

'Hundreds' were a Saxon unit of government and brought together a number of manorial settlements. From later Norman times the villages of Ovingdean, Rottingdean, Falmer, Stanmer and Kingston were organized in the Younsmere Hundred. Their courts were held out on the open Downs, and the place was chosen for its rough centrality for all the communities. They are said to have met here right up till around two centuries ago.

The Bostle barrow field. TQ 371 054.

JUST east of Woodingdean, on the top of the hill just south of the bridleway fenceline, there is a cluster of low grassy mounds. They're not much to look at, and the barrow field is a bit scruffy — a 'precious fragment' surrounded by huge plough lands. There's a lot of graves, though. In that small area you could, with care, count 27 small mounds, which are probably Saxon, and three larger, probably Bronze Age barrows. And that's not all of it, for the bridleway you walked down crosses the flattened remains of more barrows and graves, and its very likely there are more all around.

The plough had recently clipped the edge of a couple of the barrows when we last went there on a November day. A Hare started up at our approach. A family of Badgers were obviously conducting their own excavations in several of the mounds. We looked at their excavated chalk rubble and I picked up a piece of rough pottery, with simple impressed decorative lines upon it. When I got home I looked at it under better light. My fingertip fitted neatly into each of the impressed marks. My finger was sitting in the thumb marks left by a potter who had made this piece perhaps 3,600 years ago. That is really something.

In 1997 archaeologists excavated the flattened part of the cemetery on the bridlepath alignment.¹ They found Saxon ring ditches with the skeletons of folk who must have been settlers at the very

end of the pagan period. They found an unusual number of infant burials. In the Bronze Age the farming peoples may have set this place aside for the graves of their little children. They found cremations. One knotty bit of charcoal was tentatively identified as a species of *Daphne* shrub. There are two native species of *Daphne*: the sweet smelling Mezereon, *Daphne mezereon*, which is a vernal shrub that only recently went extinct on these Downs, and the evergreen Spurge Laurel, *D. laureola*, which is still found on our Downs, for instance in Coombe Plantation. Both species must always have been scarce, and are slight in size, so they wouldn't have been used as fuel. Perhaps they were cast on the pyre for their beauty, and if evergreen Spurge Laurel was used, because it symbolized the everlasting after-life.

The Bostle combe slope. TQ 371 048.

THERE is a delightful ancient Down pasture slope with the softest Sheep's Fescue turf, just south of the barrow field. It is the sort of place you could sit all day, with a picnic and a drink. From it you can see only sky, the green valley, and the sea. It is silent, save for the gulls and perhaps a distant aeroplane. In spring there are Cowslips and Violets. In summer the Thyme is everywhere, and in autumn the Gorse comes back into bloom.

In the valley bottom down to New Barn, on the Falmer Road, you will notice small earth dams. They are there because in October 1987, heavy rains on these winter ploughed valley side soils caused muddy flood waters to rush down into many Ovingdean homes.

High Hill. TQ 378 041.

IT is the **north slope of the Hill, TQ 380 043**, that still retains the magic of old Downland. I love that place. I rate it as amongst the best on our Brighton Downs.

The old drove known as Bazehill Road takes you up to High Hill from Rottingdean.