

- 4-6. As Nos. 1-3, but with thicker buff surfaces.
 7. Fragment of cordon or sharp carination: black ware, finely pitted where grits have weathered from surface: some white grit in body, coarser than previous sherds.
 8-14. As Nos. 1-3, but two sherds are of darker grey, and one is fired to a reddish surface.
 15. Larger sherd ($1\frac{3}{4} \times 1$ in.): as 1-3 but more soapy surface, due, perhaps, to lower firing temperature.

2. THE IRON AGE DEFENCES AND WANSDYKE

By

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The descriptions and conclusions which follow are based on a series of visits made to Maes Knoll, mainly during the winter months when the undergrowth was withered. The last visit was on Dec. 3rd, 1962, a day when the low winter sunshine threw everything into sharp relief.

Maes Knoll has a roughly triangular shape with east and west sides and a northern base. The north-west corner is truncated by Maes Knoll Tump. The camp covers about 30 acres. It has been briefly described by other writers. Seyer (1821, Vol. 1, p. 89) describes outworks, though these are natural scarps altered by ploughing; that is, they are lynchets. Major and Burrow (1926, *Fig.* 28) have elaborated Seyer's drawing but do show the outwork to the north-east, but the account is typically confused. More recently the site has been discussed by A. and C. Fox in "Wansdyke Reconsidered" (1958). Both strategically and tactically the position is a very strong one, lying at the south-east end of a spur of the Dundry ridge.

A common route of approach is along the top of the spur from the west to where one encounters, straddling the neck of the spur, the tremendous outer ditch and bank known as Maes Knoll Tump. The ditch has a remarkably sharply cut outer edge and looks relatively modern. It has a flat base and a steep outer face. The slope up the side of the Tump is also very steep. A levelled profile across the work, made just south of the O.S. Δ at ST 59866624, is given in *Fig.* 2. The bottom of the ditch is now 17 ft. below the level of the natural surface to the west. The top of the Tump is 48 ft. above the bottom of the ditch and 21 ft. above the level of the interior of the camp. The overall width is 200 ft. Approximately in the centre of the top of the Tump is a small ruined building, 12 ft. north to south and 8 ft. east to west. It looks comparatively modern. The north end of the ditch has some ruined buildings in it, and the extreme north end has been almost levelled by spoil derived from the north end of the Tump. This cutting shows that the great mound is apparently of simple dump construction, but the section is far from complete.

Along the curving north side of the camp a much ploughed-down bank, still in places up to 4 ft. high by 20 ft. wide, can be followed to the north-east

corner, where it turns south and where there has been some modern destruction to make a trackway down the hill. The bank runs along the edge of the escarpment. Below, the slope is very steep for about 20 ft., and there has been a considerable amount of slumping from the top. Then comes a well-marked bench, some 20 ft. or so wide and with faint traces of a ditch in it. A careful examination of the north-west and north-east corners indicates that the bench is really the continuation of the west and east ditches and, further, that the profile of this side of the spur within the limits of the camp is quite different from that beyond the limits of the camp. That is, the hill has certainly been scarped to steepen the slope and there is probably a ditch in the bench as well. Towards the east end of the bench, for about 50 yd.

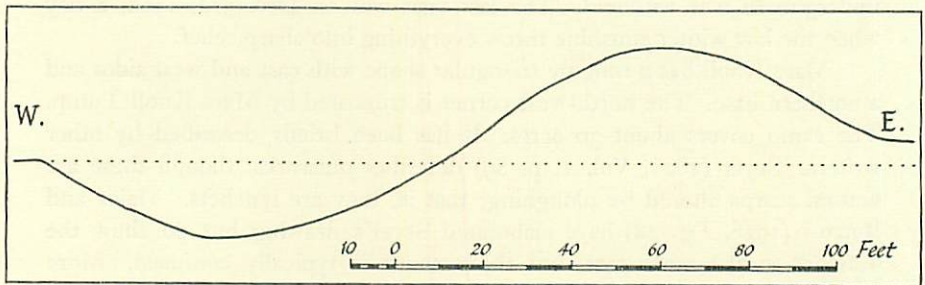


Fig. 2.—Maes Knoll Camp. Profile across North-west Ditch and The Tump.

from ST 60096622 to ST 60156622, is a feature not previously recorded, namely a low bank about 2 ft. high and 15 ft. wide along the outer edge of the bench with a shallow ditch, largely obscured by slumping from above, on its inner side.

From the north-east corner down the east side the northern bank is continued, accompanied by a ditch which has all the characters, though it is not so large, of the ditch outside the Tump. This continues south. It is over 8 ft. deep and 20 ft. wide at the bottom. As it approaches field o (*Fig. 1*) the ditch has been considerably altered by agricultural efforts, which have pushed most of the bank into the ditch. The area is somewhat confused because it is here that the ditch begins to turn away to run down hill south-easterly. Beyond this point, for the rest of the way along the east side, the only evidence for a defensive structure is a low scarp, some 2-3 ft. high, ending in a short slope and then, further south, in almost level ground. Field o has been very frequently ploughed from south to north.

At the extreme south end there is quite a well-marked bank across the spur, and it is behind this that Rahtz and Barton have made their excavations (p. 10). How much of this artificial platform is merely bank slip is not known.

At the west end of this bank is the entrance to the camp. It is best seen from the slope of the spur below. Between the entrance and the edge of the steep scarp on the west are the remains of a bank, presumably the defence of the other side of the entrance. This bank can only be traced for a few yards northwards along the western side. Here again, as for most of the east side, the position of the defences can only be inferred. They may have been on the edge of the scarp and have been ploughed down over it, or they may have been set further back. Only excavation can prove them. However, as the north end of the west side is approached, a low bank is seen at the edge of the scarp. It gradually becomes wider and higher till, where it merges into the south edge of the Tump, it is about 4 ft. high and 15 ft. wide.

There are outworks of the camp on the spur running down from the north-east corner towards Whitewood Farm (ST 607664). These works consist first of a bank about 2 ft. high by 15 ft. wide, most easily seen close to the north-east corner of the camp on the east side of the ditch. This bank can be traced for about 150 ft. to a point where it commands the whole of the slope of the spur, and there is no dead ground as there is from further west. For part of this distance the bank is accompanied by a shallow ditch on the outer side, and beyond, north, by a second bank, which appears to be a continuation of that already described as lying below the scarp near the east end of the north side. It seems likely that the first bank and ditch return south to cross the east ditch in the confused area already referred to, and to continue south down to the southern tip of the camp.

The relationship of Wansdyke to the camp has been a vexed question for some time. The generally accepted view is that Wansdyke did include the camp and that it ended there. In their 1958 paper, "Wansdyke Reconsidered", A. and C. Fox express contrary views. They consider that Western Wansdyke ends short of Maes Knoll because no bank could be traced up to the eastern side of the camp beyond the west side of their Field 1, which runs up from the valley bottom east of Maes Knoll, that there was no way through the Iron Age defences and that the part marked as Wansdyke, running down from the camp to the valley bottom, was nothing more than a sunken way. On all these points the present writer holds completely different views. First, it is conceded that Wansdyke is a running defensive structure or at least a delineating boundary one. But militarily it is an absurdity to end such a work in the valley bottom or even a few yards short of such an eminently suitable defensive site as Maes Knoll. Further, they have overlooked the immense differences between the ditch on the northern part of the east side of the camp and the rest of the defences, and how very similar this is to the ditch outside the Tump at the north-west end. These ditches are so obviously of much later date than the rest of the defences, which are scarcely discernible, and their profiles are far too sharply defined for the ditches to have been

dug over 2000 years ago. Further, under the excellent lighting conditions of Dec. 23rd, 1962, the ploughed-down bank of Wansdyke could be easily seen stretching from the east edge of their Field 4 (ST 61156548) right up to the western edge of Field 1. In Field 0 its place is taken by an area levelled by ploughing, which has pushed the bank into the ditch. Their sunken way is equally obviously the continuation of the ditch of Wansdyke. At the west edge of Field 0 Wansdyke turns north, and both the bank and ditch are part of it. At the north-east corner, the ditch is continued west, along the north side with its corresponding bank, and the ditch returns south in front of the Tump.

The Iron Age defences, on the other hand, have been almost totally destroyed, largely by agricultural processes. Only at the southern tip and at the southern and northern ends of the curved west side can they be determined from surface features. The outworks at the north-east seem to be part of these defences too, and so probably is the 50-yd. length of mound, with ditch inside, beneath the east end of the north side. Presumably the ditch of Wansdyke has incorporated this Iron Age one. Wansdyke cut through the defences and obliterated them at the north turn on the east side. Along the north side, the bank of Wansdyke may coincide with the Iron Age defences, but it is more likely that they were destroyed when Wansdyke was built. The Tump presumably covers the defences at the north-west in view of the manner in which the putative Iron Age bank runs under it at the south end of the Tump. One may suppose that there was an Iron Age entrance here to the camp, but where it was and what form it took can only be determined by excavation.

A. and C. Fox have suggested that Western Wansdyke ends short of the camp, or in the valley bottom to the east of the camp, because it had already outflanked the likely and possible routes of approach down ridgeways and old Roman roads. The Cotswolds, the Fosse Way and roads leading out of Bath had all been outflanked, but they failed to consider the possibility of a lateral Roman road from Bath along the left bank of the Avon and also the secondary road from Bristol over Dundry (Tratman, 1962), though, to be fair, this information was not published when they wrote their paper. Perhaps the massiveness of the termination of Wansdyke at Maes Knoll Tump is a reflection of the possible use of this road over Dundry as a means of reaching the presumptively open land of the flat top of the Dundry ridge. An enemy could then attack eastwards along the ridge.

CONCLUSIONS

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Maes Knoll Camp was originally an Iron Age A fort, but the defences of that period have been very extensively destroyed, largely, probably,

by long-continued agricultural operations, but also, perhaps, because they were slighted by conquerors, as for example, at Little Solsbury (Dowden, 1927, p. 27). They may have been slighted again by the builders of Wansdyke. On the north there is some evidence for two Iron Age ramparts.

The builders of Wansdyke incorporated Maes Knoll as the western end of the west section of the dyke as a terminal strong point. On the east, Wansdyke was cut through the Iron Age defences and took a different line. Along the north, probably, and on the north-west, certainly, the Wansdyke works have covered and obliterated the Iron Age defences.

The Tump and its ditch mark the end of Wansdyke in the west. No authentic extension beyond this has been found, and the topographical position of the Tump and Ditch automatically precludes any extension to the west.

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