

## Grismond's Tower, Cirencester, and the Rise of Springhead Super-mounds in the Cotswolds and Beyond

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Here in Gloucestershire we are very lucky to have some of the best preserved and most interesting archaeological remains in north-west Europe. Belas Knap long barrow, Uley Bury hillfort, Chedworth Roman villa, the Saxon churches of the Coln valley and our wonderful castles (most still occupied) represent just a few of the highlights; and, of course, there are many more. Some are not so visible and not as well loved as those just mentioned, and some fade in and out of archaeological consciousness as interest shifts between different aspects of our past.

It is one of these monuments with a slightly chequered history that I would like to use as the centrepiece of this lecture. It is the great domed mound nowadays known as Grismond's Tower just inside the walls of Cirencester Park beside Tetbury Road on the west side of the town. This tree-covered hill, long regarded as a round barrow, is about 30 m in diameter and stands about 4 m high (Fig. 1). As such, it is one of the largest surviving round barrows on the Gloucestershire Cotswolds, yet it is little known. During our Society's visit to Cirencester for the President's Meeting in October 2013 we were able to visit and inspect Grismond's Tower through the kindness of Allen Bathurst, 9th Earl Bathurst, starting outside the very fine icehouse built into the mound in the 1780s (Fig. 2). It was not the first time the Society had visited, the last occasion being more than 80 years previous during the 56th Annual General Meeting on 7 July 1931. The account in our *Transactions* (Anon. 1931, 35) records that tea was taken in the King's Head, the Bathurst or Corinium Museum was visited and 'Mr Baddeley then conducted the party to the "Icehouse", the mound inside the park close to the Fosseyway known as "Grismonds", an important barrow again used for later interments.' Welbore St Clair Baddeley (1856–1946) was in his mid-70s when he led that tour; seven years earlier he had included an introductory note on the legends surrounding Grismond's Tower in his masterful *History of Cirencester*, suggesting that 'the Romans, the Saxons, and the Normans, all of them in turn, had respected this barrow' (Baddeley 1924, 5).

Certainly Grismond's Tower is impressive. But what do we really know of it? What does it tell us about Cirencester and its past? And are there any wider implications for understanding the life and times of early communities in the Cotswolds and beyond? In researching these questions ahead of our visit in 2013 I found myself drawn into an intriguing set of connections and contradictions, and a tangled web of facts and legends. What has emerged is, in a sense, two stories: the history of archaeology in a microcosm with walk-on parts for some of the greatest scholars of their generation; and the biography of a prominent and unusual barrow whose size and place in the



Fig. 1. View of Grismond's Tower in 2014, looking north. Photograph by Timothy Darvill: copyright reserved.



Fig. 2. View of the entrance to the ice-house built into Grismond's Tower in the 1780s, looking south-east. Photograph by Timothy Darvill: copyright reserved.

landscape allows it to be set within a broader tradition of prehistoric super-mounds. Let us start with the central character in both – the mound – before moving on to its wider context.

## GRISMOND'S TOWER: A PLACE IN HISTORY

As already indicated, Grismond's Tower lies just inside Cirencester Park on the west side of the town, c.150 m south-west of the Mansion, at c.120 m OD (OS Nat. Grid SP 0189 0184). To the south-west is an artificial lake, created in 1735, that is supplied by underlying springs (Beecham 1886, 193). The first edition of the 1:10,560 Ordnance Survey map published for the area in 1875 marks the site as 'Grismond's Tower', but this was changed to 'Ice-house' on the second edition published in 1901. More recent Ordnance Survey maps, such as the 1:25,000 edition of 1982, show the mound as 'Tumulus' printed in the characteristic Antiquities Script. The icehouse was designated a Grade II\* Listed Building on 24 May 1993, while Cirencester Park was added to the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by English Heritage on 28 February 1986 (English Heritage 2014).

### Early Accounts

The earliest identified record of the site is important, if slightly confusing. It can be found in the jottings of the chronicler and antiquarian William of Worcester (1415–85; *alias* Botoner) who visited Cirencester c.1478, presumably as a guest of the Abbey, while collecting information for a projected description of Britain (Gray 1981, 31). This work was never completed, but his *Itineraries*, containing notes and everyday accounts of his journeys and conversations, make interesting reading (Harvey 1969). While discussing Cirencester, William refers to:

*'Turris grosmond iuxta capellam Sancte Cesilie vbi Rex Arthurus fuit coronatus iacet in occidentali parte ville Cirencestrie que ab antiquo vocatur Ciuitas Passerum'*

which Harvey (1969, 272–3) translates as:

'Grismond's Tower by the Chapel of St Cecilia, where King Arthur was crowned, lies west of Cirencester town, which anciently was called the City of Sparrows.'

Here, though, Harvey has assigned the personal name 'Grismond' to the word 'grosmond' (also 'grosmund' in some renderings), which Beecham (1886, 5), Baddeley (1924, 5) and Smith (1964, 66; 1965, 45) all accept as being a French/Norman variant of a familiar Latin adjectival noun that they translate as meaning simply 'great hill' or 'great mound', rather than a personal name. Later in his account of Cirencester William notes that:

*'Castrum Torre in orientali parte de abbathia Cirencestrie. Castrum Grosmond est aliud vbi Arthurus Rex coronabatur prope capellam Sancte Cecilie virginis in altera parte occidentali ville Ciren/Cirencestrie'*

which Harvey (1969, 284–5) translates as:

'Torre Castle on the east side of Cirencester Abbey. Grismond's Castle is another, where King Arthur was crowned, near the Chapel of St Cecilia's the Virgin, on the opposite, west, side of the town of Cirencester.'

Here *Castrum Torre* probably refers to the Tar Barrows on the east side of Cirencester (O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 108), but William's use of the term *castrum* here for both 'Torre' and 'Grosmond', and *turris* in the earlier note with reference to 'Grosmond' is interesting as it suggests that he

thought both had been (or were still) used in some kind of defensive capacity. In the case of the 'great mound' there may be some confusion with the remains of Cirencester Castle, which is believed to lie to the east within the Roman walled area perhaps to the north of what is now Castle Street (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, fig. 34), or perhaps a wooden tower once stood atop the mound. In amongst these topographical details William perpetuates earlier traditions. First, he situates the crowning of the mythical King Arthur in Cirencester (see Alcock 1971 for a critical review of relevant sources) connecting it with the use of a large ancient barrow such as was common for coronations in the early medieval period (Pantos and Semple 2004). Second, he amplifies an earlier legend (Harvey 1969, 285–6), suggesting that:

'Cirencester was called the City of Sparrows because a certain Africanus, who came from Africa, destroyed the city after a siege by sending birds flying over the city with wildfire tied to their tails.'

But in both cases, as Beecham suggests (1886, 5), William of Worcester had probably been feasting on the romantic imagery contained in the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth and his abbreviators when he wrote his itinerary, and may thus be excused a little fabrication.

### The Dissolution and Antiquarian Interest

Sixty years after William of Worcester's visit, on 31 December 1539, the Abbey of Cirencester was surrendered to the Commissioners appointed by Thomas Cromwell to dissolve the monasteries. In consequence, that part of the former Abbey's lands on which Grismond's Tower stood (known as Oakley) passed into lay hands with five successive owners over the following century. It was first granted to Lord Seymour of Sudeley, who held it between 1540 and 1554, after which it passed to Sir Anthony Kingston, who held it until 1592. Sir John Danvers and his son the Earl of Danby owned it between 1592 and 1615, and finally Sir Henry Poole of Sapperton acquired it in 1615 and held it until 1645 (Beecham 1886, 83). Over this same period Grismond's Tower is well represented in accounts made by visiting antiquarians and travellers.

Soon after the Dissolution we have an account of the mound by John Leland (c.1506–52) a renowned traveller and scholar sometimes considered the first and only King's Antiquary appointed by Henry VIII to record something of the country's early history (Marsden 1984, 1). Leland's observations were gathered during his tours of Britain between 1538 and 1543, including three visits to Gloucestershire, and set down in note form for later use in compiling a topographic description of the kingdom. That never happened, but many of his notes and jottings ended up in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Thomas Hearne edited the first printed edition of the *Itinerary*, which appeared in nine volumes between 1710 and 1712, since when there have been several later editions, translations, and studies of Leland's life and travels (Hearne 1774; Latimer 1890; Toulmin-Smith 1906; Chandler 1993; Carley 2010). Grismond's Tower is mentioned in a series of disconnected notes about extant historical aspects of Cirencester's topography at the time of Leland's visit while on his West Country tour in 1542 (Latimer 1890, 229; Chandler 1993, 165; 1996) which are reconstructed by Lucy Toulmin-Smith (1906, vol. 3, 101–2) as:

'In the south west side of the waul be lykelyhod hath been a castel, or sum other great building, the hilks and ditches yet remaine. // Sum say that it was the place wher sege was laid to the town, and not far there is a steepe rownd biry like a windmyl hill extramuros cawlded Grismundes Tower for Gsumundes Tower, as theie say. // The place is now a waten for conys, and there hath e fowna mennes bones insolitae magnitudinis, also to sepulchres ex secto lapide. In one was a round vessel of leade covered, and in hit ashes and peaces of bone.'

This is translated by John Chandler (1993, 190) as:

'There was probably a castle or some other large building on the SW side of the walls because the banks and ditches are still there. One explanation is that a siege was laid against the town at this point; not far from here and outside the walls there is a steep circular mound like that of a windmill, which is known as Grismund's or Gurmund's Tower. It is now a rabbit warren, and unusually large human bones have been discovered there, as well as graves made of hewn stone. A round vessel made of lead was found in one of them, which contained ashes and pieces of bone.'

From this account we can conclude that the mound was not part of the remains of the castle, that in the mid 16th century it was a rabbit warren, that human remains and stone cists had been found within the mound and that at least one cist contained a lead urn containing a cremation. The evidence of burials accords with what might be expected of a prehistoric or Roman barrow, and Leslie Grinsell considered most or all of those noted by Leland to be intrusive secondary interments (O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 108).

The first edition of William Camden's classic work *Britannia* was published in Latin in 1586 and subsequently went through seven editions through to 1607, when it included a full set of county maps based on surveys by Christopher Saxton and John Norden and descriptions of sites and monuments by a wide circle of correspondents and contributors (Piggott 1976, 33–53). The first translation into English (by Philemon Holland) appeared in 1610 with later revised editions by Edward Gibson in 1695 and Richard Gough in 1789. Throughout its life *Britannia* was an influential text and one that seems to have changed the frame of reference within which Grismund's Tower was interpreted.

In early editions of *Britannia* Camden said little about Cirencester, but did refer to a mound of earth called 'Grismund's Tower' (Camden 1607). Later editions approvingly quote Leland by weaving in sections of text in varying degrees of completeness. From the first of Gibson's revised editions, for example, we read (Camden 1695, col. 284):

'The inhabitants show a mound of earth near the town which they say Gurmund cast up; but they call it Grismund's Tower; [Which is to be seen on the west-side and is a steep round berry, like a windmill-hill, where mens bones of an unusual size have been found, with a round vessel of lead, and sepulchres, with ashes and pieces of bone, as Leland informs us].'

Common to the first two editions is the connection between the reported local name of 'Grismund's Tower', with someone called 'Gurmund' or 'Gurmundus' who, it was suggested, was responsible for making it. But, Camden declares, 'Who this Gurmund was, I confess I am ignorant' (1695, col. 284). He goes on to investigate Gurmund, speculating that he might be a Danish leader who captured the town by setting light to it using firebrands tied to sparrows (conflating the earlier story). By way of authority he cites the *British Annals*, Giraldus Cambrensis, and Alexander Neccham, the 12th-century historian and abbot of Cirencester from 1213 until his death in 1217. In doing so Camden and his associates were the first to link the mound with this quasi-historical figure Gurmund, and in retrospect it is easy to see a chain of misleading phonetic corruptions from 'Grosmund', to 'Grismundes', and in turn 'Gurmund'. In this way the big mound became the property of a big man.

Importantly, Camden's text also introduces a Danish connection, albeit spurious, and a romantic context. By the 1789 edition, with input from Richard Gough, it is acknowledged that 'Garmond is mistaken for Godrum the Danish chieftain' (Camden 1789, 281), but such was the influence of *Britannia* (and then as now readers rarely use the most up-to-date edition or check the iterative changes) that the damage was done; once forged, these legends and stories became influential and uncritically accepted across three centuries. Strangely, the next appearance of the site is under a quite different name.

### Poole's Mount and the English Civil War

From 1615 Grismond's Tower was in the ownership of Henry Poole of Sapperton and is referred to as 'Poole's Mount' when it makes a brief cameo appearance as part of the stage on which the English Civil War was played out in the Cotswolds (Jennings 1976). In January 1642 Cirencester was fortified with a garrison of Parliamentary forces commanded by Colonel Fettiplace. Two batteries were established, one towards the south-west corner of the town at Poole's Mount with two six-pounders, and a second on the north side in the garden of William Master with a brass saker (Beecham 1886, 289).

The Siege of Cirencester as it is known took place on Thursday 2 February 1642, when Royalist forces led by Prince Rupert attacked the town. At least four separate fronts were opened. One line of advance, under the command of Lord Wentworth, approached from the south-west towards Poole's Mount but took a wrong turn and found themselves under fire from the battery and 'annoyed by musketry' from a high wall in front of them. Accordingly, they went north to enter the town along Cecily Hill and by the late afternoon the town had fallen to the Royalists (Beecham 1886, 290–1).

In 1645 Mr Poole's house and lands were sold to James Livingston, from 1660 the first Earl of Newburgh, who held them until his death in 1695. The middle decades of the 17th century were interesting times intellectually as well as politically, and it was in the 1660s that the site had a small role in one of the great debates of the time: who built Stonehenge?

### Grismond's Tower and the Stonehenge Debate

In 1620 James I visited Stonehenge and soon after commissioned Inigo Jones (1573–1652), the neo-classical architect and Surveyor of the King's Works, to investigate the great stone circles. Jones concluded that Stonehenge had been a temple in the Tuscan Order of architecture erected by the Romans to the god Caelus, but with the disruption caused by the English Civil War the results of his work were not published until 1655, three years after his death, with the help of John Webb (1611–72) his assistant and son-in-law (Jones and Webb 1655).

Jones's thesis was hotly disputed by the natural philosopher Dr Walter Charleton (1619–1707). In 1663 he published *Chorea Gigantum or Stone-Heng Restored to the Danes*, in which he asserted the view that Stonehenge had been erected by Danes to be a court royal and a place for the election and inauguration of their kings – essentially a Thing (Charleton 1663). Two years later John Webb returned on the attack with an essay entitled *Vindication of Stone-Heng Restored*, in which he dismantled Charleton's rather muddled arguments. Among his counter-arguments is the idea that the Danes did not build in stone. He cites the case of the Thing mound at Lundie in Scania, which was built of turf and soil, before backing it up with a British example, noting that the Danes 'so wanted the stones in Gloucestershire, as to cast up a tumulus of turfs in Cirencester in memory of theirs and this Doctor's Gurmund, when Burford quarries are so near' (Webb 1665). He backs the story with an extensive account of Gurman the Dane coming to Cirencester, seemingly embellishing and expanding the legend already outlined by Camden. A compilation of the three essays by Jones, Charleton and Webb was published in 1725 (Webb 1725), and may have contributed to William Stukeley's belated contribution to the debate with his *Stonehenge Restored to the British Druids* published in 1740. Stukeley also contributed to our understanding of Grismond's Tower, but there are other events in the biography of this mound to consider first.

The Wiltshire polymath John Aubrey (1626–97) was active in recording the antiquities of Wiltshire and surrounding areas between 1663 and 1693. He includes a passing mention of

Cirencester in his *Monumenta Britannica*, a volume completed in 1668 but not published until modern times, noting simply that 'the mount in the garden of the great house there (built by old Sir John Danvers [regicide, 1588–1655]) is called Grismund's Tower' (Aubrey 1980, 342–3).

### Grismond's Tower in the 18th Century

On the Earl of Newburgh's death in 1695 his lands were sold by his widow Frances to Sir Benjamin Bathurst, MP for Bere Alston and New Romney, Cofferer of the Household and Governor of the British East India Company. Sir Benjamin died in 1704 and the estate passed to his son Allen Bathurst, who was made Baron Bathurst in 1712 and became the first Earl Bathurst when the title was created in 1772. Between 1704 and his death in 1775 Allen Bathurst set about developing his seat in Cirencester and for a brief period around this time Grismond's Tower comes into sharp focus in terms of the images and descriptions we have of it.

Something of the landscape inherited by Allen Bathurst can be glimpsed from Johannes Kip's fine bird's-eye view of Cirencester looking west in 1712. On this engraving there is a rather ragged clump of trees and a slight hill where Poole's Mount stands. Kip's engraving was included in the majestic *Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire* by Sir Robert Atkyns (1647–1711), also published in 1712, which provides the most consolidated account of the site up until that time. Atkyns drew heavily on Camden and others before him for his historical account of Cirencester, perpetuating some of the more romantic images of its Dark Age past and probably adding material from John Webb and others. He says of Cirencester that (1712, 339):

'The Danes in the year 879 took it from the Mercians, under the leading of Gurmond their general, who built a tower in that place the ruins whereof are now visible, and at this day, by corruption, it is called Grismond's Tower. There goes a fiction as if Gurmond had been an African Prince and had taken the town by a stratagem, setting it on fire by sparrows.'

Work on the development of Cirencester Park continued apace during the second decade of the 18th century. The Mansion was built in 1714–18, replacing Oakley House (visible on Kip's view). Lands from the manor of Sapperton were added in 1716, and in 1718 work began landscaping the grounds with assistance from Alexander Pope (Savory 1878). Although the work remained unfinished in 1775, much had been achieved and the basic framework established.

Just as the work on re-shaping the park was getting underway the town was visited on 17 September 1721 by the most noted antiquary of his generation, William Stukeley (1687–1765). Accompanied by Mr Roger Gale he prepared a plan of the town and in marking Grismond's Tower preserves the idea of it being a 'Mount' by calling it 'Gurmonds Mount' and shows a profile of it. The plan was not published at the time but is preserved in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (see Darvill and Gerrard 1994, frontispiece). His description in the *Itinerarium Curiosum* notes that (Stukeley 1776, 67):

'west of the town, behind my lord Bathurst's garden, is another mount, called Grismunds or Gurmonds, of which several fables are told: probably reified by the Danes when they laid siege to this place.'

Sixty years later, drawing on the works of Atkyns and Stukeley, Samuel Rudder (1726–1801) provides the first detailed treatment of Grismond's Tower. The son of an eccentric vegetarian, Rudder was born in Uley, apprenticed to a printer, and before 1752 had set up a printing press of his own in Cirencester, where he was already established as a bookseller (Gray 1981, 67). The first edition of his *History and Antiquities of Cirencester* published in 1780 (an extract from his longer work *A New History of Gloucestershire* published the previous year: Rudder 1779) includes a plan of the Home Park at Cirencester during the time of the 3rd Earl, Henry Bathurst (1762–1834), with

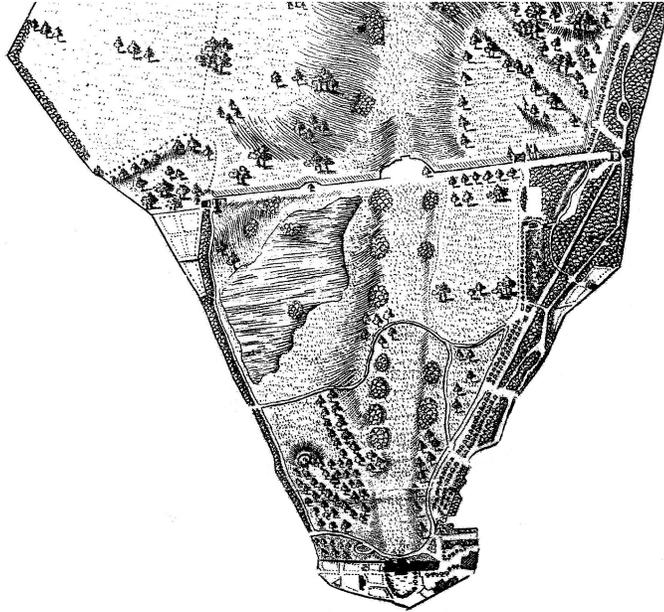


Fig. 3. Extract from the plan of Cirencester Park included in the first edition of Rudder's *History and Antiquities of Cirencester* published in 1780. Grismond's Tower can be seen lower left at the end of the lines of planting with the ornamental lake beyond.

Grismond's Tower and the nearby ornamental lake clearly depicted south-west of the Mansion (Fig. 3). The lengthy description of Grismond's Tower in the main text includes some interesting archaeological observations (1780, 19–20):

'Westward of the town also, a little within lord Bathurst's park, is a large round mound of earth thrown up to the height of about twenty feet, according to tradition, by Godrun the Dane, who is called Gurmundus in the British annals; whence, by vulgar corruption, the place hath obtained the name of Grismund's-tower, and Christmas-tower. There was probably a wooden watch-tower erected on it, according to the custom of the Danes, the better to explore the country, and to guard against a sudden surprise from the enemy. Upon opening the mount, about fifteen years ago, several large earthen vessels, full of ashes and burnt bones, were found in it, and the earth and stones very much burnt for a great space in one part of it. But that a leaden vessel, with some ashes and bones of an uncommon size have been found on the mount, I have read nowhere but in Busching's *Geography*. Indeed Leland speaks of such a vessel, with ashes and pieces of bone, having been found where the castle stood, which Busching mistook for this tower. Who were the proprietors of these bones, and what bodies these ashes are a part of, are questions above the reach of antiquarism; but it is probable that they belong to some persons of eminence among the Danes, who fell in battle against the Saxons and Britons in these parts.'

What exactly the 'opening' of the mount involved is far from clear, but from the dates given it must have been in the mid 1760s. Given the time-lapse since the discoveries mentioned by Leland (more than 200 years) it seems likely that two separate events with similar outcomes are involved. But, while records for this period are sparse, there are no obvious suspects undertaking investigations in Gloucestershire during the middle decades of the 18th century who might have been involved.

Around 1780 or a little before an ice-house was built into Grismond's Tower as part of the works associated with the development of the park. This impressive example, still intact, has a central ice-well 3 m across and 6 m deep, of ovoid form, with brickwork laid in Flemish bond. The vaulted tunnel leading into the mound opens to the north-north-east, where there is an imposing entrance façade of local stone. It is estimated that up to 16 tons of ice could have been stored in the well, and it was last used c.1935 (Beaman and Roaf 1990, 257).

The construction of the ice-house must have involved very considerable disturbance to the mound, more or less removing its central core and a large section of the original buried ground surface, and one wonders whether any archaeological remains were found at that time. No contemporary accounts have yet been identified, and Samuel Rudder makes no mention of any new finds in his revised *History and Antiquities of Cirencester* published in 1800 (re-issued without revision after his death as *The History of the Ancient Town of Cirencester* in 1814). He was a friend of the first Earl Bathurst and generally wrote from first-hand knowledge. Speaking of Grismond's Tower 20 years after his first account, he expands and updates the picture and confirms the earlier finds (Rudder 1800, 76):

'About a quarter of a mile westward of the town, a little within earl Bathurst's park is Grismond's Tower, vulgarly called Christmas Tower. It is a large round tumulus, thrown up to the height of about twenty feet. Beneath this mount, Allen lord Bathurst dug an ice-house, more than twenty years ago; but the tumulus had been opened some years before, when several very large urns, full of ashes and burnt bones, were found within it, and the earth and stones very much burnt for a considerable space about.'

Later on he concludes (1800, 85):

'To sum up all, our research amounts to this, that Grismond's Tower is a large tumulus, and that the urns which were found under it, were placed there by the Romans, and probably contained the remains of some eminent persons of that nation, who belonged to the Roman nation here.'

Rudder's record of burning would be appropriate to either prehistoric or Romano-British burial traditions below round barrows, and his rather vague description of the urns only fuels the ambiguity. None of the recorded extant Roman burial urns from the town can be provenanced to Grismond's Tower or the eastern part of Cirencester Park (cf. McWhirr *et al.* 1982). But there is, in the collections of the Corinium Museum, a complete collared urn said to come from the Cirencester area with a 'Bathurst Collection' accession number (B1241: O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 138 fig. 4). This is probably the 'ancient British pottery urn with bones' exhibited in Case C of the Corinium Museum when housed in the Tetbury Road displays (Church 1922, 25). Ian Longworth considered the vessel to be a secondary series collared urn of the south-eastern style (1984, 200, no. 598, pl. 146f), and certainly it would be perfectly at home amongst the early 2nd millennium BC ceramic traditions known from the Cotswolds and upper Thames Valley (Darvill 2011, 144–50 and fig. 74). Leslie Grinsell and Helen O'Neil (1960, 109) in their study of Gloucestershire barrows include reference to a long narrow human skull found under a small heap of earth with flint flakes and a glass bead near the entrance to Lord Bathurst's Park, which they note might also relate to Grismond's Tower. Clearly, important material was coming to light and it is a great shame that it was not better recorded at the time.

### Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Obscurity

As the walls and hedges of Cirencester Park grew taller, so Grismond's Tower gradually disappeared from view and its presence in the archaeological literature diminished. Ralph Bigland (1712–84) makes a few remarks in his *Historical Monuments and Genealogical Collections Relative to the County of Gloucester*, but these are mainly to debunk earlier speculations (1989,

357). Thus he usefully questions William of Worcester's idea that kings were crowned there and dismisses as 'monkish legend' the story of the Danes burning the town. The mound was not visited in August 1877 when our Society held its second Annual Meeting in Cirencester, although members managed to squeeze into a packed programme enough time to view the investigation of a Roman burial in a stone coffin found in Cirencester Park the day before the meeting opened (Anon. 1878, 8).

Mention of Grismond's Tower is notably absent from important published works such as Buckman and Newmark's *Illustrations of the Remains of Roman Art in Cirencester* (1850), Witts's *Archaeological Handbook of Gloucestershire* (1881), Haverfield's account of Corinium (1920), and Dunning and Jessop's study of Roman barrows (1936). Exceptions include Welbore St Claire Baddeley's comprehensive coverage of the legends of Gormund, Guthorn and Grismond in an introductory note to his *History of Cirencester* published in 1924, and his role in guiding our Society's visit to the mound in 1931 has already been mentioned. The site is listed as 'Cirencester 6' in Helen O'Neil and Leslie Grinsell's gazetteer of Gloucestershire barrows (1960, 108) and is briefly mentioned by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in their survey of Iron Age and Romano-British sites in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds (RCHME 1976, xxxvi).

So what are we left with? Piecing the evidence together we have an exceptionally large barrow made of earth and stone (or, if we believe John Webb, with a turf core of some kind) on elevated ground above a spring. At least two investigations of some kind seem to have taken place between the 16th and 18th centuries, both very poorly recorded but revealing evidence of burials. How many burials there were and their exact date is far from clear, although some were probably Romano-British. Further finds may have been made in the 1780s when the ice-house was constructed and it is tempting to speculate that the Bronze Age urn now in the Corinium Museum came to light during these works. Place-name evidence suggests that in the medieval period the mound may have supported a wooden tower and was later a garden feature or 'mount'. During the Civil War it was certainly used as a gun emplacement.

### GRISMOND'S TOWER IN ITS LOCAL CONTEXT

During the century or so that Grismond's Tower has languished in relative obscurity a great deal of archaeological work has been carried out in the surrounding area. The construction in 1867 of the Cattle Market on the east side of Tetbury Road revealed a Roman burial in a stone coffin, a handful of cremation burials and a cremation in a stone container (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, 206). Rescue excavations on the site of a kitchen garden less than 100 m east of Grismond's Tower during the construction of a petrol station in 1960 revealed an extensive Roman cemetery with 46 cremations and eight inhumations recorded, one of the graves being marked by an inscribed tombstone (Reece 1962). Further excavations in the same area in 2011–12 revealed a further three cremations and more than 70 inhumations dating to the period from the 1st to the early 5th centuries AD: there were also traces of a square mausoleum (Holbrook *et al.* 2013). Together with the stone coffin, probably of Roman date, found within Cirencester Park in 1877 (Anon. 1878) and numerous antiquarian records of burials to the south-west of the Cattle Market (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, fig. 87 and Appendix), this evidence suggests that Grismond's Tower lay at the focus of a substantial cemetery following the line of what is now Tetbury Road, perhaps the course of an earlier street leading out of a western gate in the Roman city wall (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, fig. 87). To the south-east is the Bath Gate Cemetery, partially excavated during the construction of the eastern relief road between 1969 and 1981, when more than 450 burials were excavated between the amphitheatre and the city walls (McWhirr *et al.* 1982).

Something broadly similar may be glimpsed on the east side of Cirencester, on the opposite bank of the River Churn. Here a scatter of burials has been found outside the Verulamium Gate (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, fig. 87) and three round barrows known as the Tar Barrows stand on a west-facing slope (O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 108; and see Piggott 1976, 77–99 for strange antiquarian records of finds in the area). Geophysical surveys in 2007–8 revealed what seem to be mausolea, funerary enclosures, and cremation pits south of the Tar Barrows (Guest in Chapman *et al.* 2009, 267–9). Richard Reece (2003, 279–80) notes how this small pre-Roman barrow cemetery would have overlooked the confluence of the River Churn and the Daglingworth Brook. The natural watercourses of the area have been altered a great deal in Roman and later times, but there are still traces of springs feeding the Churn that issue south-west of the Tar Barrows in much the same way that the spring to the south of Grismond's Tower probably fed the Daglingworth Brook before being used to supply the ornamental pond built in the 1730s (Beecham 1886, 193).

The dates of the barrows on both sides of the Churn Valley remain problematic. On typological grounds the conical form of the southern barrow in the Tar Barrow cemetery might suggest a later prehistoric or early Roman date (cf. O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 108; Reece 2003, 280; Fig. 4), but this characteristic is not especially distinctive. The profile of Grismond's Tower is more typical of prehistoric barrows in the Cotswolds, but nothing is known about the changes that must have resulted from the construction of the ice-house and the site is ripe for detailed topographic and geophysical surveys. What is clear is that prehistoric burials dating back as far as the 4th millennium BC have been found in the vicinity of all these barrows. Querns Barrow, a probable Neolithic long barrow 55 m long by 15 m wide and 1 m high, is still extant in the field beside the



Fig. 4. The southern barrow in the Tar Barrow cemetery, Cirencester, looking north. Photograph by Timothy Darvill: copyright reserved.

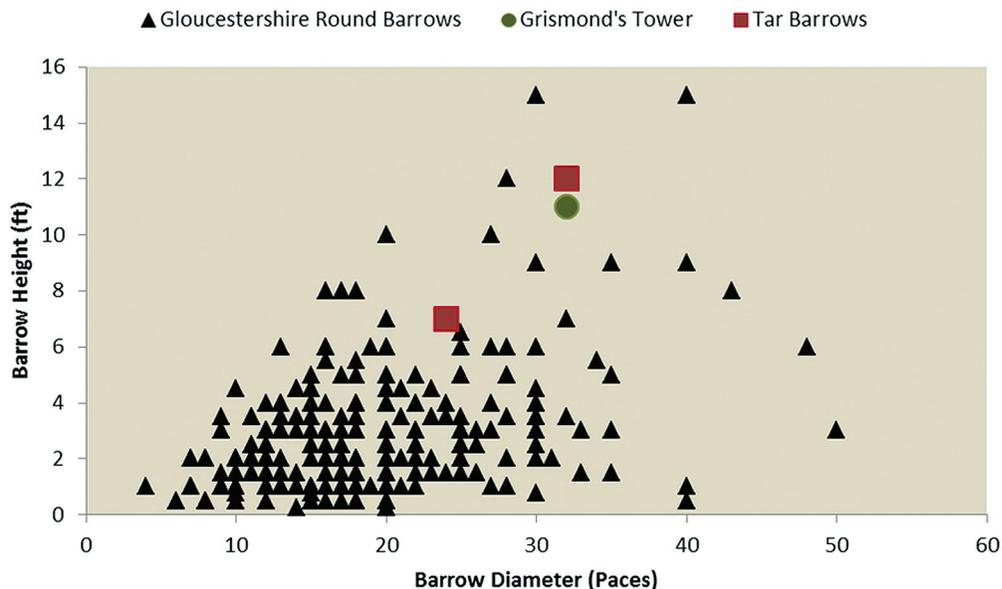


Fig. 5. Scattergram showing the size-range distribution of round barrows in Gloucestershire based on the measurements given in O'Neil and Grinsell 1960. Grismond's Tower and the two extant Tar Barrows are identified separately.

entrance to Cirencester Hospital just 350 m south of Grismond's Tower (Crawford 1925, 129; O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 75; Darvill 2004, 248). More unusual and very hard to interpret is a rectangular pit associated with charcoal dated by two radiocarbon determinations to 4328–3813 BC (HAR-1010: 5250±90 BP) and 4225–3710 BC (HAR-1116: 5130±80 BP) found during the excavation of the Bath Gate Cemetery (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, 99–100). Fragmentary cremated remains of an adult male were recovered together with a scatter of iron nails, the latter perhaps in some kind of re-cut associated with the later burials that seal the feature. On the east side of the town excavations at Kingshill North in 2006–8 revealed burials of the 2nd millennium BC, one within a ring-ditch, about 500 m south-east of the Tar Barrows (Biddulph and Welsh 2011, 10–13).

The size of Grismond's Tower and the remaining Tar Barrows is impressive, and they represent some of the largest mounds in the area (Fig. 5). Standing sentinel either side of the Churn Valley overlooking springheads and the confluence of the Churn and Daglingworth Brook, these would have been imposing monuments, especially when viewed by anyone moving along the valley. But they are not the only such monuments in southern Britain.

### GRISMOND'S TOWER AS SPRINGHEAD SUPER-MOUND

Large round mounds overlooking springs and watercourses have recently been recognized as a special class of monument dating mainly from the later 3rd and early 2nd millennia BC. Prompted by new investigations at Silbury Hill (Wilts.) in 2007–8, super-mounds have been identified at a handful of other sites in the Kennet and Avon Valleys, including the Marlborough Mound and the

Hatfield Barrow at Beechingstoke (Leary 2010; Leary *et al.* 2013a, 244; Leary *et al.* 2013b) and further afield in other parts of Wessex (Barber *et al.* 2010). Many examples were used as mottes in the early Middle Ages, typically surmounted by a wooden tower, and some became garden mounds in post-medieval times. Indeed, turning the argument around, there may well be other large prehistoric barrows masquerading as medieval castle mounds scattered through the landscape.

In the Cotswolds there are no super-mounds quite as large as those to the south in Wessex, but there are several impressive barrows overlooking springs and watercourses to set alongside Grismond's Tower and the Tar Barrows. At the head of the River Churn is Seven Springs, for many commentators the source of the Thames (Ackroyd 2007, 37). The springs issue from the wall of a pool, although where exactly they were in earlier times is a matter of conjecture. Immediately to the north-east at the head of the dry valley above the springhead is a large round barrow – 'Coberley 5' (Darvill and Grinsell 1989, 72), around 25 m in diameter and, although under cultivation, still standing more than 1 m high. When freshly ploughed, its stony composition can easily be appreciated (Fig. 6). It is, quite literally, a springhead mound and it stands at the head of one of the largest and most important rivers in Britain.

Due south of Seven Springs is the Beech Pike barrow, 'Elkstone 1', which was some 35 m across and nearly 4 m high when Leslie Grinsell visited in September 1959 (O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 113). It is still very well preserved and sits on a prominent hilltop overlooking the headwaters of Bagendon Brook, a west-bank tributary of the River Churn (Fig. 7). East of Seven Springs is the delightfully-named St Paul's Epistle barrow, 'Dowdeswell 3', some 20 m across and 1.5 m high (O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 112). Again it is set on high ground with wonderful views over the central Cotswolds, parts of the Severn Valley and across to the Malvern Hills; it also overlooks the headwaters of the River Coln (Fig. 8). There are many others, and the link between barrows and springs and rivers has been highlighted several times. O.G.S. Crawford spoke of such relationships in this masterful book *The Long Barrows of the Cotswolds* and provided two case studies. Around Swell in the northern Cotswolds he showed how long barrows, round barrows in clusters and small cemeteries mainly overlook rivers (Crawford 1925, 5–7). The Golden Coffin Barrow, 'Swell 11', literally clings to the side of the valley above the headwaters of the River Eye



Fig. 6. 'Coberley 5' round barrow north-east of Seven Springs, looking north. Photograph by Anne Buffoni: copyright reserved.



Fig. 7. 'Elkstone 1' round barrow, looking north. Photograph by Timothy Darvill: copyright reserved.



Fig. 8. St Paul's Epistle ('Dowdeswell 3') round barrow, looking north. Photograph by Timothy Darvill: copyright reserved.

(O'Neil and Grinsell 1960, 132). In the Avening district of the central Cotswolds barrows tend to overlook the confluence of rivers within the characteristic deeply-incised valleys of the area, and some long barrows are aligned on these points, as in the case of the Tinglestone Long Barrow overlooking the Avening Brook (Crawford 1925, 7).

## CONCLUSION

This brief excursion has come a long way in a short time from the substantial mound of Grismond's Tower to Silbury Hill as the largest round barrow in north-west Europe, a monument that is actually only 30 km away to the south: but the conclusions are clear. Like many monuments, Grismond's Tower came in and out of archaeological consciousness as intellectual traditions, visibility, and access changed over the years. It is a site steeped in myth and legend, much of it misplaced, and sadly deficient in records relating to the few investigations that might have yielded evidence of its origins and development. Further research is needed to clarify the sequence of construction and use, but we can be relatively certain that prehistoric and Roman burials have been found within and around the mound.

Looking beyond the site itself Grismond's Tower raises important questions about the re-use of earlier structures in the medieval period, about what some of our great Roman cemeteries might have looked like if they incorporated earlier monuments, and why exactly Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows were situated where they were. I started by saying how lucky we were to live in a county so rich in archaeology, and like many before me I have pondered why, for example, there are so many barrows scattered across the Cotswolds. Maybe it is because of the robust materials used to build them. Maybe it is because earlier land-use on the hills has served to protect and preserve them. But looking at Grismond's Tower and some of the other sites I have touched upon here makes me wonder whether we have missed the point. Perhaps the Cotswold uplands are so rich in barrows because they are so rich in springs and the headwaters of England's greatest rivers. Some (at least) of these barrows might be considered 'springhead super-mounds' and direct our attention away from the simple physical facts of location towards the beliefs and world-views of these ancient communities and their interests in water.

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