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Two Finds of Beaker Pottery from Gloucestershire

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Two Finds of Beaker Pottery from Gloucestershire

By E. M. CLIFFORD, F.S.A.

I. Barnwood, near Gloucester

IN the summer of 1945 the Gloucester Concrete Construction Company reported to me that, when removing top-soil above the gravel at Barnwood (approximate Map Reference 32/865179), workmen had uncovered a trench from which pottery, flints, utilized pebbles and slag had been collected. I visited the site in time to measure the trench which was 12 feet long, 7 feet wide at the top, 4 feet deep and U-shaped in section. No record had been kept of any of the objects in the trench, nor their relationship to each other, but all came out of the trench. There was no indication that they had accompanied burials. There was much burnt soil with the slag, which was confirmed as iron slag by the British Museum (Natural History). Iron slag from a smelting hearth, not far distant from the present site, had previously been identified by Dr Plenderleith of the British Museum Laboratory in 1939 and an Early Iron Age burial had been found there in 1926.¹ The pottery was submitted to Professor W. F. Grimes who confirmed that it was Beaker pottery, but pressure of work prevented him making a detailed report, which has now been done by Miss C. Fell and is printed below. The flints include scrapers and a fabricator, some of which are illustrated by Mr C. O. Waterhouse in FIGS. 2 and 3 and described by Captain H. S. Gracie.

The finds have been presented to the Gloucester City Museum.

The pottery (FIG. 1, 1-4)

The beaker sherds from Barnwood make an important addition to the scant material of that culture already published for Gloucestershire,² which includes a burial from the same site.³ Two more beakers were found with inhumation burials in a pit grave under a small

¹ *Trans. BGAS*, LI, pp. 224-6, fig. 10.

² *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.*, III, pt. 1, pp. 159-63, pl. xi. For distribution of beakers in the Bristol Channel area see Savory, *Culture and Environment* (1963), p. 37, fig. 9, edit.: Foster & Alcock.

³ *Trans. BGAS*, LI, p. 220.

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barrow on Bredon Hill in March 1963 and will be published by Mr Nicholas Thomas.¹

- i. A number of sherds of finely gritted ware with red-brown outer and black inner surface give almost the complete profile of a beaker. The decoration has been incised before firing with a pointed bone, or wooden tool and consists of parallel horizontal

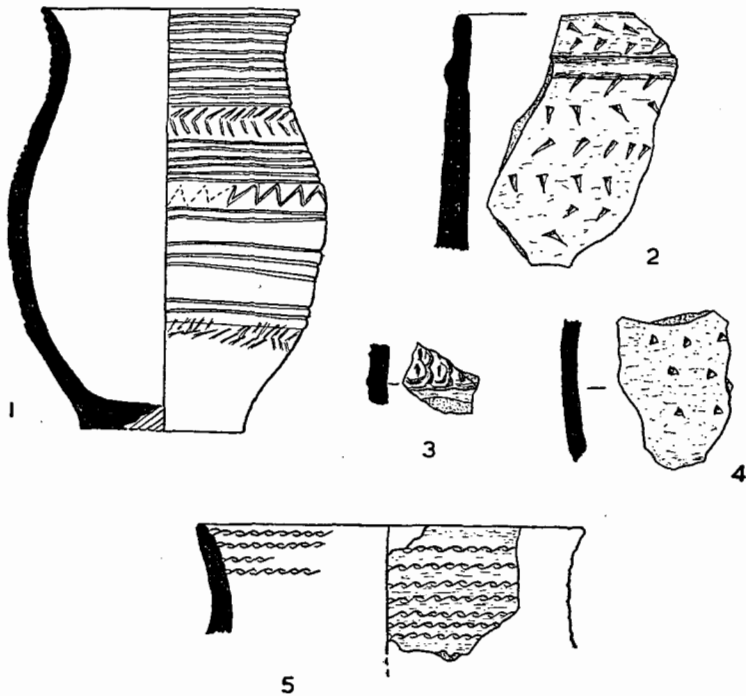


Fig. 1. Barnwood, 1-4; Homme House, Much Marcle, Nr. Dymock, 5. (‡)

lines, a herring-bone and a zig-zag zone, two plain zones and a roughly executed attempt at a second herring-bone zone immediately above the lower part of the vessel, which is undecorated and curves in towards the flat base. Height $5\frac{5}{8}$ inches; rim diameter 4 inches.

The form and arrangement of the decoration of this beaker place it among the Bell Beakers (B1) of Professor Piggott's recent

¹ *Gloucestershire Echo*, 27 March 1963, p. 4. My thanks to Mr Nicholas Thomas for allowing me to mention this find. One pot is a Bell Beaker (B1), the other a degenerate form approximating to the Barrel Beaker (B2).

nomenclature, though the bulging body and definite foot incline towards the Barrel Beaker (B2) form.¹ The decoration is fairly closely paralleled in the beaker from Little Rollright, Oxon., though there the zig-zag zone is lacking.² For further comparison see the beaker from Felixstowe, Suffolk.³ In the Netherlands this ornament appears on hybrids of Footed with Bell Beakers, the Barnwood beaker probably owing its origin to the Reflux Movement from the Low Countries, possibly not earlier than the 17th century B.C.⁴

2. Rim sherd of finely gritted, well smoothed handmade ware, red-brown outer and black inner surface. There is a moulded band below the rim, which is about 7 inches in diameter. The outer surface is decorated with stabbed decoration arranged in haphazard herring-bone fashion. It belongs to the Giant, or Pot Beaker class, contemporary with the Veluwe phase of Dutch beakers—1700–1500 B.C.⁵
3. Sherd of dark-brown handmade ware. Vertical lines in finger-tip rusticated decoration end in a slightly raised horizontal band. The best known complete beaker in this ware is from Somersham, Hunts,⁶ but rusticated Long-Necked Beakers (A) are also known from Somerset, e.g. Wincanton⁷ and Gorsey Bigbury near Charterhouse-on-Mendip.⁸ Beakers with this decoration are considered contemporary with Pot Beakers.
4. Sherd from the body of a beaker in fine red-brown ware, bearing stabbed decoration on the outer surface. Such decoration occurred at Gorsey Bigbury.⁹ Other comparisons can be made with beakers from Eynsham, Oxon.¹⁰ and Blaen-cil-Coed, Ludchurch, Pembrokeshire.¹¹

II. Sherds from Homme House, Dymock

In 1949 Professor Stuart Piggott sent me a fragment of cord-zoned beaker pottery and a piece of cinerary urn ware. He rescued them from a miscellaneous collection of antiquities after a recent country sale. With them was a label saying 'Fragments of pottery dug

¹ Piggott, *Culture and Environment* (1963), pp. 53–91; *Prehistoric Peoples of Scotland* (1962), pp. 80–2, edit.: Stuart Piggott. ² *Oxoniensia*, XXI (1956), p. 2, fig. 1, Oxon. 34.

³ *Antiquity*, v, pp. 415–26, plate; Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, vol. 1, pl. x, 86.

⁴ *Palaeohistoria*, iv (1955), Van der Waals and Glasbergen, p. 16.

⁵ Piggott, *The Long Barrow at West Kennet*, pp. 44 and 73; *Culture and Environment* (1963), p. 88.

⁶ *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.*, II, pt. i, pp. 22–3, pl. xii. ⁷ Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, I, pl. vii, 42.

⁸ *Bristol University Spelaeological Soc.*, v, pt. i (1938), pp. 34, 38–42, fig. 15, 20.

⁹ *ibid.* also fig. 15, 32. ¹⁰ *Oxoniensia*, XXI (1956), p. 4, fig. 1, Oxon. 39.

¹¹ *Guide to the Prehistoric Collections. National Museum of Wales* (1939), p. 178, no. 396, fig. 73, 14.

up near Homme House, Dymock, Gloucestershire'. No date for the find was given. The sherds were formerly the property of Lady Thursby, now deceased.

Homme House is in the parish of Much Marcle and is about 5 miles from Ledbury and 8 from Ross-on-Wye, near the Gloucester/Hereford boundary, standing about 300 feet above o.d. The soil thereabouts is clay with marl. The house is occupied to this day by the descendants of the celebrated John Kyrle, born at the White House, Dymock in 1634, and eulogized by Alexander Pope as 'the Man of Ross'—'Rise honest muse, and sing the Man of Ross'.¹ Various mementoes of Kyrle still remain at Homme House.

The beaker sherd is described below by Miss C. Fell. The fragment of cinerary urn does not permit reconstruction and is not illustrated. It is of handmade ware, red-brown outer, dark-grey inner surface, with a black core. It is coarse and well gritted, $\frac{7}{8}$ inch thick, the outer surface rough and pitted, but undecorated. Both sherds have been presented to the Gloucester City Museum.

The beaker sherd (FIG. 1, 5)

The single sherd of beaker pottery from Homme House, Much Marcle is of coarse black, handmade ware with medium grits in the paste, both surfaces being well smoothed and dark brown in colour. It comes from the rim of a Cord-Zoned (B₃) Beaker, about 6 inches in diameter; the outer surface was decorated before firing with seven parallel rows of fine cord impression, while inside the rim there are four rows of the same ornament.² A predominantly coastal distribution with inland penetration by river valleys is noticeable in this type of beaker, and the makers of the Homme House vessel are likely to have come via the Severn. Cord-Zoned Beakers in Oxfordshire are recorded from Stanton Harcourt, Cassington and Clifton Hampden.³ A westerly spread from the Thames to Brecknockshire via the Cotswolds was postulated by E. T. Leeds,⁴ but an initial penetration up the Severn seems more plausible. Professor Piggott has recently demonstrated that beakers of this type in Britain result from the Reflux Movement from the North European Plain and the Low Countries. Early examples may have reached these shores by soon after 2000 B.C., but others as late as 1700 B.C.⁵ The poor quality of the sherd under discussion suggests that it may date late in the series.

¹ Kelly's *Directory of Gloucestershire* (1931), p. 158.

² Piggott, *Culture and Environment* (1963), pp. 65-6.

³ *Oxoniensia*, XXI (1956), p. 6, fig. 2, Oxon. 11 and 46.

⁴ *Oxoniensia*, III (1938), pp. 18-19.

⁵ Piggott, *Culture and Environment* (1963), p. 71.

The Flints from Barnwood

The flints are very similar to those from the same area described in *The Antiquaries Journal*, xxxiv, pp. 178-87. Both black and brown materials are present and only one specimen, a small point, shows any

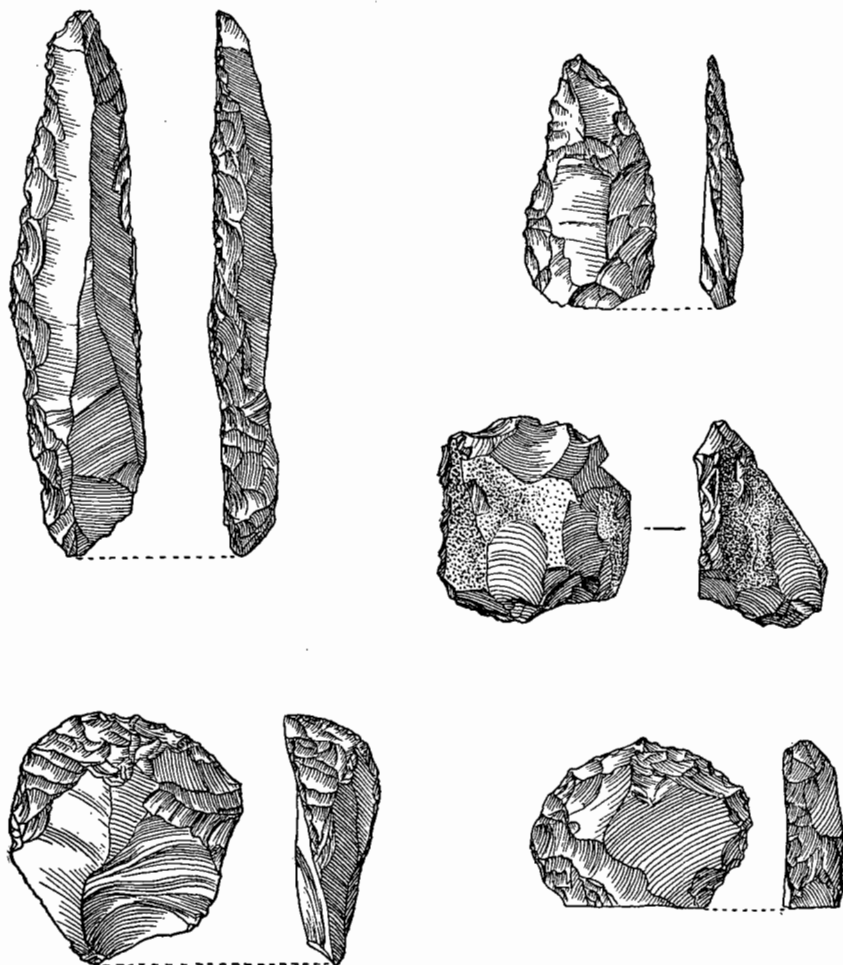


Fig. 2. Barnwood Beaker Site. (‡)

appreciable patina. With this one possible exception they could all have come from Bed 4, which contained tools ranging from the Mesolithic period to the Late Bronze Age. In this new group there are no microliths and in fact all, including the fabricator (FIG. 2) could belong

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to the Bronze Age. A typical knife, not illustrated, confirms this suggestion. The two pebbles (FIG. 3) are battered at both ends and have obviously been used as hammer stones. There were no pebbles in

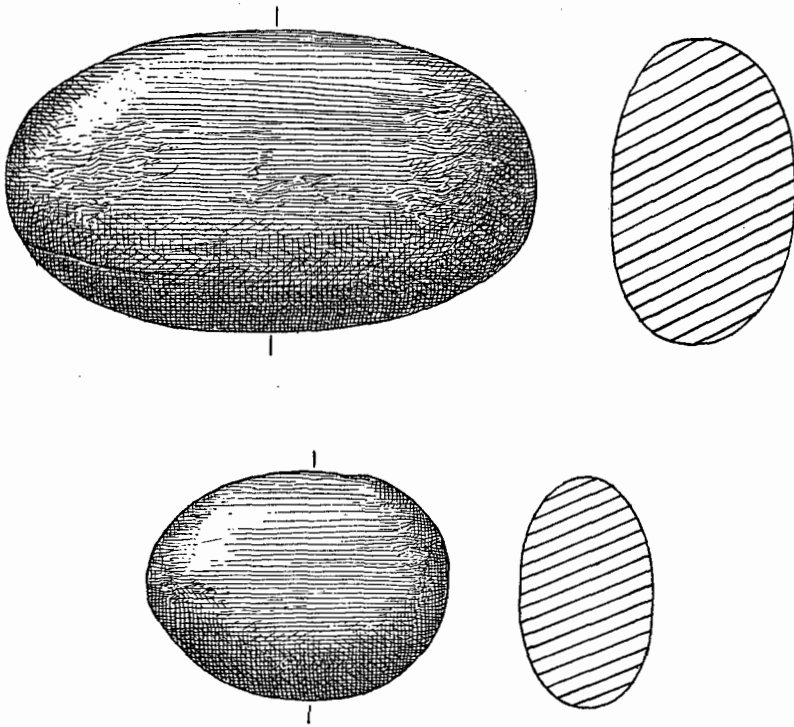


Fig. 3. Barnwood Beaker Site. (†)

the earlier collection, where the only hammer stone was derived from a broken polished axe. The absence of patina in a limestone district is most unusual and must be due to the nature of the soil in which the implements lay.