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A Late Bronze Age Barrow at Berry Wood near Burley, New Forest, Hampshire

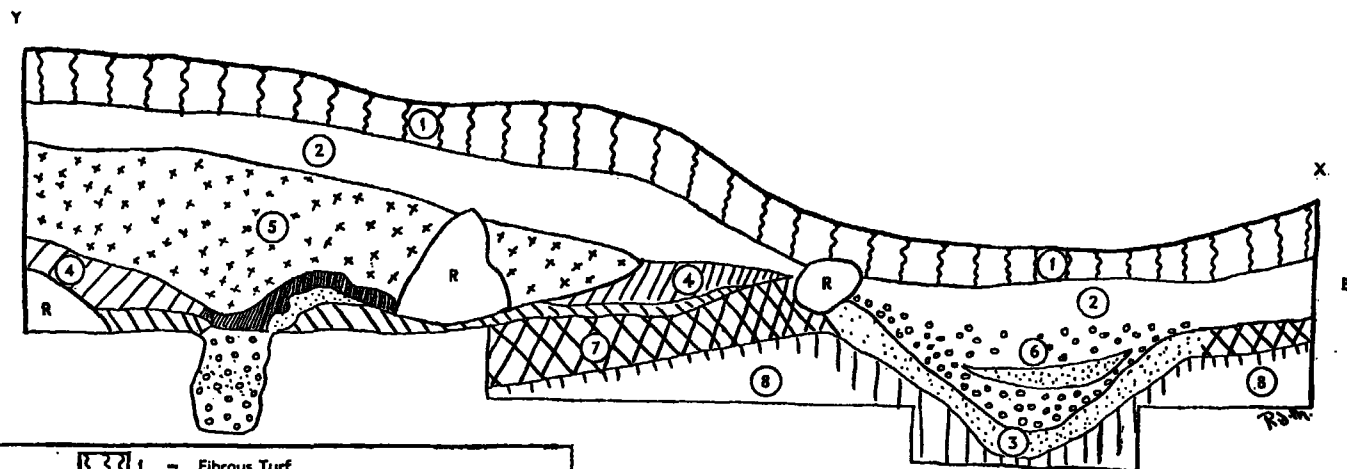
by R. MCGREGOR

THE barrow is one of two small round barrows lying close together to the south of the track from Burley Street to the Old House, as it enters the outskirts of Berry Wood. The site is situated below the 250-foot contour, with the hollies and beeches of Berry Wood to the north and Oakley Inclosure to the east. To the south lies the open expanse of Whitmoore Bottom and Burley Moor, where there are two more round barrows and the possible remains of a third known locally as Colin's Grave. Down the hill to the west is Turf Croft with Burley Street beyond. North of Berry Wood an area of moor and bog stretches across the Ringwood to Stoney Cross road. There are three unrecorded round barrows to the north of Berry Wood, and a group of tumuli on Bratley Plain which were opened by Wise.

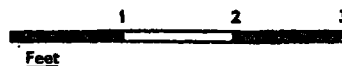
The Berry Wood barrows were found in 1938 by Miss Hardcastle who unearthed part of a globular urn containing cremated bones in a rabbit scrape in the southern tumulus. Both barrows were riddled by rabbit holes and tree roots, and the southern crowned by a holly tree. It is an interesting possibility that the word Berry may be a corruption of Bury which is a name often given to barrows.

The northern barrow was chosen for excavation because it appeared less disturbed by rabbits. The barrow was excavated in two stages; the south-western quarter in April 1952, and the remainder during January and February of 1956. This interval was unfortunately unavoidable.

The barrow was a small one, its present height at the centre being about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet. It was contained by a ditch of very neat and uniform construction. The diameter of the barrow was 21 feet within the ditch. The latter was approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad and 18 in. deep. It was roughly U-shaped and filled with alternate layers of fine sandy-grey and dark black silt. The inner edge of the ditch never strayed more than six inches from a circle taken from the centre. The ditch was cut through a leached gravel into the subsoil of yellow loamy clay. On the latter's surface a hard red pan had formed in the neighbourhood of the ditch. The ditch was broken by two causeways of undisturbed gravel, one in the south-west and the other almost diametrically opposite in the north-east quarter. The latter had been partially destroyed by rabbits, and the pan on top of the clay exposed.

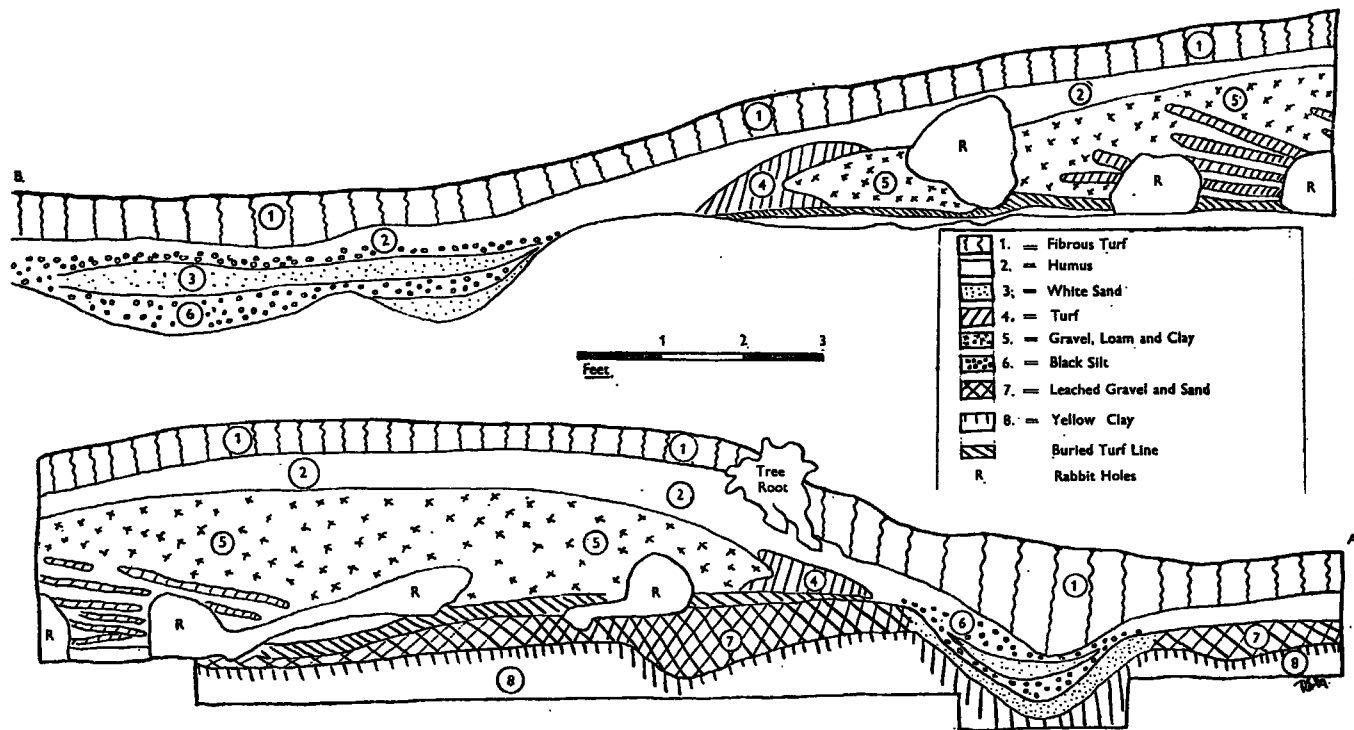


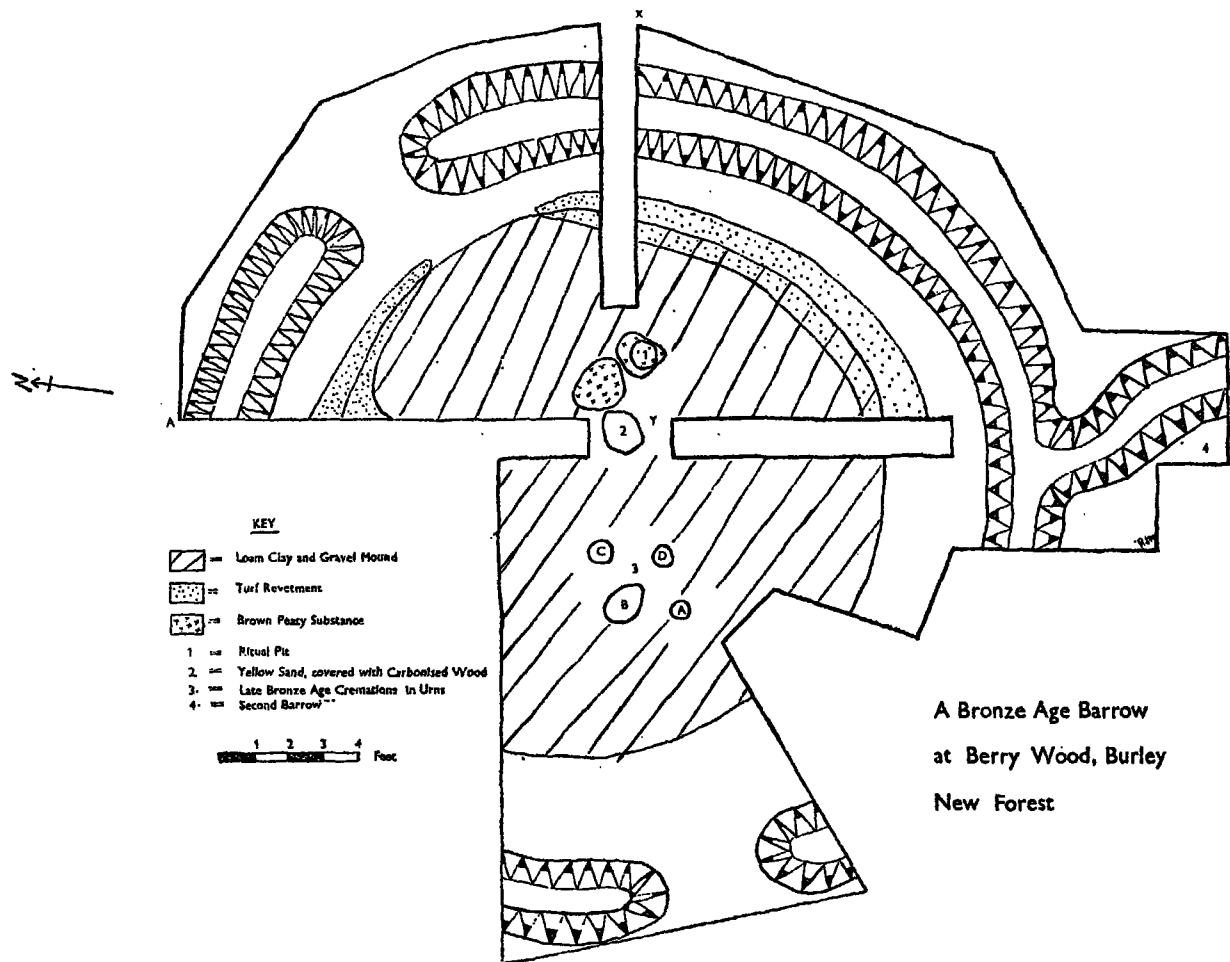
- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| | 1 - Fibrous Turf |
| | 2 - Humus |
| | 3 - White Sand |
| | 4 - Turf |
| | 5 - Gravel, Loam and Clay |
| | 6 - Black Silt |
| | 7 - Leached Gravel and Sand |
| | 8 - Yellow Clay |
| | Buried Turf Line |
| | Brown Peaty Substance |



S.W. Quadrant

LATE BRONZE AGE BARROW AT BERRY WOOD





LATE BRONZE AGE BARROW AT BERRY WOOD

The core of the barrow was made of turves and was very irregularly preserved, being most obvious in the south-west. Individual turves were apparent in some parts of the mound. This mound covered a buried turf line 2-3 in. thick, which rested on a mixture of white, leached gravel and sand, on average five inches thick. This in turn was separated from the subsoil of yellow clay by a vague pan which was most pronounced near the ditch. This formation continued where test pits were dug outside the ditch but the pan was found to be more pronounced.

The turf mound contained four cremations buried in urns of Deverel-Rimbury type. They were placed close together on the buried turf line, opposite the south-western causeway. Three of them, Nos. A, B and D, were barrel or bucket urns, and the fourth, No. C, a globular urn. They rested inverted on the turf line except for the easternmost, No. D, which was standing on its base.

Five feet to the east of the urns there was a small hole a foot deep and the same across. It was filled with dark silt and sealed on top by an area of hard brown peaty substance. There is a possibility that the latter might be the remains of a decayed tree stump, but that was not the impression that it gave. The hole seems to have been a ritual pit, presumably used to contain food offerings. We may know more about the latter when the filling has been analysed. Just over a foot to the west of the pit was a consolidated lump of dark matter containing carbonised wood and measuring 21 x 14 in. This covered a layer of fine yellow sand half an inch thick and resting on the turf line. This also awaits analysis.

The turf mound was covered by a mixture of leached gravel and yellow loamy clay, both obtained from the ditch. The gravel gave way to a brown loam containing humus near the top and the sides. Gravel, loam and clay were much mixed, however. The whole seems to have been retained by a heap of turves and separated from the ditch by a narrow berm. This revetment was not everywhere well defined, being most so in the north. It was suggested that this turf circle was only used during the building of the barrow to define the area of construction. It seems, however, to have served as a retaining wall as it had spread over the gravel mound and prevented the latter from filling the ditch. The berm would also have helped with this. The ditch had very little gravel in its filling, and what there was appeared to have mostly come from outside the ditch.

Adjoining the first barrow in the south was a second similar in size, from which Miss Hardcastle obtained a portion of a globular urn. From the small section of its ditch that was uncovered it appeared that its ditch deviated from its course to join that of the first barrow. Another point in connection with the ditch should be mentioned. The barrow was built on a slight slope and the ditch on the north-east side had been cut deeper than that on the south-west or downhill side of the barrow. This was particularly noticeable when the ditch was full of water or ice.

The four urns were of a late type and of the usual poor ware and in bad condition. They were held together by the cement-like conglomeration of cremated bones and burnt matter which they contained. As soon as this was removed they disintegrated into a large number of pieces.

A. This was a small bucket urn, 9 in. high and 7 in. in diameter near the base. It had been inverted and as a result most of the base was missing. It was made of reddish brown ware containing white grit, and was decorated with four knobs and a line of nail marks level with the knobs. It had a plain rim.

B. A large bucket urn, 11 in. high and with its base measuring 10 x 12 in. It was nine inches north of A. and very misshapen. It was made of the same red-brown ware containing white grit and evenly fired. It was inverted and most of the base was badly preserved.

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C. A globular urn, 8 in. high and 7 in. in diameter at the rim. It was made of black ware containing white grit and better fired than the other urns. For decoration the urn had four knobs rather higher than half-way up the urn. It had also traces of a scratched line parallel with the rim. It was placed inverted five inches north-west of B.

D. A bucket urn. The only urn in the group standing on its base. Because of this the upper portion was badly preserved. Its base was well preserved and concave with a hollow in the centre. The urn was made of dark brown muddy ware containing white grit. Its rim was thickened and slightly inverted. The urn was ornamented with a row of finger-tip indentations.

This barrow poses a number of questions. Why were the urns in the south-west and not in the centre? Why was the one urn not inverted in contrast to its companions? What was the ritual pit used for? We may know more about the latter when the filling has been analysed. What was the small area of yellow sand covered with carbonised wood? Why was the second barrow's ditch made to join that of the first? Was it merely to save labour or did it have religious significance? In connection with the first question it should be noted that the cremations are opposite the south-western causeway. Many of the barrows in the district seem on the surface to have causeways in the south-west, though it is impossible to be sure without excavation. Possibly the south-west had some special importance.

The answers to some of these questions will be found when more research has been carried out in this district, but others can only be answered by the imagination.

The remains of the four urns, together with samples of the various soils and a small model of the barrow, have been placed in the Red House Museum, Christchurch.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to record my gratitude to the Deputy Surveyor for granting me permission to dig and to Miss Ingram of Queen's House for helping me to get the dig under way. I would also like to thank Professor Piggott for his kindness and help and Mr Robertson Mackay and Mr Aubrey Parkes for helping with advice. Also Mr Lavender of the Red House Museum for generous assistance, especially in connection with the soils. Nor must I forget Miss Hardcastle and Messrs Miles MacNair, Peter Rosati, Duggie Menzies and my brother, without whose labours the barrow would still remain undug. I would like to thank Mr Lavender and Mr Calkin in advance for publishing the results of soil and pollen analysis and details of the pottery. Their co-operation was made necessary and accepted gratefully because of the writer's departure abroad before the results were known.