

EXCAVATION OF A MEDIEVAL 'HIGHWORTH CIRCLE' AT STRATTON ST. MARGARET

by C.J. & J.H. GINGELL

with a report on the animal bones by P.N. NEWTON

INTRODUCTION

IN THE AUTUMN of 1975 an enclosure was excavated at Stratton Park, near Swindon, Wilts, in the line of the Stratton St. Margaret by-pass. The enclosure (SU 18758613) was a circular earthwork with external bank of the class known as Highworth Circles¹. It was discovered in 1935 by A.D. Passmore, who records² that he dug a trench across the ditch 'just W. of S. from the centre' and 'found bottom at 2', no relics'. The site (FIG. 1, no. 42) was under permanent pasture - two fields divided by a hedge probably dating from the Enclosure Award of 1796 (Wiltshire Record Office, no. 49). Although the greater part of the site was well preserved, the part lying to the east of the hedge was much reduced by a narrow ridge and furrow cultivation. To the north the fields were bounded by a section of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal, the construction of which in circa 1805 may have been responsible for the reduction of the northern side of the enclosure bank. The site lay on Kimmeridge Clay at 98m OD, on land dipping slightly to the south where a number of tributaries of the River Cole run.

Acknowledgements

Due to the foresight of W.J. Ford of the Library and Museums Service of Wiltshire County Council, provision for the excavation of this site was included at an early stage in the planning of the Stratton St. Margaret by-pass. The writers owe a considerable debt to the officers of Wiltshire County Council: W.J. Ford, R.A. Canham for much material assistance and advice and to the director and staff of the County Surveyor's Department for generous practical help including the provision of a bulldozer, a JCB excavator, a hut and fencing material. Captain Max Wilkinson provided a group of volunteers in the form of Army Apprentices from Arborfield Camp, and to him and to these young apprentices we are grateful for assistance at several weekends. J.C. Bakewell and P.A. Harding, together with the writers, did most of the excavating.

THE EXCAVATION

The whole area of the circle west of the hedgerow was stripped of turf and about 0.05m of topsoil with a small caterpillar earthmover, and cleaned with an open '3-in-1' bucket. Radial baulks (FIG. 3) were marked out from the exterior across the bank and ditch to provide sections. The remainder of the site was cleaned by hand, and the interior excavated to the clay subsoil in search of structural remains or post-holes. None were found. In the western part of the ditch a number of C17 and C18 pits cut into the ditch fill (FIG. 3; feature nos. 2, 3, 7, 8 and 9) were excavated. The bank was cleaned in the two westernmost sectors but no trace of post- or stake-holes nor of hedge-planting was found in the top. A trench was cut through the bank and ditch north of baulk A. The whole sector between A and B was

1. Allen, G.W. and Passmore, A.D. 'Earthen Circles in North Wilts'. WAM 47 (1935), pp 114-122. Supplemented by Grinsell, L.V., V.C.H. Wiltshire Vol. 1, pt. 1, (1957), pp. 247-8.
2. Passmore, A.D., Ms. 'Archaeological Notebook', W.A.S. Library, Devizes Museum, p. 175. Also WAM 47 (1936), pp. 529-30.

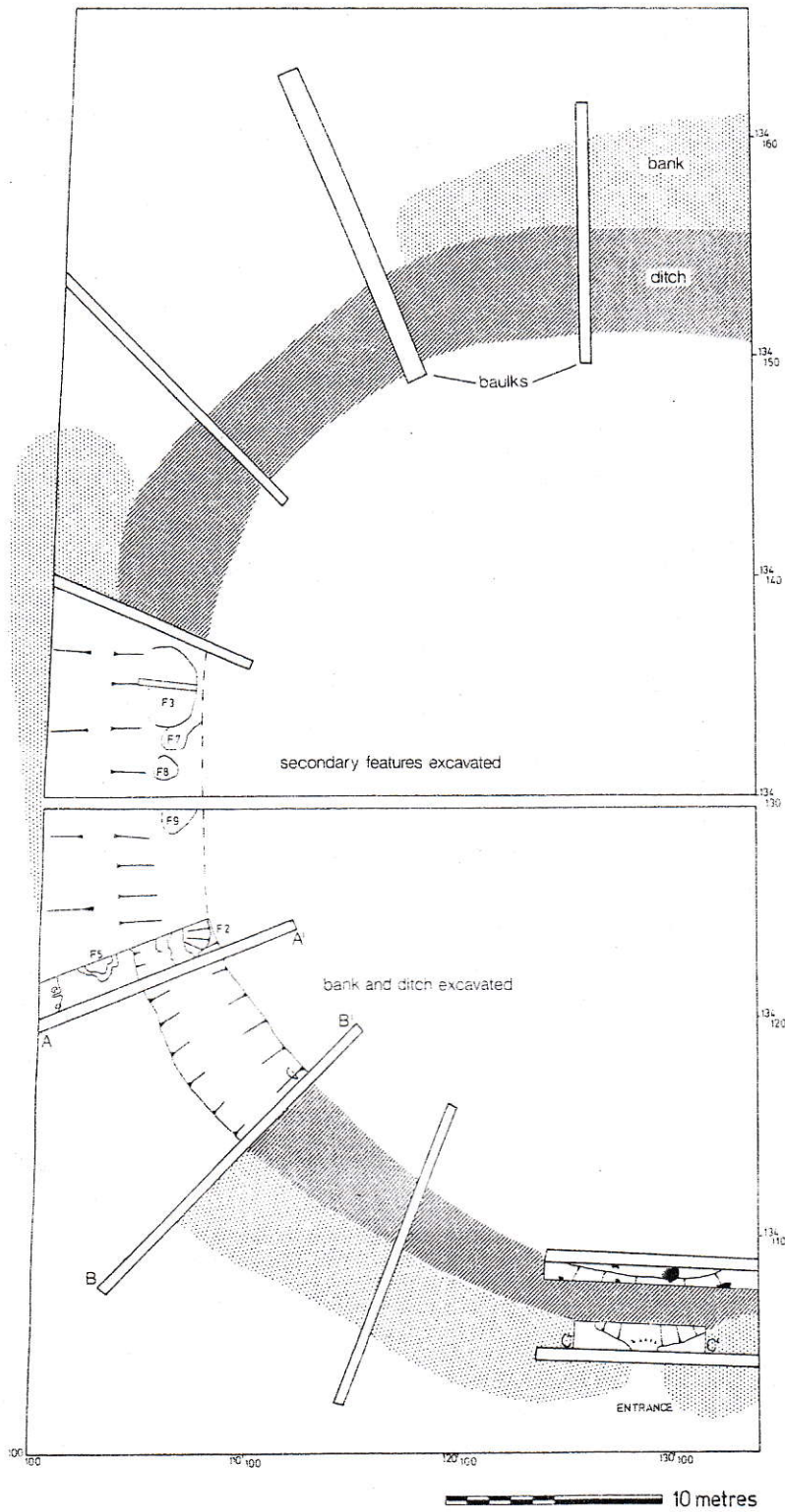


FIG. 3. Excavated areas: whole area outlined stripped by machine, selected sectors of the bank and ditch excavated by hand.

Pre-enc

The soils. Evident was no observ condit bank, flake p were r

Constr

The irregu from t no sig



Entr.

T (FIG and were

Disu

A cons

Pre-enclosure remains

The old ground surface beneath the bank was extremely difficult to identify precisely in the clay soils. There was no clear turf-line, nor were any plough-marks visible. Slightly more humic soil was evident in places and a shallow pit containing brushwood charcoal (only *Salix* sp. identifiable). There was no indication of ridge and furrow development, but it is unlikely that this would have been observable. Romano-British (mostly Savernake ware) and medieval sherds were present in weathered condition. In addition, a collection of twenty flint flakes and core fragments was found beneath the bank, ten forming one working group including conjoining pieces. There was some evidence of crested flake production with platform preparation and hard hammer knapping. A scraper and a discoidal knife were recovered.

Construction of bank and ditch

The ditch was broad and shallow (3 to 4m in width, up to 0.80m in depth), of V-section with irregular hollows running along the bottom (FIG. 4, A and B). The bank cannot have been separated from the ditch by a berm of any width, since the slumped bank lies so far across the ditch. There was no sign of revetting of the bank nor of stakes or a hedge on the top.

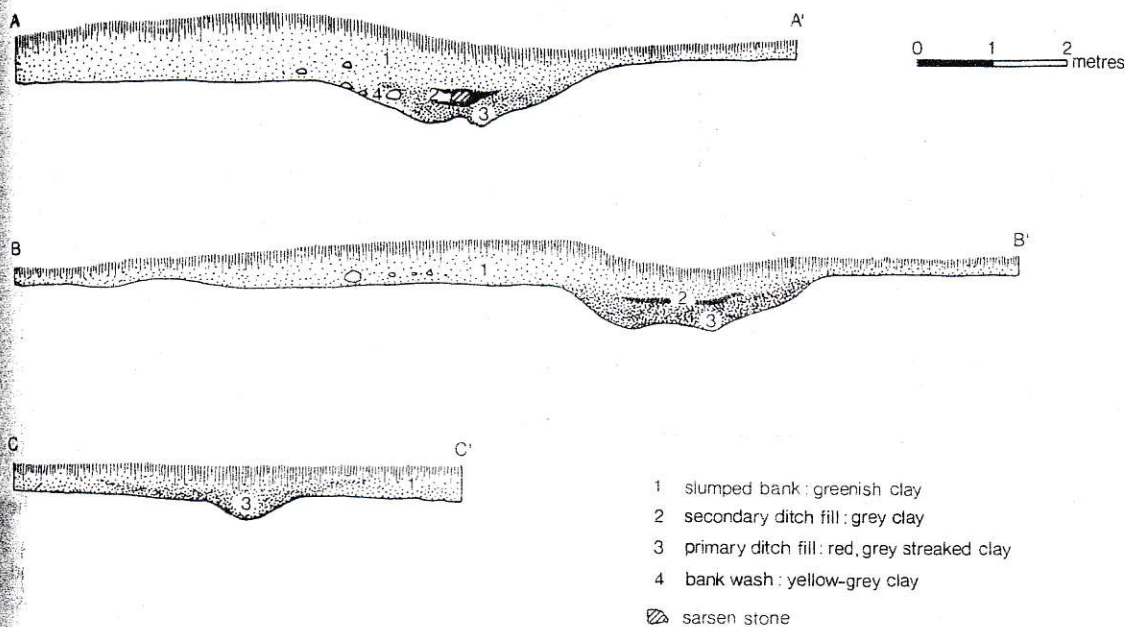


FIG. 4. Sections: A and B through the bank and ditch, C across the entrance.

Entrance

The only visible entrance was that on the south side. This was a narrow passage through the bank (FIG. 3) leading directly into the ditch, with no causeway. The terminals of the bank were much eroded and no stake or post-holes could be identified flanking the entrance passage (FIG. 4C). Sarsen boulders were found in the base of the ditch inside the entrance.

Disuse and erosion of enclosure

Although some primary erosion of the bank into the ditch occurred, the bulk of the ditch fill consisted of slowly deposited lenses of water-borne clay deposits. The clay bank had spread more

slowly over the ditch fill, nor by edge recession, for the peak of the bank overlay the outer edge of the ditch. This may be simply gravitational spread, or may suggest that the bank was constructed with an inner face more steeply sloped than the outer.

THE POTTERY

Approximately one hundred sherds of early medieval pottery were found in stratified levels in the bank and ditch. These have been examined by Alan Vince (Museum of London). Below the bank were sealed weathered sherds of Minety cooking pots³ and Newbury Type 4⁴ vessels (FIG. 5a). In the lower levels of the ditch were small sherds of Minety Type 4 cooking pots, bowl and jug (FIG. 5b-d) and a fragment of Minety Type 3 ridge tile. These fragments and the remaining sherds may be dated to the period 1200-1400.

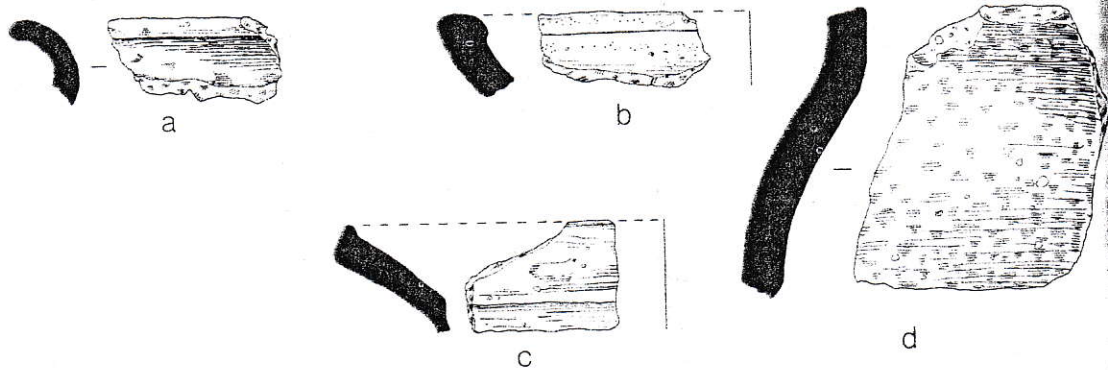


FIG. 5. Medieval pottery from the excavation.

ANIMAL BONES by P.N. NEWTON,

Animal Ecology Research Group, Department of Zoology, Oxford University.

A collection of 121 pieces of bone from medieval levels in the bank and ditch were examined, of which 34 pieces (28.1%) representing 30 bones were identified. Of these, 15 were of horse, 9 sheep or goat, 2 dog, and one each of cattle and pig, with 2 of either horse or cattle. For each species the minimum number of animals represented is 1.

Dog, cattle and pig are only represented from the ditch, not being found in bank material. Horse and sheep/goat are represented from both ditch and bank material. Some bones, such as horse astragalus, vertebrae and pelvis appear to have been broken in antiquity, but no butchering marks have been found. The horse remains are represented by a disproportionately large number of molariform teeth, but other bones are from diverse body locations. Similarly, a diverse range of sheep/goat bones are represented; the scapula appears to have broken in antiquity at the neck, but no butchering marks were found, the remainder of the bones having recent breaks. The remains of cattle, dog and pig are represented by very small samples.

The finds from the 1975 excavations are deposited in Swindon Museum.

3. Musty, J., 'A Preliminary Account of a Medieval Pottery Industry at Minety, North Wiltshire', *WAM* 68 (1973), pp. 79-88.

4. Vince, A., 'Excavations at Newbury', forthcoming.

Altho
to the si
have for
a family
During
conside
acquiri
period

It m:
Stratto
centuri
Hundr
across
It is lo
practic

Alth
the Co
Hund
grazin
in oth
proced

found
impu
prope

Bluns
large
requi
impo

show
all ch
lord's

addit
Th
hunc
ponc

xiv.

(197)

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Although an examination of parish, manorial and hundred records has revealed no direct reference to the site in question (or indeed to any Highworth Circle), the enclosure at Stratton Park appears to have formed part of the lands of Adam de Stratton in the thirteenth century. Adam de Stratton came of a family which had been holding land in Stratton by knightservice for at least three generations.⁵ During his notorious career, until he was deprived of his lands and offices in 1289, he added considerably to his properties at Stratton, of which he became lord of the manor in 1275, as well as acquiring the manor of Sevenhampton, amongst others. A large number of manorial records from this period survive in the Public Record Office.⁶

It may be significant that the majority of the Highworth Circles lie within the former manors of Stratton and Sevenhampton, which formed a single holding for most of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is surely no coincidence moreover, that of the 41 recorded circles, 38 lie within the Hundred of Highworth, with two at Latton (nos. 1 and 2) in the Hundred of Cricklade, and one just across the Thames at Dudgrove Farm (no. 40) in the Gloucestershire Hundred of Brightwell's Barrow. It is logical therefore to look to the manorial court and hundred court rolls for a custom or agricultural practice which would suggest the use of such enclosures.

Although there is no specific reference to the construction or use of any form of earthen enclosure in the Court Rolls or in the Accounts and Surveys, the Court Rolls of Adam de Stratton's manors and the Hundred Rolls of Highworth⁷ contain many references to impounding of stray animals, or those grazing illegally. R.B. Pugh noted that attachments of beasts were more common in these manors than in other court rolls of the same date. It is not clear whether impounding of beasts represents the same procedure as their attachment. 'In one instance, that of the man of Highworth whose forty-eight beasts found in a Sevenhampton field were attached, it obviously does, for there is a later reference to the impounding of those beasts'.⁸ In some cases the beasts are impounded in the distrainer's private property, as in the case before a hundred court of 1276 where ten pigs were impounded by William of Blunsdon 'in curia sua summe murato de petra et mortario et janua clausa serrura'.⁹ It is clear that the large numbers of beasts mentioned in some cases would require a pound of some size. That they would require attention and feeding is shown by the allowance of two bushels of mixed corn to the oxherd of impounded animals mentioned in the Accounts for 1283-4.¹⁰ A count of cases in the manorial rolls shows that of 46 references to impounding, 3 refer to 'beasts', 22 to 'sheep', 2 to 'lambs', 16 to 'cattle' of all classes, and one to a 'cart'. In addition one is a charge of 'not filling the park', one of 'breaking the lord's park (wall)', and one of 'allowing cattle to enter the park.' In the hundred rolls pigs and horses in addition are frequently impounded.

The most useful reference, in view of some features of the Circles discussed below, is that in the hundred courts for 16th May to 14th July 1279¹¹ when Henry Wride or Wryde is charged 'de pondfolda (sua) levata super communen pasturem'.

5. *Accounts and Surveys of the Wiltshire Lands of Adam de Stratton*, ed. M.W. Farr, WANHS Records Branch XIV (1959), p. xiv.
6. *Accts. and Surveys; also Court Rolls of the Wiltshire Manors of Adam de Stratton*, ed. R.B. Pugh, Wilts. Rec. Soc. XXIV (1970).
7. *The Rolls of Highworth Hundred 1275-87*, ed. Brenda Farr, Wilts. Rec. Soc. XXI (1966), XXII (1968), *passim*.
8. *Court Rolls*, p. 15.
9. *Highworth Hundred Rolls*, p. 45.
10. *Accts. and Surveys*, p. 147.
11. *Highworth Hundred Rolls*, pp. 123, 125-6.

DISCUSSION

ARCH

The excavation of the Stratton Park enclosure, although unproductive of finds, has established answers to a number of general questions about the Highworth Circles. In the first place, the most likely date for the construction of the excavated example is the thirteenth or fourteenth century. In the second place the absence of occupation features, the construction of the bank and internal ditch and the very narrow entrance with no causeway across the ditch all suggest that it functioned as a stock enclosure. This evidence and the almost total absence of Romano-British pottery effectively disposes of the suggestion of Allen and Passmore¹² that the Circles are of Romano-British date. Their section of No. 16, Hannington suggests that the ditch cut the Romano-British buildings; had they excavated the bank no doubt further Roman material would have been located in the old ground surface. The 'Norman' sherds from No. 21 found by Allen and Passmore¹³ now appear more significant.

Further evidence of date and possible function can be deduced from the Allen aerial photographs in the Ashmolean and Devezes Museums. In the Stratton Park example narrow post-Enclosure ridge and furrow has destroyed the eastern part, but broad rig strips were just discernible abutting the south side of the enclosure and can be traced on the contour plan (FIG. 2). The weathered state of the pottery in the old buried soil beneath the bank may suggest that this was under cultivation, but for a period too short to produce discernible ridges. The relationship of some other Circles to medieval land-use may be determined from the aerial photographs. Nos. 1 and 2 (Port Farm) lie on ground bearing no traces of ridge and furrow, beside a trackway leading to open field strips some few hundred metres north. No. 7 overlies an open field; 7a to 12 (Ashmead Brake) lie on pasture between two fields. Nos. 22 to 24 (Sevenhampton), 26 to 28 (Common Farm), 30 to 39 (North Leaze) lie on pasture near fields. Nos. 34 and 35 lie on a headland as does No. 40 (Dudgrove). No 41 (Upper Inglesham), if a Circle, lies on a narrow headland between fields.

Clearly, although some variation is present, in general the following points may be argued. i) The evidence of excavation suggests construction during the 'high' period of open field cultivation. ii) The majority of the enclosures lie on pasture, or headlands in close proximity to open fields. The place-name Common Farm indicates that some at least lay on common pasture, as did Henry Wride's pound (see above). iii) Although there is a causeway across the ditch of 7 (Port Farm) the narrow entrance of the Stratton Park example and of 27 (Common Farm) where an old track, unrelated to post-enclosure fields, leads into the Circle, and other examples, suggest that little other than livestock could have used the enclosures. The general lack of causeways would bar wheeled traffic altogether.

The 1975 excavations at Stratton Park allow us to identify the date of construction of these remarkable enclosures and to suggest their use for impounding stock, as implied in the court cases. It remains for further research to establish why such numbers of large pounds were built, some at least privately; what agricultural practice made them necessary, and whether 'pond folda', 'defenc', and 'parcus' refer to the same structures.

12. Allen and Passmore op. cit. p. 118.

13. Ibid. p. 119.

A further report on recent work on Highworth Circles will appear in a subsequent number of this journal.

THIS PAPER
compiled by
Environment
Archaeologi
work on the
to produce
in no other
many recor
personnel i

The corr
recover. A
the line dra
on Historic
the full typ
Library at
deposition:

The sur
Devezes ar
private Ca
not give n
archive'.

Introductio

The need
under cor
Gibbs an
provision
Council a
of Swind
was publ

Once t
'M4 Pro
sociologic
of techn
Natural
publishe

The n
in April
survey.

WAM 47
1935-1937

on a grey ground, later, two layers of apparently a border black letter text, and higher still, a course at the level of the fourteenth century. Above the string-course are the string-course patterns, still in the original plaster, such a wealth of colour, and fragments of painting of various dates, together with such a large range of post-reformation texts, contribute in giving an extraordinary degree of interest to the walls and to the interior of the church generally. It is advisable, in my opinion, that all the extant colour decoration should be sought for and carefully preserved. Every fragment thus exposed would, I feel convinced, help to enhance the beauty of the building and intensify the impression of genuineness, received on entering; little or nothing appears to have been removed or maltreated, and thus the evidence of its occupants, in each succeeding century, creates a human and living interest which, added to the intrinsic picturesque appearance of the interior, makes Inglesham a rare and almost perfect example of an unspoiled English village church.

the remains of earlier painting. On the south wall of the same aisle there are other texts and traces of earlier colour decoration.

The woodwork of the screens is almost entirely painted, mostly in red and a golden yellow, but I failed to observe any traces of painted ornamentation.

In the porch, above the doorway, there is an eighteenth century text, and in the recess in the east wall considerable remains of red colouring.

Whilst there does not appear to be any subject or range of subjects, such as one might have expected to find on walls such as these, which have been so little damaged, yet the survival of so much of the original plaster, such a wealth of colour, and fragments of painting of various dates, together with such a large range of post-reformation texts, contribute in giving an extraordinary degree of interest to the walls and to the interior of the church generally. It is advisable, in my opinion, that all the extant colour decoration should be sought for and carefully preserved. Every fragment thus exposed would, I feel convinced, help to enhance the beauty of the building and intensify the impression of genuineness, received on entering; little or nothing appears to have been removed or maltreated, and thus the evidence of its occupants, in each succeeding century, creates a human and living interest which, added to the intrinsic picturesque appearance of the interior, makes Inglesham a rare and almost perfect example of an unspoiled English village church.

E. W. TRISTRAM.

An Earthen Circle at Stratton St. Margarets.

O.M. XVI, N.W. six inch. On the top of this sheet, is marked as a shaded area, Stratton Park. Immediately below and S. of this is Stratton Wharf, alongside the old Wilts and Berks Canal. S.E. of the junction of the Wanborough—Stratton road and the canal is a grass field in which (about under the W. of Stratton Wharf) is an earthen circle similar to those described in *W.A.M.*, xlvii, p. 114, June, 1935. It is in detail exactly like those already recorded and consists of a low wide bank with a shallow but broad ditch inside the bank. There is no trace of an entrance. The E. part of the circle is divided from the remainder by a hedgerow, this part has been ploughed flat but is still plainly seen, the remainder is in fair condition but has been under the plough. Diameter 380 feet over all, bank 15ft. wide and 1½ft. high, the ditch 10ft. wide and 2ft. deep.

In August, 1935, a trench was dug across the ditch on the S. side (with the kind permission of Mr. Eacott) and the original bottom was found two feet under the turf; no relics were found. Then water filled the excavation which had to be abandoned.

This earthwork stands immediately N. of the Roman station of Wanborough and had its character not been known it might very well have been taken for an amphitheatre attached to that place, by anyone not familiar with such remains.

In an early number of this *Magazine* the late Mr. William Morris records several earthen circles which seem to have been similar to the

above, as standing in Swindon and N. of the Shrivenham road; they have been destroyed and the ditches no doubt remain below the County Cricket Ground at Swindon.

The Stratton circle was discovered by Major G. W. G. Allen.

A. D. PASSMORE.

Stonehenge Human Markings of Ancient Origin.

The *Wiltshire Gazette* of October 25th, 1934, contains a very important statement on this subject. The publication of the fact that Mr. Alex. Keiller had found certain circular markings which he believes to be of human origin on one of the stones found and re-erected by him in the Kennett Avenue at Avebury, produced a letter in a London paper from Mr. Ludovic McL. Mann, F.S.A. (Scot), of Glasgow, asserting that there were designs of ancient origin on more than one of the stones of Stonehenge. On this the then editor of the *Wiltshire Gazette* (Mr. J. J. Slade) remarked in the paper that although it was a fact that the fallen lintel of the Great Trilithon does bear certain markings, it is not a fact that these markings are coeval with the building of the monument. Their modern origin has been proved in *Wills Arch. Mag.*, ix, 268. In the *Gazette* of September 20th, 1934, Mr. Mann answered that he did not refer to the modern markings. The editor then asked Mr. Mann to send a drawing of the marks which he did refer to. Mr. Mann sent two drawings which were reproduced in the *Gazette* of October 25th. One of these represents the sickle-shaped device on the lintel of the trilithon with nine cup markings, the other shows six cup markings on one of the blue stones, both carefully drawn to scale so that there could be no mistake as to the exact position of the markings. Mr. Mann writes—"The drawings which I sent to you are actual scale copies made from rubbings, and are the markings on two of the stones, namely, the blue stone in the Blue Stone Ring immediately to the right when entering the circle on the axial line of the avenue. The companion blue stone immediately to the left bears only a single cup-marking in the centre of the face of the stone. There is a group of 17 cups cut on the south-west face of the tall blue stone, rather cylindrical and slightly obliquely canted. . . . There are also, as already mentioned to you, carvings of cups and other designs on the fallen lintel stone which once capped the central or largest trilithon. The fallen monster slab of that trilithon has most of its face covered by a large group of cups." "The drawing of the lintel stone sculpturings now submitted proves the elaborate exactitude and the adherence to the ancient stereotyped linear measures which characterise similar carvings in Britain, Ireland, and Europe further afield."

With these scale plans to guide them Messrs. G. H. Engleheart and R. S. Newall together visited Stonehenge on October 13th, 1934, and most carefully examined the stones referred to, and in the issue of October 25th they report as follows:—"We visited the monument . . . and together and in the presence of two competent witnesses closely examined the stones specified by Mr. Mann. Using his original letters