

TWO MOUNDS AT NASH COURT, BOUGHTON

By R. F. JESSUP, F.S.A.

SINCE the topographical characteristics of Roman burial mounds were first recognized it has sometimes been wondered whether the two prominent mounds in the Park at Nash Court, Boughton-under-Blean¹ might not, on the evidence of their form and location alone, be attributed to that period. They were conical mounds (Plates I and II) with steep sides truncated to form a small platform at the top, a distinctive feature of Roman barrows in north-east Gaul and south-east Britain, and further they stood close to the Watling Street where its Roman course was not in any doubt and in an area in which other Roman remains had been found. The outward indications were that these imposing mounds most likely belonged to a known series of burial places of the wealthy merchants who during the first half century A.D. played an important part in the intensive commercial development of Britain.² In Kent the Dane John and the Dungill Hills at Canterbury, and the barrows at Richborough, Plaxtol and Snodland mark its progress. An air photograph and observation from the air at various seasons gave no help with the immediate problem of the Boughton mounds, the significance of which obviously could not be settled without proper excavation, for there was always the possibility that they formed part of the landscape garden made when the Park was laid out in the late years of the 18th century and that they were intended to frame the delightful vista from the terrace of the house down the hill of greensward towards the lake which once existed at its foot. There was no estate plan to which reference might be made, and local tradition was surprisingly silent.

At the same time, in view of the topographical indications, the mounds had quite rightly been given protection under the Ancient Monuments Act, and it was hoped that an opportunity might be found for the complete excavation of at least one of them, though it was realized that such an undertaking would be very expensive and probably beyond the financial resources of the Society. An unlooked for chance came in 1948 when the tenant of the land, Mr. T. G. Redsell, with the approval of his landlord, Lord Sondes, wished to remove the mounds and turn the whole of the grass Park over to arable. In

¹ Six-inch map, Kent Sheet 34 S.E. They were first shown on the 1801 edition, but it was not realized until 1927 that they might be antiquities.

² G. C. Dunning and R. F. Jessup, "Roman Barrows," *Antiquity*, March, 1936.

NASH COURT, BOUGHTON-UNDER-BLEAN, KENT

NORTH MOUND

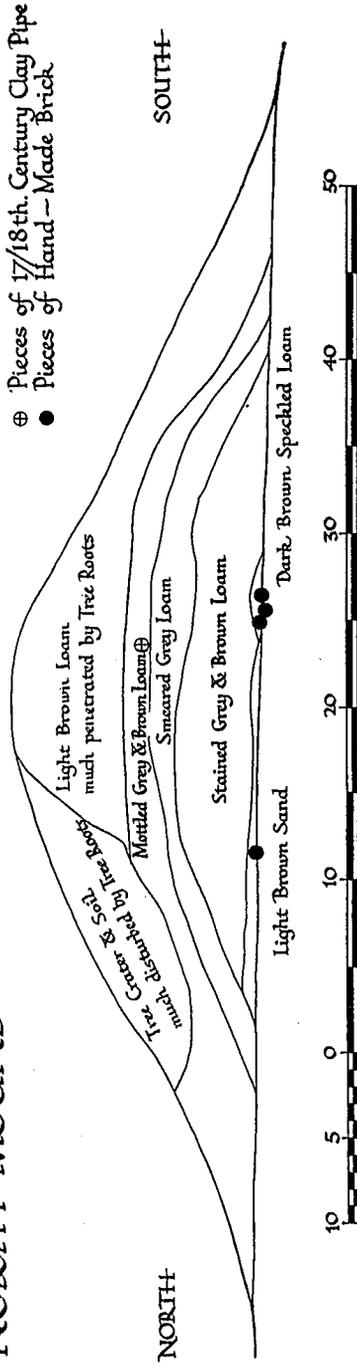
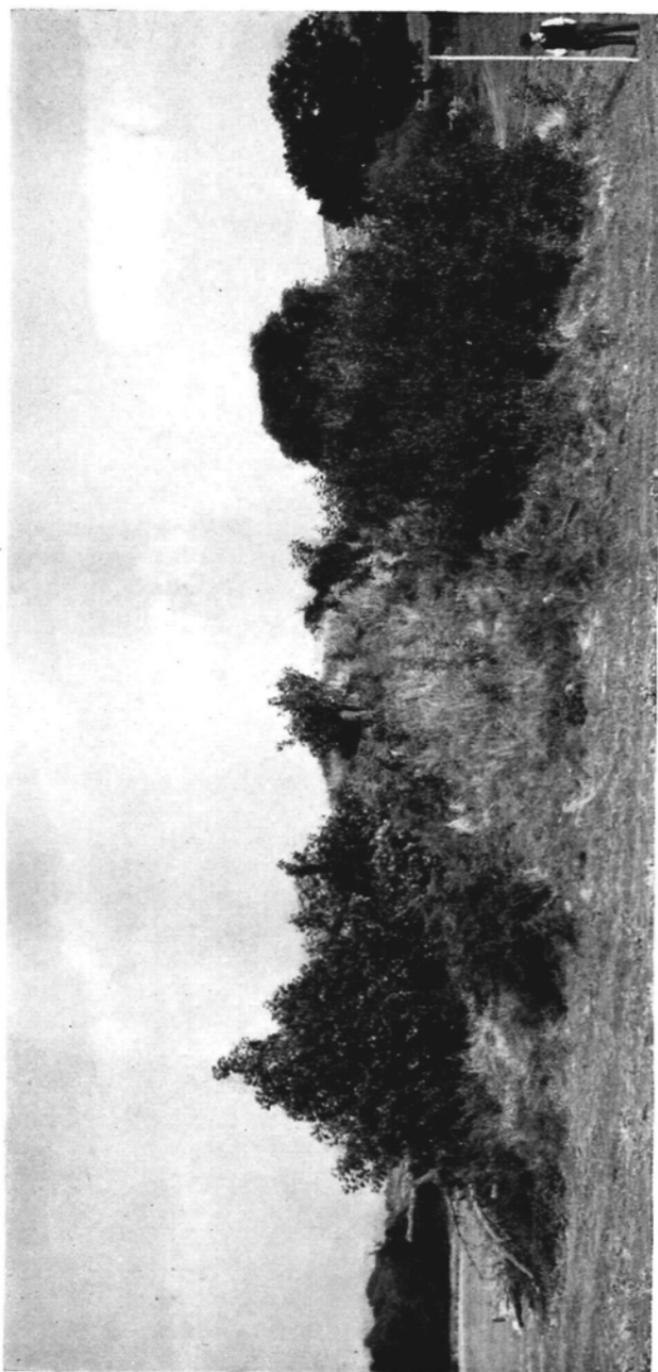
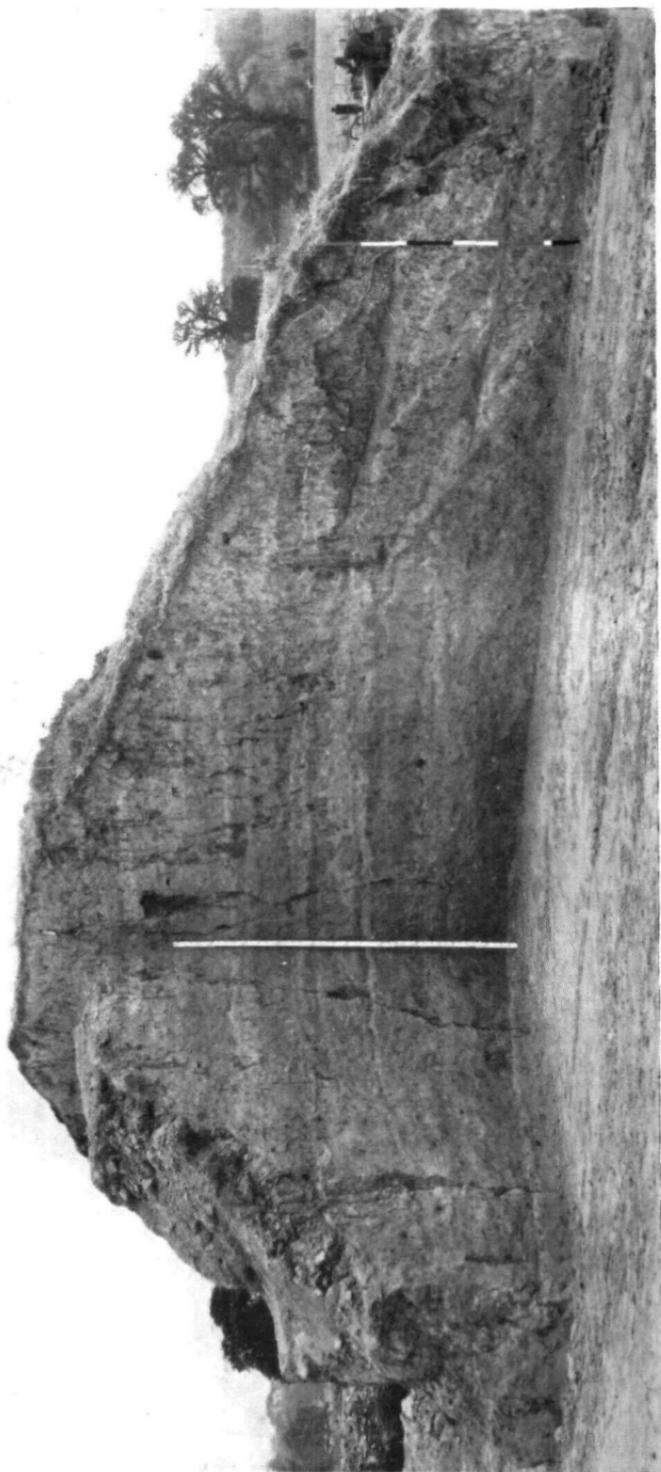


Fig. 1. Section through the true N-S axis of the north mound.



NORTH MOUND, NASH COURT, BOUGHTON, AFTER FELLING OF TREE AND BEFORE EXCAVATION



NORTH MOUND, NASH COURT, BOUGHTON, S.W. QUADRANT REMOVED

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view of a legitimate doubt as to the nature of the mounds, it was not thought reasonable to refuse this request provided that excavation was first allowed to take place. Accordingly at the instance and expense of the Ministry of Works through the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments and with the ready agreement of Lord Sondes and Mr. Redsell, the writer undertook the complete excavation of the northern of the two mounds, the southern afterwards being demolished by Mr. Redsell. In the actual field-work, Mr. W. Neville Terry, then of the staff of Maidstone Museum, gave very full assistance, and it should be said that the Ministry has also met the cost of illustrating this Report.

It was decided to excavate the mound by the quadrant method, and to strip it down to the natural subsoil, layer by layer, as far as possible. In view of the great bulk of the mound—it was almost 15 ft. in height and 80 ft. in diameter and had a well-established tree growing on its summit—a small bulldozer was used to remove the top soil, and as the excavation progressed and no structural features were encountered and no material relics discovered, it was decided to employ the bulldozer extensively. In the hands of a skilled and properly instructed operator it proved to be an implement of some precision capable of providing a good clean section (Plate II) in a loamy soil in dry weather: its use in a clay soil is open to objection, for the slickenside which it produces especially in damp weather tends to mask stratification. The excavation proved a welcome test of the possibilities of this implement.

It may be said at once that the series of regular tips of soil of which the mound was built yielded nothing but part of a clay pipe with a functional foot-stand, the bowl being found close to the stem 7 ft. 7 in. down in the body of the mound, and the stratification above them being disturbed by tree roots. Pipes of this type were smoked in some country districts until 1800 at least, and there can be no reasonable doubt that this one was broken and dropped by one of the men engaged in building the mound. On the old surface level were four "markers" each consisting of pieces of hand-made straw tempered brick laid at the angles of a square having sides of about 15 ft. Why the mound was set out in this fashion instead of with the more simple aid of a string tied to a centre pin is not clear.

A section of the mound at its centre (Fig. 1) showed:

0 to 7 ft.	Light brown and mottled grey and brown loam.
to 10 ft. 3 in.	Smearred grey loam.
to 14 ft. 6 in.	Stained grey and brown loam.
to 15 ft.	Light brown sand with a maximum thickness of 9 in.—the old surface.

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Tree roots persisted down to the old surface, and the various horizons gave interesting examples of the effect of good drainage upon soils composed very largely of the local Thanet Sand.

The ornamental lake with which Thomas Hawkins of Nash Court improved his Park in the years about 1798 is now filled in, and the rill which supplied it is an open sewer. The two mounds tree-crowned stood one on each side of it, and almost certainly the material of which they were made came from the bed of the lake. Mounds and lake, joined to give the eye delight, have now gone. The elms are felled, and the Park is a potato field.