

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

**A Cup- and Ring-Marked Stone from Nottingham Hill,
Gotherington**

by R. W. B. Morris and A. Marshall
1983, Vol. 101, 171-174

© The Society and the Author(s)

Notes

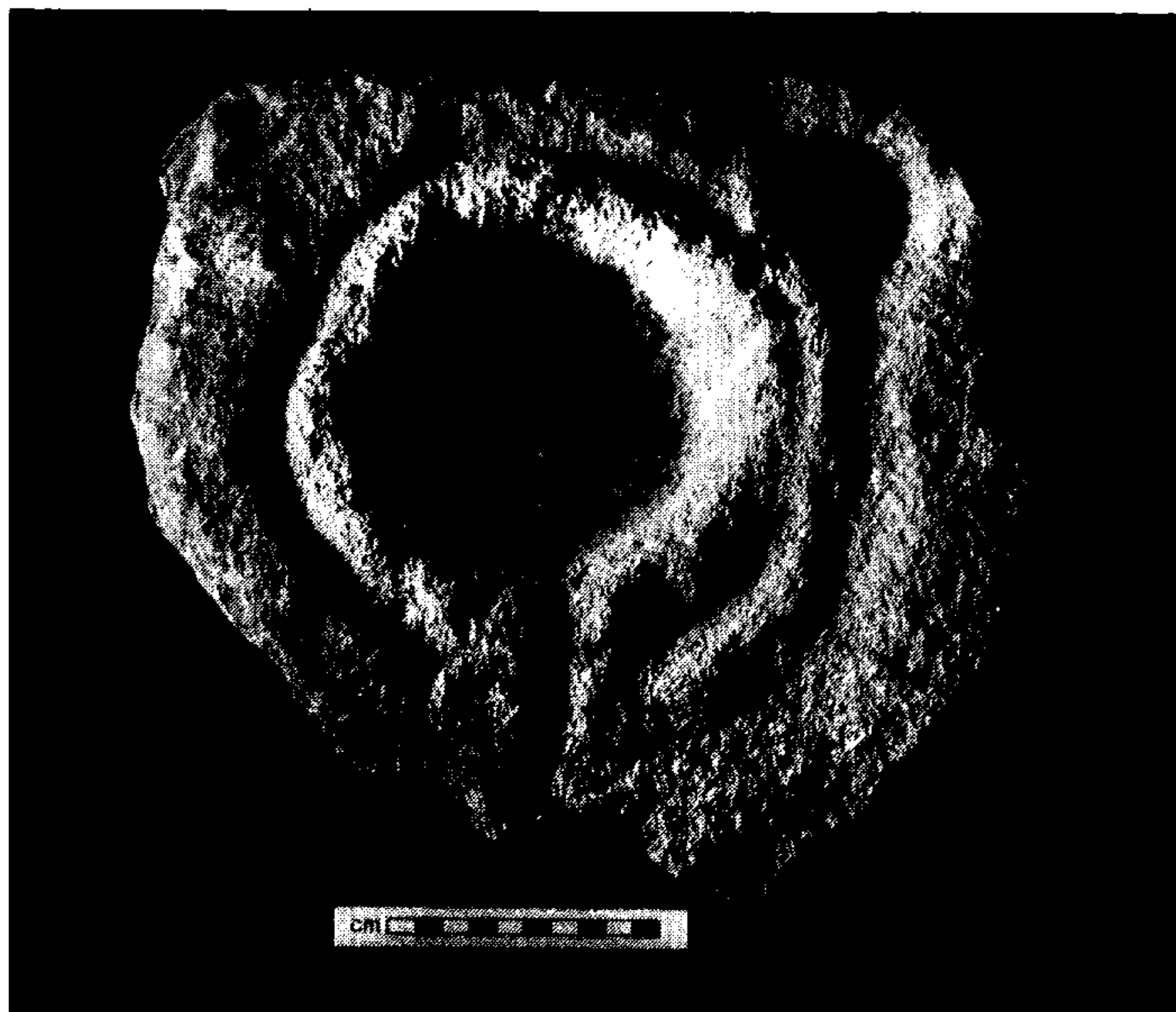
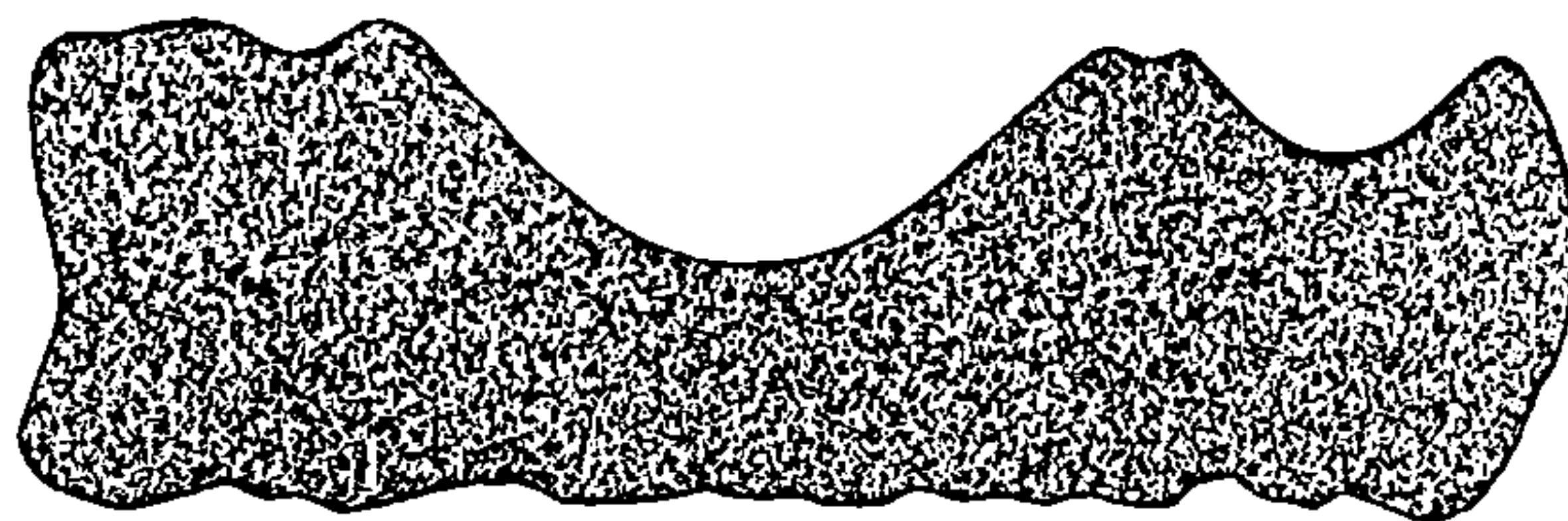
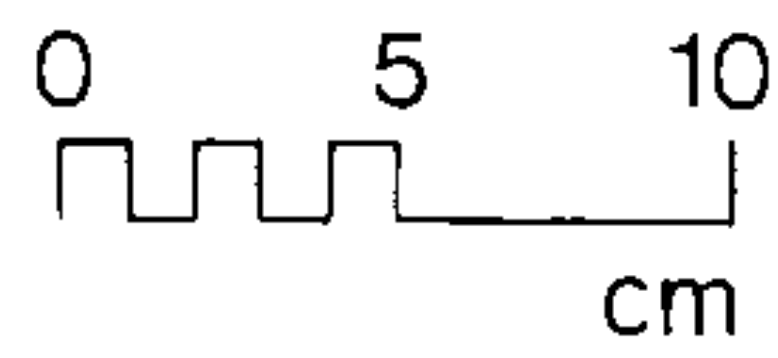
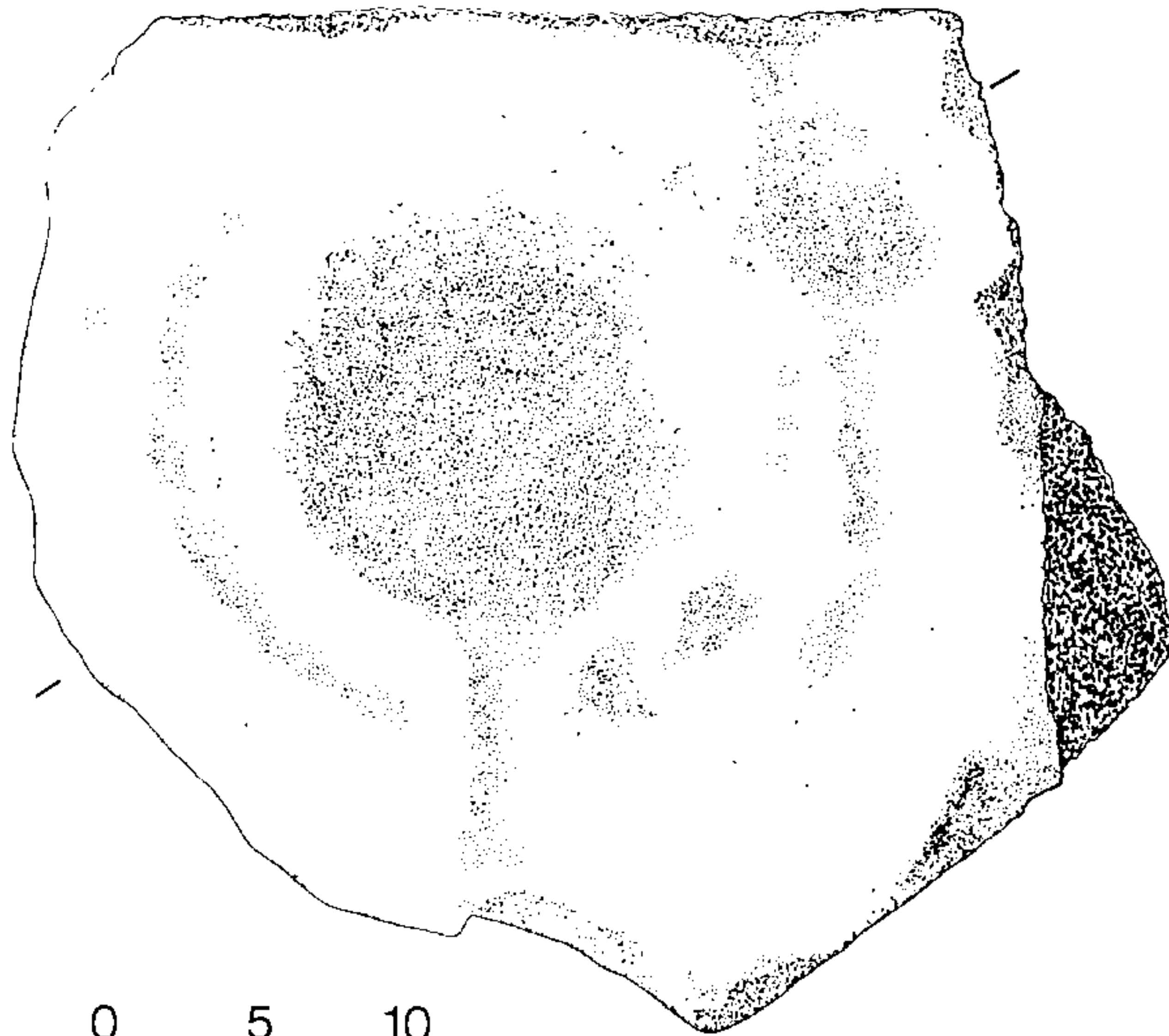
A CUP- AND RING-MARKED STONE FROM NOTTINGHAM HILL, GOTHERINGTON

The worked stone which is the subject of this note appears to belong to the group of cup- and ring-marked stones which occur mainly in Scotland and the northern half of England. Sometimes they occur in megalithic contexts, or as parts of stone burial cists, which in certain cases contain beakers or food vessels, and they quite often appear on sites not far away from places where copper ore has been worked (Morris, 1977, 1979, and 1981). It is the first object of this type with such clear affinities to be found in the southern half of England, and indeed it is by far the most southerly example so far recorded of the cup *and* ring motif in Britain. Hitherto, the most southerly recorded example was the stone found at Baslow in Derbyshire (SK 273 730) about 150 km further north. Many examples of cup marks without rings exist in southern Britain, but this appears to be the first with clear ring marking.

The stone was found in October 1981 during surface collection of occupational debris from the plough-soil within the hill-fort on Nottingham Hill, Gotherington (SO 98 28), as part of a programme of field-work undertaken by the Cotswold Archaeological Research Group (C.A.R.G. 1982).

Nottingham Hill is an extensive limestone spur forming part of the Cotswold scarp, overlooking the Severn Valley approximately 6 km north-west of Cheltenham. Across the neck of this spur the bivallate ramparts of an iron-age hill-fort cut off approximately 48.5 ha. (120 a.) of the hilltop, which may also be delimited by additional perimeter defences running around the edge of the scarp, although because of extensive erosion and quarrying this is far from clear (see plans in R.C.H.M. 1976, and Hall and Gingell, 1974). Evidence for the nature and date of settlement on the site is very meagre. A thin scatter of flint occurs over the hilltop, but this is too low in comparison with other dense flint scatters from the Cotswolds (C.A.R.G. 1982) to suggest similarly high levels of occupation or activity. The level of other occupational debris from the hilltop is also very low, and shows no detectable concentrations. These finds include fragments of grit-stone saddle querns, and pebbles with heat-cracking and abrasion marks, but no pottery nor anything which could be dated with any precision. Apart from the structural evidence on the site for occupation in the Iron Age, there is some evidence for activity in the late Bronze Age. No excavation has yet been carried out on the hill-fort defences, but one small area has been excavated within the interior, at approximately SO 9842 2820, in order to recover a hoard of late-bronze-age metalwork (Hall and Gingell, 1974), part of which had been turned up by ploughing. Although noting the presence of hearths and occupation surfaces associated with pottery of presumably iron-age date, this excavation did not extend beyond its specific brief of recovering the hoard and its immediate context. Additional references to occasional finds of probable iron-age or Roman date exist, but none of this material has survived (R.C.H.M. 1976).

The worked stone was found on the level ground at the margin of the interior of the hill-fort, immediately to the rear of the inner rampart, and within approximately 100 m of its northern end



Cup- and ring-marked stone from Nottingham Hill

and the edge of the escarpment, at SO 9875 2825. It was found as a loose block lying with the worked surface uppermost, and half embedded in the plough-soil, together with other slabs and irregular lumps of oolitic limestone of similar size, and of closely-similar rock-type. Detailed petrological examination of the worked stone suggests an origin in the immediate area of Nottingham Hill. The object is a discrete slab with an unworked under-surface weathered by percolation of ground-water along a joint. It is typical of others lying behind the rampart, and shows no sign of having formed part of a larger block, nor of being fragmentary in any way. It has an approximately uniform thickness, and two squared corners on one side, and because of its apparent suitability as a block for dry-stone walling, the possibility exists that it may have been built into the rampart, perhaps its rear facing, or into another structure on the margin of the interior. The way in which the carving on the worked face fits the general shape of the stone suggests that the object may be approximately complete, and that if the block was re-used as a building stone, then little, if any, further shaping was required.

The worked stone is approximately 30 cm by 30 cm in area, and 11 cm thick, with a complex of dished depressions and connecting channels on the upper surface. There is a central cup-mark approximately 15.5 cm in diameter, and a shallow radial groove (channel 1) leads from it to the edge of the stone. The central cup-mark is surrounded close to its lip by a penannular channel or 'ring' (channel 2), which has a small depression at one end. This end of channel 2 appears to be discontinuous with channel 1, but there is a very lightly pecked connection at the other end. Outside channel 2 is a second, shallower ring or channel (channel 3) but because of its shallowness it is difficult to determine whether it links with the radial channel 1. Channel 3 contains a clear, small cup-mark part-way along its length, and is quite definite on one side of the central cup-mark, and on the other side it is possibly mirrored by a rather indistinct depression or cup-mark and length of channel. Channel 3 is not continuous throughout its length, ending where it meets the edge of the stone beyond the small cup-marks. The cup-marks and channels show no signs of wear caused by any specific use, and there is no other evidence besides the general shape of the working to suggest function. Oolitic limestone is soft and fairly porous, and this would preclude any use of the cups which involved prolonged abrasion. Indeed any such use would soon result in observable wear obliterating the marks of initial working, and this is not the case. The cup-marks and ring-channelling were produced by hammering or pecking away the stone, and peck-marks survive over the entire surface of the cups and rings, except around the lips and the top few centimetres of the cup-marks, where they have been smoothed out or have worn away. Any discussion of functional explanations for cup- and ring-marked objects is extremely difficult, and the problems of interpretation of the group as a whole are outlined in greater depth elsewhere (Morris, 1979).

The central cup-mark is somewhat larger than the average size of cup-mark found further north, although still larger cup-marks are in fact known. It is similar in shape to the single, still larger depression in a small, columnar, tapering block of oolitic limestone found during an early excavation on a site producing iron-age material a few kilometres away on Cleeve Hill (Marshall, 1978).

Acknowledgement

A.M. would like to thank the landowner Mr D. Abbatt, of Langley Hill Farm, Winchcombe, for his co-operation, and also the field-walkers Simon Smith and Barbara van Dyke who helped search the site.

Bibliography

- C.A.R.G. 1982: Cotswold Archaeological Research Group, Research Report 1
 Hall, M., and Gingell, C., 1974: 'Nottingham Hill, Gloucestershire, 1972', *Antiquity* XLVIII. 306–309
 Marshall, A.J., 1978: 'Material from iron age sites in the northern Cotswolds', *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, XCVI. 17–26
 Morris, R.W.B., 1977: *Prehistoric Rock Art of Argyll* (Dolphin Press, Poole, Dorset)
 Morris, R.W.B., 1979: *Prehistoric Rock Art of Galloway* (Blandford Press, Poole, Dorset)
 Morris, R.W.B., 1981: *Prehistoric Rock Art of Southern Scotland* (B.A.R., British series 86, Oxford)
 R.C.H.M. 1976: Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Glos. I: Iron Age and Romano-British Monuments in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds*

March 1983

RONALD W.B. MORRIS AND ALISTAIR MARSHALL

EARTHWORKS AT ABBEY (ALVESTON) AND ELBERTON (AUST)

The following two reports deal with surface finds from two so-called 'camps' near Thornbury. The material, which has been collected over the last twelve years, gives some partial dating and clarifies the extent of occupation.

A tentative fabric series for the pottery has been deposited along with the finds at the City Museum, Bristol.

I would like to thank Mr F. Weekes, of Grovesend Farm, and Mrs Hill, of the Grove, Alveston, for permission to recover the surface finds at Abbey Camp; and Mr and Mrs Bernays of Old Down, Tockington, for permission to investigate Elberton Camp.

ABBAY CAMP

Abbey Camp straddles the old ridgeway, now the A38, just south-east of Thornbury, in the parish of Alveston. At this point (ST 649888) on gradually rising ground, attaining 91 m (350 ft), there are views of the Forest of Dean, the Severn Valley and part of the Cotswolds (see FIG. 1).

The earthworks form a rough ellipse and are mostly intact on the south side of the road, where a gap can be assumed to have given access to a settlement outside the earthwork. On the west side the camp is bounded by a lane leading from Vilner Farm on through the 'settlement' and probably at one time connecting with Dodsmoor Lane. Local tradition speaks of this lane as at one time 'flowing with blood', the tradition possibly originating from the discovery of human bones when the road was widened in the 1930s. A local field-name 'Long Strangers' could point to other similar finds.

The name 'Abbey' is difficult to explain but has been retained for a house on the edge of the earthwork. A cottage nearby on the A38 overlies Roman material discovered during extensions to the building. This is known as 'Little Abbey'.

Whatever the earlier date and function of the site may have been, there are all the signs of intensive Romano-British occupation up to the 4th century. Stone roofing tiles indicate a substantial building, although the foundations are not visible. In the pasture between the earthwork and the lane some uneven features need investigation in view of some reference to a possible barrow in the vicinity.¹ The finds came from the area shaded in FIG. 1.

1. *Trans. B.G.A.S.* LXXIX (1960), 101; Witts, *Arch. Handbook of Glos.* (1883), 1.