

## ON THE OPENING OF AN ANCIENT BRITISH BARROW AT HUNTSHAW.

BY H. FOWLER.

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IN the early part of this month I received a letter from Dr. Thompson, of Bideford, acting on the behalf of a party of gentlemen who had just previously been at the opening of a similar Barrow near Putford, requesting me to superintend the opening of the Huntshaw Barrows. This I undertook to do with much pleasure, as I felt great interest in the matter.

The first necessary step was to obtain the consent of the Honourable Mark Rolle, the owner of the soil. This was readily and cordially granted. I now required the consent of Mr. Squire, the tenant of the farm, and I here so far succeeded, that I not only obtained his sanction, but also his personal assistance.

I now consulted Mr. Pearce, of Torrington, a most zealous antiquarian, who undertook at once to co-operate with me, and obtain suitable workmen. Five labourers, under Mr. Pearce's guidance, were soon got together, and employed to cut a trench, as previously arranged, through one of two Barrows, situated a short distance apart from each other.

Mr. Doe, of Torrington, a learned archæologist, Mr. Pearce, and myself, had, long before this time, entertained thoughts of doing the same thing.

The Barrow thus cut through, and which is the easterly Barrow of the two to which I have referred, is situated about two and a half miles to the north of Torrington, in a field which bears the very significant name of Burrow Park. This place was evidently, in the days of our Celtic forefathers, one of considerable importance, for in the surrounding neighbourhood five other Barrows are found.

The land here is of considerable elevation, and is believed to be the highest in this district that lies between Exmoor and Dartmoor; and observations made from the summits of

the various Barrows would extend over an area comprising more than one-half the county.

It is worthy of remark, that just here-about a red earth, probably some variety of the new red sandstone, first makes its appearance. It wends its way in a westerly direction until it reaches the sea coast, a distance of about six miles, occasionally dipping under the overlaying strata, and as often re-appearing.

In form the Barrow is of the ordinary round or bowl-shape. It is remarkable for the regular arrangement, and I might say symmetry, of all its parts; for although we were not fortunate enough to meet with any of the expected relics, such as urns, cists, bronze implements, or other remains of this kind, yet the section made by cutting a trench five feet wide right through its centre, and down to the primitive soil, laid open to our view such a symmetrical arrangement of all its parts, that we felt ourselves greatly rewarded for the pains we had taken.

The plan which I have here drawn, and which is made from actual admeasurement, will convey a better idea of its structure than any description I can give in words. The following appears to have been the method of its construction:—A pan or bason was first scooped out of the earth. This pan in its centre had a depth of two feet, and presented the appearance of an inverted segment of a circle, whose chord measured 38 feet, representing the base line of the interior, this was then filled in with fine mould. Over this, to the height of four feet, were distinctly traced 18 alternate layers of wood-charcoal, and fine mould of the same character. This part of the Barrow I conceive to be highly interesting, and may possibly lay open a field of research which I cannot find has ever been minutely or satisfactorily gone into. The layers of charcoal have an average depth of five-eighths of an inch, and those of mould, two inches. I have very carefully examined the whole mass, but I cannot trace the slightest remains, either of bones or of bone ashes, in it. I should not wish, however, any reliance to be placed on my failure to find these substances, as a more microscopic examination and a more correct chemical analysis than I have made may find them both; and should this ever be the case, one inference would readily present itself to us, that they were 18 separate strewings of the burnt remains of the dead, intermingled with the wood-charcoal, and ashes in which they were burnt. The layer above this had a depth of three feet, and consisted of the same kind of mould, two feet of which have since been worn

away by the processes of agriculture. The whole interior or nucleus of the Barrow was now built up.

This structure was now coated with a circular capping of clay, having a depth of two feet, the upper part of which was worked or puddled, evidently with the design of protecting the contents; lastly a capping of stone, of the presumed depth of one foot, was placed over the whole. This stone was not the stone of the immediate district, but the ordinary shistus of the country, carried there from a further distance.

At the point where the circular coating of clay springs from the original soil, and which is on a line with the base line already described, the clay spreads itself out to the extent of about 10 feet, tapering away to a point.

It now would have presented to the eye the appearance of a section of a sphere; and the thought here may well suggest itself, how far this globular form, together with its stone capping, may be typical of the Druidical religion. These *tumuli*, constructed on what were then dreary upland moors, must have been objects of awe and veneration to our ancient British ancestors, their very form doubtless suggesting, on the bleak horizon lines, the form of the setting sun, with its various associations.

The adjoining Barrow, to which I have already alluded, is very different in its character. A partial cutting shows the interior to be composed almost entirely of one homogeneous mass of clay, with occasional streaks of charcoal. Its summit has not been so much worn away, and the stone capping is found further up its sides.

The space between the Barrows is elevated some feet above its original level, from the falling in of the *débris*, and a merely superficial observation would lead one readily to infer that they were originally united. Actual admeasurement however proves, that their bases were originally about 30 feet apart.

Our want of success in finding any such remains as urns or cists may be attributed to the possible fact, that they were placed in some part of the bed of the Barrow *out* of the centre; for, in such a case, it is evident that numerous cuttings might be made without coming across them.

We have hopes, therefore, that some such remains will still be found, and the more so as the perfectly undisturbed state of the portions already examined precludes the idea of the Barrow having ever before been opened.