



NORTON CAMP, NEAR TAUNTON, 1908.

View of 12-ft. Cutting across the Fosse on the W N W. side of the Camp, taken from the N., showing the Vallum on the left, the trees in the distance representing the line of the W.S.W. "Hollow-way" entrance into the Camp.

From a Photograph by H. St. George Gray.

Excavations at Norton Camp, near Taunton, 1908.

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

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8. TAUNTON AND TAUNTON DEANE, Homeland Handbook, No. 29, 1903, p. 50.
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II.—ROMAN REMAINS FOUND AT TAUNTON.

DR. HAVERFIELD does not regard Taunton as a Romano-British site. The idea that Taunton had a Roman name, *Thonodunum*, is unfounded. This name is apparently a modern invention, appearing firstly in Collinson, and Mr. Haverfield considers it a latinization of Camden's "Thonton" (*Vict. Co. Hist. Som.*, I, 367).

However, it is only fair to state that various remains of the Roman period have been found in Taunton and the immediate neighbourhood. A great hoard of silver coins, extending from Constans to Honorius, was found in 1821 near two skele-

tons in a field called "Ten Acres," at Holway, close to the town on the S.E. ; some of these are in Taunton Museum. It is probable that there was a small Romano-British settlement there. Many other coins were found in 1870, and subsequently ; including coins as early as Domitian, Trajan and Antoninus Pius¹.

Amongst other local Roman things in the Museum are :—The greater part of the rim of a large black earthenware vessel found in Fore street in 1861 ; several fragments of pottery found in Bishop's Hull cemetery, in 1858 ; and a large perfect urn of thick, grey earthenware, 2½ feet high, found in the parish of Staplegrove in making the G.W.R. Roman coins and "divers other antiquities" are recorded to have been found near Taunton Castle about 1643 ; a denarius of Vespasian with the *JUDAEA CAPTA* legend on the reverse was found about 1750 in pulling down a house in the parish of St. James² ; another coin of Vespasian, with the *JUDAEA CAPTA* reverse, was found in a garden at Priory Villa³, about 1856 ; a coin of Magnentius was discovered on the south side of the town⁴ ; the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1825, states that a gold coin of Valens was found in the garden of J. Champante ; and a gold coin of Constantius II was found near Taunton, in the second half of the XVIII Century. Only this year a second brass Roman coin, much defaced, was dug up in the churchyard at Trull. There are other alleged Roman remains, which are unauthentic⁵.

Certain authorities on the Roman period, including Dr.

1.—See "Roman Coins lately found at Taunton," by J. H. Pring, M.D., *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, Vol. XXVII, pt. ii, pp. 51-9.

2.—*Op. cit.*, XXVII, pt. ii, 52 ; and Jeboult's "West Somerset," p. 3 of the Taunton section.

3.—This information was obtained from Mr. A. J. Monday, who was present at the discovery. He thinks it was a *Sestertius*, or "first brass" coin.

4.—This was in the possession of Mr. H. Franklin, who also had a first brass of Maximian found near Taunton in 1886.

5.—The majority of the above-mentioned records of the finding of Roman remains in the neighbourhood of Taunton are included in Mr. Haverfield's list in the "Victoria History of Somerset."

Haverfield, do not regard Bathpool lane, on the N.E. of the town, Hoveland lane and Ramshorn bridge on the S.W., or Silver street, as being in any sense Roman.

III.—NOTES ON NORTON CAMP.

Norton Camp is about $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the W.N.W. of the centre of Taunton, and somewhat under 200 feet above mean sea-level⁶. Geologically it is on the Keuper Marls,—the upper portion of the New Red sandstone. The earthworks of Norton, enclosing an area of about 13 acres, encompass the top of a hill, having slopes on all sides, none of which are very steep; occupying therefore, a commanding but not very strong position. There is no definite evidence, in the somewhat mutilated condition of the earthworks, that more than one vallum surrounded the camp, and it is not clear, from a superficial inspection of the ground, whether a fosse, or ditch, extended round the whole of the camp. If it did it has been obliterated in most parts. On the W.N.W., however, there seemed to be little doubt that an ancient ditch existed between the vallum and the small outer bank, and partly to prove that point I made a trial excavation there. In the case of a camp it is highly desirable to re-excavate parts of the fosse to get the best possible evidence of the date of construction.

There is little need for me to describe the general form and features of this camp, as Mr. C. W. Dymond, in 1872 made an excellent plan of it⁷. The enclosed area is roughly oval, with a maximum interior diameter from N.W. to S.E. of about 900 feet, and a minimum diameter from W.S.W. to E.N.E. of 700 feet. There are three main entrances,—on the N., S.E. and W.S.W., which are usually styled “covert ways,” or “hollow-ways.” Perhaps the most interesting is the western entrance;

6.—This comparatively slight height did not favour the assumption that the Camp was of Bronze Age construction. On the other hand the form is, of course, not typical of a stronghold constructed by the Romans, who adopted a rectangular system of fortification.

7.—Reproduced in *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XVIII.

it projects some 400 feet beyond the camp proper, and would enable the occupants to leave the camp unseen. As a protection against an attacking enemy coming up the hollow, a barrier or rampart was thrown across it close up to the camp, with narrow paths on either side for ingress and egress. The entrance-way on the north is much prolonged, and "terminates in a narrow lane leading in the direction of a place called 'Conquest' on the Bishop's Lydeard road."⁸ It has been recorded on more than one occasion that a large hoard of Roman coins was found in 1666 at Conquest Farm "in the parish of Bishop's Lydeard and close to Norton Fitzwarren." As a matter of fact Conquest is $1\frac{1}{3}$ miles n.w. of Norton camp. Dr. Haverfield has shown that these coins were not discovered at Conquest, but that there were two hoards found at Lydeard St. Lawrence and Stogumber respectively.⁹

Mr. T. Leslie was in the habit of searching over the interior space of this camp when under the plough, and he found half-a-dozen nice little flint scrapers and a flint borer; also a few fragments of grey Roman pottery. These are in our Museum, with the exception of the two best scrapers which are figured on p. 135, nos. 2 and 3.¹⁰ In 1905, Mr. J. Cook found a flint flake, length $3\frac{1}{8}$ ins., having three dorsal ridges and slight saw-like serrations at one end, in his garden at the School House, Norton¹¹. A flint celt of Neolithic type was found by Mr. Charles Morris, on the eastern slope of Norton Camp, sticking out of a bank. It is pointed at the butt-end, and although rather roughly chipped shows excellent examples of conchoidal fractures; length $4\frac{1}{8}$ ins., maximum width $1\frac{9}{16}$ ins., maximum thickness about $\frac{7}{8}$ in.¹¹ It is figured in the accompanying illustration, no. 1.

8.—*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XLIV, ii, 199.

9.—*Arch. Journ.*, LIX, 342-5.

10.—The larger scraper, with a finely-chipped bevelled edge, is of a yellowish-brown colour, and was found by Mrs. Leslie, on August 1st, 1900. The other, also finely chipped, has a worked notch, or hollow, at the top.

11.—This is in Taunton Castle Museum.

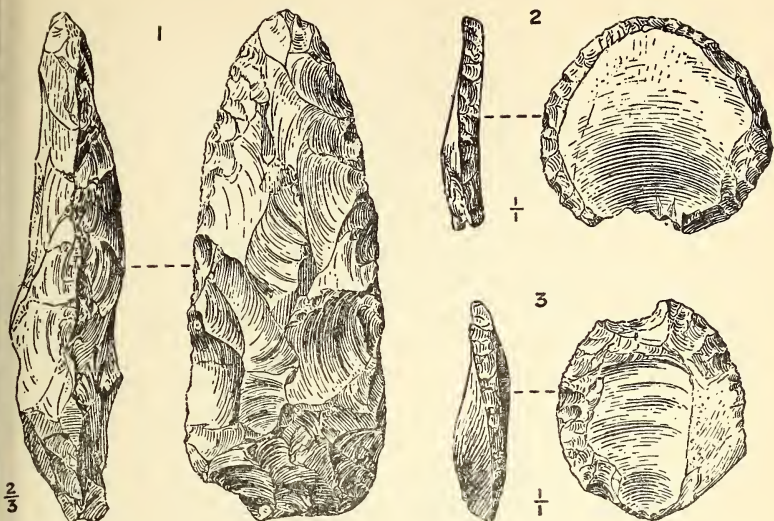


Fig. 1.—Flint Celt and two flint Scrapers found at Norton Camp previously to the 1908 excavations.

A quantity of potsherds of the Romano-British period, perhaps from a kiln in the parish, were found in 1861-2, in making the Minehead railway line, much of which was presented to our Museum by the Rev. W. A. Jones. They came from gravel beds worked for ballast. Many of the fragments (some making nearly complete pots) were distorted and cracked, probably spoilt in manufacture and cast aside where they were made. Judging from the quality and texture of the large urn from Staplegrove, it would appear probable that it was fabricated at the Norton kiln.

IV.—EXCAVATIONS AT NORTON CAMP.

The digging began on July 24th, being continued until July 29th, 1908, in anticipation of the visit of the Somersetshire Archæological Society to the camp on August 19th. The owner of the property, the Hon. Francis Bowes-Lyon, kindly

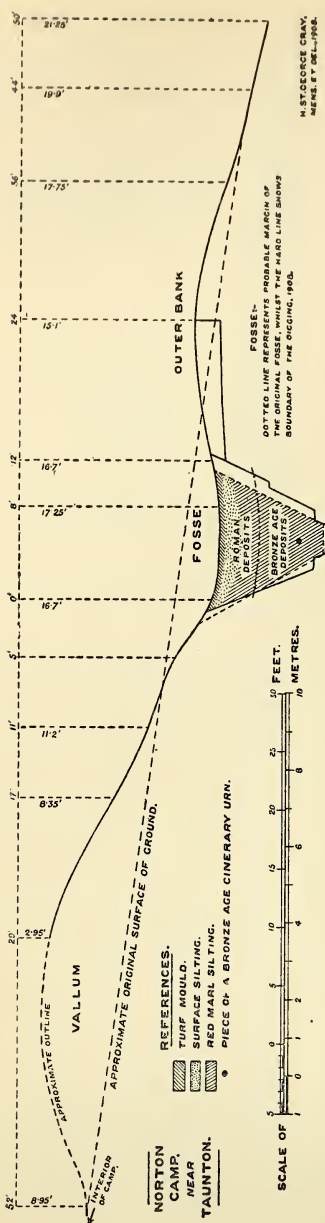


Fig. 2.—Section across the Vallum and Fosse of Norton Camp, on the w.n.w. side, about 55 feet to the n. of the footpath leading from the Camp to Norton Rectory, showing the excavations made into the Fosse in July, 1908.

gave permission for the ground to be opened, and the tenant, Mr. J. Summerhayes, readily acquiesced in the carrying out of the work, and gave us useful assistance.¹²

The part of the fosse chosen for excavation is on the w.n.w. of the camp, the s. margin of the cutting being 55 feet to the n. of the footpath leading from the interior of the camp to Norton Rectory at the foot of the hill. An area 26 feet long and 12 feet wide was pegged out at the foot of the outer slope of the vallum, across the surface of the silting of the fosse, and half-way across the outer bank, which latter is only clearly defined in this part of the camp¹³. It was not evident whether this short length of outer bank was of natural or artificial formation.

12.—The following men were employed for the work: Robert Fox, Frederick Toogood and Henry Waiter (all of Taunton), and James Coles (Norton).

13.—It is very difficult to inspect some of the earthworks encircling the camp, owing to the great quantity of trees and undergrowth.

During the early stages of the digging a section was plotted across the vallum and fosse along the s. margin of the 12-foot cutting. The result is given in the accompanying diagram, Fig. 2, from which it is seen that the vallum in this part has a basal width of about 50 feet at the present time. Owing to the undergrowth it was very difficult to get the relative level of the cornfield just inside the vallum, but this having been ascertained satisfactorily it could be estimated that the crest of the rampart is about $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet high above the original surface of the ground. The diagram shows the approximate original ground level from the interior of the camp across the vallum, fosse, and outer bank.

The turf and turf-mould measured 6ins. thick, and produced only a few modern shards of glazed pottery. This was followed by a fine light-coloured silting (called "surface silting,") consisting of mould and Keuper marl mixed. This extended to about 2 feet from the surface in the middle, tapering to about 1 foot deep at the sides. From 2 feet to 4·5 feet, a tenacious red marl silting was met with, very much compressed. Below 4·5 feet, the silting, of the same general character, became rather looser, being mixed more thickly with nodules of gravel-flint and other stones. At 6 feet deep, especially at the n. of the cutting, a more sandy marl of a lighter colour occurred; and it changed to no great extent from here to the bottom, which was reached approximately at a depth of 9·2 feet from the surface on the s. side of the cutting, and 8·7 feet on the n. side. The average depth therefore, was 9 feet below the present surface of the silting, and about 12 feet below the original level of the ground in this part. The width of the bottom of the fosse appeared to be about 2·5 feet.

This marl is a most troublesome material in which to trace the original outline of a fosse, and in this respect I have never experienced such difficulty in the excavating of ancient ditches. Owing to the colour and nature of the deposit, it was impos-

sible to distinguish silting from undisturbed marl with any degree of certainty. On the escarp side, especially in the upper part, I do not think we reached the undisturbed side, but on the counterscarp our digging appeared to penetrate a little into the natural marl, exposing large patches of grey marl in places. On more than one occasion the men thought they had reached the bottom of the fosse, but the digging of another "spit," revealing shards of pottery, soon disposed of their assumption. The approximate width of the fosse at the top was estimated as 13 feet.

As shown in the diagram the outer bank was partly excavated, but no pottery or other object was found, and the marl was so firm, especially on the inner slope of the bank, that we came to the conclusion that that part at least was natural, although it is probable the highest parts of the bank had been thrown up from material obtained in excavating the fosse originally. The diagram distinctly shows what part of the outer bank may have been built.

The object of this digging was firstly to prove the existence of an ancient ditch; and secondly we hoped to find pottery and possibly other relics which would afford reliable evidence of the date of construction of the camp. This evidence was forthcoming, but we were disappointed in finding no relic of antiquity of bronze or flint. The pottery, however, which was plentiful, was sufficient for the purpose.

Pottery.—No less than 120 fragments of pottery of the Roman period were found at depths varying from 0·8 foot to 2 feet. They included two thin pieces of grey fluted ware, and one piece of thin brown ware with raised ridge and a line of small indented dots precisely similar to a fragment from Ham Hill, Somerset, in Taunton Museum.

At depths ranging from 2 feet to 3·3 feet, about 132 fragments of pottery of the same character were gathered together, including a few bits which, although of a rather coarse British type, yet doubtless belonged to the Roman period. Most of

this pottery found at a less depth than 3·3 feet consisted of well-baked, lathe-turned, grey and brown ware, probably of local manufacture. There was a large proportion of bases and rims of vessels ; and the thick grey ware belonging to large

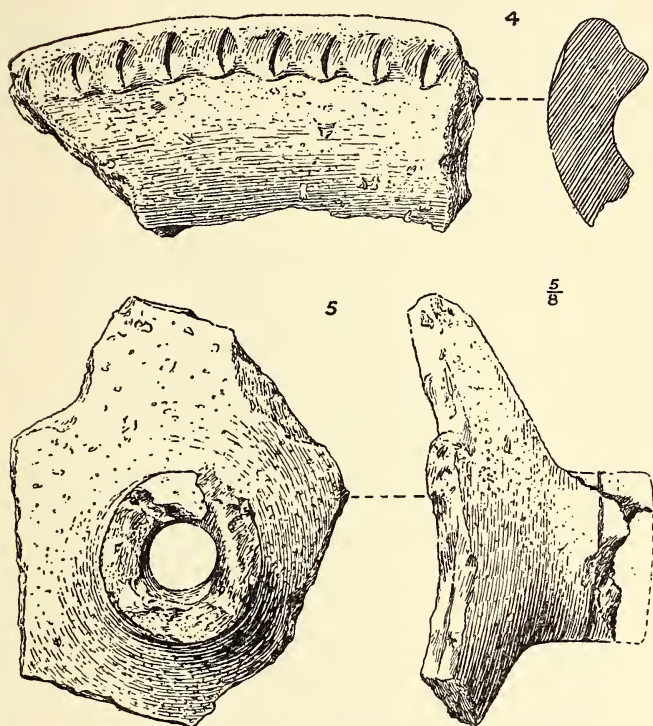


Fig. 3.—Roman Pottery found in the Fosse of Norton Camp, 1908.

pots was observable. From 2 feet 3·3 feet, several small pieces of one pot were found, too fragmentary, however, to be worth restoring ; a fragment of rim with raised vertical band, a feature sometimes met with in the s.w. and other parts of Britain ; rim of a thick grey pot ornamented on the inside of the lip with finger-tip and nail marks (Fig. 3, no. 4). A piece of rough ware of the Roman period was also found, much

broken by the pick-axe, from which a spout projects, $\frac{7}{8}$ in. long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ ins. external diameter (Fig. 3, no. 5). Two similar but longer spouts of the same period were found at Wadeford, Somerset. The projection cannot be regarded as the handle of a cover of a vessel, as the curvature of the piece to which it is joined is rather considerable. But the knobs of lids of Roman pots often take a similar form, some being cylindrical; others solid. See examples from Norton Fitzwarren and Charterhouse-on-Mendip, in Taunton Museum.

From 3·3 feet downwards the pottery changed and was of a coarser description. From 3·3 feet to 4 feet two fragments only of Romano-British pottery were found. On the other hand ten fragments of pottery of pre-Roman character were discovered. They are small and difficult to classify definitely, and might be Late-Celtic, or late Bronze Age. From 4 feet to 5 feet thirteen early British shards were gathered; a few of these are possibly of the Late-Celtic period.

From 5 feet downwards the pottery was, without exception, pre-Roman, and all can safely be assigned to the Bronze Age. From 5 feet to 6 feet fourteen fragments of Bronze Age pottery were found, and from 6 feet to 7 feet five pieces.

At a depth of 6·8 feet a most important "find" was made, consisting of a piece of the rim of a large Bronze Age cinerary urn, (Fig. 4, no. 6) about $3\frac{3}{4}$ ins. by $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins.; maximum thickness, 16 mm. It has a straight rim with squared lip. The clay contains a small proportion of grains of quartz, and is black all through. The ornamentation consists of twelve lines of impressions of twisted cords, in pairs, below which vertical lines of the same pattern can be traced. The pick unfortunately shattered the left-hand bottom corner of the piece. This twisted cord pattern is also seen on the small ornamented fragment, 18 mm. thick, found at a greater depth in the Norton fosse (Fig. 4, no. 7); also on a cinerary urn from Whitefield, Wiveliscombe, and a fragment of another found at Willett, in 1834, both in Taunton Museum. This

decoration is common on cinerary urns, and typical of the Bronze Age. The Hon. John Abercromby has figured many examples in Vol. XLI of the *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*

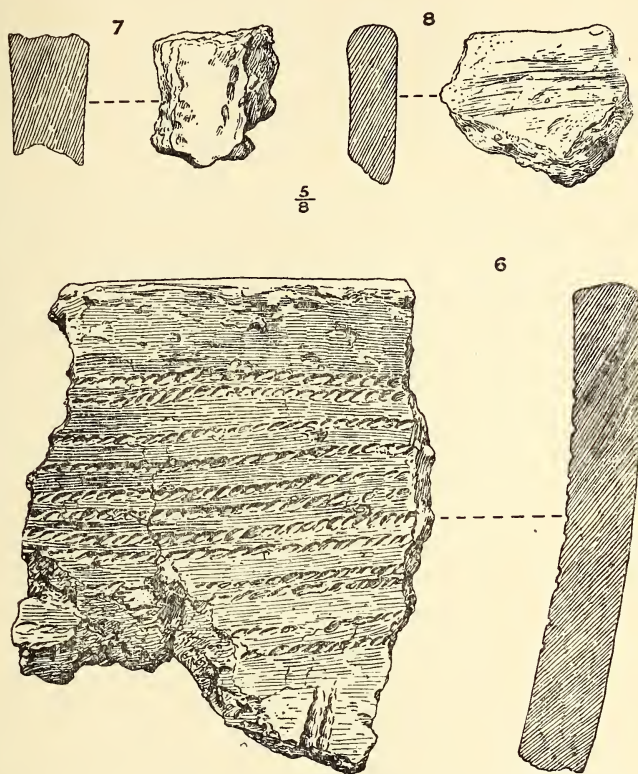


Fig. 4.—Bronze Age Pottery found deep in the Fosse of Norton Camp, 1908.

From 7·2 feet to 8 feet thirteen fragments of Bronze Age pottery were found, including a piece of rim of a blackish-brown vessel (Fig. 4, no. 8), and the fragment above-mentioned (Fig. 4, no. 7). The deepest fragment of pottery was found at a depth of 8·2 feet from the surface, and about a foot above the bottom of the fosse. About 310 fragments of pottery were found in all.

Animal Remains.—Very few animal remains were found in the cutting, and they were mostly in very poor condition. From 2 feet to 3·3 feet several teeth of horse, ox and sheep were found, and one of dog. Another dog's tooth (second upper molar) was found at a depth of 7·5 feet. Besides the teeth of ox above mentioned, *bos longifrons* was represented by an acetabulum at a depth of 5·5 feet; and the shaft of a radius showing marks of gnawing (? by a dog) at a depth of 6·6 feet¹⁴.

Concluding Remarks.—Here, then, we have a camp which was constructed in the Bronze Age (a period extending approximately from B.C. 1700 to B.C. 350, according to the generally accepted chronology of the British Bronze Age). Norton Camp may have been thrown up during the middle of that period. It is thought that cremation was not generally practised in Britain before B.C. 1000, and seeing that the portion of a cinerary urn was found in the fosse of Norton camp, at a depth of 6·8 feet (the total depth of the silting being 9 feet), and that the fosse would fill up very rapidly to that level, the urn fragment cannot, I think, be regarded as much later than the date of the construction of the camp, and therefore it would be practically of the time when the fosse was allowed to silt up from natural causes.

We have no positive proof that the Late-Celtic population of the s.w. of Britain (roughly from B.C. 300 to the Roman Conquest) overran or used Norton Camp as a habitation; but it is very evident that the Romans, or the Britons of the Roman period, occupied the camp very considerably. In this comparatively small cutting the Romano-British stratum was found to be 2·5 feet thick, and it produced no less than 252 fragments of pottery undoubtedly of that period, and of a fabric which probably came from the Roman kiln a short distance off on the west (see p. 135). The 2½ feet of silting and

.—Two or three of these items were kindly identified by Prof. Boyd Dawkins, F.R.S.

pottery must have taken the greater part of the period of the Roman Occupation to accumulate.

In conclusion, I would add that this camp and Small Down camp, near Evercreech, which I partly excavated in 1904¹⁵, were almost certainly constructed about the same time, but it is a question if the Romans used Small Down as much as they did Norton Camp.

The drawings of the Pottery and Flint Implements were executed by Mr. Ernest Sprankling of Taunton.

DONATIONS TO THE EXCAVATION AND ILLUSTRATION FUND.—The Very Rev. The Dean of Wells, F.S.A., £1; Messrs. F. J. Fry, A. F. Somerville, H. H. P. Bouverie and C. Tite, 10/6 each; Messrs. T. H. M. Bailward and H. J. Badcock, 10/- each; Rev. W. T. Reeder, Messrs. J. B. Braithwaite, W. de C. Prideaux, A. G. Chater, A. F. Major, H. Franklin and Edwin Pearce, 5/- each; Messrs. J. B. Paynter, A. E. Goodman, W. H. Fisher and J. E. Kingsbury, the Revs. H. H. Winwood, C. H. Heale, A. E. Fenton and L. H. Court, and Mrs. Hook, 2/6 each; Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Hunt, 2/- each. Total, £7 3s 6d.

The Hon. F. Bowes-Lyon, the owner of the property, has kindly promised to defray the cost of fencing the excavations and filling them in.

15.—*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, L, pt. ii, 32-49.