THREE BRONZE AGE ROUND BARROWS AT COSSINGTON: A HISTORY OF USE AND RE-USE

John Thomas

Archaeological work during gravel quarrying at Cossington, Leicestershire, has included the excavation of three Bronze Age round barrows (two excavated in 1976 and the third in 1999) that are part of a dispersed barrow cemetery, located at the confluence of the Rivers Soar and Wreake.

Environmental information has enabled a picture of the Cossington landscape in which the barrows were constructed to be pieced together. Together the three excavations provide important information on the variety of monumental architecture and burial traditions that were employed in the Bronze Age. The remarkable preservation of the barrow excavated in 1999 has also revealed the extent to which such monuments were re-used over time. This barrow formed the focus for later activities in the Iron Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods, when the mound became the setting for a small inhumation cemetery. An area to the east of this barrow revealed a rich palimpsest of ditches, gullies and a post alignment reflecting a complex history of land division in the vicinity of the monument.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring and autumn of 1976 two Early Bronze Age round barrows (1 and 2) were excavated within Cossington gravel quarry by Leicestershire Museums Archaeological Unit. A third barrow (3) was excavated in the quarry over the summer of 1999 by a team from University of Leicester Archaeological Services. Finally, a watching brief in an area of the quarry to the north of the third barrow resulted in a small rescue excavation in 2001. The survival of barrow 3 as a low earthwork presented a rare opportunity, in the context of the East Midlands, to examine a well-preserved Early Bronze Age monument in detail. The three barrows represent part of a small, dispersed cemetery (revealed by aerial survey) at the confluence of the Rivers Soar and Wreake (Fig. 1). Two further barrows, revealed as cropmarks (Leicestershire SMR Ref. SK61SW CB), were identified to the south of the River Wreake, away from the area of quarrying and a third probable ring ditch also exists near Rothley, to the east (SK51SE L (Fig. 2)).

Collectively the results of the three barrow excavations provide valuable information on a wide range of issues including differences in monumental architecture and changing funerary practices, they also reveal a remarkable history of use and re-use over about 2,500 years, culminating in the siting of an Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery on the denuded mound remains of barrow 3.

This report presents a summary of the results of the three barrow excavations following a period of detailed post-excavation analysis.

SITE LOCATION

The excavations lay on the southern side of the village of Cossington, 11km north of Leicester. The two barrows excavated in 1976 lay in the southern part of the quarry, on a sand and gravel terrace 300m north of the River Wreake, close to its confluence with the River Soar (SK605 128). The third barrow, excavated in 1999, lay further north within the quarry area, approximately 500m away (SK613 102). A Watching Brief examined land to the east of Barrow 3, up to the eastern quarry limit. The 2001 rescue excavation was located approximately 60m north of Barrow 3, in the adjacent field (SK601 135).

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Preserved pollen from a palaeochannel close to the barrow excavations has been dated to the Late Neolithic (between c.2300/2500 and 2100/2300 cal BC), thus providing a broad environmental setting for the landscape in which the barrows were established. The Late Neolithic environment at Cossington appears to have been one in which a fairly high degree of wildwood persisted. Pollen indicators,
Fig. 2. The Wreake/Soar confluence zone showing the locations of the three excavated barrows, palaeochannels and other nearby cropmark ring ditches. (Drawn by Michael Hawkes.)
with supporting evidence from insect remains, show that mixed woodland existed close to the palaeochannel. Species such as alder, lime oak and elm appear to have been dominant and other species such as birch also grew in the area. Other woodland species included ivy, hawthorn, sloe or cherry, wild raspberry or bramble, with wood club-rush, bugler and nettle representing a herb layer in the woodland. Species of beetle feeding on lime, alder, dead wood and nettles support the picture of mixed woodland at this time. Evidence of water and waterside vegetation was present throughout, providing information about the watercourse from insect and plant remains.

Other evidence suggests that the area was not completely covered by woodland and indicates that human activity had begun to make a mark on the landscape. Pioneer species such as ash and elder were evident suggesting areas of clearing or marginal areas of the woodland, perhaps associated with human activity. Nearby human occupation is also indicated by persistent charcoal remains in much of the pollen profile, as well as species indicative of trampled or disturbed ground such as fat hen, chickweed and parsley piert. Although evidence for cereal growing is limited, seeds of grassland plants such as mouse-ear chickweed, plantain, hawkbit and pollen of white clover, alongside dung beetle remains all suggest the nearby presence of a significant area of open grassland, perhaps maintained by grazing animals. Although a mixed assemblage, animal bones recovered from the palaeo-channel base include butchered remains and domestic cattle species, adding further to the evidence for human occupation at Cossington during the Late Neolithic.

Some evidence for the gradual clearance of the alder carr woodland is indicated by the decreasing representation of its pollen from the profile over time. This is likely to be an indicator of either increased human activity in the area or that these activities were taking place closer to the channel.

BARROWS 1 AND 2

Pre-barrow activity

Very little evidence was recovered from the excavations to provide an indication of activities at the site before the construction of the monuments. A small number of blades in the lithic assemblages from both barrows provide indication of a Mesolithic presence in the area. Further possible evidence for early activity on the site was obtained, surprisingly, from a small group of cremated human bone, recovered from a Bronze Age pit (F4 – see Fig. 3 for location), which produced a Neolithic radiocarbon date of 2930–2870 cal BC. It is possible that the human remains from this pit represented a disturbed Neolithic cremation burial, perhaps revealed during the creation of the barrow in the Early Bronze Age. The cremated bone assemblage from the feature is small. However, what remained appears to represent a single adult individual. This suggests that the bones are contemporary and that the dated bone was not an anomaly that had been accidentally incorporated in the fill of the pit. The presence of Neolithic cremated remains on the site is puzzling, raising the possibility that an earlier
The Early Bronze Age

Barrow 1
The dating for the establishment of Barrow 1 is uncertain. However, an Early Bronze Age date is suggested by a radiocarbon determination of 1940–1620 cal BC, obtained from a charcoal deposit situated between some of the latest fills of the re-cut first phase ditch. The initial monument which was fairly simple was

Fig. 3. Barrow 1 showing the two ditch phases, central feature, outlying cremation cemetery and charcoal patches (indicated by cross-hatching). (Drawn by Michael Hawkes.)
defined by a sub-circular ditch that apparently encircled an inhumation placed in a rectangular grave that lay slightly off-centre in the enclosed area (Figs. 3 and 4). In plan Barrow 1 bears resemblance to other relatively simple contemporary monuments excavated in the East Midlands e.g. Willington, Derbyshire (Beamish 2001) and Castle Donington, Leicestershire (Coward and Ripper 1998). The form of the barrow in its early stages is difficult to establish. However concentrations of gravel and pebbles infilling the primary ditch may reflect the accumulation of material from an eroding mound. It seems possible that soils from the excavated ditches could have been deposited into the enclosed area to form a low mound; it is also possible that the monument was defined by an embanked ditch.

Before the initial ditch filled up completely it was re-cut, effectively redefining the monument and its importance to those who used it. After this newly defined ditch had been open for some time, and had begun to fill up, a series of discrete charcoal patches were deposited on the top of the penultimate ditch fill on the western side of the monument (see Fig. 3 for location). Several of the charcoal deposits were associated with flint scrapers and waste flakes and some had been carefully placed on a supporting layer of pebbles. One of these patches provided the Early Bronze Age date referred to above. Quite to what these charcoal deposits relate is unclear. The spatial patterning of their deposition suggests a degree of structure as each patch is distinct from another and there seems to have been a deliberate choice of location for the deposits, showing a preference for the eastern side of the monument. Earlier interpretations of these deposits suggested they may
have been hearths, with the ditch being used as shelter for transient episodes of occupation at a time when the monument had gone into decline (O’Brien 1978, 7). Given the evidence for the continued importance of these monuments over time, however, these activities are difficult to reconcile in terms of purely secular events. It is perhaps more likely, given the context, that the charcoal deposits relate to the disposal of pyre debris from cremation ceremonies associated with the monument.

After the ditch had filled in completely, suggesting the monument had fallen into disuse, a small pit containing Neolithic cremated human bone was inserted into the upper ditch fill on the western side. The deliberate burial of the bones in this way and at this point in the barrow’s history, strongly suggests that this was an act of structured deposition, and can be interpreted as a closure deposit. The careful burial of the bones also hints at their perceived importance by the users of Barrow 1, and that they perhaps fulfilled an ancestral role, legitimising ownership or land rights during ceremonies involved with this period of the barrows use.

Eventually the monument was redefined by the creation of a new ditch that enlarged the circumference of the barrow but also carefully referenced the outer edge of the original boundary (Fig. 5). This new ditch was shallower than its predecessor but would have served to effectively demarcate the monument afresh. No obvious evidence for funerary activity is associated with this redefinition of the barrow ditch, although some might be expected with the evidence of renewed interest in the monument. It is possible however that any associated burials were placed in a surviving barrow mound and have since been ploughed away. Alternatively this phase of the monument’s redefinition may be related to the establishment and use of a cremation cemetery on the western edge of the barrow (see below). Equally, as Clay has suggested for an enlargement of the barrow at Sproxton, Leicestershire, the very act of maintaining the monument may have been important enough to warrant its redefinition (1981, 13).

Barrow 2

Barrow 2 was a larger and more elaborate monument than Barrow 1, consisting of two concentric ditches that defined an area containing a range of Early Bronze Age burials (Fig. 6). Dating for Barrow 2 is clearer, and its establishment may have slightly pre-dated that of Barrow 1. The distinctly ‘angular’ plan-form adopted by the two ditches is striking and can be paralleled locally at Eye Kettleby (Finn forthcoming) and the monuments at Sproxton and Eaton (Clay 1981). An Early Bronze Age palisade slot that pre-dated the construction of Lockington Barrow VI (Hughes 2000, 9) also followed a distinctly similar plan and, at Lockington Barrow 1, the excavator described the ditch as being ‘excavated by means of sausage-shaped depressions which did not always connect.’ (Posnansky 1955, 20). The dimensions of the inner ditch of Barrow 2 are almost identical to those of the Lockington palisade (Hughes 2000, 9) and the northern ring ditch at Eye Kettleby, suggestive of a localised tradition of monumental architecture (Finn forthcoming).

As with the ditches associated with Barrow 1, it is evident that the Barrow 2 ditches had a complex history, particularly the inner ditch which underwent several phases of redefinition. The very precise mirroring of the plan-shape
adopted by both boundaries indicates that for a time, the monument was defined by two open ditches. It seems likely, given the size of the enclosed area in relation to the surrounding ditches, that Barrow 2 could never have had a large central mound. It perhaps was more of a ceremonial enclosure or ‘open arena’ site (Garwood in press, 34–36), defining space in a similar way to the northern ring ditch at Eye Kettleby (Finn forthcoming). Some evidence from the inner ditch suggests infilling from an internal bank which tends to support this idea.

The burials associated with Barrow 2 reflect both a long period of use in the Early Bronze Age and a range of burial practices. The earliest was the cremation burial of a young adult male (F17), deposited between 2140–1930 cal BC. The remains of the individual appear to have been packed into an organic container alongside pyre debris, before being placed in the burial pit and surrounded by packing stones (Fig. 7). The burial was also accompanied by fragmentary remains of two Beaker vessels, broken in antiquity, perhaps included as grave goods. A similar burial was found at Eaton, Leicestershire (Feature F11) where a compact group of calcined bones in association with broken Beaker pottery had been placed into the side of a pit, perhaps also in an organic container, and held in place with packing stones (Clay 1981, 30). Similar finds of partial Beaker vessels in association with unusual pits and burials have been highlighted as potential
structured deposits, perhaps reflecting the procurement and deposition of heirlooms or relics (e.g. at Lockington, Leicestershire, Woodward 2000, 59, and Whitemoor Haye quarry, Staffordshire, Coates and Woodward 2002, 81). Although other burials were located close to the burial (F17) it was not impinged upon, perhaps suggesting that it was marked in some way to avoid later disturbance. A nearby concentration of stones (F18) may be the remains of such a marker.

Several burial features associated with food vessels probably represent near contemporary funerary activity with F17. The crouched inhumation of an 8-year-old child (F15) close to the centre of the enclosed area was accompanied by a
combination of unusual artefacts, including an enlarged food vessel, accessory cup, stone bowl and three flint knives, which may be a unique assemblage to the area (Figs. 8 and 9). The food vessel is certainly unusual in a local context and has more comfortable affinities with areas further north. Similarities between the decoration on the stone bowl and the food vessel suggest the two were linked in some way and may have been intentionally placed in the grave together. The unusual nature of the artefacts chosen for incorporation with this burial may be a reflection of more northern traditions, not necessarily associated with the East Midlands. Unfortunately no dating is available for this grave, however, a similar food vessel from Eye Kettleby, Leicestershire was dated to 2140–1940 cal BC (Woodward forthcoming). To the south-west of F15 a second food vessel was placed upright in a shallow pit (F16) with no other finds. The dimensions of the pit appear too small for it to have been intended for an inhumation although the degree of truncation it had suffered is unknown. The possibility remains that F16 is the much truncated base of a pit intended for use as a burial.

Later activity is indicated by the deposition of three Collared Urns within Barrow 2. One was found in a shallow pit (F15a) that had been partially cut into the upper levels of the inhumation F15 and may represent the truncated remains of a grave. If this is the case the locations of both F15a and F16 in relation to the F15 inhumation may indicate it was once covered by a small mound which acted as a
focus for later activity. An adult cremation burial (F14), placed in the ground between 1880–1630 cal BC was also associated with a Collared Urn. The cremated remains and urn had been placed in a pit together although there was a clear distinction between the pot and the cremated remains. The cremation burial had been placed in the lower part of the burial pit and the pottery vessel had been placed on a raised ledge adjacent, almost as if the urn had been intended as an accompaniment to the cremation burial, rather than a container (Fig. 10). The special nature of pottery vessels in the Neolithic and Bronze Age has recently been discussed and it is possible that this arrangement provides a reflection of the relationship between the pot and the buried person in life (Woodward 1995 and 2002, 1041–2). The rim of a third Collared Urn was found within the inner ditch F12 and may represent the remains of a further disturbed burial.
Fig. 9. Plan of F15 showing the inhumation and detail of the associated grave goods. (Drawn by Michael Hawkes – top of page, and Dave Hopkins – bottom of page.)
The late Early Bronze Age

Barrow 1—The cremation cemetery
A compact, linear arrangement of thirteen cremation burials, was created to the south-east of Barrow 1 during the later stages of the Early Bronze Age. The suggested date range for the cemetery falls between 1910–1690 cal BC (at 95% probability) and 1660–1520 cal BC (at 95% probability) or 80 to 360 years (at 95% probability) between the first and last cremation burial at the site. All of the radiocarbon measurements taken from the cremation cemetery were statistically consistent, with the exception of F20, which fell at the beginning of the estimated date range. Whilst the central position of F20 suggests that it relates to the main group, the radiocarbon evidence indicates some degree of phasing within the burials.

It is evident that various rites of burial were practiced at the site. Of the thirteen known burials, six were deposited in inverted urns, two had been placed in stone cists and a further two burials had been placed in pits with pebbles and stones. A single cremation burial had been buried upright in an urn. Each burial appears to have held the remains of a single individual although the ageing and assigning of gender has been impeded by the condition of the bone which was fragmentary as a result of the efficient burning and, in some cases, the deliberate
breakage to which it was subjected. A single cremation, F6, contained a calcined flint ‘strike-a-light’, perhaps included as a grave good. A similar situation was revealed at Lockington Barrow 1 (Leicestershire) where four plano-convex knives and a broken barbed and tanged arrowhead were found with the central cremation burial group, all of which were calcined (Posnansky 1955, 20) suggesting they had accompanied the body on the pyre.

The Barrow 1 cremation burials offer a relatively early example of a flat cemetery associated with an earlier round barrow. Cemeteries of this type have traditionally been associated with Deverel-Rimbury style pottery and viewed as a Middle Bronze Age phenomenon (Woodward 2000, 43). The evidence from Cossington, along with other Midlands sites where radiocarbon determinations are available (for example at Eye Kettleby, Leicestershire; Finn forthcoming; Bromfield, Shropshire; Woodward 1995) show that the lifespan of this type of cemetery is not restricted to the Middle Bronze Age alone, but is often the result of a long history of use beginning in the Early Bronze Age.

BARROW 3

In contrast to the excavations of Barrows 1 and 2, which centred closely on each monument, the work undertaken in 1999/2001 offered a wider ‘landscape’ perspective of Barrow 3 (Fig. 11). The fact that this barrow was so well preserved also lead to a pattern of reuse over several centuries, offering a fascinating insight into attitudes towards ancient monuments in the later prehistoric and early historic periods.

PRE-BARROW ACTIVITY

Some of the earliest evidence for activity on the site is represented in the lithics assemblage. Several pieces indicate very early activity including a Lower Palaeolithic side scraper and a backed blade characteristic of the Upper Palaeolithic. Several microliths and a scatter of blade and bladelet debitage from the east of Barrow 3 offers further evidence of transient hunter-gatherer activity on the site during the Early Mesolithic. Significantly the microliths are characteristic of Deepcar type assemblages that are extremely rare in a Midlands context and as such represent an important addition to the regional Mesolithic resource. Evidence for Neolithic activity in the area was limited to a possible Laurel Leaf point.

Evidence for activity on the site prior to the construction of Barrow 3 is characterised by a loose scatter of pits, possible post holes and natural features located beneath the mound and in its immediate vicinity. These features were characterised by their pale fills and dearth of dating evidence although several pits contained environmental remains and lithics providing some limited evidence for nearby occupation.
Fig. 11. Plan showing the locations of all excavated areas from 1999 and 2001.
(Drawn by Susan Ripper and John Thomas.)
The Early Bronze Age

Creation of the Round Barrow
It is unclear when Barrow 3 was constructed although a general Early Bronze Age date seems likely. Dating of the later ditch deposits suggest that the barrow ditch had become largely filled by c.1500 cal BC. The character of Barrow 3 combines elements particular to Barrows 1 and 2. In form it is relatively simple, a ditch and mound similar to Barrow 1, built on a much more monumental scale comparable with Barrow 2 (Fig. 12). In size and shape Barrow 3 has much in common with Lockington Barrow VI, a monument that also retained a denuded mound (Hughes 2000). Also in common with the other nearby barrows the ditch reflects a complex history of infilling and recutting over time. Unfortunately little information was retrieved from the mound material to indicate construction methods due to the homogeneity of the soils. No obvious ‘primary’ burial was revealed during the excavation of Barrow 3 although a rectangular modern intrusion near the central area of the mound may have destroyed any evidence for one. It is possible however that a primary interment was never intended for Barrow 3. Several barrows have recently been excavated with no direct evidence for a primary/central burial (e.g Lockington Barrow VI, Hughes 2000) and it has been suggested that such monuments fulfilled a cenotaph function.

The Bronze Age Inhumation
The only evidence for contemporary burial associated with Barrow 3 lay on the very edge of the monument, close to the inner ditch edge on the south-eastern side. This comprised the crouched inhumation of a possible female, buried with a composite bead necklace of amber, faience, jet and shale components (Fig. 13). Composite necklaces are commonly found in association with cremated remains and where sufficient evidence is available it seems they usually accompanied female burials, hinting strongly in favour of a female burial here. The body was also accompanied by a finely worked flint blade. Unfortunately no traces of the body remained within the grave due to the unfavourable soil conditions and therefore no radiocarbon dates are available. However the tradition of composite necklaces that the Cossington example belongs to can be broadly dated to the first half of the second millennium BC (c.1750–1500/1450 cal BC) and seems likely to have belonged with the second phase of the barrow’s use. Given the location of this burial it seems fairly likely to have been a secondary interment, although the uncertainty over the presence/absence of any associated primary burial limit discussion of whether this was the only burial at this monument. The distribution of this type of composite necklace is heavily biased towards Wessex and this is only the second such find in the East Midlands, the only other recorded example coming from Abney Moor, Derbyshire (Pennington 1877). The use of these high-status items in other areas of the country can be seen as a form of emulation of a Wessex-based fashion. The geographical area represented by the raw materials used to make the necklace is extremely wide, and it seems likely that the wearer
also wished to communicate links with these areas or wider trading networks. The particular components of the necklace may also have been deliberately chosen due to their perceived ancestral, magical or mystical powers and as such would have protected the wearer on her journey into the afterlife.

**Evidence for later activity**

**IRON AGE AND ROMAN SETTLEMENT AND USE OF BARROW 3**

In the mid-late Iron Age a settlement grew around Barrow 3. A roundhouse was constructed to the west of the monument and enclosures were created to the north (Fig. 14). The remains of Barrow 3 were clearly evident to the Iron Age occupants and some respect of the monument can be seen in what was revealed of the settlement layout. Several pottery vessels had also been deliberately placed into the remains of the mound and in pits close to the monument, suggesting that Barrow 3 held some particular significance to the Iron Age people living nearby (Fig. 15). This tradition continued into the Romano-British period with the deliberate insertion of three pots into the mound and infilled ditch remains (Fig. 16). Deliberate burial of artefacts within ancient monuments has been widely recognised (Williams 1998a) although there have been relatively few recorded examples in Leicestershire. The significance of such acts may have been linked to perceptions of ancestry, ownership and land rights.
Fig. 13. Plan of Bronze Age burial F58 showing location of composite bead necklace (above) and detail of beads, as strung (below). (Drawn by Michael Hawkes (top) and Marion O’Neill (below).)
Fig. 14. Barrow 3 during the Iron Age. Iron Age features are shown in black and possibly contemporary features in grey. (Drawn by Susan Ripper and John Thomas.)
Fig. 15. Location of Iron Age and Roman pottery deposited within Barrow 3.
(Drawn by Susan Ripper and John Thomas.)

Fig. 16. Complete Roman pot buried in the top of the Barrow 3 mound.
ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AND SETTLEMENT

Barrow 3 acquired fresh significance in the Early Anglo-Saxon period when a settlement was established close to the monument and the mound formed the focus for a small inhumation cemetery (Fig. 17). This is also a well-documented phenomenon from other parts of the country but the first confirmed example from Leicestershire.

The cemetery had been badly plough-damaged and because of the acid soils no trace of human bone was recovered. Fortunately, associated metal artefacts from the cemetery survived, suggesting the presence of at least three male burials, two probable female burials and a further three of indeterminate sex (Fig. 18 and 19). Metal grave goods from the cemetery included iron knives, spearheads and a shield boss, as well as copper alloy dress fittings and brooches (Fig. 20). Remarkably the remains of wooden shafts had survived within the sockets of the spearheads and mineralised fabric impressions were retained on other artefacts. A scatter of metal finds from the vicinity of the barrow suggests several other burials had been completely destroyed as a result of subsequent ploughing. Two large, grave-shaped pits were also located on the edge of the barrow and appear to have related to the Anglo-Saxon cemetery (Fig. 21). The pits contained large amounts of burnt cobbles and one also held the partial remains of a large pottery bowl that appear to have been reused as a dish. It seems likely that the pits were connected in some way to the funerary rite, and given the burnt stones, may have related to food consumption at the time of burial.

Nearby settlement was indicated by a scatter of pits and a sunken-featured building located to the north of Barrow 3. Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon settlement was even more fragmentary than in the Iron Age, however once again it is clear that the remains of Barrow 3 held some importance. Associations with the supernatural and significance of the ancestral powers may also have drawn the attention of the Anglo-Saxon occupiers of the site to Barrow 3 (Williams 1998b). Whilst the location of the cemetery may indicate opportunistic reuse of an existing monument, studies have shown a degree of selectivity in the barrows that were chosen (Lucy 2000, Semple 1998) and it is likely that deliberate reuse involved a desire to be associated with a mythical past to create a sense of place in the landscape (Bradley 1987) or to invent specific histories for local communities (Williams 2006, 183).

Landscape to the east of Barrow 3

To the east of Barrow 3 a palimpsest of boundary features was revealed including a series of ditches and gullies on various alignments and a post boundary, all apparently relating to an area of formerly marshy ground (see Fig. 12). Unfortunately the lack of dating evidence from these features makes it difficult to discuss their contribution to the development of the site in any great detail. Environmental evidence from pollen remains suggests that the area of marshy ground in the easternmost part of the site existed in open, cultivated ground with areas of grassland and possible heathland nearby. This is in contrast to the
Fig. 17. Barrow 3 during the Anglo-Saxon period. Anglo-Saxon features are shown in black and possibly contemporary features are grey.
(Drawn by Susan Ripper and John Thomas.)
evidence from the palaeochannel pollen profile dated to the Late Neolithic, which suggested a more wooded landscape. Unfortunately no dating was possible for these deposits although the suggestion of a more open landscape does hint at a later date. Similar evidence from other sites in Leicestershire and Rutland reveals a pattern of increased clearance of the landscape linked to larger areas of grassland from the Late Bronze Age onwards (Clay 2000). This suggestion is supported by the predominance of landscape boundaries in this part of the site, which do not generally make an appearance in the region’s archaeological record until this time (Willis 2006, 121).

**CONCLUSION**

The excavations at Cossington quarry provide an opportunity to consider the context and histories of three near contemporary Bronze Age funerary monuments. Barrow 3 also offers a relatively rare opportunity, in the Leicestershire context, to examine an example that has survived as an upstanding earthwork. The quarry setting of the excavations has allowed a wider landscape context for the monuments to be examined enabling a more in-depth
Fig. 19. Anglo-Saxon burial F85 (the most southerly burial) and associated metalwork (A is a knife and B is a spearhead). (Drawn by Michael Hawkes.)
Fig. 20. Selected Anglo-Saxon metalwork from the cemetery (A–C are knives, D and E are spearheads, F is a shield boss and G is a copper alloy annular brooch. (Drawn by Michael Hawkes.)
understanding of how the monuments, in particular Barrow 3, were involved in changing funerary and settlement patterns over time. The evidence for prolonged use and re-use of the monuments, both in the Bronze Age and beyond, has highlighted the rôle of ancient monuments in the social and political negotiations experienced by the local inhabitants of Cossington as the settlement of the area developed.

To sum up, the excavations have added a significant amount of information to the regional understanding of the complex lives of Early Bronze Age monuments. The three barrows have contributed to an understanding of the local and regional nature of funerary architecture of the period and have highlighted the complexities involved in their continual evolution and elaboration. As prominent features in the landscape the memories and mythologies involved in the life stories of the monuments provide a reflection of changing attitudes as occupation of the landscape increased. It is clear that the monuments held high importance to their creators and rather than becoming static landmarks of past occupation, their significance was retained, remembered and redefined by later groups wishing to stake a claim on the Cossington landscape.

Full details of the project findings will be published as part of the University of Leicester, ‘Leicester Archaeology Monograph’ series.
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PERSONAL DETAILS

John Thomas gained his B.A. in archaeology from the University of Leicester and also holds an M.A. in Landscape Studies. He has been a professional archaeologist since 1986 and is currently employed as a Project Officer with University of Leicester Archaeological Services.