

## *Further Observations on the Polygonal Type of Settlement in Britain*

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IN a previous paper<sup>1</sup> which I had the honour to submit to the Society on Silchester and its affinities to the pre-Roman civilization of Gaul, I described the definite resemblances in form of town-plan and other features of the settlement type to be found at Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) and other similar early sites in this country, to known settlements of the Gauls in France and Northern Italy. From this I concluded that a considerable immigration of Gauls took place from France to this country somewhat prior to the first century of our era and subsequent to the expeditions of Julius Caesar; that a permanent settlement of these Gauls in South Britain resulted, and that they retained their national customs and institutions throughout the Roman and well into the Saxon period of our history. I further suggested that the general direction of this immigration was from the mouth of the Seine to the Sussex coast and inland towards the Berkshire Downs and the head-waters of the Thames. In the present paper an attempt is made to indicate with some measure of precision the main route followed by the immigrants towards the interior, and the area of their settlement.

A careful study of the maps of the Ordnance Survey, especially those of the 6 in. scale, reveals the existence between the Sussex coast and Silchester of earthworks or camps of polygonal outline so much resembling in form and general character the settlement enclosures of the polygonal type, that the conclusion seems warranted that they are the work of the same period and people; and it is possible to fix from their geographical distribution the general direction of the route followed, and the extent of country affected by the subsequent settlements of their builders. That this type of earthwork originated in France or Italy cannot be so definitely established as in the case of the settlement enclosures. Unfortunately in Northern France, where one would look for examples, the more intensive culture even of the higher ground, on which

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xxxii, p. 185.

in this country so many of our camps have survived destruction, has centuries ago obliterated most of the early earthworks, so that there is by no means the same store of monuments of this character left as we have in this country. But in the Champ de Chastellier near Avranches<sup>1</sup> in La Manche one example survives which corresponds almost exactly to the camps found on this side of the Channel (fig. 1). The peculiar multi-sided or polygonal character of the design is very noticeable, and this feature is characteristic of all the camps to be discussed. It is true that the outline is not one of straight-ruled sides forming definite angles where they meet; rather the various faces of the enclosure change direction at fixed points, giving a general polygonal appearance. It is only when a straight-faced masonry wall supersedes the original line of bank and ditch as at Silchester, Chichester, or Canterbury that we get an accurate polygon. In the early earthwork stage they were clearly not accurately laid out with a tape, a general direction only being followed by the working-parties who constructed them.

The figures in fig. 1 are all drawn to the same scale, the outline representing the summit line of the vallum or rampart. This vallum is always single, of moderate profile, and the ditch corresponding to it somewhat shallow, the space occupied by the bank and ditch together being usually about twenty-five yards across.

On this side of the Channel it is at the point where I have suggested that the immigrant Gauls reached our shores that our series of polygonal camps begins.

On the south-eastern shore of South Hayling Island, just above high-water mark on the mud-flats of Chichester Harbour, is an entrenched camp, Tunorbury (fig. 1), whose origin has caused much speculation. It is remarkable in its situation, on a low-lying sea-shore, and I must particularly emphasize the fact that its peculiar outline can in no way be influenced by the contours of the ground, a factor which is so frequently urged to account for the peculiar outline of these polygonal structures, especially at Silchester. Its purpose seems obvious: to give support to a naval armament operating in the harbour; and its close resemblance to the Champ de Chastellier needs no demonstration. It must have a cross-Channel connexion.

The next of the series is the well-known Trundle<sup>2</sup> (fig. 1), on the hill above Goodwood race-course, which marks the first stage

<sup>1</sup> Coutil, *L'Époque Gauloise dans le Sud-ouest de la Belgique et le Nord-ouest de la Celtique*, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> *V. C. H. Sussex*, i, 466.

in the advance from Regnum to Silchester. Except that its dimensions in area are some 50 per cent. larger, it is almost an exact counterpart of Tunorbury on the mud-flat. Proceeding inland over the heather-covered country of the Hind Head district towards Silchester, in some twenty miles we reach the chalk downs north-east of Winchester where are two more similar camps—Norsebury (fig. 1) and Oliver's Battery (fig. 1)—some eight miles apart and on either flank of what afterwards became the line of the Roman road from Silchester to Winchester.

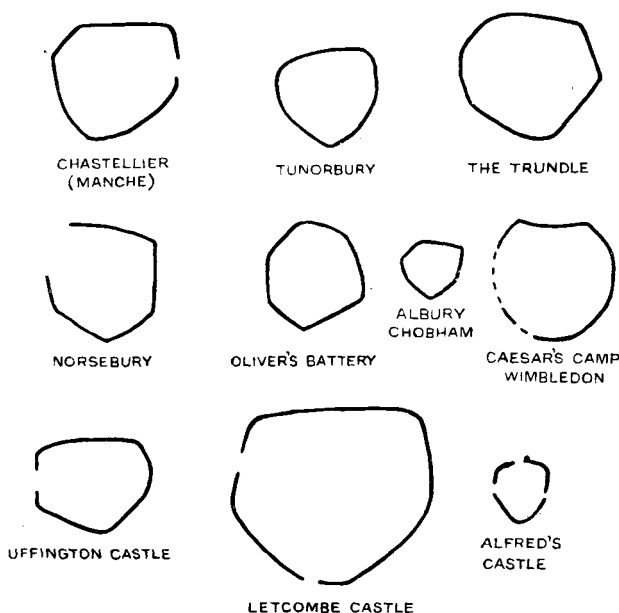


FIG. 1.

Silchester lies some twenty-five miles beyond, and brings us to the western extremity of the series of heathlands covering the Bagshot sands and stretching eastwards with few interruptions to the Thames at Richmond and Wimbeldon.

There is evidence that one stream of immigration turned in this direction on the route which was later followed by the Roman road to London. At Chobham, twenty miles east of Silchester, is a small camp of the series, Albury Bottom<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1), some half-mile east of Chobham Place, which, like Tunorbury, occupies a position in a marsh. As it is surrounded on all sides by higher ground, it is difficult to appreciate the object of its situation, except

<sup>1</sup> *V. C. H. Surrey*, iv, 394.

that the marshy ground afforded a difficult approach. Here, again, its outline can be in no way attributed to the configuration of the ground. Further east, again, is at Wimbledon the so-called Caesar's Camp<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1), and, in spite of the defacement it has suffered and yet suffers, one can still make out sufficient of its outline to determine its resemblance to the type I have described. Whether or no any permanent occupation of this area between Silchester and the lower Thames resulted, I have so far no evidence to adduce, nor do I think it probable. But it was in a direction north and west of Silchester that the main stream of occupation and settlement seemingly flowed, attracted doubtless by the open chalk downs which afforded a safe and plentiful feeding ground for the flocks or herds of an agricultural people.

If we start from Silchester and follow the direction of the Roman road towards Speen we shall find ourselves on the original route to the Berkshire downs. This route crossed the Kennet at Aldermaston and at once ascended in a north-westerly direction to the high ground above the valley at Upper Woolhampton. Here it turned to the west following the crest of the hills across Bucklebury and Coldash Commons, open heathlands, until it reached Grimsbury Castle, an earthwork probably of the Bronze Age, above Hermitage.<sup>2</sup> Here it divided, one branch going westerly following the hills north of the Lambourn valley, the other north-westerly towards the higher slopes of the downs above Wantage, by a route which still for a considerable distance is known as the Old Street. In either direction the traveller would emerge on the open chalk downs, a country which can have changed but little in its general appearance in the course of the many centuries which have elapsed since the period with which we are dealing. Both routes lead by a gradual incline to the summit of the downs, which present a steep escarpment towards the Vale of White Horse and the upper Thames valley. Along the edge of the escarpment runs the well-known Ridgeway, a line of communication from west to east which must have been used from the earliest dawn of civilization.

In close proximity to this route along the downs are three encampments: on the east Letcombe castle<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1), further west Uffington castle<sup>4</sup> (fig. 1), and, rather thrown back on the west, Alfred's castle<sup>5</sup> (fig. 1) on the extremity of the Lambourn valley route. All these reproduce the same features as the

<sup>1</sup> *V. C. H. Surrey*, iv, 389.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans. Newbury District Field Club*, iv, 138. *V. C. H. Berks.*, i, 257.

<sup>3</sup> *V. C. H. Berks.*, i, 261.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

other camps I have described. They seem to indicate a line taken up to protect the territory to the south, and mark probably a definite stage in the advance of their builders towards the interior of the country. The White Horse itself, cut into the turf below Uffington castle, has a close resemblance to the horse depicted on the British coins of the period to which I suggest these earthworks belong.

Can we find any traces still existing of a permanent occupation of the downlands between this line and the great settlement at Calleva? A close study of the large scale maps, to which I can add a fairly intimate knowledge of the ground acquired by many years of manœuvres on the downs, reveals unmistakable evidence of at least two other settlement enclosures which resemble in form the earliest period of Calleva.

These downlands, as might be expected, have yielded evidence of occupation by man throughout the various stages of civilization from the Stone Age onwards, and the traces of the Roman era are fairly uniformly distributed over its surface. But it is worth noting here that traces of early Saxon occupation, except for one cemetery at Shefford half-way up the Lambourn valley, are conspicuously absent; and even at Shefford there was certain evidence of absorption of the Saxon settlers by the native population.<sup>1</sup> In spite, however, of the many remains of earthworks belonging to several prehistoric epochs, which still survive, there are certain features which indicate a definite Gaulish occupation on the same model as Silchester.

If the westerly route is followed to the very ancient town of Lambourn (fig. 2), a favourite residence of King Alfred, the impress of original polygonal form of defences, bank and ditch, enclosing an area rather smaller than Calleva but very similar in outline, can still be seen. In Lambourn park on the north-north-east the line of entrenchment is very clearly defined, and is shown on the 6 in. Survey maps: on the east it is not so well preserved but still can be clearly followed across the meadows on this side of the town, and in places the ditch is still a marked feature although the bank has been scattered. On the south the line has been preserved by the encircling road; it is only on the south-west that little trace remains. Here there has been considerable building in modern times. One entrance, on the north-east, can still be clearly traced, together with the outer works by which it was protected, very similar in design to the north entrance at Old Shoreham and to the east entrance at Silchester in the outer entrenchment. The road or track which leaves this entrance

<sup>1</sup> Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, iii, 184; iv, 650.

goes across the downs by the Seven Barrows to Uffington and the White Horse. That it was surrounded by a *leuga* radius territory, a *leugata*, is indicated by a point still known as the Mile End on the north, at the *leuga* or eleven furlong distance. That Lambourn was occupied during the subsequent Roman period there can be no question, since coins and pottery have been turned up at various times in the town, proving an occupation from Vespasian to Magnentius.<sup>1</sup>

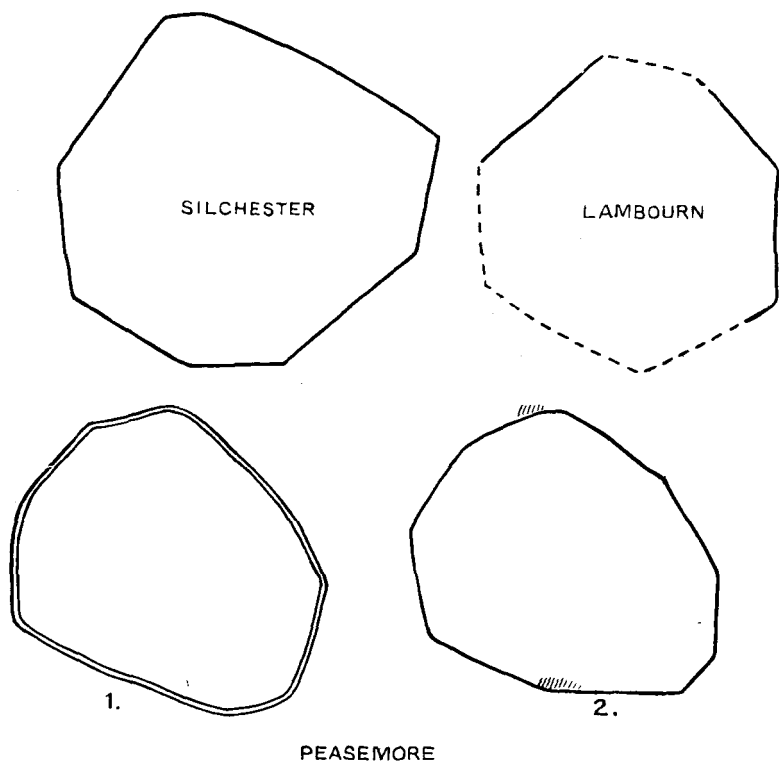


FIG. 2.

The parish of Lambourn is very extensive and comprises the whole of the Hundred to which it gives its name. It has a total area of 14,860 acres and is by far the largest parish in Berkshire, if not in England. It comprises several separate manors, some of which are certainly as old as Alfred's time. It is an oval area with the town of Lambourn in the centre, and, taken in conjunction with the evidence we have of the absence of early Saxon settlement of the downlands, is significant, as suggesting a

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. Newbury Field Club*, iv, 204.

different origin to that seemingly forming the normal parish area of the Saxon 'tun'.

Some eight miles east of Lambourn is the little village of Peasemore or Peysmer (fig. 2). It at once strikes the eye when seen on the map by a polygonal area surrounded by a road, some 660 yards in diameter, almost exactly corresponding in size to Lambourn. Except for the church and a few houses at its northern extremity the area enclosed is to-day all arable land, and to an observer strikingly reminiscent of Silchester. Here the road which must once have followed the line of the outer side of the ditch is all that remains, except that on the south-west angle some fifty yards of the ditch, broad and deep, remain to show that it once encircled the settlement; a pond near the church is a part of this ditch. Otherwise a good soil and centuries of cultivation have obliterated all other signs of occupation. The *leugata* is still perpetuated in a hamlet called World's End on its north-east boundary, and by another called Down End on its southern boundary, but no definite Mile End remains for exact measurement. No Roman remains, so far as I know, have been found on the site, but there are records of finds of coins, pottery, etc., and of a burial of that period just beyond the *leuga* distance. But sufficient remains at Lambourn and Peasemore to tell us that here were Celtic settlements with their communal territory surrounding them, smaller but otherwise closely corresponding in form to the chief city at Calleva.

From the evidence I have adduced this conclusion is I think warranted, that here we have among these remote valleys in the downs a territory stretching from Calleva which once formed part of the *civitas* of the Atrebates, perhaps the whole. We can still see dimly through the mists of ages, but none the less unmistakably, the outline of a Gaulish *civitas* or canton as it existed in the pre-Roman days. Moreover, it corresponds very closely to similar conditions which we know existed in Gaul, and which have been described by M. Fustel de Coulanges in his work on Gaul in the Roman period.<sup>1</sup>

La *civitas* occupait un territoire étendu. Il était ordinairement partagé en plusieurs circonscriptions, auxquelles César donne le nom latin de *pagi*. Dans ce territoire on trouvait, le plus souvent, une ville capitale, plusieurs petites villes, un assez grand nombre de places fortes; car il y avait longtemps que chaque peuple avait pris l'habitude de se fortifier, non contre l'étranger, mais contre le peuple voisin. Dans le territoire on trouvait encore une multitude de villages, *vici*, et des fermes isolées, *aedificia*.

<sup>1</sup> Fustel de Coulanges, *La Gaule Romaine*, p. 10.

*La ville capitale* is represented by Calleva, the administrative centre of the *civitas* or canton, the city of the Atrebates, which in course of time adopted a Roman form, with forum and other public buildings, and connected up with the road system of the Empire, while still retaining its local independence and administering its communal lands on a Celtic and non-Roman system. The territory subject to it is divided into *pagi* or rural districts each with its *petite ville*. We can see the traces of two, Lambourn and Peasmore, and may it not be that the existing parish and hundred of Lambourn, so unusually large for a parish, are the district of the *pagus*?

Of the character of these smaller towns we can recover something. They lie away from the main Roman highway and perhaps were little affected by the manners and customs of Rome. An earthen rampart and ditch sufficed for their defence, even when Calleva had to protect itself behind a massive wall. The absence of remains of Roman building suggests that the habitations of the villages were of the round wattle and daub type covered with thatch. But, like the chief city, they had for a *leuga* radius from their settlement the communal lands in which they exercised complete independence.

Now it is the survival of evidence of this *leuga* radius, or as it is called in early French law the *bannum leucae*,<sup>1</sup> which is so interesting to our inquiry. Because it is by a study of the incidents which attached to this particular form of jurisdiction on the other side of the Channel, that we can recover some idea of what the organization of the Gaulish settlement or village community was like. Anything like a detailed examination of this fascinating subject is impossible in the space at my disposal even if I were competent for the task; and even among students of early French institutions the origin of the *bannum leucae* as a Gaulish institution is only vaguely suspected by reason of the *leuga* being the Gaulish measure of length.<sup>2</sup> No *leuga* radius such as we have at Silchester, definitely to be identified as an integral part of the town plan, has been recognized in France so far as I am aware. And it is only in France, when that country was beginning to settle down to organized government after the chaos of the barbarian invasions, that the *bannum leucae* of the towns becomes a recorded feature. In early charters granted to these towns from the tenth century onwards by

<sup>1</sup> Gondetoy, *Dict. de l'ancienne langue française du ix<sup>e</sup>-xv<sup>e</sup> siècle*, s.v.; du Cange, *Glossarium*, s.v. *Bannum*.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed summary of classical references to the Gallic *leuga* see A. Holder, *Alt-Celtischer Sprachschatz*, vol. ii, p. 197 s.v.

Frankish kings and bishops we find reference to the privileges they claim to enjoy within their *leuga* radius. First and foremost the most complete local autonomy, civil and criminal ; no outsider, be he count or any other authority, can interfere in their affairs. Then the right of the inhabitants, or duty, to serve under their own banner when called upon for military service, the so-called *here-bannum* : and in this connexion it is interesting to note that the train bands of London assembled under their own leaders till the seventeenth century at their Mile End. And, lastly, we have many references to the communal possession of the land and certain necessary institutions such as a common mill and oven, at which corn must be ground and baked, a common wine-press, and certain communal animals such as bulls and boars, later known as the *banalités* of the village. And when we add to this the assumption that I ventured to put forward, when examining in my previous paper the origin of the *leuga* as a measure of length, that it grew out of the custom of cultivation in the long furrow or long rig system which we find surviving in the medieval English manor, we can picture for these early settlements a system strikingly resembling the manorial system of feudal times, sufficient to warrant the claim that in the Gaulish *civitas* is to be found at least the germ of our manorial land system.

The *places fortes* remain in the 'castles' of Letcombe or Segsbury, Uffington, and Alfred, commanding the Ridgeway from any attack from the Berkshire Vale to the north, and may have been strong enough to prevent until a late date any invasions of the downland territory by the raiding band of Saxons who early ascended and settled along the waterway of the Thames.

And, lastly, one example of a *ferme isolée* remains to us : the entrenched enclosure on Lowbury Hill above Churn, excavated by Professor Donald Atkinson in 1913-14.<sup>1</sup> From the pottery he found it appeared possible that the site had been occupied continuously since about 400 B.C. But he says, 'of the pottery of the period just before and after the beginning of the Christian era there is a larger quantity, notably pieces of several squat, round-bellied jars. . . . This type occurs commonly in early deposits at Silchester, and though it would be rash to assert that none was made after A.D. 43, the greater number were probably earlier'.

'Moreover the first definite proof of direct Roman influence is late in appearing. . . . The finds show that somewhere about the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, the

<sup>1</sup> Atkinson, *The Romano-British Site on Lowbury Hill*, pp. 25 foll.

inhabitants began to come under the influence of Roman civilization'. When this came about, 'the large number of exact parallels with objects found at Silchester, including the pottery found about the kiln outside that town, tempts one to figure them going down to Silchester from time to time to do their marketing and to see life'. And Professor Atkinson seems to arrive from an entirely different standpoint at the same conclusion. 'As I read the evidence', he says, 'from such sites as Lowbury and Pitt Rivers villages, the conquest of the country south of the Thames, rapid and probably meeting with little opposition in spite of Vespasian's thirty battles, made little or no immediate difference to these remote settlements. In Britain at any rate the Celts seem to have acquired late, if at all, the ἀστυνόμοι ὄργαί.'

I go perhaps rather further, concluding as I do from the evidence which has come down to us in the sites I have described, that life went on with but little change in essentials during the Roman occupation. The Gaulish *civitas* remained throughout a distinct unit in Britain until, when the legions were withdrawn, the *civitates* were told to provide again for their own government and security when they could no longer look to Roman power to protect them from outside enemies. In some measure the *civitas* of the Atrebates held out until such time as they became absorbed in Saxon England, not so much by conquest as by assimilation, but not before their settlements had shrunk to mere shadows of their former state. Even the great city of Calleva contains but a handful of population living among the dilapidated mansions of olden days. Perhaps the reason may be found in the narrative of Gildas, who, after describing the follies and quarrels of the British princes, says, 'A contagious plague fell so outrageously among this foolish people and without the sword swept off such numbers of them, that the living could scarce bury the dead'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this plague was the yellow death that caused such ravage in Europe in Justinian's reign and which seems to have been as deadly as the Black Death of the fourteenth century.

Be the cause what it may, there seems no doubt that the population dwindled away until but a feeble remnant remained to preserve a dim tradition of former prosperity and a recollection, recorded in place names, of the former ordering of their settlements. The deserted farms were, perhaps, as at Lowbury, later reoccupied by Saxon farmers. The settlements decayed and were avoided by fresh inhabitants, until such time as the city of Calleva and its *leugata* became the *allod* or manor of a Saxon

<sup>1</sup> *Historia Gildae de excidio Britanniae* § 22. 10.

king. But the boundaries of its territory were not forgotten. They subsist to our own day, defined almost as clearly as when first roped out by the first inhabitants. Only Lambourn survived. Its remote position, its plentiful water supply from the Lambourn sources, its sheep-walks on the downs, contributed to perpetuate its existence as an upland town. Here King Alfred found a safe retreat in the darkest days of the Saxon power, and as a cheaping or market town of the downs it has remained almost to our own days within its old entrenchments, little affected by the changes of the outside world.

The conclusion, then, that I put forward, is that a definite system of social organization was introduced into this country from northern Gaul not long before the inclusion of Britain in the Roman Empire ; that it was not superseded, at least in the territory of the Atrebates, by any social or land system based on the Roman model, and that it continued substantially unchanged after the Roman administration was withdrawn ; and, lastly, that to this system we owe the bases of our modern land measures, and probably much of the methods of land cultivation which survived until a comparatively recent date.

Beyond that at present one cannot go further than to recognize that Teutonic settlement ultimately did more to efface the Gaulish system here than it did in France, where we must look, especially in north-eastern France, for further light on this subject.

I conclude with a final question. Can we be sure that these northern Gauls were Celts, and not rather Teutons, in other words an advance guard of the Franks and Saxons who followed them five centuries later ?

#### DISCUSSION

Mr. C. L. KINGSFORD (Chairman) said the paper showed clearly the relation between history and archaeology. During the last forty years the value of potsherds had been established, and the evidence they afforded was in most cases undeniable. Field investigations of the kind described in the paper were pioneer work of great interest, and opened up new lines of study.

Mr. BUSHE-FOX was struck by the lack of finds, especially at Peasmore. As the sites in question were not supposed to be places of refuge, more relics of their earliest inhabitants should have come to light. Lowbury was said to belong to the Gaulish immigrants, but the pottery there was distinctly early, dating from the third or fourth century B.C., whereas the invasion was dated after Caesar. He noticed also that the *octroi* stations were only on one side of the enclosures,

but three would be required at Silchester to control the approaches from other directions.

Mr. PAGE said the paper was very welcome as so little was known of the organization of Roman Britain. Professor Haverfield had pointed out that the cantonal system was certainly adopted, but not so thoroughly as in Gaul; whether it survived the Roman period however was doubtful. There were many Lowes or Liberties in the country, but most of them could be traced to the tenth or eleventh century, such as the Lowey of Pevensey (a waste-chester in Saxon times), which was not referred to before the Norman castle was built. There were also the *banlieues* of various monasteries, such as Ramsey, Bury St. Edmunds, Malmesbury, and St. Albans; but survival from Roman times was not likely even at Verulam. It would be interesting to trace the *leugata* of London, but the boundary was probably irregular and may have been altered from time to time.

Mr. ALBANY MAJOR laid emphasis on the value of earthworks and early customs. He knew of three Grim's Ditches which would be included in the territory of the Atrebates, and there was evidence that at certain periods they formed the boundary between the Britons and Saxons, though the name had not been satisfactorily explained. It was his intention to study some of the earthworks on the lines laid down by Colonel Karslake.

Mr. LYON THOMSON asked if the plans of earthworks shown on the screen were arranged to show uniformity of shape or were all orientated in the same way.

Mr. PALEY BAILDON inquired what manorial customs pointed to a Gaulish rather than to a Saxon origin for the enclosures described in the paper. The Gauls should have left traces easily distinguishable, and he had long searched for indications of a village community in England, without success.

Colonel KARSLAKE replied that Roman coins had been found at Lambourn dating from Vespasian to Magnentius (A.D. 69-353), but Peasmore was disappointing. He had only casually searched the ground, and would point out that between the walls and outer enclosure of Silchester very few traces of Roman occupation could be found on the surface, but 9-10 in. below it were abundant remains of circular or quadrangular British dwellings, which had basin-shaped ovens or fire-places in the middle. The brick-like fragments found were probably remains of wattle-and-daub; and early British pottery was soon disintegrated by frost on the surface. At Lowbury some pottery certainly dated back to the fifth century B.C., but the ware found in abundance was only made just before the Christian era. Except at Silchester no *leugata* could be said to have survived in England; but in the *Dialogus de Scaccario* every town in which the king's taxes were collected had a *leugata* beyond which those in charge of the taxes were forbidden to go. As relics of a communal

system, he cited the common mill, oven, and wine-press, which later, in Gaul, came under the control of some Frankish count who used them for his own advantage. In the tenth and eleventh centuries the dependent population began to secure privileges, and *leugatae* were given to Ripon and Battle Abbey. There was a Mile End at Colchester, and traces of a *leugata* at Leicester, but it could not be proved of Roman origin. At Silchester the barrier was on the north for levying tolls on goods going south. It was placed where the roads joined and only one route was practicable. The diagrams were not arranged according to compass bearings, but in order to show the similarity of outline, the flat side being the front, and the point marking the rear of the defences. Lambourn retained some remarkable manorial customs. The charters in France and England were very much alike, but the comparison had not been fully worked out. They appeared to have a common origin.