

THIRD REPORT OF THE BARROW COMMITTEE.

THIRD REPORT of the Committee—consisting of Mr. C. Spence Bate, Mr. G. Doe, Mr. P. O. Hutchinson, Mr. J. Brooking Rowe, and Mr. R. N. Worth (Secretary)—to collect and record facts relating to Barrows in Devonshire, exclusive of Dartmoor as defined in the twelfth minute (of 1880), and to take steps where possible for their investigation.

Edited by R. N. WORTH, F.G.S., Hon. Secretary.

(Read at Dawlish, July, 1881.)

THE Barrow Committee are indebted to Mr. Francis Brent, of Plymouth, an old member of this Society, for an illustrated account of a singularly interesting discovery of an ancient grave—a kist-vaen with urn—associated with the remains of a kitchen-midden, beneath a house in one of the oldest parts of Plymouth.

The Rev. Treasurer Hawker has called the attention of the Committee to some Barrows at Berrynarbor, permission to examine which has been kindly given. It is hoped that the group may be explored when the harvest is over in the ensuing autumn, and the results duly recorded in the next report.

The Committee beg to recommend that in their reappointment the limitation of their operations with regard to Dartmoor be omitted. No adequate conclusions can be formed by them concerning the Barrows of the county, if so large and peculiarly important an area is excluded from their investigation.

J. BROOKING ROWE, Chairman.
R. N. WORTH, Secretary.

June 17th, 1881.

DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT GRAVE IN STILLMAN STREET,
PLYMOUTH.

DURING alterations made by the Messrs. Pitts upon premises in Stillman Street, Plymouth, preparatory to the erection of a new malt-house, an interesting discovery was made of a little grave, containing an urn which once held the ashes of the burnt body of one of the ancient inhabitants of Devonshire. The workmen in the course of their excavations came upon some shells, mostly of the oyster, periwinkle, cockle, and mussel, all very much decayed from age, so that a few only could be preserved, and probably part of an ancient refuse heap or kitchen-midden. The actual quantity was not large, but similar shells were scattered throughout the adjoining soil, showing that the heap had been disturbed in former years. Two flat stones were then found, which at first were taken to be the covering of an old drain, each about three feet long by fifteen inches wide and three thick. They were what is locally called dunstone—a hard, green, gritty, trap rock, which had been brought from a distance, and seemed to have been weathered before being used for this present purpose.

The stones were placed at a right angle to each other, thus forming a roof, the gable ends of which were crossed by two pieces of stone, each about a foot long, of similar description to the cover stones.

On raising the stones a large urn, composed of black ware, was discovered, placed in a small grave or cist, which was about eighteen inches deep, by two feet wide, and three feet in length; this had been excavated in the native rock, which was here a soft and brittle shale.

Unfortunately no one was on the spot to record what I have since learnt from the workmen employed; and soon the grave was cleared out, the urn destroyed, and the *débris* carted away to some ballast-heap, whence it has been taken on board ship and lost. When I first saw the grave it had been completely emptied, and the west side destroyed. The grave lay nearly north and south; the east and south ends had been built up of small slabs of dunstone, and were quite perpendicular, whilst the north end consisted of the native rock, sloping away at a considerable angle, and exceedingly decayed and shattered. It is not improbable that the north and west sides were originally as perpendicular as the rotten rock would admit, but that in excavating the soil the labourers had removed all the loose stuff, which was carted

away with the rest, leaving the rock at the angle at which it had most readily broken.

From the few fragments of the urn which I was able to preserve, the drawing of the restored figure has been prepared. This may not be absolutely correct, but at all events it will enable us to form some idea of what this interesting urn was like, wherein were placed the ashes of the cremated body of one of Plymouth's ancient forefathers. That it once contained ashes cannot I think be doubted; the portions of the bottom still present a white appearance, which probably comes from the contact of the ashes with the clay. No human bones were, however, brought under my notice.

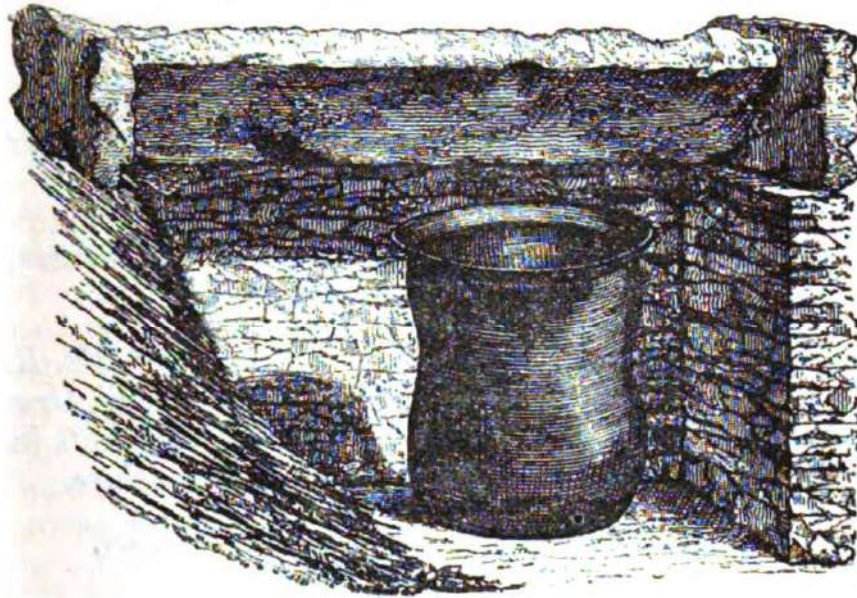
It is much to be regretted that further excavations could not be made, which might have led to additional discoveries, and perhaps more careful observations than could now be recorded, but the nature of the new building would not admit of this; much soil and soft rock were removed, but nothing of interest was discovered, although I visited the spot several times daily.

The urn itself, in its restored figure, presents a somewhat unusual form, and differs from that of most vessels found in kist-vaens, or barrows, in its larger diameter at the mouth (13 inches) in proportion to its height; it is also very thin. It was placed in the grave with the mouth upwards. A fragment of an urn, nearly allied to this, but smaller, was found by the Rev. Mr. Kirwan, July, 1868, in a large barrow on Broad Down, near Sidbury. A drawing of the fragments, as well as of the restored urn, are given in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* of this year. The barrow is No. 57 of Mr. Hutchinson's list in the Second Report of the Barrow Committee. Mr. Kirwan's urn was about half the size of the Stillman Street one.*

I am not aware that any grave similar to this has ever been recorded, and if not, this discovery may be considered as highly interesting. The Romano-British graves met with by Mr. Spence Bate on the hill at Fort Stamford, near Plymouth, were composed of slabs of stone, without roof cover, and contained many relics, but I think no cinerary urns, or other pottery, except what may be considered as food or water vessels. The barrows opened by Mr. Kirwan, near Sidmouth, rarely contained kist-vaens, but the urns were usually enclosed with flint stones. The barrows opened and explored in Cornwall did not contain similar cists; and

* Vide *Trans. Devon. Assoc.* vol. ii. p. 641; vol. xii. p. 134, and illustrations.

none opened elsewhere, as far as I am aware, contained cists with roof stones placed at right angles to each other, as have been found in this Plymouth grave. The early Roman



inhabitants of Britain, however, used tiled graves. One with eight roof tiles, placed in a similar manner to the Plymouth grave, and closed at each end with a tile in the same fashion, was found near York.* This contained no urn, but a layer of charcoal and burnt bones. Again, the Stillman Street urn is of somewhat finer ware than ordinary British, and seems to have been made on a potter's wheel, nor do the fragments show any sign of the lines or rude ornaments so common on British urns. It exhibits, however, every appearance of having been subjected to the funeral fire, and fragments of charcoal still adhere to the surface.

In all probability, then, we have here the grave of one who lived in Devon after the Romans had visited our county, and introduced their mode of burial.

FRANCIS BRENT.

* *Celt, Roman, and Saxon*, p. 308.