

THE EXCAVATION OF A ROUND CAIRN ON COURT HILL, TICKENHAM,  
NORTH SOMERSET, 1969, AND THE KINGS WESTON HILL BARROWS,  
BRISTOL

A COMMENTARY ON THE PAPER BY H. STEPHEN GREEN IN VOLUME  
117 OF 'SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGY AND NATURAL HISTORY'

BY E. K. TRATMAN, O.B.E., F.S.A.

Mr. Green's report on the Court Hill Cairn (CHC) appeared in Volume 117 of *Proceedings*. He found a primary inhumation in a pit and the skeleton has been dated as Early Bronze Age on the basis of a C14 date derived from collagen from the bones. He also found two concentric dry stone walls. The dating of these in relation to the primary burial was not firmly established and, as Mr. Green suggests, the outer wall may have been a primary feature.

*Comment.* Here is a useful grouping of customs and structure. It is over the section headed 'Significance' that I must join issue with Mr. Green because in my opinion it contains fallacious deductions which cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged.

Mr. Green has looked around for parallels to CHC and has selected the Kings Weston Hill barrows (KWBs) and, for good measure, Butcombe 2 barrow also (ST 51656273). So I quote: 'Restudy of the finds (from KWBs) in the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society Museum has revealed that the pottery fragments (from Tratman's barrow 1) described by L.V. Grinsell as 'Iron Age A' are in fact fragments of a collared urn of Bronze Age date and *sherds of the collar are represented.*' (My italics.)

*Comment:* Most of the finds were destroyed in the war. L.V. Grinsell has told me that he has never examined the pottery from the KWBs and so his comment on the pottery as 'Iron Age A' is derived from the primary reports (Tratman, 1924 and 1926). I have also re-examined, several times, the surviving pottery. There is very little.

- KWB 1. 40 tiny sherds, none larger than 2 x 2 cm. They look Iron Age. 1 body sherd 3 x 2.5 cm, 1 base sherd of coarse calcite-gritted ware, 1 body sherd with fine finger nail decoration and very thin walled. Each is from a different pot. No lip or base forms.
- KWB 2. This is not considered by Green. It had a basal hearth, centrally, 3m. diameter. In and on the hearth were many potsherds of Early Iron Age type. Immediately above the hearth an iron cheek piece (which survives). No finds beyond perimeter of hearth at that level nor in the cairn above. Pottery: over 100 tiny sherds, 27 larger sherds, the largest 4 x 6 cm. They represent at least 6 pots. All are body sherds. No lips or bases.
- KWB 3. 130 tiny sherds, largest 2 x 2 cm. 4 numbered larger sherds representing two pots. (a) body sherd 5 x 4 cm, weathered, can be matched with sherds from KWB 2. (b) body sherd 6 x 5 cm, coarse paste with large calcite grits. (c) sherd 4 x 3 cm from shoulder of pot, and two other small pieces belonging to the same pot shoulder. No lip forms or bases. (The lip form shown in Tratman, 1926, Fig. 3 was drawn from the actual sherd, though it is admitted that the relationship of the sherd to the shoulder may not be correctly shown.)
- KWB 4. The only pottery from this was a single sherd of a Roman mortarium on bed rock.

*Quote:* 'Finds from this group of cairns (KWBs) seem to have a minimum time range of Early Bronze Age to Saxon and it seems clear that the thinness of the cairns has resulted in contamination and perhaps disturbance.'

*Comment.* The matter of disturbance of the KWBs was considered in the primary reports. It was concluded that disturbance had taken place probably in Roman times and perhaps again in Saxon times. But in KWB 2 the only signs of disturbance were two minute sherds of Samian ware found just under the turf.

*Quote:* 'In the absence of any structural grounds for considering the Kings Weston Hill barrows to be of Iron Age date *we must conclude that their origin is Early Bronze Age.*' (The italics are mine.)

*Comment.* This argument is highly specious. At the very best it depends, presumably, on the identification of three small potsherds from KWB 3 as parts of a collar of a collared urn and not as the shoulder of an urn. The lack of structural features is better interpreted in the entirely opposite way. CHC is Early Bronze Age. It had burial by inhumation in a dug grave. It had associated structures, probably contemporary. These can be fairly accepted as features that may be expected to occur in barrows of that period in the local zone. The lack of structures and burial by cremation without graves can fairly be regarded as placing the barrows later than the Early Bronze Age.

Therefore it must be concluded that there are no grounds for redating the KWBs to the Early Bronze Age and that they should remain in the Early Iron Age albeit in the earliest phase.

*Quote:* 'It is likely also that the same explanation applies to the round barrow Butcombe 2.'

*Comment.* Butcombe 2 (Rahtz, 1958): this barrow was constructed of red clayey earth capped by 3-4 layers of Lias slabs. An undisturbed small inner cairn was found not far from the centre. The soil under this and in the surrounding area contained pottery 'with Iron Age affinities.' Until these findings can be refuted by fresh evidence, speculation on dating is a waste of time and misleading.

#### REFERENCES

- Green, H. Stephen, 'The Excavation of a Round Cairn on Court Hill, Tickenham, North Somerset, 1969', *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 117 (1973) 33-46.
- Rahtz, P.A. and M.H., 'T40: Barrow and Windmill, Butcombe, North Somerset', *Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc.*, 8(2) (1958) 89-96.
- Tratman, E.K., First and Second Reports on Kings Weston Hill, Bristol, *Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc.* 2(1) (1924) 76-82, and 2(3) (1926) 238-243.