

REPORTS

Middle Iron Age Occupation at Ells Lane, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire

STEVE FORD

with contributions by PAUL BLINKHORN and CERI FALYS

SUMMARY

Excavation revealed one middle Bronze Age pit and one later Bronze Age or early Iron Age pit, and elements of a small, short-lived, middle to late Iron Age farmstead. Artefactual evidence for earlier periods (Mesolithic and Neolithic) was also present, but no features of these dates. Other than pottery, and residual flints, finds were sparse.

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd carried out an archaeological excavation on land adjacent to Banbury Road and Ells Lane, on the northern margins of Bloxham, near Banbury, Oxfordshire (SP 4330 3665) (Fig. 1), in advance of housing development. Based on the findings of evaluation¹ of the whole area of the proposed development (1.26 ha), excavation was targeted on the southern portion of the site. The site was in pasture on the lower slopes of Hobb Hill and varied in elevation between about 127 m (south-west) to about 123 m (north-east) above OD, Hobb Hill rising to over 150 m just to the west. The northernmost trenches revealed geology of Marlstone rock beds, whereas those trenches further south revealed the Upper Lias clay. Traces of ridge and furrow were observed in the northern portion of the proposal site and on the slopes of Hobb Hill, but were not visible in the excavation area. More broadly, Bloxham nestles in the valley of a tributary of the Cherwell, at the foot of the Cotswolds which rise to the west; this is a region where the oolitic limestone to the south gives way to the lias claylands of the South Midlands.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies in an area of the county with relatively little recorded archaeology for earlier periods, despite the great expansion of fieldwork and aerial reconnaissance in recent years.² Fieldwork as a response to redevelopment in Banbury has revealed a range of sites and finds, including Iron Age and Saxon settlement.³ A late Roman cemetery has been located just west of Bloxham itself (Fig. 1),⁴ but there is no evidence that Bloxham was the location of a large or nucleated Roman settlement.⁵ Various sub-rectangular or rectangular enclosures are recorded in the county Sites and Monuments Record to the south of the site, which might be of Iron Age or Roman date, but

¹ Sean Wallis, 'Ells Lane, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire, an archaeological evaluation', (TVAS TS report, 2005).

² Grace Briggs, Jean Cook, and Trevor Rowley, eds, *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (Oxford, 1986); Roger Featherstone and Bob Bewley, 'Aerial reconnaissance in North Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 65 (2000), pp. 13–26.

³ Charlotte Stevens, 'Iron Age and Saxon Settlement at Juggler's Close, Banbury, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 69 (2005), pp. 385–416.

⁴ W. F. J. Knight, 'A Romano-British site at Bloxham, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 3 (1938), pp. 41–56.

⁵ Martin Henig and Paul Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 2000), p. 68.

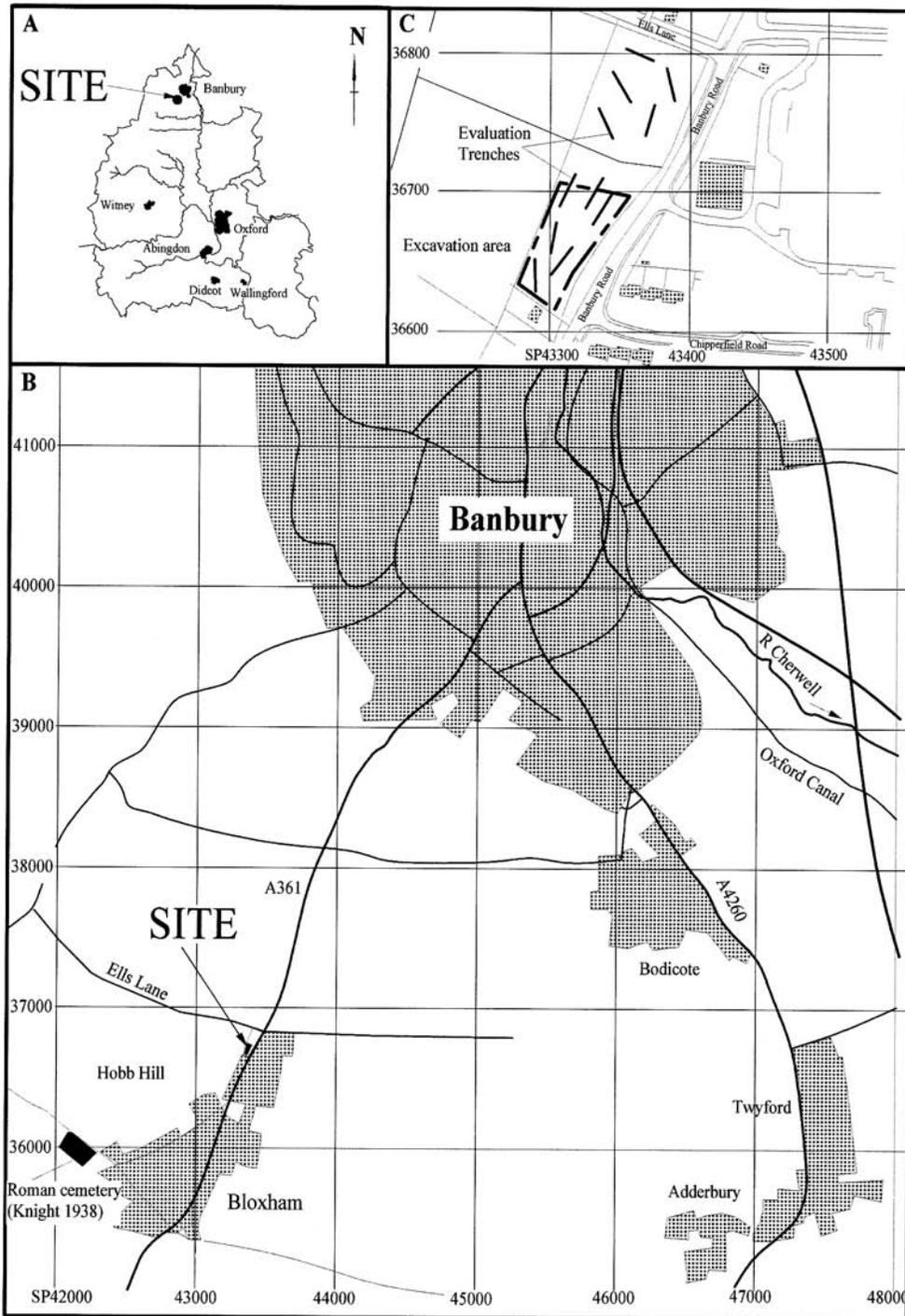


Fig. 1. Site location in relation to Oxfordshire (A), Banbury (B) and Bloxham (C)

this has yet to be confirmed by excavation. At Steeple Aston, south of the site, recent work has revealed Iron Age and Roman settlement.⁶ A string of hillforts extends along the Cherwell valley, towards Bicester, of which Madmarston Camp, some 5 km to the north-west of the current site, has seen geophysical survey and limited excavation,⁷ while Tadmarton fort is 4 km due west. Around Bicester itself several middle and late Iron Age and Roman sites are known.⁸

The place-name Bloxham is Anglo-Saxon in origin, and translates simply as ‘the homestead of [a man called] Blocc’.⁹ The Church of St Mary in Bloxham was a minster, mentioned in a charter of AD 1067, when William I granted it to Westminster Abbey. It remained important until the thirteenth century.¹⁰ The settlement of Bloxham formed due to the original ecclesiastical enclosure, and it enlarged as the lay community grew. A notable feature of nearly all the minsters of the region was their proximity to water transport. In the case of Bloxham, the minster was located on a stream feeding the Cherwell.¹¹

DISCUSSION

A small excavation has revealed a range of finds and deposits, representing several different periods, with the emphasis on the middle to late Iron Age. What appeared a straightforward ‘single phase’ site at the outset turned out to yield greater complexity on analysis. The importance of routine multiple radiocarbon dating, even on apparently single-period sites, is again emphasized.¹²

The earlier periods are represented by lithics alone, with both Mesolithic and Neolithic or earlier Bronze Age material present, but without marked clustering to indicate occupation or specific activities. Yet the site lies in a region without abundant raw material, and where lithic usage is conservative. The relatively high density of flintwork recovered would therefore appear to be more than a product of casual loss or rejection (typical of the more flint-rich geologies of southern England) and points to occupation of these periods in this locale, if not within the area excavated here.

The presence of a burial-related deposit, radiocarbon dated to the middle Bronze Age, points to funerary activity on the site at this time, which may also account for some of the flintwork recovered. Similarly, a single pit, radiocarbon dated to the early Iron Age, predates the main Iron Age activity by several centuries. Apart from comminuted burnt bone from the earlier feature, neither of these features produced artefacts or economic data. Combined with the flintwork, these results create an expectation that additional contemporary occupation deposits may be found in surrounding areas.

The main activity, dated by radiocarbon and pottery, is of middle Iron Age date, and towards the end of that period, comprising an unenclosed settlement with one roundhouse site, redefined once, and a small number of gullies, pits, and postholes of uncertain function in adjacent areas. The very few charred plant remains include wheat and barley and indicate consumption of an arable crop and use of oak as fuel, as is fairly typical. Yet there is no evidence for below-ground

⁶ S. Cook and C. Hayden, ‘Prehistoric and Roman settlement near Heyford Road, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire’, *Oxoniensia*, 65 (2000), pp. 161–210.

⁷ P. J. Fowler, ‘Excavations at Madmarston Camp, Swalcliffe, 1957–8’, *Oxoniensia*, 25, pp. 3–48.

⁸ Peter Ellis, Gwilym Hughes, and Laurence Jones, ‘An Iron Age boundary and settlement features at Slade Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire: a report on excavations 1996’, *Oxoniensia*, 65 (2000), pp. 211–65; Anne Marie Cromarty, Stuart Foreman, and Paul Murray, ‘The excavation of a late Iron Age enclosed settlement at Bicester Fields Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire’, *Oxoniensia*, 64 (1999), pp. 153–233.

⁹ A. D. Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names* (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁰ John Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994).

¹¹ John Blair, ‘The Minsters of the Thames’, in John Blair and Brian Golding, eds, *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Honour of Barbara Harvey* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 5–28.

¹² Colin Haselgrove, et al., *Understanding the British Iron Age: an Agenda for Action: a Report for the Iron Age Research Seminar and the Council of the Prehistoric Society* (Salisbury, 2001).

storage in the form of the storage pits typical of sites located on chalk, limestone, and gravel outcrops in the region. This may be a result of the unsuitability of the underlying clay, but there is also an absence of evidence taken to be typical of above-ground storage, such as four-posters and similar structures. Elsewhere, on more extensively excavated clayland sites where a fuller ground plan has been obtained, this lack of storage has also been noticed.¹³ In a similar vein, there is a lack of obvious structural complexity in the ground plan, such as additional gullies interpretable as animal pens.

In conclusion, it is considered that the site is likely to represent part of a basic farmstead of low status and probably short duration. However, the full extent of the site has not been determined, and it could be a peripheral part of a much larger settlement complex extending south. The evidence recovered here provides no real indication of the economic basis of the site, although the tiny amount of iron slag recovered, suggesting the possibility of iron working, might be more significant than it appears at first sight. The site's position within the complex hierarchy of settlement already recorded for the Upper Thames region,¹⁴ or in relation to the hillforts nearby, is a topic which can be considered only from future fieldwork in adjacent areas. Despite the limited nature of the evidence here, the site makes a significant contribution to the study of this period in the North Oxfordshire area, where few sites of this period are known, especially on this geological outcrop.

THE FIELDWORK

Evaluation

The evaluation involved the machine digging of eleven trenches between 19 m and 22 m long and 1.6 m wide. Five trenches contained prehistoric deposits,¹⁵ all within the area subsequently excavated; their descriptions are integrated with the excavation results below.

Excavation

Topsoil and subsoil, typically 0.5 m deep, were stripped mechanically from an area of 2900 sq m, to expose the archaeologically relevant horizon. A few archaeological features (notably a charcoal-rich deposit) were obvious from the initial phase of stripping, but considerable difficulty was encountered in recognizing other deposits and in establishing the correct level, despite observation of the stripped area over several weeks in both dry and wet conditions. Several phases of re-machining took place during the initial stripping, and at the end of the fieldwork, further machine stripping was carried out to clarify the extent of some of the deposits previously revealed. As most of the features revealed were quite shallow, it is not thought that this repeated machining had a serious adverse effect. A range of periods is represented by the cut features and artefactual material recovered during the excavation. These are ascribed to six phases.

Mesolithic, Neolithic, Early Bronze Age

This combined 'phase' is represented only by unstratified or residual lithic artefacts. A small proportion of these were distinctive, such as those of narrow flake (blade) tradition, indicative of Mesolithic or possibly early Neolithic date. A burnt fragment of polished stone axe (Langdale tuff?) is likely to be of Neolithic or possibly early Bronze Age date, and a triangular arrowhead is of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. The remaining, less distinctive, pieces could be of any date from the Mesolithic to the end of the Bronze Age. The distribution of all struck flint recovered across the site is shown on Figure 3, combined with unstratified pottery finds. There are no concentrations of this material sufficient to indicate a specific focus of activity, but the relative density of flints is of note in an area of the county with few natural flint resources.

¹³ Graham Hull and Steve Preston, 'Middle Iron Age occupation at Mawsley New Village, Cransley Lodge, Kettering, Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 30 (2002), pp. 1–20.

¹⁴ Richard Hingley and David Miles, 'Aspects of Iron Age settlement in the Upper Thames Valley', in Barry Cunliffe and David Miles, eds, *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 2 (Oxford, 1984) p. 54; David Miles, 'The Iron Age', in Grace Briggs, Jean Cook, and Trevor Rowley, eds, *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 49–57.

¹⁵ Wallis, 'Ells Lane, Bloxham'.

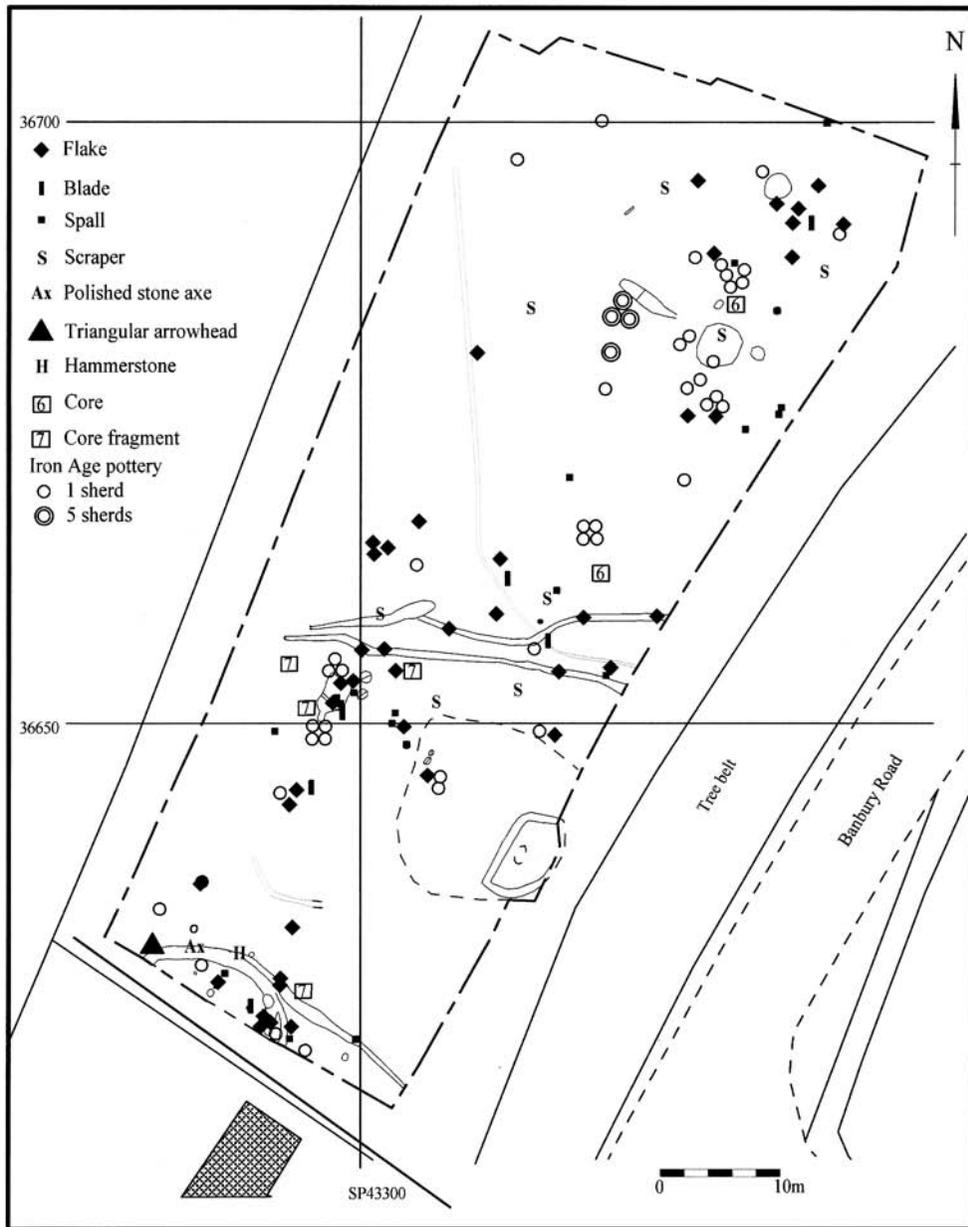


Fig. 3. Distribution of struck flint and unstratified pottery

Middle Bronze Age

A shallow, bowl-shaped pit (203), towards the south end of the site, contained a fill that was rich in charcoal and included a large number of tiny fragments of burnt bone (23 g), which were too small to identify (even to the level of human or animal). It is considered that the deposit represents cremation pyre debris. No artefacts were recovered, but a radiocarbon determination of 1410–1285 cal BC indicates a date in the middle Bronze Age (Table 1).

Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age

A bowl-shaped pit (139) was cut by middle Iron Age ring gully 103. It had a charcoal-rich fill but produced no artefacts. A radiocarbon determination of 790–536 BC (Table 1) indicates that the feature predates ring gully 100 by several centuries and belongs to the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age. Apart from wood charcoal, no other finds or charred plant remains were recovered.

Middle Iron Age

The main phase of activity on the site belongs to the middle Iron Age. The Iron Age features comprise a ring gully (103), four linear features (100–102, 106), shallow pits (135/141, 7/212), certain and possible postholes (9, 10, 124, 142, 146, 148 and 125?), some of which are ascribed to this period but are in fact undated, and uncertain deposits, possibly tree holes (207, 131, 16/143).

The ring gully (103) structure lay on the southernmost portion of the site with about one third of the circumference exposed (assuming a circular plan). The ring gully had been recut on at least one occasion, as the gully diverged into two segments (140, 200) on the eastern side, one of which was a terminal (140). Although the gully was wider in the western segment, only a single cut was visible in section; any recut must have totally removed the original. The excavated sections of this feature produced the majority of artefacts from the site, mainly pottery, but including residual struck flints, a few fragments of burnt flint, and fragments of degraded animal bone. A radiocarbon determination on charcoal from slot 136 gave a date of 201–46 cal BC (Table 1).

Joining the ring gully was ditch 106, which terminated (210) at its junction with the gully, but without a stratigraphic sequence visible. Several slots across this ditch produced no artefacts.

Within the ring gully were two postholes (142 and 146) and just outside it, two more (148 and 211). Postholes 142 and 211 produced Iron Age pottery and may be directly associated with the use of the ring gully. However, as two other deposits in the same area are of middle Bronze Age (203, just outside the ring gully) or late Bronze Age/early Iron Age date (139, inside and cut by the ring gully), it is unsafe to assume these postholes are associated with this phase.

Three gullies (100, 101, 102) formed a roughly parallel alignment approximately 2 m apart, orientated east-west across the centre of the site, although it does not seem appropriate to discuss this arrangement in terms of a trackway. The relationship between gullies 100 and 102 is unclear, as was the western limit of gully 100. This was not successfully clarified by further stripping at the end of the fieldwork. Gullies 100 and 101 continue beyond the eastern margin of the site, with gully 101 petering out to the west. Similarly gully 102, whilst well defined at its eastern terminal (129), also petered out to the west. All three gullies produced Iron Age pottery and residual struck flint, with gullies 101 (slot 11) and 102 (slot 3) producing tiny fragments of iron slag.

Feature 7/212 had a deep V-shaped profile of ditch-sized proportions, yet appears to be no more than 4 m long, again petering out to west and east, and is perhaps better considered as an elongated pit. It produced a relatively large number of pottery sherds (33), burnt clay, and tiny fragments of animal bone.

At the north end of the site were dark spreads, initially considered to be pits (16/143, 131, 207). However, they were all shallow, typically 0.1 m deep, with irregular bases and diffuse edges, and may be tree-root holes or natural hollows. They produced some pottery, struck flint, and fired clay. They may represent an episode of tree clearance. A short length (1 m) of what appeared to be a gully (214) is of uncertain date or origin. Similarly, at the south end of the site, feature 1 had seemed to be a clear ditch during the evaluation, but its edges simply petered out on excavation: it produced twenty sherds of pottery and a small amount of bone. Other 'features' from the evaluation could not be relocated at all; they may have been nothing more than a buried soil sitting in natural undulations. The few finds from these 'features' have been treated as surface finds.

Roman

This phase is represented only by three sherds of unstratified pottery.

Post-medieval

What may be flimsy wall footings, or possibly drains, of limestone rubble (104, 105), incorporating two sherds of pottery from the mid-eighteenth century or later, and an extensive spread of limestone rubble (57, 206), sealing a more positive limestone wall foundation (107), all seem to relate to post-medieval use of the site. Historic maps, including Davis's map of 1797, and Ordnance Survey maps of 1881, 1900, and 1923, however, do not indicate any structures on the site.

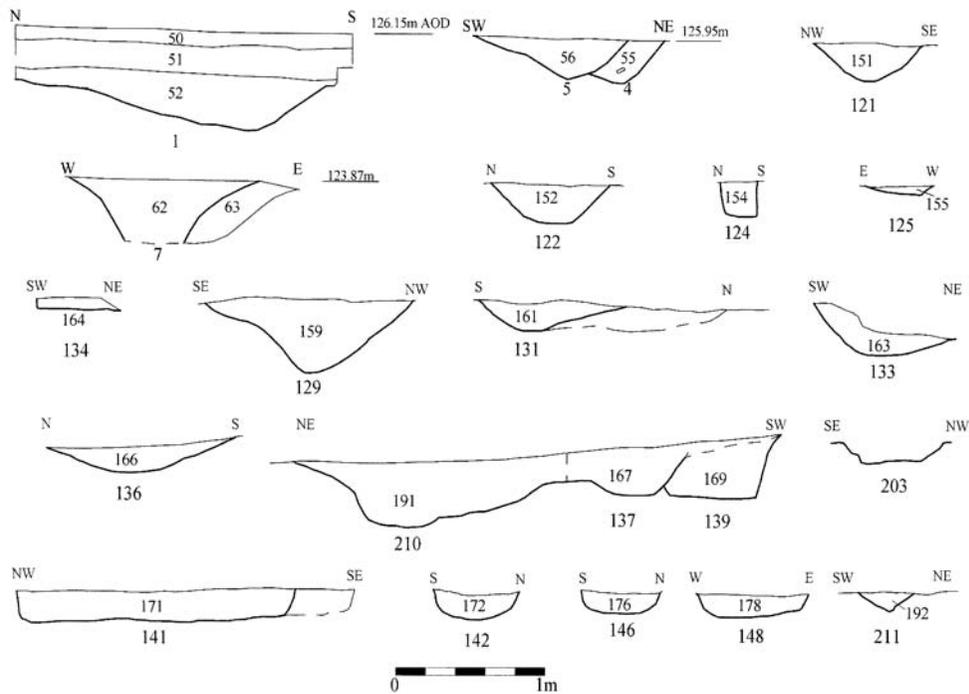


Fig. 4. Selected sections of features

RADIOCARBON DATING

Three radiocarbon determinations were obtained by the University of Kiel on charcoal fragments (Table 1). The calibrated dates derive from the INTCAL98 curve,¹⁶ and the results are considered reliable. Details are in the archive.

THE POTTERY by PAUL BLINKHORN

The pottery assemblage comprised 423 sherds, with a total weight of 1,765 g. The bulk of the material was of Iron Age date, with just three sherds of Roman (38 g) and two of post-medieval creamware (23 g). The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 2.

Iron Age Fabrics

The following fabrics were noted:

- F1: Moderate grey sub-angular grog up to 5 mm, most 2 mm or less. Rare to sparse slivers of shell up to 2 mm. 79 sherds, 547 g.
- F2: Fine shell fragments up to 3 mm, few other visible inclusions. Much of the shell leached out. 308 sherds, 1005 g.
- F3: Moderate organic voids up to 5 mm, rare angular red ironstone up to 3 mm. 4 sherds, 18 g.
- F4: Moderate sub-angular quartz up to 2 mm, sparse angular white flint up to 2 mm. 11 sherds, 40 g.
- F5: Fine sandy. Few visible inclusions, apart from sparse sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5 mm. 4 sherds, 24 g.
- F6: Coarse shell. Moderate to dense shelly limestone up to 5 mm. 12 sherds, 70 g.

¹⁶ M. Stuiver, P. J. Reimer, E. Bard, J. W. Beck, G. S. Burr, K. A. Hughen, B. Kromer, G. McCormac, J. van der Plicht, and M. Spurk, 'INTCAL98 radiocarbon age calibration', *Radiocarbon*, 40(1998), pp. 1041–84.

TABLE 1. RADIOCARBON DETERMINATIONS

KIA31993: Charcoal, Ring gully 136 (166)		
Radiocarbon Age:	BP 2111 ± 29	
Calibrated Ages:	cal BC 162, 130, 120	Probability
One Sigma Range: (Probability 68.3 %)	cal BC 172–92 69–63	64.9% 3.4%
Two Sigma Range: (Probability 95.4 %)	cal BC 201–46	95.4%
KIA31994: Charcoal, Pit 139 (169)		
Radiocarbon Age:	BP 2505 ± 28	
Calibrated Ages:	cal BC 761, 679, 670, 610, 596	Probability
One Sigma Range: (Probability 68.3 %)	cal BC 765–758 686–657 650–542	2.7% 12.3% 53.3%
Two Sigma Range: (Probability 95.4 %)	cal BC 790–536 534–519	93.5% 1.9%
KIA31995: Charcoal, pyre debris 203 (182)		
Radiocarbon Age:	BP 3075 ± 30	
Calibrated Ages:	cal BC 1375, 1336, 1320	Probability
One Sigma Range: (Probability 68.3 %)	cal BC 1400–1367 1363–1310	26.6% 41.7%
Two Sigma Range: (Probability 95.4 %)	cal BC 1411–1285 1285–1261	85.9% 9.5%

The Iron Age Assemblage

The Iron Age pottery assemblage comprised 418 sherds, with a total weight of 1704 g. It consisted of largely featureless, highly fragmented sherds (mean weight of just 4.1 g), which can only be broadly dated to the Iron Age. Featured sherds were rare – just four rimsherds, a fragment of a lug handle, and a single large base sherd. All the sherds were hand-built, with no evidence of wheel-throwing. The rims were all of simple upright forms, with no evidence of decoration of any kind (Fig. 5: 1–4).

Relatively few assemblages of Iron Age pottery have been excavated in the Banbury area, or northern Oxfordshire generally. Booth¹⁷ noted that in the north of the county, shell-tempered fabrics tend to be of early or middle Iron Age date. Early Iron Age assemblages usually produce vessels with pronounced shoulders and finger-tipped rims; such features were entirely absent from this assemblage.

One of the few recent excavations in Banbury, at Juggler's Close, produced an assemblage of 661 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery.¹⁸ The bulk of that assemblage comprised sand-tempered and/or shelly wares, along with 182 sherds of grog-tempered, wheel-thrown 'Belgic' wares. Just one sherd of hand-built, grog-tempered pottery was noted. That site also produced small quantities of flint-and-quartz tempered wares, similar to fabric 4 from Ells Lane. A smaller assemblage at Hennef Way,¹⁹ consisted of twenty sherds of undiagnostic Iron Age pottery, all in a shelly fabric similar to fabric 2 at this site.

¹⁷ Paul Booth, 'Appendix: The Iron Age Pottery', in C Cropper and Alan Hardy, 'The Excavation of Iron Age and medieval Features at Glympton Park, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 62 (1997), pp. 105–6.

¹⁸ Edward Biddulph, 'The Iron Age Pottery', in Charlotte Stevens, 'Iron Age and Saxon Settlement at Juggler's Close, Banbury, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 69 (2005), pp. 385–416.

¹⁹ Paul Blinkhorn, 'Pottery from Hennef Way, Banbury, Oxon.' (John Moore Heritage Services, TS report.)

TABLE 2. POTTERY OCCURRENCE BY NUMBER AND WEIGHT (in g) OF SHERDS PER CONTEXT BY FABRIC TYPE

Fabric		F1		F2		F3		F4		F5		F6	
<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Wt</i>										
1	52			12	39			6	27			2	5
5	56	2	27	19	54							2	12
7	62			24	48							6	14
10	60											1	6
122	152			1	4								
123	153			1	2								
125	155			1	1								
130	160	2	3	16	19								
131	161			3	10								
132	162			1	1								
133	163	1	1										
135	165			1	5								
136	166	4	13	20	45								
137	167	34	250	95	273	2	15						
138	168	1	5	1	1	2	3						
140	170	14	101	33	272			4	10				
141	171	2	8	9	14								
142	172			2	2								
200	183	3	12	11	27								
207	188	4	15	4	7								
211	192			5	17			1	3				
212	193			3	21								
*6	58			2	3								
*8	64			3	12								
*8	65			6	17								
*12	72			4	6								
*13	67			5	15					1	19		
*15	68									3	5		
other	unstrat.	12	112	24	71								
Total		79	547	308	1005	4	18	11	40	4	24	12	70

* evaluation 'feature' not located by excavation; treat as unstratified.

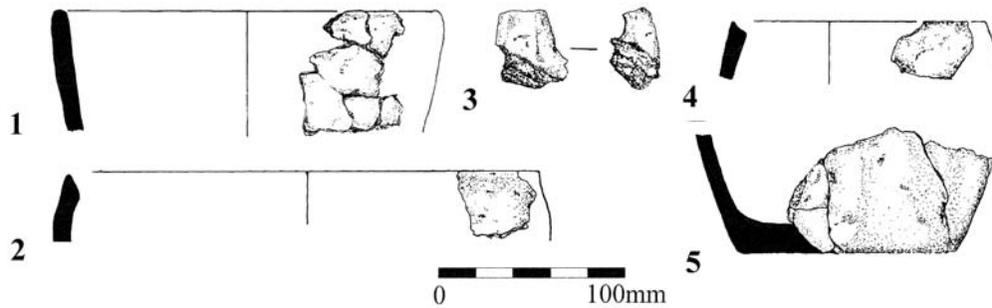


Fig. 5. Selected pottery (see text for details)

The presence of a relatively large assemblage of grog-tempered ware (F1) here is of note. Such pottery represented a small proportion of a middle Iron Age assemblage at Oxford Road, Bicester, but was by far the dominant fabric type amongst the late Iron Age 'Belgic' wares.²⁰ Grog-tempered vessels, both wheel-turned and hand-made, were also very common amongst the latest Iron Age pottery at Old Shifford Farm, Standlake.²¹

To the north evidence is equally scant in the vicinity of Banbury. At Culworth, near Sulgrave, 191 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery were recovered from a large enclosure ditch. All but ten sherds were in shelly fabrics, with the rest quartz-tempered.²² No grog-tempered sherds were noted.

The presence of hand-built, grog-tempered pottery at this site is somewhat enigmatic, given the paucity of such wares in the south Northamptonshire–north Oxfordshire region, other than at the very end of the Iron Age, when wheel-throwing was commonplace. No wheel-thrown Iron Age pottery was noted here. However, diagnostic carinated or finger-impressed early Iron Age and scored middle Iron Age vessels were absent. The balance of evidence would suggest, therefore, that this assemblage is probably of late Iron Age origin, perhaps the first century BC, but dating from before the introduction of wheel-thrown 'Belgic' wares, although this chronology is best regarded as tentative.

Illustrations

Fig. 5. 1: Fabric 2. Rimsherd with an upright profile. Black fabric with dark reddish-brown outer surface. Calcareous inclusions mainly leached out. Gully 103, slot 137, fill 167.

Fig. 5. 2: Fabric 1. Rimsherd with upright profile and internal bead. Light-grey fabric, with reddish-brown outer surface. Gully 103, slot 137, fill 167.

Fig. 5. 3: Fabric 2. Fragment of lug handle. Dark-grey fabric with reddish-brown surfaces. Gully 103, slot 137, fill 167.

Fig. 5. 4: Fabric 1. Rimsherd with upright profile and internal bead. Light-grey fabric with dark-brown outer surface. Same vessel as Fig. 5. 2? Gully 103, slot 140, fill 170.

Fig. 5. 5: Fabric 2. Base sherd. Uniform black fabric, calcareous inclusions, mainly leached out. Outer surface of body lightly burnished. Gully 103, slot 140, fill 170.

STRUCK FLINT by STEVE FORD

A small collection of eighty-four struck flints was recovered, including forty-two flakes, six blades (narrow flakes), nineteen spalls, two cores, four core fragments, and eleven retouched items. Thirty-six of the pieces came from Iron Age deposits, the rest from the stripped surface. It is doubtful whether any of the flintwork is contemporary with the Iron Age phase of activity on the site,²³ although some ad hoc use of sharp flint at this time cannot be excluded.

Apart from fire-damaged pieces, which account for twenty per cent of the collection, the material is in good condition, presumably as a result of the preserving properties of the clay substrate. A small number of pieces are patinated and iron stained. It is unclear where the raw material would have been obtained, but a range of colours

²⁰ Paul Booth, 'Pottery and other ceramic forms', in C. Mould, 'An archaeological excavation at Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 61 (1996), pp. 75–88, Table 1.

²¹ Jane R. Timby, 'Pottery', in Gill Hey, 'An Iron Age and Roman Settlement at Old Shifford, Standlake', *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), p. 134.

²² Paul Blinkhorn, 'The Pottery', in M. Audouy, 'Excavations at Berry Hill Close, Culworth', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 25 (1995), p. 55.

²³ A. Saville, 'Iron Age flintworking: fact or fiction?', *Lithics*, 2 (1981), pp. 6–9.

and textures is present. Relatively few pieces retained cortex, thus hindering sourcing, but also indicating that partially or wholly finished items were preferentially used, rather than working fresh nodules on site. Those pieces that do retain cortex suggest a secondary, pebble source, although some of the larger pieces might be direct from a chalk source. Direct chalkland sources are located at least 80 km to the south, with abundant secondary sources in river gravel deposits further still. It is likely that most of the material was obtained from glacial drift deposits in the environs of the site, although the volume and quality of such flint is not known.

Typology

Eleven formal types were present in the collection. These comprised eight scrapers, a hammerstone, a triangular arrowhead, and a fragmentary polished stone axe. In addition, two flakes have edge damage consistent with use, and another flake may have been retouched.

The stone axe has been broken in two places, with a middle segment remaining. It is very highly polished, with traces of just a single remnant flake scar remaining. The axe has an oval section, with slightly faceted sides. The piece has been burnt, but retains a light grey/greenish lustre, suggesting that it might be from the Group VI quarries in Langdale, in the Lake District.²⁴

These formal retouched types account for seventeen per cent of the collection (excluding spalls and core fragments), which is a high proportion, but not unexpected where raw material is at a premium.

Chronology

Several periods may be represented by the flintwork. The six narrow flakes (blades) are indicative of Mesolithic or possibly an early Neolithic date, and it is possible that some of the broad flakes are of similar date. However, it seems likely that the majority of the flintwork, which lacks distinctive chronological attributes, is of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. Two items are more diagnostic: the triangular arrowhead is of later Neolithic or early Bronze Age date,²⁵ and the polished stone axe is of Neolithic or possibly early Bronze Age date.

Distribution

The distribution of the excavated struck flint is shown on Figure 3. No marked clusters are evident, and the greater frequency of finds from the excavated deposits probably indicates no more than a more intensive search in those areas – or even just convenient holes for stray finds to accumulate in.

ANIMAL BONE by CERI FALYS

Of the total of 109 pieces of animal bone (weighing just 179 g) recovered from thirteen contexts, only three fragments of cattle-sized teeth were identifiable.

BURNT BONE by CERI FALYS

Burnt bone was recovered from ten contexts, primarily from sieved samples. All but one deposit were composed of very few small fragments. All pieces are chalky white, poorly preserved, and very small, with the largest fragment being 21 mm long and the majority under 5 mm. No identification was possible as to human or non-human, let alone any more detailed data. The largest deposit of burnt bone was whole-earth, sampled from pit 203 in a series of spits. The samples were wet sieved, using a 2-mm mesh, and also floated. A total of 528 small bone fragments, weighing just 23 g in total, was recovered, in addition to large quantities of fired clay and charcoal: the majority of pieces are 5 mm or smaller. None could be identified. It is possible this represents a deposit of pyre debris.

OTHER FINDS

A collection of 200 pieces of burnt clay was recovered, weighing a total of 743 g. Almost half (322 g) came from tree bole 207. None of the pieces showed any distinctive features. Nine small fragments of iron slag (33g), all from gullies 101 and 102, are insufficient to provide any information beyond the obvious indication of iron working somewhere nearby.

²⁴ T. H. McK Clough and W A Cummins, *Stone Axe Studies*, CBA Research Report 23 (London, 1979).

²⁵ H. S. Green, *The Flint Arrowheads of the British Isles*, BAR, BS 75 (Oxford, 1980).

PLANT REMAINS

Sixteen bulk samples taken for environmental analysis proved very low in plant remains, with only single grains of wheat (emmer or spelt) and barley identifiable in gully 101 (123) and gully 102 (129). The latter also contained relatively abundant oak charcoal, as did tree bole 207.

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