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# THE DWELLERS IN WILTSHIRE IN PREHISTORIC TIMES.<sup>1</sup>

By PROFESSOR SIR WILLIAM BOYD DAWKINS, D.Sc. F.R.S. F.S.A.

## I. INTRODUCTORY.

The prehistory of Wiltshire is a part of the larger study of prehistoric Britain, and it is well worthy of the special attention of this joint meeting of British archaeologists whose main object is the investigation of the unrivalled antiquities of the county of Wilts. I propose to deal with it from the point of view presented by the human remains, leaving the prehistoric huts, the villages, the temples and the tombs in local hands, especially in those of the Cunnington family, with whom the archaeological instinct, hereditary for more than a century, is now bearing fruit in new explorations, and in the re-organisation of the museum at Devizes, by the present holders of the name, Mr. and Mrs. B. Howard Cunnington. They and other members of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society are ably carrying on the work begun early in the last century by Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

The county is singularly fortunate in having among its chroniclers Dr. Stevens of Salisbury, General Pitt Rivers, Dr. Thurnam and Dr. Beddoe. I shall enter into their labours and see how far the incoming of the various tribes can be linked with the antiquities, and how far the successive waves of immigrants have contributed to the population down to the time when the West Saxon conquerors of Roman Britain occupied Wiltshire and named it after their headquarters (Wilton) on the Wyley.<sup>2</sup>

## II. DEFINITION OF PERIODS.

We must first define our terms. The term 'prehistoric' covers the vast interval between the beginning of history and the last phase of the pleistocene or continental condition

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Institute and the Wilts. Archaeological Society at Devizes, July 1920.

<sup>2</sup> I have dealt with this in my address to the Cambrian Archaeological Association and

the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Jan. 1914, 'On the Retreat of the Welsh from Wiltshire.'

of Britain. It is strictly limited to Britain after it became an island, and includes the three successive stages of culture—neolithic, bronze, and prehistoric iron—as shown in the following table :—

## DEFINITION OF TERMS.

3. HISTORIC PERIOD	.. ..	Roman invasion down to present day. Britain insular.
2. PREHISTORIC PERIOD—		
(c) <i>Prehistoric iron age</i>	.. ..	Brythonic tribes.
(b) <i>Bronze age</i>	.. ..	Goidelic tribes.
(a) <i>Neolithic age</i>	.. ..	Iberic (Mediterranean) tribes. Britain insular.
Geographical changes by which Britain was severed from the continent.		
1. PLEISTOCENE PERIOD	.. ..	The artist-tribes of the caves ( <i>Homo sapiens</i> ). The Anthropoids of the River-drift. Extinct mammalia. Britain a part of the continent.

When we leave history behind in our enquiry into the past we lose all clue to date, and it is impossible to measure pre-history in years, because there are no chronometers in nature to help us. The sequence, however, in the above table is clearly established over nearly the whole world. In Europe the profound geographical change by which Britain became an island, and the biological and climatic changes connected with it, indicate an immeasurable interval of time between the pleistocene and the prehistoric periods, which would necessarily involve a corresponding difference between the pleistocene hunters and the neolithic tribes which succeeded them, both on the continent and in Britain.

## III. THE PREHISTORIC TRIBES IN WILTSHIRE.

It was pointed out in 1865 in *Crania Britannica*, a joint work by Drs. Thurnam and Davis, that the human skeletons associated with the prehistoric antiquities of the county belong to two distinct types possessing all the characters

of different races. The older of the two came into Wiltshire in the neolithic age, while the later appears only in the burials associated with bronze, and may be looked upon as having introduced the civilisation of that age into Britain. The two races present a striking contrast in physique. The neolithic tribes were of moderate stature, measuring 5 feet 5 inches in average height, and had long or oval skulls, oval faces, delicate features with small jaws and chins not projecting beyond a vertical dropped from the forehead. From their identification with the small dark peoples of Europe there can be no doubt that they were of dark complexion and black hair.

The incomers in the bronze age were taller, being 5 feet 8 inches in average height, with broad heads and faces, high cheek bones and strongly-marked features, the lower part of the face, and particularly the lower jaws, being massive and projecting beyond the vertical dropped from the forehead.<sup>1</sup> From their identity with the Celtic section of the Alpine<sup>2</sup> race we may infer that they were fair, with light or brown hair, and of variable stature.

The former, according to Thurnam, are identical with the Silures of Tacitus inhabiting South Wales at the time of the Roman conquest, and belonging to the primitive Iberian race represented by the modern Basques of the south of France and of northern Spain. The latter he identified with the Celtæ or Gauls. These remarkable conclusions of Dr. Thurnam, so far in advance of his time, have been amply confirmed by later writers in the same field, Broca, Virchow, Busk, Huxley, myself and others.

We owe to Sir John Rhys<sup>3</sup> the division of the Celtæ into two great Aryan groups separated from one another by their language: the older branch, represented by the ancient section of the Gauls and the Gaelic-speaking peoples of the British isles, he terms Goidel or Q. Celts, and the later branch Brythons or P. Celts. The Q. Celts are still represented by the Gaelic-speaking peoples of Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man, while the P. Celts are familiar to us under the name of Welsh. The Celtæ of Thurnam

<sup>1</sup> For details see Dawkins, *Early Man in Britain*, ch. ix (Macmillan, 1880).

<sup>2</sup> Ripley, *Races of Europe*, ch. xi (London, 1900).

<sup>3</sup> Rhys, *Lectures on Welsh Philology*, pp. 16-20 (Trübner, 1879): *Celtic Britain*, pp. 213, 214, 226, 227 (London, 1884).

belong to the older Gaelic (Goidelic) section. The Brythons were the next invaders, and they were followed by the Belgae, also Brythonic, who were masters of the south of England as far west as Somerset at the time of the Roman conquest.

It is generally assumed that there were other races in prehistoric Britain and that to them may belong the neolithic and bronze age antiquities rather than to either of the above historic races. There may have been; but if so, why have they vanished without leaving any trace of their existence in Britain or in the adjacent regions of the continent? On the other hand, the three above-mentioned peoples have been identified by their physical characters, by their association with archaeological remains, and also by the philological evidence of the names of mountains and rivers, that have been adopted by later invaders using new tongues. These are now to be found in the maps both of Britain and the continent.

#### IV. IBERIC OR MEDITERRANEAN RACE THE OLDEST IN EUROPE.

The Iberic race in the neolithic age spread through the British Isles, and over Europe from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and from the straits of Gibraltar as far to the east as the Rhine, and probably over Germany. The examination of the skeletons from tombs of Greece and of Asia Minor by Dr. Virchow proves that at the dawn of history the race occupied the Greek isles and mainland as well as Asia Minor. To Dr. Sergi we owe our knowledge of its extension over the whole of the Mediterranean littoral, including Italy and Greece. He terms it, therefore, Mediterranean, and includes in it not only the ancestors of the present swarthy peoples of southern Europe, but also the ancient Egyptians, the Berbers, and other tribes of northern Africa. Throughout this area it is the oldest strain as yet clearly defined in the existing population.

The term Iberic is here used because it was first applied to this race by anthropologists and by the ancient Greek geographers. It was applied by the latter to the inhabitants of the region between the Black and Caspian seas and the Caucasus, as well as to the whole of the Spanish peninsula and a large part of France. According to Sir John Rhys,

Hibernia (Ireland) was so called because it was inhabited by Iberians.<sup>1</sup>

The term is singularly applicable to one of the races in the British isles because Tacitus in his life of his father-in-law, Agricola, the conqueror of Wales, identifies the Silures north of the estuary of the Severn with the Iberians of Spain. For these reasons the older name is preferable to that of Mediterranean for the swarthy long- and oval-headed tribes that represent in Britain the neolithic aborigines of Gaul and Spain.

#### V. THE IBERIC TRIBES ON THE CONTINENT.

The Iberic tribes mentioned by Greek and Roman writers had a wide range over Europe. In the third century before Christ they ranged in Gaul as far north as the Loire and have left their name attached to that region in history. In the middle of the first century before Christ their northern boundary only extended as far as the Garonne, the land between these great rivers being occupied by invading Celtic tribes, into which they were gradually absorbed, losing their language as well as their nationality. In Spain, also, the peninsula called after their name had been invaded by the Celtic tribes before 300 B.C. and had a Celtic population on the Mediterranean side, mixed Celtiberian in the middle and Iberian on the side of the Atlantic in Portugal and the adjacent region. The Iberians, therefore, come before us in the pages of history as retreating under the pressure of successive invaders. At the present time they are represented only by the swarthy Basque-speaking tribes of the western Pyrenees, and by the small dark strain in the population of middle and north-western Europe. In prehistoric times they were in retreat before the Celtic race.

#### VI. THE CELTIC TRIBES ON THE CONTINENT.

At the beginning of history the Celtic tribes were in possession of large parts of France and Spain and were pushing the Iberic possessors of those lands westwards and northwards. They had also crossed the Alps and established

<sup>1</sup> Shortly before his death, after full discussion, he agreed to this derivation.

themselves in Italy. From the name Gallia applied to France and Lombardy by the Romans it is clear that the invaders were Goidels of the elder Celtic branch—and the terms 'Mixed Iberians' applied to tribes in France and 'Celt-iberians' to those of Spain show that the conquered tribes were absorbed into the mass of the conquerors. A later invasion of Spain, Gaul and Italy by the Brythonic Celts is also proved by the place and river names of those countries.

The date of these invasions is far out of the reach of history. The Goidels are proved by the discovery of caves and tombs to have been in France and Spain in the neolithic age, and to have mingled with the Iberic tribes. The Brythonic invasion probably took place at the close of the bronze age or in the beginning of the age of prehistoric iron. It is important for us to note that these invaders of Britain swept up the invaded tribes in their conquest of the continent, so that the Celts or Gauls of history are not ethnically pure, but consist of a mixture of Goidels and Brythons with the Iberian aborigines.

#### VII. THE LINES OF MIGRATION INTO BRITAIN.

In dealing with the routes by which these tribes found their way into Wiltshire the physical geography of southern England is a certain guide.

At the beginning of the prehistoric period Britain had already become an island, with the lower grounds covered by forests and morass, by very few open glades. The grass lands were to be found in the uplands, and especially on the dry chalk downs ranging from Dorsetshire through Wiltshire and Hampshire, northwards into Yorkshire and eastwards to the straits of Dover. The valleys were mostly filled with impassable marshes and thickets, offering shelter to bears, wolves, foxes and other wild animals, and were unfit for occupation by man. Under these conditions the first migration took place. The Iberic shepherds and farmers of the French downs between Calais and Boulogne could see the cliffs of Dover, the South Foreland and the green slopes of the downs, and would be tempted to cross the straits in search of new pastures. They would pass westwards along the range of



chalk by Guildford into Berks, Hants and Wilts, or they might find their way from Folkestone along the shore of the Wealden forest, past Hastings to Beachy Head and on westwards by the downs of Sussex and Hampshire into Wiltshire.

It is probable that hunters were the first explorers, as generally happens in the settlement of a new country, and that they brought back to their kinsmen in France their discoveries of good pastures and of an abundance of flint in the chalk for making their implements. In North America the backwoodsman and the trapper formed the advance-guard of the herdsman and farmer, and in Africa the hunter of big game prepared the way for the European settler. In Britain it is likely that there were hunting tribes in possession which disappeared before the settler like the Red Indian in North America. The downs of Wiltshire and the adjacent countries afforded good pasturage for stock, also ground more or less free from trees for the cultivation of wheat and barley, while the surrounding lower lands were unfitted for both. Consequently the neolithic population was mainly centred in the downs. It must be also noted that the rivers would offer to invaders possessed of boats, like the neolithic dug-outs, facilities for penetrating into the lower districts. In the neolithic age, however, boats had small share, if any, in the settlement of the Wiltshire downs, because the forests and morasses in the river valleys formed a barrier on every side except the east, where the bare chalk ranges offered a free passage and open pastures for sheep and cattle from the straits of Dover along the South Downs.

#### VIII. THE IBERIC TRIBES IN WILTSHIRE.

The Iberic tribes have left ample proof of their presence in Wiltshire in the numerous hut-circles or counter-sunk huts, and in the long barrows so conspicuous on the higher parts of the downs. The more adventurous hunters probably came first with their dogs, and then the herdsman with his domestic animals, dogs, horses, sheep, goats, small shorthorns (*bos longifrons*) and pigs, would slowly push



westwards, tempted by the pastures of the downs, into Wiltshire. From the dry uplands they gradually extended over the whole of the British isles. At a later time, probably in the neolithic age, they learned to till the ground and to grow wheat and barley in the clearings. Their huts, from 5 to 6 feet in diameter, and sunk 3 feet or more into the ground, were circular, with conical roofs made of thatch or branches of trees, or of wattle and daub. They generally occur in clusters, and their contents reveal the life of the village community. It was for the most part pastoral and dependent on the herds of domestic animals, and, in a lesser degree, on agriculture. The grinding and polishing of the neolithic axes and other tools were done at home, the flint and other suitable rock being roughly chipped into form where it was mined and afterwards distributed far and wide by barter. There were spinning and weaving, and the making of rough woollen cloth out of the fleeces of the sheep. The preparation of the skins for clothing, their cutting out with the stone implements, and the sewing of them together so as to make rough woollen or wash-leather or fur garments, was the occupation of the women, while the making of a coarse pottery was probably shared by the men and women. Their villages were connected by rough tracks, now represented on the ordnance maps by the ridgeways, and each had its burial-place marked by the long barrows, from which Dr. Thurnam obtained proof of the physique of the villagers, that gives us the means of identifying the first shepherds of Salisbury Plain with the Iberic stock, and allowed us to picture them as a well-built, long-headed swarthy people, not differing from the existing dark natives of Wiltshire, who are, in my opinion, their lineal descendants. Both habitations and burial places are dated by the neolithic implements.

#### IX. THE GOIDELIC TRIBES IN WILTSHIRE.

The Goidels had established themselves on the continent nearest to Britain during the neolithic age, imposing their language and customs on the Iberic aborigines, but they did not dare the perils of the British Channel until they

were armed with more effective weapons of bronze.<sup>1</sup> Then they spread over Britain and into Ireland, incorporating the conquered neolithic tribes into their organisation and introducing everywhere the higher civilisation of the bronze age and the practice of burning the dead. In Wiltshire the numerous round barrows prove that they covered the downs with their settlements. They were, in my opinion, the builders of the two great megalithic temples of Avebury and Stonehenge, that are related to the smaller stone circles of the bronze age in other parts of the British isles as are Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral to our village churches. To them also belong some of the camps or fortified villages on the higher hills. They probably also introduced a higher type of agriculture, while they still depended for their living mainly on their flocks and herds of the neolithic breeds. They were in touch with the Mediterranean peoples at the dawn of history, and the Egyptian beads found in one of the many barrows close to Stonehenge give us the first historic date in the prehistoric archaeology of Britain. The beads belong to the time of Akenaton and Tutankamen, and probably imply that Stonehenge was in use as a temple during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries before Christ. Similar beads have been found in association with bronze along the trade routes through Gaul, and all were probably brought from Egypt by the Minoan traders who introduced the wares of Egypt to the European peoples in the bronze age, before the trade fell into the hands of the Phoenicians and Greeks.

#### X. THE BRYTHONS AND BELGAE IN WILTSHIRE.

The Brythons, as I have already mentioned, were in Britain in the prehistoric iron age, when our island was visited by Pytheas about the year 325 before Christ. They

<sup>1</sup> I am unable to agree with Mr. T. Rice Holmes that the broad-headed tribes invaded Britain in the neolithic age. His conclusion is based on the mistaken assumption that the presence of stone implements in burial mounds, coupled with the absence of bronze, implies neolithic age. So far from this being the case, they are so often associated together in Britain and over wide areas on

the continent as to warrant the early bronze being called the 'aeneolithic' age. In most cases they are dated by the occurrence of bronze age pottery. It is, of course, possible that a few adventurers armed with bronze may have crossed the channel and established themselves in Britain, but there is no evidence of an invasion in force in the neolithic age.

had given their name to the island some time before and possibly as far back as the close of the bronze age. They were a group of Celtic tribes following the same lines of invasion as the Goidels and absorbing into their mass both the Goidelic and the Iberic elements in the British population. In Wiltshire they occupied the hill-forts on the edge of the downs, and were the founders of Old Sarum. They probably introduced a new cult into Britain, and it is possible that in their time both Avebury and Stonehenge were deserted temples of a discarded faith.

The Belgae, the last settlers in Wiltshire before the Roman conquest, are described by Caesar as Celts mingled with Germans, inhabiting north-eastern France, and the lower Rhine, and as present also in southern Britain. At the time of the conquest they had extended their power as far to the west as Somerset and had made Winchester (*Venta Belgarum*) their chief city, and, but for the Roman arms, they would have conquered the whole island. They probably belong to the Brythonic section of the Celts, and imported no new ethnic element into Britain that can be traced either in physique or in language. Nor are there any habitations, tombs, or oppida that can be definitely assigned to them.

#### XI. THE EVIDENCE OF PHILOLOGY AS TO LANGUAGE.

We may turn now to the place and river-names in the ordnance maps for further evidence of the settlement of Wiltshire by the above tribes before the Roman conquest. Most of them are of Saxon origin, but there are many that prove that the Welsh language was spoken throughout the county before the English conquest. Forexam ple :

Pen Selwood, Hackpen (*pen*=hill).

Combe (*cwm*=valley, ravine).

Og, Ogbourne (*og*=rapid river).

Avon=river (*afon*=water).

Wiley, a river-name (Gwili, near Carmarthen).

Wiltshire itself derives its name from the English settlement of Wilton on a river bearing a Welsh name, and the numerous Combes and the two Avons are sufficient evidence that the Welsh language prevailed before the introduction

of the English tongue by the West Saxons. We may further infer from the absence of place-names of Latin origin (*Devizes* is of uncertain derivation, and in any case cannot be older than the name of the county boundary, *Ad Devisas*) that Latin was not spoken by the people during the time of the Roman dominion, although it was the official language.

A smaller number of names in the topography testify that the Gaelic language also was used in the county before the introduction of Welsh, such as

Maiden Bradley (*magh*=meadow : *dun*=fort).

Baydon, Rowden (*dun*=fort).

Axeford (Axe, Exe, Usk=water).

Kennet, a river-name in Ireland and Scotland (*ken*=white).

Candown, near Tilshead (*can*=head).

In the adjacent county of Hampshire we find the name Dublin (*dubh*=black, and *linne*=pool) applied to a pool on the river Test, a Gaelic name, handed down from one generation of fishermen to another until it has found its place in the ordnance maps. The Iberic tongue has left no certain trace in the philology of Wiltshire, because it has been wholly submerged by the Gaelic, Brythonic and English tongues.

## XII. THE IBERIC ELEMENT IN THE POPULATION.

There is, however, ample proof that the Iberic tribes were the neolithic aborigines in Wiltshire, and that they were absorbed into the mass of the Goidelic, Brythonic, Belgic and Saxon invaders, and that while they have lost their own tongue they have preserved their physical characters, and are now represented by the small, dark element in the existing population. As I have shown elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> they were the dominant type, not only in Wiltshire and the adjacent counties of Somerset, Hants and Dorset, but in Sussex, Northamptonshire and Yorkshire in the ages of bronze and prehistoric iron, until they were displaced by the invading Saxon tribes. In Britain they showed the same clannish qualities that have preserved

<sup>1</sup> Bulleid and Gray, *The Glastonbury Lake Village*, 4to, 1917, vol. ii, pp. 673-684.

their language in the Basque provinces, while in the rest of Spain it has been lost in the tongues of their successive conquerors, although their physical characters are dominant in the greater part of the peninsula bearing their name.

#### XIII. THE BUILDERS OF STONEHENGE AND AVEBURY.

The question naturally arises who were the builders of Stonehenge and Avebury? Both these great temples belong, in my opinion, to the bronze age, and are probably the expression of a cult introduced into Britain by the Goidels. I feel inclined to account for the silence of history by the view that this cult had passed away in Britain and on the continent long before the time of the Roman conquest. These temples have no place in the religion of the Brythons, who coupled the worship of rivers with that of gods identified by the Roman writers with those of Greece and Italy. Nor have they any place in the mysteries of druidism either in Gaul or in Britain. They were probably standing lonely and desolate very much as they are now, ignored by the Belgic tribes and by their Brythonic predecessors. Had they been in use at the time of the Roman conquest it is most unlikely that they would have escaped the notice of the early writers on Britain.

#### XIV. CONCLUSION.

From all these facts it will be seen that the present dwellers in Wiltshire can be traced back to a remote and very varied ancestry. The first shepherds of Salisbury Plain, belonging to the dark Iberic race, appear on the downs with their sheep and cattle at the beginning of the neolithic age, introducing into Britain a civilisation hitherto unknown. They were invaded in the age of bronze by the taller, broad-headed Goidelic Celts, who imposed upon them their own Gaelic tongue and incorporated them into their tribes. In the prehistoric iron age this mixed population was invaded by the Brythonic Celts, and afterwards by the Belgae, a kindred people also speaking Welsh. Then followed the Roman conquest, in which the inhabitants

came under the influence of the highest civilisation of the time, but without giving up their Welsh tongue for the Latin speech of their conquerors. The Welsh tongue prevailed in Britain until the English conquest, and in Wiltshire until it came under the dominion of the West Saxons.

Through all these changes, covering an untold number of centuries, the Iberic was the chief element in the population of Wiltshire. It survived the Saxon conquest and is still represented by the dark strain in the people; and the wool trade, so important in the county to-day, may be traced back to the fleeces of the horned sheep introduced by the Iberic shepherds in the neolithic age.