Discoveries at Amesbury

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ON 26th June 1920 workmen in the employ of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, whilst excavating at the Ministry's Farm Settlement at Amesbury, discovered some bones of a skeleton. The site lies approximately 175 yards north-east of Ratfyn Barrow (marked on the Ordnance Map), and about 6 in. below the surface of the chalk. The grave was about 7 ft. long and about 2 ft. 3 in. in depth. Mr. P. Farrar, of Bulford Camp, a local archaeologist, was at once communicated with, and discovered further remains after a careful search. An extract from his Report to the Ministry reads as follows :

'The second skeleton, which I extracted with my own hands, was at the feet of the first; the bones had been somewhat destroyed, the lower jaw, for instance, lying about 6 in. away from the skull. It appeared as if the body had been dropped in anyhow, for the skull actually rested on a thigh-bone. Rats, moles, cats, and dogs, however, could all get at a shallow interment such as this, and disarrangement of the bones may have been due to action by animals. Close to the place where the head of the first skeleton lay, the workmen in my presence turned up the axehead which you have. Close to the grave on the north side is a pit filled with dark earth which contained some fragments of charcoal. I picked away a little of the face, but saw no relics. Depth about 18 in. but uncertain. The barrow-pit cuts through a wide shallow trench about 9 ft. 6 in. across and 18 in. to 21 in. deep at the centre, distant about 15 in. from the north end of the grave. In the north-west side of the barrow-pit was found, I understand, an urn containing bones. The bones had all crumbled in the urn, which was in a hole not more than 15 in. deep and lay in fragments.

'I may add that there were some unimportant fragments of three types of Romano-British pottery found in the surface soil.

'On the 15th July I revisited the site and, after clearing away some of the fallen material, reached the undisturbed chalk at the southern end of the original excavation. There appears to me to be a distinct curve on the end, and it is possible that the bodies were buried in their pit dwelling. The pit at the side on re-examination looks rather like an annexe shallower and smaller but

connected with the larger excavation ; and the whole thing is reminiscent of certain Early Iron Age pit-dwellings found by Mr. and Mrs. Cunnington, of Devizes, in Casterley Camp. In one of these were found skeletons evidently thrown in after death. It is true, however, that the workmen said the first skeleton was on its side, contracted, with hands up to the face, so we may perhaps assume a natural death.'

After his first visit to the site, Mr. Farrar reported the matter to Rev. G. H. Engleheart, F.S.A., our local secretary for Wilts. He states in his report that 'the axehead is a fine and perfect specimen made of dark green-grey close-grained quartzite, and is very similar to one figured in Evans's *Ancient Stone Implements*, second edition, p. 194, fig. 126. With reference to the disposal of these relics, I venture to urge strongly that they may be deposited in the Salisbury Museum, which is deficient in material from Salisbury Plain. The British Museum already possesses an abundance of similar objects. Our Fellow Mr. F. Stevens, the curator, is doing excellent educational work in Salisbury by the instrumentality of the museum, and the acquirement of additional objects will be of much service to him. Dr. Blackmore, of the same museum, is very competent to report on the skeletons.'

As regards Mr. Engleheart's suggestion, the Ministry does not propose to relinquish its formal ownership of the axe. Arrangements, however, will be made to place the axe in the Salisbury, South Wilts., and Blackmore Museum at Salisbury, on what will doubtless prove to be permanent loan, and it will be exhibited there with other antiquities discovered at Amesbury, which are already in the curator's charge.

Mr. REGINALD SMITH added the following notes :

In the absence of any definite association, the exhibits must be judged on their individual merits ; but several analogies are available, and there is little room for doubt that the axe-hammer dates from the earliest stage of our Bronze Age, when the dead were buried unburnt and beakers formed part of the normal grave-furniture.

The Amesbury specimen (fig. 1, *a*) certainly came from such a burial, though it is doubtful if a beaker also belonged to it : one fragment among those exhibited, $\frac{3}{8}$ in. thick, seems to belong to an exceptionally large specimen of that type, as the lip is bevelled on the inner side, a peculiarity noted on more perfect vessels at Gullane Bay, Haddingtonshire (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, xlii, 315, 317) and at Peterborough (*Archaeologia*, lxii, 345). The other fragments belong to several vessels not of the beaker type, all no

doubt dating from the Bronze Age, but otherwise nondescript. Some over $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick may belong to cinerary urns.

Axe-hammers or battle-axes are comparatively rare in the British Isles, but the present type is well represented; and, pending an examination of the whole series, parallel examples with some evidence of date may be enumerated here. It will be noticed that the Amesbury axe is slightly dished on the top and bottom faces, and that its depth and maximum breadth are both $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. Col. Bidder's exhibit, from the Thames at Datchet (fig. 1, *b*),

FIG. 1. Perforated Stone Axe-hammers found in England: *a*, Amesbury; *b*, Datchet; *c*, Standlow; *d*, Bulford.

is almost an exact duplicate, with the same width and depth, and only one-fifth of an inch longer: the top and bottom are nearly flat. River-finds are seldom of evidential value, but fig. 1, *c*, represents a British Museum specimen found in a barrow (Standlow, Derbyshire) by J. F. Lucas in 1867. It is $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, and is said to have been found with a bronze dagger, also in the museum (*Archaeologia*, xliii, 411, note 2). It is dished at the top and bottom, like the fourth illustrated here (fig. 1, *d*), which is also of the same length. This was found by Col. Hawley on Bulford Down with a primary burial of a brachycephalic man in the crouching attitude (*Wilt. Arch. Mag.*, xxxvi, 617 and 622, fig. 5). Traces of the handle were noticed, and a wedge of bone found that had been used for security. With many other finds on Salisbury Plain it was presented to the national collection.

A larger specimen, $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, is under Mr. Parker Brewis's

charge at Newcastle-on-Tyne Museum, and was found deep in the bed of the river Wear above Sunderland Bridge. Its site has been taken to confirm the view that this series is of Scandinavian origin, but other specimens from barrows elsewhere in England can hardly be so explained.

One of hard bluish stone veined with white (fig. 2) is illustrated in *Archaeologia*, xliii, 410, fig. 96, and in the Salisbury volume of the Archaeological Institute (1851), 110, fig. 14. It accompanied

FIG. 2. Stone Axe-hammer, East Kennet, Wilts. ($\frac{2}{3}$).

FIG. 3. Stone Axe-hammer, Bardwell, Suffolk ($\frac{1}{2}$).

a skeleton with a beaker and bronze dagger-blade in a barrow near the long barrow at East Kennet, Wilts. ; but there are glaring discrepancies in the two accounts of the find. In Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, are two with slightly expanded cutting-edge, accompanied by bronze dagger-blades, each with three large rivets. Both are of toadstone, and were found in Derbyshire with skeletons : one is 4 in. long and comes from Carder Low, the other is $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

longer and accompanied a secondary interment in a mound at Parcelly Hay, near Hartington (*Bateman Colln. Cat.*, pp. 6, 8).

Several others are quoted by Sir John Evans (as fig. 3), but not all conform strictly to the type under consideration. This is characterized by a uniform thickness from cutting-edge to the butt-end, the edge having little or no tendency to spread nor the butt to become conical. It is more than probable that this is the earliest form of the stone battle-axe in Britain, although the reverse order of development has been advocated by Nils Åberg in *De Nordiska Stridsyxornas Typologi*.

As there is apparently no predecessor in the Neolithic Period, it is necessary to account for the sudden appearance of this weapon in Britain ; and its ultimate origin seems to have been in Hungary, where copper was known very early and continued in use for a long time. Axe-heads of this form were exported from that centre, and one is illustrated from Norway (fig. 4). On the

FIG. 4. Copper Axe-hammer found in Norway.

fringe of Europe metal was first worked at a comparatively late date, perhaps a thousand years after its appearance in Hungary, and remained scarce for centuries ; hence the copper weapon was imitated in stone, and underwent a development that can only be explained by constant reference to metallic models.

References to several copper or bronze specimens found in Scandinavia are given by Professor Montelius in *Archiv für Anthropologie*, xxv, 467, note 1, and xxvi, pp. 472, 493 ; and if this argument is sound, it has an important corollary. Copper, if not bronze, was contemporary with the beakers of Britain, and there is no proof that stone axe-hammers were made in our Neolithic Period. In Scandinavia, which was much nearer the original source of metal, many of the stone battle-axes date from megalithic times (passage-graves and cists, marking the last two stages of the neolithic there). Did Scandinavia get into touch with Hungary before copper tools reached Britain from that centre, or did the British Bronze Age begin much sooner than

the Scandinavian? There are reasons for thinking that the cist-burials of Scandinavia were contemporary with the Early Bronze Age of Britain (*Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xxxii, 19); but on the other hand Knut Stjerna attributed the Scandinavian passage-graves to the Copper Age (*Proc. Prehist. Soc. E. Anglia*, iii, 24). Professor Montelius thinks the Bronze Age began about the same time on either side of the North Sea; and the stone axe-hammers afford a likely means of reaching a final agreement on this point.

DISCUSSION

Mr. PRAETORIUS had found on the sea-shore north of Anglesey a drifted Scottish boulder of granite which appeared to be a similar axe-hammer in the course of manufacture. The drilling had been begun from both faces, but, like the shaping of the stone, had never been completed.

The PRESIDENT expressed the Society's indebtedness to Sir Lawrence Weaver for the exhibit, and was not surprised to find that so beautiful a weapon dated from the Bronze Age, though it was rather an inversion of ideas to derive a stone axe from a metal prototype. He questioned whether the material was quartzite, and whether all the pottery fragments were contemporary. The bevelled lip indicated an unusually large size for a beaker.