

ART. X.—*Some Excavations in the Bewcastle District.*
By MISS K. S. HODGSON.

I. A BRONZE AGE TUMULUS ON THE SHIELD KNOWE.

THIS site has long been known: it is described by Mr. Maughan,* is marked as a cairn on the Ordnance Maps, and was visited a few years ago by our member Mr. K. St. Joseph. In the summer of 1939, with the advice of our President and Prehistoric Secretary, it was decided to excavate it. The owner, Sir Fergus Graham of Netherby, gave very kind permission for this, which was done extensively, and had not the war necessitated a hasty closing down of the work it would have been completed: as it is, only the fourth or northern sector remains unexplored.

The Shield Knowe is a crescent-shaped morainic ridge on the skirts of Blacklyne Common, high up the valley of the White Lyne not far from its source in Christenbury Crag. North and East the valley is closed in by high moors rising to over 1000 ft.; the only opening is to the W.-S.-W., down the river, which has a fine view to the Solway and the Lake hills, therefore this tumulus is not one of the "sky-line" group.† The actual tumulus

* Archaeol. Journ. XI, 219. There is now no trace of the "small building about four yards long and three yards broad" which Mr. Maughan describes "on the summit of the centre cairn." He also says "a considerable way along the western side of the northern barrow is a rectangular enclosure which may have been the ground works of a milecastle." Probably this is the oblong foundation on the "saddle" between the highest point of the ridge (the site of these excavations) and a lower hummock. It measures 18 feet long by 8 feet wide, with a doorway just 3 feet wide in one of the long sides 2 feet from the eastern end. I counted thirteen such foundations along both banks of the White Lyne between this point and its junction with Rough Grain.

† There are several of these in the district—"The Currick" (a long cairn?) the great circular ditch on Barn's Pike, and "Mitchell Scott's Cairn" on Tor Brae.

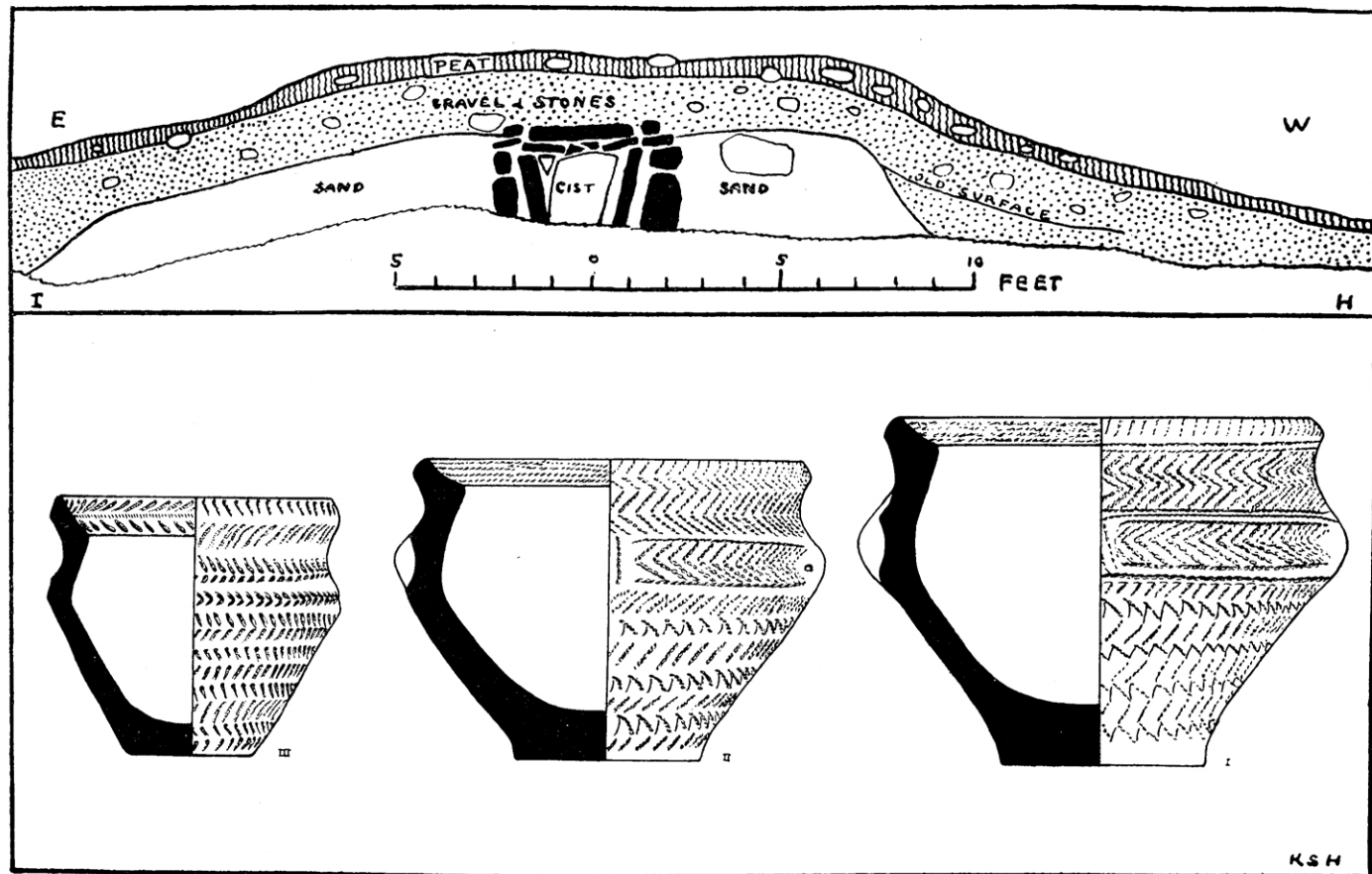


FIG. 1.—THE SHIELD KNOWE.

1. Section H—I.

2. Three Food-Vessels. 1, 2 from Central cist. 3 from Secondary cist.

has been almost entirely destroyed; only in the Western sector there was a spread of large stones just below the peat (humus) (fig. 2, 3), in the other parts there was only gravel and stones, indistinguishable from the subsoil where this consisted of moraine material. This moraine subsoil was gravel, mixed with large stones, lumps of soil, and small pieces of black shale. It was replaced, over nearly half the area, by a bank of fine clean sand interspersed by bands of hard pink material (Figs. 1, 2). Exactly the same appearances—junction of gravel with banded sand—were observed in a “control” trench dug across the ridge, well away from any possible interference. Some lines also appeared in the gravel and were at first taken for old surfaces till soil analysis showed their true nature. Beneath both the gravel and the sand there was a fine grit, full of moisture.

The primary interment had been placed at the line of junction of the moraine and the sandbank. The covering slab, a large water-worn limestone measuring 4 feet 10 inches by 2 feet 6 inches by 6 inches was 18 inches below the present surface and just level with the top of the sand. It sloped slightly (three and a half inches) to the East, and had been placed with its ribbed surface uppermost. There were several small stones, apparently “packers,” round it (fig. 4). Under it was a cist measuring internally 3 feet 5 inches by 3 feet at the top and 3 feet by 1 foot 6 inches at the bottom and 2 feet deep. This cist was well and elaborately constructed, having a double wall—the outer one of cobbles, with rounded corners (figs. 2, 4), the inner wall or lining of neatly fitted slabs—two large ones on each side, one laid lengthways, the other stood upright (slightly slewed to meet the ends) with smaller pieces fitted in to bring the top edges level. The ends were made of single upright slabs. The walls were 1 foot to 1 foot 2 inches thick, and the interspace was 3



FIG. 3.—Remains of the cairn (cf. Fig. 2).



FIG. 4.—The Central Cist and its setting.
The cover-slab is on the extreme right tilted up.

THE SHIELD KNOWE TUMULUS.

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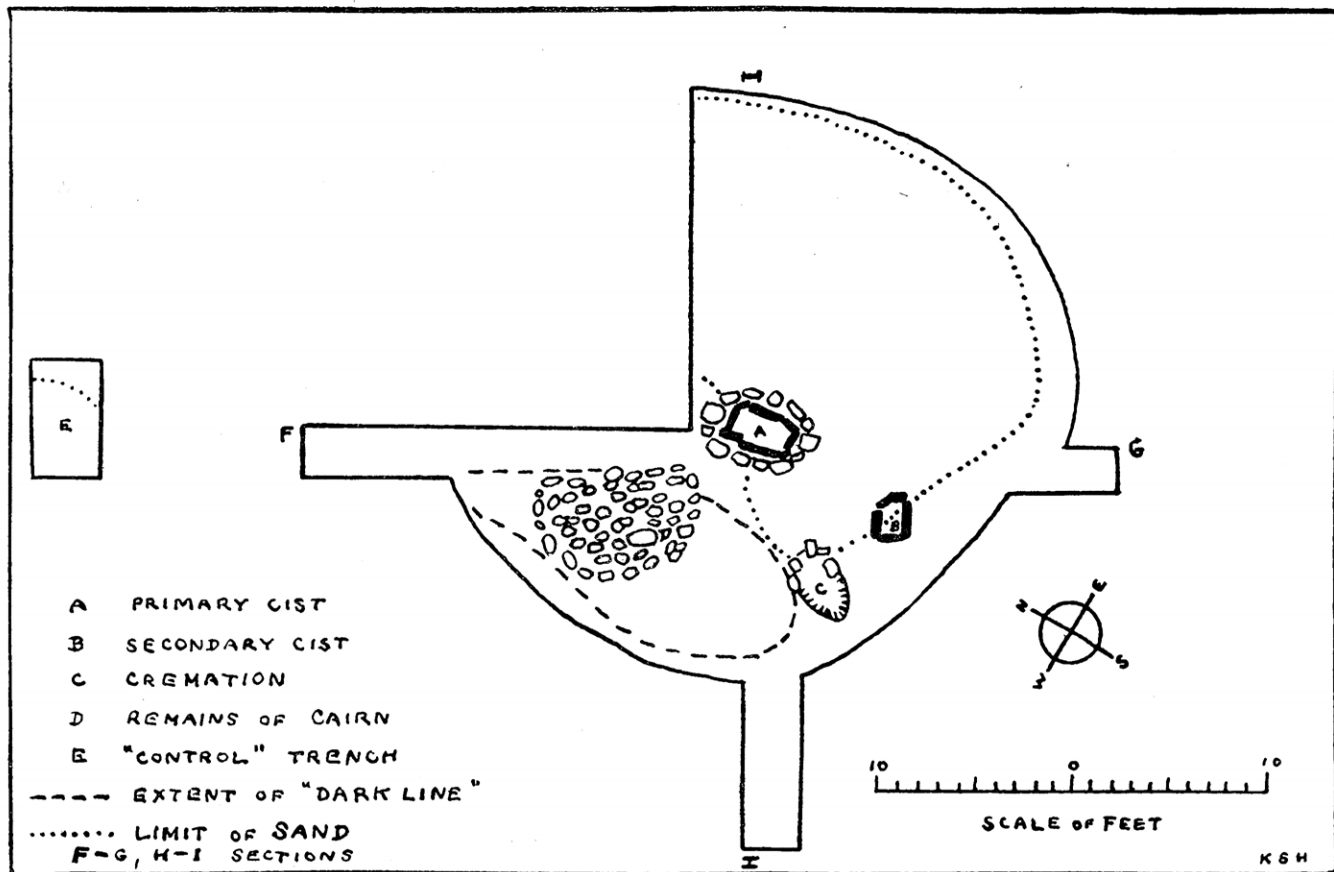


FIG. 2.—PLAN OF THE TUMULUS ON THE SHIELD KNOWE.

to 5 inches. Partly over the walls at opposite corners—N.W. and S.E.—were two small flagstones, about 1 foot square (fig. 4). The bottom of the cist was the sand (no sort of floor) just above the moist grit. There was no trace of the clay luting which is sometimes found in these structures. The whole was filled with a rather coarse yellow sand.

Within the cist were found (1) a fragment of bone nine inches below the top, (2) a fine pair of nearly perfect food vessels. These were lying side by side against the west wall, almost at the bottom of the cist—3 feet 7 inches from the present surface and 6 inches from the north end (fig. 5). A small cobble was close against the larger vessel, as if placed there for the purpose of preventing it rolling over. A curious point is that the bone was apparently from an inhumation, while the analysis of the sand gives evidence of cremation (see the reports which follow).

A small secondary cist was found 8 feet 4 inches south of the primary burial (figs. 2 and 5) 1 foot 4 inches below the surface. Like the first, it was on the division between the sand and gravel, in fact it was actually set in both. It had no cover-slab, but the top was filled with three large cobbles. It was built of thin single slabs, and was filled with sand in which were found a few tiny bits of charcoal. The measurements were 1 foot 11 inches by 1 foot 2 inches by 10 inches deep. A small food-vessel was found standing, base upwards, in the N.E. corner (fig. 6).

The site of a cremation was found 4 feet to the west of the secondary cist. This was an oval hollow, 4 feet by 10 inches by 9 inches deep, cut into the gravel subsoil which was burnt deep crimson and as hard as brick. The hollow contained a quantity of charcoal and bones; the charcoal was in large pieces, some as much as five inches long and one and a half inches thick. Stones



FIG. 5.—The Central Cist: two food-vessels *in situ*.



FIG. 6.—The Secondary Cist: food-vessel *in situ*.

THE SHIELD KNOWE TUMULUS.

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were arranged at the inner end in a way which suggested a rude form of hearth or furnace; these were much reddened and cracked (fig. 2).

North and west of this hollow, over the whole western sector, there appeared a well-defined dark line about one and a quarter inch thick (shown in the plan by a line of dashes (figs. 1 and 2). Samples were taken from different places, of which (but see Dr. Raistrick's report for a full description) one is old turf, and another is slightly burnt, which looks as if these represent the original surface at the time of the cremation. Very careful watch was kept throughout the excavation for signs of old surface, but these were the only traces detected. The probable explanation seems to be that the turf was removed over most of the area, but that in this part where the ground falls away more sharply small patches escaped removal.

The two food-vessels from the primary burial are fine specimens of Abercromby's Type 1A. Their decoration is chiefly cord-impressions, both straight and herring-bone. The lugs of the smaller pot are perforated, those of the larger are imperforate. So far as I know, they are the first specimens of this type to be found in Cumberland. The food-vessel from the secondary cist is Abercromby's Type II. It is decorated with herringbones of incised lines. I hope to make a full study of these food-vessels later, comparing them with the others from the area of our Society, when conditions allow of examination of the latter.

One other find remains to be mentioned—a small blunt-pointed piece of wood which was in the "moist grit" 21 feet from the centre. Dr. Zeuner of the Institute of Archaeology very kindly examined it and pronounced it to be of larch "a tree not indigenous in Britain." From its shape, it is probably the peg of a rabbit snare.

Mr. F. G. Simpson and the Rev. H. M. Banister visited the excavation and gave most valuable help which I gratefully acknowledge.

REPORT ON THE BONES FROM THE SHIELD KNOWE TUMULUS.

By EMERITUS PROFESSOR ALEX. LOW, M.D., F.S.A.Scot.

BONES FROM CREMATION.

There are many pieces of very thoroughly cremated bone varying from half an inch to about three inches in length and in all weighing 810 grms. The fragmentary condition makes identification very difficult. All the pieces which can be identified are human and there is no evidence of animal bones.

There are numerous pieces of the flat bones of skull indicating at least two individuals; a number of fragments of vertebrae including part of a first cervical vertebra; of the long bones of the limbs there are fragments of humerus, ulna, and phalanges of fingers; pieces of femur and tibia and a cuneiform bone of the foot. Mixed with the bones are pieces of charcoal.

BONE FROM THE CENTRAL CIST.

As regards the bone from the central cist in association with food-vessels, the tiny pieces are so decayed that it is impossible to identify them—evidently an inhumation interment.

REPORT UPON CHARCOAL FROM SHIELD KNOWE TUMULUS.

By M. Y. ORR, Regius Keeper, Royal Botanic Gardens,
Edinburgh.

1. From contents of Food-vessels: Willow and Oak.
2. Scattered in tumulus: Willow and Oak.

3. From primary cist: Willow and Oak.
4. From cremation: Oak, Hazel one piece, Willow two pieces.

REPORT UPON EARTH-SAMPLES FROM THE SHIELD KNOWE.

By A. RAISTRICK, M.Sc., Ph.D.

I. Hard line in clean sand. The material is pure sand with a very slight trace of lime binding it together. We take the lime to have been infiltrated from the stones above.

II. Soft lump from mixed moraine level (3). Natural subsoil=sandy silt with a clay binding.

III. Hard line in "control" (=outside) trench as II.

IV. Dark line in 3rd (Southern) sector. Fine grained sand, a little silt.

V. The same level as IV, from the 2nd (Western) sector. Slightly burnt sandy gravel.

VI. Same level, 2nd (Western) sector. No trace whatever of burning, but the dark line is peaty and organic. We noted grass and sedge pollens and fragments of grass material; also one hazel pollen. The vegetation appeared to have been *in situ*, for there were traces of iron pan below the layer. The layer had been somewhat broken by settlement and pressure.

VII. Material from primary cist. Earth *filling* shovelled in from the cremation containing fine calcined bone.

VIII. Material from food-vessels in primary cist. This is manifest infiltrated material, including a piece of

* This raises an interesting question—when did the alder become the predominant tree of the district as it undoubtedly is now? Its pollen was not present in the soil samples from Bewcastle Roman fort (these *Trans.* xxxviii, nor was there any alder among the charcoal from the medieval site in Askerton Park. (The analysis of this was too late to be included in the report on that site).

Dalbeattie or Carrick granite. A very careful examination for the slightest trace of bone or organic material revealed nothing.

IX. Material from cremation hollow. Certainly burnt: charcoal and ashes present, so comminuted as to be indistinguishable.

X. Material below cremation. Clean sand, with a little burnt oxide percolated through it: well stratified, abundant large pebbles: undoubted natural soil in position.

XI. Black material from mixed moraine (3). Black bituminous shale, evidently glacial drift.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE BEWCASTLE DISTRICT.

II. A HUT-CIRCLE NEAR WOODHEAD.

Some six or seven years ago Mr. Ewart of The Bush pointed out to me a circular foundation on his land, between Woodhead and a vanished farmhouse called Mount Hulie. It was then noted for future investigation, which was carried out in 1939 with very interesting results.

It proved to be a typical Bronze Age hut-circle twenty-six feet in diameter, cut back into the hill-side (figs. 7, 9). Its wall was about 2 feet 6 inches across, with a footing of 3 or 4 feet. There is very little left—the best piece is the retaining wall at the back (figs. 7, 9), which has been preserved by the washed soil from the hillside. There are no orthostats. On the east side of the entrance there is an appearance of coursing, but this may have been done in comparatively recent times by a shepherd repairing the wall for use as a shelter.

The entrance faces about S.S.E. It is 2 feet 5 inches wide at the inner face and 2 feet 9 inches at the outer—a slight but definite splay. It looks across the little burn to the slope, not directly down-hill so that the Westerly gales would blow in.

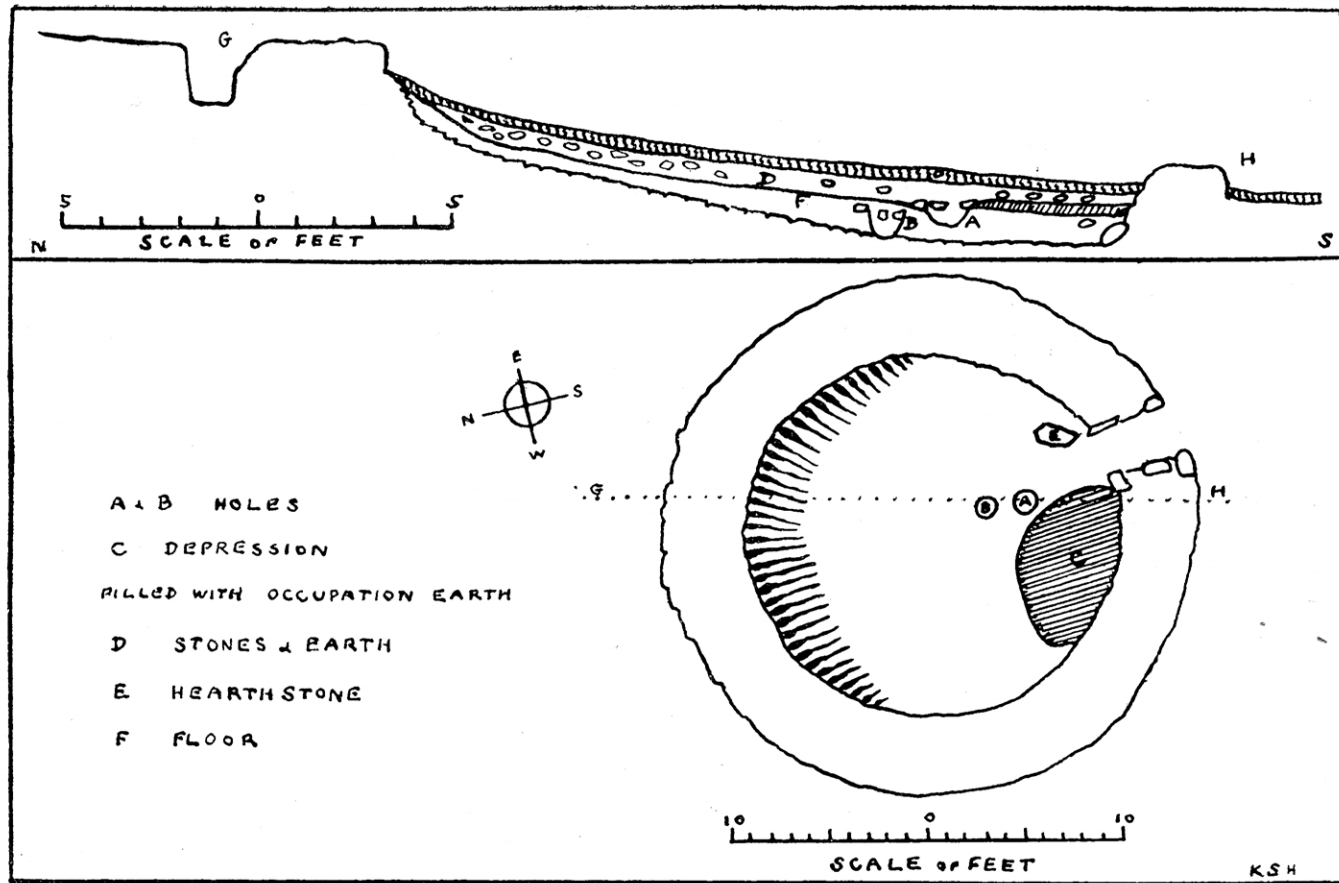


Fig. 7.- PLAN AND SECTION OF HUT-CIRCLE NEAR WOODHEAD.

It is doubtful whether there was a true floor: all that was found was an irregular layer of clay with flattish stones here and there, and very faint traces of occupation-earth, and probably this was merely the natural soil trampled. At this level a hole was found, and another two inches lower (fig. 7), both 1 foot diameter: the first 9 inches deep the lower one 11 inches. Both were set with packing stones, and filled with dark greyish material containing ash. It is difficult to see the purpose of these holes: they can hardly be post-holes, because they are far too shallow to support a post of that size unless it was kept in position by opposing strains, which could hardly be as the holes are by no means central. If they had been cook-holes for baking food in hot ashes, they ought to have shown signs of heat, whereas the yellow earth of the sides was quite unchanged.

Mrs. Nugent Young, F.S.A.Scot., has suggested to me that these holes might be intended for "stepping" a pole supporting a roof of skins, seeing that they are shallow, and in an eccentric position which would bring the greatest height over the occupied area.

Between these holes and the wall there was a very shallow depression in the floor, only a few inches deep, 6 feet 4 inches long and 4 feet wide (fig. 7.). This was filled with occupation earth, very dark and containing a few bits of charcoal. A tiny flint flake (seven-eighths of an inch long), very slightly worked, was found at the bottom of this level close to the wall.

Just to the right of the doorway (going in) there was a slab of sandstone 2 feet 2 inches by 1 foot 3 inches only 2 inches thick, much reddened and split by heat—obviously a hearth-stone. There was no sign of any surrounding wall or ditch.

The principal find was one of much interest and importance: a button and ring of well-known Bronze Age



FIG. 8.—General view of the hut-circle.



FIG. 9.—Outside of the wall of the hut-circle.
HUT-CIRCLE NEAR WOOD HEAD.

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iii ii i

FIG. 10.—The Food vessels from the Shield Knowe Tumulus.
i and ii are from the central cist, iii from the secondary cist.

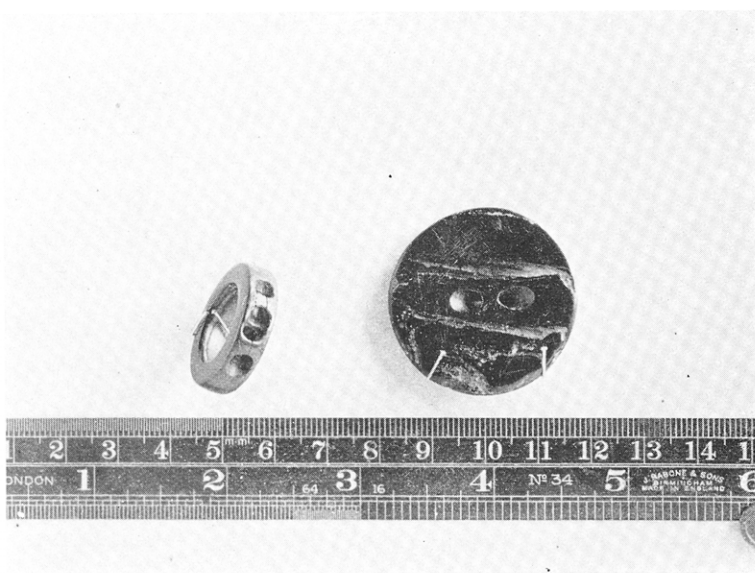


FIG. 11.—Jet objects from Woodhead hut-circle.
The button shows V-perforations; the ring also has three perforations.

THE FINDS.

types (fig. 11)*, which were lying on the floor near the middle of the hut. (Why were they left lying there? Does it hint at a hurried departure?) The button, which is one and two-thirds inches diameter, is only slightly conical; it is one-sixteenth of an inch thick at the edge and one quarter of an inch at the centre. It has the typical V perforation. The ring is fifteen-sixteenths of an inch diameter and three-sixteenths of an inch thick: it is perfectly plain except for the usual three oval perforations on the outer face. Experiment showed that a No. 6 steel sewing needle would easily pass through either outer hole and the central perforation—much more would a flexible bone needle do so. The button was also experimented with, but even a finer needle stuck against the side of the hole. The lack of ornament on both objects, and the comparative flatness of the button, would seem to indicate that they may be late forms. As for the material of which they are made, Dr. Davis, to whom scrapings were submitted for microscopic examination, says "The button and ring are not made of Kimmeridge shale. The dust is indistinguishable from jet. It is not lignite."

If the local type of settlement is like this, a solitary hut or two with no surrounding wall, there may be numbers of them on the moors, for only very close search would find them. Such a structure has already been noted on the lower slope of Blacklyne Common not far from the Shield Knowe tumulus described above, and this should be excavated as soon as possible since it may well be associated with the tumulus. Meanwhile we may consider that this rather than the "village settlements" of Westmorland and South Cumberland is likely to be the type of habitation in this district, which would solve the

* *Ancient Stone Implements*, Evans, pp. 453 and 454; *The Bronze Age*, V. Gordon Childe, p. 133.

difficulty of there being many burial cairns and no habitation sites known.

REPORT ON THE CHARCOAL FROM THE
HUT-CIRCLE.

By M. Y. ORR.

Much of the charcoal is in a very friable condition, which makes identification difficult, however the results given below indicate generally the composition of the material.

- a. Charcoal from floor. Willow, Hazel (1), Ash (1).
- b. Charcoal from holes. Hazel and Ash.

Grateful thanks are due to all those who so kindly gave permission for the excavations and otherwise facilitated the work—to Sir Fergus Graham and Mr. Bowes for the Shield Knowe, to Messrs. Halton Hough and Soal and Messrs. Ewart for the Woodhead hut-circle.