

Excavations at Langford Downs, Oxon. (near Lechlade) in 1943

By MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

LANGFORD Downs Farm (O.S. 6 in. Oxon. 36 NW) is situated two miles north of Lechlade and a mile south-east of Southrop village (FIG. 12). Its fields lie on the east bank of the River Leach as it flows south to the Thames below Lechlade. The general height above sea-level of the flat gravel tract here is 280 ft.; to the south is an imperceptible fall to the Thames and well to the north the beginning of the rise to the Cotswolds. The boundary between Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire makes a right-angled bend from the Leach along the north hedge of the field containing the sites to be described.

Air photographs (PL. IV) taken by Flt./Lt. D. N. Riley first drew attention to the antiquities of Langford Downs in the fields (one on the east and two on the west) bordering the lane leading from Southrop to the main Lechlade-Witney road. They appeared chiefly as crop-marks¹ but in the south corner of the east field as dark streaks and patches on the white surface of gravel stripped of topsoil. They consisted of several small ditched enclosures and a group of ring-ditches. The east field had three closely related enclosures, the west several examples among a complicated pattern of markings some of which are probably to be interpreted, like those at Mount Farm, Dorchester,² as the boundary ditches of prehistoric fields. The ring-ditches numbered five in the east field with a sixth nearby, on the other side of the lane. An interesting feature was a line of big holes running east-west across the exposed gravel and continuing, as a crop-mark, into the west field. In the autumn of 1943, the antiquities of the east field were examined³ before being destroyed. A general plan of the ground available for excavation, based on the air-photographs, is given in FIG. 13, but the sites marked must be regarded as members of two larger groups now divided by the modern road.

¹ The east field carried barley, the west peas.

² *Oxoniensia*, II, 13.

³ Thanks are due to Messrs. Wakefield, Bishop and Coley for facilitating excavation in the area already being worked for gravel and to Mr. Howes for generous permission to dig in the area still being farmed; to Flt./Lt. D. N. Riley for drawing attention to the site and for the loan of air-photographs; and to Mr. L. F. Cowley for his report on the animal remains. The excavations were undertaken by the Ministry of Works (Ancient Monuments Branch).

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

SITE I: THE ENCLOSURES

The central and only complete feature of the stripped area was a small, roughly rectilinear enclosure, 130 ft. E.-W. by 180 ft. N.-S. (FIG. 13, A), of a type well known in air-photographs of the Thames valley. The ditch had certain peculiarities which hinted at work of more than one period, notably a thickening and partial duplicating on the west and a concavity in its line at the

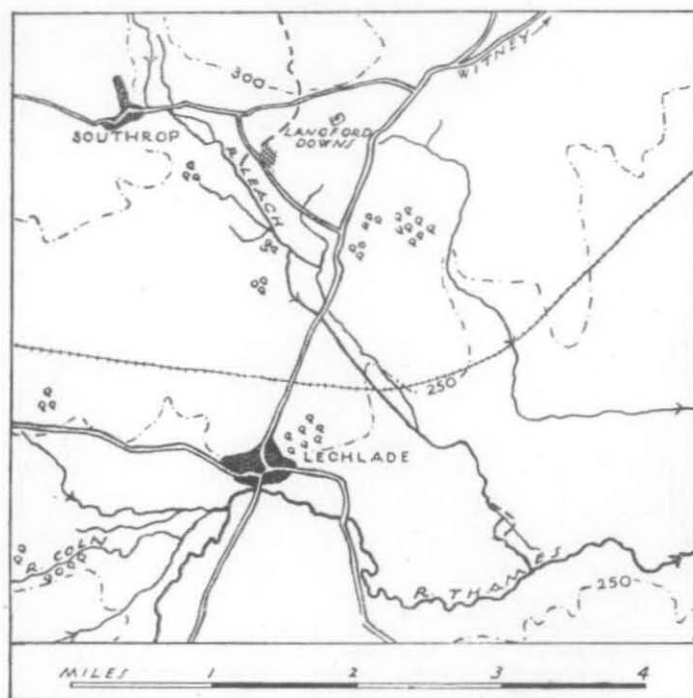


FIG. 12

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Map of the Lechlade district showing position of site (hatching, top left)

Based on the O.S. 1-in. map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

north-east corner where it became very narrow and amalgamated with the east ditch in a curious fashion. The air-photograph showed at least four possible entrance breaks.

From enclosure A radiated three major ditches forming two outer enclosures. Much of the ditch of varying width belonging to the north

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

enclosure (FIG. 13, B) could be traced on the gravel and as a crop-mark outside the stripped area, but its west side lay somewhere beneath a vast modern mound of topsoil or the lane. It certainly did not extend into the west field. This north enclosure measured 146 ft. N.-S. and anything up to 120 ft. more than the 140 ft. exposed E.-W. To the south of the central enclosure a narrow ditch bounded an area 100 ft. by, again, something more than the 140 ft. visible (FIG. 13, c). According to the air-photograph there occurred

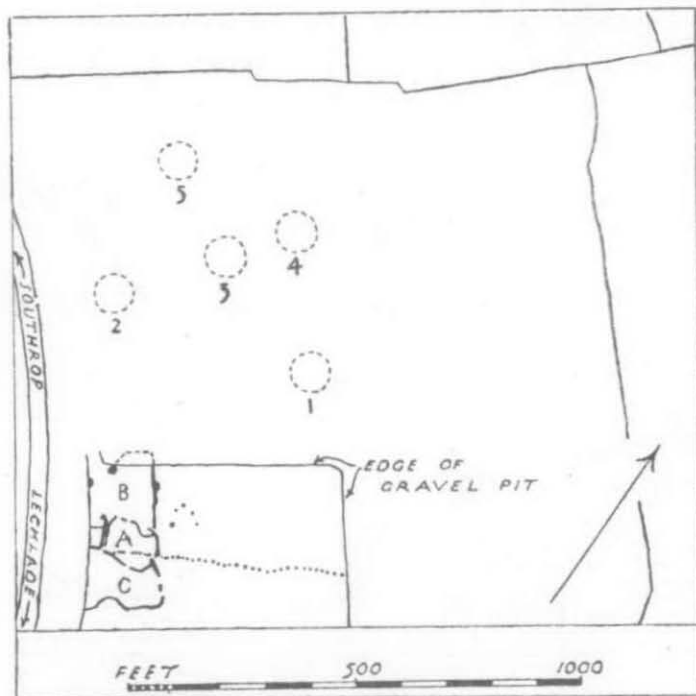


FIG. 13

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

General plan of Sites I (the enclosures) and II (the ring-ditches)
based on the air-photograph

in its south sector a concavity like that of enclosure A, but this part had already been destroyed when excavation began.

The mechanical removal of topsoil resulted in some places in the loss of a skin, sometimes several inches thick, of the old surface, in others in drifts of mixed gravel or earth hiding features in that surface. Preliminary clearing revealed certain modifications in, and additions to, the plan (FIG. 14). It

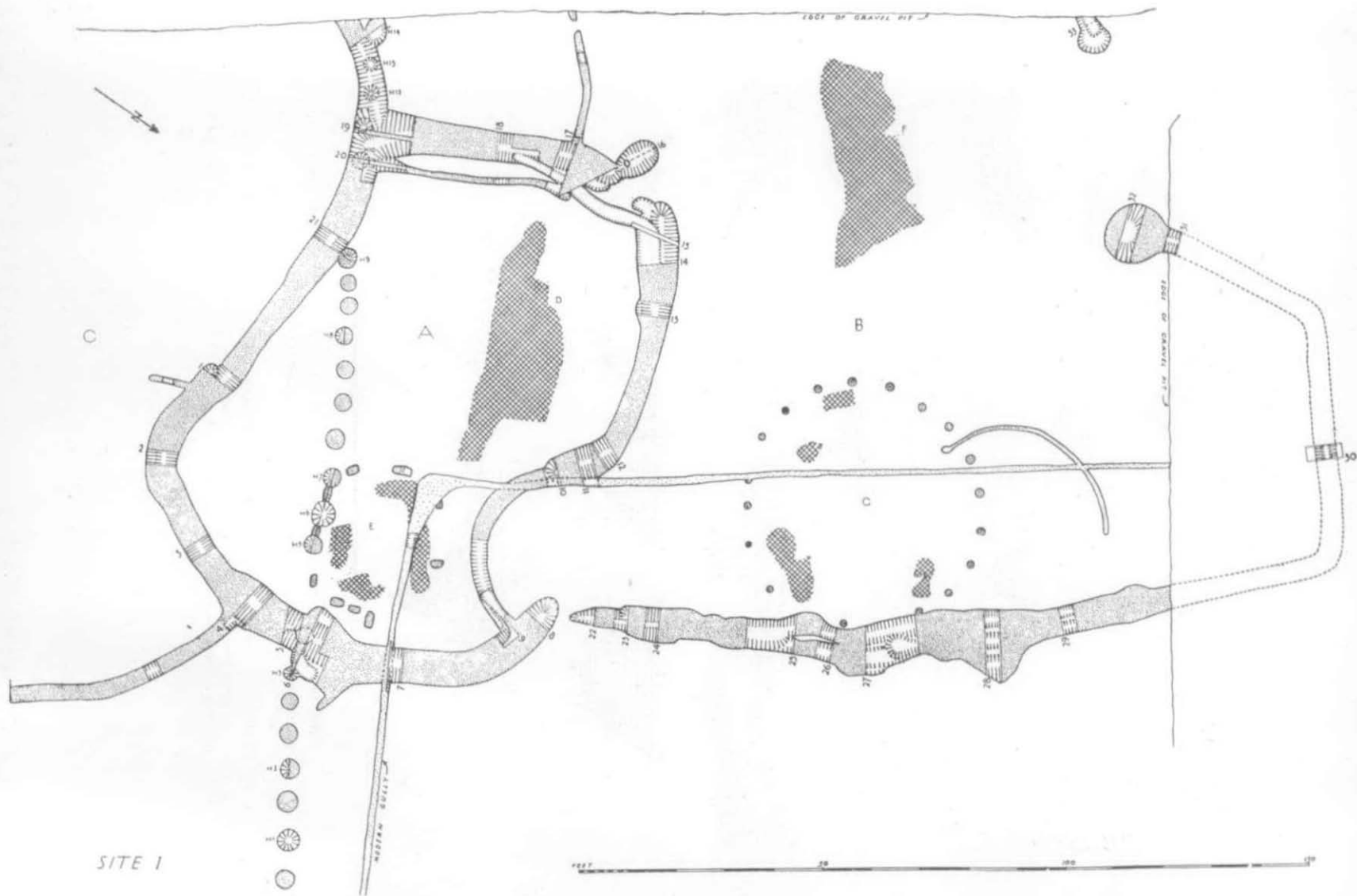


FIG. 14
LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.
General plan of the enclosures (Site I) (p. 49)

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

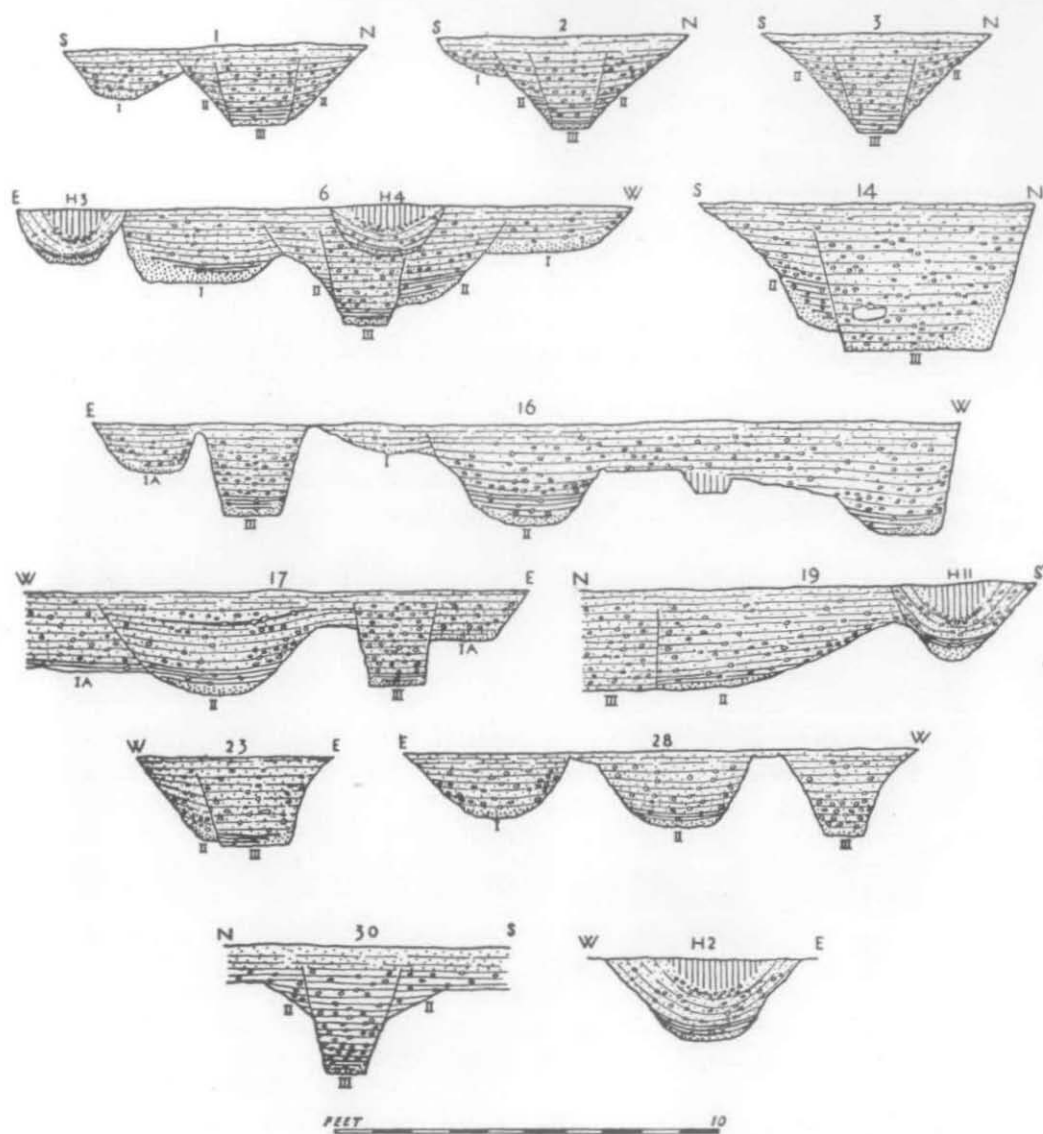


FIG. 15

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Sections through the ditches of the enclosures (Site I) (pp. 49-55)
 Arabic numerals refer to cuttings, Roman to phases of occupation. H=hole (in line of holes)

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

left no visible entrance breaks for enclosures A and C. On the other hand it revealed signs of occupation in enclosures A and B. A series of cuttings (FIGS. 14 and 15) across the ditches confirmed the idea that their idiosyncrasies were due to their embodying the work of several periods. Three phases were recognized for enclosures A and B. Only the first phase affected enclosure C. In each phase the ditch followed fairly closely the plan of its predecessor, except for the siting of the entrances. FIG. 16 shows with tolerable accuracy the three versions of the plan; where evidence for the course of a ditch has been destroyed by later work, but assumption of continuity seems reasonable, a broken line has been used. As most of the habitation-features cannot be assigned definitely to any one phase, they are repeated on each plan.

PHASE I

Before the first plan is dealt with, it must be mentioned that a gully running parallel with and then west from the west ditch of enclosure A probably resulted from some earlier occupation on the site. Section 17 (FIG. 15) showed the filling of the gully (1A, lying horizontally because the cutting ran along and not across it) broken by the profile of the phase II ditch on the west and the phase III ditch on the east. A faint crop-mark on the air-photograph suggests that this gully ran for some distance into the west field.

The evidence for the original version of enclosure A was meagre; in most places renovations had wholly destroyed the first shallow ditch. On the south what remained had a flattened U-profile, 3 ft. 6 ins. wide and 15 ins. deep below the surface of the gravel, now lowered by mechanical scraping (FIG. 15, nos. 1-2). Its filling consisted of 2 ins. of cream-coloured coarse sandy quick silt covered by slightly sagging layers of brown soil and gravel. This first ditch formed the greater part of the north-east concavity, which must have been dictated by some obstacle or activity now unknown. One of the four entrances occurred here, for the rest of the concavity was formed by the phase III ditch, which was too narrow to hide the ditch of phase I had it existed. A second entrance lay at the north-west corner where a passage 6 ft. wide (PL. V, A) ran between rounded ditch-ends. The terminal noted in cutting 1 marked a break on the south, while on the east the ditch widened and deepened (FIG. 15, no. 6) as it curved outwards in hooked form on one side of a fourth break. The opposing end was not uncovered; it must have been a little north of cutting 4.

Little, again, of the first ditch of the north enclosure B remained. The length surviving on the east evidently terminated in the expansion just beyond cutting 28. Entrance gaps seem to have been frequent, including the one mentioned, another at the south-east corner and a third wide one on the

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

north-west. The ditch, like its counterpart for the main enclosure (A), was wide-mouthed and shallow.

The ditch of the south enclosure (C) was tested at its junction with the ditch of enclosure A, and again some distance to the south. Its profile and filling tallied with those of the ditch it joined. Further proof of contemporaneity was furnished by two sherds from the same bowl, one lying on the floor of the ditch of enclosure C, and the other a few feet away at the bottom of the ditch of enclosure A.

PHASE II

The first ditch had silted up to within 6 ins. of the surface of the gravel when its successor was cut. Unfortunately we have no data as to the rate of silting; presumably in so shallow a cutting the process cannot have taken long. The second ditch of the central enclosure (A) was a flattened U in profile, but deeper and wider than the ditch it superseded (FIG. 15, nos. 16 and 17, PL. V, c). Its width varied from 5 to 7 ft. Its maximum depth was rather more than 3 ft. Its filling was sandy quick silt, a thin deposit of grey soil with pebbles and then brown loam with gravel. For the most part it followed the original plan. In some places it failed to overlap completely the earlier ditch, running on the south slightly inside it and at the north-west entrance slightly outside it, so that its rounded ends formed outer lobes to those of the first version.

A novel appendage to the ditch on the south side of the causeway was an oval pit (9 ft. long E.-W. by $6\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide) connected with, but almost at right angles to, the ditch-end. A section (FIG. 15, no. 16) showed the pit to be shallow, about half the depth of the ditch, at its inner end and as deep as 3 ft. at the vertical face of its far end. The filling was the same as that of the ditch. An interesting minor point was the appearance at the middle of the sloping part of the pit of a small oval cavity ($1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. by 1 ft. 2 ins.) dug 6 ins. deep in the gravel and filled with dark softish soil. Its sides sloped inwards to a round bottom 9 ins. across. It may be the lower part of a hole dug for a post outside the enclosure of phase I; or it may, during phase II, have held a post of which the upper part was broken off before silting up of the pit took place.

The main alteration of plan in the second period came at the north-east corner, where the concavity was ignored and north and east ditches turned slightly inwards to end opposite, but 23 ft. away from, each other. This and the north-west break were the only entrances at this time.

The north enclosure (B) had a similar ditch on rather a smaller scale—3 to 7 ft. wide and 2 ft. deep. The faint crop-mark taken to indicate the north

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

side of this enclosure was tested in cutting 30 ; the ditches of phases II and III were present. In the sector examined there were two breaks on the east (PL. V, D shows the terminal on the north side of one of them) and a third on the north. There the ditch finished on the east side of a roadway 30 ft. wide, in a pit like that described for enclosure A, though in this second case the two features were aligned so that the pit formed a knobbed terminal to the ditch. The pit was 12 ft. in diameter and 4 ft. deep at its maximum (cutting 32). On the other side of the entrance was a normal rounded ditch-end. The remaining short length of this ditch joined the south-west corner of the phase II ditch of enclosure A. The filling at the junction was carefully examined in a right-angled cutting from trench 19, but no sign of any difference in date between the two ditches was found.

PHASE III

The second interval, like the first, was sufficiently long to permit silting up of the ditch to reach an advanced stage—to within 9 ins. of the surface. The new ditch was dug narrower and deeper with a flat bottom. Its appearance suggested a palisade-trench, but its filling was that of a normal open ditch without trace of carbonized wood or packing material. Usually 2 to 3 ft. wide at the top, it tapered to 10 to 16 ins. at the bottom. Its average depth was $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. (FIG. 15, nos. 16 and 17) though just east of the causeway its width increased to 6 ft. and its depth to 4 ft. (FIG. 15, no. 14).

Adherence to the established plan meant that generally the ditch of phase III was cut in the filling of the ditch of phase II. Its profile was fairly easily distinguished, because its filling was darker and lay more horizontally than that of the U-shaped ditch where the bands of sand and gravel sagged with the curve of the sides. Where this ditch ran independently of its predecessor its filling was naturally more pebbly or lighter in colour than elsewhere.

The entrance arrangements suffered certain changes. The ditch now blocked the north-west causeway on its inner side (PL. V, A). A gap was left on the west side ; the north end of the ditch at this break was found at a slightly higher level than the phase II ditch (PL. V, B). The tradition of a north-east entrance was maintained with the filled ditch of phase I curving across the opening. West of the gap the ditch-end coincided with that of the ditch of phase II ; on the east the ditch of phase III turned sharply from the line of the phase II ditch to form a short arm with a squarish end cut into, and a little deeper than, the end of the ditch of phase I (PL. VI, A). There was a peculiar feature here. Despite a uniform surface width for the whole concavity the ditch of phase III was as narrow as 2 ft., but alongside it ran a gully, 1 ft. wide and 4 in. deep. The gully seemed unrelated to the ditch

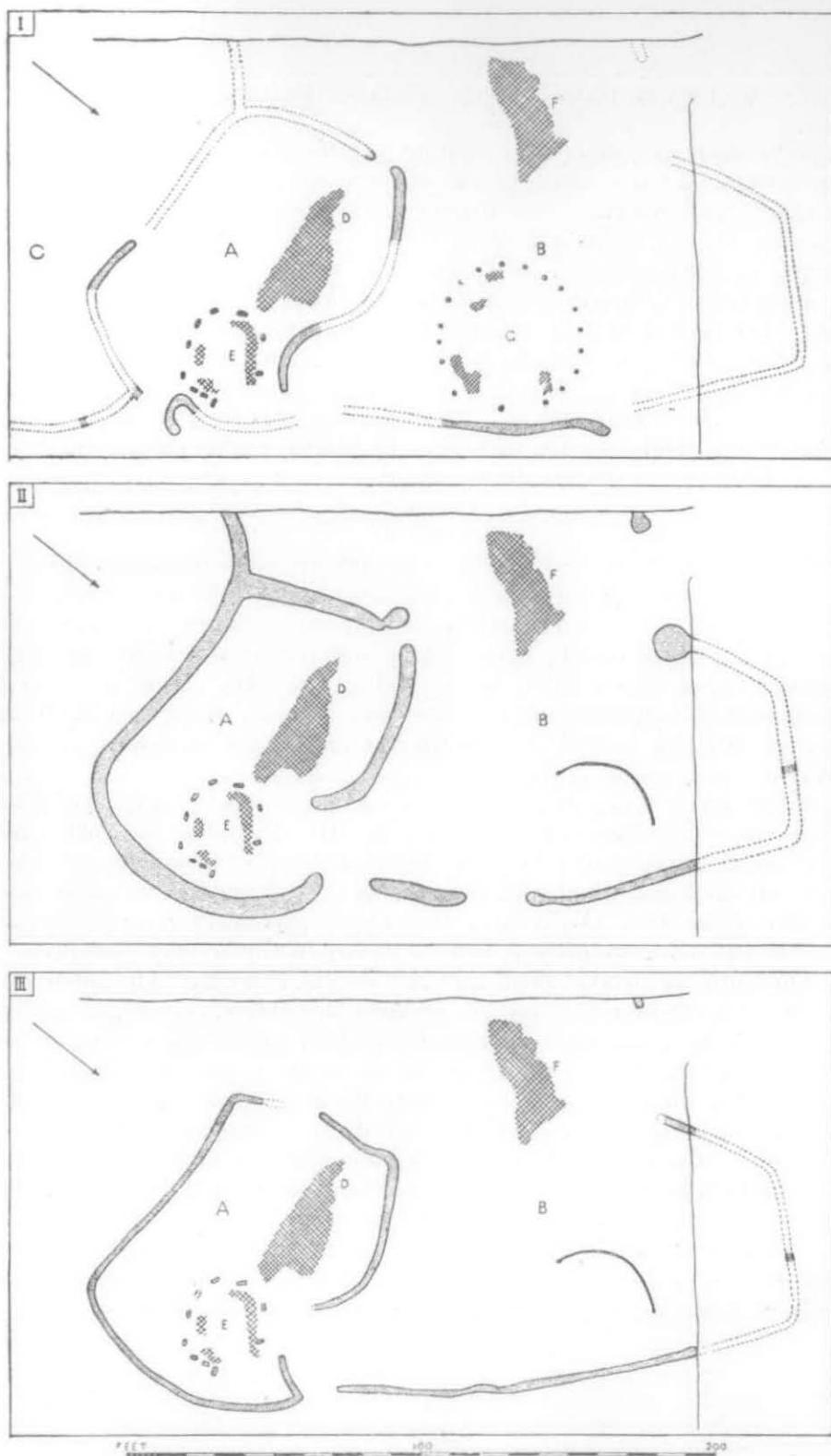


FIG. 16

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Probable plan of the enclosures (Site I) in phases I, II, III; conjectured sectors of ditches are shown with broken lines (p. 49)

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

of phase I, because it ended on the east against a ridge of solid gravel and could not therefore be a connecting link between the ends of the earliest ditch ; nor would it be related to the ditch of phase II. It apparently had some connexion with the final cutting.

The last ditch of the northern enclosure (B) had the same character as that of enclosure A. Leaving an opening 13 ft. wide north of enclosure A, it ran unbroken (unless an entrance lay unexcavated beneath the stubble) to the north-west gap where it was seen in the trench on the inner side of the terminal pit of the phase II ditch. The pit would be only about half silted up when the ditch of phase III came into commission. On the other side of the break, the square end of the latter was just visible in the filling of the phase II ditch on the edge of the stripped area. A third entrance may be suspected on the south-west, since the ditch of phase III did not appear at the junction with enclosure A.

HABITATIONS

To which phase the traces of occupation in enclosure A belonged was uncertain. Obviously it would be unsafe to argue from their relationship to the entrances. Quite possibly the dwellings like the ditches were similarly sited in successive periods. Inside the north-west entrance an area of irregular shape, 50 ft. long and, at its widest, 16 ft. across, was covered with dark brown soil, dirty with powdered charcoal. This soil filled a shallow depression in the gravel ; it was nowhere more than 4 ins. deep. The gravel beneath was exceptionally hard and compact, suggesting a well-trodden floor. The frailest of structures must be visualized, for there were no traces of the uprights essential to an even moderately substantial hut. However, in the north-east corner of the enclosure was a series of post-holes ; ten of them enclosed an oval space 28 ft. by 25 ft. with occasional patches of dirty soil again 4 to 6 ins. deep in gravel. The holes were roughly rectangular in shape, varying from $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. to 4 ft. in length and having a width of about 18 ins. Their depth (much reduced by mechanical scraping in preparation for gravel-digging) was 6 to 10 ins., their filling a dark brown soil with a few scraps of carbonized wood. In several holes lumps of callas, presumably used for packing, remained in position. The size of the holes suggests that they held more than one post, and certainly in the larger, western hole the bottom had two distinct squarish hollows on either side of a very low central ridge. Two of the south post-holes had been mutilated by the digging of the line of big holes discussed below.

Enclosure B had a circle of post-holes close to its east ditch. The holes

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

were round, 1 ft. to 1 ft. 9 ins. in diameter and now 6 to 7 ins. deep. Their filling was a soft blackish soil. The interval between the holes averaged 5 to 6 ft. Of the eighteen holes one had been partly destroyed by the modern gully and on the north-east one had been damaged and another one or probably two wholly destroyed by the cutting of the ditch of phase III (PL. V, D). Presumably the circle of uprights carried a wattle wall or fence. The structure evidently antedates the final ditch. It is also unlikely to belong to phase II since at that stage an entrance to the enclosure gave immediately, and surely inconveniently, on to the wall. It must, therefore, be assigned to the earliest phase. This feature is reminiscent of the round house at Woodbury,⁴ but here with rather greater diameter to span there is no provision for internal support for a roof. If the structure was indeed a house, its roof must have rested on a network of horizontal timbers with the first beams placed as chords to arcs formed by the circular wall. Alternatively there may have been flimsy lean-to shelters against the fence, or the place, roofless, may have served as a corral for animals. There was no trace of a hearth. What patches of occupation-soil occurred lay close to the line of the wall.

Of a different date from the 'house' was a small gully which started with an expanded oval end a few feet inside the post-holes and curved away to the north to finish on a square end. It was 10 ins. wide and 7 ins. deep. Its rectangular section and filling of blackish soil with lumps of callas indicated a palisade-trench. Similar segmental gullies have been found on recently excavated Iron Age sites in Lincolnshire,⁵ Middlesex,⁵ and Cardiganshire.⁶ Well to the west of the round 'house' lay a large patch of occupation-soil similar to that of enclosure A.

THE LINE OF HOLES

Cuttings at the points of intersection of the ditch of enclosure A and the line of holes, already mentioned as a distinctive feature of the site, proved that the latest ditch had silted up before the holes were dug. The evidence came from sections 6 and 19 (FIG. 15). In the former a partial ridge of gravel remains between hole 3 and the ditch of phase I, and only in the top filling could their relationship be read (PL. VI, c), but hole 4 had clearly been dug in the filling of the ditch of phase III. In cutting 19, hole 11 breaks the sagging filling of the ditch of phase II, and, in cutting 20, hole 10 impinges on the dark filling of the phase III ditch (PL. VI, B, rods right and left respectively).

⁴ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, new ser., VI (1940), 78.

⁵ Information from Mr. W. F. Grimes.

⁶ *Arch. Camb.*, xcvi (1945), 234.

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Further holes were examined, but none provided any datable object. They were all round, 3 to 5 ft. across, and basin-shaped (FIG. 15, H2). The intervals between them varied from 3 to 5 feet.

The generally accepted explanation of such lines of holes, of which another example has been recorded by Major Allen at Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham, Berks.,⁷ is that they held the posts of a palisade or fence. This explanation is so obviously based on common sense that only incontrovertible evidence could be accepted against it. At Lechlade the filling of the pits creates some difficulty over this reading of their purpose. Their shape and size are such that they may well have held large posts which would have been kept in place by replacing the material dug out when the hole was made; for there was no sign of stones or other packing in the holes. Normally sections across such holes would show a dark central cylindrical core penetrating to the bottom of the pit with the packing undisturbed around it. Here, however, the fillings were of the same character as those of the ditches, a little gravelly quick silt covered by sagging bands of grey soil, brown soil and gravel; and while there was a central core of soft blackish soil quite free from gravel, a feature which did not occur in the ditch-fillings, this was shallow or basin-shaped (9-12 ins. deep and 1 ft. 4 ins. to 2 ft. in diameter) repeating the profile of the hole itself. In other words, it appeared both in its form and in its lack of any charcoal constituent to mark a final stage in the silting up of the holes, rather than the decay of a timber post. This feature was consistent in all the holes investigated whether dug in the ditch-fillings or into virgin gravel. The conclusion seems to be that the holes were dug and never used, being allowed to silt up by a normal process; or that the posts which occupied them were completely removed. Against the latter must be set the fact that the fillings were normal silting rather than the clean packed gravel that might have been expected; for, while this packing would have weathered and collapsed with exposure, some part of it should still have remained unchanged. On the whole the more acceptable conclusion is that the holes were dug for a palisade and were never so used; but it will be interesting to see how the result here compares with that of the Long Wittenham palisade when it comes to be examined.

Sundry shapeless earthy patches outside the east ditch of enclosure B were excavated. They represented holes or pits of varying depth and size, apparently natural irregularities in the gravel surface, filled with light yellowish or dark brown soil. Similar cavities of natural origin are undoubtedly responsible for some of the markings on the air-photographs.

⁷ *Oxoniensia*, v, 164 f.

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

THE POTTERY

No pottery was associated with the structures within the enclosures. The material illustrated all came from the floor of the ditch in the section-cuttings. It falls into two classes—that in the Iron Age A tradition and that of Belgic type.

Phase I (FIG. 17, nos. 1-3).

1. Rim fragment of jar with high shoulder and short slightly everted rim. Soft reddish brown gritty ware, outer face partly blackened. Hand-made. Cf. Frilford 61 (*Oxoniensia*, iv, 22, fig. 7) for somewhat similar rim. B.28.⁸
2. Upper half of necked bowl. Well-fired brown ware with grit backing; smooth surface smoked black in places. Wheel-made. A.1 with a joining fragment from A.6. A Belgic type which occurs at Maiden Castle, Dorset. (Cf. R. E. M. Wheeler, *Exc. at Maiden Castle* (Res. Rept. Soc. Ant. xii), no. 213, p. 234, fig. 73) and at Verulamium (cf. R. E. M. and T. V. Wheeler, *Exc. at Verulamium* (Res. Rept. Soc. Ant. xi), no. 70, p. 170, fig. 21).
3. Rim fragment of necked jar or bowl similar in form and ware to the last. A.10. There were also two fragments (not illustrated) from the rounded shoulder of a necked bowl of thin black burnished ware, similar to No. 2. A and C, at their junction in cutting 4.

Phase II (FIG. 17, nos. 4-12).

The pottery valid for dating phase II is that which came in reasonably fresh condition from the floor of the ditch in sectors unaffected by the ditch of phase III. Again both native Iron Age A (4-8) and Romano-Belgic (9-12) types are present. Of the former no. 4 is a common A2 type. These 'native' pots are hand-made of a gritty buff ware or a black ware well backed with grit but smoothed or burnished. Four bowls of the necked and cordoned Belgic (Swarling-Aylesford) form occurred.

4. Jar of coarse buff ware with plentiful grit backing. Debased situliform, probably akin to Mount Farm, Dorchester, K.3 (*Oxoniensia*, ii, 33, fig. 8) and similar forms occurring in an A1-2 content there. B.27.
5. Globular pot with simple rim of the same fabric as no. 4. B.27.
6. Jar with short everted rim. Black well-gritted ware, burnished outer face. B.27.
7. Jar with very slightly everted simple rim of the same fabric and probably the same form as no. 4. B.32.
8. Lower part of a pot of similar ware, but with both surfaces smoothed. B.32. Probably these hand-made pots all originally had this well-finished surface.
9. Necked bowl with cordon at base of neck and another lower down. Smooth black burnished ware, buff inner face. Wheel-made. Cf. Swarling 25 (J. P. Bushe-Fox, *Exc. at Swarling* (Res. Rept. Soc. Ant. v), no. 23, pl. ix). A.15.
10. Necked bowl with cordon at base of neck and with foot-ring. Grey-buff ware burnished black externally. Wheel-made. A.18.

⁸ The letter indicates the enclosure, the figure the cutting, as on the plan (FIG. 14).

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

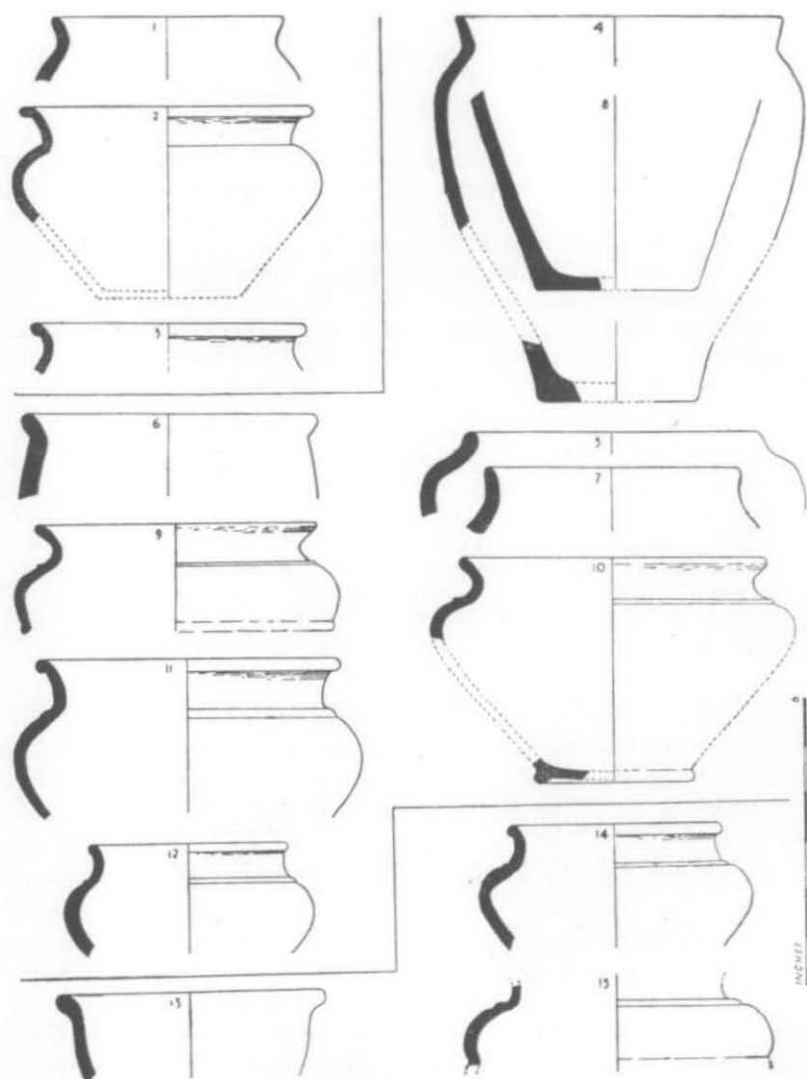


FIG. 17

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Pottery from the ditches of the enclosures (Site I) (p. 56)

Phase I, 1-3; Phase II, 4-12; Phase III, 13-15

Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

11. Necked bowl with cordon at base of neck. Smooth black ware with traces of burnishing. Wheel-made. B.28.
12. Necked bowl with cordon at base of neck. Good burnished black ware. Wheel-made. A.16.

Phase III (FIG. 17, nos. 13-15).

13. Bowl of coarse gritty buff ware similar to nos. 4, 5, 7 and 8. Hand-made. A.17. The form has an Iron Age A origin, being probably derived by blunting of the angles from the small carinated bowl. Cf. similar but presumably earlier types at Maiden Castle (Wheeler, *op. cit.*, nos. 7, 8, 18, fig. 56).
14. Necked bowl with cordon at base of neck. Heavy black ware, burnished externally. Wheel-made. A.16.
15. Fragment (with worn edges) from necked bowl with cordon at base of neck and again below. Smooth buff ware with black inner face. B.32.
Fragments from other necked bowls are not illustrated.

SMALL FINDS

Other finds were few, but, as far as they went, indicated normal Iron Age activities. A triangular loom-weight of clay (too friable for reclamation) lay on the bottom of the phase II ditch of enclosure B (cutting 27). The top filling of the phase III ditch of the same enclosure contained a spindle-whorl of sandstone, 1.2 ins. in diameter, with hour-glass perforation. Of the quantity of animal bones found most were too fragmentary for identification, but ox (Celtic shorthorn), horse (of the pony class, about 12 hands at the withers), a few pigs and a number of sheep (or goats) were represented.

DATING

It is obviously dangerous to date the site from material found solely in the ditches, but the condition and uniform character of the Belgic pottery series are sufficient to justify the conclusion that the enclosures as a whole are of Belgic date. The fact that all this group is wheel-made indicates that it belongs late in the Belgic period. On the other hand the complete absence of Roman products must show that the site had been abandoned by Roman times, for it is difficult to believe that in this area, which has produced abundant signs of Roman occupation near at hand,⁹ Roman pottery would not have been met with during the excavations. The total absence of such wares in all the cuttings, even in the upper part of the fillings, was a remarkable feature of the site, contrasting with, for instance, the comparable site at Linch Hill Corner, Stanton Harcourt,¹⁰ where occupational deposits in the hollows of the silted up ditches produced Romano-British (1st century) wares as well as Belgic types. At Langford Downs a hearth at a similar high level (FIG. 15,

⁹ Primrose Copse, between the site and the river, has produced a quantity of Roman sherds.

¹⁰ *Oxoniensis*, VIII/IX, 47 ff. (Site 8).

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

no. 17 and PL. v, c) had only sherds of the two varieties known from the floors of the ditches. Without attempting close dating of the site, a time in the first half of the first century A.D. seems most likely.

The successive reconditioning of the enclosures—again as at Linch Hill Corner—must cover a comparatively short period because the pottery throughout the life of the place maintains uniformity. The general character of the pottery also indicates that the Belgic strain which it betokens reached the site from the east, up the Thames valley, rather than from the south. The predominant necked and cordoned bowls are derived from the Aylesford-Swarling group and seem to have been types with the highest survival value. In this the site agrees with the steadily accumulating evidence for the area, in which pottery of south-eastern origin bulks very much more largely than pottery from Wessex.

The presence in all phases of a small amount of pottery in the tradition of Iron Age A is of interest because of the often expressed view that the Iron Age A culture survived strongly in the Upper Thames valley until a comparatively late date. The question arises whether this pottery is due to true survival of cultural elements or whether it is merely a case of the accidental presence of debris from an earlier settlement. Its consistent character combined with the fact that the forms themselves appear to be very much devolved would seem to indicate true survival. The somewhat worn condition of many of these sherds need not invalidate this view, for the high grit content of their body tends to make them more friable than the more closely-knit Belgic fabrics. In this respect, again, Langford Downs tallies with other sites of the period in attesting not merely the strength of the Iron Age A tradition, but also the comparative weakness of the Iron Age B element, here completely absent and elsewhere only sparsely represented.

SITE II : THE RING-DITCHES

In the air-photograph the ring-ditches appeared as well-defined crop-marks, but at the time of excavation the stubble offered no clue to their positions. Trial cuttings (FIG. 18, nos. 1-5, AA¹) located them, but were in each case some distance from the centre of the enclosed area. The centre points having been more closely determined, sections were taken on the full diameters of the circles (FIG. 18, nos. 1-5, BB¹ and FIG. 19) which ranged from 95 ft. (no. 5) to 109 ft. (no. 4).

The ditches varied in shape and size. Most of them showed the lack of uniformity in digging noted on other similar sites and attributed to gang-work. Their description may be summarized :

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

NO.	WIDTH	DEPTH	PROFILE
1.	6 ft. 6 ins.- 7 ft. 9 ins.	2 ft. -2 ft. 6 ins.	Wide U.
2.	9 ft. -14 ft. 6 ins.	1 ft. 6 ins.-2 ft. 6 ins.	Sloping sides with flat bottom on the west, more rounded on the east. The abnormal width on the east seems to be due to alterations of slope in cutting the outer side of the ditch.
3.	10 ft. -11 ft.	1 ft. 9 ins.-2 ft. 3 ins.	Short steep sides and wide flat bottom.
4.	10 ft.	3 ft.	Wide U.
5.	8 ft. -10 ft.	2 ft. 6 ins.-2 ft. 9 ins.	Gently sloping sides and narrow flat bottom.

The ditch-filling was everywhere the same with slight variations in the thickness of the deposits. A few inches of coarse gravelly quick silt masked the bottom and the lower parts of the sides. Above came a band (up to 1 ft. thick) of fine grey limy soil, usually soft, but in places (no. 1, south cutting and no. 5, all cuttings) almost cement-like. This was succeeded by earthy filling, light or reddish brown in colour, with lines of gravel sagging in sympathy with the ditch-profile. The earthy filling finally merged into the topsoil, which became a darker brown towards the surface. The topsoil was generally 12-18 ins. deep except inside no. 4, where towards the centre it rose to 2 ft. 6 ins. above the gravel. There was, however, no evidence for the existence here of an artificial mound. The cuttings showed simply the normal change to a greater pebble content as the topsoil approached the underlying gravel. If any of the ditches originally encircled a mound, it had vanished completely. It seems likely, however, that mounds once existed, in that from the top filling of nos. 1, 2 and 5 came a few sherds of Romano-British coarse pottery. The ditches had evidently silted up by Roman times, yet, while the abandoned ditches of the nearby Iron Age settlement could be ignored, something drew attention to the ring-ditches. In several places the section cuttings were extended in a search for banks outside the ditches, but none existed.

Examination of the old ground surface of the interiors produced little result. Several of the circles had, usually at or near the centre, one or more hollows in the gravel. In no. 1 the three central hollows were oval, ranging from 3½ ft. by 2 ft. to 7 ft. by 4½ ft., while to the east, near the margin of the ditch, lay a bigger one, 9 ft. by 6 ft. No. 2 had a single central cavity, 7 ft.

SITE II

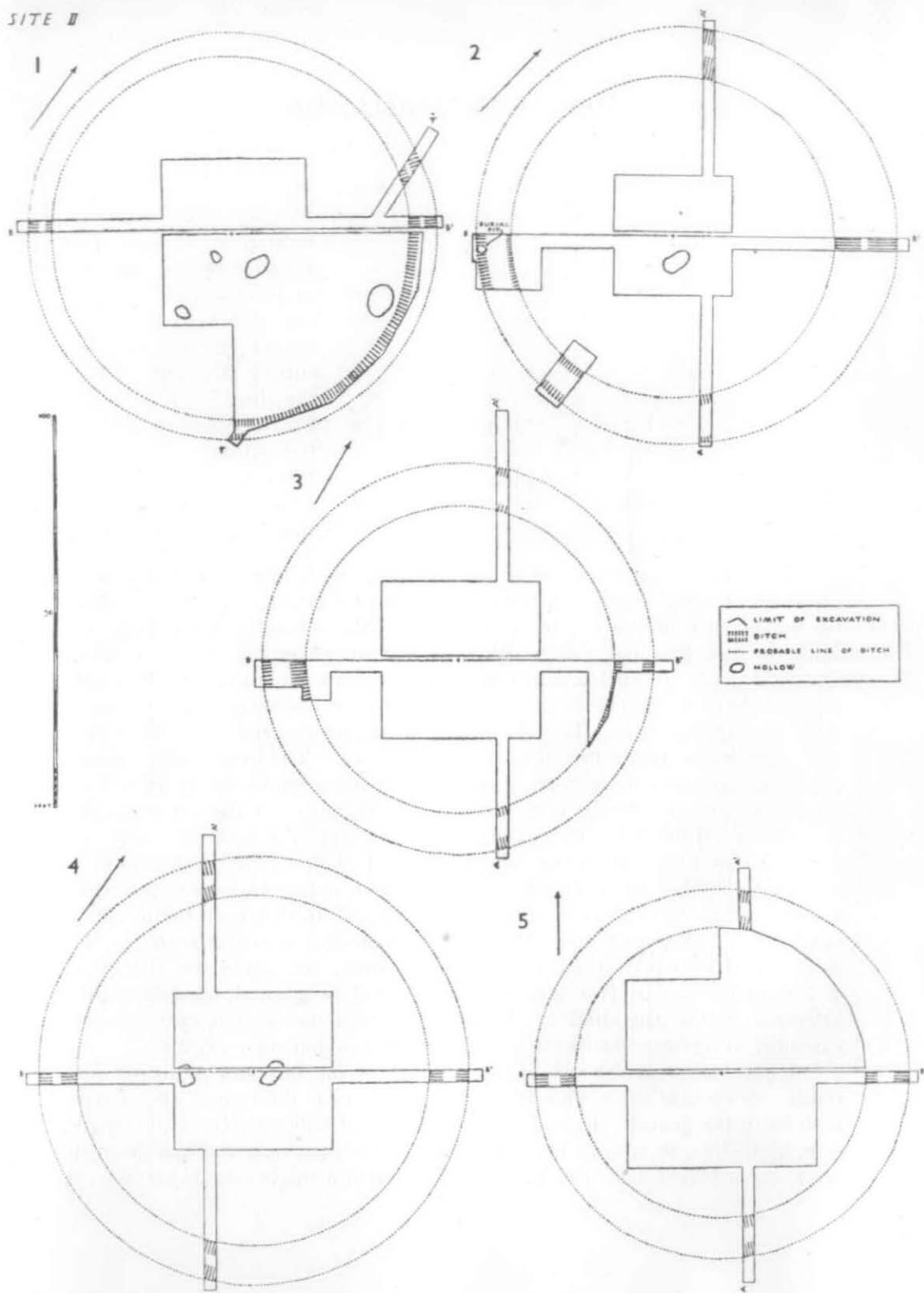


FIG. 18
LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.
Plans of the ring-ditches (Site II) (p. 59)

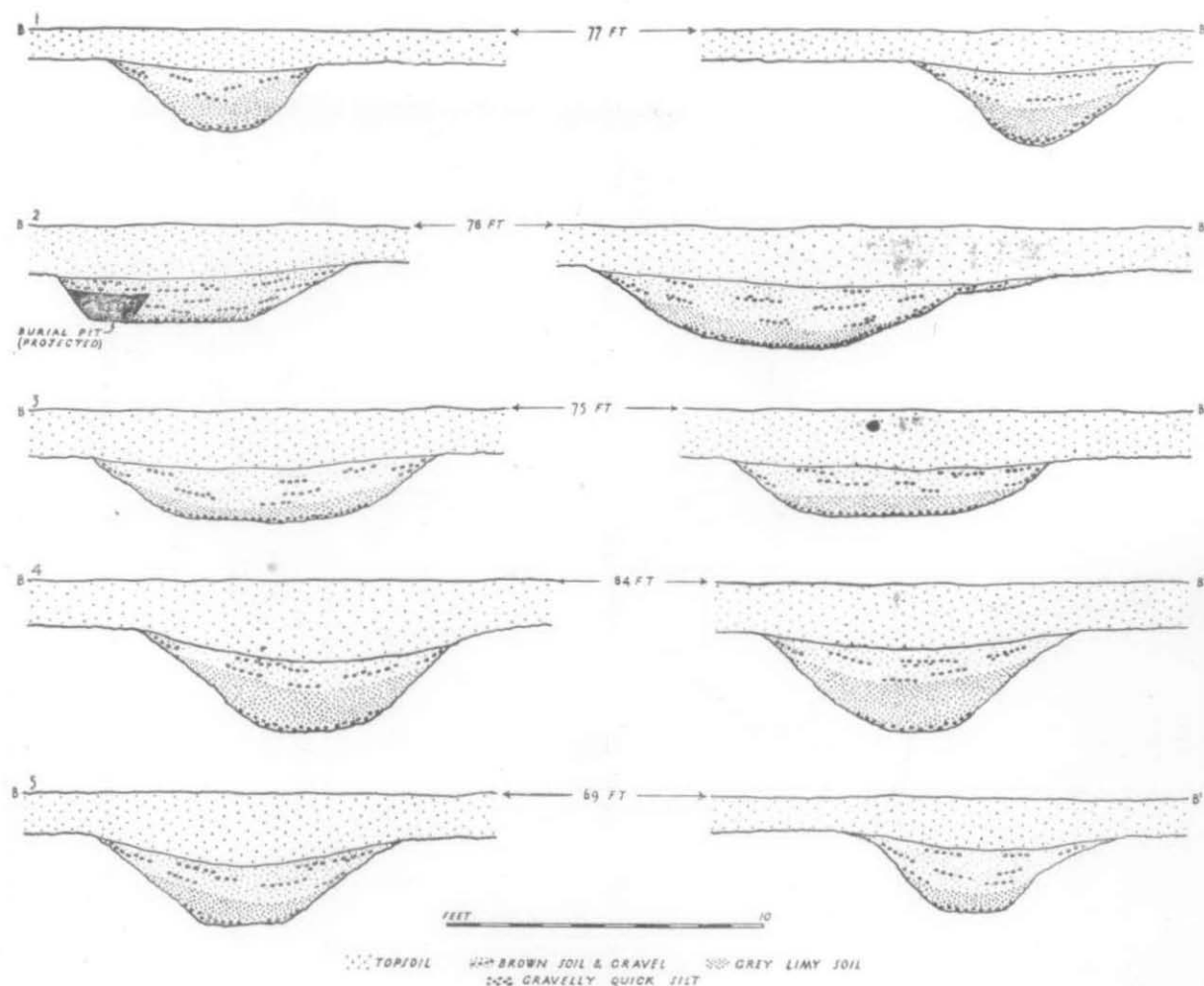


FIG. 19
LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.
Sections through the ditches of the ring-ditches (Site II) (p. 60)

EXCAVATIONS AT LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

by 4 ft. and roughly rectangular. In no. 4 also there were two rectangular depressions, 5 and 7 ft. by 3 ft. None of these hollows was more than a foot deep. They all contained blackish soil with occasional lumps of callas.

A little further work was done in the hope of securing evidence of use of the ditches either at the time of construction or later. A widening of the south-west cutting of no. 2 revealed a cremation-burial in a small oval pit (2 ft. 10 ins. by 2 ft. by 9 ins. deep) in the filling against the outer slope of the ditch (PL. VI, D and FIG. 19). The pit contained very soft black soil, biggish lumps of charcoal all hawthorn (*crataegus* sp.),^{10a} many tiny scraps of burnt bone and the greater part of a bowl of burnished black ware, broken before burial. Of the bones,

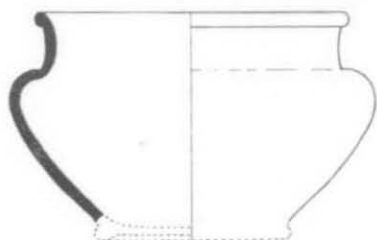


FIG. 20

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Pot from the later cremation-burial in ring-ditch 2 (p. 63)

Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$

Mr. L. F. Cowley writes: 'In my opinion the material is human since I can identify two bits of digits. Unfortunately there is nothing more.' The bowl (FIG. 20) is of Belgic type similar (cf. FIG. 17, no. 2) to those described from the ditches of the nearby steading and probably relates to that settlement. Further south, on the bottom of the same ditch, was a diminutive fragment of beaker ware. This abraded sherd can have no bearing on the date of the site except as indicating a post-beaker period.

Ring-ditches in the Thames valley have been assigned by excavation to all phases of the Bronze Age. Here at first glance the section might be taken to mean that the ditch was not completely silted up when the burial was made, probably in the first half of the 1st century A.D., but taking into consideration the width and shallowness of the ditch it seems more likely that silting had by this time reached a state of stability. The evidence is insufficient to justify a conclusion that the ring-ditch is anything other than of Bronze Age date. The fact that a late Iron Age burial was inserted in the silted up ditch of no. 2

^{10a} Kindly identified by Mr. H. A. Hyd.

MRS. AUDREY WILLIAMS

seems to indicate that in the minds of the later dwellers in the area these ring-ditches had a funerary significance.

While a number of ring-ditches have produced evidence of burial-usage or of slight occupation, as at Sutton Courtenay,¹¹ it is not unusual for them to prove barren. The majority of the classic group at Standlake¹² and single examples at Mount Farm, Dorchester¹³ and Cassington¹⁴ were featureless. If burials indeed existed at Langford Downs, they were probably made in the hollows already described, to decay or to be removed completely in later times. Where no hollow was found (nos. 3 and 5) burial on the surface of the gravel, as at Stanton Harcourt,¹⁵ may be assumed.

¹¹ *Archaeologia*, LXXVI, 60.

¹² *Ibid.*, XXXVII, 364.

¹³ *Oxoniensia*, II, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII/IX, 46 (Sites 6 and 7).



LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

Air-view of the site looking N. ; the portion excavated lies to right of road (p. 44)

Ph. Flt.-Lt. D. N. Riley.



A



B



C



D

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

- A. Enclosure A, NE. entrance, phase I and II ; the vertical rod marks phase III ditch (pp. 49, 51).
- B. Enclosure A, end of phase III ditch, N. of W. entrance (p. 51).
- C. Enclosure A, phase II ditch on the W. (cutting 17) (pp. 50, 59).
- D. Enclosure B, ditches of phases I-III on the E. (cutting 27) ; the rods mark two post-holes of the round house (pp. 51, 54).

Phh. Mrs. Audrey Williams.

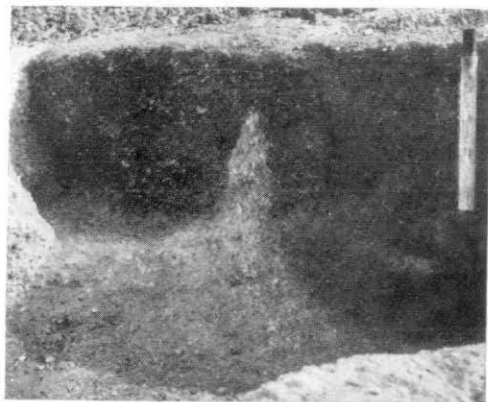
PLATE VI



A



B



C



D

LANGFORD DOWNS, OXON.

- A. Enclosure A : phase III ditch at NE. entrance ; phase I ditch in foreground (p. 51).
- B. Enclosure A : nos. 10 (l. rod) and 11 (r. rod) of line of holes (p. 54).
- C. Enclosure A : phase I ditch and no. 3 of line of holes (p. 54).
- D. Ring-ditch 2 : section on W. ; the ' island ' mound is the site of the cremation-burial (p. 63).

Phh. Mrs. Audrey Williams.