

OLDBURY HILL, IGHTHAM.

BY SIR EDWARD HARRISON.

MOST writers on the history and topography of Kent have devoted a few paragraphs to the hill fort of Oldbury.¹ It has been mentioned in archæological and geological papers, and notices of antiquarian discoveries and other references have appeared in *Archæologia Cantiana*.² Benjamin Harrison, the Ightham archæologist, collected more facts about Oldbury than anyone else, but he published very little. Many extracts from his notes and correspondence were embodied in his biography,³ but many others had, perforce, to be left out of that work. New finds continue to be made on Oldbury from time to time. It seems worth while to bring together the salient facts that combine to tell the story of Oldbury, and it is proposed to draw for this purpose on Harrison's unpublished notes as well as other sources of information.

Oldbury lies within the parish of Ightham, and in ancient documents of title is counted part of Ightham Common. Its nearest point to Ightham village is about half a mile to the west of that place, where the wooded eastern face of the hill rises abruptly beyond Oldbury hamlet. The southern and western faces are equally steep, but on the northern side the slope is gentle and almost uniform, from the southern point of the hilltop, where there is a ring of high ground above the 600-foot level, to the floor of Holmesdale, at about 300 feet O.D., near the Swanley-Maidstone railway line. The highest land, roughly the woodland area above 500 feet

¹ Except where it is necessary to distinguish the hill fort of Oldbury from Oldbury hamlet, I have used the short term Oldbury for the former.

² Principal references : I, 155, 174-5 ; II, 2, 8 ; IX, liii ; XIII, 4 ; XV, 69, 91-3, 97 ; XVI, 13 ; XVIII, 184 ; XXII, li ; XXVII, lxxvii ; XXVIII, cii ; XXXI, 157 ; XXXIV, 157.

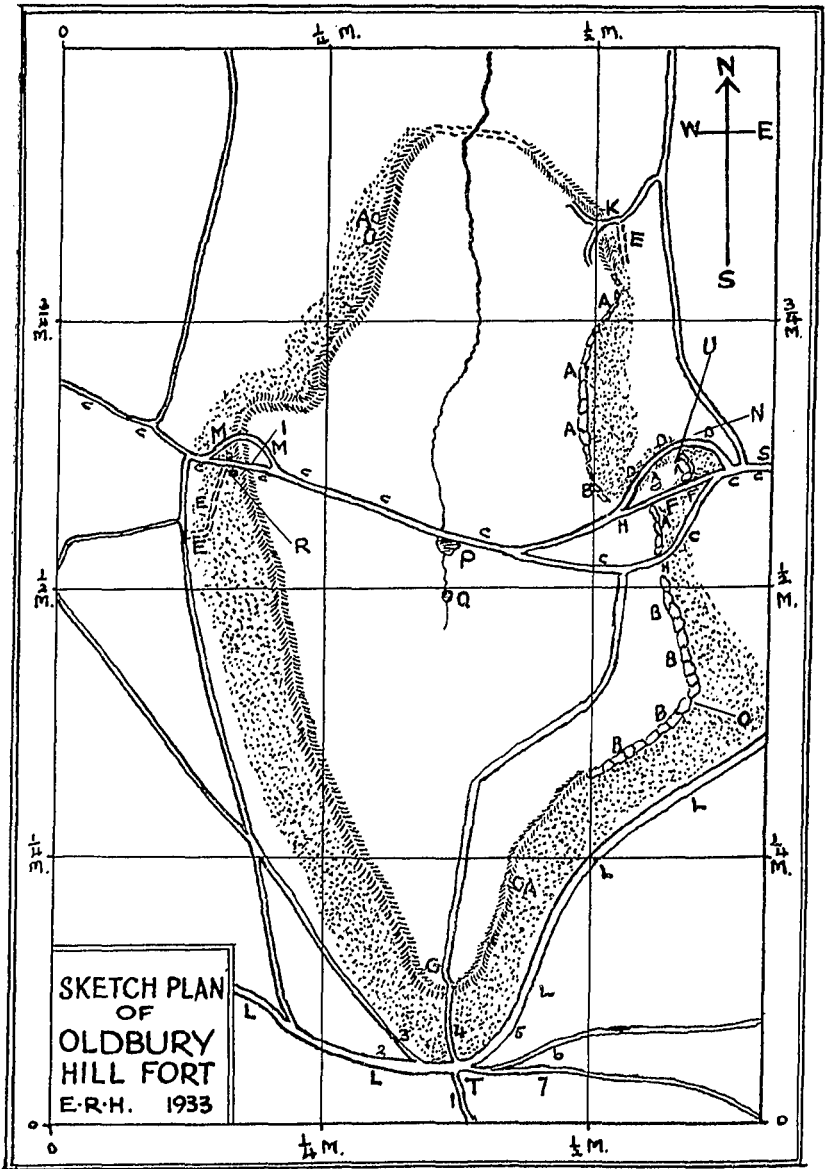
³ *Harrison of Ightham*, by the present writer. Oxford University Press, 1928. It has been considered unnecessary to notice in this paper all the references to Oldbury that are to be found in the book.

O.D., is a table-land tilted a little towards the north, and commands a striking view on all sides but one. North-west and north are seen the valleys of the Darent and its eastern tributary stream, the gap by which the river pierces the North Downs, and the double curve of the hills that enclose the valleys. Towards the east the downs stretch along the sky-line, with Holmesdale spread out before them. They are broken by the Medway gap, which is seen opening towards Rochester, but continue beyond it in a south-easterly direction, and may be followed by the eye nearly to the coast. To the south, the great valley that carries the little Ightham stream, the Shode, breaches the Greensand ridge, and a broad expanse of Weald country, towards Crowborough, lies exposed beyond the opening. On the south-western and western sides the view from Oldbury is limited to a mile or two by the high land of Raspit Hill and Seal Chart.

The commanding position of Oldbury and the natural defences offered by its steep slopes marked it in early times as a suitable site for a hill fort. Along the brow of the hill, following the turns of the crest, runs a line of rocks and earthworks, which enclose a space of about 123 acres. This fortified enclosure has for long been called Oldbury Camp, but would be better named Oldbury hill fort. It is about five-sixths of a mile across from north to south and rather over one-third of a mile from east to west. The fort is irregular in plan, as the rampart follows a natural defensive line, but roughly resembles a tongue with its tip towards the south. The northern part of this area is under cultivation, the southern part is woodland.

Very near the centre of the fort is a small pond, prettily named the Waterflash. It is fed by feeble springs and by a small stream flowing in from the south, which drain the summit of the hill. The overflow from the Waterflash runs down the slope to the north and joins the Shode stream. Hidden in the wood about seventy-five yards behind the pond is a little circular pool which was hollowed out long ago.¹

¹ This pool is not quite in its original condition. It was deepened in the early years of the present century.



EXPLANATION OF PLAN, AND NOTES.

Not all the roads and tracks shown are public ways.

Earth-works shown by hatching.

Steep slopes shown by stippling.

A : Line of existing rocks.

B : Line of destroyed rocks.

C : Old highway, probably Roman.

D : Prehistoric way.

E : Tracks, possibly pre-historic.

F : Footpath.

G, H, I, K : Entrances to Fort.

L : New (18th century) road, which displaced C.

M : Farm Road.

N : Approximate site of excavation, 1890 (Rock shelter tools found).

O : Site of destroyed cave.

P : Waterflash.

Q : Pool behind Waterflash.

R : "Cæsar's Well."

S : Oldbury hamlet.

T : Seven Wents. The seven ways are numbered.

U : Mount Pleasant.

Buckwell, the swimming pool, Rose Wood, etc., are outside the limits of the plan.

The plan is divided into quarter-mile squares.

This pool is indicated as the central well from which the occupants of the fort drew their supplies of water. The pond may be of any age, but as a conjecture it is suggested that it was made for watering horses in the days when a highway crossed the hill, climbing its slopes and afterwards passing the pond. The feeders of pool and pond are now liable to fail in dry seasons, but the flow of water may have been greater and more constant in the past, when the land was less well-drained than it is to-day. There are several other springs—locally called wells—just outside the fortified lines, and a vigorous streamlet flows down a valley on the north-west side of the fort.

Oldbury is crossed from east to west by a woodland track with broad verges, which probably dates from Roman times, and which afterwards became part of a highway running from Maidstone, through Ightham, to Westerham and Godstone. Its old name, the waggon road, has not been quite lost. This road ceased to be of importance as a highway in the second half of the eighteenth century, when a new road was made below the southern slopes of Oldbury, so as to avoid the steep gradients of the older route. By 1821 the ancient way had fallen almost entirely out of use, for in that year the broad green strips on either side of it, and also a bold spur of the hill called Mount Pleasant, were sold into private ownership as waste lands of Ightham parish.

The geological features of Oldbury have a direct bearing on its archæological history. The hill is built up of the sandy deposit called the Folkestone beds, which run east and west across Kent. Under the Folkestone beds is a sandy clay—the Sandgate beds. The holding up of percolating water by the Sandgate beds gives rise to springs, which occur round the base of the hill. The Folkestone beds at Oldbury, although made up principally of unconsolidated sand, with sand rock, chert and ironstone, also include seams of clayey material which themselves produce feeble springs, and, in one case, a considerable flow of water at a high level.

The outcrop of sand rock is well seen on the eastern face of the hill, where a flight of steps has been cut in it to

carry a footpath up the steep ascent. This soft rock is overlain, towards the summit of the hill, by a hard, whitish grit, which weathers a buff colour and is about five or six feet thick. There is also at about the same horizon, apparently, where it occurs, replacing the buff stone, a very hard, dark green sandstone or grit, which seems limited to a small superficial area on Oldbury and is not known to occur elsewhere, except on the neighbouring Raspit Hill and Seal Chart. The green stone, which is known as Ightham stone or, more accurately, Oldbury stone, is not unlike granite in general appearance.¹ Its hardness led to the summit of Oldbury being extensively quarried about a century ago, when all the green stone that could be found was broken up, carried to London, and used in road making.² Further reference to the quarrying work will be made later.

The two hard rocks, the buff and the green, must have protected the summit of Oldbury from denudation by natural forces. Where they occurred as masses of vertical rock at the top of the hillside slopes, they also served, as we shall see, first as shelters for some early inhabitants of the hill, and, later, as part of the lines that enclose the fort.

The great natural beauty of Oldbury calls for brief notice. Not only has the hill all the charm that is often associated with the Greensand heights in the south country—timber trees and underwood, moss and fern, bracken, heather and huckleberry—its attractiveness is greatly added to by its commanding position, craggy rocks, precipitous slopes, and the entrancing views which are obtained from a terrace walk—or ride—that runs along the crest, following closely the line of the earth-works.

The outstanding archæological interest of Oldbury lies in the abundance of relics that have come from it to testify

¹ For a geological description of this rock see a *Note on the Structure of the Ightham Stone*, by T. G. Bonney, *Geol. Mag.*, Decade III, Vol. V, No. 7, p. 297, July, 1888. A chemical analysis of a sample of the stone, made in 1886 by Mr. T. H. Sowerby, showed that it contained 92·3 per cent of silica, some iron, alumina, a little calcium, with a trace of potash, but no fluorine, sodium, or magnesium.

² It is known to have been used in macadamizing the Edgware Road.

to its long-continued human occupation, first by successive prehistoric peoples, and, after them, by the Romans.

The earliest traces of man from the neighbourhood are the lower palæolithic hand axes and other flint tools which have been found both on the surface and in the gravels deposited by the Shode stream.¹ These gravels are spread over the northern flank of Oldbury at levels reaching up to 120 feet or more above the present stream bed. It would be outside the scope of this paper to give an account of the drift implements found in the Ightham district,² which have no special association with Oldbury. But their occurrence in large numbers in the vicinity points to the use of the hill and its surroundings as a hunting ground by our palæolithic forerunners uncounted years ago.

We come next to a palæolithic race, later in time than the makers of the drift implements, yet still remote, of whom it can be said definitely that they inhabited Oldbury. These were people who dwelt under the rocks that run along the crest of the hill and were used first as shelters and afterwards as defences. The rock shelter people belonged to the middle palæolithic period, and, apart from differences of type, their flint tools are in general distinguishable from the drift implements by their colour and unworn appearance. Most of the drift implements have been rolled in a stream bed until their edges have been more or less smoothed, and they have been stained brown by contact with iron oxide in solution. The rock shelter tools, on the other hand, are as a rule unworn and whitish in colour. This colouring is due, not to staining but to chemical action called patination, which has gradually

¹ Or an earlier stream which occupied the Shode valley before it had been cut down to its present level. This older stream may possibly have flowed northward and westward to join the river Darent, that is, in a direction opposite to that of the present stream, which runs east and southwards into the Medway.—See *Arch. Cant.*, XV, 91-2.

² These implements were described and their significance was explained in a paper read before the Geological Society of London in 1889: *On the Occurrence of Palæolithic Flint Implements in the Neighbourhood of Ightham . . .*, by Joseph Prestwich. *Quart. Journ. Geol. Soc.*, May, 1889, p. 270. See also *Palæolithic Implements found in West Kent*, by F. C. J. Spurrell, *Arch. Cant.*, XV, 89. The sequence of Stone Age industries is conveniently summarized in a table printed on p. xiv of the British Museum *Guide to Antiquities of the Stone Age*, Third Edition, 1926.

changed the black or grey surface of the newly-chipped flint, first to an indigo-blue shade and ultimately to white. With few exceptions the rock shelter implements have not been stained, for they have not been lying in iron-impregnated gravels.

The linking of the white implements with the rock shelters was suggested by Harrison. He found that, although these tools might be picked up on many fields in the Ightham district, they seemed to have some particular association with Oldbury, as they occurred there in far greater numbers than elsewhere. In 1870, having seen some implements from the cave of Le Moustier, he noticed their resemblance to the Oldbury tools and wondered whether the Oldbury rocks had served the same purpose as the French cave. The opportunity to test this speculation came after twenty years. In 1890, with the help of a grant from the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Harrison opened an excavation immediately under the face of the largest rock, and after several holes had been dug, with meagre results, he found the site of a workshop, where the white tools were made.

A full report of the excavations was made to the British Association: a summary will suffice here. A shallow trench was first dug in front of a rock, containing a very small artificial cave, on the north-eastern slope of the hill. Nothing of interest was found there and a rock floor was met with a few feet underground. An excavation was next made a little lower down the hillside, but great blocks of stone, fallen from above and buried in the soil, and a network of tree roots made exploration difficult. A third hole at a still lower level produced two white implements, but rocky ground again obstructed the diggers. Only neolithic flakes were found. Finally Harrison selected a spot about fifty yards distant from the last-mentioned excavation, below Mount Pleasant. Here the discovery of large numbers of white flakes indicated that a place where tools were made had been hit upon. A superficial area of about ten rods was dug over to a depth of three feet, and "49 well-finished implements or portions of them and 648 waste flakes have

been found at this spot, leading to the supposition either that this was the frontage of a rock shelter, or that the material had slipped down from above."¹ The implements found in these excavations, some of which are almost identical in type with implements from Le Moustier cave, were sent to the British Museum, where specimens are exhibited in the galleries.² Other specimens of the rock shelter types are in Maidstone Museum, whilst many others are in private collections.³

The finding of 700 tools and flakes in a space no larger than an ordinary allotment amply warrants the inference that the implements were made on the spot, and that the rocks and caves above were primitive shelters used by the implement makers. The principal rock masses now remaining follow a line running for several hundred yards along the eastern and north-eastern faces of the hill and gradually petering out northwards. The hard rock at the top overlies a softer sandstone, and the more rapid weathering of the latter tends to make the harder rock overhang it a little, so as to form a projecting roof. The hillside below the rock masses is strewn with blocks of hard rock which have broken away from the parent bed above, a fact which suggests that the overhang of the hard rock may have been greater in prehistoric times than it is to-day. The natural overhang may also have been increased by the artificial scraping away of the softer rock. There are still to be seen two small caves which have been intentionally hollowed out in this soft rock, though whether the excavation was done in prehistoric times or later is uncertain.

The suitability of the rocks as shelters should not be judged only by those which now remain. There were many more rocks and there was at least one considerable cave on

¹ From the Report of the Committee appointed to carry on the excavations (Dr. John Evans, Benjamin Harrison, Professors Joseph Prestwich and H. G. Seeley).

² See the *Museum Guide to Antiquities of the Stone Age*, Third Edition, 1926, pp. 77-8, and Plate V.

³ In a letter to Mr. Reginald A. Smith, dated 26th August, 1913, Harrison stated that he had then in his own possession, "close on 350 specimens, good, indifferent, and flakes."



PLATE I.

Rock Shelter on east side.



PLATE II.

Rock—probably used as shelter—on west side.

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the south-eastern face of the hill, which were destroyed when the Oldbury stone was quarried. Dr. John Harris, writing early in the eighteenth century,¹ refers to this cave in the following terms, "Just on the Brow of the Hill there is an Entrance into a Cave, which is now filled up by the sinking of the Earth, so as to admit a Passage but a little Way into it: But in the Memory of, and by the Report of, Ancient People, it went formerly much further in under the Hill."

Harrison's notes give more information about this cave. In 1890 he interviewed a life-long inhabitant of Ightham, Thomas Hollman, who was then seventy-seven years of age, who had worked on Oldbury Hill, when the stone was quarried, for "five or six winters," and who "remembered the cave well." The witness described it as "like a large fox's earth," about four or five feet high, and going in "as far back as from here to that wall . . ." [a distance of about fourteen yards]. "The ceiling was the rock, all in one line." He also stated that the green stone rocks which were removed, overhung the softer rock below them, "by about four feet and a half."

Colonel D. W. G. James, who owned Oldbury, told Harrison that when a boy he explored the cave, crawling in for more than twenty yards. A smuggling incident of which a record remains suggests that the cave was deep and that its recesses were difficult to explore.

If the "Passage but a little Way into" the cave of Harris, corresponds with the fourteen (or twenty) yards of the later witnesses, then the cave "went formerly much further in" than fourteen (or twenty) yards. How much? We are not left guessing at this point: Hollman gave Harrison some further significant information.

He stated that the situation of the cave was "on the top of the hill, above Bassett's house," that it faced "about south east," and that if he were in the cave and looked straight out he would see "Cophall." These particulars

¹ *The History of Kent*, by John Harris, p. 163, 1719. It is evident from Harris's account that he was not personally acquainted with Oldbury. Hasted (*The History . . . of . . . Kent*, by Edward Hasted, Vol. II, p. 250, 1782) merely quotes Harris without adding to his statement.

enable the site of the cave to be identified with an old open depression at the south-east point of the hill—B.M. 557 on the six-inch Ordnance Survey map. This depression is about thirty yards long, a distance which seems to represent the full depth of the cave.

Natural caves are not formed under the conditions existing on Oldbury Hill, and it may safely be inferred that the cave under consideration was hollowed out by man—possibly by enlargement of an animal's burrow. It may have been made by the rock shelter people or later, perhaps much later, for we know no more than that it existed a good many years before 1719. If the cave was there when the rocks were used as shelters it is a sure inference that the better protection of the cave was used also.

The question of date can be solved, if at all, only by digging, and excavation along the thirty-yards "floor" of the cave site is now proceeding (November, 1933). An old surface below the present ground level has been traced, but so far nothing definitely prehistoric has come to light.

Some of the flint industries of the upper palæolithic period (Aurignac, Solutré, La Madeleine) are probably represented by the workmanship of some flint tools from the vicinity, as is also the pygmy industry of Tardenois, but the subject has not been worked out locally and bare mention of these industries must suffice here.

Harrison's early exploration of Oldbury resulted in the discovery of an abundance of neolithic tools. In a letter written in 1874 to Dr. (afterwards Sir) John Evans his finds "at Oldbury Camp" were stated to include eight entire celts and a considerable number of broken ones, fifty or sixty scrapers, twenty stone corn crushers, six drilled hammers, ten or twelve arrowheads, one flint awl and scraper, hand rubbers for polishing, curved implements for chipping, spear points, etc.¹ The last sixty years have added greatly to this list and there must be numerous specimens still lying hidden under the surface of the woodland hilltop.

¹ See *Harrison of Ightham*, pp. 74-5. Most of these tools are now in Maidstone Museum.

Neolithic tools and flakes may be found almost everywhere in the Ightham district if they are diligently searched for. But there are several sites where a large number of finds within a small area points to a neolithic settlement in the vicinity. Such settlements at Oldbury were clearly indicated, and a chance excavation made in 1906 seems to have disclosed the site of one of them as well as more definite evidence of later occupation.

On the north-western side of the hill, between a strip of woodland called The Toll, along which the rampart runs, and another wooded enclosure known as Patch Grove, is a secluded green valley watered by a little stream which receives the overflow from the Waterflash and joins the Shode. In 1906 Mr. H. A. Hooker, the landowner, excavated a private swimming pool in this valley, using the stream to fill it. The excavation was about sixty-six feet by thirty-six feet, and from three to six feet deep. Harrison watched the progress of the work and has left notes of his observations.

“13th November, 1906. Hearing that some pottery had been found, I . . . secured fragments representing sixteen or more vessels, principally Celtic, but some Roman, and a Roman horseshoe. The overlying deposit is full of ash or cinders, pieces of brick, and bits of ware.

“18th November. . . . There is a Celtic or pre-Roman layer at the base, containing many flint flakes and cores, and Roman ware is found higher up. . . . The spoil collected represents thirty or more vessels. I had the satisfaction of unearthing two large Celtic urns.”¹

In another note Harrison recorded the finding of large blocks of Oldbury stone, one measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $2\frac{3}{4}$ feet, and many 18-inch blocks, many flint flakes in the ash and brick-and-tile deposit near the large blocks of stone, and other flakes in a yellow clayey deposit below the burnt layer. He himself found many flakes, cores, pot boilers, and reddened chert stones in the burnt layer.

¹ These discoveries at Patch Grove were briefly noticed in *Arch. Cant.*, XXXIV, 157, where the urns were described as “some Roman and others perhaps earlier.”

In summing up the position he wrote, not altogether fancifully, that the blocks of Oldbury stone "may have been used as seats on which . . . men sat and made implements, for many flakes lie close by." He noted the section as follows: "The layer of humus was a foot and a half deep. Below this was a wash—say alluvial—resting on an ash-and-tile layer one foot in depth, and at the base of this layer was a very clayey stratum [containing flint flakes] and a deposit of gravel."

The finds at the swimming pool point to occupation both in neolithic times and later. Other localities around Oldbury where neolithic finds have been so numerous as to suggest settlements include (a) Great Field, west of the manor house, Ightham Court Lodge, (b) near the banks of the Shode stream, east of Ightham village, (c) the Fishponds valley, adjoining Oldbury on the south-west, (d) Rose Wood, half a mile south-east of Oldbury, and (e) Foxbury, near Stone Street. From the land immediately adjoining Rose Wood Harrison obtained several thousands of flint flakes, while celts, polished and unpolished, scrapers, arrow-heads, drilled hammers and other stone tools have been found in the vicinity.

A large circular pit formerly existed in Beech Wood, to the east of Rose Wood. Harrison obtained neolithic tools and flakes and potsherds from this site, and in 1892 he obtained evidence of neolithic interments in the land immediately round the pit.¹

Many signs of neolithic occupation became apparent when a part of Ightham Common, lying below Oldbury on its southern side, was first cultivated. Harrison also noticed what he "supposed to be a stone avenue leading from near the base of the hill, by Middle Wood rock, across Ightham Common, in the direction of Diplock's knoll." As the stones were broken up and removed this evidence has been lost.

If indications of neolithic occupation of the Oldbury district are abundant, relics of the succeeding bronze age are singularly few. Indeed, the only bronze objects of which a definite record exists are two spear heads, one, found about

¹ *Harrison of Ightham*, p. 177.



PLATE III. Section through Rampart on west side of Hill Fort.



PLATE IV. Bead of 200-100 B.C. found near Rampart.

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the year 1830, that was once in the possession of Colonel D. W. G. James,¹ and another found more recently on Ightham Common. There are also a celt of Oldbury green stone and numerous tanged arrowheads, which, although not made of bronze, are assignable to the bronze age.

The next comers to Oldbury were a Celtic race, who introduced the iron age into this country. They came to England about 500 B.C., and it is to an iron age people that the earth-works which, together with the rocks, encircled the hill fort, are to be attributed, although their precise date is still undetermined. These works consist of a single bank and ditch, the earth from the ditch having been thrown inwards to build up the rampart. The defences are best seen on the western side of the hill, where a ride along the crest follows the line of the ditch.² Along the northern side, where the land is cultivated, the earth-works were partly levelled by a farm tenant in 1865, but may still be traced for the greater part of the distance. As the north-eastern corner of the fort is approached the rampart is seen at its highest, for at this point and along the northern line the gentle slope of the hill afforded no natural defence. There is no trace of mound or ditch along the greater part of the eastern side, where the line of rocks crowning a steep ascent would present a formidable obstacle to an assailant. The rampart appears again on the south-east side, about three furlongs before the southern point of the fort, above Seven Wents, is reached, but it is not continuously a marked feature until this point has been passed and cannot always be made out at all.

Judged by its present appearance, the rampart seems to have been nowhere of any great strength.³ It is, however,

¹ *Harrison of Ightham*, p. 69.

² There may be traces of a double line of earth-works on the western side, particularly near its southern end, where a definite terrace about 200 yards long can be followed on the slope a little below the rampart. This statement, however, is made with reserve, as (a) the indications are feeble or impersistent, and (b) rides have been made near the crest of the hill by successive owners, whose works are not always readily distinguishable, at sight, from more ancient works.

³ See, on this point, the article on *Ancient Earthworks*, by I. Chalkley Gould (*Victoria History of Kent*, Vol. I, p. 395, 1898), and also *The Archaeology of Kent*, p. 157. By R. F. Jessup. Methuen & Co., 1930.

to be borne in mind that it was constructed of the sand, clay, and loose stones thrown up from the ditch below, and that such materials would be very little resistant to sub-aerial denudation.¹

There are five recognizable entrances into the fort that may be ancient gateways, two on the east and one on the north-east, west, and south sides respectively. These are probably not all co-eval with the rampart, and of the five, the south entrance had less appearance of great antiquity than the others. The approach to this entrance from outside, till a few years ago, was a narrow track climbing the hill, but it was not a deep hollow way and could not with any confidence be set down as prehistoric. This track has been almost obliterated by the making of a new, unfinished road. There was a very old way into the fort from the east, a hollow track winding round the spur of Mount Pleasant and reaching the summit by an easy gradient up a combe. The defences of this entrance were not earthworks but the line of rocks. This hollow road may well be as old as the fortified lines, if not older. The woodland track across the hill from east to west enters the fort from the east only a short distance from the point where the hollow way comes up the combe. It is probably later than the ramparts and of Roman origin. The hollow way joins it at both ends, forming a loop from the later route. The western exit from the fort of the east-west track has several puzzling features. This road begins its downward course a little before the natural slope of the hillside begins, and so passes through the earthworks at a level that is well below their base—suggesting that the road was cut at the lower level after the rampart had been made, in order to get an easier gradient. The sloping of the rampart above the cut, however, is consistent with the existence of an original exit at this point, in which case an older track may have been deepened by Roman engineers.

¹ There is a small open quarry in the rampart at the north-eastern corner of the fort, where materials have been taken out to repair a farm road, and where the character of the earth-works can be readily examined. Similar conditions exist near the west entrance into the fort, immediately above Styants Bottom, where the rampart has been cut through to take a modern ride.

But even this view is not free from difficulty. The Roman track, after passing the fortified lines outwards, proceeds westwards down the slope, at right angles to the rampart. Beside it, on its southern side, immediately under the rampart is a little circular spring-fed pool, a so-called "Caesar's well." Starting from the Roman track just outside the rampart, and passing the pool, a deep, hollow track makes its way down the hillside in a southerly direction, running almost parallel with the rampart for a distance of 160 yards, after which it takes a westward turn. The temptation to regard this hollow track as the earliest, pre-Roman, approach to the gateway is strong, but such a view carries with it the implication that the deep exit from the fort, below the base of the rampart, is also pre-Roman. The earth-works on each side of the north-eastern entrance are sloped down towards the gateway, which is plainly co-eval with them. This entrance is now used for farm purposes and is approached from outside by farm tracks. It is not easy to pronounce with any confidence on the prehistoric line of approach—one of the farm tracks does indeed follow a parish boundary line, but has no other indication of considerable age. It may, however, be significant that on this side of the fort, as on the west, there is a fragment of a hollow way, only about sixty-six yards long, for it soon runs on to cultivated land where it is lost. This way begins outside the gateway, and, like the track by the western exit it descends the slope (here very short) by a line parallel with the ramparts, taking a southerly course towards a combe lying under the rock shelters—a combe which would be well fitted for an ancient dwelling place.

There is little doubt that the earth-works were thrown up during the last five centuries B.C., but in the absence of systematic excavation on a large scale the available evidence is too slender to exclude the element of speculation from any suggestion that may be made as to a more precise date. The following facts may, however, be relevant. The fort is a forest hill fort and a large one—the fortified enclosure covers 123 acres. Objects found near the earth-works include about

half a dozen uninscribed gold coins, a large bead, and two circular half-querns of pebbly conglomerate. Such coins were formerly assigned to 150 B.C. or thereabouts, but the trend of recent opinion is to give them a somewhat later date. The bead was found in 1932 in the soil thrown out of a fox earth, immediately below the western rampart. It is nearly an inch in diameter, is made of glass, is deep blue in colour, and is ornamented with white spiral markings. This bead has been dated at the British Museum as between 200 and 100 B.C. There is one and only one precisely similar bead in the Museum, and this latter bead was also found in Kent, at Westerham. The half-querns were found, one in 1865, in the northern rampart, which was then being dismantled,¹ and the other about half a century later, near the same spot. Whether these are the two halves of the same quern cannot now be stated, as the earlier find has disappeared.

British hill forts were the subject of a noteworthy article printed in a recent number of *Antiquity*,² where the iron age forts are classified as Iron Age A, B and C. The B forts are associated with an immigration which did not extend to south-east England, and need not concern us here. The A and C forts are found in south-east England, including Kent. Of these, the A forts are earlier, a general date for them being 300 B.C. The C forts were built by invading Belgic tribes from Gaul who came to Kent about the year 75 B.C.

The evidence from Oldbury, detailed above, seems to point to the earth-works having been made by the Belgic immigrants in the first century B.C. rather than by the earlier (Iron Age A) invaders, but there is as yet no certainty about this point.

The builders of the earthworks were in their turn dispossessed by the Romans, of whose occupation of Oldbury there is ample evidence. It does not follow that they garrisoned the fort continuously after Kent had been pacified, although the indications point in that direction. A few

¹ *Harrison of Ightham*, p. 53.

² *Hill-Forts*, by Christopher Hawkes. *Antiquity*, March, 1931, p. 60.

hundred yards outside the fort, on its north-west side, is a grass meadow called Buckwell, which was a Roman burial ground. The knowledge of its use for that purpose seems to have been preserved either by long tradition or as the result of some early disturbance of the soil, for ancient leases of the farm on which it lies, contained "a covenant . . . that Buckwell field was never to be broken up."¹ About the year 1835 this prohibition was overlooked and the ground was disturbed, when numerous Roman burial urns, regularly placed, were found.²

In 1909 an excavation made in the valley above the swimming pool of which mention has been made, only a short distance from Buckwell, disclosed a *bustum* or place of cremation, where, according to Harrison, "an immense quantity of Celtic and Roman shards were lighted on, and the earth and stones were reddened by fierce heat."³

Harrison regarded several ponds near Oldbury as ancient ponds, dating back to the Roman occupation or earlier. Of one of them, Oxpasture pond, he wrote as follows, "In October, 1893, the Oxpasture pond . . . was cleaned out . . . Owing to long-continued drought . . . the season was very favourable for pond cleaning. A flight of stone steps led down to the water. Pottery was found in the mud, six feet deep. The pottery appeared to be Celtic (possibly Romano-British). The pond is only 500 yards distant from the Roman cemetery, and this fact, in conjunction with the discovery of pottery, suggests that the pond dates back at least to the time of the Roman occupation of Oldbury Camp."

Miscellaneous Roman relics from Oldbury or its immediate neighbourhood include a gold Trajan coin, several

¹ From a letter, *B. Harrison to Reginald A. Smith*, 28th July, 1917.

² See *Arch. Cant.*, II, 1. *On . . . Roman Remains at Plaxtol*, by Major Luard. One sentence (at p. 8), relating to the Buckwell urns, deserves reproduction: "Some of this pottery went into the possession of Mr. Evelyn, of Wootton, the possessor of the soil, some to the British Museum, and some [the farmer] took home, where they were converted into toys for the children and feeding-vessels for the chickens, and, between children and chickens, but two are now left."

³ And see *Arch. Cant.*, XXXIV, 157.

other coins, a Samian dish, lamps, and part of an unguent or pill box made of soapstone.

Although direct proof is lacking, there is good reason for the view that the track across Oldbury from east to west, already mentioned, was on a line of Roman communications through Kent. It is prolonged in the one direction, through Ightham village, towards Aylesford and Maidstone, and, in the other, towards Westerham and Keston.¹

There is little to tell of Oldbury in post-Roman days. There is neither evidence nor tradition of the use of the fort for defensive purposes by any later comers, and it is likely that the hilltop was deserted for the hamlets that lie below it. One at least of these, Oldbury hamlet, has some indications of respectable antiquity. The parish pound is there, and not, as might be expected, in or nearer to the centre of Ightham parish. Three Oldbury field names, Bear Field,² Roundabout Field and Double Dance, seem to contain an elusive hint of ancient assemblies.

The story of the quarrying of the summit of Oldbury in the years following 1830, when considered in relation to the destruction of antiquities which it wrought, may have acquired a sufficiently archæological flavour to deserve a few paragraphs in this paper. According to Harrison, "the character of the eastern and south-eastern faces of the British Camp was entirely destroyed. The huge, beetling outcrop of rock which formed the defence on these sides was removed and what was possibly the most important camp in the south-east of England became shorn of its strong defensive works."³

It is clear from examination of the hilltop in its present state that it was principally or solely the green stone that was sought for quarrying and removal. This rock, which apparently all lay within an area a quarter of a mile square, or

¹ See *Arch. Cant.*, I, 155, 174-5.

² Sometimes, however, written Bare Field.

³ Harrison, who was born in 1837, could have had no personal recollection of the rocks that were destroyed. It is likely that he obtained his impressions from his maternal grandfather, who, to Harrison's lasting regret, was responsible for the quarrying of the stone.

less,¹ was so effectively removed that it is now difficult to find a single block *in situ*.

The method of quarrying was described to Harrison by the witness who gave him particulars of the cave. The surface soil was first removed, down to a layer of "black rock [iron stone] . . . as flat as a table and about six inches thick," which itself overlay the green stone. The sand was next removed from under the green stone, which was "a solid rock five to six feet thick." A spherical mass of iron, called a dumb dolly, was then used to break down the exposed masses of rock to a size suitable for removal.

The buff-coloured grit, although a hard rock, does not seem to have been sought for road-making. But for this fortunate circumstance it is likely that all the rock shelters and rock fortifications of Oldbury would have been destroyed.

In this paper I have tried to bring out the great, perhaps the unique interest of Oldbury, owing to its long-continued occupation by people after people from early prehistoric times. There is more to be learnt about this truly ancient monument than has yet been discovered, for a woodland area must retain many of its secrets so long as the trees remain. But while skilled excavation at carefully selected spots might yield interesting results, it is not entirely a matter for regret that exploration is difficult. An old man who remembered the hill before its summit was quarried, writing to Harrison from New York in 1890, ended his letter with these words, "Your grandfather Biggs turned Oldbury Hill upside down, and perhaps covered up all the caves." It is to be hoped that future excavators will not add to the destruction that has already taken place.²

¹ This area can be roughly made out to-day (a) by hollows which represent the sites of excavations that were made to get out the stone, and (b) by numerous fragments of the green stone which were left behind when the excavated blocks were broken up for removal.

² The writer takes this opportunity of acknowledging the courtesy of Mr. H. A. Hooker, the owner of the greater part of Oldbury, in allowing him to explore its recesses, to dig, and to wander at will. Mr. Hooker is keenly alive to the natural beauty and archæological interest of the place, and the earth-works have been scheduled under the Ancient Monuments Protection Acts. Oldbury, is, however, on the very verge of a building zone, and the time may be not far distant when development becomes imminent. The acquisition of the whole area by the National Trust, if a suitable opportunity should occur, is therefore eminently desirable.