

A BRONZE AGE BURIAL AT BARNHAM

By A. R. EDWARDSON

The discovery in 1950 on the housing estate at Barnham, Suffolk of two Anglo-Saxon scramasaxes, raised the question of whether the large tumulus on the opposite side of the road might contain an Anglo-Saxon burial. The tumulus stands on a small triangular meadow at the cross-roads in Barnham and only some fifty yards north east of the windmill built in 1821. (Map reference: Suffolk (West) XXII.N.E. 868791). Since this meadow, being in the village and not cultivated, may at any time be built upon, an examination of the site seemed advisable. The remains of another tumulus are situated at the southern end of the meadow; according to information given by an elderly inhabitant of the village, this had, some fifty years ago, been very much bigger, but had been largely removed to facilitate the passage of farm carts entering the gate; an examination of these remains was also undertaken.

The present dimensions of Tumulus I are 60 feet in diameter and 6 feet high above the general field level; a trench 10 feet wide was cut from the northern perimeter of the tumulus, beginning 3 feet deep and continued to a point beyond the apex of the mound, 40 feet from its northern perimeter (Fig. 18). This disclosed that for 10 feet from the beginning of the trench the present surface rested on sand uninterrupted by any old level until the chalky clay was reached at a depth of 3 feet, the depth of the sand increasing as progress was made into the rising mound. Thirteen feet from the north end of the trench an old turf line was uncovered at a depth of five feet from the present surface, and upon the old turf line an inner mound of turves, presumably obtained from the perimeter, had been built, rising in relation to the present surface of the tumulus some 3 feet below it; this inner mound of turf attained a height above the old turf level of 4 feet in the centre, and was not disturbed at any point excavated. This evidence clearly demonstrated that after the building of the turf structure on the old ground level, sand had been added as a capping above it; this sand is at present approximately an even 3 feet in thickness, although allowances must be made for the probability that it was originally much thicker, since the very light nature of the sand would inevitably lead to much spreading and consequent reduction in height. A trial pit dug on the southern perimeter of the tumulus disclosed the same features as those exposed on the

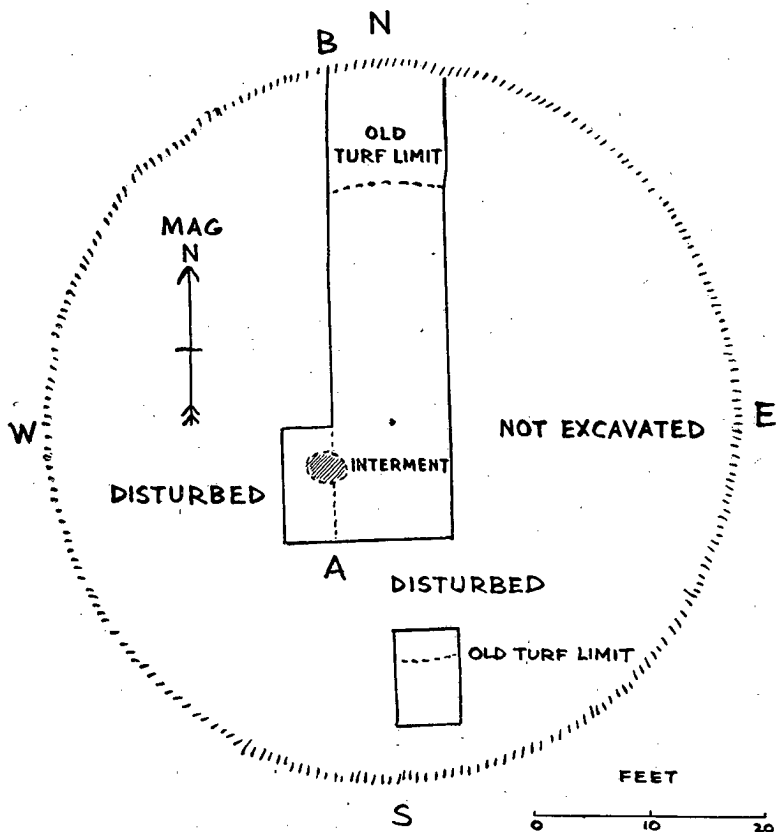


FIG. 18—Barnham Tumulus, plan.

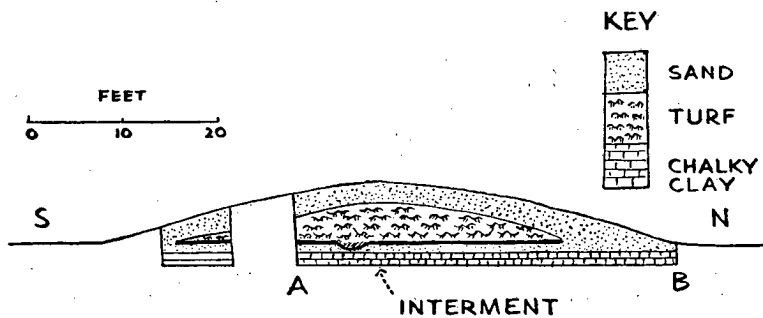


FIG. 19—Barnham Tumulus, section A—B

northern edge and established the diameter of the inner turf mound as forty feet. (Section, Fig. 19).

Twenty two feet from the northern perimeter of the turf structure the old turf level upon which it had been built was disturbed over an area approximately 5 feet by 2 feet, and below at a depth of eighteen inches lay an inhumation interment of a much disintegrated skeleton, the head to the east. The fragile bones remaining showed by their disposition that the interment was in a contracted position with the legs drawn up and the arms crossed. All but some ten per cent of the bone structure had disintegrated aided by the light nature of the sand and the percolation of water containing iron salts, since the sand round the bones contained a considerable amount of iron deposit and the surface of the chalky clay all over the site as a basic stratum was overlain by a thin irregular iron deposit.

A report on the bones by Dr. C. P. Bampfylde Wells, F.R.A.I., PH.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., of Norwich, follows:

Fragments from a crouched interment under the base of the tumulus

About forty fragments were present, all of which were human. Included were:

(a) Cranial fragments of:—R. temporal; R. parietal; R. maxilla with teeth M1, M2 and M3 in situ, the R. mandibular condyle and coronoid process, and part of the alveolus of the mandible with M1, M2 and M3 in situ.

(b) Post-cranial fragments of:—part of atlas, part of the head of the R. humerus; a small fragment of the glenoid fossa of the R. scapula; a small part of the head and neck of the R. femur and splinters from various long bones.

The fragmentary condition of the material does not permit any conclusions of anthropological significance to be drawn. It can, however, be stated that the remains are those of a female. Age at death was definitely more than twenty years and probably less than thirty.

An area of osteitis of the alveolar margin of the R. maxilla is present. No dental cause for this can be found and it may have followed a chronic ulcer of the buccoalveolar fold consequent upon injury from a sharp particle of food having perforated the mucous membrane. The teeth, though moderately crown-worn, show good occlusion. No other pathological features are present and no indication of the cause of death can be detected.

While the skeletal fragments are far too defective to permit the assertion that they belong to the British Bronze Age type, equally there is no discernable feature which would exclude them from this, their presumed, category.

CALVIN WELLS.

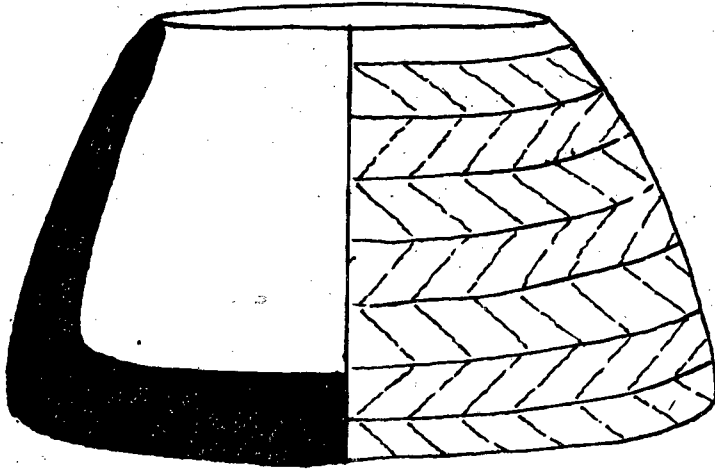


FIG. 20—Incense or Pygmy Cup (†)

Sufficient of the bone remained to define the posture, and within a few inches of the skull and jaw fragments there lay on its side an Incense or Pygmy Cup, of decorated pottery. The cup has a base diameter of 3.7 inches, a diameter at the rim of 2.1 inches, and is 2.2 inches high. The entire circumference is decorated with three bands of chevron decoration, excepting the narrow zone round the rim, and the base has a thickness of half an inch (Fig. 20). In outline, but not in decorative style, it is similar to an example from Aberdeen figured in J. Abercromby's *Bronze Age Pottery*, Vol. 2, Plate LXXXIII, 339. This interment may be considered as the primary one in the tumulus since the turf construction over it was undisturbed and may be considered to belong to the early middle Bronze Age between 1700 and 1400 B.C. An area immediately to the west of the excavated area and another to the south of it showed signs of disturbance on the surface and investigation to a depth of 3 feet disclosed tins and other rubbish buried in pits dug into the surface of the mound.

The excavation of the remains of Tumulus II revealed that quite four-fifths of the original structure had been removed to below the present ground level and the remaining portion which now appears as a bank by the hedge was originally the southern perimeter of the tumulus, since at a depth of two feet a turf structure similar to that in Tumulus I was encountered rising in a northerly direction for a few feet and then abruptly destroyed where the present bank inclines down to the cart track; no material of any kind was discovered.

I should like to express my grateful thanks to the Duke of Grafton for permission to make this investigation, and to Dr. C. P. Bampfylde Wells for his report on the skeletal remains. My gratitude is also extended to Mr. E. J. Reeve of North Farm, Barnham, for his agreement for the work to be carried out and to Master-Sgt. D. McClure, U.S.A.F., Lakenheath, and Messrs. D. A. Johnson, D. A. Rayner, P. Kerry and others without whose assistance during very hot weather the considerable labour could not have been attempted. Finally I should like to thank Mr. R. Rainbird Clarke, M.A., F.S.A., F.M.A., Curator of the Castle Museum, Norwich, for his suggestions, encouragement and help in publishing this paper on the excavation. The Pygmy Cup together with the bone fragments are preserved at Moyses Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds.