

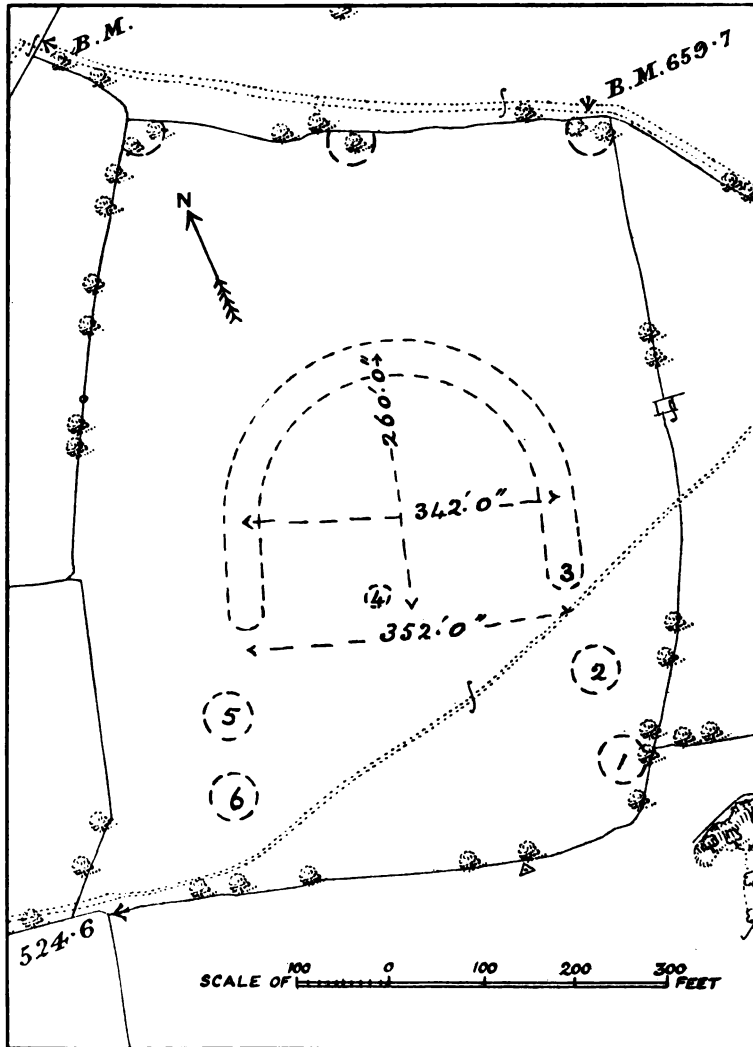
Excavations at Lansdown, near Bath.

BY THE REV. H. H. WINWOOD, M.A., F.G.S.

MANY years ago the Rev. Preb. Scarth, the late Rector of Bathwick, called my attention to some peculiar earthworks on the slope of one of the fields on Lansdown. The snow which had recently fallen, and was then gradually disappearing, left a dark line in the form of a horse-shoe. On careful examination this dark line proved to be a low bank or vallum, with a ditch on either side, and at either end of the horse shoe-shaped bank were two circles with a ditch round each of them. The circles were only slightly raised above the level of the ground, and could only be traced when the grass was short in the winter months.

Several authorities on earthworks in other places have visited these without being able to throw any light on their origin and use, and as the pick and spade are the only revealers of the long-hidden secrets of such puzzles, in conjunction with Mr. Thos. S. Bush, the Hon. Treasurer of the Bath Branch of the Society, it was determined to see what the result would be by their means. Accordingly, having first obtained leave from the tenant, Mr. Alfred Wright, we commenced work on Monday, September 7th, 1903.

It will be necessary to describe the position of the field in which they occur, and then the form and size of the earthworks themselves. They are situated on the southern slope of the second field after crossing the stile north-west of the Royal Villas, and between the 700 and 600ft. contour lines, Ordnance Survey. (The name is "Barn ground" in the Tithe Map).



PLAN OF EARTHWORK AT LANSDOWN,
 PARISH OF WESTON, NEAR BATH.
 "BARN GROUND," No. 136 ON TITHE PLAN.

From the accompanying plan, kindly made for me by Professor Boyd Dawkins when we visited them together, three years ago, and since accurately measured by us, their shape and size will be seen. A low bank with ditch on either side, more clearly seen on the north, takes the form of a half-circle with the two ends produced in a straight line, or, more correctly, that of a horse-shoe with the two ends somewhat enlarged, as if the shoe had two heels. Both at the east and west side are two low tumps or circles, nearly uniform in size, with a shallow ditch surrounding them.

After due consideration it was determined to cut across the centre of No. 2 circle, as a hedge ran across No. 1, and had destroyed a portion of it. Mr. Bush having carefully staked out the ground and taken the levels, we began just outside the ditch on the east side, and finding the undisturbed ground followed it through the centre to the same distance outside the ditch on the west. As the three other circles are nearly all the same size, it will be as well here to state that this one (distant 81ft. from the hedge on the east side), measured 48ft. in diameter, not including the ditch, and was raised on an average of 6ins. above the surface. The extent of the cutting, which averaged 2ft. in depth, and 2ft. in width, was 72ft. The following are the results of three days' work.

Just below the turf, averaging 3ft. or 4ft. in thickness, came a yellow tenacious clay with stones and fossils intermixed; from the latter, it was evident that the clay belonged to the Fuller's earth series, and had been washed down from somewhat higher ground. Just below the turf, and sometimes slightly buried in the clay, small pieces of modern red pottery, glazed and unglazed, broken stems of tobacco pipes, bits of iridescent glass, oyster-shells, a quantity of cinders and clinkers, and a few small fragments of chipped flints, a fragment of Pennant and White Lias, were found. At the base of the clay the broken-up beds of the Inferior Oolite were exposed with the characteristic fossils.

Having finished Circle No. 2, our attention was directed to a green depression (No. 4 in accompanying plan), about the centre of the lower part of the horse-shoe vallum. A few hours were spent here without any satisfactory results. There had evidently been a hole here, which had been filled up with stones, amongst which was a block of considerable size. After clearing these away, a crowbar was driven down some depth till it reached the soft clay. Was this a well filled up? Further digging right across this depression from either end of the horse-shoe can alone decide this question.

The next attempt was made at the south end of the horse-shoe at the east side (No. 3 on plan). The total width at this place from centre of ditch on either side was 31ft., and the cutting from side to side, commencing outside the ditch, 43ft. The deepest part on the east side was 3ft. 4ins., and the elevation above the general surface level about 6ins.

Again the undisturbed ground was struck and followed throughout with similar results to those of Circle No. 2, the same indications of modern life above the clay, and beneath it the top beds of the Inferior Oölite. Perhaps the most interesting find was a geological one: this was an Ammonite characteristic of the top beds of the Inferior Oölite, named *zigzagiceras*, about which Mr. Buckman sends me the following note:

“I have never seen any specimen of this Ammonite north of the Mendips, and this ‘find’ is a record.”

So far as the excavations have been made the only conclusion possible as to the age of these earthworks is that they are not of any antiquity; all the “finds” are comparatively recent; their origin and the object for which they were thrown up still remains a mystery.

During the progress of the work Messrs. Trice Martin and Gerald J. Grey gave their assistance occasionally; and, in conclusion, thanks are especially due to the tenant for permission to trench in his field.