

## Archæological Notes

*Excavations at Knowle Hill, Somerset.* (O.S. 6 in. to 1 mile, Som. 12 S.W., N.G.R., ST 584615.) This hill rises from the floor of the Chew valley and is a most conspicuous landmark. A circle was first noted on the hill by Crook and Tratman in 1949, when it was given the catalogue number of T301. This circle is clearly seen in aerial photographs, which also show markings, which may be Celtic fields, on the southwest slope of the hill. A war-time (1939-1945) brick-lined trench cuts into the circle on the north and some shallow mine workings along the hill intrude into the circle on the west. The purpose of the circle was unknown though according to some of the local inhabitants it was a barrow. In view of the many discoveries made by Mr. Phillip Rahtz\* in the Chew valley prior to the formation of the Chew Valley Lake it was thought that the circle might be a prehistoric farmstead surrounded by a palisade trench. In 1959 it was decided to carry out some trial excavations at the site with the object of determining the age and function of the work, and its possible connections with Burledge Camp (Crook and Tratman 1949 and 1954 and ApSimon 1957). The latter site lies about a mile and a half to the south; while about half a mile to the northwest, adjacent to Pitt's Lane, Rahtz† had found a Belgic-Roman settlement site. Permission to carry out these excavations was kindly given by the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Chew Magna.

The circle, *Fig. 8*, is about 100 ft. in diameter, bounded by a low bank about 1 ft. high and about 4 ft. wide at its base, with the ditch about 1 ft. deep and 3 ft. wide outside. In March, 1959, trial excavations were made by this Society. *Figure 8* shows the sondages, which consisted of a trench through the ditch and bank on the west and a series of pits 4 ft. square at intervals across the circle. The ditch was shown to be only 18 in. deep with a shallow U-section. The silting yielded no dateable remains. The sections of the pits were fairly uniform. Beneath the turf a layer of brown earth extended downwards to a depth of 10 in., resting on undisturbed yellow clay. There was a slight scattering of small pot sherds and a little charcoal at the base of the brown earth. The pottery, of which there was very little, included a few sherds that might be as early as Iron Age A, but the majority were Romano-British. Two iron nails were amongst the stones of the bank on the east.

It was quite evident that the circle enclosure was not a living site. The quantity of the scattered pottery was far too small for this and there was a total absence of any other evidence of occupation for the charcoal, such as it was, could easily have been the product of heath fires. The pottery found was no more than could easily have been the product of occasional picnic parties on the site. The excavations were inconclusive in that the purpose of the circle still remains unknown though the circle is not of prehistoric or Roman origin. Probably it is a product of landscape gardening in the 19th or even 18th centuries, and may have been a tree circle, though no evidence of tree roots were found. If this is the correct interpretation then the similar circle near Dowling's Wood (Crook and Tratman 1949) is likely to be one too and likewise the two circles above Butcombe (Tratman 1935).

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*The Rediscovery of the Roman Villa at Lye Hole, Somerset.* (O.S. 6 in. to 1 mile, Som. 11 S.E., N.G.R., ST 502622.) The original account of this villa was by Scarth in 1876. The discovery of the villa was reported to Scarth by William Body, the tenant of Lye Hole farm. The year was a dry one and the lines of the walls could easily be traced and the plan of these indicated a Roman villa. The site was two fields away from the farm in a "secluded and well watered situation". Some tentative excavations were made in the eastern angle where stones, roofing tiles, much charred wood and mortar containing powdered brick were found. Later in the year another

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\* A report on these excavations is in course of preparation.

† Information in a letter.

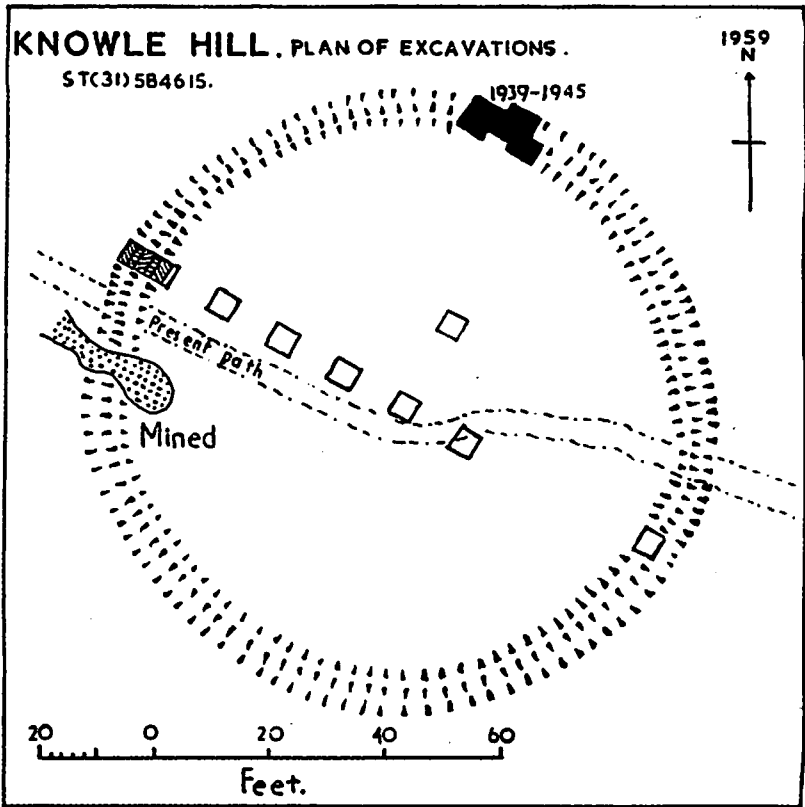


Fig. 8.—Plan of Earthwork on Knowle Hill. The sondages are shown as open squares except for the cutting through the bank and ditch on the west.

excavation was made in the southern extremity of the villa. Many parts of Roman tiles were found, *pillae* for a hypocaust were spaced at regular intervals and were built of hexagonal tiles, of flat angular stones and of flat round stones. Red and brown pottery was found together with bones and wall plaster. All this lay only 18 in. deep. The villa had apparently been destroyed by fire and the site covered rather less than half an acre. The next field south was known as "The Burying Ground" but no record of anything having actually been found there was known then or now.

The site, Fig. 9, was rediscovered by A. M. ApSimon after an initial failure by both of us. Miss Shepherd, who lives at the farm, pointed out the site though there were slightly varying accounts of the sites of the walls given by several local inhabitants. The situation is an excellent one facing south and west, well sheltered and well watered. In spite of the dryness of 1959 no lines of wall could be seen. Perhaps by August all the ground had become too dry altogether though local inhabitants said that the wall lines had not appeared earlier in that year.\*

An attempt was made to locate some of the walls of the building by geo-electrical methods. Professor L. S. Palmer took over this work. A series of traverses were made running north-northwest to south-southeast and at right angles to these crossing

\* At other known sites of Roman villas the lines of the walls did not become visible in the drought of 1959 as they had done in other dry periods.