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## Excavations in Blagden Copse, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Hampshire, 1961

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**A**N extensive series of earthworks in Blagden Copse has been preserved, but obscured, by woodland and undergrowth. Two sub-rectangular enclosures, a field system, and a linear dyke are the surviving remains of Iron Age and perhaps Romano-British farming activities, and adjoining these earthworks is a small but important barrow which covered a rich La Tène III cremation burial. This complex has never been planned in detail because the closely-spaced trees and dense undergrowth are formidable obstacles to the surveyor.<sup>1</sup> The land has now been planted by the Forestry Commission, and the construction of an access road involved the levelling of some of the earthworks, including the area between one of the enclosures and the barrow. Before this sector was destroyed the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Works, prompted by Professor C. F. C. Hawkes, decided to carry out a brief excavation, in October and November 1961.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Earthworks*

The enclosure immediately adjoining the Forestry Commission road is roughly quadrangular (Fig. 1) with quite sharp north and west corners and an entrance in the south corner. An area of about half an acre is enclosed by a low bank with a ditch on the inside. Along the north-east side the bank is now about 2 ft. high and the ditch 18 in. deep, but because of the natural slope of the land the top of the bank stands some 5 ft. 6 in. above the bottom of the ditch (Fig. 2, A-B). There is a slight internal bank, 9 in. high, along the north-east side and round the north and east corners. The west corner is rather different, for the ditch and outer bank disappear, and are replaced by a pronounced inner bank some 2 ft. 6 in. high (Fig. 2, E-F), and in plan this projects slightly. It is possible that these changes indicate a reconstruction. Along the south-western side the outer bank is some 30 in. high, the ditch 12 in. deep, and the inner bank about 12 in. high (Fig. 2, C-D).

1. The area is covered by the Ordnance Survey 6 inch sheet, Hampshire XV.NE., but none of the earthworks are plotted. The barrow (SU.364523) and 'Field System' are marked on recent Ordnance Survey 1 inch maps (Sheet 168, 1959 edition). Some of the earthworks are described by H. S. L. Dewar, 1929, 121-24, with a plan opposite p. 121.

2. The writer was assisted by Miss S. M. Johnson and Mr. A. L. Pacitto. Mr. H. S. L. Dewar, who has carried out previous excavations on the site, visited the Ministry's excavation and gave valuable assistance in describing his own finds and correlating them with the present work.

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The outer bank on the south-western side of the enclosure continues eastwards beyond the entrance to form the southern edge of a broad hollow roadway whose northern side has been cut into the natural slope with no additional bank (Fig. 2, J-K). About 50 yards from the entrance the roadway crosses a dyke which can be traced in a straight line for about 120 yards to the east and a further 135 yards to the west. The dyke has a low southern bank, broken only by the roadway, and a slight bank on the north side for 45 yards west of the roadway.

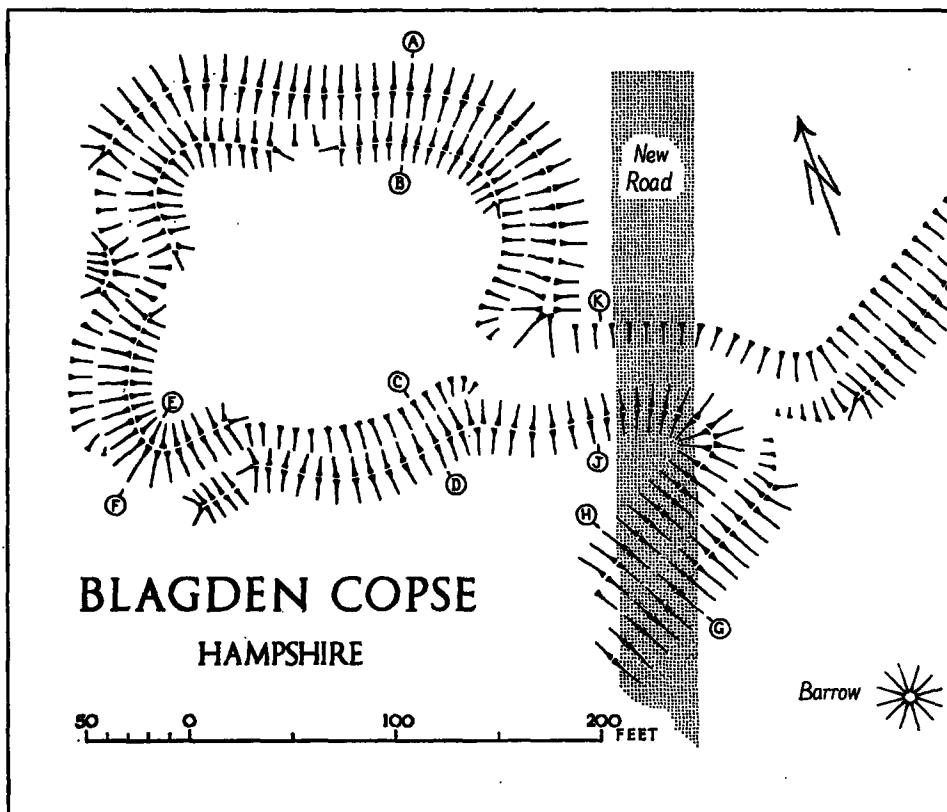


FIG. 1. Earthwork in Blagden Copse, showing the area destroyed by the Forestry Commission Road.

The small barrow is on the south-eastern side of the Forestry Commission road (Fig. 1), 45 yards beyond the main dyke and 80 yards from the entrance to the enclosure. It is 34 ft. diameter and 2 ft. 6 in. high. In the centre there is a roughly oval hole, 11 ft. by 6 ft. in which the La Tène III burial was found in 1905, and east-north-east of the centre is a rectangular trench, 9 ft. by 3 ft., where further calcined bones were found in 1928.<sup>3</sup>

A second enclosure, some 300 yards north-east of that illustrated in Fig. 1, is slightly larger, but quadrangular with an entrance in one corner. This enclosure is confined by a ditch with a bank on the inside.

3. H. S. L. Dewar, 1929, 121-22; C. F. C. Hawkes and G. C. Dunning, 1930, 304-09.

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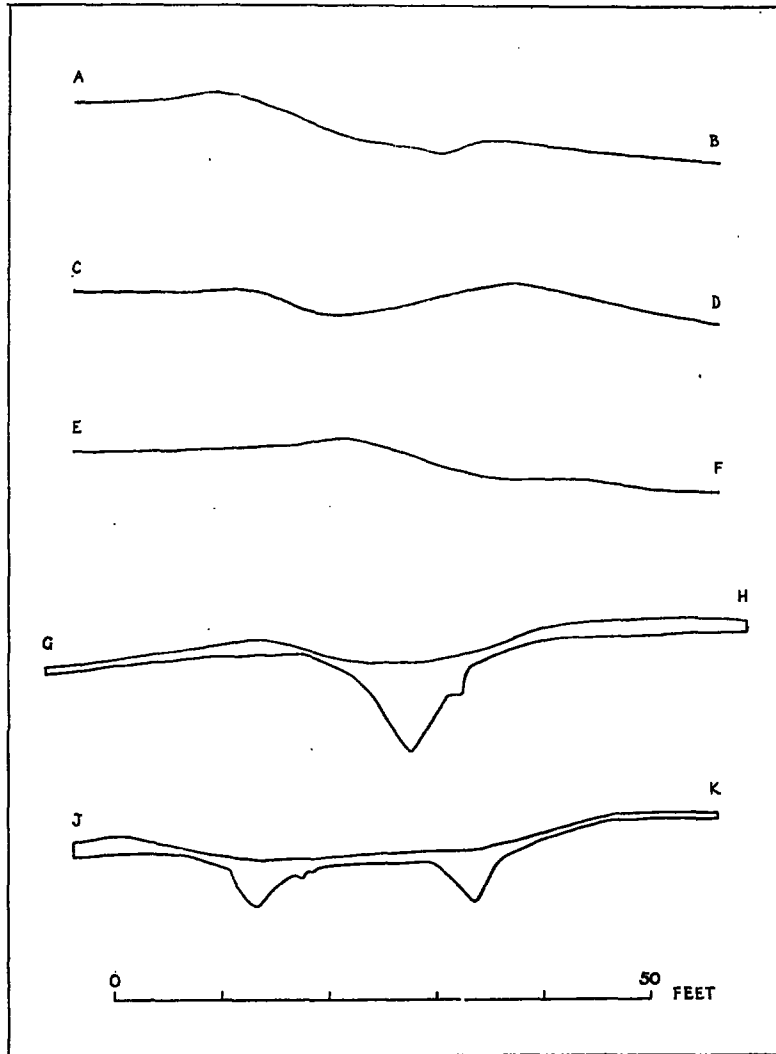


FIG. 2. Profiles of the earthworks; See fig. 1 for location.

### *The Excavation*

The Forestry Commission road, some 40 ft. wide, crosses the earthworks immediately east of the first enclosure, and most of the prehistoric roadway and part of the main dyke had to be levelled (Fig. 1). Neither the enclosure nor the barrow was damaged. Hence the Ministry's excavation was limited to trenches across the prehistoric roadway; at the junction of roadway and dyke; and through the dyke on both sides of the junction.

Some pottery was scattered in the angle between the southern bank of the roadway and the northern bank of the main dyke, but excavation showed that this was confined to the surface and top-soil, and no features were found. Dewar found a quantity of pottery in the

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same place, and some of it had been covered only by moss.<sup>4</sup> This unstratified pile of pottery, mainly composed of Romano-British sherds, could have been deposited here in recent years. At the western side of this area, in the northern continuation of the trench across the main dyke (section C-D, Fig. 4), the surface layers were exceptionally dark, and a quantity of burnt flints and three small stake-holes were found; but there was no dating evidence and

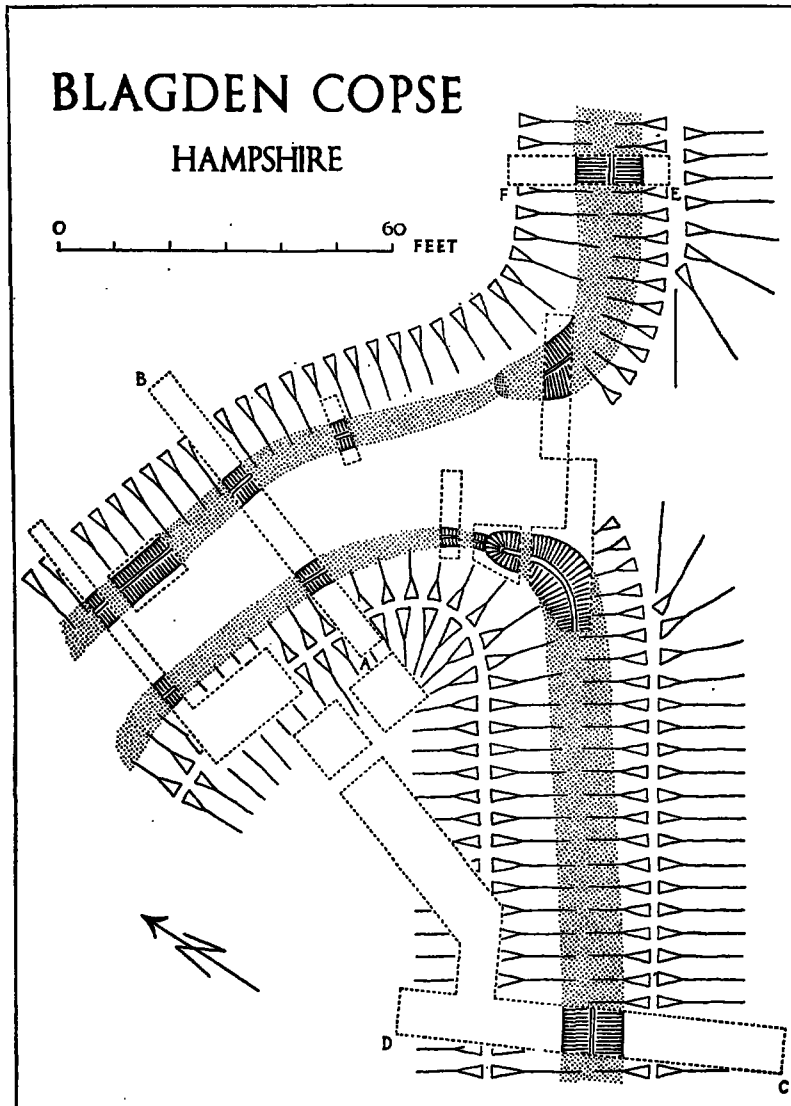


FIG. 3. Trenches excavated in 1961.

4. H. S. L. Dewar, 1929, 123.

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these features could have been comparatively modern. Lengths of the banks on both sides of this angle were cleared, but there was no trace of a pallisade or fence.

The prehistoric roadway was sectioned by two trenches. In the central part (section A-B, Fig. 3) it was 12 ft. to 13 ft. wide, but the width increased to just over 20 ft. at the junction with the main dyke. There was a ditch on either side of the roadway, each about 5 ft. wide and 4 ft. 6 in. deep, and beyond the southern road-ditch was a bank 18 in. higher than the ground level. A number of large flints were scattered over the road surface, resting on the undisturbed chalk (section A-B, Fig. 4). The natural chalk in the lower part of the north road-ditch (in the western trench, Fig. 3) was stained yellow, possibly by manure washed out of the enclosure.

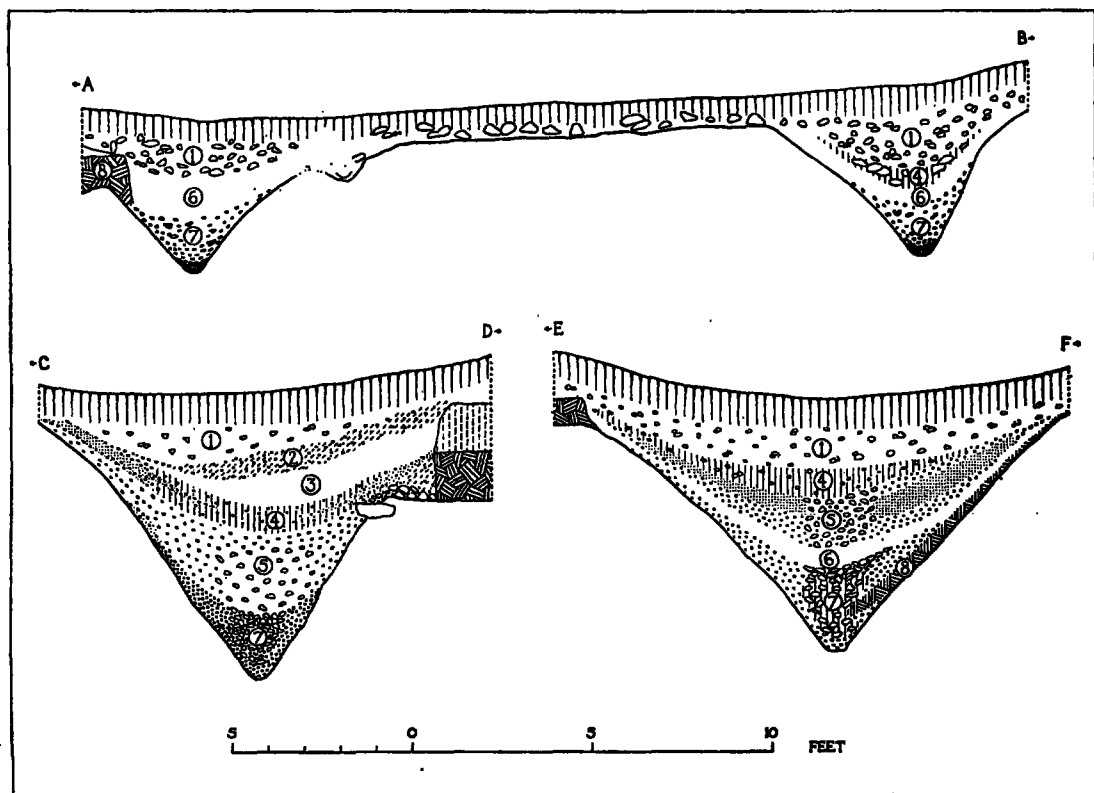


FIG. 4. Ditch Sections; location shown in Fig. 3.

The main dyke was 11 ft. wide and 8 ft. deep in section C-D, Fig. 3; 12 ft. wide and 7 ft. deep in section E-F. The junction of the southern road-ditch with the western stretch of the main dyke was excavated; here the dyke turned inwards and then stopped, and the road-ditch ran into the upper part of it. The opposite side was not examined, but the eastern stretch of the main dyke curved inwards in the same way as its western counterpart. There can be no doubt that the roadway, road-ditches and main dyke were contemporary and were constructed as part of the same plan.

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### *The Pottery* (Fig. 5).

(a) *From the filling of the road-ditches:* None of these sherds is wheel-turned. There are two fabrics, the one (nos. 1, 3, 4) is grey-brown with sandy grit; and the other (nos. 2 and 5) is dark grey, burnished, with flint and chalk grit.

1. (H.AD.1) Bowl with two slight grooves below the rim, and rough vertical brush marks on the body.
2. (H.AF.1) The greater part of a small crude bowl.
3. (H.AS.1) Small jar, with vertical brush marks similar to no. 1.
4. (H.AT.1) Jar whose body has been trimmed vertically with a knife.
5. (H.AT.2) Jar with upright sides and a band of decoration formed by diagonal grooves between two rows of dots.

(b) *From the lower filling of the main dyke:* (i.e. layers 5–7, Fig. 4). Most of the sherds are in the dark grey burnished ware, as nos. 2 and 5 above; but no. 6 has fine sandy grit. This layer is not securely sealed, and no. 11 and a minute sherd of samian have presumably intruded from the upper levels.

6. (H.AK.1) Bowl in fine sandy ware.
7. (H.AO.1) Straight sided bowl with a groove below the rim.
8. (H.AO.2) Jar with a simple rim, thickened on the inside.
9. (H.AV.3) Jar with short upright rim.
10. (H.AV.4) Bead-rim bowl or jar.
11. (H.AV.5) Wheel-turned sherd, light grey, very fine sandy grit.
12. (H.AV.2) Bowl with fairly straight sides and a groove below the rim.
13. (H.AK.2) Chalk spindle whorl.

The pottery found in the road-ditches (nos. 1 to 5) is similar to that from the lower filling of the main dyke (nos. 6–12). Stratigraphically and typologically this is the earliest pottery from the site, and it confirms that the causeway and main dyke were constructed at the same time. The pottery belongs to the class found in the final occupation at St. Catharine's Hill<sup>5</sup> and in the earliest occupation at Worthy Down.<sup>6</sup> The cultural group to which it belongs has been named the 'St. Catharine's Hill Group'.<sup>7</sup>

(c) *From the upper filling of the main dyke:* (i.e. layers 2–4, Fig. 5). No wheel-turned pottery was found in the road-ditches, but in the main dyke at the point where it turns to meet the southern road-ditch, a number of wheel-turned sherds were found. This pottery was too high in the filling to be a sealed group, but the main types are illustrated, nos. 14 to 16, together with two vessels, nos. 17 and 18, each represented by several sherds.

- 14–16. (H.AH.3; H.AH.4; H.AQ.2) Wide-mouthed bowl, usually with a cordon at the base of the neck and sometimes with a groove on the body. At least nine different vessels of this type, to which three foot-rings probably belong as well. The form is usual on La Tène III sites, e.g. Camulodunum form 221/222<sup>8</sup> and Bagendon forms 116 and 120.<sup>9</sup>

5. C. F. C. Hawkes, J. N. L. Myres and C. G. Stevens, 1930, especially fig. 13.

6. R. W. Hooley, 1929, pl. iii.

7. B. W. Cunliffe, 1964, 2–4, and type pottery fig. 2.

8. C. F. C. Hawkes and M. R. Hull, 1947, 261–62.

9. E. M. Clifford, 1961, 235–36.

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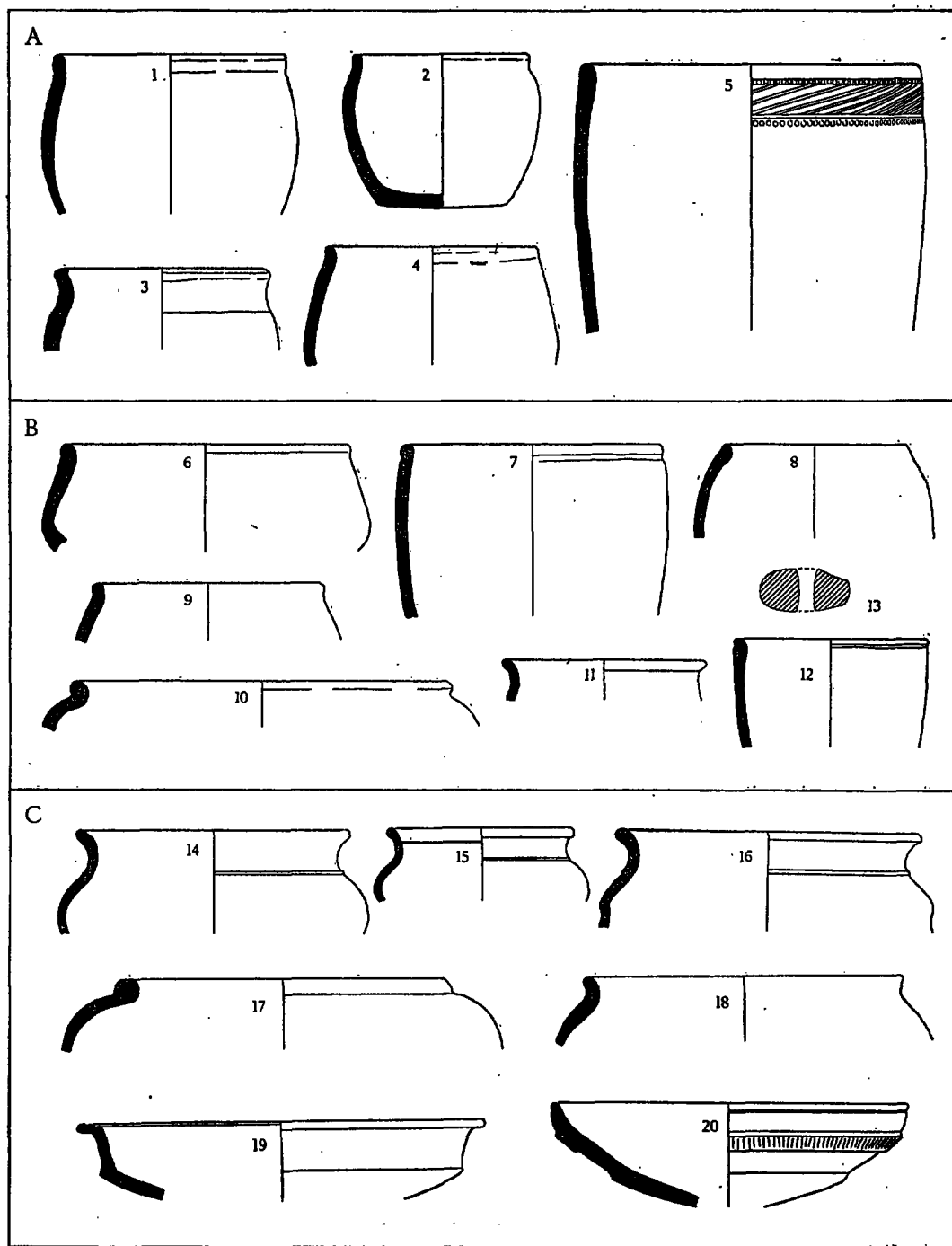


Fig. 5. The Pottery (1/2).

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17. (H.AH.4) Bead-rim jars. Sherds from at least twenty different vessels.
18. (H.AQ.2) Jar with short upright rim; three vessels represented.
19. (H.AH.2) A carinated bowl with reeded rim, in dark grey ware with fine sandy grit.
20. (H.AH.26) Bowl or lid in soft fabric, light grey core with dark grey surfaces. It has a wide flat cordon with a series of incised lines across it.
21. (H.AH.32 and 33) (not illustrated). Three sherds, two with rouletted decoration, from a butt beaker. These sherds, and the small piece of samian mentioned above, were the only imported pieces found.

The pottery from this layer, and especially nos. 14 and 15, is similar to that stratified above the 'St. Catharine's Hill Group' at Worthy Down.<sup>10</sup> This is the pottery of Hawkes' and Dunning's 'Second Belgic Invasion'<sup>11</sup>, now Hawkes' 'Southern Second C'.<sup>12</sup> Cunliffe has replaced the overworked and ambiguous term 'Belgic' in this context by 'Southern Atrebatian'<sup>13</sup>, but a type-site name would have been more suitable. This type of pottery came into use during La Tène III, and survived into Roman times.<sup>14</sup>

### *Discussion*

Judging from surface indications the Blagden Copse enclosure was not defensive. An enclosure whose bank is on the outside of a ditch is likely to have been designed to detain rather than to defend. Thus it is unlikely to have been for human occupation, but it could be reasonably interpreted as a pound for holding animals, possibly cattle. The narrow confined roadway which approaches the entrance would not be inconsistent with controlling cattle, and the main dyke is presumably a boundary defining an area of pasture on its south-east side.

There is a very similar site, Enclosure K, at Gussage Cowdown, Dorset,<sup>15</sup> with a long causeway-entrance at one corner of an enclosure which, like Blagden Copse, has the ditch on the inside and the bank on the outside. Recently Perry has identified a dozen sites of this type ('Banjo' enclosures) in Hampshire, eastern Dorset and south-eastern Wiltshire.<sup>16</sup>

The excavation has shown that the main dyke at Blagden Copse was constructed at the same time as the roadway, and presumably the enclosure was also contemporary. It seems that the road-ditches and main dyke were allowed to silt naturally and there was no attempt to re-excavate them. This one-period occupation started with pottery of the 'St. Catharine's Hill Group', and although occupation in the area continued into Roman times these particular earthworks were probably used only for a short time. The wheel-turned pottery, which is absent from the road-ditches, is at a very high level in the main dyke and it is possible that these earthworks had already lost their original significance by that time.

The enclosure and dyke are only one part of a considerable Iron Age settlement, and their relationship to other features remains to be seen. In particular the domestic site has yet to be located. But the cremation under the barrow probably belongs to the life-time of our enclosure, for its pottery is typologically later than that of the 'St. Catharine's Hill Group'. This burial is important, for La Tène III barrows are rare and the only other example in Britain is the

10. R. W. Hooley, 1929, pl. iv.

11. C. F. C. Hawkes and G. C. Dunning, 1930, 280-91.

12. C. F. C. Hawkes, 1959, 181-2.

13. B. W. Cunliffe, 1964.

14. B. W. Cunliffe, 1964.

15. O. G. S. Crawford and A. Keiller, 1928, 113, fig. 21 and pl. xvi.

16. B. T. Perry, 1966.



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very much larger mound at Lexden, Colchester.<sup>17</sup> It is possible that the Hurstbourne Tarrant barrow, like that at Lexden, is in a cemetery of otherwise flat cremations—but this is just one of many points which warrant further investigation. The Ministry's excavation merely recorded the earthworks now flattened by the Forestry Commission road, but in so doing provided some useful dating evidence for a complex which deserves much more detailed treatment.

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17. P. G. Laver, 1927.