

William Cunnington and the Long Barrows of the River Wylve

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One of the more important contributions in the field of Neolithic studies was that of the survey of the long barrows in Hampshire (RCHME 1979), which was carried out while Isobel Smith was an Investigator for the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) during the 1970s. That project, in which Isobel played the major role, not only compared long barrow types as observed and measured in the field, but also considered their landscape position and took long barrow studies on the kind of major leap forward rarely seen since the pioneering work of William Cunnington at the beginning of the 19th century. Cunnington's work too was painstaking and imaginative. Nobody had dug into a long barrow before, or at least in a recorded way, and until then the only model in terms of excavating tumuli was that of the Reverend Douglas in Kent. Both Cunnington's study and that of the RCHME were innovative and both remain significant. This paper is offered as a tribute to Isobel as a scholar, colleague and friend.

William Cunnington

Having been told by his doctors to 'ride out or die', William Cunnington, a draper and cloth merchant of Heytesbury, Wiltshire, embarked on

what must then have been seen as an unusual pursuit of investigating the earthen mounds that were to be found liberally scattered on the local chalk Downs. Records of these interventions are preserved in letters to his benefactors and supporters, initially H.P. Wyndham, MP for Salisbury; and later R.C. Hoare of Stourhead, who used the work in his *Ancient Wiltshire*, the first folio of which was published in 1810. These letters often describe the stratigraphy that was encountered, along with the discovery of skeletons and other finds. Though dictated by Cunnington, they were written by his daughters, a copy being retained in each case (R.H. Cunnington 1975, 7-8: 1954). Hoare's copy bound into five volumes was eventually purchased by the Society of Antiquaries (Soc. of Ants. London ms.217), while Cunnington's copy sorted into 13 books and bound in three volumes, went to the library of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (referred to below as Cunnington mss Devizes). From these it is clear that Cunnington made some tentative explorations, initially to satisfy the question posed by Wyndham as to whether, in contrast to the round mounds, the long examples covered bodies slain in battle. Cunnington knew little about long barrows, but then neither did anyone else, and given the medical advice he had received

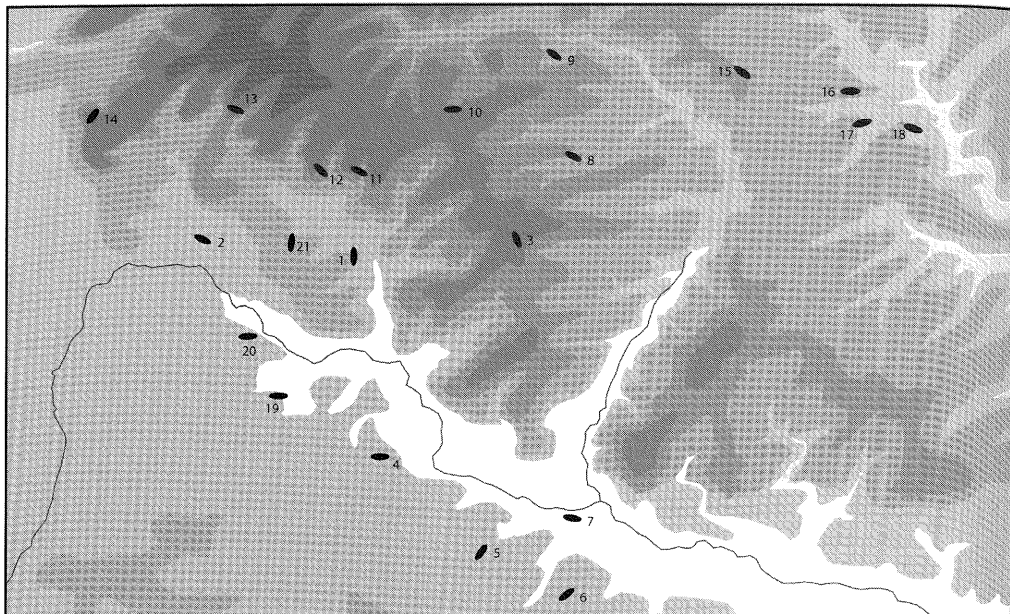


Fig. 1. Map of the distribution of Long Barrows along the River Wylde and the south eastern part of Salisbury Plain: 1 Heytesbury North Field, 2 King Barrow, 3 Knook, 4 Corton, 5 Boyton, 6 Stockton, 7 Sherrington, 8 Knook Down, 9 Imber, 10 Boles Barrow, 11 Norton Bavant, 12 Middleton Down, 13 Oxendean Down, 14 Arn Hill, 15 Kill Barrow, 16 Tilshead Lodge, 17 Old Ditch, 18 White Barrow, 19 St Leonard's Church, 20 Dairy Plantation, 21 Scratchbury

concerning the importance to his health of exposure to the downs air, the pursuit seemed as good as any and was one that gripped him with increasing fascination.

Between 1800 and 1809 Cunnington excavated 18 of the 53 or so long barrows subsequently recorded on Salisbury Plain and in South Wiltshire, that is 25% of the present total, having discovered many of them himself during trips on to the downs. These formed part of the Salisbury Plain West group defined by Ashbee (1970) and many were investigated by the RCHME during the late 1980s and early 1990s, those situated on military land being published as part of a survey of that area (McOmish *et al.* 2002). Most were only at a little distance from Cunnington's home and in particular they focus on the upper reaches of the River Wylde (Fig. 1). Some he excavated more than once, returning to

both Heytesbury North Field (Heytesbury 4: National Monuments Record (NMR) Number ST 94 SW 6) and King Barrow (Warminster 14: NMR ST 84 SE 8), for example, to ask questions refined by the experience of his later excavations.

Heytesbury North Field

Initial efforts were modest enough. In 1800, at the invitation of Sir William A'Court, of Heytesbury House, he dug a small trench into the centre of the low long barrow that lay just outside the park and within Heytesbury North Field, little more than a kilometre north of Cunnington's home. The result was inconclusive, though Wyndham was content with the human bones found in association with a deposit of black earth (R.H. Cunnington 1975, 12) that seemed

to help to support his theory concerning battle casualties.

Lying within the Heytesbury arable it is of no surprise that the mound has been reduced. It now reaches barely 1m in height, but it is likely to have been little different in Cunnington's day and the bulk of the mound might indicate that it was always low. At c.38m long, by a maximum of c.15m wide, it lies towards the shorter end of the range and its orientation along the contours, with its axis towards the south, was not then seen as unusual or noteworthy. No ditches are visible now, but according to the Ordnance Survey Record Card (incorporated into NMR records) they were noted as formerly being present from traces on an air photograph (Crawford Coll. No. 3071 15-5-33).

Not unreasonably Cunnington's attention focused on the centre of the mound with the expectation of that being the 'business' area and it was there that he cut a not inconsiderable trench some 5m in length by c.2.5m wide. Four years later, with the experience of having dug several other barrows in the vicinity, he returned to the site and placed two further trenches towards the broad end, a position where he had since made discoveries in some of the other mounds. He wrote to Wyndham in February of that year describing his finds (Cunnington mss Devezes, Book 3, 45) and in order to assist his description, he annexed a plan of the excavations (McOmish *et al.* 2002, fig 1:11), one of the earliest of excavation plans and certainly the first of a long barrow.

At the base of the first trench, Cunnington discovered the 'black earth' and traced it through to the second, where it was observed to increase in height and rise to form a circular barrow, the black earth being mixed with large flint nodules, sarsens and chalk marl. The third trench was cut into this 'conical' mound and excavated down through it until a circular pit was encountered (Cunnington thought that it was a cist), c.1.5m in diameter and 0.7m deep, that was neatly cut into the underlying natural chalk. The pit contained no artefacts, but was filled with the

same material as that of the overlying circular mound. Between this pit and the southern edge of the trench lay a great number of human bones evidently in disarray and many in a state of decay 'crossing each other in every direction'. Cunnington thought that more than ten individuals were represented and perhaps as many as twenty.

King Barrow

Late in October 1800, with his first exploration into a long barrow behind him, he made his way to Boreham, near Warminster, 3km from his home in Heytesbury, where, with the help of some labourers, he cut into the enormous mound known as King Barrow. The contrast with the mound in Heytesbury North Field could not be more marked. However, now armed with only a little background knowledge, he clearly felt up to the task. The mound (Fig. 2), a massive 62m in length, 17m wide and 4.5m in height, is situated on the edge of a small bluff overlooking what is now the floodplain of the River Wylye at Bishopstrow and viewed from the west this position enhances its profile considerably. Reference to the hachured plan makes it clear that its wider end lies to the southeast, though Cunnington, perhaps influenced by the manner in which the natural ground surface dramatically falls away here, considered it to be in the north. Strangely, the only contemporary measured plan that survives indicates the same width, 16.4m, at either end (Cunnington mss Devezes, Book 11). Only a few metres away from the south end, and on the same axis, is a round mound and a little to the southwest another, both now landscaped as part of the garden of Bishopstrow House (see below NMR ST 84 SE 48 and ST 84 SE 10). Notwithstanding this and site landscaping, and the effects of former cultivation, the surviving earthworks associated with the long barrow allow the identification of several components that appear to be ancient, each separated by a break of slope or ledge along the length of the mound.

At the base lies a raised platform (Fig. 2a), less marked on the northeast side, where it is composed of a shallow scarp no more than 0.2m in height, though in the west it forms a substantial lynchet-like feature. In the southwest the scarp bifurcates, its ultimate extent being unclear as it is overlain by recognisable garden features associated with Bishopstrow House, but it may once have been unitary with scarps around or beneath the round barrow 20m southeast of the long mound. A more substantial platform (Fig. 2b), appearing as a ledge or berm particularly on the western flank, where it is over 1m wide and up to 2m in height, lies over it and on this the main part of the superstructure has been built. The upper portion (Fig. 2d), though prominent at the southeast end, noticeably broadens and

becomes indistinguishable from the lower in the north (Fig. 2c) and given the Bronze Age and Saxon finds discovered by Cunnington (below) could even, in part, be a secondary structure. No side ditches are evident, indeed on the western side there is no room for one unless it lay at the foot of the natural scarp. However, there may be some artificial scarping here that would not only have provided material for the construction of the mound, but also would have enhanced its perceived height. Any ditch in the northeast could potentially be filled in and cultivated, though for a mound of this size one might expect such a feature to be of considerable proportions and some trace, however shallow, visible on the surface.

On the summit a large depression, 9 x 6m by 1m deep, situated towards the northwest end may

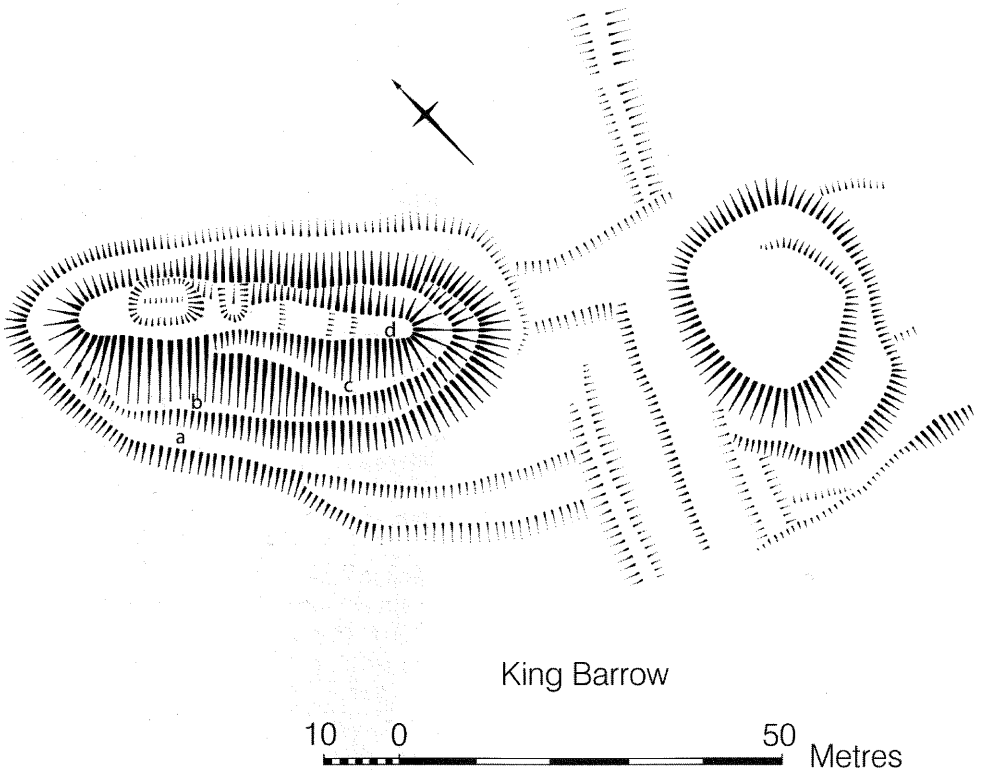


Fig. 2. Hachured plan of King Barrow, Bishopstrow, Wiltshire

represent the episode of destruction ascribed to Mr Morgan, the farmer, who according to Hoare (1810, 73) intended to level the mound, having already ploughed away part of it. There is no other scar on the mound that matches the description of this event and it appears unlikely that such a trench would have been backfilled.

A little north of centre, a cut into the mound from the northeast, 4m in width, may mark the site of Cunnington's initial exploration. Hoare (*ibid.*, 72) remarked that Cunnington had opened 'a section of twenty eight feet (8.5m) in length from the northeast edge to the centre...', while Cunnington himself (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 11, 22) records that work began in the northeast of the cutting near the edge of the mound and worked towards the centre, before moving northwest and then southwest, resulting in a T-shaped trench. Presumably work proceeded by digging straight down to the ground surface at the edge of the mound, placing the first spoilheap away from the mound, before moving on to repeat the process and perhaps moving fresh spoil into the area vacated.

Confirmation of the location of these events is provided by a sketch (Fig. 3) of the profile of the mound on the reverse of one of the later Cunnington papers (Soc. of Ants. London ms.217/ Volume IV, folio 76: Devizes, Book 11, 22). This clearly indicates the position of Cunnington's first T-shaped trench at about the mid-point in the side of the mound, with the damage caused by the farmer depicted towards the northwest end. Other illustrations were evidently prepared but are lost, there being references in the letters to 'Fig 1 The South West side of the Barrow' and 'Sir. You will receive with this a drawing of King Barrow by my Brother...' and 'My Brother has been very much from our home and could not finish the drawings before this Evening'. Evidently these referred to an illustration, lettered A-M, marking the position of features of interest found in the mound, including the position of bones and charred wood found beneath the barrow (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 11, 21). Some of the finds were illustrated too, though unfortunately the figures

described do not tie in with the illustration of artefacts made later by Crocker (below). Cunnington's early notes, amounting to a daily record, were later copied by Hoare during his preparations for *Ancient Wiltshire*. Entries for October 31st, November 2nd, 5th, 8th and 21st 1800 occur, though sometimes appear a little confused (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 11, 22): 'we began by making a section 6 feet wide and 28 feet from the present edge C to the interior part of the barrow D'. Immediately below the turf the excavators encountered a deposit of chalk, 'white Marl stones', beneath which the mound as a whole was found to comprise 'white Marley Earth, and often vegetable mould, also Nodules of Pyritical kind' (*ibid.* 21). On October 31st, he 'found more bones of horses, swine - a piece of ivory 8 1/2" long, like the point of an elephant tooth (tusk), a piece of black urn... when the bottom (was) found (to be)... almost red by the action of fire...'. On November 2nd '... found (the) same... bones, fragments of horn and (I) suppose the barrow was larger'. He may have been digging at the south end, for on several occasions he indicates that he believed the mound to have been larger and that it may have originally joined the round mound to the south. On November 5th he came across '... a pavement of burr stones...' and on November 8th, '... a kind of Skeleton near the same place and a piece of Stags Horn near it...'. A note in a letter written on 1st December 1800 adds that 'at H [on the lost plan] was found some irregular common Stones such as the Farmers in this neighbourhood pave their Stables with'. This was probably deliberately broken sarsen, similar to that later encountered in Knook Barrow.

According to Cunnington, fragments of coarse pottery and animal bones, including antler and boar tusks, were frequently encountered throughout the fabric of the mound. He commented that the antlers were remarkably large and the tips of some firm and white like ivory (*ibid.* 21).

Beneath the mound, 'a floor of yellow clay' was met with and Cunnington was led to conclude

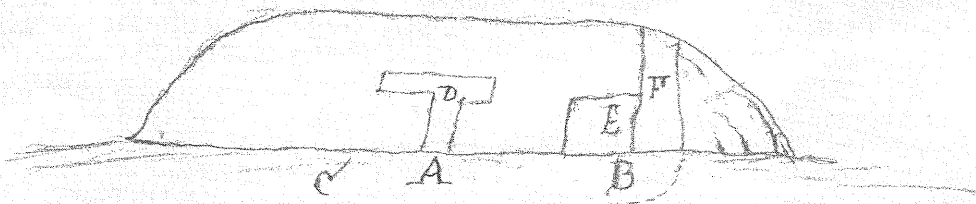


Fig. 3. Sketch of King Barrow showing the position of excavation trenches (from Soc. of Ants. London ms.217/ Volume IV, f 76)

that when the barrow was constructed all of the adjacent land might have supported a deposit of clay. He noted, however, that the base of the barrow was over half a metre lower than the adjacent ground, the floor being easily distinguished from the mound that covered it (*ibid.* 21). Hoare (1810, 72) too, indicated that the floor lay 'more than two feet below the present surface'. Cunnington further remarked that, in places, the yellow floor was stained a dull rusty red colour 'rather as blood appears on the roads a few days after it has been shed' and that 'flakes' of similar colour to corroded iron were observed and that it was also covered with charred wood and ashes, with animal bones, both 'beasts and birds', fragments of human bones and potsherds all present. Bones amounting to almost 4.5 litres ($\frac{1}{2}$ peck) were recovered (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 11, 21).

The nature of this deposit is quite uncertain. The floor evidently extended a distance of 12.5m from Cunnington's trench D at least as far as A (Fig. 3): i.e. from the centre towards the edge of the mound, from where it rose steadily to within less than 0.5m of the surface. In tracing it, Cunnington found that in the northeast it extended for 'many feet' beyond the strict confines of the mound and indeed as far as the round mound to the southeast, while Hoare too felt it was 'remarkable that this floor should extend several feet from the barrow on the northeast side' (Hoare 1810, 72). It is possible that the platform identified in the earthwork survey provided a covering for this, as it extends for several metres beyond the mound proper in every direction.

Nine years later, this time with the support of Richard Colt Hoare, Cunnington returned to the mound at the point at which Mr Morgan, the farmer, had 'cut through' it. Cunnington's account (Soc. of Ants. London ms.217/ Volume IV, f76) states clearly that the farmer had 'carried away a great deal of the barrow' near the point marked 'B' on his sketch plan, that is, towards the northern end of the mound. Conveniently it presented a ready-made section that could be utilised and this is marked 'E' on this sketch plan.

Certainly Cunnington investigated the northwest end of the mound, for he revealed secondary skeletons close to the surface at that end. The stratigraphy matched that found in the earlier trench. Here Hoare quoted Cunnington's notes almost verbatim, recording that:

we also found the floor of it full 2 feet and a half lower than the adjoining ground, and covered with black ashes, as in the first section; and the soil as before in some places had the appearance of iron when decomposed. In uncovering this floor we were surprised to find that as we approached the edge of the barrow, the clay and earth which covered the floor rose 3 feet in height like another tumulus, and ten or twelve feet in diameter; amongst this clay was an immense quantity of animal bones, some of oxen, but mostly of swine; among these bones and ashes were several pieces of burned human bones and fragments of an urn and other British pottery, some specimens of which are curiously ornamented. After exploring a great many feet of this barrow within a barrow, we made a large

section from top to bottom, but found nothing but a few animal bones and a little charred wood. (Hoare 1810, 73)

This section was at 'F' on Cunnington's plan.

Cunnington was concerned at the lack of a primary interment and concluded that the enormous quantity of ashes may have represented cremations, but was particularly struck by the profusion of animal bone here in contrast to the other excavated long mounds. The floor was evidently 'covered with animal bones of almost every description', including those of birds, along with fragments of charred wood, some of which still adhered to bones. Just above the floor in the northeast of the trench was the complete skeleton of a horse. Cunnington noted the distinction in position and in his later note observes that it was found near point 'A' on the sketch plan, i.e. close to the edge of the mound. The latter would appear to have been incorporated within the structure of the mound, or perhaps more likely inserted later.

No trace remains of the 'curiously ornamented' pottery from the clay floor and while a water colour by Philip Crocker (Crocker folio Devezes Pl. XLIII, figs 3-5) illustrates several sherds, it is not clear whether these were among those found at the base of the mound. Crocker depicts three sherds, all of which appear to display Grooved Ware characteristics, and if these can be identified as those mentioned as 'curiously ornamented' from the clay beneath the mound, they would be a unique find from such a position. It may perhaps be safest to assume that they came from deposits around the edges of the mound and represent later activity.

At the base of the final trench 'F', a portion of what appears to be a ground axe was recovered. Hoare (1810, 73) describes it as a violet colour and it may perhaps be from one of the Cumbrian or Welsh grouped rock sources. Cunnington's watercolour (*ibid.* fig. 6) indicates that it may be a mid-portion of a ground axe of lenticular cross-section and therefore unlikely to be of Group VI rock. If indeed recovered from the position indicated by Cunnington this also is a rare find

indeed. Though edge ground axes are frequently associated with Neolithic round barrows (e.g. Kinnes 1979), no other examples of ground axes from long barrows are known (e.g. Kinnes 1992, 108-110) and, like the pottery, it may be prudent to suggest that it derived from the edge of the mound where secondary activity may not have been easily distinguished.

The sequence here appears to begin with the clay floor. This represents a considerable amount of activity involving animal bones, fragments of pottery and episodes of burning represented by charred wood, ashes and perhaps by the reddened ground, though whether burning comprised the main part of the activity is unclear. Over this at one point, a circular mound, c.3-4m in diameter by c.1m in height, was constructed of clay and earth, within which human and animal bones and potsherds were all incorporated, suggesting that the material may have been composed of debris from the floor. Around and over the floor, perhaps sealing the event, the base platform identified during the earthwork survey (Fig. 2) must have been constructed – its composition and purpose unknown – and this in turn must have provided a platform for the superstructure of the mound proper. However, the problem with this interpretation is that it allows no room for what appear to be later Neolithic deposits, even around the edges of the mound, and for the moment they remain unsatisfactorily unexplained.

In whatever form that it appeared at the end of the Neolithic, the mound appears to have attracted subsequent activities. In 1800 Cunnington had opened a trench at 'E' on the sketch plan, close to the area later disturbed by the farmer and found a 'prettily ornamented' urn that he thought might have contained a secondary cremation burial, but which had in turn been disturbed by Saxon insertions. His text suggests that this was found 'on top of the barrow E', though this could mean it was close to the surface on the slope down to the barrow edge rather than actually at the summit. However, only a small percentage of the mound was investigated and

this may be only one of a number of such insertions. Crocker's illustration of finds from the mound (Philip Crocker folio Devizes Museum Pl. XLIII, fig. 2, 109) depicts what appears to be a large, buff coloured, potsherd from a Collared Urn, with six horizontal lines of twisted cord decoration on the collar and four further lines on the neck. Below this, rows of short diagonal twisted cord (maggots) are arranged either side of the shoulder. Horizontal lines of twisted cord are frequently found on the neck and collar of both primary and secondary Collared Urns, examples being widespread from Wales to Yorkshire (Longworth 1984): Wiltshire examples including Longworth's numbers 1631 from Amesbury; 1664 from Bower Chalke; 1681 from Durrington; and 1694 from Ogbourne St Andrew.

Twenty metres to the southeast of King Barrow lies a round mound of considerable size (NMR ST 84 SE 48). In its present form it measures almost 40m by 30m and reaches no more than 1.5m in height, but it has been deformed by the construction of a spiral path and its summit and incorporation into a landscaped garden. Today no surface indication of the presence of a ditch can be detected. The mound was evidently excavated by Cunnington in 1801 (Cunnington 1975, 164), though other than the fact that no burial was found (Soc. of Ants. London ms.217/Volume IV, f76), no details are known. However, he cautiously referred to the long barrow floor as extending as far as the round barrow and indeed felt that the mound itself once formed part of the long barrow. He acknowledged that were this so it would form one of the largest mounds on Salisbury Plain, though no longer than the massive Old Ditch long barrow at Tilshead (Tilshead 2: NMR SU 04 NW 9) that he had excavated in 1802 and which he had shown to cover a round mound (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 3, 39).

Little more than 150m to the southeast a further large round barrow (NMR ST 84 SE 10) is situated on the same terrace edge. Measuring 52m by 50m by 2.2m high in the north and 4m high in the south, with a flat summit 7m in diameter containing an old excavation hollow, it

is no wonder that Grinsell (1957, 160) thought that it may be a motte. Included on Hoare's map as a barrow (1810, fp50) and also considered a barrow by the Ordnance Survey Archaeological Investigator, Norman Quinnell in 1967, the bowl shaped profile, although large, can be compared to other local large round barrows, in particular Westbury 7 (NMR ST 84 NE 30). This was excavated by Hoare (Hoare 1810, 54) and is almost certainly Neolithic in date. The Compton Barrow (NMR SU 15 SW 17), which reaches some 46m in diameter (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 39), has also been suggested to be Neolithic on account of its great size.

Although by no means a critical indicator of date, there are a number of other excessively large mounds in the area. Further southeast, 500m from King Barrow, a large round mound to the east of Bishopstrow Farm (NMR ST 94 SW 17: ST 94 SW 93) was also formerly considered to be a motte (Cunnington M, 1930, 137). Bob Smith (1985) independently came to the same conclusion on the basis of a very wide ditch around the mound visible on an air photograph. However, the ditch at Compton is of similar proportions and given the local context of other large round barrows there seems to be no reason why this should not be another example, together forming a small cemetery of Neolithic barrows.

A further example, a large ring ditch of 50m in diameter, thought to be a plough-levelled barrow, has recently been discovered from the air south of the River Wylde at Heytesbury (M Barber pers. comm.: NMR 1382371), and this in turn lies close to a pair of conjoined ring ditches each c.44m in diameter (NMR 1382373). These appear to form part of a cemetery of ten further round barrows at Tytherington that focus on a small relict tributary that fed into the River Wylde at Mill Farm (NMR AP Nos 4526/101), at least four of which had ditches in excess of 50m in diameter. Two further ring ditches of exceptional size occur amongst a levelled cemetery at Upton Lovell (NMR No 78865/10 series). However, the Knoll (NMR ST 94 SW 38), a round barrow situated within a cemetery of six

ring ditches (NMR AP Nos 4436/04-07) at Sutton Veny, a kilometre to the southwest, urges caution as its ditch of between 60-70m in diameter surrounds a mound of no more than 30m in diameter.

Knook Barrow

In 1801 Cunnington turned his attention away from the Wylde and cut a trench into the centre of Knook Barrow (Knook 2: NMR ST 94 SE 21), a mound of parabolic profile with side ditches, situated on the Down between Knook and Imber on Salisbury Plain. He found only four headless skeletons, just beneath the turf, that he considered secondary. However, following the pattern already established, in Autumn 1802 he returned and with the assistance of two workmen made a large cut from the centre towards the east end. Here he encountered a cairn of flint and 'man made stones', presumably deliberately broken sarsen, piled upon a flint pavement c.4.5m long by c.2.0m wide and narrowing towards the east. The cairn rose to c.1.3m in height, reducing in extent as it did so towards a ridge first encountered at just c.0.3m below the topsoil. Lying over the cairn, 'immediately under the turf', were part of the head and horn cores of a large ox, one horn being burnt. Cunnington showed it to his butcher who said that it was larger than any ox that he had seen. It may have been *Bos primigenius* and given the shallow deposits between the turf and the ridge of the cairn this may originally have been formally placed on the ridge itself.

The pavement was 'covered' with small fragments of burnt bones, both animal and human, together with fragments of charred wood. Amongst them Cunnington singled out birds, some of which appeared like the bones of an Heron'. Cunnington estimated that there might have been eight humans represented but emphasised the conjectural nature of that figure given the great number of small intermixed bones. Close to the centre of the mound, at the west end of the platform, was a neatly cut semi-circular pit, similar to that encountered beneath Heytesbury

North Field long barrow, filled with earth and containing two fragments of bone and pieces of charred wood. The clean nature of the pit appears to imply that it was backfilled deliberately, its relationship to the pavement being uncertain.

Having investigated other long barrows – Boles Barrow (Heytesbury 1: NMR ST 94 NW 20), Arn Hill (Warminster 1: NMR ST 84 NE 5), Old Ditch (Tilshead 2: NMR SU 04 NW 9), White Barrow (Tilshead 4: NMR SU 04 NW 3), Tilshead Lodge (Tilshead 5: NMR ST 04 NW 12) and Knook Down (Knook 5: NMR ST 94 NE 18), all situated further into the interior of Salisbury Plain (McOmish *et al.* 2002) – Cunnington returned to the Wylde and turned his attention to long mounds south of the river.

Corton Long Barrow

In 1804 he returned to Corton to re-investigate the nearby Corton long barrow (Boyton 1: NMR ST 94 SW 37), situated on the chalk valley slopes and with good views along the Wylde, which he had initially trenched in 1801. In Cunnington's day it measured some 65m in length (although this would be of greater than average length for a long barrow and may be an error) by 7.5 wide at the east end and was said to reach almost 3m in height, though even then it had been damaged by cultivation and its appearance as confluent round barrows was considered to have resulted from quarrying by local farmers (Lambert 1806b, 339). By 1914 it had been reduced to almost half that length (M. Cunnington 1914, 386) and today, covered with 14 beech trees and elder shrubs, it is 36m and some 16m wide, though still retaining considerable height, at a maximum of just over 3m. Its current ovoid shape (Fig. 4) is due to cultivation and the remaining outline of the mound and the bulk of ploughed down soil suggests that it may originally have been longer, perhaps a little short of 40m in length, by about 22m wide and probably wedged shape in plan, a little like Ellbarrow (Wilsford N 3: NMR SU 05 SE 22: McOmish *et al.* 2002, 25a). Recent augering (Allen & Gardiner 2004) has indicated

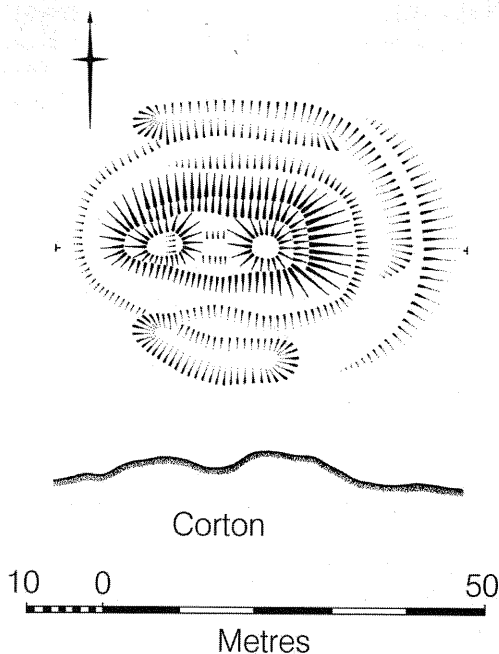


Fig. 4. Hachured plan of the Corton long barrow

that while the surrounding chalk has been truncated, a perched chalk bench had been preserved immediately about the barrow. Side ditches are in part just visible and appear to curve slightly, though presumably curtailed at either end – which the augering would appear to confirm.

Cunnington cut a trench at the east end and in this encountered features similar to those in mounds to the north of the river. At the base of the mound, two oval pits, each just over a metre in length and c.0.7m deep, were neatly cut into the underlying chalk; but they contained nothing of note in their fill. Between these, eight human skeletons, like those in other mounds, lying in no particular order and in different directions, were encountered. Over these a ridged cairn of flints and chalk, measuring 6m by 3m at the base, rose to about 2m in height, where it was surmounted or capped by a massive boulder, probably of sarsen, that 'required three men to lift it out'.

Recent air photographs taken by Damien Grady, indicate that little more than 30m east of the long barrow, two parallel ditches, some 55m apart, can be traced for 180m northwards towards the river (NMR 1382383). Unfortunately there is no indication of function or date, but they are mentioned here as they may represent a mortuary enclosure or cursus.

Boyton

Little more than 1km to the east of this, Boyton (Sherrington 4: NMR ST 93 NE 23) long barrow is situated in a superb position on a bluff overlooking the Wylie. Its location appears to have been deliberately chosen opposite the Imber stream, which meets the Wylie at right angles at this point and provides a magnificent view down the Chitterne valley opposite. Holdenhurst long barrow, in Hampshire (Piggott 1937), is similarly sited alongside the River Stour and facing the Moors River valley. In 1914, Boyton long barrow measured 45.5m in length by a maximum width of 19.5m (M. Cunnington 1914, 399) and there appears to have been little change as, in 1975, the Ordnance Survey recorded it as 45m by 17m by 3m in height. Most of its centre has been quarried away and Mrs Cunnington was informed that the centre of the mound was occasionally used to mend the adjacent trackway (*ibid.* 399). When visited by the RCHME in 1992 dense vegetation prevented reasonable measurements being obtained. No ditches are visible, cultivation taking place right up to the southern flank, while a track traverses the northern side.

Stockton

South of Sherrington Clump, Stockton 1 (NMR ST 93 NE 26) long barrow is a further large, wedge-shaped, mound measuring 29m by 12m by 1.4m maximum height, oriented to the northeast, and now situated within a clump of trees around which cultivation has created a plough lynchet. Side ditches were visible in 1914 (M. Cunnington 1914, 399), but have since been

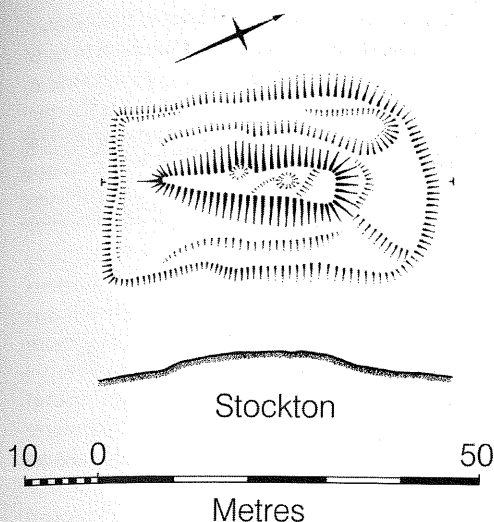


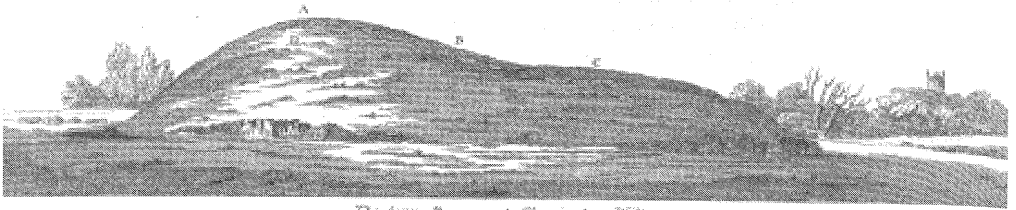
Fig. 5. Hachured plan of the Stockton long barrow

almost levelled (Fig. 5). A shallow remnant of the westernmost ditch and a slight trace of the eastern one is all that can now be seen. The mound was excavated by Cunnington and Hoare and a series of at least five human skeletons discovered beneath a conical flint cairn. A rectangular pit, filled with flint and chalk, was found to be cut in the chalk to a depth of 1.2m (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 3, 49). Hoare provides little information and no further details have been discovered among Cunnington's notes, which simply indicate that when opened it proved similar to other long barrows (Hoare 1810, 107).

Sherrington

On Friday 2nd November 1804 Cunnington investigated a mound situated just metres away from the bank of the river at Sherrington (Sherrington 1: NMR ST 93 NE 1). He described it as an 'egg cut in two lengthways... the large end to the westnorthwest', a description that he had used to describe Boles Barrow as well as Silver Barrow at Tilshead. In a sketch of the profile of the mound (Hoare mss, 68, Devizes Museum) however, its form appears more like half a pear

than an egg, and the illustration to accompany Lambert's article suggests so too (Lambert 1806b, pl. XVIII). Then it measured 33m in length by a maximum of 24m wide and 4.2m in height (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 1, 51: Hoare 1810, 100-1). Sadly, like other mounds by the Wylve, it has since been much reduced by cultivation, being recorded as 26m in length in 1914 (M. Cunnington 1914, 399) and although now still standing to a considerable height the ends have been severely curtailed and it is almost circular. Its original form can only be gauged from Cunnington's descriptions and illustrations, the latter prepared by Philip Crocker (Lambert 1806b pl. XVIII: presented here as Fig. 6). While the perspective in Crocker's engraving produces uncertainty about the orientation, the tower of Codford St Mary church (which has since lost its pinnacles) depicted in the middle distance, provides a reference point. The large end of the mound clearly lies to the west, though whether aligned generally north or south is less evident. Cunnington's letter, however, is clear enough and for him, having considered the northwest end of King Barrow to be the business end, it would not seem out of place. The Ordnance Survey Archaeological Investigator indicated that the mound was thus oriented in 1975, with the higher portion at the southwest, with a small hollow, an indication of digging, at the highest point. However, air photographs (NMR 18867/17-18: 18821/33-5) depict curvilinear soil marks alongside and southwest of the existing mound. Some caution is necessary here as the detail of the photographs is blurred by cultivation, but the alignment, general shape and position of the marks indicate the possibility that they may relate to the long barrow. If so, they may indicate that the mound was formerly much larger, perhaps as long as 50m, flanked by the 'ghosts' of curving ditches a maximum of 30m apart and narrowing to 5m in the southwest. Such a length is reasonably standard for long barrows within the region, and the orientation of the soil marks would indicate that the axis of the mound lay with broad end towards the northeast. If so, the remaining



The long Barrow at Sherrington Wilt.



Fig. 6 Crocker's illustration of the Sherrington 1 long barrow, with Saxon spearhead below, originally published in *Archaeologia* (Lambert 1806b)

portion of the mound, i.e. that excavated, formed part of the wider end.

The first trench was made in what in 1804 was the broader end, and the mound found to be composed of gravel. No ditches were visible and Cunnington only mentions that the gravel was dug from 'near the Wylve'. At a depth of 4.2m he found that, like King Barrow, the floor of the mound was covered with charred wood and ashes (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 1, 51). A skeleton of a pig and a large unidentified bird and other bones were recovered, probably from the floor, though the precise stratigraphical position is not entirely clear. As in other mounds, a neatly cut circular pit was encountered at the base. In this one, an ox skull and a small antler had been deposited. A further trench cut to the south of the pit added no further details. Subsequently, in 1856, John Thurnam and the Reverend A. Fane excavated part of the mound, but there are no recorded details, nor is there any mention of the event in Thurnam's catalogue of skulls (copy WANHS library Devizes) or amongst items from Thurnam's excavations deposited at the British Museum (BM Acc. Reg. 1873, 12-19).

Internal features

The features encountered by Cunnington during excavation of these mounds are consistent enough to suggest that they form some common cultural thread in at least this western portion of the Salisbury Plain chalk. Some of the elements can be traced across wider areas. Pits beneath the mounds appear to begin the process and aside from those examples mentioned here and elsewhere on Salisbury Plain – e.g. beneath Fussell's Lodge (Ashbee 1966) where a C14 date of 4330-3700 cal BC (BM 134) was obtained from material sealing the pits (Schulting 2000), and at Knook 2 and 5, Tilshead 2, Arn Hill, Warminster and Winterbourne Stoke (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 28-9; Hoare 1810, 65, 71-2, 83, 86, 91, 102, 107, 117) – they occur too in Dorset at Wor Barrow (Pitt-Rivers 1898, 66) and Thicket Down (Drew & Piggott 1936, 81), and also in Hampshire at Moody's Down Northwest (Grimes 1960, 248-9). At further distance, traces of hurdling around a pit at Skendleby 1, Lincolnshire, has indicated that it was unlikely to have served as a posthole (Phillips 1936). However, in contrast, at Skendleby 2 nearby, two oval pits were thought to contain posts and there were human bones

positioned between them in a manner similar to that at Fussell's Lodge. The C14 dates imply that a time span, perhaps of several centuries, could separate the use of the pits from any covering event (Evans & Simpson 1991, 42). A sarsen standing stone was encountered at one end of a pavement in Arn Hill long barrow (Warminster 1: NMR ST 84 NE 5: McOmish *et al.* 2002, 29) in a position similar to that where pits occur in other mounds, and it was suggested that others also may have been stone sockets that once supported monoliths.

The discovery of a pavement, probably of broken sarsen at King Barrow, is notable in that similarities can be observed with the deliberately broken sarsen that comprises the cairn at Knook long barrow. Here, it was suggested that the fragmented sarsen had derived from a broken standing stone that had formerly stood in the pit at the base of the mound (McOmish *et al.* 2002). If this interpretation is accepted it draws interesting parallels with activities involving the deliberate destruction of standing stones and subsequent incorporation of their fragments into tombs in Brittany (Bradley 2002, 34-41).

The pavement itself, at King Barrow, is a feature found in five other local barrows, most of which provided a platform on which human bones, either articulated or burnt or both, were found. The descriptions of skeletons placed on platforms vary and it is by no means clear that they are articulated. Sometimes burnt bone fragments are present and occasionally burnt animal bones too. At several sites, King Barrow, Sherrington, Old Ditch and Knook Barrow, charred wood and ashes are specifically mentioned, usually lying on a pavement. At Knook Barrow, the pavement was covered with charred wood and burnt bones (both animal and human), mostly as small fragments. However, among these were clearly identifiable bird bones that had either remarkably escaped the fire or had been placed there afterwards. The different condition of human bone was noted by Cunnington on the platform at the west end of Old Ditch (Tilshead 2), where two skeletons were described as lying side by side

and a third at the heads of these. They were associated with a great amount of charred wood and ashes, along with fragments of bones that had been half burnt. However, Cunnington was led to comment on the lack of ashes and burnt bone or indication of fire at Boles Barrow. In contrast to the great number of (perhaps disarticulated) skeletons found there, just one piece of burnt bone was recovered. Similarly, no burnt bones were recovered at Heytesbury North Field, even though there were many skeletons present. A similar situation occurred at Knook Down where four skeletons were found lying in the same direction, but no evidence of fire or burnt bones.

It may be that many of these sites represent crematoria (Kinnes 1992, 85), with the pits playing a role in assisting draught onto or under the platform. The frequent accounts of surfaces reddened by fire, charred wood and burnt bone provide some support, and stone platforms and pits used in the firing process have been recorded beneath round mounds in northern England (Kinnes 1979). Some of the charred wood at King Barrow 'adhered to the bones half cremated', although the presence of animal bone in some quantities might suggest that this was not a process restricted to human funerary rites. Sites such as Kill Barrow (Tilshead 1: NMR SU 04 NW 11) and Winterbourne Stoke 53 (NMR SU 14 SW 92), where material had fused together and the chalk burned to a lime-like substance (Thurnam mss catalogue copy Devizes: but also M. Cunnington 1914, 400-1 and 407), has greater potential in this respect. However, there is no need to explain the process here as a single event (e.g. the burning of a mortuary house) and instead the pavement may provide a platform for a series of events.

Mounds or cairns covering these platforms are of frequent occurrence. Sometimes they are evidently ridged, as at Corton (Boyton 1), but in a number of cases they appear to be circular. Heytesbury 4 (Heytesbury North Field), Stockton 1, Tilshead 2 (Old Ditch) (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 28) and in one account, Boles Barrow, are said to have circular or conical internal mounds and

	Black earth	Pit	Pave-ment	Fire	Humans	Animals	Cairn
King Barrow			*	*	*	*	earthen circular
Sherrington		*		*		ox head	
Corton		*			8		pyramid-ridge
Boyton							
Stockton		*			5		circular
Old Ditch	*	*	*	*	3	*	circular
Tilshead Lodge		*					circular
White	*						
Boles		*	*	No	*	oxen	ridge
Arn Hill		Stone	*		*		
Silver Barrow			*		*		
Knook Down		*		No			
Knook	*	*	*	*	* burnt	* burnt	ridge
Heytesbury	*	*			*		circular

to that we can add the clay/earthen mound beneath King Barrow. This might be less of a surprise if we consider the number of circular elements, cairns or chambers contained within megalithic structures, for example, Camster Long (Masters 1983, 107), Clyde Cairns, e.g. Mid Gleniron 1 and II (Scott 1969, fig. 73), tombs in Wales such as Capel Garmen and Dyffryn Ardudwy (Lynch 1969, figs 45 and 51), or Cotswold cairns such as Ty Isaf (Corcoran 1969, fig. 22). The multi-phase construction involved in such sites is evident and it clearly occurs in earthen long mounds too, as at Wayland's Smithy, where one mound with side ditches was constructed on top of an earlier example (Whittle 1991). Cairns within earthen long barrows are usually thought to cover mortuary chambers, the ridging echoing the form of the roof. However, at Fussell's Lodge, one of the best excavated examples, the cairn appeared to be ovoid (Ashbee 1966) and as recorded may even have been anthropomorphic in form, with head and leg-like projections: the association of head and hooves deposits adds, perhaps, a little support to this suggestion. In this respect it is worth considering, too, the similar deposits found on top of the cairn at Knook.

The nature of the floor at King Barrow is intriguing. Described as set beneath the present land surface it is unclear whether this was a surface excavated in antiquity, or a mistake in identification by Cunnington. The factor evidently so concerned him that he returned for a second look, but in doing so simply confirmed his earlier observations. The position of the mound on the lip of the terrace may have something to do with it, where deposits may be more liable, for example, to landslip or soil creep. The process of mounding up the earth from the material of the floor (ashes, bones and potsherds) appears to be of some importance, and the conical mound so described formed a component at the distal rather than the wider end. Cunnington's excavations at King Barrow do, in fact, appear to have concentrated at the smaller end and it may be that features, such as mortuary deposits similar to those encountered in other barrows, exist elsewhere in the mound. The hachured plan suggests it, as does the contrast in the excavated material with other local long barrows. If so, in addition to the various phases of pre-mound activity, it may be that activities continued on and around the mound and even that the mound itself was extended. Both its length and height are

above average for long barrows within the area (McOmish *et al.* 2002). Its great size has similarities with Old Ditch long barrow, which at 101m is even longer, though it too may have been extended (cf. the butt end of the mound at Skendleby 2 was extended at some point (Evans & Simpson 1991)). The implication is of common though slowly changing practice, well established by tradition on the western part of Salisbury Plain, but with comparable elements from elsewhere in Britain.

Position in the landscape

The siting of long barrows on Salisbury Plain appears to be remarkably riverine, with examples set on the slopes above the River Avon and by and near the winterbournes and springs of the River Till and elsewhere (McOmish *et al.* 2002). The association with water is paramount, though whether this is purely a practical consideration, or whether the sites are positioned with more sacred factors in mind is not clear. The location of at least some mounds close to the River Wyllye and along the slopes and flanks of the valley imply some association with the river and, given their spacing, access to the river frontage. Nearest neighbours Corton/Boyton/Sherrington and Stockton indicate intervals of about 2km, depending on details of the topography. Towards King Barrow, this leaves a gap of some 5km, but if the long ditched features noted on air photographs between Bishopstrow and Codford are taken into account this discrepancy may be explained.

Cunnington's original account of the 'Golden' barrow (NMR ST 94 SW 13), situated on the river bank at Upton Lovell (Cunnington mss Devizes Book 10, 16: Lambert 1806a, 126-8), provides more detail than that of Hoare (1810, 98-100) and indicates that it may even have been a short long barrow. It is clear from Hoare's account of the excavation that the 'Wessex' material comes from a secondary deposit set into an earlier mound. Hoare says little of the barrow itself, the assumption being that it was circular and it was subsequently described as a bowl barrow by the

Ordnance Survey. Cunnington's account, however, introduces caution. Having trenched the mound at the end of July 1803, he wrote to A. B. Lambert, the landowner, on 1st August:

The tumulus... is situated a few yards north of the river Wyllye. It is of pyramidal form [the term pyriform having been used by Stukeley in connection with long barrows on the Marlborough Downs (Stukeley 1743, 45)], the base length 58 feet by 38 feet wide (the length on the top 21 feet) and 22 feet in the slope, and stands from east to west. (Lambert 1806a, 128)

He goes on to say that whereas the north side of the barrow was extremely neat, presumably that to which Hoare referred, the south side (that facing the river), was mutilated. A trench cut lengthways along the barrow revealed a cist at a depth of just over 0.5m with 'Wessex' material recovered adjacent to it. At 17.5m by 11.5m, this might be an oval or small long barrow. However, Cunnington returned to the mound in July 1807 and made a point of stating that his earlier description was incorrect, as 'I have since been informed that it was originally circular and the sides were cut through by the plough when the land (now a water meadow) was in tillage'. He went on to estimate its diameter as 21m and height as 3m (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 10, 16). Excavation to the floor of the mound revealed a rectangular pit nearly 0.5m deep that contained a small deposit of burnt human bones, though no accompanying grave goods.

At times both Leman and Hoare appear to have pointed to errors in Cunnington's interpretations (R.H. Cunnington 1954, 234-5), though it may be that on this occasion his original observation, uninfluenced by archaeological literature, was valid. Unfortunately it is now difficult to confirm matters either way. The exact site of the mound appears to have been lost. It is depicted as, perhaps 200-300m, north of the river by Hoare in his map of the Wyllye Station (1810, 97) and early Ordnance Survey editions place it at NGR ST 94444010. The mound had been cultivated in Cunnington's day and the process

of preparing the land for water meadows must have levelled it completely (land levels being critical in the operation of water meadow systems). Certainly by 1920 there was no trace of the mound and its location was known only from the testimony of the Rector of Upton Lovell who indicated that it was in a field named 'Barrow Newtons' (Goddard 1922). Grinsell (1957, 193) acknowledged the mound as destroyed, but nevertheless gave a description of it as measuring 19 by 13 paces, perhaps estimating it from Cunnington's description, and as being 'high'. It is clear from air photographs, however, that more than one barrow was present in the field and the 'Golden Barrow' must have been part of a cemetery of at least seven round mounds, visible as ring ditches on air photographs situated alongside this stretch of river (NMR 18865/10 series), all thus introducing greater uncertainty.

A mound (NMR ST 94 SW 24) situated 300m to the east of St Leonards Church, Sutton Veny, near Warminster, has also been claimed as a long barrow (Grinsell 1957, 143). Situated just above what is now the floodplain of the Wylye and measuring 32m in length by 27.5m, and reaching 1.4m in height, it has been partially destroyed by a trackway and its original form and extent obscured. M. Fletcher, the Ordnance Survey Archaeological Investigator, considered it to be a round barrow in 1969. Air photographs provide the merest hint that it may indeed have some length, with soil marks extending into the cultivated field to the west (NMR AP Nos 4526/85, 89, 93). Nearby, 100m to the southwest, soil marks indicate the presence of a further oval ditched feature some 50m in length. Another mound at Sutton Veny (NMR ST 94 SW 16) situated in a field c.300m to the north-northwest of St Leonards Church, has also been claimed to be a long barrow. It was reported as being circular in 1914, but of great size and motte-like with a flat top (Cunnington 1914, 400), though as it was marked as a long mound on Hoare's map of the area (Hoare 1810, 97) it was accepted that it may then have been observed when in better condition. South of the river at Dairy Plantation,

opposite Norton Bavant, cropmarks of two almost parallel ditches, oriented to the northeast and slightly expanding at the northeast end may represent another levelled example (NMR AP No ST 2042/99). Occupying a shallow saddle in the terrace above the river, they reach almost 100m in length, the southernmost ditch curving inwards at the terminal.

If this, along with any one of the potential examples at Sutton Veny is eventually shown to be genuine, the even spacing is retained: Corton to Norton Bavant at 2.3km, Norton Bavant to King Barrow, 2km. To the north of King Barrow a series of long barrows also lie along the bluff overlooking a re-entrant and almost hidden valley which lies parallel to the mainstream of the Wylye, its minor tributary stream issuing into the Wylye at Heytesbury. They occur at Norton Bavant 13 (NMR ST 94 NW 28), Middleton Down (Norton Bavant 14: NMR ST 94 NW 16), Heytesbury North Field, Oxendean (Warminster 6: NMR ST 94 NW 17), Knook and an oval or short example situated within Scratchbury hillfort (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 36). Their spacing too, generally matches that along the Wylye itself, though some, Norton Bavant to Middleton Down at 1km and Middleton to Heytesbury North Field at 1.6km, lie a little closer together. The landscape itself appears to have been sub-divided into units based on access to water. Only Boles Barrow and Ell Barrow stand out from this general pattern, both having been placed high on interfluves at a distance from springs or streams.

Later prehistoric burial activity at long barrows

While King Barrow alone appears to provide a focus for the positioning of what are probably Neolithic round barrows, others appear to have attracted later round barrows. The well-known Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads group is perhaps the best example, although such associations with cemeteries are not that commonplace. No such known grouping occurs around the Tilshead long barrows, or Boles Barrow, or the Norton Bavant

examples, nor those at Sherrington and Corton. At Oxendean, there is one round barrow nearby and similarly one at Boyton. At neither do levelled examples appear on air photographs. In contrast, there is a slight indication that oval barrows or short long barrows in the area provide a focus for round barrow cemeteries, for example at Tytherington and perhaps at Sutton Veny and Upton Lovell, as they do elsewhere (e.g. Radley (Bradley 1992, Barclay & Halpin 1999)). However, the degree to which long mounds were used for secondary insertions during the Bronze Age is unknown. At King Barrow one secondary burial was certainly disturbed by later ones, and Cunnington refers to the presence of two cremations found on top of Old Ditch long barrow (Cunnington mss Devizes, Book 3, 39). One of these was unfortunately dispersed before he could inspect it. The second, however, with several teeth and fragments of skull recognisable, was placed in a small depression or cist 'not larger than the crown of a small hat'. Accompanying these were several very large antlers and fragments of charred wood.

Some of these mounds continued to be observed as important features in the landscape millennia after their initial use. For example, some were used as markers when linear ditches were aligned on them during the Late Bronze Age, as were Oxendean, Old Ditch, Kill Barrow and White Barrow (McOmish *et al.* 2002). Some of the barrows on lower ground may have served the same function, though if so cultivation has removed any surface evidence. Finally, reuse of some of these mounds for inhumation again in Saxon times implies their further, or at least renewed, importance both as landscape features and as burial places.

Inhumations of the early Anglo-Saxon period intrusive in long barrows in the Wylve Valley

William Cunnington recorded several intrusive accompanied burials of early Anglo-Saxon date, together with others, which were

unaccompanied and may be of similar origin, from his excavations of long barrows in south Wiltshire. Indeed, in the subsequent two hundred years there has been little additional information to add to his list. Only one of his Anglo-Saxon finds, the sword from King Barrow appears to survive. In interpreting what he found we are, therefore, almost wholly dependent upon Cunnington's own brief manuscript record, some of it published, and illustrations prepared by Philip Crocker.

At King Barrow, 'at the depth of eighteen inches, three human skeletons were found, lying from south-west to north-east; and on the thigh of one of them was an iron sword, which originally had a handle of oak wood; the blade is about eighteen inches long, two wide, and single-edged' (Hoare 1810, 72). The seax was recorded in a watercolour by Crocker (Philip Crocker folio Devizes, pl. XLIII, fig.1), and the weapon itself has now been identified by Paul Robinson with an unprovenanced one in the Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes (Robinson 1979/80). On the Continent, seaxes have been classified into three groups: narrow, broad and long, although this subdivision is less clear in England (Böhner 1958, I, 130-45; Geake 1997, 72-3). The overall proportions, together with the length (443mm) and width (50mm) of the blade, show the one from King Barrow to be of the broad variety. It exhibits the typical long, shallow groove along either side of the blade and has a single-handed tang, 130mm long. Although the broad seax is dated to the 7th century AD on the Continent, it is far less common in England than the other types and it may have appeared here only later in that century (Evison 1961, 229-30; Geake 1997, 74). It has been pointed out that the lightness of the construction of the seax, in contrast to the sword, makes it more suitable as a hunting knife than a fighting weapon (Gale 1989, 80).

Cunnington recovered another, more elaborately furnished, 'Anglo-Saxon' sword burial in his excavations in the long barrow at Sherrington, discussed above (Lambert 1806b, 344-5). There, in trench C:

at the depth of 18 inches... [he] discovered the skeleton of a stout man, (the extreme length of the thigh bone was nineteen inches) lying from west to east. On the right side of this skeleton, close by the thighs, lay a two-edged sword, the blade two feet in length, with rather an obtuse point, but no guarded hilt; it had been enclosed in a scabbard of wood, a considerable quantity of which now adheres to it. On the right side of the head lay an iron spear and on the left, and close to the head... the *umbo* of a shield. With the latter... an iron buckle, a piece of leather, a strip of brass perforated in several places... also a thin piece of silver... near the *umbo* was found the knife. (*ibid.*)

In addition, there were two other skeletons, with the same orientation, to the east of this one: 'one of an adult, the other of a child four or five years of age; with these were found a small knife, and a piece of corroded lead' (*ibid.*). A further west-east burial, with a spearhead to its right, had already been recovered, again at eighteen inches depth, from trench B.

Black-and-white illustrations (Figs. 6 and 7) of all of these weapons, together with the knife, appear in the plates which accompany Lambert's paper. They are derived from watercolours by Philip Crocker which are preserved, together with much other material by other antiquarians, in folio volumes in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London. The sword (Fig. 7) lacks fittings and is undatable (Soc. of Ants. London, *Primaevae Antiquities*, vol. 1, folio 4, no. 2). The spearhead (Fig. 6) from the same grave (*ibid.* no. 1) appears to belong to Swanton Type H3 (pers. comm. H. Härke; *contra* Swanton 1974, 80) datable between the late 5th and the end of the 6th century (Swanton 1973, 114). The shield-boss (*ibid.* no. 4; Fig. 7) is difficult to classify from the drawing but seems to be a 'low straight cone' of the late 6th to mid-7th centuries (Evison 1963, 41-2). Finally, the knife (Soc. of Ants. London, *Albums of Drawings, Wiltshire Red Portfolio*, vol. 2, folio 10, no. 5; Fig. 7) looks to be of the large variety which is rare before the 7th century (Härke 1989). The perforated strip of brass may be from a bucket. Overall, the burial is likely to date no

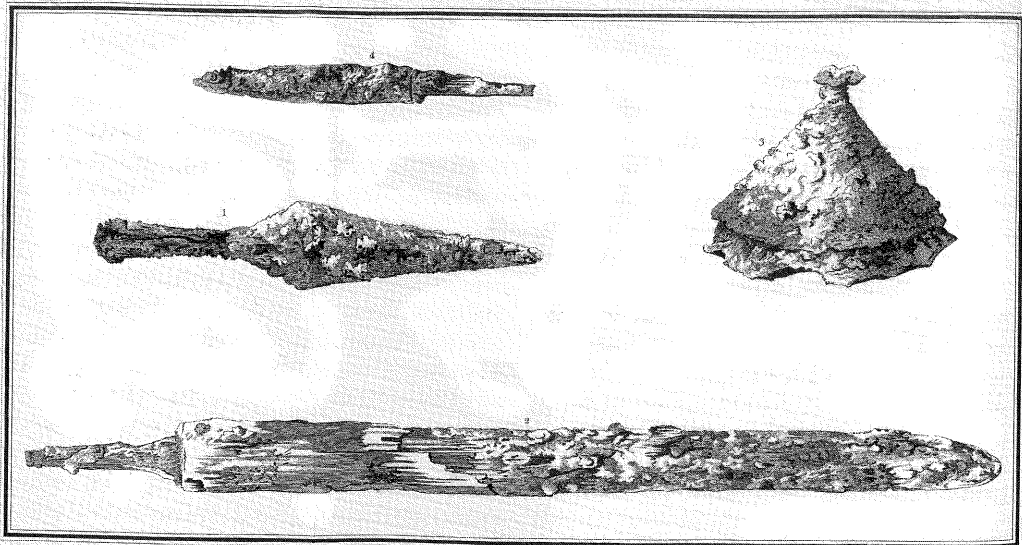


Fig. 7. Illustration of Saxon artefacts from the Sherrington long barrow taken from Crocker's watercolour and originally published in *Archaeologia* (Lambert 1806b)

earlier than the late 6th century and may belong to the first half of the 7th century. The spearhead (Fig. 7) from trench B (Soc. of Ants. London, *Primaevae Antiquities*, vol. 1, folio 4, no. 3) is of Swanton Type E2 (H. Härke pers. comm.; *contra* Swanton 1974, 80), not closely datable, but most examples are of the 6th or 7th centuries (Swanton 1973, 81).

A further 'Anglo-Saxon' weapon grave was uncovered by Thurnam in 1865 in the Tilshead Lodge long barrow, in the valley of the Till, a northern tributary of the Wylye, where Cunnington had found an unaccompanied intrusive burial towards its east end (Hoare 1810, 92): 'within a foot of the summit a skeleton stretched at length from east to west, with an iron *umbo* and other mountings of a shield on the breast, and the remains of a small brass-bound bucket of wood at the head' (Thurnam 1869, 196). The bucket, the only one of these finds to survive, is in the British Museum (accession no. 1873, 1219.204). The bucket has been reconstructed with four copper-alloy hoops and there are fragmentary uprights and indications of the handle (Cook forthcoming). The burial may date to the 6th century.

Another, probable, 'Anglo-Saxon' interment in a long barrow investigated by Cunnington is one with a copper-alloy buckle in Bowl's Barrow. Hoare (1810, 87) records that 'near the east end, and at the depth of two feet nine inches [Cunnington, in 1801] found a human skeleton lying south-west and north-east, and with it a brass buckle, and two thin pieces of the same metal'.

Early Anglo-Saxon presence in the Wylye valley and southern Wiltshire

In the 6th century much of the Wylye valley lay within those parts of Wiltshire to which Anglo-Saxon material culture, seen particularly through burials accompanied by grave-goods, had spread from its 5th-century nucleus round Old Sarum. A notable feature of some of these graves is their insertion in prehistoric burial mounds, an assoc-

iation which has been considered to have been deliberate, one aspect of the exercise and display of power by new leaders through appeal to a mythical past (Williams 1998). The degree to which this novel culture was due to Saxon and other immigrants from the Continent or to native inhabitants who identified with them is a matter of lively and ongoing debate. Widely divergent views are held on the numbers who arrived from overseas, some arguing for no more than a small elite.

It is only in the first half of the 7th century, however, that Anglo-Saxon style male and female burials make their appearance along the upper Wylye, or Deverill, and generally in south-western Wiltshire west of Teffont and south of Cold Kitchen Hill (Fig. 8). These graves include a weapon burial on the top of Barrow Hill at Ebbesborne Wake and others under primary barrows at Alvediston, West Knoyle and Maiden Bradley. The burial with the seax at Sherrington may now be added to this notable group of graves. In the Roman period, it has been argued, south-west Wiltshire lay within the *civitas Durotrigum*, bounded in part on the east by Bokerley Dyke (today on the Dorset/Hampshire county boundary). To the north of the Dyke a probable Roman temple site at Teffont, an Old English name meaning 'the **funta* (perhaps borrowed direct from Latin *fontana*, 'a spring') on the boundary', may reasonably be argued to lie on the same *civitas* limit. Such shrines were often associated with both natural springs and boundaries. The location of the Sherrington burial is of particular interest in this context in providing further suggestive evidence for the recognition of another point on the boundary of this Roman canton. The siting of this grave at such a prominent spot immediately south of the Wylye suggests that here the river itself formed the *civitas* edge. From Teffont, therefore, the limit, it may be argued, continued northwards as far as the river – long considered to mark the northern limit of the Durotriges (Cunliffe 1973, 435) – and thence westwards along it to its source by Cold Kitchen Hill. The source of the river affords a typical location for the extensive Iron Age and Roman religious complex on the hilltop above, where the

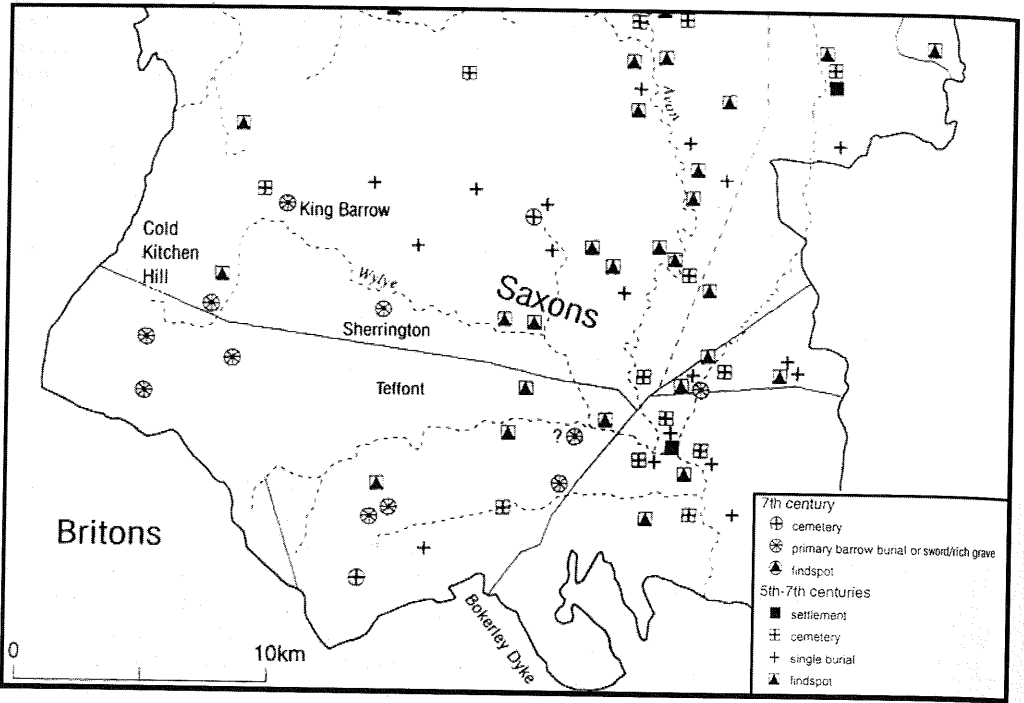


Fig. 8. The distribution of 'Anglo-Saxon' and other sites of the 5th – 7th centuries

civitas Durotrigum may have met those of the Dobunni and the Belgae. The seax in the Sherrington grave indicates its high status. Seaxes were prized possessions of the elite (Gale 1989, 80). The primary Saxon barrows also point to the high status of other burials in this group, and the location of the grave at Ebbesborne Wake is similarly suggestive. These distinctive early 7th-century interments may well mark, through their explicit burial ritual, the Saxon takeover of new territory.

In this same south-western part of Wiltshire there are also two richly furnished female burials of the second half of the 7th century. They occur at Mere (a flat grave) and at Swallowcliffe, inserted through the primary burial in a Bronze Age round barrow. These remarkable interments are part of a pattern of burials, widespread in Wiltshire and elsewhere, which indicate an increasingly competitive burial display among the elite. A

contemporary male grave with weapons is that on Ford Down, to the east of Old Sarum, under a primary barrow and of the very end of the 7th century or the early 8th (Musty 1969). The seax burial at King Barrow is of a similar date. Part of the ostentation here would seem to be the deliberate choice of the insertion of the Saxon burial into such a massive mound (Eagles 2001, *passim.*, for further discussion of themes referred to in this section).

Later Anglo-Saxon burials

At Knook long barrow, Cunnington:

in digging near the centre, about eighteen inches below the surface, discovered four headless skeletons lying from south to north, which appeared to have been deposited with very little ceremony, as two of them had their legs laid

across each other. Not having sufficient time to prosecute his researches, he reinterred the bones, and closed up the barrow. (Hoare 1810, 83)

The burials at Knook Barrow might be thought to belong to an Anglo-Saxon execution site. Such places are of widespread occurrence from the 8th century onwards, though some apparently have slightly earlier origins. They are almost always located on hundred boundaries (Reynolds forthcoming). Knook Barrow, however, is not so placed. Furthermore, it is intriguing to note that a headless skeleton, with an iron buckle at the waist, together with several skulls, three of them said to exhibit sword cuts, nearby, have been recorded from New Town Plantation, Heytesbury (Salisbury Museum Annual Report (1954-5), 11; NMR ST 94 SW 14). The oval buckle is in Salisbury Museum and is typical of the 6th century, though such a simple type is difficult to date closely and the burial may be later. It is reasonable to hold doubts whether this brief record really does describe the victims of executions, but it may be noted that the site lies on the boundary which not only divided Heytesbury (the adjacent parish to Knook on the west) from Norton Bavant, but also separated Heytesbury hundred from that of Warminster (Gover *et al.* 1939, map of 'Wiltshire hundreds and parishes' in end pocket). Another explanation may therefore have to be sought for the exceptional burials inserted into Knook Barrow.

Conclusion

It is perhaps astonishing that in Wiltshire, at the heart of Wessex, barrow study continues to rely, at least in part, on a data set that is now 200 years old. While to some degree a comment on the nature of modern archaeology, it emphasises the great and continuing importance of the pioneering work by William Cunnington.

In form the long barrows discussed here fall into similar categories to those defined on Salisbury Plain Training Area (McOmish *et al.* 2002). However, while that study was concerned

with a block of higher downland – marginal land throughout the historic period – the monuments considered here focus on well-watered, more sheltered land (where, in particular, settlement might be expected to occur). Furthermore, the large number of round barrows identified on air photographs alongside the river indicates that this upper stretch of the Wylve was of continued significance right through the Early Bronze Age. Indeed in a footnote Hoare (1810, 98) compared the area with the chalk plains of Wiltshire and stated that nowhere were the barrows so large or numerous as in this part of the Wylve valley.

While Roman and earlier construction and cultivation had changed the face of the land immeasurably since the long barrows had first been introduced, in the Anglo-Saxon period they were nevertheless again being perceived as of some spiritual significance. Now encountered by new arrivals, they were regarded as appropriate locations or monuments for warriors and heroes, among others, to be interred. As such they were powerful places that perhaps provided a link with the supernatural, an interface with a world of timeless spirits built upon traditions, and ancestral tales of themselves now part of the creation of a new mythology.

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