



Fig. 1. Two of the secondary burials adjacent to the barrow. The hands crossed behind the back implies that they are gallows victims.

Excavation of Galley Hills Saxon Barrow

Photographs by James Barfoot

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DURING MAY 1972 the excavation took place of one of the four Galley Hills Barrows on Banstead Down, Surrey. Within the last 100 years, two of the barrows had already been bunkered by the local golf course, and as the result of a similar recent robbing it was decided to excavate what remained of the now damaged third barrow in the hope of retrieving as much data as possible.

The barrow had been robbed for top soil so that of the original oval mound 9m x 15m, only a horse-

shoe shaped remnant, 9m x 5m, was now in evidence at its western end. The centre had been robbed away, hence it was thought unlikely that any of the primary remains would be recovered. Nevertheless, the aim of the excavation was to discover the date of the primary use of the barrow, the dates of any secondary usage, and at least the method of construction that had been used.

The excavation was conducted in three quasi-quadrants in the third of the barrow that still re-

mained. In all three the same stratigraphy confirmed the constructional design. The barrow was a scraped-up barrow, utilizing the local top and sub-soils which once overlay the parent Downland chalk as the raw materials for the body of the mound. Before this was done however, a thick layer of broken flint nodules had been laid over the the reddish-brown sandy clay soil which was natural to the area, and these flints then described the intended shape of the barrow. The layer of flints acted as a "floor" beneath the mound and it terminated at the edges of the barrow. No ditch or bank seems to have been incorporated in the construction (Fig. 2).

The natural reddish-brown sandy clay from around the barrow was then heaped up over the flint floor, where it has been preserved to a height of about 1m. In the areas which would have been denuded of the reddish-brown sandy clay the exposed chalk began to decay and thus a pea-grit of broken chalk now differentiates the sub-soil of the surrounding areas from that under the barrow. More recently a black loamy top soil has covered the barrow and the immediate vicinity.

The method of construction then, is well attested at Galley Hills, but oddly it finds no parallel in other barrows in Britain, as one might have expected, and therefore is of no assistance in the dating of the barrow.

A secondary pit was noted on the north side of the remaining mound. Curiously this pit is eccentric to the centre of the barrow, cutting down from below the modern top-soil through the body of the barrow and the flint floor, as well as the reddish-brown sandy clay sub-soil, and cutting a further 40cms into the natural chalk. It contained a number of fragments of human bone scattered throughout the fill, both pieces of long bone and of skull. Also found here were over 100 splinters of clear glass and a pipe stem with a floreated terminal. The glass when re-constructed turned out to be a mid-18th century hand-blown mixtures bottle,¹ whilst the pipe stem, judging by the size of bore,² is of similar date. Quite what the purpose of this late pit might have been cannot be ascertained. It is certainly not a normal robbing of the barrow, nor does it have any connection with secondary burial.

Secondary Burials

A number of secondary burials were noted during excavation both on and off the mound and in varying states of preservation, a factor more likely to

1. From comparisons made at the Wellcome Medical Museum, Euston.
2. I. C. Walker, "Statistical Methods for Dating Clay Pipe Fragments", *Post-Medieval Archaeol* 1 (1967) 90.
3. L. V. Grinsell, *The Ancient Burial Mounds of England*, 2nd ed. (1953).

be accounted for by the soil difference than any difference in time. One secondary on the mound in the south east area comprised only a skull with its mandible badly disturbed, and a humerus. The fragmentary nature of this secondary was explained when the local groundsmen recalled that he had re-interred the bones here after finding them in another part of the barrow when removing the soil. Undoubtedly they are the remains of a secondary burial, but no more reliable information can be forthcoming.

Very near the centre of the mound and about 30 cms. below the surface was a second secondary, fully extended with its arms by its sides, hands over pelvis, and laid out NNW-SSE, the head to the SSE. The lower limbs however were somewhat curtailed by the digging of the 18th century pit mentioned above, which certainly explains the presence at least of the long bones in the backfill of that pit. In and around this secondary were a number of other fragments which plainly did not belong to either of the secondaries so far mentioned, nor yet to the primary when that was eventually located. Fragments of mandible, an articulated radius and ulna taken with the skull fragments in the pit point to a third secondary burial on the mound, presumably one which was totally disturbed by the interment of the second secondary.

Off the mound to the south, but still adjacent to it, were found two skeletons, lying head-to-toe in a north-south direction on the natural chalk and covered by no more than 20 cms. of pea-grit chalk. They were exceptional in appearance, since in both cases the wrists had been tied behind the back and the necks appear to have been dislocated (Fig. 1). They give every indication of having been hanged, which might very well explain the name of the mounds here as the 'Galley Hills.' This would by no means be the first time that gallows have been noted in connection with barrows, e.g. Galley Law, Derbyshire; Gallow Hill, Yorkshire; Gallow Howe at Castleton and Galley Hill, Streatly, Beds., are all names of barrows associated with gallows³. At the Five Knolls Group, Dunstable, about thirty mutilated secondaries were found in a barrow⁴. Final proof for a gallows at the Banstead barrow came from a map dating to the reign of Henry VIII where the original name for the 'tumulus' is given as 'Gallows Hylle'⁵. The rationale behind this type of secondary use of barrows is that executed criminals, like suicides, were not given the privilege of Christian burial, (*viz.* *Hamlet* Act V Scene II). Since they could hardly be buried in common land, their burial

4. C. L. Matthews, *Ancient Dunstable*, Manshead Archaeological Society (1963) 83-4.
5. Public Record Office, Map of Banstead Downs (MPI 68 no. 6).

was restricted to known pagan burial areas such as barrows. Also noticeable is that these bodies had been buried north-south, not the normal east-west, supposedly lest any further eschatological confusion might arise. It is more than likely that all five of the secondaries recovered are to be construed in this gruesome context, buried as they were in shallow, unholy graves within the shadow of the gibbet itself.

Despite the extensive robbing of the barrow, devastating the mound to bed-rock even in the centre, the primary burial miraculously survived, having been placed in a deep grave 1 m. below the surface of the natural chalk, and though only a vestige of the upper stratigraphy remains, it is sufficient to tie in the primary to the remainder of the barrow.

It would seem that during the construction of the barrow, a space some 1m x 2.5m had been left in the laying out of the flint 'floor' in the centre of the area. Here the pit was cut through the reddish-brown sandy clay into the chalk, the spoil being piled up over the flint 'floor' in the meanwhile. Since chalk expands up to a ratio of 1/1.75 when cut from the parent rock⁶, the backfilling of these diggings meant the formation of a now permanent chalk mound in the centre of the barrow, not as a cairn, but as an upward extension of the chalk infill of the grave. In fact the Galley Hills ratio is 1/1.5.

Primary Burial

At the base of the pit had been placed the primary burial with its accoutrements. What remained of the primary was in very good condition, but strangely the upper torso, with the shoulders and the skull were completely missing, whilst the arms and the hands lay disconnected from the lower limbs, but in the correct position of a once fully articulated skeleton. Manifestly some measure of robbing or disturbance had affected the primary burial, though this disturbance is not connected with the recent robbing of the barrow since the robbed area of the primary lay beneath the remainder of the barrow, whilst the intact portion lay in the recently robbed area.

Two possibilities are envisaged; either the body had been thus mutilated before interment, or the mutilation is the result of some post-mortem deliberate robbing or arbitrary disturbance. That the body could have been interred in that condition must be rejected. The grave had been made for a full-sized incumbent, not one cut from the waist upwards. Also it would not be possible to maintain the arms in their correct position if the torso were not there for attachment.

If a deliberate robbing is to be countenanced, then it would imply prior knowledge of the burial. As

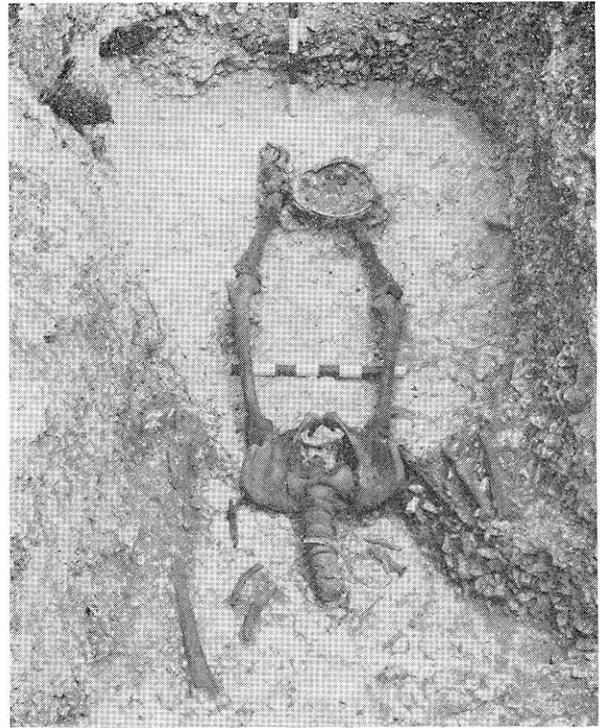


Fig. 2. The robbed primary burial, with iron knife to the left of the pelvis, spearhead to the right, the shield boss high above the left leg and the bronze hanging bowl over the feet.

will be seen below, the date of the primary turns out to be Saxon, and thus the robbing must be Saxon also, done by persons knowing the geography of the burial and with a consummate lack of interest in the remainder of the burial. This last point would, of course, rule out the possibility of the robbing being done by 18th or 19th century treasure seekers, since they surely would have exposed the whole burial. On the other hand, it is felt that a contemporary robbing is not the answer to the problem. The parts of the body that are omitted are missing completely. This would mean that the whole of the upper part of the body had been ripped out without trace, leaving the remainder absolutely intact. If the robbing were intended to acquire objects, simple disturbance, not disappearance, would have been the result. The idea to which the excavators incline is that the robbing is completely arbitrary, a hole dug in the centre of the mound to take, for example, the post of the gallows. Though the stratigraphy is lacking to be absolutely sure, this would seem best to fit the facts.

As to the remainder of the burial, it had been laid out on the natural chalk from east-west, feet to the east. The body was abnormally large, probably as

6. P. Ashbee and I. W. Cornwall, 'An Experiment in Field Archaeology' *Antiquity* 35 133.

much as 6ft. 4in., and the muscular attachments indicates that the person, a male in his thirties, possessed a very powerful physique. The bones of the left side were noticeably stronger than those of the right, which might imply that he had been left handed. Furthermore, from the muscular attachments on both the femora it was evident that the person had developed abnormally large adductor muscles in the thighs, a complaint commonly associated with excessive horse riding, "rider's bone" as it is called in Gray's *Anatomy*.¹

Grave Goods

Together with the remains of the skeleton were parts of the standard Saxon paraphernalia. At the left hip was a small iron knife, the 'saxandrus' as it is known. This presumably had hung from a belt, though neither belt nor knife handle were found. Lying diagonally across the right hip was a split-socketted, waisted iron spear head with two opposing rivets. Parts of the wooden shaft were still traceable, showing that the spear had been placed at an angle over the lower limbs.

High in the fill alongside the left lower leg were the remains of a shield with the boss (*umbo*), two dome-headed rivets, and a single pin iron buckle. Obviously the shield had been placed vertically alongside the body, and the iron fittings still re-

mained in that position.

Over the feet of the burial had been placed a bronze hanging bowl, very badly decayed but not totally beyond reconstruction. It was a wide bowl with an everted rim and an indented base. Three escutcheons were recovered with the bowl, one of which fitted in the centre below the bowl, one in the centre inside and the third on the outer surface near the rim. There had once been a fourth escutcheon in the diametrically opposed position, but this had fallen off before the burial was made. All the escutcheons found were decorated with a lobed cross of enamelled cloisonne work, using red enamel and fragments of 'floated' milliflore glass rodding.

Both inside the bowl and beneath it large amounts of organic material had been preserved by the anti-biotic nature of the decaying copper. The bowl itself contained crab apples or some similar type of fruit. These contents had been covered with a fine flax-made linen, and tied in the everted rim of the bowl with flax string, all of which survive. Beneath the bowl the clothing remains have now been analysed and the following apparel can be reconstructed. The person was wearing a pair of soft leather short boots which dropped easily into creases around the ankles, and fastened with leather thonging and buttoned strap. Over this, either as a chemise, a trouser or burial cloth, was a plain woven fabric, with vegetable fibres forming the warp and fine reddish brown wool the weft⁸.

Above this again, and the surface upon which the bowl lay, were the remains of the cloak, a very good quality garment made of woollen twill into which had been threaded unspun hanks of fine lustrous sheep's fleece. The overall impression of this cloak would be of an ultrafine fleece or fur, capable of being brushed into grained lines. The quality of this cloak indicates the wealth of this Saxon warrior burial.

The dating for the complete burial is given by the shield boss, which is of the sugar-loaf type referred to by Miss Vera Evison⁹. This type of boss, she is sure, had a limited range in Britain, and most probably dates to the last few decades of the 7th century. It is to this period then that the primary burial and barrow date, and the secondary gallows victims will be post-Saxon but probably pre-Tudor, since by Tudor times the gallows at Banstead Common was no longer in use. A full report of the excavation will be appearing shortly in the *Surrey Archaeological Collections*.

7. Johnston & Whillies, Gray's *Anatomy* (1946) 648.
8. The excavators are extremely grateful to Miss Elizabeth Crowfoot for the analysis of the textiles. A full report of her findings will appear in the excavation report.
9. V. Evison, 'Sugar Loaf Shield Bosses' *Antiq J* 43 66.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The London Archaeologist Association

THIS WILL take place at 6.15 p.m. on Friday, 3rd May, at Church House, Dean's Yard, S.W.1.

The annual report and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers and also the election to the Publishing Committee of the six local society representatives whose nominations should be made in writing not less than 14 days before the A.G.M. to the Chairman, Montague Chambers, Montague Close, S.E.1.

Local societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers to the A.G.M.; individual subscribers to the magazine and their friends will also be welcome to attend. A copy of the agenda will be circulated to all societies known to be interested in the *London Archaeologist*.

Following the A.G.M., Mr. Brian Hopley, the Chief Urban Archaeologist of the Guildhall Museum, will talk on "The Future of Archaeology in the City of London".