

THREE TURF BARROWS AT HURN, near CHRISTCHURCH.

By C. M. PIGGOTT.

THE three barrows which are the subject of this paper are in the Parish of Hurn to the north of Christchurch. The surrounding country is open heathland with a tertiary gravel and sand subsoil. The barrows are here described in order of excavation, which is also their order from south to north and their probable chronological sequence as well. (See location plan, Fig. 1.)

Excavation of Barrow I. (Fig. 2.)

Digging continued for a fortnight. At first six men were employed, but after the first week the number was reduced to four. The work was supervised by the writer, with Mr. R. C. Treweeks as assistant.

The barrow was first contoured at 6in. intervals and then an approximate centre point chosen. Two preliminary cuttings were made on the south-west and north-east respectively to look for a ditch, but none was found; nor was this surprising when it was discovered that the barrow almost entirely consisted of turf. From the centre point lines were then laid out running magnetic east and south from it, and these marked off at 4ft. intervals from the centre outwards. This area was removed from the outside inwards, down to the level of the old surface exactly 4ft. below the highest point on the barrow. Similar methods were adopted with the north-west sector and both were searched carefully for any possible stake-holes, but none were found to exist.

The Mound.

This consisted of a top covering of sandy soil, greyish-brown in colour, and disturbed sometimes to a depth of 2ft. by rabbits and bracken and tree roots. Below this, resting on the old surface and in the centre reaching a depth of 2ft. was the main material of the barrow, turf. This appeared as laminated sand, yellow with dark-brown striations running roughly horizontally and with varying depths between, but seldom more than 3ins.

On the west side the edge of this turf mound coincided with a dark-stained layer which may have represented an old surface. Continuing over the turf towards the centre, it faded out a little to the west of it and only a few inches below the present surface.

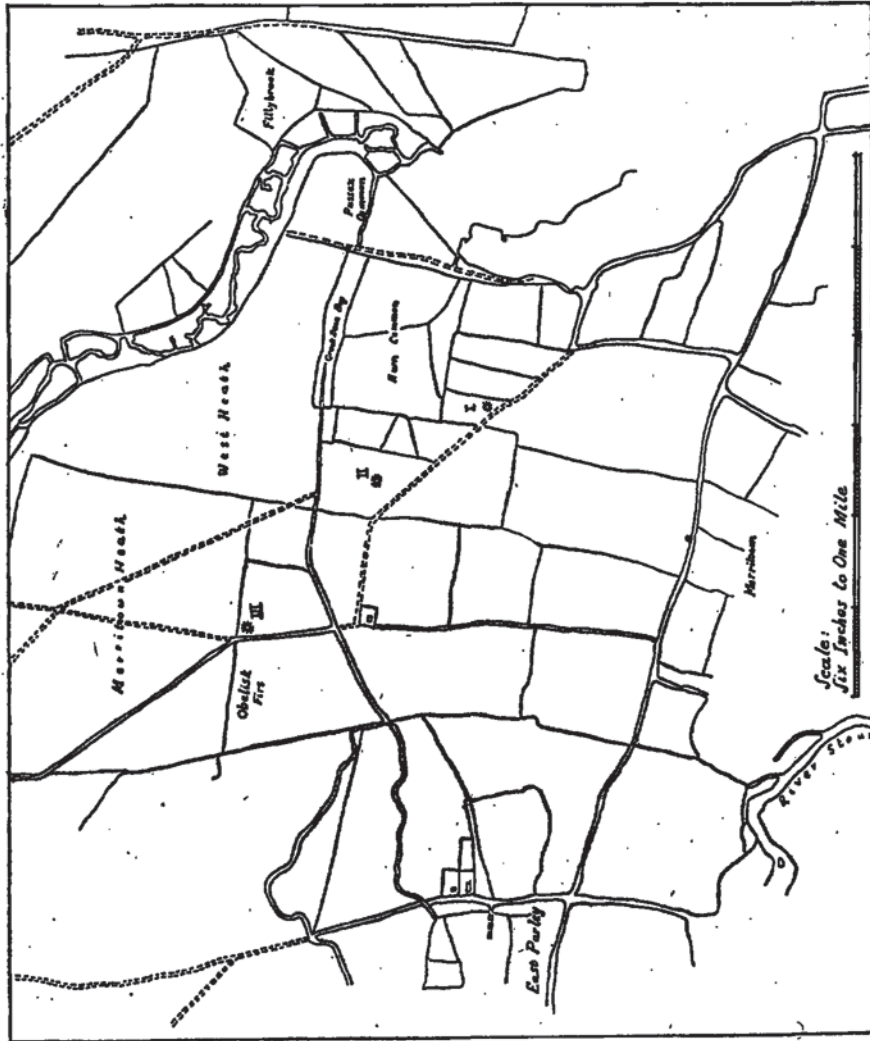


FIG. 1.—Map showing position of the three Hurr Barrows.

From the 6in. O.S. map by permission of H.M. Stationery Office.

The Pre-Barrow Surface.

This was in no way demarcated from the overlying turf mound except that the laminations caused by staining were less frequent below a certain level.

Pottery and a few flakes were discovered on this horizon, and the spread of gravel from the mound above the grave (mentioned later), enabled this original surface to be identified. The presence of hard-pan was restricted to the outer edges of the mound, except in Cutting I where it was found on the old surface level right over the cutting. It was absent all over the central area.

The Grave. (See Sections Fig. 8, and Plate I a and b.)

An oval pit was found almost in the centre of the barrow, filled with clean gravelly sand like the natural subsoil. It was not possible to ascertain the exact bottom of the grave, as the filling so closely resembled the subsoil, but a tip of sand which had been thrown into the ground from the west tailed out at a depth of a little more than 3ft. This was considered to be the most probable bottom of the grave.

Below that the filling appeared to become less and less stained, but the excavation was continued to make certain that nothing was missed to a depth of 7ft., when water level was reached.

In the acid soil it was not surprising that no skeletal remains were discovered, and one can safely infer that the burial must have been by inhumation rather than by cremation. No grave-goods of any description, nor any flakes or potsherds were discovered in the grave filling. The upper part of the filling consisted of gravel and sand and the surplus material heaped up to form a mound, described below.

The Gravel Mound and Trampled Floor. (See Plate II a and b.)

Over the grave the surplus filling mentioned above took the form of a mound with steep sides and a flat top, the whole being compacted and trodden down. Both from its base (varying from 1ft. to 6in. below the surface) and from its surface a spread of gravel ran out into the surrounding turf-mound. The spread from the surface of the gravel mound was quite thin (2in. at the most) but practically horizontal, and must represent a trodden floor, reflecting some stadium in the construction of the barrow.

The dimensions of this mound, which was no doubt composed of the surplus gravel from the grave underlying it, measured 10ft. along its north-south axis and 6ft. from east to west.

The gravel was clean and unmixed and contained no archaeological objects.

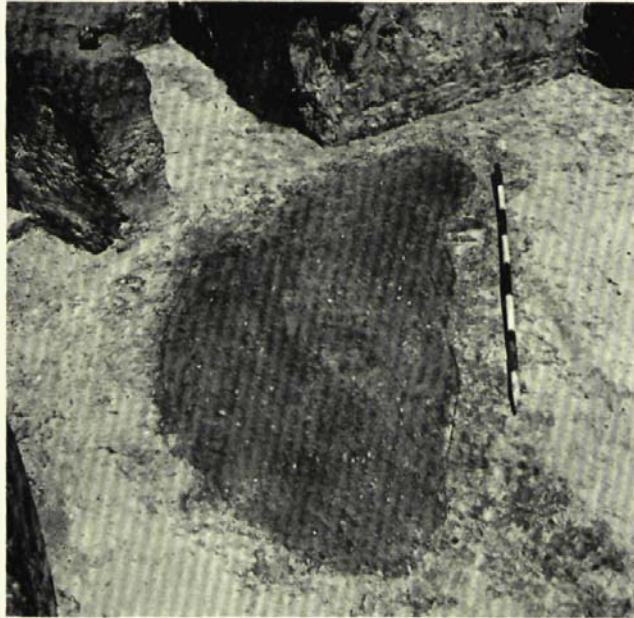


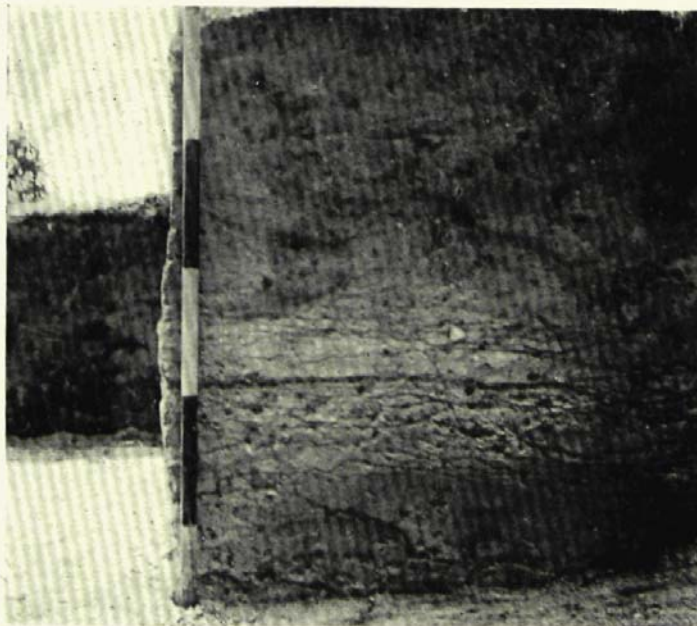
PLATE IA.
Grave in Barrow I before excavation.



To face p. 250] PLATE IB.
Grave in Barrow I after excavation.
(Note that the exact floor of the grave was not found.)



PLATE IIA.
The gravel mound over the grave in Barrow I.



To face p. 251] PLATE IIB.
The turf structure of Barrow I, and the trampled floor showing as
a horizontal band.

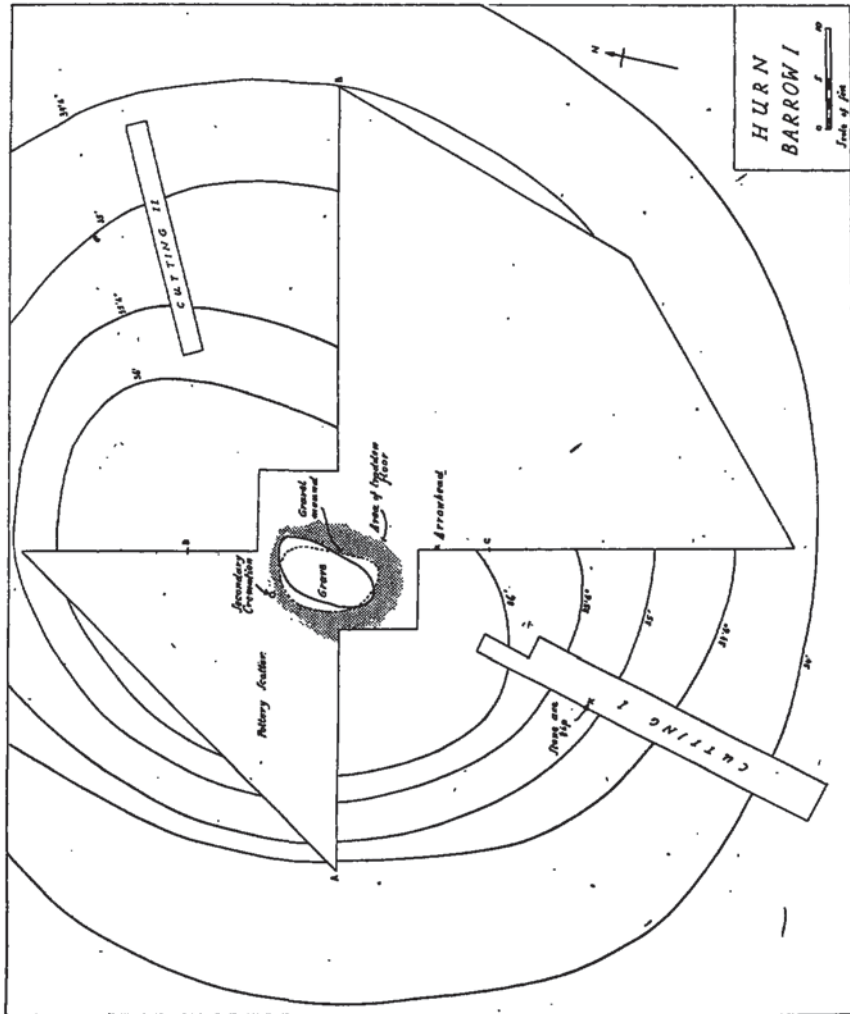


FIG. 2.—Plan of Hurn Barrow I.

The Finds. (See Fig. 3.)

(a) **Flint.**

Some fifty flakes, both worked and unworked, were found in the body of the mound, and all appeared to have been made of local pebble flint, with one exception. This poor quality material led to poor workmanship by comparison with the plano-convex knife which was of superior flint, possibly brought from Cranborne Chase, where the nearest chalk flint occurs.

A leaf-shaped arrowhead (No. 3) was found in the west wall of the south-eastern sector at a depth of 2ft. 3in., and the plano-convex knife from the same sector but only a few inches deep on the skirts of the mound. (No. 2.)

The polished flint axe fragment was broken when found, and only consisted of the cutting edge with faceting just showing on one angle. (No. 1.)

A date at the end of the Neolithic period or in the Early Bronze Age is suggested by all these finds.

(b) **Pottery.** (See Fig. 4.)

Fortunately, although only eight fragments were discovered in this barrow, those found included not only a flat base, but also rims representing two pots, and two decorated pieces. As we have seen, the flint types would fit well into a date near the overlap of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age times, and the pottery belongs to a class which substantiates this dating. Though not absolutely typical Grooved Ware, these sherds are certainly closely related thereto. The date of Grooved Ware appears to be fairly well established as Late Neolithic but persisting into Early Bronze Age times.

The ware is in all cases well fired and red on the outer surface and black inside. The surface is slightly smoothed but shows minute pittings, due to the small particles of extraneous material originally in the clay. The grooves on No. 9 are shallow and flat and the punctured holes on No. 11 are roughly stabbed, in comparison with the decoration of No. 10 which was more carefully executed possibly with a bird bone. Close analogies for all these pieces come from Lion Point, Clacton,¹ and nearer to our site from Christchurch, Maumbury, and Maiden Castle,² so that ours is by no means an isolated example.

(c) **The Secondary Burial.**

A cremated secondary burial was found at a depth of 2ft. in the north-west sector. The fragments of bone had been much disturbed by roots and were in a very bad condition. Nothing accompanied them and they were probably inserted into the mound in the Late Bronze Age.

Interpretation.

Although we have nothing to date the burial, we have sufficient evidence to enable us to reconstruct only very little less of the story than if we had the actual grave goods. As we have already seen, the finds suggest a date in the Early Bronze Age and this is supported by the size and shape of the grave itself, which has many close analogies with Early Bronze Age examples. This, combined with the knowledge that the burial must have been by inhumation, makes us reasonably certain in assigning it to that period.

Let us now try to reconstruct the order of events in the actual building of the barrow. The site having been selected, the grave was dug and the unaccompanied body buried in it. Quite a large amount of gravel and gravelly sand was left over after the grave had been filled and this extra material was then heaped over the grave, though not exactly covering it at all points, being slightly differently orientated. The small group of potsherds was probably connected with this stage of the proceedings, and must represent an intentional deposit rather than a scatter of earlier material like the flints.

Their concentration in a small area and the number of vessels represented weigh against the second possibility. Next, turves were added round the gravel mound. The reason for suggesting this sequence is that the steep slope of the mound could only have kept such straight sides, if the gravel had been stopped from slipping by some such substance. Since there were no stake-holes round it, suggesting any kind of revetment, the turf seems the most likely

1. Figgott in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, 1936, pp. 191, ff.

2. See forthcoming Report.

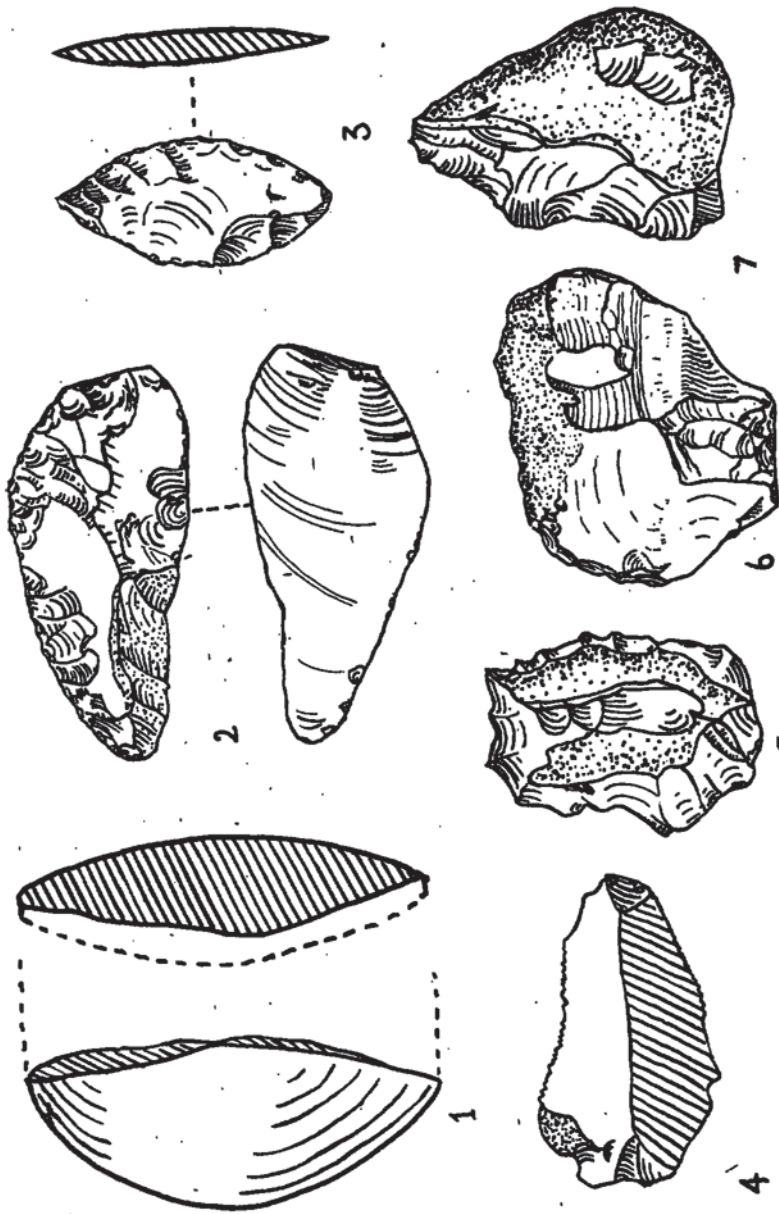


Fig. 3.—Flint objects from Barrow I.
1. Polished flint axe fragment.
2. Leaf-shaped arrow-head.
3. Leaf-shaped arrow-head.
4-7. Scrapers.
5. Plano-convex knife.

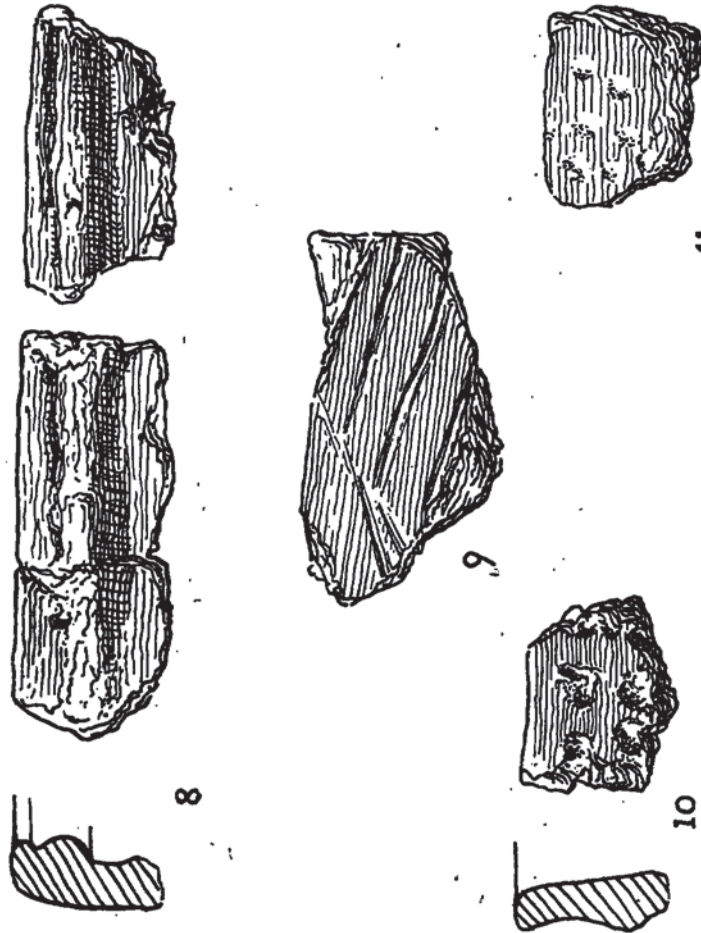


Fig. 4.—Grooved ware from Barrow I.

answer. The next stage is not without some interest, as it strongly suggests that the grave and partially constructed barrow was the scene of some form of ceremony during which the ground over the burial was trampled. This at least would seem to be the most likely explanation for the quite definite hard, gravelly, horizontal line in all sections near the centre.

The mound was then completed with turf and sand, and not again disturbed till, about a thousand years later, a presumably Late Bronze Age cremation was inserted into the top.

It is only during very recent years that the local varieties of turf barrows have been properly examined, and excavators have been fortunate in having very real assistance from the work notably of Van Giffen,³ whose excellent

3. *Die Bauart der Einzelgraber*, Leipzig, 1930.

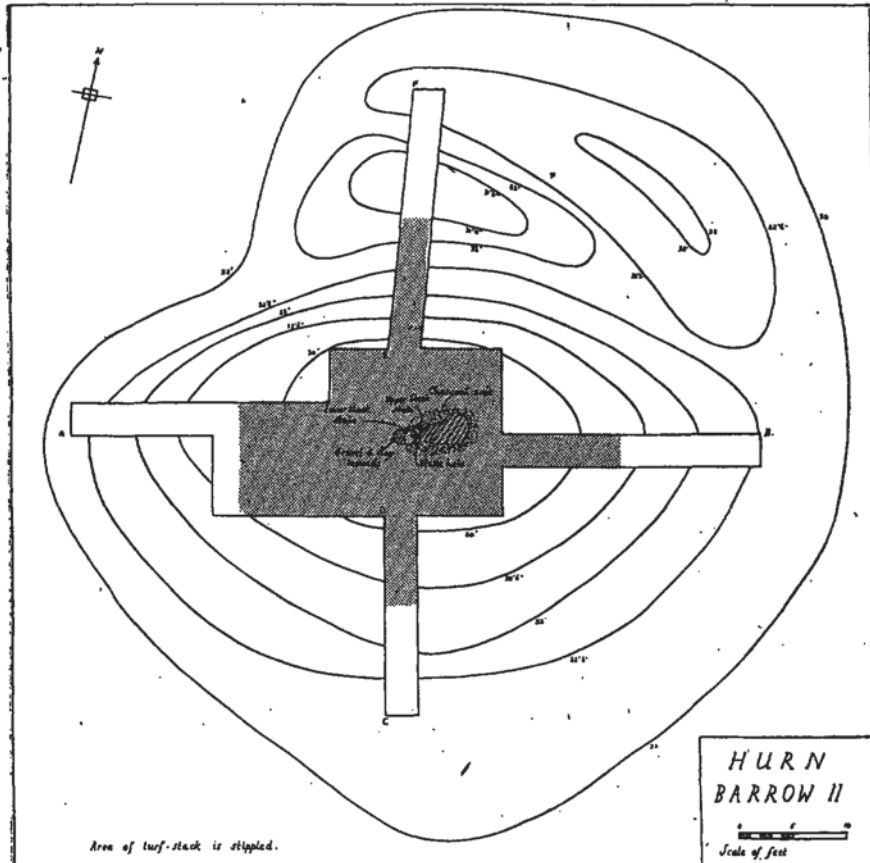


FIG. 5.
Plan of Hurn Barrow II.

photographs are of great value in helping to recognize and identify the various structural features which may be present. Other turf barrows in this country have not so far received in print the interest due to them, and many, such as the examples at Ibsley⁴ and the better known ones from Hengistbury Head,⁵ were largely of material rather than of structural interest to the excavators at the time of their examination. Sir Cyril Fox has recently put the matter on a new basis, and it was fortunate that a chance to examine these Hurn barrows presented itself so soon after his work had been published.

At Sheepplays 293⁶ was found a dome over the primary burial very similar to our gravel mound, smaller but roughly the same slightly kidney-shape. This belonged to the Middle Bronze Age.

4. Heywood Sumner in *Proc. Bournemouth Nat. Science Soc.*, xiv (1921-22).
5. *Excavations at Hengistbury Head. Research Report of Society of Antiquaries*, 1915.
6. Fox in *Ant. Journ.* XXI, April 1941, pp. 97-127.

Excavation of Barrow II.

The second barrow had been partly disfigured on the north side and it was difficult to estimate the original centre. Rabbit-holes pitted it all over. In spite of these superficial difficulties, however, the excavation proved useful and informative, though close dating was impossible in the absence of any finds.

This barrow was also contoured at 6in. intervals, and cuttings were made across the mound from north to south and east to west, and 3ft. wide. Round the centre a large area was cleared (see Plan, Fig. 5) to the natural surface. Three men were employed for a fortnight on this excavation.

The Old Surface. (See Plate IIIa.)

This was most difficult to find, even in those parts of the barrow where pure turf construction overlay the natural subsoil, which was gravel. It was possible, however, to recognize the pre-barrow surface by following down the dark edge of the turf stack (see below) and at its base a very slight colour distinction was visible in certain lights only.

Nothing in the way of pottery or flints was found on this surface, nor had it been cut into at any place except in the centre where a triangular stake-hole was found.

The Mound.

This measured about 65ft. in diameter and 6·2ft. at its greatest height. It showed a more complex construction than the first barrow. On the south to north section it was clear that the core of the mound had been made of turf mixed here and there in the lower courses with sand and gravel, including in one place a length of about 10ft. of pure gravel. This admixture of a small amount of sand and gravel seems however to have been largely fortuitous and was nothing like so clear in the opposite cutting from west to east (Fig. 8).

The Turf Stack.

It was soon clear that we were dealing with what Sir Cyril Fox has termed a turf-stack construction, the sharp slope of its edge being obviously contrasted by its dark colour with the surrounding sandy soil containing only a few turves. On the east side this dark line continued horizontally into the barrow almost to the centre, where it stopped near two bowl-shaped dark patches (see section, Fig. 8), one above the other and slightly overlapping. Below these again, and on the old surface, were two (or possibly one) broken clay and gravel mounds. Small pieces of charcoal were found in and around these but they were otherwise archaeologically sterile. Under these was the triangular stake-hole described below.

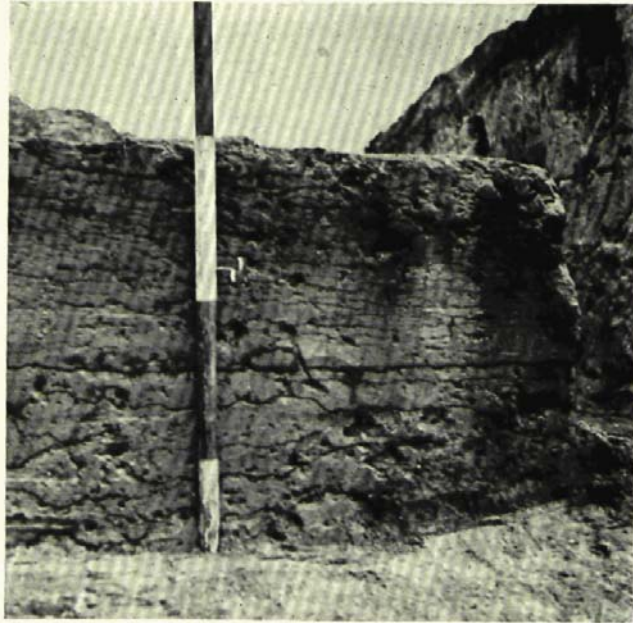
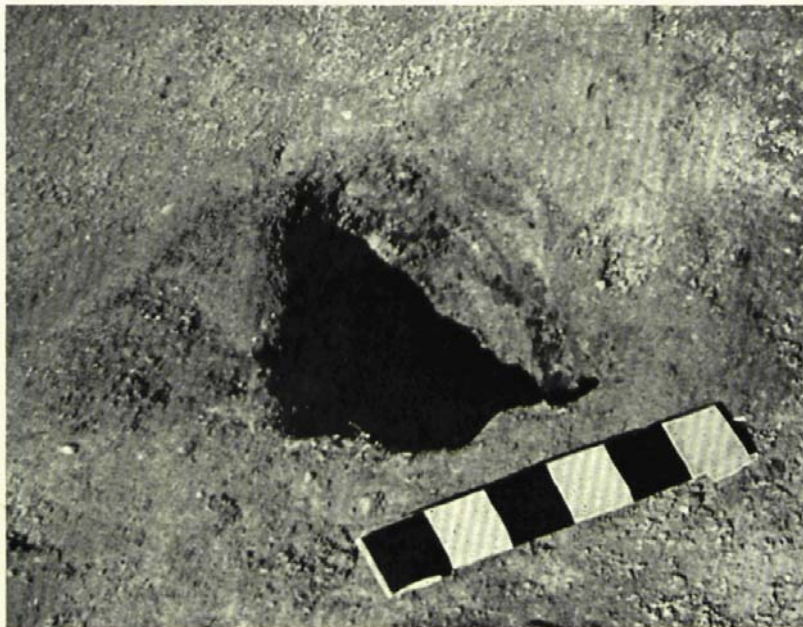


PLATE IIIA.
The turf structure of Barrow II.



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PLATE IIIB.
The triangular stake hole in Barrow II. (Scale of 6 inches.)

The Triangular Stake-hole. (Plate IIIb.)

This measured 6in. by 6in. by 9in., its base being north and south and its apex towards the west. Its sides were hard, yellow and oxidised and it had a filling of light grey sand. No sign of decayed wood was present.

Summary.

In the absence of a grave, we must assume either that the burial was placed on the old surface and covered by the clay and gravel mounds, or that there was no burial and that the barrow and stake together represented a cenotaph rather than a burial place. Of these two possibilities the first seems more probable, the more so as the area covered by the mounds would have been about that required by a body. We cannot be certain, but the evidence for purely cenotaph barrows is small and often unconvincing.

With regard to the presence of compacted soil near the centre of the barrow both in this case and in Barrow I, it is likely that this feature was frequently overlooked in early excavation, for during the last few years several examples have been noted in barrows of the Early and Middle Bronze Age. Greenwell too observed the same thing in several of the Yorkshire barrows, notably Weaverthorpe XLVII,⁷ and Rudstone LXVIII.⁸ In the first of these he says "About the centre, for a foot in height above the natural surface, the earth was exceedingly hard, with an appearance suggesting the idea of its having been puddled." No burial pit was found and he concluded that the body had been placed on the old surface and had subsequently dissolved. Neolithic pottery was found in the body of the mound. In the case of Rudstone, which is more closely comparable to Barrow I, Greenwell says: "The earth which overlaid the graves was so compact that it was only broken up with great difficulty, and had all the appearance of having been intentionally puddled." This barrow was of Early Bronze Age date.

Excavation of Barrow III.

The third barrow, situated further to the north again, had been less interfered with by rabbits and tree roots, but was covered thickly with bracken. A 9ft. wide track had been cut right across it roughly from east to west, the south side of which we estimated was approximately the centre point of the barrow. It was therefore decided that we should appropriate this cutting and it was accordingly excavated by removing the north half first right across the barrow and leaving the south strip as a check. This method of excavation proved most satisfactory. Firstly the ditch was cleared out and then a few feet within it taken down to 6in. below the old turf line, which in this case showed up very distinctly (Plate IVa

7. *British Barrows*, pp. 201, ff.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 262, ff.

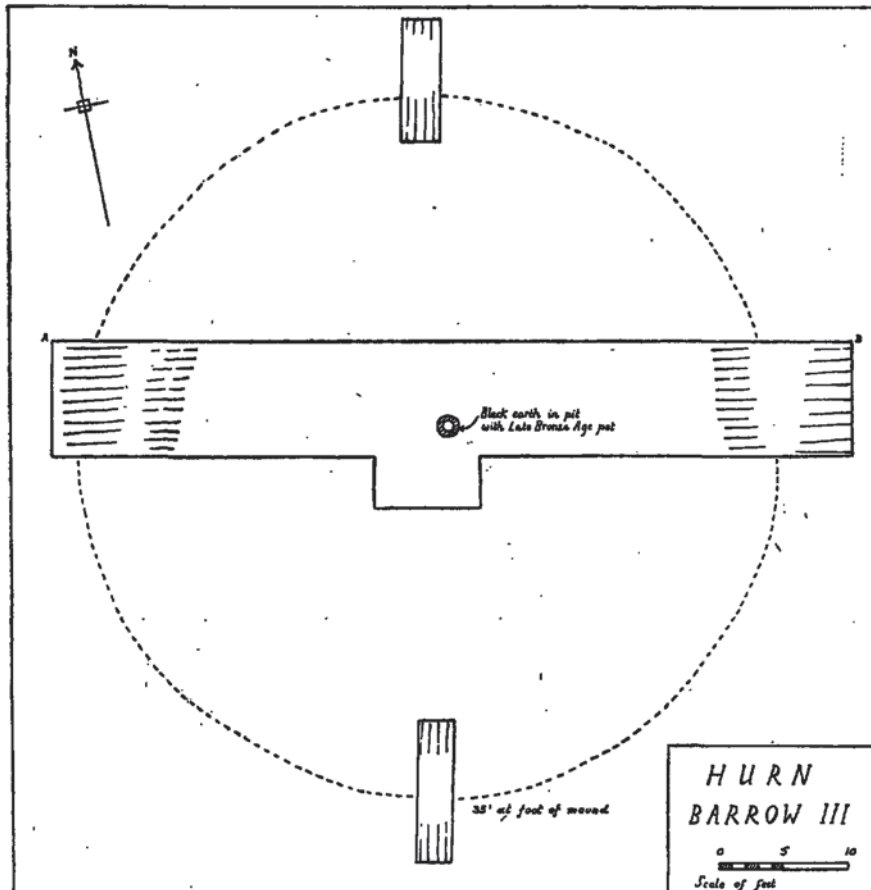


FIG. 6.
Plan of Hurn Barrow III.

and b). Next a convenient working distance of about 3ft. was chosen and removed in steps so that any structure might be observed in plan, until each yard had been taken down to the old surface. This method was simultaneously used from both sides at once, so that the middle should remain untouched until the last. An area was then extended round the estimated centre point and left till last. Having done this and found the primary burial, it was decided to put two other trenches into the mound to pick up the line of the ditch which was only a shallow scoop. This completed the excavation as far as the limited time would permit.

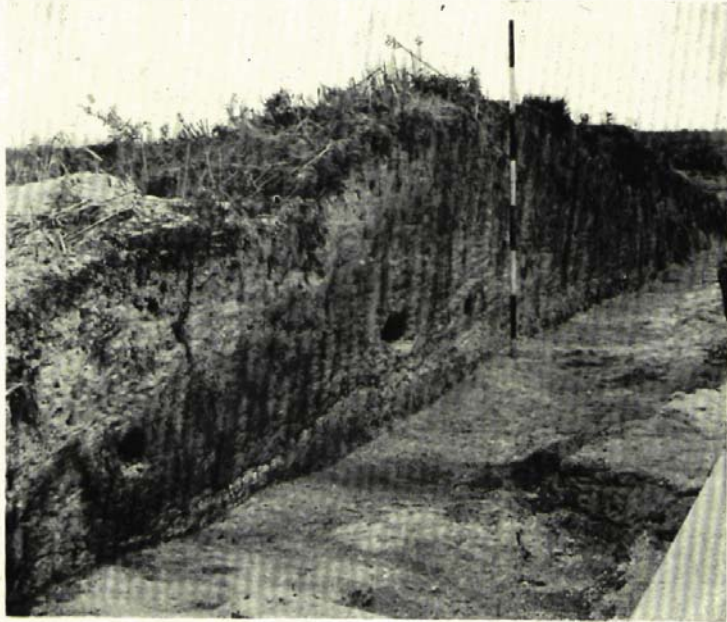
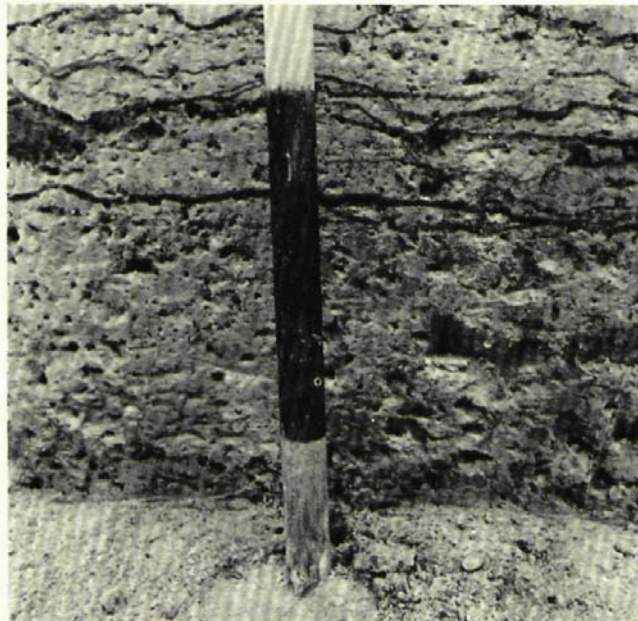


PLATE IVA.
Cutting across Barrow III.



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PLATE IVB.
Detail of turf line in Barrow III.
The dark line marks the original surface.

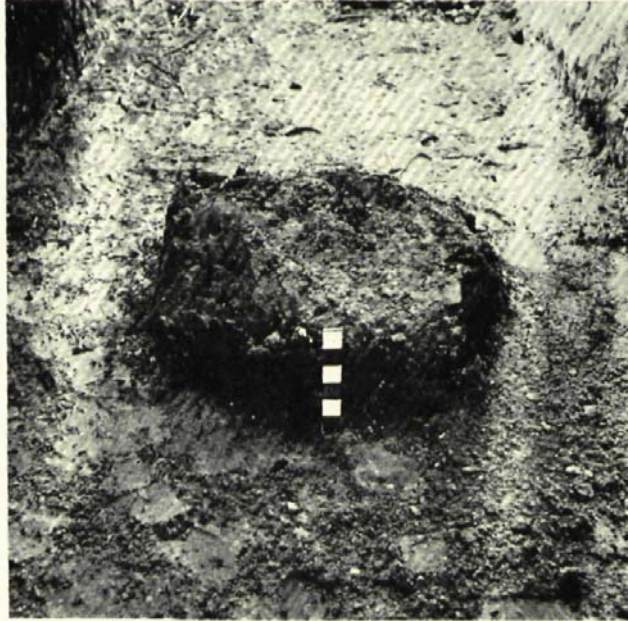
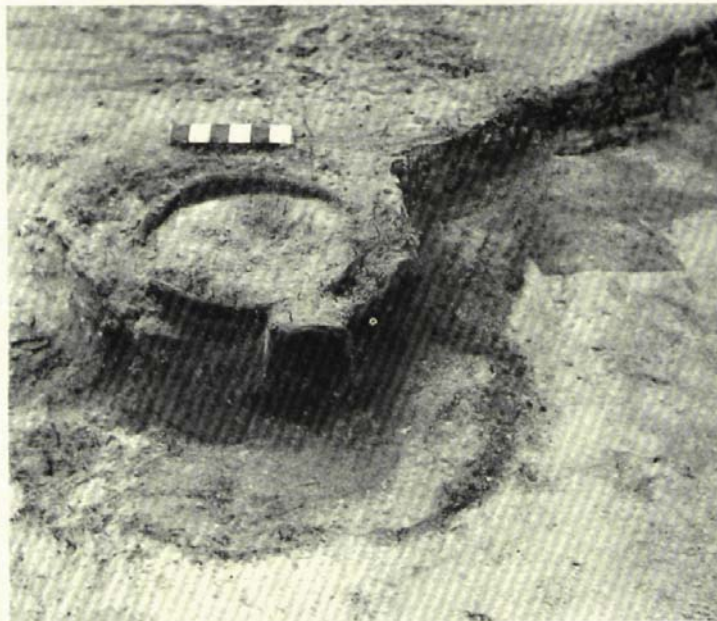


PLATE VA.
The clay dome in the ditch of Barrow III.



To face p. 259] PLATE VB.
The Deverel-Rimbury urn in Barrow III.
Note also the hard squarish outline of ? folded material or leather
in centre right.

The Mound.

This measured 39ft. in diameter, measured from inside the ditch. It was entirely composed of sandy turf and its maximum height was 4ft. 8in. The only peculiarity was that every now and then large lumps of green clay were found in the turfy material. Sir Cyril Fox also found this feature in his barrow, and there suggested that a possible explanation was that these lumps were deliberately so placed, to give additional stability to the mound. But one or two lumps were also found in the ditch in the case of Hurn III, both high up and low down in the filling, and it is difficult to see a reason for this.

On the west side a run of sandy loam over the edge of the mound was evidently composed not only of material derived from the ditch, but also of additional earth.

The Ditch.

This can barely be favoured with the name of ditch, since it was only a shallow scoop and its limits on either side were not easy to ascertain. A very hard callus had formed over its floor, so hard that the men said it was impossible even with picks to break it owing to its depth. This ditch was evidently dug after the barrow had been almost completed, as some of the earth from it had been added to the mound.

It contained nothing of note on the east side, but on the west a large number of worked and unworked flints were found, many of them apparently deliberately grouped round a greenish clay dome placed more or less in the centre of the ditch (Plate Va). This by that time had partly filled with earth which had possibly been dug from it to add to the mound, and slipped back again. This might happen in a very short time.

The Clay Dome.

This was an aquatic deposit and contained many shells of the varieties listed in Note 2. It also contained two unworked flakes and many more around it. This dome measured 1.65ft. in diameter and .65ft. high. Other than a suggested date in the Late Bronze Age and not very long after the central burial was made, one cannot hazard a guess as to its meaning, and it seems that once again one must invoke the aid of that useful but unsatisfactory word 'ritual.' More than this one cannot say, nor can one find a real analogy. The clay of the dome appeared totally different from that found in the mound, but on analysis proved to be the same.

The Primary Burial.

A small pit 16in. deep had been dug almost exactly in the centre of the barrow. This had been filled with black earth and

charred wood and some cremated bones which had escaped from the cracked Deverel-Rimbury urn found standing upright in the pit with its rim flush with the old surface. Beside this and on the old surface was a square stain less than $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick which may have been folded leather or cloth. It can be seen in Plate Vb.

The Late Bronze Age Urn. (Fig. 7.)

This is a fairly large example, well made, with unusually thin walls. The rim is flat and a row of finger-tip impressions decorate the shoulder. No other feature is worthy of note, and it was evidently made by the group of Deverel-Rimbury people, whose cemeteries; notably Latch Farm,⁹ abound in the region.

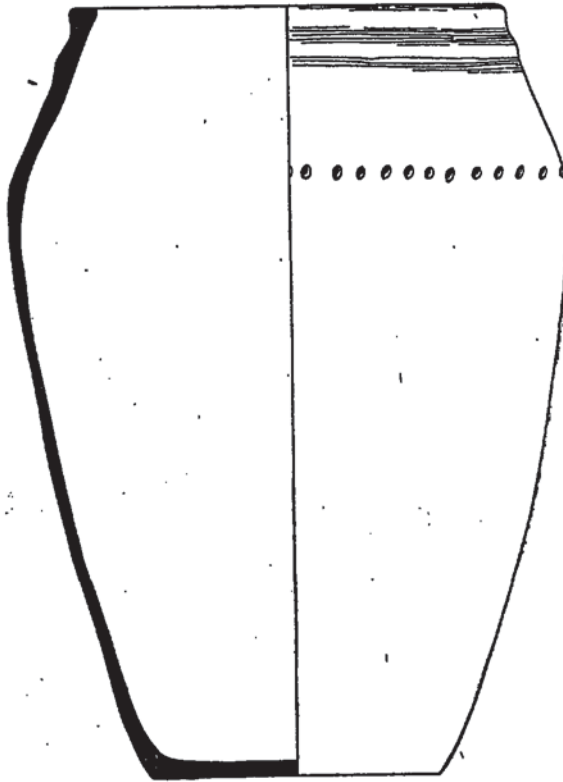


FIG. 7.

Deverel-Rimbury urn from Barrow III.

(Scale slightly over $\frac{1}{2}$.)

9. C. M. Figgott in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, 1938, pp. 169, ff.

Measurements :—

Diameter at rim	-	-	-	9in.
Diameter at base	-	-	-	6in.
Height	-	-	-	16in.
Maximum girth	-	-	-	11 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

NOTE 1.—On the material of the clay 'dome' which contained a small fragment of (?) limestone, Dr. F. J. North has kindly reported as follows :—

"This is an aquatic deposit and contains shells. Some of these were isolated by washing the material, and have been reported on by Mr. A. S. Kennard. There seems to be no point of geological significance in connection with the clay."

(2) "A fragment of limestone. This is an oolitic limestone of the Bathstone type rather than the Portland type. I have no material from Tillywhim for comparison, but the general appearance of the rock, even in its present weathered condition, suggests the Bathstone area. Are there any old buildings in the neighbourhood in which Bathstone is likely to have been used? The stuff could not have been brought there by natural agencies."

(3) On the other specimens of clay from the make-up of the mound itself, Dr. North says: "This material is less sandy than that of the clay 'dome,' but it contains a generally similar assemblage of shells."

NOTE 2.—Report on Non-marine Mollusca from sandy clay, by A. S. Kennard, A.L.S., F.G.S. :—

"Six species were present, viz. :

<i>Bithynia tentaculata</i> (Linné)	-	-	-	1 ex.
<i>Lymnaea truncatula</i> (Müller)	-	-	-	1 ex.
<i>Lymnaea palustris</i> (Müller)	-	-	-	1 ex.
<i>Planorbis planorbis</i> (Linné)	-	-	-	3 ex.
<i>Planorbis leucostoma</i> (Millet)	-	-	-	24 ex.
<i>Trochulus hispidus</i> (Linné)	-	-	-	1 young.

With the exception of the last, these are all freshwater forms. The material was probably obtained from the bank of a small stream and is therefore older than the grave, but it is certainly a stream deposit. It may be that it was waste material from either pottery manufacture or a 'wattle and daub' hut, or it may be ritual. So far as my knowledge goes, nothing like this is on record."

Report on Plant Remains from excavations at Hurn, near Christchurch, Hants, July 1941.

By H. A. HYDE,

Department of Botany, National Museum of Wales.

ALL the material submitted to me consisted of fragments of carbonized wood, some of which were still partly embedded in a sandy matrix. Having regard to their appearance and to the type of matrix in which the specimens had been preserved, I should have no hesitation in describing them as charcoal, *i.e.*, wood carbonized by heat: decay in such a well-aerated soil would, I think, be much too rapid to allow of carbonization by putrefaction.

All, or in some instances only representative, specimens from each batch of material were examined microscopically, first under a low-power binocular microscope and then if necessary under a microscope having a magnification of about $\times 75$; where necessary a clean fracture was obtained by breaking the specimen transversely and sometimes also longitudinally. My determinations are summarized below:—

BARROW II.

IIA. Charcoal from (?) old surface near centre.

Twenty-five pieces identified, all oak (*Quercus Robur* L. sens. lat.); size varied from 2.2 cm. (measured tangentially) by 1.5 cm. (radially) by 1.5 cm. (longitudinally) down to fragments a few millimetres across. Most of the specimens were of very slowly grown wood (about 25 rings per radial centimetre) but others had grown rapidly (rings up to 3 mm. wide). The many other fragments in this batch (perhaps 100 or more) were all similar in appearance and almost certainly of the same species.

IIB. Charcoal from E. cutting at depth 5.3ft.

Six small fragments, all oak: greatest diameter (tangential) 1.1 cm.; (radial) 0.8 cm.; greatest length 1.3 cm. In addition one small knotty piece would not give a clean fracture and remained undetermined.

IIC. From surface of Turf Mound.

Six minute fragments, none more than 0.5 cm. in diameter and mostly less: all hazel (*Corylus Avellana* L.); some of the pieces had been much compressed radially before carbonization.

IID. Charcoal from old turf line.

Fifteen pieces, mostly of irregular shape and the largest measuring 1.2 by 2.1 by 1.0 cm., were examined and all identified as oak; growth rate variable, the majority slow. The packet submitted contained a further 50 or so fragments, all apparently of a similar character.

BARROW III.

The packet contained two large pieces of charcoal measuring 5.0 by 2.7 by 2.0 cm. and 4.5 by 2.1 by 2.5 cm. respectively, and perhaps 40 smaller fragments. The large pieces and 10 others (in size down to 0.5 cm. diameter) were identified as hazel. The two large pieces, to judge from the sequence of ring widths, were parts of one and the same trunk.

Note on the significance of the plant finds.

Quercus Robur L. sens. lat. is now regarded as comprising two species, *Q. Robur* L. sens. strict. (= *Q. pedunculata* Ehrh.) Common or Pedunculate Oak and *Q. petraea* Liebl. Durmast or Sessile Oak. The wood of these two species appears to be indistinguishable, certainly in the form of charcoal fragments. Both are known to occur to-day in Heathy Oakwood.

Hazel (*Corylus Avellana*) though often abundant in pedunculate oak woods which are found mainly but not exclusively on clays and loams, is much less common in oakwoods on sands.

I am not familiar with the Christchurch area, but I should presume the vegetation around Hurn to be heath alternating in places with dry oakwood (cf. Tansley, *The British Isles and their Vegetation*, p. 764). If so, it would appear that the plant finds from these two barrows are consistent with the hypothesis that the local vegetation in the Bronze Age approximated to that of the present day. In view of the generally accepted belief that the Bronze Age climate was markedly drier than the present one, the present evidence of tree growth at that time on sandy soils is noteworthy.

FIG. 8

SECTIONS OF BARROWS AT HURN, HAMPSHIRE

