

ART. VI.—*Report on the exploration of the Sunbrick disc barrow.* By THE EXCAVATION COMMITTEE OF THE NORTH LONSDALE FIELD CLUB, per JOHN DOBSON.

*Communicated at Carlisle, April 22nd, 1926.*

ON the southern shoulder of Birkrigg, Lat.  $54^{\circ} 9' 25''$  N., Long  $3^{\circ} 6' 0''$  W., about 270 yards S.W. of the cairn which marks the summit, just within the 375 ft. contour line, and in the N.W. corner of the large field, by the western side of which a grass track leads off from the Sunbrick-Ulverston road to strike the highway from Ulverston to Scales, a large disc barrow has been known to a number of the members of the North Lonsdale Field Club for some years and in 1925 it was decided by the Club's Excavation Committee that the season's work should be the examination of this barrow. The work was placed in charge of Mr. W. G. Atkinson, with the assistance and advice of Mr. Jas. Randall, Mr. J. Slater, Messrs. Alfred and Eric Fell and, above all, of Mrs. and Miss Richardson, together with a practised and skilful excavator Mr. R. Stables.

The Sunbrick disc barrow differs slightly from the ordinary form. It is somewhat in the form of an old-fashioned wooden trencher with a slightly raised rim, the vallum. The diameter within the vallum or rampart is approximately 54 feet and the circumference along the top of the vallum about 60 yards. This vallum was found on excavation to be constructed of large blocks of limestone, generally speaking of the size and shape of a door-step, pitched or sloped one against the other, with their longer axes at an angle of about  $45^{\circ}$  to the living rock below, the whole being covered with soil overgrown

with close-set moorland turf and forming a circular ridge, raised only a few inches above the interior surface of the barrow, and visible only to the trained eye until attention had been called to the fact of its existence. From the outside the vallum appeared as a distinct bank, especially on the north and west, but was scarcely visible on the south where the underlying rock rises barely covered with thin turf. Within this circular rampart the "mound" of the barrow (though it scarcely deserves to be called a mound) was found to be constructed of earth, cobble stones and pieces of limestone. The area was rudely paved, mainly with limestone, the natural rock of the moor, and just below the turf. In this it differed from the "Druids' Circle,"  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a mile away due east across the moor, for there the double pavement was composed almost entirely of cobble stones and was covered with a much deeper layer of soil than here. The pavement in the barrow now under examination and the large blocks of limestone below were wedged so tightly together and showed so few signs of having been disturbed that the workers were of opinion that the barrow had never been broken into.

The work on the barrow was commenced by the removal of the turf from a strip two yards wide across the mound from S.E. to N.W. preparatory to the digging of a trial trench of that width from side to side within the vallum. This trench had not proceeded far before it became abundantly evident that the barrow was artificial and constructed as before described. When the trench approached the centre of the circle, two or three patches of black earth covered with large blocks of limestone were found. In this part, under a large stone, 12 inches by 18, lying on the black earth, a small quantity of bones was found, one apparently a portion of a skull showing the suture, a boar's tusk broken, and a small fragment of ornamented bronze, the only piece of wrought metal met with on the site. Mr. Frank Stevens, Curator of the

Salisbury Museum, to whom it was submitted, thinks it is part of the ferrule on the handle of a dagger, and of the bones in this burial (No. 1) Sir Arthur Keith says, "1. Fragment of human fibula. 2. Fragment of right coracoid process of lower jaw. Other fragments, human, not identified. No trace of cremation."

A little nearer the centre of the circle was found burial No. 2, under very similar conditions, except that the bone fragments were here more numerous and of larger size than at No. 1. On these Sir Arthur reports:—"a. Right metatarsal of right great toe, woman. b. Part of fibula, man. c. Part of radius of forearm, woman. d. Upper end of fibula. e. Right side of lower jaw. f. Left thigh-bone of new-born infant or full-time foetus. g. Humerus, ditto. h. Tibia, ditto. i. Part of femur of 7 months foetus." He adds: "The other fragments in this box are too small for identification."

Working westward, three more interments were discovered, Nos. 3, 4, and 5, at depths approximately 18 inches below the turf. No. 3 contained human teeth, small fragments of skulls and other bones. Concerning these Sir Arthur writes:—"a. Right astragalus of a small woman. See facets on upper aspects of neck. They indicate squatting habit. b. 2nd metacarpal of left hand—probably same person as "a." c. Fragment of occipital squama. The teeth in this box are of several people. Two cusped premolars are unerupted—person under 13 years of age." No. 4 burial contained: "a. Left second upper molar, man. b. Fragment of shaft of femur. c. Fragment of occipital. d. Fragment of shaft of femur of foetus nearly at full time. e. Fragment of lower end of ditto, ditto." In burial No. 5 were found fragments of bone deposited under a large flat covering stone and resting on dark earth: "a. Part of left ear-passage. b. Part of sphenoid of skull. c. Goat or sheep. d. Fragment of skull bone."

Later, the searchers found more human bones in the trench. These appeared as though they had been cast indiscriminately and not regularly interred like those under the stones. In digging near the centre, about a foot from No. 3 burial, three small teeth, inferred to be those of a child, were found with a few heaped-up bones.

In excavating the quarter circle to the S.W., 8 feet from the centre, on the removal of two large stones, 3 human teeth were found, but nothing more. One large boulder weighing probably 5 cwts. was moved to one side but no remains were found beneath it. Probably it was on the site when the barrow was first thrown up and had then been left where it lay. Another day's work in this section produced no finds of importance, but in the large trench the searchers found more human teeth, one the tooth of a child, and Mrs. Richardson picked up what was thought by those present to be the lower jaw of a lemming, *Myodes lemmus*, but on closer examination was identified as the jaw of the water vole, *Microtus amphibius*, generally called the water rat. In the lemming the incisor teeth are without grooves but these are distinctly grooved and of the size and colour of those of the water rat, while the molar teeth, in size and triangular zig-zagging, appear to agree with those of the latter creature.

In this same S.W. section, resting on black earth under a large block of limestone a yard from the centre, along with two teeth, a small flint scraper was found—burial No. 6. This scraper and one broken by the pick, when working near No. 17 burial, were the only pieces of flint found on the site. They are both of small size, but the unbroken one is of very regular shape with one side slightly convex and shows secondary flaking very clearly. The broken one has been more nearly circular in shape as the majority of scrapers are, is comparatively thin, and has been through the fire. Of these flints Sir Arthur Keith says, "I do not think the flint implements are more than

chance things; they were probably in the soil when it was thrown up into barrow form."

Mr. Frank Stevens writes:—"I will not contest Sir Arthur Keith's point as to scrapers falling into sites. But it must never be forgotten that in poor settlements, flint was used even in Roman days. . . I think the flint belongs to the site. As you have no local flint, it stands to reason it has been imported for a definite purpose and you would expect to find it worked." In this connection also Mr. W. G. Atkinson's discoveries on a neighbouring site, which he describes in the following paper, will support the theory that these flint scrapers belonged to the builders of the Sunbrick disc barrow. Also when, some years ago, a small barrow situated on the N. side of Birkrigg, about as far from the summit as this is on the S. side, was examined, in a rudely constructed kist, where had been a burial by inhumation previously disturbed, a small flint scraper was found.

Sir Arthur's report on the finds at burial No. 6, is:—"are Lower molar 1st or 2nd left side, on the point of eruption, child of 10 to 12 years. *b.* Milk tooth—canine?"

Three feet six inches to the S.W. of this burial and flint, under another large stone, was found, lying on black earth, one human tooth and a piece of burnt clay, concerning which the report says, "*a.* Right upper 2nd incisor, man's. *b.* Fragment of ochre." This was marked as burial No. 7. Within a foot away, at No. 9, was found what the workers took to be a stone scraper, a pebble split and the edge flaked and rubbed. Whether this is a tool Mr. Stevens is very doubtful and writes, "Shows little use, question if ever used as a tool."

When the work in the west was continued, another burial, No. 8, was found containing two pieces of bone, one of which had been cut at one end and rubbed smooth. Of these bones Sir Arthur writes, "*a.* Right petrous bone of adult skull. *b.* Part of human tibia or shin bone, been

used as a polisher." And later in black earth under another large stone, four minute fragments of bone were discovered. No. 10. On these the remark of Sir Arthur is:—"Cremated fragments—human?" "In all our finds," the workers' note says, "there was very little evidence from burnt bones of the practice of cremation. Almost invariably where black earth was found, remains also were discovered." In this part of the circle the long tooth of a pig was found. Two teeth and a few bones were the only objects found during a long day's work.

At this stage the weather became unfavourable, but work was continued in the N.W. section, and about a yard from the vallum, under a large stone, were found fragments of skull and a piece of burnt clay. This was noted as burial No. 11, and of these bones Sir Arthur says, "*a.* Hinder part of human parietal bone. *b.* Probably splinter of humerus of young person. Has been partially burned."

During the next three days the weather continued unfavourable and little progress was made. The examination of the N.W. section of the barrow, however, was completed, and under a large stone, but without black earth, two teeth were found and marked on the plan as burial No. 12. On these two teeth the report is, "*a.* Right, 1st lower premolar, woman. *b.* Second molar, left side. Sex?"

When the weather improved, work was taken up in the section between north and east. About two yards from No. 12 two human teeth were found under a large stone but no black earth and no further finds were made in that day's work. In this part of the barrow the workman was instructed to dig through the vallum in order that its method of construction might be carefully noted. This was found to be as already described.

In this northern section working eastward a solitary oyster shell was found beneath the pavement, also a

tooth and a quantity of bones. Nearer the centre there was a heap of bones, among which was a piece of an infant's skull and part of a very small jawbone.

Still working from N. to E. there were found four more interments Nos. 13, 14, 15 and 16, all containing human remains, among which were the largest pieces of skull yet unearthed and one or two complete sets of teeth. Of the finds in No. 13 the report says, "*a.* Piece of shoulder blade. *b.* Fragment of os innominatum. *c.* Fragment of jaw of child aged 12 years, see other teeth of this jaw. *d.* Atlas vertebra of a child, perhaps of *c.*"

Of No. 14, Sir Arthur Keith writes, "Long bones,—*a.* Humerus of a newly-born child. *b.* Part of upper jaw of a child of 4 years. *c.* Left temporal bone of a woman. *d.* Right temporal bone of a woman. *e.* Part of temporal bone of another person. *f.* Part of left humerus of a man. *g.* Part of left femur of a woman? It shows great flattening or platymeria. *h.* Lower end of right tibia, man; shows squatting facets. *h*<sup>1</sup>. Lower end of right tibia of a woman, squatting facets. *j.* Lower end of right femur, woman. *k.* Part of forehead of a woman. *l.* Part of tibia *h*<sup>1</sup> *m.* Top of left femur of a man. *n.* Left 5th metatarsal of a woman. *o.* Right os calcis of a man. *p.* Fragment of hip bone. *r.* Part of a woman's fibula. In this box parts of a man's and a woman's skeletons, of a child and of a foetus of full time." "Skull bones," in No. 14. "*a.* Super-occipital bone and *b.* parietal bone of the same individual. *c.* Parieto-occipital region of skull. *d.* Skull of a child 4 to 6 years. *e.* Left malar bone. Fragments of three, perhaps four, individuals."

From burial No. 15, parcel with fragments of skull, he finds, "*a.* Left half of a young person's frontal bone; probably of a woman about 20 years. The interior shows numerous venous openings and a perforation between the left frontal acorus and interior; a natural perforation. The forehead is of a type met with in women of the West

country. *b.* Probably the upper jaw of the above, although the teeth are very large for a woman. The wisdom tooth is erupting. *c.* 1st upper. *d.* Lower molar of the above. *e.* Right ulna, woman's. *f.* Fibula, woman's."

On find in No. 16 his report is, " Lower jaw of a woman; small face, chin slightly developed. She was about 20 years old or a little more; right wisdom tooth coming into position. Teeth in splendid condition, no caries. The jaw is of a kind not uncommon among Welsh women or other breeds of the west. Three teeth of upper jaw may belong to same individual. Bigonial width (at the angle of the jaw), 90 mm. Depth of symphysis 25.5 mm. *a.* Greater part of left parietal bone; may go with lower jaw to same individual, numerous small fragments apparently of same skull. *c.* Upper part of shaft of left femur—rather stout to be a woman's—more likely of a man. *d.* Head of the above bone. *e.* 7th cervical vertebra—likely of a woman. *f.* Part of a woman's clavicle. *g, g<sup>1</sup>, g<sup>2</sup>,* Joints (phalanged) of fingers. *h.* Terminal joint of big toe."

In this same N.E. section was found one more burial, No. 17, and near by the small flint scraper broken by the pick, which was said above to have been through the fire; also a piece of partly fused iron-stone. Of the bones Sir Arthur reports, "*a.* Part of left sphenoid of skull. *b.* Upper pre-molar. *c.* Lower molar 2nd. *d.* Right radius, lower end, man's. *e.* Head of femur, man's. *f, f<sup>1</sup>* Parts of man's tibia. *g<sup>1</sup>* Upper part of fibula. *l.* Part of heel bone, os calcis. Iron-stone? Slag?"

Of bones found in the trench he says, "*a.* Right tibia, small man; shows bowing (slight rickets) and side to side flattening. *b.* Part of lumbar vertebra. *c.* Part of left scapula. *d.* Upper central incisor. *e.* ? Bone of foetal or young lamb. Fragments of human skulls of varying ages. Miscellaneous teeth. Only one shows caries, one shows very deep wear."

In the miscellaneous collection from the centre of the mound Sir Arthur finds, "*a.* Fragment of humerus, woman? *b.* Right cheek or malar bone, woman. *c.* Part of parietal bone," and adds, "It would not repay my labour were I to identify all these fragments. At least six individuals of different ages and sex are represented, probably more than six. All parts of the skeleton are present, also sheep, pig and smaller mammals. One minute fragment may have been burned."

In the parcel with the oyster shell, "*a.* is the tibia of a youth or small woman. *b.* Part of right scapula of a man. *b*<sup>1</sup>. Part of the above. *c.* Upper right second molar, old man, long roots. *d.* Part of humerus, child of 4 years. *e.* Part of hip bone."

Other miscellaneous finds in a box with no number include "desiccated laminae of bone, not human; unidentified, *a.* Fragment of burned bone. *b.* 2nd left lower molar, unerupted. Pieces of coal? *c.* Lower incisor of an old person. *d.* ditto."

From another box, unnumbered, but of finds from near the centre of the mound, north side, but under no covering stone he mentions "*a.* Super-occipital of full-time child. *b.* Another part of same bone. *c.* Right thigh bone of full-time child. *d.* Tibia of human foetus. *e.* and *f.* Two milk teeth of a child under 2 years. *g.*, *g*<sup>1</sup>. Parts of left ulna, adult, woman? *h.* 4th metatarsal of foot; probably of the above. *i.*, *i*<sup>1</sup>. Parts of temporal bone. *k.* Part of lower jaw of a woman. *l.*, *l*<sup>1</sup>, *l*<sup>2</sup>. Fragments of ribs of the same."

Two days were spent in examining the last small section of the mound, in taking measurements by Mr. Slater, for the plan, in restoring the surface to its original condition and replacing the turf, so that in the course of a few months an ordinary observer will be quite unable to see any signs of the barrow having been so thoroughly examined.

In his covering letter to Mr. Atkinson, Sir Arthur Keith

so well sums up the conclusions to be drawn from the examination of this site that this report may well be brought to a close with a few quotations. Under the date Oct. 21st, 1925, he writes:

“ The opinion I have formed is that the barrow was used and the burials were made in Late Celtic times—perhaps down as late as Roman times. I notice that all the bones are still permeated with black mould—that always means that we are not dealing with really ancient burials. . . . I enclose lists of the contents of each box and parcel and you will see there must have been a number of people buried in the barrow—ten at least,—perhaps a score, men, women, children of all ages and even the unborn or newly born. I should think burials were made at diverse times and that a new burial led to the disturbance of those made previously, hence the scattered nature of the fragments, for parts of the same bone occur in separate parts of the barrow. I wonder that there is not more evidence of cremation. I should have said there is only a fragment or two of partly burned bone; nothing to suggest that cremation was practised.

I infer that the soil of this barrow is a bone-consuming soil; hence the sparseness of your finds. I do congratulate you on the careful way you have carried out this investigation.”

The thanks of the North Lonsdale Field Club are hereby expressed, to Sir Arthur Keith, for his great kindness in reporting on the finds, to Mr. Frank Stevens, F.S.A., who gave his opinion on the piece of bronze and the flints, to the Rev. W. M. D. La Touche who so readily gave permission to dig on the site, to Mr. W. Case, the tenant, for so kindly overlooking any damage done to his pasture, and to all the workers already mentioned by name in the early part of this report, but specially to Mr. W. G. Atkinson, who beside superintending the work did much manual labour in the course of the exploration.

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