

## CRICKLEY HILL: THE 1988 SEASON

Excavations at Crickley took place between 5 July and 20 August 1988, in two adjacent areas within the Neolithic settlement. On average the size of the workforce was 70 volunteers, with seven supervisors. At the end of the season, the cuttings were backfilled and returfed, and the records and finds were transferred to the University Museum, Nottingham, for processing.

### 1. Excavations on the Knoll

Work in nearby areas had already taken place in 1976 and 1978. In 1976 we had dug at the centre of the Knoll, revealing a complex series of postholes and pits, with some gullies and cobbled stone platforms. Conditions in 1976 were extremely poor for observation of fine details of stratification, since the heatwave bleached out colours in the soil, and we were left at the end of the year with no certain picture of the number of phases present in this part of the site. In 1978 we worked on the slope to the south of the knoll. This was a much wetter year, and it proved possible to identify two distinct periods of cobbling, the earlier associated with a series of pits one of which contained the fragments of a burnt human skull. In this southern area, however, we could not find clear evidence of domestic occupation similar to that in the centre of the knoll. In 1987, therefore, we began excavations in the area between the 1976 and the 1978 cuttings. Conditions were favourable for the work, and we were able to distinguish a complex series of stratified layers, including three certain and two probable cobbled platforms. The edges of these spreads of limestone overlay the sides of at least three of the pits which we found running in lines parallel to the contours of the knoll. The pits themselves contained bone and some pottery which had been put into the pits after a partial infilling with stone. Dating evidence was very slight for this phase: one pit contained a tiny fragment of bronze, but the pottery associated was formless, plain coarse limestone-tempered ware indistinguishable from our general prehistoric sherds. Nearby, on the edge of the northernmost platform, a cluster of sherds seemed likely to belong to the early Bronze Age.

At the end of the 1987 season, therefore, we had identified a horizon of activity which could be linked to that found in earlier work on the knoll, but which was not clearly tied to the Neolithic settlements whose defences have provided a firm sequence of occupation. We reopened part of the 1987 cuttings in 1988, in order to continue the excavations. At the northern side of cutting P2 we had already found the remains of three successive hearths belonging to earlier occupation than one of the platforms. Work in this area, in ideal conditions for observing stratification, demonstrated that the cutting contained the intercutting gullies of at least two and more probably three successive phases. This was in line with the evidence from the adjacent areas of the 1976 season, notably in cuttings O1, P1 and Q1. What we were now able to see was that the gullies contained rows of postholes, to hold posts similar in size to those found elsewhere on the site where the bedrock was soft: in these latter areas the posts stood in individually cut postholes; here in the hard rock the builders seem to have compromised with an easier but less secure technique. None of the structures now identified was complete, since all ran out beyond the excavated area, but three corners of rows were seen, and the

presence of hearths suggests to us that we are here dealing with three phases of rectangular buildings of reasonable size, at least 6 metres broad. Other post-in-trench groupings were found in the centre and southern side of P2, and the northern side of Q2. It is possible that these represent a fence line or lines to the south of the habitation zone, which was concentrated in the middle of the knoll. Further to the south, in the centre and south of cutting Q2, there were few signs of any activity earlier than the pit-and-platform phase which formed a final stage of occupation to the north. This has proved a most rewarding area since it has provided the opportunity to begin to link the Neolithic interior with the sequence of occupation provided by the ramparts, and we shall need to extend the work into the undug areas around, in order to find the edges of the settlement, and to complete the plans of the structures which we have so far identified.

## 2. Excavations on the Long Mound

The Long Mound has been the object of our work during most of the seasons since 1977. Our conclusions before the 1988 season were that the area on which the mound had been constructed had been, during the final Neolithic occupation, a narrow fenced road leading back from the entrance to a gateway, beyond which it continued northwards as a still narrower track until it reached an enclosed platform on which stood a small building which was probably the settlement's shrine. Subsequently, the platform area was partially covered by a linear cairn of stones, approximately overlying the course of the approach trackway to the shrine. At a later date the cairn was truncated by the building of a small stone circle, and was buried below an earthen Long Mound, whose margins were outlined by a series of large stone slabs. Work at the southern end of the Long Mound between 1977 and 1987 showed that the Mound directly overlay the Neolithic settlement, without any intervening cairn phase.

In 1988 we dissected an area towards the centre of the Long Mound, and found for the first time in this southern zone a complexity of phasing which matches that at the northern, cairn, end of the monument. The Mound itself proved to be of at least two phases, since the marginal slabs had been buried by slipped soil from the central core, and had been replaced by other slabs set at a higher level. Below the Mound soil we uncovered low piles of stones which proved to be the packing around a series of postholes set in a line pointing directly towards the cairn (though not exactly at the centre of the Mound, since this is slightly curved at this point). Two of these postholes had clearly held three successive phases of post. At the southern side of the 1988 cutting a large complex of packing stones seems to mark the south end of this phase of the Long Mound area: here the final activity involved short lengths of shallow gully identical in appearance to the gullies of the cairn at the northern end of the monument. Our conclusions at this stage of the work are thus that after the Neolithic abandonment a cairn was built at the platform end of the site, and that the line of this structure was continued southwards as a series of freestanding posts. The whole was a little more than half the length of the final Long Mound. After a period long enough to necessitate restoration of the posts on at least two occasions, the Mound was piled over the cairn, and was subsequently rebuilt. From time to time during the seasons of work in this area we have uncovered small metal objects in the Mound soil. More were found both in 1987 and 1988, but in these cases we could be certain [thanks to the wetness of the digging seasons] that these

were intrusions into the Mound, and did not provide dating evidence for the Mound's construction. These most notably include an Iron Age finger ring, a second century AD brooch of trumpet type, and a knife blade of the 17th century AD. This burial activity has not been observed elsewhere on the hill, and it is quite possible that it represents a superstitious use of this part of the site extending well beyond the period of major ritual practice, which at present we would date to the late Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Below the Mound and earlier than the free-standing post period we have uncovered a ground surface of the Neolithic settlement, covered liberally with pottery, bone and flint. The surface was burnt, and was at the end of the 1988 season beginning to show traces of the stone packing for postholes. We therefore believe that the remains of Neolithic houses and fence lines, similar to those excavated to the south of this area, remain to be uncovered, and propose continuing in this part of the site in 1989.