

Cambridge Chronicle Nov 13 1818

Antiquities &c. discovered at Whittlesford

We are now enabled to lay before our readers some particulars respecting the remarkable discoveries that have been made upon the estate of Ebenezer Hollick, Esq of Whittlesford, at a place called Got Moor, between Whittlesford and Triplow, two miles from Newton.

Mr Hollick employed some labourers to level three antient tumuli upon Got Moor called The Chronicle Hills, with a view to the improvement of his land. These tumuli stood in a line nearly north and south upon the north side of a brook separating the parishes of Triplow and Whittlesford. The old road from Cambridge to Triplow through Shelford crossed this brook: it may have been a Roman way. Upon the left (ie eastern) side of it, were the tumuli; and also other sepulchres of a very remarkable nature, as we shall presently show.

The middlemost of The Chronicle Hills was 8 feet high, and it was 27 yards in diameter; the others were much lower. They ranged along an antient wall constructed of flints and pebbles, which the workmen are now removing. Its length was 4 rods, its thickness 30 inches, and it had three abutments upon its eastern side. Beyond this wall, at the distance of 12 rods to the east, was found an antient well made with clunch, 9 feet in diameter, full of flints and tiles of a curious shape, so formed as to lap over each other. Some of these tiles had a hole in the centre – and, from their general appearance, it was believed that they had been used in an aqueduct. In this well were found two Buck's or Elk's horns, of very large size. Upon opening the tumuli, the workmen removed, from the larger one, four human skeletons, which were found lying upon their backs, about two feet from the bottom. Some broken pieces of terra cotta, with red and with black glazing, were found in opening the tumuli, heaped among the earth, which, from the nature of the workmanship, seemed to be Roman, but this is uncertain.

In opening the northern tumulus, and in removing the wall upon its eastern side, such an innumerable quantity of the bones of a small quadruped was found, that they were actually stratified to the depth of four inches, so that the workmen took out whole shovels filled with these bones; and the same were also found near other sepulchres about an hundred yards to the north of The Chronicle Hills. The most singular circumstance is, that there is no living animal now in the country, to which these bones thus deposited by millions, may be anatomically referred. The bones of the jaw correspond with those of the Castor, or Beaver as found in a fossil state in the bogs near Chatteris; but the first are incomparably smaller. Like those of the Beaver they are furnished with two upper and two lower incisors, and with four grinders on each side. Nothing like these minute bones has, however, been yet known to exist in a fossil state. One of the Professors of this University, after a careful examination of the spot, believing them to have belonged to the Lemming, which sometimes descends in moving myriads from the mountains of Lapland transmitted several of them to London to Sir Joseph Banks, and to Sir Everard Home, who have confirmed his conjecture. According to these gentlemen there exists at present a creature of this species called a Shrew Mouse, which is exceedingly destructive to young plantations. About two years ago the Commissioners of Forests wrote to Sir Joseph Banks to know what could be done to get rid of them. A colony of these animals may have been hemmed in by some flood, and, being all of them drowned, were perhaps thus huddled together in one

spot.*[ed note: the italic text comes from an unknown journal of Jan 1819 which credits the original newspaper]*

Before we conclude this article, already extended to an unusual length for a newspaper, we have also to add, that about 100 yards to the north of The Chronicle Hills, there were found two other sepulchres, in which human skeletons were found in soroi, constructed of flints and pebbles, put together with fine gravel. These soroi were surrounded each by a circular wall 2½ feet thick, and about 3 feet high, 22 feet in diameter. The whole were covered beneath mounds of earth, which rose in hills about 2 feet above the soroi, having been probably, diminished in height by long pressure and the effects of rains.

In the first soros, (which was 5 feet square, and 8 feet deep, brought to a point with pebbles,) were found two skeletons. The uppermost appeared to be of larger size. Under the skull was found the blade of a poignard or knife. The head of this skeleton rested upon the body of the other. The soros was full of dirt; and patches of a white unctuous substance, like spermaceti, adhered to the flints. It had an oak bottom, black as ink, but stained with the green oxide of copper, owing to the decomposition of an antient bronze vessel, very small parts of which have been removed to this university, and analysed: the composition consisting, as usual in antient bronze, of an alloy of copper and tin, in the proportion of 88 of the former to 12 of the latter. Large iron nails, reduced almost to an oxide, were also found here. In the other soros (which was 4 feet square, within its circular wall, and 8 feet deep,) an human skeleton was found; and another below it in a sitting posture, with an erect spear, the point of which was of iron. Nails were found here, but no wood, as in the other soros. Here the small quadruped bones were found in great abundance. The skull of the sitting figure was stolen by one of the labourers, and carried to his own cottage at Whittlesford: it had every tooth perfect. The robbery has given rise to a very amusing instance of superstition; for it is maintained at Whittlesford, that the headless skeleton of an antient warrior knocks every night at the door of this cottager, demanding the skull sacrilegiously stolen from his grave.

Much more might be added respecting the antiquities of Got Moor, and of The Chronicle Hills. Many gentlemen of the university have resorted to the spot to gratify their curiosity. The mode of burial exhibited by those antient sepulchres, added to the fact of the bronze reliques found within one of them, and also that no Roman coins have ever been discovered among the other ruins, plead strongly for the superior antiquity of the people here interred; and lead to a conclusion that The Chronicle Hills were rather Celtic than Roman tombs.