

Archæologia Cantiana.

HOLWOOD AND KESTON.

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DURING the Congress of the Kent Archæological Society in 1878, I endeavoured to discharge the duty allotted to me by offering to the visitors to Holwood Camp, as it is called, some remarks on these fine remains of earthworks, and on others similar in construction and character. I also, so far as time would permit, touched on Keston in the immediate neighbourhood, which is often associated with Holwood, but between them there never could have been any particular connection irrespective of contiguity, the one being of British origin, the other of Roman: the former an *oppidum* of the largest class, the latter a *vicus* or village of considerable extent. The proximity is indicative of a time of perfect peace and quietude, when the belligerent Britons had succumbed thoroughly to the civilization of their conquerors and had become blended with them, using their *oppida* no longer for purposes of war, but adapting them, often in connection with the Romans, for pastoral uses. In some we find that the Romans erected buildings; but often and generally, they shew no traces of human habitation.

The deep lines of the circumvallation at Holwood, although overgrown with trees, are seen to the best advantage where we assembled, near the entrance from the high road; but no fair conception of the *oppidum*, nor of the grandeur of the earthworks, could have been formed by those unacquainted with similar constructions which are yet perfect. The entire work occupied nearly one hundred acres. When the mansion, now the property of Mr. Alexander, was built for William Pitt, the celebrated statesman, the ramparts where the house stands, and also those on the north and south, were sacrificed to the taste of the landscape gardener, and levelled, the entire area being converted into pleasure gardens. This is a fate to which British *oppida* have not unfrequently succumbed in times when taste was not so discriminating as it is in the present day. The grounds of the mansion in Cobham Park occupy the greater part of an *oppidum*,* and so do those of Syndale near Faversham. All of these were on the line of Cæsar's march towards the Thames, and must have been objects of notice, if not of concern, to him.

But if Holwood in its present state is disappointing, it can be well studied in connection with numerous works which, yet in a most perfect state, are to be found in every county. Oldbury near Ightham is, I think, the most contiguous, and it has been well described in the ninth volume of the *Archæologia Cantiana*, page liii., by Canon Scott-Robertson. Its area is full one hundred and twenty three acres, and its circumference two miles. Lingfield Mark Camp, a few miles from Edenbridge, is another, and these three, which present all the peculiar and grand features

* *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XI., p. 121.

of British *oppida*, can be inspected with ease in a couple of days.*

Down to a comparatively recent time these great works, many of which must be of a very remote antiquity, and which one would suppose to be obviously strongholds of the Britons anterior to the coming of Julius Cæsar, have been very generally misunderstood and considered as Roman. In almost all topographical publications they have been so termed. Holwood has been repeatedly called Roman, and in one instance, Saxon! Very slight reflection and comparison will dispel this common error, if it has not already disappeared before recent inductions based on scientific and careful inquiry. Mr. C. Warne has set an example of sound research in his description of the *oppida* of the Durotriges in Dorsetshire,† and Colonel (now General) Lane Fox has explored in a similar rational spirit those of the South Coast.‡ But this subject of research can only as yet be said to have been entered upon; other counties require explorers such as these ardent and conscientious men; in order not only to examine more systematically these wonderful constructions, but also to reveal those not yet made known, if discovered.

The Romans in their marches never encamped without a vallum and foss, but they usually selected open and level ground, and the form of their camp was a square, or rectangular approaching a square. If satisfied with the security of the locality selected, the vallum and foss were slight, constructed merely that their system of rigid discipline might never be relaxed;

* A plan of the last will be found in my *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. vii., p. 73.

† *Ancient Dorset*. ‡ *Archæologia*, vol. xlii., *Hill Forts in Sussex*.

but if a hostile attack was apprehended, the foss and vallum corresponded in magnitude to the estimated danger, and occasionally they were doubled. As may be supposed, such camps were likely to be obliterated by agricultural processes, and thus traces of them are not often to be found. But when permanent occupation was decided upon to hold a country in subjection, the *castra* were built of stone, such as are found in the interior and in the north and west of Britain. In Kent they are altogether wanting, considering that those on the Saxon shore were for a foreign and not for an internal enemy. Nothing can be more conclusive of the early and effectual pacification of Cantium, and the south of Britain, than the absence of these *castra*.

In the great British earthworks, such as Holwood, there are no features corresponding to those of Roman castrametation. They are usually, if not almost invariably, on elevated and often on precipitous ground, of large extent, and surrounded often with double or triple *valla*, and fosses varying in depth from twenty to one hundred feet, the latter being the stated depth of the grand Sorbiodunum or Old Sarum. The configuration of these *oppida* is usually adjusted to the nature of the ground, of which Oldbury affords such an interesting and striking example.* Cæsar and Strabo describe them; but when woods are mentioned it must, of course, be understood that they were occasionally surrounded with wood as Oldbury now is, and the approaches to this stronghold could easily have been closed by felled trees; not so the *oppida* upon the South Downs; they were never wooded, and the trees for defence must have been brought from a

* *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. IX., p. liii.

distance. Powerful and impregnable as these *oppida* may have been to the Britons, who were ever at war among themselves, they soon yielded to Roman science and energy. Cæsar found no great difficulty in storming that in which the defeated Britons took refuge, in the commencement of his march to the Thames; and that of Cassibelaunus himself soon shared the same fate. The conquest of the *oppida* of the West Britons by Vespasian, as narrated by Suetonius, presents a yet more striking instance of the ineffectual resistance of these formidable earthworks to the highly trained Roman legions. It is far different at the present day; if garrisoned by artillery, they would be as so many Plevnas.

Cæsar gives the names of the four British Kings who ruled in Cantium, without referring to their particular localities; we may accept the four strongest of the Kentish *oppida* as their residences, in palaces built like their subjects' houses, of wood, and thatched with reeds and straw. Contiguous to them at certain seasons, and in all times of alarm, were large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, such as Cæsar found on the occasion I have mentioned.

Keston is but a short distance from Holwood Hill, so contiguous indeed, that the latter is often described as at or adjoining Keston. It was brought before the antiquarian world by discoveries made by Mr. A. J. Kempe and Mr. Crofton Croker, which are published by the former in the twenty-second volume of the 'Archæologia.' Mr. Kempe had been excited both by a tradition that on Keston Court Farm there was once a town, and by the fact that in a field called Lower War Bank, as well as in adjoining fields, foundations of Roman buildings could be traced at certain

seasons by the decay of the herbage or corn growing above the walls. The higher part of the field referred to is called the Upper War Bank. Here Mr. Kempe discovered the foundation of a circular building flanked with buttresses, a square tomb of stone, a stone sarcophagus, and the grave of a second which had been, some time before, removed to Wickham Court. Mr. Kempe also excavated portions of an extensive building in the lower field. In 1854, Mr. G. R. Corner followed up with some success Mr. Kempe's researches, and published the result in the thirty-sixth volume of the 'Archæologia,' together with extracts from Anglo-Saxon Charters giving boundaries of the locality which throw a remarkable and, I think, conclusive light on the etymology both of Keston and of War Bank. The details of these researches, as given in the 'Archæologia,' prove that a *vicus* of considerable extent occupied the fields now in cultivation, and that the burial-place was on the higher ground, the circular building supposed a temple being probably a tomb; but no inscription told who were the tenants of the cemetery, although they must have been comparatively wealthy, and the name of the *vicus* is also still shrouded in oblivion. Unfortunately the distances from the places between which the *Noviomagus* of the Itinerary of Antoninus is placed, do not warrant our seeing in the ruins of the War Bank fields, important as they are, the ruins of this station.*

Mr. Corner shews, I think satisfactorily, that the name is not derived, as has been supposed, from the *oppidum* at Holwood Hill, or from any such Roman remains to which the Saxon applied the term "Chester,"

* I have given my reasons at length on this subject in the *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. X., pp. 170, 171.

which had led to "Casterton" and "Keston;" but that from these tombs and sarcophagi the Saxon settlers called the place *Cystaning*, or "The Field of Stone Coffins." This became converted into the "Chestan" of Domesday Book, and subsequently as it now stands, Keston. The first of the Charters in which Mr. Corner found the name among other boundaries, is of Æthelberht, King of Wessex, dated A.D. 862, by which he gave to Dryghtwald, ten carucates of land at Bromleagh; the two others being grants of this land at Bromley, the one by King Ædgar, A.D. 966, to St. Andrew, and Ælstan Prior of the Church of Rochester; the other by Ædeldred, in 987, to Aelsige, his minister; in these the boundaries are described much as in the first. In all of these appears "Cystanunga Mearce," Keston Mark, and "Weardsetle," which must be the Watch Tower, now the War Bank.

It will be at once admitted that the names of these places are satisfactorily explained by the charters, and that they correct the popular derivations. When our Saxon forefathers took possession of the land, they found it covered with Roman buildings, often deserted and nameless. To such places they had to give names which were frequently suggested by natural objects, or, as here, by prominent works of art. The stone coffins or cysts, and *ing*, a field, suggested the name of *Cystaning*; the circular building they did not so well understand, and supposing it a watch tower called it *Weardsettle*.