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Littledean Camp

by C. Scott-Garrett
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LITTLEDEAN CAMP

by DR C. SCOTT-GARRETT, M.B.E.

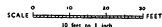
For the Forest of Dean Local History Society

LITTLEDEAN CAMP is situated on the end of a ridge of land stretching behind Newnham, Gloucestershire, at about the 600-foot contour. From this site there is a commanding view to the South and East across the valley of the Severn to the Cotswolds, extending from beyond Gloucester City to the Bristol Channel. On the other side the ridge overlooks the town of Littledean and the valley to Mitcheldean, but the further view westwards is blocked by the higher ridge on the outskirts of Cinderford. To the North lies Welshbury Camp and the Flaxley Valley.

The Roman road, Elton-Littledean, passes the Camp at a distance of about one fifth of a mile at the foot of the ridge on this side and joins another Roman road at Littledean, the Dean Road, which runs from Lydney through the Forest of Dean to Littledean and Mitcheldean.

The Camp itself is small in area and is practically circular in shape with a floor 60 feet across sloping gently north-westwards in conformity with the original surface of the ridge. The floor is completely surrounded by the inside slope of the vallum. The diameter from vallum top to vallum top averages 116 feet so that the inside slope occupies about 28 feet of horizontal surface, that is, almost as much as the radius 30 feet, of the camp floor proper. The vallum is very high averaging 12 feet above camp floor level and probably was originally somewhat higher perhaps even 15 feet. Its top has been broken and lowered in some places chiefly on the south-east side, and the displaced material has added to the length of the inside slope of the vallum. The outer slope of the vallum is steeper and descends to a fosse which surrounds the whole camp. Trees are growing

N
MAGNETIC
12/80



B	=	Central point of the camp.
A, B, C, D, E	=	Original surface excavation
		places, each 5 feet by 10 feet.
Hatched Circles	=	Trees on camp floor; trees on
		valium and fosse not shown.
- - - - -	=	Boundary of charcoal hearth
P, T, V, W, X, Y, Z	=	Presence of debris and detritus
		presence and depth of fosses
		pitching, etc.
C.T.	=	Trench 50 feet by 3 feet ex-
		cavated to bed-rock.
M.T.	=	Trench 8 feet by 3 feet ex-
		cavated to bed-rock.
L.L.	=	Trench across tree valium,
		2 feet 6 inches wide, 3 feet
		6 inches deep.
H	=	Valium lower, 35 degrees
		west of south, 12 feet long.
K	=	Quarry; indentation 18 deg.
		north of east, cut back
		24 feet into the outer wall
		of fosse; width 30 feet.
		Depth 5 feet of wooden
MO	=	probable site of houses out-
		look, lower or closer.

all over the vallum, fosse and camp floor and there are some badger sets in the outer slopes of the vallum. The top of the vallum averages 22 feet above the bottom of the fosse and the diameter from fosse-foot to fosse-foot is about 196 feet. If we allow 3 feet for the average width of the vallum at its summit we get 37 feet, or half of 80 less 6 feet as the horizontal distance occupied by the outer slope. Remembering that the fosse bottom is 10 feet below the camp floor we arrive at a measure of the increased steepness of the outer over the inner slopes of the vallum. FIG. 1 has been drawn to make this clearly evident.

Standing anywhere inside on the floor of the Camp one is shut off completely from a view of the outside except at one narrow point. This point which we call the 'entrance' lies 24 degrees east of south, measured from the centre of the camp, point B on the PLAN.¹ Here the vallum wall for a distance of 10 feet is only 6 feet high above the camp floor, half the normal height. The gap widens at full vallum height to roughly 20 feet. Despite this lowering there are still considerable slopes down into the camp and into the fosse at this point. Moreover the fosse, at this point has suffered some infilling as if to make a roadway across it.

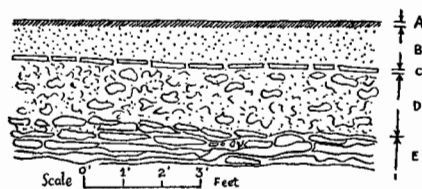
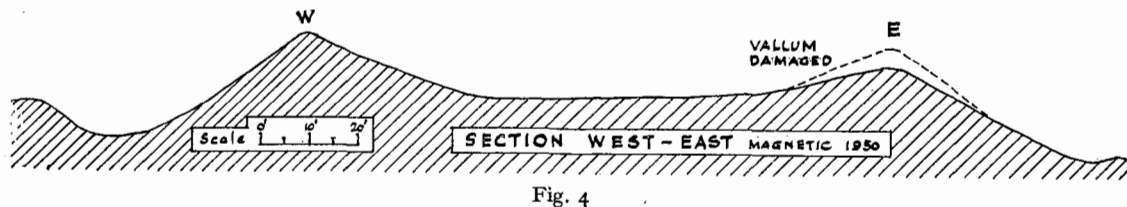
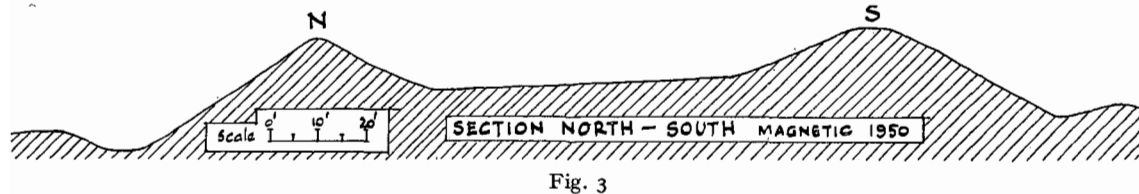
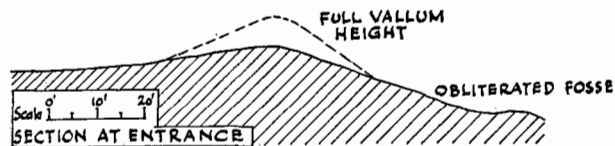
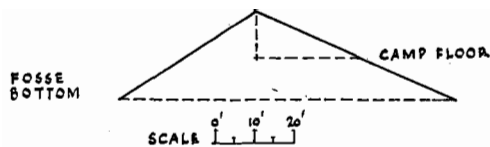
A section across the entrance is shown in FIG. 2.

Other sections across the whole site are shown *viz.*, along the North-South line in FIG. 3 and along the West-East line in FIG. 4.

The side of the ridge slopes very steeply on the south-east down to the valley of the brook at Grove farm. The side on the north-west is not so steep. On the north-east the ridge narrows almost to a line sloping down on either side and running down through the Mill Grove woodlands to the Elton Road and Mill Brook, the nearest running water to the camp. On the south-west the ridge is broad, rising gently to the Newnham-Littledean road and it is from this direction that we believe the ingress to the camp was made.

The ridge is composed of old Red Sandstone of a shaley type, with a thickness of some 2 to 3 feet of rather brashy overlying

¹ All direction readings were taken from centre point B.



soil. Whilst the vallum slopes are grassy it is noticeable and significant that the outer slopes of the fosse are raw showing generally an earth-rock ungrassed section. The fosse for most of its depth has been excavated out of the sandstone rock. At one point on the north-east side the outer face of the fosse has been quarried into, H on the plan, for a short distance. The purpose of this would seem to have been merely to provide some extra material for the erection of the vallum.

Besides the entrance there is another point at which the vallum seems to have been intentionally lowered, as distinct from crest damage due to tree felling and haulage particularly on the south-east side. This is the point K on the plan. Here the vallum roughly takes on the character of a small broad platform 4 to 5 feet below the normal crest of the vallum. We will refer to this platform or vallum lowering later.

EXCAVATION

Owing to the trees growing out of the camp floor and our obligation to the owner to avoid any damage to them, excavation had to be confined mainly to the south-western half of the floor. Five sections, A, B, C, D, E, each of area 5 feet \times 10 feet as near as convenient to the centre of the camp were allotted to teams of diggers and sifters. It was considered that any buildings or post holes were most likely to occur in this position especially as it had been suggested¹ that the camp might have partaken of the nature of a henge. Before long, at depths varying from 5 to 12 inches below the turf, a rough, much-displaced pitching was encountered made from flattish pieces of sandstone strata no doubt excavated from the fosse. At this floor level pieces of coarse pottery and a few nails were recovered. This pottery was also found below the level of the floor in the more stoney or brashy layer underneath. No post holes or any trace of formed walls were encountered. In case this pitching should have been confined only to the areas A-E, trial holes were opened at different points throughout the whole

¹ See supplement to *Prehistoric England*, by Mrs Jacquetta Hawkes, Chatto and Windus, 1948.

surface of the camp—shown on the plan at points marked P, T, V, W, X, Y and Z. In all cases the same conditions were encountered and pottery sherds also were obtained from most of these trial spots. Two of the trials deserve special mention, namely, those at points T and Z. At T instead of the usual red earth the soil was quite black and on examination proved to consist mainly of charcoal powder, portions of stick charcoal and a little soil, otherwise it was quite barren. Consequently the full extent and depth of this charcoal area was determined by excavation. Its bounds are shown on the plan by the dotted area on the north-west side of the camp partly impinging on the vallum side. At its centre whilst there were indications of the original pitching floor at a depth of 9 inches the charcoal discoloration continued down to a depth of 18 inches before red earth was reached. From the centre out to the edges of this area the charcoal layer gradually lessened and faded away. Obviously here we had encountered one of those charcoal burner hearths which are fairly common in the Forest of Dean, but which grass over only with difficulty and after the lapse of some time. On enquiry it appeared that charcoal burning had taken place within the camp but had ceased some 50 years ago.

The trial excavation at point Z, where the camp floor joins the foot of the vallum was made to determine the relation between these two. No definite line of demarcation was found, for the rough floor merged quite irregularly into the simple glacial type core of the foot of the vallum.

An excavation also was made in the floor of the quarry at H down to bed rock which was reached at 18 inches depth without any positive result. Finally a 50-foot long trench, 3 feet wide (C.T.) situated clear of tree roots was excavated to bed rock as well as a short 8-foot stretch (M.T.) at right angles. These trenches, while they increased our yield of pottery sherds and iron objects of the same class as we had already found, revealed that no earlier deposits of any kind existed. The rock surface was somewhat uneven as to depth with pockets of red clay here and there, but on the whole its inclination conformed generally to that of the camp floor. Before finishing

excavation a small trench LL, 2 feet 6 inches wide, was cut into the top of the vallum to a depth of 3 feet. No pottery or other remains were encountered and the excavation revealed that the core of the vallum consisted of jumbled stone, thus confirming information already derived from the excavation at Z and from observations at the badger holes.

A section taken in M.T. is shown in FIG. 5.

A is turf; B, soil free from pottery; C, rough stone pitching much disturbed and missing in places, probably where it has been destroyed by tree growing, depth varying from 5 to 12 inches; contained pottery and iron objects; D, brashy sub-soil with some pottery sherds especially at the top; E, the somewhat disintegrated top of the old Red Sandstone.

MISCELLANEOUS FINDS

Amongst surface finds we have to record some few flakes of flint showing ripple markings and a white patination similar to that exhibited by flints from the Cotswolds. Only one specimen showed a trace of edge flaking. Their occurrence here was regarded as adventitious and quite unconnected with the camp. There was also a bullet identified by the Royal Arsenal Woolwich as a .45 British service revolver bullet of World War II; a china doll's leg and some pieces of clay pipe stem much blackened. These latter were from the vallum trench, LL, and the charcoal hearth, and doubtless emanated from the Charcoal burner. Nodules of haematite so ubiquitous throughout the Forest Area were also encountered.

Amongst the stratified remains only one piece of bone was found, an indeterminate fragment of the handle of some implement such as a knife.

IRONWORK FINDS

These comprised nails of different lengths, a small portion of a horse or pony shoe and a key. As usual these iron objects were much detrited especially the key. They were all stratified in the pottery layer and so can be considered of the same age as the pottery. Nearly all the nails exhibited clenching or bending.

Some of the shorter ones may be from horse shoes. As far as their condition permits of judgment they have stems with square or rectangular sections and broad heads and resemble those found by Casey at Lydney Castle.¹

Unfortunately the key was too detrited to be cleaned, so evidence from its wards is not available. A distinctive feature however is its D-shaped bow. Keys having bows of this or a kidney shape occur in Class VII of the London Museum Classification² equated at the earliest to the 14th century. It may be said, however, that this classification has relied not so much on archaeological evidence as on contemporary representations and stylizations. In fact archaeological evidence on types of bow seems to be very scanty. Alternatively and, we think, more accurately it can be regarded as belonging to Class IV, keys of which often have a superficial resemblance to some 14th–15th century types. As such, its date would be of the end of the 11th century or early 12th century.

POTTERY

Our pottery finds determined at once the origin of our site. They consisted in the main of pots with everted edges and infolded rims. Only at one site has such pottery with infolded rims been recorded heretofore, namely, by Casey at the small stone-built Norman Castle in Lydney Park³ dated on several considerations to the early 12th century. Our pottery finds can conveniently be divided into three types:—

Type 1

Everted edges with infolded rims: Coarse to the touch containing many quartz grains. The colour is very various, buff shading to black, brown or red. Sometimes opposite surfaces are of a different colour, *e.g.* black and red, and the colour of the centre often differs from that of either surface. Firing does not seem to have been complete enough to

¹ D. A. Casey, *Antiq. Journ.*, xi, 1931, p. 240.

² *London Museum Medieval Catalogue*, 1940, p. 133.

³ Casey, *loc. cit.*, p. 255.

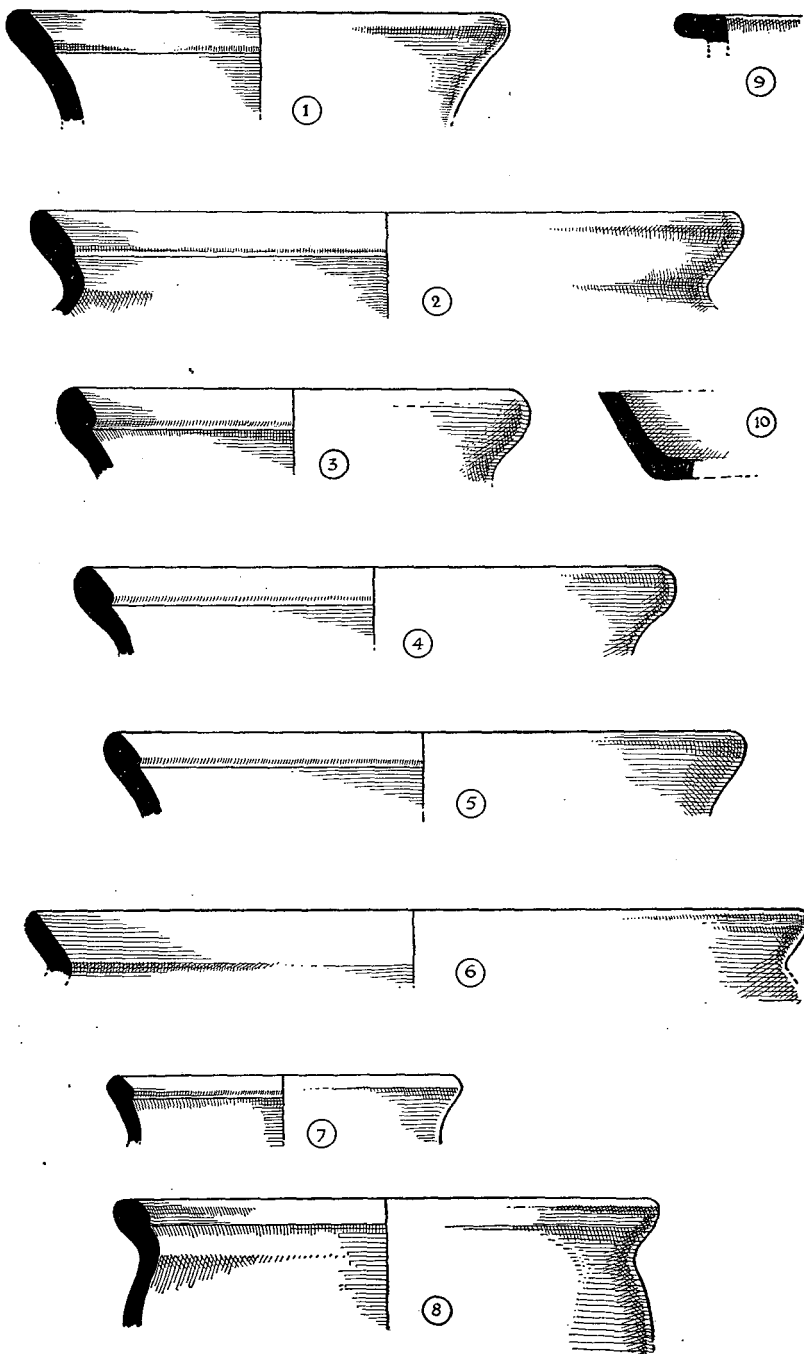


Fig. 6. (Scale $\frac{1}{4}$)

produce an even result throughout the matrix: See Nos. 1, 2 and 4 (FIG. 6).

Type 2

Everted edges with infolded rims: Coarse to the touch and with a coarse matrix with quartz grains; differs from type 1 in being grey or blue-grey in colour right through the material. Probably a slightly different matrix from type 1, and certainly much better fired and harder. See Nos. 3, 5 and 7 (FIG. 6).

Type 3

Made from a quite different matrix from types 1 and 2 with shell or calcite as a constituent. Soapy to the feel: rims are (a) plain; (b) flanged with a slight groove in the flange. The colour is a terra-cotta shade sometimes with surface blackening. See Nos. 6 and 9 (FIG. 6).

All three types are wheel made and unglazed. Types 1 and 2 have until now only been found at Lydney Castle. We are, however, able to record a third occurrence, a specimen of type 1, from Brookend, Woolaston, of which a drawing is shown at No. 8 (FIG. 6).

From its occurrence only at the three adjacent sites of Brookend, Lydney and Littledean it would appear that the manufacture of this unique infolded rim pottery was indigenous to this one district. Mr G. Dunning¹ of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, however, considers that 'the Lydney folded-over rims are a rather exaggerated form of a type widespread in south-west England, found mainly in Somerset and Devon on sites of about the middle of the 12th century (Castle Neroche, Exeter, etc.)'.

Type 3a has been found not only at Lydney Castle² but at other early Norman sites,³ particularly by Pitt-Rivers⁴ at

¹ Letter to author.

² Casey, *loc. cit.*, fig. 7, Nos. 10 and 18.

³ *London Museum Medieval Catalogue*, 1940, p. 228, gives a bibliography of medieval pottery sites.

⁴ General Pitt-Rivers, *Archaeologia*, XLVII, 1883, p. 465.

Caesar's Camp, Folkestone; by Francis¹ at Rayleigh Castle, Essex; by Prof. Hughes² at the Cambridge Ditches; at Christ's Hospital,¹ London; at Alstoe Mount, Rutland³ and Old Sarum.⁴

Type 3b, is noted by Francis at Rayleigh Castle (Appendix B, No. 34). All three types have been recorded as having sagging bases. The number of base angles which we have found was scanty and while they suggest sagging no one specimen was complete enough to demonstrate it clearly enough to be drawn (see No. 10, FIG. 6). Another point about the infolded rim pots is that generally speaking the size of the infold is an indication of the diameter of the vessel: large pots have deeply infolded rims, small pots have generally shallow infolding. This property is also noticeable in the pots found by Casey at Lydney Castle.

The depths of the infolds of the Littledean pots vary from 13-28 32nds of an inch, averaging roughly four different sizes.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Nicholls⁵ in his history of the Forest of Dean when dealing with Flaxley Abbey which was founded by Roger, Earl of Hereford, in the reign of Stephen (1135-54) sometime between 1148 and 1154, writes 'the institution of the Abbey was confirmed and its endowment augmented by two charters granted by Henry II (1154-1189) to the following purport: 'Know ye that I have granted and confirmed to God and St. Mary and the monks of the Cistercian Order, a certain place in the valley of Castiard called Flaxley to build an Abbey there; and all the land called Wastdean and one iron forge free and quit, and with as free liberty to work as any of my forges in demesne; and all the land under the Old Castle of Dene with liberty to plough it up to wit 100 acres, which remains to be assarted and that which is already assarted. . . .' Nicholls rightly identifies the

¹ E. B. Francis, *Trans. Essex Arch. Soc.*, XII, 1913, p. 171.

² McK. Hughes, *Camb. Antiq. Soc. Proc.*, VIII, 1892, p. 32.

³ *Antiq. Journ.*, XVI, 1936, p. 396.

⁴ *Antiq. Journ.*, XV, 1935, p. 174.

⁵ H. G. Nicholls, *Forest of Dean*, Chap. XI, 1858, p. 177.

'Old Castle of Dene' as being Littledean Camp. Now although this site is marked on the Ordnance Survey Map as a Roman Camp our excavations have revealed not the slightest trace of any Iron Age or Roman remains, in fact, nothing essentially determinate except the Norman pottery. We must then read the word 'old' of the charters as meaning 'disused' rather than 'ancient'. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that the camp is a Norman one which in the middle of the 12th century had been abandoned long enough to merit the adjective 'old'. We think, therefore, that Littledean Camp belongs much more likely to the early part of the 12th century or the end of the 11th century rather than to the Anarchical period (1139-1151) in the reign of Stephen when the Empress Matilda was contesting the throne, and to which period Mr Casey has dated the erection of the stone built Norman Castle in Lydney Park, and consequently that the local infolded rim pottery existed throughout the whole first half of the 12th century.

LOOKOUT TOWER OR CITADEL

Attention has already been drawn to the lowering of the vallum at K which has not resulted from any damage to the vallum but seemingly was so designed. When this lowering is viewed in conjunction with the somewhat greater lowering at the so-called entrance point we arrive at the fact that these two adjacent lowerings isolate the portion of the vallum marked MO making it a sort of tumulus on the rampart. In point of fact it is the highest existing part of the vallum. It is now covered with timber trees so its surface could not be investigated. When also we remember that any defenders on the camp floor, though hidden, would have no view at all of attack from any or all quarters outside, it will be seen that some sort of watch tower was necessary to complete the fortification of this camp. We therefore think that a wooden watch tower was built on this isolated portion of the vallum at MO, all trace of which has now gone. In fact that MO replaces in this camp, in quite a unique manner, the well known motte of the early Norman motte and bailey castle. The bailey is in this case

also of unique type in being a circular area with a very strong and lofty vallum of stone and earth as defence instead of the usual wooden stockade on a low vallum. This look-out tower would no doubt have been meant to serve as the citadel here as in the normal bailey castle type of adulterine castle of the Normans.

CONCLUSION

Our investigation shows that Littledean Camp is a purely Norman fortification entirely free from a Roman or earlier foundation. It is unique as an adulterine castle in having a circular bailey defended by a very high and strong earthen vallum incorporating a motte on the vallum itself. Documentary evidence and a key point to its belonging to the end of the 11th century or early 12th century. Pottery evidence would certainly place its date in the first half of the 12th century. As to its purpose—the protection of the surrounding settled townships of Newnham, Westbury, Littledean and Mitcheldean and the lands on which they depended from the damaging attacks of marauding bands from the imperfectly subdued lands of Wales was a matter of great importance in these early Norman times. A garrison stationed in the commanding position of this camp would have been ideally situated for this purpose.

The paucity of our finds, however, forces the conclusion that the period of active occupation of the site was short. Perhaps also it may have been intermittent.

There are two other 'camps' in the Forest of Dean region which exhibit a similarity to Littledean Camp in being more or less circular ramparted areas with slight fosses, no clear entrances and having definite raised portions on the rampart. One, Howle Hill Camp (Nat. Grid. Ref. SO/62 612202), is positioned with a very wide viewscape of the surrounding country on all sides. The other, the castle in Glasshouse Woods (Nat. Grid. Ref. SO/72 716212), is much nearer Gloucester City than either Littledean or Howle Hill Camps and is of the same type but not so impressive. Both, I think, were erected for the same general purpose and at the same time as Littledean Camp.

These three camps thus together formed a lookout screen for Gloucester City against marauding bands from Wales.

The following members of the Society have carried out the practical work of this investigation:—Major and Mrs D. Percival, Mrs D. Pope, Mrs C. Scott-Garrett, Mr I. L. Durham, Mr N. Little, Mr J. Davis, Mr P. A. Hulin, Rev. R. J. Mansfield, Mr and Mrs T. Bright, Mr and Mrs F. W. Batty, Mr V. Allott and other occasional helpers.

The Society's best thanks are due to the Ministry of Works and to the owner, Mrs E. W. Jacques of Newland, for permission to excavate this scheduled site as well as to Mr M. G. Corbet-Singleton of Dean Hall for permission to traverse his land to reach the Camp.

We render special thanks also to Mr E. J. Rice, Principal of the Lydney School of Art, for preparing the drawings of pottery, and to Mr J. B. Simcox for the plan.