

An Early Iron Age Site at Camerton, Somerset

BY VERY REV. PRIOR HORNE, F.S.A.

THE district in which this Early Iron Age site is situated is one that lends itself to defence with but little help. The extensive plateau is naturally defended by the steep Cam valley on the north, and Radstock valley to the south. From its height of a little over 500 feet it has a commanding position, the greater part of the Mendip range being visible.

About a quarter-of-a-mile N.W. from the site is the Saxon Cemetery excavated by the writer, 1928-1932;¹ and to the west, the fairly extensive Romano-British group of houses, part of which has been excavated but not yet reported upon.²

The site is situated about one mile from Radstock, and seven from Bath. It is in the parish of Camerton, and is known as the Seven Acre Field. The rock here is of oolitic formation; the subsoil is good and lends itself readily to cultivation.

During the years 1814 and 1815, the Rev. John Skinner, rector of Camerton, conducted various excavations in this parish, and he has left a description in one of his diaries³ of some graves he found in a quarry. This quarry is situated at the junction of the Fosseway, now the main road to Bath, with the Bath Old Road which runs down into the town of Radstock to the E. of the large tumulus known locally as the 'Round Hill'. Although he gives a sketch of the quarry, Skinner evidently did not see that the face of it cut across some ancient ditches, and he only described a few human and some animal bones found, and concluded that the burials were older than

¹ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxiv, 61-70; lxxix, 39-63.

² *Ibid.*, lxxix, 114.

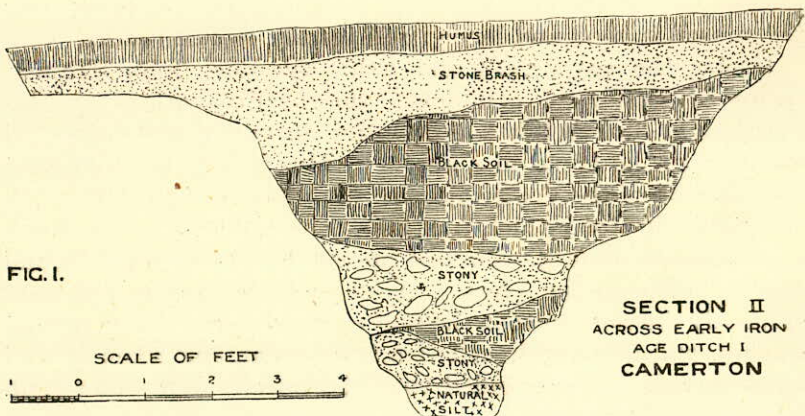
³ This diary has been kindly lent me by his grand-daughter, Miss K. G. Boyle, and from it I have extracted much useful information connected with excavations in different parts of the county. Other volumes of this diary are deposited in the British Museum and the Bath Museum.

the Roman period. The quarry where he made these discoveries has been out of use for many years, and is now overgrown with trees and scrub.

Knowing that Skinner had found these early remains at this spot, it was thought worth while to make some exploration of the land at the head of the quarry. This had been railed off, and the fence extended from the Fosseyway hedge to Bath Old Road, thus cutting off the triangle that formed the quarry. Early in 1934 a test trench 2 ft. 6 in. wide was made across the field just inside the fence, extending its full length. At its western end this trench cut two well-formed ditches, Ditch I and Ditch III (Plate XXV). Nothing was found at the south end of the trench. This completed the work for the year.

DITCH I

The Ditch No. I (Plate XXV) discovered the previous year was followed in March 1935. It started from the quarry face, and ran out into the field, taking a curve to the north. It was cut into the rock, and was usually 6 ft. in depth, V-shaped, and 8 to 9 ft. in width. A section (No. ii) taken at the point indi-



cated on the plan is shown in Fig. 1. It will be seen from this that after there had been some slight natural silting of the ditch, a certain quantity of black earth became deposited on it. There were evidently periods when the occupation was

less intensive, as the occupation-earth seems to have ceased for a time, and the ditch was allowed partly to fill. That the same folk were responsible for the next and much thicker deposit of black earth can be proved from the fact that the pottery types from each of these layers are the same. When this occupation finally ceased, the disintegration of the sides of the ditch continued, but during the process the site must still have been lived upon, as several finds occurred in the stone-brash layer 2, and they agree in character with finds made in the Glastonbury Lake Village¹ and the excavations at Wookey Hole.² These are described in the list of finds. Finally the humus formed over the ditch completely obliterating it, so that to-day we see an ordinary grass field. The pots shown on Plate XXVI have been reassembled from fragments found in the black occupation-earth in these ditches.

On March 21st in the following year, Ditch I was again followed, and after running a short distance northward came to a rounded termination. It will be seen from the plan that the east end of this ditch ran across the old quarry, and probably joined up with the ditch which was discovered in the north face of the quarry, and which was found to run under the Fosseway. A trial trench was made in the field on the opposite side of the road, and the ditch was again revealed. The filling of this ditch, both on the south and north sides of the Fosseway, agreed with that of Ditch I (as seen in Fig. 1), and was no doubt part of the same.

DITCH II

Ditch II is of peculiar outline ; it was cut into the rock with the same care as Ditch I, and is undoubtedly of the same age. Black occupation-earth was found near the bottom (Fig. 2—Section i), and later became covered (as in Ditch I) by a substantial layer of stones and earth. Above this, occupation-earth was of considerable extent and thickness, and reached right across the ditch. The ditch finally filled up as in Ditch I, and there was no sign of its existence on the ground level. There was one feature about the ditch that added to its in-

¹ Bulleid and Gray, *The Glastonbury Lake Village*.

² Balch, *Wookey Hole, its Caves and Cave Dwellers*.

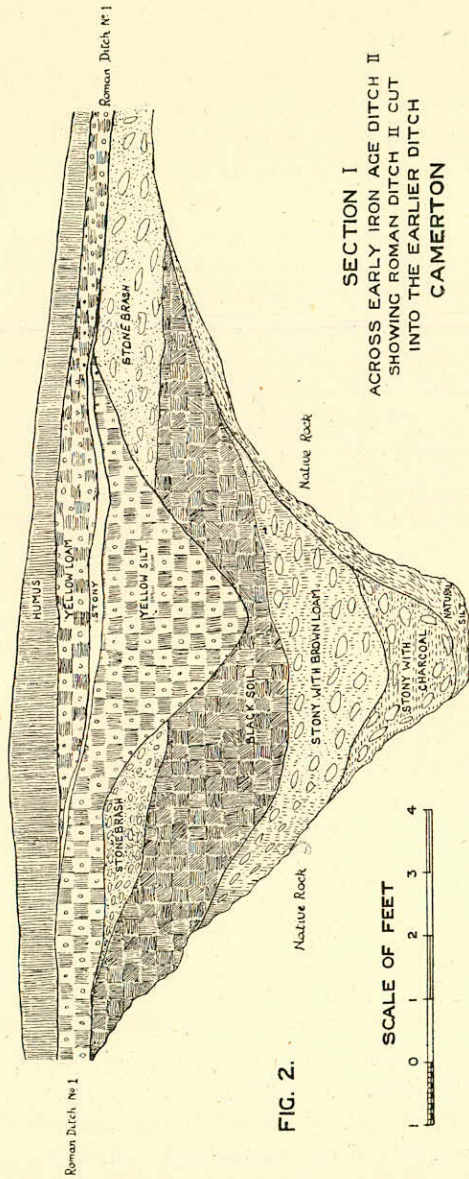


FIG. 2.

terest. In Fig. 2 yellow silt is seen to penetrate the deposit of black earth. This feature is a clear indication that a later ditch crossed Iron Age Ditch II obliquely and is cut into its filling. Long after Ditch II had ceased to function, the Romans, early in the Occupation, made this comparatively shallow ditch, which is one of two running parallel with the Fosseway. It was filled with a yellow silt or mud, and showed that it held water which probably came from the road surface. The silt contained a number of pieces of early Roman Samian ware and other Roman pottery. The Roman ditches were traced for a length of 165 yards and are known to continue westward.¹ How far the makers of these later ditches were aware that they were working over an older site is unknown, but it is quite possible that the Iron Age work was not completely obliterated at that time, and indeed traces of the ramparts, following the line of the earlier ditches, may have been in existence when the Romans came to construct the great road.

DITCH III

Ditch III is but a fragment of one that forms a bow and disappears under the Fosseway in the same manner as Ditch I. In construction it was similar to the others.

DITCH IV

This small circular ditch was superimposed on the earlier group of ditches. It seems to have surrounded a circular hut of late Iron Age 'B', or Belgic period, and it is like similar circular huts found at Maiden Castle, Dorset.² The span of the hut would have been too great for a simple central post-hole, and the roof must have been supported on posts forming a rough inner circle (A on plan). The hearth (B), which was edged with small stones, was roughly central, and contained large pieces of charcoal when found. A small gulley (C) had been dug to drain the floor space, and this emptied into the surrounding ditch. The walls were of wattle and daub, and would have stood just within the circular ditch. Large pieces

¹ These ditches, together with other Roman remains, will form the subject of a separate paper in these *Proceedings* at a future date.

² *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi (1936), p. 282, fig. 6.

of clay, used in forming these walls were found, and the impress of the wattle on one side and the finger-prints on the other were most distinct on many of the examples. The entrance to the hut was across a small causeway facing eastward, flanked on either side by posts which no doubt supported a gate of some sort, and the large posts were strutted by smaller posts placed on either side in the ditch.

PIT I

This pit, which was 6 ft. in diameter, and 5 ft. 6 in. in depth, was of the same age as the large ditches. This is proved as Ditch IV is cut into its filling, and the pottery was similar to that found in the large ditches. An iron dagger (see list of finds) was the only object, apart from the pottery, found in this pit.

THE FINDS

- (1). Ditch I, Layer II Stone Brash. Spindlewhorl of stone (Plate XXVI, fig. 7). It is $1\frac{3}{16}$ in. in diameter, and $\frac{3}{4}$ in. in thickness, $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. av. in weight. The central hole is $\frac{3}{16}$ in. across, and is so truly bored, that it must have been made from one face only. The pattern is the same on the top and under side.¹
- (2). Ditch I, Layer II Stone Brash. Iron fibula, in poor condition, with the catch missing.
- (3). Ditch I, Layer II Stone Brash. Fragments of ornamented pottery (Lake Village type).
- (4). Ditch I. Re-assembled pots (Plate XXVI) represent the various types found in the ditch; Figs. 1-5 found in Layer IV.

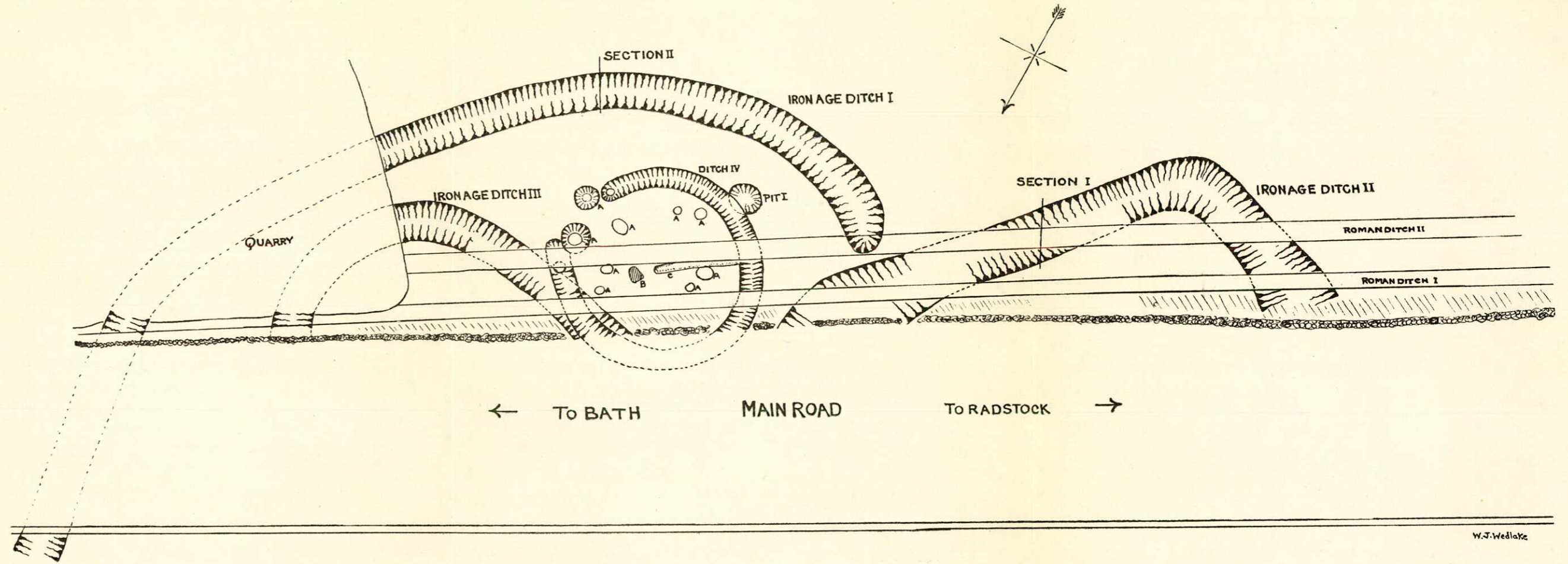
Fig. 1 is 14 in. in average height, and 11 in. at the rim which is squared; the base shows finger-marks, resulting from joining the clay of the base to that of the sides. The vessel is of rough workmanship: it bears no marks of fire, and hence it may have been used for storing grain.

Fig. 2 is 8 in. in height, 7 in. across the rim which is squared. It has not been used as a cooking-pot.

Fig. 3 is a straining-pot $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. high, and the same width across the rim which is rounded.

¹ *Antiq. Journ.*, xv, 199. Reproduced here by the kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries.

CAMERTON SEVEN ACRE FIELD EXCAVATION



- A. BELGIC HUT POST HOLES
- B. " " HEARTH
- C. " " GULLY

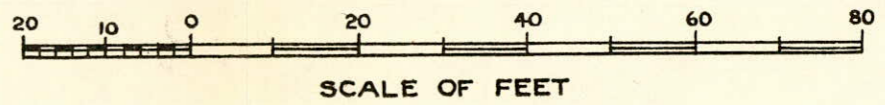


Fig. 4 is $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. high, and 5 in. across the rim.

Fig. 5 is $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. high, and 5 in. across the rim.

Fig. 6 is the lower part of a pot with a pedestal base, 4 in. in diameter; it is 3 in. high as far as it has been restored. This is the only vessel of this type found on the site, and it was recovered from the bottom layer of Ditch II.

- (5). Ditch II, Layer III. Bone needle $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. in length, having a broad, flat triangular head $\frac{3}{8}$ in. wide, with a circular hole $\frac{3}{16}$ in. in diameter.
- (6). Ditch II, Layer III. A bronze needle, the eye imperfect.
- (7). Ditch II, Unstratified. A flint leaf-shaped arrow-head, $1\frac{2}{5}$ in. in length, has the unusual feature of two notches in the sides for diagonal binding.
- (8). Pit I. An iron dagger. It has a blade 7 in. in length; greatest width 1 in. tapering to a point. The shank is $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. long and the end has been turned sharply to one side to make the grip secure.
- (9). A quantity of clay daub, bearing the imprint of the wattle on one side and finger-prints on the other. This came from Ditch IV.
- (10). A piece of worked antler from Ditch I.
- (11). Skeletons of infants. Ditch I, Layer III. No. 1, Human foetus of about 7 months. No. 2, Full time infant, probably born dead.
- (12). Spindlewhorl of oolite; plain.

Other finds in the larger ditches included fragments of querns, pieces of baked clay, part of a human mandible, and a number of unworked pieces of flint. To these finds should also be added a small tanged chisel of bronze which was found in the face of the quarry at its southern end. It is $2\frac{3}{4}$ in. in length, $\frac{1\frac{3}{8}}{8}$ in. wide at the cutting-edge, about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick, and, though not stratified, most likely belongs to the late Bronze Age.¹

SUMMARY

The site excavated is most probably the s.e. corner of an early Iron Age hill-fort, which extends to the higher ground to the north and west. One ditch has been traced on the other

¹ Figured and described in *Antiq. Journ.*, xiv (1934), 424. Weight 10·3 grammes.

side of the Fosseway, as shown in Plate A. If these ditches were followed up, probably the complete plan of this hill-fort would be revealed. As it is, the portions of ditches that are included in the Seven Acre Field, where the excavation has taken place, are so fragmentary and disjointed that it is impossible to make out their true significance.

These ditches, passing under what is now the Fosseway, raise an interesting question. It has been assumed that the Romans followed ancient trackways when making their roads, but it is obvious that in the first phase of the Early Iron Age, there could have been no trackway over this site, as it would have cut across the interior of the camp. The finding of certain objects of a later date in the layer which seals the earlier ditches shows that these ditches had long been abandoned when the Romans arrived. It is, however, quite possible that the later Iron Age population had a trackway here, and the Romans took advantage of it on their arrival. On a clear day it is possible to stand on the Fosseway where it crosses the site, and follow the straight Roman road running south over the Mendips at Beacon Hill. Owing to the land under examination having been for many years under the plough, it was impossible to determine whether the rampart was on the outside or inside of these ditches, but the nature of the filling rather suggested that it was on the former. It is also noticeable that the construction of these ditches is so like those discovered this year (1937) at Maiden Castle, Dorset, that they are probably of much the same date, and this is further borne out by the pottery found in them, which is stated in Dr. Mortimer Wheeler's report to be about the end of the second century B.C.

In conclusion it would seem that these ditches were constructed not later than the end of the second century B.C. and that they fell into disuse before the Iron Age 'B' influence had really reached the site.

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It only remains for me to express my thanks to Sir Frank Beauchamp, Bart., the owner of the land, who has always kindly allowed these excavations to be made, and to his tenant Mr. Wilfrid F. Wells who has given every facility for the work and has taken a



POTTERY FROM EARLY IRON AGE SITE

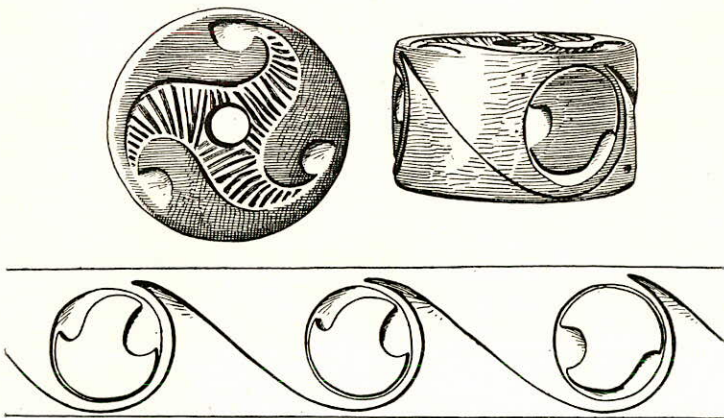


Fig. 7. ORNAMENTED SPINDLE-WHORL OF STONE

keen interest in it. Without the help of W. J. Wedlake who has acted as foreman, and who has also made the plans and kept notes of every item occurring during the work, I could never have brought this excavation to a successful issue. I also received much assistance in the digging from voluntary helpers, among whom I would mention Mrs. Clifford, F.S.A.(Scot.), Miss E. Hardy, Miss C. Fell and Miss Hamilton Thompson, and also Messrs. J. M. de Navarro, F.S.A., Bernard Sturdy, J. W. Brailsford and R. Dumbreck, to all of whom I wish to express my thanks. Finally I am much indebted to Dr. J. W. Jackson, of the Manchester University, for his report on the bones found, to Dr. Mortimer Wheeler, F.S.A., for the trouble he has taken in examining the pottery, and to Mr. A. S. Kennard, A.L.S., for writing on the mollusca discovered in the ditches.

REPORT ON THE POTTERY, IRON AGE SITE, CAMERTON

By Dr. R. E. Mortimer Wheeler, M.C., M.A., D.LITT., F.S.A.

I have been shown the interesting group of pottery from the Iron Age site at Camerton, and judging from such knowledge as I have of West-country pottery it is clear to me that the group in question belongs to the Iron Age 'A 2' series, and within that series it should typologically fall *late*. It has lost almost entirely the definition of form which lies at the back of our 'A' pottery, and not infrequently approximates to the very devolved type which occurs as late as the first century B.C., for example, in the Lake Villages (*Glastonbury*, Plate LXXV, Types v and xi).

On the other hand, only one sherd has any suspicion of the influence of Iron Age 'B'. If we date the arrival of the latter at c. 100 B.C., I should be inclined—for the reasons stated—to place the group at the junction of the two cultures, *i.e.* at the end of the second or beginning of the first centuries B.C., but not later than the latter date. I speak only of course from the sherds which I have seen.

REPORT ON ANIMAL REMAINS, IRON AGE SITE, CAMERTON

By J. Wilfrid Jackson, D.SC., F.G.S.

(*Manchester Museum*)

The bones from the above site belong to horse, pig, ox, sheep, and dog. There are also some fragments of human skull.

The remains are much broken, as in 'kitchen midden' material of this and other periods. They agree generally with those from the Early Iron Age sites of Glastonbury Lake Village, All Cannings Cross, Swallowcliffe Down, Kingsdown Camp, etc.

Some notes on the remains are given below :—

HORSE. Of this animal there are the following : (1) The symphysial part of the mandible of a youngish animal ; it contains the

two median incisors showing slight wear. (2) Loose teeth, consisting of two worn incisors, two upper premolars and two upper molars (all adult and well worn; two animals represented at least), seven lower cheek teeth (all adult and worn). (3) Limb-bones, comprising a small scapula, the distal end of a radius, a small pastern bone, a young radius, a metacarpal (minus both ends), two metatarsals (lengths, 238 and 245 mm.). These and the other bones indicate small animals of the type of the Exmoor and New Forest ponies, about 12 hands high. Similar remains were found at the above-mentioned stations, as well as at the Roman Fort at Newstead, near Melrose.

FIG. The domestic pig is represented by fragmentary jaws, a few loose teeth, and some broken limb-bones. The remains are similar to others from Glastonbury, etc.

Ox. The remains of small oxen are fairly numerous and consist of many broken bones, fragmentary jaws, loose teeth, and two horn-cores. Young and old animals are represented. The broken nature of the remains renders it impossible to obtain measurements. With the exception of one example, a metatarsal, all the metacarpals and metatarsals have been broken up. The solitary example has a length of 195 mm., and a mid-shaft diameter of 24 mm. An astragalus measures 58 mm. in length. Both the above bones and those in a fragmentary condition agree closely with the remains from Glastonbury, Kingsdown Camp, and other stations, and indicate small animals of the Celtic Shorthorn type (*Bos brachyceros* Owen, *longifrons* Owen).

SHEEP. Of this animal at least fourteen individuals are represented by the lower jaws. Some are young; others adult. In four of the latter the lengths of the full row of six cheek-teeth are, 64.5, 65, 66.5, and 69 mm. Very similar jaws were found at Glastonbury. One fragment of skull has the stump of a small horn-core, like the Glastonbury series. There is also a fragmentary horn-core of larger size. The limb-bones are all incomplete, but in general build are quite as slender as those from Glastonbury and other sites of the Early Iron Age.

DOG. Belonging to this animal are an atlas-vertebra, a canine tooth, and the left part of the upper jaw with the last molar only.

In addition, an imperfect skeleton of a dog found in Ditch I.

DETAILS.—*Limb-bones.* The femur has a full length of 166 mm., and a mid-shaft diameter of 12.5 mm. The tibia has a full length of 166.5 mm., and a mid-shaft diameter of 12 mm. The humerus is 149 mm. long, and 12.5 mm. at the middle of the shaft. The radius, 151 mm. long and 12 mm. at the middle of the shaft. The ulna is 176 mm. long.

The tibia is about the size of the example figured by Pitt-Rivers

from the Romano-British village at Woodcuts, Dorset (*Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, 1887, vol. i, pl. lxix, fig. 5). The bones belong to a dog much larger than the Fox-Terrier used by Pitt-Rivers as a test animal (*op. cit.*, vol. ii, 1888, Table). The animal was also longer-legged than the dog found with beaker pottery at Easton Down, Winterslow (see *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, xlvii, 1935, 76-8, and pl. iv). The latter was a small dog of the type of *Canis palustris* Rüttimeyer, described from the Swiss Lake Dwellings of the New Stone Age. This appears to have had a stature of 17 or 18 in. at the shoulder. The Camerton dog was probably just under 2 feet in height.

Skull. The skull is too badly broken (in addition to parts being missing) to yield full measurements. The following have been obtained:—Least width between orbits, 35.5 mm.; zygomatic width, 95 mm.; width between post-orbital processes, c.48 mm.; greatest width of palate, 63 mm.; least width of palate, 34.3 mm.; and length of tooth-row, 68 mm.

Mandible. The dimensions are as follows:—Length from middle of condyle to alveolar point, 133 mm.; height of vertical branch, 48 mm.; width of vertical branch, 31.5 mm., length of tooth-row, 72.7 mm.

The skull and mandible are larger than the Easton Down dog, and agree closely with a fox-hound in the Manchester Museum. The remains of dogs of similar size, as well as larger and smaller, were found at Glastonbury.

REPORT ON THE NON-MARINE MOLLUSCA

By A. S. Kennard, A.L.S., F.G.S.

Seven species were represented in the material submitted to me, *viz.*;

Pomatias elegans (Müll.)

Helicella cellaria (Müll.)

Arion sp.

Trochulus striolatus (Pfr.)

Arianta arbustorum (Linn.)

Cepaea nemoralis (Linn.)

Cepaea hortensis (Müll.)

This faunule would appear to indicate slightly damp conditions with an abundant growth of herbage. There is no evidence of open grassland, the typical species of that habitat being absent. The absence of *Helix aspersa* Müll. is noteworthy. Its true status in the West of England has yet to be determined, but in the rest of England it has never yet been shown to be pre-Roman. It may be that this is also true of Somerset and that its presence in Wick Barrow is due to later admixture, for unfortunately a barrow is not a sealed deposit.¹

¹ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, liv, ii, 52.