

REINTERPRETING THE PRIDDY LONG BARROW, MENDIP HILLS, SOMERSET.

by

JODIE LEWIS

ABSTRACT

The Priddy Long Barrow was partially excavated by UBSS in 1928, the first long barrow excavation to be undertaken by the Society. A very short report detailing some of the findings was published by Phillips and Taylor in 1972 (with editor's comments), when it was suggested to be an artificial mound containing human bone of Late Neolithic date. Few other conclusions were drawn but intriguing details suggested that this was a complex monument, worthy of re-analysis. This paper details the results of an examination of the site archive and offers a new interpretation of the monument. It is argued that the Priddy long barrow is a non-megalithic long barrow, dating to the Early Neolithic period. At least four phases of activity and construction are suggested. New information on the finds, destroyed during World War II, is also given and new plans presented.

INTRODUCTION

The Priddy Long Barrow was partially excavated in 1928 by UBSS, the first long barrow excavation undertaken by the Society. A short report, detailing the findings, was prepared by C. W. Phillips in 1929 but was "lost" until 1950. Upon its discovery it was given to H. Taylor, who had been involved with the excavation, for comment and publication. However, it was not until 1972 that a report appeared within these *Proceedings* (Phillips and Taylor, 1972). The published article took the form of a three page description and plan by Phillips and a one page summary and account by Taylor.

The published excavation report is brief and rather sparse on detail, although the information contained suggests that the Priddy Long Barrow is an important and complex monument. Unfortunately, all of the finds and photographic records were destroyed in 1940, though the notebooks and drawings survive in the Society's library. The complexity of the site, together with the lack of archaeological experience of those who undertook the excavation and the long delay in publication, means that the published account is somewhat unsatisfactory. It should be emphasised however that according to the standards of 1928, the excavation was by no means bad, just very much "of its time". That the excavation was published at all was almost entirely due to the efforts of E. K. Tratman, who was responsible for retrieving the site archive from Taylor and coaxing from him the comments that appear in the published account.

As part of doctoral research into the Neolithic of Northern Somerset the Priddy Long Barrow was reanalysed and the beginnings of a new interpretation formed (Lewis, 2001). This paper presents the reinterpretation in greater depth and includes the results of a detailed study of the site archive. This has involved transcribing the original excavation notebook, reading all of the correspondence relating to the site and reanalysing the site plans.

LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

The Priddy Long Barrow is located approximately 800 m west of Priddy village green, in the parish of Priddy; NGR ST 51425091 (Figure 1). The underlying geology is Carboniferous Limestone and the soils are Brown Earths of the Nordrach Series (Findlay, 1965). The barrow lies at 250 m AOD at right angles to a gentle slope (Figure 2). The southern edge of the Mendip plateau is only c.600-700 m south of the site and while the hills of the Quantocks and Exmoor are visible today it is uncertain whether this would have been the case in prehistory, as tree cover may have obscured long range views. Approximately 100 m north of the barrow, the land dips into a wide valley, some 15 m lower than the site itself. Small limestone outcrops occur in the field containing the barrow and those fields to the south-west and north-east. From the barrow today there are wide-ranging views onto the West Mendip plateau, with excellent views to North Hill and Black Down. However, the caveat concerning tree cover and the effect this has on visibility should be remembered.

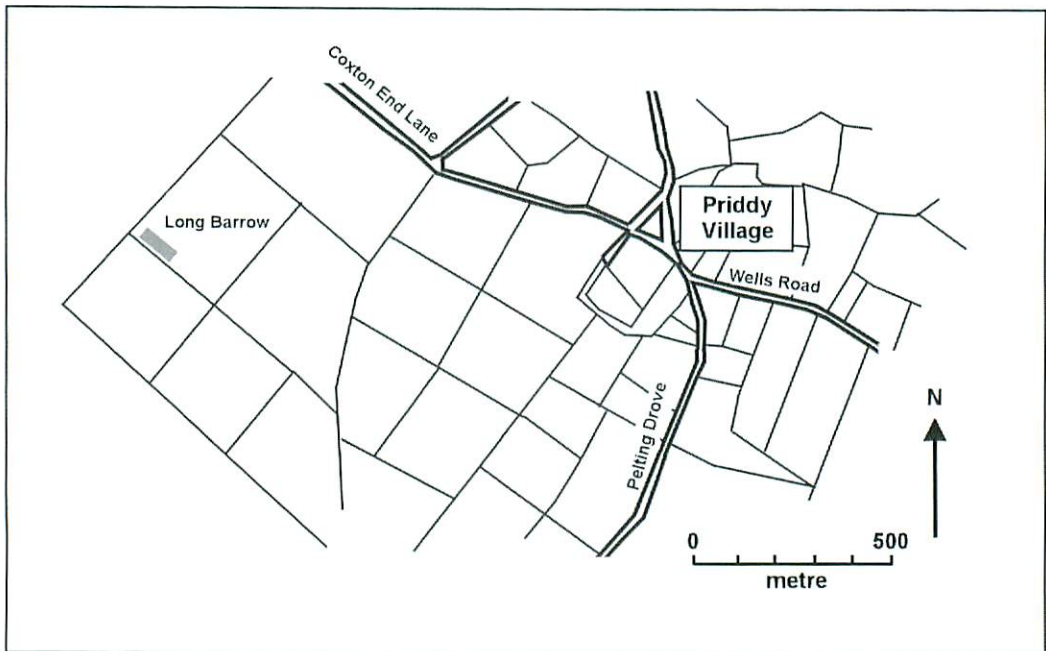


Figure 1. Map showing location of Priddy Long Barrow.

Before its excavation, the Priddy Long Barrow comprised a 2 m high long mound, rectangular in plan, with a depression near its southern end. While the published account describes its main axis as pointing broadly north-south, it is more accurate to describe it as aligned south-south-west/north-north-east, an observation also made by Grinsell (1971). Upon excavation, the mound was found to measure c.22 m long by c.10 m wide. After excavation, the trenches were back-filled and mound was reinstated to its present form.

The excavation by UBSS was not the first at the barrow. The Rev. John Skinner first opened part of it in 1816 but “no cist was found as it was not properly opened” (B.M. Skinner MS 33648 folio 157).

THE 1928 EXCAVATION

The names of all those who took part in the 1928 excavations are not known. Between two and nine individuals worked on the project, including two hired labourers who worked for seven days and were paid a rate of 1/- an hour. The site notebook appear to have been mostly compiled by D. Moreton, with occasional pages written by E. K. Tratman. Other named individuals are H. Taylor, S. B. Adams, J. Moreton and J. J. Hinton. D. Moreton is named as the leader of the excavations for six days and E. K. Tratman for one day. It is interesting to note that in a letter from C. W. Phillips to E.K. Tratman dated the 29th December 1970, Phillips recalls that one of his strongest memories about the site was that there was some doubt over who was really running the excavation. It is curious that it was Phillips who submitted the report for publication in 1929, when he is never mentioned by name during the excavations and nor is there any evidence that he compiled any of the field notes. However, Phillips is credited with making the original drawings during the excavations (Phillips and Taylor, 1972 p32) and Taylor states that "C. W. Phillips was not present at the earliest stages of excavation but nobly stayed to complete the job [and] his was the greatest share. He did not witness the excavation of the robbed south end" (*ibid* p35). Yet in a letter from Taylor to Tratman (17th October 1970), Taylor apologises for confusion over who "did the work" and credits Tratman and Donald Moreton.



Figure 2. *Priddy Long Barrow, view from the south.*

The excavations were carried out over 14 days between 1st April and 17th June 1928. The first day of the project concentrated on surveying the mound, so that a 1 ft (c.0.3 m) contour plan could be produced. The mound was marked out in 6 ft (c.1.8 m) squares and a grid produced with letters (from P - A) marking the northing co-ordinates and numbers (from 8 - 1) the easting co-ordinates. Finds and structures could thus be given a co-ordinate relating to the

**PRIDDY
LONG BARROW
NGR: ST 5142 5091**

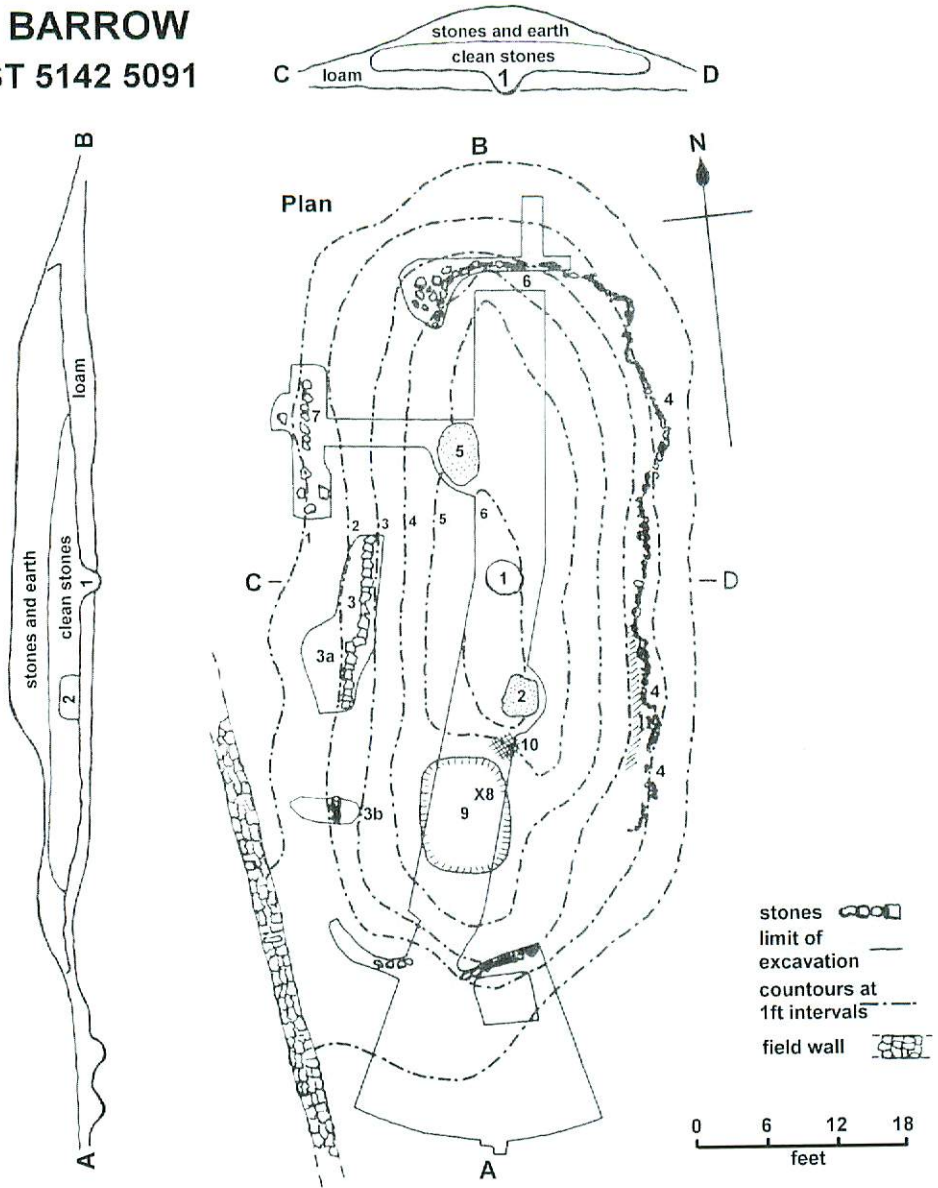


Figure 3. Priddy Long Barrow, after Phillips and Taylor, 1972. 1: Central Pit; 2: Cist and Hearth II; 3, 3a, 3b: rough stone wall; 4: Very irregular stone boundary; 5: Hearth I; 6: Northern edge of stone, straight; 7: Row of stones; 8: Position of "Gravette point"; 9: Depression, possible site of Skinner's 1816 excavation; 10: Pavement of Old Red Sandstone slabs.

grid letter and number they were in. The published account by Phillips describes the main excavation trench as being 7 ft (c.2.1 m) wide and up to 7 ft deep. The reproduced plan shows this trench cutting through the main north-south axis of the barrow with three smaller trenches dissecting the western extremity of the mound and one to the north. Two further trenches were excavated along the eastern edge of the long mound but are not described in the published account.

The excavations revealed that the long mound was formed of a central stone core of large stones weighing up to or over $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt (c.25.4 kg). The stones of the southern and central areas were found to be free from earth and the presence of stalactites that had formed in the voids suggests that they had lain "clean and undisturbed for a long time" (Phillips and Taylor, 1972 p33). The stones at the northern end of the mound are described as smaller, with earth in the interstices. Above the stone core was a capping, formed of earth and small stones. It would appear that the a rough stone revetment wall, surviving to only one or two courses high, may have delineated the boundary of the stone core of the mound (*ibid*).

The following features or structures were encountered and described in the original excavation report (Figure 3). A "hearth" (Hearth I, shown as 5 on the published plan) measuring 5 ft (c.1.5 m) by 6 ft (c.1.8 m), described as thick with a well-defined boundary. This contained charcoal and a piece of what was described as ?copper slag. The hearth is located in the north-western part of the barrow, partially but not totally covered by the stone core. A second hearth, also containing charcoal (Hearth II in the published account) was located south of the centre of the mound. This measured c.0.9 m x 1.1 m and was sealed by the stone core of the barrow. A small roughly made cist measuring 14 inches (c.0.36 m) by 26 inches (c.0.66 m) had been built directly on top of Hearth II (Figure 4). Three of the four walls of the cist could not be traced beyond their lowest courses but one wall and corner are described as carefully built and evidence existed that the cist had been corbelled. The stone core of the barrow above the cist was not disturbed, suggesting that this was an original feature. A pavement of Old Red Sandstone slabs was also found south of Hearth II. Finally, a pit, measuring 2.5ft (c.0.76m) in diameter, cutting the old ground surface and filled with "bigish stones", was found centrally placed below the barrow.

A depression was apparent before excavation at the south end of the mound. This was presumed to be the location of Skinner's excavation in 1816. The stratigraphy in this area was disturbed, lending credence to this suggestion.

FINDS

The following finds were recorded in the final report.

Bone

Above the pit were two human molars, part of a shaft of a humerus, part of either a radius or ulna and a fragment of mandible. These are not described as burnt. Nearly 100 fragments of *burnt* bone were also recorded, most being 1 inch long (c.0.02 m). These were found scattered in the 1 ft (c.0.3 m) of earth and stone above the pit, within a circle, c.3 ft (0.91 m) in diameter. A few tiny fragments of burnt bone were also found in Hearth II, below the cist.

A pig's tooth was found in the spoil excavated from the southern end of the barrow.

Flint

Six inches (c.0.15 m) below the yellow loam, beneath Skinner's excavation pit, what was described as "an angular Gravette point" was recovered. Details regarding the location of the other flints found are sparse. Approximately 40 flints, including 3 cores, were found on the north-eastern edge of the barrow, beyond and above the stone core, 1 ft (c.0.3 m) from the surface. Four scrapers are recorded; a steep end scraper, a round scraper, a keeled end scraper and a small round scraper, but no location is given. Four other retouched flakes are described; a flake with secondary working around the edge, a "tranchet" (arrowhead?), a retouched thumb-nail flake and a fragment with a serrated edge.

Pottery

One piece of undecorated Roman pottery was found, near the surface at the south end of the mound.

STRATIGRAPHY

The stratigraphy of the mound and the surrounding area was recorded and proved puzzling to the excavators, leading Phillips to conclude that the barrow had been built on a raised earth foundation (*ibid* p31). All of the known stratigraphical information from the excavations is summarised in Table 1.

The mound and the ground below it	Initial excavations south of the mound	Pit, 25 yards from the excavations
0.91m mixed earth and stone (dark earth at top, yellow loam below)		
0.91m large stones		0.15m turf
0.15m compact yellow loam clay subsoil	0.6m compact yellow loam clay subsoil	0.38m compact yellow loam clay subsoil
0.01m ochre splashed band	Red loam and stones	Red loam with stones
0.91m yellow loam clay subsoil		
Red loam and stones ("cobbles")		
(NB – yellow loam up to 0.91m deep at north end of barrow)		

Table 1. *Stratigraphy of the Priddy Long Barrow.*

From these observations it is possible to see that the "cobblestone" (limestone) and red loam layer occurred in all of the excavated trenches and appears to represent the natural sub-strata. Above this lay between 0.38 m and 0.60 m of yellow loamy subsoil. There is nothing to indicate that the barrow was placed on an artificial platform, as Phillips suggested (Phillips and Taylor, 1972 p31). The confusion about this seems to have risen from the presence of the ochreous band, interpreted as the old turf level. However, this is a natural phenomenon, observed under other prehistoric monuments in the region, as Taylor himself clarifies (*ibid* p35).

The lack of an obvious buried soil beneath the mound is interesting as it may suggest that the area on which the monument was to be built was stripped of turf and topsoil before its construction. This might have been preparation in advance of the construction of the monument or a result of previous cultivation of the site.

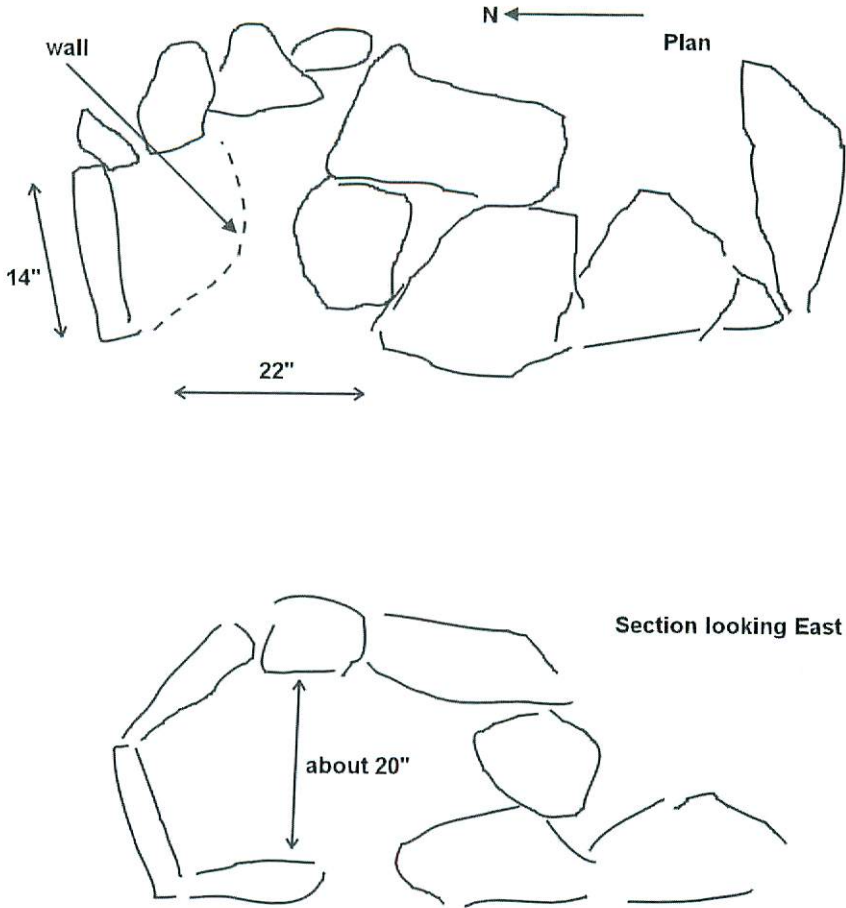


Figure 4. Plan and section of cist re-drawn from original field log.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The method of excavation is not made explicit in the report but there are some clues to how work progressed. On the 20th May 1928 the following was written about excavations in northern part of the main trench:

"It was considered unnecessary to dig down nearly three spits through the clay to the stony substratum, as had been done hitherto: the top spit alone of clay was dug and nowhere did it show any signs of disturbance."

This indicates that excavation was carried out by removing “spits” of deposit; it is recorded elsewhere that the yellow loamy clay was c.3 ft (c.0.91 m) deep at the northern end, indicating that the average “spit” was approximately 1 ft (c.0.3 m) deep. A thorough reading of the field log also shows that with the exception of that described above, all of the trenches were excavated to the top of the limestone layer, 1½ - 2 ft (c.0.5 m – 0.6 m) below the stone core of the barrow.

As previously mentioned, trenches were also excavated along the eastern extremity of the mound, but not described in the published account. The Field Log records that a T-shaped trench measuring 8 ft by 8 ft (c.2.4 m x 2.4 m) was excavated on the 20th May, encountering stones forming an irregular edge to the barrow. It is then stated that the stones were followed for a distance of some 40 ft (c.12 m) along the north-western edge; this is a mistake as the plan shows clearly that it was the trench along the north-eastern edge that was of this length.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM THE FIELD LOG

The plan of the barrow, which appears to have been made by Phillips, was obviously re-lettered and renumbered during the course of the excavation. The first pages of the field log refer to co-ordinates such as XY6 (these letters were not shown on the plan) but midway through the excavation the co-ordinates referred to above are used.

The first few days of the excavation involved excavating a trench measuring 18 ft (c.5.5 m) east-west by 15 ft (c.4.5 m) north-south in front of the barrow. The trench was excavated to a depth of 18 inches (c.0.45 m) through a yellow loamy soil. At this depth a spread of small stones was encountered, described as cobblestone flooring. During these excavations, two parallel “ditches” were encountered, approximately 6 ft (c.1.8 m) south of the front of the barrow. The excavators found this confusing, describing the northern most “ditch” as having a very pronounced wall on its northern side. Excavation in this area appears to have been quickly abandoned.

The “cobblestone flooring” and the ditches both appear to be natural features; the flooring is the natural substrata, encountered not only outside the barrow but underneath it and in a pit excavated 25 yards (c.22.8 m) away (see stratigraphic description, Table 1). The ditches are probably rifts in the limestone, and indeed one was described as being visible on the surface for a further 90 yards (c.82.3 m). Exactly what the “wall” on the ditch was is unclear, and it might be possible that this was a humanly-created feature. However, the rifts were sealed by the yellow loam which passes underneath the barrow suggesting that these features would not have been visible when the barrow was constructed.

Major O. G. S. Crawford visited the excavations on the 8th April, just 4 days into the project. The event is described thus:

“Major Crawford most fortunately turned up: he suggested that the stone layer was probably the natural rocky sub-stratum, although he could suggest no reason for the apparent ditches.”

This was undoubtedly not a fortuitous meeting. Crawford had recently published the seminal *“Long Barrows of the Cotswolds”* (1925), establishing himself as the leading authority on long barrows. During his visit Crawford advised UBSS on the excavation strategy for the barrow, suggesting that they opened a trench through the middle of the monument, along its

long axis. This trench was 7 ft (c.2.1 m) wide, running from the south-west corner to the centre of the mound. At the centre, the alignment of the trench was changed slightly to run in a direction true to the axis of the monument and narrowed to c. 6 ½ ft (c.1.9 m).

The following additional information is also recorded in the log about the structures, features and finds encountered during excavations.

- The stones at the base of the stone core are described as being placed horizontally to form a floor.
- Hearth II is described as sitting on top of the yellow loamy clay, apart from in one area where it lay partially across some small stones.
- The east wall of the cist was the wall that was carefully built and it is assumed that the rest of the cist had collapsed. This might imply that the stones of the cist were of the same material as the stones of the core as no attempt was apparently made to 'find' the stones of the cist.
- The cist is described as placed *directly* over the centre of Hearth II.
- Six pieces of burnt and unburnt bone were found 15-30 inches (c.0.38 m-0.76 m) *above* the cist. This would seem to be in addition to the burnt fragments of bone found below the cist.
- A quantity of burnt human bone was described as coming from 3 ft (c.0.91 m) *beyond* the centrally placed pit, 6 inches (c.0.15 m) above the clay. A flint knife was found associated with human bone in this area. These finds were in addition to the human bone found in a circular area 3 ft (c.0.91 m) in diameter above the pit.
- A piece of calcined rib was found at the junction of the stone core and yellow subsoil, approximately half-way along the main trench.
- The piece of possible copper slag was found very near the outer edge of Hearth I; the report does not explicitly state that the slag actually came *from* the hearth and it is possible that it was found close to the hearth, but not in it.
- At the north end of the barrow the stones are described as smaller than those in the south and centre, with the voids between them filled with earth.

A RE-CONSIDERATION OF THE FLINTS

Whilst a site grid existed, there is little mention in the published report of where most of the flints were found. Using the Field Log it has proved possible to approximate their positions (Figure 5). However, there is a discrepancy between the number of flints recorded in the publication and the number in the Field Log, as the following tables illustrate.

Item	Location
“Angular Gravette Point”	6 inches below yellow loam, in area of Skinner’s excavation pit (8 on published plan)
40 + flints, including 3 cores	Small area above and beyond the stone core, east side (11 on published plan)
Flake approximating to a round scraper	Not mentioned
Flake with secondary working	Not mentioned
Steep end scraper	Not mentioned
Keeled end scraper	Not mentioned
Retouched thumbnail flake	Not mentioned
Small round scraper	Not mentioned
Fragment with serrated edge	Not mentioned
Tranchet	Not mentioned
c.40 fragments	Not mentioned

Table 2. *Flints Recorded in 1972 Publication.*

Much new information was gained on the locations of flint items found during excavations (see Figure 4). The published account records that 89 flint items were recovered, but location details were only given for the Gravette point and the chips and cores. The field log directly mentions 69 flints and it has proved possible to work out approximate locations for all of these. This leaves a discrepancy of 20 items, for which no descriptions or find spots exist. As previously noted, all finds were destroyed during the Second World War so no further information can be gained.

The flints can be broken down into five groups, according to their location. Group 1 is represented by the angular Gravette point. This is described in the published account thus:

“...an angular Gravette point [of flint], incompletely retouched, patinated white, comparable with implements from the transitional layer at King Arthur’s Cave, Wye Valley.” (Phillips and Taylor *ibid*: 34).

This item was found at a depth of 6 inches (c.0.15m) below the surface of the yellow loam, in the ½ inch (c.0.01m) thick “ochre splashed band” (a natural phenomenon), at the southern end of the barrow below Skinner’s excavation pit. This Gravette point could have been either a Creswellian point or a Cheddar point: without the item it is impossible to say

(Roger Jacobi *pers. comm.*). Cheddar Points were in use from c. 13,000 – 12,000 BC, whilst Creswellian Points came into use at the same time but continued to be made after this date. It seems fairly likely that the classification of the item as a Late Upper Palaeolithic tool is correct, as Taylor was also responsible for the excavations at King Arthur's Cave, where similar flints were found. Jacobi notes that surface finds of these items are relatively rare on the Mendip plateau, with the closest occurrence to the Priddy Long Barrow probably being at Badger Hole Cave, Wookey Hole (Roger Jacobi *pers. comm.*). The Gravette point is of interest for this reason but it was a fortuitous find and does not relate to the construction and use of the long barrow.

Item & Number given on New Plan	Location	Mentioned in Published Account?
A 4 or 5 flint flakes	Beyond stone core at south end of barrow	No
B A few fragments of flint	Above yellow loam in the SW end of barrow	No
C 1 "Angular Gravette Point"	6 inches below yellow loam, in area of Skinner's excavation pit (8 on published plan)	Yes
D 20 flint chips and a possible scraper	Above and beyond stone core, east of central pit	Yes but not as accurately
E 20 flint chips, tranchet (ptd?), 2 or 3 cores	Above and beyond stone core, east of Hearth II	Yes but not as accurately
F 1 Flint knife and 1 smaller flint	North of central pit, associated with human bone	No
G 2 flints	East of Hearth I	No
H 1 small scraper	North-east of Hearth I	Yes but no location
I 4 flints	North of Hearth I	No
J 1 flint flake	West of Hearth I	No
K 1 scraper and 1 flint fragment	Beyond stone core, north-west of Hearth I	Scraper mentioned but no location
L 1 flint	Beyond stone core, west of Hearth I	No
M 2 serrated flint flakes and 1 flake	Beyond stone core, west of central pit	1 serrated "fragment" mentioned but no location

Table 3. *Flints recorded in Field Log.*

The four or five flints found in the excavations south of the southern end of the long barrow comprise Group 2. These are described in the field log as "poor flakes, quite unpatinated" (Field Log 7th April 1928). These were found at a depth of c.2 ft (c.0.6 m) below the surface, in the yellow loam. It seems unlikely that they relate to the long barrow as they were sealed within the yellow loam that passes underneath the barrow.

Group 3 comprises those flints found west of the stone core of the barrow but sealed beneath the earthen cap. One scraper, one flint fragment, one "flint", two serrated flakes and one flake are all described in the field log as coming from just beyond the stones, either level with or a few inches below their bases. These flints would appear to be contemporary with the

construction/use of the long barrow but there need be no great significance attached to them; they could be deliberately placed deposits or, more prosaically, items used during the construction of the monument and lost/discarded. The serrated flakes tally well with an Early Neolithic date and other examples have been found at other long barrows in the Mendip region (Lewis, 2001).

The flints forming Group 4 are those that were found along the eastern side of the long barrow, just east of the stone core, 1 ft (c.0.3 m) below the surface in the earth and small stone capping. This material may have been accidentally incorporated into the mound when the earth capping was added. Alternatively, it may represent human activity on the mound itself, perhaps flint knapping, denoted by the presence of three cores and over 40 chips of flint. The only dating evidence for this collection is suggested by the description of a "tranchet", possibly a tranchet arrowhead of Later Neolithic date. At other long barrows in Somerset including the Devil's Bed and Bolster (Rode), Brays Down (Shoscombe) and Priddy Hill (Priddy), flint items of Later Neolithic date were also found, either on or close to these Early Neolithic monuments. Whether the long barrows retained any sanctity in the intervening millennia is questionable however.

Finally, the flints representing Group 5 are those that were found sealed within the stone core of the long barrow, either within or at the base of the stones. A few "fragments" were found somewhere at the south-west end of the mound above the yellow loam, during the first few days of excavation. A flint flake with a "mottled white patina" (Field Log 9th April 1928) was recovered sealed beneath the mound material at the north end of the mound, west of Hearth I, and two flints were found at a similar depth east of the hearth. A scraper was found north-east of Hearth I and a further four flints were found north of the hearth, but at unspecified depths. This cluster of 8 flints within a c.2 m radius of Hearth I is interesting and may relate to activities carried out at the hearth, or at least at the northern end of the mound.

A flint knife and one smaller flint were found associated with burnt human bone at a depth of c.3 ft (c.0.91 m) below the surface of the mound, north of the central pit (Field Log 6th May 1928). This depth suggests that the flints and burnt bone were found in or over the stones of the core; the significance of this is returned to later. It is possible that the knife and smaller flint were grave goods accompanying the cremated individual(s). The provision of grave goods, whether personal or communal, was not a standard practice in long barrows (Kinnes, 1992 p108). Kinnes records fifteen association of worked flint and mortuary deposits, but stresses that some of these might be fortuitous occurrences (*ibid*). Two flint knives and cremated bone were found at the Slewcairn barrow, Solway (*ibid* p46) and a plano-convex knife in the chamber of the Dalladies long barrow, North-East Scotland (*ibid* p47). The possibility should be retained that the knife and flint were grave goods, meaningfully placed with the cremation(s), at the Priddy long barrow.

THE PRIDDY LONG BARROW: A RE-ANALYSIS

The excavations at the barrow revealed a complex sequence of features and structures which were not able to be fully interpreted by the excavators. The conclusion offered by Phillips is brief: "On the whole the results of investigations in this barrow are disappointing. Little is certain beyond that it is an artificial mound in which some human bones were buried" (Phillips and Taylor 1972: 35). It was Tratman, as editor of the *Proceedings* in 1972, who offered the statement that "from its form and structure a Late Neolithic date may be presumed [for the barrow]" (*ibid*: 31).

The problems over interpretation were the result of many factors; the long delay in publishing (44 years), the confusion over who was running the project, the lack of relevant archaeological experience of those involved and perhaps most importantly, the complex archaeology only semi-revealed in the trenches. Reaching an understanding of such a site after only partial excavation is not easy, even in the light of modern techniques and theoretical models, but a new fourfold phasing is offered below. This phasing is likely to be an oversimplification but the excavations do not allow a more detailed sequence to be identified.

Phase 1

The first phase of activity at the site is represented by the central pit and two hearths. The pit, 0.76m in diameter, contained fairly large stones "in no particular order" and it seems possible that this pit would have held a substantial timber post, the stone representing packing material. 2.5m north-west of the pit was Hearth I and 2.5m south-east of it was Hearth II (NB: see Phase 3 for further details of Hearth I). It would appear that there is little direct evidence to link these three features to the construction and use of the long barrow as it is known that long barrows were sometimes erected over "old" activity areas, whose original purpose was not connected with the long barrow (for example at Hazleton North: Saville, 1990). However, there are indications that the pit and two hearths at Priddy were intended to be part of the monument. Firstly, the pit lies centrally placed to both axes of the long barrow mound, suggesting that it was visible when the mound was erected. Secondly, the presence of burnt bones in Hearth II, below the cist, and a calcined rib fragment lying on the old ground surface below the stone core, suggests that rituals involving human remains were taking place on the site before the erection of the mound.

Phase 2

Phase 2 is represented by the construction of a corbelled stone cist, measuring at least 0.36 m x 0.66 m, over the centre of Hearth II. Upon excavation the cist was found to be semi-ruinous, possibly caused by the weight of the stone core of the mound above it. Immediately south of the cist was a "pavement" of Old Red Sandstone slabs, partially sealing Hearth II. No finds were found in the cist or on the ORS paved area.

Phase 3

Phase 3 is the most difficult to understand. Superficially, it involved the erection of the stone core over the features described above. There are, however, indications that Phase 3 is comprised of many sub-phases.

Firstly, the Field Log states that the stones at the base of the stone core were placed horizontally to form a floor, (Field Log 10th April 1928), calculated from the published plan to be 12.8 m long by 7.3 m wide. This could have acted as a platform that was quite separate from the mound on top of it, a proposition which may be supported by the location of the human remains. Apart from the burnt human bone mentioned in Phase 1, all of the other human remains are described as being found above the old ground surface. For example, human bone was recovered from 0.3m *above* the pit; burnt and unburnt human bone was found in the 0.38 m -0.76 m *above* the cist; burnt bone was found 0.91 m north of the pit, 0.15 m *above* the clay. The location of the human bone, which was found between 0.15 m and 0.76 m above the old ground surface *might* be suggestive of the use of this stone layer as a platform on which human remains were placed in order to decay. The use of this feature as an excarnation platform would have involved human remains being spread on top of the platform, the fragments working their way between some of the stones, resulting in the differences in height recorded during the

excavations. Excarnation is a recognised practice during the British Neolithic and selected bones from this process are found in ritual and ceremonial monuments of the period.

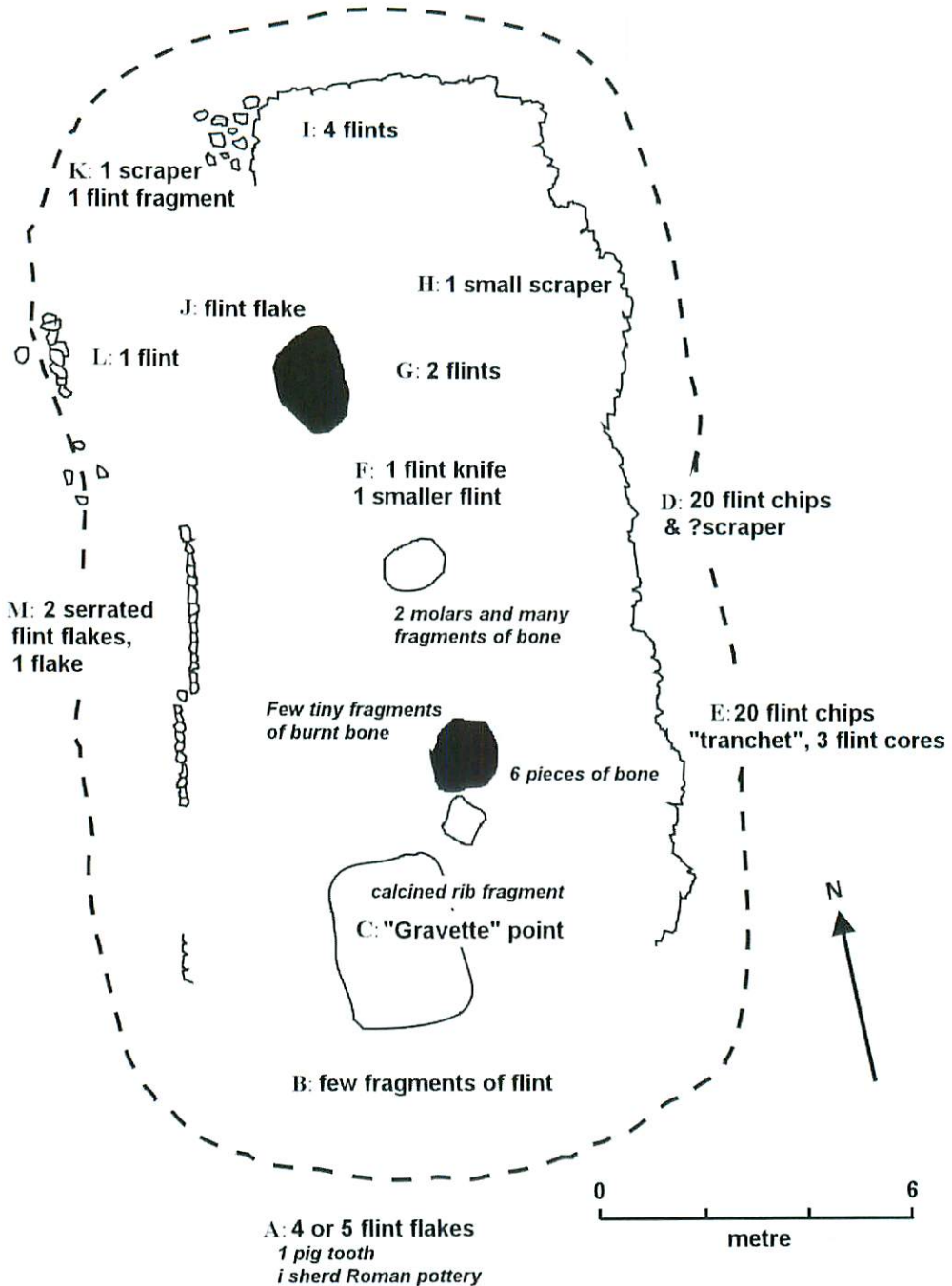


Figure 5. Location of finds.

The time lapse between the laying of the “platform” and the covering of this with the stone core proper is unknown. However, when the stone core was erected it totally covered the central pit, the cist, Hearth II and the small paved area of ORS and partially covered Hearth I. This “partial covering” of Hearth I is important and leads on to another strand of argument.

Hearth I, beneath the north-west section of the mound, was partially covered by the central core and partially by a mixture of earth and smaller stones. This was described as “unstratified” by Taylor and it was suggested that the hearth may have been intrusive and inserted from the west. The Field Log (13th May 1928) describes it thus:

“The hearth which was first discovered in the side trench on 29th April, was found to be much more extensive than had previously been thought. It measured about 5' x 6'. Thick and most definite, it lay immediately on the clay layer beneath the stones – but the mass of stones did not extend quite far enough entirely to cover it. Its edge was quite clearly defined. Charcoal was abundant, with pieces bigger than a pen being picked out.”

If Hearth I were an intrusive feature it would not have been covered by the stone core, nor would it have been placed directly on the clay layer, which represents the sealed old ground surface. The evidence suggests that Hearth I is a primary feature, belonging to Phase 1.

The Field Log and the published report clearly state that the northern part of the mound was different in composition from the south and central “core” of the mound, described as being formed of medium sized stones, mixed with earth. The obvious interpretation is that the northern end of the monument was not “unstratified” but of different construction from the main body of the mound. This observation is fundamental to the interpretation of the Priddy Long Barrow as a non-megalithic long barrow. Non-megalithic long barrows are often formed of separate areas, which may include wooden/embanked chambers, mortuary houses and forecourts (Kinnes, 1992 pp81-98). Excavation of these monuments shows that these different components were often filled with different deposits when the long barrows were “closed”, preventing re-access. This closure can take the form of the filling of the different zones with different materials and the erection of the mound. Kinnes states that at the end of use, chambers and mortuary areas commonly had a separate blocking procedure (*ibid* p92). It is argued here that the different materials at the north end of the Priddy Long Barrow may relate to the filling of a different part of the long barrow structure.

It is possible that the whole of the barrow was revetted by a low stone wall and the published account states that the edge of the stone core was well-defined (*ibid* p34). However, the evidence for an actual wall is sketchy; the stones are at best two courses high (one course on the west side) and only in one place do they form a straight line (western side of the barrow, marked 3 on the published plan). It is not clear whether the stones were laid deliberately and it is perhaps best to follow Phillips and describe the stones as “defining” the edges of the stone element of the barrow.

Phase 4

A capping of earth and small stones was placed over the entire length of the long barrow, increasing the length to c.22 m. This was a deliberate act, almost doubling the length of the monument. The finding of over 40 pieces of flint along the eastern edge of the barrow, just east of the stone core, 0.3 m below the surface in the earth and small stone capping is of

interest. Either this material was scooped up when the earth capping was collected, becoming accidentally incorporated, or it represents activity on the mound itself, after the earth cap had been added. The presence of a flint "tranchet" in this collection, possibly a tranchet arrowhead, might indicate a Later Neolithic date for at least some of the material. Indeed, as Phillips suggests, the material might represent activity, even "chipping" (i.e. flint knapping), on the surface of the barrow. A piece of possible slag "the size of a walnut" and a lump of haematite weighing seven pounds were also found, outside the stone core. Whether these finds were recovered from the earth capping of the mound or actually off the barrow is not made explicit. These may also represent prehistoric activity; it is stated that it is uncertain whether the slag is actually slag and it is possible that it was a natural lump of metallic stone (see the Discussion, below). The presence of haematite at a Neolithic long barrow is also not without analogy, as this material was also found during the excavations at Orchardleigh long barrow (St George Gray, 1921, 1929). It is certainly possible to document an interest in unusual rocks, minerals and fossils in the Neolithic and thus their presence at the Priddy Long Barrow is not unusual.

DISCUSSION

The evidence from the excavation points to the Priddy Long Barrow being a non-megalithic long barrow where rituals involving the manipulation of human remains took place. Non-megalithic long barrows are characterised by internal structures of wood or turves, with long covering mounds of stone, earth or both. The internal structures often take the form of a rectangular chamber, bracketed and sometimes sub-divided by wooden uprights (Thomas 1999: 131). At the Haddenham long barrow in Cambridgeshire, waterlogging preserved a box-like chamber formed of oak planks, with three timbers dividing this box into two compartments, one for burials and the other possibly for offerings (Shand and Hodder, 1990; quoted in Thomas, 1999). Forecourt areas are also a common feature of non-megalithic long barrows and can be formed of crescentic arrangements of posts. However, while there is a constructional repertoire of forms common to non-megalithic long barrows, Thomas has argued that the way these were combined and the precise sequences leading to the final form were varied (*ibid*). Thus Priddy long barrow draws on this "constructional repertoire" but need not be identical to other non-megalithic long barrows.

Non-megalithic long barrows are contemporary with megalithic long barrows, (c. 4000 - 3000 cal BC) where stone chambers replaced those of wood or turves. Megalithic long barrows of the Cotswold-Severn group are well-represented in the west of Britain, with famous examples such as West Kennet in Wiltshire and Stoney Littleton in north-east Somerset. Locally, non-megalithic long barrows exist in large numbers on the chalk of Wessex but are less frequent in Somerset.

At Priddy, the monument may have taken the form of two separate "activity" areas: the finding of human remains in the central and southern areas suggest that this may have been the chamber with perhaps a forecourt structure at the northern end. The finding of a central pit strongly supports the non-megalithic interpretation, these being common features of this type of monument. It seems likely that the pit contained a timber post, which may have been visible even after the stone "platform" was constructed. The small paved area of Old Red Sandstone, beneath the stone "floor" of the mound also has precedents at other non-megalithic long barrows. The use of Old Red Sandstone as the material for this paved area is of interest, as the closest source is 1.5 miles north-east of the site, at North Hill. Its use may well have been symbolic, perhaps representing North Hill itself. Old Red Sandstone is a material that was

widely used in the Neolithic period in the south-west, largely for the manufacture of quern stones and whetstones. Items made of ORS, sourced as coming from Mendip, have been found in Early Neolithic monuments such as the Windmill Hill causewayed enclosure, Wiltshire (Smith 1965) and Hambledon Hill causewayed enclosure, Dorset (Fiona Roe, *pers comm*). At the latter site approximately a quarter of all the stone items were of Mendip ORS, highlighting the importance of this material. The presence of the ORS pavement at Priddy might thus be a way of drawing on the symbolic properties of the stone and incorporating those qualities into the monument itself. Indeed, Thomas states that the introduction of distinctive materials into a barrow might have been a way of “manipulating materials that were representative of the surrounding landscape and introducing them into a series of physical and symbolic relationships with the bones of the dead” (Thomas, 1999 p134).

The function of the two hearths, sealed beneath the stone cairn, is unclear. They are described as containing charcoal, with pieces “as big as a pen” from Hearth I. (The piece of questionable copper slag, purportedly found within this hearth, is discussed below, and can be dismissed from this discussion.) It is tempting to see their use connected with the cremated bone and indeed, a few pieces of cremated bone were found on top of Hearth II. However, there is no mention of ashes or other materials that might be expected if they represented pyre sites (McKinley, 1997). What is certain is that two wood fires were burnt on the site and while a number of reasons for their existence are possible (the cooking of a “ritual feast”, the purification of the site, the transformation of the site from a domestic to a ritual space) their true function remains unknown. The spacing of the two hearths, each c.2.5 m from the central pit, might indicate that they were deliberately located with reference to this feature.

The material identified as copper slag from the area of Hearth II raises several problems for the interpretation of the site. The identification of the material itself is not unproblematic as the finds from the site were destroyed during WWII and further analysis is impossible. The misidentification of the material as slag remains a real possibility as it is *always* referred to as “?copper slag” in the field log. It is however, impossible to verify the nature of the material, as it is no longer available for study. The possibility of the material being prehistoric in date is relatively slim. No copper sources that can be proven to have been exploited in prehistory exist close to the site, although there are small amounts of locally occurring chalcocopyrite and other copper-related minerals. Craddock (1990 p69) has suggested that most smelting would have taken place close to mine sites, as this reduced transport and fuel supply problems. No bronze slag has ever been found at Bronze Age mine sites, however, or indeed at settlement sites, and Bronze Age copper slag has been described as entirely absent from the British archaeological record (Craddock and Meeks, 1987). The reason for this absence may be accounted for by the method of smelting employed during the Bronze Age, which was poorly reducing and essentially non-slugging. These conditions have been reproduced during experimental work at Butser Ancient Farm and at the University of Glasgow (Craddock and Gale, 1988 p180) and the results of laboratory-based tests have been published by Pollard *et al* (1990). Given these circumstances, it would seem highly unlikely that the material is in fact Neolithic or Bronze Age and should not be viewed as relating to a prehistoric phase of the monument. Roman and later interference with Neolithic monuments has been noted at West Kennet Long Barrow, Wiltshire by Piggott (1962) and, more locally, at Orchardleigh, Giant's Grave and Stoney Littleton in Somerset by Lewis (2001). A single, undecorated sherd of Roman pottery was found near the surface at the south end of the Priddy Long Barrow, also indicating a Roman presence at this site. The Romans were interested in the mineral wealth of Mendip, but, as stated above, no significant copper deposits occur closer than Shropshire and mid-Wales. It is also a possibility that the material is derived from a relatively modern episode

of deposition on the mound itself, the material having worked its way down through the mound due to the action of gravity and/or animal and root disturbance. If the material is not copper slag, it may add further support to the idea of prehistoric interest in "unusual" materials such as metallic ores/minerals, as found at Orchardleigh and at the Priddy Circles (Lewis, 2001). The preceding arguments for the secondary nature of the material still apply, however, regardless of its physical properties.

The cist is an unusual structure, as yet with few documented parallels. However, it is a primary structure and Taylor explicitly states that the mound above it was not disturbed in anyway (letter dated 17th October 1970, from Taylor to Tratman), eliminating doubt as to whether it was a secondary insertion. The cist was empty, containing "no black earth, charcoal or calcined bone" (Taylor, 1972 p35). While Taylor suggested that the cist could have contained a primary inhumation, the small size of the cist makes this unlikely. It is possible that human body *parts*, or cremated bone, could have been placed within the cist at a certain stage in the funerary ritual, being removed after an (unknown) period of time.

The human remains recovered from the monument are of interest as both burnt and unburnt bones were found. It is only possible to say that this represents a minimum of two individuals. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that the number of burials left prior to the "closure" of a long barrow is irrelevant as excavations reveal a monument at the *end* of its life, and many more individuals could have been held at, and removed from, the barrow during its currency of use (Kinnes, 1992 p92). Early Neolithic long barrows can contain up to forty-five disarticulated and articulated *unburnt* skeletons, with cremation only becomes a common funerary rite in southern England in the Early Bronze Age. However, Kinnes records that whilst cremated remains are infrequent finds, two non-megalithic long barrows in Wiltshire (Shepherd's Shore [Avebury] and Tilshead Old Ditch E [Salisbury Plain]) contained single cremation deposits with unburnt skeletal material in secure association (Kinnes, 1992 p101). Interestingly, both sites also contained paved areas, the paved area at Shepherd's Shore being formed in part of oolite, derived from the Bath-Frome region (Cunnington, 1927). In Somerset, recent research (Lewis, 2001) has uncovered evidence that burnt and unburnt human remains were deposited in the megalithic long barrows at Stoney Littleton (Wellow), Orchardleigh (Buckland Dinham) and Brays Down (Shoscombe). The finding of both burnt and unburnt material within other long barrows in the Mendip region might thus be indicative of a distinctive regional tradition.

CONCLUSION

Our understanding of the function and rituals taking place at Neolithic long barrows is continuously evolving. Long barrows can no longer simply be thought of as funerary monuments, built for the express purpose of containing human burials. Recent research suggests that long barrows fulfilled a variety of functions, and that diverse ceremonies and rituals may have taken place within and around them (Bradley, 1998; Woodward, 2000). Some of the rituals *were* concerned with the manipulation of human remains but long barrows fulfilled a function beyond the sepulchral. This is highlighted by the fragmentary nature of many skeletons and the absence of certain body parts, suggesting handling of the bones prior to or after deposition. Current archaeological thinking sees these monuments as places used in one stage of the mortuary process, and this need not be the final stage. The evidence from Priddy supports this: a few unburnt body parts are represented, perhaps of more than one individual, and it seems unlikely that the amount of burnt bone found represented a whole cremated

individual. Rituals involving the manipulation of human remains, usually as “dry bones”, took place at sites other than long barrows. The recovery of human bones from causewayed enclosures and from domestic settlement sites suggest that they may have come to be used as “relics” in certain ceremonies, perhaps related to rites of passage (birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, death, etc.) and rites of intensification (war, disease, etc.). The mixing and dispersal of human bones suggests the removal of identity and it is possible that bones came to be viewed as ancestor relics rather than individuals. Long barrows may thus have been liminal places where individual identity was lost and ancestral identity created. These were places where human bone was introduced and removed, perhaps over hundreds of years. Most long barrows show evidence of deliberate closure; at non-megalithic long barrows by the infilling of the different structural components and erection of the mound and at megalithic long barrows by the filling of the chambers with “cultural debris” and the blocking of the entrances. At the Priddy Long Barrow, the erection of the stone core, the separate filling of north end and the covering of these areas with a capping of earth and small stones marked the decisive closure of this complex monument.

This paper has illustrated the enormous potential for re-analysis of “old” excavations in the light of current archaeological thinking. However, the arguments put forward are based on a field log that might contain inaccuracies and it should be remembered that what is offered is only an interpretation. This was only possible because the site archive (minus the photographs and finds) still existed in the UBSS museum and contained enough detail to allow reinterpretation. This paper would not have been possible without the efforts of E.K. Tratman who reassembled the archive and organised the publication in the 1970s. Correspondence suggests that this was a somewhat onerous task.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Roger Jacobi for his helpful comments about the Gravette point and David Mullin for reading and commenting on the text (especially the copper “slag”), as well as help redrawing the figures. Once again, thanks to Graham Mullan for his patience and the anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

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Dr Jodie Lewis
1 Ockeridge Cottage
Chance's Pitch
Colwall
Malvern
WR13 6HP
jodie.lewis@worc.ac.uk