

## Maes Knoll Camp, Dundry, Somerset (N.G.R. ST 6066)

### I. TRIAL EXCAVATIONS, 1958

By

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This note is to record the digging of two test-holes at the south end of Maes Knoll Camp, which lies 1 mile south-east of Bristol at the east end of the Dundry Oolite ridge, an outlier of the Cotswolds. The holes were dug to determine whether the extensive platform at the south end of the camp was natural or not and to find some dating evidence for the camp. The two test-holes, A and B, are shown on the plan of the camp (*Fig. 1*). Each pit was 4 ft. square and they were 44 ft. apart from centre to centre; A was near the south-east scarp towards the back of the platform, and B was nearer to its south-western and steepest end.

The platform was shown to be of artificial construction, some 4 ft. thick, at test-hole B. Fifteen potsherds were found, but they are too small to give any definite dating evidence: fourteen of them could be matched from local Iron Age A groups;\* several of these were deep in the platform and suggest that this is a secondary addition to the primary occupation of the camp. The other sherd was near the surface of the mound in test-hole B, and it is probably part of the cordon of a pot or of a sharp carination. Its form and fabric could be matched from the sub-Belgic pottery of the district, e.g., the Hole Ground Complex at Wookey Hole (ApSimon, 196-), and is likely to be datable to the first century A.D. More pottery is, however, needed before these suggestions for dating can be strengthened into definite evidence.

#### DETAILS OF TEST-HOLES AND SUGGESTED INTERPRETATION

A. Layer 1: Turf and buff-brown topsoil: 0-6 in. No finds. (Post-Iron Age soil accumulation.)

Layer 2: Weathered oolite and yellow-brown clayey soil: 6-30 in., which was maximum depth reached. Sherds 1-3, fragments of Pennant sandstone at 30 in. (Make-up of platform.)

B. Layer 1: Turf and buff-brown topsoil: 0-7 in. No finds (as in A).

Layer 2: Yellow-brown, clayey soil, small fragments of oolite: 7-24 in. Sherds 4-7 (7 is the sub-Belgic one) and two pieces of animal bone. (Latest "occupation level" on surface of platform, and disturbed top make-up.)

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\* Iron Age A potsherds have recently been found by Mr. K. J. Barton in his excavations at Pickwick, a site just below the south scarp of Dundry, some 400 yd. west of Maes Knoll.

- Layer 3: Weathered, small oolite and yellow-brown clayey soil: 24-50 in. Sherds 8-14, five pieces of animal bone. (Make-up of platform.)  
 Layer 4: As layer 3, but slightly darker with flecks of charcoal: 50-62 in. Sherd 15. (Primary "occupation layer" under platform and disturbed surface of natural.)  
 Layer 5: Yellow clayey soil, yellow clay, and large pieces of weathered oolite: below 62 in. (Weathered surface of natural bedrock.)

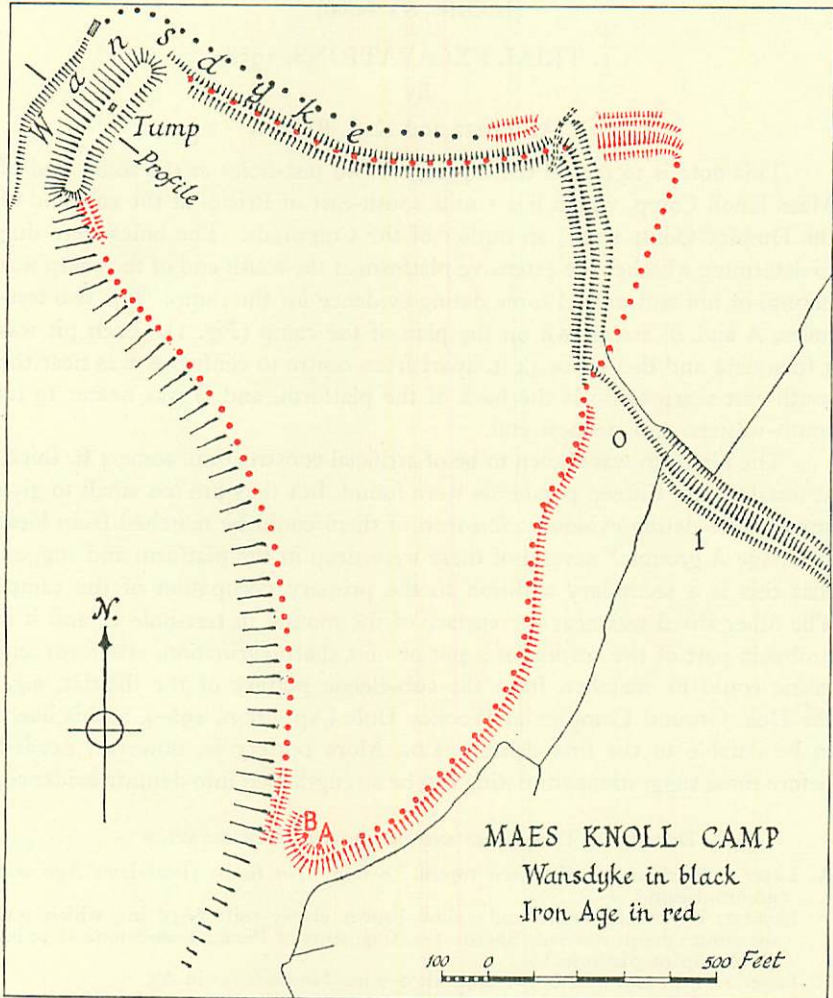


Fig. 1.—Map drawn by H. Freke. Based on Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright reserved.

#### DESCRIPTION OF POTSDHERDS

- 1-3. Hard, compact, grey with buff surfaces: very finely crushed grit, probably calcite.

- 4-6. As Nos. 1-3, but with thicker buff surfaces.  
 7. Fragment of cordon or sharp carination: black ware, finely pitted where grits have weathered from surface: some white grit in body, coarser than previous sherds.  
 8-14. As Nos. 1-3, but two sherds are of darker grey, and one is fired to a reddish surface.  
 15. Larger sherd ( $1\frac{3}{4} \times 1$  in.): as 1-3 but more soapy surface, due, perhaps, to lower firing temperature.

## 2. THE IRON AGE DEFENCES AND WANSDYKE

By

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The descriptions and conclusions which follow are based on a series of visits made to Maes Knoll, mainly during the winter months when the undergrowth was withered. The last visit was on Dec. 3rd, 1962, a day when the low winter sunshine threw everything into sharp relief.

Maes Knoll has a roughly triangular shape with east and west sides and a northern base. The north-west corner is truncated by Maes Knoll Tump. The camp covers about 30 acres. It has been briefly described by other writers. Seyer (1821, Vol. 1, p. 89) describes outworks, though these are natural scarps altered by ploughing; that is, they are lynchets. Major and Burrow (1926, *Fig.* 28) have elaborated Seyer's drawing but do show the outwork to the north-east, but the account is typically confused. More recently the site has been discussed by A. and C. Fox in "Wansdyke Reconsidered" (1958). Both strategically and tactically the position is a very strong one, lying at the south-east end of a spur of the Dundry ridge.

A common route of approach is along the top of the spur from the west to where one encounters, straddling the neck of the spur, the tremendous outer ditch and bank known as Maes Knoll Tump. The ditch has a remarkably sharply cut outer edge and looks relatively modern. It has a flat base and a steep outer face. The slope up the side of the Tump is also very steep. A levelled profile across the work, made just south of the O.S.  $\Delta$  at ST 59866624, is given in *Fig.* 2. The bottom of the ditch is now 17 ft. below the level of the natural surface to the west. The top of the Tump is 48 ft. above the bottom of the ditch and 21 ft. above the level of the interior of the camp. The overall width is 200 ft. Approximately in the centre of the top of the Tump is a small ruined building, 12 ft. north to south and 8 ft. east to west. It looks comparatively modern. The north end of the ditch has some ruined buildings in it, and the extreme north end has been almost levelled by spoil derived from the north end of the Tump. This cutting shows that the great mound is apparently of simple dump construction, but the section is far from complete.

Along the curving north side of the camp a much ploughed-down bank, still in places up to 4 ft. high by 20 ft. wide, can be followed to the north-east