



## ON THREE TUMULI IN GORSLEY WOOD, NEAR BRIDGE, AND CANTERBURY.

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The tumuli, the opening of which I am about to describe, were first pointed out to me by a friend, with whom it has been a pleasure and privilege to be associated, in this and other archaeological pursuits. His desire for a life of seclusion, owing to impaired health and family bereavements, prevents more than this brief acknowledgment of the valuable information and assistance I have received from him.

In our rambles together, we one day penetrated into Gorsley Wood, and in the centre of the wood my friend shewed me, amid brake and ash and hazel which were growing out of and around them, the three mounds which were the objects of our search. One only at first caught the eye, but closer scrutiny revealed three tumuli, of progressive size as to their heights and the length of their diameters, their centres lying in one straight line, and the circular boundaries of the two outer mounds coalescing with that of the central one at their points of junction. Actual measurement shewed the height of the largest mound (A) to be about 4 feet, that of the second (B) about 3 feet, and that of (C), the smallest, about 2 feet above the level of the surrounding ground. The length of the diameters of their bases could not be computed accurately, as the small elevation of the mounds made it difficult to decide where their very gradual ascents really commenced. So far as we could judge, the diameter of A was about 35 feet, that of B about 30 feet, and that of C about 25 feet. That the tumuli should have remained so long unnoticed need cause no surprise,

when their heights are compared with their diameters; and when it is remembered that, perhaps for centuries, they had been almost entirely hidden by tall ferns and underwood.

On hearing of the discovery made on his property, my kind friend and patron, the late Marquis Conyngham, not only gave me permission to open them, but placed at my disposal a sufficient number of workmen for the purpose, thus taking upon himself the entire expense. In the selection of these, and in all the liberal arrangements made, I received valuable assistance from his Lordship's active Land Agent, Mr. Robert Smith, who entered heartily into the work, and in every way furthered my object.

The largest (A) of the three tumuli was the first attacked; two trenches being dug through it at right angles to one another. In one of these we found some fragments of a broken urn, and a pavement slanting downwards from the exterior towards the centre of the mound. This pavement was formed of large red bricks or tiles, and was bordered with flint stones. These bricks or tiles were most of them coarsely made, badly burnt, and of the shape and size usually known as Roman bricks. The older archaeologists, Camden and others, called them British bricks.

It may here be mentioned that flints and broken bricks, and among them a portion of a large *amphora*, were found in other parts of the circumference of this and of the other tumuli; but to what extent they encircled the mounds I am unable to say, the earth having not as yet been removed except from the trenches which were dug out. The pavement of bricks with border of flints certainly did not form complete circles around the mounds, and in this respect they seem to correspond with the stones found around British barrows opened by Canon Greenwell in Yorkshire.

While the trenches were being opened from their extremities with the results described above, one of the workmen had been digging down to the centre of the mound, and had there discovered a human skull, seemingly imbedded in sand; it proved to be resting upon a large block of sandstone, some of which had crumbled into sand. The skull appeared to be that of a young person, and a curious

change took place in it when exposed to the air. When first unearthed, the venous lines in the interior of the skull were clearly defined, and of a bright red colour; but in a few seconds their red appearance vanished, and they could with difficulty be traced. My friend also noticed a dark red discolouration, of about the size and shape of a heart, upon the stone itself when it was first cleared of earth. This also disappeared when exposed to the air. These remarkable changes afford, I think, sufficient proof that the barrows had never been opened since the burials took place.

The stone being now uncovered, the earth was dug out round its sides, and it was found to be the cover of a large kistvaen or stone chest, 5 feet in length by 3 feet 9 inches in breadth. Measured internally, its length was found to be 4 feet, its breadth  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet, and its depth  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet. Since these measurements were taken, large flakes of the stone have fallen from the sides of this kist, so that the inner dimensions seem larger than when it was first opened. The top stone was in some parts 11 inches thick, and of such a weight that it was necessary to remove it by the help of pulleys attached to a neighbouring tree. The sides of the kist were formed of large blocks of sandstone, 5 and 6 inches thick, well levelled internally, and nicely joined and fitted to one another. They rested upon another block of sandstone, 9 inches thick, which formed the bottom of the kist, and which extended about a foot beyond the kist, on one side of it. Nothing was found within the enclosure except a few ashes; but burnt wood and one or two fragments of rude ornaments were found on the outside. A few feet from the south corner of this kistvaen was the place of cremation, indicated by a quantity of ashes and charcoal, with burnt and wet earth, and what seemed to be calcined bone, there discovered. An unpleasant odour was emitted from these when first dug out. The ground below was burnt for some depth, from which it may be surmised that the place had been used for purposes of burning on several occasions, and was perhaps a place of sacrifice before being used for the cremation of the dead.

The opening of this first tumulus having led to such



interesting results, all engaged in the work, including the labourers, were eager to proceed with the other two. The same course, of digging trenches through the mounds, was adopted as before; but the experience now gained led us to direct particular attention in each case to the centre of the tumulus. Nothing of special interest, beyond the finding of two or three fractured urns, presented itself until the centres were reached. We were then rewarded by finding in each tumulus a kistvaen similar in most respects to that previously discovered. The depth of the top stone of each kist was about a foot below the present level of the surrounding ground. This level, from the accumulation of fallen leaves, is evidently higher than it once was.

The results of these further excavations were thus described by me at the time, and I have nothing to alter or to add to what I then related:—

“The second tumulus contained a kistvaen (B) of exactly the same dimensions as the first. One corner of the top stone of this kist was broken off; probably in its conveyance from the coast, as the piece could not be found. The earth of the mound had in consequence fallen in, and nearly filled the chamber. Two small pieces of charred bone and a few ashes, one little piece of bronze ornament, and a few fragments of thin glass were all that could be found amongst the debris. The third mound was so nearly on a level with the surrounding ground that it would probably have escaped notice but for the other two. In it was a third kistvaen (C), quite perfect, and unbroken (length 3 feet, breadth  $2\frac{1}{4}$  feet, depth 3 feet). It is remarkable that the depth of this kist was equal to its length, while the depth of each of the others was the same as the breadth. The contents also of this were different. In it was a large quantity of bones, in small fragments; and a medical friend who was present traced portions of the skull and of most other parts of an entire human skeleton. Some of the bones seemed to have been burnt, but the greater part had escaped the fire. A small particle of bronze and a few pieces of fine glass were also found in this kist. In the mound itself were found two fractured urns, smaller and of a more delicate make

than those found in the other mounds. Although the cover and sides of the kist were unbroken, the accumulation of sediment, deposited by the moisture which had found its way in from the surrounding ground, had half filled the kist. At the bottom were some large flint stones, possibly those on which the body had been placed for cremation, and therefore reverentially preserved by the Druids, and deposited with the bones.”

In connection with these particulars, it may be noticed that there is evident harmony of design in the construction and relative positions of the kistvaens. The direction of each is nearly the same; the sides pointing, with but little variation, north-west and south-east. The distances between the two outer kists and the central one are also nearly equal. The dimensions of kists A and B are the same, those of C designedly different; the internal depths of the two former being equal to their breadths, while that of the last is equal to its length.

One place of cremation only has been as yet discovered, namely, that already described near the first kist (A). With regard to the remains found in the three kists, there would appear to have been considerable difference as to the extent of the cremation which had taken place. A few ashes, but no bones, except one small bone apparently of a bird or some small animal, were found in kist A. From this I should imagine that cremation had in this case been perfectly performed; the body being entirely consumed, except the head, which was placed on the cover of the kist, and had apparently not been committed to the fire. In kist B the cremation was not quite perfect, two small pieces of charred bone being found among the ashes. With respect to the body found in the third kist (C), most of the bones were untouched by the fire, though a sufficient number shewed traces of burning, to prove that cremation had to some extent been attempted. This difference in the mode and extent of the practice of cremation is noticed by Canon Greenwell in his account of the British barrows in Yorkshire. “The application of fire,” he says, “to the body was one of the rites which was commonly practised in connection with

burial. The extent of the burning varied much, as might be expected, and as is found to be the case in India at the present day. Sometimes the bones were reduced almost to powder, at other times they were so little consumed that each particular bone can be recognised, whilst in some cases only a part of them has been acted upon by the fire, other portions being in a perfectly uncalcined state. It appears then to have been considered sufficient that fire should be applied to the body without reducing it completely to ashes; and if so, it is quite possible to understand how the application might in some cases be so trifling as to leave upon the bones no indication of fire having been in contact with the body."

Nothing of any intrinsic value was found in or about the kistvaens. A few articles discovered, however, have an archaeological interest. Among these may be mentioned the very fine glass, some small pieces of which were found in each kist. It is as thin and as clear as a modern watch-glass, and is free from any iridescence, such as is usually produced upon glass by the chemical properties of the earth. The late Mr. Hughes, of the firm of Ward and Hughes (by whose regretted death the Kent Archaeological Society loses one of its members), informed me that this was in consequence of its absolute purity, and proved that it was manufactured of the very finest sand, without any metallic admixture. Some pieces of the glass were found adhering, in a circular form, round a kind of greenish earth, shewing that they were probably the remains of a small unguent bottle.

Another piece of dark green glass, found near kist A, is apparently part of a bodkin or hairpin. It is surrounded by a spiral line roughly cut in the glass, and terminates in a point which resembles a small adder-head.

A few small pieces of iron, like nails or nuggets, much corroded, were found near kist A. Upon two of them a trace of gold is discernible. It is very minute, but when examined through the microscope is seen to consist of narrow strips of gold tissue like shavings. The small bronze ornaments found are so fragmentary that their original use

can only be guessed at. They are apparently parts of fibulæ, or of earrings, made of very thin metal, and in some instances seem to have been combined with wood.

The three or four cinerary urns, none of them perfect, which were discovered, not near the kistvaens, but in various parts of the mounds, were probably inserted subsequently to the throwing up of the tumuli, and may not belong to the same period as the central kists. The not unfrequent use of ground which former inhabitants of the country have set apart for burial, by those races who have succeeded or dispossessed them, has been noticed by the narrators of other explorations; amongst them by the Rev. Bryan Faussett, in his *Inventorium Sepulchrale*, in which he points out the contiguity of Saxon graves in this neighbourhood with those of the Romano-British and Roman period. That this may be the true explanation of the various interments in the tumuli at Gorsley was first suggested to me by Mr. George Payne, who has identified one of the urns as of Durobrivian pottery, and another as of Upchurch ware. My obligations are due to him, and to his friend Mr. Warren, who has kindly supplied architectural drawings of the kists.

I am also indebted to the Rev. Canon Scott Robertson and to Mr. C. Roach Smith for the interest they have kindly taken in the discoveries at Gorsley, and for their suggestions. I am glad to be confirmed by the latter in my opinion that the kists contain the burnt remains of British chiefs; although he considers that these chiefs were *reguli* under the Roman domination. From an examination of the various articles found in and about the kists he assigns the interments to the Romano-British period. I have reason myself to believe that the kistvaens themselves belong to a much earlier period; but as this paper is professedly a simple relation of facts, I refrain from the discussion of any controvertible question.

I am glad to be able to add that the kistvaens have been effectively enclosed, and that the present Marquis Conyngham takes the same interest which his lamented father did in the preservation of these ancient monuments.