

On the Types of Ancient British Earthworks.

BY THE REV. F. WARRE.

IT can hardly be but that researches into the habits and investigations of the remains of a people whose existence as a nation terminated at the time from which the written history of these islands takes its origin, must always be more or less unsatisfactory, and their results at best little more than ingenious guesses at the truth; and the events which we know to have taken place in this country render this observation peculiarly applicable to all attempts to explain the vestiges which even now remain on our uncultivated hills and downs of that race which occupied this country before the period of the Roman invasion. All that we really know of them amounts to this: that a race of warlike savages, not altogether destitute of intellectual cultivation, a branch of the great Celtic family, had from a very early time possessed the island; that they had a religion retaining some vestiges of primeval civilization and knowledge; a priesthood whose attainments in astronomy and mechanics, from whatever source derived,

were not inconsiderable ; that other tribes, from time to time, had come to the coast from neighbouring shores of continental Europe, among which the Belgæ, who took possession of a considerable part of the southern and western counties, appear to have held the highest rank both in military and domestic civilization ; that long before the time of Cæsar they understood the art of mining, and carried on a considerable trade in the produce of their mines, not only with their neighbours on the coast of Gaul, but probably with the Carthaginians and even Phœnicians. During the Roman occupation, the country, though suffering extreme depression, became really a part of the civilized world, and before they finally left it was inhabited by a polished and Christian people, in no degree deficient in refinement proper to the inhabitants of an important province of the great Roman empire ; but the great northern hive was now sending forth its swarms of fierce barbarians, and, though strongly opposed for full 200 years by the brave and warlike Romano-Britons, eventually swept from the face of the earth almost every relic of Roman civilization. Even the language disappeared from the greater part of the island ; and even where the northern barbarian did not carry his exterminating arms, the population, isolated from the civilized world, rapidly degenerated into barbarism, and have left us no records either of the Celtic or Romano-Briton periods, except a few poems, which must be considered in some degree mythical, and must be followed most cautiously even by those who, like myself, are inclined to attribute to them very considerable importance as historical documents ; and yet, in spite of their vague and unsatisfactory results, these investigations are wonderfully fascinating when once they are entered upon.

It is hardly possible that any one can pass an earthwork disturbing the regular beauty of the velvet turf of a chalk down, with its apparently shapeless masses, without wishing to know by whom, and for what purpose, it was constructed, and stopping to take a closer view of it. When he observes marks of a rude engineering science, the entrance covered by flanking defences and commanding courses of platforms, he must wish to know its general plan, and speculates upon the use of its different enclosures; when he finds hut-circles in sheltered recesses, and sepulchral barrows on open downs, and observes the difference between the domestic pottery of the one and the cinerary urns of the other; when he observes the connection and means of communication established through long lines of country, by forts and beacons placed within sight of each other, and traces the roads leading from one station to another, still visible on the smooth surface of the down, it is impossible to resist the temptation to search for some clue to the habits of those whose vestiges these things are, and if he discovers in works apparently of the same period, and evidently of military origin, types so completely distinct as clearly to indicate some difference either in the intention or the nation of the constructors, to me at least he would need no excuse for devoting some portion of his time to the attempt to elucidate the mystery of so extraordinary a phenomenon.

That this is the case, and that there are at least two perfectly distinct types of military works to be found among those commonly supposed to be British camps, will, I think, be allowed by any one who will take the trouble of inspecting the accompanying ground-plans.

One, which I suppose to be that used in the construction of purely military works, is usually found occupying isolated

hills or the extremities of high ground, artificially divided from the adjoining country, and is most commonly surrounded by a system of intrenchments, all apparently of one plan, and constructed for the simple purpose of defence; while the other, which I suppose to be that used in the construction of fortified towns intended for permanent habitation is divided into two, or perhaps, more frequently three, or even more, portions, protected by fortifications varying in strength and importance, in some cases bearing a striking analogy to the plan of a mediæval castle, consisting of a keep and an inner and outer bailey. In these cases, that part which answers to the keep appears to me to have been the stronghold; that of second importance probably was intended for the place of refuge for the neighbouring population in times of danger; while the outer enclosure, which is usually much larger, and less strongly fortified than the other two, might have been occupied by the cattle, herds of which constituted the greater part of the wealth of the primitive tribes which then inhabited this country.

I cannot, perhaps, explain this difference of construction better than by describing somewhat in detail the Camp of Cadbury, a very perfect specimen of the first-mentioned type; and those of Worle Hill and Castle Neroche, which afford equally good examples of the second.

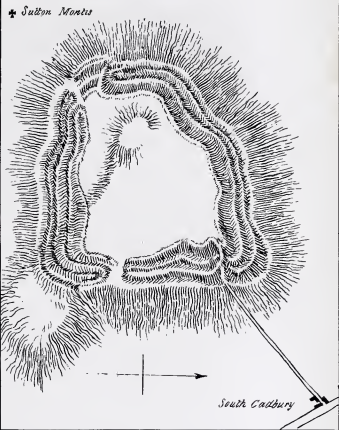
Cadbury Castle,* which I have chosen as a specimen of the first, or purely military type, is thus described in the additions to Camden, published with Gibson's edition: "Leaving the sea, our next direction is the river Ivel, near which is Camalet, mentioned by Mr. Camden as a place of great antiquity. The hill is a mile in compass. At the top are

* See plate VI.

BELGIC OR MILITARY TYPE.

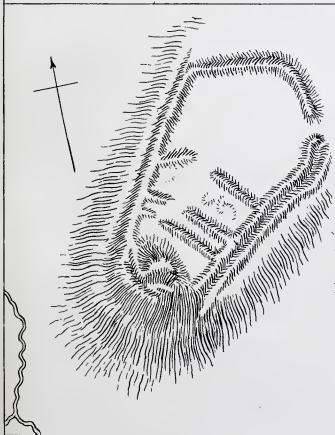


Sorbiodunum, Wiltshire.



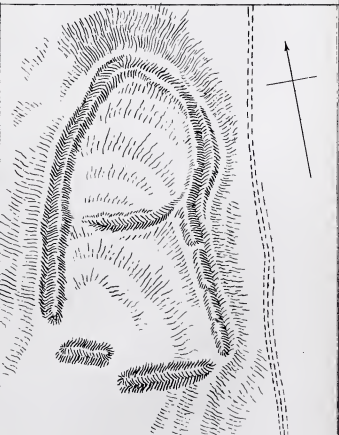
Cadbury, Somerset.

ABORIGINAL OR PERMANENT TOWNS TYPE.



Castle Combe, Wilts.

On stone by T.G. Crump



Winklebury, Wilts.

Ebd., lith. Thurton.

four trenches, and between each of them an earthen wall. On the very top of the hill is an area of twenty acres, (it is really much larger,) where in several places, as Leland observes, may be seen the foundations of walls, and there was much dusky blue stone, which the people of the adjoining village had carried away." At the present time the high walls, and almost all the foundations of walls, have disappeared, as well as all traces of the internal arrangement of the place; but the outer fortifications are sufficiently well preserved to enable us to make out their plan satisfactorily. Whatever outworks may have existed have been obliterated by cultivation, with the exception of some platforms on the south side; but there are the vast trenches with their earthen walls, on some of which the remains of a work of dry masonry may still be observed. Three entrances may also be clearly made out; that on the east side has been so much altered for the convenience of the occupants of the area within the works as to have entirely lost its ancient character; but it seems probable that there was an original entrance at this point. The next is at the south-east angle of the place, and having crossed the outer defences, opens into the moat between the inner agger and the one next to it, the path over the inner agger being steep and narrow, and probably at one time being strongly fortified. This opening of the approach into the trench is not uncommon in British works. At the south-west angle is the main entrance, which leads through all the intrenchments up to the area of the fort, commanded by flanking works, and probably by platforms for slingers; and at the highest point of the ground within the works there are still vestiges of what may have been the foundations of an interior fortification. On the north side the ancient works have been so much disturbed by modern

fences that it is not easy to decide whether there was an entrance in that direction or not.

Now this appears to me to be a purely military work. All the fortifications seem of one plan, and to have reference to each other. That there is no division such as I have mentioned as existing in the other type, nor any appearance of a cattle enclosure, which I believe will always be found in connection with a British city, which, however strongly fortified, was constructed for other purposes besides those of a purely warlike character.

I will now proceed to describe the works on Worle Hill and Castle Neroche, which I have chosen as specimens of the second type ; and my excuse for inflicting a description of both upon the meeting is that I believe them, though both of the same type, to be of very different dates.

Of the fortification on Worle Hill, Mr. Rutter gives the following account : "Worle Hill* is an elevated ridge, about three miles long, but not more than a furlong in breadth. The western end projects into the Bristol Channel above the town of Weston, and is formed into one of the most remarkable fortifications in England." The length of the space enclosed from the inner rampart on the east to the point of the hill on the west is about a quarter of a mile, and the medium breadth is about eighty yards, making an area, as supposed, of about eighteen or twenty acres. Before arriving at the outer rampart, seven ditches are sunk across the ridge of the hill. There are two ramparts, about fifteen feet high from the bottom of the ditch, composed entirely of stones. These ramparts, with their corresponding ditches, cross the hill in a part where it is about 100 yards broad, and then, turning west-

* See Plan of Worle Hill Encampment, *Proceedings of Society for 1851*, p. 64.

ward, are continued as far as the security of the station required. Those on the north are soon rendered unnecessary by the rock, which is there precipitous. Those on the south are gradually blended into the natural declivity of the hill, which is nearly as steep as the rampart itself. There can be no doubt but that these ramparts were originally walls of dry masonry erected on the side of the trenches from which the materials were taken. There is, however, no appearance of walls by the trenches to the east of the main rampart, which were probably intended to render the level ground on that side more difficult to an invading force, while the stones taken from them furnished materials for the immense ramparts of that part, which I may be allowed to call the keep of the place, which is a rectangular space, strongly defended on three sides, immediately within the eastern rampart, and divided from the western part of the fortification by a trench cut in the solid limestone. At the south-western angle of this rectangular space was the main entrance, strongly defended by flanking works and platforms, constructed on the outer face of the rampart. There was also a smaller entrance at the north-eastern angle. On the south side the fortification extended from the western rampart to the extremity of the hill. On the north the rock is precipitous. It was artificially fortified wherever the nature of the ground required. At the north-western extremity was a third entrance, defended by an outwork, and several small walls ran along the south side of the hill. From the main entrance a strong rampart extends to the east to the distance of a few hundred yards, and, turning to the north, crosses the ridge of the hill to the east of the trenches before mentioned, dividing, apparently, the main fortification from the outer enclosure, formed by a similar rampart,

which, having followed the shape of the hill for some distance, turns with somewhat of an acute angle, and extends quite across the hill to the sea on the north. The whole of this extensive fortification is thus divided into four compartments, of which the strongest by far is that which I have called the keep. That extending to the west, which was probably occupied during times of danger by the surrounding population, is also strongly fortified; while the eastern enclosure, which I suppose to have been intended for cattle, is merely fenced by a wall of dry masonry, having an external trench, from which its materials were dug. Altogether it presents a very perfect specimen of what I believe to have been an aboriginal British city of very early date, very strongly fortified, intended for other purposes besides those of a purely military nature.

Castle Neroche,* the other fortress I intend to describe, and which I believe to be, though of similar type, of much later date than that on Worle Hill, consists of three distinct enclosures and fortified beacon. It occupies an elevated point at the eastern extremity of the Blagdon Hills at a short distance from the turnpike road from Taunton to Chard. On this side the first work we meet with is a rampart, consisting of a trench and high bank. This is the lowest of a series of what may be almost called field-works defending the most accessible side of the beacon, and reaching quite across the sloping side of the hill, in the form of a small segment of a large circle. On turning either flank of the rampart, we find ourselves in front of another, consisting of a double trench and agger, above which again rises a second segmental rampart, similar in construction to that below, but facing more to

* See Plan of Castle Neroche, *Proceedings of Society for 1854*, p. 44.

the north-west, the interior of which is also flanked by a double trench and rampart; and still higher up two more ramparts and ditches occupy the face of the hill, from one precipitous side to the other. On the south side of the beacon is a deep trench, dividing it from the main fortress, and round the top of the beacon itself remain fragments of a mass of wall, which has been pronounced by a high authority to be of Roman construction. The strongest part of the fortress is situated immediately to the south of the trench, and is defended on the west by the main rampart of the place, which is here carried along the very brink of the precipice, and is divided from what I may be permitted to call the inner bailey by a deep trench and agger, through which, from the north-east rampart, is the approach to one of the smaller entrances; and one of the original gates, probably the main entrance, may, in spite of modern mutilations, be traced at the north-west corner of the smaller enclosure. From this gate the exterior fortifications, consisting of two very deep trenches with aggers of corresponding magnitude, extend to a considerable distance towards the south-east, and, turning with an easy curve to the east, the external rampart of the two finishes near the approach to the modern cottage from the south-east, while the interior is continued quite up to the steep descent of the hill on the north-east. The external defence of the place, consisting, like the internal work, of a very deep ditch and lofty bank, beginning at the precipitous side of the hill on the east, extends towards the south-east in a direction nearly parallel to the two interior lines, forming on this side a third line of defence of very great strength, and extending considerably beyond the exterior lines, encloses an area of several acres, and was probably intended for the reception of cattle. There can,

I think, be no doubt that these three fortifications, which I have described, are specimens of two perfectly distinct types, the one with its series of concentric fortifications, reminding us of the plan of an Edwardian castle, and by the absence of all independent enclosures, leading us to suppose that they were constructed entirely for warlike purposes ; while the other, with its several enclosures, is more like the Norman plan of fortification, less purely devoted to military views, and containing within its out-works arrangements rather suited to the convenience of the occupiers than to the mere strength of the fortress.

The question which naturally arises from these facts is this : Are these types merely the difference between a purely military work, and one also intended for convenient habitation, common to all the inhabitants of Britain? or do they mark the difference of taste or nation of the constructors of these very different works? In the total absence of written history, and at this great distance of time, it is probable that this difficulty can never be satisfactorily cleared up. I will, however, venture to lay before you a few observations which have occurred to me on the subject ; but before doing so, I must beg you to observe that the very crude theory which I am about to suggest is one brought forward in the hope that it may either be confirmed or refuted by the investigations of others who may be inclined to take up that very interesting pursuit, which circumstances compel me most unwillingly to relinquish.

It would certainly be a great step towards the solution of the difficulty if we could connect either or both these types of fortification with any known historical fact, and I cannot but hope that what I am about to mention may aid us in doing so.

It is a fact generally admitted by primeval archæologists that the south and west of this island were in very early days occupied by a people of Celtic origin, commonly known as the Loegri, who are said in the Welsh triads to have sprung from the primeval stock of the Britons, and that these Loegri admitted to their hospitality, and granted a settlement under very stringent conditions, to a tribe called the men of Gal Edin, who are stated in the triads to have arrived in naked ships or boats on the Isle of Wight, when their country, which was probably at the mouth of the Elbe, was overwhelmed by the sea. These men of Gal Edin are supposed to have been the Belgæ, who repaid the hospitality of the Loegri by depriving them, by force of arms, of a large portion of their most valuable territory. The contest appears to have raged through the whole extent of Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Dorsetshire, and parts of the adjoining counties, for perhaps two or three centuries, and no long time before the Roman invasion. Their western frontier appears to have extended from the mouth of the Parret to Seaton, or rather Axmouth, following, as near as might be, the courses of the Parret and the Axe. Now, on the high ground on the west of the Parret exists a line of hill forts, which appear to have been connected by beacons for the defence of the country beyond, which was still held by the Dumnonii, a tribe of Loegrian descent. Of these the most northerly is the Castle Hill at Stowey, in later days occupied by the mediæval stronghold of the Audley family. The next is Rowborough, in the parish of Broomfield, which is connected by the beacon on Cothelstone with the earthwork at Norton Fitzwarren, commanding the valley of the Tone; and the very strong fortress on Castle Neroche. The last on this line is on

Hambdon Hill,* while the line of the Axe is protected by the forts of Musberry and Membury.

All these are of the second type, the only one of which there can be any doubt being that at Norton, which at first sight might be supposed to belong to the first, but, on closer observation, some vestiges of external enclosures may, I think, be found, though almost obliterated by cultivation.

Now it seems probable that these forts were constructed by the Dumnonii as a protection from the inroads of the Belgæ; and it seems to me that it is not impossible that the second type may be the normal one of the aboriginal Loegri; while the first, instances of which abound on the chalk hills and downs of the Belgic territory, and of which the earthwork on St. Catherine's Hill, near Winchester, Venta Belgarum, Sorbiodunum, and Cadbury, are very remarkable examples, may be that introduced by the men of Gal Edin. Nor does the fact that some very fine examples of the second type, such as Worle Hill, Dolbury, Combe Down, and Orchard Castle, are to be found within the Belgic territory, at all militate against this opinion, as that territory was in the hands of the Loegri for centuries before the men of Gal Edin were driven from the Tyrny-pol by the irruption of the sea.

Sir Richard Hoare, speaking of Orchard Castle, says that it is quite unlike the camps on the chalk downs, and similar to those he had seen in Wales. Now Orchard Castle is Castle Neroche in miniature; while the very great antiquity of that on Worle Hill is shewn by the extreme rudeness of some of the pottery found there, which is different from any I have ever seen, but which, I am

* See Plan of Hambdon Hill, *Proceedings* for 1853, p. 84.

told, is of the same kind as that found in some of the most ancient fortresses in North Wales.

May not these, then, be British towns of earlier date than the Belgic invasion? and may not the Dumnonii have constructed this line of defence against the Belgæ on the same plan as these more ancient fortifications? And may not this be in reality the aboriginal type of fortification? while the concentric plan is that in use among the invading Belgæ?

This is, indeed, but a crude theory; but it has often happened that great discoveries have been the result of guesses, having less apparent foundation than that which I have now ventured to suggest.
