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Condicote Earthwork, a Henge Monument, Gloucestershire

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NOTES

CONDICOTE EARTHWORK, A HENGE MONUMENT, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Mr O. G. S. Crawford drew attention in his book *The Long Barrows of the Cotswolds*¹ to the possibility that the Camp at Condicote may have been a sacred circle rather than an earthwork of a defensive nature. He went on to say that a trench through the rampart and prolonged inside for a few yards would be sufficient to prove the case. Since then the writer has been fortunate in obtaining some evidence as to the nature of the site, during trenching for a water main, and later the drainage for a new house. The results follow in the accompanying note.

The earthwork known as Condicote Camp² lies on high but sloping ground beside the head of a dry valley, on the east side of Condicote village, a position which has no strategic significance. Situated at over 600 feet O.D. it has a northward aspect overlooking that part of the Dikler valley, where the river of that name disappears below ground for a distance of some two miles. The earthwork encloses a circular area of nearly four acres and consists of a single bank, now nearly obliterated. There is slight evidence of an internal ditch along its north arc, to be seen in exceptional circumstances under winter conditions, but on the surface there is no sign of an outer ditch. There is a slight sign of an entrance on the south-west.

Mr G. B. Witts in his *Archaeological Handbook of Gloucestershire*³ mentions the Camp, stating that 'Seventy years ago, however, the banks were so steep that it was difficult to climb to the top of them.' It thus appears that much of the levelling of

¹ *The Long Barrows of the Cotswolds*, 1925, p. 11.

² 6 in. O.S. Glos. XXI, N.E.

³ *Archaeological Handbook of Gloucestershire*, p. 15, No. 31 and *Proceedings Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club*, vi, p. 208.

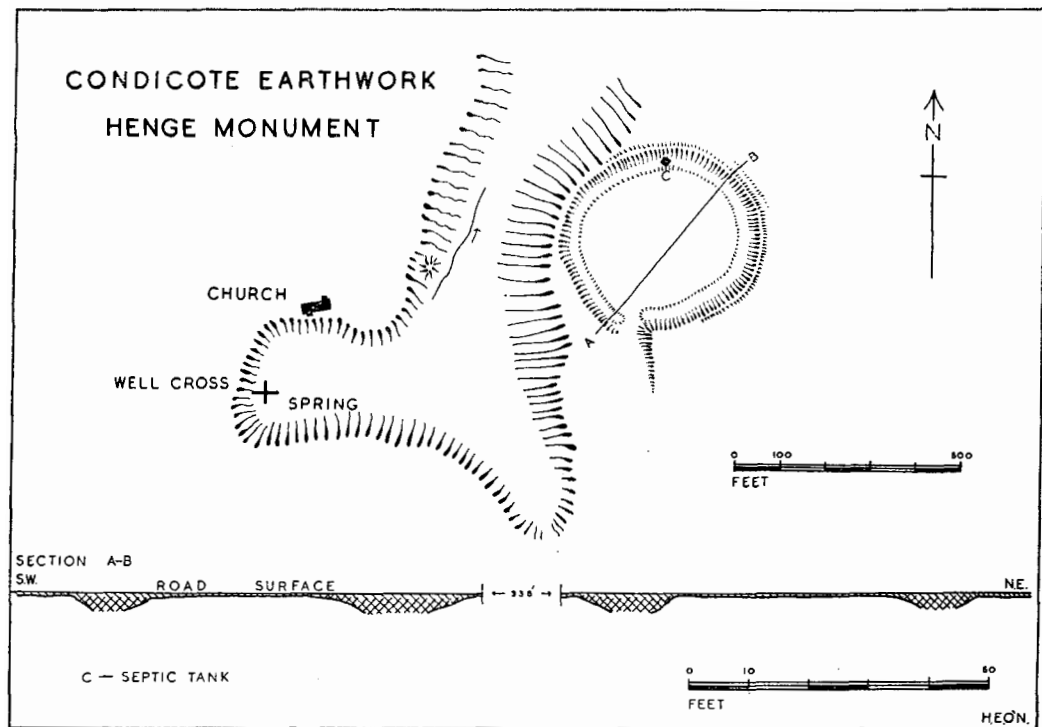


Fig. 1. Plan of Condicote Earthwork

the bank must have taken place prior to 1862, the date of the publication of his book. The site (Fig. 1) too, is close to a good spring of water, a fact of importance on the dry wolds of the North Cotswolds, when it is remembered, as mentioned above, that the near-by river disappears into the ground in this area. The village of Condicote with its Church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, is grouped around the site of the spring where the remains of the base of a restored Well Cross mark the spring.¹

The earthwork is divided by a road running through it from S.W. to N.E. which leads from Condicote to the Stow on the Wold-Broadway road, while a small house with accompanying barns is situated on its west bank and a cottage and its garden are on the east bank and outer ditch. The area south of the road has long been under plough where the bank is practically obliterated, while the area north of the road, where not disturbed by building, remains a grass field. The bank is best preserved along the north-west side where it can be traced standing on the slight rise of ground which here falls away to form the east side of the dry valley.

Two sets of circumstances have occurred in the last fourteen years at Condicote which have helped archaeological discovery. Both occasions have shown that a deep and substantial ditch does exist within the earthwork with a slighter one outside the ditch. It seems, therefore, that the earthwork belongs to a type which has come recently to be termed as 'henge monuments.'

In October 1938 a scheme for supplying piped water to Condicote village from Blockley included the digging of a trench along the north side of the road running through Condicote Camp. The trench was dug by mechanical means and

¹ Charles Pooley, *Old Crosses of Gloucestershire*, 1868, pp. 71-2. R. C. Skyring Walters, *The Ancient Wells, Springs and Holy Wells of Gloucestershire*, 1928, pp. 41-3. L. Richardson, *The Country around Moreton-in-Marsh*, 1929 p. 118. Geological Survey Memoirs. L. Richardson, *Wells and Springs of Gloucestershire*, 1930, p. 78. Geological Survey Memoirs.

Proceedings Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club, xvii, Pt. 2, 1925, pl. viii, Fig. 1.

The water from the Condicote spring was locally considered to have healing powers because it ran towards the east.

was filled in at the earliest opportunity, so there was not much time to be lost in obtaining any available evidence of an archaeological nature. The trench was dug three feet deep and twenty inches wide, but enough was exposed to show that there existed both outer and inner ditches on either side of the bank. On the south-west side of the earthwork the top of the outer ditch, as seen in section in the trench (Fig. 1, Section A-B), measured fifteen feet across, the base of the bank twenty-seven feet and the inner ditch twenty-four feet. On the north-east side the inner ditch was fifteen feet across, the base of the bank thirty-six feet and the outer ditch fourteen feet. From the angle of the slope of the ditches a depth of about six feet from present road surface seemed probable. In the section in the trench the road material was seen to be six inches deep, lying on a layer of reddish loam which averaged from six to fourteen inches deep, and this lay directly on solid rock, the latter, Great Oolite,¹ being everywhere close to the ground surface of the earthwork. The filling of the ditches was of a darker reddish loam with a great amount of the rock rubble mixed in it. This rubble also constituted the core of the bank and was no doubt derived from the making of the ditches.

No finds of objects or sherds of pottery were made nor were there any signs of pits, postholes or disturbance of any kind throughout the whole length of the trench. The only variation encountered in the filling was the presence of two deposits of a pure bright yellow sand at a depth of two feet from ground level. They occurred in the centre of the area and near the south-west end. These deposits are, however, natural, as they occur elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

It was disappointing that such little evidence was recovered at the time, but this paucity of finds on the sites of henge monuments appears to be in keeping with their character.

During 1952-3 work of drainage for a house entailed further

¹ L. Richardson, 'Taynton Stone,' *The Country around Moreton-in-Marsh*, 1929, p. 116. Geological Survey Memoirs.

trenches within Condicote Camp.¹ In all the trenches solid rock was reached within eight inches from ground level except for the area for the septic tank, which had been sited over part of the inner ditch on the north side of the earthwork. Unfortunately the full width of the ditch was not exposed, as the septic tank measured only eight feet across. The width of the top of the ditch was estimated to be about sixteen feet. The sides of the ditch adjacent to the bank were, however, clearly seen in section. Its profile showed an irregularly shaped ditch, cut into the solid rock to a depth of seven feet. The slope was gradual for the first four feet, but became nearly vertical towards a somewhat U-shaped bottom. The lowest twelve inches of filling was of rubble, slipped from the rock sides of the ditch, mixed with natural yellow clay and appeared to be the result of weathering. The rest of the filling was of one homogeneous reddish loam mixed with disintegrated rubble.

Two sherds were found in the filling. One amongst the rubble at a depth of fifteen inches from present ground level, was of the Iron Age period and of a type that can be matched at Salmonsbury, Bourton on the Water. The other sherd was in the clay filling at the side of the trench and though of an indeterminate form was of the Romano-British period. In the top of the filling sherds of 19th-century earthenware and bottle glass showed the period of final levelling of the inner ditch, while the earlier pottery evidence showed that the ditch was still at least partly open in Romano-British times. No other finds were made nor were there indications of pits or postholes.

As in so many cases of observations at other henge monuments only meagre information is forthcoming. All one can say is that the Condicote earthwork has a bank with internal ditch of greater proportions than the outer, which shows its use as a site for ritual purposes rather than as a defence ; the absence of occupation debris rules it out as a habitation site.

¹ The site is scheduled as an ancient monument under the Ancient Monuments Acts but these trenches and the house were permitted on condition that facilities were given for an archaeological watch of the proceedings.

The earthwork is situated centrally for the fairly extensive prehistoric population of the North Cotswolds, if one may judge this from the number of long and round barrows in the neighbourhood. Though a precise date for the erection of the monument is not possible as yet, it no doubt served as a focal point for those people whose remains were laid in the barrows. There are seven long barrows and twenty-four round barrows within a radius of two miles. Of special account is a coppice, Hull's Plantation across the Dikler valley, where eight round barrows are closely grouped together. The remarkable collection of flints, including leaf-shaped and barbed and tanged arrow-heads, polished flint axes, scrapers, borers and many other types of flint artifacts collected by Mr Swainston around Condicote, also points to a concentration of human occupation in this area.

In conclusion it seems that the spring of water at Condicote must have been largely instrumental in attracting human occupation in a somewhat waterless neighbourhood, and that the spring being held in particular veneration accounted for the siting of the sacred circle, to be followed in the due course of time by a Christian Church.

I am much indebted to Mr and Mrs George Lane of Condicote and the Ministry of Works for the opportunity to examine the site prior to building operations. I also wish to thank Mr G. H. Swainston of The Glebe Farm, Condicote, for his permission to draw attention to his collection of flints.

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TWO SOCKETED BRONZE AXES FROM GLOUCESTERSHIRE

(a) From Sling Common near Coleford.

A socketed and looped Bronze Age axe has recently been found on Sling Common near Coleford (Nat. Grid Ref. 581081) by Mr S. Prest. The find was made whilst digging in an orchard on the Common. It has been presented to the Forest of Dean Local History Society.