

A BARROW ON WOOTTON COMMON, HANTS.

By W. A. SEABY, F.S.A.

Discovery of the Barrow.

THE burning of the gorse bushes on the eastern half of Wootton Common, early in 1939, exposed to view a round barrow, just north of the path running along the southern boundary of the New Forest, between Wootton Post Office and Boundway Hill, Sway. The edge of the fire ran across the barrow from north to south, so that bushes were still thriving on its western side while those on the east were blackened and dead.

The barrow, probably the one known to local inhabitants as Elkham's Grave, is not marked on the 6-inch O.S. Sheet, Hampshire, 79 S.E. although the name appears on Wootton Common. It lay about 200 yards S.S.E. of the southern corners of Broadley Inclosure and 150 yards N.E. of the footpath gate adjoining Mr. Kitcher's Farm. The exact position is latitude, $50^{\circ} 47' 6''$ N. ; longitude, $1^{\circ} 38' 30''$ W. In the summer of 1944 the Hampshire W.A.E.C. put the whole of this heath-covered area under cultivation and the mound is now completely ploughed out.

Description of the Barrow and Trial Excavation.

The sub-soil on this part of the common is bright yellow sandy clay (Headon Beds) of the Oligocene series, although immediately to the north this deposit is overlaid by gravel. The make-up of the mound was a light mixture of humus and yellow brown sand containing small worn flint pebbles.

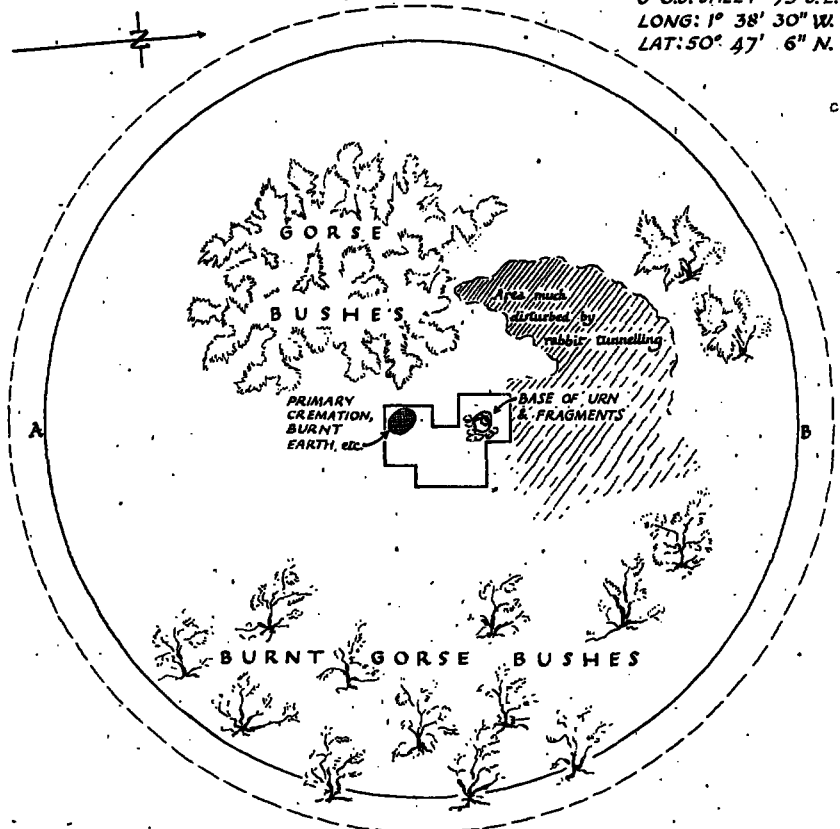
The barrow rose 2 feet 6 inches above the level of the common and was 33 feet in diameter. It was bowl in shape, no berm being present¹ (Fig. 1.). If a ditch existed it must have been completely silted up, but a slight "tread" appeared where ponies and cows skirted the mound.² The top of the barrow was fairly flat, the downward slope starting only about 10 feet from the edge, except in the northern part where disturbance by rabbits had considerably splayed the mound. As might be expected it was a rabbit warren of long standing and one area had been partly destroyed by rabbit-tunnelling and by persons digging for rabbits (see plan). Examination of the heaps of earth revealed nothing except two small fragments of an urn rim in the entrance to a large burrow entering the top of the mound just north of the centre.

1. L. V. Grinsell, "Hampshire Barrows," Hants Field Club *Proceedings*, XIV, Pt. 1, p. 11.

2. Many of the larger barrows in this area have quite wide ditches, which although shallow through silting form veritable moats in wet weather. No ditch of this type was present here.

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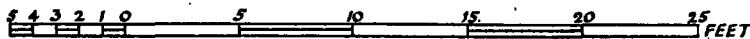
6° O.S. SHEET 79 S.E.
LONG: 1° 38' 30" W.
LAT: 50° 47' 6" N.



PLAN OF BARROW SHOWING LIMIT OF EXCAVATION & SURFACE FEATURES.



SECTION ACROSS BARROW, S-N.



W.A.S./1939.

FIG. 1.

Fearing that further domestic activities on the part of the rabbits might lead to the total destruction of what burial remains lay within the body of the mound, the writer and his nephew, Peter J. Seaby, decided to make a trial excavation during Easter, 1939. Time did not permit either the cutting of a trench through the barrow, or taking out alternate quadrants, so it was decided to excavate an area, four feet square, clear of the "furze," slightly to the west of the centre of the mound and south of the burrow which had produced the pot fragments. Nothing of unusual interest was discovered until the ground level had been reached, when a faint black line, the old surface, was noted in the south-eastern corner of the pit at a depth of 2 feet 6 inches. At this level traces of charcoal also appeared and it became obvious that the central interment had been located.

The Primary Interment and the Urn.

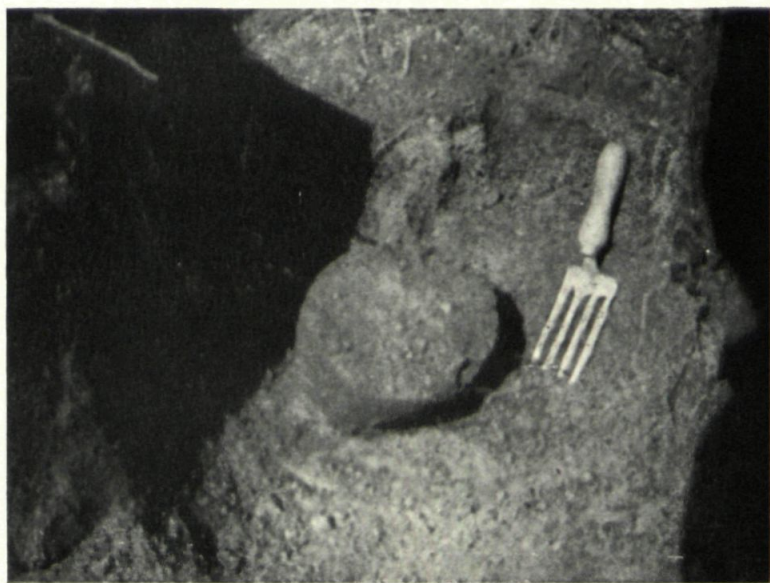
The excavated square was cut back and at a depth of three feet from the top a compact oval patch, measuring 10 inches across, of blackened earth, dried vegetable matter and calcined bones, came to light immediately south of the centre of the barrow. This had a rounded top and was in the form of a compressed mass. It was found necessary to remove the deposit *en bloc* to see whether anything had been placed beneath. The mass was about six inches thick, resting in the undisturbed sub-soil clay. Nothing else was discovered immediately around or under the deposit. When samples had been broken off it was replaced in its original position and a 1938 penny was rammed edgewise into the centre.

Dr. F. E. Zeuner of the Department of Geochronology, Institute of Archaeology, London, who examined a sample from the deposit, reports as follows:—"The sample is, in my view, *not* burned. It may be dried, however. It looks like a dense root-soil of some kind of herbaceous vegetation, and may have belonged to a piece of grass-turf taken up elsewhere and placed in the barrow for some purpose."

Cutting back the area to the north which contained the burrow with the pottery sherds, several more rim fragments were exposed; after their careful removal the lower part of an urn was revealed in the north-east corner of the trench. A square was dug out from the top, so that the base of the vessel could be removed intact and, in doing so, several further fragments were recovered.

The urn was found leaning at an angle of thirty degrees from the perpendicular (Plate I (a)). There was a hole at the bottom of the wall on one side, possibly made by a root, and small root fibres had penetrated the cracks. Adhering to the base of the urn were two fragments of the rim, while another large fragment was found inside against the wall (Plate I (b)). The vessel held no cremated remains, the only occupants being two beetle grubs in the sand

PLATE I



(a) Urn during the excavation. *Note tilt.*



(b) The urn removed. *Note the two fragments of rim adhering to the base.*

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filling! Although the area around was carefully dug over, no trace could be found of about half the neck from shoulder to rim.

Description of the Urn.

The urn is oval in plan and distortion in the shape may partly be due to earth pressure. Average measurements used in the reconstructed drawing are as follows:—height, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches; diameter at mouth, $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches; girth, 9 inches; diameter at base, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The profile shows an S-curve with concave neck and convex side. The widest part of the body is just below the lugs, the sides curving in steeply towards the bottom; the rim is flattened,

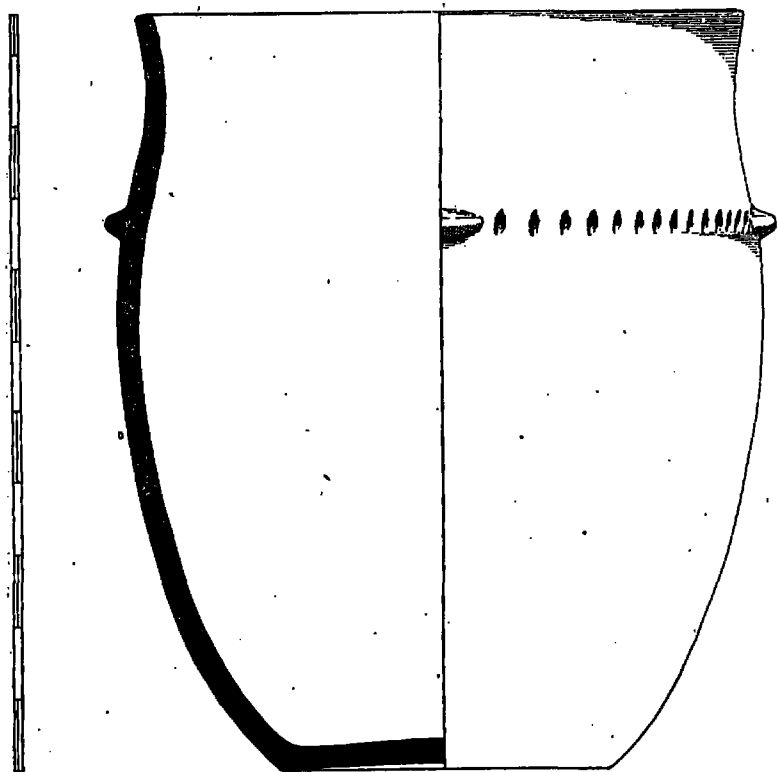


FIG. 2 ($\frac{2}{3}$ approx.).

the base is slightly concave. It is decorated around the slight shoulder with finger-tip impressions, divided by four lug-handles not quite equally spaced (Fig. 2.). The clay contains a small percentage of grit, but the surfaces have been smoothed; pitting

occurs where calcareous particles have been dissolved by acids in the soil. The ware is reasonably well baked, but somewhat friable in places. The outer surface colour varies from grey-brown at the rim to light red-buff at the base; the interior is blackened.

The urn is of the Deverel-Rimbury class and is barrel in type. A somewhat similar urn with finger-tipping but without the lugs was found at the Pokesdown urnfield.³ Dr. Clay described this as "an atypical urn of the globular variety." A more characteristic example of the globular urn, which, however, has finger-tipping on a raised band round the shoulder, besides the more normal incised decoration on the neck, was found in the urnfield at Barnes, I.O.W.⁴

The Wootton Urn is also similar to one of the urns from the Rimbury urnfield and another found in a barrow near Weymouth, both in Dorchester Museum,⁵ but in neither case is the S-curve as pronounced as in the present example, now deposited in the City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.

Conclusions.

While it is difficult to say with certainty whether the urn was directly associated with the central and primary interment, its proximity to the centre of the mound and the depth at which it lay, together with the fact that it contained no cremated bones, strongly suggests that the urn was placed in the mound at the time of the central deposit and was probably inverted over it. This might be a reason for parts of the rim being found inside and *beneath* the base, as such a friable vessel would most likely break near the rim while the earth was being piled on it. Rabbits and rabbiting might account for the position in which it was found.

Instances of barrows with established primary deposits of Deverel-Rimbury date are not numerous in this country, but Grinsell suggests that a considerable number of bowl barrows in the New Forest may belong to this period.⁶ Examples include Colbury, Landford and Plaitford, the last revealing two Deverel-Rimbury urns, one of bucket and the other of debased globular form, placed a few feet from the centre of the barrow as at Wootton.⁷

Comparatively few of the innumerable barrows in the New Forest have been excavated and most of those which have been were inadequately reported on at the time of excavation.⁸ In 1933 Mr. Christopher Hawkes suggested that the main port of entry

3. *Antiq. Journ.*, VII (1927), pp. 473-4, No. P. 3.

4. *Proc. I.O.W. Nat. Hist. and Arch. Soc.* (1931), p. 109, No. 1 and Pl. II.

5. Cf. Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, II, Pl. XCI, 425d and XC, 423.

6. Grinsell, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

7. *Antiq. Journ.*, XIII, p. 414 *et. seq.* (J. P. Preston and C. F. C. Hawkes, "Three Late Bronze Age Barrows on the Cloven Way.")

8. Wise, *New Forest*. (This was written before Mrs. Piggott's excavation of the fifteen New Forest Barrows. See below.)

for the Deverel-Rimbury culture, about 700 B.C., was up Southampton Water and along the Cloven Way.⁹ In 1938 Mrs. Piggott with fuller evidence showed that the mouth of the Wey and the Stour and Avon at Christchurch were the more probable inroads.¹⁰ It is, however, very evident on the distribution maps published in her paper that the main area of the New Forest is devoid of find spots. The excavation of fifteen barrows on Beaulieu Heath and at Stoney Cross in the New Forest by Mrs. Piggott in 1941-42 does not add very much to our knowledge of movements or the distribution of these Late Bronze Age folk, since only one of the barrows opened (Beaulieu I) could be dated to this period. Here, however, there was no urn, only a simple cremation, exhibiting similar characteristics to that on Wootton Common.¹¹

9. *Antiq. Journ.*, XIII, pp. 436-440.

10. *P.P.S.*, n.s., IV, Pt. I, p. 181.

11. *P.P.S.*, n.s., IX (1943), pp. 5-6. (C. M. Piggott, "Excavation of Fifteen Barrows in the New Forest, 1941-2.")