

Radiocarbon Grant to South Somerset Archaeological Research Group (Interim report)

The £1050 grant was used to pay for three radiocarbon dates relating to the excavation of a barrow ditch at Crissells Green in South Cadbury parish which was carried out by SSARG to clarify the nature, condition and development of the site following a previous inconclusive investigation. The stratigraphic information indicated that after construction there was a period when the barrow ditch was open, collecting a series of washed-in fills, after which the ditch was entirely filled in rapidly. It appeared that there had been a mound, but that had been removed, apparently before the development of a plough soil which contained late Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, all of this being sealed under a considerable hillwash. It therefore appeared that the barrow had been modified at an early date, rather than in recent centuries. However, virtually no diagnostic dateable material was recovered during either excavation, which left a number of questions as to where the barrow fitted in the local landscape history. Was it present or destroyed as closely adjacent Middle Iron Age field systems came into being? How did it relate to an earlier linear feature that ran beneath it and was potentially a very early Bronze Age boundary?

Samples of bone were available from the base of the barrow ditch and from the interface of the fills at the point where the sequence of slow filling ended and the rapid fill occurred. It was anticipated that the former would provide Bronze Age dates and would relate to deposition in the ditch, or redeposited material from the original mound, and that the latter might produce Iron Age dates.

In the event, the dates were as follows:

- Sample 1 Cattle bone from lower ditch fill :1670-1500 cal BC (95%)
- Sample 2 Human mandible fragment from lower ditch fill : 1530-1410 cal BC (95%)
- Sample 3 Human femur fragment from interface of slow and rapid fill : 1410-1250 cal BC (95%)

This sequence of dates implies, given the possible gap in dates between samples 1 and 2, that there may be a degree of redeposition of material. The interesting element is the less anticipated date of sample 3. This came from a poorly preserved but fully articulated crouched burial of an adult male which does not appear to have been left open to the elements but rapidly covered. This implies that the modification of the barrow mound may have taken place in the Middle-Late Bronze Age.

Further consideration of these results and their implications for the local landscape history require further work but have been extremely enlightening in understanding the modification of a monument that had failed to produce other means of dating. It is hoped that a full report of the excavation and finds reports will be available by the end of 2010.

SSARG is extremely grateful for the SAHNS grant which has enabled a far greater understanding than we would have achieved from existing information and has brought to light a complexity in treatment of barrows in South Somerset that can now be compared with emerging information on similar practices in the wider South West of Britain.

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