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## The Bronze Age Round Barrow on Codicote Heath, Hertfordshire

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*With reports on Pottery and Flints by A. M. ApSimon,  
and Soils by L. Biek*

### INTRODUCTION.

THE barrow was on Codicote Heath (Nat. Grid Ref. 52/207185), on the north-east side of the Kime Valley, about two-thirds of a mile from the village of Codicote and one and three-quarter miles east of Kimpton. Its position, on the brink of the "hanger" commanded a majestic view to the south and south-west. The barrow was reported by Mr. Arthur Hayes about 1900.<sup>1</sup> He mentions that at that time there were "marks of it having been opened from the top at some period." Most probably the barrow was first recorded by the Ordnance Survey, c. 1860-70. The Heath was ploughed during the 1914-18 War and again during 1939-45. Before 1948 the barrow was much higher than it was at the time of excavation and the surrounding ditch could be seen clearly. Sometime between 1948-50 a local farmer found it necessary to reduce the height of the barrow. This he did by removing at least 3 ft. of its centre and placing the material in the ditch. At the time of excavation the ditch was no longer visible and the barrow showed as a well spread mound about 2 ft. in height above the surrounding field surface. It was a scheduled Ancient Monument.

The subsoil is a Glacial gravel containing Bunter pebbles and has for the past thirty years been worked commercially. The gravel pit which is on the east side of the Heath was being rapidly expanded westwards towards the site of the barrow. Eventual destruction made it necessary for the barrow to be excavated and this was carried out from 24th September to 24th October, 1956, for the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments of the Ministry of Works by kind

<sup>1</sup>Trans. East Herts. Arch. Soc., Vol. 5, 1912, Part 1, p. 95.

permission of the Three Hills Sand & Gravel Company and the owners, the Oxford University Chest Estates.

THE EXCAVATION (see General Plan and Plate 1).

A cross-section method of excavation was used on a north to south, east to west alignment. Quadrant trenches were dug on the north-west and south-west sides and extended from the centre of the barrow to the fringe of the mound to include the cutting of the ditch. Extensions were made in all quadrants to facilitate the examination of the original barrow and its underlying surface.

THE BARROW (see General Plan (Fig. 2), and Main Sections).

The trenches showed the barrow to be of the bell variety with a small central core of dark soil, under a larger covering mound; it had a wide berm and a surrounding ditch.

The barrow, which was probably circular when erected, was found to be of oval shape and was 31 ft. (north to south) by 26 ft. (east to west) in diameter; it was surrounded by a wide berm 26 to 30 ft. broad. The surrounding ditch, which was circular and of flat-bottomed V-shape, was 6 ft. wide except on the east side where a shallow gravel working had reduced the modern surface. Its depth varied from 3 ft. to 3 ft. 6 in., from plough level. Its diameter was 91 ft. The original mound was composed of three "skins" (Layers 5, 6 and 7) of make-up material covering a small core (Layer 8) of almost black, sandy, soft soil. Pebbles and coarse flint gravel (Layer 3) had accumulated against the outer slope of the barrow and on the surface of the berm, resulting from the weathering of the barrow or a flint capping soon after its erection. The pre-barrow ground surface (Layer 4) was found preserved only beneath the original mound, elsewhere it had been destroyed by ploughing or had been removed for the construction of the barrow.

THE PRIMARY BURIAL (see General Plan and Main Sections).

This was not found *in situ*. The filling of a small robbing trench (Layer 9) showed in the north to south

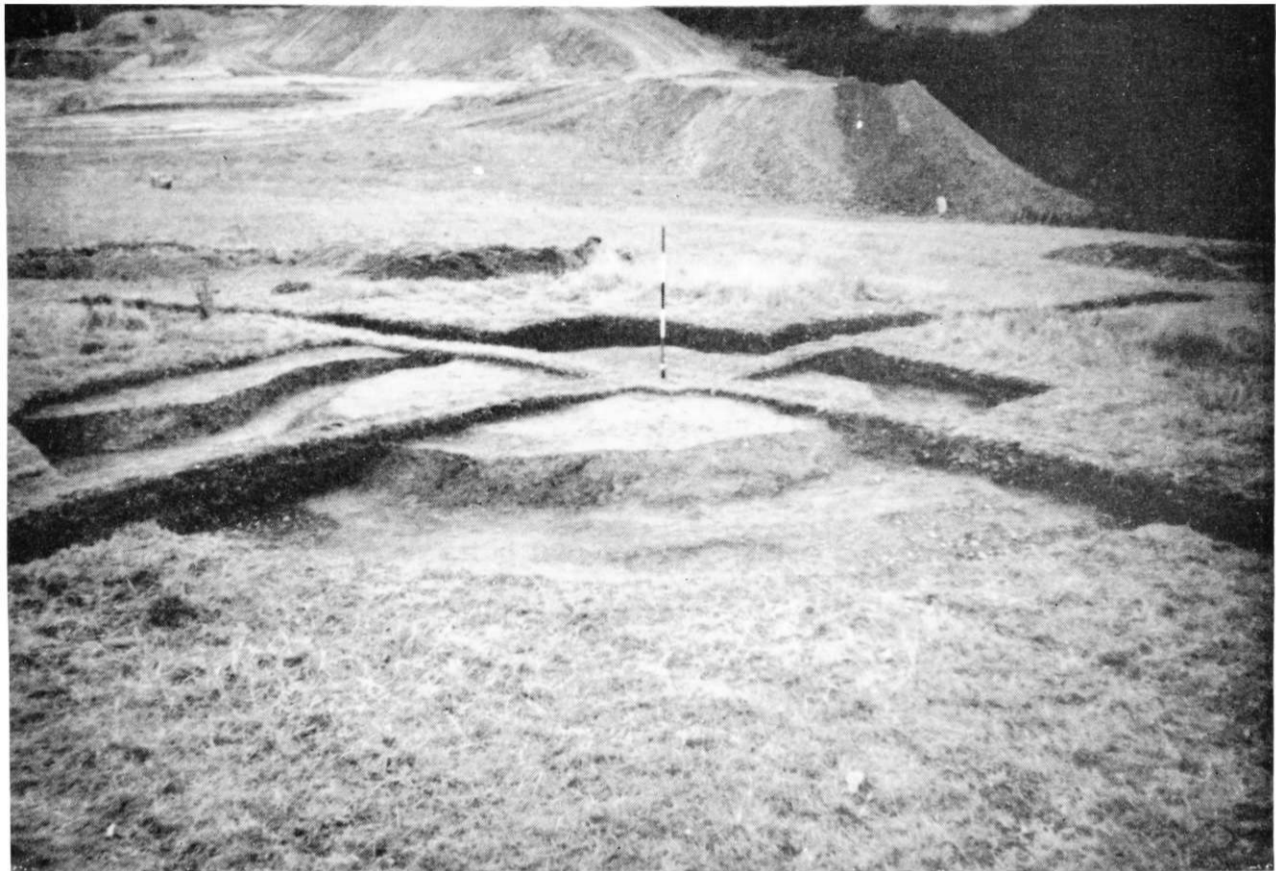


PLATE I. GENERAL VIEW OF SOUTH-EAST OF BARROW DURING EXCAVATION.



*Facing page 6*



section of the north-west quadrant and from the base of this a small quantity of calcined bone (see p. 19) was recovered. No evidence remained to indicate whether the cremation had been accompanied by grave goods. The robbing trench had been accurately placed and had destroyed the original site of the cremation; it had penetrated the surface of a large roughly oval-shaped spread of charcoal (Layer 12) on the pre-barrow ground surface. This measured 10 ft. north-west to south-east by 8 ft. A few scraps of calcined bone (see p. 19) were found in this when it was removed and it suggests that the main bulk of the cremation was perhaps associated with this originally. An interpretation of the charcoal spread as the site of the pyre can be suggested but the underlying surface was not burnt. A faint mauve-brown discoloration immediately below the charcoal spread could be due to natural staining, or it might suggest that the charcoal was "live" when deposited, and that it represents part of the pyre brought to the site of the barrow from elsewhere and strewn over the cremation. A large piece of charcoal from this deposit has been identified (see p. 19).

PRE-BARROW OCCUPATION: NEOLITHIC (see Plan of Hut, Fig. 4).

The pre-barrow ground surface preserved by the barrow was scraped down to the surface of the underlying gravel in the north-west quadrant, and three patches of dark, soft soil were found. These are described as follows:—

*F.1.* A shallow depression in the surface of the gravel. Part of the feature extended under the main north to south section (see north to south section) and was not excavated. The part of the feature in the quadrant was cleared and showed that the sides sloped to a concave base and that the end was rounded. The filling was dark brown soft sandy soil containing much flint and pebble. A flint scraper (Fig. 5, No. 1) and a wall sherd were found in the centre of the filling 2 in. below the surface of the gravel. The length of the part of the feature examined was 1 ft. 5 in. east to west by 1 ft. 2 in. north to south and 4 in. in depth.

*F.2.* A shallow depression similar to *F.1.* The sides sloped to a concave base. The ends were rounded. The filling was similar to that of *F.1.*, and contained six rough flint flakes and a flint core. Length of feature east to west 3 ft., north to south 1 ft. 1 in. Depth in centre 5 in.

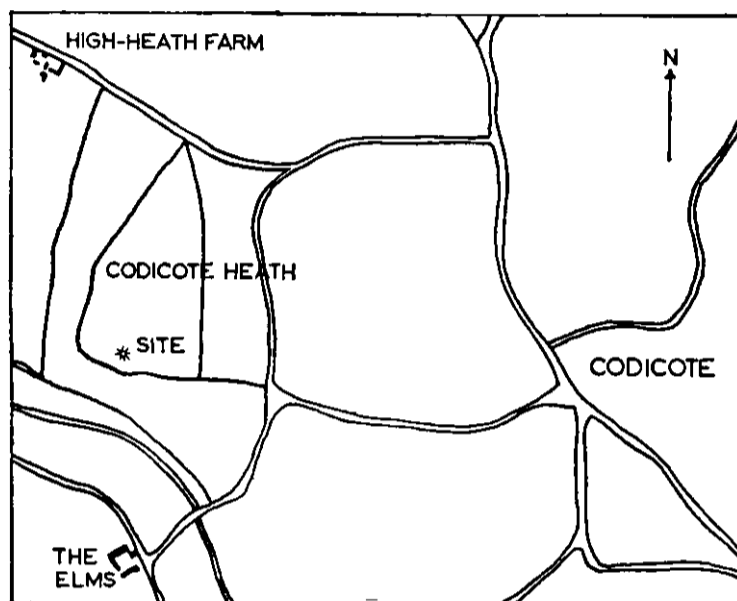


FIG. 1

*F.6.* The largest depression of the three. It was oval in shape, with sides sloping to a concave base. Both ends were rounded. The filling consisted of dark greyish-brown soft soil with much small gravel, and contained thirty-one fragments of pottery including a rim sherd (Fig. 5, No. 15), a flint core (Fig. 5, No. 2) and another, between 2 and 8 in. below the surface of the gravel. The length of the feature north-west to south-east was 4 ft. Width at top 1 ft. 3 in. Depth in centre 10 in.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE (see Plan of Hut, Plate 2).

An examination of the pre-barrow ground surface in the excavated area of the south-west quadrant produced a considerable quantity of pottery fragments, flint tools and flakes (see A. M. ApSimon's report on these p. 14 and Fig. 5). These were found in the top 4 in. of the level and were sealed by the make-up material of the barrow. The reduction of the level by scraping to the surface of the natural gravel showed small and large patches of soft grey-brown charcoal

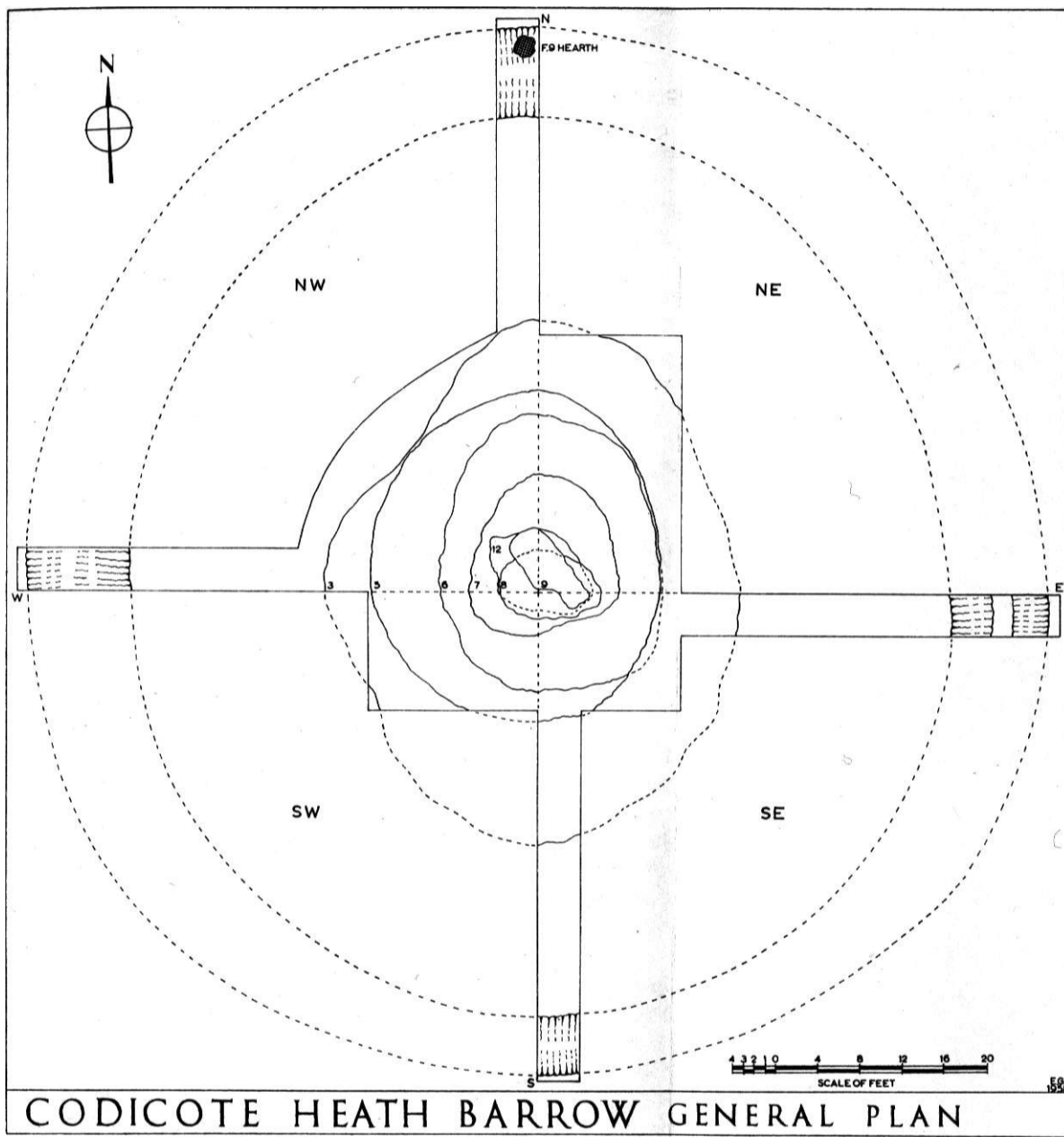


FIG. 2





flecked soil. The patches when probed were found to have depth, some as much as 14 in. These were excavated and found to be post-holes and stake-holes of varying width and depth. A total of sixteen, Nos. 1 to 13 and 15 to 17, were located and proved. The north-west, north-east and south-east quadrants together with the baulks separating the north-west and south-west and the south-east and north-east quadrants were in turn scraped down to natural gravel. The north-west quadrant revealed post-holes and stake-holes similar in shape and size to those found in the south-west quadrant. Four post-holes, Nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24, of medium size (average 5 in. in diameter) formed an arc-shape on the north side of the hearth (F.4, see below) and others were found continuing an arc-shape from the south-west quadrant. A total of eighteen holes, Nos. 21 to 38, were located and excavated. Four others, Nos. 14, 18, 19 and 20, were found when the baulks were removed and the gravel surface exposed. An isolated stake-hole, No. 39, was found in the north-east quadrant. The two post-holes Nos. 16 and 17 probably represent door post-holes. Post-hole 16 was burnt red round the top edge and the filling contained a great deal of heavily charcoal-flecked burnt silt. The evidence suggests that the post was burnt down.

In plan the post-holes and stake-holes consist of three outer arc formations, (1) Nos. 13 and 14, (2) Nos. 15, 12, 9, 6, 1 and 18, (3) Nos. 11, 10, 8, 7, 5, 4, 3, 2, 20 and 19, and an inner arc formation of four holes, Nos. 21 to 24. The inner arc lay within the north-west quadrant, together with a group of three pairs of stake-holes, Nos. 26 and 27, 28 and 34 and 35 and 36, and four odd ones Nos. 25, 33, 37 and 38. Two other pairs of stake-holes, Nos. 29 and 32 and 30 and 31, occur a few feet to the north-east of these.

A large clay hearth (F.4) of roughly oval-shape, reddened by intense heat, was found partly under the baulk separating the north-west and south-west quadrants. This measured 2 ft. 9 in. north to south by 2 ft. 3 in. east to west and when sectioned was 2 in. in depth at the centre. It had been formed from a dump of raw yellow coloured clay which had been laid in a shallow scoop in the gravel, and its surface had the

appearance of having been "patted" down by hand. Pottery fragments and flint flakes were found in the thin silt on the surface of the hearth.

Depth of post-holes and stake-holes from gravel surface

|     |        |     |        |     |           |     |        |
|-----|--------|-----|--------|-----|-----------|-----|--------|
| 1.  | 6 in.  | 11. | 14 in. | 21. | 10 in.    | 31. | 17 in. |
| 2.  | 6 in.  | 12. | 10 in. | 22. | 8 in.     | 32. | 8 in.  |
| 3.  | 4 in.  | 13- | 8 in.  | 23. | 8 in.     | 33- | 6 in.  |
| 4.  | 5 in.  | 14. | 6 in.  | 24. | Si in.    | 34. | 5 in.  |
| 5.  | 6 in.  | 15. | 10 in. | 25. | 7 in.     | 35- | 7 in.  |
| 6.  | 7 in.  | 16. | 7 in.  | 26. | 5 1/2 in. | 36. | 8 in.  |
| 7.  | 10 in. | 17. | 10 in. | 27. | 9 in.     | 37. | 9 in.  |
| 8.  | 11 in. | 18. | 8 in.  | 28. | 13 in.    |     |        |
| 9.  | 6 in.  | 19. | 6 in.  | 29. | 16 in.    |     |        |
| 10. | 11 in. | 20. | 4 in.  | 30. | 17 in.    |     |        |

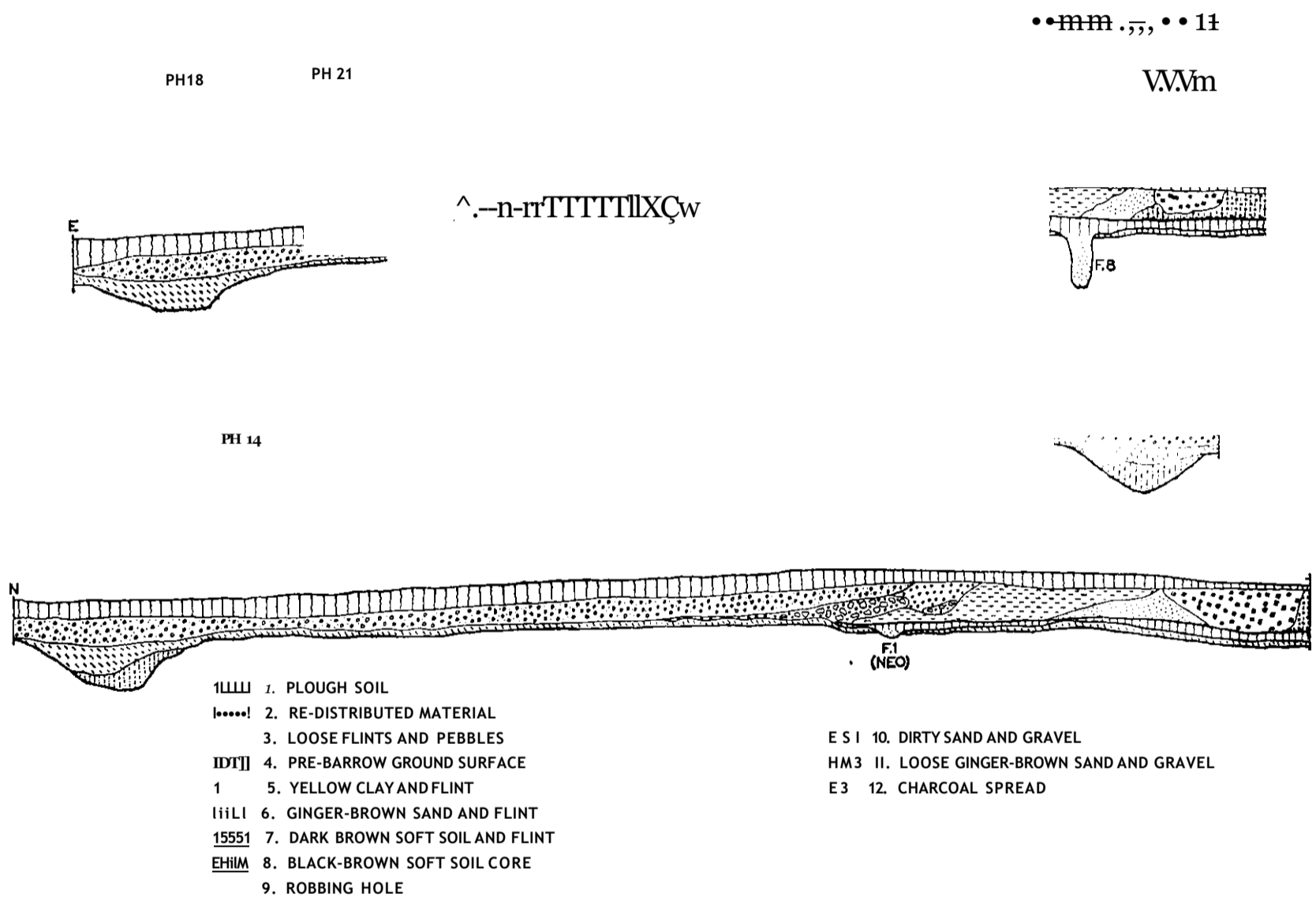
A small pit (F.3) with vertical sides and flat base of sub-rectangular-shape, was found in the north-west quadrant close to the inner arc of post-holes. The filling was dirty, charcoal flecked sand and gravel and contained a complete rubbing stone (Fig. 5, No. 20 and p. 18), two flint cores, one burnt, four flint spalls and twenty-seven flakes.

Another small pit (F.7) and part of a narrow gully (F.8) were found close to the main east to west section in the south-east quadrant. Their fillings of mixed dirty sand and gravel contained eight flint flakes. These two features were not proved as belonging to the sequence of features of Middle Bronze Age or the Neolithic occupation.

A small hearth (F.9, see General Plan) was found in the filling of the north ditch. This measured 1 ft. in diameter and was 1 in. deep in the centre. Three sherds, one which had been refired, were found in association with the hearth.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

It is extremely unlikely that the post-hole and stake-hole complex represent the remains of a ritual hut, part of the ceremony of burial by cremation, prior to the construction of the barrow. The large quantity of pottery and flint artifacts found in the old ground surface, together with the evidence that the hearth had



C O D I C O T E      H E A T H  
 B A R R O W      S E C T I O N S

FIG. 3

EG  
 lose

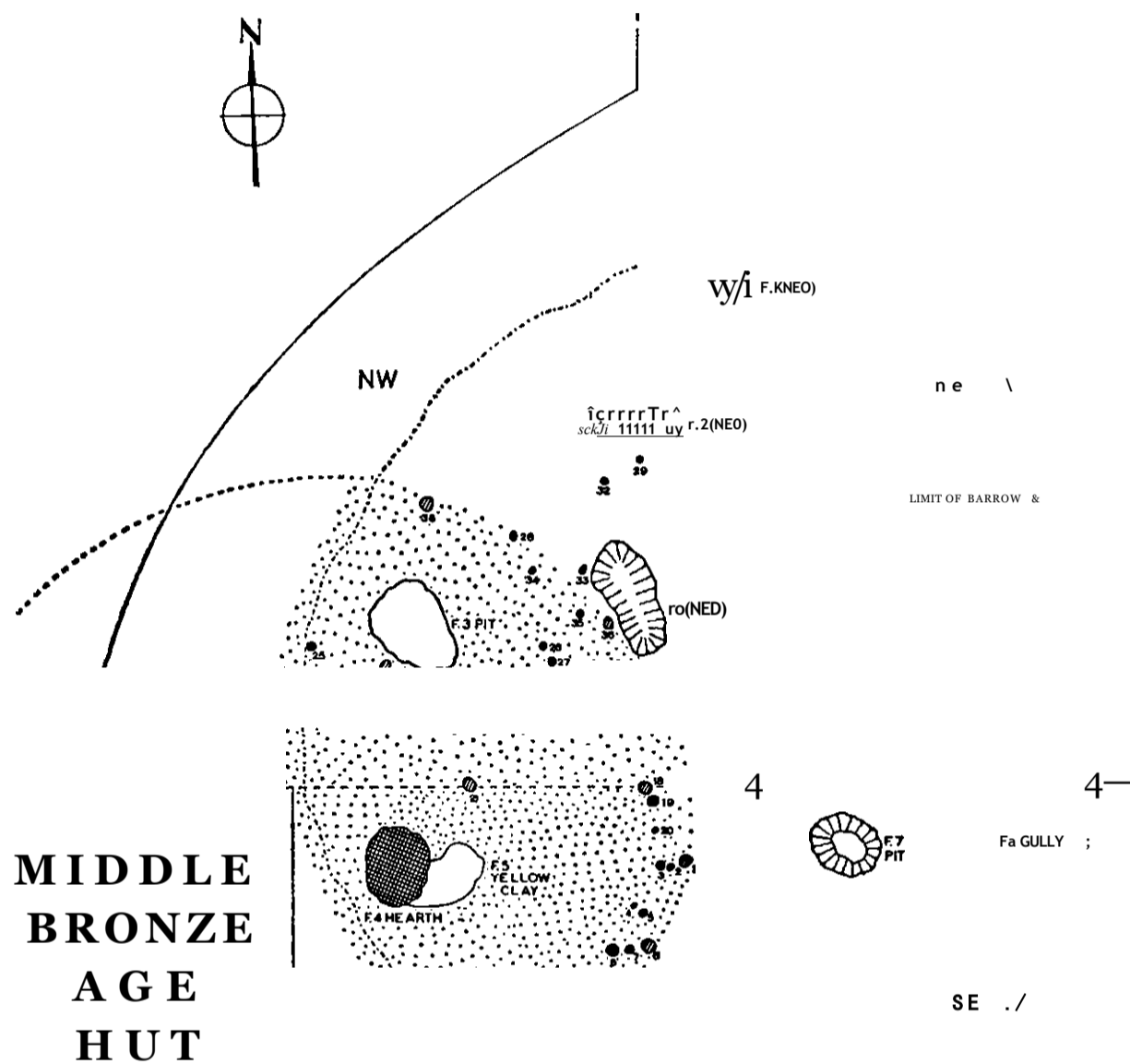
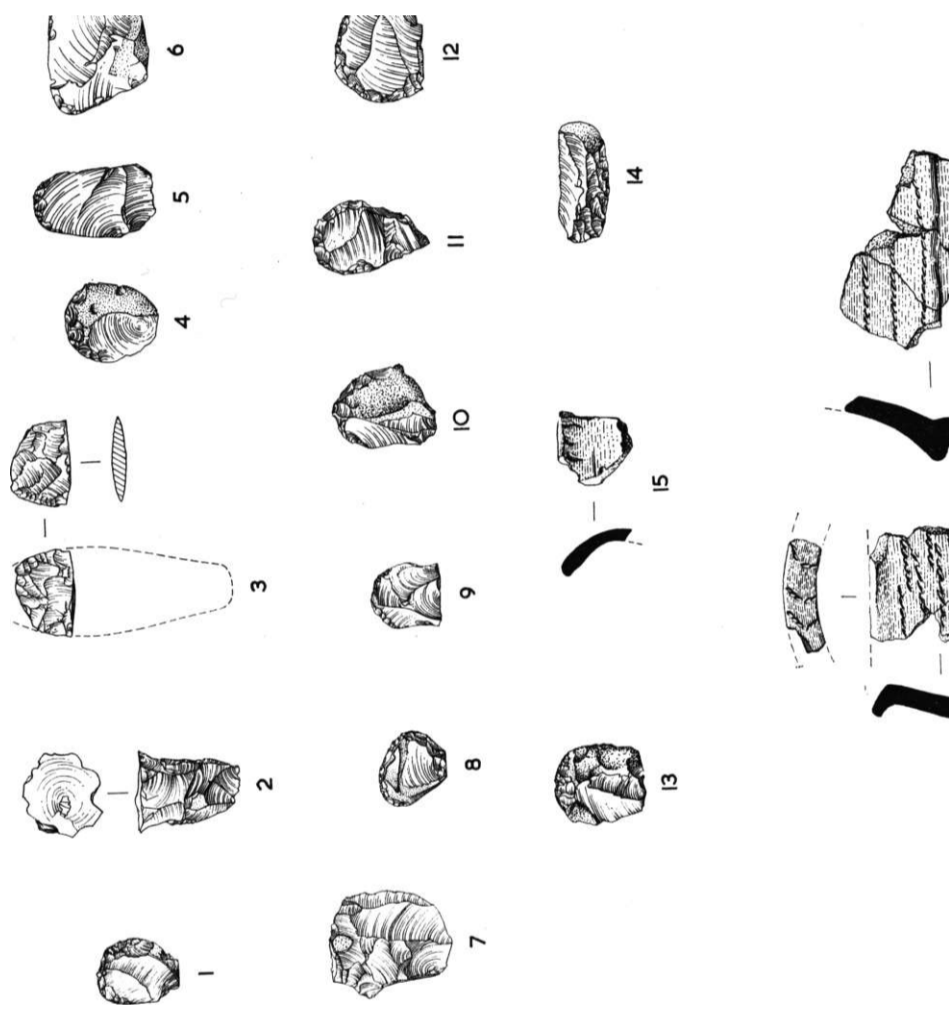


FIG. 4

been used a number of times, and the pit with its rubbing stone, suggest domestic occupation of some duration. This evidence together with the pattern of the post-holes and stake-holes suggests a house of domestic type. There can be little doubt that it was circular in plan, with outer rings of fairly large posts and stakes; with an inner ring or horse-shoe-shaped arc of medium-sized posts supporting the centre of a conical roof. The stake-holes just inside the outer

jasf]



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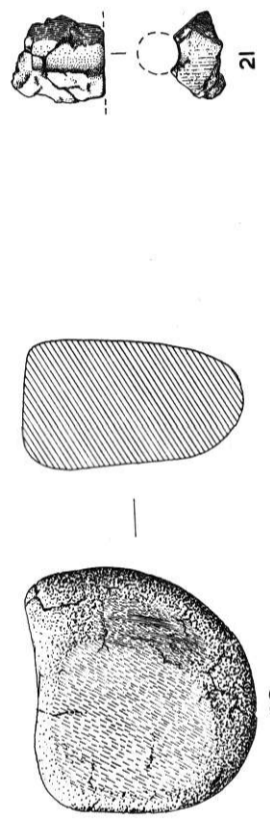
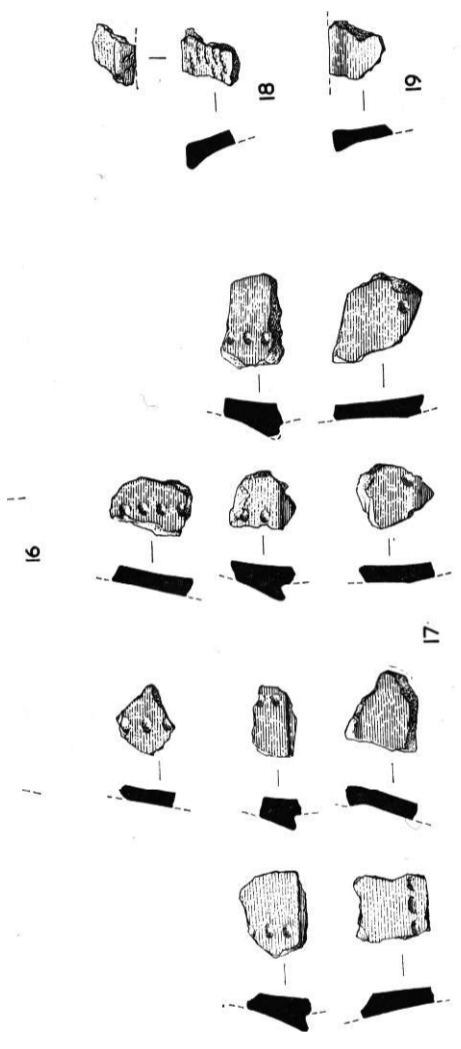


FIG. 5





posts suggest wattle or hurdle walling. The hearth and pit are situated outside the inner central supporting posts but within the confines of the structure. Owing to the destruction of the old ground surface beyond the periphery of the barrow mound, the western part of the hut was not found, but from the indications recovered a diameter of about 20 ft. can be assumed. The suggested plan follows a common pattern of domestic huts or houses of the Middle Bronze Age. The writer's excavations at St. Eval,<sup>2</sup> Cornwall, revealed two houses of similar plan and structure but of much larger size.

#### THE FINDS

##### FLINTS.

A total of 398 flint tools, cores and flakes was found in the excavation. Ten were from features of Neolithic date, 194 from the old ground surface and from features contemporary with the hut occupation. One hundred and twenty-six were found in the make-up material of the barrow, and sixty-eight from the plough soil, the re-distributed mound material and the ditch fillings. Of this total of 398, 369 were discarded on the site and twenty-nine retained. Fourteen of these have been drawn and are illustrated.

##### POTTERY.

A total of 206 sherds and crumbs of pottery of Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age date was found. Of these, thirty-seven have been identified as Neolithic and 169 as Middle Bronze Age. Of the Neolithic group, thirty-one sherds, including a rim fragment (Fig. 5, No. 15) were found in F.6; one from F.1; three from the north ditch cutting; one from the east ditch cutting and one from the old ground surface in the north-west quadrant. Of the 169 fragments of Middle Bronze Age date, 152 came from the old ground surface within the limits of the area covered by the hut, mainly in the south-west quadrant; fourteen from the make-up of the barrow; one from the re-distributed mound material and two from the plough soil. Four

<sup>2</sup> Report forthcoming.

pieces of a baked clay weight (Fig. 5, No. 21) were found in the top 12 in. of filling of the north ditch.

#### THE FLINTS, by A. M. ApSimon

##### NEOLITHIC.

Fig. 5, No. 1. Round scraper worn by use. This is the only finished implement from the Neolithic depressions. Provenance: north-west quadrant, in filling of F.1.

Fig. 5, No. 2. Struck core from F.6, south-west quadrant, top half of filling. There were two further cores, one from the same provenance and one from F.2, north-west quadrant. F.2 also produced six flint flakes of black or dark grey colour.

##### MIDDLE BRONZE AGE.

Fig. 5, No. 3. Fragment of flint dagger made of grey calcined flint. From 2 in. deep in old ground surface in north-west quadrant under charcoal spread (Layer 12). This area also produced three calcined flint blades and ten waste flakes.

Fig. 5, No. 4. Round scraper of grey cherty flint. From old ground surface, near hearth F.4 in south-west quadrant.

Fig. 5, No. 5. Tongue-shaped scraper made on side of large flake. Probably broken. From 3 in. deep in old ground surface in north-west quadrant.

Fig. 5, No. 6. Finely re-touched knife or scraper. This might be regarded in the nature of a flensing knife. This area also produced a calcined core-scraper and a waste flake. Same provenance as No. 5.

Fig. 5, No. 7. Large flake which seems to have been used as a knife or chopper. Working edge is without re-touch. From 3 in. deep in old ground surface in south-west quadrant.

Fig. 5, No. 8. Side scraper of black flint much used.

Fig. 5, No. 9. Round scraper of dark grey flint. Both of these (Nos. 8 and 9) are from the old ground surface, close to stake-holes 2 and 3 in the south-west quadrant. This area also produced four calcined flints and eleven waste flakes.

FLINTS FROM M.B.A. BARROW MOUND (Mound make-up).

Fig. 5, No.10. Coarse round scraper.

Fig. 5, No. 11. Coarse round scraper. Both of these (Nos. 10 and 11) are from Layer 6.

Fig. 5, No. 12. Large round scraper, working carried down the right-hand edge. From Layer 6. This layer also produced a re-touched flake and seventeen waste flakes.

Fig. 5, No. 13. Round scraper of black flint. From Layer 5. This layer also produced a utilised flake and eighteen waste flakes.

Fig. 5, No. 14. Roughly worked knife with inverse re-touch along the left-hand edge. From rabbit burrow in south-east quadrant.

Layer 8 produced twenty flint flakes and three calcined flint flakes.

#### SOURCE OF FLINT.

The obvious source of flint used on the site would be the underlying gravel subsoil. This is confirmed by the character of the cortex of the flints and their colour, which ranges from grey to black. The abundance of locally obtainable material allowed implements to be made from large flakes without the necessity of economising in the use of flint. The roughness of much of the M.B.A. flint work may therefore be deceptive, but scrapers and knives of the kind figured are commonly found in M.B.A. contexts. The fragment of the flint dagger (Fig. 5, No. 3) may well be a stray, as this type normally occurs in beaker contexts. There is nothing distinctive about the flints from the Neolithic depressions.

#### THE POTTERY, by A. M. ApSimon NEOLITHIC.

Some thirty-three sherds and fragments from Neolithic F.6. The sherds are all fairly small and somewhat worn. Most are of medium thickness, from  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. The ware is mainly of medium brown fairly heavy paste with much flint grit: individual grits ranging up to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. though most are rather smaller than this. On some sherds the grits project

from the inner surface but most sherds show a fairly smooth outside. Several sherds retain a smooth buff-brown (to reddish-brown) colour on the outside while two sherds show signs of tooling on the inside surface, which is generally rather darker than the outside. Several sherds show evidence of ring-building.

There is no evidence of decoration or form except that provided by the sherd described below.

Fig. 5, No. 15. Slightly beaded everted rim sherd, rather worn. There are two finger-nail impressions immediately below the rim. This sherd presumably belonged to an open bowl with everted rim. This shape is not uncommon in developed Western Neolithic pottery in south-east England and reasonable parallels may be quoted from the Whiteleaf barrow in Bucks. (Childe and Smith, 1954, p. 225, Fig. 6, No. 22.)

At the same time the form and fabric are not far removed from Ebbsfleet pottery and we are nearly at the stage where an attempt to separate the two styles is no longer profitable.

#### MIDDLE BRONZE AGE.

Close on 200 sherds and fragments are assignable to this group. Judging from rims and fabric not less than four pots are represented (see description below). Two pots provide the majority of the sherds but only a relatively small proportion of either of these is present. Fragments from rim, collar and upper walls appear more frequent than from the lower parts and base fragments are few. The ware appears much less abraded than the Neolithic and good joins can be made. Some of the fractures are however moderately weathered.

Ware: this is described more closely under individual pots. The most obvious difference from the Neolithic fabric is the apparent absence of angular and burnt-flint grits. Such grit as there is, appears to be mainly small (?) flint gravel stones, as well as fragments of non-siliceous stones, probably already incorporated in the natural clay. Some pots show a marked proportion of sand tempering. The presence of a tooled surface is well marked on many sherds. The firing and texture of the pottery is in every way typical of Middle Bronze Age pottery.

There is no suggestion that any other form than that of normal collared urns is present.

*Urn A, Fig. 5, No. 16.*

*Collared Urn.* Paste is blackish with a fair number of gravelly grits. Inside smooth olive-brown to dark brown, outside smooth pale olive-brown to warm reddish-brown. The pot seems to be ring-built and the lower projecting rib of the collar seems to be applied to the surface of the pot.

The outer surface of the collar is decorated with a number of horizontal lines of rather careless rough cord impressions. The inner side of the sharply-bevelled lip carries a row of chevrons in deeply impressed cord. The surfaces of this pot show clear marks of smoothing. No grain or other impressions have been seen.

*Urn B, Fig. 5, No. 17.*

*Collared Urn.* Fragmentary sherds from lower part of collar and body. No rim sherds seen. Paste, fine almost stoneless, some sand tempering. The firing has given it mainly a brick-red colour most of the way through though the inner part remains black. (One or two flint grits seen, also some gravel pebbles.) The outer surface has a smoothed finish.

Decoration: the collar of this urn was decorated at intervals with vertical rows of small oval depressions that look as though they had been made with a pointed instrument. It is possible that there was a horizontal row of similar impressions round the shoulder.

*Urn C, Fig. 5, No. 18.*

*Collared Urn.* Rim sherd, dark brown ware with some stone grits, outer surface light brown, inner surface dark, smoothed.

Two horizontal lines of cord impressions are visible on the outer surface. The inward bevel of the rim carries some rather vague impressions, probably again cord. This is the rim of a collared urn, rather similar to those described above, resembling Urn A in paste but in thinner ware.

*Urn D, Fig. 5, No. 19.*

Rim sherd of fine black ware with some fine stone grits. Surfaces dull brown, no decoration. The

bevelled rim suggests that this is from a rather small plain collared urn though the outward inclination of the side is greater than usual. The fragment is too small for any certainty.

#### GENERAL REMARKS.

The group of Middle Bronze-Age pottery described above is in itself in no way remarkable. It would be possible to quote widespread parallels for the simple shape and decoration of these urns but this seems of doubtful utility. There is nothing to lead us to suppose that these urns are either particularly early or late of their kind, a conclusion that is in no way at variance with their position under a bell barrow which may well be roughly contemporaneous with them.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Perforated object of baked clay, Fig. 5, No. 21.*

Fitting fragments of hard friable reddish baked clay. These appear to be part of an object with a perforation or groove at right-angles to one outer surface. The object seems originally to have split along the axis of perforation and the fragments are therefore probably from only one half of it. It seems probable that this was a weight of some sort though it could just possibly be part of a perforated lug. There is not enough to be certain.

#### THE RUBBING STONE.

This was found in the filling of the small pit F.3. It is a complete example, worn on one flat face. All other surfaces abraded. The worn face shows polished high spots and there are some striations.

The rubbing stone and a mineral specimen from F.6 were submitted for identification to Miss Helen A. H. Macdonald of the Petrographical Department of the Geological Survey and Museum who states:

The rubbing stone: brown sandstone, possibly erratic.

The mineral specimen: ironstone.

#### ANIMAL BONE.

A few pieces of very decomposed bone were found in the re-distributed mound material (Layer 2) in the

<sup>3</sup> Childe, V. G., and Smith, I. F. (1954). "The Excavation of a Neolithic Barrow on Whiteleaf Hill, Bucks.," *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.*, XX, 212-230.

south-east quadrant but owing to their poorly preserved condition and the opinion that they were modern, they were discarded on the site.

CALCINED BONE, by Dr. K. Oakley, British Museum,  
Natural History

- (1) From base of robbing hole (Layer 9). Not large enough for identification.
- (2) From the old ground surface in Layer 12, north-west quadrant. Sample too small to say whether human or not. One or two pieces could be animal. No evidence that bones had been broken deliberately.

CHARCOAL.

Nine samples of charcoal were taken throughout the excavation and consist of (1) from the small pit F.3, (2) from the plough soil, 6 in. below the surface in the north-west quadrant, (3) from the make-up material of the barrow (Layer 5) in the north-west quadrant, (4) from the barrow make-up material (Layer 6) in the north-west quadrant, (5) from the old ground surface (Layer 4) in the south-west quadrant, (6) from the hearth (F.9) in the north ditch filling, (7) from halfway down in the filling of the burnt post-hole (No. 16) in the south-west quadrant, (8) from the old ground surface (Layer 4) 2 in. above the surface of the natural gravel in the south-east quadrant, (9) from the charcoal spread (Layer 12) in the north-west quadrant.

The identification of the charcoal by Dr. C. R. Metcalfe of the Royal Botanic Gardens :—

- (1) Too fragmentary for identification.
- (2) Probably Hawthorn (*Crataegus sp.*).
- (3) Oak (*Quercus sp.*).
- (4) Hazel (*Corylus sp.*).
- (5) Oak (*Quercus sp.*), Yew (*Taxus sp.*). Possibly Poplar or Willow.
- (6) Field Maple (*Acer campestre*). Probably Hazel (*Corylus sp.*).
- (7) Oak (*Quercus sp.*).
- (8) Oak (*Quercus sp.*).
- (9) Oak (*Quercus sp.*).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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