

## A BARROW ON BREACH FARM, LLANBLEDDIAN, GLAMORGAN.

By W. F. GRIMES, M.A., F.S.A.

### I. INTRODUCTION.

The Vale of Glamorgan (Fig. 1, I) is the middle part of the coastal plain of south Wales. An undulating belt of country, much dissected by river systems, its highest parts consisting of knolls and ridges which rarely achieve a height of more than 400 feet above sea-level, it was occupied fairly intensively throughout prehistoric times. Round barrows are found scattered throughout its length. But they are particularly concentrated in one area in the middle portion of the Vale, where, between the ancient towns of Llantwit Major on the coast, and Cowbridge, about six miles inland, between twenty and thirty have been recognised. None of these barrows has hitherto been scientifically examined, nor do they appear to have suffered damage apart from ploughing. The excavation here described was undertaken by the Archaeological Section in the hope that from it might be derived definite information bearing upon the intensive Bronze Age occupation of this part of the coastal plain which the barrows clearly attest.

The work was financed by grants from the Parent Society's and Section's funds, supplemented by subscriptions from individuals which are recorded at the end of this Report. Here it is appropriate that thanks should be expressed both to subscribers and to others without whose help the work could not have been carried out. Mrs. Howel Jones, Mrs. P. J. Williams, my wife and Mr. L. D. Thomas did much to help on the actual site; the Caerleon Excavation Committee and Mr. Guy Clarke supplied plant; the Glamorgan County Council through the Small Holdings Committee and their Land Agent, Mr. F. Orton, gave the necessary permission, and their tenant, Mr. J. Thomas, of Breach Farm, also helped us in every possible way. Finally, I have to thank

my colleagues, Mr. L. F. Cowley, Mr. H. A. Hyde, and Dr. F. J. North for their appended reports on the human remains, on the plant material, and on certain geological aspects of the site itself.

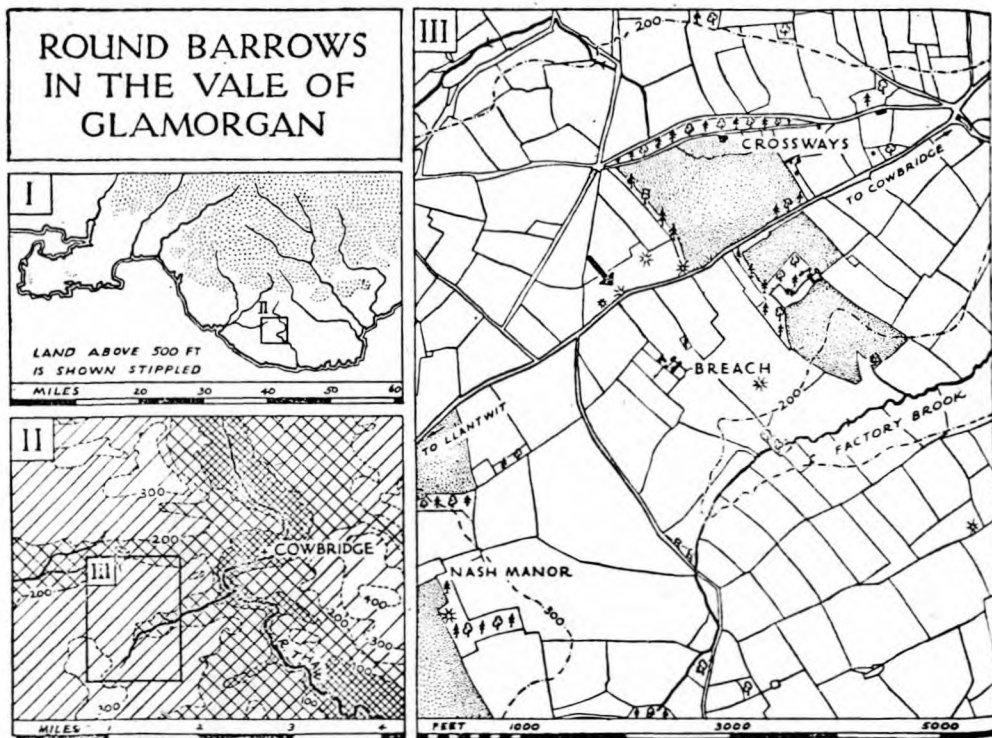


FIGURE 1. The barrow which is the subject of this report is indicated by the arrow in Plan III.  
Based on the Ordnance Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

## II. THE SITE.

The barrow (Fig. 1, III) is one of a group of seven within an area of a square mile. In relation to modern landmarks, it lies directly beside the main road from Cowbridge to Llantwit Major, about two miles from the former (O.S. six-inch sheet, Glam. 45 NW). With its fellows it stands on the back of a ridge which lies roughly north-east south-west, and is defined on the north-east by small streams forming part of

PLATE A.

RC  
IN



Breach Farm Barrow before excavation.

the Ewenny and Ogwr system, on the east and south-east by the Thaw and its tributary, the Factory Brook. The ridge rises to a height of just over 300 feet at its outward end and also on the south-west, where it joins the main mass of the plateau; but the barrow-group is set in the poorly defined saddle between the two, at a height of about 250 feet above sea-level. The underlying rock is Lias limestone, which is here covered by at least two feet of yellow clay.

Like its neighbours, the barrow had been much reduced by ploughing (Plate A). It was very flat on top, and its limits were exceedingly difficult to define. Its apparent diameter of 110-20 feet proved to be very much of an exaggeration; its height of about four feet could be more readily estimated. On the south side the hedge bounding the high road appeared to encroach on its margin. But here, too, appearances were deceptive: it was found that the whole monument lay intact within the field.

### III. EXCAVATION.

For excavation the mound was divided up into quadrants, the main axis lying roughly north-east south-west, parallel with the line of the field hedge. The northern pair of quadrants was examined first of all. A thirty-two feet wide cutting was begun simultaneously from east and west, its inner side coinciding with the main axis. The working face was moved inwards towards the centre a foot at a time, and since the section along the main axis was also dressed vertically as the excavation advanced, it was possible to study the construction of the barrow in three dimensions.

In due course, both on the east and on the west the facing stones of a stone ring were encountered, and the method of working the north-eastern quadrant was then modified. Here for the time being attention was concentrated on revealing the outline of the facing, while on the north-west the wide cutting was continued and extended in width where necessary in order to take in the growing curve of the ring.

The northern half of the ring having been established, at least as far as its outer face was concerned, efforts were now concentrated on the north-west quadrant. It had already

been discovered that the facing stones were the kerb of a wall-like structure, rather than of a complete cairn, and the whole of the contents of the quadrant within the ring were removed down to the original ground surface, except for a peculiar heap near the centre which detached itself from the body of the mound. (Further reference is made to this below).

The final clearing of this quadrant then presented two sections in which the structure of the barrow could be studied, and it was abundantly clear that we were dealing with at least two elements: a central mound of clay, within an encircling ring (Plate B).

The central mound was not completely uniform in character. Its various features will be described in their appropriate place; here as affecting the policy of excavation it should be noted that its main element, of what for convenience may be called a 'mixed' grey and brown clay, dipped with increasing rapidity as it approached the inside of the stone ring, ultimately appearing to pass underneath the stones. There seemed to be justification for treating this profile as significant, and over the remaining three quadrants of the mound the overburden was removed down to the surface of the 'mixed' clay, the ringwork being exposed at the same time. The original profiles of the barrow were preserved in the cross-balks by which the quadrants were separated. The surface of the clay mound was found to be entirely undisturbed: there was no sign of a secondary burial either in it or in the ring (Plate B, and plan, fig. 2).

While the complete plan of the site was thus being recovered, attention was also given to the clay heap near the centre which has already been mentioned in passing. It was circular in plan, with a basal diameter of slightly less than three feet, tapering irregularly upwards to about the same height (Plate C). A cross-section revealed the heap to be of the same material as the rest of the mound, and that it was not structurally distinct was demonstrated by the fact that natural markings in the surrounding clay were continued in the heap itself. But the markings also gave the clue to the origin of the heap, for—as Plate D, shows—they were



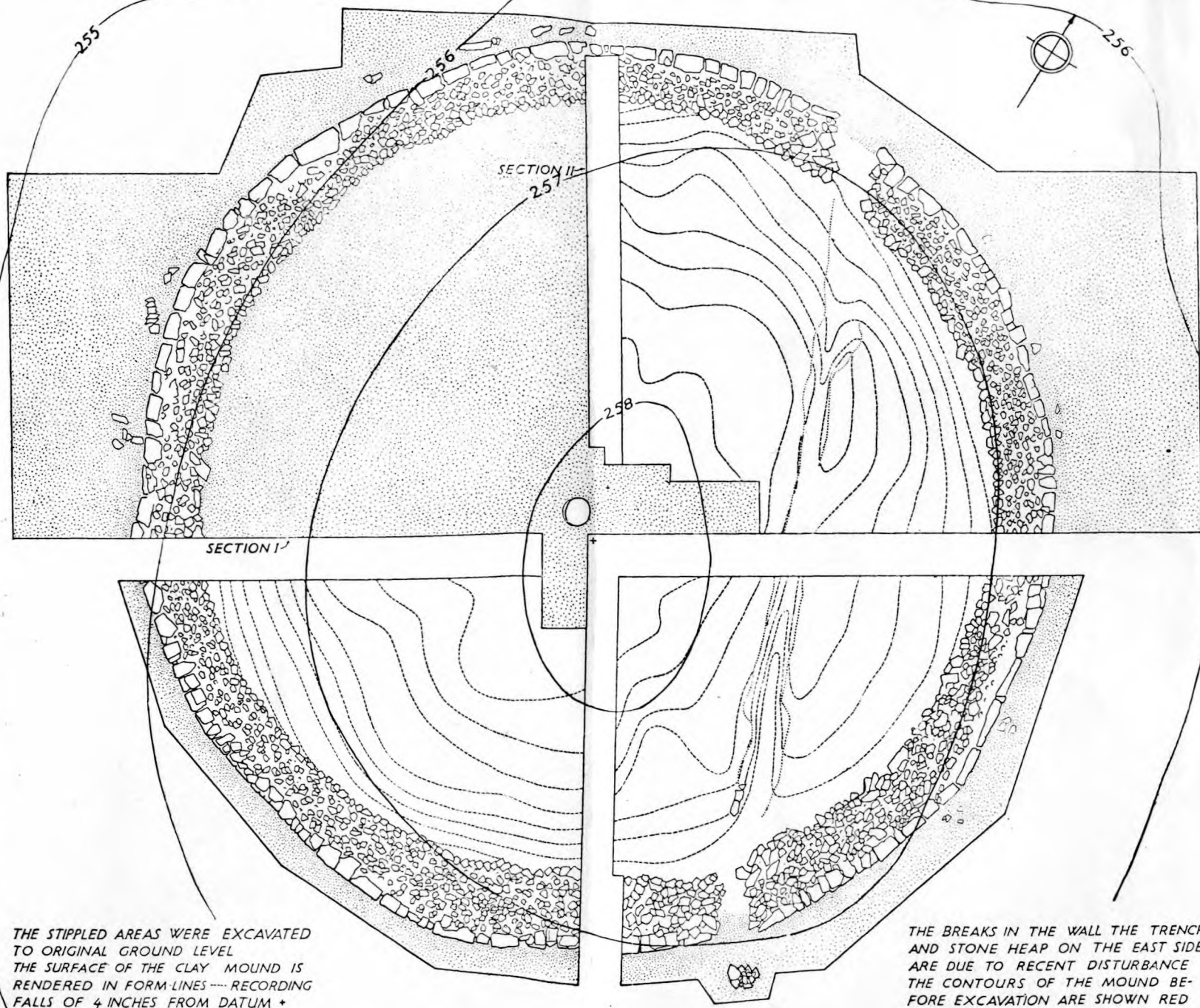
# A BARROW ON BREACH FARM LLANBLEDDIAN GLAMORGAN

METRES

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THE STIPPLED AREAS WERE EXCAVATED TO ORIGINAL GROUND LEVEL  
THE SURFACE OF THE CLAY MOUND IS RENDERED IN FORM LINES — RECORDING FALLS OF 4 INCHES FROM DATUM +

THE BREAKS IN THE WALL THE TRENCH AND STONE HEAP ON THE EAST SIDE ARE DUE TO RECENT DISTURBANCE THE CONTOURS OF THE MOUND BEFORE EXCAVATION ARE SHOWN RED

FIGURE 2.



Breach Farm Barrow as finally excavated.

several inches lower, and clearly suggested subsidence. It was soon found that the heap actually covered the central burial-pit, and was without doubt the product of subsidence, which detached it from the body of the mound as the filling in the pit beneath contracted and withdrew its support. The pit produced the only burial.

The examination of the mound was completed by further excavation of the central area—it was considered unnecessary to remove the remainder of the clay, which, as already stated, showed no signs of disturbance—and by the removal of stones in three places to test the relationship of mound to ring.

#### IV. THE VARIOUS FEATURES OF THE MONUMENT.

It is now possible to consider the various elements of the barrow in the order of their construction.

The *burial pit* (Plate E) was roughly oval in plan, 28 inches across and about the same depth below the old ground surface. Removal of its upper filling of clay revealed a deposit of burnt bones 10-12 inches thick on the bottom. The associated objects lay on top of the bones, the pigmy cup on its side to the west, with its base against the wall of the pit, the bronze and stone implements in a compact mass against the east side. With the latter had been deposited a quantity of wood, most of which had become a porridge-like pulp. But the conditions in the pit proved unfavourable to bronze: corrosion was so far advanced that only the heavier axe could be saved in recognisable form.

The pit was covered by the *central mound* of clay, which at its highest part rose  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the old ground surface. The mound was a composite structure, but the most outstanding feature in the sections was nevertheless the result of a natural process. This presented itself both during the removal of the north-west quadrant and in the completed sections, as a double layer, the lower brown in colour, the upper grey, separated by an irregular iron pan which often attained a thickness of half-an-inch. The irregularity and contorted character of the iron pan rendered it unlikely that the division was merely the result of normal tipping of clay



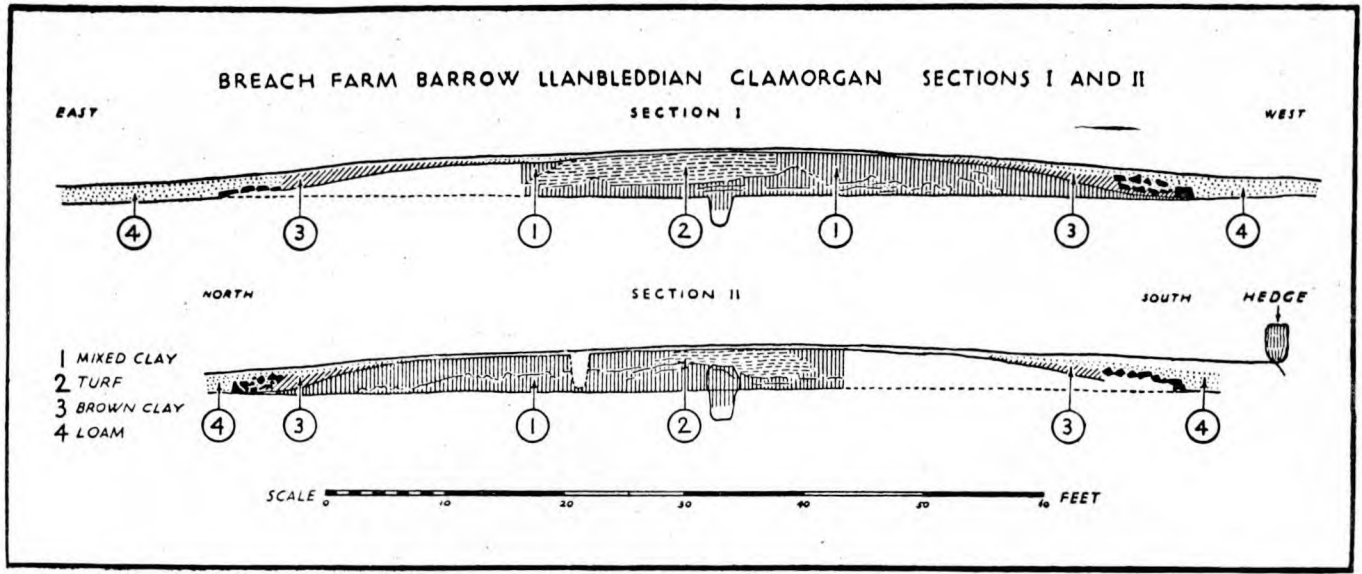
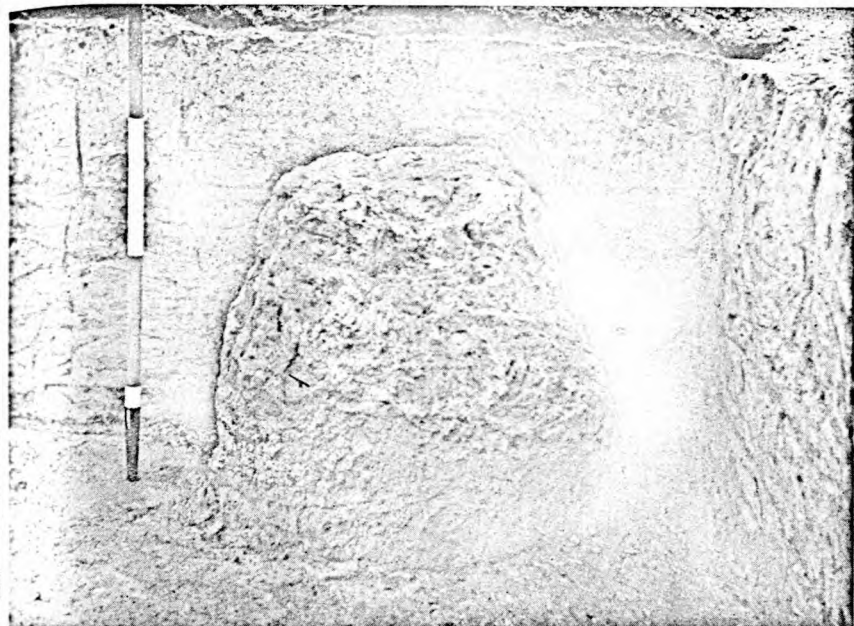
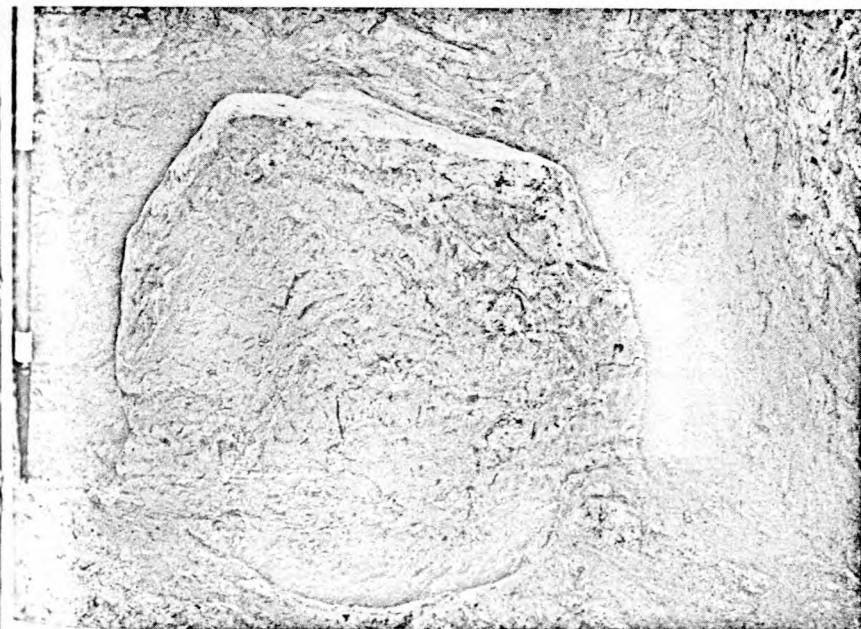


FIGURE 3.

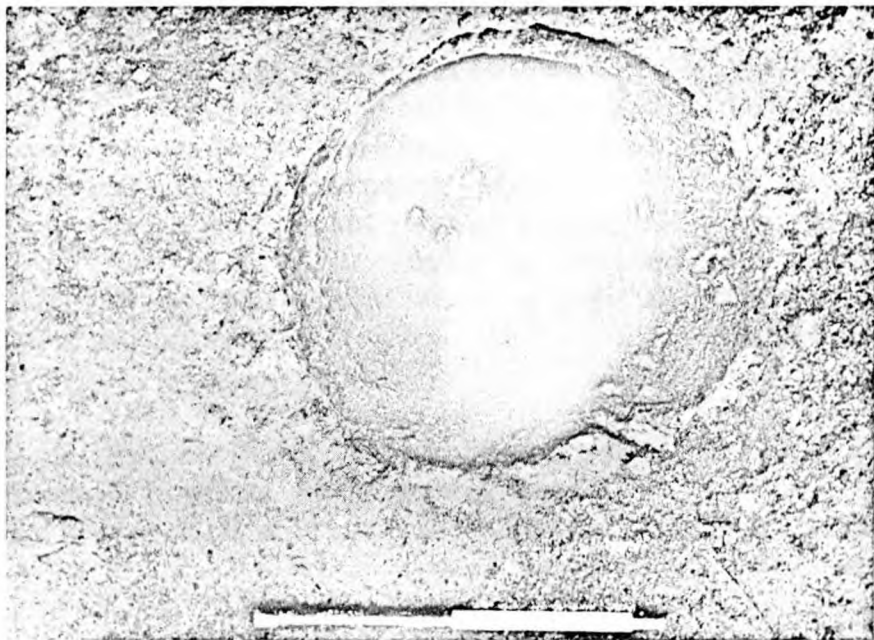


Breach Farm Barrow. The central clay heap.



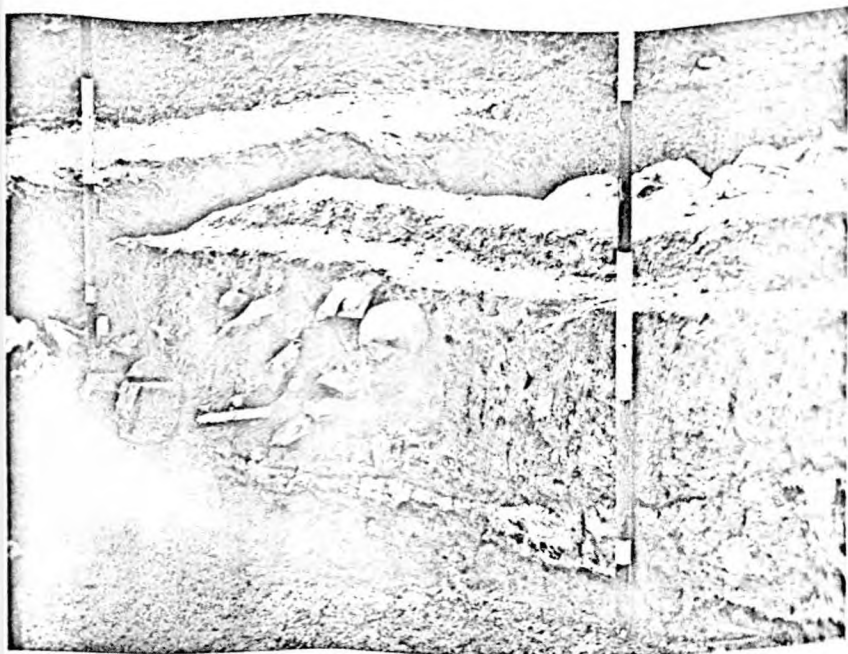
Breach Farm Barrow. The central clay heap in section showing markings.

PLATE E.



Breach Farm Barrow. The burial pit.

LATE F.



Breach Farm Barrow. Section through the stone ring.

LATE G.



Breach Farm Barrow. The largest facing stone in the ring.

on to the mound. And this was confirmed by Dr. North, who kindly examined samples from the sections and supplied the attached report, which shows that the alteration was due to natural causes.

In the drawn sections (fig. 3), therefore, the whole of the central mound is shown as a single deposit, except in the middle part, where an irregular heap of what was probably turf was piled up before the last of the clay was added. This heap was differentiated by its brown colour, and by many irregular horizontal black lines. Its limits were poorly defined. On the west it seems to have presented a more or less vertical face, on the east it sloped upwards, and on north and south its limits were irregular and indistinct.

The central mound therefore consisted of clay in which had been incorporated an irregular heap of turfy material, the purpose and meaning of which are unexplained. Its relationship to the stone ring must be studied before the latter can be described.

The section (Plate F) shows quite clearly that the mound passed beneath the inner core of the ring, and although owing to conditions of lighting and general situation it has not proved possible to illustrate the fact clearly in a photograph, it was also visible as a thin trace beneath the facing-stones themselves. There can therefore be no doubt that the ringwork was built after the mound was laid.

But while the facing stones lay directly upon the 'grey' clay, it will be further recognised from the illustrations that the core of the ringwork lay upon an intervening deposit, which was in fact another brown loamy clay. The conclusion seems to be that after the first (mixed) clay mound had been laid the facing stones were set around it in a circle. A second mound of brown clay was then added, and the monument completed by the addition of the core to the ring. The loam which forms the subsoil in the section is probably the product of the breaking-up of this clay by ploughing. At any rate, the division between loam and 'mixed' clay was clearly marked, while loam and brown clay faded into one another without any clear dividing line. The sudden

flattening of both clay layers beneath the ringwork is presumably the result of compression because of the added weight of the stones.

The *ring* had an overall diameter of 81 feet (E.-W.: N.S. it is two feet less). It varied in width from eight feet on the south to five feet on the north-west. Facing stones were used only on the outside. The inner face was irregular, and the core consisted of a jumble of stones forming as it were a skin on the secondary mound. Most of the stones of the core were comparatively small, and the vast majority appeared to be of the local Lias Limestone, but there were occasional pieces of a thinly-bedded sandstone, and one such appears in the section, Plate F. The facing stones were entirely of Lias Limestone, and their character will be appreciated from the general photograph of the site, and from Plate G, in which the largest of them is shown at close quarters. Their pitted and weathered surface is sufficient to show that they have been obtained by quarrying from the top of the bed-rock, presumably somewhere in the immediate locality, though not on the actual site.

The stone ring provokes three questions: how was it built; what was its original height; was it intended originally to be seen?

In the nature of things, on none of these points is finality possible. As to the first, the plan shows that parts of the northern half of the ring are laid on a curve, whereas on the south—and particularly on the south-east—the circle is built up of straight alignments. In this difference is perhaps to be seen the work of two or more gangs building independently to points fixed by a line from a central peg, and possibly the way in which stones are sometimes used as stretchers on the northern half only may support this idea. On the other hand, the straight alignments may on the south-east side at least, be due simply to the use of a series of unusually long facing stones.

As to the original height of the ring, here too the evidence is uncertain. Throughout most of its circuit only one facing course remains; but on the south side (where the greater depth of covering soil has resulted in its better preservation)



two courses are frequent, and in one place there are actually three. If on this evidence we agree that the ring was originally three courses high, however, we may doubt whether it was ever much higher. We shall see that there is reason to believe that the face was originally exposed, and it is therefore remarkable that very few stones found their way to the ground before the ring was covered up.

The one feature which favours the view that the facing stones were intended to be uncovered is the absence of clay and of any kind of differentiation in the deposits outside the ring. Here (as the drawn sections show) there is only loam which it is suggested may have been drawn downwards by the many years of ploughing to which the site has been subjected.

The monument therefore was a composite barrow with a mound (itself a composite structure) covering a central burial pit, and enclosed by a stone ring, which was probably somewhat higher originally, and which was intended in the first place to be exposed to sight.

It remains to consider the burial and its associated finds.

#### V. THE BURIAL AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS.

The human remains may be dismissed briefly. Mr. Cowley's report reveals surprisingly that three individuals are represented amongst the burnt bones. But comment is impossible in face of the fact that age, sex and other characters could not be determined.

(a) *The bronzes.* It has already been stated that there were four bronze implements (p. ), of which only the axe has survived. Of the remaining three, one was already too far decayed to be identifiable when it was taken from the pit; the other two appear to have been a simple tanged chisel and small flat dagger. The identification of the chisel is based on the fact that part of its square tang and expanded blade was visible at each end of the mass of corrosion in which it was encased. This and the dagger were in an advanced state of decay: no free metal remained, and even the smooth patina which is the last safeguard against disintegration had been broken down. Both specimens powdered rapidly within a short time of finding.

The axe (fig. 4) is very fragile, and perhaps owes its preservation to its more solid character. It is of the comparatively rare slight type, with strongly expanded edge, fairly well-marked central thickening and especially with incipient side flanges, which appear to have been cast rather than hammered up. It has its own cultural significance, which will be considered later; but perhaps even greater is its value as a dating medium, since it can hardly be later than the 'turn' of the Early-Middle Bronze Age.

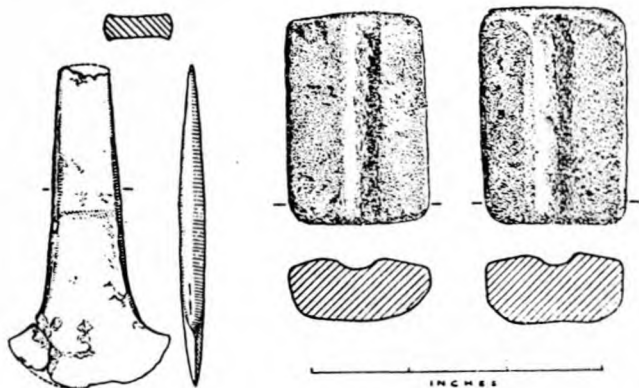


FIGURE 4. THE BRONZE AXE AND SANDSTONE SHAFT SMOOTHERS.

(b) *Wood*. Associated with the bronzes and elsewhere in the pit was a quantity of wood. Much of this had acquired a pulp-like consistency, and it is impossible to say what purpose it had served. Mr. Hyde's report (Appendix II) states that Willow was commonest amongst the specimens examined, and he has also been able to identify as Ash a piece which stood apart from the rest in a position which suggested that it may have been part of the handle of the dagger.

(c) *Arrowshaft-smoothers*. These (fig. 4) are shaped oblong pieces of sandstone—which in Dr. North's view have no character by which their source can be determined: they may well be local—almost identical in size, each with a broad groove longitudinally down the middle. They were found with

(d) *The Flints*, in a compact mass underneath the bronzes. There was no sign of any kind of container. There were twenty-three flints in all, of which two were unworked pieces, presumably raw material. The remainder comprised:—

1. A convex scraper, retaining a good deal of white chalky crust. (Fig. 5, 1).
2. A leaf-shaped point. The bulbar face is untouched; the pressure and resolved flaking on the convex face is of good quality, and the point has the finely serrated edge which is a feature of the finest of the arrowheads (below). (Fig. 5, 2).
- 3-5. Triangular points. They vary slightly in size, but are all of the same form, being isosceles triangles with slightly convex sides. They are worked on both faces, but in 3 and 4 retain part of their original flake-surfaces. 5 has a battered and blunted point. The type has rarely been recorded before\*. (Fig. 5, 3-5).
- 6-8. Discoidal implements. These also are an unusual type. All three are oval or egg-shaped in outline. They appear to combine knife and scraper edges in the same implement, and the nearest parallel would seem to be the discoidal polished knives of the early Bronze Age†. These, however, are much larger than our specimens, which also of course show no sign of having been polished. (Fig. 5, 6-8).
- 9-21. *Thirteen arrowheads*. It may be said without much fear of contradiction, that the arrowheads are unsurpassed in this country. They fall, according to their material, into two groups. Fig. 6, 5-19, 12-13 are all of grey-black flint. As the drawings show, they vary in form, and while 6, 7, and 13 generally resemble one another in the possession of slightly convex sides and drooping barbs, the others show slight but definite differences which defy classification. Their workmanship, particularly in the case of 5, is of a very high standard, but it is inevitable that when compared with their fellows

\* See *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 193 , p. 13 and 1938, p. 74. for examples from Holdenhurst, Hauts., and Aldbourne, Wilts., respectively.

† J. G. D. Clark, *Proc. Prehistoric Soc. E.A.*, 1928-9, 41-54.

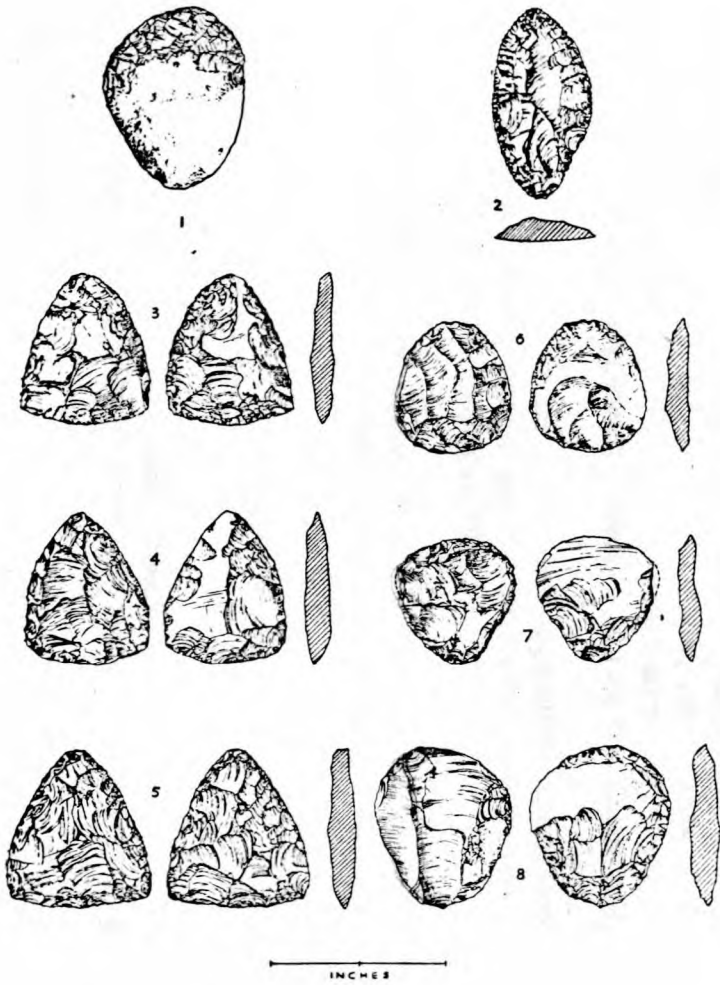
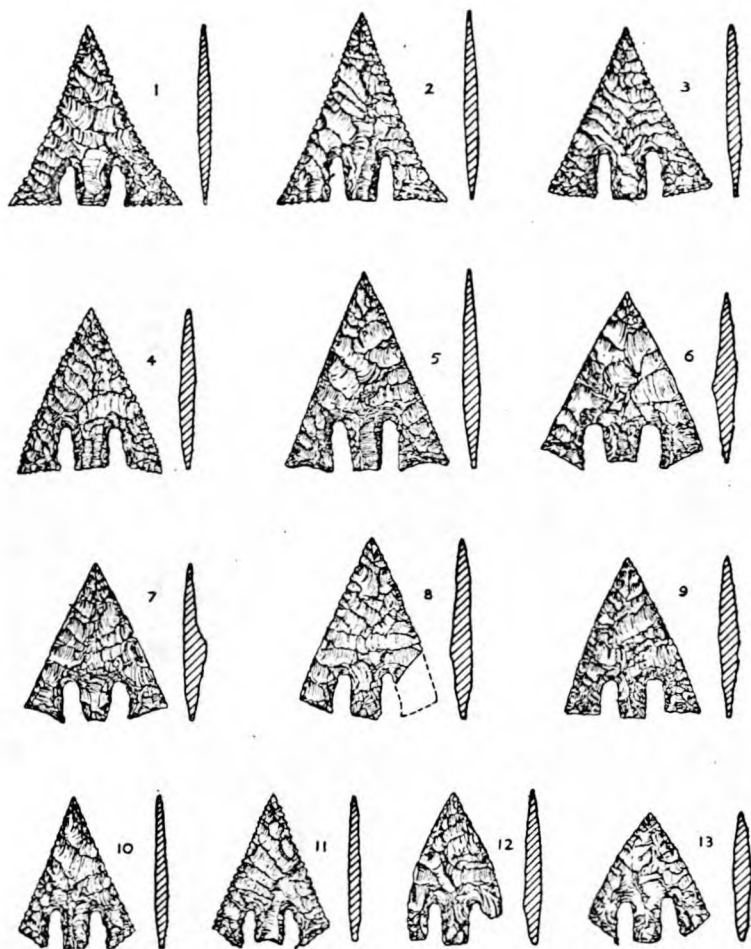


FIGURE 5. FLINT IMPLEMENTS OTHER THAN ARROWHEADS.



INCHES

FIGURE 6. THE ARROWHEADS.

they appear to be of hum-drum character. 1-3, 10 and 11, are also of similar flint, pale yellow in colour, except that 1 and 2 have patches of a warmer orange. 4 is rather different: the colour is uniformly a warm yellow, and the flint lacks the transparent quality of the rest. Whether these colour differences have any significance must remain uncertain until more is known about flint and its sources; in any case this series is more definitely united in the possession of other features. In particular, all have finely serrated edges, which are accompanied by flaking of the highest quality. The uniform thinness of their sections also contrasts with the thicker, less regular sections of the group already described. But here, too, their forms vary considerably, for while 10 and 11 are almost identical, 4 is convex-sided, and the exquisite concave-sided group 1-3 also show variations in their barbs. This variation is indeed the most striking feature of the find from the purely typological point of view. No better illustration could be found of the dangers that attend rigid classification of arrowheads forms.

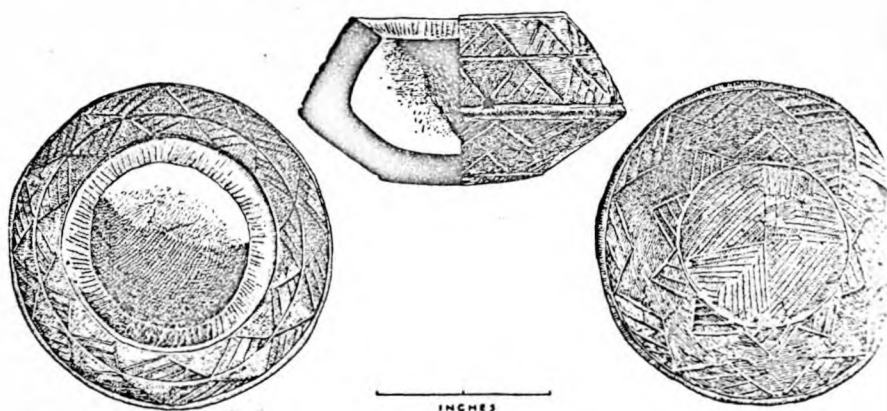


FIGURE 7. THE PIGMY CUP.

(e) *The pigmy cup.* The cup is intact (fig. 7). Of biconical form (diameter 97 mm., height 51 mm.), it is of good though thick ware, with a dark brown or almost black surface which is smooth and well finished. The decoration is incised throughout. The chief elements are a double row



of triangles on the upper part, and a reserved bar chevron on the lower. These, with their fillings of oblique lines, have all been done with a smooth point. In addition the internal bevel of the rim has shallower vertical or slightly oblique lines, and the rounded base a panelled cruciform pattern. Traces of red colouring matter in the incised lines suggest that the decoration on the walls may have been picked out with some kind of pigment. The colour remains in several places, and can hardly be accidental. The pair of holes on the greatest girth is more widely spaced than usual. They are hardly large enough on the inside to admit a fine point.

#### VI. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.

We have already seen that the bronze axe dates the burial to the 'turn' of the early and middle phases of the Bronze Age.

The flint implements shown in fig. 5, together with the two waste pieces not illustrated, seem to indicate that the barrow-builders were obtaining supplies of flint from the chalk country, presumably in the south of England. This material is fresh and black; it contrasts strongly with the poor flint from the drift or sea-beaches which were the only natural source of flint within Wales. The scraper, in particular, has a fresh chalky cortex. But for its absence of patina it might well have been picked up on any of the chalk downs of Wessex.

This connexion may have been purely commercial. It is tempting to go further, and to see in the group as a whole evidence of intercourse with Brittany.

On the positive side, only in Brittany are such finds of arrowheads common with burials, whose contemporaneity is fixed by bronze axes at a similar stage of development to ours. The closest British parallels are to our Nos. 10 and 11 (fig. 6); but the group from Barrow 17 at Everley, Wilts\*, is without decisive associations, and the broken example from Alton Parva†, though found with a grape cup, is hardly a satisfactory document on which to work, even if form in arrowheads were an entirely reliable character.

\* *Ancient Wilts.* I, 183.

† *Archaeologia*, LXXVI (1927), 96, 100.

On the negative side, it must be agreed that the resemblance of the Breach to those from Brittany is not very exact. But the Breton arrowheads themselves vary very much in outline and some of them contain elements, such as angular, slightly splayed barbs, which may well have developed into the distinctive features of our finest examples\*.

The ascription of the arrowheads to Brittany is supported by the evidence of the axe. The form appears to be a refinement of the heavier Breton axes. It is rare in this country: a circumstance which must give added significance to the two examples which have been found here with associations. These are the well-known Bush Barrow (Normanton) find†, and that from Barrow 7 on the Ridgway, Dorset‡, both of which occurred with the appropriate Breton types.

Finally the question of barrow-structure must be considered.

Composite barrows, with a mound of earth containing or enclosed by a stone ring have a wide distribution. Fig. 8, which does not pretend to show the full range, illustrates instances from Yorkshire, south Wales, Denmark, Devon and Brittany, and the type does not appear, therefore, to be restricted to any particular region. The lack of attention which has been given to the question of barrow-structure handicaps us here, and we cannot be sure of the extent to which these different monuments resemble one another in detail. We do not know, for instance, whether Nos. 3 and 4-6 in the figure were provided with the wall-like curb which was a feature at Breach.

For various reasons, however, we can hardly doubt that we are to seek the immediate connexions of our site in such

\* I have made no mention of the flint of which they are made, some of which may or may not be of foreign origin. Nor do I attempt to discuss the pigmy cup. The Brittany associations of the Clandon cup (*Proc. Dorset N.H. and Arch. Soc.*, LVIII, 18-20) may have a bearing on the origin of our type: both at least are biconical. But apart from such varieties as the grape cups and pedestalled cups whose source is more or less self-evident, discussion of individual specimens is valueless without prolonged research over a wide area.

† *Ancient Wilts.*, I, 202-4; cf. *Wessex from the Air*, 191-2.

‡ *Proc. Dorset N.H. and Arch. Soc.*, LVIII, 20ff.

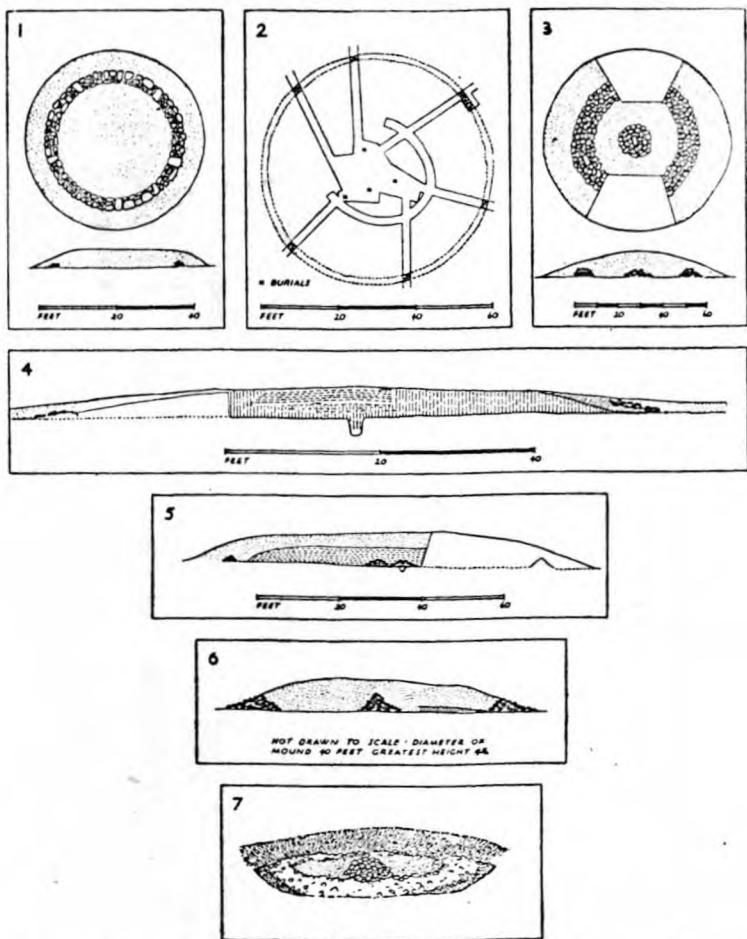


FIGURE 8. COMPARATIVE PLANS AND SECTIONS OF STONE-RINGED BARROWS.

1. Brotton Warsett Hill, Yorks. (Elgee, North-east Yorkshire, 72);  
 2. Pendine, Carm. (J. Ward, *Arch. Camb.*, 1918, 36); 3. Sole, Jaederen, Norway (H. St. G. Gray, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 1908 (II), 58); 4. Breach, Glam.; 5. Parracombe, Devon (R. H. Worth, *Trans. Devon Assoc.*, 1905, 93); 6. Hameldon, Devon (*ibid.*, 1902, 107); 7. Keranbroc'h, Rosporden, Finistère (from a photograph in le Pontois, *La Finistère Préhistorique*, 211).

Devonshire monuments as Paracombe and Hameldon. And here a further link with Brittany presents itself. For the Hameldon barrow produced the well-known amber dagger-pommel with decoration of gold pins\*, a style of ornament which is once again characteristic of the Breton dagger-arrow-head complex, and which occurred also, of course, at Bush Barrow.

In view of the widespread distribution of stone-ringed barrows which we have already noted, it may be merely a coincidence that the type is found in Brittany, where in any case composite barrows of one kind or another appear to be common. But the sum total of coincidences all tending in the same direction is now considerable, and will surely justify a tentative conclusion that the culture represented by the Breach Farm barrow was derived from Brittany.

In which case the intrusion that affected the south of England at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age also reached the coastal plain of south Wales. Indeed, if barrow structure is any guide, its influence was not confined to the immediate neighbourhood of the present site. Stone-ringed barrows are also found further west, as at Mynydd Carn-goch, near Swansea†, and Pendine, Carmarthenshire‡.

Here, after all, prehistory is merely repeating itself, and we are probably dealing with a movement which was not confined to south Wales. As far as our own site is concerned either a transpeninsular or an all sea route up the Bristol Channel would have been possible. If this reading of the evidence is correct the Breach Farm barrow represents the continued operation of a process which had been at work, as far as the Bristol Channel generally was concerned, in megalith and beaker times.

\* It is of course true that the burial with which the dagger and pommel were associated may not have been the primary burial. But it was found on the old ground surface, not merely in the body of the mound, to the south of the centre; and since there seems no need to question the excavator's statement that the small central cairn contained no burial, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was the burial for which the barrow was built. *Trans. Devon Assoc.*, V (1872).

† *Arch. Camb.*, 1856, 52 ff. Another site at Coity, Glamorgan, 5 miles from Breach, is shortly to be published by Sir Cyril Fox.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1918, 35 ff.