

A NEWLY DISCOVERED 'CUP AND RING' CARVING IN ECCLESALL WOOD, SHEFFIELD

By JOHN BARNATT

(Department of Prehistory and Archaeology, Sheffield University)
and

PETER FRITH

This well preserved carving (Fig.1) is located near the northeastern edge of Ecclesall Wood (SK 32658320), on the slightly domed upper surface of a low earthfast slab of coarse sandstone. It was first noticed in 1981 by one of us (PF), when it was partially covered by leaf mould and soil. Today these have disappeared and the stone stands proud, next to a newly formed footpath. The fine preservation of much of the carving suggests it has had a protective cover for much of its life.

This is the first prehistoric carving to be discovered in the eastern foothills of the southern Pennines. In contrast, further north are numerous examples of cup and ring art which centre round Ilkley Moor, to the northwest of Leeds (Cowling, 1946; Raistrick, 1934-6). However, the nearest comparable rock art to the Ecclesall Wood example consists of several carvings to the southwest, on the eastern gritstone moors of the Peak District (Barnatt and Reeder, 1982); the closest of these around Bar Brook are only nine kilometres away. The Ecclesall Wood carving can perhaps be regarded as an outlying example of Derbyshire 'cup and ring' art, although stylistically it has elements of design found in both regions.

This fine carving is unusual in several respects. The most prominent features are three sub-oval, deeply cut rings, each surrounding 1-4 shallower cups connected by gutters. Typically, cup and ring art has a solitary cup surrounded by near-circular rings. The occurrence of internal multiple cups and relatively irregular rings is a feature of Peak District rock art but is rare elsewhere. However, the gritstone examples have 10-14 cups, while examples with only a small number of cups are also found in the Ilkley Moor area. The central ring with its internal cups has been emphasised by cutting away the sandstone on three sides to form a raised oval boss. This interesting feature is possibly unique and illustrates that the carving was designed with visual prominence in mind, rather than being executed purely as a ceremonial act. Another unusual feature of the carving is the gutters near the edge of the slab, which surround much of the carving. Internal gutters subdivide the slab into several irregular, 'enclosure-like', zones. Similar features have recently been recorded at a newly discovered carving on Ilkley Moor (Anne Haigh: *pers. comm.*). Several carvings around Ilkley have linear elements which occasionally enclose other features: well known examples are the Idol Stone and the Tree of Life Stone.

The various elements of the Ecclesall Wood carving are not cut to a consistent depth; frequently, shallow features are intersected by deeper ones. This feature gives the distinct impression that the carving is not executed as a unitary design but has been modified over time. However, successive coherent designs are not apparent. There are several irregular patches of shallow carving on the slab which may represent attempts to cut away obtrusive features of earlier designs. Elsewhere on the slab they serve to emphasize particular features, as with the 'boss'. If the carving was modified and some features became redundant, these may have been rendered unobtrusive if those elements of the carving to be retained were painted, while others were not. The evolution of specific carvings over time is a topic which needs much more research before we reach a fuller understanding of this kind of prehistoric rock art.

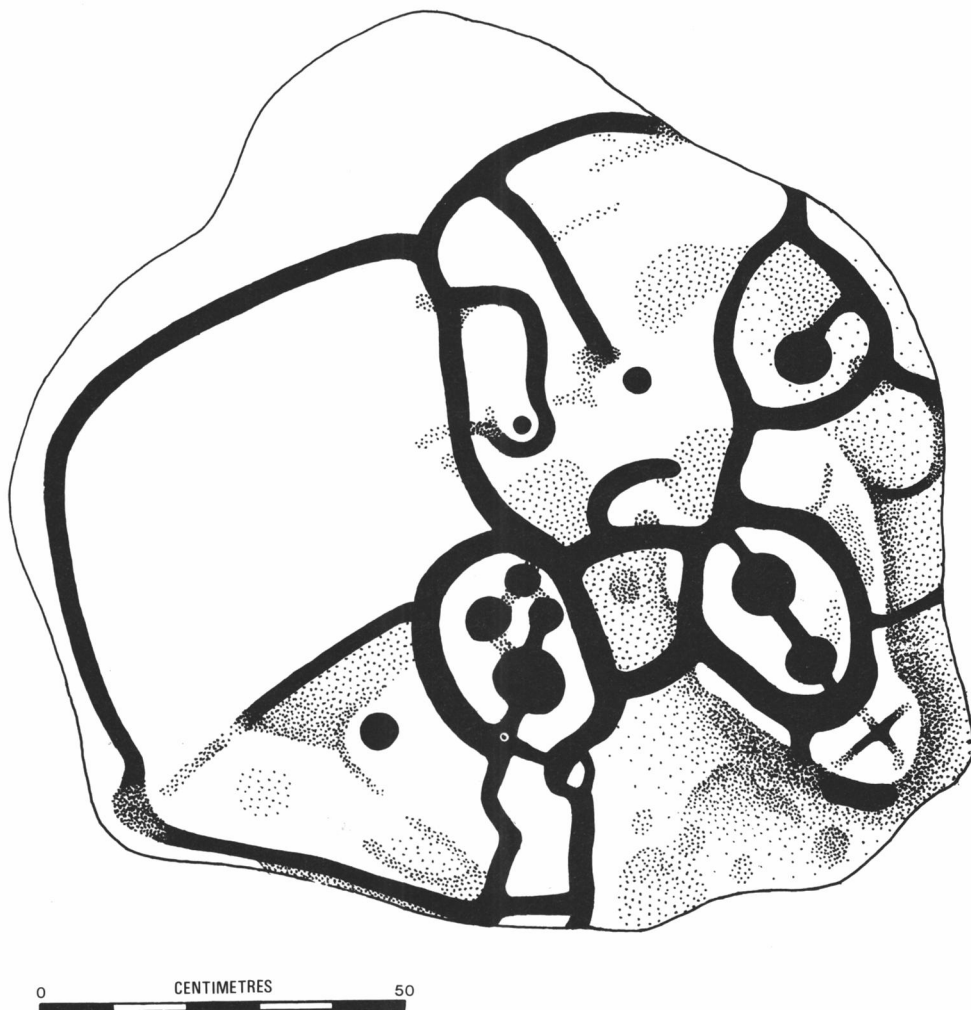


Fig. 1 The 'cup and ring' carving in Ecclesall Wood, Sheffield (SK 32658320).

REFERENCES

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