

# Excavations at Murtry Hill, Orchardleigh Park

## PART II

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VOLUME LXVII of the Society's *Proceedings* for 1921 (pp. 39–55) contained a full report on the survey of the mutilated long-barrow on Murtry Hill in 1915, and the subsequent excavations conducted in 1920.

In my paper on this subject, Chap. iii was devoted to early records of the site from the pen of Sir R. Colt Hoare, the Rev. J. Skinner, the Rev. W. Phelps, Dr. J. Thurnam and the Rev. E. L. Barnwell. Thurnam stated that the Orchardleigh Barrow had been 'rifled and partially levelled', and also noted that the result of any exploration was unknown.

The result of the digging which I conducted under the auspices of the Somerset Earthworks Committee of the Somerset Archæological Society was interesting, but no pottery, implements nor human remains were found which could be ascribed to the Neolithic period. All the small objects found, and there were not many, were of the Roman period, and from this fact one is inclined to think that the barrow may have firstly been disturbed during that period.<sup>1</sup>

We were disappointed in not being able to get any archæological record of Murtry Hill earlier than Hoare's. However, in October 1929, Mr. B. Howard Cunnington, F.S.A. Scot., of Devizes, wrote me to say he had found among the manuscripts

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wick Barrow, Stogursey, etc., *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* liv, ii, 32–36.

of his great-grandfather, William Cunnington, F.S.A., of Heytesbury, two letters from Philip Crocker stating clearly that digging had taken place at Murtry Hill in 1803 or 1804; and, with Mr. Cunnington's permission, I take this opportunity of publishing these letters, together with the sketch by Crocker (accompanying Letter 2) of the *three* stones at the E. end of the barrow.

Letter (1) addressed to William Cunnington of Heytesbury. No date, but about 1803.

DEAR SIR,

*(Here follows an extract from his father's memoranda, after which he says)*

In the barrow here at Frome (which I have sometimes mentioned to you) has been discovered part of a wall of small stones, put together without any cement or mortar, running in the direction of some large stones which it is probable to suppose formed a cistvaen. Whether this wall extends to any interment and formed a passage to the spot where the body was deposited must be left until the whole is laid open, but the extent of the barrow will require much time and patience before such discovery can be ascertained. However, I shall watch them in their proceedings and make memorandums of any particular occurrence. The workmen have little respect and less knowledge of what they are doing, otherwise than filling their carts with the stones from the barrow for the mean purpose of repairing highways.<sup>1</sup>

Yours,

PHIL. CROCKER.

Letter (2) addressed to William Cunnington, of the year 1803 or 1804.

DEAR SIR,

I cannot sufficiently satisfy myself upon the subject of this Frome Barrow, which, after four hours' careful examination and close search seems a mass of 'extraordinaries'. Though your conjecture was perfectly right in finding skeletons, yet we also found a great deal of coarse, burnt pottery (evidently urns) without any ashes, beads or other ornaments. How these two different modes of burial could be under one tumulus (unless they are interments of different

<sup>1</sup> Stones for repairing the road were obtained by the overseers 'at Murtrey Brow' in 1791 and 1795; but there is no mention in the overseers' books of the sums paid for removing stones from 'Barrow Tyning'.

dates) you can best explain. I have given the following sketch to assist you in drawing some conclusion.



Large upright — 7 feet — 3 broad — 2 thick.  
Small do — 3 feet.  
Oblique or fallen stone — 4 feet.

Stones at E. end of long-barrow, Murtry Hill, Somerset.

*From a Sketch by Philip Crocker.*

The foregoing sketch shows the inside of the barrow at the north end with the large stones exactly as we found them. The human bones were in great quantities round each, but in so decayed a state (from the dampness of the barrow) that it was difficult to trace the direction in which the bodies lay. If in either one, this point was ascertained, it was between the large upright stone and the smaller one, lying rather north and south, but the bodies were so crowded together and mixed with the soil that this point seems very doubtful.

Pieces of urns were found with the bones indiscriminately and in no particular spot, secured (as were the bodies) by large stones set edgeways.

On a barrow so singular, I should much wish to have your opinion, and also, if you think it probable that the urns were designed to cover *unburnt* bones (as mentioned in Borlase), or whether they belonged to another distinct interment.

Yours truly obedient,

PHIL. CROCKER.

Mr. Philip Crocker, it should be noted, has been described as agent to Sir R. Colt Hoare. This is not correct; but he was draughtsman to Hoare<sup>1</sup> and to William Cunnington. Mr. B. H. Cunnington informs me that he has several letters proving that Crocker was one of the officers of the first Ordnance Survey, and was responsible for the survey of the s. of England.

Hoare recorded that two upright stones of a cistvaen were standing at Murtry Hill. Skinner, in 1825, mentions that 'a stone about 10½ ft. in height, with another half that height leaning against it, still remains at the eastern extremity; a third has recently been broken in pieces'.

Crocker, it will be observed, shows three stones, a fallen stone between two uprights, but whatever their *exact* position in his time, the dimensions given by him are inaccurate (see bottom of the drawing). From my diagram and statement,<sup>2</sup> it will be ascertained that the larger stone seen to-day is 10 ft. in height, and penetrates the ground only to the extent of 1½ ft. The stone leaning against it measures 7.75 ft., including the foot-and-a-half now buried in the ground.

In reviewing these letters it seems evident that what remains of the dry-stone wall is represented by the smaller stones shown in my plan and photograph in the *Proceedings* for 1921.<sup>3</sup> It also seems probable that the barrow contained primary interments by inhumation and secondary interments by cremation. The former excavators apparently removed all the prehistoric pottery, for I did not find a single shard of pottery earlier than the Roman period.

<sup>1</sup> See Hoare's *Ancient Wiltshire*.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lxxvii, 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, lxxvii, Plates V and VI.