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THE WORKED STONE FINDS FROM BARROW T5: BURRINGTON COMBE

by

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ABSTRACT

Barrow T5 was originally excavated by the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society during the 1920s. This work was unsatisfactory and the site was reexcavted, this time carefully and completely by H. Taylor between 1949 and 1957. No final report was reproduced. This paper gives the background to the work and gives details of the non-flint worked stone implements, almost all of Ol;d red Sandstone (Portishead Formation) recovered from the site. The finds include polishers and one broken mould which indicate metalworking at the site, or nearby and two crude knives, one of sandstone and one of limestone.

INTRODUCTION

The barrow T5 is located at ST 47436 58465 above the west flank of Burrington Combe and just 140 m from the Society's Field Headquarters (Figure 1). It is catalogued as no. 24133 and 24134 in the Somerset SMR and marked 'Cairn' on the OS maps of the area.

The number 'T5' was allocated to this feature by the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society in the 1920s at a time when several barrows were investigated in rapid succession by a team led by R.F. Read. This work was reported on by Read (1923, 1924 and then by Herbert Taylor (1926). For more on the numbering system and the somewhat poor nature of this early work, see Donovan (2017: 135-6). T5 was the first barrow excavated by the Society during this period. The impetus behind this work was the fact that, although the Society's work in caves had yielded finds of Palaeolithic age, notably in Aveline's Hole and of the Iron Age, in Rowberrow and Read's Caverns, little had been learnt about the intervening Neolithic and Bronze Age archaeology of the area. It was hoped that information from the barrows would help fill this gap and this was largely the case. At T5, a trench was dug from the periphery to the centre and a roughly circular central area was excavated. The total area excavated was about 25 m2. The central area was found to consist of three distinct layers, but the cross section illustrating this is too small to be of much use (see Read, 1924, Fig. 14). A stone cist was found off centre and was regarded as a primary burial though no human remains were found. Pottery, including a Beaker, was described. The work at T5 in 1923 was later described by Arthur ApSimon (1969: 41) as 'a very bad excavation'. The same criticism would apply to the other barrow work carried out by the Society in 1923 and 1924 (Donovan, *op cit*). Indeed, such was the poor nature of the work that it attracted criticism from other local archaeologists and led in due course to the scheduling of many of these monuments (Grinsell, 1989). However, this style of rapid investigation ceased when Read, its main proponent, emigrated in 1925.

After 1930, Taylor decided that the best method to approach the excavation of such monuments was to remove the mound completely as only in that way could it be certain that no cists or secondary burials would be missed. Taylor applied this more methodical approach to

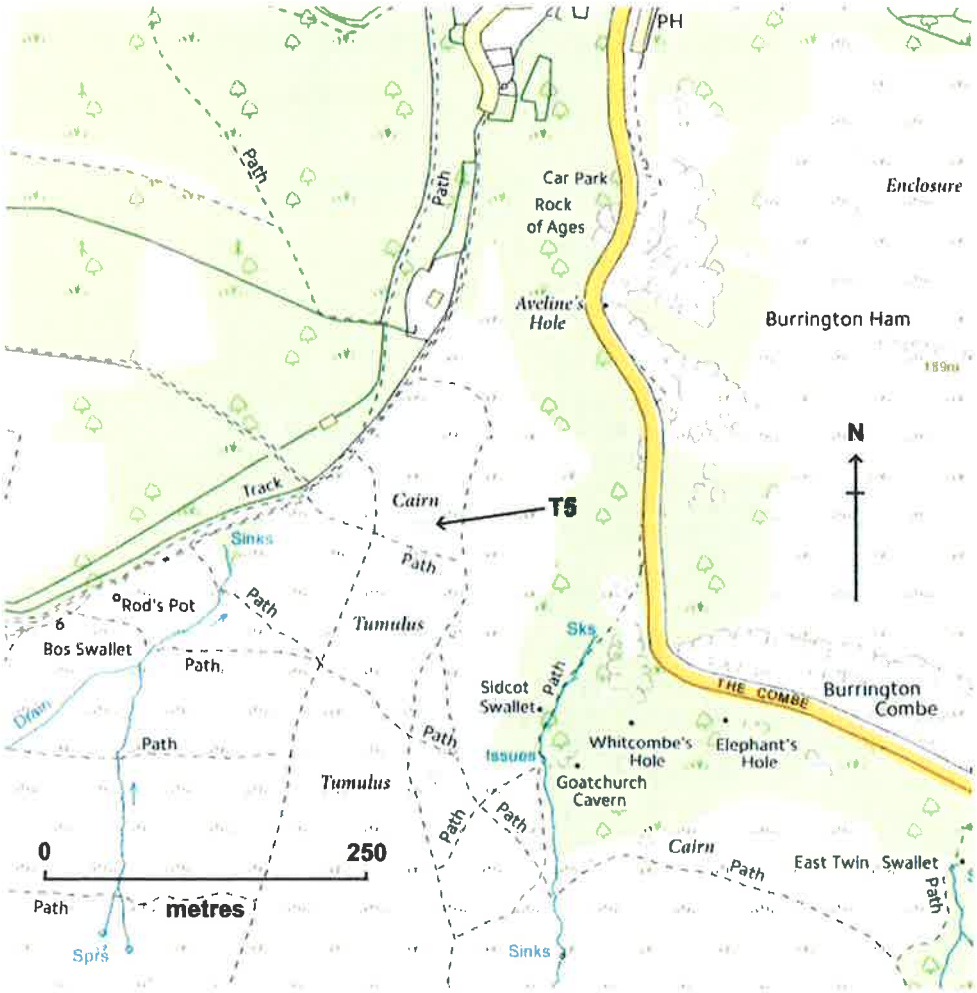

Figure 1. *Location of the barrow T5 close to Burrington Combe.*

excavations carried out over a number of years at the Tyning's Farm group of barrows on the south side of Black Down. These excavations have been fully reported, though not as fully illustrated as Taylor would have liked as much material, especially photographs and other paper records, were destroyed when the Society's museum was bombed in November 1940 (Taylor, 1933, 1951).

After the Second World War, Taylor returned to T5 and excavations recommenced.. Work started in 1949 (Blackwell, 1951) and brief comments about its continuation appeared in successive Secretary's Reports; in 1954, the discovery of an "extensive Late Bronze Age cemetery" was noted with the comment that "So far fifty graves have been found" (Robertson, 1954). In 1956, it was announced that "Dr Taylor has completed the excavation …"

(Robertson, 1956) but the following year "The excavation of barrow T5 has been continued ..." (Ineson, 1957). These somewhat contradictory reports bear witness to the fact that Taylor worked with just a few assistants, mainly his wife, Betty and friends Mr and Mrs Masterson.

There are no other mentions of the site in the Society's annual reports and it is not known why Taylor never published a report. Although he was in poor health in his later years, he had continued excavating until 1963. On his death in 1983, his papers and photographic records were donated to the Society by his widow; the finds were already in the Museum. Unfortunately, the field notebooks which are the most important documentary record were all handwritten by him and are extremely difficult to decipher.

No details of any post-excavation work on the finds have been found in the archive. However, in 1974 James Russell, then the Society's Museum curator, was tasked by E.K. Tratman, then the President, to make a fair copy of a full plan of the excavation, apparently as it was when work ceased. This was presumably in expectation of a report being published. Both the fair copy and the original survive in the archive and were rediscovered in 2018. Russell (*pers comm*) has stated that he had no other knowledge of the finds or the archive at that time.

The majority of Taylor's archive of this site has now been digitised and it is intended that the site can be fully analysed and published. This paper, which describes the worked stone objects, is the first part of this work.

THE WORKED STONE ASSEMBLAGE

Excavations at T5 offered a small but interesting assemblage of worked stone objects. In total 57 objects have been unearthed; 27 of old red sandstone, three of grey sandstone, one of limestone and 27 of flint. This paper focusses only on the Old Red Sandstone the fine pale sandstone material and the limestone knife (see table 1). Old Red Sandstone (now the Portishead Formation but hereinafter 'ORS') is local to the area. The source of the pale grey sandstone is not known.

Table 1. *The worked sandstone objects from the T5 barrow excavations. The catalogue numbers given here are the numbers written on the objects; In many cases these numbers are different from the numbers shown in the excavation catalogue.*

catalogue	material	object type	length (m)	width (m)	height (m)	Condition
T5.5/20	Limestone	Crude knife	0.11	0.04	N/A	Complete
T5.5/21	ORS	Crude knife	0.07	0.037	N/A	part
T5.3/ 8	ORS	Grinder	0.13	0.095	0.08	complete
T5.3/55	ORS	Polisher	0.095	0.075	0.025	complete
T5.3/56	ORS	Grinder	0.12	0.055	0.03	complete
T5.3/57	ORS	Polisher	0.063	0.069	0.038	complete
T5.3/64	ORS	Grinder	0.18	0.066	0.014	complete

catalogue	material	object type	length (m)	width (m)	height (m)	Condition
T5.3/64	ORS	Grinder	0.086	0.063	0.031	complete
T5.3/64	ORS	Grinder	0.09	0.063	0.058	complete
T5.3/51	ORS	Pestle	0.051	0.04	0.037	part
T5.3/53	ORS	Polisher	0.052	0.053	0.033	complete
T5.3/49	ORS	Polisher	0.054	0.045	0.031	complete
T5.3/43	ORS	Polisher	0.04	0.038	0.028	complete
T5.3/57	ORS	Grinder	0.063	0.057	0.018	part
T5.3/62	ORS	Saddle quern	0.31	0.21	0.041	part
T5.3/ 58	ORS	Grinder	0.14	0.13	0.02	part
T5.5/12	ORS	Hammerstone	0.057	0.056	0.04	complete
T5.5/6	ORS	Grinder	0.11	0.064	0.034	complete
T5.5/7	ORS	Polisher	0.063	0.044	0.01	part
T5.5/15	ORS	Grinder	0.062	0.03	0.034	complete
T5.5/13	ORS	Polisher	0.044	0.038	0.038	complete
T5.5/5	ORS	Hammerstone	N/A	N/A	N/A	small fragment
T5.5/10	Pale fine sandstone	Whetstone	0.048	0.028	0.012	part
T5.5/45	Pale fine sandstone	Unidentified	0.034	0.029	0.003	complete
T5.5/2	ORS	Grinder	0.062	0.039	0.055	complete
T5.5/1	Pale fine sandstone	Polisher	0.088	0.052	0.038	part
T5.5/11	ORS	Lid	0.064	0.068	0.018	complete
T5.5/9	ORS	Lid	0.08	0.08	0.016	complete
T5.5/14	ORS	Casting mould	0.16	0.98	0.051	part
T5.9/16	ORS	Saddle quern	0.18	0.19	0.05	part

A catalogue has been produced of all objects and a detailed photographic archive has been created. A 3D point cloud photogrammetric model of the crude limestone knife has been produced to allow the best possible illustration of the object.

Quern stones
T5.3/62 Almost complete medium sized saddle quern. Worked on opposite faces. Main grinding face worked to exhaustion, chipped and uneven surface outcome with no clearly visible grinding striation. Made of ORS.
T5.5/16 Fragment of a small saddle quern 20 x 15 x 4 cm. Worked only on the grinding face. Made of ORS.

Polishers
T5.3/55 small sub-rounded polisher with high polished surfaced that indicates use on organic materials (e.g. leather/bone). Made of ORS.
T5.3/57 small almost conical polisher with a dent in the polishing surface. Low polished face with heavily used signs. Difficult to identify if the polisher was used for organic or non-organic material polishing. Made of ORS.
T5.3/53 small sub-rounded polisher with a high polished surface possibly used on organic materials. Made of ORS.
T5.3/49 Very small sub-rounded polisher. Difficult to identify if the polisher was used for organic or non-organic material polishing. Made of ORS.
T5.3/43 Small sub-rounded polisher. Made of ORS
T5.5/7 Fragment of an elongated polisher with a highly polished surface. Possibly used for the production of metal objects as its unusual shape does not support an interpretation as pottery burnisher or organic material polisher. Made of ORS.
T5.5/13 Small sub-rounded polisher. Made of ORS
T5.5/1 Small sub-rounded polisher with a highly polished surface that may indicates use on organic materials (e.g. leather/bone). Made of a pale, fine grained sandstone.

'Crude knives'
T5.5/20 Medium sized 'crude' knife. Made of limestone
T5.5/21 Fragment of a smaller 'crude' knife. Made of ORS

Rubbers (Hand Grinders)
T5.3/ 8 Large rounded rubber stone. Made of ORS.
T5.3/56 Medium sized, sub-angular hand grinder. Made of ORS.
T5.3/64 Medium sized, sub-rounded hand grinder. Made of ORS.
T5.3/64 Small, sub-rounded hand grinder. Possibly used in small mortars, based on circular striations in the grinding surface. Made of ORS.
T5.3/64 Small, sub-rounded hand grinder. Made of ORS.
T5.3/5 Medium sized, sub-rounded hand grinder. Made of ORS.
T5.3/58 Fragment of a large sub-rounded hand grinder. Made of ORS.
T5.5/6 Small, sub-rounded hand grinder. Made of ORS.
T5.5/15 Small, sub-angular hand grinder. Possibly used in small mortars, based on circular striations in the grinding surface. Made of ORS.
T5.5/2 Small, sub-angular hand grinder. Made of ORS.

Lids
T5.5/11 Medium sized, round, almost discoid, object with worked periphery. Probably lid for a vessel. Made of ORS.
T5.5/9 Small, round, almost discoid, object with worked periphery. Probably lid for a vessel. Made of ORS.

Pestles and hammerstones
T5.3/51 Fragment of a medium sized pestle that was used in association with a mortar vessel. Made of ORS.
T5.5/12 Medium sized hammerstone. Made of ORS.
T5.5/5 Small fragment (only the working tip survives) of a possible hammerstone. Made of ORS.

Miscellaneous
T5.5/10 Small whetstone that have been used extensively, based on the heavy polished, wared, surface. Made of a very fine-grained pale sandstone.also AS)
T5.5/14 A fragment of a possible casting mould. Made of Old Red Sandstone.

Figure 2. *Saddle quern of Old Red Sandstone. (Cat. No. T5/3.62).*

Figure 3. *The two 'crude knives' from T5. Left is Cat. No. T5.5/20 of carboniferous limestone and right is Cat. No. T5.5/21 of Old Red Sandstone*

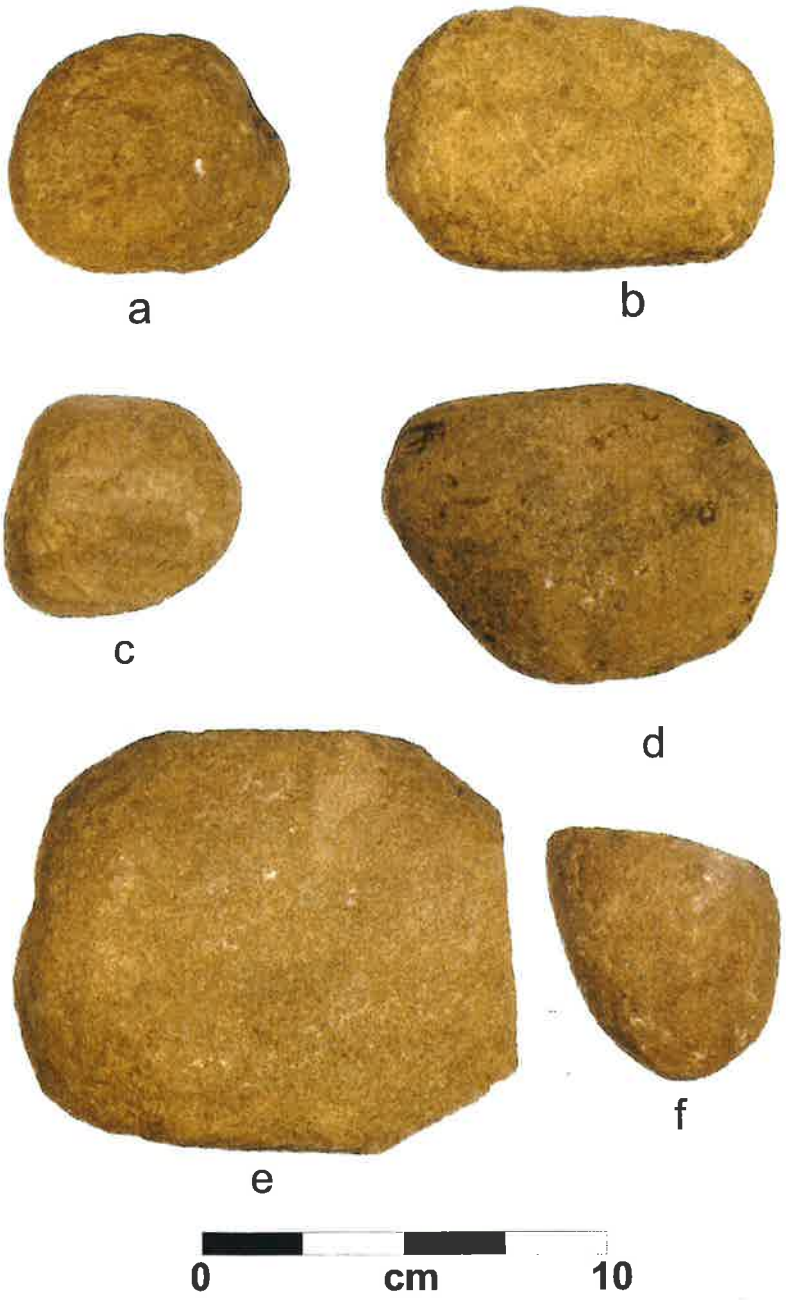

Figure 4. *a. polisher (T5.3/53), b. hand rubber (T5.3/64), c. polisher (T5.3/49), d. hand rubber (T5.3./55), e. hand rubber (T5.3/56), f. fragment of a pestle (T5.4/51). All made from Old Red Sandstone*

DISCUSSION

The earliest phase of use of this monument possibly dates around the late third - early second millennium BC based on the Beaker pottery sherds associated with the primary burial in the mound. T5 has also a later phase, possibly dating to the mid/late second millennium BC, represented by a flat cremation cemetery, south/south-west of the barrow. The detailed site map drawn by Russell (*vide supra*) shows this clearly. This can be found at http://www.ubss.org.uk/resources/procsupplement/28_1_141-151.pdf . It is to be hoped that the detail of the excavations on which this plan is based will be published at a later date.

The most interesting artefacts are probably the two stone 'blades' that seem to have been made as small crude knives. The sandstone and the limestone have been worked in a way similar to flint blades with parallel motions of a hammerstone that created a quite sharp – for a sandstone or limestone – blade. It seems unlikely that the knives were used as such but rather had a symbolic character or purpose. It is difficult to identify similar examples of ORS symbolic knives, which makes the T5 examples of interest and requiring further analysis.

Polishers constitute almost 30% of the worked stone artefacts found in the early and later phase of Barrow T5. Hammerstones, polishers with evidence of metal polishing, moulds, and cushion-stones may not be particularly common in Beaker-age Britain but they are well documented in the Netherlands and northern Belgium (see Drenth *et al* 2016) and have been intensively studied in the context of Bell Beaker culture (see Brodie, 2001; Freudenberg, 2006). Worked stone toolkits have been found in Beaker burial associated with male burials both in Europe and in the British Isles according to Drenth *et al* (2016: 49) with British examples in Clarke (1970) and Fitzpatrick (2013). In the case of Barrow T5 however, as the analysis of the material from the excavation is at a very early stage, such an conclusion would be premature.

At this stage of the site analysis, it is not possible to say much about the landscape context within which the barrow is to be found, but its presumed period(s) of use do coincide with those of other Bronze Ages sites found nearby. These include Bos Swallet (ApSimon, 1998) which is 360 m to the west; Gorsy Bigbury, some 3.2 km to the south (ApSimon, *et al* 1976); and Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet, 4.4 km south-southeast (Levitan and Smart, 1989). Nearest are two barrows to the south at ST 4747 5837 (Barrow T6, Somerset HER 24136, {Read, 1923}) and at ST 4745 5822 (Barrow T6c, Somerset HER 24129).

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