

## 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 pallisade 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 Burlledge 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).

E. V. GILBERT.

*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

---

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

† Information in a letter.

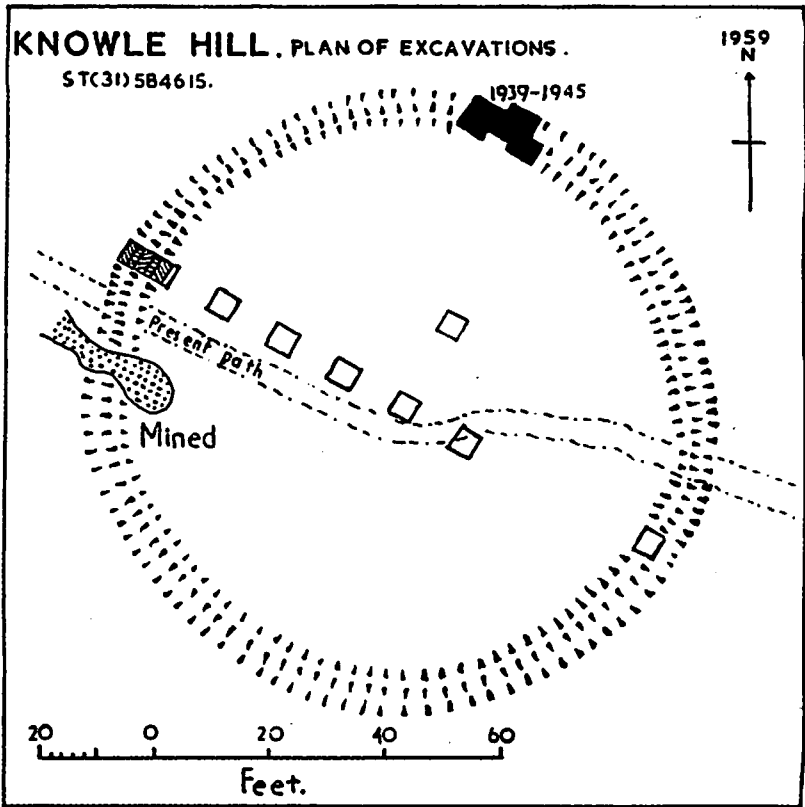


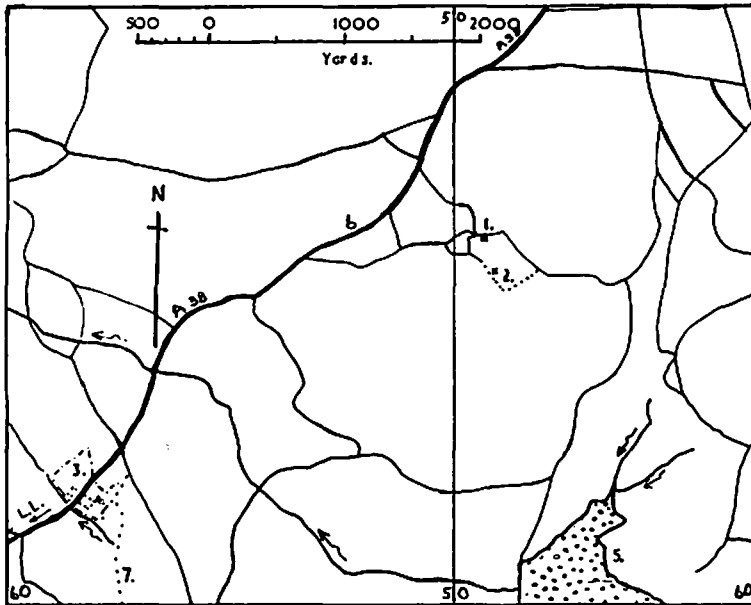
Fig. 8.—Plan of Earthwork on Knowle Hill. The sondages are shown as open squares except for the cutting through the bank and ditch on the west.

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.



*Fig. 9.*—1, Lye Hole Farm House; 2, Lye Hole Roman Villa; 3, Havyat Green; 4, Area within which the villa probably lies;\* 5, Yeo Reservoir; 6, Redhill; 7, Cophthorn Lane; L.L., Lower Langford.

a low mound with indefinite margins, which mound might be the tell of the villa. A full account of this is to be published by one of us (L. S. P.) in another journal. Certain zones of high and low resistance were found. In the plan, *Fig. 10*, the areas of high resistance have been noted as probable ruined walls and the low resistance areas as ditches, the edges being recorded in the figure. Beyond the area of the test in the next field to the east a piece of old wall can be traced from ST 50276222 to ST 50286218. The wall is about 2 ft. thick and looks Roman in type where clearly exposed. The wall runs slightly obliquely to the hedge and at its southern end, where it turns west through the hedge, there is a distinct mound in the hedge. The site has to some extent been bedevilled by the foundations of an old summerhouse, garden and lily pond mainly to the north of this wall at ST 50286225. West of the hedge and wall for a distance of about 46 ft. the ground has been badly disturbed by foundations for pigeon huts and the like but the disturbance does not generally seem to have gone deeper than about a foot. An old lane goes off at the north-west corner of the site at ST 50196225 and this can be traced northerly on a curving course to Pigeon House Farm. Scarth thought that this lane might be a Roman road connecting the Lye Hole villa to the one at Havyat Green, Langford. The lane, however, used to extend along the route shown as a dotted line in *Fig. 9*, and is more likely to be of mediaeval than Roman date. The site covers an area of at least 100 ft. from north to south and 150 ft. from east to west, that is about a third of an acre. It may easily cover much more. Roman coins are said to have been found when the field east of the site was ploughed and the field to the south is known as "The Burying Ground".

E. K. TRATMAN.

\* Since this map was prepared a drain trench along the south side of the road at Havyat Green has shown that the villa must lie entirely north of the present road as no evidence of the villa's existence was seen in this 4 ft. deep trench.

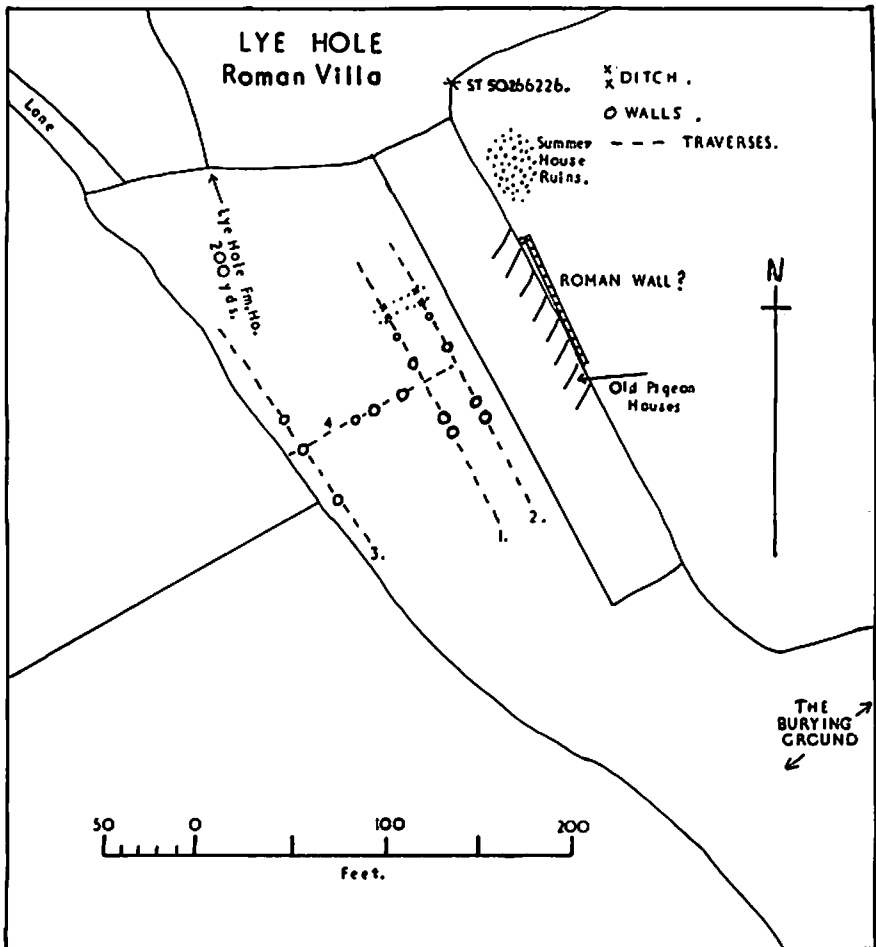


Fig. 10.—Lye Hole Roman Villa.

*Failure to locate the Roman Villa at Havyat Green.* (O.S. 6 in. to 1 mile, Som. 18 N.W., N.G.R., ST 475607 ?.) An account of this discovery is given by Scarth (1876). His account is obviously partly based on an account given by Douglas and contained in a volume of letters that passed between Skinner and Douglas\* though Scarth seems to have had access to additional information as his account includes items not mentioned in the letters. The old road to Bridgwater was altered in the early 1800s. Then walls were found standing about a foot above their foundations and were buried about 18 in. below the turf. Scarth (1876), apparently quoting Douglas, mentions that at Havyat Green the labourers "broke into foundations which were evidently Roman and found a quantity of ancient pottery, Samian ware and fragments of urns and sepulchral *effluviae*". The account further states that the walls were of Limestone with some White Lias and with "roofing tiles brought from a distance". Many roofing

\* This volume of letters is in the Public Library of the city of Bath.