

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE INVESTIGATION OF BARROWS ON
THE LINE OF THE ROMAN ROAD BETWEEN OLD SARUM
AND THE PORT AT THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER AXE, SUP-
POSED TO BE THE "AD AXIUM" OF RAVENNAS.

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ONE of the most interesting lines of Roman road in the West of England, for the careful tracing of which we are indebted to Sir R. Colt Hoare, lies between the ancient city of Old Sarum and what was once the port at the mouth of the River Axe, on the Bristol Channel, opposite to Brean Down, supposed to be that known anciently as "AD AXIUM." The visitor to Weston-Super-Mare must have contemplated that huge headland projecting into the Channel, but has probably thought little of its ancient interest, and of the remains existing on it and in its vicinity.

At the extremity of this projecting point, and also at the embouchure of the river Axe, not very far from the ruined old church which crowns the high ground above Uphill, but situated on the side of the ridge looking towards Bleadon, are the remains of an ancient settlement, probably of very considerable importance in Roman times. A British settlement, of considerable magnitude, is also traceable on the same side of the Mendip. These I had an opportunity of examining, as late as July last, and can verify the accuracy of Sir R. C. Hoare's description, when he says, "On going from Cross to Uphill, the road passes through the village of Bleadon, and before you descend the hill to it, I recommend a digression on the left side of the road, where there are decided vestiges of a very extensive British settlement, covering on all sides a wide tract of land as far as the Roman station."² These I had noticed a year or two previous to reading Sir R. C. Hoare's account, and determined to examine them at an early opportunity. The Roman station is small, but quite distinguishable. From hence has been

¹ Communicated to the Section of Antiquities, at the Annual Meeting of the Institute at Bath, July, 1858.

² Ancient Wilts, vol. ii., Roman *Æra*, p. 44. See the Map of the localities above described, *ibid.* Iter ii. plate iii.

traced in almost a direct line, and broken only at particular intervals by the increase of modern cultivation, a continuous course of Roman road. Two, or probably more, Roman stations are distinctly traceable, and have been accurately laid down by Sir R. C. Hoare, to whom we are indebted for a careful survey of this most interesting district, extending along the ridge of the Mendip Hills, until it enters Wilts, and terminates in the fortress of Old Sarum.

The line of Roman way appears to have been formed, like most other Roman roads, in the line of an ancient British trackway. Long before the coming of the Romans, the line of the Mendip Hills appears to have been a thickly populated region, from the vestiges which remain of extensive settlements not only near Bleadon, and other points in Somerset, but at Stockton and Groveley Wood in Wilts. The sides of the Roman road are studded with ancient tumuli. In one place the Roman road is made to turn out of its course, to prevent the violation of one of these enduring records of mortality, possibly also to avoid wounding the feelings of the people, by whom it had been raised.

While Sir R. C. Hoare carefully examined the course of this road, and noted the vestiges of the settlements of the original inhabitants, and the later works of their Roman conquerors, his friend, the Rev. John Skinner, undertook to examine the interior of some of the barrows which seemed to offer the best chance of ascertaining by their contents the probable date of their construction, and the degree of civilisation of the people who formed them. The account of the examination of these tumuli is contained in a volume of MS. letters, and other papers, presented by him to the library of the Literary and Scientific Institution at Bath, and written for the most part to his friend the Rev. James Douglas, author of the *Nenia Britannica*. These letters, as far as I know, have never been published, and as they appear well worthy of being brought to light, I have been desirous to bring them under notice, because in the present advancing state of archaeological investigation, especially as regards ancient interments, every record of any careful examination becomes of value. The subject of burial and cremation has of late excited so much attention, and such valuable treatises have been put forth upon it; investigation has also been carried on throughout such an extended field of

inquiry, that every additional record which can be relied on, must be considered valuable in determining the difficult question. Professor Grimm and the German archæologists, as well as our late esteemed and talented countryman Mr. Kemble, have done much towards elucidating this subject; the extensive excavations carried out by Lord Braybrooke, and the careful researches by Mr. Wylie and Mr. Akerman, have contributed still more to invest the inquiry with interest.

Sir R. Colt Hoare makes mention indeed in his *Ancient Wilts* of the researches of Mr. Skinner, and adds a brief note as to their contents,³ considering these tumuli to be similar to those already investigated in Wilts; but this notice will hardly satisfy those who seek to gather up every vestige that may throw light upon the manners and habits of the ancient inhabitants of their country.

I will now proceed to place before the archæologist some notices of the sepulchral antiquities in Somerset, as recorded by Mr. Skinner in the MS. collections to which I have referred; commencing with the tumuli opened by him near the village of Priddy, between Chewton and Cheddar.

No. 1. A tumulus, 10 feet in perpendicular height, 182 feet in circumference, formed chiefly of mould taken from the spot. On the east side, at the depth of 10 feet, a small interment of burnt bones was found, in quantity almost a pint. From the thinness of part of the skull, it appeared to have been that of a child. The ashes were found on a flat stone, without any cist or covering. Two feet lower down a similar interment was discovered, and at the bottom, just below the natural surface, was found the primary deposit, in a small oval cist covered with a flat stone, and near it a rude clay urn which was unfortunately broken.

No. 2. This tumulus was 8 feet high, 163 in circumference, formed of earth and loose stones, and contained the primary interment of burnt bones in a small cist, 16 inches in length, 1 foot wide, and 1 foot deep. The cavity was nearly filled with burnt bones, and covered with a flat stone; in it were found four amber beads in excellent preservation, and a fifth somewhat in the form of a heart, which broke in pieces on being handled. Part of a bronze spear or arrow-head was also found, much corroded, and a ring of the same

³ See vol. ii. *Roman Æra*, p. 42.

metal. The appearance of decayed wood on the blade, seemed to indicate that it had been enclosed in a sheath. Not far from the cist was found a small oval cup of pottery, 4 inches long, 3 wide, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ deep in the interior, the outside embossed with a number of projecting knobs; this little urn is similar to one given in Sir R. Colt Hoare's *Ancient Wilts*. The amber beads were of fine rich red, or ruby colour, highly polished, and transparent when held up to the light; a small blue opaque glass bead was found with them, perforated; only one of the amber beads had a hole made through it; the others were bored on one side, probably for the admission of a pin. The cist was covered by a mass of rude stones to the height of $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet, heaped over with earth taken from the vicinity of the barrow.

No. 3. This barrow consisted of a pile of loose stones, with only sufficient earth to cover the surface; it measured 12 feet in height, 164 in circumference; some of the loose fragments weighed from 150 to 200 lbs. The cist, formed of loose stones, was $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length by 2 in width, and was covered with a large flat grey stone of a material not found in the neighbourhood. It contained a quantity of burnt bones, but no beads or bronze implements. An urn was found reversed, as is usual, and it was so much decomposed by the moisture, that its form could not well be ascertained. Within $\frac{1}{2}$ foot of the summit was found a deposit of burnt bones, deposited in a small cavity covered with a flat stone.

No 4. This barrow measured 7 feet high, 181 in circumference. It was formed of earth to a depth of 3 feet; beneath this appeared a pile of loose stones to the bottom. A quantity of burnt bones was found here, in the same kind of cist as in No. 3, and a brazen (or bronze) spear-head or dirk blade. When perfect it was probably 5 inches long and 1 inch broad, retaining near one extremity three bronze rivets which had fixed it to the handle; on the blade was the appearance of decayed wood, as if the sheath had rotted away.

No. 5. This barrow measured 6 feet in height, 155 feet in circumference, formed of earth. No interment discovered.

No. 6. Eight feet and a half high, 180 feet in circumference, $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet of earth from the summit, 3 of small stones. At the bottom lay a considerable quantity of burnt bones and charcoal in a cist, which also contained a large urn,

dotted over by some blunt instrument, when the clay was soft ; this was unfortunately broken.

No. 7. Seven feet high, 163 feet in circumference, formed of about 3 feet of earth from the summit, and 4 feet of loose stones ; burnt bones and charcoal in the centre, with part of a brazen (or brönze) blade much corroded.

No. 8. Six feet high, 150 feet in circumference, formed of earth ; a small quantity of burnt bones lay at the bottom, but no urn.

There was a ninth barrow in this line, but stated to have been removed, in order to supply materials for a wall in the vicinity.

The range is still called "*Priddy Nine Barrows.*" They stand out boldly on the ridge of the hill as you look towards Wells on the road thither from East and West Harptree. I visited them July 12, 1858, but the operations of agriculture are fast encroaching on all this tract of country, and will soon eradicate these memorials of ancient occupation ; we cannot feel too thankful to Mr. Skinner for having undertaken their investigation at the time he did, and for having recorded his researches so carefully. A tract of land not far distant has been taken for improved cultivation, and a Model Farm commenced.

Within a quarter of a mile south of this line, is another range of seven barrows ; the smallest of these was opened by Mr. Skinner, who found a quantity of charcoal and a few scattered ashes ; it had probably been opened before.

Near them are some circular banks,⁴ called by the peasants "*The Castles ;*" the diameters of which are each 500 feet, the mound is low, and they have no external ditch. They are a quarter of a mile from the barrows opened, and about 250 feet distant from each other.

Nothing can surpass the wild desolation of this tract, which contrasts vividly with the rich valleys on each side of it ; yet the soil appears fertile and produces good crops, and the interior of the hills is productive of minerals, some lead mines being in active operation.

Mr. Skinner describes other barrows which he opened, half a mile to the south of Priddy Church, in the autumn of 1818, all of small dimensions : one of them measuring only 4 feet

⁴ Similar circles exist in Walton Down near Clevedon, for which see a note at the end of this memoir, communicated by Mr. Long whilst it was in the press.

in height, and about 50 feet in circumference ; and the other being 3 feet high, and also a flat barrow, wider in circuit ; these two stood together. In the first he found pieces of charcoal and a small flint arrow-head, almost 2 feet from the summit ; and nearly the same depth below, some stones and burnt bones. The interment seemed to have been disturbed, and the barrows previously examined. In the second of these no cist was found as indicative of burial, although three openings were made.

A group of barrows, standing in a line to the north-east of Priddy Church, commonly called "Ashen Lane Barrows," about half a mile distant from the church, was next examined.

No. 1. The workmen dug to the depth of 8 feet, and made a large excavation, but found nothing. This barrow was 7 feet high, and 80 feet in circumference.

No. 2. About 7 feet high, and 60 feet in circumference. This barrow contained burnt bones and charcoal, at the depth of 6 feet, but no appearance of a cist or urn.

No. 3. This barrow measured only 3 feet high, 37 paces in circumference. It contained a cist 15 inches deep and a foot long, nearly filled with charcoal and burnt bones, the latter much injured by being wet, the barrow being so low.

No. 4. At the depth of 6 feet an oval cist was found, of larger dimensions than the former, containing burnt bones, also some thick fragments of an unbaked urn which may have been traces of a second deposit.

No. 5. In this interment were found burnt bones, without any urn or cist.

The ground was not opened between Nos. 4 and 5, but it appeared to be a place of interment. The whole group, as Mr. Skinner supposed, may have been a family burying-place.

I will next proceed to notice Mr. Skinner's examination of a tumulus known as "Lime Kiln Barrow," rather more than a quarter of a mile north-west of Priddy Church, and so called from being near a lime-kiln. It measured 75 paces in circumference, and 6 feet in depth. Immediately on removing the earth from the summit, a rude urn was discovered, 16 inches in diameter, turned bottom upwards on a heap of ashes ; and on being examined a flat bronze arrow-head was found, very thin and sharp at the edge, with a rivet hole

at the extremity to fix it to the shaft. The length was about 3 inches, the breadth $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch, the thickness not more than that of a shilling in any part. The edge was sharp enough to mend a pen; this, as Mr. Skinner observes, shows how different a mode they must have had in ancient times of tempering bronze, to that at present used, and accounts for swords having been formed of this metal, as well as arrows and spear-heads.

It is also worth noticing, Mr. Skinner here remarks, "how exactly the shape of this brass (bronze) arrow head was formed after that of similar objects made of flint; the metal was obtained, probably, by the Britons in an unwrought state, of foreign merchants, and fashioned after their own models." No primary interment was found in this barrow, which had evidently never been opened before. "I suppose," says Mr. Skinner, "we missed the centre, or did not dig deep enough."

In an inclosed field, recently walled in, near this spot, were five other barrows, four of which were opened without any thing being found; but Mr. Skinner observes, that the workmen employed by him did their work so badly, that they may have digged wide of the cists, as he was not at the time on the spot to direct them, and could not rectify this mistake except by working the ground all over again.

Four Barrows half a mile to the N.W. of "Ashen Lane Barrows" were subsequently opened.

No. 1. This contained an oval cist of rough stones, covered with a flat one, at the depth of 4 feet; the cist was nearly a yard long, and contained burnt bones and charcoal in large quantities.

No. 2. Burnt bones at a depth of 5 feet, no cist or urn, the ground very wet.

No. 3. No cist and few ashes, but a quantity of charcoal.

No. 4. Nothing found. Being a flat barrow, the centre was not properly ascertained.

Half a mile to the N.W. of the last-mentioned barrow is another called "Green Barrow," from its surface being more verdant than the rest. In this was found, not exactly in the centre, but to the side of it, a quantity of burnt bones, heaped on a flat stone, without any appearance of a cist or urn; among the ashes was discovered a brazen (or

bronze) spear-head, the two nails which fastened it to the haft still remaining in the socket. Near it was found lying "an ivory⁵ pin," upwards of 4 inches in length, rather broken at the point, and of a green colour from having been deposited near the brass; three holes were perforated in the head of this pin. A pin very much resembling this, but made of brass (bronze) was dug up by Sir R. C. Hoare's workmen from a barrow near Abury. The ivory, observes Mr. Skinner, seems to present a strong confirmation of the British commerce with Eastern merchants.

Mr. Skinner states, that he was prevented from examining two other barrows by the rain, which began to fall very heavily. A labourer residing in Mendip informed him that twenty years ago, he and another while removing some stones from a high hillock, about a mile and a half to the north-west of Priddy, called Beacon Barrow, found nearly twenty brazen (bronze) weapons. These he sold to a farmer for two gallons of cyder. They were almost a foot in length and very heavy. Beacon Barrow stands on a high spot, commanding a view of the Welsh hills: and, as its name imports, it was probably used to convey signals by fire.

At Charterhouse, within a quarter of a mile east of Beacon Barrow, are very interesting remains of a Roman station, and a perfect amphitheatre. On visiting this (July 12th, 1858), and on entering a farm-yard to ask the road, the first thing that caught my eye was the upper stone of an old quern. The farmer at once conducted me to the hollow I enquired for, and on the way thither told me that the quern had been dug up in the field beyond the amphitheatre, and that a pot of coins had also been found there. I was delighted to find the amphitheatre so perfect. It is ploughed over and sown with hemp, but the form of it remains, and the entrances are quite distinct. In walking eastward from the amphitheatre, I discovered by the yellow colour of the fresh growing corn, where the settlement had been, just as at Wroxeter you could trace the form of the city by the change in the colour of the growing crops, there being no depth of earth owing to old foundations. The farmer pointed out the site of another amphitheatre, about

⁵ Possibly formed of the tooth of *sea horse*, here called "ivory" by Mr. Skinner.

half a mile distant to the south, beyond the farm, in the direction of Cheddar Cliffs. Sir R. C. Hoare speaks of one, which he says "has been destroyed," but this is probably the one to which he alludes. I understand that in making a drain, two or three years since, the labourers came upon the old Roman road. This was mentioned to me incidentally, and it was described as in very perfect condition.⁶

From the examination of these barrows, Mr. Skinner observes that cremation appears to have been general among the inhabitants of Mendip, for, as he remarks, he had discovered in that district no single instance to the contrary. On this he proposes the following questions :—

1.—Was not the custom of burning the dead observed by a race distinct from those who buried the body entire ?

2.—Were not the vaulted barrows, when the body was interred entire, generally speaking, of more ancient construction than the raised tumulus ?

3.—What distinction is to be made between the Lowes of Cheshire and Derbyshire, and some of the northern counties, and the barrows of the southern and western ?

4.—Did the original inhabitants of Britain before the Belgic invasion bury or burn the bodies ?

In answer to the first question I am disposed to think that burning the dead was practised by a race distinct from those who buried the body entire. The description which Tacitus has given us of the Jews, and their feelings and customs with regard to the dead, seems to throw light upon this enquiry. His words are these,—“*Animasque prælio aut suppliciiis peremptorum, æternas putant. Hinc generandi amor, et moriendi contemptus. Corpora condere, quam cremare, e more Ægyptio; eademque cura, et de infernis persuasio; coelestium contra.*” We remark that he mentions the burial of the dead as a *national peculiarity*, and the manner in which it is mentioned, seems to imply that it was coupled with their belief in the immortality of the soul.—He says, “*e more Ægyptio,*” they did it after the

⁶ Sep. 23, 1858. I have had another opportunity of visiting Charterhouse, and find that the second amphitheatre, said to have been destroyed, was only partially filled up. The farmer told me that his father contemplated filling it

entirely, but that the visit of Sir Richard Hoare caused him to desist and leave it as it now is. The entrances are not here traceable as in the other, but in size it is much the same. The farmers seem now to place more value on these relics.

manner of the Egyptians, with whom they had a similar belief in rewards and punishments hereafter. This I conceive to be the real meaning of "de infernis persuasio." The soul was weighed in the balance and rewarded or rejected according to its acts, as we see represented in paintings on Egyptian tombs and mummy cases or coffins; but while they coincided with the Egyptians in this belief, they differed from them in their belief in a multitude of divinities. There seems good reason to suppose that a belief in the doctrine of a resurrection was originally prevalent in Egypt, and that it was held that after a cycle of years the body should be reanimated, hence the care to embalm it, and construct the sepulchre which should endure the needful time. Hence the sumptuous tombs of the kings and queens, and the pyramids. This is corroborated by the story of the phoenix believed by the Egyptians, which is mentioned by St. Clement in his epistle, as an emblem of the resurrection. If we turn from profane to sacred writings, we find that the patriarch Job, who dwelt in Arabia, believed in the doctrine of the resurrection. We find Abraham covenanting with the children of Heth for the possession of a burying-place, and completing a purchase which was afterwards the burial-place of his family.

But the burial of the human body appears everywhere to have accorded with the simplest and purest feelings of mankind, if it had not its origin in some primæval tradition of the hope of a reunion of soul and body.

The memorable words of Cyrus respecting the disposal of his body after death, seem almost to imply something of the kind. "Τὸ δ' ἐμὸν σῶμα, ὦ παῖδες, ὅταν τελευτήσω, μήτε ἐν χρυσῷ θήτε, μήτε ἐν ἀργύρῳ, μήτε ἐν ἄλλῳ μηδενί, ἀλλὰ τῇ γῇ ὡς τάχιστα ἀπόδοτε· τί γὰρ τοῦτου μακαριώτερον τοῦ γῇ μιχθῆναι, ἢ πάντα μὲν τὰ καλὰ πάντα δὲ τὰγαθὰ φύει τε καὶ τρέφει." Xenoph. Cyri Inst. H. It appears to me that the last sentence, which refers to the earth re-producing all that is good and beautiful, almost breathes a hope which he dared not express. Cicero considered burial to have been the most ancient mode of disposing of the body. "Mihi quidem antiquissimum sepulchræ genus id videtur fuisse, quo apud Xenophontem Cyrus utitur." Plutarch has recorded in his life of Numa, that the Roman lawgiver was buried in a stone coffin, and his laws in another. From the Septuagint version of the Holy Scrip-

tures, we learn that when Joshua was buried, the stone knives with which he had circumcised the Israelites were interred with him. Here we have an early intimation of the burial of weapons, or articles of note or value, with the deceased. *Καὶ ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν πρὸς τοῖς ὁρίοις τοῦ κλήρου αὐτοῦ ἐν Θαμνασαρὰχ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τῷ Ἐφραὶμ ἀπὸ Βορρᾶ τοῦ ὄρους τοῦ Γαλαὰδ· ἐκεῖ ἐθῆκαν μετ' αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ μνήμα εἰς ὃ ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖ τὰς μαχαίρας τὰς πετρίνας, ἐν αἷς περιέτεμε τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ ἐν Γαλγάλοις, ὅτε ἐξήγαγεν αὐτοὺς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου, καθὰ συνεταξεν αὐτοῖς Κύριος· καὶ ἐκεῖ εἰσὶν ἕως τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας.* Joshua xxiv. 30.

This latter portion of the verse, though not in the Hebrew, is nevertheless good as a tradition of what had been done, since we may regard the Septuagint as a paraphrase rather than an exact translation of the Hebrew original.

May we not venture then to reply, in answer to the first question suggested by Mr. Skinner, "Was the custom of burning the dead observed by a race distinct from those who buried the body entire?" that those nations which retained any tradition amongst them of a restoration and reanimation of the human frame, would doubtless continue to bury their dead, but when such an idea became extinct, and the human family became numerous on the face of the earth, and when cities became populous,—when war and pillage often led to the desecration of the sepulchre,—then, as we find in the case of the Greeks and Romans, cremation succeeded to inhumation, until such times as Christianity produced another change, and brought back the ancient custom of burial without burning. This leads to the attempt to answer the second question, "Were not vaulted barrows where the body was interred entire, of more ancient construction than the raised tumulus?"

Whoever examines that very interesting chambered tumulus still preserved entire at Wellow, in Somersetshire, and remarks that no iron tool has apparently been used in its construction, but that the stones are simply split and placed in their position, and similarly with respect to that at Uleybury, in Gloucestershire, may, I think, be inclined to consider these as anterior to the barrows in which bronze weapons are found, implying a certain knowledge of metals not perceptible in these chambered tumuli.⁷

⁷ See Remarks on Chambered Tumuli; Proc. Som. Arch. Soc. vol. viii. and Dr. Thurnam's Memoir on Uleybury in this Journal, vol. xii. p. 316.

I am not prepared to enter into the third question, respecting the Lowes of Cheshire and Derbyshire, not having had opportunity of examining any of them ; but in relation to the fourth question proposed by Mr. Skinner, I would, with all diffidence, suggest that we may attribute the chambered tumuli to the race inhabiting our country previous to the coming of the Belgæ. The barrows in Mendip, examined by Mr. Skinner, may probably be assigned to the Belgic tribe. They are certainly older than the Roman times, as is noticed by Sir R. Colt Hoare, in the construction of the Roman road at Lower Pertwood Farm, Wilts, where the road is carried round outside the barrow.¹ They have no characteristics of Saxon burials, and they seem most properly to occupy the interval between the extinction of the aboriginal race, among whom the practice of burial was observed, and the time of the Roman invasion and subsequent occupation of this country.

¹ Hoare's Ancient Wilts, vol. ii. p. 39.

Mr. W. LONG, author of the valuable memoir on Stanton Drew in this Journal, has communicated a note on earthworks on the hills between Bristol and Clevedon, which deserve careful examination. Upon the brow of Walton Down may be seen a circular enclosure, diam. about 130 paces, surrounded by a vallum and ditch, and approached on the north-east by a winding way, 12 to 15 paces in width. The entrance to the approach is flanked by defences, and the circle would appear to have been a *locus consecratus*. At the end of the Down are about fifteen hut circles, of which three were opened by Mr. Long. Under the thick turf and fine mould, about a foot deep, lay some stones, and underneath them fragments of coarse black pottery, burnt earth, burnt bones, two crystals, and a stone spear-head, as supposed. The mould seemed saturated with animal matter, and the ground hollow. At about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, two thigh bones and other human remains were found ; the body had been drawn up, the size of the cist not allowing it to lie at full length. The skull lay at the side ; it seemed of a savage type, the cheek-bones high, the mouth projecting. The earth beneath was dark and unctuous, and about two feet below was a second deposit of bones, broken pottery, and burnt earth. The cavity was about six feet deep. A singular round cake of clay was thrown out in this excavation. The width of this hut-circle was about 5 feet. The skeleton was pronounced to be that of a female.