

# The Priddy Circles, Mendip, Somerset. Henge Monuments.

By

E. K. TRATMAN, O.B.E., M.D., M.D.S., F.S.A.  
(ST 5452. O.S. 6 in. ST 55 S.W.)

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS - - - - -	97
2. SUMMARY - - - - -	98
3. TOPOGRAPHY - - - - -	98
4. THE EXCAVATIONS - - - - -	102
5. SEQUENCE OF CONSTRUCTION - - - - -	110
6. THE FINDS - - - - -	110
7. DISCUSSION - - - - -	111
8. DATING - - - - -	118
9. THE LOCAL ECOLOGY - - - - -	119
10. CONCLUSIONS - - - - -	119
KEY TO ALL SECTIONS - - - - -	121
APPENDICES 1-3 - - - - -	121

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The initial excavations at this site were by Mr. Christopher Taylor, who was assisted by his brother Peter and by their parents. Part way through the course of making cutting 1 the responsibility for the excavation was transferred to the author as a means of allowing the excellent work that the Taylors were doing on this scheduled monument to continue. The Taylors were eventually responsible for all the bank cuttings and for part of the excavation of the central area. The author was directly responsible for the entrance excavations and for part of the central excavations. Mr. Christopher Taylor has also made the original drawings on which *Figs. 23* and *24* are based.

Mrs. Fairbanks very kindly gave permission for the excavations to be made on her land and allowed a caravan to be brought on to the site. Mr. Derek Findlay of the Soils Survey visited the site on a number of occasions and gave valuable information about the soils. Dr. Jeffries of the Botany Department of the University of Bristol made a special investigation of the basal deposits in the Causeway pit number 1. Professor Dimpleby has prepared the pollen analysis and Mr. Findlay has reported on the soils. Dr. H. Taylor undertook much of the photography. Professor Donovan, Dr. Welch and Mr. C. Bristowe all examined many stone specimens from the site and use has been made of their comments in the

body of the paper. Many members of the society assisted with the excavations from time to time. To all of these I am very grateful for the assistance that they have given but especially my thanks are due to Christopher and Peter Taylor.

To Professor Atkinson and Professor Piggott I am indebted for comments upon this paper before publication and the paper has benefited much from their advice. Mr. C. Houlder and Mr. Gavin Simpson supplied me with data in advance of publication about the henge monuments at Llandegai and Maxey. I am grateful to both of them for their assistance.

## 2. SUMMARY

The circles, which are generally known as the Priddy Circles, are actually in the parish of East Harptree and are sometimes referred to as the Harptree Circles (*Plate 14*).

There are four of them and they extend over  $3/4$  mile and it is convenient to number them from south to north. The three southerly ones are close together but the fourth is separated from these by a gap more than large enough to have held a fifth circle. There is no single axis that will pass through the centres of any three of them.

A preliminary report was published on the excavations of the south circle (No. 1), to which circle all the excavations were confined (Taylor and Tratman, 1957). Since then more extensive excavations have been made in Circle 1. These have confirmed that this one is a, and presumably the others are, henge monument(s) of the single entrance type of Atkinson's (1951) class 1. He did not include the circles in his list as there was then no evidence as to what they were and they had no observed entrances of ancient date.

The construction of circle 1 is essentially two concentric rings of posts and stakes delimiting and supporting a bank of stones and earth. By analogy the structure of the other circles is the same. The ditch in all four circles is outside the bank. In this they are like Stonehenge.

No finds were made so dating is by analogy only with Stonehenge phase 1.

The excavation of the entrance of circle 1 showed that there had been an earlier structure on the site.

## 3. TOPOGRAPHY

(*Plate 14 and Figs. 21 and 22*)

The circles occupy flat land, part of the Mendip plateau, around 900 ft. O.D. There is a gentle slope down from circle 1 to circle 3 and then a gradual rise to circle 4, which is practically at the same level as circle 1. A slightly different orientation of the line of the circles towards

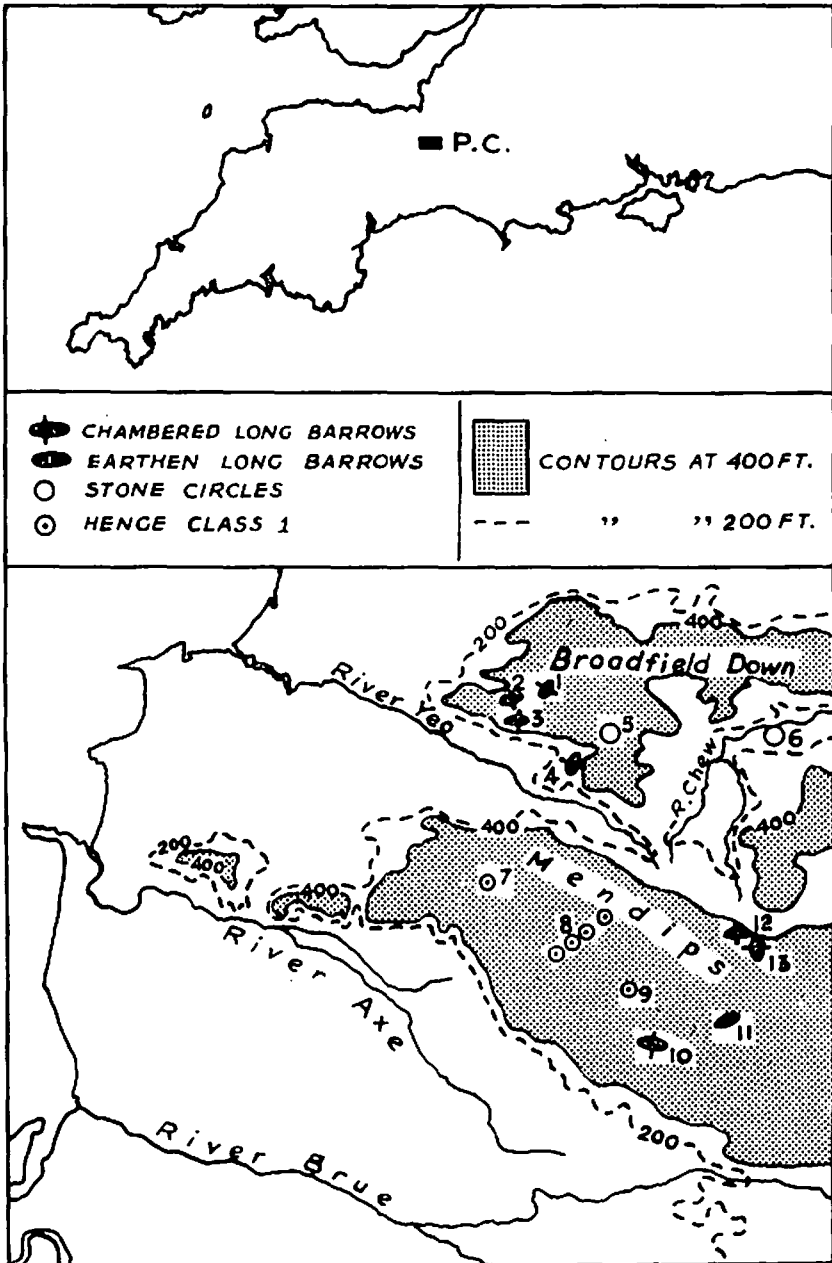


Fig. 21. P.C., Priddy Circles. (1) Felton Common. (2) Waterstone (Dolmen). (3) Redhill. (4) Butcombe. (5) Leigh Down. (6) Stanton Drew. (7) Gorsey Bigbury. (8) Priddy Circles. (9) Hunter's Lodge. (10) Penhill. (11) Green Ore. (12, 13) Chewton Mendip.

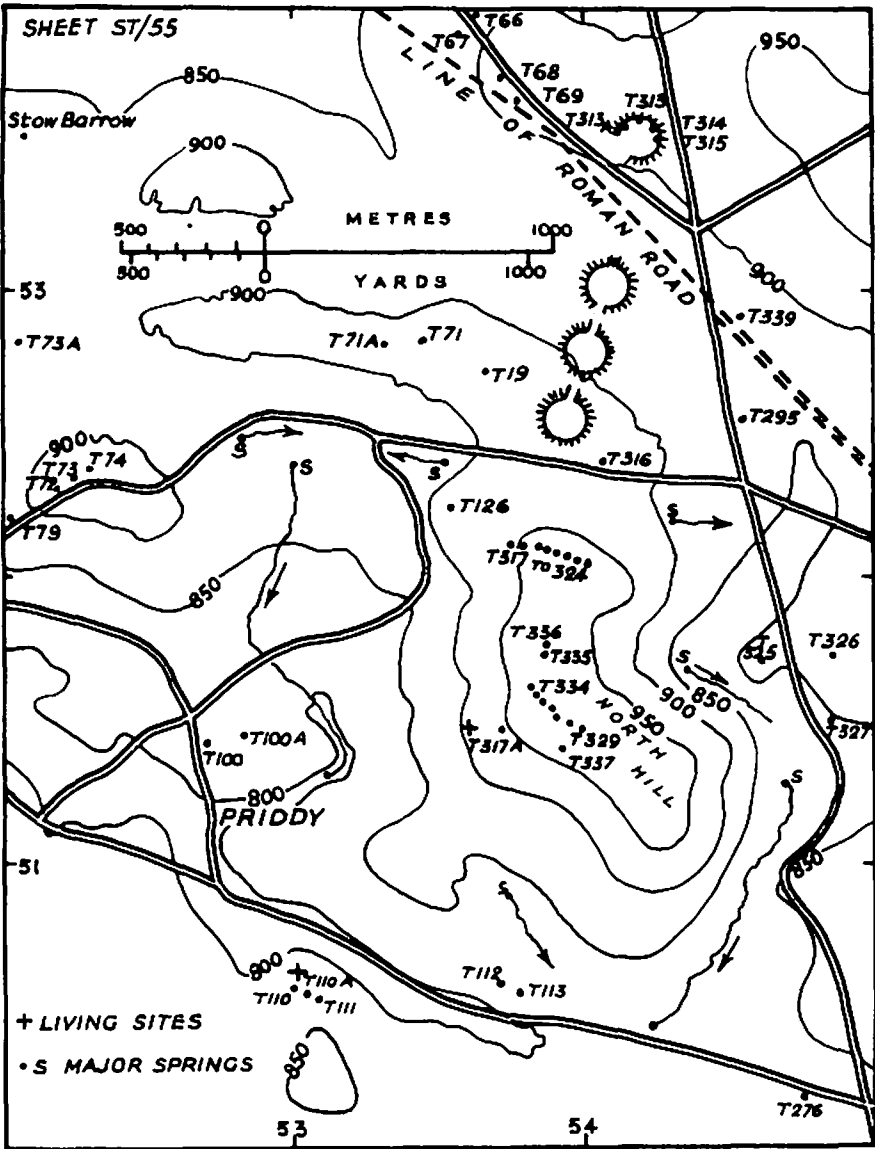


Fig. 22. Local map. Based on Ordnance Survey. (Crown copyright reserved.)

the north would have put them on even flatter ground. They are dominated to the south by North Hill (Fig. 22), which is one of the periclinal hills where the Upper Old Red Sandstone (C3) is exposed. The circles themselves lie either on Lower Lias (g<sup>1</sup>) or on Triassic deposits of Dolomitic

Conglomerate (f<sup>8</sup>), which here thinly covers the surface of the Carboniferous Limestone. Only parts of circle 1 actually lie on limestone (d<sup>1b</sup>). Circle 2, however, lies on a patch of Jurassic deposits (g<sup>1a</sup>).

There is much evidence of mining in the area and workings have seriously interfered with the circles. Most of the area covered by circles 1-3 is now rough grassland but parts are being brought under the plough. Circle 4 has been ploughed many times.

Water is available in shallow pools within and without circle 3. There are considerable springs around the base of the Old Red Sandstone outcrop. In fact for the plateau of Mendip the area is well watered.

*Circle 1.* This is tolerably complete. A portion of the south-west quadrant has been destroyed by mining and there are three modern gaps in the ring (M). Mining has involved the ditch on the west and south and to a small extent on the east. There is an irregular extensive hollow west of the centre and this too is a product of mining and contains a number of large stones so derived. The circle is not quite a true one, being flattened slightly on the west. The circle has a diameter from bank top to bank top of 520 ft. The single original entrance is N.N.E. of the centre. Stones 1 and 3-7 were removed by the farmer before excavation but subsequent ploughing immediately after removal did not reveal any change in soil texture or colour. Stone 8 was placed in its present position quite recently. It is not known where it came from. Other stones have recently been placed on top of the bank east of the entrance by the farmer (1964-5). Stone 2 is in a relatively ancient position (see below).

*Circle 2.* This is a true circle and its diameter and position of its entrance are similar to circle 1. It has been considerably disturbed by mining. A group of stones (10-14) and stone 9 represent modern collections from the field. None of them is in its original position. There are two modern gaps in the ring (M).

*Circle 3.* This is distinctly flattened on the east and west. The N-S diameter is 520 ft. and the E-W 490 ft. from bank top to bank top. The north-east quadrant reported by Alcroft (1908) as being levelled is still traceable. The circle has been greatly disturbed by mining. The major disturbances are shown on *Plate 14*. The entrance is S.S.W. of the centre, the opposite pole to circles 1 and 2, and has probably been widened, perhaps by miners. The marsh may be an original feature or the product of mining. The two ponds are certainly modern, and so is a small mound, which is probably spoil from the major pond.

*Circle 4.* This is incomplete. It has a diameter of 560 ft., which is considerably larger than any of the others. The O.S. map shows only the eastern semi-circle remaining. However the bank and in part the ditch can be traced as shown in *Plate 14*. If the visible and proved end of the ditch on the S.S.W. was intended to be at the edge of the causeway then the entrance would have been in the same position as that of circle 3.

Where the ditch can be seen it appears with an even section with no indications of partial interruptions of baulks.

Borings were made (HI-17, *Plate 14*) to test for a filled ditch. Nos. 10 and 11 were done first to get a representative core section from a visible part of the ditch. Holes 1-9 and 2-15 showed the visible end of the ditch was the real end. Hole series 16 and 17 were made as shown. They were spaced to straddle the bank and ditch, if either existed. No trace of any ditch or bank was found. So the portion marked on *Plate 14* as "untraceable" was never, it seems, constructed.

*The Gap.* The gap between circles 3 and 4 is mainly open grassland. No evidence exists on the surface, nor in air photographs, nor when the fields are under plough of there ever having been a circle here. Nor is there any evidence of the Roman Road from Charterhouse to Old Sarum existing across here yet it must have crossed the area (*Fig. 22*).

#### 4. THE EXCAVATIONS

*Plate 14* shows the areas excavated. They are all confined to circle 1, except for the test borings in circle 4. They comprise 4 cuttings through the bank and ditch, the whole of the entrance and centre together with a strip 40 ft. wide from the centre to the inner edge of the bank and a series of sondages (A and Z).

The ditch infilling was substantially the same in all the cuttings involving that structure. At the base was a thin film of ochreous earth resting directly on the basal undisturbed red clay. Above this was a fill of ditch wash, which fill got gradually darker towards the top of the ditch. There was generally a well marked darker band near the top blending into the modern turf. This darker band was interrupted by a lighter band some way from the top. Variations in the fill could be interpreted as effects produced by the variations in the drainage of the site. For example cuttings I and II were relatively well drained, cutting III well drained and cutting IV very well drained. On the other hand the entrance cutting was very poorly drained and the ditch was often waterlogged during the course of the excavations.

The bank structure was very variable but could be divided into two. Type 1 consisted of a double dry stone wall, inside and outside, with more stones and earth between the walls (e.g. cutting I and II, (*Fig. 23* for cutting I)). At cutting IV most of the bank had been removed but there was just sufficient to show that there had been a wall structure here. At cutting III and at the east side of the entrance there was no stone work and turf walls had been used to support the bank. On the west side of the entrance the stone work had been removed. Beyond cutting III stone can be seen in the bank continuously round to cutting IV and again beyond the destroyed portion round to cutting II.

#### CUTTING I

This was made by Messrs. Peter and Christopher Taylor to find out something about the site. The details of the cutting are shown in *Fig. 23*. Under the bank the primary turf layer appeared as a very dark grey to black compressed layer. Below was a compact yellow soil with extensive iron pan formation. In this dark layer appeared circular areas

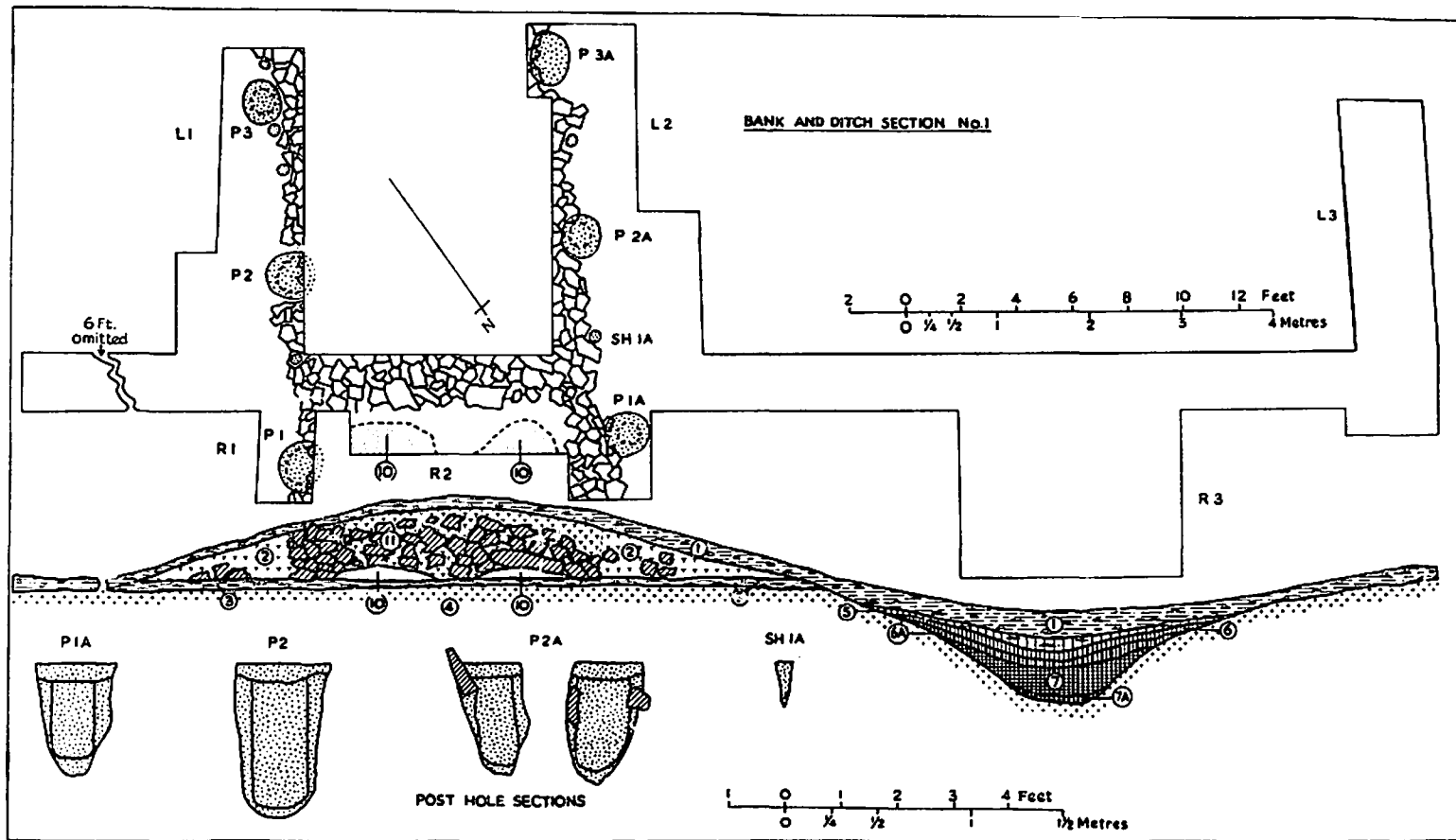


Fig. 23. Bank and Ditch cutting 1.

of yellow soil with, in most cases, a darker central core. The patches were 12-18 in. diameter and the core 6-8 in. In some, stones were found projecting a little out of the top of the yellow circles. The patches occurred in slight recesses of crude dry stone walls which formed the original inner and outer faces of the bank but which were concealed by bank slip (*Fig. 23*). Towards the centre of the bank opposite each patch was a bun-shaped mass of yellow soil resting directly on the primary turf layer and under the bank structure (10 in *Fig. 23*. Also *Plate 17* right, background).

The dry stone walls were in a state of collapse but in places were quite well preserved to a height of 2 ft. The inner wall was better built than the outer. Between the walls were more stones, not built as a wall. Over these was yellow soil with patches of darker earth. The latter were always next to the stones.

This part was construed as a series of holes for posts which were used to support crude dry-stone walls. Some of the posts had been held upright by the use of chock stones (e.g. P 2A, *Fig. 23* and *Plate 15A*, left). Part of the spoil from the postholes had been used to pack round the posts. The remainder had been carefully disposed as discrete heaps on the ground over which the bank was to be constructed. The postholes were arranged radially about 12 ft. apart and circumferentially about 8 ft. apart. The darker cores represented the actual posts.

The postholes were so narrow compared to their depth (average 2 ft.), that they must have been dug with a "jump bar" technique and the shape of grooves in the sides (e.g. *Plate 16*, A and B) suggested the use of stone axes, rather than metal implements, mounted chisel fashion on the ends of long handles.

When the primary turf layer was removed another set of holes with dark filling appeared in the subsoil. There were no spoil heaps for these holes which were up to 6 in. across at the surface tapering downwards to an average depth of 6-9 in. These were deemed to be the holes for stakes, driven in directly, to serve as additional support for the walls. They were placed alternatively with the postholes (*Plate 15A* right, *Fig. 23*, SH 1A).

Under the primary turf layer there were in places still smaller holes filled with dark earth; they were about 2 in. across and 2-3 in. deep. They were always close against the foot of the drystone walls. Against the face of the walls, where these were intact, was a very thin layer of dark soil extending sometimes as much as 2 ft. up from the primary turf layer. Both the tiny holes and the layer were full of worm holes indicating a high organic content. The arrangement was deemed to represent remnants of hurdle or wattle work placed vertically immediately within the lines of posts and stakes. The small dark areas would represent the decayed ends of the longer stakes of the hurdles and would only appear when these stakes had been long enough to penetrate through the original turf layer into the subsoil. This would account for their irregular occurrence. Where they were seen in sequence the distance apart was about 2 ft. An example is seen in *Plate 17* to the right of the posthole.

The darker patches in the central earthy infilling were so discrete that they must represent individual pieces of turf from the ditch, presumably. The texture of these patches also suggested that they were pieces of turf.

The stones of the bank were examined by several geologists. All the stones were of local origin. It was possible that some might have been brought from as far afield as Wurt Pit about a mile away to the east. The stones included a considerable proportion of Old Red Sandstone blocks. The source for these would be the slopes of nearby North Hill (*Fig. 22*), where there is an abundant supply.

The ditch infilling calls for little comment beyond that already given. The lighter layer towards the top was considered to be the result of collapse of the bank with a consequent short-lived period of accelerated silting, which, because of the increased amount of bank material, would be lighter in colour.

The basal portion of the ditch had steeper sides than the upper portion, a form of double profile. This is a normal result of rapid early silting with little weathering of the sides of the ditch and slower later silting and concomitant greater weathering of the sides.

## CUTTING II

This was made to see if the method of construction found in cutting I was continued round the circle. The cutting confirmed the findings of cutting I. There were only the most minor differences. In the ditch infilling above the primary silting a log seemed to have rolled into the ditch with a little yellow soil. This might have been when the bank collapsed and one of the posts rolled into the partly silted ditch.



## CUTTING III

The object here was to elucidate the position of the large stone (2 in *Plate 14*) on the bank in the sequence of construction and use of the circle.

The bank here was found to contain no stone walling. Instead the limits of the bank were defined by low walls of turf (*Fig. 24*). There were only postholes here and no stake holes. The posts were set rather more closely circumferentially than in cutting I and II and the cores indicated rather more slender posts also.

In the mass of the bank slip on the inner side of the bank a shallow hollow had been dug. The floor of the hollow contained a number of stones scattered as shown. There had been extensive disturbance by burrowing animals and further disturbance by man. The main block was found to be resting on several of the smaller ones but the hollow under the main block had been completely disturbed and the black earth fill contained broken glass and other recent debris. It was not even certain that the block was in its original position. *Plate 15B* shows the site partially excavated. The view is taken looking S.S.E. with T316 in the background. The block was removed to permit complete excavation and was subsequently replaced. All that can be concluded is that the original placement of the block and stones took place after the bank of the circle was in ruins.

The ditch here was rather shallow and in the primary silting (7) were two thin bands speckled with very finely divided charcoal. The total quantity was very small. The site was well drained to a swallet to the south.

The quantity of turf used for the bank walls was far too great to have been derived just from the surface of the ditch area. The primary turf layer under the bank was intact so the extra turf was not derived from there. The source of the extra turf is not known.

## CUTTING IV

In the area of this cutting the bank had largely been destroyed. There is considerable disturbance to the east of the cutting and a considerable quantity of stone has been dumped in the ditch and on to the bank so that the structure is only just traceable. This disturbance ends short of the cutting, which was designed to test the structure in this quadrant.

The outer row of post and stake holes was found and also part of the inner row. Gaps in the sequence seemed to be due to disturbance. However sufficient remained to show that there had been a wall structure here similar to that found in cuttings I and II. In the ditch the original cutting had reached bed rock, here Carboniferous Limestone. This had not been disturbed or cut into. On the surface of the limestone were a few small pieces of charcoal. These were collected but the British Museum laboratory eventually found them to be technically unsuitable for a C<sub>14</sub> dating test.

## INTERIOR CUTTINGS

Two squares of sides of 20 ft. were dug by hand (*Plate 14*). The adjacent corner areas of these squares were also dug by hand. The section exposed consisted of turf and soil to a depth of about 9 in. resting directly on undisturbed subsoil. There was some incompletely decayed grass in the lower part of the top soil. The subsoil was criss-crossed by two sets of fine grooves at right angles to each other. These seemed to be plough marks. It was learnt that the whole area had been ploughed twice during the war and so hence the plough marks which were far too fine to have been made by anything but a metal share.

No structures of any kind were found. No traces of occupation were found. No objects of any kind were found. So, with the sanction of the Ministry of Works and the permission of the owner, an earth grader was employed to strip a 40 ft. wide area as shown on *Plate 14*. The line was determined to cut across any line of interior structure that might lie between the entrance and the centre. No such structures were found.

The edge of a pit full of darker soil was found. A tree trunk hole as at Arminghall (Clark 1936) seemed at first to be a possible explanation of this hole and so the cutting was enlarged to take in what might then be the opposite member. Nothing was found. It was then considered that this was a miners' shaft. Later collapse occurred showing the hole to be just that. (It is on the line of a mining rake which runs from outside the circle on the east to the miners' pit in the interior). No finds of any kind were made. The area was restored and resown with grass.

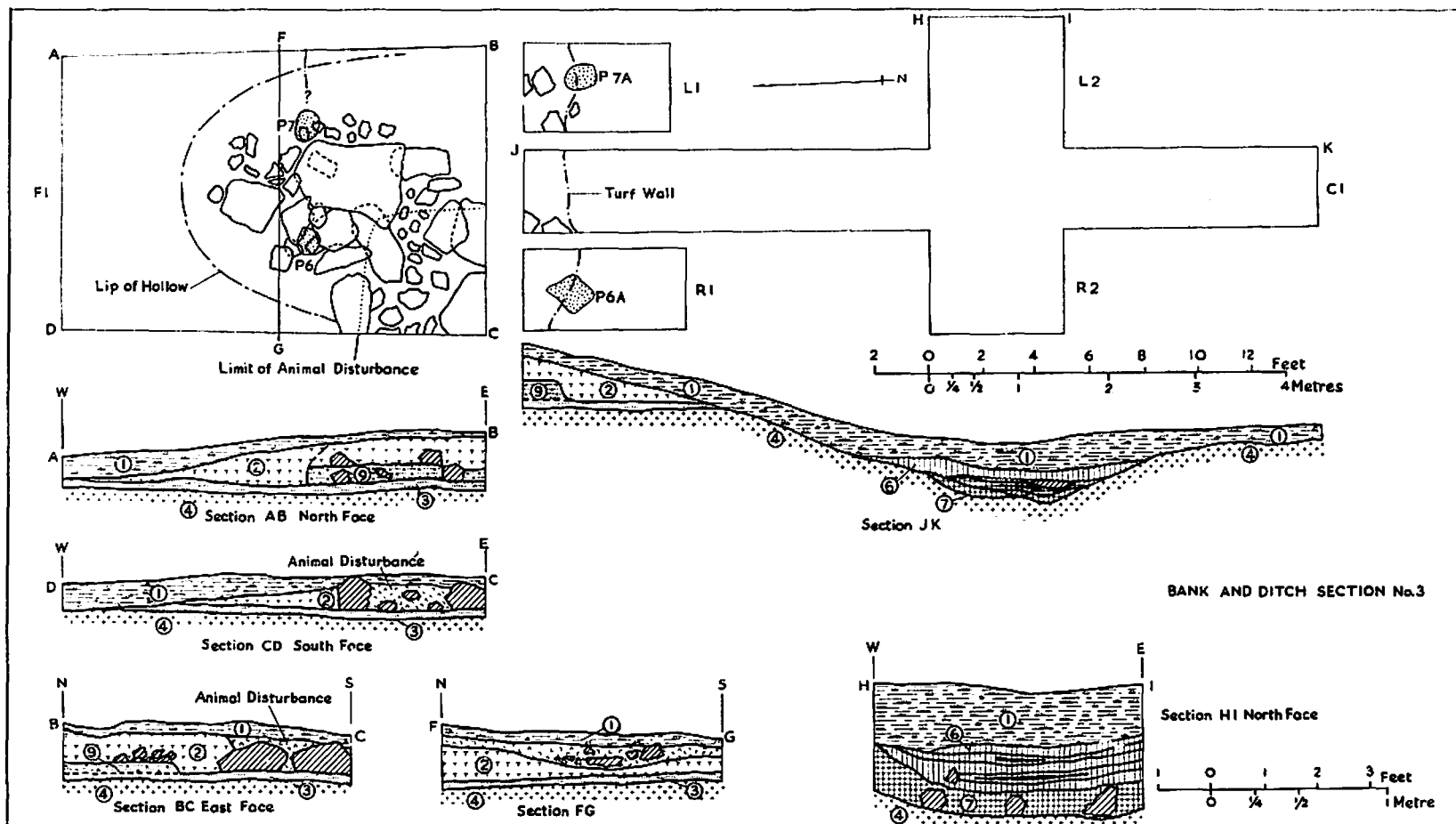


Fig. 24. Bank and Ditch cutting 3. The large stone in plan is stone 2 of plate 14.

## THE ENTRANCE CUTTINGS

*(Plates 17, 18, 19. Fig. 25)*

The excavation of the entrance was taken in two parts. First the east side was dug and then the west side. In the course of these excavations certain structures earlier than the circle were encountered. As the work on the entrance was going on at the same time as cuttings I-IV it was necessary to use a different numbering for the post and stake holes than these for the other cuttings which were done in sequence. They were given "E" as the code for "Entrance".

On the east side the bank was found to consist entirely of earth with turf walls at the outer margin. The limits of the wall could not always be defined exactly particularly towards the inner side. The outer side can be considered to have followed the succession of postholes. Against the entrance causeway there were only postholes and no stake holes (*Plate 19*) and on the north side of the bank there was an unusually long gap between E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub> with no intermediary stake. There is a similar but narrower gap between E<sub>5</sub> and E<sub>8</sub>. (For the sake of clarity the line of the edge of the bank slip has been omitted where it crosses the earlier structures).

There had been considerable degradation of the bank by the use of the entrance for a cattle track in recent times. There was an exceptionally large posthole at the N.E. corner of the bank with a hurdle stake hole alongside it (*Plate 17*). The spoil heap from this hole is also seen in the plate as a thin lighter band above the primary turf layer and covered by the dark turf wall. The relationship of the bank slip to the turf wall is also shown.

A darker bank ran across the bank obliquely from E<sub>2</sub>. It seems likely that this was part of a cross brace but it could not be traced right across the bank to E<sub>6</sub>. E<sub>4</sub> and E<sub>7</sub> were given posthole numbers before their true functional relationships were determined in the course of the excavations.

The ditch showed quite a well defined double slope. An experiment was made with this ditch. It was left open through one winter. This was a mild one with only two short periods of frost. But it was a wet winter and the ditch was seen to be full of water several times. In the spring the ditch was cleared out again. As much as 1 ft. of fill had accumulated and the sides of the ditch had been eroded to a depth of 2 in. By early summer grass and weeds had started to cover the sides.

On the top of the primary silting (7) was a scatter of flattish stones. They might represent a destruction layer but if so they did not come from the immediately adjacent bank as this had no stone.

While the bank spread was being cleared several unsuspected structures appeared and which are shown in red on *Plate 19*. They are described below.

The causeway between the banks and ditches presented a fairly regular surface. It was broken by entrance pit 1 (red) and also by stone hole 3 on the west. Part of the causeway on the west was covered just under the grass by a crude layer of cobbling in which small stones had been used. It was obviously a modern repair job and is not shown for sake of clarity. Beyond the limits of the ditches was a very shallow, narrow trench called the Marking Out Trench (MT, *Plate 19*). It showed up as a faintly darker band just penetrating the yellow subsoil. It had definite ends opposite the ends of the ditches' steep slope, which are approximately the position of the ends of the ditches as originally dug. It had obviously been made by spit-locking with some form of pick through the original turf and just into the subsoil.

A similar trench in a similar position was found in relation to the inner sides of the banks. Only parts of this could be traced. There must be some doubt, therefore, as to its function and extent. It was not parallel to the external trench.

On the west side a large pit filled with dark earth was found. It was explored to a depth of 6 ft. The filling had shrunk away from the sides and the spoil from it had been heaped up to the west and this spoil heap overlay the bank slip and its covering of turf. Clearly this was a miners' pit.

On the east side and covered by the spread of the bank a group of small stones were found packed tightly into the top of a faintly marked ovoid area (*Plate 19*, Stone Hole 1) with several associated small holes filled with dark earth. Alongside this was a round area of darker soil and this looked like a posthole and so was numbered E<sub>4</sub> (*Plate 19*). In its top were firmly embedded two stones. This collection of stones was in marked contrast to the subsoil, which here did not contain any large stones.

Excavation showed the holes to have the form shown in *Plate 19* and *Fig. 23*. The round hole was basin shaped. The larger hole had nearly vertical sides and a pear shaped

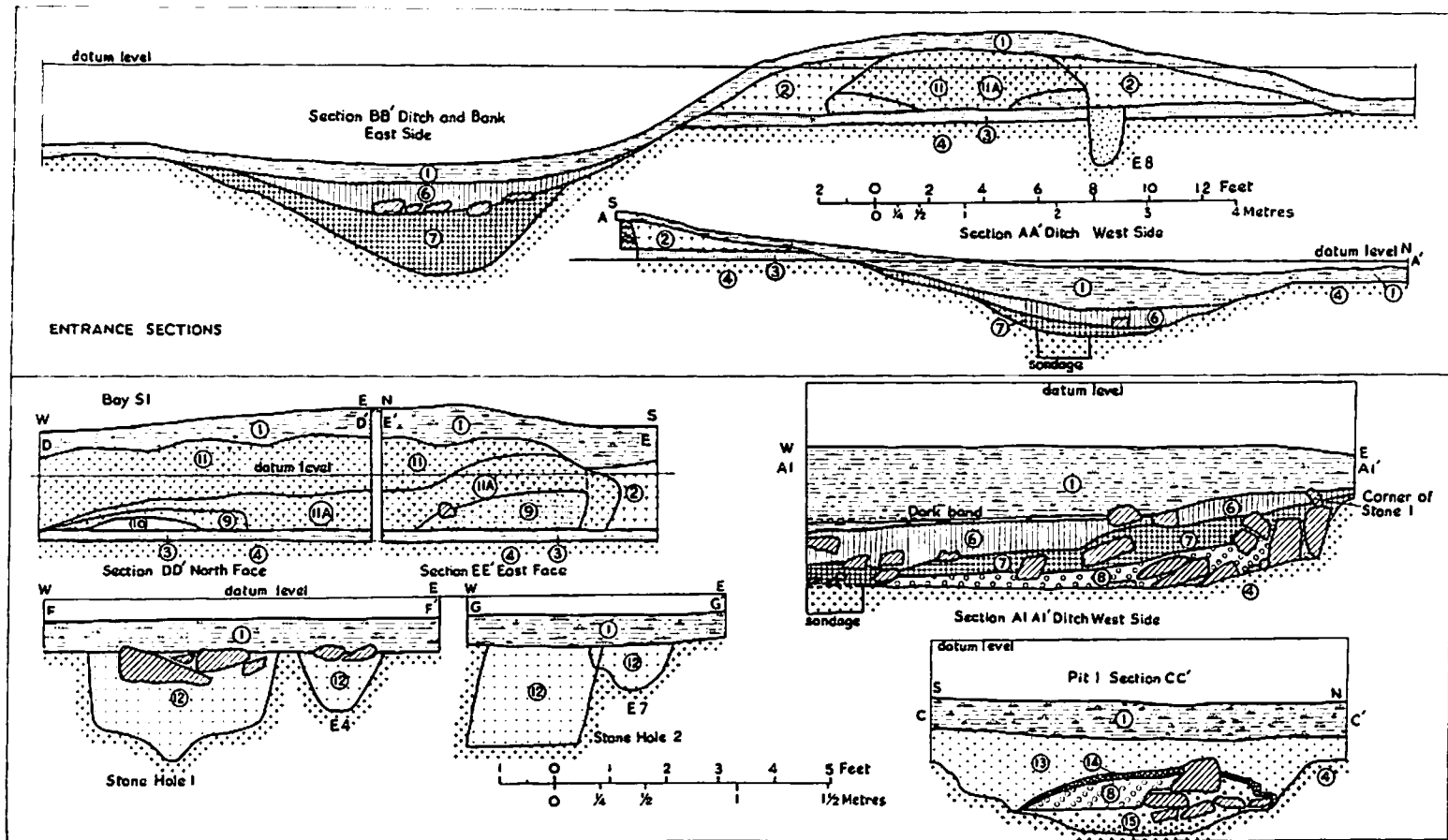


Fig. 25. Entrance excavations. Sections.

depression in the base that was obviously the product of pressure from some structure that had stood in the hole. Three of the smaller holes ran into the side of the main hole half way down its sides. The obvious conclusion was that the larger hole was a stone hole but the function of the associated basin-shaped hole was not clear.

An approach cutting to section posthole E6 was started. A disturbance was noted in the face of the cutting. Careful clearing revealed another hole, rather similar to hole 1 and alongside it another basin shaped hollow, this time cutting the edge of the main hole. Neither of these were marked by stones and on the surface disturbance was hard to detect. A single small stake hole broke the circumference of the main hole. (*Plate 19* and *Fig. 25*). This second large hole was considered to be a second stone hole. The edges of both stone holes were sharp and the infilling quite compact. All four holes reached down to the red clay of the natural subsoil.

Close to these holes an irregular oval area of slightly darker soil was found. On excavation this was shown to have below the surface a series of stones packed quite closely together in a mass of worked clay (*Appendix 2*). The stones had a faintly marked concavity in their arrangement with the concavity directed towards the east. There was an almost continuous cover of iron pan over them. On the east was black earth fading downwards to a much greyer colour. This area had been very badly disturbed by burrowing animals. The greyer material was thought, perhaps, to be the leached remains of a cremation but the analysis (*Appendix 2*) makes it clear that there was no cremation here.

The two stone holes and associated basins and subsequently the oval pit were all eventually lined with polythene sheeting and filled with dark earth so that they could easily be found again if the site was re-excavated. *Plate 18* shows the inner row of post and stake holes of the bank. From bottom to top a stake hole, postholes E8, E5, E6 and E10. Stone holes 1 and 2 are shown backfilled. The pit is seen partially excavated and the area of animal disturbance can be seen. In background is the stone core of the bank on the west side of the entrance.

When the west side was cleared yet another pit was found. Its rim was not easy to define and some doubt exists as to whether the E18 and E19 of the bank cut the edge of the pit or not. In the deeper part of the pit was a pile of stones, quite irregularly placed. Over one of them was a patch of darker soil considered to be the remains of a piece of turf. Amongst the stones were two nodules of marcasite. The limits of the base of the hole were easy to define in the red clay. It was considered that this hole also had once held a stone.

It was found that the bank had been completely robbed out for about 4 ft. The arrangement of the post and stake holes for the bank are shown in *Plate 19*. Post E20 had probably been renewed, to judge from the unusual form of the hole. Some of the stone robbed from the bank had probably been used to make the rough cobbling found just under the thin turf between the bank end and the ditch ends. This was a modern addition.

Over the ditch when the modern turf had been removed a considerable collection of stones began to appear. The main grouping is shown in *Plate 19*. As it was not clear what these represented their excavation was approached from the west along the floor of the ditch. The scatter of stones extended for 10 ft. It consisted of two large stones and a number of smaller ones. To the west there were only smaller stones resting on a thin layer of primary silting above the red clay of the ditch bottom. Towards the causeway the stones rested directly on the red clay with the thinnest of films of primary filling below them. Then came the two larger stones (1 and 2 *Plate 19*). Their tips rested directly on the ditch floor. Associated with them were smaller stones partially embedded in the same type of worked clay found in the entrance pit. The arrangement suggested that as the causeway was approached the sides of two stone holes complete with chockstones and clay packing had been ripped out and the two stones allowed to fall. The stones round the base of the larger ones seemed to represent the remnants of packing towards the lip of the ditch. Round stone 2 three of the smaller stones were still wedged in on edge with a little clay packing round them. After the fall of the stones weathering had been effective in destroying, except for the wedged stones on edge the rest of the sides of the stone holes and it proved impossible here to determine the exact limits of the ditch or the holes.

The stones were raised, using car jacks and ropes, to permit examination of the ditch under them. Where they touched the ditch slope there was only the thinnest film of silting under them. The stones were lowered back into place and eventually covered up again when the ditch was back-filled.

Soil samples were taken by Dr. Findlay from a sondage in the bottom of the ditch (*Fig. 23*), from under the edge of the bank slip and at the edge of the original bank (*Plate 19*).

Stones 1 and 2 were examined to see if they could possibly be from either stone hole 1 or 2 from the causeway. They would have fitted neither. It remained possible that one of them could have stood in stonehole 3.

### 5. SEQUENCE OF CONSTRUCTION

The site was laid out with two concentric rings of postholes. These were dug and the spoil placed towards the bank side of each hole. Posts were set up and held upright by packing back part of the spoil and sometimes by the use of chock stones.

Stakes were then driven in alternatively with the posts except at the entrance where posts alone were used. There were minor variations of this arrangement. Hurdles were set up behind the rows of posts and stakes and held in position by driving the stakes of the hurdles into the ground. Whether there were attachments to the posts and stakes could not be determined. Behind the hurdles dry-stone walls were constructed by collecting stones locally. Within the walls more stones were placed. Then the ditch was dug and the earth piled in the central area between the walls. The use of cross bracing can only be inferred. There is no direct evidence. The stones were collected locally.

On the east side of the entrance and round to cutting 111 and just beyond turf walls had replaced the stone walls.

The total height of the bank, where highest, can be calculated from the amount of bank slip. It would be 4-6 ft.

In the course of construction certain pre-existing structures were removed.

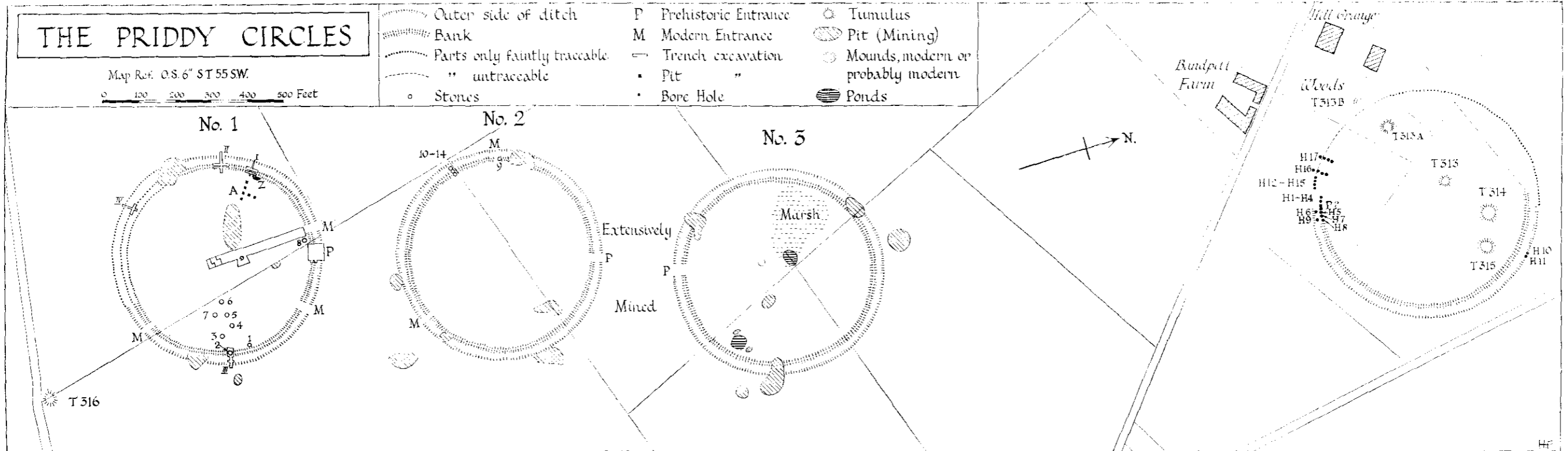
The two extremely shallow and narrow trenches outside and inside the causeway were presumably, for there is no absolute proof, marking out trenches made to mark out the causeway and entrance.

A berm about 9 ft. wide was left between the outer edge of the bank and the inner lip of the ditch.

### THE FINDS

The most remarkable thing about these excavations is the total absence of any significant deposits or objects. Not a single grave or burial was found. Not a single sherd of prehistoric, or, for that matter, even Roman pottery was found. Not a single flint or other stone implement save a few nondescript flint pieces from the surface layer. Only in hole 3 of the causeway were two nodules of marcasite but it could not be determined if they belonged to the earlier structure or had been dropped in when that was removed. Probably the former.

Nodules of marcasite occur in Cretaceous deposits and the nearest site, though not necessarily the actual site, from which they could be derived is the Trowbridge area about 25 miles to the east on the approach



**PLATE 14**  
The Priddy Circles.

to Salisbury Plain. Such nodules have been the subject of superstition for many years. They have often been called "thunderbolts" and nowadays are often brought to museums and appear in collections as fragments of meteorites. Their position in the pit marks them as having some significance, but what that was is unknown. There seem to be no records of similar finds from similar sites.

### DISCUSSION

Only one circle has been partially excavated and any conclusions based on these excavations can only be applied by analogy to the other circles. Nevertheless the topographical features of the circles are so similar and together they seem to be of unitary design that argument by analogy should be sound enough.

The fourth circle differs from the others by being incomplete and also by having within its perimeter three or perhaps four low round tumuli (T313A, 313, 314, 315,\* *Plate 14*). These have not been excavated but their arrangement suggests that they are secondary features.

The unitary layout of the circles suggests that there was once a fifth circle between circles 3 and 4. There is no evidence at all that there ever was such a circle but it must be noted that this is negative evidence. Actual excavation might prove that there was a fifth circle.

No close analogy with the form of bank structure in circle 1 is known from other sites. The closest comparison would be with the wall structure of the post-supported walls of the Neolithic house at site A at Knockadoon, Lough Gur, (O'Riordan, 1953) but there are considerable differences. The earthen long barrow of Fussell's Lodge (Ashbee, 1967) was supported by wooden posts and there was a wide berm between the quarry ditch and the timber uprights of the mound. But beyond these two points there are many major differences in the manner in which the timber was used.

The ditch at Priddy was just a quarry ditch and lies outside the bank. In the limited sections cut there was no evidence of the separate and confluent pit technique of digging. The smooth and regular profile of the undisturbed ditch of circle 4 suggests that in that circle the ditch was dug, as far as it was completed, as a continuous trench and so by analogy was that of circle 1. Complete proof either way is lacking.

When circle 1 was constructed certain earlier items were destroyed. On the evidence they were three stones set in holes and two had associated shallow basin shaped holes alongside. The holes of stone hole 1 and its associated basin seemed to have been marked with smaller stones, perhaps the original chock stones, rammed into the surface of the filling. The

---

\* The numbers refer to the U.B.S.S. catalogue of Mendip barrows.



sharpness of the edges of the holes shows that they were not allowed to fill up naturally but were filled deliberately. On the other hand the two stones at the west side of the causeway were just allowed to fall into the ditch when the sides of their holes were removed. There were too many stones in the ditch for them to be derived from the chockstones of stones 1 and 2. So perhaps there was originally a third stone here.

The pit on the causeway was too shallow to have held either a post or stone yet the mass of small stones set in clay suggest some form of upright once stood there. The dark earth disturbed by animals suggests the presence of some wooden object.

There is a total absence of any evidence of occupation.

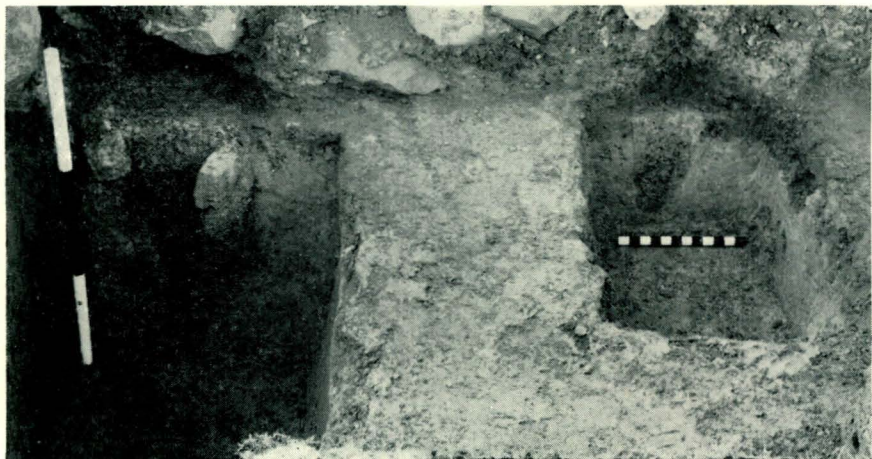
The important part of the monument is obviously the bank. Circle 1 is and, by analogy, the others are, henge monument(s) or meeting places for religious or other purposes (Kendrick 1932, Ch. 7, p. 83). As circles 1-3 each have a single entrance and circle 4 would have had one only they fall into Class 1 (Piggott, 1939, p. 140 and Atkinson, 1951, p. 82). But the Priddy Circles have their ditches outside their banks and so fall, in this respect, into the same sub-category as Stonehenge.

Now the term "henge" is a convenient archæological invention to describe certain types of prehistoric monuments. What functions were served by henges are a matter of surmise, unsusceptible of proof. In this paper it is assumed that henges were meeting places for purposes of tribal or communal nature.

A study of the literature on henges shows that though there is some degree of similarity amongst them each site has its own peculiarities. So much so that it is almost a general rule to say that each henge is unique in some respect or other.

The origin of henges has been discussed notably by Clark (1936) and Atkinson (1951). No satisfactory origin has been found though there is a general agreement, on present evidence, that they are of native (British) origin. Derivation of henges from a circular form of megalithic construction presents its own difficulties as Atkinson has demonstrated (1951, *Fig. 29*). At the same time megalithic structures associated directly with henges are quite common. Within Wessex Stonehenge itself and Avebury (e.g. Smith, 1966) are obvious examples. The Devil's Quoits (Grimes, 1960, Ch. IV), Arbor Low and the Ring of Brodgar all had megalithic features. The Sanctuary on Overton Hill, though not classed as a henge because it has no bank or ditch, had a structure of stone and wood in its various stages of development. Meini-Gwyr had stones against the bank on its inner side and there had been a pallisade of stones marking the two sides of the entrance.

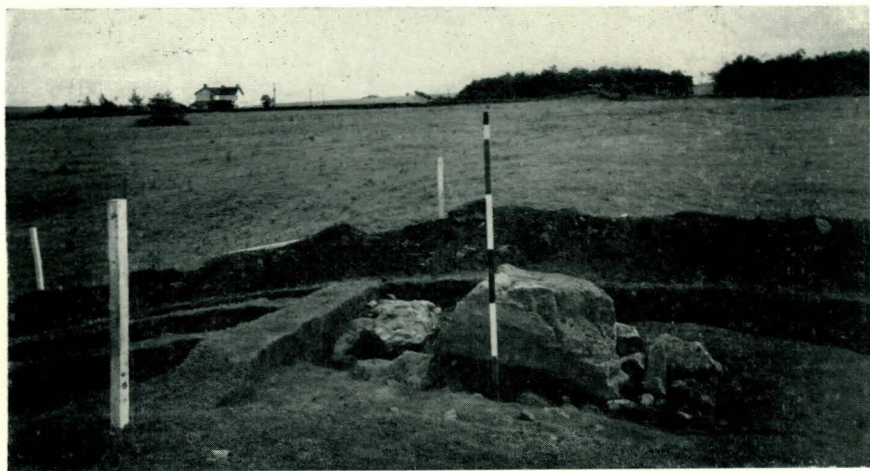
In north Somerset there are stone circles at Stanton Drew. Two of



**PLATE 15A**

*(Photograph: H. Taylor)*

Bank cutting 2. Posthole with chock stones and stake hole. Scales: feet and inches.



**PLATE 15B**

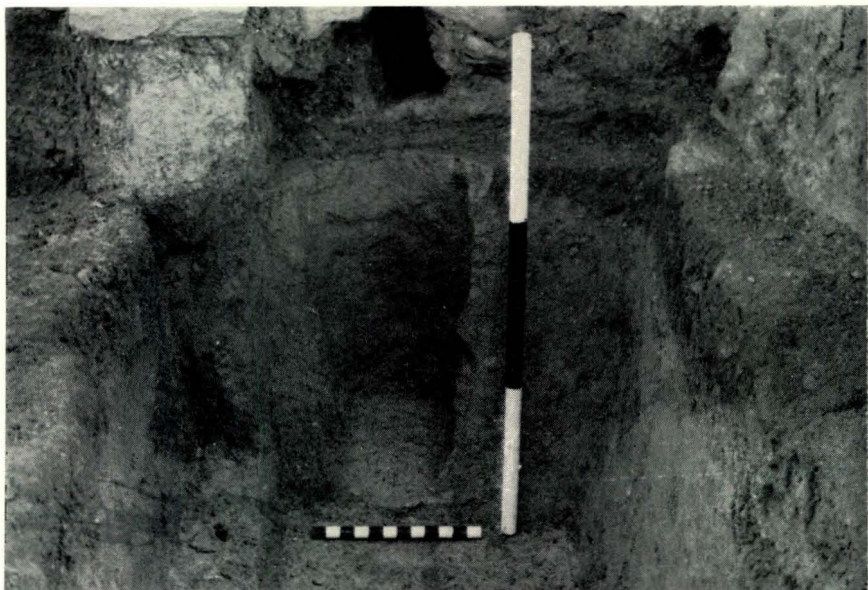
*(Photograph: H. Taylor)*

Bank cutting 3. Large stone on smaller stones. Tumorus, T316, in distance, right. Scale: feet.



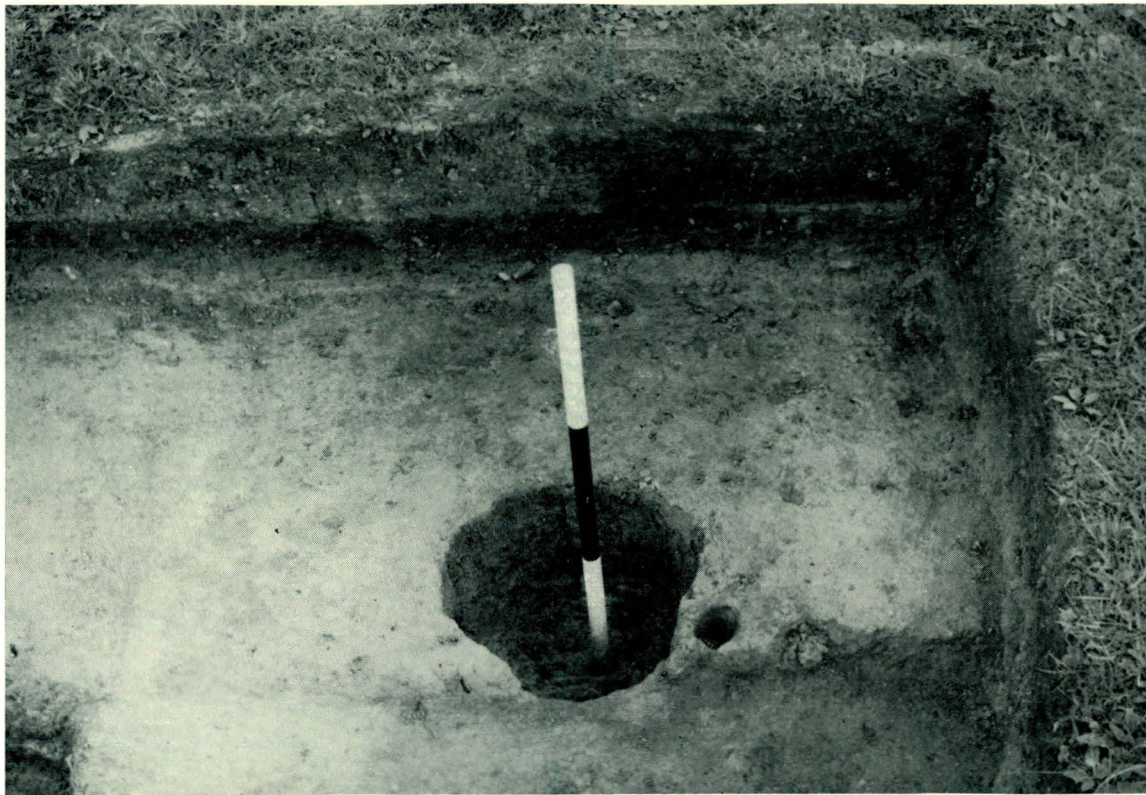
**PLATE 16A**  
A posthole partially excavated.

*(Photograph: H. Taylor)*



**PLATE 16B**  
The posthole fully excavated. Scales: feet and inches.

*(Photograph: H. Taylor)*



**PLATE 17**

*(Photograph: H. Taylor)*

Entrance, east side. Outer corner of bank. Posthole and hurdle stake hole.  
Spoil from posthole seen in background.



**PLATE 18**

*(Photograph: H. Taylor)*

Entrance excavations. Postholes and stake hole of eastern side inner series (foreground). Stone holes 1 and 2 back filled. Pit 1 in causeway partially excavated. Stump of stone core of bank west side of causeway (background). Scales: feet and inches.

them have each an avenue leading down to the bank of the river Chew. There have been no excavations there to test for the presence of a bank or ditch or for internal structures. Not far away was once another small stone circle (Dymond, 1896, p. 18, footnote) and there may have been another (Tratman, 1958). There is also the Rollright Circle in Oxfordshire. Henges have been shown to exist in Cornwall, Wales and the north of England which are generally in the stone circle areas. But the evidence linking stone circles to henges is tenuous and seems to link them to the secondary phase in class I and to the somewhat later class II. However banked stone circles (e.g. Druid's Circle, Pennaenmawr, (Griffiths, 1960, p. 205 ff.)) with or without an entrance would seem to provide one link between henges and stone circles though the relative dating would demand further investigation. Giot (1960) describes another twin banked stone circle at Er Lannic and claims that it is unique in Brittany and Europe, excluding Britain.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF HENGE MONUMENTS IN THE MENDIP ZONE

On the Mendips disc barrows are known. They are relatively few. At least two of them are known to have causeways across the ditches and so might be called henges. One is on Blackdown (T171, (Tratman, 1926), ST 484573) and the other on North Hill (T330, *Fig. 22*). Both are in close association with groups of round barrows. At Piney Sleight (T21 ST 475552), half mile from Gorsey Bigbury, is another small disc barrow with a causeway. A small excavation (Read, 1924, p. 135) in the centre yielded a tiny sherd of beaker pottery, that has survived the war, and a few sherds of other pottery, which, from the description, might have been Neolithic. Only excavation can prove if these are henge monuments so for the time they should be left in the category of disc barrows.

In the Mendip zone some 300 round barrows exist. Of these 22 are recorded as having ditches. The determination being by excavation in four cases and by surface features in the rest. Of this 22 there are 4 with causeways proved by excavation and 5 with causeways shown by surface features. As there has been very little satisfactory excavation of barrows in the Mendip zone for the past 50 years it may well be that a good number of other round barrows have ditches and some of these may also have causeways.

The henge monuments on Mendip are in general distributed on the lower lying ground of the general run of the Mendip plateau, though higher ground could have been utilised. All the Mendip henges are class I.

If one adds the Mendip examples of henges to Atkinson's list (see Table 1) and to his map, here *Fig. 26*, (after Atkinson, 1951, *Fig. 29*), it

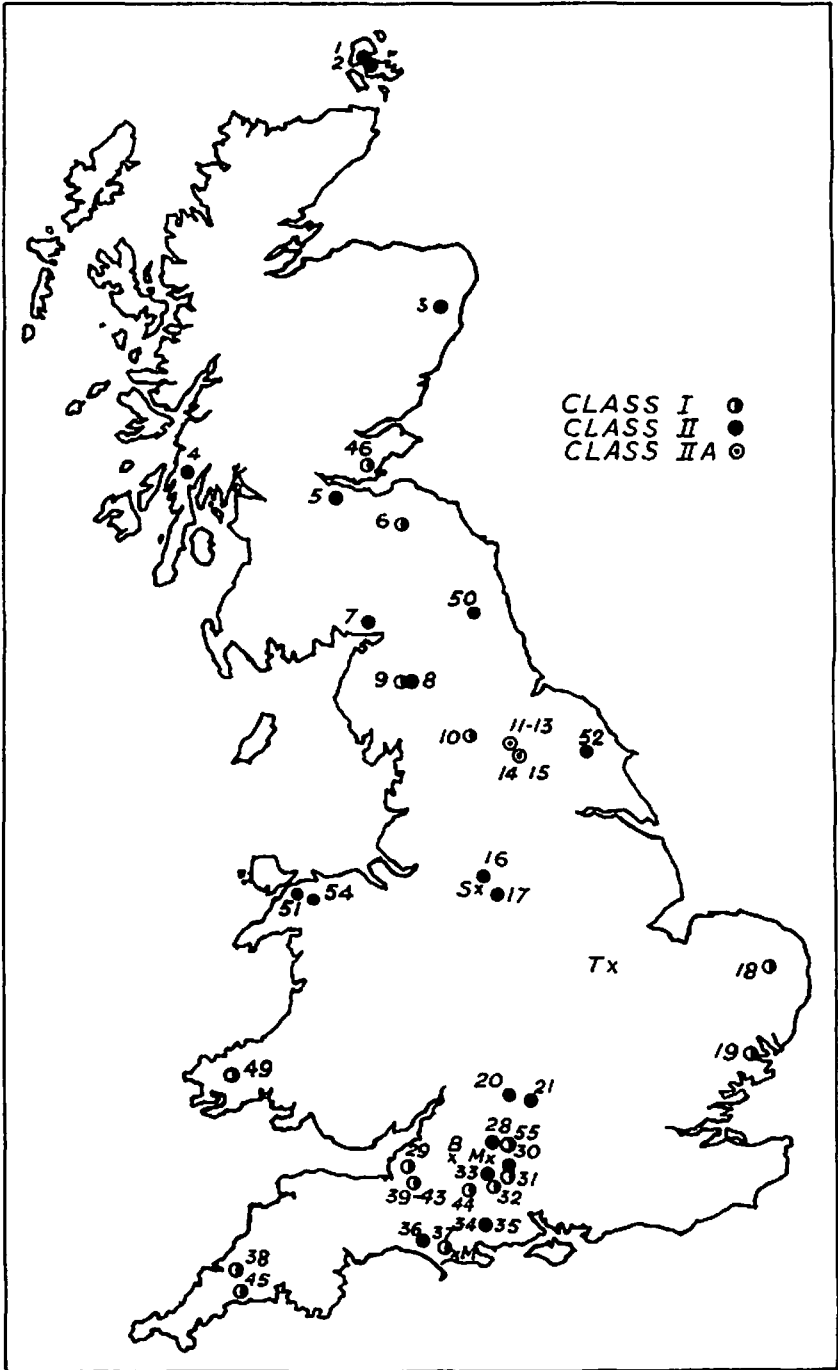


Fig. 26. Distribution of henge monuments. (After Atkinson, 1951).

becomes evident that there is a marked predominance of Class 1 in the Wessex area but allowance must be made for the intensive field work that has been done in so much of Wessex so that the map may, at least in part, represent this work and not the real distribution of henges.

The area distribution of henges, long barrows and stone circles is in part exemplified by *Fig. 21B*. It will be seen that in central and western Mendip there are only henge monuments (7-9). There are no stone circles or chambered long barrows.\* The chambered long barrows are 10, 12 and 13 and there are others to the east associated with the so-called Frome gap. There are no stone circles at all on the Mendips. On the other hand just to the north on Broadfield Down (*Fig. 21B*) there are no less than four long barrows or remains of them. Nos. 1, 2 and 4 are certainly chambered and 3 probably so. There was a stone circle at Leigh Down, 5, and there are three circles at Stanton Drew, 6.

No satisfactory excavations have been made in these long barrows and stone circles. Nothing is known of their date and cultural relationships save by inference. But the disparate distribution of these and the henges on central and western Mendip must surely have some significance.

After all on the Mendips with its abundant supply of stone suitable (cf. Broadfield Down) for making megalithic circles and chambered tombs one might expect them to be present. It is extremely unlikely that they would all have been totally destroyed. Their absence can be reasonably taken to imply that the people(s) with these ideas did not occupy western or central Mendip at all. On the other hand the Mendips were certainly well populated during the later phases of the Neolithic and so too, it seems from casual finds and the Chew Valley Lake Excavations (as yet unpublished), was much of the lowland surrounding Mendip.

#### SIZE, NUMBER, SPACING AND ORIENTATION

The Priddy Circles are much larger than any other henges in Class 1. They exceed even Mayburgh (385 ft. diam.). Even in class 11 they are exceeded only by the monuments of Durrington Walls, Avebury and Knowlton South and by the earthwork at Marden in the vale of Pewsey, if this work really is a henge (Stone, 1958, p. 92 and Grinsell, 1958, p. 93).

Class 1 monuments are usually single but concentric rings of varying form do occur but there does not seem to be any correlation between concentric rings within a single site and multiple rings as at Priddy. In class 1 there are three circles at Knowlton, though the north circle is a very doubtful henge. In class 11A there are three circles on Thornborough

---

\* The Priddy long barrow (T105, ST 514509) was partially excavated c. 1928. No report has been published. It was a long cairn with a single cremation pit burial. It is conceivable that the cairn lay on top of an earthen long barrow but the excavations failed to prove this.



Moor. So the Priddy circles are unique in being four in number in both classes of henges.

Another aspect of this problem is the number of henges within a given area. Multiplication of henges within a limited area would seem to imply the existence of numerous separate "religious" communities amongst a relatively scanty population if the functional use assumed for henges is correct. Therefore where several of one class occur within a limited area, but not as parts of a unitary whole, they might be expected to be successional in date. This has not yet been proved for any area. But where different classes occur in close proximity (e.g. Woodhenge and Durrington Walls, class 1 and 11 respectively) this difficulty does not arise for Atkinson (1951) has shown that class 11 are later than class 1.

There can only be speculation on the reasons for spacing where groups of henges occur as at Knowlton, Thornborough Moor and Priddy. The available evidence suggests that there was some significance attached to the spacing.

Atkinson (1951, p. 86 and *Fig. 28*) has claimed that in class 1 henges the orientation of the entrance in relation to the centre is random. However for the Mendips there is a predominance of a northerly orientation (N.N.W. to N.N.E.) in four sites out of six and the other two have their entrances at the opposite pole.

Too much should not be made of these features for there is plenty of room within a single idea for these variations in development of a site by various architects or even a single architect.

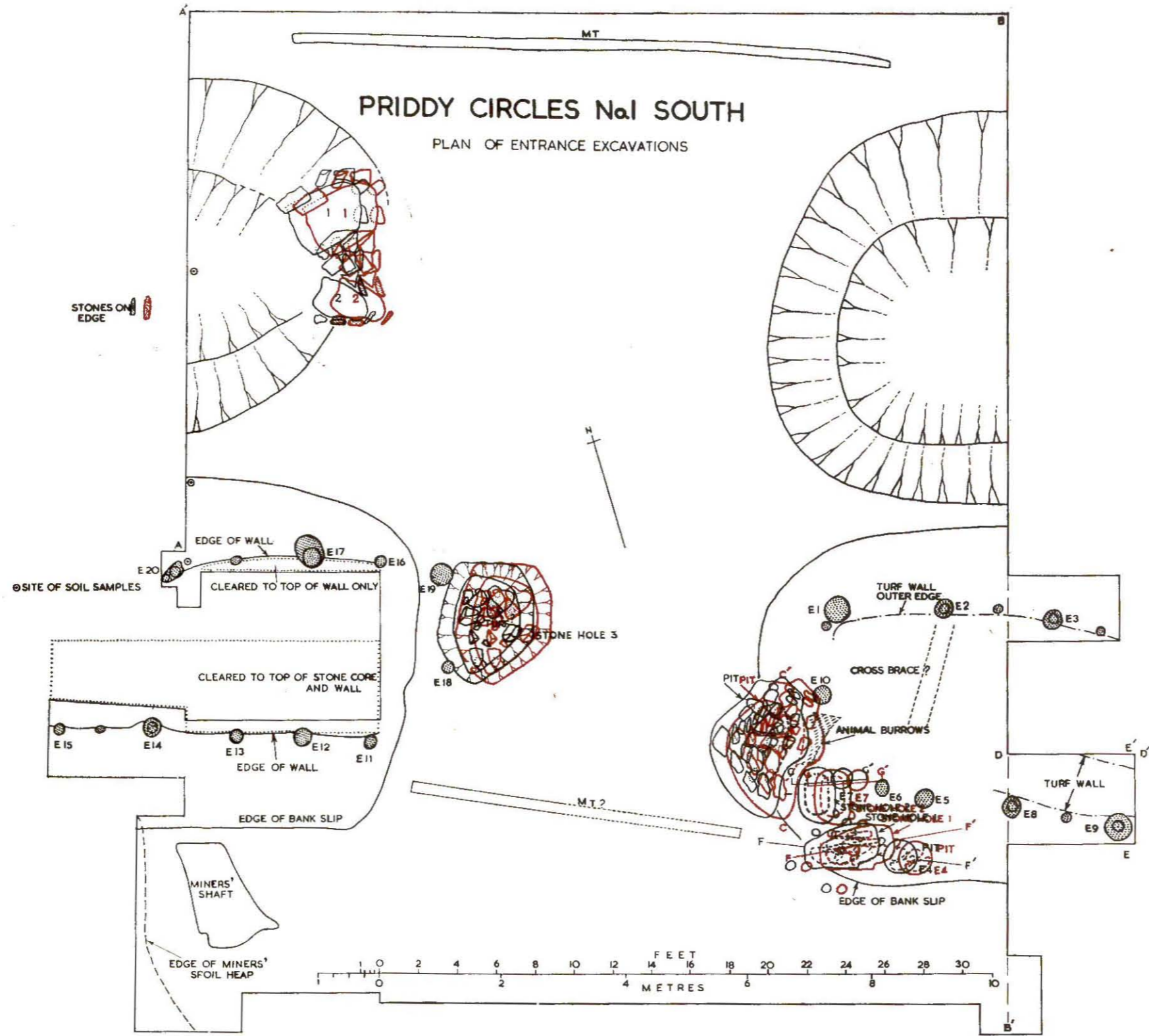
#### MATERIALS USED IN THE BANK

These were turf, earth, stones and timber. Where there were turf walls extra supplies beyond those obtained from the ditch site had been used. The source from which this extra turf was obtained is not known. The pollen analysis (Appendix 1) indicates that North Hill was the source of some earth and so perhaps also for the turf.

The earth content was derived from the ditch but possible supplementary material was obtained in limited amounts from elsewhere and may have been brought, with the supplementary stones, from North Hill.

The stones can only have been obtained by collecting them from the surface in and around the circle. The presence of abundant Old Red Sandstone pieces indicates that a considerable quantity was obtained from North Hill.

The timber presents a different problem. Insufficient remained to identify the type or types of tree(s) used. The average size of the posts was around 6-8 in. and there was no evidence of the use of split tree trunks. Wherever a core could be seen in the posthole filling it was round



**PLATE 19**  
Entrance excavations. Plan.

as *Fig. 24* and *Plate 19* show. The minimum length of a post was 5 ft. and was probably as much as 6 ft. The total number of posts used in circle 1 was estimated at about 320 and about the same number of stakes. On the basis of size of the posts it can be estimated that trees about 20 ft. tall were used. Each of these, on an average, would provide two posts and perhaps one stake. So in all a minimum of 160 trees would have had to be felled. If the structure is the same in the other circles then a total of 600-700 trees would have had to be felled, cut up, and brought to the site.

But in Appendix 1 it is shown that the area was grassland at the time the circle 1 was constructed so the timber had to come from elsewhere. The unpodzolized soils at Nordrach, 3 miles away, indicate where there was an adequate forest stand for the supply of timber (Appendix 3). The source of the material for the hurdles would be the same as that for the posts and stakes.

The labour force required must have been considerable but if the circles were constructed in sequence, as the incompleteness of circle 4 suggests, then the force would be smaller. After all the timber could be brought to the site by oxen used as draught animals and large quantities of earth and stones can be collected quite quickly by a labour force armed with nothing more than antler picks and ox shoulder blade shovels and wicker baskets for carrying material.

#### DITCH FILLING AND ENTRANCE, CIRCLE 1

The rate of accumulation of fill in the ditch has been shown to have been very rapid as far as the first 18-24 in. were concerned so that anything in the lower part of the filling can be considered as contemporary with the cutting of the ditch to within two or three years. The small accumulation of fill under some of the smaller stones in the ditch on the west side of the causeway indicates an interruption, perhaps by only a single rain storm, in the digging of that part of the ditch. Whereas the larger two stones lay directly on the ditch floor and could only have reached their position by digging away the stone and clay packing round the faces of the original stone holes towards the ditch and allowing the stones to fall, or to be pushed over. The material from all this was allowed to lie in the ditch.

The entrance, as defined by the postholes, (*Plate 19*) was funnel shaped. This is the case also with other henges of class 1.

The other holes in the entrance had been back filled immediately after the removal of their contents Stone hole 1 and its adjacent pit seemed to have been carefully marked. The position of these sites and their contents would have obstructed the entrance way. This, presumably, was

the reason for their removal. No such removal was applied to the stones at the ditch end as they did not obstruct the causeway.

#### LENGTH OF USE

Though there is evidence in circle 1 that rotted posts were occasionally replaced this need not indicate a period longer than, say, 20 years of use. There is also the fact that circle 4 was never completed. In the four cuttings made through the bank and ditch and in the entrance cutting also there was no evidence of action to restore the bank when once major collapse had begun. That would be when the hurdles, stakes and posts, in that general order, gave way. This would be within a couple of decades or less. But as Smith (1965, p. 17) has shown that collapse and even deliberate destruction of the ritual banks of the Windmill Hill site did not mean that the site had been abandoned. This could also be true for the Priddy Circles.

#### DATING

There are no dateable objects from circle 1 or from the other circles. The date of construction must be determined by reference to other henges dated by other means. The lack of finds is comparable with the paucity of finds from the first stages of other henges. The interior here as at other sites was kept scrupulously clear of domestic debris. The collection of stones for the bank is comparable with Mayborough site. In size and multiplicity there are no comparable sites in class 1 and this might indicate a somewhat late date in the henge sequence as the larger henges are in general the later class 11 group.

The ditch outside the bank and the general simplicity of structure and the absence of finds links the circles to Stonehenge phase I. The date for this structure has recently been revised by a C<sub>14</sub> date for an antler pick from the bottom of the ditch (Atkinson, 1967) as 2180 B.C. ± 105. The dating of the circles by this method is of course open to doubt but there is at present no other way of dating them. Such a date is in keeping with the C<sub>14</sub> dates for Windmill Hill (Smith 1960 and 1965, p. 28) and for finds from the Neolithic horizons in the Somerset Levels (Godwin, 1960 and Godwin and Dewar, 1963). The circles are thus of 2nd Neolithic date.

There is the complicating factor of the incomplete fourth circle. Something happened. All work stopped and was never renewed. Later, it is presumed, several round barrows were built inside the fourth circle. They are irregularly spaced. The nature of the happening can only be guessed. Perhaps Gorsey Bigbury to the north provides a clue. Here, at a class I henge, the excavators found no internal structures. There had

been some silting into the ditch\* before the bank was partially slighted and the stone so obtained was used to make a level platform in the ditch. On this was established an "A" Beaker occupation and two burials were put into part of the ditch (Jones 1938). The two posts at the entrance were rooted out (Tratman, 1966) and the holes back-filled. However the central area still seemed to be taboo as it yielded no finds.

In the case of Gorsey Bigbury the take-over implies a disregard of the original communal or religious purpose to serve which the monument was first constructed but the disregard was not total as the central area was left alone. All the same it is beginning to look as if the incoming "A" Beaker people changed the "religion" of the indigenous people but proof of this can hardly be forthcoming. It is suggested that this change at Gorsey Bigbury is mirrored by the incompleteness of circle 4. Is there perhaps, also, something here that is related to the final closure of the West Kennet Long Barrow (Piggott, 1962)? It is well to remember that in the Mendips, as elsewhere, the "A" Beaker people are later arrivals than the "B" people (e.g. ApSimon *et al.*, 1961).

#### 9. THE LOCAL ECOLOGY

Professor Dimbleby has shown (Appendix 3) that the area was under grass when the circles were built. There was no evidence of agriculture based on corn crops. The area is well supplied with water from the springs that rise round the foot of North Hill (*Fig. 22*) and the area, for the Mendip plateau is very well watered. The streams go underground on the limestone. All this would fit to a cattle raising economy.

Living sites, as indicated by surface finds, of Secondary Neolithic date are also shown (*Fig. 22*). No Neolithic burial sites are known though there are many round barrows, presumptively of Bronze Age date. It is possible that some of them cover Neolithic burials. Occupation of the area obviously continued into the later period.

Some woodland was still in existence to provide the posts and stakes for the circles' construction and general use. Such woodlands may have been confined to the valleys but Dr. Findlay (Appendix 3) has indicated that the unpodzolized soils of the Nordrach region a few miles to the north were probably tree covered at this time.

#### 10. CONCLUSIONS

The earlier structures on the entrance area of circle 1 comprised two standing stones and some other structure, perhaps another stone, at the ditch end on the west side of the causeway. Towards the interior just

---

\* The ditch at Gorsey Bigbury is cut in solid Carboniferous Limestone and a wide berm was left between the ditch and the bank. Silting would thus take place very much more slowly than at the Priddy Circles.

inside the future bank of the circle stood three stones: two had associated pits of unknown function. A fourth pit had held some other structure. The whole may have formed part of a stone circle with special features. If so then the centre of this circle was outside circle 1 in what is now extensively mined ground.

There was no means of dating the earlier structures.

The later structure consisted of the circle bank, which was supported by posts, stakes and hurdles to give vertical faces inside and out. There were considerable variations in the internal structure of the bank and this must have affected the height. There was a wide berm between the outer edge of the bank and the lip of the ditch. The berm was originally 9 ft. wide. The ditch was just a quarry ditch.

Some foreign material was brought to the site to help make up the bank but in the main the bank was composed of material available on the actual site. Most of the foreign material came from the nearby North Hill. Timber may have come from Nordrach.

There was an entrance to the north in circle 1 and the causeway between the ditch ends was composed of undisturbed soil. The entrance to circle 2 is placed in the same relative position as Circle 1 but circle 3 had the entrance at the opposite pole and so too, in all probability, had circle 4.

Circle 1 it is claimed is a henge monument class 1. The other circles are, by analogy, also claimed to be henge monuments class 1.

The circles are unusual in being four in number and in one line. They are exceptionally large for class 1 henges.

The fourth circle was never completed.

The ditch is outside the bank in each case and this allows a comparison to be made with Stonehenge 1 and on this comparison the date for the circles is regarded as being about 2180 B.C., that is within the Secondary Neolithic.

The circles remained in use for a comparatively short time and it is possible that their disuse and the failure to complete circle 4 was associated with the arrival of "A" Beaker people.

The economy of the people, it is suggested, was based on cattle rearing.

Two foreign objects, the nodules of marcasite were found in the filling of the earlier stone hole 3.

After the bank of circle 1 had collapsed a large stone was set up on smaller stones in a hollow scooped out of the bank slip. This cannot be dated.

In the Mendip zone there is a considerable overlap of the ideas represented by henges, long barrows and stone circles.

If henges are a native invention then the general distribution (*Fig. 26*) suggests that Wessex is their home. But class 1 henges are earlier than class 11 and on western and central Mendip there are six class 1 henges and no others. Nor in the same area are there any long barrows or stone circles. Perhaps, then, the Mendips are the place of origin of henges where the population never succumbed to the long barrow and stone circle ideas.

## KEY TO ALL SECTIONS

1. Turf and immediate subsoil. Present day.
2. Bank slip.
3. Primary turf layer (compressed).
4. Natural subsoil, undisturbed.
5. Turf lines in ditch silting.
- 6, 6A. Secondary silting of ditch.
7. Primary silting of ditch.
8. Worked clay.
9. Turf walls.
10. Spoil heap from post hole.
- 11, 11A. Earth of Bank. 11A contains recognizable pieces of turf.
12. Infilling of stone holes 1 and 2 and associated pits.
13. Soil filling over iron pan in causeway pit No. 1.
14. Iron pan in causeway pit No. 1.
15. Leached grey soil in base of causeway pit No. 1.

## APPENDIX 1

## POLLEN ANALYSIS

by Professor Dimbleby

A series of samples was submitted, extending from the base of the bank of circle No. 1 into the buried soil. The distribution of the more important pollen types is shown in *Fig. 27* and the complete counts are given in the table. Pollen was not found in countable quantities below the top 5 in. of the buried soil, and at all levels the quantity was small. This, together with the relatively high proportion of fern spores (*Dryopteris* type), which are resistant to decay, indicates a soil of considerable biological activity and only moderate acidity.

The pollen distribution in the buried soil is not adequate to give much information on vegetational changes prior to the construction of the circle, but it does indicate the contemporary condition. The countryside was quite open, possibly with a little persistent hazel (*Corylus*) scrub, and was clearly grassland. There is no good evidence of agriculture; the high values for ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa*) probably point to meadow or pasture. *Succisa* is commonly a plant of moist sites or heavy soils, but the absence of sedges (*Cyperaceae*) shows that if the site was damp it was not permanently so.

Although the tree and shrub pollen was so poorly represented that no statistical treatment was possible, the assemblage of species recorded was not at variance with a date in the Sub-boreal period. Beyond this it is not possible to go.

The two samples from the base of the bank show features which are not present in the buried soil—at any rate at the point sampled. In both samples numbers are low (showing that this is not topsoil material), and most of the groups present in the buried soil are also present in these samples, though in different relative proportions. In addition, however, there is a much greater representation of pollen of oak (*Quercus*), birch (*Betula*) and heather (*Calluna*), particularly in the upper of the two samples. This seems to indicate an influence of an acidophilic type of vegetation of heathy woodland. Such a type probably existed contemporarily on the nearby sandstone outcrop. The presence of Old Red Sandstone material in the make-up of the bank suggests that such a contamination could have occurred physically, so that the pollen assemblage could be partly derived from ditch material and partly from such extraneous introduction—it is perhaps significant that the acid soil of the sandstone outcrop would be proportionately richer in pollen than the limetone soil, especially if, as seems likely, the bank material at this point is from the deeper layers of the ditch. Consequently, a small admixture of the sandstone soil could have an effect out of proportion to its relative size.

# PRIDDY CIRCLES

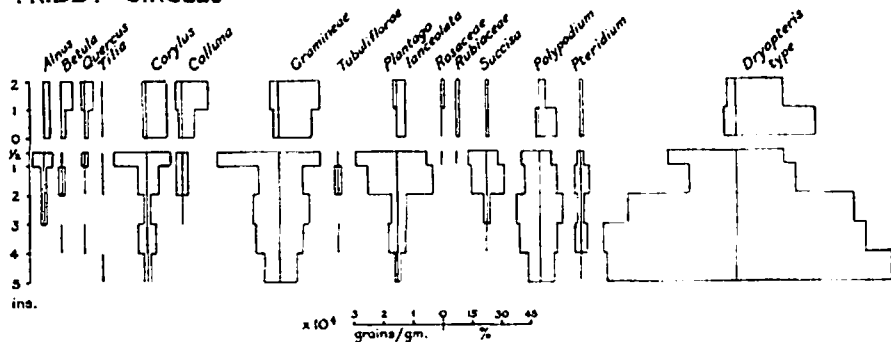


Fig. 27. Pollen Diagram.

Table  
POLLEN COUNTS

Depth (ins.)	-2	-1	$\frac{1}{2}$ -1	2	3	4	5
<i>Trees</i>							
Alnus	5	6	11	4	2	—	—
Betula	11	3	1	2	—	1	—
Pinus	—	+	—	—	—	—	—
Quercus	9	3	2	1	—	1	—
Tilia	1	1	+	1	—	—	1
Ulmus	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Shrubs</i>							
Corylus	21	24	29	13	3	10	4
Salix	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Calluna	29	15	6	6	1	—	—
<i>Grasses</i>							
Gramineae	43	37	53	26	34	32	18
<i>Herbs</i>							
Caryophyllaceae	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Compositae	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liguliflorae	2	—	1	—	—	—	—
Tubuliflorae	—	—	+	2	—	+	—
Cyperaceae	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leguminosae	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Linum Catharticum	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plantago Lanceolata	8	9	36	38	9	10	3
P. Major	—	—	—	—	1	1	—
Ranunculaceae	2	—	2	—	—	—	—
Rosaceae	2	1	1	—	—	—	—
Rubiaceae	3	2	1	—	—	—	—
Succisa	2	4	15	19	4	1	—
Urticaceae	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Varia	6	5	9	5	6	1	—
<i>Ferns</i>							
Botrychium	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Dryopteris type	50	94	60	62	142	172	169
Polypodium	7	20	15	20	29	25	17
Pteridium	3	5	3	8	2	6	1
Total	207	230	248	208	234	261	213
Dilution Factor	65	43	390	260	260	260	260

Note. The percentages in the figure are based on the total pollen and spore count. The absolute frequencies are obtained by multiplying the counts by the dilution factor for each sample.



Table 1  
HENGE MONUMENTS IN GREAT BRITAIN  
(Table after Atkinson, 1951. Numbering continued from Atkinson).

ADDITIONS TO CLASS I									
No.	NAME	GRID. REF.	DIAMETER FEET	BEARINGS OF ENTRANCES	INTERNAL STRUCTURES	POSITION OF BANK IN RELATION TO DITCH	EXCAVATIONS	CULTURE	REFERENCES
39	Priddy Circles, 1	ST539525	520	13°	None	Inside	Partial	?	<i>Proc.</i> (a) <i>Supra.</i> (b) 1957; 8; 7.
40	Priddy Circles, 2	ST540528	520	16°	—	Inside	—	?	(a), (b) <i>ibid.</i>
41	Priddy Circles, 3	ST541531	520 N-S	191°	—	Inside	—	?	(a), (b) <i>ibid.</i>
42	Priddy Circles, 4	ST542535	490 E-W	190° ?	—	Inside	Test borings	?	(a), (b) <i>ibid.</i>
43	Hunters Lodge	ST559498	154	350°	—	Outside	None	?	<i>Proc.</i> 1958; 8; 24. Cat. No. T239.
45	Castlewich	SX371685	250-260	S.S.W.	—	Outside	None	?	<i>Ant. J.</i> 1952; 32; 67.
46	Balfarg	NO281032	290	N.W.	2 stones	Outside	None	?	<i>Dorchester, Oxon,</i> 193, p. 105.
47	Condicote*	SP154288	c. 350	S.	—	Twin ditches	Partial	?	T.B.G. 1957; 76; 141-6.
49	Mcini-Gwyr	SN142267	120	W.	17 stones	No ditch	Partial	?	<i>Culture and Environ-</i> <i>ment</i> 1963; p. 141.
48B	Maxey, site 69*	TF126075	60	N.	None	Outside	Complete	1 sherd Mildenhall ware	<i>Ant.</i> 1967; Awaiting publication: Antiquity.
DOUBTFUL CLASS I									
44	Sutton Veney	ST885439	c. 200	S?	—	Outside	None	?	See p. 31.
55	Silk Hill	SU1947	?	?	—	Outside	None	?	<i>Wessex before the Celts.</i> 1958; p. 93.
ADDITIONS TO CLASS II AND IIA									
50	Coupland	NT940330	310	N. & S.	—	Outside	—	?	<i>Dorchester, Oxon.</i> 1951; p. 106.
51	Llandegai S.W.	SH592710	230	76° 25°	External pits	Inside	In progress	?	<i>Ant.</i> 1961; 35; 264. <i>Ant.</i> 1967; 41; 58.
52	Rudstone	TA097707	240	N.W.	Post holes	Outside	Partial	Late Neo.?	<i>Ant.</i> 1964; 38; 217/8.
48A	Maxey, Site 69*	TF126075	290 30 20	S.E. N. & E.	None	Twin ditches Twin Banks Outside	Complete	?	<i>Ant.</i> 1967; Awaiting publication: Antiquity.
DOUBTFUL CLASS II									
54	Llandegai N.E.	SH594712	300	264°, opposite entrance not confirmed	—	Inside	In progress	Fragment craig Llywd axe	<i>Ant.</i> 1961; 35; 264. <i>Ant.</i> 1967; 41; 58.

\* Not shown on Fig. 26.

## APPENDIX 2

## REPORT ON SOIL SAMPLE FROM PIT 1, ENTRANCE, CIRCLE 1

By R. L. JEFFRIES, B.Sc., Ph.D.

(This sample was from the basal "grey layer" which was thought by the excavator might be leached burnt bone from a cremation. E.K.T.)

The soil sample was grey buff in colour and contained numerous iron stains. It appeared to be heterogeneous in composition and crumbled easily.

The exchangeable calcium level in the sample was 10 mgm/10 grm over-dried soil while the exchangeable phosphate level was 16 mgm/P/PO<sub>4</sub>/10 grm oven-dried soil. A water extract of the sample gave a pH of 3.8. These figures are in keeping with data obtained from natural soils of similar pH.

Examination of the material under a binocular microscope yielded no evidence of any bone material and the low levels of calcium and phosphorus support this finding.

The sample appeared to have been "worked".

## APPENDIX 3

## A NOTE ON SOIL PROFILES EXPOSED AT PRIDDY CIRCLE NO. 1

By E. C. FINDLAY

As will be seen from the 1 inch soil map, Sheet 280 (Wells), the Circles lie within an area mapped as Priddy series, soils classed as peaty gleyed podzols. The development of this type of soil has been linked (Dimbleby 1962) with the clearance of forest by early man and the subsequent incursion by heath vegetation which appears to give rise to the horizon sequence characteristic of this class of soil. The diagnostic features are a thin rusty coloured horizon of iron accumulation, usually termed "iron pan", overlain by a dull, olive or ashy coloured layer and a humose or peaty top soil. The sections at Priddy Circle No. 1 were examined in the light of this background.

At a number of sites where sections were cut the old land surface was exposed beneath the bank. Examination of the buried soil showed a dark grey layer about 4 in. thick having a weakly laminated structure and containing abundant bleached chert. Immediately below this there were, in some sections, fragments of rusty concretionary material, underlain by about 4 in. of strong brown friable silt loam. The succeeding layer, 6 in. deep, was a pale brown silt loam and passed rather abruptly into yellowish red tough silty clay containing much chert (often silicified crinoid stems, indicating origin by solution from Carboniferous Limestone). The last two layers are characteristic of Mendip plateau soils, including the unpodzolized Nordrach series, but the overlying layers are not altogether typical of the Priddy series. The buried top soil was not highly humose, analysis confirmed organic carbon levels of 0.8 to 1.6 per cent compared with 6.5 to 15.5 per cent in described soil pits and there was no distinct bleached layer so distinctive of undisturbed podzolized soils. The concretionary rusty iron deposits might be interpreted as a discontinuous or disrupted iron pan but the underlying strong brown horizon is a more reliable indication of some podzolization having taken place, and was noted in more than one section even where pan-like fragments were absent.

No features of podzolization were to be found in the recent top soil developed on the bank although on normal flat sites in the surrounding fields, in places within the Circles, and particularly on the original entrance causeway to the Circle, a thin iron pan and humose top soil were to be found. It might be supposed that the disturbing influence of rabbits in the banks which are favourite sites for warrens has inhibited any tendency to podzolization, likewise grazing stock favour raised sites and banks and their activity may have further limited the development of a continuous cover of heath vegetation. On the other hand, run-off alone may account for less leaching on the bank sites.

Turning to features revealed in the ditch sections considerable variation was found. At the first site examined (cutting 2) a dark, humose top soil overlay a moderately well developed iron pan within the primary silting. At cutting No. 1 there was a very distinct pan developed at a very irregular depth, the overlying soil showing obvious indications of waterlogging by its greenish grey colour and rusty mottling. At a third site, in the ditch immediately adjacent to the entrance causeway, there was no pan developed but about 14 in. of dark grey to black humose soil overlay light grey to grey brown mottled silty clay containing darker layers of humus accumulation. The original floor of the ditch was cut in the tough silty clay subsoil and the first 6 in. or so of this material was grey brown, merging downwards into the natural reddish yellow colour. The indications

here were of prolonged waterlogging as might be expected in this situation where water collecting in the ditch would pond against the entrance causeway, downward percolations being restricted by the considerable thickness of silty clay.

In the southern sectors of the Circle no indications of wetness were to be found in the ditch accumulation for here the limestone is at relatively shallow depth, even out-cropping in places, and just outside the ditch on the south east there is a swallet hole into which drainage water could make its way.

#### Discussion

Events subsequent to construction of the Circle and its abandonment seem to have followed rather different courses dependent on a variety of local site conditions. Over the area in general the development of a thin iron pan type of soil has gone on for at least part of the time and in South Wales there is evidence for a reincursion of heath vegetation in Medieval times (Crampton and Webley 1964). The podzolization process seems to have been initiated previous to construction either under an earlier heathland phase or more likely under woodland for a distinct iron pan was not seen in the buried soil and the pollen analysis did not record appreciable amounts of ericaceous species.

Whereas no podzolization seems to have taken place on the banks of the Circle, nor in the ditch where limestone lies at shallow depth, there is good evidence of thin iron pan development in the entrance where traffic had trodden the original soil down to the clay subsoil, necessitating some cobbling. In sites receiving more than normal amounts of drainage waters, i.e., in most of the ditch, thin iron pans have developed strongly, to the extent where they have restricted further downward drainage of water. Such advanced development is usually seen only in wetter and colder upland sites of Wales and Scotland. In the particular instance of the ditch near the entrance where both lateral and downward movement of drainage water was limited a peaty gley type of soil developed and no thin iron pan formation was possible.

#### REFERENCES

- Ant.* = *Antiquity*  
*Ant. J.* = *Antiquaries Journal*  
*Arch.* = *Archaeologia*  
*P.P.S.* = *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*  
*Proc.* = *Proceedings, University of Bristol Spelæological Society*  
*T.B.G.* = *Transaction Bristol and Gloucestershire Arch. Soc.*
- ALCROFT, A., 1908, *Earthwork of England*. MacMillan, London.  
 APSIMON, A. M., 1951, "Gorsey Bigbury. The Second Report." *Proc.* 6: 186-199.  
 APSIMON, A. M., DONOVAN, D. T., and TAYLOR, H., 1961, "The Stratigraphy and Archaeology of the Late-Glacial and Post-Glacial Deposits at Brean Down, Somerset" *Proc.* 9: 67-136.  
 ASHBEE, PAUL, 1966, "The Fussell's Lodge Long Barrow Excavations 1957". *Arch.* 100, 1-80.  
 ATKINSON, R. J. C., 1951, *Excavations at Dorchester, Oxon*. Dept. of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.  
 — — 1956, *Stonehenge*. Hamish Hamilton, London.  
 — — 1967, "Further Radiocarbon Dates for Stonehenge". *Ant.* 41, 63.  
 CLARKE, J. G. D., 1936, "The Timber Monument of Armingham and its Affinities". *P.P.S.* 2, 1-51.  
 — — 1954, "Excavations at Dorchester, Oxon" (Review). *Ant. J.* 34, 91.  
 COPLEY, C. J., 1958, *An Archaeology of South-East England*. Phoenix House, London.  
 CRAMPTON, C. B., and WEBLEY, D. P., 1964, "Preliminary Studies of the Historic Succession of Plants and Soils on Selected Archaeological Sites in S. Wales". *Bull. Brd. Celtic Stud.* 20, 440-449.  
 CUNNINGTON, B. H., 1929, *Woodhenge*. George Simpson, Devizes.  
 DEWAR, H. S. L., and Godwin, H. 1963, "Archaeological Discoveries in the Raised Bogs of the Somerset Levels". *P.P.S.* 29, 17-49.  
 DIMBLEBY, G. W., 1962, *The Development of British Heathlands and their Soils*. Oxford Forest Memoirs No. 23, Clarendon Press, Oxford.  
 DYMOND, G. W., 1896, *Stanton Drew, Somerset*. Privately printed.  
 FOX, Lady A., 1952, "The Castlewich Ringwork. A New Henge Monument in S.E. Cornwall". *Ant. J.* 32, 67-71.  
 GIOT, P. R., 1960, *Brittany*. Thames and Hudson, London.

- GODWIN, H., 1960, "Prehistoric Wooden Trackways of the Somerset Levels; their Construction, Age and Relation to Climate Change". *P.P.S.* 26, 1-36.
- GRIFFITHS, W. E., 1960, "The Excavation of Stone Circles near Penmaenmawr, North Wales". *P.P.S.* 26, 303-339.
- GRIMES, W. F., 1960, *Excavations of Defence Sites*. H.M.S.O.
- — 1963, *Culture and Environment*, (Ch. 5). Routledge and Keegan Paul, London.
- GRINSELL, L. V., 1958, *The Archaeology of Wessex*. Methuen, London.
- HOULDER, C., 1967, "The Henge Monuments of Llandegai". *Ant.* 41, 58.
- JONES, S. J., *et al.*, 1938, "The Excavation of Gorsey Bigbury". *Proc.* 5, 3-55.
- KENDRICK, T. D., and HAWKES, C. F. C., 1932, *Archaeology in England and Wales, 1914-1931*. Methuen, London.
- MCINNES, ISLA, J., 1964, "A Class II Henge in E. Riding of Yorkshire". *Ant.* 38, 218.
- O'RIORDAIN, SEAN, P., 1953, "Lough Gur Excavations. Neolithic and Bronze Age Houses of Knockadoon." *P. Roy. Irish Acad.* 56C, 297-460.
- PIGGOTT, S., 1954, *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles*. Camb. Univ. Press.
- — 1962, *The West Kennett Long Barrow*. H.M.S.O.
- PIGGOTT, S., and C. M., 1939, "Stone and Earth Circles in Dorset". *Ant.* 13, 138-158.
- READ, R. F., [1926], "Second Report on the Mendip Barrows". *Proc.* 2, 132-146.
- ST. JOSEPH, J. K. S., 1961, "Air Reconnaissance in Wales". *Ant.* 35, 264.
- — 1964, "Air Reconnaissance. Recent Results". *Ant.* 38, 217.
- SIMPSON, G., 1967, "Awaiting publication: Antiquity".
- SMITH, ISOBEL, 1960, "Radio-Carbon Dates from Windmill Hill". *Ant.* 34, 312.
- — 1965, *Windmill Hill and Avebury. Excavations by Alexander Keiller. 1925-1939*. Oxford.
- STONE, J. F. S., 1938, "An Early Bronze Age Grave in Fargo Plantation". *Wilts. Arch. Mag.* 48, 357-70.
- — 1958, *Wessex before the Celts*. Thames & Hudson, London.
- STONE, J. F. S., PIGGOTT, S., and BOOTH, A. ST. J., 1954, "Durrington Walls, Wiltshire". *Ant. J.* 34, 156-174.
- TAYLOR, C., and TRATMAN, E. K., 1957, "The Priddy Circles". *Proc.* 8, 7-17.
- TRATMAN, E. K., [1926], "Field Work". *Proc.* 2, 274-289.
- — 1927, "Field Work". *Proc.* 3, 25-40.
- — 1938, "Field Work". *Proc.* 5, 80-86.
- — 1958a, "The lost Stone Circles of North Somerset". *Proc.* 8, 110-118.
- — 1958b, "Another Henge Monument on Mendip". *Proc.* 8, 124.
- — 1966, "Gorsey Bigbury. The Third Report". *Proc.* 11, 25-30.