ARCHAEOLOGY IN MOSELEY BOG

BURNT MOUNDS

Burnt mounds are mounds of heat-shattered stones and charcoal, which date from about 1500 to 1000 BC. 40 burnt mounds have so far been discovered in Birmingham, many of them in parks and open spaces. They are usually visible as a layer of heat-shattered stones in a stream bank, more rarely as an actual mound, and as concentrations of heat-shattered stones on ploughed field surfaces.

Burnt mounds are usually interpreted as the debris from boiling water by dropping heated stones into it, to cook food. Although experiments have shown that this could have been the case, we would expect to find animal bones and other debris from food preparation and cooking when the sites are excavated. Another interpretation is that they are the debris from steam or sauna-type bathing. North American Indians and people in Northern Europe produced steam for bathing by pouring water over heated stones inside a tent or a hut. Other interpretations are that the sites may have been used for dyeing or felting textiles, or in leatherworking or woodworking. Reconstructions of burnt mounds, to test the interpretation of them as steam baths or saunas, based on the excavated evidence from the burnt mound site at Cob Lane in Bournville, have demonstrated the validity of this interpretation. The reconstructions draw attention to the potential complexity of apparently simple burnt mounds: as sweat lodges, they have at least two elements, the hearth, now represented by the burnt mound itself, and the sweat lodge, with its hollow and water sump, and possibly a third, a discard area for burnt stone. This would explain the range and extent of features at burnt mound sites, including the apparent occurrence of pairs of burnt mounds.

Burnt mounds are invariably located in wet locations with associated reservoirs of palaeoenvironmental data. At Cob Lane in Birmingham, for example, an organic deposit only slightly predating the burnt mound contained a beetle fauna indicating woodland and grazing animals. This was overlain by a mineral soil layer, again predating the burnt mound and interpreted as colluvium resulting from ploughing upslope from the site. Tree trunks in the former stream bed suggested forest clearance, and the mound contained charcoal probably from coppiced trees and possibly initially made for metalworking.

Before burnt mounds were discovered in Birmingham and dated by radiocarbon, the only remains of this period in the city were a few finds of bronze axes. The number of burnt mounds implies a far greater population than was previously thought. Burnt mounds are also likely to be markers of otherwise elusive contemporary settlements, which would have been located on higher, better drained land.

The burnt mound in Moseley Bog was discovered in 1980. It is visible as a low mound with a stream running through it. The composition of the mound is exposed in the stream banks as a layer of heat-shattered stones and charcoal nearly 14m long and about 30cm thick in one bank and a thinner layer 4m long in the other. On one side of the stream the

site survives as a low but prominent mound about 12.5m long and 6.5m wide, and on the other it is crossed by a path. Heat-shattered stones are visible on the eroded path surface. The visible remains suggest that the mound is approximately circular and is about 13m in diameter. A resistivity survey in 1998 confirmed the extent of the mound, as an area of high resistance, on the path side of the stream and located a possible former stream channel. On the other side of the stream an area of low resistance may indicate the location of a pit or trough under the mound. Samples of charcoal from the stream bank at Moseley Bog have been dated to about 1100BC by the radiocarbon method.

A second burnt mound in Moseley Bog is about 11m east of the first and is visible as a layer of heat-shattered stones 3.3m long and up to 4cm thick in the north bank of the stream.

Following an assessment by English Heritage the burnt mounds in Moseley Bog were designated a scheduled ancient monument in August 2002. This means that they are considered to be of national importance and are therefore protected by law. It is an offence to damage them in any way or to use a metal detector on them.

MILLPOOL DAM

Moseley Bog is the bed of a former supplementary storage pool for Sarehole Mill. The water was held back by an earthen dam with a brick sluice. The pool was drained between 1843 and 1884. The dam survives on the east side of the bog, near Pensby Close and is about 100m long, 11m wide and 2.5m high. Its north end curves round to the north-west, and a hollow near its north end, now containing a pond, was probably a quarry for the dam. The remains of the sluice consist of two phases of brickwork, handmade and machine made. There is also brickwork on the west side of the dam towards its north end, possibly constructed as a repair or strengthening. Pebbles on the surface of the dam suggest that it may have had a pebble capping.

POND

The pond is marked on the 1884 OS map and lies in a hollow which was probably the quarry for the millpool dam.

COLDBATH MILL OR LADY MILL

The mill was located on the western edge of the Bog, near Yardley Wood Road. Nothing is now visible above ground but there are likely to be below-ground remains of its buildings and watercourses.

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