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THE EXCAVATION OF A PREHISTORIC SITE AT UPPER CHAMBERLAIN'S FARM, ERISWELL

by D. P. DYMOND, M.A., F.S.A.

Although its western side just touches the flat Fenland, by far the greater part of Eriswell parish lies on the lighter soils of the Suffolk Breckland, and in common with many other Breckland parishes it has already produced considerable evidence of prehistoric activity.[1] Upper Chamberlain's Farm is 250 yards north-east of the B.1112 road between Eriswell and Icklingham. It is surrounded by the typical landscape, on these light soils, of early 19th-century Parliamentary enclosure: the main features are straight roads and tracks, large straight-sided fields and tree-belts. The site of the excavation lies at grid reference TL/74667692 in a small fenced enclosure south-east of the farm buildings (Fig. 1). Here a barrow was appreciable as a low circular mound about 90 ft across and up to 13 ins above the general level of the field. On the edge of the mound was a clear circle of whiter chalky soil, and immediately outside this lay a slight depression which represented the ditch. The severely eroded condition of the barrow is probably due to the fact that it has lain for centuries within one of the open-fields of Eriswell parish, and had been ploughed regularly from the early Middle Ages until at least the time of enclosure in 1818.[2] By 1960 the field had been pasture for many years, but was then re-converted to arable by deep-ploughing. To meet this new threat, and to see what information could be recovered from an already severely eroded barrow, it was decided to excavate during the winter of 1965-6. The quadrant method of excavation was used, with 3 ft balks laid out almost to the cardinal points. Therefore reference will be made to the north-west, north-east, south-west and south-east quadrants. Small parts of the east-west and south-east quadrants were cleared of topsoil mechanically, and the rest by hand.

[1] C. Fox, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (1923), pp. 18*n*, 25, 91*n*, 107, 322, 323; also Maps I-III. Suffolk Archaeological Index, compiled by S. E. West (County Archaeologist).

[2] J. T. Munday, *Eriswell Land Utilization, 1652-1818* (undated), p.14; The Eriswell Enclosure Award is in the Bury & W. Suffolk Record Office, Q/RI 14. This large open-field was called Gt. How Field, and was named from a surviving barrow called How Hill (TL/759764). The name of one of the furlongs, Deth Hill, seems to refer to another barrow. Certainly there are at least two other barrows near the one excavated: at TL/743779 is a prominent mound and at TL/749764 a badly eroded one.

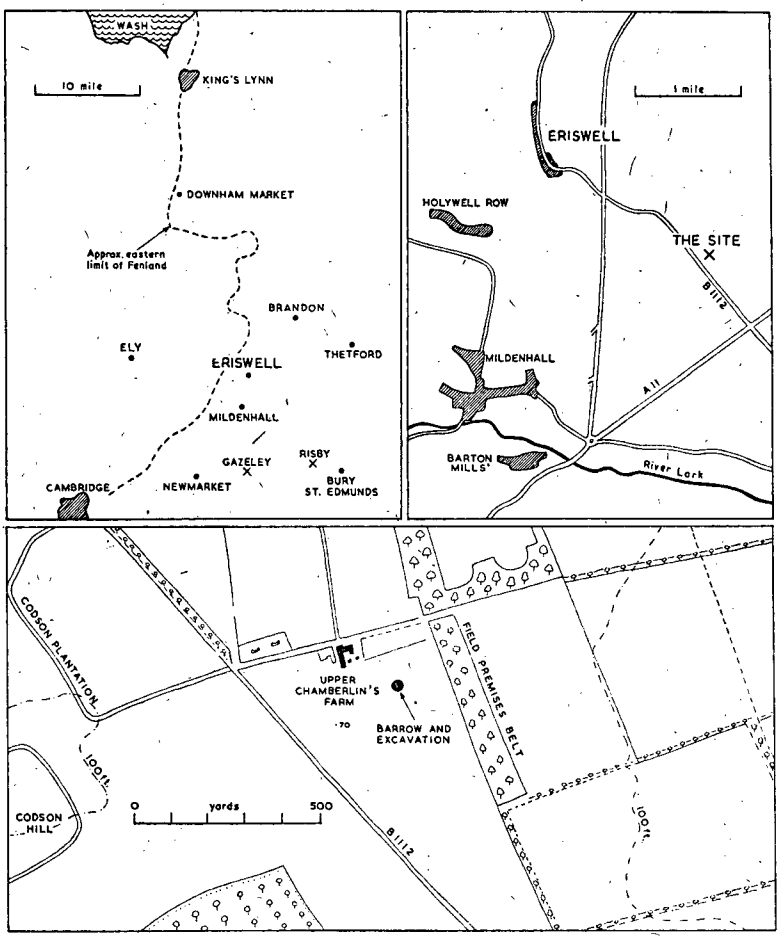

FIG. 1.—Location Map.

THE BRONZE AGE BARROW

On excavation it became obvious that the barrow was of the 'bowl' variety, with a ditch immediately outside the mound.[3] The diameter of the mound varied from 61 ft (east-west) to 65·5 ft (north-south). The chalk ring which formed the outer edge of the mound varied from 4 to 7 ft wide, and where best preserved was up to 5 ins thick. Originally it would have doubtless covered the whole barrow. At its highest central point the mound was found to be only

[3] Paul Ashbee, *The Bronze Age round barrow in Britain* (1960), p. 24.

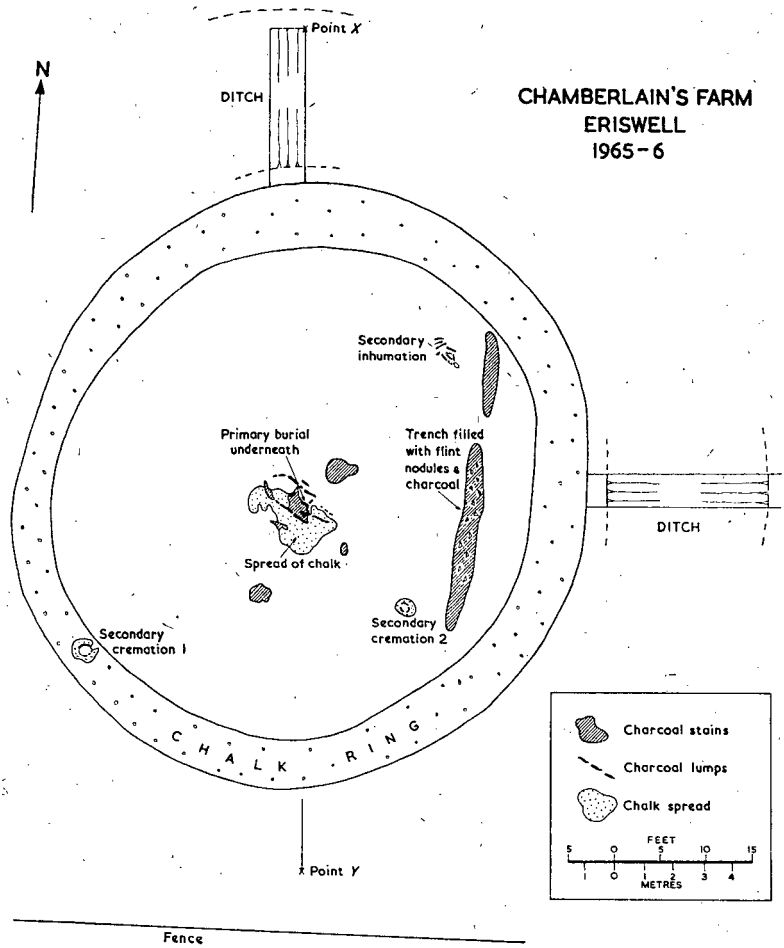

FIG. 2.—Upper Chamberlain's Farm, Eriswell, 1965-6: plan of barrow.

1 ft above the old ground surface as marked by an intermittent turf-line. The peripheral ditch was sectioned twice: on the east side it was 17.5 ft wide and 4·25 ft deep below the present ground surface; on the north side it was 18 ft wide and 5·5 ft deep. In the mound of the barrow one sherd of black Beaker ware with twisted-cord impressions was found, and in the primary silt of the ditch, layer 7, a piece of comb-impressed Beaker (Fig. 9, nos 8 and 34).

The four burials

1. At the approximate centre of the mound, and sealed by it, was an intact primary cremation (Fig. 4). The body of a young adult male had been cremated at a high temperature, collected efficiently and then placed in a roughly circular steep-sided hole cut 1·3 ft beneath the old ground surface. The bones were covered by an inverted urn. The hole was 2·2 ft wide at the top, 1·2 ft wide at the base, and had a fairly flat bottom. Most of it was cut through natural chalk. Although the sides were blackened with charcoal, marks of a cutting instrument $\frac{1}{4}$-in wide and $\frac{1}{8}$-in deep were clearly visible. (These were definitely not the marks of the excavators' trowels as the whole deposit was deliberately removed with wooden spatulae). Around the inverted urn was a packing of chalk lumps and charcoal. At the north side of the pit, just below the level of the old ground surface, was a circular black stake-hole. Above the pit and around it, particularly on the south side, had been spread an irregular patch of broken or powdered chalk with a thickness varying between 1 and 3 ins. This patch measured 9 ft by 5 ft, with its main axis south-east by north-west.

Above the chalk and with the same axis was an intriguing pattern of charcoal lumps and stains. There was one large area of staining in the centre, above the grave-pit, but the most obvious feature was two roughly parallel lines of charcoal surviving to a slightly higher level, each 3 to 4 ins wide and *c.* 3 ft apart. Nearby three other small patches of charcoal-staining were probably connected with the primary interment.

The interpretation of these traces is by no means certain, but the following hypothesis is suggested. The funeral pyre was certainly not immediately adjacent to the burial-pit because there is insufficient burnt material. Therefore the burnt bones must have been brought to the grave, possibly in the urn, and after their deposition and the inversion of the urn, the pit was carefully filled with some of the remains of the pyre. At this stage a stake was driven into the *side* of the hole (presumably to avoid shuttering the urn), and from this by means of a cord, the radii of the barrow and ditch could have been laid out. Chalk lumps or powder, probably derived in part from digging the pit, were evenly spread over and around the grave (perhaps as part of a purification ritual). Finally a wooden object which had no doubt been used at an earlier stage of the funeral was deliberately burnt on top of the grave. The nature of the charcoal stains and lumps strongly suggested a kind of wooden biér or stretcher. A flat tray of planks had apparently been attached to two pole-handles. Such an object could have been used to carry the body to the pyre, or to carry the inurned ashes to the grave, or both.

Two samples from burial 1 were sent to the British Museum laboratories for radiocarbon dating, one from the burnt wooden

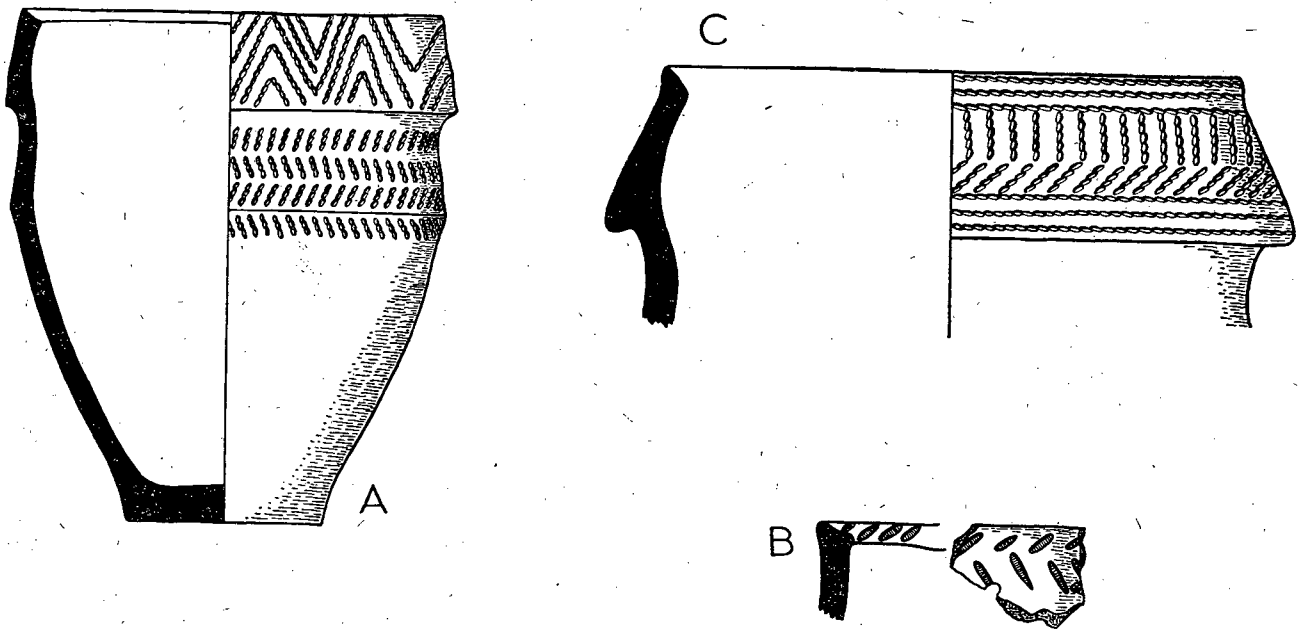

FIG. 5.—Cinerary urns found in barrow. A - primary burial, scale $\frac{1}{6}$; B - secondary cremation 1 in south-west quadrant, scale, $\frac{1}{3}$; C - secondary cremation 2 in south-east quadrant, scale $\frac{1}{3}$. Drawn by I. H. Longworth.

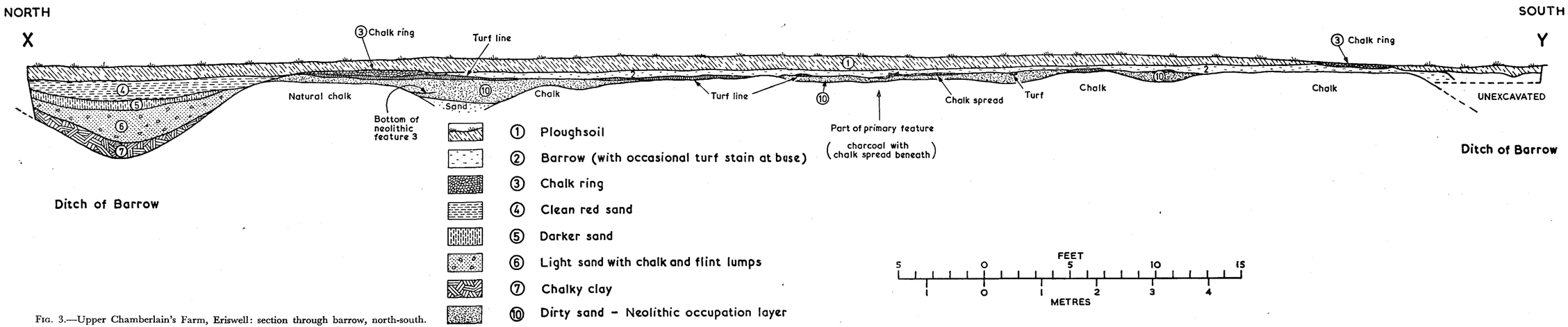

FIG. 3.—Upper Chamberlain's Farm, Eriswell: section through barrow, north-south.

object and the other from the cremated bones. A date of 1520 B.C. ± 115 was derived from the charcoal, and has already been published.[4] In other words, there is a 2 : 1 chance that the true date for the primary burial lies within the period 1405-1635 B.C. This date-bracket is close to conventional chronology which suggests a date of *c.*1400 B.C. for the urn, as a late example of Longworth's primary series.

Dr. I. H. Longworth has written the following description of the primary urn: 'The vessel has been very badly crushed but a reconstruction is just possible (see Fig. 5, A). In particular, the height of the vessel can only be roughly estimated:

Diam. of mouth : *c.*12·75 ins.
Height ,, ,, *c.*16·00 ins. [the exact depth of the grave-pit]
Diam. of base : *c.* 6·00 ins.

It is quite well fired, and consists of light brown paste, tempered with a little grog and with some grit inclusion. The surface has been smoothed. Decoration consists, on the collar, of irregular twisted cord triangles filled with multiple chevrons and, on the neck and running over the shoulder, of twisted cord herring-bone pattern. The primary urn with its simple rim and herring-bone decoration descending below the line of the shoulder, belongs to the closing stages of the primary series [5] suggesting, on conventional chronology, a date of somewhere around 1400 B.C. for the central burial.'

Dr. Calvin Wells reported that the deceased was probably a male in his early 20's. The cremation had been carried out efficiently, probably with the pyre built over the body (see below p. 15).

2. In the south-west quadrant a secondary cremation was found in a pit cut through the mound to almost the original ground surface. Because of repeated ploughing, only the very bottom of the pit survived: a small pile of cremated bones within the crushed remains of an inverted urn was surrounded by a ring of unworked flints, chalk lumps and charcoal (Fig. 6, secondary cremation 1). The cremated bones were too few and too finely crushed for specialist analysis.

Dr. Longworth has given the following comment on the urn: 'The sherds recovered represent the collar of a vessel of light brown paste with dark grey core. The surface has been smoothed. The collar is decorated with a whipped cord herring-bone pattern, and the internal rim bevel carries short whipped cord diagonal lines' (see Fig. 5, B).

3. In the south-east quadrant was another, probably secondary, cremation (Fig. 6, secondary cremation 2). Again only the bottom

[4] *Radiocarbon*, XI (1969), p.285; also in *Archaeological site index to radiocarbon dates for Great Britain and Ireland*, C.B.A. (1971), 4B.2.
[5] *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, XXVII (1961), pp. 263-306.

of the grave-pit survived, measuring in plan 1·75 ft by 1·3 ft. It had possibly been cut to below the old ground surface beneath the barrow, but the stratigraphy admitted of no certain interpretation. Although it is perhaps more likely to be secondary in the sense that it was inserted into the pre-existing mound, it could also have been a satellite burial deposited before the mound was built. A few burnt

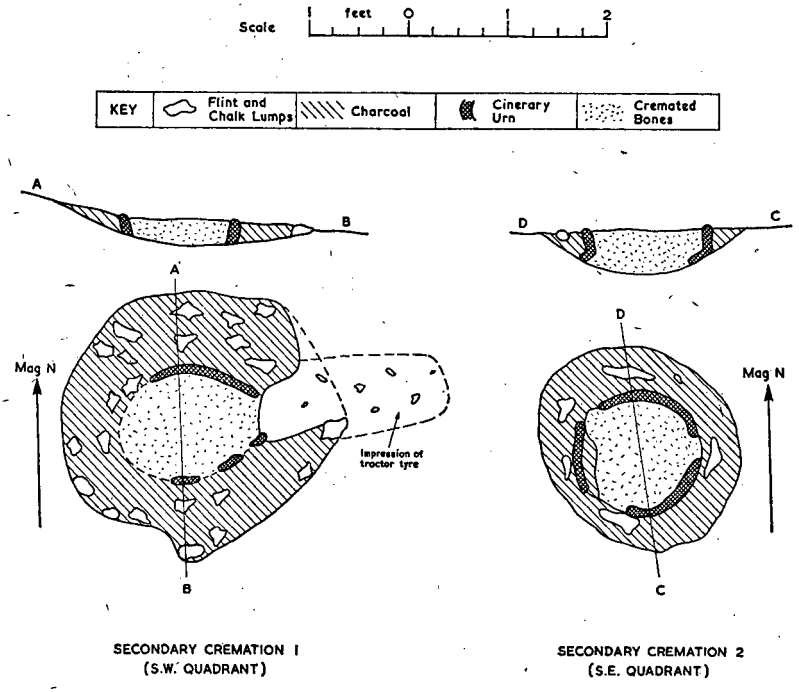

FIG. 6.—Secondary cremations, plans and sections.

bones were found within the collar and neck of an inverted urn, and this deposit had also been packed with unworked flints, chalk lumps and charcoal.

Dr. Calvin Wells reported that the firing had been well carried out, but that the subsequent collection of the remains was perfunctory. The bones were from a single adult, probably female (see below p. 16).

Dr. Longworth describes the urn thus: 'these sherds come from an inverted vessel whose collar has been telescoped over its neck. A

reconstruction has been attempted with a probable rim diameter of 8·5 ins (see Fig. 5, c). The paste is coarse, brown in colour and tempered with some grog. The external surface, which has been roughly smoothed, shows local dark grey discoloration. From the sherds recovered it appears that the rim and neck of the vessel were undecorated and that the collar carried a twisted cord herring-bone pattern enclosed between triple horizontal twisted cord lines'.

4. In the north-east quadrant was the contracted inhumation of a woman aged 25-30 years. She was lying south-east to north-west, with the head to the south-east. The skull was extensively damaged by ploughing, and in all probability another season's ploughing would have completely destroyed the rest of the skeleton. No grave goods were found. Although the area was carefully scraped, no relationship could be demonstrated between the grave-pit and the mound. Because of modern ploughing, only a shallow scoop was left under the body, which was probably just below the old ground surface. Again therefore, it is impossible to say whether the burial is truly secondary, satellite, or even considerably earlier than the mound. The latter is an interesting possibility, as Calvin Wells has commented on the gracility of the skeleton which resembles Neolithic rather than the more robust Bronze Age types (see below p. 17).

The 'banana' trench

This feature under the eastern side of the barrow was a shallow trench 14 ft long, 2 ft wide at its greatest, and running approximately north-south (see Fig. 2). It was filled with a dome of flint nodules, some clearly burnt, mixed with some charcoal and dark soil. At each end the trench thinned out, and at the north end there was a spread of charcoal which had apparently been raked-out. No artifacts were found. The feature was clearly an early one which had been totally sealed by the barrow. This however leaves the problem of deciding whether the trench was connected with the ritual *immediately preceding* the barrow-making, or whether it is a much earlier and therefore totally unrelated feature which happened to have been covered and protected by the later barrow.

Although the turf-line was generally indistinct in this area and confusable with charcoal staining, there was, in an east-west section across the centre of the trench, a short length of recognizable turf, 1 ft. long and 2 ins thick. There was no way of resolving whether this was part of a genuine but intermittent turf-line on the old ground-surface, in which case the feature was disused long before the burial ritual took place and may be contemporary with the neolithic occupation described below, or whether it was a stray flag of turf in the upper fill which could mean that the trench was connected with the funeral ritual.

THE NEOLITHIC OCCUPATION

As the excavation of the barrow proceeded, it was increasingly realized that the sandy layer beneath the old turf-line was not a convincing 'natural' layer. In colour it was mottled, with clean and dirty patches, tending on the whole to be darker towards the top. When sherds of Neolithic pottery were found embedded in its upper surface, it became fully recognizable as a cultural layer (layer 10). Its thickness depended on the undulating surface of the chalk beneath. Under the eastern side of the barrow, for instance, the chalk came very close to the old ground surface and was covered by less than an inch of layer 10, but under the northern side the surface of the chalk was lower and covered by a much thicker mantle of sand. Here the lower part was clean and obviously natural, and the upper part only was the mottled occupation layer. Layer 10 was up to 10 ins deep, and contained lenses of quite clean sand: as in places it lay on top of undisturbed glacial sand, it gave the impression of a natural light soil which had been loosened, churned and darkened by the sustained treading of men and animals, and the spread of rubbish. Had it been a plough-soil, one would have expected less pottery and a more homogeneous texture.

Area 1

In order to investigate layer 10 further, it was decided to excavate a small area under the north side of the barrow (Fig. 7); this was later extended to a maximum size of 20 ft by 18·5 ft. Here in a roughly circular patch about 12 ft in diameter, was found a concentration of over 350 Neolithic sherds, a small proportion of which were decorated. These were distributed evenly throughout the upper and middle levels of layer 10, which was up to 11 ins thick in this area. Similarly over 200 waste flakes were found, 2 small cores and 2 scrapers (Fig. 10). Eight flakes were fire-crackled, and there were fragments of 4 pot-boilers. The flint was mainly of a grey and mottled kind, but some brown, translucent material also occurred.

At the bottom of the layer, a series of features became obvious as dark patches in the natural sand: there were three dished hollows (N1, N2, N3), a stake hole immediately beside one of the hollows (N4), and a possible post-hole with a V-shaped profile (N5). These features were nowhere more than 6 ins deep below the top of the natural sand, and appeared to be an extension of layer 10; there was no sign that they had been cut through that layer. Four small waste flakes were found at the bottom of the two hollows (N2 and N3), but otherwise no finds occurred in direct association with these five features. However, it was noticeable that the concentration of pottery in layer 10 proper, was directly above and around the hollows, and must have had some connection with them. Inter-

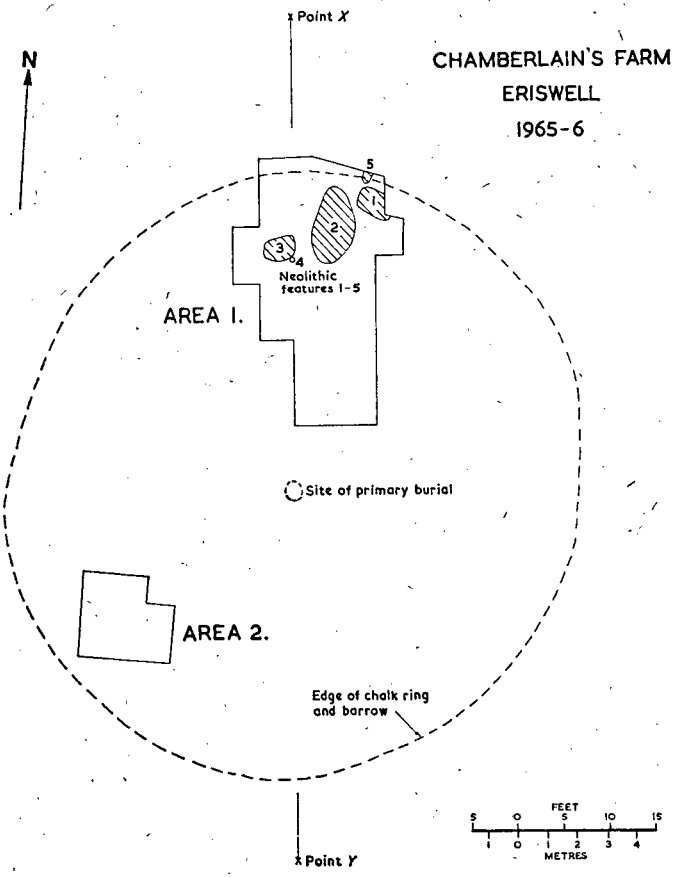

FIG. 7.—Plan of Neolithic features beneath barrow.

pretation of these features is very difficult, but their shallow profiles makes it unlikely that they were storage pits of the Hurst Fen type.[6]

Area 2

Another small area of layer 10, measuring 9 by 10 ft was excavated under the south-west quadrant of the barrow. Here 10 more sherds were found, and a quantity of worked flints that included 4 small cores, several large flakes from cores, and over 200 other waste flakes (Fig. 10). Two flints were fire-crackled. Immedi-

[6] J. G. D. Clark, *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, XXVI (1960), pp. 205-11; Hurst Fen, Mildenhall, lies only 1¼ ml. W. of Upper Chamberlain's Farm.

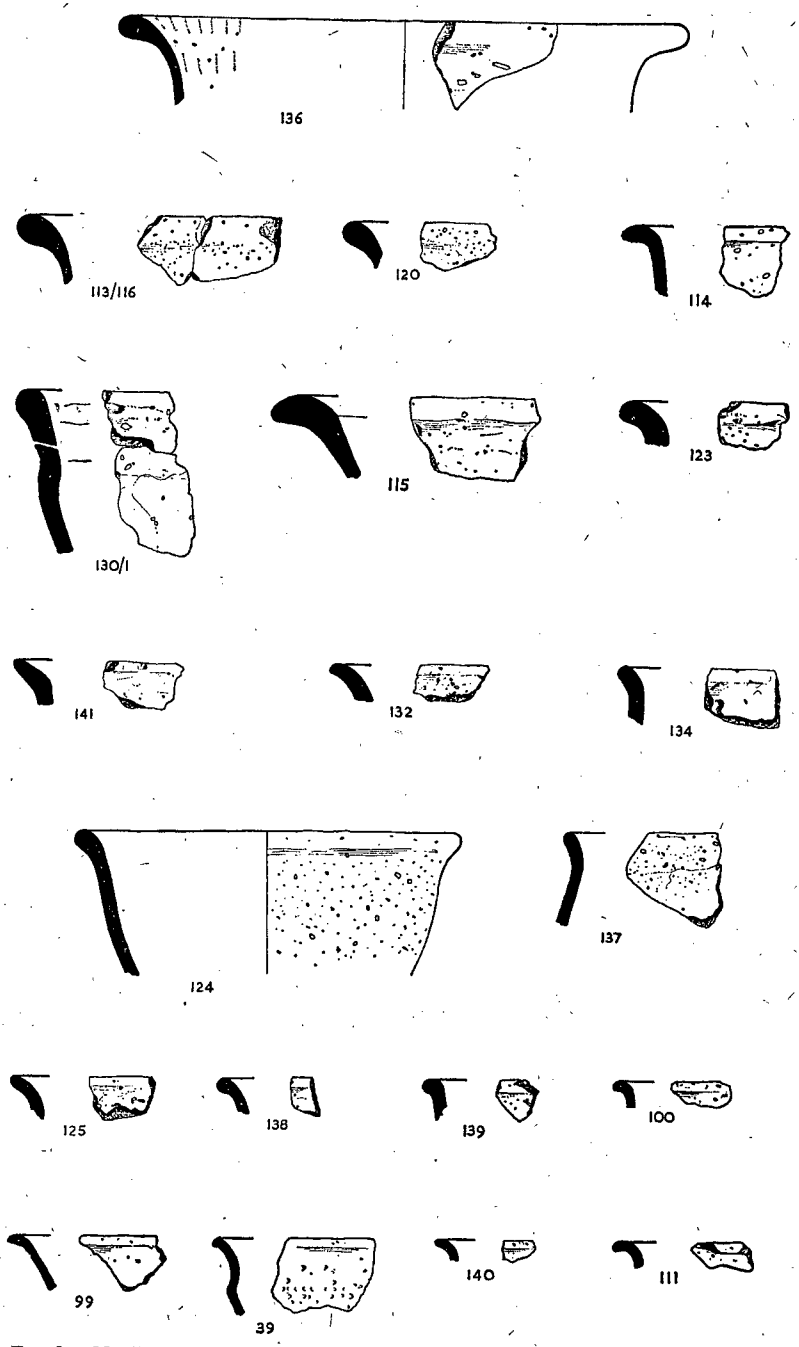

FIG. 8.—Neolithic undecorated pottery. The numbers correspond to recorded find-spots. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

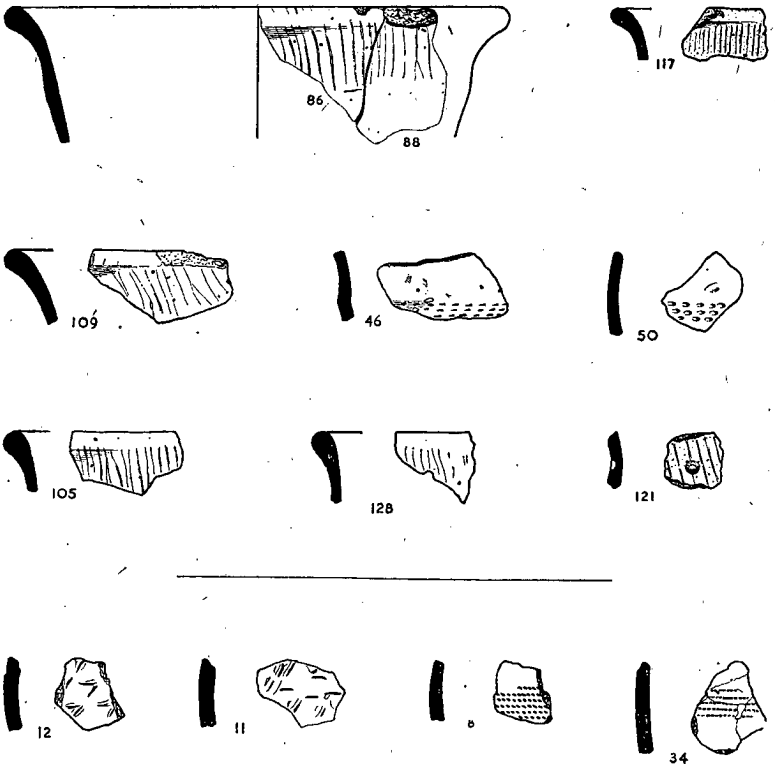

FIG. 9.—Top three rows: Neolithic decorated pottery; bottom row: nos 11 and 12 from old ground surface beneath barrow, no 8 from mound of barrow, no 34 from fill of barrow-ditch. The numbers correspond to recorded find-spots. Scale ¼.

ately south of area 2, and on the scraped surface of layer 10, 12 sherds of pottery were found. Five of them were small and plain, resembling the Neolithic ware in area 1, but the other 7 were decorated by two-way finger-nail impressions (Fig. 9, nos 11, 12).

The Neolithic pottery

The Neolithic pottery found beneath the barrow is close to the so-called Mildenhall ware as defined by Isobel Smith.[7] In colour the pottery ranges from a sandy-buff through reds and browns to black. Frequently the inner face and core are darker than the outside, and sometimes the core is a dark band sandwiched between surfaces of a

[7] I. F. Smith, *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, XX (1954), pp. 224-227; see also G. Briscoe, *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, XLVII (1954), pp. 13-24.

lighter colour. In general the fabric is quite well-fired, and the surfaces show few traces of cracking or crumbling. Often the external surface has been carefully smoothed, and sometimes the internal one also.

The pottery was heavily gritted with crushed flint and perhaps some sand. There is no trace of chalk fragments, or of corky fabrics resulting from the washing-out of grits. Most of the flint was finely crushed, though pieces up to 9 mm in length do occur.

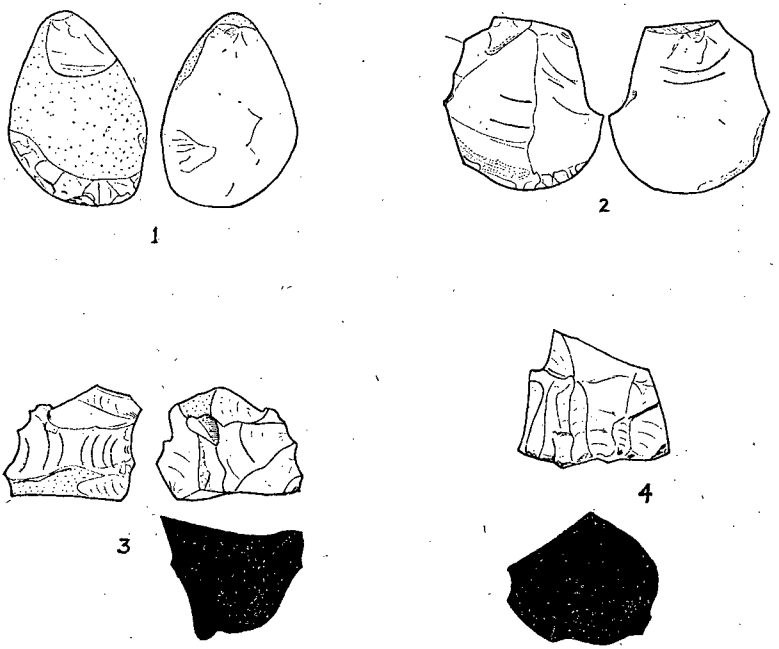

FIG. 10.—Flints from layer 10 beneath barrow. Nos 1 and 2, scrapers from area 1; no 3, core from area 1; no 4, core from area 2. The numbers correspond to recorded find-spots. Scale ½.

As the great majority of sherds were less than 30 mm long, generalisations about the forms of the pots are difficult. From the larger fragments it seems that wide, open-mouthed bowls with markedly out-turned rims were normal. No doubt there was a fair range of sizes and qualities. Some bowls were quite delicate with walls 4 to 6 mm thick (*e.g.* Fig. 8, no. 140), while at the other end of the scale were stronger, cruder vessels with walls up to 12 mm thick (*e.g.*, Fig. 8, no. 130/1). As well as almost straight-sided bowls, there were several examples with shallow necks and shoulders. In two

cases there was a marked carination on the shoulder (Fig. 8, no. 39; Fig. 9, no. 46). The smaller thinner bowls tended to have rolled-over rims, whereas the larger ones were either expanded or externally thickened.

A small proportion of the sherds bore some kind of decoration. There were several examples of lightly incised vertical and diagonal lines over neck and rim (*e.g.* Fig. 9, nos 86/8, 109, 117); one neck-fragment bore a deep circular impression (Fig. 9, no. 121) and on another sherd there were shallow impressions reminiscent of decoration at Hurst Fen (Fig, 9, no. 50).

REPORT ON THE HUMAN REMAINS

by Dr. Calvin Wells, F.R.A.I., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

The Primary Cremation

This material consists of over 600 pieces of bone, many of which are precisely, and many more approximately, identifiable. Among easily recognized fragments are: several pieces of cranial vault, including parietal and occipital fragments and part of the left temporal bone including the posterior margin of the external auditory meatus, part of the tympanic plate, the sulcus sigmoideus, and the asterion point. Fragments of sphenoid are present and the base of a styloid process. The left and right maxillae are present, and fragments of mandible which include the left condyle and coronoid process, with a short extension of the ramus to include a few millimetres of the alveolus. This shows that the left third molar tooth had erupted and was in the jaw at death. A canine, a damaged premolar and a mandibular molar were the only loose teeth to be recovered. The canine had been damaged by firing but appears to have been little eroded by attrition during life. No jaw fragment carrying teeth survives but the loose molar is probably the missing left third molar noted above.

From the post-cranial skeleton the following are the chief surviving fragments: a small fragment of atlas, fragments of other vertebrae from all levels of the column, the central part of both clavicles, part of the blade of a scapula and about two-thirds of a scapular glenoid fossa, and many pieces of ribs. The fragments of long bones are mostly small but a few range from 6-10 cm in length, and come from humerus, ulna, radius, femur and tibia. Fragments of the proximal articular surfaces of humerus and femur are present, and a small piece of distal humeral articular surface. The proximal and the distal quarter of the right radius, and the proximal one-sixth of the right ulna survive. The right patella is present but