

REPORT OF THE SECOND EXCAVATIONS AT OLIVER'S BATTERY, IN 1931

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WITH the consent of the Hampshire County Council as owners of the freehold of the site, and of Mr. F. W. Talbot as its lessee for 99 years, we commenced our second excavations of Oliver's Battery, near Winchester, on June 15th, 1931, on behalf of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society.

The report of our first excavations and of the discovery of the Winchester Anglo-Saxon Bowl is printed in the current volume of our *Proceedings*, and we continued the work upon the same economic principles and with the personnel little changed. The working party was represented by our Hon. Joint Secretary Major C. O. Ibbetson, Mr. E. S. McEuen, the Rev. S. T. Percival, Mr. Talbot, Mr. Lewis Williams and myself; and the actual diggers were our own employees as before, with the addition of Major Ibbetson's gardener. Our Hon. Joint Secretary Mr. Frank Warren, F.S.A., and Sir Thomas Troubridge, F.S.A., helped us throughout, and Dr. Williams-Freeman and Mr. Christopher Hawkes, F.S.A., gave us the benefit of their technical knowledge of the pottery discovered.

The previous excavations had left us with a series of interesting problems which it was our duty to endeavour to solve, namely:

1. The period of occupation of the site before the present early Roman earthwork was built.
2. Whether there had been an earlier defensive work or protected village on the same site.
3. The period of Roman occupation.
4. Whether the early Anglo-Saxon interment was an isolated incident, or one of a cemetery.
5. Evidence of Cromwellian or other occupations.

1. The Period of pre-Roman Occupation.

Most of the high ground of Hampshire yields shards of pre-historic pottery, but the quantities found by us on this site far exceeded anything we expected, for beneath the vallum the average must have approached one shard per square foot of excavation. The adjoining tumulus with its numerous fragments of cinerary urns had told us that it dated from the earliest Hallstatt period, indeed to me it looked of the Bronze Age, and I should be tempted to place it and its pottery to the transitional period between the two. We should therefore expect to find similar

pottery upon the site of our excavations, and this we did, both on the previous occasion and now. That was the earliest ware that we found and we found it beneath the vallum, and in the silt that had been washed down onto almost the surface of the ditch.

Owing to the exigencies to be explained under our problem 4 the plan of our operations was unusual because, except for a few cross-sections to determine the position of the original gateways, etc., we cut a three-foot broad trench along the centre of the vallum for its whole length where it was possible to do this without injury to the trees planted upon it, for that was a condition of our permission. As before, we carefully excavated our trenches in level layers of about 6 inches at a time, and sank them down to the virgin chalk.

In the construction of an earthwork, whether defensive or mere ditch and bank, the method has been the same for all time. The surface soil of the ditch was first thrown up onto the surface soil of what was to be the base of the vallum or bank. Here, therefore, some 20 feet of surface soil for the ditch had been piled onto the original 15 feet of surface soil below the vallum, thus more than doubling the material in which any relics of pottery or other materials last dropped on the original site before its disturbance would lie. It follows that if we can date the latest item in the subsoil beneath the vallum we know that the earthwork was not then in being.

The relics thus found comprised innumerable small shards ranging from a few examples of the early Hallstatt period (thus contemporary with the adjoining tumulus) through the later Hallstatt, still few, and the early La Tène, Class I, more, and most of the middle period of La Tène, Class II. With that the collection abruptly closed down. This gives us a general period of occupation of the site before the construction of the earthwork of from about 800 B.C. to 50 B.C. with a wide margin of safety at each end.

The evidence so far thus disclosed a very long period of occupation of the hill site increasing in population down to about B.C. 50—or roughly Caesar's invasions—by a very poverty-stricken race of hill folk, for although a few of the shards were ornamented with prick patterns, not a scrap of metal, nor ornament of any kind was found—only bits of pottery ranging in size from about two or three inches in diameter to the possible minimum.

Beneath the vallum, therefore, there was not a single bit of pottery that had been turned on the wheel nor anything of the later Belgic or Gaulish types. This in ordinary logic would postulate that the earthwork was built just when this hand-made pottery ceased, and before the wheel-made came in, probably

about, or soon after, B.C. 50. But in that case we should have found wheel-made and late Belgic shards upon the surface of the vallum, in the ditch, or within the enclosure, and we found not a scrap until the Roman period which, as explained in our previous report, was represented by the base of an early Roman bowl in the centre of the vallum itself and Roman shards on the surface of the ditch. Now we found a few more wheel-turned shards of the Roman period in the surface soil of both vallum and enclosure and below the silt in the ditch.

This is evidence that about or soon after B.C. 50 the hill-folk entirely abandoned the site, which remained unoccupied until the Roman advent in A.D. 43, an interval of nearly a hundred years.

According to the theory of a second Belgic invasion at that date they would be driven away, but personally, although it is outside the purport of this report, I think that any such invasion was merely a peaceful penetration under Commius, because he continued the coinage which was established before his day, unchanged in any detail, save the mere addition of his name. To me, therefore, it seems more probable that Winchester, as Venta Belgarum, was then in the making, and that these destitute hill tribesmen found work and shelter in its building.

A find in the north vallum by Major Ibbetson was a good example of a late neolithic flint-axe, but of course this had been merely thrown up from the chalk of the ditch and had nothing to do with the date of construction, for it had been "nearly always" there.

We searched as carefully as the trees allowed for the original gate-ways. On the north and south sides the vallum and ditch were continuous and there were none. But on the east and west sides, a little to one side of the centre and opposite each other, there was evidence that the vallum had been broken for an entrance, but filled up later, probably during Cromwell's occupation. In the original chalk bed here on the east side there were four holes of about a foot in diameter and a few inches deep, which may have been made for, or used as, the post holes, but they were irregular for the purpose and were not clearly artificial, although such irregular post holes are known; for instance, in Wales. On the west side, unfortunately, a clump of trees prevented a complete excavation of the entrance.

The most curious discovery was that beneath the whole of the south-east corner of the earthwork there was a large area of deep charcoal, probably more than six yards square and several inches thick, some pieces of it being hard and as large as a small orange. It contained neither bones nor anything except the usual La Tène shards, and none of the Hallstatt period. It is therefore

difficult to explain, but it was certainly there before the early Roman fort was built over it, and we can only suggest that as this point of the hill was a landmark for miles along the valley, it may have been the site of a very early beacon, possibly of Roman origin, or before.

2. Throughout our work we looked for any possible indications that there had been any previous earthwork, or small ditch, to explain the earlier populous occupation by even a village, but there were none.

3. Roman Occupation.

The additional Roman shards we found were upon the original surface of the ditch, upon and within the vallum, and in the enclosure. They were very few indeed, and therefore they supported the view taken in our previous report that the earthwork was erected at the advent of the Romans in A.D. 43, and in occupation for only a very brief period.

In the entrance on the west side we found a very delicately patinated bronze ring, $1\frac{5}{16}$ inches in diameter with a rim of flattened-egg section averaging $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch broad with the thinner edge outwards. The ring seems to be hand-made for it is not quite a true circle, nor the rim of even width, and I think that it is probably Roman. If so, for experts who have seen it are a little uncertain, we will not resort to the usual harness explanation when in doubt, but suggest that it is a ring brooch with, as so often is the case, the movable pin missing. It is rather large as such, but I have a still larger example with the pin preserved to it. In support of this there is a flattening of the outer edge on one side which may indicate the position of the collar of the pin.

This and the shards were all that we found of the Roman occupation, and our special search for any coins, etc., was in vain.

4. The Anglo-Saxon Interment.

The discovery of the now famous Winchester Anglo-Saxon Bowl upon the breast of an armed Saxon Chieftain in our previous excavations very naturally induced us to make a complete search for anything further of that kind or period.

As explained in our previous report, he was buried in a shallow grave across the north-east corner of the vallum, and as Saxon cemeteries were customary at this early date, it was more than likely that we should find that he was one of many. But this was not the case. As he lay across the vallum, if there had been

other interments, it was almost certain that the raised and easily dug soil of the vallum would similarly have been selected for them. We therefore cut a longitudinal trench the whole length of the vallum around the earthwork, only missing a few short bits where we were prevented by the trees. Nothing Saxon of any kind rewarded our labour.

Therefore the burial of the Saxon Chieftain was a special event, and the theory in our previous report that the site was selected because of its prominence remains sound ; and, personally, I still believe that he fell in the Saxon siege or conquest of Winchester, about the period of A.D. 550.

5. The Cromwellian and later Occupations.

As Cromwell used the earthwork for parking his artillery during his siege of Winchester, and that lasted only a very few days, much evidence of his short occupation was not to be expected. But previous finds had already proved it, particularly the knight's spur of his date found about 1875 within the enclosure near the present entrance, and a pair of farrier's pincers found by Mr. Cox just east of the eastern ditch and presented by him to the Winchester Museum. To that Museum I am giving the knight's spur, and we all hope that the County Council and Mr. Talbot will find a good home on permanent loan there for all the Battery and Tumulus relics.

The enclosure of the earthwork had been much disturbed, especially on its northern half, during its occupation in the Great War, so our excavations within it were restricted by that reason, but more so by the thickness of the trees. To the Cromwellian period we added very little—such as the remains of a large black glass bottle, and of a knife, small fragments of metal, etc.

At the close of the 18th century during the French wars it is recorded that Hessian troops were quartered here, and it is amusing to think that a small hand bootjack found by Mr. Cox may be a relic used by them for what came to be known to us as Hessian boots.

Looking back on the history of Oliver's Battery, it is curious and interesting to notice that it always played its part at the beginning of events. The site was first occupied at the coming of the men of the Iron Age. It was vacated by the second Belgic invasion, or owing to the foundation of modern Winchester. The earthwork was built by the Romans during their conquest. It was chosen for the burial of a Saxon Chieftain who probably fell during their conquest of Winchester. Cromwell used it when he captured the City. Our first Continental allies here, the Hessian troops, were quartered in it. It was again

chosen as a camp on the outbreak of the Great War, and finally it is the scene of one of the earliest excavations of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society.

We are indebted to the Committee of The Battery Hall for placing it at our service during the work and we were grateful for its shelter. As we provided the labour, the subscription from my friend Mr. Thomas G. Barnett, F.S.A., of Birmingham, towards the cost of the first excavations has covered the actual payments of both and left the Society with a slight balance towards "our next"—wherever that may be.