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A Section of Offa's Dyke at Buttington Tump, Tidenham

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Notes

A SECTION OF OFFA'S DYKE AT BUTTINGTON TUMP, TIDENHAM

The isolated fragment of Offa's Dyke known as Buttington Tump lies roughly in the middle of the southernmost section of the Dyke, which crosses the promontory between the Wye and the Severn, in the parish of Tidenham (O.S. 6-inch sheet Glos. LIV S.E.; Nat. Grid ref. ST 547931).¹ The Tump is a conspicuous feature on the landscape, lying immediately west of the Tutshill-Beachley Ferry road, at the top of a slope, its height exaggerated by the lowering of the road level at the top of the hill, due to past attempts to ease the gradient on this difficult stretch of road. The mound was made even more noteworthy by a setting of stones, noted as 'Standing Stone' on the O.S. sheet, which stood on its summit immediately above the road.

During 1960, road improvement by the Gloucestershire County Council necessitated the removal of some 25 feet of the mound immediately adjoining the road. This opportunity was used by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, Ministry of Works, to section the Dyke and investigate the stones, which were thought possibly to be an original feature, comparable with the stone set on the southern extremity of the Dyke on Severn Cliff, a quarter of a mile or so away.

Apart from Sir Cyril Fox's description already referred to, the mound was noted, but not accepted as a barrow, in O'Neil and Grinsell's list of Gloucestershire barrows in these *Transactions*,² where it is noted that the mound is named in Greenwood's map of 1824 as 'Butlington Tump'. A note on the stones by Mr J. G. Wood appears in Crawford's *Long Barrows of the Cotswolds*, p. 191, which states that they might be as old as the Dyke, but voices the suspicion that they might have been put there when the road to Beachley was improved and the hill cut down, when they might have been found to be in the way.

¹ For a description of the Dyke in this locality and its significance, see C. Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, pp. 196 ff.

² *Trans. BGAS*, LXXXIX (1960), p. 135.

NOTES

Before excavation the Tump consisted of an earthen mound, 78 feet long by 33 feet wide, reaching a height of about 9 feet above the filled-in ditch, which was visible as a slight hollow on its south side. The stones were set at its highest point, and consisted of an irregularly shaped stone upright, $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, resting on a flat, roughly circular base of four irregular slabs, the whole structure being about 5 feet in height. The upright rested in the slight hollow at the junction of the base slabs. All were of local red sandstone conglomerate.

The stones were removed and re-erected about 25 feet west of their original position. A section was dug across the Dyke by mechanical digger, and the face trimmed by hand. Material from the demolished section of the bank was used to form a roughly equivalent length of bank on the side furthest from the road. The layers in the section (FIG. 1) are as follows:—1. Top soil; 2. Red clay; 3. Yellow sand and gravel; 4. Mixed gravel and clay; 5. Dark brown soil; 6. Sandy filling; 7. Lime; 8. Gravelly filling. The excavation was carried down to the natural subsoil throughout. Under the bank this consisted of very hard and compact gravel. The lower part of the ditch, however, was dug

OFFA'S DYKE : BUTTINGTON TUMP,
TIDENHAM, GLOS.

NAT. GRID REF. : ST 547931
O.S. 6 inch sheet LIV S.E.

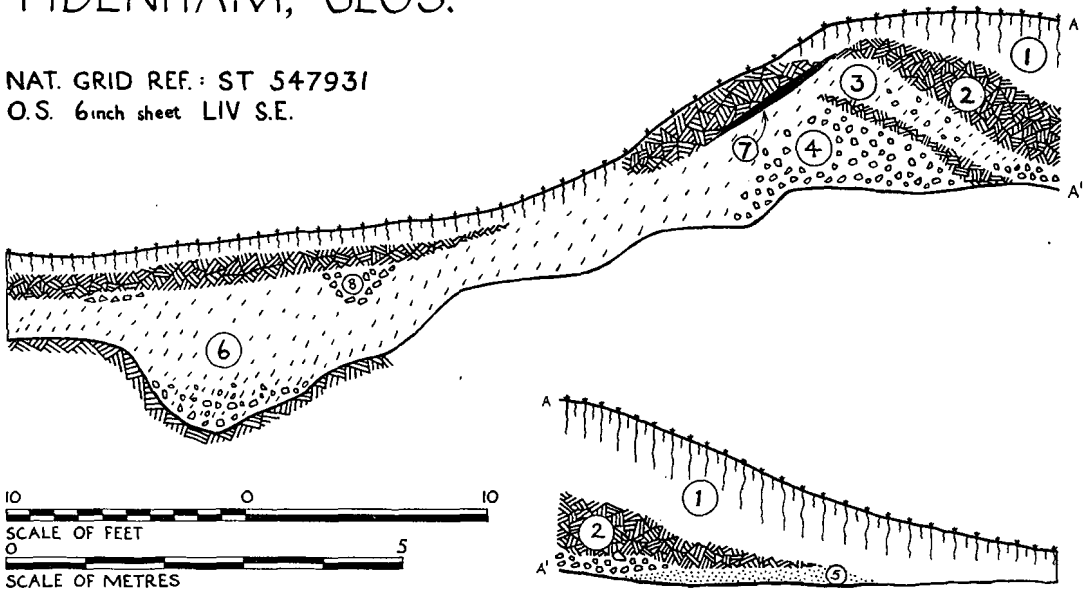


Fig. 1

into undisturbed red clay, which was found to replace the gravel as the natural subsoil on the south side of the Dyke. Thus, the bank was sited on the edge of a gravel spread, slightly higher than the clay ground, which slopes gently away to the south. The bank (layers 2, 3 and 4) consisted of material derived from the ditch, mixed layers interbedded with hard red clay, which would have formed a durable capping for the earthwork. The site of the bank had been prepared by removing the top soil: layer 5 is not present under the bank, but begins under the tail of it. The earthwork would have had a total width of about 42 feet. The original width of the bank is difficult to determine, but the ditch would have been about 14 feet wide, allowing for a bank about 28 feet wide. The height of the bank above the ditch would have been at least 16 feet.

It was clear that the front of the bank had been badly mutilated, the way that layers 2, 3 and 4 were abruptly curtailed suggesting that at some stage material from the bank had been deliberately thrown in to fill up the ditch. Subsequent activity is shown by layer 8, which represents a filled-in drainage ditch; by layer 7, a deposit of lime on the surface of the bank; and also by a deposit of red clay over the ditch filling and on the face of the bank. Furthermore, it is clear that layer 1 represents a deliberate deposit of top soil against the back of the bank. This deposit has had the effect of broadening the crest of the mutilated bank to something like its original dimensions, but on a slightly different line. It was on this deposited top soil that the stones stood. They could not therefore have been an original feature.

The filling of the ditch was probably undertaken to provide access from the road to some cottages, whose remains can be traced on the site of the ditch to the west of the Tump. It seems safe to assume that the surface deposits of clay and top soil are related to road improvements, while the stones look like the handiwork of an antiquarian landowner.

J. M. LEWIS.