

Maesbury Camp, or Masbury Castle.¹

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

THIS camp, although large—its interior space covering an area of not less than $6\frac{3}{4}$ acres²—is not of a rare type; and perhaps its chief claim to popularity at the present day is on account of the marvellous and extensive view which can be obtained from it, under certain climatical conditions, especially in westerly and southerly directions. Indeed it commands the finest prospect on the eastern Mendips.

Maesbury³ falls under Class B of the classification of Defensive Works drawn up by the Congress of Archæological Societies, viz., “Fortresses on hill-tops with artificial defences following the natural line of the hill.” Small Down Camp, near Evercreech,⁴ $5\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the S.E. of Maesbury, may be regarded as a finer and even more characteristic example of the hill-fortress. We have at Maesbury, as at Small Down, at Norton Fitzwarren and at Banwell (all in Somerset), at Poundbury (Dorchester), at Hunsbury (Northamptonshire), etc., a camp of irregular oval form (see sketch plan), the interior dimensions being about 740 by 520 feet; but, on such high ground, it is disappointing to see no precipitous declivity

1. Referred to as Masberry Castle in Collinson's "History of Somerset," Vol. II, 209.

2. Phelps gives 6 acres for the area of the camp. My own estimate has been made from the six inch ordnance sheet (Somerset XLI, N.E.)

3. Maesbury = "Field fort."

4. "Excavations at Small Down Camp," *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, L, ii, 32-49.

on either side, although of course the ground in the immediate vicinity of the camp on the s.w. is decidedly steep. The ascent to the camp from the n. and w. is by a gradual slope ; and with regard to the e. and s.e. sides it is surprising that, as there are no outworks, there should be no double or triple lines of rampart with intervening ditches to defend the entrance to the camp, as at Small Down.

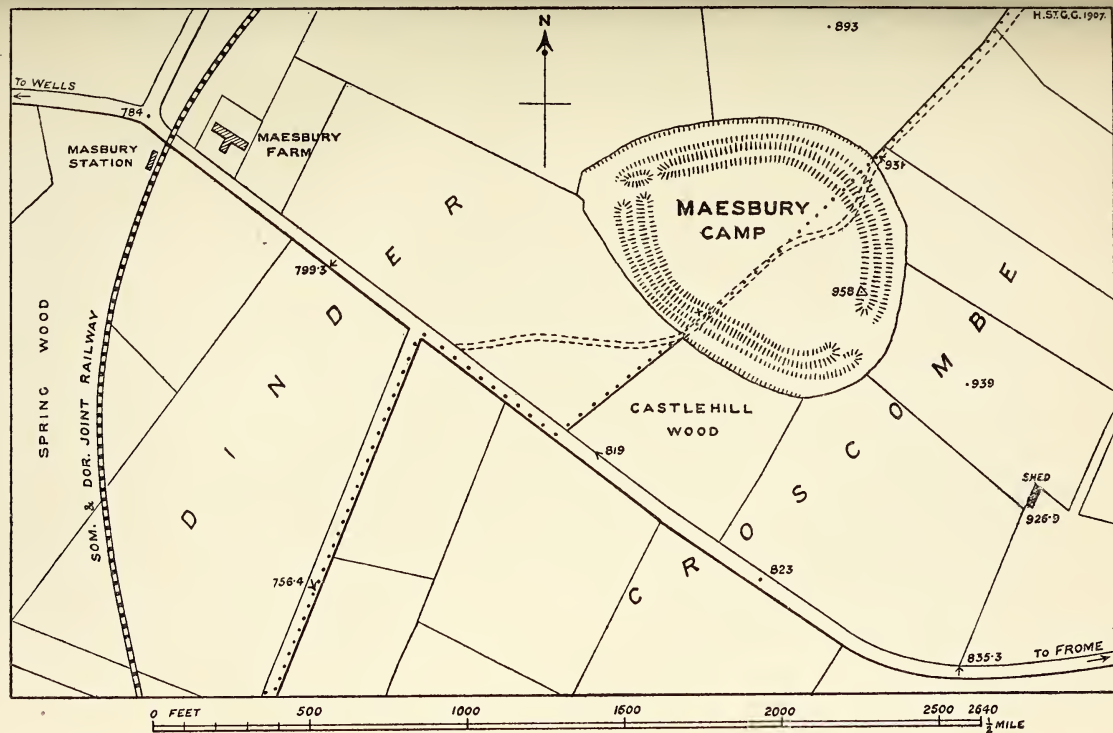
The weak side of an ancient camp was often strengthened by one or more lines of outworks across the ridge on which the camp is situated, as for instance at Ruborough on the Quantocks,⁵ and at Worlebury.⁶ At Maesbury however an advancing enemy could be easily seen approaching the s.e. entrance owing to the fact that, although the highest part of the camp is 958 feet above mean sea-level, the ground to the s.e. near Warren Farm is 16 feet higher, and there is a decided fall in the ridge (some 70 feet) between that high point and the camp itself.

The entrenchment, which belongs to Mr. A. T. Hall of Sharcombe, is divided between the two parishes of Dinder and Croscombe, the s.e. half belonging to the latter. At $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to the n.e. of the centre of the camp, the Roman Road, which runs along the top of Mendip from *Ad Axium* to Old Sarum, passes ; and the group of tumuli on Beacon Hill⁷ is only 14 furlongs to the e.s.e. There are also tumuli to be seen in a n.w. direction at a distance of 10 furlongs, in Burnt Wood and at Whitnell Corner. On the w.n.w. Pen Hill stands up conspicuously, the summit, just 1000 feet above sea-level (the same height as the Priddy Nine Barrows), being three miles from the centre of the camp. From Wells the camp is $3\frac{3}{4}$ miles distant in an e.n.e. direction, and from Shepton Mallet

5. See plan, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XLIX, ii, 174.

6. See "Worlebury," by C. W. Dymond, F.S.A. ; and *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, LI, i, pp. 17-28.

7. Beacon Hill, the summit of which is 1020 feet above sea-level, is the highest point of the eastern Mendips.



MAP OF MAESBURY CAMP AND THE IMMEDIATE LOCALITY, based on the six-inch Ordnance Sheet (Somerset, XLI. N.E.).

2 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles in a N.N.W. direction.⁸ Brent Knoll, surmounted by its ancient earthworks,⁹ stands up boldly on the w. at a distance of 17 miles.

The S.E. entrance appears originally to have been about 40 feet wide, that is across the causeway separating the encircling ditch of the camp; and at the foot of the rampart on either side it may have narrowed to about 35 feet. On the s. side of the entrance the rampart has been partly destroyed for a length of some 90 feet, the material having been used to fill up the ditch: this has probably been carried out in recent times for agricultural purposes and to facilitate the driving of flocks and herds into the camp. The rampart, however, has not been reduced to the level of the "old surface line" beneath it, except close up to the entrance.¹⁰ In this part, and on the s., the top of the ditch is estimated to have been about 33 feet wide, and the crest of the rampart appears to be¹¹ some 15 feet high above the surface of the silting of the ditch.

On the s. and s.s.w. the outer bank has evidently been levelled to a certain extent, resulting in a rather steep escarpment on the outer side, at the bottom of which, along a modern trench, a hedge has been constructed, as the northern boundary of Castlehill Wood.

Perhaps the most perfect part of the earthworks remaining are the vallum and fosse on the s.w. Here the outer bank, about half as high as the vallum, has not been disturbed, the intervening ditch averaging 24 feet wide. In places on the s.w. the vallum is high,—probably some 18 or 19 feet above

8. Masbury Station on the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway is only 3 furlongs w. of the centre of the camp.

9. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, LI, i, 43-5.

10. Mr. A. F. Somerville writes: "I remember more than forty years ago hearing that there was a well at the S.E. entrance; I think it is quite probable as the supply of water for Dinder House comes from a strong spring at the foot of the hill close to the Railway Station."

11. I have not however had the opportunity of taking levels.

the surface of the silting of the fosse. It is rather surprising that the ditch here has not silted up to a greater extent.¹²

The present western entrance does not appear to me to be ancient, but merely an opening for the purposes of agriculture. Still it needs proof by excavating, and in this way there would be no difficulty in settling the matter. On the s. of this entrance the ditch was about 28 feet wide at the top; and the gap in the rampart is some 33 feet wide.

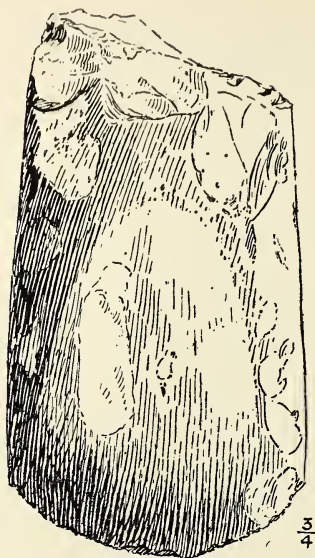
Along the N.W. the ditch appears to have averaged 30 feet in width; but the rampart is not so high as in other parts of the camp. The outer bank along this face has been mutilated, and there is a boundary hedge, in an apparently modern trench, at the foot of the outer slope. Fir-trees have been planted along the ditch and outer bank on the N. and N.W.

Relics and Date:—No authentic archæological remains have been found within the bounds of the camp, as far as I have been able to ascertain. Some fragments of flint found by the late Mr. Jonas Rugg, of Croscombe, are said to have been unearthed at Maesbury. A Mr. Cunningham (formerly of Stuckey's Bank, Shepton Mallet) stated some years ago that several flint arrowheads had been found at Maesbury. A flint celt of good workmanship is said to have been found "near the water at the west of the camp." These statements are all unsatisfactory, and they are of no value as evidence of the date of construction of the camp.

One or two "finds" of greater importance have been made in the immediate vicinity of Maesbury Camp; and they are moreover authenticated. The greater part of a flint celt or axe of Neolithic type, now of a dirty white colour, was found in Dinder Wood, just below and to the s.w. of Maesbury, by Mr. A. F. Somerville on Jan. 23, 1893. It is figured in the

12. Ancient ditches in the chalk generally silt up to a more considerable extent.

accompanying illustration, the implement being deposited in the Museum at Wells. It is of No. 2 type of Sir John Evans' classification, with flat sides.



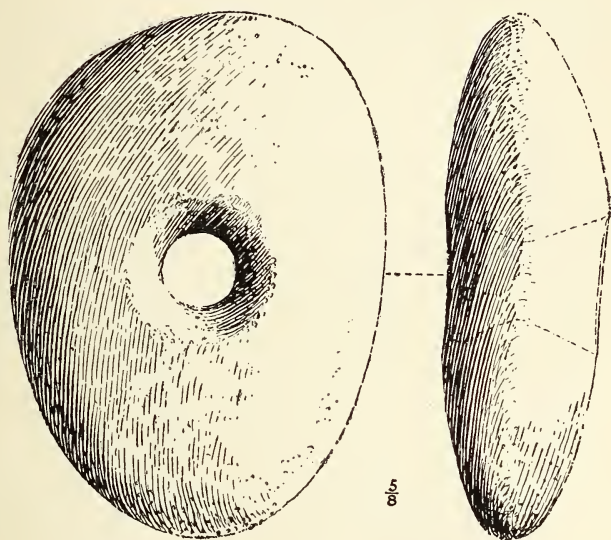
Part of a flint Celt or Axe of Neolithic type, found in Dinder Wood, near Maesbury Camp, 1893.

The faces are decidedly convex and the cutting-edge considerably bevelled on both faces. The edge has been much damaged as if it had been utilized for hammering; the celt has been broken near the butt-end. It was firstly shaped by chipping and finished by grinding and polishing, the latter process not being carried far enough to obliterate all the facets of the chipping. Present length $3\frac{11}{16}$ inches; width at the cutting-edge $2\frac{1}{8}$ ins.; maximum thickness $1\frac{3}{16}$ ins. Mr. Somerville also found two flint implements of less importance in a ploughed field on Crapnell

Farm, about 600 yards to the s.w. of Maesbury Camp, and other flints have been found in ploughing in the immediate neighbourhood.

Another drawing (two views) represents a perforated stone hammer ploughed up in 1842 by a labourer in a field to the s. of the camp on the borders of the parishes of Dinder and Crocombe. The implement, which is bi-convex in section, was probably a natural water-worn pebble originally, selected for the purpose of being converted into a hammer, or adze-hammer. It has been bevelled on all sides towards the edge, the broader end having more acute bevelling than elsewhere. Slight indications of the implement having been used for hammering are seen at both ends. The perforation for the

wooden shaft was probably commenced from both faces by 'pecking,' the hole perhaps being completed by friction caused by the rotation of a stick with sand; the aperture has been worked out as much from one face as from the other, the narrowest part of the hole being in the middle (*see dotted line in the drawing*), where the diameter is $\frac{5}{8}$ in. The external

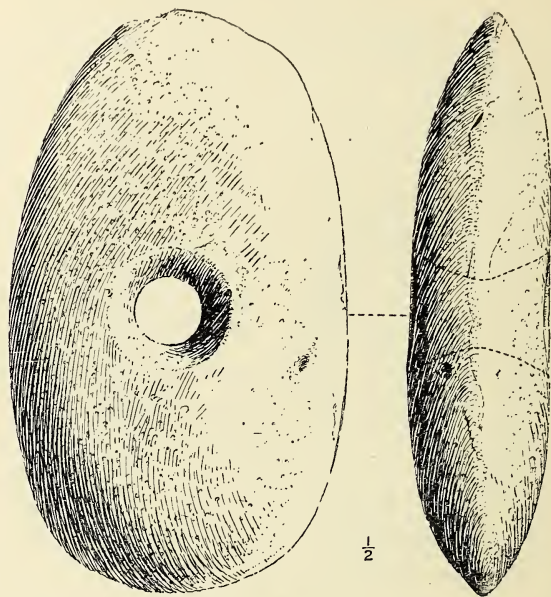


Stone Hammer found in 1842 in a field to the south of Maesbury Camp, on the borders of the parishes of Dinder and Croscombe.

diameter of the hole on one face averages $1\frac{5}{16}$ ins., on the other slightly less. Length of the hammer $4\frac{5}{8}$ ins.; maximum width $3\frac{5}{16}$ ins.; maximum thickness $1\frac{3}{8}$ ins.; weight exactly 1 lb. For forty years this implement was one of many stones ornamenting a cottage window-sill, but when it came into the possession of Mr. Arthur Bulleid (the owner) it was blocking a rat-hole in the skirting-board of another house. The dark stain passing diagonally across the stone was made by paint and shows the part of the stone which projected into the room.

Although the hammer is of Neolithic type, it is probably referable to the early Bronze Age.

For the sake of comparison a similar, but finer, implement, previously unrecorded, is here figured. It was found over twenty years ago at the north end of Strawberry Hill, East Clevedon, Somerset, by the owner, Mr. S. Hollyman. It is of



Stone Adze-Hammer found on Strawberry Hill, East Clevedon,
Somerset.

an elongated oval outline, and bi-convex in section. The edges are more bevelled at the ends than along the sides. Very little battering is observable at the ends, so that the implement seems to occupy a sort of intermediate position between a hammer and an adze. The hole has been bored from both faces, the external diameters each being $1\frac{1}{4}$ ins., tapering in the middle to about $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Length $6\frac{1}{8}$ ins.; max. width $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins.; weight $27\frac{1}{2}$ ozs.

A somewhat similar hammer-head was found at Maxmills, in the parish of Winscombe, in 1865.¹³ It is of fine-grained granite, containing a good deal of felspar. Length 7ins., width 4ins., thickness 2ins., weight $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.

The writer is unable to record the finding of any other antiquities in the vicinity of Maesbury Camp. It might however be noted that many years ago an urn was found in the Fosseway in the neighbourhood of Maesbury containing coins of Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, and Faustina.¹⁴

In the *Victoria History of Somerset* Professor Boyd Dawkins, in the prehistoric map of the county, marks this camp with a symbol indicating that it belongs to the Prehistoric Iron Age. Wondering if any Late-Celtic objects had been found in the camp, I wrote to him and found that he had no record of any, but he stated that he regarded the camp as belonging to the Worlebury type, and he believed that the ramparts at Maesbury and at Dolebury Camps were composed of dry walling. Excavations only can settle this point, and there is at present no walling exposed to view in any part of the camp. There is a great similarity between Maesbury and the neighbouring camp at Small Down which the writer partly excavated in 1903.¹⁵ The relics, chiefly pottery, found deep in the ditches, were of Bronze Age type, and I ventured to assign the construction of the camp to the Bronze Age. It seems probable, therefore, that Maesbury Camp had its origin in the Bronze Age, and it may subsequently have been occupied in the Prehistoric Iron Age.

13. Found by a man engaged in digging a field-drain about 200 yards east of Max House, the residence of Mr. Charles Smith.

14. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XII, i, 60.

15. *Op. cit.*, L, ii, 32-49.

(The Stone Implements were drawn by Mr. E. Sprankling, Taunton)