

## EXCAVATIONS AT THE BULL RING HENGE, DOVE HOLES, DERBYSHIRE, 1984-85

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### SUMMARY

In March 1984, substantial earth-moving work in the immediate environs of the Bull Ring henge made it necessary to carry out rescue excavations around the southern entrance to the monument. Unfortunately, the area had already sustained extensive damage, and only undated and post-medieval features were discovered, together with scattered lithics from disturbed contexts. A detailed survey of the henge was also made to facilitate the monitoring of subsequent changes to the site .

### THE SITE

Bull Ring henge lies at 340 metres O.D., close to the western edge of the undulating limestone plateau which forms the major topographical feature of the central Peak District (Fig. 1). The site is only *c.* 200 metres east of the boundary between the carboniferous limestone and overlying shales. A kilometre to the west, the gritstones of the western moorland form a high escarpment, Black Edge, which rises to over 500 metres O.D. A short distance to the north-west is the only major break in the western upland, Barmoor Clough, allowing easy access to the Cheshire plain. To the south and south-east, between the site and the river Wye, are extensive areas of relatively flat limestone plateau, which were particularly suitable for extensive exploitation by prehistoric farmers. The monument was carefully sited on the crest of a slight ridge, making it clearly visible from most places up to about a kilometre away.

Some 200 metres east of the henge is the steep dry-valley of Dove Holes Dale; a tributary dry-valley lies a similar distance to the south: both have been extensively modified by limestone quarrying. The henge lies in one of the least aesthetically pleasing spots in the Peak, surrounded by quarries, sports fields, a cemetery and the village of Dove Holes.

Today, the henge comprises a circular bank and internal ditch, which are interrupted by two entrances, orientated north-south (Fig. 2). These entrances give access to a flat central area, 53.0 x 46.0 metres in diameter. The bank has a crest diameter of 82.0 x 86.0 metres; its width varies from 9.0 to 11.0 metres, and it stands on average 1.0 metre high. The ditch is at present 8.0-12.0 metres wide and 1.0-0.5 metre deep. In the southern half of the site, bank and ditch are separated by traces of a berm, originally a maximum of 5.0 metres wide. This berm is not visible to the north, but it is unclear whether its absence there results from the bank and ditch being originally closer together, or differential erosion. A short distance to the south-west, outside the henge bank, is a large mound which stands over 1.5 metres high, and is at present 27.0 x 21.0 metres in plan; this is probably a barrow.

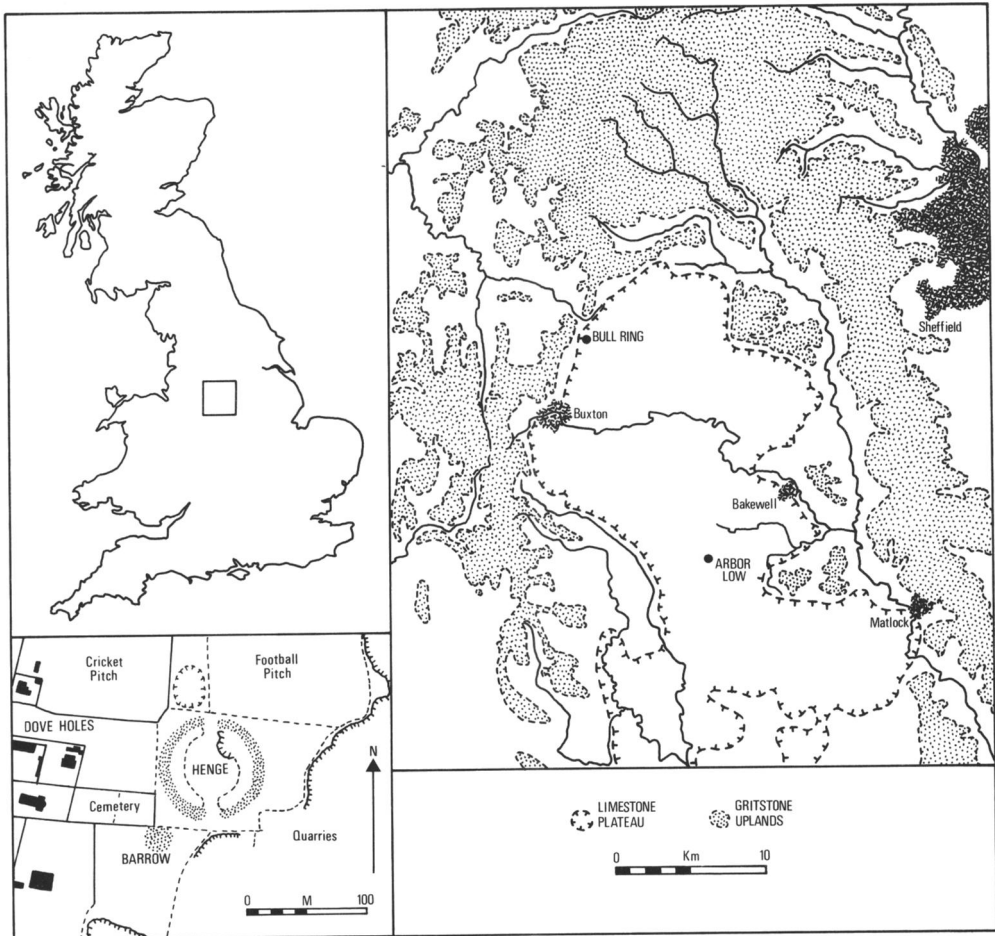


Fig. 1 Bull Ring henge: location

The Bull Ring closely resembles the henge at Arbor Low, seventeen kilometres to the SSE, except that it has no orthostats within the earthwork. However, it should be noted that the Bull Ring has been subjected to more intense agricultural activity than Arbor Low over recent centuries. The site was first documented in 1789 by Pilkington, who noted that “all the stones, excepting one, are removed.” This suggests that some form of orthostatic setting once existed. Pilkington also noted a drystone wall which bisected the site from entrance to entrance. At some time earlier in the eighteenth century the whole area had been enclosed by small sub-rectangular fields defined by walls; it may well be that orthostats were broken up and removed at this time. Immediately beyond the henge bank, both north and south, other walls ran at right angles to that already noted. The site was also subject to plough damage. Pilkington remarked that at the time of his visit the western half of the henge interior was sown with corn. Today, both halves of the interior have rig and furrow running from north to south (Fig. 2:A; see also Fig. 2 for features B-S in the following). There is a gap at the centre along the course of the former wall (B). Ploughing also encroached upon the ditch immediately west of the northern entrance; as a result the ditch is less steep here than elsewhere.

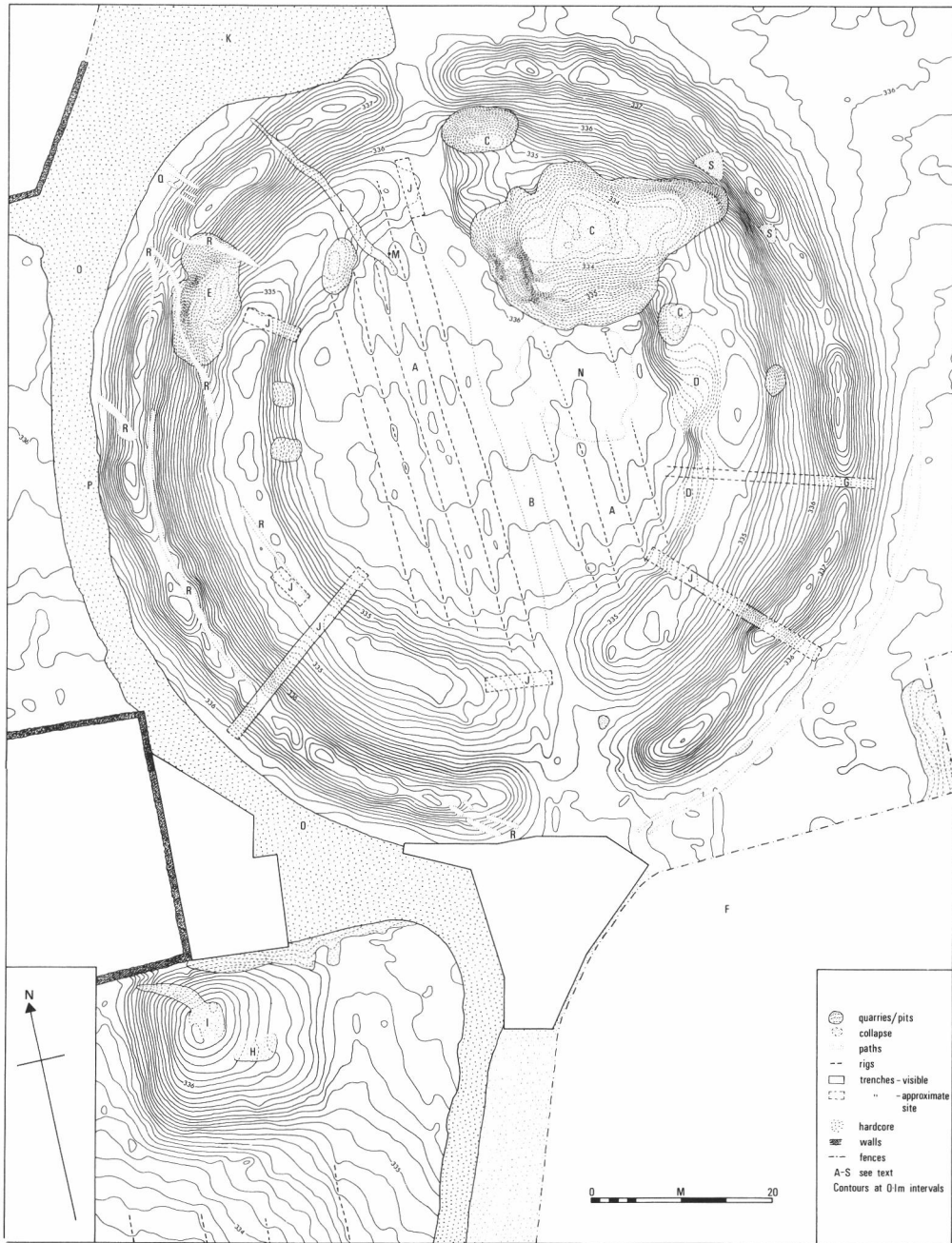


Fig. 2 Bull Ring henge: present state of the monument

The gap between rig and furrow suggests that ploughing ceased after the central wall was removed. To judge from Ordnance Survey maps, this removal took place between 1840 and 1878. The nineteenth century saw other damage done to the site. In the north-eastern quadrant, quarries (C), started c. 1830 (Turner, 1902), lowered the depth of the ditch and cut into the central platform. Two ramps which provided access for these operations from the centre can still be seen (D). In the north-western quadrant, the external edge of the ditch was cut by a further small quarry (E). In the course of quarrying a human skeleton was found, but no details were recorded (Turner, 1902). Fortunately quarrying ceased before more of the site was destroyed.

In the nineteenth century several changes also occurred in the henge's environs. To the west, immediately outside the henge bank, a drystone wall had been built by 1878. To the east, there was extensive quarrying for much of the nineteenth century, to feed a series of limekilns to the south-east. These quarries came within 10.0 metres of the southern entrance of the henge (F), and within 35.0 metres of its eastern bank. In the south-eastern quadrant, spoil was tipped within 10.0 metres of the bank; the tips were removed when this area was converted into a sports pitch in the late-1970s. A small, shallow quarry, of unknown date, also existed 20.0 metres to the north-west of the northern entrance of the henge, but has now been filled in.

Until recently little further damage was done to the site. The land was used as permanent pasture, and the only known disturbances to the henge are two small archaeological excavations and the building of a wooden hut at the base of the quarry in the north-eastern quadrant.

In 1902, Salt, Ward and others dug a trench, c. 25 feet (7.5 metres) long across the ditch on the western side. This is no longer visible on the ground. Unfortunately, the results of the excavation were never adequately published, and the finds have been lost. It was reported (Turner, 1902; Ward, 1905) that at the base of the ditch-side were two flint flakes, and at the base of the ditch were sherds of pottery, the fabric of which was described as consisting of "half-burned" coarse clay with quartz grit, "reddish outside and bluish black inside — a well known type." The trench which cuts through the bank on the ESE (G), is of unknown date and presumably derives from an unpublished excavation.

The mound to the south-west of the henge had a slit trench dug on its top during the 1939-45 war (H) (Alcock, 1950). There are indications that digging has also taken place at the mound crest (I), perhaps in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, but there is no documentation of this (Marsden, 1977). Today the mound is sub-rectangular in plan. However, its edges have been modified: it may originally have been oval, and thus is analogous to the Gib Hill barrow adjacent to Arbor Low (Radley, 1968). The eastern and western edges have been truncated by eighteenth and nineteenth century ploughing: rig and furrow is visible here. Beyond the southern edge is a headland. The northern margin has been cut by a drystone wall which stood here until recently.

In March 1949, Alcock excavated six small trenches within the henge (J) (Alcock, 1950). He concentrated primarily on the bank and ditch in order to obtain dating evidence. Alcock concluded that the bank was originally between 5.5 and 7.0 metres wide, and stood about 2.0 metres high. The internal ditch was steep-sided, between 8.0 and 12.0 metres wide, and had silted by between 0.5 and 1.0 metre. Originally, before erosion, it would have been between 1.2 and 2.1 metres deep and 5.0 - 6.5 metres wide. Its base was very irregular, cutting bedrock and natural, clay-filled fissures. Erosion of the upper ditch sides had taken place, and to some degree this had removed the original berm between bank and ditch. The only finds at the base of the ditch were fragments of bone, an ox molar and a small undecorated body-sherd of a coarse buff ware of undiagnostic type. A small rim-sherd of a smooth-surfaced black fabric was found 15cms up the ditch side. Alcock's suggestion that this was from a beaker is not supported by its profile,

which is more in character with a food vessel (P. Beswick, *pers. comm.*). It is a great pity the pottery from the 1902 excavation was lost, as this could have helped further interpretation. Seven flints were also found within the ditch in 1949, but none is closely datable (see Appendix).

Alcock dug two small trenches to investigate the entrance causeways, and demonstrated that they were original; no features were found. He also probed a small area of the interior in search of stoneholes of a postulated circle of similar dimensions to that at Arbor Low. That he found none does not negate the possibility of orthostatic settings: even if a stone circle once existed the stone holes may well have been shallow as at Arbor Low (Barnatt, *in press*), and they would anyway be difficult, if not impossible, to detect by probing because of the irregular nature of the fissured bedrock. No search was made for central features or portal stones.

In the late-1970s the ownership of the site and surrounding land changed. All the drystone walls surrounding the site, with the exception of the cemetery wall to the south-west, were removed and the land given over to sports fields. Since this date, damage to the site and its environs has accelerated. (Unfortunately, as with many long-standing scheduled sites, the protected area at the Bull Ring stops at the edges of the most obvious features.) Immediately outside the northern entrance, a hardcore parking area and changing rooms have been constructed (K), with no opportunity given for archaeological excavation. A shallow trench has been dug across the bank to the north-west (L), to house a cable to a spotlight in the central area (M - now removed).

For several years a large bonfire was lit on November 5th in the north-eastern quadrant of the central area (N) (the Community Association has now agreed that further fires will not take place). As a result, the rig and furrow which once crossed this quadrant is largely no longer apparent, and no doubt archaeological data below the surface have been severely damaged. In 1984, the north-eastern quadrant suffered more damage when timber uprights were set into the ground to support a temporary stage, used to crown the May queen.

In March 1984, contractors laid a hardcore road (O) to facilitate the filling of a quarry *c.* 100 metres SSW of the henge. This road clipped the western edge of the henge bank (at P); the latter was also disturbed to the north-west by the encroachment of heavy plant (at Q). A large area between the southern entrance of the henge and the south-western mound was also stripped of topsoil, and was intended to have further hardcore spread on it. Fortunately, these operations were noticed by Dr P. Stonehouse and rescue excavations were arranged. These took place in the period 22nd March — 27th April, 1984; further work was executed between 13th and 23rd May, 1985. The trenches were backfilled with hardcore by the site owners after excavations were completed. At present negotiations are under way to reach a management agreement with the owners of the site. It is hoped that these will be successful in preventing further damage. However, growing public access to the site is bound to increase the likelihood of long term erosion. Some has already taken place: several tracks are noticeable (R); and in places the turf has been broken, exposing the rubble of the bank. Small natural collapses of the bank to the east have occurred (S). In the course of the 1985 excavations, several minor repairs were made to the henge bank: features L, Q, R and S were filled with soil and turfed over. During the 1984 excavations, a detailed survey of the monument and its immediate environs was undertaken to document past damage and facilitate future management. The survey and excavation archive has been deposited with the Derbyshire County Council Sites and Monuments Archive at the Planning Department, County Offices, Matlock; the finds are held by Buxton Museum, Buxton.

## THE EXCAVATIONS

Immediately prior to excavation in mid-March 1984, contractors had stripped topsoil beyond the southern entrance of the henge over an area extending from about 0.5 metre from the quarry edge to the east, to the cemetery wall to the west. Through the centre of this area they had laid a rough, hardcore track, which largely utilised building rubble. Immediately to the west of the track were further large tips of rubble, intended to be spread over the adjacent stripped areas.

Excavation commenced on both sides of the track, and continued until the area stripped of topsoil had been completely examined (Fig. 3). Initially it was planned to link the two trenches by removing the hardcore track. However, after it became clear that the hardcore rubble had been compressed so deeply into the subsoil that damage to archaeological features was likely to have been severe, this area was not examined. The area to the east of the track (Trench A) was excavated in March-April, 1984. At its northern end Trench A also included a narrow strip which had not been mechanically stripped but which had been disturbed by heavy plant. Excavation of the area to the west of the track (Trench B) was also commenced in March 1984, but in April drought conditions cracked the clay subsoil to such an extent that digging became very difficult. By this time the site owners, because of problems over planning permission, had suspended their plans to use the hardcore track. As a result, a second season became possible, and excavation was postponed until May, 1985. Trench B was completed during this second season, and a small extension to Trench A was dug in its north-western corner further to investigate features found the season before.

After both trenches had been initially cleaned, a large number of darker areas cutting the friable yellow-brown clay subsoil were recorded as potential features (Trench A: total 206; Trench B: total 89). However, as excavation proceeded, it soon became clear that the majority of these were the result of damage to the subsoil sustained during the mechanical stripping, which had been done during wet weather. The spurious features included both linear hollows, where the mechanical excavator had sunk into the surface, and a number of depressions, up to fifteen centimetres deep, where it had taken irregular scoops out of the subsoil. In places it was clear that the upper subsoil had suffered extensive removal, although the precise depth of the damage was difficult to assess. In Trench A, the only intact soil profile was to the north. Here 20.0-25.0 cms of a dark grey-brown humus overlay the clay subsoil. To the west and south the stripping had removed all indications as to the original level of the subsoil surface. To the east the presence of a former drystone wall by the trench edge prevented original subsoil levels being assessed. In Trench B the southern and western trench edges were likewise disturbed by drystone walls. Spot heights suggested that only the top 0-5.0 cms of subsoil had been removed over much of both trenches prior to excavation. However, there were exceptions. In the north-western quadrant of Trench A, a broad scoop, running from east to west, had removed 10.0-15.0 cms of subsoil. Smaller scoops at the western edge of Trench A suggested that 10.0-20.0 cms of subsoil had been removed adjacent to the line of track (and, presumably, from under it) prior to hardcore being laid. (The hardcore rubble had been compressed into the subsoil a further 5.0-15.0 cms.) The excavation plan (Fig. 3) includes the major features created by the mechanical excavator, but superficial irregularities caused by the churning of the surface by machinery have been omitted.

A second series of potential features proved, on further investigation, to be of natural origin and is also omitted from Fig. 3. The subsoil was variable, particularly in Trench B, where there were noticeably stony patches, some with clearly defined edges. These stones were of glacial origin and comprised rounded quartzite pebbles, small limestones, sandstone cobbles and

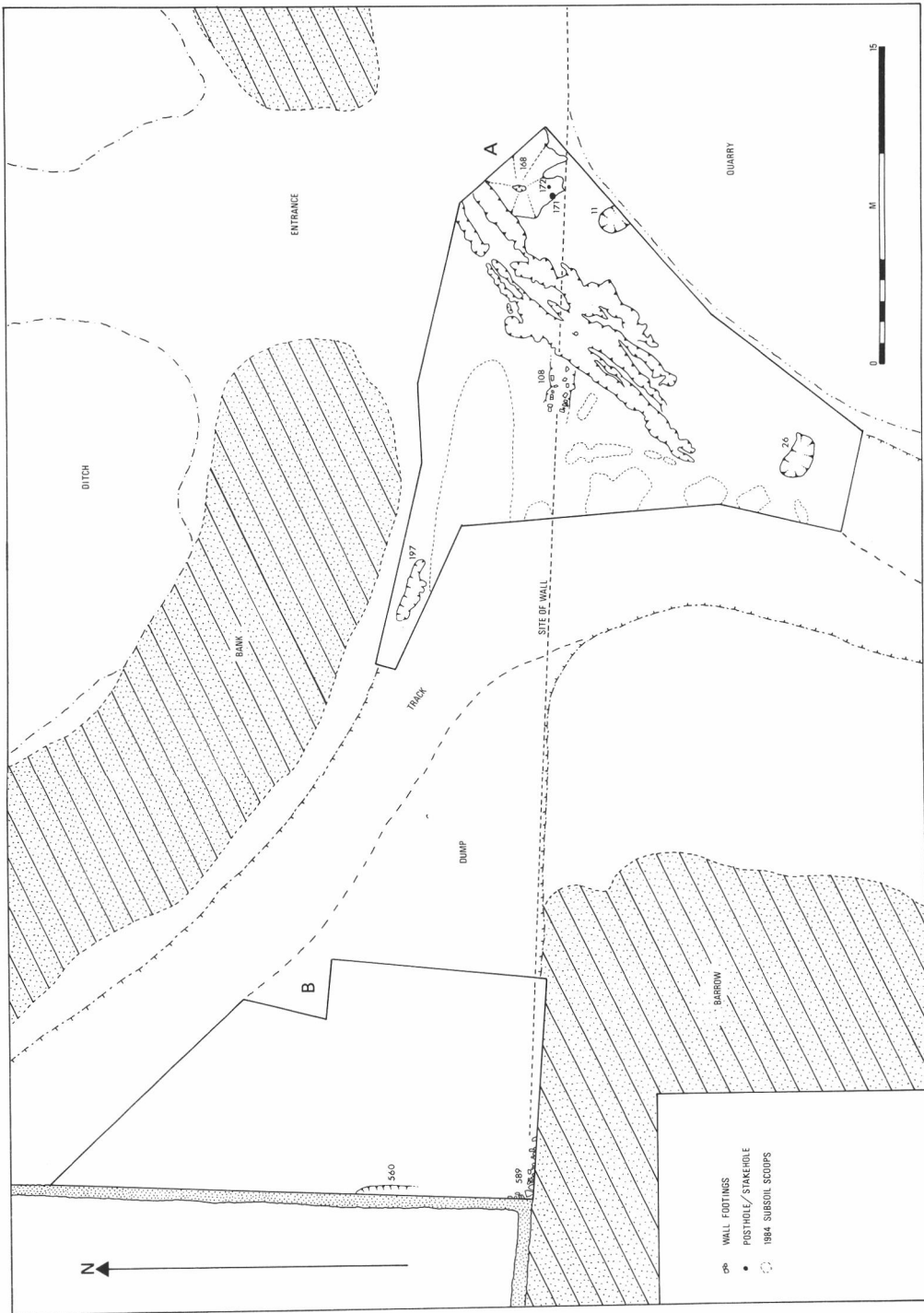


Fig. 3 Bull Ring henge: 1984/5 excavations — modern features

occasional igneous pebbles. In other areas, the subsoil was intermittently stained by humus wherever bedrock came close to the surface of the subsoil. These humic-stained layers continued down the profile following the irregular top of the bedrock.

To compound the problems noted above, excavation revealed that earlier phases of post-medieval activity had further damaged the area outside the southern entrance to the henge (Fig. 3). An eighteenth century drystone wall ran from east to west across the area. This was demolished in the late-1970s. Its footings were found in the south-western corner of Trench B (Feature 589), where it had truncated the edge of the south-western mound. Further east in Trench B, the wall had been totally removed, and its foundation trench had not cut the subsoil. In the central portion of Trench A, evidence for the wall was again found (Feature 108). Here the foundation trench cut the subsoil by about 10.0cms and was 90.0-120.0 cms wide. Several footing stones survived *in situ*, indicating the wall was 75.0-85.0 cms wide at its base. To the east, a large portion of Trench A was disturbed by a complex series of wheel ruts cutting the line of the drystone wall and running from north-east to south-west (Feature 6). These were up to 21.0 cms deep and their fill, of a mottled dark-grey clay with poorly formed lenses of iron pan (with many randomly placed limestone blocks adjacent to the line of the wall), showed that they had been water-logged. No trace of a formal gateway through the wall existed, and old photographs of the site demonstrate that the wall ran unbroken here. This suggests that the ruts formed in very recent times, probably immediately before the wall was demolished. Perhaps a collapse in the wall was utilised by contractors to gain access from the eastern side of the henge, where spoil tips were being removed, to the disused quarries to the south-east and south. To the east of the ruts no trace of the drystone wall was found; its footings again must have been shallower here.

A second drystone wall, demolished in the 1970s, ran approximately along the line of the eastern margin of the trench, above the quarry edge to the east; it has been replaced by a fence. No certain traces of its footings were found, but one feature (Feature 11) may be associated with its demolition. This was a hollow, 8.0 cms deep, filled with topsoil, with several limestone blocks resting in the surface of its fill. The cemetery wall to the west of Trench B had a shallow foundation trench cut into the subsoil in the southern portion of the trench (Feature 560).

Several other features were also of post-medieval date. In the north-eastern quadrant of Trench A was a substantial posthole (Feature 171), with a small stakehole nearby (Feature 172). Both had timber still *in situ*. The post (probably a re-used telegraph pole) had been pulled over and its top broken off. These features were at the edge of an earlier, poorly-defined pit (Feature 168). This measured about 3.2 metres across, and was a maximum of 12.0 cms deep, except at the centre where a steep-sided pit, measuring 66.0 x 34.0 cms at its top, had been dug a further 13.0 cms deep to expose bedrock at its base. The upper fill of Feature 168 (a maximum of 9.0 cms deep) consisted of topsoil. Below this was a layer of soft orange-brown friable clay, with a humic content formed from mixing topsoil and subsoil. This filled both the upper and lower pits. To the east it contained limestone cobbles. Four flint flakes were found at different depths in the fills. Near the base of the lower fill was an iron horseshoe. The feature was excavated with great care as its position suggested that it might be the site of a demolished portal stone. However, there was no indication of a compacted base to the feature, nor of any packing stones in the lower fill. A few angular limestone blocks in the upper fill closely resembled those from demolished walls further south in the trench. The function of this pit remains obscure, but it may be safely concluded that it was not a stonehole. Two other small, irregular pits in Trench A contained post-medieval finds (Features 26, 197). Their purpose also remains undemonstrable.

Several undated features were also found during the excavation (Fig. 4). These fall into two



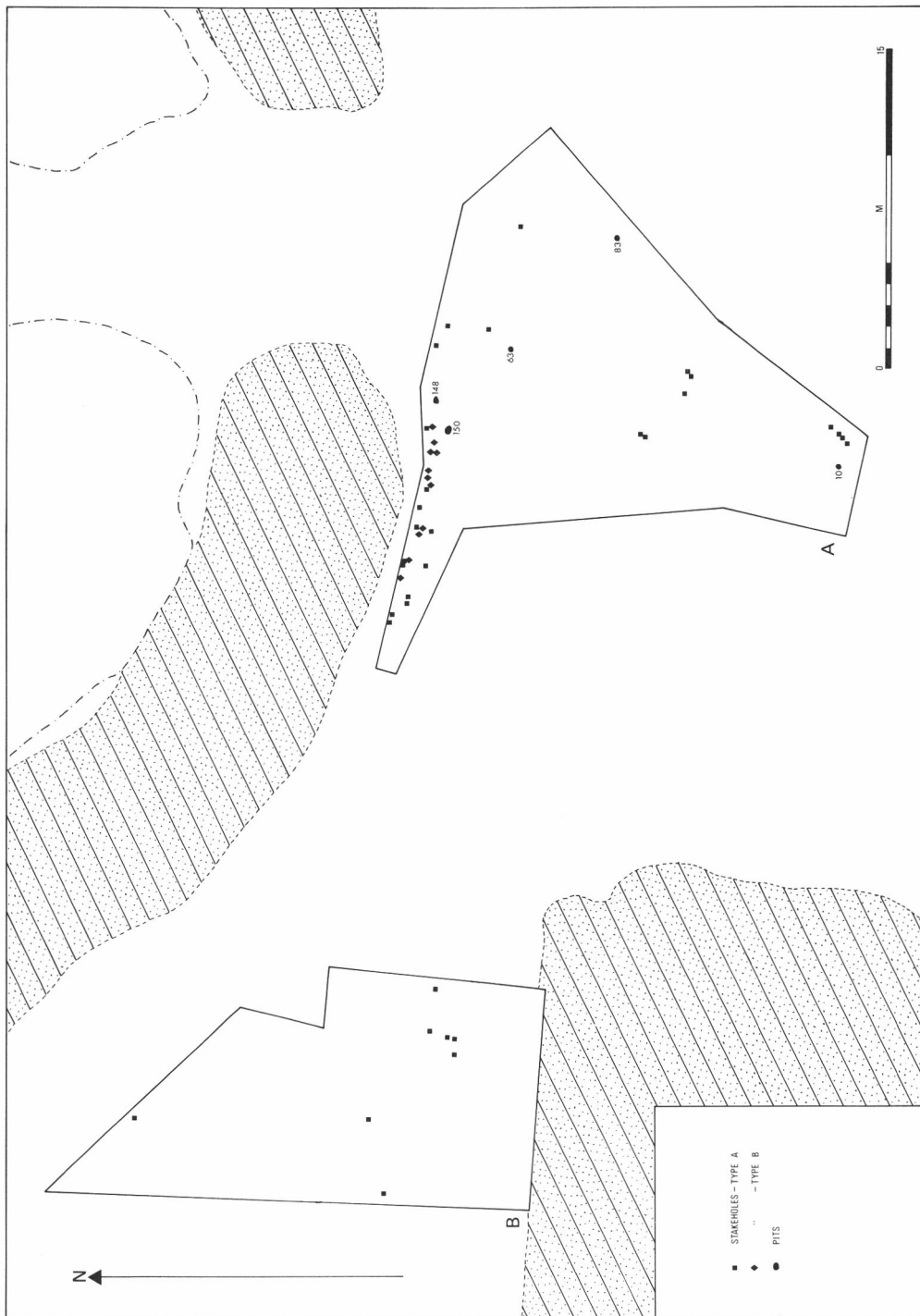


Fig. 4 Bull Ring henge: 1984/5 excavations — undated features

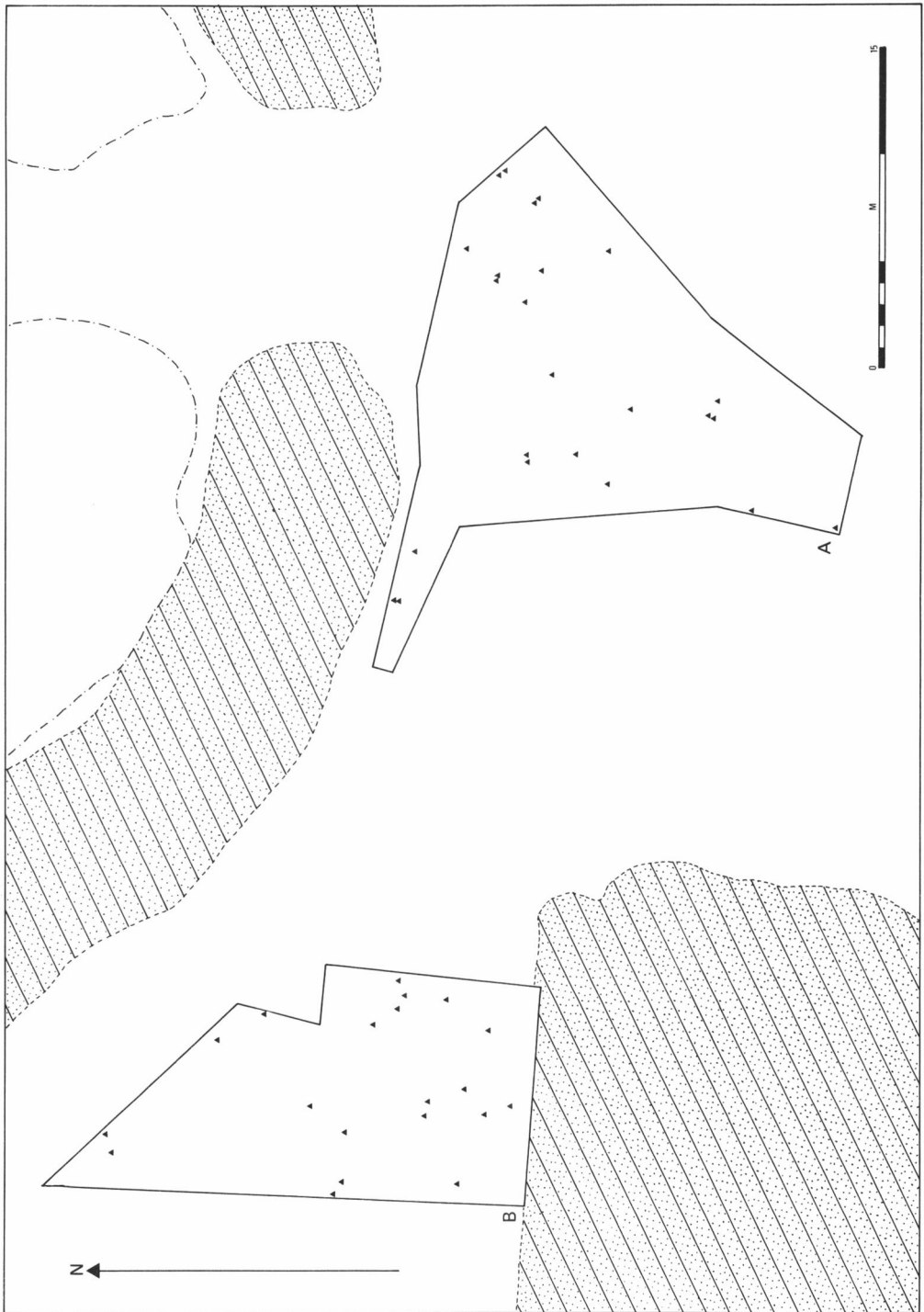


Fig. 5 Bull Ring henge: 1984/5 excavations — lithic distribution

categories. The first comprises five shallow pits found randomly scattered in Trench A. Three of these were in the area stripped by mechanical excavation, and are somewhat truncated. Their regular profiles suggest that they are not the product of machine-disturbance. Feature 10 measured 18.0 x 16.0 cms in plan, and was only 1.5 cms deep. Feature 63 measured 16.0 x 12.0 cms, and was 2.0 cms deep, with steep sides and a flat base. Feature 83 measured 26.0 x 24.0 cms, was 5.0 cms deep, and again had steep sides. All three had consistent fills of a dark grey-brown humus which, as far as could be ascertained, was indistinguishable from the topsoil that had been removed from above.

Two further pits were found at the northern edge of the trench in an area where topsoil remained intact. Feature 148 measured 25.0 x 20.0 cms and was steep-sided with a maximum depth of 6.0 cms. Feature 150 measured 34.0 x 22.0 cms, was 5.0 cms deep and again was steep-sided. Both had humic topsoil fills with their bases covered with rotted shale. This layer occurred elsewhere in the vicinity, at the junction of topsoil and subsoil. None of the pits had any finds to suggest their age or function. In the second category fall the most frequent of the undated features, namely stakeholes. From thirteen to twenty of these were found in the mechanically-stripped areas of Trenches A and B. The pattern of their distribution here is susceptible to no obvious interpretation. One small concentration occurs in the south-eastern corner of Trench A, and a second near its centre. In Trench B there is a crudely linear concentration running east-west through its centre. In all the fills of these holes, was a dark humus which appeared to be identical with the topsoil. Their depths varied, with a maximum of 13.5 cms; on average they were 4.0 - 6.0 cms in diameter, and 5.0 - 8.0 cms deep.

In the northern portion of Trench A, in the narrow strip where the topsoil had not been mechanically removed, between 20 and 25 stakeholes were found. Normally these were 11.0-17.0 cms deep and 3.0-6.0 cms in diameter. Over half these features had a simple fill of topsoil (Fig. 4; Type A). The others had their upper portions filled with topsoil, while their lower fills consisted of a soft red-brown friable clay with a humic content (Fig. 4; Type B). This was easily distinguished from the lighter, more compact subsoil. The stakeholes in this portion of the trench appear to form two fence lines running concentric with the outer edge of the henge bank and curving into the southern entrance. One of these lines appears to have been replaced at least once, and all may be replacements of a single fence which enclosed the henge at this point. There were no indications of the date of this feature. This interpretation must be treated with caution, as such a small undisturbed area was examined, and those stakeholes in the extension to the north-western corner could be viewed as having a random distribution. However, two points can be made in its support: first, the eastern portion of the undisturbed area, outside the henge entrance, was almost devoid of stake holes in contrast with the area further west; and second, if the fills of the stakeholes are examined, those of Type B form (with just one exception) a single line of holes, a fact that is difficult to explain away as the product of chance.

The only certain indications of prehistoric activity found during the excavation were 41 flint flakes and three pieces of worked chert. These were found randomly distributed in both trenches (Fig. 5). All were from disturbed contexts found alongside post-medieval artefacts.

#### THE FINDS (JB and AM)

The finds from Trench A are numbered 1-53, 60-67, while those from Trench B are numbered 101-130. These numbers correlate with those used during excavation and in the excavation archive.

## LITHICS

## Retouched and Utilised Flakes

- 37: Secondary flake of dark grey-brown translucent flint, with probable retouch on one margin for use as a cutting tool. One end is broken. Length 22.5 mm; breadth 15.0 mm.
- 39: Secondary flake of yellow-brown translucent flint, with retouch on two margins and forming a small notch at the distal end. Length 24.5 mm; breadth 14.0 mm.
- 40: Tertiary flake of yellow-brown translucent flint, with retouch on two margins and forming a small notch at the distal end. Length 25.5 mm; breadth 25.5 mm.
- 118: Tertiary flake/blade of yellow-brown translucent flint, with both margins showing signs of utilisation. The distal end has broken. Length 36.5 mm; breadth 18.0 mm.

## Waste Flakes

See Table 1:

- Key: Column 1: find number  
 Column 2: material — the flints are translucent unless otherwise stated  
 Column 3: flake type — P: primary, S: secondary, T: tertiary, CR : core rejuvenation  
 Column 4: state of completeness — C: complete, B: broken or fragment  
 Column 5: length (in mm)  
 Column 6: breadth (in mm)

1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	yellow-brown flint	S	C	25.5	12.0	101	brown-grey flint	T	C	22.5	24.5
7	yellow-brown flint	S	C	26.5	19.5	103	yellow-brown flint	T	B	13.0	6.0
9	mottled grey semi-translucent flint	T	B	27.5	17.0	104	mottled grey semi-translucent flint	T	B	14.0	10.0
16	yellow-brown flint	S	C	32.0	10.0	106	brown-grey flint	S	B	14.5	10.0
26	patinated flint	T	C	12.5	9.0	107	yellow-brown flint	T	C	18.5	8.0
28	brown-grey flint	T	C	15.5	11.5	111	dark grey-brown flint	S	C	32.5	25.5
29	yellow-brown flint	T	C	19.0	10.5	113	black chert	S/CR	C	23.0	13.5
31	opaque cream flint with iron staining	T	C	35.0	43.5	114	patinated flint	T	B	9.5	17.0
33	brown-grey flint	S	B	20.5	12.0	115	brown-grey flint	T	B	6.5	3.5
38	brown-grey flint	T	B	22.5	15.0	117	grey semi-translucent flint	T	B	12.5	19.0
41	dark grey-brown boulder flint	P/CR	C	29.5	10.5	120	yellow-brown flint	T	B	9.5	12.5
42	yellow-brown flint	P	C	21.0	9.5	121	brown-grey flint	T	C	12.5	8.5
45	grey chert	T	B	8.0	9.5	122	yellow-brown flint	T	C	13.5	8.0
47	yellow-brown flint	T	B	11.5	8.5	124	yellow-brown flint	T	B	14.0	9.0
48	yellow-brown flint	T	B	14.5	8.0	125	yellow-brown flint	S	C	14.5	15.5
50	patinated flint	T	B	13.5	10.0	126	grey semi-translucent flint	T	B	12.0	12.0
51	mottled red-brown semi-translucent flint	T	C	21.0	11.5	127	burnt - grey semi-translucent flint	T	B	27.5	22.5
53	brown-grey flint	T	B	15.0	13.0	128	mottled grey-brown semi-translucent flint	T	B	25.5	12.0
60	dark grey-brown flint	T	C	4.5	6.0	130	burnt - grey semi-translucent flint	T	B	12.0	9.5
61	yellow-brown flint	T	B	20.0	9.5						
66	grey chert	?	B	13.0	20.5						

Table 1: Bull Ring henge — the Lithic Finds

## OTHER FINDS

The majority of other finds are post-medieval, and the excavation archive should be consulted for details. The only notable exception to this is Find 102, which is a small abraded body-sherd of Roman colour-coated ware, recovered from the disturbed surface of the subsoil.

The post-medieval finds include sherds, glass, clay pipe-stems, a horseshoe, a bullock shoe, animal bone, smelted lead and limekiln slag.

## DISCUSSION

The excavation outside the southern entrance of the henge has produced largely negative results, except in terms of documentation of post-medieval activity. To what extent is the lack of identified prehistoric features significant? As far as Trench B is concerned, this seems likely to be an authentic archaeological phenomenon, as over much of the trench later disturbance to the subsoil was probably only superficial. However, in the case of Trench A, which lay just outside the henge entrance, this question is more open to debate. Over half of the trench surface was disturbed by later features, which often cut 10.0 cms or more into the subsoil. All that may be said with certainty is that no substantial, deeply-cut, prehistoric features ever existed. More ephemeral, shallow, features may have been destroyed, although it seems unlikely that a complex pattern of features could ever have existed, as at least some of these should have survived. The only candidates for even the most tentative interpretation as prehistoric features are the five small, shallow pits in Trench A, and the stakeholes scattered through both trenches. Neither set of features had any datable artefacts associated with it. The pits are randomly scattered and had topsoil fills. Little sense can be made of the stakeholes, except at the northern edge of Trench A. Here they appear to have formed a hurdle fence, which followed the outer edge of the henge bank and curved into the southern entrance. This fence seems to have been replaced at least twice, once on a slightly different line. Although the fence could be prehistoric in date, other possibilities are equally plausible. The derivation of 'Bull Ring' is obscure, but one possibility is that the name implies that the site was once used for stock-control or bull-baiting in the medieval or early-modern periods, prior to the enclosure of the land in the eighteenth century: a fence surrounding the monument could have helped contain animals. Alternatively, the site may have been used for rural entertainment or other meetings, and fenced to keep stock out.

A number of lithic pieces were found during the excavation, but little can be said about these, particularly since they are from disturbed contexts. There are various types of flint and chert present, although the only one found in quantity is a yellow-brown translucent flint. Of the total flintwork, 41.5% (17 pieces) is of this type. No obvious spatial patterning within the trenches is discernible: the distribution of lithic type, utilised pieces and flakes of different dimensions appears to be random, as far as the poor data allow any assessment. The sole observation worthy of note is that the size range of the 44 flakes found during the excavation is very much smaller than that of the nine pieces found by Alcock in the henge ditch (Fig. 6). However, the significance of this is obscure.

During the initial stages of excavation, it was hoped that prehistoric features comparable with those found outside entrances at several other henges would exist. This does not seem to be the case. The types of features identified elsewhere are varied, as is well demonstrated by a number of small henges/hengiforms in the Milfield basin of Northumberland (Harding, 1981; Miket, 1985; Harding and Lee, 1987). At the circle-henge of Whitton Hill 2 (Miket, 1985), at least three post-pits flanked the exterior of the single entrance, forming a short, splayed avenue. One of these had a cremation at its base. In contrast, no external features were found outside any of the

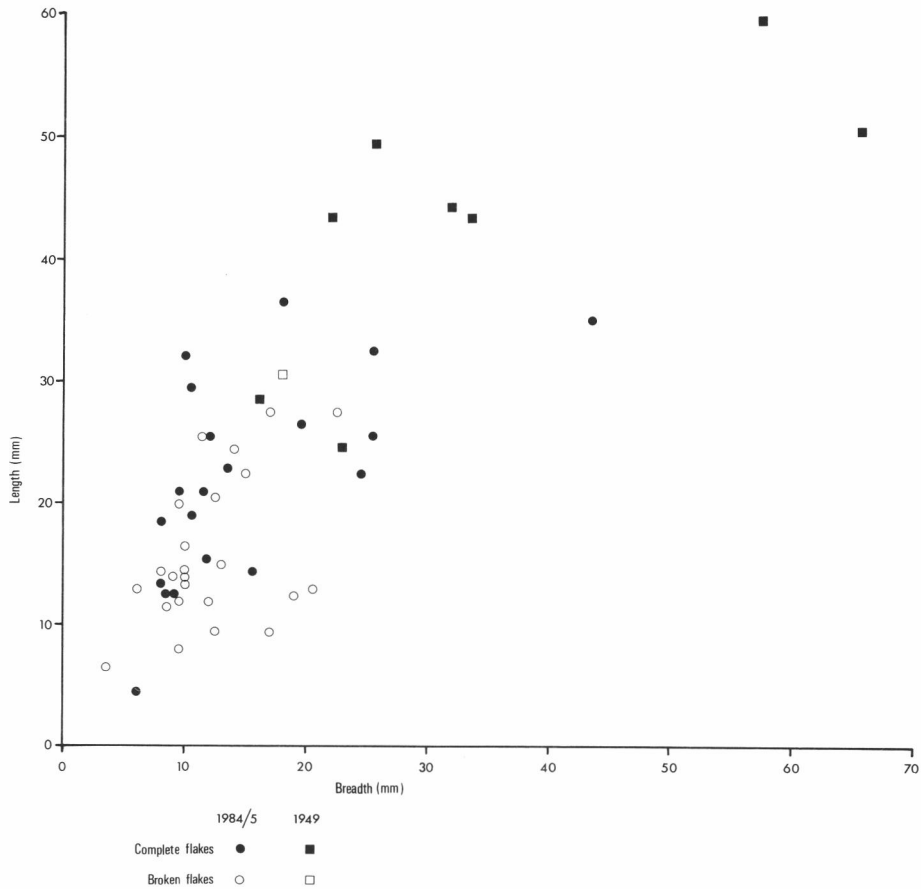


Fig. 6 Bull Ring henge: comparison of size range of lithics — 1949:1984/5 excavations

four narrow entrances at Whitton Hill 1, a site which may have been roofed (Miket, 1985). At Yeavinger there was a pit outside the north-western entrance which contained a contracted inhumation (Harding, 1981). At Milfield North the henge was surrounded by a ring of pits which lay at, or were partly overlain by, the outer edge of the bank. These contained substantial timber uprights (Harding, 1981). At Milfield South only a small area outside the entrance was excavated; no features were found (Harding, 1981).

Elsewhere, further external features have been found. At Llandegai, Gwynedd (Houlder, 1968), the north-eastern henge had a segmented ring of pits, 7.5 metres in diameter, containing several cremations. Outside the south-western entrance of the second henge at Llandegai was a large pit containing cremated human remains of several individuals, which appear to have been buried in a large wooden box. The other entrance at this henge appears to have had no external features. Elsewhere in Wales, a pit containing clay and fine charcoal has been recorded outside the entrance to the hengiform site of Meini Gwyr, Dyfed (Grimes, 1938). In Scotland, only one henge has been excavated outside its entrances. At North Mains, Tayside, a pit containing a cremation and an enlarged food vessel lay within the WSW entrance; adjacent to this pit was a

posthole. Beyond these were several undated features, notable amongst which was a line of three large pits orientated towards the henge interior. Only a small area outside the other entrance was investigated and no features were revealed (Barclay, 1983). In southern England, the only henge to have had excavations outside the entrance is Stonehenge. Here a complex series of stoneholes and postholes, as well as the avenue, has been investigated (Atkinson, 1979; Pitts, 1982). At Avebury, two of the entrances are associated with stone avenues, but the areas immediately outside the entrances have not been adequately investigated (Smith, 1965). At other major excavations of henges in recent years, digging has largely been confined to henge interiors.

The above review indicates that, where excavations have been sufficiently extensive, the majority of sites have features outside their entrances. This in turn suggests that if external features had been searched for elsewhere, their discovery may have cast further light on these monuments (and that scheduling confined to visible earthwork perimeters, as at the Bull Ring, is grossly inadequate). Features have been found outside a total of eight entrances. The only sites where they may be safely assumed to have been absent are at one of the two entrances at the south-western henge at Llandegai, and one of the two entrances of the Yeavinger hengiform. The four entrances at the atypical hengiform at Whitton Hill 1 also had no features, but this site is of debatable relevance to a discussion of henges proper. The excavations at the Bull Ring can tentatively be interpreted as indicating a further site where no substantial features exist immediately outside one of its entrances. Unfortunately, any data for the other entrance have probably already been destroyed, making further investigation impossible.

The Bull Ring is one of two large henges in the Peak District, the other being the better preserved site at Arbor Low (Gray, 1903; Burl, 1976; Barnatt, in press). They are very similar in design and scale, and both may well have served as the region's major communal monuments in the later Neolithic. Detailed discussion concerning their place within a regional and national context has recently been presented elsewhere (Burl, 1969; Bradley, 1984; Barnatt, 1987; in press).

It is ironic that a communal monument of one era has suffered damage, however inadvertently, at the hands of a community association of another. It is hoped that the tide of recent damage can be stemmed by management agreement. However, given the obvious difficulties in ensuring the safety of the site and in preventing continuous erosion of its earthworks, the ideal solution at the Bull Ring would be total excavation.

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APPENDIX:  
THE LITHICS FROM THE 1949 EXCAVATION (AM)

Alcock's find numbers are given for each find, followed by Buxton Museum catalogue numbers.

- BR 49.1/3450 This was wrongly described by Alcock as a scraper. It is a core face/edge piece struck at right angles to the old cortical platform. It has fine retouch at its broad end. The flint is translucent brown with a very slight patination. Length 43.5 mm; breadth 33.5 mm.
- BR 49.2/3451 This tertiary waste flake of Lincolnshire/East Yorkshire Wolds flint was described as utilised but this seems unlikely. Length 59.5 mm; breadth 57.5 mm.
- BR 49.3/3452 This primary waste flake of flint is heavily patinated. Length 43.5 mm; breadth 22.0 mm.
- BR 49.4/3453 This secondary flake of opaque white flint has irregular retouch on one margin. Length 49.5 mm; breadth 25.5mm.
- BR 49.5/3454  
A: A secondary flake of Lincolnshire/East Yorkshire Wolds flint. Length 50.5 mm; breadth 63.0 mm.  
B: A secondary flake of patinated flint. Length 44.0 mm; breadth 32.0 mm.  
C: A broken tertiary flake of cream coloured chert. Length 30.5 mm; breadth 18.0 mm.
- BR 49.6/3455 A primary flake of translucent brown flint, which has possible retouch on one margin indicating it is a possible side scraper (unrecognised by Alcock). Length 24.5 mm; breadth 23.0 mm.
- BR 49.7/3456 This secondary flake of brown translucent flint was wrongly described by Alcock as a scraper. It is a utilised flake with shallow inverse retouch on one margin at the distal end. Length 28.5 mm; breadth 16.0 mm.

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