

Report of Excavation of a Twin Barrow and a Single  
Round Barrow, at Sigwell, Parish of Charlton Horethorne,  
Somerset.

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THE following account of the examination of three round barrows at Sigwell, in the parish of Charlton Horethorne, two of which were in juxta position, and may be spoken of as a twin barrow, while the other stood apart from any other barrow, but overlooked what we hold to have been a camp of an earlier period than these barrows, throws light upon the following general questions :—Firstly, it shows that in the Bronze Age, and amongst men who were practising cremation, considerable variety existed as to their mode of disposing of the dead. In the two burials discovered no urn had been employed, and the bones had been picked out of the pyre and placed apart—one set in a bark coffin, the other simply in a separate place in the soil of the barrow. Yet, in one of the barrows pottery was found, of a kind which showed, with some probability, that urn burial was not unknown to the original constructors of the barrow. Secondly, the measurements of the exterior mass of each barrow, as compared with those of the very small spaces in which the burnt bones were contained (in one case within a circle of 6 in. radius), will show how exceedingly easy it must be to overlook the existence of such a burial, and how cautious we should be in asserting that nothing can be found in such mounds to serve as their *raison d'être*. Thirdly, the relative position and elevation, and other peculiarities of one of these barrows (that to be hereinafter spoken of as Sigwell 3), and of a small British Camp, show, as we believe, very unmistakably, that the camp was earlier in point of date than the barrow, and the work of stone-using, not of bronze-using men.

The British Association gave a grant towards the defrayment of the expenses of this exploration, and the following report was read before the Plymouth Meeting in Aug., 1877 :—

The examination of the Twin Barrow was begun on July 18th, 1877, by opening the tumulus situated to the north ("Sigwell I") by a trench 9 ft. 1 in. wide from the east side. The natural soil, lias sand, was of a light yellow colour, with concretions of a small size and somewhat darker hue intermingled with it, and was readily enough distinguishable from the made earth of the barrow, which was darker in colour, owing to finely divided carbonaceous matter, and was also more loosely compacted. The natural soil was 5 ft. below the top of the barrow at its eastern edge, and 9 ft. below it at the centre. When the excavation had passed the centre westward, it was opened out northwards to a length of 21 ft. A great deal of charcoal was found about 4 ft. above the natural surface at the centre; and 7 ft. 6 in. from the surface under the centre picket a well-formed flint "scraper" or "strike a light" was found. And in all, about 20 fragments of worked flint were found in this barrow, some of them with *patina* upon them, and some with rose-coloured staining (from manganese?), but most retaining the black surfaces of their original fractures unchanged, and showing thereby that they were chipped during, or only shortly before, the erection of the mound for the purpose of funereal ceremony. But in this northern part of the twin barrow we found no pottery, no bronze, no interment, and the flints, such as they were, were much fewer in mere number than in either of the two barrows to be hereafter described. Our failure to find any interment may be explained by the fact that this mound was very extensively burrowed into by badgers, foxes, and rabbits, and, if the interment had been contained within as small a compass, and had consisted of such easily scatterable materials as those contained and discovered in the two other mounds, it is easy to see how it might have been entirely dispersed and destroyed.

We commenced upon the southernmost of the two halves of the

twin barrow ("Sigwell II"), driving a trench 15 ft. wide from east to west, beginning along a line 30 ft. south of the line of the centre picket, but some little way from the actual southern boundary of the barrow. Some excavation had been made, either for the sake of investigation or for digging out rabbits, &c., on the south-east side of the barrow. The earth disturbed by this operation had been partly thrown out eastward, partly filled in again. Through the westward part of the disturbed soil we dug, and found that the diggers had not gone very far down, and had left a steel for striking a light and a piece of glazed pottery in their filling in. We came upon the natural surface at a depth of 9 ft. 10 in., as in the northern barrow, the ground and the mound being of the same distinctive character as regards each other.

A piece of British pottery was found, 15 ft. 6 in. to the south-west of the centre picket, and 9 ft. 10 in. below the surface. It had been, apparently, the bottom of a jar or urn, and may possibly indicate that an urn burial had taken place in this barrow before the one we have had to deal with. The distal half of the metacarpal or metatarsal of a sheep or goat was found about 5 ft. down in the barrow, near to the centre picket. It was a good deal decayed, but one of the phalanges was found in relation with it. 3 ft. 8 in. to the west of the centre picket we found a grave 1 ft. 6 in. deep, in the natural soil, 10 ft. long, 5 ft. wide at the north, 4 ft. wide at the south end; its long axis due magnetic north and south; that of the tumulus itself about N. 5° E.

The eastern edge of the grave was 1 ft. to west of the centre picket, 3 ft. 10 in. of the length of the grave being to the south of the centre, and the remaining 6 ft. 2 in. to the north. In this grave was contained a bark coffin, inside of which were a bronze dagger and a quantity of very thoroughly-burnt small fragments of human bones; the longest diameter of the largest of these fragments being only  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., it is difficult to say more than that this fragment, being apparently a part of that portion of the occipital bone which is known as the *Torcula Hirophiti*,

the very same portion of bone as that which was found in the deposit of La Tiniere, and one which possesses a singular power of resisting various destructive agencies, probably belonged to a young male subject. With this and one or two more fragments of skull there are some fragments of the long bones. With the above fragments were mixed up here (as also in Sigwell III, to be hereafter described,) masses of bones so burnt and so broken up as to present an Oxford-grey colour from the intimate intermingling of their white with their carbonised factors. With the bones were mixed up inside the oak-bark coffin some flint flakes, but not a single fragment of charcoal. The coffin had been made of two pieces of bark, which had been fastened together so as to leave two free ends projecting freely, not wrapped round each other. But in one section, drawn by Gen. Lane Fox, the upper bark cover having been shorter than the lower, this latter simply curves round its free edge. As the ensuing description will show, the lower piece of bark must have been laid upon the ground, and the bones from the pyre or ustrinum must have been brought to it and placed upon and along it, together with the earth and the bronze dagger and the flints which were found inside the coffin by us. The upper piece of bark was then put over the entire mass of contents and the rest of the barrow piled over them.

The coffin's east edge was nearer the east border of the grave than its west edge was. At this edge it was about 1 ft. 2 in. short of the grave's boundary. Its length was from south to north about 7 ft. In working from south to north we had cut away the south end of the coffin before we were aware of it, so that we cannot say with perfect certainty where its south edge began, but as its north end was to be seen 2 ft. from the north end of the grave, the entire length of which was only 10 ft., this is of no great consequence. The width of the coffin was from 34 in. to 36 in., its depth in the middle line about 6 in. 5.

The contents of the bark coffin contrasted very strikingly with the made earth of the barrow above: with the natural soil

into which the grave was sunk on either side ; and, thirdly, with the soil from the grave itself, which had been thrown up on the east side of the grave, as seen and shown in the section.

The soil within the coffin was lighter a good deal than the made earth of the barrow, the intermingling of which with finely divided carbonaceous matter had made it in places very dark ; but was much less light than the natural ground into which the grave was sunk. But it is of great importance to note that in the soil *inside* the bark coffin no fragments of charcoal sufficiently large to be detected with the naked eye were visible ; as hence we see that the body was burned some distance away from the grave, and that the burnt bones<sup>1</sup> were picked up out of the ashes and carried to the grave separately, being distributed as deposited throughout the entire length of the coffin examined. The upper bark was much thinner than the lower, the lower being as much as seven-eighths of an inch thick, whilst the upper was as little as one-fifth to one-fourth of an inch. The upper piece had split in some places and the sand had worked its way into the space left empty.

*In situ* the layers of bark towards the interior were black, and the outer reddish ; but on drying, the reddish colour is in many places the colour throughout the entire thickness of the bark. Microscopic examination showed us no dotted cells, and the Scotch fir is thereby excluded, but it is possible that it may have come from the Wych elm. Its structure, however, had been made exceedingly difficult to examine by the ravages of a fungus.

In this coffin, together with the bones and the two or three flint chips, was a bronze dagger with three rivets, 6 inches long from proximal rivet to point. It was much decayed, and did not rest on the bottom of the coffin, but was separated from it by a considerable thickness of dullish yellow sand. Its point was broken away for a length of seven-tenths of an inch, and this

(1). For the picking up of the burnt bones see Max Müller, *Die Totenbestattung* Zeitschrift Deutsche Morgenland Gesell, vol. ix, p. 17 ; Colebrooke, *Life and Essays, Asiatic Researches*, vol. ii, p. 188.

part was brought away on a piece of the hardened sandy earth. This lump of earth is preserved with a little of the crumbled-away part of the point adherent to it: the greater part of this point, however, has been attached, together with the rest of the blade, to a piece of cardboard. The lamina which held the rivets has broken up, and small fragments of bronze diffused throughout the soil represent it. The dagger lay near the southern end of the grave, about 2 feet from the end: its rivet end was at the south, its point at the north.

An interment, which must have been of a somewhat similar character, is described by Mr. Spence Bates, F.R.S., in the *Transactions of the Devon Association*, vol. v., 1872, pp. 555, 556. There "a mass of comminuted bones mixed with earth, instead of being enclosed in an urn, were found lying closely placed together in one spot beneath the stones." And in the earth that was carted home, "besides a quantity of bits of bone, was found the blade of a bronze dagger."

Sigwell III., Monday, July 23, 1877.—Commenced work with seven men upon the barrow to the south-west of Sigwell Camp, by cutting a trench 17 ft. long and 12 ft. 6 in. wide, and to south-west of centre picket. This barrow resembled the two already described as Sigwell I and II.—in the material and mode of construction, in containing burnt bones which had been picked out of the ashes of the fire in which the body they belonged to had been burnt and buried apart; and, in containing fragments of coarse pottery, it resembled Sigwell II., but differed from it in not furnishing any specimen of bronze, and in (perhaps by way of compensation) furnishing a very large number of worked flints—some black, others whitened on their fractured surfaces, and in containing a small fragment of a patterned drinking-cup or food vessel, and in containing a very much larger quantity of human burnt bones as well as two large fragments of unburnt bones, an *os innominatum* to wit, and a piece of *femur*. Among other important lessons taught by the history of this barrow, one of special importance is the ease with which

it is possible to miss an interment, when that interment lies within a circle of half a foot radius, and consists only of a small quantity of either very finely comminuted or all but pulverized burnt bones.

A good scraper was found 3 ft. 5 in. south-west of the central picket and 4 ft. 7 in. below the level of it. All through this barrow flints were found in much greater abundance than in either of the other two. We were inclined to connect their presence in this quantity with the absence in this barrow of any rabbit holes, supposing that a rabbit in burrowing would be likely to throw out a worked flint rather than an equivalent mass of sand for obvious reasons, mechanical and others. But we should not press this view.

Exactly beneath the centre picket and 6 ft. below it, was a mass of burnt bones, occupying a circle of about 1 foot in diameter. The bones belonged to an adult, sex uncertain. In two other spots in the barrow two other bones were found, viz., a fragment of a right *os innominatum*, the acetabulous portion of which is so shallow as to suggest that it has been affected by disease and absorption; and a fragment of a *femur*, also of the right side.

The burnt bones were in much greater quantity than those found in Sigwell No. II, and had some, though very little, charcoal among them. A difference which may be accounted for by the place in which they were burnt having been in close proximity to the place where we found them.

The place of burning we discovered thus—at a depth of 1 ft. 9 in. below the burnt bones there was a thick seam of burnt wood, 4 inches thick, and the floor below the ashes, at a spot a little to the north-east of the centre, was very much reddened, showing that a fire had been lighted and had burned with much intensity upon it. In these ashes on the floor of the barrow were a few fragments of human bones, well burnt, like those above, which we may suppose therefore to have escaped the careful outpicking which had removed so large a number of

the burnt bones from intermixture with the ashes, and had placed them together as described, on the top of a mass of earth piled up to a height of nearly 2 ft. about the site of the pyre. A similar upping of earth must have taken place in the bark coffin in Sigwell II, as the description shows, and a similar picking out of the bones from among the ashes. That the fire had been lighted on the original surface without paring away the turf was plain enough from the fact that, in paring it immediately below the ashes, at 7 ft. 9 in. to 8 ft. below the centre picket, the stalks of coarse grass and bracken were very plainly visible in section. But besides this we found also round sections of small stakes, about 1 in. in diameter, which penetrated 6 or 7 inches down into the natural soil, and some of which tapered towards their lower ends. They had been stuck in to support the pile of wood we may suppose. A chipped flint disc  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in., chipped on both sides, was found in the centre of the burnt wood, which might have been used as a sling-stone with a riband sling. Of the other flints some had black fracture surfaces, others had been weathered before being put into the barrow. Two good scrapers were amongst them, one having been found by us 3 ft. 5 in. south-west of the centre and 4 ft. 7 in. below the surface, the other having been found in superintending the filling in of the excavation. One flint has a saw edge, as we think purposely produced: another has the appearance (but not as we think the reality) of a barbed arrow head. Some of the flints had been burnt.

The two bones found at a distance from the burnt ones may nevertheless have belonged to the same body as that which furnished the ashes. Both are of the right side: the one an *os innominatum*, the other a *femur* fragment. They may have escaped the perfect burning to which the rest of the skeleton was subjected. Why they were not put together with the perfectly burnt bones we do not know.

The charcoal and ashes of the fire must have undergone a very complete shifting of place as regards a considerable part of them,



for the layer of charcoal over the natural soil, which had been reddened, was not thicker than that which was over the parts which were not so reddened. The charcoal over these latter parts therefore must have been removed on to them.

That the burnt bones were collected in a skin, or possibly in some textile fabric, and so placed where we found them, may, in the absence of any relics of bark, or of either of the other substances just mentioned, be shown to be probable by a reference to a paper by the Baba Rajendralala Mitra, in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1870, iv, p. 253, where we read that the bones from the pyre are "washed and put in an urn, or tied up in a piece of black antelope skin." That the two large fragments of bone found in this interment may very well have belonged to the same body as that which furnished the ashes, is evident from the following observations of Dr. Hutchinson.

Dr. Hutchinson, of Patna, an active observer of "all that can throw light upon our knowledge of medical jurisprudence in India, took an opportunity to ascertain exactly the amount of wood which would be necessary to destroy entirely an adult healthy body, and the time that would be necessary for its entire cremation. The pyre was composed of 10 maunds of wood, but an equal amount of fala straw was necessary, as also two bottles of oil. The pile was lighted at 6.30 p.m., and at 3 a.m. next morning the consumption of the body was declared to be complete. When he visited the spot, he found in the centre of the ashes the heads of two *femora* entire, but completely calcined, and a mass of incinerated matter as large as two fists, said to be the remains of the liver. Thus 20 maunds, or 1,600 lbs., of wood and straw, and two bottles of oil, were required to consume a healthy body, and 8½ hours were required for the operation, which even then was virtually incomplete. Here, however, five times the needful quantity of fuel was consumed."

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