

EARTHWORKS ON HAYES AND WEST  
WICKHAM COMMONS.

BY A. H. A. HOGG, B. H. ST. J. O'NEIL AND C. E. STEVENS.

THE object of this note is to put on record work which has been done by the writers on these earthworks during the past few years. When the work was started it was intended to make a comprehensive examination of the whole area, but, as it is most improbable that this will be possible, at any rate within a reasonable time, it seems desirable to publish an account of what has so far been done. Many hut circles, and a few minor sections of bank and ditch, have been added to the number of those already known. One hut circle has been partly excavated, and a section has been cut across the ditch of the causewayed earthwork.

SURVEY.

In preparing the survey use was made of Petrie's plans published in *Archæologia Cantiana*, XIII. The earthworks are shown in their relative positions, and the modern road system is indicated for convenience. No attempt has been made to represent the correct sizes of the huts.

HUT CIRCLES.

The description of the earthworks may begin with the hut circles, since these are numerically the most important. Their general character is clear from the drawings of the excavated example. The diameter may be anything from 10 feet to 30 feet, and the depth of the central depression varies from 2 or 3 feet to a barely perceptible hollow. The position of the entrance is sometimes visible as a gap in the low bank which encircles the hollow, but it does not seem to be consistently placed at any particular point of the compass. More huts probably remain to be located, especially in the

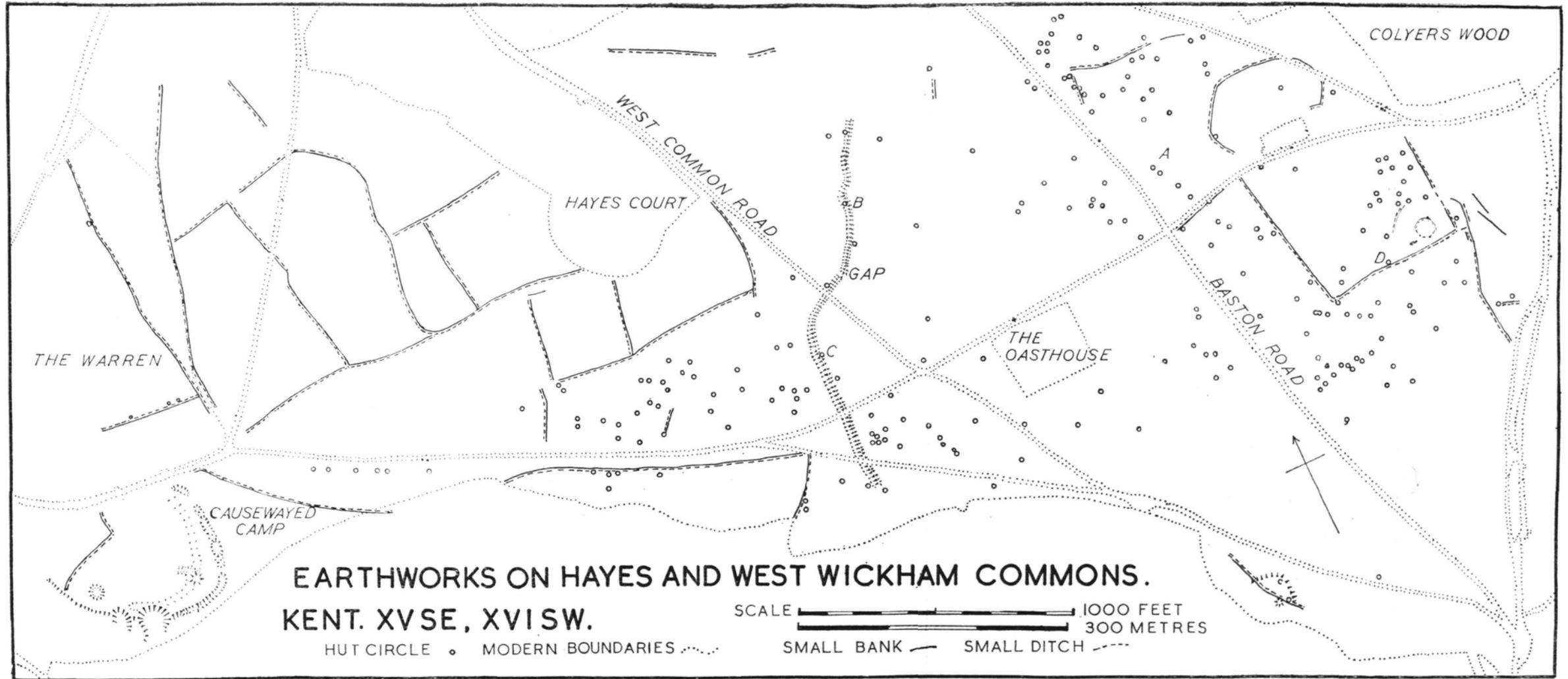


PLATE I.

area north of "The Oast House", between West Common Road and Baston Road, which is now thickly overgrown, and there may also be some north-west of Colyers Wood.

#### ENCLOSURES.

As the plan indicates, these huts are distributed over the greater part of the common, but cluster most thickly near two groups of enclosures. Both groups are formed by banks and ditches of about 10 feet overall width, with a "C D vertical" height of 2 or 3 feet. In the western group the plan of the enclosures shows a similarity to a Celtic field pattern, although the areas enclosed are rather larger than Curwen's norm,<sup>1</sup> and traces of lynchetting were suspected but cannot be regarded as certain. The banks lying nearest to the southern boundary of the common may perhaps be comparatively recent boundary banks. In the eastern group the hut at D cuts into and is therefore later than one of the banks. In the south-eastern corner of the rectangular enclosure there is a curious circular bank of very slight profile with an internal ditch, and a small rectangular projection on the north-eastern side. There is no evidence as to its purpose. A somewhat similar work on Chiselhurst Common is known as the Cockpit, and another such earthwork on the same common was trenched with indefinite results by Messrs. E. L. Mann and Dennis G. King.<sup>2</sup>

#### DYKES.

Between the two groups of enclosures a dyke with its ditch on the western side (overall width about 40 feet, C D vertical height about 5 feet in the best preserved part) runs roughly north and south across the common. A short distance east of West Common Road are a gap and a causeway which seem to be original. The ends of the dyke, which seem to mark its original terminations, do not now coincide with any natural obstacles, although its southern end is near to a steep hillside. It seems reasonable to infer

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquity*, I, 272-80.

<sup>2</sup> *Kentish Times*, July 24th, 1926.

that it originally crossed an area which had been cleared of the denser undergrowth. It is clear from the present state of parts of the common that the natural vegetation, if undisturbed,<sup>1</sup> could be an appreciable obstacle to traffic. All the huts, excepting a few at the south end, would be within this hypothetical clearing. A hut at B is constructed over the silted ditch, and one at C cuts into the back of the bank. Thus some at least of the huts are later than the dyke. The relative age of other huts is uncertain. About 800 feet south-west of the "Road" of "Baston Road" is a raised earthen platform, with two hut circles on it and a small mound, perhaps a barrow, near by. The platform is crossed by a small bank and ditch, certainly later.

#### CAUSEWAYED CAMP.

The only earthworks remaining to be described are the causewayed Camp and its associated barrows. Their character is clear from the plan and section, and, as a detailed account has already been published,<sup>2</sup> it is unnecessary to repeat it here.

The trench across the ditch produced no dateable relics. It yielded two or three nondescript flint flakes and some moderately large pieces of oak charcoal, and it was possible to make an examination of the pollen in the peaty sand. Other details are shown in the section. Dr. K. B. Blackburn, of King's College, Newcastle-on-Tyne, who kindly examined the charcoal and pollen, reports that the latter "seems to indicate an Oak-Hazel wood in the neighbourhood with some Holly. Odd grains of Alder and Heather suggest that these grew not so far away."

#### EXCAVATED HUT CIRCLE.

The hut excavated was that marked A north-east of "The Oast House" and east of Baston Road.

For two days at Easter, 1934, one of us conducted trial

<sup>1</sup> It is said that it was much clearer fifty years ago, when sheep grazed on the common.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquity*, 1937, p. 223-5.

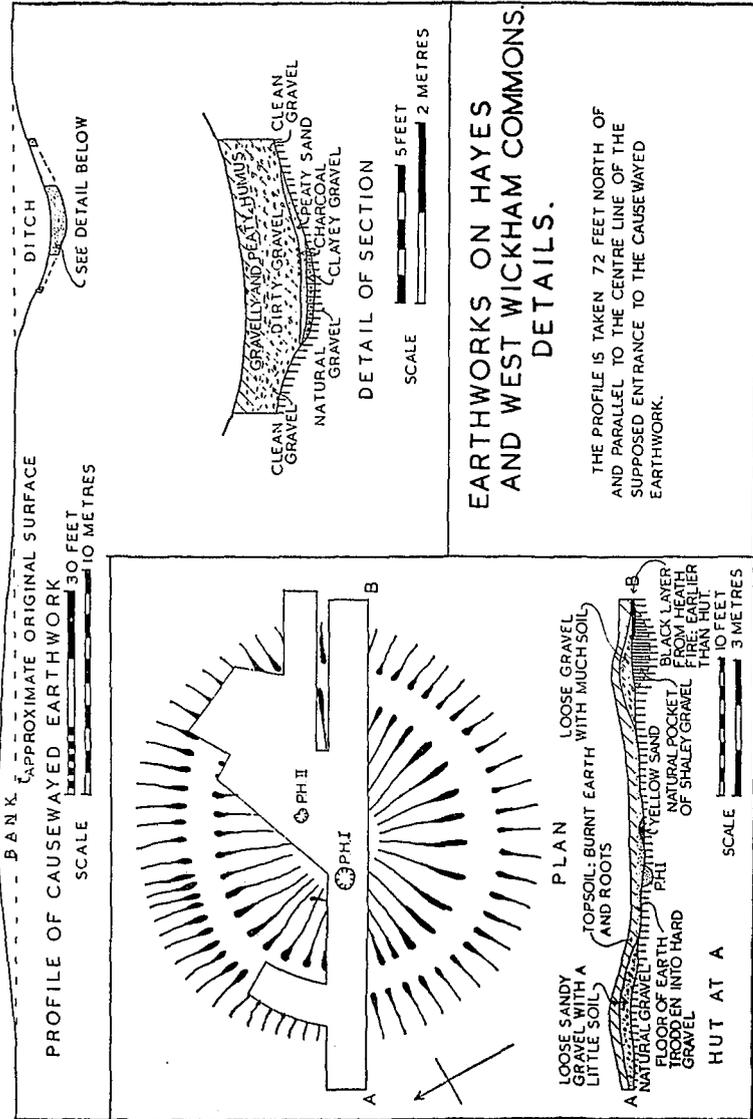


PLATE II.

excavations at this hut. He was ably and energetically assisted by Mr. B. F. Davis, Mr. Davis's daughter, and her friend; Mr. I. D. Margary also most kindly attended on one day, and wielded his trusty spade. This help was much appreciated.

A trench was dug across the hut and subsequently enlarged towards the east for the examination of the depression, which as usual seemed to mark the entrance. Other extensions were made in a search for post-holes. The floor of the hut was made of a hard dirty gravel, which seemed to be merely the result of the introduction of earth on to the natural clean gravel by human feet. It may have been levelled or even slightly dug out, since the material of the surrounding bank at the western end of the section was a loose sandy gravel, like the subsoil itself, with only a little mixture of soil. At the other end of the section the bank material, although similar, contained more soil and was rather grey in colour. It seems to have been the topsoil which was removed from the site of the hut floor during the construction of the hut. The black layer under this part of the bank is probably the result of a heath fire before the hut was built, such as had recently devastated this part of the Common in 1934. As a result of this modern fire some twenty more huts were evident. The black layer extended further under the bank on the northern side of this trench.

No post-holes were found on the line of the bank, nor were there any at the entrance. Two were, however, found near the centre of the floor, and it is likely that a third would be found in the unexcavated southern part of the hut. Post-hole 1 was 3 feet in diameter; post-hole 2 roughly 2 feet. They were doubtless for the supports of a roof, the outer edge of which rested upon the surrounding bank. There is no reason to suppose that this bank was originally of any considerable height, and there is no method of ascertaining whether or not there was a central hole in the roof. The deposit of yellow sand is of unknown purpose. There was no sign of a hearth and there were no finds apart from a few primary flint flakes.

## CONCLUSIONS.

No evidence of date is available, except rather uncertainly for the causewayed camp. Here the presence of a bell barrow constructed over the apparent entrance suggests a date not later than the Bronze Age, and the blunt V section of the causewayed ditch, with its slight evidence of occupation, may be compared with that of the Neolithic site at Abingdon. On the whole, it seems probable that the earthwork is in fact Neolithic, rather than an unfinished work of later date.

The huts may belong to almost any period, but the absence of areas covered with charcoal fragments allays the suspicion, aroused by the name Colyers Wood, that they were constructed by charcoal burners. As far as the writers know, no ancient pottery has been found on Hayes or West Wickham Commons, although Belgic pottery has recently been found at the site of the new school in Hayes, and at Hayes Court there was preserved (in 1933) the remains of a second century Roman cremation burial, which was found about ten years earlier close to the main gate of that house, when a new tennis court was being made.

It is therefore still almost as impossible to estimate the age of these huts as it was in 1878 and 1886 when George Clinch excavated some of them.<sup>1</sup> The most that can be said about them is that the associated enclosures, and therefore the huts themselves, are unlikely to be earlier than the Iron Age. They might even be as late as Roman times, but, if so, the absence of relics is surprising in such an intensively Romanized district.

The area deserves further investigation, but it seems clear that a very extensive campaign of excavation would be necessary fully to determine the significance of the sites. Even lacking any relics from the huts themselves, a comparison of the pollen sealed by their banks with that beneath the adjacent barrows and the Iron Age camp at Holwood might enable the sites to be dated with fair certainty.

<sup>1</sup> See his *Antiquarian Jottings*, 122-5, *V.O.H. Kent*, I, 315-16, and Appendix.

## APPENDIX

BY B. H. ST. J. O'NEIL

As recorded in *A History of Hayes* (Lovat Dickson & Thompson, 1935) by the late Canon H. Percy Thompson, sometime Rector of Hayes, there is now in the possession of the parish of Hayes a large folio volume made by Charles Kadwell, c. 1833. It contains much material of interest in connection with the history of Hayes, which until recently was a quiet Kentish village. Canon Thompson, who was largely responsible for the purchase of this volume on behalf of his parish, inserted in it various more recent items. These include a painting of the Roman burial, which was found c. 1923 at Hayes Court (*v.p.* p. 32). There are the bases of two pots, and a *sestertius* of Antonius Pius (Cos II or Cos III). The larger vessel is of buff ware, but only the lower part was preserved, when found.

There are also tracings of two plans made by George Clinch, which give an indication of some of the pits, which he excavated, but after considerable research the writer has been unable to find any later plan, which gives details of his later work. Canon Thompson had also various letters of 1878 from Clinch to the Rev. G. V. Read, then Rector, such as one of November 23rd, in which he says that he hopes "to be able to excavate 1 or 2 of the pit dwellings next Tuesday at 2 p.m." These letters with the plans also provide some assistance in tracing the course of Clinch's excavations.