Further Excavations in Barrow Hills Field, Radley, Berks.

By E. T. LEEDS

Ring-ditch 16.1

"N the first volume of this Journal a report was published of the exploration of one (No. 14) of the large group of circular enclosures revealed by cropmarks in Barrow Hills field, Radley, on Major Allen's excellent photographs. The first photograph (PLATE VI, A) was later supplemented by others taken on a larger scale. One result was the detection of a third double ring (No. 15, FIG. 7), which did not appear in the first photograph, near the eastern end of the southern row; it can be seen (PLATE VI, B) as a soil-mark on the ploughland to the right of the white patch representing the gravel-pit. Major Allen also called my attention to the easternmost circle of the southern row, because, both in the photograph taken in June, 1934 (PLATE VI, B), and again in another taken in December, 1935, when the ground was covered by a light fall of snow, there appeared to be a distinct break in the western side of the circle, a feature not discernible in any other member of the group (compare, for example, No. 11, which appears on the same photograph). In passing it may be useful to note that the mottled area below the gravel-pit² to the left of the two single-ditch circles marks the site of an old gravel-pit, now to some extent levelled and returned to grass. The anomaly of a gap in one of these ring-ditches was one that could only be tested by excavation, and once more thanks are due to Mr.W. Dockar-Drysdale for permission readily granted to explore the site, a permission all the more appreciated owing to the length of time during which the ground eventually remained open. No opportunity, however, presented itself until July 1936, when during three days the members of the Oxford University Unemployed Camp at Eynsham drove an exploratory trench from east to west, so as to strike the gap at the west end, and to ascertain, if possible, the diameter of the area within the ditch. It was clear that at no point could a complete diameter be

¹ For purposes of reference I have in figure 7 numbered the circles shown on the plan (Oxoniensia, 1, 8, fig. 1) consecutively from west to east, beginning with the northern row (Nos. 1-11) and returning to the southern row (Nos. 12-16).

² The photograph is taken looking southwards.

measured, which would include both inner and outer lips of the ditch, since the ditch had suffered considerable mutilation not only over nearly the whole southern half, where the gravel-diggers in recent times had demolished its entire outer edge,¹ but also by the older workings along the north-eastern quadrant.



SKETCH-MAP SHOWING POSITION OF RING-DITCHES IN BARROW HILLS FIELD, RADLEY, BERKS.

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

In the exploratory trench the gravel lay at from 2 to $2\frac{1}{4}$ ft. below the modern surface over a large part of its length, but towards the eastern end it was found to slope downwards to the inner lip of the ditch. On the west a complete section of the V-shaped ditch was obtained; it measured 21 ft. in width and $6\frac{1}{4}$ ft. in depth. The trench at the point at which the section was cut passed right through the gap seen on the photograph. The gap proved to be some photographic illusion; on the ground no difference was visible, except that there was

¹ It appears as a rounded promontory in the northern face of the gravel-pit.

PLATE VI



A. The two lines of ring-ditches in Barrow Hills field, looking N.B. Nearer view of ring-ditches 11, 16, etc., looking S.

RADLEY, BERKS. Phh. Major G. W. G. Allen. PLATE VII







C



Е



A, C. Food-vessels (pp. 33, 35) from eccentric pockets in ring-ditch 16 at Radley. Scale ¹/₄.
B. Beads of amber, shale and faience, and a bronze knife and awl from the central burial (p. 35) in ring-ditch 16 at Radley. Scale ³/₄.
D, E. Food-vessel and cinerary urn (p. 37) from the urn-field at Pearith's Farm, Long Wittenham. Scale ¹/₃.

BRONZE AGE FINDS FROM RADLEY AND LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS.

Phh. Ashmolean Museum,

a faint indication of a cart-track along the line followed by the trench, suggesting that consolidation of the ground over the ditch has prevented the grass from growing stronger and darker, as it is able to do over the rest of the ditch. The inner lip of the ditch was also struck on its northern side in a second trench, but at a point where mutilation had taken place. Typical filling of the ditch will be described later.

In the north face of the main trench a small patch of charcoal-tinged earth was revealed at A (FIG. 8); this proved to be the southern side of a small pit, $13\frac{1}{2}$ ins. deep and 18 ins. in diameter at the top, diminishing to 12 ins. at the bottom. The mouth of the pit was covered by 12 ins. of top-soil, and its bottom lay $1\frac{1}{2}$ ins. above the untouched gravel subsoil, so that the entire pit lay in what was in Bronze Age times the humus overlying the gravel.¹ In the pit, lying in pieces on its side, was the food-vessel (PLATE VII, A),² surrounded by fairly thick charcoal, but unacccompanied by any other objects and with no signs of burial; it has been subjected to considerable heat. The vase is grey in colour, and is decorated with eight horizontal cord-impressed lines round the upper part of the external wall and three more on the concave, internally bevelled lip.

The Oxford University Archaeological Society continued the investigation in the Michaelmas Term, 1936, and at intervals during 1937 and early in 1938. A large portion of the area (FIG. 8) within the ditch was explored and several sections were cut across the ditch. The plan surveyed by Mr. J. J. Leeming reveals that the ring is not a true circle, but an ellipse, measuring 100 ft. from SE. to NW. and 133 ft. from NE. to SW. Two sections, (FIG. 8, xx, yy), the one NW. the other NE., will suffice to give a fair idea of the filling.

(a) Section xx. The bottom was brown silt with a few stones, 18 ins. thick at the middle; in this at 5 ft. from the surface was found a Romano-British sherd. Above the brown silt the ditch was filled with a mixture of earth and gravel apparently thrown back from the inner side of the ditch in the process of levelling, since the stony character of the filling was more pronounced on the inner slope. It was noted that the stony filling even extended beyond the lips of the ditch in each direction.

(b) Section YY. In this section the outer edge had been mutilated by earlier workings and a gravelly streak observed in the upper filling near that edge could be ascribed to the same disturbance. The upper filling otherwise resembled that of the NW. section with the same accentuation of stoniness on the inner side. The lower filling, which was very gravelly, must represent a

¹ It is not certain that this increased thickness of soil is to be attributed to the former presence of a tumulus ; it may equally be due to the ridge of a land in ploughing.

^{*} Ashmolean Museum, 1936.336 : H. 31 ins. D. 51 ins.

quick silting of the original upcast before the ditch and banks or mound were covered by a growth of grass.

In the SW. and SE. quadrants the inner lip of the ditch was partially explored for distances of 20 ft.; traces of charcoal and burnt bones were noted in the humus in the SW. quadrant, and there too at one point $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep some



FIG. 8

sherds of soft black ware were found on the inner slope; they are possibly Anglo-Saxon.

The discoveries made in the interior of the ring are here recorded in order of date, continuing the record from July, 1936 (p. 33) :---

B. 15 and 22 Nov., 1936. A cooking-hole, 18 ins. in diameter, filled with earth and charcoal. The top of the pit lay 1 ft. below the modern surface, at which level the ground close to the hole was much redder than elsewhere in the

vicinity, and over an area of 5 ft. by $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. was dotted with dark spots, 2 ins. in diameter, which could be traced for some inches downwards. These, when plotted, appeared to have no regular plan, and if they had any connexion with the cooking-hole at all (one about 1 ft. from the edge of the hole was filled with charcoal), can only have served for sticks driven in at will for one purpose or another. The greater part of the pit was 9 ins. deep; a small portion, however, at the south side was 6 ins. deeper, and here the charcoal was denser. The lower part of the pit was lined with reddened pebbles of no great size : no other remains were found either in or near the hole.

C. 15 Nov., 1936. A cremation-burial. The top lay only 9 ins. below the modern surface; it occupied a hole, roughly oval, measuring $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. by 1 ft., but pointed towards one end. The upper layer consisted of burnt bones; below this to a depth of 19 ins. were thick ash and charcoal. The layer of bones was not symmetrical with the area covered by the charcoal-filled pit, but overlapped its northern edge. The cremation had presumably been carried out on the spot, but some collection of the ashes had taken place on the completion of the rite. The bones are those of an adult.

D. 14 Feb., 1937. A small pit, 2 ft. in diameter and 1 ft. deep. Lying on its side in a charcoal layer was a small vase (PLATE VII, C),¹ a miniature version of the overhanging-rim type of cinerary urn, burnt to a grey colour and showing heat-cracks; the deep rim is decorated with columns of cord-impressed semicircles. There was no trace of bones or ashes, but the pit contained a few small pot-boilers and much burnt wood.

E. 28 Feb., 1937. This must be regarded as the central burial corresponding to that encountered in No. 14.² It consisted of an oval pit orientated SE.–NW., 3 ft. long by $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide, and penetrating no more than 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins. into the gravel; the walls were almost vertical and the rim of the hole was clearly defined by a streak of charcoal. The remains of a cremation-burial were restricted to a small portion of the deeper part of the pit, the contents of which were heaped up to a level above that of the gravel subsoil. The cremated bones occupied the uppermost layer with the smaller fragments above and the larger below; underneath were considerable quantities of charcoal. Associated with the cremation were the following objects (PLATE VII, B):

- (a) A flat, bronze knife, 2³/₈ ins. long and 1 in. wide, with two rivets and a rounded butt.
- (b) A bronze awl, I in. long, beaten flat at the butt end.
- (c) Three amber beads, two fusiform 116 and 118 in. long, one oblate.

¹ Ashmolean Museum, 1937.131 : H. 5‡ ins. D. 4³/₄ ins.

² Oxoniensia, 1, 8 ff.

- (d) Ten shale beads, six fusiform of varying length from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. and four oblate.
- (e) A fragment of a pale greenish blue segmented faience bead; two complete segments and part of a third are preserved.

None of these objects shows any trace of fire, and most of them were found only just above the bottom of the pit. In spite therefore of the presence of charcoal, the ashes from the pyre must have been redeposited at the completion of the rite, and the objects placed beside them.

F. 2 May, 1937. A cremation-burial in a pocket in the top-soil about 15 ins. deep; the remains were sparse, but were *in situ*, as deposited.

G. 16 May, 1937. In a small depression in the gravel about 15 ins. by 12 ins. and 3 ins. deep were a few bones, two fragments of a baby's tooth, some pieces of daub and many burnt stones.

H. 16 and 23 May, 1937. In the top-soil at depths varying from 15 to 21 ins., a cremation burial *in situ*, as deposited, five sherds, and a white-patinated, thin, flint scraper.

J. 16 and 23 May, 1937. In the top-soil from 12 to 18 ins. deep a scattered group of burnt bones and numerous unburnt sherds.

K. 23 May, 1937. In a circular pit in the gravel, 2 ft. in diameter, 9 ins. deep at the side and 12 ins. at the centre, the rim of the pit burnt red (compare No. 14: Oxoniensia, 1, 12): a cremation-burial burnt *in situ*. A few sherds evidently purposely buried with the ashes.

L. 23 May, 1937. Scattered sherds, cremated bones, broken animal bones and flint flakes. At least one of the sherds found here belongs to the same vase as some of those found at K.

M. 30 May, 1937. Remains of a cremation-burial, not burnt *in situ*, in a pocket above the gravel ; burnt bones only.

N. A flint flake, a large sherd and two fragments of burnt bone scattered east of M.

P. Scattered charcoal, burnt bones, and a sherd were found within the circle in the SW. sector.

The central burial (E, p. 35). The approximate date suggested for the burial in circle No. 14 has been corroborated by this important find, for among the beads is one of that segmented faience class, the accepted date of which lies between 1400 and 1100 B.C. The history of these beads has been so thoroughly treated by Mr. H. C. Beck and Dr. J. F. S. Stone¹ that it is unnecessary to do more than note how fully the association at Radley coincides with other discoveries. For, though not so rich quantitatively in beads as several of those, it

¹ Archaeologia, LXXXV, 203 ff.

contains all the usual varieties, jet, amber and faience, and with them both a flat, bronze knife-dagger and a bronze awl, an association which has only been paralleled at Aldbourne and Amesbury, Wilts.¹ Segmented beads occur with knife-daggers alone in two doubtful cases ; seven certain and two queried associations with awls alone are recorded.²

The group of segmented beads to which the Radley example belongs have almost all been found in the southern counties, particularly Dorset and Wiltshire : one occurrence is known from Cambridgeshire and two from Yorkshire. At Radley, therefore, another milestone has been set up on the line of land-communication between southern and northern England.

The flat knife-dagger, which is rather sadly oxydized, appears at first glance to have its two rivets inserted in notches in the angle of tang and blade. Actually small pieces have broken away on the outer edge of the rivet-holes, and the dagger in its original state closely resembles in form and size that from Blewbury, Berks., also found with a cremated burial.³ This narrow form may be contrasted with the wide, triangular form associated with a beaker at Eynsham (*supra*, p. 18); the difference represents the change which had taken place in the course of some 500 years or more in this useful implement of everyday life so frequently found in the graves of women.⁴ The use of the term dagger for these thin blades is misleading; they were the combined knife and scissors of the Early Bronze Age housewife.

Pottery. An examination of the pottery suggests that two distinct periods are represented, the one by the two complete vessels (PLATE VII, A, C) and a few of the sherds, *e.g.*, those found at K, the other by sherds only, particularly those found at J.

(i) In the earlier group the ware is comparatively soft and smooth with at most a small admixture of grit, and is characteristic, for example, of early types of the overhanging-rim urn, comparable to the small vase from D. Two discoveries of recent years in the urn-field at Long Wittenham, Berks.⁵ (PLATE VII, D, E), afford close parallels, the one, 6 $4\frac{1}{2}$ ins. high, $4\frac{5}{8}$ ins. diameter, in point of size, the other, ⁷ a large-sized urn, $12\frac{1}{2}$ ins. high and $9\frac{1}{4}$ ins. in diameter, by reason of the presence of similar semi-circular cord motifs round the body, combined with an unusual row of sprays executed in the same technique around the deep rim.

¹ Ibid., 237-8, ² Loc. cit.

^a Evans, Ancient Bronze Implements, p. 225 : J.B.A.A., XVI, 249.

⁴ However at Amesbury (*Archaeologia*, LXXXV, 219, fig. 2, 11) the old shape is associated with segmented beads ; it evidently had a long life.

⁸ Antiq. Journ., 1X, 153 ff. : Oxoniensia, 11, 1 ff.

⁴ Ashmolean Museum, 1934.59. ⁷ Ashmolean Museum, 1934.58.

The other complete vessel found at A falls also into this group; it is of even softer paste, and the cord-decoration marks it as no later than the Middle Bronze Age.¹

The pottery of this group is normally light red in colour ; the vase from D appears to have been discoloured by intense heat ; the same may be true of that from A.

(ii) Rough ware, dark brown, lighter brown and deep red, the paste mixed with very coarse grit. It is the class of ware to which belong the large barrelurns with applied finger-pressed band and contemporary small vessels from Long Wittenham, Berks.,² of the Deverel type, and is also found in somewhat earlier types, which mark the last stage of the overhanging-rim urn and are occasionally ornamented with false handles. Among the sherds from J may be noted :—

(a) A dark brown rim, with a narrow, rounded edge.

(b) A bright red rim, pressed down into a flattish groove.

Both these belong to vessels with vertical walls.

(c) A light brown sherd from an angled shoulder.

(d) A light brown sherd with part of a false handle.

These probably belong to vessels of Abercromby's biconical type, group 2.3 It should be noted here that the small biconical vase found in No. 14

(Oxoniensia, I, pl. II, A), is not of this ware; it belongs to the earlier group, and, moreover, closely resembles in form the vessel from Dorchester, Dorset, which was associated with segmented beads.⁴ Another vessel found with such beads links on to the little vase from D by way of the larger Long Wittenham urn; it has the same band of semi-circular cord-markings.⁵

It seems clear that the pottery marks two periods of occupation or employment of the site. To the first belong the two small vases, the central cremation and probably some of the scattered sherds; to the second belong the sherds found at J and a few others. In the paper on ring-ditches in *Oxoniensia*, I, I suggested that these ditches originally enclosed habitation-sites, and that the burials were not original. It is a thesis which is admittedly difficult to sustain, but the evidence of the cooking-hole at B, and the pots showing signs of subjection to great or constant heat at A and C do point to that explanation. Up to the present there is no case of a vase cracked by heat associated with a cremation-burial in the district.⁶ The later sherds support the thesis; they are not portions of broken

¹ Cp. Roughridge Wilts. (A. C. Smith, N. Wilts., p. 111, fig. 68).

^a Antiq. Journ., 1X, 153. ^a E.g. B.A.P., 11, pl. LXXXV, nos. 371-2.

⁴ Archaeologia, LXXXV, 217, fig. 1, 5. ⁵ Ibid., fig. 1, 7.

⁶ This statement has been made previously about the vase from No. 14 (Oxoniensia, 1, 13). Actually there are some minute fissures, but no more than would be caused by deposition on the hot ashes of the pyre after cremation.

urns that once contained cremated bones; they are from several vessels, and the conditions under which they were found show that the greater part of the ground must have remained uncovered until a late date in the Bronze Age, even though the central burial may have been marked by a low mound. It is indeed by no means certain that the sherds have any true connexion with the parcels of cremated bones near which they were found. Owing to the shallow depth at which the cremations were deposited, they can have been partly scattered



FIG. 9

by tillage. If, however, that connexion does exist, there are two periods of use of the site for burial, with, as it seems, a definite interval betweem them.

Ring-ditch 11.

At the end of February, 1938, a trench was driven from east to west across this circle (FIG. 9), the easternmost of the northern line (PLATE VI, B, and FIG. 7). The line adopted proved to lie almost on the exact diameter of the circle (87 ft., inner lip), as was confirmed by cuttings across the ditch on the north-south axis. The depth of soil above the uniform gravel averaged 18 ins.; 8 ins. of

this represented modern top-soil; a finer earth below is probably the original humus of Bronze Age times. At the western end of the trench a good deal of mixed gravel and clay found below the modern top-soil may be the upcast from the ditch.

The ditch as exposed at the ends of the trench was not uniform in section. At the western end it was of the regular V-shape, 17 ft. wide and $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep, the lower part filled with earth with some gravel slide on its inner face and impure gravel above as secondary filling. At the eastern end it had a wide floor and nearly vertical walls and, as preserved, measured 7 ft. wide and $3\frac{1}{4}$ ft. deep; against both faces there was a gravel slide, 9 ins. thick at the foot of the wall, and 3 ins. at the middle of the floor. The rest of the filling up to the top of the gravel subsoil was composed of earth free from any admixture of gravel; but above this level some gravel in the top-soil suggests, as did the section at the west end of the trench, a comparatively late demolition of the original bank. The decreased width of the ditch on the east side is to be accounted for by a certain amount of denudation of top-soil in recent times to make a gentle slope down the face of the old gravel-pit. The position of the original lip of the ditch has been roughly estimated on the plan and section (FIG. 9). Surveyed by Mr. J. J. Leeming.

At the centre of the circle a cremation-burial was found in a pit, 21 ft. in diameter, which penetrated the gravel not more than 2 inches : it had no gravegoods with it. Search was made in May over an area of 15 ft. by 19 ft. at the centre, but little was found. Eight feet south of the central cremation, I ft. from the surface and 6 ins. above the subsoil was a burnt layer, 2-3 ins. thick and about 18 ins. in diameter, consisting of reddened soil with pebbles and a little charcoal; but with nothing to indicate its date. Post-holes, 6 ins. in diameter and 6 ins. deep, were found in the original diametrical trench cut earlier in the year; one contained a little charcoal. North of the centre was another of unusual construction; the upper part was a large ovoid excavation $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide with its floor sloping from a depth of $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. from the surface at its border to 23 ft. at the edge of the post-hole itself, which was placed in the larger end of the excavation. The hole, I ft. in diameter penetrated the gravel for 19 ins. below the larger excavation. The ramp-like shape of the upper part of the hole was doubtless intended to assist in raising the heavy post to a vertical position, so that it could be lowered into the hole.

In the filling of the ditch on the western side of the circle four sherds were found at a depth of $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft.; they are plain sherds from a thick-walled vase of red Bronze Age ware. Comparison with those from ring-ditch 16 (p. 37) suggests that they fall within the earlier group, which has been assigned to the Middle Bronze Age; both the relative absence of grit in their composition and the depth at which they lay in the filling of the ditch agree in confirming this dating.