EXCAVATION OF A MOUND IN WESTON WOOD, ALBURY

BY

THE VISCOUNTESS HANWORTH AND F. A. HASTINGS

THE site is in Weston Wood, Albury,[1] on the estate of Her Grace, Helen, Duchess of Northumberland. It consists of a flat-topped mound in a good state of preservation, covered with trees of an ornamental type. Stumps of earlier trees indicate that the site is of some age. It is situated on the Folkestone Beds of the Upper Greensand.

The mound had traditionally been associated with dancing in olden times and in a recent paper[2] had been linked with other sites in the area, including the earthen circles on St. Martha's Hill, all of which were suggested as having Pagan Saxon associations. Mr. Wood said that the mound could have been formed during the making of the paths in the eighteenth century but his final suggestion was that it was a Moot.

The late Miss O. M. Heath, assisted by Mr. Humphry Nevill, Secretary of this Society from 1931 to 1935, cut some trenches before the war. Mr. Nevill is now resident in New Zealand, but he has kindly supplied us with this information. His conclusions, which agree with ours, are given on page 101. This excavation was not published, and the whereabouts of the finds is not known. One of the trenches was encountered during the course of excavation and another could be seen as a faint depression running due east from the west side of the mound to the centre. The site was included in a list of Surrey barrows by L. V. Grinsell[3] but he suggested it was too large for a barrow, and possibly not ancient.

Excavation was begun under the direction of The Viscountess Hanworth but later, owing to the prolongation of the work, Mr. F. A. Hastings assisted in the direction of the excavation.[4] The finds will be deposited in the Guildford Museum.

[1] Nat. Grid. Ref., TQ (51)/0547 4840; height approx. 340 feet O.D.

[2] Wood, E. S., "Earth Circles on St. Martha's Hill, near Guildford." *Sy.A.C.*, LIV, 10–46.

[3] "An Analysis and List of Surrey Barrows." *Sy.A.C.*, XLII, 57.

[4] We offer our grateful thanks to Her Grace Helen, Duchess of Northumberland for permission to excavate the site, to Mr. N. P. Thompson for the initial organizing of the excavation, to Messrs. J. X. W. P. Corcoran, M.A., Ph.D., F.S.A., E. S. Wood, B.A., F.S.A., W. C. Knox, B.A., and Miss E. M. Dance, M.A., Ph.D. for helpful advice, and to the estate office for assisting and allowing inspection of the estate plans.

SUMMARY

The site consisted of the end of a natural spur adapted to form a flat-topped circular mound and berm. The diameter of the mound is approximately 100 feet at the top, and it rises some 5 feet from a berm whose width is from 12 to 16 feet. A clay capping covers the surface of the mound, and a single row of stones on the south and east at its base appears to be revetting, to retain the loose soil used in its construction. There was no evidence of any structure on the site, and although tree-roots had done extensive damage it is thought that post-holes would have been easily recognized in the clay capping had they been present.

The site is tentatively dated to *c.* 1750 by a coin of George II found beneath the clay capping. The purpose of the mound is not known, but it is suggested that it might be a piece of eighteenth-century landscape gardening.

A hollow-way of packhorse type encroaches on the north and east. Flints, apparently Mesolithic, are found on the site, and a small occupation site of Iron Age A was found on the old land surface on the north, including fragmentary pottery, part of a baked clay loom weight, and a rubbing stone. This seems worthy of further exploration at a later date.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

When first examined the site appeared to be surrounded by a ditch with the hollow way running through it on the north and having an outer bank here. The first trenches were planned to examine the outer bank and the apparent ditch.

Trench A

This trench was laid out on a north-south axis, 40 feet long and 4 feet wide, to cut through the apparent ditch on the south side of the mound. The section revealed in this trench (Fig. 2) consisted of 2 inches of top soil, dark sand with humus; 2 to 6 inches of grey sand with humus; then 12 to 18 inches of loose yellow sand. This yellow sand was obviously the main make-up of the mound in this area. The next layer was the natural grey sand followed by a hard dark yellow pan. As can be seen, there was no ditch on the south side of the mound. The most interesting feature noted in this trench was a single row of stones, approximately at the base of the mound, which appeared to be a simple form of revetting. The stones were carstone, a ferruginous sandstone which is natural to the Folkestone Beds. Below them the mound merges into the natural grey sand. The only finds in Trench A were a few flints with Mesolithic working but no definite implements, and some pieces of modern brick and tile.

It was now decided to look for a ditch further down the slope to the south. An extension of Trench A 20 feet in length (omitted from

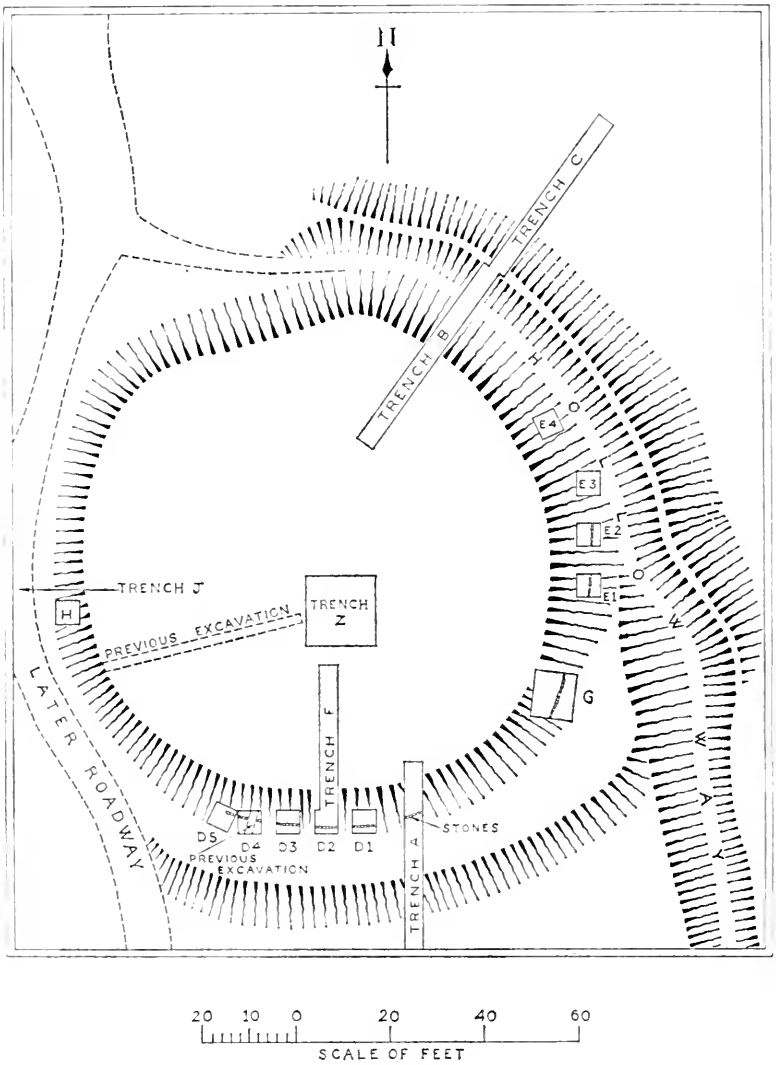
N
TRENCH C
TRENCH B
E4
E3
E2
E1
TRENCH J
H
TRENCH Z
PREVIOUS EXCAVATION
G
LATER ROADWAY
TRENCH F
STONES
DS
D4
D3
D2
D1
PREVIOUS EXCAVATION
TRENCH A
20 10 0 20 40 60
SCALE OF FEET

FIG. 1.—PLAN.

the plan for lack of space) was made leaving a baulk of 5 feet; but it was soon obvious that this was the natural soil consisting of two inches of top soil, two inches of grey sand with humus, three feet of grey sand and then hard pan. No ditch was found.

The Stone Revetting gives the definite impression of being recent. The stones are neatly set and interlocked although they are in a loose sandy soil, and unless they had been buried immediately they would surely have tumbled long since, had they been ancient. None of them are bigger than two feet in any direction, and they are set so that they are level at the top. It was suggested that they might have been placed in position to demarcate the limits of the mound in the making and then buried after their useful purpose had been served, but this is disproved by the fact that they were set in the made soil. It is more likely that they formed a simple revetting and may have been left exposed as an ornament. The old land surface was not visible in this trench.

Trench B

This was 32 feet long and 4 feet wide, designed to cut through the make-up of the mound on the northern side and the apparent ditch, through which the hollow way runs, and also the outer bank.

A clay capping some two to six inches thick appeared beneath the second layer. The section (Fig. 2) shows the complex layers of the made soil of the mound in this area, and it also shows that again there was no ditch. What was thought to be a ditch was simply the hollow way worn through a level platform or berm by the traffic of the road; the outer bank is residual, and was not made as such.

It was then realized that this berm extended round the east and south sides of the mound, but had almost been obliterated on the south by weathering. It was also noticed that the top of the residual bank was on the same level as the berm to the south, and that what had appeared to be a ditch there was only the junction of the berm and the mound. The stone revetting was not present in Trench B, but one or two large stones, which had possibly fallen out of position, appeared to have been re-used as a hearth on the opposite face of the hollow way. A few scraps of charcoal were found.

The present land surface consists entirely of leaf mould with no turf, and it seems possible that as demonstrated by Dr. I. Cornwall in another context[5] the old land surface may have been completely leached away. The alternative that it may have been dug away before building the mound seems purposeless in view of our final conclusions. The brown layer (B 1 Horizon) and hard pan (B 2 Horizon) of a podsol[6] are shown in the section (layers 9 and 10). Layer 8 is thought to be a second brown layer formed since the

[5] "Soil Science and Archæology from some British Bronze Age Monuments," *P.P.S.*, XIX, 135.

[6] See *ibid.*, 129–30 for a description of podsol.

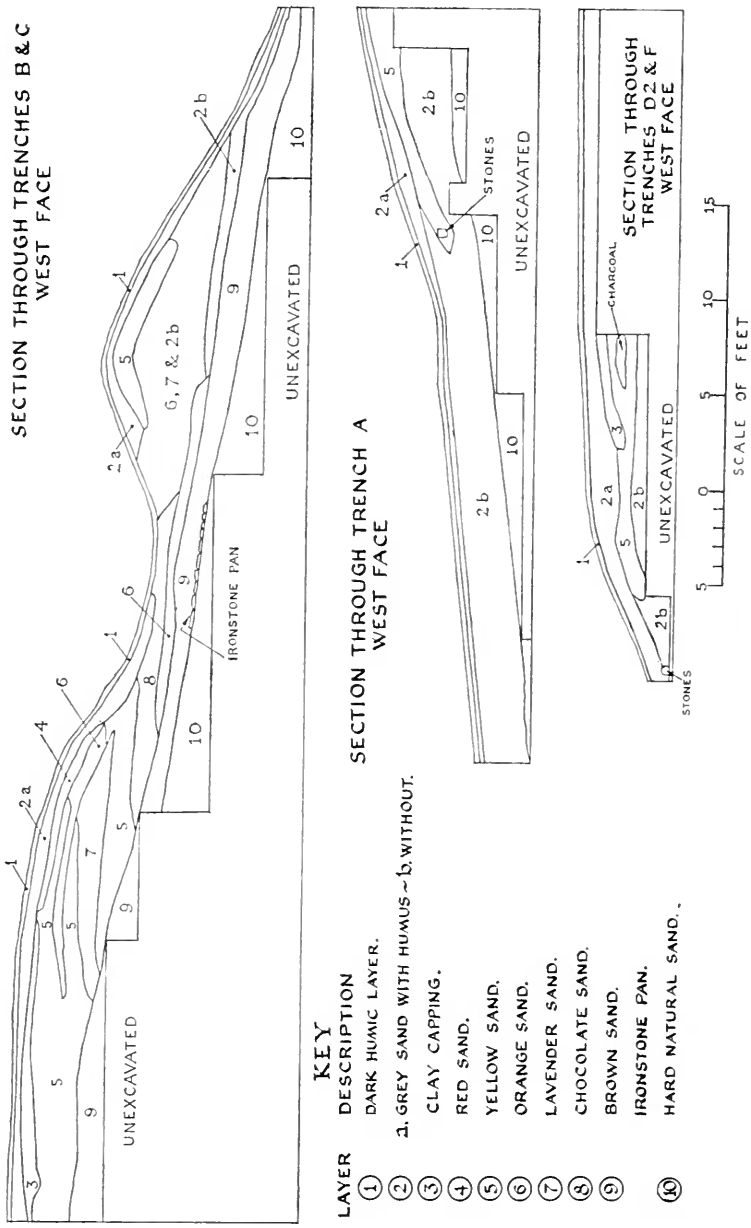

FIG. 2.—SECTIONS.

mound was made, but it is very difficult to assess because the made soil is so mixed here.

Trench B was extended southwards for another 12 feet to check further on the make-up of the mound. A small sherd of Iron Age A pottery was found in the topsoil. The clay capping was present over the whole surface of the mound here at varying thicknesses up to ten inches with deeper pockets. Beneath the clay were some two to three feet of the loose yellow sand. Just under the clay capping in this trench a coin was found. It was identified as a half-penny of George II at the British Museum, and dated 1745–56, thus giving a *terminus post quem* for the site.

Trench C

This was designed as an extension of B to the north to examine the outer edge of the site. It was 40 feet long and 4 feet wide.

In this trench on the old land-surface were found a number of fragmentary sherds of Iron Age A pottery and a portion of a baked clay loom-weight (Fig. 3), as well as a sandstone rubber. The old land-surface was still not visible in this trench but its position was obvious (Fig. 2). Layer 2b is the leached layer (A 2 Horizon), Layer 9 the dark brown (B 1 Horizon) and Layer 10 the hard pan (B 2 Horizon) of a podsol. At the tail of the residual bank the made soil clearly merges into the natural.

The complexity of the layers in Trenches B and C, which does not appear elsewhere, is probably partly explained by the presence of manganese in the soil which had also discoloured the stones here.[7] If the building of the mound was begun on this side, which seems quite likely, the topsoil with its humic content from a quarried area may also have been partly responsible for the coloured layers.

Trenches D and E

These were two grids of 5-foot squares with baulks between, designed to trace the stone revetting round the mound, as it was missing in Trench B. The stones continued round both the south and east of the mound, approximately at the base of the yellow sand. In Trench E the stones were smaller, and in E2 were set with their long axis at right angles to the circumference of the mound as if the builders had run out of the better carstones and made use of the thinner ironstone pan. In E3 the stones had tumbled because the hollow way had encroached on the edge of the mound. The stones gradually tailed off and only one appeared in E4 as if they had not extended beyond this point or had been completely eroded by the road. Where present they were again at the base of the yellow sand which lay directly over the dark brown natural layer (B1 Horizon), and in E4 the complete soil profile of the podsol was present, showing there was no made soil here.

[7] Information from Mr. Atkinson of the Albury Sand Pits.

Trench Z

It was now decided to excavate the top of the mound for evidence of possible structures. Trench Z was laid out 15 feet square as near as possible to the centre, but its size and position were largely dictated by the position of the trees.

The square was carefully excavated by trowelling, and at a depth varying between six and eighteen inches the clay capping was met. Here it consisted of beaten clay and chalk, chalk lumps, flint nodules and other stones which were not natural to the site, but had been brought from a source fairly close to hand. The whole made a substantial surface. Under the capping in the north-east corner some beech-mast was noted in a good state of preservation. This may have denoted the old land surface in this particular area, but there was no definite humic layer present and the beech-mast could have been taken down by rodents. A peculiar lead object, unidentified, but suggested by the Department of

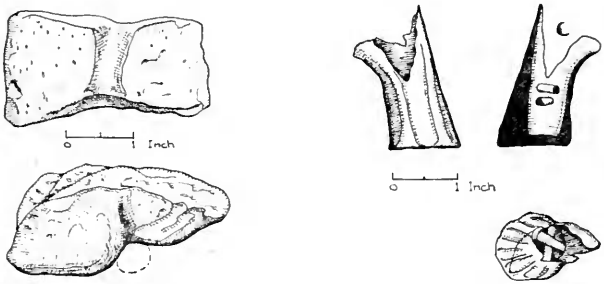

Fig. 3.—Loom Weight (left) and Lead Object (right) ($\frac{1}{3}$).

British and Mediæval Antiquities at the British Museum to belong to the seventeenth century, was found just below the clay (Fig. 3 and p. 102). There were patches of yellow sand, but some of the soil beneath the clay was natural. No sign of any structure was discovered, and although tree roots had disturbed the clay capping it is thought that post-holes would have been easily recognized.

This square was obviously not solving any problems, so trowelling was abandoned and the north-west corner was dug to a depth of 4 feet 6 inches, where the natural hard pan appeared.

Trench F

Trench F linked Z with D, completing a section almost the whole way through the mound. Again the old land surface was not detectable, but the yellow sand which we had equated with make-up lay directly over the leached layer (A2 Horizon of the podsol).

A spread of black soil with pieces of charcoal was seen in the yellow sand and examined. It was probably a small fire lit by the builders of the mound. Nothing was found in it. The section in F

clearly showed that the clay capping was of one and the same build as the mound and not a later addition. Its purpose was not obvious, but the intention may have been to fix the loose soil on top.

Trench G

Before the recognition of the berm as such, a sort of semi-circular apron or platform was noticed on the south-east of the mound and it was suggested that it looked like an "entrance." A trench 10 feet by 9 feet was opened to examine this. The stones appeared in their usual position and were unbroken. There was no sign of an entrance; this apron was in fact a continuation of the berm, very well preserved here. Again the stones looked comparatively recent. A coin of William and Mary dated 1694 was found at a depth of eleven inches in layer 2a in the side of this trench, but this coin has not been accepted in the evidence (see page 100).

Trenches H and J

Trench H was cut to look for the revetting to the west. A hard dark yellow pan and undisturbed layers of natural ironstone appeared immediately below the top-soil. This proved that the soil had been quarried from here, and a further trench in the natural ridge at J (omitted from the plan for lack of space but sited opposite H) confirmed that a deep cutting had been made through the ridge. The end of the stones was then traced in an extension of D at D 5.

By now it was quite obvious that the mound had been made by quarrying through the natural spur on the one side, the spoil being used to make up the north, east, and south sides as necessary, finishing up with a flat-topped mound surrounded by a berm on the north, east and south, where there are steep natural slopes, and standing free of the ridge on the west. It was also apparent that the stones were to help retain the made soil, as they only appeared where the mound was made.

Note on the Surface of the Mound

Above the clay capping on the top of the site was a layer of good loamy soil 9 to 18 inches in depth. This could not have formed naturally and must have been brought to the site. It is suggested that it may have been added very recently, even within the last fifty years, to improve the soil before planting lilac and other shrubs which are now present.

THE DATING OF THE SITE

Apart from the Iron Age site, which lies partly buried under the berm to the north, the site showed a remarkable absence of dateable finds, which may be partly due to the acid nature of the soil. The only definite date we have is the coin of George II *c.* 1745–56, which was sealed under the clay capping. It is dangerous to date a site

purely on the basis of one coin, and we cannot deny that such a small object could have been carried through the clay by natural processes, although there are very few worms in this acid soil.

In support of an eighteenth-century dating for the site there is the lead object which is thought to have a seventeenth-century look and was old when lost, and the stone revetting that is thought to be fairly recent. Further support for this dating is that the mound is not shown on a map dated *c.* 1729 but is shown on one dated before 1802 (see below, p. 101-102).

The second coin, of William and Mary, cannot be accepted. It was in a much better state of preservation than the later one of George II; in fact it had a polished look, as if recently carried on someone's person, and had either been lost on the site quite recently or may even have been "planted."

Thus we have only a tentative dating to about the middle of the century. In view of this lack of evidence we reached the conclusions formulated below.

POSSIBLE PURPOSES OF THE SITE

1. *A Barrow*

A large proportion of the mound is natural and it is not typical in shape or size.

2. *A Motte*

The shape is suitable, but it has no ditch and is not in a defensive position, being overlooked by higher ground to the north-west.

3. *A Moot or Meeting Place*

At first sight it appears very suitable, as it is flat-topped and has a road running by; but what little is known about moots seems to point to their not having been made as such, but rather that some existing landmark was adapted.[8] Gomme[9] quotes a number of place-names which imply the sites of moots; we have no place-name evidence of this nature for Weston Wood, and our dating of the site points to a much later period.

4. *A Dancing Floor*

The note that the Rector of Albury had a maypole erected in Weston Wood[10] was found to be incorrect. The maypole was erected in the village, at the corner where Blackheath Lane joined the west end of Weston Street. It still stood here in 1911.[11] However, many years ago Miss O. M. Heath was told by an old parishioner, Mr. Lewer of Brook, shortly before he died, that his grandfather had told him that the large mound in Weston Wood was an old meeting

[8] Copley, G. J., *An Archæology of South East England* (1958), pp. 188–90 give a general summary.

[9] Gomme, G. L., *Primitive Folk Moots* (1880).

[10] *Sy.A.C.*, LIV, 17.

[11] *V.C.H.*, III (i) (1911), p. 72.

place, and that there used to be dancing and fiddling there in old days,[12] and this is not contested; but it is unlikely that the mound was specially built for that purpose.

5. *A Windmill Mound*

Water-mills were always far more numerous than windmills in the west of Surrey and in the area centred on Guildford. There were in fact three water-mills close at hand.[13] The normal diameter of a mill base of the post mill type (other types can be discounted) is about 24 feet, so that our mound is disproportionately large for this purpose;[14] it is thought, too, that some evidence of the structure would have been discovered in the excavation.

6. *Landscape Gardening*

This seems to be the most likely purpose of the mound, situated as it is in a wood with a southern aspect overlooking a valley, offering a date around the middle of the eighteenth century; and here we are corroborated by Mr. Nevill's letter to us in which he says:

> I may say at once that we found nothing to connect the mound with an early date, and came to the same conclusion as you that it was a piece of Eighteenth Century Landscaping. We ran a trench to the middle of the mound and sank a few trial pits. We also looked for any signs of a ditch or trench, but found nothing to date the site by.

The presence of deciduous trees of an ornamental nature on a sandy soil suggests landscape gardening, and even the stone revetting is reminiscent of the edging to many flower-beds in this district.

This report has been based so far purely upon the archæological evidence revealed by the excavation; but a search has been made in the estate records and other historical sources for evidence to support the suggested earlier origin for the site, with negative results.

NOTES ON THE ROAD

The road which enters Weston Wood opposite Weston House heads north, taking a wide bend to the east in the middle of the wood to avoid an over-steep climb. After righting itself it passes by the mound and goes downhill to meet the ancient cross-ridge road observed by Margary.[15]

There is a map in the Albury Estate Office which shows the property of Sir Robert Godschall. It was not new when he wrote his name on it, and it might have come to him when he bought the property in 1729.[16] In the extreme eastern part of the wood is marked

[12] Miss O. M. Heath's Notes (Guildford Museum).

[13] The paper mill which made banknotes in Albury Park, the Explosives factory at Chilworth, and the old flour mill at the foot of Weston Wood, where the Ellis Research and Testing Laboratories now stand. See Heath, O. M., *Walks Round Albury*, p. 12.

[14] Information kindly supplied by Mr. K. G. Farries.

[15] *Arch. J.*, CIX, 44.

[16] *V.C.H.*, III, 74.

a complex of paths radiating from two circles, typical of the formal layout of grounds before landscape gardening came into fashion. It may be significant that the road is shown in its right position, well away from these paths, and is marked London Road. The mound is not shown.

A later map, belonging to William Man Godschall who died in 1802, has no radiating paths in the east, but the mound is shown planted thickly with trees; and it can be seen from a slight flattening on the north that the road had already encroached on it.

We have been unable to secure satisfactory evidence for proving the date of the road, which has been claimed as at least medieval,[17] but it would appear that it must have existed before the mound. After the mound was made, the road eventually encroached upon the berm which is the easier path from the north.

In the nineteenth century a carriage-drive from Weston House to the Downs is referred to.[18] The original track, in that portion where it encroaches on the mound, is too narrow to be this; the road running on the west side of the mound must have been brought into use at this time. The road's function would have been to link Weston House with the Greensand Ridgeway known as the Pilgrim's Way and via the cross-ridge[19] with the North Downs Trackway known here as the Drove Road. It is not clear if it was ever a public road, and it is wholely within the private estate.

PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

On the Downs above Albury overlooking the North Downs Trackway is an area which is known as Harrows Hill; and it has been suggested that this points to the presence of some pagan Saxon site nearby,[20] possibly the mound in Weston Wood. This name is not mentioned in the Surrey Place-Names Volume and we were unable to find it on any recent or old map, including the Ordnance Survey First Editions. The only similar name belongs to the house and copse to the east of Newlands Corner Hotel, each known as Harrow Hill Copse. These names appear to be of recent origin. However, if we accept that the Downs were so named, the following may explain it. When the North Downs Trackway enters Hampshire it becomes the Harroway. Crawford[21] suggests that this name may be derived from "Heargweg," the "shrine way" or the way to Stonehenge. It is possible that the name extended further to the east, and we feel this might offer a more likely derivation for the place-name Harrows Hill than a connection with the mound in Weston Wood.

The Lead Object. This is hollow, slightly conical, made of sheet lead, and having a wrap-over joint finished in the form of a letter

[17] *Sy.A.C.*, LIV, 43.
[18] In information given by Mr. John Browne to Miss O. M. Heath.
[19] See note 15 above.
[20] Johnston, P. M., *Sy.A.C.*, XXXIV, 63.
[21] Crawford, O. G. S., *Archæology in the Field* (1953), pp. 78–9.

"V," to hide the joint and to add to the decoration (Fig. 3). It is ornamented and strengthened with fluting. One end is closed and only roughly finished with the remains of a rivet through the centre. This suggests that this end was fastened to something. The closed end is not at right angles to the main axis. The other end is open, damaged and incomplete. Inside can be seen the remains of some plaster and two rivets at right angles to each other, diametrically positioned across the cylinder. There was obviously an insertion of wood or some similar material in this open end, held by the rivets. The British Museum was unable to identify the object but suggested a seventeenth-century date for it.