

## THE EXCAVATION OF A BARROW ON ROCKBOURNE DOWN.

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THE excavations described below were carried out in the summer of 1940 on a small ring-barrow on Rockbourne Down. One of those recorded as a ditch only by Grinsell in *Proceedings Hants Field Club*, XIV, Part 2 (1939), 357 (ninth barrow from top of list). The site was then under grass, but has since been ploughed over throughout the latter part of the war and all trace of these very inconspicuous barrows has vanished.

Before excavation the barrow was hardly noticeable, having no raised area in the centre, and the ditch itself was extremely slight, and had almost been ploughed out. It was decided to excavate the central area and a quadrant within the ditch, and then, if necessary and possible, other quadrants would also have been cleared.

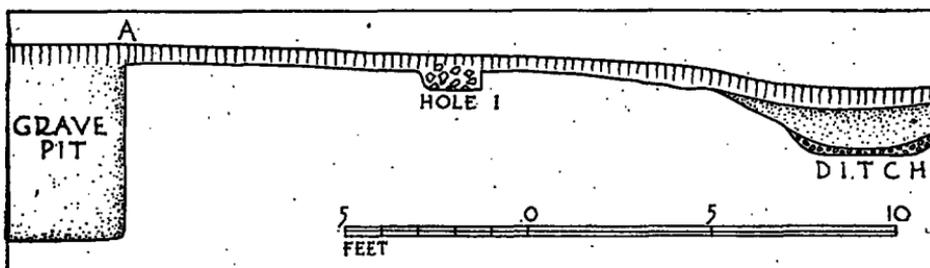


FIG. 2.

**The Ditch** (Figs. 1 and 2) was found to be shallow and irregular, varying from 6 to 3.5 feet wide at the top and about 1.5 feet deep, with a flat bottom. The silting was slight and did not show whether a bank had accompanied the ditch either on the inside or outside of it. One sherd, a piece of beaker of indeterminate type but characteristic ornament, was found in the primary silt. (Fig. 3.)

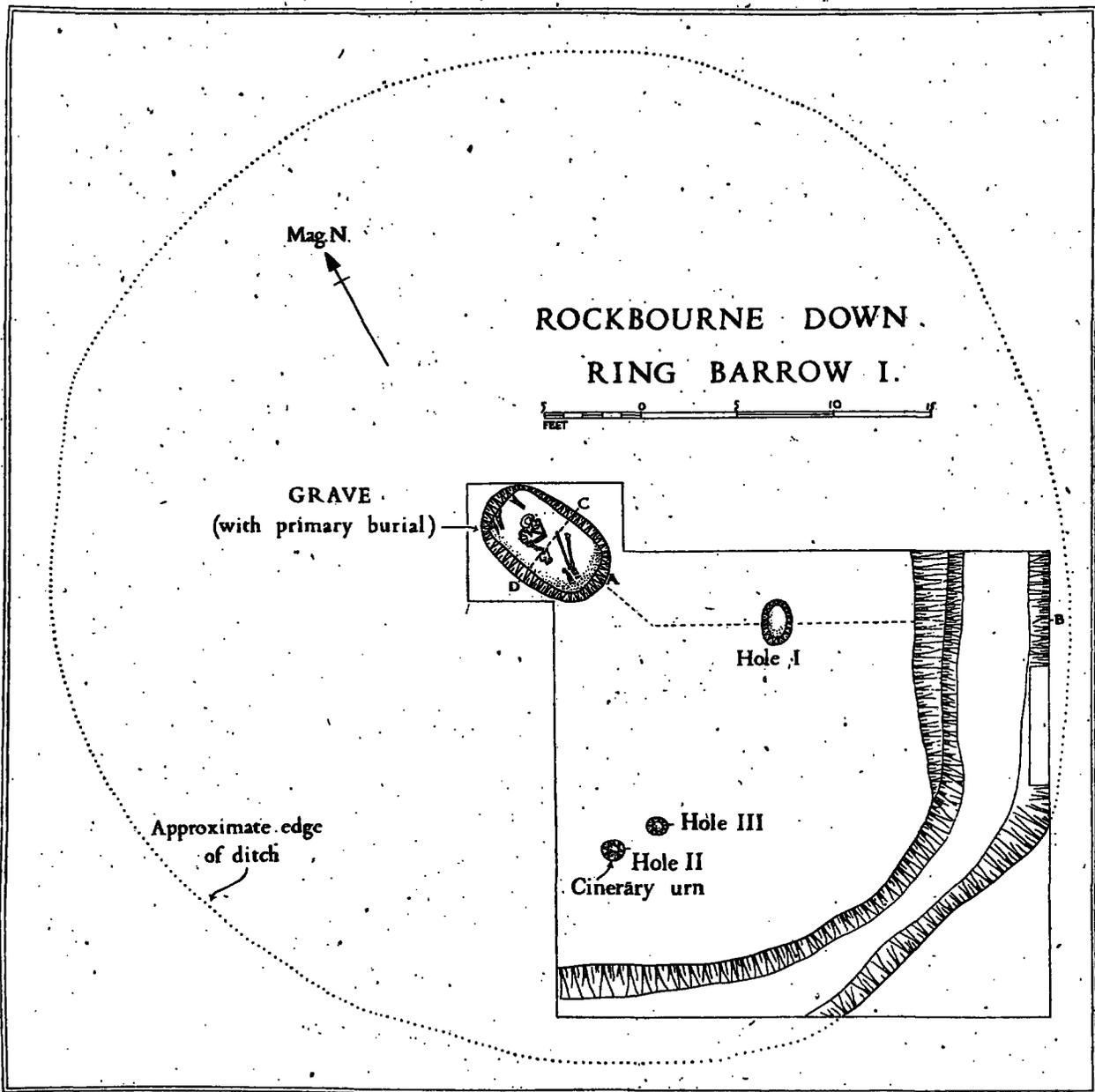
Apart from the grave itself, three holes were found in the ditched area. **Hole I** was 6 ins. deep below the chalk surface, and oval in shape, 2.3 feet long and 1.5 feet wide. It was filled with flint packing stones, but no trace of a post remained. **Hole II** was circular, 1.25 feet in diameter. It contained fragments of a small Middle Bronze Age cinerary urn (Fig. 4), but no cremation. **Hole III**, nearby, was a shallow scoop, a little over one foot across at the top. It can be seen from the plan (Fig. 1) that the spacing of these holes was irregular and did not suggest the presence of a circle or symmetrical structure. All the same, if war conditions had not prevented it, it would have been more satisfactory to have

PLATE I.



*To face p. 156]*

SECONDARY BURIALS—Above : Detail.  
Below : General View (Scale, one foot).



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FIG. 1.



FIG. 3.

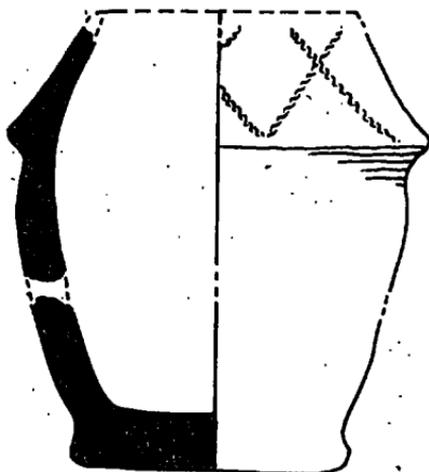


FIG. 4.

uncovered the entire barrow, and with the return of peace this may yet be possible if the ploughed-out site can be identified.

**The Burials** (Figs. 5 - 8 and Pls. I and II). Beneath the turf the area of the burial pit was marked by large flints which formed the filling of the central part to a depth of 3.5 feet. Fragments of a disarticulated skeleton were found in the chalk rubble which lined the inner walls of the pit (*cf.* Fig. 6), and at 3.5 feet remains comprising three whole or imperfect skeletons were found, that one nearest the middle of the grave having an imperfect food-vessel with it (Fig. 5). Finally, on the solid chalk floor of the grave at a depth of 5.1 feet was the primary interment with no grave goods save three antler tines at the head (Fig. 8).

**The Grave** was rectangular in plan, 7.2 feet long and 4.5 feet wide, and was more oval at the top than at the bottom.

**The Sequence of Burials.** The remains at 3.5 feet were puzzling. Those at the centre of the grave were clear enough: they represented the bones of a young adult, crouched, and with the head to the S.E. The body had been placed on its left side, and it held a pot in its arms. This pot was only the lower part of a food-vessel, which had been put into the grave in this incomplete condition. The base bears impressions of cereal grains, identified by Prof. Percival as wheat. It contained earth, a fish vertebra (probably pike), and another bone fragment which appears to be a very young human sacrum. At the neck of the skeleton were two shells of the marine species *Littorina littoralis* (Linn), perforated as beads. Partly beneath this skeleton, and between it and the western side of the grave-pit, were found other bones, notably two femora, tibiae, pelvic fragments, ribs and a humerus, as well as a skull and mandible. Another group of bones lay

# ROCKBOURNE DOWN RING-BARROW

PLAN AT 3 FT. 6 INS. IN FILLING OF GRAVE, SHOWING:-

- 1. BONES OF SECONDARY INHUMATION —
- 2. BONES DISPLACED FROM PRIMARY BURIAL —
- 3. SCATTERED BONES OF A THIRD BURIAL —

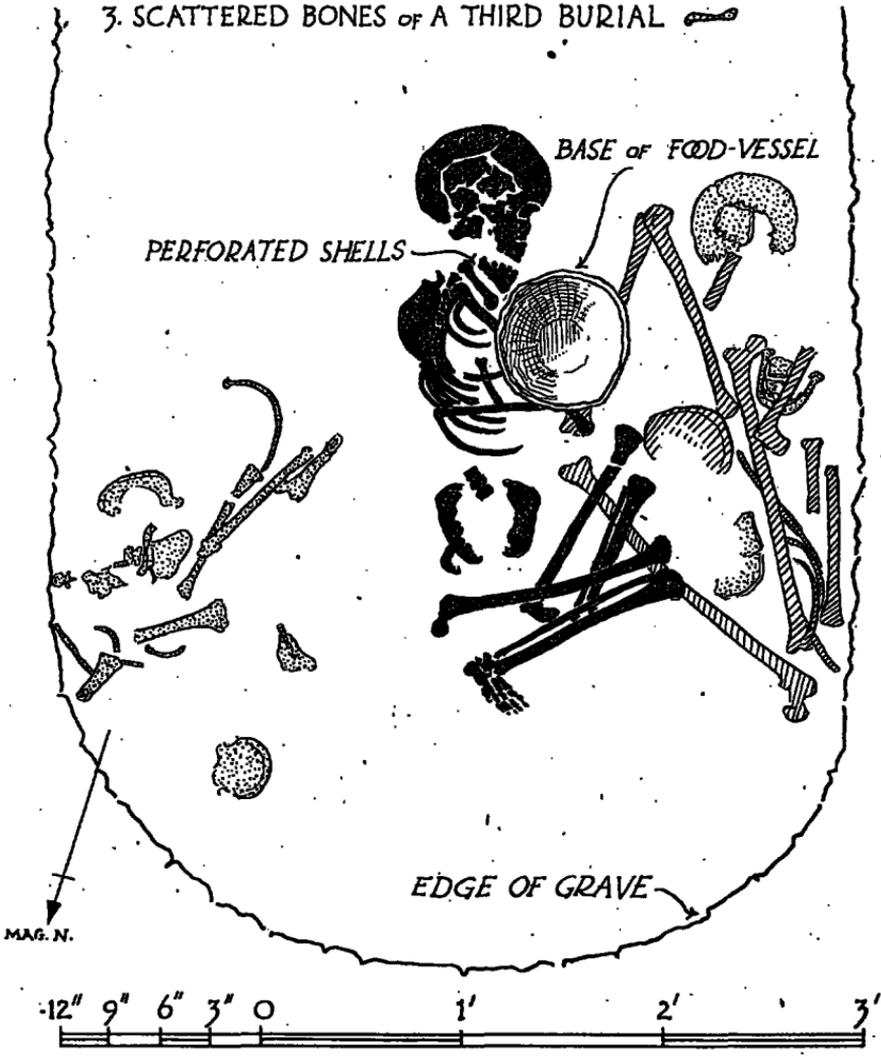


FIG. 5.

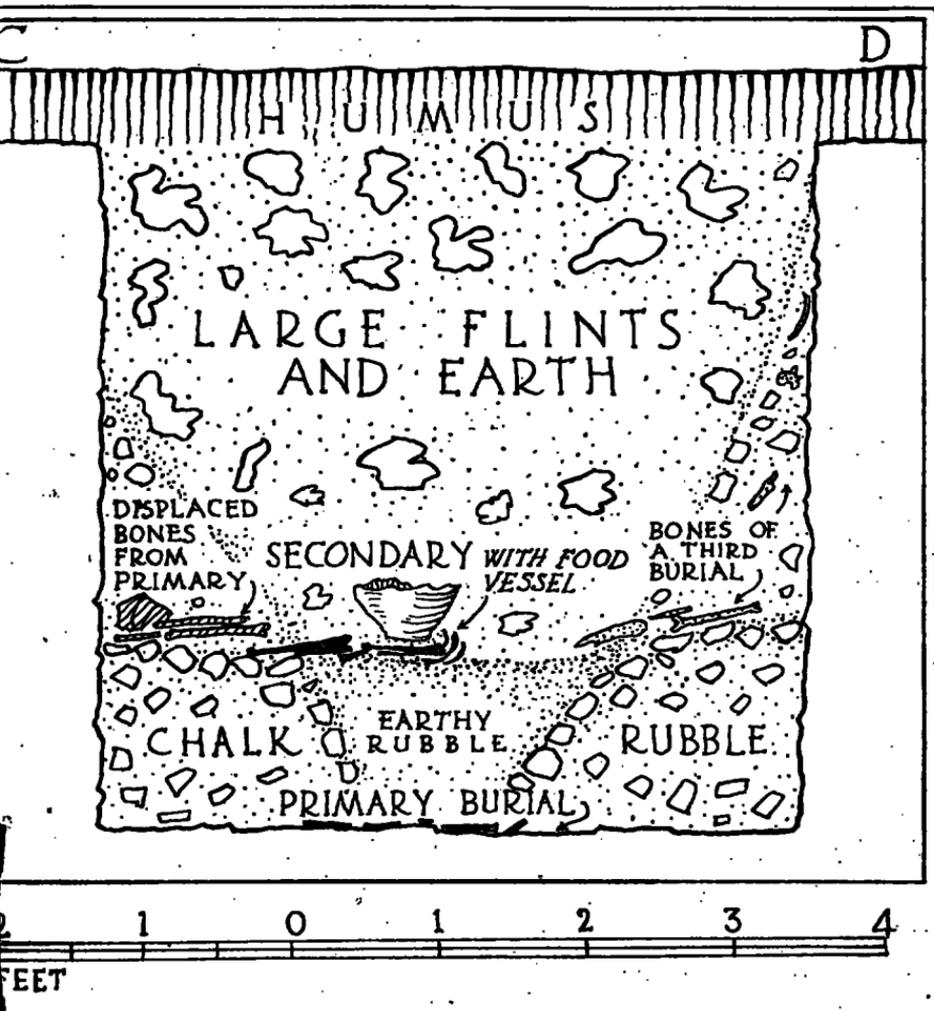


FIG. 6.

behind the crouched burial and near the eastern wall of the grave. This included broken bits of most bones of the human skeleton, but no skull fragments.

Until the primary burial was reached this complex of bones remained obscure, except that three persons were obviously represented, one deliberately buried and the others in a disturbed state following burial and decay of the flesh. **The primary burial** (Pl. II and Fig. 8) was, however, in a most interesting state of incompleteness, and it helped to elucidate the secondary burials. The body had been crouched on its left side with the head to the

N.W., but there was an area of disturbance centred on its thighs, and precisely those bones were missing which were lying in front of the secondary burial (except the skull) which must be referred to yet a third burial. There were also clear indications that the ribs and vertebrae of the primary skeleton had been pushed out of place beyond an oval depression in the filling, suggesting the forcible impact of a foot. The sequence, then, seems to have been as follows :—

1. The primary burial was placed at the bottom of the original grave pit.
2. The grave was filled in, but its site was clearly recognisable.
3. The filling of the grave was dug into at a later date to insert the secondary burial (shown black in Fig. 5). This digging was incautiously carried down too deep in the centre of the filling, and the primary, by now a skeleton, was encountered, and the upper part of the legs, etc., were disturbed. These bones were then laid with the secondary burial (hatched in Fig. 5).
4. The third skeleton (stippled in Fig. 5) is not so easy to explain, but it seems likely that it was also encountered in the grave filling when the secondary with the food-vessel was put in, and then disturbed and redistributed. Fragments, presumably of this skeleton, occurred very high up in the redeposited chalk rubble at the sides of the pit (See Section, Fig. 6).
5. The deposit of the small cinerary urn in Hole II is presumably secondary to the main barrow, but at what date it was placed there is not known. Its form does not call for comment (Fig. 4).

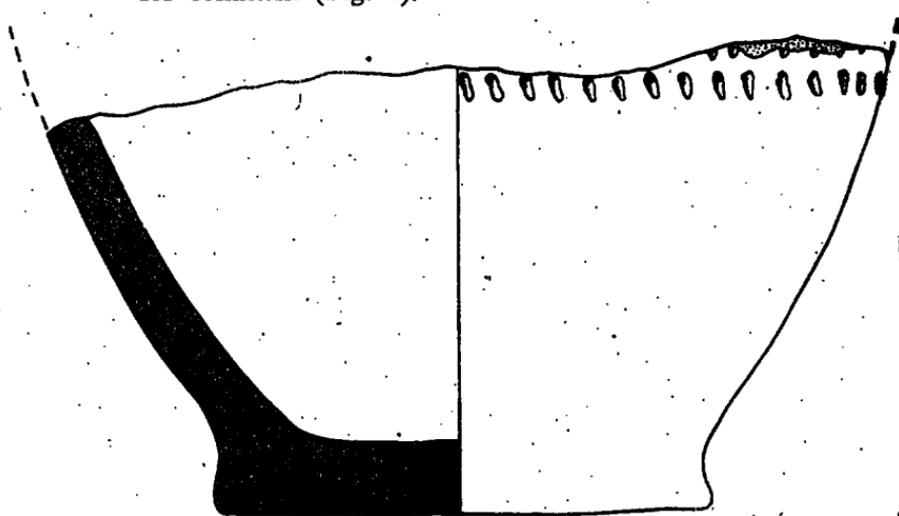


FIG. 7.



*To face p. 160]*

PRIMARY BURIAL.—Above : General View.  
Below : Detail of antler tines at head of grave.  
(Scale, one foot).



FIG. 8.

This very insignificant-looking barrow has proved on excavation to have a number of points of interest. In the first place a specific type of barrow, consisting of a shallow ring-ditch with a central inhumation grave which could never have been covered by anything save the smallest mound, has been shown to belong to the Early Bronze Age: the beaker sherd in the ditch silting and the inhumation burial on the floor of the grave are consistent evidence of such a date, which is reinforced by the presence of a secondary inhumation associated with a vessel which can hardly be later than the end of the Early Bronze Age phase in Wessex. In terms of years, the primary burial with its encircling ditch could be as early as 1800 or 1900 B.C. and is probably not later than 1700, while the food-vessel secondary burial ought at least to be earlier than 1600, and since it was deposited at a time when the original grave still showed signs on the surface, cannot be far removed in date from the primary burial. The food-vessel is in its incomplete condition difficult to date, but there seems no reason to dissociate it from those other southern British examples discussed by Fox (in C. M.

Piggott, "Excavation of Fifteen Barrows in the New Forest," *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* IX (1943), 27) and by him assigned to a date "not later than 1600 B.C."

It is difficult to find parallels for a secondary interment being made in the filling of a grave-shaft at a later date than its filling, but the sequence and the consideration shown for the disturbed bones of the primary interment recalls the two beaker burials in Rusden Low, Middleton-by-Youlgrave, Derbyshire, one of which was a subsequent interment at the deposition of which the earlier skeleton and beaker had been collected together and placed on one side (Bateman, *Ten Years Diggings*, 43-44).

The pike vertebra and infant's sacrum form an odd deposit whose purpose seems to imply some obscure magic or ritual rather than a straight-forward deposition of food for the future life. There is a good parallel from a burial, probably of the food-vessel culture, at Langton, East Riding, Yorks, where in front of the waist of a female skeleton, as if originally in a bag, were three bronze awls, two bone tools, a flat jet ring, a pierced animal tooth, a bit of a belemnite fossil, a fish vertebra, three cowries and a perforated *nerita* shell (Greenwell, *British Barrows*, 138). The perforated shell also provides a parallel to those at the neck of the Rockbourne secondary, and other similar examples may be quoted from Cop Head, Wilts, with a cremation and six segmented bone beads (Colt Hoare, *Ancient Wilts*, I, 68; *Stourhead Catalogue*, p. 59) and those from Winterbourne Stoke Barrow 5 (*Ancient Wilts* I, 114)—both Middle Bronze Age—and from a barrow near Dorchester (Warne, *Celtic Tumuli of Dorset*, Tumuli, various periods, 45), probably of the Middle and the Late Bronze Age respectively. In all these instances, as at Rockbourne, the trade connections with the coast which the marine shells imply is interesting.

The grain impressions on the base of the food-vessel form a valuable addition to the scanty records of Middle or Early Bronze Age grain, which have been recently summarized by Curwen in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* IV (1938), 29 and Fox (*Arch*, LXXXVII (1937), 150). The examination of the fabric of ancient pottery for grain impressions should prove to be a most fruitful source of information when systematically carried out on the lines of the Scandinavian botanists working on this subject before the war (*cf.* for instance, Holbaek in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* VI (1940), 176 for some preliminary results in England, and another identification by the same authority of grain on a Middle Bronze Age cinerary urn from Lambourne, Berks, cited in *Ant. Journ.* XX (1940), 471).

Our thanks are due to Mr. Wallis, the owner of the land, for permission to excavate, and to Mr. A. S. Kennard, Dr. Wilfrid Jackson and Prof. John Percival for their identifications of the shells, bones and grain impressions respectively. Owing to war conditions it has not been possible to have anatomical reports prepared on the skeletons.