

POST-RING ROUND-HOUSE AT SWARKESTONE LOWES

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ABSTRACT

Excavation in 1994 revealed the postholes of a round-house, probably of double-ring construction, with wall-line, measuring about 10.7m in diameter, inferred solely from the position of a pair of double postholes at the easterly doorway. This entrance and the internal ring of roof-supporting posts, believed to have numbered nine originally, were probably disposed symmetrically. The scanty evidence for dating this building, from both potsherds and flintwork, points to the first half of the final millennium BC, when plentiful structural analogues are known from various parts of Britain, including at least one of the few other post-ring round-houses so far recorded on the Trent gravels.

INTRODUCTION

The preceding pages of this volume contain an account of the 1993–94 excavations upon the gently-undulating, gravel-covered ridge of Swarkestone Lowes, situated at the northern flank of the Trent Valley, to the south of Derby (Elliott and Knight 1999). Those excavations were directed by LE (on behalf of T&PAT), and this paper has been prepared by GG, making free use of facts provided by LE from the archive he has compiled (*ibid.*, 80). The purpose here is solely to elaborate upon the most readily interpretable structural remains recorded by LE — *viz.*, those of a post-built round-house located at SK 36422959, in trench 19 (*ibid.*, figs 2 and 5).

The round-house fell partly within the initial, 3m-wide, area of trench 19, which was aligned roughly west/east, and partly within a northerly extension, measuring 5.3–6.1m north/south by 10.1–10.7m west/east (Fig. 1). The extension was opened specifically in order to complete investigation of this building-plan, because the general character of the structure had been recognized by LE on the strength of an arc of three postholes (numbered 279–281) revealed by the original trench. Besides the remaining portions of the round-house, additional postholes occurred in the extension, but the essential elements of the round-house ground-plan are not difficult to disentangle from the composite plan (as expressed in Figs 1 and 2), especially when the sequential information provided by a ditch (278, the only archaeological feature other than the postholes to be uncovered by this part of trench 19) is taken into account. Before embarking upon a description and analysis of the ichnography of the round-house and its various particulars, several points should be made by way of introduction.

First, it must be acknowledged that only one of the features here termed ‘postholes’ could be demonstrated to have served that function. Feature 280 alone contained a distinguishable post-pipe, considered likely to indicate the former position, though not

necessarily the exact dimensions, of the foot of the timber upright once embedded in it. This pipe (hatched in Fig. 1) was slightly oval in plan, measuring *c.* $0.23 \times 0.18\text{m}$, with near-vertical sides, penetrating to within 0.05m of the bottom of the 0.23m depth of 280 as excavated, and standing hard against the western wall of the posthole, which itself measured up to $0.32 \times 0.40\text{m}$ as excavated. The pipe was filled with loamy sand, similar to, but paler than, the brown/black soil occupying the remainder of 280, while the latter was typical of the homogeneous fill of each of the other features believed to have belonged to the round-house (i.e., progressing clockwise, 279, 281, 371, 360, 361, 362 or 363, 366 and 277); the general darkness of these fills seems likely to have resulted from the inclusion of charred materials, though flotation of samples proved disappointing (Hunt in *ibid.*, 144). Despite the lack of recorded evidence for other pipes, the characteristic form of other holes in the 'post-ring', or 'ring', of the round-house (i.e. all listed above bar 366 and 277) implies that interpretation as postholes is valid, especially as their disposition surely signifies a relationship between them: each had a circular or slightly oval outline (ranging from *c.* 0.30m to *c.* 0.40m across as excavated), steep sides and a flattish base where well preserved. The case for interpreting the two other, more complex, features ascribed to this building-plan (366 and 277) as postholes must rest more upon analogy with the entrances of round-houses recorded in excavations elsewhere than upon any intrinsic qualities of this particular pair, as will be explained below.

Secondly, it will be convenient to deal briefly with a row of other presumed postholes (365 and 367–370 — *cf. ibid.*, 106), if only in order that they may be discounted from further consideration in the present context. These five holes, all broadly comparable in size, were set at reasonably regular intervals of 1.6–2.0m centre-to-centre, forming a virtually straight line which crossed the area of the round-house. At such spacing, a sixth hole might be expected to have occurred in the 2.7m gap between 365 and the eastern limit of excavation, conceivably coinciding with 366 of the round-house. However, no evidence for this was seen in the ground, even though the uniform, dark brown, humic fill of each of the five in the recorded line was quite distinguishable from the sandier fill of all the round-house postholes, suggesting that the former would have been identifiable had there been an intersection with 366 (the obvious doubling of 366, as it appears in the plans, should not be construed in this fashion, as will be made clear below). This view becomes all the more tenable when it is appreciated that the evidence points firmly to a sequence in which the post-line post-dates the round-house, for two of the line (367 and 368) were cut into the less dark fill of ditch 278, which is itself believed to have been created later than the round-house (see below). This line of holes had perhaps held the stanchions of a fence, which, to judge from the character of their fill, may have been of no great age.

Thirdly, it should be borne in mind that no superficial stratification survived in this part of the site, so that the evidence for the round-house derives entirely from features cut into the sands and gravels of the terrace, which here lay directly beneath ploughsoil. It ought also to be iterated that the level from which each posthole was recorded was rather arbitrary, for the surface of the terrace-deposits had not only been truncated to an incalculable extent by subsequent ploughing but was reduced further, and by a variable amount, in 1994, so as to reach a level at which archaeological features could be observed with confidence (*cf. ibid.*, 90). In general, a greater depth (up to 0.18m) was removed for this purpose across the original 3m trench, which was stripped inappropriately by machine; whereas the extension was stripped by hand and with greater restraint, building

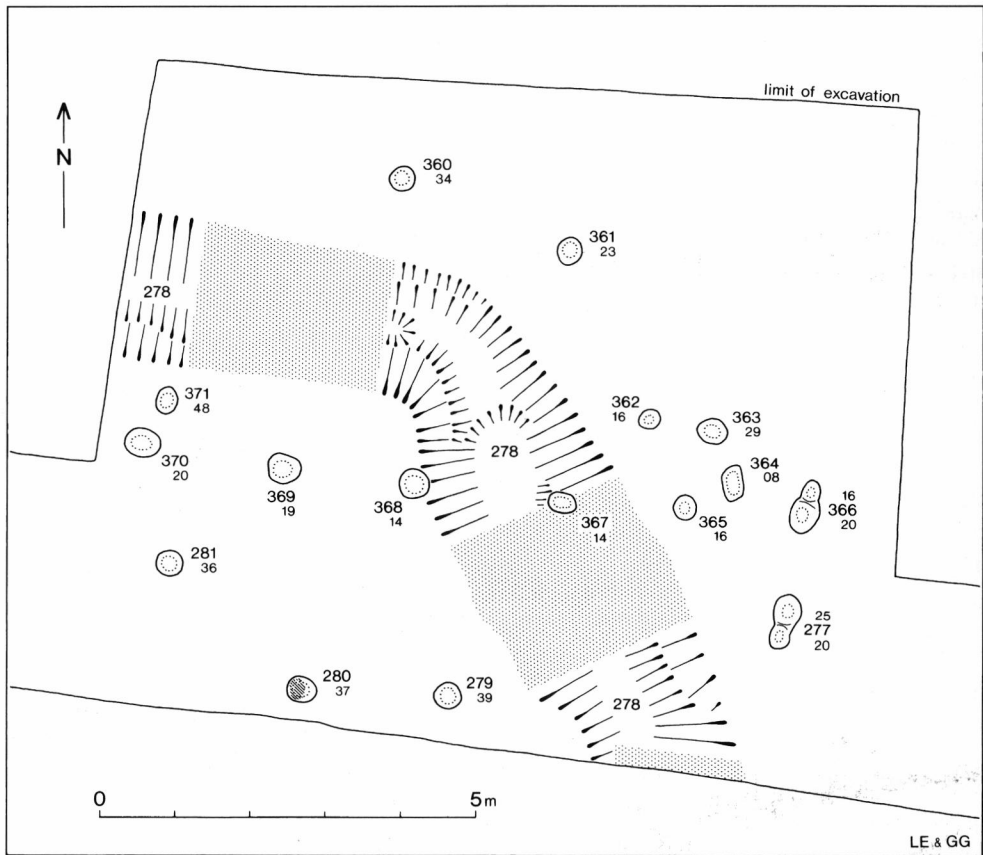


Fig. 1. Swarkestone Lowes: plan of features in the part of trench 19, excavated in 1994, that included the post-ring building-plan; presumed postholes have an unbroken outline at the top (as excavated) and a dotted outline at the base; the pipe in 280 is hatched; ditch 278 is hachured where excavated, stippled where the fill was not fully removed; feature-numbers have three digits, while two-digit numbers are posthole-depths in centimetres, as estimated from the base of ploughsoil (see pp. 155–6). Scale 1:100.

upon the experience gained in digging the initial trench, and removing just *c.* 0.03–0.05m. The recorded depth of each posthole must be adjusted to make amends for this loss during the early stages of excavation, and this procedure produces the figures shown in Fig. 1 (where, it should be emphasized, no attempt has been made to recompense for any destruction by the plough). Given these factors, and given also the dearth of structural detail evident in the fill of most postholes, it has seemed unnecessary to publish drawings of their sections (though these are available in archive).

POST-RING

The depth-range of the seven postholes attributed to the ring (see above) may be assessed in two distinct ways: either from the amount by which each penetrated below the adjacent surface of the terrace-deposits (calculable as *c.* 0.23–0.48m, after due adjustment of the

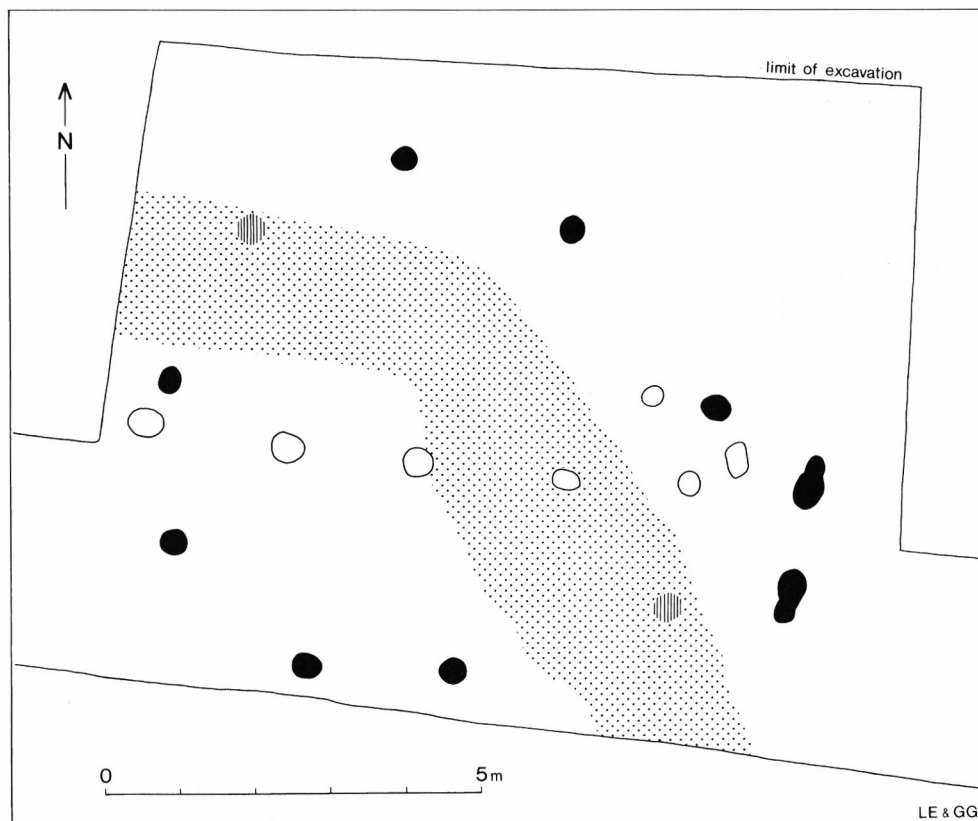


Fig. 2. Swarkestone Lowes: interpretive plan covering the same area as Fig. 1, with postholes attributed to the round-house shown solid where recorded or hatched where assumed to have been removed by ditch 278; seven other postholes are outlined, and ditch 278 is stippled. Scale 1:100.

recorded figures, and assuming 363 is preferred to 362 — see below); or according to the absolute base-level of each (ranging from 54.26m to 54.41m above Ordnance Datum). Either way, the holes around the south-western part of the ring are seen to have been generally the deepest, suggesting that those responsible for digging the foundations of this building in prehistory may have endeavoured to compensate for the surface gradient of 3–4° down towards the north (and actually appear to have somewhat over-compensated). If so, this may offer a hint of a notable regard for detail on the part of the builders, for it could be taken to imply a sufficient measure of prefabrication of the superstructure as to demand that the postholes be dug individually to such depth as suited uprights of pre-determined length. This is an interesting aspect of round-house construction that has attracted comment previously in respect of the celebrated example at Pimperne Down, Dorset, a structure that was clearly related generically to that at Swarkestone, but was better preserved when excavated and possessed a far greater number of postholes in the ring, thus allowing the pattern to emerge more convincingly (Harding 1974, 39; Harding and Blake 1993, 31, fig. 16).¹

Although no circle can be described on the plan to pass through all of the ring-postholes, they did lie approximately on a circumference of around 7.1m diameter. This best-fit circle would have touched five of the seven (*viz.* 280, 281, 371, 360, 361) and passed outside the edge of 279 by *c.* 0.20m. The position is less clear on the eastern side of the ring, where it has already been intimated that a choice must be made between 362 and 363, which fell respectively *c.* 0.30m and *c.* 0.20m inside and outside the nominal circle. Moreover, another probable posthole, 364, lay close to these two, at *c.* 0.40m outside the circle, and this too may appear to present an alternative possibility for the seventh ring-post. Since each of these three had a similar fill of dark loamy sand, no decision is possible on this basis; and the sole grounds for selection is by shape and size of posthole. This criterion makes 363 seem favourite, because its recorded diameter of *c.* 0.38m and depth of *c.* 0.29m below ploughsoil were quite compatible with the dimensions of the other six in the ring (Fig. 1). 362 was somewhat smaller, with a diameter of less than 0.30m and an equivalent depth of *c.* 0.16m; while 364 was more markedly sub-rectangular in outline (up to 0.45 × 0.28m as excavated), and its surviving depth of only *c.* 0.08m below ploughsoil would tend to rule it out of contention. On this tenuous premise, 363 is preferred for the purposes of Figs 2 and 3.

Nevertheless, the similarity of the fill of the extra pair (whichever two they may have been) to those of the round-house leaves open the possibility of some relationship between them. In the case of either a 363/364 or a 362/363 pairing, the span would have been just *c.* 0.75–0.85m (measured centre-to-centre of the features, in the absence of post-pipes; as are those of all other pairs cited below). The preferred pairing of 362/364 would have had an equivalent span of *c.* 1.40m. This brings to mind posthole-pairs recorded on the sites of other prehistoric settlements, too numerous to recite; and, to anticipate the discussion concerning the overall diameter of the Swarkestone round-house, it seems likely that this possible posthole-pair would have lain inside the building. Those identified within the bounds of the inner ring of the arguably similar, though obviously grander, House 3 at Longbridge Deverill Cow Down, Wiltshire, have been interpreted in several ways: ‘an earth-fast table or dresser’, in the case of a pair of *c.* 2.3m span, and ‘screens and/or drying racks’, for a group of possible pairs that probably came closer in span to that conjectured at Swarkestone (Chadwick Hawkes 1994, 65, 66, 67–8). Nearer to home, an example of *c.* 0.8m span situated within a sub-circular structure at Rampton, Nottinghamshire, has been regarded as ‘a short radial screen and draught excluder’ (Ponsford 1992, 95). The location of the Rampton pair resembles that of the Swarkestone pair (though in mirror-image), inasmuch as it lay near the doorway of the building (see below), and this factor could be enlisted in support of other possible functions that might have benefitted from better light than seems likely to have been enjoyed across much of the interior of a round-house.² Of course, many examples inside buildings could as easily represent something as prosaic as, say, a hat-stand, and the various purposes proposed for such posthole-pairs are generally little more than guesswork.³

ENTRANCE & WALL-LINE

The two most easterly features in this area of excavation at Swarkestone, 366 and 277, are the only ones whose structural interpretation has yet to be debated. In shape, these were closely comparable to each other but quite different from the roughly cylindrical

form of all others allocated to the round-house; though their uniform fill of dark, loamy sand was indistinguishable from that of the ring-postholes. Both 366 and 277 had an elongated and slightly waisted, or figure-of-eight, outline, with double base divided by a slight ridge of undisturbed gravel, as though designed to hold paired timbers stood side-by-side. Each of these double postholes (as they may reasonably be regarded, following the presumption made above about the simpler, cylindrical features) measured *c.* 0.72–0.75m by *c.* 0.38–0.40m overall, as excavated; and they had a common long axis. Moreover, in each, what may be termed the inner lobe (i.e. the southern part of 366, the northern of 277) was slightly deeper (Fig. 1) and wider (*c.* 0.38–0.40m as compared with *c.* 0.23–0.28m) than the outer lobe. Comparing like with like, 366 was a little shallower than 277, perhaps compensating for gradient in a similar way to the postholes of the ring.

The symmetrical configuration of features 366 and 277 is the most distinctive, and potentially the most informative, element of this building-plan. In the light of exemplars and inferences discussed at length elsewhere (Musson 1970, 267–70; Guilbert 1981a), they permit this round-house to be interpreted as probably a ‘double-ring’, or aisled, structure, in which the recorded ring of postholes would have held uprights that supported the roof internally, standing separate from an external wall, the position of which is betrayed in the excavation-plan solely by the setting of double postholes, themselves presumed to have given foundation to an entrance through that wall. Each of 366 and 277 lay *c.* 1.6–1.8m outside the nominal circle through the post-ring, and each had its long axis aligned approximately with the circumference of a circle concentric with the post-ring and measuring *c.* 10.7m in diameter. This outer circle can thus be regarded as the approximate line of the wall, defining the internal floor-area of the building (Fig. 3 — *cf.*, especially, *ibid.*, fig. 8). The wall is therefore assumed to have been of shallower foundation than the recorded postholes, with the result that any impression it may once have made upon the ground had been eroded, so explaining its absence from the archaeological record. Such a comparatively superficial, concentric wall-line does feature in the recorded ground-plans of some similar structures (*ibid.*, 299–300, 303–4, figs 1, 2 and 7);⁴ but the friable nature of the subsoil, combined with its truncation by both ploughing and excavation, hardly provided conditions conducive to the survival of such tenuous evidence at Swarkestone Lowes.⁵ The waisted shape of each entrance-posthole suggests that these may have housed not only the door-frame, in the inner lobes, but also a second pair of uprights standing virtually contiguous to the door-frame, in the outer lobes, and perhaps intended to anchor the adjoining ends of the wall.

Such a doubling of posts to either side of the doorway can perhaps be inferred from similarly disposed, elongate postholes (though often apparently not waisted in the manner of those at Swarkestone) in many a round-house ground-plan of this general type, as, for example, in Huts 1 and 3 on Platform 4 at Black Patch, Alciston, Sussex (Drewett 1982, figs 4–6 and 9–10 — though scant details of individual features are provided in the published account — *ibid.*, 325–6), and in the ‘3887 complex’ at Winklebury Camp, Hampshire (Smith 1977, 35, figs 5–6 and 41; Guilbert 1981a, 300–2, fig. 1 — though the excavator does not explain how much the shape of some postholes could have been due to recutting).⁶ Occasionally, tangible evidence for the former existence of more than one timber within such postholes has been encountered, lending additional credence to this explanation of the form of 366 and 277 at Swarkestone.⁷ An instance of this occurred in the well-known, and seemingly more complex, House I at

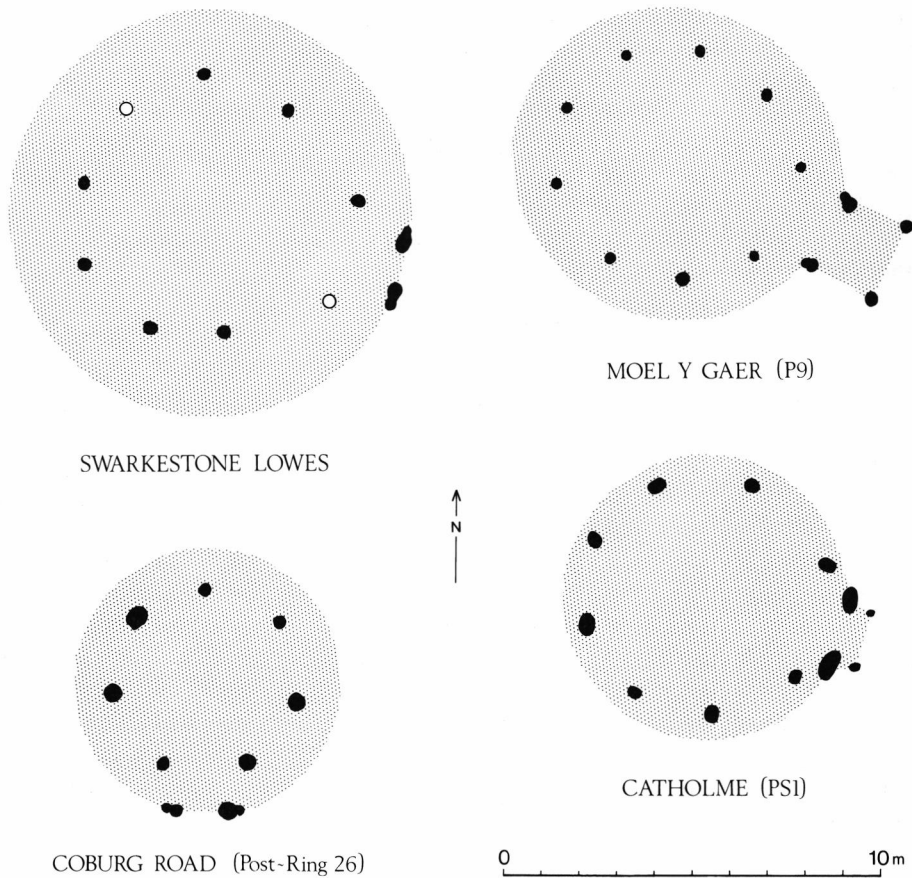


Fig. 3. Simplified, interpretive ground-plan of the post-ring round-house at Swarkestone Lowes, together with those of analogous structures recorded at Moel y Gaer, Flintshire, at Coburg Road, Dorchester, Dorset, and at Catholme, Staffordshire (sources cited in text). Postholes are shown solid where recorded or outlined where interpolated, and the inferred approximate floor-area of each building is stippled. Scale 1:200.

Little Woodbury, Wiltshire (Bersu 1940, 83, figs 20, 21 and 24 — though the excavator seems to have viewed these as composite postholes resulting from secondary adaptation that involved supplementary posts, or what he termed ‘additional repairs’),⁸ and others may be adduced at Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1981, fig. 6) and Bishops Cannings Down (Gingell 1992, 10), both also in Wiltshire, and at Moel y Gaer, in North Wales (Guilbert 1976, 308, figs 3 and 4.A). At the last-named site, numerous post-ring round-houses have been excavated, and these incorporated entrance-postholes in a variety of forms, some simply cylindrical (Guilbert 1981a, fig. 8.Q; 1982a, fig. 3.2), some elongated (Guilbert 1976, figs 3 and 4.B; 1981a, figs 7.A and 8.P; 1981b, fig. 16; 1982a, fig. 3.2), some slightly waisted (Guilbert 1981a, fig. 8.L; 1982a, fig. 3.2), and some even more distinctly lobate than those at Swarkestone, but arranged perpendicularly (Guilbert 1976, fig. 4.A; 1981b, fig. 16; 1982a, fig. 3.2; an example of which is depicted in Fig. 3). A particularly close

comparison to the configuration of 366 and 277 at Swarkestone comes from features forming part of the structure known as 'post-ring 26' at Coburg Road, Dorchester, Dorset (Smith *et al.* 1992, 26, fig. 6), which merits illustration here (Fig. 3). This is surely also to be interpreted as a double-ring round-house, with internal post-ring of *c.* 5.0m diameter, and inferred external wall of *c.* 7.0m diameter interrupted by a pair of waisted, double postholes at the entrance. As at Swarkestone, the outer lobes of these double postholes at Coburg Road were narrower and shallower than the inner ones, and the most obvious difference between these building-plans lies in the smaller number of postholes comprising the inner ring at Coburg Road, as befits its smaller diameter.

An alternative would be to perceive such apparently double postholes as a consequence of tangential recutting, though this was not perceptible in the fill of 366 and 277 at Swarkestone, and their symmetrical disposition relative to the rest of the building-plan (see below) makes it seem unlikely that their shared shape can have been fortuitous. Since the same can be said of the equivalents at Coburg Road, the similarity of these two structures provides reciprocal strength to this reasoning. Rather, if they were recut, it must be probable that this was done with the intention of supplementing an original single pair of door-frame/wall-end uprights after some incalculable period (much as Bersu surmised at Little Woodbury — see above). In the case of the Swarkestone building, the originals would have had a span of either *c.* 1.9m or *c.* 1.3m (centre-to-centre of lobes), which either remained at, or was narrowed to, *c.* 1.3m secondarily (and, with due allowance for the estimated thickness of the uprights of this frame, the actual opening for the door might have measured *c.* 1.1m across). The entrance could only have been widened secondarily if the outer lobes were not only cut later than the inner lobes but held timbers which replaced those in the latter. Be they double postholes by original design or by secondary outcome, the general thrust of the argument presented here, postulating that 366 and 277 represented the round-house entrance, is unaffected.

The situation of these entrance-postholes, to the east of the post-ring, can be construed as a further factor in favour of interpreting them in this way. A line drawn from the nominal centre of the post-ring to the mid-point of the doorway would have passed some 12° south of due east (as measured in relation to Ordnance Survey Grid North), placing it within the range of easterly to south-easterly orientations so frequently chosen for the entrances of prehistoric round-houses. It is a subject for debate whether this orientation was adopted so as to gain purely practical advantages, by admitting early-morning light and warmth while excluding the worst of the elements, as is often argued (e.g. Musson 1970, 271; Lambrick 1978, 118; Hingley and Miles 1984, 63; Gingell 1992, 13; Chadwick Hawkes 1994, 65; Britnell *et al.* 1997, 196), or to accommodate more ethereal concerns, perhaps connected with a cosmology imbrued even in the commonplace features of prehistoric settlements, as it has lately become fashionable to suppose (e.g. Wait 1985, 177, 261; Fitzpatrick 1994, 69, fig. 20.4; 1997, 77, 83, fig. 9.4; Hill 1995, 81, 83, 93–4, 111–12, figs 8.7 and 8.8; 1996, 103, fig. 8.8; Parker Pearson 1996, 119; and most fully explored in Oswald 1997). The present writer has long been ambivalent in this matter (Guilbert 1975, 205–6), recognizing that it could well have been a combination of mutually beneficial factors, both pragmatic and propitious, that led to the observed bias (*cf.* Reid 1993, 61) — i.e. the awakening of the sun could have been as welcome for its promise of physical comfort as for its metaphysical evocation of life. Although two of the similar round-houses portrayed in Fig. 3 shared this easterly aspect, the south-facing

entrance of the Coburg Road example is a reminder that this was not obeyed invariably (*cf.* Hill 1996, 104; Parker Pearson 1996, 127; Oswald 1997, 91).

Regarding the round-house entrance, it may finally be noted that the extent of trench 19 to the east of 277, less so 366 (see Figs 1 and 2; Elliott and Knight 1999, fig. 5), allows some confidence that there was no projecting porch; unless, of course, its postholes were so much shallower than those of both ring and doorway as to have been entirely razed by erosion. Having said this, it should also be remarked that another possible combination of postholes given consideration by the authors could have given this building a porch. This would use the suitably elongate, but surprisingly shallow in this context, 364 as the north side of a doorway through an outer wall of *c.* 8.4m diameter (thereby demanding that 362 be chosen over 363 for the posthole-ring, if the double-ring model is to be maintained), with 366 and 277 providing foundation for the front of a porch of *c.* 1.0m in length. However, this option has been rejected, not least on the grounds that a southern partner for 364 was not recorded, even though (to anticipate the next paragraph) it would be expected to have evaded destruction by ditch 278. Although the apparent omission of a porch is not exceptional in such a building-plan (*cf.*, for example, Guilbert 1981a, figs 1, 4, 7 and 8, or Coburg Road in Fig. 3, where the Moel y Gaer and Catholme plans show that a porch could be of varying proportions), a recent discussion of one double-ring round-house that *was* equipped with a substantial porch has gone some way to elucidate just how it might have served significant practical and formal roles in everyday life (Chadwick Hawkes 1994, 65–6). While some have recognized the commonsensical, draught-excluding advantages of an entrance-passage that could be closed at both front and back (e.g. Harding 1974, 39; Cunliffe 1974, 164), others have seen fit rather to regard it as a ‘symbolic . . . liminal space . . . to define the orientation . . . and to emphasize the threshold’ (Fitzpatrick 1994, 69; 1997, 77; Hill 1996, 103).

SYMMETRY OF DISPOSITION

It should be evident from the various analogues advanced in the preceding discussion that the structural pattern emerging from this appraisal of the trench 19 postholes at Swarkestone Lowes finds a good match among post-ring round-houses at many other sites in prehistoric Britain; and one recurrent, though by no means mandatory, feature of such structures was a carefully-contrived regularity in the layout of the posts around the internal ring. If tolerably even spacing figured in this instance, it is apparent that two postholes are lacking from the recorded plan, at the south-east (between 363 and 279) and the north-west (between 371 and 360). The position of each would have lain within the *c.* 1.8–2.5m width of ditch 278. They were sought repeatedly by scraping the relevant areas of the ditch-fill, itself noticeably paler than the fill of the nine excavated postholes of the round-house, encouraging the view that the missing two would have been seen had this building been constructed over the infilled ditch. On the contrary, this negative evidence can be taken as acceptable proof that ditch 278 was cut through the site of the round-house, fortunately removing, or truncating no more than two of its postholes, which can thus be restored to the plan, as hatched in Fig. 2 and outlined in Fig. 3.

Even this measure of restoration in the ground-plan is bound to mean that the detailed arrangement of the nine-post ring cannot be assessed conclusively, and yet the pattern portrayed in the drawings does display something approaching the balance discernible in

similar building-plans elsewhere. Leaving aside the two gaps left by the lost postholes, the five surviving original intervals between ring-posts ranged from 1.95m to 3.00m, measured between centres (though the upper limit could be reduced to 2.50m by selecting 362 instead of 363 for the ring — see above); and the missing postholes can be interpolated without upsetting these figures. Although this exercise appears to produce no precise symmetry, it reveals that eight of the postholes *may* have been roughly paired off to either side of an axis which approximates to a diameter of the nominal circle, drawn from the mid-point of the entrance, where the double postholes were positioned symmetrically about it, to the odd posthole (371 — the deepest of them all), situated at what may be regarded as the back of the ring (i.e. virtually the same line as that employed above to determine the orientation of the round-house). In other words, this structure may have come close to complying with the concept of ‘axial-line symmetry’, as identified in the plans of many round-houses scattered widely through prehistoric Britain (Guilbert 1982a).⁹ Indeed, the Moel y Gaer and Coburg Road building-plans in Fig. 3 provide excellent examples of this phenomenon, the former being one of those which first drew attention to it (*ibid.*, fig. 3.2), though the latter was not recognized in the excavation-report (Smith *et al.* 1992); while the Catholme round-house in Fig. 3 shows that a ground-plan which appears equally regular in its own fashion could be achieved with an even number of ring-posts (*cf.* Guilbert 1982b, 212; Kelly 1988, 149). It remains a matter for conjecture whether this bilateral system of construction reflects some structural device, as was originally supposed (Guilbert 1982a, 77), and as at least one ethnographic comparison might suggest (Routledge and Routledge 1910, 66, fig. 1 — thanks to Peter Crew for this reference), or holds some significance related to the manner in which these buildings were used, functionally and/or symbolically, as others have subsequently implied (Fitzpatrick 1994, 68–9, fig. 20.4; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1995, 87; Parker Pearson 1996, 120; Oswald 1997, 94).

MAGNITUDE MATTERS

In sum, this structural analysis of trench 19 at Swarkestone Lowes has identified a round-house of familiar double-ring ichnography, originally with nine roof-supporting uprights forming its internal ring, not strictly circular but averaging rather more than 7.0m in diameter, probably possessing reasonable bilateral symmetry, and with an inferred outer ring, or concentric wall-line, of about 10.7m diameter. Of course, this wall too may not have been truly circular, for it could as easily have lain equidistant from the posts of the inner ring all around, producing a sub-circular outline lying *c.* 1.4m beyond the post-ring if the choice of 363 over 362 is sound, but *c.* 2.2m beyond if 362 be preferred.¹⁰ In the former case, and assuming a counterpart to 363 placed symmetrically with it, the long axis of the oval (actually rather pear-shaped) building would have coincided with the axial-line discussed above (*cf.* Guilbert 1976, 306; 1982a, 71); in the latter case, and assuming a symmetrical counterpart again, the building would have been somewhat flattened about the opposite axis.¹¹ In the interests of simplicity, however, the wall-line/floor-area of the Swarkestone round-house is assumed circular in Fig. 3 (as are those of the Coburg Road and Catholme examples, though this would seem perverse for the more obviously oval instance taken from Moel y Gaer). Nevertheless, the oval alternatives should not be dismissed lightly, for they could have made a significant difference in terms

of indoor floor-space, giving as little as *c.* 76m² or as much as *c.* 97m², as compared with *c.* 90m² for the circular option. These figures may be set into some kind of context by adopting Alcock's comparison to the space inside a modern three-bedroomed bungalow (1972, 33, fig. 1). Even so, it should not be forgotten that there is seldom enough archaeological evidence to establish that such a round-house actually served as a dwelling (and certainly none at Swarkestone), though sometimes sufficient signs do survive to suggest that not all can have had the same function, residential or otherwise, even where their structural imprint seems essentially the same (Guilbert 1981b, 106). In truth, the term 'round-house' is merely a generic one, a convenient shorthand for a broad class of structures linked by their round or curvilinear, but not always circular, ichnography, and not necessarily carrying any functional significance (Strang 1991 notwithstanding).

To provide a prehistoric perspective upon the order of magnitude of the Swarkestone building, some comparisons may briefly be drawn with round-houses of broadly similar design that are of various dates and recorded in various parts of Britain. The postulated wall-diameter of our example would place it above the general run of those deduced from the published data relating to well-known Middle-Bronze-Age settlement-sites on the South Downs, such as Itford Hill (Burstow and Holleyman 1957, 172–94; Musson 1970, 268–70) and Black Patch (Drewett 1982, 325–47), where the floor-area of the round-houses rarely exceeded 8m across. On the other hand, it would be on a par with larger examples of comparable age to these, at Shearplace Hill, Dorset, where it can be reckoned that House A was up to *c.* 10.4m in diameter (Guilbert 1981a, 304, figs 2 and 7.E), and Green Knowe, Peeblesshire, where Houses 2 and 3 on Platform 2 measured 10.0–10.5m across (Jobey 1980, 78–9, fig. 3; Hill 1984, 84–5). Similarly, it would be among the biggest of those at Moel y Gaer, where the floor-dimensions of the post-ring round-houses, as known or inferred, ranged in diameter from 6.5m to 10.8 × 11.5m, and where the episode of settlement characterized by these structures can be assigned to the period of transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age (Guilbert 1981b, 106, fig. 17; 1982a, 67–9). Looking north again, Structures 1 and 2 at Heslerton, Yorkshire, may stand as examples of similar structures attributable to much the same period as those at Moel y Gaer, and probably of much the same size as that at Swarkestone (Powlesland 1986, fig. 54).¹² Far greater are some of the double-ring round-houses recorded on renowned settlement-sites and hillforts of the Early Iron Age in Southern England, like House I at Little Woodbury (Bersu 1940, 78–92; Musson 1970, 271–3), House 3 at Longbridge Deverill Cow Down (Chadwick Hawkes 1994), and B1 at Crickley Hill (Dixon 1973, 58, fig. 1; 1976, 172–4, fig. 8; Guilbert 1981a, 299, fig. 8.N), each with wall-diameter of around 15m, translating into a floor-area of 170–190m², about twice that of the Swarkestone round-house. At least one in that region and of that general period, 3890 at Winklebury Camp, may have been as much as 16.5m/214m² overall (*ibid.*, 300–2, fig. 1). Broadly contemporary with these, but nearer to Swarkestone geographically, Building 500 at Bancroft, Buckinghamshire, certainly exceeded 200m² and may have measured a massive 18.6m/270m² (Williams 1994, 21–37). Closer again to Derbyshire, the outer wall-trench of each of the double-ring Huts 1 and 2 at Wakerley, Northants, shows that such buildings, of around 14.0m/154m², also occurred at a mature stage of the Iron Age (Jackson and Ambrose 1978, 124–8, 171–2, figs 1, 9 and 10; Gwilt 1997). And the concentric rings of posts of Buildings 1–3 at Thetford, Norfolk, each of about 11.0m/95m², were evidently erected at some time in the mid-1st century AD

(Gregory 1991, 48–52, 99–104, 189, figs 44, 93 and 95–96). Many more could be instanced, and from a wider geographical area, but these few, taken from sites that are prominent in the literature, should afford sufficient national context for something of the broad range of relatives of the Swarkestone round-house to be appreciated.

DATING-EVIDENCE

The related round-houses cited in the preceding paragraph can be attributed to various points between the mid-2nd millennium BC and the 1st century AD, while others that are earlier could be mentioned.¹³ This wide date-range means that the round-house at Swarkestone Lowes cannot be dated conclusively by analogy alone, making it doubly unfortunate that direct dating-evidence from trench 19 is scanty. Ditch 278, which, from its inferred relation to the round-house, might have afforded a *terminus ante quem* for the end of the life of the building, yielded only an assortment of small potsherds that are either difficult to date or liable to be residual (Elliott and Knight 1999, 127 and 136). The entrance-postholes of the round-house also produced potsherds (nine from 277, two from 366), but, with a single exception, these too are small and formally indeterminate. The exception is a fragment of flattened and faintly-cabled rim in unabraded condition (*ibid.*, 126–7, 136, fig. 17.7), which David Knight places broadly in the period of the Bronze-Age/Iron-Age transition (*ibid.*, 133). It was found high in the surviving fill of the larger lobe of 277, and, providing it was not intrusive (and there is no particular reason to suppose it to have been so, despite the apparent contamination of the sample of this feature-fill collected for flotation — see Hunt in *ibid.*, 144), it should offer a *terminus post quem* for the building, and perhaps the best approximation to the date of its use or, at all events, its demise — i.e. somewhere in the first half of the final millennium BC, but no more precisely definable in the current state of knowledge. Hence, the limited evidence of the pottery is at least seen to be in keeping with that of some of the nearest structural analogues.

Two more categories of artefact found in the round-house postholes deserve to be mentioned, one largely for the sake of completeness, the other on account of its relative rarity in such circumstances (and it may be noted that the postholes yielded no others besides these and the pottery). The first comprises four fragments of baked clay from 371, two of them bearing wattle-impressions (*ibid.*, 105) and perhaps offering a snippet of information about the superstructure of the round-house, though nothing to cause a stir, since it would usually be supposed that the wall, maybe also any internal partitioning, of such a building would have been daubed. The second may well attest to the working of flint during the life of the round-house, and therefore probably at a time when that practice had evidently diminished, at least as an art-form (Edmonds 1995, 184–9). Ring-postholes 360 and 361 contained five pieces of flintwork, which, like one from entrance-posthole 366, can be considered typical of the assemblage of Early-Mesolithic material from Swarkestone Lowes, especially as this is known to have clustered in this part of the site (Garton and Brown 1999, fig. 15). On the other hand, ring-postholes 279, 363 and 371 each incorporated flintwork that is less safely reckoned to be residual in these contexts, as next explained by Daryl Garton.

Flintwork (DG)

The two flakes from 371 differ in character from flintwork used on this site in the Early Mesolithic: one is a thick primary flake that has a damaged distal end and is burnt (Fig. 4.a); the other was struck at right-angles to several previous flakes that used a cortical platform (Fig. 4.b). Furthermore, both these are made from translucent flint, whereas much of the Early-Mesolithic material is Wolds-type flint (as defined in Garton and Brown 1999, 108). The finds from 279 include three shattered fragments and two primary cortical flakes, all calcined (it should be noted that 'calcined' is here used of material that has become whitened and crazed by what was probably more intense, or more prolonged, heat than that which affected the material described as 'burnt', which, though crazed, has not lost its original colouring and is therefore still identifiable with its parent material; since most items discussed here are calcined, it follows that little of it can be sourced even in broad terms). To judge from the similar appearance of their bashed cortical surface, the pair of primary flakes found in 279 could have originated from a single nodule; although these flakes cannot be fitted back together (which would have made the case more convincing), their common provenance adds to the argument that these were not residual pieces from much earlier activity. One of them is complete (Fig. 4.c), measuring 24mm in breadth by 38mm in length; and it is thick, with a thick plain platform and a prominent cone of percussion, suggestive of a hard hammer-blow, typical of those used to remove cortical flakes. One of the flints from 363 is also a calcined fragment; the other is a tiny unburnt spall.

Although items like those from postholes 279 and 371 could occur in Early-Mesolithic assemblages, such thick cortical flakes, struck with broad plain platforms, are more characteristic of later technologies, particularly those of the Bronze Age (e.g. Ford *et al.* 1984, 162–4; Pryor 1985, 163; Healy 1991, 117). It may be relevant to note that similar flakes, including a fragment from one that had been made into a scraper (Fig. 4.d), were more plentiful in ditch 278 (Garton and Brown 1999, 114, tables 4 and 5), which, it may be recalled, was later than the round-house, though perhaps not significantly so (Elliott and Knight 1999, 97). Although few in number, these finds could be indicative of some use of flint during Late-Bronze-Age or Early-Iron-Age activity around the round-house. This suggestion can only be strengthened by observing that most of the nineteen burnt or calcined flints from trench 19 (i.e. nineteen of 168 flints from its entire 85m length) came from contexts that either belonged, or lay close, to the round-house. The seven of these

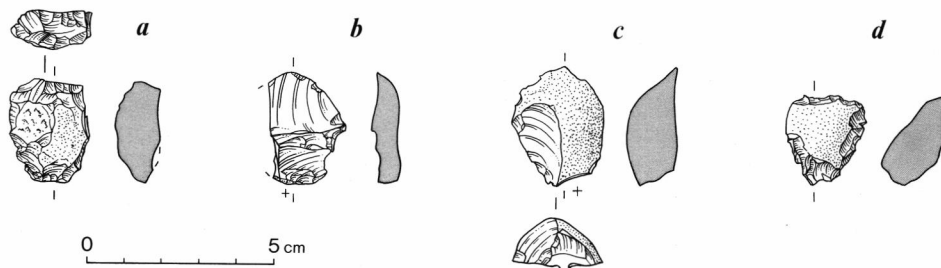


Fig. 4. Swarkestone Lowes: flint flakes from postholes 371 (a and b) and 279 (c) of the post-ring round-house, and from ditch 278 (d). + indicates point of percussion where known. Scale 1:2. Drawn by Richard Sheppard.

from postholes of the round-house have already been enumerated, and eight others were in ditch 278 (while four occurred singly in features away from the round-house). Admittedly, the material from 278 includes two burnt/calced blades that seem certain to be Mesolithic; but it contained another two (both calcined) which, though not diagnostic in themselves, *could* relate to a Bronze-Age assemblage (a broad flake and a fragment of discoidal core with flake-removals). In addition, the recovery of *only* calcined pieces from 279 may suggest that burning affected all these, perhaps as a group, shortly before they entered this posthole, or possibly at the time they did so. If derived from the adjacent ground-surface, rather than from some depth within deposits through which the posthole was cut, these pieces could be broadly contemporary with the round-house.

Where present in small amounts and mixed with earlier material, itself generally more ubiquitous, Late-Bronze-Age flintwork can be difficult to identify with confidence (e.g. Holgate 1988; Saville 1995, 20); and examples are seldom encountered in circumstances uncontaminated by earlier material (e.g. Clark and Fell 1953, 34–5; Orme *et al.* 1983, 63; Winham 1985, 84–5; Herne 1991, 73). However, in trench 19 at Swarkestone, the blade-technology of the predominant Early-Mesolithic flintwork contrasts with the less controlled style of flaking seen in the pieces from the later contexts. Since diagnostic items of Late-Neolithic or Early-Bronze-Age types are absent from trench 19 (Garton and Brown 1999, 114), the distinction between this late flintwork and the earlier material is more convincing here than is often the case. The three most complete flakes from the round-house postholes are illustrated in Fig. 4 together with the fragmentary scraper from the later ditch, so as to provide some insight into the form of flintwork that may occur more widely than is sometimes appreciated in association with the remains of settlements of the early part of the 1st millennium BC.

LOCAL COMPARANDA

Returning finally to the structure of the Swarkestone round-house, the more local analogues for this double-ring style of building should be considered. They are few on the ground, or, at any rate, few have yet been recorded, in the northern Midlands. In so far as the writer is aware, none of the type is known for certain elsewhere in Derbyshire;¹⁴ while only two other examples can be adduced from sites on the gravel-terraces of the Trent Valley.

The post-ring round-house at Catholme, already mentioned in support of several points, lay some 23km upstream of Swarkestone, near Barton-under-Needwood in Staffordshire, where it was discovered adventitiously in extensive excavations during the 1970s (Losco-Bradley *et al.* in preparation). More completely preserved than that at Swarkestone, the building-plan at Catholme had an eight-post internal ring of *c.* 6.5m diameter, and an inferred wall-line lying barely 0.5m outside the post-ring, giving a floor-area of only *c.* 44m², and therefore perhaps less than half that of the Swarkestone building (Fig. 3). The position of the easterly entrance of the Catholme round-house was marked not only by a pair of elongated postholes in the equivalent position to 366 and 277 at Swarkestone (and, though not waisted at Catholme, these each contained an oval post-pipe, perhaps resulting from a conflation of contiguous uprights) but also by an extra pair of smaller postholes positioned beyond these and interpretable as the outer foundations of a short porch. The Catholme round-house can reasonably be attributed

to the Late Bronze Age by virtue of potsherds found in its postholes and in adjacent pits, and it may not have been significantly different in date from that which stood on Swarkestone Lowes.

The second local analogue, under excavation even as this paper is being written in 1998, is another with nine-post ring, promising to provide a still closer comparison to the Swarkestone structure; details of its plan and evidence of its date will be awaited eagerly. This round-house was also uncovered by chance, during routine archaeological evaluation of a site undergoing development, situated to the north of Castle Donington, less than 1km beyond the border of Derbyshire, and just 8km east of Swarkestone (thanks to Patrick Clay, University of Leicester Archaeological Services, for information).

Although further instances are surely to be expected as more prehistoric settlement-sites are excavated, not least on the gravels, no post-built and probably double-ring round-house with so clear-cut a ground-plan as any of these three has hitherto been published from any place in this region. Indeed, Willis (1997, 208–9, 212–13) has lately remarked not only upon the rarity of recorded round-houses with an internal post-ring but also upon the scarcity of evidence for structures of any form before the Late Iron Age in the East Midlands (by which he means Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire).¹⁵ Accordingly, the Swarkestone Lowes round-house can be regarded as a valuable acquisition for the regional record of prehistory, as well as a useful addition to the ever-growing corpus of building-plans from Bronze-Age and Iron-Age contexts across Britain.

NOTES

- ¹ Something similar can sometimes be inferred tentatively from examining the records of excavated round-houses, at least among those instances where excavators have supplied sufficient information concerning the depths of postholes to facilitate such considerations — e.g. at Glanfeinion, Montgomeryshire, where prefabrication offers an alternative to differential erosion as a possible explanation of the variations in the recorded depths of the ring-postholes (Britnell *et al.* 1997, 180, 184).
- ² Any temptation to infer an emplacement for a loom from this location should be viewed with caution, for the loom-explanation of posthole-pairs is contentious. Although put forward elsewhere, notably by Brewster (1963, 25–6), interpreting what was fundamentally a posthole-pair of *c.* 2.0m span as ‘the site of a vertical loom’, also supposedly within a round-house, Hut I at Staple Howe, Yorkshire, this notion has been discredited by Britnell (1977), followed by Chadwick Hawkes (1994, 68 — disowning Chadwick 1960, 19, though the loom-interpretation persists in respect of Longbridge Deverill Cow Down — Parker Pearson 1996, 120), but others have repeated it for other sites — e.g. Woodward (1991, 46, 68), in relation to a pair or pairs, probably *c.* 1.2m span, inside Hut 864 at Rowden Pasture, Dorset; and Harding and Blake (1993, 29–31), apropos of that, comprising C3 and C4, within the round-house at Pimperne Down, Dorset. However, the Pimperne ‘pair’ seems so good a match in terms of situation to the supposed ‘dresser’ at Longbridge Deverill as to imply a similarity of function, whatever that may actually have been; and it is in such repeated patterns that the best prospect of discerning a function for such features may ultimately lie. Hence, it is of considerable interest to remark three others that are reminiscent of the Pimperne and Longbridge Deverill examples, admittedly not all regarded as posthole-pairs by their excavators, but each apparently of a similar order of span (though this is difficult to determine exactly in all cases, because of the

nature of the component features), each positioned alongside the southern sector of the inner post-ring, and therefore occupying much the same spot in relation to the easterly entrance of its respective round-house, each of which was a sizable building of two or more rings, and all belonging to an early stage in the Iron Age: postholes 285 and 305 inside Building 500 at Bancroft, Buckinghamshire (Williams 1994, 26–7, 37, figs 12 and 16 — incidentally, eschewing interpretation as a loom); ‘irregularly shaped pits (828 and 830)’ within Round-House 1128 at Dunston Park, Berkshire (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1995, 73, 87, figs 35 and 36 — noting the resemblance to the Longbridge Deverill ‘dresser’); and perhaps lurking within ‘hollow complex Hb’ inside House I at Little Woodbury, Wiltshire (Bersu 1940, 82, figs 20 and 21).

- ³ Besides those cited above, see, for example, Bersu 1940, 94–6; Ellison and Drewett 1971, 190; Reynolds 1993, 99–100 — each drawing upon ethnographic rather than archaeological evidence for possible explanations of posthole-pairs.
- ⁴ The 1980s and 1990s have seen the publication of a variety of additional post-ring round-houses preserving evidence for a concentric wall, including the ‘wall-grooves’ on Platforms 2 and 5 at Green Knowe, Peeblesshire (Jobey 1980, 76–82, figs 3 and 4); the ‘external slot’ of the ‘house’ at Lookout Plantation, Northumberland (Monaghan 1994, 29–32, fig. 2); the ‘slight outer wall-trench’ of House 3 at Groundwell Farm, Wiltshire (Gingell 1981, 44, fig. 7); perhaps also that of House 2 at the latter site, if the ‘central four-post structure’ can really be counted as a post-ring (*ibid.*, 41–4, fig. 6); the outer, or ‘secondary’, ring of postholes of House 3 at Longbridge Deverill Cow Down, Wiltshire, if its proposed interpretation as a ‘verandah . . . inserted under the eaves’ is challenged (*pace* Chadwick Hawkes 1994, 58–9, 61–2, fig. 4); the outer ring of postholes in Buildings 1, 2 and 3 at Thetford, Norfolk (Gregory 1991, 48–52, 99–104, figs 44, 93 and 95–6); and the ‘revetment wall’ of Hut 864 at Rowden Pasture, Dorset (Woodward 1991, 43–5, fig. 23). Cumulatively, these diverse, but all demonstrably double-ring, ichnographies can only serve to strengthen the argument for a double-ring interpretation in such cases as Swarkestone Lowes, where the evidence is more circumstantial.
- ⁵ Rather more than 50% of the postulated *c.* 31m course of the wall of this round-house actually lay outside the limits of trench 19, but this is sure to have been destroyed during the construction-works begun in 1995, for the new road passes through a deep cutting on Swarkestone Lowes.
- ⁶ In some cases, the equivalents of these postholes became so exaggeratedly long as to take on the proportions of short slots, possibly implying a greater structural complexity at this point in some round-houses than it seems necessary to deduce at Swarkestone Lowes. The most fully debated examples occurred in some stage of House A at Shearplace Hill, Dorset (Rahtz and ApSimon 1962, 303, fig. 5; Avery and Close-Brooks 1969, 348–50; Guilbert 1981a, 304–6, fig. 2); others are to be found, for example, in Huts B, D, E and H at Itford Hill, Sussex (Burstow and Holleyman 1957, 174, 176, 177, 181, 190–2, figs 6, 8, 9 and 13), in House B at Bishops Cannings Down, Wiltshire (Gingell 1992, 10, fig. 5), in Structure 3890 at Winklebury Camp, Hampshire (Smith 1977, 36, fig. 8; Guilbert 1981a, 300–2, fig. 1), and in some of the ‘huts’ at Wakerley, Northants (Jackson and Ambrose 1978, 124–33, figs 1 and 9–11), to name but a few.
- ⁷ On the other hand, the example of House 3 at Longbridge Deverill Cow Down, Wiltshire, would appear to show that unduly large and elongate postholes could be made for the entranceway of a round-house even where the superstructure evidently required that only a single and comparatively slender upright be bedded in each hole (Chadwick Hawkes 1994, 64, fig. 4).
- ⁸ This explanation of the double postholes at Little Woodbury is unfortunately entangled in a rather garbled passage of that eminent excavation-report, and it should be noted especially that Bersu’s reference (1940, 83) to ‘the entrance-posts of ring I, E F’ should surely read ‘. . . G H’, while his ‘double posts outside the entrance, G H’ should read ‘. . . J K’.

- ⁹ A few examples selected from numerous references in the subsequent literature can illustrate how the idea of 'axial-line symmetry' has been adopted or adapted by others in elucidating a variety of round-house ground-plans: Hill 1984, 84–5; Ellison and Rahtz 1987, 264; Kelly 1988, 149; Fasham *et al.* 1989, 144; Reid 1989, 4; Benson *et al.* 1990, 185–6, 238; Woodward 1991, 68; Monaghan 1994, 38; Williams 1994, 36–7, fig. 20; Britnell *et al.* 1997, 195; Oswald 1997, 89, 94.
- ¹⁰ In fact, round-houses with surviving evidence for the wall-line can demonstrate that exact concentricity of outer wall with inner post-ring was not always observed — e.g. in Hut 864 at Rowden Pasture, Dorset (Woodward 1991, fig. 23), the distinctly oval 'flint revetment', taken to mark the line of the external wall, lay *c.* 0.9–1.6m beyond the internal post-ring, and the latter was perhaps less deficient than may appear at first sight if it is allowed that pits 771 and 772 could have removed one or two postholes (*pace ibid.*, 45, 71–2); and in the nameless round-house at Lookout Plantation, Northumberland (Monaghan 1994, fig. 2), the multangular 'external slot' was rather eccentric to the post-ring, though actually less so than the excavator has implied, thereby nullifying much of the complexity of superstructure which he has inferred (*pace ibid.*, 37–8).
- ¹¹ The latter arrangement is encountered less often than the former, but is not unknown — e.g. in Round-House 491 at Bray, Berkshire (Barnes and Cleal 1995, 11, fig. 10), which can perhaps be re-interpreted as a porchless double-ring building with eroded wall-line measuring *c.* 10.3 × 9.1m, assuming this to have lain equidistant from the *c.* 7.7 × 6.5m post-ring on all sides, and to have been aligned upon a doorway founded in postholes 556 and 611 at the south-east; and in Hut 2 at Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire (Jackson 1977, 17–20, fig. 8), which seems reasonably regarded as double-ring, though the composition of the inner ring of postholes is not easy to extricate from among the postholes encompassed by the 11.2 × 10.4m 'wall-trench'.
- ¹² At Heselton, Structure 1 might be re-interpreted as a double-ring round-house, with eleven-post internal ring, lost wall-line of *c.* 10.7m diameter, and easterly porch formed by Structure 7 (*pace* Powlesland 1986, 134, 140, figs 54 and 58); while Structure 2 may have been much as outlined by Powlesland (1986, 134, figs 54 and 58), though perhaps lacking posthole 1663, and with postholes 1090 and 1672 seeming likely to have held a door-frame on the line of a concentric outer wall of *c.* 11.3m diameter, rather than a 'porch'.
- ¹³ Briefly, earlier examples might include Roundhouse 146 at Stackpole Warren, Pembrokeshire (Benson *et al.* 1990, 185–9), and Structure I at Redgate Hill, Hunstanton, Norfolk (Healy *et al.* 1993, 22–4, 73–5), regarded as 'Early Bronze Age' and 'probably Early Bronze Age' respectively.
- ¹⁴ There is an obvious possibility that some of the postholes and stakeholes uncovered by the 1960s excavations on platforms within the hillfort on Mam Tor belonged to round-houses (and presumably to the centuries around the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, like much pottery found there); those on Platform 3 should be singled out for comment here because they could easily have formed part of a double-ring structure of *c.* 11m overall diameter, with inner ring of postholes and outer stakes-in-groove wall-line (Coombs and Thompson 1979, 22, fig. 9), but this platform-floor would need to have been more fully preserved (as evidently are others on Mam Tor), and more extensively excavated, for the point to be proven. Some have seen fit to endorse the excavator's view of four 'post-sockets' revealed in the 1960s at Swine Sty (Machin 1971, 7–8, 10, fig. 2, in which they are presumably indicated with variable precision by the 's' symbols), regarding them as sufficient to demonstrate a 'circular timber hut' (Hart 1981, 65; while Barnatt [1986, 46; 1987, 396; Barnatt and Smith 1997, 28] is little more cautious), but interpretation of so few postholes demands wariness, particularly when they appear not to adhere closely to the circumference of a circle (and especially as excavation can sometimes show that distinct arcs in the enclosure-walls of prehistoric settlements do not necessarily reflect the positions of 'circular houses' [*pace ibid.*,

29], as witness Crawcwellt, Merioneth [Crew 1995, 32]); it can but be concluded that further excavation alone could now elucidate not only the pattern and purpose of these and any other postholes which may have accompanied them but also their context, for it has lately been recognized that the assemblage of artefacts from this site ranges from Late-Neolithic flintwork to pottery similar in age to that from Mam Tor (Barnatt and Smith 1997, 30), making the frailties of the Swine Sty settlement all the more palpable, and defying the suggestion that detailed publication of those excavations will prove to be 'of national importance' (*pace* Hart 1981, 65). Rather better defined, but no less tantalizing because no better dated, is a group of postholes recorded in 1992 during excavations by T&PAT across the line of Grey Ditch, Bradwell, for this *may* represent most of a post-ring round-house, perhaps even of double-ring form, overlain by a ploughsoil containing Romano-British pottery, which later became buried by the bank of the linear earthwork; it is intended that this structure and stratigraphy will be reported fully in a future volume of *DAJ*.

- ¹⁵ This region can, however, boast some good examples of apparently single-ring post-built round-houses, in which the doorway was evidently integral with an external wall built about an approximate circle of spaced posts. This form is well seen among the southern round-house complex in Area I/VI at Grove Farm, Enderby, Leicestershire, said to be dated by pottery to the 2nd–1st centuries BC or thereabouts (Clay 1992, 17, 21, 33, figs 5, 7 and 14). An instance that is of particular interest in the present context was recorded in 1997 in a quarry on the Trent gravels at Rampton, Nottinghamshire (Garton and Priest 1998; thanks to Daryl Garton for additional information), for this incorporated double postholes at the entrance and appears to have embodied a comparable brand of bilateral symmetry in its single-ring ichnography to that observed in double-ring round-houses at Swarkestone Lowes and other settlements of the Bronze Age and Iron Age, though the Rampton round-house may not be closely datable.

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