

4.4 Trench 23

The combined results from the 1999 excavation of Tr3 and the 2002 excavation of Tr16 had raised the possibility that an Iron Age roundhouse might once have stood in the middle of Area A, the garden of the Old Vicarage. The basis of this interpretation was the edge of an un-excavated feature recorded running north west to south east across the west side of Tr3. When Tr16 was excavated a series of curving gullies were found which matched closely the feature found in Tr3. When combined these features described a semi-circle. On many Iron Age sites the primary archaeological evidence for the existence of roundhouses are the remains of the circular drainage gullies which would have run around the house beneath the eaves of the thatched roof. As ditches and gullies of various shapes and sizes are quite common on Iron Age sites the evidence from Tr3 and Tr16 was not enough to say conclusively that the gullies found in them would go on to form a circle. Therefore John and Ann Hearle gave permission for trenches to be excavated in their garden with the specific intention of following the line of the gullies found in the previous trenches. The only restriction on the excavations was quite understandably the large rhododendron bush just a short distance to the south and west of the point that the gullies ran out of the south west corner of Tr16. It was in the gap between the bush and Tr16 that Tr23 was excavated (Fig 10).

Tr23 was hand excavated 4.5m long north to south by 1.5m wide. It quickly became obvious that the gully from Tr16 did indeed continue to run south west through Tr23. It's presence was clearly indicated by the presence of a dark grey fill, (467), within the cut, [365]. This was very similar to the charcoal rich fills of the gully found in Tr16. In Tr16 it would seem that this fill represented a deliberate backfilling of the gullies. Excavation of fill (467) revealed a second fill (465) which appeared to be derived from the surrounding natural boulder clay and probably represents natural silting during the lifetime of the gully. The exposed gully cut was excavated for a length of 1.20m. It was 0.75m wide and 0.30m deep. It's sides initially sloped steeply then broke to a shallower angle onto a flat base.

One of the most significant findings from Tr16 was the fact that in the south west corner of the trench the roundhouse gullies were cut by a stone lined linear feature. This suggested a change of function for this part of the Iron Age settlement. Immediately north of cut [365] was a linear feature running east to west across Tr23. It's fill, (390), contained a high percentage of sandstone fragments. This feature appeared to be associated with a post hole. As it is aligned perfectly with the stone lined gully found in Tr16 it probably represents the westward extension of that feature.

Discussion

The section of gully excavated in Tr23 (Fig 11) was very similar to cut [114] the section of gully excavated in the south west corner of Tr16. Like cut [114] this was a single gully whereas immediately north of the stone lined gully in Tr16 there were clearly two phases of gully. These have been interpreted as representing either a re-cutting of an original gully in order to maintain it's efficiency as a drainage gully or as representing a completely new gully encircling a new roundhouse. There was no indication of a second phase of gully in Tr23. This would seem to support the theory that the gullies were re-cut. If a second phase of roundhouse existed it might be expected that a new gully would be dug all the way around it. However the maintenance of an original gully might only require re-cutting in certain areas which is what seems to be the case in the south west corner of Tr16 and Tr23. As in Tr16 the gully in Tr23 was cut entirely through boulder clay without any sign of the natural sandstone bedrock. Cut [365] in Tr23 also seems to continue the trend seen in Tr16 of a shallowing of the gullies as they ran south.