

THE DEVIL'S RING, BRIGHTWELL HEATH

by THE LATE R. GILYARD-BEER, O.B.E., M.A., F.S.A.

THE EXCAVATIONS

INTRODUCTION (Fig. 51)

THE DEVIL'S RING was the most distinctive of a group or cemetery of six scheduled barrows lying 5 miles due east of Ipswich on Brightwell Heath, grid reference TM 241443. The heathland hereabouts is particularly well furnished with burial mounds, some 22 of which exist or are known to have existed on Brightwell and the neighbouring heaths of Martlesham, Foxhall and Waldringfield. In 1953 the Devil's Ring and its five companions were threatened with destruction by a proposal to convert this part of the heath to agricultural purposes, involving the levelling of the barrows and other surface features in advance of ploughing. The then Ministry of Works (now the Department of the Environment) decided to excavate the barrows before they were bulldozed, the owner of the land Mr A. H. V. Thompson gave permission, and a limited excavation was carried out during the summer of 1953.

It was a rescue excavation in the strict sense of the term. From the outset it was clear that the time available before destruction would not permit the complete excavation of all the barrows, and it was therefore decided to excavate all of them partially rather than a few completely. The method adopted was to lay down cross sections as if in preparation for excavation by the quadrant method, and to develop these into the excavation down to the natural of a substantial area of the central part of each mound and the whole of one of its quadrants. An additional restriction was imposed by the fact that no archaeologically trained assistance was available and only unskilled labour could be used, with the result that all detailed hand excavation had to be done by the director or, in his absence, by the relief director.

The order in which the barrows were examined in this rough, ready and inadequate fashion was dictated by the direction in which the levelling of the heath proceeded, more or less from west to east, and they were given key-letters from A to F in that order. These letters are retained in this report, but the barrows are described in their general order of significance and productivity, starting with barrow D, the Devil's Ring itself, and ending with the unproductive barrow A. After this partial excavation, the bulldozing of the remains of the barrows was kept under observation in the hope that additional evidence might be revealed accidentally, but nothing of significance was seen.

This part of Brightwell Heath consists of sands and gravels covering the Red Crag of Suffolk. The barrows themselves were all built of this same sand, in which natural drainage had created reddish-brown pan-lines, sometimes concreted. These lines had formed not only in the sand of the barrows but also in the natural sand on which they stood, on occasion penetrating without a break from one into the other and therefore usually being untrustworthy as an indication of historic levels. Old buried turf-lines had leached out completely except where the turf had been burned, and they could not be detected by eye. Nor did soil samples react to analysis distinctively enough to be of practical use, showing only a very slightly higher organic content at the level of the former turf. Over most, but not all of the site, the main indication of buried ground-surfaces was the presence of a higher proportion of gravel in the natural sand a few inches below where the vanished surface had been. The porous nature of the sand also encouraged heavy staining to penetrate from loam-filled disturbances at higher levels down to

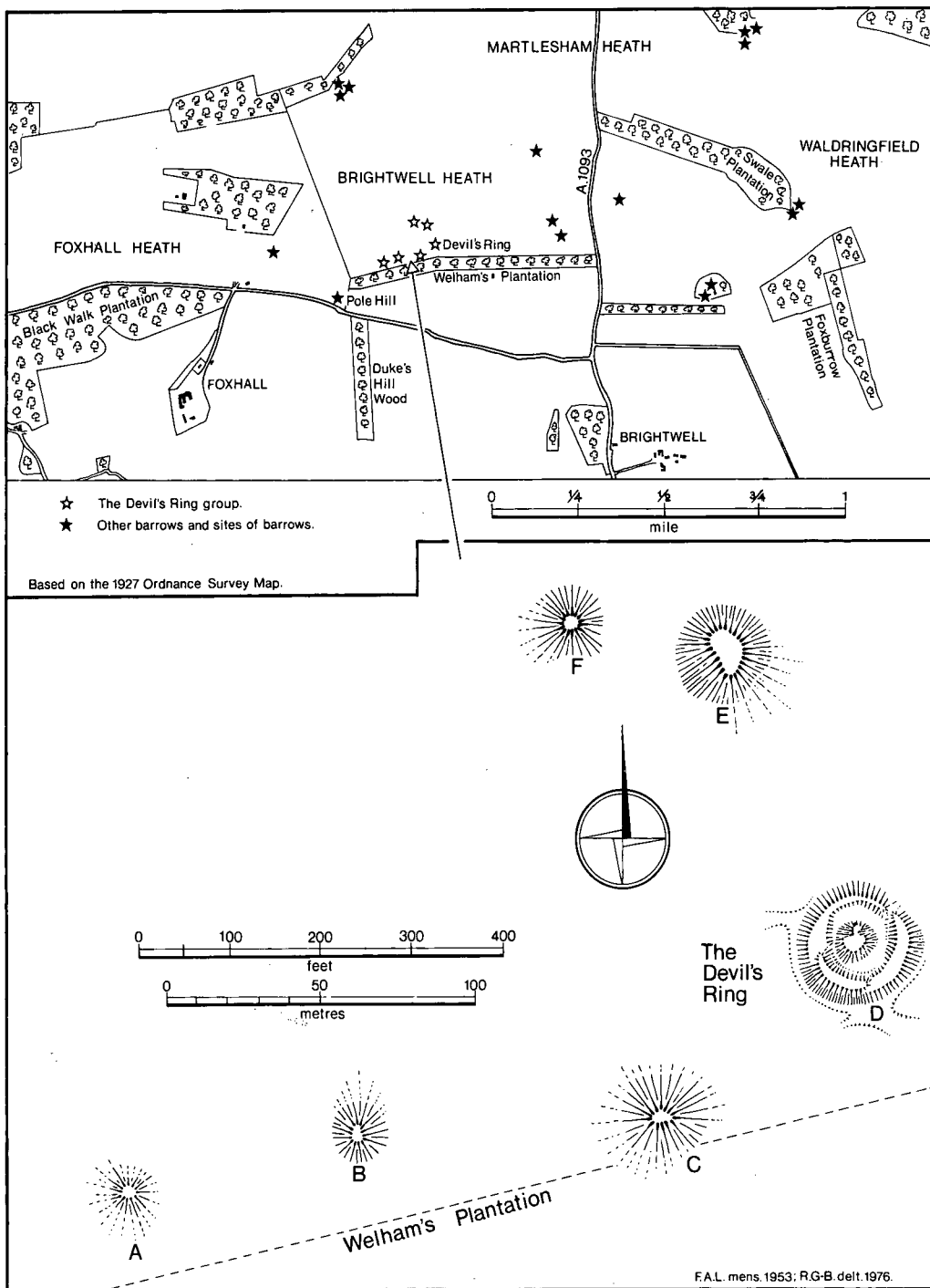


FIG. 51 — Site plans.

considerable depths and even into the natural sand and gravel; its meretricious appearance of clarity sometimes made it difficult to determine the exact extent of physical disturbance.

Brightwell Heath has an impressive record of disturbance, extending from 1538 when a complaint was lodged with Thomas Cromwell, Lord Privy Seal, against 'divers ill-doers who have digged for gold and treasure' at Brightwell (Gairdner 1893, 555¹), up to military exercises during the 1939-45 war. At one time or another most of the barrows had been planted with trees and the bases of some of them had been circled by rings of trees, the roots of which had destroyed stratification over large areas. Robber-pits from old excavations had also been destructive, but less destructive than the widespread military activity that had left sandbagged trenches, dug-outs roofed with corrugated iron, and even a small dump of explosives concealed within the mounds. But the most destructive agent of all had been the rabbit; it was clear that the barrows had long served as warrens and the burrows penetrated to all levels, leaving only comparatively small areas that were capable of providing trustworthy stratification. For those interested in the relationship between rabbit-culture and pillow-mounds it was noticeable that the Brightwell rabbits had shown a marked preference for the artificially constructed barrows as opposed to the slightly more compacted natural sands of the heath.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first name to be mentioned must be that of the late Group-Captain G. M. Knocker, p.s.a., who during my absences from the site shouldered the thankless task of relief director with his customary competence and unquenchable cheerfulness. Specialist reports have been kindly provided by Mr R. Robertson-Mackay, the Ancient Monuments Laboratory through Mr L. Biek, the National Physical Laboratory, Mr D. R. Brothwell, Dr J. F. Levy, and the late Dr J. S. Weiner. Mr F. A. Lewin of the Ancient Monuments Architects Branch carried out the general survey of the site, the establishment of levels and the contouring of the barrows. Other acknowledgments are given in Mr Robertson-Mackay's report on the pottery and the flint and stone implements. I am also indebted to Mr D. Sherlock for much help in the later stages of the preparation of this report, and to my son Peter Gilyard-Ber for correcting the typescript.

THE DEVIL'S RING: BARROW D (FIGS 52 AND 53)

Summary. A variant form of disc barrow with a low mound covering a central fire-pit and an offset un-urned cremation, set on a plateau encircled by a substantial bank and a deep outer ditch. Pottery from the construction of the bank points to a Bronze Age date, perhaps at the end of the period of overlap between the primary and secondary series of collared urns. There is some evidence for early Iron Age occupation in the area, perhaps as early as the 6th century B.C., after the ditch had silted up completely.

Excavation

Before excavation the Devil's Ring showed as a low and much disturbed small mound measuring some 43ft (13.1m) from N. to S. by some 39ft (11.9m) from E. to W. and standing about 1ft 6ins (0.45m) high, occupying the middle of a plateau about 62ft (18.9m) in diameter from N. to S. by 58ft (17.7m) from E. to W. Outside the plateau was a well marked concentric bank forming a circle about 100ft (30.5m) in diameter measured from its crests. The bank was much eroded and had spread to a width of approximately 33ft (10.1m). At its highest it stood 3ft 6 ins (1.1m) above the level of the plateau, but in general had been eroded down to 2ft 6 ins (0.76m). There were no surface indications of a ditch.

THE DEVIL'S RING.

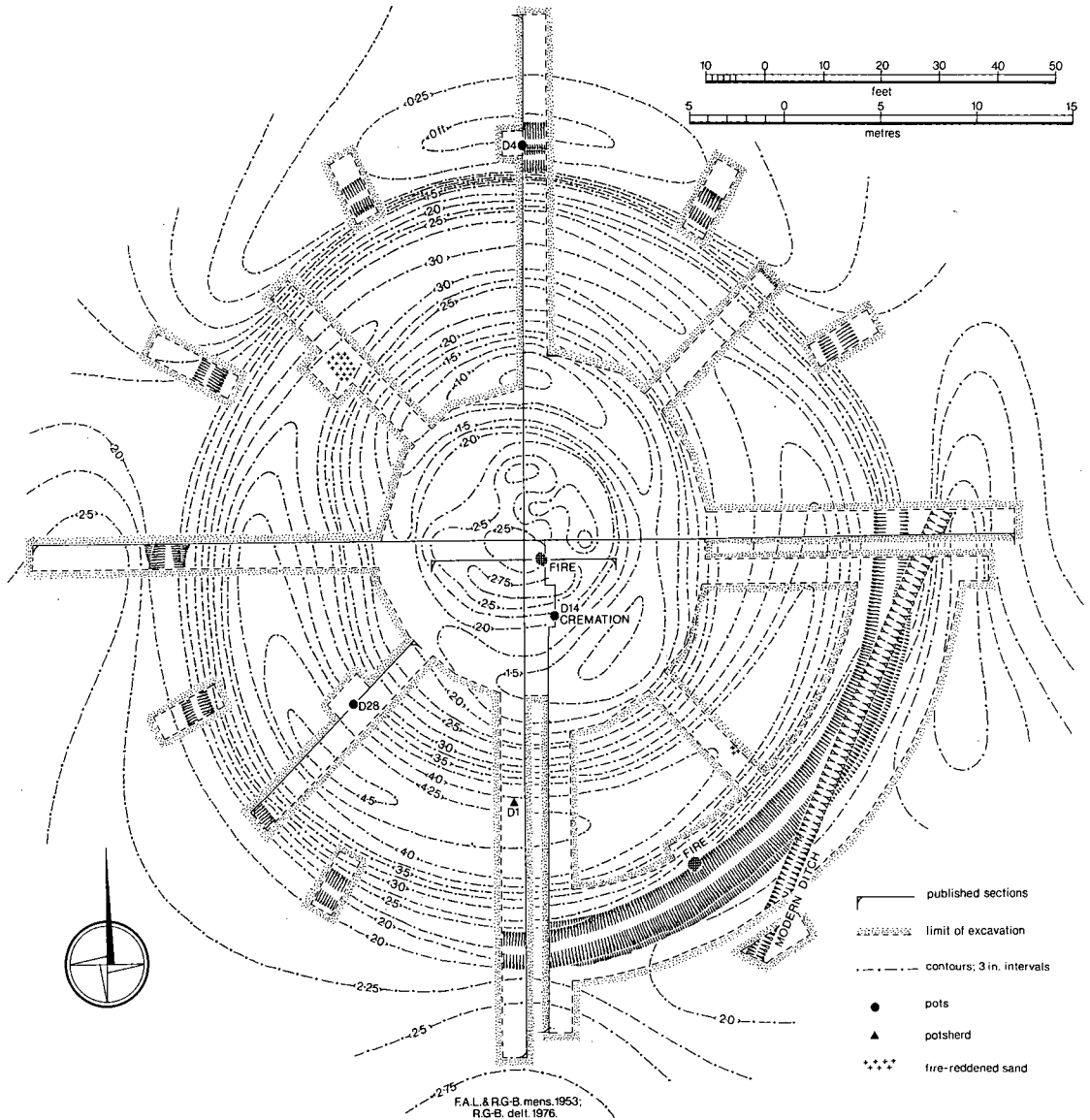
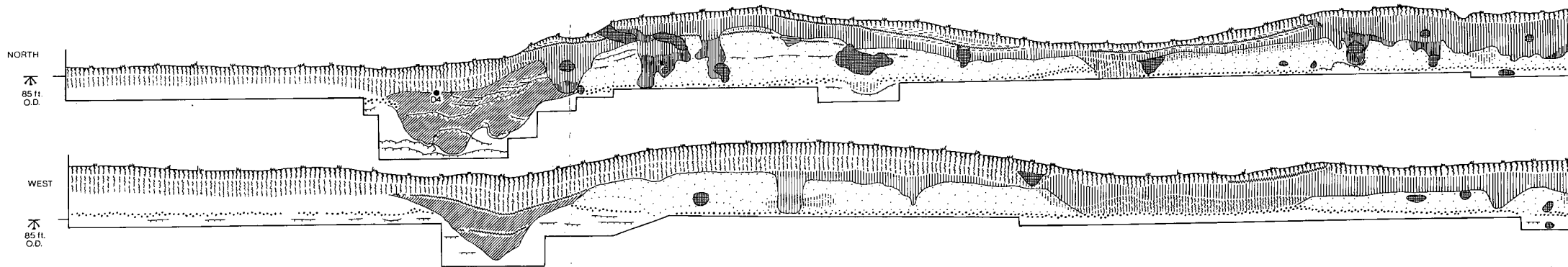
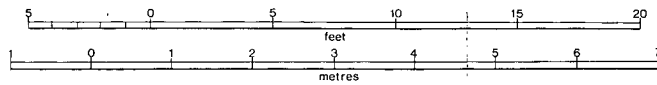


FIG. 52 — Barrow D: plan.



G.M.K. & R.G.B. mens. 1953; R.G.B. delt. 1975.

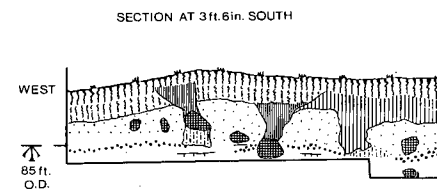
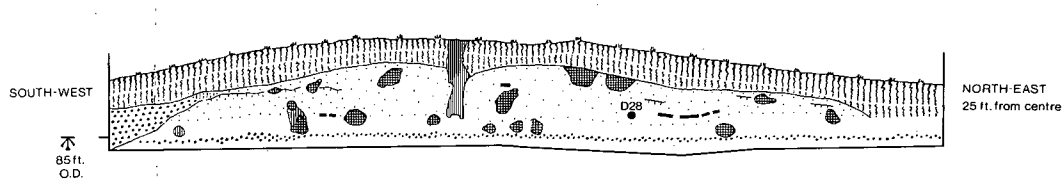
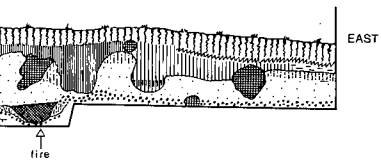
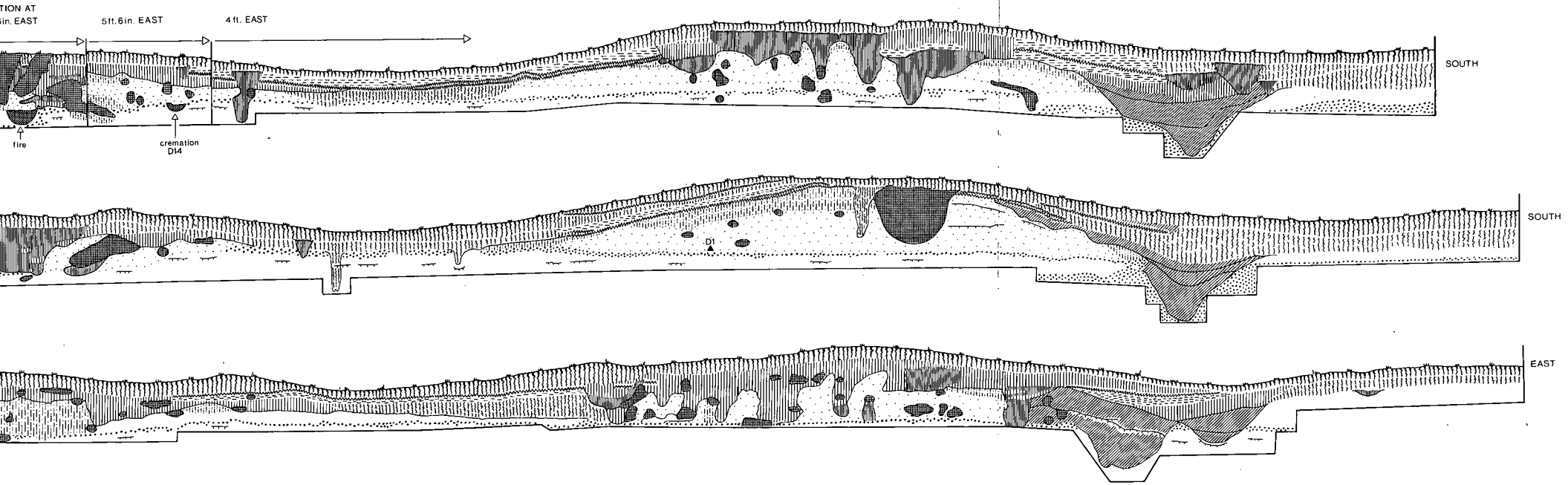


FIG. 53 — E



- | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| humus | silt | charcoal | pots |
| root penetration | disturbed sand of mound | cremation material | potsherd |
| rabbit-holes, tree-roots &c. | sand of mound | gravel | |
| mixed sand & loam | burned humus | natural sand | |
| d ^o (dark) | scorched loam | pan lines | |

sections.

other and smaller area, only about 1ft 6ins (0.45m) in diameter, was 35ft (10.7m) S. and 36ft (10.97m) E. of the centre. If these areas had indeed been the sites of fires, the debris had been cleared away before the bank was built.

In the base of the bank and a little above the old ground-surface at a point 26ft 9ins (8.15m) S. and 30ft (9.14m) W. of the centre of the barrow the lower part of a small collared urn (D28. Pl. XVa) had been placed almost upright but tilted slightly towards the S.W. Starting 1ft (0.3m) to the N.E. of it and continuing for 2ft 6ins (0.76m) in that direction and at the same level the sand of the bank was stained with charcoal. Enough of the undisturbed bank remained above this pot to show that it was not a secondary insertion, and its filling proved on analysis to be indistinguishable from the sand of the bank. These circumstances make it evident that the empty pot, already lacking its rim, was placed here during the building of the bank. In an analogous position at 42ft 7ins (12.8m) S. and 2ft 3ins (0.68m) W. of the centre a single sherd from a bowl (D1), possibly a cinerary urn auxiliary vessel, was also found near the base of the bank, but in an area disturbed by rabbit burrows.

Outside the bank with little or no intervening berm a substantial ditch had been cut, its diameter as measured from the outer lip varying from 133ft (40.5m) to 138ft 6ins (42.2m). Although on plan the ditch approximated so closely to a true circle that its irregularities could not be detected by eye, measurements showed that its course to the N.W., N. and N.E. had been struck from a point some 5ft (1.52m) S. of centre, whilst the S. and S.E. sectors had been struck from a point some 9ft (2.74m) N.W. of this, giving a curve of slightly greater radius. An attempt had been made in this S.E. quadrant to give the ditch a curve more consonant with the rest by cutting back its outer lip on the S.E. and its inner lip on the S. (Pl. XVb). A similar adjustment was also seen on the N. side where a recutting had produced two intersecting ditch profiles.

The profile of the ditch was as variable as its plan, sometimes being almost semicircular and sometimes triangular. Its average width had been about 6ft (1.83m) at the top, increasing to as much as 9ft (2.74m) where the lip had been recut, and its depth varied from 3ft (0.91m) to 3ft 6ins (1.06m). It had filled with sandy silt derived from erosion of the natural sands of the heath and slip from the bank, and the general absence of clearly marked levels of organic material suggested that the process of silting had been rapid (Pl. XVIa).

Towards the top of this ditch filling at a point 64ft (19.5m) N. of centre no less than 47 fragments of a single early Iron Age vessel (D4) were found immediately below the modern levels of disturbance. Although these sherds lay on the horizon between ditch filling and more recent overburden the fact that all belonged to one vessel suggests that it had been placed on top of the ditch filling and later broken up by disturbances. The soil associated with it was comparable on analysis to the general nature of the upper parts of the ditch filling itself and showed no trace of the vessel having had significant contents.

The whole of the S.E. quadrant of the ditch was excavated and sections were put through it at 10 places in the other three quadrants. These sections, and 9 sections through the bank, showed no signs of causeways across the ditch or of entrances through the bank, and the inference is that both bank and ditch were continuous.

The more recent disturbances to the Devil's Ring presented no points of special interest, except for a shallow and relatively modern ditch running in a straight line from S.S.E. to N.N.W. and cutting through the lip and upper parts of the filling of the prehistoric ditch in its S.E. quadrant.

In addition to the main sections across the cardinal axes of the barrow, excavation down to the natural included the whole area of the central mound and plateau, the whole of the S. E. quadrant of the ditch, six more sections to trace the rest of the course of the ditch, and three more sections through the encircling bank. Excavation showed that the barrow had been erected on ground sloping gently upwards towards the S. and E., and that it had consisted of four circular elements arranged concentrically; a central mound, a surrounding plateau, a bank outside the plateau, and a ditch outside the bank.

The mound must always have been small and low, although its dimensions could not be fixed with any degree of accuracy because only remnants remained undisturbed by burrowing animals and root penetration. It was wholly built of sand and had a diameter of 38 to 40ft (11.6 to 12.2m). Nowhere did it remain more than 2ft (0.61m) high above the old ground level, and it contained no structures.

Approximately beneath the centre of this mound a pit (Pl. XIVa) had been dug into the old ground-surface, oval on plan and bowl-shaped in section, measuring 2ft (0.61m) by 1ft 7ins (0.48m) and 9ins (0.23m) deep. The pit contained the charcoal from a fire of oak, mostly in its S. and E. parts, with a few fragments of burned bone (D7) too small for identification of the sex or age of the body, in the upper part of the pit towards the N.W. Over these deposits the pit was filled with dirty sand having humic and charcoal contents. The pit was too small to have been a pyre and the very small amount of bone in it can hardly be dignified with the name of a cremation. It seems more likely that a wood fire was lit here and that its ashes were levelled up to the old ground-surface with dirty sand containing some charcoal and bone from a cremation carried out elsewhere.

Only 2ft (0.61m) to the E. of this and 8ft 6ins (2.6m) to the S. towards the edge of the mound a very shallow hollow only 3ins (0.07m) deep and about 1ft (0.3m) in diameter had been scooped out of the old ground-surface and filled with the remains of a cremation (D14. Pl. XIVb) — charcoal, blackened sand and burned fragments of bone. The bone probably represents the cremation of an adult, but there is no certainty of this or of the sex. Here again, the cremation had not been carried out *in situ* and the material had been brought from a pyre elsewhere.

Although the mound above both fire-pit and cremation was much disturbed, modern root penetration reaching to the top of the former in places, no signs could be found of either of them having been inserted into the mound, and it is virtually certain that both were primary features.

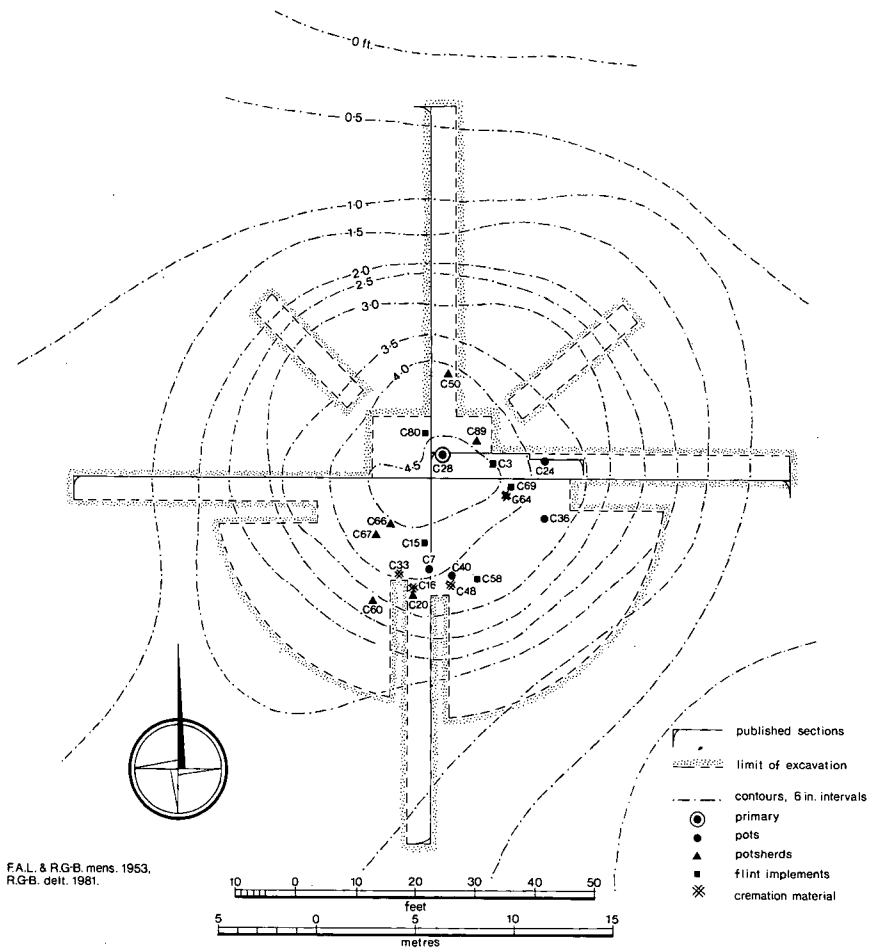
The plateau surrounding the mound was irregular in shape because of the uneven slip of the surrounding earthworks, but averaged some 115 to 120ft (35.0 to 36.6m) in diameter. Judging from the manner in which the bank had slipped over the external ditch and allowing for a comparable slip over the edge of the plateau the latter may have been originally as much as 136ft (41.45m) in diameter. Complete excavation showed that the plateau contained no structures or other features of significance.

The outer edge of the plateau was enclosed by the substantial annular bank which, where undisturbed, measured from 24ft 6ins to 32ft 6ins (7.5 to 9.9m) wide, and 3ft 6ins (1.06m) high, and in areas where its crest could be seen not to have been disturbed by deep root-penetration must once have stood at least 4ft (1.22m) high. It was constructed of clean sand, and although a total of nine sections was cut through it no structures were found. In two areas the old ground-surface beneath the bank appeared to have been subjected to fire, the sand being reddened and mixed with flecks of charcoal. The larger of these areas, roughly oval and measuring 5ft (1.52m) by 3ft 6ins (1.06m) lay 29ft (8.8m) N. and 31ft (9.45m) W. of the centre of the barrow. The

DEVIL'S RING BRIGHTWELL HEATH

BARROW C (FIGS 54 AND 55)

Summary. A bowl barrow without a ditch, erected in two stages. The first stage had a central fire-pit into which a cremation in a collared urn had been inserted, and over this a low mound with two secondary un-urned cremations. After a very short period of time the mound had been heightened and two more cremations were associated with this heightening, one in a collared urn and the other un-urned. The pottery points to the period of overlap between the primary and secondary series of collared urns for both stages of the mound, and the primary cremation yielded a radiocarbon date of 1770 ± 130 b.c. A few sherds of middle Neolithic and Beaker pottery suggest occupation near the site in those periods, and early Iron Age pottery suggests subsequent occupation nearby.



F.A.L. & R.G.B. mens. 1953.
R.G.B. dett. 1961.

FIG. 54 — Barrow C: plan.

Excavation

Before excavation this appeared as a fairly low mound, much disturbed, and measuring about 106ft (32.3m) in diameter from N. to S. by 99ft (30.2m) from E. to W., standing to an average height of 3ft (0.91m) above the surrounding heath.

Excavation showed that the mound had been built on a gradual rise in the old ground-level, the highest point of which was slightly S.E. of the centre of the mound.

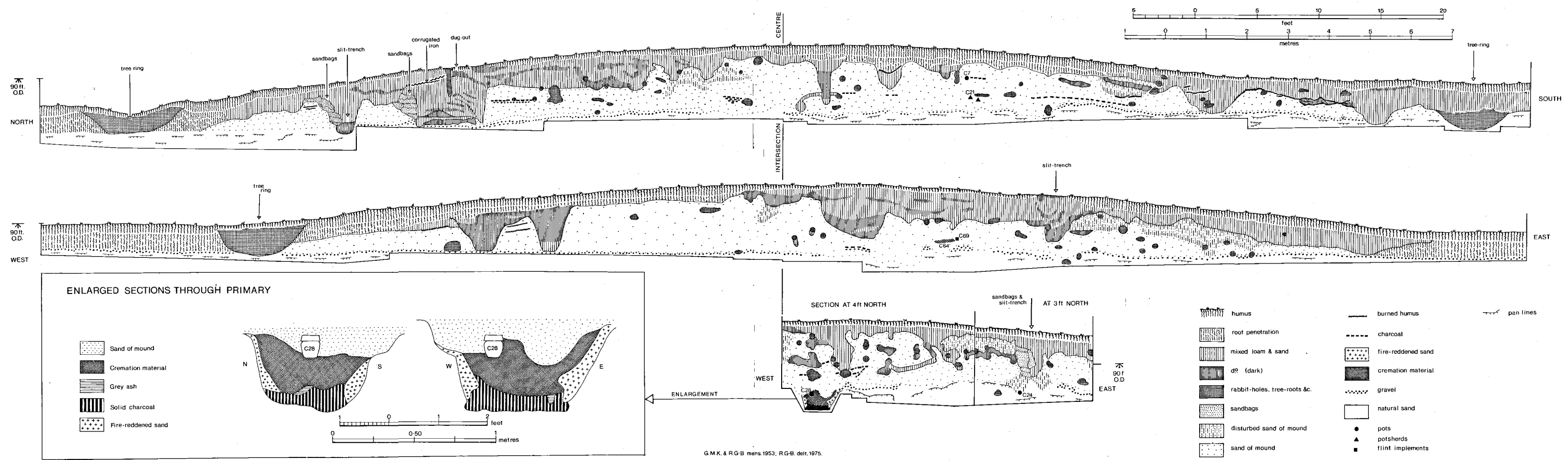
4ft 6ins (1.37m) N. and 2ft (0.61m) E. of the centre of the mound a pit had been dug some 2ft (0.61m) into the natural sand of the heath. This pit was roughly oval on plan, measuring 2ft 8ins (0.81m) by 2ft 4ins (0.71m) with walls sloping steeply to a flat bottom measuring 2ft 1in (0.63m) by 1ft 9ins (0.53m). The floor of the pit was covered by a solid deposit of clean charcoal from 4ins (0.1m) to 8ins (0.2m) in depth, derived entirely from oak and from more than one tree, some of the wood having been of slower growth than the rest (C52). The sand of the walls of the pit was reddened by fire to an average depth of 2ins (0.05m), and some of this red sand had slipped downwards covering the upper edge of the charcoal deposit. Above the charcoal the pit had been filled almost to the top with dirty brown sand containing much charcoal and fragments of bone. Here again, the charcoal had been derived from oak whilst the bone fragments, most of which occurred in the W. part of the filling, probably represented a single individual and contained a high proportion of skull fragments (C31).

In this W. part of the filling where the proportion of bone was highest a collared urn (C28) had been inserted in the fill in an upright position (PI.XVIb). The urn was filled to the top with oak charcoal and the cremated remains of a single individual whose sex and age could not be determined. Both the pit and the urn it contained were covered by the sand of the mound.

The pit itself was too small to have acted as a pyre for carrying out the cremation; nor did the obvious remains of the fire in it contain any cremation material. The sequence of events indicated by the stratification is firstly the digging of the pit; secondly the lighting of an oak fire in it generating sufficient heat to redden the sand and cause the walls of the pit to slip; thirdly the filling of the pit with the scrapings of a cremation carried out elsewhere; fourthly the insertion into the filling of the urn containing the major parts of the cremation; fifthly the construction of the mound over all this. The contents of the urn yielded a radiocarbon date of approximately 1770 ± 130 b.c.

The mound erected over this primary cremation is best described in two parts for there was certainly a pause during its building, although it cannot be said with certainty that this pause was long enough for the mound to be regarded as representing two distinct periods. Both the upper and lower parts of the mound were built of the same clean sand, nor was any turf-line recognisable on the upper surface of the lower mound, and the division between the two could only be delimited with accuracy where that upper surface had been contaminated by charcoal. Fortunately the contamination covered fairly extensive areas, and from these the lower mound could be seen to have stood some 2ft (0.61m) high near the centre, tailing off from 20 to 28ft (6.1 to 8.5m) S. of the centre, 30 to 33ft (9.14 to 10.1m) E. of it, and 32 to 40ft (9.75 to 12.2m) W. of it, indicating an original diameter of about 65ft (19.8m). On the W. this lower mound seems to have projected beyond the upper mound.

The clean sand of which the lower mound was constructed contained no recognisable structures. Near its base, 16ft 6ins (5.03m) S. and 4ft (1.22m) W. of centre a few fragments of burned bone and charcoal (C27) were found, and 5ft (1.52m) N. of these at a slightly higher level an oak charcoal stain, the shape of which suggested a small piece of flat board. A middle Neolithic rim (C65) was found on the old ground surface beneath the mound at 9ft 7ins (2.9m) S. and 9ft (2.74m) W. of centre. Isolated potsherds also occurred in the sand of the mound itself, including middle Neolithic sherds (C50) at 16ft 2ins (4.9m) N. and 4ft 7ins (1.4m) W. of



G.M.K. & R.G.B. mens. 1953; R.G.B. dett. 1975.

FIG. 55 — Barrow C: sections.

centre, and Beaker sherds at 7ft 6ins (2.3m) S. and 6ft 10ins (2.1m) W. (C66) and at 15ft 8ins (4.8m) S. and 7ft 11ins (2.4m) W. (C67), this last associated with a little charcoal.

In the centre of the surface of the lower mound, over the primary pit, the sand showed signs of burning and contained charcoal derived from both oak and alder (C73). Several other features were found on this surface. 12ft 9ins (3.9m) E. and 2ft 6ins (0.8m) S. of centre there had been deposited an un-urned cremation (C64), probably of a man of more than 20 years of age, associated with a good plano-convex knife (C69. PI.XVIIa). 18ft 6ins (5.6m) S. and 3ft (0.9m) W. of centre another un-urned cremation (C16) had been placed in a shallow hole some 10 to 12ins (0.25 to 0.3m) wide and 4ins (0.1m) deep that had been scooped out of the surface of the lower mound; the remains were too fragmentary for determination of sex or age, and it seems likely that they represent only a part of the cremation material. A few more fragments of bone found 2ft 6ins (0.76m) E. of this, and seven more fragments 2ft (0.6m) farther S. may well have belonged to the same body.

A single potsherd lay on the surface 14ft 6ins (4.4m) S. and 5ft (1.5m) E. of centre, associated with a little charcoal, three small pieces of cremated bone (C56) and a flint scraper (C58). From 20 to 28ft (6.1 to 8.5m) S. of centre there was a spread of oak charcoal up to 3ft (0.9m) in width, containing a single Beaker sherd (C20), and acorns (C91) were identified in a similar spread of charcoal 20ft (6.1m) N. of centre. 9ft 6ins (2.9m) W. of C58 a fragment of a long bone (C62) lay close to another single Beaker sherd (C60). Five other sherds and a flint knife (C15) were also found scattered on this surface.

None of these features showed any signs of having been inserted through the sand of the upper mound. The picture presented by this final phase of the building of the lower mound is therefore one of very untidy activity; the lighting of a bonfire of oak and alder on the summit of the mound, and the deposition of two un-urned cremations on the S. and E. slopes, accompanied by the accidental spilling of cremation material, charcoal and a few residual potsherds. It was noticeable that the spread of charcoal associated with these activities fell within an area of 25ft (7.6m) radius of the centre of the mound.

Above this dirty surface the upper part of the mound, also built of clean sand and containing no recognisable structures, had a diameter of approximately 100ft (30.5m) from N. to S. and 89ft (27.1m) from E. to W. Undisturbed parts of it remained to a maximum height of 5ft 3ins (1.6m) above the mean level of the original ground-surface.

Low in the sand of the upper mound and almost on the surface of the lower mound isolated potsherds were found at 10ft 3ins (3.14m) S. and 7ft 6ins (2.3m) W. of centre, and at 4ft 6ins (1.4m) N. and 3ft 9ins (1.14m) W. of centre. Ten potsherds were found in the make-up of the mound at higher levels, three of them being associated with fragments of charcoal. The base, possibly of an urn (C89), with no associated features occurred at 6ft (1.8m) N. and 7ft 9ins (2.36m) E. of centre. All these sherds, together with a flint secondary flake (C3) and a scraper (C80) had the appearance of having been brought in with the sand when the mound was built.

On the surface of the upper mound in the few areas where it had remained relatively undisturbed four features were found *in situ*. The first was an accessory cup (C7) at 15ft (4.6m) S. of centre, with no associated features. The second was a miniature collared urn (C36) in a very shallow hollow scooped out of the surface, 19ft (5.8m) E. and 6ft 10ins (2.1m) S. of centre, also without associated features. The third was a group of 15 fragments representing parts of two urns (C40), associated with a little oak charcoal and with a few cremated bones (C48) that probably represent a single adult; although the urns had been squashed flat the arrangement of the surviving fragments suggested that one of them had originally been placed rim downwards on the surface of the mound at 16ft (4.9m) S. and 3ft 6ins (1.06m) E. of centre. The fourth was the remains of an un-urned cremation (C33), probably of a single adult, in a hole 1ft (0.3m) in

diameter and 10ins (0.25m) deep dug into the surface of the mound at 16ft (4.9m) S. and 5ft 6ins (1.7m) W. of centre.

Also, at 2ft 8ins (0.81m) N. and 19ft (5.8m) E. of the centre, an Iron Age cup (C24) was found in a small hole 8ins (0.2m) in diameter and 9ins (0.23m) deep in the sand of the mound. Although the cup itself did not appear to have been disturbed, it lay beneath the floor of a sandbagged slit-trench and the sand between it and the trench floor had been heavily stained and disturbed, destroying the earlier stratification. The circumstances of its deposition are therefore unknown. On analysis its contents proved to be modern root-mat with some charcoal and pebbles. Two more Iron Age sherds (C71, C77) were found in the rubbish on the floors of these slit-trenches.

No signs of a ditch outside the mound were found. This might well have been obliterated by the disturbance caused by the planting of a tree-ring round it in later times, but it can be said with confidence that no ditch existed towards the E. where the ground had not been disturbed in this way.

Elsewhere, the whole area of the mound had suffered very extensive disturbance in modern times, including the digging of military slit-trenches revetted with sandbags, and a dug-out with sandbag walls and a corrugated iron roof. A small dump of gelignite in a very sensitive condition was also found buried here and was successfully removed by the Royal Engineers. Some of these disturbances had gone down into the natural sand below the barrow, as had the root disturbance caused by the perimeter tree-ring, and it was clear that the mound had long served as a very active rabbit-warren.

The presence of the Iron Age cup and sherds, although associated with relatively modern military disturbance, suggests that there had been occupation of that date somewhere in the vicinity of this barrow.

BARROW F (FIGS 56 AND 57)

Summary. A bowl barrow without a ditch. Beneath the centre of the barrow there was an oval pit lined with a wickerwork (?) mat and containing a wooden object of uncertain purpose. There was also a small fire-pit towards the S. edge of the mound. No burial was identified.

Excavation

The order in which the various areas of land on the heath were levelled for cultivation made it necessary to leave the excavation of this mound until the end of the campaign, and the time available for digging ran out when only the E. and W. trenches had been taken down to the natural, when the S. trench had hardly been begun and the N. trench had not been started. As the labour was withdrawn from the site on the Friday before the final bulldozing started on the following Monday, an attempt fostered by desperation was made to find the primary deposit by the frankly procrustean method of digging out the filling of a deep robber-pit that had penetrated the centre of the mound, in the hope that some evidence might have survived beneath the bottom of the pit.² This crude method, which created a pit 8ft 6ins (2.6m) deep and 4ft (1.2m) wide with near-vertical sides in the soft sand of the mound, brought its own just reward in the collapse of the northern end of the pit whilst the primary deposit was being examined. Although the structure beneath the mound was measured, plotted and sampled, photography could not be completed.

DEVIL'S RING BRIGHTWELL HEATH

Before excavation the mound stood 4ft 9ins (1.45m) high above the general level of the heath and was slightly oval on plan, measuring some 80ft (24.4m) from N. to S. by 70ft (21.3m) from E. to W. There were no surface indications of a surrounding ditch.

Excavation showed that the mound had been built on fairly level ground. Where undisturbed it was of clean sand, standing to a height of 4ft 2ins (1.3m) above the old ground surface. Its area could only be checked in the E. - W. section, where it was 70ft (21.3m) across but had originally been larger, the E. perimeter having been curtailed by later disturbance. No pottery or structures were found within the limited areas excavated, nor was there any evidence for a surrounding ditch.

There was no layer of gravel across this part of the site, and beneath the central part of the mound the old ground surface appeared as a layer of dirty sand flecked with charcoal, with signs of penetration by small roots into the natural sand beneath, suggesting that a light growth of vegetation had been burned off. This layer could be traced over a distance of 39ft (11.6m) beneath the central part of the mound and failed to reach its W. edge by 13ft (3.9m). Its relationship to the E. edge could not be determined because here the lip of the mound had been disturbed, and lack of a N. - S. section prevented its extent in those directions from being traced.

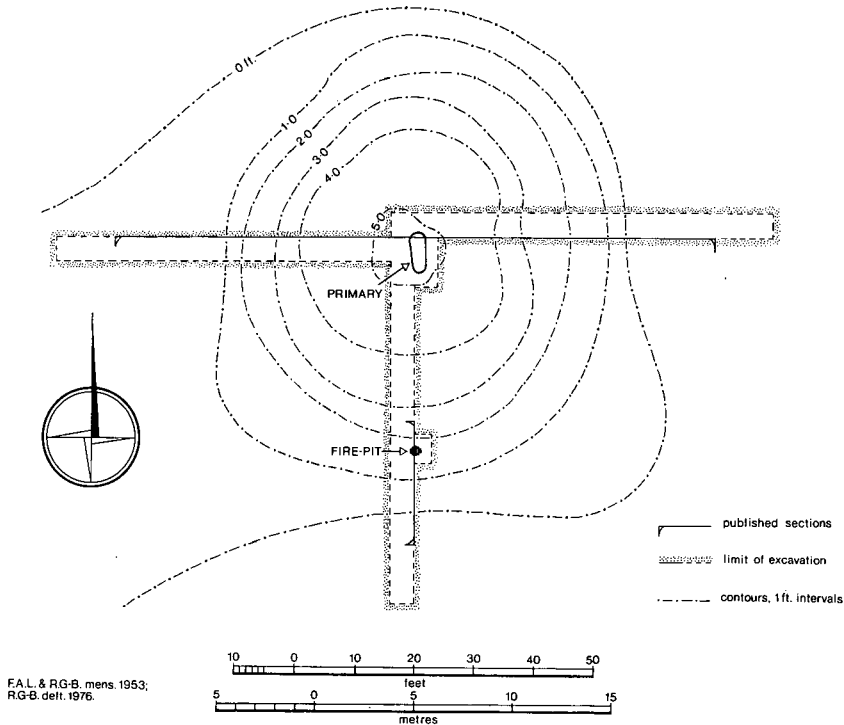


FIG. 56 — Barrow F: plan.

Towards the edge of the mound, 34ft (10.4m) S. of the centre, a small pit had been dug 2ft 2ins (0.66m) into the natural sand. It was full of charcoal and the sand of its walls was reddened by fire. Its contents could not be fully examined because it was destroyed by intruders on the site during the night following its discovery, but preliminary examination showed no traces of cremation material and it appears to have been a simple fire-pit.

Beneath the centre of the mound, immediately below the old burned ground surface and sealed by it except in two places where this had been broken by later disturbances, a large pit had been dug to a depth of 2ft 9ins (0.84m) into the natural sand. The upper 1ft 3ins (0.38m) of this pit was 4ft 9ins (1.45m) wide from E. to W. but had been curtailed by a robber-pit on its E. side and may originally have measured about 5ft 6ins (1.67m). Its N. - S. dimension was not fully traced. It had roughly sloping walls which ended on both sides with a gentler slope or shelf delimiting the lower part of the pit, the shape of which was both more clearly defined and more regular (Pl. XVIIb).

This lower part of the pit, extending from 1ft 3ins (0.38m) to 2ft 9ins (0.84m) below the old ground surface, was oblong in shape with its long axis from N. to S. It had a flat bottom, the edges of which curved up to meet its near-vertical walls. On plan the side walls were straight but tapered evenly to enclose a space that was wider at the N. end than at the S. The N. end had rounded angles but a fairly straight top, whilst the S. end was more evenly rounded. The measurements of the pit were 2ft 3ins (0.68m) at the N. end, tapering to 1ft 7ins (0.48m) at the S. end, and its overall length was 10ft 4ins (3.15m). The measurements of the top of this lower part of the pit were slightly larger because of its tapering walls; 2ft 9ins (0.84m) at the N. end, 2ft 4ins (0.7m) at the S. end, and 11ft (3.35m) in length.

The pit was full of sand which was a little greyer than the sand of the mound above or the natural sand into which it had been cut. On its walls and floor extensive traces could be seen of a dark brown stain or shadow, broken only by two rabbit-holes and by lighter disturbance at the N. end. The stain had a coarsely speckled or mottled appearance which suggested strongly that it derived from a lining of closely woven wickerwork about 1 to 1½ ins (0.02 to 0.03m) thick.

Lying lengthwise on this wickerwork floor near the E. side of the pit was a more solid stain that seemed to represent a rather shapeless wooden object which had been perhaps as much as 3ft 5ins (1.04m) long (the stains spread and faded out towards the N., where there had also been disturbance by rabbits), 7½ ins (0.19m) wide at the S. end and narrowing to as little as 2ins (0.05m) to the N. The S. end of this object seemed to have had most wood in it, up to 1in (0.02m) thick, but pierced by an irregular oval shape like a knot-hole.

It must be emphasized that neither the 'wickerwork' nor the 'wooden object' were represented by any solid material, both of them existing only as discolourations of the sand. Samples were taken of them and of the grey sand filling of the pit, but did not respond to analysis.

The purpose and nature of the 'wickerwork' and the 'wooden object' have been the subject of many suggestions, starting from the supposition that they might represent a coracle with its paddle laid along the bottom. It is most unlikely, however, that the wickerwork structure can have been self-supporting. Had it been so, traces of its insertion into a pit dug to receive it could hardly have escaped detection, for it would have been virtually impossible to dig a pit so accurately that no intrusive material was trapped between its walls and the outside of the wickerwork. As it was, the wickerwork had all the appearance of having been pressed directly against the walls and floor of the pit where it had decayed and left only its stain in the sand. The most reasonable explanation would seem to be that it was a wickerwork mat pressed into the pit after the latter had been dug, acting as a lining and overlapping on to the shelf between the lower and upper parts of the pit on the E. side, where traces of it were found in that position.

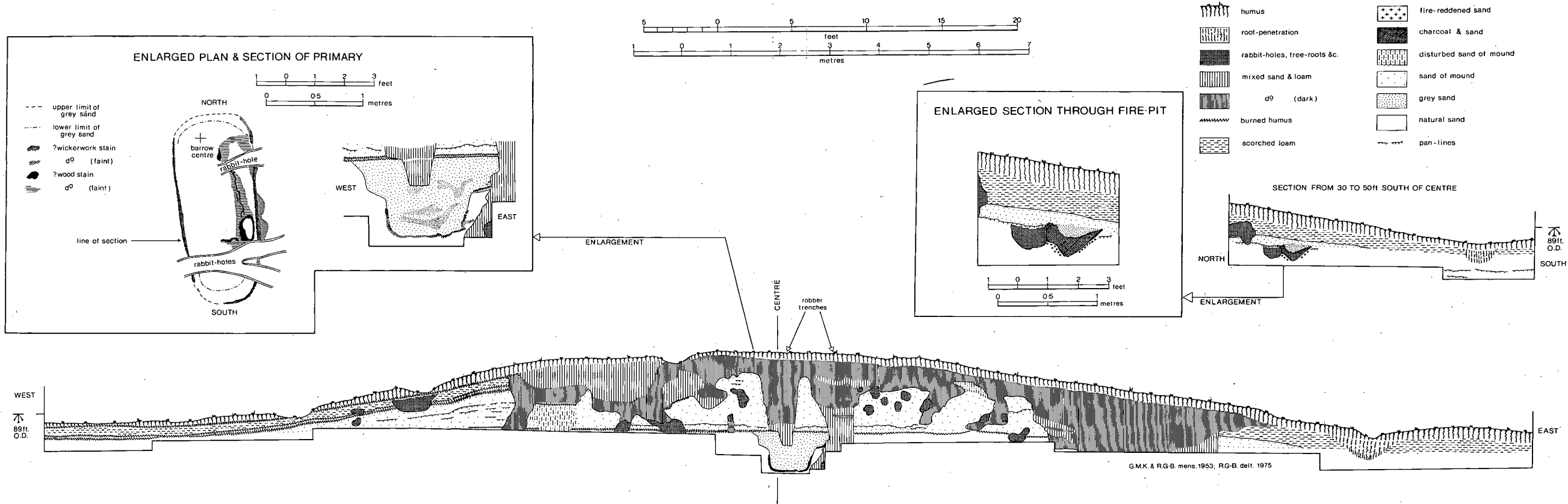


FIG. 57 — Barrow F: sections.

Although the pit was eminently suitable for the reception of a body, no traces of inhumation or cremation were found.

The sequence followed in the construction of the barrow was therefore first the digging of the pit in the natural sand on a level area of the heath, then the lining of this pit with a wickerwork mat and the deposition of a wooden object in it, followed by the filling of the pit up to the general level of the heath with grey sand. Perhaps associated with this activity, although a definite relationship between the two cannot be proved, was the digging of another but much smaller pit in the natural sand some 34ft S. of the main pit, and the lighting of a wood fire in it. The main pit remained in this state long enough for light vegetation to grow over the surface of its filling. This was then burned off and a mound of clean sand was built over the two pits.

BARROW E (FIGS 58 AND 59)

Summary. A large bowl barrow without a ditch. No primary deposit was found. There were possible traces of three secondary cremations with pottery on the surface.

Excavation

Before excavation this appeared as an irregular and slightly oval mound measuring 110ft (33.5m) from N. to S. by 97ft (29.6m) from E. to W., and standing to a height of 6ft 8ins (2.03m) above the general level of the heath. It had obviously been much disturbed, and there had been trees growing on it up to recent times, whilst the stumps of a tree-ring planted on its lower slopes still survived. There were no surface indications of a ditch.

Excavation showed that the mound had been built on a rise of about 1ft (0.3m) in the old ground level which could be detected only with difficulty as there were few clear indications of the old ground surface and the layer of gravel usually present beneath it on other parts of the site was absent here, leaving only the very slight difference in the colour and texture of the sand of the mound and the natural sand beneath it as an indication.

Beneath the centre of the mound and lying on the old ground-surface there was a layer up to 3ins (0.07m) thick of dirty sand flecked with charcoal, covering an area of 37ft (11.3m) from N. to S. by 20ft (6.1m) from E. to W. Analysis showed no turf content in this layer, and it was presumably spread immediately before the building of the mound and was not the burned remains of vegetation on the old ground-surface.

The mound was built of clean sand and where undisturbed had a diameter of 94ft (28.6m) from N. to S. and 94ft 6ins (28.8m) from E. to W. It stood to a maximum height of 5ft 9ins (1.75m) above the old ground-level. The mound contained no structures and there were no traces of a primary inhumation or cremation within it or beneath it. Over the greater part of the mound the tip-lines of its construction could be seen and plotted when the sections through it had been sprayed with water. Where these tip-lines were numerous and relatively complete their lenticular form suggested tipping from skeps or similar containers (Pls. XVIIIa,b).

Within the sand of the mound, 2ft 6ins (0.76m) above its base, 4ft 9ins (1.45m) S. and 6ft 11ins (2.1m) E. of the centre a single sherd of pottery (E36) was found associated with a charcoal stain. Another fragment of charcoal and three flint flakes also came from within the mound 3ft 2ins (0.9m) above its base, 11ft 3ins (3.4m) S. and 5ft 6ins (1.7m) W. of centre, and had probably been brought in accidentally with the sand used for building the mound.

In three places on the disturbed surface of the mound groups of sherds were found that must, strictly speaking, be regarded as unstratified, but that may represent shallow secondary deposits

broken up as the mound surface was later eroded and disturbed by vegetation and by digging. One of these groups consisted of eleven sherds and a flint (E28), with charcoal staining, and lay 4ft (1.2m) S. and 24ft 3ins (7.4m) E. of centre. The second group, also on the E. slope of the mound, had three sherds (E29) and charcoal stains, 3ft 6ins (1.06m) S. and 17ft 8ins (5.4m) E. of centre. The third group was nearer the centre at 1ft 11ins (0.6m) S. and 7ft 2ins (2.2m) E., where there were four sherds (E32) and charcoal stains. Several other sherds were also found in heavily disturbed areas.

There were no traces of a surrounding ditch.

The barrow had been heavily disturbed by tree-roots, by rabbit-burrows, and by the digging of weapon-pits. The damage was particularly heavy on the N.W. slopes where the mound had been almost entirely disturbed over a distance of some 30ft (9.1m), in places to a depth that penetrated the natural surface by 3ft (0.9m) or more. The N. and S. slopes, in addition to disturbance by the old tree-ring, gave evidence of successive heath fires in comparatively recent

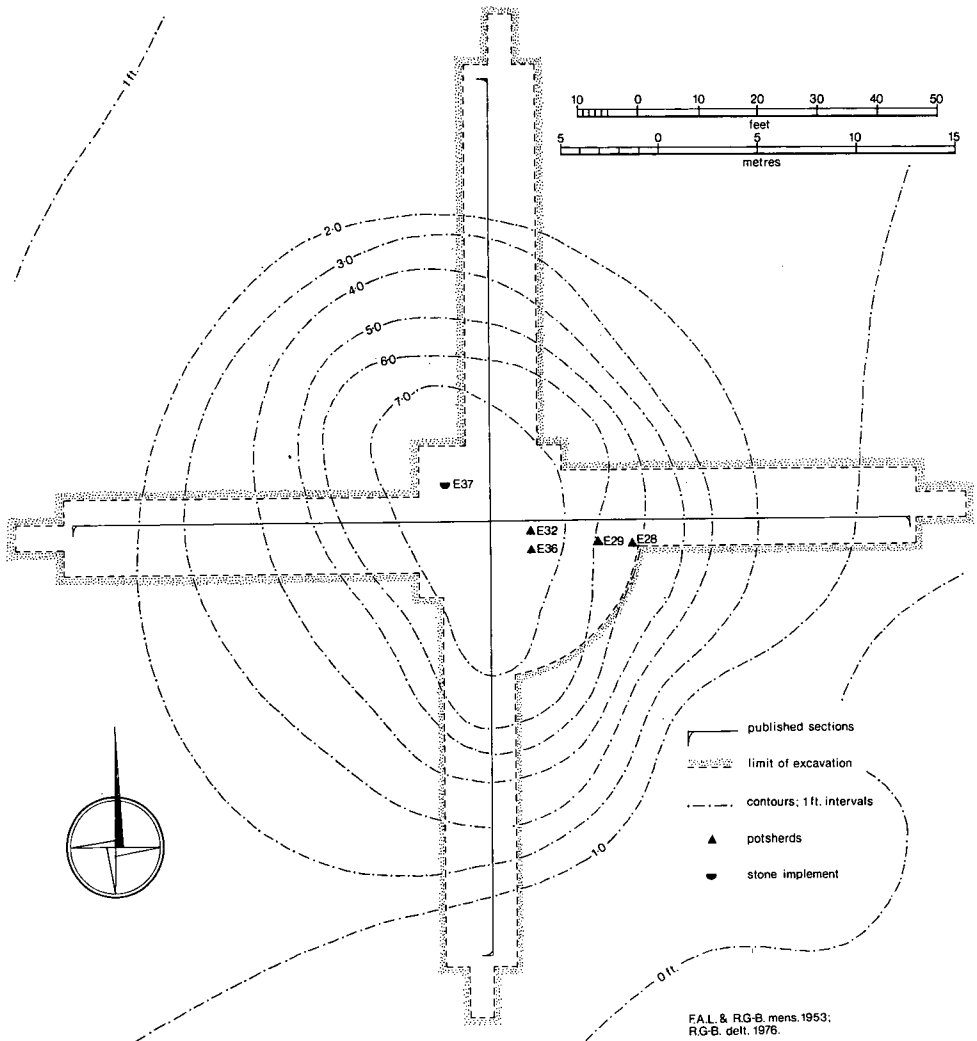


FIG. 58 — Barrow E: plan.

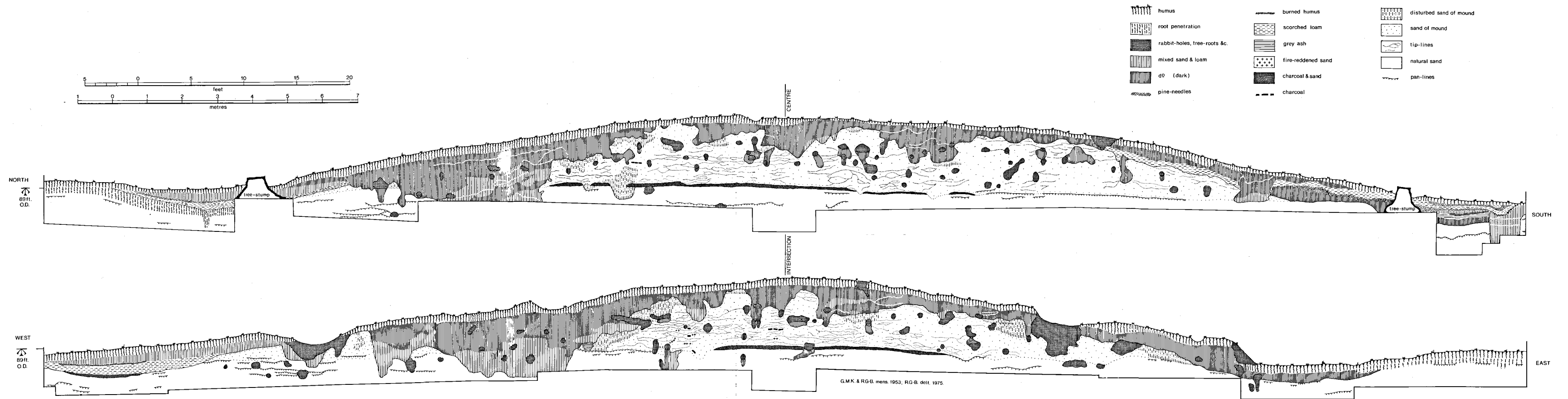


FIG. 59 — Barrow E: sections.

times, interspersed by layers of unburned pine-needles from the trees. 80ft (24.4m) S. of centre a very deep trench had been cut through these layers into the sand. Near the centre of the mound the discovery of two clay pipe bowls (E27, E34) showed that some of these disturbances had taken place about the middle of the 19th century.

BARROW B (FIGS 60 AND 61)

Summary. A bowl barrow without a ditch. No burial was found. Pottery evidence suggested middle Neolithic and Beaker occupation nearby.

Excavation

Before excavation this appeared as a mound, nearly circular on plan, with a diameter varying from 69 to 74ft (21.0 to 22.5m) and standing to a maximum height of 3ft 6ins (1.06m) above the existing ground level. The top of the mound was very irregular from robbing. There were no surface indications of a ditch.

Excavation indicated that the old ground surface lay from 2 to 2ft 6ins (0.61 to 0.76m) below the modern surface, about 1ft (0.3m) above a fairly consistent layer of natural gravel with occasional pockets extending up to the old surface. The old surface had been practically level, with a few small natural depressions and irregularities.

On this surface the mound had been constructed of clean sand. Where it survived undisturbed, especially at its N. and W. edges, it had a diameter of about 52ft (15.8m) although the addition of lightly disturbed areas on the lip of the mound would increase this to 61ft (18.6m). Undisturbed parts of the mound remained to a height of 2ft 6ins (0.76m) above the old surface.

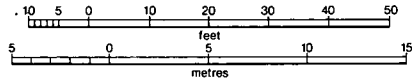
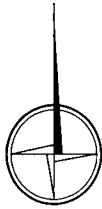
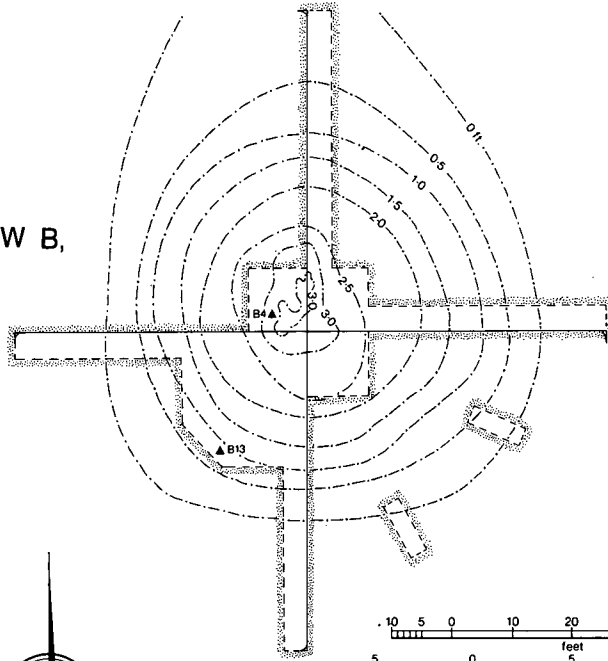
The sand of the mound filled the depressions in the old surface, notably one 8ft (2.4m) N. of centre, which was 4ft (1.2m) wide and up to 1ft 6ins (0.45m) deep. The behaviour of the gravel layer in the natural sand showed that this was not a man-made feature. Similarly, although the pan-lines adopted a section reminiscent of a shallow ditch 38ft (11.6m) S. and 35ft (10.7m) E. of centre, the presence of natural sand above them showed that this was not a true ditch. Additional sections were cut through the S.E. quadrant to determine this point. Nowhere was any evidence found for a surrounding ditch.

No structures were found within or beneath the mound. A thin and discontinuous layer of charcoal flecks existed within the sand of the mound, running from 3 to 9ft (0.9 to 2.7m) S. of centre, about 1ft (0.3m) above the old ground surface, rising slightly as it approached the centre and continued by pan-lines over a total distance of 16ft 6ins (5.0m). Where this was not present no distinction could be made between the sand above and below its general level, and it cannot be held to constitute evidence for a two-period mound. Its appearance suggested a pause in the building of the mound too short for a new surface to form.

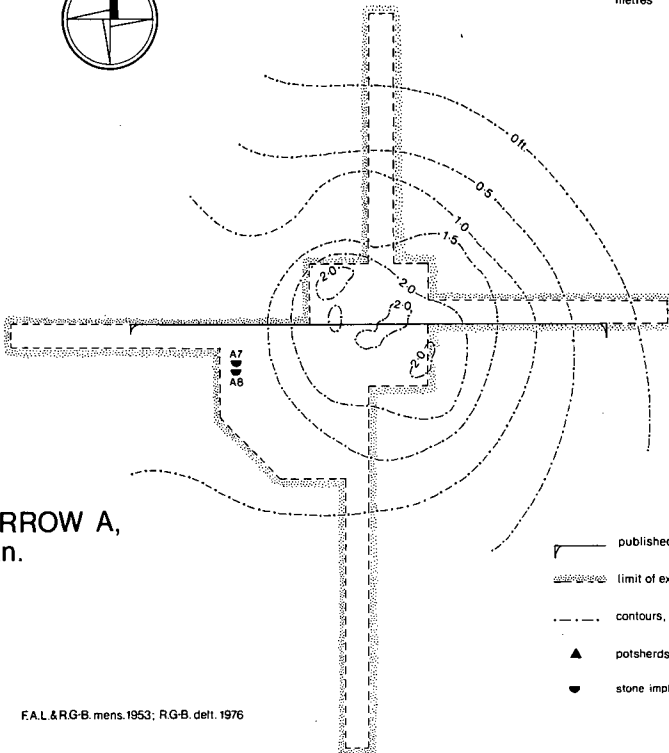
A group of seven sherds of pottery was found on the old ground surface sealed by the undisturbed sand of the mound at 3ft 6ins (1.06m) N. and 6ft (1.8m) W. of centre; one of these sherds was Neolithic (B4). Other sherds, associated with minute flecks of charcoal, occurred within the sand of the mound at 1ft (0.3m) above its base at 2ft 6ins (0.76m) N. and 4ft 6ins (1.37m) W. of centre. In addition to these, three sherds were found unstratified in disturbed areas; they included a probable Beaker sherd (B13).






The pottery contained within the mound and sealed by it constitutes the only evidence that this barrow was a man-made feature rather than a natural one. It also suggests that there had been Neolithic and Beaker occupation in the area from which the sand had been won. There were no signs of primary or secondary inhumations or cremations within the mound or beneath it.

BARROW B,
Plan.



BARROW A,
Plan.



-  published sections
-  limit of excavation
-  contours, 6 inch intervals
-  potsherds
-  stone implements

F.A.L. & R.G.-B. mens. 1953; R.G.-B. del. 1976

FIG. 60 — Barrows B and A: plans.

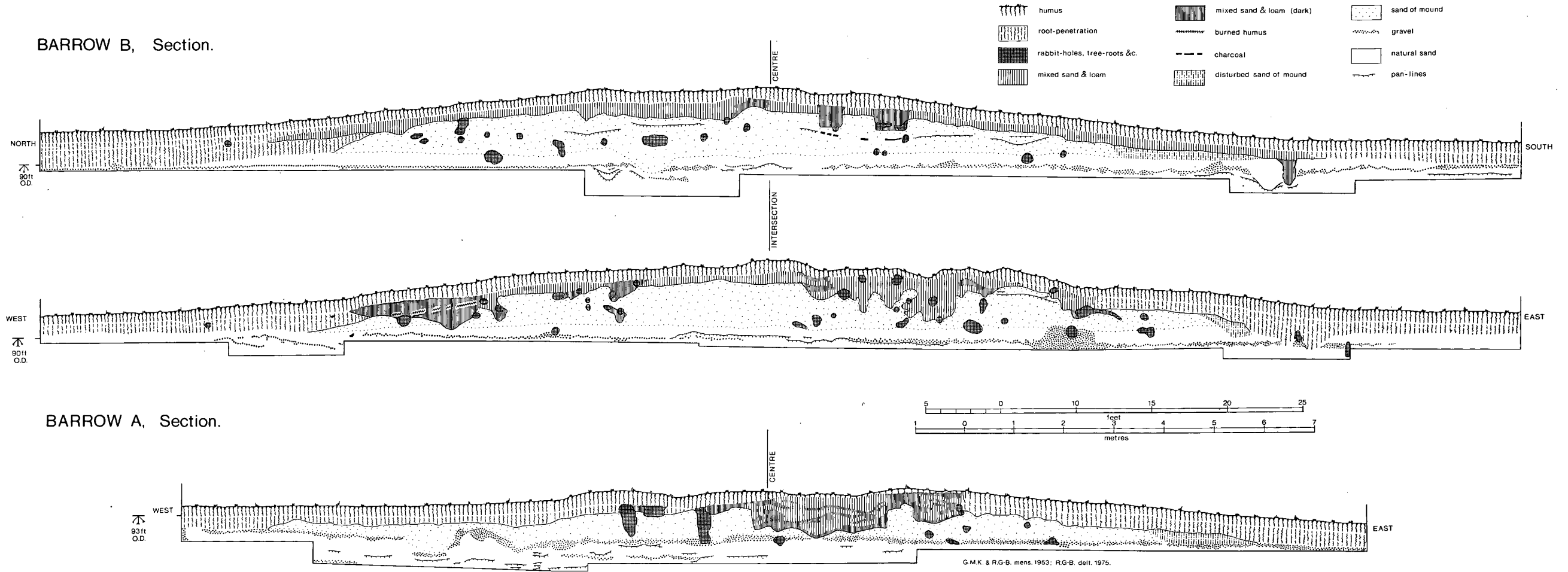


FIG. 61 — Barrows B and A: sections.

Much of the central part of the mound had been disturbed extensively by tree-roots and rabbit-burrows going down to within 1ft (0.3m) of the old surface. Two shallow trenches, 1ft 6ins and 2ft (0.45 and 0.6m) wide with vertical sides 1ft 6ins (0.45m) deep and flat bottoms had been cut into this disturbed area S. of centre, and were probably shallow foxholes or weapon-pits cut during military training in comparatively recent times.

BARROW A (FIGS 60 AND 61)

Summary. Probably a bowl barrow without a ditch. No burial was found.

Excavation

This mound was the westernmost and smallest of the group associated with the Devil's Ring. Before excavation it appeared as a mound roughly circular on plan, about 56ft (17m) in diameter, standing to a height of 2ft 6ins (0.76m) above the level of the heath. Rough depressions in the top of the mound suggested robbing. There were no surface indications of a ditch.

Excavation showed that the old ground surface had lain a little above a fairly consistent layer of natural gravel about 2ft (0.6m) below the present surface. On this a circular mound of clean sand had been constructed, the undisturbed parts of which indicated a diameter of at least 60ft (18.3m); inclusion of the lip of the mound lightly disturbed by root penetration would increase this diameter to 67ft (20.4m). The mound remained to a height of 2ft 6ins (0.76m) above the old ground surface.

This old ground surface had not been level. The main irregularity in it was a ditch-like depression 22ft 6ins (6.8m) W. of centre, filled with the clean sand of the mound, but the behaviour of the gravel layer showed that it was a natural feature.

No structures were found in or beneath the mound and its surroundings, nor were there any signs of primary or secondary inhumations or cremations. Two stone pebbles were found in the upper part of the sand of the mound, one of them probably a smoother and the other a small hammer stone (A7 and A8), and a few flint flakes were found in disturbed areas. There was no evidence for a surrounding ditch.

Immediately E. of centre a large robber-pit 9ft (2.7m) wide and 3ft (0.9m) deep with vertical sides had been dug through the mound, just breaking the old ground surface at one point.

Although in all probability a man-made structure, this mound can only be so regarded on the analogy of its neighbours and on the grounds that it contained two man-made implements, for it provided no other definite proof in itself. A N. - S. section of 113ft (34.4m) and an E. - W. section of 110ft (33.5m) were drawn, but only 80ft (24.4m) of the latter is published here, as the rest adds nothing of significance.

GENERAL REMARKS ON BARROWS F, E, B AND A.

The failure to find any primary burial, whether by inhumation or cremation, in four out of the six barrows calls for comment. A single cenotaph or memorial barrow with no burial would not be outside the bounds of possibility, but that two-thirds of the barrows examined should be cenotaphs is asking altogether too much of coincidence. It is of course possible that the burials may have lain outside the areas of the barrows that were fully excavated, bearing in mind that

all the excavations were partial rather than complete, but this is not likely because it would imply that the primaries were well outside the central areas of the barrows. It is much more likely that the primaries had been destroyed in antiquity by the very considerable disturbances noted in each of the barrows. However, the possibility of inhumations that had decayed to such an extent as to leave no material trace cannot be ruled out entirely, especially when it is remembered that barrow F was proved to have contained a structure eminently suitable to receive a body, and that neither visual evidence nor evidence from analysis was able to confirm this.

THE FINDS FROM THE BARROW CEMETERY

by Reay Robertson-Mackay, M.A.

INTRODUCTION

All identifiable and diagnostic finds have been illustrated. These finds have first been divided into very broad chronological groups; within these, they have been described and identified in barrow groups, using the numerical find numbers of the excavator. These sub-divided barrow groups have then been discussed internally in a strictly chronological order. This is obviously a middle arrangement, in which the finds can first be seen in barrow groups, and then together in chronological groups with a minimum of stress on the individual barrows from which these objects came. For reasons of brevity, dimensions are not given in the text for illustrated finds. For convenience the excavator's original reference numbers have been retained. This latter system has also the advantage of keeping the published numbers identical with the original manuscript site archive. The capital letter prefix in all find references denotes the particular barrow concerned.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am much indebted to various friends and colleagues who have helped me, especially to Dr Ian Longworth who has discussed and advised on the Bronze Age collared urn series. Professor Barry Cunliffe has kindly read and commented on the Iron Age section of this report. The finds drawings are the work of Mr David Neal and Mr Jim Thorn, both of the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, Department of the Environment.

THE PRE-BARROW FINDS

The Pottery

This consists of a small group of mostly eroded sherds coming from either beneath the barrows or from adjacent deposits which have been scraped up to form barrow mounds. In either case they form an interesting picture of the prehistoric occupation in the immediate area of the barrow cemetery before the barrows were constructed. This pottery is divided into two groups, Neolithic and Beaker. The illustrated sherds are as follows:-

Barrow B

B4 A much abraded but still identifiable Ebbsfleet sherd (Fig. 62, B4) decorated externally with two rows of whipped cord 'maggots', one externally on the rim and one on the short deep cavetto neck. This vessel also has the characteristic small sharply inturred internal flange at the top of the rim. It compares well with an example from Windmill Hill, P239 (Smith, 1965).

B13 An undecorated base sherd (Fig.62, B13). This may have come from a beaker (type unidentifiable).

Barrow C

C20 A plain rim sherd (Fig. 62, C20) with two horizontal rows of rough impressions probably made with the end of a twig or straw. Beaker (type unidentifiable).

C49 A rim sherd (Fig. 62, C49) with pinched fingernail impressions. Rusticated Beaker (Clarke's FP group). (Unstratified).

C50 An undecorated slightly everted rolled over rim sherd (Fig. 62, C50). Middle Neolithic.

C60 A weathered body sherd (Fig. 62, C60) which shows a small horizontal cordon. The rest of the decoration is indistinct but appears to comprise some cord impressions below this cordon. Beaker (but too eroded to classify with certainty).

C65 An undecorated rim sherd (Fig. 62, C65) with an externally thickened angular rim. Middle Neolithic.

C66 A weathered rim sherd (Fig. 62, C66) with incised and tooth-comb stamp decoration. A cross-hatched band is surmounted by a series of horizontal lines. It would appear to belong to Clarke's European Bell Beaker or Wessex/Middle Rhine groups (Clarke, 1970), and to Lanting's East Anglian steps 2 or 3 (Lanting, 1972).

C67 A rim sherd (Fig. 62, C67) with two horizontal rows of fingernail impressions. The upcast clay has been smoothed over before firing. Rusticated Beaker (Clarke's group FN).

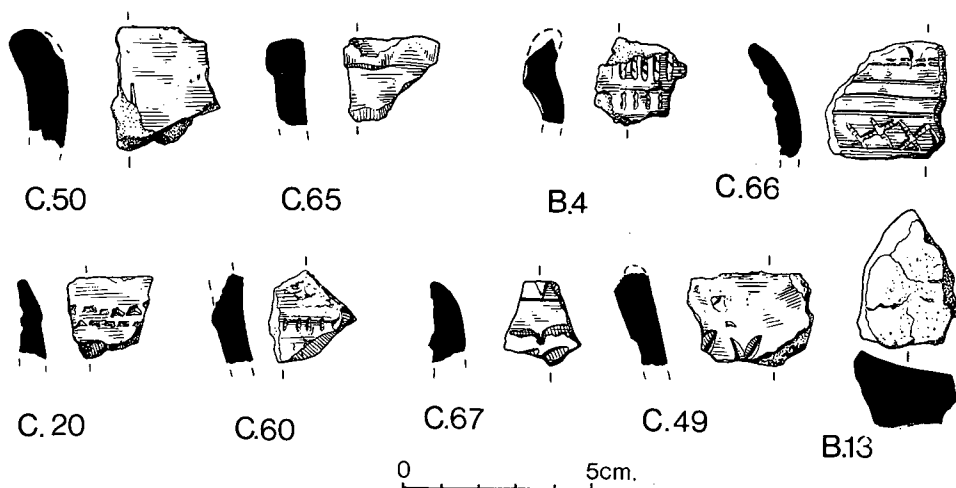


FIG. 62 — Neolithic pottery and Beaker sherds from Barrows C and B (scale 1:2).

Discussion of the Pre-Barrow Pottery

The Neolithic Pottery

Brightwell C50 comes from the rim of a bowl typical, both in fabric and form, of the Middle Neolithic in Britain (Smith, 1965, Fig.17). A study of this slightly rolled-over rim type (Type 1) from the Middle Neolithic causewayed camp at Staines, Surrey, showed it to be easily the most common of the rolled-over rim types present from the enclosure ditches, representing some 27% of all rolled-over rims sampled, as opposed to *c.*13% and *c.*7% of the other two rolled-over rim types present (Types 2 and 3) (Robertson-Mackay, forthcoming). More diagnostic however, is the flat-topped angular rim (C65) which has also been recognised as a rare but distinctive type at Staines, representing 1% of all the rims sampled from the ditches (Robertson-Mackay, forthcoming P38 and P39). Ebbsfleet pottery (Brightwell B4) has been shown to be contemporary with other Middle Neolithic pottery (Smith 1965, 14). It seems likely then that the three Brightwell sherds C50, C65 and B4 can be regarded as contemporary, and owing to their eroded state they probably indicate the presence of a Middle Neolithic settlement in the area of the barrow cemetery.

The Beaker Pottery

It is noteworthy that all the identifiable beaker sherds came from Barrow C, with the exception of one from Barrow B (B13, which could not however be assigned to a specific type). Again the eroded nature of the sherds suggests that they come from a nearby Beaker settlement. Two of the sherds (C49 and C67) had fingernail rustication which is often, although not exclusively, associated with a series of coarser Beaker domestic pottery (cf Gibson 1982, 69 – 76).

One of the sherds (C49) in particular looks as though it might belong to this latter category. There is little doubt that all of these six sherds are residual Beaker occupation material. Had Barrow C been sited virtually on top of such a settlement more sherds would have been found, and since the other barrows were almost devoid of Beaker material, it could be suggested that this Beaker settlement lay not far to the N.E. of Barrow C.

The most diagnostic sherd is C66 which is decorated with an unusual mixture of tooth-comb stamping and linear incision. This combination may be partly due to the idiosyncrasy of the individual potter, but in any case the basic design is clear. Since the sherd represents only the top portion of the vessel it is uncertain whether it represents a pot belonging to Clarke's European Bell beaker, or to his Wessex/Middle Rhine groups. In either case these groups would correspond respectively to Lanting's steps 2 and 3 for East Anglia (Lanting 1972, Fig. 2). The small diagnostic sherd C20, with a thin pointed everted lip with lines of horizontal impressions almost immediately under it, probably broadly belongs to the same early phase as above. C60 is a small worn sherd which has a very narrow cordon on the angle of the belly of the pot. This beaker sherd is however too worn for reliable classification. Whatever the exact identifications, there is an indication here that we are dealing with some of the earliest beakers in East Anglia.

THE FINDS FROM THE BARROWS

The Pottery

Barrow C

C7 An accessory vessel (Fig. 63, C7). This plain cup has a splayed base and a flat topped, slightly thickened rim. The latter had been added on to the topmost coil of the undecorated pot. The exterior surface is uneven, and has been burnished vertically on the lower part of the pot and horizontally on the upper portion. This treatment was probably executed in that order. Light burnishing also extends into the interior. During manufacture the pot had stood on a rough surface. The fabric is black with fine burnt flint grits, and a sandy texture. The vessel had been fired to a medium brown colour on the exterior.

C28 This complete cinerary urn (Fig. 63, C28; Pl. XIXa; A. M. Laboratory no. 2297) has a deep vertical collar. There is no cavetto neck; instead the straight neck joins the collar at a marked angle, which is particularly conspicuous inside the pot. The vessel has a flat and slightly inturned rim with a straight body, giving the pot a distinctly straight-walled angular biconical form. Impressed twisted cord on the collar forms the decoration in a random and rather degenerate style. An inspection of the whole collar reveals however that this is possibly intended to be a series of empty running lozenges with some attempted filling of the triangles created beneath them (Longworth 1961, type K). Alternatively this decoration may simply be a degenerate version of Longworth type L. The only other decoration is a row of 21 shallow oval impressions on the shoulder. These represent a vestigial stopped groove. This pot exhibits a certain amount of burnishing on the exterior, being vertical on the body, and horizontal on the neck. The burnishing does not occur on the collar, and as this treatment overrides some of the decoration on the shoulder, it would seem likely that the vessel was burnished after the decoration had been applied. The interior, which had been wiped smooth during potting, has a dark stain just below the shoulder. The base has a smooth finish, and the fabric is black with numerous large grits of crushed material (some of which have a cinder-like appearance). The pot had been fired externally to a light reddish brown.

C36 A miniature collared urn (Fig. 63, C36; Pl. XIXd) which has a neck the same depth as the collar, a pointed rim with a slight internal bevel, and a splayed foot. Decoration is executed in impressed twisted cord on the collar and neck only. A single horizontal impressed line below the rim is followed by a row of short diagonal lines on the collar