

## A Revised Account of the Earthworks between Shipham and Charterhouse-on-Mendip

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The present paper summarizes our knowledge of the earthworks lying between Shipham and Charterhouse, on the Mendip Hills, Somerset, with the exception of the barrows. The remaining sites do not, of course, form a homogeneous archaeological group, but fall into a convenient geographical series, bounded on the north by the watershed of Black Down, and by a waterless limestone area on the south.

The work was prompted by the examination of aerial photographs of the area in question, and field work has been done to supplement the information thus gained. Many of the sites are mentioned by Tratman (1927, pp. 25-40). Several new items are recorded, however, and some emendations made in the case of others. An attempt has been made to give a full bibliography of each site, excluding casual references of no archaeological interest, and attention is directed to fuller accounts where these exist.

Two of the twelve sites listed—Charterhouse Amphitheatre and Gorsey Bigbury—have been excavated, with definite results in the latter case only. The purpose and age of most of the remainder will remain unknown until they have been attacked with the spade.

All the earthworks, with the exception of Gorsey Bigbury, are referred to by purely topographical names, and their locations are shown in the accompanying map (*Fig. 18*).

### Longbottom Camp

Skinner, MS. (*teste* Tratman, 1927, p. 26).

Bothamley, 1911, p. 512.

Knight, 1915, p. 3.

Burrow, 1924, p. 114.

Tratman, 1927, pp. 26-7, fig. 2.

Dobson, 1931, p. 203.

The plan published by Tratman is good ; that of Burrow is quite wrong. This quadrilateral earthwork remains of unknown age and purpose, and no useful information can be added to the remarks of Bothamley and Tratman.

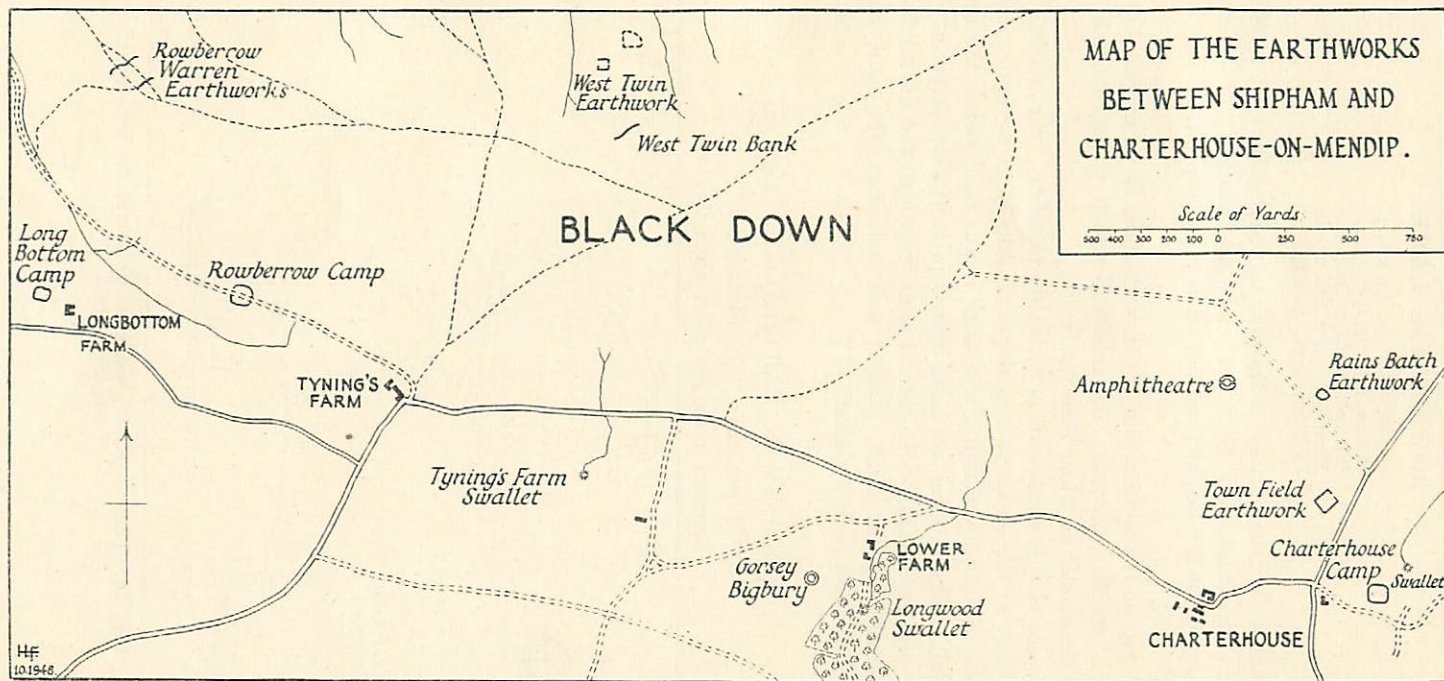


Fig. 18.

## ROWBERROW CAMP

Hoare, 1821, p. 42, pl. 3.  
 Bothamley, 1911, p. 512.  
 Burrow, 1924, p. 114.  
 Tratman, 1927, pp. 27-8.  
 Dobson, 1931, p. 203.

Bothamley's plan of this earthwork, copied by Burrow, is not very accurate. The bank and ditch are more well-marked than Tratman's remarks imply, as the height from the ditch to the top of the bank is from 3 to 4 ft.

The gap on the western side, 33 ft. wide, may be an original entrance, since it is much wider than the trackway which passes through. The outlet to the east is no wider than the track.

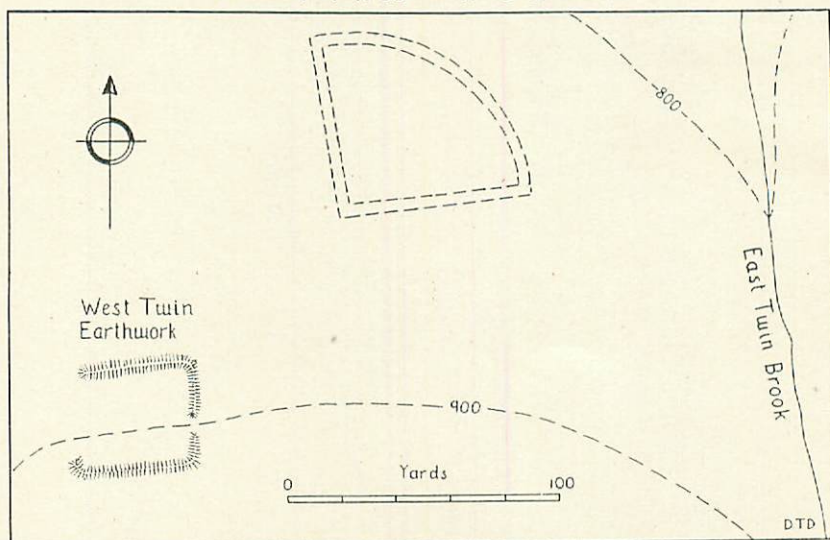
The site of this earthwork is peculiarly puzzling; the northern part, in particular, of the enclosed area slopes so steeply as to render it inconvenient for almost any activity, and since it was built below the brow of a steep hill, defence could not have been a primary consideration.

The area has recently been cleared of undergrowth and the surrounding country, including the ditch, planted with conifers; the bank and the enclosed area have been left clear.

WEST TWIN EARTHWORK (*Fig. 19*)

(Tratman's "(9) Blackdown")

Tratman, 1927, pp. 28-9, fig. 3, No. 1.



**Fig. 19.**—Plan of West Twin Earthwork and the immediate neighbourhood.

The plan given by Tratman is not quite correct, and the Ordnance Survey (Somerset 6 in. Sheet 18 N.W., edition of 1931) wrongly shows the work as a complete square. The plan here published is emended from aerial photographs and a re-examination on the ground. The northern and southern sides are well defined and straight, but the eastern side is less regular in appearance. No western side can be traced, but the south-western corner appears to be present. The angles, so far as they can be determined, are almost right angles.

A short distance to the north-east of this earthwork a marking of peculiar shape, the quadrant of a circle, is visible on aerial photographs. This feature is shown dotted in *Fig. 19*. Attempts to trace any definite bank or ditch on the ground have so far failed.

#### WEST TWIN BANK

Tratman, 1927, pp. 29-30, fig. 3.

The position and orientation of this work is shown in *Fig. 18*, and a detailed plan is given by Tratman. The purpose of the work is not clear; in this connection it should be borne in mind that further earthworks may exist on Black Down. Low banks are easily overlooked on account of the heath vegetation, and the peat area on the summit shows up black on ordinary aerial photographs.

#### ROWBERROW WARREN EARTHWORKS

Skinner, B. M. Add. MS. 33717, p. 180 (*teste* Tratman).

Tratman, 1927, p. 30.

Nothing can be added to Tratman's comprehensive description of these works. Their origin and purpose are unknown; Tratman's suggestion that they were defences to the end of the spur is the most plausible hypothesis.

#### GORSEY BIGBURY (T. 186)

Skinner, B.M. Add. MS. 33673, p. 102; 33653, p. 216 (*teste* Tratman).

Phelps, 1836, p. 135.

Scarth, 1858, p. 153.

Allcroft, 1908, p. 589, n. 3; p. 591, n. 2.

Tratman, 1922, p. 97.

Baker, 1923, p. 152.

Tratman, 1927, pp. 34-6.

Dobson, 1931, pp. 208-9, 241.

Clark, 1932, p. 109.

Jones, 1935, pp. 174-8.

Jones and others, 1938, pp. 3-56.

The site has been completely excavated by this Society, and a full account published (Jones, 1938). The work appears to belong to the group of 'henge' monuments with a single entrance. The earliest pottery

found was Neolithic B-Beaker, and the construction of the earthwork is attributed to this culture by the excavators. The main feature of the site was the occupation of the ditch, which yielded typical A Beakers in abundance and was quite probably unconnected with the original purpose of the work. Jones believes that the site was never completed as a ritual earthwork.

In the same field as Gorsey Bigbury are a number of circles, marked principally by vegetation. The largest of these are approximately the same size as Gorsey Bigbury, the smallest about half this diameter. The origin of these circles is unknown, but they are possibly connected with Gorsey Bigbury and demand investigation.

### THE AMPHITHEATRE, CHARTERHOUSE

- Hoare, 1821, p. 42, pl. 3.  
 Rutter, 1829, pp. 189, 329.  
 Phelps, 1836, p. 135.  
 Scarth, 1858, p. 153.  
 Long, 1870, p. 29.  
 Scarth, 1875, p. 138.  
 Haverfield, 1906, p. 336.  
 Allcroft, 1908, pp. 589-91.  
 Gray, 1909, pp. 118-37.  
 Bothamley, 1911, p. 506.  
 Allcroft, 1919, p. 100, n. 2; pp. 107, 116; p. 127, n. 1.  
 Burrow, 1924, p. 104.  
 Tratman, 1927, p. 28.  
 Dobson, 1931, p. 152.  
 Pearce, 1944, p. 101.

An excellent contoured plan of the site is given by Gray (1909, *Plate 1*), who dug several trenches which produced Roman pottery, including Samian ware, from all levels within the vallum. All the pottery was in small sherds and about equally common were flint flakes, cores and implements. Gray also showed that the eastern and western entrances are original, and were probably about 8 ft. 6 in. wide when built; the gap in the southern side is probably not an original feature. No masonry, or features characteristic of an amphitheatre, were found, and indeed the work is rather small for such a purpose, as was pointed out by Gray, who concluded that it was built in Roman times.

Allcroft (1919) advanced the hypothesis that small earthworks of this type, though based in their plan on the large amphitheatres, were used principally as local meeting-places for the transaction of municipal business. He called this small type of arena the *circus*, and quoted a number of other British examples.

In 1938 a trial trench was dug by this Society from the centre towards the vallum (Pearce, 1944, p. 101), with the object of finding out whether there was an inner ditch. The result was negative. Any finds and records

have unfortunately been destroyed with the Society's museum in 1940, but the question arose at the time whether the work might not even be post-Roman in date. In this view, the pottery and flints were already present in the soil from which the vallum was built, which is not unlikely considering the abundance of Roman pottery in the soil around Charterhouse, and of flint flakes throughout Mendip. The fragmentary nature of the pottery, and absence of other finds, is in accordance with this possibility, and the age of the work cannot, therefore, be regarded as proved.

#### RAIN'S BATCH EARTHWORK (*Fig. 20*)

Hoare, 1821, pl. 3.

This small earthwork lies 380 yards almost due north of Town Field Earthwork. The site was noticed on an aerial photograph and subsequently traced on the ground. It is shown on Hoare's map, but is not mentioned by that author in his text and appears to have escaped the notice of subsequent workers. The bank is clearly traceable on the ground; the ditch is ill-defined, and the total relief of bank and ditch not more than 1 ft. There is no well-marked entrance. No features were observed in the enclosed area.

#### TOWN FIELD EARTHWORK (*Fig. 20*)

("(7) Charterhouse-on-Mendip" of Tratman)

Skinner, B.M. Add. MS. 33673, p. 102 (*teste* Tratman).

Hoare, 1821, pl. 3.

Tratman, 1927, p. 28.

This work is an accurate rectangle, whose external dimensions are 83 by 95 yards. The gap in the north-eastern side is not quite symmetrically placed and may not be original. First described by Tratman, this earthwork was observed by Skinner, and shown by Hoare on his map of Iter II.

#### ROMAN SETTLEMENT, CHARTERHOUSE

Skinner, B.M. Add. MS. 33717, p. 180 (*teste* Tratman).

Hoare, 1821, p. 42, pl. 3.

Rutter, 1829, pp. 189, 329.

Phelps, 1836, p. 135.

Scarth, 1858, p. 153.

Scarth, 1875, p. 133.

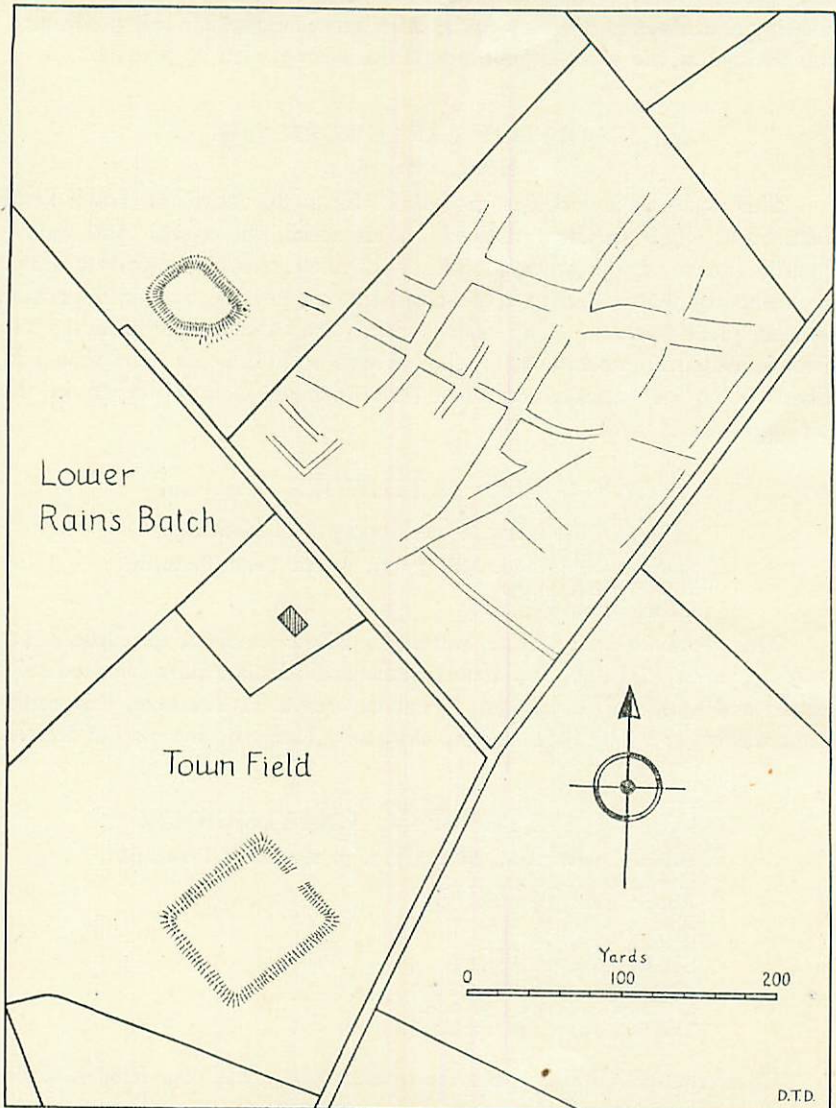
Haverfield, 1906, pp. 334-6.

Collingwood, 1930, p. 106.

Dobson, 1931, pp. 130, 235.

Charterhouse has long been recognized as the site of a Roman settlement connected with the working of the lead mines in the neighbourhood. A large number of objects have been found within the area covered by the

settlement, almost all of which were chance finds, or else from inadequately recorded excavations. The bulk of these finds is preserved in the Bristol and Taunton museums. Little is known about the settlement, and that little has been summarized by Haverfield. Hoare mentioned that "a considerable tract of ground is covered with squares, circles, and other



**Fig. 20.**—Plan of Town Field, Charterhouse, and the immediate neighbourhood. For explanation, see text.

irregularities", and Scarth (1858) "discovered by the yellow colour of the growing corn, where the settlement had been . . ." The bulk of the remains, according to Haverfield, occurred in Town Field and Upper and Lower Rains Batch. Town Field has a somewhat broken surface, but few definite features can at present be made out. Upper and Lower Rains Batch are less irregular, and little is visible to-day, either from the ground or on the air photographs examined. It is possible, however, that the markings observed by Scarth would show up on aerial photographs taken under suitable conditions.

More definite features have been found in the field north-east of Town Field, on the other side of the lane (*Fig. 20*). Here is a criss-cross pattern of strips, depressed slightly below the level of the rest of the field, which are partly traceable on the ground. Charcoal, brick fragments, and coarse pottery of Romano-British type have been found in the field. The markings possibly represent the plan of part of a Roman or medieval settlement, although they also bear some resemblance to Celtic fields as seen on aerial photographs.

*Note.*—The bibliography given above does not include papers describing objects found at Charterhouse.

#### CHARTERHOUSE CAMP

Bothamley, 1911, p. 506.  
Burrow, 1924, p. 102.  
Tratman, 1927, p. 28.  
Dobson, 1931, p. 235.

A small-scale plan is given by Bothamley, and this has apparently been copied by Burrow. The camp has a double vallum and is square, with very rounded corners. The enclosed area is about 70 yards square. The south-western corner and the southern side are destroyed, and the eastern side has been largely obliterated by mining. The portions which remain are very faint. Burrow's classification as a camp class 'C' is probably correct, and the age of the work is unknown.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The siting of so many earthworks, whatever their origin, along this narrow strip of country was no doubt due to the presence of a good water supply in the streams which descend from Black Down. After crossing the outcrop of the Lower Limestone Shales (K zone), which extends from Longbottom Farm to Charterhouse and is nowhere more than  $\frac{3}{8}$  mile wide, the streams are absorbed by swallets in the massive limestone, and further south, therefore, surface water supplies are non-existent. The only earthworks so far recorded in this latter region are barrows.



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