



Report of Excavation of a Twin-Barrow, and a Single Round Barrow at Sigwell (Six Wells),
Parish of Compton, Somerset.

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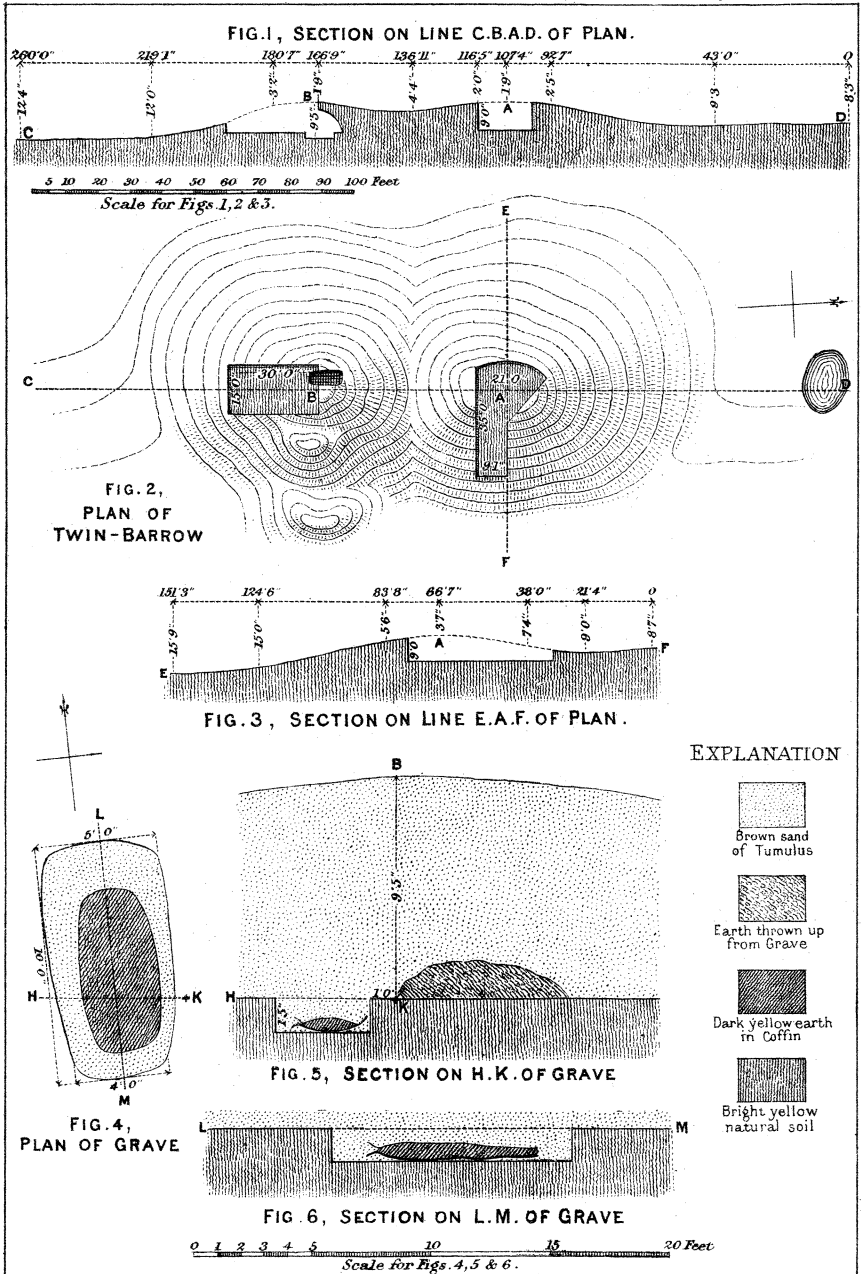
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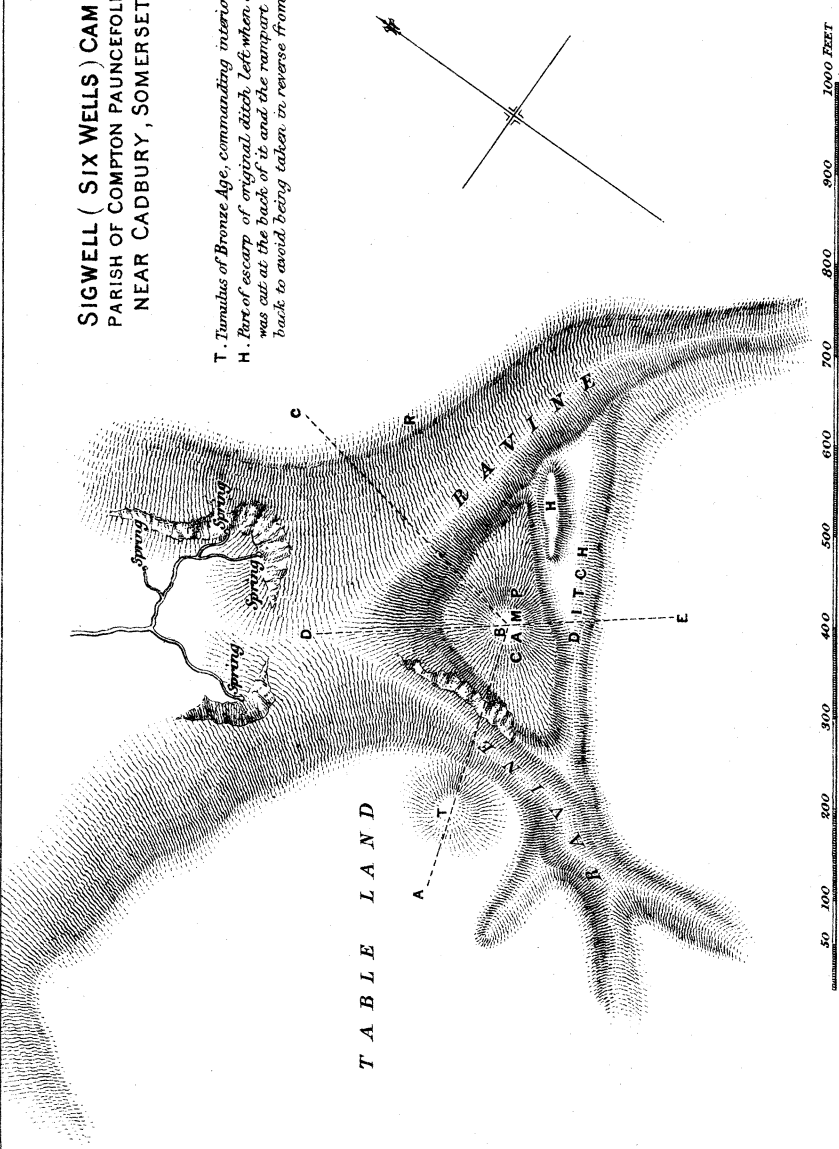
A.L. FOX, DEL.

SIGWELL TWIN-BARROW, EXCAVATED JULY, 1877.

J. P. & W. R. EMSLIE, LITH.

**SIGWELL (SIX WELLS) CAMP
PARISH OF COMPTON PAUNCEFOLD
NEAR CADBURY, SOMERSET**

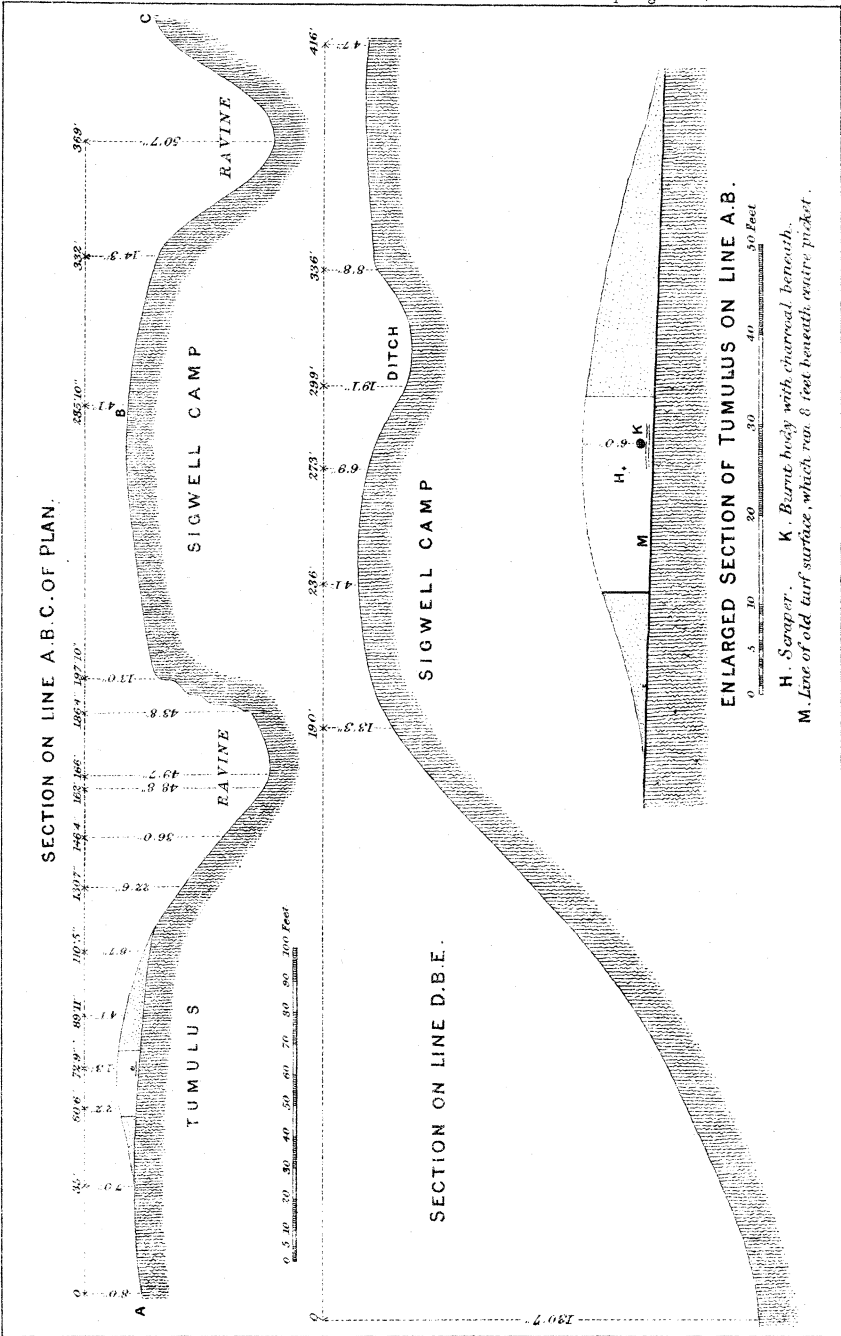
*T. Tumulus of Bronze Age, commanding interior of Camp.
H. Part of escarp of original ditch left when another
was cut at the back of it and the rampart thrown
back to avoid being taken in reverse from R.*



T A B L E L A N D

J. P. & W. R. EMSLIE, LITH.

A. L. FOX, DEL.



REPORT of EXCAVATION of a TWIN-BARROW, and a SINGLE ROUND BARROW at SIGWELL (SIX WELLS), PARISH of COMPTON, SOMERSET. By PROFESSOR ROLLESTON, M.D., F.R.S., and MAJOR-GENERAL A. LANE FOX, F.R.S. *With an APPENDIX on the TOPOGRAPHY of SIGWELL.* By MAJOR-GENERAL A. LANE FOX.

THE following account of the examination of three round barrows at Sigwell, in the parish of Compton, Somersetshire, two of which were in juxtaposition and may be spoken of as a twin-barrow, whilst the other stood apart from any other barrow, but overlooked what we hold to have been a camp of an earlier period than these barrows, throws light upon the following questions.

Firstly, it shows that in the Bronze Age, and amongst men who were practising cremation, considerable variety existed as to the mode of their disposing of the dead. In the two burials discovered no urn had been employed, and the bones had been picked out of the pyre and placed apart, one set in a bark coffin, the other simply in a separate place in the soil of the barrow. Yet in one of the barrows pottery was found of a kind which showed with some probability that urn burial was not unknown to the original constructors of the barrow.

Secondly, the measurements of the entire mass of each barrow, as compared with those of the very small spaces in which the burned bones were contained, in one case within a circle of six inches radius, will show how exceedingly easy it must be to overlook the existence of such a burial, and how cautious we should be in asserting that nothing can be found in such mounds to serve as their *raison d'être*.

Thirdly, the relative position and elevation and other peculiarities of one of these barrows, that to be hereinafter spoken of as "Sigwell iii," and of a small British camp which we believe the area labelled B on the plans to have been, show, as we believe very unmistakably, that the camp was earlier in point of date than the barrow, and the work of stone-using, not of bronze-using, men.

This exploration was undertaken at the suggestion of the Rev. J. A. Bennett, the rector of the neighbouring parish of South Cadbury; and to his other suggestions on many points, and to his help throughout, we are greatly indebted.

The British Association gave us a grant towards the defrayment of the expenses, and the following report was read before the Plymouth Meeting in August, 1877.

"Sigwell i," July 18, 1877, Tuesday.—The examination of the twin-barrow was begun by opening the tumulus situated to the north ("Sigwell i." Pl. 1, fig. 2, A) by a trench 9ft. 1in. wide from the east side.

The natural soil, lias sand, was of a light yellow colour with concretions of a small size and somewhat darker hue intermingled with it, and was readily enough distinguishable from the made earth of the barrow, which was darker in colour owing to finally divided carbonaceous matter, and was also more loosely compacted. The natural soil was 5ft. below the top of the barrow at its eastern edge, and 9ft. below it at its centre. When the excavation had passed the centre westward, it was opened out northwards to a length of 21ft..

July 19, Wednesday.—A great deal of charcoal was found about 4ft. above the natural surface at the centre; and at a depth of 1ft. 6in. from the natural bottom, and 7ft. 6in. from the surface under the centre picket, a well formed flint “scraper” or “strike-a-light” was found. And in all about 20 fragments of worked flint were found in this barrow, some of them with *patina* upon them, and some with rose-coloured staining (from manganese?), but most retaining the black surfaces of their original fractures unchanged, and showing thereby that they were chipped during, or only shortly before, the erection of the mound, for the purpose of funeral ceremonial. But in this northern part of the twin-barrow we found no pottery, no bronze, no interment; and the flints, such as they were, were much fewer in mere numbers than in either of the other two barrows to be hereafter described. Our failure to find any interment may be explained by the fact that this mound was very extensively burrowed into by badgers, foxes, and rabbits; and if the interment had been contained within as small a compass, and had consisted of such easily scatterable materials as those contained and discovered in the two other mounds, it is easy to see how it might have been entirely dispersed and destroyed.

“Sigwell ii,” July 20, Thursday.—We commenced upon the southernmost of the two halves of the twin-barrow (Pl. 1, fig. 2, B), driving a trench 15ft. wide from east to west, beginning along a line 30ft. south of the line of the centre picket, but some little way, as the plan will show, from the actual southern boundary of the barrow. Some excavation had been made, either for the sake of investigation or for digging out rabbits, fox, or badger, on the south-east side of the barrow; the earth disturbed by this operation had been partly thrown out eastwards, partly filled in again; through the westward part of the disturbed soil we dug, and found that the diggers had not gone very far down and had left a “steel” for striking a light and a piece of glazed pottery in their “filling-in.” We came upon the natural surface at a depth of 9ft. 10in., as in the northern barrow, the ground and the mound being of the same distinctive character as regards each other.

A piece of British pottery (labelled “Sigwell ii a.”) was found 15ft. 6in. to the south-west of the centre picket, and 9ft. 10in. below the surface. It had been apparently the bottom of a jar or urn, and may possibly indicate that an urn burial had taken place in this barrow before the one we had to deal with. The distal half of the metacarpal or metatarsal of a sheep or goat was found about 5ft. down in the barrow near to the centre picket. It was a good

deal decayed, but one of the phalanges was found in relation with it.

3ft. 8in. to the west of the centre picket (Pl. 1, figs. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6) we found a grave 1ft. 6in. deep in the natural soil, 10ft. long, 5ft. wide at the north, 4ft. wide at the south end, its long axis due magnetic north and south, that of the tumulus itself being about north 5° east. The eastern end of the grave was 7ft. to west of the centre picket, 3ft. 10in. of the length of the grave being to the south of the centre, and the remaining 6ft. 2in. to the north. In this grave was contained a bark coffin, inside of which was a bronze dagger, and a quantity of very thoroughly burnt small fragments of human bones. The longest diameter of the largest of these fragments being only $\cdot 9$ in., it is difficult to say more than that this fragment, being apparently a part of that portion of the occipital bone which is known as the *Torcular Herophili* (the very same portion of bone as that which was found in the deposit of La Tinière, and one which possesses a singular power of resisting various destructive agencies), probably belonged to a young male subject. With this and one or two more fragments of skull there were some fragments of the long bones. With the white fragments were mixed up here (as also in "Sigwell iii" to be hereafter described) masses of bones so burnt and so broken up as to present an Oxford grey colour from the intimate intermingling of their white with their carbonised factors. With the bones were mixed up inside the oak bark coffin some flint flakes labelled "Sigwell ii c;" but not a single fragment of charcoal. It had been made of two pieces of bark, which had been fastened together at the sides, so as to leave two free ends projecting freely, not wrapped round each other. But in one section drawn by General Lane Fox (Pl. 1, fig. 5), the upper bark cover having been shorter than the lower, this latter simply curves round its free edge. As the ensuing description will show, the lower piece of bark must have been laid upon the ground, and the bones from the pyre or ustrinum must have been brought to it and placed upon and along it together with the earth and the bronze dagger, and the flints which were found inside the coffin by us. The upper piece of bark was then put over the entire mass of contents, and the rest of the barrow piled over them.

The coffin's east edge was nearer the east border of the grave than its west edge was; at this edge it was about 1ft. 2in. short of the grave's boundary. Its length was, from south to north, about 7ft.; in working from south to north we had cut away the south end of the coffin before we were aware of it, so that we cannot say with perfect certainty where its south end began, but as its north end was detectable 2ft. from the north end of the grave, the entire length of which was only 10ft., this is of no great consequence. The width of the coffin was from 34in. to 36in.; its depth in the middle line about 6 \cdot 5in. (Pl. 1, fig. 4):

The contents of the bark coffin contrasted very strikingly with the made earth of the barrow above, with the natural soil into which the grave was sunk on either side, and thirdly with the soil

from the grave itself, which had been thrown up on the east side of the grave as seen and shown in the section. The soil within the coffin was lighter a good deal than the made earth of the barrow, the intermingling of which with fairly divided carbonaceous matter had made it in places very dark; but was much less light than the natural ground into which the grave was sunk. But it is of great importance to note that in the soil inside the bark coffin no fragments of charcoal sufficiently large to be detected with the naked eye were visible; as hence we see that the body was burnt some distance away from the grave, and that the burnt bones were picked up out of the ashes and carried to the grave separately,* being distributed as deposited throughout the entire length of the coffin examined. The upper bark was much thinner than the lower, the lower being as much as seven-eighths thick, whilst the upper was as little as one-fifth to one-fourth. The upper piece had split in some places and the sand had worked away into the space left empty. *In situ*, the layers of the bark towards the interior were black, and the outer reddish; but, on drying, the reddish colour is in many pieces the colour throughout the entire thickness of the bark. Microscopic examination showed no dotted cells, and the Scotch fir is thereby excluded, but it is possible that it may have come from the Wych elm. Its structure, however, had been made exceedingly difficult to examine by the ravages of a fungus.

In this coffin, together with the bones and the two or three flint chips, was a bronze dagger with three rivets, 6·5in. long from proximal rivet to point. It was much decayed, and did not rest on the bottom of the coffin, but was separated from it by a considerable thickness of dullish yellow sand. Its point was broken away for a length of 7·10in. and this part was brought away on a piece of the hardened sandy earth. This lump of earth is preserved with a little of the crumbled-away part of the point adherent to it; the greater part of the point, however, has been attached, together with the rest of the blade, to a piece of cardboard. The lamina which held the rivets has broken up, and the small fragments of bronze diffused throughout the soil in the bottle labelled "Sigwell ii b," represent it.

The dagger lay near the southern end of the grave, about 2ft. from the end; its pivot end was at the south, its point at the north. An interment which must have been of a somewhat similar character is described by Mr. Spence Bate, F.R.S., in the Transactions of the Devon Association, Vol. v. 1872, p. 555-556. There "a mass of comminuted bones mixed with earth, instead of being enclosed in an urn, were found lying closely placed together in one spot beneath the stones." And in the earth that was carted home, "besides a quantity of bits of bone, was found the blade of a bronze dagger."

"Sigwell iii" (Pl. 2, T, and Pl. 3), Monday, July 23.—Commenced

* For the picking up of burnt bones see Max Müller, *Die Todtenbestattung*, *Zeitschrift Deutsche Morgenland. Gesell.* vol. ix., p. 17. Colebrooke, "Life and Asiatic Researches," Vol. ii. *ibique citata*.

work with seven men upon the barrow to the south-west of Sigwell camp, lettered T upon plan, by cutting a trench 17ft. long and 12ft. 6in. wide on line A B of plan, and to south-west of centre picket. This barrow resembled the two already described as "Sigwell i" and "ii" in the material and mode of its construction; in containing burnt bones which had been picked out of the ashes of the fire in which the body they belonged to had been burnt and buried apart; and in containing fragments of coarse pottery, it resembled "Sigwell ii," but differed from it in not furnishing any specimen of bronze, and in, perhaps by way of compensation, furnishing a very large number of worked flints, some black, others whitened on their fractured surfaces, and in containing a small fragment of a patterned drinking cup or food-vessel, and in containing a very much larger quantity of human burned bones as well as two large fragments of unburnt bones, an *os innominatum*, to wit, and a piece of a femur.

Among other important lessons taught by the history of this barrow, one of special importance is the ease with which it is possible to miss an interment when that interment lies within a circle of half a foot radius, and consists only of a small quantity of either very finely comminuted or all but pulverised burnt bones.

A good scraper, labelled "Sigwell iii c," was found 3ft. 5in. south-west of the centre picket and 4ft. 7in. below the level of it. All through this barrow worked flints were found in much greater abundance than in either of the other two. I was inclined to connect their presence in this quantity with the absence in this barrow of any rabbit-holes, supposing that a rabbit in burrowing would be likely to throw out a worked flint rather than an equivalent mass of sand for obvious reasons, mechanical and other. But I should not press this view.

Exactly beneath the centre picket, and 6ft. below it, was a mass of burnt bones occupying a circle of about a foot in diameter. The bones belonged to an adult, sex uncertain. In two other spots in the barrow two other bones were found, viz., a fragment of a right *os innominatum*, the acetabular portion of which is so shallow as to suggest that it has been affected by disease and absorption, and a fragment of a femur also of the right side. The burnt bones, "iii d," were in much greater quantity than those found in "Sigwell ii," and had some, though very little, charcoal amongst them: differences which may be accounted for by the place in which they were burnt having been in close proximity to the place where we found them. The place of burning we discovered thus. At a distance of 1ft. 9in. below the burnt bones there was a thick seam of burnt wood 4in. thick, and the floor below the ashes, at a spot a little to the north-east of the centre, was very much reddened, showing that a fire had been lighted and had burnt with much intensity upon it. In these ashes on the floor of the barrow were a few fragments of human bone, "iii e," well burnt, like those above, which we may suppose, therefore, to have escaped the careful out-picking which had removed so large a number of the burnt bones from intermixture with the ashes, and had placed them together, as

described, on the top of a mass of earth, piled up to a height of nearly 2ft. above the site of the pyre. A similar up-piling of earth must have taken place in the bark coffin in "Sigwell ii," as the description shows, and a similar picking out of the bones from among the ashes. That the fire had been lighted on the original surface without paring away the turf was plain enough, from the fact that in paring it immediately below the ashes, at 7ft. 9in. to 8ft. below the centre picket—the stalks of coarse grass and bracken were very plainly visible in section (Pl. 3, enlarged section). But besides this we found also round sections of small stakes about 1in. in diameter, which penetrated 6in. or 7in. down into the natural soil, and some of which tapered towards their lower ends. They had been stuck in to support the pile of wood we may suppose. A chipped flint disc, 2½in., chipped on both sides, was found in the centre of the burnt wood, "Sigwell iii c," which might have been used as a sling-stone with a riband sling. Of the other flints some have black fracture surfaces, others had been weathered before being put into the barrow; two good scrapers were amongst them, one "Sigwell, iii. c," having been found by us 3ft. 5in. south-west of the centre, and 4ft. 7in. below the surface; the other "Sigwell iii f," having been found by the Rev. J. A. Bennett in superintending the filling-in of the excavation. One flint has a saw-edge, as I think purposely produced; another has the appearance (but not, as I think, the reality) of a barbed arrow-head. Some of the flints had been burnt.

The two bones found at a distance from the burnt ones may nevertheless have belonged to the same body as that which furnished the ashes; both are of the right side, the one an *os innominatum*, the other a femur fragment. They may have escaped the perfect burning to which the rest of the skeleton was subjected. Why they were not put together with the perfectly burnt bones I do not know. The charcoal and ashes of the pyre must have undergone a very complete sifting to leave so few bones behind amongst them, and also a very complete shifting of place as regards a considerable part of them, for the layer of charcoal over the natural soil, which had been reddened, was not thicker than that which was over the parts which were not so reddened. The charcoal over these latter parts, therefore, must have been removed on to them. That the burnt bones were collected in a skin, or possibly in some textile fabric, and so placed where we found them, may, in the absence of any relics of bark, or of either of the other substances just mentioned, be shown to be probable by a reference to a paper by the Babu Rajendralala Mitra, in the "Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal," 1870, iv., p. 253, where we read that the bones from the pyre "are washed and put in an urn or tied up in a piece of black antelope skin."

That the two large fragments of bone found in this interment may very well have belonged to the same body as that which furnished the ashes, is evident from the following observations of Dr. Hutchinson, of Patna, which are put on record by Dr. Norman Chevers, in his "Medical Jurisprudence," p. 64, 1870:—

“Dr. Hutchinson, of Patna, an active observer of all that can throw light upon our knowledge of medical jurisprudence in India, took an opportunity to ascertain exactly the amount of wood which would be necessary to destroy entirely an adult healthy body, and the time that would be necessary for its entire cremation. The pyre was composed of ten maunds of wood, but an equal amount of fala straw was necessary, as also two bottles of oil. The pile was lighted at 6.30 P.M., and at 3 A.M. next morning the consumption of the body was declared to be complete. When he visited the spot he found in the centre of the ashes the heads of two femora entire, but completely calcined, and a mass of incinerated matter, as large as two fists, said to be the remains of the liver. This 20 maunds, or 1,600 lbs. of wood and straw and two bottles of oil, were required to consume a healthy body, and 8½ hours more required for the operation, which even then was virtually incomplete. Here, however, five times the needful quantity of fuel was consumed.”

OBSERVATIONS *on the* TOPOGRAPHY *of* SIGWELL.

By MAJOR-GENERAL A. LANE FOX.

As it was my particular function during these excavations to make the survey and take the measurements, a few words on the topography of the neighbourhood of Sigwell may be desirable.

Leaving Professor Rolleston, whose admirable description we have just heard, to superintend the digging, I set about examining the surroundings. At the distance of a mile in a south-west direction we have Cadbury, a large British camp, which like most earthworks that are distinctly British, occupies with its entrenchments the whole brow of the hill on which it is situated; it is one of those positions which the Rev. F. Warre, in his excellent classification of the British camps of this district,* describes as fortresses pure and simple, having no interior divisions, as distinguished from other works which, having a kind of keep and sometimes one or two fortified interior partitions, he considers to be fortified towns rather than positions of a purely military character. It is on a detached spur from the line of hills which are shown on the right of the accompanying rough sketch, and which run north and south, forming the eastern boundary of the Yeo Valley, and the source of many of its tributary streams. To the west of Cadbury the ground is low for some distance. On the east, the summit of the hills is occupied by table land, the margin of which is defined in the accompanying sketch by Littleton Hill, Pen Hill, Charnwell, Sigwell, and Gurt, and between this range and Cadbury is the long eastward-stretching valley of Whitcomb, with its central stream rising in Sigwell and joining another stream from the summit

* Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Vol. v., p. 38.