

Little Solsbury Hill Camp

1. REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS OF 1958

By

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Three small excavations have been made in this camp in 1955, 1956 and 1958. The two former have been reported (Dowden, 1957) and a plan of the camp showing the sites of the excavations was published. The sites are along the northern side of the camp. The 1958 excavations consisted of three squares with sides of 10 ft. laid out in a line at right angles to the rampart wall and parallel to and east of the 1956 trench and separated from it by a 2-ft. wide baulk. The inner face of the rampart wall was exposed in the north face of square C I, the most northerly of the three, but the rampart itself was not sectioned. The stratification of the deposits against the rampart wall was essentially the same in both the 1956 and 1958 excavations.

Layer

<i>No.</i>	1956	1958
1.	Turf.	Turf.
2.	Earth and stones, secondary occupation.	Earth and stones, secondary occupation.
2a.	Lighter coloured earth and stones, secondary occupation.	Lighter coloured earth and stones, secondary occupation.
3.	Loose stones with air spaces, rampart spoil.	Large, loose stones with air spaces, rampart spoil.
4.	Hearth.	
5.	See 7.	
6a.	Loose primary occupation.	Soft, yellow-brown earth, primary occupation.
6.	More compact primary occupation.	Yellow-brown earth but much stonier, primary occupation.
7.	Trodden layer.	Not found.
8.	Core of rampart.	Not excavated.
9.	Rampart platform, clean, yellow clayish, stony soil.	Not excavated. Equivalent is yellow, clayish, stony soil with charcoal flecks filling natural fissure.
10.	Natural rock.	Natural rock.

In square C I the minimum depth to the natural rock was 4 ft. but the basal layer dropped rapidly away to the west into a ditch running at right angles to the rampart. This was excavated to a depth of 5 ft. 6 in. from the surface, yielding only yellow gravel and occasional flecks of charcoal, without reaching solid rock. This ditch is probably a natural fissure filled in. Many such natural fissures can be seen in the quarry faces round the hill. The filling is very similar in character to the rampart platform of the 1956 excavations, and it is suggested that the top at least of the fissure was filled in and the ground levelled immediately before the rampart was built. This might explain why, in the 1956 excavations, the primary occupation layer was found to pass under the inner face of the rampart wall but not to do so in the 1958 excavations. The rampart wall had sagged into the top of the fissure.

The stratification of the other two squares, C II and C III, was identical with that found in 1956. Layers 2 and 2a are represented but thin out rapidly to the south. Rampart spoil, layer 3, is absent. Layer 6 also thins out rapidly to the south and was not present in C III. Three postholes were found in C III but none of them was detectable until the bedrock was exposed. A small area paved with thin limestone slabs was found at a depth of 23 in. in C II. The 1958 excavations produced no new facts to suggest that the sequence of events propounded in the 1957 report was not correct. This may be summed up as (1) primary occupation, (2) collapse or more probably deliberate destruction of the single, stone wall rampart, (3) continuation of the occupation without a break amongst the ruins of the rampart and huts, (4) complete abandonment of the site well before the Roman Conquest. Thus layer 2 represents the secondary or post rampart destruction occupation.

2. THE POTTERY, 1955, 1956, 1958

(*Fig. 40*)

Considerable quantities of pottery were found during each of the excavations. Most of the material was in small fragments, often abraded, and collections of sherds found together belonging to several different vessels and it has only been possible to reconstruct two cooking-pots. In contrast with the pottery already described (Falconer and Adams, 1935) very few fragments from these excavations were decorated and only two lug fragments were found. All the pottery is hand formed, with the possible exception of sherd 101. The paste of most of the sherds is coarse with many fossil shell fragments but some sherds are of fine quality and often burnished. A large number of sherds were of hæmatite coated ware.

Rim forms range in a continuous series from rounded to flattened though no bead rims were found. Bases are of two types, either passing directly into the wall of the pot or having a slight heel. Decorated sherds are rare, the majority only showing finger-tip impressions, and only five pieces had incised

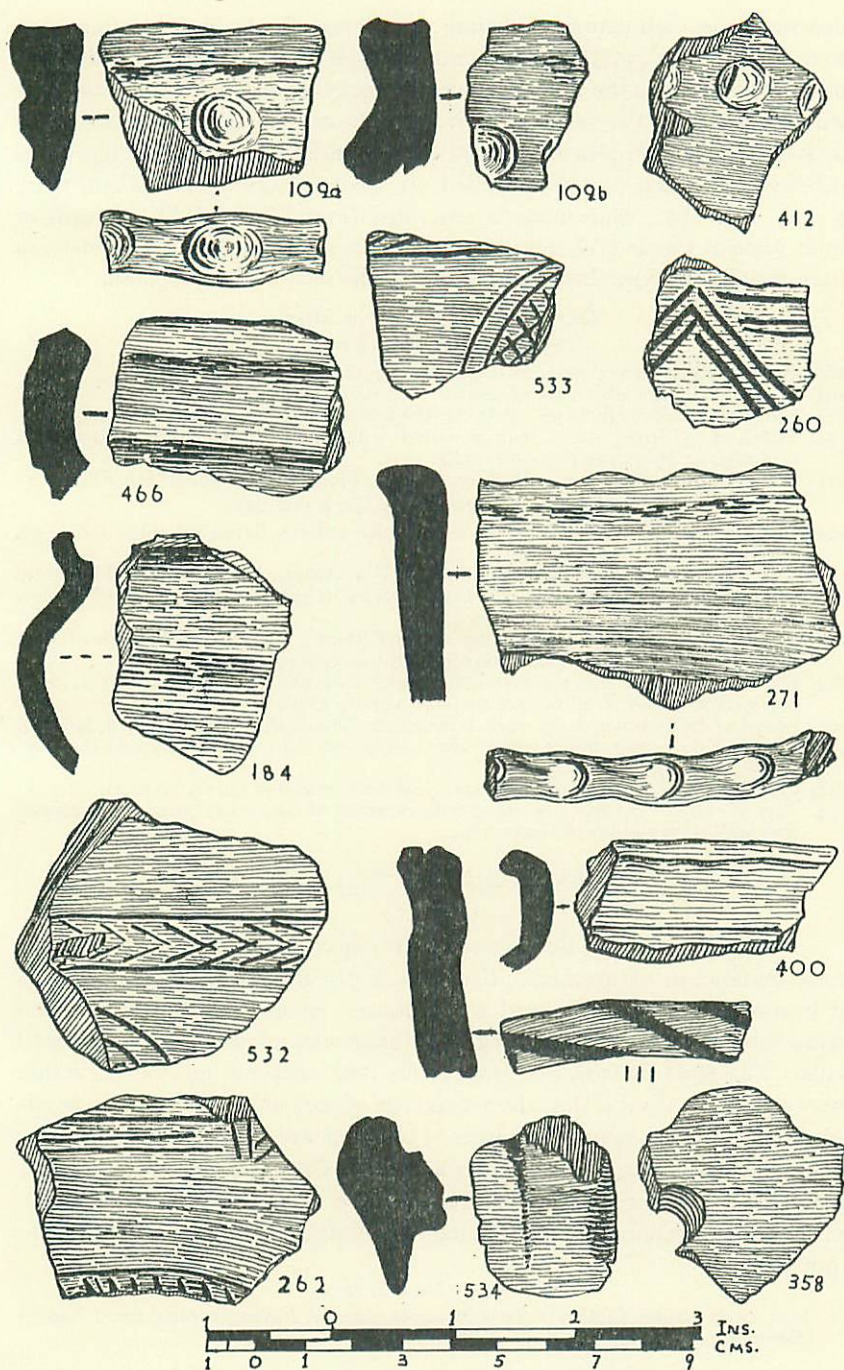


Fig. 40.

decoration, in each case made before the pot was fired. Two lug fragments were found. One (534) was of the normal type showing the tang which had been stoppered into the wall of the vessel; the other was a more unusual type where the rim of the vessel has a vertical protrusion which has been perforated. Single examples of this type have been found at All Cannings Cross (Cunnington, 1923, p. 176 and *Plate* 37, 1), at Glastonbury (Bulleid, 1917, p. 519, *Fig.* 169), while none is described from Meare (Bulleid, 1948) or from Maiden Castle (Wheeler, 1943). This is a rare form obviously derived from metal prototypes but here belongs to the secondary occupation.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SHERDS

Primary Occupation (Layer 6)

- 260. Pink sherd decorated with incised lines (1955).
- 262. Sherd of black shelly ware decorated with incised lines (1955).
- 271. Sherd of black shelly ware. Rim flattened with finger-tip ornament (1955).
- 358. Sherd of red shelly ware. Rim rounded with semicircular vertical projection and slightly offset perforation (1958).
- 412. Sherd of grey shelly ware, black externally. Finger-tip ornament (1958).

Secondary Occupation (Layers 2 and 2a)

- 101. Black burnished ware, decorated with lattice pattern (layer 2a) (Dowden, 1957, *Fig.* 3, No. 2).
- 109a, 109b. Sherds of coarse red shelly ware. Rim flattened and everted. Finger-tip impressions on top of rim. Horizontal series of pinch marks externally below rim (1955, layer 2).
- 111. Sherd of dark brown shelly ware. Rim flattened and decorated with oblique lines. Internal and external, horizontal, finger grooves (1955, layer 2).
- 184. Sherd of shelly ware, red internally, black externally, highly burnished. Rim rounded with top inch incurving above a sharp angle (1955, layer 2).
- 400. Sherd of dark brown shelly ware, burnished. Rim sharply everted (1958, layer 2).
- 466. Sherd of dark grey shelly ware with sharply everted rim and rounded shoulder (1958, layer 2).
- 532, 533. Two sherds of red shelly ware. Incised decoration (1958, layer 2).
- 534. Part of a lug of creamy, grey ware with remnant of tang where lug was stoppered into wall of vessel (1956, layer 2a).

3. METAL OBJECTS, 1955, 1956, 1958

(*Fig.* 41)

A surprisingly high number of metal objects have been recorded from these quite small excavations. The total is 51: of these 42 were of iron, 8 of bronze and 1 of iron plated with bronze. Apart from those described below most of the objects were nails and fragments of pins or perhaps small nails. The finds include two lanceheads, both socketed and one is rather more slender and longer than the general run of such objects from corresponding sites. No other weapons or parts of weapons were found. The one complete knife had a tang for fixing it in a handle. Only one object, number 15, is recorded from the primary occupation layer. Otherwise all are from the secondary occupation. Some of the items have already been figured (Dowden, 1957, *Fig.* 2).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- 1. Iron knife blade, slightly curved towards tip and having a tang for a handle (Dowden, 1957, *Fig.* 2, No. 5) (1956, layer 2).

2. Half of a solid bronze ring 2.25 cm. diam. (layer 2). Not figured.
 6. Solid bronze ring. Diam. of hole 1.5 cm. This hole is scarcely large enough for the ring to have been a finger one and so perhaps it was an ear-ring (layer 2). (Dowden, 1957, *Fig. 2*, No. 4.)

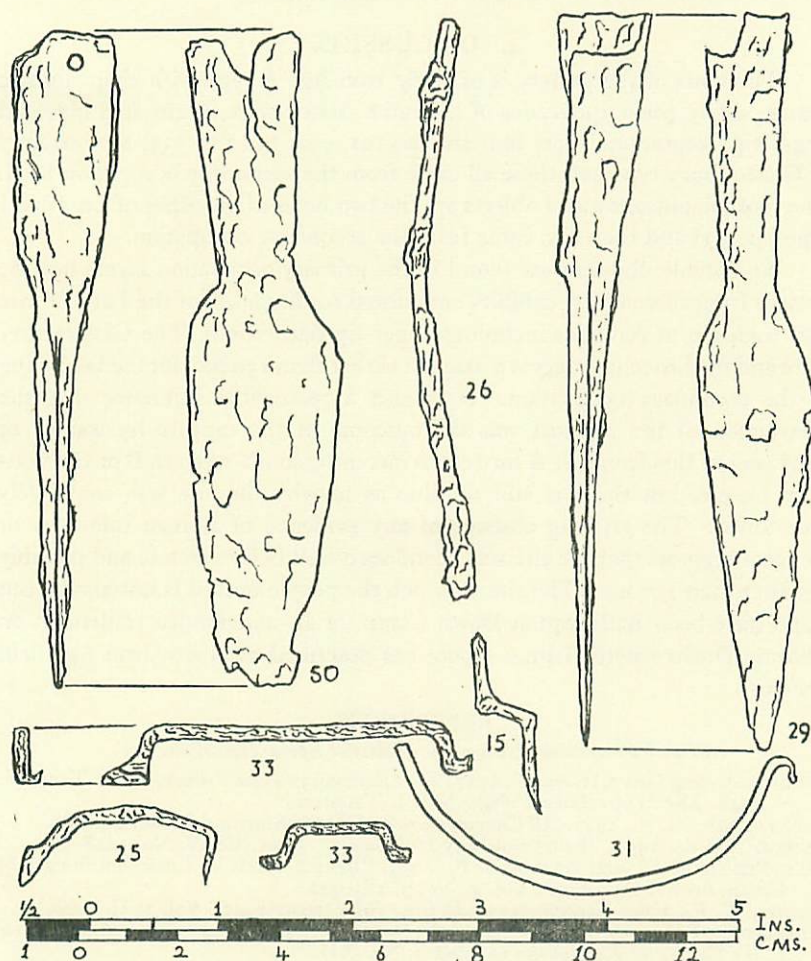


Fig. 41.

8. Bronze plated harness loop with the two loops in the same plane. A comparatively rare type. The bronze plating was revealed during cleaning and preservation and does not show in the illustration (Dowden, 1957, *Fig. 2*, No. 6) (1955, layer 2).
 10. Bronze ring of thin wire wound spirally $1\frac{1}{4}$ turns (1955, layer 2). Not figured.
 15. Iron pin, probably part of a brooch bow (1955, layer 6).
 16. Long iron pin, in two pieces, 11.0 cm. (1955, layer 2). Not figured.
 25. Bent iron pin (1955, layer 2).
 26. Iron object 11.5 cm. long, 0.3 cm. square section. It is slightly bent and has a worn portion in the centre (1955, layer 2).

- 29. Iron lancehead, socketed, length 14.3 cm. (1958, layer 2).
- 31. Part of a bronze bangle (1958, layer 2).
- 32. Bow of small iron brooch (1958, layer 2). (Lower 33 in *Fig. 41*.)
- 33. Bow of a long iron brooch with part of the catch plate (1958, layer 2a).
- 50. Iron lancehead, socketed, length 12.7 cm. (1958, layer 2a).

4. DISCUSSION

The mass of the pottery is of Early Iron Age A type with characteristic coarse, shelly paste, quantities of hæmatite coated ware, perforated lugs and finger-tip decoration. Only four sherds (101, 400, 532 and 533) are certainly of Glastonbury type and these all came from the secondary occupation level. The most significant metal objects are the two bows of brooches of La Tène I type (32, 33) and they also came from the secondary occupation.

No datable objects were found in the primary occupation layers but the pottery from these layers exhibits undoubted continuation of the Late Bronze Age tradition of ceramics including finger-tip decoration. The Glastonbury ware and the brooches suggest a date not earlier than 150 B.C. for the beginning of the secondary occupation. It is also a reasonable inference that the destruction of the rampart was the outcome of the capture by war or of surrender of this Iron Age A fortress to incoming south-western B or Glastonbury people, but there is still no clue as to why the site was completely abandoned. The striking absence of any evidence of Roman influence or contacts suggests that the site was abandoned well before 50 B.C. and possibly not later than 100 B.C. The site to which the people moved is not known but could have been Bathampton Down Camp, or an undefended settlement on Charmy Down where Grimes (1960) has described extensive Iron Age field systems.

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