

A Cyst of the Beaker Period at Corston, near Bath

BY HERBERT TAYLOR, M.C., M.B., Ch.B.

Interment in barrows was probably exceptional at any time, the privilege of leaders and their households. Such evidence as there is, however, does not suggest that the flat cysts of the Beaker Period were for lesser folk but rather the possibility that some communities did not raise tumuli. Flat and barrow graves, whether or no they are actually complementary in distribution,¹ seem to differ very little in wealth, choice of goods, burial customs, date, or proportion between the A + C and B complexes.² Despite the odds against their discovery not a few of these isolated flat burials are known. They may well have outnumbered those in tumuli. The Corston cyst, for instance, might have passed unrecorded but that it lay almost wholly outside the boundary of a quarry and that its discoverers realized its importance:

About July, 1931, John Thrift, of Bath, found part of a human skull and other bones at the foot of a face in the Corston Lime Kilns Quarry and noticed its impression above. With Arthur Longhurst he dug from the face the greater part of a male skeleton, a crushed beaker, a "hone," a flint fabricator or strike-a-light, a piece of limonite, scraps of non-human bone, charcoal and burnt clay, and two sherds from other vessels. Fragments doubtless of the same skull and jaws were seen on the talus by workmen but have disappeared. The find was reported by Mrs. Thrift to Dr. Wallis of the Bristol Museum. Colonel Longhurst, R.A.M.C., identified the bones and showed a few to Sir Arthur Keith. It is, we believe, the first Beaker burial to be recorded within 15 miles of Bath.

In November our Society was invited to co-operate. The conditions were not unlike those at Culbone.³ In the abandoned southern face of the quarry the lias was exposed beneath 6 or 8 inches of loam; it was interrupted by the section of a cyst, into the bottom of which a hole had been dug. The soil was not deeper in its neighbourhood and there was no reason to suppose that a barrow ever stood there.

¹ Cf. Fox, *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, p. 27.

The sites of the chief bones and artefacts were pointed out and recorded, photographs were taken and the spoil was re-examined, but it was found that very little had been missed. The turf, soil, and covering of flags were then removed and the filling was excavated from the exposed face, which was kept vertical as in cave and barrow excavation. Owing to the probability of interference if left overnight the slabs lining the walls and the floor-covering of loam were removed too but replaced for the photograph (Plate Va). All the material was examined *in situ* by the diggers, Mrs. Thrift and the writer, and sorted again afterwards. A plan, section, and model were made.

Although it is common to find a flat burial within a stone, timber, or ditched circle, such circles do not seem to have been looked for around known flat burials. The quarry face was examined without result, but probing revealed a shallow ditch or pit which, once found, was plainly visible in the section. Though probably of the Beaker Period it bore no apparent relation to the cyst (see below).

The adjacent plough land yielded a few flint implements, including part of a polished axe.

THE CYST. (Plate Va; Fig. 15.)

The cyst, measuring about 5 feet 3 inches by 4 feet 9 inches at the rock surface and 3 feet 2 inches in depth, had been cut by wedging or levering up the strata of the lias, as was shown by the irregular, stepped walls. Most of the north wall had been quarried away in modern times. On the floor was a smooth bed of loam 3 inches deep, distinctly redder than the soil of the field and in the rock fissures and quite barren. Slabs of lias about a foot high lined the base of the south and east walls but not the west and passed around the north-east corner as if to continue against the missing north wall. Although not jointed together they were regular and distinct from the erratic broken stones of the filling.

On the bed was a discontinuous black lamina superficially resembling groups of dead leaves, which, however, could have left no trace unless charred. The specimens crumbled to a powder, amongst which carbonized wood was recognizable.

THE BURIAL. (Fig. 15.)

The following were set on the bed of loam.

a. The greater part of a skeleton, buried after the ligaments

man about 5 feet 7 inches in height and 37 or 40 years of age ; Professor Fawcett reports that the skull is too incomplete for measurement,

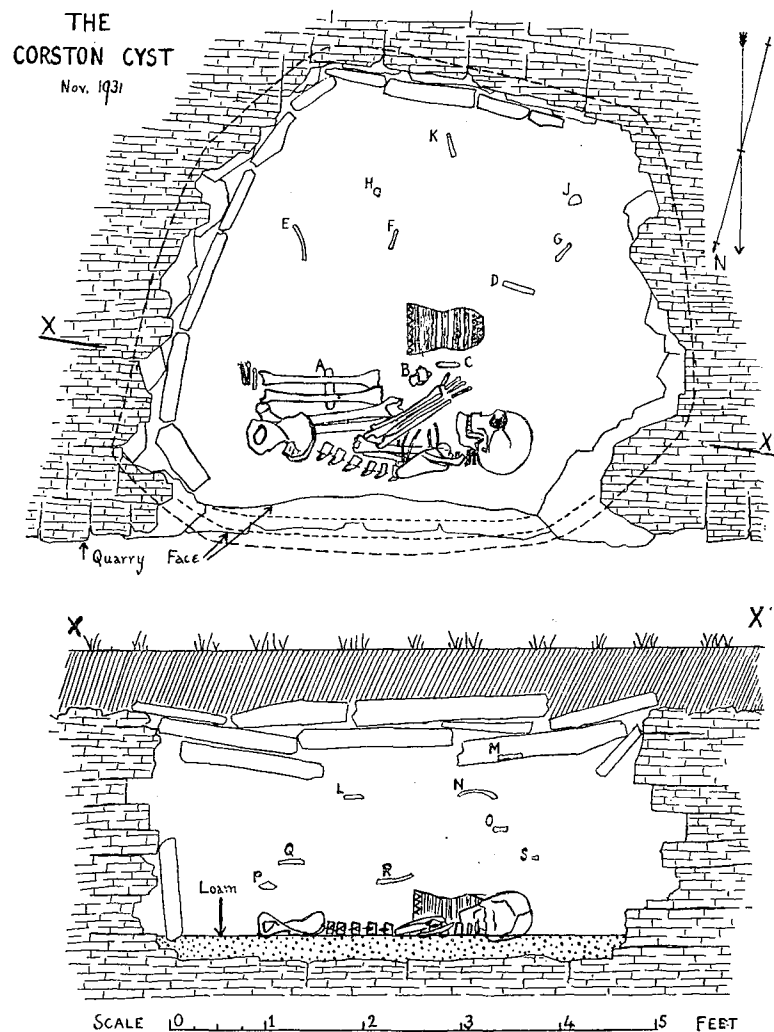


FIG. 15.—The Corston Cyst. Plan and Section.

The approximate position of the early finds is shown in red.
Only objects lying on the floor are marked in the plan.

but that the remains present no feature that would be unusual in a man of to-day ; there are not even squatting facets on the astragali and tibiae.



a.—The Corston Cyst.
The rule is one foot in length.



b.—The Beaker, Corston Cyst.

- b.* A crushed beaker of Type A,⁴ lying upon its side near the "hands," its mouth to the east (Plate VI).
- c.* A "hone" or cult object in slate, beneath and at right angles to the tibiae (Fig. 15, A; Fig. 16 No. 1).
- d.* A flint fabricator or strike-a-light between the "hands" and the beaker, parallel with the latter (Fig. 15, C; Fig. 16 No. 2).
- e.* A human metacarpal found at a distance from the body during our own excavations (Fig. 15, F).
- f.* Half a dozen scraps of non-human bone.

Naturally enough, the deposit had been regarded as a contracted burial, most of the human bones being in anatomical position. According to the account, however, which was confirmed by Colonel Longhurst, the femora and tibiae were parallel and close together; an astragalus lay near the hands (Fig. 15, B); most of the left hip bone and right humerus were absent and the hands and feet were represented by a few bones only; a few vertebrae formed a line somewhat as shown, but not many small bones and ribs were found. As a rule the cancellous elements were broken, their fragments widely separated or missing. Some material from the lost part of the cyst may have passed into other hands, but at least it was out of place. The detail of this part of Fig. 15 is conjectural, e.g., it is not known whether the limb bones were apposed correctly.

The deduction that bare bones were buried is confirmed by our own discovery⁵ of a few of the missing ribs and bones of the hands and feet, etc., scattered about the floor and in the filling. The absence of cuts shows that not dismemberment but preliminary burial or exposure had taken place. The state of the remains may indicate that the bones were soft, possibly owing to some method of hastening decay, for otherwise the most careless exhumation or collection for reburial could scarcely explain it. However, preliminary burial amongst rather large stones might cause such fragmentation. The bones were not gnawed by animals, nor rubbed as they might have been if broken by rough handling in transport. Ceremonial violence, it might be supposed, would be limited to the more important bones, which seem to have been whole when buried, although now broken by the weight of the stones; the humeri and mandible are possible exceptions. The shaft of the right femur is curiously eroded, doubtless post mortem, but not gnawed by mammals since it bears no tooth marks and the articular ends, which would have been attacked first, are spared.

Reburial has been recorded from long barrows,⁶ whose builders (or their successors) made Beaker as well as Neolithic wares. We do not know whether it has been established previously for the full Beaker Period—nor whether it has been excluded in any instance. It was possible in the Culbone cyst³ and the Wick Barrow,⁷ although disturbance in Roman times explains some or all of the bones scattered in the latter. There is no doubt of it at Gorsey Bigbury.⁸

The following lay upon the bed, but it is not clear whether they were set there or cast upon the first few stones of the filling; if the latter, probably they were thrown on deliberately as no soil seems to have been used. The two round scrapers were beneath slabs and could not have fallen more than an inch or so (Fig. 15, J and H; Fig. 16 Nos. 3 and 7). In the region of the body were a piece of limonite, two cheek teeth of sheep, and three scraps of beaker ware not from the main vessel (Fig. 16 No. 6, another like it, and a thicker, plain sherd). Scattered everywhere were a few human bones, chiefly broken ribs but including a metacarpal and a metatarsal from the southern third of the cyst (Fig. 15, E, G, K, and others); a few scraps of non-human bone, the size of ox, some charred and some calcined; nodules of burnt red clay, perhaps potters' paste; scraps of charcoal the wood of which cannot be identified. Some of the human and other bone, burnt clay and charcoal lay beneath slabs and could not have fallen far.

THE FILLING.

The cyst was packed with broken lias and soil like that of the field, but many air-spaces showed that the latter, or most of it, had been washed in, the filling having been of stones. Human bones almost certainly of the buried person were scattered here and there at all depths below 13 inches, chiefly small bones of the hand and foot, ribs and fragments, some of which are shown in the section. Fig. 15, P has been fitted to the right scapula of the "body." We found also scraps of large non-human bones (??? ox), some charred; the worn tip of a tine of red deer, perhaps from a pick (Fig. 16 No. 4); a few pieces of unidentifiable charcoal and two very small plain pieces of beaker ware, thicker than the chief vessel, one being shouldered (Fig. 16 No. 9); two chips, a large knife and an end-scraper in flint. The knife (Fig. 15, D; Fig. 16 No. 5), was sealed down by slabs in a space practically free from soil near the base of the beaker and rested almost vertically upon its business edge which was just sunk in the

⁶ Crawford, *The Long Barrows of the Cotswolds*, pp. 13-15.

⁷ St. George Gray, *The Wick Barrow Report*.

⁸ Near Charterhouse-on-Mendip. Excavation is in progress.

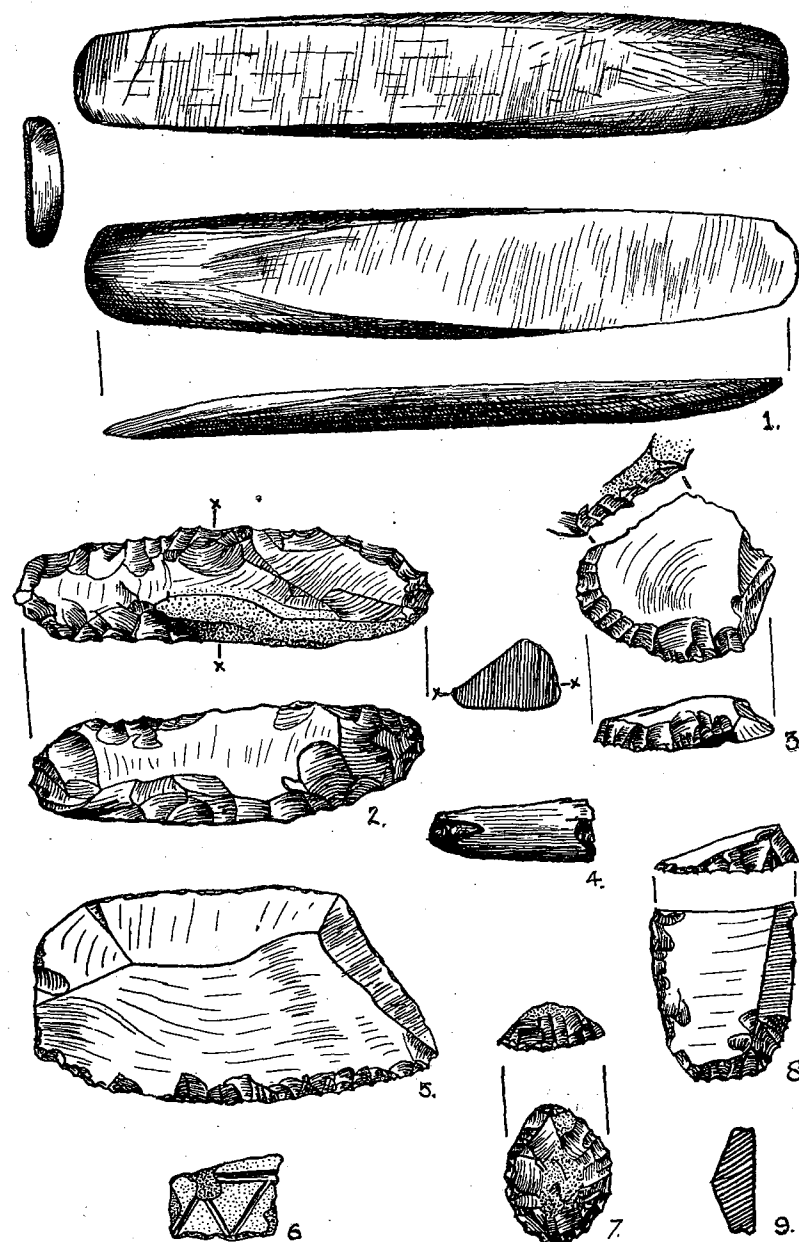


FIG. 16.—The Corston Cyst.

Artefacts, two-thirds natural size.

loam bed; it was certainly placed in the filling and not thrown in with earth nor fallen from above. Several human bones, the shouldered sherd No. 9 and the end-scraper No. 8, were also in relatively clean spaces between the stones (Fig. 15, O, P, R, S, L). It is possible that the flint chips and the other sherd entered with the soil, but it should be noted that in the search for a ditch an area about forty times as great as the cyst was excavated and that it yielded only one worked flint and two flakes, and no pre-Roman pottery, except in the pit described below.

Thus there is evidence that industrial débris and human bones were scattered in the filling of the cyst and on its floor and that they were not introduced with soil; compare the barrows at Tynings Farm described elsewhere in this number.

THE COVERING. (Fig. 15.)

Flags of lias, two or three deep, sealed down the contents though permitting the entry of soil. They were covered by less than six inches of humus and must have been almost flush with the surface before the filling settled.

THE BEAKER. (Plates Vb and VI.)

The beaker, of Type A, is $9\frac{5}{8}$ inches in height and $7\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter at the mouth; the latter measurement may have been $\frac{1}{8}$ inch less or $\frac{1}{4}$ inch more. The ware, less than $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick, is of a black fine homogeneous paste without visible grit. It is burnt reddish brown externally but internally buff near the mouth, black below. The rim has been flattened slightly on top, causing the outer lip to bulge a little. The decoration, in the "cogged wheel" technique, consists chiefly of parallel horizontal lines in groups separated by small chevrons; there are five chevrons on the neck and one to every band on the body, one tending to degenerate to the criss-cross pattern. At rim and base are hanging triangles, the latter group shaded, the former plain on a shaded ground. One of the four plain zones is on the neck.

Features regarded as early⁴ are the high neck and globular body—the least diameter is scarcely above the middle of the vessel—the wide splay of the neck and the slight inward curve near the rim; (Plate Vb shows the only aspect in which it is not marked); the four plain zones, the good technique of the decoration, and the good quality of the ware. On the other hand, the angle between neck and body is not very sharp, the simplicity of the motives does not seem to be an early feature and the high neck persists to the end of the series

PLATE VI



The Beaker from Corston Cyst.

The beaker may be placed in Abercrombie's Phase 1, a date between 1800 and 1900 B.C. being probable. The nearest vessels he figures seem to be Nos. 8 (Wilts.) and 12 (Wick Barrow, Somerset), but both are typologically later, of Phase 2, the curve of the body being flattened and the plain zones reduced to one.

OTHER ARTEFACTS. (Fig. 16.)

The so-called hone, No. 1, is in an almost black fine-grained spotted slate, which, Dr. Wallis reports, "is so prevalent in Devon, Cornwall, and North Wales that it is impossible to give an exact locality for its origin." The ends are bevelled, one from either face, to a convex sharp edge. The bevels and the lateral edges are covered with parallel longitudinal striæ due to rubbing upon a gritty stone or sand, the faces are polished. The polish ends abruptly and coincides with the truly plane area of either face; it was produced after the longitudinal grinding by rubbing from side to side against a flat, fairly smooth surface. If due to use as a hone or polisher it would have passed on to the bevels, its faint striæ would have been longitudinal or oblique instead of transverse, and probably the surface would not have remained plane; if due to dressing skins it must have extended a little on to the edges as well. The object is so nearly symmetrical that it seems to have been shaped, not worn to shape, and indeed it bears no sign of use. The suggestion that it was an unused hone, polisher, or rubber does not explain either the bevelled ends or the care with which it was made, for the idea of a ceremonial hone seems rather far-fetched. Possibly it should be regarded as a cult object comparable with the schist "idols" of Spain and Portugal⁹ and the plate amulets—if such they be—of this country.¹⁰ Of course, some hones are similar in plan, e.g., a "whet-stone," possibly used, found by Canon Greenwell in a barrow at Rudstone along with a riveted knife-dagger and other graves-goods of the A + C complex.¹¹ Its resemblance, however, is superficial for the faces are not plane and the ends are rounded off from the same face.

The slug-shaped fabricator or strike-a-light (Fig. 16 No. 2) was made on a curving flake, the ends of the bulbar face having been "scaled" to flatten it. Both ends and both edges have been worked and battered. A lump of limonite was found nearby; this substance,

⁹ Obermaier, *Fossil Man in Spain*, p. 334, Fig. 140.

¹⁰ Cf. that from T. 12, the East Barrow, Tynings Farm. *Proc. U.B.S.S.*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Plate X, 4.

¹¹ Evans, *Ancient Stone Implements*, Fig. 182, p. 239.

Dr. Wallis reports, is softer than pyrites but capable of striking fire with flint.

The long edge of the knife, No. 5, has been strengthened or resharpened by chipping at a low angle and the two edges forming the back have been blunted by "nibbling."

The larger round scraper, No. 3, is worked along half its circumference and an uncomfortable edge is cut down for the finger by inverse chipping which does not remove the whole thickness of the cortex. The bulbar surface is the upper one, an unusual finding.

The small button scraper, No. 7, is flaked steeply all round except at the very narrow butt.

The end-scraper, No. 8, possesses a steeply-chipped convex end and a straight edge retouched in blunting fashion, whether to serve as a protection for the finger or as a sidescraper.

No. 4, the end of an antler tine of red deer, has been worn smooth or polished and damaged at the tip. It may be from a pick.

No. 6 and another are scraps of beaker ware bearing shallow incised decoration, a chevron bordered by a horizontal line. They are less than $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in thickness. No. 9 is shown in section. It is undecorated; the internal shoulder or ridge may be due to food-vessel influence, cf. Abercrombie's Beakers Nos. 230, 231 (Aberdeen). Like a plain sherd from the floor and another from the filling, it is thicker than the main vessel. All these fragments resemble the beaker itself in paste and colour. Doubtless they were from domestic pots.

The scraps of clay found on the floor were burnt red throughout. One contained coarse granules of nearly decalcified (local ?) limestone, one fine white sand, the remainder no addition. They may have been potters' paste.

THE OUTER EXCAVATIONS.

In the face of the quarry a hollow in the rock was visible, extending from about 32 to about 40 feet west of the western edge of the cyst. It was about 2 feet deep, or 2 feet 9 inches including the humus. It proved to be the section of a long depression running roughly north and south, filled with broken rock. Most probably it was natural, for the quarrymen are accustomed to find such broad shallow trenches, which may be of great length and 3 feet or more in depth, but become gradually shallower at either end and are invariably barren.

In the present case, however, a small pit had been dug along the eastern edge. This pit was about 2 feet wide, 1 foot 9 inches deep in the rock and 4 feet 6 inches in length, but it was originally longer, being truncated by the face of the quarry. Near the bottom

of its filling of dark, greyish soil were 30 or 40 very small chips of incompletely patinated, greyish flint, four crumbs of what may be Beaker ware and scraps of the bones of sheep, ox, and pig.

In order to determine whether the pit was one of a series surrounding the cyst, the S.W. quadrant of a circle 40 feet in radius, having its centre in the cyst, was examined, together with the ground immediately surrounding the latter. The greater part was excavated down to bedrock, the remainder being tested by probing for rock and "bosing." The whole of the ground within 50 feet of the cyst was probed and "bosed" also, and the face of the quarry was examined but no other such pit or depression existed.

A series of small holes was discovered. These varied from about 10 inches to 1 foot 3 inches in depth (excluding the humus) and from 1 foot to 2 feet 3 inches in diameter at the rock surface, decreasing to about half that size at the bottom. In each small upright slabs of lias surrounded a central space and had the appearance of wedges set to secure a post some 3 inches in diameter. Their tops seemed to have been broken and scored by the plough; some seemed to have been displaced. The soil in these "stake-holes" was clean and barren, no trace of a post remaining.

Six "stake-holes" were set at intervals varying from 5 to 8 feet, to form an irregular line running roughly S. by W. from a point near the quarry face and about 26 feet W. of the centre of the cyst. A solitary hole was found about 21 feet S. of the cyst and another actually in the loose rock of the depression already described. The last lay so close to the Beaker Period (?) pit that one must have been filled in solidly when the other was made. Thus although no artefacts were found in them it seems that the "stake-holes" were considerably later or earlier than the Beaker Period. In any case they bear no obvious relation to the cyst. Indeed, they may not be artificial pits at all.

All these features have been photographed and measured to facilitate further excavation.

Our thanks are due to Mr. Gullock, of Manor Farm, Corston, and to Mr. Coombes, owner of the quarry, for permission to excavate; to Professor Fawcett, Dr. Skene, and Dr. Wallis, who have examined the human and other bones, the charcoals and the geological specimens respectively; to Dr. S. B. Adams who has drawn the artefacts and rendered varied assistance. Especially are we indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Thrift, Colonel and Mrs. Longhurst and their sons, who undertook the earlier and shared in the later excavations and placed the finds in the Society's Museum on permanent loan.

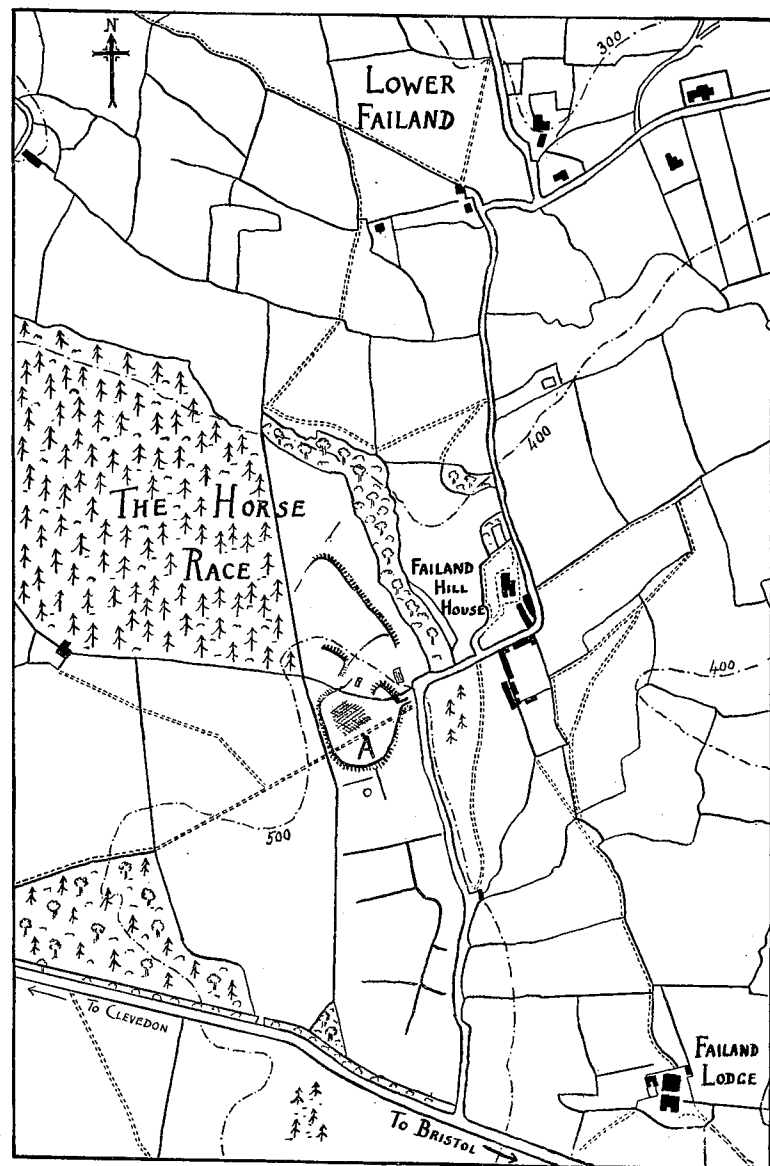


FIG. 17.—Sketch Map based on the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

On the north and south sides of the occupation site there are faint traces of old enclosures which represent the cultivated fields of the inhabitants. Although they are only well preserved on the north side they have all the characteristics of the Iron Age cultivations of Britain. Doubtless many other traces of these fields are now covered by the trees on the Horse Race, and where the banks cross the road eastward towards Failand Lodge they are obliterated by modern ploughing. One other place in this area where scraps of Romano-British pottery may be found is on the edge of the little escarpment overlooking Lower Failand, close to the "e" in "Horse" on the map.

This little site with its associated fields is only one of a number belonging to the period of the Roman occupation which are to be found all along the Failand ridge. It is close to the line of the ancient trackway from the crossing of the Avon near the modern Suspension Bridge to Cadbury Camp and Clevedon, and here it is represented by the modern Bristol-Clevedon road.

There is one other feature of the Horse Race which merits attention. In the days before it was planted with trees it yielded more stone axes than any other area of corresponding size in North Somerset.

There are records of seven from the Horse Race, most of them now being in the Perceval Collection in the Cambridge Archaeological Museum. Another good site not far away is the field south of the Bristol-Clevedon road and west of the Tyntesfield Upper Lodge, which has yielded four. The writer picked up the broken corner of the cutting edge from a basalt axe on a mole hill in the field to the south of the Roman site near the junction of the road from Lower Failand with the main road. It is now in the Museum of the Spelæological Society.

This considerable nucleation of twelve stone axes is also accompanied by a fair number of flint flakes and a few barbed and tanged arrow heads. It looks, therefore, as though this region was in favour in the early Metal Age, though there is now no visible surface indication of any organized settlement.

IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS IN WRAXALL PARISH.

This site is on the crest of the ridge which runs between Bristol and Clevedon and marks the highest point in the parish of Wraxall. It is situated in the main in a grass field on the north side of the road from Bristol to Cadbury Camp shortly before it comes to the turn which leads past Naish House and down to Clapton-in-Gordano

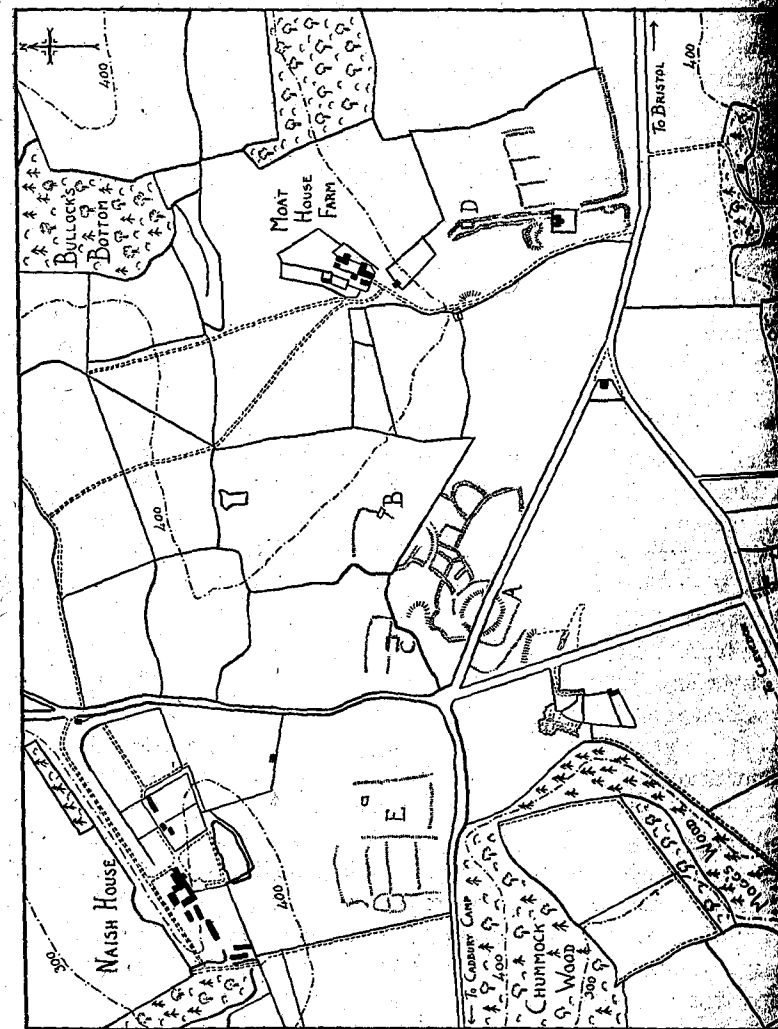
and Portbury. On the early editions of the Ordnance Survey it was described as "Ancient Remains."

The main feature, shown on the accompanying map at A (Fig. 18), is a circular enclosure which unfortunately has been bisected by the road. Its height above sea level is 470 feet. Trial excavations conducted by the writer in 1929 and published in the Society's Proceedings¹ revealed that a rock-cut ditch 3 feet 6 inches deep and 8 feet wide across the top surrounds the site and that behind this there stood what was probably a stone wall, now fallen into ruin. The infilling of this ditch showed that the work belonged to the La Tène II phase of the Early Iron Age and that the site was not frequented by Romano-British people till the ditch was nearly silted up. Time did not permit a fuller investigation, but an examination of the field to the north of the road shows a number of ancient enclosures which are obviously associated with the round work. Mole hills on this field give flint flakes, Romano-British pottery, and sometimes a few fragments of Samian ware. The field to the south has been spoiled by frequent ploughing, but it does not seem that there were more than a few enclosures there. In contrast to this poverty of other remains that part of the round enclosure which projects into the southern field is more strongly developed than that on the north side. In the absence of further excavation the only thing that can be said about this site is that it was probably cultivated in Romano-British times and that there appears to be an interesting continuity of use from the pre-conquest to the post-conquest period. The dwelling sites of the cultivators of the Romano-British phase must be sought elsewhere than in the round enclosure, for this feature was in ruins before the Roman period began.

The enclosures marked on the map are sketched, but they give a sufficient indication of the arrangement until the ideal method, air photography, can be brought to bear on this area.

Several other features of this neighbourhood require description.

Immediately to the north of the wall bounding the field containing the Iron Age site there is a sharp declivity, at the bottom of which lies site B. The chief feature of this is the remains of a small rectangular building 33 feet long by 15 feet wide. It stands at the point where a considerable lynchet meets the foot of the steep slope. Nothing has been found there to show its date, but it is completely overgrown and probably belongs to the same class as the Romano-British site D, which will be described later.



¹ *Proc. Spel. Soc.*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 45-52.

At C there is another building site associated with lynchets. Here there is only a very faint indication that the enclosure was ever completed by a fourth wall on the west. The dimensions are 60 feet by 90 feet and the outline of the structure is not very regular when seen on the ground. The north and south walls are straight and parallel, but the cross wall to the east is not so regular. This site looks as though it is the remains of a walled enclosure rather than of a roofed building. Here again there is no direct evidence of date better than some small fragments of black Romano-British ware which have been picked up from mole hills in the area enclosed by the lynchets.

In the field south of Naish House at E there are more traces of Celtic cultivation. On the western side of this site near the boundary there are some irregularities in the ground represented on the map by two small enclosures which look as though they may be the site of huts, though no *débris* of any kind is to be found there at present.

Last comes the site at D on the brow overlooking Moat House Farm from the south. The peculiar feature of this site is the roadway between banks which leads from close to the modern road up to the site of a building. The road has been interrupted by the building of two cottages and the opening of a quarry and, viewed on the ground, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the strong earth and stone bank which leads away eastwards from its southern end is contemporary with it. This bank stands 3 feet high and is 7 feet wide at the base. It appears to have a slight ditch along its southern side and at the east end it merges into another modern field boundary. The road averages 15 feet in width and is flanked by well-marked banks about 1 foot high and 3 feet wide. On its west side there is a small enclosure associated with it south of the cottages. When it approaches D the eastern bank continues north to form the east wall of a small rectangular enclosure while the western bank veers to the north-west, avoiding the enclosure and ending at the edge of the drop to Moat House Farm. The enclosure measures 72 feet by 36 feet and has no visible entrance. From its north-east corner another small bank runs north-west towards the other and stops at the edge of the slope also. A few test holes dug here have shown that this enclosure is surrounded by the remains of a wall and that a good deal of walling material has collapsed into the interior. Shards of greyish-blue pottery mixed with this rubbish make it very probable that this site must be referred to the Roman period. In the field to the south-east are remains of the small fields associated with Celtic cultivation.

These sites, taken together with the Roman settlement below the escarpment to the north at Clapton-in-Gordano, where Mr. Egerton Godwin found a hoard of 5000 coins with the limiting date of A.D. 297, and the other sites already reported on above Lower Failand to the east, show that this ridge was fairly well exploited in Romano-British times. Trial excavations have shown that the little circular work south of Manor Farm, Failand, called "Roman Camp" on the Ordnance Survey maps, must be referred to the same period as the circular enclosure at A. Much further to the west on Dial Hill overlooking Clevedon Court are many more traces of Celtic cultivation with associated enclosures, and it is significant that all these areas were obviously abandoned at the time of the Anglo-Saxon penetration of North Somerset. The villages of the new dispensation ignore the older sites and are all placed without exception below the ridge on the northern and southern sides.

Much work remains to be done on this ridge and on that which runs along the coast from Clevedon to Portishead, but it should soon be possible to get a fairly accurate idea of the distribution of population in this corner of North Somerset in Iron Age and Romano-British times.

CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON FIELD SYSTEMS IN ASHTON PARK.

There is no area in the neighbourhood of Bristol which more completely preserves the character of the primitive countryside than Ashton Park. This great enclosure occupies the larger part of the southern side of the Bristol-Clevedon ridge in the first two miles of its run westwards from the Avon Gorge, and fronts the imposing mass of Dundry Hill across the valley containing the low watershed parting the small brooks which flow from the foot of Dundry to the Avon from the streams passing west through Nailsea and Kenn Moors to the sea at Clevedon.

The axis of the park lies south-west and north-east, and the north-west half consists of a flat table land ending in a steep escarpment which falls rapidly to the boundary at the Bristol-Weston road on the south-east.

Ashton Court is situated under the lee of the ridge at the east end of the park, and the area which deserves special consideration lies on the plateau above the Court and near the Clifton Lodge at the top of Rownham Hill.

The antiquities of the Leigh Woods area are too well known to require more than passing comment here. They consist of three promontory forts guarding an ancient ford over the Avon, the site

of which is now fairly represented by a line a little below the Suspension Bridge. Of these three two, Stokeleigh Camp and Burgh Walls, occupy the north and south sides of Nightingale Valley respectively, and abut on the east on the precipitous sides of the gorge. Burgh Walls has been almost totally destroyed by building operations.

No direct evidence of the date of these works has been found, but it may be inferred from their type that they belong to the Iron Age and were in occupation during the period 500 B.C.—A.D. 100. If these sites belong to the Iron Age it is to be expected that some signs of the agriculture by which the inhabitants supported themselves should be discernible in the neighbourhood, if the ground has not been seriously altered by building development or agriculture. Many of the great fortified hill-top villages of the Iron Age in Wessex have been shown to have this associated agriculture by means of air-photography,² and this local case seems to have been no exception. Just inside the Clifton Lodge of Ashton Park is a very finely preserved set of Celtic fields. They lie on both sides of the straight drive leading into the Park and stretch rather more than half a mile along the edge of the escarpment, while some pass down hill at the east end so far as to clear Summerhouse Plantation (see Fig. 19).

The northern part of the Park was formerly common land, and since it is plain that no attempt has been made to cultivate this area since the fields were abandoned—probably in the fifth or sixth century A.D.—it is likely that they were formerly lost under bracken and scrub, but now that the ground has been improved into pasture they have appeared again. Similar systems of fields are to be seen on Durdham Downs on the other side of the gorge, and there are other groups of Celtic cultivations further along the Failand ridge above Ashton Watering, at Manor Farm, Failand, and at Moat House Farm, Wraxall, where they are closely associated with a small earthwork proved by excavation to be Early Iron Age in date.³ At the far end of the ridge above Clevedon Court are others, and the coastal ridge between Clevedon and Portishead carries them near Walton Castle and on Walton Down.

The Ashton Park fields are plainly visible because the cultivators collected the stones from their small rectangular plots and piled them along the boundaries which now show as broad low banks in the grass. This is plainly illustrated at A, where the turf has been removed recently and reveals the mass of small stones forming the bank.

² *Wessex from the Air*, by O. G. S. Crawford and Alexander Keiller, Plate XXV, p. 154.

³ Phillips, C. W., *U.B.S.S. Proceedings*, 1931, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 45 et. seq.

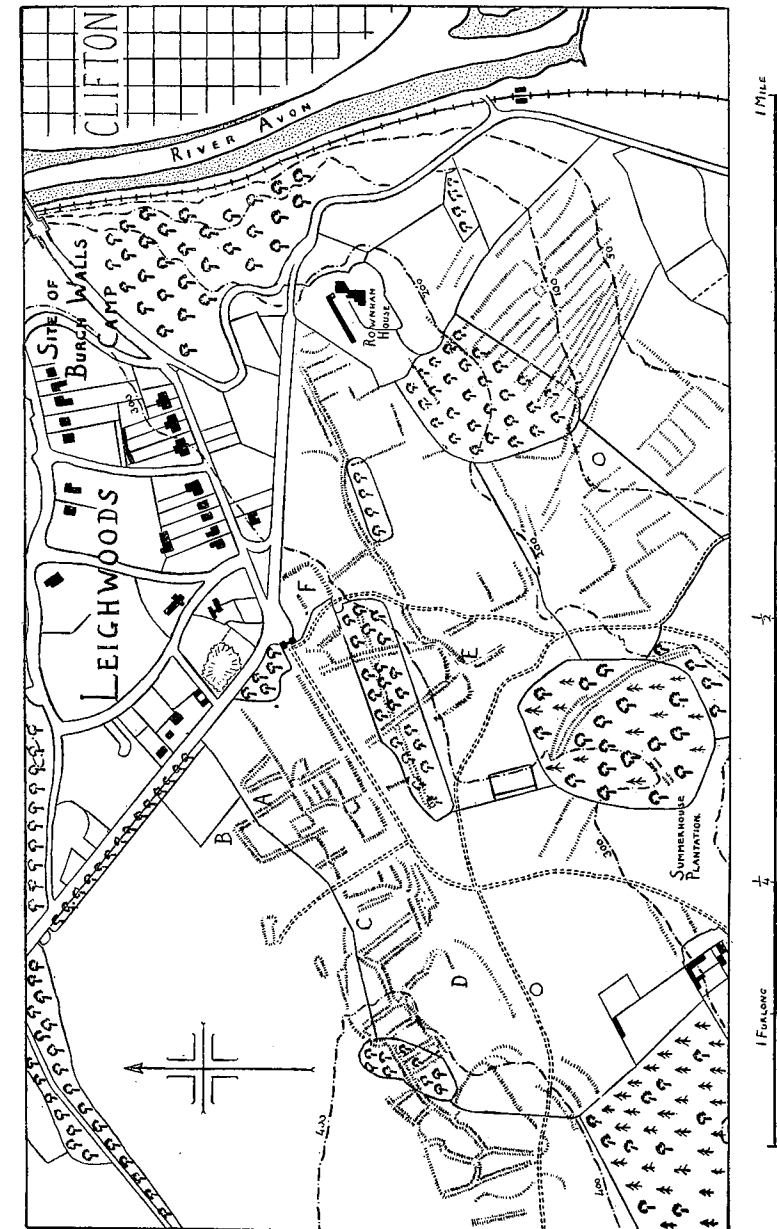


FIG. 19.—Sketch Map based on the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

Where the field boundaries run along the slope of the hill they are now represented by lynchets of varying height.

These fields do not show the regularity of the systems found on the more tractable chalk lands of Wessex, where the place of the stone bank is often taken by a ditch, but in most cases they conform to the limits of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres which are the regular sizes in Celtic agriculture.⁴ Pottery of Romano-British type has been picked up at both B and C, but it is probable that the nearest approach to a dwelling site among these fields was at C. Here there are a number of depressions in the ground with an average diameter of 20 feet, and the earth of the mole-heaps, which are significantly numerous here, is dark in colour, in strong contrast to the warm red of the earth in the other parts of the site. This is the site where nearly all the scraps of pottery have been found, and the former existence of one or two huts may be suspected. At D are a number of similar depressions, but there are no mole-heaps and so no pottery. Partial silting up of the holes left by the fall of trees may, however, explain these.

At E there is an interesting example of an old track, no longer in use, winding up the steep slope, and it is so closely associated with the Celtic system that it is probably contemporaneous with it. The fields do not extend any farther west than the limit of the map and the whole of the upper plateau of the Park to the western boundary wall shows no other traces of similar work. These untouched areas may have been grazing grounds.

The second important system of fields surviving in the Park is to be found on the slopes south of Rownham Hill above Bower Ashton. Here is a perfectly preserved set of Anglo-Saxon terraced strip fields along a slope which rises through a vertical height of 200 feet. It would be difficult to find a more significant relationship between antiquities in this district than that which exists between these fields and the Celtic system at the top of the hill. Together they provide a perfect epitome of the change wrought in the countryside of Britain by the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. The hilltop and upper slope cultivation of the Celts was abandoned and its place taken by the Teutonic open-field system with its characteristic strip system on the lower slopes, worked by folk who obviously lived in the river valley. Burgh Walls gives place to Bower Ashton.

⁴ E. Cecil Curwen, *Antiquity*, 1927, Vol. 1, p. 278, "Prehistoric Agriculture in Britain."

The description of these fields as Anglo-Saxon does not mean that they were used in the Anglo-Saxon period alone. They represent the agriculture of the people of Bower Ashton from the Dark Ages till the eighteenth century, when the system was given up for the modern enclosed type of farming. Centuries of ploughing have gone to produce the powerfully marked features of this system, which now resembles nothing so much as a giant flight of steps. An inspection of an Estate Map dated 1730 at the Ashton Court Estate Office shows that this area was enclosed by then, so that the system is likely to have gone out of cultivation in the seventeenth century or earlier.

Several other sites in the Park show signs of ancient agriculture. One is in the ploughed field west of New Barn, where there are some strongly developed lynchets of Celtic type, and others are situated on favourable sites between New Barn and Ashton Court. None of these is of much importance. The most interesting secondary consideration which arises from an examination of the Celtic field system is the light it throws upon the remarks about this area in Albany Major and E. J. Burrow's *The Mystery of Wansdyke*. In this work there is no reference of any kind to traces of primitive agriculture at the east end of Ashton Park, but several of the lynchets and banks are used to support a theory that a branch of Wansdyke ran from Pill Grove in the south-west corner of the Park to Burgh Walls Camp. An examination of this on the ground shows little foundation for the theory, and the more so since Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, of the Ordnance Survey, has examined the west end of the Wansdyke and can find no authentic trace of it west of Maes-Knoll at the east end of Dundry Hill. Mr. Burrow has apparently illustrated a square lynched field just below the Clifton Lodge (F) as "Remains of square earthwork." He has also accepted the uncorrected Ordnance Survey naming of the deep trench in Summerhouse Plantation as "Camp" and has illustrated this. Examination shows that this is no more than a quarry, probably some hundreds of years old and not unconnected with the older Ashton Court. The surface soil and useless disintegrated rock from the top have been thrown out on each side of the quarry and so give the deceptive effect of ramparts. It compares with the well-known fifteenth century quarries on the top of Dundry Hill. The semicircular earthwork which Mr. Burrow shows on the east side of Summerhouse Plantation either proves not to be in existence at all, or to consist of more dumped quarry refuse.

The author desires to express his gratitude to Mr. H. B. Napier for facilities given to examine the ground in Ashton Park.

