

THE EXCAVATIONS AT BALKSBURY, 1939.

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BALKSBURY is a comparatively inconspicuous neighbour of Bury Hill, lying half a mile north of it, as has been described above (pp. 291, 293-4, with Fig. 1), in the angle between the Anna and Anton valleys, just within the Andover boundary. Centuries of ploughing have reduced its single rampart and ditch to a faint scarp, perceptible still in such fields as are open, but elsewhere now further obscured by building. Modern archaeological interest in it dates from the description and plan given by Dr. Williams-Freeman in his *Field Archaeology*,¹ published just a quarter of a century ago; more recently it has been discussed by Mr. Alexander Keiller in *Wessex from the Air*.² The form of its name has varied: Dr. Williams-Freeman calls it Bagsbury, and Mr. Keiller quotes Gough and Colt Hoare as calling it Barksbury, but cites also a medieval form 'Bakcleresbury' which makes Barksbury certainly the preferable modern spelling. The principal problem that the site presents is its close proximity to Bury Hill. Neither Dr. Williams-Freeman nor Mr. Keiller is prepared to believe that the two camps were held by hostile forces watching one another, nor is the view that the stronger Bury Hill was meant to guard the weaker Barksbury any more acceptable. Nor, regrettable as it may seem, is there any evidence whatever to support Colt Hoare's attempt³ to quote Polydore Virgil to show that at a critical moment in the campaign of 1016 Edmund Ironside occupied Bury Hill while Barksbury was held by Canute. Mr. Keiller, with the Brown Caterthun and the White Caterthun, Forfarshire, in mind, has suggested a solution in difference of age, Barksbury being an older centre from which the population shifted subsequently up to Bury Hill. But speculation was not enough, and it was left to the spade to seek the true nature—chronological, cultural, even social—of the relationship between the two sites. This was the motive that prompted us to undertake a small trial excavation at Barksbury, for without it the work on the main objective at Bury Hill would have been incomplete. For permission to dig we are indebted to Mr. H. W. Ll. Mostyn, of 'Amria,' Barksbury, who most generously gave us a free hand to do our worst amidst the rich grass of his chicken runs. We take this opportunity to

1. pp. 137-8, 354.

2. pp. 95-6. Several air-photographs of the site were taken in 1929, for making use of which we are indebted to Mr. O. G. S. Crawford as Archaeological Officer of the Ordnance Survey.

3. *Ancient Wiltshire*, Vol. I (1812), 18.

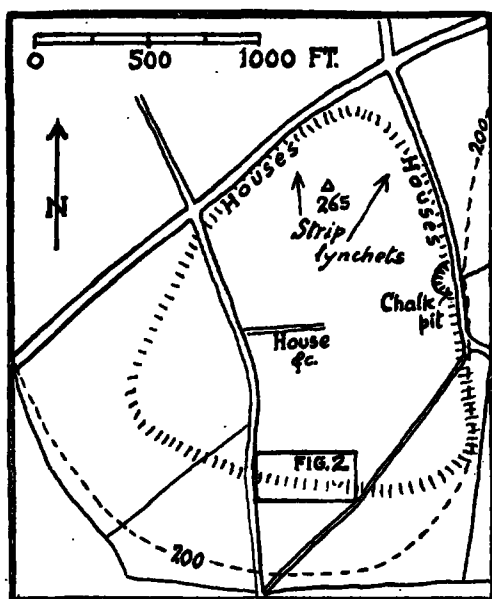


FIG. 1.
PLAN OF BALKSBURY CAMP.

express our warm appreciation of his kindness, and also for his good offices to Mr. A. C. Lupton, of Rooksbury Mill.

In area Bawksbury is a very large camp (Fig. 1), covering as much as 45 acres on a rounded plateau between the two valleys; at its highest point it reaches only 265 feet, and is thus dominated, overshadowed almost, by the 310 feet of Bury Hill. The plan is roughly triangular, the southern side standing above the River Anna and facing Bury Hill, while the eastern overlooks the trout-filled Anton. For more than half its length the west side runs by the Salisbury-Andover Road, which partially overlies its ditch; the east is closely flanked by the little turning to Rooksbury known as Mill Lane. Along both these roads villas have recently been built on or near the line of the ramparts. The Clatford Road cuts across the south-western angle, before dropping steeply to cross the Anna.

The south side and that portion of the camp west of the Clatford Road are still in open grass fields, and although the earthworks show only as a low scarp (1 in 8 and 6 feet high), their single type of construction with single bank and ditch is unmistakable. Two parallel dark lines are visible on the air-photograph inside the

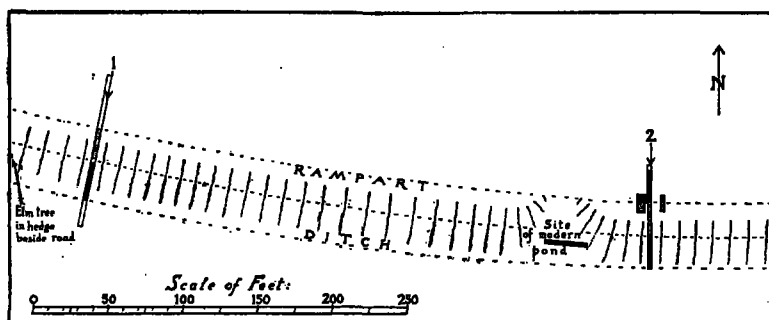


FIG. 2.

BALKSBUURY: PLAN OF THE EXCAVATIONS.

ramparts to the north-east ; these mark a pair of well-defined strip lynchets left by Saxon or Medieval ploughing. The 6in. O.S. map reference is Hants XXIII, N.E. and S.E.

Excavation.

(Plan, Fig. 2 : position inset on Fig. 1).

As our chief concern was to establish the relationship between this camp and its neighbour, investigation of structural features was hardly considered. But there was one simple problem that demanded attention. On his plan Dr. Williams-Freeman marks a gap in the rampart near the centre of the south side, and he mentions it as a possible entrance. A trial trench was therefore cut opposite to this gap in such a way that it must uncover any solid chalk causeway across the ditch. It satisfactorily disproved the existence of an original entrance ; there was no causeway : the soil was a confused mass of chalk, humus and clay to a depth of about 4 feet, at which level lay a stratum of burnt clay and wood. This included a stick that could not be of any considerable antiquity as it had remained fresh although unburnt ; in addition there was a sherd, fairly modern, of brown glazed pottery at 3 feet 6 inches. There can be no doubt, then, that the gap must be due to a comparatively recent disturbance, most probably to the sinking of a pond. This finding is in agreement with the appearance in the air-photograph of a rounded dark patch at this point. The actual position of the entrance remains undiscovered, but a slight difference in alignment between the ramparts on the two sides of the Clatford Road may very possibly mean that the ancient gateway lies below that road's modern metalling.

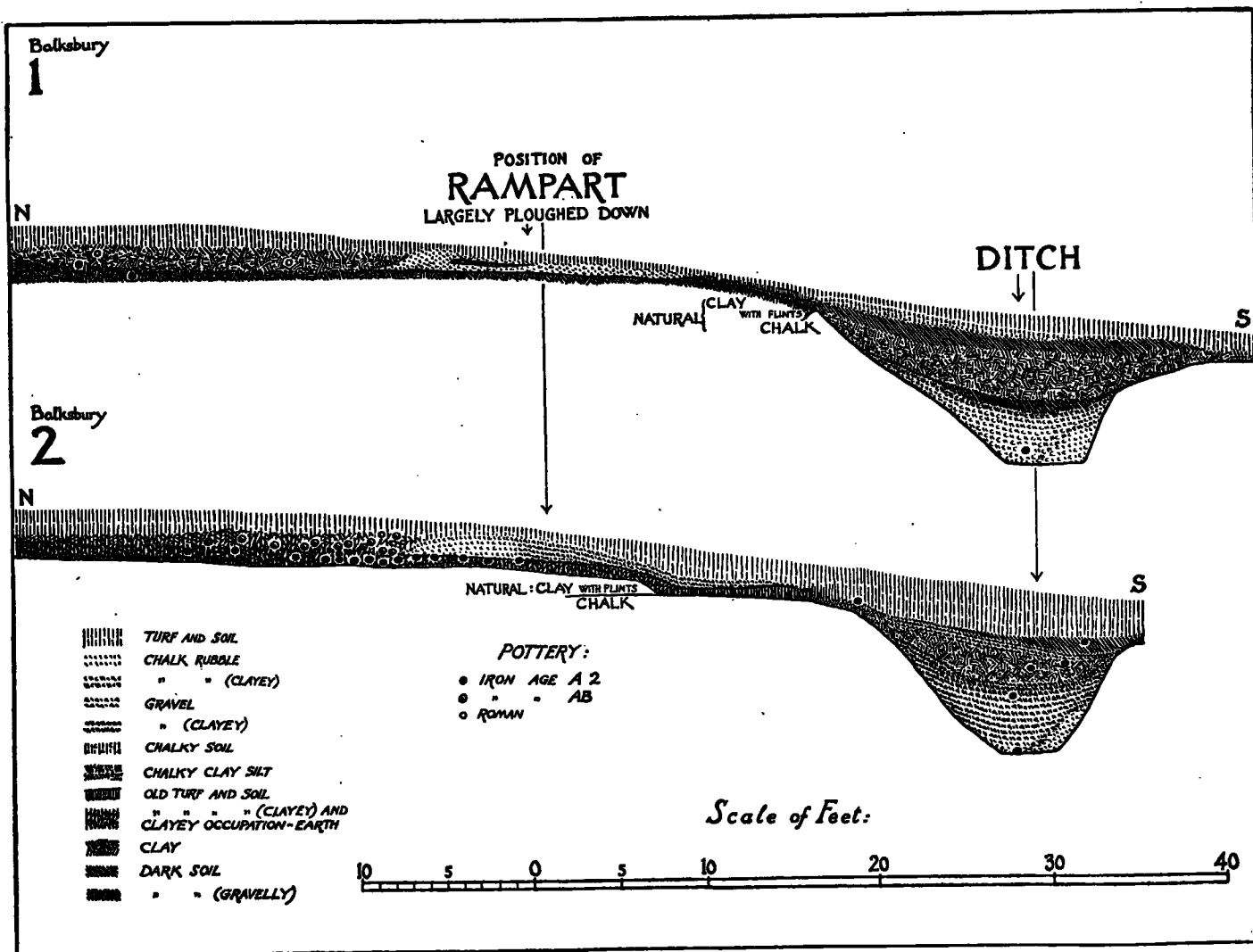


FIG. 3.

[To face p. 341]

BALKSBURY: SECTIONS 1 AND 2 ACROSS THE SOUTHERN DEFENCES.

Sections Across the Rampart. (Fig. 3).

Two trenches were cut across the line of the southern rampart, the main one near the east hedge of the Clatford Road, and the second some 123 yards further east.

Section 1.

A 4ft. trench was cut from well behind the scarp marking the line of the rampart to extend across it and far enough beyond to include the probable position of the ditch. Behind the scarp it was found that a bed of sticky reddish-yellow clay drift overlay the decayed and pocketed chalk surface. On the drift rested the small surviving fragment of bank, showing as a band of chalk about 18 feet in width. The inner tail stands to the height of a foot, but southwards it soon thins away to a few inches, and dies out altogether several feet from the lip of the ditch, a position particularly exposed to the plough. The ditch itself proved to be of unusual form, the inner face sloping quite gently to a flat bottom 4ft. 6in. across, while the outer is extremely steep with a slope of nearly 3 in 1; the greatest depth is nearly 9 feet below the present surface, and the width from lip to lip about 22 feet. The ditch-filling indicates a simple history. After a rapid fall of clean chalk down the precipitous outer face, there was a gradual silting-down of bank material until the position of rest was attained that is marked by the dark band. Subsequent ploughing must have been responsible for bringing down the remaining chalky-clay mixture from the bank, above which a thick humus has accumulated.

Occupation-remains were limited to a very dark deposit at the back of the rampart, overlying the drift and the tail of the bank, and to a little pottery, bone and charcoal just above the ditch bottom. The deposit behind the bank was black with charred wood, and contained a few Romano-British pot-sherds. There were in addition three other sherds stratified below the Romano-British horizon that can be assigned to the same Iron Age category as the pieces from the ditch bottom, namely Iron Age A 2, the period of Camp I at Bury Hill. This trench had thus yielded evidence for an Iron Age occupation round about the period when the earthworks were built, but clearly more material was required before the results could be sufficiently explicit.

Section 2.

This section was made 123 yards east of the first to discover whether the ditch continued in the same flat-bottomed form, and if possible to find more dating-evidence; to economise labour it was not pushed through quite to the weathered extremity of the ditch's outer lip. The bank was found to be rather better preserved than in the other cutting, the base measuring 23 feet in width and continuing almost to the lip of the ditch. In Section I the whole

base of the bank was chalky, but here chalk had been used for the inner 7 feet only, the remainder being composed of large gravel stones, evidently derived from the drift. This outer gravelly portion shows a sudden drop in its base-line, probably due to the dying out of the resistant bed of drift that here again was found to overlie the chalk behind the ramparts. The ditch maintained the same unusual profile noticed in the first section, so that it can safely be presumed that this is the normal form at Balksbury. The filling also is similar and allows the same interpretation, although the dark layer above the primary silt is here missing.

Section 2 fortunately struck an area of considerable prehistoric occupation, represented by a dark deposit behind the ramparts. The vital fact was the continuation of occupation-material, including pottery, under the base of the bank as well as above that level. Although no division of the dark layer was visible behind the bank, it was conclusively proved that the lower part of it, from 24-40ins. below the surface and extending beneath the bank, contained pottery of A 2 type only, while the upper levels, 18-24ins. below the surface and running up over the tail of the bank, yielded ware exclusively of Iron Age AB character.

Stray A sherds occurred at various depths in the ditch filling, where they had doubtless been carried by silting and ploughing. But happily there were also a few tiny but unmistakable A sherds on the chalk bottom below all the primary silt, a position equivalent to that of the more substantial A 2 finds in the ditch in Section I.

It is conceivable that in Section 2 these pieces might have been secondary derivatives from the occupation-deposit under the bank, but as this was confined to the inner half of the bank, away from the ditch, it is extremely unlikely. In the first cutting such a possibility is even more remote, for there the A pottery inside the rampart was exceedingly scanty and did not extend under the bank at all. Thus the evidence from the two cuttings strongly suggests that Balksbury was fortified during a period of Iron Age A 2 occupation, and before the infiltration of Iron Age B influence that gave rise to Iron Age AB—an interpretation that harmonizes with the general historical picture described in the main report, pp. 332-337.

Extensions from Section 2.

In order to obtain more pottery and to confirm the stratification recorded in the section itself, an extension was cut on the west side, straddling the chalky tail of the bank. The occupation deposit continued, again with A 2 sherds at the base and under the bank, and AB forms above.

Another small trench cut parallel with the section, but some 8 feet to the east on the far side of its dump, produced no pottery although a slight dark occupation-layer could still be detected.

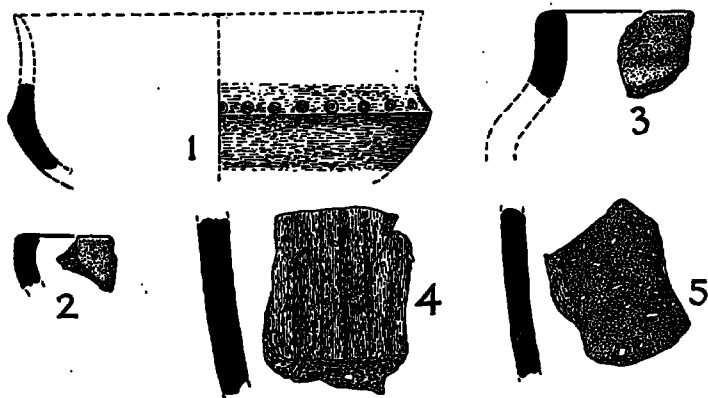


FIG. 4.

BALSBURY POTTERY: 1-4, IRON AGE A2; 5, IRON AGE AB.
(Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.)

The Pottery. (Fig. 4.)

I. Iron Age A2.

Although a considerable number of sherds was found, they were all small and generally gave no hint as to the form of the pots from which they were derived. Only three minute rim-fragments were found—one too small and crumbling for preservation. The ware is generally grey or brownish, occasionally with a warm red-brown tinge; it tends to be soft and sandy and contains variable admixture of large grits; the surface is often rough and uneven.

FROM THE DITCH BOTTOM. *Section 1.* From 9 inches above the chalk bottom came two sherds of coarse dark greyish-brown ware $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick and filled with large white grits. A flat object has been drawn along the surface leaving a series of straight flutings about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide (Fig. 4, 4).

Section 2. Three minute sherds found right on the bottom; they are of soft greyish-brown paste with white grits, only $\frac{1}{4}$ in. in thickness.

FROM THE DITCH SILTING. *Section 2.* Half a dozen sherds found at various levels from 2 to 6 feet below the surface include one small rim-fragment (Fig. 4, 3) of a shouldered pot of the same type as at Quarley Hill and Bury Hill I (pp. 324-6). All are grey-brown and more or less gritty.

FROM INSIDE THE RAMPART. *Section 1.* Three sherds from below the Romano-British occupation-deposit behind the bank; one was lying on the surface of the drift, the others were trodden a few inches into it. One is of soft blackish paste with large white grits and a red external surface; the others are more sandy and harder, and one of them has been burnt to a uniform brick red.

Section 2 and West Extension. Some three dozen sherds found at depths from 24-40 inches below the surface, including nine from under the foot of the bank. The majority are of soft, brown paste with grits, and from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. in thickness; one rim-fragment came from 33 inches deep behind the bank (Fig. 4, 2). One sherd from 30 inches is $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick and bright red flecked with fine white grits and very hard—perhaps accidentally burnt. There are finally six sherds of a smooth-surfaced and almost gritless red-brown ware, including one fragment of the shoulder of a carinated bowl, restorable as in Fig. 4, 1:

above the carination runs a row of circular impressions made with a hollow stalk or the like. This bowl, in a local substitute for 'haematite ware' like Fig. 15 of the Quarley Hill report, is evidently to be connected with the classic bowl series of All Cannings Cross and Meon Hill, and requires no earlier date than Iron Age A 2.

II. Iron Age AB.

FROM BEHIND AND ABOVE THE BANK. *Section 2 and West Extension.* All pottery showing B influence comes from the dark deposit behind and above the tail of the bank in Section 2 and its extension. It was found at from 18 to 24 inches below the surface, which means that its lowest limit exactly coincides with the base line of the bank. Altogether some 85 sherds were recovered, but they are no less diminutive and formless than the A 2 material. The ware is noticeably thinner and harder than the earlier pottery, the surface much smoother, and the grits finer and more evenly distributed (Fig. 4, 5). The great majority of the pieces are of black paste from $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ in. in thickness, conspicuously speckled, particularly on the interior face, with small white grits. Thirty sherds were found together at a depth of 25 inches and form part of a single vessel, unfortunately not restorable. As a whole this AB pottery agrees exactly with that from Bury Hill II (pp. 326-7).

III. Romano-British.

These pieces are too few and nondescript to be dated accurately. They do not strongly suggest a Belgic to Early Romano-British age answering to Bury Hill III (pp. 327-9), and must like the later fragments from Bury Hill (p. 329) be considered strays.

FROM BEHIND THE BANK. *Section I.* Two rim-fragments in buff-coloured paste, one very sandy; found 18 and 22 inches below the surface.

Section 2, West Extension. One small piece of dark grey ware, hard and smooth-textured; found 1 foot below the surface.

Report on the Charcoal.

By FRANCES L. STEPHENS, Department of Botany, British Museum (Natural History).

Ditch Bottom in Section 1 (p. 341).—Oak.
 " " " " 2 (p. 342).—Hazel.

Conclusions.

The trial excavation at Balksbury, modest though it was in scope, threw revealing light on the history of the camp. The presence of Iron Age A 2 pottery below the bank is sufficient proof that this culture was established before the earthworks were constructed; the discovery of A 2 sherds alone on the ditch bottom should mean that it continued after they were completed. It is therefore justifiable to claim that the camp was built during a period of A 2 occupation, but how long this lasted either before or after the building there is not enough evidence to say. The fact that the base-line of the rampart coincides almost exactly with the top of the A 2 occupation behind it encourages the opinion that it did not long outlast the building period. There may have been an enclosure-work of some kind before the main rampart came to

be built—palisaded as at Quarley Hill, or ditched as at Danebury (p. 333). It is reasonable to suppose that the A 2 phase at Balksbury is at least partially contemporary with Bury Hill I, associated with the same culture. If, then, Mr. Keiller's suggestion of a difference of date is not the true explanation of the proximity of the two camps, what in fact was their relationship? A confident answer is impossible, but a reasonable one is that Balksbury was primarily intended for cattle. Its low-lying position close by two rivers, yet on well-drained soil, affords ideal conditions for a cattle-enclosure, whereas the very large area would have been a handicap for military purposes. It is also arguable that the curious form of ditch, while ill-suited for defence against armed attack, would be efficient enough for keeping in and protecting beasts. It has even been asked if it could not have been used for cattle driving. But the strongest argument for the interpretation is based on a Dorset analogy. The relative position of Balksbury and Bury Hill is similar to that of Poundbury and Maiden Castle. Poundbury also is comparatively low-lying and close to a river, and recent work there has convinced the excavators¹ that it was constructed primarily as a cattle enclosure in the days of the Iron Age A 2 occupation of Maiden Castle. We hope therefore that the future will not prove us far wrong if tentatively we put forward a like explanation for our own site. If, as argued above, Bury Hill I was built as a defence against the Continental Celtic invaders of the mid-3rd century B.C., the same danger can have caused the construction of the Balksbury defences, whether or no there was already a palisaded or slighter earthwork enclosure surrounding the site already. A central date for the Balksbury I occupation will then be 250 B.C.

As for the site's later history, it has been shown that there was a re-occupation characterized by Iron Age AB pottery, and this may be presumed to coincide with the building-period of Bury Hill II about 50 B.C. If this was for defence against the Belgae, the circumstances of the first occupation will have repeated themselves. Rather surprisingly, there is no evidence of a Belgic occupation answering to Bury Hill III. Stray Romano-British sherds show that the site was not unused after the Roman conquest, but in Saxon or Medieval times it had passed under the strip-cultivator's plough.

1. We are indebted to Dr. R. E. M. Wheeler and Miss K. M. Richardson for this information. The Report on the Poundbury excavations will be published shortly in the *Proceedings of the Dorset Field Club*.