

TWO MOUNDS ON ROW DOWN, LAMBOURN, BERKS.

P. A. RAHTZ

SUMMARY

NEITHER MOUND has been proved to be a barrow. Both yielded sherds of pre-historic and Roman date; there is evidence of Roman occupation, possibly a hut site, close to the larger of the two; the greater part, if not all of this mound, is clearly Roman or later. Both mounds have been considerably disturbed by central pits, probably dug by barrow-robbers, the smaller in the 16th century, and the larger in the 18th century.

INTRODUCTION

The excavation was directed by the writer in April 1958, for the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Works, because of impending agricultural development. Six men were employed for four weeks.¹ Row Down is in the parish of Lambourn, near the Wiltshire/Berkshire border.

Fig. 1. The larger mound, Row Down West (RDW),² was recorded by Mr. L. V. Grinsell as a probable barrow in 1934.³ The smaller mound, Row Down East (RDE)⁴ was found while the excavation of RDW was in progress. The other known features are a large east-west linear ditch traversing the Down south of RDW,⁵ and field banks,⁶ visible on the ground in the field around RDE; one of these banks encroaches on RDE (p. 27), but no definite evidence of their inter-relation was found in the excavation. There was also a row of sarsen stones or stubs shown on the 6" O.S. map passing close to RDW; one at least of these, the nearest one east of RDW, still exists under the turf.

Most of Row Down consists of the Upper Chalk, here soft with many flints, which around RDE form a distinct layer on the weathered chalk. RDW, however, lies on a knoll of clay with flints some 200 ft. in diameter on the crest of the Down, 662 ft. above O.D. This is not plotted on the 6 in. O.S. MS. map at the Geological Survey and Museum. It may be an outlying patch of Clay-with-Flints (and sarsen fragments) which covers considerable areas nearby, particularly around Baydon, or it may be the upper filling of a large solution pipe in the chalk,⁷ as would be suggested by the dip of the chalk shown in the west section (Fig. 3, S1).

¹ I would like to thank Miss V. Russell, who assisted in the excavation of the larger mound (RDW), and supervised that of the smaller (RDE); Mr. L. V. Grinsell for his helpful suggestions; Mr. L. Bick of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory for scientific advice; Mr. K. Annable, Mr. B. Hartley, Mr. J. G. Hurst, Mr. A. Oswald and Mr. N. Thomas, who have examined material submitted to them; and Mr. L. C. Denton, the owner, who gave us every facility, and who has given the finds to Newbury Museum.

² N.G. Ref. SU 299796 (1 in. O.S. map 158; 6 in. O.S. map XXV.N.W.); two miles W.N.W. of Lambourn Church; scheduled as Berks. 92.

³ *Berks Arch. Journ.* xl, 51.

⁴ N.G. Ref. SU 302795.

⁵ See O. G. S. Crawford, "*Archaeology in the Field*", 1953, p. 111, fig. 16, and p. 112.

⁶ See P. R. Rhodes, *Oxoniensia*, vol. 15, pp. 1-28, "Celtic Field Systems of the Berkshire Downs".

⁷ Information kindly given by the Geological Survey and Museum.

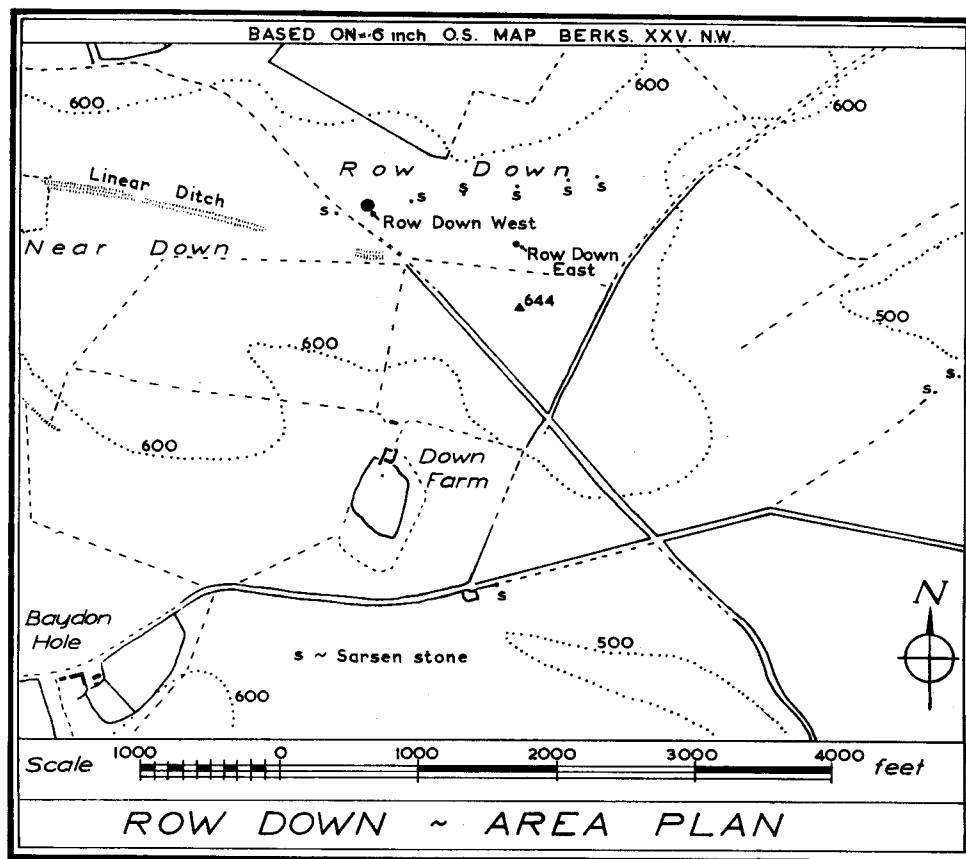


Fig. 1

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ROW DOWN WEST (RDW)

Fig. 2. Before excavation, RDW was an irregular mound about 50 ft. \times 40 ft. as shown in fig. 2. The south side appeared to have been encroached on by ploughing, and there was a large central depression. On the north side was a subsidiary mound, which proved to be topsoil removed by 18th century barrow-diggers.

The mound was excavated in quadrants, (Pls. Ia and Ib) stripped to the surface of the underlying gravel (layer 6), which was cleaned and photographed with key pillars standing (Pl. Id), and then removed to expose the clay-with-flints below. Extension cuttings were made to N.W. and N.E. to excavate the subsidiary mound and the Roman features below, and to the south-west to try to find other features associated with post-hole 12. Trenches were cut to south and west, to see if the mound had an encircling ditch, and to trace the limits of the clay and gravel knoll.¹

Fig. 3. The stratification was as shown in the radial sections S1-S4, fig. 3, and its interpretation is suggested below. The knoll is represented by layers 7 and 8,

¹ These are probably represented by a slight scarp 70 ft. east of the centre of the mound, and 110 ft. south of it, but not visible on the other two sides.

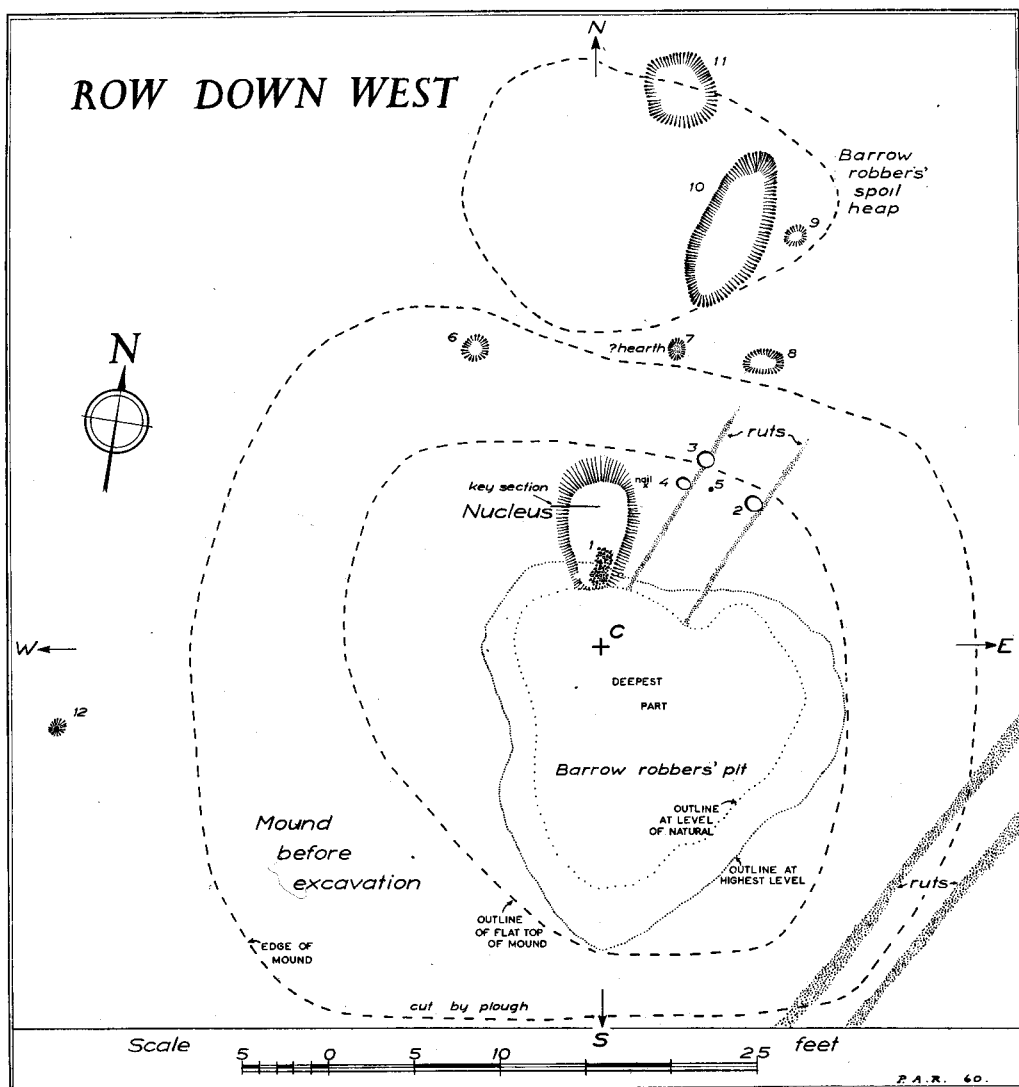
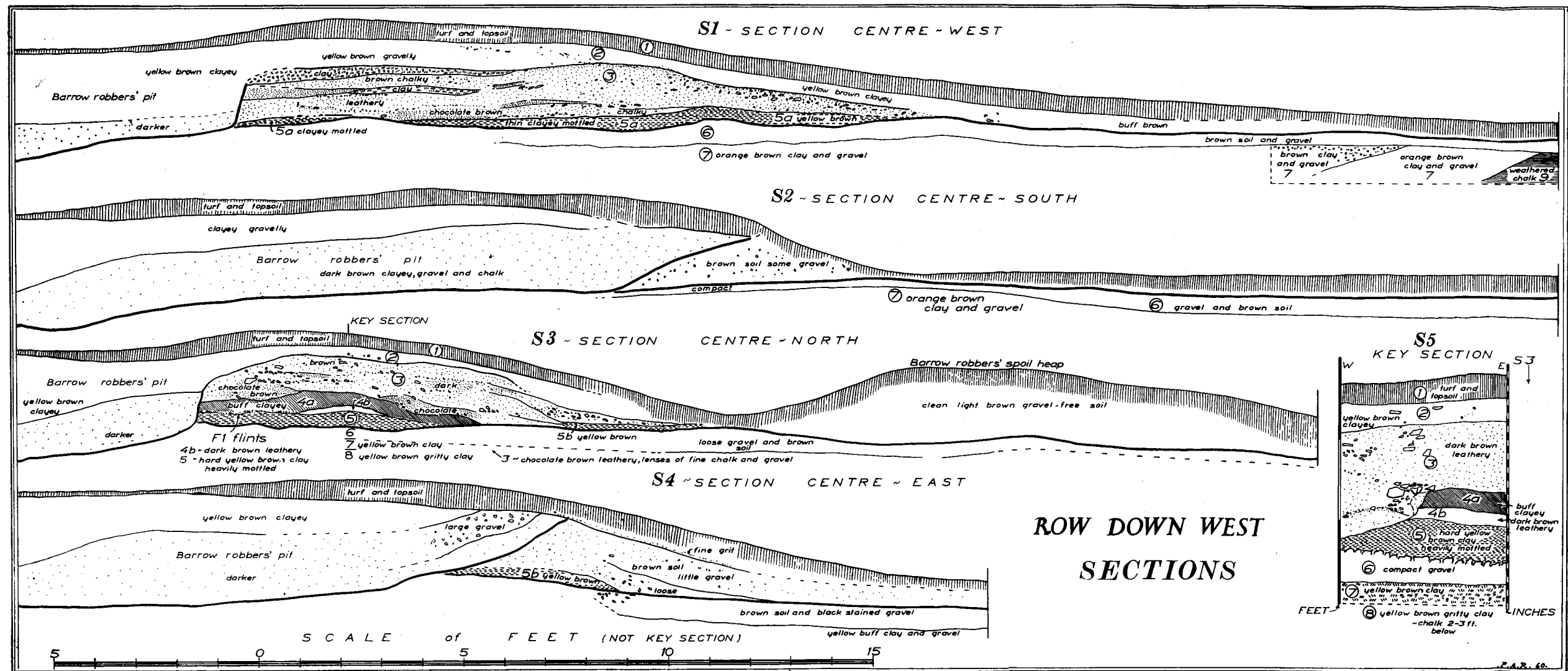


Fig. 2. Plan of Row Down West

covered with a layer of compact flint gravel (6) which is presumably an entirely natural capping weathered from the knoll. The surface of this was disturbed in Roman times over most of the area of the mound, two sherds and a nail of this date being embedded in the top layer of flints. The cart ruts shown on the plan, (fig. 2) were only 1-2 in. deep, and showed only when the gravel surface was cleaned. The N.E. pair at least clearly pre-date the mound and post-hole 3, and are probably Roman. The pair in the N.E. quadrant were 4 ft. apart, the others under the tail of the mound in the S.E. quadrant were 3 ft. 6 in. apart, in both cases measured from centre to centre.



RDW STRATIFICATION

Layer	Description	Interpretation
1	Turf and dark brown topsoil.	Recent turf and topsoil.
2	Yellow-brown slightly clayey and disturbed gravelly soil.	Spread of spoil from barrow-diggers' pit.
3	Layers of dark brown (buff-brown when damp) leathery compact soil, and yellow-brown clayey soil with lines of small chalk and flint gravel.	Make up of Roman or post-Roman mound.
4A	Mottled yellow-brown leathery soil, slightly clayey.	Uncertain.
4B	Dark brown compact leathery soil (brown when damp), gravel free.	Old soil or turf line?
5	Hard, yellow-brown heavily mottled clayey soil.	Old subsoil or former soil cover?
5A	Buff-brown, clayey, mottled compact soil.	As 5 but disturbed.
5B	Yellow-brown soft clayey slightly mottled soil.	As 5, but disturbed.
6	Large and small flint gravel, stained yellow-brown or black.	Natural gravel, weathered out of clay with flints to form a capping.
7	Yellow-brown clay with small grit and flints.	Natural clay with flints.
8	Yellow-brown clay with small grit and flints with orange flecks.	As 7.
9	Soft chalk.	Weathered bed-rock of Upper Chalk.

Fig. 3

The only part of the gravel which may not have been disturbed is that under the "nucleus" shown on the plan, where the lowest layer covering the gravel is considerably thicker, harder, yellower and more mottled (layer 5), and is here covered by layers 4A and 4B, which were only clear at this point. There was also a thin layer of gravel between layers 4A and 5, shown as F1 on plan and section S3, which could be the upcast from a grave-pit. The only find from the nucleus was a struck flint flake at the base of layer 5. The nucleus may be merely the residue of a pre-Roman soil cover, or of a mound, which may have been a barrow (perhaps robbed in Roman times), but there is no evidence either way. Outside this nucleus the three layers slope away and merge into a single disturbed layer, which contained sherds of Roman and prehistoric date. This is 5A on the west side, and 5B to the east; and each merges imperceptibly into the less compact and unmottled soil below the tail of the mound, and thence into the ploughsoil outside. Under the northern subsidiary mound, it could not be distinguished from the clean soil of the mound, which lifted cleanly off the gravel, and continued downwards with little variation into the Roman features on this side; the mound was presumably piled onto an arable surface, which had already destroyed the Roman layer.

Most of the body of the mound (layer 3) consisted of layers of dark soil, gravel, chalk fragments, and a small amount of clayey soil. Most of this material could well have been turf and topsoil, with some clay, scraped from the surrounding area. No definite continuous surface could be distinguished among this layer; its upper surface was distinct from layer 2 above; but there was no definite "old turf" line between the two. Layer 3 yielded dozens of fragmentary and abraded prehistoric and Roman sherds (pp. 27 and 30) in the proportion of about 2 : 1, a clay spindle-whorl, (p. 30) and a few Roman sandal and other nails (p. 31), but this material was distributed quite evenly throughout the layer, and was evidently gathered up with it. There was no evidence to suggest that layer 3 had been piled up other than at one time. The resulting mound may have been considerably higher than the elevation of layer 3 in the drawn sections would suggest, and its weight was perhaps responsible for the compactness of layers 4 and 5 below.

Prehistoric occupation of the area is witnessed by the sherds and spindle-whorl (p. 27) under and gathered into the body of the mound. Post-hole 12 contained burnt clay and might be of pre-Roman date. It is note-worthy that only four struck flint flakes (all featureless) were found in the whole excavation.

The Roman occupation is represented by several dozen sherds of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., about a third of these around the post-holes (see p. 30), two bronze objects (p. 31), several sandal nails and boot protectors of Roman type (p. 31), and larger nails (p. 31) associated with the features north of the mound (see pp. 30-1 for details). These may represent a hut site, 6, 8, 9 being post-holes, 7 a possible hearth, and 10 and 11 perhaps for local drainage or storage (Pl. 1c). Three more possible post-hole and a stake-hole (2-5) may be associated. They were sealed under the mound on the north side and showed in the surface of the soil (layer 5B) over the basal gravel. They are later than the ruts in this part and do not penetrate the gravel, unlike those to the north, which only showed when the gravel was cleaned. This would suggest the

existence of some depth of soil over the ruts before the holes were dug. There is no reason to think that the structure was of substantial construction or was used for any length of time. It may be no more than a shepherd's shelter, or successive shelters.¹ No indication of the nature of the structure can be got except from the nails. There were several large flints in the area, which may have been used for packing the uprights or for use as roof weights. Another post-hole (12) was found outside the mound on the west side; this had burnt clay in its filling, and may indicate structures or ovens nearby, but not necessarily of Roman date.

CONCLUSION

The date and purpose of the mound is obscure. It may perhaps have been a Roman or Saxon barrow, robbed of its interment by the barrow-diggers, though its shape is in no way typical. The only other possibilities are that it was a boundary or observation mound. It evidently looked like a barrow in the 18th century, as that must surely be the explanation of the large pit in the centre. This contained 18th century glass near its base in the centre, with clay pipe-stems, and similar material was found in the subsidiary north mound. This was apparently the turf and topsoil from the mound piled onto an arable surface (see p. 23 above).

Apart from this recent material, the pit contained nine Roman and ten pre-historic sherds. There was nothing about these sherds to suggest that any were discarded from an interment. The pit appears to have been dug from the south side, and deepened in the centre. The size and extent of the robbing pit suggests perhaps that the barrow-diggers were unsuccessful and dug away a considerable part of the subsoil in the centre of their search. The top part of the pit is more clayey than that below, and a scatter from this part of the spoil was spread over the rest of the mound (layer 2), containing also glass and pipe-stems (p. 23). Subsequently the filling of the pit subsided, resulting in the central depression visible before excavation. The only use of the mound in recent times has been by racehorse trainers watching their horses from its vantage point, and the occasional picknicker or barrow-visitor. A few pieces of lemonade bottle glass and modern horseshoes in layer 1 are evidence of such visits. The trampling of the central area has largely destroyed the turf and topsoil in the centre.

RDW FEATURE LIST

F1. Patch of flints and ? manganese-studded soil at junction of layers 4B and 5. These may have been the throw out from a grave pit onto the pre-barrow soil (5).

F2. Post-hole: $12 \times 10 \times 3$ in. deep from level seen, which was just above surface of layer 5B; filling purplish-brown soil with specks of red-orange (? iron concretion).

F3. Post-hole: $13 \times 13 \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ in. deep: base 1 in. above gravel (layer 6) filling and level seen similar to F2.

¹ It is possible that the heavy gravel of the knoll discouraged cultivation, leaving it an island among the arable, on which some structure might be habitually erected, protected to some extent by the mound from the prevailing wind.

F4. Post-hole: $8 \times 5 \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. deep: filling dark compact clayey soil with red-orange flecks: seen at same level as F2 and F3.

F5. Stake-hole: 3 in. diameter, 1 in. deep from level seen (as that of F2-F4): filling dark clayey, "manganese" flecked soil, with high proportion of red-orange flecks.

F6. Post-hole: $15 \times 15 \times 10$ in. deep from surface of gravel (layer 6): filling brown soil, slightly darker at base; traces of iron nail at base.

F7. Post-hole or hearth: $18 \times 15 \times 3$ in. deep from surface of gravel: filling brown soil heavily charcoal-flecked in top, more gravelly towards base: bronze objects (p. 31), nearby on south side.

F8. Pit or post-hole: $30 \times 21 \times 3$ in. deep from surface of gravel: filling soft brown soil, lightly charcoal flecked.

F9. Post-hole: $19 \times 15 \times 6$ in. deep from surface of gravel: filling yellow-brown soil.

F10. Gully: maximum depth 8 in. from surface of gravel: nail and iron buckle (p. 31) in filling, which is yellow-brown slightly gravelly soil: possibly for drainage, overflowing into pit 11.

F11. Pit: c. 4 ft. \times 4 ft. irregular, maximum depth 10 in. from gravel surface: filling brown soil, slightly darker at base: remains of iron nails at base.

F12. Post-hole (outside mound to south-west): $15 \times 15 \times 7$ in. from surface of gravel (16 in. from turf): darker towards centre, where there is a hole 6 in. in diameter and a further 6 in. deep (core of post?): this is dark with some charcoal and a few fragments of red burnt clay.

ROW DOWN EAST (RDE)

(Fig. 4, plan and sections)

RDE lay about 360 yds. W.N.W. of RDW at a slightly lower altitude, but still on a high, open part of the Down (see fig. 1). The mound was roughly circular, about 17 ft. in diameter, and 14 in. high, with a flat top. This part of the Down is traversed by several ploughed-down field banks only a few inches high, and one of these joined the mound on its west side.

The mound was excavated in quadrants with baulks 1 ft. wide; another baulk was left bisecting the west quadrant in order to examine the junction of the field bank with the mound.

Excavation showed that the natural chalk (layer 8) was covered by a thin layer of flint gravel (layer 7 under the mound, layer 3 under the field bank); the surface of the chalk was several inches higher under the mound than outside. This layer is probably of similar origin to layer 6 in RDW, and is presumably derived from the weathering of flints out of the chalk. On this the mound was piled, consisting of brown soil with little gravel (layer 5); this had been cut by two disturbances, Pits 1 and 2. Pit 2 had

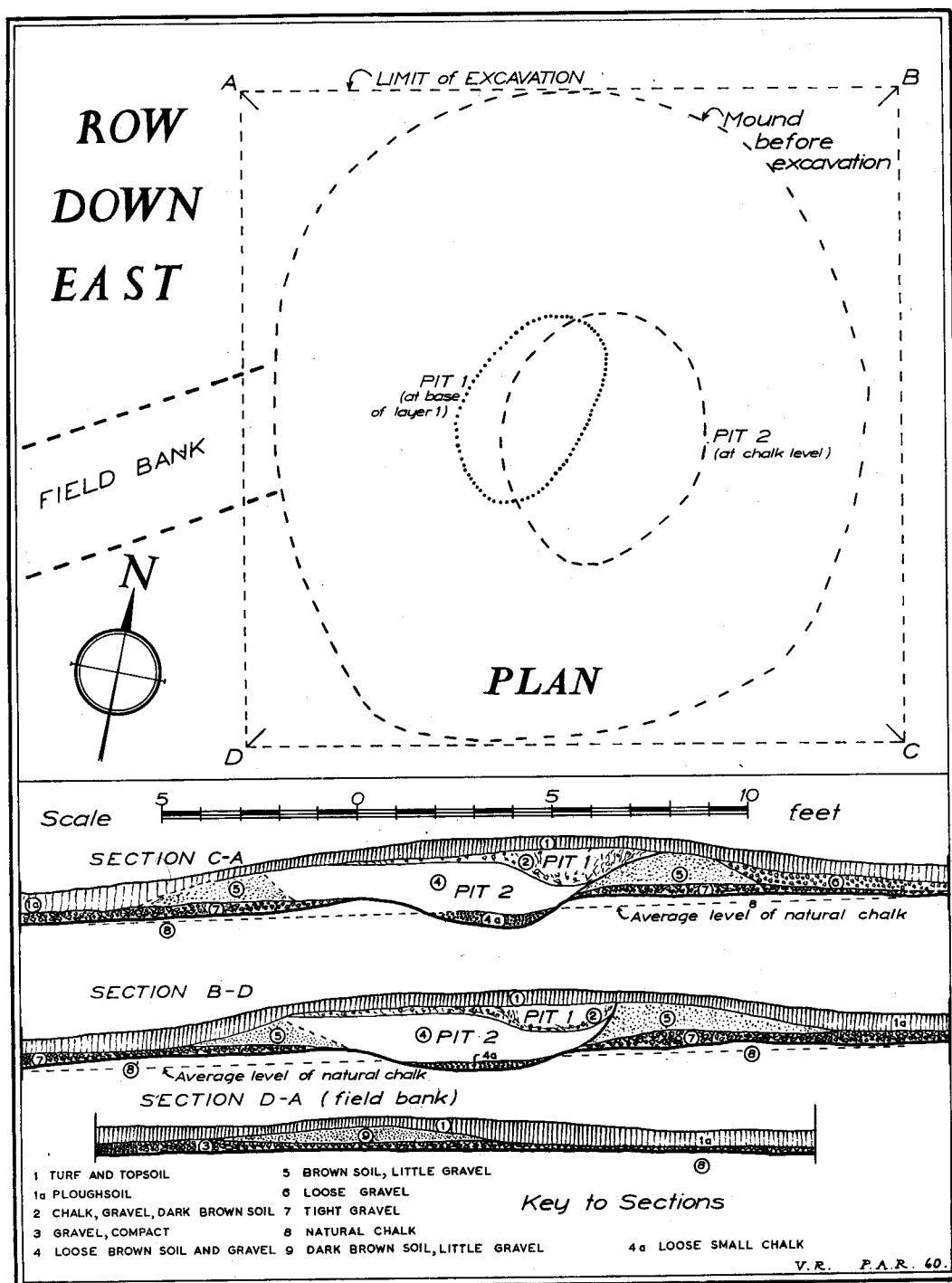


Fig. 4. Row Down East. Plan and sections

cut through the mound and the underlying gravel and chalk; its filling (layer 4) was similar to layer 5, but looser, with some small loose chalk at the base (4A); its junction with layer 5 was clear on the west side, but the two layers merged to the east. Pit 1 had cut through the upper part of Pit 2; its filling (layer 2) was darker and more chalky than that of Pit 2; its position is too excentric to be merely the subsided filling of Pit 2.

In a shallow profile of this type, the position of isolated finds cannot be regarded as significant, and none can be considered as sealed. Under the mound, among the gravel of layer 7, were two small sherds; one is probably prehistoric, of soapy buff ware, the other is a base sherd of hard reddish fabric with grey surfaces, probably Roman, but possibly medieval: neither dates the mound with certainty. In the mound (layer 5) was only a flint flake. In Pit 2 was a 16th century sherd at the base, a fragment of bottle glass, three ? prehistoric sherds of fabric C (p. 30), and one grey Roman sherd. In Pit 1 were two Roman sherds and a sherd of ? prehistoric fabric C. In the topsoil and in the tail of the mound were several dozen 16th century sherds of several vessels (p. 32), and some Roman and prehistoric ones.

The field bank was shown to consist of dark brown soil with little gravel (layer 9) which merged imperceptably with layer 5 of the mound, and might be contemporary or not.

CONCLUSION

The only evidence for the mound being ancient is the slight rise in the level of the natural chalk under the mound, which suggests that the chalk under the mound has been protected from ploughing and natural weathering agencies for a considerable period. The mound may well have been a small barrow, perhaps contemporary with the prehistoric sherds found in several places; it may have been at the junction of two field banks, a frequent occurrence.¹ If there had been any burial or grave-pit, it has been destroyed by Pit 2, probably a barrow-robbing pit of 16th century date, to judge by the sherd found at its base; this was presumably refilled with its own spoil. Occupation of the same date in the vicinity of the mound is witnessed by a spread of 16th century sherds over and around the mound; these need represent no more than field-workers' utensils. Finally, Pit 1 was dug in the side of the filling of Pit 2. This was probably for the planting of a bush, which is said to have formerly stood on the mound, and to have been planted on the mound in comparatively recent times to prevent racehorses being upset by the sudden rise in ground level.

THE FINDS (Fig. 5)

The Prehistoric Pottery

Row Down West

87 sherds were found which were distinctive from the Roman pottery found; they are probably all prehistoric, but some may be of early or late Roman date, "native" or "degenerate", in both of which periods some remarkably "prehistoric-looking"

Cf. Knighton Hill Barrow, Broadchalke, Wilts.; excavation by writer, publication forthcoming.

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fabrics occur. They have been classified by appearance into six fabrics A–F, but this does not imply that they are necessarily of different dates, though there may well be two periods represented. All are rather small and abraded, and include only two rim sherds (Fig. nos. 1 and 2) and no decorated pieces; under the circumstances only tentative suggestions on dating may be given. Some of the more distinctive sherds have been kindly examined by Mr. Nicholas Thomas of the City Museum, Birmingham, whose opinions are embodied with my own in the following description:—

A (19 sherds)

Fine textured black or dark grey with buff surface; slight grit backing, probably finely-crushed flint; possibly Late Bronze Age, Iron Age or even Romano-British; includes Fig. 5 no. 1.

B (8 sherds)

Fine textured grey-brown with red-brown surfaces and slight grit; probably as A, differently fired.

C (47 sherds)

Dark grey, otherwise as A and B, probably as them, differently fired.

D (1 sherd only)

Grey with buff interior surface, irregularly pitted with "biscuit texture"; this is not unlike some of the later Iron Age pottery in the Chew Valley Lake,¹ North Somerset.

E (7 sherds)

Coarse dark grey, heavy flint grit, reddish-buff surfaces; identical in fabric to Neolithic B pottery from Wiltshire such as that from Downton,² near Salisbury, and from West Kennet;³ but also to some L.B.A. ware.⁴

F (5 sherds)

As E, but black all over with a smoother surface; probably also Neolithic B; includes Fig. 5 no. 2; three of the five sherds were in the barrow-robbers' pit.

The distribution of all the sherds is shown in the following table:—

	Barrow Robbers Pit	Layer 2	Layer 3	Layer 4 (top)	Layer 5A (base)	Layer 5B
A	1	2	16	—	—	—
B	2	—	6	—	—	—
C	4	4	37	1	—	1
D	—	—	1	—	—	—
E	—	—	7	—	—	—
F	3	—	2	—	—	—
(Roman)	9	3	13	1	5	4

¹ M.O.W. excavations by writer; publication forthcoming by H.M.S.O.

² M.O.W. excavation by writer; publication forthcoming.

³ Inf. Mr. N. Thomas.

⁴ The latest group in the forthcoming report on the Late Bronze Age pottery from Shearplace Hill, Dorset, by A. M. Ap Simon.

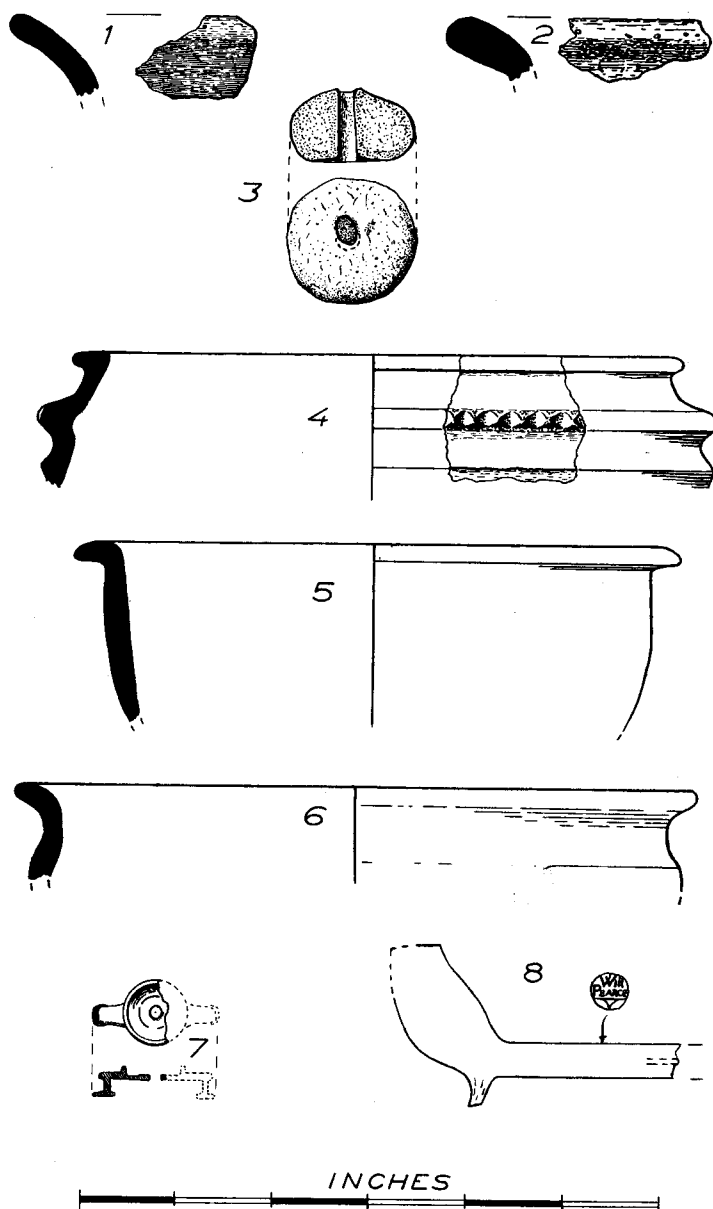


Fig. 5. Finds from Row Down West: 1-3 Prehistoric (p. 30); 4-7 Roman (pp. 30-1);
8 Post-medieval (pp. 31-2)

*Illustrated sherds**Fig. 5*

No. 1. Rim sherd, (diameter 5 in.+) fine textured dark grey with fine grit backing; top and inner surface fired to pinkish-buff; dating uncertain (see fabric A above); from layer 3, N.W. quadrant.

No. 2. Rim sherd (diameter c. 7 in.), coarse black with large flint grits, but with a smooth surface as far as these allow (fabric F); probably Neolithic B; similar plain rims were among the Neolithic B pottery from Downton,¹ near Salisbury, but they are usually decorated; from barrow-robbers' pit.

*Other finds**Fig. 5*

No. 3. Fired clay spindle-whorl, hand made with some ? fingernail impressions; buff finely-gritted fabric similar to A above; perforation made from side underneath in drawing, probably with a stick before firing, from layer 3, N.W. quadrant.

Row Down East

From RDE came seven prehistoric sherds; one of fabric A was outside the mound, one of fabric E in the tail of the mound, one of fabric C in Pit 1, three of C in Pit 2, and another sherd of smooth soapy buff ware under the mound. All are small, abraded, and featureless; they are probably part of the same general scatter as that around RDW.

*The Roman Pottery**Row Down West*

Thirty-five sherds were found, several of them around the post-holes and other features on the north side of the mound. On the grounds of fabric alone, they are undatable except in very general terms, but many are of a grey fabric frequently of 3rd century date. There is one sherd of abraded *samian*. Mr. Brian Hartley has kindly identified this as from the rim of a f.33; the fabric suggests a South Gaulish origin, in which case it should be dated 80-100 A.D. (found near pit 10). Four of the other sherds are illustrated; none need be other than 2nd or 3rd century date, and no closer dating than this is given to the Roman occupation of the site; the Roman sherds may be the result of several visits to the site over a long period of time.

Fig. 5

No. 4. Rim sherd of a ? bowl; coarse reddish-sandy ware with grey core; there is a dimpled cordon below rim; from N. edge of post-hole 9.

¹ M.O.W. excavations 1957 by writer; publication forthcoming.

No. 5. Rim and body sherd of a flanged bowl; fine grey ware; from layer 5B near post-hole 6; this is a form which is most common in the later 2nd century, but can continue into the 3rd century.

No. 6. Rim sherd of jar; fine sandy grey-brown, grey core with dark grey surfaces; from area west of post-hole 6.

Row Down East

From RDE came six featureless grey Roman sherds, one of them in Pit 2; and a reddish sherd with grey surfaces, under the mound, which is probably Roman, but could be medieval.

Other Roman finds

(All from Row Down West)

Bronze or copper alloy

Fig. 5

No. 7. ? Belt-fitting; there was probably another rivet on the other side of the saucer-shaped central part; the latter may originally have been enamelled; found by edge of ? hearth 7 with the brooch-pin described below.

Not illustrated: broken brooch pin, 1 in. long with two turns at end, $\frac{1}{16}$ in. rounded section.

Iron (not illustrated)

10 nails, average $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, $\frac{3}{8}$ in. heads, $\frac{1}{8}$ in. shanks.

Nail, $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, $\frac{1}{2}$ in. head, $\frac{3}{16}$ in. shank.

Nail, 2 in. long, no head, $\frac{1}{4}$ in. shank.

Nail, $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, head $\frac{1}{2}$ in., shank $\frac{3}{16}$ in.

Nail, $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, head $\frac{1}{2}$ in. square, slightly domes, shank tapering from point through $\frac{3}{8} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in. to maximum by head of $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in.

Curved flat plate, $1\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{3}{8} \times \frac{1}{16}$ in. thick, end turned over.

? Buckle, $1\frac{1}{4} \times 7$ in., sides $\frac{1}{8}$ in. square.

Boot-protector, oval $1 \times \frac{5}{8} \times \frac{1}{16}$ in. thick, with prongs at right angles to each end $\frac{3}{16}$ in. long, and $\frac{3}{16}$ in. thick, turned over at ends.

Curved flat plate, $3 \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{8}$ in. thick.

Post-Roman finds

Row Down West

These include *clay-pipe* fragments from RDW; they have been kindly examined by Mr. Adrian Oswald, M.A., F.S.A., F.M.A., of the City Museum, Birmingham, who reports that "the two stamped pieces (including Fig. 5, no. 8) are of William Pearce; these are common in Marlborough and elsewhere in that locality; the style

and mark implies a date of 1690-1720, but the only William Pearce known at present is one who was apprentice in 1733 to John Pearce of Bristol. These pipes should be earlier than that and were perhaps made by the father of John Pearce."

There are also fragments of *glass* bottles and a wine-glass stem which are also of early 18th century date; and some small *sherds* of mottled stoneware and brown-glazed coarse pottery; all these finds were doubtless derived from social activities connected with barrow-digging.

Row Down East

From RDE there are several dozen sherds of post-medieval pottery. At least five different vessels are represented, and all the larger sherds come from layer 1. The fabric of all is a very soft brick-red ware, with dark surfaces, and internal and external glaze varying from orange-brown to bottle green. Mr. J. G. Hurst, M.A., F.S.A., of the Inspectorate, suggests that they are all of 16th century date.