

I.

ON A NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BARROW AND
ITS CONTENTS. BY DOROTHEA M. A. BATE.

In the past the farmer with his plough has often been the means of bringing to light traces of the former inhabitants of these islands, but at the same time has inevitably caused the destruction of so many of the smaller prehistoric sites that to find these nowadays it is necessary to resort to sparsely inhabited regions where moorland and mountain still retain their ascendancy. It is no doubt partly due to the possession of large tracts of such country that Northumberland, particularly in the north and north-west of the county, has proved such a productive field for the archæologist, and has already yielded so many early British remains, particularly in the form of burials. This being the case it might be thought unnecessary to place on record any further finds of this description were it not for the fact that, beyond the broad division into burnt and unburnt burials, no two interments seem to be absolutely identical, even when enclosed in the same mound as in the example now to be described. It is this indication of individuality and the value, even if small, of the separate items which help to form the accumulated evidence which will eventually clear up many questions still but imperfectly answered, that must be the excuse for the following account of an isolated excavation.

When spending the summer of 1908 in Northumberland, my attention was attracted to a grassy mound in a moorland field close to Trehitt Hall, which lies five miles to the north-west of Rothbury, in the fine open country between the Simonside Range on the south and the greater mass of the Cheviots to the north, where tracts of moorland creep down from the hills and remain unconquered among the surrounding fields, long ago brought under the sway of the agri-

culturist. Permission to investigate this tumulus was most kindly given by Lord Armstrong, who has done much to help and encourage similar work in this district. Inquiry proved this supposed barrow to be well known; that it had never been excavated was no doubt due to its appearance being such as to give rise to considerable doubt as to its mode of origin. I was, in fact, informed that its opening was contemplated some years previously, but that, a trial trench at its base disclosing an accumulation of water-worn gravel, the attempt was relinquished on the supposition that the mound was sufficiently accounted for by the former existence of a spring at this spot—a theory which was eventually proved to be correct so far as it went, but which had been misleading in its effect.

In his valuable work on Upper Coquetdale,¹ Mr D. D. Dixon only refers in passing to this tumulus, mentioning that "There is also a very large barrow or mound on the west side of the Rithe, opposite Trehwitt House." A fuller description is given by James Hardy,² who quotes the following from MacLauchlan's *Memoir* (pp. 51-2): "About 350 yards west of the Wreigh Burn, close to the boundary between Trehwitt and Burradon, and on the Trehwitt side of it, is an oval mound of about 60 yards square. It is probable that this is an ancient tumulus; there are several stones placed on the moor not far from this tumulus, which have the appearance of having been there for a long time."

As mentioned in the quotation given above, the barrow is close to the boundary between the properties of Trehwitt and Burradon, above and on the right bank of the small tributary of the Coquet, indifferently known as the Rithe or Wreigh Burn. It is situated in a large field included in the farm of Low Trehwitt, and known as

¹ D. D. Dixon, *Upper Coquetdale*, pp. 117-118. R. Redpath, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1903.

² James Hardy, "On Urns and other Antiquities . . . Southern Skirts of the Cheviot Hills," *Proc. Berw. Nat. Club*, 1885-6, p. 302.

Low Trehitt North Moor. The meaning of the name Trehitt is said to be "white lands";¹ this colour cognomen is commonly applied locally to the tracts very characteristic of this country, which, like the field in question, are clothed with long coarse herbage, the pale tints of which form such a striking contrast to the dark hue of the heather-clad portions of the hills.

The mound may be described as roughly oval in shape, though

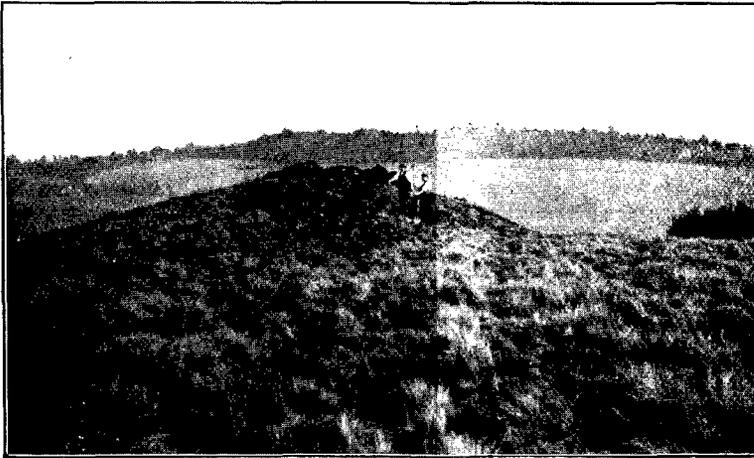


Fig. 1. The Mound before excavation.

slightly larger at its eastern and lowest end, owing to the inclination of the ground, which here slopes down towards the burn. It lies almost due east and west, and attains a height of about 10 or 11 feet above the field, from which it rises at so slight an angle that a correct measurement of its circumference was difficult to obtain, and may be only roughly given as about 120 yards. This indefinite outline is well seen in the accompanying illustration (fig. 1). With

¹ From *tir*, land, *whighth*, white—whitelands. See D. D. Dixon, *Newcastle Courant*, December 1884.

regard to the stones mentioned in the quotation given above, a number of small groups of stones were observed in the field, but had no more apparent connection with the barrow than with the extensive boundary wall close by.

The excavation was commenced by removing a strip of turf, about 7 feet wide, from the centre of the southern base-line to the summit of the mound, in order to drive a trench to its centre at the level of the field surface, with the object of finding the site of the original interment. On first penetrating the interior of the tumulus, and as investigations proceeded, the opinion that it was of natural formation, and owed its origin to the agency of water, seemed to be confirmed, for it appeared to be entirely composed of small water-worn stones mixed with gravelly soil. Before abandoning the search altogether, the base of the mound was left, and work commenced at a greater height in order to cut a section across its crest: a change was soon noted, the gravel at a depth of about 3 feet from the surface giving place to a loose, earthy soil interspersed with larger stones. This upper layer was found to extend along the whole length of the top of the mound, and was evidently of artificial and comparatively late origin. There seems no doubt that with the desire to achieve a certain result with a minimum of labour—no small consideration in the face of an absence of all adequate tools—advantage was taken of a natural elevation which only necessitated sufficient additional material to conceal and protect the three tombs which it was eventually found to contain. Although, no doubt, slightly higher originally, it seems unlikely that any extensive alteration in the dimensions of the barrow has taken place since the interments were made, for directly the summit became overgrown with thick, coarse grass, all work of denudation would practically cease.

Altogether the upper layer of the tumulus was examined for a distance of about 60 feet, this appearing to be the whole extent of sufficient depth to contain interments. As a result of this, three

tombs were discovered : the most westerly of these was constructed with the greatest care and enclosed the remains of an unburnt burial ; the central cist was small, and had evidently been made for the reception of cremated remains accompanied by, or contained in, an urn, while the easterly grave was roughly built, and only yielded a few fragments of bone and pieces of charcoal. It will be seen from the figures and detailed descriptions given below that all were very rudely fashioned, and they rested on the gravel, contrary to the more usual custom of sinking the cists so that only the covering stone is above the original ground level. All three were what may be described as " box-shaped," that is, having four sides and a lid ; although Mr Forster of Burradon told me that the commonest form in this district is triangular in section, the side stones sloping together until they meet and obviate the necessity of a covering slab.

When two or more burials occur in the same barrow, it is usual to find the primary one, for which the tumulus was originally erected, placed at the base of the centre ; the others would have been included later either from labour-saving motives, or possibly a particular mound might be used as a family or tribal burial-place. In the case under discussion, in which the three cists were placed on the same level in a space not more than 20 feet in length, there does not appear to be much indication of priority. The difference of method suggests that these burials were not made simultaneously, while the inference that no great time elapsed before all the interments were made is supported by similar pottery being found in two of the cists, although in one it was represented by a complete urn, and in the other by only one fragment.

Details of the Cists and their Contents.—When the trench commenced at the base of the mound was continued to the summit, the central cist (fig. 2) was the first to be discovered, where it lay only about a foot below the surface. It was irregular in shape and very rudely constructed of freestone slabs, now considerably decomposed, and

varying in thickness from $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The cover, on which lay a smaller stone, measured $25\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $24\frac{3}{4}$ inches, the depth of the cist being 12 inches, and the bottom formed of a single slab 2 inches thick, this being the only instance of a floor stone being



Fig. 2. The Central Cist in the Trewhitt Barrow.

present. The side stones did not fit at all closely, and no clay had been employed to cement the joins, though these were roughly strengthened by smaller stones placed on the inside. On removing the cover the cist was found to be filled with fine earth and a few small stones, the presence of which may probably be accounted for by the loose construction of the sides, which, failing to resist the

pressure of the superimposed earth and stones, allowed surrounding material to gradually work its way inside. This fine earth having been removed by hand, a vase was disclosed lying on the bottom stone with its base close to the west side and its mouth towards the



Fig. 3. Urn from the Central Cist in the Trehitt Barrow.

centre. It was filled with earth similar to that by which it was surrounded, and, on being lifted, immediately fell to pieces, this brittleness being caused by its having become saturated with wet. Although in a very crumbling and fragmentary condition, all the pieces were carefully preserved, and have since been most successfully put together by Mr F. O. Barlow, Formatore in the British

Museum (Nat. Hist.), so that the whole vessel has been practically restored to its original form (fig. 3).

From the circumstances of its discovery, this specimen might have been supposed to be a cinerary urn, though from its size and its shape, which lacks the typical and heavy overlapping rim, and also from the extent and elaboration of its ornamentation, it most nearly approaches the class distinguished by Jewitt as Drinking Cups,¹ which are usually found associated with unburnt remains. The height of this vase is $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches, the circumference of the lip (taken exteriorly) $16\frac{1}{8}$ inches, the circumference of the base 11 inches, and that of the shoulder 17 inches, this last measurement being taken at about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the base. It is composed of a gritty reddish brown clay, the broken edges showing black from the effects of firing.

With the exception of the outer surface of the base, which is flat, the whole exterior of the urn is covered with lightly incised patterns, four in number, and composed of dotted lines and plain incisions; these encircle the pot in twelve bands, with an added dotted line at the edge of the lip. Commencing from the top, the first band is edged with zigzag lines, roughly about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch apart, the space between being occupied by perpendicular dotted lines. This design is repeated in the seventh band, which is just below the widest part of the shoulder, while the fifth and ninth are similar in outline but lack the vertical dotted lines, the dividing space being quite plain. Bands 2 and 4 consist of four closely dotted horizontal lines, while groups of three, instead of four, of these dotted lines form bands 6, 8, 10, and probably 12, which is not very well preserved and so somewhat obscure. Bands 3 and 11 are composed of two rows of longitudinal incisions.

Western Cist.—The trench carried right over the centre of the mound having resulted in the discovery of the interment described above, it was next continued at the same depth in a roughly westerly

¹ Jewitt, Llewellynn, *Grave-mounds and their Contents*, chap. v., London, 1870.

direction following the crest of the tumulus. Pieces of stone blackened by fire were found here and there, and at a distance of 6 feet from the first a second and larger cist was encountered 18 inches below the surface. The illustration (fig. 4) was taken after one side-stone,



Fig. 4. The Western Cist in the Trehitt Barrow.

seen alongside, had been displaced, and the contents removed. This cist was oblong in shape, a single slab forming the cover and each of the four sides. These were not fastened together in any way, and there was no floor stone. Its depth on the outside was 28 inches, while the cover was 44 inches long, 33 inches wide, and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches

thick. The side stone on the north was from 3 inches to $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and that on the east $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness.

On lifting the cover, this cist, like the one described above, was found to be filled with earth, but in this case it was much coarser and contained a number of stones of too large a size to have found a way in between the slabs, thus suggesting that they were placed with the soil in the tomb before it was closed. Small pieces of charcoal and blackened earth and stones occurred throughout, and at a depth of about $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches a number of unburnt human bones were found: a few of these were in a fair state of preservation, including an immature right femur and other leg and innominate bones. No portions of skulls were preserved, though, when subsequently sifting the earth, several whole and fragmentary teeth were obtained, some of these being scarcely worn.

Besides these human remains, seven or eight small flints were obtained from this cist, and also a small fragment of pottery, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in size, similar in colour and typical decoration to the urn (fig. 3), though its more finely incised ornamentation differs slightly in design. Portions of two alternating patterns can be seen, each only about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in width. One consists of three horizontal lines, while in the other cross-hatched lines form a small diamond pattern. The flints (fig. 5) are small and very rude, and, with perhaps the exception of the one shown in the top left-hand corner of the photograph, show little or no attempt at design. This seems to suggest that in this instance the finished implements may have been reserved rather for the use of the living than given up in honour of the dead.

Eastern Cist.—A further excavation at the western edge of the tumulus yielding no result, the search was transferred to the opposite end of the mound, where another tomb was soon discovered at a distance of about 10 feet to the east of the central cist. It lay immediately below the surface, and was the most rudely and carelessly

constructed of the three tombs. The covering slab was very massive and irregular in shape; it measured 63 inches in length, the breadth

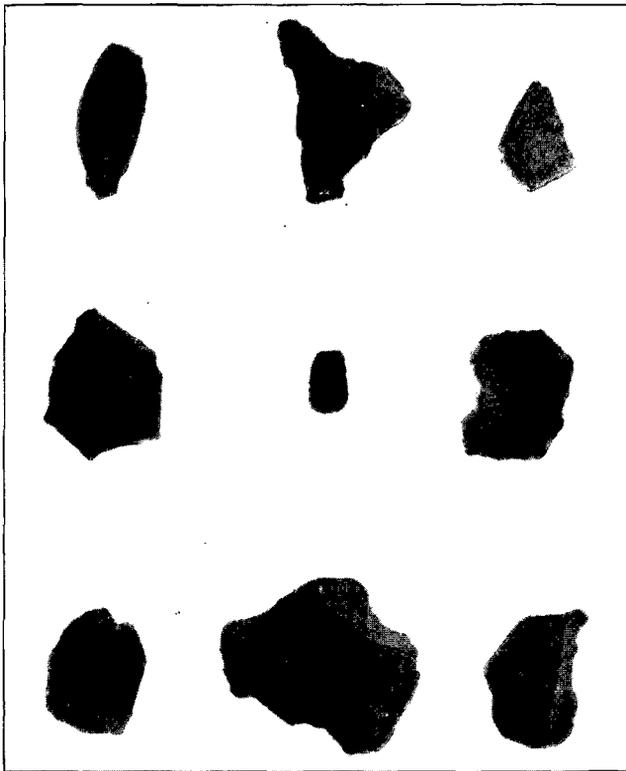


Fig. 5. Fragments of Pottery and Flint Chips from the Western Cist in the Trehitt Barrow.

varying from 20 inches to 33 inches; the wide end was $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, while the narrow portion, which projected beyond the walls, attained the great thickness of $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The inside length of the cist was only about 33 inches; there was no foundation stone, and the

sides, consisting of several, instead of single, stones, had fallen outwards under the weight of the ponderous cover. It was filled with earth, in the upper portion of which were found a few fragments of unburnt bones, and in which also occurred many small pieces of charcoal and a number of stones, some showing unmistakably that they had been exposed to the action of fire.

I do not know if any satisfactory explanation has been suggested to explain the occurrence of both burnt and unburnt burials in one district, and apparently during more or less the same period. War with neighbouring tribes being probably a permanent condition in those days, the near presence of the enemy might easily account for the omission of cremation and the consequent betraying column of smoke; but that this is not a wholly sufficient reason is proved by the presence of charcoal and fire-blackened stones in each of the two unburnt burials of the Trewhitt mound.