

Excavation of a Barrow at Broughton Knowe, Peeblesshire

by Jean Ward

The barrow is situated at 1,068 ft OD on the S slopes of Broughton Knowe (NT 098389). It is on a gentle slope, and lies to the N of a linear cemetery of seven similar barrows. Attention was drawn to the site by the Royal Commission's investigation of a similar site in the locality with a possible Iron Age context.¹ Before excavation, the barrow appeared to be 20 ft in diameter

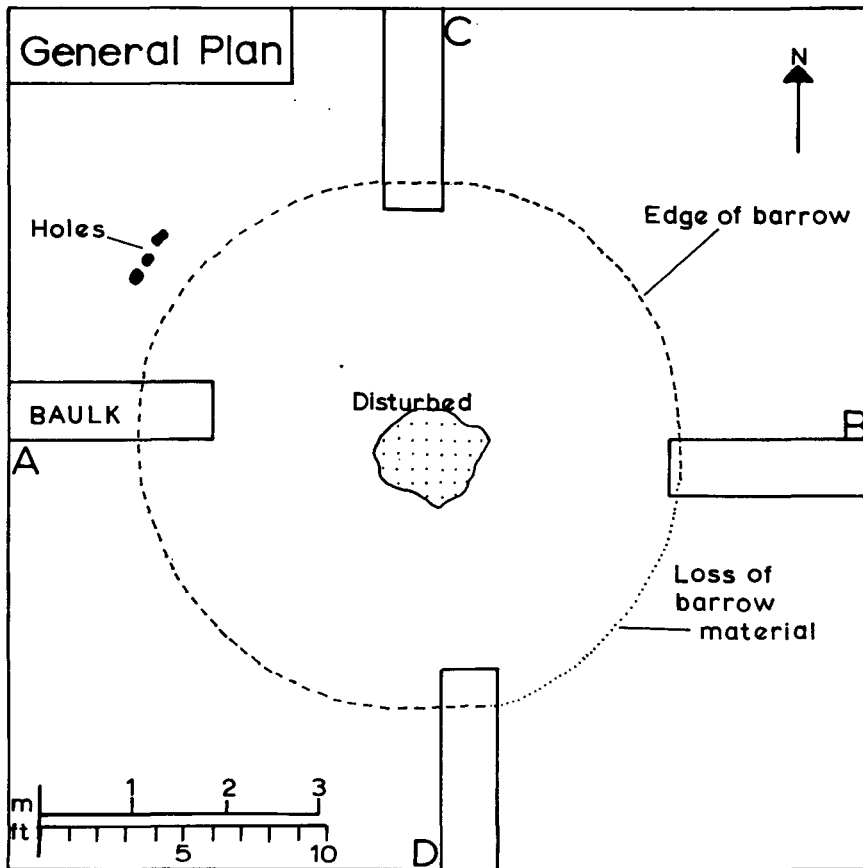


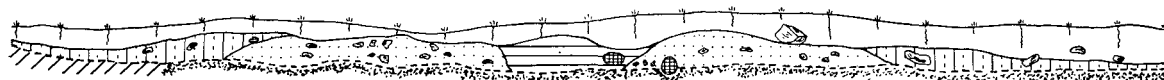
FIG 1 Plan of barrow at Broughton Knowe

and 1 ft high, with the slight suggestion of a ditch.² The central area was slightly depressed, but the disturbance did not appear to be serious.

With the removal of the turf, the curve of the barrow could be easily traced by a distinct soil contrast; it was 18 ft in diameter, and the mound was composed of very fine soil. This had an almost total lack of stones, and was knitted together by a tight interlacing of small roots. The curve of the mound was absent in the SE area, but elsewhere it stood 1-1 ft 6 in high (fig 1). Outside the perimeter, there was a change to a darker, stone-filled soil. This extended a little over the outer edge of the barrow, but was too loose to be a residual capping layer.

The disturbance noted during the initial examination was much more extensive than first realised. A large intrusive area of soft, dark earth occupied the centre, and extended down to the original ground surface (fig 2). There was no trace of a central pit. The disturbance had obviously taken place in the last 100 years, as objects such as an eraser, porcelain and an iron boot-nail were found below the turf-line. Further aggravation of this area was caused by rabbit activity, and a burrow containing animal bones ran through the disturbed section. Beneath the barrow lay a very thin iron pan approximately 4 mm thick, covering a bright orange soil which was the original ground surface under the barrow. The orange soil was present over the whole area of the excavation, with the exception of 4 ft on the S edge, which had a natural surface of shattered rock.

Section along DC



- along AB

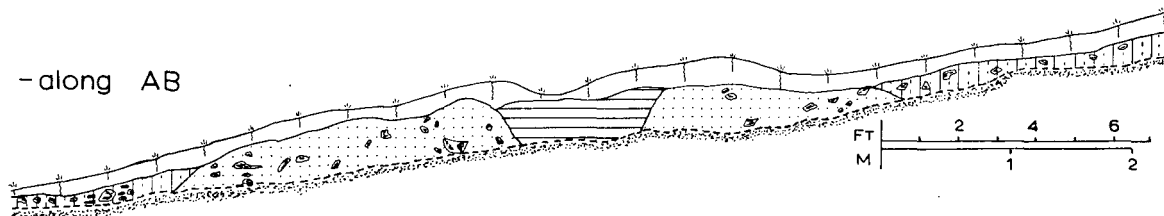


FIG 2 Sections through barrow at Broughton Knowe

The central disturbed area produced no finds, but objects came from the body of the barrow and around the perimeter, just above the iron pan. Several flints were found in the mound, and specks of charcoal were scattered over the entire area. No trace of a ditch was found around the mound. A curious feature emerged in the NW area, however, where concentrations of charcoal specks on the natural surface drew attention to a small area, just beyond the perimeter of the mound. Three holes were uncovered, filled with charcoal and soft, damp earth of a clayey consistency. The charcoal appeared to indicate the former presence of posts. Although the holes were all 8-12 in deep, one was rectangular and vertical, while the other two were round and

set at an angle, with their upper edges sloping away from the barrow. They were not interconnected and did not continue further round the barrow.

FINDS (fig 3)

- a. Fragment of a flint blade, with steep flaking on two cutting edges.
- b. Classic flint flake with bulb of percussion.
- c. Object of polished stone. It was cut along straight planes and the round tip showed signs of wear.
- d. Triangular object of local blue chert, which was flaked on two faces and may have been intended as a missile point.
- e. Chert thumbnail scraper with minute flaking round the edge. It had been broken or was unfinished towards the back and showed no traces of wear.

Fragments of wood and charcoal scattered about were either contaminated or too small for dating purposes.

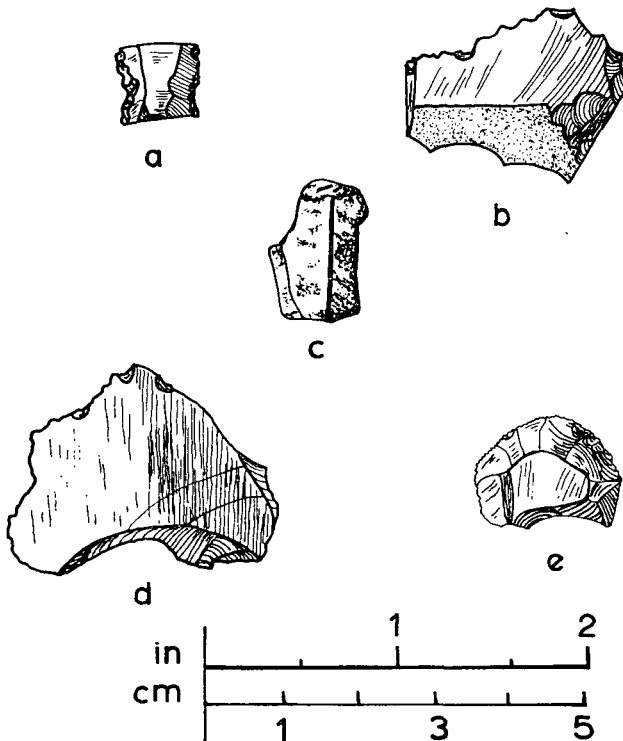


FIG 3 Finds from Broughton Knowe

DISCUSSION

Although it was hoped that the barrow might provide some information on burials of the Iron Age, its structure and associated finds suggested an earlier date within the Bronze Age. As there was no ditch, the mound of the barrow must have been raised by scraping the soil up

from the surrounding area. This appears to place it in the category of 'Ditchless Scrape Barrows', which are Late Bronze Age in context in the Wessex area.³ No attempt had been made to cut a platform out of the slope, and it is curious that little silt accumulated on the downhill side. This may have been prevented by a thin capping of turves, surviving now in the form of the fibrous roots which cover the mound. Excavation revealed no pits dug in the original ground surface, and there was no level area on which the burial might have been placed. The lack of pottery and bone in the central area may be due to several factors. The soil is acidic in nature (heavy liming was carried out in 1962) and this may have disposed of osseous remains. Animal bones found at a high level in the barrow were in a fairly poor state of preservation, although MacLaren's excavation did have some cremated traces in the mound which had not been affected by the soil.⁴ The intrusive pit, however, may be responsible for the lack of finds. If the burial was a cremation, and placed in an urn, the whole contents could have been removed without leaving even a scatter of bone. A cenotaph burial cannot be dismissed, as several of this type have been found in England, e.g. Stancombe, CCLXXXVII, in Berkshire, excavated by Greenwell.⁵

The three outlying holes are problematic. They could have been part of a recent setting of posts, or a ritual arrangement on the edge of the barrow. Other examples of 'extra' barrow holes in the latter context have also been found in Britain.

The associated finds are too general in archaeological context to provide any definite dating for the barrow. Local chert was obviously a satisfactory substitute for the scarcer flint. The scattering of flakes and artifacts in barrow material is not unusual in the Bronze Age,⁶ and suggests a ritual aspect. This factor may also account for the flecks of charcoal over the area, which may have been deposited during the erection of the mound.

This small barrow on Broughton Knowe, like the other which has been excavated, can only be dated arbitrarily to the Bronze Age. The finds can locate it no more accurately in the archaeological time sequence, although its poor construction and lack of ditch seem to indicate a later date than MacLaren's example.

NOTES

1. RCAMS, *Peeblesshire*, I (1967), no. 4, p. 51. A grant for the above excavation in 1968 came from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
2. *ibid*, no. 6, p. 52.
3. P. Ashbee, *The Bronze Age Round Barrow in Britain*, (1960), 44.
L. Grinsell, *PPS*, VII (1941), 107.
4. A. MacLaren, *PSAS*, XCIX (1966-7), 93-104. I should like to express my thanks to Mr MacLaren for his constant interest in the excavation.
5. W. Greenwell, *Archaeologia*, LII.
6. Ashbee, *op cit*, 55.