

Collared urn and accessory vessel

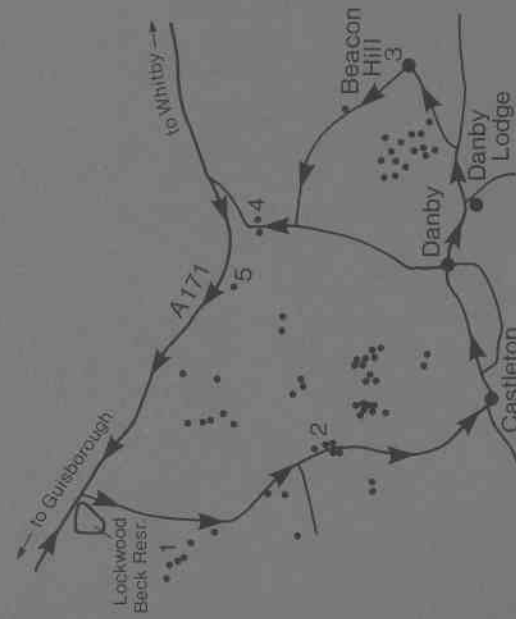
decorated 'collar' around the upper part of the pot. These were used as containers for cremated bone. Other types of vessel include the 'Food Vessel', which often accompanies rather than contains the burial, and a small cup-like vessel called an accessory vessel or 'pygmy cup'.



Cup-marked stone

A common early Bronze Age feature is the cup-marked stone — the 'cup' being a circular hollow pecked into the stone. Some 'cups' have a shallow ring around them but these are rare in our area. Their actual function remains unknown but it is probable they had a ritual significance.

Other finds from burial mounds include worked flints, such as arrowheads, and, more rarely, stone battle axes. Jet ornaments are also occasionally found. There is a noticeable lack of metal objects from the barrows in Cleveland, there being no record of any metal finds being recovered from a barrow.



The following route can be followed by car and includes some of the larger barrows of the county — it is advisable to take a map of the North Yorkshire Moors with you.

- 1 Black Howes
- 2 Three Howes
- 3 Beacon Hill — excellent view point
- 4 Robin Hood's Butts
- 5 Herd Howe

A more detailed account of these sites can be found in our survey 'Bronze Age Burial Mounds in Cleveland', by G.M. Crawford, obtainable from Cleveland County Libraries and from:-

Cleveland County Archaeology Section
Old School, Victoria Road, Middlesbrough

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BRONZE AGE BURIAL MOUNDS



The Black Howes, Moorsholm High Moor

The circular Bronze Age burial mound or barrow is the most common type of monument within the county, over 100 having been recorded. These date from the early Bronze Age (1800-1200 BC) and are a common feature on the higher ground of the moors. The siting of burial mounds in prominent positions, such as hill tops and false crests, was deliberate — they were clearly meant to be visible for many miles. Groups of barrows are distinguishable, including groups at Boulby, Brotton and a group centred on the Black Howes, on High Moor, near Moorsholm. The mounds are usually made of stone gathered when early Bronze Age communities were clearing the oak forests which preceded the moorland we know today.

Barrows differ in size, some being as large as 16 metres in diameter. They also vary greatly in their construction, but the function of each was the same — they were all burial mounds. After cremation the burnt remains were gathered together and put inside a pottery vessel ('collared urn'). This was then placed inside the mound and the whole structure capped with stones.

As these burial mounds were easily recognisable, 19th century antiquarians have left only a few unexcavated. Several people were noted for their prolific barrow digging in our area, particularly Canon Atkinson, Vicar of Danby, William Hornsby, local tradesman and the historian and journalist John Walker Ord. Although most barrows are known to have been excavated, the construction of the mound was rarely given more than a general note. The primary aim of the antiquarian excavation was to recover grave goods, such as the large urns the cremations were placed in. Some barrows were excavated but not recorded at all, the tell-tale rectangular trench, dug by the 19th century excavators in the centre of the mound, is sometimes found during modern excavation.



Antiquarian barrow digging

The large number of 19th century excavations has resulted in only a few barrows remaining undisturbed. Cleveland County Archaeology Section has excavated two barrows in recent

years, both belonging to the group of mounds on the coast at Boulby near Loftus. The group as a whole contained a dozen barrows, some now ploughed out. Barrows belonging to the same group are commonly intervisible; standing on any barrow in the Boulby group it is possible to see up to six other barrows.



Kerbstones of the Boulby round barrow excavated in 1980

At Boulby the barrow excavated in 1980 had been built on the site of a much earlier Neolithic long barrow and although half had been lost by ploughing the remaining half allowed a detailed examination of the mound construction. Upright kerbstones had been placed in an octagonal, rather than circular layout, with large buttressing stones at the angles. A band of stones had been placed over the kerb, while the core was made up of fairly clean clay. The whole structure may then have been capped with a layer of stones, subsequently removed by ploughing or for wall building. Four cremations, each in a collared urn, and one accessory vessel were found. Twenty-one jet buttons of Bronze Age date were also found, though these were several metres away from the mound, in a disturbed part of the underlying Neolithic structure.

Only a few hundred yards away another barrow in the Boulby group was excavated in 1985. The construction of this mound was both complex and different from the others in the group. A small mound only 8m in diameter, the site had been delimited by a gully, with a possible entrance to the east. The gully was eventually filled with stones to form an outer ring around a semi-circular mound of clean orange clay. A second, internal, ring of stones and a smaller bank of clay surrounded a feature made up of stones placed in a neat rectangular shape.

The central feature contained a disturbed cremation in a small pottery vessel. Other finds were also recovered, including a jet V-perforated button and a broken stone battle-axe. These were found not in the centre of the mound but among the stones in the outer ring. These finds suggest that the barrow has a fairly early date in the Bronze Age, perhaps around 1500 BC.



Burial mound under excavation at Boulby, 1985

The most common find, by nature of the early Bronze Age burial tradition, is pottery. Several different types of vessel are found, the largest and most easily recognisable being the 'collared urn', so called because of the large, usually highly