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**Description of the Long Barrow called "West Tump," in the
Parish of Brimsfield, Gloucestershire**

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DESCRIPTION OF THE LONG BARROW, CALLED
"WEST TUMP," IN THE PARISH OF BRIMPSFIELD,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

By G. B. WITTS.

Read at Cheltenham, 19th January, 1881.

THE "West Tump" Long barrow is situated high up on the Cotteswold Hills, in the middle of Buckholt Wood, in the parish of Brimpsfield, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south-west of Birdlip.

The fact of its being in the middle of a wood, with large beech trees growing on it, probably accounts for its having escaped the notice of archaeologists up to the present time, and it also accounts for the far more important fact that it had never been meddled with since it was constructed, nor had, consequently, its elevation been diminished by the process of cultivation.

In the month of July, 1880, this Society held its summer meeting at Stroud, and on the last day of the meeting, the members visited the old British Camp known as Painswick Beacon, or Kimsbury Castle, and thence drove through the Cranham Woods to examine a round barrow, in the parish of Brimpsfield, opened by Mr. Dorington, the President of the Society for the year.¹ (I should here state, on the authority of Professor Rolleston, that this is one of the most interesting round barrows ever discovered, being a transition barrow, combining features of the long barrow, and of the round barrow.)

Most of the members of the Society, being in carriages, kept to the roads. I was on horseback, and in taking a short cut through Buckholt Wood, with my mind intent on archaeology, I

¹ See description, ante, pp. 133-136.

suddenly saw before me a huge mound! I rode to the top of it, and around it, and after a careful examination, came to the conclusion that it was a Long Barrow, and a very perfect one. Before many hours were past, in fact before I returned home that night, I had obtained permission, through the kindness of Lady Cromie and Mr. W. F. Beach, to have it opened and examined, and had also obtained, through the co-operation of Mr. Francis Day and other members of the Society, promises of funds sufficient, at any rate, to commence the work. I must also express my sincere thanks to Professor Rolleston, whose valuable advice and assistance, I was privileged to have during a portion of the examination.

The Barrow lies south-east and north-west, and is of the "horned" form, so well known in other long barrows in Gloucestershire, and from Dr. Anderson's description of the horned cairns of Caithness, which plan is considered an evidence of great antiquity. It is 149 feet in its extreme length, and 128 feet from the central concavity of the "horns" to the north-west end (*see Plate XXV., fig. 1*). Its greatest width, which occurs at a point 32 feet from the south-east end, is 76 feet; and at a point 15 feet from the north-west end the width is 41 feet. The greatest height of the Barrow is at a point 45 feet from the extreme south-east end, where it reaches an elevation of 10 feet 3 inches. It gets lower as it approaches the N.W., or narrow, end, being 6 feet 9 inches high 47 feet from that end (*see Plate XXV., fig. 2*).

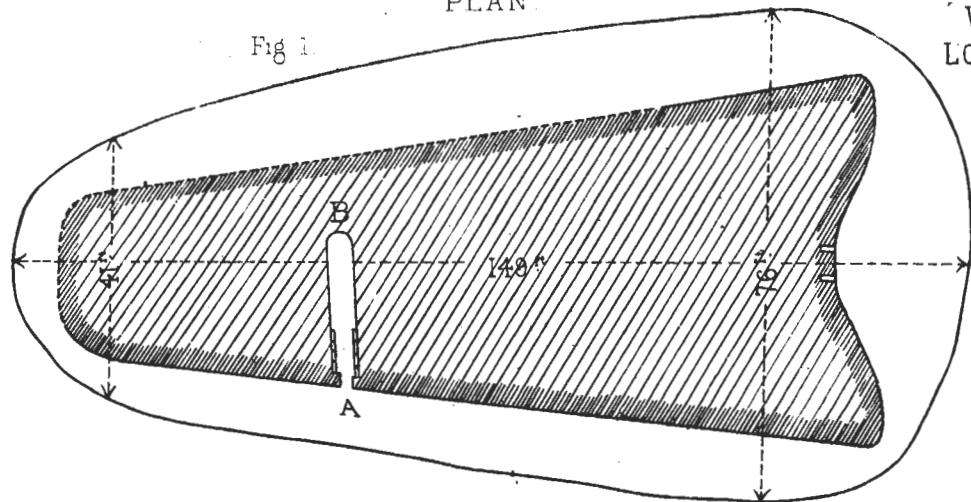
The Barrow is composed of oolitic rubble and slabs, and is surrounded by a wall, built chiefly of thin oolitic stones, faced only on the outer side, and very carefully laid without mortar, though near the entrances, hereafter to be described, it is constructed of Stonesfield Slate, having about 20 courses in a height of 3 feet. At the south-east end, the circumscribing wall, where it assumes the horned form, attains a height of 3 feet 6 inches. The horns are of equal size (*see Plate XXV., fig. 1*), and in the centre of the concavity between them were found two upright stones in the wall, not derived from the ordinary oolite, but from the top of the Stonesfield slate above mentioned, locally known as Pendle stone. These stones were of the height of the wall, 1 foot



PLAN

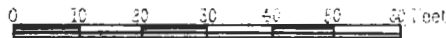
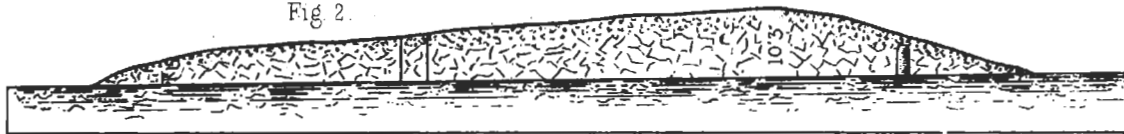
'WEST TUMP.'
LONG BARROW.

Fig 1.



LONGITUDINAL SECTION.

Fig 2.



8 inches wide, and 6 inches thick ; the space between them at the bottom was 3 feet 8 inches, but as the stones reclined from each other, it was wider at the top.

Before the Barrow was opened the south-east end presented an ordinary rounded form, there being no indication of the enclosing wall, with its "horns." The interior was carefully constructed ; the stones had not been thrown together carelessly, but were what engineers would call "hand-packed." There was a wall running through the centre, from S.E. to N.W., and leading, as it did, from the centre of the upright stones at the south-east end, encouraged us in the idea that we had found the entrance into a chamber from that end, but after driving a "heading" 30 yards long, following the central wall, and finding nothing, we were satisfied this was no entrance to a chamber. In driving this heading, we cut through a mass of stones, placed at an angle of 45 degrees against the upright wall.

We found the first skeleton, which I will call No. 1, and which was that of a young woman about 18 years of age, with small and delicate bones, lying outside the wall, at the south-east end in the concavity between the horns, in front of the two upright stones. It lay in a contracted position, with its head to the south-west. Two worked flint flakes were found with this skeleton.

The next skeleton found (No. 2) was that of a fine old man, lying outside the wall at a distance of 8 feet from the upright stones at the south-east end, in the direction of the southern horn. This was also in a contracted position, with the skull lying towards the north, and broken into about 24 pieces. This has been re-constructed and proves to be decidedly of a dolicho-cephalic type, and the calvaria of great thickness. Taking up the jaw of this skeleton, Professor Rolleston explained how much the original had suffered from his teeth, pointing out that in consequence of much stone grit mixed with his food, most of the teeth had been ground down to the nerve, creating bad gum boils, the effects of which were clearly seen by a cavity in the bone surrounding the fangs of the tooth. A few of the teeth were decayed during life-time, altogether proving that this ancient Briton suffered considerably

from the present prevailing disease of the teeth. He also pointed out the effect of water dripping on the bones, which must have been the work of ages; also the stains of manganic oxide, proving the immense antiquity of the bones.

While endeavouring to find the wall near the southern horn, we found a small piece of Roman pottery, 12 inches below the surface, and 2 feet outside the wall of the barrow. After searching in vain for a chamber at the south-east end, we proceeded to open out the line of the wall on the south-west side of the barrow. At a point 37 feet from the southern horn, the stones of the exterior wall showed distinct signs of fire. A few feet further on, we found two human ribs lying against the wall.

Another skeleton (No. 3), being that of a young person, was found lying just inside the south-west wall, at a distance of 45 feet from the southern horn. The stones of the wall at this point, showed signs of having been displaced at some period, and in moving them we discovered a skeleton in a contracted position, the skull lying 12 inches from the face of the wall and towards the north-west; the teeth were in good preservation. Two upright stones were placed to hold up the rubble above the skull, and below the skeleton were placed flat stones lying on the original surface of the ground. There was no sign of burning here.

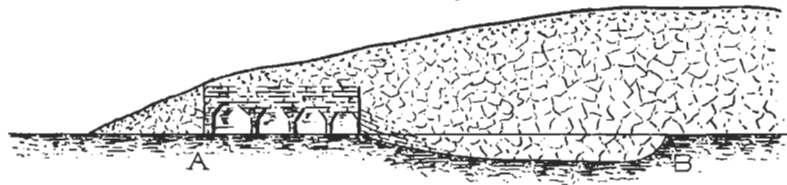
At a point 56 feet from the southern horn, a few small bones were seen just outside the wall, which had evidently been disturbed. In moving the wall we discovered a skeleton (No. 4) in a contracted position, firmly wedged in among the stones—so firmly that many of the stones had to be broken. The skull was lying to the north, and 2 feet 6 inches from the outer face of the wall.

Another skeleton (No. 5), though found at a later date, is described here as it was lying within a foot of No. 4, and between Nos. 4 and 6. It was lying just inside the wall at a point 57 feet from the southern horn. It was the skeleton of a child about 6 years of age, lying probably between its parents; the position of this skeleton was thus noted by Professor Rolleston when removing

"WEST TUMP," LONG BARROW.

SECTION THRO' A.B.

Fig 1

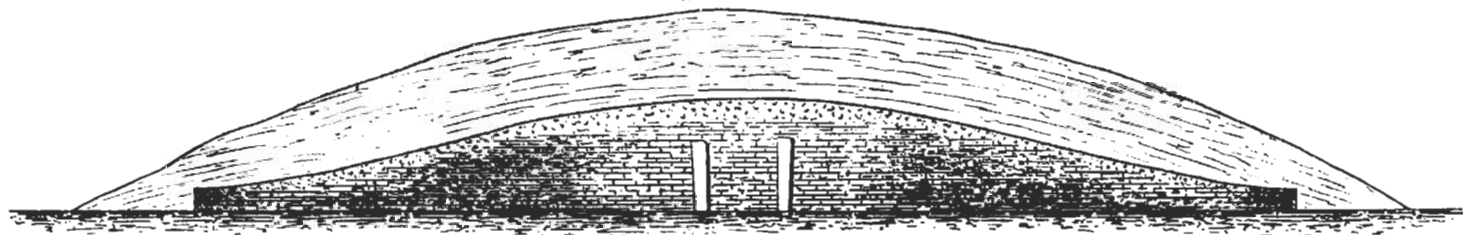


FLINT ARROWHEAD.

FULL SIZE.

ELEVATION OF S E END

Fig 2.



it:—"Back aspect of right thigh uppermost; Tibia and Fibula bent back upon it; farther end of humerus in natural position; hands at face; right knee in contact with lower jaw; pelvis at east; skull west; the subject therefore lying towards the east, and his knees bent back on the anterior surface of the body."

The next skeleton (No. 6) was found at a point 59 feet from the southern horn, close to Nos. 4 and 5, lying just inside the wall, and in exactly a contrary direction to No. 4, *i.e.*, the skull of this one was lying towards the south instead of the north. Many of the bones of this skeleton, and especially the skull, were much stained by Manganese.

These three skeletons, found just inside the wall, are a peculiar feature in this barrow. We have no knowledge of any other case. They must have been interred after the barrow was completed, a hole being made from the outside.

At a distance of 68 feet from the southern "horn," skeleton No. 7 was found, lying outside the wall. This was not in the same contracted position as the other skeletons, and possibly was a later interment, nevertheless it was not lying at full length, with the bones in their proper order. The skull and the feet were 48 inches apart, lying against the wall, and the space between them contained the skeleton, thus giving the idea at first that it was lying nearly at full length, but such was not the case. Next to the skull came the ossa coccygis, then twelve of the vertebrae in place, then the femora, tibiae, &c.

We continued to follow the south-west wall, without any discovery, until we reached a point 82 feet from the southern "horn," when there was a distinct break in the wall 2 feet wide (*see Plate XXVI., fig. 1. A.*). No upright stones were showing, but the wall ended abruptly, and proved to be the entrance to the chamber we had so many days been trying to find. In breaking through the rubble of the opening we found two pieces of British pottery, lying at a distance of 12 inches from the outer face of the wall, and continuing the excavation towards the centre line of the barrow, we found a small chamber, or rather passage, 3 feet wide and 7 feet long (*see Plate XXVI., fig. 1. B.*), the side walls having

upright stones against them. The roof was formed by flat stones gradually projecting one above the other in the beehive form. The inside was filled with rubble and bones in a very disorderly and confused state.

Several of the skulls found here showed solid supraciliary ridges, only now known in Australia, and many of the bones showed the manganese stain. A strong femur was found broken into three pieces, and these were attached to one another by a small root of a tree, which was growing through the inside of the bones.

Amongst the numberless human bones found in this passage were a few of the sheep or goat, and a marrow bone (meta carpel) of the red deer, which had been used for food, the dents made by a flint implement, in endeavouring to break it so as to take out the marrow, being still visible. A very perfect leaf-shaped arrow-head, made of flint, was also found in the passage, at a distance of 2 feet from the exterior wall (*see Plate XXVI., fig. 3*).

At a point 8 feet from the entrance of the passage, the side walls cease, and in this distance probably portions of 8 skeletons were found.

The main chamber or trench, which now commenced, was excavated below the original surface of the ground, beginning gradually to decline until it reached a depth of 15 inches, the width of this trench being 4 feet, and its length 15 feet 6 inches (*see Plate XXVI., fig. 1*). On the north-west side of it were the remains of a wall, but only three courses in height. Great quantities of human bones were found here, much mixed with the rubble, but the further we got in, the more perfect we found the skeletons.

At a distance of 18 feet from the outside wall, we discovered a skeleton, which at first sight Professor Rolleston thought was undisturbed, but on further examination it proved to be incomplete. The body was lying with the skull towards the S.S.W., with one femur reaching towards the N.N.W., and the knee-cap in relation with it. The Tibia and Fibula were bent back upon

the femur crossing the line of the vertebræ, one sheep's metacarpel was observed by the skull, and a portion of the femur of "Bos" was lying near the hip joint.

Continuing to clear out the chamber, still 4 feet wide and 15 inches deep, we found four more skeletons very nearly *in situ*, all to some extent disturbed, though some very slightly; we also found one more large flint flake.

Arriving at the end of the excavated trench at a distance of 24 feet from outside wall, marked B on plan (see *Plate XXVI., fig. 1*). We found it formed in the shape of a semi-circle, and arranged around the end were five flat stones, on which was sitting, in a contracted form, the skeleton of a young subject, with the remains, probably of a baby in close proximity. This skeleton appeared to be quite undisturbed, and was in no way mixed with the bones belonging to any other adult. The skull was lying towards north-west; the knees were close to the skull, but the femora were reversed, *i.e.*, the head of one femur, with part of the pelvis attached, was close to the skull (underneath it), whilst the head of the other femur was 15 inches from the skull; with this remarkable exception, the skeleton was in proper order and in a contracted form.

Immediately this skeleton was passed, the trench came to an end, and there were no further signs of bones in any direction. Up to this point we had discovered the remains of about twenty-one skeletons. While we were carefully examining the interior of the barrow thus revealed to sight, with its interesting occupants, the workmen continued to excavate along the line of the south-west wall to a distance of 119 feet from the southern "horn," where it commenced turning to the north, and around this curve the excavation was continued to a distance of 10 feet.

The examination of the "West Tump," for the year 1880, was now concluded, and all the walls and interesting portions of the barrow were carefully covered up, to protect them from frost and other damage.

All the skulls found in the "West Tump" were of the dolichocephalic type; they have been properly cared for, and some of

them set up, through the kindness of Professor Rolleston, will shortly find a resting place in the Gloucester Museum, with other typical bones from the same barrow.

The West Tump seems to differ from all other long barrows (except one at Upper Swell),¹ whether in Caithness, Wiltshire, or Gloucestershire, in having its grave sunk below the surface of the natural ground, instead of being represented by a chamber with upright slabs for its walls, and placed on the surface, defended by the piling of stones around it.

In this case, some slabs were placed on edge on either side of the passage, or gallery, leading to the principal place of burial from the outside. This passage having also a large mass of bones, but the grave itself was sunk into the ground, and as the breakages in the bones show, the bodies were only very imperfectly protected from the pressure of the rubble in which we found them embedded, even when first put into the barrow.

Another peculiar feature in this barrow is the discovery of three skeletons, Nos. 1, 2, and 7, *outside*, but touching, the circumscribing wall. The skulls of Nos. 1 and 2, were certainly dolicho-cephalic, that of No. 7 was so broken and incomplete that it could not be put together.

In concluding this notice of the "West Tump," I annex a very interesting letter from Professor Rolleston, relating to it, dated Genoa, Jan. 17th, 1881.

"Hotel de Londres, Genoa, January 17th, 1881.

"My dear Mr. Witts,—As I shall not be able to be present at the meeting in Cheltenham, before which the discoveries you have made at the Cranham Long Barrow will be brought, I should like to put on paper some of the larger points, which my opportunities for seeing the Barrow have impressed upon me. I am very sorry not to be present at your meeting, but *per contra*, I am very glad to have seen so much of the exploration, as by your kindness I did see; I regret also not to have been able to give a detailed account of the objects of interest, or at least of the bones found

¹ See Description, ante, pp. 106-107.

in the Barrow ; but, *per contra* again, the bones have been preserved and properly cared for, and having lasted to tell their own tale for some thousands (I do not say how many as yet) of years, they will well last a few more months, now that they have been thus looked to. The first great point which your "West Tump" Barrow presents to my view, at least in the distant perspective into which my temporary exile puts me, is its freedom from any ambiguity or question as to its age. There is no room whatever for supposing that the tumulus itself is of any but a very early pre-historic age, or that the human bones which it contained *could* have belonged to men of the times of Cromwell, of Henry VI., or Henry IV., or to any metal-weaponed warriors, whether *Plantagenet, Saxon, Roman, or British*. How is this to be proved? The absence of any scrap of metal is, it may be said, only a negative argument towards the positive conclusion that the "West Tump" is a pre-historic tump. I should answer to this, that there is no cubical mass belonging to a metallic period, and of equal bulk to this one, in which many scraps of metal could not be found. Notably in burial grounds cast-off pans, as well as shards of pottery, are always to be found. I was struck indeed, with the emphasis laid in a letter, published recently in the "Times," as to the neglected state of a London cemetery, upon the shabby appearance presented by the flotsam and jetsam into which metallic articles entered largely. But there is a much stronger argument for its pre-historic character than this; and it lies in the peculiar shape and conformation of the tump. The "West Tump" is a "Horned Cairn," and horned cairns are found all over Great Britain, from Caithness in the extreme north of Scotland, to the Peninsula of Gower in the extreme west of Wales. Now the peculiarities of a "Horned Cairn" are such, that it is impossible to imagine that they do not indicate to us that one race of man, and one only, must have combined them as they are combined. But we have no *record* of Great Britain having ever been so occupied by one single race in historic times, hence this tumulus is *pre-historic*.—Q.E.D. Think further of the distance, and difficulty of intercommunication, which even now separates Caithness from Cheltenham, and think what is implied in the view, that the same race of men must have

spread from the one spot to the other. There is yet another consideration which tells in favour of the pre-historic character of these tumps, and of their being pre-historic in a sense in which no other raised burial place can claim to be. Their conformation appears to me to be modelled upon that of a Limestone Promontory burrowed into by water, and so hollowed into the caves which were the first dwelling places of Troglodytic men. The houses of the dead have in many places, and in all ages, been modelled after the dwelling places of the living, and I think the "idea" of the "Horned Cairns" is taken from that of a Cave dwelling in a sinuously eaten out Limestone Promontory, such as you may see many of in South Wales. It was, indeed, whilst working out the rubble filling up one of those caves, just as you worked out the rubble in the "West Tump," that I came to see the likeness—this likeness, I should add, anybody else may see who will compare your plans of the "*West Tump*" with a ground plan of one of these caverns. By saying, as I did for the first time in public, at the meeting of the British Association, at Swansea, last autumn, that the "idea" of the Horned Cairn was to be found in a cave-containing headland, I mean that the one structure has been made after the pattern of the other; just as the "idea" of a Gothic cathedral is said to be found in an avenue of trees; or the "idea" of a Saxon urn, with its equatorial angularity and vandyked pattern, to be found in the appearance which a holly leaf presents, when held by its stalk with the under surface towards the spectator.

The bones from the "West Tump" are like all bones from similar barrows, which have been through my hands, and in the following points. They belonged to a short-statured, but long-headed, race of men, who were, if we may judge at all from what we see of living men of the same osteological character, darkish in complexion and hair. I have seen many such in this part of the world, being, as it is, a part of the world where pristine races are likely to survive, "the two voices, one of the sea, one of the mountains," favouring the chances which feebler folk have for escaping extirpation at the hands of stronger. But such men and such women may be found in many parts of even the most

Saxonized and Danicized counties of England and notably in Gloucestershire, which is such a county. I am perfectly certain that a sufficiently extensive set of bones from any real "Horned Cairn" would be distinguishable from any equally numerous and fairly selected, or similarly-selected set of bones from any other variety of interment in Great Britain, from those of the Bronze period down to those of yesterday inclusive. Irrespective of any manganese, or black fungus markings, or discolorations, you will find peculiarities, specified by me elsewhere (*e.g.*, in "British Barrows," in my paper on "The People of the Long Barrow Period," and on the tickets sent to Cheltenham with the "West Tump" skulls) in a collection of cranial and other bones from a Long Barrow, which you will either not find at all, or find in very much smaller proportions per cent. in a collection from any other source. This statement, if true, is of great importance, both as regards the age of these interments, and as regards the variability of our own species. I shall be glad to have the opportunity of shewing its truth by a statistical examination of this particular set of Long Barrow bones when I return to England. Lastly, the broken state of many of the skeletons has been explained by some writers as being indicative of human sacrifices, &c. I think those persons who exposed themselves to constantly recurring avalanches of stones in the "West Tump" excavations or *exsaxations* will allow that those avalanches are a *vera ac sufficiens causa*, for that broken state of the bones, and that the theory of successive interments which is absolutely necessary for explaining the *number* of the bodies will also account for the commination which so many of them have suffered.

With very kind regards,

I am, yours very truly,

(Signed) G. ROLLESTON.

P.S.—Please have this printed with your paper.