

Archaeological Excavations at Wallingford Road, Didcot, South Oxfordshire, 1991

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SUMMARY

This paper describes the excavation of a prehistoric site in advance of the construction of a superstore. The earliest activity on the site is represented by a few finds of Mesolithic date. The main use of the site occurred in the Early and Middle Bronze Age and is represented by an occupation site and field system.

INTRODUCTION

In June 1991 an evaluation was carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in a 4 ha. area of pasture immediately east of Didcot (SU539899), on the site of a proposed superstore development (Fig. 1).¹ The field, at about 54 m. OD, is on level ground and is crossed by well-preserved ridge and furrow. The evaluation, consisting of a series of 15 machine trenches of varying lengths (Fig. 2), showed the presence of a small prehistoric site comprising shallow pits, post-holes and ditches. London Retail Investments, who funded the initial evaluation, kindly agreed to fund further excavations in advance of their development. The main part of this work was carried out during August 1991.

The underlying geology of the area is Upper Greensand and Gault Clay, and the site itself lies on grey sandy clay. The junction between the Upper Chalk and the Upper Greensand is c. 3 km. to the southwest, while 2 km. to the northeast are river gravels from an abandoned channel of the Thames. The site is situated in the eastern part of the Vale of the White Horse in which very few prehistoric sites have so far been recorded.²

An area of c. 2,800 sq. m. was stripped of an average of 0.3 m. of topsoil by a 360° excavator to reveal the top of the clay, into which the archaeological features are cut. Because of the various problems inherent in working on dry clay, notably the indistinct soil colours, any immediately visible features were tagged and the surface was quickly covered with plastic sheeting in order to conserve the subsoil moisture. This strategy was only partly successful in avoiding the problem of subsequent rapid drying and

¹ S. Ford, 'Wallingford Road, Didcot, South Oxfordshire. Archaeological evaluation' (Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Report 91/6). Reading.

² G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986); M. Tingle, *The Vale of the White Horse Survey* (BAR cccviii, 1991).

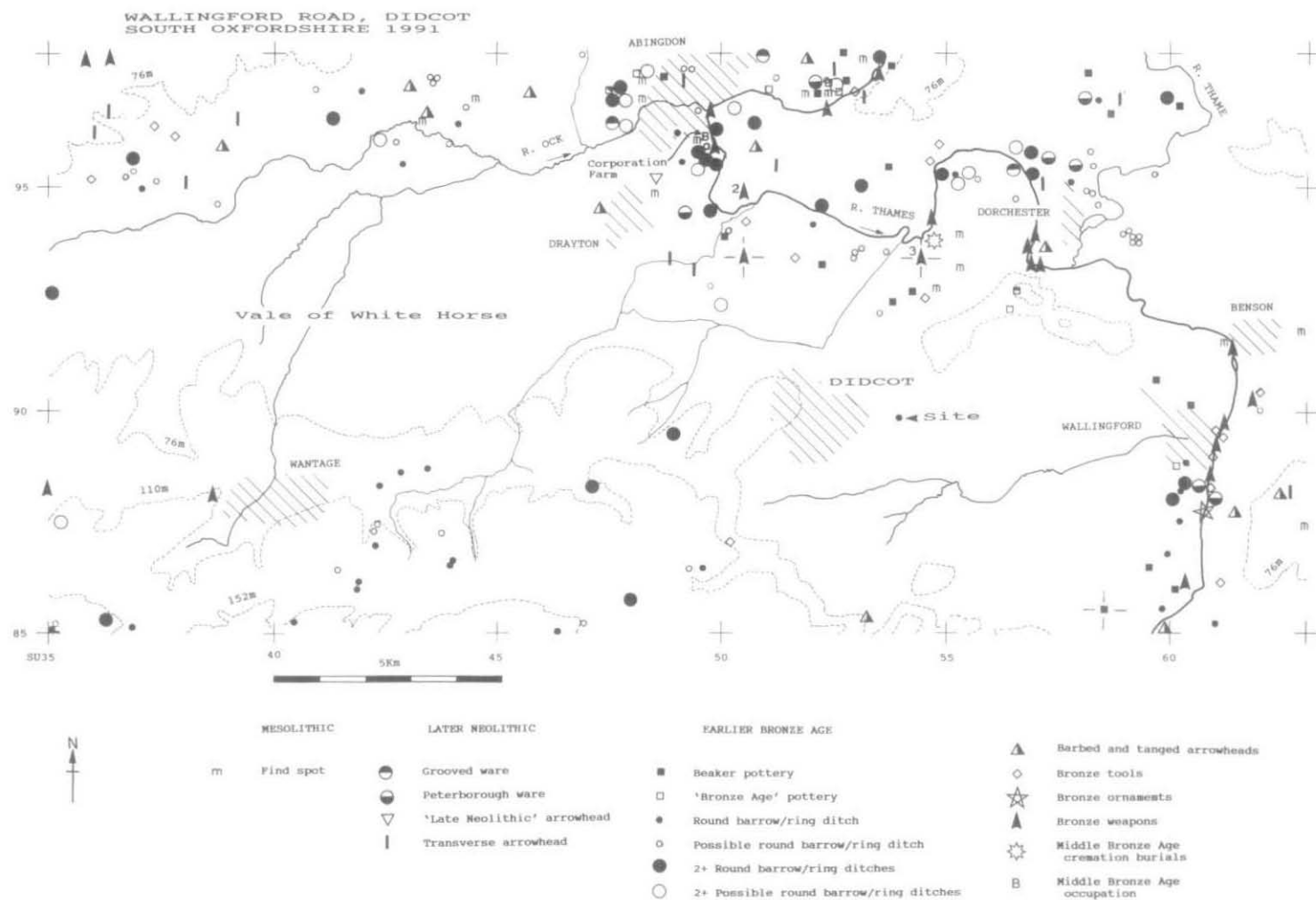


Fig. 1. Location of the site in the region.

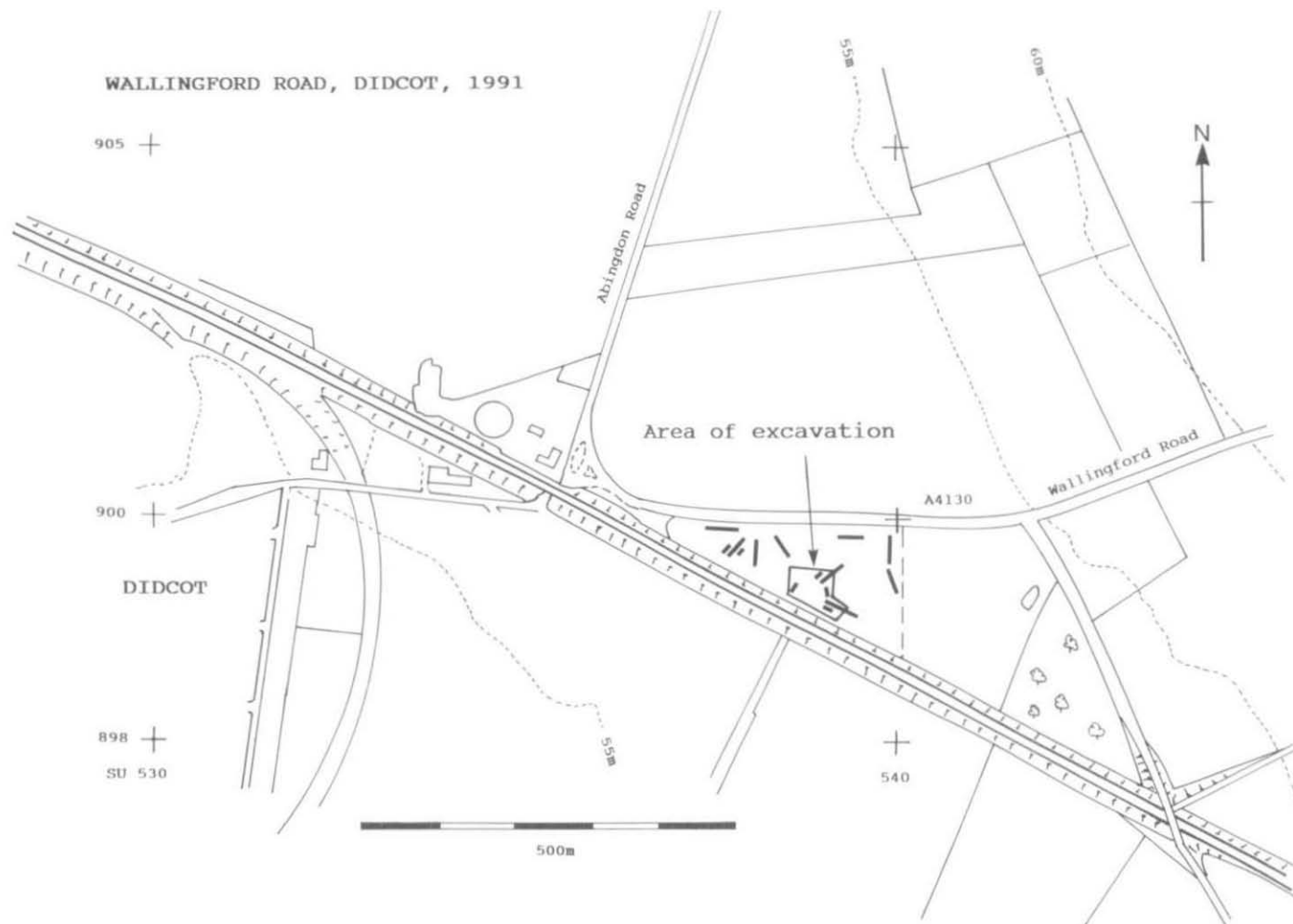


Fig. 2. Plan of original evaluation trenches.

cracking of the surface. The features generally showed as darker stains in the clay surface, although only a few had clear outlines. Without excavation it was often impossible to distinguish between archaeological and natural features, and therefore the majority of the stains were investigated: almost half of them were thought to be natural, probably tree roots and burrows, although many were too ephemeral for their origin to be determined.

All circular and oval features of potential archaeological merit were half-sectioned prior to full excavation, whilst linear features were sampled at between 10 and 30 per cent. Samples were taken from a variety of the archaeological features for flotation, in the hope of recovering seed remains. Unfortunately the results obtained were insignificant (see carbonised seed report below).

DESCRIPTION OF FEATURES

Four categories of archaeological features were examined: linear features, post-holes, pits and scoops, and burnt flint dumps (Table 1). All the features were remarkably shallow, ranging in depth from 0.05–0.70 m. This must, in part, be a result of medieval or earlier ploughing truncating the features. The fills of the various features invariably consisted of a matrix of sandy clay which was greyer and often blacker than the surrounding natural subsoil, and usually contained a certain amount of charcoal flecks.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF FEATURES

Feature	Fill	Description
2	50	post-hole
4	52	scoop
5	53	gully
6	54	post-hole
7	161	gully
10	55	pit
20	70	scoop
24	71	pit
25	72	gully
26	79	gully
27	73	scoop
28	74	pit
29	75	gully
30	76	scoop
31	77	post-hole
32	78	post-hole
34	86	scoop
35	85	scoop
37	82	pot in situ
38	83	scoop
43	88	post-hole
44	89	gully
45	90	gully
48	93	post-hole
102	97	pit
104	99, 152	pit
105	150	gully

Feature	Fill	Description
106	151	gully
107	153	ditch
108	154	ditch
109	155	pit
110	156	post-hole
111	157, 158	burnt flint pile
112	159, 160	ditch
113	162	gully
114	163	post-hole
115	164	post-hole
116	165	post-hole
117	166	post-hole
118	167	pit
119	168	pit

Linear features

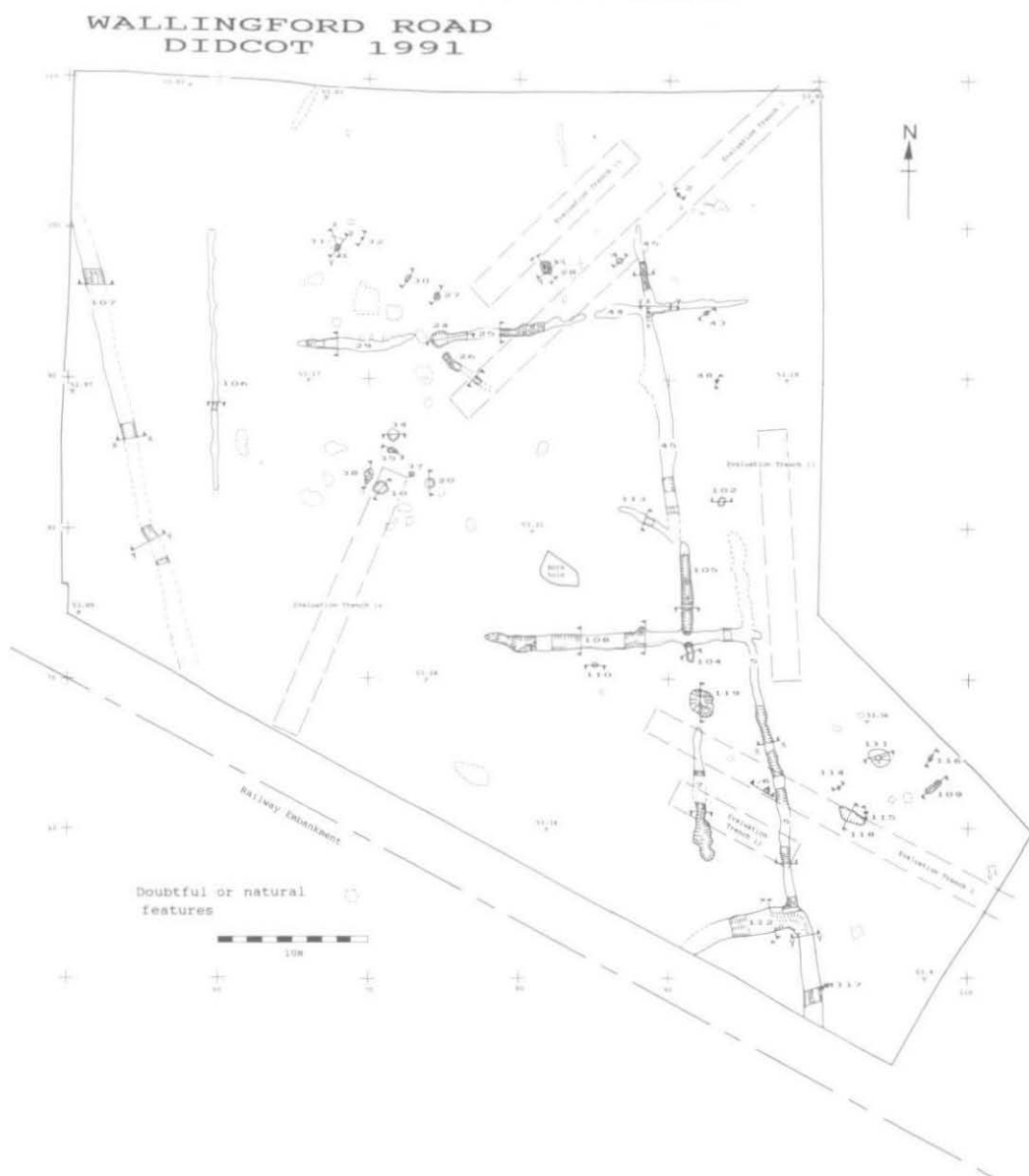
Feature 5 (Fig. 3) was the easternmost gully uncovered, and ran for approximately 25 m. on a north-south axis. At its southern end it joined ditch F112, but the northern end was rather vague. About two thirds of its length to the north it intersected ditch F108. The gully, averaging 0.8 m. wide and 0.12 m. deep, had a shallow, open U-shape in cross-section (Fig. 4) with slightly irregular sides. The fill contained struck flints, pottery, bone fragments, quartzite cobbles and cobble fragments.

Gully F7 ran north-south parallel to and west of gully F5. It was shallow, between 0.08 and 0.15 m. deep, with uneven edges that were difficult to follow. At its narrowest it was only 0.4 m. across but widened out at the southern end to 1.2 m. before terminating in a shallow, rounded end. This gully produced some struck flints and pot sherds. At the northern end there was a broad shallow depression, F119, with which this gully may have been associated.

Feature 108, a ditch about 9 m. long, ran east-west with the eastern end terminating in a junction with gully F5. The cross-sections excavated revealed a ditch which sloped gently down on the northern side and was both vertical and undercut along the south side. It was 1 m. wide, on average, and 0.4 m. deep. On the surface of the central portion, running along the south side, there was a dark band 0.1-0.15 m. wide. Upon excavation this band proved to have darker fill than the rest of the ditch, with many charcoal flecks and small pieces of burnt clay, and it produced all the bone fragments recovered from that segment of the ditch. This dark band indicates more than one phase of activity but it could not be interpreted as a definite recut. However, slightly further east, features 104 and 105 clearly cut into the fill of ditch F108 and therefore belonged to a later phase. Ditch F108 produced a quantity of struck flints (Figs. 8 and 10) but relatively little pottery (Figs. 9 and 10).

Ditch F112 located in the south-east corner of the excavation ran northwards from the baulk for about 7 m. before turning roughly westwards and disappearing again under the baulk. On the right-angled bend it was joined by gully F5, although the exact relationship between them remains unclear. The cross-sections excavated produced similar profiles of a U-shaped ditch with a narrow, deeper slot along the bottom. The north-south branch of the ditch was about 0.6 m. deep and 1 m. wide at the top with a fairly homogeneous black fill in which struck flints, pottery and bone were found. In the east side of the southernmost section there were slight differences in the fill which might have been the result of spade marks from a recutting of the ditch. The east-west branch of the ditch had a much more mottled fill and was less regular, varying in width from 1 to 1.8 m. and in depth from 0.6 m. at the bend, getting shallower and more vague towards the west. This branch also yielded struck flints and pottery and a few bone fragments.

Feature 45, a north-south gully, lay on the same alignment as features 7, 104 and 105, but due to the nature of the soil it was unclear if it did in fact join onto feature 105. Feature 105 was a 5-m. long, 0.6-m. wide gully with a noticeably darker fill than that of gully F45. This gully seemed to be associated with feature 104 because they both cut ditch F108 in the same way and had similar fills. There was a shallow, flat-based gully running north-west from the southern end of gully F45 for about 4 m. (F113). Feature 45 was approximately 20 m. long and varied from 0.4 to 0.9 m. in width. The cross-sections excavated revealed a shallow V-shaped profile in the south and a straight-sided, flat-bottomed profile in the north, both with an average depth of 0.2 m. The northern end of this gully faded out with no distinct terminal. Along the bottom central axis of the excavated northern portions was a series of small, uneven oval holes up to 0.2 m. in depth, which had much darker fill



similar to those in the bottom of gully F25. It was not clear if these holes were of natural (e.g. burrows and root holes) or of man-made origin.

Features 29, 25 and 44 were gullies which formed a discontinuous east-west line parallel to and north of ditch F108. Feature 44 was the easternmost of these gullies. It was 10.5 m. long and lay across gully F45 perpendicular to it. The junction of features 44 and 45 was excavated but unfortunately it was not possible to determine their stratigraphic relationship. The profile of this gully was similar to gully F45, with an uneven flat bottom and steep sides but with no deep holes along the base. The fill yielded pottery and struck flints. A 1.5-m. length of ditch produced a small number of flakes of the same material, some of which were found to fit

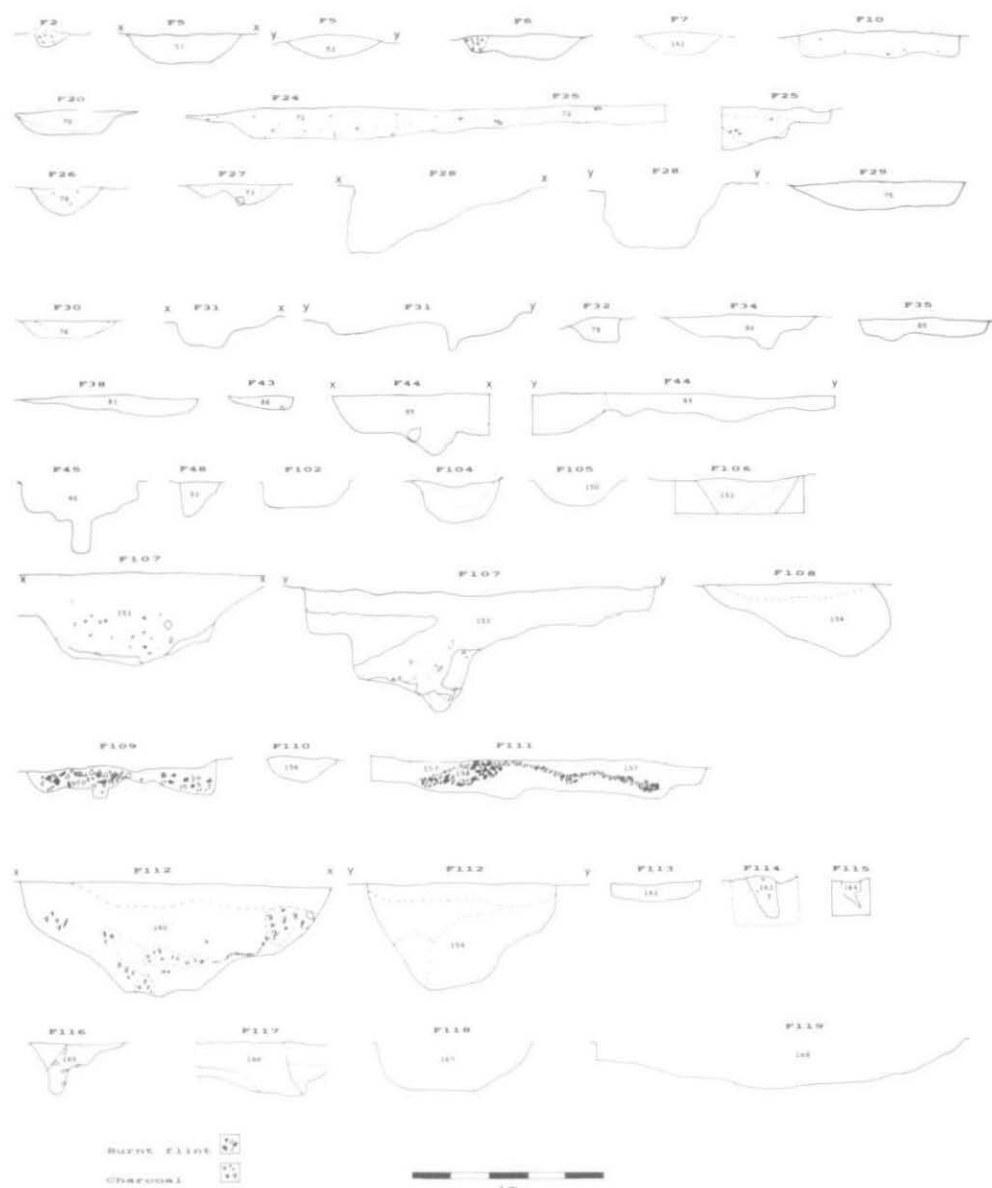


Fig. 4. Sections of features.

together. This group of flakes must have been more or less in situ, and strongly suggests a knapping episode at a time when the gully was still partially open.

Feature 25 ran westwards from the end of gully F44, and although they may have been joined in the past there was a 0.50-m. gap between them once the topsoil had been stripped. This stretch of gully was about 9 m. long, between 0.5 and 0.8 m. wide and 0.1–0.15 m. deep. Like gully F45, it had an uneven outline with straight sides and a relatively flat bottom which, in the excavated portion, also had some deeper holes that may have been of natural origin. The fill was similar to that of the associated gullies, producing both flakes and pottery. The western end of this gully appeared to terminate in a shallow circular depression (F24) which was slightly

deeper than the gully and had darker fill. This depression produced a petit tranche derivative arrowhead (Fig. 7, 3) and some pottery. It was not possible to tell if features 24 and 25 were contemporary.

Feature 29 was an 8-m. long gully which ran westwards from features 24 and 25 and was separated from feature 24 by about 1 m. It was similar to gully F25 in most respects and yielded a barbed and tanged arrowhead (Fig. 7, 2). Features 25, 29, 44 and 45 were all excavated with the possibility of finding palisade slots, but none were seen.

Feature 26 was a 4-m. long and 0.4-m. wide U-shaped gully which ran north-west to south-east, ending close to F24. It was not possible to determine whether or not it was associated with the line of gullies F29, 25 and 44.

Feature 106 was an isolated, narrow and ephemeral gully, no more than 0.5 m. wide, with very pale fill. It was about 17 m. long on a north-south axis and was parallel to gullies 45, 7 and 5, but well to the west. Its association with the other gullies remained unclear.

Feature 107 was a ditch that ran close to the western edge of the excavation area, disappearing under baulks at both ends. Its cross-section varied slightly along its length but was basically a V-shaped cut. It was about 1.1 m. wide and up to 0.7 m. deep but the sides were not easy to follow as the fill merged into the natural clay. There were lumps of natural clay in the fill which were probably from the gradual disintegration of the original sides of the ditch as the clay cracked and broke off. This process was observed happening in the short time that the ditches were open after excavation.

Post-holes

Fourteen possible post-holes were recorded and these were graded from 1 down to 3 as a measure of their validity as authentic archaeological features. Only five were thought to be of grade 1 (F2, 48, 114, 116, 117) and six of grade 2 (F6, 31, 32, 43, 110, 115), while the remaining three were of grade 3 and have been discounted. They were generally small, both round and oval in plan, with maximum dimensions between 0.1 and 0.37 m. and ranging from 0.08 to 0.25 m. in depth. The profiles (Fig. 4) were either flat bottomed or V-shaped and a few were slightly angled off the vertical. The fills were largely of black sandy clay and none had any evidence of packing stones. The few finds from the post-holes comprised a small number of struck flints, pot sherds and burnt flint. The post-holes were scattered across the site and did not form any obvious groupings or patterns.

Pits and scoops

A total of 15 pits and hollows were examined and these fell into three main clusters. The features varied in size and plan from small roughly circular pits and scoops, with both shallow and steep sides and flat bottoms, to larger oval pits (Figs. 3 and 4). There were also some of rather irregular plan. The maximum dimensions ranged from 0.5 to 2 m. and the depths were between 0.05 and 0.3 m. This variety of shapes and sizes and almost random distribution is fairly typical of Late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites.³ There were no signs of any recutting but the nature of the soil may have obscured such evidence. The fills of these features were grey or black sandy clay, usually with at least some charcoal flecks. All but two of these pits and scoops produced some pottery and all but two produced struck flints. F27 produced a Roman sherd. The pottery from these pits and scoops consisted of small eroded fragments and, together with the small quantities of finds generally from these features, this suggests that they were not deliberately backfilled but rather that they were left open and filled up gradually.

A petit tranche derivative arrowhead was found in F24 and a barbed and tanged arrowhead in feature 29, both of which may be residual finds. Burnt stones (mostly flint with some quartzite and sandstone) were noted in five of the pits but only in feature 109 were they found in any quantity. This feature was an oval pit with steep sides and an uneven base which was divided into two main depressions. The fill was very dark with much charcoal and so it is possible that this was a cooking pit. Otherwise, these pits and scoops contained no evidence to indicate function.

³ R.J. Bradley, S. Lobb, J. Richards and M. Robinson, 'Two Late Bronze Age settlements on the Kennet gravels: Excavations at Aldermaston Wharf and Knight's Farm, Burghfield, Berks.' *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* xlv (1980), 217-96; S.J. Lobb, 'The Excavation of a Late Bronze Age Settlement at Furze Platt, Berks.' *Berks. Arch. Jnl.* lxx (1979), 9-17; F. Pryor, *Excavations at Fengate, Peterborough, England: The Second Report* (Royal Ontario Museum monograph v, 1978).

Feature 37 contained an in-situ pot, probably a Collared Urn (Fig. 5, 1-3) (see pottery report) located in the middle of the most coherent of the pit groups. Since burial the pot has been deformed and damaged and parts have eroded away. The pot, which had originally been placed upright, was oval in plan and appeared to have been pushed over sideways. An interesting aspect of its deformity is that it indicates subsoil movement. The only known disturbance on this site is medieval ploughing, which may be the cause of the damage to the pot and may also explain the under-cutting and irregular shape of some of the other features.

Burnt flint dump

Feature 111 was a layer of burnt flint between 0.12 and 0.3 m. thick which formed a small oval mound 0.6 by 0.75 m. across. It consisted of tightly packed pieces of burnt flint and charcoal, but there was no evidence of burning in situ and no finds were recovered. This could simply represent a dump of burnt stones, perhaps connected with the possible cooking pit (F109) which was located about 3 m. to the south-east. Three post-holes (F114, 115, and 116) were located near this feature, all of which also contained small amounts of burnt flint. Interestingly there were four small ephemeral patches of slightly darker clay and a few burnt flints also around this feature and it was thought, before excavation, that these may have been post-holes for a hut circle. However, the patches were too vague and their interpretation as a structure could not be substantiated.

POTTERY by JANE TIMBY

An assemblage of approximately 650 sherds (c. 3670 gms.) of pottery was recovered from the site. Most is of prehistoric origin but there are, in addition, a few Roman sherds and one of possible medieval date. The greater part of the prehistoric assemblage (55 per cent by sherd number) derived from specific excavated contexts. Of the remaining material 36 per cent came from located unstratified collections and 9 per cent from evaluation trenches 1, 2, 4, 7, 12, 14 and 15. Of the stratified material, 146 sherds (22 per cent of the total assemblage) derived from one feature (F37) and are likely to come from a single in-situ vessel.

The overall condition of the material was poor in that the sherd size was low, averaging around 6 gms. Much of the material had eroded or abraded surfaces so there was little opportunity to determine surface finish/treatment. Decorative features were difficult to identify particularly on the coarser tempered wares and it is therefore likely that much of this, if present, has been lost. The overall number of featured diagnostic sherds, therefore, is particularly low, which has severely hampered any accurate attempts at identifying the cultural associations of the material.

The following text briefly describes the assemblage on the basis of fabric type and featured sherds within that fabric category. This is followed by a general discussion of the pottery and its likely chronology.

Methodology

The sherds were broadly defined macroscopically into three fabrics on the basis of the main tempering agent(s) present. This excluded the material of obvious Roman or later date. Further sub-divisions were made on the size, frequency and mixing of these inclusions, resulting in 19 sub-divisions (Table 2). Some of the material was simply too small (1 gm. and less) to define. The categories are also by necessity quite broad in that individually the sherds showed quite a diversity of characteristics. The three principal tempering agents encountered were: quartzite (Q), flint (F) and grog/clay pellets (G). A summary of the fabrics by weight and number can be found in Table 3.

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTION OF FABRICS

Q1: Coarse quartzite-tempered
No. 236, Wt. 1713 gms.

Description: A moderately hard, very coarse fabric tempered with a moderate density of white angular quartzite inclusions up to 8 mm. across. In addition the paste contains a sparse to moderate frequency of rounded to sub-angular light coloured grog up to 2-3 mm. across in size. Rare fine iron grains and fine black organic material are also present. The sherds are usually light brown through to dark grey in surface colour with a dark grey core.

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTION OF FABRICS

Featured sherds: A large number of sherds (c. 146) probably from a single collared urn or similar vessel were recovered from pit F37. Unfortunately only three of these were decorated/featured (Fig. 5.1-2), the remaining sherds being plain straight-sided wall sherds, 10-11 mm. thick, and one basesherd. The latter indicated a diameter of c. 200 mm. (8% eve) (Fig. 5.3). The decorated sherds appear to come from a collar or a cord on towards the top of the vessel and carry simple oval indentations.

Other featured material from the rest of the assemblage includes two simple rims from F24(71) (Fig. 5.5) and 89/69 (Fig. 5.6); a carinated sherd from Tr 2 (Fig. 5.4), and a sherd with impressed indentations from 154 (88/72-3) (Fig. 5.7).

Q2: Finer quartzite-tempered

No. 66, Wt. 193 gms.

Description: A finer version of fabric Q1.

Featured sherds: A bodysherd from the base of a collar on an urn was recovered from 85/65 (Fig. 5.8).

Q3: Quartzite tempered with grog

No. 14, Wt. 64 gms.

Description: A hard ware with a hackly fracture. Moderate temper of coarse white angular quartzite with sparse to moderate rounded-sub-angular grog, sparse iron, quartz sand and organic material. Very finely micaceous clay.

No featured sherds.

Q4: Finer quartzite tempered with grog

No. 6, Wt. 25 gms.

Description: As Q3 but finer.

No featured sherds.

Q5: Quartzite tempered

No. 9, Wt. 26 gms.

Description: Quartzite tempered ware distinguished by a very sandy clay matrix. Both coarse and slightly finer examples of this fabric seem to exist.

No featured sherds.

F1: Flint tempered

No. 17, Wt. 44 gms.

Description: A moderately hard, rough ware with a hackly fracture. The paste contains a moderate temper of angular white, red and grey flint up to 5 mm. in size but mainly in the 2-3 mm. range. The clay matrix is very finely micaceous and brownish in colour with a grey core. Sparse to moderate fragments of rounded to sub-angular dark grey or black grog, sparse iron, quartz sand and organic inclusions are also present. The fabric resembles Q3 but with flint instead of quartzite as the main tempering agent.

Featured sherds: A fragmentary rimsherd of indeterminate form was recovered from F105(150). A second unstratified rimsherd from a handmade necked jar/bowl (Fig. 6.24) was also recovered.

F2: Coarse flint tempered ware

No. 73, Wt. 543 gms.

Description: As fabric Q1 but with a moderate temper of white angular calcined flint instead of the quartzite. The flint averages in size between 2-3 mm. but with occasional larger fragments. The fabric has an orange-brown exterior and outer core and a dark grey-black interior and inner core.

Featured sherds: Two featured sherds were present: two joining rimsherds were recovered from F105 and F108 although it should be noted that the fracture was recent. The very abraded surfaces of this sherd (Fig. 5.19) show an expanded rim form although there must be some doubt as to which side represents the exterior and how complete the sherd is. A second featured sherd came from F5 (53) (Fig. 5.10); a lugged bodysherd with a horizontal band of impressed finger-nail decoration.

F3: Finer flint-tempered ware

No. 50, Wt. 253 gms.

Description: A finer version of fabric F2 slightly more compact in character.

Featured sherds: Slightly thinner-walled vessels. A single simple rimsherd was recovered from F5 (Fig. 5.20). Two small decorated sherds were recovered from the surface: one carried a single line of small oval stabs (Fig. 6.21); the second a single horizontal girth groove (Fig. 6.22).

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTION OF FABRICS

FQ: Mixed flint and quartzite temper

No. 1, Wt. 38 gms.

Description: A moderately hard ware with a hackley fracture, generally orange-brown in colour with a black core and interior surface. The clay matrix has a fine sandy texture with very fine mica present. It has an added sparse to moderate frequency of ill-sorted subangular to angular flint in a variety of colours ranging from fine up to 6 mm. across in size, and a scatter of white quartzite averaging 3-5 mm. in size.

Featured sherds: A thick-walled handmade vessel.

FS: Flint and sand

No. 9, Wt. 56 gms.

Description: A sandy clay matrix with a sparse to moderate frequency of angular calcined flint (up to 5 mm.), and sparse macroscopically visible ill-sorted quartz sand.

Featured sherds: The only featured sherd is a simple upright rimsherd from F108 (Fig. 5.9).

G1: Grog-tempered

No. 18, Wt. 52 gms.

Description: A smooth, fairly soft fabric with a moderate temper of dark grey or brown rounded grog/clay pellets. The very finely micaceous clay also contains sparse fine quartz (less 0.5 mm.), rare iron and occasional organic inclusions.

Featured sherds: Two rimsherds were present: a small squared fragment from F27 (Fig. 5.13) and an inward sloped rim from 62/68 (Fig. 5.12). The exterior of the former may have fingernail impressed decoration or this may simply be a manufacturing irregularity the fragment being too small to be sure. A flat basesherd fragment in this fabric came from 67/96.

G2: Grog tempered

No. 16, Wt. 61 gms.

Description: This fabric is distinguished from G1 by containing only a sparse frequency of grog accompanied by fine ill-sorted flint fragments and quartz sand. It possesses a gritty texture.

Featured sherds: A bodysherd from the base of a collar on a collared-urn was recovered from the top of F44 (Fig. 5.14). No other featured sherds were recorded.

G3: Grog tempered ware

No. 36, Wt. 120 gms.

Description: A moderately soft ware with a soapy feel. Sherds are either black in colour throughout or have a black core and interior with an orange-brown exterior surface. The paste contains sub-angular to rounded grog/clay pellets up to 3 mm. in size. In addition occasional fine white angular flint and quartzite are also present.

Featured sherds: A carinated bodysherd possibly from the base of a collar was recovered from the top of F29. Eight sherds from a thin-walled hemispherical bowl with a solid lug in a comparable fabric type was recovered from F118 (167) (Fig. 6.23).

G4: Grog tempered

No. 6, Wt. 124 gms.

Description: A smooth, soft ware with thin walls. The fabric contains a moderate frequency of orange rounded to sub-angular grog-clay pellets with occasional angular calcined flint fragments up to 3 mm. in size.

Featured sherds: Three joining fragments from a very crude thick-walled vessel were recovered from F107 probably from the rim of a vessel although this is not flat (Fig. 5.16). The sherds are in very worn condition and it is just possible that there was originally some impressed decoration although this may be post-depositional abrasion.

G5: Grog tempered

No. 2, Wt. 46 gms.

Description: A fairly soft dark grey ware with a slightly sandy texture and a moderate to common frequency of rounded to sub-angular grog/clay pellets, dark grey, cream and orange in colour.

Featured sherds: A rimsherd with totally abraded surfaces was recovered from 51/87 (Fig. 5.11). The fabric may be of Roman or prehistoric date; the sherds are too fragmentary to be certain.

GF1: Grog and flint tempered

No. 23, Wt. 123 gms.

Description: A smooth, fairly soft fabric with a soapy feel. The matrix contains a sparse scatter of ill-sorted white

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTION OF FABRICS

angular flint up to 2.5 mm, in size accompanied by a sparse to moderate scatter of dark grey-black rounded grog/clay pellets.

Featured sherds: A single bodysherd from 84/82 shows a band of lightly scored diagonal line decoration (Fig. 5.15). A plain rimsherd from a vessel c. 16 cm. in diameter was recovered from 87/100 (Fig. 5.17).

GF2: Grog and flint tempered

No. 4, Wt. 12 gms.

Description: As GF1 but the basic clay matrix has a fine sandy texture and feel. No featured sherds.

GS: Grog and sand tempered

No. 26, Wt. 118 gms.

Description: A pale brown ware with a very sandy texture. The matrix contains a common frequency of fine rounded quartz sand, sparse rounded to sub-angular grog/clay pellets and very occasional quartzite. Some sherds show a slightly greater frequency of angular quartzite 1.5 mm. and less in size whilst others show macroscopically visible rounded quartz grains (1 mm. and less).

Featured sherds: A thick base angle with a diameter of c. 6 cm. came from 72/82 (Fig. 5.18). The diameter suggests a fairly small thick-walled closed vessel.

GQF: Grog, sand and flint tempered

No. 1, Wt. 3

Description: A moderately soft fabric with a gritty feel. The paste contains a moderate density of rounded dark grey clay pellets/grog of 1 mm. and less in size, sparse white angular flint and quartz sand also up to 1 mm in size and finer.

No featured sherds.

TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF FABRICS

Fabric	No.	Wt. (gms.)
Q1	236	1713
Q2	66	193
Q3	14	64
Q4	6	25
Q5	9	26
F1	17	44
F2	73	543
F3	50	253
FQ	1	38
FS	9	56
G1	18	52
G2	22	113
G3	36	120
G4	6	124
G5	2	46
GF1	23	123
GF2	4	12
GS	26	118
GQF	1	3
unclass.	25	19
Roman +	6	13
TOTAL	650	3685

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF SHERDS FROM FEATURES

Feature/ Context	Prehistoric (General)	Deverel Rimbury	Collared Urn	Roman
F5 (53)	6+11f			
F6 (54)	3f			
F7 (161)	10			
F10 (55)	20			
F11 (56)	4			
F20 (70)	5			
F24 (71)	1+17			
F25 (72)	8+4			
F26 (79)	4(4f)			
F27 (73)	+2			+1
F28 (74)	11			
F29 (75)	5(2f)+1		+1	
F31 (77)	2			
F34 (86)	1			
F44 (89)	5+2		1	
F45 (90)	+16(3f)			
F48 (93)	1			
F102 (97)	5			
F104 (99)	5			
F105 (150)	4			
F106 (151)	2			
F107 (153)	37+1			
F108 (154)	29+16			
F112 (160)	22+9			
F118 (167)		6		
F119 (168)	2			

N.B. 'added' figures are for surface finds

'f' indicates additional fragmentary sherds

Discussion

The commonest fabric within the prehistoric assemblage from the Wallingford Road site is the very distinctive coarse quartzite tempered ware (fabric Q1). This accounts for 55 per cent by weight (51 per cent by sherd number). A large number of the sherds derive from a single in-situ vessel from F37. The decorated sherds suggest that the vessel is either a Collared Urn or perhaps alternatively a cordoned vessel of Deverel Rimbury character. Other sherds of fabric Q1 occur in pits F102 and F119, and in most of the north-south/east-west linear features (F5, F7, F25, F29, F44, F45, and F108) forming the field system. It apparently occurs in association with most of the other identified fabrics, for example Q2, Q3, F2, F3, GF1 G1, G2 and FS, although this does not necessarily imply that they are all contemporary.

Fewer complete sherds which may also derive from collared urns are found in fabrics Q2, G2 and G3, which similarly occur in the field boundary gullies.

The quartzite fabric is a slightly unusual one in that there are, at present, few other identifiable published examples of the fabric from the area. It does not feature, for example, amongst the large later Bronze Age assemblage recently analysed from Reading Business Park.⁴ Other published sites from the region similarly make no reference to such material, for example Abingdon, Aldermaston Wharf and Rams Hill.⁵ However,

⁴ M. Hall and R. Bradley, 'The Prehistoric Pottery from Reading Business Park' (1990), unpublished report, Oxford Archaeological Unit.

⁵ M. Avery, 'The Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure, Abingdon', in H.J. Case and A.W.R. Whittle (eds.), *Settlement Patterns in the Oxford Region: Excavations at the Abingdon Causewayed Enclosure and Other Sites* (CBA Research Report xxxiv, 1982); M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-Ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974-76* (CBA Research Report xxviii, 1978); Bradley et al., op. cit. note 3; R. Bradley and A. Ellison, *Rams Hill: A Bronze Age Defended Enclosure and its Landscape* (BAR xix, 1975).

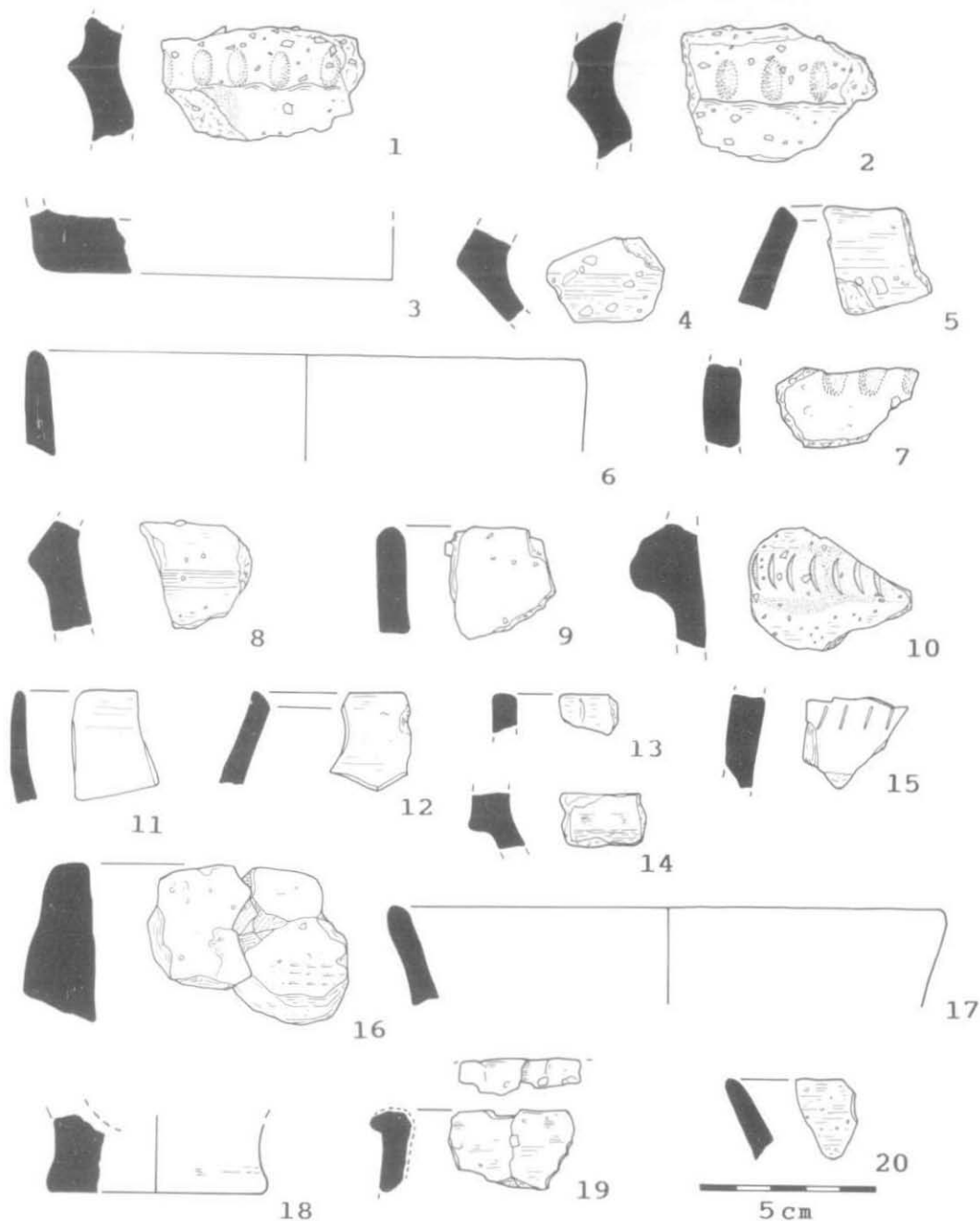


Fig. 5. Pottery: 1-2: Two bodysherds, ?from the base of a collar, decorated with oval depressions. Very coarse fabric Q1. A slight thickening on the edge of 2 may suggest a possible handle/lug(?). Pit F37; 3: Basesherd from an urn, fabric Q1. Pit F37; 4: Carinated bodysherd, fabric Q1. Trench 2, 5.OE 1.8N; 5: Simple inturned rim, fabric Q1. Pit F24 (71); 6: Simple rimmed vessel, fabric Q1. 89/69; 7: Bodysherd with impressed decoration, fabric Q1. 88/72-3 (154); 8: Bodysherd from base of collar, fabric Q2. 85/65; 9: Simple vertical rim, fabric FS. Ditch F108, 87/72; 10: Lugged bodysherd with a band of finger-nail decoration. Fabric F2. Gully F5 (53), 97/71; 11: Simple curved, tapered rim, fabric G5. Abraded. 51/87; 12: Inturned simple rim, fabric G1. Worn internal surface. 62/68; 13: Rim fragment, ?possibly decorated, fabric G1. Scoop F27 (73); 14: Bodysherd from base of collar, fabric G2. Top of gully F44, 87/94; 15: Bodysherd decorated with lightly incised lines, fabric GF1. 84/82; 16: ?Rim from very thick-walled vessel with worn surface. Possible evidence of decoration. Fabric G4. Gully F107 (53), Slot 3; 17: Simple slightly everted rimsherd, fabric GF1. Slightly vesicular exterior surface. 87/100; 18: Basesherd. Fabric GS2. 72/82; 19: Two joining rim fragments with very abraded surfaces. Fabric F2. Gullies F105 and F108; 20: Simple everted rim, fabric F3. Gully F5 (53).

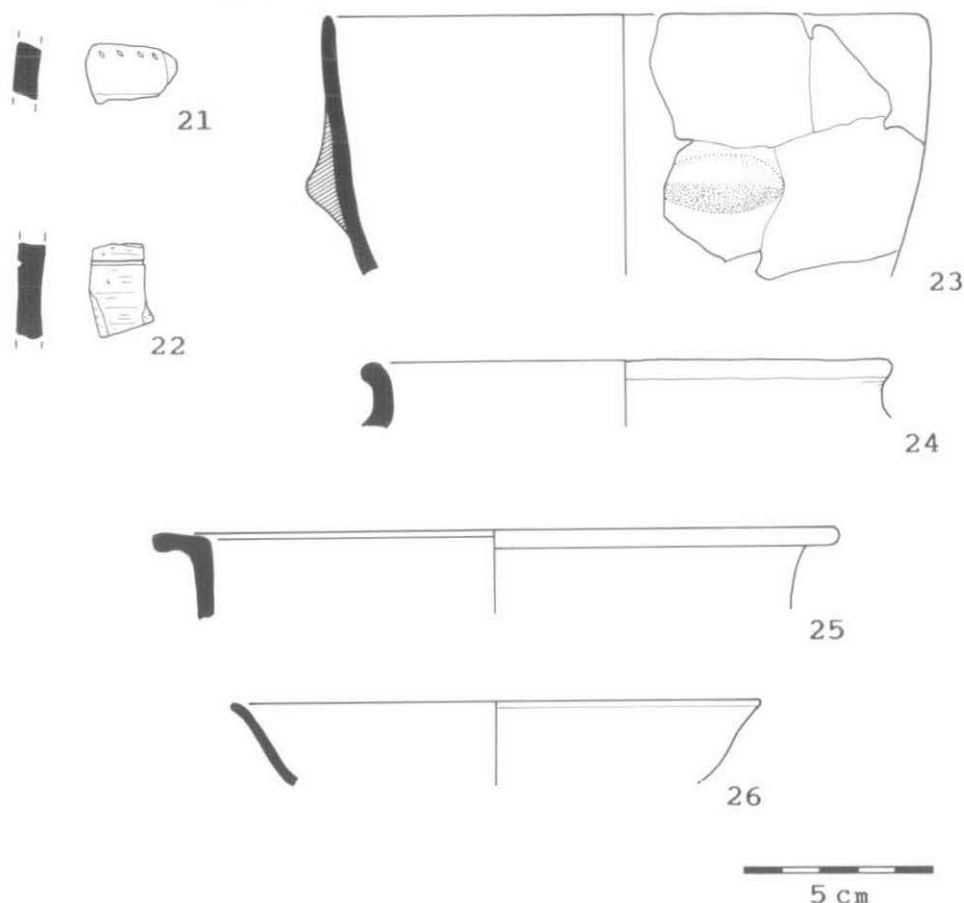


Fig. 6. Pottery: 21: Small bodysherd with a line of impressed decoration, fabric F3. 79/94; 22: Bodysherd with a single incised girth groove, fabric F3. Unstratified; 23: Eight sherds from a simple, hemispherical lugged bowl/cup. The surfaces are abraded and of a mottled orange to dark grey colour. Fabric G3 with occasional fragments of quartz and flint (1–3 mm. in size). Pit F118 (167); 24: Thickened rim necked jar/bowl, fabric F1. Unstratified; 25: Flat rim wheelmade bowl in a grey sandy fabric with a common frequency of fine well-sorted quartz sand (less than 0.5 mm.), sparse dark grey clay pellets and rare flint (1 mm or less in size). Roman. Trench 4, 1–10 m.; 26: Thin-walled wheelmade curved wall dish in a fine dark orange fabric with worn surfaces. Roman. Trench 4, 1–10 m.

recent excavations in the Cassington-Eynsham area of Oxfordshire have produced similarly tempered wares from Bronze Age contexts which may be contemporary with the Didcot material.⁶ A further unpublished comparable assemblage came from Wilsham Road, Abingdon, where the pottery is associated with a series of Deverel-Rimbury enclosures, pits, structures and ?fields.⁷

The other quite distinctive vessel within the assemblage is the thin-walled lugged bowl/cup from pit F118. This constituted the only vessel from this feature and was classified as fabric G3. Other sherds in possibly comparable fabrics are mainly associated with linear features F25/24/14 and F45, pit F28 and scoop F20. Another lugged, decorated vessel occurs in fabric F2 from gully F5. Although no direct parallels for these two

⁶ Information from A. Barclay (Oxford Archaeological Unit) who kindly allowed me access to this material.

⁷ P. Shand, 'Corporation Farm, Abingdon. Excavations of Late Neolithic monuments and Middle Bronze Age Rectilinear Enclosures 1970–71', unpublished undergraduate dissertation (1985), Reading University.

vessels can be identified at present such features are generally associated with later Bronze Age material. Fabric F2 also features as the expanded rim bowl (Fig. 5, 19) which is a common later Bronze Age/Early Iron Age type in the Thames Valley. This period also saw the introduction of a number of decorated vessels comparable perhaps to the scored lines and stab marks found on Figs. 5, 16, 6, 21 and 22 in fabrics GF1 and F3.

In conclusion it would seem that some of the ceramic material from Wallingford Road belongs in an Early Bronze Age tradition, with what may be a Collared Urn assemblage. The rest, however, would fit into the Deverel-Rimbury tradition proper. The latter can perhaps be identified in the lugged vessels, the possible expanded rim bowl and some of the simple rim forms which find parallel with material of this date elsewhere in the area (e.g. Aldermaston Wharf, Reading Business Park).⁸ This assemblage could, therefore, be evidence for the late use of collared urns or for the early development of the Deverel-Rimbury tradition.⁹ The apparent association of many of the fabrics within the field system and the overall poor condition of the pottery would suggest that much of it represents redeposited material.

Roman and later

In addition to the prehistoric material, three featured Roman sherds were present. One derived from an Oxfordshire colour-coated mortarium of later 3rd–4th century date and came from location 60/100. The other two sherds came from evaluation trench 4 (Fig. 6, 25 and 26) and are probably of later 1st–2nd century date. A plain unfeatured bodysherd in a fine orange sandy ware came from 58/105 and is also probably Roman. A possible medieval sherd came from location 79/85.

FLINT, by STEVE FORD

A total of 729 pieces of struck flint were recovered from the whole site, of which 713 came from the excavated areas (Tables 5 and 7). The flint is mostly in a fresh and unpatinated condition.

Raw material and technology

Several sources of raw material were recognised:-

- (1) A light brown cherty flint present naturally on the site in small quantities.
- (2) Gravel flint with thin water-worn cortex. Mediocre quality with frequent flaws resulting in many core fragments. Gravel flint in the Upper Thames basin only occurs in any quantity in the valley south of Wallingford. It may be present in an ancient course of the Thames near South Moreton some 3 km. east of the site, or near to the current course of the Thames at Drayton, some 4 km. north of the site.
- (3) Chalk flint with thick fresh cortex and relatively few flaws. Chalk outcrops within 4 km. of the site to the south, but the chalk here is Lower and Middle chalk which produces very little flint. The Upper chalk which is a more likely source is some 5–6 km. distant.

Of a sample of 50 pieces retaining cortex 54 per cent was of gravel flint, 44 per cent of chalk flint and 2 per cent of local chert.

Apart from a few pieces such as the blades most of the struck flint appears to have been made using a hard hammer with relatively little platform preparation, etc.

Chronology

Material dating to several periods is likely to be present in the collection but only two phases can be recognised with certainty.

⁸ M. Hall and R. Bradley, *op. cit.* note 4; R. Bradley et. al., *op. cit.* note 3.

⁹ I am grateful to Richard Bradley for discussing this point.

TABLE 5: SUMMARY TOTALS OF ALL STRUCK FLINT RECOVERED FROM EVALUATION AND EXCAVATION

	All	Excavated areas only	Features (including surface)
Flakes	340	336	170
Blades/narrow flakes	17	17	7
Cores	59	58	31
Retouched	86	82	30
Spalls	157	163	74
Bashed lumps/core fragments	67	61	32
TOTAL	726	719	356

TABLE 6: RETOUCED FLINT TYPES

	All	Excavated areas only	Features (including surface)
Scraper	53	52	22
Denticulate scraper	1	1	—
Hollow scraper	1	1	—
Notched flake	2	2	—
Awl	3	1	1
Irregularly retouched flake	8	8	2
Fabricator	2	2	—
Fabricator/scraper?	1	1	—
Knife	2	2	—
Microolith	3	3	1
Barbed and tanged arrowhead	2	2	2
Petit tranchet	1	1	1
derivative arrowhead			
Arrowhead tip	1	1	—
Serrated flake	4	4	—
Hammerstone (flint)	2	1	1
Flake from Polished Axe	1	1	1

As the material is either unstratified or contains residual material, the unretouched blades and cores have not been subject to a metrical analysis. Casual inspection shows that the collection does not include a significant 'blade-like' element indicative of a Mesolithic/Early Neolithic date. Nevertheless the recovery of true blades and blade cores clearly indicates the presence of this early tradition.

The clearest indication of the date range of the flintwork comes from examination of the retouched component (Table 5).

A small Mesolithic contribution to the collection is demonstrated by the presence of three microoliths (one geometric form and two obliquely blunted forms, Fig. 7, 16–18) a blade core, and several blades. It is possible that the fabricators, serrated pieces and other retouched items could be of Mesolithic date. Similar uncertainty concerns the blades and blade core and arrowhead tip which could belong to the Early Neolithic.

The presence of a range of retouched items, such as a petit tranchet derivative arrowhead, a flake from a polished axe, and a fabricator, would indicate a significant Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age component.¹⁰ However, it is the presence of two barbed and tanged arrowheads which allows further refinement of

¹⁰ S Ford, R.J. Bradley, J. Hawkes and P. Fisher, 'Flint working in the metal age', *Oxford Jnl. Archaeol.* iii (1984), 157–173: Table 4.

TABLE 7: STRUCK FLINTS FROM FEATURES

Feature /context	Flake/ blade	Core	Core fragment/ bashed lump	Spall	Scraper	Other retouched
5 (053)	12+18	1+3	5+2	4+2	2+2	Serrated blade; Retouched flake; Hammerstone
6 (054)		1			1	
7 (161)	6+3	1+1	+2	1		
10 (055)	1					
20 (070)	1			+1		
24 (071)		+1		2		
24/25				1	1	
25 (072)	3+1	1		5		
26 (079)	1			1		
28 (074)	6	1		2	1	
29 (075)	3+2	2				
34 (086)	1+1			1		
37 (082)					1	
38 (083)				1	1	
44 (089)	5+3	1+2		3+3	2+1	
45 (90)	8+5	1+1	2	2+1	1	Awl on blade
48 (093)			1			
102 (097)	4					
104 (099)	2			3		
105 (150)	2			2+5		+Awl
106 (151)					+1	
107 (153)	6	2		1		
108 (154)	33+16	2+6	5+6	17+7	3+1	
109 (155)	1		2			
110 (156)	1+3		1	+3		
111 (157)						Microlith
112 (160)	12+6	3+2	7	1+1	+1	
112 (159)	1					
116 (165)	1			1		
118 (167)		1				
119 (168)	12		5	5		Retouched flake

Note: 'added' finds are those from feature tops.

chronology. These distinctive items are firmly of the Early Bronze Age. As with all projectile points it is possible that they represent casual loss during hunting, but this does seem somewhat coincidental.

These observations are made on the stylistic affinities of the flint collection alone. When these are compared with the information from the pottery analysis (Timby, this report), three themes emerge.

Firstly, the earliest pottery recovered included items of the Collared Urn tradition. This would converge with the 'Early Bronze Age character' of most of the flint-work.

Secondly, the pottery report highlights the presence of Deverel-Rimbury pottery of Middle Bronze Age date. Middle/Late Bronze Age flint assemblages have few distinctive traits, perhaps the most significant being a

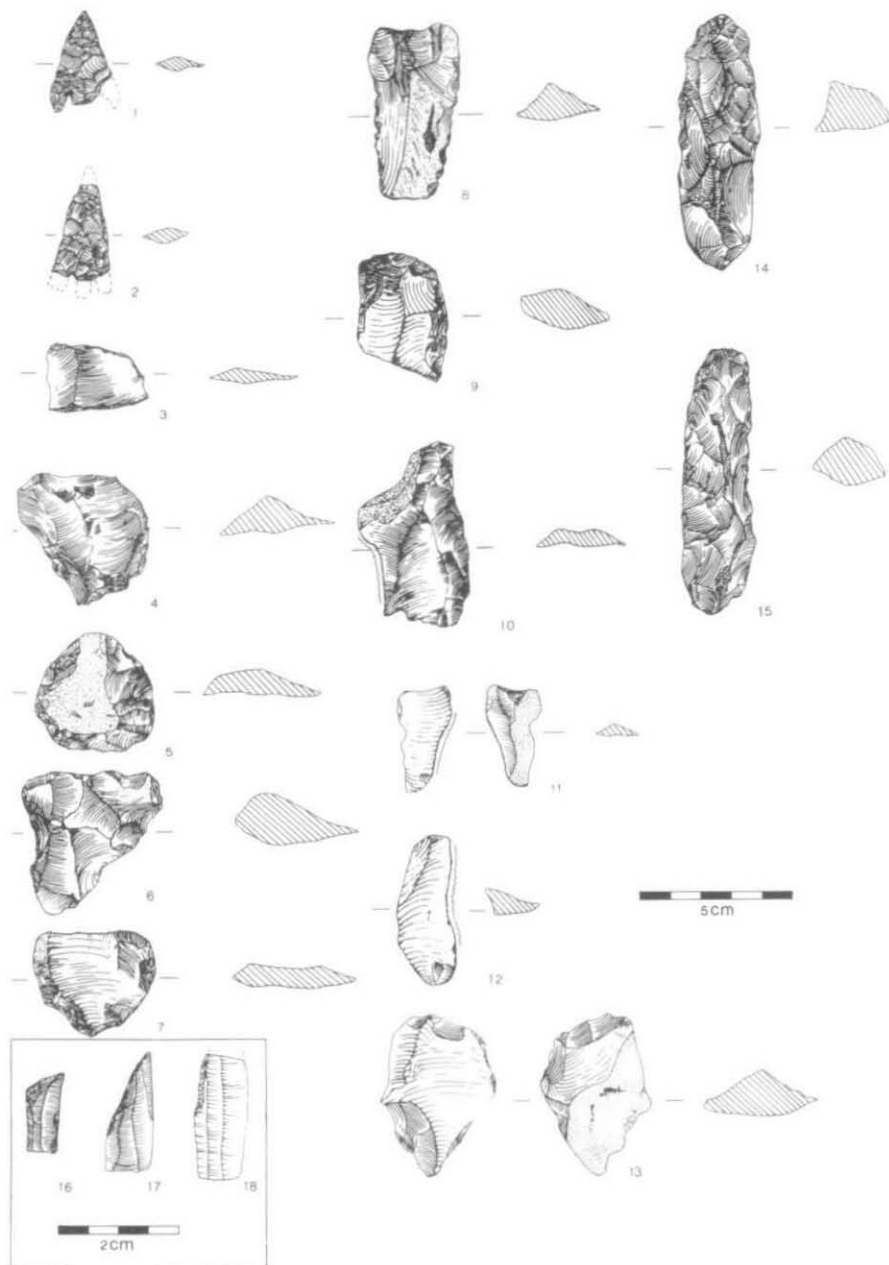


Fig. 7. Flint illustrations: 1: Barbed and tanged arrowhead, F108 (154) top 86/72; 2: Barbed and Tanged arrowhead, F29 (075) 68/92; 3: Petit tranchet derivative arrowhead, F24, (71) 74/93; 4: Scraper 65/96; 5: Scraper, 65/96; 6: Hollow scraper, 67/91; 7: Scraper, F113 (162) 88/81; 8: Flake from polished axe - retouched, F105 (150) top 90/76; 9: Knife, 101/64; 10: Serrated flake, 87/83; 11: Serrated flake 65/98; 12: Serrated flake 75/81; 13: Denticulate scraper, 88/65; 14: Fabricator/rod, Evaluation trench 15; 15: Fabricator/rod, 89/69; 16: Geometric microlith, 102/64; 17: Oblique blunted microlith, F112 (160) top 93/51; 18: Oblique blunted microlith, F111 (157).

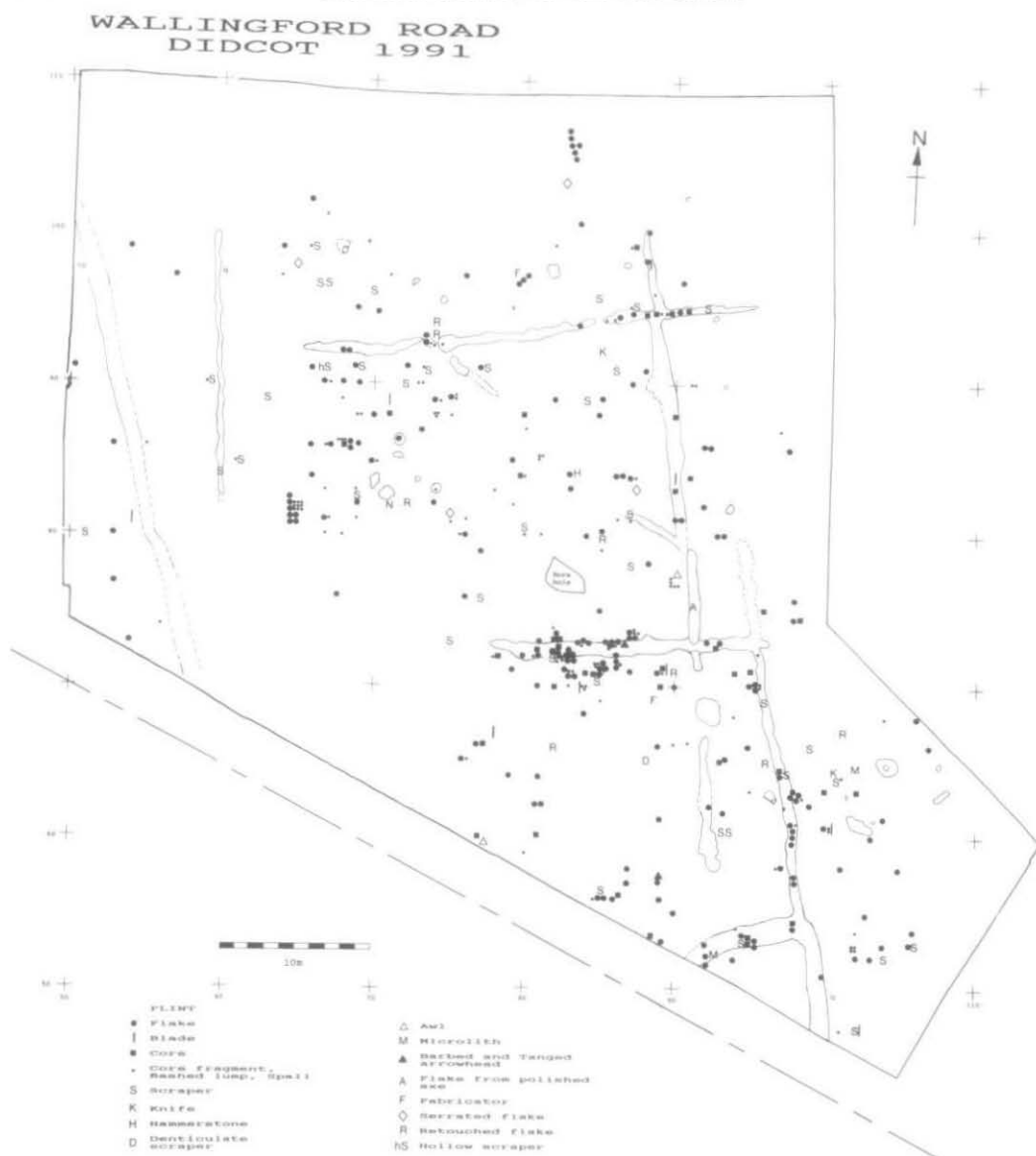


Fig. 8. Plan of distribution of struck flint from unstratified contexts.

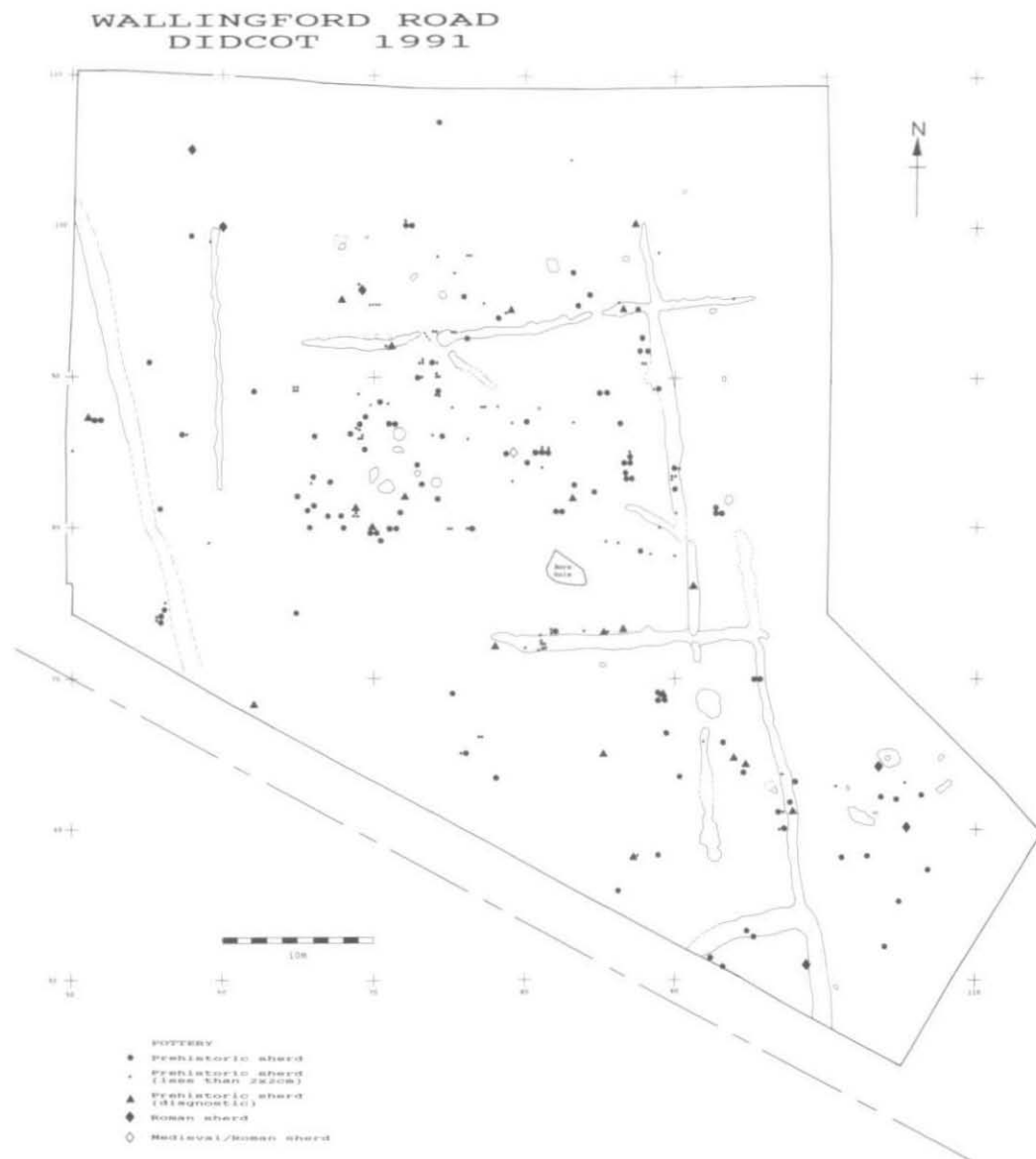


Fig. 9. Plan of distribution of pottery from unstratified contexts.

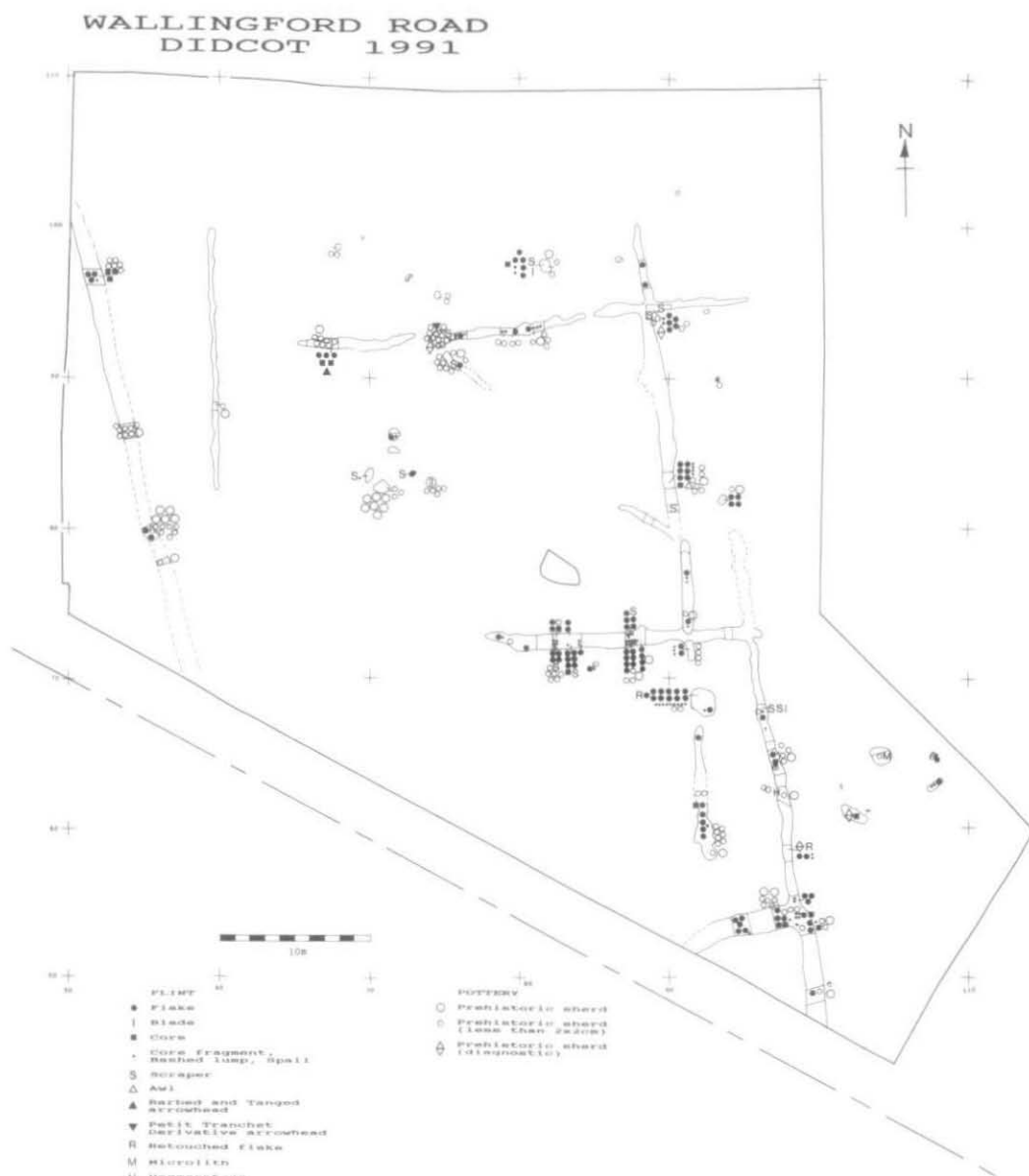


Fig. 10. Plan of distribution of struck flint and pottery from excavated features.

restricted range of retouched types.¹¹ In a mixed flint assemblage such as we have here, definition of the extent of the late component is difficult. Another factor is that the Early and Middle Bronze Age phases may not be far removed in time.

Finally it is notable that an apparently Early Bronze Age assemblage, identified by the presence of barbed and tanged arrowheads, is associated with Collared Urn material with no Beaker pottery present.

Functional and spatial analysis

Spatial analysis of finds and their relationship to structural remains aims to identify how space is used on the site and what activities took place.

In this case a detailed analysis is limited by the knowledge that the site has been ploughed in medieval times and, if the field system is a part of an arable regime, possibly also in the Late Bronze Age. Study is also handicapped by the absence of hearths and huts around which many activities are likely to have focussed.¹²

There is clearly some spatial patterning on the site overall, and there are localised pockets of material which are presumably *in situ*. A few comments are therefore in order.

First, the disposition of struck flint, when taken in conjunction with the subsoil features, suggests that the limits of the main focus of occupation activities have been reached on three sides, with further extension possible beyond the southern site boundary beneath the railway embankment. It can be seen that the majority of features occur within an area of about 30 × 40 m.

Assessment of contemporary hunter-gatherer depositional activities identifies clear zones of use such as 'drop' zones and 'toss' zones around hearths.¹³ These studies suggest that arcs or circles of debris should be associated with activities such as toss zones or the sweeping clean of work areas.¹⁴ If sites are used for any length of time these patterns may become blurred by disturbance such as trampling, or the movement of material to form middens.

There is some suggestion that scrapers form an approximate arc around the pit group centred on pit F37, but the diameter of this arc is of the order of 15 m. Data from ethnographic studies suggests that toss/drop zones with diameters of 2–4 m. are more realistic. Other struck flints occur adjacent to and coincident with this pit group. To the south east, a zone centred on 85/65 occupying an area of c. 10 × 10 m. is relatively blank. It may have been kept deliberately clean. Nearby, a dense cluster of flintwork occurs both on top of and within ditch F108 at 82/72. This may be the remains of a midden. Attempts at flint refitting on this group of material only located two conjoining flakes found about 1 m. apart.

One noteworthy aspect of the assemblage is the high proportion of scrapers present on the site. A brief review of published sources (but not taking into account the influence of accessibility of raw materials) shows that for earlier Neolithic sites scrapers can account for between 9 per cent and 68 per cent of all retouched flint though with figures of between 15 and 50 per cent being more typical.¹⁵ For sites of later Neolithic and Bronze Age date, scraper proportions vary from between 9 and 94 per cent, though with a more usual range of between 20 and 50 per cent. Sites such as Rackham, Sussex (with 94 per cent scrapers) are thought to indicate some specialist function, e.g. relating to the processing of hides.¹⁶ At Wallingford Road, scrapers formed 63 per cent of the retouched flint component and 11 per cent of all flint. This may similarly reflect some specialist activity, perhaps hide processing, but as scrapers have a wide range of potential uses this cannot be further examined without microwear analysis.¹⁷

¹¹ Ford et al., *op. cit.* note 10.

¹² M.G. Stevenson, 'Beyond the Formation of Hearth Associated Artefact Assemblages', in E.M. Kroll and T. Douglas-Price (eds.), *The Interpretation of Archaeological Spatial Patterning* (Plenum Press, New York, 1991), 269–300.

¹³ L.R. Binford, *Nunamiut Ethnoarchaeology* (Academic Press, New York, 1978).

¹⁴ J.F. O'Connell, K. Hawkes, and N. Blurton-Jones, 'Distribution of Refuse-producing Activities at Hadza Residential Base Camps: Implications for Analyses of Archaeological Site Structure', in Kroll and Douglas-Price (eds.), *op. cit.* note 12, p. 67.

¹⁵ E. Healey and R. Robertson-Mackay, 'The Lithic Industries from Staines Causewayed Enclosure and their Relationship to Other Earlier Neolithic Industries in Southern Britain', *Lithics*, iv (1983), 1–27.

¹⁶ E.W. Holden and R.J. Bradley, 'A Late Neolithic Site at Rackham', *Sussex Archaeol. Collect.* cxiii (1975), 85–103.

¹⁷ E. Moss, *Functional Analysis of Flint Implements* (BAR IS cxvii, 1983).

BONE REPORT by ISABELLE RUBEN

A total of 114 bone fragments was recovered from only four features, all of which were ditches or gullies (F5, 107, 108, 112). This limited recovery of bone is probably a result of the acidity of the soil, and those bones that have survived were badly eroded and in small pieces less than 0.10 m. long. Only 11 fragments, mostly teeth, were identifiable to species level (Table 8). The rest of the fragments were divided into large or small mammal categories, although these most probably represent deer and sheep/goat respectively. There were only two fragments which probably belonged to a hare-sized animal. No cut marks nor evidence of gnawing were observed and there was only one small fragment of burnt bone. The sample was too small to draw any conclusions other than to state that both sheep/goat and deer are represented, with the majority of the fragments being sheep/goat remains or of sheep/goat size.

TABLE 8: FAUNAL REMAINS

	Unident.	Sheep/ goat	Deer	Rodent size	Large ungulate	Small ungulate	Total
Teeth		9	1				10
Skull	1					11	12
Humerus			1				1
Rib						1	1
Shaft frag.					7	10	17
Unident.	7			2	4	60	73
TOTAL	8	9	2	2	11	82	114

STONE by ISABELLE RUBEN

A variety of stone types were discovered on the site, mostly non-local. The majority comprised quartzite cobbles, usually burnt, followed by burnt flint. Fragments of sandstone, ferruginous sandstone, haematite and chalk also occurred. Apart from the dump of burnt flint (F111) and an adjacent pit containing burnt flint (F109) discussed above, there was no obvious patterning to the stone finds. Two pieces of conjoining chalk from gully F44 had been deliberately striated.

CARBONISED SEED REMAINS by JOHN B. LETTS

Nineteen of the 30 bulk soil samples taken from a range of features were floated, sieved through a 0.25 mm. mesh, and any carbonised remains collected.

Virtually no carbonised plant remains were recovered. Sample 10 (F108, 154) contained a single charred seed of orache (*Atriplex* sp.), an ubiquitous weed of waste and arable ground. Sample 18 (F112, 159) contained very poorly preserved fragments of cereal, none of which could be identified to species. Half of the samples examined contained small fragments of wood charcoal. With these negative results no further sieving of the remaining samples took place.

DISCUSSION

The site has been used discontinuously from the Mesolithic period up to the present day. There were a small number of Mesolithic flints found both on the stripped surface and as residual finds within features. These are of some interest as there are few finds of this period in the vicinity (Fig. 1), in marked contrast to the Greensand areas of

Hampshire and Surrey which appear to have been preferentially exploited at this time.¹⁸ In this region Mesolithic sites are mainly recorded either from the Corallian ridge north of the river Ock or from the floor of the Thames Valley itself. Recently a few finds have come to light on the clayland to the west near Uffington.¹⁹ The Mesolithic finds here, especially the microliths, may have been casually lost during a hunting expedition or at a task specific site (a hunting blind for instance), where activities such as tool maintenance are used to pass time profitably while awaiting prey.²⁰

The earliest occupation of this site may have been in the Late Neolithic period, but more likely in the Early Bronze Age. It is represented both by a distinctive scatter of struck flints, including a petit tranchet derivative and barbed and tanged arrowheads, and by several sherds of Collared Urns. The single pot in F37, which may also be a Collared Urn, and the group of pits around it probably belong to this early phase.

Collared Urns from domestic settings have so far been relatively rare, being usually found in funerary contexts.²¹ However, an assemblage of Collared Urns from an occupation site was excavated by E. Martin at West Row Fen, Mildenhall, Suffolk, and more recently a group of Collared Urns was found at Stackpole Warren, Dyfed, in association with an Early Bronze Age round house.²² Most of the vessels at Stackpole Warren were small and undecorated and were probably of local origin, and so were probably from a domestic context. The vessel from F37, as well as the Collared Urn sherds from elsewhere on the site, come from apparently domestic contexts and there was no evidence, such as burning or cremated bone, to suggest any connection with funerary use. It is also worth noting that this urn, along with a number of other sherds, was made of a very coarse fabric, tempered mainly with quartzite, which is an unusual temper for southern Britain.²³ However, since quartzite would have been available locally from the nearby Thames river gravels this may argue for locally made pottery.

It has been suggested that during the late 3rd and 2nd millennium B.C. several pottery styles were current at the same time and that each represents a different role, which are thought to have changed through time. Different styles may have changed their status, starting as special-purpose ceramics but eventually being for domestic use.²⁴ Thus, for example, Beaker pottery moves, with time, from funerary to domestic contexts and is replaced in the funerary role by Food Vessels and Collared Urns. The few examples of Collared Urns from domestic sites may involve a similar sequence of events, moving from early funerary contexts to later domestic use, and the Collared Urns at Wallingford Road may therefore be an example of later domestic manufacture using a different, more practical temper from that used for funerary purposes.

The flint report (above) pointed out that the Barbed and Tanged arrowheads were not accompanied by Beaker pottery but were associated with Collared Urns. This is not unusual,²⁵ and shows that Barbed and Tanged arrowheads are a typical part of the Early Bronze Age flint repertoire.

¹⁸ W.F. Rankine, 'Mesolithic Research in East Hampshire', *Proc. Hants. Field Club*, xv (1954), 157-72.

¹⁹ R. Holgate, *Neolithic Settlement of the Thames Basin* (BAR cxciv, 1988); Tingle, op. cit. note 2.

²⁰ R. Torrence, 'Time budgeting and Hunter-gatherer Technology', in G. Bailey (ed.), *Hunter-gatherer Economies in Prehistory, a European Perspective* (1983), 11-22.

²¹ I.H. Longworth, *Collared Urns of the Bronze Age in Great Britain and Ireland* (1984).

²² Ibid. p. 77; D.G. Benson, J.G. Evans and G.H. Williams, 'Excavations at Stackpole Warren, Dyfed', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* lvi (1990), 179-246 at p. 219.

²³ Longworth, op. cit. note 21, p. 4.

²⁴ Torrence, op. cit. note 20, p. 22; R. Bradley, *The Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain* (1984), 72.

²⁵ A. Gibson, *Beaker Domestic Sites* (BAR cvii, 1982), 86.

The main activity on the site was probably in the Middle Bronze Age when the linear features were laid out and the other features came into use. The dating for this relies on sherds from lugged vessels and an expanded rim bowl of the Deverel-Rimbury tradition, which were recovered from several features. A prehistoric date for the linear features is based on the refitting of a few flints from F44. This episode can be assumed to be of pre-Iron Age date, since flint knapping was very uncommon during the Iron Age and later, and it seems unlikely that refitting material would be located in close proximity if disturbed during ditch-digging.²⁶ These facts taken together provide a general *terminus post quem* for the site.

The linear features are perhaps best interpreted as field boundaries forming a rectilinear field system, which may have been associated with hedges if they were also used as barriers for the control of livestock. Their irregular profiles and short lengths make it unlikely that they functioned primarily as a drainage system. Since the majority of these features are on the same alignments, running north-south (F5, 7, 45, 106) and east-west (F25, 29, 44, 108) they are considered as belonging together in a single system, with the possible exception of the ditch (F107) at the western edge of the site. This ditch is on a slightly different alignment and it was not possible to determine its relationship to the rest of the site.

Features 26 and 113, in the north-east corner of one of the fields, are short gullies running towards each other at 45° to the main axis, which may have been used to divide off this part of the field. There are gaps in the northernmost line of gullies which may have been left deliberately as a means of access to the open ground to the north. A similar situation occurs in the Late Neolithic field system at Fengate, where gaps in the boundaries apparently allowed access to the unenclosed land beyond.²⁷

There are few parallels for the ditched field system at Wallingford Road. Locally, a field system at Northfield Farm, Abingdon, is thought to be Bronze Age, but its exact date is unclear.²⁸ Recent work in Dorset at the site East of Corfe River has uncovered a set of parallel ditches dated to the Early-Middle Bronze Age.²⁹ At Blackpatch on the Sussex Downs, fields were originally laid out with ditches against which lynchets formed subsequently.³⁰ Enclosed Middle Bronze Age sites are also associated with field systems represented only by lynchets, as at South Lodge Camp in Cranbourne Chase.³¹ A close parallel, in terms of layout, is the Late Neolithic system at Fengate mentioned above, where the fields are also associated with irregularly shaped pits and shallow depressions. There is also a resemblance to the plans of some Middle Iron Age and Roman fields, as at Farmoor, Oxon. and Pingewood, Berks.³²

More than one phase of activity is clear from the cutting of certain features, for example features 104 and 105 cut into the fill of ditch 108. However, the ditches and gullies in plan form a coherent system and although there is more than one phase, it seems likely that the system functioned together as a whole.

²⁶ A. Saville, 'Iron Age Flintworking - Fact or Fiction?' *Lithics*, ii (1981), 6-9.

²⁷ Pryor, *op. cit.* note 3.

²⁸ R. Thomas, 'A Bronze Age field System at Northfield Farm?' *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1980), 310-11.

²⁹ P.W. Cox and C.M. Hearne, *Redeemed from the Heath* (Dorset Natural History and Arch. Soc. Monograph Series ix, 1991).

³⁰ P. Drewett, 'Later Bronze Age Economy and Excavations at Black Patch, East Sussex', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* xlviii (1982), 321-400.

³¹ J. Barrett, R.J. Bradley and M. Green (eds.), *Landscape, Monuments and Society. The Prehistory of Cranborne Chase* (1991).

³² G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman Riverside Settlements at Farmoor, Oxon.* (CBA research rep. xxxii, 1979); J. Johnston, 'Excavations at Pingewood', *Berkshire Archaeol. J.* lxxii (1983), 17-52.

The deeper ditch F112 in the south-east corner of the excavation unfortunately runs under the current railway embankment, but it might be either the corner of an enclosure ditch for a ?Middle Bronze Age settlement or, alternatively, part of an irregular Early Bronze Age ring ditch such as those dug at Ashville, Abingdon.³³ This ditch produced a small number of indeterminate cereal seeds.

The morphology and fills of the features were fairly uniform, suggesting that they were probably broadly contemporary. This and the small number of finds from the site perhaps indicates a relatively short phase of occupation spanning the Early-Middle Bronze Age, while the eroded condition of the pot sherds implies that the features were not deliberately back-filled with midden material, but rather were left open and filled gradually. Few data were recovered concerning the economy of the site. Only a few bone fragments were preserved, but the presence of the field boundaries implies the control of stock, either to control grazing or protect crops, or for the management of processing activities. The opportunity to recover information on palaeobotanical aspects of the economy was not overlooked. Unfortunately, virtually no such remains were recovered. The processes which take place before carbonised remains become preserved in the archaeological record are complicated.³⁴ Too much emphasis cannot be placed on their absence, but a few comments are in order. It has been suggested that the cumulative evidence for Neolithic cereal agriculture shows that it was in fact a minor component of the diet.³⁵ If anything, more emphasis was placed on wild produce. Perhaps this is also the case here.

The discovery of what appears to be an Early Bronze Age occupation site, surviving as more than a scatter of struck flints in the topsoil, is an unusual event. The site throws some light on the nature of occupation sites in this impoverished period. It can be seen that the site is unenclosed and contains groups of shallow pits and post-holes. The majority of finds and features occupy an area of about 40 × 40 m. It has already been mentioned that there was no evidence to indicate any particular function for the pits and scoops, apart from the burnt flint-filled pit (F109) which may have been a cooking pit. Pits similar to this one, sometimes also including flakes and sherds, have been recorded on several occasions, as on the Middle Bronze Age site at Thorny Down in Wiltshire.³⁶ The small pile of burnt flints (F111) could be a small version of the burnt flint mounds which are recorded from other settlement sites of this general period as at South Lodge Camp, Wilts.³⁷ None of the post-holes grouped together into any structurally significant patterns.

Discovery of Middle Bronze Age occupation is less unusual on the wider regional scale. For the Middle Bronze Age proper the clearest patterns recorded are on the chalklands of Wessex and Sussex, where one finds enclosed settlements with several structures and some associated pits, as at Blackpatch, Sussex, Shearplace Hill and Martin Down, Dorset and South Lodge Camp, Wilts.³⁸ The evidence from Wallingford Road diverges from this pattern. Within the Upper Thames basin, the discovery of

³³ Parrington, *op. cit.* note 5.

³⁴ R. Dennell, *Early Farming in South Bulgaria from the 6th to the 3rd Millennium BC* (BAR IS 45, 1978).

³⁵ L. Moffett, M. Robinson and V. Straker, 'Cereals, Fruits and Nuts: Charred Plant Remains from Neolithic Sites in England and Wales and the Neolithic Economy', in A. Milles, D. Williams and N. Gardener (eds.), *The Beginnings of Agriculture* (1989) (BAR IS 496, 1989), 243-61.

³⁶ A. Ellison, 'The Bronze Age Settlement at Thorny Down: Pots, Post-holes and Patterning', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* liii (1987), 385-92.

³⁷ Barrett et. al., *op. cit.* note 31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; Drewett, *op. cit.* note 30; P. Rahtz and A. Apsimon, 'Excavations at Shearplace Hill, Sydling St. Nicholas, Dorset', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* xxviii (1962), 289-328.

Middle Bronze Age material is a rare event. Sites such as Corporation Farm, Abingdon, and cremation cemeteries at Standlake Downs and Long Wittenham, attest to the existence of the Deverel-Rimbury in the region, but the main emphasis of this material is still in the valleys of the Kennet and the Middle and Lower Thames.³⁹

This paucity of Deverel-Rimbury material, in contrast to the richness of the preceding period, has been interpreted as showing a hiatus in development during which the balance of power is thought to have shifted downstream.⁴⁰ The few discoveries here suggest that more Deverel-Rimbury material is present than anticipated and it remains to be seen whether its rarity results from the ephemeral nature of occupation making their detection difficult, rather than from a genuine absence. We must await the results of future fieldwork to test this observation further.

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³⁹ E. Leeds, 'Bronze Age Urns from Long Wittenham', *Antiq. Jnl.* ix (1929), 153-4; D.N. Riley, 'A Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Site on Standlake Downs, Oxon.' *Oxoniensia*, xi/xii (1947), 27-43; J.C. Barrett and R.J. Bradley, 'The Later Bronze Age in the Thames Valley', in J.C. Barrett and R.J. Bradley, *Settlement and Society in the British Later Bronze Age* (BAR lxxxiii, 1980), 247-69.

⁴⁰ R.J. Bradley, 'The Bronze Age in the Oxford Area - its Local and Regional Significance', in G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986).