort with its inturned barbican entrance surmounted by a bridge or sentry walk.[48] It would be reasonable to see any inhabitants of the fort at that time eventually rehoused on the Watling Street, thus beginning Roman settlement at

Dunstable. With the exception of the princely ornaments from Stanfordbury and Old Warden, there is little to show of personal wealth. The only major coin hoard at Whaddon Chase is 10km away in Buckinghamshire.

Throughout the period of its written history Bedfordshire has always been on the edge of national events and major discoveries, but never at the heart of them; with the possible exception of the Caesarian episode, it can be seen that the preceding millenium had already set the pattern.[49]

NOTES

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