

A WOMAN OF WESSEX CULTURE

By H. B. A. RATCLIFFE-DENSHAM, F.S.A.

Olim et compluris alias venerati sunt, non adulatione nec tamquam facerent deas. Tacitus. Germania.

A solitary Bowl Barrow occupies a commanding position, 10yds. above the upper chalk pit on the west slope of Chanctonbury Hill (Nat. Grid Ref. TQ12841205). Mr. L. V. Grinsell listed it in 1934,¹ and mentioned a dip in the centre: it was then 3½ft. high and 14 paces in diameter.

The site is approximately 660ft. above sea level and has a downward slope to the W.N.W. of one in seven: it lies just above the junction of the middle and the upper chalk, in the *Holaster planus* zone, and just below a wide area of clay with flints. The prehistoric "greenway" from the west passes close to the south and there is a superb view across the Weald, towards Wessex.

The mound was surveyed and excavated in 1958-59, as it was in imminent danger of destruction by the plough. Mr. J. Goring, the owner of the site, gave every possible facility for the excavation.

SURVEY AND EXCAVATION

The area was divided into 5ft. squares, with sides N-S and E-W (True bearings). Altitude readings were taken at each of the intersections with a clinometer. The survey was drawn with 6in. contours (Fig. 1).

The S.E. quadrant was excavated completely down to bare chalk (Plate 1). The excavation was continued westward as a section through the centre of the mound, to cut the western sector of the ditch. This section was widened to define the central cyst and again, further west, to define a modern trench. Other sections were cut in the S.W. and N.W. quadrants to define the ditch, as shown in Fig. 1. A cremation was excavated in the N.E. quadrant.

DESCRIPTION

The barrow was found to be an oval mound of chalky loam, surrounded by a ditch. The longer diameter of the oval, running approximately east and west, was 41ft. between the inner sides of the ditch; while the shorter diameter was 38ft. The average width of the ditch was 3½ft. at the top and 2ft. at the bottom; the average depth was 1½ft. The top of the mound, near to the centre, was 21in. above the old turf line, and 42in. above a line joining the modern surface levels at the east and west peripheries respectively. This was partly due to the well-known fact that the old, surface soil, under a mound, is protected from erosion, and partly to the siting of this barrow on a slope which was convex from east to west. Beneath the centre of the mound was a rectangular grave (Fig. 1), 7ft. 4in. x 3ft. 9in., cut into the old surface to a depth of 1ft. 9in. Its long axis was 9 deg. true. It contained a

¹ *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 75, p. 253. 51 N.W. No. 8.

crouched inhumation (Plate II). The central depression, which was mentioned by Grinsell, had been nearly ploughed away by the time of the survey, but the soil over the grave contained noticeably fewer large flints than that over the rest of the mound, which suggested a previous, local disturbance. This was possibly dated by a medieval potsherd which lay 8in. below the surface, at the periphery of the area.

The old turf line in the vicinity of the grave was covered by a layer of chalk sludge, 2in.-3in. thick: a rabbit hole ran down through it into the north end of the grave. Near the end of the hole was a phalanx from a hand which was missing from the inhumation. Close by the phalanx was an ogival, bronze dagger (Plate III). Two feet to the east of the grave was a cairn of large flints, reaching down to the natural chalk and containing some carbonised wood. This suggested the presence of a vertical post, erected contemporaneously with the barrow (Fig. 1. P). The old turf line to the east of this cairn could not be traced. This part of the barrow consisted of a capping of large flints on chalk rubble which contained many flint flakes, animal bones, mussel shell, charcoal and tiny sherds of rough pottery. An unurned cremation lay just below the modern turf line, 4ft. inside the east sector of the ditch (Fig. 1. C). It had been pulverised by the plough, and had no associated artifacts.

Ten feet to the west of the central cyst was a straight trench, 12ft. long, cut down through the barrow, a foot deep into the natural chalk (Fig. 1. D). The alignment of this trench was 5 deg. true. It was filled with plough soil and contained also rotten branches of gorse, a 1945 farthing, a round of service ammunition, part of a mortar bomb and a worn sherd of a Bronze age pot. It was, presumably, a military slit trench which commanded a wide view down the Findon wind gap to the sea. The north-western face of the mound, which was the steepest and had the lowest position, was carefully revetted by a wall of large flints. The ditch varied somewhat in depth and width; it was filled, mainly, with chalk rubble. In the S.E. sector the inner part of the filling contained pieces of charcoal; it was noticeably looser than the outer part, which was very tightly packed with flints. In the east part of this sector lay the remains of a carbonised timber, about 3ft. long and 3in. wide. This suggested that the upper, eastern face of the barrow may have had some sort of timber revetting, or that the ditch may have been used for a palisade.

THE INHUMATION

This was the skeleton of a young woman, lying crouched on her left side, on the chalk floor of the grave, with her head towards the south-west (Plate II). The posture was such that the highest part of the skeleton would have been the right hand, lying on the right knee. All of this hand was missing, except one phalanx which lay near the dagger in the soil above, whither they had,

CHANCTONBURY

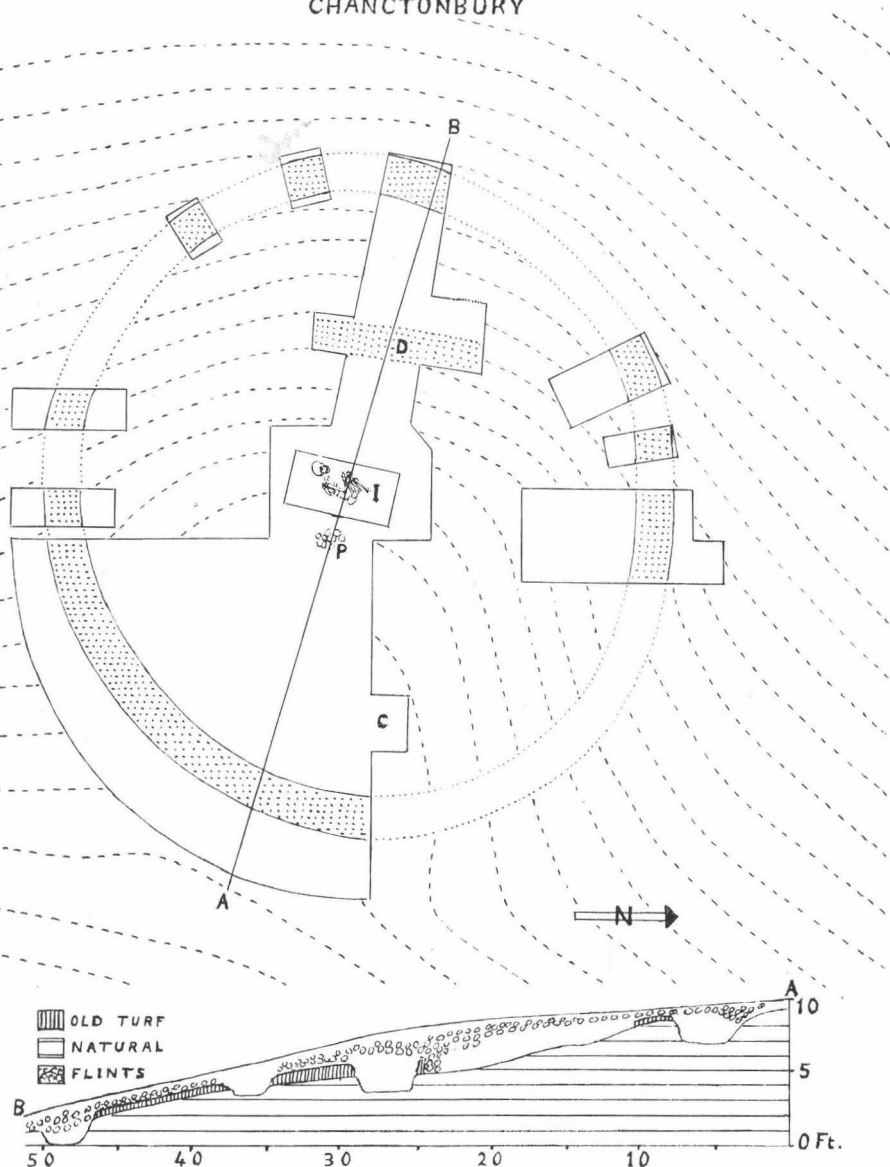


Fig. 1

presumably, been moved by the rabbits or the medieval diggers. The skeleton, which was otherwise intact, lay close to the west side of the grave, with a fragment of carbonised wood and a pea-sized piece of crude pottery in front of the face. A large flint rested against the left shoulder. There were no other grave goods. The body must have been buried with the arms and the legs trussed up, possibly in a bag; but the weight of the soil had forced back the right shoulder and hip, breaking the shoulder blade, the ribs and the upper part of the thigh bone. The bones of the left side, which was in contact with the floor of the grave, were largely eaten away by humic acid: those of the right side were, mostly, well preserved. The woman died in her early thirties, judging by the sutures of her skull, the wear of her joints and teeth, and the condition of her first, sacral, intervertebral joint. The stature, calculated from the eight main long bones, was 5ft. 5in.

The head was of medium size and rather high. The forehead was smooth, lofty and narrow, because the temple, on either side, was strongly moulded by the muscles of mastication. Behind the temples the skull widened considerably, becoming broadest behind the ears, where the mastoid portion was abnormally cellular. The back was flattened after the manner of the typical broad head of the British Bronze Age, with a slight suggestion of a "chignon."

The base of the nose was well shaped and of average width, but it became disproportionately wide lower down. The eyebrows were smooth and flat. The distance between the eyes was close to the average, as were their size and proportions. Both jaws were relatively high and narrow and both cheek bones were very much flattened, so that the whole face, like the forehead above, was distinctly narrow and out of harmony with the rest of the head. The line of the lower jaw was softened and rounded, although it was strongly made, with a firm, rather pointed chin. The teeth were unduly large, and very crowded, especially in front, where they projected markedly. There was a regular edge to edge bite, with pronounced occlusal wear causing even exposure of the dentine and associated with great development of the muscles of mastication. The line of occlusion was not horizontal, but curved evenly down on each side to a nadir opposite the first molars. The crowding in the upper jaw had forced the right central incisor into the mid line. The left, lateral incisor was apparently, congenitally absent; an X-ray photograph, however, showed well a formed lateral incisor in the pulp cavity of the upper left, central incisor (Plate IV). As a result of the gross crowding in the lower jaw the left, central incisor was displaced to the right of the mid line. The right, lateral incisor had been rotated anti-clockwise through a right angle and compelled to erupt on the lingual aspect of the canine, above which it projected for a distance of 3.5mm. The aberrant eruption of this lateral incisor had not occurred until the middle

twenties and had further caused it to wear a deep groove in the side of the first bicuspid, behind the canine. A sequel was the replacement of the original grinding action of the teeth by a crushing action. This was confirmed by a marked difference in the development of some of the muscles of mastication and in the wear in the joints of the jaws on the two sides. An additional sequel must have been a soreness of the tongue due to friction against the projecting point. This may well have been associated with some difficulty in pronouncing dental consonants. Under Bronze Age catering conditions and in the absence of a dentist, indigestion might be expected to have supervened.

The neck was of average length, but decidedly thick, moderately muscled and not quite straight. The shoulders were broad; the right being higher and slightly more strongly muscled than the left. Their joints were turned somewhat backwards, and their upper parts shortened. The upper arm bones were relatively short and slender, with good sized upper ends: they were less curved, but more twisted than is usual. The elbow and wrist were small and the forearm relatively long and slender. The surviving parts of the left hand showed that it was small and flexible, with a relatively long palm and short thumb and fingers.

The front and the back of the chest were badly decayed, but its other parts showed no unusual feature. The lower spine, which was largely intact, had less than average backward curvature and was moderately muscled. The pelvis was markedly female and of fair size. The lower limbs showed unmistakable evidence that the woman was accustomed to squat on her haunches with her knees together and her feet turned outwards. The hip joints were of average size, strong and worn in their upper quadrants. The thigh bones were straight, slender and relatively short; they were moderately buttressed, but not flattened. There was a moderate degree of "knock knee," but very little inward twist of the bottom of the thigh bone. The knees were of moderate size, somewhat out-turned and showed definite signs of squatting. The knee-caps were unusually small and also showed changes due to squatting. The shin bones were very slender and narrow, with their lower ends twisted outwards through 45° and their upper ends bent backwards through 15° . They were relatively long, the left being slightly the longer, as is usual. The ankles were small, with extensions caused by squatting; the bones on their outer sides were bent inwards and had their sub-cutaneous surfaces roughened, possibly by anklets or some form of binding. The feet were small, relatively long, turned outwards and unusually flexible.

THE BRONZE DAGGER

A fine example, in bronze, of an ogival, Wessex-style dagger, which belonged to Ap Simon's¹ Camerton-Snowhill type (Plate III).

¹ University of London Institute of Archaeology, *Ann. Report*, X, pp. 37-62.

It was intact, apart from its haft, and its three rivets were all in position. Its weight, with the rivets, was exactly 3oz. Its maximal length was 131mm., its maximal width was 51mm. at 22mm. from its base, and the maximal thickness of its mid rib was 6mm. at 37mm. from its base.

A group of five parallel grooves commenced at each lateral rivet hole and ran down towards the point, between the midrib and the edge, on each side of each face of the blade. For the greater part of their course the grooves in each group ran at a distance of 1mm. from one another. First, the innermost of the five turned inwards, over the midrib, to meet its fellow in the centre line, on each face, 39mm. from the point. Then the next groove curved across, in its turn, to meet its fellow of the opposite side 37mm. from the point. Subsequently, the other three grooves followed suit, meeting their fellows in the centre line at 35mm., 26mm. and 2mm. from the point respectively, on each face. Some of the grooves were slightly out of the true for part of their courses. The rivets were 6mm. in diameter; the lateral ones were 16mm. long, and the central one was 17mm. long

The chemical analyses of the dagger and of the rivets were:—

Cu	Sn	Pb	As	Sb	Ni	Bi	Fe	Zn	Ag	Mg	
84.8	14.3	.53	.17	—	.172	.004	.01	.04	.046	.005	Dagger
83.4	14.6	1.39	.18	.05	.328	.004	.007	.04	.064	.005	Rivets

Mrs. E. E. Richards, of the Archaeological Laboratory, Oxford, who kindly made the analyses, observed:—‘On the bases of the analyses, done in this laboratory, the differences between this and the Wiltshire dagger are within the statistical fluctuations in composition found in objects of the same period.’

THE CREMATION

This was very incomplete, comminuted and diffused, either because of soil creep, root growth, or deep ploughing. It was accompanied by a number of burnt flint flakes and by a much worn, unburnt, circular, flat flint scraper. Small fragments from the neuro-cranium, a cervical vertebra and centres of the shafts of femur, tibia, humerus clavicle and phalanx were identified. They represented a single, small individual. The diameter of a piece of tibia was consistent with death at an age of 8-10 years. No teeth or epiphyseal material survived.

A small, burnt fragment of a human femur and one of a tibia lay near to the central post hole and obviously came from a cremation which had been disturbed. They belonged to an individual who was bigger than the subject of the one which was described above.

THE POTTERY

A pea-sized, unidentifiable sherd lay by the skull of the inhumed woman.

A worn, buff, coarse gritted sherd came from the upper part of the grave; its fabric was typical of the local, middle or late Bronze Age.

Part of the base of a smooth, grey, hand-made, Iron Age pot was found near the central post. It was about 10in. in diameter and was stained with carbon, both inside and out. It was near to the charred fragments of femur and tibia and may well have contained the cremation of which they formed a part.

A number of sherds of a small, dark grey, hand-made pot were situated half way down in the filling of the ditch. This vessel, which was about 3in. in diameter, had a thick, flat base and a thin, slightly everted rim which was flattened at the edge. The paste was smooth, rather unevenly mixed, with medium fine grit and unevenly fired. There were traces of a tarmac slip. Exactly similar pots were found by the writers on Barns Farm Down, the next hill to the west, across the Findon "wind gap," in a small settlement which belonged to the A2 (ceramic) division of the local Iron Age. The barrow is visible, on the sky line, across the valley from the site of this settlement, which is also adjacent to the greenway along the top of the escarpment. A few worn, Roman sherds were scattered in the surface soil over various parts of the barrow.

FLINT

Eighty-nine definitely struck, white patinated flakes and five cores were picked out of the great quantity of broken flints which occurred throughout the substance of the mound. 32 flakes showed secondary working; a dozen had been trimmed into knives; 11 into rather flat scrapers of various shapes. There was one plane, one miniature celt and one scraper, worked from a core. The standard of workmanship was exceedingly poor.

MOLLUSCA

These were identified by Mr. G. H. Barnacle. They were predominantly *Helix nemoralis* and *Pomatias elegans*; the latter tending, as usual, to cluster round the organic remains. There were, in addition, one or more specimens of the following species—*Helix aspersa*; *Arianta arbustorum*; *Helicella caperata*; *Helicella gigaxi*; *Marpessa laminata*; *Cochlicopa lubrica*. All these occur on the Downs at the present day, but the specimens from the barrow were uniformly patinated white.

CHARCOAL

This was identified at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The wood on the old surface, beneath the barrow, consisted, almost entirely, of Ash *Fraxinus sp.* The timbering in the ditch was also composed of this wood. The probable, central post was Oak, *Quercus robur*, though fragments of another species of Oak, too compressed and disintegrated for identification, occurred in that area.

Small amounts of Dog-wood, Cornus and Apple, Malus, together with a quantity of Deal, came from the vicinity of the modern, military trench.

DISCUSSION

Only two other inhumations from the latter part of the Early Bronze Age appear to have been recorded in Sussex. Both were under large, round barrows and both were accompanied by knife-daggers.

The human remains in the coffin under the famous Hove barrow¹ were numerous small fragments of carious bone, apparently charred, some of which were picked out.

The skeleton from the Black Burgh² was crouched in a grave, on its left side, with the face towards the north-east. The bones were so decayed that, although the position was marked with sufficient clearness, they could not be removed entire, with the exception of a portion of the pelvis and some of the leg bones. The late Professor W. H. Flower reported on fragments of the skull and of the pelvis and the right femur. They belonged to a youngish, adult woman who was slightly made and not very muscular. The teeth were healthy, with moderate, flat wear and no caries. The dentition was complete, except for the right, upper third molar which had been lost during life. The femur was 17½ in. long, which gives a stature of 5ft. 4½ in. using modern regression formulae. It was further noted at the excavation that the fingers of both hands were intact and were almost touching the chin, while the dagger lay two feet away from the feet. Unfortunately, all trace of these bones has been lost and there is no more information about them. The subject of the mutilation of skeletons inhumed under barrows has been discussed recently by Ashbee.³

The main measurements and indices of the inhumed skeleton are appended as a note. A much fuller list and an anatomical description of the bones are available on application to Barbican House.

APPENDIX I

Anatomical Note on the Inhumation

Skull	Cranial capacity. (Lee).	1446cc.	Maximal Length.	177mm.
	Sagittal Arc.	360mm.	Frontal Arc.	124mm.
	Parietal Arc.	118mm.	Occipital Arc.	118mm.
	Maximal Breadth.	141mm.	Minimal Post-orbital Width.	92mm.
	Auriculo-Bregmatic Height.	123mm.	Basion-Bregmatic Height.	136mm.
	Length-Breadth Index.	80	Length-B.B. Height Index.	77
	Upper Facial Height.	71mm.	Upper Facial Index.	56.5
	Total Facial Height.	117mm.	Total Facial Index.	93

¹ *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 9, p. 121.

² *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 280-7.

³ *The Bronze Age Round Barrow in Britain*. (Phoenix House, 19), p. 79.

	Gnathic Index. 93	Nasal Index. 51
	Orbital Index. 82.5	Upper Alveolar Index. 118
	Mandibular Length. 75mm.	Bi-Gonial Width. 92mm.
Upper	Clavicle Length. 146mm.	Humerus Length. 314mm.
Limb	Humeral Head Diameter. 43mm.	H. Index Robusticus. 16.8
	Radius Length. 241mm.	R. Index Robusticus. 15.4
Lower	Femur Length. 436mm.	F. Index Robusticus. 18.4
Limb	Femoral Head Diameter. 41.7mm.	Meric Index. 83
	Pilasteric Index. 112	Anatomical to Load Axis Angle. 15°
	Tibia Length. 376mm.	Cnemic Index. 66
	Retroversion of Head. 15°	T. Index Robusticus. 18.1
	Squatting facets present on the Tibia and the Astragalus.	
	The skull was crypto-zygous.	
	The right Olecranon Fossa was perforated.	