

Field Work

BY C. W. PHILLIPS, M.A.

A ROMANO-BRITISH SITE AT WRAXALL.

The object of this note is to place on record a small peasant Romano-British agricultural site on the northern limit of the parish of Wraxall (Somerset, 6 inch sheet V, N.E.). It takes the form of a roughly circular enclosure about 375 feet in diameter on the eastern side of the stretch of ground called the Horse Race, above Failand Hill House. Until quite recently most of the area was open grass land and rabbit warren, but now two-thirds of it are covered with an impenetrable plantation of young fir trees. Only the east side remains clear.

The position of the round enclosure is given on the accompanying map at A (Fig. 17). It is bounded by the grass-covered remains of what was probably a dry stone wall now averaging 1 foot to 1 foot 6 inches in height and 6 feet wide in most of the circuit. It is fairly well preserved on all but the north-west side, and there is one well-defined entrance on the east side at which point the bank turns outwards on both sides forming a kind of passage.

The work seems to have been open along a fair stretch of its north side and the bank is nowhere better preserved than at the north-east side, where it reaches a height of between 2 feet 6 inches and 3 feet before making a re-entrant turn through a right angle and coming to a stop. On the other side of the gap is a small trough-like quarry which looks old and may be the work of the inhabitants, though if this gap was an entrance into the enclosure this hole is inconveniently situated. There is another and rather larger example to the north-east.

The area cross-hatched on the map yields abundant traces of human occupation. It is hummocky and so was probably the site of one or more huts, but it is impossible to make out any plan on the ground. The earth of the mole hills here is much darker than that outside the enclosure and contains many fragments of coarse black and greyish-blue Romano-British pottery. Fragments of undecorated Samian ware of good quality are not uncommon and there is a fair amount of iron slag in the ground. Some of the black ware is decorated with a cross-hatch design.

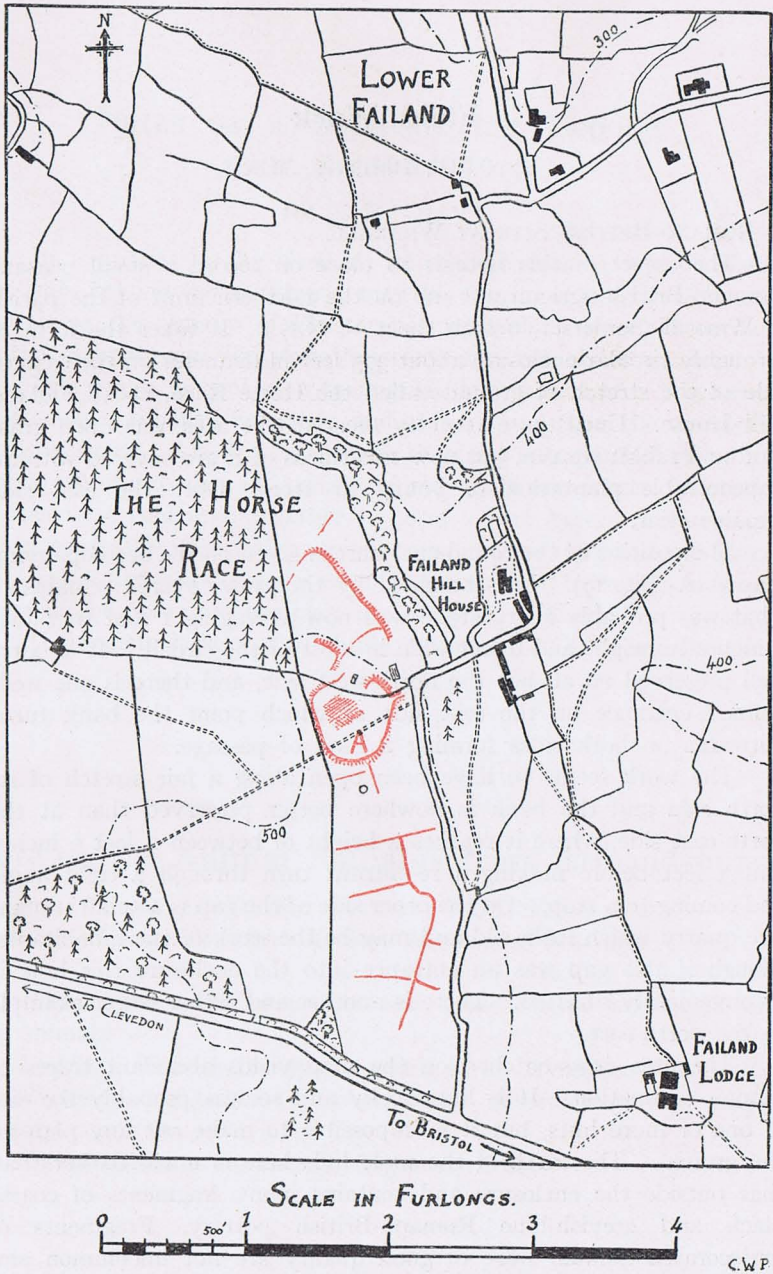


FIG. 17.—Sketch Map based on the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

On the north and south sides of the occupation site there are faint traces of old enclosures which represent the cultivated fields of the inhabitants. Although they are only well preserved on the north side they have all the characteristics of the Iron Age cultivations of Britain. Doubtless many other traces of these fields are now covered by the trees on the Horse Race, and where the banks cross the road eastward towards Failand Lodge they are obliterated by modern ploughing. One other place in this area where scraps of Romano-British pottery may be found is on the edge of the little escarpment overlooking Lower Failand, close to the "e" in "Horse" on the map.

This little site with its associated fields is only one of a number belonging to the period of the Roman occupation which are to be found all along the Failand ridge. It is close to the line of the ancient trackway from the crossing of the Avon near the modern Suspension Bridge to Cadbury Camp and Clevedon, and here it is represented by the modern Bristol-Clevedon road.

There is one other feature of the Horse Race which merits attention. In the days before it was planted with trees it yielded more stone axes than any other area of corresponding size in North Somerset.

There are records of seven from the Horse Race, most of them now being in the Perceval Collection in the Cambridge Archæological Museum. Another good site not far away is the field south of the Bristol-Clevedon road and west of the Tyntesfield Upper Lodge, which has yielded four. The writer picked up the broken corner of the cutting edge from a basalt axe on a mole hill in the field to the south of the Roman site near the junction of the road from Lower Failand with the main road. It is now in the Museum of the Spelæological Society.

This considerable nucleation of twelve stone axes is also accompanied by a fair number of flint flakes and a few barbed and tanged arrow heads. It looks, therefore, as though this region was in favour in the early Metal Age, though there is now no visible surface indication of any organized settlement.

IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS IN WRAXALL PARISH.

This site is on the crest of the ridge which runs between Bristol and Clevedon and marks the highest point in the parish of Wraxall. It is situated in the main in a grass field on the north side of the road from Bristol to Cadbury Camp shortly before it comes to the turn which leads past Naish House and down to Clapton-in-Gordano

and Portbury. On the early editions of the Ordnance Survey it was described as "Ancient Remains."

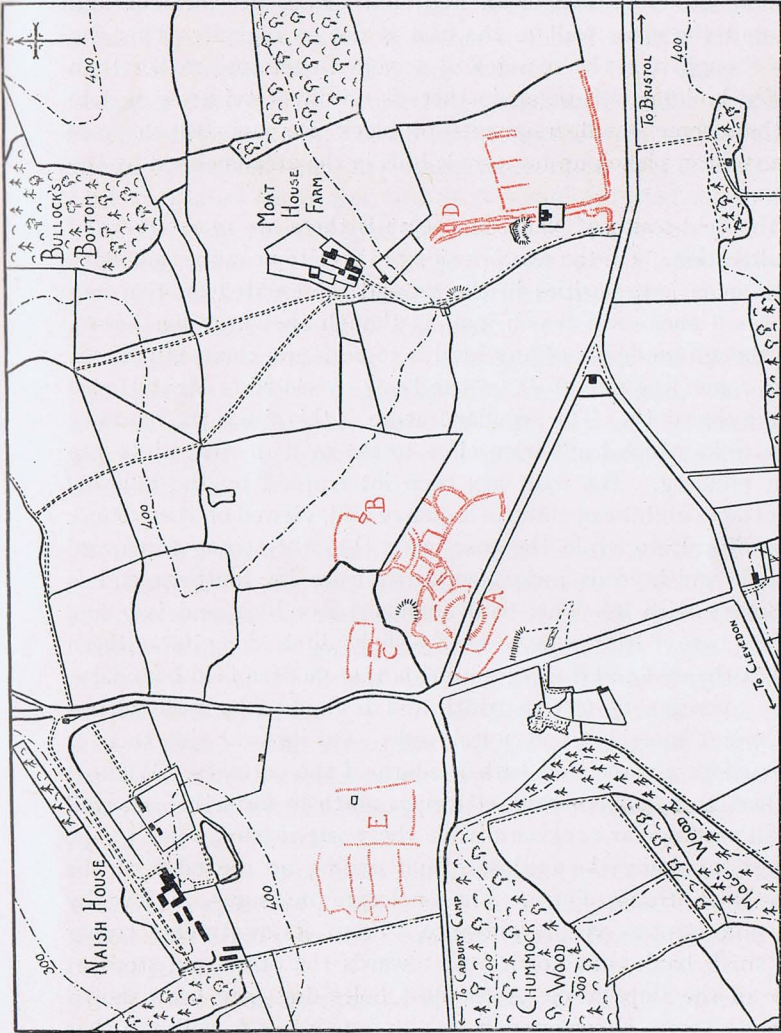
The main feature, shown on the accompanying map at A (Fig. 18), is a circular enclosure which unfortunately has been bisected by the road. Its height above sea level is 470 feet. Trial excavations conducted by the writer in 1929 and published in the Society's Proceedings¹ revealed that a rock-cut ditch 3 feet 6 inches deep and 8 feet wide across the top surrounds the site and that behind this there stood what was probably a stone wall, now fallen into ruin. The infilling of this ditch showed that the work belonged to the La Tène II phase of the Early Iron Age and that the site was not frequented by Romano-British people till the ditch was nearly silted up. Time did not permit a fuller investigation, but an examination of the field to the north of the road shows a number of ancient enclosures which are obviously associated with the round work. Mole hills on this field give flint flakes, Romano-British pottery, and sometimes a few fragments of Samian ware. The field to the south has been spoiled by frequent ploughing, but it does not seem that there were more than a few enclosures there. In contrast to this poverty of other remains that part of the round enclosure which projects into the southern field is more strongly developed than that on the north side. In the absence of further excavation the only thing that can be said about this site is that it was probably cultivated in Romano-British times and that there appears to be an interesting continuity of use from the pre-conquest to the post-conquest period. The dwelling sites of the cultivators of the Romano-British phase must be sought elsewhere than in the round enclosure, for this feature was in ruins before the Roman period began.

The enclosures marked on the map are sketched, but they give a sufficient indication of the arrangement until the ideal method, air photography, can be brought to bear on this area.

Several other features of this neighbourhood require description.

Immediately to the north of the wall bounding the field containing the Iron Age site there is a sharp declivity, at the bottom of which lies site B. The chief feature of this is the remains of a small rectangular building 33 feet long by 15 feet wide. It stands at the point where a considerable lynchet meets the foot of the steep slope. Nothing has been found there to show its date, but it is completely overgrown and probably belongs to the same class as the Romano-British site D, which will be described later.

¹ *Proc. Spel. Soc.*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 45-52.



C.W.P.

FIG. 18.—Sketch Map based on the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

At C there is another building site associated with lynchets. Here there is only a very faint indication that the enclosure was ever completed by a fourth wall on the west. The dimensions are 60 feet by 90 feet and the outline of the structure is not very regular when seen on the ground. The north and south walls are straight and parallel, but the cross wall to the east is not so regular. This site looks as though it is the remains of a walled enclosure rather than of a roofed building. Here again there is no direct evidence of date better than some small fragments of black Romano-British ware which have been picked up from mole hills in the area enclosed by the lynchets.

In the field south of Naish House at E there are more traces of Celtic cultivation. On the western side of this site near the boundary there are some irregularities in the ground represented on the map by two small enclosures which look as though they may be the site of huts, though no débris of any kind is to be found there at present.

Last comes the site at D on the brow overlooking Moat House Farm from the south. The peculiar feature of this site is the roadway between banks which leads from close to the modern road up to the site of a building. The road has been interrupted by the building of two cottages and the opening of a quarry and, viewed on the ground, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the strong earth and stone bank which leads away eastwards from its southern end is contemporary with it. This bank stands 3 feet high and is 7 feet wide at the base. It appears to have a slight ditch along its southern side and at the east end it merges into another modern field boundary. The road averages 15 feet in width and is flanked by well-marked banks about 1 foot high and 3 feet wide. On its west side there is a small enclosure associated with it south of the cottages. When it approaches D the eastern bank continues north to form the east wall of a small rectangular enclosure while the western bank veers to the north-west, avoiding the enclosure and ending at the edge of the drop to Moat House Farm. The enclosure measures 72 feet by 36 feet and has no visible entrance. From its north-east corner another small bank runs north-west towards the other and stops at the edge of the slope also. A few test holes dug here have shown that this enclosure is surrounded by the remains of a wall and that a good deal of walling material has collapsed into the interior. Shards of greyish-blue pottery mixed with this rubbish make it very probable that this site must be referred to the Roman period. In the field to the south-east are remains of the small fields associated with Celtic cultivation.

These sites, taken together with the Roman settlement below the escarpment to the north at Clapton-in-Gordano, where Mr. Egerton Godwin found a hoard of 5000 coins with the limiting date of A.D. 297, and the other sites already reported on above Lower Failand to the east, show that this ridge was fairly well exploited in Romano-British times. Trial excavations have shown that the little circular work south of Manor Farm, Failand, called "Roman Camp" on the Ordnance Survey maps, must be referred to the same period as the circular enclosure at A. Much further to the west on Dial Hill overlooking Clevedon Court are many more traces of Celtic cultivation with associated enclosures, and it is significant that all these areas were obviously abandoned at the time of the Anglo-Saxon penetration of North Somerset. The villages of the new dispensation ignore the older sites and are all placed without exception below the ridge on the northern and southern sides.

Much work remains to be done on this ridge and on that which runs along the coast from Clevedon to Portishead, but it should soon be possible to get a fairly accurate idea of the distribution of population in this corner of North Somerset in Iron Age and Romano-British times.

CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON FIELD SYSTEMS IN ASHTON PARK.

There is no area in the neighbourhood of Bristol which more completely preserves the character of the primitive countryside than Ashton Park. This great enclosure occupies the larger part of the southern side of the Bristol-Clevedon ridge in the first two miles of its run westwards from the Avon Gorge, and fronts the imposing mass of Dundry Hill across the valley containing the low watershed parting the small brooks which flow from the foot of Dundry to the Avon from the streams passing west through Nailsea and Kenn Moors to the sea at Clevedon.

The axis of the park lies south-west and north-east, and the north-west half consists of a flat table land ending in a steep escarpment which falls rapidly to the boundary at the Bristol-Weston road on the south-east.

Ashton Court is situated under the lee of the ridge at the east end of the park, and the area which deserves special consideration lies on the plateau above the Court and near the Clifton Lodge at the top of Rownham Hill.

The antiquities of the Leigh Woods area are too well known to require more than passing comment here. They consist of three promontory forts guarding an ancient ford over the Avon, the site

of which is now fairly represented by a line a little below the Suspension Bridge. Of these three two, Stokeleigh Camp and Burgh Walls, occupy the north and south sides of Nightingale Valley respectively, and abut on the east on the precipitous sides of the gorge. Burgh Walls has been almost totally destroyed by building operations.

No direct evidence of the date of these works has been found, but it may be inferred from their type that they belong to the Iron Age and were in occupation during the period 500 B.C.—A.D. 100. If these sites belong to the Iron Age it is to be expected that some signs of the agriculture by which the inhabitants supported themselves should be discernible in the neighbourhood, if the ground has not been seriously altered by building development or agriculture. Many of the great fortified hill-top villages of the Iron Age in Wessex have been shown to have this associated agriculture by means of air-photography,² and this local case seems to have been no exception. Just inside the Clifton Lodge of Ashton Park is a very finely preserved set of Celtic fields. They lie on both sides of the straight drive leading into the Park and stretch rather more than half a mile along the edge of the escarpment, while some pass down hill at the east end so far as to clear Summerhouse Plantation (see Fig. 19).

The northern part of the Park was formerly common land, and since it is plain that no attempt has been made to cultivate this area since the fields were abandoned—probably in the fifth or sixth century A.D.—it is likely that they were formerly lost under bracken and scrub, but now that the ground has been improved into pasture they have appeared again. Similar systems of fields are to be seen on Durdham Downs on the other side of the gorge, and there are other groups of Celtic cultivations further along the Failand ridge above Ashton Watering, at Manor Farm, Failand, and at Moat House Farm, Wraxall, where they are closely associated with a small earthwork proved by excavation to be Early Iron Age in date.³ At the far end of the ridge above Clevedon Court are others, and the coastal ridge between Clevedon and Portishead carries them near Walton Castle and on Walton Down.

The Ashton Park fields are plainly visible because the cultivators collected the stones from their small rectangular plots and piled them along the boundaries which now show as broad low banks in the grass. This is plainly illustrated at A, where the turf has been removed recently and reveals the mass of small stones forming the bank.

² *Wessex from the Air*, by O. G. S. Crawford and Alexander Keiller, Plate XXV, p. 154.

³ Phillips, C. W., *U.B.S.S. Proceedings*, 1931, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 45 et. seq.

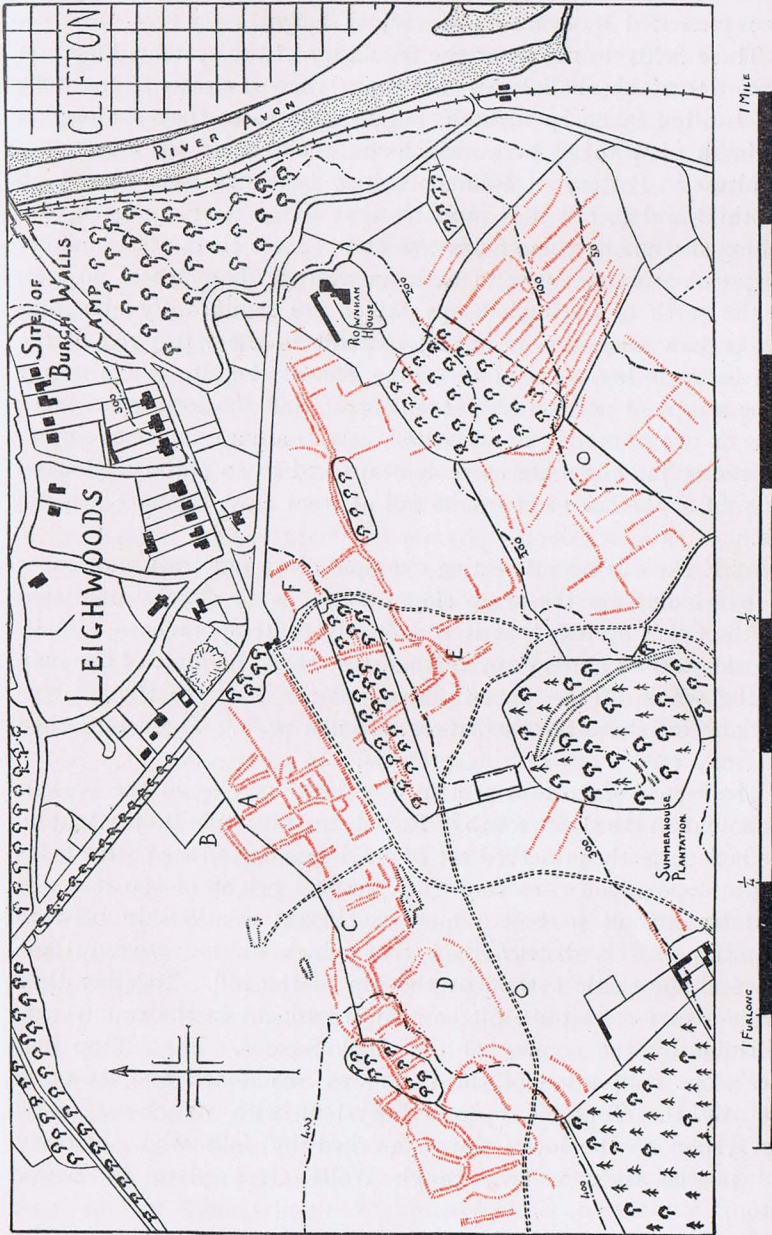


Fig. 19.—Sketch Map based on the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H. M. Stationery Office.

Where the field boundaries run along the slope of the hill they are now represented by lynchets of varying height.

These fields do not show the regularity of the systems found on the more tractable chalk lands of Wessex, where the place of the stone bank is often taken by a ditch, but in most cases they conform to the limits of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres which are the regular sizes in Celtic agriculture.⁴ Pottery of Romano-British type has been picked up at both B and C, but it is probable that the nearest approach to a dwelling site among these fields was at C. Here there are a number of depressions in the ground with an average diameter of 20 feet, and the earth of the mole-heaps, which are significantly numerous here, is dark in colour, in strong contrast to the warm red of the earth in the other parts of the site. This is the site where nearly all the scraps of pottery have been found, and the former existence of one or two huts may be suspected. At D are a number of similar depressions, but there are no mole-heaps and so no pottery. Partial silting up of the holes left by the fall of trees may, however, explain these.

At E there is an interesting example of an old track, no longer in use, winding up the steep slope, and it is so closely associated with the Celtic system that it is probably contemporaneous with it. The fields do not extend any farther west than the limit of the map and the whole of the upper plateau of the Park to the western boundary wall shows no other traces of similar work. These untouched areas may have been grazing grounds.

The second important system of fields surviving in the Park is to be found on the slopes south of Rownham Hill above Bower Ashton. Here is a perfectly preserved set of Anglo-Saxon terraced strip fields along a slope which rises through a vertical height of 200 feet. It would be difficult to find a more significant relationship between antiquities in this district than that which exists between these fields and the Celtic system at the top of the hill. Together they provide a perfect epitome of the change wrought in the countryside of Britain by the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. The hilltop and upper slope cultivation of the Celts was abandoned and its place taken by the Teutonic open-field system with its characteristic strip system on the lower slopes, worked by folk who obviously lived in the river valley. Burgh Walls gives place to Bower Ashton.

⁴ E. Cecil Curwen, *Antiquity*, 1927, Vol. 1, p. 278, "Prehistoric Agriculture in Britain."

The description of these fields as Anglo-Saxon does not mean that they were used in the Anglo-Saxon period alone. They represent the agriculture of the people of Bower Ashton from the Dark Ages till the eighteenth century, when the system was given up for the modern enclosed type of farming. Centuries of ploughing have gone to produce the powerfully marked features of this system, which now resembles nothing so much as a giant flight of steps. An inspection of an Estate Map dated 1730 at the Ashton Court Estate Office shows that this area was enclosed by then, so that the system is likely to have gone out of cultivation in the seventeenth century or earlier.

Several other sites in the Park show signs of ancient agriculture. One is in the ploughed field west of New Barn, where there are some strongly developed lynchets of Celtic type, and others are situated on favourable sites between New Barn and Ashton Court. None of these is of much importance. The most interesting secondary consideration which arises from an examination of the Celtic field system is the light it throws upon the remarks about this area in Albany Major and E. J. Burrow's *The Mystery of Wansdyke*. In this work there is no reference of any kind to traces of primitive agriculture at the east end of Ashton Park, but several of the lynchets and banks are used to support a theory that a branch of Wansdyke ran from Pill Grove in the south-west corner of the Park to Burgh Walls Camp. An examination of this on the ground shows little foundation for the theory, and the more so since Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, of the Ordnance Survey, has examined the west end of the Wansdyke and can find no authentic trace of it west of Maes-Knoll at the east end of Dundry Hill. Mr. Burrow has apparently illustrated a square lyncheted field just below the Clifton Lodge (F) as "Remains of square earthwork." He has also accepted the uncorrected Ordnance Survey naming of the deep trench in Summerhouse Plantation as "Camp" and has illustrated this. Examination shows that this is no more than a quarry, probably some hundreds of years old and not unconnected with the older Ashton Court. The surface soil and useless disintegrated rock from the top have been thrown out on each side of the quarry and so give the deceptive effect of ramparts. It compares with the well-known fifteenth century quarries on the top of Dundry Hill. The semicircular earthwork which Mr. Burrow shows on the east side of Summerhouse Plantation either proves not to be in existence at all, or to consist of more dumped quarry refuse.

The author desires to express his gratitude to Mr. H. B. Napier for facilities given to examine the ground in Ashton Park.

THE "ROMAN CAMP" AT MANOR FARM, FAILAND. Somerset,
6 inch V, N.E.

This small, roughly circular, earthwork lies directly on the line of the ancient track from the ford of the Avon, at the bottom of Nightingale Valley, to Cadbury Camp. It is quite obvious that it is not a Roman camp, and with the object of testing its date the writer made a small excavation in its interior in the late summer of 1928. The area examined down to bed rock was not more than six feet square, but it yielded enough relics to show that the construction and occupation of this work belonged in all probability to the Iron Age like the other larger work at Moat House Farm, Wraxall.

The relics consisted of part of a Kimmeridge shale bracelet, and some twenty fragments of smooth black burnished ware ornamented with small round depressions. In the very small area opened no signs of any structure occurred, but when a section was cut across the bank and ditch it was found that the former was largely formed on the north side by a natural outcrop of rock. The ditch was very slight.

It is probable that this work is not unconnected with the numerous traces of ancient agriculture which are to be seen between it and Manor Farm.