

TRANSCRIPT FROM THE SKINNER MSS IN THE B.M.(Contd.)

PRIDDY NINE BARROWS

Letter to the Rev. John Douglas from the Rev. John Skinner dated Camerton Dec. 1st. 1815.

“Since we opened the small cairn together at Shorsecombe I have (Dug a range of barrows near Priddy, between Chewton and Cheddar). In the middle of September last I employed four labourers and my own servant.....opening the range of barrows, eight in number, situate to the north east of Priddy. (He encloses a numbered plan). Number I, a tumulus of the first class ten feet perpendicular in height, one hundred and eighty two in circumference, formed chiefly of mould taken from the spot, on the east side at the depth of four feet we came to a small interment of burnt bones in quantity about a pint (Fragment of skull so thin that it was probably a child). The ashes were found on a flat stone without any cist or covering. Two feet lower down we came to a similar interment. (At the bottom, just below the natural level of the soil was the primary burial in a small oval cist covered with a flat stone. Near it a rude clay urn which unfortunately was broken by the workmen).

Number two was not quite so large, being only eight feet high and one hundred and sixty three in circumference, formed of earth and loose stones. Within a small cist sixteen inches long twelve inches wide and about twelve inches deep were burnt bones which nearly filled the cavity. A flat stone cover. In the contents were four amber beads in excellent preservation, and a fifth, somewhat heart shaped, fell to pieces when handled. These beads of a fine rich red or ruby colour, highly polished and quite transparent against the light. Also a small blue opaque glass bead, perforated. Only one amber bead had a hole through it. The others were bored on one side. Part of a spear or arrow head, bronze, much corroded with one rivet. Traces of decayed wood on the blade suggested it had been in a sheath. One of the workmen picked up, not far from the cist a small oval clay cup four inches long, three inches wide, and two and a half deep, the outside was embossed with a number of projecting nobs similar to one shown by Sir Richard Hoare and discovered by Mr. Cunnington on the Wiltshire downs. The cist was covered by a mass of rude stones to the height of three and a half feet, then heaped with earth.....

Number three, may rather be denominated a camedd than a barrow as it was a pile of loose stones with only sufficient earth to cover the surface. It was twelve feet high, and one hundred and sixty four in circumference. Some of the stones weighed one hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds, and it was dangerous for the men to work under them. They built a wall as they proceeded, and it took two men from Saturday to Tuesday before they reached the cist. The cist was two and a half feet long and two in width covered with a large flat grey stone of a kind not found in the neighbourhood. It contained a vast quantity of burnt bones but no beads

or brass. There was an urn in it, reversed as usual, but so decomposed by moisture that shape and size could not be made out. Within half a foot of its summit we found a deposit of burnt bones in a small cavity covered with a flat stone.

Number four, seven feet high one hundred and eighty one in circumference, earthed to the depth of three feet, then a pile of loose stones to the bottom. A quantity of burnt bones was there found in the same kind of cist as number three, and a brazen spear or dirk blade. When perfect it might have been about five inches long and one broad, retaining near its' shaft three brazen pins or revets,.....(Traces of decayed wood on the blade, as of a sheath.).

Number five, six feet high, one hundred and fifty five in circumference formed of earth, no interment discovered.

Number six, eight and a half feet high (one hundred and eighty in circumference composed of five and a half feet of earth from top and three feet of small stones at bottom. A cist at bottom with a considerable quantity of burnt bones and charcoal. A large urn in it. Dotted over, broken, fragments saved to make a drawing.

Number seven, seven feet high, one hundred and sixty three in circumference, three feet of earth from top and four feet loose stones to base. Burnt bones and charcoal in centre. Part of a brazen blade much corroded.

Number eight, six feet high, one hundred and fifty in circumference, formed of earth. A small quantity of burnt bones at the bottom, but no urn.

There was a ninth barrow on this line destroyed to get stones for a wall in the vicinity. Hence range called Priddy Nine Barrows.

Within a quarter of a mile to the south of this line, is another range of seven barrows, smallest of which I opened and found a quantity of charcoal, and a few scattered ashes, it seemed to have been opened before.

The sketch enclosed will show position of these ranges of tumuli and also of two circles near at hand, the diameter of each exactly five hundred feet, they are called by the peasants the castles.....they lie about a quarter of a mile from the barrows we opened and are about two hundred and fifty feet distant from each other.....I may say there are thirty or forty barrows within a mile of this spot, which one of these days I shall probably explore as they are mostly, I believe on Lord Waldegrave's estate, from whom I have obtained permission to open them.

Skinner in a later letter dated Camerton Sept. 28th 1819 to the Rev. Douglas again mentions the circles at Priddy where he says when speaking of the banks of one of the circles having been levelled by the plough. "There are four similar circles contiguous to each other : three of them one hundred and fifty paces apart;

the fourth at a greater distance, suggests there may have another circle, now destroyed, in this space each of the remaining circles is as near as possible of the same dimension, that is, five hundred and forty feet in diameter the banks above six in height, the ditch from which they were taken is on the outside. ”

Skinner asks Douglas, if he thinks these circular earthworks are related to the stone circles, and says the smaller circular earthworks, which by some are called Bullpits or gymnasia.

THE RIGHT REVEREND ABBOT HORNE O.S.B., F.S.A.

The Right Reverend Dom. Percy Ethelbert Horne O.S.B., Titular Abbot of Glastonbury though not a Somerset man had through his writings, his many activities, and his personal qualities become a well loved figure throughout Somerset. He had a delightful sense of humour and understanding. For many years he was a council member of the Somerset Archaeological and was President in 1941. He took an active part in the direction of the excavations at Glastonbury Abbey, and it was due to his suggestion that the site of the High Altar was suitably railed round at the Abbey ruins. He was instrumental in procuring some of the bog oak from the Lake Village at Meare for the fine candlesticks which now stand on the High Altar at Downside Abbey, and he recovered from a cottage at Cannington, Somerset an original altar stone which is now used in the chapel of St. Silvia at the Abbey.

Abbot Horne was the author of “Scratch Dials” which are Pre-Reformation Mass Clocks. This work alone entailed a visit to every Pre-Reformation Church in Somerset and his work on Somerset Dovecots and Manorial Fishponds, together with many other contributions made him a veritable encyclopedia on every aspect of county history.

It was the writer’s privilege to know the late Abbot Horne for a quarter of a century, and a visit to Downside to meet him was always refreshing and edifying. Apart from his work on Archaeology Abbot Horne had an amazing knowledge of Botany, Ornithology and Folklore. He was also an authority on Mistletoe and “Sports” or freaks in trees, including the Glastonbury Thorn, and he had an intimate knowledge of woodcarving.

He also published two volumes of delightful stories of Somerset Folklore which revealed a long and intimate acquaintance with the Somerset Folk whom he loved.

“Father Ethelbert” (As he was intimately known in the district) for many years visited Somerset parishes during the winter evenings lecturing to Somerset people about their native county under the auspices of the Worker’s Educational Association. He often gave as many as seventy lectures during a season in this way. His interesting series of lectures entitled “Somerset from