

REPLY TO MR CRAWFORD KNOX

Lady Hanworth and Mr. Hastings have replied as follows:

The above article by Mr. Crawford Knox on the mound in Weston Wood contains no new evidence, and is largely a repetition of information included by Mr. E. S. Wood in his article on the earth circles on St. Martha's Hill¹¹ which has already been dealt with in our excavation report. It very clearly illustrates the dangers of uncontrolled theorizing from folk-lore material; for in doing so Mr. Knox has allowed himself to ignore the facts produced by the excavation and to strive after explanations which are not in accordance with the plain evidence, but which on the contrary are inspired by the compulsion to force the facts to fit an *a priori* theory.

(i) Mr. Knox believes the mound "to have been built much earlier than the eighteenth century." This belief is disproved by the metal

¹¹ *Sy. A.C.* LIV, 10-46.

objects found sealed by the clay capping of the mound. To overcome this Mr. Knox has therefore to suppose a barrow which was removed in the eighteenth century before the clay capping was applied. Such a line of argument would enable anyone to prove the existence of anything that is not there; but as it happens the argument cannot be applied here. For

- (a) the published sections show no unconformity in the sequence of strata below the clay cap: a truncated barrow would have had tip-lines at quite different angles to those which exist, and which conform with the clay cap.
- (b) Nor is there any trace in the locality of the sizeable spoil-heap which must have resulted from the demolition of the mound.

(ii) Mr. Knox ignores not only the archaeological but also the cartographical evidence. The mound does not appear on the map of *c.* 1729 but does appear on that of *c.* 1802. He does not explain its absence on the earlier map; but to us there is no problem, since it had not yet been constructed.

(iii) Much weight is put on the behaviour of the road which is "apparently mediæval." The only reason given for this date is that "Weston itself is mentioned . . . as early as 1241." In fact there is no evidence at all for the road being older than the seventeenth century, or for its being a "road" of any more importance than an estate tract taken by people setting out thence on horseback for London. But even the mystique of Mediævalism should not blind us to the danger of the argument

- "(i) Let us assume the road to be mediæval;
- (ii) therefore the mound is mediæval or earlier."

The basis of the contention is of course Mr. Knox's belief that the mound is earlier than the road. Mere field inspection in this case is no sure guide to priorities. For (a) the track from the north makes straight for the centre of the mound, whereas if it was aiming for a pre-existing mound it would surely direct itself towards the northern edge (round which it skirts), which it could easily do at this point. But (b) it is clear from the way the road approaches the mound from the south that the road never took a more direct line under the site of the mound; nor, as Mr. Knox remarks, is there space for it to take a less direct line further north-east. But his further point, that "people do not normally turn a corner in this manner" (*viz.*, in a curve), "they cut across it," is disproved by the behaviour of more than one of the paths in Weston Wood itself; curved corners of more than 90° do occur with no mound to account for them. In fact we believe that here it is the crossing of the ridge which accounts for it.

(iv) Mr. Knox may be right when he points out the nuisance-value of the berm to traffic; we assumed the original presence of a

berm on the north-east because the top of the outer bank here is level with the berm on the south, and we suggested that the bank represented the remains of the berm after subsequent traffic had worn its centre away. The outer bank is certainly artificial, but it *may* have been designed as a bank to delimit the "road." No doubt traffic continued to use the "road" after the mound had been made; but the new quarry-cutting *west* of the mound now offered a shorter and more convenient route, and there are in fact traces of a hollow-way from this direction joining the "road" south of the site. But this hollow-way is not nearly as pronounced as that of the "road," and this is curious if the mound is of prehistoric date, since after its construction traffic would, as we have seen, more naturally have taken this easier and shorter route. The conditions of the two hollow ways suggest a much briefer span of use for the newer one than the three millennia or so which have elapsed since barrows were built.

(v) Although our suggestion that the mound was a landscape feature was only tentative, Mr. Knox's objections to this cannot be sustained. (a) Access, if this was desired, is easy by way of the new path created on its west side or from the north; probably, however, it was designed to carry a plantation.¹² (b) The objection that its circularity "could hardly be seen even from horseback" forgets the trees. A circular clump is a very common and easily recognisable sight. (c) Even today this part of Weston Wood contains a number of ornamental trees; landscaping is there for all to see.

(vi) Mr. Knox's special pleading for the site to be a barrow need not detain us long; the onus of proof is on him, and he has detailed some of the objections. The suggestion that the stone revetting is typical of a barrow is far from correct. There are no parallels in any excavation report for a stone curbing to a barrow in such well-preserved condition, and as Dr. Corcoran remarked to us, the stones are unusually small for that purpose. Taking into account the loose nature of the sandy soil, these stones could never have remained in position for so long a period, and still less if an original mound had been extensively mutilated in the eighteenth century. We need only add that (a) the mound is *not* sited on a false crest, but on the real one; (b) the carstone is *not* "the only stone found" hereabouts. Mr. Knox himself later remembers the large stones mentioned by Manning and Bray, and these would have been far more in keeping with a barrow. But they were not thus used. Mr. Knox's attempts to construct a sacred circle from these scattered rocks need not concern us, since he does not tell us what part this circle played in or on his barrow, and admits the lack of evidence. Two points should be added: (c) Against the "improbability that such stones could have occurred here naturally" can be weighed the statement of the Geological Survey Memoir that such blocks

¹² *cf.* the mound in Albury Park excavated by Miss. Harding. *Sy. A.C. LVIII*, 114.

occur on the surface along the outcrop of Upper Greensand north of Weston Wood.¹³ (d) Mr. Knox finds it difficult not to associate the Sherbourne Palm Sunday Fair with the mound, but offers no evidence. According to Miss Heath and Mr. E. S. Wood, however, the fair took place at Sherbourne Farm in association with the Silent Pool, one-third of a mile away, and there would seem to be no connection.

(vii) The place-name Harrowshill was dealt with in the report. It is true that the V.C.H. mentions it and suggests that it may refer to a nearby Saxon holy place, but offers no evidence in support. Our research suggests that the name is quite modern, and that is probably the reason why it is omitted from the Surrey Place-Names Volume. If we are wrong, it would still be necessary for Mr. Knox to demonstrate a connection both in space and in theology between his bronze age barrow and this Saxon place-name.

(viii) Finally, for the date of the mound, we must elaborate a fact of the excavation which was not clearly enough stated in our report. Sherds of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery were found in Trench C north-east of the bank; but two of the sherds and the fragment of loom-weight were found on the surface of layer 9 below 2b directly below the northern lip of the bank. This is not quite the same thing, of course, as finding them below the mound itself; but so far there has been no disagreement with our contention that both mound and bank are contemporary. A Bronze Age date for the mound is thus extremely unlikely.

¹³ H. G. Dines and F. H. Edmunds, *The Geology of the country round Aldershot and Guildford*, p. 46.