

A Bronze Age barrow and Anglo-Saxon cemetery on Bowcombe Down, 575m south east of Apesdown

A Scheduled Monument in Newport, Isle of Wight

Coordinates

Latitude: 50.6832 / 50°40'59"N - Longitude: -1.349 / 1°20'56"W

OS Eastings: 446087.528331 - OS Northings: 87259.280486

OS Grid: SZ460872

Map-code National: GBR 8BN.1RH = Map-code Global: FRA 8728.D9S

Entry Name: A Bronze Age barrow and Anglo-Saxon cemetery on Bowcombe Down, 575m south east of Apesdown

Scheduled Date: 7 April 1997

Source: Historic England

Source ID: 1015624

English Heritage Legacy ID: 22068

County: Isle of Wight

Civil Parish: Newport

Traditional County: Hampshire

Lieutenancy Area (Ceremonial County): Isle of Wight

Church of England Parish: Carisbrooke St Mary the Virgin

Church of England Diocese: Portsmouth

Details

The monument includes an Anglo-Saxon cemetery arranged around and located within an earlier Bronze Age bowl barrow. It lies on the ridge of Bowcombe Down and is now levelled by cultivation, although remains are visible on aerial photographs.

The Bronze Age barrow, at the south west of the monument, was the largest of a group of 12 observed by Hillier in the middle of the 19th century, the remainder being smaller Saxon barrows or 'hleaw'. All of the barrows were part excavated by Hillier and Wilkins in the 19th century: the 11 smaller barrows were excavated in 1854, and the Bronze Age barrow in 1858. The Bronze Age barrow produced two Bronze Age cremations, one in a shallow pit under the centre of the mound, and another near the mound's summit.

In addition, 12 inhumations of Saxon date were recovered suggesting that this earlier burial monument provided the focus for the Saxon cemetery. Finds from this barrow included an iron sword and shield fitting, spearheads, knives and arrowhead, bronze ornaments, pottery, glass, beads and a bead necklace. Surrounding the Bronze Age barrow are five of the Saxon barrows, while the other six lie to its north east. All of the barrows in the north eastern group contain cremations; the south western group is mixed. In addition to the burials, finds from these barrows included a bronze brooch and strap end, an iron knife, a Roman coin and both complete and broken ceramic urns. Of the total of 34 Saxon graves recorded at this site, 14 were cremations and 20 inhumations. Of the cremations, all but two were in urns and only those two were accompanied by grave goods. Only one of the inhumations was unaccompanied. Numerous additional finds have come from the monument, particularly from the late 1970s onwards. These include human bone representing further inhumations and cremations, bronze artefacts, and Anglo-Saxon metal work, including a bronze bowl. Gates, gateposts and post and wire fences are excluded from the scheduling, but the ground beneath these features is included.

Source: Historic England

Reasons for Scheduling

Beginning in the fifth century AD, there is evidence from distinctive burials and cemeteries, new settlements, and new forms of pottery and metalwork, of the immigration into Britain of settlers from northern Europe, bringing with them new religious beliefs. The Roman towns appear to have gone into rapid decline and the old rural settlement pattern to have been disrupted. Although some Roman settlements and cemeteries continued in use, the native Britons rapidly adopted many of the cultural practices of the new settlers and it soon becomes difficult to distinguish them in the archaeological record. So-called Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are dated to the early Anglo-Saxon period, from the fifth to the seventh centuries AD. With the conversion to Christianity during the late sixth and seventh centuries AD, these pagan cemeteries appear to have been abandoned in favour of new sites, some of which have continued in use up to the present day. Burial practices included both inhumation and cremation. Inhumations involved the placing of burials in rectangular pits in the ground, occasionally within coffins. Cremation burials involved the placing of burnt remains in containers which were then buried in small pits in the ground. The most common burial containers were pottery vessels, frequently heavily decorated, although glass and metal ones are also known. In each type of burial the human remains might be accompanied by those of animals and also grave goods, including jewellery and weaponry. In some cemeteries only one of these burial rites was practised, in others, both are evident. Cemeteries range in size, the largest containing several thousand burials. Individual cemeteries were in use for up to 300 years.

Anglo-Saxon cemeteries represent one of our principal sources of archaeological evidence about the early Anglo-Saxon period, providing information on population, social structure and ideology. All surviving examples, other than those which have been heavily disturbed, are considered worthy of protection.

The Anglo-Saxon cemetery on Bowcombe Down is one of two recorded examples on the Isle of Wight. Finds from the ground surface in the years following excavation and levelling demonstrated that archaeological remains do survive while environmental evidence will also be present, relating to the cemetery and the landscape in which it was constructed. A Bronze Age round barrow within the area of the cemetery has been reused for secondary Anglo-Saxon internments. This Bronze Age barrow is one of six along the ridge of Bowcombe Down, forming part of a prehistoric round barrow cemetery dating to the period c.2000-700 BC.

Source: Historic England

Sources

Books and journals

Arnold, C J, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of the Isle of Wight*, (1982), 90

Arnold, C J, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of the Isle of Wight*, (1982), 89

Grinsell, , Sherwin, , 'Proceedings of the I.O.W. Nat History and Archaeological Soc' in *Proceedings of the I.O.W. Nat History and Archaeological Soc*, , Vol. 3, (1940), 184,198

Other

Ordnance Survey Field Inspector, Ordnance Survey card SZ48NE3, (1967)

Ordnance Survey, Ordnance Survey Card SZ 48 NE 3, (1967)

Source: Historic England