

XI.—EXCAVATION OF TWO BRONZE AGE BARROWS AT KIRKHAUGH, NORTHUMBERLAND.

BY HERBERT MARYON.

[Read on 26th February, 1936.]

The little town of Alston, Cumberland, climbs uneasily out of the valley of the South Tyne, about thirty-five miles west of Newcastle upon Tyne. Its market-place is over 1,000 feet above sea-level, and, to the west, the open heather-clad fells stretch to where Crossfell, the highest point on the Pennines, cuts out the sunset. About a mile to the north of Alston, downstream, the Ayle Burn joins the main river and separates Cumberland from the Northumbrian parish of Kirkhaugh. A mile away, on the opposite side of the main stream, at its junction with Gilderdale Burn, and just beyond the Maiden Way, are the well-marked ditches of the Roman camp known as Whitley Castle.

The land on either side of Ayle Burn is the property of the Greenwich Hospital Trustees, and is farmed by Mr. W. Raine of Randalholme Hall. This farm-house has a pele tower and an interesting history. Dotted about on a little plateau on the Northumbrian side of the Ayle Burn, and just below the 1,200 foot level, are the School House of Kirkhaugh and a number of derelict farm buildings. The barrows with which we are concerned are situated in the first and fourth fields respectively, to the south-east of the School House of Kirkhaugh as shown in the map. (Fig. 1.)

Credit for their discovery must be given to Mr. W. Lee of South Tyne cottage, Alston, who, half a century ago, was a scholar at Kirkhaugh school. A keen observer, from youth upwards he had believed that these mounds were burial places, though the local opinion, shared apparently by the Ordnance surveyors, was that they were mine dumps. A few months ago Mr. Lee spoke of his belief to an old scholar of mine, Mr. Brian Mullen, of Gateshead, and he, in his turn, told me. So it came about that an expedition to the site confirmed Mr. Lee's discovery. Mr. Lee was certain that within his lifetime the barrows had not been disturbed. Through the kind offices of Mr. E. S. Broughton, the local representative of the Greenwich Hospital Trustees, and of Mr. Raine, permission to excavate was obtained, and work began on September 18th, and was continued on the three following days, and on October 12th. Mr. J. W. Alderson, of the School House, Kirkhaugh, kindly assisted me throughout the excavations.

Barrow No. 1 is situated in the first field to the east of that in which the School House stands. Its centre is situated 131 feet from the curved field wall to the N.N.W., and 42 feet from the wall to the W.S.W. It is about 22 feet in diameter and, at first sight, appears to be about 3 feet in height. But, on investigation, it was found to rest upon a little knoll or ridge of limestone, which is responsible for about half the height. (Fig. 2.)

On removal of the turf a continuous layer of flattish stones was found to cover the mound. The stones seemed to have been piled from the centre outwards, the later ones overlapping the lower borders of those previously laid. The stones forming this layer varied in size from a few inches to 2 feet in length, and many of the larger ones were from 50 to 100 lbs. in weight. They were slabs of the local limestone. This protective layer over the centre of the mound seemed to be quite unbroken, and indicated that the barrow had not previously been examined,

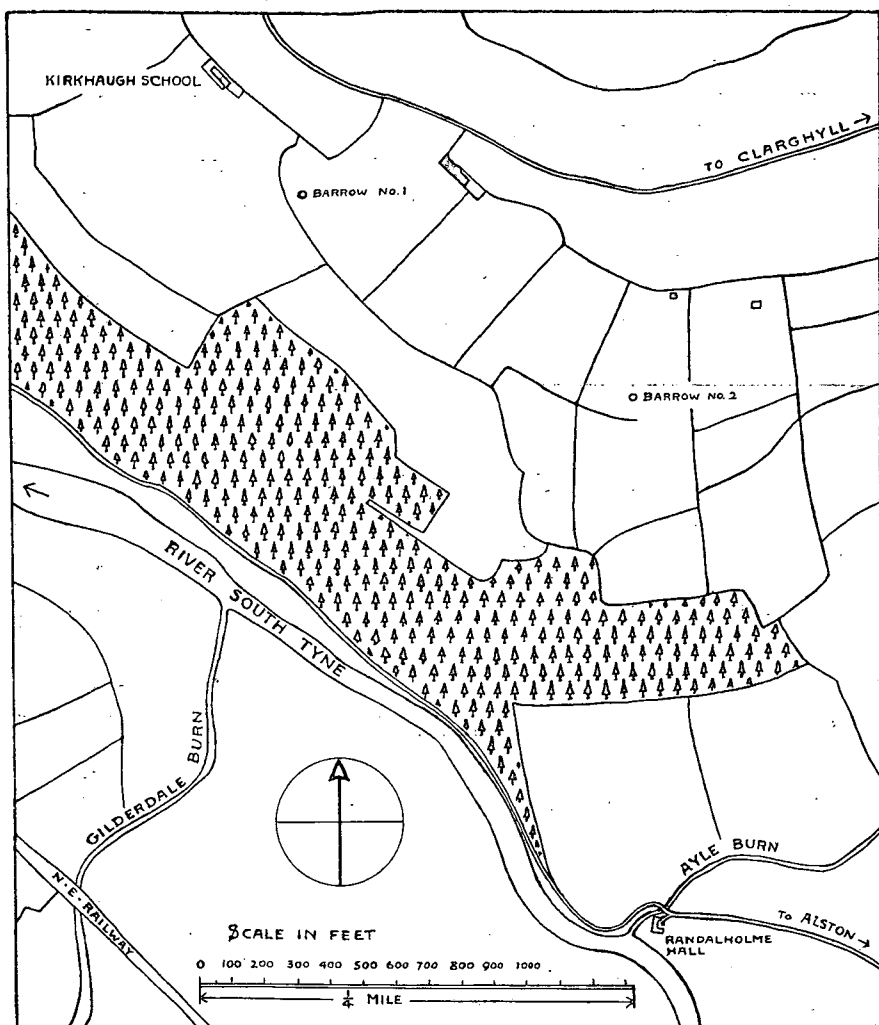


FIG. I.

though, as shown below, some comparatively recent penetration, probably by rabbits, must be postulated.

On removal of the layer of stones the mass of the barrow at the centre was found to be of a light earth inter-mixed with small stones. This broke up very easily, and only at one point, near the centre, as described below, was material found of such a consistency that a mass squeezed in the hand would cohere as a ball. The earth stratum was about a foot deep at the centre of the barrow, and immediately below it, native limestone rock was found. This proved to be a rounded knoll, part of a small ridge which runs parallel to the escarpment of the hill. Near

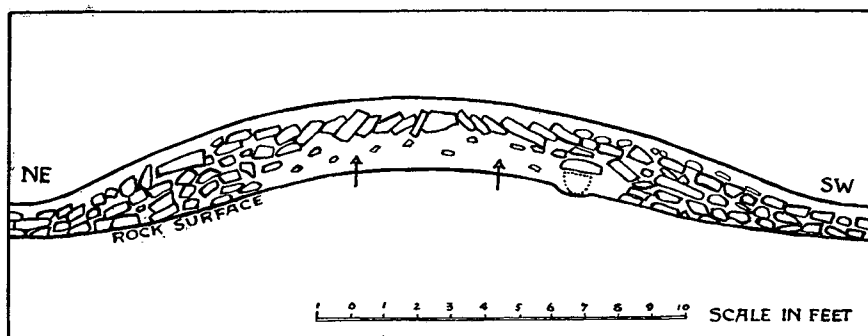


FIG. 2.

the centre of the barrow a natural cleft in the rock, measuring about $24 \times 9 \times 6$ inches deep, was found to be full of clay.

Careful search was made for any trace of the body. No fragments of bone were found, but, near the centre of the barrow, a number of patches of greasy, greyish clay were observed on the rock surface. These were in a position that a body might have occupied, but beyond this, nothing can be affirmed. With the exception of the food-vessel, which was found at a point about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet south-west of the centre, all the finds came from a space, 3 or 4 feet in diameter, at the centre of the barrow, as marked by the

arrows in fig. 2, and from within a few inches of the rock surface. Except a few fragments of charcoal, nothing of interest was discovered beyond these limits. The rock surface over the whole area excavated was cleared and swept.

In addition to (a) the food-vessel which, when found, had been crushed flat, there were discovered, scattered irregularly through the earth at the place indicated (fig. 2):

- (b) 1 gold ear-ring.
- (c) 1 flint arrowhead.
- (d) 1 flint saw.
- (e) 6 worked flakes of flint.
- (f) 2 flint cores, and a number of unworked flakes.
- (g) 1 whetstone, or hone.
- (h) 1 coarse rubber of sandstone.
- (i) 1 rough nodule of glazed ware.
- (j) 1 vase or mug handle.
- (k) a fragment of coarse pottery, a nodule of iron pyrites, and some pieces of charcoal.

(a) Fig. 2. The food-vessel had been crushed, probably by the large flat stone, weighing about $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt., which was found above it. The fabric was sodden with water and very soft, so it was not possible to recover every fragment. It is of dull red ware, grey-black at the core where un-reached by fire. Its measurements are $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the base, 8 inches at the rim and about 6 inches in height. The whole of its outer surface is decorated with impressions of a fine cord, which had been wound round it from bottom to top, when soft, leaving a series of parallel impressed lines about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch to $\frac{3}{16}$ inch apart. This vessel is like the example at the British Museum, from Greenwell's Barrow XIII on Sherburn Wold, East Riding, Yorks. (Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, vol. 1, xxxii, no. 69). It should be dated late or middle-late Bronze Age.

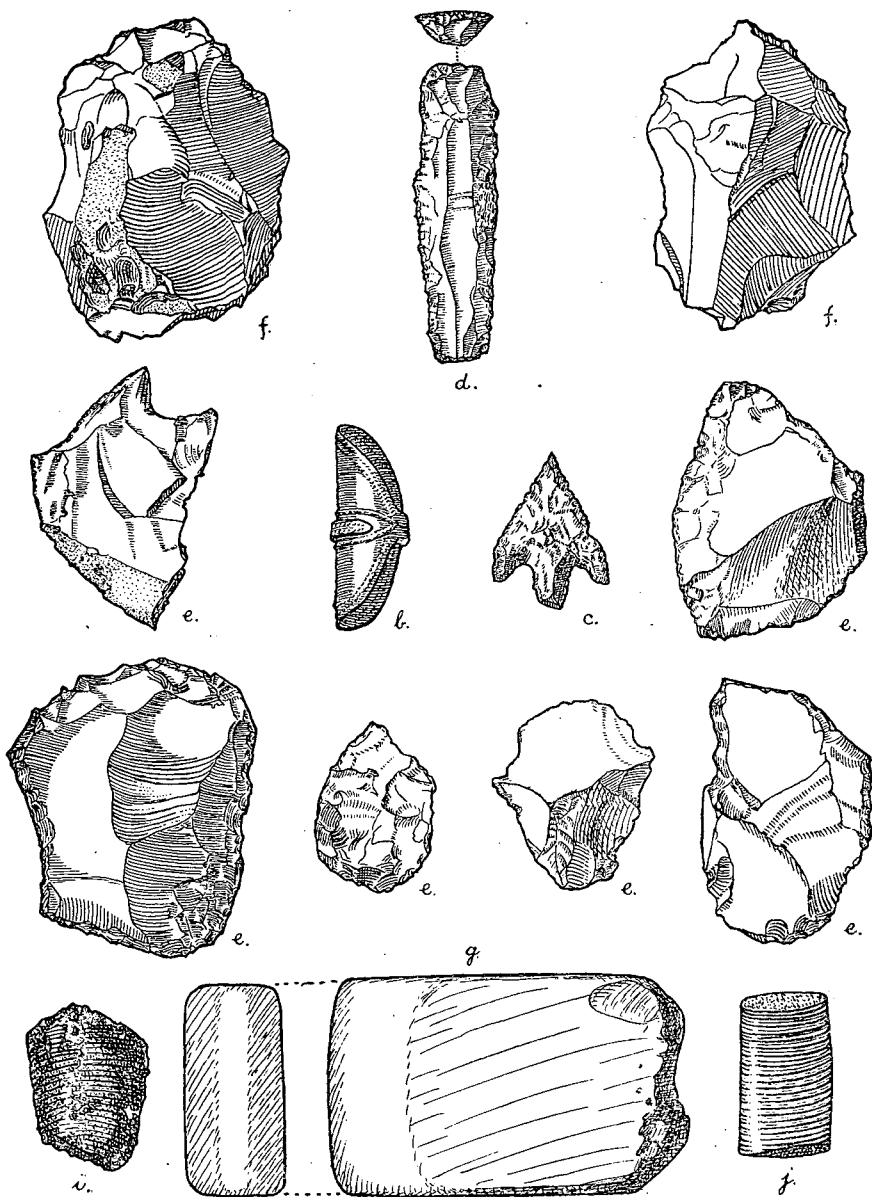
(b) The ear-ring (fig. 3, b) is formed from a thin oval

plate of gold, measuring 34 mm. long by 28 mm. wide, with a flat tongue, 30 mm. long and 3.5 mm. wide, intended to pass through the ear perforation, projecting from the centre of one side.

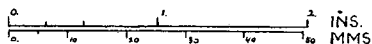
Round the edge of the oval plate and along the edges of the tongue, runs a double row of repoussé bosses, 0.75 mm. apart, with a space of about 1 mm. between the rows. The bosses are omitted just where, when in use, the tongue would pass through the ear. The bosses were probably produced by means of a pointed metal, or possibly a bone punch, while the sheet gold rested upon a hard wood or lead block. Across the body of the ear-ring, on either side of the tongue as coiled, is a ridge. These two ridges meet at an angle opposite the point of the tongue, V-fashion. These ridges were driven up from the back of the sheet metal by a blunt tracer (repoussé tool). The same, or a similar tool, was then employed on the front surface of the gold plate to depress the ground slightly on either side of each ridge. The whole ear-ring was then coiled into a nearly complete cylinder of about 10 mm. diameter, with the tongue outside. The gold is of good colour, and has a dull burnished appearance. Under the microscope, however, as is frequently the case with ancient gold work, it seems to be slightly porous, probably owing to the disappearance of the surface alloys under the action of salt and other solvents in the soil.

The weight of the ear-ring is 2.01 grams (1 dwt. 7 grains Troy). A gold ear-ring of similar character is in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.¹ This was one of a pair found in a stone cist at Orton, Morayshire. It measures about 4 inches in length, and is in its original coiled condition. The whereabouts of the other member of the pair is unknown. No other examples in their original coiled condition are known. In the National Museum, Dublin, there are three gold ear-rings of this

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. viii, p. 30. Illustrated also in Evans's *Ancient Bronze Implements*, fig. 492.



SCALE



INS.
MMS.

KIRKHAUGH

FIG. 3.

type,² measuring respectively about $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches, 5 inches and 5 inches in length. The first of these was found in co. Down: the find-spot of the others is unrecorded. All three have been uncoiled. The first has a border of three rows of dots, the last two are without decoration.

In the British Museum there is a gold ornament which, in form and in method of construction, seems to be related to these ear-rings. It was found with a gold chain of spiral rings in the tomb of a girl at Merida, Spain. It consists of a thin oval plate of gold, measuring about 3 inches in height by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width, slightly curved from side to side. On either side of the oval plate, at the centre of its height, the material extends sideways as a tongue or wire, several inches in length. These wires probably passed round the ankle of the wearer and terminated in spirals. A ridge runs across the face of the oval, from side to side. This projection was formed by hammering up the sheet gold with a blunt tracer, from the back. The sheet metal was then turned over and a similar blunt line traced on either side of that first produced. This technique is an exact parallel to that employed on the Kirkhaugh ear-ring. The ornament forms yet another link between the metal crafts of Spain and those of these islands in the Bronze Age.³ It would seem probable that the Kirkhaugh ear-ring was obtained from Ireland in the ordinary course of trade.⁴

(c) The flint arrowhead (fig. 3, c) is a fine specimen. It measures 26 mm. in length by 20 mm. across the barbs. It has a light grey patina.

² Armstrong, *Catalogue of Irish Gold Ornaments*, pl. XVIII, nos. 413, 423, 424.

³ A related oval ankle ornament in bronze comes from Avignon, Vauclose (British Museum). Another pair of anklets of bronze with a raised central ridge, from Hohenzollern, South Germany, is illustrated in the British Museum Guide to the Bronze Age, p. 139.

⁴ Dr. Callander has drawn my attention to two ear-rings of similar character, in bronze, found at Migdale, Skibo, Sutherland (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxv, fig. 5), with a hoard of bronze axes, etc. He notes that this is the only find not mentioned in Evans's *Bronze Implements of Great Britain*, pp. 391-3.

(d) The flint saw (fig. 3, d) measures 50.5 mm. in length by 20 mm. in width. Its secondary flaking, on both edges, is fairly regular. One edge is polished by use.

(e) A number of flint fragments which show regular secondary flaking (fig. 3, e).

(f) Two flint cores (fig. 3, f). It is of interest to note that the nearest place where flint occurs naturally is in Yorkshire, about 100 miles away.

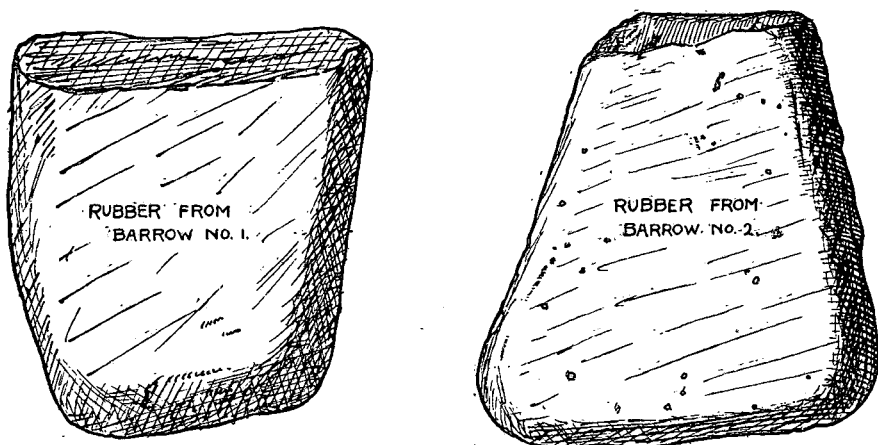


FIG. 4.

(g) A whetstone or hone (fig. 3, g). This has some resemblance to a stone celt, but the edge is quite blunt. The implement measures 62.5 mm. in length by 38.5 mm. in width and is 16 mm. thick. It has a smooth semi-polished surface.

(h) A rubber of red sandstone, probably of local origin (fig. 4). It measures 92 mm. by 78 mm. and is 33 mm. thick at the stoutest part. It shows signs of considerable use.

(i) A rough nodule of glazed ware (fig. 3, i) 28 mm. long by 20 mm. in thickness, yellow-brown in colour.

Probably mediaeval. This and the next find are so much later in date than the other objects found beneath the stratum of stones that they must have worked down from above. Rabbits' holes are to be found in the banks close to the barrow.

(j) Vase or mug handle (fig. 3, j) of black glazed ware, 28 mm. long by 15 mm. in width. It is of late seventeenth-century Staffordshire ware. It also must have worked its way through the protective layer of stones.

(k) A fragment of pottery measuring 51 mm. by 28 mm. The ware is of a coarse, gritty texture, in colour red on one side and black on the other. It is probably part of a cooking vessel. A nodule of iron pyrites 40 mm. by 25 mm., and a number of charcoal fragments were found in the barrow.

A date for the whole find would be about 1000 B.C.

Barrow No. 2 is situated in the fourth field from that in which the School House stands. Its centre is 142 feet from the field wall to the west, and 70 feet from that to the south. The barrow is 16 feet in diameter and apparently 30 inches in height. Upon examination, however, it was found that this barrow, like the former, stands upon a hump of rock, and so gains in apparent height. The rock was about 18 inches below the surface at the centre of the barrow. On removal of the turf the mound was found to consist of mixed earth and stones throughout. Near the centre was a cist, measuring about $24 \times 18 \times 9$ inches deep, formed from rough boulders. Overhanging the northern side were several flat stones, piled one above the other, forming a kind of roof. This was missing on the southern side. The cavity was entirely filled with fine mould, with a few small stones. It seemed probable that the barrow had been previously opened, and the fine material in the cist was surface mould that had washed into the cavity. Nothing of interest was found therein, nor was there any apparent discoloration of the earth. The rock surface beneath the barrow was cleared and swept.



In the earth about the cist were found a broken stone rubber, and a number of broken animal bones.

The rubber (fig. 4) measures 96 mm. in length, by 90 mm. at greatest width, by 24 mm. in thickness. Its upper and lower surfaces are flat, and, like three of its edges, have been smoothed by use. The implement is of red sandstone, and probably of local origin. This was the only worked stone found in the barrow. The animal remains found in the body of the barrow were submitted to Dr. Francis C. Frazer, of the British Museum (Natural History), for identification. He reports: "Most of the pieces are too fragmentary to be able to decide what they are. Of the three teeth the largest is an ox molar, the medium sized one a pig canine and the remaining one a sheep molar. The pointed fragment is a tine of a deer's antler. The largest bone fragment is likely part of the shaft of the humerus of an ox, but it is not possible to be certain about it."

My thanks are due to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, as Trustees of Greenwich Hospital, and to Mr. E. S. Broughton, their local representative, for permission to excavate. To Mr. and Mrs. Raine and their sons, of Randalholme Farm, for help in many ways. To Mr. Christopher Hawkes and Mr. R. L. Hobson of the British Museum, and Dr. Francis C. Frazer of the British Museum (Natural History) for help in the identification of certain specimens. To Dr. J. Graham Callander of the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, and to my colleagues Dr. Hickling and Dr. Raistrick, of Armstrong College, for valuable help.

By permission of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty all the objects found in the two barrows have been placed on permanent loan in the Black Gate Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne.