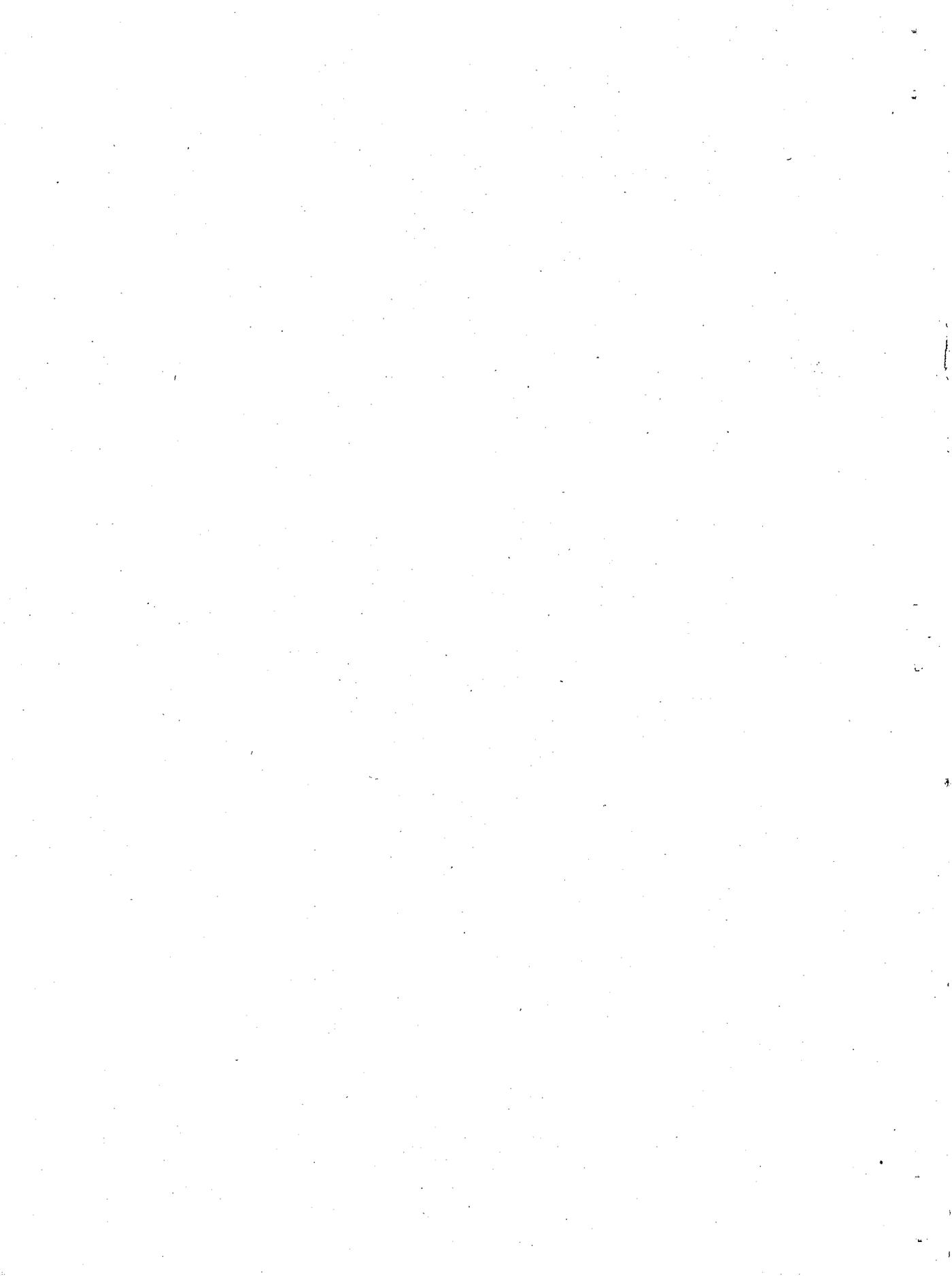


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THE BRONZE AGE BARROW AND IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT THRIPLow

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BETWEEN October 1953 and February 1954 the Cambridge Archaeological Field Club carried out excavations on the site of a ploughed-out barrow 220 yd. south-east of Thriplow church, $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles due south of Cambridge. The object was to recover as much information as possible before the final destruction of the site, a process begun by levelling operations in the 1840's, continued by a century of regular ploughing, and much hastened by the change to deep ploughing made four years ago.

The barrow stands on the top of a low chalk hill at just over 100 ft. O.D., but its situation cannot be described as a commanding one. Street Way passes 120 yd. to the south and the Icknield Way¹ is less than a mile away, again to the south.

This may explain the number of barrows in the immediate neighbourhood.² The only example calling for special mention here is an unpublished one, completely levelled by ploughing, some 400 yd. south-west of Barker's Farm, Duxford, and two miles from Thriplow.³ This, though slightly smaller than our barrow (its ditch was about 45 ft. radius), seems to have been very similar in structure.

The Thriplow Barrow had appeared as a prominent cropmark in barley in the summer of 1953, and in the ploughing during the following September two large blocks of sandstone, each weighing about 50 lb. and showing signs of fire, were said to have been removed from the site of the barrow to the edge of the field. However, there was some doubt whether they were from this barrow or from another unlocated circular feature in the same field. At the beginning of the work the only surface indications were a slight rise on the crest of the hill, a rough circle of chalk of about 35 ft. radius also brought to the surface by the plough (enclosed by broken lines on Fig. 1), and an irregular belt of stones, rounded sandstone and flint up to the size of one's fist, around the south-west quadrant.

THE BARROW

The aim of complete excavation was not fulfilled, but enough was cleared to show that no internal structure of post-holes, such as was found at Chippenham⁴ and Snailwell J,⁵ was present here. Similarly, efforts to distinguish an old turf line were unsuccessful. That this was not present may have been due to the fact that the barrow was built of

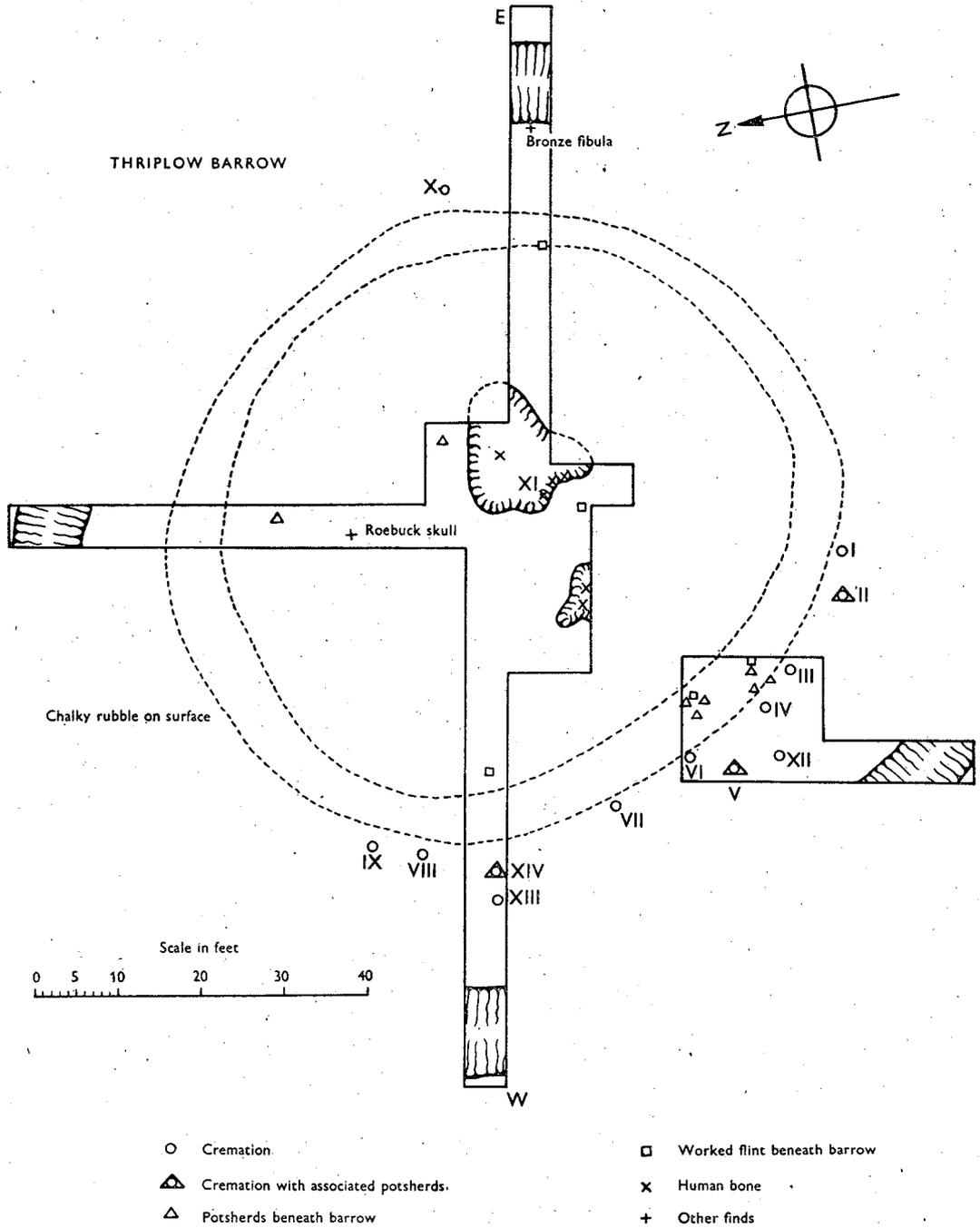
¹ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XLIII, p. 30.

² O. G. S. Crawford, 'Field Survey of the Royston Area', *P.P.S.* vol. II (1936), pp. 97-105.

³ Information from Mr W. Parkinson of Duxford.

⁴ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XXXVI, pp. 134-55.

⁵ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XLIII, pp. 30-49.



a chalkless and virtually stoneless loam, presumably scraped from the surface of the surrounding ground and so identical with the underlying soil, rather than to any stripping of the area before building started. At several points sherds and flints were found; these were always low in the build of the barrow. One of the former seems to be of Neolithic B ware (Fig. 3, no. 4), which must antedate the construction of the barrow. The scraper (Fig. 3, no. 1) is unfortunately not distinctive enough to help with the dating. Also there were a number of dissolution pockets in the underlying chalk, of which the contents, though differing from the loam of the barrow, merged into it without any line of demarcation.

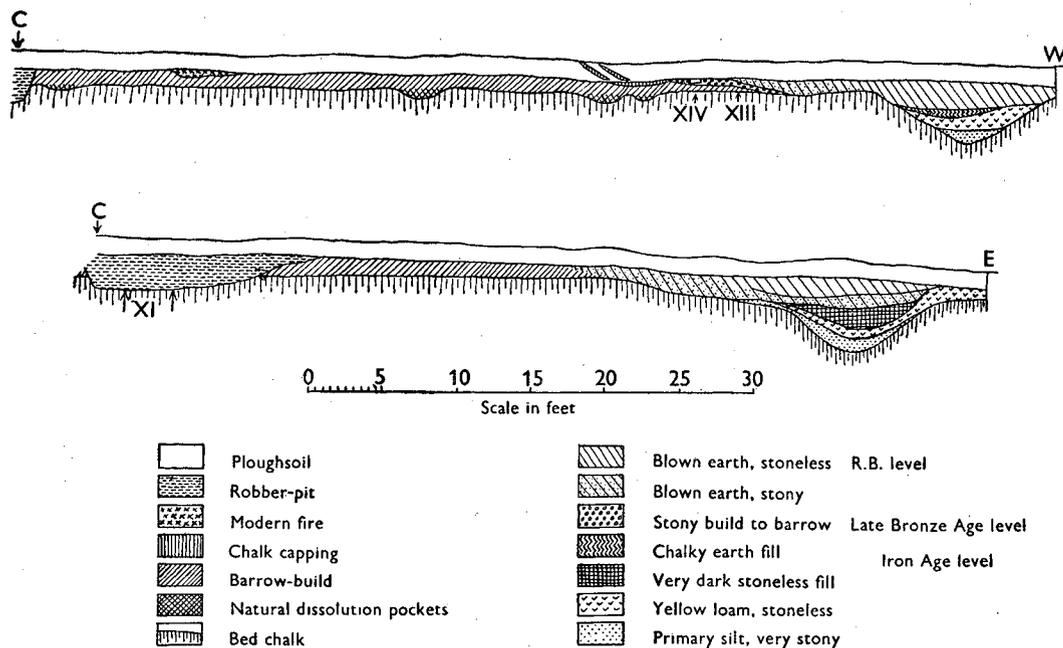


Fig. 2. Section along east-west axis.

The outside of the barrow itself, at a radius of about 40 ft., was marked by a belt of chalk which ploughing had destroyed everywhere except at the western edge. It was this chalk which explained the circular soil mark. The west section (Fig. 2) shows some *in situ* and some scraped up into the ploughsoil, witnessing the rate of destruction of the site.

There are two possible explanations for such chalk rings, namely that they are revetments to the monuments, or that they are the surviving remnants of an original complete capping. When the top of the barrow is gone, the only criterion lies in the amount of chalk used, i.e. the size of the ditch from which it was quarried. At Snailwell the ditches were so small that Mr Lethbridge was certain that there was insufficient chalk to give a capping to the barrows. Indeed, one wonders where the chalk was found for even the revetments to barrows D, F and H, since these had no ditches at all. At Thriplow, however, the ditch was a substantial one, being at an

average radius of 55 ft., with a V-section 10 ft. wide where it cuts the chalk and 5 to 6 ft. deep from modern ground level. The volume of chalk removed can be calculated as sufficient to give a capping about 1 ft. thick (very approximately, since the original height of the barrow is unknown). Thus, on the evidence available, a chalk capping seems more than likely.¹

Where the primary burial should have been was a modern robber-pit, confirmed, if confirmation were needed, by the discovery of several pieces of tar well down in the filling. Also in this mixed filling were some fragments of unburnt human bone, including part of the right half of a mandible, an area of the frontal and left parietal bones of the skull, two pieces probably of frontal and occipital, and several more skull fragments too small to identify more exactly. There was also a piece tentatively identified as the axillary border of a human scapula.

The only other find in the barrow was a roebuck cranium, complete with antlers, 20 ft. north of the centre. It was definitely incorporated in the barrow during its construction and not buried subsequently. The significance of this skull is not clear, though there are many parallels (e.g. the ox skull in Snailwell A, the horse skull in Snailwell C).

Owing to the removal of nearly all the primary burial and any grave goods it may have had, the barrow cannot be precisely dated by archaeological means. The Peterborough sherd and the Late Bronze Age sherds with the secondary burials define its chronological limits, though not very closely. The fact that the bones at the centre were unburnt supports an attribution to the Early Bronze Age, or the outset of the Middle Bronze Age at latest. But the prominent berm between barrow and ditch invites comparison with Wessex bell- rather than bowl-barrows. Further than this it is unsafe to go on the limited evidence.

THE SECONDARY BURIALS

In the south-west quadrant eleven cremation burials had been turned up by the plough.² Of these, three were accompanied by sherds of very coarse pottery of Late Bronze Age type. Also in this area were the medium-sized stones mentioned above. It was then noticed that there was a small group of similar stones in the east-north-east. On examination, cremated bone (no. X) was found with these, too, so the association of these stones with the cremations seems secure. This is important because in the west section these stones appear as a layer banked up against the chalk and loam of the barrow. In this layer were cremations XIII and XIV, the latter with the undisturbed fragments of part of the rim of its urn (Fig. 3, no. 6), a very late type with the overhanging rim reduced to a mere cordon, in position round the burnt bones. The whole base and body of the urn had been removed by the plough.

¹ Given a width of 5 ft., the revetment would have to be nearly 5 ft. high to account for the chalk from the ditch. This is not an impossible figure, but there is no evidence for such a structure.

² A similar arrangement was noticed at Snailwell B (*Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XLIII) and apparently Latch Farm Barrow, Christchurch, *P.P.S.* vol. IV (1938), pp. 169-87.

In other words, the earlier barrow was extended by the addition of the stony layer when it was used for secondary burials in the Late Bronze Age. The sandstone of which most of these stones are formed is local in the sense that it occurs in quantity in the area today, though not in the geological sense. But the stoneless loam of the barrow suggests that it was not, at that earlier period at least, to be found loose on the surface, from which the loam was presumably scraped or cut as turves. This gives us three possibilities:

That the original barrow builders had carefully sorted out the stones from the surface soil, to the very smallest;

That the Late Bronze Age folk had brought the stone from somewhere where it was exposed by natural erosion, such as a stream bed, the nearest suitable one being $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away;

That the soil in the immediate neighbourhood had been disturbed, as by cultivation, between the time of the barrow's construction and the time of the cremation burials, thus bringing the stones to the surface. Today one can see a similar though later stage in the same process in which deep ploughing is bringing up for the first time quantities of chalk, which lay too deep to be reached by earlier methods of cultivation.

The third possibility, that we have here evidence for the earliest agriculture in the area, is admittedly nothing but a guess, but is, I think, an interesting one, particularly when the evidence of the charcoals is also taken into consideration.¹

THE DITCH FILLING

The contents of the ditches proved of even more interest than the secondary burials. The ditch section in the east (that in the north was virtually identical, and in the west and south-west closely similar) showed the following strata:

In the very bottom was a stony layer of rapid silt, followed by a stoneless layer of the same yellow colour. These contained a few animal bones and struck flakes of flint, but were otherwise sterile.

Above this was a very dark deposit containing large quantities of pottery, flint flakes, animal bones and charcoal, clearly a midden deposit. Only two of the flakes showed any secondary working, to form a rough scraper (Fig. 3, no. 2) and an awl (Fig. 3, no. 3). The pottery was of Iron Age A type and will be treated further below. This layer was present in all sections, though poorly represented in the south-west. In the west it had a quantity of chalk mixed with it, but was otherwise the same.

This was overlain by a stony brown layer, again practically sterile, and so very useful for marking off the preceding from the succeeding culturally rich ones, and for showing a break in continuity of occupation. The upper one was of the same dark brown colour, with animal bones and a few flints as before, but the pottery was Romano-British, much eroded and very fragmentary, and a number of Iron Age sherds were also present. In fact it is probably the result of the levelling of the mound

¹ See Appendix IV.

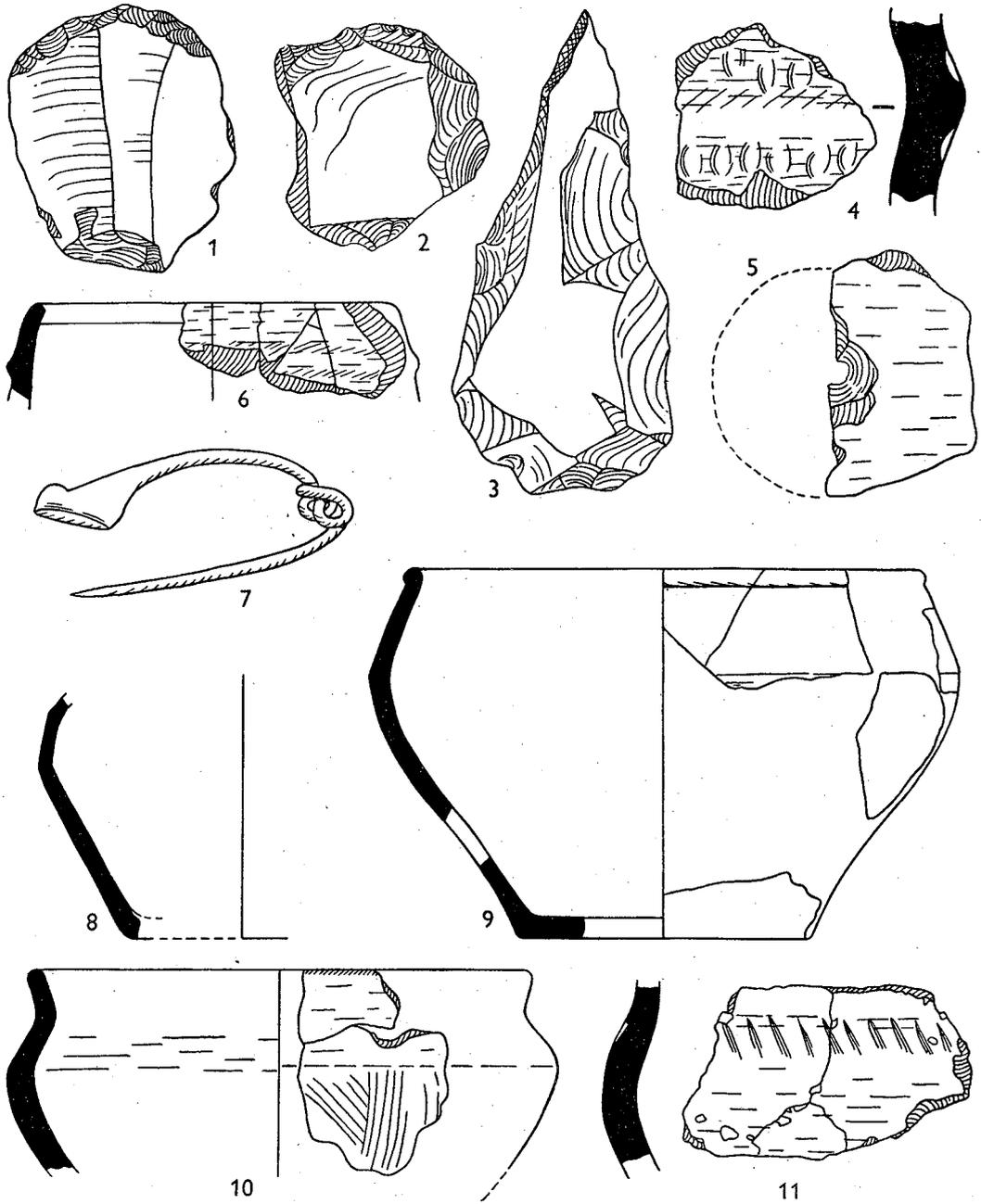


Fig. 3. 1-2, Flint scrapers, 1/1. 3, Flint awl, 1/1. 4, Neolithic B sherd, 1/1. 5, Broken spindle whorl, 1/1. 6, Late Bronze Age urn with Burial XIV, 1/4. 7, Bronze fibula, 1/1. 8-9, Black burnished Iron Age ware, 1/2. 10, Coarse Iron Age sherd, 1/2. 11, Coarse buff Iron Age sherd, 1/2.

a century ago, the sherds having been exposed on the surface until that date, rather than an accumulation in its present position. There were also a few scraps of iron, for the most part too small and corroded to identify, and the bronze fibula shown in Fig. 3, no. 7.

Finally came the 15 in. of ploughsoil which covered the whole site.

THE SECOND RING

It was at first thought that the second ring, said to lie near the western edge of the same field, was another barrow. An air photograph¹ showed only the main barrow and a searchlight site in the south-east corner. However, the quantities of Iron Age pottery and other material in the ditch suggest the presence of a settlement of that age somewhere nearby. There is nothing from the excavated site to explain the two large stone blocks, whereas they could well have been hearth stones in the other.

Here, indeed, we may have the settlement of people who not only used the barrow ditch for their domestic rubbish, but also erected the Chronicle Hills² group of barrows, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the north-east. The ascription of the Thriplow pottery and the Chronicle Hills burials to the same people is supported by the evidence of Marnian contacts provided by each, the black burnished bead-rim bowl of the former, and the iron-nailed coffins and plural burials of the latter.

THE SMALL FINDS

Little can be said of the undistinguished scraper from below the barrow, nor of the second and awl from the Iron Age ditch deposit. The great number of flint flakes, 411 in all, distributed through all layers, with a maximum in the Iron Age levels in the ditch and on the barrow berm, calls for some comment. They corroborate the evidence for flint working during the Iron Age in this district, for example from Fengate (Peterborough),³ Hunsbury,⁴ Cavenham Heath⁵ and Micklemoor Hill, West Harling.⁶

One of the Iron Age potsherds (Fig. 3, no. 5) had been perforated in antiquity, presumably for use as a spindle whorl, and subsequently broken. There was no metal below the R.B. level, and none of the bones showed any working.

THE IRON AGE POTTERY

The great majority of the Iron Age sherds, amounting to over two-thirds, formed a fairly homogeneous group of coarse red or black wares. Tempering with flint grits was the rule; chalk had been used for this purpose in only four sherds. The shapes of vessels were also fairly uniform as far as they could be recovered, and there were really only two forms present, the common Iron Age A situla jar (Fig. 4, no. 10), as

¹ For which information thanks are due to Dr J. K. St Joseph.

² Account and references in C. Fox, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, pp. 77-9.

³ *Arch. J.* vol. c, pp. 188-223.

⁴ *Arch. J.* vol. xciii, p. 73.

⁵ *Arch. J.* vol. xcvi, pp. 27, 28.

⁶ *P.P.S.* vol. xix (1953), pp. 1-40.

found at Fengate¹ and West Harling,² and a smaller one (Fig. 4, nos. 7-9) which could be considered with equal justice a low jar or a high bowl. It was noticeable that the outline of the vessels was a curved, not an angular, one.

Rims were very variable, though simple. The majority were plain, unthickened and slightly flattened on the top. Others had been distinctly thickened or given a 'frilled edge' (Fig. 4, no. 5). In a few sherds the opposite was the case, the rim being markedly thinner than the wall of the vessel (Fig. 4, no. 11, third from left).

Bases were equally divided between the simple obtuse-angled profile (Fig. 4, nos. 16 and 17) and the projecting base ring type (Fig. 4, nos. 12 and 13) and again a few intermediate forms were present. All bases were quite flat. No handles were found.

Decoration was present in 8% of sherds of this class, consisting of finger-tip ornamentation of the rim (one sherd, Fig. 4, no. 1) or shoulder (four sherds, Fig. 4, no. 2) in 1.5%, nicking of the rim (Fig. 4, nos. 4-6, and Fig. 4, no. 3), where the effect is that of cabling³ in 8.4%, or slashing of the shoulder (Fig. 3, no. 11), in 2.8%. One sherd only (Fig. 4, no. 4) showed both these two last, but this is due more to the small size of the sherds than to any other cause. One sherd (Fig. 3, no. 10) showed a distinct scraping of the surface, such as can be paralleled at Breedon, Leicestershire,⁴ and which might possibly be decorative as well as functional.

The remaining pottery belonged to several wares, none present in any quantity. Unless burnishing be considered decoration, they were entirely unornamented, with the exception of a single sherd.

The most interesting of these was a highly burnished black or dark grey ware, of which one vessel was capable of complete reconstruction (Fig. 3, no. 9). The bowl form, the ware, and the distinct bead-rim all serve to link it with the 'Marnian' bowls at Fengate,⁵ though Dr Kenyon prefers to regard it as the product of Marnian influence rather than as an import. Another vessel in this ware of which the shape can be reconstructed is shown in Fig. 3, no. 8. No parallels can be quoted for the double carination this shows. This ware was present to the extent of only 3.6%.

A second burnished ware, characterized by a tendency to split longitudinally, and a fine yellow-buff colour, was represented by 4.9% of sherds, probably the remains of very few vessels. No shapes could be determined in this or any of the succeeding wares.

6.5% of sherds were of a fine black ware, carefully smoothed though not strictly speaking burnished.

There were two grey or buff wares, one with large flint grits, the other without visible tempering, except in one sherd which had ground pottery for this purpose. One sherd of the former (Fig. 3, no. 11) had a slashed shoulder. These occurred in 10.4 and 6.3% of cases respectively.

¹ *Arch. J.* vol. c, pp. 188-223.

² *P.P.S.* vol. xix (1953), pp. 1-40.

³ As in West Harling Class III, *P.P.S.* vol. xix (1953), pp. 19 and 29.

⁴ *Trans. Leics. Arch. Soc.* vol. xxvi (1950), pp. 17-82.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, bowls K3 and K4.

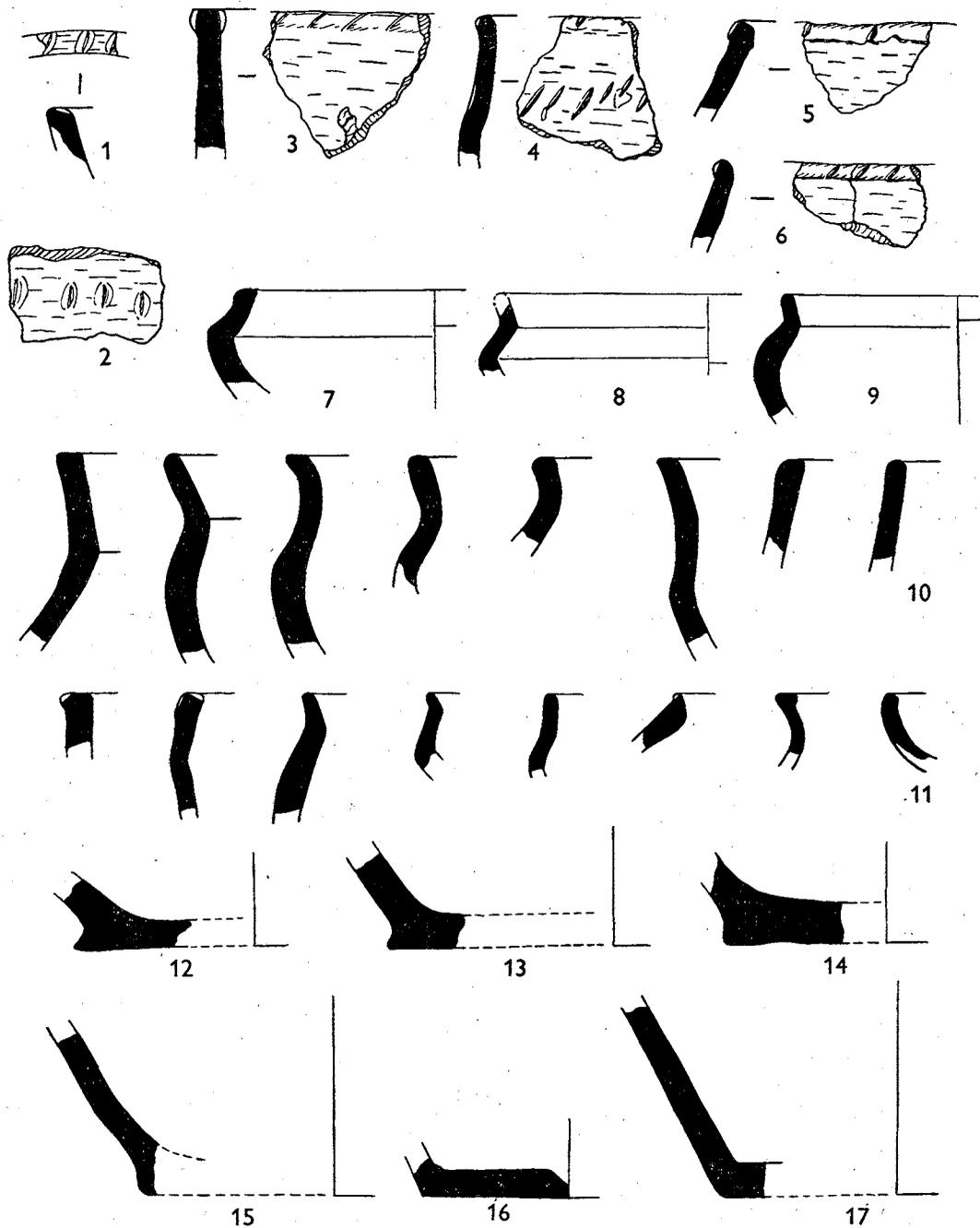


Fig. 4. Coarse red and black Iron Age wares from ditch. 1-2, Finger-tip decorated sherds. 3-6, Slash-decorated sherds. 7-11, Various rim-outlines. 12-17, Base-outlines. All 1/2.

Finally there were two sherds which would have passed easily with the coarsest of Late Bronze Age ones from the secondary burials, though they were found stratified with the Iron Age ones in the ditch. These would represent a bare 0.4%.

To sum up, on the evidence of the curved profiles we can assign the pottery from this site to the same cultural group as that which occupied Fengate, Peterborough, in the second or A 2 phase of its Iron Age settlement. The burnished bead-rim vase gives us an even closer date, about the middle of the third century B.C., from its close parallels in North France.

Influences from Wessex were not as clear as at other sites of this period in the Fen area, and the link with Leicestershire suggested by the 'scraped' bowl is also rather unusual.

In one Iron Age sherd there was embedded a grain of carbonized barley (see Appendix III).

THE ROMANO-BRITISH OCCUPATION

The weight of pottery from the R.B. occupation level was approximately equal to that from the Iron Age one, but the size of individual sherds was very much less, making interpretation correspondingly difficult.

Of the significant sherds, some eight in all, only two disagree with the dating given by the brooch, which from close parallels in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, and the Colchester Museum can be dated between A.D. 80-120. These were a sherd of a Form 37 decorated Samian bowl, the decoration of which suggests the work of the potter Drusus in the middle of the 2nd century, and another of colour-coated ware of Castor type which cannot be earlier than A.D. 180. The other six, part of the base of a pedestalled vase, butt-beaker sherds, a dish with footring of derived Belgic type, an early type of dish (cf. Silchester Fig. 11, no. 12 in *Archaeologia* vol. XCII), a local imitation of Samian Form 18/31, and parts of an upturned reeded rim, all belong to the first or early second centuries A.D., at which period Thriplow must have again been the site of a flourishing human settlement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Field Club's thanks are due to many people for help in the excavation and publication of the site:

To Mr G. O. Vinter (information and assistance); Mr Guy Smith (permission to misuse his field); Mr A. P. D. Lockwood and Dr A. G. Davis (snailshells); Mr P. Bury (animal bones); Mr D. Bainbridge (human bones); Mr H. A. Hyde (charcoals); Dr Hans Helbaek (grain impressions); Dr K. Kenyon (Iron Age pottery); Mr R. Inskeep (R.B. pottery); and Mr T. C. Lethbridge (for constant help and advice).

Finally, though I write this report on behalf of the Cambridge Archaeological Field Club, I must record my gratitude to the members of that body who have helped in so many ways, not least in the actual digging!

APPENDIX I

THE SNAILSHELLS

A number of snailshells were collected from the site and identified as follows:

	Barrow	Primary silt, ditch	I.A. level ditch	R.B. level ditch
<i>Cepea nemoralis</i>	6	6	3	—
<i>Pomatius elegans</i>	1	—	—	1
<i>Helicella itala</i>	11	2	1	—
<i>Arianta arbustorum</i>	2	1	1	—

The first is a very general species, showing a certain amount of preference for dry grassland and hedgerows. The second and third are confined to chalk, the latter grassland, the former dry banks, copses, etc. On the other hand, *Arianta* is a snail of damp situations, particularly woodlands. The number is too small to draw far-reaching conclusions, but on the whole suggests dry open scrub. The chief indicators of grassland, *Helicella*, were noticeably stunted specimens.

APPENDIX II

THE ANIMAL BONES

A considerable quantity of animal bones came to light, in the ditch. The following shows the distribution by species and layer of the identifiable ones:

	Rainwash	I.A. level	I.A.—R.B.	R.B. level
Horse	—	6	1	3
Cow	2	21	1	8
Sheep/Goat	—	33	5	41
Pig	—	5	—	4

Apart from a horse metapodial (maximum length 218.5 mm., breadth at middle of shaft 31.0 mm., length-breadth ratio 7.0) from the Iron Age level, and a number of teeth and phalanges, the bones were too fragmentary to throw any light on the size of the animals they represented.

The roebuck skull has already been noticed.

APPENDIX III

THE CARBONIZED GRAIN

The carbonized grain embedded in the Iron Age potsherd is that of hulled barley. The pales and the lower end of the grain are partly destroyed. The grain in its present condition is 5.5 mm. long, 2.75 mm. wide, and 2.09 mm. thick. It has a slight longitudinal twist. Remains of the upper pale show the ventral fold very distinctly.

The imprint was made accessible by carving away the overhanging edges and removal of the grain. Again the length of the imprint, 5.36 mm., is defective, whereas the thickness, 2.56 mm., would be just about the true dimension of the fresh grain. The width could not be ascertained.

Judging by the twist it was the nodding variety of six-row barley, *Hordeum tetrastichum* Kcke., and such dimensions as could be obtained show that this grain was quite small compared with the barley of the Neolithic and Bronze Age in England. (Cf. Helbaek, 'Early Crops', *P.P.S.* vol. xviii, pp. 194-233.)

Various imprints in several other Iron Age sherds from the site did not lead to any interesting results. They mostly come from small pieces of charcoal and so on; one blurred imprint of an internode of barley gave no details as to variety.

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APPENDIX IV

THE PLANT REMAINS (CHARCOALS)

All but one of the specimens submitted were charcoal in the narrow sense, i.e. fragments of wood carbonized by fire; the one remaining specimen, part of a nut shell, was also carbonized in the same way. All the wood fragments were small, none exceeding 3 cm. in any direction. Unless otherwise stated they formed parts of mature stems or branches. A summary list of determinations follows:

A. *Early? Bronze Age [Barrow].*

Oak (8+, all very slowly grown, equivalent to rates varying from 28 to 42 rings per in.).

Maple: 1.

B. *Iron Age. Ditch.*

1. From ditch in west.

Oak: 3 (one part of a young stem or branch). Maple: 2. Ash: 1.

2. From ditch in north.

Oak: 3 (slow grown, equivalent to 15-25 rings per radial inch).

Ash: 3 (one a rounded piece of a young stem displaying about 70-90° of periphery; 21 rings per in.).

Hazel: half nut shell split longitudinally along suture.

3. From ditch in east.

Ash: 5 (including two imperfect sections of young stems with 7 and 10 rings per inch respectively).

Total determinations from Iron Age.

Oak: 6. Ash: 9. Maple: 2. Hazel: 1.

Comment

All the species referred to are native to the region: they are as follows:

Oak: *Quercus robur* L. sens. lat. (so far as wood anatomy is concerned the trees might have been *Q. robur* L. sens. str. or *Q. petraea* L. or the hybrid or a mixture of species and hybrid(s)).

Ash: *Fraxinus excelsior* L.

Maple: *Acer campestre* L.

Hazel: *Corylus avellana* L.

The numbers concerned are small and it is not known how many individual trees are concerned: no firm statistical conclusions are justified.

However, the number of ash fragments from the Iron Age suggests that this species, if not dominant, was co-dominant along with oak, while the presence of oak to the exclusion of ash from the Early(?) Bronze Age suggests that at the earlier period oak may have been the exclusive dominant. I understand that such an interpretation is in accordance with the evidence from pollen analysis.

H. A. HYDE