

The Felmersham Fish-Head Spout

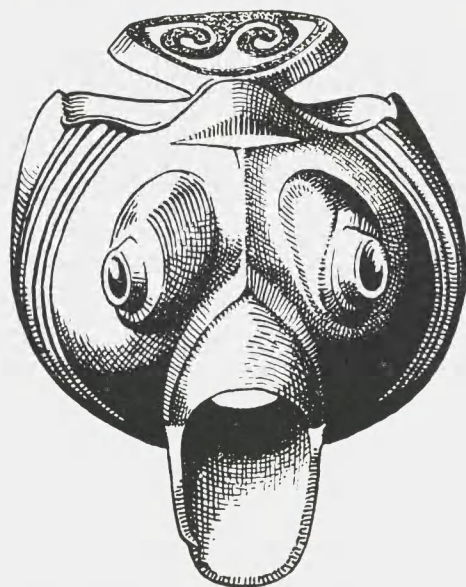


Fig 2. The Felmersham Fish-Head Spout.

The Belgic bronze fish-head spout, which forms the centrepiece for the front cover of this Journal, was found with other bronzes and pottery in gravel digging on the north bank of the Ouse near Felmersham Bridge, Sharnbrook, in 1942. Mr W. Watson, who published the group,¹ concludes that it was made early in the first century A.D. to serve as the mouth of a fairly shallow bowl possibly fixed at a spring-head to collect the water and direct it in a jet from the fish's mouth. It is apparently the only example known from Britain of a fish in Belgic art.

It is now in the Bedford Museum and has been redrawn for this Journal by Mr C. E. Freeman.

W. H. Manning

Field System Survey at the Knocking Hoe National Nature Reserve, Pegsdon

The Knocking Hoe National Nature Reserve is situated in south-eastern Bedfordshire, three-quarters of a mile north-east of Pegsdon village.² The Reserve comprises some 22 acres of lower chalk downland, consisting of a rounded knoll known locally as Knocking Hoe, and a steep-sided dry valley to the south. All form part of the Chiltern escarpment. Archaeologically the reserve is of considerable importance because of its wealth of ancient field systems.

¹*Antiq. Journ.* XXIX (1949), 37ff, especially 41-42 and 50-51, and fig 3, 4 and 8; more recently Sir Cyril Fox *Pattern and Purpose* (1958) 80, fig 49 and pl. 46 a and b.

²I am indebted to the Nature Conservancy and the owner of the land, Mr R. Franklin, for permission to examine the field systems. Permission to visit the Reserve should be obtained from the Nature Conservancy, 19 Belgrave Square, London, S.W.1.

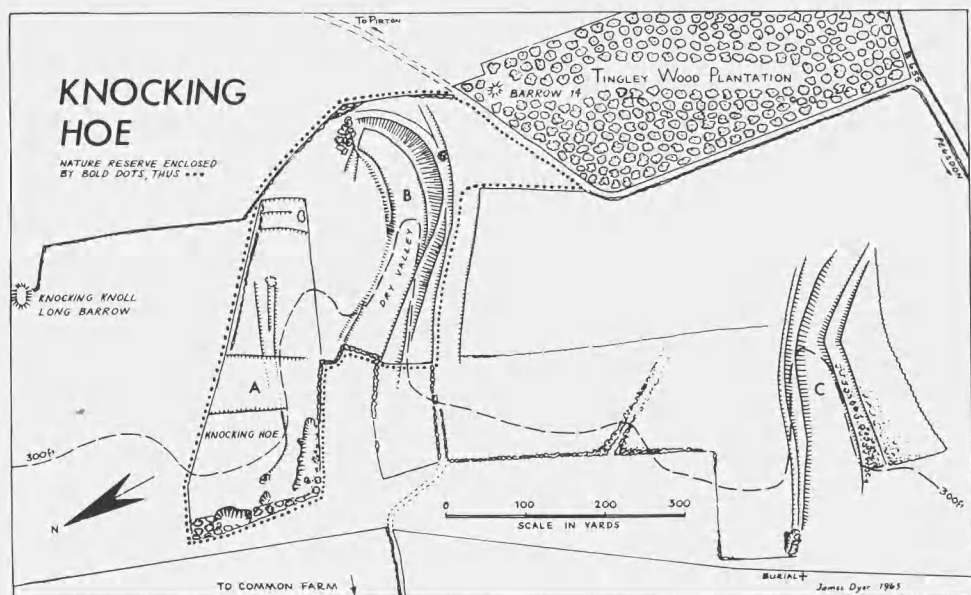


Fig 3. Field System at Knocking Hoe.

The Reserve lies half a mile north of the present Icknield Way, and beside the medieval trackway which passes from Tingley Wood to Pirton village. Due north of Knocking Hoe on the county boundary is Knocking Knoll, the truncated remains of a long barrow. This was dug into by William Ransom about 1855 with uncertain results. His reference to a 'rectangular cavity containing nothing but soil' may allude to this barrow. A grave cut into the chalk of the adjoining field contained human remains which may be connected with the long barrow.

In Tingley Wood Plantation is a round barrow (County No. 14) which is probably unexcavated. According to William Stukeley, writing in 1724, east of the Reserve at 'High downs is a pleasant house by a wood, where is a place called Chapel close; in this wood are barrows and dykes, perhaps of British original'.¹ This must refer to part of Tingley Wood since the Plantations beside the Reserve did not exist in Stukeley's day. The dykes may refer to some form of Iron Age camp at present unidentified. Beacon Hill south of the Reserve, seems a likely spot for such a camp, but there are no surface indications; the whole hilltop having been scarred by chalk workings and Home Guard trenches. Like the Reserve, the slopes of Beacon Hill and the hills west of it, are covered with strip-lynchets.

About 1840 a large number of human skeletons together with those of horses and fragments of metal work were found in Danes Field half a mile north-east. In 1879 William Ransom excavated two small mounds at the foot of Knocking Hoe on Pegsdon Common and found a Saxon burial, Belgic cremation urns and Romano-British pottery.² Hitchin Museum contains Saxon weapons and beads from Ransom's excavations. Unfortunately the exact find-spots are unknown, but Ransom's vague note suggest that a settlement site of presumably Roman-British date existed about

¹W. Stukeley: *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1724) I, 73.

²*Trans. Herts. Nat. Hist. Soc.* (1886) IV, 39.

midway between Pegsdon Common Farm and the present village. Almost every period seems to be represented by some monument in the district.

As has already been stated the Reserve covers a spur of the lower chalk and its adjoining dry valley. For the purposes of this report a second dry valley outside the Reserve to the south is also considered. The highest point of the Reserve is at almost 400 feet O.D. and the lowest 225 feet O.D. The Reserve is being maintained as chalk downland and is still grazed by cattle and sheep. The nearest water supply is a small stream close to Pegsdon Common Farm, a quarter of a mile west of the dry valley.

The ancient fields form three groups marked A, B, and C on the map. Group A is centred on the slopes to the east of Knocking Hoe, Group B in the dry valley to the south-east of it; Group C lies outside the Reserve, a little less than half a mile to the south-west and is known as the Pegsdon lynchets.

Group A: East of Knocking Hoe.

Three contour lynchets, the lowest originally 250 yards long, run east-west. The upper was 150 yards long, whilst the intermediate was about 80 yards. The upper and lower have been cut across and almost ploughed out by a square field, bounded by two *up-and-down lynchets*¹ running north-south. This occurs on a saddle of more gently sloping land and has been described in the past as a 'Celtic Field', but a much more recent origin should be sought. It measures almost exactly an acre in extent.

Further east on the same spur three low lynchets face west, one being partly disturbed by an ancient quarry.

Group B: The dry valley group. (Pl. VIII)

All the lynchets in this group are of contour type. On the northern face of the valley is a single *bench lynchet* about 5 feet above the valley floor. This is prominent at the eastern and western ends of the valley, but fades out in between. The western section runs from the valley floor to a pointed end 50 yards south-east. The eastern section stays above the floor. It is 15 yards wide and very flat, trailing to a pointed western end. The southern face is covered by the greatest number of lynchets. A valley floor bench runs from the head of the valley for 180 yards to the west; here, less than a yard wide, it is drawn out to a point. Sweeping up from the floor of the valley to the upper head of the coombe is an *approach lynchet* 320 yards in length. At its lower end this lynchet is 22 yards wide, but it is reduced immediately it starts to climb the hill. One end of this approach lynchet terminates close to the entrance to the Reserve, north of Barrow 14; a branch track follows the upper edge of the dry valley and passes round to the eastern end of the Knocking Hoe spur where it fades out. A second approach lynchet branches off close to the bottom of the valley to give access to a terrace 45 yards wide. This terrace is triangular in shape and is narrowest where it joins the main approach lynchet at its eastern end. Two further terraces lie above this on more gently sloping ground with easy access from east or west. The fence bounding the Reserve on its southern side passes between them.

Group C: The Pegsdon Group.

This group comprises long contour lynchets on either side of a dry valley. Those on the northern face, three in number, average 350 yards in length. Two lynchets on the southern face are about 300 yards long. Access to these lynchets was an easy matter from either end.

¹For definition of lynchets types see Bowen: *Ancient Fields* (1962) 40 and *W.A.M.* CCVIII (1960) 336.

Discussion

A number of general observations emerge from examination of these lynchets:

1. They can be of any length; there being no apparent criterion beyond the amount of land available.
2. The treads of each terrace are sloping in length, and, with the wider ones, in width also.
3. Where the hill slope is at its gentlest, the terrace is at its widest.
4. The direction in which the lynchets face is of no importance. Whilst the majority of Group B face north, Group C faces south.
5. The slopes were apparently utilised when the hilltops were already fully cultivated, and we can assume that the clay in the valley bottoms was too heavy for single furrow ploughs.

The problem of use and date of these, and indeed of all, lynchets is an intriguing one, which has long been open to speculation. It has been suggested that the terraces were used for flax and vine cultivation, but it is more likely that less exotic crops such as wheat or barley were produced. As to date, Wood and Whittington¹ found a filled-in Romano-British ditch under lynchets at Horton in Wiltshire, and this leads them to consider that that group probably date from Romano-British times onwards. They suggest that some lynchets may date even from the Belgic period if a pre-Roman heavy plough can be attested. It is perhaps significant that William Ransom found Belgic and Romano-British remains at the foot of Knocking Hoe on Pegsdon Common. In choosing a local date we should bear in mind the fine series of lynchets lying immediately west of the entrance to the hill-fort of Ravensburgh, near Hexton, only two miles south-west of Knocking Hoe, which are surely connected with the occupation of the fort. Their situation on the furthest side of the hill-mass from Hexton, makes their connection with the medieval village extremely unlikely. Finally, it is worth recalling that all strip lynchets need not necessarily be of the same date; many are medieval, and some are still being formed today in Belgium and the Isle of Portland for example.²

JAMES F. DYER

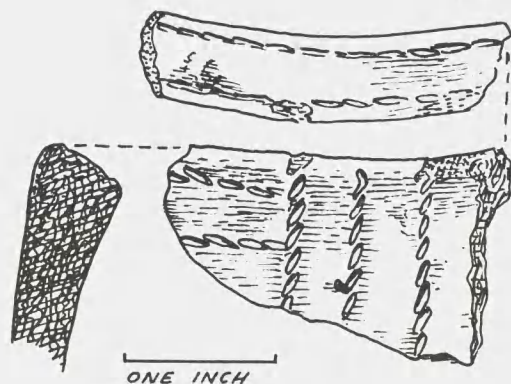


Fig 4. Rim-shoulder of a collared urn found on the surface of Knocking Knoll (now in Luton Museum.)

Since this paper was written Mr J. E. Thruswell of Pirton has given the writer a decorated rim-shoulder from a collared urn, found by him on the surface of the Knocking Knoll long barrow

¹W.A.M. CCVIII, (1960) 337.

²Antiquity VI, pl. IV; XXII, 79-81.