



Notes on Some Tumuli and Stone Circles Near Castleton, Derbyshire

Author(s): Rooke Pennington

Source: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 4 (1875), pp. 377-386

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2840982>

Accessed: 16/06/2014 07:57

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The following paper was read by the Author :—

NOTES on some TUMULI and STONE CIRCLES near CASTLETON, DERBYSHIRE. By ROOKE PENNINGTON, LL.B., F.G.S. [With Plate xxvi.]

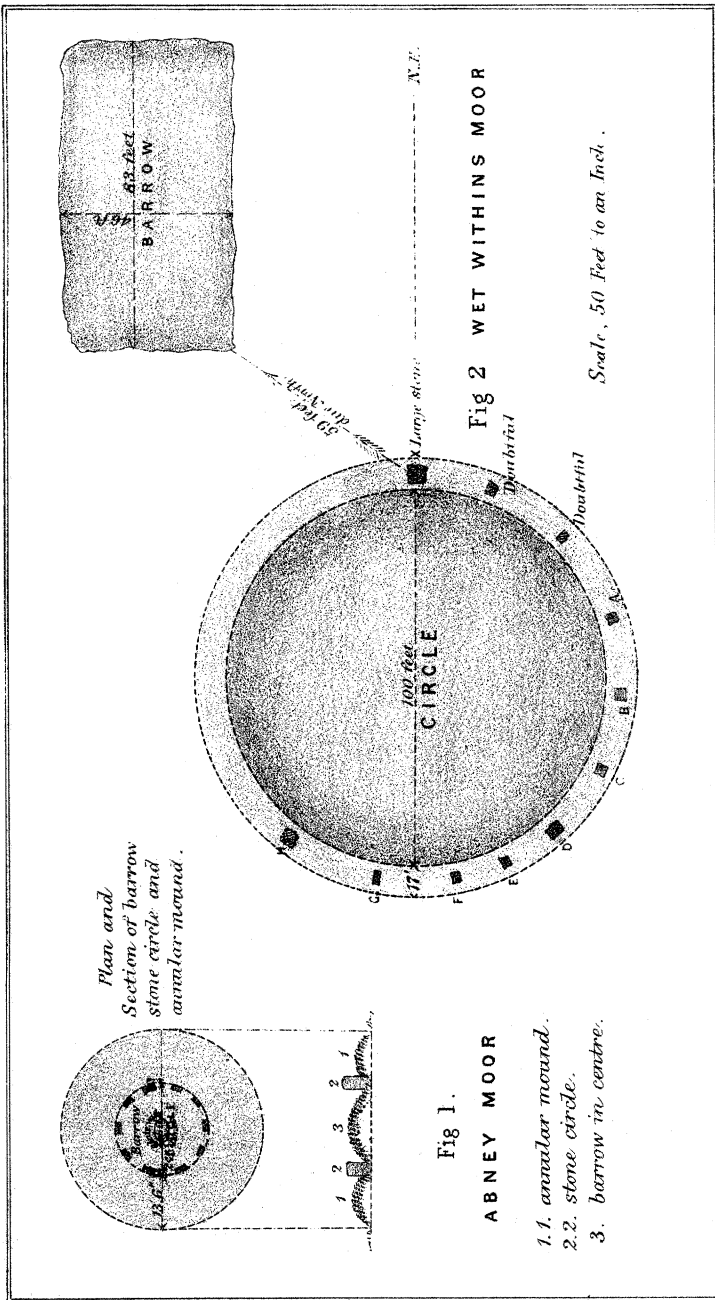
DURING the last five or six years I have from time to time engaged myself, in company with Mr. John Tym, of Castleton, in opening a number of the barrows which still remain unexplored in that picturesque neighbourhood.

These burial places of our predecessors occur most frequently upon the tops of hills, often designated "lowes," a well-known Anglo-Saxon (English) term for burial mound, but not seldom exist still in the valleys, and it may be doubted whether their comparative scarcity in the dales is not the effect of cultivation. The barrows are by no means confined to the Mountain-Limestone heights; they are equally distributed over those of the Millstone-Grit moors which are contiguous to fertile valleys; though those in the latter position seldom contain remains as well preserved as the limestone tumuli. No doubt the greater dryness of the latter has something to do with this.

The first barrow the contents of which I will describe, is one situated on the top of Elden Hill, about four miles from Castleton. Elden Hill is celebrated for having in its side the famous chasm, known as Elden Hole, a descent into which I made last summer. The mound was circular, forty-nine feet in diameter, and about five feet high in the centre. Mr. Bateman, the well-known Derbyshire archaeologist, dug into its upper portion in 1856, finding two interments.* He left, however, the greater portion of the mound intact. Upon cutting into the northern side of the mound, we soon came upon numbers of rats' bones,† and snail-shells (*Helix nemoralis*), and then upon an occasional human bone, possibly dragged by rats into its position. The mound had never been disturbed before on this side. After working some time and removing some large stones, apparently supports for looser materials within and above, human bones became more plentiful, and masses of rats' bones—amongst which an occasional finger or wrist-bone of man occurred—became frequent. About four feet into the mound, embedded in earth, and at a depth of about a foot and a half, we came on some bones and teeth of the horse; the bones appeared to be very much diseased. About a foot further on, and a foot deeper, two feet and a half from the surface, was a left antler of red deer, which had been worked or shaved off at one place for some purpose. It was firmly fixed in the earth, and very rotten. Shortly

* "Ten Years' Diggings in Celtic and Saxon Grave Hills," p. 87.

† The water-vole or water-rat (Owen), *Arvicola amphibia*, mentioned below.



C.F. Bell, Litho. London, E.C.

STONE CIRCLES & BARROWS, NEAR CASTLETON.

after, at a greater depth, we came upon another portion of red deer antler, and some teeth of that animal, one very large.

When within about a foot of the centre of the mound, and at a depth of about three feet and a half from its surface, we opened into a large cist. (This cist was on our left, to the north-west of the centre.) We found that it was the same cist into which we had dug from the south-west in November, 1869. It was of large extent, and in it we found fragments of a rude urn, ornamented with the finger-nail and a sharpened stick. It had been crushed by falling earth, but the whole of it was there, though very fragile. Near it was a number of human bones, evidently of an old man.

We were now at the opposite side of this cist, but found nothing in it, save a bone of the horse. Proceeding with our excavation to the centre, we noticed that the subsoil disappeared, and that upon clearing out the *débris* of the mound we were on the rock. That we were, in fact, in a shallow grave, became manifest; rats' bones became more plentiful than ever, in fact, they came out by spadefuls. The presence of these bones in such large quantities may be explained by supposing that the rats, possibly resorting, in the first instance, to the barrows for the purpose of devouring the bodies, found them agreeable places of residence, and took up their quarters from time to time amongst the loose stones of the tumuli. Seeing that it is the water-vole (*Arvicola amphibia*) which is thus found, it seems strange that in this, as in many cases, the barrow stood on a hill remote from any water whatever, the very streams in the neighbourhood being all subterranean (the formation is the mountain limestone). I can only suppose that considerable changes have taken place, and that formerly the growth of forests over the now treeless wastes, and the underwood accompanying, made the now arid valleys humid and swampy. Even in the middle ages, the district of the Peak Forest, in which this barrow is situate, was much better wooded than it is now.

To return to the grave. In it was a tolerably well-preserved skeleton of some young person, probably, I should say, not more than seventeen years of age. The body had been placed on its left side, in a contracted position, knees into chin, the face looking north. The skull was protected by three stones, with a cap-stone. No regular cist, however, protected the remainder of the body; there were simply a number of large pieces of limestone irregularly piled around it.

No implement was found, except what seemed to be a fragment of a bone: one, and only one, little bit of unglazed pottery. A number of animal bones accompanied the interment, showing

the funeral feast to have consisted of *Bos longifrons*, horse, and boar or pig: the latter very numerous.

The skull was long and narrow, and well developed. The teeth were well preserved. The ribs, vertebræ, &c., had nearly all disappeared; the long bones were, however, there, and served to show the position of the body. The cist previously mentioned, and Mr. Bateman's finds, were respectively at considerably higher levels. This interment was in the exact centre of the mound, and beyond all question the primary one.

The position of the ring of stones which, I have said, we came across in excavating, and which we subsequently found extended all round the outer fringe of the barrow, although concealed by the earth, and the symmetry also of the mound, show, I think, that it was altogether built up when this primary interment was made. We have, therefore, the funeral rites performed with all the barbaric pomp of feasting, and a large mound laboriously piled up, upon the occasion of the death of a young person who must have possessed some position other than that won by prowess or skill, which claimed these attentions. This would point to a recognition of the superior rank of a chief's family, for we know that young persons were not always thus honoured, and indeed it would be absurd to expect that savages would in every case expend this labour over the young. I do not, of course, mean to say that this is a solitary instance of this kind, but it is a very clear and conclusive one.

The remaining finds were not important. They comprised two collections of human bones, in heaps, with one of which was a flint chip and some quartz pebbles, the latter indicative, I think, of a late interment. Both the collections of bones were associated with the bones of the red deer. A portion of a jet ornament was also found, but with what particular interment it had been cast into the tumulus it was impossible to say, but probably with the primary one just described.

On the top of the hill known as Siggett (a corruption of Sidegate), just to the south-east of Castleton, was a large barrow about forty feet in diameter, though not more than three feet and a half in height. Beginning to dig on the north side we met with occasional human bones, teeth, and flint flakes. Throughout the whole mound the bones of the *Arvicola amphibius* were exceedingly abundant. Getting near to the centre, one foot below the surface, was an inverted urn of the usual rude type, made by hand, and ornamented with impressions of the thumb-nail. It was completely crushed in, but had been filled with burnt bones. A little to the right, and somewhat nearer the centre, was a fine skeleton. It was three feet and a half below the surface, and the natural soil had been slightly scooped

out to form a resting-place for it. It had been laid upon its left side in a contracted position, its head to the north-west. With it were a bronze ring, a jet bead, and a quartz pebble. The skeleton of a child was buried very near to it, and apparently with it. Both these skeletons were buried rather than encisted. There was no indication of any attempt to protect them from the earth and rock of the mound. Independently of the bronze ring, the quartz pebble points, I think, to a period later than the neolithic age, or at any rate than the earlier portion of that age.

Of nine cases in which the finding of quartz pebbles is specially recorded by Mr. Bateman, all, with one exception, present indications of belonging to a late period, and that exception is of doubtful age. Two of them are certainly, and two are almost certainly, subsequent to the introduction of iron. Quartz pebbles do not naturally occur near Castleton. I should think it unlikely that they were brought thither simply to be used as sling-stones, and still more unlikely that if this particular pebble was for that purpose, that the deceased should have been sped on her journey with but a single missile.

Other indications pointing to the comparative lateness of interments containing quartz pebbles, may it not be that they were deposited as amulets? Just as, no doubt, the practice of depositing flint flakes with the dead, a custom prevailing down into the iron age, arose from a superstitious veneration for the qualities of that stone, which in earlier times had been the sole source of all utensils, so may it be with quartz pebbles. These appear to be placed just as the flint flakes are placed, where there can be no use for them, and where there is great difficulty in assigning any other than a superstitious motive for so depositing them.

To return to the barrow. The skeleton appeared to be that of a female, considerably advanced in life. The skull was of the round form, but so rotten that it fell to pieces. The teeth were good, but worn flat. The bones were well preserved, but presented no peculiarity worthy of notice. Near to this skeleton, but not so placed as to be identified as appurtenant to it, was a well-chipped celt. There were so many interments in the mound that this might easily have belonged to some other than the one in question. Three or four feet from the skeleton, to the north of it, and about two feet and a half below the surface, was a deposit of burnt human bones, unaccompanied by any implement. At about the same distance from the skeleton, on the western side of it, was another urn, buried at about two feet below the surface. This had been a very large and fine urn; the diameter of its mouth was about eighteen

inches. It was crushed, but the rim was nearly perfect. The ornamentation had been effected by pressing twisted grass on the clay before burning. The urn was filled with burnt bones; no implement accompanied it.

Some distance to the south of the skeleton, at about three feet and a half below the surface of the barrow, and on the natural surface of the ground, were the burnt bones of some animal, accompanying the skeleton of a boy or girl. With this interment was a quartz pebble, and also two flint flakes. At the centre of the mound, nearly four feet below the surface, resting on the rock, was another urn, also much crushed. We succeeded in putting some portion of it together, and found that it was perfectly plain, no pattern or ornament having been impressed upon it. It was completely full of bones, much more thoroughly consumed than is usual, or than the other burnt bones in the same tumulus. Both human and animal bones could, however, be detected, and all appeared to be burnt in an equal degree. This would seem to show that the corpse was not burnt until after the funeral feast was concluded, and that then the bones of the animals eaten were cast at the same time and into the same fire with the body.

This is one of those barrows which have led me to the conclusion that, in Derbyshire, at any rate, no connection can be established between the neolithic age and contracted burial, and the bronze age and incremation. For instance, in this barrow we have four instances of incremation without any bronze implement accompanying them; and though this negative fact is not worth very much in leading us to a conclusion, yet the occurrence in the same mound of contracted burials associated with bronze, is one clear instance in support of my observation.

The barrows explored in the Derbyshire district show that the percentage of those in which contracted burial occurs with bronze is almost the same—very little less than those in which incremation and bronze go together. Besides this, the two modes of interment over and over again occur in the same mound, and very often the burnt one is the more ancient. It seems certain that in this district the two customs were in force at the same time, that both existed in the age of stone, and both continued in vogue after the introduction of bronze.

On the moors between Castleton and Eyam several circles and barrows of great interest remain; to three of these I would draw special attention. Upon Abney Moor is, or rather was, a sepulchral circle, presenting one of the several types of burial by cremation. Incinerated bodies are found sometimes in urns, sometimes deposited in cists, frequently placed, without protection from the superincumbent mound, upon the natural surface

of the ground. The circle-tumulus on Abney Moor differed from any of these in containing a quantity of burnt bones piled up upon a large, flat piece of sandstone (the "slate" of the locality), and screened from the earth, peat, and stones of which the barrow was composed by a large piece of rock. The mound was about twenty feet in diameter, and five feet and a half high. Outside and around was a rampart of earth about a foot high, the outside diameter of which was about fifty feet (fig. 1, Pl. xxvi.). Upon this rampart or annular mound were ten large stones, each upright and about three feet in height, placed along the rampart's inner margin. The entire sepulchre presented a most interesting relic of antiquity, being quite perfect, and standing very conspicuously out amidst the dreary moorland in which it was situated.

Upon digging into the mound, numerous fragments of bone, both burnt and unburnt, appeared, and also a few fragments of pottery. No entire urn was found except one, which, I believe, was whole, but which was unfortunately completely broken by the men before I got to the place. It appears to be of superior make to the ordinary barrow pottery. In the exact centre of the tumulus was found the interment I have referred to. The mass of burnt bone was considerable; it had been placed with some care upon the slab, though, as observed, no regular cist enclosed it. The traces of handicraft accompanying it were flint flakes, a chert flake, and some jet beads, some amber beads, and a very good arrow-head. The beads had evidently formed portions of necklaces. That the funeral fire had been lit upon the spot was manifest from the numerous pieces of burnt grit-stone and sandstone found upon the natural surface beneath the site of the barrow.

In the immediate vicinity of the circle are a number of pit dwellings, whose artificial character is clearly shown by their not being simply depressions in the peat and subsoil, but actual excavations in the rock itself. Within a short distance of this sepulchral circle are two other circles of a very different character. With great respect to some who hold other views, I feel quite sure that many of our megalithic circles, particularly the larger ones, are not sepulchral, but devotional. Being concerned in exposing the absurdity, or rather the want of foundation for calling stone circles Druidical, some archæologists seem to have gone to the other extreme, and so have denied that any of the circles are temples at all. Now the two other circles I have just mentioned are most remarkable contrasts to the Abney Moor one, and are clearly non-sepulchral.

On Offerton Moor is a circular rampart of earth. The outside diameter is eighty-nine feet one way, eighty-three feet the

other; the rampart seven feet wide, and two feet and a half high. About 100 feet away to the north-east is a large ruined barrow of the round form. No stones remained, but that the rampart once supported the megaliths of a circle is pretty clear, for the barrow was evidently destroyed to build a neighbouring wall many years ago, and the stones of the circle would go at the same time.

On the Wet Withins Moor is a very fine stone circle (fig. 2, Pl. xxvi.). The rampart is seventeen feet wide, the inside diameter is about 100 feet, the outside diameter 116 feet. The circle, probably, originally consisted of fifteen or sixteen stones; eleven are still standing. The stones stand at irregular intervals; the longest is on the north-east, and is nearest to the barrow to be presently described. This stone stands perpendicularly, and is shaped like a chair. The other stones are flat, varying in width from one foot to four, and inclining inwards at angles from forty to sixty degrees. The space between the stones varies from twelve to twenty-one feet.

To the north of the circle, and fifty-nine feet from it, is a large oblong barrow, eighty-four feet long by forty-six feet wide (see fig. 2, Pl. xxvi.), which was explored from time to time during the last century, though very meagre accounts of the results have been handed down. The north-eastern axis of the circle, which passes through the large stone mentioned as nearest to the barrow, is parallel with the principal axis of the tumulus.* This will be seen from the diagram (fig. 2, Pl. xxvi.). Now, within neither of these circles is there any trace of burial. Particularly in the more interesting one, the Wet Withins circle, the area within its circumference is entirely undisturbed, except where a large stone once stood in its centre. Nobody could have been buried beneath the rampart, and it is of course antecedently improbable that such should have been the case. Near each circle is the large burial mound just described, and evidently connected with it.

Now these circles are certainly not sepulchral, else the mounds would have been inside them, as in the Abney Moor circle. If not sepulchral, what are they? Is it not probable that a people of the intelligence which the peoples of the neolithic and bronze ages in England must have possessed would have a religion? The absence of religion is a characteristic of the most degraded races. If a religion, why not temples? and if temples, where else should the temples be found but on these moors, where are the pit-dwellings and hill forts of our out-of-door predecessors, who, almost ignorant of house building, must have worshipped,

* There is a sketch of this circle, by Sir Gardner Wilkinson, in the "Reliquary," vol. i. p. 159.

if they worshipped at all, in the open air? And does not the proximity of the tumuli to these circles seem to show that the dead were buried near to the sacred place, just as to-day the churchyard is the place of the Christian sepulchre?

In addition to the one described, there were formerly a large number of barrows, many of which have been ruthlessly destroyed by stone-getters on the Abney moors. Several I have, however, explored, with varying success. In many, all traces of burial had well-nigh disappeared; a fragment of a decayed urn, a few bits of bone, were all that remained, save flints, flakes, or perhaps an arrow-head or celt. The results I have obtained from other localities in this neighbourhood—from Oxlow, Shatton, Alport, and elsewhere—I do not describe, because they were unimportant, except in relation to matters not within the scope of this paper. But I may say that traces of the prehistoric age are numerous throughout North Derbyshire and on the surface of the country, as, for instance, on Mam Tor, Lose Hill, Rushup Edge, and other heights near Castleton, where flint flakes and implements are pretty frequently found. The former (the flakes) are common; and inasmuch as there is no flint to be found naturally within fifty miles at least of the place, each bit is an indication of the agency of man in transporting it to the place where it is now picked up.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXVI.

Fig. 1.—Plan and section of stone circle, barrow, and annular mound, on Abney Moor, near Castleton, Derbyshire.

Fig. 2.—Plan of stone circle and oblong barrow on Wet Withins Moor, near Castleton.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. WALHOUSE, in support of Mr. Pennington's view that some stone circles may have been intended for purposes other than sepulchral, probably devotional, observed that in India, especially on the Nilgiri Hills (Madras Presidency), he had seen some circles, though few, which showed no traces of enclosing interments of any description. Sepulchral tumuli surrounded by single, double, or even triple circles are indeed abundant; but such circles were very different in character from the few first referred to, which are far more extended, wider in diameter, and usually show traces of an entrance at the east side, and neither contain, nor are near, any interments or sepulchral tumuli.

Mr. JEREMIAH could not agree with that part of Mr. Pennington's paper where he seems to state that the so-called Druidical circles of Derbyshire and elsewhere must be considered as having been erected for some more important purpose than of being sepulchral—

in fact, as having been used for religious purposes, which, to his mind conveyed the conclusion of their being Druidical. Now, interesting as the finds of dogs' bones and remains of horses, &c., may be in the exploration of the tumuli in the neighbourhood of the Derbyshire circles, he thought that the ever-recurring Druidical hypothesis deserved a passing attention, as it impeded the scientific study of the megalithic remains in Britain. Since the time of Dr. Stukeley downwards, archæology has always been found in conjunction with the ritual of a Druidical worship, which appears, at least, to be without any real foundation; and yet we are to resign our judgment upon the mere statement of Cæsar's, of there having been Druids in Gaul; and, speaking merely from hearsay, he leads one to infer that the mysterious arts they practised came from Britain. It must not be forgotten what incredible absurdities he indulged in with regard to the beasts inhabiting the Hercynian Forest, and his generally loose statements in reference to the tribes he conquered. The successive writers, as Strabo, Pomponius, Mela, and Tacitus, are all vague in their description of the Druids and their ritual. The most important statement of Cæsar's is, that the Druids were acquainted with the Greek characters; but here is the weakness, for the word "græcis," according to Scaliger, is an interpolation by a modern commentator; if not, then it is impossible to account for the curious fact that Divitiacus, the most learned of the Druids in Gaul, understood no Greek, which caused Cæsar to converse with him by an interpreter. This is the statement made by Cicero. I may here observe that this line of argument is older than some writers imagine, for I have found it in a "Short Dissertation about the Mona of Cæsar and Tacitus," by Thos. Brown, 1702. Having endeavoured to show a few objections to even the religious purposes of stone circles generally, he would rather suspend his judgment, and profess to know nothing absolute about the origin of the stone circles in Britain, than accept the *ipse dixit* of the author of the paper just read.

Mr. A. L. LEWIS said it gave him great pleasure to find so able an archæologist as the author of the paper evidently was, coming forward to support the view that all stone circles were not sepulchral; but he was rather surprised that he had not mentioned, in confirmation of this view, the great circle at Arberlows, in Derbyshire. The north-easterly bearing, from the circles, of the barrows, mentioned by the author, was a most interesting circumstance. It was not only at Stonehenge, but in other large British circles, that he (Mr. Lewis) had found a special reference to the north-east to exist, and it seemed from the paper to exist, though in another form, in Derbyshire. Mr. Jeremiah had been rather severe upon any who should attribute these monuments to the Druids, but there could be little doubt that most of them belonged to the Celts, and it was evident, from the classic writers, that nothing bearing, however remotely, on religion could have been done amongst the Celts without the sanction of the Druids. Mr. Jeremiah had, indeed, endeavoured to persuade them that those writers did not

know what they were writing about, or at least that their meaning could not now be understood; but Cæsar, in particular, had seen the Druids in Gaul, and would have seen them in Britain had the military part of the population permitted him to do so; and he had made statements about them which were as precise and of as great authority as any other part of his works, although they did not identify them with the rude stone monuments. This, however, was a question which was too wide to be discussed on that occasion.

Mr. J. E. PRICE remarked upon the value of the paper, as recording certain facts of interest which had come within the immediate observation of the author. The simple records of such facts were frequently of greater import than lengthened disquisitions on doubtful theories. While describing no great novelty, the paper was a contribution to materials already collected by Mr. Bateman in his "*Derbyshire Researches*,"* and by Mr. L. Jewitt, F.S.A., who, both in the pages of his "*Reliquary*," and in "*Grave Mounds and their Contents*," had so fully discussed the mass of information connected with the burial customs of the early races of Derbyshire. The frequent presence in barrows of the small bones of rats and mice had often been recorded.† The rat referred to was the "*Arvicola*," water-vole, or water-rat, which, as a native of the county, was known to have selected these old barrows for its winter home. The quartz pebbles mentioned by Mr. Pennington had also often been observed. In the Wiltshire barrows they had been thought by Sir R. Colt Hoare to have been used for sling purposes.‡ At the same time, they may have been preserved as amulets or charms. In Anglo-Saxon graves it was no uncommon thing to find small balls of crystal; these, by early antiquaries, had been connected with magical ceremonies. At times, however, they had been observed with fastenings of the precious metals, and adapted for suspension as personal ornaments.§ Some reference had also been made to the respective periods to which the barrows and stone circles were to be assigned, as judged by the various distinctive forms of burial. Mr. Price ventured to think that the age of all our megalithic monuments was most uncertain. Who had constructed them, and what was their object, had not as yet been clearly ascertained. They were not referred to by Cæsar, or any other classic writer. If post-Roman, this was explained, if otherwise, it was singular that even in a county like Kent no reference to its stone monuments could be found. Kent was a county with which Cæsar and his generals must at least have been familiar.

* See 'The Opening of Tumuli, principally at Middleton, by Tolgrave, Derbyshire, from 1821 to 1832,' by W. Bateman, F.S.A., in "*Collectanea Antiqua*," by C. R. Smith, F.S.A. Vol. i. p. 49.

† See, for examples, "*Crania Britannica*," by Dr. B. Davis.

‡ "*Ancient Wiltshire*," Part I. p. 76, by Sir R. C. Hoare.

§ See "*Inventorium Sepulchrale*," by the Rev. Bryan Faussett, 1856.