

A Middle Iron Age Settlement at Deer Park Road, Witney: Excavations in 1992

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SUMMARY

Rescue excavations at land east of Deer Park Road, Witney, recorded the remains of an unenclosed middle Iron Age settlement. A roundhouse, dated from a charcoal sample to 390–115 cal BC, and associated features were clearly distinct from a second area of features grouped around a limestone pavement some 140 m. to the north. Artefactual evidence, mainly from the roundhouse and nearby features, supplemented by charred cereal remains from the area of limestone paving, suggests that the inhabitants practised a mixed subsistence economy similar to that known from other Upper Thames sites of the period. Increasing concern with drainage of the roundhouse might have contributed to eventual abandonment of the site.

INTRODUCTION (Figs. 1 and 2)

A salvage excavation was undertaken on land adjacent to Deer Park Road, Witney, by Cotswold Archaeological Trust in October and November 1992. The site, located on the western edge of Witney, was centred on NGR SP338100 within the West Witney Development, an area of residential housing. The salvage excavation was commissioned by Countryside Planning and Management on behalf of Bovis Homes (South Western) Limited.

Outline planning permission had been granted for the site prior to the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 in 1991. However, the developers had commissioned an archaeological assessment of the site in July 1991,¹ and subsequently, at the request of the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, an evaluation in November of the same year. The evaluation revealed previously unsuspected middle Iron Age activity in the form of postholes, surfaces and ditch alignments in two apparently discrete areas of the development site.² In October and November 1992 Bovis Homes (South Western) Limited provided funding and resources for limited salvage excavation of these two areas in advance of house building.

¹ Countryside Planning and Management, *Witney, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Appraisal* (TS Rep. 1991).

² G. T. Walker, *Deer Park Road, Witney, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation* (CAT TS Rep. 9163, 1991).

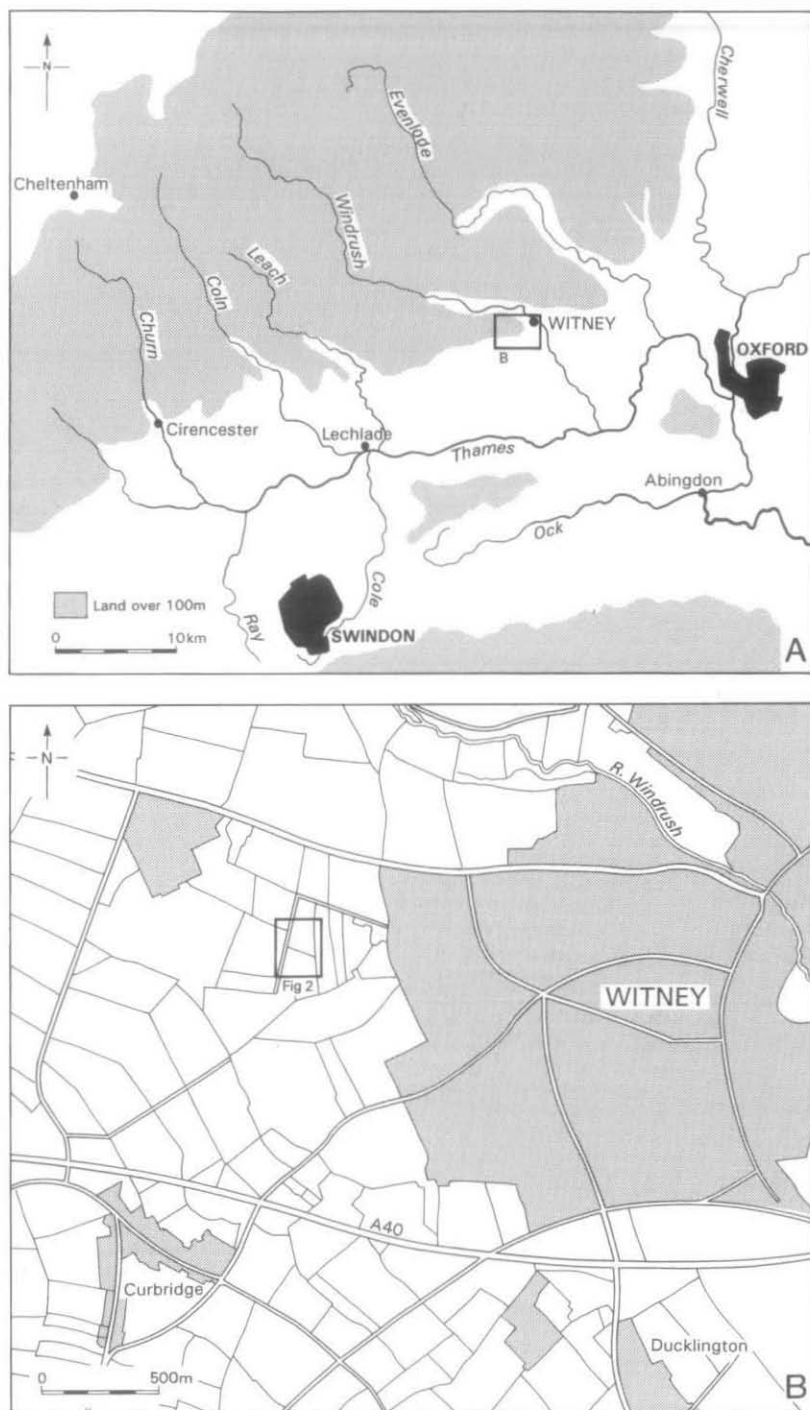


Fig. 1. Site Location.

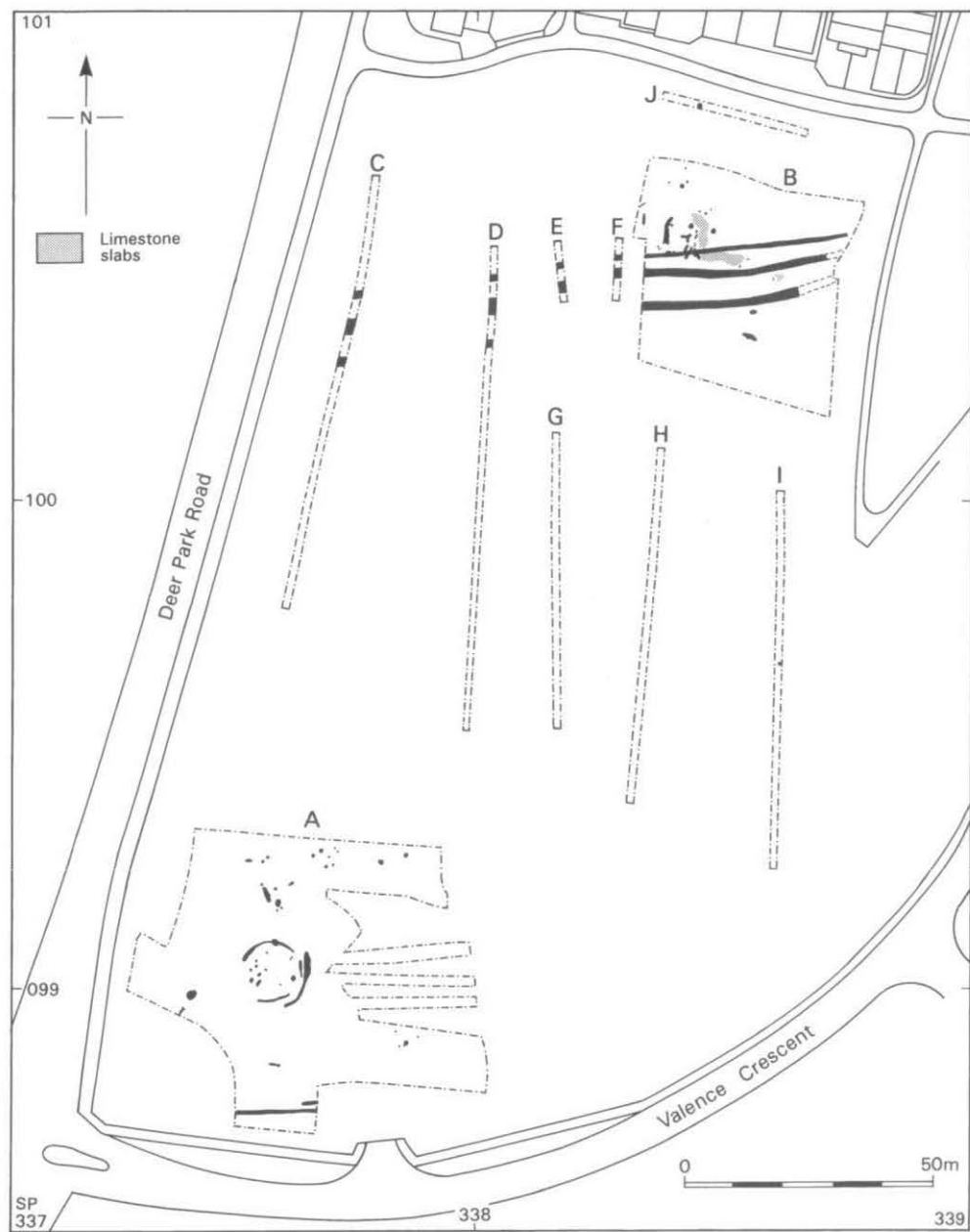


Fig. 2. Excavation Areas.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site, lying within former agricultural land worked from Deer Park Farm to the east, occupies a level area of ground at 105 m. O.D. which drops gently away on all but the NW side. To the N and E of the site the valley of the River Windrush encloses the high ground, whilst the minor valley of the Colwell Brook encloses the site to the S and W. The Colwell Brook, rising from a spring 1 km. distant provides the closest and most readily accessible source of running fresh water.

The site is divided between Kellaway Clay in the N and the overlying Kellaway Sands in the S. Both form an island within the surrounding Cornbrash.³

The soil sequence was consistent across the site, comprising a humus-rich topsoil overlying a clayey-loam subsoil. A deposition horizon of stones sorted from the subsoil above, indicated the site was long in use as pasture, thus accounting for the well-preserved condition of the archaeological remains.

THE EXCAVATIONS

METHODOLOGY

Detailed excavation of the site was severely handicapped by the prevailing wet weather conditions throughout the winter months of November and December, particularly during November, the wettest recorded for 50 years. On frequent occasions several days' work was rendered useless after spells of persistent rain. During the excavation bouts of continuous pumping lasting several days were required to clear the excavation areas of accumulated water. In Area A, by pumping from a large sump excavated in the gravel, it was possible to reduce the water table temporarily to allow deeper features to be excavated in relative comfort. This was not possible in Area B where there was no free-draining gravel capping to the clay.

The main aims of the investigation were to recover a plan of the site and to characterize and date the occupation by recovery of artefactual and environmental samples. Typically, this consisted of sampling by hand-excavation all planned features, except where they were clearly of a repetitious nature and considered unlikely to yield further significant information, or, as was more often the case, where repeated or prolonged submersion made their excavation impractical.

Although evaluation had not revealed the presence of the roundhouse, it had predicted that remains of habitation could be expected. Topsoil and subsoil machine stripping in Area A was therefore initially carried out over a notional area within which remains were anticipated. This area was subsequently extended and modified to accommodate additional areas of activity where it was practicable to do so within the constraints of the site. Inevitably, mechanical stripping during a period of very bad weather led to some truncation of archaeological deposits. In Area B, where a focus of activity had been readily identified from the evaluation, machine stripping progressed outward from here to the point where either physical constraints or the absence of features established the excavation limits.

Between the two open excavation areas linear trenching was undertaken to supplement the 1991 evaluation trenches and provide a check on these.

³ Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), *Witney. Sheet 236 Solid and Drift Edition 1:50,000 series* (1982).

AREA A (Fig. 3)

Roundhouse (Fig. 4)

The principal feature within Area A was a roundhouse. This was a circular structure bounded on the N by a shallow and narrow gully running continuously from the front entrance on the W to a rear entrance on the NE, and mirrored by a gully of similar dimensions to the S, although this was incomplete over a 3.5 m. length on the SE side. Opposing this break and extending around the E side of the house was an outer gully 068.

The inner gully ring had undergone several recuttings during its lifetime. Initially, the first recut 070 appears to have followed the full line of the original gully 192, and probably also 095 and 194 on the S although the latter relationship was not tested by excavation. Subsequent recuts, 190 and 187, were restricted to the gully terminals adjacent to the main entrance. Notably, these were deeper and wider than the previous gullies, but were later cleared out by smaller final recuts.

At the same time as the terminals were deepened a steep-sided pit 166 was cut through gully 070 to act as a sump. Finally, a short spur 181 was cut at the end of gully 173. Short lengths of gully like 181 are found appended to the main ditch circle at other sites and, as at Ashville for instance, have been interpreted as foundation trenches for wattle windbreaks.⁴ However, a more plausible interpretation here would be as a soakaway or overflow.

The accumulation of domestic rubbish, particularly within the terminals of the inner gullies, persistent recutting and the absence of post- or stake-settings within the gullies clearly indicates that the main ditch circle was an open feature intended to drain water shed from the roof of the house, and was never structural.

The internal arrangements of the house focus mainly on the group of postholes clustered around the W entrance. Two of these, 080 and 076, formed the entrance posts to the building; the elongated form of the latter suggests it may have held two posts, one for a lintel, the other from which the door may have hung. The function of the remaining eight postholes is less obvious, although the following tentative interpretation is offered. Inward, and to the centre of the main entrance and placed centrally within it, posthole 074 held an upright to support a ridge-piece for a dormer over the door. Posthole 082, although as large as those of the doorway, cannot readily be accommodated within any design for this and must therefore have been part of the wall structure, as also the smaller 084. A further posthole, 238, similar in size to 084, was noted some 3 m. distant and would also fall adjacent to a projected wall line. By the rear entrance two further postholes, 169 and smaller 171, may have held an upright for the roof and perhaps a doorpost. However, no corresponding postholes were present on the S side of the rear entrance.

The remaining length of wall between the front and rear doors of the building was less well served with posts, there being only one definite example, 175, set well inward of the wall. This is so distant from the projected wall line that a repair to a rafter or perhaps a post upon which a wattle screen was fixed to define a bay against the wall would seem the most likely interpretation. Finally, posthole 078, set well within the body of the house, could similarly represent a repair to the rafters near the doorway, a more substantial anchor for a screen, perhaps also attached to 082, or alternatively one of a pair of uprights, which could have included either 082 or 074, upon which a weaving loom was mounted.

Three other features within the roundhouse merit attention. Feature 177 adjacent to the front door was an elongated pit containing a moderate amount of charcoal. Against the east wall of the house another elongated shallow pit 072 contained a little charcoal along with a broken quern and pottery. This was flanked by a steep-sided narrow gully 222 containing some charcoal, burnt clay and a loomweight. Internal features such as these are relatively rare occurrences, although some clay-lined examples at Claydon Pike (Glos.) were interpreted as water-containers or cooking-holes.⁵ In the absence of lining materials here the most likely interpretation for 072 and 177 are cooking-holes; although the small feature 222 is too small for this and an alternative function must be sought.

The juxtaposition of pits, postholes and drainage gullies defines the available space which the walls of the building could have occupied. Along the N arc between the front and rear doors this is well defined and regular. A circle, concentric with the centre line of the N drip gully, described through doorposts 076 and 080 and rear door posthole 171 would be just over 9 m. in diameter and would be closely flanked on the interior by postholes 082, 084 and 238. On the S side the symmetry of design is lost. Pit 177 sits close to the inside edge of the projected wall line but pit 072 sits directly within it. That the wall must have passed between pit 072 and gully 095 is clear, although this introduces an unwelcome bulge into the otherwise symmetrical wall line at the point where there is a break between gullies 095 and 194.

⁴ M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974-76* (OAU Rep. 1, CBA Res. Rep. 28, 1978).

⁵ T. Allen, D. Miles, S. Palmer, 'Iron Age Buildings in the Upper Thames Region', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (1984), 89-101.



Fig. 3. Excavation Area A.

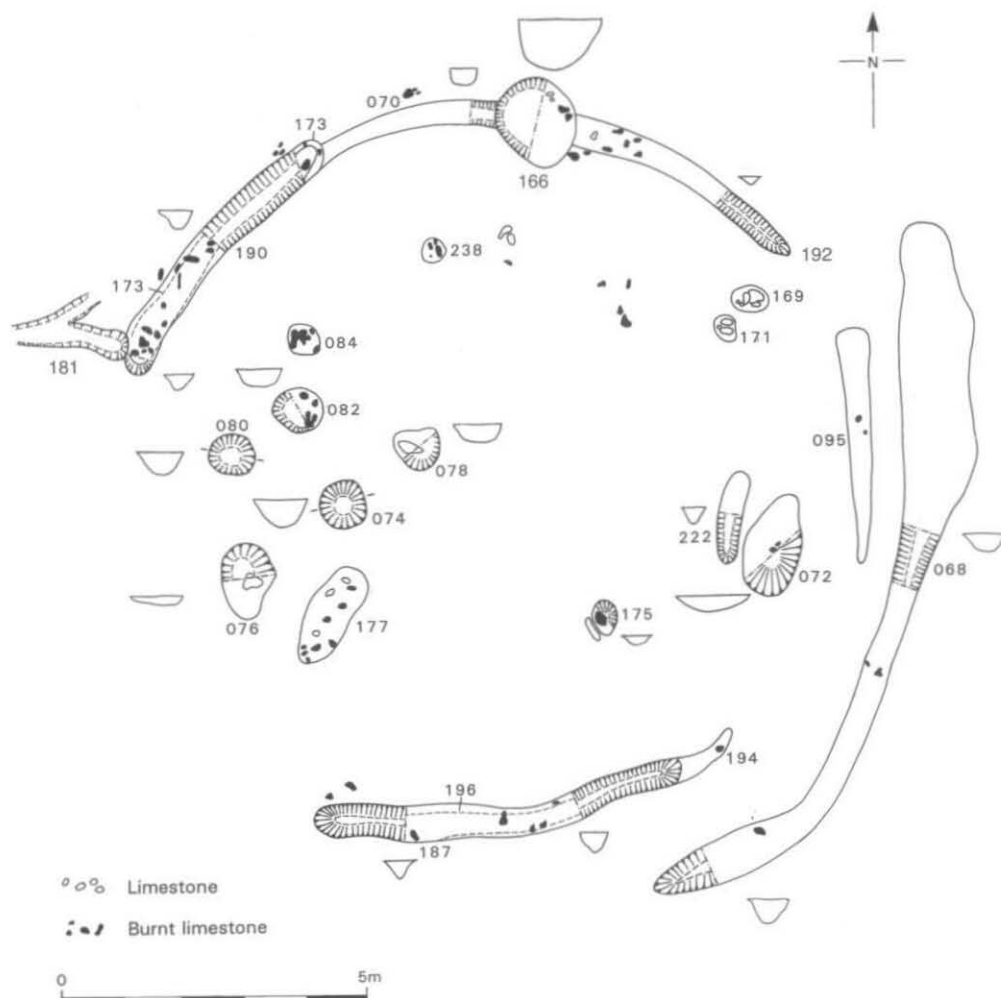


Fig. 4. Area A: Roundhouse.

Clearly from the description given above this house cannot be of 'post-ring' construction, neither in the absence of evidence to the contrary can it be considered 'stake-walled'. The presence of stakes was detected elsewhere within Area A and, if present, could well have been expected to survive within some of the patches of natural clay present in the vicinity of the roundhouse. Excavated roundhouses frequently fail to exhibit evidence for wall construction, which has led to suggestions that wooden sleeper beams were used to provide support for uprights,⁶ although this has been questioned on the grounds of unsuitability for round buildings.⁷ The conclusion therefore arises that the house was of mass-wall construction, although direct evidence is lacking. Houses 1, 2 and 3 excavated at Mingies Ditch provide contemporary parallels; with House 1 perhaps bearing the strongest

⁶ P. Dixon, 'Longhouse and Roundhouse at Crickley Hill', *Antiquity*, xlvii (1973), 56-9.

⁷ Allen, Miles, and Palmer, *op. cit.* note 5.

resemblance to the Deer Park Road example.⁸ Assuming all the available space between the flanking gullies and the nearest internal feature was occupied, then a wall base of between 0.75–1.0 m. would be possible. This is well within the limits suggested to build a turf wall of suitable height.⁹ This assumes that turf rather than limestone was the material employed: the latter, unless purposely removed, might have been expected to leave some trace however slight, although none was found.

Unlike the houses at Mingies Ditch where alluviation had sealed intact occupation layers within the houses, no recognizable floors were recorded here. However, the interior space appeared slightly more compacted than the clayey-gravel outside the building and in favourable light adopted a somewhat darker tone. If this slight variation represents a contemporary floor level, which is by no means certain, then it would appear that the inside of the house was kept scrupulously clean. This also suggests that, at least in the area of the roundhouse, the original turf and soil may have been stripped before construction to reveal the firmer clayey-gravel deposits below.

Other structures

Two other possible structures were identified within Area A. On the N limit of the excavated area two postholes, 135 and 137, several small post impressions, 143, 145, 147, and two hearths, 149 and 151, formed a close grouping and perhaps represent a small hut or windbreak. SE of the roundhouse posthole 185, post impressions 161 and 183 and two hearths 157 and 159 form a similar discrete group. In both cases no clear pattern of construction emerges although some form of basic shelter or windbreak is to be suspected at the very least, perhaps even a small mass-walled hut in the example N of the roundhouse.

The cistern

Approximately 8 m. N of the roundhouse an oval bowl-shaped pit 103 was associated with five small and one larger post or stake impressions. These were closely arranged around the N and E sides of the pit and suggest the feature was originally enclosed by a small fence or possibly a covering structure. The pit was located almost centrally within a sub-circular area of pure blue clay, one of a number which penetrated the surface of the overlying gravels. That the digging of the feature within the stiff clay must be regarded as deliberate would appear obvious, given that moving a metre or so in any direction would have afforded considerably easier excavation within the gravel. This was the only example encountered anywhere within Area A and must clearly be regarded as a water trough or cistern, presumably the latter and protected from the unwanted attention of animals by an enclosing structure. A similar example of an enclosing structure was noted at Guiting Power (Glos.), where the excavator suggested a pegged-out skin may have been stretched across a rock-cut pit to store water.¹⁰ A more comparable example may be the puddled clay-lined and fenced water hole found at Foxholes Farm (Herts.), interpreted by the excavator as being solely for domestic use.¹¹ Numerous clay-lined pits were also found at Claydon Pike where they were interpreted as water-containers or cooking-holes, although here they were found within roundhouses.¹²

An elongated pit 234 immediately S of the roundhouse was also set centrally within a discrete area of blue clay and may also have been a water trough; it was not excavated.

Hearths

Groups of hearths were clustered between the roundhouse and the shelter/hut to the N, with two outliers to the E, a total of fourteen in all. A single driven post impression accompanied one group of three hearths,

⁸ T. G. Allen and M. A. Robinson, *Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford, Oxon* (Thames Valley Landscapes: the Windrush Valley, Vol. 2, 1993).

⁹ G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman Riverside Settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire* (OAU Rep. 2/CBA Res. Rep. 32, 1979).

¹⁰ A. Saville, *Excavations at Guiting Power Iron Age Site, Gloucestershire, 1974* (CRAAGS Occ. Paper No. 7, 1979).

¹¹ C. Partridge, *Foxholes Farm. A Multi-Period Gravel Site* (1989), 31–3.

¹² T. Allen, D. Miles, S. Palmer, *op. cit.* note 5.

otherwise all appeared unenclosed. As the site is relatively exposed it would have been desirable to provide the hearths with some protection from the wind, and the linear arrangement of at least three groups of hearths might suggest they were set along fencelines. All, however, were located in areas of fairly homogeneous gravel, where in such a coarse medium it may not be reasonable to expect evidence of stake-built windbreaks or fences to survive.

Post-trench and associated features

A discrete group of features was located 15 m. SW of the roundhouse, directly opposite the main entrance. Here, a large shallow ovoid pit 011 containing a sub-rectangular slab-lined pit 051, lay adjacent to a short length of stone-filled vertically-sided trench 004, and a posthole 020. Trench 004 disappeared into the edge of the excavation and its full length remains unknown. Posthole 020 was cut through its infill, near the terminal.

Pit 051 had a complex history of more than one phase. In its original form the pit was steep-sided and sub-rectangular, approximately 1.5 m. long by 0.7 m. wide. Limestone slabs were laid flat in the base of the pit and lined the sides up to two courses high. Many of these were burnt and the bottom of the pit contained a layer of burnt clay. Pottery and three fragments of an iron object (Fig. 7, 2 and 3) were recovered from this phase. A considerable quantity of limestone was also found within the immediate vicinity of the pit, much of it burnt. It is possible that this feature was a cooking or roasting pit, and that the iron objects found within the burnt clay fill were the remnants of a roasting spit. All that remains of this are a pair of simple feet and the bowed lower legs of an upright. If correctly interpreted, this object may be a precursor to the more substantial and elaborate late Iron Age fire-dogs, of Welwyn type.¹³

Subsequently, the pit appears to have been used to erect numerous posts, mostly 0.1–0.15 m. in diameter, set within a limestone and clay fill. Although several of these appeared contemporary, no regular arrangement could be discerned. It may be that later re-use of the pit to erect posts was associated with nearby trench 004 and posthole 020, where the jumbled limestone and clay backfills of these features suggest both held posts that were later salvaged. It is not possible to demonstrate that all these features held posts at the same point in time, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that they once did, and that together they may have formed a fenceline perhaps punctuated by an entrance. The area of clay and gravel immediately surrounding these features, as well as containing a notably high burnt stone content, was somewhat compacted, as if trampled. However, this could equally date from activity associated with the possible roasting pit and need not in itself indicate the presence of an entrance.

Later gullies

At the extreme S end of Area A two linear features were noted. Gully 041 and a short length of accompanying gully 065 crossed the site E to W. Both contained fills of notably different composition to other features on site and were stratigraphically later than the Iron Age activity, although containing only residual Iron Age material.

AREA B (Fig. 5)

Limestone paved areas and associated features

An extensive area of limestone paving formed a focus around which other features in Area B were clustered. The limestone pavement 532 was composed of slabs up to 0.3 m. in size set within a clay-loam and pebble matrix; approximately 10% of this slabbing was composed of burnt stone. In places, an occupation soil had accumulated on top of the pavement, but its full extent could not be discerned under the difficult excavation conditions. The pavement was laid out in an approximate L-shape, with well-defined arms to the N and E. The W edge of the pavement was rather less well-defined than elsewhere, being somewhat fragmented and scattered.

¹³ I. M. Stead, 'A La Tène III Burial at Welwyn Garden City', *Archaeologia*, cl (1967), 53–8.

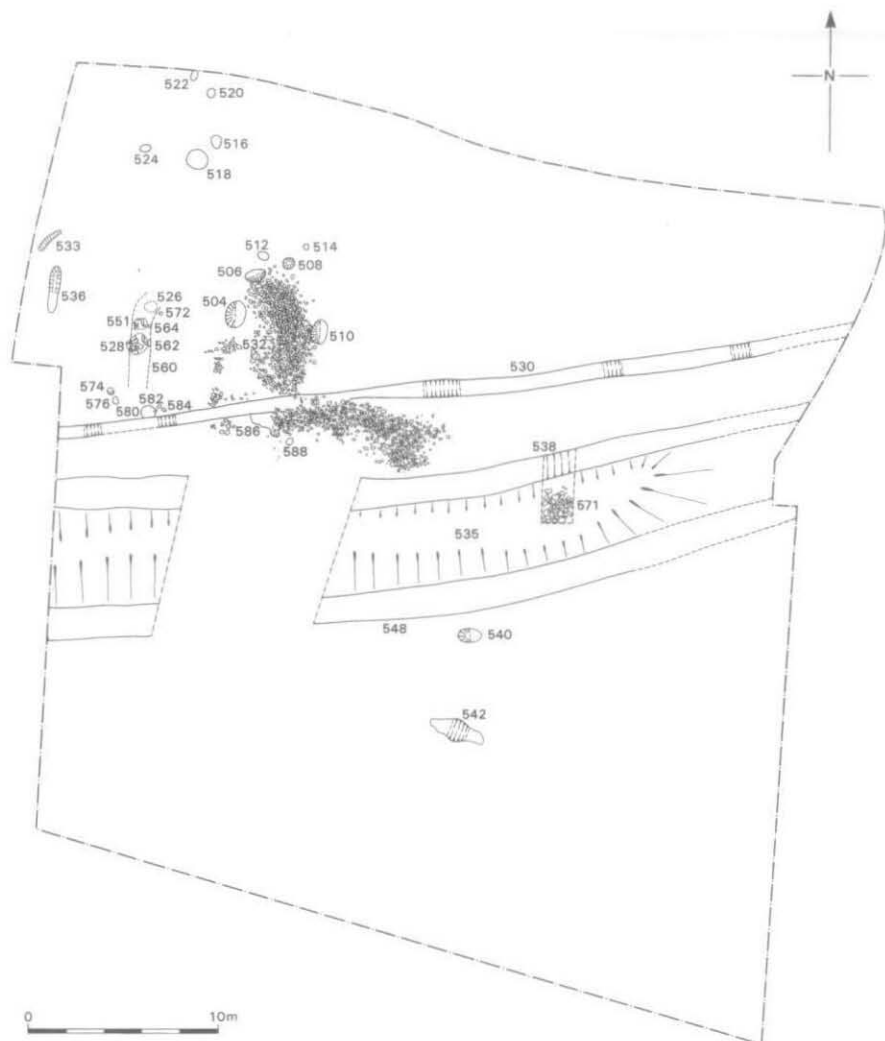


Fig. 5. Excavation Area B.

A small section of outlying pavement 571 was seen some 7 m. to the E, covered by an 18th-century bank 535. The full extent of this second pavement was not established.

Surrounding pavement 532 were up to seven shallow hearth pits, mostly oval in plan. These were almost exclusively distributed around the N arm of the pavement and in most cases were located on the immediate periphery of the stones. This 'satellite' arrangement offers an impression of a purposefully organized working area, as if the pits were being serviced from the pavement.

There are few clues to the reason for this arrangement or its original function. Features 505, 507, 509 and 511 contained very high concentrations of oak charcoal, much higher than most other features, and fragments of burnt clay, potsherds and at least one perforated loomweight. Robinson suggests the high ratio of oak charcoal to cereal remains is unusual and may suggest a non-domestic activity (this report).

During the watching brief another possible layer of surfacing 570, some pits, stakeholes and a possible gully, all overlain by an occupation soil, were seen below 532. A similar area of limestone cobbling dating to the middle Iron

Age was found at Abingdon Vineyard. This consisted of three successive layers of cobbles, each of which had an occupation soil upon it.¹⁴

An additional complication in the interpretation of the pits and pavement area is an incongruous radiocarbon determination RCD 2052 of 1020 ± 70 BP obtained from charcoal in pit 504. As the pit appears to be part of a group and arrangement clearly dated to the middle Iron Age on artefactual evidence this date must be the result of contamination, possibly by fine root matter which was noted in the deposit during sampling.

Stone settings

Approximately 7 m. to the west of the pavement a short length of curving shallow gully 560 contained two well-constructed stone settings, 528 and 551, and a small pit 526. Both these settings were sub-rectangular in shape and contained large limestone packing slabs, some up to 0.5 m. in length. The slabs were carefully arranged in a regular fashion around the pits.

These settings, although averaging 0.4 m. × 0.6 m. in plan, were no more than 0.3 m. deep, and if they held posts at all, these could not have been of any great height. Within 528 the stone setting enclosed a rectangular void approximately 0.45 m. × 0.25 m. in size, with upright slabs set on all four sides. The surrounding soil pressure had pushed inward the slabs on the S side of the box which had preserved the inner space. A large flat slab was laid in the base of the box. Clearly, this tends to suggest that if a post was once present it was subsequently removed, or possibly the setting never housed a post. An almost identical, although less regular, arrangement was encountered in setting 551. Here however the enclosed area was smaller, 0.3 m. × 0.25 m., with the long axis aligned N-S and a flat slab in its base. A sample taken from the fill contained the highest concentration of burnt cereal and plant remains found on the site.

Both settings were each accompanied by a single stakehole, immediately adjacent to the E. The small pit 526 was also located within gully 560, and possessed a small stakehole on its E side. No stone setting was present within the pit; the only item recorded was a large lump of fired clay, possibly a loomweight.

Similar stone-built structures recorded from Iron Age contexts have been identified as smithing hearths, but these invariably possess clay linings.¹⁵ Although the infill of 551 contained approximately 10% charcoal and burnt clay this could easily be derived from the charcoal-rich deposits close-by; certainly there was no *in-situ* clay lining present in 551 or 528, nor any evidence of burning on the stones.

Hearth pits and gullies

In the NE corner of the excavation a cluster of small pits up to 0.5 m. in diameter and a possible posthole were noted but not excavated. On the W edge of the excavation two short gullies were observed. Slightly curving gully 533 was very insubstantial, being no more than 1.25 m. long, 0.2 m. wide and only 0.05 m. deep. However, the gully fill contained evidence of ironworking in the form of three fragments of iron slag. One of these was a hearth bottom, another piece comes from the area around a tuyère. All three pieces could have accumulated from no more than a single day's blacksmithing, probably concerned with manufacture or repair of tools for use by the inhabitants of the site. Gully 536 was larger, being 2.5 m. long and 0.5 m. wide.

In the S half of the excavation two small hearths were encountered. Both sat within a shallow irregular scoop 542, and the fire-reddened clay spreads above both indicated they had been deliberately extinguished.

Later features

A broad low bank 535 crossed the middle of the excavation, running approximately NE-SW. A section through the bank showed it to be approximately 7 m. wide and 0.45 m. high, composed of gravelly clay-loam. To the east, a second smaller section showed the bank to overlie a limestone pavement 571, comparable to pavement 532. On both the N and S sides the bank was flanked by shallow ditches 538 and 548 respectively.

That both these ditches appeared to be later additions may explain the subtle proportions of the bank, which in

¹⁴ T. Allen, forthcoming, *Report on Abingdon Vineyard, Oxon.*

¹⁵ C. Salter, pers. comm.

the absence of contemporary quarry ditches, must have been built with material scraped from the surrounding ground surface. No dating evidence was recovered from either the bank or the two ditches.

On the N side of the bank a third slightly smaller ditch 530 ran parallel to the others, cutting through the limestone pavement 532. An upper ditch fill composed purely of charcoal yielded an iron bucket handle, and a fragment of clay tobacco pipe was recovered from the ditch bottom.

Although it was previously considered the bank and ditches were possibly associated with the medieval deer park,¹⁶ they are more credibly part of the 18th-century enclosures at Witney Park illustrated on a contemporary map.¹⁷

TRENCHES C-J

These trenches were cut to enhance the coverage provided by the 1991 evaluation trenches between Excavation Areas A and B. Of the eight trenches cut, only two, I and J, yielded evidence that might be associated with the Iron Age settlement. In trench I a small hearth was found, apparently isolated, and in J another hearth-pit similar to those seen in Area B was encountered.

In trenches C-F the bank and ditches of the boundary seen in Area B were traced as far as Deer Park Road.

THE FINDS

THE POTTERY by JANE R. TIMBY

Introduction

A small assemblage of pottery was recovered amounting to approximately 366 sherds, just under 3.2 kgs. in weight. With one single exception, the entire assemblage comprises plain undecorated domestic-type wares. Several of the sherds could be recognized as coming from single vessels indicating a low minimum vessel count, for example, context 163 contained 128 sherds from a single pot. When this is taken into account, the range of types is obviously diminished. The condition of the sherds is poor, partly due to relatively hostile ground conditions and the generally soft, friable nature of the material. Several pieces had lost their surface finish and had abraded edges. The number of featured sherds is relatively low and only one complete profile could be reconstructed. The pottery is accompanied by several fragments of fired clay, a number coming from triangular perforated loomweights. The material was sorted into main fabric types and quantified by weight and count (in grammes) according to each excavated context. The report briefly describes the defined fabrics and their associated forms, followed by a discussion of the pottery in relation to the site and its likely chronology. The final section makes a brief comparison of the assemblage with other broadly contemporary groups of material from the Thames gravel region.

Fabrics and Forms

The sherds were sorted macroscopically, aided by the use of a $\times 20$ binocular microscope. Three main categories were defined on the basis of the main inclusions present in the clay: fossil shell/limestone, sand and iron. Further subdivisions were made within the first two categories resulting in eight fabrics. The definitions are quite broad, since the character of such handmade material is generally fairly diverse. Most of the fabrics encountered at

¹⁶ G. T. Walker, 'Witney, Deer Park Road', *South Midlands Arch.*, 24 (1994), 32.

¹⁷ R. Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford 1793/4*, facsimile in Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.

Witney can be paralleled with material from within a 20-km. radius suggesting fairly localised manufacture. (Parallels with other sites are referred to in the following descriptions. After an initial bibliographical reference only the site names are used.)

Only twenty-eight rimsherds were recovered, representing a maximum of twelve vessels. The main forms present seem to reflect vessel forms identified elsewhere in the Thames Valley dating to the middle Iron Age. This range is characterized by a moderately small repertoire of types, notably vessels with slack profiles and generally simple rims. Little evidence of use was noted with just two sherds showing the presence of burnt residue on the interior surface.

Limestone/fossil shell-tempered wares (Fabrics H1, H2, H3 and H4)

Fabric H1

No. of sherds: 96; wt. 1541 gms.

Fabric: A coarse fossil shell-tempered fabric, generally orange-red, or mid- to light brown in colour, very occasionally grey or black. The slightly friable clay matrix contains a moderate to dense frequency of coarse fossil shell up to 5 mm. across, accompanied by fragments of limestone. Several sherds show flat, irregular surface voids, particularly on the surfaces where material has leached out, either through use or post-depositional processes. The fabric equates with Farmoor fabric B3,¹⁸ Gravelly Guy fabric SH16;¹⁹ Whitehouse Road, Oxford fabrics H1/H2²⁰ and Watkins Farm Group 6.²¹

Form: The majority of the sherds appear to have a matt finish, one vessel shows fine diagonal trimming lines (Fig. 6, 2). Vessels tend to be thick-walled and include barrel jars with plain slightly inward-curving rims (Fig. 6, 6), a large jar with an externally flanged rim (Fig. 6, 2) equating with Ashville form A²² and jars with upright plain rounded rims (Fig. 6, 1) equating with Ashville form B.²³

Fabric H2

No. of sherds: 69; wt. 350 gms.

Fabric: A soft, smooth, soapy black, open-textured fabric. The paste contains a sparse scatter of Oolitic limestone more generally represented by voids. Sparse iron is also present. Equates with Whitehouse Road, Oxford fabric L1.

Forms: A large jar with an internally projecting rim (Fig. 6, 8) equating with Ashville form A, and a smaller thinner-walled everted rim jar (Fig. 6, 11)

Fabric H3

No. of sherds: 22; wt. 99 gms.

Fabric: A moderately soft fabric containing a moderate to frequent scatter of Oolitic limestone, both as dissociated grains and as conglomerates. Occasional fine fragments of fossil shell can also be detected.

Forms: A moderately thin-walled everted rim jar (Fig. 6, 5).

Fabric H4

No. of sherds: 5; wt. 54 gms.

Fabric: Dark brown fabric of slightly vesicular texture. The surfaces are pocked with numerous voids which on fresh fracture contain calcareous linings indicating the presence of fairly fine fragments of limestone and fossil shell (less than 0.5 mm. in size). The paste also contains a marked iron content in the form of dark brown rounded grains.

Forms: A large simple rim barrel-shaped jar, (Fig. 6, 7).

¹⁸ G. Lambrick, 'The Iron Age pottery', in G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, op. cit. note 9, 35-46.

¹⁹ S. Green, 'The Pottery', in G. Lambrick, T. G. Allen, & F. Healy, *Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt: the Development of a Prehistoric and Romano-British landscape* (Thames Valley Landscape Monograph, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, in prep.).

²⁰ J. R. Timby, 'The Pottery', in A. Mudd, 'Excavations at Whitehouse Road, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, lviii (1993), 56-63.

²¹ T. G. Allen, *Watkins Farm, Northmoor, Oxon.* (Thames Valley Landscapes: the Windrush Valley, Vol. 1, 1990).

²² C. D. De Roche, 'The Iron Age Pottery', in M. Parrington, op. cit. note 4, 40-74.

²³ Ibid.

*Sandy Wares (S1, S2 and S3)**Fabric S1*

No. of sherds: 21; wt. 453 gms.

Fabric: Dark red-brown to dark grey fabric with a sandy texture. At magnification the clay contains a moderate to common frequency of fine well-sorted, rounded to sub-angular, quartz sand. Occasional larger grains up to 0.5 mm. across occur along with rare to sparse grains of iron and angular flint. Probably equates with Whitehouse Road, Oxford fabric S5, Gravelly Guy fabric SA/35.

Forms: Relatively thick-walled vessels with a matt or burnished finish. Slightly globular jars with simple rims (Ashville form D) (Fig. 6, 3 and 9). A small jar with a flat base could be reconstructed from sherds from context 561 (Fig. 6, 12).

Fabric S2

No. of sherds: 13; wt. 61 gms.

Fabric: A finer sandy fabric with a very fine quartz sand content and occasional iron. The fabric tends to be black in colour with a reddish dark-brown core. The paste appears to contain very fine mica. Equates with Whitehouse Road, Oxford fabric S2.

Forms: Vessels tend to show a fine surface finish. Included in this group is a decorated sherd from a bowl, from 543 beneath the limestone paving in Area B (Fig. 5). The incised decoration shows part of an infilled segment probably from a curvilinear, geometric design. The Whitehouse Road assemblage similarly contained decorated globular bowl fragments in this fabric equating with Ashville form classes B and D.

Fabric S3

No. of sherds: 137; wt. 604 gms.

Fabric: A brown to grey-black ware characterized by a moderate frequency of dark greenish-grey or brown rounded grains of glauconitic sand. The clays would appear therefore to be derived from the Lower Greensand series. Equates with Whitehouse Road, Oxford fabric S3.

Forms: The majority of the sherds derive from a single much fragmented vessel from context (163). This is a slack-sided jar with a simple, slightly thickened rim (Fig. 6, 4).

*Iron/ferruginous pellets (II)**Fabric II*

No. of sherds: 3; wt. 10 gms.

Fabric: A moderately hard orange-brown fabric with a smooth, slightly soapy feel. The only visible inclusions are a number of fine rounded dark to red-brown iron grains and occasional small voids possibly from dissolved limestone.

Form: No featured sherds.

Discussion

The range of forms and general composition places the assemblage in the middle Iron Age tradition. It has been suggested that within the Thames Valley there is a general progression during the middle Iron Age from shell/limestone-tempered wares to sandy wares. This was demonstrated at Farmoor with the shift from pits on the gravel terrace (Phase I) to the enclosures (Phase II).²⁴ At Witney shell or limestone-tempered wares account for 64% by weight compared to 35% sandy wares. This, combined with the large jars with expanded or flanged rims belonging to Ashville form A, would indicate an occupation period well within the middle Iron Age period. The ferruginous, or ochreous wares at Farmoor also tend to be characteristic of Phase I.

The pottery from Witney is perhaps slightly too small a sample to allow any valid distributional information across the site although some comments can be made. The group can essentially be split into that from Area A

²⁴ G. Lambrick, *op. cit.* note 18.

relating to the round house and to Area B interpreted as general utility area. Slightly more pottery was recovered from Area A, 1986 gms., 271 sherds, compared to 1186 gms., 96 sherds from Area B. Almost twice as many shell/limestone sherds were recovered from A, 42% compared with 22% by weight from B. Fabric H4 was not amongst material from A, whilst fabric H3 was absent from B. Ferruginous wares were similarly represented in both areas whilst sandy wares accounted for 20% in Area A and 15% in Area B by weight (of total assemblage). The finer wares represented largely by fabric S2 were better represented in Area A although the single decorated sherd came from Area B. The substantial part of a sandy ware jar was recovered from the round house (context 163). Unfortunately it was very fragmented. It is not clear whether the observed patterns reflect chronological or functional differences between the two areas. It is quite likely that if more material was recovered the pattern would completely change.

In addition to the pottery a quantity of small fragments of loomweight were recovered. Again these were recovered from both areas with the larger amount coming from Area A, 928 gms. compared to 199 gms.

Comparison with other sites

There are now quite a large number of sites from the Thames gravel area with assemblages similar to Witney, for example Farmoor, Ashville, Watkins Farm, Mingies Ditch,²⁵ Abingdon Vineyard,²⁶ and Gravelly Guy. Compared with other Iron Age sites in the area the range of fabrics at Witney is quite limited and most, if not all of these find parallel with material encountered elsewhere on the gravels, for example, Gravelly Guy, Whitehouse Road, Oxford, and Watkins Farm. This may suggest a fairly tight period of occupation at Witney. Typologically the greatest correspondence of types is with the Phase II material from Farmoor. This is dominated by barrel-shaped jars, globular bowls and vessels with beaded, everted or thickened rims. The angular, carinated vessels more characteristic of Farmoor Phase I appear to be absent from Witney. Similarly there is an almost complete absence of decorated forms. Lambrick suggests a date from around the 3rd century BC to the end of the 2nd or even into the 1st century BC for Farmoor Phase II.²⁷ A similar date seems to apply to material from Whitehouse Road, Oxford,²⁸ and Watkins Farm.²⁹ The fabric range from Witney would appear to show the greatest correspondence to Enclosure A at Whitehouse Road which was dominated by shell/limestone-tempered wares (45%) and had a relatively limited range of fabrics compared to enclosure B. At Watkins Farm sandy wares were slightly better represented compared to the calcareous group possibly indicating a marginally later period of occupation. Both Farmoor and Oxford seem to have been abandoned before the end of the 1st century BC, but small quantities of grog-tempered ware from both might suggest a slightly longer period of occupation compared to Witney where there is an absence of any 'Belgic' element.

Catalogue of Illustrated sherds (Fig. 6)

1. Large vessel with a simple rounded, thickened rim. Fabric H1. Area A, (012).
2. Large vessel with an expanded rim. Fabric H1. Area A, (012).
3. Globular-bodied jar with a simple rim. Fabric S1. Area A, (021).
4. Jar with a simple slightly everted rim, fabric S34. Area A, (163).
5. Small everted rim jar, fabric H3. Area A, (163).
6. Simple barrel-bodied vessel, Fabric H1. Area A, trench IX, (10).
7. Simple barrel-bodied jar, Fabric H4. Area B, (534).
8. Large vessel with an internally expanded rim, Fabric H2. Area B, (537).
9. Simple rim globular jar, fabric S1. Area B, (529).
10. Two joining body sherds showing part of an infilled panel design. Probably from a globular bowl. The surface has a fine burnished, smooth finish. Fabric S2. Area B, (543).
11. Everted rim jar/bowl, fabric H2. Area B, trench V, (14).
12. Small jar with a flat base, fabric S1. Area B, (561).

²⁵ Allen and Robinson, *op. cit.* note 8.

²⁶ Timby, in prep. 'Selected Iron Age and Early Roman Pottery from Abingdon Vineyard'.

²⁷ G. Lambrick, 'The Iron Age Pottery', in G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, *op. cit.* note 9.

²⁸ J. R. Timby, *op. cit.* note 20.

²⁹ T. G. Allen, *op. cit.* note 21.

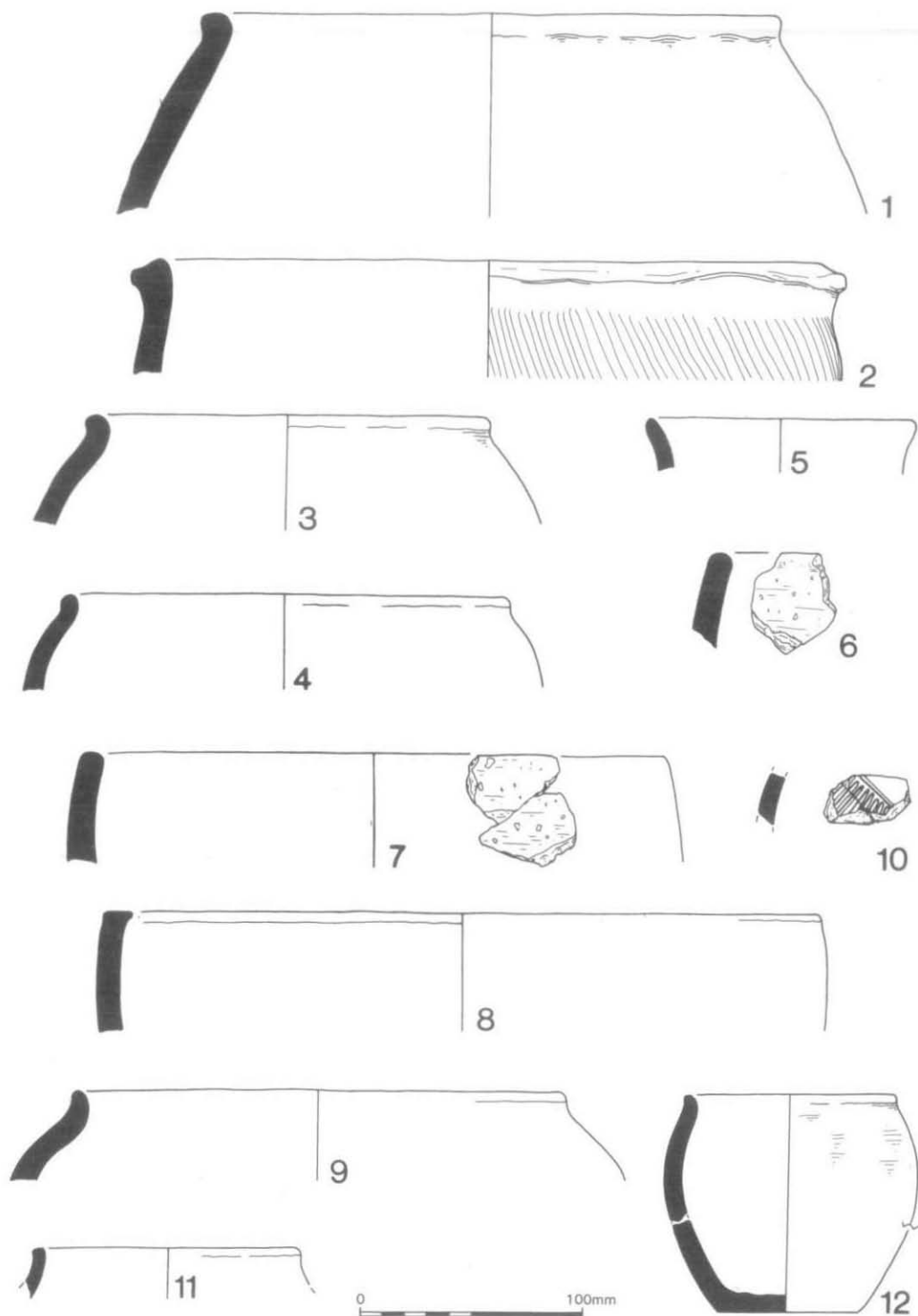


Fig. 6. Iron Age Pottery.

OBJECTS OF IRON by GRAEME WALKER (Fig. 7)

Six complete or fragmentary objects of iron were found, all but SF11 were from Area A. One of the objects from Area A (SF1) came from within an irregular gully which may have been a natural feature. SF10 was found during the evaluation.

1. Flat handle of a reaping hook with two rivets for attachment. For a more complete example from Ashville see Parrington.³⁰ SF9 (532)
2. Two broken fragments which join to create a dog-leg 180 mm. long with a short foot at the base. SF6 and SF8 (087/160)
3. A third much shorter piece appears to be a mirror image of the foot end of the dog-leg SF6 and SF8. Together, these fragments possibly represent two legs of a small stand or spit. SF9 (087/160)
4. Short L-shaped hook with a flat tapered end. SF1 (023)

Small square section rod with a flat head, possibly a nail. SF3 (028) Not illus.

Small rectangular section rod tapering to a narrow end. Other end is bent with a flat head. Possibly a nail. SF10 evaluation context X(23) Not illus.

IRON SLAG by CHRIS SALTER

Only three pieces of slag were found, all of which were indicative of hammer welding. The total amount of slag recovered is equivalent to a single episode of blacksmithing activity, not more than a single days' work.

However, as the material was from a secondary context, the above estimate of the scale of iron-working represents the minimum amount of middle Iron Age iron-working activity.

TABLE 1. IRON SLAG

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Weight</i> | <i>Quantity</i> | <i>Type Code</i> | <i>Slag Type</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|---|
| 534 | 178.0 g | 1 | SD-4 | Dense slag | Small plano-convex hearth bottom |
| 534 | 136.0 g | 1 | SD-3 | Dense slag | Small sub-tuyère plate, irregular form |
| 534 | 76.0 g | 1 | SD-frag | Dense slag | Fragment unclassified. Parts of the upper surface were highly magnetic indicating the presence of metallic iron within the slag |

MOULD FRAGMENTS by CHRIS SALTER

Six contexts from Area A and two from Area B produced fragments of fired clay moulds. The identification of the mould fragments was based on the attributes of fabric type and oxidization state. All fragments had been too heavily abraded for any external morphology to be identified.

³⁰ M. Parrington, op. cit. note 4.

THE WORKED STONE by FIONA ROE (Fig. 7)

Querns

There are four pieces of worked stone (three illus.) which were used for the grinding of corn and other food materials. Two are parts of broken saddle querns (Fig. 7, 6 and 7), while two further fragments came either from querns or rubbers (Fig. 7, 5). All are made of May Hill sandstone, a coarse Silurian griststone containing distinctive clasts of salmon pink feldspar.³¹

May Hill is a landmark in north-west Gloucestershire, 3.8 km. north-east of Mitcheldean and about 65 km. from Witney if a direct route were taken. It is curious that stone imported from this distance should have been chosen in preference to the local materials being used contemporaneously for saddle querns. Lower Calcareous Grit could have been obtained from the Corallian of Oxfordshire at a distance of about 14 km. to the south-east of Witney, and Lower Greensand was also available, probably from around Culham 23 km. to the south-east. Both of these saddle quern materials have been found in use on other Oxfordshire Iron Age sites. However, at Gravelly Guy, near Stanton Harcourt, there was a greater quantity of May Hill sandstone than of Lower Calcareous Grit,³² and it may be that the non-calcareous Silurian sandstone was found to be a superior type of grinding stone.

Currently, May Hill sandstone has been recorded from eleven Iron Age sites, and a good many more examples could be expected in the future. There are five known sites in Worcestershire, including most notably Beckford, by Bredon Hill, where numerous saddle querns and distinctive bun-shaped rubbers came specifically from middle Iron Age contexts.³³ Transport of heavy items to these sites need not have been a problem, since a route up the River Severn was available.

A second group of these sites is likely to emerge amongst hillforts along the Cotswold edge. Only two such sites have been recorded to date, most notably Crickley Hill, some 25 km. distant from May Hill.³⁴

Thirdly, evidence is emerging to show that May Hill sandstone was being transported to a number of sites in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. In addition to Gravelly Guy it has been recorded from Thornhill Farm near Fairford, Glos.³⁵ and there are six pieces from Abingdon Vineyard, Oxon.³⁶ Abingdon is some 83 km. from May Hill as the crow flies, and within easy reach of the Lower Calcareous Grit and Lower Greensand, both of which were also being used at the site for saddle querns. The question arises as to how the May Hill sandstone was being transported to these sites, whether by land, or partly by river, and whether other commodities such as pottery, Forest of Dean iron ore or Droitwich salt might have been part of the same trading pattern.

Catalogue of worked stone

5. Fragment of saddle quern or rubber. SF17 (073)
6. Fragment of saddle quern. SF7 (089)
7. Large fragment of saddle quern. SF18 (532)

Small fragment of quern or rubber. SF12 (071) Not illus.

STRUCK FLINT by GRAEME WALKER

Five struck flints were recovered from the excavations, four from Area A and one from Area B; all were recovered from secondary contexts. Of the five flints, two were fire-damaged and one of these very shattered, the remainder were relatively unaffected by post-depositional factors. The three squat flakes and a single blade, possibly used as an awl, would not be out of place in a later Neolithic/early Bronze Age context. No excavated features could be identified to this period and it is unlikely the small assemblage is related to permanent occupation.

³¹ J. D. Lawson, 'The Geology of the May Hill Inlier', *Quarterly Jnl. Geol. Soc.* iii (1955), 85-116.

³² F. E. S. Roe, forthcoming. 'Worked Stone', in G. Lambrick et al., op. cit. note 19.

³³ F. E. S. Roe, forthcoming. 'Worked Stone', in J. Wills forthcoming, *Excavations at Beckford 1975-79*.

³⁴ P. Dixon, pers. comm.

³⁵ Oxford Archaeological Unit, in prep. *Report on Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Glos.*

³⁶ T. G. Allen, forthcoming. *Report on Abingdon Vineyard, Oxon.*

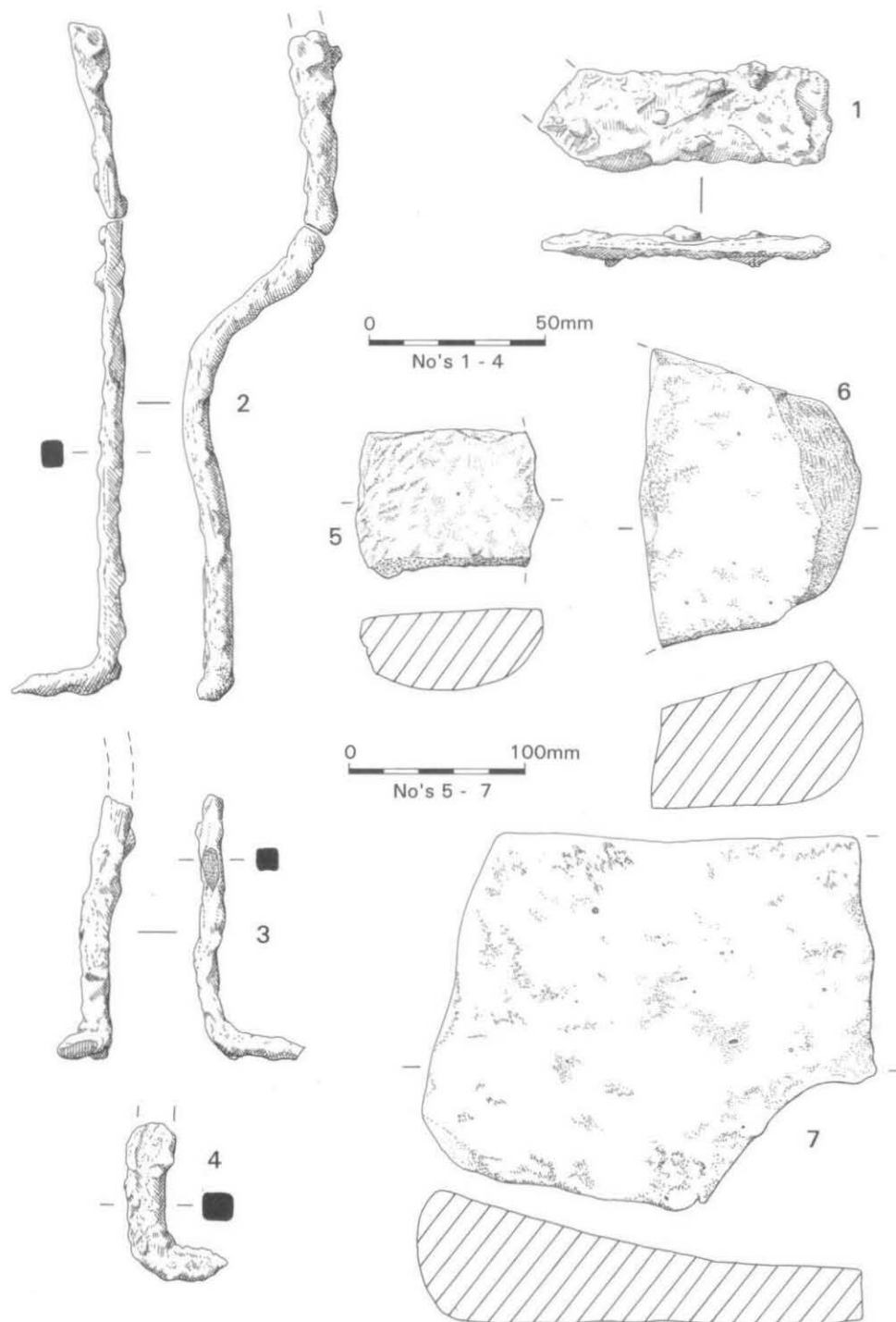


Fig. 7. Iron and Stone Objects.

THE ECONOMIC EVIDENCE

THE ANIMAL BONE by MARK MALTBY

Animal bones from the excavation were identified to species where possible and recorded individually. Data recorded included anatomy; side of the body; fragment description; epiphysal fusion; tooth eruption and wear; gnawing marks; butchery marks; surface condition and measurements.

Area A

Trench X of the 1991 evaluation lay within this area and the bones recovered from there are included with those retrieved from the subsequent excavations in 1992. Altogether, 122 fragments were recorded, of which only thirty-two could be identified to species. This reflects the poor preservation of the bones and the high fragmentation of the assemblage. Ninety-one fragments had eroded surfaces and preservation of the bones in shallow features was not favourable for the survival of the more fragile anatomical elements. Eighty fragments (only ten identified) were retrieved from 188 – the lower fill of the roundhouse gully. Nine other contexts produced only small numbers of fragments (Table 2).

Cattle, sheep/goat, dog and pig were the only species identified (Table 3). Cattle were the best represented with sixteen fragments. Their larger, generally denser bones have a better chance of survival than many of those of the smaller species in moderate preservation conditions. A large number (seventy) of unidentified large mammal fragments, most if not all of which probably belonged to cattle, indicates the high degree of fragmentation of even these bones. Fifty-six of these were found in 188 but probably represent the fragmentary remains of a relatively small number of bones. Two cattle bones were measurable: a tibia had a distal breadth of 52.1 mm.; an astragalus had a lateral length of 58.0 mm. and a distal breadth of 39.6 mm. A maxilla from 165 belonged to an immature animal which still possessed its deciduous fourth premolar and whose third molar had erupted but was not in wear.

Seven of the thirteen sheep/goat fragments were loose teeth. These dense elements have a better chance of survival in poor preservation conditions than most of the skeleton. A sheep metacarpal from 012 was the only positive identification to species. A mandible from 012 possessed a fully erupted cheektooth row and belonged to an adult but not elderly animal, since none of the molars were in heavy wear. No measurements were possible on any of the sheep/goat bones.

Two dog bones were identified: a tibia from 012 had a distal breadth of 20.5 mm. and belonged to a medium-sized individual, a femur of an adult dog from 165 had traces of burning on it. The only identifiable pig bone came from the evaluation trench and consisted of a fragment of mandible.

No butchery marks were found on any identified fragments. The eroded surfaces made observation of fine cut marks extremely difficult. A small fragment of pelvis of a large mammal (probably cattle) from the evaluation 23 did have knife cuts on the shaft of the ilium. Only one observation of gnawing was made (on a large mammal longbone fragment from 174). Again surface erosion had probably obliterated other similar marks. Apart from the absence of horse (which was present in area B) the range of species is typical of Iron Age sites. The sample is too small to merit further discussion.

Area B

All but one of the thirteen fragments from Area B were recovered from Trench V of the 1991 evaluation. Cattle (2), sheep/goat (2), pig (2), horse (1), unidentified large mammal (4), and unidentified mammal (2) were represented. The identified material consisted of loose teeth apart from a calcined sheep/goat tibia from 529. This again indicates poor preservation of bones in the area.

THE MACROSCOPIC PLANT REMAINS by MARK ROBINSON

A total of twenty-seven samples, with a volume of 381.5 litres, were floated over a 0.5 m. mesh to recover charred plant remains. The resultant flots were divided into size fractions using 2 mm., 1 mm. and 0.5 mm. sieves and each fraction sorted under a binocular microscope. Charred plant remains other than charcoal were picked out and identified. The results are listed in Table 4, which gives the number of items identified from each sample. Charcoal was roughly sorted under a binocular microscope and then representative fragments were identified using high power incident light microscopy. The results are listed in Table 5, which records present (+), frequent (++) or abundant (+++) for each sample. Four of the samples contained very large quantities of oak charcoal and this has been weighed.

TABLE 2. ANIMAL BONE FRAGMENTS FROM AREA A

| Context | C | S | P | D | LM | SAR | UM | Total |
|----------|----|----|---|---|----|-----|----|-------|
| 005 | | 2 | | | | | | 2 |
| 012/(20) | | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | | 13 |
| 031 | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| 069 | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | | | 4 |
| 164 | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| 165 | 2 | | | 1 | 1 | | | 4 |
| 168 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| 174 | 4 | | | | 5 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| 188 | 8 | 2 | | | 56 | 3 | 11 | 80 |
| (23) | | 1 | | | 3 | | | 4 |
| TOTAL | 16 | 13 | 1 | 2 | 70 | 8 | 12 | 122 |

Key:

C = cattle; S = sheep/goat; P = pig; D = dog; LM = unidentified large mammal (cattle/horse/red deer); SAR = sheep sized mammal (sheep/goat/roe deer/dog); UM = unidentified mammal.

(No.) = 1991 evaluation context

TABLE 3. ANATOMICAL PARTS OF IDENTIFIED SPECIES FROM AREA A

| | Cattle | Sheep/goat | Pig | Dog |
|-------------------|--------|------------|-----|-----|
| Skull | 1 | | | |
| Mandible | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| Loose Teeth | 5 | 7 | | |
| Pelvis | 1 | | | 1 |
| Femur | 1 | | | 1 |
| Tibia | 1 | 1 | | 1 |
| Carpals | 3 | | | |
| Astragalus | 1 | | | |
| Metacarpal | | 1 | | |
| Metatarsal | | 2 | | |
| First Phalanx | 1 | | | |
| Thoracic Vertebra | | 1 | | |
| TOTAL | 16 | 13 | 1 | 3 |

Interpretation

With the exception of Sample 25 from Area B, charred plant remains other than charcoal were very sparse. The assemblage from Sample 25 was dominated by cereal grain, particularly wheat. Although few grains could be identified with certainty, all the wheat could have been *Triticum spelta* (spelt wheat). There were also lesser quantities of *Hordeum vulgare* (six-row hulled barley). The only weed seed that was at all well represented was *Bromus S. Eubromus* sp. (eg. *B. secalinus*, chess) a grass which readily grows as an arable weed and whose edible grains formerly seem to have been deliberately harvested along with the grains of the cereal they were growing amongst.³⁷ Chaff

³⁷ M. Jones, 'The Plant Remains', in B. Cunliffe, *Danebury, an Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire volume 2. The Excavations 1969-78: the finds* (CBA Res. Rep. 52, 1984), 483-95.

remains were sparse although a few glumes of *T. spelta* were found. This assemblage possibly represented grain cleaned ready for use. The occurrence of very small quantities of grain and chaff in the other samples from both areas was perhaps the result of a background spread of burnt crop-processing debris on the site becoming incorporated into archaeological features.

Most of the samples contained some charcoal, particularly of oak. Four samples from Area B, 14, 15, 19 and 26, all contained very high concentrations of oak charcoal. Charcoal is to be expected on an Iron Age occupation site but the high ratio of oak charcoal to charred cereal remains raises the possibility that some of this charcoal has resulted from a non-domestic activity.

Discussion

The charred crop remains from Deer Park Road fall into a similar pattern to that first established by Jones for Iron Age sites on the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley, with spelt rather than emmer as the major wheat and six-row hulled barley likely to have been another important cereal.³⁸ In comparison with sites in the valley bottom, the concentration of cereal remains was low perhaps because it was not occupied very intensively. However, further sites need to be investigated before differences between the arable economy of the Cotswolds and the Thames gravels can be confirmed.

TABLE 4. CHARRED REMAINS (Excluding charcoal)

| Sample | 1 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 25 |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Context | 012 | 550 | 545 | 505 | 531 | 168 | 529 | 553 |
| Sample Size (litres) | 10 | 40 | 20 | 40 | 15 | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| GRAIN | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Triticum spelta</i> | | | | | | | | 8 |
| <i>T. dicoccum</i> or <i>spelta</i> | | | 1 | | | | | 24 |
| <i>Triticum</i> sp. | | | | 1 | | | | 13 |
| <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> - lateral | | | | | | | | 2 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| <i>H. vulgare</i> - lateral | | | | | | | | 3 |
| <i>Hordeum</i> sp. - median | | | | | | | | 2 |
| <i>Hordeum</i> sp. | | | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| cereal indet. | 1 | 2 | | | | 1 | 1 | 51 |
| CHAFF | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Triticum spelta</i> - glume base | | | | | | | | 3 |
| <i>T. dicoccum</i> or <i>spelta</i> - glume base | | | | | | | | 3 |
| OTHER SEEDS | | | | | | | | |
| cf. <i>Medicago lupulina</i> | | | | | | | 1 | |
| <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg. | | | 1 | | 3 | | | |
| <i>Rumex</i> sp. | | | | | | | | 1 |
| <i>Galium aparine</i> | | | | | | | 1 | |
| <i>Bromus</i> sp. (eg. <i>secalinus</i>) | | | | | | | | 10 |
| indet. | | 2 | | | | | | 1 |
| OTHER REMAINS | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Rubus</i> or <i>Rosa</i> sp. - prickly | | | 1 | | 8 | | | |
| <i>Prunus</i> or <i>Crataegus</i> sp. - thorn | | | | | 5 | | | |

³⁸ M. Jones, 'The Plant Remains', in M. Parrington op. cit. note 4, 93-110.

TABLE 5. CHARCOAL

| Sample | Context | Sample size (litres) | cf. <i>Corylus avellana</i> hazel | <i>Quercus</i> oak | cf. <i>Rubus</i> blackberry | <i>Prunus</i> cf. <i>spinosa</i> sloe | <i>Pomoideae</i> hawthorn etc. | <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ash | Charcoal Weight (gms) |
|--------|---------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 012 | 10 | + | | | ++ | | + | |
| 2 | 056 | 1 | | + | | + | | | |
| 6 | 150 | 40 | | + | | | | | |
| 7 | 140 | 10 | | + | | | | | |
| 10 | 104 | 20 | | ++ | | | + | | |
| 11 | 120 | 10 | | + | | | | | |
| 14 | 509 | 20 | | +++ | | | | | 90 |
| 15 | 507 | 20 | | +++ | | | | | 170 |
| 16 | 163 | 10 | | +++ | | | | | |
| 17 | 550 | 40 | | +++ | | | | | |
| 18 | 545 | 20 | | + | + | | | | |
| 19 | 505 | 40 | | +++ | | | | | 355 |
| 20 | 531 | 15 | | +++ | | | | | |
| 21 | 168 | 5 | + | + | | | | | |
| 22 | 165 | 20 | | | | + | | | |
| 23 | 565 | 1 | | +++ | | | | | |
| 25 | 553 | 4 | | + | | | | | |
| 26 | 511 | 20 | | +++ | | | | | 170 |

RADIOCARBON DATES by GRAEME WALKER

Two radiocarbon determinations were initially made from charcoal samples retrieved from the fill of the roundhouse gully in Area A (Wit-92-16) and a pit fill from Area B (Wit-92-19). The determination obtained from Wit-92-19 was inconsistent with the artefactual evidence. The count was rerun, but returned a similar determination. Fine root penetration was noted in the sample, and along with less than rigorous drying procedures may have resulted in a young date. The primary measurement result is presented as conventional Radiocarbon Age in years BP as defined by Stuiver & Polach.³⁹

TABLE 6. THE RADIOCARBON DATES

| Sample | Lab Ref | $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (‰) | Date BP | Calibrated date at 1σ | Sample details |
|-----------|----------|---------------------------|---------|------------------------------|--|
| Wit-92-19 | RCD-2052 | -27.40 | 1020±70 | AD 970-1035 | Charcoal from pit 504. Sample repeated as RCD-2424 |
| Wit-92-19 | RCD-2424 | -27.40 | 1070±70 | AD 890-1020 | Replicate check measurement on RCD-2052 |
| Wit-92-16 | RCD-2053 | -26.00 | 2190±90 | 390-115 BC | Charcoal from roundhouse gully 070 |

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Although the excavations at Deer Park Road were neither total nor carried out under ideal conditions, enough has been revealed to illustrate that the occupation falls within the general category of undefended farmstead sites. Such sites are most common during the

³⁹ M. Stuiver and H. A. Polach, 'Discussion: reporting of ^{14}C data', *Radiocarbon*, 19, No. 3, 355-63.

Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley and its tributaries but are less well represented on the Cotswolds and Oxford Uplands.

The dissimilarity between Areas A and B might cause some question to arise over whether both sites can be genuinely regarded as disparate elements of a single settlement. That they can is suggested by the lack of evidence for any comparable activity in the immediate vicinity. The CAT evaluation of 1991 encountered no Iron Age activity on the clay N of Area B.⁴⁰ Similarly, evaluation by the Oxford Archaeological Unit E of Area A in 1994 found no Iron Age evidence, although an undated ditch was encountered. Here too, it was found that the gravels were restricted to the higher ground around Area A, and that heavy clays predominated elsewhere.⁴¹ To the W of Deer Park Road the land drops gently towards the Colwell Brook and is unlikely to offer suitable ground for settlement. Only to the S of Area A, where the ground is level and where gravels were seen in contractors' trenches, is there any possibility of settlement continuing.

It therefore follows that as Area B is not itself a self-contained settlement unit and there are apparently no other centres of habitation in the immediate vicinity, other than Area A, the two, although widely separated, are probably interrelated. The limitations of the ceramic evidence preclude support of this view, but neither is the evidence contradictory. Similarly, the broad variance between radiocarbon dates from the two areas prohibits any useful comparison.

Accepting that Areas A and B are interrelated, an explanation for the dissimilarity between the two areas can be most readily sought in terms of functional differences. Clearly Area B, with its relatively low quantities of domestic refuse, concentrated areas of burning, ironworking debris and the relatively high concentration of cereal remains, provides a contrast with the more obvious domestic character of Area A. Although these features collectively imbue Area B with a slightly unusual character, no single element is of such pre-eminence as to suggest that the site had a singular specialist function. With the exception of ironworking, craft activities represented in Area B are reflected in Area A. Although metalworking of both iron and bronze has been demonstrated to be a normal activity carried out in Iron Age settlements, some sites possess areas specifically reserved for this, for instance at Gussage All Saints.⁴² However, these do not tend to be situated at any great distance from the main habitation centre, and in any case the quantity of debris recovered from Area B may amount to only a single days' smithing.

Rather than seek a specialist function for Area B it may be more profitable to suggest that the site was a general 'utility area' reserved for no specific task, but where a range of activities were performed. The processing of harvested cereals and the repair of iron tools might be more readily undertaken within the working environment, i.e. paddocks or fields, where the final transport of cleaned and parched grain to the homestead would be more economical of time and labour than freshly harvested produce. A comparison with the more recent agricultural practice of having field-barns located at some distance from the main farm buildings to act as out-stations for a range of activities may be an appropriate analogy.

The occupation at Deer Park Road is, notwithstanding activity in Area B, of a commonly seen kind. However, the significance of the excavation lies as much with its geographical and topographical location as the nature of the settlement evidence uncovered. Recent years have seen a concentration of archaeological survey and excavation on the highly visible Iron

⁴⁰ G. T. Walker, *Deer Park Road, Witney, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation* (CAT TS Rep. 9163, 1991).

⁴¹ A. Parkinson, *West Witney Community Site, Witney, Oxfordshire* (OAU TS Rep., 1994).

⁴² G. J. Wainwright, *Gussage All Saints. An Iron Age Settlement in Dorset* (DOE Arch. Rep. 10, 1979).

Age sites of the densely settled gravels in the Thames and Windrush Valleys. However, further W on the dip-slope of the Cotswolds and the Oxford Uplands detailed investigation has been wanting. It is necessary to travel as far west as Guiting Power to find a modern excavation within the Windrush Valley catchment not actually located on the valley floor.⁴³ Although the increasing use of aerial photographic survey has in recent years expanded the Cotswold settlement picture away from one primarily dominated by hillforts to now include 'banjo enclosures', little is known of other types of settlement.⁴⁴ However, the recently discovered middle Iron Age settlement at Glympton Park on the edge of the Oxford Uplands may provide a parallel for Deer Park Road.⁴⁵

Deer Park Road therefore provides a useful counterpoint to the valley terrace sites and helps to broaden the known range of sites occupying the higher ground. Hingley's model of social organization which perceived distinct patterns between open settlements of the Thames Valley and enclosed settlements of the Cotswolds and Oxford Uplands⁴⁶ has recently been challenged as too simplistic.⁴⁷ This is clearly illustrated by the form of settlement at Deer Park Road, which fails to reveal itself in aerial photographic surveys in deference to the more visible 'banjo enclosures'. It is to be expected that sites such as Deer Park Road are much more numerous than previously suspected and this therefore illustrates that caution should be exercised where complex models of social organization are proposed on the basis of settlement typology.

The cultural evidence indicates little if any significant variation in material lifestyle from other local sites. Although the range of pottery fabrics is perhaps more limited than elsewhere, this is rather to be interpreted along with other site evidence as an indication of relatively short occupation rather than of a functionally significant variation.

The limited economic evidence surviving on the site shows a range of animal species to be present, the only major departure from the trends seen on other local sites being the poor representation of horse, although the high proportion of bones unidentified to species makes this conclusion less than certain. Similarly, the charred plant remains show no significant variation from valley bottom sites other than an overall low incidence of cereal remains. However, the conditions for preservation of organic materials on the site were not good, and other indicators such as broken quernstone fragments and a possible reaping hook clearly imply that cereals were a significant part of the inhabitants' diet.

A range of domestic crafts appears to have been carried out at the site. Pottery forms were predominantly of plain undecorated domestic types, possibly not manufactured on-site but undoubtedly made locally. Loomweights testify to weaving, but the absence of spindle whorls might suggest spinning of wool was carried out elsewhere. Metalworking, both forging of iron and casting of bronze, was practised.

Collectively the evidence suggests a relatively self-contained settlement unit practising

⁴³ A. Saville, *op. cit.* note 10.

⁴⁴ D. Miles, 'The Iron Age', in G. Briggs, J. Cook & T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986), 49–57, also R. Hingley and D. Miles, 'Aspects of Iron Age Settlement in the Upper Thames Valley', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (University of Oxford: Comm. for Arch. Monog. No. 2, 1984), 52–71.

⁴⁵ A. Hardy, 'Glympton Park Estate', *OAU Annual Rep.* (1994), 30.

⁴⁶ R. Hingley, 'Towards Social Analysis in Archaeology: Celtic Society in the Iron Age of the Upper Thames Valley (400–0BC)', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *op. cit.* note 5, 72–88.

⁴⁷ G. Lambrick, 'The Development of Late Prehistoric and Roman Farming on the Thames Gravels', in M. Fulford and E. Nichols (eds.), *Developing Landscapes of Lowland Britain. The Archaeology of the British Gravels: A Review* (Soc. Antiq. Occ. Paper Vol. 14, 1992), 78–105.

mixed subsistence farming. This widens the distribution of such sites beyond the river valleys where previously most mixed farming settlements have been identified; although it has been suggested more specialized farming settlements also operated on the valley floors during the middle Iron Age.⁴⁸ However, it is clear from examples such as the recently excavated site at Whitehouse Road, Oxford, that conventional models of farming settlement patterns still require further refinement and Deer Park Road should not be regarded as a typical farmstead until further upland sites have been excavated.⁴⁹

The rather sparse settlement evidence at Deer Park Road implies that the site was short-lived, perhaps suggesting a failed attempt at settlement on relatively difficult ground prone to waterlogging during wet periods. Although abandonment of the site cannot be closely dated, the radiocarbon determination from the roundhouse suggests occupation is likely to have ceased by the 1st century BC, at a time when abandonment or settlement shift has been noted at many sites in the Upper Thames Valley.⁵⁰ Although the reasons behind this are unclear, social and climatic conditions may have been driving factors. The increasing concern with drainage of the roundhouse in Area A offers the most immediate solution for the prevailing circumstances of abandonment at Deer Park Road.

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⁴⁸ T. G. Allen, *op. cit.* note 21.

⁴⁹ A. Mudd, 'Excavations at Whitehouse Road, Oxford, 1992', *Oxoniensia*, lviii (1993), 33–85.

⁵⁰ T. G. Allen, *op. cit.* note 21.