

Third Report on the Excavation of Mendip Barrows.

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Since the Second Report appeared the Society has lost the services of Mr. R. F. Read, the author, one of its oldest and most energetic members; we wish him success in his venture overseas. His successor took charge of Barrow excavations too late to write this account.

An improved system of identifying tumuli, applicable both to the Ordnance map and to the museum, has been adopted; the letter T (tumulus) followed by the number of the barrow. Artefacts are further distinguished by additional figures.

EXCAVATION.

The continuation of the Tynning's Farm Group has been the chief work of the year, but the results will not be described until these barrows have been completed, a rule which I think should be followed in future. The practice of making several interim reports on one and the same barrow, besides being inconvenient for reference, leads to successive emendations and additions.

Barrow No. 5 Blackdown, (T.9.), has been re-excavated, and a barrow at Harptree Lodge, (T.19), which was being removed wholesale, was examined as thoroughly as possible.

NOTES ON PREVIOUS WORK.

Two points require fuller discussion than they have received. Firstly, the beaker of Barrow No. 1, Blackdown, (T.5), was very probably associated with an inhumation, although a burial by cremation without additional grave furniture was also associated. No unburnt bone was found with the beaker in the cist, but the nature of the soil is such that it would be unlikely to be preserved; the size of the cist (2-ft. 3-ins. by 3-ft. 7-ins.) is what one would expect for a crouched burial. The beaker was crushed against the side of the cist, and was broken before the latter was filled in, for one wall of the vessel was laid inside the other in a fashion which could not occur of itself. Of course the beaker may have been broken intentionally for ceremonial reasons, but the manner of the breakage and the position in the cist are very suggestive.

In my opinion the two tiny fragments of calcined bone found in the cist did not fall in during the excavations, nor was that explana-

tion suggested until six months afterwards ; but fortunately the contemporaneity of the cremation is proved otherwise (see the Second Report) ; it preceded the erection of the barrow if not the infilling of the cist. The cremation appeared to represent a complete body, not certain members of the (supposed) inhumed individual, for the skull, vertebræ, and upper and lower limbs were represented. On the Continent, cremation is said to have been practised in Neolithic times, *e.g.* in Brittany ; its presence here with an early beaker may possibly indicate the arrival of cultural elements from some such locality, either by coastal adventure or less probably direct across the English Channel and thence by land. Whether the beaker folk brought the custom, whether it preceded them, or was a contemporary introduction of another race, is not clear. The association of a beaker with cremation has been noted elsewhere, *e.g.* at Cwm Du ; Colt Hoare records it in Wiltshire, but unfortunately it seems that occasionally he applied the term " Drinking Cup " (beaker) to a cinerary urn ; and indeed Barrow No. 2 Blackdown (T.6) seems to be of about the same period, to judge by its close resemblance to No. 1, (the form is unusual if not unique locally), by its propinquity, (it is the only other barrow within half a mile), and by the presence of a knife made from a flake of polished flint (celt ?). In No. 2 a cist, 2-ft. by 1-ft. 8-ins., too small for an inhumation unless of an infant, contained calcined human bones. It had been robbed ; very probably it once contained a beaker. The calcined bones were not a later introduction into the cist, they were present in the joints of its walls and floor ; no trace of another burial has been found although the whole area of the barrow has been dug.

Secondly, it is necessary to place on record the use of black peaty (carbonaceous) material, sprinkled and occasionally mixed with red and yellow ochre, around each of the three cinerary urns from the Tynning's Farm Barrow Group. It was best marked around the earliest of the three, (type 1, Abercromby), which together with its capstone was almost completely sealed in thereby ; around the two later (type 3, Southern Group 1 and type 4, Abercromby) it was distributed in patches. The black matter contains no ash, visible charcoal, bone, or other débris such as accumulates on the floor of a dwelling site, hence we can rule out the suggestion that it was derived from the deceased's dwelling. It may be compared with the black " unctuous " matter which is sometimes found around or sealing in the interment in Long Barrows, (*e.g.*, at West Kennet, where red ochre also was noted¹) ; with the black layer with red ochre which

¹ Thurnam, *Archæologia*, Vol. 38, p. 405, *et seq.*

sealed down the urn and the pile of stones with graves goods in the Fern Hill Farm Barrow, (T.15), which it is hoped to describe next year ; and with the black strata in the Mendip Hunt Barrow, (T.19), described below.

MOUND NO. 5 BLACKDOWN (T.9).

This cairn, which was regarded very doubtfully as a degraded barrow, has been re-excavated. The discovery of dry stone walling of modern type, of mortar, and of modern pottery ; the absence of bone and of any dateable object earlier than red pottery with green internal glaze ; and the structure of the mound, make it clear that we are not dealing with a barrow. It appears to be the remains of a small stone building, possibly a ranger's hut. The remains of many fires extended across the whole width of the chamber ; apparently there was no built hearth.

BARROW NO. 1 MENDIP HUNT KENNELS (T.19).

Lat. 51° 16', 15". Lon. 2° 39', 54". O.S. Som. Sheet XXVII, N.E.

Attention was diverted perforce from the Tynning's Farm Group by the discovery that a large barrow was being destroyed for levelling purposes. Two-thirds of the part above the present land surface had been removed already, but fortunately the original turf level lay nearly two feet below the level of disturbance. Permission on behalf of the owner having been kindly granted by Mr. H. A. Tiarks, M.F.H., the workmen were questioned and the material already removed was examined,—fortunately it was spread out in a relatively thin layer,—excavations were undertaken by ourselves and the remainder of the demolition supervised as far as possible.

EXCAVATION.

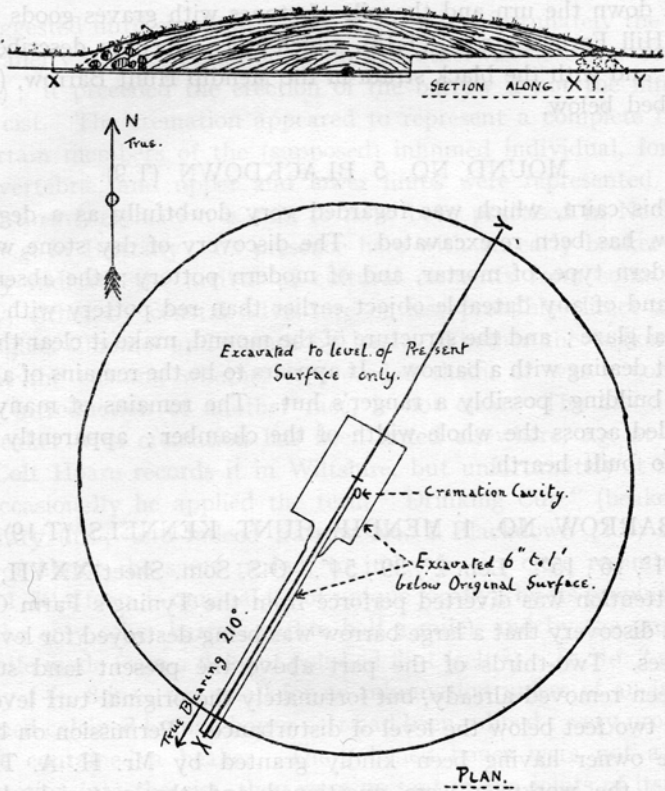
The manner and extent of the excavations are shown in the plan and section. Obviously they are incomplete, and if the whole has not been removed already they will be continued. Enough has been done to show that further finds are unlikely.

SITE.

About 150 yards South of the Mendip Hunt Kennels at Harptree Lodge, near Priddy, upon a tableland rather than a ridge. There are several similar barrows in the vicinity.

TYPE.

It is a simple bowl about 8 feet in height, (6 feet above the present turf level), and 75 feet in diameter. A number of stones were mingled



sparingly with the earth at the periphery, forming a ring about 3 feet in height. The bulk of the barrow contained no large stones, but was composed of alternate layers of black peaty soil, and grey, yellow and red clayey sandy and gravelly material (the black and red vastly predominant), as though derived from a pit showing a succession of deposits or from different localities. In either case the matter cannot all have been derived from the immediate neighbourhood of the barrow. The black soil has been mentioned above; the colour is due to carbon. Probably the barrow was constructed mainly of turfs arranged in more or less concentric layers, with subsoil of varying colour adherent to them.

STRATIFICATION.

1. Turf and humus, 4".
2. Layered soil, 7' 6"
3. Original turf level, 2"
4. Continuous floor of iron-cemented sand and stones, $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 4".
5. Yellow ochreous sand.

Level of Disturbance

Layered Soil

Original Turf Level

Iron-cemented Floor

Ochreous Sand

Bottom of Excavations



PLATE XV.

The layered soil contained a single "point" of cancellous bone which can hardly be an artefact.

A small cavity had been scraped out of the original turf and compacted floor in the centre of the barrow; it was lined by a layer of unbaked grey clay $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " in thickness, which was continued above the old turf level to form an irregularly ovoid cremation chamber, 13" by 11" in diameter and 8" in height (Plate XV). The walls and floor were smoothed internally, but left rough outside; the small hole in the top of the shell through which the ashes were introduced was sealed by similar clay left rough on both surfaces; no lip or other sharp division existed between walls and roof. This curious substitute for a cinerary urn contained a mixture of fine powdery charcoal and calcined human bones; one or two unburnt pieces of bone, doubtless human, but not identifiable, a few small pieces of white cherty material, and a cylinder of charcoal were found in the mass. The last may have been accidental, but was probably the remains of a bead.

A few small fragments of charcoal and calcined bone were found upon an area of the original surface about 8' in diameter, hence it is probable that the cremation was carried out *in situ*. The individual was an adult and the bones seem slender, but the sex cannot be determined from the fragmentary remains.

The continuous iron-cemented floor appears to be a natural feature; it is thicker beneath the hearth area than elsewhere, and in that part a large number of small chert-like stones lay upon its surface, but these appear to be accidental.

CONCLUSIONS.

The age of the barrow cannot be determined at present, in the absence both of dateable objects and of comparable funeral customs. Cremation and round-barrow burial were practised with varying frequency at all periods from the Transitional Phase of the Bronze Age to the Saxon. The salient features are cremation followed by interment in a clay chamber constructed *in situ* and left unfired; absence of grave-goods (unless the charcoal cylinder represented a necklace of beads burnt with the dead?), and a barrow of noble size not constructed of the materials closest at hand.