

## The Cossington Barrows

Can you imagine what it was like to be living in Charnwood in the bronze age? We know that life was short and unbelievably hard, but the only real evidence we have comes from the circular burial sites or barrows that are dotted around the country – some 250 of them in Leicestershire alone.

Last month John Thomas from the University of Leicester Archaeological Services told the Local History Group about three barrows that his group have been excavating at Cossington, near the confluence of the rivers Wreake and Soar. They have been dated as early bronze age, between 2000 and 1500 years BC.

John has written a book called Monument, Memory and Myth about the barrows and the artefacts that his group have found in and around them. From their excavations they discovered that the barrows were used for perhaps 200 or 300 years, not just as burial sites but as focus points for the community. And for many years after the sites ceased to be used for burial people would gather round them to make offerings and remember their ancestors.

The first barrow comprised a single ring-shaped ditch, with evidence that many of the bodies there had been cremated. In the second barrow the excavators were able to identify the body of a young child along with urns and other objects presumably intended for use in the after life. The third barrow however was remarkable in that although it was cut in the bronze age (about 1500 BC), there is evidence that it was re-used about 1000 years later (during the iron age), again during Roman times, and finally in the Anglo-Saxon period, at least 2000 years after it was first cut.

Many artifacts from various periods have been found, not only in the burial sites themselves but also scattered round the barrows. Pottery, knives, drinking vessels, bowls, tools and beads have all been found. One set of beads with thirteen stones matches another found at Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset, probably bought from a travelling merchant.

There is a permanent display at the Charnwood Museum in Loughborough which reconstructs the child grave discovered in the second barrow.

Roger Berkeley, Local History Group