

CRICKLEY HILL: THE RESULTS OF THE 1987 SEASON

In the 1987 season work concentrated on the slope between the 1976 area (cuttings O1, P1 and Q1), and the zone dug between 1978 and 1981 (principally cuttings O3 and P3). It was expected that this would be a fairly empty area, as the work carried out in 1971 and 1972 immediately inside the Neolithic banks had revealed a scatter of artefacts swiftly petering out as digging proceeded away from the defences, and the 1978 cutting had shown little activity at the beginning of the slope itself. Only the 1976 cuttings showed no variation in artefact-distribution in the vicinity of the 1987 cutting, and so we expected that the dense occupation found on the top of the hill would come to a gradual end at the northern end of the 1987 cuttings, leaving a tract of about 25 metres width of little prehistoric activity. Only in one area did we expect to find anything unusual: in the northern side of the 1978 cutting O4 we had found a human cremation in a small pit, set within a ring of shallow ditches, and capped by a cobbled platform. Flint in the area and in the shallow ditches suggested a Neolithic date.

In the event, the area proved very much more interesting than we had expected. After taking off the topsoil, we found considerable traces of what seemed at first to be a hard-packed cobbling. Full cleaning of this proved in the end that this was of comparatively recent origin, and an examination of aerial photographs taken in 1972 and 1976 showed that this was the uncleared bottom of our own spoiltips.

Below this material we found a buried topsoil, and prehistoric levels. Large areas of worn stones formed at least four platforms, each measuring about 5m by 4m, with very irregular edges. Experiments suggested that these had been formed not by laying slabs and cobbles, but by the wearing down of existing layers of stones without any turf covering. To

test this we dug a section of a recent path which had received heavy use for twelve years, but which had been protected by 6cms of earth. We found that in these circumstances the limestone was completely protected, and no trace of the path could be uncovered by excavation. The platforms must therefore be envisaged as cleared areas of bare limestone, which received a measure of trample. The surrounding limestone must have been covered with earth or turf.

The platforms had been built up against, and in part overlay, a series of pits, measuring about 1m or a little less across, and about 70 cms deep. Two of these had lain open for a while, with a grassland soil forming up inside them, before they were completely filled. Both contained human cremations. Examination of the whole area revealed segments of two certain and two probable rings of pits, running concentrically around the top of the knoll, and roughly parallel with the Long Mound. No dates are yet available for these pits, but pottery from near the top of one, on one of the platforms, has been compared with Beaker domestic forms, and we are taking platforms and pit circles to belong to this period: the brackets lie between the Neolithic settlement and the Iron Age settlement, i.e. 2500 and about 700 B.C. This area proved very complex in its excavation and much still remains to be done here: in particular, it is clear that at least two Neolithic structures, with hearths and considerable quantities of pottery and flint, underlie the platforms, and we expect that stratification of the lower levels will be well preserved here.

Work was proceeding meanwhile on a section of the Long Mound. Our aim was chiefly to confirm the design of the structure and its phasing, and the 1987 season gave us two surprises: in the first place we uncovered unequivocal evidence that the slabs which marked out the edge of the Long Mound are of two phases, and that therefore the earthen Long

Mound itself was of two periods. Secondly, we found that below the Long Mound lay not a stone cairn (as at the circle end of the monument) but a series of stone-packed postholes for small posts, and a single cross-shaped trench, in its positioning resembling the marker post at the end of the final phase of the Mound. The identical combination of ritual focus, cairn and markers (succeeded by earthen mound) and axial terminal marker has in September 1987 been excavated by Lalgouache at Locmariaquer in Morbihan, in a certainly Neolithic context. Thus the Mound is proving to be a much more complex structure than we had at first believed, and conflicting dating evidence from the eastern and the western portions of the monument is tending to suggest that its use extended over a considerable period of time, perhaps as much as a thousand years.

At the end of the 1987 season these complexities had been unravelled, but the top of the Neolithic landsurface was only just beginning to appear. The burning of the final settlement was quite obvious, as were the postpackings of a fairly dense occupation below the Long Mound. All this was left to future work, for it is clear that it will take the best part of a season to complete this difficult area.

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