

The Percy Sladen Memorial Fund Excavations at Bury Hill Camp, Winterbourne Down, Gloucestershire. 1926.

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Bury Hill is a little eminence of Bristol Coal Measure Pennant Grit that rises 210—220 feet above O.D. in an angle of the Frome Valley, which here changes course from west to south. The camp is situated at the west end of this Hill 100 feet above and about 100 yards east of the river. It stands five and a half miles north-east of Bristol, and less than half a mile south of the village of Winterbourne

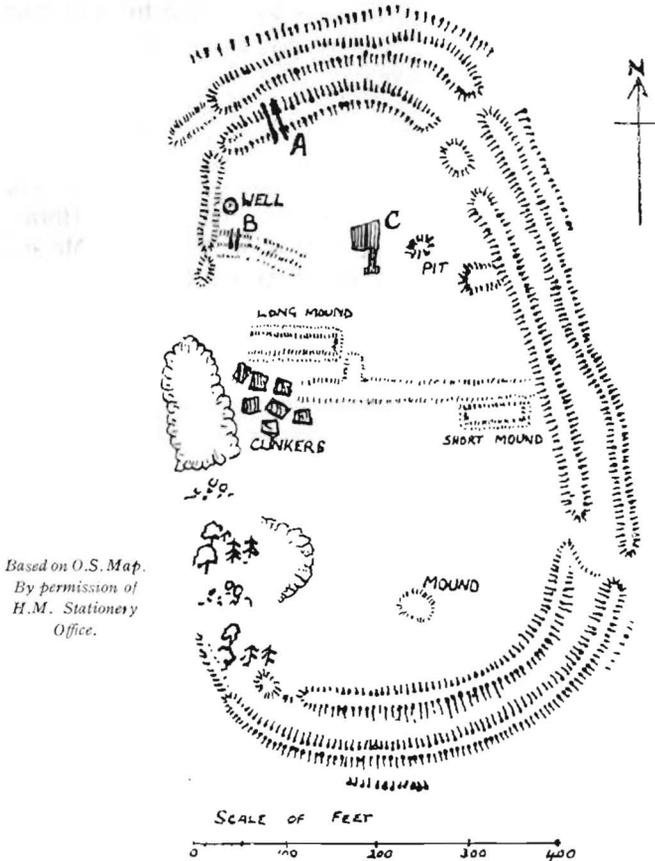
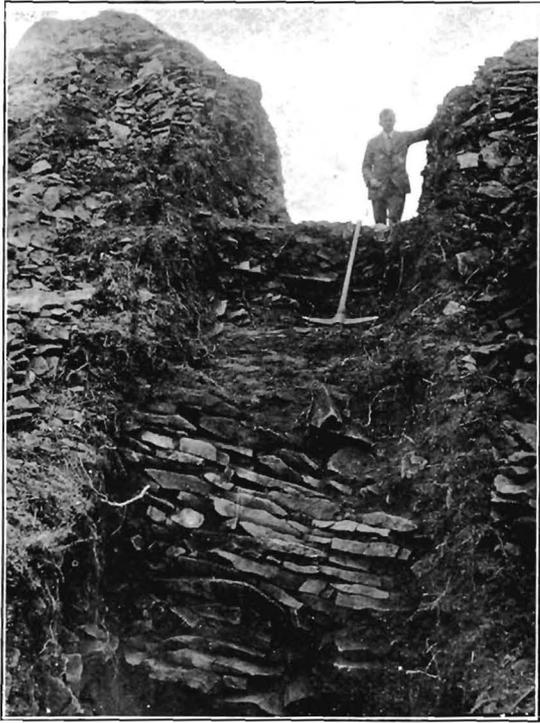


FIG. 1.

124
124



A



B

PLATE I.

Down, an alsatia that came into being rather more than a hundred years ago. South-west of the camp, in the shade of the ramparts, is the fine Jacobean farmstead of Moorend, the residence of Mr. Rutter, the owner, to whom we are indebted for ready permission to excavate.

Last year Miss Balch drew the attention of the Society to the continued devastation of the camp by quarrying, and in June the prompt action of the trustees of the Percy Sladen Fund in granting £30 towards its exploration opened the way to work on the site. The grant was timely, for some part of the area investigated has since vanished.

The slope from the camp to the water meadows is very steep, and is now scarred by quarries, but it was never precipitous. To the north the land falls gently away to the river, on the east and south is rolling country; so that the camp would fall under the heading of Contour Forts in Mr. Allcroft's system of classification.

As shown in the sketch, Fig. I, the defences enclose an irregular pear shape, 220 yards by 120 yards being the greatest length and breadth. 260 and 150 yards are the extreme dimensions of the fortifications, the whole covering about five and a half acres. The enclosure is uniformly flat except in the N.W. corner, where it falls a few feet towards the valley.

THE LARGE HUT SITE.

(Fig. 2 and Plate I B)

In June work was begun on a long rectangular mound in the west of the camp which was rapidly becoming obscured by the quarry spoil tip. For this reason the west limits of the mound were ill-defined, but more than 70 feet remained uncovered and available for excavation. The mean width of the mound was 17 feet. It was enclosed by a ditch 4 feet wide, and from 6 inches to a foot deep. The mound was hummocky, rising from a foot to 2-ft. 6-ins. above the bottom of the ditch. At regular intervals shallow transverse grooves had been cut across it, but excavation showed that these had no relation to any of the structural features discovered; they are almost certainly due to disturbance in recent times. The material was Pennant stone in thin flags and some earth. In the N.E. corner where the surface was most irregular potsherds, which elsewhere were abundant, were distributed very sparsely.

Remains of a foundation wall of four or five courses of Pennant stone, about a foot high, were visible on the north side, but the masonry

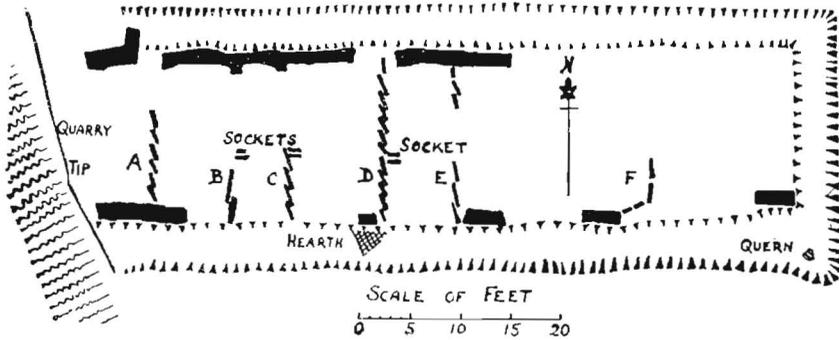


FIG. 2.

was manifestly not intended to bear a heavy super-structure. The wall rested flush with the bottom of the ditch.

The entire area of mound and ditch was turned over to a depth of a few inches below the true surface level, when finds were no longer made. Lengths of the containing foundation wall were discovered along both sides of the mound, but much had been destroyed beforehand. A remarkable feature revealed by excavation was the presence of a number of slanting transverse rows of undressed Pennant flags across the site. These had all been embedded about 9-ins. in the earth, the flag against the south wall being embedded first, and the next overlapping it about 3-ins. and partly resting on it, and so on throughout the row, tilewise. All sloped to the west except the row B which sloped east, and all had the mean height of 15-ins., less than half of which was above the surface. Only row D was complete, but B and C appeared to stop midway across the floor. The two latter rows seemed to have some connection with what are either drainage leads into the subsoil or pole sockets. These leads or sockets are holes rather less than a foot deep in the rock, each lined with parallel stout slabs of Pennant stone four inches apart. The spaces between the slabs were so small that only very slender poles, too slight to take the weight of a roof, could have been inserted. A pottery counter was discovered in one of the hollows. Possibly the sloping flags represent a very crude system of tile drainage.

The plan of the building recalls very strongly the "long buildings" in the forts of Gellygaer, Newstead, Great Chesters, Housesteads, and elsewhere. Walls of either timber or sods were raised on stone foundations, the buildings being roofed with brushwood. Two doorways were found in this hut.

The Roman conquest had been carried as far as Caerleon and Mendip by A.D. 47. Probably this hut is all that remains of the

housing of an outpost established during the campaign, or at any rate during the troubled times which preceded the founding of Caerwent. The part excavated would have provided sleeping quarters for half a century. The pottery, which is listed below, lends the greatest support to this hypothesis. The bulk of the sherds are of Roman types, early for Britain, and they can easily be differentiated from the pottery found in other occupation sites of the camp. Moreover, a number of sherds of uninfluenced Celtic pottery, hand-burnished, and not made on the wheel, were discovered at the west end of the hut. The Roman and native cultures had made contact here, but there is no sign of their mingling; especially of that replacement of the native by the Roman which is so patent in even the earliest Romano-British villages.

One other smaller hut site in the east of the camp, 51 feet by 15 feet 6 inches, with a five foot ditch, is safe from quarrying for many years to come and remains unexcavated. It is identical in form, and would be contemporary with the large hut.

THE RAMPARTS.

(Fig. 3 and Plate IA)

Except on the steep west side of the camp there are two ramparts enclosing a ditch. To the north of the camp there is a second or outer ditch with a mean depth of 3 feet. There are further traces of this ditch to the north-east, south-east, and south.

There are entrances in the south-east, north-east, and north-west, and further, if the 25-in. O.S. map of 1915 is to be relied on there was a fourth entrance to the west. The north-west entrance was protected by a curtain wall, the remains of which may still be seen. It recalls the original entrance of Hod Hill Camp, and as at Hod Hill the Romans may have cut the two straight gaps through the eastward valla.

In September a trench 8 feet wide was driven through the inner vallum 20 yards east of the north-west entrance (Fig. 1, A). The mound here rises 9 feet above the adjoining enceinte and 13 feet above the present bottom of the fosse. The ramparts are less degraded here than anywhere else, except, perhaps, in the extreme south of the camp, where they are more massive.

Five feet from the south end of the trench Pennant flags larger than any in the immediate neighbourhood were discovered. Their disposition along the inner line of the rampart suggested the foundations of a low retaining wall, though it must be understood that

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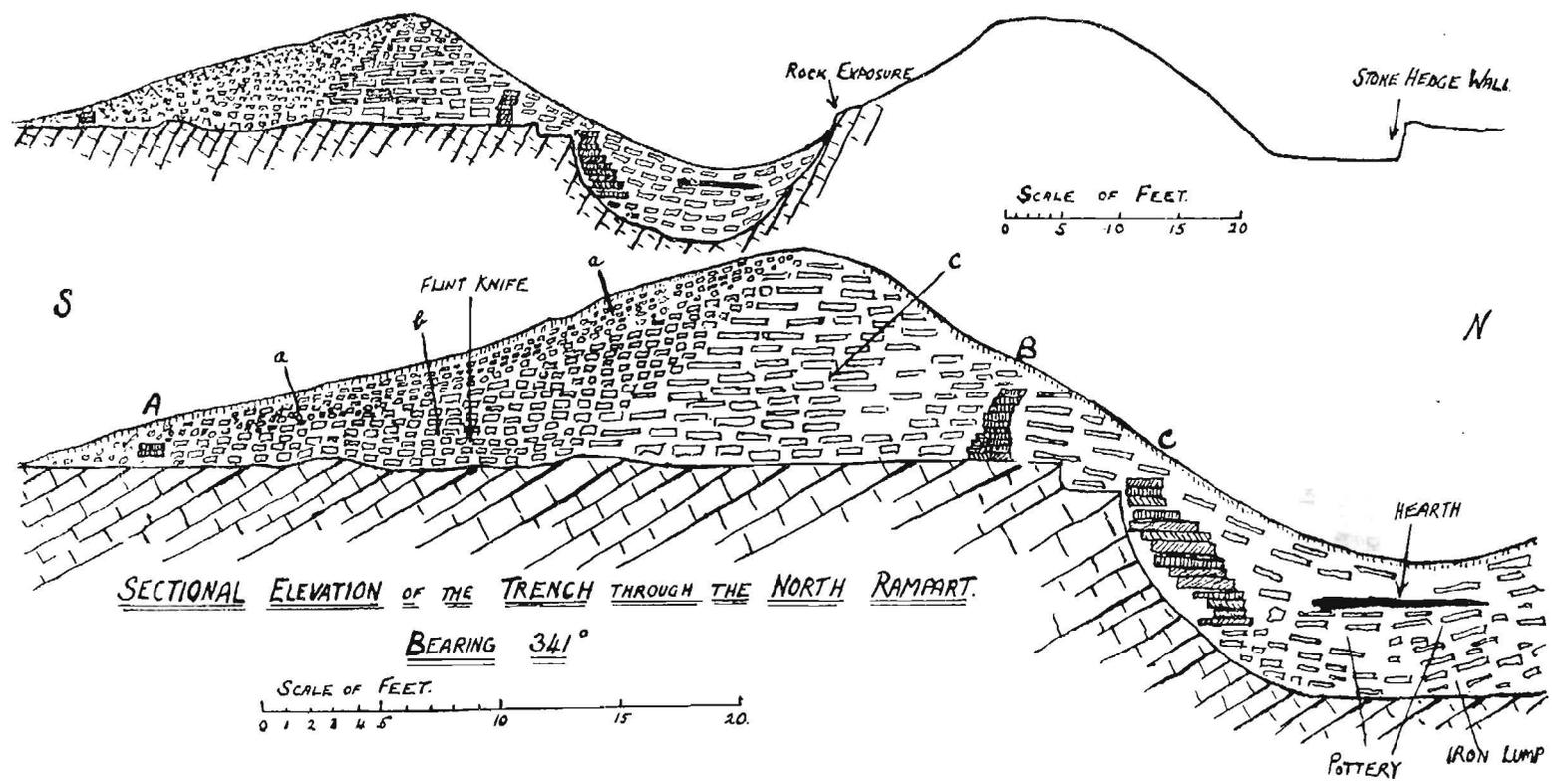


FIG. 3.

the inference is due to their relatively larger size alone, there being no structural evidence.

The mound was raised in three courses :-

- (a) Erected prior to the others : nearly triangular in section, consisting of large Pennant flags. The ditchward face was kept in position by a retaining wall of small flags. The weight of the rampart has caused the upper half of the wall, which is still 3-ft. 6-ins. high, to rotate outwards through an angle of 30 degrees, but the masonry was put together so well that when uncovered it still held together.
- (b) Resting against the south face of the more massive core was a triangular course of smaller stones and some of the characteristic vivid orange soil of the district.
- (c) On this was placed an even course, 18-ins. to 2 feet thick, of fine rubble and grey earth, forming the inner and gentler face of the rampart.

In the two inner courses, where the stones were of an appreciable size, they lay horizontal without exception, a condition which the workmen at once recognised as evidence of their being placed in position from baskets ; which not unreasonably leads to the conclusion that the ramparts were thrown up with an absence of bustle, and not as a measure of campaign.

The partial outward collapse of the inner wall B may be correlated with many large hollow spaces in the core of the rampart, and a concavity in the upper ditchward slope which may be traced for some distance along the rampart.

No vestige of the original turf was found under (a) and (b), nor was there much sign of the original sandy loam, both courses appearing to rise directly from the rock. There was no sign of any holes in which palisading stakes had been inserted, though the crest of that part of the rampart examined was in a good state of preservation. Iron ore and dibs were absent, though everywhere else in the camp they were in profusion. There was much charcoal, especially in course (b), and three flints, including the knife. Fig. 7, (1).

Outside the wall B there is a berm, after which the rock floor drops more than 5 feet into the ditch, which is here about 20 feet wide. The very massive dry wall C faces the rock and therefore can have no structural significance ; unless it be that the builders, after taking advantage of a natural hollow running towards the Frome valley for their north defences, found it too wide for their purposes.

This alone explains why such a stout wall should rest against the rock face. Unlike the rampart the wall was founded on loose rubble. When the rock beneath the ditch was encountered it sloped along the thrust of the strata, and in every way suggested an unhewn surface. Unfaced rock was already exposed in the lower inner face of the outer rampart.

The excavated section of the lower wall C was not along the line of the ramparts, but was thrust outwards, suggesting that the inner rampart was scalloped.

It is well to consider the aspect of the ramparts when the camp was occupied. That the berm between the two walls had a function in defence is unlikely. Since occupation an enormous mass of stone has slithered down the rampart into the ditch—the stone still keeps its slope—in fact far too much to have been retained by the inner wall alone. It is fairly safe to conjecture that the outer wall C was continued upwards for revetment, and the inner wall was for reinforcement alone, in the Worlebury Camp manner, though the form of the inner slope is unlike anything at Worlebury that we know of.¹

Between the ramparts there is a mound 28 feet long which rises 2 feet above the bottom of the ditch. Its end was cut by excavation. It covered a thick deposit of ash and charcoal. Two feet below there was a more meagre hearth that contained large charcoal fragments, and 6-ins. below this there were a few sherds of coarse dark wheel-made ware which are probably Romano-British. The lump of iron described below was discovered at a depth of 5 feet and a foot from the rock.

PLATFORM EXCAVATION.

(Fig. 4)

This excavation was undertaken to ascertain the nature of a sinking and the character of some mounds 40 to 50 yards south-east of the entrance of the camp. (Fig. 1 C.) The pit was proved by digging to have been sunk 6-ins. into the rock. Crockery fragments of the early 19th century and a clay pipe were found in the debris at the bottom of the excavation. Undoubtedly this small shaft was sunk by recent prospectors for iron ore, and the surrounding mounds are their spoil heaps.

Beneath these mounds, a few inches below the still recognisable turf level, there was a very rough and vague platform of Pennant

1 C. W. Dymond, *Worlebury*, 1886. Plate V, and p. 96.

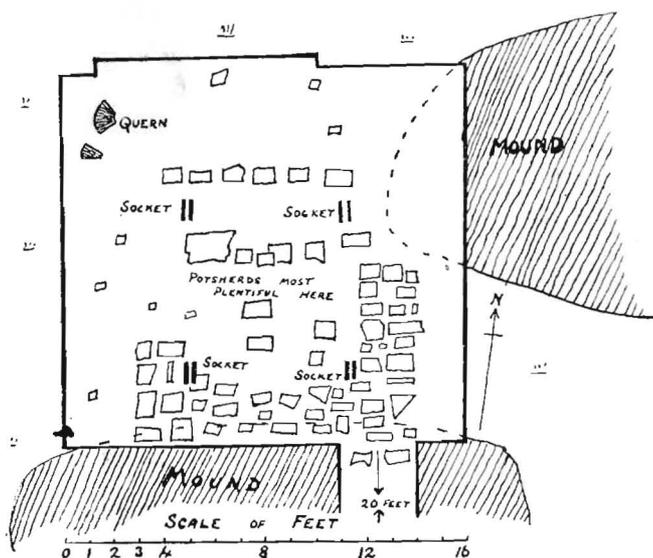


FIG. 4.

flags, and four "sockets" of rough stones let into the subsoil beneath the platform, as in the long mound. Pebbles and iron ore were abundant, but there was no trace of charcoal on the site. Potsherds were especially plentiful, in places there were more sherds than earth; a far greater quantity was found in the 350 sq. ft. of the excavation than on the much larger hut site. The other finds were the half of a cake-shaped upper quern stone of a type common on Romano-British sites, the end of a bronze fibula, some flint blades and horse-shoe scrapers, a fragment of a plain bracelet of Kimmeridge shale, a broken jet ornament, and a few indecipherable coins.

The pottery is mostly ordinary Roman culinary ware. There are sherds of New Forest and Castor ware, and also of the rosette stamped ware. All is wheel-made, and a glance at the assembled material suggests a late date in the Roman occupation of Britain: late 3rd or possibly 4th century. The site was used much later than the occupation of the long hut, and, judging by the quantity of material discovered, over a period of some years. It may represent a return to the occupation of hilltop camps by the inhabitants of the South-west during the unsettled conditions that existed in these parts during or after the reign of Probus: conditions which in Somerset are betrayed by the frequent discovery of large hoards of late 3rd century coins.

MOUNDS IN THE ENCEINTE.

In the light of the above evidence it is unsafe to deduce the nature of the irregularly shaped hollows and mounds within the camp before their excavation ; but one low stony mound that rises immediately north of the short mound and crosses the remaining portion of the camp is certainly ancient, and probably of pre-Roman construction. An offshoot of the ridge strikes north near the conjectural middle line of the camp but fades away within 35 feet. Such transverse mounds are pretty well the rule in the more elongate West of England camps, such as Maiden Castle, Hembury and Muzbury.

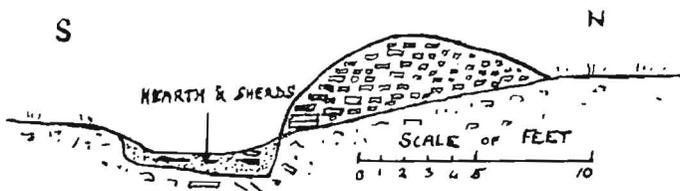


FIG. 5.

A ditch 8 feet wide and a foot to 18-ins. deep, which probably began near the single vallum in the N.E. quarter of the camp, Fig. 1 (B) runs east for 40-ft. then steadily curves north. To the north it is protected by a low mound that joins the vallum. A suggestion was made that the ditch was a sunken trackway into the camp, and excavations were carried out to find out how far this was so ; with inconclusive results. The ditch was first sectioned, then the silt was cleaned out for a distance of 26 feet from its disappearance under the quarry spoil tip. No wheel tracks were uncovered, but the remains of a small hearth and a few small potsherds came to light. Three of the sherds are undoubtedly Romano-British, but the rest belong to the Early Iron Age.

The protecting mound had been constructed of small stones, as a section through it revealed ; Fig. 5. At the point excavated, where it is highest, it now rises 4-ft. 9-ins. above the original trough of the ditch, and 3-ft. above the original turf. Probably it was never much higher. The largest stones were used on the inner and steeper face.

THE OVAL MOUND.

The small mound near the south extremity of the camp is two feet high, and has diameters of 34 and 29 feet. It is surrounded by a ditch a foot to two feet wide, and 6 inches deep. The mound

was turned over and examined over half its area, and since the sharp sand from the disintegrated Pennant stone had destroyed all traces of the former turf, the excavation was carried down to the rock.

The material of the mound was Pennant stone, and a very little earth. Many of the stones were standing on end, and there is no doubt that it is nothing more than a dump of a few score cart loads of spoil, from one of the many small adjoining quarries, in a slight depression.

A few very small Romano-British potsherds, a couple of minute fragments of calcined bone, some charcoal and a flint blade were all the remains found under the heap. Probably these represent considerably less than the mean distribution of ancient material lying beneath undisturbed turf elsewhere in the camp.

THE WELL.

The well was found in a four-foot hollow near the north-west entrance, under the rampart which is only 4 feet high at this point. Here there is an inner berm to the rampart which has the appearance of a paved track. In June, before work was put in hand, the hollow was overgrown with bushes and the soil was black and damp, notwithstanding the prevailing drought. Mr. Evans supplies the information that within recent years the well was the sole source of water for the house without the entrance. Until the quarry was driven forward it was of the class of wells which never fail.

After the well had been cleaned out the diameter was 2 feet 6 inches. Steps down to the bottom gave it a pear-shaped section. The depth was nearly 6 feet. At once it began to fill. The dry masonry lining was of excellent workmanship, but there was no indication whatsoever of its age.

For some distance round the soil was turned over, but nothing was encountered except a few bits of mediæval crockery, and two small Romano-British potsherds, some limestone, a small block of chalk, and a piece of heavy spar. All ancient material had vanished during the construction and modern use of the well.

Since the spring was once more powerful it may have served as the camp's only source of water during occupation.

STONE IMPLEMENTS.

Some years ago, during a clearance of earth before an extension of the quarry, and at a point several yards west of its present margin, the half of a very fine ovoid mace head (Fig. 6) was found by Mr.

Evans and presented by him to this Society. The fine grained tough quartzite of which it is made has taken a high polish. The socket is hour-glass-shaped. Stone implements of this type in England are now generally ascribed to the early Bronze Age, though one such specimen was unearthed by Dr. R. Clay in the La Tène I village on Fifield Bavant Down, Wilts. In view of the extreme rarity of polished stone implements in the Cotswolds its presence here is interesting.

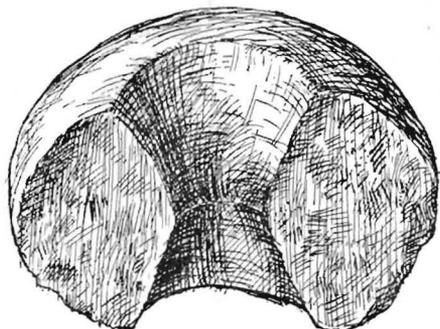


FIG. 6.— $\frac{2}{3}$

Another fragment of compact quartzite has a convex polished surface that appears to be wrought, and may be part of a stone axe. It was found in the ditch of the large hut.

A broken trapezoidal knife with chipped back (Fig. 7), identical in form with the gravette point of the British Upper Palæolithic, and two small flint blades were found in the main rampart.

During the excavation of the long mound and the "platform" site a number of flint implements and blades, of which a few were densely patinated, came to light. They include chipped knives, horseshoe scrapers and cores. Doubtless most of these were in use in Roman times, for that flint implements were used by Romano-British communities we know from Dr. Taylor's work in Rowberrow Cavern, and from much other excavation.

Implements which certainly belong to an earlier period are a patinated halberd-shaped tranchet, and a leaf-shaped arrowhead of a type common on the Cotswolds, but rare on Mendip (Fig. 7). Flint is not indigenous to the locality, but implements and chips may be picked up on ploughed fields near the camp.

Several small rectangular hones, not of local stone, were encountered among the Roman pottery, also a spindle whorl and a number of discs of Pennant stone. These vary from 2 to 5 inches

in diameter and often are rudely chipped, but some have smooth ground edges. A similar disc, but of pottery, was found inside one of the sockets or drainage leads of the large hut. Such discs are often termed "pot covers," but some of these specimens are too small for that purpose. They may have been employed as stands for vessels which were stood in the hot embers.

QUERNS.

Fragmentary hand-mills have been met with about the camp. The largest and most interesting specimen was found some years ago by Mr. Evans near the stone mace head, and under the same circumstances.

It is a half of a typical beehive-shaped quern of the Early Iron Age, with an asymmetrical hour-glass-shaped feed hole or hopper and "sparrow-pecked" concave under surface. It is made from a block of gritstone, probably from the Bristol Coal Measures, and the sides and upper surface are not dressed. The usual shallow hole for the insertion of a wooden handle is in the side.

In the large hut and its ditch there were found a segment of a discoidal nether quern stone of pecked "pudding-stone," a similar segment of fine quartzite and half the upper stone of a saddleback quern of fine gritstone. Querns of the latter type were in use in the Early Iron Age (La Tène II) communities of Glastonbury Lake Village.

The larger part of a bun-shaped upper quern stone of coarse purple quartzite was found immediately beneath the turf near the edge of the "platform" excavation. Its feed is straight, and the lower pecked surface is concave, dating it as Romano-British.

Other small fragments were brought to light by excavation.

MINERALS AND MINING.

Nodules of Hæmatite and limonite were everywhere abundant below the turf except in the main rampart, where little or none was found. Since the ramparts were raised from soil and stone from the adjoining ground the absence of iron-ore in their materials is worthy of note. It is difficult not to see some association between the Romano-British material, and the ore found therewith, so that it seems reasonable to conclude that the ore was scattered over the place by mining operations before or during the Roman period, but after the raising of the ramparts.

Blocks of mountain limestone, none of them massive, occurred nearly everywhere, and all show signs of calcination. Probably

they were introduced from the neighbourhood of Clifton Down, seven miles to the south-west, for use as a flux in smelting operations. Chalk which was found in one or two places may have been introduced for a kindred purpose.

A lump of iron, or slag containing a high proportion of iron, was found in the excavation between the ramparts where there were indications of a hearth. So much unconsumed charcoal is incorporated in the mass that it is probably soft native iron which was being indurated by further reduction with charcoal.

A few fragments of coal were in undoubted association with the pottery; some was half consumed, but it is hard to be sure that it was a Romano-British fuel. Round quartzite pebbles, locally called "dibs," which do not come from the local rock were common everywhere but in the rampart.

METALS, COINS, GLASS, KIMMERIDGE SHALE, ETC.

Flat-headed nails of several sizes were found both on the large hut and platform sites, together with a few indeterminate pieces of iron, and on the platform site an article that looks like a buckle frame.

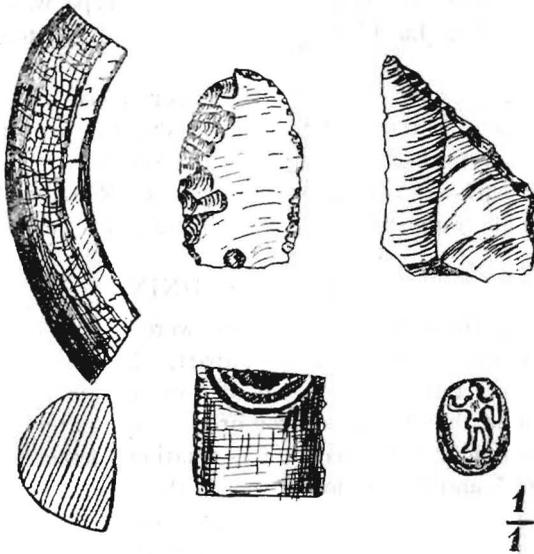


FIG. 7.

The box-like moulding of a bronze ornament, possibly the head or foot of a brooch, was discovered on the "platform" site.

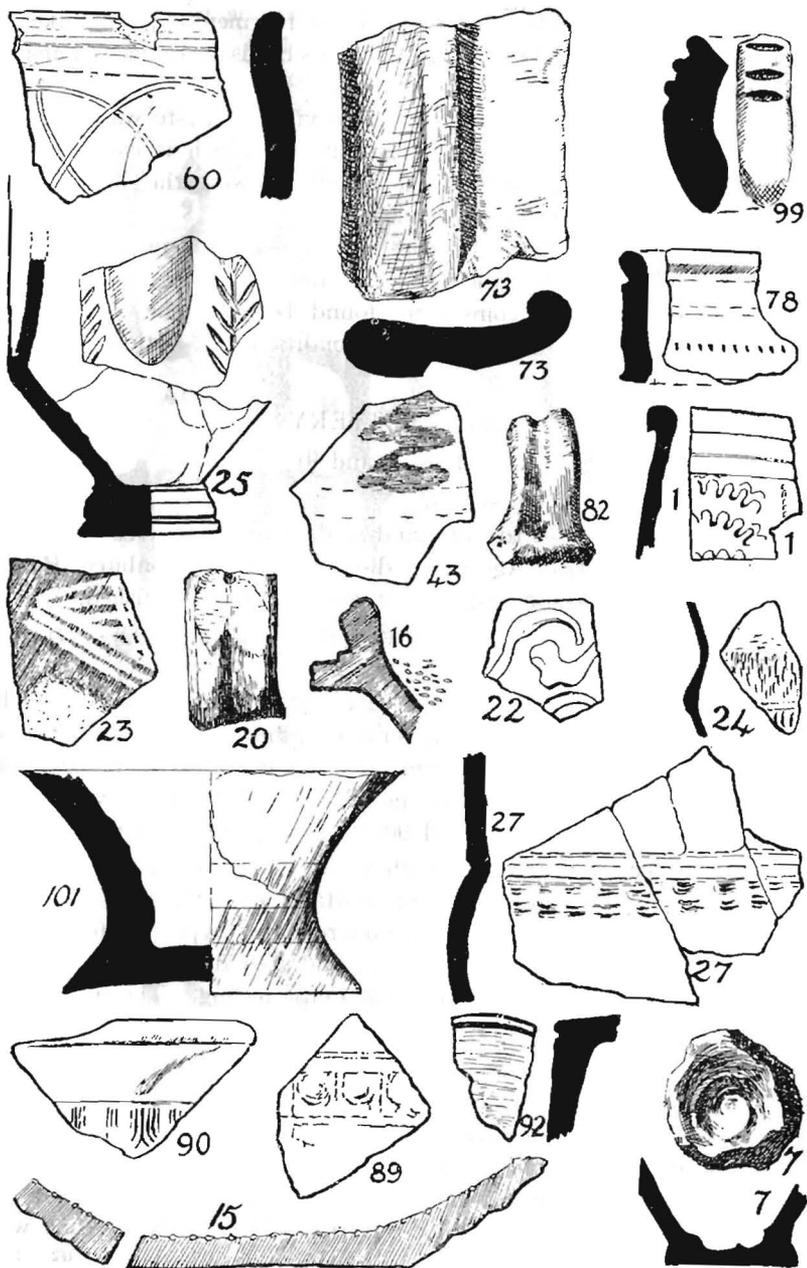


FIG. 8.— $\frac{1}{2}$

The latter site also furnished fragments of a severely plain bracelet of Kimmeridge shale, Fig. 7; a fragmentary panel-like jet ornament, Fig. 7; and two very small glass beads of common Romano-British types.

The bezel of a ring in ultramarine vitreous paste was found at the east end of the hut site. The subject, which is cast, not engraved, may be an athlete in the act of throwing the discus, Fig. 7. It is remarkable for its crudeness.

A piece of pot metal (vitreous slag) and a small piece of Roman bottle glass came from the platform site.

Six small copper coins were found both on the "platform" and hut sites. They were in such a condition that nothing could be made of them.

THE POTTERY.

(Figs. 8 and 9)

FROM THE LARGE HUT SITE.

A number of sherds of hand-made ware of gritty paste are similar to Early Iron Age wares discovered at Glastonbury, Read's Cavern, and elsewhere. Most of them are hand-burnished.

Nos. (51), (52), (58), (67), (70), (71), (79), (85), (92), (94), and (95) belong to this class.

(54) is the rim of a large steen about 2 feet in diameter. The rest are examples of wheel-made ceramic of imported types or common culinary ware. Turned out rims and flanged rims were common, but very few of the latter have the upright collar. There were a few sherds of Samian ware (89 and 90); probably of the 1st century.

Of other imported wares there are amphoræ fragments (73) in buff stone-ware, fragments of mortaria of early date (97), and at least one of the very late hammer-headed type. A few sherds display the matte lattice decoration, and (60) dark burnished ware with matte curves likewise shows the Celtic feeling. The significance of this assemblage has already been discussed.

THE PLATFORM SITE.

As far as could be ascertained no hand-made pottery was found on this site. There were a few abraded sherds of Samian ware and some plain imitation Samian ware. The greater number of the vessels were bowls with turned-out rims (34 and 35); basins with flanged rims and upright ridges, of which a series is shown (36-40); or were bowls in a hard grey or brown paste having everted rims with sections like fish-hooks (9), (11), (13), and (14). The prototype

of the latter ware may be (77) from the large hut site, which is in a similar paste. In addition to these types there were many coarse straight-sided dishes (41 and 42). One bowl (19) has a ridged moulding. The bases of the thinner vessels, particularly the red ones, are usually bevelled.



FIG. 9.— $\frac{1}{3}$

(15) and (16) are fragments of an early type of mortar.

The important difference between this assemblage and that from the hut site is the presence of a good number of developed native types of the 2nd and succeeding centuries, types stimulated by a reali-

sation of classical achievements. There were a number of pieces of Castor ware (22), and New Forest ware (4), (23), and (25) was plentiful.

(4) is the neck of a flagon in soft red paste ; (23) is in buff ware with chocolate slip with a white chocolate motif painted thereon ; (25) is a damaged fluted beaker or chalice in buff stoneware with brown slip, with a fluted design in thick white paint touched with green. Others of the New Forest sherds were so well fired that except for their dark colour they resembled porcelain.

(43) is typical of several pale sherds blotched with vermilion.

(1) is a pale pink ware got up to resemble Samian, has the rosette stamp, and, according to Mrs. Cunnington who has discussed problems arising from the Ashley Rails discoveries¹, it may be dated as early as the 4th century.

(24) in buff clay with a dark red matte slip bears multiple oblique roulette hatching. (27), a bellied bowl in buff clay with a dull brown slip is decorated with three rows of undoubted finger-nail impressions, like some sherds found at Bokerly Dyke.

On the coarser crockery, matte and incised lattice decoration is common, and curvilinear motifs are employed on some of the plain dishes.

(28) of dark brown soapy paste has a rim not unlike that found on ware which elsewhere has been assigned to the XII century.

Some lumps of unfashioned argil which had been fired were encountered.

THE RAMPARTS.

(101) from the ditch between the ramparts is wheel-made, of a hard grey ware with black surface. The base is slightly concave. Unlike anything else from the camp it recalls examples from Swarling.

We are indebted to Miss Balch who furthered the work in many ways ; to Mr. Evans for much practical assistance in excavation, and for the gift of a quern stone and stone mace-head ; to Dr. Herbert Taylor who worked through the pottery, to Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Rowley for drawings and sketches which accompany this report, and to Professor Ormerod for suggestions and a donation.

¹ M. E. Cunnington, *Man*, 1921, p. 3.