

Alistair Marshall, *Excavation, analysis and interpretation of early Bronze Age barrows at Guiting Power, Gloucestershire* (Archaeopress, 2020). ii + 372pp., numerous figs and tables. Cardcovers, £50.00; eBook, £16.00 [ISBN 978-1-78969-359-1 and 978-1-78969-360-7]

Round barrows are one of the most common and widely-scattered classes of prehistoric monuments in the Cotswolds, yet very few have been excavated over the last century or so and only a handful have been examined to modern standards. This lacuna makes the present volume especially welcome as we have here detailed reports on open-area excavations at two sites: Guiting Power 1 and 3. As well as pre-excavation surveys and full descriptions of the recorded stratigraphic sequences, there is also a good selection of specialist studies and a wealth of contextual information. Supporting the published volume is a modest body of on-line content that can be accessed via the URLs given in the printed text or the live-links in the eBook version.

In its arrangement and structure this is an idiosyncratic volume. It is presented in three distinct parts, each of which is self-contained with abstract, keywords, text, figures, and bibliography. Each could have been, and perhaps was, written as a stand-alone journal article. There is no front-matter introducing or explaining the volume or the wider project of which it is part. With no conventional academic apparatus such as lists of figures, tables, and abbreviations, no index, and the illustrations set in blocks at the end of each part, it is not an easy volume to use.

Part 1 describes the work at Guiting Power 1, a bowl barrow investigated between 1993 and 1996. The site lies on relatively high ground, and, although heavily ploughed, stood 1.1m high at the start of the excavation. Table 1.1 presents an interesting analysis of the implications of the recorded preservation in relation to the integrity of the site. The work revealed a rich old ground surface and preserved soil with the cumulative remains from several millennia of low intensity activity. The pre-barrow land-use was deciduous woodland with the barrow itself built in a small clearing. The construction sequence is divided into nine phases, starting with the burning of the corpse of an adult male on a pyre. This became the primary cremation deposit and was placed in a small pit that was immediately capped with a low rubble cairn. Soil and turf were then stripped from the surrounding area and used to create a primary mound. A second pyre cremated the corpse of an infant, although the remains were not incorporated into the growing barrow. In Phase 5 high-quality limestone from an adjacent quarry pit was used to build a kerb of upright slabs around the primary mound and to cap the mound in a layer of stone rubble. After a period of decay lasting for a century or so a second kerb was added, concentric to the first, defining a barrow that was now 16m in diameter. No further burials seem to have been added to the mound but the remains of a Collared Urn were found outside the kerb suggesting the placement of a casual burial beside the barrow. Sometime later, around 2020-1620 BC according to a radiocarbon date, a pyre was used to cremate an adult female outside the mound on the northwest side, the remains being buried in a small pit together with a burnt flint scraper and a bronze awl. After this the mound gradually decayed and was subject to the rigours of prevailing local land-use down to modern times.

Discussion of this sequence looks in detail at its present and contemporary setting, the rituals associated with its development, discusses the finds and environmental materials, and considers the resource management issues in relation to other barrows in the area. Guiting Power 1 was restored as a mound following the excavation, although not it seems in a manner considered satisfactory by the excavator (p.37). Detailed comparisons are made with previously excavated round barrows on the Cotswolds and there is a useful figure (1.33) showing comparative plans of these sites.

Hiding amongst the description of Guiting Power 1 is a short account of work at Hawling 2 (p.29-31). Although a small-scale 'rescue' operation, the description and associated plans and photographs suggest a quite different kind of round barrow with an outer cairn wall and stone cairn. A narrow wall-edged passage opening from the edge of the cairn and leading towards the centre was recorded and interpreted as a 'spirit passage'. Given that the centre of the barrow appears to have collapsed and/or been disturbed by a modern pit it is pertinent to wonder whether this piece of keyhole excavation has in fact revealed the remains of an early Neolithic simple passage grave.

Part 2 describes the work at Guiting Power 3, a large ditched round barrow of the type conventionally referred to as a bell barrow, surviving under pasture on relatively low-lying ground overlooking a headwater stream feeding the River Windrush. Ten phases of construction and use were identified above a preserved old ground surface containing Mesolithic and Neolithic worked flint. The earliest construction comprised two arcs of low bank with opposed entrance gaps suggestive of a hengi-form style monument. After a period of use the banks were levelled and a layer of clay spread across the site. In Phase 3 a ring of 80 wooden stakes created a fenced enclosure 13.4m in diameter with an entrance to the southeast. Inside was a scatter of posts, signs of trampling, and a spread of broken pottery including Beaker-related ware and Collared urn. The stakes were eventually removed and perhaps used as fuel for a pyre on which the corpse of an adult female was cremated about 2120–1740 BC according to a radiocarbon date. The remains were gathered up and buried in a pit in the centre of the former enclosure. A round mound of clay was heaped over the primary burial, perhaps in stages, with some evidence of associated ritual activity including flint working and the deposition of the cremated remains of an infant. Soon after (Phase 6), a ring-ditch 39m in diameter, 3m wide and 1m deep was dug, and the stone used to form a ring-bank revetment and a capping for the mound which in its final form was 20m in diameter and probably stood about 1.5m high. Later phases document the decay of the monument through nearly four millennia, including its incorporation into the perimeter of a late Saxon and medieval manorial compound. Detailed discussion of the main components of the monument, and the rituals enacted, includes extensive comparisons with other sites in southern Britain. Good use is made of experimental work on pyre construction and firing that has wider implications for work elsewhere (although (p. 222) Marshall is highly critical of some existing citations of the experiments). This barrow was also reconstructed after excavation.

Part 3 follows up the interesting discovery of the fenced enclosure forming a pre-barrow constructional feature at Guiting Power 3. A sample of 46 post-rings found below early Bronze Age barrows across Britain is reviewed and classified into two main types: temporary pre-barrow enclosures bounded by a single ring of free-standing stakes or a fence to create a

temporary arena or sacred space; and single or multiple rings connected with the construction or use of the barrow mound and related rituals. This analysis provides the most detailed consideration of such features currently available and deserves wider recognition. It usefully up-dates and adds clarity to the various studies published by Alex Gibson in the early 2000s, rightfully separating off these components of round barrows from the free-standing timber circles whose construction and use clearly sits alongside their better-known counterparts made of stone. In Marshall's account the tabulation of available radiocarbon dates for the barrow-related structures (p.297-8), the corpus of sites (p. 307-14), and the ground-plans and phasing of known examples provide strong support for his simple but useful classification.

The two excavated early Bronze Age barrows discussed here provide valuable insights into the wider population of these monuments on the Cotswolds and beyond. Neither covered richly furnished graves; both contained cremations. What might be regarded as the simple bowl barrow at Guiting Power 1 in fact has a long sequence of development and use, whereas the bell-barrow, a kind of monument sometimes referred to as a 'fancy barrow', represented by Guiting Power 3 has a more condensed and straightforward history of construction and use. Importantly, Marshall recognizes that round barrows are part of bigger settlement systems and includes appropriate discussion of the sites in relation to the results from landscape-scale fieldwalking. This, he suggests, indicates that in the Cotswolds round barrows mainly lay beyond the settlement areas, perhaps scattered amongst the fields and grazing lands on the margins of local territories.

Archaeopress have done a good job with the presentation of the volume which is well-edited and neatly set out. It is clear from the acknowledgements that many specialists were involved with the post-excavation work, although none are credited in relation to their specific contributions to the text. The printed copy is priced at the going rate for a book of this size, and for those that prefer an eBook electronic version the price seems very reasonable. The additional on-line resources include some rather neat animations of the survey data as a series of overlays.

Timothy Darvill
Fairford