

Bowl Barrow on Nunwell Down known as The Devils Punchbowl.

NOTE: *J.E. Price & F.G. Hilton Price were the archaeologists who excavated at Brading Roman Villa at the same time as digging at the Devils Punchbowl.*

Victorian dig report is below.

The monument includes a bowl barrow just below the crest of a south east facing hillside on the Isle of Wight. The barrow has a mound which measures 18m in diameter and is c.1.4m high.

Surrounding the mound is a ditch from which material was quarried during its construction. This has become partly infilled over the years but can still be seen as a slight depression on the south side of the mound c.1.5m wide and 0.2m deep. The remainder will survive as a buried feature.

There is a central depression in the mound c.5m wide. This represents an excavation conducted in the last century in which an interment was found. The interment was that of a child in a contracted position. A hammer-head perforated deer antler was also found in the barrow.

The post and wire fence on the north edge of the mound and the hedgerow fence are excluded from the scheduling, but the ground beneath is included. The hedgerow bank is included in the scheduling since it will contain material from the substance of the barrow.

Source: Dr David Tomalin and *Historic England*

Victorian dig report.
Royal Anthropological Institute of
Great Britain and Ireland
J. E. PRICE- On Excavations of Tumuli

The following paper was read by Mr. J. E. PRICE.
APRIL 1882

EXCAVATIONS of TUMULI on the BRADING DOWNS, ISLE OF WIGHT. By JOHN E. PRICE, F.S.A., and F. G. HILTON PRICE, F.S.A., F.G.S.

THE excavation of the Roman buildings at Morton, near Brading, in the Isle of Wight, has up to the present time not resulted in any discoveries of a character which could with propriety claim any especial recognition in the proceedings of the Institute ; but as our Journal occasionally admits archaeological communications (useful often for purposes of comparison), and moreover already contains descriptions of researches among the tumuli and grave-mounds of this country, it may be well to briefly chronicle the results of an examination which we had the opportunity of making last autumn, of some of the well-known barrows on Nunwell and Brading Downs.

Our work at the villa being temporarily suspended, owing to the presence of the crops, and other circumstances, we availed ourselves of the kind permission accorded by Lady Oglander to investigate the various tumuli within the limits of her estate, several of which are in close proximity to the villa. The situation of those now excavated is one of the finest in the neighborhood; it is on the summit of that picturesque range of hills which, extending across the middle of the island, runs more or less in an unbroken line from Culver Cliff to Freshwater Gate ; upon the summit is the old road, the highway from Brading by Arreton to Newport, the commercial centre of the island; a liminary hedge marks one side of the ancient way, and near thereto the barrows, or rather such of them as remain, can be readily distinguished. Imperfect examinations have clearly been made from time to time, which, added to the gradual levelling of the soil and the steady operations of nature, have in many cases nearly obliterated the elevated sites, and to the unpracticed eye many difficulties might present themselves as to the most desirable spots for excavation ; and it is to be regretted that those who in former days explored these barrows have not published an exhaustive report of their investigations, partial in many cases, but sufficient to destroy, for historical purposes, many interesting features.

The largest tumulus, which is nearly circular, is about 60 feet in diameter and 5 feet high at the highest part. In the centre it is only 2 feet 6 inches. The site of this tumulus is marked upon the ordnance map and it is locally known as the "Punch Bowl," or "Devil's Punch Bowl," a designation which, as is well known, has been often applied to barrows, and

originated doubtless in the legends and superstitions which found favour with the country people in former days ; the bowl or cup-like form being due either to the pernicious habit of explorers, when excavating tumuli, of excavating a shaft or pit in the very centre of the mound, with the expectation of dropping at once on the anticipated treasure, perhaps finding nothing and abandoning the work, or from the fact of the barrow having been raised over cists containing urns or interments by inhumation, which gradually perishing and giving way, led to a subsidence of the soil in the crown of the tumulus.

There is a tradition current among the laborer's on the estate that in this hollow portion of the "Bowl " a large stone formerly existed, that it was removed from its position by mischievous people, and sent rolling down the hill, and that, for some time after, it was to be seen near to a ditch or path adjoining Nunwell House. We instituted a careful search with one of the laborer's but was unable to trace the stone. It is possible that it had some association with the tumulus, and perhaps some significance as a liminary mark, or it may have been only placed there in recent times for the support of a staff or pole, the situation of the mound being one which might even be selected for a beacon.

Both on the promontory at Bembridge and on that at Freshwater such beacons once existed, and in the midst of ancient sepulchres, around what is known as the sea-mark, a mass of masonry on Ashley Down, and visible miles away at sea, are congregated tumuli, no less than twelve of which were once partially examined by the Isle of Wight Philosophical and Scientific Society, and the results are recorded in vol. x. of the "Journal of the British Archeological Association. "

Our examination of the " Punch Bowl " commenced in July last; we began by cutting a trench direct through the diameter. of the mound, the width of the trench being about 3 feet. Cutting in this direction we were enabled thoroughly to explore the centre. Near to the junction of the upheaved soil, comprising many tons of chalk, with the surface of the ground, there appeared what may be described as a layer of charcoal, extending (as it would seem from its being again met with in the cross cuts, subsequently made) throughout the circumference of the barrow. Associated with this layer of charred wood were several fragments of both human and animal bones, and scattered pieces of early British coarse sun-dried pottery. Traces of cremation were present, but the mound having been previously disturbed, nothing perfect or *in situ* was disclosed. We next proceeded with a trench in a southerly direction, extending from the centre to the edge of the tumulus, about 8 feet west of this; another cutting was made, and here was discovered a skeleton of a child which Professor Flower has been kind enough to examine, and pronounces to be that of an individual about nine years of age. These remains, together with some of the pottery found, are exhibited. The body was in a contracted position; the position of the head pointing to the north-east has no especial significance, it having been clearly shown by barrow-diggers that there was but little rule in this respect.

The skeleton was nearly complete, but the bones very fragmentary and decayed ; near to it was found a small urn, or cup, of very early, but of coarse and crumbling pottery, and so fragmentary that but little has been saved. Among the relics appeared a primitive and interesting object, viz., the basal portion of the antler of a red deer through which a hole had been drilled transversely to the long axis of the horn. This artificial perforation is quadrilateral in shape and intended doubtless for the reception of a handle.

It measures 6 inches in length, and the hole, which is 1 inch in diameter, is cut through it at 2 inches from the thickest end

(see fig.).



Canon Greenwell and Mr. Franks, who have seen it, consider it to be a hammer of British make, and very rare. It is much to be regretted that it was injured by the excavators before they observed what was being thrown out of the trench. There were a considerable number of flint flakes taken out of these trenches, and some small fragments of British pottery, and a few animal bones, mostly splinters.

We should state that our trenches, north, south-east and west, were about 4 feet in width, also the inner circular trench, but the smaller cuttings were slightly less. In the trench east and west, at a point about 12 feet from the east end, and at 2 feet from the surface, resting upon a layer of charcoal, a bone pin, tooth of an ox, bits of pottery, and bones

were found. Adjoining this spot, a small earthenware cup of coarse British pottery, several flint-flakes, pieces of bone, and fragments of pottery were also discovered, but no indications of human bones were met with, notwithstanding great care was taken.

We next turned our attention to making a circular trench through the highest portion of the mound ; measuring from the principal trenches already made, we commenced a trench 3 feet wide, at 12 feet from the east end, 14 feet from the north end, 18 feet from the west end, and 9 feet from the south end.

Throughout this excavation, the black line was distinctly visible at a depth of about 2! to 3 feet from the top. Finding nothing particular in this circular cutting beyond a few flakes and bits of pottery, a few extra sections were cut on the south side with a view of ascertaining whether any secondary interments had been made, this side being quite near to the old road, which probably dates from British times.

The first section, 3 feet wide, was made 13 feet south of the main east and west section on the east face, the second was 15 feet 6 inches from that, and the third was 8 feet west of the north and south section. These trenches were all dug into the inner circle without any results.

Another trench was cut in the inner circle inwards towards the centre, from the point 7 feet 8 inches west of the north and south section, extending for a distance of 6 feet without any results. At 2! feet from the surface of the mound there was a uniform layer of earth much mixed with fragments of charcoal. This mound bears evidence of having been opened from the north side, due north and south towards the centre, when probably the primary interment was removed. The original excavator did not cut it through on the south side.

Finding nothing more, we restored the mound. A smaller tumulus was next opened; it is situated 45 feet east of the " Devil's Punch Bowl." We made a section east and west 35 feet in length, and a cross section north and south 19 feet 6 inches ; the trenches were 6 feet in width through the mound; a large number of flakes were found beneath the turf within a foot of the surface. In the north and south section, on the south side of it, a handful of burnt bones was discovered. After making a deep excavation in the centre, and finding the ground had never been disturbed, we filled it in. The antiquities discovered in these mounds are deposited in the British Museum. It would seem from these investigations that the burials referred to are of the British period, that is to say, they belong most likely to a time which may have been historical when the Romans began to colonise the land near Brading, and erected that extensive range of buildings which have been recently disclosed ; for there are no indications of the tumulus having enclosed any relics of the Roman period, indeed, it is singular that as yet no sepulchral memorials of this time have yet been met with in the vicinity of our work.

Frederick George Hilton Price.



We have yet to discover the graves of some of the inmates of this vast establishment, which, from many indications found, was evidently occupied for generations. As a rule, the barrows in the Isle of Wight chiefly mark a transitional period, or rather the association between Romans and Saxons ; for example, those upon Brook Down, Afton Down, Shalcombe and Chessell Downs, on Brighstone, also at Bowcombe Downs ; and this especially applies to those which have been examined along the range of hills from Newport or Carisbrooke to Freshwater, a distance, say, of 12 miles. It would seem that the burial-places of the earlier races, of the Belgic tribes who as we know occupied the Isle of Wight, are more plentiful in the district we are now investigating,

and this may be expected to be the case if we may view, as we now probably may, the old town of Brading and its immediate vicinity as marking the situation of the first occupation of Vectis by the Romans.

Mr. F. G. HILTON PRICE made some remarks in illustration of the paper, and the discussion was sustained by the Rev. H. Winwood and the President.

(Vectis Archaeological Trust)

Entry Name: Bowl barrow on Nunwell Down known as The Devil's Punchbowl

Scheduled Date: 23 October 1967

Last Amended: 12 September 1995

Source: Historic England

Source ID: 1012719

English Heritage Legacy ID: 22040

County: Isle of Wight

Civil Parish: Brading

Traditional County: Hampshire

Lieutenancy Area (Ceremonial County): Isle of Wight

Church of England Parish: Brading St Mary the Virgin

Church of England Diocese: Portsmouth