

PREHISTORIC ROCK ART IN THE PEAK DISTRICT

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and

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INTRODUCTION

Rock Art in the Peak District is relatively rare by comparison with areas further north, such as Ilkley Moor. An archive search revealed that only eight complex carvings and fourteen simple cup marked examples are known; six further carvings have also been found recently. The carvings are fully catalogued in the appendix to this paper; the numbers in brackets in the following text refer to the appendix.

The majority of the carvings is from the Millstone Grit moorlands on either side of the River Derwent. The exceptions are two cupmarked sandstone slabs found in barrows at Brund and Elkstone in Staffordshire. To the east of the Derwent, carvings cluster around Bar Brook. Excavations at the Barbrook II ring cairn by Lewis, and at a cairn nearby by Riley, have uncovered a variety of simple carvings (10-16). Further examples seem to have come from barrows a little further south at Stone Low and Newbridge Farm (29-31, 34). Nearby on Gardoms Edge two of the finest examples of rock art in the region have been found; both have been executed on slabs amidst a boulder-littered landscape interspaced with areas of clearance and with a large defensive enclosure nearby to the west (1-2). Only one remains *in situ* today; it is extremely difficult to find as it is covered over to prevent weathering or vandalism. Apart from this cluster of carvings there are no other examples known on the east moors, which stretch for about thirty kilometres from Bamford Moor to Matlock Moor. However, bronze age settlement is attested both to the north and south of the Bar Brook valley (Hart, 1981) and perhaps some carvings remain undiscovered.

In contrast all the gritstone outcrops west of the Derwent have carvings. In the north there is a cup marked slab protruding from a disturbed barrow on Eyam Moor (9). An intricately carved slab was found somewhere around the locality of the Burr Tor hillfort (4). Several carvings have been found on Calton Pasture, east of Bakewell; these include two complex carvings found during the excavation of Ball Cross hillfort (5, 6), and a decorated slab recently recovered from the vicinity of one of the barrows on the ridgetop (8). On the southern gritstone outcrop of Stanton Moor and Harthill Moor the only find until recently was a cup marked slab found in a stream (3). The carvings discovered by the authors have been on these moors; they provide a second example of carvings on rock outcrops rather than art incorporated in prehistoric monuments.

NEW DISCOVERIES (Figs. 1 and 2, Plate1)

Five carvings have been found on the western end of the prominent gritstone crag of Rowtor Rocks (SK 23556215). The best preserved of these is situated just below the crest of the outcrop, on the upper face of a large boulder, located to the southeast of the 'armchair' (see below). Three large cups with a distinctive steep sided section, are surrounded by single and double rings, together with less symmetrical elements (Fig. 1.1). Directly above this carving to the northeast is a second badly weathered example, carved on a flat topped rock at the highest point of this section of the outcrop. Today all that is visible is a simple cup and ring with a possible gutter to one side (Fig. 1.2). A second simple cup and ring is located on a horizontal face of a boulder directly behind the 'armchair' (Fig. 1.3). The fourth carving is on a boulder at the same level as the first but a few metres further west. This curious carving has a cup surrounded by an

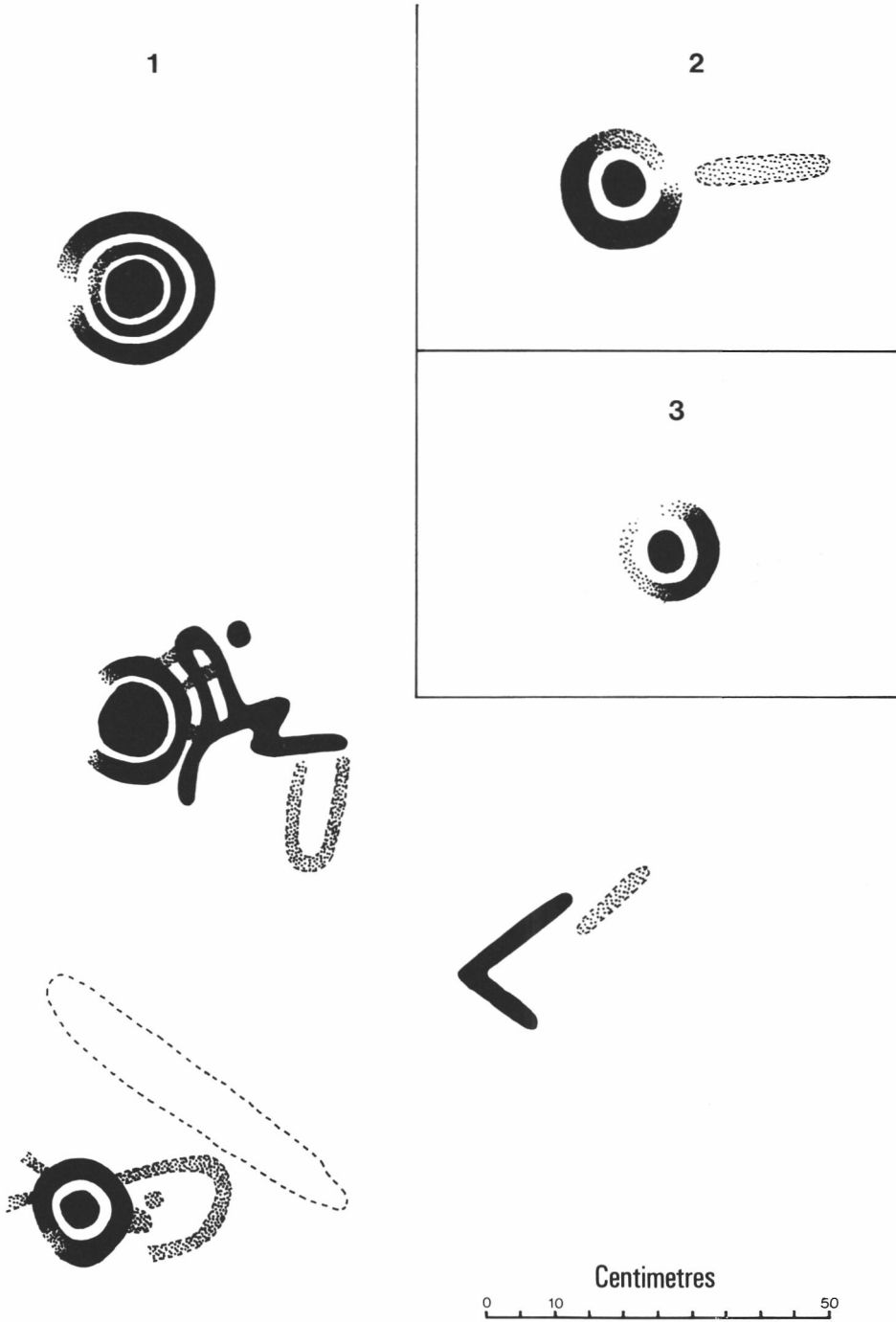


Fig. 1 Newly discovered rock art on Rowtor Rocks, Birchover. Plotted from rubbings taken by J. Barnatt and P. Reeder.

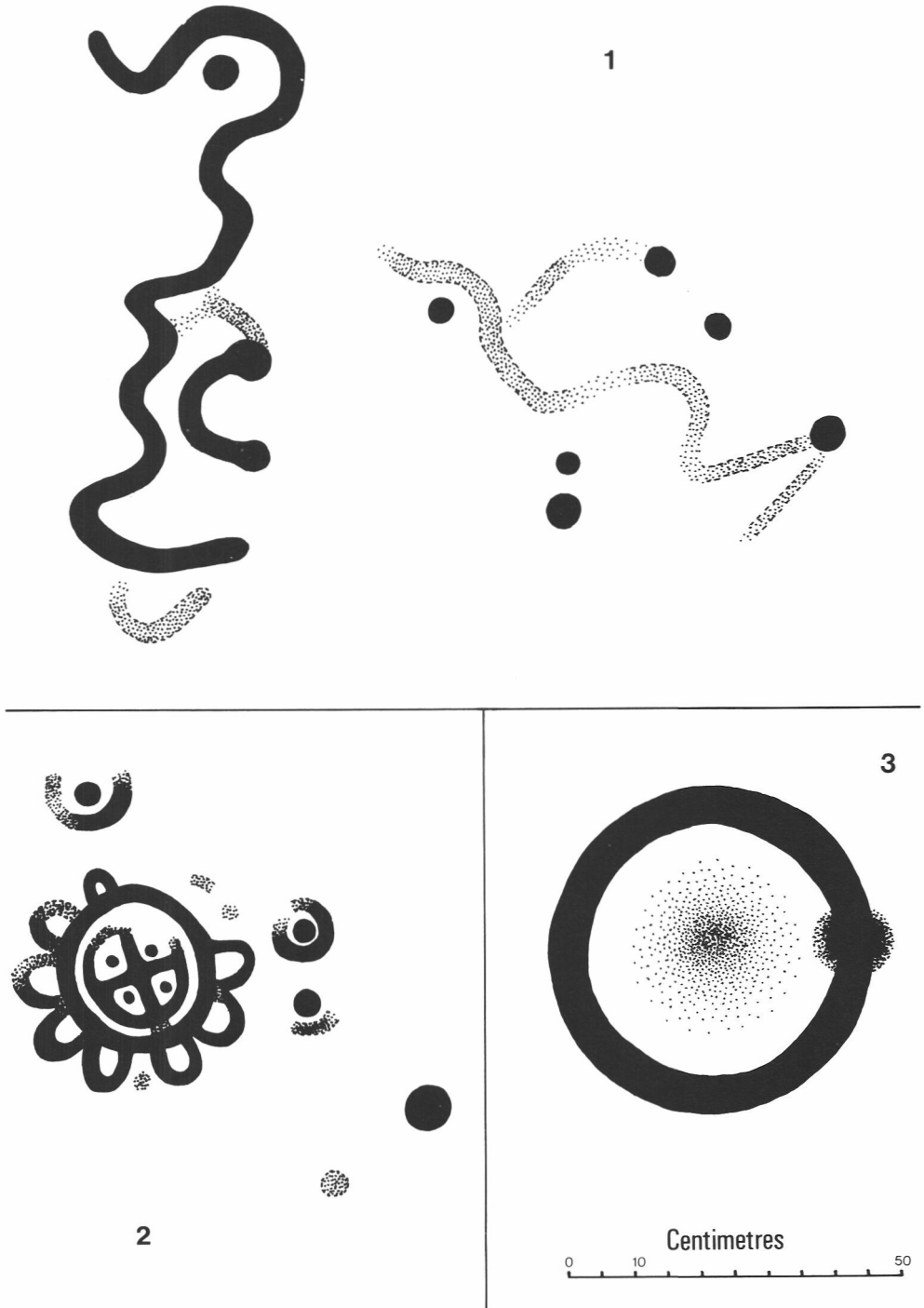


Fig. 2 Newly discovered rock art on Rowtor Rocks, Birchover (1,2) and Robin Hood's Stride, Harthill (3). Plotted from rubbings taken by J. Barnatt and P. Reeder.

incomplete ring which bends away with a long snake-like extension; further possible curved lines and cups also exist (Fig. 2.1). The last and most unusual carving is on the steep slope of the northern side of the outcrop, placed on a small boulder about five metres down. The narrow grooves, which are badly weathered, form a complex symmetrical design combining a central cross with four cups, two concentric rings and nine or ten 'U' shaped grooves. Associated with this carving are traces of small cups, two of which have rings (Fig. 2.2). Several other rocks on the outcrop have possible cupmarks (see appendix).

The five carvings on Rowtor Rocks share the crag with extensive later modifications to the summit. These consist of various rock-cut rooms, shelters, benches and steps, combined with artificial terraces, and traces of small stone and timber buildings. There were also stone pillars along the outcrop crest that have now been removed. These eccentric structures have sometimes been fancifully linked with druidic activities in prehistory. Clearly, however, they are of much more recent origin, as attested both by their style and their relatively fresh tooling. This transformation of Rowtor Rocks probably took place in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. Thomas Eyre lived nearby and it appears he created a bizarre rock garden with shelters and summer houses, situated to take advantage of the fine views. His mansion, Rowtor Hall, once stood below the outcrop to the south, where the vicarage now stands.

While it is possible that the rock art was carved when the garden was created, it is unlikely. One carving (Fig. 1.1) has distinctive wide cups with an angular profile, a feature which is only found occasionally elsewhere in Britain; the only other Derbyshire example was first uncovered in 1965 (Gardom's Edge 1). Anyone wanting to imitate prehistoric art is much more likely to have copied the usual shallower dish-like cup. Further, there is little evidence of any antiquarian awareness of cup and ring carvings at such an early date as Thomas Eyre's creation. All five carvings are on the only part of the outcrop crest which received no drastic modification.

The sixth newly discovered carving is of less certain antiquity. It is located on Robin Hood's Stride, a similar crag to Rowtor Rocks and about one kilometre to the west (SK 22476225). This carving consists of a large well defined circular groove surrounding a central dished area with no well defined cup (Fig. 2.3). The ring is unusually well preserved, as it was covered by vegetation until 1978. There are many inscriptions on this outcrop which are obviously recent; these concentrate on the summit. In contrast, the circular carving is on the southeastern side of the outcrop on a wide horizontal ledge.

DISCUSSION

Rock art in the Peak District could always have been uncommon. Few carvings are known from any region of southern Britain; however, the limited occurrence of durable rock suitable for carving may well bias our sample considerably. The majority of known carvings in the Peak District is on small slabs associated with prehistoric monuments — buried and are hence preserved. There are two major exceptions to this trend. The fine carving on Gardom's Edge (1) was only found in 1965; the discovery of two badly worn cups led to the uncovering of the remainder of the carving, which had presumably been buried by soil and vegetation since antiquity. The worn carvings on Rowtor Rocks are protected by a heavy tree cover, being at a lower altitude than most other gritstone outcrops in the region. The durability of Millstone Grit is variable and perhaps it is generally somewhat softer in the Peak District in comparison with areas such as Ilkley Moor. Weathering is likely to have destroyed many carvings.

Another bias to the distribution may result from variations in carving style. Two well preserved cup and ring carvings have been recovered in the Peak District which have wide but shallow rings (13, 21). All we would expect to find in worn examples of this type is the central cup; simple cups are usually hard to identify because they are often indistinguishable from natural hollows common on weathered outcrops of Millstone Grit. Many such cups are indeed found which cannot be classified with any certainty as examples of prehistoric rock art.

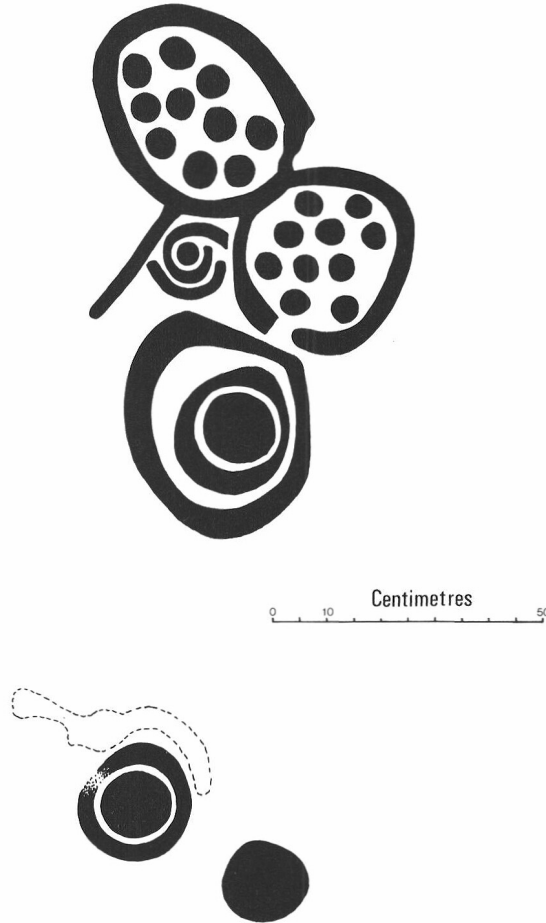


Fig. 3 The cup and ring carving on Gardom’s Edge (1), *in situ* on a large horizontal slab. Plotted from a rubbing taken by J. Barnatt and B.Larkman

In Derbyshire it is unlikely that rock art was restricted to the gritstone uplands. The limestone plateau has always been the core area for settlement (Hawke-Smith, 1979, 1981); art may well have been common here. However, carboniferous limestone is far from suitable for carving, being very likely to fracture in an unpredictable way and thus ruin any attempt to carve complex designs. Under these circumstances it is likely that any art on stone would have been painted rather than carved. In many regions south and east of the Pennines there are no rock outcrops or hard building stone, so by definition rock art cannot have been executed. However, it is of course entirely a matter of conjecture how rock art may have related to painting or carving on wooden houses and ceremonial monuments throughout Britain; the true distribution of art styles may never be fully recovered.

Two styles can be identified in Peak District carvings. The more common is the cup and ring tradition, found throughout northern Britain and Ireland, and carved both on rock outcrops and cist slabs. Normally the most frequent diagnostic element of this style is concentric rings around a central cup; good examples from the Peak District have been found on Rowtor Rocks (24), Gardom’s Edge (1) and Calton Pasture (8). However in Derbyshire this motif is no more common than oval grooves that enclose

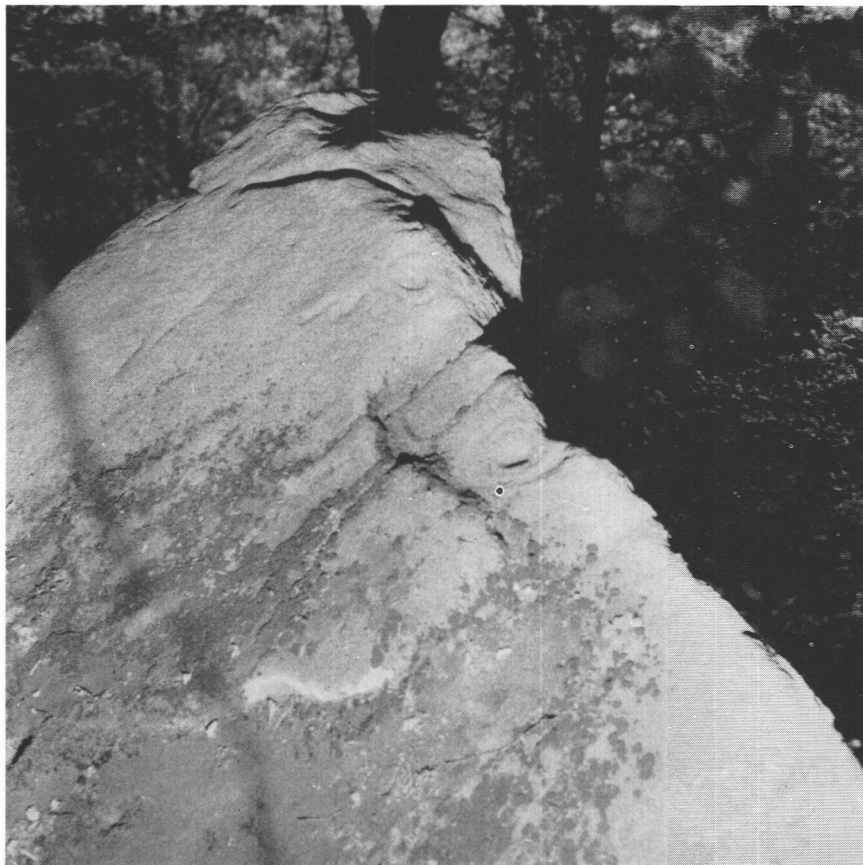


Plate 1 Newly discovered cup and ring marks at Rowter Rocks, Derbyshire. Two cup and ring marks are visible immediately to the left of the rock crest in the centre of the picture. A third cup and ring mark is out of sight on the flat top in the shadow. See Figure 1 for the drawing of all three. Photo: Brian Larkman.

several small cups, for example as found at Gardom's Edge (1, 2) and Ball Cross (5). This unusual design is not found around Ilkley Moor, with the possible exception of an example at Cottingley (B. Larkman *pers. comm.*). It is, however, found occasionally in Northumberland and southern Scotland. The motif has only been found on large earthfast boulders. Perhaps it represents a conceptual equivalent to cupmarked cist slabs, with the gutter representing the edge of the slab.

Cupmarked slabs with randomly arranged cups have been found at Bleakley Dike (3), and Stanage Barrow (9). A small capstone inside the Barbrook II ring cairn (10) has one side decorated with rows of cups, whilst underneath there is a central cup surrounded by a ring of nine others. A small slab from Ball Cross (6) is unique in that the sides have been carefully shaped to form an equilateral triangle. The hollowed centre has eight randomly placed cups and a groove that crudely divides the slab in two.

The second group of carvings found in the region is executed in the style of the art on neolithic passage graves, best known in the major cemeteries of chambered tombs such as those of the Boyne valley and Loughcrew in Ireland. The long duration of this tradition is attested by its occurrence on bronze age cist slabs common both in Ireland and southern Scotland. Less frequent examples are found in northern England, where slabs have been found at Aspatria, Cumbria (Fergusson, 1872: 157), Lilburn Hill Farm,

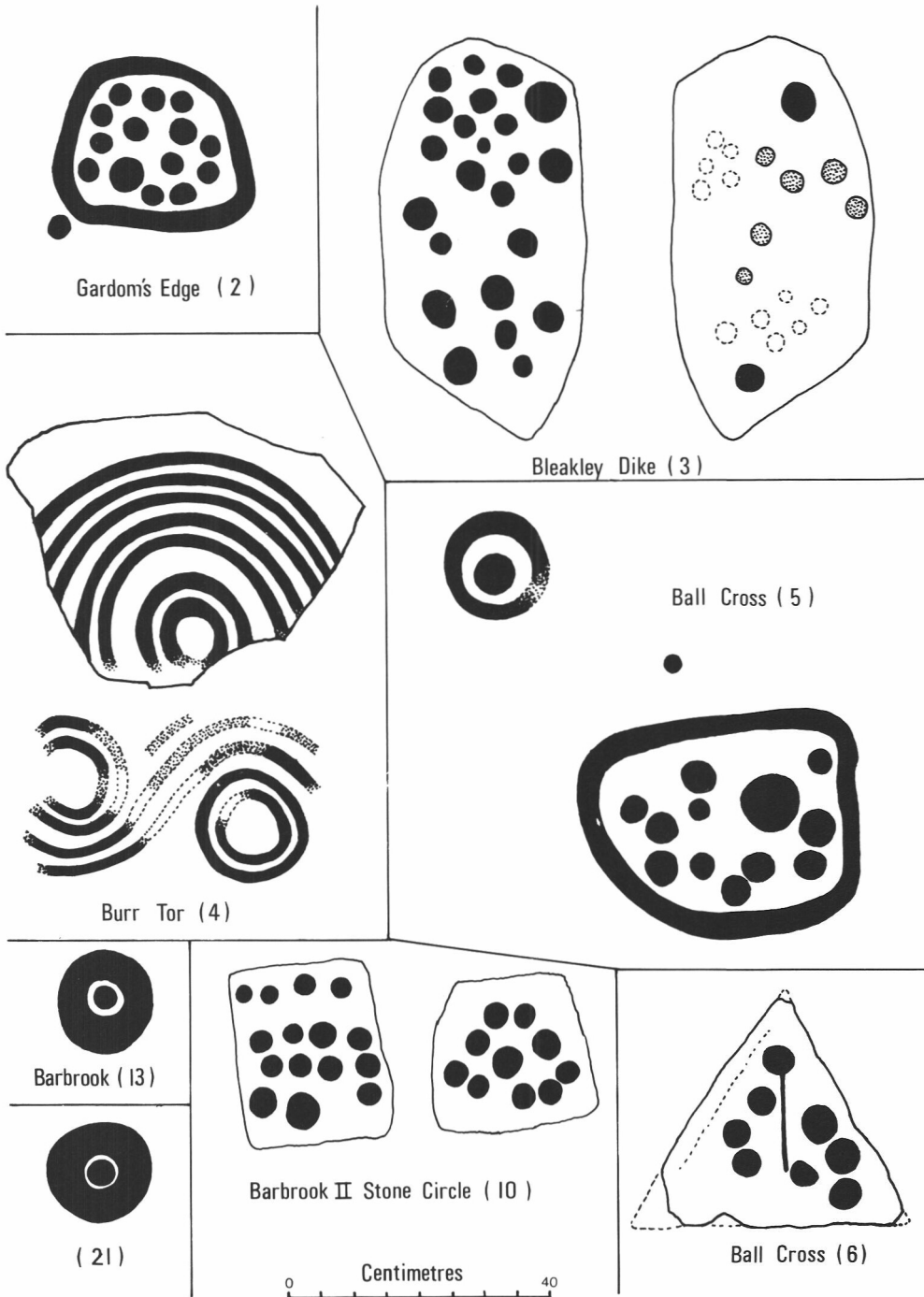


Fig. 4 Rock art in the Peak District: carvings now located in Sheffield City Museum. Plotted from rubbings taken by J. Barnatt and B. Larkman; the slab outlines are sketched for 3, 4, 6 and 10.

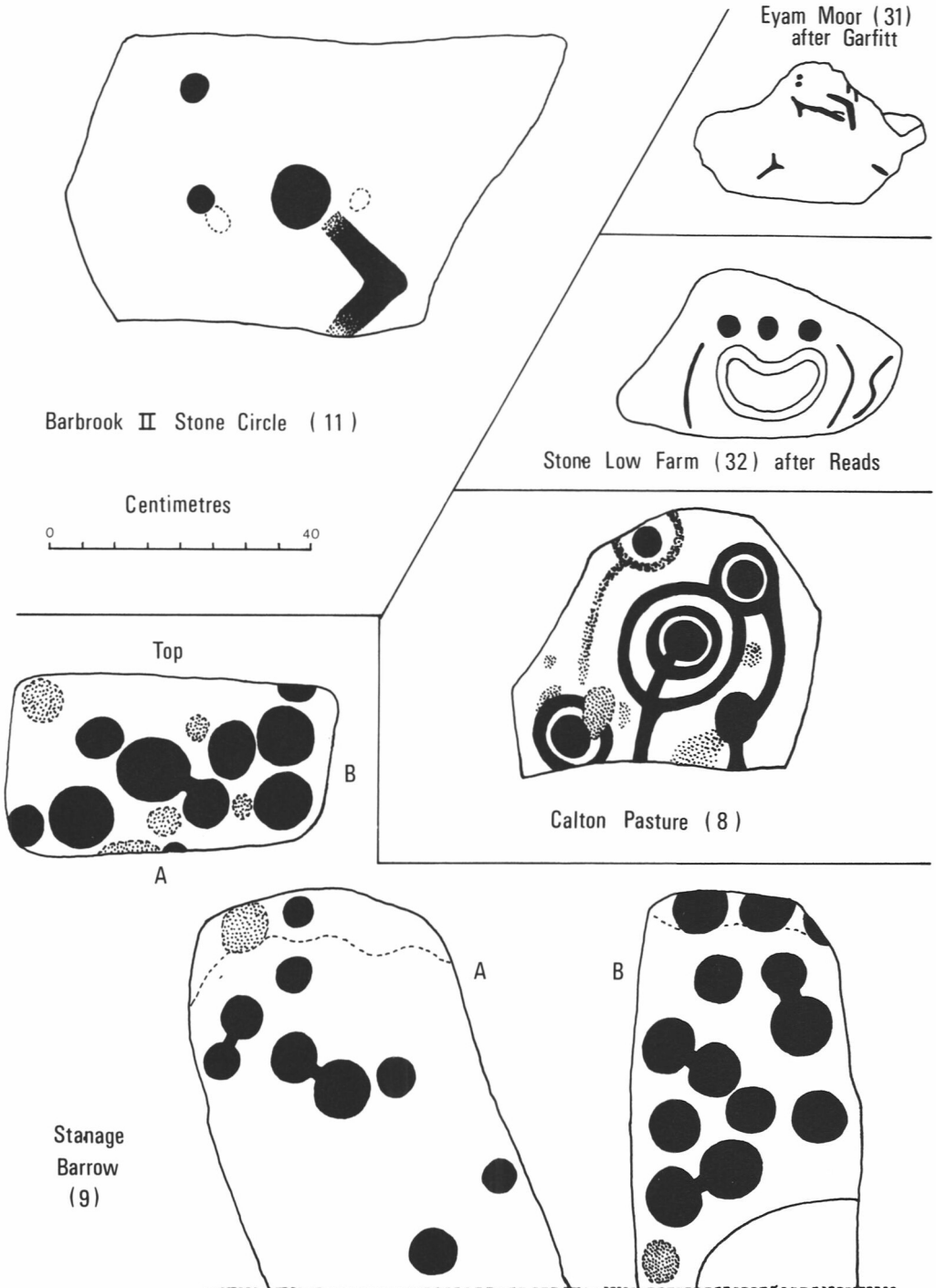


Fig. 5 Rock art in the Peak District: carvings *in situ* (9,11) and in the care of Derbyshire Museums Services (8). The lost 'carvings' (31,32) are not to scale. The others are plotted from rubbings taken by J. Barnatt and R. Barnatt.

Northumberland and Ravenhill, North Yorkshire. Passage graves with similar carvings are known on Orkney and in north Wales at Bryn Celli Ddu and Barclodiad y Gawres (Twohig, 1981). The closest example to the Peak District is at the Calderstones near Liverpool; several decorated slabs found here were probably removed from a now destroyed passage grave (Twohig, 1981).

Two examples of passage grave art are found in the Peak District. The slab found at Burr Tor was discovered many years ago and the original context is unfortunately obscure. This slab has seven concentric circles on one face, while on the angular undersurface is a badly damaged double spiral (Fig. 4). Both are common motifs and are found on the cist slab from Lilburn Hill Farm and on the chamber slabs at the Calderstones and Barclodiad y Gawres. The other example is on Rowtor Rocks (Fig. 2.2). This carving combines concentric rings, radial lines with cups and 'U' shaped motifs, all found in different combinations in Irish passage graves.

Both styles of art found in the Peak District have similar wide ranging distributions over much of northern Britain, although the cup and ring style is found more frequently. There is little sign of clear cut regional styles; in fact motifs re-occur across wide areas. Such homogeneity suggests that the carved symbols must represent basic threads of belief that were common to many communities in neolithic and bronze age Britain. It is certainly unlikely that the two styles represent different groups of people with distinct traditions.

The correct emphasis to be placed on the distinction drawn between the cup and ring and passage grave styles is somewhat obscure. Occasional cup and ring motifs are found in neolithic passage graves, and it is only later in bronze age cists that a clearer distinction can be drawn: cist slabs are found carved with exclusively cup and ring motifs. On several rock outcrops the art styles are mixed; these may be composite carvings executed over long periods. Generally, however, the art on outcrops is exclusively of the cup and ring tradition. There are two basic interpretations of the relationship of the styles to each other. The first is that there is a chronological distinction between the two. On this hypothesis the passage grave tradition with a wide number of motifs including the cup and ring prevailed in the Neolithic and to some extent the Earlier Bronze Age; in the Bronze Age the cup and ring motif gradually assumed a more important role in the symbolism of the carvers and began to be carved to the exclusion of many other designs. The alternative view is that both styles originated in the Neolithic but were functionally distinct: a wide range of symbols was appropriate in chambered tomb contexts, while the cup and ring symbols were more specific and appropriate for outdoor locations.

Until more general analysis throughout Britain is carried out, the Derbyshire carvings cannot be dated except in the crudest sense. Some of the simpler examples are found in earlier bronze age contexts, as at Barbrook. Although the Ball Cross examples are found in a late bronze age/early iron age context, this is probably due to them being reused as rubble in the rampart. The majority of the carvings probably dates to the third or second millennia b.c., but it is impossible at present to be more precise than this.

APPENDIX : GAZETTEER OF PEAK DISTRICT CARVINGS

1. Gardom's Edge, Baslow SK 27307301 (Fig. 3)
A complex carving on a large earthfast slab; discovered in 1965 and now kept covered for preservation. There is evidence of prehistoric field clearance nearby and a large hillfort of unknown date to the west.
2. Gardom's Edge, Baslow SK 27527328 (Fig. 4)
A carving on a small slab found in 1949 near site 1. Now on display in Sheffield City Museum.
3. Bleakley Dike, Youlgreave SK 21576340 (Fig. 4)
This small slab was found in a stream; there are cupmarks on both faces; one is badly worn. It is likely this stone has been washed downstream and may well be from a barrow. Now on display in Sheffield City Museum.

4. Burr Tor, Great Hucklow SK 180783 (Fig. 4)
This slab is finely carved in passage grave style with designs on both sides. It was apparently found somewhere near the Burr Tor hillfort, a badly damaged enclosure of unknown date. The slab has been in Sheffield since 1824 and is now on display in Sheffield City Museum.
- 5-7 Ball Cross, Edensor SK 228691 (Fig. 4)
5. This large boulder was discovered during excavation in the upper silting of the ditch of a small late bronze age/early iron age hillfort; it appears to have been part of the rampart. The carving is badly worn and is likely to be of an earlier date than the fortification. One face has an oval groove surrounding cupmarks, while the top has a cup and ring and an isolated cup. Now on display in Sheffield City Museum.
6. This small stone was found at the bottom of the ditch silts. The flat face has a dished centre with eight cupmarks and a groove; the sides have been carefully shaped into an equilateral triangle. One side has two cupmarks and a further two slight hollows. Now on display in Sheffield City Museum.
7. A third find was a small slab with three cupmarks arranged in a crude triangle; this also came from near the base of the ditch. Now in Sheffield City Museum store.
8. Calton Pasture, Edensor SK 23386855 (Fig. 5)
This worn carving on a flat topped slab was found near a barrow and may well be a cist cover. The cups are deep but the surrounding rings are very shallow. It was moved to the office of the North Derbyshire Archaeological Trust after it was placed in an old quarry by the farmer. It is now in the care of Derbyshire Museums Service.
9. Stanage Barrow, Eyam SK 21547865 (Fig. 5)
This decorated slab protrudes from the top of a damaged 15m diameter barrow; it may be a displaced cist cover. Three of the visible surfaces are carved while two are plain. Some of the cupmarks appear to be joined by short grooves. An urn is reported from this barrow.
- 10-12. Barbrook II stone circle, Holmesfield SK 27757582 (Figs. 4 and 5)
10. This small stone was found near a stone-filled pit; both were under a cairn that obscured the northeast entrance to the ring cairn. The flat base has nine cups surrounding a central one; the curved top has four lines of cups. Now in Sheffield City Museum store.
11. This small slab has three cups and a right angled groove on its upper face; it was the capstone of a small disturbed cist inside the ring cairn. It is still on site next to the ruined cist.
12. A kerbstone of the small internal cairn has a single cup on its upper edge. The cairn contained a collared urn, a cremation which has provided a radio-carbon date of 1500±150 b.c. (BM179), two burnt flint scrapers and a flint knife.
- 13-16. Barbrook barrow, Holmesfield SK 27907560 (Fig. 4)
This excavated and restored cairn is just above the Barbrook I stone circle. It contained burnt bones near the centre, collared urn sherds in a pit under the kerb, and a cremated child and biconical urn in an annexe to the east. The carvings on the stones were only found after the stones were removed from the cairn (Riley, 1981). They are now in Sheffield City Museum store.
13. A rectangular slab with a fine unworn cup and ring at the centre of one face; the ring is unusually wide and shallow with angular sides.
14. A small triangular slab with four cups in a crude line along the edge of one face.
15. A small slab with a single cup at the centre of one face.
16. A small slab with one or two cups on one face and another underneath.

17. Gardom's Edge, Baslow c.SK 2773
There is a slab with a large cup on one face in Sheffield City Museum store. It was deposited here in 1957 and is thought to have come from Gardom's Edge.
- 18,19. Brund, Sheen c.SK 100615
Carrington dug a large barrow at Brund in Staffordshire on 21 June 1851. He found two stones, each with a cup; one was associated with a cremation and situated well above the natural ground surface. Bateman records that one stone was too large to be carried and that the cup was cut from it (Bateman, 1861: 177-8). Presumably the second was treated in the same way as both are now on fist-sized stones kept in Sheffield City Museum store.
20. Elkstone SK 050585
Carrington dug this barrow on 31 Aug 1850 and found a 'large sandstone' with a cup, associated with a cremation, a few burnt flint flakes and an 'ornamented vase'. This was also cut from its slab and is now in Sheffield City Museum store. Other burials in the barrow consisted of a skeleton with a boar's tusk and a skeleton in a rock cut grave.
- 21,22. Provenance unknown, Sheffield City Museum store (Fig. 4)
Both carvings are unworn and must have been buried since antiquity, presumably in a prehistoric monument.
21. A cup and ring on a triangular slab which is very similar to carving 13.
22. A small slab with two cups on one face.

New carvings

- 23-27. Rowtor Rocks, Birchover SK 23556215 (see text and Figs 1 and 2)
28. Robin Hood's Stride, Harthill SK 22476225 (see text and Figs. 1 and 2)

Possible carvings

- 29-31. Birchin Edge, Baslow SK 28717255
Three carved stones that were apparently part of a cist in a small barrow to the northeast of Newbridge Farm were found in 1957. The cist contained a collared urn and a shale disc. The carvings could not be found in 1965 and have not been seen since.
29. Slab with 12 cups.
30. Slab with 1 cup.
31. Said to be a 'carved stone' which was deposited in Sheffield City Museum; this does not appear to be here, unless it is the slab which has nothing more than unusual weathering. Alternatively it could be carving 21.
32. Eyam Moor, Eyam SK 22437932
Ordnance Survey maps mark the site of a cup and ring carving; there is a small quarry at this spot. No details appear to have been documented.
33. Eyam Moor. Eyam SK 22917901 (Fig. 5)
This 'carving' on a small boulder was recorded by Garfitt in 1924 as representing two deer horn implements; it cannot be found today. It is likely that the markings were the product of weathering.
34. Stone Low Farm, Brampton SK 290716 (Fig. 5)
A nineteenth century letter from Hugo Reads notes that urns were found together with two cupmarked stones lying in the stackyard near a barrow. He illustrated one; it is difficult to determine if this is a genuine carving and it does not survive. Bateman notes that the barrow in the stackyard was dug in 1830; it contained two large urns holding cremations, flints and a miniature cup. It is likely to be the same barrow; the carved stones may have been part of a cist.

35. Burbage Rocks, Sheffield SK 26788156
Six cups had been reported from a boulder here. Inspection revealed that the whole outcrop is scarred, having been used for target practice. Many gritstone outcrops have suffered in this way and the pitting should not be confused with cupmarks; the former are far less regular.

Millstone Grit frequently has small hollows which are formed naturally and which can easily be confused with cupmarks; it is often not possible to distinguish between the two alternative interpretations. Sometimes the context makes it tempting to suggest cupmarks. The tallest stone of the Park Gate stone circle (SK 28046851) has two such hollows. Another example is the Wet Withens stone circle (SK 22557900) where an upright to the north/northeast has two cups. One of the many small boulders in the cairn nearby also has a single cup.

On Rowtor Rocks are several boulders with possible cupmarks, including one example with two parallel lines of three cups, flanked by two pairs of cups with a long groove above them. On another rock is a large cup surrounded by a ring of seven cups with a further five cups nearby. A second similar carving with central cup and five outer cups has also been noted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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