

AN EARTHWORK IN PRESRAW WOOD, EXTON, HAMPSHIRE

By B. T. PERRY

THIS brief note and accompanying plan (Fig. 1) relate to a previously unrecorded earthwork in Presraw Wood in the parish of Exton, Hants. (N.G.R. SU 57752310).

The earthwork, which lies in an area of recently cleared scrub, is cut through by 'Cathedral Walk', formerly an avenue of tall beech trees. It was during the cutting of these and the clearing of the land on either side of the avenue that the earthwork was discovered a few years ago by Major John A. Pelly, the owner of the land. The ground to the northeast of the avenue has been replanted with beech and firs and this part of the earthwork has been largely destroyed save for a stretch of its northern side.

The greater part of the earthwork, however, lies to the southwest of the avenue, and here the northwest corner, the western side and the southwest corner of the earthwork are still clearly visible in the rough undergrowth. The latter corner is particularly well marked and is only a little short of a perfect right angle. Here the original form of the earthwork is most recognisable with a distinct internal bank and an overall measurement of rampart and ditch of about 35 ft.

The southern side of the earthwork is well marked for a distance of about 300 ft, and seems to have been laid out in a straight line. Of the eastern side only a small portion is still visible, but it can be seen cutting Cathedral Walk. Little trace of the earthwork can be seen to the north of the avenue, between *x* and *y* (Fig. 1) and the corner *z* is difficult to distinguish in the undergrowth. The earthwork is therefore no longer complete, but appears to have occupied between three and four acres. The form of that part of the earthwork which is best preserved suggests a Roman date, and Romano-British pottery can be picked up in mole hills both inside and outside the enclosure, at *p* and *q*.

The earthwork lies on the top of a spur projecting southwards from the well marked ridge which runs from Telegraph Hill east of Winchester, to Beacon Hill, southwest of Warnford. This ridge is to be regarded as of potential strategic significance and the spur in question commands an excellent view to the south. The earthwork seems to have been sited with an eye to defence.

Defensive earthworks of the Roman period are rare in Hampshire, and Iron Age hillforts do not appear to have been re-used as such. The excavations at Bury Hill revealed some Roman material but no structural changes were dated to this period (Hawkes 1940, 330). Roman occupation took place within Tidbury Ring, though there is no evidence that the earthwork itself was in use, or that occupation was early (Milner 1944, 38). A number of hillforts have yielded surface finds of Roman material, e.g. Old Winchester Hill (Williams-Freeman 1915, 391) but there is nothing to suggest that the earthworks performed a defensive function at this time.

The only possible parallel to Presraw Wood within Hampshire appears to be Oliver's

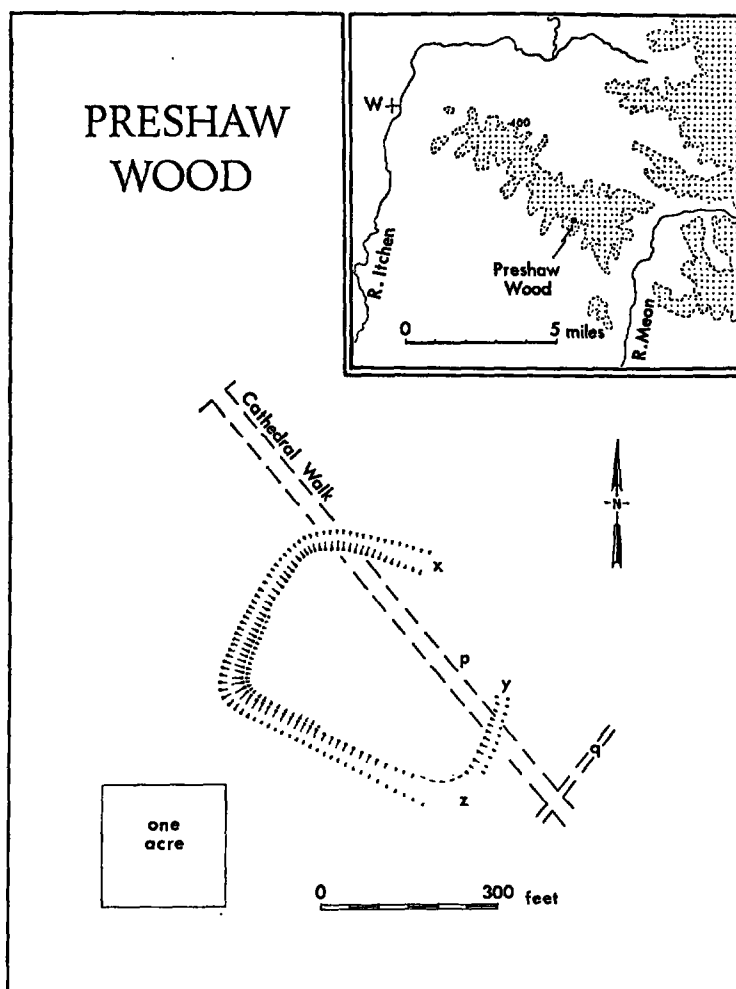


Fig. 1.

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Battery, Winchester, (not to be confused with Oliver's Battery, Old Alresford, Hants.) a straight-sided 2 acre earthwork with rounded corners where excavation suggested that it was constructed and briefly occupied early in the Roman period (Andrew 1932, 7).

The similarity between Presraw Wood and Oliver's Battery in terms of appearance, size and siting, and the surface evidence of Romano-British coarse pottery at Presraw Wood suggest that this previously unrecorded site may represent a defended earthwork of the early Roman period.

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(*Note written 1968*).