The Excavation of Two Barrows at Merton, Oxfordshire

By Philippa Bradley, Michael Parsons and Ric Tyler

with contributions by Alistair Barclay, Angela Boyle, Andrew Brown and Bob Wilson

SUMMARY

Two barrows, an Iron Age enclosure and a number of other archaeological features were excavated in advance of quarrying associated with the construction of the M40 motorway. The barrows produced evidence for secondary funerary activity but no primary burials were identified. Evidence for limited middle and late Iron Age occupation associated with the enclosure was also recovered.

LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook evaluation and excavation at Merton borrow pit during February and March 1990 on behalf of Sir Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd., during the excavation of a borrow pit required for the construction of the M40 motorway. The investigations consisted of an open area excavation, measuring approximately 40 m. by 23 m. and an evaluation of the adjacent field consisting of 13 standard OAU evaluation trenches (30 m. by 2 m.) and one 15 m. long trench. The area of the evaluation covered just over two hectares. The area had been under pasture prior to the development at around 59 m. OD.

The borrow pit (Fig. 1; SP 568 169) is situated 6 km. to the south of Bicester, and 0.5 km. south-west of the village of Merton. The pit was to be dug to an approximate depth of 60 m. to extract Jurassic limestone. Topsoil and overburden produced during the digging of the borrow pit were stored on the adjacent evaluated area.

The site was situated towards the south-western end of an elongated outcrop of Jurassic Cornbrash rubbly limestone. The area is surrounded by alluvium and River Terrace deposits.[1] The topsoil consisted of a reddish brown fine loam. The subsoils, where examined, were redder and more clayey towards the bottom, suggesting an argillic profile. The topsoil in the area evaluated to the west of the main excavation was a dark brown silty loam. In this area a layer of mid-brown clayey silt was recorded under the topsoil on the higher areas of the site. This was interpreted as an old truncated topsoil which, in some places, had been disturbed by ploughing. Flint flakes and one sherd of prehistoric pottery (from trench 6) were recovered.

[1] Geological Survey of Britain, Sheet 237, Thame.

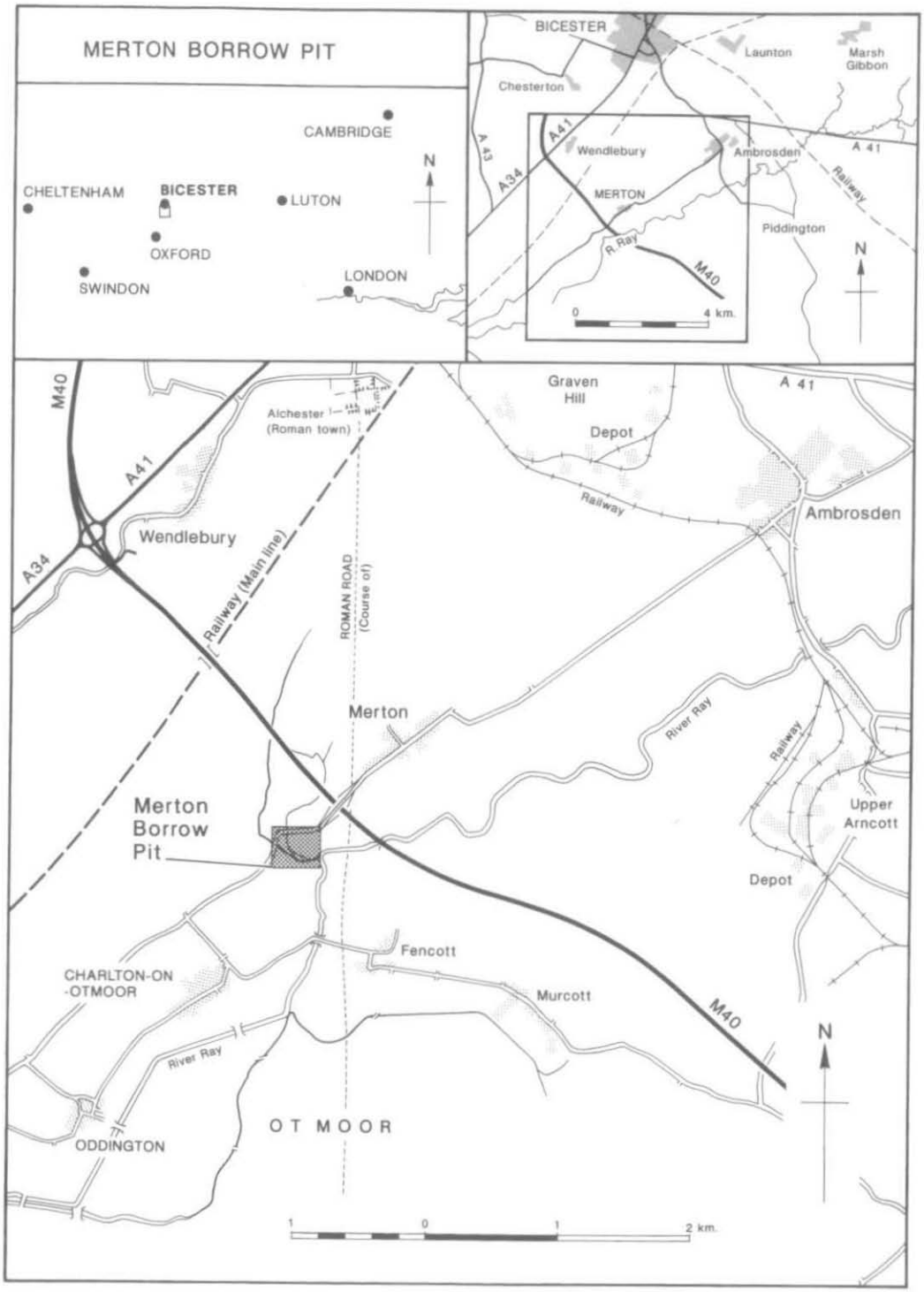

Fig. 1. Site location plan.

Within the area excavated variations in the underlying natural were observed. The natural was either of cornbrash, sandy clay or silt, or clayey silt.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

An aerial photograph (BUM 063) of the site showed two large circular ring ditches and a sub-rectangular enclosure lying approximately 100 m. north of the point where the river Ray and its tributary converge. No cropmark features were visible to the west of the excavation where the field was under pasture.

Chance finds of Mesolithic, Neolithic and indeterminate prehistoric flintwork have been made at various locations in the immediate vicinity of the excavation (for example Oxon. SMR numbers 1818, 9551, 9552, 12879). A number of ring ditches are known from cropmarks, for example Oxon. SMR number 11578 (a penannular, possible henge monument) located *c.* 1.6 km. to the north-east of the site and several more including Oxon. SMR number 11610 (two ring ditches), 12198 and 5151 in the vicinity of Islip to the south-west of the excavation. There are other ring ditches to the north-east of the site, for example Oxon. SMR numbers 5632 and 5633. Neolithic and Bronze Age material including Beaker pottery and flintwork was recovered from excavations conducted prior to improvements to the A421 near Bicester.[2] Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork was recovered from excavations at Slade Farm, Bicester; the site also produced late Bronze Age and Iron Age activity.[3] A small quantity of relatively undiagnostic flintwork was recovered from excavations at Oxford Road, Bicester.[4] Bronze Age activity in the area is also indicated by the discovery of a Food Vessel at Brismere near Oddington (Oxon. SMR number 1811)[5] and a Bronze Age spearhead (Oxon. SMR number 3232) *c.* 1 km. to the north-west of the excavation.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Both of the barrows and the rectangular enclosure had been partly destroyed by quarrying prior to the excavation and ploughing had also truncated many of the features (Fig. 2).

Barrow 100 (Figs. 3–4, 7)

Mechanical stripping of the topsoil revealed a circular feature filled with yellowish brown silty clay, with an approximate external diameter of 21 m., and an internal diameter of 14 m. Five 2 m. wide sections (100/A–E) were hand-dug across the ditch, and a further section (F) was machine-dug (Fig. 4). The north-eastern part of the barrow ditch had been removed by the quarry prior to the excavation (Fig. 2).

The ditch was between 2.50. m. and 3.0 m. wide, the widest part being on the south side. The ditch had a flat bottom from which both sides rose at an angle of between *c.* 70° and near-vertical, becoming flatter (*c.* 45°) towards the surface. It was between 1.18 m. and 1.30 m. deep (Fig. 7).

Examination of the ditch sections did not provide any firm evidence for the location associated earthworks. Given the amount of plough disturbance in the area the differential silting of the ditches could equally result from natural weathering. Sections across the ditch showed that the lowest 0.5 m. had filled rapidly, with a large quantity of cornbrash present (Fig. 7). This may represent deliberate infilling of the ditch but it may also simply be the result of frost shattering of the ditch sides soon after digging. The upper fills, however, consisted of silty clay deposits, indicating gradual silting. No associated original ground surface was identified.

[2] A. Barclay, 'Prehistoric Pottery', in P. Booth, 'Excavations in the extramural settlement of Roman Alchester, Oxfordshire' (in preparation); P. Bradley, 'Worked Flint', in ibid.

[3] G. Hughes and L. Jones, 'Archaeological excavations at Slade Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 1996' (unpubl. post-excavation assessment and research design, Birmingham University Field Archaeological Unit, 1997).

[4] C. Mould, 'An Archaeological Excavation at Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, lxi (1996), 65–108.

[5] *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 245, plate VIIa.

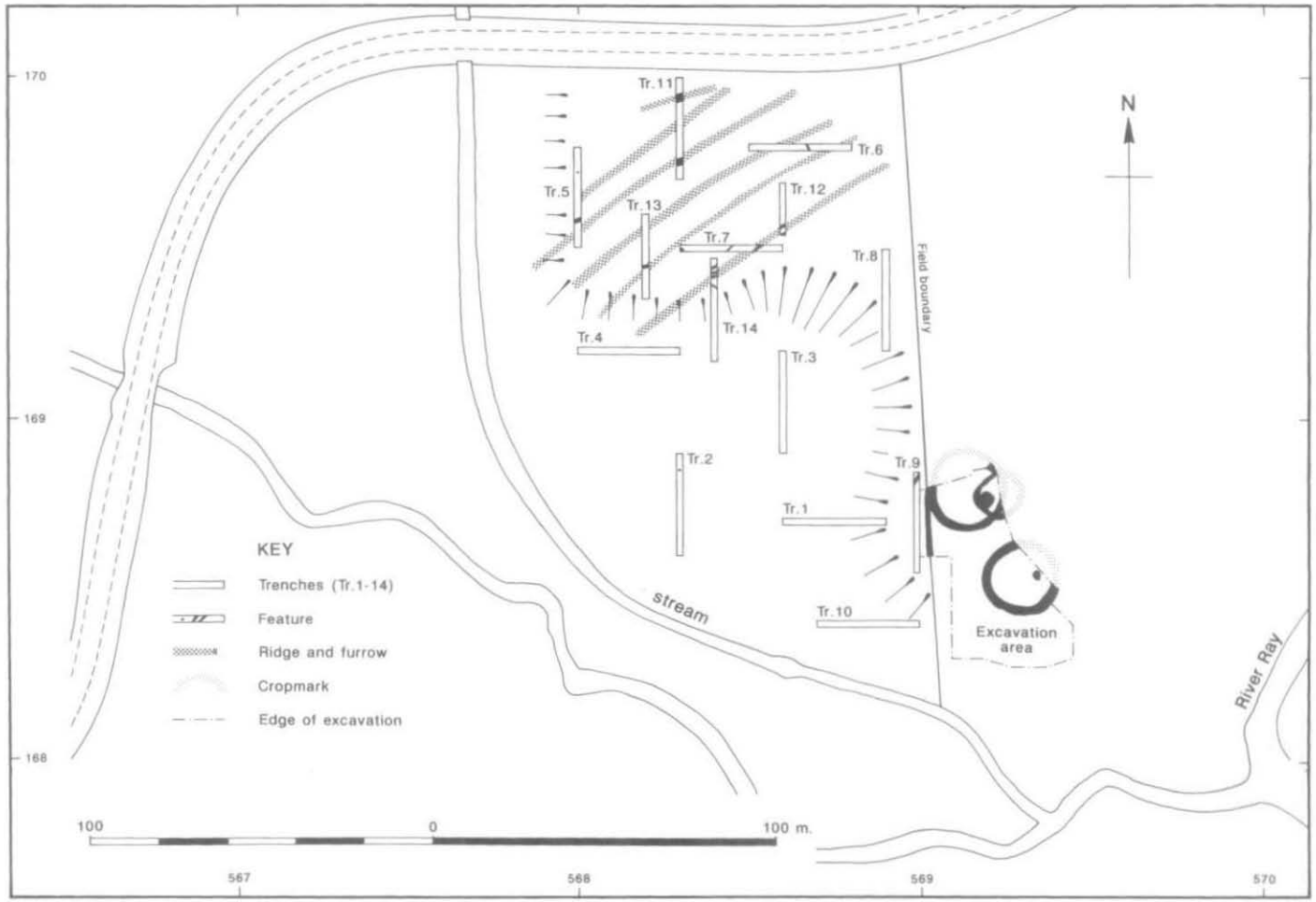

Fig. 2. Location of excavation and evaluation trenches in relation to the cropmarks.

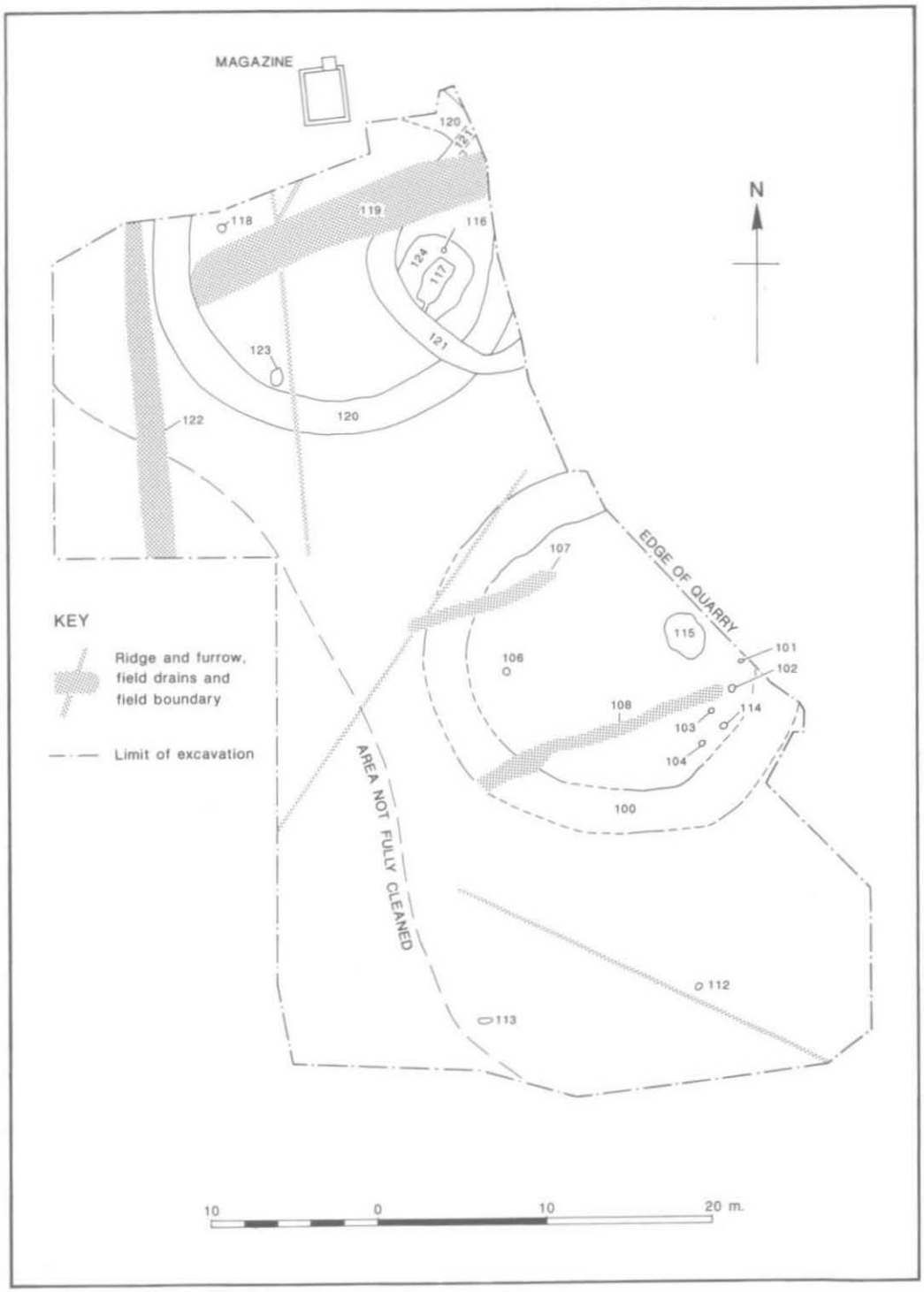

Fig. 3. Detailed plan of excavated area.

Very little pottery was recovered from the lower layers, but there were large quantities of flint. In section 100/B/8 a cluster of 41 flakes were found (Fig. 14). These were remarkably similar in size and shape and may represent a hoard (see Brown below). In ditch sections 100/B/10 and E/9 there were two large pieces of burnt wood, possibly oak (Fig. 7). These seem to be fairly substantial pieces of roundwood which have been heavily charred and then discarded in the lower fills of the ditch. Burnt limestone was recovered from sections A, B and E (2.5, 1 and 1 kg. respectively) although unfortunately the layers from which this material derived was not recorded and therefore the distribution of this material through the ditch profile is unknown. A copper alloy object, possibly a pin, was retrieved from the upper fill of the barrow ditch.[6]

A group of four cremation deposits, three urned (103, 104, 114) and one apparently without an accompanying vessel (102), were located inside the south-eastern quadrant of the ditch (Figs. 3, 4, 8). A further deposit (101) produced 32 sherds of Collared Urn (Fig. 12, P5) but upon investigation no trace of cremated bone was present. Four of these deposits formed a ring inside the edge of the barrow ditch (Figs. 3–4). The fairly even distance away from the edge of the ditch may suggest that the deposits were placed around the edge of an existing mound.

Another possible cremation deposit (106) was located towards the west of the enclosed area (Figs. 3–4); this deposit comprised only two fragments of burnt bone and a small quantity of fired clay, making its identification as a cremation deposit rather tentative. A small quantity of cremated bone was recovered from 110/C, the subsoil into which the cremations were cut.

The cremations were shallow bowl-shaped features, approximately circular in plan with diameters of between 0.28 m. and 0.41 m (Figs. 3-4, 8). They were between 0.12 m. and 0.26 m. deep and they were filled with yellow, grey or green clays with varying quantities of charcoal and cremated bone (see Boyle below).

A relatively large quantity of cremated bone was retrieved from the upper layer of the ditch (100/A/1). It was unclear whether this material represented a plough-disturbed cremation deposit or a deliberate scattering of the remains. The location of the material on the northern edge of the barrow, away from the concentration of cremation deposits, and within the upper fills of the ditch, makes the former interpretation more likely. The central area of the barrow contained only natural cornbrash, with small pockets of subsoil, some of which were investigated. In the south-eastern quarter of the barrow's interior there was a large oval pit (115) measuring 2.70 m. × 2.30 m. (Figs. 3–4, 9). It was steep-sided, 1.22 m. deep with a flat base. At the surface the natural cornbrash edges of the pit were very weathered. This, together with the fill, which consisted of very decomposed, almost powdery limestone concentrated in the centre of the pit, suggested that it had been exposed to the elements for some time before being backfilled. Only a few flint flakes and small fragments of animal bone, including one of pig, were recovered. However, the size and profile of the pit would suggest that it is of later prehistoric date and probably associated with the enclosure ditch 121 (see below).

Three other features were identified outside the barrow. Two small pits were observed approximately nine metres south of the barrow. One of these was buried by machine clearance and was therefore not excavated. The remaining features (112 and 113, Figs. 3–4) were roughly oval in plan and filled with layers of ash and silty clays; *in situ* burning may have occurred in both.

Barrow 120 (Figs. 3, 5, 10)

The barrow was situated 7 m. north-north-west of 100. It was circular with an approximate external diameter of 22 m. and an internal diameter of 13 m. The barrow ditch is markedly different to that of barrow 100, being of a generally broader and shallower form. No trace of a primary central burial was found, although plough furrow 119 may have destroyed any central features. There was no evidence for a mound and the uniformity in the dimensions of furrow 119 as it cut across the central area of the barrow suggests that any earthwork had been lost to agricultural activity in antiquity. Within the barrow the remains of two cremations were identified, of which 116 was urned and 118 was unaccompanied. The north-eastern and north-western part of the barrow ditch had been lost to the quarry before the excavation. This part of the site was also disturbed by later features including an enclosure ditch, a plough furrow and field boundary (Figs. 2, 5).

Five 2 m. wide sections were hand-dug across the ditch (Fig. 5, 120/A–E). The ditch was between 1.90 m. and 4.50 m. wide. Its sides sloped up from the flat bottom at an angle varying from *c.* 50° to almost vertical, tapering towards the surface. The ditch was between 0.4 m. and 1.90 m. deep (Fig. 10).

The ditch fill consisted of brown and pale yellow slightly clayey silt, with very little cornbrash. There was little indication of the position of any associated earthworks from the silting within the ditch, although section C (Fig. 10)

[6] This object was originally described as a pin after excavation; unfortunately it is now too decayed for full identification to be made and is therefore not datable.

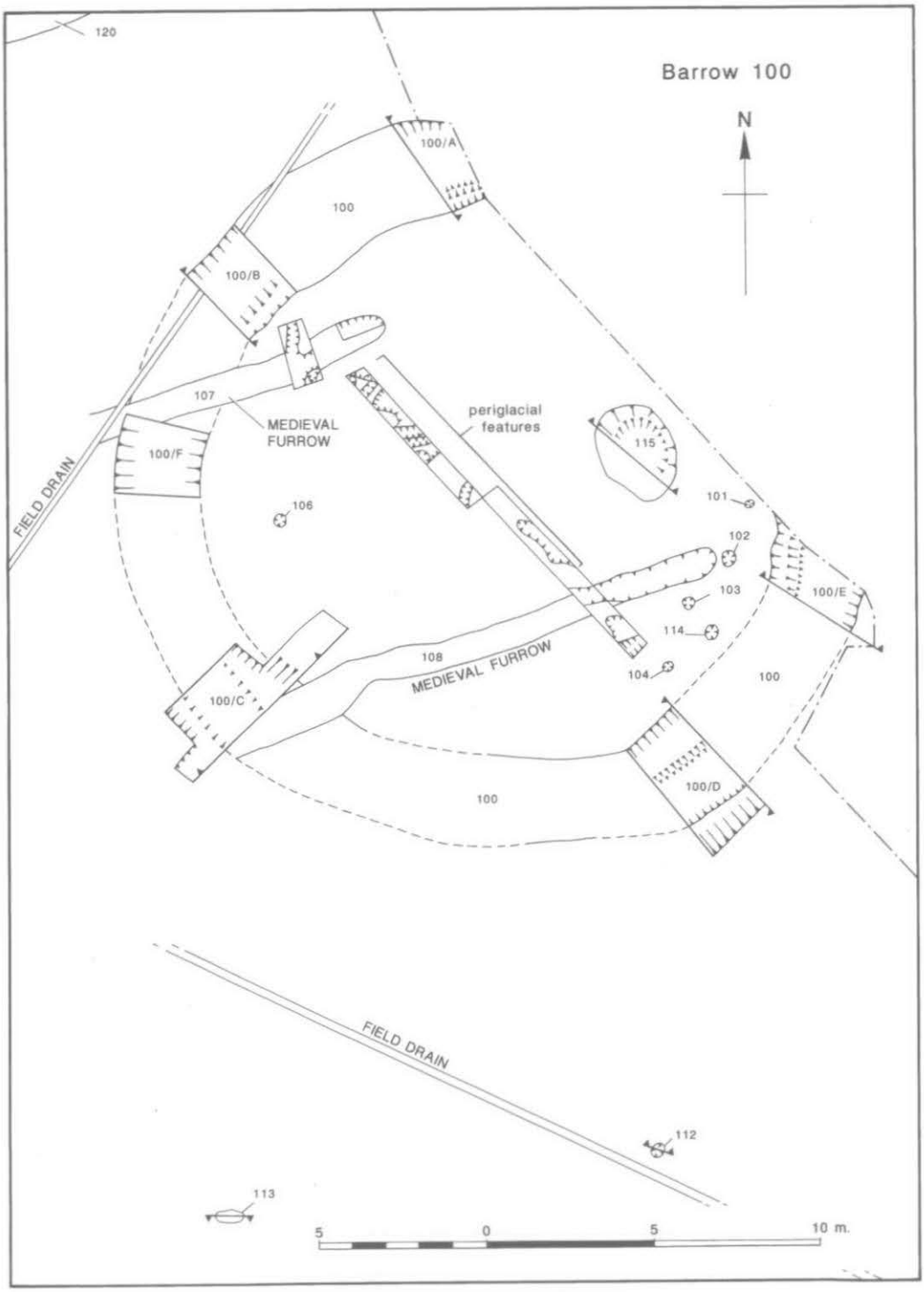

Fig. 4. Barrow 100: site plan.

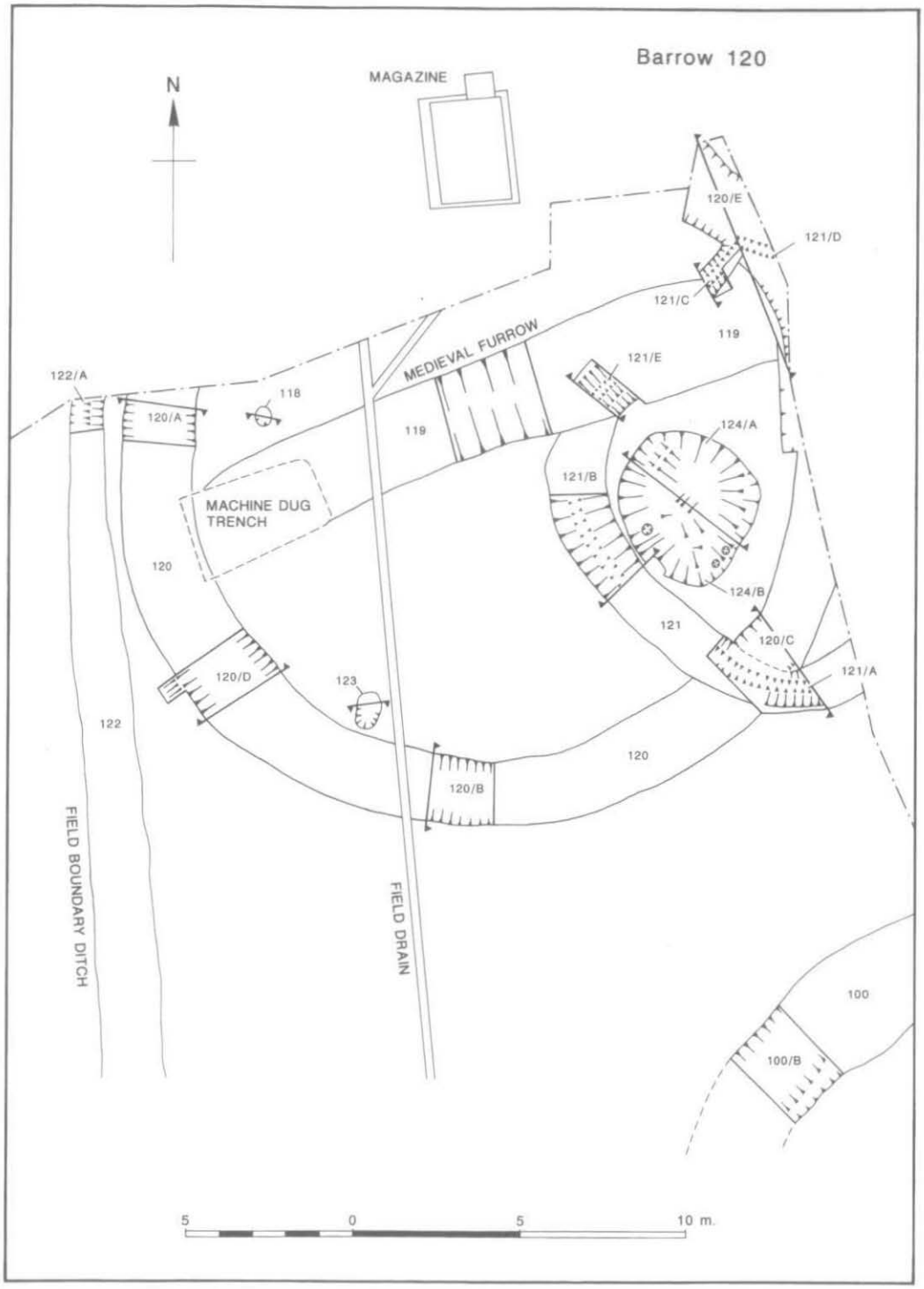

Fig. 5. Barrow 120: site plan.

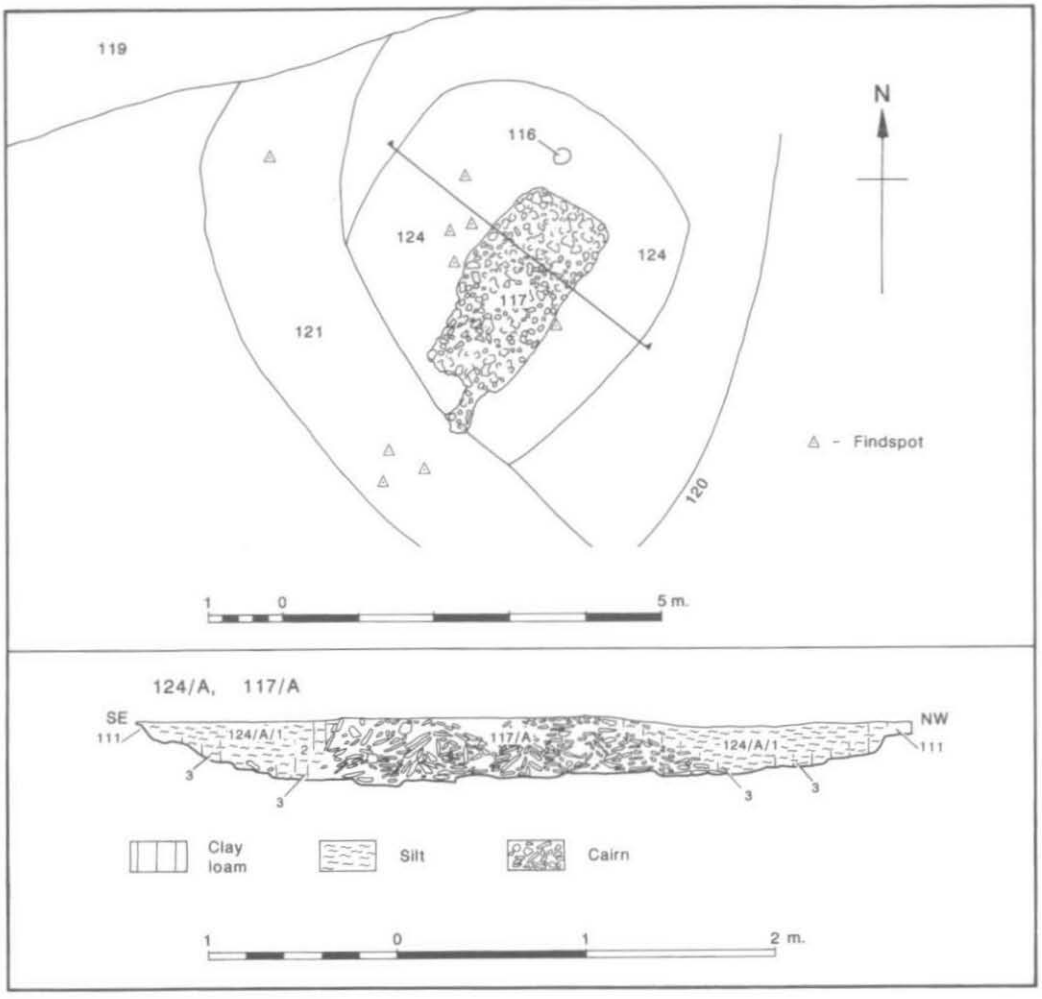

Fig. 6. Plan and section of pit 124 and cairn 117.

suggests that more material was coming in from the south, possibly indicating an external earthwork. A small quantity of pottery (28 sherds) and approximately 80 pieces of worked flint, including a broken leaf-shaped arrowhead, were recovered from the ditch fills. A quantity (0.5 kg.) of burnt limestone was recovered from ditch section B.

The inside of the barrow was cleaned to reveal three features including a large oval pit (124) in the south-eastern quadrant (Figs. 3, 5–6). The pit measured 4 m. × 4.30 m., and was very shallow (maximum depth 0.30 m.) and considerably weathered. It had sloping sides and a flat base. Within the pit there was a roughly rectangular mound of cornbrash (117) measuring approximately 2.60 m. by 0.90 m. This deposit of cornbrash was 0.30 m. thick at its centre. It was overlain by some damaged but possibly originally articulated animal bone. Only six fragments could be identified to species, interestingly they were cattle bones. The fill around the cornbrash, consisting of pale yellow silt, produced a single flint core. The pit was cut to the south-west by enclosure ditch 121 (Figs. 3, 5).

A small circular posthole (116) was cut into pit 124 at its north-eastern end (Fig. 3). The posthole had a diameter of 0.10 m. and was 0.09 m. deep. It was flat bottomed, steep sided and filled with brown and grey silty clays. A

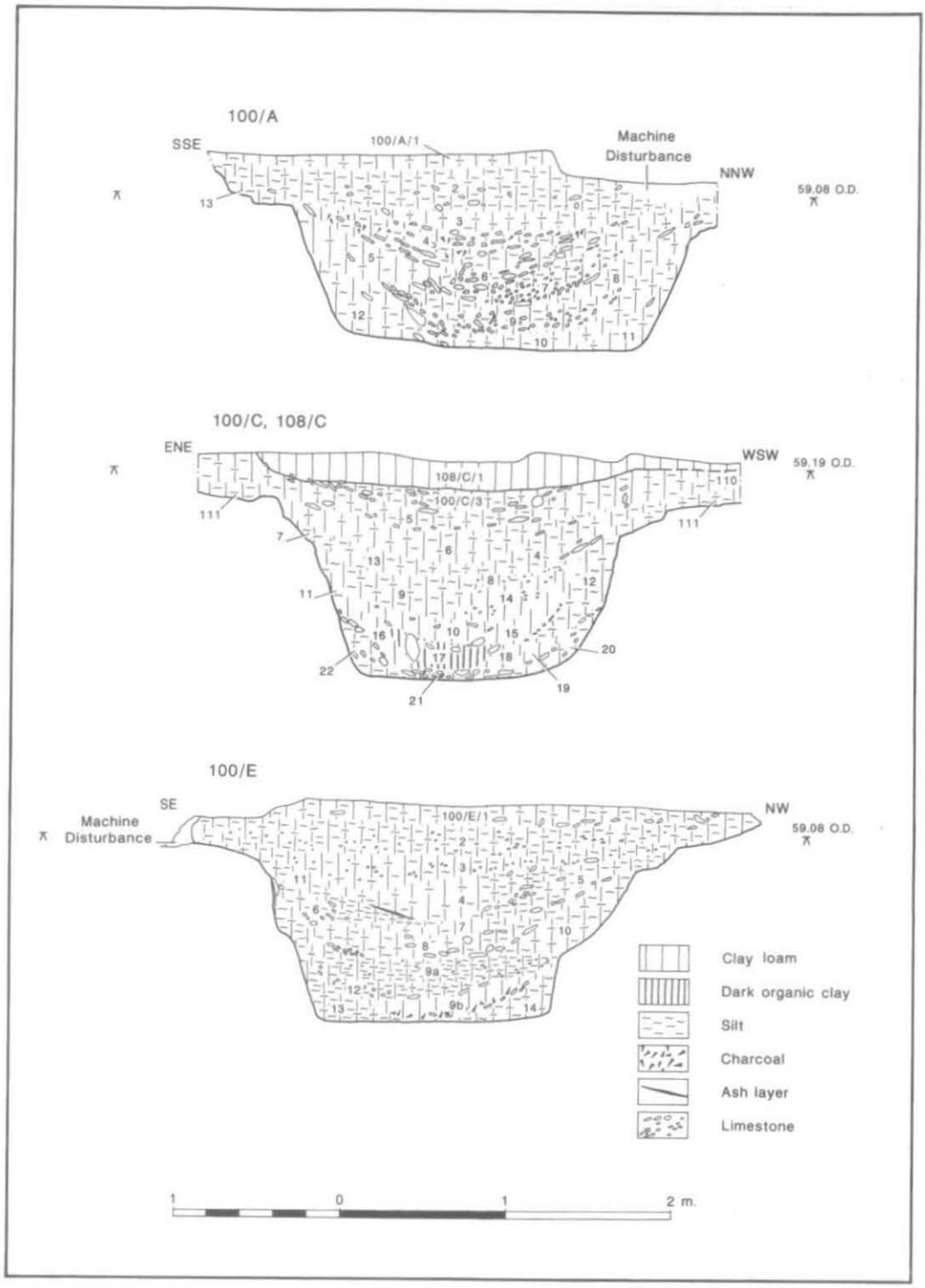

Fig. 7. Sections through barrow ditch 100.

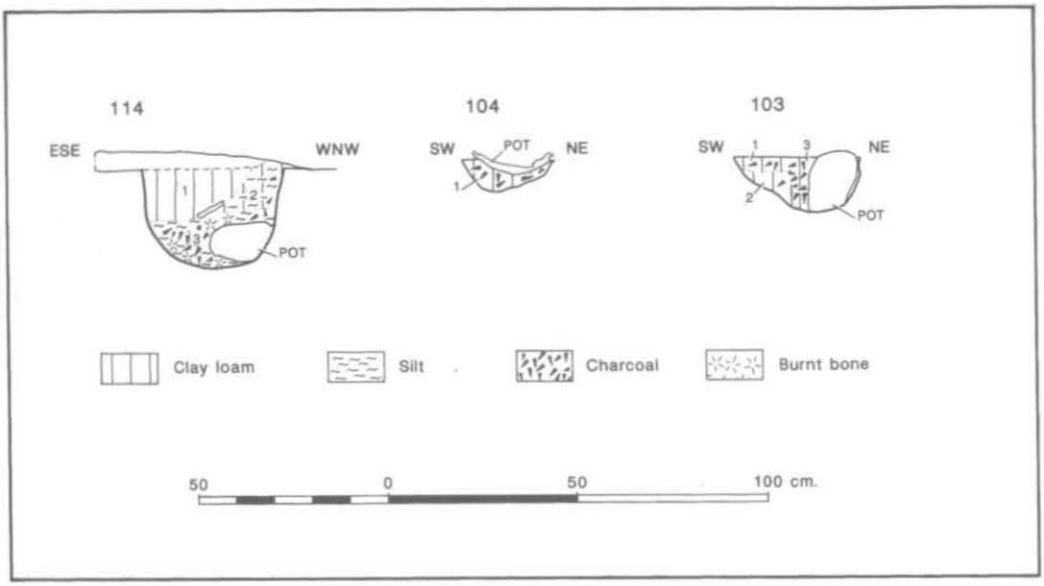

Fig. 8. Sections of selected cremations.

small inverted Collared Urn was placed within the posthole (Fig. 11, P4). The base of the Collared Urn did not survive.

Two other pits were identified; feature 118 was situated in the north-western part of the interior (Figs. 3, 5). It was roughly circular in plan (0.55 m. × 0. 52 m.) with vertical sides and a flat base. It was very shallow, being only 0.08 m. deep. The context sheet describes flecks of charcoal and burnt bone within a matrix of very dark ashy silt. Unfortunately the sample taken from this feature was not processed and therefore the presence of burnt bone and charcoal cannot now be confirmed.

The remaining pit, 123, was situated just inside the ditch on the south-west side (Figs. 3, 5). It was badly damaged by topsoil stripping, but appeared to be approximately oval in plan, measuring 1.0 m. north-south × 0.75 m. east-west, with sides sloping at 60° down to a flat bottom. It was 0.11 m. deep and was lined with a layer of grey silty clay and filled with a burnt reddish clay containing flecks of charcoal and lumps of burnt sandstone. The soil to the west of the feature appeared also to have been burnt.

No features were observed outside the area of the barrow, nor was there any trace of associated earthworks or preserved original ground surfaces.

LATER FEATURES

Rectangular Enclosure 121 (Fig. 3, 5, 10)

The sub-rectangular enclosure (121) was cut across the north-east part of barrow 120. Five sections (121/A–E) were hand-dug across the ditch; three of them (A, C and D) were positioned to ascertain the relationship with 120. A fourth section (B) was excavated to investigate the relationship between 121 and the large pit (124) described above (Fig. 3).

The ditch was 1.5 m. wide, and had a V-shaped profile with sides sloping at 65° to a rounded bottom. It was 0.6 m. deep on average. The fill of the ditch included regular silting layers, suggesting that it had not been rapidly filled. It contained pottery including a little Neolithic material, some middle and late Iron Age sherds, fired clay and worked flint. Quantities of burnt limestone were recovered from sections A, B, F (3, 2.5 and 0.5 kg. respectively). This material was not recorded by layer so that is impossible to determine whether or not there were any significant concentrations through the ditch profile.

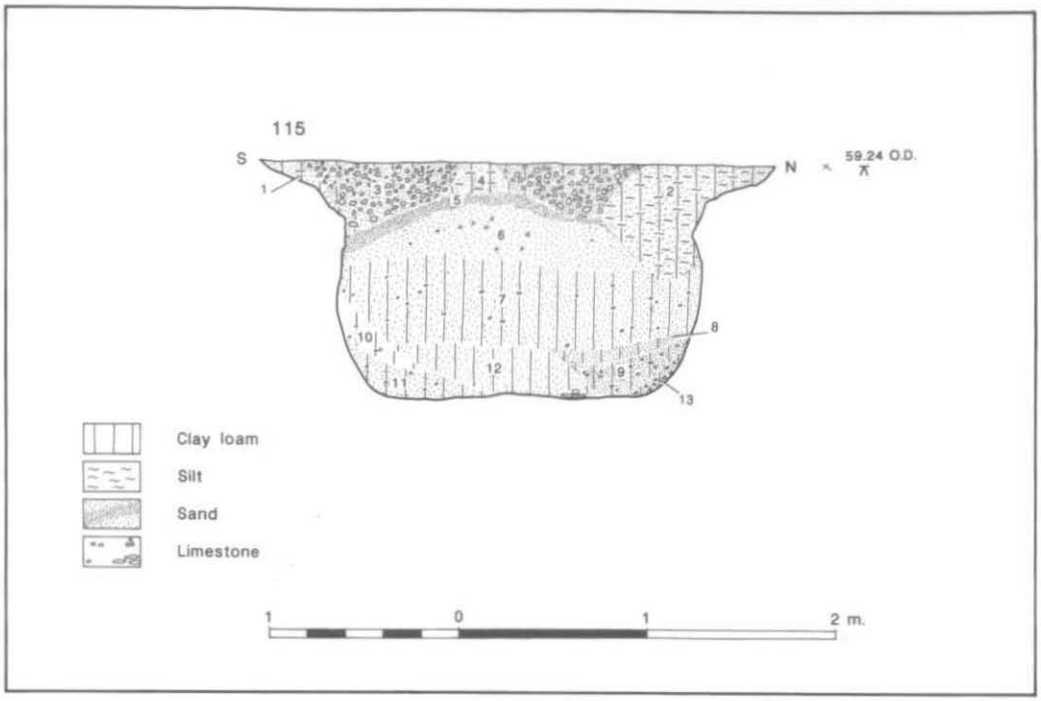

Fig. 9. Section through possible Iron Age pit 115.

Later agriculture

The site was crossed by three plough furrows (107, 108 and 119) orientated north-east to south-west which may have respected the north-south field boundary (122) on the west side of the site (Figs. 2–5). Clay field drains also traversed the site (Figs. 3–5). Further evidence for medieval ridge and furrow cultivation was recovered from the evaluation to the west (see below). Finds from the evaluation include a little Roman and medieval pottery and a clay pipe fragment (see below).

THE EVALUATION

The area to the west of the barrows produced relatively few features when evaluated (Fig. 2); trenches 1, 3, 4, 8 and 10 produced no archaeological features.[7] The archaeology encountered consisted of a series of ditches and gullies (trenches 7, 9, 11, 12 and 14), and a pit and a couple of postholes recorded in trenches 7, 5 and 6. Tree-throw holes were recorded in trenches 2 and 3; some contained charcoal in their fills, indicating clearance, but no dating evidence was recovered. Medieval ridge and furrow ploughing was identified in the northern half of the area evaluated (Fig. 2). This was orientated north-east – south-west and the width between furrows averaged 11 m. A possible headland was identified north of trench 5 but it could not be traced in the east and west of the field.

Dating evidence was sparse but a gully in trench 7 produced an assemblage of approximately 30 sherds of pottery

[7] G. Lambrick and A. Parkinson, 'Merton Borrow Pit, Assessment by Oxford Archaeological Unit' (OAU Evaluation Report, 1990).

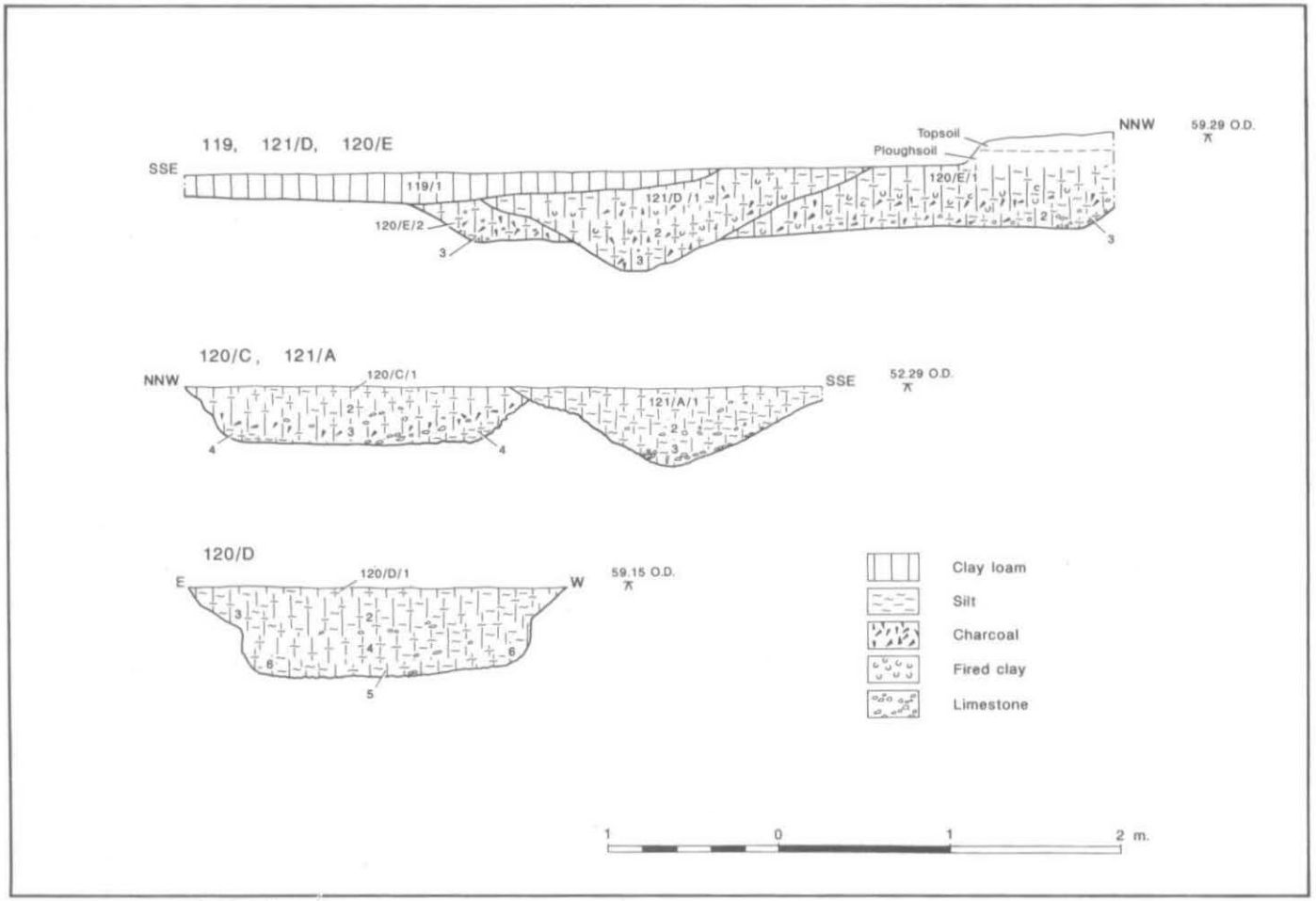

Fig. 10. Sections through barrow ditch 120.

including one rim of middle to late Iron Age date (see Barclay below). Flintwork, a few sherds of prehistoric pottery, fired clay and animal bone were also recovered (see Brown, Barclay and Wilson below). Roman and medieval pottery (see Barclay below) and a fragment of clay pipe were recovered from ploughsoil and topsoil.

THE ARTEFACTS

All the reports were written between 1990 and 1993, and revised in 1997.

PREHISTORIC POTTERY AND FIRED CLAY by ALISTAIR BARCLAY

This report discusses two relatively small assemblages of earlier and later prehistoric pottery from the excavation of two barrows and an Iron Age enclosure. Each assemblage is discussed separately below.

Methodology

The quantification of the assemblage by weight and sherd number (excluding refitting fresh breaks and sherds less than 10 mm. in width/diameter) is shown in Table 1. The pottery is characterised by fabric, form, surface treatment, decoration and colour. The sherds were analyzed using a binocular microscope (× 20) and were divided into fabric groups by principal inclusion type. OAU standard codes are used to denote inclusion types. A = sand (quartz and other mineral matter), G= grog, Q= quartzite, S = shell, V= voids (either leached shell, burnt organic or miscellaneous). Size range for inclusions: 1 = <1 mm. fine; 2 = 1–3 mm. fine-medium and 3 = >3 mm. medium-coarse. Frequency range for inclusions: rare= <3%, sparse= <7%, moderate= 10%, common= 15% and abundant= >20%.

NEOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGE

The earlier prehistoric pottery assemblage includes five partially complete early Bronze Age vessels, Collared Urns and Food Vessels, from funerary deposits (cremation pits 101, 103, 104, 114 and 116). A further 54 sherds of late Neolithic, early Bronze Age and middle Bronze Age pottery was recovered from excavated contexts including the barrow ditches and an Iron Age enclosure ditch.

Reference is made to the terms used by Longworth[8] when describing the Collared Urns and the chronology is based on the critique of the former by Burgess.[9]

Fabrics (see Table 2)

Discussion of fabrics: Thirteen fabrics have been identified as earlier prehistoric and these have been grouped under the principal inclusion type of either flint, grog or shell. The single flint-tempered fabric (F2) is thought to be Neolithic. The nearest natural sources of flint are likely to be derived geological deposits (e.g. gravels, tills and clay-with-flints). The waste from flintworking may also have been used for pot temper. Of the nine grog-tempered fabrics three are late Neolithic, four are Beaker and two are early Bronze Age. Of the three shell-tempered fabrics one is thought to be late Neolithic, while the other two are almost certainly middle Bronze Age. The shell is probably fossil and most likely to derive from the local underlying Jurassic geology.[10]

Fabrics with sparse and ill-sorted angular flint temper are commonly associated with either earlier or later Neolithic pottery. A similar fabric to F2 has been recorded at Yarnton where it is used to manufacture Peterborough Ware.[11]

[8] I.H. Longworth, *The Collared Urns of the Bronze Age in Britain and Ireland* (1984).
[9] C. Burgess, 'Urnes of no small variety', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 51 (1986), 339–52.
[10] Geological Survey of Britain, op. cit. note 1.
[11] Unpublished material recovered from excavations directed by Gill Hey (OAU) at Yarnton, Oxfordshire and assessed by the author.

TABLE 1. QUANTIFICATION OF ALL DATABLE PREHISTORIC POTTERY FROM THE BARROW DITCHES AND THE ENCLOSURE DITCH

Context	Date					Total
	Later Neolithic (Peterborough Ware)	Beaker	Early Bronze Age (Collared Urn)	Middle Bronze Age	Middle & Late Iron Age	
Barrow 100						
100/A/1					5, 16 g.	5, 16 g.
100/B/1		1, 2 g.				1, 2 g.
100/D/2					2, 9 g.	2, 9 g.
100/E/2		3, 11 g.		1, 2 g.	1, 3 g.	5, 16 g.
100/E/3			2, 14 g.			2, 14 g.
100/C/4		1, 2 g.				1, 2 g.
100/A/5		1, 3 g.		15, 18 g.		16, 21 g.
100/B/8				1, 44 g.		1, 44 g.
Subtotal		6, 18 g.	2, 14 g.	17, 64 g.	8, 28 g.	33, 124 g.
Barrow 120						
120/B				1, 5 g.		1, 5 g.
120/E/1				1, 5 g.	1, 5 g.	
120/E/2	6, 47 g.		3, 40 g.		1, 45 g.	10, 132 g.
120/B/3	1, 23 g.					1, 23 g.
120/B/4				12, 50 g.		12, 50 g.
Subtotal	7, 70 g.		3, 40 g.	13, 55 g.	2, 50 g.	25, 215 g.
Enclosure 121						
121/A/1	4, 22 g.				1, 2 g.	5, 24 g.
121/B/1	1, 8 g.				5, 35 g.	6, 43 g.
121/D/2	1, 3 g.				2, 8 g.	3, 11 g.
121/E/2					2, 14 g.	2, 14 g.
121/F/2					4, 13 g.	4, 13 g.
121/C/3					2, 36 g.	2, 36 g.
121/B/4					1, 31 g.	1, 31 g.
Subtotal	6, 33 g.				17, 139 g.	23, 172 g.
Gully 7/6						
7/6					42, 200 g.	42, 200 g.
Subtotal					42, 200 g.	42, 200 g.
Total	13, 103 g.	6, 18 g.	5, 54 g.	30, 119 g.	69, 417 g.	123, 711 g.

The use of grog-tempering to manufacture Peterborough Ware is somewhat unusual but it does occur in the Upper Thames Valley.[12] While the use of grog-tempering for Beaker, Food Vessels and Collared Urns is common and the use of shell temper in both the late Neolithic and middle Bronze Age is well established within the region.

Peterborough Ware. Thirteen sherds including a small number of decorated sherds can be assigned to the Peterborough

[12] Unpublished material from Yarnton, Oxfordshire, see note 11; also unpublished grog-tempered Fengate Ware from Wallingford, Andrew Richmond pers. comm.

TABLE 2. EARLIER PREHISTORIC FABRICS

Code	Description	Contexts	Total number of sherds & weight
Flint-tempered			
F2/LNPW	Hard fabric with illsorted angular flint.	121/A/1, 121/B/1	5, 30 g.
Grog-tempered			
G2/LNPW	Soft fabric sometimes with a laminated fracture containing moderate medium grog.	120/E/2	1, 1 g.
GA2/LNPW	Soft fabric sometimes with a laminated fracture containing moderate medium grog and rare coarse quartz sand.	120/E/2, 121/D/2	5, 41 g.
GAP(Fe)2/LNPW	Soft fabric sometimes with a laminated fracture containing moderate medium grog, rare coarse quartz sand and rare ferruginous pellets.	120/E/2	1, 8 g.
GA2/BKR	Soft fabric with moderate angular grog and rare quartz sand.	100/C/4	1, 2 g.
GS2/BKR	Soft fabric with moderate angular grog and sparse shell platelets.	100/B/1	1, 2 g.
GSA2/BKR	Soft fabric with moderate angular grog, sparse shell platelets and rare coarse quartz sand.	100/A/5, 100/E/2	4, 14 g.
G2/EBA	Soft fabric with variable amounts of medium angular grog fragments.		
GA2/BKR	Soft fabric with moderate amounts of medium angular grog and rare coarse quartz sand.	100/E/2	2, 14 g.
GF2/EBA	Soft fabric with moderate amounts of medium angular grog fragments and rare medium angular flint.	120/E/2	3, 40 g.
Shell-tempered			
S2/MBA	Hard fabric with common medium shell platelets.	7/6, 121/B/1, 121/C/3, 121/D/2, 100/E/2	30, 76 g.
SF2/LN?	Hard fabric with common medium shell platelets and rare flint.	120/B/3	1, 23 g.
S3/MBA	Hard fabric with common medium to coarse shell platelets.	100/B/8	1, 44 g.

Ware tradition. A number of plain, thin-walled sherds in fabric F2 could belong to the early Ebbsfleet Ware style of the Peterborough Ware tradition and, as already mentioned, these sherds bear some resemblance to sherds recovered from elsewhere in the Upper Thames Valley.[13] Other sherds are principally grog-tempered and some of these are decorated with either impressed whipped cord maggot or impressed lines and grooves (Fig. 12, P9–10, 12 & 18). This type of decoration is often found on sherds of this ceramic tradition. It is somewhat unusual but not impossible for the grog-tempered fabric to be of this date.[14] However, the degree of firing characterised by a slightly oxidised exterior surface and a largely unoxidised core and interior margin is quite usual, as is the laminated fracture. These

[13] Unpublished material from Yarnton, Oxfordshire, see note 11.
[14] Unpublished material from Yarnton and Wallingford, Oxfordshire, see notes 11 and 12.

grog-tempered sherds could alternatively belong to the primary series of the Collared Urn tradition.[15] Given that there are only body sherds present the dating of this group of material remains ambiguous.

Beaker: Six sherds are identified as belonging to the Beaker tradition. Nearly all of the sherds are plain with the exception of one with paired finger-nail decoration (Fig. 12, P7). All of these sherds were recovered from the upper ditch fills of barrow 100. The sherds, which are all relatively thin-walled, probably belong to fine vessels rather than 'domestic' pot-beakers, especially the three refitting sherds from ditch fill 100/E/2.

Early Bronze Age: The cremation deposits from the barrows produced five vessels: three Collared Urns and two Food Vessels (Figs. 11–12, P1–5).

Food Vessels: The decorated Food Vessel (P1) is of bowl form and can be closely paralleled with a vessel found at Yarnton.[16] Both of these vessels are thin-walled, well made and decorated with horizontally applied impressed twisted cord. The grog-tempered fabric and reddish finish of the Yarnton vessel resembles the finer fabrics of certain Beakers and, although the Merton vessel has been altered through refiring its origin fabric may have been similar in finish to the Yarnton vessel. A slightly similar pot, a miniature Food Vessel, is recorded from Barrow 16 at Radley,[17] and like P1 had been refired. P1 is dissimilar to the assemblage of Food Vessels recovered from around the southern end of the Radley cemetery.[18] In contrast to this vessel is the plain vase-shaped vessel P3. Although both vessels can be classed as Food Vessels the two are dissimilar. In form, P3 has more in common with the vessels already referred to from Radley.[19]

Although the two food vessels are quite dissimilar, they were however found within 2 m. of one another. It has been noted that Food Vessels are quite rare in the Upper Thames region[20] and when they do occur they tend to be found with cremation deposits.

Collared Urns: Three Collared Urns were associated with cremation deposits and sherds from another vessel were recovered from the ditches of both barrows. The three Collared Urns (P2, 4–5) fall within Longworth's[21] secondary and Burgess's[22] late series as they exhibit the following traits: peaked collar base, no decoration below the collar, bipartite profile and inner profile continuous and curved.[23] A 'late style' Collared Urn has been recorded from a small barrow near to the Rollright Stones and has an associated radiocarbon determination of 3320±90 bp (2σ 1878-1420 cal BC Calib 2.1).[24] Following Burgess[25] these vessels probably date to the end of the earlier Bronze Age and this is, perhaps, supported by their secondary positions in the barrows.

Further sherds identified as Collared Urn were retrieved from the upper fills of the barrow ditches. This includes two rim sherds from a small vessel (Fig.12, P6) and the neck and collar fragments from a more substantial vessel (Fig. 12, P11). Given the high position of these sherds within the barrow ditches, it would seem probable that they derived from disturbed cremation deposits. There is a significant corpus of Collared Urns from the Upper Thames region[26] which includes a wide variety of vessel forms.

Middle Bronze Age: Thirty sherds recovered from the ditches of the two barrows are thought to belong to the Deverel-

[15] Longworth, op. cit. note 8.

[16] Yarnton Food Vessel examined by the author in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; see also H. Case, 'Beaker Pottery from the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, xxi (1956), 9, Fig. 4.

[17] Radley Food Vessel examined by the author in the Ashmolean Museum; see also E.T. Leeds, 'Further Excavations in Barrow Hills Field, Radley, Berks', *Oxoniensia*, iii (1938), Plate VII, A; R.M.J. Cleal, 'Prehistoric Pottery', in A. Barclay and C. Halpin, *Excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire. Volume 1. The Neolithic and Bronze Age Monument Complex* (Thames Valley Landscapes, forthcoming).

[18] Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17.

[19] Cleal, op. cit. note 17.

[20] Burgess, op. cit. note 9.

[21] Longworth, op. cit. note 8.

[22] Burgess, op. cit. note 9.

[23] Longworth, op. cit. note 8.

[24] T. Darvill, 'The Neolithic and Bronze Age Pottery', in G. Lambrick, *The Rollright Stones: megaliths, monuments and settlement in the prehistoric landscape* (Eng. Heritage Archaeol. Rep. 6, 1988), 91; M. Stuiver and P.J. Reimer, *User's Guide to the Programs CALIB and DISPLAY, Rev. 2.1* (Quaternary Isotope Laboratory, Univ. of Washington, 1987).

[25] Burgess, op. cit. note 9.

[26] Longworth, op. cit. note 8.

Rimbury tradition of the middle Bronze Age. These sherds could have derived from secondary cremation deposits placed within and around the possible barrow mounds.

Discussion of Neolithic and early Bronze Age Pottery

The earlier prehistoric pottery from Merton has a wide date range and indicates both pre-barrow and funerary-associated barrow activity. Both the Peterborough Ware and the Beaker sherds were mostly recovered from the upper fills of the barrow ditches but also from the Iron Age enclosure ditch and may indicate pre-barrow domestic activity. Nearly all of this pottery which is represented by small and abraded sherds is likely to be redeposited material. The Beaker sherds could provide a crude *terminus ante quem* for Barrow 100, while the secondary cremation deposits from the two barrows which contained either Food Vessels and/or Collared Urns provide a *terminus post quem*.

The occurrence of small, sometimes refired, urns as secondary deposits within barrows may reflect wider changes in funerary practice towards the end of the earlier Bronze Age.[27] For the Upper Thames, Barclay has noted a difference in the use and deposition of large and small urns,[28] with large urns placed either in the centre of barrows or in pits outside barrows and small urns placed in secondary positions within barrows. Merton would certainly appear to fit this pattern.

Very little earlier prehistoric pottery has been recovered from this area of Oxfordshire and this mostly reflects a lack of archaeological activity. Both Beaker and Deverel-Rimbury pottery have been found, only 4 km. away, during excavations along the A421 near Alchester,[29] while Peterborough Ware has been recorded further north-east from Astrop, Northamptonshire.[30]

IRON AGE POTTERY

The excavation produced a small assemblage (69 sherds) of middle and late Iron Age pottery which includes at least four rims from globular-shaped vessels (Fig. 12, P8, 14, 16-7). Most of the pottery was recovered from the fills of an Iron Age enclosure (121) and a gully (7/6), while other sherds came from the upper fills of the barrow ditches.

Fabrics

Eight Iron Age fabrics have been defined and are listed under the principal inclusion type in Table 3.

Fabric discussion: The fabrics have been divided into four groups according to their principal inclusion type. The sandy fabrics are typical of middle Iron Age ceramics, while the shell/calcareous fabrics are somewhat unusual. The latter may also be of this date given the local availability of calcareous temper. The use of grog would suggest a late rather than a middle Iron Age date.

Forms and decoration

The four illustrated rims (Fig. 12, P8, 15-7) are all of typical everted forms that can be placed in either the middle or late Iron Age. In the case of both P8 and P14 enough of the profiles survive to suggest that the vessels were of

[27] J.C. Barrett, *Fragments from Antiquity* (1994), 126–9.

[28] A. Barclay, 'Cremains of the Clay: refired pottery and ritual in prehistory' (unpubl. paper read at Theoretical Archaeol. Group Conf., Univ. of Reading, 1995); A. Barclay, 'Transforming Vessel Types on the Funeral Pyre', *The Old Potter's Almanack* 3(2), 5–6; A. Barclay, 'Ceramic Ecology and Contextual Archaeology: four case studies from the Upper Thames Gravels', in J.D. Hill and A. Woodward (eds.), *Prehistoric Britain: The Ceramic Basis* (Oxbow Monograph, in preparation).

[29] A. Barclay, op. cit. note 2.

[30] Fengate Ware found at Buston Farm, Astrop: E.T. Leeds, 'On Neolithic Pottery from Buston Farm, Astrop', *Oxon. Archaeol. Soc.* (1913), 114–18.

TABLE 3. IRON AGE FABRICS

Code	Description	Contexts	Total number of sherds and weights
Sand-tempered			
A1	Common sub-rounded white or colourless quartz (up to 1 mm.) and rare organics.	121/B/1, 121/C/3, 121/D/2, 121/E/2	6, 48 g.
AP(Fe)/AP(Fe)?S2	Sparse sub-rounded white or colourless quartz (up to 1 mm.), rare ferruginous pellets and, or rare, often leached, calcareous matter (?shell).	121/D/2, 121/F/2, 121/B/4, 121/E/1	7, 51 g.
AS2	Sparse sub-rounded white or colourless quartz (up to 1 mm.) and sparse, often leached, calcareous matter (?shell).	121/A/1	1, 2 g.
Ferruginous pellets			
P(Fe)2	No added temper although fabric contains moderate illsorted ferruginous pellets (1–3 mm).	121/B/1	1, 2 g.
Grog-tempered			
GSP(Fe)2	Moderate grog, sparse shell (mostly leached) and sparse illsorted ferruginous pellets (1–3 mm).	100/E/2, 121/D/2	2, 9 g.
Shell/calcareous-tempered			
SC2	Medium moderate shell (sometimes leached) and small-medium sparse calcareous limestone inclusions	7/6, 12, 121/B/1	44, 208 g.
SCA2	Medium moderate shell (sometimes leached) and small-medium sparse calcareous limestone inclusions and sparse coarse quartz sand	100/A/1, 120/E/1, 120/E/2	7, 66 g.
SP(Fe)2	Medium moderate shell and sparse ferruginous pellets (1–3 mm).	100/D/2	2, 9 g.

globular form, and it is possible that the two remaining rims (P16-7), as well as the base (P15), may belong to similar pots. All of these sherds were undecorated and none had been burnished. With the exception of P8 which came from the gully 7/6, all of these sherds came from the enclosure ditch 121. P8 and 14 are of probable middle Iron Age date, while the smaller everted rim, P16, is more likely to be late Iron Age, especially given that it is manufactured from a grog-tempered fabric.

A single decorated sherd with two parallel incised lines came from the upper fill (D/2) of barrow ditch 100 (Fig. 12, P13). This sherd is in a grog-tempered fabric that could be late Iron Age date.

Discussion of Iron Age Pottery

The small assemblage of mostly middle Iron Age pottery is similar in character to material recovered from sites in the Upper Thames region.[31] Both the sand-tempered middle Iron Age and the grog-tempered pottery from Merton is similar to material recovered from the A421, Alchester (Paul Booth pers. comm.). In the recent report on pottery from Oxford Road, Bicester, Booth has discussed the local

[31] D.W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972).

evidence for comparable assemblages and there is little point in repeating this discussion here, other than to note the general paucity of excavated material from the surrounding area.[32]

Catalogue of illustrated pottery

Cremation pots

P1 Pit 103. Food Vessel. Complete (reconstructed) decorated biconical vessel (278 g.). Height 92 mm. Base dia. 86 mm. Twisted cord decoration on the rim bevel and the neck. The vessel has been refired which explains its distorted condition. Colour: ext: greyish-brown; core: dark grey; int: greyish-brown. Fabric G2. Condition: good but has been distorted by refiring.

P2 Pit 104/A. Collared Urn. Approx. 100 sherds (260 g.) from a plain vessel. The rim is bevelled (Longworth rim form 15) and slightly out-turned; the neck is concave and the shoulder protrudes. The vessel has probably been refired. The base is complete, dia. 72 mm. Colour: ext: grey; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Fabric G2. Condition: poor.

P3 Pit 114. Food Vessel. An almost complete plain, bipartite and vase-shaped vessel (360 g.). The rim is flat with a very slight bevel. There is a thickening of the shoulder where the neck meets the body, and the latter is globular terminating with a concave foot angle. The vessel walls have been constructed from five diagonally bonded rings of clay each approximately 15 mm. in height. The rings are poorly bonded and are emphasised by diagonal voids suggesting lack of plasticity during construction. The vessel is well but unevenly fired. Colour: ext: yellowish-red to light yellowish brown; core: light grey; int: yellowish-red to light yellowish brown. Fabric G2. Condition good.

P4 Pit 116. Collared Urn. Only the collar and body survives albeit to a height of 78 mm. (220 g.). Rim dia. 110 mm. Collar height 45 mm. Impressed decoration consisting of two horizontal rows of twisted cord on the rim bevel and two rows of herringbone on the collar which is bounded by two rows of twisted cord above with one row beneath. Colour: ext: brown; core: yellowish-red; int: yellowish brown. Fabric G2. Condition good.

P5 Pit 101. Collared Urn. 32 sherds from a Collared Urn (85 g.). The rim, diameter 130 mm., is bevelled and internally thickened. Decorated with twisted cord impressions with a zig-zag motif on the rim bevel and vertical and horizontal lines on the collar. Colour: ext: reddish-yellow; core: grey; int: dark grey. Fabric G2. Condition poor.

Barrow 100: Bronze Age pottery

P6 100/E/3. Collared Urn. Two collared sherds (6 g.) only one illustrated, probably from the same vessel. Decorated with horizontal and oblique twisted cord impressions. Colour: ext: dark brown; c: black; int: black. Fabric GA2. Condition: fair-worn.

P7 100/A/5. Beaker. Body sherd (2 g.) with paired finger-nail decoration. Colour: ext: light reddish-pink; core: dark grey; int: reddish-yellow. Fabric GSA2. Condition: worn.

Gully 7/6: Iron Age pottery

P8 7/6. Middle Iron Age. Forty two sherds including an everted rim from a globular vessel (200 g.). Colour: ext: reddish-brown; core: grey; int: light brown. Fabric: SC2. Condition: fair.

Barrow 120: Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery

P9 120/E/2. ?Peterborough Ware. Body sherd (8 g.) with oblique incised decoration. Colour: ext: reddish yellow; core: black; int: black. Fabric GAP(Fe)2. Condition: worn.

P10 120/E/2. ?Peterborough Ware. Sherd (7 g.) with impressed whipped cord maggot decoration. Colour: ext: reddish yellow; core: black; int: black. Fabric GA2. Condition: fair-worn.

P11 120/E/2. Collared Urn. Three sherds (40 g.) from the neck and collar of a vessel. Indeterminate impressed

[32] P. Booth, 'Pottery and other Ceramic Finds', in C. Mould, 'An Archaeological Excavation at Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, lxi (1996), 65–108.

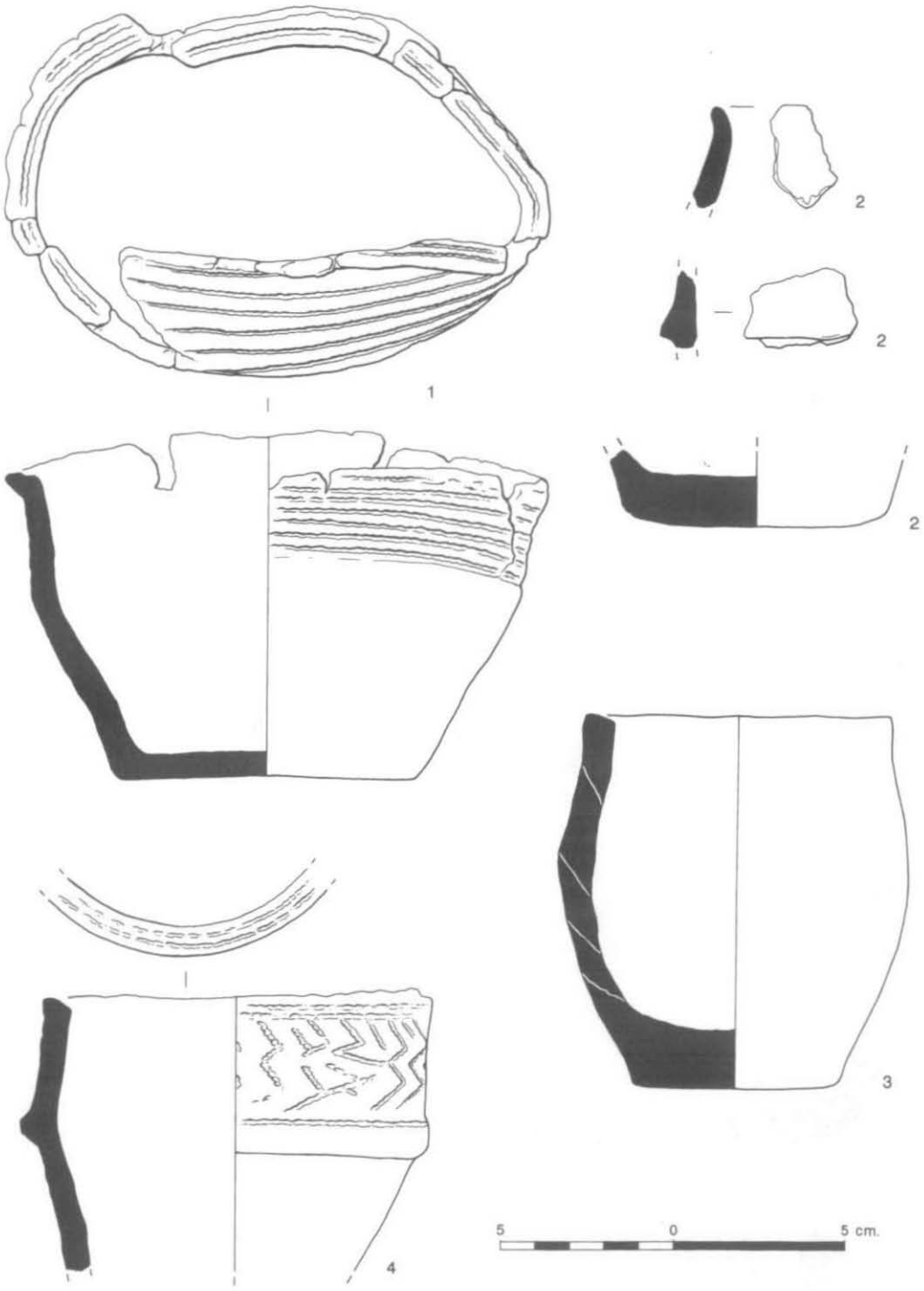

Fig. 11. Prehistoric pottery (1–4).

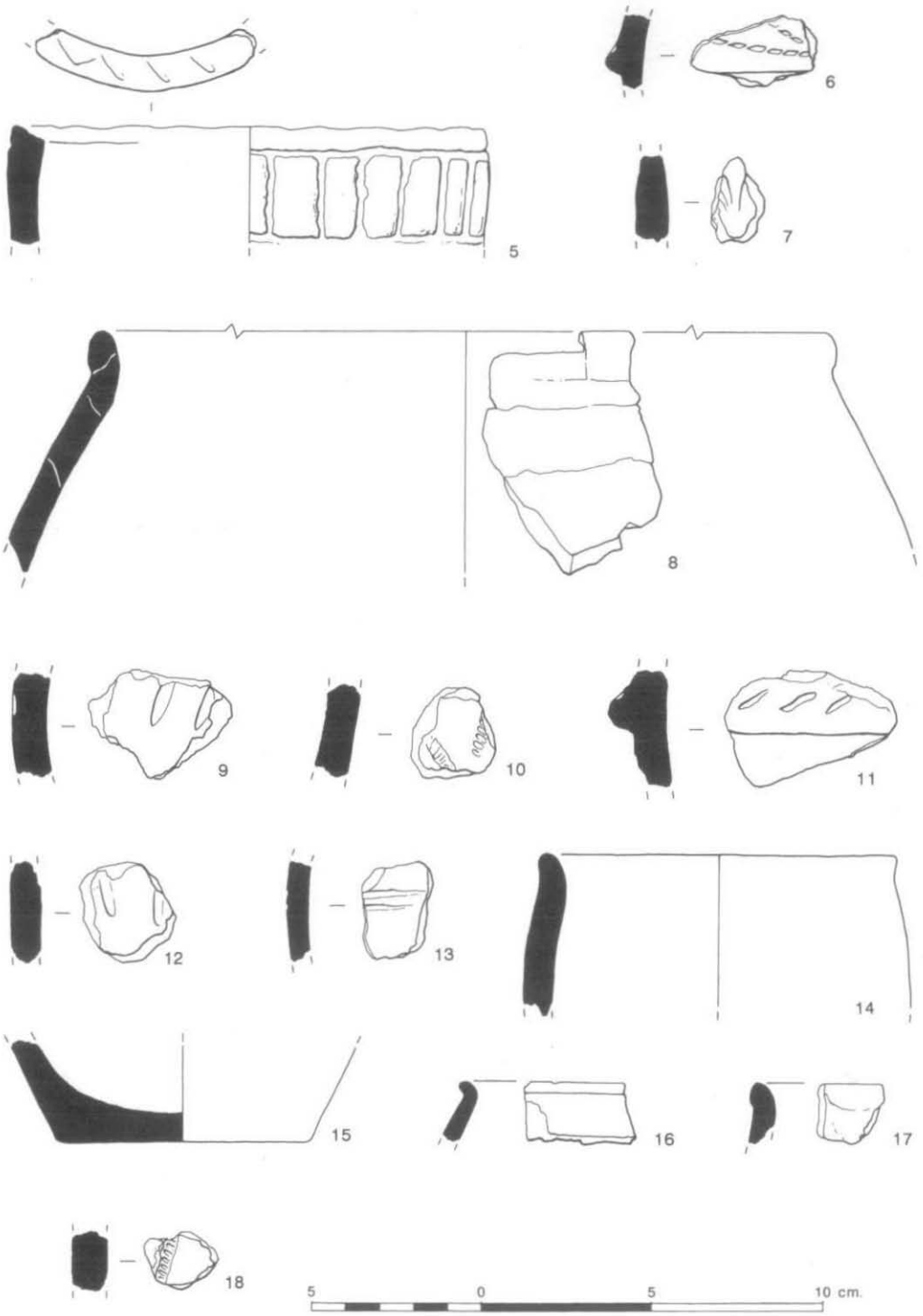

Fig. 12. Prehistoric pottery (5–18).

decoration on the base of the collar. Colour: ext: brownish yellow; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Fabric GF2. Condition: very worn.

P12 120/E/2. ?Peterborough Ware. Body sherd (6 g.) with faint incised decoration. Colour: ext: reddish-yellow; core: black; int: black. Fabric GA2. Condition: worn.

Barrow 100: Iron Age pottery

P13 100/D/2. Late Iron Age. Two body sherds (6 g.) one with linear groove decoration. Colour: ext: dark brown; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Fabric GSP(Fe)2. Condition: fair-worn.

Sherds from Iron Age enclosure

P14 121/C/3. Middle Iron Age. A flat slightly out-turned rim and concave neck (31 g.). Colour: ext: dark grey; core: black; int: dark grey. Burnt residues on exterior surface. Fabric A1. Condition: fair.

P15 120/E/2. Middle Iron Age. Base sherd (45 g.). Colour: ext: dark greyish-brown; core: dark grey; int: dark greyish brown. Fabric SA2. Condition: fair.

P16 121/D/2. Late Iron Age. Rim sherd with a pointed everted rim (2 g.). Colour: ext: dark brown; core: dark grey; int: dark brown. Fabric GSP(Fe)2. Condition: fair-worn.

P17 121/A/1. Middle Iron Age. A pointed slightly out-turned rim (2 g.). Colour: ext: dark brown; core: dark grey; int: dark brown. Fabric AS2. Condition: fair.

P18 121/D/2. Peterborough Ware. Sherd with impressed whipped cord maggot decoration (3 g.). Colour: ext: reddish-brown; core: black; int: black. Fabric GA2. Condition: fair-worn.

ROMAN AND LATER POTTERY by ALISTAIR BARCLAY (with identifications by P. BOOTH)

In addition to the above a small number of contexts (subsoil, 6/3 7/1) produced a total of five sherds of Roman pottery. Most of this pottery can be described as Roman Grey Ware (including two rims from jar-shaped vessels) with the exception of an oxidised fineware sherd. All of these sherds could be of local manufacture. A probable medieval sherd came from context 119 and post-medieval sherds were recovered from contexts 6/1 and 11/4.

FIRED CLAY

Several contexts produced amorphous fired clay that most likely derives from either hearths, ovens or burnt walls. Context 7/6 contained 11 pieces of fired clay (120 g.). The fabric which is oxidised reddish brown in colour contains large clay pellets (up to 7 mm.), organic impressions (grass stems), and rare white quartzite (up to 3 mm.). The Iron Age enclosure ditch, 121/A/1, produced 56 pieces of low-fired clay (60 g.). The fabric which is almost black in colour is very carbonaceous and contains organic inclusions. In addition, contexts 5/5 and 123/A/3 produced a small number of amorphous fired clay fragments, weighing in total 16 g. and 40 g., respectively.

WORKED FLINT by ANDREW BROWN

The following analysis relies heavily on the use of characteristic patterns of cortication and technological indicators to distinguish four chronologically distinct groupings within the collection of 582 struck flint artefacts. This somewhat unconventional methodology is explained and the results used to suggest that the barrows may not be contemporary, although the evidence is by no means unequivocal. A remarkable assemblage of flakes from one of the ditches is interpreted as a hoard.

Methodology

The approach used to distinguish groups within this assemblage relies first on typology, then technology and finally degree of cortication as a staged series of chronological indicators. The use of the degree of cortication (see Shepherd

1972 for use of terms 'corticated' versus 'patinated')[33] of flint artefacts for dating purposes is not, on its own, an acceptable technique. Not only can flint artefacts be found with one side corticated and the other with its original appearance but examples have also been found where corticated flakes refit into uncorticated cores and *vice versa*. The processes of cortication and patination are too poorly understood as yet to allow predictions to be made as to the extent to which flint artefacts from different sources, in different soil conditions and of different ages will discolour.

In some cases, however, it becomes evident during analysis that broad patterning in the degree of cortication is present. In the Somerset Levels[34] for example, typologically Mesolithic pieces were consistently corticated to either a bluish-white or a thick, creamy white in the case of the earlier Mesolithic examples. This contrasted with the Neolithic and later pieces which had developed at most a faint 'misting' which sometimes required microscopy to identify. In the Fens, again Mesolithic material was consistently visibly corticated in contrast to the Neolithic and later pieces.[35] At Danebury, the technologically Neolithic items were thickly corticated while the mid-first millennium material was fresh in appearance. Closer to home, at Reading Business Park, the Neolithic material was again corticated in the main, while the late Bronze Age element of the collection was not discoloured.[36]

These are, of course, generalisations which cannot be taken to absurd limits. It must be accepted, especially given the lack of understanding of the processes mentioned above, that individual exceptions to the rule will be found within the assemblage – an uncorticated microlith amongst otherwise heavily corticated Mesolithic material, or a corticated leaf-shaped arrowhead amid an otherwise uncorticated, technologically and typologically Neolithic assemblage. Such exceptions should be expected, and indeed documented clearly to avoid misinterpretation of the evidence.

The use of the degree of cortication for dating can be used reliably provided that a good typological, and especially technological dating framework is established first. If these types of evidence point to a chronological division in the degree to which the collection as a whole has corticated, and even conscious efforts to prove a null hypothesis cannot reject the observation, variations in cortication can then be used as a chronological indicator. Having demonstrated satisfactorily the chronological trends the degree of cortication can be used to extend the scope of the typological/technological dating to include the whole assemblage. In the best examples of such a methodology, even the most undiagnostic flake can be ascribed with considerable confidence to a particular phase of activity.

Typology

Typological analysis of the 515 pieces recovered from the area of the barrows identified 19 retouched items:

Microliths	8
Microburins	3 (one detached from bladelet)
Scrapers	4
Leaf-shaped arrowheads	2
Core-burin	1
Borer	1

None of the eight microliths was of a geometric type, suggesting that they were not manufactured during the later Mesolithic period (Fig. 13, 2–8). They were distributed apparently randomly across the site. The core burin (Fig. 13, 11) illustrated a blade production technique, using a flake for a core, which is uncharacteristic of periods later than the earlier Mesolithic. Both leaf-shaped arrowheads were broken and neither occurred in a satisfactorily stratified context to provide reliable dating evidence beyond probable activity on or near the site during the earlier Neolithic. The scrapers were very varied, the most remarkable being the double-ended example from the lower contexts of barrow 100, cutting B (Fig. 13, 16). One irregular-edged example was typical of the latest period of flint use and may belong to the Iron Age phase of occupation demonstrated through other artefact types. The borer was not diagnostic. A broad date range for the collection, therefore, was suggested by the retouched inventory.

Of the 67 pieces recovered from the various evaluation trenches, none was retouched so that typological analysis was not possible. Technological study was also made difficult by the small size of the sample. Examples of each of

[33] W. Shepherd, *Flint: its origin, properties and uses* (1972).

[34] A.G. Brown, 'Flint and Chert Small Finds from the Somerset Levels. Part 1: the Brue Valley', *Somerset Levels Papers*, 12 (1986), 12–26.

[35] A.G. Brown, 'Use and Non-use: aspects of the prehistoric exploitation of the fen edge at Isleham', in D.N. Hall, *The Fenland Project, Number 10: Cambridgeshire Survey: Isle of Ely and Wisbech* (East Anglian Archaeology 79, 1996), 202–12.

[36] A.G. Brown, 'The Late Bronze Age Material', in J. Moore and D. Jennings, *Reading Business Park: a Bronze Age Landscape* (Thames Valley Landscapes: the Kennet Valley, vol. 1), 90–3.

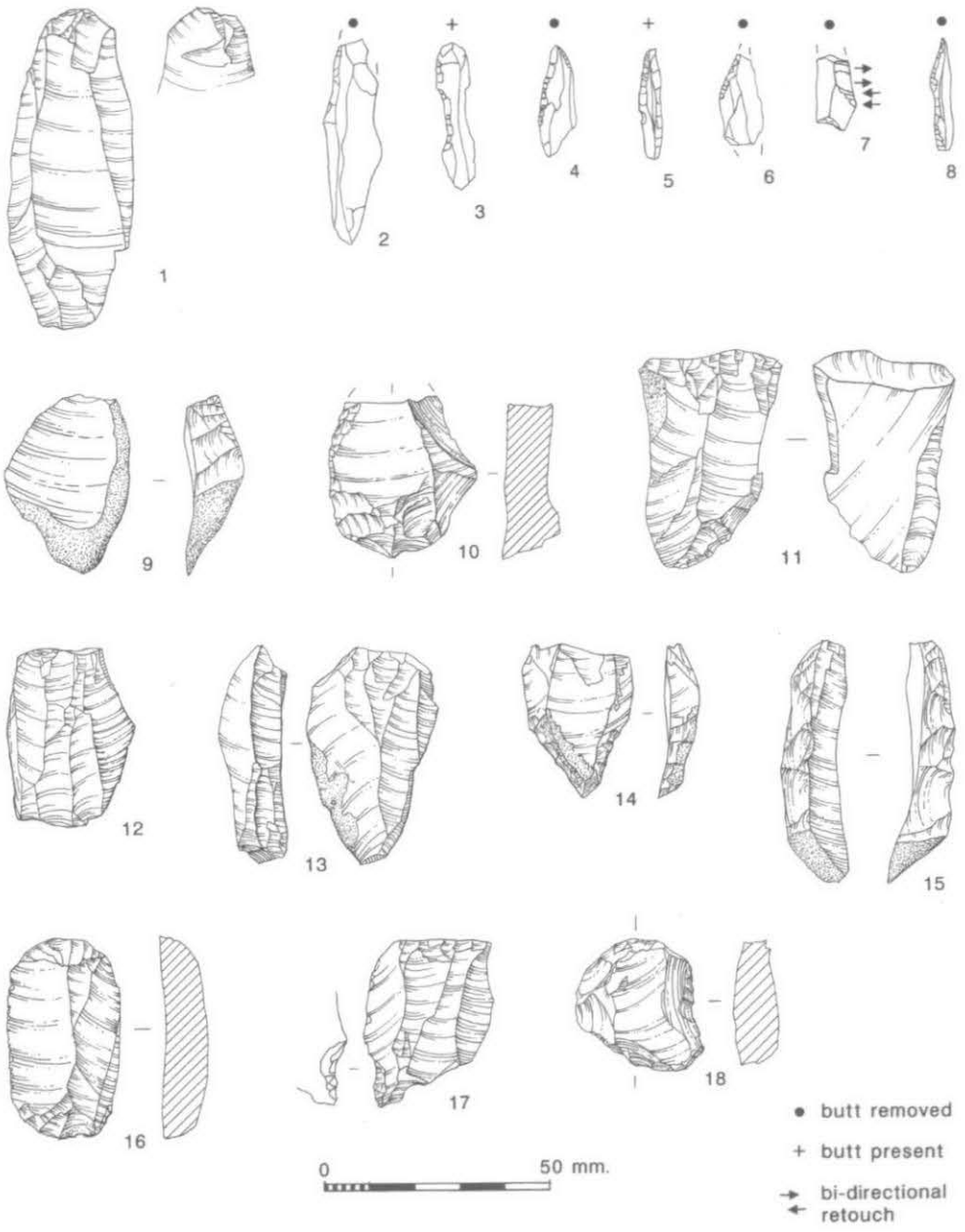

Fig. 13. Struck flint from the excavations.

the three main technological components of the main excavation assemblage (see below) were identified, however, and since no additional components appeared to be present, this material can be considered entirely consistent with the remainder of the collection. It is not considered separately in the following discussion of the collection as a whole.

Technology

Technologically, the material can be split into four groups. The first was characterised by bipolar reduction featuring some large blades. Core tablet rejuvenation flakes were present with the same broad blade scar segments. The small length and width of the platforms compared with the overall blade width which suggested that indirect percussion had been employed. This material was almost entirely non-cortical, but the scraps of thick cortex on the distal ends of some blades indicated that uneroded chalk flint was available for exploitation. The core preparation flakes were absent. An early post-glacial date for the material is entirely appropriate for this component of the collection.

The second technological group was characterised by narrower blade production, again using bipolar reduction techniques and core tablet rejuvenation but also using other approaches to reduction, resulting in a variety of core forms. Amongst this component were core preparation flakes, crested blades and many chips indicating that reduction had taken place at the site rather than the products having been brought from elsewhere. The raw materials exploited were distinctive, featuring in particular a type of material the cortex of which was consistently coffee-coloured, thin and coarsely textured where solution has created a fine pock-marked effect. This material may have been grubbed from soliflucted deposits or from soils – the solution effects were not sufficient to suggest a river gravel source but the brown staining precluded a fresh chalk source. This component belongs on technological grounds to the Mesolithic, but to neither the earliest nor the latest parts of the period.

Flakes/blades showing unidirectional flaking in their dorsal scarring characterised the third group. These pieces were struck from A1 type cores with a single platform being worked circumferentially in the main. Crested flake/blades and large core tablet rejuvenation flakes were again present. Butts were narrow and featured preparatory chipping and abrasion but not faceting. That this component included a significant number of shattered core fragments illustrates one of the chief differences between it and the preceding components – poorer quality flint, pale grey or brown in colour, although still with unabraded thick cortex on the exterior, had been the raw material for this material. This component had technological parallels with earlier Neolithic chalk source assemblages such as Goring Gatehampton Farm, and conformed to the characterisation of Thames Valley early Neolithic material provided by Holgate in his regional survey.[37]

The fourth component was the most unusual. It comprised a group of flakes from a single context (100/B/8) of the southern barrow totalling 41 pieces (Fig. 14). Each approximated to a length : breadth index of 1 : 1 and, moreover, the flakes were almost square in shape. This was mostly achieved using butts of remarkable length, often the full span of the flake, and by precipitating a hinge termination parallel with the butt. Three which did not end in such an even hinge had been retouched into the square ended form, either by direct or indirect retouch. The uncanny regularity of the flakes (Fig. 14) suggested at first that the entire set should refit onto a single core. Thorough attempts, however, failed to reunite more than three pairs of flakes.

Further understanding of the reduction sequence required for the production of such flakes allowed an explanation: the 'square' flakes had needed to be individually engineered by creating a flattened nose on a very large core. A carefully aimed impact with a hard hammer delivered a symmetrical shock wave, the even absorption of which resulted in the parallel hinge termination. Two flakes seems to have been the maximum number that could be detached before the nose needed recreation by trimming. Amongst the trimming flakes must have been the negative hinges from the square flakes, but none was present in this context, nor indeed in the entire collection. Given the use of hard hammers and very wide butts this material is likely to be of early Bronze Age date. Technologically this material can be paralleled within the region though typologically it is most unusual.[38]

Cortication

The technological evidence points strongly to a correlation between the degree of cortication and the date of the overwhelming majority of the pieces, in the particular circumstances of the site. This was such that the recognition

[37] R. Holgate, *Neolithic Settlement of the Thames Basin* (BAR 194, 1988).

[38] A. Brown, 'Struck Flint', in A. Barclay, M. Gray and G. Lambrick, *Excavations at the Devil's Quoits, Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire 1972–3 and 1988* (Thames Valley Landscapes: the Windrush Valley, 3, 1995), 50.

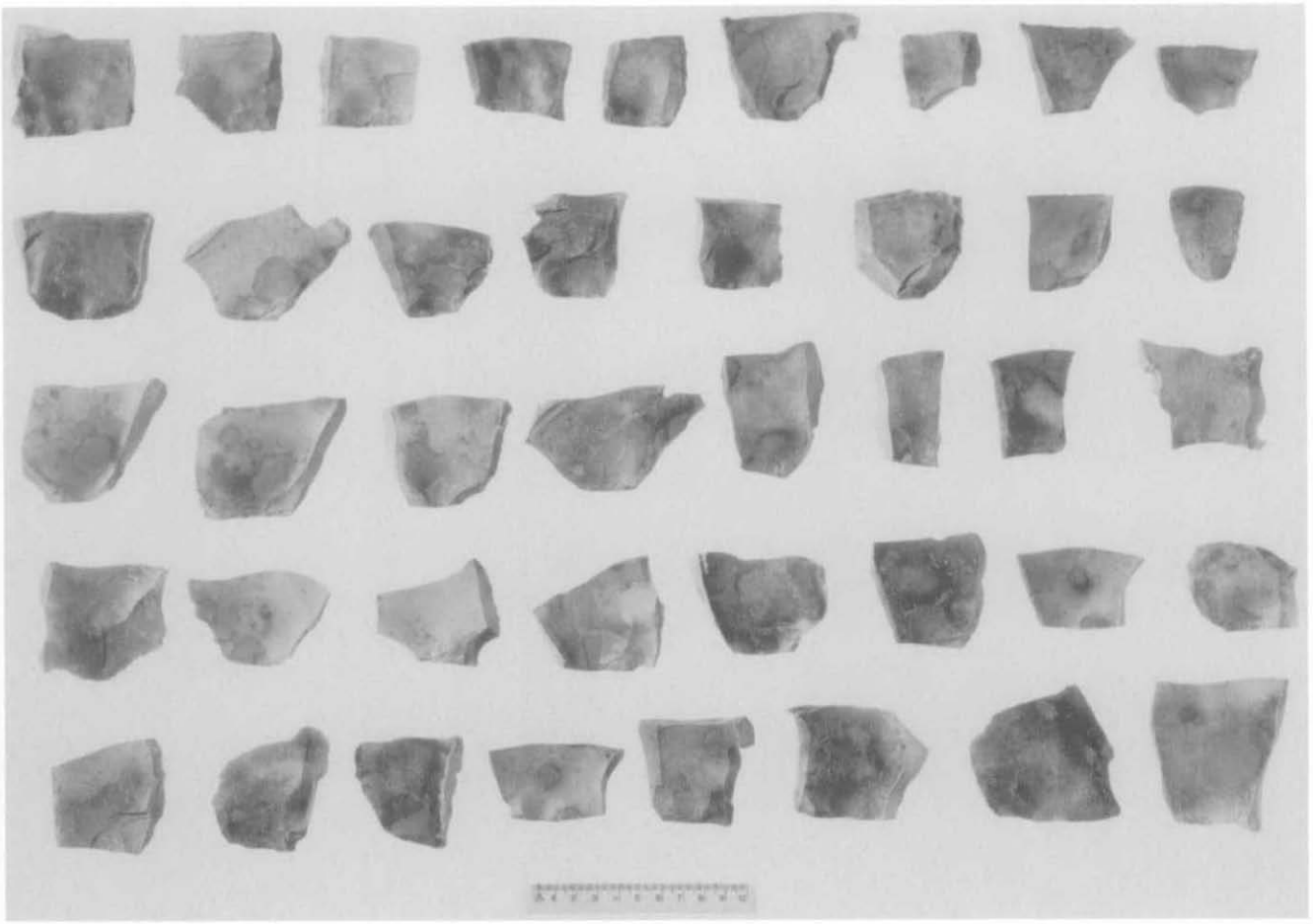

Fig. 14. The 'square flake' deposit from barrow 100.

of differences in the degree of cortication added confidence to the technological distinctions identified and allows the broad dating to be extended to the less diagnostic pieces of the collection. The first group, of early post-glacial date, was consistently thickly corticated to a creamy white colour. The core-burin, one of the scrapers and two obliquely backed microliths were included in this group (Fig. 13, 2–8).

The second group, many of which showed a characteristic brown cortex, had cortication ranging from a consistent pale grey to a densely speckled bluish-white. The speckling could be even, agglomerated into blotches or occasionally variable between one area of a flake or blade and another. In each case, however, there was no trouble in identifying the piece as being corticated with the naked eye. All but one of the remaining microliths and all of the microburins belonged to this group (Fig. 13, 2–8).

The third component, of Neolithic date and based on poorer quality grey or brown flint, was predominantly uncorticated, although some featured a faint, 'misty' cortication which was difficult to identify without the use of magnification. The double-ended scraper was amongst this class of cortication (Fig. 13, 16).

The earlier Bronze Age deposit (Fig. 14), constituting the fourth group, was corticated to a greater extent than the Neolithic material, most pieces exhibiting an inconsistent, light covering. Since this material was so technologically distinct from the second group of material, its closest neighbour on the cortication spectrum, confusion between the two was considered most unlikely.

Amongst the exceptions which should be mentioned were the remaining microlith, which was apparently uncorticated, and one of the two leaf-shaped arrowheads which was corticated to a greater degree than was its contemporary debitage. Both instances can probably be explained through the difference in the raw material of which they were made from that of their contemporaneous debitage. The only two pieces in the collection which were made from a gravel flint source were corticated as if belonging to groups two and three, but with insufficient technological or typological evidence on which to base a date, the degree of cortication has been ignored and the pieces remain undated.

Distributions

Equipped with a shorthand dating system, using degrees of cortication as a proxy for more complex technological and typological dating considerations, the distribution of material of different date can be examined in order to contribute to the dating of the principal features of the excavated barrows.

The background scatter of material can be explored using the group of flints from the evaluation trenches in the area west of the barrows. Here, Mesolithic material was widespread but Neolithic pieces concentrated markedly to the north of the WSW–ENE ditch across the area, thus being confined largely to the slightly higher ground.

In the area of the barrows the vertical distribution pattern of pre-Neolithic pieces within the three ditched features is a useful measure of the consistency of redeposition from the surrounding soil. Table 4 shows the distribution of such pieces.

TABLE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF MESOLITHIC MATERIAL FROM 100, 120 AND 121

Context	mid-Mesolithic	early Mesolithic	Burnt
121/1	5 (71%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)
121/2	9 (69%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)
121/3	5 (63%)	2 (18%)	1 (13%)
120/1	14 (64%)	4 (18%)	4 (18%)
120/2	20 (63%)	8 (25%)	4 (13%)
120/3	7 (70%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)
100 upper	27 (50%)	17 (31%)	10 (11%)
100 middle	41 (66%)	12 (19%)	9 (15%)
100 lower	8 (73%)	1 (9%)	2 (18%)

Burnt material may include some Neolithic, but it is predominantly earlier on technological grounds where such a distinction is possible.

The proportion of mid-Mesolithic pieces remains remarkably constant, at around 65% of the lithic inventory for each context group. Using this fraction of the context groups as a standard, the proportion of Neolithic material can be compared as a ratio, Table 5.

In the lower layers of 121, which is known to be an Iron Age feature, there is a relatively high proportion of Neolithic pieces for which it is difficult to account. The larger sample sizes of 120 (layers 1 and 2) and 100 (upper

TABLE 5. RATIO OF NEOLITHIC TO MESOLITHIC WORKED FLINT FROM 121, 120 AND 100

121/1	0.6:1	120/1	0.4:1	100 upper	0.7:1
121/2	0.4:1	120/2	0.4:1	100 middle	0.6:1
121/3	1.4:1	120/3	0:1	100 lower	1.6:1

and middle context groups), however, set a standard of between 0.4 and 0.7 Neolithic pieces to 1 mid-Mesolithic. Neolithic pieces are slightly more frequent in the upper fills of 100 than 120. It is the lower fills which are of particular interest, however, in the consideration of the date of the barrows.

Dating of the barrow ditches

The sample sizes for the lower contexts in both barrow ditches are small, and caution is required, but using these data the possible scenarios can be assessed. If both barrows were Bronze Age in date, notwithstanding the absence of Bronze Age lithic material other than that in 100/B/8 (the 'square flake' deposit), the differential redeposition of Neolithic material in the lowest fills would have to be explained. If feature 100 had cut a surface locally rich in Neolithic flint, the scatter should be recognisable in the area excavated. In fact, of the 51 pieces located on and in the exposed subsoil after stripping, only five were of Neolithic date, making it unlikely that the over-representation of Neolithic pieces in the bottom layers of 100 could be accounted for in this way.[39] Moreover, if the ditch had been dug through a surface which contained Neolithic flintwork, the upcast bank material, postulated as being on the outer edge of the ditch, should have sealed some Neolithic flintwork. The excavation located just one Neolithic piece within 5 m. of the lip of the ditch, an area containing 15 early pieces.

On the other hand, if both barrows dated from the Neolithic, the same difference in redeposition would need to be explained but in reverse: is it likely that feature 120 should contain no debitage contemporary with its construction in its lower layers? Such an absence would, of course, be possible, even quite likely, in an area where flint was scarce or was seldom exploited. In this case, Neolithic flintwork is common in the locality as a background scatter, and some depositional activities might be expected during the early years of a monument's existence. Indeed, it is the Bronze Age background flintwork which is absent and which was not available to become incorporated accidentally into the lower fills of a freshly cut ditch.

It seems somewhat ironic to conclude that the feature with the only Bronze Age material of the whole site, feature 100, may in fact date from the Neolithic while the feature with nothing but redeposited Mesolithic material in its lowest layers, feature 120, seems to date from the Bronze Age. The conclusion is tentative, but a number of pieces of circumstantial evidence can be brought into play to support this suggestion.

The first is the difference in the construction techniques of the two features, one deep, steep-sided and flat bottomed, the other shallower and of broader proportions. The second is the stratigraphic location of the Bronze Age 'square flake' deposit, halfway up the filling of ditch 100. Another is the intact nature of even the most vulnerable edges of the Neolithic flakes in the lower layers of 100, edges which would be expected to show damage traces had they been subjected to significant movement or trampling on a surface prior to deposition. Refitting of this material from 100 (lower) would have

[39] It could be suggested that the Neolithic material was once prolific in a Bronze Age ploughsoil, having been drawn preferentially into the ploughzone as a result of being separated vertically from the Mesolithic material in a developing soil profile. In this scenario, the Neolithic material may have been removed during topsoil stripping, or laterally transported by ploughing, leaving little of this material to find its way to the subsoil surface. The lack of identifiable ploughsoil in either lower ditch, however, and the spatial evidence from the western area suggesting that the Neolithic material was there concentrated to the north of the barrows rather than adjacent to them, weighs against this scenario.

bolstered the conclusions, but the closest to a conjoin was a chip and a trimming flake which were so close in texture and appearance that only a single intermediate flake probably separated them.

The last piece of circumstantial evidence is that allowing one of the barrows to date from the Neolithic may make sense of the absence of contemporary activity alongside the other, Bronze Age, barrow. If the presence of the earlier monument marked the locality out as one of some special nature, then its reiteration by the creation of a new burial monument in the Bronze Age, in a locality otherwise unused at the time, may explain the absence of Bronze Age flintwork other than the remarkable 'square flake' deposit which had been placed in the ditch of the original monument at its closest point to the new monument.

Catalogue of illustrated flint

Entries are ordered as follows: brief description, context number, small find number.

1. Early post-glacial blade showing punctiform butt. 120/B/3. Sf 295.
2. Microlith. U/S. Sf 41.
3. Microlith. 120/D/2. Sf 325.
4. Microlith. 120/B/2. Sf 391.
5. Microlith. 120/D/2. Sf 311.
6. Microlith. U/S. Sf 32.
7. Microlith. U/S. Sf 6.
8. Microlith. 100/A/6. Sf 153.
9. Mesolithic core tablet rejuvenation flake. U/S. Sf 54.
10. Early post-glacial scraper. U/S. Sf 501.
11. Early post-glacial core/burin. 120/C/2. Sf 374.
12. Mesolithic core showing bipolar flaking. 100/D/2. Sf 187.
13. Mesolithic core on a flake. 100/A/3. Sf 125.
14. Mesolithic borer. 120/D/2. Sf 301.
15. Neolithic crested blade. 100/B/13. Sf 247.
16. Neolithic double-ended scraper. 100/B/10. Sf 291.
17. Early post-glacial flake re-worked as a borer. Inverse retouch cuts through cortication. U/S. Iron Age? Sf 331.
18. Early post-glacial flake re-worked as a scraper. 100/B/1. Iron Age? Sf 172.

THE HUMAN BONE by ANGELA BOYLE

Barrow 100

Five small cremation pits were located just within the south-east edge of barrow 100. Three of these, 103, 104 and 114 contained clear evidence of cremation urns and of burning. Flecks of charcoal and some pot sherds were present in 101 although after sieving no human bone was found to be present in this deposit. Substantial amounts of charcoal and burnt wood derived from pit 102. A sixth small pit, 106, was located within the western part of the barrow. It was not certainly identified as a cremation pit because it suffered considerable machine damage and appeared to contain only flecks of charcoal and a small quantity of fragmentary pottery. Two fragments of completely calcined bone weighing less than 1 g. and a piece of fired clay were recovered from sieving. The larger piece of bone measured 5 mm.; neither was identifiable.

The contents of each of the remaining features were sieved and a very small weight of burnt bone recovered. In each case the material derived from different layers within the feature as well as from within the urns themselves (where urns were present). However, given the degree of machine damage and the small quantities of bone recovered there is little reason to believe that they represent distinct deposits or more than one individual.

Deposit 103 weighed approximately 5 g. and fragments were generally very small, the largest measuring 5 mm. All were white and well calcined. The crown of a tooth, probably subadult, was the only identifiable bone.

Deposit 104 differed only in the presence of a quantity of probable 'pyre debris' (stone, charcoal and shell). Again fragments were small, the largest measuring 6 mm., white and well calcined. One fragment was coloured bluish-black and has been tentatively identified as a (?)distal phalange.

Deposit 114 contained charcoal, shell and approximately 45 fragments of bone, all coloured white and weighing less than 2 g. The largest piece measuring 9 mm. was exceptional.

Deposit 102 produced charcoal and five fragments of white and well calcined bone. Identifiable pieces included possible skull vault and part of a tooth crown. Although the possible skull vault appeared very thin and therefore perhaps indicative of a younger person, no attempt was made to assign age because of the size of the fragment and uncertain identification.

Approximately 71 g. of cremated bone was recovered from context 100/A/1, one of the sections cut across the barrow. The bone ranged in colour from white through to fragments with a bluish-black cortex (and therefore not substantially burnt). The largest piece measured 36 mm. though the majority averaged 10 mm. in length. This material was associated with a quantity of animal bone.

Barrow 120

Barrow 120 contained two certainly identified cremations. A small Collared Urn, 116 was placed towards the north-east end of a large pit 124 which was located in the south-east quadrant of the barrow. When the contents of the urn were sieved 2 g. of tiny burnt bone fragments, 2 mm. in length, were recovered along with some pyre debris. The very fragmentary remains of a possible premolar and an unidentified tooth crown had survived. Pit 123 lay just inside the ditch on the south-west side. It was badly damaged during machining and contained only charcoal and one unburnt fragment of bone measuring 6 mm. which was not certainly identified as human. A number of sections were cut across the barrow ditch and one piece of bone was recovered from 120/E. It was probably part of a long bone shaft, not excessively burnt and measuring 17 mm.

A small quantity of cremated bone weighing less than 1 g. was recovered from layer 110/C. All of the material was white and well calcined; the largest fragment measured 36 mm.

Discussion

Relatively little can be said about this small assemblage of bone. Although deposit 100/A/1 accounts for approximately 71 g. of the total, the exceptionally small size of the fragments reduces their utility. There is limited evidence for differential burning in this deposit but this is within the normal range of variation for one individual. Without any diagnostic bones it is impossible to speculate on the number of individuals or their sex. The entire collection could easily belong to one individual or the much denuded remains of a number of distinct cremations.

THE ANIMAL BONE by BOB WILSON

A small collection of identifiable bones was recovered, chiefly from the barrows (100, 120) and enclosure ditch 121. Only a few identifiable bones came from features 115, 117 and 123. Most bones were in poor condition, difficult to identify, and mainly consisted of hundreds of small newly broken and unidentifiable fragments, particularly those from 117/B.

TABLE 6. FRAGMENT FREQUENCY OF BONES IN FEATURES

Feature No.	100	112	115	117	120	121	123	Total
Cattle	21	–	–	6	5	10	–	42
Sheep	10	–	–	–	4	–	–	14
Pig	4	–	1	–	1	1	1	8
Horse	–	–	–	–	1	1	–	2
Red Deer	13+A	–	–	–	2	2	–	17+A
Subtotal	48+A	–	1	6	13	14	1	83+A
Unident.	294	4	8	c.389	188	104	12	999
Total	342+A	4	9	395	201	118	13	1083
Burnt Frags.	2	–	–	–	3	–	–	5

A = antler

Results of identification are given in Table 6. Goat, roe deer and aurochs were not identified although the first two may be present in the collection. Horse is represented by two incisor teeth. Red deer are over represented among the identifiable bones since they include eight maxillary teeth from the same cranium.

The collection appeared relatively homogeneous in species composition throughout the features, especially the relatively common occurrence of deer bones throughout the feature sections up to 50 m. apart. Thus the collection could be regarded as a single assemblage although it probably accumulated in a number of episodes associated with the infilling of the successive features over many years.

The bones clearly represent occupation debris of some kind and presumably it was deposited mostly subsequent to the digging of the barrows. Five burnt fragments perhaps are connected with the presence of the cremations. All body parts of animals appear represented among the bones and thus both butchery and food consumption waste appear present. Possibly a settlement lay close by but alternatively the bone waste is explained by ceremonial consumption of food close to the barrows.

Eaten animals included young individuals as well as fairly mature ones but there is insufficient evidence for slaughtering patterns to be determined. Sexing of the pelves indicated the presence of a cow, an immature bull/steer and a hind of red deer. Fragments of a shed antler of a young red deer stag occurred in 100/A/6.

Although inflated by one group of teeth, the high relative abundance of deer bones among the identified bones (n = 84) indicates that sheltering woodland was a significant component of the landscape, certainly to a greater extent than around Neolithic and Bronze Age sites along the main Thames river channels to the south and west. The relatively high proportion of cattle bones need not be inconsistent with the presence of some woodland as cattle were probably both browsers and grazers in the Upper Thames Valley during the Neolithic,[40] and this might well have continued into the Bronze Age in less frequented areas. Together the percentages of all species bones indicate a broken and mixed landscape of woodland, scrub and grass pasture, the acreages of which are difficult to estimate.

CHARCOAL, CHARRED PLANT REMAINS AND MOLLUSCA

The samples were processed using the standard methods and the resulting flots were scanned for charcoal, charred plant remains and mollusca by Dr. M. Robinson. The yield from the samples was generally very low and they did not merit any further analysis. The following is based on Dr. Robinson's identifications. Charcoal was recovered from the following contexts: 100/A/9, 100/B/10-11, 100/E/9, 101, 102/B/3, 104, 112, 112/B/3, 120/B/2 and 120/E/2. Species identified included oak (*Quercus*), possible sloe *Prunus spinosa* and hazel/alder (*Corylus/Alnus*). Much of the charcoal was heavily comminuted. A fragment of cremated bone was identified from context 100/A/1. Snail shells typical of open habitats were recovered from contexts 100/C/9, 103/A, 104/B/1, 114/3 and 120/E/2. Species identified include *Vallonia* sp. (context 114/3), *Trichia hispida* gp.(114/3) and *Cepaea* sp. (100/C/9). Other charred plant remains were very sparse, but a possible tuber was recovered from context 101/B/2 and a grass tuber, possibly of *Arrhenatherum elatius* (onion couch) was recovered from context 103/B/2.

DISCUSSION

The earliest evidence of activity comprised finds of Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork. Within the area evaluated, the Neolithic material was concentrated towards the higher ground to the north of the barrows, while the Mesolithic material formed a more even scatter over the whole area. A phase of tree clearance may be indicated by the presence of tree-throw holes with charcoal in them in two of the evaluation trenches although this activity remains undated. A number of sherds of Peterborough Ware pottery (Fig. 12, P9-10, 12) located within the fill of barrow 120 and a redeposited sherd in 121 (Fig. 12, P18) were the only other finds of pre-Bronze Age date, while redeposited Beaker sherds may also pre-date the barrows. No firmly datable features of correspondingly early date were found, though there is some suggestion from the flint assemblage that barrow 100 may be of Neolithic date.[41]

[40] M. Robinson and R. Wilson, 'A Survey of Environmental Archaeology in the South Midlands', in H.C.M. Keeley (ed.), *Environmental Archaeology: a regional review*, ii (1987), 33–7.

[41] A. Brown, in this report.

However, Neolithic monuments tend to be dug in segments and Beaker barrows are frequently of much smaller diameter, approximately 10 m. Given the form and profile of the barrow ditches an early Bronze Age date seems likely and this type of barrow can be readily paralleled within the region.[42] The differences between the ditch profiles may be explained by differential truncation. Notwithstanding Dr. Brown's suggestions above, on balance the Neolithic flint assemblage from barrow 100 thus seems more likely to be redeposited. The existence of these barrows was previously only known from aerial photography and no trace of upstanding earthworks was recorded at the time of excavation. No evidence for associated earthworks or old land surfaces was found during the excavation. The location of the Iron Age enclosure would suggest that any mound or bank associated with barrow 120 was largely eroded at the time that it was dug.

No evidence for a central primary burial was found in either barrow. This need not be surprising (especially considering the extensive plough damage to the site) as barrows without central burials are known from excavation, for example barrow 13 at Radley and barrows 1, 2 and 4 at Stanton Harcourt.[43] Examples of barrows without central burials, even where mounds were still extant at the time of excavation, include Portesham, Dorset.[44] Piggott[45] argued that such a lack of central primary burial may be used as evidence that the original deposition, either of inhumation or cremation, was laid upon the ground surface rather than being interred in a grave and that it has thus been more exposed to destruction by later agricultural activity.[46]

The cairn within barrow 120 may have been a relatively early construction. There is, however, no dating evidence for this deposit. Although secondary cairns are known from excavation, for example at Marshfield,[47] Burn Ground, Glos.[48] and the Rollright Stones,[49] these cairns have tended to be constructed upon the ground surface on the periphery of existing barrows, whereas the cairn at Merton appears to have been constructed within a large shallow pit dug into the natural cornbrash. The resulting waste material may have been used in the construction of the mound itself. The very weathered nature of the pit may suggest that it had been left open for some time prior to the construction of the cairn and its final filling. In the absence of any evidence relating to the original form of the monument it is impossible to deduce the relationship of the cairn to the barrow itself or to any earthwork or stone-built mound which may have existed in antiquity. In the examples cited above, and in particular at Burn Ground,[50] it was noted that material from the original mound was utilized in the construction of the secondary cairn, and the necessity at Merton to excavate a hollow prior to the construction of the cairn may possibly be used to infer that the barrow did not originally have a mound, or if it did, that its construction was later.

The deposit of 41 flakes within the middle fill of barrow 100 is of some interest given the

[42] Barclay, Gray and Lambrick, op. cit. note 37; Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17.

[43] Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17; A. Hamlin, 'Excavation of Ring Ditches and other Sites at Stanton Harcourt', *Oxoniensia*, xxviii (1963), 1–19.

[44] M.W. Thompson and P. Ashbee, 'Excavation of a Barrow near the Hardy Monument, Black Down, Portesham, Dorset', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 23 (1957), 124–36.

[45] C.M. Piggott, 'Excavation of Fifteen Barrows in the New Forest 1941–2', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 9 (1943), 1–27.

[46] W.G. Simpson, 'A Barrow Cemetery of the Second Millennium BC at Tallington, Lincolnshire', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 42 (1976), 215–39.

[47] G.L. Gettins, H. Taylor and L.V. Grinsell, 'The Marshfield Barrows', *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc.* 72 (1953), 27–8, Fig. 3.

[48] W.F. Grimes, *Excavations on Defence Sites 1939–45, I: mainly Neolithic and Bronze Age* (1960), 104, Fig. 40.

[49] Lambrick, op. cit. note 24, 72, Figs. 48 and 50.

[50] Grimes, op. cit. note 48.

similarity of the pieces, the large size of the flakes and the regularity with which they end in a hinge fracture, technically a fairly difficult feature to produce consistently (Fig. 14). It is difficult to see any function for these flakes although the hinge fracture is such a common occurrence that any function may have been linked with this part of the artefacts. It is also possible they were never intended for use other than deposition within the barrow ditch. Microwear analysis of the flakes may provide further information about any possible function or functions. The cores from which these flakes were struck would be very distinctive as would any artefacts made on the blanks.

A red deer antler was recovered from 100/A/6 at approximately the same depth as the flake deposit. The presence of deliberate deposits within barrow ditches has been recorded at other sites, for example Radley,[51] and underlines the importance of excavating a sufficient proportion of such monuments. The material within the barrow ditches seems to have been abraded and worn; many of the pottery sherds are very small and seem to have derived from surface scatters.

No obvious pyre site was located although two pits (112 and 113) showed signs of burning and produced quantities of ash. An area of burning was also recorded around pit 123 within barrow 120. Both of these features were located to the south of barrow 100 away from the cremation deposits. Two substantial pieces of charred wood were recovered from the lower fills of the ditch and are of some interest. These pieces may represent parts of the cremation pyres which were not fully burnt and were subsequently deposited in the ditch. These pits, the area of burning and the charred timbers from the ditch may be the slight remains of the pyre sites associated with the cremation deposits. The location of one of the timbers (100/E/9) within two metres of the concentration of cremation deposits perhaps lends weight to this interpretation.

The recovery of a possible tuber and a grass tuber from two of the cremations is of interest. At other sites in the region where these tubers have been found it has been suggested that they may represent tinder for the cremation pyres or bedding for the corpse prior to cremation.[52] Evidence for pyre sites is generally quite slender but from ethnographic evidence the structure of pyres can be suggested.[53] The extensive excavations at the linear barrow cemetery at Radley produced some evidence for pyre sites preserved under only some of the mounds, perhaps suggesting that there may be some spatial segregation of these activities or that not all pyre sites subsequently had mounds placed over them.[54] Two of the cremation urns (P1 and P2, Fig. 11) have been refired and it seems likely that these pots were included in the pyre during the cremation.

Due to the lack of any stratigraphic relationships, the dating of the cremation deposits relative to the barrow is problematical, though their siting at the perimeter of the enclosed area suggests that they are secondary and their siting may respect an extant mound. The concentration of secondary cremation burials within the south-eastern quadrant of ring ditches and round barrows is a characteristic that has long been recognised[55] and has been noted more recently with specific reference to barrows of the Deverel-Rimbury tradition.[56]

[51] Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17, 'Discussion'.

[52] L. Moffett, 'The Prehistoric Use of Plant Resources', in Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17.

[53] J. McKinley summarises the main points which emerge from a study of ethnographic cremation practices. A criss-cross pyre structure, constructed of large timbers with smaller twigs and wood infill, seems to be universal: J. McKinley, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham, part viii: The Cremations* (East Anglian Archaeology 69, 1994), 80–1.

[54] Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17.

[55] W. Greenwell, *British Barrows: a record of the examination of sepulchral mounds in various parts of England* (1877), 12–13.

[56] P. Ashbee, *The Bronze Age Barrow in Britain* (1960), 84.

The discrete cremations were represented by very small quantities of bone. It has been shown, from observations undertaken at modern crematoria, that the quantity of bone recovered from a modern adult is between 1,600 g.–3,600 g. dependent upon the individual, the average being approximately 3,000 g.[57] Even allowing for the obvious differences between ancient and modern cremation processes[58] and taking into account the degree of disturbance apparent, the exceptionally small quantities of bone recovered suggest that these deposits constitute the partial deposition of the cremated individual(s). However, due to the extremely fragmentary nature of the bone assemblage, and the small number of individual cremation deposits concerned, any analysis to elucidate mortuary practice or even the number of individuals represented is not possible.

The siting of the two barrows seems to have been deliberate. The pairing of barrows can be seen throughout the region, for example barrows 12 and 13 at Radley; examples of paired barrows have also been excavated at Ashville and Rollright.[59] Some of these may be the remnants of larger barrow cemeteries although others seem to have been deliberately paired or isolated.[60] The location of the barrows may reflect earlier knowledge of the area. The site was obviously a favoured location as it was used intermittently from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age.

Later prehistoric activity on the site is attested to by the enclosure ditch 121 which cuts both the northern barrow (120) and the pit (124) within it. The enclosure ditch yielded several sherds of middle and late Iron Age pottery. As has been noted above, pit 115 within barrow 100 has a profile characteristic of Iron Age storage pits and may be contemporary with and related to enclosure ditch 121. In the absence of any diagnostic finds from the pit fills, positive confirmation of this was not possible.

From the low density of later prehistoric features and finds it is possible to infer that occupation and utilisation of the site during this period was of a limited extent and nature. Taking into account the proximity of the Iron Age activity to the river Ray to the south-east and its associated floodplain, it may perhaps be suggested that this occupation took the form of seasonal pastoral activity similar in nature to that recognised on the Thames floodplain at Port Meadow[61] and Farmoor.[62] The enclosure ditch perhaps represents a small stock enclosure associated with some form of small scale domestic settlement not apparent from aerial photography and probably largely lost to quarrying activity prior to the archaeological investigation. Locally Iron Age activity is sparse and has recently been summarised by Booth.[63]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork, subsequent post-excavation analysis and publication were funded by Sir Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd. In particular John Driver is thanked for his assistance throughout

[57] J. McKinley, 'Cremations: expectations, methodologies and realities', in *Burial Archaeology: current research, methods and developments* (BAR 211, 1989), 65–74.

[58] Ibid. 65–74.

[59] Barclay and Halpin, op. cit. note 17; C. Balkwill, 'The Bronze Age Features', in M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age ring-ditches and Roman features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxon.)* (CBA Res. Rep. 28, 1978), 25–30; Lambrick, op. cit. note 24, Figs. 2, 3.

[60] Lambrick, op. cit. note 24, 124.

[61] G. Lambrick and A. McDonald, 'The Archaeology and Ecology of Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common, Oxford', in G. Lambrick (ed.), *Archaeology and Nature Conservation* (1985), 95–109.

[62] G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman Riverside Settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire* (1979), 134.

[63] Booth, op. cit. note 32.

the project. Andrew Parkinson and Michael Parsons supervised the evaluation and the excavation respectively under the direction of George Lambrick. Initial post-excavation analysis was undertaken by Michael Parsons and Andrew Parkinson in 1990. Further work was carried out by Heather Baker, Ric Tyler and Sarah Milligan. Alistair Barclay, George Lambrick and Mark Robinson kindly commented on the text and the environmental remains respectively. The drawings are the work of the OAU Graphics Office, Andrew Brown drew the flints. The photograph of the flint was taken by Jane Inskipp. Laurence Jones (Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit) kindly provided unpublished information about the excavations at Slade Farm, Bicester. The archive and finds will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service (Accession number OCMS 1989.120).