

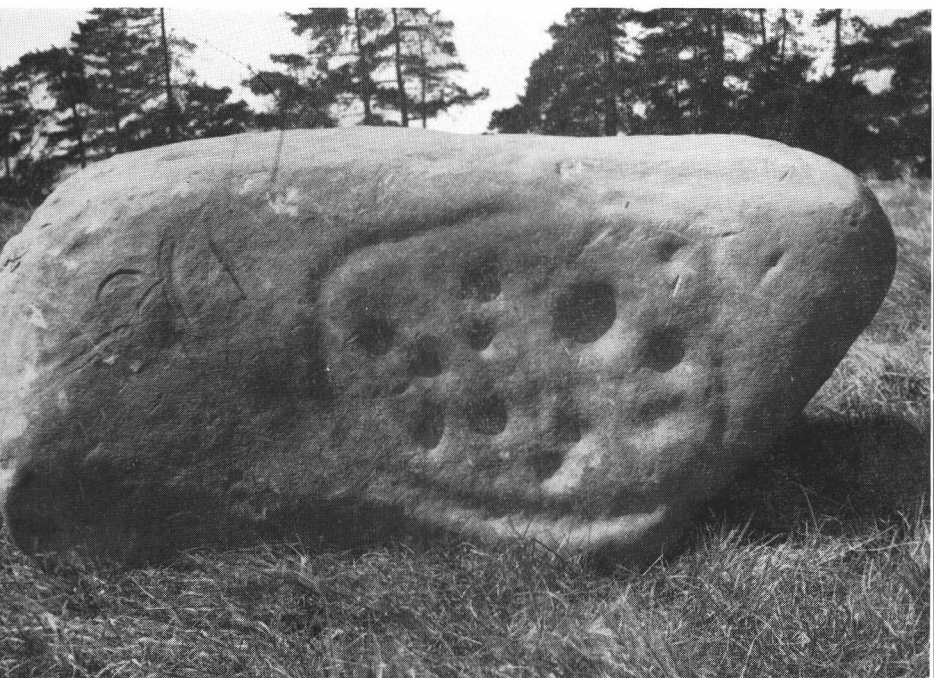
## AN IRON AGE FORT AT BALL CROSS FARM, BAKEWELL.

By JOHN STANLEY.

I N the spring of 1952 I approached Mr. R. W. P. Cockerton and asked him if he had any work in which a group of schoolboys could help. He suggested that an investigation should be made of a small earthwork at Ball Cross Farm on Calton Hill, east of Bakewell. Nothing whatever was known about it and Mr. Cockerton thought it would be worth while to cut a trial trench through it. He had himself previously dug in the ditch with only one assistant, Mr. Geoffrey Sellors, and coming up against a large quantity of stone, had realised that a considerable labour force would be necessary to achieve any result. This has been provided by boys of Stockport Grammar School, who have worked on the site for a total of eight weeks in the last three years. Particular praise is due to these schoolboys, many of them very young, for the enthusiasm and care with which they have worked.

The site is a small Iron Age fort about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  acres in extent overlooking Bakewell from the east, which had been first noticed by Mr. John Taylor, a London publisher, when on holiday visiting a brother at Bakewell in 1821. Three stages of occupation have been identified. The first probably ended with the Roman advance northward when the fort was destroyed. There was a later patching up on a much reduced scale possibly later in the Roman period. Finally there was a small home-stead in one corner about the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The principal remains are of the Iron Age rampart and its ditch. The fort was surrounded by a strong stone



*Photo by R. W. P. Cockerton.*

THE LARGE CUP AND RING STONE.

Found in the ditch, section 1, the Ball Cross Fort, Bakewell.

wall which, at the end of the occupation was thrown down into the ditch. For about a hundred and fifty feet from the north-east corner there is a counter-scarp bank also with a stone core.

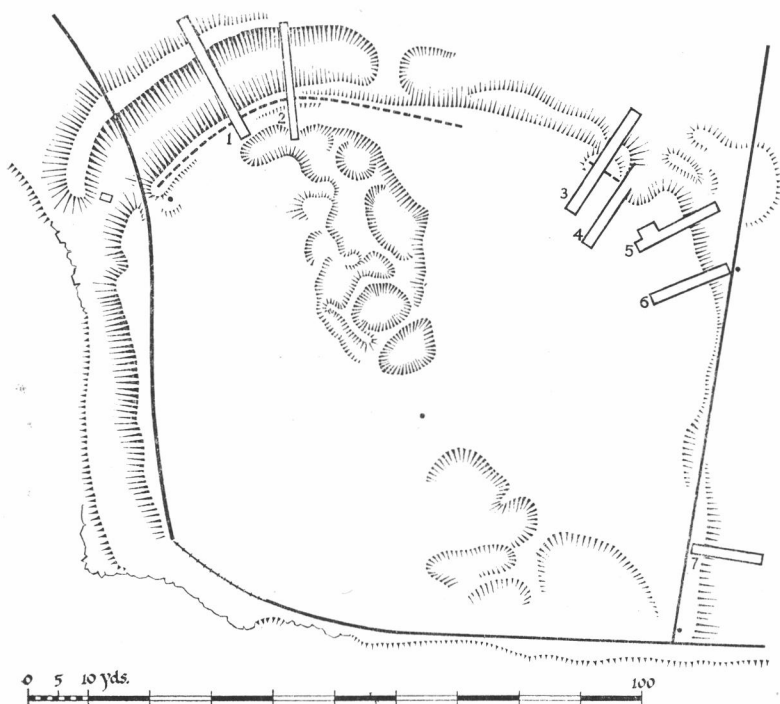


FIG. 1.—Plan of the Iron Age Fort at Ball Cross Farm, Bakewell.

(The solid lines represent field walls.)

Along the line of the wall and resting on its foundations there are remains of a second, weaker, wall. For some distance these stones, smaller and more carefully dressed than the earlier remains, show on the surface of the ground. On the south side this wall stood on a low bank outside the original wall and close to the edge of the ditch.

About half-way along the line of the bank a small break proved to be the site of a carefully paved floor with which was associated a beaker of Cistercian ware of the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The principal phase is clearly datable to the Iron Age by a quantity of very crude domestic pottery all found in a comparatively small area near the medieval intrusion.

Three quern-stones were found, two of them parts of saddle-querns and the third a flat upper stone of a rotary.

Perhaps the most remarkable finds are three cup stones which were clearly stratified with the main wall structure.

### THE SITE AND THE STRUCTURE.

The site is just below the 900 foot contour at Ordnance Survey Nat. Grid Ref. 43/228691, on a spur of Calton Hill overlooking Bakewell from the east. The fort lies three miles south-east of Fin Cop and four miles north of Castle Ring, both of which are clearly visible from it.

Behind the site the ground rises to an oval enclosure called Moatless Plantation which may itself be a mutilated earthwork and which may well be worth investigation.<sup>1</sup> The fort itself occupies half of a small pasture and is about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  acres in extent. The two sides facing the valley are precipitous and appear to be undefended but it may be that some land has been lost here by erosion since ancient times.

About 200 feet from the tip of the headland along its western edge a clearly marked bank, ditch and counter-scarp emerge from the wood and continue for about 160 feet into the field, the ditch diminishing in depth. The bank continues in a less well-marked form and describes a rough horse-shoe curve until it meets the cliff edge at the south-east corner about 240 feet from the tip of the headland. For about three-quarters of this distance the ditch is completely silted up and the bank rises in a gentle slope about four feet above the level of the field. The bank does not rise above the interior level which rises very gently to the centre of the area from all sides. This

<sup>1</sup> Called MOTELowe in 1344 (Hardwick Charters.)

slightly raised headland is the best point on the Calton ridge for commanding the Wye valley and it also immediately overlooks the ancient trackway which runs east from Bakewell.

Inside the enclosure are two groups of more or less regular depressions. Several were opened without result and it seems very likely that they are the marks of ancient quarrying. The sandstone lies very near to the surface.

Seven sections have been cut through the defences of which numbers 1, 3, 5, and 7 are illustrated here.

The first to be cut was number 2 which was a tentative trial trench. It soon became clear that the site would repay further work. In the bank we found the foundations of a stone wall going down from the surface to a depth of four feet. It was about five feet thick at the base and three at the top and consisted of very large roughly quarried stones with a facing on the inside of smaller flat stones. Resting on this foundation and protruding through the surface were foundations consisting of smaller and more carefully squared stones which certainly looked as though they belonged to a later phase. This was clarified when we cut trench number 7. Stones of various sizes were scattered on the slope in front of the wall and from a depth of about one foot to the bottom of the ditch five feet further down was a tumbled mass of stones which had obviously come from the wall on the bank. The stones near the top were smallish, similar to those of the dry-stone walls of Derbyshire, but as we dug deeper they became far bigger, often as much as two people could lift. Near the top the stones were embedded in earth but as we went down cavities appeared between them while at the bottom there was no soil at all, merely a slimy coating of silt on the undersides of the stones. There was no primary silt in the bottom, probably because of the slope of the ditch towards the wood, which was steep at this point. A worked flake of flint was found in the bottom of the ditch and another just inside the wall. Also inside the wall at a depth of about three feet was a three inch thick bed of charcoal covering an area of about two square feet. Near the bottom of the ditch was found the first of the cup stones.

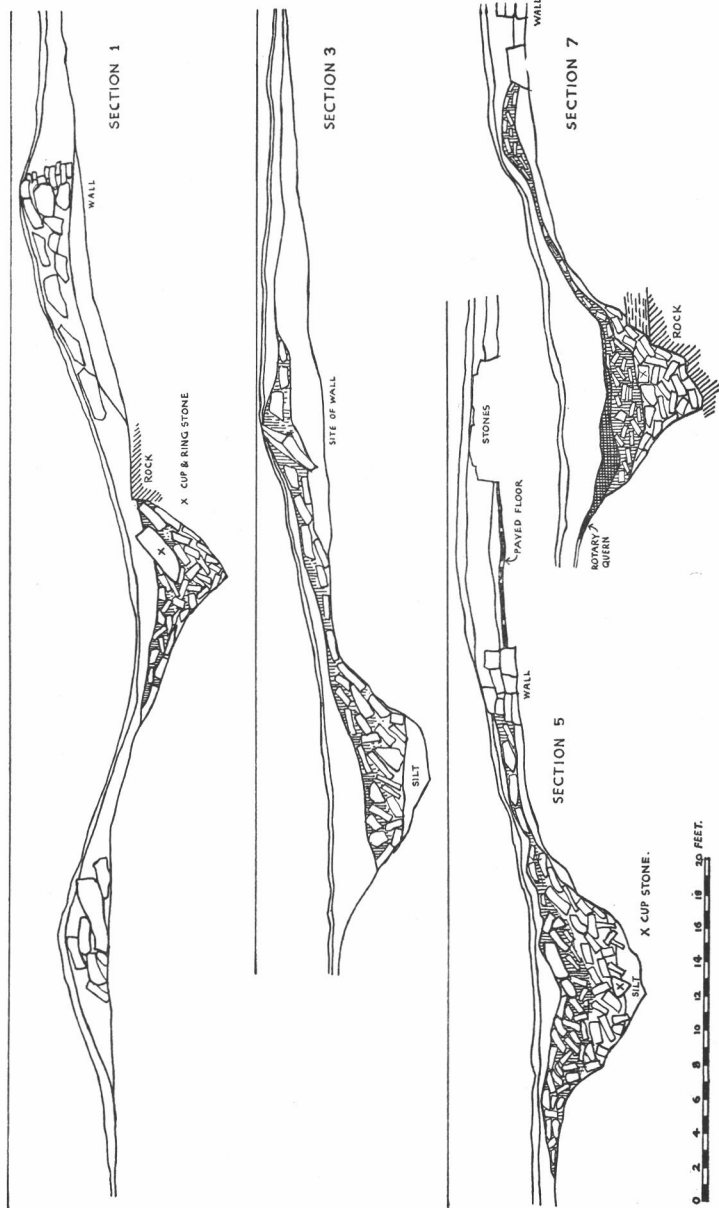


FIG. 2.—THE BALL CROSS FORT, BAKEWELL,  
Sections through the bank and ditch.

Section number 1 was cut later in order to obtain a complete section through bank, ditch and counter-scarp. A similar pattern was revealed. Upcast from the ditch was probably used at this point to build up the ground on which the wall was built which has here a considerable slope. There was an outcrop of rock at the inner edge of the ditch. Like the main rampart, the counter-scarp bank had a core of very large stones. Again there was no appreciable silt in the ditch because of the good drainage. The distance from the main wall to the top of the counter-scarp was 43 feet and there was a rise of 12 feet from the bottom of the ditch to the existing top of the rampart.

Here we made our most exciting find. About a foot below the surface in the ditch we came on a very large boulder which was only lifted with the aid of a tractor. It bears a remarkable decoration consisting of twelve cup-like depressions enclosed in an irregular cartouche.

Neither of these two trenches produced any pottery.

Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 were cut in the central region of the rampart where its features were least well-defined on the natural surface. The ditch does not show on the surface at all at this point.

With the exception of section 5 this excavation revealed complete destruction of the rampart wall. The ditch was in each case filled with the complex of stones previously observed and had a scattering of similar stones on the berm. The bottom of the ditch contained a layer of slimy grey silt to a depth of from 9 to 18 inches. This silt contained a great deal of charcoal and some traces of animal bones unfortunately too decayed and fragmentary for preservation.

In section 5 four courses of masonry were still in position, the wall being about 4 feet 6 inches thick at the base. Immediately inside the wall we found a roughly paved floor at a depth of about two feet, extending ten feet towards the interior of the fort and ending in a complex of stones rising to within a few inches of the surface. This complex of stones about three feet wide extended diagonally across the five foot wide trench and may be the perimeter wall of a house. Not enough of this

structure has been uncovered at present to identify it clearly but the objects associated with it, pottery, rubbing stones, etc., make it very likely that it was a habitation. Two or three inches of black soil on the floor contained a very large quantity of charcoal fragments. One stone was lifted and revealed about four inches of similar charcoal laden soil resting on the undisturbed ground level.

The lateral extension of this section to uncover the whole floor and to expose a long section of the rampart will be the next task of the excavators.

With the exception of one small rim sherd, all the pottery was found in these four sections, a few pieces in the ditch but the bulk of it on either side of the rampart wall at a depth of from ten inches to two feet. Several pieces were in the crannies between the stones of the floor.

The third cup stone was found in section 5 right at the bottom with its point embedded in the primary silt. A fragment of a quern of rather indefinite shape came from the ditch filling but the depth is not known as it was not recognised until later.

Section 7 near the south-east corner was in many ways the most informative of all. It was in this section that the two phases of the rampart were clearly recognised. The bottom of the ditch was some eight feet below the surface, the last 2 feet 6 inches being rock-cut.

Because of the position of the field wall only the outer face of the rampart wall, standing three courses high, was uncovered. About 18 inches in front of this was a large stone resting on the original surface and extending two feet forward. In front of this and abutting against it was a low bank of earth which tailed off into the ditch. On this bank was a layer of smallish, generally flat, stones more obviously dressed than those of the main rampart and the lower ditch filling. Similar small stones extended down the bank and formed a distinct upper layer in the ditch on top of those of the original fall. Once this second low bank had been seen in section it could be traced faintly on the surface for some 50 or 60 feet along the rampart. Over the second fall of stones in the ditch there was a layer of black earth, thicker towards the



outer side and, just before it levelled out to the natural surface, containing a fine and complete upper stone of a flat quern of a late type. This is the only object found in the whole dig which could possibly be called Romano-British. Five feet below the surface and in the earlier stone filling was half of a saddle quern of early type.

The last phase of occupation is represented by a late medieval structure which was built into the bank about half-way along its curve and facing outwards. The remains consisted of a regular pavement about 11 feet by 6. Along the back and at the two ends there remained the foundations of an enclosing wall. The foundations of a dry-stone wall cut across one corner and continued up on to the bank behind. These stones continued after a gap of two feet and fragments of a small beaker of fine red clay with a dark brown glaze were found here which the British Museum confirms is Cistercian ware of the beginning of the sixteenth century. The nature of the paving and the associated pottery seem to rule out any connection with the prehistoric structure.

### INTERPRETATION.

I do not intend, nor am I competent, to enter into a detailed discussion of the significance of Ball Cross at this stage but it is possible to arrive at a few general though tentative conclusions. Elsewhere in this *Journal* Mr. Preston discusses the Derbyshire forts and all that we have found tends to support his suggestions.

The entrance has not so far been located but the most likely place is the north-west corner where the counterscarp provides an extra, though not very strong defence. It was not a particularly strong fort. The foundations of the wall are not more than five feet thick at any point excavated and the ditch was only eight feet deep in the deepest section. There was enough stone in the ditch and scattered inside and outside the rampart to build a wall some seven or eight feet high. The sections cut were about five feet wide so that, while no post-holes were found, it is not possible to say whether or not there was a timber revetment until a long section of the wall

is uncovered. Certainly there was a great deal of charcoal everywhere. Allowing for the difference in scale the structure seems very similar to that found by Sir Mortimer Wheeler at Stanwick in Yorkshire.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that the fort was slighted very thoroughly. The material from the wall had been thrown down to fill the ditch; in some places it had been cleared right down to the foundations. That it went down all at once was clearly shown by the way the soil had only partially seeped down between the stones leaving large cavities in the lower part of the filling. While no direct evidence was found it is very tempting to suggest that it was destroyed by the Romans in their advance northward. Who else would be likely to make so thorough a job of it? Mr. Preston suggests that the Derbyshire forts would probably be slighted by the Romans. Have we confirmation of that at Ball Cross?

Later the site was re-enclosed but judging from the remains the rebuilding could hardly have had any military significance. In the north-west section where the original foundations were left a new wall seems to have been built with smaller stones, while along the southern side a new low bank was made on the berm and here again we have a layer of these smaller stones. Apart from the late rotary quern there is nothing among the finds which can certainly be associated with this phase. Perhaps after a period of use as a shelter it was allowed to fall into decay.

Excavation of the habitation site, which was found in the last days of the 1954 summer's dig, has not advanced far enough for a clear description to be possible.

### POTTERY.

The pottery from this site almost all came from the sections near to the presumed habitation. A small piece, one inch of rim with an incised pattern, which came from the floor of section 5, was the only piece with any trace of decoration. About 120 sherds were found and about as many tiny fragments. No piece was bigger than 3½

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XXXII, p. 3 and Pl. V.

x 3 inches. Many pieces of rim were found but no bases. It has not been possible, therefore, to estimate the height of any of the pots. The great majority of the sherds came from either side of the rampart wall, among and under the debris from the wall and at a depth of from about 10 inches to 2 feet 6 inches. Fragments extended about ten or twelve feet inside the fort. Only a few pieces were found in the ditch.

It was possible to identify portions of four large cooking pots varying from 10½ to 15 inches in diameter at the rim. Two of them had flat rims, one a slightly in-turned rim, but of the fourth no portion of rim was found. Most of the other sherds were from pots of similar quality with slight variations of body material and hardness. Two sherds of a pot with a boldly out-turned rim and of rather harder body were found deep in the fallen material in the ditch in section 5.

No trace of wheel-made pottery was found except the medieval pot. The body appears to be of local clay and contains many impurities, small chippings, and is in most cases badly consolidated. The colour varies from light yellow-brown to red and dark brown. Many of the pieces are blackened on the inside. The general impression is very rough and primitive and they remind one very much of the Bronze Age cinerary urns from Derbyshire so far as the material is concerned. The Ball Cross pots, however, seem to be rather harder fired than is characteristic of the Bronze Age.

The closest parallel seems to be with the pottery found by Miss Kathleen Kenyon at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire,<sup>3</sup> although Ball Cross has not produced any parallels to the scored decoration found at Breedon.

A single sherd found on the surface of Mam Tor and now in the Sheffield Museum is of precisely the same character and form as the Ball Cross pottery.

### THE CUP AND RING STONES.

Three carved stones all found in the ditch present an interesting problem which can hardly be answered until

<sup>3</sup> *Trans. of Leicestershire Arch. Soc.*, Vol. XXVI (1950) p. 25 and Figs. 3, 4 and 5.

other Derbyshire forts have been dug. There can be little doubt that they are cult objects and they seem, from the circumstances in which they were found, to have been in some way associated with the wall. The two small triangular stones were found deep in the ditch; a likely position if they had originally stood on top of the wall. The third, a very large stone, was high up in the ditch but in view of its weight it might easily have remained on the berm when the wall was pushed over and have been rolled down with the last stones, some of which partially overlay it. It took four strong lads to roll it over when we got it out.

Such stones have generally been associated with Bronze Age cultures and it is possible that the Ball Cross headland was the site of some sort of ceremonial centre associated with the people who buried their dead in the Bronze Age barrows on Calton, their cult stones being used as building material by a later people. On the other hand, taken in conjunction with the pottery, which seems to represent a fusion of Bronze and Iron characteristics, the stones may represent the late survival of an old cult only slightly affected by the culture of the Iron Age invaders. Mr. Preston, in this *Journal*, suggests that the rank and file of the Brigantes may have consisted of the descendants of the Bronze Age people of the Pennine area and it may well be that we have here some striking evidence in support of that view. It remains to be seen whether material of this kind turns up on other sites in the area.

All the finds, together with drawings of the sections are being deposited in the Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, where they will be available for study in the context of other material from Derbyshire and West Yorkshire.

We are particularly grateful for the interest, assistance and advice which we have had from Mr. Cockerton throughout the work. Without him we could not have undertaken it. We acknowledge with gratitude the permission to dig so readily given by his Grace the Duke of Devonshire, and the interest and help of Mr. Robert Hill, the farmer of Ball Cross. Mr. John Bartlett, Deputy Curator of the Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, has given us invaluable assistance and encouragement.

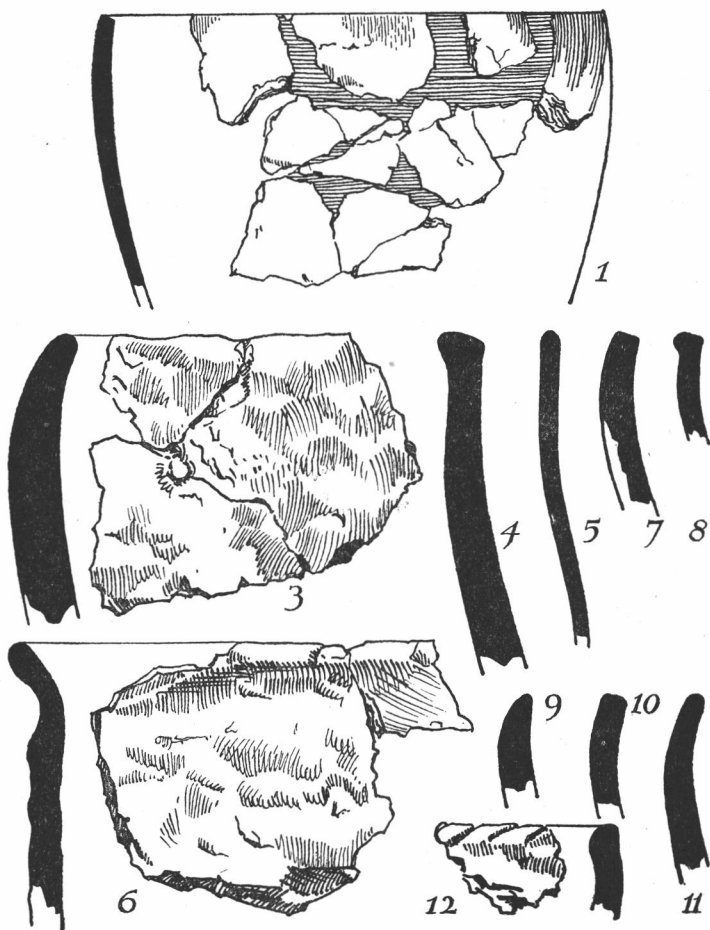


FIG. 3.—POTTERY FROM BALL CROSS, BAKEWELL.

No. 1 one-quarter actual size.

Nos. 3-12 half actual size.

(No. 2 is not illustrated.)

The numbers correspond to those in the Appendix - List of Finds - Pottery.

## APPENDIX — LIST OF FINDS.

## A. POTTERY.

All the pots in which a portion of rim has survived are illustrated. No bases were found.

No. 1. Portion of a pot 10½ inches in diameter at the rim. Thickness  $\frac{3}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch. The surface is smooth and appears to have been scraped when the clay was fairly dry. The colour is a warm brown outside, blackened in places near the rim. The inside is a dark grey-brown. The rim is flattened and very slightly in-turned.

No. 2. Twenty-three sherds, of which ten fitted together, of a pot of about 13 inches diameter (not illustrated). Thickness  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch. This pot is very coarse and clumsy. The body contains many small stones and grits. The clay is badly consolidated and both surfaces are very rough. The colour is a light warm yellow outside and varies on the inside from grey to black. No portion of the rim was found. The texture of this pot recalls that of the late Bronze Age urns in the Bateman collection although it appears to be rather harder baked.

No. 3. Six sherds (five pieces of rim) of which three fitted together, of a large cooking pot 15 inches in diameter and  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch thick. The pot is well-made though very roughly finished, the rim is thinned and slightly in-turned. The surviving part has a hole 1½ inches from the rim, presumably for a thong to suspend it by. The colour is dark brown and the pot is well-fired.

No. 4. Five sherds (one piece of rim) of a pot of about 13 inches diameter. Thickness  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch. The rim is thinned slightly and flattened with a suggestion of an outer lip. The body, colour and texture are very similar to No. 3.

No. 5. Eight sherds (five pieces of rim) of which five fitted together, of a tall pot of 4½ inches diameter. Thickness  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. This pot, black in colour, has a very sandy and crumbly body and is badly fired.

No. 6. Two rim sherds of a pot of 9 inches diameter and  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch thickness. This pot, found deep in the ditch of section 5, embedded in the debris from the rampart, is boldly moulded with a strong out-turned rim. The colour is light brown and the surface is polished though very lumpy. The body contains some large grits.

No. 7. Fragment of a flattened and in-turned rim of a pot of 11 inches diameter, brown and containing a high proportion of grits. This was the only piece found in the ditch filling of section 7.

No. 8. Small fragment of a flat rim with a slight lip. Yellow-brown in colour.

No. 9. Fragment of the rim of a coarse black pot of about 6 inches diameter.

No. 10. Fragment of the rim of a very coarse brown pot of about 7 inches diameter. Friable and containing many grits.

No. 11. Fragment of the rim of a small brown pot of very coarse texture.

No. 12. Fragment of the rim of a pot with incised decoration on the edge. Colour, dark grey-brown, and well-fired. This piece, from the hut floor, was the only piece of ornamented pottery found in the excavation.

### B. THE CUP AND RING STONES.

The three stones with cup markings are all cut from the local yellow sandstone.

No. 1. A large and heavy stone 37 inches long and of roughly square section. The rounded edges appear to be naturally weathered through exposure. It bears on one face a well-defined pattern of twelve cup-shaped indentations, one of them much larger than the others, surrounded by a deeply engraved line. Two isolated cups appear on the adjacent face, one of them with a ring round it. This stone was embedded in the top of the fallen material from the wall in the ditch of section 1.

No. 2. A triangular stone 16 inches wide at the base, 15 inches high and 7 inches thick. A line is engraved down the centre through a ring of five cups. There is one cup in the apex and two more in the lower right-hand corner. The lower left-hand corner is somewhat weathered but may have carried another one or two cups originally. It was found in the bottom of the ditch in section 5.

No. 3. A broken fragment of a stone which may have been similar to No. 2, but possibly smaller as the surviving portion is only  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches thick.

### C. OTHER FINDS.

No. 1. A perfect upper stone of a flat rotary quern, a late type. Gritstone. Diameter  $17\frac{1}{2}$  inches, thickness 2 inches, centre hole  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Handle hole pierced right through from the top. A deep groove joins the handle hole to the edge on the underside. It was found on the outer slope of the ditch in section 7 above and beyond the fall of stones from the wall.

No. 2. A portion  $10\frac{1}{2} \times 7$  inches of a soft sandstone saddle quern. Thickness at the edge 4 inches, in the centre 1 inch. Found in the ditch of section 7 in the lower level of the wall material.

No. 3. Fragment of a saddle quern of fine gritstone,  $11 \times 10\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Thickness  $5\frac{1}{2}$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Found in the ditch of section 5.

No. 4. A flat piece of sandstone one inch thick roughly chipped into an oval shape about  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Mr. J. P. Heathcote says that he has found similar stones in Bronze Age barrows on Stanton Moor. He suggests that they may have been used as pot covers.

No. 5. A fine grained sandstone, probably a rubbing stone, roughly oval, about  $3\frac{3}{4}$  x  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches and one inch thick, flat on one side and rounded on the other. Found on the habitation floor.

No. 6. Two small flat stones, very smooth, roughly rectangular, one with a pointed end,  $4$  x  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches and the other  $5$  x  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Probably rubbing stones.

No. 7. Two small stone discs  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick. One is  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches in diameter, the other one inch. Purpose unknown. The larger was found 9 feet inside the wall in section 4 at a depth of one foot.

No. 8. A small jet bead  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in diameter and  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch thick. Found on the berm in section 3 at a depth of one foot.

No. 9. Five small flints with slightly worked edges. Degenerate workmanship.

No. 10. A small nodule of iron slag found just inside the rampart in section 2.