

Burials on the Hog's Back excavated in 1935

When the late Dr A J (Tony) Clark was excavating a barrow on the chalk ridge of the Hog's Back between Guildford and Farnham in 1966 it would appear that he was approached by Mr H L Ward and given certain details of an excavation in 1935 in which Ward had been involved. That excavation has remained unpublished and the aim of this note is to place on record what little is known about the site.

In 1935 workmen digging a trench for a water main on the north side of the A31 disturbed human burials and Major A G Wade was called in to excavate the site. The exact location is uncertain but the description 'near the old boundary of the manors of Farnham and Wanborough' (*Surrey and Hants News*, 24 May 1935) would place it in the area SU 911 483. The report of an interview given by Wade (*ibid*) reads in part:

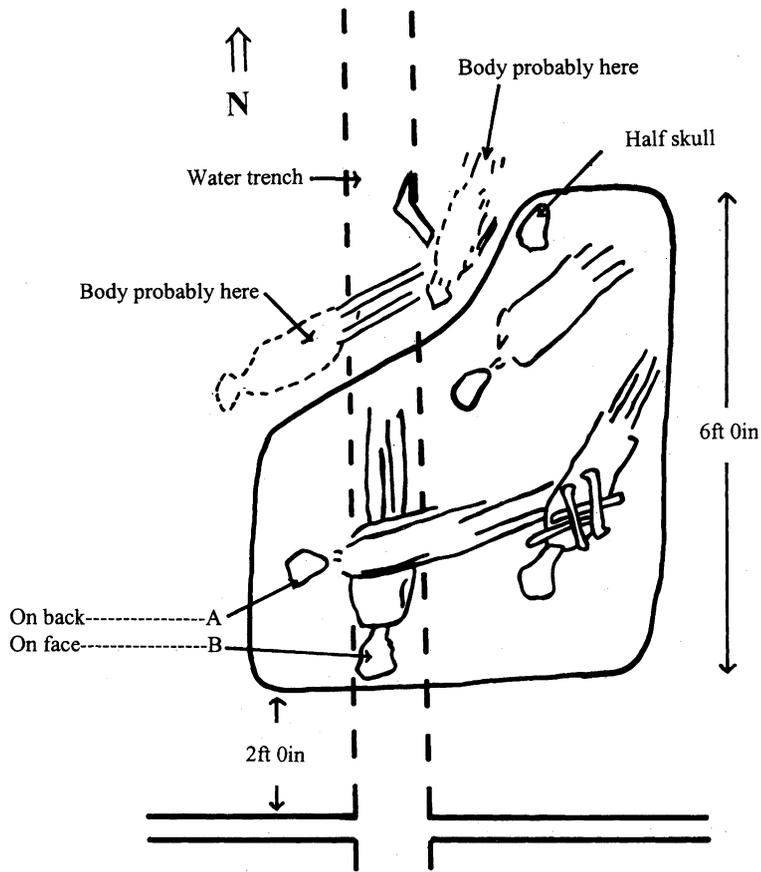
Two complete skeletons and two other skulls have been unearthed ... the remains were found lying on a mass of mined flint. A curious feature of the burial is that the first skeleton, found at a depth of 2ft 6in, was lying with the head towards the south and the feet to the north, while the second skeleton was lying underneath with the head pointing towards the south. One skeleton was lying on its face and another on its back. The right arm of one of the skeletons was lying across the chest, the left arm lying by its side. The thigh bones were very large, denoting a powerfully built man. Remains of very rough flint cutlery implements were found together with a large quantity of snails.

Part of one of two sketches made at the time of the excavation by Ward is reproduced (fig 1). The entire sketch shows the distance from the kerb to the hedge as 45ft (13.5m) and that from the kerb to the southern edge of the trench as 2ft (0.6m). The north–south axis of the trench measured 6ft (1.8m). The sketches show that the bodies had been tumbled unceremoniously into a shallow grave and covered before they could be disturbed by animals.

Wade assigned the burials to the Neolithic period believing them to have resulted from the accidental collapse of a flint mine, with the bodies of the miners having been laid on the rubble infill of a shaft. Photographs located in the Research Collection of the Surrey Archaeological Society (Huband Collection 5/1/11) show that the skeletal remains were well preserved and cast some doubts as to this extreme age. Ward's annotations of the newspaper article add to these doubts as he states that parts of seven skeletons were found, that the mined flint was in fact a mass of snail shells and that no worked flints were located. Correspondence preserved in the Huband Collection makes the suggestion that the burials resulted from an outbreak of plague in Wanborough in 1604. However, although such an outbreak is recorded in the parish registers of Wanborough in 1603 and of Puttenham in 1604, there is no suggestion that either was of sufficient severity to result in mass burials having to be made in unconsecrated ground. That these were the remains of executed criminals would also seem possible but no records exist of gallows in the immediate locality.

These burials should not be confused with those recorded as having been found 'near the Doone Café' (Oakley *et al*, 1939) which was situated at SU 883 480 (John Boas, pers comm). It should also be noted that the sketches indicate the excavation of the site to have been incomplete. In the absence of any dating evidence it seems unlikely that their age will ever be known but the location beside an ancient road distant from any known settlement might suggest that the deaths resulted from either criminal or military activity.

The cuttings and sketches given to Tony Clark have been deposited in the Research Collection.



A ---- Body lay on back across body B at right angles
 B ---- Body lay on face with right arm folded over across breast

No vestiges of funeral rites or weapon or pottery

Fig 1 Part of a sketch made in 1935 by Ward of the excavation by Wade. The area excavated is indicated and the probable positions of skeletons not excavated are shown with dotted outlines. The handwritten annotations have been transcribed

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Oakley, K P, Rankine, W F, & Lowther, A W G, 1939 *A survey of the prehistory of the Farnham district* (SyAS special volume)

JUDIE ENGLISH and STEVE DYER