

Burwalls and Stokeleigh Camps.

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WILLIAM BARRETT in his *History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (1789), gives a bird's eye view of the three camps which overlook the Avon Gorge, near Clifton;¹ and his sketch, incorrect as it undoubtedly is, may serve as an indication of some of their features, at a time when they were comparatively intact. Attributing them, as was in his day the custom, to the Romans, he thus describes what he believed to be their manner of construction. "The commanding spot on Leigh-down and Clifton Hill, on the very summit of the rock on each side of the river being chosen; they marked out the compass of the intended camps, allotted a convenient area in each, dug out the four fosses, rose the three ramparts or valla, and with the stones here ready at hand, constructed the high strong walls, heaping the stones together in a very irregular manner, and sloping it gradually to the top, from eighteen or twenty feet at the base, to two or three at the crest, pouring their boiling mortar among the loosely piled stones, which being thin and fluid, insinuated itself into the many openings and hollows of the work, and by its strength, bound together all the irregular pieces of stone into a compact wall, as appears evident at this day."²

(1). Barrett, plate 2, p. 18.

(2) Barrett, p. 17.

Separate plans of all three camps are given by Manby, in his *Fugitive Sketches* (1802).¹ They are probably more correct than Barrett's bird's eye view, and were evidently prepared with some care. The camps were by him, too, attributed to the Romans, and his description involves some fanciful interpretations. Much more adequate and reliable descriptions are given by Seyer, in his *Memoirs* (1821),² and the account he furnishes has been extensively quoted by subsequent writers. The camps are by him no longer regarded as Roman, but as British. Plans are given on a full page plate, showing the positions of the three entrenchments, and their topographical relation to each other, to the Avon, and to Stokeleigh Slade, now generally known as Nightingale Valley. A plan, seemingly based on Seyer's, but with some differences of detail is given by Phelps, 1836.³ Prebendary Scarth read a paper to the Society of Antiquaries in 1872 on "The Camps on the River Avon at Clifton," which was printed in *Archæologia* (1873) with a plan copied from Seyer.⁴ In the *Proceedings* of the Somersetshire Archæological Society for 1868-9, Mr. G. M. Atkinson reproduces from Seyer and Barrett a description of the Camps, and gives sections of the ramparts of "Bower Walls Camp."⁵

Of the two camps which lie within the county of Somerset some account is here given. The plan of the Stokeleigh Camp, which accompanies this paper, is based on the 25-inch Ordnance Survey Map, and was drawn by Mr. Arthur Singleton, under my direction.

(1). "Fugitive Sketches of the History and Natural Beauties of Clifton, Hotwells and Vicinity," by G. W. Manby, pp. 9, 12 and 13.

(2). "Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and its Neighbourhood," by Samuel Seyer, pp. 59, to 66.

(3). "History of Somerset," by the Rev. W. Phelps, plate iii, vol. i, opposite p. 96.

(4). "Archæologia," vol. 44, pp. 428-434.

(5). "Somersetshire Archæological Society," vol xv, pt. ii, pp. 27-31.

BURWALLS CAMP.

Of the Burwalls, Burgh Walls, Borough Walls, Bowre Walls, or Bower Walls Camp, little now remains. Three ramparts originally ran from the precipitous slopes of Nightingale Valley (the Stokeleigh Slade of old writers), where indications of the ancient work may still be seen, opposite Northside House, to the less steep slopes of the Avon, above which there are remnants of the valla, in the grounds of Mr. George Wills. This course is somewhat differently figured in Manby's and Seyer's plans, the former showing a bolder sweep, and being probably the more correct. Thus, a somewhat triangular area of about seven acres was enclosed, protected by the ramparts and ditches to the south, and by the inaccessible, or difficult slopes of the Avon Gorge and of Nightingale Valley on the other sides. The Somerset approach to the Clifton Suspension Bridge lies within the area thus enclosed, and near this spot, according to Seyer, there was a mound, or signal station.

On Barrett's and Seyer's plans two large entrances are shown, passing straight through the fosses and valla in such a way as to divide their length into three approximately equal sections. Manby and Phelps give, however, only one such entrance. Seyer's text¹ does not seem to accord well with his plan. He describes (1) a main entrance, fifty feet wide, on the south-west; (2) a narrow passage to the west, near the edge of Nightingale Valley; (3) a very narrow gap in the inner rampart, a few yards to the south of the main entrance; (4) another gateway, ten or twelve feet wide, "from which a road, or path, turning to the left, passed under the rampart, and was inclosed or secured by another rampart on the right hand, so that this road passed for some distance in a lane, or ditch, between two ramparts." He also speaks of (5) a lowest entrance,

(1). *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.

apparently near the Avon slopes, ten or twelve feet wide. As the ramparts have been almost wholly destroyed there is now no means of checking these statements. From the point where the insignificant remains of the ramparts abut on Nightingale Valley, there proceed along the cliff with sinuous course the foundations of old walls, outside the Camp. They are probably quite independent of the ancient stonework. What may be their age or purpose is not known. They are not shown on any of the old plans.

With regard to the ramparts themselves, the outer and inner, according to Seyer, were of large size. "The second rampart," he says,¹ "is not so considerable as either the inner or the outer, lying low between them: it has on it a dry wall, two feet thick, and in many places still two or three feet high, and easily to be traced nearly along the whole line." The inner rampart rose eighteen feet above the area inside, and twenty-two feet above the bottom of the ditch outside. "It was," says Seyer, "certainly finished with a wall built of stone and mortar," the latter, "in great abundance, forming the crown of the rampart." He does not, however, give any evidence of the existence of this "wall," other than the occurrence of the stone and mortar."

It was, perhaps, especially the inner vallum of this Camp which Barrett had in mind when he described the building of the irregular stones into a compact wall by pouring in "boiling mortar." Collinson² described it as "composed of a strong cemented mass of limestone rubbish, so hard as scarcely to be broken by any tool." When the ramparts were in process of demolition they were visited by Prebendary Scarth, whose description is often quoted and has seemingly passed without serious protest. I am informed, however, that this description gives an exaggerated, if not erroneous, idea of the definite-

(1). *Op. Cit.*, p. 63.

(2). "History of Somerset," vol. ii, p. 289.

ness of the ancient work, of the relation of the cemented portion of the vallum to that composed of loosely-piled stones, and of the purposeful method of its construction. Scarth¹ says, "The innermost and highest of the three ramparts which parted the Camp on the western side, is formed of a compact mass of concrete, and when cut through, showed a core of solid lime and burned wood, banked upon each side with stones, and coated with turf. When the work was examined as the process of removal continued, it was evident that large fires had been kindled at intervals of from nine to fifteen feet apart, and covered with limestone which was calcined, and that wood and stones had been burned together in the centre of the wall, while the sides were banked up with stone and earth. This had become solid by the infiltration of rain water, and so formed a solid core."

Mr. G. M. Atkinson, in the same number of the Somerset Society's *Proceedings* (opposite p. 28), gives a figure of the wall in section. This figure closely resembles that (also by him) illustrating, on a larger scale, Scarth's paper. Both show a very definite central, vertical-sided wall, against which the irregular fragments are piled, and this is described as "limestones smashed and charcoal." Scarth and his illustrator seem, therefore, by implication, or by direct statement, to have held the opinion that the central cemented part of the vallum was due to deliberate intention.

I find it difficult to understand, however, how, in the manner described by Prebendary Scarth, anything like a continuous vertical wall of cemented material could be produced. If large fires were kindled at intervals of from nine to fifteen feet the result would be irregular patches of rudely calcined stone; and it is not easy to see how this could anywhere

(1). "Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society," vol. xv. 1868-9, part ii, p. 30. The description in "Archæologia," vol. xlv, p. 432, *et seq.*, is substantially similar.

assume the form of such a central wall-sided core as is figured for Scarth by Atkinson.¹

I have had some conversation with one of the workmen, now an old man, who assisted in the demolition of the vallum. His recollection was clear as to the occurrence of burnt timber and charcoal well within the rampart at some distance from the surface. But he described the cemented material as irregular and patchy in its distribution, with here and there very hard and well-consolidated lumps of no great extent, the "mortar" being elsewhere often quite soft and flaky.

This description accords well with that given me by Mr. A. C. Pass and Mr. A. E. Hudd, F.S.A., who also saw the work of destruction in progress, and who are strongly of opinion that there was no evidence of intentional and purposeful preparation of a solid and cemented core to the vallum, and that it rather indicated the lighting of fires on the wall and the incidental formation of calcined lime which was slaked by the rain and ran in between the stones, cementing them indeed, but without any intent on the part of the constructors to bond the loose material. If we suppose that this was done, not

(1). The paper on the Camps by Mr. Atkinson was read to the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society at their meeting at Williton, in August, 1868, by Mr. Scarth, the author not being present, and Mr. Scarth "added observations on the structure of the ancient ramparts" ("Proceedings Somerset Society," vol. xv, pt. i, p. 35). This paper, illustrated by Mr. Atkinson's drawings and sections, and an Abstract of Mr. Scarth's observations, were printed in the "Proceedings" (vol. xv, pt. ii, p. 25-31). Later, in February, 1872, Mr. Scarth read a paper to the Society of Antiquaries, which was printed in "Archæologia," vol. xxiv. The sections of the inner rampart given by Mr. Atkinson are entirely unlike any section I ever saw during my frequent visits to the Camp at the time it was being destroyed. The enlarged section shown on the second Plate looks to me like a picturesque rendering of the small diagram given on the first Plate, and not from a drawing made on the spot. Mr. Atkinson and Mr. Scarth apparently visited the Camp at a time when a section of the inner vallum was exposed showing a considerable quantity of calcined lime-stone, but I feel sure they never saw a clearly-defined central mass of lime *with vertical sides* such as is represented in these Plates. Of course, I do not mean to imply that either of these gentlemen wilfully misrepresented what they saw in support of a theory, but I think they were misled by the appearance of a section which had been long exposed to the weather, and in which much of the grey calcined material from the top of the rampart had been washed down almost to the bottom. [Note appended by A. E. Hudd, F.S.A., in the "Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club," vol. v.]

only when the vallum was completed but from time to time during its process of construction, we seem to reach the hypothesis which best accounts for the observed facts. There is no such cemented material visible in any part of the Stokeleigh Camp now exposed to view. But in the Clifton Camp there are patches of mortar-like material, for the most part flaky and crumbly, but sometimes more firmly consolidated, which certainly supports the view that it is an incidental product, due to the lighting of fires on the vallum; the primary purpose of the fires being other than that of producing a bonding substance. It is possible, however, that the builders of the camps observed the secondary effects and were thus led to light their fires with a new and added purpose, as was perhaps the case also with the builders of the so-called vitrified forts in Scotland.

In a letter from Mr. A. C. Pass, parts of which I have his permission to quote, he says: "During the destruction of the Burwalls vallum I went many times to examine it. The burnt lime contained in it was *never* mortar, but simply clean lime with a few fragments of charcoal here and there intermingled. As I read it at the time, fires had been sometimes burnt on the top of the vallum; these fires had calcined some of the limestone into lime, and the first showers of rain had slaked the lime and enabled it to run as a powder into the interstices of the stones below; then the vallum was rebuilt or made good at the damaged patches. I have no doubt that originally this "wall" was a dry stone wall with some inconsiderable batter, and never intended to be a mortar-built wall. The only vitrified fort which I examined in Scotland was burnt in a similar patchy manner. If, instead of sandstone, limestone had then been used, similar lime would have been found in it; but being silicious stone, the heat had (with the aid of the potash from the burning wood) partly viscified and agglutinated the work. Other parts were intact and simply clean stones, not burnt. These fires may have been burnt to keep

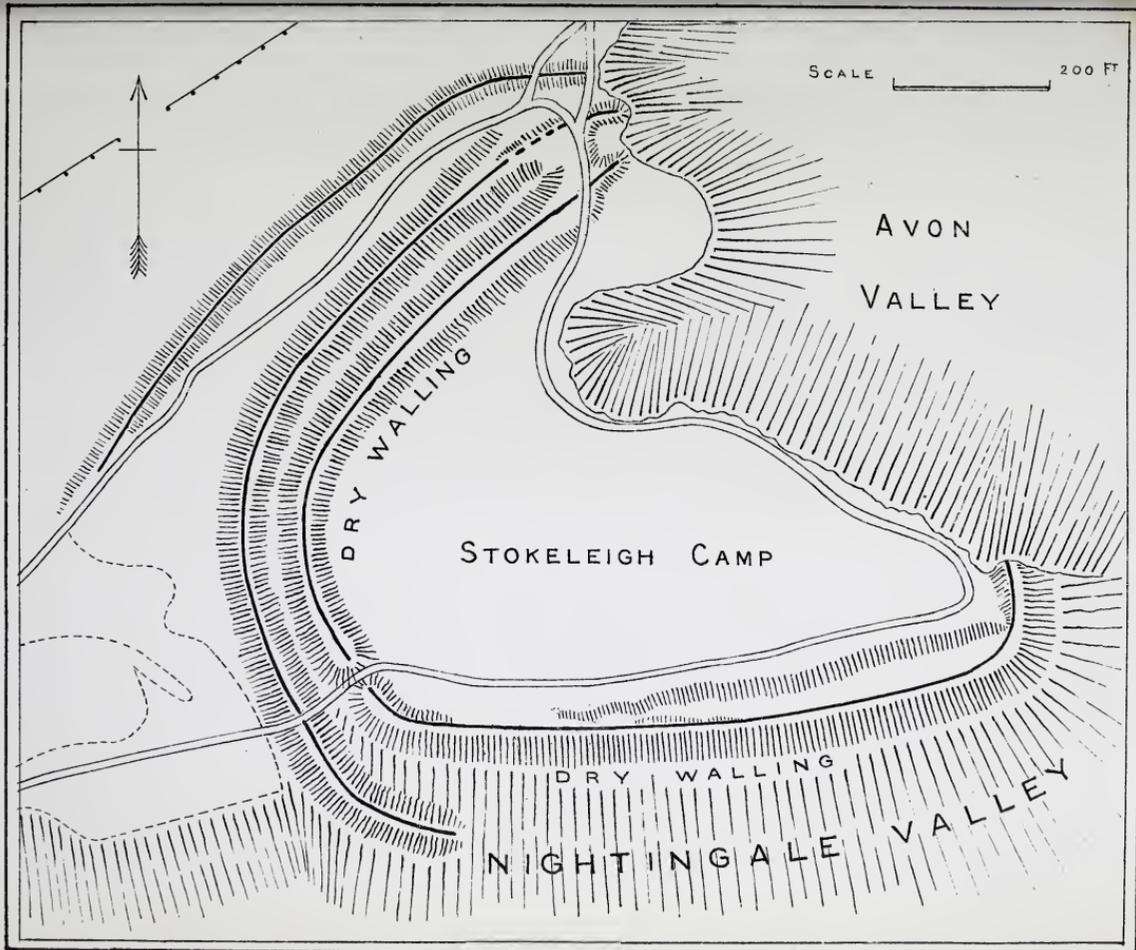
off beasts of prey from the folds where the cattle were kept, or they may have been watch-fires."

With the kind permission of Mr. George Wills, a section was made through part of the remaining rampart in his grounds at the south-eastern end of the Camp. Nothing but earth and loose stones was here disclosed. There was no trace of any cementing material.

STOKELEIGH CAMP.

The ramparts of the Stokeleigh Camp, which covers an area of about seven-and-a-half acres, are more impressive than those of the Clifton Camp now are, or perhaps ever were, though the fact that they are overgrown by trees prevents their being well seen, except at close quarters. Their distribution is indicated on the accompanying plan. Of the three sections into which the boundaries of the Camp may be divided, that to the north-east, overlooking the Avon valley, is flanked by precipitous natural cliffs, and needed no artificial defence. Here, therefore, there are no ramparts. That to the south overlooks the steep, but not inaccessible slopes of Nightingale Valley. Here there is a single line of defence, now of no great height, but showing at several points evidence of the dry walling to be shortly described. Seyer marks no defences here, but a single line is shown in Manby's plan. At the east end of this southern boundary a natural feature of the ground may have formed a second line of defence, but does not seem to have been artificially strengthened, save perhaps where it is dying out to the west. At its western end the single vallum is larger, and is flanked by an outer rampart descending the valley and slope for some little distance.

It was on its north-western side, where the ground is level, that the Camp was most open to attack, and we find this quarter strongly defended by two large and massive ramparts. The great breadth of the flattish top of the outer vallum,



especially at its southern end, is worthy of remark. The crest of the inner vallum even now rises in places to a height of thirty feet above the bottom of the fosse. This inner rampart shows along the summit for nearly its entire length clear evidence of dry walling. Seyer describes it as four feet thick, and in some places two or three feet high. To the north both inner and outer ramparts end off where the steep declivity towards the Avon commences. And from this end of the Camp a third low ridge, somewhat sinuous and diverging gradually from the others, is traceable for some distance. Seyer figures it as forking at the end, with two ridges curving westwards. Its purpose is a matter of conjecture. Within it, and near its origin, is a small pond in wet weather, which is marked in Seyer's plan.

Manby marks only one entrance near, but not at the end of the ramparts to the north. Seyer, who figures two entrances, places this one close to the termination of the defences. Manby's entrance is where the modern path enters the Camp, and on the eastern side, where it crosses the inner rampart, stones seem to be definitely laid parallel with the path in such a manner as to suggest a gateway.

A spur of ground runs out eastwards at this northern end of the Camp, and shows some but not very definite signs of walling. Only for about five feet on its south side are the stones so aligned as to suggest the possibility of a once continuous protecting wall. This may have been better defined when Barrett's plan was drawn. Seyer¹ speaks of a building of considerable size, having perhaps a square base with a circular foundation in the middle; "but," he adds, "the whole is so overgrown with shrubs and brambles that nothing certain can be discovered without a regular search."

On this spur, too, there are some indications of a small building, for rude foundations in a parallelogram, forty feet long by fifteen feet wide are indistinctly traceable. If these

(1). *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

be what Manby marks on his plan the scale on which they are drawn is much exaggerated. They do not seem to belong to the original camp but perhaps mark the site of some later hut or shed. To the south of the spur is a depression running down to the Avon. Here there may have been a path to the Camp, connected with a ford described by early writers as crossing the Avon at the foot of the British trackway which ran down to the river on the Gloucestershire side.

Seyer marks an entrance to the south-west, where the modern path crosses the ramparts. In Manby's plan there is no entrance here, nor does the present configuration suggest the probability of a definite entrance at this end. Seyer states¹ that close by there are "the foundations of long narrow building, a gatehouse or the like." These are not now definitely traceable. But near the path, just within the Camp, there are some stones, apparently in line, which, in the light of Seyer's statement, may perhaps be regarded as the last remnants of the foundations of this "gatehouse."

At the south-east corner of the Camp the ground is somewhat raised in a manner which suggests the work of man. Seyer figures a signal mound here, and not improbably he is right in his interpretation.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this Camp is the dry walling above mentioned. In several places above the slopes of Nightingale Valley large stones definitely laid may now be seen. They probably form the base of a vertical wall which protected this part of the Camp from attack from below. The figure shows a small portion near the *g* of "dry walling" on the plan. Several of the larger stones are from two feet to two-feet six inches long, and from ten to fourteen inches deep. Near the *y* of "dry walling," the breadth of the wall is well seen, and measures about four-feet six inches.

In preparation for the visit of the British Association in 1898, a portion of the walling to the west (near the *d* of

(1). *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.



STOKELEIGH CAMP, ROUGH WALLING AT SUMMIT OF INNER VALLUM.



STOKELEIGH CAMP, BASE OF WALL OF INNER VALLUM.

“dry”) was exposed by the removal of the stones, which were banked up against it (*See Plate*). For a length of about ten feet the rubble was removed to a depth of seven-and-a-half feet on the outer face of the wall. The upper three feet was a vertical face of rudely built wall, the stones selected and laid in courses, with no sign of anything like mortar or cement. Below this the stones were irregularly disposed and wedged in to form a footing, on which the first course of bedded stones should be laid. Near the base of the excavation was a nearly circular hollow, eighteen inches wide and three feet eight inches deep. Nothing was found in it. It had the appearance of being artificial; but if so its purpose is unknown. Near the *g* of “dry walling” the remaining upper course of the wall was exposed for a length of seventeen feet, and traced for more than one hundred feet. Whenever the breadth of the wall could be ascertained, it measured from four feet six inches to five feet. The outer and inner faces were formed of built stones, the intervening space being filled in with a packing of smaller stones. No remains of the handiwork of man were found; the only bone turned up was a portion of the jaw of a fox.

Barrett¹ states that “a stone with a hole in the middle, a little handmill-stone with which they used to grind their corn is still preserved, found at Stokeleigh Camp, and the hilt of an old sword was found there.” Seyer,² who quotes from Barrett, remarks that the earlier writer does not say where the stone quern, if such was its nature, was preserved, so that even then all trace of its existence seems to have disappeared.

At a meeting of the Clifton Antiquarian Club in 1891³ the late Rev. Dr. Hardman stated he had found several fragments of Romano-British pottery and other remains on the sloping bank of the river, just under Stokeleigh Camp. Mr. A. E.

(1). Barrett, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

(2). Seyer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 66.

(3). “Proceedings, Clifton Antiquarian Club,” vol. ii, p. 178.

Hudd informs me that he understood from Dr. Hardman, that these remains were found not far from the mound in the eastern corner. But as Mr. Hardman died a few weeks later, Mr. Hudd had no chance of accompanying him to the spot. Mr. Hudd, Mr. Ellis, and Mr. Pritchard have all searched beneath the cliff-face for Roman or other remains, but without success. I, too, have sought in vain all along beneath the north-east part of the Camp. But, as Mr. Hudd observes, remains may be there in considerable quantity, could one only light on the right spot.

Seyer¹ notes that "the mole-hills almost all consist of black earth, although the natural soil would be red; a sign which Sir R. Hoare considers to be in Wiltshire a sign of British habitation."

To revert to the wall on the inner vallum. The points to be noted are that it was built on the summit of the rampart, that the stones were selected for size and shape and laid in courses without the use of mortar or cement, and that its face was vertical. Dry walling is not unknown in other Somerset camps. That in Worlebury has been carefully described and figured in Messrs. Dymond and Tomkins' Memoir on this Camp (1886). But here the method of construction was quite different. It was not restricted to the summit of the rampart; it was not vertical, but sloped from the base upwards; it was rather of the nature of a definitely built facing to the rampart, and it was not single, but had, and still shows, a succession of walled faces one within the other, so that the rampart was a compound structure with an inner wall-wedge, outside which stones were heaped and then again faced with protective walling, this being repeated three or four times.

Dry walling is also seen at Dolbury-on-Mendip. But here the inner rampart shows no walling. It is the *outer* rampart which is thus built. The walled face slopes steeply, and is best seen near the *base* of the rampart curving round at the

(1). Seyer, Op. Cit., p, 66.

eastern entrance, as we have seen, a wall around the low middle rampart in Burwalls Camp. At the Camp on Sulisbury or Salisbury Hill, near Bath, again, there still remain, to the north, some signs of dry-walling. It seems to be a not quite vertical facing to the vallum near the summit.

In these several examples, therefore, of walled camps the method of construction is in each case different. Different again is the method employed, if we accept Prebendary Scarth's description, in the inner vallum of the Burwalls Camp. Do these different methods indicate different tribes, or different periods, or merely differences of local tradition? Such questions are easily asked; but can they be answered?

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