

## LOST FINDS FROM BLAKE LOW, A ROUND BARROW NEAR GREAT LONGSTONE, DERBYSHIRE

By RAYMOND A. VARLEY

(Department of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, Naphralan Road,  
Bangkok 10200, Thailand)

### INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1848, Thomas Bateman investigated three round barrows at Bleaklow, near Longstone Edge, Great Longstone. The finds from these barrows were incorporated into the Bateman collection of antiquities in Lomberdale House, Youlgreave, but by the time the collection was purchased by the corporation of Sheffield, in 1893, many of the small finds had disappeared or had been separated from the objects with which they were found. The finds from

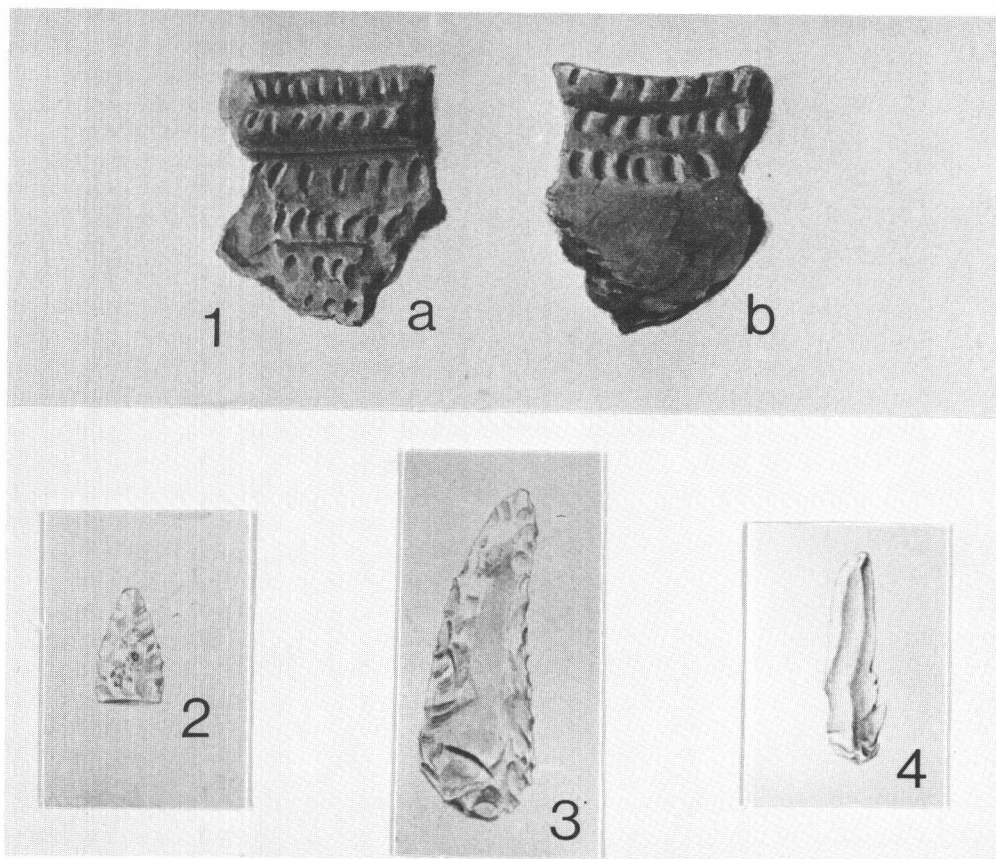


Plate 1 Blake Low: Jewitt's illustration of finds from the cist burial. 1 a-b: decorated rim sherd; 2: leaf-shaped arrowhead; 3: plano-convex knife; 4: undiagnostic blade.

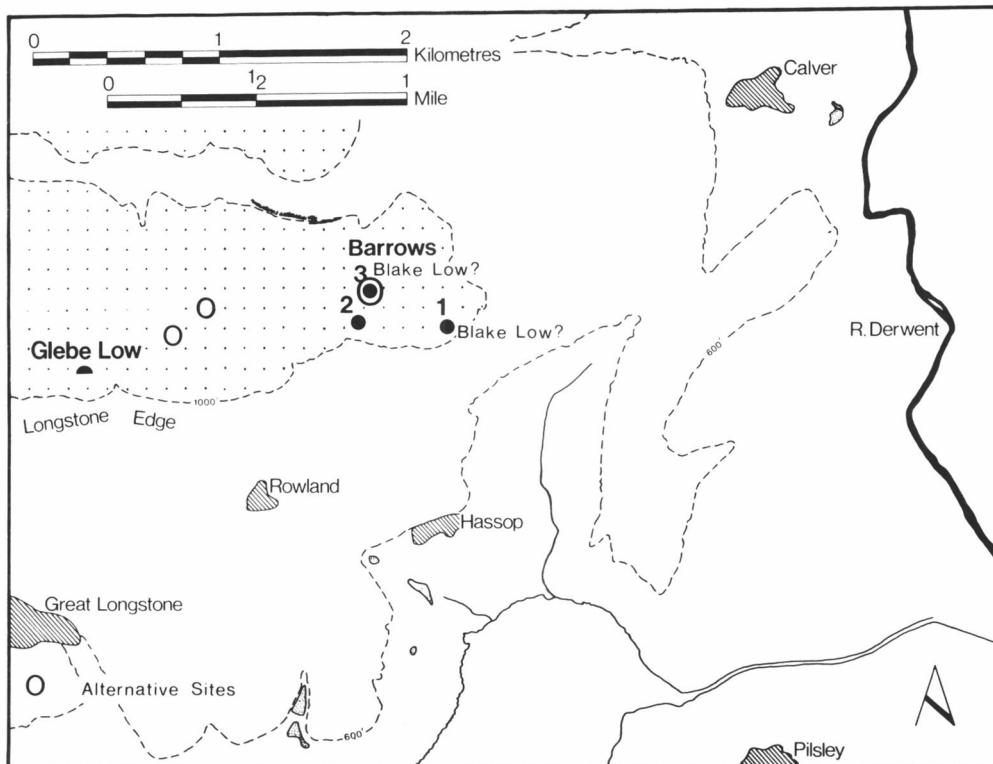


Fig. 1 Blake Low: location of the Bleaklow Barrows and Glebe Low on Longstone Edge.

these barrows were not illustrated or described by Bateman in his excavation accounts (Bateman, 1861: 40-43). However, Llewellyn Jewitt, a friend of Bateman, illustrated many of the archaeological finds in the Bateman collection in a large volume of water-colour drawings (Jewitt, n.d.). There are of course omissions, but the surviving identifiable find from the barrow named Blakelow, consisting of a Beaker, is included in Jewitt's volume (n.d.: B58). Some of the missing artefacts from Blake Low, found in a "rude cist", such as three flints and a fragment of a decorated vessel (Plate 1) can also be identified in Jewitt's volume, where they are illustrated on the same page (B58) as the Beaker. These drawings are unfortunately the only pictorial record we have of any of the lost items from these barrows.

The drawings of objects which still exist at Sheffield Museum are sufficiently good to enable us to place considerable reliance on the drawings of objects now missing. Jewitt put no scales on his plates but, with reference to sketches of existing objects, it is reasonable to say that he drew flints to natural size, and fragments of pottery and bronzes to a similar scale.

### THE SITE

The three barrows are situated approximately two miles north-east of Great Longstone, on the eastern edge of Longstone Edge (Fig. 1). The escarpment of Longstone Edge, formed of carboniferous limestone, rises 600 feet above the broad shale lowland of the Wye valley. The results of open-cast mining at High Rake and Deep Rake are clearly apparent, and can be seen for miles (Unsworth, 1971: 80-81). Extending over Longstone Edge is an extensive series of tracks, roads, disused quarries, old lead mines and heaps of lead spoil, some dating from the

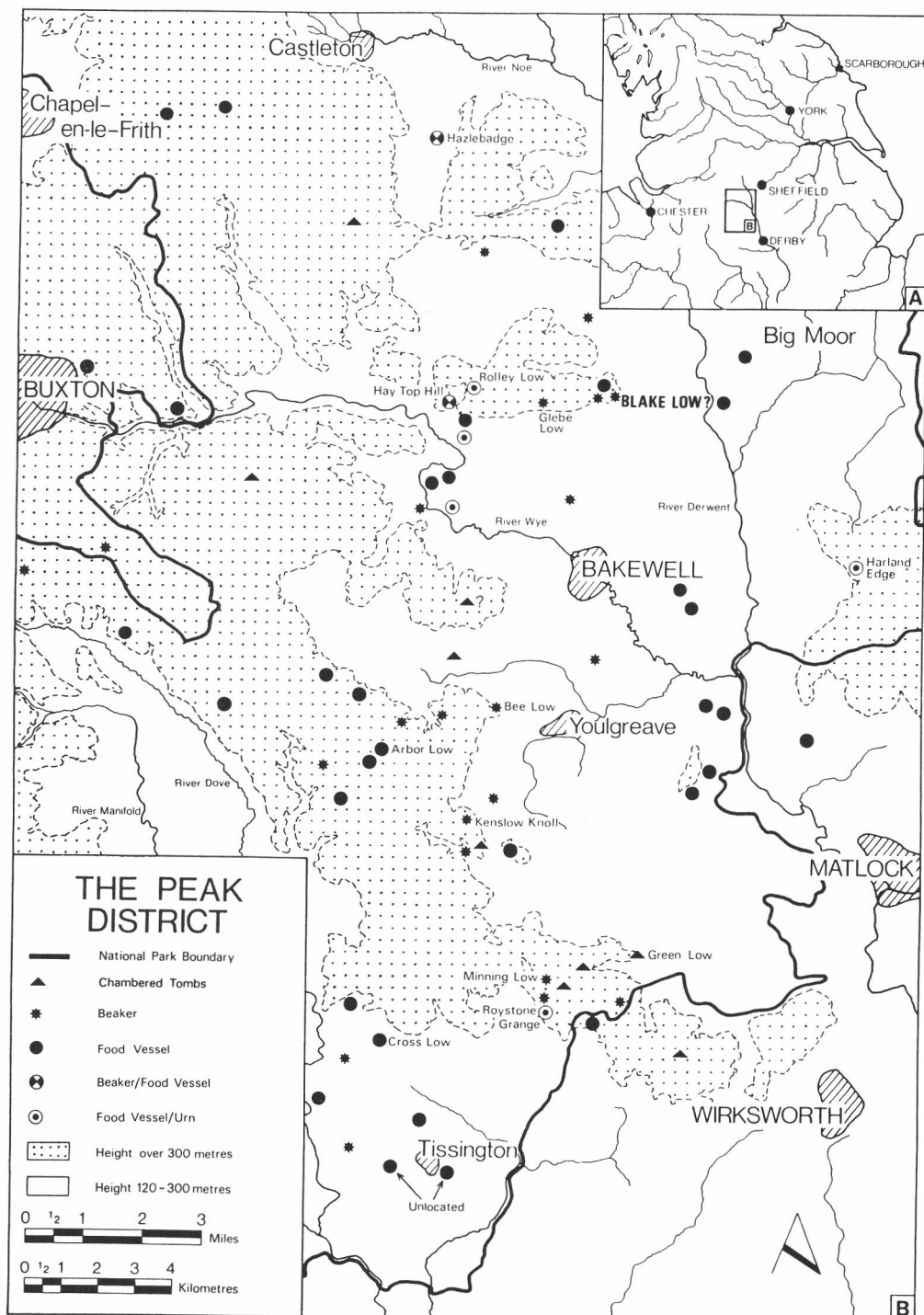


Fig. 2 Blake Low: distribution of Peak District burial sites.

eighteenth century (Hopkinson, 1958: 23-24). Otherwise, the escarpment is covered with scattered clusters of deciduous trees, scrub and rough grass.

The three barrows were subsequently recorded on the first edition of the O.S. map of 1876-1878, which also indicates what was found in them. According to Bateman, the first barrow he excavated on Longstone Edge, named Blake Low, was situated lower than the other two barrows. This description would suggest the identification of this barrow with that at SK 22347335 (Marsden, 1977: 39), now in a small plantation at 1085 feet above sea level (Fig. 1:1). However, Barnatt's recent detailed survey of Peak District barrows (1989) suggests alternative sites. In particular, Barnatt suggests that the Blake Low barrow could be the one where it was previously thought that Food Vessels were excavated by Bateman in 1848 (Marsden, 1977: 39), at SK 21927353 (Fig. 1:3). Only scientific excavation of these barrow sites will resolve the problem as to which were those excavated by Bateman, and indicate what was found in them. In the following, I have assumed that the Blake Low barrow is the one at SK 22347335, and have numbered this and the two others according to Bateman's chronological narrative of his excavations (Fig. 1:1-3).

All these barrow sites, and Glebe Low to the immediate west (Radley, 1966: 54-69; Fig. 1), were erected on a plateau over 1,000 feet (c. 300 metres) above sea level, which commands extensive views over the surrounding country to the south-east, south and south-west. The limestone landscape has the appearance of rough grassy pasture, divided by both stone walls and limestone outcrops. The latter are a common feature and may have determined the siting of the barrows. To the south-west, the land falls steeply away to the hamlet of Rowland; to the south runs the river Wye, a tributary of the Derwent, into which it flows at Rowsley. The surrounding countryside is relatively rich in prehistoric remains (Fig. 2).

#### THOMAS BATEMAN'S EXCAVATION OF BLAKE LOW

Bateman excavated this barrow on 17 July 1848; it was the first barrow he excavated in the area of Longstone Edge (Bateman, 1861: 40-41). The excavated portion of the mound was largely constructed of soil, intermixed with limestone fragments of various shapes and sizes. Although the barrow had been disturbed by stone-robbers, a central burial, which could represent the primary burial, was found to be undisturbed. It consisted of a rock-grave, cut into the natural solid limestone to a depth of two feet, and containing a crouched inhumation of a young female. The body lay on its left side, accompanied by the remains of an infant and an antler tine. A Beaker was placed by its head. The grave had been filled with soil and limestone rubble, in which was found a profusion of bones belonging to the water-vole.

A secondary burial, found near the primary grave in a "rude cist", was made up of about six inhumations, badly disturbed, presumably, as Bateman suggested, by stone-robbing. These were accompanied by four flint implements and a decorated vessel (Plate 1).

#### THE FINDS

The Beaker from Blake Low has in the past been discussed in some detail by a number of experts (e.g. Abercromby, 1912: 26, pl. x: 90 *bis*; Clarke, 1970: 166-67, 344, fig. 529). However, three out of four flints and a fragment of the decorated vessel (Plate 1) from the "rude cist" have previously escaped the detailed attention they deserve.

#### Pottery

##### *Decorated sherd* (Plate 1:1a, b)

The actual find is now missing, but Jewitt's illustration of the one sherd shows both its exterior (a) and interior (b). The exterior decoration on the moulded rim was of closely spaced rows of shallow impressions, probably produced by a bird bone, and the same is probably true of the inside rim. The, presumably, thick coarse fabric with a heavy-mould rim is characteristic of Peterborough ware, and is also characteristic of some Food Vessel styles.

## Flints

### *Leaf-shaped arrowhead* (Plate 1:2)

The illustration shows a nearly complete (missing base) leaf-shaped arrowhead.

### *Knife* (Plate 1:3)

The drawing shows a long knife with secondary working along the sides. Although Jewitt did not draw a section of the knife, it strongly resembles the plano-convex type as defined by Pierpoint (1980: 124-31).

### *Undiagnostic blade* (Plate 1:4)

One flake which could have been used as a rough knife.

## Bones

Another aspect of Bateman's activities was craniology and skeletal anatomy (Lester, 1973: 14). He therefore removed and incorporated into his collection the skull of the young female discovered in the rock-grave (Plates 2, 3). The skull was found to have suffered a temporal fracture (see Appendix).

## DISCUSSION

### The central burial

According to Bateman (1861: 41), the body of the young female "lay on the left-side, with the knees drawn up". This crouched or contracted position was a usual form for a Beaker burial. The infant inhumation is easy enough to understand if we assume a double burial of a young mother and her new-born child.

The decoration on the neck of the Beaker (Fig. 3) is in the form of eleven horizontal grooved lines. Between the rim and the first grooved line is a row of diagonal impressed jabs; and enclosed between the first and second grooved lines is a series of horizontal impressed dots. On the lower part of the beaker are two further incised grooved lines, 1.3 cms apart. The horizontal incised grooved lines, impressed jabs-and-dot decoration developed in the later stages of the Peterborough tradition of the Later Neolithic when that tradition had already absorbed some of the newly introduced Beaker usages (Longworth, 1984: 19). The immediate effect of the Beaker tradition was to remove the round-based bowl of the later neolithic wares.

### The cist burials

Bateman (1861: 40-41) described at least six individual inhumations as lying in a "rude cist ... in a state of the utmost disorder". This suggests that the remains were scattered about and disturbed by the subsequent use of the cist, a feature characteristic of many 'neolithic' collective tombs (e.g. Manby, 1965: 16-19; Piggott, 1962). Multiple inhumations and cremation-burials were far more common than they have been thought. Graves were not always covered immediately by a barrow, and may have been left accessible for subsequent burials. On the other hand, perhaps the most logical view to take of known multiple burials is that they represent cases of simultaneous or near-contemporary disposal of the deceased.

The illustration of the single decorated rim sherd (Plate 1:1a, b) presumably represents all that remained of the decorated vessel when Jewitt drew the finds from the cist, and is most plausibly interpreted as part of a Peterborough ware bowl or Food Vessel. However, in classifying these vessels the shape is of prime importance, and since Jewitt omitted to draw a section of the sherd, it is not possible to identify this vessel with certainty. The sherd was probably decorated using a bird bone, to produce rows of closely spaced impressions. The bird bone motif is one of a number of traits which had their ancestry in the later neolithic ceramic traditions of the Peterborough culture (Longworth, 1984: 4-28). The absorption of the bird bone trait into the Collared Urn tradition can be shown by an example cited from a round barrow excavated by Greenwell (1877: 371-74, barrow CLXI) at Ferry Fryston, West Yorkshire (Pacitto and Longworth, 1969: 300, fig. 6:4). The bird bone impressions on this urn are in rows 'all over' on

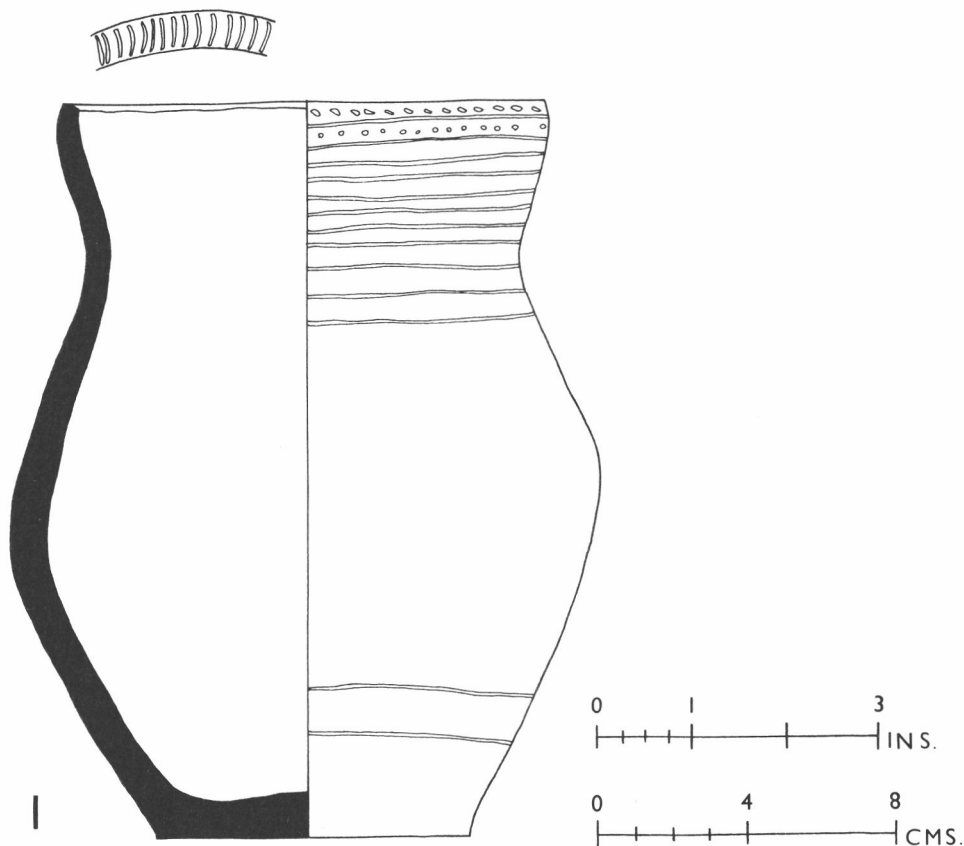


Fig. 3 Blake Low: the Beaker.

the collar, and a further row is present on the shoulder (Longworth, 1984: 279, pl. 84 (b): 1595). Although research, notably by ApSimon (1969, 1972), Clarke (1970), Waddell (1976) and Simpson (1968), has thrown increasing light on the origins of the various Food Vessel groups, the problems are complex and until a full corpus of the material is available a precise analysis cannot be attempted.

Altogether four flint implements were found in the cist. Jewitt illustrated only three flints (Plate 1:2-4); presumably the fourth flint was missing when he drew the finds from the cist. In the Peak District, leaf-shaped arrowheads have been found in chambered tombs, cairns and in some graves under barrows of the Late Neolithic. Similarly, the plano-convex knife would also be at home in the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (Kinnes, 1979).

#### The date of the Blake Low barrow

The dating evidence for the excavated part of the mound appears to be the Beaker (Abercromby, 1912: 26, pl. X: 90 *bis*; Fowler, 1955: 72-77, fig. 1; Clarke, 1970: 166-67, 334, fig. 529) associated with an inhumation in a grave cut into the bedrock at or near the centre of the barrow. The nearby cist burials probably post-date the Beaker burial. Though it is not possible to prove conclusively that the decorated fragment accompanying the cist burials belongs to the Later

Neolithic, the Beaker could fit into this period. The Blake Low barrow could, therefore, be assigned to the Beaker tradition of the Later Neolithic context in the Peak District of Derbyshire in the third millennium BC. However, to elucidate a full history of Blake Low a scientific archaeological excavation of the site would be required.

It is likely that more Beaker burials await future discovery in the Peak District. A further barrow, named Glebe Low, was excavated in 1965-66 (SK 204073124: Radley, 1966), and more recently a detailed fieldwork survey of the Peak District barrows (Barnatt, 1989) has revealed additional barrow sites on Longstone Edge.

#### APPENDIX: THE HUMAN SKULL FROM BLAKE LOW (Plates 2, 3)

Skull of a young female aged approximately 15 years (Sheffield City Museum accession no. J.93-941). Bateman described this as:

A very thin skull, of oval shape, with prominent parietal tubers, projecting nasal bones, full mouth, and large teeth, wanting the *dentes sapientiae*; the chin pointed, the femur 16½ inches long. The skull presented some indications of fracture, inflicted either during life or shortly after death.

It used to be argued that the 'Beaker Folk' were of a different physical type — biometrically more round-headed — than the people who were buried in long barrow and chambered tombs. However, the supposed biometrical distinctions are no longer regarded as significant, since most long barrows were out of use long before 2000 BC, and simple population genetics could easily account for the supposed changes over a period of five centuries (Darvill, 1987: 88-89). It is now realised that many of the traditions supposedly introduced by the 'Beaker Folk' were in fact indigenous to later third-millennium BC communities in Britain.

On the left profile of the Blake Low skull is a temporal fracture, but whether this was the direct cause of death is difficult to determine. At present, all that we can derive from the skull is metric information, as follows (taken from Jones, 1981):

#### *Dentition formulae*

Key: / : empty socket; U : unerupted tooth

[8] 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 [8]

[8] 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 [8]

#### *Cranial measurements (mm)*

L:17.0; B:13.8; H:12.5; LB:9.6; GL:9.6; GH:6.3; GB:9.0; NA:4.7; NB:2.3; O1:3.9; O2:3.3; G1:3.8.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Mr P. Broomhead, Director of the Sheffield City Museum, for permission to publish the photographs of both the Blake Low skull and Jewitt's manuscript drawing (produced by the National Monuments Record Office, London). I am extremely grateful to Miss P. Beswick, of the Sheffield City Museum, for making vessels available for study and for assistance and advice given to me during the preparation of this paper. I would like to thank the late Mr J. T. Chesterman, of the Department of Archaeology and Prehistory at the University of Sheffield, for supplying measurements and information on the Blake Low skull derived from the undergraduate dissertation of Miss S. D. Jervis, and Professor Keith Branigan of this Department for permission to publish the data. The following individuals also provided information and advice on various aspects of sites and finds: Mrs P. Dinmond, of the R.C.H.M. (England); Mr J. Barnatt, of Derbyshire County Council; Mr K. Smith, of the Peak District National Park; and Mr P. M. Vine, of the University of Nottingham.



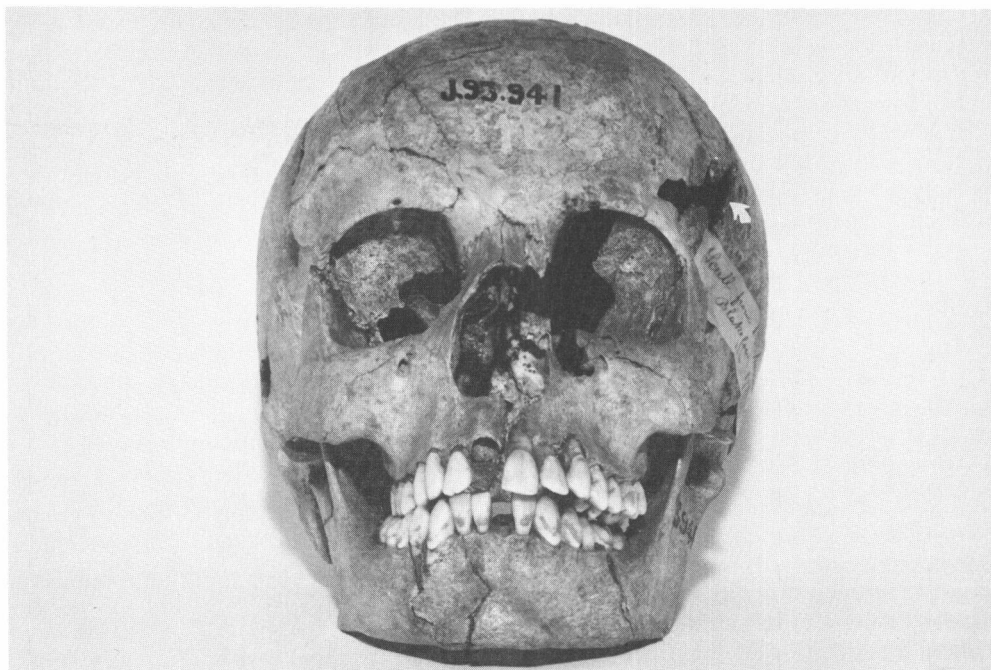


Plate 2 Blake Low: front view of female skull, showing position of missing front teeth and fracture on left temple.

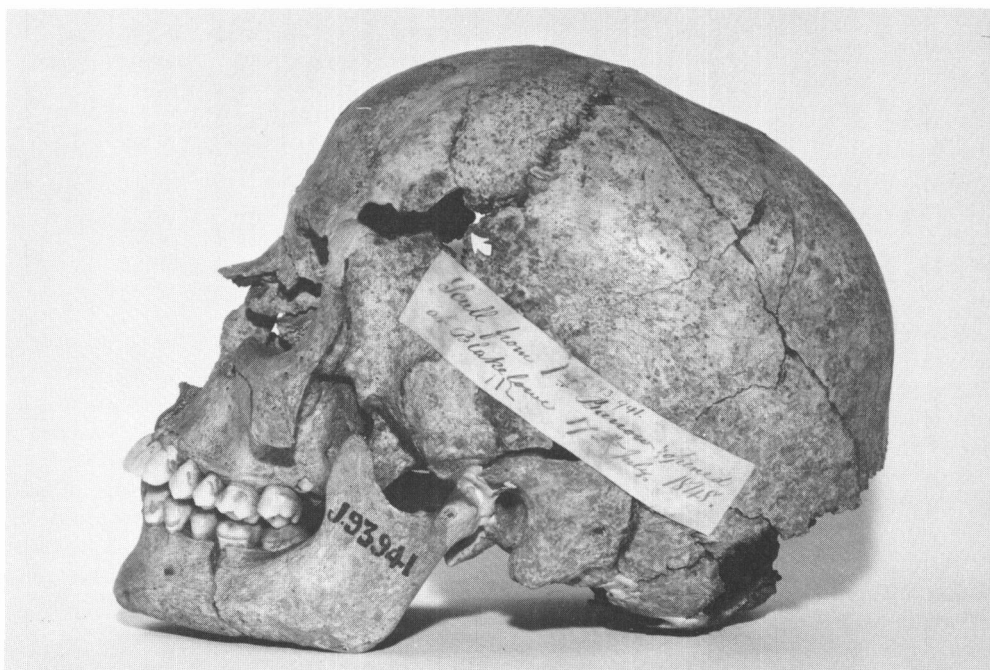


Plate 3 Blake Low: left profile of female skull, showing full extent of temporal fracture.



## REFERENCES

- Abercromby, J. (1912) *A Study of the Bronze Age Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*. Oxford.
- ApSimon, A. M. (1969) The earlier Bronze Age in the North of Ireland. *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 32: 28-72.
- ApSimon, A. M. and Greenfield, E. (1972) The excavations of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements at Trevis Rer, St. Eval, Cornwall. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 38: 302-81.
- Barnatt, J. (1989) *The Peak District Barrow Survey*. Derbyshire Archaeology Advisory Committee (unpublished typescript).
- Bateman, T. (1861) *Ten Years' Diggings in Celtic and Saxon Grave Hills in the Counties of Derby, Stafford and York*. London.
- Clarke, D. L. (1970) *The Beaker Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland, vols i, ii*. Cambridge.
- Darvill, T. (1987) *Prehistoric Britain*. London.
- Fowler, M. J. (1955) The transition from Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age in the Peak District of Derbyshire and Staffordshire. *DAJ* 75: 66-122.
- Greenwell, W. (1877) *British Barrows*. Oxford.
- Hopkinson, G. G. (1958) Five generations of Derbyshire lead mining and smelting, 1729-1858. *DAJ* 78: 9-24.
- Jervis, S. D. (1981) *A Re-assessment of the Cranial and Morphological Differences in Thomas Bateman's 19th Century Skull Collection*. University of Sheffield, Department of Archaeology and Prehistory (unpublished B.A. dissertation).
- Jewitt, L. (n.d.) *Relics of Primaeval Life*. Sheffield City Museum (unpublished manuscript).
- Kinnes, I. (1979) *Round Barrows and Ring-Ditches in the British Neolithic*. British Museum Occasional Paper 7, London.
- Lester, G. A. (1973) Thomas Bateman, barrow opener. *DAJ* 93: 10-22.
- Longworth, I. H. (1984) *Collared Urns of the Bronze Age in Great Britain and Ireland*. Cambridge.
- Manby, T. G. (1965) The Green Low chambered tomb. *DAJ* 85: 1-24.
- Marsden, B. M. (1977) *The Burial Mounds of Derbyshire*. Bingley.
- Pierpoint, S. (1980) *Social Patterns in Yorkshire Prehistory, 3500-750 BC*. British Archaeological Reports, British Series 74, Oxford.
- Pacitto, A. L. and Longworth, I. H. (1969) The excavation of two bronze age burial mounds at Ferry Frystone in the West Riding of Yorkshire. *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 42: 295-305.
- Piggott, S. (1962) *The West Kennet Long Barrow: Excavations 1955-56*. London.
- Radley, J. (1966) Glebe Low, Great Longstone. *DAJ* 86: 54-69.
- Riley, D. N. (1966) An early bronze age cairn on Harland Edge, Beeley Moor, Derbyshire. *DAJ* 86: 31-53.
- Simpson, D. D. A. (1968) Food Vessels: associations and chronology. In Coles, J. M. and Simpson, D. D. A. (eds), *Studies in Ancient Europe*, 197-211. Leicester.
- Unsworth, W. (1971) *Portrait of the River Derwent*. London.
- Waddell, J. (1976) Cultural interaction in the insular Early Bronze Age: some ceramic evidence. *Dissertationes Archaeologicae Gandenses* 16: 284-95.