

## EXCAVATIONS IN BRITTANY

SPRING 1939

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The survey of the hill forts in the northwestern departments of France, which had formed part of the work of the expedition directed by Brigadier R. E. M. Wheeler in 1938, seemed to show that camps with multiple defences, lay mainly in Morbihan and Finistère.<sup>1</sup> The chief examples of these were quoted by him in his interim report:<sup>2</sup> Castel Coz, Castel Meur, others near Audierne, Quimper and Quimperlé, one at S. Avé, near Vannes, on the Ile de Groix, on Belle-Ile-en-mer, and near Pouliguen in Loire Inférieure. The first two of these had been excavated many years ago and the pottery from them was in part still available for study,<sup>3</sup> and Kercaradec near Quimper had been subjected to trial cuttings in 1938. The excavations of the main 1939 expedition in France were planned to take place in the region of the Seine, but it was considered advantageous that trial cuttings should be made on one or two more of the camps with multiple defences mentioned above. Accordingly with the aid of a grant from the Society of Antiquaries of London and in company with a few volunteers,<sup>4</sup> for whose help I am profoundly grateful, my husband and I went to Brittany in the Spring of 1939.

We started excavations at the Camp du César, near Kervédan on the Ile de Groix, helped by the good offices of M. le Curé at Groix and with the kind co-operation of the municipal officers of the island. Trial trenches were later made in the large camp at the Pointe du Vieux Château, Belle-Ile-en-mer, and also, in the few days interval pending negotiations over the latter site, at a single promontory fort at Vieux Passage, Commune of Plouhinec, Morbihan (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup>

This report, originally intended to form part of the main French expedition's report but now published separately owing to the war, does not in any way pretend to be a full or complete account of the camps described. Trial trenches were dug, as at Kercaradec, with the intention of finding out the structure of the defensive system, gaining some idea of the date of the

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquity*, 1939, xiii, 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Though unfortunately not in wartime.

<sup>4</sup> Misses Wilson, Dray, Ballingall and Messrs. Shinnie, Nicolson, Pickard, Rivet and Mayfield.

<sup>5</sup> These three sites have been described by M. Cayot Delandre, *Le Morbihan son histoire et ses monuments*, Rennes, 1847, pp. 493, 538 and 502 respectively.



# CAMP DU CESAR, *KERVEDAN, ILE DE GROIX, 1939*

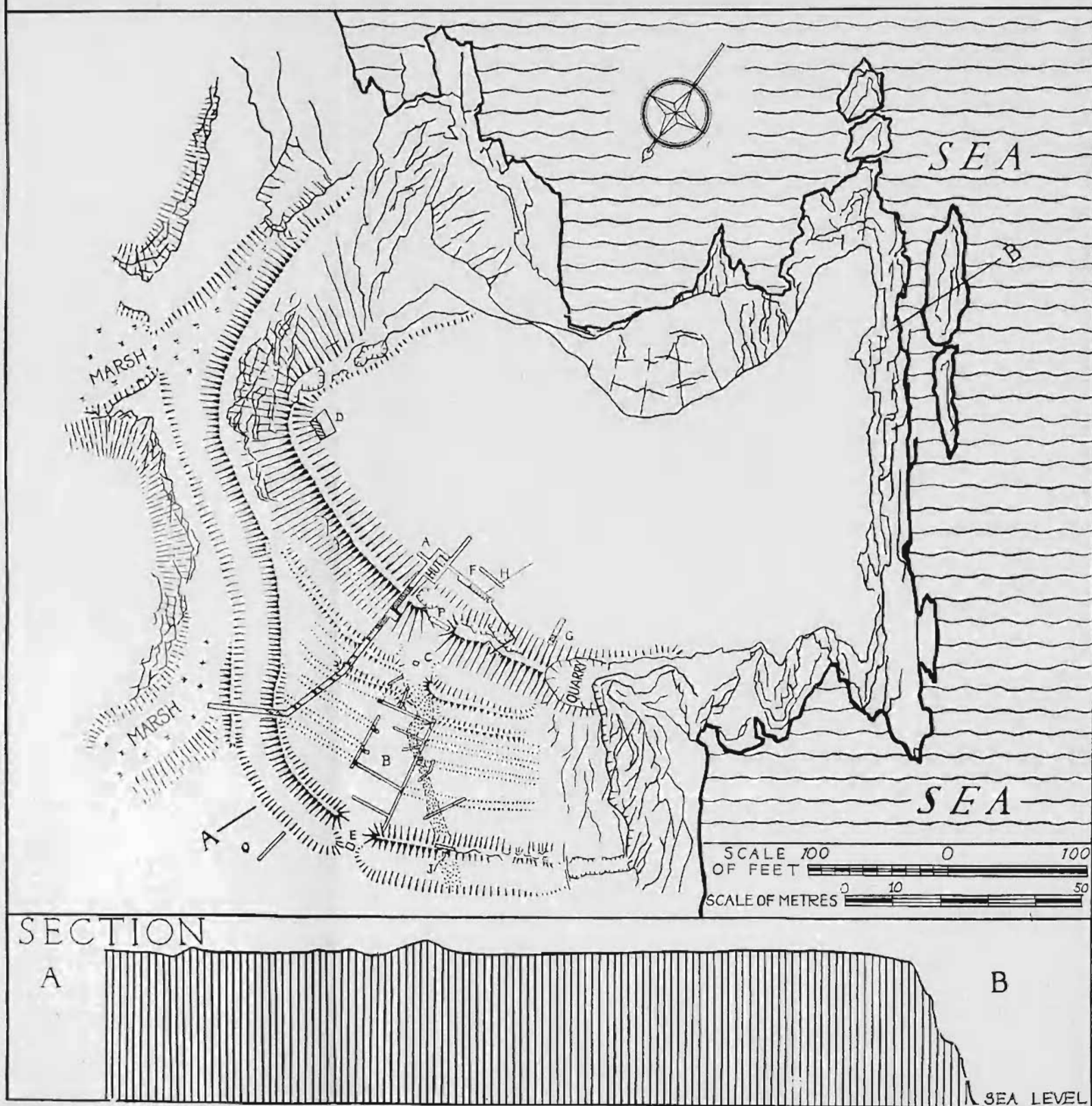


FIG. 2. (See p. 129)

camp, and fitting if possible these camps into the pattern of relationship between the insular and continental cultures of the early Iron Age. It is, therefore, as an interim report that the following notes are published and my apologies are due both



FIG. 1

for their summary character and for the lack of references owing to war conditions.

#### CAMP DU CÉSAR, KERVÉDAN, ILE DE GROIX

The Camp du César (fig. 2) is a small, but impressive cliff castle half a kilometre southwest of the village of Kervédan,

on the Ile de Groix. Some two acres only at present remain inside the inner defences. This flat, and now very barren, island occupies a strategic position almost directly across the mouth of the estuary which leads up to the naval base of Lorient. The camp lies near the extreme western point of the island, on one of the rocky promontories, here of mica-schist, which form the coast line of so much of this part of Armorica. Across the neck run two main lines of bank and ditch (pl. I, A), some 170 feet apart at the centre, and, between them, two smaller banks and traces of five narrow ditches.<sup>1</sup> On the west the banks end on the cliff face, while on the east, an arm of a marshy valley, which confines the low plateau forming the camp, has been utilized and deepened by the builders, and forms the major defence on that side. A good deal of quarrying has been carried out along the length of both the bigger banks and the eastern end of the inner one has fallen away to the sea. The interior of the camp is practically denuded to the bare rock except for a slight accumulation of soil in the lee of the ramparts.

### *Defences*

The main section through the defences (fig. 3) shows the base of the innermost rampart to be made up of three distinct levels. First, level 3a, a layer of heavy clay laid on the old turf line; above that, a heap of loose stone rubble, the whole revetted north and south by schist slabs and bound together on top with a level of heaped turves (pl. I, c).<sup>2</sup> Against both sides of the base of this twenty foot wall have been dumped loads of heavy clay material, similar to that at the bottom of the rampart wall, presumably to stabilize it. Above the layer of turf sods the wall seems to have been carried up in a less perpendicular fashion with stone slabs revetting material made up of earth tips. This may be an addition, but the appearance of the fallen material suggests that there was little time-lag between the building of the lower and the upper portions. The innermost ditch is roughly cut with an attempt at a central rib in the rounded bottom,<sup>3</sup> and, beyond this, are three small banks of dump construction and five shallow ditches, the last of which underlies the outer large bank (pl. I, B). The outer large bank, also of dump construction, has a large well-cut ditch in

<sup>1</sup> These can be traced as grass-grown lines against the bare rock.

<sup>2</sup> Two feet above the base of the revetment is a small niche, 1 ft. 7 in. high, 1 ft. 6 in. wide, running into the face of the trench. This was filled with clay dumped

against the stones and had probably served to hold a temporary timber structure in the course of the rampart construction.

<sup>3</sup> The consistency of the filling negatives the idea of a re-cutting at a later date.

# CAMP DU CESAR, KERVEDAN, ILE DE GROIX, 1939 SECTION THROUGH DEFENCES

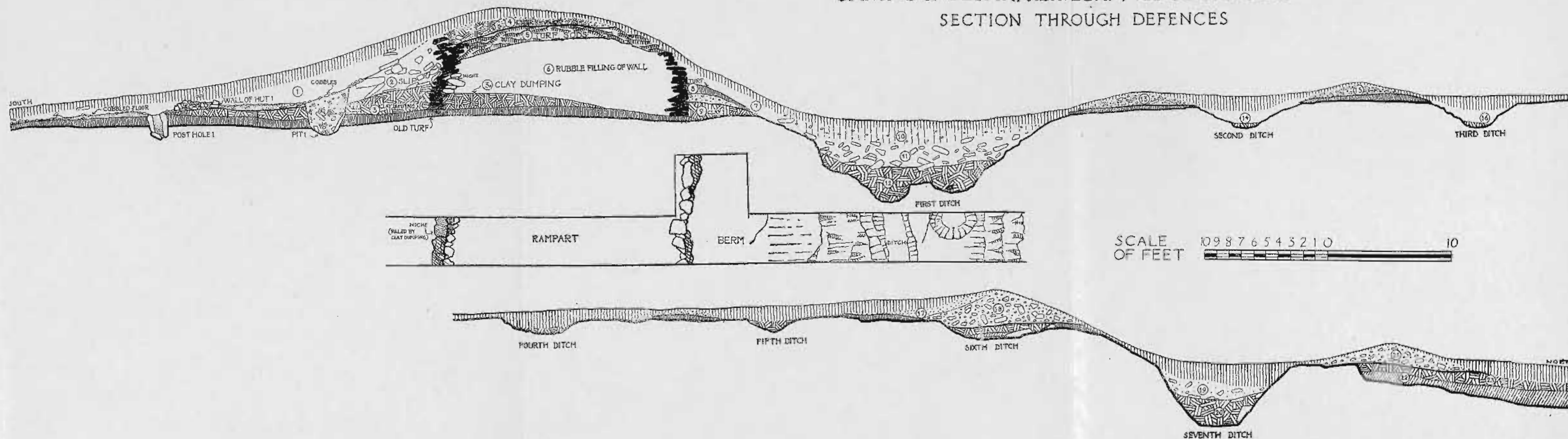


FIG. 3. (See p. 130)





# KERVEDAN ILE DE GROIX DETAILED PLAN OF ENTRANCE

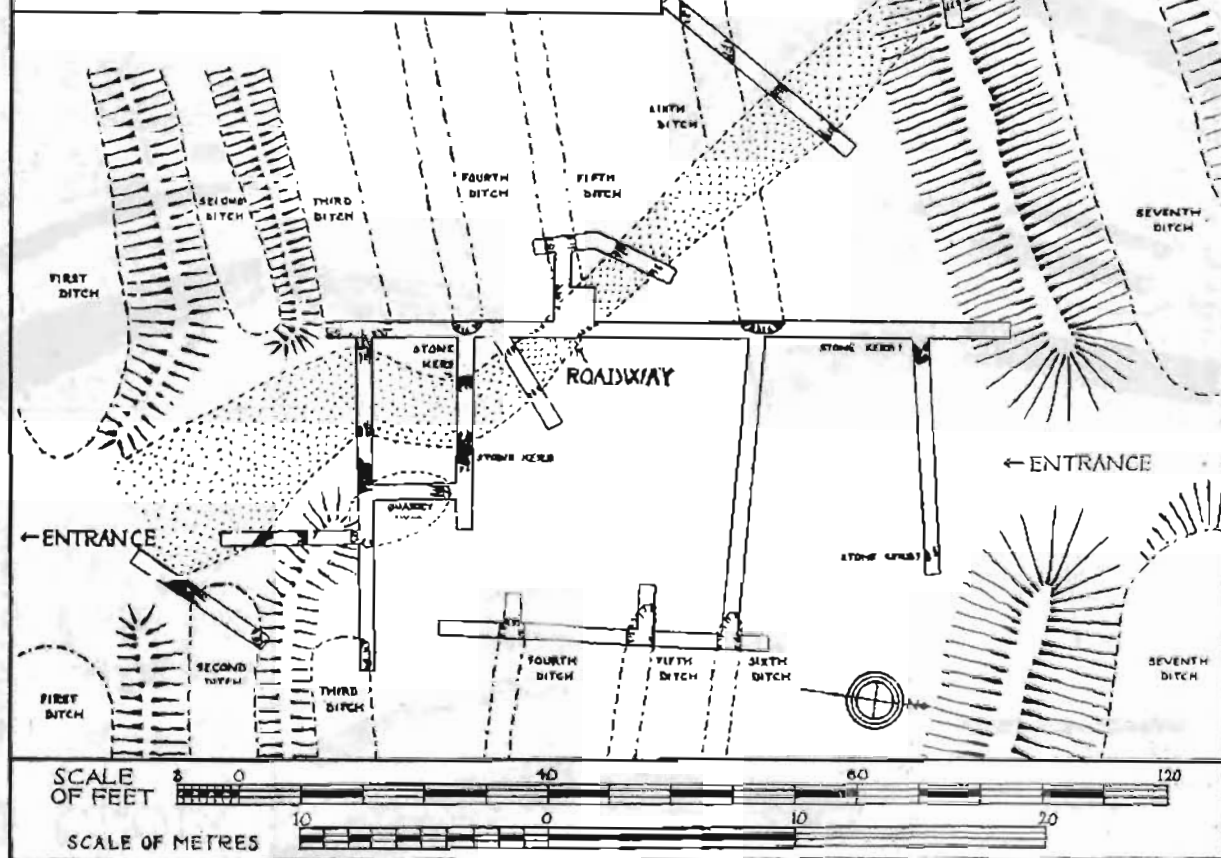
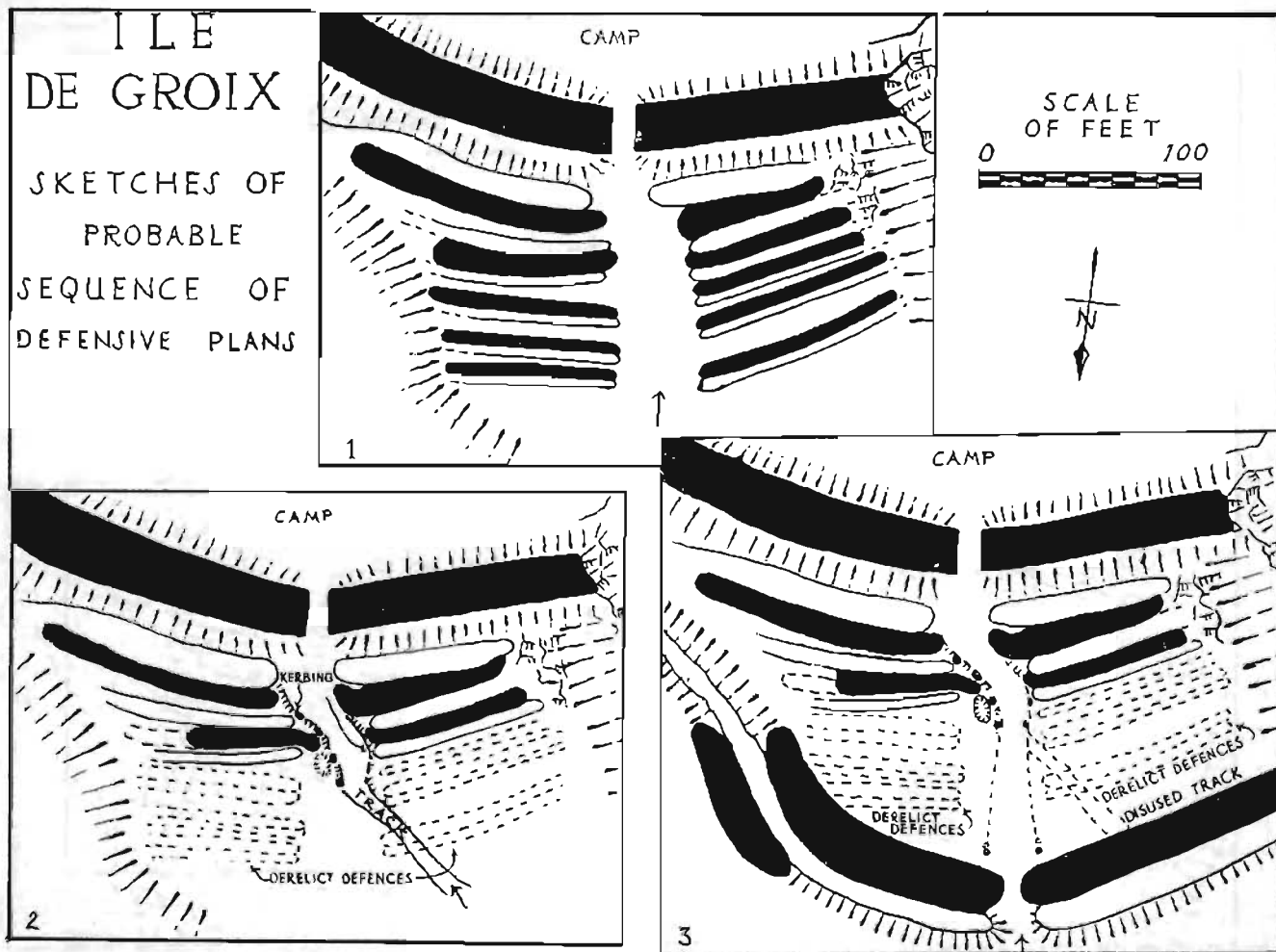


FIG. 4. (See p. 130)





front of it with a flat bottom. Beyond this a slight counterscarp extends along the edge of the ditch for a short distance as an extra defence against the entry of the arm of the marsh from the north. The ground under the counterscarp had been dug away and filled up again before the bank was raised, and this may represent an attempt to deepen the marshy valley for defensive purposes at the same time as the construction of the small banks and ditches.

When a number of trenches (fig. 4) were dug in the area between the two large banks, it became clear that there were three periods of construction in the outer defences. The first plan (fig. 5,1) appears to have consisted of the 20 ft. wide revetted rampart of the innermost bank with the ditch in

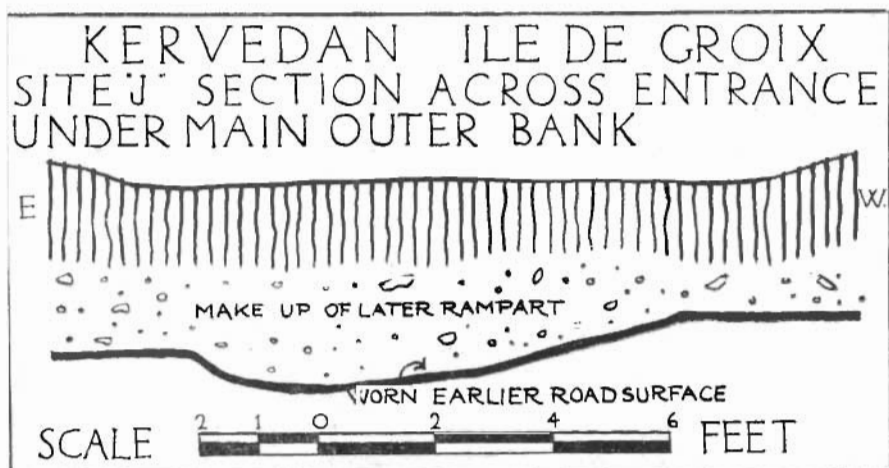


FIG. 6

front of it, and beyond, the five small banks and ditches and a wide central entrance way. The arrangement seems designed to prevent rush tactics on the flanks and to give a broad un-hindered field of fire from the main bank. No signs of palisade post-holes were found on the crests of the small banks but they had been much denuded. It is possible that some, or all, of the small banks and ditches were themselves an addition to the original scheme of a single ramparted camp, but there is as yet no evidence either way.

This first defensive arrangement apparently fell into disrepair, for in the second period (fig. 5,2) a track was found running across the outer small ditches on the west side of the entrance gap (fig. 4). This track led up to the gateway where a certain amount of reconstruction seems to have taken place. The

third bank on the east side (and possibly also the second bank on the west side) appears to have been extended to form a slight wing, thus staggering the inner entrance way. The material for this extension was presumably taken from the shallow

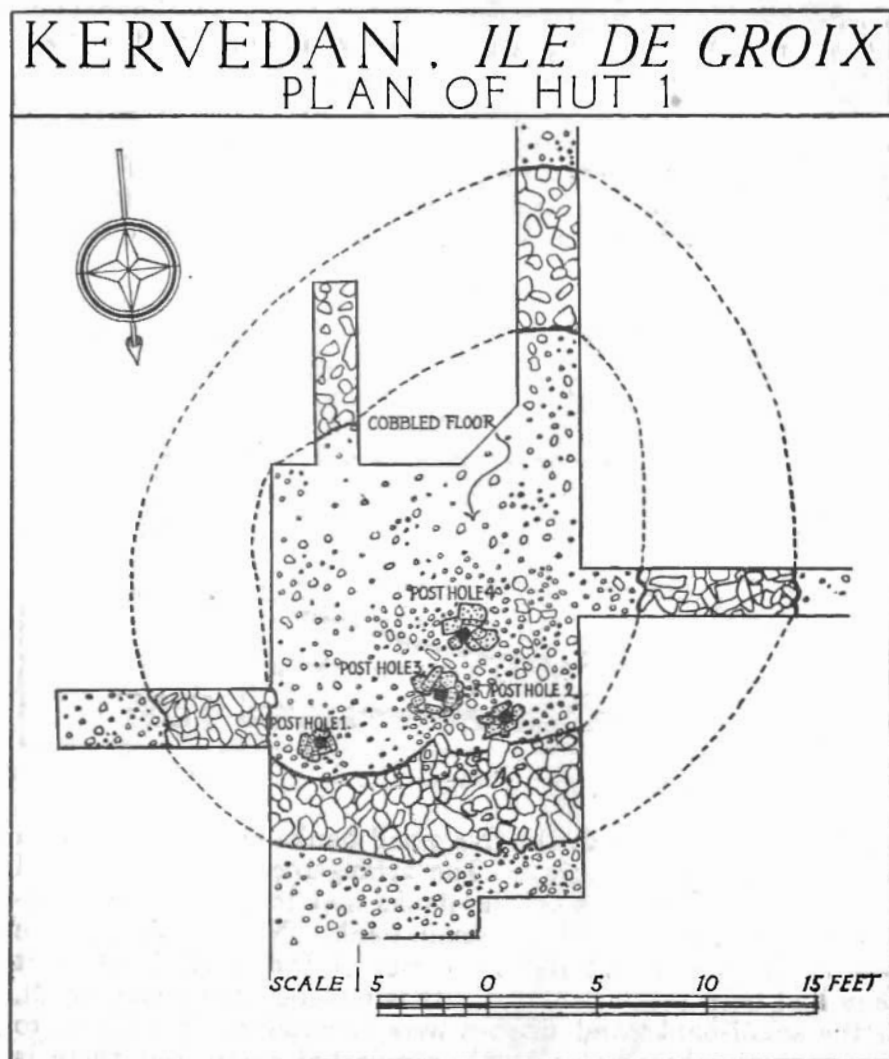


FIG. 7

quarry in the middle of the original entrance passage immediately in front of it. Stone kerbing was found associated with this reconstruction on both sides of the track but it does not appear to continue beyond the area at the end of the fourth ditch.



A. GROIX. VIEW OF CAMP FROM NORTH-WEST



C. GROIX. NORTH FACE OF RAMPART, BERM AND DITCH



B. GROIX. VIEW TO NORTH SHOWING SMALL  
OUTER DITCHES



D. GROIX. POST HOLES IN COBBLED FLOOR OF  
HUT



The track was traced passing under the large outermost bank and possibly led to a quarry which lies just outside the camp.

In the third period the large outermost bank was thrown up, and a wide ditch dug right across the neck of the promontory (fig. 5,3). Traces of kerbing were found inside the central entrance through this bank, and the latter overlies one of the small ditches (sixth ditch, figs. 2 and 3) on the east and the track of the second period on the west (fig. 6). It is worth noting that filling had accumulated in the small ditch before it was built over while there was no debris lying on the track. From this point, and the fact that while there is quite considerable wear on the track in the outer part of the entrance, but very little wear in the inner gateway itself, it would appear that the track was mainly used to get kerbing material etc. from the quarry outside, and that the large outer bank and ditch were only the finishing touches to the second period of defensive reconstruction.

#### *The Camp. Hut 1*

Behind the innermost rampart, and overlying the debris from the original revetted wall, is a roughly circular stone hut (Hut 1, fig. 7). The walls are of loosely piled rubble, and the floor is for the most part cobbled with rounded beach pebbles which seem to have been thrown down wherever the floor was becoming uneven. In this floor are set four post-holes (pl. I, D) about 1 ft. 6 in. to 2 ft. deep, packed with stone slabs. By their position and differing angles they do not appear to have served any primary structural function but were perhaps put in at various times to hold up the roof or support the walls. On the cobbled floor north of the hut were found and two fragments of horizontally grooved, red-brown ware (fig. 10). These sherds constituted, except for one indeterminate handmade fragment from the filling of the small ditch, the entire pottery finds from the excavations. On the floor of the hut and round about it were found small pieces of daub and charcoal giving some indication of the former construction of its upper part. Further up the debris of the rampart, and dug into it, is a pit some 3 ft. 3 in. deep. This was filled with earth and stones and contained some charcoal; apparently it was filled up during the period of the occupation of the hut, as a trampling of beach pebbles ran over the top of it.

#### *Other Sites*

A narrow trench was taken across the inner entrance (fig. 8) and the section presented problems which can only be elucidated



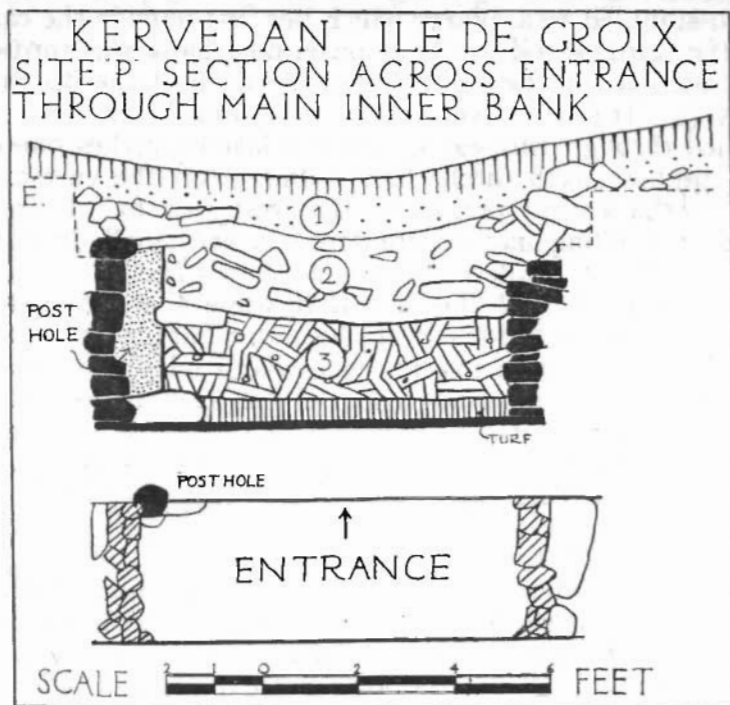


FIG. 8. SECTION E—W

when the whole gateway is uncovered. There is an 8 ft. wide stone revetted passage-way, the stone slabs on either side being laid on the native rock. In the centre of the passage-way, however, the rock is covered by a layer of old turf material and neither it nor the underlying rock shows any sign of wear. Above the turf is a layer of clay material similar to that dumped to support the wall revetment in the main rampart section (fig. 3, level 3) and set into this, and bedded on a large stone against the east revetment had been set a post, presumably one of the gateposts. It would appear, then, either that the gateway was hardly in use at all, or that, following their policy of dumping clay to strengthen the bases of their walls, the builders had done the same thing in the entrance.

A rough road surface was found leading up to the inner entrance from the interior of the camp (Site F, fig. 2), and traces of rubble walls were noted at Sites D and G in the lee of the main rampart.

## FINDS

Besides the few sherds of pottery, a slab of schist,<sup>1</sup> roughly triangular in plan and apparently broken off along its hypotenuse, was found in the filling of the main innermost ditch (fig. 3, level 11 and fig. 9 A). Part of a hole showed on the long side.

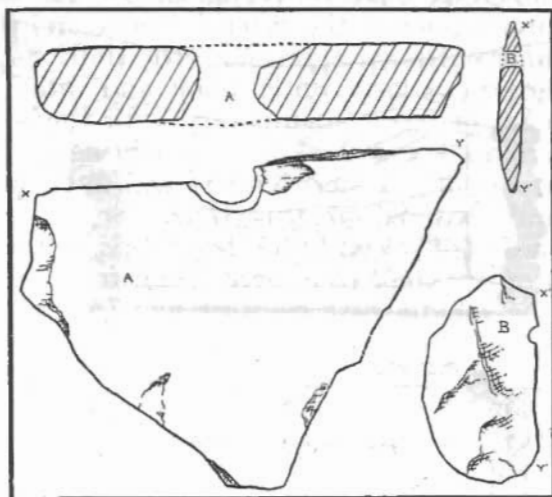


FIG. 9. STONE SLABS FROM GROIX ( $\frac{1}{8}$ )

It is uncertain for what purpose this object was intended, but it is likely to have been a rough-out for a quern. A small slab of similar material through which a hole was bored at one end (fig. 9 B) was found in the same level and may have served as a roofing slab.

A number of charcoal specimens found in and around Hut 1 were very kindly examined by Dr. Tandy, of the British Museum, and proved all to be of oak. Except for the willows which fringe some of the marshy valleys and a few trees in the village of Groix, the island is now practically devoid of timber.



FIG. 10. SHERD FROM GROIX ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )

*Pottery* (fig. 10)

Horizontally grooved sherd of smooth red-brown ware probably turned on a slow wheel. Found on the floor of Hut 1 behind the main rampart. Combed and rilled ware does not seem to be common in Brittany. But this sherd is possibly related to the more sophisticated cordoned ware found at Le Petit Celland<sup>2</sup>, dated to the first half of the first century B.C., and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> At Hengistbury Head for instance a pot of Class C, with rilling round the lower part, was found associated with the best cordoned ware of Class B.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This specimen was deposited in the municipal offices at Groix. If it were intended for a quern it is interesting to note that it would have been of Roman, not Iron Age type. Cf. E. Cecil Curwen, *Antiquity*, 1937, 133-51 and *Antiquity*, 1941, 15-32.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquity*, xiii, 1939, 79, fig. 8, 1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> I am very grateful to Sir Cyril Fox and Mr. Christopher Hawkes for their opinions on this sherd.

<sup>4</sup> J. P. Bushe-Fox, *Hengistbury Head*, 1915, pl. XIX, no. 10.

*Conclusion*

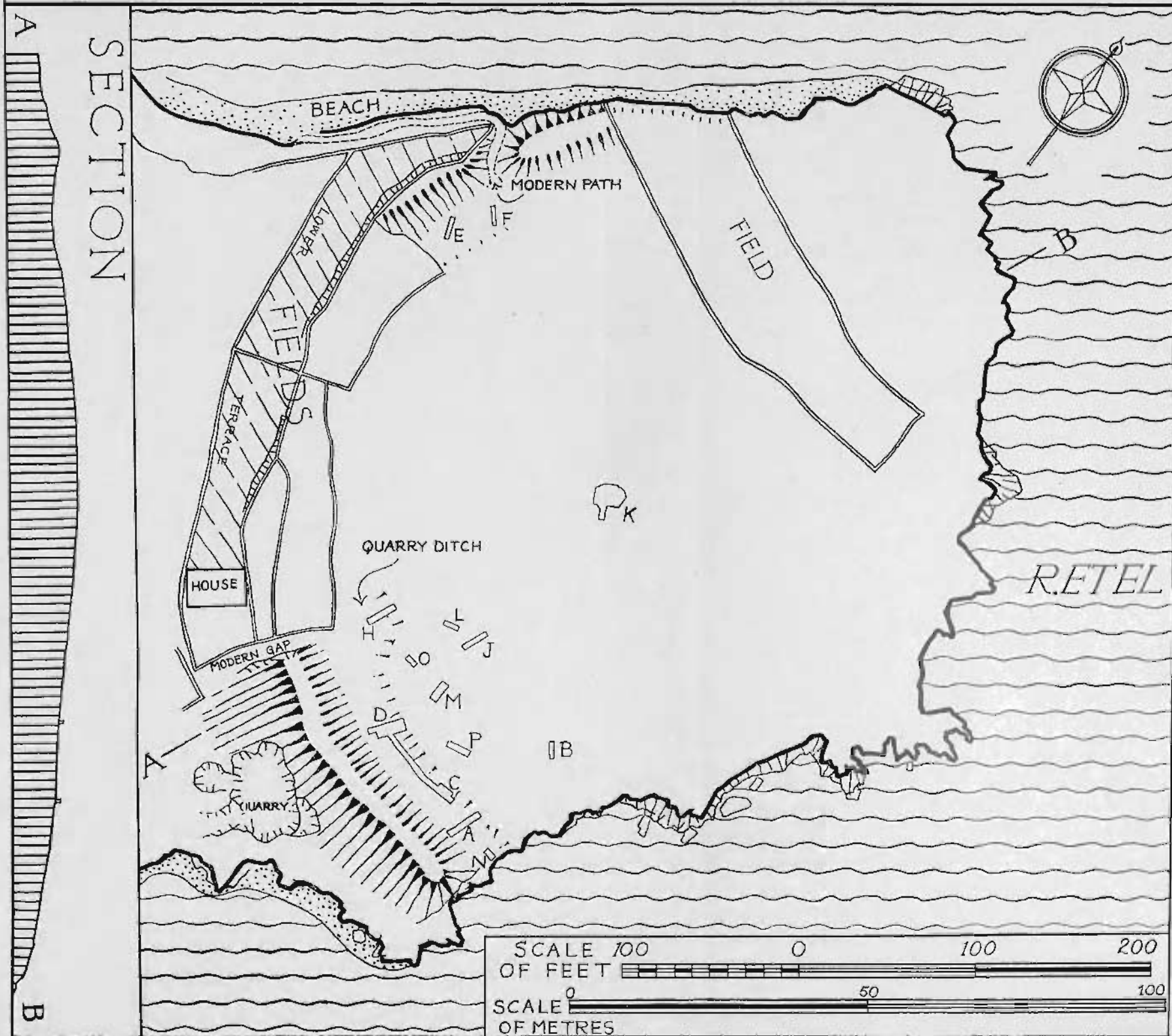
There appear to have been three stages in the fortunes of the camp; first the construction of the large rampart and ditch and numerous small outer defences; the second stage, a trackway running across the outer defences, and a re-organization of the inner entrance approach; the third stage consisting of the building of a large outer bank and ditch, which may have been more or less contemporary with the second period, the track perhaps being used by those bringing in materials. It seems that the large inner rampart and ditch were probably not structurally altered at this time. Some time after its decay a hut was put up on the fallen debris at the back of the rampart and on the floor of it were found fragments of pottery perhaps of the middle first century B.C. (see above, p. 137). It is alluring to attribute the activity of the re-construction to the threat of Caesar's advance and to suggest that the rampart was thrown down after his victory, but the absence of dating evidence leaves this a conjecture.

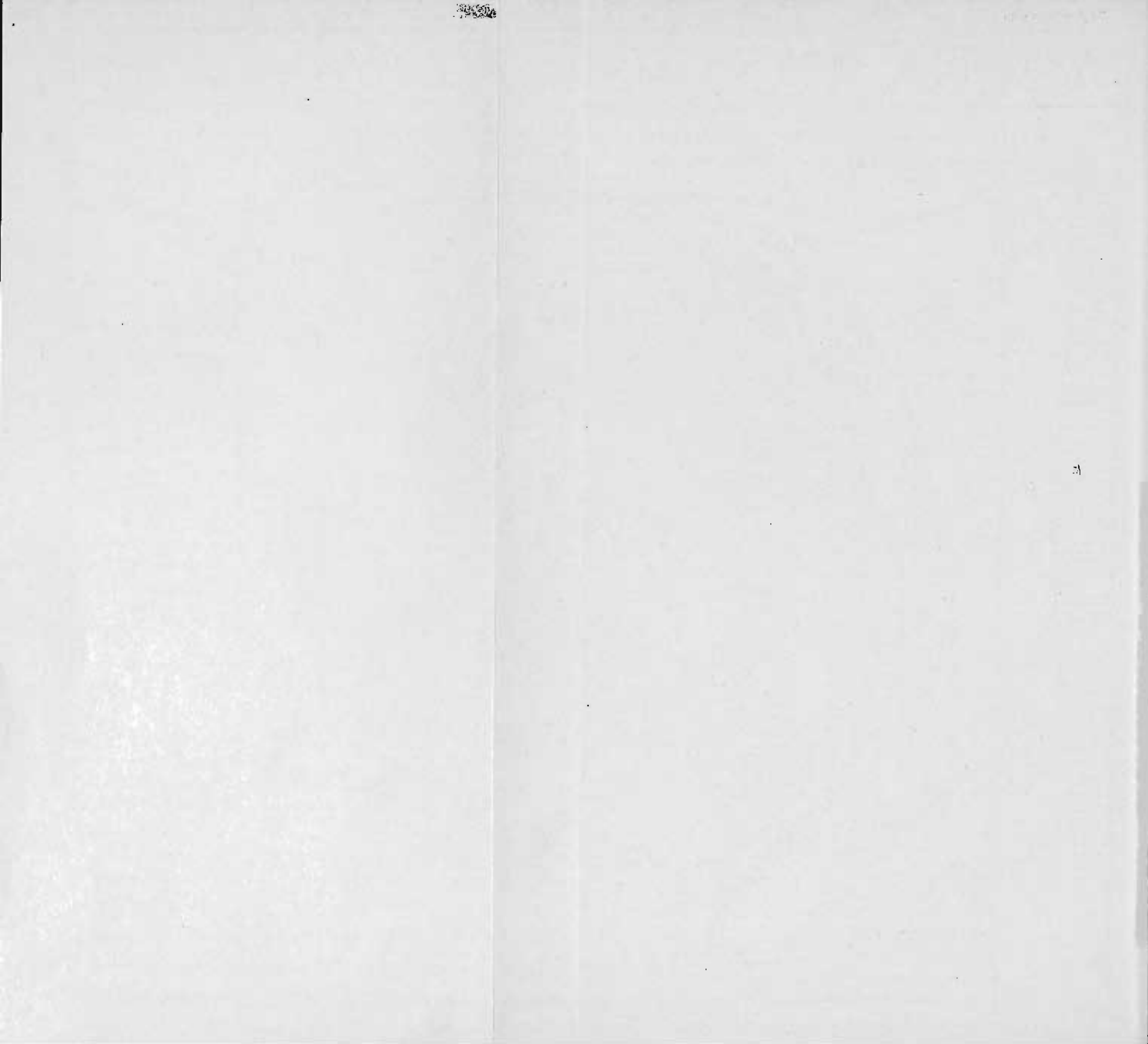
*CAMP AT VIEUX PASSAGE*

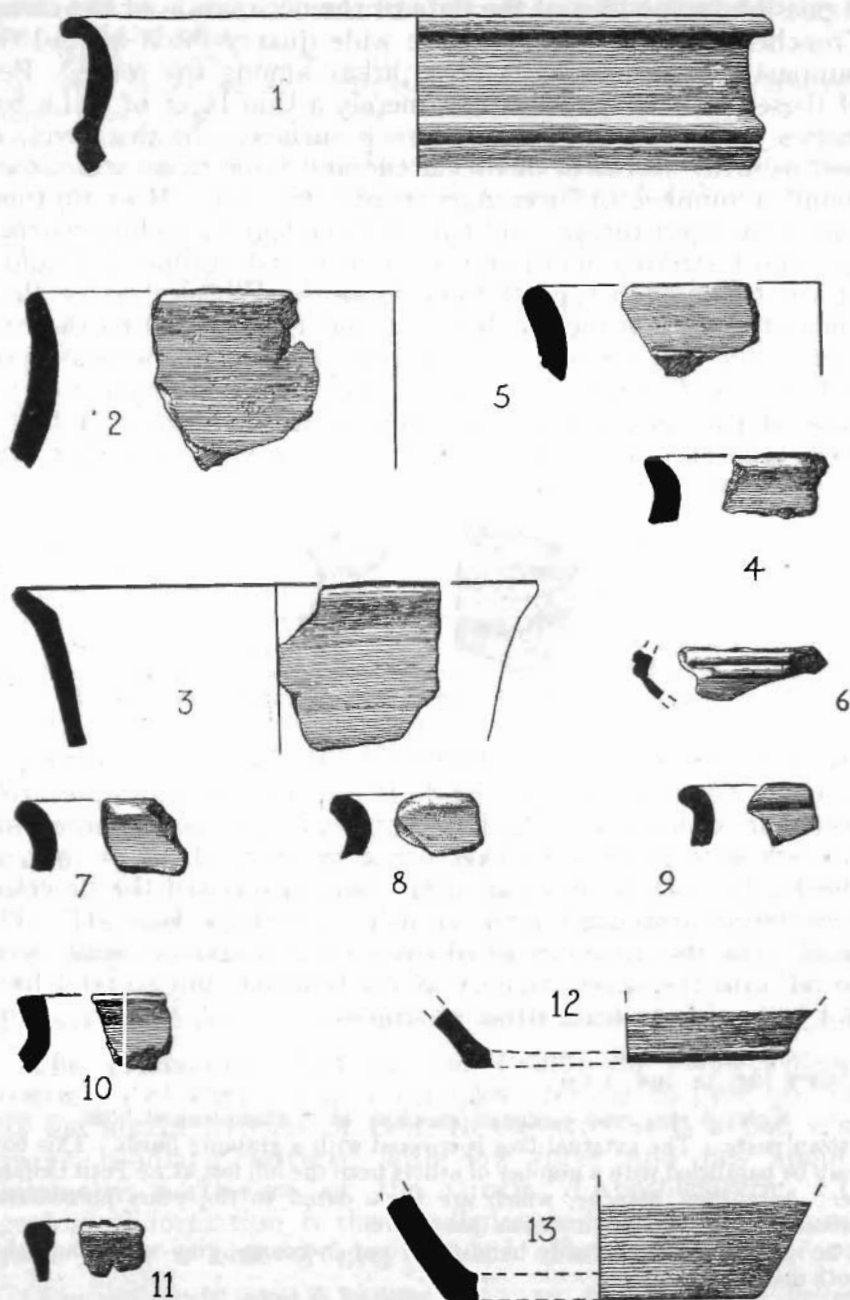
After gaining some idea of the defensive system at the Camp du César on the Ile de Groix, it was decided to make some trial trenches at a large promontory fort on Belle-Ile-en-mer which seemed to promise a similar system. In the few days interval pending negotiations with the Mayor of Sauzon, on the island, a number of small trial cuts were made in the interior of a camp of  $2\frac{3}{4}$  acres, defended by a single bank, overlooking the estuary of the river Etel at the village known as Vieux Passage (fig. 11). Permission to dig inside the camp was readily accorded by M. Thomas, and his tenant; but since the rampart belonged to another owner and time was limited, no section was taken through it.

The village of Vieux Passage, in the commune of Plouhinec, Morbihan, marks one end of an old ferry route across the estuary, and just east of the village a rocky, heather-covered granite promontory juts out into the river. The single bank which ran across the neck of this promontory has been partially destroyed by a house and its adjacent fields, and the external ditch is now practically indiscernible on the surface. The interior of the camp rises to a central eminence whence an extensive view can be obtained up and down the estuary. Two small but adequate harbours lie on either side of the neck of the promontory.

# VIEUX PASSAGE PLOUHINEC 1939





FIG. 12. POTTERY FROM VIEUX PASSAGE ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )



With the short time at our disposal, our aim was to acquire, if possible, some idea of the date of the occupation of the camp. Trenches were cut mainly in the wide quarry ditch behind the rampart with a few in sheltered areas among the rocks. Few of these had any stratification, merely a thin layer of soil a few inches thick between turf and rock surface. In this level, as well as stray pieces of medieval tile and later china ware, were found a number of Iron Age sherds (fig. 12). Most of these had been wheel-turned, and two or three had a graphite coating. The most striking sherd shows the rim and cordoned shoulder of a pot similar in type to those found by Wheeler<sup>1</sup> at Le Petit Celland, near Avranches, Manche, and there dated to the first half of the first century B.C., or more closely to the years preceding the Caesarian invasion. Another indication for the date of the occupation was found in the discovery of half a dark blue glass bead (fig. 13). Glass bracelets of similar type

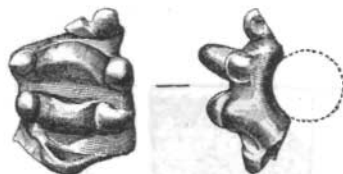


FIG. 13. BROKEN GLASS BEAD FROM VIEUX PASSAGE ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )

are not uncommon in Brittany. Déchelette<sup>2</sup> mentions a hoard at Gervech, Commune de Brech, and two examples from Kerhillio, Commune de Erdern are now in the Carnac Museum.<sup>3</sup> According to Déchelette<sup>4</sup> they occur in Switzerland as early as the La Tène II period, but in the Brittany hoard the bracelets were found associated with Gaulish coins of La Tène III. The bead with its similar worked decoration would certainly seem to fall into the same category as the bracelets but so far I have not been able to trace other examples.

*Pottery* (fig. 12, nos. 1-13)

1. Everted rim, and cordoned shoulder of a wheel-turned bowl in grey-brown paste. The external face is covered with a graphite finish. This bowl may be paralleled with a number of others from the hill fort at Le Petit Celland, near Avranches, Manche, which are there dated to the years immediately preceding the Caesarian invasion (see above).

2. Plain rim of probably hand-made pot in coarse, grey ware, burnished both inside and out.

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquity*, xiii, 1939, 79, fig. 8.2.

<sup>2</sup> Déchelette. *Manuel. Second Age du Fer*, 833.

<sup>3</sup> Associated with counter-sunk handles.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 831, fig. 580.



3. Graphite coated sherd of gritty brown ware with plain everted rim, bevelled on the inside. Wheel-made. Cf. an open bowl of similar type at Belle-Ile (fig. 17, no 4).

4. Slightly everted rim in gritty, brown paste. Wheel-made.

5. Plain, heavy rim, wheel-turned in gritty brown paste. There is a slight groove below the rim on the outside.

6. Sherd from wheel-turned pot of fine grey-buff paste, with a double cordon on the shoulder. A double cordon has not so far come to light amongst the cordoned bowls at Le Petit Celland but this sherd would seem to come from that class.

7. Slightly everted rim of smooth buff ware. Wheel-made. Similar rims were found at Huelgoat.<sup>1</sup>

8. Everted rim of grey-buff ware. Probably wheel-made.

9. Everted rim, wheel-turned in smooth light grey ware, probably from a bowl like no. 1 above.

10. Flat topped rim in wheel-turned gritty, dark grey ware. Cf. similar sherds from Kercaradec and Le Petit Celland.

11. Flat topped rim of hand-made gritty, red paste. Very rough, perhaps a waster.

12. Probably hand-made, flat bottomed base with the suggestion of a base ring. Gritty, brown ware.

13. Plain, flat bottomed base of gritty buff-grey ware; possibly turned on a slow wheel.

These sherds from Vieux Passage can be compared to the pottery found at Huelgoat, Le Petit Celland and Kercaradec. Rims like nos. 2, 4, 7, 8, are common to all these sites, and flat rims, reminiscent of Hallstatt technique such as no. 10, occur also at Kercaradec and Le Petit Celland. These would seem to represent the basic common ware. Nos. 1 and 9 at Vieux Passage belong to the more sophisticated cordoned bowls which form one of the principal types at Le Petit Celland. Graphite coating occurs here too, as on the three other sites.

Both the camps at Huelgoat and Le Petit Celland have been dated by coins, pottery and structural evidence to the first half of the first century or more closely to the years preceding the Caesarian advance, and it is likely that the occupation of the camp at Vieux Passage should be dated to the same period.

#### POINTE DU VIEUX CHÂTEAU, BELLE-ÎLE-EN-MER

The promontory fort at the Pointe du Vieux Château, commune of Port Philippe occupies an area of over 90 acres at the northern point of Belle-Ile-en-mer. It is a flat, wind-swept headland, covered with low furze and lies about a kilometre north-east of the Grotte d'Apothicaire. The geological formation is the Phyllades de St. Lo, the dominant rock being a blue or grey schist.<sup>2</sup> Permission to excavate

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful indeed to Brigadier Wheeler for allowing me to consult his MS. on his Brittany and Normandy excavations.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to the Geological Museum, South Kensington, for this information.

the site was kindly given by the Mayor of Sauzon with the consent of the tenant.

The present name of the site betrays the medieval reconstruction of the camp. A motte (pl. II A) now occupies the east end of the neck of the promontory, and a large bank and ditch (pl. II B) continue the line of defence to the other rocky cliff turning the interior of the camp into an enormous bailey. There are signs of a blocked, earlier, central, inturned entrance on the inner face of the large bank (fig. 14). Outside the large ditch, which has utilized to some extent a natural hollow, are two low banks and ditches (pl. III A), and beyond them again, some 340 ft. south-west, are another bank and ditch defending the second neck of the peninsula. A trackway, showing green against the bare outcrop can be seen leading up from an entrance through the outer bank towards the inner banks. The peninsula has been used, according to local report, for military manoeuvres during the present century if not also earlier—'petites guerres' had been fought there and trenches dug. Just to the west of the outermost bank there are entrenchments of an uncertain nature which may possibly be due, as is perhaps the trackway (see above) to these excursions.

Two salient points had to be examined in the short time at our disposal; whether there had been, as it appeared on the ground, an Iron Age camp prior to the medieval fortifications, and if so its date of occupation and its type of defence.

The section, therefore, which was taken through the main bank and the two smaller banks outside it (fig. 15) showed at the eastern end an original rampart made up of light rock-cut materials with the remains of a stone revetment on the inner face. A layer of turf or turves overlies the loose make-up of the rampart. The front of this bank was unfortunately buried so deeply by the later deposits that it proved impossible, in the time, to determine the nature of its outer profile. At the western end of the section a rock-cut ditch appeared, partially filled and overlaid by the tips of heavy clay material which made up the medieval bank. These tips were held up at intervals by small retaining walls. It seems probable that considering the relative positions of the early rampart and ditch there is likely to be another ditch also covered by the medieval deposits between the two; any bank between the two having been, presumably, thrown as later levelling into one or other of them.

The section through the small banks (second and third bank, fig. 15, and pl. III, C and D) showed a square-cut ditch in front

# POINTE DU VIEUX CHATEAU SAUZON BELLE-ILE-EN-MER DETAIL OF DEFENCES

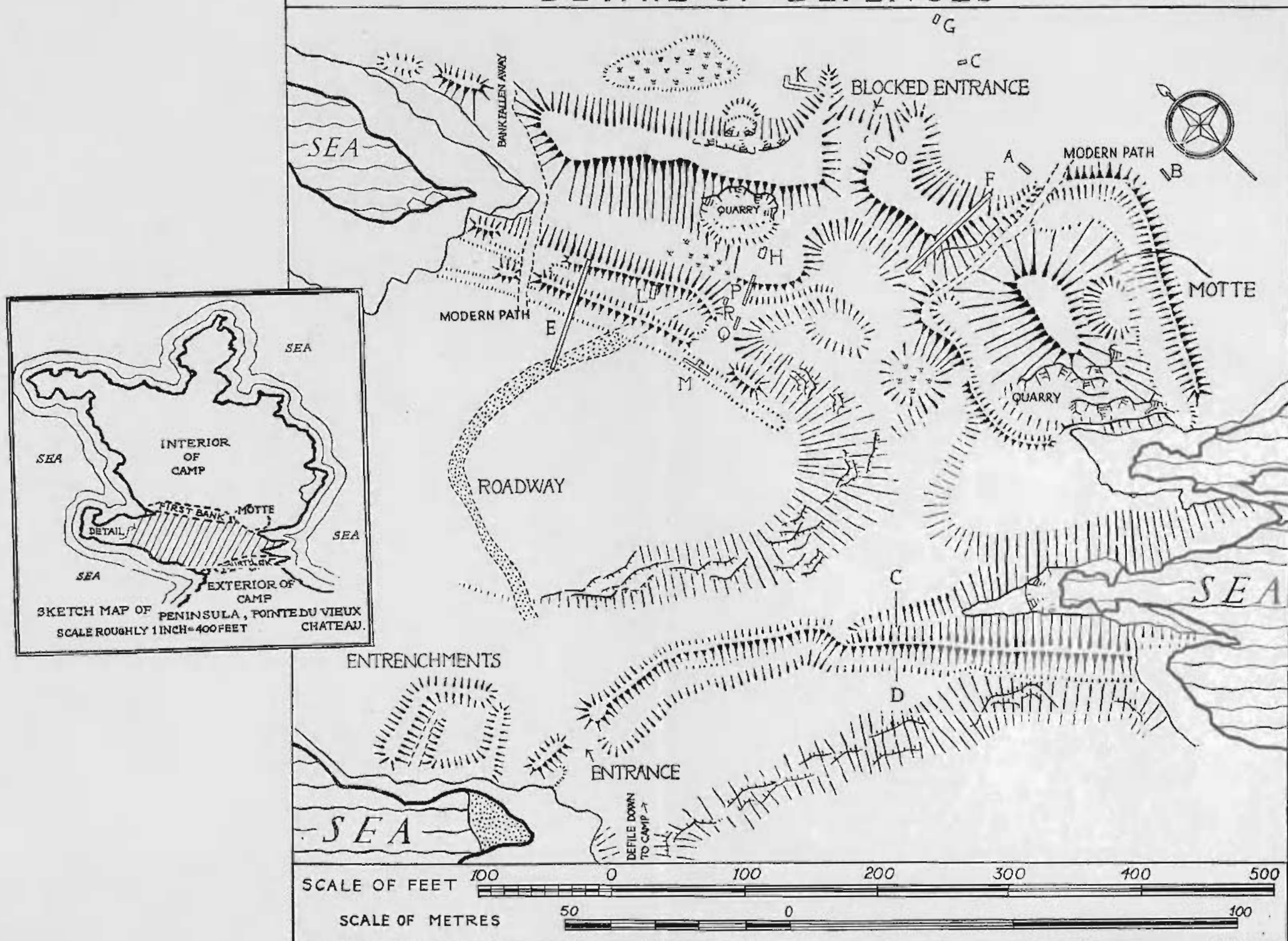
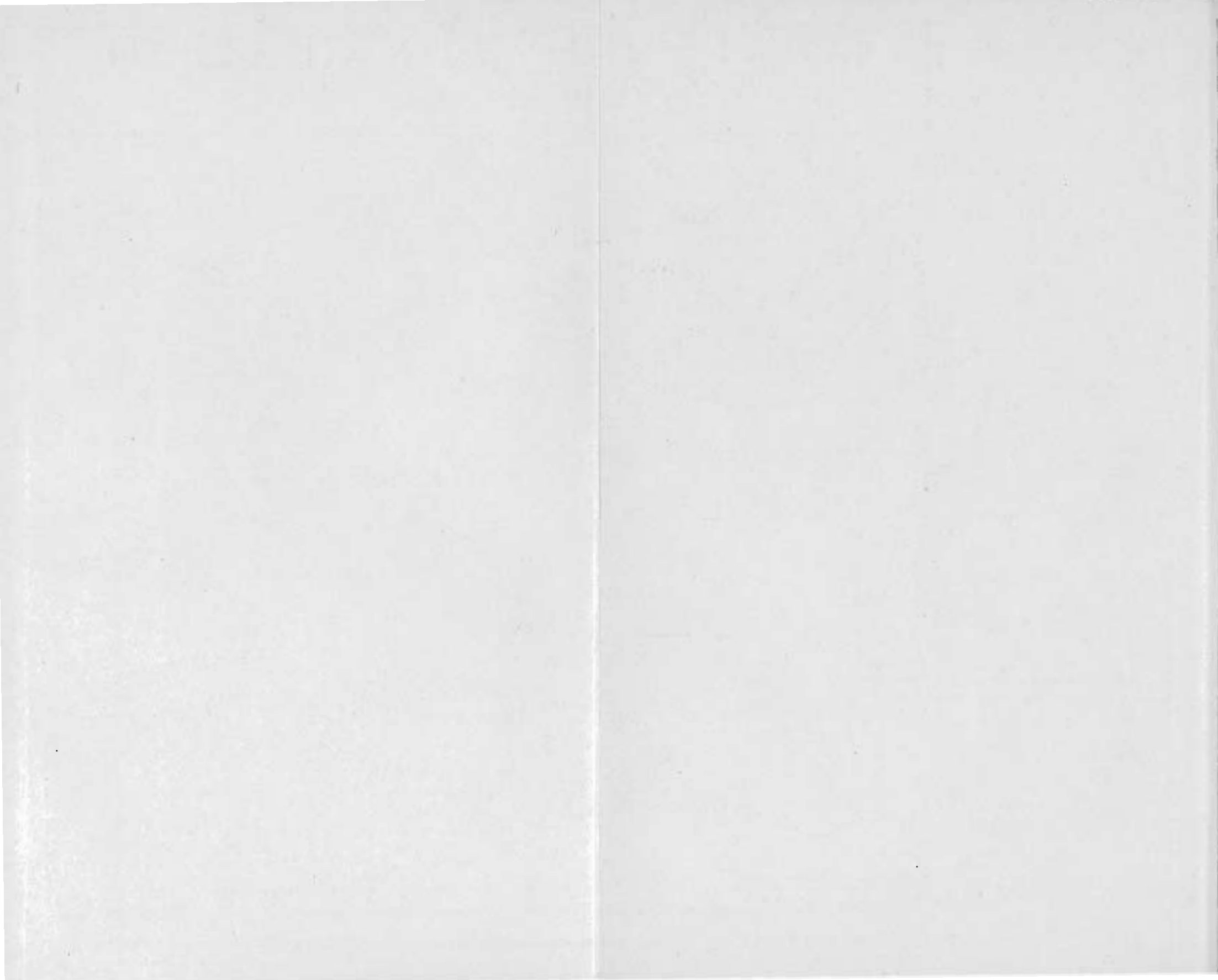


FIG. 14. (See page 142)



# POINTE DU VIEUX CHATEAU *SAUZON BELLE-ILE-EN-MER*

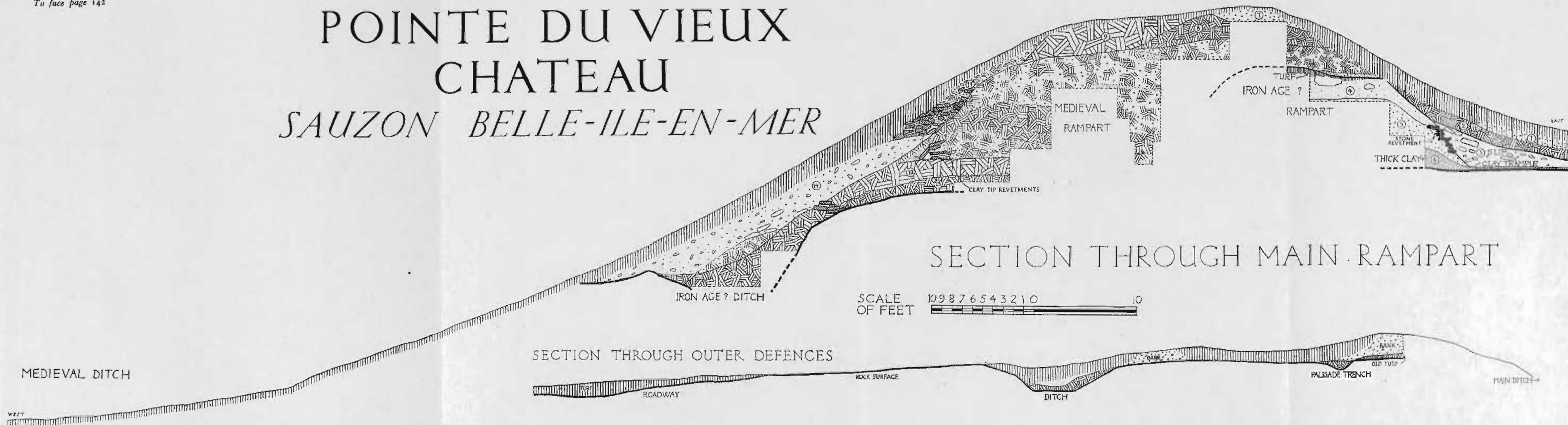


FIG. 15. (See p. 142)





of the third one and a narrow trench in front of the second one. Both banks are of dump construction.

On the ground it appeared that the medieval bank had been carried right across the ends of the original inturned entrance (pl. III, B). To verify the existence of this earlier entrance a section was cut (Section O, fig. 16), which showed the original cobbled surface of the entrance, a second cobbled surface a foot above it, which was, in its turn, grown over with a layer of turf.



FIG. 16

This turf was worn through in the middle of the section, possibly during the period when the medieval bank was in course of construction. The usual heavy clay rampart tips of the medieval bank continue immediately above this to the top of the rampart. The approach to this inturned entrance could have been along the defile to the west of, and below, the central plateau, or across that plateau straight to the now blocked entrance. There are traces of a causeway leading to the entrance but trial trenches showed that there was a considerable depth of made up material in which were a few medieval sherds.



Other slight cuttings were made in this area but produced inconclusive results only showing that the third ditch (Site M, fig. 14) ran from the edge of the cliff on the north to the edge of the plateau on the south; the gap visible at present, therefore, does not appear to belong to the original lay out.

A number of small trenches cut in the interior of the camp revealed little stratified occupation, the rock surface being only a few inches below the turf. Medieval sherds were found at Site A in a level overlying the filling of an earlier ditch or pit.

No section was taken through the outermost bank but at the extreme south, where some of it has fallen over the cliff, a section was exposed which showed it to be of dump construction.

A certain amount of Iron Age pottery (fig. 17) was found on the site, mainly in the make-up of the medieval rampart on Sites O and F. It was in very small pieces and restricted to certain of the tiploads, and thus presumably came from an occupation level which the medieval builders removed when they were clearing the large ditch in front of the great bank.

### *Conclusion*

The camp at the Pointe du Vieux Château was then as far as one can disentangle the earlier from the medieval remains, constructed on rather similar lines to the earliest defensive system at the Camp du César, on the Ile de Groix. There would appear to have been a rampart formed of loose rock-cut material, revetted on the interior at any rate, by stone slabs. In front of this lay probably a ditch and bank (see above, p. 142). and then the ditch which was uncovered in the section through the main bank (fig. 15). As it now stands the wide medieval ditch has destroyed any signs of earlier banks and ditches, but postulating the existence of its earlier prototype there would be five banks and ditches to compare with the six at the Ile de Groix. The connection of the outermost bank and ditch at Belle Ile with the other defences is still uncertain.

### *Iron Age Pottery* (fig. 17, nos. 1-6)

1. Rim of a very small bowl of gritty buff paste, with slightly everted rim. Wheel-made? Site O, level 3. This and the following sherds were all found in the medieval dumps forming the main rampart.
2. Plain, rim of dark grey ware burnished externally. Wheel-made. Site O, level 3.
3. Straight rim of hand-made pot, of buff, gritty ware, burnt black, inside. There is a row of finger tip impressions just below the rim in Hallstatt technique. Site F, level 10.



A. BELLE ILE. FOURTH BANK IN FOREGROUND AND MOTTE IN BACKGROUND



B. BELLE ILE. VIEW FROM INTERIOR OF THE CAMP SHOWING MOTTE ON LEFT  
AND BLOCKED ENTRANCE THROUGH THE MAIN BANK



A. BELLE ILE. VIEW OF THE MAIN, SECOND AND THIRD DITCHES



C. BELLE ILE. SECTION THROUGH SECOND DITCH



B. BELLE ILE. BLOCKED INTURNED ENTRANCE  
THROUGH MAIN BANK



D. BELLE ILE. SECTION THROUGH THIRD  
DITCH

4. Rim with internal bevel. The ware is dark grey and the pot is burnished on the inside only. Wheel-made? Site O, level 3.

5. Flattened rim of grey ware burnished externally, possibly with graphite finish. Hand-made. Site F, level 10.

6. Flattened and slightly everted rim of gritty, buff-grey ware. Hand-made. Cf. a sherd from Vieux Passage (no. 2) and others from Kercaradec.

The few sherds found here are mainly of simple form like many of the types from Huelgoat, Le Petit Celland, Kercaradec and Vieux Passage (such as nos. 6 and 2). But sherds with finger tip impressions (no. 3) do not seem to occur at these sites and in the absence of any of the later features, such as cordoned, decorated or bead rimmed ware, one might date the sherds to the end of the second or beginning of the first century B.C.

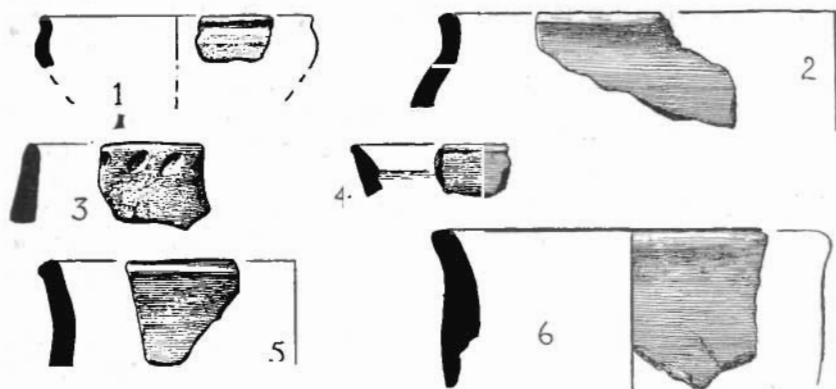


FIG. 17. POTTERY FROM POINTE DU VIEUX CHÂTEAU,  
BELLE-ÎLE-EN-MER ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )

### *Sling Stones*

Stray examples of rounded beach pebbles, of varying size and shape, and cobbled floors made up of similar material, were found on all three sites.<sup>1</sup> No hoards of such pebbles were, however, discovered. About half these stones were suitable for use as sling stones; that is to say they were round to oval, about 2 in. in length and weighed  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. to 2 oz. The rest of the examples were merely indeterminate pebbles. Stones of this nature are easily procurable from the beaches adjacent to the camps at Belle-Île and Vieux Passage, but, on the Ile de Groix the nearest area is now about a mile along the coast. The multiple, small defence system seems well suited to the use of the sling, and a few stray examples of pebbles were found, not all indeed of standard sling stone size, in the filling of the ditches at the Ile de Groix and Belle-Île. So it would appear likely that at all these camps the sling was in use as a defensive weapon.

### *Medieval Period*

As Mr. Dunning shows below in his report<sup>2</sup> on the medieval pottery found in the excavations at the Pointe du Vieux

<sup>1</sup> Sling stones also found at Kercaradec, near Quimper, *Antiquity*, xiii, 1939, 72, but not at Huelgoat or Le Petit Celland, *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>2</sup> For which I am much indebted.

Château, the camp seems to have been reconstructed in the eleventh or twelfth century A.D. The original defensive bank was greatly enlarged and a huge ditch cleared in front of it, while at the southern end a portion was reconstructed to form a motte. There are no signs of masonry work on the surface of the motte or along the crest of the bank. References to Belle-Ile about this time from literary sources are rare and deal almost entirely with a notable quarrel between the Abbey of Saint-Saveur at Redon and the Abbey of Saint Croix at Quimperle over the possession of the island.<sup>1</sup> This, originally belonging to the Count de Cornouaille, had been handed over to the Abbey of Redon by Duke Geoffrey the First of Brittany at the beginning of the eleventh century. When the Abbey of Quimperle eventually achieved possession of the island in 1118 A.D., by a mixture of force and diplomacy, it is recorded<sup>2</sup> that they constructed a 'château pour se mettre à l'abri d'une surprise de la part des écumeurs de mer qui infestaient les côtes'. The Vieux Château may well have been the one in question, and in any case the reconstruction was almost certainly put in hand by the Abbey which remained sole proprietor of the island till the sixteenth century.

The reference to the activities of pirates on the Breton coast is amply substantiated from other sources. For instance, in the *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* (1436), the commodities of Brittany are given as salt, wine and canvas—with the sinister addition of thieves, robbers and pirates. In fact pirates infested this region throughout the middle ages, and no doubt they thrived off the trade routes from the Mediterranean and more particularly the flourishing wine trade from Gascony to England.

#### REPORT ON MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM BELLE-ILE BY G. C. DUNNING

The pottery found at Belle-Ile belongs to a group represented at a number of sites in Brittany, with distinct local characteristics. Whilst this group shows partial contact with more advanced ceramic groups in NE. and SW. France, in the main it is to be regarded as embodying an unbroken ceramic tradition persisting from Gallo-Roman times in this proverbially conservative region. Similar pottery is known from a number of sites in Morbihan, and the dating evidence is consistent in placing the Belle-Ile sherds in the eleventh or twelfth century.

The leading types of vessel are globular cooking-pots with rounded shoulders, everted rims and flat bases, and bowls or dishes with angular flanged rims. Both these forms are represented at Belle-Ile (fig. 18).

<sup>1</sup> A description of this quarrel is given shortly by M. Cayot Delandre, *Le Morbihan*, 528 ff. See also Dom. G. A. Lobineau,

*Histoire de Bretagne*, Paris, 1707, I, 90, 126, 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Morbihan*, 530, but no authority is quoted for this statement.



1. Large cooking-pot of light red ware, gritty and with micaceous specks. Sharply everted rims with well defined grooves on inner slope. Site M, level 1.

2. Small cooking-pot of gritty and micaceous buff ware, finer and fired harder than no. 1. Everted rim grooved inside and with angular internal beading. The large shallow finger-tip mark is probably one of a series widely spaced round the upper part of the vessel. Site A, level 2.

3. Bowl of coarse, gritty and micaceous ware, dark brown surface caked with soot. Expanded rim, almost flat on top. Site K.

4. Large vessel, probably a deep bowl, of coarse grey ware, very gritty, light red surface, blackened outside. Angular flanged rim with inner slope and small beading. Site A, level 2.

The principal site for pottery of this character is a pottery kiln at Meudon, near Vannes.<sup>1</sup> This produced large quantities of cooking-pots decorated above the shoulder with roller-stamped patterns in great variety (70 different stamps

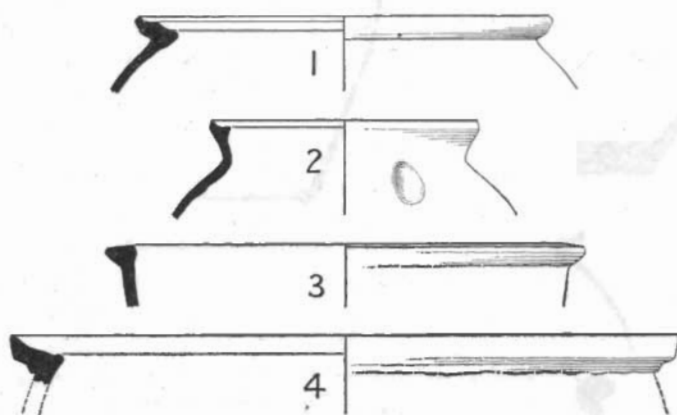


FIG. 18. MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM BELLE-ILE ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

are recorded). Fig. 19, no. 1 is a complete pot of Meudon ware from Ile d'Hoedic, and stamped sherds are known from three other sites in the Vannes-Carnac region. Elsewhere in France, e.g. at Rouen, roller-stamped decoration occurs on red-painted vessels of the eleventh or twelfth century, which are ultimately derived from Carolingian and later pottery in the Rhineland. Another type widely diffused in France, the pitcher with bridge-spout<sup>2</sup> is also represented at Meudon. A complete example, found in a grave<sup>3</sup> on Gavrinis (fig. 19, no. 2), is very similar to pitchers found in twelfth century graves at Angoulême, and is probably an importation from SW. France. Neither of these intrusive elements, roller-stamping and the bridge-spout, was generally adopted in Brittany. They serve, however, not only to emphasize the isolation of this region but also to provide external dating for the indigenous pottery.

During the excavation of a cemetery of superimposed graves at St. Clément, Quiberon, the late M.Z. le Rouzic found fragments of cooking-pots and bowls,

<sup>1</sup> *Revue Archéologique*, xxiv (1914), 67-93.

<sup>3</sup> *Bull. Soc. Polymathique du Morbihan*,

<sup>2</sup> J. de Saint Venant, "Anciens Vases à bec," *Bulletin Monumental*, lxiv, 3-62. 1885, 134.



which he referred to the eleventh century. The pottery was in a thick layer of marine shells, the debris of occupation on the site, separating the three lower series of burials from the fourth and uppermost layer above. A selection of the pottery is illustrated in fig. 19, nos. 3-7, and provides close parallels, both in the roughly wheel-turned ware and the shapes, for the Belle-Ile pottery. No. 3 is exactly comparable with Belle-Ile, no. 1, and there is a general resemblance between nos. 4, 5 and Belle-Ile nos. 3, 4. No. 6 has an applied band

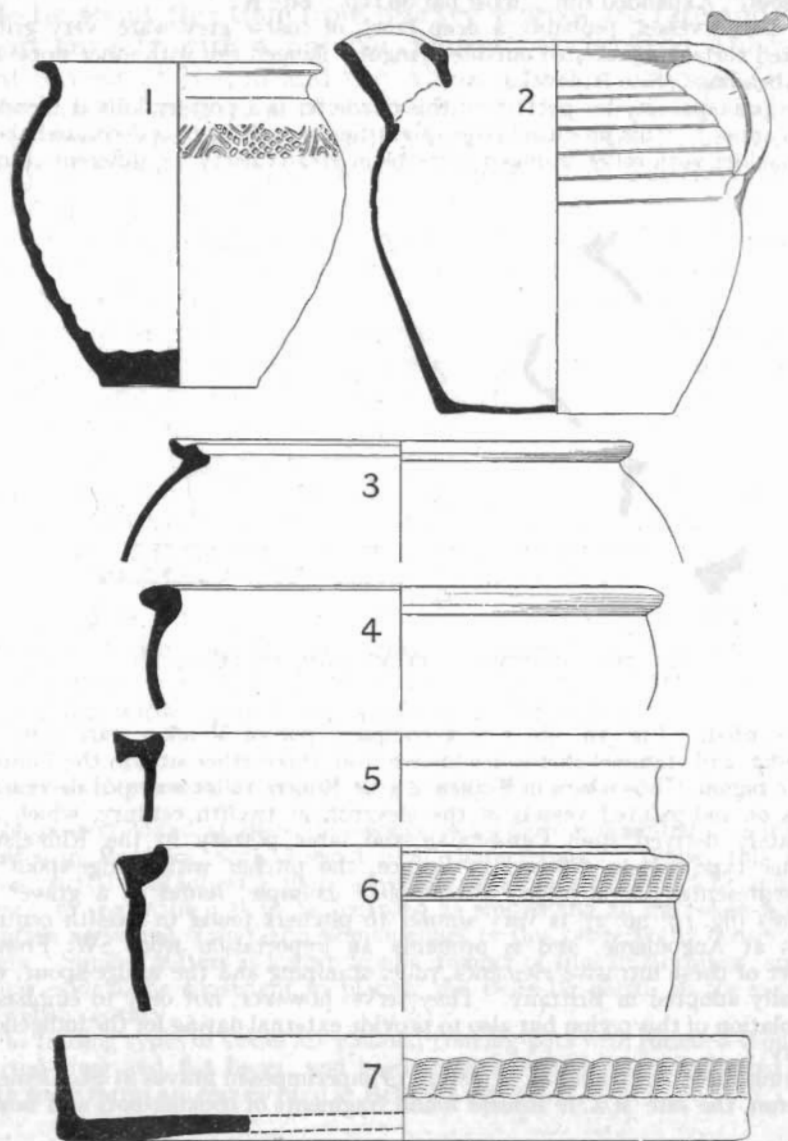


FIG. 19. MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM MORBIHAN

1. ILE D'HOËDIC (VANNES MUSEUM); 2. GAVRINIS (VANNES MUSEUM);  
3-7. ST. CLEMENT, QUIBERON (CARNAC MUSEUM) ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

with finger-printed decoration, also on no. 7, but pinched up from the surface of the pot.

Finally a flanged bowl with flat base, very similar to fig. 19, no. 5 in rim section, was found by J. Miln<sup>1</sup> in one of the rectangular structures on the south side of the tumulus of Mont St. Michel at Carnac. These are the cells of a small monastic settlement adjoining an apse-ended chapel not later than the twelfth century, and preceding the chapel built on the summit of the mound.

### Conclusion

Of the three camps examined, Vieux Passage appears to have been occupied latest, probably in the middle of the first century B.C., while that on Belle-Ile, in so far as it can be dated, would seem to have been in use earlier, perhaps in the latter part of the second century B.C. The camp on Groix cannot be dated owing to lack of pottery, but could perhaps be assigned tentatively to the same period as that on Belle-Ile on structural grounds.

The main rampart on Groix, and probably on Belle-Ile, is neither of the *murus gallicus* type found at Huelgoat,<sup>2</sup> for example, or of the stepped type found at Kercaradec,<sup>2</sup> near Quimper, and at St. Gurnard's Head<sup>3</sup> in Cornwall. It will be interesting to see whether its type of construction—a layer of turves holding in place a wide mass of rock debris and retained on both sides by a stone wall—has any dateable significance if and when it is found on the Brittany mainland.

It has been noted that the camp on Groix, and perhaps that on Belle-Ile, has the rather unusual system of a large innermost bank and ditch and six small outer defences. It is difficult to find comparative material for this peculiar arrangement but it seems likely that this multiplicity of outer defences is without any special significance but is rather due to the individual requirements of each site. At Groix and Belle-Ile, for example, the necks of the promontories to be defended are of considerable width and the underlying rocks are hard and lie close to the surface. It was probably easier to construct one large rampart and a number of small ones than three fair-sized banks, and the arrangement would serve equally well as a defence against the slingstone.

Much more work is still needed on the Brittany hillforts, Belle-Ile included, before sufficient evidence can be found to enable a full discussion of the relationship of the cultures of Brittany and Britain in the latter part of the Early Iron Age.

<sup>1</sup> J. Miln, *Excavations at Carnac*, 1877, 147, pl. III 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquity*, 1939, xiii.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gordon, *Arch. Journ.*, xcvi, 96 ff.