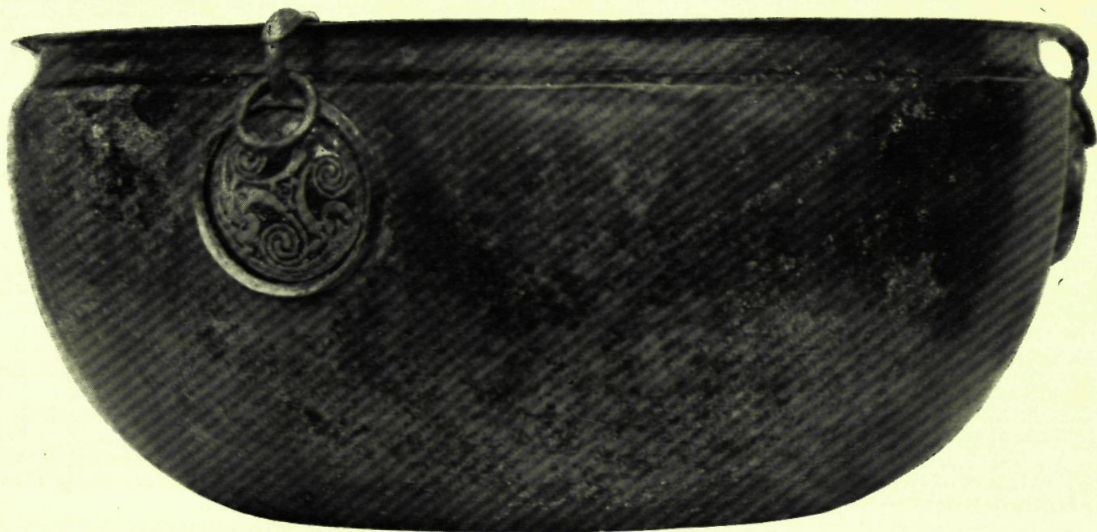




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Fig. I. THE WINCHESTER ANGLO-SAXON BOWL.

[Photograph by E. Gardener.]



REPORT OF THE FIRST EXCAVATIONS AT OLIVER'S BATTERY IN 1930

By W. J. ANDREW, F.S.A.

AT the Annual Meeting of the Society on April the 29th, 1931, I read the following Report of the tentative excavations made on the site of Oliver's Battery, near Winchester, in August 1930 ; and as the subsequent and extended exploration has tended to confirm the deductions then made, I venture to repeat it here.

Report of the Excavations of 1930

The discovery of "The Winchester Anglo-Saxon Bowl"¹ has materially helped, but has almost completely obscured the original purpose of our tentative excavations, which was to determine the date of construction of the earthwork.

For 150 years at least it has always been known colloquially as Oliver's Battery, but as the name Oliver alone is not quite conclusive as to identity with the first Protector, we must look back to the Ordnance Survey of 1808, made by compilers who would glean their information locally, and there it is styled "Cromwell's Battery," and in the modern editions this is extended to "Oliver Cromwell's Battery." As this identification goes back to within 163 years of Cromwell's siege of Winchester in 1645, when it is recorded that he "prepared his batteries on the north and west of the city," the tradition is not likely to be an invention, and this battery is probably that referred to as west of the city.

It stands on the crest of a chalk ridge a mile and three-quarters from Winchester Castle, but this distance, instead of being against the identification, is strongly in its favour. To avoid risk of sortie and capture by night, siege artillery was withdrawn at sunset to a stronger position, and parked within a defensive earthwork often a mile or more away, and that this was the Parliamentary custom we know from the Chaplain's diary of the contemporary siege of Latham House, and from similar earthworks outside Basing, York, etc.

Further evidence in support of Cromwell's occupation of the Battery was the discovery by Mr. Drew, of Winchester, about 1875, of an officer's spur within the enclosure. It is now exhibited and is of Cromwellian date, being a jingle spur, the privilege only of a noble or knight. Also that by Mr. Cox, whose house adjoins the Battery, of a pair of farrier's pliers just outside the surrounding ditch, which he has presented to the Winchester Museum. They also conform with the date of the siege.

1. The bowl is the subject of a separate paper by Mr. Andrew in this volume.

As the evidence therefore stood only a year ago, name, history, and relics, all seemed to point to the earthwork having been made by Cromwell in 1645 for an artillery park. Yet the Society's advisers on early earthworks, Dr. Williams-Freeman and Mr. Crawford, were not satisfied, but believed that the Battery was of far earlier origin. As they were unable at the time to undertake the necessary tentative excavations to determine the question, I was asked by the Society to do so. Mr. F. W. Talbot, who is lessee for 99 years of the Battery, but owner of the tumulus and adjoining land, welcomed the scheme, and he, Mr. McEuen, the Rev. S. T. Percival, Mr. G. Weeks, and Mr. Lewis Williams at once offered to join me as the working party. We had the assistance of our Secretary (Mr. Frank Warren, F.S.A.) and Mr. Crowther-Beynon, F.S.A., and occasionally that of Dr. Williams-Freeman, Sir Thomas Troubridge, F.S.A., and Dr. Green, F.S.A. Later Mr. Reginald Smith, D.S.A., and Mr. C. F. C. Hawkes, of the British Museum, most kindly examined and checked our classification and dating of the pottery discovered. The actual diggers of the rough work were our own employees—Messrs. W. A. Dudman, W. White, R. Russell and F. Gradidge..

Description of the Battery.

The Battery stands on the eastern side of the crest of a broad chalk ridge, 400 feet above Ordnance datum overlooking Winchester, and a mile and three-quarters to its north-east. It is a straight-sided fortification with carefully rounded corners, and quadrilateral in plan, but it suggests an attempted parallelogram adjusted to the best defensive contours of a poor site. On north and south it measures 73 and 85 yards respectively in breadth, and on east and west 105, and 90 yards in length; the total area covered¹ being 2.032 acres. It is surrounded by a vallum of earth and dry ditch, the former, as disclosed by the spade, being 15 feet in width rising to 4 feet in height, and the ditch, which is of a widened V-shape, is from 20 to 25 feet wide and nearly 5 feet deep. There are indications possibly of others now made up, but the only present entrance is on the western side of the actual south-west corner, and from this, winding round the south side eastward towards Winchester, is shown on the pre-war Ordnance map a broad but very low causeway. But the site was again occupied as a military camp during the recent war, and almost all traces of this have disappeared.

An entrance at a corner, especially opening on one side of it, is quite unusual in early fortification, and strategically wrong, because it offers the numerical minimum for defence, and the

¹ According to the Ordnance Survey.

maximum for attack, and in this case it would be specially so for the outer ground is here level, and the fort at its weakest. On the other hand it was the easiest approach for heavy artillery and faced away from Winchester, so if we accept the low causeway as a road made for the guns, we have only to imagine the filling up of the original entrances and opening of this, to offer Cromwell a ready-made park for his artillery in the strongest strategic position he could find.

It follows that if this entrance was of Cromwellian construction, the original ditch cut in the chalk would still remain beneath it and continue round the corner. We therefore cut a trench 4 feet wide, carefully, as usual, removing the chalk in 6in. layers only at a time, through it, but at one side to include a section of the vallum. The result proved the expected, for the original ditch was intact and neatly curved round the corner of the fort, having obviously been filled in for a later causeway.

But almost mathematically in the centre of the vallum itself and still embedded in the edge of the trench we were cutting, was the first direct evidence of early date of construction ; for 14 inches below the chalk, and so 20 below the present crest of the vallum, was a portion of the base of an early Roman bowl, or cruse, of red earthenware. As the vallum throughout was, as is usual, constructed by throwing up the chalk of the ditch as it was dug, it follows that this shard was either dropped on the vallum during its construction, or on the surface of, or in the chalk cast up whilst making the ditch. In any case, therefore, this early Roman relic was in existence when, or before, the earthwork was in construction, so we get a definite limitation of date, not earlier than the coming of the Romans in A.D. 43. The latest limitation for construction was A.D. 500—550, the date of the burial within the vallum at the opposite corner of the Saxon chieftain.

The Saxon Interment and Bowl.

At this opposite corner, that to the north-east of the fort, the hillside falls away more steeply than elsewhere, so the lines of the vallum there, to preserve their level, are more carefully built up, and the corner is the nearest to Winchester. This, therefore, we had selected for our chief trench and should have cut it across the actual corner, but trees and a pathway intervened. After setting our lines we at the last moment ventured to move them eastward two feet nearer to the true angle, an accident of second thoughts that was to give us the bowl, for as it was we only touched the fringe of the Saxon grave. The lines of this shallow grave were clearly cut from the surface of the vallum, proving that it had then been much as it is now, and the difference between its consolidated chalk and the loose mixed earth and soil within the

grave, further proved that the vallum was much older than the interment. The site for a Saxon chieftain's burial would never be chosen near any inhabited place, so the fort had probably been long abandoned and forgotten, but the prominent height of this corner probably tempted its selection for the grave, as it did ours for the trench.

It is therefore to the relics found in this trench upon the surface of the original soil underneath the vallum and in the ditch that we will turn. In the compressed soil below the vallum, and therefore two feet below the level of the Saxon grave were ten small shards, a fragment of iron-pyrites and two horseteeth. These relics may of course have been upon the surface any length of time before the vallum was built, but not afterwards. The shards were mostly of the Early Iron Age, of Hallstatt quality, but two were of the late La Tène culture, which here may bring us down very nearly to the Roman advent. None was later. But on the bed-chalk of the original ditch lay the fragment of the lip of a Roman bowl, again of early red earthen, which proves that the fort was in early Roman occupation either during construction, or very shortly afterwards, before any silting into the ditch commenced.

Date and Purpose of the Earthwork.

To sum up the results of our very tentative excavations and the general evidence. The fort is an irregular parallelogram in plan, formed of earthen vallum and ditch with carefully rounded corners, covering in all about two acres, with presumed entrances at the sides. It is therefore Roman in character and proved to be of early Roman date, but it stands upon a hill, away from water. No Roman relics were found on its surface, therefore its occupation was probably brief. Hence it conforms with a small class of forts of necessity and of only earthen construction, made here and there during the actual progress of the Roman conquest of Britain, and its size of only two acres was that usual for a Cohort of Auxiliaries. For instance, Agricola in his advance to subdue the North in A.D. 79 built a fort at Ambleside¹ of the same earthen construction, plan, and size, as this, and it was not stone-walled until the following century. So here we have a fort of similar character which may well have been a temporary outpost of Auxiliaries to guard the workers, whilst making the two military roads of Roman occupation in, or very soon after, A.D. 43, the one from Clausentum (Bitterne) to Winchester, the other from Winchester to Old Sarum, for it is placed halfway between them, three-quarters of a mile only from each, and is in full view of both. It was only of temporary character, and when the roads were

1. *Roman Britain* by Mr. R. G. Collingwood, F.S.A., pages 25-27.

completed its purpose would be served. In this relation it is worth notice that the old road from Winchester to Hursley, and beyond, passed close to this earthwork, and in the earliest maps it is called "Port Lane."

The Tumulus.

This stands 70 yards to the north of the Battery, and is a low "round" barrow, 38ft. by 32ft. in diameter and of an average height of only 3ft. We were met with the proposition that it was a burial mound of the great plague at Winchester in 1666. But to have removed plague victims two miles by road from the city seemed to be highly improbable, and the explanation of the tradition may well be that previous excavators of whom we had late 18th-century evidences, found what we did, and very naturally offered that explanation.

We cut a trench 3ft. wide, due north and south through the centre. Halfway between that and the south end we came upon the site of the, or an, original urn-burial. A hole had been dug in the floor chalk in which a small cinerary urn had been placed, and water had filled in the hole around it with dissolving chalk until a perfect impression of the urn was left, for it had been removed, broken, and its fragments lay around. The impression suggested an urn about 10 inches high by 7 broad, expanding upwards from the base, and with plain rim. All around the hole lay 70 or 80 small fragments of urns, a good ball of iron-pyrites, a few calcined bones that the urn had contained, and a little charcoal. The shards represented at least seven or eight urns, for they were of varied ware and included four different rims, and as many bases, so probably most of them were ceremonially cast in at the cremation. Perhaps also the pyrites was, for it was then the only steel for "flint and steel" purposes. The shards were all of the Early Iron Age and of Hallstatt quality, so the date of the barrow may be as early, or rather as late, as 600 or even 700 B.C.

But we were content no further to disturb the tumulus, for it proved a complete and unwelcome surprise to us. It is full of the skeletons of human bodies thrown upon the natural surface of the soil in any direction, and even crossing each other. This, no doubt, had suggested the plague burial. In our narrow trench there were three to the north that were headless, but there seemed to be more skulls than bodies to the south, perhaps due to disturbance and examination by the previous excavators, for it was there that we found remains of a bottle and the broken stem of a churchwarden pipe. We disturbed the remains as little as possible, and, as in the Saxon case, left them intact. But there was a loose fragment of bone which is of interest because it bears two cuts, or slashes, and is, therefore, a factor in the explanation of the

burials to follow. The soil of the tumulus must have been cast outwards, the bodies thrown in "anyhow," and the soil replaced. A tumulus, being of deep, loose soil, would naturally be chosen for such a purpose. It was not a plague burial because plague victims were handled as little as possible, and as their clothes were worse than useless to anyone else, they were buried in them, and in their boots and shoes. We found nothing of the kind, nor any contents of pockets, etc.

What we did find was (1) A perfect iron curved military buckle of the double-ring type, and impressed upon the rusted tag is a clear impression of the woven material of its strap. (2) A similar buckle of single-ring type, tongue missing. (3) An ovate ball of pipeclay much serrulated by use. (4) A cut flint, broken at the point, clearly a gun flint. (5) A small ball of rolled leather.

The buckles are typical of, and the other relics conform with, the Cromwellian period, and there can be little doubt that here we have the burial of the slain in an affray on this site during the Civil War. The straps would be used for moving the bodies.

It may have been a sortie by Lord Ogle from Winchester in an attempt to capture the guns in the Battery. But the following account of a skirmish on this site, given by the Rev. G. N. Godwin in his *Civil War in Hampshire*, seems exactly to meet the facts. Port Lane, previously mentioned, was the old highway from Hursley to Winchester, and passed within a few yards of this tumulus as it crossed the crest of the hill. We know that the crest of a hill was the point of contention and thick of the fight, in most seventeenth-century battles and skirmishes, so if there was a fight between Hursley and Winchester we should expect the main struggle to be here :—

"1645, April 14th. Col. Norton marched on Romsey with six troops of horse intending to fortify the town against the garrison at Winchester. Early in the morning Major Stewart was sent out with three troops of horse to face Winchester, occupy the enemy's attention, and to bring them to action on equal terms at some distance from Romsey, where the other three troops of Norton's horse were 'hard at work.' Sir William Ogle rode forth from the Castle with all his horse, and Major Stewart retreated upon Romsey. When Norton's force arrived from Romsey, after Stewart had been wounded, several of his men captured, and seven or eight Cavaliers slain, the enemy's body was discovered '*between Hursley and Winchester*' (quoted from a contemporary account), Ogle's force routed, and some 30 soldiers captured."

The Cromwellian spur, fragments of pottery and other relics mentioned were placed on the table for inspection.