

**THE PAGAN-DANISH BARROW CEMETERY AT
HEATH WOOD, INGLEBY:
1955 Excavations.**

By MERRICK POSNANSKY.

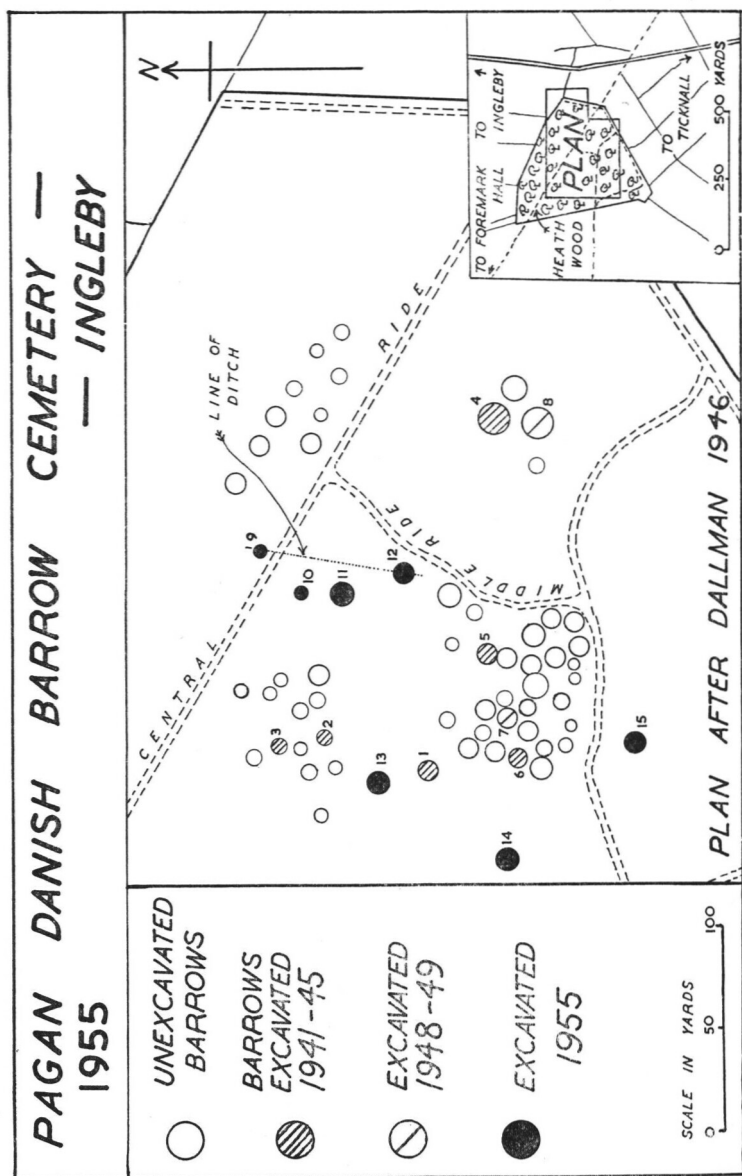
I N August 1955 the Ministry of Works excavated seven mounds in the barrow-cemetery at Heath Wood, Ingleby, in advance of clearance for reafforestation by the Forestry Commission. A preliminary report on these excavations giving an account of the history of previous work¹ on the site, primarily by William Fraser and others between 1941 and 1949, is contained in the Society's *Journal* for 1955. It was there resolved that the cemetery was Pagan-Danish, as finally concluded by Fraser, and that it almost certainly dates from the period between 878 and 900. As the more substantial material finds from the 1941-9 excavations had largely suggested this conclusion, the main interest of the 1955 excavation was to provide exact information on the structural nature of the individual mounds and to throw whatever light was possible on the burial practices of this short period for which the archaeological record is scantily represented. The discovery of a well-cut V-shaped linear ditch below two of the mounds and its dating to a period immediately before the erection of those mounds suggests the importance of undertaking further excavations on the site at some future date.

THE SITE.²

The site is situated on the south side of the Trent, 6½ miles south of Derby (National Grid Reference c. SK 342/258), on a marked false crest above the main river bluff at the foot of which lie the settlements of Ingleby, Foremark and Repton. The site is clearly visible from

¹ A full list of the previous references is given at the end of this report.

² A full site plan and a map of the immediate and general area is given by Dallman in Fraser, 1946.



the north or riverside but not at all from the south or Ticknall side. The site has a commanding prospect, parts of seven counties being visible from the one spot, yet nowhere is the site much above 360 ft. in height. Geologically the small area of the wood is diverse, providing geological boundaries between the Keuper Marl, Keuper Sandstone and a small inlier of Bunter Sandstone, which is masked by a thin capping of Boulder Clay containing flints towards the lower ground of the north-west.

At the time of the excavation the area had been felled of heavy timber though it was still encumbered by the stumps and a large variety of undergrowth and scrub. The position of the mounds had been re-located from Dallman's plan and marked out by stakes by masters and boys of the Repton School Archæological Society. It had been decided in consultations between representatives of the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Works that three main concentrations of mounds and a small group should be left unplanted. These comprise a group of nine mounds to the north of the Central Ride, the main concentration of twenty-nine mounds to the west of the Middle Ride, a group of fourteen mounds immediately to the south-west of the Central Ride and a small outlying group of four mounds to the east of the Middle Ride (see fig. 1). Though these mounds are to be left unplanted, the timber of the nineteenth-century plantation has still been left standing on them and no attempt has been made to clear the area. The writer excavated seven mounds (9-15) which lay away from or between these main groups.

THE EXCAVATIONS.

The actual methods of excavation were largely dictated by the time available (some three and a half weeks) and by the nature of the encumbering timber (see fig. 2). A quadrant method was employed for Mounds 9, 11 and 12, the whole central area excavated for Mound 10. Mound 15 was halved and centred and Mound 13 was trenched. The stumps were removed and the final portions of the mounds levelled by mechanical means, though

PAGAN-DANISH BARROW CEMETERY, INGLEBY - 1955

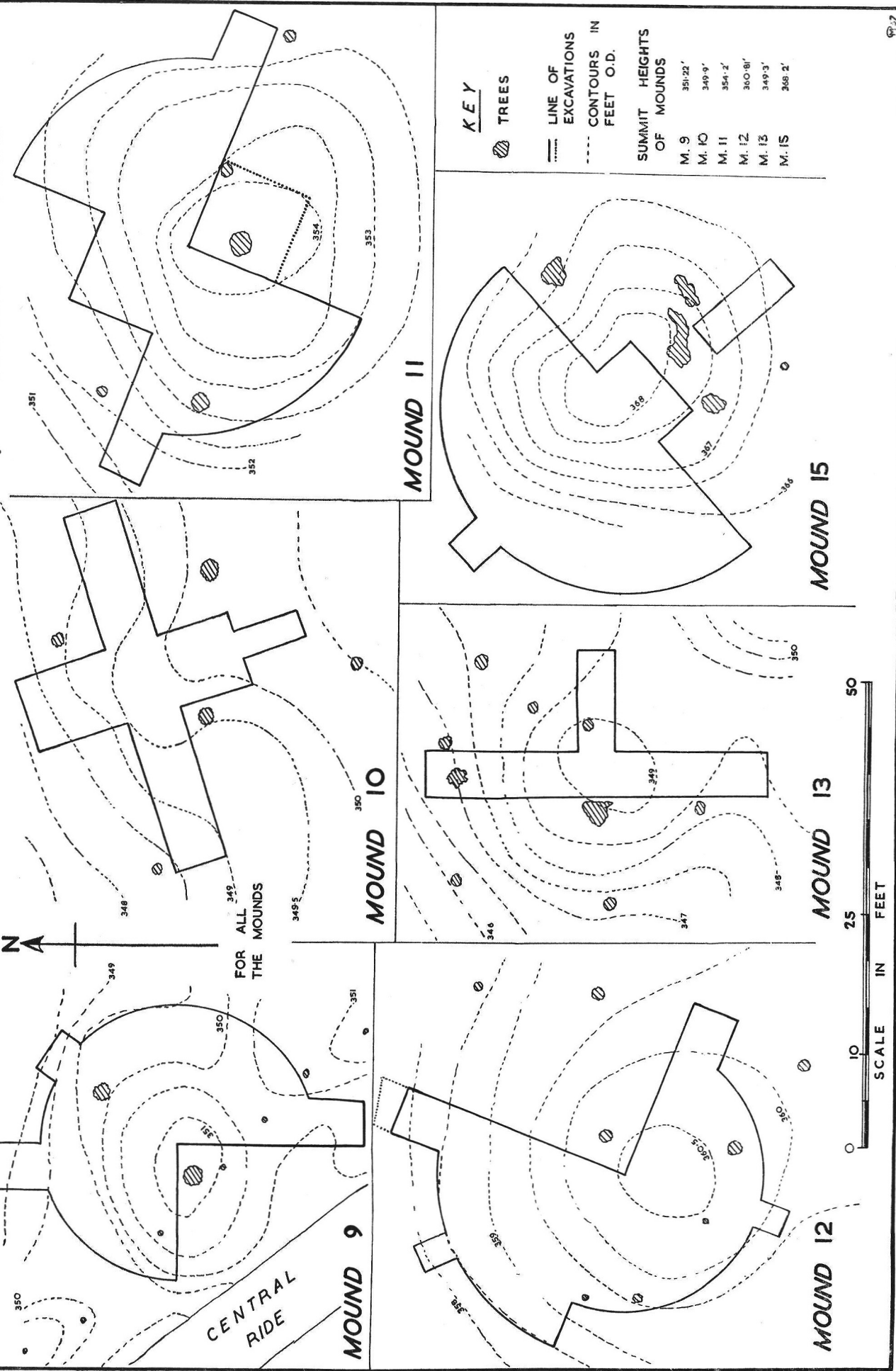


FIG. 2

in every case excavations were taken down to below the old ground level and through into the natural. Before excavation all the mounds were contoured (fig. 2) and most found to range in diameter from 20-25 ft. and in height from $1\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft.

All the mounds had been greatly disturbed by burrowing creatures, a recent skeleton of a fox actually being found beneath the cremation hearth of Mound 11 (pl. I), while small collections of carbonized nuts were found in some of the mounds. The stonework was greatly disturbed by the root action of the trees and must largely account for the irregular shape of the "false cairns" and the incompleteness of the kerbs (fig. 3).

Mound 14 on excavation was found to be purely natural. Of the other six, only one, Mound 11, contained a cremation hearth, the others being of a cenotaph nature. Of the ones previously excavated, all lying within the main concentrations, Mounds 2 and 4 would appear to have been of a cenotaph nature. The cremation hearths of Mounds 3 and 8 had been disturbed to a degree rendering it impossible to be sure of their exact limits.

MOUND 9.

Mound 9 lay on the edge of the Central Ride, the upcast of which partly heightened it on one side. When cleared of vegetation and the covering of woodland soil, consisting primarily of leaf-mould, a cairn of stones was revealed approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. high and between 15 and 20 ft. in diameter. The stones of this cairn had been greatly displaced by the root action of past and existing trees and by burrowing animals. Running along the mound parallel to the Ride was a line of rhododendrons.

The stones, as in all the mounds, consisted primarily of Bunter and Keuper Sandstones and Millstone Grits all found locally on or near the site. The stones were of assorted sizes, though few were over 12 ins. in length. Beneath the cairn and raised on the buried land surface was a mound of brown sandy soil. About 9 ins. of soil was present beneath the mound. There was no sign of a ditch and it would appear that the mound soil was

scraped up from around the mound (see fig. 4). Surrounding the cairn was a ring of stones (see fig. 3). These were fairly continuous on the south-east side, and from the presence of a similar ring of stones around Mounds 10, 11, and 12 must be interpreted as a kerb.

The mound and the kerb overlaid on the eastern quadrants of the mound a ditch of "V" section, details of which will be discussed later.

There was no indication of any hearth or interment beneath the mound and the natural had not been disturbed, and it can only be concluded that this mound never contained a burial.

MOUND 10 (pl. I).

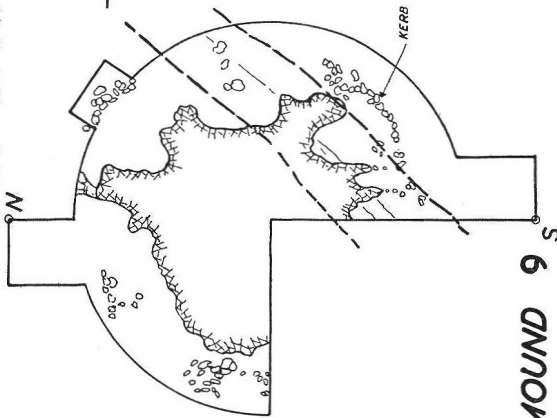
When cleared of vegetation and surface soil, this was found to represent the most perfect of the "false cairns" and was 15 ins. in height and of an elongated shape, some 15 ft. by 7 ft. Its irregular shape would seem to have been intentional. The stones of this cairn included many of very large size, some approaching 2-3 cwts. in weight. The mound was surrounded by a kerb, the line of which was picked out by probing away from the excavated area. There was no ditch and no indication of there ever having been an interment.

MOUND 11.

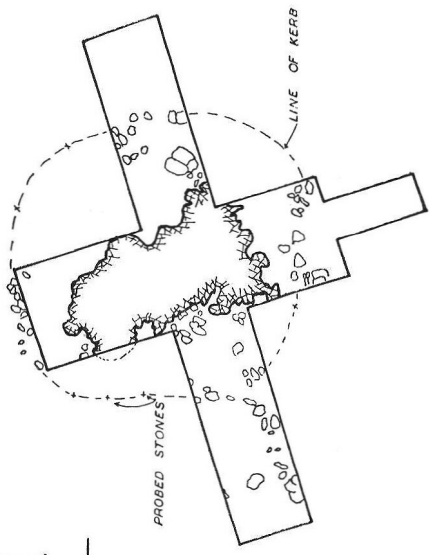
This mound, when cleared of vegetation and the covering of surface soil, was a little over 15 ins. in height and between 15 and 20 ft. in diameter. As with Mounds 12 and 15, the covering of stones was not continuous over the mound, though an attempt had been made to demarcate the mound and to provide a scattered covering. The stones were, as in Mounds 9, 12 and 15, mainly less than 12 ins. in length. The kerb was well preserved in the south-east quadrant. Below less than a foot of loose sandy soil with included lumps of Keuper Marl, further stones, reddened and blackened, were found resting on a layer of charcoal, ash and bone some 2-3 ins. in thickness (pl. I, fig. 4), covering an area of north-south elongate shape between 13-14 ft. in length and 7-9 ft. in width.

PAGAN - DANISH BARROW CEMETERY, INGLEBY — 1955

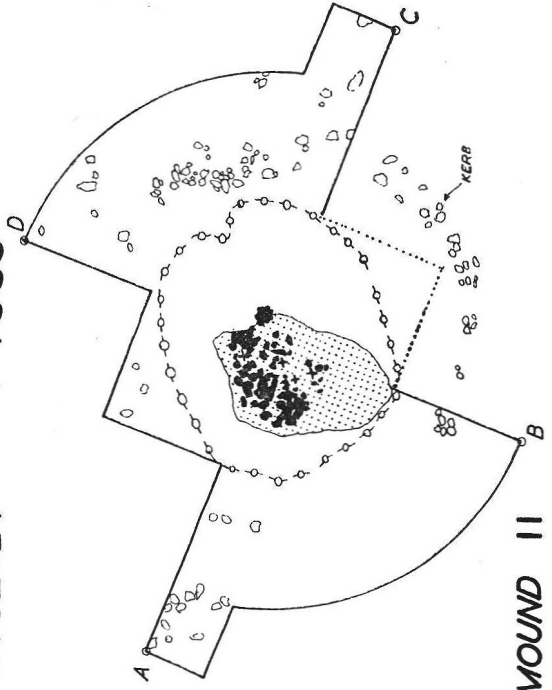
MOUND 9 S N



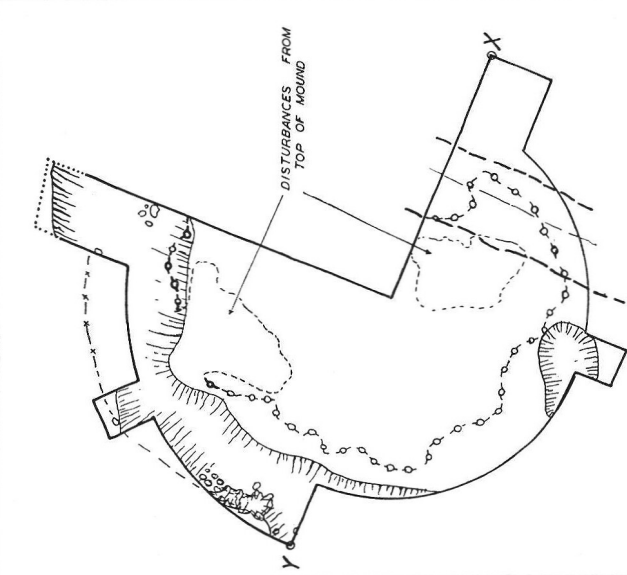
MOUND 9 S



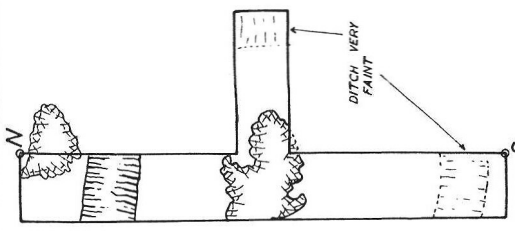
MOUND 10



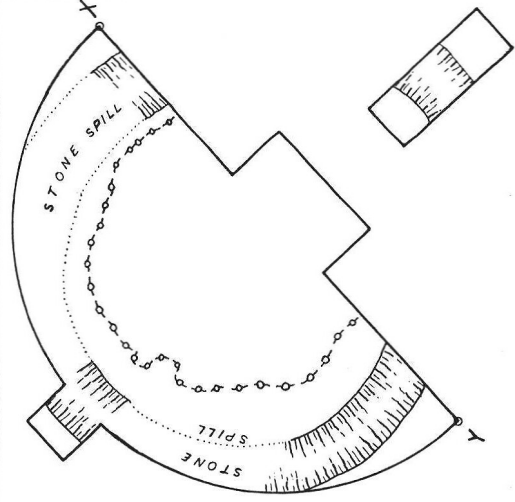
MOUND 11



MOUND 12



MOUND 13



MOUND 15

KEY

- CONTINUOUS 'FALSE CAIRN' OF STONES
- DISCONTINUOUS COVER OF STONES
- LIMITS OF MOUND
- CREMATION-HEARTH WITH POSITION OF GRAVE-GOODS MARKED BY X
- MOUND-DITCHES
- PRE-MOUND 'V' SHAPED DITCH [MOUNDS 9 & 12]
- A—B SECTIONS
- INDIVIDUAL STONES OF KERB DRAWN IN FOR MOUNDS 9, 10, 11 & 12
- REDDENED STONES ABOVE CREMATION-HEARTH OF M. 11



FIG. 3

This charcoal layer directly overlaid some 2-3 ins. of compact reddish sand and more than a foot of compact brown sandy subsoil. The whole sequence had been displaced in the south-east quadrant by the root action of a large tree.

The reddening of the soil beneath the charcoal layer would indicate a cremation hearth *in situ*. The bones³ in the hearth comprised both human and animal, but their excessive fissuration and comminution prevents any conclusion further than suggesting the incomplete representation of not more than one individual. As in the case of many Bronze Age burials, only part of the body may have finally been buried. The reports on the cremated remains from the 1941-6 excavations⁴ provide similar evidence of thoroughly cremated, deliberately and excessively comminuted bone, nowhere seemingly comprising a whole individual and including the bones of edible domestic animals and dog. The discoloured stones overlaying the hearths may have been so discoloured by having been thrown on to the fire to extinguish the flames, though the degree of discolouration could also have been caused by long contact with the hearth layer. Professor Cave's report suggests that the bones were comminuted after incineration, which would in its turn suggest that the fire may have been cold before the stones were actually thrown on to the hearth.

In the hearth were found a spade iron, a piece of wire embroidery (fig. 6), the subject of a specialist report,⁵ three nails and several pieces of twisted and corroded metal-work, which are possibly part of the same wire embroidery-work.⁶ There is no direct evidence that these objects or in fact any of the objects from the previous excavations were ever consumed even partially in the flames.⁷ The nails⁸ seem somewhat similar in form to

³ See Appendices III and IV.

⁴ Cave and Jackson in Fraser, 1946, pp. 20-2.

⁵ Appendix I.

⁶ Information from Mr. L. Biek, cf. Appendix I, wire embroidery no. 2.

⁷ Personal communication from Mr. L. Biek of the Ministry of Works Laboratory who is studying all the Ingleby material.

⁸ One nail has a large round head and now appears hollow and may have been a decorative stud (personal communication from Mr. L. Biek who examined and X-rayed all the objects).

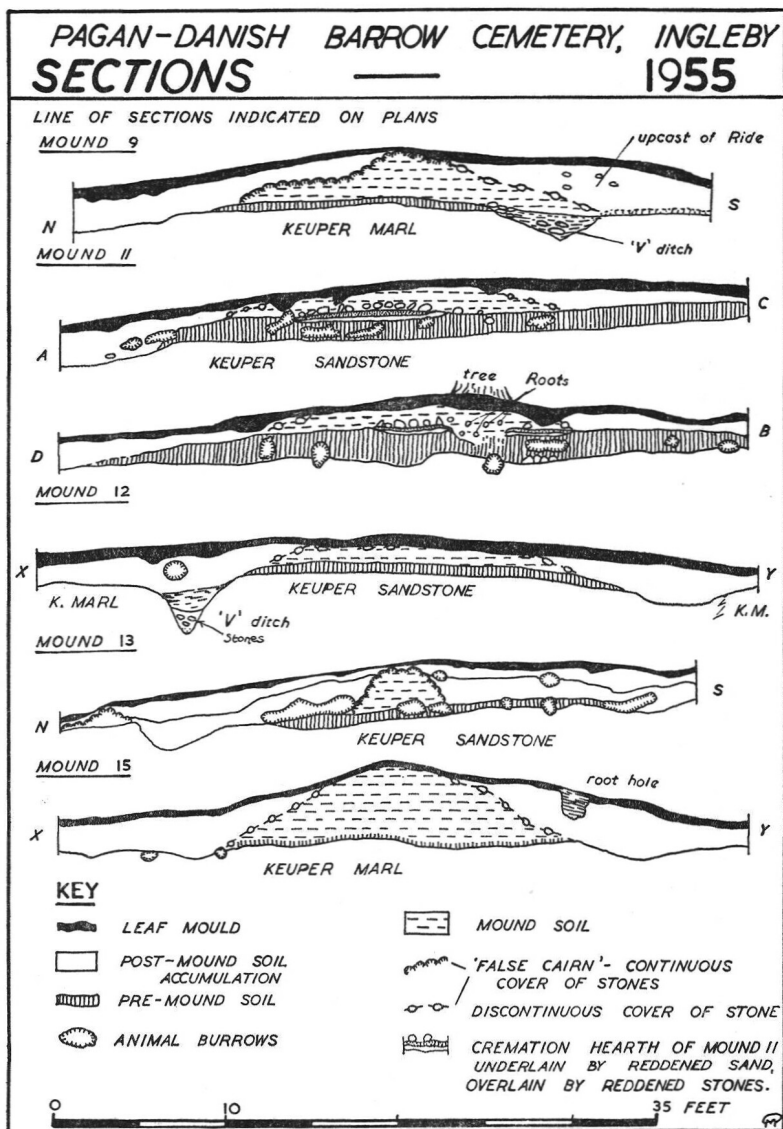


FIG. 4.

those described by Leeds from Mound 6.⁹ What their usage was is uncertain; they could be from a wooden chest or shield as suggested by Leeds in earlier reports, though why only three is puzzling if a whole object was buried. It is interesting to note in this connection that only portions of swords were recovered from the cremation hearths of Mounds 1 and 7, and one cannot help but conclude that as with the bones only part of the object was buried. This practice of breaking bones and objects, as if to release the spirit of such objects, is one familiar enough to both the prehistorian and the social anthropologist.

The charcoal has been shown by Mr. J. F. Levy to have consisted practically entirely of Oak, which must be a reflection of the then prevailing Oak woodland. The inclusion, however, of the Holm or Evergreen Oak is somewhat surprising, since this species, commonly found in the Mediterranean region, is not native to the general area. The fragments may have belonged to some object burnt in the fire made of this wood or the use of such an exotic wood in a cremation pyre may have had some special ritual significance.

It is of interest to note that with the exception of the kerb, Mound 11 was the most poorly constructed of all the mounds and its "false cairn" the least obvious.

MOUND 12.

Mound 12, when cleared of vegetation, was a little over a foot in height and between 20 and 27 ft. in diameter. The "false cairn" was discontinuous and the underlying earth mound was only 9 ins. in total height above the original land surface. A shallow ditch, or to be more exact a series of irregular shaped convergent hollows surrounded the mound on the east side and were nowhere more than 18 ins. in overall depth. A kerb surrounding the mound overlay the shallow depressions. Two irregular disturbances, each approximately 8 ft. by 5 ft., were found cutting down to the original land surface in the north-west and south-east quadrants, though from the return fill it is doubtful if either cutting located a hearth.

⁹ E. T. Leeds in Fraser, 1946, p. 18.

There was no indication of any sign of there having been an interment. A parallel sided "V" section ditch (pl. II) was found below the south-west quadrant, which, it was subsequently confirmed, was the continuation of the ditch first observed underlying Mound 9.

MOUND 13 (pl. II).

Mound 13 was the smallest of the mounds, being only 10 ft. by 5 ft. in diameter though $2\frac{1}{4}$ ft. in height above the original land surface. Its cairn was steep and imposing, containing large stones as in the case of Mound 10. A shallow but discontinuous ditch surrounded the mound separated from the cairn by a broad berm. It is doubtful whether a kerb ever existed, though a heap of stones was found outside the ditch on the northern side. No indication of any hearth or interment was found.

MOUND 15.

Mound 15 was the largest of the mounds, measuring when cleared of vegetation 22 ft. in diameter and $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in height. Its earthen mound was only sparsely covered by stones. A very shallow ditch, some $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in width, surrounded the mound separated from it by a narrow berm. A considerable number of former covering stones had spilled into the ditch. There was no kerb and no indication of any interment or hearth ever having existed.

THE "V" SECTION DITCH.

This ditch was first picked out under the eastern quadrants of Mound 9 and later under Mound 12. A trench, perpendicular to the supposed course of the ditch picked up the line of the ditch halfway between the two mounds. The ditch in its known course trends downslope from a course slightly east of north under Mound 12 to one more due north-east under Mound 9. As can be seen in the section of Mound 9 (fig. 4), the mound clearly postdates the ditch. The ditch was some 3 ft. 6 inches deep at its deepest and between 6 and 9 ft. wide. It had been filled in by fresh material and Keuper sandstones which made it difficult to recognize its existence when first found. The



PLATE I.—Top: Mound 10 showing 'false cairn' structure. Bottom: Mound 11 showing cremation hearth covered with stones. Rodent disturbance well marked below hearth.

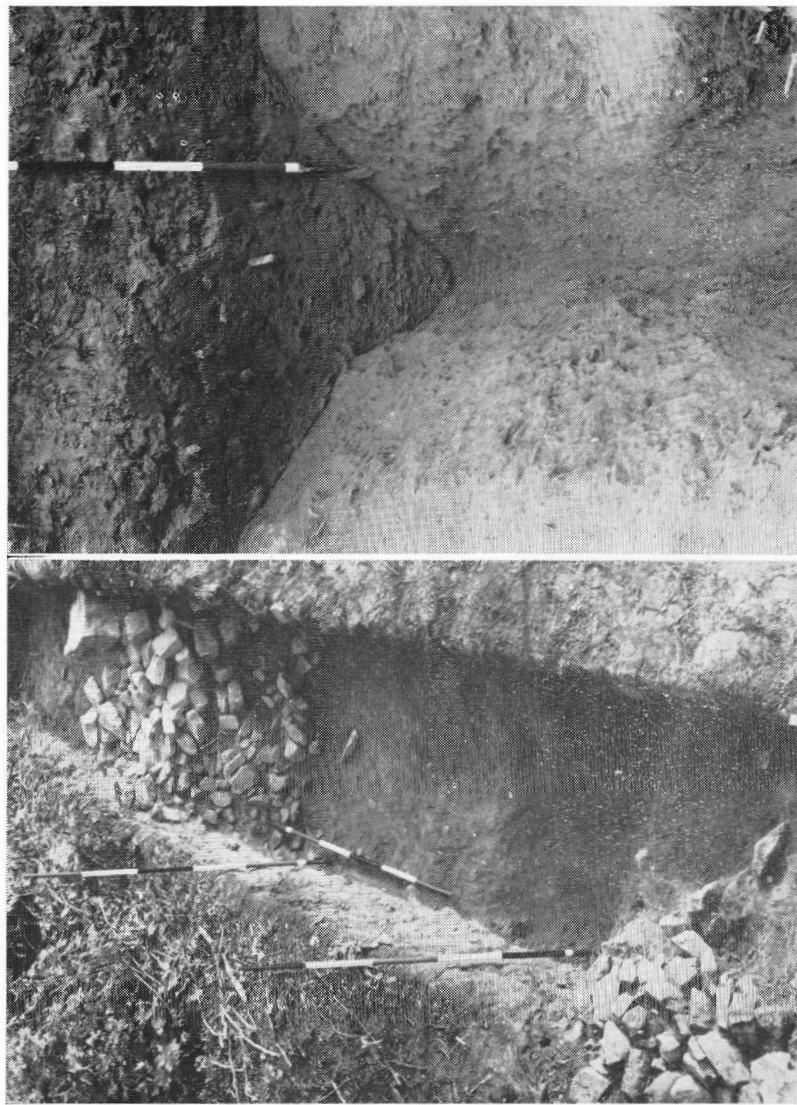


PLATE II.—Left: Mound 13 showing 'false cairn' berm and part of discontinuous ditch and fragment of original kerb. Right: Mound 12 showing 'V' ditch underlying mound.

absence of a complementary bank and the freshness of the marl filling, together with the sharp clean-cut sides suggest that the ditch was short-lived and filled in with the original marl dug from the ditch. Under Mound 9, the ditch filling included a large number of fragments of a very crumbly pottery, and the impression gained was of a ditch hurriedly filled in and that the pottery must either have been lying on the surface or have been broken and so incorporated at the time of the infilling.

The commanding position of Heath Wood would have been ideal for a Danish earthwork, but only further excavation and possibly aerial photography immediately outside the woodland itself will reveal either the purpose or extent of the ditch.

DESCRIPTION OF THE POTTERY (fig. 5).¹⁰

The absence of excavated Pagan-Danish sites in England makes it impossible to compare these sherds, either in fabric or form to any known pottery from this country,

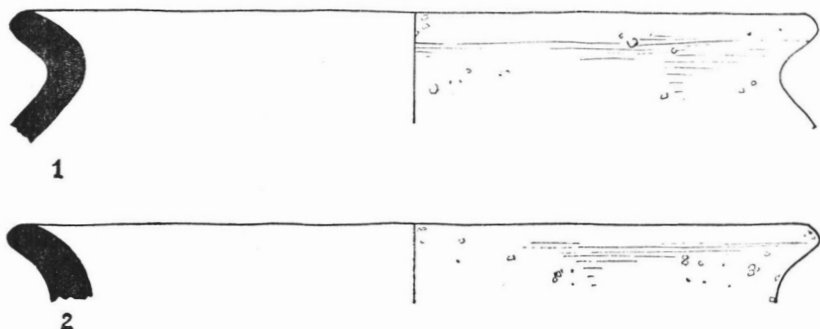


FIG. 5—Pottery from the 'V' section ditch.
(Drawn by G. C. Dunning) Scale $\frac{3}{8}$

though the circumstances of their discovery leave little option but to assign them to this period and to a date immediately prior to the date of the cemetery itself. Over twenty fragments of hand-made pottery were found, though the majority were of small size and body pieces

¹⁰ Mr. Gerald Dunning, Mr. J. R. C. Hamilton and Mr. David Wilson examined the pottery and gave the writer the benefit of their wide experience.

and included no basal fragments. The fabric is gritty with a fine paste containing quartzite fragments, poorly fired with a smoothed black exterior, brown interior, and buff core. Two bowls were represented by the rim fragments, one (no. 1) with a sharply everted rim form and a rim diameter of 8.4 inches, and the other (no. 2) probably also everted with a rim diameter of 8.5 ins.

CONCLUSIONS.¹¹

Both Shetelig and Leeds have pointed out that as regards archaeological poverty and the cremation rite, the Ingleby cemetery points to North Jutish or Swedish affinities. The wire embroidery in Ösenstich, with its South Swedish parallels strengthens this view. Shetelig, Leeds and Wainwright have concluded, on the basis that the first Danes were warriors and that the Ingleby cemetery is sizeable and that further the men of these first armies were adventurers with little "primitive reverence of pagan funeral customs",¹² that the survival of these rites at Ingleby was due to new immigrants arriving direct from their Scandinavian homeland soon after the peace of 878. By 917 this part of the Danelaw had been annexed by Edward the Elder, though probably as early as 900 Christianity was becoming widely accepted in the Eastern Danelaw.¹³

The presence of so many cenotaph mounds (nos. 2, 4, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15) is perhaps a little surprising, though as was suggested in the preliminary report, these barrows for the most part lie away from the crest of Heath Wood and it was possibly only the first barrows on the crest that witnessed the full pagan rites. The later barrows may only represent a "lip service" paid to traditional practices of still superstitious continental-born Danes, who with the increase of Christian influences felt compelled to bury their dead in the accepted manner of the locality. The evidence of Danish burials in church grounds with grave goods as at Repton,¹⁴ Rampside and Ormside is possibly

¹¹ For full references to the authorities referred to here see Posnansky, 1955.

¹² Shetelig, 1954, p. 91.

¹³ D. Whitelock, 1941, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," *Saga-Book* of the Viking Society, Vol. XII, Pt. III, p. 175.

¹⁴ *D.A.J.*, 1923, XLVI.

a further phenomenon of this transitional stage between pagan and Christian burial customs. On the whole these cenotaph barrows are as regards structure much more carefully built than those containing the cremations, the former care expended on the cremation rites being diverted to the building of the mounds.

The form of the barrows with their earthen mounds, false cairns and kerbs is of interest though without parallel in this country and probably reflects a burial practice from the homeland of their makers.

It is of importance that further work be directed at finding out the nature of the ditch predating the mounds, which if of Danish origin would mean a closely dated site of the ninth century.

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APPENDIX I.

OBJECTS FOUND IN CREMATION HEARTH, MOUND 11.

Wire Embroidery.

Miss Elisabeth G. Crowfoot examined the embroidery and contributes the following note:

"1. Fragment of interlaced wire, silver (?), length 2.8 cm., width 8 mm. Photograph front and back, pl. III, fig. 6 — 1.

This fragment comes from a band of metal wire embroidery on some textile, silk or wool, which has been destroyed; examination by the Shirley Institute showed traces of carbonised fibres from between the strands of wire.

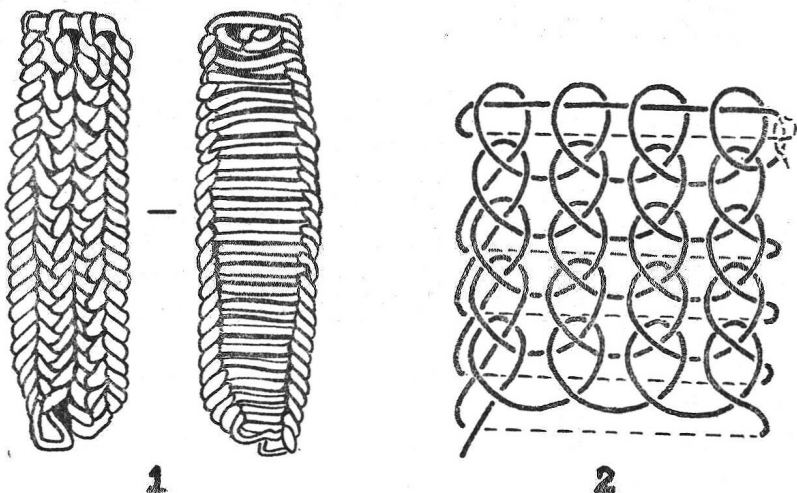


FIG. 6, 1.—Fragment of Embroidery (Scale $\frac{1}{2}$).

2.—Variety of Osenstich used in Ingleby fragment.

The embroidery is in the technique named *Ösenstich* by Dr. Agnes Geijer (*Birka III, Die Textilfunde aus den Gräbern*, Uppsala, 1938, pp. 109-11, Abb. 25). The work is done with a continuous thread, looped 'as if in a spiral' across the front with the thread carried straight across the back (see diagram, fig. 6); our piece has one end of the embroidery, with the end of the wire holding the first row of loops and twisted round to secure it; there are about nine loops to the cm. This variety of *Ösenstich* is similar to that shown by Dr. Geijer on Abb. 25e and pl. 31. 2 (St. 7, c. 26 cm. long and 5 mm. wide), but our example has four

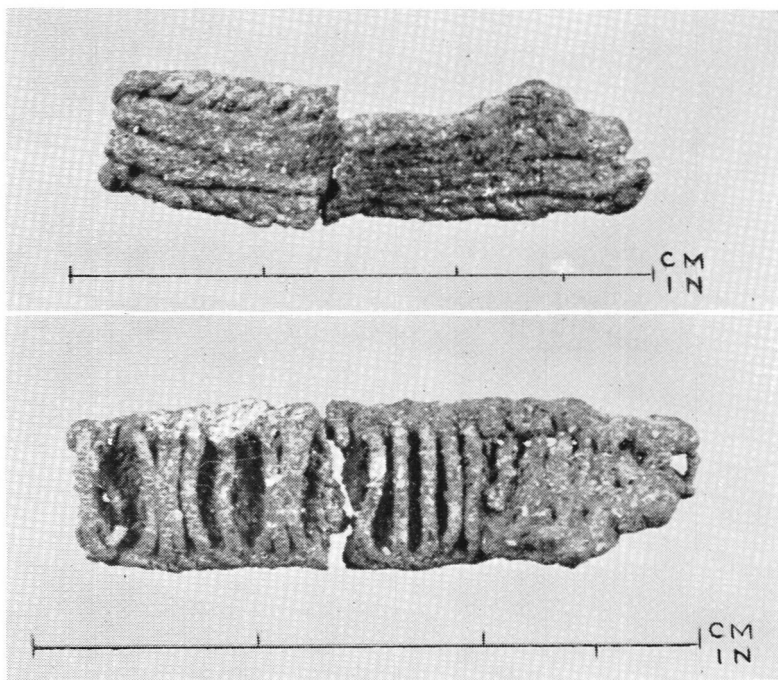


PLATE III.—Fragment of Embroidery from Ingleby. Top: Front view.
Bottom: Back view.

loops to a row instead of three, and uses the rather simpler looping system shown on Abb. 25c, d.¹⁵

There were altogether ten fragments in *Ösenstich* from Viking graves at Birka (St. 5-14). All these were in silver wire, and come from headbands (on women) or caps (on men); textile remains adhering to them are all of silk. Dr. Geijer catalogues six other fragments in this stitch from burials in Gotland and Småland, some of which are in Visby Museum. All these burials where datable are of the 9th and 10th centuries A.D.

2. Another fragment of metal from Mound 11 might be part of this embroidery, a lump of pieces stuck together; there seem to be traces of the wires here and there, but the surface is too deteriorated for it to be possible to make out a pattern."

APPENDIX II.

FLINT WORK (fig. 7).

A total of twenty worked pieces of flint were found on the excavation. Pieces were found in all the excavations except that of Mound 12. Two pieces including the round scraper made from a cortex flake (fig. 7, 1) and the broken tranchet derivative arrowhead (fig. 7, 2) were found in the prebarrow soil of Mound 11, the remainder of the material was found in the soil of mounds themselves, whilst two pieces came from the infilling of the ditch under Mound 9. Altogether there are five implements or utilized waste flakes, comprising the broken, poorly made arrowhead (Clark, 1934, Class D); two scrapers, one of elongated form (fig. 7, 4); a core (fig. 7, 3) re-utilized as a scraper and a utilized waste flake.

It must be assumed that the material was lying on the surface and became incorporated into the build up of the mounds. The scrapers and the arrowhead are suggestive of a Late Neolithic Beaker dating for the material. The number of recent stray finds of worked flints from the general Middle Trent area is a strong indication that the wealth of material revealed at Swarkeston¹⁶ is not of an isolated nature, but that prehistoric man was present either living on the terrace gravels on the north side of the Trent or possibly foraging on the south side.

¹⁵ The stitch is also found on Peruvian textiles (Early Ica, 1300-1400), see K. and A. Bühler-Oppenheim, *Die Textiliensammlung Fritz Iklé-Huber im Museum für Völkerkunde und Schweizerischen Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel*, Basel, 1948, p. 238, Abb. 145, where the stitch, exactly similar to our example, is used to join the edges of two pieces of material.

¹⁶ See papers in this *Journal* for 1955-6 on the Swarkeston excavations.

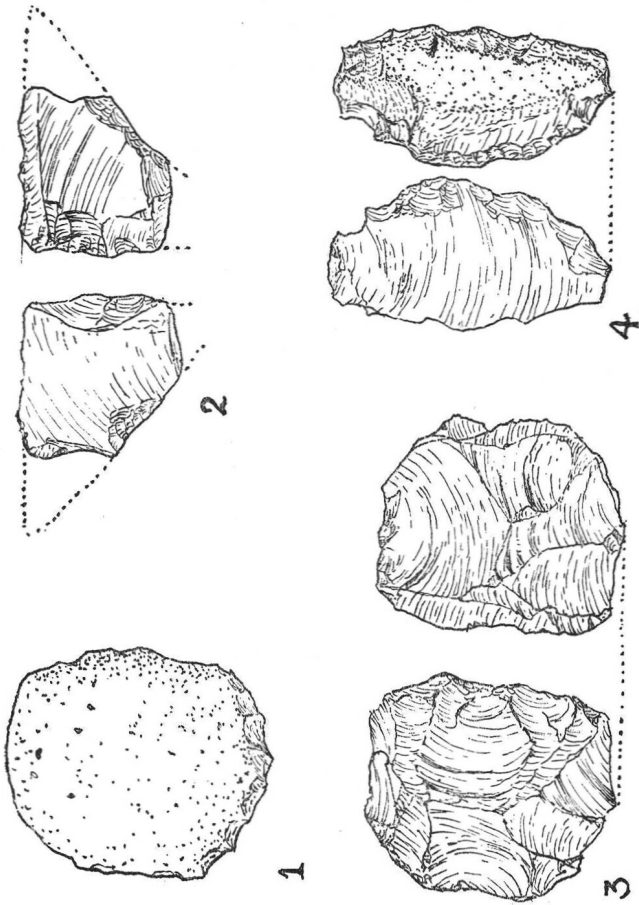


FIG. 7.—Flints: nos. 1 & 3, scrapers. No. 2, a broken tranchet derivative arrowhead. No. 4, a core. (Scale actual size).

APPENDIX III.

CREMATED REMAINS FROM MOUND 11.

Professor A. J. E. Cave of the Department of Anatomy, St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College, examined the cremated remains and contributes the following note:

"The osteological material available for examination comprises a great mass of burnt and excessively comminuted bones, both human and non-human. Their original burning, with its consequent fissuration and warping, has been so intense and their subsequent deliberate pounding so thorough, that the resultant fragments are generally impossible of identification. About half of them are minute irregular chips and splinters of compact bone, the other half mere decorticated pieces of cancellous bone, useless for identification purposes. It is difficult, in all this material, to find more than a very few fragments capable of even tentative identification in terms of osteology, practically no single fragment being large enough or sufficiently unaltered to manifest something positive of its original morphological characters. Indeed, such fragments as do retain any recognizable anatomical features are, for the most part, of non-human origin.¹⁷

Regarding the greater parts of the fragments present, it is not possible to say whether they are human or otherwise, nor to assign them with confidence to any particular skeletal element.

Recognizable as certainly, or probably, human are: various small chips from the shafts of different long bones, a number of small pieces of cranial vault, some rib and vertebral fragments and a distal femoral fragment. These items afford no clue as to the age, sex or stature of the skeleton whence they derive.

There is nowhere in this Ingleby material any evidence of skeletal immaturity, of the sex of the bones represented or of the duplication of individual bones. The presumption is, therefore, that the bulk of the material derives from a single adult skeleton, which is, however, very incompletely represented. There is no firm basis for more positive opinion."

APPENDIX IV.

ANIMAL BONES.

Dr. J. Wilfred Jackson examined the animal bones and contributes the following note:

"Owing to their condition and fragmentary nature they are extremely difficult to determine. They seem to be animal and not human. Some of the smaller bones suggest a small dog, and the larger pieces may belong to sheep."

¹⁷ See Appendix IV on the Animal Bones by Dr. Wilfred Jackson.

APPENDIX V.

CHARCOALS.

Mr. J. F. Levy of the Department of Botany, Imperial College of Science and Technology, examined a representative sample of the charcoals from the cremation hearth of Mound 11 and contributes the following note:

"The fragments consisted of fragments of wood charcoal. These could be roughly divided into three groups according to size. The smaller may or may not have belonged to the same piece of timber as the larger. The groups were as follows:

1. Large pieces, greater than one inch in at least one dimension.
 2. Medium pieces, between half an inch and one inch in at least one dimension.
 3. Small pieces, less than half an inch in any dimension.
- I. LARGE PIECES. 17 specimens.
 - 10 specimens OAK (*Quercus* sp.). 7 of these were from large dimension timbers and 3 from branches some 1½-3 ins. in diameter.
 - 2 specimens EVERGREEN or HOLM OAK (*Quercus ilex*). Both from small branches.
 - 3 specimens HAZEL (*Corylus* sp.). All from small branches.
 - 1 specimen PYRUS type. From small branch.
 - 1 specimen much distorted and not identified.
 2. MEDIUM PIECES. 21 specimens.
 - 18 specimens OAK (*Quercus* sp.). 14 of these were from slow grown trees and the remaining 4 from fast grown trees.
 - 3 specimens HAZEL (*Corylus* sp.). All from small branches.
 3. SMALL PIECES. About 200 specimens of which 50 were examined.
 - 49 specimens OAK (*Quercus* sp.).
 - 1 specimen not identified."