

# Round Barrows and Ring-Ditches in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

By E. T. LEEDS

THE enormous change that has come over the prospects of archaeological research through the results of air-photography has in few places been better demonstrated than in the upper Thames valley. Remains that in the past were dimly sensed by a mind hampered by the limitations of horizontal vision have now been unveiled by the soaring eye of the aeroplane-camera for all the world to see and read.

First admission to the secrets of crop- and contour-marks came through flights on behalf of the Ordnance Survey at the instance of Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, and it was the revelations of that work that led to exploration of a double ring-ditch at Radley, Berks., in 1931. Since then Major Allen has entered the field of aerial survey and hardly a week passes but that he adds some new discovery to the archaeological map of the district.

The outstanding feature of these revelations is perhaps the amazing number of circular enclosures indicated by a dark circumferential line that is produced by a greater depth of underlying soil, one that is particularly well defined on the rather hot gravel-terraces of the upper Thames. New examples of these enclosures are recorded year by year, as some suitable crop or favourable climatic condition betrays their presence on the ground. Many are known by isolated examples ; more are in small groups ; and in a few cases there are large aggregations, notably at Stanton Harcourt, Eynsham,<sup>1</sup> and North Stoke.

Something of their nature was already realized eighty years ago by Stephen Stone, when he explored the classic group at Stanlake,<sup>2</sup> but more recent observations in mutilated examples at Sutton Courtenay and elsewhere have suggested that the Stanlake discoveries were in some respects abnormal, and that further knowledge about these interesting remains was desirable.

For the most part the ring-ditches are true circles, and there is only a single ditch. Two oval enclosures can be cited, one at Stanlake, the other at Eynsham.

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquity*, VII, 293.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeologia*, XXXVII, 363.

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Occasionally the ditch, if circular, is duplicated, and in two cases, at Overy, near Dorchester, and at North Stoke, three concentric ditches have been observed.

In the following pages some account is given of the investigation of barrows and ring-ditches in the Oxford district during the last few years. As will be gathered from the sequel, some of those explored have proved to be the ditches surrounding burials of Bronze Age date, and as such they come within the category of disk-barrows. I have, however, used the term 'ring-ditch' advisedly, because these circular ditches observed from the air vary considerably in size, in some cases being so large that it seems impossible to believe that they can be barrows at all, and, as far as surface indications go, they cannot even by analogy be regarded as belonging to the Bronze Age. Only exploration can reveal their date. Furthermore, even examples of normal size cannot justifiably be called barrows until a burial has been found at their centre.

### RADLEY, BERKS.

(Disk-barrow with double ditch).

Among the more interesting groups of ring-ditches is one south of the River Thames at Abingdon and a second east of Abingdon in Radley parish



FIG. 1

### RADLEY, BERKS.

Map showing position of ring-ditches.

*Based on the 6-in. Ordnance Survey Map  
with the sanction of the Controller of  
H.M. Stationery Office.*

(PLATE I A, FIGS. 1 and 2). Part of the latter lies within a field still known as Barrow Hills, the name thus conserving a tradition, though all superficial traces of any mounds or mound have disappeared. Only under favourable

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conditions, such as extreme drought, is it possible to locate these rings on the ground by means of the stronger herbage or crops favoured by the deeper soil of the ditches. In this way two rings, which did not appear earlier in the year on one photograph which revealed a third, could be plainly traced in a crop of lucerne during the very dry autumn of 1930.

The third, that with which this account is immediately concerned, was clearly visible from the air in a pasture while in process of being cut for hay, and at the end of the year could still be detected by the longer grass which had grown up again over the ditches as compared with that on the other ground around and within them. It is hardly surprising that this should have been so, when it is stated that the turf, barely nine inches thick, here rests upon a bed of gravel which in many places is conglomerated to the consistency of rock—or what is generally known as 'callas.' I have said ditches, for this barrow unlike most of the others in the same field which have only a single ditch, was provided with two.

At the beginning of 1931 permission to investigate this barrow was kindly given to the Oxford University Archaeological Society by Mr. W. Docker-Drysdale, the owner of the land.

At first a large patch of ground was uncovered in the north-east corner of a square of about 125 feet (FIG. 2) enclosing the barrow, but all that was discovered was a multitude of holes about one foot deep and six inches in diameter, occurring, as indicated by the plan, all over the plot, without any apparent rhyme or reason. Whether they are merely natural holes or interstices in the gravel, or whether they are artificial (generations of stake-holes for sheep-hurdles come to one's mind), it has been quite impossible to decide. In the north-east corner of this area is shown a pit about five feet in diameter and two feet deep; it proved to be absolutely barren.

The second piece of work consisted in the clearance of a broad strip from east to west across the diameter of the two ditches. The outer ditch was found to measure ninety-eight feet, the inner fifty-five feet in diameter, measured from their middle lines. The ditches themselves, as the sections nos. 2-5 (FIG. 2) show, varied somewhat in width, largely owing to the nature of the ground in which they were excavated. The two sections recorded in the outer ditch represent the two ends of the portion examined in the strip laid bare across the barrow. Their width seems to have been determined by the relation of the rock to the surface-soil. At the east end of the eastern section (no. 3) the rock did not rise so close to the surface as at the west, so that the ditch was begun a little farther out. In the final event, however, its width, about four feet, approximated closely to that of the western section. In depth this ditch here varied between four feet one inch and four feet five inches over a length of ten

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feet. In the two sections of the inner ditch a greater difference occurred, again due to the variation in the material encountered below the surface-soil. In the eastern section (no. 4) the rock again set a limit to the energies of the excavators, for, though they managed to remove part of the obstruction in the upper layer of the west side, they evidently desisted at a lower level. The original

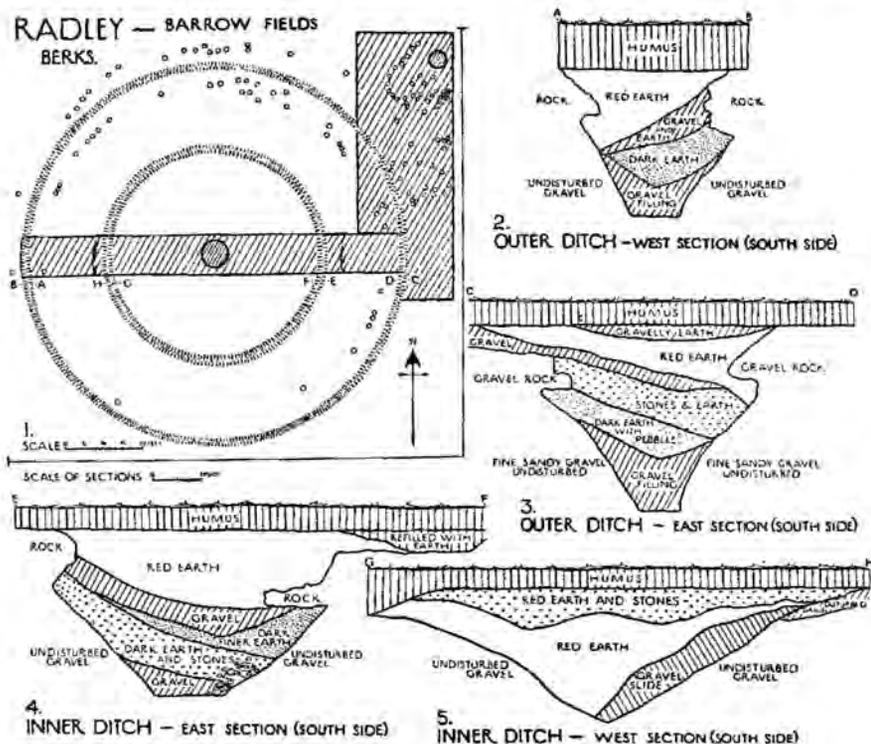


FIG. 2

RADLEY, BERKS.

Disk-barrow with double ditch.

width planned appears to have been five feet, but the western section (no. 5) of the ditch seems to show a planned width of eight feet and consequently the shelf on the inner face of the eastern section may have been part of the original scheme, eventually defeated by the unforeseen presence of the rock. As is known, however, from other ditches of a similar kind (see p. 14 below), their excavation was executed by gangs, and the work of one gang was apt to vary

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quite appreciably from that of another. This is demonstrated also in the varying depths of this inner ditch. In the eastern section a depth of four feet was reached; in the western the diggers were content with three feet. The eastern part of the ditch had a flat bottom, one foot six inches wide: on the western side the ditch is a simple V-shaped trench.

The sections showed that the upcast from the original excavation was thrown out on to the outer side of the ditches. The eastern sections (nos. 3 and 4, FIG. 2) of both ditches had an original silting at their base; above this was a layer of dark earth sloping down from the outer face of the ditch. This had the appearance partly of soil accumulated above the silting, partly of material which had slid down from the surrounding mound. The layers above this were undoubtedly of this second kind, and, to judge from section 3, may well be remains of the original mound thrown back into the ditch. If so, these remains according to the evidence of section 2 must have varied considerably in quantity. The east section of the inner ditch tells a similar tale: gravel silt at the bottom, with some rock fallen from below the rock-shelf on the inner face; above this a slide of dark earth mixed with stones, followed by finer earth, which here may be soil accumulated while the ditch remained open. Above this was shovelled back some of the gravel originally cast out of the ditch.

In the western section of the inner ditch (no. 5) no silting could be observed, though a very small part of the gravel slide might be such. On the analogy of section 4 the gravel slide must indicate the original material thrown back, and if so, it becomes hard to understand why this section should have remained so nearly empty, while others had long been in process of being partially refilled in one way or another. I can hardly pretend to an ability to solve all the riddles that these sections present.

One and all, however, exhibit a common feature, namely a fine, red earth in the upper layer, a material which has now almost come to be regarded by us as the hall-mark of the refilling of Bronze Age trenches in the Oxford district. We have encountered this filling at Sutton Courtenay,<sup>1</sup> at Cassington (see p. 15) and elsewhere. It usually constitutes the uppermost layer only of such refilling, but in some cases the whole refilling can be of this nature. Its chief characteristics are its fineness, with an almost complete absence of stones or pebbles, and its consistently red colour, dark when moist, but drying to a bright tinge. It has much the nature of what one might expect from the undisturbed deposition of material obtained from burning a large twitch-heap. Clearly it can have nothing to do with any material thrown out from the original excavations, and equally it appears in almost every case as the final levelling of the ditch.

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia*, LXXIII, 151 and LXXVI, 59, 64, 71, 153 and 170.

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Reference to the plan will show in the large plot of ground first explored several holes apparently following the curve of the outer ditch along its outer edge and others more irregularly distributed close to the inner edge. In order to ascertain whether these were merely a chance occurrence or no, a strip around the entire circumference on both sides of the ditch was laid bare. The results are set out on the plan. It will be seen that holes occur with a fair degree of consistency round three-quarters of the inner circumference; their absence in the south-west quadrant is to be attributed to the sandy nature of the ground in that quarter; all trace of them had there been obliterated if they ever existed.

Similar holes appeared also round the outer edge of the northern half of the circle. If the upcast was, as there is good reason to believe, heaped up around its outer edge, such holes might have held stakes intended to prevent the upcast from slipping back into the ditch; but this fails to account for similar stakes round the inner edge. The questionable artificiality of these holes in the first plot explored may also hold good for the rest, and what we discovered may be a mere fraction of what might have come to light if the entire surface of the ground around and between the ditches had been laid bare. One reservation, however, has to be recorded. No holes of this kind were found near the inner ditch.

No relics of any sort were found in the ditches nor on any of the intervening ground, until a large pit came to light at the very centre of the circle. It measured five feet in diameter and three feet in depth, and was filled to the brim with earth heavily impregnated with charcoal. Even the gravel round the lip of the pit was burnt to a bright red colour, evidence of considerable heat at that point. From among the filling were recovered cremated bones, reduced for the most part to quite small pieces. Fortunately, however, it was possible for Dr. L. H. Dudley Buxton to recognize the sex as that of a female, an interesting fact in view of the numerous cases where disk-barrows have proved to be the burial-places of women.

In the way of relics there were, first, a small bronze knife or razor (PLATE II B). It is of broad, leaf shape, apparently originally furnished with a tang, though this is now wanting; it measures  $1\frac{7}{16}$  inches in length and  $\frac{11}{16}$  inch in width and may be compared with the Winterslow and Priddy razors.<sup>1</sup> Remains of a second thin, bronze blade were too fragmentary to permit its original form to be determined. Lastly comes a small vase (PLATE II A),  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches high,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter across the mouth,  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches at its greatest girth and  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches across the base. It is of biconoid form, the upper section smaller than the lower. At the junction of the two portions is a slight moulding, furnished with four vertically perforated ears set at regular intervals. The

<sup>1</sup> Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements*, pp. 216-217, figs. 265-6.

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vase was found at a depth of two feet six inches, but, in spite of the traces of intense heat which the pit displayed, shows not the least sign of contact with fire. If the problems of the ditches seem insoluble, the depth at which this unburnt vase was found taken in conjunction with the burnt lip of the pit offers one equally difficult to interpret.

In form the vase accords with several of those included by Abercromby in his Rimbury type, though it differs considerably from the type specimens;<sup>1</sup> these have a finger-tip moulding round the shoulder and their biconical form is far less pronounced. The Radley vase, along with others included by Abercromby under this heading, *e.g.*, 437 and 438 from Dorset, may fairly claim to antecede the Rimbury specimens, inasmuch as it retains in a greater measure a reminiscence of the overhanging rim from which the biconoid form is ultimately derived. A later stage of the Radley vase appears in such uncouth shapes as Abercromby's 441 and 442, decorated with bosses sometimes perforated, sometimes solid. An even ruder form occurred in the Long Wittenham urn-field,<sup>2</sup> being there closely associated with large cylindrical urns decorated, like the Rimbury type proper, with a finger-tip moulding. Typologically the Radley vase must be earlier than the Rimbury specimens which in turn antedate the urns and accessory vessels from Long Wittenham, and, though it would be hazardous to date all disk-barrows to one restricted period, it is probable that they are earlier than the urn-fields, since Wiltshire examples of this type of barrow have produced some of the segmented faience beads which are generally assigned to the late fourteenth or to the thirteenth century B.C.<sup>3</sup>

### CASSINGTON, OXON.

(Double ring-ditch).

In the field which contained the beaker-cemetery,<sup>4</sup> and only a short distance westwards, a double ring-ditch like that surrounding the burial-pit of the disk-barrow at Radley was explored (FIG. 3). One half of the circumference of both ditches was excavated and the intervening surface was cleared down to the gravel, but no trace of any pit in the centre came to light. There was a gap in the western sector of the inner ditch, and the ditch itself south of this gap made a slight swing outwards, forming a spur (see further, p. 22).

The ditches varied in character. The outer, as exposed after removal of the top-soil, was barely one foot deep and never more than three feet wide.

<sup>1</sup> Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, pls. xcii-xciii, nos. 425 a-f.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, ix, 153-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Journ. Egyptian Archaeology*, i, 18; Evans, *Palace of Minos*, i, 490.

<sup>4</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, xiv, 268 ff.

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Though evidently in the first instance set out on a regular plan, to which the bottom of the ditch actually conformed, its margins had assumed an irregular, almost festooned, outline, such as can only be ascribed to its excavation by gangs of workers. A gang starting with a hole of the proper width fell away in subsequent performance, so that both depth and width decreased, until on approaching the point at which the next gang had begun work, it found itself compelled to deepen and widen its section in order to effect a proper junction with the next.

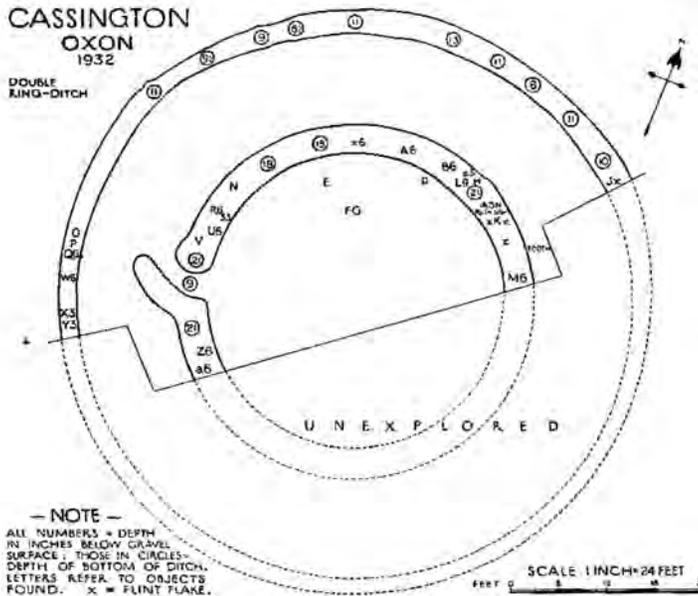


FIG. 3  
CASSINGTON, OXON.  
Double ring-ditch.

Sometimes the process of deepening was not carried out, thus leaving a drop into the pit from which the next gang had begun its section. The sections reflect in their varying lengths the numerical strength or the different energy of the parties engaged upon them.

The inner ditch was a more considerable piece of work, measuring at the surface of the gravel four feet in width and eighteen to twenty-one inches in depth into the gravel. Here again gang-work could be detected, but it was not so obvious as in the outer ditch.

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The shallowness of the outer ditch, precluded any reliable observations in regard to the direction from which the refilling, a consistent mixture of soil and gravel, had been thrown into it. But in the inner ditch this was plainly visible. The upper layer of filling to a depth of about nine inches consisted of a fine, dark red earth, entirely free from any gravel. Its nature agreed very closely with that of the filling encountered at Radley and at Sutton Courtenay (see p. 11) in ditches and pits, some of which could be assigned to the Bronze Age. Whether the same date is applicable to the ditch at Cassington is doubtful. The lower part of the inner ditch was filled with earthy gravel that had become very compact. As seen in section, it had a distinct slope from the outer edge towards the inner, similar to that observed in the ditches of the Radley barrow. It may be concluded that, as at Radley, the upcast from the ditches had been originally mounded on the outer edge of the ditch and thrown back from that side on top of a small amount of original silting. At what period this was done it is difficult to decide; a flint scraper (N) and flakes (O, Q<sub>1-2</sub>, W),<sup>1</sup> presumably of Bronze Age date, could have been thrown back with the lower filling. That the ditches were still visible in the Roman period or even later seems certain.

Most of the top soil covering the northern half had been removed before exploration began, but below a strip which we ourselves had to remove were found an iron rush-light holder and sherds of Roman pottery on the edge of the inner ditch, also pieces of tiles, mediæval or later. From its soft black paste with red exterior and from its form a sherd (K) is probably Romano-British. A-E, H, R, S, and V represent sherds of Roman wares found in the upper red filling, and of these A-D, S and V apparently belong to the same vase, a roughish grey fabric with trellis-decoration. Others included the base of a small-footed vase of soft red ware (H), a sherd of a larger vase of the same ware (R), and a sherd of a hard red ware with a purplish surface (E). The deepest level, namely nine inches, just below the red layer, belongs to L, a very small sherd of soft, coarse ware, not impossibly Bronze Age in date.

### CLIFTON HAMPDEN, OXON.

(Disk-barrow).

In 1932 Major Allen detected several ring-ditches in a field half a mile south of Fullamoor Farm, Clifton Hampden. One of them was explored in January 1933 with his help and by permission of Mr. Keen, the tenant of the farm. An area (FIG. 4), sixty-three feet in diameter, was surrounded by a ditch, twelve feet wide at gravel level and four feet deep, with a slope of a little

<sup>1</sup> The figures accompanying the letters give the depth in inches from the top of the gravel; where no number is given, the object came from the first few inches.

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over  $45^{\circ}$ . At the centre was a pit in the gravel, twenty inches in diameter and fourteen inches deep. Around the pit, but not concentrically disposed, were seven holes (one shown with a ring round it was less certain than the rest). On the north side the holes were eight inches deep, while those on the south

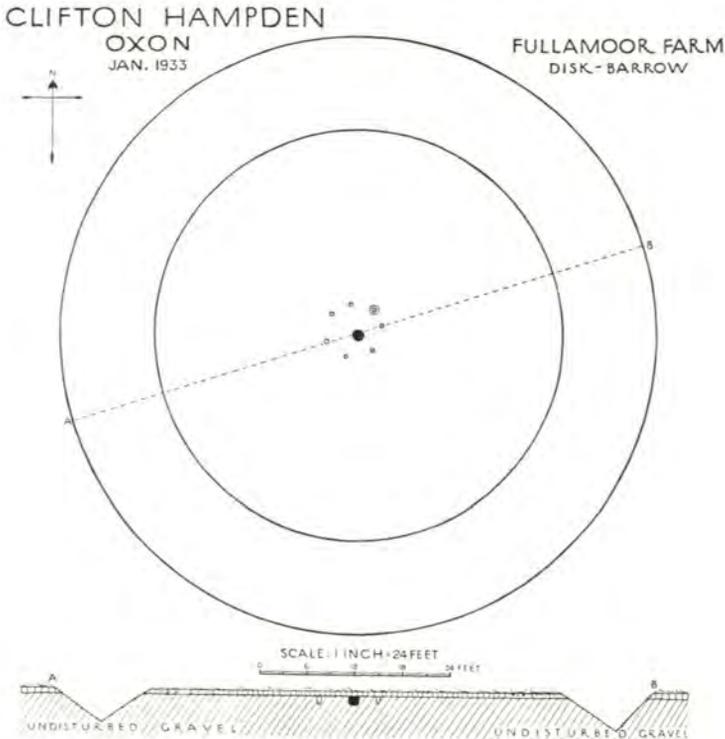


FIG. 4  
CLIFTON HAMPDEN, OXON.  
Disk-barrow.

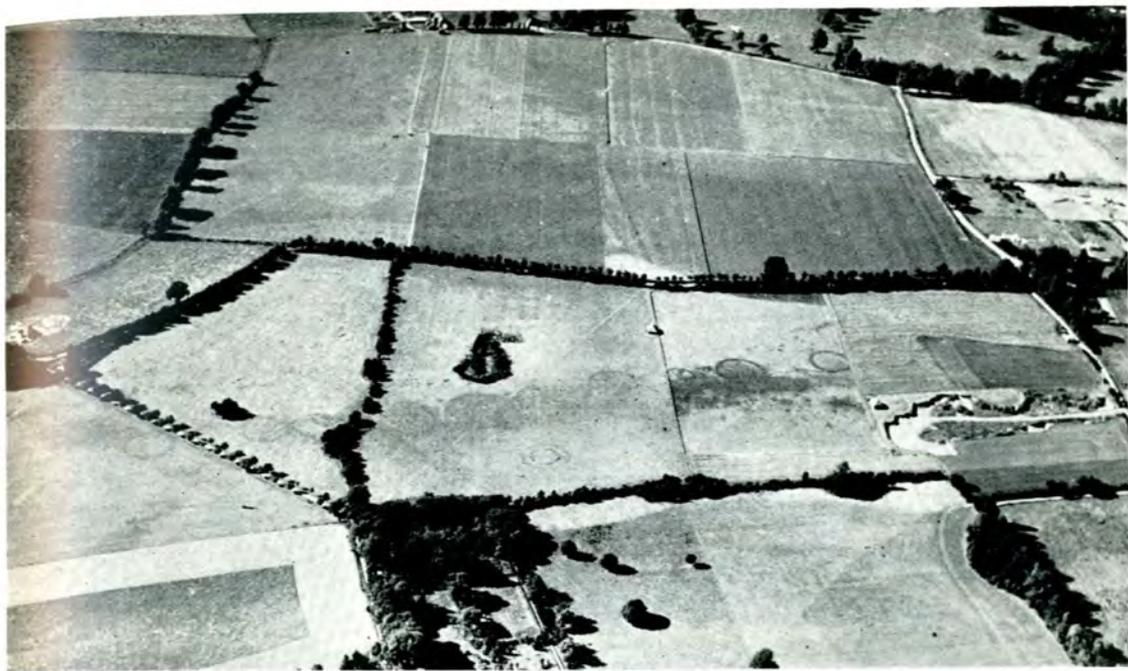
side were only six inches. The pit contained remains of a cremation-interment, but no relics.

NORTH STOKE, OXON.

(Disk-barrow with double ditch).

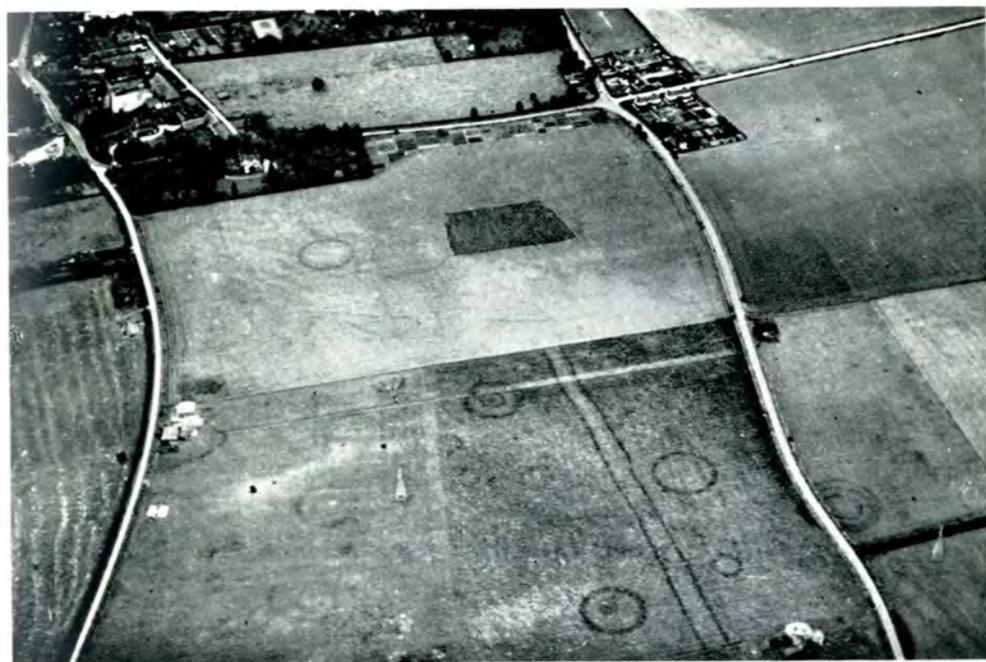
South of the village, in the large field bordering the west side of the road leading towards Goring, Major Allen recorded several ring-ditches (PLATE I B)

PLATE I



A. RADLEY, BERKS.

Ring-ditches at Barrow Hills. The example described on p. 8 *et seq.* lies NE. of the garden in the foreground.



B. NORTH STOKE, OXON.  
Ring-ditches and parallel ditches.

PLATE II



A, B. RADLEY, BERKS.  
Accessory vase and bronze 'razor' from the cremation-burial  
in the disk-barrow. Scale,  $\frac{1}{2}$ .



C. ABINGDON, BERKS.  
Food-vessel from the floor of the barrow. Scale,  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

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some of them double, and in one case with a dark spot at its centre like that at Radley. Also two long, roughly parallel ditches with what appear to be square enclosures at each end.<sup>1</sup> The triple ring-ditch mentioned above (p. 8) lies in the field on the east side of the road and belongs to the same group; the road

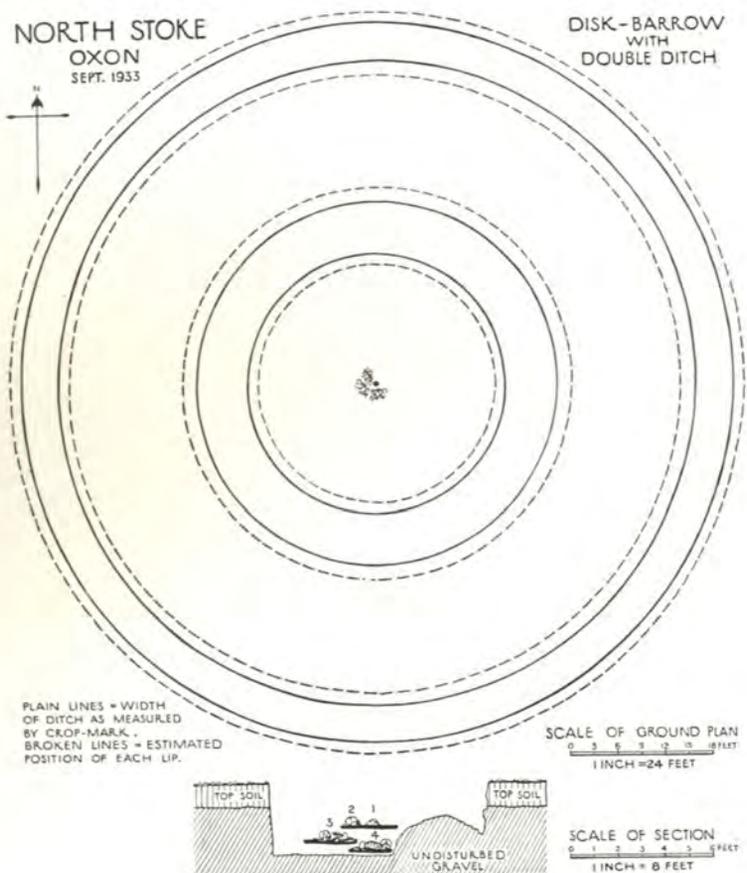


FIG. 5  
NORTH STOKE, OXON.  
Disk-barrow with double ditch.

partly encroaches upon its circumference. In September 1933 the double ring-ditch with central spot was partially examined. The area included by the outer ditch was, as shown in solid lines on the plan (FIG. 5), eighty feet in

<sup>1</sup> On these alternative interpretations see *Antiquaries Journal*, xiv, 414.

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diameter and that within the inner ditch was thirty-two feet, while the ditches were respectively eleven and seven feet wide. These measurements were taken on the ground from the crop-marks, in this case lucerne, which in a dry season like 1933 showed up the position of such ditches almost better than any other vegetation would have done. Sections were dug to find the ditches on the west side, but only with partial success, because, except on the inner face of the inner ditch, it was impossible to establish a definite edge, the transition from disturbed to undisturbed gravel being too gradual. This difficulty arises from the fact that the gravel at this site is very coarse and contains a large admixture of flint detritus from the Chilterns, at the base of whose foothills the field lies. Judging from the slope of the inner ditch, the real width of the ditch may have been nine feet six inches, and its depth three feet. The outer ditch had been filled up with top-soil containing large flints, like those in the gravel itself, but, so far as could be judged, the original width of the ditch was sixteen feet, while its depth was four feet. Major Allen comments that crop-marks are likely to indicate about two-thirds of the width of disturbed soil in the case of ditches with sloping sides. At the centre of the circle was a cremated burial of a young person of uncertain sex placed upon a layer of carbonized matter that occupied a space about two feet six inches in diameter at a depth of some fifteen inches below the surface of the field. The remains had not been burnt *in situ*, but had been carefully collected for burial. Even allowing for the flinty nature of the top-soil and the consequent shallowness of ploughing, it is remarkable that the cremation when uncovered should have been found absolutely undisturbed. No clearly defined pit could be detected. Alongside the cremation and at the same level were the skull and jaws of a child which was cutting its second teeth at the time of death. Lower down, and to one side of the cremation, at one foot six inches, lay an almost intact skeleton of an infant lying in a contracted position with head to WNW. and facing ENE.; the first teeth were only partly cut. Still lower, at two feet six inches, was a third skeleton of a child lying with its face to the east and in so contracted a posture as to occupy no more than some twenty square inches. All the burials lay, like the cremations, upon a layer of carbonized material (? charcoal).

Among the cremated bones was one fragment which showed a green stain, possibly due to contact with bronze, but no sign of an implement or other object was seen.

### ABINGDON, BERKS.

(Barrow with ring-ditch).

The presence of this barrow (FIG. 6), of which no indication could be observed on the surface of the ground, was detected in the sewer-trench in the

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centre of Saxton Road.<sup>1</sup> Lines of gravel could be seen in the soil, here much darker in colour than elsewhere along the trench, and also the sections of V-shaped ditches bounding the stretch of ground so composed. These when compared by measurement on either side of the sewer-trench showed a definite curve, and evidently belonged to a circular ditch enclosing a burial-place. No sign of this ditch had been revealed by air-photography owing to the absence of a suitable crop above it, though other examples of such ditches appeared on

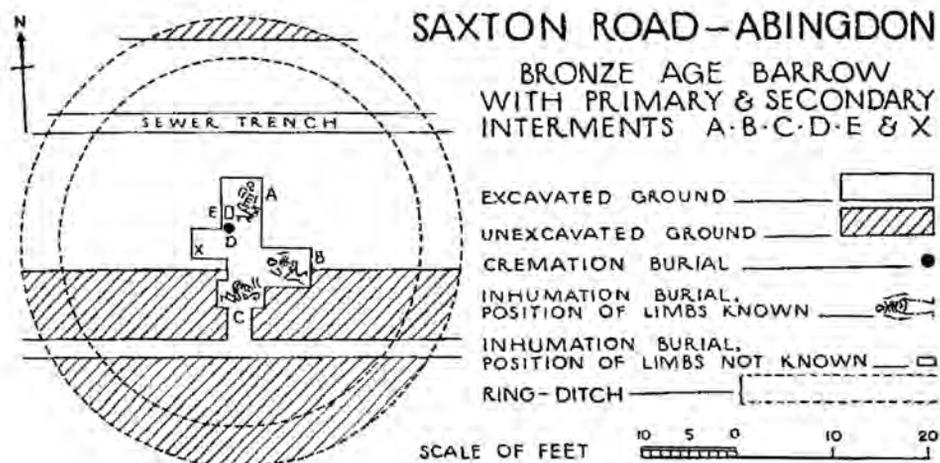


FIG. 6

ABINGDON, BERKS.  
Barrow with ring-ditch.

air-photographs both to the north-west, towards the angle of the Caldecote and the main Newbury road, and also north-east towards the St. Helen's end of the Caldecote road.

That the ditch enclosed a barrow was evident from the section exposed, but it is uncertain whether the tumulus was high like many examples in Wiltshire. If originally taller than at the present day, it must have been deliberately reduced for convenience of cultivation. Its summit coincided with a ridge running both north and south from it and at all points there was a distinct fall from the ridge eastwards corresponding to a dip in the gravel, though this dip reached its maximum some distance from the eastern edge of the circle. The height above the

<sup>1</sup> For the exact location of this barrow see E. T. Leeds and D. B. Harden, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon*, figs. 1-3.

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gravel at the centre was three feet eight inches, and at forty feet away in each direction, east and west, the difference was no more than about two feet.

After the road had been cut through the bank, its south side revealed a section of the tumulus a little south of its centre (for position see FIG. 6). Here there was a superficial layer of top-soil darker in colour than the surrounding land. It had only a gentle slope near the centre of the barrow, but at its outer edges it dropped rapidly to the limits of the mound and overflowed the ditch on each side. This upper layer was succeeded by a layer of rammed gravel of varying thickness. Eastwards from the centre it was fairly constant in depth for about fourteen feet and fell gently in that direction; westwards it increased in thickness for some ten feet with a deep pocket below the last two feet. At both ends the slope fell rapidly and the layer splayed out where the ditch began to a horizontal width of four feet six inches, at original gravel level. Below this covering layer the mound was composed of dark, tough earth, except for a width of nine or ten feet from the centre in all directions where it was interlaid with a second layer of gravel deposited at a height of twenty-one inches above the natural gravel. It was six inches thick at the middle but faded away rapidly at each end. A gap in its thickness east of the centre was due to excavation for a secondary burial, the position of which fell within this section. The gravel employed for these rammed layers was not the white, evenly bedded, shelly material below the mound, but a redder gravel that must have been brought from some other source.

The tumulus inside the ditch measured forty-four feet in diameter and the ditch was three feet six inches wide and had been dug nearly two feet deep into the gravel. The centre of the mound was ascertained by a check-trench driven from east to west, south of the centre, which was then found to lie within the area of the projected road. As this was to be excavated to a depth of three feet six inches, permission was granted to search for the interment, if any such existed.

A short trench was driven northwards from the check-trench to the estimated centre, below which point at a depth of one foot, a small pit (FIG. 6) one foot in diameter and two feet deep came to light containing the cremated bones of an adult and carbonized material, while two feet north of the pit, at a depth of twenty-two inches, lay the remains of a child's skeleton (E, FIG. 6).

Four further interments, A-C and X were found within the area of the mound :—

A. Below the cremation the outline of a grave six feet long and three feet six inches wide appeared, orientated NE. to SW. It had been excavated one foot nine inches into the natural gravel and contained the skeleton of an adult man in crouching position on its left side facing SE., the right hand bent

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up to the face, the left arm along the side, the pelvic region more or less supine. The legs were sharply flexed, the distance between the top of the skull and the tips of the right toes being three feet ten inches. The grave contained no relics.

B. Two feet east of the N.-S. trench and along the south edge of the road was found the skeleton of an adult woman, lying at a depth of eighteen inches on the lower band of rammed gravel which had been partly removed to make the grave. The skeleton lay on its left side orientated WNW.-ESE. facing S., with both hands up to the face and the legs tightly flexed. No relics accompanied the burial, but on the pelvis were fragments of an infant's skull, suggesting that the woman died before or during childbirth.

C. Immediately south of the line of the road, in the N.-S. trench was a skeleton lying in a grave three feet six inches long and two feet six inches wide cut into the rammed gravel. The body rested on its left side, orientated ESE.-WNW., facing S., in a very contracted position, with the legs tightly flexed. It belonged to a full-grown adult woman. The bones were excellently preserved. At the foot of the grave, beyond the feet of the skeleton, were traces of a thin layer of wood, about eight inches long, three inches wide, and half an inch thick; much slighter traces of wood were observed at the head of the grave.

X. In a shallow hole in the gravel three feet W. of the N.-S. trench and two feet N. of the south face of the road was a broken food-vessel, which has since been restored (PLATE II C). It is light red in colour, undecorated, rude in fabric, with a flat, inwardly bevelled rim and a slight constriction externally below the rim; the walls diminish in girth to a small base. It measures  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches in height, 6 inches in diameter across the mouth,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches at its greatest diameter, and 3 inches across the base.

No further exploration was possible owing to building operations; the tumulus may have contained other interments, but enough was discovered to establish the existence of a barrow of the Bronze Age.

## CONCLUSIONS

The date of these ring-ditches is difficult to estimate and any attempt must start from a comparison with other local finds. Clearly none of the ditches belongs to the initial period of the Bronze Age in the Oxford district. Typical burials of that phase have now been put on record at several sites, notably in recent excavations at Cassington, where, as elsewhere, some were accompanied by beakers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, XIV, 268.

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For comparative purposes we can derive no dating evidence from the Cassington double-ring-ditch and we may then begin with Abingdon. Here we have traces of a definite mound, a primary inhumation-burial, two or three secondary burials, and uppermost a cremation. There was also a small pot of food-vessel type (PLATE II C) on the floor of the mound. Radley produced a cremation performed *in situ*, accompanied by a pot (PLATE II A) definitely later in type than that from Abingdon. Lastly come the disk-barrows at North Stoke and Clifton Hampden with no signs of a mound and with primary cremations carried out elsewhere and the ashes afterwards deposited within the circle.

In short the group seems to illustrate a sequence from burial to cremation, and, since the Radley burial resembles others in which were found imported faience beads that can be approximately dated to the thirteenth century B.C., the Abingdon tumulus may represent the close of Bronze Age I, about 1500 B.C. or a little later, while North Stoke and Clifton Hampden are in all probability later than Radley.

One further point calls for notice. It seems hardly credible that so extensive preparations for burial should have been made at Cassington or at Sutton Courtenay (see *infra*) and that burials should not have ensued. Unfortunately it was not possible to explore the whole of the Cassington circle, but attention may be drawn to the gap in the inner ditch, with its curious spur-ditch at one side (p. 13). The spur has a faint analogy to the arrangement in another enclosure found near by<sup>1</sup> which again contained no trace of an interment. It may be recalled also that nothing but hollows with a few flints were found at the centre of one of the Sutton Courtenay ring-ditches.<sup>2</sup>

Is it then certain that these large ditches were primarily excavated for funerary purposes, and may they not originally have encircled a hut or huts, and in some cases have been cleaned up and refilled, a species of 'killing,' before the burial of the owner? The disorderly agglomerations of circles at Eynsham, Stanton Harcourt, etc., are all highly suggestive of native villages. It must also be remembered that, though one was used at Stanlake<sup>3</sup> to receive a large number of cremations, they were restricted to one half of the enclosure and the corresponding segment of the ditch, an 'ustrinum' occurring at one point in the same half of the ditch. This looks far more like secondary use of a deserted ring-ditch enclosure, since nothing similar was found in others of the group. How too can the generally haphazard disposition of the circles be reconciled with the orderly arrangement at Radley? There the circles run in two straight lines (FIG. 1)

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, XIV, 269, pl. xxxii and fig. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeologia*, LXXVI, 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 365, pl. ix.

## ROUND BARROWS AND RING DITCHES

close together between the lane leading south to Thrup Farm from the Radley-Abingdon road on the east and westwards for 900 yards to the edge of the Abingdon Fishponds at the parish boundary. The northern line contains eleven circles, all single : the southern consists of five, of which three have double ditches. This line actually occupies a greater length than the other. Finally, though the circles explored at Radley, Clifton Hampden and North Stoke all showed a central spot on the photograph, by far the greater number, especially those with a single ditch, show no spot at all.