

A SUMMARY OF WHAT IS KNOWN OF THE SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES,"
NEAR DRIFFIELD.

BY J. R. MORTIMER, DRIFFIELD.

Read October 7th, 1897.

The following is a summary, so far as I have been able to gather, of what has been written and what is known respecting this group of burial mounds.

These mounds, covered by the trees of an old plantation, may be seen in a little valley within the boundaries of the Lordships of Driffield and Kilham, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, nearly four miles due north of Driffield.

They measure from 1 ft. to $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in height and 9 ft. to 33 ft. in diameter. The place has from time immemorial been called "Danes' Graves" and "Danesdale." Some accounts say there were originally 500 at least of these mounds; but on the Ordnance Map 197 is the number given. Their comparative preservation seems to be due entirely to the protection afforded by the old trees growing on them. Very probably they once extended, on two sides at least, beyond the boundary of the plantation into the adjoining fields, but there the plough has obliterated all surface trace of them. Many of them within the plantation have been more or less levelled, and some wholly obliterated by persons digging for rabbits; while others have been frequently excavated at various periods by relic seekers and the otherwise curious, who have left no authentic account of their finds.

I. The first written record respecting these barrows is given by Leland more than 300 years ago. He says: "Adjacent to Driffield there is a field called the 'Danish Field,' observable for the many mounds of the slain; and there is a current report that, by the chance of war, a king fell on that field, whilst the tyranny of the Danes raged in those times."

II. The next notice of them which I possess is by Sir William Dugdale, in 1666, who saw these mounds and in his Book of Arms in the Herald's College makes the following note of them:—

MORTIMER: SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES." 287

"Memorandum—that about two miles south-westwards of Kilham, on the Wolds, at the skirt of the rising ground, are divers heaps of earth to be seen, most of which are not above three foote in depth to the level of the earth, and some hardly so much, the distance of them from each other being in divers places not above four foote, and in some about six. They are many in number [300 at least as I ghesse] and of various biggness, being by the country people called 'Danes' Graves'; so that there is no doubt but that they did cover the bodies of such as were slain in wharre there. In other parts of the country are also here and there one, but of a much greater magnitude."

III. The following passage in Gibson Camden's *Brittanico*, published in 1695, page 738, probably alludes to "Danes' Graves": "Somewhat more eastwards the River Hull runs into the Humber; the rise of it is near a village called Driffield, remarkable for the monument of Alfred, the most learned King of the Northumbrians; and likewise for the many barrows raised hereabouts."

IV. The following is an extract from the Kilham Parish Register, 15th May, 1721:—"That on the day and year above said we, the Vicar and twenty horsemen, who were beating the bounds, began our perambulations on the west side of Pockthorpe, and in our procession we came nigh the Danes' Graves, in Driffield Field, where out of curiosity we caused a man to dig in one of the said graves. When digging, we found a large thigh bone, one leg bone, and one skull, of no extraordinary size, with several other bones.—Signed, Thomas Prickett, Vicar."

V. In a letter from Mr. Thomas Knowlton to Mr. Mark Catesby, F.R.S., concerning the situation of the ancient town Delgovicia, occurs the following note:—

"Londisburgh, Sept. 1745."

"Within a mile and a half of Kilham is a place called Danes' Graves, near which, it is supposed, was fought a great battle, in which infinite numbers fell; and so were laid in heaps and covered with the chalky soil in little tumuli, of the quantity of two or three square yards; in which, if opened, one may find great quantities of human bones, though, at this distance of time, I believe there is not

288 MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES."

less than an acre of ground covered over with them, joining close to each other ; and it is one of the greatest curiosities of antiquity, in my opinion, I have ever seen ; I am determined one day to go and number them, and to measure the quantity of land they cover."

VI. Mr. Allott, Rector of Kirkheaton, says:—"At a place called Kilham, near Bridlington or Burlington Bay, was a battle fought, and there are many tumuli or graves"; and asking some persons who were stubbing whins or gorse, they told him there was one under the whins, and several round about him. He says further, "that many are sunk level with the ground, but by what remains he supposes there were twenty thousand slain. "There are axe-heads, spears'-heads, etc., constantly dug up in opening them."*

"A stone is set up on high [at Rudstone] as a steeple, which no engines now used could raise. It is supposed to be set up by the Danes in a line between the field of battle and Burlington Hill, where their camp is yet to be seen very perfect."†

BRONZE ARMLET FROM DANES' GRAVES.

VII. Dr. Thurnham drew the attention of the meeting ‡ to a bronze Armilla (plate xli.) in the Ashmolean Museum, presented October, 1830, by the Rev. W. Drake, of Broomfield House, Northallerton, by whom it was exhumed from one of the remarkable group of barrows near Driffield, East Riding of Yorkshire, commonly known as the Danes' Graves. Mr. Drake stated that the skeleton in this barrow—which, like the rest, was of very small elevation—was lying with the feet to the east. Under the skull was a large stone described as of blue granite, and within it "the constituent parts of an iron comb." With the skeleton was the bronze Armilla here figured, and the fragments of another of highly-polished jet encircling the radius and ulna of the left arm. The fragments of jet were not preserved. The ornamentation of the Armilla found near Driffield is of a peculiar and rude kind, and is

* Recent researches do not bear out the finding of axe-heads and spear-heads.—J.R.M.

† Thomas Bateman, "Ten Years' Diggings," p. 251.

‡ *Archaeological Journal*, vol. xvi., p. 83.

MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES." 289

confined to the exterior, the inner surface being smooth and plain. The style assimilates somewhat to that of a gold armlet in the Copenhagen Museum, figured in Wasaæ's "Afbildninger," fig. 302.

VIII. Mr. John Browne, of Bridlington Quay, has favoured me with the following account :—"In 1834, Mr. John Milner, of Kilham, Dr. Andrew Allinson, and a party of others, opened one of the largest* of the tumuli in a group. After exploring some time without success they turned to the outer side, when they came upon a full-sized skeleton, which was complete, with the exception of the feet, which were wanting. (The pelvis gave indication of its being that of a female.) The vertebra seemed for the most part to be anculosed, and the femora and other bones showed it to be the skeleton of a female. In another tumulus a small Urn was turned up, but it was broken by the spade of the digger. It contained a quantity of fine black mould. Another of the skeletons turned up was also of large proportions. In the skull was a hole, which had undoubtedly been made during life ; and on the leg bone was a cut from a sharp instrument, which appeared to have also been made during life. Various other "diggings" have been made by several other persons, especially by a man named Jesse Wood, of Langtoft. He possessed a considerable collection of articles which he found, but I am unable to say what became of them." †

IX. I give an account by W. Proctor, M.R.C.S., of the opening of six of these mounds by the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club, in 1849.

"Near the east edge of the "Yorkshire Chalk" Wolds, three miles north of Driffield, is a secluded spot of woody ground, measuring four acres, covered with tumuli of small size and slight elevation, so closely arranged as not to leave more than 3 ft. to 6 ft. between any two of them. The form is circular, with an average diameter of 18 ft., and an elevation from 2 ft. to 3 ft.

"In August, 1849, six of the tumuli were opened. Each was found to consist of the chalk of the district, mixed with a small

* Probably this is No. 11 of the mounds opened in July, 1897, and described in Part 2, later on.—J.R.M.

† Probably some of these may yet be in existence.

290 MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES."

proportion of earth. A few scattered nodules of the decomposed iron pyrites, which occur in the chalk, were also found. In the centre of the first tumulus was a skeleton, having the head to the north and the feet to the south; it was laid on the face, with the limbs doubled beneath the trunk;* the bones of the arms, forearms, and of the legs and thighs, were found side by side; the hands and face, elbows and knees, and the feet and hips being severally in contact. Close to the skull were the fragments of a vessel of rude earthenware about a pint in capacity. It is of a grey colour, and is composed of clay with numerous fragments of chalk and calcareous spar. It is of cylindrical form, widening towards the mouth, with a projecting rim at the bottom. It had been imperfectly baked, and probably made on the wheel.† In No. 2 was a skeleton laid in the same position and direction as the preceding skeleton.

"Close to the skull was a broken Urn of the same general character and composition as the former example, except being of a black colour and very fragile. Its shape seems to have been somewhat globular. On opening No. 3, a skeleton only was found in the same contracted position, with the head to the south-west, and the feet to the north north-east, lying on the left side with the face to the west.

"In the fourth tumulus a skeleton was discovered, placed in a directly opposite position to No. 3, viz., with the head to the north north-west, and facing the west. A second skeleton lying in the same contracted position on the right side, with the head to the north and face to the west, was met with. Besides a piece of iron, much corroded, of a flat and semi-circular form, beneath the body, no other remains were seen. The sixth barrow was a large one,‡ 5 ft. high and 25 ft. in diameter.

"After a most careful examination no vestige of interment or other deposit could be found."§

* This is also a mode of burial occasionally observed in the more ancient British tumuli.

† More probably not.—J. R. M.

‡ This might be No. 13 of the mounds opened in July, 1897, and the one in which the Chariot was found.—J. R. M.

§ The Proceedings of the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club, 1854.

MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED " DANES' GRAVES." 291

X. On April 2nd, 1894, Mr. Thomas Dowson, of Pickering, informed me that he accompanied the late Mr. Thomas Kendal, of Pickering, to " Danes' Graves " in 1849 or '50, and that they then opened three of the mounds. In each they found a body, accompanied by pieces of rusted iron ; but he did not remember anything else having been found, and Mr. Kendal seems to have kept no record.

My first visit to these graves was in 1860, and I found in the hedge bottom near the mounds a rudely-formed top-stone of a hand-mill. On the grinding face of this stone are a series of concentric lines scratched into it, reaching from the centre to the circumference ; whilst the two oval holes for inserting the handles have been punched or picked into the stone, *not* drilled into it, as are the holes in all the other mill-stones I possess.

XI. The following and most complete account is by Canon Greenwell, in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxii., which I beg permission to repeat.

"The barrows next examined [B] lie a little beyond the district which we have been considering.

"They are found in a hollow in the chalk hills of the Wolds, about four miles north of Driffield. They are called the " Danes' Graves," and number nearly 200,* lying close together in a wood. Several were opened a few years ago by the Yorkshire Antiquarian Society [Club], but the greater number have been destroyed in digging for rabbits. I examined fourteen of these barrows on March 27th and 28th, 1864. They are all small, from 16 ft. to 24 ft. in diameter, and from 2 ft. to 4 ft. in height, and are formed of chalk rubble, the material at hand. The interment, in every one which I examined, as I believe was the case in those previously opened, was contained in an oblong hollow made in the natural surface, and the bodies appear to have been laid therein without coffins.

"As all the interments were, except in some unimportant particulars, similar, I will give the general character of the burial,

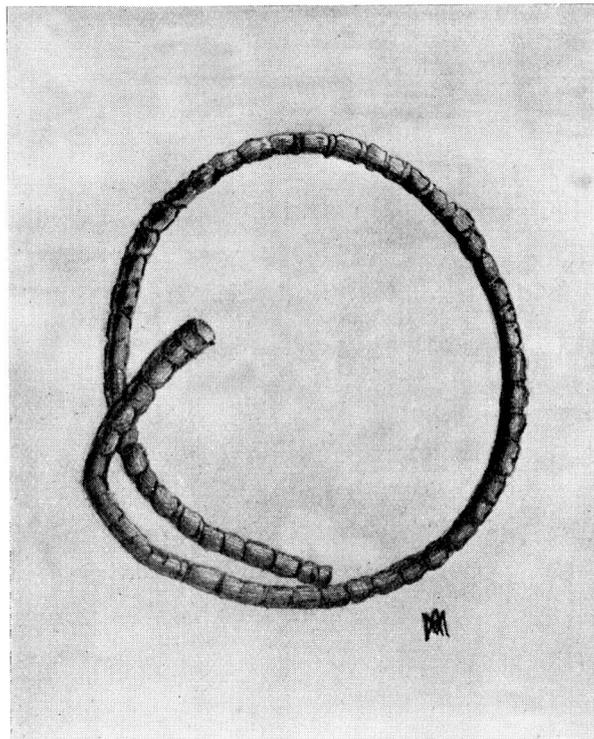
* Before the Wolds were enclosed a great many more existed ; it is stated that there were, originally, as many as 500.

noting separately those which presented any exceptional features. The bodies were doubled up, so as to suggest that they must have been tightly swathed, in order to bring them into the required shape; the hands were placed upon the chin, the bodies were laid, some on the left side, some on the right;* of those which were sufficiently perfect to determine this, six were on the left and five on the right side; and whilst seven had the head to the north, or to the west or east of north, two had the head to the south-west, one to the west, and one to the east. In one instance two bodies were interred in the same barrow; the first—that of a child about five years old—just below the summit of the mound; the second—that of an old person, and judging from the imperfect pelvic bones, most probably a male—in the usual hollow made in the natural surface of the ground. In three of the graves an Urn had been placed close behind the head; these Urns, however, were so much decayed that the shape can scarcely be ascertained. They are quite plain, pale, gray-coloured on the exterior, but of a dark-coloured ware in the middle, full of small pieces of stone. These Urns are well formed by the hand, with the lip slightly turned over, and they measure a little under 5 in. in height. The most remarkable interment [C] was that of a man laid upon his right side, with his head to the west; lying close to the mouth—so close that some of the teeth are discoloured by the oxidation of the metal—was a piece of iron, too much corroded to assign any certain use to it [see woodcut, fig. 1, half original size].† On each side of the man were placed two goats, their heads, like his, to the west. The occurrence of a goat with an interment is exceedingly rare; we have numerous instances where a horse, ox, deer, boar, or dog has been buried with a man, but except this at Danesdale, I have only known of two other cases where a goat has been found associated with a burial.‡ In the almost entire absence of weapons or implements

* Of five bodies discovered, when the examination by the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club took place, two had been laid upon the face.

† See Canon Greenwell's paper in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxii.

‡ In a barrow six miles north of Pickering was a cist, in which was found a skeleton, where, along with several flints, was deposited near the head of the man a head of a goat. Bateman's "Ten Years," *Diggings*, p. 223. At



BRONZE ARMLET, FOUND IN THE "DANES' GRAVES."

Proc. Yorksh. Geol. and Polytec. Soc., Vol. xiii., Plate xli.

MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES." 293

in these barrows it is difficult to arrive at any conclusion as to the period of their erection, or the people by whom they were made. The name "Dane's Graves" cannot, I think, be taken as proof of their Danish origin, for that designation has been frequently applied to camps, lines of entrenchment, and barrows,* which have certainly no connection with that people. The cruelties practised by the Danes seem to have made so strong an impression, that the people who suffered by them appear, sometimes, to have called certain works of unknown origin after the names of their oppressors, just as similar remains are named after the Devil. At the same time, some weight must be allowed to the popular tradition, and if nothing about the grave-hills is inconsistent with a Scandinavian origin, it is only fair to admit the probability of their being the burial mounds of some Danish settlers.†

Canon Greenwell adds:—"My own opinion is against the Scandinavian origin. The mode of interment is unlike any which has been found in Denmark, Norway, or Sweden; I do not make this assertion upon my own authority, but on that of Mr. C. F. Herbst, of Copenhagen, the Scandinavian archæologist, to whom my notes of these barrows were submitted. The pottery, also, is not such as is found in Danish grave-mounds, either in shape or fabric. On the other hand, if we attribute these mounds to a tribe of kindred origin with those who buried under the ordinary round barrows, we are met by more than one difficulty. The bodies in the 'Danes' Graves' had been interred in a much more contracted position than is usual in the British burials. The great number of these barrows, and their close grouping are also peculiar features; for though two or more 'British' grave-hills are frequently found

Therfield, near Boyston, with the remains of other animals, were found in a barrow two crania, which Prof. Duckett considered to be those of goats. Proc. of the Society of Antiquaries, 2nd series, vol. i., p. 306.—CANON GREENWELL.

* The "Danes' Hills," near Skipwith, in the East Riding, are barrows which contain interments of burnt bodies having nothing in common with what we know of Danish interments.—CANON GREENWELL.

† The burials are those of a settled population and not of any mere invaders. This is indicated by the number of the barrows, and the frequency of the interments of women, as well as that of a child.—CANON GREENWELL.

294 MORTIMER: SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES."

together, they are never massed like graves in a churchyard, as at the 'Danes' Graves.' The crania, as will be seen from Dr. Thurnam's account on the next page [which gives an average breadth-index of .73] are not of the Brachycephalic type, so distinctive of those found in the round barrows and stone cists, but approach nearer to the long Scandinavian type; a fact of great importance, when the number of skulls examined is considered.

"The pottery is neither in shape nor colour like that of which so many specimens are described in this memoir [referring to 'Ancient British Pottery'] and it also differs from it in the absence of ornamentation; but it is still more unlike Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon ware. The presence of iron indicates a comparatively late period; but the nature of the objects found, whether of iron or bronze, give little, if any, clue to the origin of these barrows. I, therefore, prefer, in the absence of any distinctive data, to offer no conjecture as to the people to whom these burials belong, nor do I think that further examination would add much information to that which we already possess." Thus concludes Canon Greenwell's report.

Not concurring with the Canon's closing remarks, and believing that a further careful search, in some of the few mounds which have not yet been disturbed, would now greatly aid us in adding something more to the very little we at present know of this very interesting and extensive group of barrows, I wrote to W. H. Harrison Broadley, Esq., M.P., asking permission to open two or three of them, thinking that probably it would enable us to make out approximately the period when the mounds were raised, and also something more of the small community which must have been, as suggested by Canon Greenwell, in quiet possession of the neighbourhood for a considerable time. I regret to say that I received the following reply:—

"Welton, Brough, Feb. 6th, 1871."

"Sir,—I am very sorry indeed that I cannot comply with the request you have made, for these reasons. First, the 'Danes' Graves' on Mr. Allanson's farm at Danesdale, and also on Mr. Gofton's at Pockthorpe, if there are any there, have been so frequently and so thoroughly examined that there can be nothing

No.	DERIVATION OF SKULL.	Probable		I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.		VII.	A		B
		Sex.	Age.						Length.	Height.		Breadth.	Length.	
1	1864.			101	20.6	7.4	5.25p	5.7	4.4	5.1	.70	.77		
2	"	M.	40	97	21.1	7.5	5.6p	5.8	—	—	.75	.77		
3	"	M.	60	82	19.9	6.9	5.5p	5.4	—	—	.79	.78		
4	"	F.	45	78	18.0	6.5	4.8p	5.4	3.0	—	.73	.83		
5	"	F.	5	86	19.7	7.2	5.1p	5.6	4.4	—	.70	.77		
6	"	F.	45	94	20.3	7.25	5.2p	5.4	4.4	5.0	.71	.74		
7	1849.			—	20	7.2	5.3p	5.8	—	—	.73	.80		
8	"	F.	—	88	20	7.2	5.2p	5.4	—	—	.72	.75		
9	"	F.	40	86.5	20	7.2	5.2p	5.6	4.3	—	.72	.77		
10	"	M.	35	85.5	19.7	7.2	5.4p	5.6	4.1	4.6	.75	—		
11	"	M.	45	91.5	20.2	7.2	5.5p	5.4	4.6	—	.76	—		
	Average of 5 skulls of men			94	20.5	7.3	5.4	5.6	4.4	4.9	.73	.77		
	Average of 5 skulls of women			85.5	19.9	7.1	5.2	5.5	4.35	—	.73	.77		

NOTE.—This table is copied from the Archaeological Journal, vol. xxii., p. 264, and is a summary of the measurable skulls obtained by Canon Greenwell up to 1864, and those obtained by the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club up to 1849.—J.R.M.

left to discover; and, secondly, I am obliged to say that the investigations have been conducted so recklessly, so carelessly, and even so indecently—the graves were not even filled up again—that I have determined not to again allow them to be disturbed. In the Museum at York you will find various articles that have been found. I myself do not possess one, they have all been taken away, or I would send them for your inspection, if you wished it.

“Believe me to be,

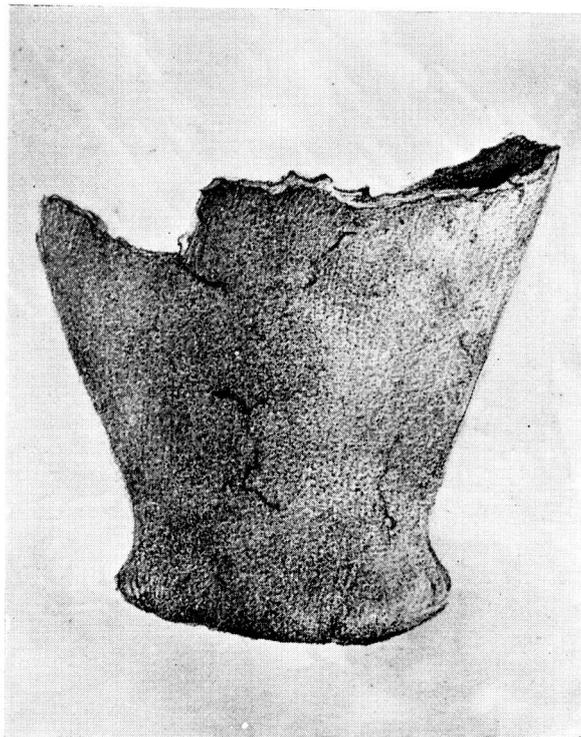
“Yours faithfully,

“W. H. HARRISON-BROADLEY.”

Though the hacked appearance of the mounds showed much cause for Mr. Broadley's complaint, I was sorry not to be permitted to make further search. However, since then, natural causes have given me some assistance.

On October 20th, 1881, the late Mr. Henry Kingston, who occupied the farm nearest to “Danes' Graves,” informed me that the high wind of the previous Friday had uprooted a large quantity of trees in the “Danes' Graves” Plantation; some of which had torn up the ground sufficiently to expose interments. On the following day [the 21st October], in company with Dr. Wood, of Driffield, I visited the place and its surroundings, and we observed that a double line of British entrenchments ran along the northern margin, extending for miles both in an eastern and a western direction from the graves. We also noticed that the southern side of the hollow “Danesdale” which the graves occupy was covered with an accumulation of un-water-worn chalk gravel, which gravel does not extend to the opposite side of the dale.

The uprooting of the trees was mainly confined to the gravelly area; those growing on the chalk rock on the north side of the dale having for the most part resisted the violence of the wind. The first exposure which had attracted Mr. Kingston's notice was a calvarium pulled up by the roots of a tree which had grown on the apex of one of the mounds. Through the kindness of Mr. Kingston I possess this calvarium. It is long and narrow, with a breadth-index of .69, and altogether of small size, and apparently belonged to a female.



FOOD VASE, FOUND IN THE "DANES' GRAVES."

Proc. Yorksh. Geol. and Polytec. Soc., Vol. xiii., Plate alii.

MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES." 297

The broken long bones were also small. The barrow which covered this interment was not more than 15 ft. in diameter and 24 in. high ; and the body seemed to have been placed a very little below its base. On the following Wednesday [October 26th] I employed an experienced digger, who, with the assistance of Mr. Kingston, junior, carefully explored the ground whence the calvarium had come, but as most of the long bones had been removed, the position of the interment could not be made out ; no relic was found.

The uprooting of another tree had, however, exposed the feet of a second body. Here also we carefully examined the ground beneath, and were able, fortunately, to make out its position.

This body was also near the centre of a small mound about the size of the last, and not more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep from the top of the mound. It lay on its left side, leg much pulled up, left arm down by the side with hand on pelvis, the right arm was over the body with hand on left arm. Its head was to the west. Near the right leg were the humerus of a small pig, or goat, and portions of a crushed food vase, which also had a splayed bottom (plate xlii.), other portions of which lay near the right arm, and seemed to have been removed by rabbits burrowing in the mound. Otherwise, the body was undisturbed and in fairly sound condition. The skull, which was crushed, has been put up, and seems to be that of a male of about 35 years of age, with a cephalic-index also of $\cdot 69$. The forehead is low and the superciliary ridges well developed. The femur measures $\cdot 17\frac{1}{4}$, tibia $\cdot 14\frac{1}{4}$, and the humerus $\cdot 12\frac{1}{4}$, and they are of rather slender substance. Eleven other crania from these graves [obtained by the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club and by Canon Greenwell] give an average breadth-index of about $\cdot 73^*$, which shows them to belong to a decidedly long-headed type. The vase—the upper part of which is wanting—is hand-made, quite plain, of a coarse, dark texture throughout, containing particles of pounded quartz and flint, and has been tolerably well baked. It has a broad, flat, and very thin bottom, and is very unlike any I have ever found with a true British interment in the large barrows on the Wolds. It rather resembles a rude kind of dark Roman, or Romano-British

298 MORTIMER : SUMMARY OF SO-CALLED "DANES' GRAVES."

vessel than any other kind with which I am acquainted. No other relic was found.

It is to be deeply regretted that more is not known of this extensive and almost unique group of barrows, and the distinctly-marked community of men [as shown by the crania] who raised them.

The plantation, which now protects the mounds, is an old one, and the trees of which it consists are likely, before long, to be cut down, and the mounds left to the mercy of the plough ; a little time will then suffice to remove all trace of their whereabouts, and make research almost impossible. Before this happens a further examination, conducted under experienced supervision, is most desirable ; indeed, it is an imperative duty demanded by archæology.

* See the Journal of the Archæological Institute, vol. xxii., p. 264.