

AN EARTHWORK IN BASING DEAN.

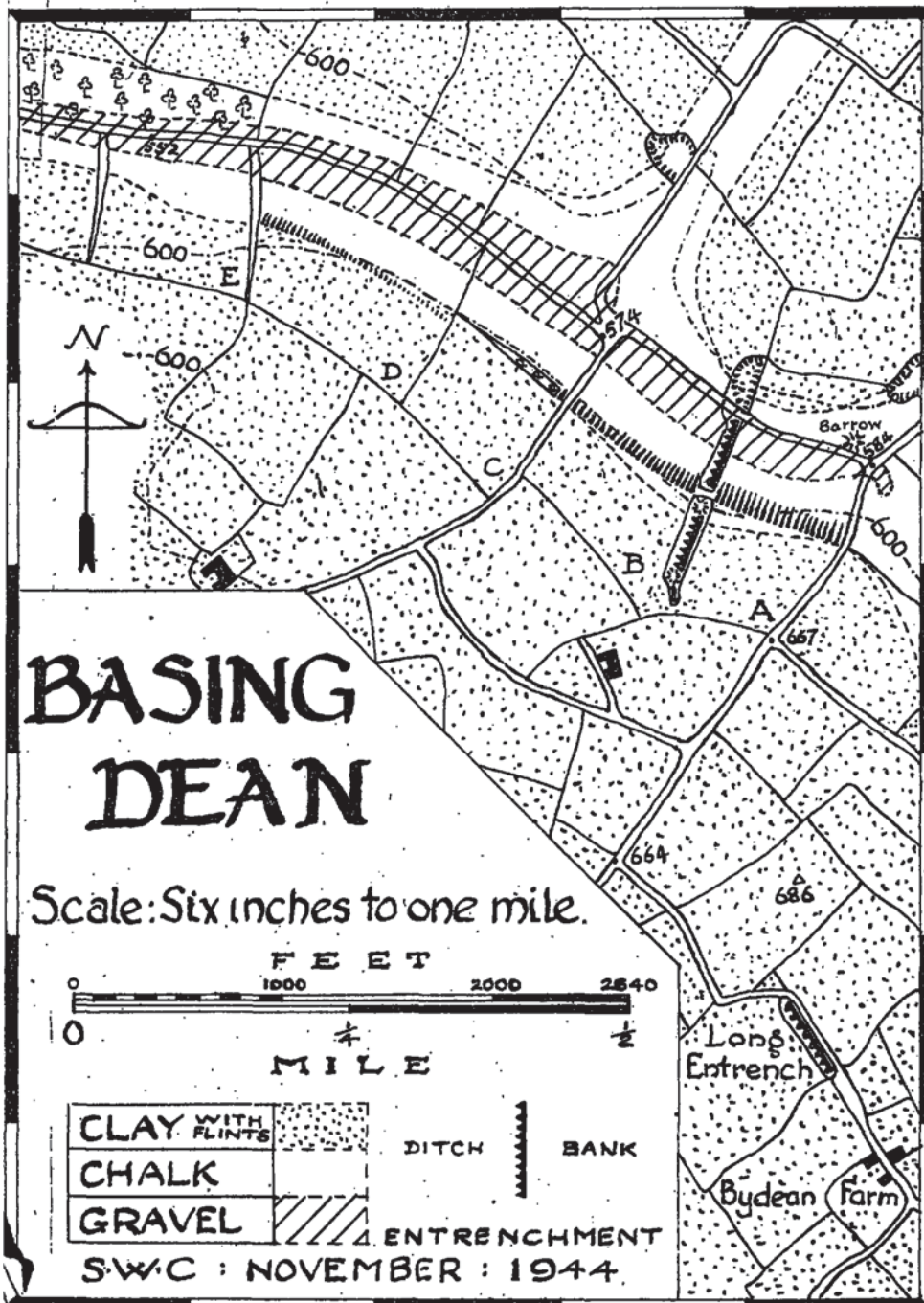
By STEPHEN COFFIN.

BASING DEAN lies to the north of Froxfield on the plateau west of the upper Rother valley. It is the westerly continuation of the dry valley which runs from the head of Ashford gorge and which contains the three Froxfield short entrenchments. The soil is chalk with a bed of gravel along the bottom of the dean, and the sides, from approximately the 600 feet contour line upwards, have a covering of clay-with-flints.¹ At the east end of the dean is a round barrow at a road junction (see map); and if from here one follows the dean road west, at the end of the first field on the left (A) is a spinney running at right angles to the road. This spinney is about 315 yards long, its greatest width being about 85 feet, and within it is a fairly well preserved earthwork. Near the centre of this belt of trees is a break, where a level path passes through to the field beyond (B).

This earthwork consists of a bank with a ditch on its west side, with no bank on the counterscarp. At the southern end, where the spinney is but a narrow tongue, the ditch has been ploughed out and only the bank remains. This runs down the slope of the dean for about 100 feet and where the spinney begins to widen out there is a fairly deep digging, presumably modern; beyond this the bank and ditch, slightly deflecting to the east, commence their course down the hill. After some 350 feet, and just before one comes to the crosspath bisecting the wood, there is another pit scarring the dyke; after which the bank and ditch continue uninterruptedly to the bottom of the slope, where the spinney abuts on to the road. The main earthwork runs N.N.E.—S.S.W. and the southern tip, consisting of the bank only, deflects about 12° towards the east. The approximate dimensions, in feet, are as follow:—

Portion of dyke.		Approximate height of			Approx. horizontal over all measurements	Approx. lengths (N. to S.)
		Ditch below ground	Bank above ditch	Bank above ground behind		
Portion to N. of crosspath	N. part	1-2	5-6	2-3	40-50	360
	S. part	4-5	6-8	4-5		
Crosspath	-	-	-	-	-	15
Portion to S. of crosspath	-	5-10	8-10	5-7	70-80	455
Southern single bank	-	-	-	4-5	6-8	115

1. O.S. 6in., Hants 52NW. Geological Survey, Sheet No. 300 (Drift).



The total length is about 315 yards. On the opposite side of the road a short track leads into a chalkpit and there seems no trace of the earthwork extending up the northern slope of the dean. This entrenchment, which faces west, extends higher up the southern side of the dean than one would expect on the assumption of its being a defensive dyke, for it runs some 460 feet beyond the lower edge of the clay-with-flints as shown on the drift map.

A comparison of this earthwork with the Froxfield Long Entrenchment and the three Short Entrenchments is of interest. All have a bank with a ditch to the west and no bank on the counter-scarp (with the exception of the subsidiary limb at the southern end of the Long Entrenchment, which has such a bank for part of its course). The three Short Entrenchments were constructed as defensive dykes on comparatively open ground with forest at or near their ends.² Their main dimensions, in feet, are :—

Froxfield Entrenchments	Bank above ditch	Bank above ground behind	Horizontal overall measurements
The Long (Southern end—"The Avenue")	16	5	60
The three Short - - -	16	8	80-90

Adjacent to the Basing Dean dyke are some surface markings which warrant attention. The Froxfield Long Entrenchment has been described as running a northerly course (part of which I have been unsuccessful in finding) from Bordean to just north of Bydean Farm (where it is well preserved); after which it is not traceable until it is said to reappear on the south side of Basing Dean, running clearly traceable as a "fold in the ground" for two fields and nearly along the 600 feet contour. (This "fold" can be seen to meet the first hedge, which is the spinney containing the earthwork, exactly where the crosspath passes through the spinney. The photograph shows the "fold" and the spinney.) The description continues: "Beyond the next lane" (i.e., in Field C) "it is a distinct ditch and low bank along the thick holly belt above the lowest field; beyond this it is not traceable across the intervening fields."³

Other traces of the fold can be found. The surface of the lane, mentioned above, shows a sudden dip (in line with the fold in Field B). I have never been able to find the "ditch and low bank" in the holly belt, but one can see that the downward slope across the belt is greater than that of the adjacent fields to north and south. Between the lane and the beginning of the holly belt—for some 10 feet or so inside the field—is a fairly steep bank, on one's left on entering the field and in line with the belt's southern

2. Williams-Freeman, *Field Archaeology of Hampshire*, pp. 286-292, pp. 374-376.

edge. The description quoted states that nothing is traceable beyond the holly belt ; but in the further field (D) the fold can still be seen, hardly visible on the near side but increasingly obvious as one looks across the field. The faint near end seems to be slightly out of alignment, being a little farther up the hillside than one would expect it to be ; but as it is very faint here it is difficult to be certain. The distant hedge, however, shows a fold in the ground quite clearly. This far point is 360 feet up the deanside from the valley road, as are the holly belt, the crosspath through the earthwork and the fold in Fields A and B.

Two other facts remain to be mentioned. Air photographs show faint markings along the line of the fold in Fields A and B (and a second one parallel to this a little further down the hill in these fields), and in the holly belt (so far as one can tell). In Field D the marking is visible only at the further end, approximately in the line of the fold, with a right angle extension running down the field from the eastern limit of the marking. A marking is visible along the whole length of Field E, which is now under cultivation but was said to show no surface signs (I imagine before cultivation). The second fact is that this fold is almost exactly on the lower limit of the clay capping of the chalk as shown on the drift map, except for a short distance on either side of the dyke where the fold is slightly further down the hillside than is the clay.

We have, then, in Basing Dean a cross-bank and ditch facing west, running for 315 yards up the south slope of the dean, which at its south end encroaches for some 450 feet on to the clay, and a faint bank running for about 1000 yards, parallel with the bottom of the dean, and almost exactly on the probable lower edge of the clay capping. We have also, beyond the eastern end of the dean, three short cross-dykes (the Froxfield Short Entrenchments) higher up the valley, parallel with the dean dyke ; and south-south-east of the dyke the Froxfield Long Entrenchment running north, the most northerly part of which is visible near Bydean Farm, some 680 yards from the southern tip of the Basing Dean cross-dyke. This tip and the Bydean Farm Entrenchment are 42° out of alignment. All the above have a bank and ditch and all face defensively west ; apart from the dyke having a lower bank than the others, the maximum dimensions do not vary greatly.

Can these earthworks be co-related ? Dr. Williams-Freeman described the greater part of the fold in Basing Dean, which he originally considered to be a part of the Long Entrenchment, but he made no mention of the dyke crossing the dean. Later he doubted whether this fold was a part of the Long Entrenchment, and he considered it very big for a hedge bank.⁴ Without excavation and the discovery of missing portions of the Long Entrenchment, it would seem difficult to be certain of the true interpretation ;

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 374-5.

the fact that the fold and the edge of the clay capping are coincident makes one wonder if this fold, wide though it is, is no more than the lower edge of the capping, but the air photographs suggest an artificial soil disturbance. Is the cross-dyke in the dean a northern extension of the Long Entrenchment or is it a fourth Short Entrenchment? Its profile and position suggest a defensive cross-dyke, but why should it extend further up the side of the dean than would seem necessary for defence? Search might reveal a connection between it and the Bydean Farm portion of the Long Entrenchment, which has a bank 7 feet above the ditch and 4 feet above the ground behind it.

The following items of tradition and historical record seem worth noting. The Long Entrenchment is believed locally to be the old Sussex—Wessex boundary⁴ and to have been made "when the Blacks fought the Whites" and "when Basing fought with Bereleigh," Basing being in Hants and Bereleigh in the Jutish Hundreds of Wessex, chiefly Meon Valley.⁵ These Wulfere of Mercia in 661, having conquered Wessex, gave to Ethelwald, the King of the South-Saxons. In 675, the year of his death, Wulfere fought with Escwin, King of Wessex, at Biedan-heafde (Biedan-heafod);⁷ Bydean Farm is on the Long Entrenchment, which may well be that of the black heathen of Sussex against Christian Wessex.

The Froxfield—Basing Dean area merits wider and more thorough attention than I have yet been able to give it. When considering its earthworks, the neighbourhood, which contains other dykes, should be viewed as a whole. For it seems likely that if these and possibly others as yet undiscovered could be co-related, an interesting complex might be brought to light.

4. Williams-Freeman, Correspondence, 1938.

5. Williams-Freeman, *Field Archaeology of Hampshire*, p. 292.

6. Williams-Freeman, Correspondence, 1938.

7. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In different versions this place-name is given variously: for example, Biedanheafod and Bedan-heafde among others; and is translated by Thorpe and Ingram as Bedwin, wrongly I believe. (Ekwall's *Dictionary of English Place-names* gives Bedwyn, Wilts, as from an Old-English form of dialect, bedwind, "convolvulus.") Thorpe gives the place-name as Biedanheafod and translates it (as well as Bedwin) as Bieda's head. Heafod (head) can be used in various senses, such as ground which by its outline suggested a head or the highest point in a countryside. Bydean Farm is on the Long Entrenchment and is about a quarter-of-a-mile south of the highest part of its probable course, and it seems reasonable to associate the name Bydean with Biedan (the genitive of Bieda).