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THE CAUSEWAYED EARTHWORK AND THE ELIZABETHAN REDOUBT ON WEST WICKHAM COMMON

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Thanks to a recent note (see below) the components of the group of earthworks on West Wickham Common (at N.G.R. TQ 398 652), shown as 'Camp' on the older O.S. maps, can now be satisfactorily distinguished. Two of particular interest are: the small ring, unimpressive in itself but apparently the only documented example still existing in Britain of the smallest type of sixteenth-century redoubt; and the causewayed earthwork, probably Neolithic but perhaps an unfinished work of the Iron Age.

The earthworks were surveyed by the writer in 1937[1] and in the same year a very small cut was made in the ditch;[2] the results are re-drawn here (Fig. 1). The site is a small steep-sided promontory at about 300 ft. (90 m.) above O.D., which projects westward from the gravel plateau of Hayes Common. From west to east, the visible features are: (a) a broad shallow depression, possibly natural but perhaps an old hollow trackway; (b) a small bank with a ditch to the north-west, all very much eroded; (c) a more substantial bank, L-shaped in plan, with a ditch on the east; (d) a small ring; (e) a mound resembling a barrow, and (f), a ditch, interrupted by causeways and accompanied on the west by a low bank of upcast (stippled on plan).

To place the remains in their context, the adjacent earthworks on Hayes Common must be mentioned. These comprise two groups of enclosures accompanied by numerous small low earthen rings.

[1] A.H.A. Hogg and B.H. St. J. O'Neil. 'A causewayed Earthwork in West Kent', *Antiquity*, xi (1937), 223–5.

[2] in n. 3 below, 30–1.

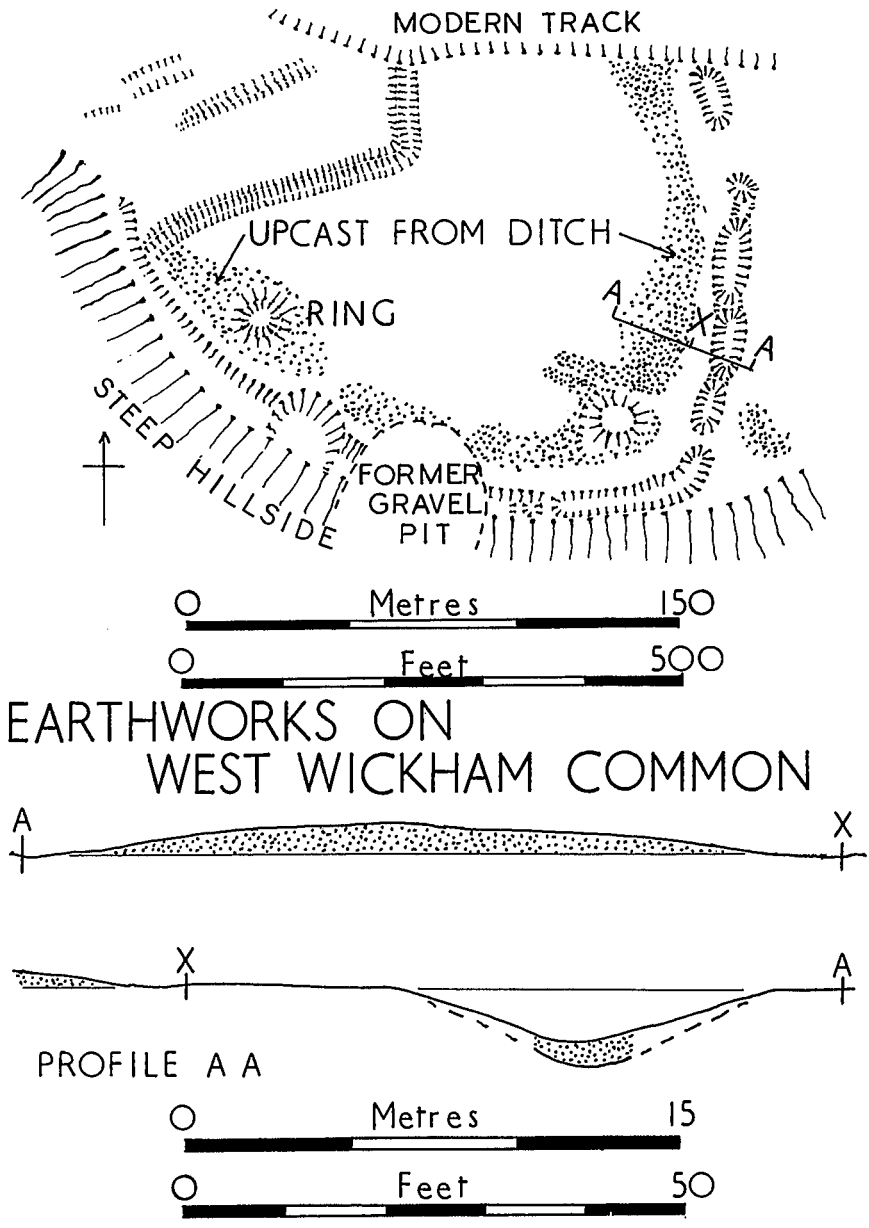
MODERN TRACK
UPCAST FROM DITCH
RING
A
X
A
STEEP HILLSIDE
FORMER GRAVEL PIT
O Metres 150
O Feet 500
EARTHWORKS ON WEST WICKHAM COMMON
A
X
X
A
PROFILE A A
O Metres 15
O Feet 50

Fig. 1.

Surveys of these made by Flinders Petrie in 1880 were transferred, with more rings added, to the background of a modern map in 1941, and published with further discussion.[3] More recently some work was done on the western group by B. Philp in the context of his valuable account of the discovery and excavation of a Bronze Age settlement.[4] Although Philp offers alternative hypotheses to explain the small rings, the old interpretation, that they are hut-circles, still seems to the writer to be the most likely. Their date, and that of the field systems, remain quite uncertain; even the very broad limits proposed by Philp seem too precise.

The writer revisited West Wickham Common in November 1980 and verified that his 1937 survey correctly represented those remains. The area is now rather more overgrown and the gravel pit to the south has been refilled, but otherwise there has been little change. Considering the remains in greater detail, the features (a) and (b) are very eroded and are unrelated to any of the other earthworks, so nothing useful can be said about them. Philp[5] suggests that the L-shaped bank and ditch (c) should be associated with the Hayes Common enclosure-banks, and although these latter are on average rather smaller the conclusion seems probable. Before discussing features (d) to (f) the documentary evidence needs to be examined.

Camden,[6] writing in about 1600 states: 'As for the other small intrenchment not far off (*sc.* from Caesar's Camp, Holwood) by West Wickham it was cast in fresh memory when old Sir Christopher Heydon, a man of great command in those parts, trained the country people.' This reference was noted in the Victoria County History[7] and in the 1937 note;[8] both commented on the difficulty of reconciling it with the visible structures. Philp was not primarily concerned with the West Wickham earthworks, but adds a brief discussion to his account of the remains on Hayes Common;[9] after quoting Camden, he concludes that the causewayed ditch was probably constructed about 1570–80. Hasted[10] says that there were

[3] A.H.A. Hogg, B.H.St. J. O'Neil and C.E. Stevens. 'Earthworks on Hayes and West Wickham Commons', *Arch. Cant.* xliv (1941), 28–34.

[4] B. Philp, *Excavations in West Kent,* (1973), 32–8.

[5] in n. 4, 37.

[6] W. Camden, *Britannia,* 1610 edn. 326; or 1695 edn., 187, n. 7, from which the text used here is taken.

[7] VCH (Kent), i (1908), 402–3.

[8] n. 1 above.

[9] n. 5 above. Philp does not mention the 1937 survey, n. 1 above.

[10] E. Hasted, *History . . . of the County of Kent.* (1797–1801, facsimile 1972) ii, 33. The earthwork is mentioned on p. 41.

two successive Sir Christopher Heydons (who seem to be confused in the *Dictionary of National Biography*); the younger inherited from his father in the twenty-second year of Queen Elizabeth I. Presumably, in the context of Camden's note, the relevant Sir Christopher was the elder, which would place the construction of the 'small intrenchment' within the two decades 1560–80; enthusiasm for military training would perhaps have been greater early in the new reign.

The difficulty in interpreting the group of earthworks has, until recently, been the lack of any convincing identification for Sir Christopher's 'small intrenchment'. Published examples of small field defences of the relevant period are scarce, and almost all are of the seventeenth rather than the sixteenth century. The most accessible source is now the description of the Civil War Siegeworks at Newark-on-Trent, where with one exception all the small works are quadrilateral.[11] At West Wickham everything except the L-shaped bank is curvilinear.

This difficulty has now been resolved by a note by J.R. Kenyon[12] which shows that three circular earthworks were built to protect the Kentish coast as late as 1540. That near Sandown, illustrated in that account, seems to have had four, or perhaps six, embrasures for cannon, and no entrance; the other two, not illustrated, each had an entrance on the landward side. No dimensions are given, but the drawing suggests that the Sandown example was roughly 100 or 150 ft. (30 or 45 m.) in diameter. These were major official military works; the country people are unlikely to have cast anything nearly so large.

An intrenchment made between 1560 and 1580, therefore, might well have been circular or nearly so. Some indication of the probable size implied by the term 'small' can be deduced from the plans given in the Newark Siegeworks report, for although the shapes are different the space needed to deploy and service the artillery is likely to have been about the same.

One of the largest surviving forts there is the Queen's Sconce (Monument 2; this and all subsequent monument numbers refer to

[11] *Newark on Trent. The Civil War Siegeworks,* RCHM England, (HMSO 1964). the pentagonal work illustrated in A.H. Allcroft, *Earthwork of England,* (1908), 608, Fig. 209, probably represents the earthwork round Stoke Lodge, which is not a siegework; see *Newark* 44, Fig. 13.

[12] J.R. Kenyon. 'A Note on Two Original Drawings by William Stukeley depicting "The Three Castles Which Keep the Downs"' *Antiq. Journ.,* lviii (1978), 162–3 and Pl. LI.

the Newark report). This encloses about 3200 sq. yds. (2675 sq. m.; here and subsequently the area is that within the crest of the bank unless otherwise specified). To judge from the plan given (Fig. 17) it held 16 guns, and is therefore unlikely to have been regarded as small by a contemporary writer. The smallest surviving works are: the Scots' Redoubt built within the Sconce at Muskham Bridge (Mon. no. 3), 40 by 60 ft. (12 by 18 m.) enclosing 267 sq. yds. (about 220 sq. m.); the Scots' Redoubt (no. 16) 55 ft. (17 m.) square, of 336 sq. yds. (281 sq. m.); and the Crankley Point Redoubt (no. 17) 65 ft. (20 m.) square, of 469 sq. yds. (392 sq. m.). There is also the Crankley Lane Raised Battery (no. 4), an oval mound about 3 ft. high, with a flat top having diameters 40 and 36 ft. (12 and 11 m.), giving an area of 125 sq. yds. (105 sq. m.); this may belong to an earlier siege, in 1536. A small work of the relevant date, therefore, is very unlikely indeed to have enclosed more than 500 sq. yds. or 400 sq. m.; that at West Wickham was merely a training exercise, so may well have been much smaller.

Among the existing earthworks there, the causewayed enclosure has ill-defined limits, but if the defensive perimeter is taken as having been about 15 ft. from the inner lip of the ditch the area is at least that of an oval with axes of 420 and 600 ft. (128 and 183 m.), that is 22000 sq. yds. (18400 sq. m.), nearly seven times as large as the Queen's Sconce at Newark. Size alone, therefore, shows that it cannot be the structure recorded by Camden.

The mound is comparable with the Crankley Lane Raised Battery in size, but is higher (see below) and has a rounded top. The crucial difference, though, is that its sides are equally steep all round, whereas the Battery has a gentle slope on one side to give access to the platform. The ring, on the other hand, is not only of appropriate area, but does look very like a miniature version of the Sandown earthwork.

So far as certainty is possible from surface evidence, then, the ring can be identified as the small intrenchment cast up under Sir Christopher Heydon's direction. It fits the definition of a small redoubt, and in view of the rarity of identifiable examples of this date a fairly detailed description seems desirable. The crest of the bank follows a circle of 37 ft. (11 m.) diameter, enclosing 120 sq. yds. (nearly 100 sq. m.). It now measures 35 ft. (10.5 m.) wide overall and stands about 2 ft. (0.6 m.) high, but the floor of the interior is perhaps 6 in. (0.15 m.) below the ground outside. The top is 4 ft. (1.2 m.) wide, and may originally have been nearly flat, but its edges are now about 4 in. (0.1 m.) below its crest. All these dimensions are rough, for the ring is thickly overgrown and its outline is not sharply defined. Vertical measurements were merely

taken from a stretched tape estimated as level 'by eye'.

The mound is about 5 ft. (1.6 m.) high and has an overall diameter of roughly 60 ft. (18 m.). The ditch is not as obvious on the north as shown on the 1937 plan, but whether that is the result of erosion or a mistake in that survey cannot now be decided. The writer would now regard the enlarged portion on the south-west as being the result of later disturbance, probably a very small excavation for gravel. A narrow trench partly encroaching on the summit has almost certainly been caused by a footpath running from north-west to south-east across the top. There is no corresponding slot at right-angles to it, such as would have been present had the mound been formed or used as the base for a windmill. Another remotely possible parallel is offered by the 'tumuli' on Dartford Heath, which seem to belong to the interesting complex of earthworks associated with the nineteenth-century military encampment there. Unfortunately, there seems to be no published description of these remains, but the mounds there were closely associated with short runs of rectangular pits (for ammunition storage ?) and circular drainage-slots for tent emplacements; neither of these features is found at West Wickham. The Dartford mounds are also smaller and more steeply conical (so far as the writer's recollection goes, but that may be at fault after some forty years).

The West Wickham mound, therefore, can be confidently accepted as a barrow, as its appearance suggests, and subject as always to the reservations imposed by relying solely on surface evidence, as covering a burial, either of the Bronze Age, or rather less probably Saxon.

The causewayed earthwork remains to be considered. The survey in 1937 was prompted by its resemblance to the Causewayed Camps which had not long before been recognised as an important and widespread type of Neolithic structure. The trench in the ditch on the east side was necessarily very small, as it had to be opened and refilled in a single day,[13] and the optimistic hope that it might yield dating evidence was not fulfilled. Nevertheless, it did establish the original profile, and showed that there is charcoal present; a similar small cut would almost certainly yield enough material for radiocarbon estimate of date.

The following description given in 1937 remains valid; metric

[13] cf. n. 4, 32. Although Philp locates the probe in the south ditch and dates it to 1934, his footnote shows that this cut is meant. He describes (p. 37) the fill as 'shallow' and the profile of the ditch as 'sharp'.

equivalents have been inserted. 'The top of the promontory is practically level but begins to fall away to the north–west . . . Any remains on the north side have been destroyed by a road. On the south the hillside falls very steeply, and has been dug out at the top to form a flat terrace, with a steep scarp, six feet (1.8 m.) or more in height, above.' (the writer would now interpret this 'terrace' as a silted-up ditch) 'To the east, after passing two old pits which have mutilated the south side, the terrace and scarp gradually become a ditch with two small causeways. The ditch rapidly deepens, and then turns north to cross the neck of the promontory. In this north–south ditch there are five causeways of varying breadth. Three dip to about 18 inches (0.5 m.) below the ground level, the other two are level. The ditch itself is flat-bottomed and varies from about 4 ft. to 6 ft. in depth (1.2 to 1.8 m.). The material from the ditch has been deposited in vague, low, amorphous mounds well back from the edge of the ditch. Except near the supposed entrance these seldom exceed two feet (0.6 m.) in height, and can never have been of any defensive value. Generally there is a small projection adjacent to each causeway.

Opposite the wide level causeway near the northern end the bank is continuous, but at the smaller level causeway near the south-east corner an elaboration of the plan suggests a probable entrance. Outside the ditch is a low mound, roughly L-shaped. Inside, the low bank increases in height to about 3 ft. (1 m.), and a straight ditch, the bottom of which is about natural ground level, passes through the line of the bank and extends into the interior of the camp, bounded by two banks about 2 ft. (0.6 m.) high.'

Soon after this survey a measured profile (AA) was taken 72 ft. (22 m.) north of the centre-line of the supposed entrance, and the small cut was made in the ditch. At this point, which is fairly representative, the upcast from the ditch stands nearly 3 ft. (1 m.) high, with very ill-defined toes some 80 ft. (24 m.) apart; the outer toe is about 25 ft. (7.5 m.) from the present inner lip of the ditch. The ditch is now 35 ft. (10.5 m.) wide at ground level and 5 ft. (1.5 m.) deep, with a bottom which is slightly rounded, not perfectly flat as described above. The original depth proved to be 7.9 ft. (2.4 m.), again with the bottom slightly rounded. The rapid silt was about 6 in. (0.15 m.) thick, comprising two roughly equal layers, the lower clayey gravel, the upper peaty sand. Above these the fill was dirty gravel.[14] Assuming that this was all provided by the erosion of the

[14] For detail of the section, see n. 2 above.

ditch sides, the original width at ground level would have been about 25 ft. (7.6 m.). No significant relics were found, but there were several moderately large pieces of oak charcoal immediately on the surface of the rapid silt; the possibility of radiocarbon dating was of course not even envisaged in 1937. Whether Philp was correct in describing the profile as sharp and nearly 3 ft. of filling as shallow is open to argument, depending on a precise definition of those terms, but the surface now seems stable. Nevertheless, no great emphasis should be placed on the depth of silting, for the gravel of the common is not very resistant to weathering.

Surface evidence, however, shows that both the Ring and the Mound are superimposed on the ditch upcast. On the interpretation offered here, the former merely implies a date earlier than the sixteenth century for the Causewayed Earthwork, but it must at latest be earlier than the Saxon period if the mound is accepted as a barrow. Having regard to its character, it must almost certainly be of the pre-Roman Iron Age or earlier. If of the Iron Age, the remains correspond to an unfinished promontory fort. The enclosed area would have been at least 4½ acres (1.8 ha.), small in its regional context but still considerable. If on the other hand the mound is of the Bronze Age, which its appearance suggests as the most likely date, the Causewayed Earthwork must in fact be Neolithic, as was originally supposed. Whether it should be regarded as unfinished in that case remains uncertain. In some Causewayed Camps the ditch upcast was used to form a defensive bank, but so many have been ploughed flat that it is impossible to say whether that was an invariable practice.

In view of the potential interest of the site, a minimal excavation adjacent to the 1937 cut would seem justifiable, in order to recover more of the charcoal, for radiocarbon dating; although, as the writer is aware, such a suggestion runs contrary to accepted archaeological practice in two ways (at least). First, 'one radiocarbon date is no radiocarbon date'; but the alternatives here are, very roughly, 3000 B.C., 500 B.C., and A.D. 1600, and not even the most 'archaeologically unacceptable' radiocarbon date is likely to be 'wrong' by a millennium. Second, the type of excavation politely described as a *sondage* is, generally rightly, condemned; but on this site the disturbance required would be negligible and to establish the correct archaeological status of the remains would be more than adequate compensation. The decision whether such an investigation would in fact be desirable, though, must of course rest with archaeologists directly concerned with this region.