

The Early Iron Age Camp on Bozedown, Whitchurch, Oxon

By PETER WOOD

BOZEDOWN camp at Whitchurch (Nat. Grid ref. 41/643783) stands on a spur of the Chiltern Hills about 200 ft. above the left bank of the River Thames, which here flows through the Goring Gap. To the south the ground falls steeply, but northwards the surface remains more or less level. This part of the Chiltern dip slope is covered by a drift, which forms part of the plateau gravels and consists of red loamy clay and coarse sand with abundant flints and Bunter pebbles. It is not a water-bearing rock, and water supply probably presented severe problems when the camp was occupied, as it did in more recent times before piped water was available to the residents of Whitchurch Hill.

A measured plan of the camp was made in July 1953 and it was found possible to trace the rampart for a length rather greater than is shown on the 25 in. O.S. map (Oxon. LV, 8). Profiles were also taken of representative sections of the defences (FIG. 2). The enclosure has an area of 58 acres. Its north-west corner stands at 430 ft. O.D. and its southern edge at about 325 ft. O.D. Roughly half the perimeter consists of the rampart and an external ditch. The rampart is for the most part nearly completely ploughed down, and the ditch filled in; but in two places (to the north-west and north-east) both are preserved in belts of woodland. A gap in the rampart to the north-west has the appearance of an entrance; but the right-angled corner formed here is out of character with the rest of the earthwork. The southern semi-circumference lacks either rampart or ditch; it is marked by the shoulder of the spur, whose slope appears to have been increased by scarping. On the east side there is no trace of the rampart in a recent coniferous plantation, but it reappears to the south, on the 375 ft. contour. It is possible that the original entrance of the camp may have been at this point, at the head of a dry valley. A road runs from the foot of this valley across the Thames flood-plain to the river bank;¹ and there is a tradition that horses once were waded across at this point, but there is no trace of a ford today. Two benches in the chalk are noticeable at the head of the dry valley, about 10 ft. above its floor.

¹ This road has been a common way from time immemorial. I would like to record my thanks for this information, and for much help in other directions, to Sir Charles and Lady Rose of Hardwick House.

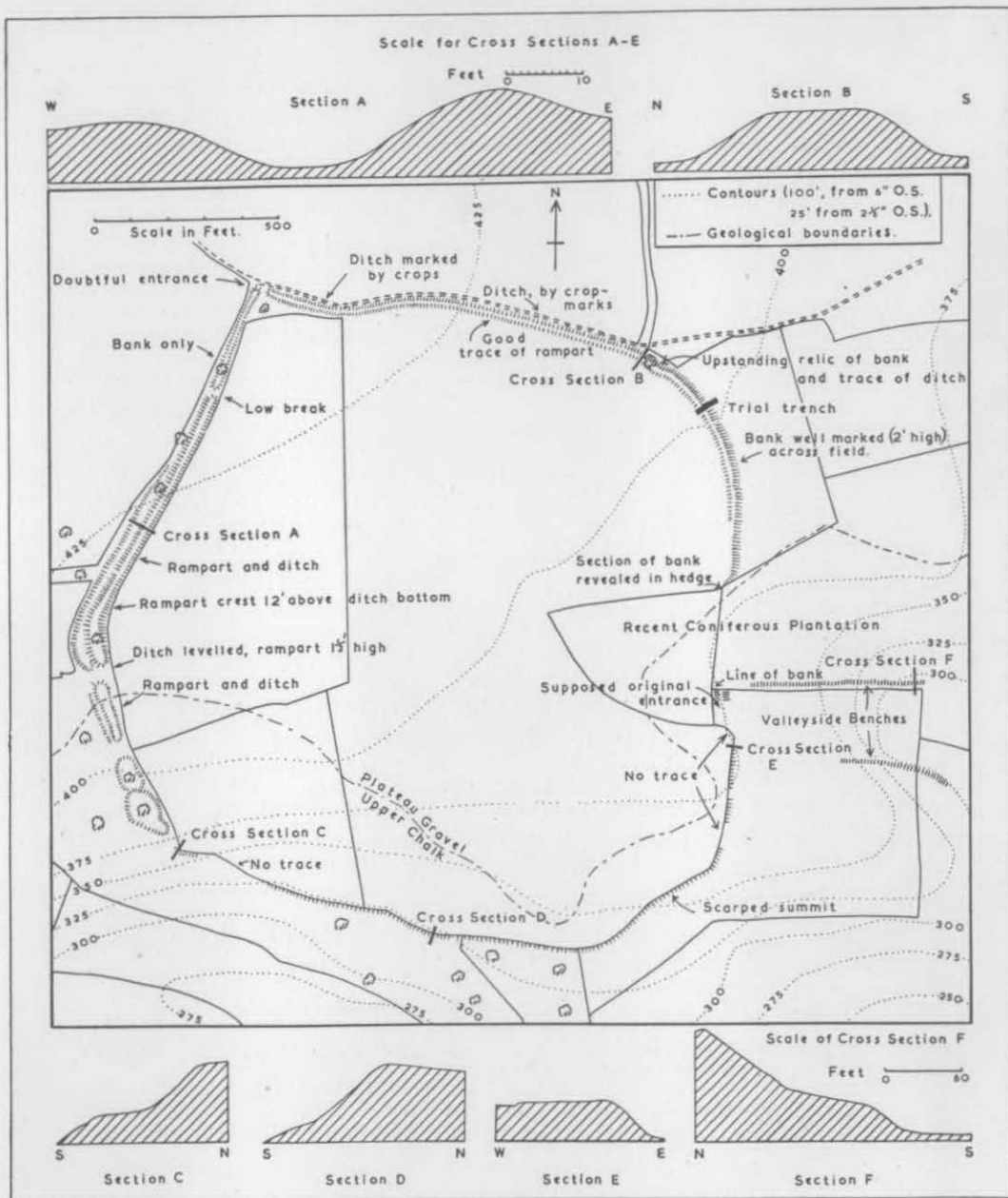


FIG. 2
 EARLY IRON AGE CAMP, BOZEDOWN, WHITCHURCH, OXON.
 Plan and sections

Based on 25in. O.S. map by permission of H.M. Stationery Office

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Little attention has been given in the past to Bozedown camp; no archaeological finds have been reported from its long-ploughed interior and reference to it is meagre.² Further exploration seemed desirable, and an excavation was undertaken in October 1953³. A four-foot wide trench was dug across the rampart and ditch to the north-east with the following results.

STRATIFICATION (FIG. 3)

The undisturbed⁴ subsoil consisted of a thin layer of fine yellow sand overlying coarse red sand which was mottled superficially by pockets of grey

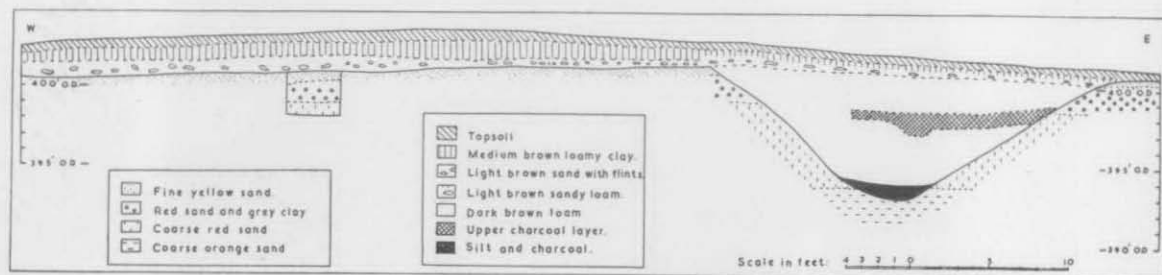


FIG. 3
EARLY IRON AGE CAMP, BOZEDOWN, WHITCHURCH, OXON.
South-facing section of rampart and ditch

clay. Above it, the rampart remained as material spread by the plough, showing the following stratification from the top downwards:

1. Topsoil.
2. Medium brown loamy clay.
3. Light brown sand containing a large number of flint nodules and fragments and specimens of box ironstone.⁵

² Rev. J. Slater in his *History of the Parish of Whitchurch, Oxfordshire* (London, 1895), p. 7, considered it to be Roman in origin and four acres in size. J. C. Smith, who visited the site in 1910 concluded that it was a British camp, in a letter from which Mr. C. W. Phillips, Archaeology Officer of the Ordnance Survey, has very kindly supplied this reference.

³ Though I am chiefly indebted for cooperation to my associates in the Department of Geography, University of Reading, considerable assistance came from students of several other departments in the University, all of which I wish to acknowledge most cordially. Permission to dig was readily granted by the owner, Mr. R. E. M. Warner, Butler's Farm, Whitchurch Hill. Encouragement and very much help in organization and interpretation were given by Mr. W. A. Smallcombe (Director) and Mr. G. C. Boon of Reading Museum; and by Mr. D. B. Harden, Keeper of the Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and Mr. H. J. Case, also of the Ashmolean Museum. The excavation costs were covered by a grant from the Research Board, Reading University.

⁴ Speaking archaeologically: geologically, this drift is very disturbed.

⁵ A natural formation, though it sometimes bears a superficial resemblance to iron slag.

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The layers of the ditch proper, beneath the topsoil, were :

4. Partly-leached B-horizon of light brown sandy loam, which appeared to consist of layers (2) and (3) mingled and spread by the plough.
5. Dark brown loam, undifferentiated throughout its depth, but containing (6) spread of charcoal.
7. Fine silt and charcoal.

The bottom of the ditch was found to have been dug in coarse orange sand.

THE FINDS⁶

From the base of layer 5 came about $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of fragmentary sherds, all less than one square inch in superficial area, of moderately hard hand-made

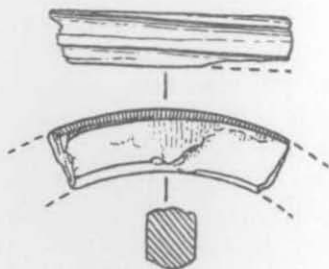


FIG. 4

EARLY IRON AGE CAMP, BOZEDOWN, WHITCHURCH, OXON.

Fragment of shale bracelet. Scale: $\frac{1}{4}$

flint-gritted ware, presumably Iron Age ; one long flake of dark grey flint ; one flake of light grey flint with used edge ; and a fragment of a shale bracelet (FIG. 4).⁷

From layer 3 came about $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of similar sherds to those noted above.

From layer 6 came about $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of baked clay and 2 lbs. of medieval sherds (see Mr. Jope's report below).

From layer 5, above layer 6, came a tanged and shouldered iron blade, $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, kindly examined by the Sheffield City Museum and dated to the period 1550-1660.

⁶ Most of the sherds have been presented to the Ashmolean Museum, but a few, together with the fragment of shale bracelet, remain in the Department of Geography, Reading University.

⁷ Cf. e.g. M. E. Cunnington, *The Early Iron Age inhabited site at All Cannings Cross Farm, Wiltshire* (1923), pl. xxvi, no. 5.

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DATING

There was little doubt before excavation that the monument was of Early Iron Age date, and the discovery of the sherds and of the shale bracelet in layer 5, and of the sherds in layer 3 tends to confirm this opinion. In isolation these sherds would not have been helpful for dating. They do not look Belgic or Roman, and are certainly not medieval, so that it is possible that the builders and early occupiers belonged to the Early Iron Age A culture.

APPENDIX

THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY (FIG. 5)

By E. M. JOPE

This interesting homogeneous group of pottery from an area at present rather thinly represented in medieval pottery finds, dates from the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. In many features the sherds may be compared with those of pottery found in 1952 in the late Saxon pits under Oxford Castle Mound which is pre-1070 (*Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1952-53), 83 ff.). We note especially the plain out-turned rim-flanges, with sometimes a light finger-tip ornament (no. 2) on the outer edge: the deeper finger-tip ornament of no. 3 seems to be a development of the twelfth century. The pottery of this group has, however, nothing in common with the pagan Saxon tradition: it is the style of pottery which was developing in this area towards the end of the Christian Saxon period, the tradition from which most features of the full medieval styles developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There are a number of base angles preserved, and it seems improbable that there are represented here any cooking vessels of globular form, such as are common in the late Saxon period south of the Thames (e.g. Abinger, Pevensey, Old Sarum; *Archaeol. Journ.*, cvii (1952), 35; *Antiq. Journ.*, xv (1935), 174).

There appear to be represented here at least nine cooking-pots and one jug. There are rims of eight cooking-pots, and a large part of the base of another. Of these rims, two show light finger-tipping. Some shoulders (nos. 5, 7) also show a characteristic profile of this period. The ware varies from a sandy fabric with practically no crushed shell (no. 5), to ones in which much crushed flint and shell (or other calcium carbonate material) has been added to the clay, the latter having dissolved out on weathering in the soil to give a digestive-biscuit appearance. Contemporary pottery of this appearance has been observed, particularly in north-east Hampshire. The colours

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vary at random from blacks and greys, fired or cooked under reducing conditions, to browns and ochreous orange, fired or cooked in the presence of air.

The jug (no. 1) is again quite at home in the late Saxon tradition. It is represented by a lip of a spout and a few body fragments. It is of a fairly hard pale buff to grey ware, with grey core, containing a little crushed shell, which has hardly been leached out. Under the lip are two applied strips of clay,

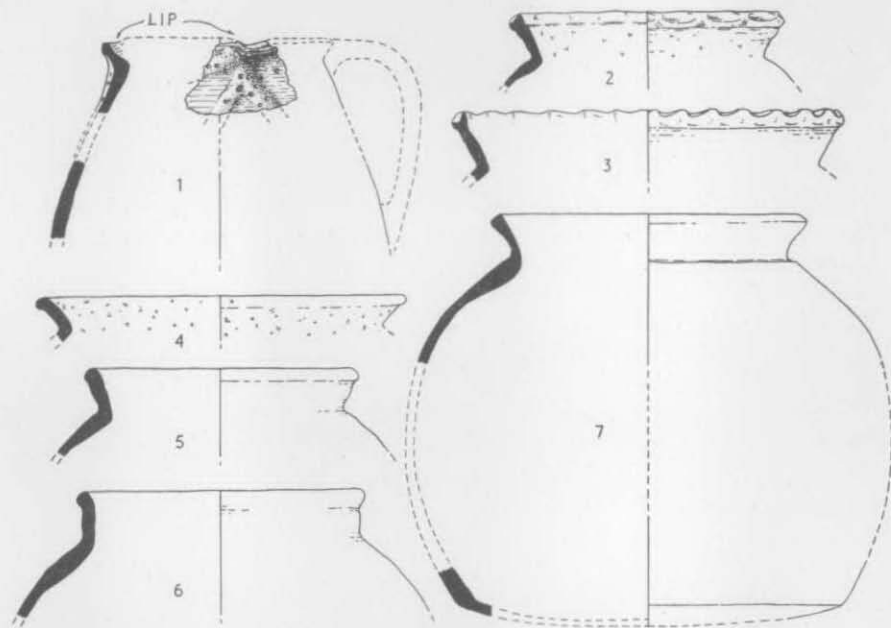


FIG. 5
EARLY IRON AGE CAMP, BOZEDOWN, WHITCHURCH, OXON.
Medieval pottery. Scale: $\frac{1}{4}$

decorated with jab-marks ; the strips are applied diagonally and meet under the lip. This style of decoration may be compared with that of other jugs and storage-jars of the period. Insufficient remains to reconstruct the shape of the jug, but it was apparently tall, and probably baggy, but not globular.

There are also a few small fragments of another vessel in which the ware contains more coarse crushed flint. Vessels of this ware were also represented among the material from the pits under Oxford Castle Mound. There is also one fragment which, by its closer textured sandy fabric, is probably thirteenth century.

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This pottery may be regarded as roughly contemporary with the settlements described in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Here Whitchurch was entered as a single manor of 10 hides, and although the nucleus of the settlement was evidently at the present church and village site beside the river, this entry probably included the outlying settlement of Hardwick, further down the river, and, it now appears, some habitation up on the chalk downs as well. The mapping of Domesday population under vills only gives a very general idea of its distribution in the eleventh century, and the accumulation of such habitation-evidence as the pottery described here from Bozedown is a contribution to a reconstruction of a more detailed picture of the distribution of the population through the countryside at this time. It is of interest here to be able to demonstrate that the population of a manor was not all concentrated in a nucleated settlement, but that some of the people seem to have lived in isolated groups at a distance, either to perform specialized functions (e.g. Hardwick), or bringing new land under cultivation on the edge of the woodland or waste, as perhaps here at Bozedown.