

## THE SEVEN BARROWS AT LAMBOURN.

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At a meeting of the Institute on 1st November, 1850, an account, received from Mr. Albert Way, was read of the excavations made under the direction of the president of Trinity College, Oxford (Dr. John Wilson), at the Seven Barrows, near Lambourn, Berks., by the kind permission of the earl of Craven, Mr. Hippesley and Mr. Atkins, on whose property these tumuli were situated; and the paragraph closes with the words, 'a detailed account will be given hereafter.'<sup>1</sup> On 6th December, 1850, Dr. Wilson sent a more detailed report of the excavations in Berkshire in the neighbourhood of Alfred's Castle, and the result of the examination of the tumuli, to supplement the account given at the previous meeting. 'The curious facts elicited by this enquiry, of which an interesting relation, illustrated by drawings, was kindly supplied by Edward M. Atkins, Esq., on whose estate one of the tumuli is situated, will be given hereafter.'<sup>2</sup>

The same writer contributed a short article without illustrations to the first volume of the Newbury Field Club's *Transactions*,<sup>3</sup> from which the following points are extracted. The tumuli known as the Seven Barrows are in fact much nearer twenty than seven in number, though some are difficult to detect. They are not the memorial of some great battle, but the last resting-places of peaceable folk, except perhaps one barrow standing apart towards Kingston Lisle (north side), which yielded an indifferent arrow-head of flint (surface) and a large number of cinerary urns. The mound was 10 feet high, with a circumference in the enclosing trench of 360 feet: on the floor in the centre were the white ashes of a huge wood fire, in which the bodies had been burnt. Apart from cases of cremation, the bodies lay with the knees drawn up to the chin; and an interesting case of burial entire was

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Journ.* vii, 386.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> p. 178, published in 1871.

found by Mr. Atkins in a barrow which had nearly sunk to the natural level in the meadow adjoining the farm-house on the Lambourn side. The skeleton of a youth about 16 years

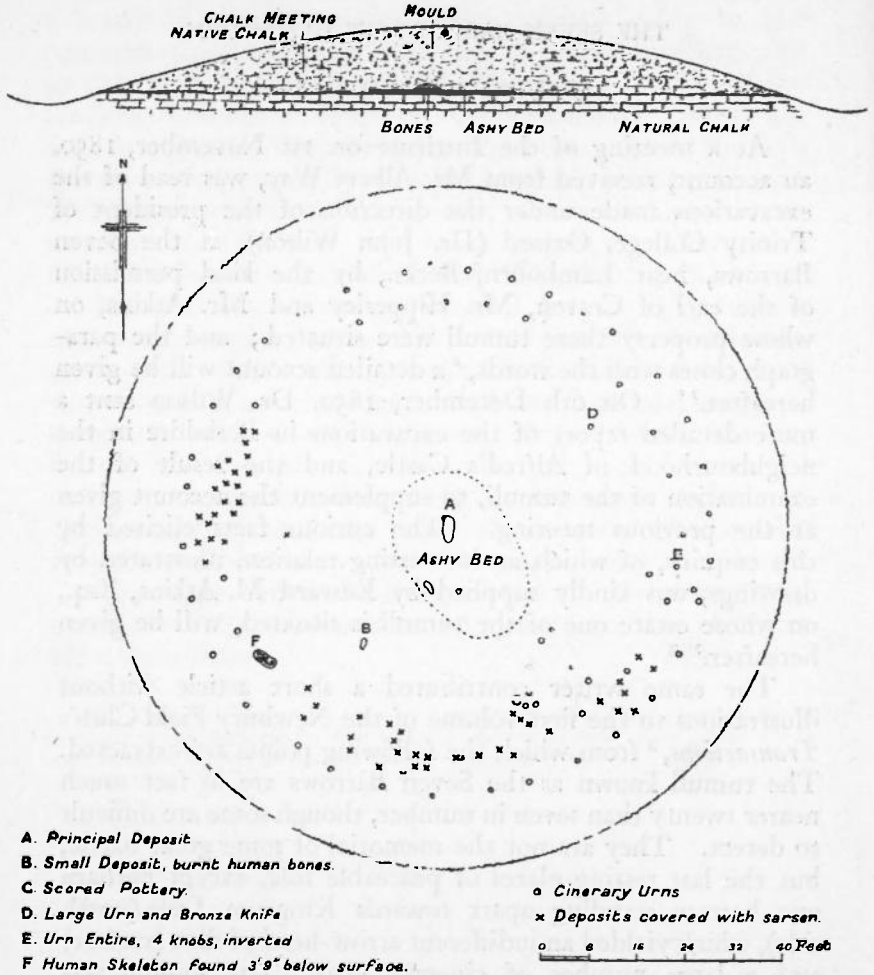


FIG. I. THE SEVEN BARROWS, LAMBOURN: BARROW NO. I.

old lay on the side with the knees drawn up; and behind the shoulder was a small collection of flints in different stages of preparation as arrow-heads, apparently placed there in a bag. Another skeleton of a young person was found on digging deeper at this spot.

A case of mixed burial is also recorded by Dr. Wilson. One of the best shaped barrows of this group, at the eastern corner towards Lambourn and near the road, was found to contain the perfect skeleton of a man, about 5 feet from the surface. He had been laid on his right side, with his face towards the west and his knees drawn up towards the chin; but was not in the centre of the mound, so digging was continued, and at the depth of about 8 feet (the height of the barrow), a flat stone was discovered covering a fine urn which stood at the back of the skeleton in a sort of cist formed of four walls of loose stones, which had been raised to protect it. The urn stood on its base in the undisturbed chalk, and the space between it and the walls of the cist was filled in with chalk and wood-ashes. It was 10 inches high and 8 inches in diameter, cracked when found, and containing burnt and pounded bones, probably of a woman.

Nothing further seems to have been published on these excavations; and in view of the promise made in 1850, it is only fitting that the following account, found among the papers of Mr. Albert Way, F.S.A. one of the leading antiquaries of his time, should be communicated to this Institute; the best drawings are from his own hand, and the details of the excavation are taken from a statement signed by Mr. Edward Martin Atkins, of Kingston Lisle.

The barrow (fig. 1) from which came all the objects illustrated, was called no. 1 by the excavators, and had a diameter of 112 feet, measured from the centre of the ditch that surrounded it.<sup>1</sup> The primary burial, which will be described first, was in the centre, and the mound raised above it was no doubt increased in area, if not in height, by the numerous subsequent interments, all of which (apart from an inhumation that may be much later) date from the later Bronze age, when cremation was the dominant funeral rite.

Surrounding the primary burial of two cremated bodies was an oval area about 29 by 19 feet, consisting of ashes obviously from the funeral pyre, the deposit being about 9 ft. 9 ins. from the summit of the barrow, and 6 inches above the solid chalk, which forms the subsoil of the neighbourhood. Towards the north end of the ash-bed

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the barrow 'standing apart towards Kingston Lisle (north side)' referred to by Dr. Wilson above.

was a typical 'incense-cup' (fig. 2) with a diameter of 3'3 ins., and the incised pattern inlaid with a yellowish clay: near it was a bronze knife (fig. 3, no. 1) 3'2 ins. long, with coarse fabric attached to one face of the blade, and there was besides a bronze awl (fig. 2, middle), measuring 1'15 ins., of the usual type with circular section, pointed at one end and flattened at the other, which would be inserted in a handle.

The only skeleton unburnt was 37 feet south-west of the centre of the barrow, and 3 ft. 9 ins. below the surface. It occupied a grave only 2 ft. 6 ins. long, the leg-bones being drawn up on either side of the trunk, which was on

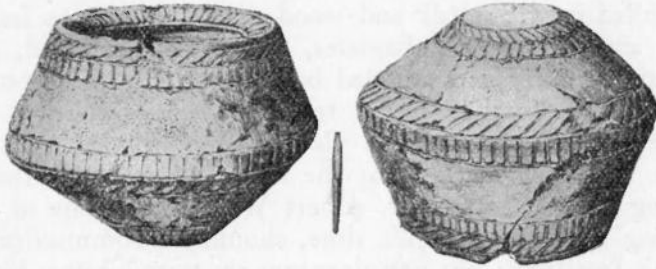


FIG. 2. 'INCENSE-CUP' AND BRONZE AWL FROM BARROW NO. I.

its right side with the head curved inwards at the east end of the grave. It was regarded as male, with a stature of 5 ft. 3 ins. or 5 ft. 4 ins., and as it had 'apparently been crammed into the chalk without ceremony,' the conclusion was that the deposit was comparatively recent. It can hardly have been neolithic, unless the circular barrow had been raised over an unmarked interment of earlier date; and it is unlikely that a Bronze age inhumation would have been found in a barrow that belonged to the period of cremation. But 'crouching' burials are generally of the neolithic or early Bronze age, and though some Anglo-Saxon skeletons were flexed, there would have been at least an iron knife to show the date, if such were indeed its origin.

Near the centre of the barrow, about 4 feet from the surface (nearly 6 feet above the area of ashes, but within its limits), was a considerable deposit of bones and ashes, apparently of a young person, and the unbroken stratum

of chalk above was taken to prove it of the same date as the barrow.

The secondary interments in the barrow were very numerous and were roughly arranged in three concentric circles. There were 59 cinerary urns (marked o on the plan shown in fig. 1), the outer circle being  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 feet below the surface, and the rest from 2 feet to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet deep. In most cases only the bottom of the urn was left, but

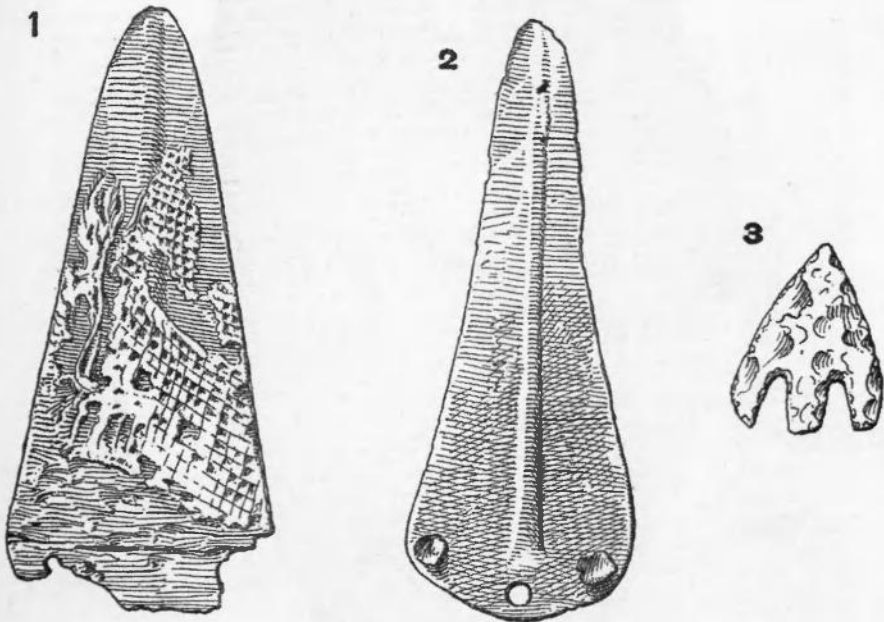


FIG. 3. (1) BRONZE KNIFE FROM BARROW NO. 1; (2) BRONZE KNIFE FROM URN SHOWN IN FIG. 4; (3) FLINT ARROW-HEAD FROM SURFACE.

each contained burnt human bones. All the urns had been crushed by the pressure of earth or by large sarsen stones which originally surrounded each burial; with the exception of a large specimen which was found complete under an unbroken layer of chalk and preserved (fig. 4). It was 19 ins. high,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  ins. in diameter at the mouth, and  $6\frac{1}{2}$  ins. across the base. To judge from the drawing, as the ultimate fate of the urn is unknown, the collar had five horizontal bands of impressions; and a row of finger-nail markings ran round the shoulder. It contained bones

and ashes, also a bronze knife (fig. 3, no. 2) 3'2 ins. long, with three rivet-holes and two rivets remaining: the latter were short and evidently held the blade in a bone or metal handle. The barbed and tanged arrow-head of flint (fig. 3, no. 3), not otherwise located, is no doubt from the surface, as mentioned by Dr. Wilson in his account of the barrow given above.



FIG. 4. CINERARY URN FROM BARROW NO. I.

Illustrations of three other cinerary urns are preserved (two in fig. 5, and fig. 6), the specimen with four equidistant knobs on the shoulder having been found entire in the second circle. It is 8'4 ins. high, 7 ins. across the mouth, and 4 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins. at the base. The second, here reproduced from Mr. Albert Way's careful drawing (dated 1851), shows two pairs of rivet-holes. The frequent occurrence of these holes suggests that cracked urns were often patched up for funeral purposes. The present example is 13'4 ins. high and 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  ins. across the mouth; and like the last, is

now in the British Museum, with four other cinerary urns, also given by Mrs. Martin Atkins, but not figs. 4 and 6.

It only remains to add that the crosses on the plan (fig. 1), fifty-four in number, denote deposits of human bones, ashes and charcoal, varying in quantity, but all surrounded with sarsen stones, and in some cases covered with a large piece of the same material, which in prehistoric times was very common in the district. Wayland's Smithy is built of the same rock, and boulders can still be seen in



FIG. 5. CINERARY URNS, ETC. FROM BARROW NO. I.

the grounds of Ashdown House, 3 miles west of the Seven Hills of Lambourn.

Such is the information derived from the excavator's notes, recovered by accident; but as there seems little chance of finding details of the other barrows excavated in this group, as distinct from those on Stancomb Down a mile to the south-east,<sup>1</sup> this opportunity is taken of extracting from the British Museum register of 1862 what is known about the other relics. Apart from the cinerary urns already mentioned, 'a small ring-barrow, first south from no. 19' and 'next the planted barrow,' yielded a

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia* lii, 59.

jet disc with central boss and V-boring at the back, also some flint flakes by the right shoulder of the skeleton; and at the feet, three more flakes near some arrow-heads. From 'the second small ring-barrow' were recovered a



FIG. 6. CINERARY URN FROM BARROW NO. I.

flake and flint-rod with lump of iron pyrites<sup>1</sup> near the upper skeleton, perhaps also the beautiful flint dagger illustrated by Sir John Evans<sup>2</sup>; and flint chips from the feet of the lower skeleton. It is clear that these small barrows (generally called disc-barrows) contained unburnt burials, and may therefore be assigned to the early Bronze age: this is also indicated by the dagger, which is frequently found with beakers and studs with V-boring.<sup>3</sup> This is contrary to Thurnam's rule that burials in disc-barrows were after cremation, without cinerary urns.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For use as flint and steel, see *Archaeologia* xliii. 422.

<sup>2</sup> *Stone*, fig. 264.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* xxxii, 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Archaeologia* xliii, 294.