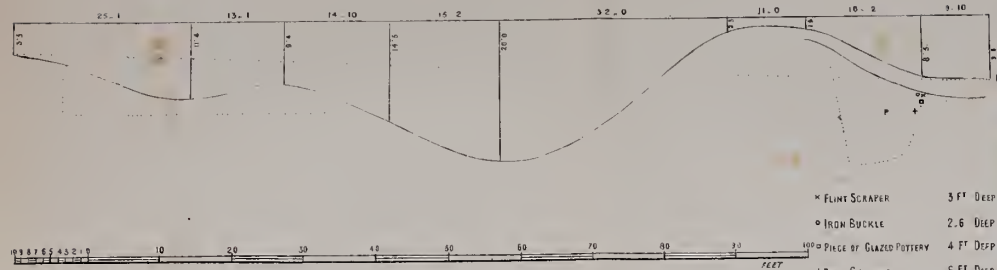
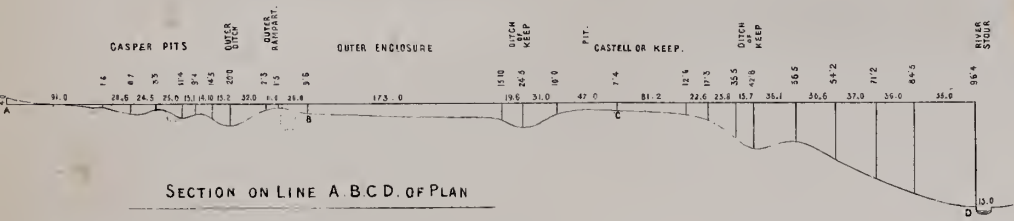
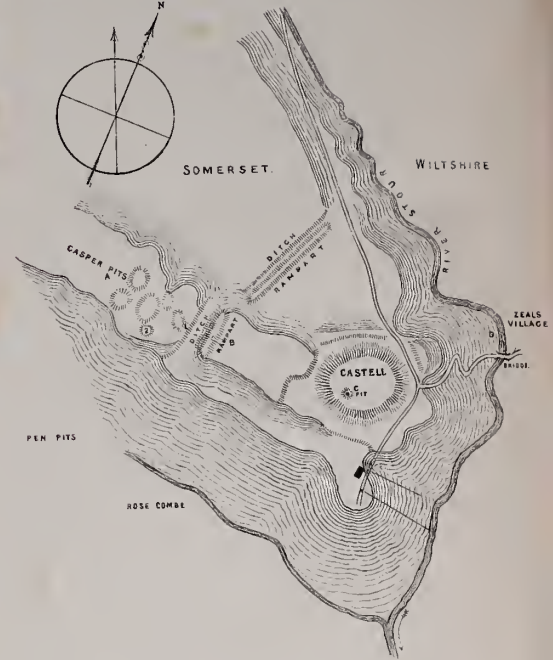
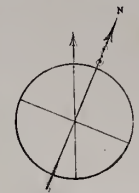


SECTION OF OUTER DITCH & RAMPART SHEWING THE POSITION OF THE OBJECTS FOUND.



Plan of the
CASTELL
near
ZEALS VILLAGE.



SECTION ON LINE A B C D OF PLAN



NOTE - Horizontal Measurements are in Feet & Inches - Vertical Measurements in Feet & Decimals of a Foot
A L F



Surveyed by
GENERAL A. LANE FOX
Sept 1879

Report of Pen Pits Exploration Committee.

The Committee appointed by the Council of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society to explore Pen Pits have the honour of sending in the following report of the excavations carried on during the past autumn under their superintendence, and of the results which have arisen therefrom.

After several preliminary meetings, the real work began on the morning of Tuesday, the 23rd of September, when the following Members met on the ground : Gen. Lane Fox, Revs. Preb. Scarth, J. A. Bennett, J. H. Ellis, H. H. Winwood, T. W. Wilkinson (Hon. Secretary), and W. Müller, Esq. After a careful inspection of the ground, it was unanimously agreed to begin work at the fortified end of the promontory to the east of the Pits, known as Gaspar Pits, in order, if possible, to arrive at some conclusion as to the age of the earthworks enclosing apparently some of the pits, and subsequently to attack the pits proper ; thus carrying out the suggestions embodied in Professor Boyd Dawkins' Preliminary Report to the Society, and published in the Twenty-fourth volume of its *Proceedings*.

It may be as well here to give a brief description of the locality. The high ground to the west, called Penridge, is composed of Greensand, of which a typical section may be seen in Long Lane quarry, *i.e.*, a top layer of Chert and rubble, succeeded by 5 feet of Greensand rock, resting upon Greensand 32 feet thick so far as the excavation is at present carried. The whole of the high ground around has been dug into at some time or other ; in fact the pits or depressions may be considered

co-extensive with the Greensand formation. Two winding tongues of land, offshoots from Penridge, have been cut out by denuding agencies, and stretch eastwards towards the brook (Stour River). Both of these are thickly covered by a promiscuous collection of excavations, to which the name of "Pits" has been applied. Those on the south of the combe, called Rose Combe, dividing the two tongues, are locally known as "Pen Pits;" those on the north as "Gaspar Pits." The most northerly of these promontories has its easterly end cut off and fortified by a Keep, called the Castel, separated from the Bailey or outer enclosure by a deep ditch, and this again from the winding spur, in which Gaspar Pits are dug, by a rampart and ditch. This ditch and rampart can also be traced sloping down on the north towards the stream, which flows round the foot of the Castel (*vide* plan).

Workmen were simultaneously set on to excavate a small Pit on the south-west side of the Castel, marked *C* in plan, and also to dig into the rampart at the west end of this outer enclosure, in order to ascertain the relative age of this part of the earthworks.

CASTEL PIT.

After cutting away a mass of thorns and brushwood and thereby clearly exposing the circular shape of the pit, an excavation was made to the depth of 5 feet 6 inches, and the undisturbed sand was reached with the following results:—Turf, top soil and rubble, with more or less rectangular blocks of "Penstone" 1 ft. 3 in. deep, succeeded by fragments of Chert and sandy loam mixed up together, indicating disturbance of ground; unmoved Greensand forming the base. About 3 feet below the turf, at the south-west corner, a small quantity of charcoal was found in the Chert and loam, with reddish, apparently burnt, sand beneath; this was followed out till it died away. Four or five pieces of greenish glazed pottery, supposed to be Norman or Saxon, were found in the rubble (marked *CP*). The circular form of this pit proved to be superficial only.

RAMPART.

After careful selection of a suitable spot by Gen. Lane Fox, at the western end of the outer enclosure, marked *B* in plan, a trench was begun at the foot of the interior slope of the rampart, 6 feet in width, the object being to cut through the rampart, if possible, on a level with the ditch on the outer side, and follow out the line of the old surface. The material constantly threatening to fall in upon the men, it was found necessary to widen the trench to 11 feet. The work was then continued until a cutting was made into the centre of the rampart, 22 feet long and 16 feet deep at the lowest point. As this work was being carried out the undisturbed Greensand was found 3 feet beneath the surface, and was followed some 8 or 9 feet inwards on the north side. At this distance it suddenly ceased to the west and south, having evidently been removed, thus indicating that the edge of a pit or quarry, which existed before the rampart had been thrown up and was filled in at the time, had been struck in the progress of the work. These old workings were excavated to a depth of some 19 feet, which was approximately the depth of the ditch on the outer side, but, through the falling in of the ground, the bottom of the old work was not reached except by a crowbar. Before the excavations at this spot were finally stopped, owing to the falling in of the sides, the reason of this great irregularity was made clear. Sufficient evidence of the relative age of the ramparts and pit beneath having been obtained, it was deemed advisable to discontinue work at this point, and the following are the results:—The general section showed turf and black surface mould 18 inches on north side, considerably deeper on south, followed by a mixture of Chert fragments and Greensand rock. About 10 feet inwards on the north side the turf and black soil rested upon Greensand, and this again upon a large block of Greensand rock, locally called "Penstone." This latter rock had never been moved from its original position, but remained *in situ*, dipping towards the south-west. The ground to the west of this sank rapidly, in-

dicating that it had originally been excavated on that side. The farthest point of the cutting on the west side, *i.e.*, that beneath the centre of the rampart proper, presented the following section: Turf and top soil 6 inches, succeeded by fine sand 7 feet 6 inches, altogether becoming coarser and coarser downwards and graduating through fine rounded pellets into angular debris of Chert and "Penstone," measuring 10 inches by 7 inches—the natural result arising from the sorting of the materials, as the original makers of the rampart threw out the sand and rubble from the ditch, the coarser portion rolling down to the bottom of the slope, the finer remaining on the top. Indeed from a subsequent visit of one of the Committee (Rev. H. H. Winwood) it seemed evident that the lower part of the slope had been roughly propped up by fragments of "Penstone," which, when carefully cleaned from the surrounding *débris* of sand and loam filling up the interstices, seemed to be quite freshly broken, the marks of tools being traceable.

The following objects were found during the progress of the work: quantities of coarse pottery just beneath the surface on the interior slope, portions of red brick or tile 1 inch thick, and two pieces of green glass.

Amongst the larger blocks of "Penstone" taken from the bottom of the trench was one which had apparently been rounded for about three-quarters of its external edge into the form of a millstone, and beneath the turf on the top of the rampart, on the edge of the inner slope, were several rectangular blocks of stone, apparently serving as a face to keep up the running sand. Three well formed flint "scrapers" in the following position: No. 1, of dark greyish flint, $2\frac{4}{8}$ inch greatest length, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch greatest breadth, tapering at opposite end, nearly flat on one side, showing waves of conchoidal fracture throughout its entire length, on the other, showing several facets and numerous fine chippings done by blows or pressure all round the outside, making a cutting edge; depth 3 feet below surface of turf and rubble resting in the Greensand, and about 9 feet inwards (see

× on section). No 2, of black flint, 3 inches long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad at one end, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch ditto at the other, also shewing facets and numerous fine chippings on one side; depth 6 feet below surface in rubble of rampart, and 10 feet from east end (see + on section). No. 3, of a more irregular form, 2 inches greatest length, 2 inches greatest breadth, one end rough, the opposite finely chipped, also found in rubble. An iron buckle with tongue (and tongue of a second), at a depth of 2 feet 6 inches (see o in section), supposed to be Norman. Piece of red pottery in rubble, 7 feet from surface and 14 feet from east end (see r on section). Piece of glazed pottery 4 feet from surface and 10 feet from east end (marked n on section).

On the south side of the cutting was a depression on the face of the rampart slope, this was filled in with black unctuous mould to a depth of 4 feet, containing a great quantity of blackish and reddish brown pottery and pieces of red pantile; some of the pottery had been subject to the influence of fire on the outside and whitish inside. On some grains of quartz stood out prominently fragments of burnt Oolite (Forest Marble), of bone, two teeth of ox (46 inches beneath the surface), tobacco pipe (temp. Elizabeth), and charcoal. This black deposit rested upon the rubble infilling of the excavation below. Brown and black pottery of the same character occurred all the way up the south slope in the black earth resting upon the rubble, and also in the black mould capping the ramparts.

From the researches at this part it was evident that three periods at least were here represented.

1st: That during which the original excavation had been made, for the object of obtaining the hard "Penstone" beneath the surface, the greater portion of which had been taken out from the south side before the rampart was made.

2nd: That represented by the construction of the rampart synchronous with the age of the earth-works around the outer enclosure and ditch.

3rd: That during the accumulation of the black unctuous

earth to a depth of four feet, and subsequently to the infilling of the original excavations.

Two fragments of pottery,¹ with green glaze inside and out, from the rampart, had a shallow fluted pattern impressed on them. The pottery and other objects taken from the rampart proper are marked *R*; that from the interior slope, *IS*.

Having so far determined the relative age of the keep, rampart, and pits, or depressions enclosed within their area, the next point was to clear out some of the pits lying outside, to the west. It was therefore agreed to begin with a large one immediately outside the rampart, and on the counterscarp of the ditch, hence called Counterscarp Pit, and marked 1 in the plan. The outline of this pit presented a circular form on all sides, except on the east, where the makers of the ditch seemed to have somewhat interfered with its regularity during the progress of their work. The level of the centre (now overgrown with turf) having been taken, a trench was commenced, 6 feet in width on the counterscarp side, and below the level of the centre, with the object of cutting right through to the opposite or western side. This was continued for the length of 23 feet, and in some parts to a depth of 6 feet 3 inches, with the following results:—A layer of Greensand rock was soon exposed beneath the turf on the south side of the trench, with the undisturbed Greensand below. On the north side of the cutting, where the edge of the pit rose at a steeper angle, there was a considerable quantity of Chert and Greenstone rubble beneath 6 inches of turf, before the undisturbed Greensand was met with. After cutting through the counterscarp lip, and reaching the centre of depression, four large "Penstone" blocks were exposed, about 6 inches beneath the surface, *i.e.*, just below the turf, resting upon undisturbed ground. Two of these were taken out, and had the appearance of having been worked. One,

(1). Mr. Franks, to whom Rev. H. H. Winwood showed specimens of the pottery taken from the inner slope of the rampart and from the black unctuous earth on the south side, stated that it was neither Roman nor British, but of subsequent date to Roman.

measuring 5 feet 2 inches in circumference and 8 inches in greatest thickness, was lying on its edge, and at first thought to be *in situ*, but subsequent inspection proved that it was not in its original position, but had evidently been rounded on one side. The fourth block, lying to the north of this, and more on the side of the pit, about 1 foot 4 inches below the surface, was clearly a block of "Penstone," remaining in its original bed of greensand. After digging down on west side of pit more than 6 feet, without finding the bottom, and failing to discover a single trace of former habitation, the work was stopped. Two of the Committee (Revs. H. H. Winwood and G. E. Smith) having, however, revisited the excavation a few days after, ascertained that the disturbed ground on the north reached to a considerable depth downwards and inwards, and were fortunate in finding indications, if not clear proofs, of the purpose for which this excavation was originally made; for at a depth of 2 feet beneath the surface of turf and *débris* they uncovered courses of "Penstone," placed as a sort of rough walling to keep up the side of the slope; and on the east side, and resting against these, was a great quantity of broken fragments of "Penstone." After clearing away the surrounding chips and carefully pulling out block by block, they succeeded in extracting several blocks of Greensand rock, with a surface as fresh as if fractured yesterday. On these clean surfaces were indications of tooling, in the shape of irregular longitudinal marks, extending from the exterior towards the centre, evidencing the use of a pointed tool. These longitudinal marks were coated with a greenish blur, caused by the blow of a tool on the chloritic particles of the rock, and similar in every way to the mark left on the same stone by the sharp tail or point of a geological hammer. These blocks then, many of which had a rounded outline, had evidently been the *ejectamenta* of workmen, cast aside as useless; and from their freshly broken surfaces (unstained in the least by the surrounding *débris*, and unmarked, except by the original tooling), it is evident that they had remained in their present

position ever since thrown out, until brought to light again by your Committee. Hence the irresistible conclusion that the north side of this pit, at least, consisted of the rubble and *ejectamenta* from an adjoining excavation, and that the Counterscarp Pit was on site of an old quarry, most probably in existence before the ditch of the rampart was made.

It was thought advisable, before leaving Gas-par Pits, to try one of the shallower depressions. Accordingly, a saucer-like hollow on the south slope of the ridge, 52 feet 6 inches north-west from the western side of Counterscarp Pit, was chosen as being most likely, from its sheltered position, to have been selected for an habitation (marked 2 in plan). The circumference of this depression measured 61 feet; and the depth, from the level of the outer lip, 2 feet. A trench was made, 7 feet wide on the south side, and carried through the centre to the opposite side; the interior was dug out to a depth of 4 or 5 feet, down to the undisturbed ground. With the exception of a piece of cloudy, white, hollow-fused glass, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch broad at the largest end, there was not anything else found. It is to be noted that this was reported to have been picked out 1 foot 9 inches below the centre of the south lip, just below the turf, and in the greensand, during the absence of the two Committee-men (Revs. H. H. Winwood and G. E. Smith) who were superintending the work, between 12 and 1 p.m. Several large blocks of Penstone were found lying just below the turf on the south-west lip, and others taken from the *débris* of the interior. Some looked as if they had been rounded. One large block, resting upon the undisturbed Greensand, its upper or north-west end about 2 feet beneath turf and *débris* of Chert and stone, measured 4 feet 7 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide, and 1 foot 5 inches thick; and from its sloping position towards the centre of the pit, appears to have been moved from its original bedding. Whilst the ground on the south side was but little disturbed, on the north side the Greensand and "Penstone" had been removed for some distance beyond the northern lip; hence

the conclusion that the cup-like depression was not the original shape of the pit, but, like the others already tested, was the result of subsequent weathering and falling in of the sides of an irregular excavation or quarry.

The nature of the Gaspar Pits having been ascertained, further excavations were carried on at the Pen Pits proper, and two deep cone-shaped pits lying north and south of each other, and separated by a neck of ground 10 feet wide, were selected. The circumference of the north pit measured 38 yards; that of the south, 45 yards. The depth of the former, 11 feet; of the latter, 10 feet. These were called the Twin Pits. A cutting was first made in the neck, 11 feet 8 inches wide, and the undisturbed ground reached at a depth of 5 feet 6 inches from the surface. The usual *débris* of Chert, sand, and "Penstone" was met with, and nothing found but a few small pieces of charcoal and chalk-flint fragments, about 3 feet down. The south pit was cleared out to a depth of 8 feet, and the north 3 feet. A block of "Penstone," with pointed tool markings, was the only object of any importance worthy of notice.

The limited amount of money placed at their disposal did not admit of your Committee prosecuting their researches further; they are, however, satisfied that the explorations (so far as they have already been conducted)—showing an entire absence of pottery, or any other trace of human occupation—warrant them in concluding that, in spite of any preconceived opinions to the contrary, these pits were never intended for the purpose of dwellings, but that they were the work of people who had dug into the surrounding high grounds in search of that hard bed of Greensand rock—locally called Penstone—lying close to the surface, beneath a *débris* of Chert and rubble, which must have been of as great value to them for their various purposes, whether for millstones, querns, or the more prosaic erection of cottage walls, &c., as it is to the cottagers of the present day who live in the neighbourhood, and are constantly digging into the surface of the broken ground for similar purposes. And thus your Com-

mittee claim to have finally solved the enigma, or, as it has been called, the *crux* of antiquaries, by means of the practical use of the pick and spade.

Your Committee cannot conclude their Report without expressing their sense of the great assistance rendered to them by General Lane Fox, and their thanks to him for the admirable plan and section of the Castel and outworks, accompanying their Report, and their opinion that the same should be printed, together with drawings of the most important pieces of pottery, iron buckle, &c., discovered during these researches.

Rev. T. W. WILKINSON adds to this—

Whilst fully admitting much force in the reasoning of the foregoing report, I must say I am not prepared to adopt the conclusions so securely declared to have been arrived at as being unquestionable.

1st, because the positive evidence of probable encampments of of large bodies of men at some very early period in this immediate neighbourhood is historic and untouched.

2nd, because the present enquiry has been sketchy and tentative in its character, and that, through no blame due to the Sub-Committee (still less to the working section of it), but because of the comparatively small interest shown in the question, as evidenced by the small minority who attended the excavations, and by the meagre and inadequate support rendered financially.

Rev. H. M. SCARTH also adds—

Many thanks are due for the Report and for the plans which accompany it, but it can hardly be considered as the settlement of a long agitated question.

The geological statements are very valuable and settle the point that the pits have, in certain places, been excavated for stone, and that worked stone, as well as unworked fragments of

rock, are still found, but much further examination is required to ascertain if a primitive population was there settled.

The excavations have also shewn that in the middle of the district where the pits exist, or have been known to exist, there stood a mediæval fortress, probably Norman, or perhaps earlier.

The form of this is laid down in Sir R. C. Hoare's map or plan of Pen Pits.

But in the immediate neighbourhood of this is an earthwork which has never been touched ; also there are other earthworks at the extremity of the Pit-district which have not been examined.

Before any conclusive evidence against a very early settlement can be arrived at, these points ought to be carefully investigated and more pits examined.

Rev. J. H. ELLIS remarks—

I approve of the report as a correct account of the proceedings of the Committee and the course of the excavations so far as I have been cognizant of them, and I agree with the conclusion based thereon. The digging in the rampart appears to me to have afforded conclusive evidence that the Pits were originally quarries. At the same time I think it desirable that further researches should be made in some more selected Pits in various parts. I beg to thank Mr. Winwood for his able report and summary of results.

The Committee of the Society, on receiving this Report, passed a vote of thanks to the gentlemen who had conducted the exploration with so much ability, and especially to General Lane Fox and Rev. H. H. Winwood.