

Large Barrows in Old Down  
field. West Cranmore Church is the  
back ground.

View from  
the  
Ploughed  
field  
to  
the  
Barrows  
from  
the  
High  
Road  
to  
Beacons  
Hill

52 Two large Barrows in Old down field west Cranmore Church  
in the back ground and the British trackway from  
Chester blade to Beacon hill turning between them

# Some Rare Types of Round Barrow on Mendip

BY L. V. GRINSELL

## INTRODUCTION.

THE scenery between Weston-super-Mare and Frome is dominated by the range of old red sandstone and carboniferous limestone hills, about 30 miles long and 4 miles wide, commonly known as Mendip, and over these hills are scattered some 320 barrows. Perhaps less than half this number are marked on the present 6" O.S. maps, the remainder having been found within the last thirty years by Mr. A. T. Wicks, members of the Bristol University Spelaeological Society, and other field-workers.

Of the total number, about six are considered to be of the long type, and have been mapped and listed with bibliographical references in the O.S. *Map of Neolithic Wessex* and its accompanying letterpress.

The present paper is concerned with those round barrows which do not appear to be of the usual bowl-shaped variety but correspond more or less closely to the bell, disc, or other rare types (Fig. 1).

## RARE TYPES OF ROUND BARROW GENERALLY.

A normal *bell-barrow* may be defined as a round barrow having a more or less clearly marked ledge or platform between the mound and the ditch (Fig. 1, A). Barrows of this type are fairly common on the chalk downs of Wessex. Occasionally the platform stands above the ground level (Fig. 1, B), and when this is so, the barrow can be recognized as of bell shape even if the surrounding ditch has been obliterated, if it ever existed. A Mendip example with raised berm is at Beacon Batch on 6" O.S. 18 S.W.

Normally the bell-barrow has no bank outside the ditch, but when this feature is present and the central mound is not very

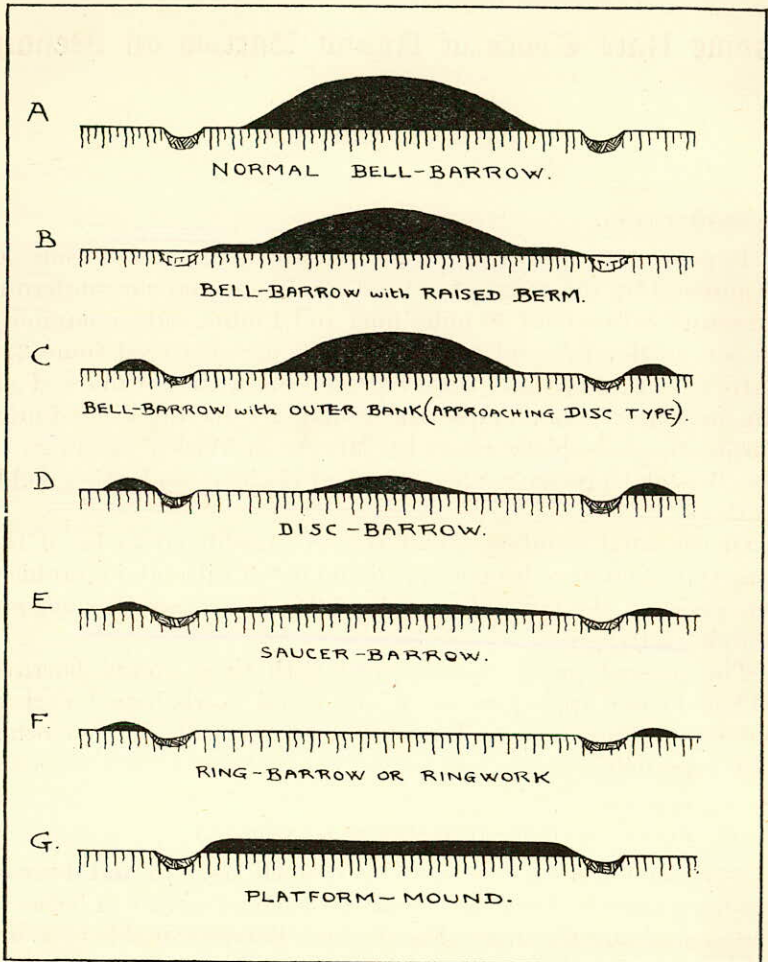


FIG 1.      RARE TYPES OF ROUND BARROW.

large, the barrow can be classed as either a bell-barrow with a small mound, or a disc-barrow with a large mound (Fig. 1, C), or, perhaps better still, intermediate between bell and disc types.

All the bell-barrows so far opened with result have been shown to belong to the Early or Middle Bronze Age.

A *disc-barrow* has a smaller mound than a bell-barrow, the earth from the surrounding ditch having been placed on the outside thereof to form a bank, and not, as in most bell-barrows, used to increase the size of the mound (Fig. 1, D). Some disc-barrows have two, or even three, small mounds placed on the central area. All normal disc-barrows have a well-formed bank on the outer rim of the ditch.

All or nearly all of the disc-barrows so far opened with result have been shown to have been constructed during the Middle Bronze Age. The earliest disc-barrows were probably later than the earliest bell-barrows, because the disc-barrow seems to have developed from the bell-barrow; but it is believed that the two types flourished in the same period, as they are very often found together.

A *saucer-barrow* differs from a disc-barrow in that the area enclosed by the circular ditch is entirely covered by a very low mound, not more than a foot or two high. There is thus no platform between the mound and the ditch (Fig. 1, E). The type has not yet been studied exhaustively, but it is almost certain that it flourished during the Early and perhaps the Middle Bronze Age.

A *ring-barrow*, or (preferably) *ringwork*, resembles a disc-barrow with no central mound (Fig. 1, F). Sometimes the central area is enclosed in a bank with outer ditch (the reverse of the plan of the normal disc-barrow). Ringworks of this kind should not be called barrows unless excavation reveals a burial of early date in the centre. They may have been constructed for a variety of purposes. When the circles are very large (as at Priddy) they are generally called *earthen circles*.

A *platform-barrow* (so-called) is really a bowl-barrow with a perfectly flat top (Fig. 1, G). This name has sometimes been applied to very flat circular mounds which may not be barrows (see my *Ancient Burial-Mounds of England*, 1936, 27). Not infrequently the name has been mistakenly applied to truncated bowl-barrows.

## EXAMPLES ON MENDIP.

Abbreviations used.

*Proc. B.U.S.S.* = *Proceedings of the Bristol University Spelaeological Society.*T (followed by  
a number) = The number of the barrow as listed in  
*Proc. B.U.S.S.*

6" O.S. 18 S.W.

**Beacon Batch Bell-barrow, T. 176.** (Fig. 2)*Parish* : Burrington. *Lat.* 51° 18'39".*Soil* : Old Red Sandstone. *Long.* 2° 44'14"W.

The mound stands on a platform raised about 1 ft. above the level of the surrounding ground. On the north-west sector a slight ditch is rendered visible by the presence of reeds growing therein ; it is evidently moist or waterlogged in wet weather. A ditch is barely visible around the rest of the circumference of this example. The barrow is the easternmost member of the group at Beacon Batch. See *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iii, 32-3.

6" O.S. 18 S.W.

**Beacon Batch Barrow, T. 171.***Parish* : Burrington. *Lat.* 51° 18'43".*Soil* : Old Red Sandstone. *Long.* 2° 44'25"W.

This is described as a disc-barrow in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iii, 32-3 ; but in the writer's opinion it is not a disc-barrow but a large truncated bowl-barrow.

6" O.S. 18 S.W.

**Gorsey Bigbury, T. 186.***Parish* : Charterhouse. *Lat.* 51° 17'57"*Soil* : Carboniferous Limestone. *Long.* 2° 44'22"W.

This is likewise not a disc-barrow as stated in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iii, 32-36. If it is a barrow at all, it is a ring-barrow as there is no mound on the central area ; but it is doubtful whether the primary purpose of this fine circle was sepulchral. The

site has been thoroughly excavated by the B.U.S.S., which has published a preliminary report in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iv, 174-8, and a detailed report in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, v, 3-56.

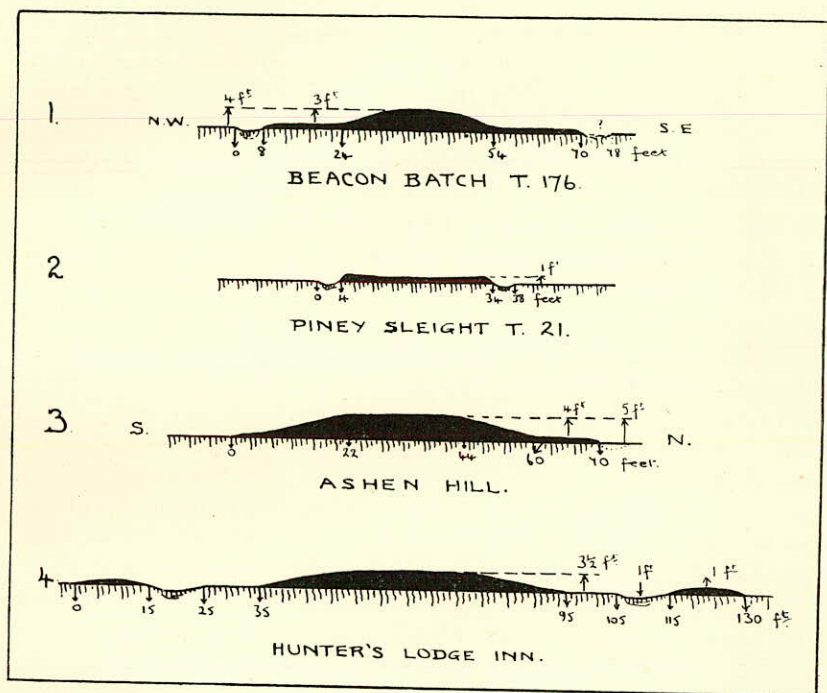


FIG. 2. SECTIONS OF BARROWS.

6" O.S. 18 S.W.

**Piney Sleight, T. 21.** (Fig. 2)

Parish: Cheddar.

Lat. 51° 17'38".

Soil: Carboniferous Limestone. Long. 2° 45'05"W.

This is described in error as a disc-barrow in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iii, 31. It is a small platform-shaped mound with a slight depression in the centre, and is surrounded by a slight ditch. It was excavated by the B.U.S.S., which found no evidence that the mound was ever intended to contain a burial (*Proc. B.U.S.S.*, ii, 135-6).

6" O.S. 18 S.E.

**Compton Martin, T. 143.** *Probable Bell-barrow.* (Fig. 3)*Parish* : Compton Martin. *Lat.* 51° 17'17".*Soil* : Carboniferous Limestone. *Long.* 2° 40'41"W.

South of the road between Charterhouse and the Castle of Comfort Inn, a long mile south-east of Nordrach-on-Mendip, is a row of four large round barrows, with a possible fifth example, much smaller, in the centre of the group. The second barrow from the east appears to be of the bell shape, as stated in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iii, 31-32. There is however some doubt whether it is a true bell-barrow because the ditch around it is very irregular, and may be the remains of comparatively modern lead workings of which there is abundant evidence in the immediate vicinity. On the other hand the irregularity of the ditch may well be due to the rocky nature of the subsoil (see notes on Westbury Beacon below). The mound has been very much mutilated. The platform or berm is about 45 ft. wide on the east, but is almost invisible on the north-west of the mound.

According to my measurements, the ditch and berm are much wider than was stated in *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, iii, 31-2. In this account it is also stated that the central mound was encircled by a low narrow bank outside of which are the berm and ditch. My own impression is that this low narrow bank, which is visible around only a small part of the mound, may not as such form a part of the original structure of the barrow. Possibly it is where the mound has been mutilated. The point is of some importance because it is further stated (*loc. cit.*) that the barrow is 'of the type commonly described as Roman', and it is within about 200 yards of the supposed course of a Roman road.<sup>1</sup>

The bad condition of the site renders identification difficult, but it is probably a mutilated bell-barrow of the Early or Middle Bronze Age.

6" O.S. 27 S.E.

**Westbury Beacon Bell-barrow, T. 102.** (Fig. 3)*Parish* : Westbury. *Lat.* 51° 15'11".*Soil* : Carboniferous Limestone. *Long.* 2° 42'58"W.

<sup>1</sup> A possible Roman date for this barrow is also stated in *Antiquity*, i, 347.

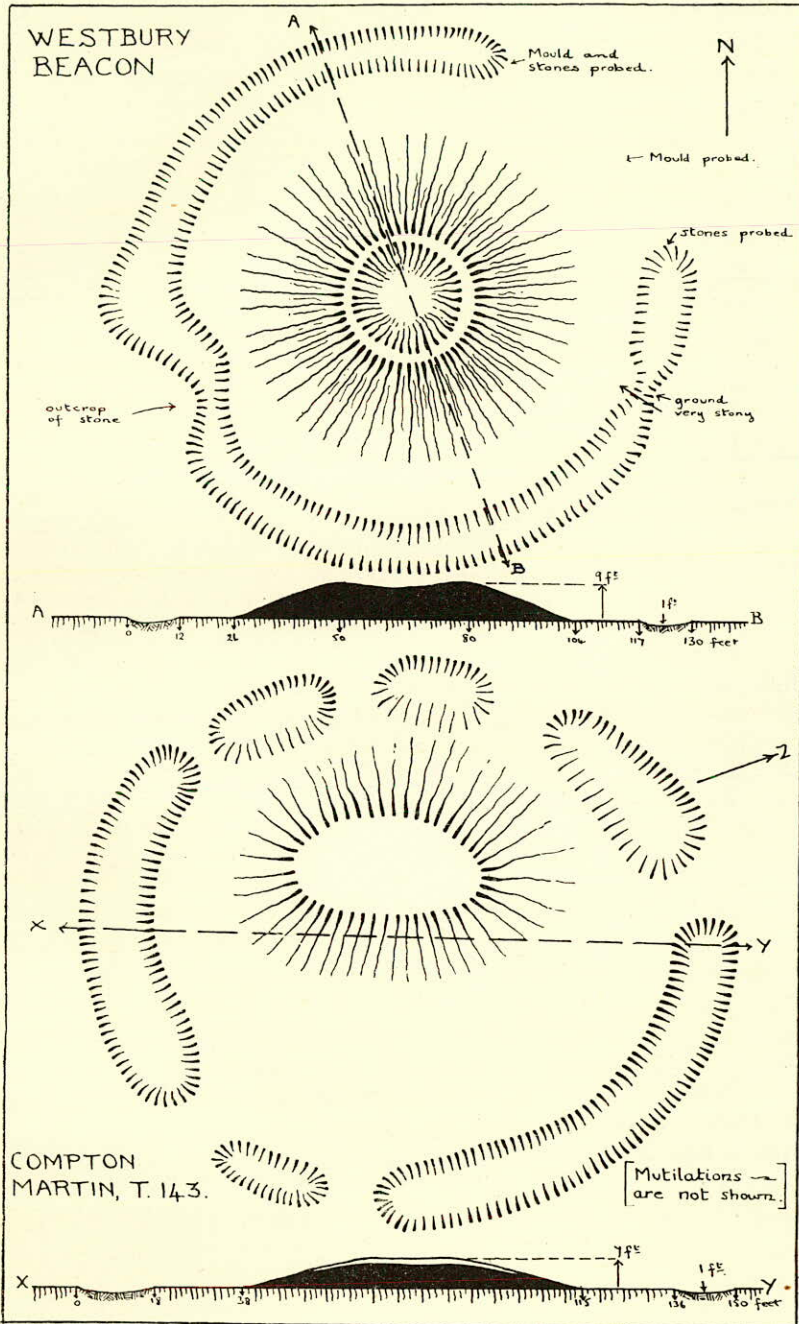


FIG. 3. BELL-BARROWS ON CARBONIFEROUS LIMESTONE.



This is undoubtedly a bell-barrow. The ditch is somewhat irregular, but this is due, at any rate on the west side, to an outcrop of rock which was evidently too much trouble for the barrow-builders to remove. The ditch is also interrupted on N.E., where probing shows the ground to be rather stony. The ditch is very well formed round the south-eastern segment. There is a slight suggestion of outer bank in places. The mound has a large cavity in the top.

The following references to this site are from the Skinner Mss.,—*Brit. Mus., Add. Mss.*, 33648 (1814–5), fol. 159 :

‘ A person came to us whilst we were examining the Barrows, and said, about twenty years since, whilst he and another labourer were taking stones from a high hillock, called Beacon Barrow, he found in a kind of Stone Cist, a number of brazen spearheads and weapons, which he described to be somewhat of the shape I have here represented them ; there were from 12 to 20 of them ; all in good preservation, and he sold them to a person at Westbury, a Farmer Bull, for two gallons of Cyder. The barrow wherein these weapons were found is about a mile and a half to the N.W. of Priddy, and standing on an elevated situation, commands a view of the Welsh hills, and as its name imports, was originally employed for the purpose of carrying signals.’

*Brit. Mus., Add. Mss.*, 33655 (1820), fol. 298b :

‘ This Tumulus, which is hollowed out on the summit, for the purpose of piling up the wood for the Beacon, measures about 60 paces in circuit, and about 12 feet in height ; upwards of 24 years ago, some brazen spear heads, and other weapons, to the amount of a dozen or more, were found by a labourer whilst taking stones from this Barrow, and sold to a Farmer at Westbury for two gallons of Cyder.’

*Ditto*, fol. 307 (b) and 308 (a) : drawings of Westbury Beacon barrow. Both drawings are poorly executed but show the berm between the mound and ditch. According to Skinner’s drawings of the ‘ Brazen spear-heads ’, they were quite unlike any recognized types of Bronze Age implement. See also *Proc. B.U.S.S.*, ii, 285–6 ; *Arch. Journ.*, xvi, 153.

6" O.S. 28 N.W.

**Ashen Hill Group (one of).** (Fig. 2)

*Parish* : Chewton Mendip.

*Lat.* 51° 15'55".

*Soil* : Old Red Sandstone.

*Long.* 2° 39'39"W.

The Ashen Hill group is composed of eight large, round barrows arranged roughly in a line from west to east, and the fourth from the west approaches the bell shape, but is a poor example of the type. No surrounding ditch is visible, but there is a berm or platform around the northern sector of the mound, and this platform stands about a foot higher than the level of the surrounding ground.

This barrow appears to have been opened by Skinner who failed to find any burial (*Brit. Mus., Add. Mss.*, 33648, 1814-5, fol. 126, tumulus No. 5, and drawing on fol. 143). Skinner's account refers to the group as the Priddy Nine Barrows, which are one-third of a mile south, but a study of all the evidence, including his drawing on fol. 143, makes it reasonably clear that Skinner was referring to the Ashen Hill group. The writer is indebted to Mr. A. T. Wicks for drawing his attention to this snare in the Skinner Mss.

This barrow was also opened in 1894 by members of the Wells Natural History and Archæological Society led by Mr. H. E. Balch, who found four burnt interments and some worked flint flakes, and in the material of the mound was found a well-worked barbed and tanged flint arrow-head, now in the Wells Museum.<sup>1</sup>

See *Reports of Wells N.H. and A. Soc.*, 1895, p. 7 ; 1896, p. 5.

The seventh barrow from the west in this group also has a suggestion of a very narrow berm on the north segment, but is a poorer example even than that just described.

6" O.S. 28 S.W.

**Hunter's Lodge Inn, Barrow.** (Fig. 2)

*Parish* : Wells (St. Cuthbert Out Ph.) *Lat.* 51° 14'52".

*Soil* : Carboniferous Limestone. *Long.* 2° 37'55"W.

This very fine example is intermediate in type between bell and disc. It is situated half a mile east of the Hunter's Lodge Inn, and 200 yards north of the road between Hunter's Lodge

<sup>1</sup> The arrow-head, Mr. Balch writes, was definitely *in* the structure of the barrow, depth about 18 in. It was in the side of the trench, and only seen during the filling-in. It was probably dropped during the construction of the barrow, but it may, on the other hand, have been brought up in a bucket when the filling-in was in progress.

Inn and Green Ore. Unfortunately this originally beautiful barrow has been badly damaged, especially on the east side, by lead-working pits. A slight excavation in one of these pits was done early this century, but nothing concerning the barrow was elicited. See *Report of Mendip Nature Research Ctee.*, 1909, p. 18; *Report of Wells Natural Hist. and Arch. Soc.*, 1911, p. 44. The 1914 report of the latter society records the finding of a quantity of charcoal on the west side of the barrow in April 1914, among material thrown out by rabbits. This barrow is figured on p. 528 of A. H. Allcroft's *Earthwork of England*.

6" O.S. 42 S.W.

**West Cranmore 3.**<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 4)

*Parish* : West Cranmore.

*Lat.* 51° 10'56".

*Soil* : Inferior Oolite.

*Long.* 2° 29'21"W.

This is the westernmost of three barrows just north of the railway line half a mile west of Cranmore station. It is a bell barrow, with ditch and outer bank, but the latter are visible only on the east side, at least part of the barrow having been under plough during or shortly before Skinner's time (*Brit. Mus., Add. Mss.*, 33675, fols. 91-105). The berm is slightly raised, and the mound has a cavity in the top.

This example was opened by Skinner, and his account is as follows—*Brit. Mus., Add. Mss.*, 33698 (1827), fol. 93 :

'No. 3 had the same kind of trench around it as No. 2, but it has been nearly destroyed by the plough, as has the Barrow been greatly defaced. At the depth of four feet, the men came to a Cist of charcoal, and scattered pieces of calcined bones, but to no regular interment.'

6" O.S. 42 S.W.

**West Cranmore 2.** (Fig. 4)

*Parish* : West Cranmore.

*Lat.* 51° 10'56".

*Soil* : Inferior Oolite.

*Long.* 2° 29'19"W.

This is the central of the three barrows north of the railway line half a mile west of Cranmore station, and is in a field called Old Down Field.

<sup>1</sup> In order to save possible confusion, we have retained Skinner's numbering of the Cranmore barrows.

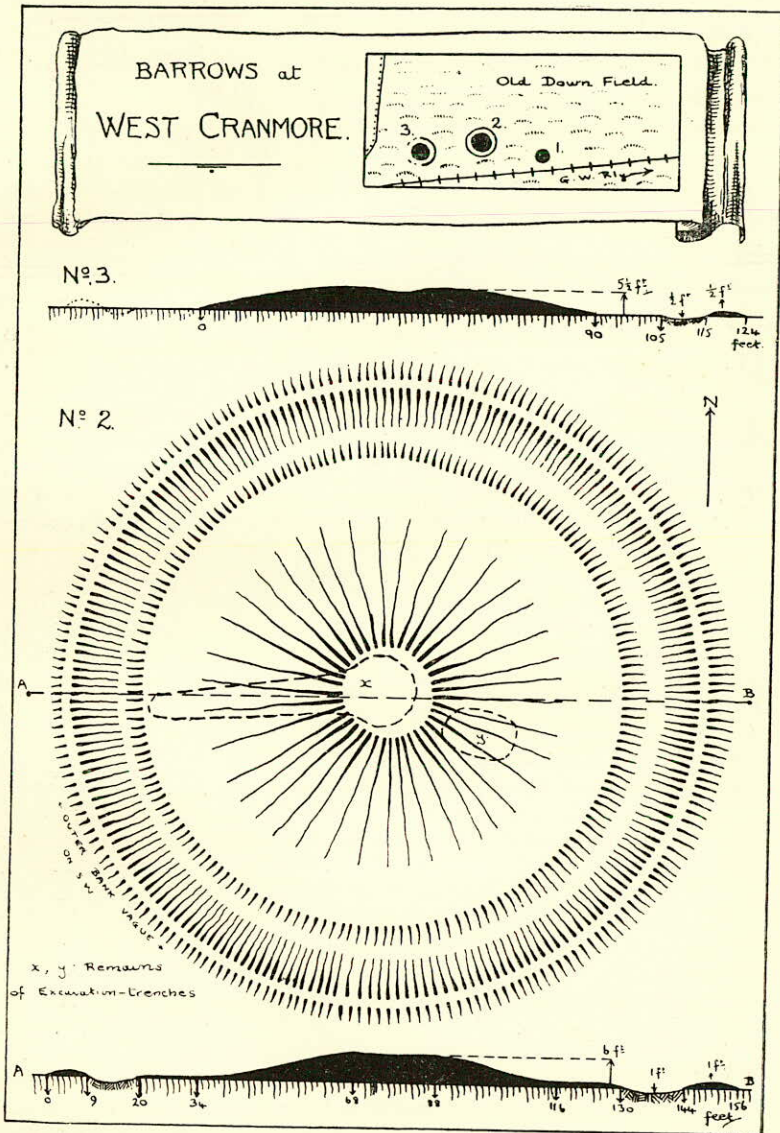


FIG. 4. BARROWS at WEST CRANMORE

It is by far the finest example of a bell-barrow yet known in Somerset. The mound, about 82 feet in diameter, is placed on a slightly raised platform, surrounded by a beautifully formed ditch and outer bank which are slightly wider and in better condition on the eastern segment than on the west. Weathering influences are probably responsible for both of the Cranmore bell-barrows being better preserved on their east than their west sides.

The following account is extracted from the Skinner Mss. (*Brit. Mus., Add. Mss., 33698 (1827)*):

- Fol. 63. ' Mine host had promised overnight, to procure me two labourers, to open the group of Barrows in Old Down field, on Mr. Stroud's Estate; as I had procured permission for the purpose, and was very anxious to examine their contents: As one of them is the most perfectly shaped tumulus I ever beheld, being of the form called Bell Barrow by Sir Richard Hoare, that is where the circular tump slopes off with a rim; this moreover was encompassed with a trench, 120 paces in circuit, and measuring eight feet in width. . . . I marked out the centre of each Barrow as near as I could: two had evidently been opened; but as it was not in the centre, the opening had been made, I did not despair of finding the original interment. I told the men to continue digging in the places I had marked out, as soon as they came to charcoal in one Barrow, to desist, and proceed to the other, and so to the third; but on no account to continue digging after they were come to a cist or charcoal. . . . (Mine host) pointed out an aged personage who was haymaking in his field, and said he could give me some information respecting the opening of the centre Barrow in Colonel Stroud's time. I found he had been a servant in the family, and perfectly well remembered, about thirty years ago, an opening having been made in the two Barrows before mentioned; but nothing was found. He said moreover, if he recollected right, at the depth of a few feet, they came to a dark soapy kind of earth: I suppose the bed of the funeral pile. . . .
- Fol. 92. The centre Barrow of the group, by far the most regularly shaped of any I ever opened, contained two interments, the primitive one of calcined bones, was at the bed of the Barrow, at the depth of six or seven feet, where there was a large cist of charcoal; but so wet was the soil, the black was intermixed, and kneaded with the other earth; indeed there might have been an Urn here, but it was decomposed;

heads of flint were found near the ashes. A jaw bone and part of an arm bone which had not passed the fire, belonged to the secondary interment, I presume, and had fallen from the top into the hole, where the men were digging; but it is impossible to ascertain these circumstances unless one is on the spot oneself. I was, I confess, much surprised to find flints in a Tumulus so regularly formed as this under our examination.'

'The produce of our researches we gave to Mr. Fussell, the Rector of Doulting, he being nearer the spot where they were found. . . . The sketches I have taken will be sufficient records for myself.'

Skinner does not tell us why he descended, in most of his barrow diggings, to the reprehensible habit of setting men on to open three or more barrows at once without being superintended. It would have been far better if he had not opened the barrows at all. It is not a matter of blaming Skinner for not being in advance of his time: his method of excavation was a good deal worse than that of Hoare, Rev. J. Douglas, and others among his own contemporaries. It is however to Skinner's credit that he filled in the holes he dug into the Cranmore barrows, whereas in the case of some recent fruitless excavation (? 1922) by local people, the digging was not filled in.

Other references to the Cranmore barrows are given in the Skinner Mss., *Brit. Mus., Add. Mss.*, 33674, fol. 121, and 33675, fols. 90-105. Good drawings of the barrows and their contents are given in 33675, fols. 90 and 106, and 33698, fols. 88 and 89. (Plates IX and X).

In 1869, Mr. J. W. Flower, F.G.S., opened two of the three Cranmore barrows, and in one of them, of the bell shape, he found a burnt interment accompanied by a grooved bronze dagger and the remains of a second smaller dagger, a small flint saw, and some flint scrapers. The bronze daggers are in the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of London. One of the daggers is illustrated in *Archaeologia*, xliii, Pl. xxxv, fig. 2. See also *loc. cit.*, xliii, 289 and 453 (J. Thurnam); *Proc. Prehistoric Society*, Jan.—July 1938, p. 103 (S. Piggott); Evans, Sir J., *Ancient Stone Implements*, 1897, p. 295; Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements*, 1881, p. 242. It seems most

likely that the barrow in which these articles were found was No. 2, but we cannot exclude the possibility that it may have been No. 3.

Mr. A. T. Wicks has ascertained that during or just before 1922, the Vicar of Doulting, Rev. H. S. Darbyshire, opened the central barrow, apparently without result. This barrow has therefore probably been opened at least four times,—

- i. in Colonel Stroud's time ;
- ii. by Rev. J. Skinner ;
- iii. by Mr. J. W. Flower ;
- iv. by Rev. H. S. Darbyshire.

After the last excavation, Mr. Wicks found a well-worked flint scraper in the material thrown out (*Report, Wells Nat. Hist. and Arch. Soc.*, 1923, p. 37).

#### CONCLUSIONS.

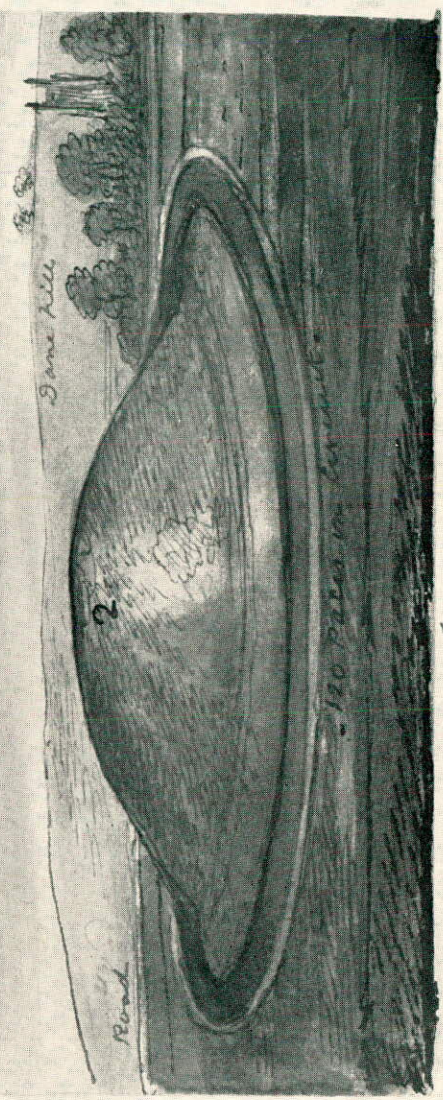
It will be seen from the foregoing account that Mendip contains the following :

- (1) *Bell-barrows* of ordinary type :
  1. Beacon Batch T. 176.
  2. Compton Martin (doubtful) T. 143.
  3. Westbury Beacon T. 102.
  4. Ashen Hill group (at least one of).
- (2) *Bell barrows* with outer bank, and central mound not very high : intermediate between bell-barrows and disc-barrows :
  1. Hunter's Lodge Inn.
  2. West Cranmore 2.
  3. West Cranmore 3.

Among bell-barrows of ordinary type those classed as types 1 and 2 in my paper on Bell-Barrows are included here (*Proc. Prehistoric Soc. of East Anglia*, vii, 1933, pp. 203-230, to which I would refer the reader).

With regard to the second group, consisting of barrows with berm and well-defined ditch and outer bank, these are certainly typologically intermediate between bell and disc forms ; but

No 2 a large Barrow in Old town field Cranmore Parish  
 near No 1 120 Paces in girth outside of the ring of  
 covered two or three miles of ground bars without an  
 also some pieces of flint chipped to a sharp edge  
 a few bone and part of the bone of the arm found  
 in this Barrow had never passed the line probably it  
 was a second interment. It is thick peat in front above  
 July 18



No 34 a large Tumulus in Old town  
 field West Cranmore encompassed by a trench measuring  
 120 Paces in Circumference.

Drawing by Rev. J. Skinner

WEST CRANMORE, BARROW No. 2, From the South

By Permission of the Trustees, British Museum



whether they are intermediate in date, and whether they represent a stage in development from bell-barrow to disc-barrow, has yet to be determined. Other examples of the type have been dealt with in my paper already cited in the *Proc. P.S.E.A.*, where these examples are classed as Type 3. Here it is only necessary to repeat that the essential difference between types 1 and 2 and type 3 is that with the former, the material from the ditch has been used to increase the size of the mound, whereas with type 3, the material from the ditch has been used to form an outer bank, and this has usually resulted in the central mound of the barrow being smaller.

There are, so far as we know, no true disc-barrows on Mendip. Of the intermediate types, Cranmore 2 and 3 come nearer the bell shape, and the Hunter's Lodge Inn barrow comes nearer the disc type.

The bell-barrows at Compton Martin and Westbury Beacon (both on the Carboniferous Limestone) appear to be rather unsatisfactory attempts to erect in a very difficult rocky subsoil the beautiful bell-barrows for which the chalk downs of Wessex are so well adapted.

My conclusion is that bell-barrows are not likely to have originated on Mendip, the soil being ill-adapted for the construction of the more elaborate types of round barrow. These barrows are more likely to have been introduced into Mendip from the chalk downs of Wessex, where barrows of bell and disc shapes abound.

The chalk downs of Wiltshire are divided from Mendip by a belt of clay soils which doubtless supported thick woodland in prehistoric times. This belt of timber was probably narrowest between Frome and Warminster, and between Bruton and Stourton. It may have been through one of these gaps that a means of communication existed between Mendip and the Wiltshire downs in the Early and Middle Bronze Age. Indeed the Frome gap may have been used in the Neolithic Age, as suggested by the distribution of long barrows (see *O.S. Map of Neolithic Wessex*). A further hint on prehistoric communication between Mendip and the chalk of Wessex is afforded by the presence on Mendip of a considerable number of flint implements including a fair proportion of arrow-heads. As

flint does not exist naturally on Mendip, it must have been transported from the chalk downs of Wessex where the supply is of course very abundant, and the chalk downs near Westbury would have been the nearest source of supply.

\* \* \* \* \*

The writer is much indebted to Messrs. A. T. Wicks and R. R. Clarke for revising this paper. My indebtedness to Mr. Wicks is shown on almost every page, and many of the references to the Skinner Mss., are due to his industry in searching and transcribing them.

A further hint that there was intercourse between Mendip and the chalk downs of Wessex in the Bronze Age is furnished by a very recent excavation of a small round barrow on Stockbridge Down, Hampshire, by Drs. J. F. S. Stone and N. Gray Hill. Associated with a secondary cremation of Middle Bronze Age in this barrow were a large number of beads, including two of yellow calcite. In regard to the latter, Dr. Stone states: 'It is not at all impossible that these beads were manufactured locally from a piece of stalactite, possibly from the Mendip caves.'—*Antiquaries' Journal*, vol. xx, 1940, p. 43.