

AN UNRECORDED TYPE OF CIRCULAR EARTHWORK IN THE NEW FOREST.

BY H. KIDNER, F.G.S.

THE circular earthwork described in this report is situated on Hatchet Moor, Beaulieu Heath. Pudding Barrow is near the west side of Stockley Inclosure, and from this very fine tumulus a trackway runs southwards, having a field, then a plantation, and again another field, all on the right. About seven furlongs from Pudding Barrow this track is crossed obliquely by another trackway, as shown both on the 6-inch and the 1-inch maps of the Ordnance Survey. The earthwork now reported will be found about 210 yards east of this junction of trackways. The writer had gone, on June 17th last, to see Pudding Barrow and other bowl barrows in the vicinity. Walking through thick heather, he came against a low bank, the segment of a circle; and getting on to the bank, the complete circle was seen, with no little surprise, its farther side being yards away, partly concealed in the thickly growing heather.

DESCRIPTION.

A brief examination of the low but wide bank, and the fact that there is no mention of such an earthwork in Mr. Heywood Sumner's "Ancient Earthworks of the New Forest," convinced the writer at once that the circular structure was of a type unrecorded in the New Forest, and he wrote later to Mr. Sumner, informing him of the facts. On Setley Plain, near Brockenhurst, there are examples of typical disc barrows as defined by Thurnam, the twin barrows there being especially fine; but the circular earthwork on Hatchet Moor differs from these in having neither inner ditch nor central mound. All round outside the bank runs a shallow trough-like depression, about a foot wide and 3 or 4 inches deep. No evidence is discernible

of there ever having been a wide or deep ditch either outside or within the enclosing bank. The bank is 7 yards wide measured from the outer border of the outside trough-like depression ; and it may be described as cambered, the camber giving it an elevation of 2 feet or 2 feet 2 inches or 2 feet 3 inches along the middle line.

On the west side the earthwork has been slightly damaged by rabbits, and on the east side it has been somewhat lowered by denudation ; but the bank is unmistakably continuous the whole way round, there being no trace of any gap that may have served as an entrance. It has a flattened or spread appearance, and no clear division can be made out between bank and area, as one shades off gradually into the other. As already stated, there is no mound centrally or otherwise placed, as in a typical disc barrow, nor any evidence of disturbance by excavation. Turf-cutting has been carried on both within the area and on the outside land surface.

BANK AND AREA.

The vegetation of the consolidated bank—viz., heather and gorse—resembles closely the vegetation of the surrounding moor ; but the area differs in two respects from the adjacent land surface : (1) The area surface is slightly lower than the outside ground level, giving it an appearance of having been depressed ; (2) a peculiarity which Mr. Sumner has recorded of other New Forest earthworks applies here also—viz., that whereas Iceland moss could be found growing plentifully outside the earthwork, none, or scarcely any, could be found within the area. Although rabbits have done some damage, there is no evidence of any having been caused by moles.

MEASUREMENT.

When Mr. Sumner joined the writer for an examination of the earthwork, he measured it and found the over-all diameter to be approximately 47 yards 1 foot north and south, and 48 yards 2 feet east and west. The thick growth of heather made accurate measurement difficult. The writer has made an

independent measurement, with the following result :—Bank 21 feet wide + area 102 feet + bank 21 feet = 144 feet over all. We thus get .34 yards as the diameter of the area, and 48 yards, the mean of Mr. Sumner's figures, as the over-all diameter.

MATERIAL OF BANK.

Whence the material was obtained for constructing the circular bank is not apparent, and the question arose whether it may have been obtained from the depressed area ; but the difference in level respectively of area and ground surface does not seem sufficient to account for the material used in making the encircling bank. In a letter to the writer, Mr. Sumner makes what seems to be a valuable suggestion. He says :—“ In the three bowl barrows that I have excavated on Ibsley Common the nuclei of the mounds must have been brought from a distance of one-quarter to half a mile, as they were composed of white pipe-clay, which only occurs in places on the sides of the plateau-gravel plain ; while one was surrounded by large collected ‘ gravel stones,’ which appear to have also been brought from a distance.” Mr. Sumner adds : “ I suggest the same transport of material in your example.”

AGE.

What has been already stated will perhaps have suggested that the circular earthwork now reported is believed to belong to the Bronze Age. Its *facies* and its setting on the open moor indicate this as its date. It is closely associated with a number of bowl barrows of the Bronze Age on Beaulieu Heath, and has all the appearances of being equally ancient. The great width and the consolidation of the bank, together with the close resemblance of its vegetation to that of the moor, favour the same conclusion. Certainly it is not a military work, nor does it look like a stockade. Therefore it cannot be referred to either Norman, Saxon, or Roman times. “ Mighty men must have lived and died around Beaulieu in the Bronze Age period,” Mr. Sumner has written, and we may safely conclude that our ring structure is part of their handiwork.

PURPOSE.

The earthwork under consideration may possibly be regarded as a variety of disc barrow ; but inasmuch as it differs from the typical disc barrow, as defined by Thurnam, in having neither inner ditch nor central mound, this classification may be open to question. Thurnam defines the disc barrow thus : " The disc-shaped barrow consists of a circular area on the same level as the surrounding turf. . . . The inclosed area is surrounded by a ditch with a bank on the outside, both very regularly formed. In the centre there is usually a small mound of slight elevation ; sometimes there are two or even three such mounds (" *Archæologia*," Vol. XLIII, p. 293). A disc-shaped barrow without a central mound, Thurnam suggests, may be regarded as " a tumulus which has never been completed, or as one which has been despoiled of its slight central mound " (*Ibid.*, p. 300). The typical disc barrow, we may suppose, was intended for sepulchral purposes. But can the same be said of the type of earthwork of which the one now reported is an example ? In the minds of both Neolithic and Bronze Age people a mound seems to have been essentially their idea of a burial place ; and so far as the absence of a mound may have significance, it would appear to suggest that we have here an earthwork primarily, if not exclusively, intended for purposes of ritual, and only secondarily, if at all, for sepulchral uses. It is Avebury or Stonehenge in humble miniature, with a circular bank of earth in place of a stone circle. As Mr. A. Hadrian Allcroft remarks : " The dividing line between the mere burial place and the temple, or place of ritual, must necessarily be very difficult to determine ; the stone circle merges into the disc barrow, the place of burial into the place of sacrifice " (" *Earthwork of England*," p. 531).

The finding of burials in an earthwork is not necessarily evidence of any sepulchral origin. There may be no more reason to suppose that these simple circular earthworks without any mound were intended primarily for interment purposes, even if burial remains be found, than for imagining

that the dome of St. Paul's was intended by Sir Christopher Wren to be the tomb of Wellington. Proof may be adduced showing that these simple earthwork circles were constructed primarily as burial places, but the writer has so far failed to find such proof. Referring to these "pond barrows," as Sir R. Colt Hoare calls them in "Ancient Wiltshire," he states: "We have dug into several, but have never discovered any pottery or sepulchral remains; though I have heard that an interment of burnt bones was found within the area of one of them on Lake Downs." The writer is indebted to Mr. Heywood Sumner for the quotation. The interment in the case referred to may have been secondary, and even much later in date. Sir R. Colt Hoare's statement should be discounted, it may be thought, owing to his method—or lack of method—in digging down from the surface, instead of making trenches, and also because of there being no mound to indicate the supposed place of interment. Possibly so; but if interment is only supposition, and if in Bronze Age times and later a mound was essentially the idea of a burial place, it follows that, in the absence of a mound, we have *prima facie* negative evidence that simple ring works of the type under consideration were not intended primarily as places of sepulture. In that case they should not be classed with disc barrows, as is done by Mr. A. Hadrian Allcroft in "Earthwork of England," pp. 527-30. Mr. Heywood Sumner, in a letter to the writer, suggested that "sacred earthwork circles" would be a suitable term to use *pro tem.* to define these simple circular structures—"sacred" to indicate that they were in some way intended for purposes of ritual, and "earthwork" to differentiate them from the stone circles erected and used in connection with some early religious observances—star or sun worship, or whatever the cult of their makers may have been.

In conclusion, the writer desires to express his thanks to Mr. Heywood Sumner for his very kind help so readily given.