

## CHAMBERED TOMBS OF DERBYSHIRE.

By T. G. MANBY.

### INTRODUCTION.

THIS paper incorporates the results of surveys made by Mr John Lomas and the writer in 1957 as part of a programme of field research carried out by the Prehistory and Roman Section of the Society.

The chambered tombs of Derbyshire comprise most of the Peak District group of megalithic tombs; other sites belonging to this group are Long Low, Wetton, Staffs., and the Bridestones, Congleton, Cheshire. The Derbyshire sites can be divided into a northern group, including Five Wells, Bole Hill and Ringham Low, and a southern, including Minninglow, Stoney Low, Green Low and Harborough (Fig. 2).

These chambered tombs first attracted the attention of Thomas Bateman in the mid-nineteenth century and he excavated at many of them. Early in the present century John Ward described the group as having single-celled, wedge-shaped chambers of pillar and slab construction with the side slabs sloping inwards.<sup>1</sup> More recently these tombs have been discussed by Phillips,<sup>2</sup> Daniel<sup>3</sup> and Piggott.<sup>4</sup>

### FIVE WELLS (Plate IIa; Fig. 3).

This is the most northern chambered tomb of the series, situated at over 1,400 ft. on the edge of a limestone escarpment, 1 mile west of the village of Taddington (SK 123710). The site is now a much robbed, grass-covered cairn of limestone rubble, 3 ft. high, 70 ft. east to west and 65 ft. north to south. A drystone field wall

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H. Derby*, I, 165-8.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, *O.S. Map of Trent Basin Megaliths*, 11-18.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel, *Prehistoric Chamber Tombs of England and Wales*, 83-6.

<sup>4</sup> Piggott, *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles*, 267-8.

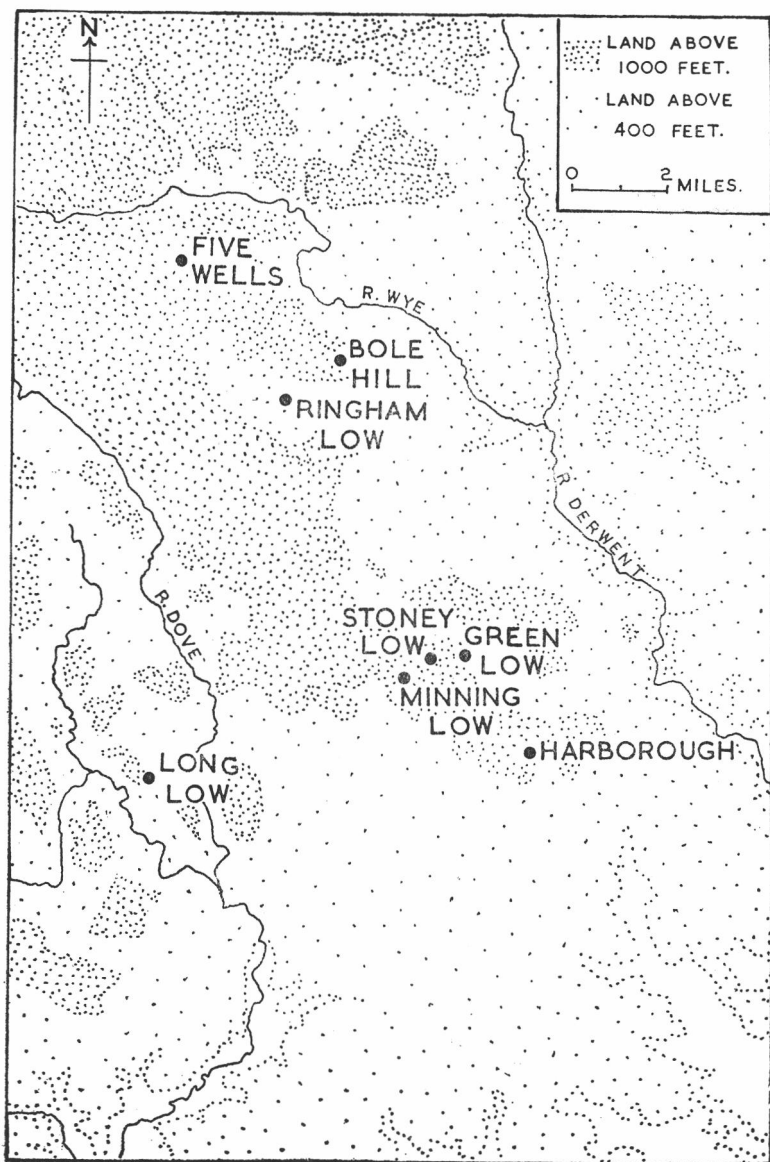


FIG. 2. Distribution map of chambered tombs in Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

crosses the northern side of the cairn and a line of craters on the southern side marks the places where Micah Salt of Buxton excavated in 1899-1901. In the centre of the cairn are the remains of two stone chambers set back to back, 5 ft. apart, on a roughly east to west axis. Both are built of slabs of carboniferous limestone now fissured and weathered. The east chamber is the better preserved

### FIVE WELLS CHAMBER TOMB TADDINGTON.

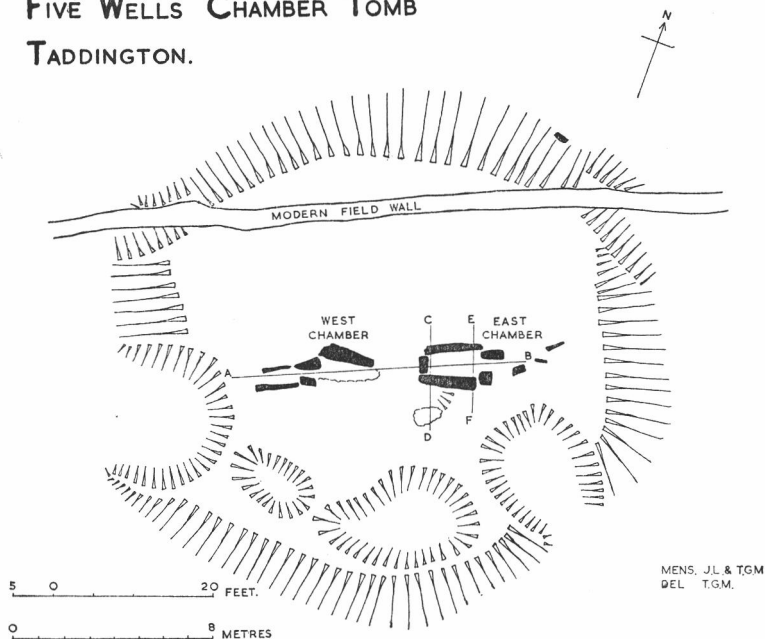


FIG. 3. Five Wells — plan.

but lacks a capstone. It has two portal pillars and a rear pillar against which lean the side slabs, the northern one still retaining two packing stones under its western end. East of the chamber are three small slabs embedded in the grass, evidently the remains of the passage. The west chamber is much more ruined and built of inferior material. The two portal pillars differ in size and only the northern side slab remains. Two slabs of the passage

remain but as this is filled with rubble their dimensions remain uncertain (Fig. 4).

Five Wells was explored by Bateman in 1846 after it had been robbed by field-wallers; he cleared the chambers and found the bones of at least twelve inhumations.<sup>5</sup> Salt discovered that the cairn was built of coursed limestone with a vertical perimeter wall oval in shape, roughly 50 ft. north to south and 46 ft. east to west.<sup>6</sup> The east chamber was cleared and found to have a paved floor, as did the passage which was 10 ft. long and curved slightly

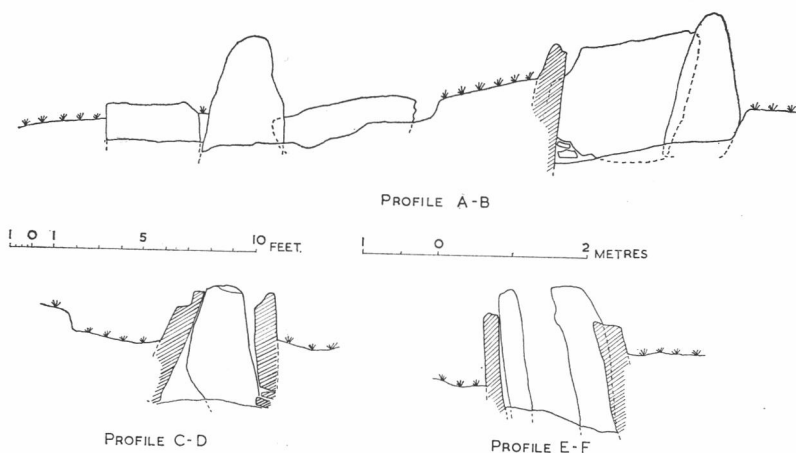


FIG. 4. Five Wells — details of chambers.

northwards before reaching the cairn perimeter. The west chamber and passage were also paved, the latter 15 ft. long and curving slightly to the south.

Salt found sherds of Peterborough and Western Neolithic pottery within and outside the chambers,<sup>7</sup> but he does not record the positions of a flint leaf-shaped arrowhead, a tanged and barbed arrowhead and a flint plano-convex knife. A cist was built against the perimeter wall of the cairn 12 ft. north of the entrance to the west passage. In it was a crouched inhumation with a flint

<sup>5</sup> Bateman, *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire*, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ward, *Reliquary*, VIII (1901), 229-42.

<sup>7</sup> Piggott, *Archaeological Journal*, LXXXVIII (1931), 156.

flake. A second cist introduced into the cairn north-west of the east chamber contained a decayed inhumation and a few burnt bones.

### BOLE HILL, BAKEWELL MOOR.

This is a doubtful site now destroyed,  $4\frac{1}{4}$  miles south-east of Five Wells (SK 184676). Stone-robbers discovered a cist enclosing three human skeletons a few years before Bateman conducted an excavation here in 1843.<sup>8</sup> He cleared four cists, the largest containing four human skeletons, and in further excavations in 1859 found two more cists, the first containing a crouched female skeleton and the second the remains of three skeletons.<sup>9</sup> This may not be a true chambered tomb and may belong to the "debased megalithic" series of Corcoran.<sup>10</sup>

### RINGHAM LOW, MONYASH (Fig. 5).

This site was recorded by Bateman and then lost sight of until rediscovered by E. and L. Alcock.<sup>11</sup> It is on level ground on the northern edge of Lathkill Dale just above the 900 ft. contour, 1 mile south-west of Bole Hill and 1 mile east of Monyash (SK 169664). The site is crossed by a field wall and the southern part is in a small plantation. North of the wall the barrow is represented by a slight and irregular rise while in the plantation is a scatter of limestone rubble and a robber trench following the western perimeter of the barrow. The whole site appears to have been systematically raked over for all usable building stone.

Ringham Low was first recorded in 1847 when it was already in a ruinous state.<sup>12</sup> At this time Bateman excavated a large cist containing the burial of a man accompanied by a flint knife and a cow's tooth. Two other "vaults" were excavated at the same time without result. In 1859 Bateman opened a large cist in the centre of the mound (no. 1).<sup>13</sup> It had a paved floor and contained

<sup>8</sup> Bateman, *Vestiges*, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Bateman, *Ten Years' Diggings*, 104-5.

<sup>10</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXV (1955), 91-7, 104-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Antiquity*, XXVI (1952), 41-2.

<sup>12</sup> Bateman, *Vestiges*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Bateman, *Diggings*, 93-7.

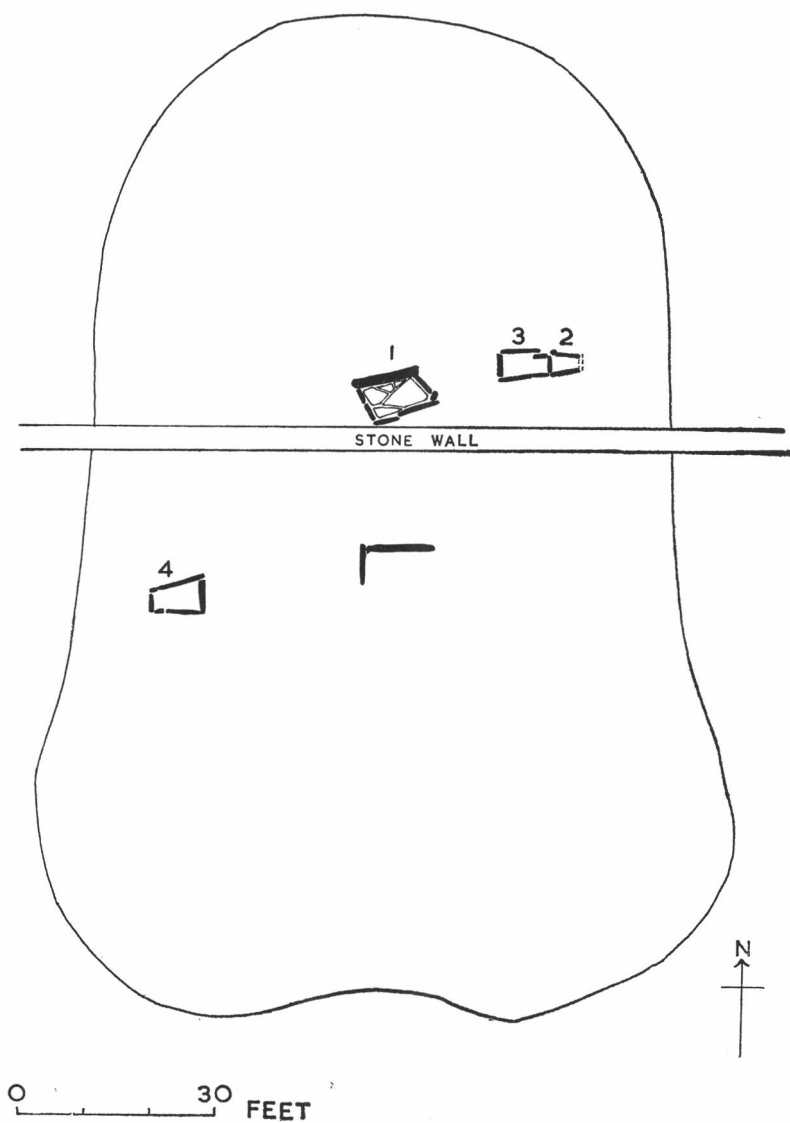


FIG. 5. Plan of Ringham Low (after Jewitt).





PLATE IIa. Five Wells — the chambers from the south-west.



PLATE IIb. Minninglow — Chamber II from the north-west.



the scattered bones of twelve persons; three leaf-shaped flint arrowheads accompanied these burials. Later a double cist was excavated: the eastern cist (no. 2) contained four imperfect human skeletons and a bone pin; the western cist (no. 3) had been disturbed and its paved floor removed, but the bones of two human skeletons and two leaf-shaped arrowheads were found. Another large cist (no. 4) yielded a few human bones and some charcoal. Bateman gives the dimensions of the site as 30 by 50 yds. with an average height of 4 ft.

In shape Ringham Low differs from the other Derbyshire chambered tombs. Daniel regarded the site as a collection of cists,<sup>14</sup> whilst E. and L. Alcock withdrew their suggestion that cists 2 and 3 represented a chamber and passage of the normal Peak type.<sup>15</sup>

#### MINNINGLOW, BALLIDON (Plates II*b*, III*a*; Fig. 6).

The chambered tomb, the largest in Derbyshire, is the eastern of two barrows on the top of Minninglow Hill at 1,200 ft. O.D., 6 miles south-south-east of Ringham Low (SK 209572). The barrow now has the appearance of an old quarry dump after generations of interference; robbing has been extensive in the western half, but the eastern portion still has a height of 8 ft. The diameter is 121 ft. north to south and 141 ft. east to west.

At the centre is an exposed chamber (Chamber I) of limestone slabs (Fig. 7; Plate III*a*). This wedge-shaped chamber is now partially filled with limestone rubble and is covered by a single capstone resting on the two portal pillars and the rear pillar. The passage runs eastwards from the chamber but is largely unexcavated. One side slab adjoining the north portal pillar is exposed but its opposite number on the south side is missing. A capstone projects out of the unexcavated side of the cairn; under it the passage is almost completely filled with rubble. In 1957 the writer was able to feel under this slab for 3 ft. without finding its edge or meeting any obstruction. This passage awaits proper excavation.

Chamber II, 17 ft. south of Chamber I, retains its

<sup>14</sup> Daniel, 169.

<sup>15</sup> *Antiquity*, XXVII (1953), 41-2.

capstone and part of its passage with another capstone. It is irregular in shape and partly filled with stones (Fig. 7; Plate II*b*). The entrance faces south with a portal pillar on the east side and a slab on the west. The rear pillar is square and stands within the chamber. The eastern side slab rests against the eastern portal pillar and the rear pillar, forming a straight wall to this side of the chamber. The west wall is formed by the portal slab and a side slab leaning against it and the rear pillar. Across the chamber entrance is an upright septal slab  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft. high. The capstone rests on the rear pillar and the west portal slab. The passage extends south from the chamber and the exposed portion is filled to the roof with rubble. The triangular capstone rests on two of the side slabs and the top of another stone appears above the turf at the south-east end of the passage.

Although Chambers I and II are the only complete ones at Minninglow, several slabs on the site may be from other chambers in the much robbed south-western quadrant. Chamber III is a wedge-shaped setting of a rear pillar with a slab on each side, the western one broken. This is inferior in construction to the other chambers as the rear pillar stands only 2 ft. 4 ins. above the turf. Chamber IV remains only as a rear slab with two side slabs and a portal slab on the northern side. Outside the edge of the mound are three loose slabs which may have been taken from this chamber. On the western edge are three slabs partly buried and overlapping each other, which may be the collapsed remains of a fifth chamber. Midway between Chambers I and III is a single standing slab 1 ft. 10 ins. high, on the edge of a crater, the last piece of some slab-built structure. The mound has been cut into on the north-eastern side by a quarry. North of this the writer picked up two small pieces of Romano-British Derbyshire ware on part of the side of the mound that had been pulled away by a falling tree.

Minninglow was excavated by Bateman on several occasions. In 1843, when five "cists" were exposed, he found an extended human skeleton in one and fragments of pottery, animal bones and six Roman coins in another. The entrance to the passage of Chamber II was also dis-

# MINNING LOW BALLIDON

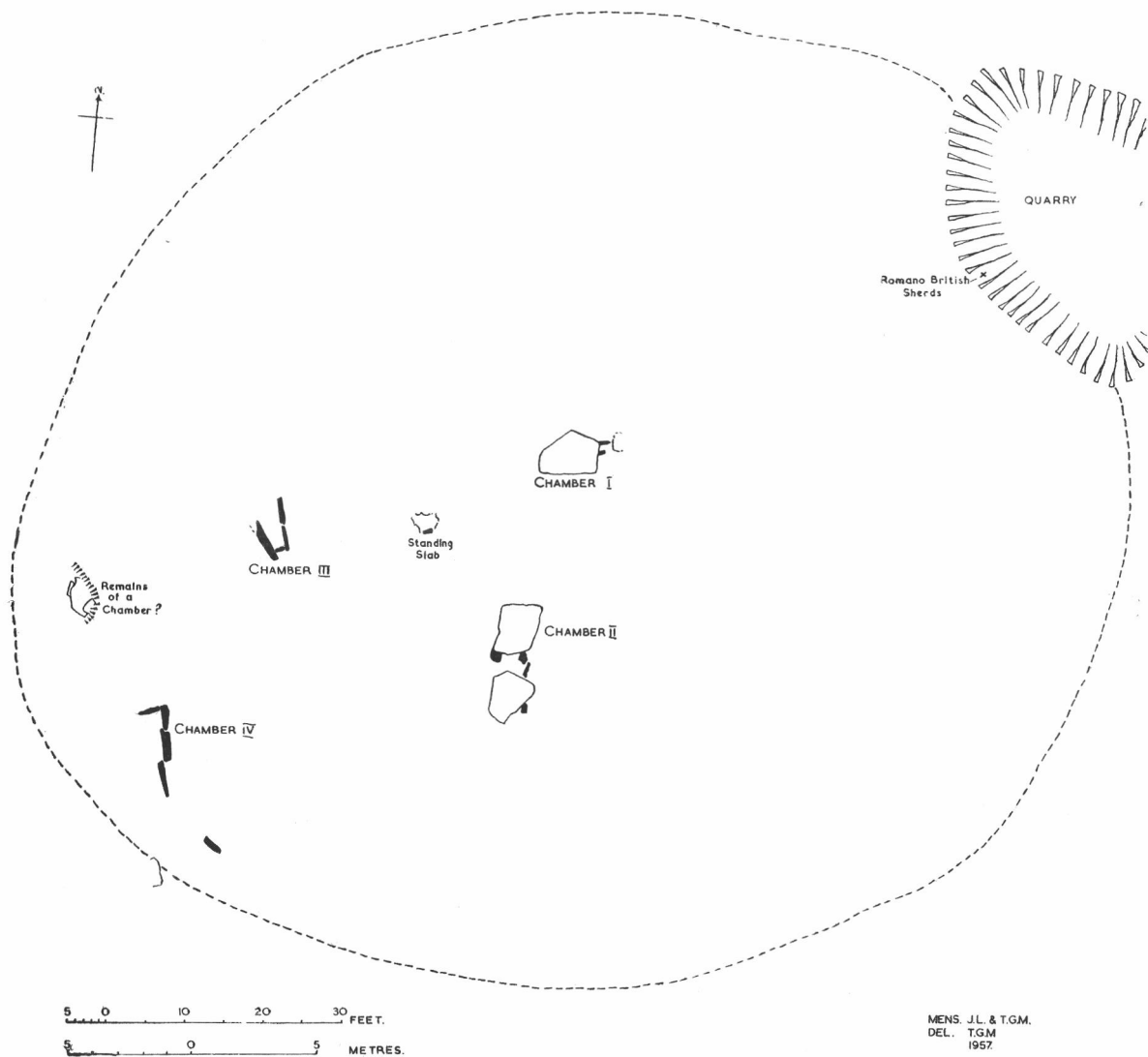


FIG. 6. Minninglow — plan.

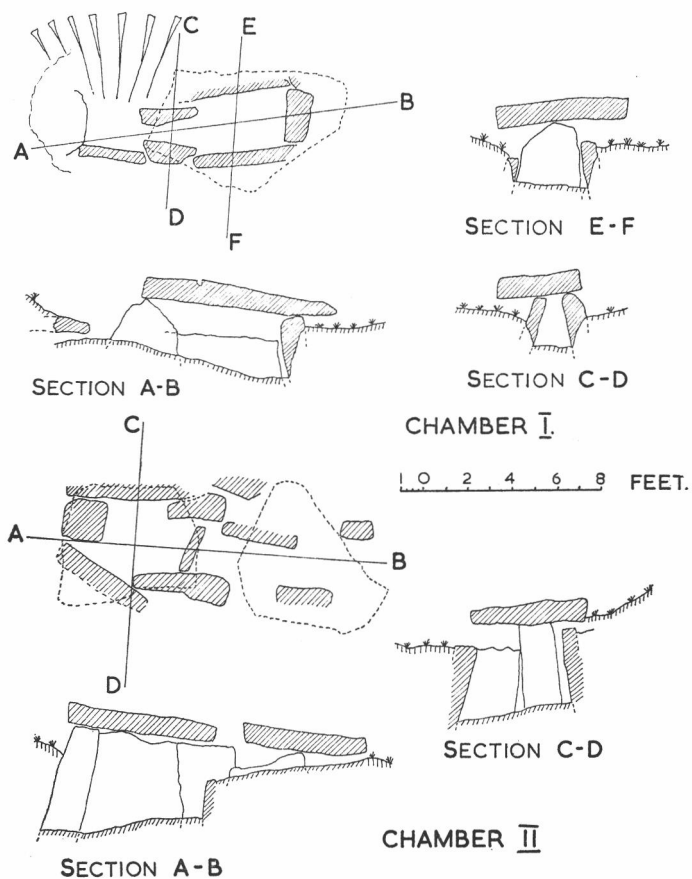


FIG. 7. Minninglow — details of Chambers I and II.

covered and the coursed construction of the mound noted.<sup>16</sup> In 1849, more Romano-British pottery and coins were discovered.<sup>17</sup> In 1851, Bateman excavated Chamber II but only found it to be disturbed; two more Roman coins were found with pottery on the western edge of the mound.<sup>18</sup>

Bateman's accounts show that by the mid-nineteenth century the site was much-robbed and the chambers exposed. The presence of Roman coins and pottery, apparently Romano-British Derbyshire ware, points to disturbance as long ago as the third and fourth centuries A.D.<sup>19</sup>

### STONEY LOW, ALDWARK.

This site is  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile north-east of Minninglow, at nearly 1,150 ft. O.D. on a flat-topped ridge that runs east in the direction of Grange Mill (SK 218578).<sup>20</sup> It is in a grass field east of the Elton-Longcliffe road and has been almost levelled. The remaining margins of the mound show it to have been round with a diameter of 108 ft. The centre is now cratered; one large stone shows above the turf and several small ones are scattered around. It appears to have been quarried outwards from the centre to leave only the margin intact as a circle no more than 1 ft. high.

Much stone had been removed when Bateman visited the site but at least three "cists" existed here, one of them 3 yards square.<sup>21</sup> The large size of the mound and the "cists" suggest that this may have been a chambered tomb. Careful excavation might settle this question.

### GREEN LOW, ALDWARK (Plate IIIb; Fig. 8).

This barrow stands on the eastern end of the same ridge as Stoney Low and is  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile to the east above 1,000 ft. O.D. (SK 232580). The cairn is grass-covered and has been greatly disturbed. It is oval, 62 ft. by 52 ft., with

<sup>16</sup> Bateman, *Vestiges*, 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> Bateman, *Diggings*, 54.

<sup>18</sup> Bateman, *Diggings*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Mr J. E. Bartlett informed the writer that a Romano-British Derbyshire ware cooking-pot found at Minninglow is among the Bateman Collection in the Sheffield City Museum.

<sup>20</sup> The writer is indebted to Mr J. P. Heathcote for the map reference to this site.

<sup>21</sup> Bateman, *Vestiges*, 46, 113.

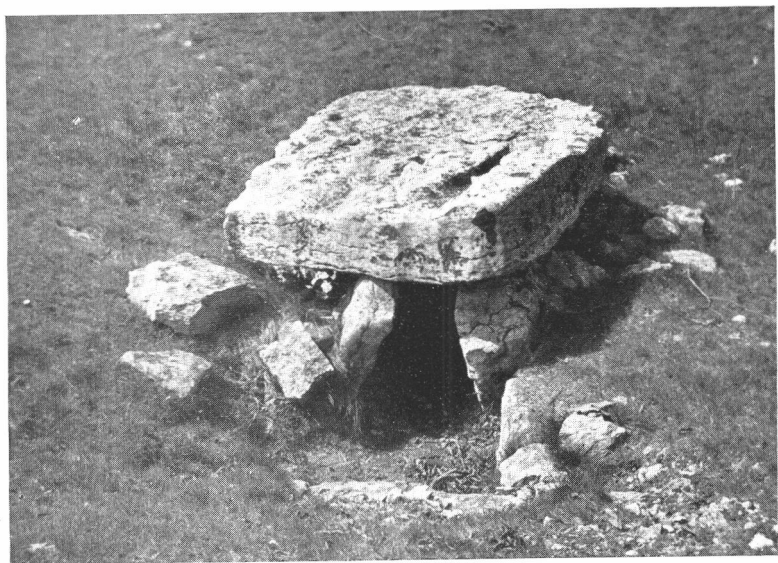


PLATE IIIa. Minninglow — Chamber I from the east.



PLATE IIIb. Green Low — chamber from the north.



a modern field wall crossing the extreme southern edge, where quarrying of the mound shows it to have been constructed of laid limestone rubble.

In the southern half are the remains of a chamber with a passage to the south and capstones missing. In construction this chamber has the wedge-shaped plan, like Five Wells and Minninglow Chambers I and II, but has neither portal nor rear pillars as slabs have been used. Originally this chamber would have been 6 ft. long and 3-5 ft. wide. The rear slab is 2 ft. high and the eastern slab 14 ins. The eastern portal slab is triangular and 2 ft. high; the western must have been removed by stone-robbers, who also caused the western side slab to fall outwards.

The portal slabs also formed part of the passage, where two slabs on the east and one on the west remain. Separating the chamber from the passage are two septal slabs set side by side. The eastern slab has been split by frost action and is 28 ins. high, whilst the western is only 1 ft. Against the latter leans a triangular sectioned pillar, 3 ft. 10 ins. high, with a natural perforation along a bedding plane. From its position and size this cannot be a portal pillar and its purpose is obscure.

The chamber and passage were dug out by Bateman in 1843 after the chamber had been exposed.<sup>22</sup> A broken human skeleton, human and animal bones and some pottery were the only finds, evidently all that was left after an earlier disturbance.

### HARBOROUGH ROCKS, BRASSINGTON.

This chambered tomb, the most southern of the series, stands on top of a staircase of magnesian limestone, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  miles SSE. of Green Low. The site is in a patch of broken ground on the summit of the rocks just east of the O.S. pillar between two (natural) rocks, "The Arm-chair" and "The Pulpit", at 1,240 ft. O.D. (SK 243553).

Before this tomb was excavated by Ward in 1889,<sup>23</sup> the mound had been robbed to leave a ring 46 ft. in diameter. At the centre were the remains of a chamber

<sup>22</sup> Bateman, *Vestiges*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> *D.A.J.*, XII (1890), 118-35.



with a passage facing north-west. The chamber was wedge-shaped, with a paved floor and side slabs inclined inwards. The passage was funnel-shaped, but only the stones of the south-west wall remained, as the north-east stones of the south-west wall remained, as the north-east

## GREEN LOW

### ALDWARK

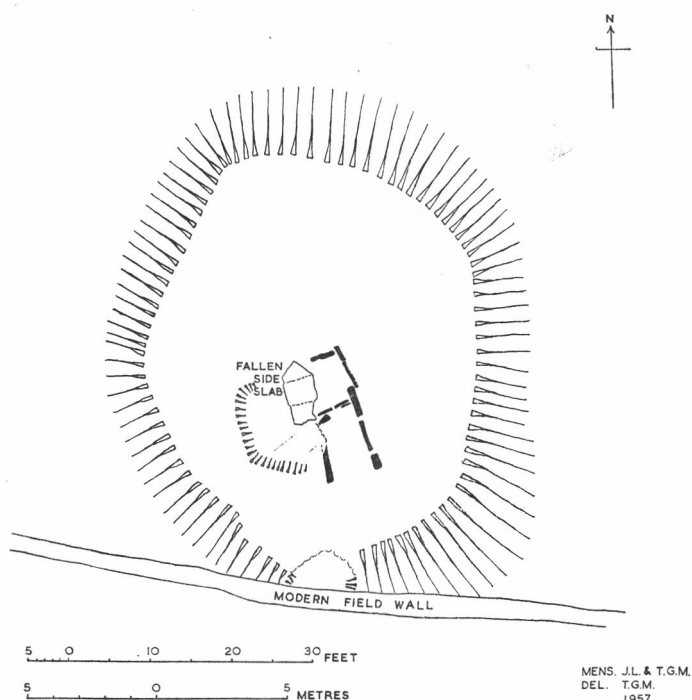


FIG. 8. (Green Low — plan).

wall and the capstones of the chamber and passage had been removed; one capstone lay on the floor of the passage. On the floor of the chamber were the mixed bones of at least five people; other human bones and three leaf-shaped flint arrowheads were scattered over the floor of the passage.

## BURIALS.

The disturbed condition of many of the chambers when excavated deprives us of much evidence, but collective inhumation seems to have been the only burial rite practised. The presence of male and female skeletons of adults and children suggests that the chambers were used for burials without regard to age or sex. Very little is known of the physique of the people, except at Harborough where all the skulls were dolichocephalic. The distinctive dolichocephalic skulls from Five Wells, Bole Hill, Ringham Low, Stoney Low and Long Low, Wetton were commented on by Bateman.<sup>24</sup> Apart from the Neolithic pottery at Five Wells, leaf-shaped flint arrow-heads were the only grave goods deposited with the dead.

## DISCUSSION.

The chambered tombs of Derbyshire, with the exception of Harborough, stand on carboniferous limestone and, apart from Ringham Low and Stoney Low, all occupy high and commanding positions.

All, except Ringham Low, are round cairns of rubble, varying in diameter from 121 ft. at Minninglow to 46 ft. at Harborough. The surviving chambers are built of weathered limestone slabs which could have been obtained very near to the sites. Careful examination of the chambers failed to reveal any sign of carving or dressing on the stones. The chambers are wedge-shaped in plan, often having septal slabs across the entrances.

It is possible to trace the development of these chambers beginning at Five Wells, where the portal and rear pillars are the principal constructional features with the side slabs subordinate. This also occurs in Minninglow Chambers I and II. The next stage of development is seen at Green Low and Minninglow Chambers III and IV, where the pillars have disappeared and their place has been taken by slabs no larger than the side slabs. The chamber and passage separated by a septal slab must finally have degenerated into the double cists of debased megalithic type found at Arbor Hill and Hazelton Hill, Staffs. and

<sup>24</sup> Bateman, *Digings*, 145.

Smerrill Moor in Derbyshire.<sup>25</sup> The Harborough chamber lacking portal stones must also be late.

Phillips<sup>26</sup> and Piggott<sup>27</sup> have suggested that these Peak District round cairns are related to the Boyne passage-graves of Ireland, while Daniel regards them as derived from the Clyde-Carlingford series of gallery-graves.<sup>28</sup> The present writer considers them to be passage-graves since the typologically early examples of Five Wells and Minninglow show a distinction in construction between the chamber and passage. A distant outlier of the Peak group, the Calderstones, Liverpool, has stones decorated in the Boyne style and points to the direction from which the chambered tomb builders entered the Peak District.<sup>29</sup>

Ringham Low stands apart from the other Derbyshire sites because of its shape. It is most closely related to Long Low, Wetton, which consists of a large circular mound with a central cist containing thirteen skeletons with leaf-shaped arrowheads. From this cairn extended a ridge with a smaller cairn on the end.<sup>30</sup> The cist at Long Low was similar in construction and contents to Cist I at Ringham Low. A pear-shaped cairn on Bradley Moor, near Skipton, which had a large cist and possibly a false portal may also be related to Ringham Low.<sup>31</sup> These three sites might well be called long cairns to distinguish them from the other chambered tombs under round cairns. Their origin is uncertain but the Anglesey site of Bryn yr Hen Bobl with its round cairn and "terrace" is similar in shape.<sup>32</sup> This site has a chamber with forecourt facing east. The dent in the south end of Ringham Low and the stones of the "false portal" at Bradley Moor may recall the forecourt idea. Piggott has suggested a similarity between the Bryn yr Hen Bobl "terrace" and the Long Low ridge.<sup>33</sup> West of our area, the Bridestones, Congleton, is a long cairn with a fore-

<sup>25</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXV (1955), 93.

<sup>26</sup> Phillips, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Piggott, *Neolithic Cultures*, 268-9.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel, 153.

<sup>29</sup> *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 1957, 20-390.

<sup>30</sup> Bateman, *Diggings*, 145.

<sup>31</sup> *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXX (1931), 248-55; XXXIV (1939), 222-7.

<sup>32</sup> *Archaeologia*, LXXXV (1936), 253-92.

<sup>33</sup> Piggott, *Neolithic Cultures*, 269.

court and a gallery-grave behind it.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore possible that this is the earliest of a scattered series of long cairns built by another megalithic people colonising the Southern Pennines and North Wales from the Irish Sea area, whose gallery-graves had degenerated into large cists by the time they built Long Low, Ringham Low and Bradley Moor cairns.

### CONCLUSIONS AND DATING.

The Peak District type of chambered tomb is a round cairn covering a wedge-shaped passage-grave. The users of these tombs practised collective inhumation. Typologically the earliest site is Five Wells, where the presence of Peterborough pottery, a tanged and barbed flint arrow-head and a plano-convex knife suggest that the chambers may have been re-used in the Late Neolithic if these are not the grave goods of the primary burials. A possible dating factor is the absence of brachycephalic and mesaticephalic skulls from the chambers. This suggests that their users had not intermarried with the Beaker people who entered the Peak District in the Late Neolithic. These mixed skull types are found in chambers of "debased megalithic" type,<sup>35</sup> so the chambered tombs must have been in use earlier. It is therefore possible that the builders of the round cairns entered the Peak District from the west during the Middle Neolithic period or at the beginning of the Late Neolithic.

A second type of megalithic tomb is the long cairn, represented in Derbyshire by Ringham Low, which is later than the round cairns, as it contains a double cist of "debased megalithic" type. Probably it indicates a second movement from the west of people originally with a gallery-grave tradition.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel, 83-6.

<sup>35</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXV (1955), 120.