

THE SECOND BRONZE AGE ROUND BARROW AT SWARKESTON, DERBYSHIRE.

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Part I. INTERIM REPORT.

Introduction.

THE Swarkeston Lows group of round barrows is situated on a gravel terrace 60 ft. above the flood plain alluvium of the River Trent. The site is about half a mile north of the village of Swarkeston which lies on the main road from Derby to Melbourne (National Grid Reference SK 365/293). The group consists of four barrows. The best preserved one is that in a narrow field known as "The Racecourse", close to the farm on the east side. This retains much of its original height though there are disturbances on the north and west sides and on its summit. The others are much ploughed down and show as well-spread mounds between 10 and 6 ft. in height.

The first barrow in the group to be investigated was the second one to the east of the farm and this was excavated during July, 1955, by Merrick Posnansky. (See his report on this and for a fuller account of the site: "The Bronze Age Round Barrow at Swarkeston," *D.A.J.*, 1956, p. 123.)

The Site, 1956.

Owing to the threat of eventual destruction by ploughing, a second barrow was chosen for excavation. This was the southern one of the group on the east side, and showed as a well spread mound, 200 ft. in diameter and 4ft. in height above the surrounding field surface. Prior to excavation no ditch was visible on the ground but one could be seen on the Air Ministry air-photograph. The barrow was surveyed during 1955 by Mr. Posnansky and

his colleagues and a contoured plan made. The excavation was carried out in two phases: 2nd-28th July and 22nd October-17th November, 1956, by the Ancient Monuments Division of the Ministry of Works, with paid labour and volunteer helpers, by kind permission of the owner Mr. Winstanley and the tenant Mr. J. E. Prince.

The Excavation of the Barrow.

A cross-section method of excavation was used on a N.-S., E.-W. plan. Quadrant trenches were dug in the NE. and SW. quadrants and extended from the centre to the fringes of the mound to include the ditch. The NE. quadrant was planned for full excavation but time did not allow the completion of this. The trenches showed the barrow to be of the Bell variety with an inner and outer turf stack, a berm varying in width and a surrounding wide V-shaped ditch. Extensions were made in the NW. and SE. quadrants, and the NE. quadrant was extended north-eastwards to include the excavation of as much of the ditch as possible. The east trench was extended further eastwards to include the cutting of a dark mark (seen on the Air Ministry air-photograph) some 20 ft. from the barrow.

The Barrow.

The plough soil which covered the entire barrow varied between 6 and 7 ins. in thickness. Plough furrows were seen over the whole of the truncated top of the barrow. The original barrow, which was probably circular, was, on excavation, of oval shape and was 72 ft. (N.-S.) by 66 ft. (E.-W.) in diameter and surrounded by a berm from 8 to 18 ft. broad. The surrounding ditch, which was circular and of wide V-shape, varied in width between 8 and 10 ft. Its diameter was 104 ft. from centre to centre. Its depth 4 ft 6 ins., except on the south side where it was 5 ft. 6 ins. The north ditch cutting showed it to be flat based at this spot and 1 ft. 6 ins. wide.

The mound was composed of two main deposits: an inner turf stack covered by a larger outer one. The inner stack was a low spread mound nowhere higher than 2 ft. Part of the core of this, together with the outer stack

above, had been destroyed by a large trench which had "guttered" the centre of the barrow. This had been dug most probably in an attempt to rob the barrow. There was no datable evidence to show when this had occurred but the absence of modern and Victorian artifacts in the filling (so common in the plough-soil) suggests perhaps a date before 1850. The inner stack was composed of turves laid grass downwards in a fairly regular manner. These were of an average thickness of 2 ins. The grass surface was represented by a thin black line about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch thick and the turf-soil above was buff-brown colour with an occasional one of dark grey. A small amount of gravel occurred at the base of some of the turves. The outer stack showed in its construction nine layers of turf in the centre of the barrow at its highest point. These were laid grass downwards in a more haphazard fashion than those in the inner stack, and varied in thickness from 2 to 5 ins. Their colouring ranged from buff-brown to light grey with dark ones interspersed among them. They had been cut from an occupied surface as many contained charcoal flecks and an occasional flint flake.

The old ground surface was found preserved beneath the inner stack but not entirely so by the outer one. In the NE. quadrant it was apparent that part of the area had been de-turfed before the erection of the barrow, as the base of the outer stack was found in contact with the surface of the dirty gravel overlying the natural some 5 ins. below the general level of the old ground surface elsewhere. It was completely missing on the berm, including the inner berm under the re-distributed mound material. Either it had been destroyed by ploughing or had been removed for the construction of the barrow. The pre-barrow grass surface was represented by the same kind of thin black line (a tentative suggestion) as the turves in the turf stacks, and was found in patches over the area of the old ground surface covered by the inner stack and parts of the outer stack; except where later features and disturbances had destroyed it. At the fringe of the inner stack to the extremities of the outer, it showed as a mixed black and orange coloured deposit which varied in thickness from $\frac{1}{8}$ to 1 inch.

Beneath the truncated top of the outer stack, mineral pan had formed on what was interpreted as the surface of the inner stack. This was seen in section as a thin orange-coloured line and was traceable down the slope (assumed) of the stack to where it met the old ground surface; here it became the mixed black and orange-coloured deposit described above. In the SE. and NE. quadrants mineral pan had formed not so much on the old ground surface, but had penetrated to the surface of the underlying gravel. It was found as a very hard patchy undulating level which varied in thickness from $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1 inch. Mineral pan had also formed on the slopes (assumed) of the outer stack and this was seen in section as an orange-coloured line sloping downwards to where it joined the old ground surface on the berm.

Both the fringe of the outer stack and the berm had been riddled by rabbits; bones were found in many of the burrows. Waste flint flakes, a few flint tools and several fragments of Bronze Age pottery were found in the turf stacks, the berm and the re-distributed mound material. Victorian and modern china and glazed pottery were found in the plough-soil together with pieces of animal bone and ironwork from Derby refuse spread on the surrounding fields as manure. Part of the side of a seventeenth-eighteenth century "tyg" was found in the plough-soil over the west ditch cutting.

The Primary Burial.

This was not found *in situ* but several small deposits of calcined bone were found in the filling of the robbing trench. The complete excavation of this at the east end showed a small circular, inverted cone-shaped hole in its base. Above this, calcined bone occurred in the filling and may indicate the original position of the primary deposit. The two barbed and tanged arrowheads found close by may have accompanied the burial.

Secondary Burial. Cremation Pit.

This was found in the NW. quadrant, inserted into the top of the inner turf stack. It showed first as an irregularly-shaped patch of heavily charcoal-flecked dirty

soil with an inner patch of unburnt silt and salmon-pink burnt sand; with pieces of charred timber (in charcoal form) half embedded in the surface. It measured 10 ft. 6 ins. (N.-S.) and 10 ft. 9 ins. (E.-W.) in diameter. Excavation revealed an oval-shaped pit with vertical sides and rounded base. Its long axis was 2 ft. 1 in. (NE.-SW.), width 1 ft. 8 ins., depth 1 ft. 9 ins. from surface of inner stack to base of pit. The rim, walls and base were fiercely burnt salmon-pink brown and whitish-green as much as $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch in thickness. The main bulk of its filling was unburnt buff-grey sand, containing burnt and unburnt pebbles and small angular natural flints. It was heavily charcoal-flecked throughout, some pieces being 1 inch in diameter. 18 fragments of a richly-decorated collared urn of cinerary-type were found just under the top to midway down in the filling: three charred logs and the parts of several others lay N.-S., E.-W. and NW.-SE. across the pit. On the SE. side of these and partly on the base of the pit was found a small quantity of finely comminuted calcined bone. This was spread evenly in the filling at this spot and mixed with charcoal. A few fragments of unburnt wood occurred on the north side at the base on the same level as the calcined bone.

Conclusions.

The Bell barrow described above is similar to many that have been examined in the past and only two features are in any way unusual. The burial inserted into the top of an already existing barrow or one in course of erection is of fairly common occurrence but the enlargement of the barrow afterwards is unusual. The period of time between the completion of the first barrow, or the pause (to enable the insertion to be made) during construction must have been of short duration. It is possible that the period was as short as a few days or weeks, certainly not much longer, as no humus line showed between the two deposits. Only around the pit was it seen that the surface of the inner stack had been trampled and this showed as a thin layer of dirty charcoal-flecked soil. Only the rim, sides and base of the pit were burnt so the interpretation of the trampled surface as the site of the

pyre should not be entertained. Rather it seems that the pyre was made elsewhere and a portion of it brought "live" to the site, and placed in the pit, where it continued to burn for a considerable time. The charred logs found criss-crossing the pit at its base are an unusual find. They were hollow for most of their length and were very fragmentary. The pit was finally filled in by scrapings from the trampled surface, and in view of their unburnt nature this had taken place when the fire was extinguished. The pottery fragments were placed in the pit during the filling and represent in all probability parts of a vessel used for ritual purposes at the pyre site.

Another unusual feature of this barrow was the preservation of a Beaker occupation level beneath the old ground surface, sealed by the barrow. This was first recognised by Miss V. H. Foulkes (Assistant Supervisor) during the first phase of excavation. Its importance was realised and an area 36 ft. square was examined in detail during the second phase of excavation. 363 post-holes and stake-holes, forming complex patterns of structures for human and animal occupation were found mainly on the south and east sides of the barrow. A large post-Beaker inhumation grave containing the rotted remains of a wicker-work "coffin" and a flint knife were found under the NW. quadrant, together with several shallow depressions and hearths. Quantities of Beaker sherds flint flakes and tools were found distributed fairly evenly throughout the level.

Part II of this report will follow in a future issue of the *Journal* and will contain a general description of the Beaker site, together with plans and sections, photographs and the finds.