

Kings Weston Down Camp, Bristol, 1956

BY PHILIP RAHTZ

This paper describes the results of a small excavation made in the spring of 1956. Test holes inside the camp and sections across the main ditch and the ditch of the circular earthwork yielded Iron Age A pottery in primary contexts, with a secondary scatter of Roman pottery of the second century A.D.

Seyer (1825) described the main rampart as standing 8-10 ft. above the ditch bottom, and the outer rampart as additional protection. Tratman (1924) suggested that the camp was of the Early Iron Age, and drew attention to the circular earthwork and to an egg-shaped enclosure further west. In 1923-4 he excavated some of the barrows on the west end of the down, discovering sherds which would fit into an Iron Age A context. Several finds of Roman date were made, including Samian sherds, a mortarium sherd and a blue bead and also a Saxon metal object (Tratman, 1926).

THE SITE*

(Fig. 4)

The site is well placed on the eastern part of a long narrow limestone ridge at an elevation of around 300 ft. above O.D. The ridge lies on the western outskirts of Bristol and overlooks the Severn estuary. It comprises *three earthworks*:—*A*, the camp; *B*, the circular earthwork; *C*, the outer earthwork.

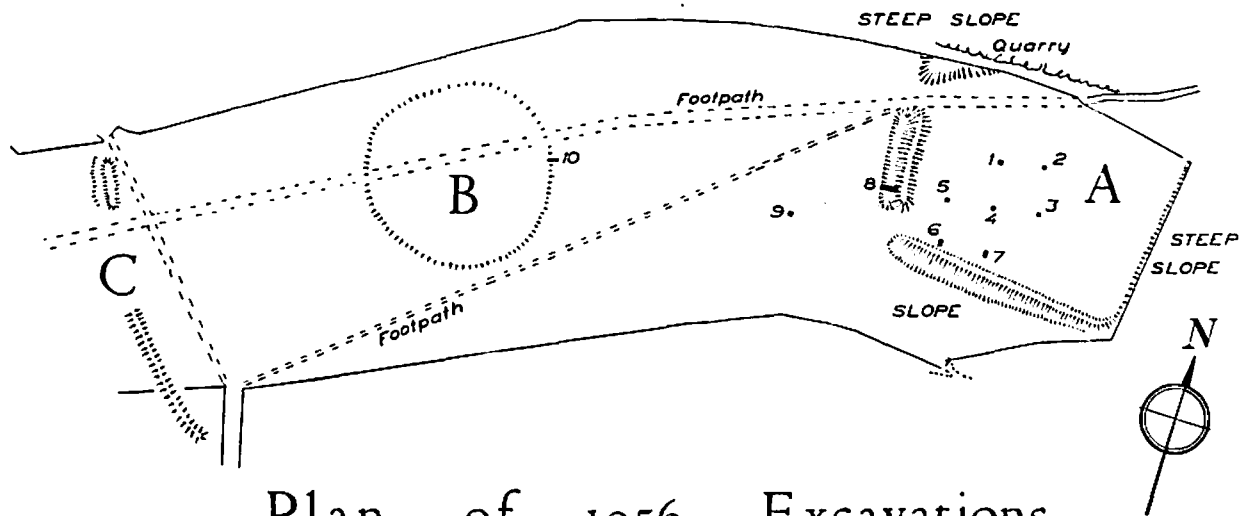
A. The Camp encloses about one acre at the east end of the ridge; it uses the precipitous slopes of the north and east sides, completing the defence by a low rampart and ditch on the south side and a larger rampart and ditch on the most vulnerable, level west side. There are entrances across the levelled ditch through the main rampart at the north-west and south-west corners, but neither need be ancient.

B. The Circular Earthwork is sited on the crest of the down about 150 yards west of the main rampart. It consists of a slight bank, more prominent on the south side, surrounded by a shallow ditch, barely perceptible in the long grass. The bank is roughly circular and about 60 yards in diameter.

C. The Outer Earthwork is 300 yards west of the main rampart of *A* and 80 yards from the west edge of *B*. It consists of a bank and ditch

* The site is owned by Bristol Corporation, who kindly gave permission to excavate, and who have deposited the finds in the City Museum.

KINGS WESTON DOWN CAMP. BRISTOL



Plan of 1956 Excavations

SCALE 50 0 50 100 200 300 400 500 FEET

P.A.R.

Fig. 4.

similar in size and character to the main rampart and ditch of *A*. The central part is levelled, but the ends are clearly defined and turn back towards the east. There can be little doubt that *C* is an outer defence of the main camp *A*, and *B* lies roughly halfway between the two.

The Present Excavation was undertaken to date the camp and circle.* Digging took place on four days in March, 1956, when 10 cuttings were made; seven test holes inside the main camp *A* (1-7), one test hole on the southern slope between *A* and *B* (9), a trench across the east ditch of the circular earthwork *B* (10), and a trench across the main ditch of the camp *A* (8).

A. Test holes 1-5 in the centre of the camp, showed little signs of occupation; 6 and 7, however, behind the southern rampart, located a good occupation level which yielded several dozen sherds, much bone, charcoal flecks and some burnt stone and burnt daub, which may represent hut sites here. In 6 this layer was sealed by heavy rubble from the south rampart. *Cut* 8 (14 ft. 6 in. \times 5 ft. 0 in.) showed the main rampart ditch to be 5 ft. 6 in. deep from the present surface in the centre and over 15 ft. wide. Its stratification is well defined as shown in the *section* (*Fig. 5*). The primary silt contained several sherds and pieces of bone and was followed by secondary silt and stone rubble derived from the rampart. The destruction of the upper part of the rampart may have occurred in Roman or later periods, as a Roman sherd was found deep in this rubble. The clay layer at the west end of the trench (*Fig. 5*, layer 3) may be a re-cut of the ditch; a Roman rim lay at its base (*Fig. 6*, No. 8 A). The east side of the ditch rises almost vertically where the bed-rock is cut, the line of which may have been carried up in a revetment to the rampart itself.

A-C.—Test hole 9 showed a very slight dark soil level with a few sherds, but no charcoal flecks or burnt stone.

B.—*Cut* 10 (8 \times 3 ft.), across the east side of the circular earthwork, revealed a rock-cut ditch 2 ft. 0 in.—3 ft. 0 in. wide and 2 ft. deep from the turf. On its east side was the natural weathered rock surface, apparently carefully levelled, and on its west (inner) side was bed rock at a slightly higher level. In the lower part of the ditch were exclusively Iron Age A sherds, in its top and in the layer over the ditch were Iron Age A and Roman sherds, the latter of the second century A.D. In this mixed layer were also thirteen slingstones.

The finds included over 100 sherds, which are marked KW 1956, followed by the number of the cutting and a serial letter. The Iron Age sherds are described below by Mr. ApSimon, and some of these and the Roman sherds are shown in *Fig. 6*. There were 200 pieces of bone representing pig, sheep or goat, ox, horse or ass (an adult about the size of a Welsh

* I was assisted in this work by Messrs. A. M. ApSimon, G. C. Boon, G. A. Brown, F. Frost, L. Harris, Dr. and Mrs. H. Taylor and Dr. E. K. Tratman.

KINGS WESTON DOWN CAMP. BRISTOL.

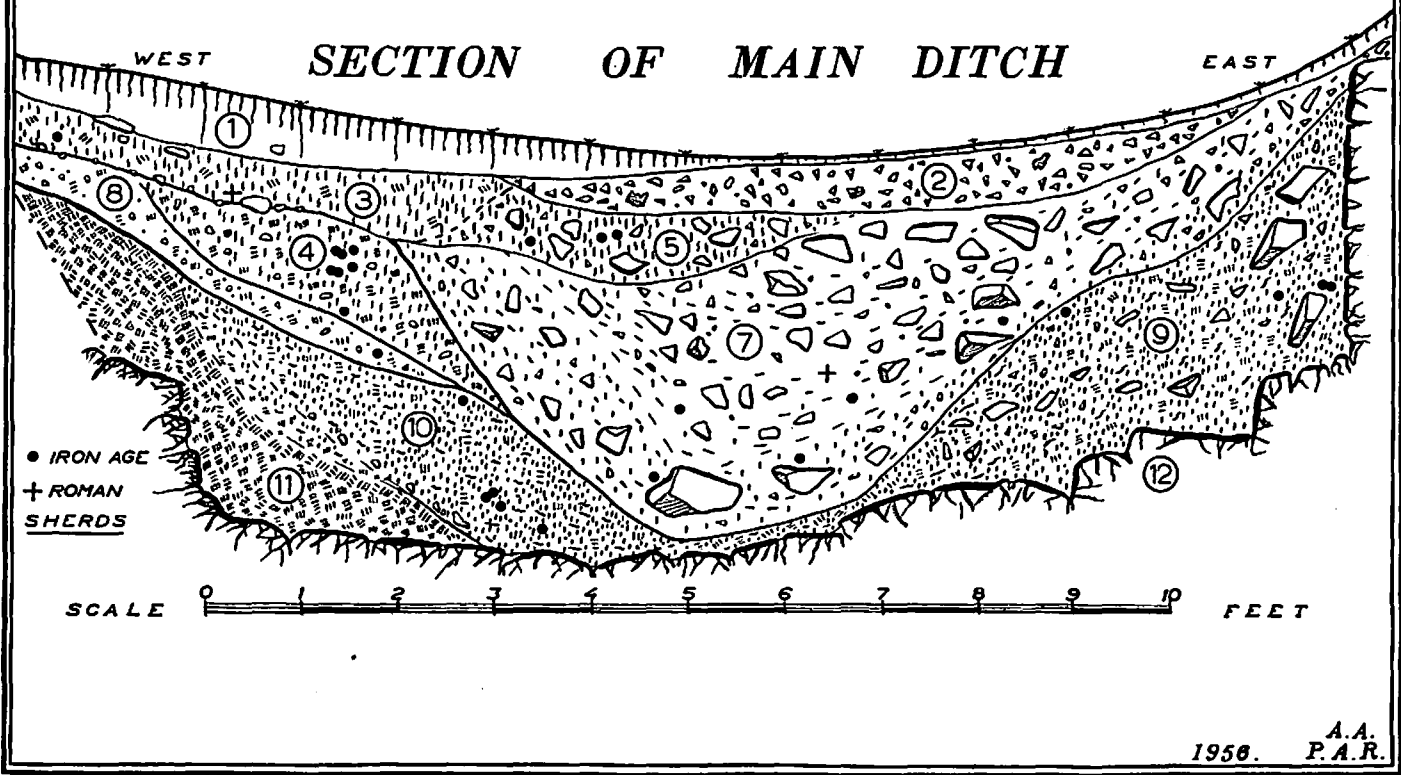


Fig. 5.

pony). There were two antler fragments, one probably of Roe deer, the other possibly of Red deer and a fragment of pelvis, possibly of Roe deer. The pig and ox could be wild or domesticated species.*

There were also fourteen flint flakes, mostly patinated white and featureless, and slingstones. These are irregular smooth pebbles derived from the Old Red Sandstone and the Carboniferous Limestone (information from Dr. F. S. Wallis), and all could be obtained locally; they vary in weight between 2 and 4 oz. (cf. Maiden Castle, Wheeler, 1943, p. 49, where the slingstones are described as weighing between $\frac{1}{2}$ –2 oz., though the size of billiard balls). Other finds include an iron disc $\frac{3}{4}$ in. diameter and 1–2 mm. thick; a fragment of a whetstone, $2\frac{3}{8}$ in. wide and $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick (identified by Dr. Wallis as a fine-grained siltstone, probably from the Old Red Sandstone), and more recent objects, including a clay pipe stem, a Victorian cuff-link, and halfpennies of 1927 and 1938, which were in the top of the main rampart ditch with much lemonade bottle glass.

CONCLUSIONS

The pottery evidence shows that the camp and circle are of the same period, which may be culturally assigned to a late phase of Iron Age A. This was followed only by Roman occupation, probably in the second century A.D. The number of Roman sherds found in the past and present excavations is rather more than might be expected from an occasional visitor or shepherd. No Iron Age B or C sherds were found, though B sherds of Glastonbury type have occurred in the neighbouring camp of Blaise Castle.†

The slingstones in cut 10, the circular earthwork (*B*), are surprising; they occur in a secondary context here, and none were found in the camp (*A*). On this slight evidence it would appear that they were not derived from the Iron Age A occupation. At Maiden Castle (Wheeler, 1943, 48 ff.) it was conclusively shown that slingstones are predominantly an Iron Age B method of fighting. Their occurrence at Kings Weston in such quantity in a small cut gives rise to interesting speculation. Identification of the circular earthwork *B* must clearly be the object of future work on the down. It is suggested tentatively that the ditch is a palisade ditch, with an exterior berm, and that within the circle may have been farm buildings or huts.

APPENDIX 1

Details of stratification are included here only for cuts 7, 8 and 10. Cut 7 may be taken as typical of the camp.

* Information from the Department of Zoology, City Museum, Bristol; a detailed list may be seen there.

† There are several hundred Iron Age sherds from this site in the collections in the City Museum, Bristol and in the Society's Museum, mostly obtained from rabbit scrapes and other disturbances.

Cut 7 (3 ft. 6 in. × 7 ft. 0 in. north-south)

1. Turf and top-soil 0-6 in.
2. Fairly dark slightly gritty reddish-brown soil, some charcoal flecks and burnt stone 6-15 in.
3. Broken yellow limestone at 15 in. with some brown soil-22 in. (surface of natural).
4. Natural, yellow limestone blocks at 22 in.

Finds

32 I.A. sherds, 6 flint flakes, 2 fragments burnt daub, 100+ scraps of bone. Iron disc at 9 in. near NW corner.
2 I.A. sherds (7 JJ and KK).

Cut 10 (8 ft. 0 in. × 3 ft. 0 in.)

1. Turf and top-soil 0-3 in. west. 0-5 in. east.
2. Reddish-brown soil and small stones, 3, 5-7 in. dipping into ditch.
3. Dark reddish-brown soil and small stones. Mainly filling of ditch.
4. Broken limestone, smooth and ? trodden at east end, irregular and rough at west end.

Roman sherds (10 A, B, C). 3 I.A. sherds (10 D, E, F). 10 sling stones, flint flake, fragment burnt daub.
3 sling stones, 2 fragments bone.
19 I.A. sherds (10 G-Y).

Cut 8. Main Rampart and Ditch (14 ft. 6 in. × 5 ft. 0 in.). *Fig. 5.*

<i>Layer</i> (Depths as in <i>Fig. 5</i>)	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1. Turf and top-soil.		
2. Angular limestone chips and brown soil.	Weathered surface of filling.	Lemonade and beer bottle glass, 1927 and 1938 half-pennies.
3. Buff-brown slightly clayey soil.	? secondary ? Roman ditch at west end.	Roman sherd at base (8 A). I.A. sherd on west lip (8 R).
4. Buff-brown clayey soil with rolled limestone fragments	Upper part of secondary silt of main ditch.	I.A. sherds (8 B, 8 C-G).
5. Heavy limestone rubble and brown soil.	Top of blocking.	Fragments bone, I.A. sherds (8 N, O, P).
7. As 5 with more air spaces in centre part.	Blocking probably derived from main rampart.	Fragments bone, I.A. sherds (8 K, L, U, Q, M). Roman sherd (8 J).
8. Yellow-brown clayey soil, charcoal flecked, with some rolled yellow stone.	Lower part of secondary silt.	I.A. sherd (8 H).
9. Reddish-brown clayey compact sticky soil with smaller rubble and few large pieces.	Derived from matrix of rampart-primary silt.	I.A. sherd (8 Y).
10. Reddish-brown clayey compact soil with charcoal flecks and occupation debris.	Primary silt and occupation layer.	4 flint flakes, I.A. sherds (8 S, T, V, W, X, Z).
11. Greenish-yellow clay merging with (10).	Probably natural clay pocket in rock.	
12. Reddish-buff and grey limestone.	Natural.	

APPENDIX 2

THE POTTERY (*Fig. 6*)

The Iron Age Pottery consists of 111 sherds from all the cuttings. An attempt has been made to sort these into fabric groups, A-F. Fifty-three sherds fall reasonably into these groups, the rest are more indeterminate. Mr. ApSimon reports on them as follows:—

Group A, Hæmatite ware.—This comprises three scraps of dark ware coated with a smooth bright red slip. One appears to be part of the rim of a small bowl with sharply everted rim (8 B), another may be the shoulder of such a vessel.

Group B.—This consists mainly of sherds of dark, heavily-gritted ware, with traces of buff-brown slip on the outside. The sandiness of much of this ware recalls coarse Romano-British fabrics. There is a fragment of a flat rim (10 P), and a base fragment. Some sherds have internal striations similar to those on wheel-turned sherds; in other respects they are similar to other sherds, and have no affinities with Roman or later pottery.

Group C.—This consists of coarse, friable ware, of dark brown fabric with a thick reddish-buff slip. The ware is heavily calcite gritted with the inner surfaces deeply pitted where grits have weathered out. This coarse ware is in the Iron Age A tradition, but my recent work on the Meare pottery has shown that it occurs there also.

Group D.—This consists of a single sherd of black, stone gritted ware, with smoothed outer surface; this is from the upper part of a shouldered jar with a simple slightly out-turned and slightly flattened rim. This shape is of Iron Age A ancestry though it could equally well occur in local Iron Age B groups (8 Y).

Group E.—These sherds are of dark, corky, slightly soapy ware with dull brown slip; they are pitted where grits have weathered out.

Group F.—These are sherds of thick, dark, stone gritted ware, some pitted where grits have weathered out, with the outer surface covered with a smooth brown-buff slip. One sherd is from a pot with a simple squared-off rim and some have a slip on the inside also. The ware is very like some of the Iron Age A pottery from Little Solsbury and it is likely that the periods of occupation overlapped, though Little Solsbury was probably occupied earlier.

Among the remaining sherds buff or brown fabrics predominate, including some of reasonably compact texture. There is one scrap bearing traces of a row of impressed finger-nail marks, arranged obliquely probably in a horizontal row round the shoulder of a vessel (6 V). There are seven rim sherds likely to be of Iron Age A type. 7 A, 6 W, 10 K are simple rounded rims; 7 HH is flat-topped, part of a shouldered jar; 10 N may be

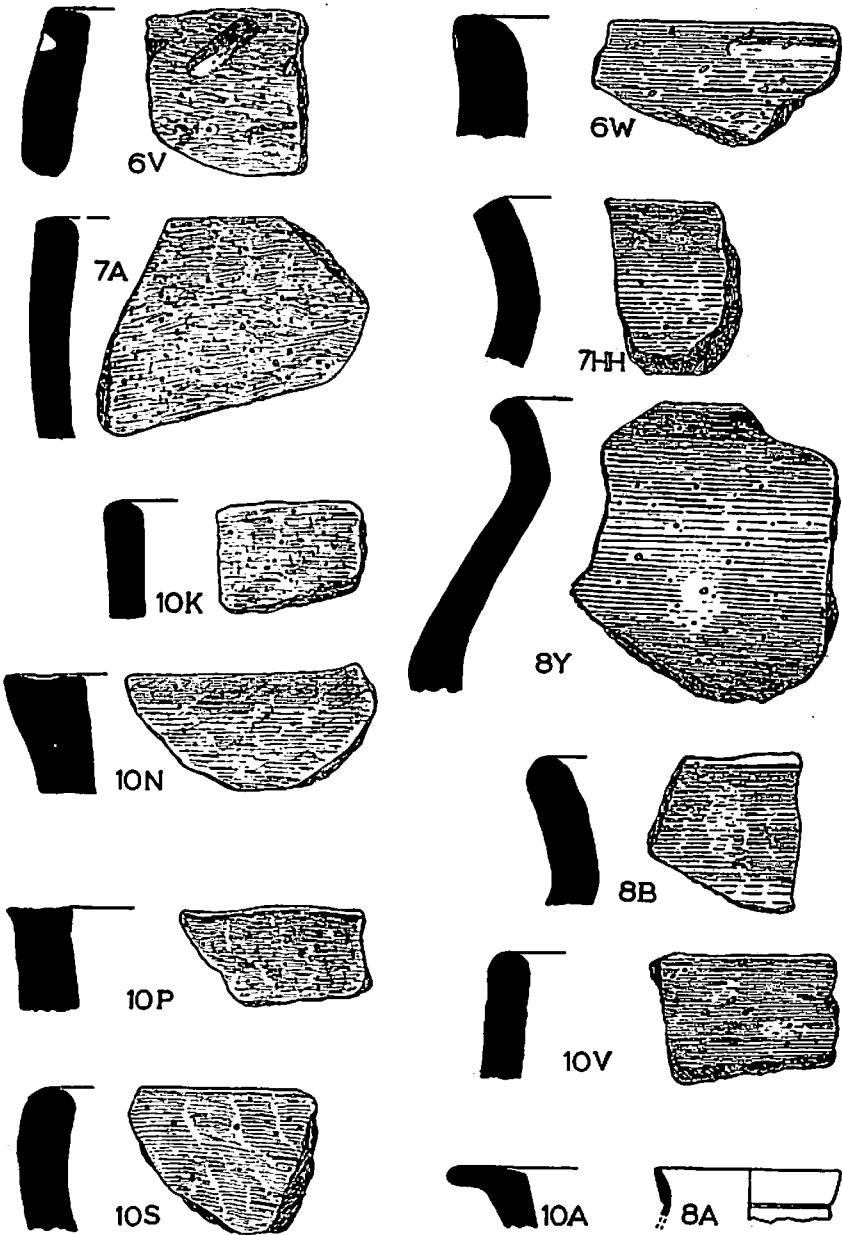


Fig. 6.—Sherds 8 A and 10 A Roman (‡); remainder Iron Age (‡).

part of a cabled rim such as occur among Iron Age pottery at All Cannings Cross, Little Solsbury and Brean Down; 10 S and 10 V are of white gritted fabric recalling that of some Iron Age A pottery from Brean Down.

The Iron Age pottery from Kings Weston generally presents the appearance of a devolved Iron Age A group. I would place it generally later than the main *floruit* of sites such as Pagans Hill,* which may indeed be very early. I think that it would be possible to find parallels for this pottery among that from Meare Lake Village, where there is a remarkable range of fabrics. At the same time there is nothing obviously requiring the invocation of Iron Age B at Kings Weston. Comparison with Blaise Castle Camp (footnote †, p. 34) is instructive. While there is an overlap of fabrics, none of the distinctive B type fabrics and shapes that occur at Blaise Castle is represented at Kings Weston. One might hazard a guess that the occupation of Blaise Castle began about the time when that at Kings Weston ended.

A. M. A.

The Roman pottery is referred to the Chew Valley Lake, CVL, type series of forms and fabrics, publication of which is forthcoming.

A rim sherd, 8 A, of a small jar is of soft, fine, buff fabric similar to CVL fabric L, probable form CVL/RP 12, 15, 16 or 19, late first-second century A.D. 8 J is a sherd of soft orange fabric while 10 A is a rim sherd of a pie dish, with hard, smooth, sandy, grey-black fabric similar to CVL fabric T, form probably as CVL/RP 167 of first half of second century A.D. 10 B is a sherd of mug or flagon handle. The fabric is soft, orange and micaceous, rather coarser than CVL fabric K. 10 C is similar to 10 B and probably part of the body of that vessel. Sherds 8 J, 10 B and 10 C are not figured.

The sherds would fit well into a second century context and rim 10 A would suggest the first half. The absence of specifically late first/early-second fabrics would suggest a date later than A.D. 120 in the Chew Valley. The Roman occupation of Kings Weston Down would therefore appear to have been in the second century A.D., probably in its early middle years.

P. A. R.

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* Iron Age A sherds from this site are to be described in the second report forthcoming.