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Cyril Fox

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The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region

Sir Cyril Fox (1882–1967) was an archaeologist and later Director of the National Museum of Wales and President of the Museums Association. Having entered Magdalene College, Cambridge as a mature student, his first year dissertation was judged to be more suitable as a PhD thesis, which resulted in him progressing straight to his PhD. His doctoral thesis, reissued here, transformed archaeological thought when it was first published in 1923. In it Fox pioneered the geographical approach to analysing ancient settlement patterns, linking the expansion of human settlement in the Cambridge area from the Neolithic era to the Anglo-Saxon period with favourable environmental conditions. His thesis emphasised the importance of treating archaeological finds as clues to past human settlement instead of being the main focus for archaeological analysis. This approach became the methodological framework for later environmental and landscape archaeology.

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The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region

*A Topographical Study of the Bronze,
Early Iron, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Ages,
with an Introductory Note on the Neolithic Age*

CYRIL FOX



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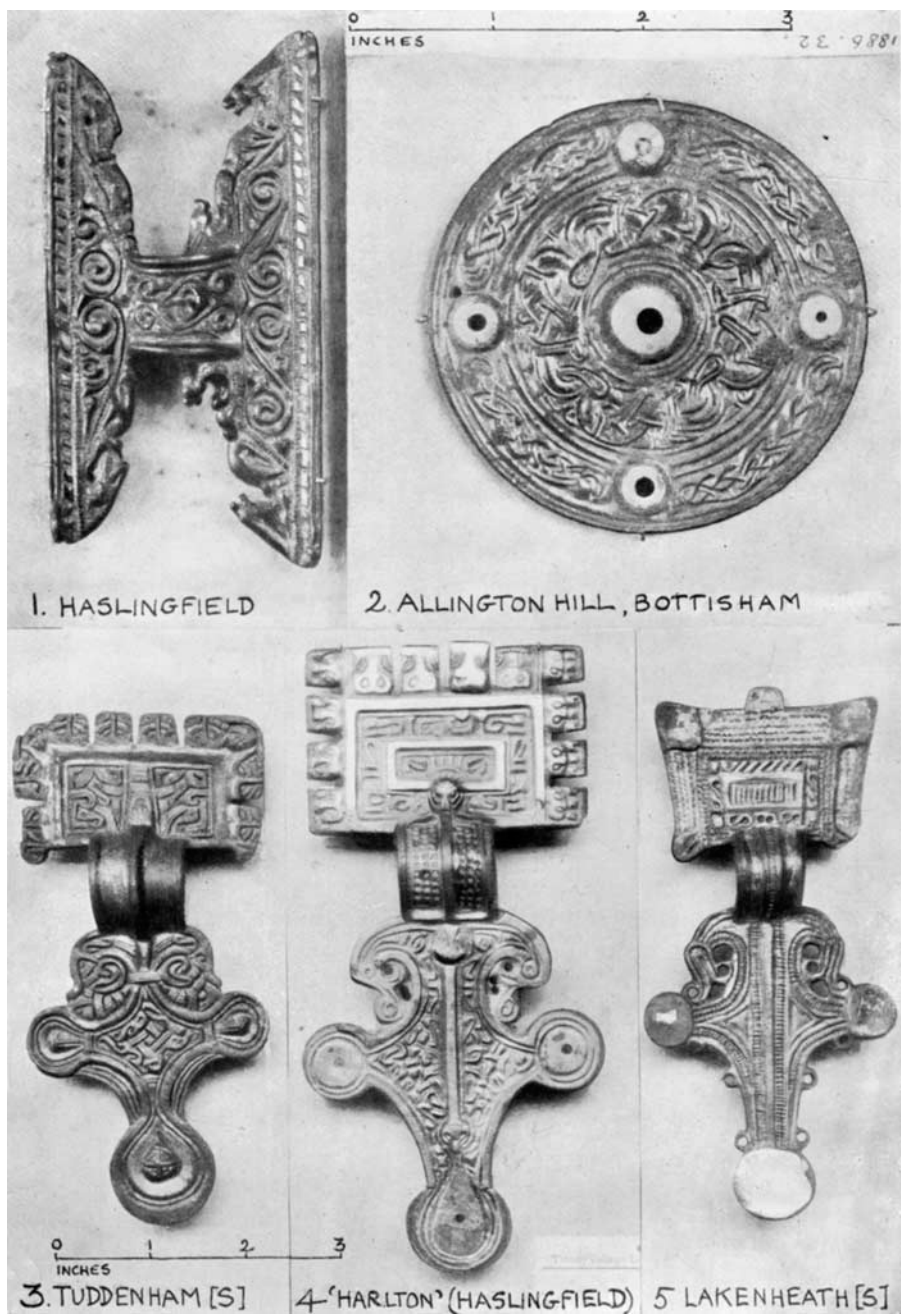
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FRONTISPIECE (PL. XXVIII)



ANGLO-SAXON AGE. GRAVE-FURNITURE OF THE PAGAN PERIOD
No 1, pp. 256, 258, 276; No. 2 pp. 258, 264; Nos. 3, 4, 5, p. 258.

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY *of the* CAMBRIDGE REGION

A TOPOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE BRONZE,
EARLY IRON, ROMAN AND ANGLO-SAXON
AGES, *with an* INTRODUCTORY NOTE
ON THE NEOLITHIC AGE

By

CYRIL FOX, PH.D., F.S.A.

∴

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE character and scope of the book are indicated in the Introduction; this prefatory note enables me to acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of others, and the help, both personal and financial, which I have received in connection with it.

A tribute is first due to Cambridge antiquaries, past and present, on whose work this study of mine has been built up, and but for whose labours it would have been impossible to complete it. I wish specially to mention the late Professor C. C. Babington, author of *Ancient Cambridgeshire*, and the late Professor T. McKenny Hughes; Baron Anatole von Hügel also, during whose tenure of the Curatorship of the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology (1883-1921) much material of vital importance for the pre-history and early history of the Cambridge Region has been secured for the benefit of my own and future generations.

To the Hon. Richard C. Neville, afterwards fourth Lord Braybrooke, a debt of gratitude is owed by all archaeologists; lacking his researches in connection with Bronze Age barrows, Roman sites and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries our knowledge of the Cambridge Region in past times would be still more limited than it is. That most of the objects found in the course of his investigations have been preserved in the Museum at Audley End House enhances the value of his work. To the present Lord Braybrooke, Visitor of my own College, I am indebted for permission to utilize the evidence available in that Museum.

The use made of the researches of students and investigators referred to directly and indirectly in the preceding paragraphs, and of the labours of others in the field of British archaeology in general, is I hope adequately acknowledged in the text. Here I may record my especial indebtedness to the writings of Professor G. Baldwin Brown and Mr Reginald A. Smith.

To the President and Council of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society special thanks are due; under the Society's auspices, and partly with the aid of its funds, the field work which formed part of my research has been carried through. My indebtedness to Dr W. M. Palmer, member of the Council, who collaborated with me in that work and largely financed it, I have elsewhere acknowledged.

For valued help and encouragement during the four years in which I have been engaged on this work I wish especially to thank Professor H. M. Chadwick and Professor Sir William Ridgeway; I have taken advantage of the permission given me by the latter to

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describe and refer to important objects in his collection of local antiquities.

For advice and information on special points I am grateful to Mr Miles Burkitt, Mr A. B. Cook, Mr W. J. Corbett, Dr W. H. L. Duckworth, Dr A. C. Haddon, and Mr F. J. H. Jenkinson¹, all of Cambridge; to Professor J. L. Myres and Mr E. Thurlow Leeds of Oxford, to Mr Harold Peake, Mr Bruce Dickins, Mr A. F. Griffith, Mr Guy Maynard and Mr George Morris; to Mr O. G. S. Crawford of the Ordnance Survey; to Mr R. A. Smith and Mr T. D. Kendrick of the British Museum; to the Rev. F. G. Walker, sometime Secretary of the C.A.S., and to Mr W. G. Clarke of Norwich. The latter has freely placed at my disposal his intimate knowledge of the archaeology of N.W. Suffolk, and has revised my Neolithic map of this area.

I am obliged to Mr H. Peake for enabling me to make additions to my list of Bronze Age Implements from the Card Index of such implements now being prepared by him on behalf of the British Association. I have also to thank Miss M. V. Taylor, of the Haverfield Library, Oxford, for access to MS. records bearing on the Roman occupation of my district.

I wish also to acknowledge the courtesy and help which I have received from Mr L. C. G. Clarke, Curator of the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology, Cambridge, and from the Curators or owners of the several public or private Museums referred to in the text.

I am indebted to Mr H. Barker, the Curator of Moyses Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds, for permitting me to obtain the photographs reproduced on Plates I, 4; II, 3, and XV, 1; to Mr J. W. Bodger, Hon. Secretary of the Peterborough Archaeological Society, for permission to reproduce objects in Fig. 1; and to Miss B. S. Phillpotts, Mistress of Girton College, for allowing me to reproduce on Plates XXXI, 1, 2, and XXXV, 1, 2, objects in Girton College Library. The Girton photographs were kindly supplied to me by Miss E. S. Fegan, Librarian of the College.

These excepted, all the objects illustrated are in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge; and my thanks are due to the Board of Archaeological and Ethnological Studies for allowing me to reproduce them. The photographs used for the half-tone plates of these objects were taken for me by Mr W. Tams of Cambridge, whose skill and care deserve special recognition here.

I am much indebted to the Syndics of the University Press for undertaking, without hope of financial profit, the publication of this

¹ Mr Jenkinson, University Librarian, kindly permitted me to make use of his MS. notes on the Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Girton, explored by him.

PREFATORY NOTE vii

book. The high cost of its production, in particular of the series of coloured maps which are essential to my scheme, made it necessary for me to find the sum of one hundred pounds additional to that which the Press was prepared to expend. It is with grateful pleasure that I here record the names of the Society and the personal friends and relations by whom this sum was generously provided.

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For the care and skill shown in the production of the coloured maps my best thanks are due to the Director-General and the Staff of the Ordnance Survey. I also wish to thank Mr S. C. Roberts, Secretary to the Syndics of the Press, and the Manager and Staff of the Press for the courtesy and help afforded me in connection with the book.

Miss E. S. Fegan, Librarian of Girton College, generously undertook the thankless task of proof-reading; Mr Miles Burkitt read the proof of Chapter I, Professor H. M. Chadwick the proofs of Chapters I, II, III, VI and VII; Dr W. H. L. Duckworth the proofs of the paragraphs dealing with the ethnology of the district. I have been glad to adopt suggestions made by these friends. I have also received valued help in connection with the proofs from Mr W. J. Corbett, Dr L. Cobbett, and my father, Mr C. F. Fox.

Communications of finds which may in the future be made in the district covered by this survey, or of past discoveries which I may have omitted, will be gratefully received and acknowledged. Such communications should be addressed to me, c/o The Curator, the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology, Cambridge.

CYRIL FOX.

RED GABLES,
MILTON, CAMBS.
July, 1923.

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All the objects illustrated, unless otherwise noted, are in the Museum
of Archaeology and of Ethnology, Cambridge.

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duction. In each of these cases the black lines of the upper portion of the scale
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A series of five coloured Maps of the Region included in the Survey, on the scale of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to one mile.

- I. Finds and Remains attributed to the Neolithic Age.
- II. " " " Bronze Age.
- III. " " " Early Iron Age.
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- V. The Anglo-Saxon Age, showing:
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*This map is available as a download from www.cambridge.org/9781108011693

COVER DESIGN

The design on the cover is a full size reproduction of one of the enamelled bronze harness plates of the La Tène IV period, included in the *Santon Downham* hoard.

CONTRACTIONS

The following contractions are frequently used :

I, II etc.. . . .	Preceding the words century, millennium; read First, Second etc. In some cases where chronological references are frequent, and where the context permits, Roman numerals alone are used for the centuries.
A.-S.	Anglo-Saxon.
A.S.C.	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
[B]	Bedfordshire ¹ .
B.A.	Bronze Age.
B.M.	Bench Mark.
B.M.G.	British Museum Guide.
[C]	Cambridgeshire.
C.A.S.	Cambridge Antiquarian Society.
C.A.S. Rep. xi, etc. .	Reports presented at the Annual General Meetings (No. xi to No. XLVIII) of the Society, from 1851 to 1888; usually bound up with Volumes I to VI of the Communications.
C.I.L.	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.
C.M.	(See under Museums.)
[E]	Essex ¹ .
E.I.A.	Early Iron Age.
[H]	Hertfordshire ¹ .
Museums:	
Audley End Mus. .	Lord Braybrooke's Museum in Audley End House, Saffron Walden.
Brit. Mus.	British Museum, London.
Bury Mus.	Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds.
Camb. Mus. or C.M.	Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology, Cambridge.
Huntingdon Mus. .	Huntingdon Institute and Museum.
St Albans Mus. . .	Hertfordshire County Museum, St Albans.
Walden Mus. . . .	Saffron Walden Museum.
[N]	Norfolk ¹ .
N.A.	Neolithic Age.
Num. Chron. . . .	Numismatic Chronicle.
O.D.	Ordnance Survey datum level.
O.S.	Ordnance Survey.
P.S.E.A.	Prehistoric Society of East Anglia.
R.	Roman.
R.C.H.M.	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England).
[S]	Suffolk ¹ .
S.I.	Suffolk Institute; afterwards
S.I.A.	Suffolk Institute of Archaeology.
Soc. Antiq.	Society of Antiquaries of London.
V.C.H.	Victoria County History.

Other abbreviations used, are, it is hoped, self-explanatory.

¹ Places mentioned in the text which, though within the area covered by the survey, are situated in counties other than Cambridgeshire, are when necessary distinguished by the addition of the County letter [B], [E], [H], [N], [S], or abbreviation [Hunts.]. This affords a rough guide to the position of such places on the 1/4-inch Maps of the Cambridge Region. The exact position of these and all other sites referred to in the text can more easily be found by reference to the Map-Square given in the Index.

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Cyril Fox

Frontmatter

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INTRODUCTION

OBJECT OF THE RESEARCH

IN this book, the archaeological data available for the study of the prehistory and early history of the Cambridge Region from the Neolithic Age onwards, are arranged and analysed. The work was undertaken in order to provide a basis—which does not at present exist—for the future detailed study, period by period, of the archaeological remains of the district and of the many problems connected therewith. The MS. was submitted in 1922 as a thesis for the Ph.D. degree of the University of Cambridge, and approved.

BOUNDARIES OF AREA DEALT WITH

The district dealt with is approximately a square with sides 44 miles in length, Cambridge being at the centre. A larger area would have been too extensive for detailed treatment, while the geographical features of the countryside rendered limitation to a smaller area undesirable. The area chosen includes a large extent of fenland, the catchment basin of the Cam, and part of the basins of other fen rivers—the Great and Little Ouse and the Lark—as well as the upper waters of streams flowing southward and eastward away from our area, the valleys of which provide convenient routes into the Cambridge plain. Thus small portions of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Huntingdonshire are included in the survey, as well as the greater part of the county of Cambridge.

PHYSIOGRAPHY OF THE REGION

The district thus defined consisted in early times mainly of four distinct types of country. (i) In the north the fens; readily traversed by water, but by land impassable, save to those locally acquainted with its drier patches and hidden fords. (ii) To the south and east of the fens a continuous belt of dry chalk downland (open, for the most part, but here and there covered with groves of beech and patches of scrub) extending from the extreme south-west of our Region (Hitchin [H])¹ to the River Kennett in the east. (iii) From the Kennett to our northern boundary and beyond stretches the East Anglian heath country, where the chalk or clay is overlaid by sands and other deposits producing a light dry well-drained soil. (iv) To the south and

¹ See List of Contractions, p. xix.

east of the open country oak-ash forest with dense undergrowth extended beyond the limits of our Region, the subsoil being boulder-clay; similar forest, moreover, may be held to have covered the whole upland between the Cam and the Great Ouse Valleys with the exception of the southern border of the fens, certain spurs adjacent to the Cam Valley where the chalk is exposed, and the patch of dry heathy country in the neighbourhood of Sandy [B] and Gamlingay. North of Huntingdon again, the fen-bordered upland on the left bank of the Ouse was until recent times forest.

That my estimate of the extent of forest in our district in primitive times is conservative is shown by the following quotation from Tansley (1911, p. 65): "There is no doubt that by far the greater part of the British Isles was originally covered with forest: in England the whole of the East, South and Midlands, except perhaps some of the Chalk Downs and some of the poorer sands." From the very beginning, however, man's activities tended to reduce the area under forest in districts otherwise suitable for his occupation.

Much confirmatory evidence bearing on the extent and character of the ancient forests is to be found in Domesday Book.

The ready means of access from neighbouring regions by land and water which the belt of open chalk downland and heathland, and the fen rivers respectively afford, and the barriers on the south-east and north-west which the forests present, are the main geographical factors governing the prehistory and early history of our district. The survey will indicate the nature and extent of their influence.

A more detailed discussion of the conditions of specially important areas in primitive times will be better deferred until occasion arises for their consideration. It should here, however, be noted that there is evidence which suggests that subsidence took place in the eastern fens during the Neolithic Age—the III millennium B.C.—and it is probable that the greater part of that area was in subsequent centuries a mere or meres which were only gradually replaced by peat. It is hardly to be doubted that the topography of the fenlands must in pre-Roman times have differed greatly from that indicated on the maps, the difference being such as to increase the range of movement by water and to curtail that by land.

Topographical description of the Cam river system is rendered difficult by the lack of ancient names for the several branches of the river. The main stream, rising at Ashwell [H] and flowing through Cambridge, is throughout the book referred to as the Cam. Its chief tributary, rising near Henham [E] and flowing past Chesterford [E], I call the Essex Cam.

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The small tributary from the west which joins the main stream at Grantchester has always been known as the Bourn Brook, and it will so be referred to in my text. The stream which rises in the forest country near Castle Camps and which flows through Linton, joining the Essex Cam at Shelford, is called the Granta on the Ordnance Maps. It is well known that this name is loosely used as a synonym for the Cam, and there is, I think, no authority for applying it, or any other name, to the stream in question. Since, however, the bridge where the London-Newmarket road crosses the latter has always been known as Bourn Bridge this generic river name seems the most suitable, and I therefore follow Hughes (1909, p. 37) in describing the stream as the Bourn River, which I hope distinguishes it sufficiently clearly.

A portion only of the Great Ouse river system is within our district. The main river enters it near Roxton [B], being at the point of entry joined by its tributary the Ivel; a large part of the basin of the latter river is included.

MAPS

(A) *Large Scale*

The principal map of the district used for the work is the quarter-inch to one mile Ordnance Survey map, printed in faint grey. This is overprinted in colours in accordance with the description given above, green being used to represent areas probably densely afforested, and brown for fen and marsh, the portions left uncoloured being considered to have been open, or, at most, lightly afforested. The river system is emphasized in blue, the courses of the rivers within the fens being such as early maps and records show, and existing traces confirm. For the physiographical reconstruction in general I have relied on geological data available in the publications of the *Geological Survey* and on personal knowledge of the countryside.

The courses of the fen rivers were no doubt frequently altered in pre-historic as in historic times owing to the blocking of the outfalls by sand-banks, etc. The Great Ouse no doubt sometimes followed the course of the "West Water" northward from Earith to Benwick, and joined the River Nene (when the channel of the "Old West River" would be a swampy morass); sometimes it flowed in an easterly direction, by the latter channel, joining the Cam near Stretham. Both routes are indicated. The Cam (or Great Ouse, which is the usual designation of the combined streams of the Cam and the Old West River below Stretham) would appear to have flowed sometimes in an ancient channel past Stuntney Hall and village, sometimes by Ely. Both courses are indicated. North of Ely the river originally passed by Littleport and up the "Old Croft" and "Welney" rivers to Upwell (outside our area) where it received the waters of the Nene, and so flowed through Wisbech. The Great Ouse was thus probably unconnected with the Little Ouse until recent times. The chief meres are shown; and

certain of the lodes also, for although they cannot be prehistoric, yet they represent the outfalls of streams from the uplands, the original course of which must approximately have coincided with their alignments. See Skertchly (1877), Cunningham (1909), and maps of the fens by Hondius and others.

(B) *Small Scale*

The four small-scale maps of Eastern England which will be found in the text are designed to illustrate the relation between the Cambridge Region and Eastern England generally in successive culture periods; those marked (A) and (B) also indicate areas probably densely afforested; they show how important at times our countryside must have been commercially and militarily. The chalk belt is a natural highway, and is the only route by which East Anglia could be reached from the Midlands, the upper Thames Valley and Salisbury Plain.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION OF MATERIAL

(I) *Text* and (II) *Maps*

Five Periods or Ages are included in the survey, the Neolithic, Bronze, Early Iron, Roman and Anglo-Saxon. The finds and remains of each Age are entered on one of the quarter-inch Regional Maps already referred to. Since these show the modern topography, the relation between ancient trackways, settlements, etc., and the roads, villages and towns of the present day can conveniently be studied on them. The small-scale maps previously mentioned, and maps of certain portions of the Cambridge Region which will also be found in the text, present information relevant to the enquiry.

In Chapter I of the text the Neolithic Age is briefly dealt with, mainly as an introduction to the succeeding Ages. In Chapters II and III the Bronze and Early Iron Ages are considered; in Chapter IV Earthwork possibly or certainly prehistoric is discussed. Chapters V and VI deal with the Roman and Anglo-Saxon Ages respectively, the survey closing at the Norman Conquest. In Chapter VII the main results are coördinated, and their general bearing discussed.

In order that the greatest possible amount of information may be given on the Regional Maps certain symbols have been employed¹; these are fully explained on the maps themselves. The method of recording finds the exact provenance of which is unknown is detailed on pp. 9 and 217 of the text. The Index gives the map-square of

¹ It is important for the reader to note that the scale of the map is such that when remains and finds from a given site are numerous, the group of symbols can only approximately represent the true position.

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every place in our Region mentioned in the text. Places and sites in our Region not marked on the $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch Ordnance map are distinguished by a star in the Index, and the position of most of them is described in detail therein.

Remains of a given Age have been sought for in connection with the whole area included on the Regional Map. The material thus gathered together has been embodied in a topographical index, which forms the basis on which this study of the archaeology of the district has been built up. It has not been found possible to include the index in the book; but all the important material dealt with in the text is fully referenced and its present provenance indicated. A list of authors quoted will be found at the end of the book, where also are appendices containing lists of beakers, hoards and round barrows attributed to the Bronze Age.

A disappointing result of an examination of the literature and of museum collections is the scarcity of information which would give clues to the age of the hill-forts and dykes. Few of these have been excavated, and the proof of age and date or period of construction lies, doubtless, in their banks or ditches¹; but one might expect that finds of the period to which a given fort or dyke belongs would occur more frequently in its neighbourhood than elsewhere. Recorded finds, however, of any sort in or near such are rare. Roman coins, it is true, have been found in or adjacent to practically every earthwork in the district, but this is certainly no evidence of origin.

(III) *Illustrations and Diagrams*

The argument is, with unavoidable exceptions, throughout verbally illustrated by reference to objects of local provenance preserved in the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology, Cambridge. The objects illustrated pictorially and diagrammatically, too, are almost all in the local museum². The basic importance of pottery in a study of this character will be found to have been fully recognized; for the rest, my endeavour has been to cover as wide a range as possible in my illustrations of finds attributed to each Age, from the Bronze Age onward.

Certain important objects and group finds in the Cambridge Museum are not illustrated. This is because adequate reproductions are available in accessible publications, to which references are given.

¹ An attempt to determine the age of the Fleam Dyke was carried out by Fox and Palmer in 1921-2.

² I hope, therefore, that the book may be found useful as a Museum Guide to the collection of local antiquities.