

CRICKLEY HILL: THE 1993 SEASON

The 25th season at Crickley Hill took place during a period of seven weeks during July and August 1993. A total of 350 volunteers took part, at a daily average of 100 rising to a peak of 220 at the height of the season. Diggers came from all over the world, including a group of 40 from Canada. The supervisors were TW Courtney (Assistant Director), D Hollos, I Wykes, P Noakes, L Capon, B Lott (Planning), C McGee (Finds Supervisor), A Pounder (sampling); N Milner, L Mitchell, R Townsend and P Carlisle were assistant supervisors. The site manager was T Dudley, and Mrs B Grubb was again the catering manager. To all these I owe my grateful thanks.

During this season we concentrated on three areas, the Neolithic banks, the Long Mound, and the platform outside the Neolithic area to the north-west of the site.

1. The Neolithic banks

During the 1975 and the 1990 seasons cuttings had been made across the banks to the north of the site. The sequence here showed first two rings of causewayed enclosure ditches, succeeded by a single ditch belonging to the final phase of the Neolithic enclosure. Two problems remained from these earlier cuttings: did the ditches maintain their relative position around the side of the hill, and was the complex pattern of fences found in 1990 typical of the configuration of the final defences on the side of the hill. A cutting measuring 10 metres by 15 was laid out across the curving bank close to the position of the 1975 cutting. This revealed the final phase bank, together with a simple fence line, and a shallow ditch of phase 1d. The causewayed enclosure ditches (1b) proved harder to locate. The end of the inner ring was tentatively identified on the western side of the cutting, but its bank appeared to have been removed before or during the construction of the 1d bank. The outer ring of the causewayed enclosure was not found, and is presumed therefore to lie further to the north, outside the excavated area.

All this was in line with expectations. What was not expected, however, was a substantial phase of occupation above the 1d bank. Three hearths with well laid bases and surrounds had been cut into the final bank. Finds of flint and pottery from these suggested a Neolithic date, and a series of postholes and stakeholes surrounded them, implying screens or structures of a later date than the bank, perhaps during the

earlier phases of the Long Mound (1e), or belonging to a previously unknown period immediately after the destruction of the Neolithic enclosure. None of the subsequent phases (neither Iron Age nor Dark Age) were represented in this part of the site, and the only late material from here was associated with the building of the parish boundary wall in the post-medieval period.

2. The Long Mound

Work in adjacent areas in earlier seasons had revealed a series of problems. The underlying Neolithic settlements had included a kitchen area to the east of the 1993 cutting, and a series of apparently ritual pits to the west. The mound itself to the east was comparatively simple, consisting of no more than two phases of construction. That to the west, however, had shown the tail of the cairn below the mound, succeeded by at least two mound phases. In order to sort out these variations, and to locate the exact position of a small cutting made in 1976 (on the old grid), a cutting of approximately 8 metres by 10 metres was laid out across the mound.

The mound was seen to vary considerably in its alignment and shape: towards the west it was about 30% broader and higher than towards the east, and examination of the soil showed that the eastern end of an early mound lay towards the centre of the cutting, with a rebuilt mound piled up against the termination. Both halves of the mound showed signs of being multi-phased, with a replacing of several of the marginal slabs. Within the mound itself lay three groups of stones, the largest including a slab of very large size. There were no finds with these, and their function is not yet known.

Below the mound, the Neolithic surface proved to resemble that previously uncovered in adjacent cuttings. To the north and east of the mound we found the edge of the Neolithic roadway of the final phase. Below the mound itself the Neolithic surface was largely bare. To the south of the mound we found the western edge of the kitchen area, with a spread of ash similar to that found in 1989. Further to the west lay a group of four pits, similar to those found in the ritual area nearer to the Neolithic shrine, but here clearly earlier than the 1d kitchen area.

Problems still remain, most notably concerning the inner ring of causewayed enclosure ditches, which have now been traced along the northern slope of the hill, and then running southwards across the flat top of the hill, but not extending as far south as the Long Mound gully. The outer ring of ditches of this phase, in contrast, cuts across the end of the hill immediately to the west of the Long Mound.

3. The Short Mound

During the 1992 season excavation of the flat area to the north of the site revealed a mound of clay, its edges bounded by slabs in the same fashion as the main Long Mound. This part of the site had been left incomplete at the end of the 1992 season, and was finished off during this year's work. A cutting measuring 15 metres by 18 metres was laid out. Clearance to the east of the cutting revealed the curving end of the Short Mound, marked by margin slabs.

Below the mound a trampled and worn surface of small stones had clearly been used as a trackway, about 4 metres broad, running from west to east across the cutting. Its western end pointed directly at the western entrance to the Iron Age fort (traced in 1977), but the finds from the surface of this roadway belonged to the Romano-British period. This is a phase of occupation poorly represented in the hillfort area, though known elsewhere on the hill thanks to the excavations of Mrs Elsie Clifford with the woodland to the east of the site. It is possible that the fragment of roadway found in 1993 was a drove from the valley, along the spine of the hill, towards the enclosures and ranch found by Mrs Clifford. The flat area at this point tends to become waterlogged (thanks to the lie of the ground and the clay subsoil) and the stones and gravel which make up the roadway may have been introduced to fill up this boggy ground.

The implications of this for the Short Mound are interesting, since this feature clearly belongs to a period after the 2nd or 3rd century AD. During the 4th century AD several of the hillforts of Southern England saw reoccupation apparently for pagan religious ceremonies (most notably at Maiden Castle), and the construction of the Short Mound may fall into this context. Its similarity with the earlier Long Mound is an interesting commentary on the longevity of beliefs in Gloucestershire.

Philip Dixon
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