

STONEY LITTLETON LONG BARROW: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS 1999/2000

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with contributions by Jacqueline McKinley, Jane Timby, and Martin Tingle

INTRODUCTION

Between December 1999 and February 2000 Cotswold Archaeological Trust carried out archaeological works on behalf of English Heritage at Stoney Littleton Long Barrow, Bath and North East Somerset (NGR: ST 735572). The structure of the barrow, which is registered as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM no. 22855), has been described elsewhere (Grinsell 1963) and has been classified as one of the Notgrove/Parc le Breos Cwm sub-type of the Neolithic chambered tombs of the Cotswold-Severn region (Darvill 1982, 118, 124). Although no major scientific archaeological investigation of the monument has been undertaken, there are a number of documented antiquarian and more recent investigations (Scarth 1859, 46; Colt Hoare 1819; Bulleid 1942; BAT 1989; CAT 1995).

The archaeological works were part of a wider programme of repair and conservation undertaken following many years of deterioration to the internal gallery and chambers, and comprised the excavation of three trenches, geophysical and auger surveys, a watching brief during conservation works and the drawing of several previously unrecorded internal elevations. The site archive and artefactual collection, which includes a fully illustrated report detailing the results of these works, is deposited with Bath Museums under accession number BATRM 1999.36.

THE TRENCHES

Trenches 1 and 2 were excavated through the barrow mound and were intended to allow access for the rebuilding of the passage roof (Fig. 1). In both trenches the corbelling of the passage roof was exposed. This was covered by a layer of tightly packed sub-rounded and sub-angular stones (1004 and 2003) which reached a maximum thickness of 0.95m. In Trench 1 these deposits were cut by a broad trench [1005], assumed to relate to robbing activity of the 1760s. Within this area of disturbance was a more defined trench [1020], assumed to be an antiquarian trench dug by the Revd Skinner in 1816, and backfilled (1008) in a repair operation dated to 1858. In Trench 2 the passage roof was cut by a modern repair trench [2001]. Trench 3 (not illustrated) measured 1.46m x 0.85m and was situated in the gallery floor between the first and

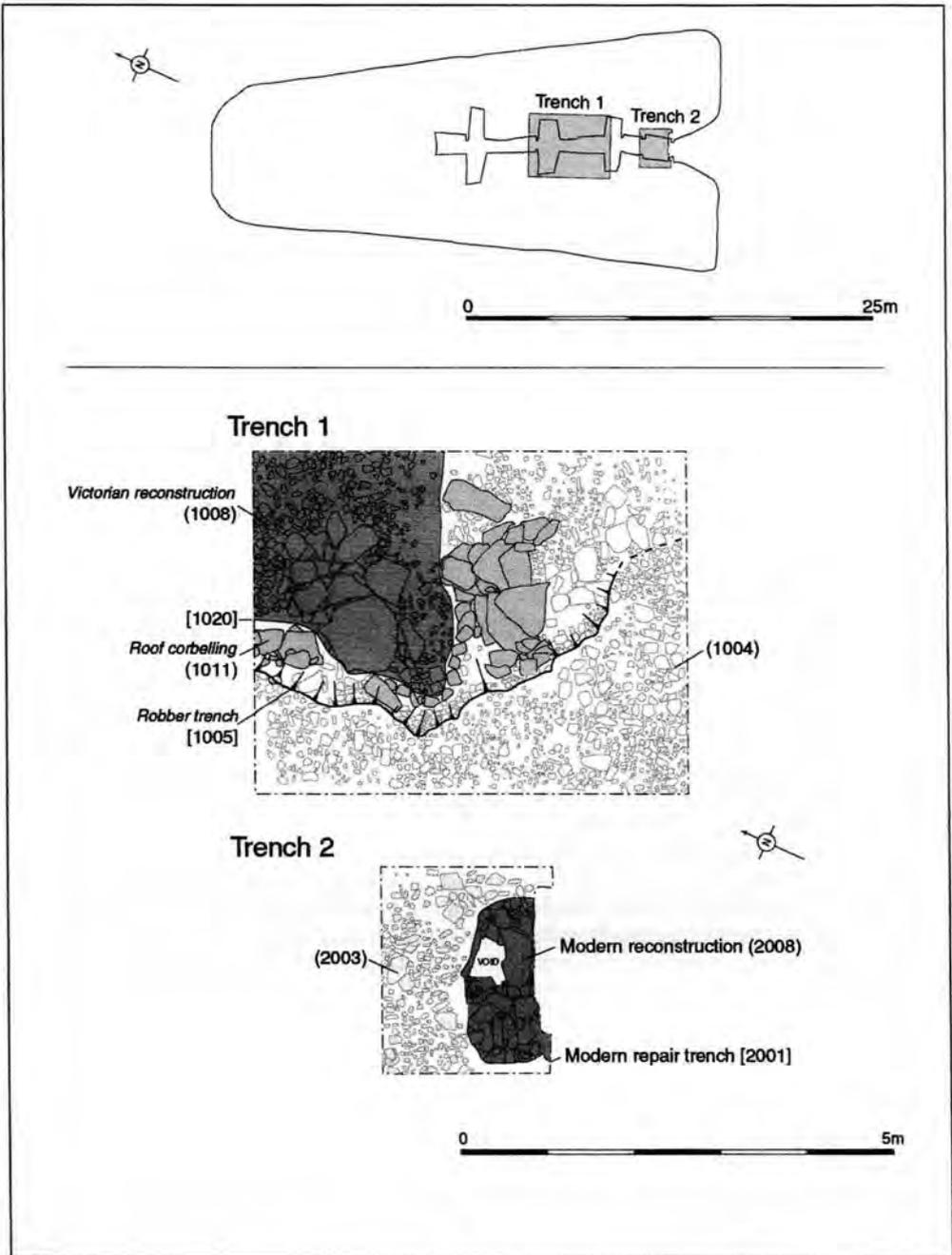


Fig. 1 Location and plan of Trenches 1 and 2

second set of chambers adjacent to a leaning orthostat. It was intended to facilitate the insertion of bronze supports designed to stop further movement of the orthostat. This trench was 0.18m deep and was excavated into a possible *in situ* floor which consisted of a layer of small stones in a reddish-brown gritty soil matrix (3002), which became more clayey adjacent to the orthostat. Only 0.05m of this layer was removed, which yielded human bone fragments and 21 prehistoric potsherds. It was sealed by a 0.08m deep deposit of small stones (3001) which, elsewhere within the barrow, forms a Victorian or later surface.

GEOPHYSICAL AND AUGER SURVEYS

The geophysical survey, carried out by GSB Prospection, covered an area of 1ha centred on the barrow and identified a row of six pit-like anomalies extending from the eastern corner of the monument and an area of low resistance on the north-east side of the barrow (Fig. 2). The pit-like anomalies may represent a boundary of an unknown date, or may be associated with forecourt structures of Neolithic or later date. The area of low resistance may be associated with a side ditch or quarry for the construction of the barrow. However, the auger survey, carried out by Vanessa Straker (English Heritage), indicated that the level of bedrock was relatively uniform on both sides of the barrow, suggesting that the low resistance reading is more likely to be the result of a natural phenomenon.

POTTERY by Jane Timby

Sixty-one potsherds (191g), which were generally small and abraded, of prehistoric, Roman and modern date were recovered. Twenty-two were unfeathered and in a calcareous fabric of probable Neolithic date. Twenty-one of these sherds were recovered from the possible *in situ* floor in Trench 3 and the other from the backfill of the 18th/19th-century intervention in Trench 1. A single sherd, also from the same backfill, was a fine, black, sandy ware with burnished interior and exterior surfaces, the form suggesting a globular bowl characteristic of the Mid-Late Iron Age. Twenty-two sherds date to the Romano-British period and were again found in the backfill of the 18th/19th-century interventions in Trenches 1 and 2. They consisted of Dorset black-burnished ware, local greywares and samian. These sherds all appear to date from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. Sixteen sherds date to the post-medieval or modern periods.

HUMAN BONE by Jacqueline McKinley

A small quantity of human bone was recovered from all three trenches. Skeletal elements from a minimum of four individuals were identified, one neonate, one young infant (*c.* 2 yr.) and two adults, the latter comprising one probable female and one probable male.

FLINT by Martin Tingle

Sixty-one worked flints (189g) were recovered, 37 of which were found in the ploughsoil around the barrow. Flakes and core fragments may suggest that flint reduction was taking place near the monument but the lack of diagnostic pieces, with the possible exception of an unstratified fabricator, makes it impossible to say if the flint working was contemporary with the period of use of the barrow.

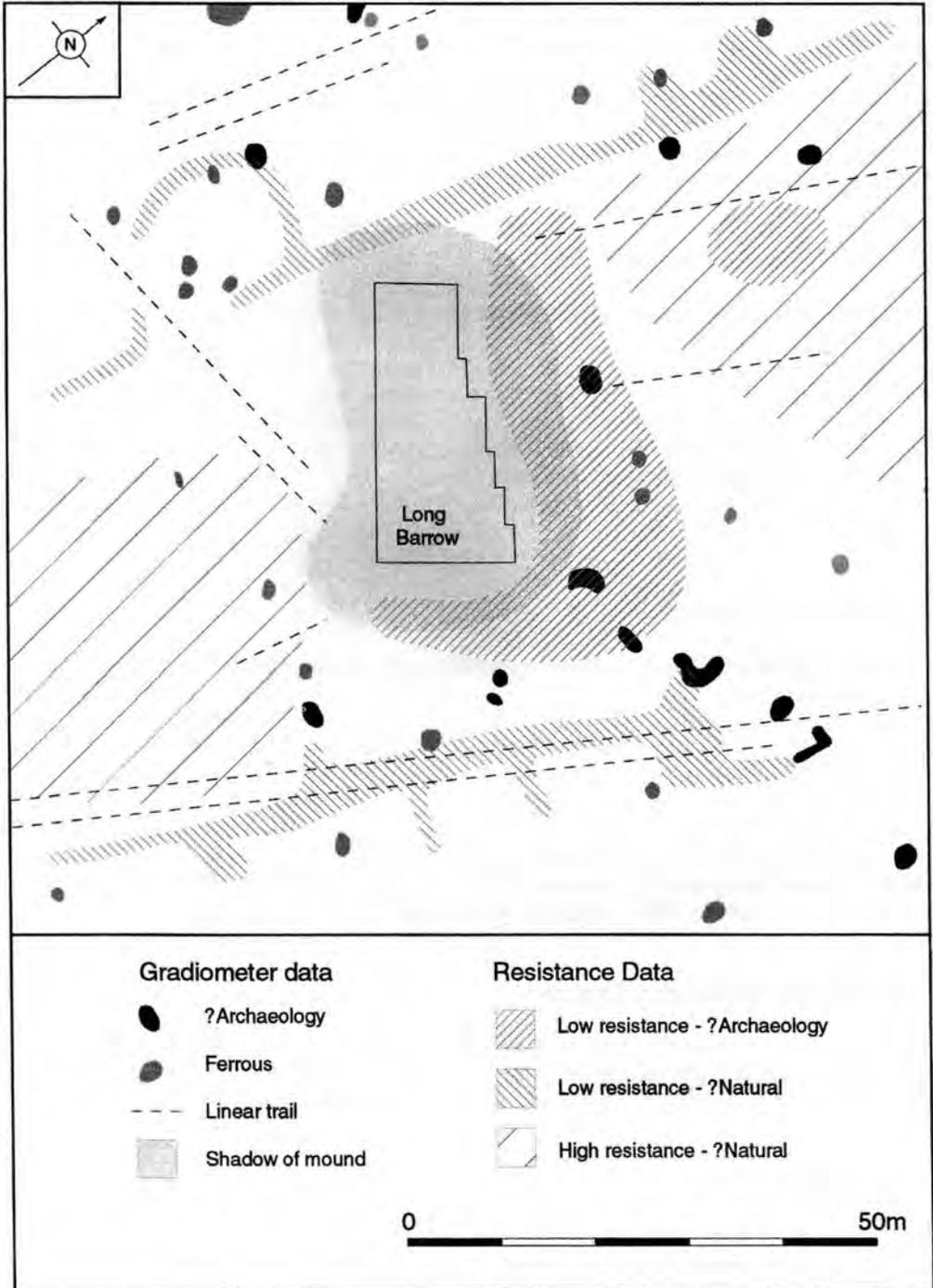


Fig. 2 Results of the geophysical survey

DISCUSSION

The archaeological works were mostly confined to reopening antiquarian and modern excavations into the monument although undisturbed structural elements were exposed just below the topsoil in Trenches 1 and 2, and a possible *in situ* floor deposit was found in Trench 3.

The geophysical evidence indicated the presence of a broad area of low resistance to the north-east of the barrow mound, although the results of the auger survey suggested that this was not a flanking quarry ditch. This anomaly may have been due to the monument having acted as a retaining wall, with moisture and colluvial fines building up on the upside slope to the north-east. The geophysical survey also identified a possible pit row extending eastwards from the eastern corner of the barrow, and this may indicate the line of a former path to the monument, such as the ancient trackway reported by Scarth (1859, 52–4). Alternatively, this alignment may be part of a boundary predating the barrow or associated with a forecourt structure.

The archaeological works have added to our knowledge of the structural make-up of the mound and this, together with the completion of the drawn survey of the internal elevations, provides a useful database for the future management of the long barrow.

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The project was managed for CAT by Dawn Enright and Martin Watts. Fieldwork was carried out by Franco Vartuca, Alan Thomas, Joanne Williams, Kate Thorne and Will Connock. The report illustrations were prepared by Peter Moore and the finds analyses co-ordinated by Emma Harrison.

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