

# Identifying the Wessex Culture :

## a geophysical analysis of the Clandon aggrandised barrow.

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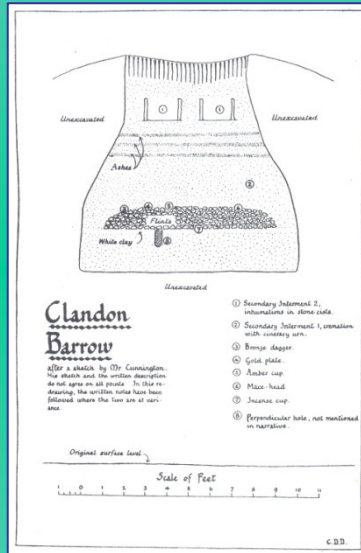
The Clandon 'aggrandised' Bronze Age 'Wessex Culture' barrow. Note the step on the right hand side of the mound - this step runs around the barrow for about half of its circumference. The arrow on the aerial photograph indicates the direction of view for the photograph on the left.

### Wessex Culture barrows?

In a recent paper the cultural package that is defined as the 'Wessex Culture' has been brought into question (Needham & Woodward, 2008) through a re-examination of the artefacts from one of the archetypal barrows associated with the culture: the Clandon Barrow in Dorset and with reference and re-appraisal of other comparative material.

### A problem of context.

One of the problems highlighted in this paper was the contextual association of the deposit, it having been recovered from an excavation undertaken by antiquarian Edward Cunnington in 1882, and not formally published until 1936 (Drew & Piggott 1936). Cunnington's records whilst limited by today's standards were nonetheless sufficiently detailed to suggest that the objects were found amidst a barrow that had a definable series of layers and features which in hindsight hinted at a structure that was multi-phased and relatively complex. Furthermore, the deposit (s) that constituted the group of artefacts could be interpreted as not being related to the primary build of the burial mound but could possibly be of a second or later phase, which may not be funerary in origin.



The burial mound located a few miles to the south west of the county town of Dorchester, survives as a large upstanding barrow on the periphery of the main collection of barrows located slightly further to the south on the main body of the South Dorset Ridgeway.

### Aggrandised barrows?

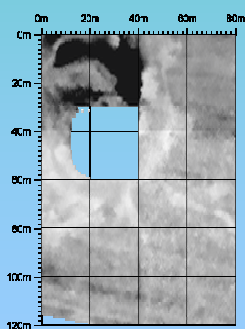
The size of the barrow has led to its possible identification as an 'aggrandised' barrow associated with other similarly large mounds in Wessex (Lanceborough, 1km to the east of Clandon and Conquer barrow at Mount Pleasant just 4km further east still are similarly 'aggrandised'). The aggrandisement of Clandon is further advanced by the form of the monument itself which upon inspection has the appearance of a 'ledge' approximately halfway up its slope, more noticeable on its western flank. This ledge could be interpreted as evidence of a restructuring of the original mound possibly even as much as indicating a second mound on top of the original. It is possible therefore that one interpretation of the artefacts recovered by Cunnington in 1882 is that they were from this later mound, if that could be proven.

### A Geophysical solution?

Short of re-excavating the barrow the only viable approach to a better understanding of the surviving monument, and therefore the original observations made by Cunnington, is through geophysical means.

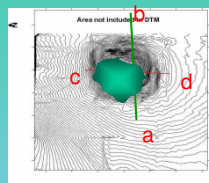


Twin array (0.5m)



A limited area survey of the immediate environs of the Clandon barrow revealed a large area of high resistance to the north of the barrow which is likely to represent the quarry for the burial mound. The low resistance around the foot of the barrow is likely to be a 'sump' effect with moisture draining off the barrow into a very slight hollow in which the barrow sits.

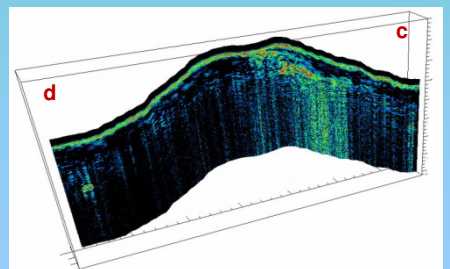
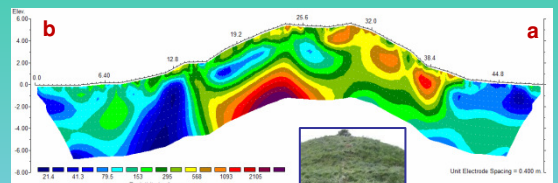
Agricultural effects can also be seen on the plot, particularly to the south.



### Pole to pole Resistivity Tomography and GPR surveys

The early results would seem to indicate that the mound does indeed appear to have been of a two phase construction with one superimposed on an earlier mound which was almost certainly left untouched by Cunnington and therefore the fine objects recovered are unrelated to the original burial monument. The surveys also reveal distinct in-homogeneity in the superimposed mound which could have complicated Cunnington's interpretation.

**Future work :** In addition to completing the analysis of additional radar transects it is planned to undertake larger area surveys (EM38 and Magnetometry) in 2011



### References

Needham, S. & Woodward, A., 2008. The Clandon Barrow Finery: a Synopsis of Success in an Early Bronze Age World. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 74, pp. 1-52  
Drew, C.D. & Piggott, S., 1936. Two Bronze Age Barrows excavated by Mr Edward Cunnington. *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society* 58, pp 18-25

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