

CELTIC INTERMENTS DISCOVERED AT SHORNE.

BY GEORGE PAYNE, F.L.S., F.S.A.

To the south of the Rochester and Gravesend road, about midway between the "Crown Inn" and Chalk Church, in a field known as "Great Bargrave," a large circle has for years been observed in the corn, especially during seasons of drought, the corn growing much more luxuriantly upon the circle than elsewhere in the field. My friend, the Hon. Arthur Bligh, often referred to it, and it was arranged that some day we would endeavour to discover the cause of this peculiarity. The matter remained in abeyance until recently, when Mr. Scriven, the agent of the Cobham Estate, made a trial hole on the site of the circle, and found that it appeared to be a wide ditch cut out of solid chalk, which had been filled up with loose rubble and flints. The Earl of Darnley requested him to communicate with me, which subsequently resulted in his Lordship very kindly placing labourers at my disposal to enable me to prosecute a systematic research. We commenced operations on the eastern side of the entrenched space, soon revealing the full dimensions of the trench, namely, 12 feet wide across the top, diminishing to 2 feet 6 inches at the base, and 6 feet deep.

It became at once apparent that the material in the trench had originally occupied the interior of the encircled area, thus forming a mound of considerable height, and 61 feet in diameter. The clearing of the trench clearly shewed that after the mound was thrown up, the chalk rubble of which it was composed gradually silted into the bottom of the former to a depth of about a foot. Upon this layer, on the south-eastern side, slight remains of a

human skeleton were met with, covered over with a thick layer of flints. We then, at the same level, came upon a layer of burnt flints split and cracked with heat, upon which rested a layer of charred wood-ash 4 inches thick, also covered with about 2 feet of flints. Amongst the ash occurred, at intervals, fragments of animal bones, with teeth of deer, bos, and sheep. This continued for a space of about 20 feet, then disappeared altogether, giving place, for a short space, to silt alone. On flints again appearing, the remains of a young person, buried in a contracted position, were immediately discovered on the north-eastern side. The bones and skull were in a fragmentary condition, but the jawbones were tolerably perfect. This skeleton was, contrary to instructions, removed by the workmen in my absence. On the north-western side of the trench the skeleton of an adult was met with, lying on its left side in a contracted position, and facing outwards. My friend Dr. Fairweather, who was present at the disinterment, called my attention to the extreme prominence of the occipital region of the skull. A few feet from this burial a sandstone polisher was cast up by the workmen, which Mr. Scriven, who was looking on at the time, fortunately detected. On the south-western side a fourth interment was disclosed, and, judging from the position of the few bones that remained, the skeleton lay on its left side, in a contracted position, facing outwards.

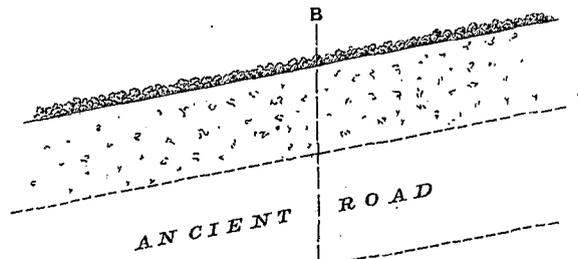
On the south south-eastern side the few remaining bones of a fifth skeleton were discovered, and just beyond a patch of burnt flints and charred wood-ash appeared again. This completed the excavation of the trench, which yielded, besides those remains already enumerated, a few fragments of purely Celtic pottery—thick, rudely made, and liberally sprinkled with grains of flint—also a portion of a grain crusher which had been roughly fashioned from a piece of Sarsen stone. The task now before us was to seek for the primary interment in the natural chalk encircled by the trench. The 9-inch covering of vegetable mould was therefore removed from the central area, when in the south-western quarter we came upon an oblong space filled in with flints; these were carefully removed, when we found beneath

them, in fine chalk rubble, a fairly complete skeleton, lying upon its right side in a very contracted position, the right hand under the skull, the left in close proximity. The grave, which had been neatly cut in the chalk, was 14 inches in depth, 5 feet 5 inches in length, and 3 feet 6 inches in width. On the removal of the skeleton the bones and skull crumbled to pieces in the hand, and it was found that the bottom of the grave had been slightly scooped out for the reception of the body. In the northern half of the central area two depressions were observed upon the surface of the chalk, filled in with loose rubble. They appeared to be artificially made, but on the other hand they may have been due to the wasting of soft places in the chalk; hence no importance can be attached to them. Other cavities, however, were met with at three different places along the inner wall of the trench, at its base, as shewn upon the Plan. A section (C to D) gives the side view of one of them. The cavity on the south-eastern side was opposite to the layer of charred wood-ash referred to on p. 87. The cavities contained nothing but material silted from the surface, and for what purpose they were made we are unable to conjecture without drawing too freely upon our imagination. The cavity on the north-western side was more like a gutter, sloping down towards the bottom of the trench, and certainly artificial.

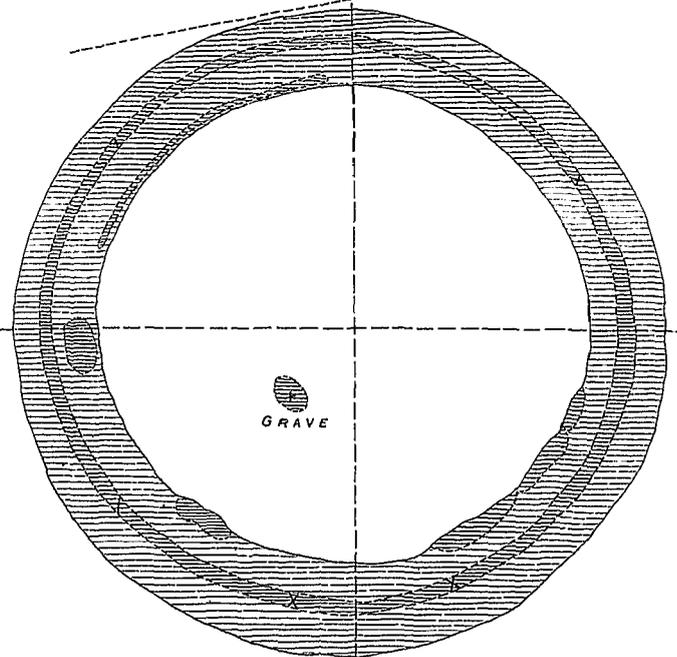
It is now time to say something of the period to which these sepulchral deposits must be assigned, which is rendered difficult from the utter absence of relics with either of the skeletons. My friend Canon Greenwell, who has been made acquainted with the various details of this discovery, is inclined to regard it as belonging to the Bronze Age, which places it at several centuries before the Christian Era. Barrows of this period, and of such magnitude as that under consideration, are not common in Kent, but that they once existed there can be no reasonable doubt. The Shorne barrow was probably swept away because it interfered with agricultural operations, and we may safely say that the same fate has befallen numerous others in this highly cultivated county. This inference, we anticipate, will be borne out at



Section C to D.



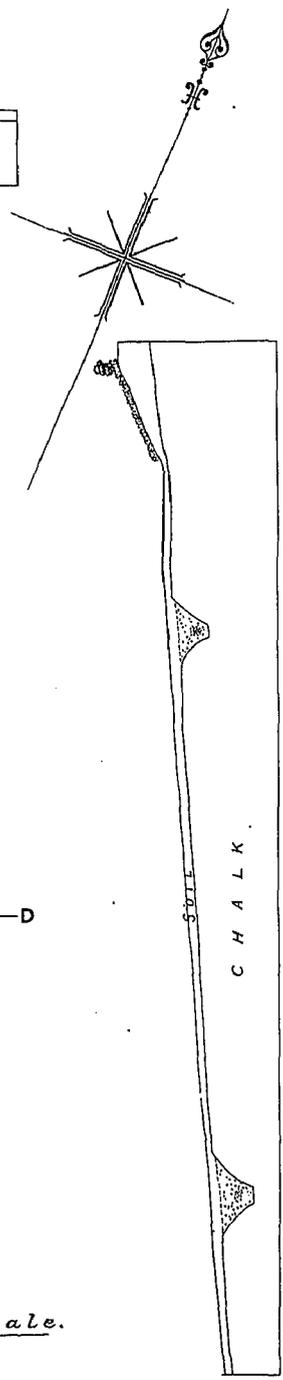
ANCIENT ROAD



GRAVE

Plan.

Scale.



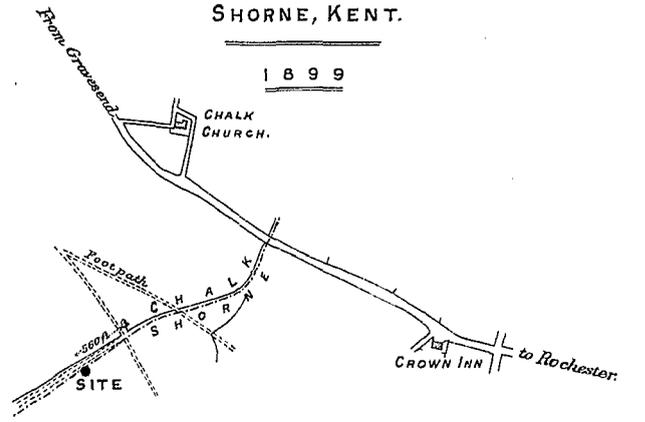
Section A to B.

PLAN OF
CELTIC BURIAL GROUND

AT IFIELD PLACE FARM,

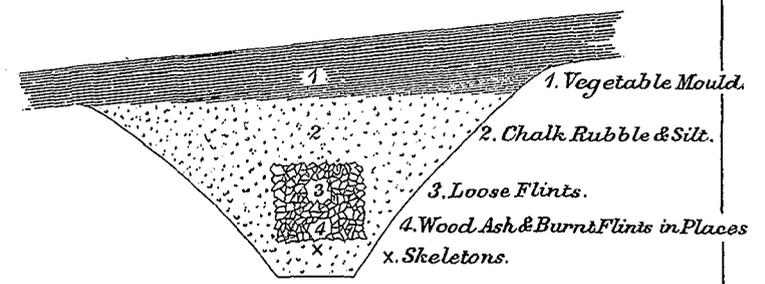
SHORNE, KENT.

1899



Key Plan.

Scale.



1. Vegetable Mould.

2. Chalk Rubble & Silt.

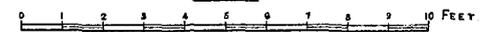
3. Loose Flints.

4. Wood Ash & Burnt Flints in Places

x. Skeletons.

Section of Ditch.

Scale.



Shorne, as two other rings are to be seen in the corn, in close proximity to that recently investigated, and which it is hoped Lord Darnley will allow to be explored at some future time. The most important item in the present discovery is, perhaps, the burials in the trench. Had the barrow been in existence, and I had been called upon to explore it, I should probably have left the trench alone, thus leaving unexplored an adjunct of equal if not surpassing importance. Canon Greenwell met with burials in trenches during his researches upon the Yorkshire Wolds, but these were only about 2 feet deep, and *under* the mounds. (See *British Barrows*, p. 166.)

The discovery of ancient interments naturally leads us to seek for the early road with which they were associated. At Shorne we were not disappointed, as there exists along the western side of the site of the barrow the line of a track-way, which may still be traced from the marshes below Chalk to Thong (see Key Plan).

On leaving the Gravesend road its worn channel may for some distance be clearly seen to the south-west, following the hedgerow until the higher ground is reached; it then passes along at the base of the scarped bank as shewn in section A to B. Soon after, on its way to Thong, it crosses ploughed fields, but to the practised eye its course may be detected. This defunct old way is, however, shewn as a road in use in a map of the Deer Park at Cobham, surveyed in 1759 by C. Sloane, which is preserved in the Cobham Hall Estate Office at Thong.* From the Gravesend road its course northwards may still be traced across the arable land to the Higham marshes, or, more correctly speaking, to the Thames, which, of course, covered these marshes in pre-historic times.

The connection of this early track with the Thong road is of importance, as I have already claimed for the latter a high antiquity (see *Collectanea Cantiana*, p. 152). It will not be out of place here to refer to another ancient way

* This is a very interesting small quarto book, bound in old calf, gilt tooled, and fastened with two silver clasps, and contains many very neatly-drawn plans of a portion of the Cobham Estate, together with the names of all the fields.

which runs through the parish of Shorne. As a starting-point it will be convenient to commence at the Great Roman Road by Brewer's Gate, Cobham Park, then on through Shorne village, passing east of the old windmill to the "Crown Inn," where it crosses the Gravesend road, thence across Green Farm to King's Farm, and so on to the North Kent Railway and Thames and Medway Canal. After leaving the Canal the pedestrian proceeds onwards along a raised causeway, with a deep ditch on either side, which trends across the marshes for a distance of nearly a mile, to Higham Church, the whole length being studded with trees and underwood. I have ascertained that this remarkably sylvan and picturesque causeway is known as "The Land-way," "and was the old way from Higham to Shorne." At the Higham end it of course led to the Roman causeway which crosses the marshes there to the Thames. This description is tedious, but it will be useful in future should excavations be made along the course of the way in question.

While at Shorne I examined the summit of the hill on which the old mill stands. This hill dominates the entire district towards the river for miles, and is situate about half-a-mile to the east of the site of the barrow. It would be unsafe to give a decided opinion upon it, as it has been much cut about for the purpose of obtaining gravel, but nevertheless it is scarped in a way which leads to the supposition that it may have been the site of a camp in ancient days.

It now remains for me to record my thanks to the Earl of Darnley for his liberality in enabling me to carry out these researches, and to Mr. Scriven for kindly preparing the plans and co-operating generally. Without such valuable aid it is impossible for us to work out the past history of the various parishes in our county.