# TRIAL EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF A MEGALITHIC TOMB AT FROMEFIELD, SOMERSET

## F. de M. and H. L. Vatcher

Trial excavations on the site of a destroyed megalithic tomb in the garden of Fromefield House, Frome, were carried out by the Ministry of Public Buildings & Works, now Department of the Environment, under the supervision of F. de M. and H. L. Vatcher, between 15th and 29th March 1965. Investigations were necessitated by the development of the garden for building purposes; the high ground on which the tomb had been situated was later levelled, and a housing estate built over the area. Owing to circumstances beyond the control of the Ministry, a full excavation of the site was not possible.

The site lies at the edge of the former village of Fromefield, now a suburb on the north-east side of the town of Frome. (Nat. Grid Ref. ST 781 489). It is between the 274 ft and 275 ft contours, at the top of a south-west facing slope, quarter of a mile from a bend of the river Frome, and between the site and the river there are several springs (Fig. 1). The bedrock is limestone with pockets of greenish clay, covered by a brown clay subsoil.

# PREVIOUS HISTORY

It is unfortunate that the tomb was destroyed about 1820, during landscaping of this part of the garden of Fromefield House. We have however an account of the destruction and what was seen, recorded in the diary of a young girl who witnessed the occasion. Dr A. Bulleid first published the evidence of this diary in 1911... "It may not be generally known, but in the garden of Fromefield House... There stands a stone of large size and had it not been for the brief note in the diary of a young girl written at the beginning of the last century, the history of this stone would have been lost. The facts of the case are briefly as follows: During the laying out of the garden a large mound was removed, and at the base of it was found the stone in question covering five walled compartments containing skeletons and pottery. The bones were allowed to remain intact, but the ground was levelled and the large cover-stone erected upright over the site."<sup>1</sup> A year later, in 1912, it is recorded that a "fragment of prehistoric pottery found with the remains of five skeletons in a chambered tumulus situated in the garden at "Fromefield", Frome, circa 1820", was presented to Somerset County Museum by Mr H. Byard Sheppard.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Bulleid writes further about the diary and describes the sherd of pottery at length in 1941. "In or about the year 1820 when the garden of Fromefield House was being enlarged, the new piece of ground included a chambered tumulus, and during the laying out and the inprovements that followed, it was opened and levelled. The late Miss Sheppard, of Frome, then a girl in her 'teens, remembered this work being done and was present when a large stone was removed disclosing five walled compartments constructed of stone slabs. Her diary states that the cells contained skeletons and pottery and she kept a fragment of a pot as a memento.

Some thirty years ago the writer was permitted to see this piece of pottery. The fragment was unornamented and varied from five-sixteenths to seven-sixteenths inches in thickness. The paste was of a dark gray colour, mixed with grits and a smaller quantity of shell or pounded shelly stone. The surface was smooth with almost a burnished look and of a buff colour. This fragment of pottery was presented to Somerset County Museum by Mr H. Byard Sheppard in 1912. The skeletons were allowed to remain intact, and were covered with earth, but the large stone was later placed upright either over or near the site in the middle of a round flower bed, and was seen by the writer in this position many years ago. Mr George Gordon, the owner of Fromefield House, tells me that the stone now stands in a wood, and that it is five feet in height above ground, and leaning at an angle of about 45°. It did not appear to me that this single stone was large enough to cover five cells, and we surmise that there may possibly have been others not mentioned by Miss Sheppard."<sup>3</sup>

## THE TRIAL EXCAVATION

Cuttings were laid out to conform with the results of the contour survey, carried out by the Ministry of Public Building & Works surveyors. The contours indicated traces of a mound, and two cuttings,  $15.24 \text{ m} \times 1.22 \text{ m} (50 \text{ ft} \times 4 \text{ ft})$  and  $11.89 \text{ m} \times 1.22 \text{ m} (39 \text{ ft} \times 4 \text{ ft})$ , were positioned to bisect this, while a 5.49 m (18 ft) square covered the area around the solitary remaining stone, to which reference is made above



(Plan 1). This stone, measuring  $1.52 \text{ m} \times 1.11 \text{ m} \times 0.35 \text{ m}$  (5' x 3' 8" x 14"), was moved in order to facilitate excavation, and the evidence of the diary was confirmed by the finding of a considerable quantity of human bone fragments in its immediate vicinity.

Excavation showed that the ground was very much disturbed down to bedrock. Irregular hollows in the clay and limestone, with lines of kerbstones delimiting long-vanished flowerbeds, particularly in the square cutting, bore testimony to the 1820 levelling and landscape gardening, while broken treestumps and roots of trees and scrub over the site indicated more recent growth, since the levelling took place. The depth of material from ground surface to the natural clay or limestone bedrock varied between 0.35 m (1' 2") and 0.61 m (2'), but only in part of the northern long cutting did any of the original mound material of the long barrow remain. Here, small flat limestone slabs on the eastern side of the mound extended for 6.40 m (21') along the cutting, laid irregularly on the old land surface of red clay. For most of this distance the slabs survived undisturbed up to the base of modern topsoil, and on the outside the rainwashed soil off the mound remained. Towards the centre of the mound, however, the slabs had been completely removed by the levelling and the natural limestone exposed, before being re-covered by disturbed soil and rubble. A peristalith or revetment of dry-stone walling could not be recognised in the length of unevenly-placed limestone material remaining in this cutting.

At the western end of the cutting, and below the 1820 disturbance, there was a hole about 0.91 m (3') in diameter and 0.229 m (9'') deep in the limestone bedrock, (1 on plan II), which may have held the base of a stone upright.

In the square cutting there was a hole of similar size adjacent to the site of the remaining orthostat, which could also have been a stonehole (2 on plan); less than 20 cms away, actually under the site, was a hole of more modern appearance (3) which was probably that dug to hold the stone when it was erected in the garden m 1820. In this cutting there were three further smaller and shallower hollows, much denuded (4, 5, and 6 on plan), any or all of which may have been the original site of a stone upright: in one of these lay two limestone slabs, which could have been used for packing.

As all these holes on the site were shallow, and all in an area which had been very much dug into in 1820, their original packing stones had gone, their filling was disturbed material, and their surrounding context was lost, together with clear definition of their shape above the base. A more precise interpretation was therefore impossible; nor was it possible in the time available to obtain more evidence of structures by area excavation on a wider scale.

The 1820 levelling had removed all but fragmentary indications of the mound in the southern long cutting, where only a thin scatter of limestone slabs, one of which measured 0.91 m (3') in length, overlay what appeared to be a remnant of the old land surface of red clay. At the outside end of this cutting also it was possible to detect undisturbed rainwashed soil off what had been the mound.

There was no trace of a ditch on either side of the mound in the area excavated or on the ground surface beyond, and it would seem probable that the limestone slabs were obtained by surface scraping. The remaining slabs found in the north-east cutting may represent a collapsed and spread peristalith wall, as found in certain other Severn-Cotswold tombs, rather than a remnant of a totally unrevetted mound of the material, but there was no positive evidence.

It is interesting to note that at the time of the trial excavation, the site included the remains of a 19th century grotto or summerhouse in stone, possibly re-used and broken components of the chambers of the long barrow itself.

# Somerset Archaeology and Natural History, 1973

#### Pottery

The few small fragments of Neolithic Windmill Hill pottery scattered in the disturbed soil in the area of the replaced stone appear to be similar to that seen by Miss Sheppard and described later by Dr Bulleid, and indeed is most probably that referred to in her diary as being in the chambers with the skeletons. The paste is hard, with a mixture of shell and flint grits, of a buff colour, and apparently very slightly burnished. The shell-grits would have been derived from the Great Oolite and Forest Marble deposits in the locality.

Two of the three rim sherds illustrated are of the rolled or pressed outward form, the other expanded or reinforced. All may be compared with rim forms found at Windmill Hill. The remainder of the sherds are featureless.





Fig. 2. Pottery

### DISCUSSION

Fromefield, on the southern edge of the Severn-Cotswold group of stone-chambered tombs, seems with its five chambers to have been typologically similar to West Kennet.<sup>4</sup> Tombs of this transepted plan, with chambers and passage, probably represent about 1/6 of the total number of tombs within the group, and are scattered at random over the area as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Other examples have a varying number of chambers opening off a central passage, from one pair at Nympsfield and Waylands Smithy to as many as six pairs at Fairy's Toot, Nempnett Thrubwell, now destroyed. The stone-chambered tombs of this type recognised in the Pornic region of north-west France are perhaps ancestral to the Severn-Cotswold group; indications of colonization via the Severn estuary or at least close contacts between the two areas seem likely.<sup>6</sup> The size of Fromefield, however, can only be a matter of conjecture, and it is indeed unfortunate that such an obviously valuable example of this type of tomb was so thoroughly destroyed in the last century.

Of the few chambered tombs nearest to Fromefield, two others were severely damaged in the early nineteenth century, Murtry Hill and 'Big Tree' on Buckland Down, where the megalithic stones were either disturbed or removed; The Giant's Grave, Charmborough, was damaged in the early part of this century, and the Devil's Bed and Bolster, between Frome and Bath, has not been examined scientifically. The Stoney Littleton barrow, to the north-west of Fromefield, which was excavated in 1816 by the Rev. Skinner for Sir Richard Colt Hoare and restored in 1858, was found to contain three pairs of chambers opening off a passage.



Fig. 3. Section



Fig. 4. Site plan I



If the limestone slabs remaining at Fromefield are the remnant of a collapsed peristalith or revetment wall, it would be similar to that at Stoney Littleton, Nympsfield and Notgrove, and others in the Severn-Cotswold group. Nevertheless, it would seem equally possible for the slabs to have been the remains of random material forming the mound itself, in the manner of the cairn tradition of gathered stones, paralleled by sites such as Parc Le Breos Cwm and Stoney Littleton (behind the revetment), Manton, and the sarsen core of the West Kennet mound. It was from this region, between Bath and Frome, that the oolite deposits provided the dry-walling material for a number of the chambered tombs in the region. Oolite-gritted pottery has been recorded from several sites including West Kennet, with a comparatively high proportion from Windmill Hill nearby.<sup>7</sup>

The 15 burials that were represented in the bones retrieved from beneath the one surviving stone at Fromefield make an interesting comparison with the burials found in other chambered tombs of the group. The numbers of burials in other tombs have varied between less than a dozen, e.g. Notgrove, with 9, to as many as 46 at West Kennet. The inadequate numbers of skulls and long bones at Fromefield are paralleled by missing material at several sites; at Ty Isaf where only 7 skulls, but 22 mandibles, remained out of a total of 33 individuals, and only 3 complete humeri; West Kennet, where there were far fewer skulls than the number of individuals, although often lower mandibles survived, and there were an insufficient number of longbones. At Tinkinswood, Randwick, and Nympsfield, to give only some examples, the skulls and long bones were poorly represented in relation to the total number of individuals. At West Kennet, Professor Piggott has considered the possibility that the skulls and long bones may have been removed perhaps for rites after decomposition, and in this connection he has noted the skull fragments and other human bones found at causewayed enclosures.

It would seem likely therefore that the removal of the major bones may have taken place while the tomb was still in use, rather than during the 1820 levelling operations; and as the small bones were picked up and carefully reburied it is unlikely that the larger ones would have been missed, either in a broken or unbroken state. It is, however, possible that some of the major bones have been removed since 1820.

The evidence for arthritis at this site may be compared to similar evidence for the disease at West Kennet.

# HUMAN BONE REPORT

#### Carole A. Keepax

The completely mixed remains of a minimum of fifteen individuals were presented for study. The bones are fairly well preserved, with only slight erosion of the surfaces and of some articular ends. However, the major long bones and the skulls are extremely fragmentary (although the bones from the hands and feet are generally complete).

Each category of bones was first considered separately (i.e. all femora, all tibiae, etc. together). Each group was sorted into the left and right sides, and then as many matching pairs as possible were formed, in order to obtain a figure for the minimum number of individuals represented. The presence of twenty-four first metatarsals, representing a minimum of thirteen pairs, indicates that at least thirteen individuals are present. The incomplete remains of two infants are also present. The total minimum number of individuals is therefore fifteen.

The assessment of minimum numbers for each part of the body is given on the following table together with further details, such as fusion of the epiphyses, degree of lipping and exostoses around the articular surfaces (due to osteoarthritis), and the general size and robustness of the bones (assessed as large and robust, medium, and small and delicate). The skull fragments and teeth are described separately.

### SKULL FRAGMENTS

Very few skull fragments are present. Only one skull (that of an adult, probably male) was partly reconstructed, and this was not sufficiently complete to be measurable. One parietal notch bone was observed on the left side of this skull.

At least six individuals are represented, demonstrated by the presence of: five occipital fragments;

three right orbit and zygomatic arch fragments; one right and three left petrous bones; one left and three right temporal bones; and a few vault fragments. The age and sex of these individuals was assessed as follows:

- 1. Infant (probably new-born)
- 2. Immature individual
- 3. Adult, probably male
- 4. Adult, possibly male 5. Adult/sub-adult
- 6. Adult/sub-adult

#### TEETH

There are a few fragments of mandible and maxilla, but most of the teeth are loose. The teeth were arranged in a logical manner (using criteria such as degree of wear, size, etc) to form the minimum number of individuals. The age estimations arrived at from a study of the tentative associations of teeth so formed were:

1. New-born infant Child, 4 (±1½) years
 Child, 10 (±1½) years Age assessed by the stage of development of the dentition 4. ) Three, possibly four, young adults. 5. (about 17-25 years) Age assessed by stage of development 6. 7. } Two adults, aged about 25-35 years of the dentition and dental wear.8 9. One middle aged adult

These are described in more detail with the separate descriptions of the individuals.

| Site  | Surface<br>dimensions<br>(max) | Depth (approx.) |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Rt. 5th metatarsal (lateral half of distal articular surface) | 4 x 5 mm                       | 4 mm            |
| 1st phalanx of hallux (2 pits on proximal articular surface)  | 2 x 2 mm<br>2 x 2 mm           | 1-2 mm<br>1 mm  |
| 1st phalanx of hallux   | 3 x 2 mm                       | 1 mm            |
| Sternal end of clavicle                                       | 10 x 5 mm                      | 3 mm            |

Using the above evidence, an attempt was made to reconstruct the individuals present, and to assess their sex, and age at death. Unfortunately, the more diagnostic bones (e.g. skull, major long bones, pelvis, and vertebrae) are poorly represented and fragmentary, so that many individuals are represented mainly by the less useful bones of the hands and feet. The age of the individuals was estimated mainly by dental development and attrition, fusion of the epiphyses, and degree of lipping due to osteoarthritis. The assessment of sex was more difficult, and was based mainly on the general size and robustness of the bones, and a few skull characteristics. The detailed associations of bones used to reconstruct the individuals (arrived at by consideration of the age and sex characteristics displayed by each group of bones) should be regarded as tentative, although the major conclusions seem to be fairly well established.

Descriptions of the individuals, based on the most likely associations of different parts of the body, are as follows:

1. New-born infant

F ragments of skull; right scapula, radius, and ulna; humeri; ribs; femora; tibiae; two deciduous teeth (upper central and upper lateral incisors) with the crowns formed and the roots just beginning to develop. The following measurements were possible:

Max. length of left femur shaft (without epiphyses) ..... 70.1 mm

Max. length of tibiae shafts (without epiphyses) ...... 60.1(1) 61.4(r) mm

The development of the dentition suggests that the infant may have survived for up to a few months after birth.

2. Infant About 1 year old

The presence of a child of approximately this age is suggested by left humerus and ulna fragments, (larger in size than (1), and smaller than (3)). 3. Child  $4(\pm 1\frac{1}{2})$  years old

Fragments of tibiae; calcanei; a left talus; a first metatarsal; a mandible fragment containing little-worn first and second deciduous molars and an unerupted first permanent molar crown (with little of the roots formed), a loose deciduous canine.

4. Juvenile 10(±11/2) years old

Fragments of skull; clavicles; vertebrae; humeri; radius; ulna; calcanei, left talus, first metatarsals, first metacarpal, and other bones from the hands and feet; central and lateral lower permanent incisors with most of the roots formed, and a lower permanent canine with the root half formed. All epiphyses are unfused. 5. Adolescent 13-19 years old

Fragments of femora; humeri; radius; scapula; calcanei, first metatarsal, first metacarpals, talus, and other bones from the hands and feet; twelve permanent teeth with little wear (including a second molar with no wear). There is medium hypoplasia of the enamel of a lower canine, and slight hypoplasia of the anterior teeth. Most major epiphyses are unfused.

6. Sub-adult 17-21 years old Fragments of skull; radii and ulnae with epiphyses fused; bones from the hands and feet with epiphyses unfused; proximal epiphyses of humeri; twelve permanent teeth with little wear, including a third molar with roots incompletely formed.

7. Sub-adult 17-22 years old, possibly female

Fragments of femora; ulna; sternum; first metacarpals; proximal phalanx of hallux; a canine, and a third molar (with incompletely formed roots) may also belong to this individual. The proximal epiphyses of the

The phalanx, metacarpal, and femora, are almost completely fused, but the separate epiphyses are still visible. 8. Young adult 17-25 years, probably female Fragments of skull; tibiae; femora; humeri; radii; ulnae; sternum; bones from the hands and feet; ten permanent teeth with slight wear, including two fully erupted third molars. Four teeth display white mottling, possibly due to fluorosis, and a lower first molar has a pitted surface, associated with considerable hypoplasia of the enamel. Most of the other teeth display slight hypoplasia. All visible epiphyses are fused. 9. Adult, about 25-35 years old, possibly female

Fragments of femora; tibiae; ulna; bones from the hands and feet; seven permanent teeth (with medium wear). The first metacarpals display very slight lipping of the distal ends, probably due to very early osteo arthritic changes in that area.

10. Adult, about 25-35 years old, probably male

Fragments of skull; bones from the hands and feet; twelve permanent teeth with medium wear.

11. Adult, middle aged, probably male

Fragments of skull; femora; tibiae; radii; ulnae; sternum; bones from the hands and feet; fourteen permanent teeth with fairly heavy wear, There is distal neck caries of an upper second molar;. A first metacarpal displays medium lipping, due to osteoarthritis, at the distal end; a few other hand and feet bones are slightly affected. 12. Adult

Represented only by first metatarsals, first metacarpals, and proximal phalanges.

13. Adult First metatarsals, first metacarpals, and proximal phalanges only.

14. Adult

First metatarsals, first metacarpals, and proximal phalanx of the hallux only.

15. Adult

First metatarsals and first metacarpals only.

## PATHOLOGY AND SKELETAL ANOMALIES

#### Oral health

Out of the seventy-eight teeth received for study, only one was carious. One case of ante-mortem loss of a tooth (a lower molar) was observed in the thirty-three sockets examined. The two mandibles and two palate fragments present (from three individuals) all display slight alveolar bone recession (probably due to a mild periodontal disease). Slight calculus was observed on the teeth of these three, and three other individuals.

From the small amount of evidence available, it therefore appears that the oral health of this group was fairly good. However, the young age of many of the individuals may have contributed to the low frequency of caries, etc. observed.

#### Osteoarthritis and degenerative joint diseases

The acromial end of a left clavicle, and a few bones from the hands and feet, display slight lipping and exostoses at the articular ends, due to osteoarthritis. A first metacarpal and a first phalanx of the hand are affected to a medium degree.

A number of small pits were observed on the articular surfaces of various bones. The pits are roughly circular, and the interior surface is porous in appearance. These degenerative joint changes are comparable with 'osteochondritis dissecans', and might, for example, be due to an early arthritic condition. Their occurrence may be summarised as follows:

#### "Erosion fossae" of the femoral neck

Two pairs of femora from two sub-adult individuals (in one case, the epiphyses are unfused, and in the other, they are fused but still visible) display a slight depression on the anterior surface of the neck, just below the head. The dimensions of the depression (in both cases) are about 2 x 1 cm. There is little compact bone over this area, producing a porous appearance. This is the 'erosion fossa' described by J. Angel,<sup>9</sup> who believes that it is caused by mechanical stress due to (for example) over-extension of the hip joint. The occurrence (in this series) of the erosion fossa in two young individuals is consistent with his view that it is most common in children and women, as the musculature is weaker, and less able to resist over-extension.

Minimum number of individuals for each part of the body

|                              | Min.<br>no. of<br>indiv- | Min. no. witi<br>unfused epir<br>Min.<br>no. of Su<br>indiv- Children (id |                              | Min. no. with<br>with fused epiphyses<br>epiphyses (ie adult) and<br>no lipping of<br>Sub-adults articular<br>(ie almost surfaces |     | Min. no. with<br>slight lipping<br>of articular<br>surfaces |       |     |               | Min. no. with<br>medium lipping<br>of articular<br>surfaces |              |       | Total<br>number of<br>individual<br>bones (or<br>fragments<br>from one<br>bone) |       |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|---|-----|---|-------|-----|---------------|---|--------------|-------|---|-------|
|                              | iduals<br>(total)        | and<br>infants  | adult<br>size)               | Small   | Med | Large   | Small | Med | Large         | Small   | Med          | Large | left  | right |
| First                        |                          |   |                              |   |     |   |       |     |               |   |              |       | 10  | 10    |
| metatarsal                   | 13                       | 2   | 2                            | 1   | 1   | 1   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 12  | 12    |
| First<br>metacarnal          | 12                       | 1   | 3                            | 1   | 3   | 1   | _     | 2   |               | -   | 1            | -     | 11  | 10    |
| Metacarpals                  | 0                        | 1   | 1                            |   | 7   | -   |       | Ĩ   |               |   |              |       | 66  |       |
| (not inst)                   | ,                        |   | 1                            | -   |     |   | -     |     | -             |   |              |       | 00  |       |
| (not first)                  | 8                        | 1   | 2                            | 1   | 2   | 2   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 66  |       |
| phalanges<br>(feet)          | 8                        | -   | 2                            | _   | 5   | _   | _     | 1   | _             |   | _            | _     | 28  |       |
| Proximal                     |                          |   |                              |   | ,   |   |       |     |               |   |              |       |   |       |
| (hand)                       | 8                        | -   | 1                            | 4   | 6   | -   | 4     | -   | -             | -   | 1            | -     |   | 73    |
| Ulna                         | 8                        | 3   | -                            | 1   | 3   | 1   | +     | -   | -             | -   | ÷.           | -     | 5   | 5     |
| Calcaneus                    | 7                        | 2   | -                            | 1   | 2   | -   | -     | 1   | 1             | -   | -            | -     | 7   | 7     |
| Talus                        | 7                        | 2   | - <del></del> -              | 2   | 2   | 1   | ÷     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 7   | 4     |
| Tarsals & carpals (not talus |                          |   |                              |   |     |   |       |     |               |   |              |       |   |       |
| & calcaneus)                 | 7                        | -   |                              | -   | 7   | 4   | -     | _   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 48  |       |
| Tibia                        | 7                        | 4   |                              | -   | 2   | 1   | -     | -   | ÷             | -   | -            | -     | 6   | 7     |
| Femur                        | 6                        | 1   | 2                            | -   | 3   | -   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 6   | 5     |
| Patella                      | 6                        | -   | -                            | -   | 4   | -   | -     | 1   | 1             | -   | <del>1</del> | -     | 5   | 1     |
| Radius                       | 6                        | 2   | 1                            | -   | 3   | -   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 3   | 6     |
| Humerus                      | 6                        | 3   | 2                            | _   | 1   | -   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | Э   | 3     |
| Ribs                         | 2                        | 1   | 1                            | -   | 3   | -   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     |   | 0+    |
| Clavicle                     | 2                        | 1   | 1                            | -   | 2   | -   | -     | 1   | -             | -   | -            | _     | 4   | 1     |
| Sternum                      | 4                        | -<br>(<br>s   | sternebrae<br>eparate)       | 2   | _   | 1   | -     | _   | -             | -   | -            | -     |   | 4     |
| Middle<br>phalanges          | 3                        | -   | 1                            | -   | 1   | -   | ÷     | -   | 1<br>(1 bone) | -   | -            | -     | 17  |       |
| Scapula                      | 3                        | 1   | 1                            | -   | 1   | -   | ÷.    | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     | 3   |       |
| Vertebrae                    | 3                        | 1   |                              | -   | 2   | -   | 4     | -   | -             | -   | -            | _     | 16+   |       |
| Pelvis                       | 2                        | -   | 1                            | -   | 1   | -   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     |   | 2     |
|                              |                          |   | (iliac<br>margin<br>unfused) |   |     |   |       |     |               |   |              |       |   |       |
| Distal phalanges             | 1                        | -   | -                            | ÷:  | 1   | -   | -     | -   | -             | -   | -            | -     |   | 1     |

Fromefield Megalithic Tomb.

## Summary

A minimum of fifteen individuals are present: two infants under eighteen months: three children (aged about four, ten and thirteen to nineteen years); two sub-adults (one possibly female); one young adult (probably male); and three older adults (two probably male, one possibly female). Therefore, there does not appear to be any particular sexual or age bias in the barrow burials.

There is very little evidence of disease; the oral health was fairly good, and there is little evidence of osteoarthritis. However, the young age of many of the individuals and the imcompleteness of the remains may partly explain the low incidence of pathological evidence.

It is interesting that the hands and feet are noticeably better represented than the major long bones and skulls. This might possibly be due to the prevailing customs at the time of burial: the major bones may have been removed to another site after the bodies had decayed. However, in this case there is an alternative explanation:

The collection of bones presented for study are believed to be those which were discovered in 1820 (during levelling of the site), removed from their original positions, and then reburied. It might be expected that some of the smaller bones would have been missed during that excavation and therefore not reburied, but the reverse is true. It is therefore tempting to suggest that some of the skulls and long bones may have been retained by an 'interested party', instead of allowing them to be reburied. If the bones received for study do represent all of the skeletons disturbed and reburied in 1820, one can only assume that the skulls and long bones were so fragmentary that they were unrecognised by the 19th century diggers, whereas the fairly complete bones of the hands and feet were more readily recognisable.

- 1. Proc. Som. Arch. Soc. LVII (1), (1911), 37 2. P.S.A.S. LVIII (1), (1912), 108 3. P.S.A.S. LXXXVII (1942), 67

- The West Kennet Long Barrow, Excavations 1955-56, (1962), 10, general plan
  Proc. Prehist. Soc. III (1937), 71; VII (1941), 34; Prehist. Chamber Tombs Brit. Isles (1950), 65
  West Kennet Long Barrow, 59-62

- Windmill Hill and Avebury (1965), 28, 46
  As in "Digging Up Bones", D. R. Brothwell, 1972
  J. Lawrence Angel, "The Reaction Area of the Femoral Neck" (Clinical Orthopaedics, No. 32, 1964)



Plate I

Plate II

FROMEFIELD MEGALITHIC TOMB



Plate III



Plate IV

FROMEFIELD MEGALITHIC TOMB