

TIMBER CIRCLES: A RE-EXAMINATION

By STUART PIGGOTT

During the second (1939) season of the Prehistoric Society's excavations on the Iron Age farmstead site at Woodbury, near Salisbury,¹ I had the opportunity of working with Dr. Gerhard Bersu upon the site of the large circular house which forms so distinctive a feature of this settlement, and the advantage of frequent discussion with him of the questions and problems involved in dealing with the interpretation of such structures. As a result of this, I was stimulated to apply the methods and lines of approach he had indicated to two of the Bronze Age circular monuments usually known as 'Timber Circles,' and while, in presenting some tentative results, I should like to express my real sense of indebtedness to Dr. Bersu, I should not like to implicate him in conclusions with which he may disagree.

The monuments with which I am dealing were first distinguished in this country by Mrs. Cunnington's excavations in 1926-1928 on the site later christened 'Woodhenge' in south Wiltshire, where a novel type of structure, represented by the sockets of six concentric roughly circular rings of wooden posts, was found within an enclosing ditch and external bank and associated with pottery attributable to the Early Bronze Age (including Beaker sherds).²

In 1930 the same excavator found an analogous structure to exist on the site of the stone circles known as 'The Sanctuary,' part of the Avebury complex of megalithic monuments in North Wiltshire,³ and in the same year the publication of Dr. van Giffen's work on the Dutch 'palisade-barrows'⁴ made it clear that

¹ For interim report on the first season's work see *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* iv, 308; full report forthcoming in *ibid* vi (1940).

² The excavations were fully published in 1929 (*Woodhenge*, Devizes,

1929), and all references are to this publication unless otherwise stated.

³ *Wilt. Arch. Mag.* xlv (1931), 300.

⁴ *Die Bauart der Einzelgräber*, Mannus-Bibliothek nos. 44 and 45, Leipzig, 1930.

something similar existed in Holland and Germany, though here the wooden structure was beneath a round barrow and normally of smaller dimensions than the English examples. Here again these wooden circular structures were associated with the Beaker culture, and a cultural link seemed likely. The excavation of another English site near Norwich gave Dr. Grahame Clark an opportunity of discussing the group as a whole,¹ together with apparently analogous monuments having an enclosing ditch and bank, but stone uprights or none at all, and some of the views expressed in this paper have recently received criticism from Dr. van Giffen in dealing with the connection between the Dutch palisade-barrows and the English 'Henge Monuments.'² In Dr. Clark's classification, the absence of an enclosing ditch and bank precludes the Sanctuary from admission to the 'Henge Monument' class, but in this paper I am concerned primarily with the actual timber structures represented by postholes, whether with an enclosing ditch or not, in the open or beneath a barrow.

The problem before us is to visualise the type of structure of which the postholes formed the foundations. In her original account of Woodhenge, Mrs. Cunnington described it as 'an elaborately designed wooden construction, possibly comparable in some respects to the more familiar stone circles,'³ and in her definitive publication of the site put forward arguments for a strong connection with Stonehenge, stressing the idea originally put forward by Petrie in 1882⁴ that the constructional features at Stonehenge were not in a stone technique, but presupposed a wooden prototype. This prototype, Mrs. Cunnington hinted, was Woodhenge itself. The monument was visualized as six concentric circles of wooden uprights of varying dimensions, some possibly lintelled, with an orientation which did not agree with the entrance across the encircling ditch, but which was just obtainable between closely-set posts.

¹ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* ii. 1.

³ *Antiquity* i (1927), 94.

² *Ibid.* iv, 258.

⁴ *Stonehenge, Plans, Descriptions and Theories*, 27.

The discovery and excavation of The Sanctuary in 1931 provided an analogous structure, and here the possibility that the postholes represented the plan of a roofed structure was considered but dismissed on the reasonable grounds that 'if a roof had been intended the ground plan would have been simpler, as any roof using all these uprights is necessarily a complicated structure.'¹ Nevertheless, Col. R. H. Cunnington made a gallant attempt to combine all the

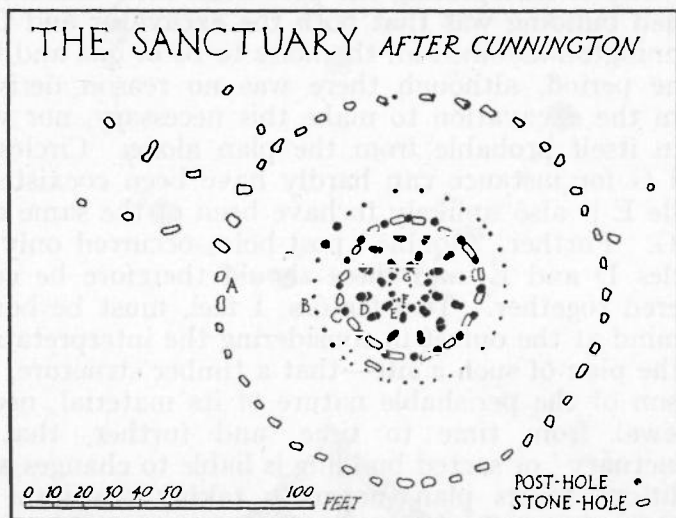


FIG. 1

postholes into a single-roofed building in a note published in 1932.²

After this, the question of the roofing of the timber circles (or some of them) was dropped, and it was tacitly assumed that, in Dr. Clark's words in reference to the Arminghall site, at all sites the posts were 'not the uprights of a house, but the pillars, as it were, of an open-air temple.'³ Here matters rested until M. Vayson de Pradenne characteristically disturbed our complacency by criticising a national institution as only a Frenchman could—the venerable institution

¹ *Wilt. Arch. Mag.* xlv, 309.

² *Ibid.* 486.

³ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* ii, 13.

being none other than Stonehenge, which gaunt and noble pile he dared to suggest was nothing other than the structural framework of a roofed building analogous to the 'earth-lodges' of the Omaha Indians. The obvious implications of such a theory on the timber circles he mentioned in passing, but did not discuss.¹

A critical examination of the evidence for the existence of a roofed structure at the Sanctuary immediately suggests one fact. The real difficulty in the way of interpreting the post-holes as a convincing roofed building was that both the excavator and Col. Cunnington assumed all the holes to be of one and the same period, although there was no reason derived from the excavation to make this necessary, nor was it in itself probable from the plan alone. Circles F and G for instance can hardly have been coexistent, while E is also unlikely to have been of the same age as G. Further, 'double' post-holes occurred only in circles D and E, and these should therefore be considered together. Two factors, I feel, must be borne in mind at the outset in considering the interpretation of the plan of such a site—that a timber structure, by reason of the perishable nature of its material, needs renewal from time to time, and further, that a 'sanctuary' or sacred building is liable to changes and additions to its plan, normally taking the form of enlargements. To interpret the Sanctuary as a one-period plan may in fact be analogous to considering a parish church of to-day, embodying the alterations and enlargements of successive generations of the pious, as representing an original Norman structure on the site.

A possible interpretation of the Sanctuary will now be considered, dividing the monument as revealed by excavation into a series of structural phases.

PHASE I

The group of post-holes which form the most obvious entity on the site are also the smallest, those representing the central post, and the eight posts of Circle F. In themselves these can be construed as a

¹ *Antiquity* xi (1937), 87.

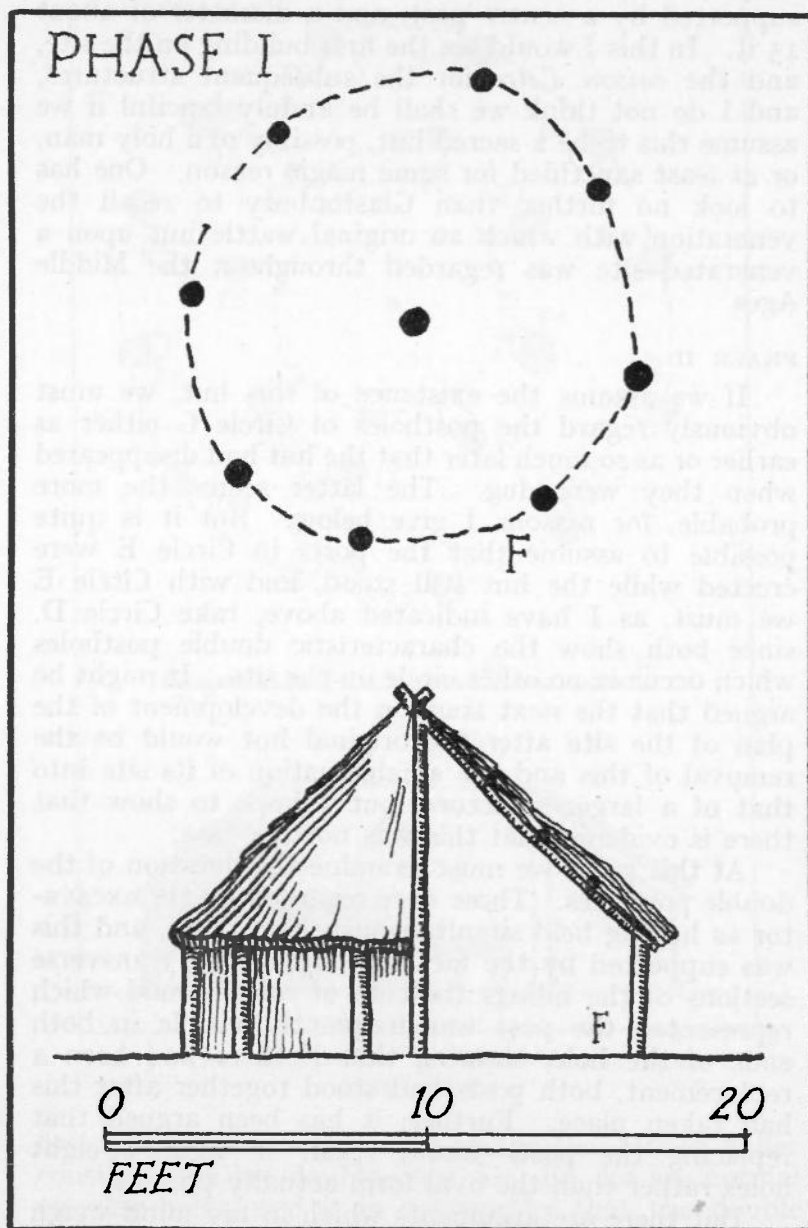


FIG. 2. THE SANCTUARY : SUGGESTED FIRST PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION

simple, small, circular hut, having a conical roof supported by a centre post, and a diameter of about 15 ft. In this I would see the first building on the site, and the *raison d'être* for the subsequent structures, and I do not think we shall be unduly fanciful if we assume this to be a sacred hut, possibly of a holy man, or at least sanctified for some magic reason. One has to look no further than Glastonbury to recall the veneration with which an original wattle hut upon a venerated site was regarded throughout the Middle Ages.

PHASE II

If we assume the existence of this hut, we must obviously regard the postholes of Circle G either as earlier or as so much later that the hut had disappeared when they were dug. The latter seems the more probable, for reasons I give below. But it is quite possible to assume that the posts in Circle E were erected while the hut still stood, and with Circle E we must, as I have indicated above, take Circle D, since both show the characteristic double postholes which occur in no other circle on the site. It might be argued that the next stage in the development of the plan of the site after the original hut would be the removal of this and the amalgamation of its site into that of a larger structure, but I hope to show that there is evidence that this was not the case.

At this point we must examine the question of the double postholes. These were regarded by the excavator as having held simultaneously two posts, and this was supported by the fact that by cutting transverse sections of the fillings the core of rotted wood which represented the post was frequently visible in both ends of the hole, showing that if there had been a replacement, both posts had stood together after this had taken place. Further, it has been argued that replacing the posts would result in figure-of-eight holes rather than the oval form actually present.

But there are arguments which in my mind weigh very heavily in favour of these postholes representing replacements to a long-standing structure. In the

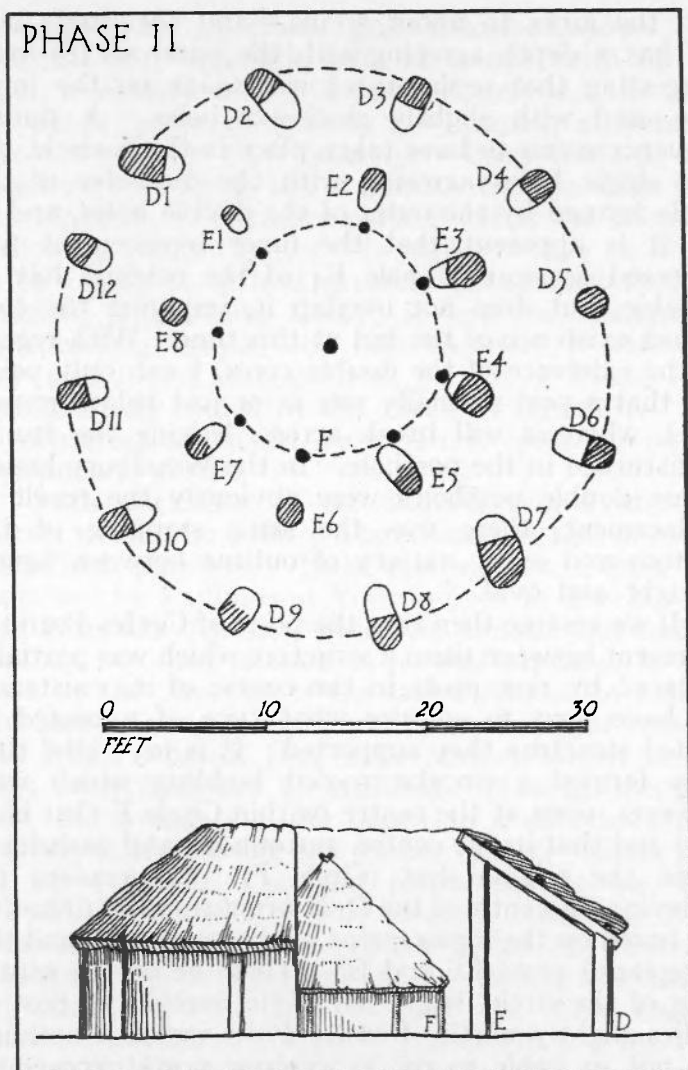


FIG. 3. THE SANCTUARY: SUGGESTED SECOND PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION

first place, not all the holes in the two circles under consideration are double—nos. D5, E6, E8 are normal circular holes, and it is noteworthy that the double holes in the D circle have the two halves dug to unequal depths—the outer half to a depth of about 60 ins.,

and the inner to about 50 ins.—and the single hole D5 has a depth agreeing with the outer set (61 ins.), suggesting that replacement was made on the inner side, and with slightly shallower holes. A similar sequence seems to have taken place in the E circle, the two single holes agreeing with the diameter of the circle formed by the outer of the double holes, and in E4 it is apparent that the inner replacement was squeezed as near to hole F4 of the original hut as possible, but does not overlap it, implying the continued existence of the hut at this time. With regard to the existence of the double cores, I can only point out that a post normally rots at or just below ground level, where it will break across, leaving the stump undisturbed in the posthole. In the Woodbury house, where double postholes were obviously the result of replacement, there was the same stepping of the bottom and every variety of outline between figure-of-eight and oval.

If we assume then that the posts of Circles D and E represent between them a structure which was partially replaced by new posts in the course of its existence, we have next to enquire what type of unroofed or roofed structure they supported. It is my belief that they formed a circular roofed building which was, however, open at the centre (within Circle E that is to say) and that in the centre, surrounded and enshrined, stood the original hut (Circle F). My reasons for believing the centre of the D-E structure to be unroofed are based on the replacement of the posts in E and the unreplaced posts E6 and E8. These lie on the south-west of the circle, while the single unreplaced post of D lies slightly north of east. Posts inside a building are not so liable to rot as exterior posts exposed to rain, yet here both circles have replacements. This implies rain reaching the posts of Circle E, which can only be the result of a central open space acting as an *impluvium*. And since the prevailing wind would blow the rain from the south-west, posts on the south-west of the inner circle and on the north-east of the outer circle would be sheltered and so less likely to rot and need replacement, which is in agreement with the

position of the unreplaced posts described above. The original hut, therefore, still, of course, with its own roof, would be enclosed in a roofed surround, the centre of which (particularly with the draining of water off the central hut roof) must have been liable to have been very damp in wet weather. On the other hand (as Mr. C. A. R. Radford pointed out in the discussion following the reading of this paper) it may be argued with equal, or indeed greater, plausibility that the original hut would decay, if exposed, before the surrounding temple, and that therefore it may have survived intact through both periods of Phase II by being totally roofed by the Phase II structure. Such a construction would be perfectly possible on the evidence available.

Such enclosure of an original sacred structure intact within the walls of a later building has, of course, historical parallels. Bede relates how Edwin was baptised by Paulinus at York in 627 'in the church of St. Peter the Apostle, which he himself had built of timber. . . . But as soon as he was baptized, he took care by the direction of the said Paulinus, to build in the same place a larger and nobler church of stone, in the midst whereof that same oratory which he had first erected should be enclosed. Having, therefore, laid the foundation, he began to build the church square, encompassing the former oratory' (*Hist. Eccl.* ii, 14). As Mr. Clapham points out to me, later medieval examples of this practise must reflect the enclosure of the Holy Sepulchre within the Church of the Anastasis at Jerusalem, and he quotes as examples of this the Portiuncula at Assisi, the Santa Casa at Loretto, the Christ Chapel at Einseideln and the Holy House at Walsingham.

PHASE III

Phase II of the Sanctuary seems to have lasted some time, as is implied by the replacements, and the next building phase that can be detected shows a certain alteration not only in the actual structure, but in the ideas embodied in it. To this next phase I would assign Circles B, C and G, but the interpretation is at

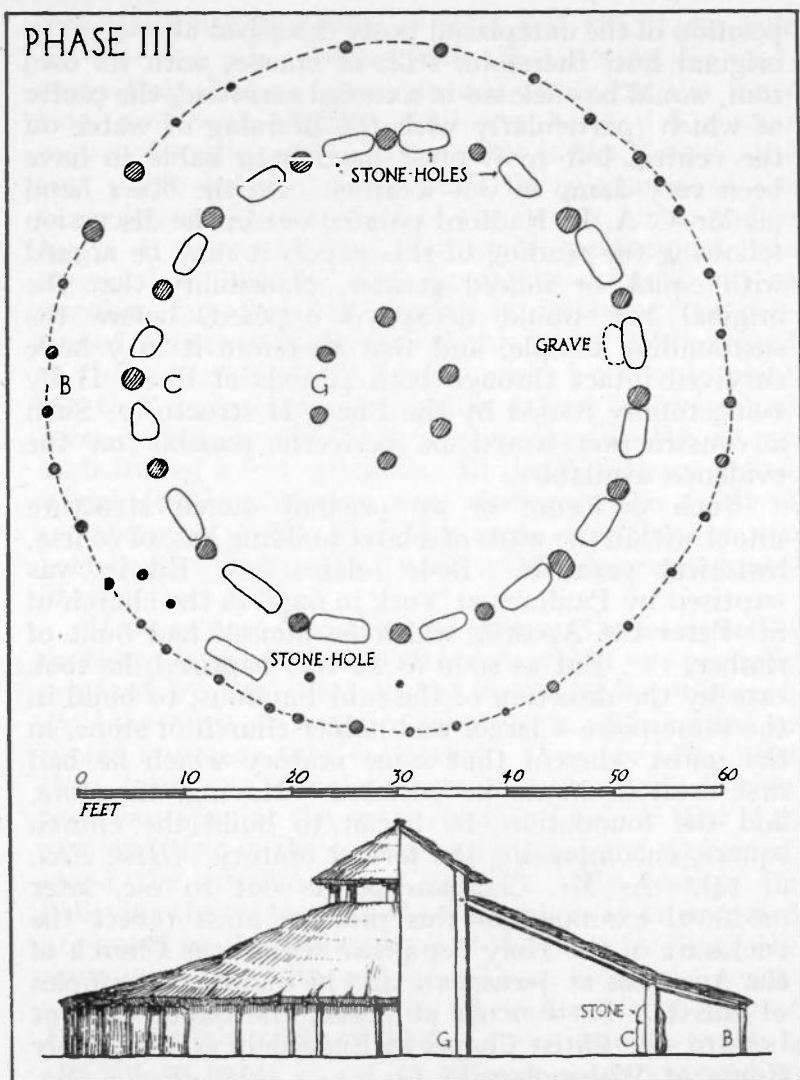


FIG. 4. THE SANCTUARY : SUGGESTED THIRD PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION

this point rendered more complicated by the fact that Circle C consists not only of postholes, but also the sockets of standing stones of a circle which remained visible until the eighteenth century. I think, nevertheless, that it is possible to explain the whole series in a reasonably convincing way.

Mrs. Cunningham's interpretation of the ' Stone and Post Ring ' (Circle C) was to assume two phases, the latter of which being the stones, but she points out that the sites at least of the posts of this circle must have been known to enable the stones to be set up neatly between them, and it seems more likely that the sequence was the reverse, since the sections through stone- and postholes on the circumference of the circle suggest that the postholes were cramped by the presence of the stones, which would account for the curious undercutting of the postholes. If the stones and posts are considered as existing contemporaneously, the obvious and convenient sequence of construction would be to erect the cumbersome stones first, the more easily handled posts after they were in position.

If the posts of Circle C stood between the stones, they cannot have formed the wall of a building, though they may have taken the thrust and supported what was in a sense a wall-plate in the form of lintels. The actual wall of this building I take to have been formed between the small posts of Circle B, the entrance being formed by B33 and B34, posts of similar dimensions to those of the C circle and aligned precisely opposite C1 and C31, whereas the rest of the posts are irregularly spaced suggesting that they were not set up until the inner structure was in existence. This form of construction, with an inner colonnade set immediately within the actual wall, is employed in a combination of stone and wood (outer stone wall) at Maiden Castle (*Ant. Journ.* xvi, 282) and Caerau, N. Wales (*Ibid.* xvi, 300) and in wood in the great circular communal houses of north-west Brazil.¹

We now have to consider the problem of dealing with the central area of this hypothetical building. Circle G has postholes similar in type and dimensions to Circle C, and if taken in conjunction with these, would support a roof with either a central ' lantern ' raised above the rest of the main roof, or a central opening. At Woodbury the big circular house had a central structure consisting of a square setting of four

¹ Oelman, *Haus und Hof im* in *Archiv für Anthrop.* xxxv (1909), *Altertum* (1927), 28 ; Koch-Grünberg, 43.

great posts, exactly similar to the communal houses of north-west Brazil of to-day and at Maiden Castle, Hut DB had a slightly eccentric interior setting of five posts (*Ant. Journ.* xvi, Pl. xlvii). The Sanctuary setting of six posts would agree with this and with the

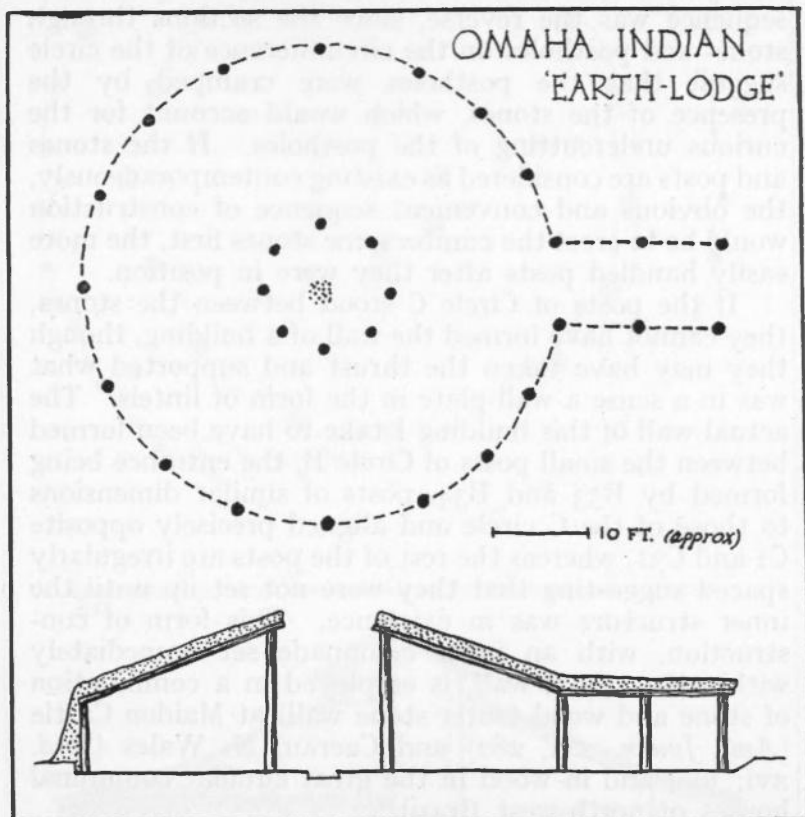


FIG. 5. PLAN AND SECTION OF 'EARTH-LODGE,' BASED ON FLETCHER AND LA FLESCHÉ

Omaha and Missouri 'earth-houses' mentioned above, which have a circle of four, six or more posts and a central opening.¹ The form is, in fact, the forerunner of the Pantheon.

¹ Oelman, *op. cit.*; Fletcher and La Flesché in *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of Bureau of American Eth-*

nology (1905-6), 75, 97-98; Saffert in *Archiv für Anthrop.* xxxv (1909), 119, with further references.

So we would have for the final timber phase (Phase III) at the Sanctuary a large circular temple enclosing a series of standing stones between the posts of a colonnade, with another single stone on the south-west with a flanking wooden structure of four posts. This temple had an entrance on the north-west, and was lighted from the centre, either by an open hole or a roofed 'lantern,' but there is one very important point to notice. The pre-existing structures must have been cleared away, presumably owing to their decaying condition, including not only the encircling structure with its two periods of repair, but the central hut. For the posts of Circle G in our last stage were placed in such a position that the hut must have been destroyed before they could be set up. And here we can see that change in ideas which I have mentioned above. The ideas embodied in the earlier structures were centripetal, centred on the original hut-shrine, and there is no specially marked entrance. But in our last phase, the centre is clear save for the posts supporting the roof, a circle of stones is housed within the temple, and there is a well-defined entrance. Can it be chance that this entrance points towards Avebury and its stone circles?

PHASE IV

There remains the question of the outer stone circle at the Sanctuary (Circle A) in its relation to the inner stone circle and the wooden structure. The stone circles could be regarded as contemporary one with another, but there is some evidence to suggest that the outer was a later addition. In the first place, it is connected with the West Kennet Avenue at a point somewhat to the south of the direction of the entrance into the timber structure of Phase III housing the inner stone circle, implying a change of plan, and then there is the curious fact, to which Mrs. Cunningham drew attention, that its diameter is precisely double, not that of the inner stone circle (C), but of the post-hole circle which we have considered the outer wall of the Phase III timber structure (Circle B). If this means anything, it must imply that Circle B was

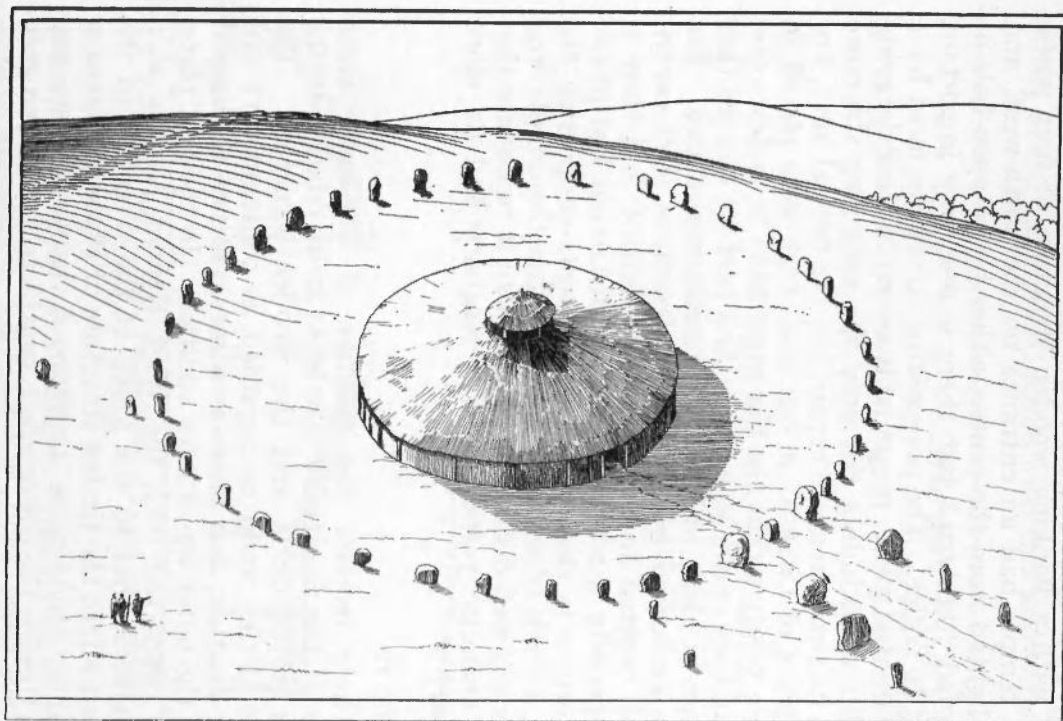


FIG. 6. ISOMETRIC VIEW OF THE SANCTUARY IN ITS SUGGESTED FINAL (FOURTH) PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION

standing when the stones of Circle A were set up, and since the stones of Circle C could hardly have been set up after the making of Circle B, Circle A must rank second in order of construction. The difference of axis would then suggest a fair interval between the two events, and here again the evidence from Avebury may help, for the joining of the Avenue to the Main Circle is a late stage in the sequence observed in the excavation of the main site.¹ Can we then place the first stone circle at the Sanctuary (in its timber housing) as contemporary with the first phase at Avebury (Northern, Central and Southern Circles) and equate the outer circle, joined with the Avenue, with a later and similar phase at the Great Circle ?

Having achieved some measure of success in interpreting the Sanctuary on these structural lines, the obvious monument to be examined next is Woodhenge itself. Here, at first sight, grave difficulties present themselves, but a study of the plan and other evidence suggests certain conclusions from which we can form a basis. In the first place we are struck by the dominance in the scheme by the great 'C' holes, which the evidence of the ramps show to have held the first set of posts erected, and outside these the A and B rings appear to be connected, for both share the curious gap to the north-west, between A53 and A54 and B29 and B30. If one is to be regarded as a replacement of the other, A must replace B, for B has outward-facing ramps which could not have been used with the A posts in position. But the replacement theory seems most unlikely, in view of the wide interval (about ten feet) separating the two rings. It seems more likely that while A was the actual visible wall of the structure the thrust and weight was mainly taken by the posts of B, in a similar manner to the B and C circles in Phase III of the Sanctuary. Furthermore, at Woodhenge a stone had existed between the posts of the B circle on the south, and could hardly have stood embedded in a wall. As we have seen, this form of structure postulated both at the Sanctuary and at

¹ For the recent work at Avebury see *Antiquity* x (1936), 417 ; xiii (1939), 223.

Woodhenge has parallels in Britain in the Iron Age and in the north-west Brazilian communal houses. While it is difficult to regard the circles D, E and F as

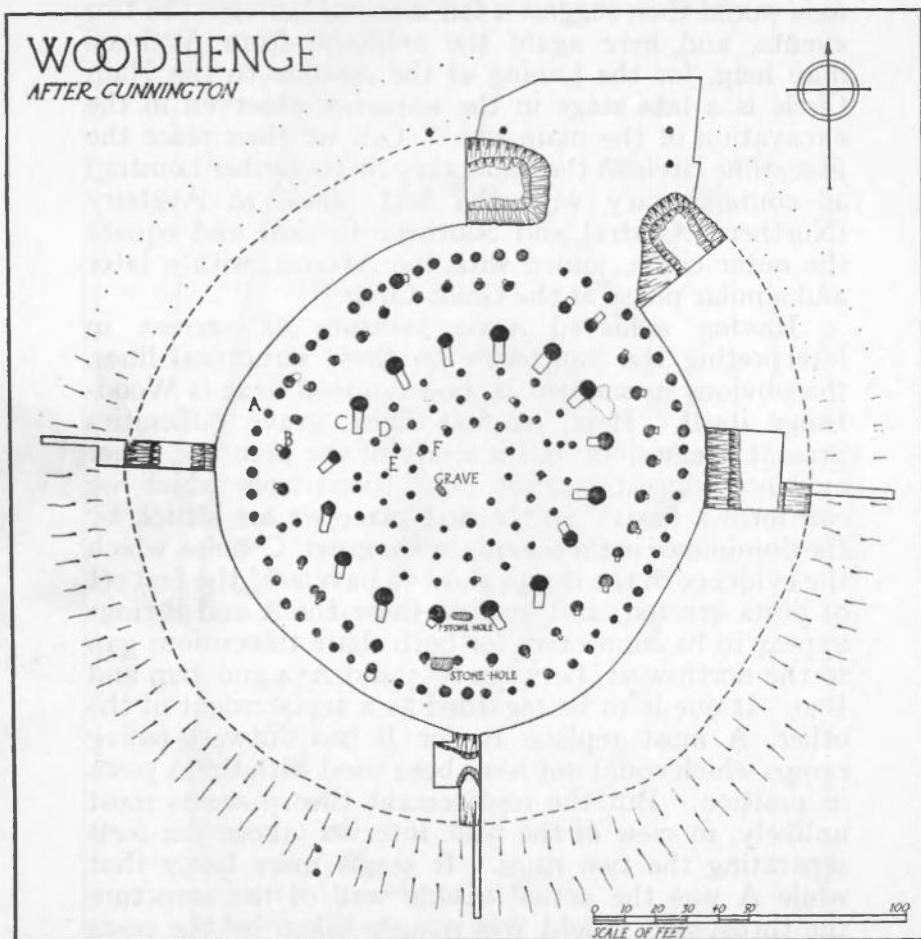


FIG. 7

contemporary, it is equally difficult to detect evidence of any sequence. The small infrequent ramps give us no clue, and the holes of all three circles are practically identical in proportions.

It is clear that the posts of the C ring must have

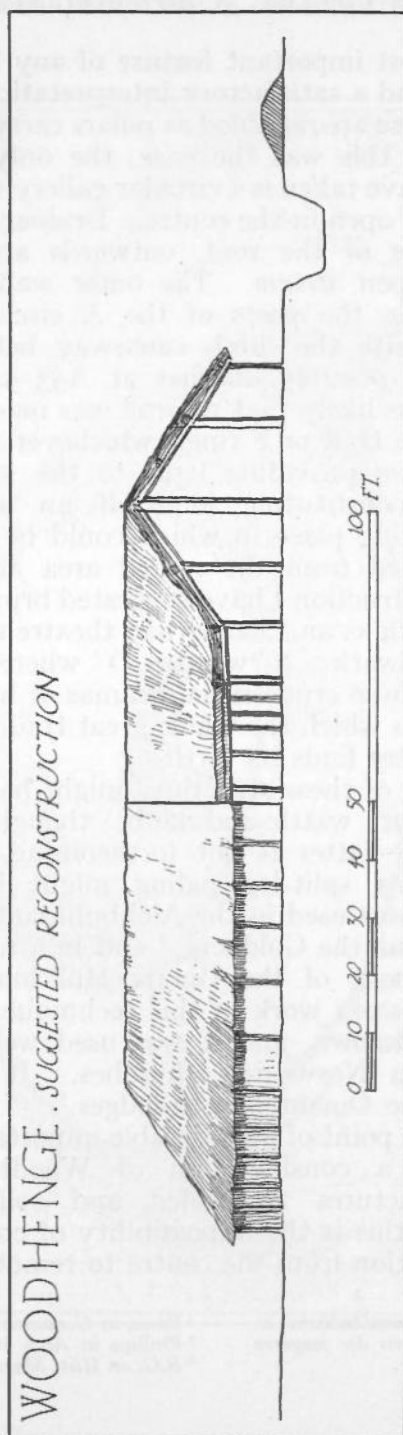


FIG. 8

formed the most important feature of any building at Woodhenge, and a satisfactory interpretation can only be gained if these are regarded as pillars carrying a main ridge-pole. If this was the case, the only form the building can have taken is a circular gallery with ridged roof, the whole open in the centre. Drainage would be on both slopes of the roof, outwards and inwards towards the open *atrium*. The outer wall would be formed between the posts of the A circle, with an entrance opposite the ditch causeway between A43 and A44, and possibly another at A53-54. In the interior it seems likely that no wall was made between the posts of the D, E or F rings, whichever was in use, the open *atrium* providing light to the surrounding gallery, and constituting in itself an arena, and ceremonies taking place in which could be most conveniently viewed from the roofed area around. In fact, the reconstruction I have suggested brings to mind nothing so much as an Elizabethan theatre such as the Globe at Southwark: a 'wooden O' wherein perhaps were enacted those crude ritual dramas of harvest and of springtime in which the whole great tradition of the European theatre finds its birth.

The walling of these structures might have been of hurdle-work, or wattle-and-daub, though tangible evidence of the latter is not forthcoming. In well-wooded districts split-log paling might have been employed: it was used in the Aichbuhl culture at the type-site¹ and on the Goldberg,² and in a robust form for the revetment of the Giants Hill long barrow, Lincs.³ The Saxon work in this technique at Greenstead⁴ is well known, and it was used well into the middle ages in Norwegian churches. It was also employed in the Omaha 'earth-lodges.'

There is one point of considerable importance which emerges from a consideration of Woodhenge and analogous structures as roofed and solidly-walled buildings, and this is the impossibility of constructing lines of orientation from the centre to remote external

¹ Buttler, *Der Donaulandische u. der westische Kulturkreis der jungeren Steinzeit* (1938), 18.

² Bersu in *Germania*, 1936, 232.

³ Phillips in *Arch.* lxxxv, 47.

⁴ *R.C. on Hist. Mons. Essex* ii, 112.

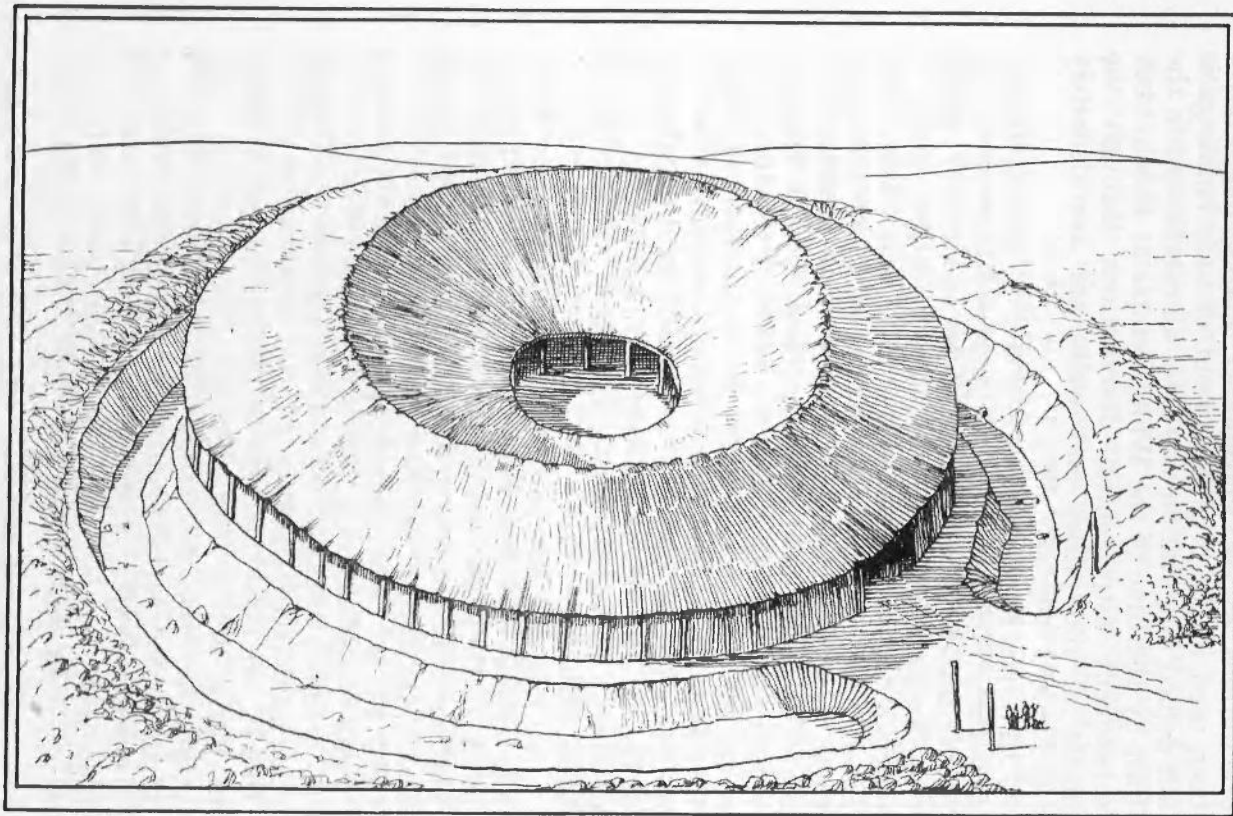


FIG. 9. ISOMETRIC VIEW OF WOODHENGE IN ITS SUGGESTED COMPLETED FORM

points of sidereal or solar importance. That such orientations as the midsummer sunrise might have been used in the original lay-out of such buildings is not denied (orientation was after all established in the East by the time of the White Temple at Erech)¹ but subsequent astronomical observations through the media of roof-pillars and wall-posts are definitely ruled out.

In thus interpreting our two major 'timber circles' as circular buildings of ritual purpose I have obviously placed myself in a position to be assailed by critics from every side. The main lines of attack might be on such lines as the absence of any comparable Early Bronze Age house-plans which might, on a smaller scale, reflect the same constructional technique as these big communal buildings, and the questionable validity of utilising a farmer's house of the Iron Age, in the third or fourth century B.C. to interpret an Early Bronze Age temple of the second millennium. Further, doubt might be cast on the architectural capabilities of the Beaker folk in making such monumental pieces of timber construction as I assume Woodhenge to have been.

To take the last point first, I think that since one must admit the inescapable fact that such enormous posts as those erected in the C holes at Woodhenge were actually cut down, trimmed, handled and set up, and if one further assumes (as I think we have every right to do) that Stonehenge preserves in stone a 'fossil' so to say of a vanished wood technique, these two points alone point to a skill in carpentry on a large scale quite commensurate with the buildings visualised. Indeed, we need not turn to Stonehenge for evidence of Early Bronze Age carpentry by inference, since actual morticed beams dating from the very beginning of the phase were found on the submerged surface of the Essex Coast.² The consummate skill in carpentry attainable by folk still in a stone-using culture is attested by such recent primitive groups as the Maori,

¹ Cf. Childe, *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (1934), 151; Hogben, *Mathematics for the Million* (1937), 48 ff.

² *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* ii, Pl. xxxviii, b.

and the timber framework of the Omaha 'earth-houses' mentioned more than once above were likewise originally made with stone axes.

The question of analogous house-plans of the Early Bronze Age, and the validity of the Woodbury comparison, may be taken together by considering, in barest outline, what is known of prehistoric house-types in reference to Britain. Apart from palaeolithic and mesolithic wind-shelters or semi-subterranean winter huts,¹ from Neolithic times onwards there seems to be a marked dichotomy in house-types between Western and Central-Eastern Europe, reflecting, in terms of the Neolithic cultures themselves, the difference between the Danubian and Western groups and their allies. In the east the house-type is normally rectangular or irregular (i.e. the *kurvencomplexbau* type of Danubian sites such as Köln-Lindenthal); in the west, circular. It is not my intention to mention the rectangular house-group for any reason but to dismiss it, merely adding that there is no need to see its identity with the megaron, and that it goes back to very early Neolithic times in, e.g., Scandinavia.² It is essentially a timber type, deriving from log huts in the forest areas.

In the Western Neolithic cultures of France and Spain the circular house appears to be dominant, often appearing as a stone-built 'hut-circle.' In the Iberian Neolithic, such sites as El Garcel are characterised by circular or oval huts, and the types persists there into the Early Bronze Age.³ There is little early Neolithic evidence from France or Switzerland, and there are no recognisable houses of the Cortailod culture at the type-station. In the Western Neolithic site at Fort Harrouard, however, the one recognisable hut on the site was circular, framed on wooden posts and with a central hearth.⁴ At the Armorican site of Le Lizo the stone-built huts were circular or oval.⁵ It is inter-

¹ Discussed by Clark in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* v (1939), 98 ff.

² E.g. at Strandegaard and Barkaer — Brønsted, *Danmarks Oldtid* i, 146.

³ Childe, *Dawn of European Civilisation*, Second Edn. (1939), 251.

⁴ Philippe, *Cinq Années de Fouilles au Fort Harrouard* (1927), 114 and Plan C.

⁵ *Revue Arch.* 1933, 189 ff.

esting to note in passing, however, that the cultures of Michelsberg and Schussenried, of 'Western' origin, are characterised by rectangular houses in their areas of main development in East Switzerland and south-west Germany.¹

The English Neolithic evidence is slight but contradictory. Stone hut-circles on Dartmoor,² but a large rectangular house at Haldon not very far east;³ some semi-subterranean oval huts,⁴ and possible traces of a rectangular house with bedding-trench in the German manner at Easton Down.⁵

The Beaker folk brought the circular house from the west into central Europe, where such round huts as those at Oltingen⁶ bear witness to the intrusive nature of the culture. As I shall indicate later, there seems good reason for supposing that the circular Beaker house was to become an important feature in the burial ritual of these people in parts of Germany and in Holland. In England the amorphous *kurven-complexbau* huts of Easton Down⁷ may have a Neolithic origin, but true circular huts referable to the culture are recorded from the submerged surface of the Essex Coast.⁸

The strong hold which the Western house type must have had in Britain becomes clear, however, in the later Bronze Age. The great accumulation of Middle-Late Bronze Age stone-built hut-circles on Dartmoor find expression in timber at Plumpton Plain and New Barn Down,⁹ or at Birchington in Kent,¹⁰ where the intrusive Late Bronze Age cultures from North France and the Low Countries seem universally to have adopted the native circular house-type in their new home. And although at All Cannings rectangular houses proper to the parental cultures on the Continent

¹ Cf. Buttler, *op. cit.* 74 ff.

² At Legis Tor (*Trans. Devon Assoc.* xxviii, 174) and probably other sites (cf. Radford in *Proc. First Internat. Congress Prehist.* (London, 1932), 138).

³ *Proc. Devon Arch. Ex. Soc.* ii, 244; *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* iv, 222.

⁴ As at New Barn Down (*Sussex Arch. Colls.* lxxv, 153) and Corfe Mullen (*Proc. Dorset N.H. and Arch. Soc.* lx, 73).

⁵ *Wilts. Arch. Mag.* xlvi, 232.

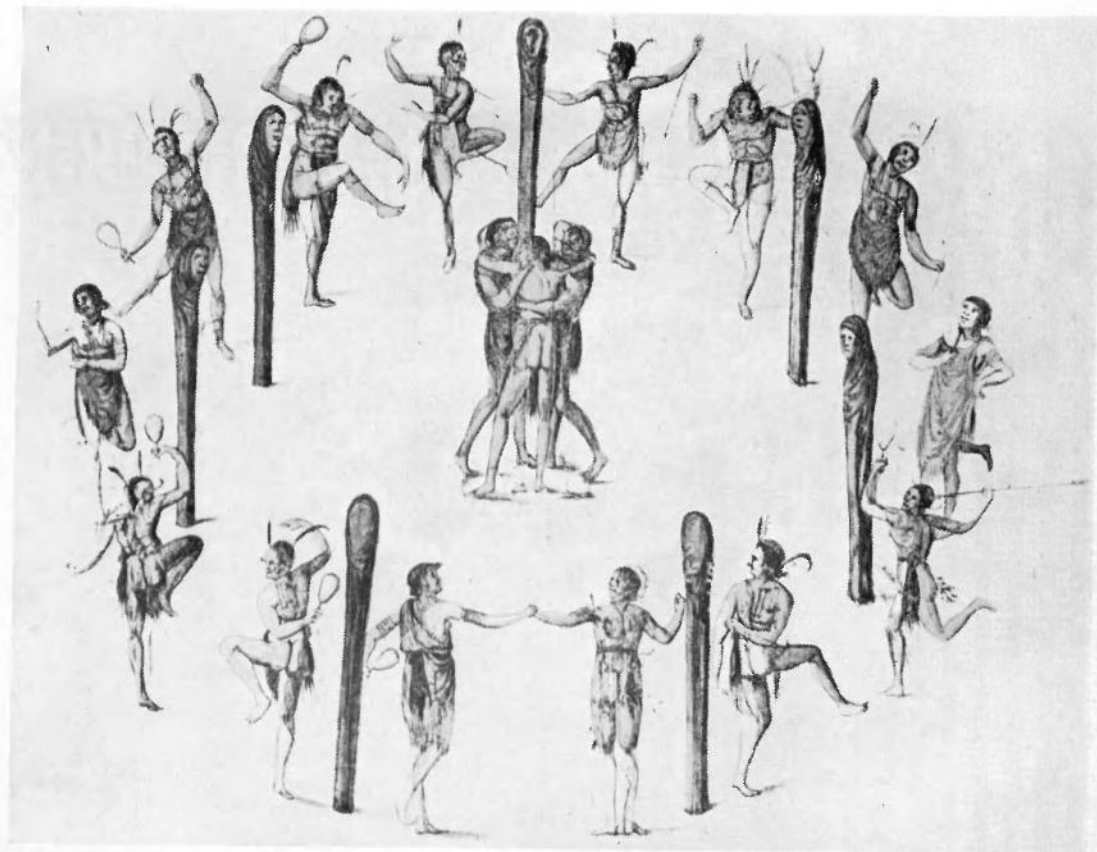
⁶ *Prähist. Zeitschrift* v (1913), 161.

⁷ *Wilts. Arch. Mag.* xlvi, 228 ff.

⁸ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* ii, 184. Cf. also the circular stone-walled huts of Beaker age at Muirkirk, Ayrshire—*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.* xlviii, 373.

⁹ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* i, 16 ff.; *Sussex Arch. Colls.* lxxv, 137.

¹⁰ Minnis Bay, Birchington—*Proc. Prehist. Soc.* v, 252.



RITUAL DANCE OF VIRGINIAN INDIANS ROUND A TIMBER CIRCLE. FROM A WATER-COLOUR DRAWING BY JOHN WHITE, C. 1585-86. (*British Museum*)

seem to have existed, the Woodbury evidence shows that the native type had certainly re-asserted itself at a later phase of the Iron Age, while the 'B' cultures of the west show, e.g. at Glastonbury (cf. Fig. 12) or Maiden Castle, the circular house built of stone or timber, or both, as its dominant form. The Woodbury house, therefore, takes its place as a descendant of a well-established native house-type in Britain, and as such may legitimately be employed to illuminate the problems of Early Bronze Age structures. The survival of the Early Bronze Age type of 'Henge' with interior timber structure into the Early Iron Age at Frilford, Berks, should be borne in mind in this connection (*Oxoniensia* iv (1939), 1-70).

The thesis I have developed with reference to Woodhenge and The Sanctuary must not be taken to imply that I consider that all our 'timber circles' are the remains of roofed structures. I feel, for instance, that the Arminghall monument must have presented its horse-shoe of eight uprights untrammelled by roof or walls, and the same may hold good for Bleasdale. We may rather visualize such circles as that seen and drawn by John White in Virginia in 1585,¹ where he found the Indians 'wth. strange iesturs and songs dansing abowt posts carued on the topps lyke mens faces' forming a small timber circle on the outskirts of the village of Secoton, with a beaten dancing-floor around it (Pl. i). But the circles in barrows at such sites as Caebetin, Calais Wold and Mortimer's B41² seem much more explicable as huts, and the same goes for the structure in Barrow 2 on Crichel Down, Dorset.³ If we admit these, we at once plunge ourselves into the deepest waters of controversy, for we are forced to

¹ John White, for a time Governor of Virginia, made his drawings while on the voyages of Raleigh and Grenville in 1585-90. These water-colours are in the British Museum (*Cat. Drawings Brit. Artists* iv (1907), 326 ff.), and some of them were engraved in De Bry's *America* (Frankfort am Main, 1590). Collotype reproduction of nine of the original drawings were published by Laurence Binyon in Vol. xiii (1924-25) of the Walpole Society, Pls. xxiv-xxix, the

view of the village of Secoton being Pl. xxiv, that of the dance Pl. xxv. The Secoton drawing is also reproduced in the Hakluyt Society's reprint of Thomas Hariot's voyage (*Extra Series*, Vol. viii, opp. p. 336), and the British Museum have since issued a set of coloured postcards of White's drawings.

² *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* ii, 32-33; *Forty Years*, 182.

³ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* iv, 319; full publication to appear in *Archaeologia*.

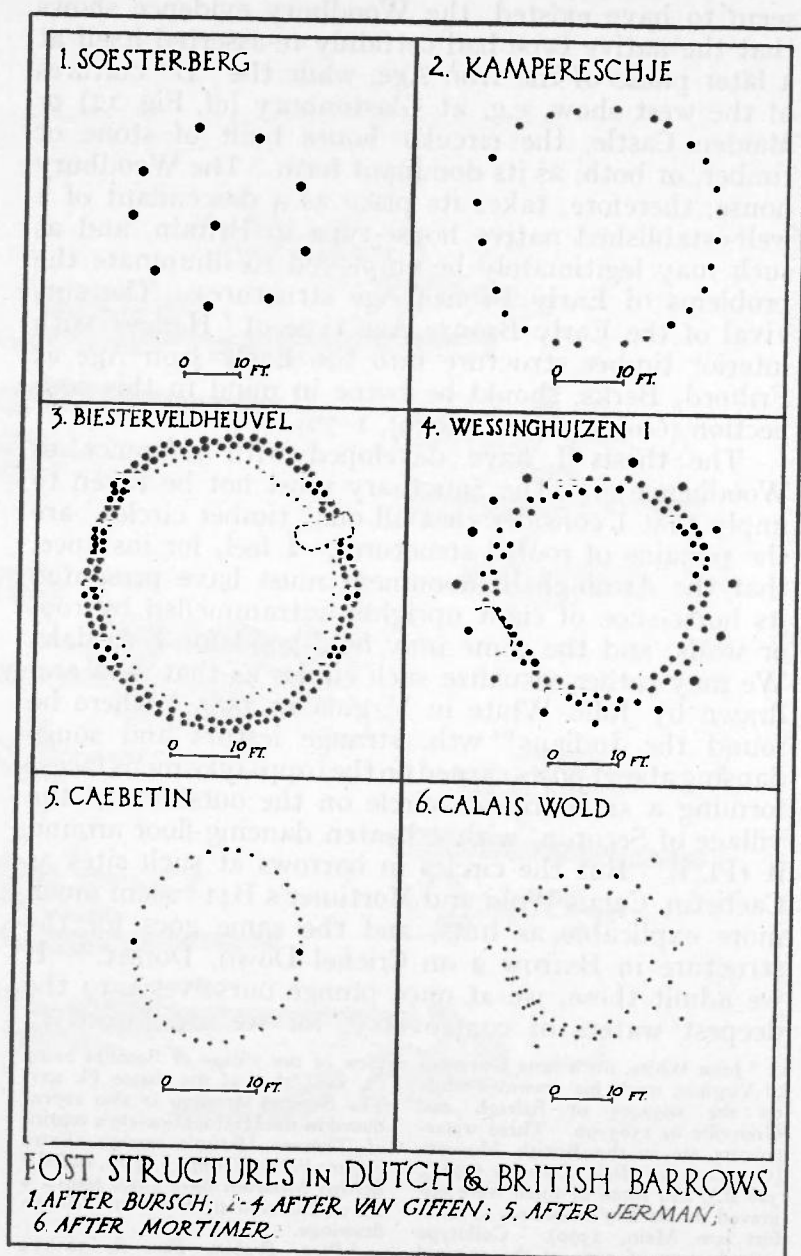


FIG. 10

consider the timber structures in the Dutch palisade-barrows : are these purely ritual arrangements of posts within the barrow or are they circular houses for the reception of the dead, either built *ad hoc* or, more likely, secular buildings consecrated for the purpose ?

Small timber structures specially constructed for the deceased are well known in central and northern Europe under the generic name of *totenhause*, and have recently been discussed and illustrated as a group by Kersten.¹ They are normally rectangular in plan, and in England the type seems to occur under a Devonshire barrow² but is otherwise unrecognised. Although Holwerda interpreted the circular timber structures in the barrows he excavated in Holland along the same lines, subsequent Dutch excavators, notably van Giffen and Bursch, consider that the circular settings of posts so frequently found in barrows of their Early and Middle Bronze Age are 'ritual' features not to be connected with roofed structures, admitting hut-burial only in certain very small circular or oval structures surrounding the grave, often with lean-to sides.³

Although it is neither seemly, nor in most cases wise, to express views on structures contrary to those of the distinguished excavators of them, yet I feel I must risk the twin charges of folly and of discourtesy towards Dr. van Giffen by criticising his views on the palisade-barrows : defending myself on the one hand with an assurance that any such re-examination would serve only to enhance the brilliance of the excavations which provide such abundant and so well documented material for study, and on the other, with a reminder that in archaeology there are always several correct explanations for any set of observed phenomena.

I do not propose an elaborate enquiry into the possibilities of roofed structures suggested by all the Dutch palisade-barrows excavated : I merely wish to make a few points which I think are of importance,

¹ *Offa* i (1936), 56 ff.

² At Wrangworthy Cross, East Putford. *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* i, 134; ii, 216, and information from Mr. C. A. R. Radford.

³ At Onnen (*Bauart* Taf. 90); Eeze v (*ibid.* Taf. 108); Hilversum 8 and 5 (*Oudheidkundige Mededelingen* xvi, 50, 53; rectangular at Gairle (*Proc. Prehist. Soc.* iv, 263).

and to indicate certain specific plans which show features of unusual interest. In general it seems likely to me that the majority of the Dutch palisade-barrows began with a burial made in the floor of a hut, which was then either pulled down over the burial or collapsed. Were the hut roofed with turf in the manner of the Omaha houses a ready-made turf mound would result from this collapse. The objection to this theory, as urged by van Giffen and apparently as confirmed by his sections, is that no such collapse can be traced in the make-up of the barrows. But in one section,

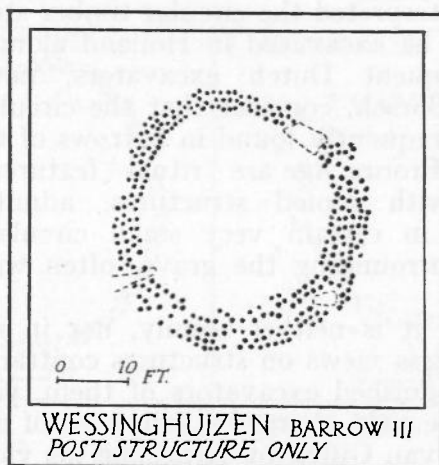


FIG. II. (*After van Giffen*)

that of Wessinghuizen II, it can be seen quite clearly that the posts have here collapsed inwards in the body of the mound nearly on to the old ground level.¹ This certainly suggests that the sequence was here as outlined above, and it is at any rate impossible to explain on van Giffen's theory that the posts stood free above the mound of the completed barrow. I am most strongly tempted to believe that the phenomena in this barrow are, owing to exceptionally favourable soil conditions, a record of what must have taken place in other instances without leaving visible traces.

¹ *Bauart*, Taf. 58.

Two or three house-types can, I think, be recognised in the Dutch barrows : the simple hut with central post occurs at Soesterberg 2;¹ without the central post at several sites, e.g. Kampereschje.² The multiplication of closely-set posts can only be satisfactorily explained by assuming replacement : a site at Oss³ is a good example, which may be compared with the post-structure of a Glastonbury hut (Fig. 12). In both (and in most Dutch examples) the absence of a central post or posts is noteworthy : there was no evidence from Glastonbury for the type of roofing, which must

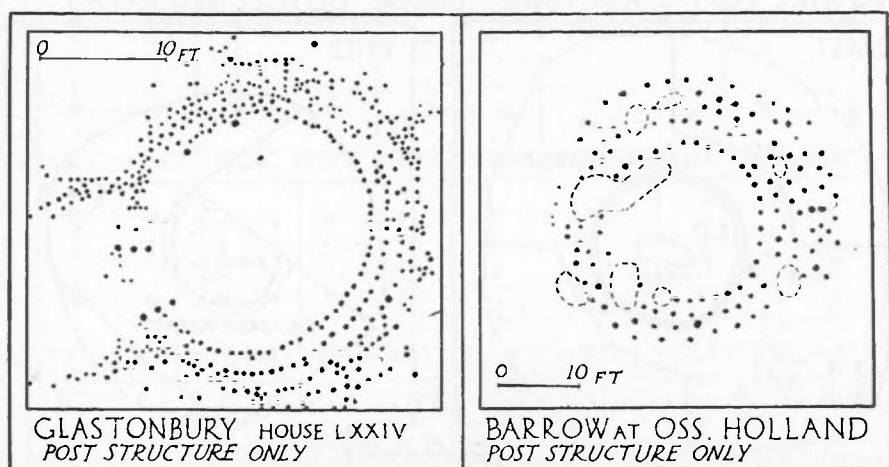


FIG. 12. (After Bulleid and Gray, and Bursch)

have been light for such thin supports. The detached posts round the edge of e.g. Wessinghuizen I and II⁴ might be interpreted as verandahs on the Woodbury analogy. Internal division into rooms is suggested by a structure in a barrow near Darmstadt.⁵

A point which may support the supposition that these timber structures were originally utilitarian houses is the existence in close proximity to the grave and surrounding palisade in two instances, of small

¹ *Oudheid. Meded.* xv, 57.

² *Bauart* Taf. 71.

³ Bursch in *Marburger Studien*

(1939), 24 and Taf. 10; cf. also Wessinghuizen iii (*Bauart* Taf. 77).

⁴ *Bauart* Taf. 58, 65.

⁵ *Zeitschrift für Ethnol.* 1904.

quadrangular settings of postholes. At Rhee¹ there was one only ; at Emst² two, side by side, showed double postholes implying replacements. Van Giffen interpreted these structures as shrines, but they fall into line with a well-known group of small structures which usually seem to have been granaries, built on piles and so raised free from damp and rats. Such structures are known in European agricultural settlements from the Neolithic onwards (Danubian at Köln-Lindenthal), and in England first recognised by

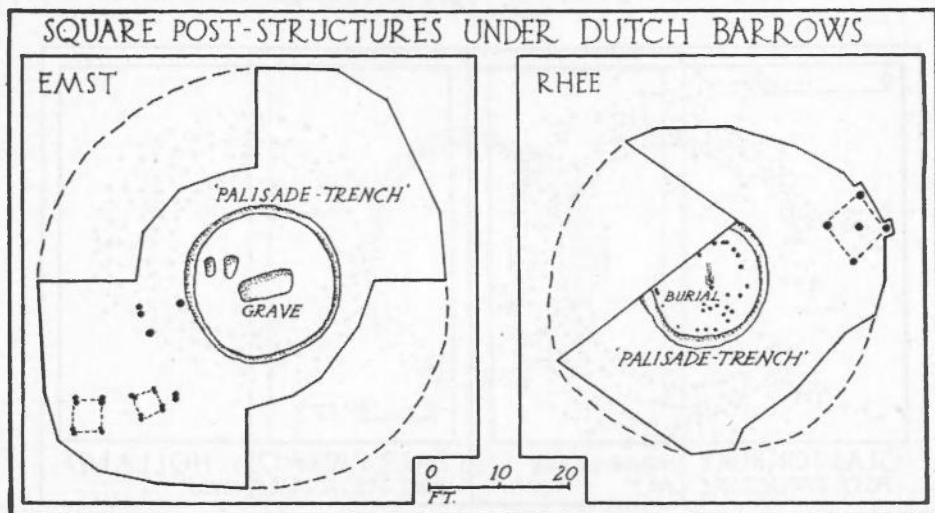


FIG. 13. (After van Giffen)

Pitt Rivers at Rotherley³ but occurring also at All Cannings (unrecognized),⁴ at Park Brow (unrecognized),⁵ at Glastonbury (noted by Oelman and Buttler),⁶ and at Woodbury. The presence of these

¹ *Bauart* Taf. 49.

² *Ibid.* Taf. 70.

³ *Excavations in Cranborne Chase* ii, 57.

⁴ *All Cannings Cross*, 57 and Pl. 2 (Site A).

⁵ *Arch.* lxxix, p. 32, Fig. P. At least two such structures are recognisable on the site, while the double line of large postholes nearby must represent the foundations of a

barn, earlier than the 'working-place' which impinges upon them, although the two elements were considered contemporary by the excavator. (For 'working-places' see *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* iv, 308 ff.; *Wilts. Arch. Mag.* xlviii, 513-519.)

⁶ *The Glastonbury Lake-Village* i, Pl. xiv; cf. Buttler and Haberey, *Köln-Lindenthal* i, 67-69, Pls. 28 and 31.

utilitarian structures so near to the dead in its circular enclosure as to be covered by the mound of the barrow strongly suggests that the home of the living had become the house of the dead.¹

Whatever may be the opposition from various viewpoints, I think I can claim that by interpreting Woodhenge and The Sanctuary as roofed structures I have produced something rather more convincing than the forests of naked posts in which we have all so long and so dismally wandered. In the middle of

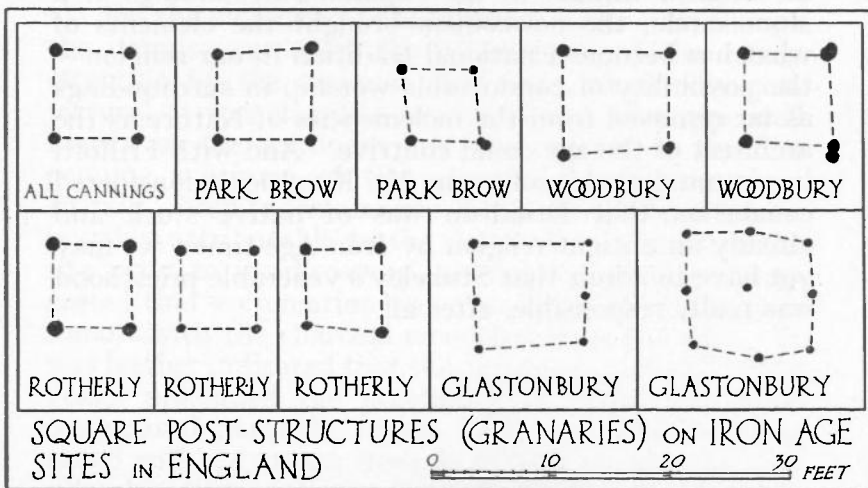


FIG. 14. (After Cunnington, Hawley, Bersu, Pitt-Rivers, Bulleid and Gray)

an avowed habitation-site such posthole complexes would unhesitatingly have been referred to roofed buildings, but we have been led astray, partly by trying to explain all the timber circles by a single formula which would explain every instance on stone-circle analogies, a resemblance which may sometimes be fortuitous, and partly by a certain shyness in claiming large Early Bronze Age buildings which could only be

¹ Since the above was written, another probable granary structure has been published, though not recognised as such, from the Late Bronze Age site at Cush, co. Limerick

(O'Riordain, *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.* xlv, Sec. C, no. 7; p. 91, Fig. 3—post-holes B C D and E in Ring-Fort 1).

called temples. Open-air sanctuaries were, we felt, just permissible, but the concept of these great dim raftered halls of magic and ritual was too much for us children of a scientific age. If I have restored to the Beaker folk their temples (more soundly I hope than Stukeley 'restored' Stonehenge to the Druids) it is with some satisfaction that I put on record yet another proof of the sound common sense of those masterful people. While the fanatical inheritors of the megalithic cult still felt constrained to endure the rigours of an English climate in the exposed surroundings of a stone circle, the newcomers brought the elements of what has become a national tradition in our religion—the possibility of comfortable worship in surroundings as far removed from the inclemencies of Nature as the architect of the age could contrive. And with Frilford in our mind, and recollecting Mr. Kendrick's considered conclusion that Druidism was of native stock and already an ancient religion by Iron Age times, we may yet have to admit that Stukeley's venerable priesthood was really responsible, after all.