

Notes

A BEAKER RING-DITCH NEAR RADLEY

In October 1979 a small ring-ditch in the parish of Radley, Oxon, was exposed during gravel extraction and was excavated by the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.¹ The site (National Grid Reference SU 5321 9854) lay 300m. SSW of Lower Radley on the first gravel terrace² at a height of about 50m. OD. The feature excavated was the most northerly of a group of three ring-ditches, known from aerial photographs,³ the other two members of which were destroyed without record by quarrying.

The excavated ring-ditch had been covered by about 50cm. of topsoil which had been removed mechanically before excavation began. The site was cleaned by hand, revealing the features shown on Fig. 1.

THE DITCH

The ditch was sectioned in four places, and was found to be round-bottomed with gently sloping sides. It was generally about 100–120cm. wide at the level of the stripped surface of the gravel, and varied between 35cm. and 50cm. in depth. The ditch was both narrower and shallower than this in its northern part, because the surface of the gravel had been lowered somewhat here during topsoil stripping. The fill of the ditch consisted mainly of fine sandy red-brown loam, with some lenses of gravel and sand. The sections did not give any particular indication that the ditch fill might be derived from an internal mound or bank. Sectioning of the 'bulge' in the southern part of the ditch showed this bulge to be 80cm. deep, with a fill similar to that of the ditch. However, careful examination of the sections did not make clear whether this bulge constituted a separate feature, in unknown stratigraphical relationship to the ditch, or whether it was caused merely by a local widening and deepening of the ditch at this point.

The only find from the ditch was an arrowhead, found high up in the fill of the ditch.

INTERNAL FEATURES

Features A – E proved on excavation to be shallow depressions, probably natural in

¹ The Society would like to thank Tuckwell's Ltd., the owners of the gravel pit, and Mr. David Grose, the pit manager, for permission to excavate and for assistance in undertaking the work. We are also grateful to R.A. Chambers and Bob Wilson of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit for helping with the excavation, to Ahmed Shishtawi, Conservation Officer of the Oxford City and County Museum, for lifting the Beaker, and to Rachel Kenward of the Oxford City and County Museum who restored the Beaker. The finds have been placed on loan to Abingdon Museum by Tuckwells Ltd. Copies of the detailed site records have been deposited with Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit and the Field Department of the City and County Museum.

² Geological Survey 1 inch map, Sheet No. 253.

³ D. Benson and D. Miles, *The Upper Thames Valley — an Archaeological Survey of the River Gravels* (1974), 59, Map 31.

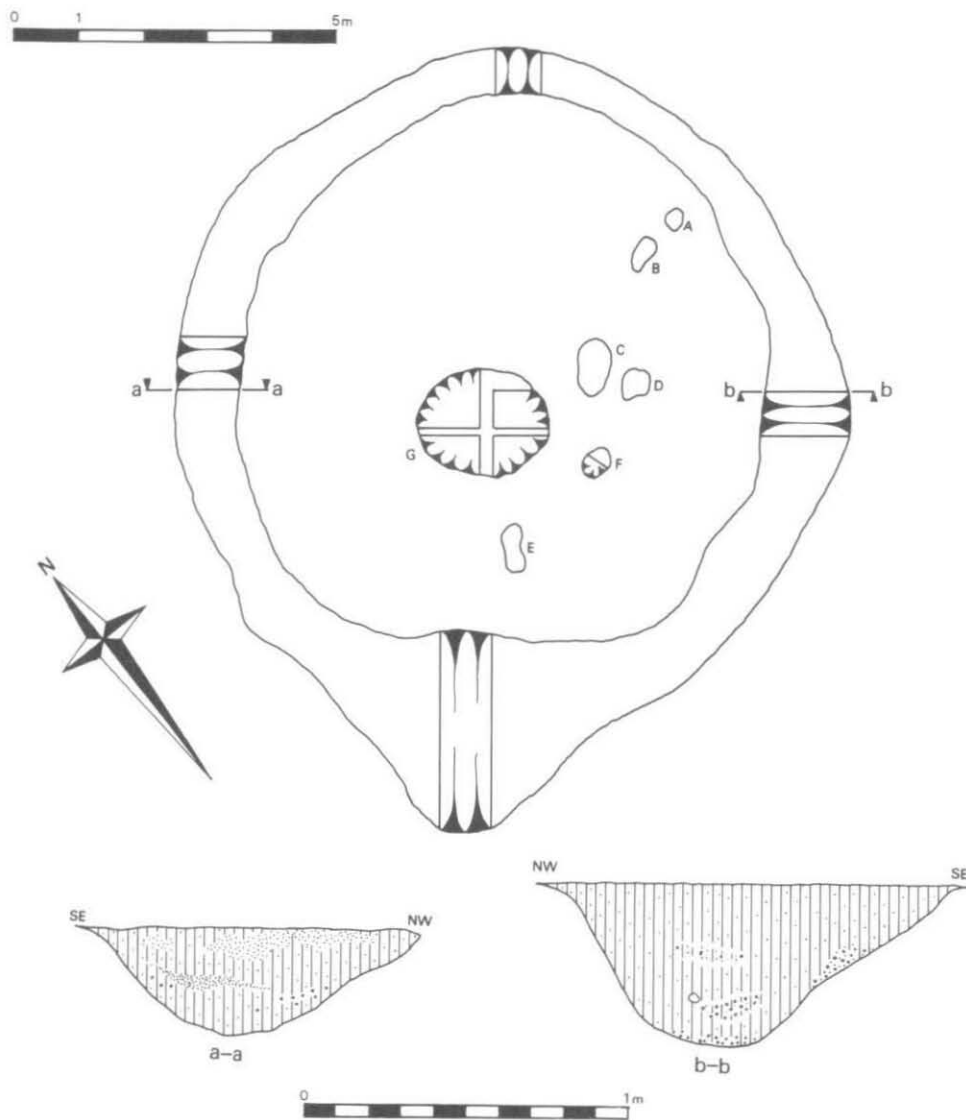


Fig. 1

(N.B. On the version of this plan published in C.B.A. Group IX *Newsletter* 10, Fig. 51, the orientation of north and the shape of the central pit are incorrectly shown.)

origin. Feature F was round-bottomed, 25cm. deep and 30cm. in diameter, with a fill of fine red-brown loam. It may represent a posthole.

The central pit, G, was visible on the aerial photograph. It proved to be roughly oval in plan, and measured 2.07m. E-W and 1.60m. N-S. The pit had a basically flat, but rather uneven bottom and varied in depth from 7 - 16cm. The fill consisted of fine red-brown loam with some gravel content.

The Beaker lay in the SW part of the pit, about 2 - 7 cm. above the base of the pit. One fragment of bone was found in the pit. No trace was found of an inhumation-burial, although the pit would presumably have contained one originally; it may have been destroyed by ploughing or during topsoil stripping.

THE FINDS

Beaker, (Fig 2,) restored from small fragments. Base complete and about three-quarters of rim, but almost continuous arc-shaped segment missing from rim to belly. Visible breaks appear mostly ancient. Preservation: weathered and slightly leached; only traces survive of burnished outer surface. Filler probably predominantly grog with stone component sparse, judging from visible breaks. Brownish-red exterior, interior reddish-brown. Cordon beneath rim. External decoration: herringbone (alternately opposed) and linear zones of notched stamps, one of some 5 teeth, another of some 10 or more.

This is a fine Middle Beaker of characteristically southern British style.⁴ It is exceptionally large for a grave pot; regionally only the Middle Beaker (similarly with a rim cordon) from the man's grave with gold ear-rings and flint arrowheads in Radley 4a nearby in the Barrow Hills barrow — and ring ditch — cemetery, would be comparable in size.⁵ Larger beakers come however from non-sepulchral contexts: for example, the Late Beaker from near at hand at Thrupp Farm, Radley,⁶ and from further afield with the Middle Beaker associated with a footed bowl from Inkpen, Berks.,⁷ and two represented in the filling of the north-west chamber at the West Kennett long barrow, Wilts.⁸

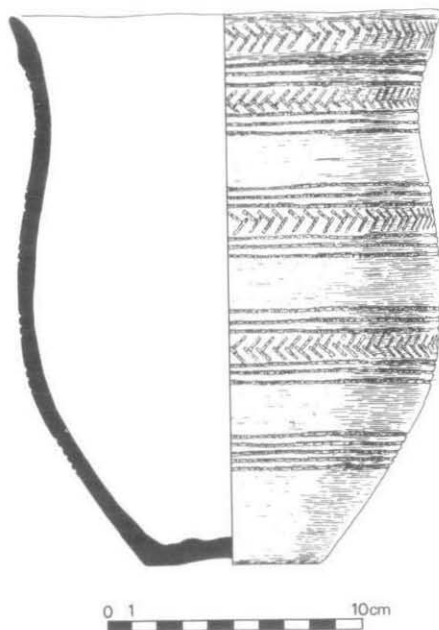


Fig. 2

⁴ H. Case, 'The Beaker culture in Britain and Ireland' in *Beakers in Britain and Europe*, (B.A.R. S26, 1977), ed. R. Mercer, 75ff.

⁵ A. Williams, 'Excavations in Barrow Hills Fields, Radley, Berks, 1944', *Oxoniensia*, xiii (1948), 4-9; D.L. Clarke, *Beaker Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (1970), Fig. 63.

⁶ A. Sherratt, 'A New Beaker from Radley', *Oxoniensia*, xxxviii (1973), 384-5.

⁷ Clarke, *op.cit.*, Fig. 205.

⁸ S. Piggott, *The West Kennet Long Barrow* (1962), 45: B7, B8.

Flint Flake, (Fig. 3), L.3.9cm. with three ancient breaks. Shallow retouch on dorsal face along two intact edges (and partly on bulbar face along one) suggest it may be a fragmentary type F transverse arrowhead.⁹ Nibbled retouch invasive of ancient patina dorsally along one of the edges is plainly more recent. Such arrowheads, although not part of the Beaker Culture, will have been contemporary with its Middle phase.

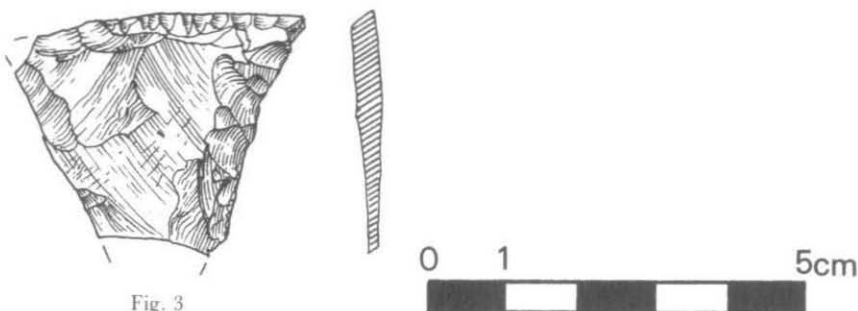


Fig. 3

DISCUSSION

The site is likely to have been a burial monument of the Beaker Culture. The superficial dimensions of the central pit are appropriate to a Middle Beaker grave, but it appears exceptionally shallow. If however it had been dug partly through subsoil loam capping the gravel (as elsewhere at Radley),¹⁰ the upper part of the pit would have been removed in 'topsoil' stripping. This could also account for the absence of any traces of an inhumation.

Small burial monuments (barrows or ringbanks) around 10 metres or less in diameter, as suggested by the ring-ditch here, are among the characteristic funerary features of the Middle Beaker phase, as nearby at Radley 4a¹¹ and regionally at Dorchester XII,¹² Stanton Harcourt (secondary ring-ditch)¹³ and Lambourn 17.¹⁴

A concentration of Beaker finds exists in the area between Abingdon and Radley¹⁵ and the present site adds to this general pattern. Hitherto, however, most of the Beaker material from this area, and from the Upper Thames Valley as a whole, has come from the second, Summertown-Radley, gravel terrace.¹⁶ What the new find does make clear, when considered with the Beaker recently found at Thrupp, about 2km. SW of Radley,¹⁷ and with other Beaker sherds and flints found nearby,¹⁸ is that Beaker activity extended onto the first terrace, and indeed to the margins of the river itself.

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with contributions by HUMPHREY CASE

⁹ J.G.D. Clark, 'Derivative Forms of the *petit tranche* in Britain', *Archaeol. Jnl.*, xcl (1934), 50-2.

¹⁰ See H. Case *et al.*, 'Excavations at City Farm, Hanborough, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, xxix/xxx (1964/5), 8.

¹¹ Williams, *op. cit.*, Fig. 63.

¹² R.J.C. Atkinson, 'The Excavations at Dorchester, Oxfordshire 1946-1951', *Archaeological Newsletter*, iv (1951), 58.

¹³ W.F. Grimes, 'Excavations at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon., 1940', *Oxoniensia*, viii/ix (1943/4), 34-45.

¹⁴ H. Case, 'The Lambourn Seven Barrows', *Berks. Archaeol. Jnl.*, lv (1956/7), 23-5.

¹⁵ H. Case, 'Beaker Pottery from the Oxford Region: 1939-55', *Oxoniensia*, xxi (1956), Fig. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Sherratt, *op. cit.*, 4-9. This find was made on the first terrace, not on the Summertown-Radley terrace.

¹⁸ In possession of Abingdon Archaeological Society, unpublished.

A BRONZE AGE FIELD SYSTEM AT NORTHFIELD FARM ?

The lack of domestic sites datable to the Bronze Age is a major problem of the archaeology of the Upper Thames region. However, interpretation of a recently-published excavation and associated cropmarks suggests one possible example of a non-ritual site of the Bronze Age.¹

Gray's publication of her excavations at Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham, includes details of two pairs of small, parallel ditches, at right angles to each other. These ditches were cut by the ditches of a late 1st or early 2nd century AD trackway and enclosure system, but were otherwise undated. Nearby lay complexes of pits, assigned to the Bronze Age on the basis of sherds found in some of them, and a penannular ditch which may represent a 'henge-barrow'.²

The parallel ditches are seen in cropmarks to form part of a system of trackways and enclosures covering about 6 hectares. This system is aligned NNW-SSE and is distinct from the later N-S Romano-British trackway also located in the excavation. A major element of this earlier system is a double-ditched trackway c. 400m. long. Adjoining the southern part of this trackway, on its E side, is a series of about twelve rectangular enclosures ranging in size from c. 55m. x 30m. to 125 m. x 70m. In several cases entrances give access from one enclosure to another, and several of the enclosures apparently contain wells.³ Hewett excavated three of these wells in the 1890's, and found one of them to contain Romano-British pottery;⁴ this however does not necessarily indicate a Roman date for the enclosures themselves. One large enclosure contains a small sub-rectangular compound with inturned entrance, within which is a possible hut-circle. To the W of the enclosure complex lies a group of five ring-ditches. Hewett excavated one of these: it had a central feature 'full of black vegetable mould', but no finds were recorded. 'Flint flakes and implements' were found on the surfaces of these fields, and also in some of the Romano-British features excavated by Hewett.⁵

Balkwill has suggested that the earlier system of enclosures may be related to Middle Bronze Age field systems such as those on the Berkshire Downs.⁶ This is certainly a valid comparison, but a parallel exists which is perhaps even closer both in physical form and in topographical location. The Northfield Farm complex bears some resemblance to the plan of the Middle Bronze Age field system excavated at Fengate, near Peterborough.⁷ Here there were paired-ditch trackways and rectangular enclosures, some with inter-connecting entrances. The Fengate 'droveways' ran at right-angles away from the Fen: the Northfield Farm trackway points towards the Thames and its adjacent floodplain. Pryor notes several other examples, in the Nene, Welland, Stour and Colne valleys, of

¹ I would like to thank Richard Bradley and George Lambrick for their helpful comments on this note, and for giving me information in advance of publication.

² M. Gray, 'Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977), 1-29.

³ D. Miles in Gray, *op.cit.* note 2, 25 and Fig. 1.

⁴ F. Haverfield, 'Some Romano-British Remains in the Upper Thames Valley', *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* (2nd series) xviii (1901), 10-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ C.J. Balkwill in M. Parrington, *The excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age ring-ditches and Roman features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974-75* (1978), 29.

⁷ F. Pryor, 'Fen-edge land management in the Bronze Age: an interim report on the excavations at Fengate, Peterborough, 1971-75', *Settlement and Economy in the Second and Third Millennia B.C.*, ed. C.B. Burgess and R. Micket (B.A.R. 33 (1976)).

droveways running at right angles towards rivers. In several cases, including Fengate, ring-ditches occur near these features.⁸

In the Thames Valley, at Mount Farm, Dorchester, two pairs of small parallel ditches met at a right-angle beside a ring-ditch which had Deverel-Rimbury pottery in a secondary position. One of the parallel ditches produced a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead.⁹

Paired parallel ditches of Bronze Age date are also known at Knight's Farm, Burghfield, in the Kennet Valley,¹⁰ and possibly at Rough Ground, Lechlade, in the Upper Thames.¹¹

There are traces of Bronze Age activity in the vicinity of Northfield Farm. A number of bronze implements have been recovered from the area, particularly from the Thames,¹² and the Pearith Farm urnfield lies 2½km. to the SW.¹³

Thus it is possible, but as yet unproven, that part of the Northfield Farm cropmark complex represents a Bronze Age field system. This hypothesis could be tested by further excavation or even perhaps by fieldwalking.

ROGER THOMAS

A BALANCE ARM FROM OXFORD CASTLE

Amongst the iron work catalogued by Ian Goodall from the Castle Moat was a balance arm.¹ This object was incorrectly drawn and a corrected drawing by Eleanor Beard is given here.

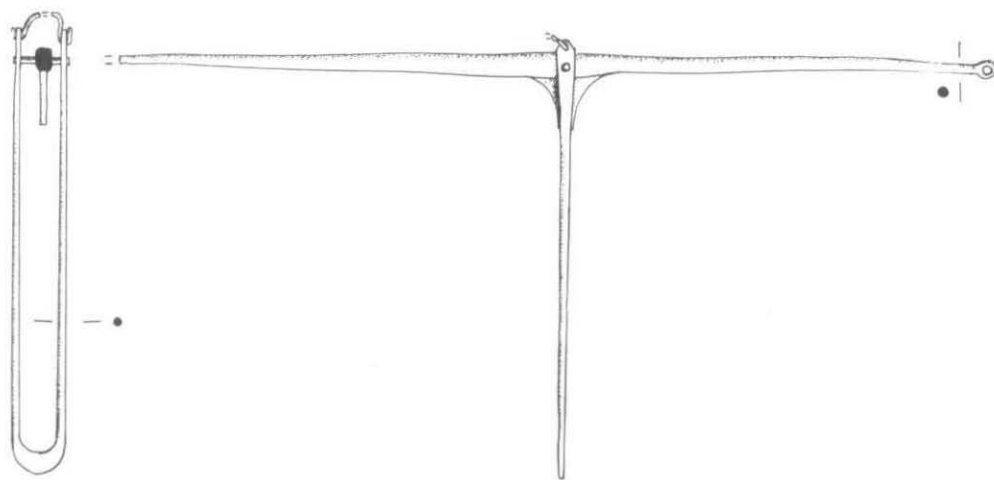


Fig. 4

⁸ Ibid., 42-4.

⁹ C.B.A. Group 9 Newsletter, No. 9 (1979), 113-5; G. Lambrick, pers. comm.

¹⁰ R. Bradley, pers. comm.

¹¹ M. Jones, 'Rough Ground, Lechlade, and Mucking, Essex' in H.C. Bowen and P.J. Fowler, (eds.) *Early Land Allotment* (B.A.R. 48 (1978)).

¹² H.J. Peake, *The Archaeology of Berkshire* (1931) 247-8; S. Needham, 'Two Recent British Shield Finds and their Continental Parallels,' *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* xlv (1979), 111-134.

¹³ H. Case et al. 'Excavations at City Farm, Hanborough, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, xxx (1965), 1-98.

¹ T.G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle, 1965-1973', *Oxoniensia*, xli (1976), 300 and Fig. 28, No. 87.

THE OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE IN 1979

A full description of the Committee's Unit's work in 1979 can be found in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 10 (1980), 135-186. The Committee produces a Newsletter which appears approximately bi-monthly, subscription £1.50 per annum, obtainable from the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP.

1. *Surveys*

R. Hingley, *The Upper Thames Valley Survey*, (CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 10 (1980), 141-143.

R. Hingley, *The Frilford/Garford/Marshall Survey*, Ibid. 143-5.

R. Chambers, *Kingham, Manor Farm*, moated site, Ibid. 145-6, 148.

R. Cowell and D. Miles, *Kingston Bagpuize*, Ibid. 145, 147-8.

H. Bird, J. Morris and R. Chambers, *Thomley*, deserted medieval village, Ibid. 148-150.

2. *Field Surveys in Progress*

Oxfordshire Parish Survey (with Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services).

3. *Excavations*

(a) Published

J. Hinchliffe and R. Thomas, 'Archaeological Investigations at Appleford', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), this volume.

G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman riverside settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire*, (Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit Report 2, CBA Research Report, 32 (1979)).

N. Palmer, et. al. 'A Beaker Burial and Medieval tenements in the Hamel, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), this volume.

D. Bowler and M. Robinson, 'Three round barrows at Kings Weir, Wytham', Ibid.

(b) In preparation (* indicates Interim report in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 10 (1980), 151-166).

Abingdon: Roman villa and Saxon settlement at Barton Court Farm.

Berinsfield, Mount Farm: Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement.

Berinsfield, Wally Corner: Pagan Saxon Cemetery.

Chalgrove: Medieval moated manor house at Hardings Field.

Hardwick: Iron Age settlement

Oxford: All Saints; Blackfriars;* medieval tenements at Church Street, the Greyfriars; the outer Town Wall at 21 Longwall Street;* Late Saxon occupation and St. Mary's College, 18-24 New Inn Hall Street;* medieval causeway and associated features, 35-40 and 65 St. Aldates.*

Lechlade/Fairford, Gloucestershire: Iron Age settlement at Claydon Pike Pit.*

Wasperton, Warwickshire: Iron Age settlement.*

(c) Other sites recorded or dug: brief notes in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 10 (1980), 167-86.

Abingdon: Roman metalwork at Peachcroft Housing Estate.

Abingdon: Roman settlement at Abingdon School.

Abingdon: Roman and medieval settlement at 60-64 West St. Helen's Street.

- Aston Rownant*: medieval settlement at Copcourt.
Bicester: Roman settlement at King's End Farm.
Bicester: medieval settlement at Lower Home Close.
Blewbury: burials at the vicarage.
Checkendon: Iron Age site at the Devil's Churchyard.
Cumnor: Roman pottery at Henwood Farm.
Didcot: Roman pottery at Blagrove Farm.
Didcot: 18th century field system.
Dorchester: burials at 8 Bridge End.
Dorchester: burials at the White Hart Hotel, High Street.
Glympton: medieval settlement at Slape Copse.
Kidlington: medieval manor house at Moat Cottage.
Iffley: medieval and later occupation at the Rectory.
Radley: late Iron Age settlement at Thrupp Farm.
Radley: Beaker burial at Tuckwell's Pit.
Stanton Harcourt: possible neolithic ring-ditch at Dix's Pit.
Wallingford: medieval occupation at 5-7 Castle Street.
Wallingford: late Saxon occupation at 9-10 St. Martin's Street.
Witney: medieval occupation at 27 Market Square.
Wroxton: human burials.