

# BARROW MEAD, BATH, SOMERSET

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## SUMMARY

This report describes trial trenching and rescue excavation of a complex of earthworks and buildings of medieval and later date, with underlying Iron Age B ditches and pits.

## INTRODUCTION

The earthworks at Barrow Mead were noted on the 25" O.S. map but their character was not recognized until 1953, when Mr. Brian Hope-Taylor, F.S.A., carried out an exploratory excavation on behalf of the Ministry of Works, Ancient Monuments Division. This was done because of the impending destruction of the site by a new school.<sup>1</sup> Resources were not at that time available for any large scale excavation; the subsequent bulldozing and trenching by the contractors was watched by Mr. E. Greenfield and myself as far as other commitments<sup>2</sup> allowed, and material was also collected by a local resident, Mr. J. Bolwell of Southdown. The present report is an amalgam of the information obtained by all parties, and the site plan is based on Mr. Hope-Taylor's survey of 1953.<sup>3</sup>



FIG. 1. SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND, SHOWING POSITION OF BARROW MEAD.

The site is between 373 and 390 feet above O.D. on the oolitic limestone, here covered with tough yellow and bluish-green brashy clay, which comprise the "natural" under the archaeological features. The area on which the school has been built is just below the

west end of a prominent E. - W. spur; the slope on the end of

<sup>1</sup> The Westhill Secondary Modern Boys' School, Rush Hill, Bath.

<sup>2</sup> The Chew Valley Lake excavations.

<sup>3</sup> Acknowledgments are due to Bath Education Committee, for permission to excavate, and to the contractors for their ready co-operation; to Mr. Ivor Collis, the County Archivist, for help with the documentary evidence; to Mr. S. F. Rigold, F.S.A., who has supplied a note on the coins; to Mr. J. G. Hurst, F.S.A., who has examined the medieval pottery; to Mr. Peter Ewence, who has drawn the finds; and to Mr. Bolwell, who spent much time at the site and has generously handed us the material he rescued, with information about its find-spots. The finds are now in the possession of the Bath Education Committee.

this just above the site carries traces of defensive banks or scarps which may be of Iron Age date; these scarps may be associated with the settlement whose fringes have been encountered at Barrow Mead. To W. and N. the ground is fairly level, but to the S. falls away sharply into a deep narrow valley, known as Padleigh Bottom, through which flows the Padleigh Brook.

#### OTHER MEDIEVAL SITES AND THE DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Fig. 2.* The medieval site is not an isolated one; there are further house-platforms and scarping in field 112 S. of Barrow Mead,<sup>4</sup> and an extensive complex in Middle Field,<sup>5</sup> on the higher ground adjoining the Wansdyke S. of Padleigh Bottom in Englishcombe parish. At both of these places Mr. Bolwell has done some exploratory digging, and found material of similar date to that at Barrow Mead. At Middle Field he has excavated a medieval dovecote,<sup>6</sup> which he suggests is probably part of the manor or village of *Barewe* which passed into the hands of the crown in 1333, following the arrest of Thomas de Gournay, of Englishcombe Castle, which is situated about 1 mile to the W.; Mr. Bolwell suggests that the name of Barrow Mead is thus derived. The name *Barewe* is usually equated with a village considerably further W., called Barrow Gurney, which passed into the hands of the Gournay family by marriage; in the writer's opinion it is more likely that Barrow Mead (though not necessarily Middle Field) is to be equated with, or is part of, *Bergh*. In 1315-16, in the *Nomina Villarum*, Thomas de Gurney held *Inglescombe* (Englishcombe) cum hamel de *Engelsbath* (Ingelsbatch), while Matill. de Baiuse holds *Twyverton* (Twerton) cum hamel de *Bergh*.<sup>7</sup>

The name Barrow may be related to a natural knoll just to the W., now known as High Barrow Hill.<sup>8</sup> Barrow Mead and *Bergh* may both be derived from this, and the medieval name may apply to

<sup>4</sup> "Lower Barrow" in 1841 (Englishcombe Tithe Map, County Record Office).

<sup>5</sup> "Odd House Croft" in the 1841 Tithe Map.

<sup>6</sup> *Med. Arch.* I (1957) p. 169 and fig. 35. and *ibid.* II (1958) p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> *Som. Rec. Soc.* Vol. 3 p. 62, Hundred of *Welwe* (Wellow).

<sup>8</sup> *Bergh* is equated with High Barrow in *Som. Rec. Soc.* Vol. 3 p. 62. High Barrow is on right of Pl.VI(b).



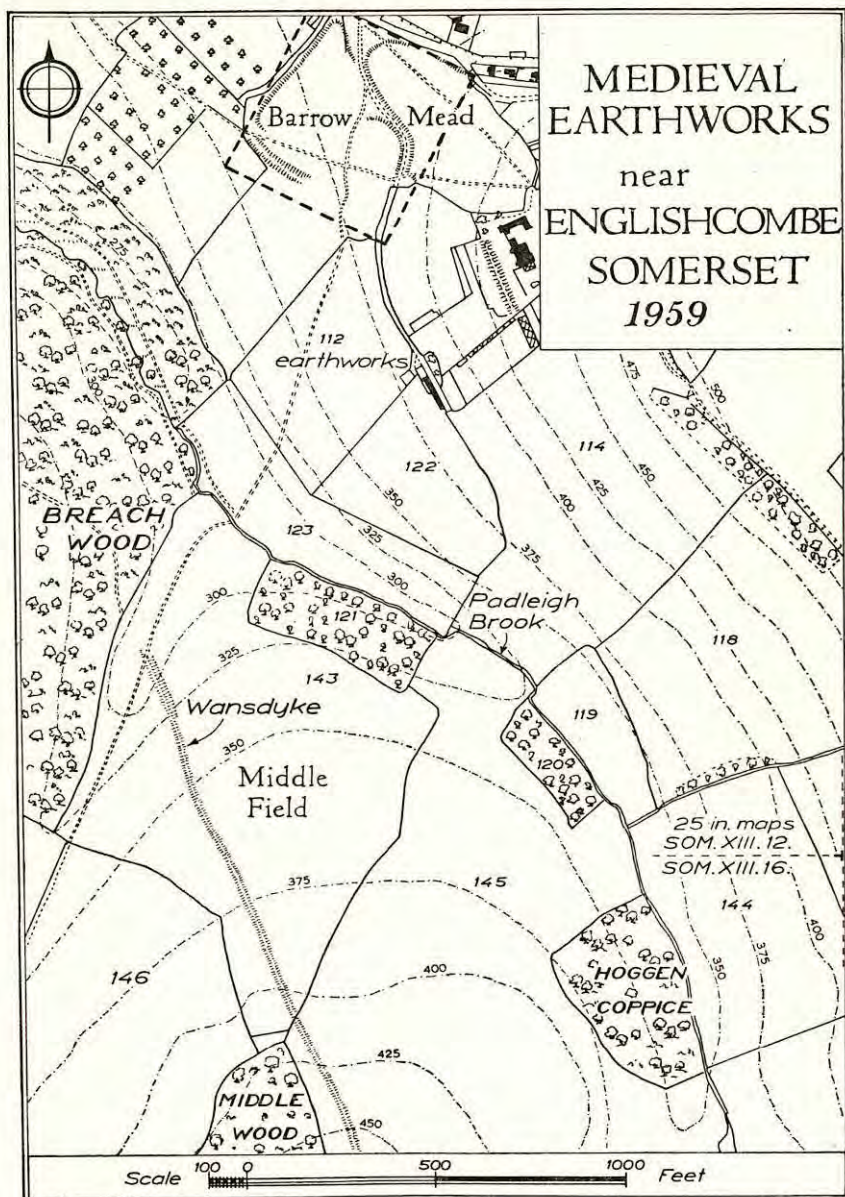


FIG. 2. MEDIEVAL EARTHWORKS NEAR ENGLISHCOMBE, SOMERSET, 1959.  
(AREA COVERED BY FIG. 3 SHOWN ———).

several sites in this area, including the medieval houses at Barrow Mead and those nearby.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE EARTHWORKS (*fig. 3*)

The site is crossed by two hollow ways. One, broad and shallow, bounds the site on W. and S.; it was regarded by Hope-Taylor as the medieval drove-road partly obscured by late building and tipping. The other of these ways crosses diagonally in a winding course. It is probably medieval in origin, but was heavily metalled in the 17th - 18th centuries and remained in use as a footpath until recent times. Medieval buildings (A) lie in apparent alignment with this track on the N.-E. side. On its S.-W. side, in a triangle formed by it and the droveway, are two groups of buildings: (B) which is medieval and in which is the principal medieval house, and (C), which is probably entirely of 17th - 18th century date, and was demonstrated to be so by Hope-Taylor (trench A) near its west corner. The Iron Age features lie underneath the medieval features indiscriminately, and bear no obvious relationship to the surface features. Most, but not all, of the medieval scarps and banks represent wall foundations; of those sectioned in trenches, one only was the upcast from the adjacent ditch. Other walls were not visible on the surface, but were found only by excavation. Thus, the outlines of buildings shown in *fig. 3* are not plans of buildings, but of the principal areas of buildings, with some indication of the main walls and their alignments.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF FEATURES AND BUILDINGS

In the description that follows, the only reliable information is that obtained in the 1953 trial-trenching, and in the small 1954 excavation of part of a house in Buildings (B). The features numbered in *fig. 3* were observed at irregular intervals when the site had become a morass of mud and rubble, and sometimes only when they were being scraped away by bulldozers. Some were seen only by Mr. Bolwell, and were destroyed before our visits.

<sup>9</sup> Barrow Mead is just inside the parish of Englishcombe, the parish boundary being the present road passing the school; Barrow Mead might be part of a hamlet of Twerton, though over the parish boundary. Barrow Mead is so named in the 1841 Tithe Map. In 1841, this field, together with others to the S.-E. of it, formed part of Barrow Farm; the farm house was the Haycombe Barn Farm of the 1st Ed. 6 inch O.S. map (information from Mr. Collis). But earlier, in 1724, the house on the site of Barrow Mead was Barrow House (see later p. 70).



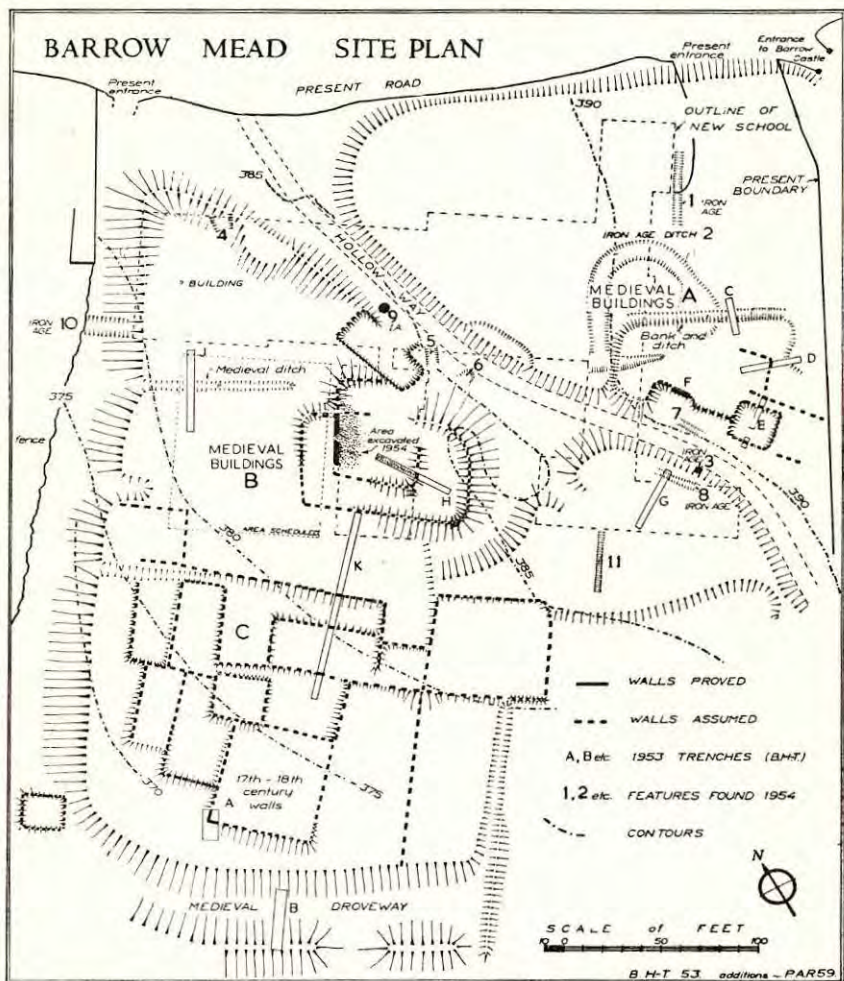


FIG. 3. SITE PLAN.

*Medieval: Buildings (A).* Wall foundations were found in Trenches D, E and F, that in D being robbed from a shallow foundation trench. There was no clear occupation level in the square building cut by Trench E, but a possible clay floor in D.<sup>10</sup> Cutting C, through the bank and ditch, suggested that the ditch had been dug in the early 13th century and re-cut later in the same century.<sup>11</sup> There was a large post-hole on the inside of the bank. Only 13th century sherds were found in this area, and none of later date. A small drainage ditch (7) was seen during bulldozing. (A) appears to have been a simple house and yard of 13th century date in a small enclosure, bounded by a bank and ditch on two sides and by the hollow way on the third side.

*Buildings (B)* appear to have consisted of a house about 20 × 28 feet externally, situated in the N.-W. part of a complex 90 × 60 feet with extensions on the N.E. side; the outer of these is aligned on the hollow way, and may be of later date. There was a good quality paved yard (see later p. 68, and fig. 4) to S.-E. of the house, and apparently an outer yard surrounded by a boundary wall; this appears to have continued as the N.W. wall of the house. Trench H located one of the outer walls and the paved yard to the N.-W.; the wall was laid on the original humus, and on its S.-E. side was clayey humus containing C13 and C14 pottery. In 1954, during a lull in construction, 2 days were spent in excavating the S.-E. wall of the house, and part of the paved yard (see fig. 4). The stratification had been destroyed inside the house by a contractor's trench, but the N.-W. side of this was dressed back and the section drawn (fig. 5). Further excavation was prevented by a very large heap of top soil, which could not be moved until the school was completed. The area covered by this heap has now been grassed down and scheduled as an ancient monument.

<sup>10</sup> In Trench D, there were two layers, a dark brown top soil with C13 sherds, and a yellow-brown compact clay with charcoal, bone, C13 sherds and an unidentifiable Roman coin; a pivot-stone was found in the robbed wall trench. The clay may have been a floor: it lay on a natural stony layer which looked very like cobbling (B.H.-T.).

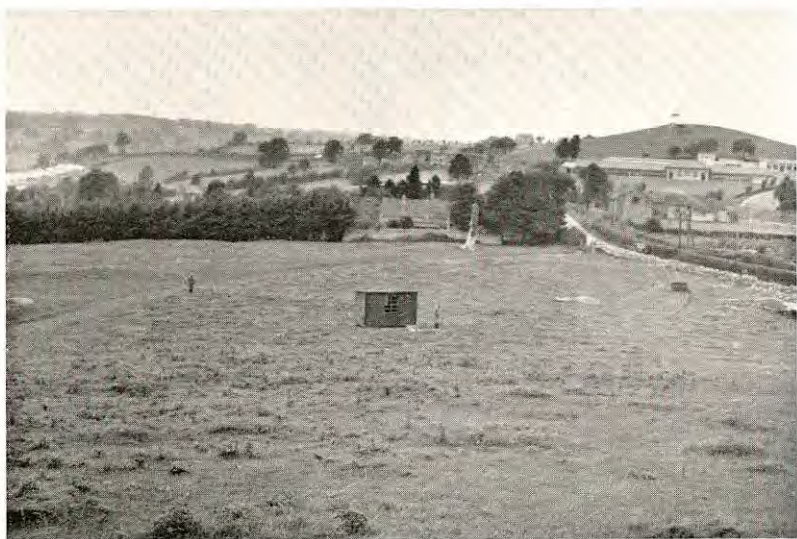
<sup>11</sup> The upper two layers were similar to those in Trench D, and the primary ditch silt contained much charcoal and C13 sherds.



PLATE VI



(a) SECTION THROUGH MEDIEVAL HOUSE,  
BUILDINGS B, FROM S.W. (cf. FIG. 5).



(b) THE SITE BEFORE EXCAVATION, FROM BARROW CASTLE.

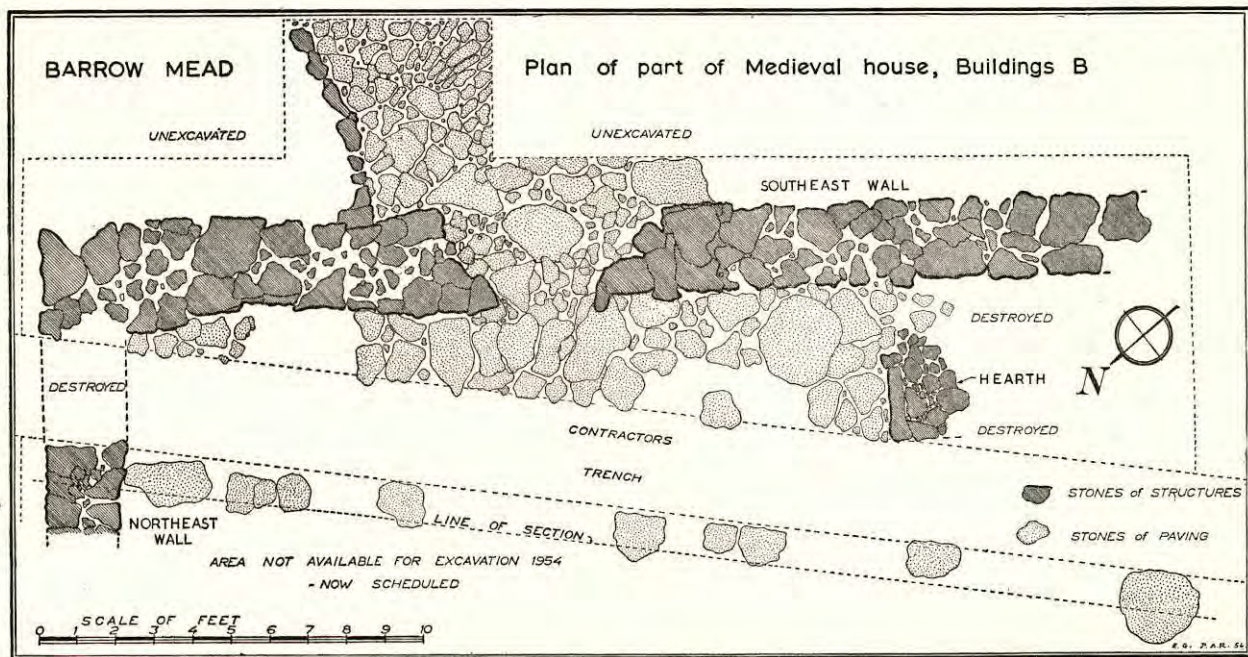


FIG. 4. PLAN OF PART OF MEDIEVAL HOUSE, BUILDINGS B.



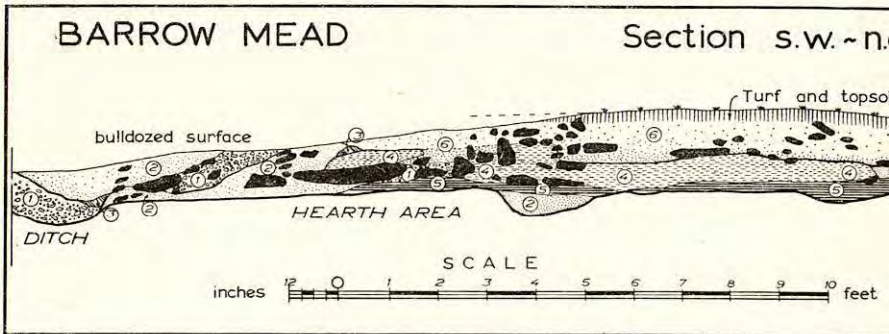


FIG. 5. SECTION SOUTH-WEST TO NORTH-EAST

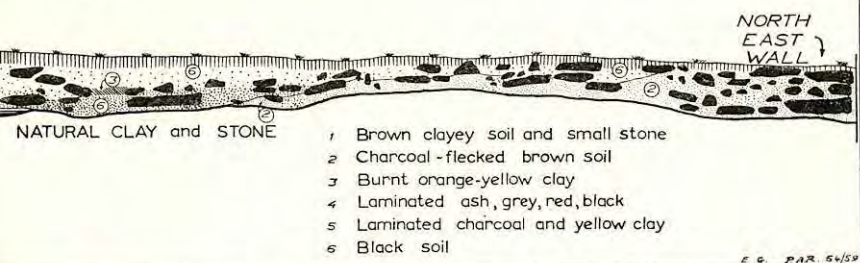
*Figs. 4 and 5.* The house was clearly of very good quality; the walls survived to a height of three courses, and may originally have been higher. The carefully laid paved yard outside the entrance was bounded, on one side at least, by a low wall, and led into an entrance in the S.-E. wall 2 feet 6 inches wide, splayed outwards to 5 feet 6 inches. The paving extended into the house, but became less clearly defined and interleaved with other layers; presumably inside the house it had been periodically replaced. On the S.-W. side of the inside of the entrance was a complex of stone slabs and laminated ash levels (fig. 5, layer 4) which appear to represent a hearth or fireplace which had seen much use; this hearth had apparently originally been surfaced with floors of clay, successively covered in charcoal and renewed (fig. 5 layer 5). There were traces of clay flooring elsewhere (fig. 5 layer 3).

The S.-E. wall was at least 28 feet long, and surface indications (fig. 3) suggested that the other dimension of the house was about 20 feet. It is uncertain how far the walls were carried up in stone; they need have been no more than "ground walls" for a timber and clay superstructure. The roof appears to have been of thatch.

The dating evidence suggests a longer and later occupation than that of Buildings (A). The pottery is of the 13th and 14th centuries, and this is confirmed by 2 coins found by Mr. Bolwell. One of these was a silver penny of Henry III issued c. 1258 - 72, which should have been withdrawn c. 1280;<sup>12</sup> it was found among the paving stones S.-E. of the house. The other was a French jetton, later than c. 1370

<sup>12</sup> Henry III long cross penny. Group V g. London. Moneyer: Renaud. RĒN/AVD/OÑL/VÑD issued c. 1258-72. Little wear.

## through medieval house B



## THROUGH MEDIEVAL HOUSE B.

and probably before 1400,<sup>13</sup> which was found in the ash levels of the hearth by Mr. Bolwell while the contractors were digging their trench. It is thus evident that Buildings (B) were in use during the later 13th and 14th centuries at least.

*Other Medieval Features.* The Droveaway was sectioned in Trench B, where it was shown to contain sherds of C12 - 13 in its primary silting, and post-medieval debris in its upper part.<sup>14</sup>

A ditch draining from Buildings (B) into the Droveaway was sectioned by Trench J, and shown to have 4 main layers, with C13 pottery predominant and plentiful in the layer below the turf and top soil. Hope-Taylor suggests that this may be dump from a building in the N. corner of the earthwork, rather than from (B).

The raised platform S.-E. of (B) was sectioned by Trench G,<sup>15</sup> which showed evidence of C13 - C14 occupation partly sealing the Iron Age ditch 8.

<sup>13</sup> French jetton, semi-official (Paris-Bourges) group. An early example of the persistent Arms of France type, but with 3 lys, therefore after c. 1370, probably before 1400. Annulet and strap over shield. Normal Inscr.: + AVE MARIA.GRACIA PLE (na). Rev. A V E M in spandrels. cf. Barnard, Pl. VI, No. 43. Both kindly identified by Mr. S. E. Rigold, F.S.A.

<sup>14</sup> Layer 1. Humus; Layer 2, very compact light brown clay with C17-18 sherds; Layer 3, sticky grey clay containing sherds of C12-13, including a late C12 cooking pot rim, a buckle (fig. 8, No. 2) bone fragments and some stone.

<sup>15</sup> Layer 1. Humus, medieval pottery at base, late C13-14 rims and sherds. Layer 2a. Similar to 1; C13 sherds. Layers 2b and 3. Clay tip and earthy tip filling depression over Iron Age Ditch 8.

Layer 4. Old turf line of Ditch 8.

Layer 5. Clay wash, silting of Ditch 8.



*Post-medieval occupation* is concentrated in the W. part of the site, where there were extensive wall foundations.<sup>16</sup> In Trench A, one wall angle<sup>17</sup> was shown to be of C17 - 18 date, overlying medieval levels. In Trench K, C17 - 18 occupation debris was concentrated in the S.-W. part of the trench, with some medieval pottery and a hearth at the N.-E. end of the trench. No further work was done in this area, which was entirely removed to a level below that of the natural rock by bulldozer.

*Undated features* comprise those numbered in fig. 3 which have not been mentioned above; they were seen during bulldozing, but were not available for excavation, and may be of Iron Age or medieval date.

*Conclusion.* An area excavation of Barrow Mead would clearly have been of considerable interest, and we must regret that such a fine site has been destroyed beyond reach of future work. Part of the House in Buildings (B) and an area to the N.-W. of it have, however, been protected by scheduling, and may be available to a future generation of archaeologists.

*Iron Age B.* The features of this period<sup>18</sup> are fortuitous discoveries, and their significance cannot be understood. The pits and ditches found at Barrow Mead may be associated with some hill top settlement, or may be merely part of an isolated farmstead. There is some

<sup>16</sup> On a map of 1742, *Five Miles Around Bath* (Bath Reference Library), "Barrow House" is shown in what appears to be this position; it is an L-shaped building with a detached rectangular block: the plan bears little relation to the earthworks in fig. 3, though the orientation is similar.

<sup>17</sup> Sequence inside wall angle:

Layer 1. Dark humus, almost barren.

Layer 2. Slightly greenish clay; C17-C18 and earlier sherds.

Layer 3. Clay of more pronounced green tinge; late C12 and early C13 rims and sherds from upper part of layer; layer 3 begins at 3 inches below the level of the wall foundation.

<sup>18</sup> Ditches 1 and 10 were respectively 6 feet and 6 feet 3 inches deep from the present surface; Iron Age sherds were found by Mr. Bolwell in the base of 10 (fig. 6, No. 5), and in the filling of 1 (fig. 6, No. 2). Ditch 2 was 3 feet deep and drained into a sump 5 feet deep which yielded Iron Age sherds, including figs 6, Nos. 1 and 4. Ditch 8 yielded Iron Age sherds where it was cut in Trench G (information from B. Hope-Taylor), but none in the extension of the ditch seen later, where it was 3 feet deep. Pits 3 and 9 were 4 feet and 5 feet deep respectively; a sherd was recovered by Mr. Bolwell from the filling of 3 (fig. 6, No. 3) and scraps from the top of 9 in black ashy soil.

scarping of the end of the spur of Rush Hill on the slope above the site (just below Barrow Castle); this is continued as a terrace, much "landscaped", in the garden of the castle itself at a higher level; the present boundary wall (also the County and Parliamentary Borough boundary) is on a 5 foot scarp from its junction with the garden of the castle for a distance of nearly half a mile — nearly as far as the Fosse-way; this scarp is probably a natural shelf, but there are traces of dry stone walling in places below the present wall, in the stretch nearest to Barrow Castle. There are no traces (in partly cultivated ground) of any bank or ditch to cut off the neck of the spur. A very large area could have been defended by a cross-dyke between the head of the Padleigh Brook Valley and that of South Lyncombe, a line now traversed by the Fosse-way. The name Barrow is suggestive, but it probably refers to the natural knoll of High Barrow Hill, to the N.-W. of Barrow Mead. The features here described are best seen on the 2½" O.S. map ST. 76 (31/76).

## THE FINDS

### IRON AGE "B" POTTERY<sup>19</sup>

#### Fig. 6.

1. Rim sherd, fine gritted grey, red-brown to dark grey surfaces, small "string" decorated cordon on shoulder. (Ditch 2, sump, Mr. Bolwell.) cf. *Meare*, vol. I, plate II p. 26.
2. Part of base, fabric as No. 1, with 3 perforations 3/16" diameter. (Ditch 1, filling, Mr. Bolwell). cf. *Reads Cavern*, pl. XXIII, No. C.22. *Meare*, vol. I, plate III. *Glastonbury*, vol. II, p. 516, IX.
3. Rim sherd of everted rim jar with internal bevel; hard gritty grey-brown, smooth soapy surface, "pared" in places (Pit 3, filling, found by Mr. Bolwell).

<sup>19</sup> References: *Meare*—Bulleid, A., and Gray, H. St. G., 1948 and 1953 *The Meare Lake Village*.

*Glastonbury*—Bulleid, A., and Gray, H. St. G., 1911 and 1917 *The Glastonbury Lake Village*.

*Read's Cavern*—Langford, F., "Third Report on Read's Cavern" *Proc. Univ. Bristol Spel. Soc.* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1921-2).



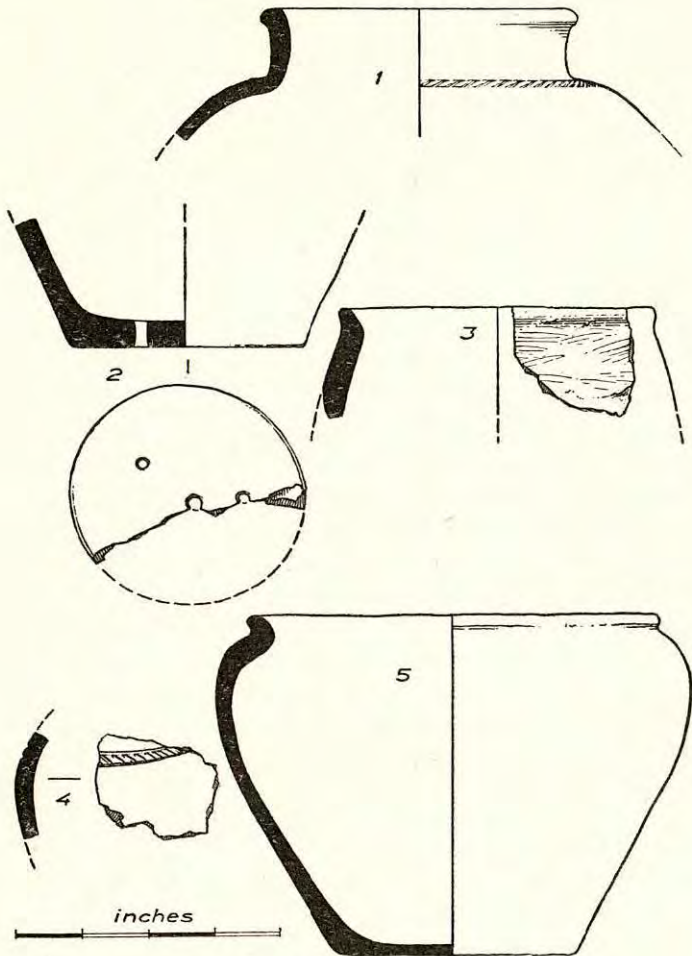


FIG. 6. IRON AGE "B" POTTERY.

4. Body sherd of fabric as No. 1; trace of "bituminous" substance on exterior; decoration of incised oblique strokes inside 2 parallel curving lines. cf. *Wookey Hole, its Caves and Cave-Dwellers* (H. F. Balch, 1914), pl. XVI, p. 73, No. 6. (Ditch 2, sump, Mr. Bolwell).
5. Most of jar with incipient bead rim; hard dark grey soapy ware (base of Ditch 10, found by Mr. Bolwell). cf. *Glastonbury*, vol. II, plate LXXII, p. 135.

## MIEVEAL POTTERY AND STONE OBJECTS

The pottery illustrated is all unstratified, found by Mr. Bolwell, near Buildings (B), but reflects the range of the scraps found by ourselves. The pottery found in 1953 has not been included, and the dating given to it in the text is by Mr. Hope-Taylor. No dating can be given to the illustrated pieces except by external parallels; no closer dating can be given than to the 13th - 14th centuries, which is consistent with the other evidence (p. 68). Both "Selsley Common" and Ham Green ware apparently have as wide a dating range, as shown in the recent excavations in Bristol,<sup>20</sup> though further study and the discovery of new dated groups may restrict them to a period of less than two centuries.

*Fig. 7.*

1. Rim sherd, hard grey micaceous ware.
2. Rim sherd, hard grey micaceous ware, lightly combed wavy line under rim. The source of the fabric of Nos. 1 and 2 is not known, though it has been found at Chew Valley Lake<sup>21</sup> in 13th - 14th century contexts.
3. Rim and handle sherd of grey gritty ware, with light buff soapy surface—"Selsley Common"<sup>22</sup> fabric. cf. Jope, 1952,<sup>23</sup> fig. 1, No. 7.
4. Body sherd of jug, coarse grey ware, with grey-buff interior surface; glazed all over exterior and patchily on interior with mottled dull green glaze with streaks of brighter green. This is typical *Ham Green*<sup>24</sup> ware, and the decoration of applied looped strips on fine girth grooves can be paralleled from the kiln. cf. *Chew V.L.* MP 60.<sup>21</sup>
5. Body sherd, fabric as No. 3 with matt patchy yellow-green glaze and combed decoration—"Selsley Common" fabric. cf. Dunning, 1949, fig. 2;<sup>22</sup> combing is a common feature at Ham Green,<sup>24</sup> but on quite different ware.

<sup>20</sup> 1957 and 1958, by the writer and Mr. K. J. Barton, forthcoming in *Trans. B. and G. A. S.* for 1961, part 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Chew Valley Lake*, medieval pottery series: publication forthcoming by H.M.S.O.

<sup>22</sup> G. C. Dunning, report on the medieval pottery in "Hut Sites on Selsley Common, near Stroud", *Trans. B. and G. A. S.* Vol. 68 (1949), pp. 32-34.

<sup>23</sup> E. M. Jope, "Regional Character in West Country Medieval Pottery etc." *Trans. B. and G. A. S.* Vol. 71 (1953), pp. 88-97.

<sup>24</sup> Near Bristol: Kiln excavated 1959, material examined by kind permission of Messrs. Kilsby and Hancock; the products of the kiln appear to be of 13th-14th century date, and account for over half of the pottery of that period in the Bristol district: See *Trans. B. and G. A. S.* forthcoming.



6. Spindle-whorl, grey clay, hard-fired; this was found at the base of the laminated hearth levels of Buildings (B) (fig. 3) but might be of Iron Age date.

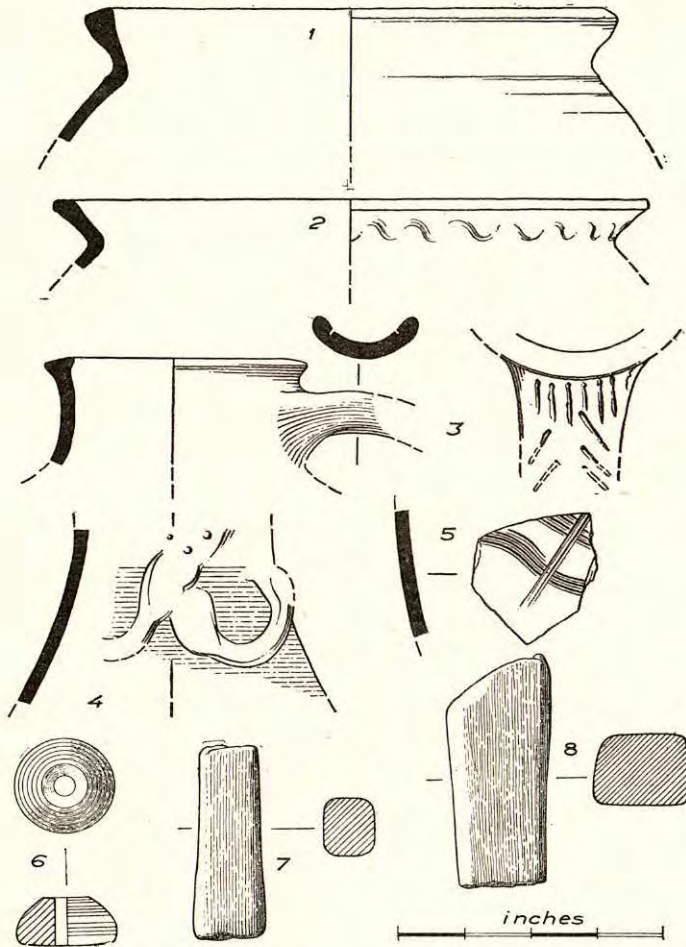


FIG. 7. MEDIEVAL POTTERY AND STONE OBJECTS.

7. Hone, broken both ends; made of Pennant Sandstone, from the local Coal Measures<sup>25</sup> (from rubble above threshold of medieval house in Building (B), fig. 3.).
8. Hone, broken both ends; made of micaceous schistose, possibly from Brittany<sup>25</sup> (unstratified).

<sup>25</sup> These have been kindly identified by Dr. F. S. Wallis, F.G.S.

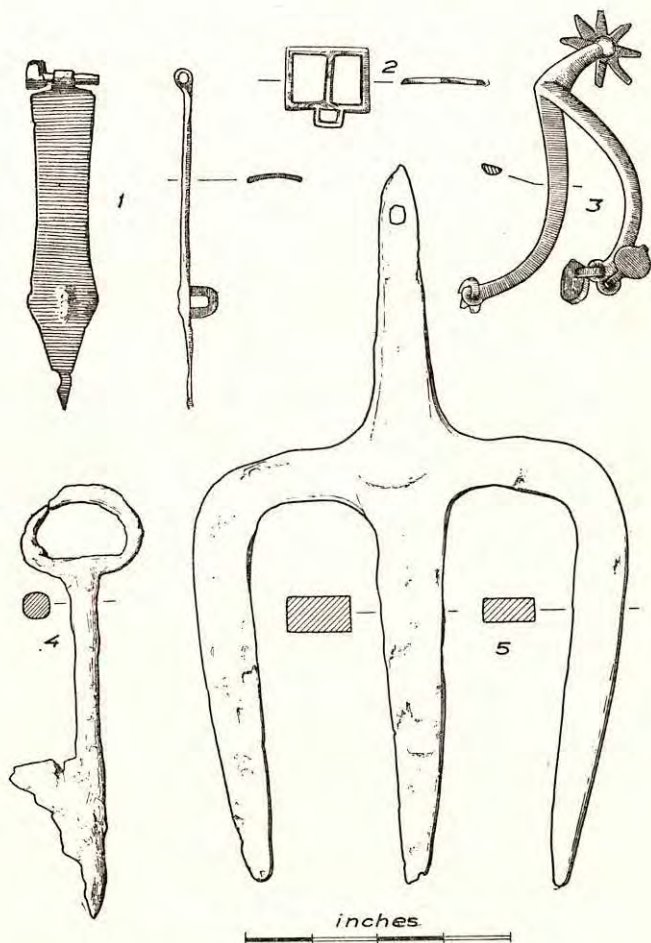


FIG. 8. MEDIEVAL AND LATER METAL OBJECTS.



## MEDIEVAL AND LATER METAL OBJECTS

Med. Cat.—London Museum Medieval Catalogue (No. 7, 1940).

\* —Cleaned at A.M. Lab.

*Fig. 8.*

- \*1. Iron hasp with projecting riveted eye, hinged on iron pin; probably from a chest, for use with a lock, whose tongue would engage with the eye (rubble on inner side of S.-E. wall of medieval house, Buildings B).
- \*2. Double buckle with loop; copper alloy with white metal coating; the buckle is undecorated, and the pin is missing; the loop is probably for attachment to other fittings, such as on harness (found by B. Hope-Taylor in the basal silt of the medieval driveway in Trench B, associated with 12th - 13th century sherds).
3. Iron spur with 8 pointed rowel, slightly curved shank, no projection at junction of body and shank, long curved arms, rounded terminals with circular perforations, one of which has broken across the middle of one hole; the two attachments appear to consist of a hook on either side of a disc; probably earlier 14th century; see *Med. Cat.* pp. 94-112; fig. 30, No. 8, with single terminals; and fig. 34, No. 3, with 12 point rowel; (from rubble of medieval house, Buildings B, found by Mr. Bolwell).
4. Iron key with solid pointed shank and D shaped bow; form of wards uncertain. Type VII, 14th - 15th century, see *Med. Cat.* pp. 141-142, and fig. 43, No. 8. (Provenance as No. 3).
- \*5. Three pronged fork, with perforated tang for insertion into bifurcated wooden handle; found by Mr. Bolwell in area of Buildings (C), and probably of 17th - 18th century date.