REPORTS

Prehistoric and Roman Settlement near Heyford Road, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

Excavations on land off Heyford Road, Steeple Aston, revealed a range of Iron Age ditches and pits, a Roman trackway and associated ditch and burials, as well as one pit possibly dating to the early Neolithic and other redeposited Neolithic artefacts. The early Iron Age site had a clear spatial structure consisting of outer ditches pierced by a narrow entrance, an alignment of pits or tree-throw holes, and a group of storage pits. Differing kinds of material were deposited in each of these groups of features: predominantly cattle in the pit alignment, predominantly sheep in the storage pits, and a few human remains in the ditch. The entrance defined by the ditches was the focus for a sequence of activity extending into the middle Iron Age which involved the deposition of human remains, the digging of a new group of pits, and the erection of posts. Subsequently the site was completely reorganised, the middle Iron Age settlement being replaced by field boundaries and a trackway. This trackway may have formed the precursor for a more substantial Roman trackway which runs across the site. A number of burials were found in and near a small ditch which runs parallel to this Roman trackway. There are also scant traces of post-medieval activity on the site.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a series of archaeological investigations on land off Heyford Road on the southern edge of the village of Steeple Aston, North Oxfordshire (NGR SP 477 255), where an area of 0.7 ha. was to be developed for housing (Fig. 1). Prior to the excavation the site consisted of paddocks and an orchard. It was bordered to the SE. by a 1980s housing development, to the SW. by farmland, and to the W. by a single property which appears to represent the E. periphery of the 19th-century village. The area lies over oolite and marlstone beds capped by ferruginous, sandy and coarse loamy soils at 108 m. OD. The site is situated on a NE. facing slope.

Archaeological background

The excavation was preceded by an evaluation carried out in March 1997 on behalf of Tay Homes (Midlands) Ltd. in relation to a planning application for housing development (planning application CHN.511/94). Planning permission had been granted for the erection of 18 detached dwellings and a new access road on land between The Crescent and Harrisville residential areas on Heyford Road.

Consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record suggested that archaeological deposits would be found within the development area. An Iron Age habitation site was recorded (SP 479 253

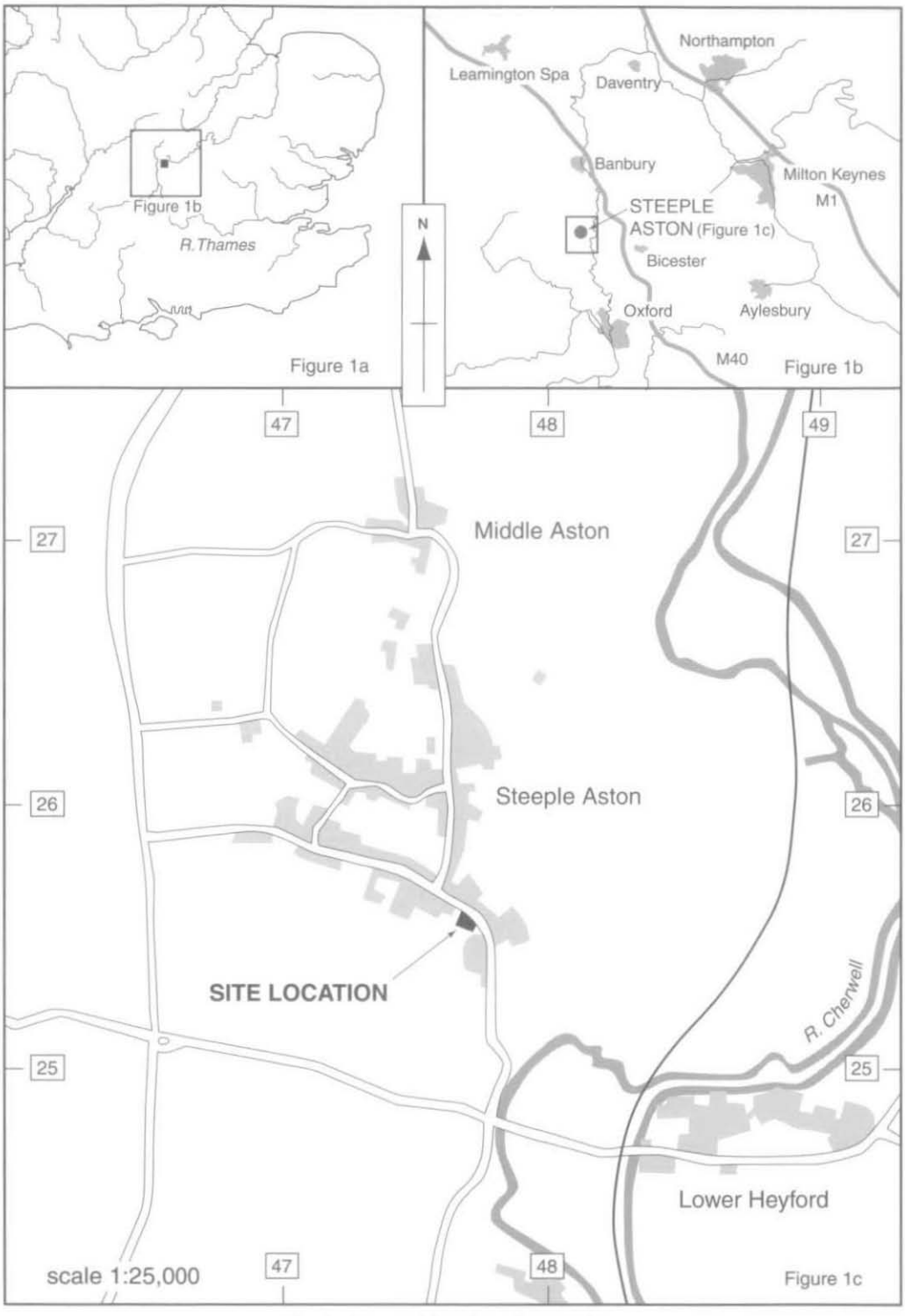

Fig. 1. Map and location of excavation.

PRN 4211) around 400 m. SE. of the development area which, although probably too distant to be regarded as part of the early Iron Age settlement found in the excavations, may be related to some of the later features. A probable Romano-British villa (SP 478 253, PRN 1749) was unearthed in 1658, and although its precise location is uncertain, it is generally thought to be S. of the village. One of the postulated locations is near or under the allotments on Heyford Road. An undated human skeleton was also found in 1926 at SP 4775 2528, S. of the village.

Given the archaeological potential of the site, the County Archaeological Officer advised the local planning authority of the need for an archaeological field evaluation in accordance with PPG16. The field evaluation consisted of four machine excavated trenches covering approximately 3% of the development area. During the evaluation, a Roman ditch, an inhumation and five ditches of uncertain date were revealed. Since it was thought that the burial might be part of a larger cemetery, and that the other features might represent activity on the periphery of a settlement, the County Archaeological Officer recommended further archaeological mitigation in the form of an open area excavation.

Excavation Methodology

The excavation was by necessity conducted in two phases. The first phase lasted approximately five weeks from April to the end of May 1997. During this phase the area of the proposed new road leading to the housing development, the area to the N. of the site designated as a public utility space, and a further area at the S. side of the site were investigated (Fig. 2). The topsoil and underlying ploughsoil were removed by machine under archaeological supervision. The second phase lasted one week in December 1997 and involved stripping an area of topsoil situated beneath overhead electric cables after they had been made safe. The features revealed were sampled by manual excavation of trenches positioned in areas of particular interest. Pits were half-sectioned. All archaeological features were planned at 1:20 and photographed. Samples for environmental analysis were taken from appropriate contexts.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

The Neolithic

Neolithic activity on the site is represented by finds of earlier Neolithic pottery and flint in two pits or tree-throw holes, 618 and 587, located towards the E. side of the site (Fig. 3). The thin upper fill (619) of pit 618 also contained a substantial number of hazelnut shells and a few grains of spelt (Table 19). Nearly two thirds of all the worked flint from the site, possibly of earlier Neolithic date also came from this context (Table 10). These artefacts provide the evidence for dating these features, and in particular pit 618 which contains no clearly later finds, to the Neolithic. On the basis of their location, their form and the finds other than the pottery, flint and hazelnuts a case can, however, also be made for dating these pits to the Iron Age.

Both pits lie at the end of an alignment of pits (see below, 'Pit Group 3') the rest of which contain only Iron Age pottery and thus seem much more certainly to date from that period (Fig. 3). The form of both pits is also comparable to that of the other pits in this alignment (Fig. 8, Table 3). Like the other pits in this group, pits 587 and 618 are shallow and have irregular, sloping sides and uneven bases, giving them the appearance of tree-throw holes. The form and location of these features thus appears to associate them with the Iron Age pits in Pit Group 3.

The faunal remains recovered from pits 587 and 618 are also comparable to those collected from the other Iron Age pits in Pit Group 3 (Table 15), and the sample of molluscs from layer 619 in pit 618 is most comparable to that from Iron Age pit 688 in the same Pit Group (Table 20), although this layer has almost certainly suffered from some disturbance. The finds other than the pottery and, in the case of pit 618, the hazelnuts and flint, thus also suggest an Iron Age date similar to the other pits in Pit Group 3.

The fact that at least some of the Neolithic pottery in pit 587 has been redeposited provides further support for the argument that the features are Iron Age in date. Pit 587 was filled by four layers (Fig. 8). Its primary fill (599) contained only Neolithic pottery, but the layer above (589) only Iron Age sherds, and the upper fill above that (588) mixed Neolithic and Iron Age pottery. This pattern of deposition, in which Neolithic pottery occurs only in the primary and upper fills, could have been created by a tree falling in an area where Neolithic material lay in or near the topsoil (see below, Discussion). This interpretation receives some support from the irregular form of the pit. Whatever the case, it is clear that the Neolithic pottery in the upper fill at least has been redeposited, and although the Neolithic pottery in the primary fill may have remained *in situ*, it is possible that this too is redeposited since there is no clear indication that the pit was recut down to this level.

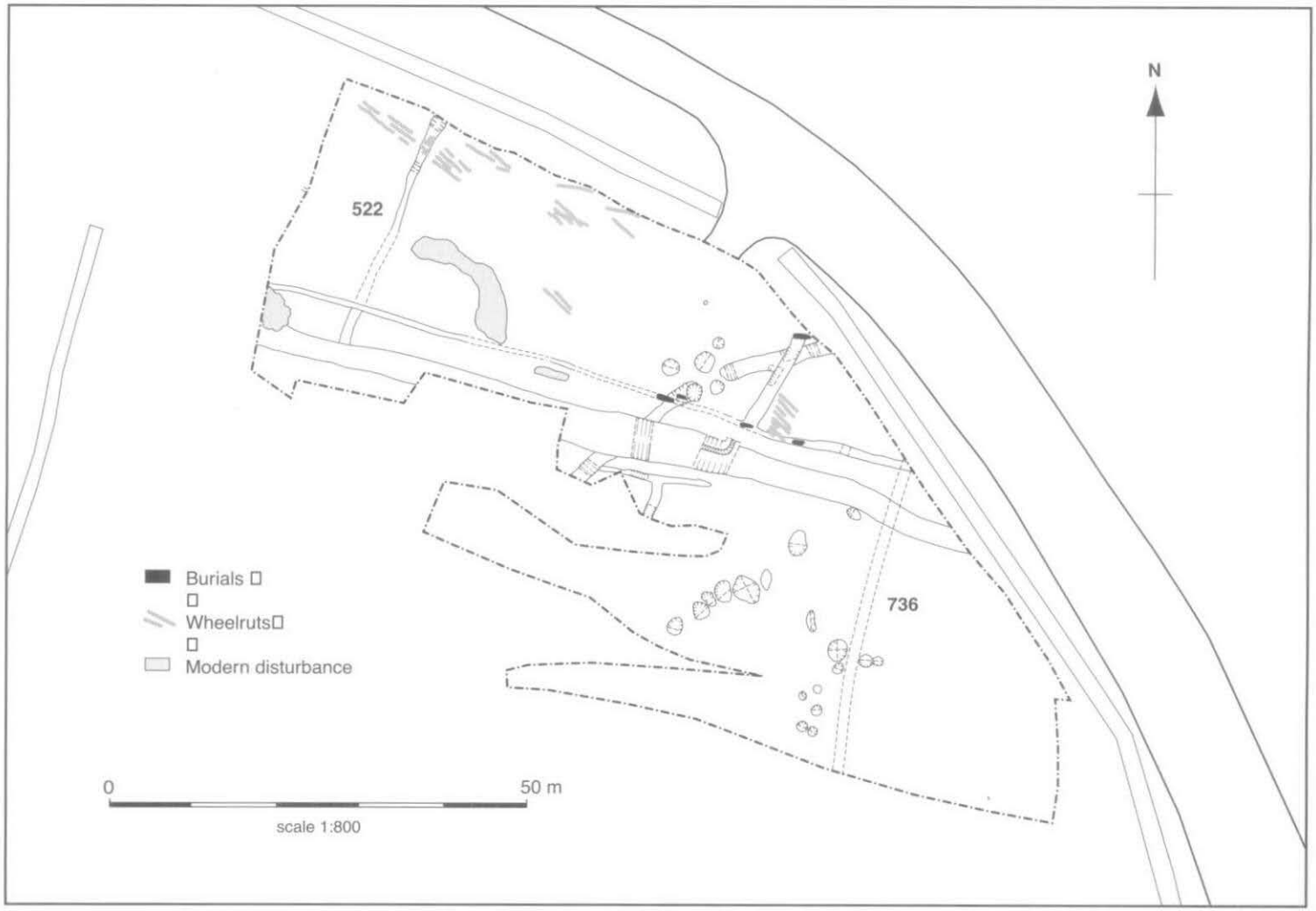

Fig. 2. Overall plan of excavated area.

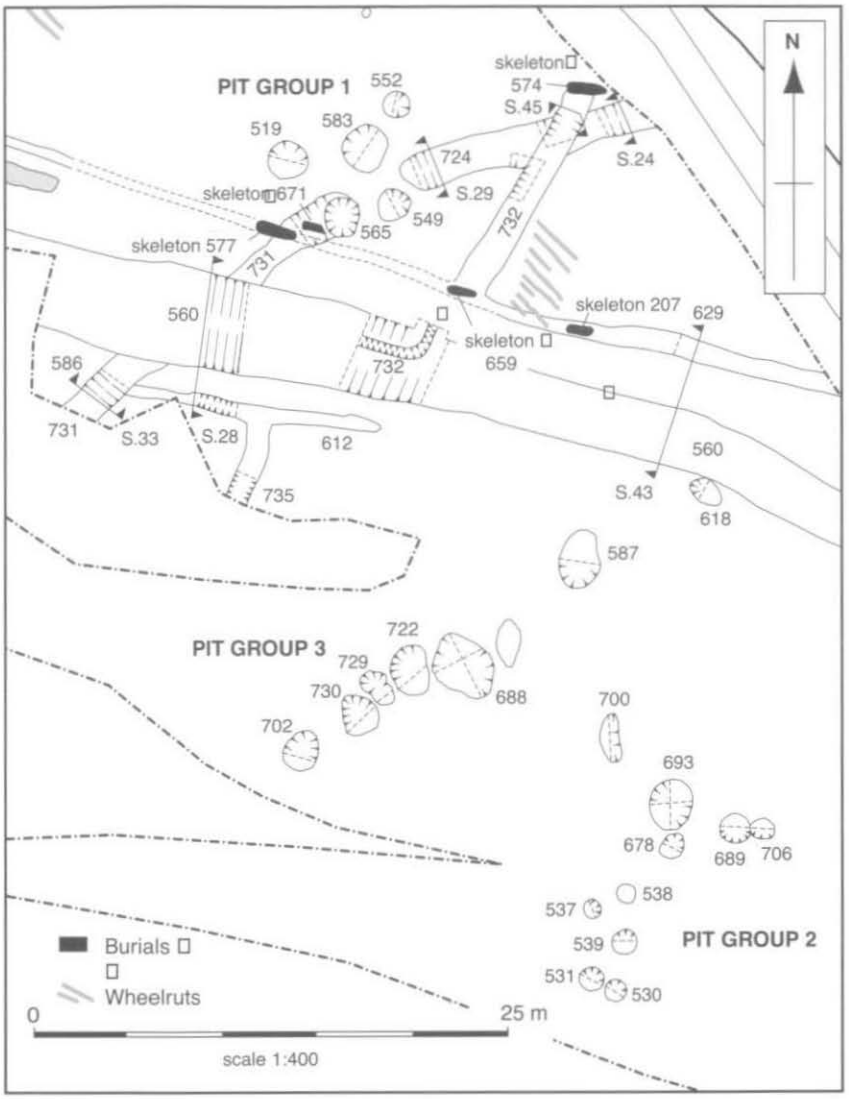

Fig. 3. Detailed plan of main area of excavation.

A stronger case for a Neolithic date can be made for pit 618, but even here there is room for doubt. This pit contained only Neolithic pottery, as well as the large quantity of hazelnuts and possibly early Neolithic worked flint. However, the possibility that the Neolithic pottery was redeposited in pit 587 must also cast some doubt upon the interpretation of pit 618 as being the only pit in the alignment to date from the Neolithic. Finds of Hellicellinae molluscs, probably introduced in the Middle Ages, indicate that the thin upper fill (619) in which the hazelnuts and almost all of the flint were found has suffered from some very late disturbance. The possibility that material of Neolithic and Iron Age date has become mixed in these pits must also cast some doubt upon the integrity of the samples of animal bones and charred plant remains (Tables 15 and 19) recovered from them.

The Iron Age

Ditches 724 and 731 (Fig. 4)

Amongst the earliest Iron Age features on the site were two lengths of ditch (724 and 731) which were partially exposed in the central area of the excavation (Figs. 3 and 4). Slightly curving, they were aligned on an ENE. to WSW. axis and formed two terminals separated by a gap 2.60 m. wide. Ditch 724 continued NE. to the edge of the site, and ditch 731 SW., up the slope of the hill beyond the limit of the excavation. It was thought that ditch 731 may have turned southwards, but this was not confirmed by excavation.

The end of ditch 731 was cut by a complex sequence of features. The earliest appears to have been a small pit (663), probably circular or ovoid in plan and 0.32 m. deep, cut when the ditch was only partially filled. Although only partially excavated it appears to have measured *c.* 1 m. in diameter. Two layers of fill, 662 and 568, were distinguished within it. The upper of these, 568, contained fragments of human long bones lying horizontally (Fig. 6). (Fragments of human bone and teeth were also found in a layer (562) filling ditch 731 where it was cut by the Roman trackway.) Subsequently, when the ditch was completely filled, a larger pit (565) was cut across its end, also just cutting the edge of pit 568. Alongside 13 fragments of possibly human bone, perhaps deriving from disturbance of pit 663, the middle fill of Pit 565 also contained middle Iron Age pottery (see below 'Pit Group 1'). Ditch 731 is probably, therefore, not later than middle Iron Age in date. No finds were recovered from the ditches themselves.

Near its end, the upper fill of ditch 731 was also cut by a burial (skeleton 671), possibly related to the Roman roadside burials found elsewhere (see below, 'Burials in ditch 629 and related burials').

Two sections were excavated across ditch 724. One (section 24) was near the NE. boundary of the site (Fig. 4). Here the ditch measured 2.0 m. in width and 0.80 m. in depth. It was cut through the natural clay substrate. The N. side of the ditch sloped steeply down to the base; the S. side sloped more gradually. Within the section of the ditch were four fills (546, 545, 544, 543) of clay and clayey-silt. From the section the ditch appears to have been recut after it had it been completely filled by 546. A series of environmental samples, from which molluscs were extracted, were taken from these layers. They suggest a change from a wooded to a more open landscape (see below 'The molluscs').

A second trench (section 29) was positioned across the terminal of the ditch (Fig. 4). Here the underlying substrate consisted of sand, and the ditch profile had gently sloping sides and a flat base. It was 1.80 m. wide and 0.54 m. deep. It contained two layers of fill (608 and 550) consisting of yellowish- and greyish-brown sandy silts. A levallois type flint core, probably dating from the late Neolithic, was found redeposited in the upper fill (550).

Two sections were also excavated across ditch 731. One (section 33) was excavated in the short segment of the ditch which appeared between the S. edge of the excavation and the Roman trackway (Fig. 4). Here, the ditch measured 1.50 m. in width and 0.58 m. in depth, and had a rounded base and steeply sloping sides. The ditch was filled by six deposits (591, 598, 592, 593, 595), all varying types of silty-clay.

A further ditch fill (562) was revealed during the excavation of a section across the junction between the Roman trackway (560) and ditch 731. Human bone fragments and teeth from a subadult or young adult were recovered from fill 562 when they were exposed within the sloping edge of the trackway.

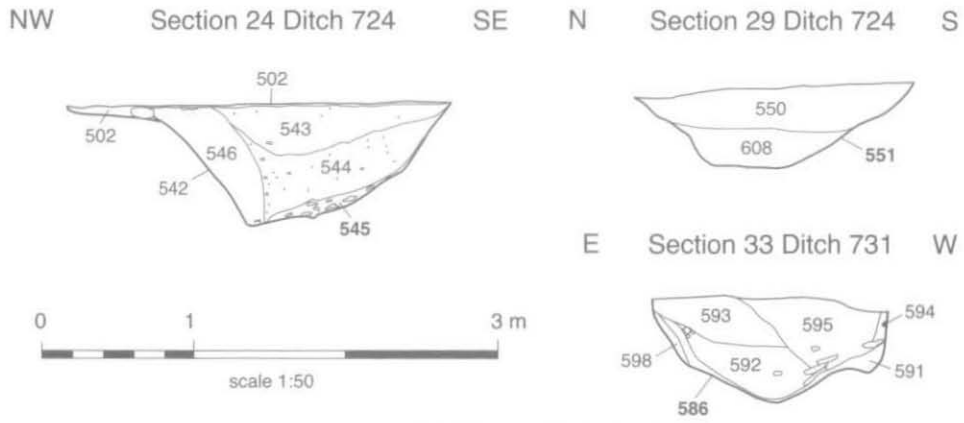

Fig. 4. Ditches 724 and 731: sections.

The Pit Groups

A number of Iron Age pits were found, concentrated in clusters or alignments forming three distinct groups (Fig. 3). The first group consisted of five pits located in and around the causeway between ditches 724 and 731. Postholes are cut into the tops of two of the pits in this group. The second group contained nine pits situated at the far SE. end of the site, whilst the third group, consisting of eight pits, was located roughly centrally between the other two groups. This third group of pits lies in a rough line oriented NE.-SW. Two of the pits in this group may date from the Neolithic, but since their chronology is uncertain and they share several characteristics with the other Iron Age pits in this group, they are included in the following discussion.

There are contrasts between the forms of the pits in each of these groups (Tables 1-3). The pits in Group 1 are generally rather shallow and have straight, near vertical sides and flat bases. The Group 2 pits are generally deeper and have a range of more or less U-shaped and undercut profiles. The pits of Group 3 are again shallow and are in general comparable in size to the pits of Group 1, but they are much more irregular in plan and section, having sloping sides and irregular bases. Two have possible recuts in their upper fills giving them the appearance of tree-throw holes.

Pottery occurs in most of the pits, suggesting a chronological distinction between the groups. Whilst middle Iron Age pottery is most common, occurring in all three groups, early Iron Age forms, occasionally mixed with middle Iron Age forms, are present in most of the pits in Group 2, and probably also in Pit Group 3 although here the pottery was less distinctive (Tables 1-3, 5-7). The pits also occasionally contain a range of other artefacts including an antler comb, an iron blade, iron wire, a copper alloy tack or pin, briquetage and worked flint.

Assemblages of animal bones of varying sizes were recovered from most of the pits, and the pit groups contrast in the proportions of each species present within them (Tables 13-15). Whilst sheep predominate in the assemblages from Group 1 and 2, in the pits of Group 3 cattle dominate. Substantial samples of charred plant remains were recovered from most of the pits in Group 1 (and in the postholes cut into the pits in Group 1) and in one of the pits in Group 2. They consisted mostly of cereals but there were also appreciable quantities of brome grass, as well as smaller quantities of other species. The single quern from the site was also found in the primary fill (610) of pit 583 in Pit Group 1, and the rubber in the fill of posthole 558, which was cut into the top of the same pit. Apart from the hazelnuts in pit 618, possibly Neolithic in date, negligible quantities of charred plant remains were recovered from the pits in Group 3, though samples were taken from pits 688, 702 and 722.

Pit Group 1: Five pits form Group 1: 519, 549, 552, 565 and 583. Most are circular in plan and have regular sections with straight, often near vertical sides and flat bases, though pit 583, the largest, has stepped sides and is much less regular (Fig. 5, Table 1). Although pit 583 has the appearance of a tree-throw hole, not dissimilar to the pits of Pit Group 3, a more regular, roughly rectangular sectioned feature at its base may be the remains of an earlier pit almost completely cut away by a later, shallower and wider pit. The pits in Pit Group 1 are generally rather shallow, never more than 1.00 m. deep and often less than 0.50 m., though they may have been truncated to a substantial degree.

All contain middle Iron Age pottery and animal remains amongst which sheep predominate (Tables 1, 5 and 13). These finds usually occur throughout the fill of the pits, though only in the middle fill of pit 565. This layer also contained some fragments of possibly human bone perhaps derived from disturbance of human remains in pit 663 below. No animal bones were found in pit 583. Large samples of charred cereals were also found in most of the pits, though usually in only one layer of the fill (Table 19). Pit 549 contained the largest sample of plant remains recovered from the site. The only quern on the site was found in the primary fill (610) of pit 583. Other finds are rare, consisting only of fragments of fired clay, a spindlewhorl and a probably residual late Neolithic or early Bronze Age flaked knife in the upper fill (503) of pit 519.

Single postholes (582 and 558) were cut into the upper fills of pits 565 and 583 respectively (Fig. 6, Table 1). Flat, roughly triangular fragments of oolitic limestone (581) of roughly the same size (*c.* 0.30 m. by 0.25 m.) were found above and partially embedded in the primary fill (661) of posthole 582. Some lay flat over this fill whilst others were pitched vertically around the edge of the posthole's base. They are assumed to have been packing stones used to support a vertical post. Both postholes contained a range of artefacts and other remains similar to those found in the pits themselves, consisting of middle and possibly early Iron Age pottery (Tables 1 and 8), animal (Table 13) and plant remains (Table 19) and, in posthole 558, the rubber mentioned above and an iron blade. Posthole 582 also contained some fragments of what may be human bone, possibly derived from disturbance of burials in the earlier features below.

Pit Group 2: A second cluster of nine pits, 530, 531, 537, 538, 539, 678, 689, 693, 706, form Pit Group 2. Four of these pits were cut into natural sand whilst the remaining pits, slightly NE., were cut into limestone bedrock and therefore have more irregular profiles. The pits of this group are generally circular or oval in plan, rather deeper than the pits of the other groups, and have a variety of more or less regular undercut or U-shaped profiles (Fig. 7, Table 2). Pits 537 and 693, however, are notably wider and shallower than the others, characteristics they share with the pits in Pit Group 3. From the section of pit 693 it appears to have been recut on a smaller scale.

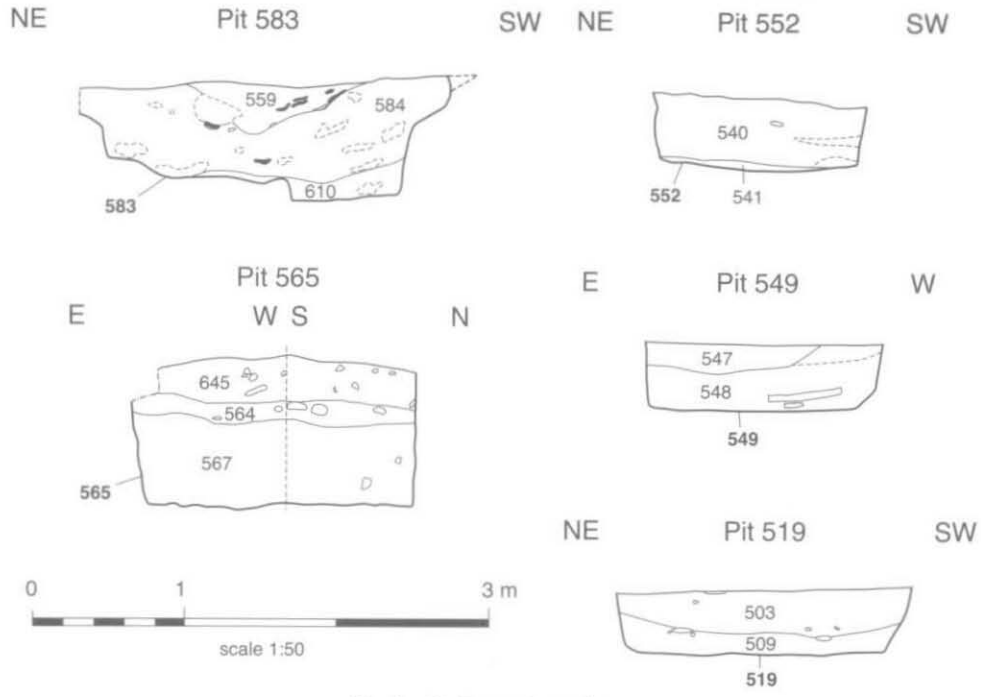

Fig. 5. Pit Group 1: sections.

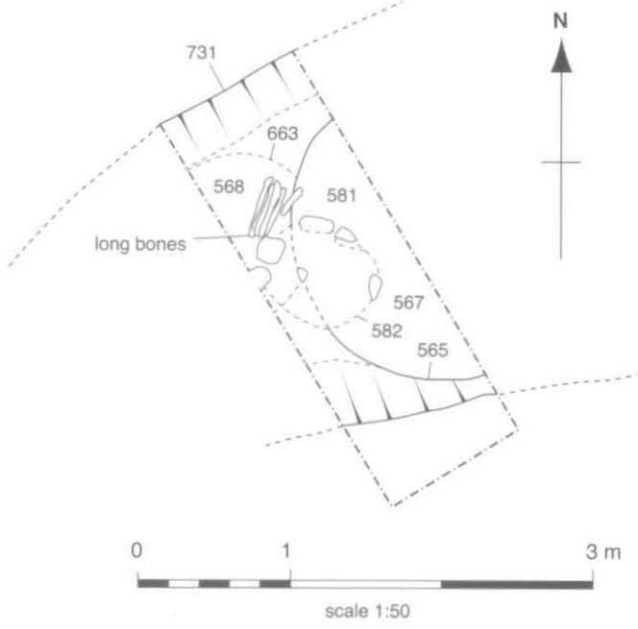

Fig. 6. Features in the terminal of ditch 731.

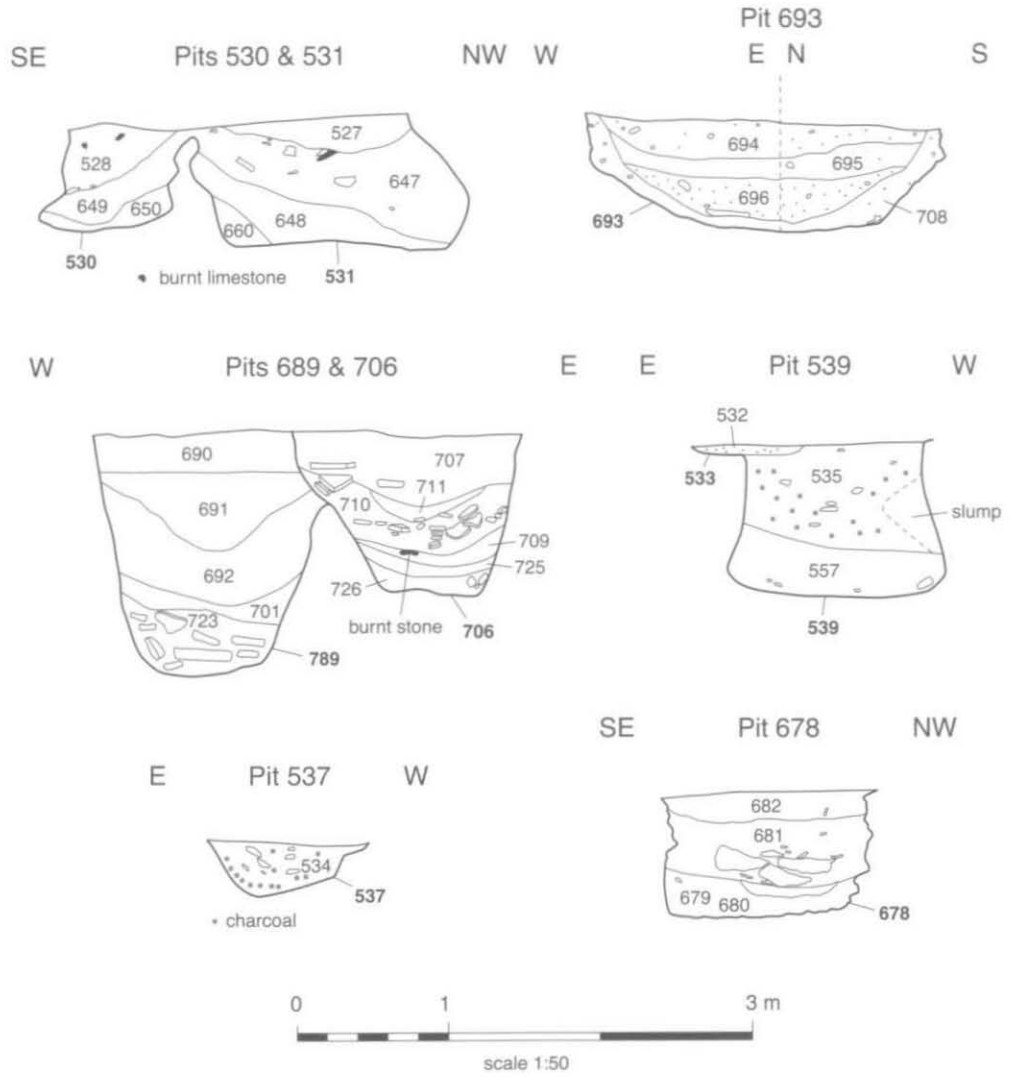

Fig. 7. Pit Group 2: sections.

Six of the pits lie in pairs adjacent to each other: the edges of pits 530 and 531 merge, whilst the edge of pit 706 cuts that of pit 689. Pits 678 and 693 form a less certain pair. Although the larger pits of these pairs not surprisingly contained richer assemblages of finds, there is no indication that the pairing of pits was anything other than coincidental. Overall the pits form a loose cluster within which there is little evident order.

Most of the pits in this group contain pottery, often in early Iron Age forms but also including some of the middle Iron Age. They also contain small groups of animal bones, especially of sheep (Table 14), and occasional fragments of fired clay and briquetage. Charred plant remains, usually consisting of cereals, were recovered from only a small number of contexts (Table 19). Two refitting fragments of an antler comb were found in layers 691 and 692 in pit 689. A copper alloy tack or pin was found in the upper fill of pit 531. Several pieces of worked flint, probably Neolithic in date were found redeposited in pit 539 (contexts 535 and 557). Although the contents of pit 678 do not otherwise differ significantly from those of the other pits in this group, the discovery of the rim of a post-medieval bottle, probably of 19th-century date, in layer 680, indicates that the fill of the pit has been disturbed at a very late date. A piece of iron wire was found in the layer above (681). Pit 537 contained no finds.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF FORM AND CONTENTS OF PIT GROUP 1 AND POSTHOLES 558 AND 582

Pit	*plan*	*Sides*	*base (m.)*	*width (m.)*	*depth*	*fills*	*pot bones*	*animal remains*	*plant*	*other finds*
519	circular	straight, near vertical	flat	1.9	0.42	503	M	x	x	
						509	M	x	x	fired clay
549	circular	straight, near vertical	flat	1.54	0.44	547	M	x		fired clay
						548	M	x	x	fired clay
552	circular	straight, near vertical	flat	1.4	0.45	540	M	x		
						541	M			
565	circular	straight, near vertical	flat	1.80	1.00	645				
						564	M	x		human? bone
						567			x	
583	circular	stepped, sloping	irregular	2.60	0.78	559				
						584	M			fired clay
						609	M		x	fired clay
						610				
Posthole										
558	circular	vertical, sloping towards the top	flat	0.86	0.49	559	M	x	x	iron blade, fired clay
582	circular	sloping	rounded	0.80-0.70	0.30	580			x	human? bone
						661				

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF FORM AND CONTENTS OF PIT GROUP 2

Pit	*plan*	*Sides*	*base*	*width (m.)*	*depth (m.)*	*fills*	*pot*	*animal bones*	*plant remains*	*other finds*
530	circular	irregular undercut	irregular	0.90	0.66	528	M?			
						649				
						650	E?	x		
531	circular	irregular, undercut	flat	1.40	0.90	527	M?	x		copper alloy pin
						647	M?	x		
						648	M?	x		fired clay
						660				
537	circular	irregular, sloping	irregular	1.06	0.36	534				
539	circular	undercut, bell-shaped	flat	1.20	1.00	535	E	x	x	worked flint
						557	E	x	x	worked flint
678	circular	vertical	flat	1.40	0.82	682				
						681	E	x		iron wire
						680				post-medieval glass
						679	E	x	x	
689	circular	steeply sloping	rounded	1.50	1.58	690	E	x		fired clay, briquetage
						691	E	x		antler comb
						692	E	x		antler comb
						701	E	x		
						723				
693	ovoid	vertical at top, sloping at base	rounded	2.10-2.50	0.85	694				
						695				
						696	E	x		
						708	E			
706	ovoid	irregular, near vertical-sloping	flat	1.05-1.50	1.06	707	E	x		
						711				
						710				
						709				fired clay
						725	E	x		
						726				

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF FORM AND CONTENTS OF PIT GROUP 3 AND TREE THROW HOLE 700

Pit	*plan*	*Sides*	*base*	*width (m.)*	*depth (m.)*	*fills*	*pot*	*animal bones*	*plant remains*	*other finds*
587	ovoid	sloping	rounded	2.00-3.10	0.60	588	M	x		Neolithic pottery
						617				
						589	M	x		
						599				Neolithic pottery
618	ovoid	irregular	flat	1.10-1.80	0.30	619		x	x	Neolithic pottery, worked flint
						620		x		Neolithic pottery, worked flint
688	irregular ovoid	irregular, sloping	irregular	1.10-1.50	0.55	718				
						717				
						686				
						687	E or M	x		
						715				
702	ovoid	irregular, sloping	irregular	1.80-2.10	0.48	705	E or M	x		
						704				
						703				
722	irregular ovoid	sloping	flat	2.30-2.70	0.70	712				
						719				
						720				
729	irregular	sloping	flat	2.00	0.50	713				
730	irregular ovoid	irregular	irregular	1.60-2.00	–	714	E or M	x		
Tree throw hole										
700	reniform	irregular, sloping	irregular	1.00-2.40	0.58	697				
						698				
						699				

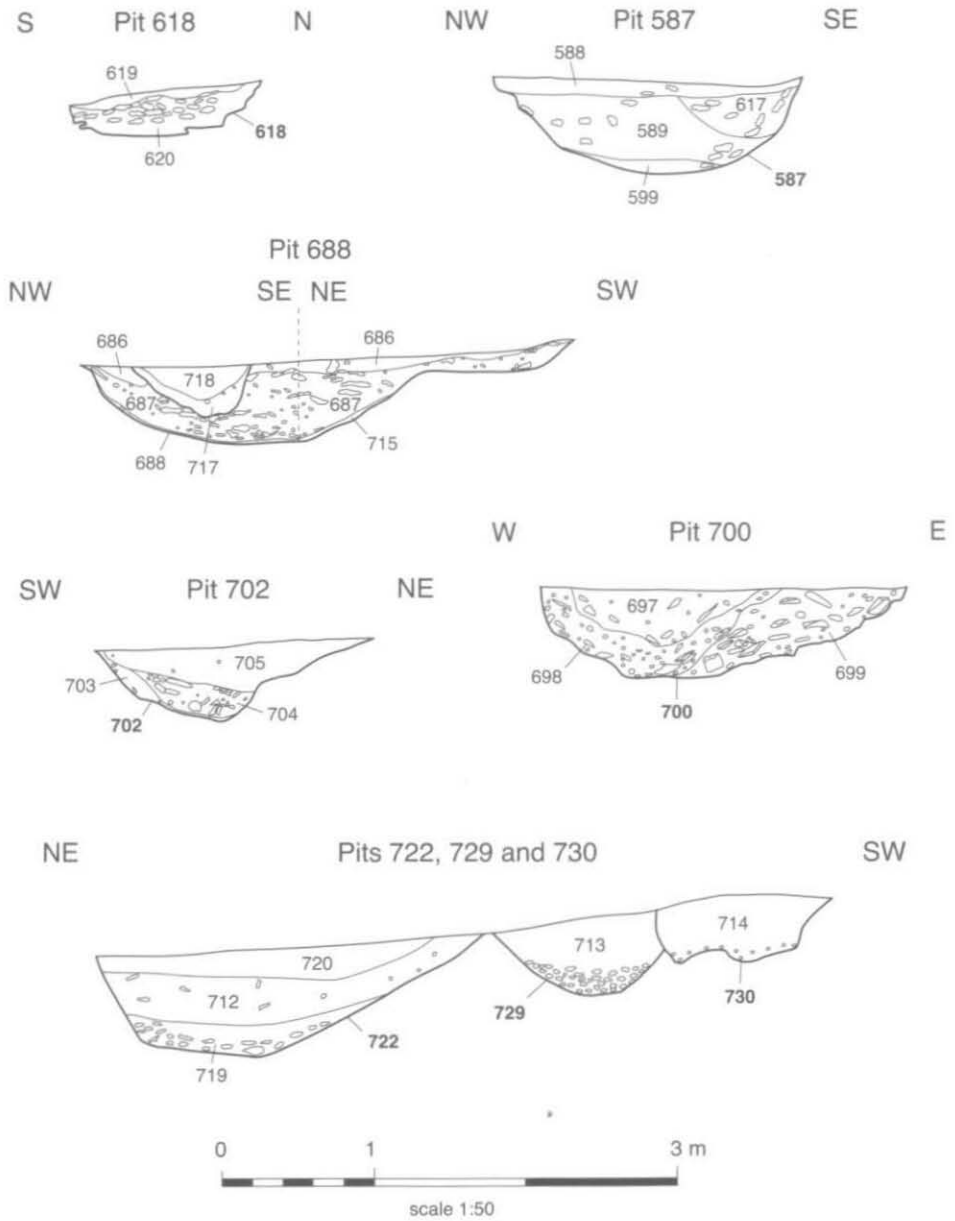

Fig. 8. Pit Group 3: sections.

Pit Group 3: The third group of pits consisted of pits 587, 688, 702, 722, 729 and 730. Pit 618 may also belong to this group, although it is possible that it is much earlier, dating from the Neolithic (see above 'The Neolithic'). Despite the chronological uncertainties, because it shares a number of the features characteristic of this group of pits, pit 618 is included in the following discussion.

The pits in Pit Group 3 appeared to be positioned in a line oriented NE. to SW. (Fig. 3). Pits 722, 729 and 730 lie in a line very close to each other, their edges cutting each other. They were generally shallower than the pits in Group 2, and although their dimensions are generally similar to those of Group 1 they are much less regular in plan and section. Their sides slope irregularly and their bases are uneven (Fig. 8, Table 3). This

irregularity, as well as other features, notably possible recuts into the upper fills of pits 688 and 587, gives them the appearance of tree-throw holes. (A further feature, 700, which also has this characteristic was excavated to the E. of the main group, outside the alignment. It contained no artefacts. Another similar feature nearby was not excavated.)

Unlike Pit Groups 1 and 2 where sheep dominate the faunal remains, in the Group 3 pits cattle are by far the commonest animal represented, with sheep and pig occurring in very small numbers (Table 15). Several of the pits contained indistinctive pottery of early or middle Iron Age date (Table 7). Two of the pits also contained Neolithic pottery, some certainly redeposited, and worked flint, as well as the large sample of hazelnuts shells already discussed above (see above 'The Neolithic'). No other charred plant remains were recovered (Table 19). Pits 722 and 729 contained no finds, although a fragment of a bone comb, found in a section cut across these pits and pit 730 during the evaluation may come from one of them. Samples of molluscs from layer 619 in pit 618 and layer 687 in pit 688 suggest a lightly wooded environment at the time the pit was filled (Table 20). The similarity of the samples of molluscs from these pits suggests that they are contemporary and, since pit 688 seems certainly Iron Age, that pit 618 does not date from the Neolithic. The sample from pit 618, however, also contained shells of Helicellinae molluscs, generally thought to be a medieval introduction, and probably therefore indicating some late disturbance of the upper fill of the pit.

Ditches 732, 612 and 735

Stretches of three further, later ditches, 732, 612 and 735, were observed near the centre of the excavation (Fig. 3). These ditches may have been associated with each other, perhaps defining a boundary or trackway along the line later followed by the Roman trackway. The association between them, however, is not certain, the only connection between them being that they are similarly aligned: 612 running parallel to the stretch of 732 which lies below the trackway, and ditch 735 running in approximately the same direction as the northern stretch of 732.

The first, ditch 732, was observed in three areas of the excavation. One of its terminals was identified at the NE. edge of the excavation just beyond the point at which this ditch cut across ditch 724. A burial, 574, was found cut into this ditch terminal, though it is unclear whether it was deliberately placed in the ditch terminal or is simply an outlier of the group of probably Roman roadside burials found to the S. (see below 'Burials in ditch 629 and related burials'). From this terminal the ditch ran in a SW. direction for approximately 12 m. up to the Roman trackway, and it appeared again below the trackway. The construction of the trackway had disturbed and truncated the upper part of the ditch in this area, and only its lower part was preserved from further disturbance beneath the cobbled surface of the trackway. It was nonetheless clear that beneath the trackway, at a point around 16 m. from its terminal, the ditch turned, roughly at right angles onto a SE.-NW. alignment. It continued for at least a further 12 m. in this direction, being observed again in a further section cut across the trackway (Fig. 10, section 28). It was not, however, observed beyond this point and no trace of it occurred in the NW. part of the site, so it may either continue along the alignment of the trackway, perhaps terminating below it, or turn S.

Two sections were excavated across ditch 732, one where it cut the N. edge of ditch 724, and one where it cut the S. The former, section 45, gives the clearest picture of the ditch (Fig. 9). The ditch was roughly 'V' shaped in section with steeply sloping sides. It measured 1.66 m. wide and 0.96 m. deep. Five layers were distinguished within it (638, 639, 640, 641 and 642) consisting of variations of clay and silty-clay. A single middle Iron Age sherd and a sheep bone, both in layer 639, were the only finds.

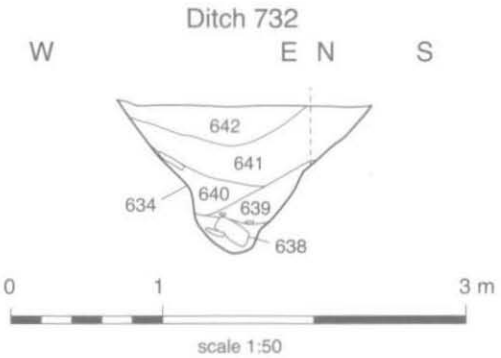

Fig. 9. Ditch 732: section.

Although it clearly predates the Roman trackway, the chronology of the ditch is thus very uncertain. The fact that the Roman trackway may follow the same alignment, however, suggests that the boundary marked by ditch 732 may have maintained its significance, and may not be very much earlier than the trackway.

Ditch 612 runs parallel to the Roman trackway, 1.5 m. to its S., for a distance of approximately 19 m. from its rounded terminal at the E. to the edge of the excavation in the W. It measured 0.54 m. wide and was 0.14 m. deep. Its sides and base were gently rounded (Fig. 10 section 28).

Although a section was cut through ditch 731 at the point at which it should have intersected with ditch 612, no trace of 612 was noted. Whilst 612 clearly does not cut 731 at this point, there was no indication either that it was cut by 731. It is possible instead that there was a gap in 612 at this point which was not clearly observed.

Ditch 735 joined ditch 612 to form a 'T' junction. It ran from this junction southwards, curving slightly, to the S. edge of the excavation in this area. It did not, however, reappear in the area which was excavated to the S. of this. It measured 1.18 m. wide and 0.10 m. deep and was filled by the same deposit (613). No stratigraphic relationship was established between ditches 735 and 612 and it is likely that they are contemporary.

The Roman Period

The Trackway and Ditch 629

The largest feature identified on the site has been interpreted as a Roman trackway (560). It was up to 5 m. wide and ran roughly E.-W. across the middle of the whole site (Figs. 2 and 3). The track was cut to varying depths into the substrate. To the W. it was relatively deep and had a cobbled surface; to the E., it was shallow and used the natural limestone as a surface (Fig. 10). Roman artefacts were retrieved from the cobbled surface in section 44 and from one of the overlying layers in section 28 (Fig. 3). A single sherd of middle Iron Age pottery, probably redeposited, and fragments of fired clay, including briquetage, were also found in the primary fill of the trackway.

A shallow ditch (629) ran roughly parallel to the trackway, between 2 and 3 m. to the N. of it (Figs. 2 and 3). Three burials were found within this ditch. They may be related to a further two burials, already noted, to the N. (see below 'Burials in Ditch 629').

The trackway 560: Three sections were excavated across the trackway (Fig. 3). The first (section 28) was positioned where the trackway cut across ditch 731. It revealed a large ditch, 5.56 m. wide and a maximum of 0.70 m. deep, cut into an area of natural sand (Fig. 10). The sides of this cut sloped gently for around 1.5 m. before falling quite sharply. The flat base was 2.7 m. wide. A cobbled surface (615) consisting of large, rounded pebbles was laid over and embedded within a layer of natural clay (734) on the base of the ditch cut. This surface varied in thickness between 0.06 and 0.18 m. and covered an area 2.20 m. wide. It was slightly cambered. Some of the cobbles located towards the edge of the surface showed signs of wear, possibly from wheel rutting. The cobbled surface was overlain by 670 and 614. Deposit 670 appears to have slumped into the ditch following erosion of its southern edge. Deposit 614 was a thin layer covering the cobbles which may have formed during the use of the trackway. Sealing both these deposits and filling the ditch was 553, a thick layer of clayey-silt 0.50 m. thick, probably deposited when the trackway fell out of use. The stratigraphy within section 44, cut further to the E. near the point at which the trackway cuts ditch 732, resembles that observed within the first.

Section 43, cut across the trackway near the E. edge of the excavation, was very different (Fig. 10). Here the trackway was 3.70 m. wide but only 0.10 m. deep. Its base consisted of the natural limestone bedrock which appears to have formed the surface of the road, removing the need for a cobbled surface. It was filled by 631, a single deposit of reddish-brown clayey-silt.

The parallel ditch 629: Ditch 629 ran roughly parallel to the N. side of the trackway following the same orientation, roughly E.-W. It measured 0.70 m. in width and was 0.35 m. deep (Fig. 10 section 43). The ditch did not appear to be continuous and may have been segmented, although it is possible that in areas where the ditch is not visible there may have been a greater degree of truncation. The ditch was filled by a single deposit (668) a yellowish-brown sandy-silt. There was no evidence to date this ditch, though the fact that it follows the course of the Roman trackway so closely suggests that the two may be roughly contemporary.

Burials in Ditch 629 and Related Burials

Three adult inhumations were found placed at intervals along ditch 629 (Fig. 3). Skeleton 207, an articulated male, probably 40-50 years old lay furthest to the E. Skeleton 659, a female, probably 30-40 years old, lay at the point where ditch 629 cuts across ditch 732. Further to the W., burial 577, a 24-25 year old male, lay near burial 671 at the point where ditch 629 cut across ditch 731. No grave cuts for these burials were identified

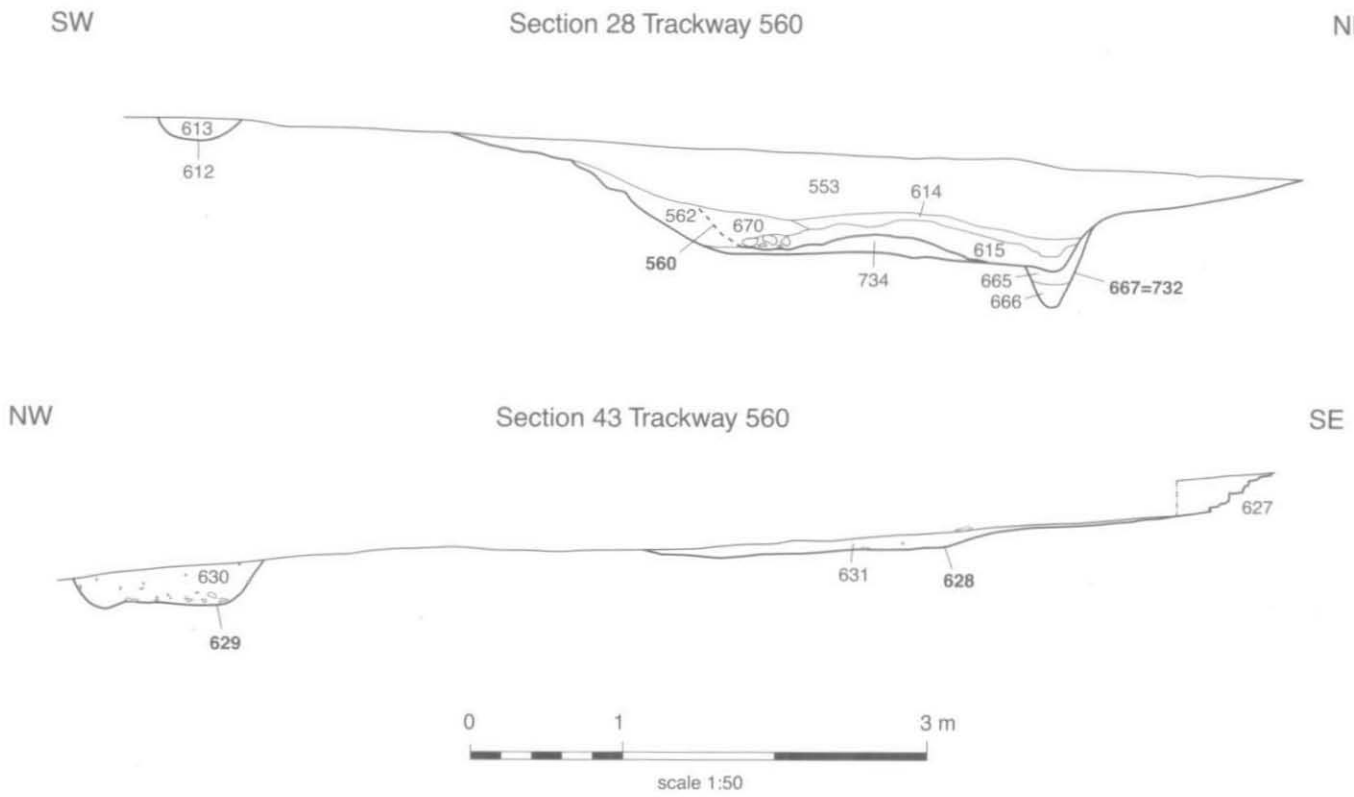

Fig. 10. The Roman trackway: sections.

and it is possible that they were inserted into the ditch when it was only partially filled. Since they all lie within the same linear ditch it is not surprising that they are all aligned roughly E.-W. Two further burials, 671 and 574, which lie outside the ditch to its N. also share this alignment. Burial 671, the inhumation of a single articulated child, was cut into the upper fill of ditch 731 a short distance NW. of burial 577, with which it may have been associated. Burial 574, the inhumation of a probably female adult, lay further to the N., and was cut into the end of ditch 732. All the burials were supine.

The Post-Medieval Period

Post-medieval activity was represented by two boundary ditches: 522 and 736 (Fig. 2). Ditch 522 was located in the extreme W. end of the site; ditch 736 at the E. end. The S. end of ditch 736 appears to have been truncated. Both ditches were aligned N.-S. The latest features identified within the site were wheel ruts orientated NW-SE. in the N. area of the site (Fig. 2). Although undated, the ruts are likely to be of 19th-century date.

Undated Ditch 533

The E. edge of pit 539 within Pit Group 2 and its upper fill were partially truncated by a linear ditch or gully 533 orientated N.-S. (Fig. 7). This ditch measured 0.76 m. wide and only 0.07 m. deep. It was filled by a single undated deposit 532, consisting of a brown sandy-silt. The ditch remains were only partially observed in the S. end of the site and it is likely that significant truncation has resulted in the removal of most of the ditch.

THE ARTEFACTS

THE NEOLITHIC POTTERY by ALISTAIR BARCLAY

Four contexts in two pits or tree-throw holes in Pit Group 3 (588 and 599 in pit 587, and 619 and 620 in pit 618) produced a total of 55 sherds (295 g.) of earlier Neolithic pottery representing a minimum of five vessels. The relationship between this pottery and the pits in which it was found is uncertain (see above, The Neolithic). Whilst it is clear that at least some of the pottery in pit 587 has been redeposited, and the same may be true of pit 618, a stronger case can be made for regarding the latter pit as Neolithic in date.

TABLE 4. QUANTIFICATION OF NEOLITHIC POTTERY BY CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Fabric*	*Quantity*	*Catalogue No.*
Pit 587	588	S1	4, 26g.	1-2
Pit 587	599	S1	26, 121g.	3-4
Pit 618	619	S1	12, 33g.	
Pit 618	620	C1, S1	13, 115g.	5-6
Total			55, 295g.	

Fabrics, Firing and Surface Treatment

Nearly all of the sherds are manufactured from a dense, crushed shell-filled fabric (S1). This type of fabric is very characteristic of early Neolithic ceramics in the Upper Thames area, especially on the gravels, and most notably from sites such as the Abingdon causewayed enclosure.[1] The only exception is a small cup that appears to have been made from unprepared or modified clay. This fabric (C1) contains very fine calcareous matter (some no more than 0.1 mm. in size), some quartz sand, rare large fragments of limestone and possibly fossil shell. Most of the material is fired to an oxidised brown or yellowish-brown, usually with an unoxidised dark grey to black core. Some surfaces may have been smoothed but none had been burnished.

[1] D.F. Williams, 'Petrological Analysis of Pottery', in M. Avery, 'The Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure, Abingdon', in H.J. Case and A.W.R. Whittle (eds.), *Settlement Patterns in the Oxford Region: Excavations at the Abingdon Causewayed Enclosure and Other Sites* (CBA Research Rep. 44, 1982), 33-5.

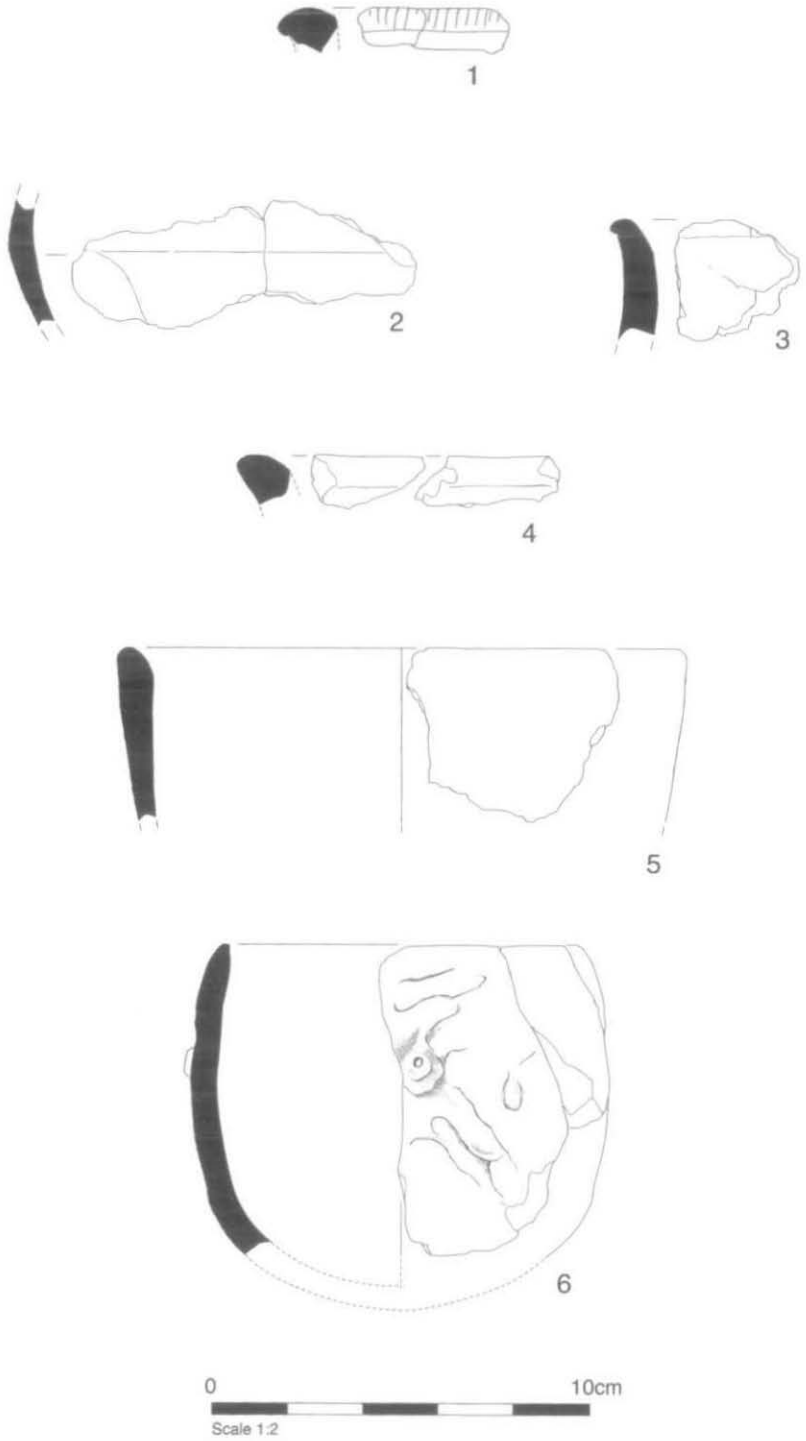

Fig. 11. Neolithic pottery.

Forms and Decoration

The small assemblage contains a range of vessels that includes a number of bowls with either simple (5), rolled (3) or slightly rounded and expanded rims (1 and 4). One rim (1) is decorated with shallow incised lines. There is also a carinated shoulder (2) from a relatively large fineware bowl, which could, from its appearance, belong with either rim 1 or 3. One further vessel is a cup (6) that has unusual decoration. What appears to be a pinched pellet or boss with a central indentation occurs on one side of the vessel near to an old break. Running up to this pellet at an oblique angle are two parallel shallow grooves. The position of these lines in relation to the pellet suggests that they were an intentional part of the decorative scheme. Unfortunately not enough of the vessel survives to show whether, or how, the pattern was repeated around the body.

Discussion

The assemblage can be compared with early Neolithic pottery found on a number of sites in the Cotswolds and from the Upper Thames gravels. The decorated rim can be paralleled with an example found within one of the quarry ditches at the Hazleton North long cairn,[2] while the cup form can be paralleled with one from a chamber deposit at the same site.[3] A cup from the long cairn at Upper Swell is also similar,[4] while bowls with heavier rims come from Eyford[5] and from outside the King's Men portal dolmen at Rollright.[6] However, the cup with its applied pellet is more unusual and certainly without known parallel in the Upper Thames and perhaps in southern England.

Catalogue of Illustrated Sherds (Fig. 11)

1 – Context 588. Fabric S1. Rounded expanded rim (6g) decorated with incised lines. Colour black throughout. Condition fair.
2 – Context 588. Fabric S1. Two refitting shoulder sherds (14g) from a fineware bowl. Colour: ext. yellowish-brown; core grey; int. brown. Condition worn.
3 – Context 599. Fabric S1. Simple slightly rolled rim (8g) from a necked or shouldered bowl. Colour: ext. yellowish-brown; core black; int. yellowish-brown. Condition worn.
4 – Context 599. Fabric S1. Simple rim (24g). Colour: ext. brown; core and int. black. Condition fair.
5 – Context 620. Fabric S1. Simple rim. Colour: ext. yellowish-brown; core grey; int. yellowish-brown. Condition worn.
6 – Context 620. Fabric C1. Refitting sherds from a simple cup (58g) that has been decorated with a pinched pellet and possible shallow grooves. Colour: yellowish-brown throughout with blackened area. Condition worn.

THE LATER PREHISTORIC, ROMAN AND LATER POTTERY by KAYT BROWN

The assemblage of later prehistoric pottery at Steeple Aston consisted of 686 sherds weighing 7527 g. of which 39 sherds (89 g.) were recovered from environmental sample processing. The material includes diagnostic pieces of both early and middle Iron Age date, although some sherds can be dated only to the early or middle Iron Age. In addition, eight Roman sherds were recovered. These included one sherd of Oxford colour-coated ware and an oxidised flagon neck which, although quite abraded, could also be an Oxford product. The remaining Roman sherds are in oxidised and reduced sandy fabrics, presumably of local origin, which can only be assigned a broad Roman date spanning the 1st-4th centuries AD. The post-Roman material includes a single late Saxon or early medieval sherd, the degree of abrasion of which would suggest it is residual. A sherd of Red Earthenware, dated AD 1580-1750, came from the same context. A single sherd of Pearl ware with blue shelled rim decoration datable to the early 19th century was also recovered.

[2] I.F. Smith and T.C. Darvill, 'The Prehistoric Pottery', in A. Saville, *Hazleton North, Gloucestershire, 1979-82: The Excavation of a Neolithic Long Cairn of the Cotswolds-Severn Group* (Eng. Heritage Archaeol. Rep. 13, 1990), 146, Fig. 157:32.
[3] Ibid. Fig. 157:33.
[4] I.A. Kinnes and I.H. Longworth, *Catalogue of the Excavated Prehistoric and Romano-British Material in the Greenwell Collection* (1985), 110.
[5] Ibid. 109.
[6] T.C. 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, Fig. 62:1-3.

The later prehistoric assemblage is in relatively good condition. There is little evidence of leaching and surface preservation is generally good, with both burnishing and carbonised residues surviving. The average sherd weight is 11 g. Twenty-three features produced pottery of which 16 were pit fills (Tables 5-8). Sherds were also recovered from two postholes, a ditch fill, one of the burials and from the 'trackway' surface (Table 8).

TABLE 5. QUANTIFICATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY IN PIT GROUP 1 BY FABRIC AND CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Fabric (number of sherds, weight)*						
		A3	LS2	SA3	S5	AS2	C2	A2
Pit 519	503				52, 444g.	10, 90g.		1, 12g.
	509		1, 14g.	4, 44g.	29, 506g.	9, 100g.		2, 20g.
Pit 549	547				2, 17g.			6, 138g.
	548			11, 200g.	2, 13g.			
Pit 552	540	2, 23g.	2, 5g.		12, 106g.			
	541		1, 2g.					
Pit 565	564		3, 13g.		1, 3g.			
Pit 583	584		2, 13g.	3, 31g.	15, 834g.	1, 27g.		
	609				8, 206g.			
TOTAL		2, 23g.	9, 47g.	18, 275g.	121, 2129g.	20, 217g.		9, 170g.

TABLE 6. QUANTIFICATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY IN PIT GROUP 2 BY FABRIC AND CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Fabric (number of sherds, weight)*						
		A3	LS2	SA3	S5	AS2	C2	A2
Pit 530	528					2, 26g.		
	650					1, 2g.		
Pit 531	527		1, 14g.		14, 70g.			
	647			1, 22g.		1, 24g.		
	648			1, 48g.				
Pit 538	535			8, 12g.	8, 38g.	1, 21g.		
	536				7, 24g.		1, 19g.	
	557			1, 10g.	3, 28g.			
Pit 678	679				1, 12g.			
	681		5, 37g.					
Pit 689	690				24, 72g.		2, 13g.	
	691				39, 550g.			
	692				97, 1643g.			
	701				1, 18g.			
Pit 693	696				11, 46g.			
Pit 706	707				37, 238g.			
	708				8, 39g.			
	725				3, 15g.	2, 17g.		
TOTAL			6, 51g.	11, 92g.	254, 2795g.	6, 88g.	3, 32g.	

TABLE 7. QUANTIFICATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY IN PIT GROUP 3 BY FABRIC AND CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Fabric (number of sherds, weight)*						
		A3	LS2	SA3	S5	AS2	C2	A2
Pit 587	588				32, 79g.			
	589				26, 150g.	7, 10g.		
Pit 688	687				7, 21g.			2, 5g.
Pit 702	705				26, 153g.		11, 61g.	
Pit 730	714						4, 3g.	
TOTAL					91, 403g.	7, 10g.	15, 64g.	2, 5g.

TABLE 8. QUANTIFICATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY IN OTHER CONTEXTS BY FABRIC AND CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Fabric (number of sherds, weight)*						
		A3	LS2	SA3	S5	AS2	C2	A2
Ditch 724	625				3, 3g.			
Posthole 582	639					11, 23g.		
Posthole 558	559		1, 7g.		76, 963g.			
Trackway 560	653				1, 29g.			
Skeleton 577	577					1, 34g.		
TOTAL			1, 7g.		80, 995g.	12, 57g.		

Methodology

The pottery was examined microscopically (x20) to distinguish fabrics, and the quantity of each fabric in each context was quantified by the number of sherds (NOSH) and weight. The pottery was recorded using the system established by the OAU for the recording of Iron Age and Roman sites within Oxfordshire. Vessel numbers were recorded by rim count, and characteristics such as decoration, firing conditions and evidence for use (such as the presence of sooting on the exterior of sherds and internal carbonised residues) were also recorded.

Fabric and Form

The fabrics were recorded by major inclusion types and coarseness. The predominant inclusion types were large coarse fossil shell (S), followed by sand (A), limestone (L) and calcareous grit (C). Some fabrics contained more than one of these inclusion types in combination. Coarseness was recorded on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is fine and 5 coarse. Due to the small size of the assemblage and the relatively small sherd sizes the fabric groupings are quite broad, with a total of seven groups being identified:

S5 A soft and friable fabric. Common coarse shell was the only inclusion visible
AS2 Moderate to common amount of sub-angular quartz grains (0.25-1.0 mm), moderate shell (>1.0 mm)
A2 Common, sub-angular quartz grains (0.25-1.0 mm)
A3 Moderate to common sub-angular quartz grains (0.25-1.0 mm), rare large (>3 mm) gravel. Although no shell is visible in breaks, some leaching is visible on surfaces
SA3 Moderate shell (1-3.0 mm), occasional limestone inclusions
LS2 Moderate to common limestone (1-3.0 mm), occasional sub-angular sand
C2 Common sub-angular calcareous grits (0.25-1.0 mm) and rare shell (1.0-3.0 mm).

All the fabrics are handmade and the majority of the sherds display evidence of irregular firing conditions, with mottled oxidised and reduced patches on the surfaces, indicative of bonfire or clamp firing. Shell tempered fabrics were dominant, although the quantity and size of the shell inclusions varied considerably, with the majority of sherds being quite coarsely tempered. Fabric S5 comprised 81.6% by count, 84.7% by weight, of the pottery.

Only 30 vessels were recorded by rim count, and few of these could be assigned to specific forms with certainty owing to the generally small size of the sherds. A number of characteristically early forms are present, such as two well-defined shoulder sherds and a single body sherd and three rims with fingertip decoration. The two shoulder sherds occur in the same finer fabric as the later material, and the fingertip decorated material is in fabric S5 (coarse shell). Middle Iron Age forms are represented by jars or bowls, particularly round-shouldered jars, with rims of relatively simple form, these being generally upright and squared or flattened and externally thickened. The number of featured sherds was low and very few profiles survived sufficiently to allow the development of a form series. Use of vessels was indicated by a number of sherds which displayed carbonised residues adhering to the interior surface, and a smaller number of sherds which displayed sooting on the exterior.

Decoration and Surface Treatment

Rim sherds from pit fills 539, 557 and 692 displayed fingertipping on the rim and a body-sherd from fill 725 also appeared to have fingertip decoration. Burnishing was present on both the exterior and occasionally on the interior of a number of vessels although confined to those in the finer shelly/sandy fabric, such as the jar/bowls in pits 583 and 519. Wiping of both external and internal surfaces was evident on a number of sherds.

Catalogue of Illustrated Sherds (Fig. 12)

Due to the poor survival of featured sherds, it was not felt that full illustration of the vessels would add any further information to the basic rim profiles in Fig. 12. The profiles thus illustrated are described below:

1 – Context 725. Fabric S5/EIA. Body sherd with fingertip impressions. Oxidised surfaces and reduced core.
2 – Context 725. Fabric S5/EIA. Internally expanded rim. Irregularly fired. Some leaching on surfaces and traces of carbonised residue on exterior surface.
3 – Context 692. Fabric S5/EIA. Externally expanded and flattened rim. Irregularly fired. Faint traces of wiping on exterior.
4 – Context 692. Fabric S5/EIA. Rim with fingertip impressions on top. Irregularly fired.
5 – Context 691. Fabric S5/EIA. Externally expanded rim with oblique fingertip decoration on top of rim. Fabric reduced throughout.
6 – Context 691. Fabric S5/EIA. Internally and externally expanded rim. Irregularly fired.
7 – Context 690. Fabric SA2/EIA-MIA. Plain rim of round bodied jar. Fabric reduced throughout.
8 – Context 681. Fabric AS2/EIA-MIA. Internally expanded rim. Some leaching visible on exterior surface and traces of carbonised residues on interior surface.
9 – Context 681. Fabric AS2/EIA-MIA. Internally expanded rim. Irregularly fired
10 – Context 527. Fabric LS2/MIA? Flattened, slightly everted rim. Irregularly fired.
11 – Context 527. Fabric AS2/MIA? Plain, flattened rim. Reduced surfaces. Some leaching on exterior surface.
12 – Context 648. Fabric SA3/MIA. Slightly thickened, everted rim of round bodied jar. Irregularly fired. Burnished exterior surface.
13 – Context 584. Fabric AS2/MIA. Upright plain rim of round bodies jar/bowl. Irregularly fired. Burnished exterior surface.
14 – Context 540. Fabric S5/MIA. Externally thickened and flattened rim of a shouldered jar/bowl. Irregularly fired with reduced and wiped interior surface with carbonised residues. Leaching on exterior surface.
15 – Context 504. Fabric AS2/MIA. Slightly out-turned rim of round shouldered jar/bowl. Irregularly fired surfaces. Very faint traces of burnishing on exterior surface.
16 – Context 547. Fabric AS2/MIA. Plain flattened rim. Irregularly fired. Burnishing on exterior surface.
17 – Context 548. Fabric A3/MIA. Slightly everted plain rim of round shouldered bowl. Irregularly fired. Wiped interior and burnished exterior surface.
18 – Context 503. Fabric SA3/MIA. Externally thickened and flattened rim of high shouldered vessel, possibly a jar. Irregularly fired. Traces of burnishing on exterior surface.
19 – Context 503. Fabric A3/MIA. Plain upright rim. Oxidised surfaces.
20 – Context 509. Fabric S5/MIA. Slightly everted rim of shouldered jar/bowl. Irregularly fired.
21 – Context 509. Fabric S5/MIA. Flattened rim. Oxidised exterior surface, reduced core and interior surface.

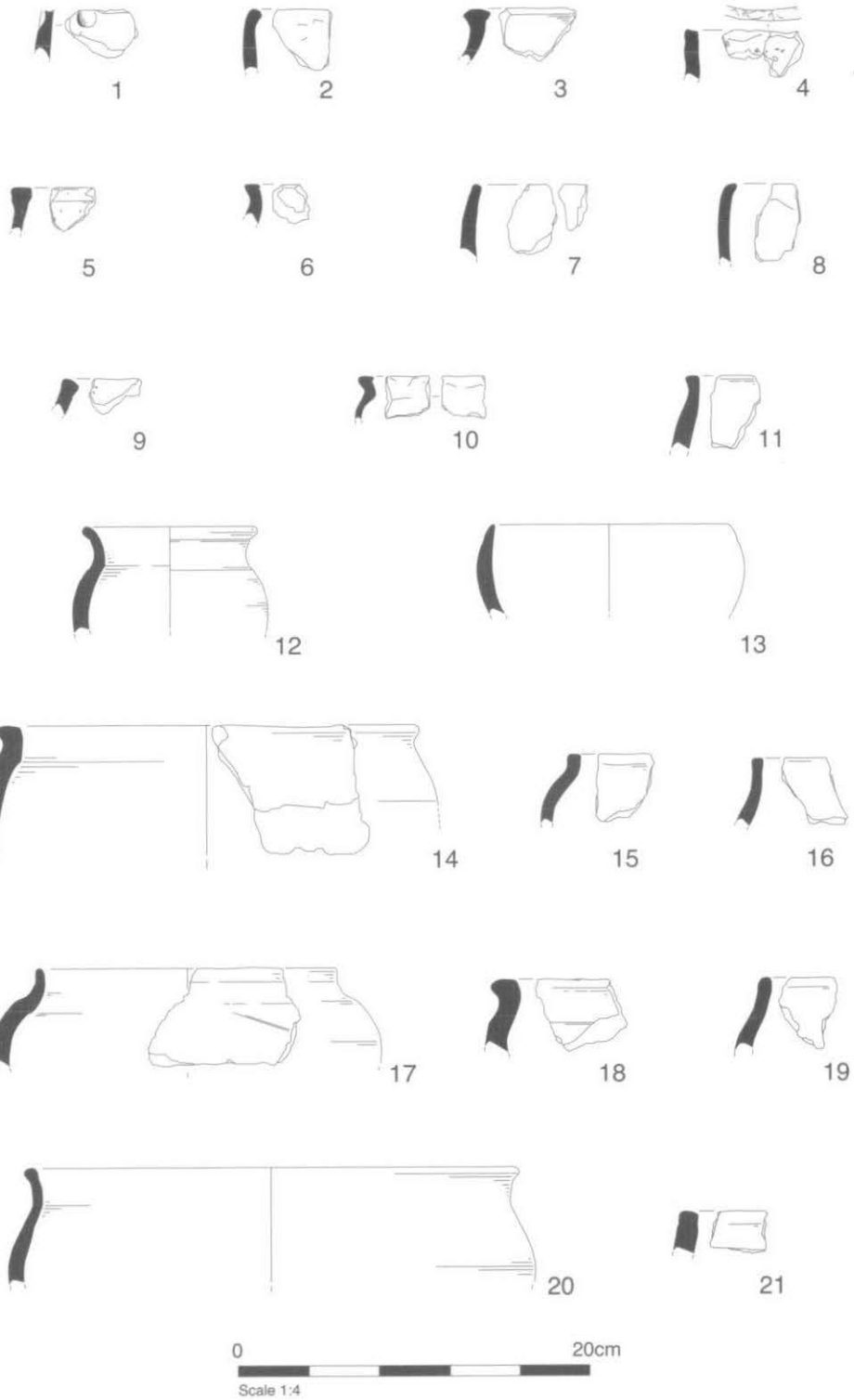

Fig. 12. Iron Age pottery rim profiles.

Discussion

Unfortunately the small size of the assemblage, both overall and at the level of individual features, limited the potential of the material for detailed analysis. Although three spatial groups of Iron Age pits were identified, very limited chronological differentiation was observed between the groups, although a number of broad trends were noted. The Group 1 pits containing pottery (519, 552, 565, 583) produced middle Iron Age forms in a wider range of fabrics than in the other groups (Tables 5-7). Within Pit Group 2, pits 539, 678, 689 and 706 all produced characteristically early Iron Age forms. Pit 531, however, contained a distinctive middle Iron Age form in its secondary fill (648) and early Iron Age sherds in this feature were presumably redeposited. No featured sherds were recovered from pits 530 and 693 or from Pit Group 3. A number of scattered features across the site also produced early forms. Chronological distinctions are based predominantly on form rather than fabric, owing to the similarity of both early and middle Iron Age fabrics. It has been suggested that a minimum of 25-30 sherds is required for a statistical assessment of the dating of features.[7] At Steeple Aston, with only pits 519, 583, 689 and 702 producing more than 25 sherds and, within these, only pits 519 and 689 producing individual contexts with over 25 sherds, no further analysis was considered viable. Moreover, there was no internal phasing, as no relationships between the features could be established, with the exception of pit 565, which cut ditch 731. The pottery derived from the processing of environmental samples comprised the same range of material as that recovered by hand excavation.

Although limited by the small size of the assemblage and the lack of featured sherds, the Steeple Aston assemblage displays the general characteristics of an early- middle Iron Age assemblage from N. of the Thames Valley. The pottery all appears to be local in origin, with all the necessary materials available from the local Jurassic limestone. A high proportion of shelly fabrics was recorded at Rollright where the local limestone is thought to account for the inclusions in 80% of the Iron Age pottery.[8] Coarse shell tempering is generally considered to be a characteristic of the early Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley. However, the homogeneity of fabrics and lack of featured sherds at Steeple Aston makes any distinction by period on fabric criteria very difficult. There is probably an unquantifiable percentage of material that is early Iron Age in date which cannot be defined on the basis of fabrics alone. The presence of characteristic early Iron Age forms such as vessels with sharply defined shoulders, internally and externally expanded rims and decoration such as fingertipping combined with coarse shell-tempering, suggests an early Iron Age date for features 689 and 706 and possibly also pits 538 and 678, all in Pit Group 2. Possibly early Iron Age forms were also found in the fill (559) of posthole 558 where, however, they are likely to have been redeposited. In contrast, the thickened or everted rims, and the occurrence of finer sandy and shell-tempered fabrics in globular bowls, occasionally burnished (alongside the continued use of coarse shell tempered material), would indicate a middle Iron Age date for the remainder of the assemblage. A similar situation was observed at the nearby site of Glympton Park where Booth argues that the use of shell tempering need not automatically indicate an early Iron Age date.[9] This tradition appears to continue in use from the early Iron Age into the middle Iron Age to the north of the Thames Valley, and a comparable situation can be observed in assemblages in south Warwickshire, for example at Nadbury Camp.[10] If this is the case then the Steeple Aston assemblage appears to have more in common with these sites, rather than with other middle Iron Age assemblages within the Upper Thames Valley where there is clearer evidence for the replacement of coarse shell tempering with finer calcareous and sand tempered fabrics, as for example at Ashville,[11] Farmoor,[12] Watkins Farm, Northmoor[13] and Yarnton.[14]

[7] Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group.

[8] Lambrick, op. cit. note 6, 93.[9] P. Booth, 'The Iron Age Pottery', in C. Cropper et al., 'The Excavation of Iron Age and Medieval Features at Glympton Park, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, lxii (1997), 104-7.

[10] C. McArthur, 'Excavations at Nadbury Camp, Warwickshire, SP 390482', *Trans. Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeol. Soc.* 95 (1990), 14.

[11] C.D. De Roche, 'The Iron Age Pottery', in M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-Ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire), 1974-76* (Oxford Archaeol. Unit Rep. 1, CBA Research Rep. 28, 1978), 40-74.

[12] G. Lambrick, 'The Iron Age Pottery', in G. Lambrick and M. Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman Riverside Settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire* (CBA Research Rep. 32, 1979), 35-43.

[13] T.G. Allen, *An Iron Age and Romano-British Enclosed Settlement at Watkins Farm, Northmoor, Oxon.* (Thames Valley Landscapes, The Windrush Valley 1, 1990).

[14] P. Booth 'The Late Iron Age and Roman Pottery', in G. Hey, *Iron Age and Roman Yarnton: the Origins and Development of a Village in the Upper Thames Valley, 700 BC-400 AD* (Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, forthcoming).

THE WORKED FLINT by PHILIPPA BRADLEY

A small assemblage of 86 pieces of worked flint was recovered from the excavations. Its composition is summarised in Table 9. The flint was recorded using standard typological descriptions, further details of which may be found in the site archive.

TABLE 9. SUMMARY OF FLINT ASSEMBLAGE

Flakes	*Blades, blade-like flakes*	*Chips*	*Cores, core fragments*	*Retouched forms*	*Total*
50*	7	21	2 (1 levallois core, 1 core fragment)	6 (2 knives, 3 serrated flakes, 1 end and side scraper)	86

* includes three core rejuvenation flakes (2 face/edge, 1 tablet)

Raw materials

The flint was generally very heavily corticated so that the original colour was not visible. However, where the original colour of the flint could be determined it was a dark grey to black. Cherty inclusions were noted but these do not seem to have affected the overall flaking quality of the material. Cortex, where present, is buff or white and quite thick. It is mostly unabraded. Such characteristics are consistent with a chalk source. Calcium carbonate concretion was noted on several pieces, this presumably reflects the calcareous nature of the underlying gravels.

Description (Fig. 13)

The majority of the flint was recovered from the two fills (619 and 620) in pit 618. The material from this pit consists of debitage and a single serrated flake (Table 10, Fig. 13.1). It did not therefore contain any diagnostic retouched forms which would provide a date for the group. However, a brief study of the attributes of this material does provide some dating evidence. Three blades, three blade-like flakes and two core rejuvenation flakes (face/edge) were recovered. Although both soft and hard hammers were used, the former dominate. Platform edge abrasion was also recorded indicating that overhangs were being removed between knapping episodes.[15] These particular attributes indicate a controlled knapping strategy where platform edge abrasion and platform rejuvenation were being practised. Such technology was employed during the Mesolithic and earlier Neolithic. The only retouched piece, a serrated flake, is of a type which occurs throughout the Mesolithic and Neolithic and is therefore unhelpful for clarifying the dating of this particular group of flint.

TABLE 10. FLINT FROM PIT 618

Context	*Flakes*	*Blades, blade-like flakes*	*Chips*	*Retouched forms*	*Total*
619	26 (includes a core rejuvenation flake - face/edge)	4	19	1(serrated flake)	50
620	4 (includes a core rejuvenation flake - face/edge)	2	-	-	6
TOTAL	30	6	19	1	56

[15] R.N.E. Barton, *Hengistbury Head Dorset, 2, Late Upper Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic Sites* (1992), 270.

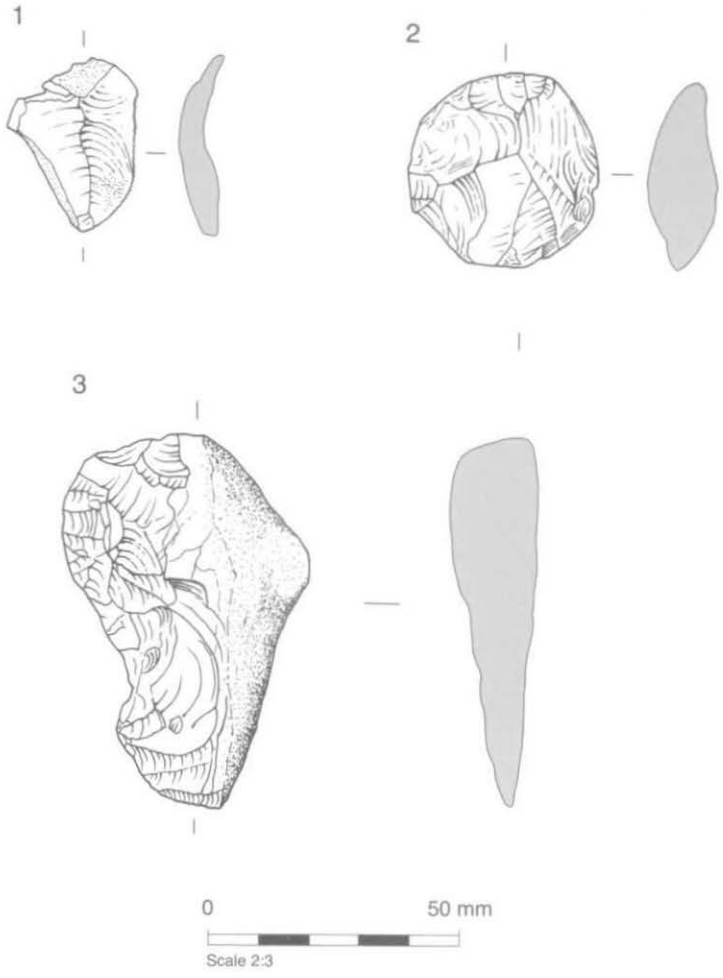

Fig. 13. Worked flint.

However, on balance, if the group was Mesolithic more blades and blade-like flakes should be present and it seems likely that the material is of earlier Neolithic date.

The remaining 30 pieces of flint were recovered from a number of pits, postholes and other contexts. The flint was thinly spread across the site with each context producing only a few pieces. Diagnostic finds are scarce but include two finely flaked knives (contexts 503 and 505, Fig. 13.3) of later Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. Two serrated flakes and an end and side scraper (Fig. 13.2) from contexts 535, 557 and 590 are the only other retouched forms. These artefacts are neatly worked and are likely to be Neolithic in date. The only core recovered from the site is a levallois type from context 550 and is probably of later Neolithic date.[16] Flakes, blades and a core tablet were also recovered (Table 9).

Discussion

Isolated finds of earlier Neolithic material are rare within the region. Holgate summarises much of the available information.[17] Recent excavations at Yarnton, Oxfordshire undertaken by Gill Hey have revealed extensive Neolithic and Bronze Age activity. Here the evidence for earlier Neolithic activity is relatively scant and consists of a few tree-throw holes with Plain Bowl pottery and a few flint finds.[18] At Yarnton flint associated with earlier Neolithic pottery is generally relatively undiagnostic, consisting, for example, of flakes, chips, an end scraper and a serrated flake.[19] However, leaf-shaped arrowheads, axe fragments and other Neolithic finds have been recovered from scatters sealed under alluvium.

THE WORKED BONE ASSEMBLAGE by ANGELA BOYLE (Fig. 14)

Two pieces of worked antler and one of worked bone were recovered during the excavation. The two worked antler fragments (s.f. 28) were found in association with Iron Age pottery in two successive fills (692 and 691) in pit 689 in Pit Group 2. The fragments were conjoining and formed a virtually complete decorated antler comb (Fig. 14). The fragment of worked bone, a rib shaft, was recovered from context 209, in a section cut across pits 722, 729 and 730 during the evaluation, which also contained pottery of middle Iron Age date and animal bone. It was the smoothed end of a comb.

A number of possible functions have been suggested for antler combs. It is possible that they were used as beaters-in in weaving, a purpose for which the study of wear patterns in recent experiments has provided supporting evidence.[20] They may also, however, have been used for working hides or scraping fat from skins. The latter suggestion is based on analogy with Eskimo examples some of which are very similar to the Iron Age examples widely known from Britain.[21] Comparable examples from the Upper Thames Valley are known from a number of sites including Gravelly Guy[22] and Worton Rectory Farm, Yarnton.[23]

[16] Levallois cores are more common amongst later Neolithic assemblages and there is some correlation between their occurrence and that of Grooved Ware: F. Healy, 'The Struck Flint', in S.J. Shennan, F. Healy and I.F. Smith 'The Excavation of a RingDitch at Tye Field, Lawford, Essex', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 142 (1985), 192-3.

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

[18] P. Bradley, 'The Worked Flint', in G. Hey, *Neolithic and Bronze Age Activity at Yarnton, Oxfordshire* (Thames Valley Landscapes, in prep.).

[19] P. Bradley, 'Flint', in G. Hey, 'Yarnton Floodplain 1992: Post-Excavation Assessment' (Oxford Archaeol. Unit, rep. for Eng. Heritage, 1992).

[20] L. Sellwood, 'Textile Manufacture and Objects of Bone and Antler', in B. Cunliffe, *Danebury: an Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire, 2, The Excavations 1969-78: the Finds* (CBA Research Rep. 52, 1984), 375-8.

[21] M.E. Cunnington, *The Early Iron Age Inhabited Site at All Cannings Cross Farm, Wiltshire* (1923), 94-5.

[22] G. Wait et al., 'Iron Age and Roman Small Finds', in G. Lambrick, T. Allen and F. Healy, *Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt: the Development of a Prehistoric and Romano-British Landscape* (Thames Valley Landscapes, forthcoming), Fig. 8.11, sfs 36, 520, 699, 2501.

[23] L. Allen, 'The Bone Objects', in Hey, op. cit. note 14.

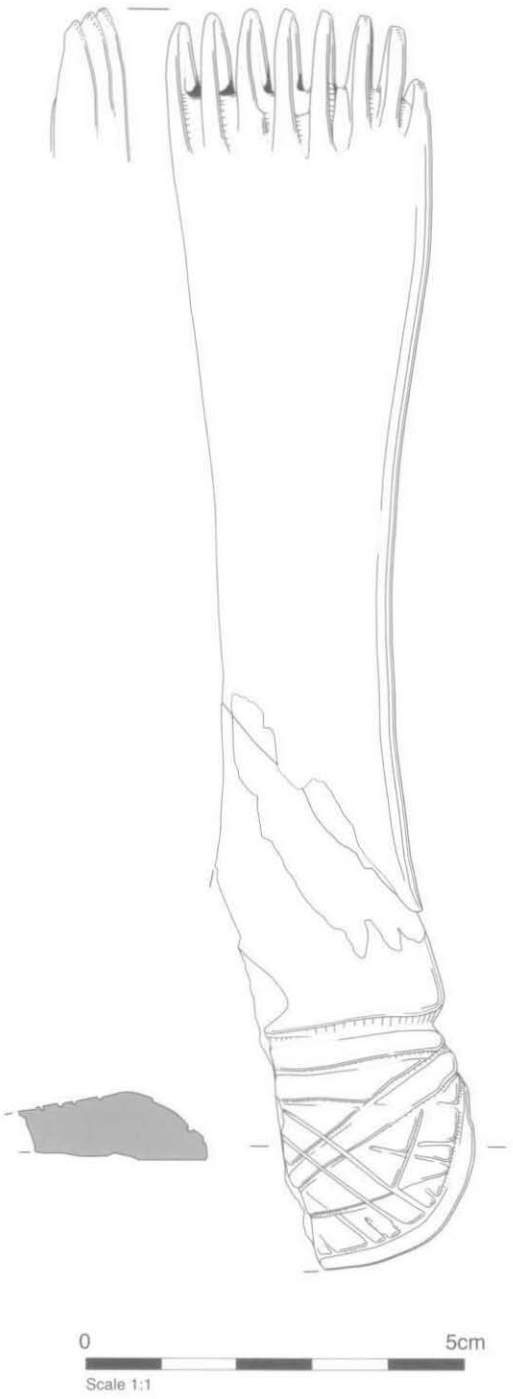

Fig. 14. Worked bone.

Catalogue

1 – Antler comb (s.f. 28, contexts 692 and 691): virtually complete antler comb, two conjoining fragments. Smoothed end is decorated by a series of incised lines (see Fig. 14). Eight teeth are present, though one is slightly damaged. Max. length 165 mm, max. width 44 mm, max. thickness 13 mm.

2 – Bone comb (context 209): smoothed handle end of bone comb. No visible decoration. Max. length 57 mm, max width 26 mm, max thickness 5 mm.

THE WORKED STONE by FIONA ROE

Introduction

The worked stone consists of three pieces. Two of these, a saddle quern and spindlewhorl, are made from Jurassic sandstone which could have been acquired locally, but a rubber was made from Cretaceous greensand which had been brought to the site from the Culham area. The saddle quern and rubber are both from middle Iron Age contexts: the saddle quern from layer 610 in pit 583 in Pit Group 1, and the rubber in context 559 in posthole 558, which was cut into the top of same pit. The spindlewhorl was found in context 503, the upper fill of pit 519, also in Pit Group 1.

Materials

The saddle quern (610) and the spindlewhorl (503) are made from varieties of iron-stained sandstone from the Hook Norton Beds. These strata form part of the Chipping Norton limestone, which is for the main part a typical Cotswold limestone, belonging to the Middle Jurassic Great Oolite, although from Chipping Norton eastwards it turns sandy.[24] The spindlewhorl is made from a red-brown, iron-rich quartz sandstone containing a scatter of slightly larger quartz pebbles, while the saddle quern utilises a well-sorted quartz sandstone which is iron-stained orange-brown. Both varieties of stone can be matched in sandstone seen at Horsehay Quarry, near Duns Tew.[25] The sandstone here is somewhat friable, but harder pieces of dogger were probably selected, and these quite possibly came from boulders lying as surface deposits near to the site.

The rubber fragment (559) is made from an entirely different type of sandstone, a greensand containing rounded, shiny quartz pebbles set in a calcareous matrix. The Lower Greensand is in general very variable, but this distinctive version, with wind polished pebbles that are often iron-stained as well, has been traced to the Culham area.

Discussion

Culham is some 29 km. (18 miles) directly S. of Steeple Aston, but the greensand is likely to have been transported over a longer distance, coming by boat along a circuitous route up the Thames, and then quite possibly some of the way up the river Cherwell. The convenience of transporting this quernstone by river may account for its appearance at a number of sites, none of which are very far from the Thames, both up-and down-river from the source area. Culham greensand has been recorded in use for saddle querns from a further dozen Bronze Age and Iron Age sites. The find at Steeple Aston is the most northerly that has been recorded to date, while the known southern limit for Iron Age greensand querns of this variety is currently defined by sites such as Claydon Pike near Lechlade, Gloucestershire[26] and Blewburton Hill in Berkshire.[27]

The sandstone from the Chipping Norton limestone is less well known than the Culham greensand. There are querns made from the same sandstone from Rainsborough Camp, an early and middle Iron Age hillfort only 10 km. (6.3 miles) NE. of Steeple Aston.[28] Here, for example, similar orange coloured sandstone was

[24] W.J. Arkell, L. Richardson and J. Pringle, 'The Lower Oolites exposed in the Ardley and Fritwell Railway-Cuttings, between Bicester and Banbury, Oxford', *Proc. Geol. Assoc.* 44 (1933), 352.

[25] B.W. Sellwood and W.S. McKerrow, 'Depositional Environments in the Lower Part of the Great Oolite Group of Oxfordshire and North Gloucestershire', *Proc. Geol. Assoc.* 85 (1974), 195.

[26] Corinium Museum, Cirencester.

[27] A.E.P. Collins, 'Excavations on Blewburton Hill 1947', *Berks. Archaeol. Jnl.* 50 (1947), 4-29; A.E.P. Collins, 'Excavations on Blewburton Hill 1948 and 1949', *Berks. Archaeol. Jnl.* 53 (1953), 21-64; Reading Museum.

[28] M. Avery, J.E.G. Sutton and J.W. Banks, 'Rainsborough, Northants, England: Excavations, 1961-5', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 33 (1967), 207-306.

used for a saddle quern,[29] while a spindlewhorl was made from darker red/brown sandstone.[30] A saddle quern of red/brown sandstone from Madmarston Camp is probably made from the same stone.[31] This early and middle Iron Age hillfort is again a local one, lying 15.7 km. (9.8 miles) NW. of Steeple Aston. There were also unworked fragments of this iron sandstone at Bicester Fields Farm, so here too it may have been used for saddle querns.[32]

The saddle quern made from the Hook Norton Beds sandstone (610) was found in the very bottom of pit 583, in an area where numerous cattle and sheep bones were also found (Table 13). There were also plant remains, mainly of cereals (Table 19). The possibility arises that this quern might be part of an intentional deposit. If there was a requirement to give up a quern as some kind of offering, there must also have been a temptation to part only with a second-rate piece of equipment, keeping the best that one had for essential use. The quern in this case is nearly complete, but it is a small one, and is not made from the best type of stone for the job. Another instance of an inferior saddle quern being deposited in a pit occurred at Groundwell West, near Swindon, Wiltshire.[33] In Oxfordshire, another middle Iron Age site with an apparent deliberate deposit is known at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford, where a group of complete saddle querns and rubbers was found in a pit inside a house.[34] The quern at Madmarston Camp was also found in a pit, not far from one of the entrances. Here the quern was associated with animal bones lying on large pieces of cooking pot, all apparently deliberately deposited.[35] Saddle querns were also found in some of the pits with special deposits at Danebury.[36]

In conclusion, this small assemblage of worked stone consists of a fairly typical mixture of local and imported materials. The evidence to date suggests that a small group of sites were making use of a localised source of Jurassic sandstone. At Steeple Aston they were also prepared to devote some effort to the matter of obtaining a preferred quernstone from outside the immediate area. This activity was duplicated at other sites in the Upper Thames Valley, since here the use of Culham greensand appears to have been widespread. It also appears that at Steeple Aston religious beliefs were being practised similar to those recorded from other Iron Age sites in the region, although this apparently did not lead to the deposition of the best available example of a saddle quern.

THE FIRED CLAY AND BRIQUETAGE by KAYT BROWN (Fig. 15)

Fired Clay

The excavations produced 58 fragments of fired clay weighing 313 g. from ten contexts. The material was all fairly abraded and consisted mainly of amorphous fragments in a range of sandy and shelly fabrics. The majority of the material occurred in association with pottery so its approximate date is known, even if its function is not. Fired clay fragments were recovered from a range of pits and no clear distribution patterns are discernible.

Briquetage

A small amount of briquetage comprising 22 fragments weighing 239 g. was examined. A sample of this material was identified by Dr. E.L. Morris. All the material displayed the rough interior surface characteristic of briquetage and was occasionally oxidised with a pale grey core.[37] Two rims were present and the thickness

[29] Ibid. 283 no. 137 and Fig. 29; Ashmolean Museum.

[30] Ibid. 288 no. 168 and Fig. 31; Ashmolean Museum.

[31] P.J. Fowler, 'Excavations at Madmarston Camp, Swalcliffe 1957', *Oxoniensia*, xxv (1960), 3-48; Oxfordshire County Museum, Standlake.

[32] A.M. Cromarty, S. Foreman and P. Murray, 'A Mid-Late Iron Age Enclosed Settlement at Bicester Fields Farm, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, lxiv (1999).

[33] N. Oakey, report on excavations at Groundwell West, Swindon, Wiltshire (Cotswold Archaeol. Trust, forthcoming).

[34] T.G. Allen and M.A. Robinson, *The Prehistoric Landscape and Iron Age Enclosed Settlement at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford, Oxon.* (Thames Valley Landscapes: the Windrush Valley 2, 1993), 79.

[35] Fowler, op. cit. note 31, 10.

[36] C. Poole, 'Study 12: Propitiatory Burials', in B. Cunliffe, *Danebury: an Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire, 6, A Hillfort Community in Perspective* (CBA Research Rep. 102, 1995), fiche 34.

[37] E.L. Morris, 'Prehistoric Salt Distributions: Two Case Studies from Western Britain', *Bull. of Board of Celtic Stud.* 32 (1985), 336-79.

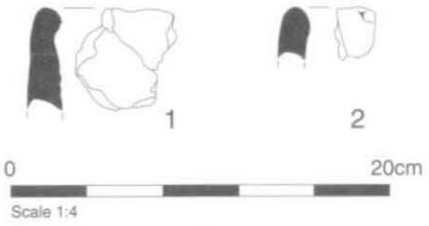

Fig. 15. Briquetage.

of body sherds ranged from 12 to 19 mm. All the material was recovered from six contexts, four of which were pit fills, one the fill of a post-pipe, and the other the primary fill of the trackway ditch. Although twelve fragments lack ceramic associations, the remainder of the briquetage occurs in association with pottery which can be dated to the early and middle Iron Age.

Briquetage is well known from a range of middle and late Iron Age sites in the Upper Thames Valley, including Watkins Farm, Northmoor,[38] Claydon Pike,[39] Mingies Ditch,[40] Gravelly Guy[41] and possibly Bicester Fields.[42] It has, however, only recently been identified in early Iron Age contexts, as, for example, at Gravelly Guy[43] and Yarnton Cresswell Field.[44] At Steeple Aston six fragments were recovered from two pits, 678 and 689, in association with early Iron Age pottery. The remaining material is dated by association with pottery to the middle Iron Age. This small assemblage is therefore important in providing another example of Droitwich briquetage in early Iron Age contexts in the Upper Thames Valley.

THE METALWORK by IAN SCOTT (Fig. 16)

The small assemblage of metalwork from the site consists of one copper alloy and ten iron objects (Table 11). The single copper alloy object is a small tack or pin, 13 mm. long. The ten iron objects include seven tacks or nails, a length of wire and a small length of bar. Both the wire and the bar could also be incomplete nails. The other object is a blade fragment with a sharply curved tip (Fig. 16). The blade appears to be complete but lacking its tang.

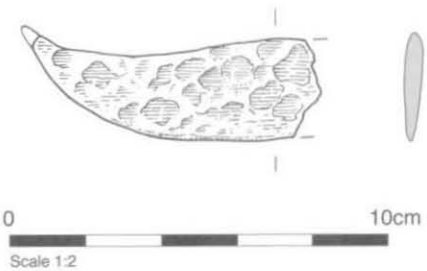

Fig. 16. Metal blade.

38 Allen, op. cit. note 13.
39 E.L. Morris, report on excavations at Claydon Pike, Glos. (Oxford Archaeological Unit, in prep.).
40 T.G. Allen, 'The Fired Clay', in Allen and Robinson, op. cit. note 34, 77.
41 E.L. Morris, 'Briquetage', in Lambrick, Allen and Healy, op. cit. note 22.
42 K. Smith, 'The Fired Clay', in Cromarty, Foreman and Murray, op. cit. note 32.
43 Morris, op. cit. note 41.
44 K. Smith, 'The Fired Clay', in Hey, op. cit. note 14.

TABLE 11. SUMMARY OF METALWORK

Context	*Metal*	*Description*	*Record No.*
527	ca	small nail or pin	ca 001
404	fe	small tack	fe 001
501	fe	nail with T-shaped head	fe 002
559	fe	blade with a strongly curved tip	fe 008
561	fe	flat rectangular head	fe 003
572	fe	rod fragment	fe 004
674	fe	small nail or hobnail	fe 006
680	fe	3 nails, including 2 cut	fe 007
681	fe	fragment of wire	fe 005

THE GLASS by CECILY CROPPER

Two fragments of glass were recovered. One was a light green-tinted chip with gold iridescence from a post-medieval bottle probably of 18th-century date. It was found in the fill (674) of one of the wheel ruts. The other was a slightly green tinted rim from a post-medieval bottle, probably of 19th-century date. It was found in one of the fills (680) of pit 678 in Pit Group 2. The clearly intrusive find indicates some very late disturbance of the contents of this pit.

HUMAN, ANIMAL AND PLANT REMAINS

THE HUMAN BONES by PETER HACKING

The remains of five inhumations, all probably of Roman date, were found on the site: three in ditch 612, one adjacent to the ditch, and the last a short distance to the N. of it. Fragments of human bone of Iron Age date were also recovered from the fills of two pits and a posthole, all lying at the end of ditch 731. Further fragments of bone were also recovered from the fill of this ditch where it was cut by the Roman trackway.

Roman Inhumations from Ditch 629 and nearby

Skeleton 207: A fairly well preserved but mostly broken skeleton. The fragmented skull, mandible, cervical vertebrae and parts of the limbs are present. The thoracic and lumbar vertebrae are fragmentary. Pelvic features and bone measurements of the left radius and ulna indicate a male, *c.* 1.84 m. tall. Seven loose lower right teeth are present including two carious molars, the wear of which suggests an age of at least 40. Two mid thoracic vertebrae show left sided wedge deformity and fusion indicating old compression fractures, and there is a healed fracture at the end of the right fifth metatarsal. There is inflammatory periostitis on the right tibia, and a small osteochondroma (benign tumor) on the right humerus. Considerable degenerative osteophytic lipping of other vertebral bodies, the hip and elbow joints further indicates a mature or elderly man, probably 40-50 years old.

Skeleton 659: The partial remains of a skeleton in fair condition but with most of the ends eroded. The skull and mandible are in good condition. The upper and lower limbs, a few rib pieces and the neural arches of the lumbar vertebrae are also present; the rest of the spine is lost. Pelvic and cranial features, and bone measurements indicate a definitely female individual, 1.60 m. ± 4 cm. tall, probably mature, 30-40 years old. There is no evidence of ante-mortem injury or other pathology. The very minor osteophytic lipping is in keeping with her assessed age.

Skeleton 577: An almost complete, fairly well preserved skeleton. The fragmented skull, mandible, parts of the ribs and sternum, almost complete upper limbs and most of the lower limbs, hands and feet are present. Pelvic and cranial features, and bone measurements all indicate a definite male, *c.* 1.72 m. tall. The medial clavicular and iliac crest epiphyses are incompletely fused. This, and the appearance of the pubic symphysis suggest an age of 24-5 years. Some of the teeth have been lost post-mortem, but those that remain show only minor calculus and no caries. The molar wear confirms an age of *c.* 25 years. The lower canine teeth show some hypoplasia indicating episodes of arrested growth at 3.5 and 5 years. Schmorl's nodes are present in three thoracic and three lumbar vertebral bodies and there is minor lipping of bone promontories, reflecting strong muscular activity. There is no indication of ante-mortem injury or other pathology.

Skeleton 671: Parts of a generally poorly preserved skeleton consisting of the fragmented skull, the mandible, parts of the long bones of upper and lower limbs, a few pieces of rib, and only fragments of vertebrae. The epiphyses are unfused and the degree of dental eruption corresponds to an estimated age of 10 to 12 years. Cribra Orbitalia of grade 3 on the right and grade 2 on the left provide some evidence of anaemia.

Skeleton 574: An almost complete, quite well preserved skeleton consisting of the skull and mandible, teeth, ribs and vertebrae and parts of all the upper and lower limbs, hands and feet. The upper and lower teeth are present, though several have been lost ante-mortem; others show caries and calculus. The dental ware on the remaining molars and some alveolar resorption indicate an age of 35 to 40 years. Minor degenerative lipping of the lumbo-sacral facet joints and the left clavicle supports the age estimate of *c.* 40 years. The cranial and pelvic features available suggest a probable female.

Iron Age Bone Fragments

Skeleton 568: Pieces of the midshafts of long bones up to 120 mm. long, recognisably femur, tibia, fibula, humerus, radius and ulna, were found in pit 663. The individual was adult and, although the gender is uncertain, the small circumference of the bones suggests probably female.

Skeleton 564: Thirteen fragments, including one burnt fragment, of unidentifiable bone, possibly human, was found in the fill of pit 565. It is possible these fragments derive from disturbance of the human remains in pit 663 (see skeleton 568).

Skeleton 580: Six small unidentifiable fragments of bone, possibly human, were found in posthole 582. Again, it is possible these fragments derive from disturbance of the human remains in pits 565 and 663 (see skeletons 564 and 568).

Discussion

The finds of human bone from the site clearly belong to two very different traditions of burial – disarticulated remains in pits in the early and middle Iron Age, and extended inhumations in the Roman period – both of which, however, are widely noted in their respective periods. The change in burial practices thus mirrors the wider changes in the use of the site. The burials are discussed more fully in relation to their context below (see Discussion).

THE ANIMAL BONES by BETHAN CHARLES

A total of 2043 fragments of bone were collected by hand from the site. Of these 1518 fragments were from Iron Age contexts and 81 from possibly Neolithic contexts. All but three of these were from pit fills. The remaining three fragments were from layer 639 in ditch 732. A total of 444 fragments of bone, the majority of which were unidentifiable, were not phased and have not been included in this report. In addition to the hand collected bone 2191 fragments were collected by sieving with meshes of >10mm and 10 – 4mm. Of this total, 1613 fragments were Iron Age and 578 fragments were not phased. Only one fragment of unphased sieved bone was identifiable and this has not been included in the report.

Methodology

The assemblage was recorded on a simple recording sheet which enabled a quick calculation of totals and a rough estimation of the number of individuals in each context to be made. All fragments of bone were counted including elements from the vertebral centrum, ribs and long bone shafts. Neither Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) or Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) methods of quantifying the relative frequency of species were used on the assemblage since both are problematic techniques. NISP is prone to inaccuracies, especially in the quantification of sieved assemblages, due to the fact that it assumes that a single individual animal is represented by each separate bone. The recovery of small bones such as phalanges and loose teeth accentuates this problem by enlarging the total number of individuals. Furthermore allowance is not made for the fact that bones may be related or that some species have more bones that others.[45] Although

[45] This problem of interdependence is highlighted by D.K. Grayson, *Quantitative Zooarchaeology* (1984) and T.P. O'Connor, 'Collecting, Sieving, and Animal Bone Quantification' (in prep.).

MNI is a more selective method of quantification, and its results are more accurate than NISP, it too is problematic and has been shown to give varying results under different circumstances. The method involves finding and recording the most numerous left or right hand components from a skeleton. These components are then paired together in order to produce an estimate of the minimum number of individuals represented. However, matching pairs is extremely subjective and it is not always possible to obtain enough elements from an excavation to compare different species, as is the case at Steeple Aston. Gilbert, Singer and Perkins have shown through their calculations that a sample number of between 60,000 – 70,000 is required to give the same degree of consistency as is given by NISP with much smaller samples.[46]

No attempt was made to determine the sex of the animals because of its dependency on finding the few parts of the skeleton which enable this process. Neither was comparison of the size of selected skeletal elements attempted because of the lack of complete elements in the collection.

An attempt was made to separate the sheep and goat bones – the similarity of which often poses difficulties in identification – using the criteria of Boessneck[47] and Prummel and Frisch (1986).[48] However, since there were no positive identifications of goat in the collection, all caprine bones are listed as sheep.

Ageing was based on tooth eruption and epiphyseal fusion, although the latter is less reliable. Silver's tables were used to give timing of epiphyseal closure for cattle and sheep.[49] Tooth eruption and wear was measured using a combination of the tables of Silver,[50] Payne[51] and Grant.[52] It must be borne in mind that tooth eruption and epiphyseal fusion rates in prehistoric animals may differ slightly from those of modern animals.

Condition of the bone

A large proportion of the bone displayed a high degree of attritional damage from plant roots with characteristic pitting and fine crevices on the surface of the bone. This may indicate that in many cases burial was a slow process since bones found in occupational deposits are more subject to biochemical activity from plant roots and leaching of the bone by soil acidity caused by penetrating rain or flood water.[53] The degree of attrition may also be related to the extent to which the bones were protected after deposition by the archaeological features in which they were deposited, deeper features providing more protection than shallower.[54] The high degree of damage suffered by many of the animal bones from Steeple Aston may have affected not only the proportional representation of each species but also the observed incidence of butchery, gnawing and pathology.

There was some variation in the condition of the bone from differing contexts and an attempt was made to measure the degree of attrition which had affected the bone by grading it on a scale from 1 to 3 (Table 12). Grade 1 indicates that the attritional damage is light, with only a few, or no bones with signs of etching, grade 2 that the surface area is affected to a greater degree with more of the surface damaged, and grade 3 that the majority of bone has suffered a high degree of structural and attritional damage. The degree of attrition in each of the Pit Groups can be related quite straightforwardly to the depth of their pits. The pits in Group 3 are shallowest: they have an average depth of just 0.5 m. and are on average 4.4 times wider than they are deep. All of the bone assemblages in this group had suffered heavy damage, being placed in grade 3. The pits of Group 1 were slightly less shallow, having an average depth of just 0.6 m., and widths on average 3.3 times their depth. Half of the bones in this group were badly damaged and were placed in grade 3, although 38% had suffered only light damage, being placed in grade 1. The pits of Group 2 were the deepest, having an

[46] As cited in O'Connor, op. cit. note 45.

[47] J. Boessneck, 'Osteological Differences in Sheep (*Ovis aries* Linné) and Goat (*Capra hircus* Linné)', in D. Brothwell and E. Higgs (eds.), *Science in Archaeology* (1969), 331-58.

[48] W. Prummel and H.-J. Frisch, 'A Guide for the Distinction of Species, Sex and Body Size in Bones of Sheep and Goat', *Jnl. Archaeol. Science*, 13 (1986), 567-77.

[49] L.A. Silver, 'The Ageing of Domestic Animals', in Brothwell and Higgs, op. cit. note 47, 283-302.

[50] Ibid.

[51] S. Payne, 'Kill-off Patterns in Sheep and Goats: the Mandibles from Asvan Kale', *Anatolian Studies*, 23 (1973), 281-303.

[52] A. Grant, 'The Use of Tooth Wear as a Guide to the Age of Domestic Ungulates', in B. Wilson, C. Grigson and S. Payne (eds.), *Ageing and Sexing Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites* (BAR Brit. Ser. 109, 1982), 91-108.

[53] R. Wilson and D. Bramwell, 'Bone and Shell Evidence', in Allen and Robinson, op. cit. note 34, 168-9.

[54] E.g. J.M. Maltby, 'The Animal Bones', in P.J. Fasham, *The Prehistoric Settlement at Winnall Down, Winchester: Excavations of MARC3 Site R17 in 1976 and 1977* (Hants Field Club and Archaeol. Soc. Monograph 2; M3 Archaeological Rescue Committee Rep. 8, 1995), 97-112.

TABLE 12. DEGREE OF ATTRITIONAL DAMAGE TO ANIMAL BONES IN EACH CONTEXT

Complex	*Pit*	*Degree of attritional damage*		
		1 (*least*)	2	3 (*most*)
Pit Group 1	519	503, 509		
	549	548		547
	552			540
	565			564
	583		609	584
TOTAL (*no.*, %)		3, 38%	1, 13%	4, 50%
Pit Group 2	530		650	
	531	648	527	647
	538			536
	539	535	557	
	678		679, 681	
	689	691	701	690, 692
	693			696
	706	725	707	
TOTAL (*no.*, %)		4, 25%	7, 44%	5, 31%
Pit Group 3	587			588, 589
	618			619, 620
	688			687
	702			705
	730			714
TOTAL (*no.*, %)				7, 100%
Posthole 558		559		
Ditch 732			639	

average depth of 0.9 m. and widths on average only 1.8 times their depth. Less than a third of the bones in this group were badly damaged. Most were placed in grade 2. It therefore seems likely that much of the damage to the bones can be attributed to post-depositional factors. (It should be noted, however, that some at least of the bones in pits 587 and 618 in Pit Group 3 may be Neolithic rather than Iron Age in date, and thus would be more likely to have suffered post-depositional damage.)

Only eight fragments of bone had clear signs of carnivorous damage, although most of the traces would have been removed by post-depositional damage. Most were on sheep long bones found in contexts 503 and 509, both in pit 519 in Pit Group 1.

Signs of butchery were also rare, occurring on only 6% of the identified bone. Both knife marks and signs of the use of heavy chopping instruments were recorded. The majority of knife marks were again found on sheep bones. Nearly all of the fragments of bone with butchery marks were radii, humerii and the tibia, indicating filleting. Knife marks were also identified on an astragalus and mandible. The majority of chop marks were found on cattle long bones. In addition, possible saw-marks were found on an innominate bone.

Only a small proportion of the bone was burnt: roughly 5% of the hand collected bone, and 14% of the sieved bone. Most of the burnt bones could not be identified, but those amongst the hand collected bone which could tended to be sheep feet bones and cattle ribs. Two of the burnt sieved bones were identified as being a sheep rib and a sheep metapodial condyle. The largest concentrations of burnt bone were in contexts 503 in pit 519, 548 in pit 549 (both in Pit Group 1), in context 557 in pit 539 (Pit Group 2), context 619 in pit 618 (Pit Group 3), possibly Neolithic in date, and in context 559, the fill of posthole 558.

Perhaps as a result of their poor condition no indication of pathological changes were observed on any of the bones.

Species representation

Overall, sheep dominate the assemblage of hand collected bone, making up 59% of the identifiable fragments. Cattle are the only other common species making up 37% (including those, possibly Neolithic in date, from pit 618). Pig forms just 3% of the assemblage. The other species are represented in very small quantities: there were a few fragments of horse bone, mainly tooth and skull bone fragments; dog was represented by a scapula fragment, and roe deer by a tibia fragment.

As with the hand collected bone, a high proportion of the sieved bone was unidentifiable, almost certainly because of the fragmentary condition of a high proportion of the bone in the assemblage. However, almost 80% of the sieved bone which could be identified was from sheep and cattle. In addition to the main domestic species there were also a few fragments of small rodent bones. Two pig teeth were also collected in the sample. Post-depositional processes, however, are likely to have affected the proportional representation of each species. Pig bones, for example, are more porous and fragile than those of sheep and cattle and are less likely to survive. Pig was represented almost entirely by teeth demonstrating the poor preservation of other skeletal elements.

The age of animals at death may also have influenced the proportional representation of species. Pigs were generally culled when young since they were primarily valued as a source of meat, fat and skin. It was not economic to keep the animals until full maturity. Their immature bones would be less likely to survive than those of older animals. Table 16 shows that the majority of cattle appear to have been mature. However, due to the poor condition of the majority of the bones it is possible that many of the bones of immature individuals have not survived.

Similar factors may have affected the representation of sheep. The evidence provided by epiphyseal fusion suggests that, as at many other Iron Age sites such as Mingies Ditch,[55] a large proportion of the sheep were killed at an early age (Table 17). As Wilson proposes, it is probable that the majority of immature animals killed were young rams or wethers.[56] Maintenance of the flock would then be maintained through the survival of the majority of ewes and a small number of rams or wethers. The more reliable evidence from tooth eruption, however, suggests that a considerable proportion of the sheep were killed at an older age. The number of fragments from immature sheep, however, may be affected by the poor condition of the bone on the site and may not have survived as well as that of older animals. A further indication that sheep may be under-represented in the assemblage is provided by the fact that the high number of skeletal elements from sheep are predominantly from the better preserved contexts whilst the contexts with badly preserved fragments are almost solely dominated by cattle bones. This pattern, however, may also be explained by the preferential deposition of the bones of differing species in differing parts of the site.

The fact that cattle bone predominates in pit 618, as in all the other pits in Pit Group 3, is one argument for dating this feature to the Iron Age rather than to the Neolithic. It is, however, noticeable that cattle bones are no more common than pig in the upper fill (619) of this pit. Needless to say, the sample of possibly Neolithic bones is too small to provide any real insights into the subsistence economy of the site during that period.

Spatial variation in the deposition of animal bones

The differences in the frequency with which the two most common species, sheep and cow, occur in the three groups of pits is very marked (Tables 13-15). Sheep make up 78% (136 fragments) of the bone from Pit Group 1 and 71% (95 fragments) from Pit Group 2, but only 6% (7 fragments) from Pit Group 3. In contrast, cattle account for 87% (110 fragments) of the bone from Pit Group 3 but only 19% (33 fragments) and 23% (31 fragments) from Pit Groups 1 and 2 respectively. This pattern hints at the deliberate deposition of the remains of different species in different parts of the site – predominantly cattle in the pit alignment in the middle of the site, and predominantly sheep in the pit groups on either side.

[55] Wilson and Bramwell, op. cit. note 53.
[56] Ibid.

TABLE 13. NUMBERS OF HAND COLLECTED ANIMAL BONES IN PIT GROUP 1 BY CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Horse*	*Pig*	*Roe Deer*	*Dog*	*Unidentified*
Pit 519	503	5	30	1	1			99
	509	4	58					57
Pit 549	547	2	7					18
	548	3	25			1		22
Pit 552	540	3						33
Pit 565	564	1						4
Pit 583	584	14	7				1	90
	609	1	9					10
TOTAL		33	136	1	1	1	1	333
% of identified bone		19%	78%	1%	1%	1%	1%	
Posthole 582	559	4	46					83

TABLE 14. NUMBERS OF HAND COLLECTED ANIMAL BONES IN PIT GROUP 2 BY CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Horse*	*Pig*	*Unidentified*
Pit 530	650	2	2	1		57
Pit 531	527	1	11		2	23
	647	1				8
	648	2	6			4
Pit 538	536	1	1			9
Pit 539	535	4	15		2	54
	557	8	11			44
Pit 678	679		18			14
	681	3	15		1	40
Pit 689	690	1	3			11
	691		3	1		3
	692	4	2			4
	701	2	3			6
Pit 693	696	1	1		1	5
Pit 706	707		2			7
	725	1	2			
TOTAL		31	95	2	6	289
% of identified bone		23%	71%	2%	5%	

TABLE 15. NUMBERS OF HAND COLLECTED ANIMAL BONES IN PIT GROUP 3 BY CONTEXT

Feature	*Context*	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Pig*	*Unidentified*
Pit 688	687	16	3	2	39
	687				19
Pit 702	705	16			33
	705	10			5
	705	4	1		77
Pit 730	714	14		1	23
Pit 587	588	4			26
	589	9	1	2	110
	589	25	1		12
Pit 618	619	3		3	44
	620	9	1	1	20
TOTAL		110	7	9	408
% of identified bone		87%	6%	7%	

Discussion

There are several possible explanations for this patterning in the distribution of bones. In part the pattern may be due to differential preservation of the bones of differing species in contexts of differing depth. It has already been noted that here, as at other sites,[57] cattle bones occur more frequently in the shallower contexts (Pit Group 3) where bone preservation is worse, whilst sheep bones predominate in the deeper contexts (Pit Groups 1 and 2) where preservation was better. The differences in the frequency with which sheep and cattle occur in the three pit groups, however, are much more marked than they are at other sites where such interpretations have been put forward.[58] It has also been noted that cattle bones are generally better represented near the peripheries of Iron Age sites, whilst sheep are more common near the centre.[59] Such a pattern may arise because cows and sheep were butchered in differing parts of the site, and the waste generated was deposited nearby, or because the larger quantities of waste derived from cow carcasses were simply deposited further from habitations at the edge of the site than were the remains of sheep. It is also possible that the different patterns of deposition arise because of the different values or meanings of the remains from differing species, cattle perhaps being used for feasting or sacrifice, whilst sheep formed a more quotidian kind of food. The very marked, albeit not absolute differences in the location of deposition of sheep and cattle bones may be best explained in these terms.

Although overall sheep clearly dominate the assemblage of Iron Age bones, as is the case at other sites in the region such as Farmoor,[60] Abingdon[61] and Mingies Ditch,[62] the existence of spatial distinctions in the deposition of animal bones highlights the problems of making inferences about the proportions of each species which were exploited. The evidence from Steeple Aston does, however, provide some evidence for the pastoral economy of the site.

The age of death of the sheep indicates that a sizeable proportion were kept until fully mature, probably for their fleece. They may also have been milked, although the evidence for this is not conclusive. The fact that the majority of the sheep were nonetheless killed at a young age may indicate that farming was in fact focused upon arable production, allowing the premature killing of the young sheep.

Since it was not possible to sex the cattle, and there was no evidence of pathological changes that might indicate hard worked animals, there is no clear evidence as to whether cows were being kept for milking purposes or whether oxen were being kept for draught purposes. The age of the cattle does imply that

[57] E.g. Maltby, op. cit. note 54.

[58] Ibid.

[59] B. Wilson, *Spatial Patterning among Animal Bones in Settlement Archaeology: an English Exploration* (BAR Brit. Ser. 251, 1996).

[60] R. Wilson and D. Bramwell, 'The Vertebrates', in Lambrick and Robinson, op. cit. note 12.

[61] B. Wilson, 'The Animal Bones', in Parrington, op. cit. note 11, 110-38.

[62] Wilson and Bramwell, op. cit. note 53.

TABLE 16. EPIPHYSEAL FUSION IN CATTLE FROM HAND COLLECTED BONE

	Fused	*Unfused*
12–18 months		
Humerus distal	2	-
Radius proximal	2	-
2–2.5 years		
Metacarpal distal	-	-
Tibia distal	4	-
2.25–3 years		
Metatarsal distal	-	-
3.5 years		
Femur proximal	1	-
3.5–4 years		
Radius distal	2	-
Humerus proximal	-	-
Femur distal	2	-
Tibia proximal	1	-

TABLE 17. EPIPHYSEAL FUSION IN SHEEP FROM HAND COLLECTED BONE

	Fused	*Unfused*
10 months		
Humerus distal	2	-
Radius proximal	3	-
18–24 months		
Metacarpal distal	-	-
1.5–2 years		
Tibia distal	4	2
20–28 months		
Metatarsal distal	2	2
2.5–3 years		
Femur proximal	-	2
3 years		
Radius distal	-	-
3–3.5 years		
Humerus proximal	-	-
Femur distal	-	-
Tibia proximal	-	-

TABLE 18. TOOTH ERUPTION OF SHEEP MANDIBLES

Age	*0–6 weeks*	*6 months*	*18 months*	*3–4 years*
Number of Mandibles	4	7	1	10

enough adults were present to maintain herd numbers, and it is likely that the animals were used for ploughing as well as for transport. There are no juvenile cattle bones in the collection implying that it is unlikely that the cattle were being milked on a large scale. However, due to the poor preservation of many of the bones the juvenile fragments may not have survived.

There is very little evidence regarding the pigs found on the site due to the fact that their bones were so poorly preserved that only teeth remained. Similarly, there was very little evidence of horses on the site. It is not certain whether the few that were represented were slaughtered since none had clear signs of butchery on the bones. The lack of other smaller species on the site is also probably the result of the poor preservation of the bones. The single fragment of roe deer indicates that hunting was practised on a small scale and contributed to the diet of the site.

THE CHARRED PLANT REMAINS by RUTH PELLING

During the excavations soil samples were taken from the pits, postholes, the possible enclosure ditches 724 and 731, and ditch 629. Sample sizes ranged from 15 to 100 litres but were generally 40 litres. The samples offer the opportunity to examine material from an area of Oxfordshire not as intensively studied as other parts of the county, and to examine the similarities between the Upper Thames Valley and the River Cherwell.

Methods

A total of 29 samples were processed by bulk water flotation onto a 250μm mesh and were submitted for analysis. Due to limited funding the analysis was restricted to a detailed assessment. Each flot was carefully scanned under a binocular microscope at x10 and x20 magnification down to 500μm. Any charred seeds or chaff noted were provisionally identified and an approximation of abundance was made. Fragments of charcoal were fractured and examined in transverse section and provisional identifications made.

Results

Charred seeds and chaff were present in 25 samples. Of those samples, thirteen contained a total number of items greater than 20. The composition of these thirteen samples is shown in Table 19. The remains are quantified on a four point scale: + = 1-10; ++ = 11-50, +++ = 51-100 items and 100+ items. Nomenclature and taphonomic order follows Clapham, Tutin and Moore.[63] Samples which contain useful quantities of material were largely derived from the pits but also included three samples from postholes. There was a greater density of remains from the two outer pits (Groups 1 and 2), especially from Pit Group 1. Samples taken from the ditches and inhumations produced very occasional cereal grains only.

Exceptionally, sample 26, from layer 619 in pit 618, contains fragments of nut shell of *Corylus avellana* (hazel) as well as a couple of grains of *Triticum spelta* (spelt wheat). This pit also contained Neolithic pottery and most of the worked flint found on the site, probably also of earlier Neolithic date. Hazelnut shells, too, are more characteristic of the Neolithic than the Iron Age, and thus lend support to the idea that this feature is Neolithic in date. However, the presence of shells of Helicellinae molluscs, generally thought to be a medieval introduction, suggests that this layer has suffered from some much later disturbance.

The charred assemblages are dominated by cereal chaff, notably the glume bases of *Triticum spelta* (spelt wheat) and indeterminate hulled *Triticum* sp. (emmer or spelt wheat). Cereal grain of spelt wheat and indeterminate hulled wheat were represented in all grain assemblages. No positive identification of *Triticum dicoccum* (emmer wheat) were made and it seems likely that emmer was absent from the assemblages. Spelt wheat is clearly the principal cereal represented. *Hordeum vulgare* (hulled barley) is represented by grain and rachis internodes. Occasional asymmetrical grains indicate the presence of six-row barley. Occasional grain and rachis nodes of free-threshing *Triticum* sp. may have been growing as rogues within the spelt wheat crop or may be a more recent contaminant of the sample.

The weed assemblages consist largely of arable species. Large quantities of *Bromus* subsect. *Eubromus* (brome grass) were present in several samples and may have been deliberately harvested with the crops. Some evidence of winter sowing is provided by the frequent seeds of *Galium aperine* (goosegrass), an autumn and winter germinating species. Occasional seeds of *Montia fontana* (blinks), *Eleocharis palustris* (common spike rush) and *Carex* sp. (sedges) may be the result of agricultural activity on the wetter ground towards or on the flood plain. Seeds of leguminous species are also fairly common. They are often taken to be an indicator of declining soil fertility and reduction in nitrogen levels.

[63] A.R. Clapham, T.G. Tutin and D.M. Moore, *Flora of the British Isles* (3rd edn. 1989).

TABLE 19. COMPOSITION OF SAMPLES OF CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

(+ = 1-10; ++ = 11-50; +++ = 51-100 items and 100+ items)

Species	Feature Complex	Pit Group 1						Pit Group 2			Pit Group 3	Postholes		
	Feature	519	519	549	552	565	583	539	539	678	618	558	558	582
	Context	503	509	548	541	567	609	535	557	679	619	559	559	580
	Sample	3	4	6	8	17	23	7	9	65	26	13	19	18
	Volume (litres)	40	40	40	30	-	35	40	40	60	40	40	40	-
Triticum spelta	Spelt wheat grain	++	-	++	++	+	++	+	+	+	+	++	++	++
Triticum spelta	Spelt wheat glume base	++	++	150+	++	++	++	-	+	+	-	+++	100+	100+
Triticum dicoccum /spelta	Emmer/Spelt wheat grain	++	+	++	++	+	-	+	+	+	-	++	++	+
Triticum dicoccum /spelta	Emmer/Spelt wheat glume base	+++	+++	250+	+++	+	+++	+	+	-	-	100+	150+	+++
Triticum sp.	Free-threshing wheat grain	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Triticum sp.	Free-threshing rachis internode	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Triticum sp.	Wheat grain	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	+
Hordeum vulgare	Barley, hulled assymetrical grain	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hordeum sp.	Barley, hulled grain	-	-	++	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	++	+
Hordeum sp.	Barley grain	+	+	-	++	-	+	++	-	-	-	+	-	-
Hordeum sp.	Barley rachis	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Cerealia indet	Grain		+	-	++	-	+	++	+	+	-	+	-	++
Corylus avellana	Hazel nut shell fragments	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+++	-	+	-
Fumaria sp.	Fumitory	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Silene sp.	Campion/Catchfly	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stellaria media type	Chickweed	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Montia fontana subsp. *fontana*	Blinks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
Chenopodium sp.	Fat Hen/Goosefoot	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Atriplex sp.	Orache	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vicia/Lathyrus sp.	Vetch/Vetchling	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	-
Leguminosae	legume, small seeded	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Rumex sp.	Docks	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
Polygonum aviculare	Knotgrass	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Plantago lanceolata/media	Plantago	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Galium aperine	Goosegrass/Cleavers	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+
Eleocharis palustris	Common Spike Rush	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
Carex sp.	Sedges	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-
Bromus subsect Eubromus	Brome grass	++	-	+++	++	+	++	-	+	-	-	++	++	++
Arrhenatherum sp.	False Oat-Grass, tuber	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Gramineae	Grass, large seeded	+		-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-
Gramineae	Grass, small seeded	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
Quercus sp.	Oak charcoal	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Pomoideae	Apple/Pear/Hawthorn etc. charcoal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
Corylus/Alnus sp.	Hazel/Alder	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-

Discussion

The high percentage of glume bases and arable weed seeds suggests that the assemblages consist of cereal processing debris, possibly used as fuel and redeposited as refuse in storage pits and other features. Some degree of sieving seems to have taken place removing the small weed seeds. As is the case in the Upper Thames Valley and generally in southern Britain, spelt wheat was the principal cereal cultivated, hulled barley forming a secondary crop. Brome grass may have been collected as an additional fodder or food crop. Assemblages such as this are typical of small or medium scale producer sites on the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley as, for example, at Ashville, Abingdon, within which a certain amount of processing of cereals was conducted.[64] This is in contrast to sites on the flood plain such as Farmoor which tend to be more pastorally based.[65]

The weed assemblages suggest a fairly standard mature Iron Age weed flora. The presence of *Galium aperine* suggests an autumn sown wheat, as is repeatedly the case in Iron Age sites in Oxfordshire. An increase in the indicators of marginal floodplain soils and depleting soil fertility on many Thames gravels sites suggests an increasing intensity of cultivation. The occurrence of marshy species and legumes suggests this may also be the pattern in the Steeple Aston area.

Generally the assemblages suggest that the arable economy of the site, situated within the Cherwell Valley, is broadly similar to comparable sites on the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley.

THE MOLLUSCS by MARK ROBINSON

Since the site lay on calcareous sands and clays which overlay Jurassic limestone there was the potential for mollusc shells to survive. Sequences of samples for molluscs were therefore taken from the ditches. Flots were also available from samples from the Iron Age pits which have been floated to recover charred plant remains.

Methods and results

Samples of 1.5 kg. from the columns taken from the ditches were floated onto a 0.5 mm. mesh and were dried. These flots were scanned and the molluscs present were identified. Shells were sparse in the flots from the pits but the four richest samples were also scanned. The results are listed in Table 20 (excluding *Cecilioides acicula*, a species which burrows deeply).

Interpretation

The molluscan assemblages from a depth of 0.20 to 0.70 m. (the bottom) in the enclosure ditch (724) were dominated by shade-loving species, particularly *Carychium* cf. *tridentatum*, *Discus rotundants*, various Zonitidae and *Clausilia bidentata*. Two samples contained examples of *Ena montana*, a species which now tends to be indicative of old woodland. The only open-country species was *Vallonia costata*. While it can maintain a slight presence in woodland, the numbers in sample 49, from a depth of 0.55 to 0.60 m., were higher than would be expected under conditions of closed woodland.

Many shade-loving molluscs can thrive in the bottoms of ditches which support tall herbaceous vegetation. However, the complete absence of open-country species apart from *V. costata* and the occurrence of *E. montana* suggests that the enclosure was set amidst woodland or had rapidly been colonised by scrub following construction. The higher incidence of *V. costata* in sample 49 probably reflected some temporary disturbance to the tree or shrub cover but thereafter numbers of *V. costata* declined, suggesting regeneration.

The shade-loving species were largely absent from the top 0.20 m. of the enclosure ditch and another open-country species, *Vallonia excentrica*, predominated. These sediments would have accumulated after the site had been fully cleared.

The linear ditch (629) and one of the graves (577) in it belonged to an open phase on the site. Shells of *V. excentrica* were the most numerous shells in the ditch away from the grave (sample 37), below the inhumation (sample 36) and above the inhumation (sample 14). Other open-country species included *Vertigo pygmaea*, *Pupilla muscorum* and *Helicella itala*.

The molluscan assemblage from the pits fell into two categories. All contained the same open-country species as the linear ditch and the grave. In samples 26 and 67 they occurred in the company of shade-loving species including *Carychium* cf. *tridentatum*, *Discus rotundants*, *Aegopinella nitidula* and *Clausilia bidentata*. Shade-

[64] Parrington, op. cit. note 11.
[65] Lambrick and Robinson, op. cit. note 12.

TABLE 20. COMPOSITION OF SAMPLES OF MOLLUSCS

Column through Enclosure Ditch 724

Sample	51	50	49	48	47	46	45	44	43	42	41	40	39	38
Context	545	545	544	544	544	544	544	544	543	543	543	543	543	543
Depth (m.)	0.65-0.70	0.60-0.65	0.55-0.60	0.50-0.55	0.45-0.50	0.40-0.45	0.35-0.40	0.30-0.35	0.25-0.30	0.20-0.25	0.15-0.20	0.10-0.15	0.05-0.10	0-0.05
Pomatias elegans	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Carychium cf. *tridentatum*	++	++	++	++	+	++	++	++	+	+	-	-	-	-
Cochlicopa sp.	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
Vertigo pygmaea	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pupilla muscorum	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vallonia costata	+	+	++	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
V. excentrica	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+
Vallonia sp.	+	+	++	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acanthinula aculeata	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ena montana	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Discus rotundatus	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
Vitrea sp.	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Aegopinella pura	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
A. nitidula	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Oxychilus cellarius	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Clausilia bidentata	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
Helicella itala	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Helicellinae indet.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trichia hispida gp.	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-
T. striolata	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
Arianta arbustorum	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cepaea sp.	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-

+ present, ++ abundant

continued

TABLE 20. COMPOSITION OF SAMPLES OF MOLLUSCS *continued*

	Pit Group 1		*Pit Group 3*		*Ditch 629 and Grave 577*		
	8 541	4 509	26 619	67 687	37 624	36 370	14 576
Pomatias elegans	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Carychium cf. *tridentatum*	-	-	+	++	-	-	-
Cochlicopa sp.	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Vertigo pygmaea	-	+	+	-	-	-	+
Pupilla muscorum	+	+	+	+	-	-	+
Vallonia costata	-	-	+	+	+	-	+
V. excentrica	+	+	+	+	+	+	++
Vallonia sp.	+	+	+	++	-	-	++
Acanthinula aculeata	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Ena montana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Discus rotundatus	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Vitrea sp.	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Aegopinella pura	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
A. nitidula	-	-	+	+	-	-	+
Oxychilus cellarius	+	-	+	+	-	-	-
Clausilia bidentata	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Helicella itala	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Helicellinae indet.	-	+	+	+	-	-	+
Trichia hispida gp.	-	-	+	+	-	-	+
T. striolata	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arianta arbustorum	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cepaea sp.	-	-	-	+	-	-	+

loving species were absent from samples 8 and 4. Samples 26 and 67 were from pits 618 and 688 in Pit Group 3. They suggest that the site was by no means fully cleared in the phase in which these pits were filled. Pit 688 is securely dated to the Iron Age and the similarity between the molluscan samples from it and from pit 618 lends weight to the suggestion that the latter pit is also Iron Age rather than Neolithic in date. The results from samples 8 and 4, in pits 519 and 552, both in Pit Group 1, suggested more open conditions later in the Iron Age.

Some of the pits and the grave contained shells of alien species of Helicellinae suggesting some disturbance to the deposits, perhaps as a result of animal activity. This activity could also have introduced some of the shells of open country molluscs into samples 26 and 67.

DISCUSSION

The Neolithic

The Neolithic pottery and the worked flint possibly of the same date were all found in two pits or tree-throw holes (587 and 618). The date of pit 618 is unclear. The pottery, flint and hazelnuts it contains suggest that it is Neolithic, but its location and form, and the animal bones and molluscs it contains all indicate that it belongs in Pit Group 3, the rest of which is clearly dated to the Iron Age. Some support for the idea that the Neolithic material in pit 618 is redeposited comes from pit 587 where it is clear that some, at least, of the Neolithic material has been redeposited.

The Neolithic pottery in pit 587 was found in the primary and upper fills whilst Iron Age pottery was found in the middle fill and mixed with Neolithic pottery in the upper fill. This pattern of deposition could have been created by a tree falling in an area where Neolithic artefacts were distributed near the surface of the soil. In falling, the roots on one side of a

tree drag a small quantity of soil from near the ground surface into the base of the tree-throw hole, whilst the roots on the other side lift a similar quantity which then becomes deposited at the top of the pit.[66] Iron Age material could have been deposited while the tree-throw hole was filling and might thus become mixed with the Neolithic material in the upper fill of the pit. The sediment from the root-ball forms a context at one side of the pit which may, as in the case of context 617 in pit 587, contain no artefacts. A similar process may have led to the deposition of the Neolithic material in pit 618, and the 'pit' itself may thus post-date the Neolithic, and like the other pits in Pit Group 3, date from the Iron Age. Neolithic material has been found in tree-throw holes at a number of other sites of later date in the Upper Thames Valley.[67]

Although the fact that Neolithic artefacts are confined to these two features suggests that the original distribution of Neolithic artefacts may also have been quite restricted, any Neolithic pottery left in the ploughsoil elsewhere may have been destroyed. The tree-throw holes may thus have acted as traps which preserved a sample of Neolithic finds. The character of the finds themselves gives no real clues as to the nature of the Neolithic activity to which they were related.

The Iron Age and Roman Period

The evidence for the relative and absolute chronology of the Iron Age and Roman activity on the site is unfortunately divided between stratigraphy and pottery. Stratigraphic relationships are of little help in relating the pits to the other features, but establish clearly the relative chronology of the three sets of ditches and the trackway: ditch 724 is cut by ditch 732, which in turn is cut by ditch 629 and the trackway. Assuming the relevant associations between ditches are valid, stratigraphy thus suggests a sequence beginning with ditches 724 and 731 followed by ditches 732, 612 and 735, and then by the Roman trackway and ditch 629 which flanks it.

The ceramic evidence, in contrast, is of little use for dating any of the ditches (except the trackway), but does provide some indication of the dates of the pits (although the occurrence of pottery within pits is not, as the Neolithic pottery from the site shows, an entirely reliable indication of when they were dug). The pits of Pit Group 2 contain early Iron Age pottery, albeit sometimes mixed with middle Iron Age forms, and were thus probably filled over a period extending from the early into the middle Iron Age. Some of the pits or tree-throw holes in Pit Group 3 may belong to the same phase although the pottery here was less distinctive. The pits of Pit Group 1, in contrast, contain middle Iron Age pottery and thus seem to belong to a generally later, albeit perhaps overlapping phase.

The stratigraphic and ceramic sequences can be joined only at one point. Pit 565 was cut into the end of ditch 731 after the ditch had filled. The ditch must, therefore, have gone out of use (though the boundary may have retained some significance) before pit 565 and perhaps all of the pits in Pit Group 1 were dug. (The fact that pits 549 and 583 would have severely hindered access across the causeway between the ditches strengthens this argument.) Pit 565 contained middle Iron Age pottery, and ditch 731 is, therefore, probably middle Iron Age or earlier in date. Two sources of evidence suggest that it was in part at least, contemporary with Pit Groups 2 and 3. The first, rather weak evidence, relates to their

[66] J. Moore and D. Jennings, *Reading Business Park: a Bronze Age Landscape* (Thames Valley Landscapes: the Kennet Valley 1, 1992), Fig. 6.

[67] E.g. A. Mudd, 'The Excavation of a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Site at Eight Acre Field, Radley', *Oxoniensia*, lx (1995), 55, with further references.

alignments: the pits in Pit Group 3 are aligned roughly parallel to ditches 724 and 731. The second, and probably the stronger evidence is environmental. The samples of molluscs from the lower fills of ditch 724 and from two pits in Pit Group 3 are similar, both being dominated by shade-loving species as well as containing a few open-country species. In contrast, the samples from the upper fill of ditch 724, like the samples from Pit Group 1, lack the shade-loving species. It thus seems likely that the filling of the pits in Pit Group 3 and the lower part of ditch 724 were roughly contemporary, both preceding the filling of the pits in Pit Group 1 and the upper part of ditch 724.

Four phases of the development of the site may, therefore, be tentatively distinguished. There are also some faint indications of activity preceding the first clear phase of Iron Age occupation.

Phase 1 (early to middle Iron Age) and before: ditches 724 and 731, Pit Groups 2 and 3, and pit 663

The molluscan evidence indicates that, excluding the preceding Neolithic activity, the first occupation on the site was established in the early Iron Age, in a landscape which had been only partially cleared of woodland. It is of interest that some of the earliest features on the site, notably Pit Group 3 but possibly including also feature 700, may be tree-throw holes. The pits in Pit Group 3 form an alignment which, if they were tree-throw holes, suggests the existence of a line of trees or a hedge preceding phase 1. This line appears to have maintained some significance since not only may it have been the location of a kind of deposition distinct from the other pits cut in this phase, but it also seems to have continued to play a role in structuring space. It divides off the other pits of this phase from the ditches which themselves seem to follow its alignment, albeit at some distance to the NW.

In its first phase the excavated portion of the site appears to have had a relatively clear spatial structure, consisting of three sets of features. The first set, ditches 724 and 731, may have defined the outer boundary of the site. Although they appear to be curving, and may define an enclosure, it is impossible to infer the wider layout of these ditches – or to say whether or not they in fact defined an enclosure – from the small excavated area. Although they may have been truncated, both of these ditches are rather shallow: in none of the sections cut across them were they more than 0.80 m. deep, though they are up to 2 m. wide. They would no doubt have formed a more formidable barrier with the addition of a bank, but they are probably best seen as related to the management of livestock, or as symbolic boundaries rather than as defensive in a military sense.[68] The ends of these two ditches define a narrow entrance into the site.

Around 20 m. SE. of the boundary marked by these ditches and parallel to them lay a line of irregular pits (Pit Group 3). The irregular form of these features suggests that rather than being deliberately dug pits, they may be tree-throw holes, or be related to the clearance of trees from the site. As the intercutting of the edges of pits 722, 729 and 722 suggest, not all of these features need have been open at the same time. It nonetheless seems likely that the line they marked would have been clear. They would thus have marked a spatial distinction between a featureless area immediately within the entrance, and the rest of the site.

The only features which were found in the rest of the site were the loose cluster of pits forming Pit Group 2. Again, as the intercutting of the edges of a few of these pits shows, not all would have been open at the same time. The form and depth of the pits in this group

[68] Cf. J.D. Hill, *Ritual and Rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex: a Study on the Formation of a Specific Archaeological Record* (BAR Brit. Ser. 242, 1995), 82.

corresponds most clearly to that of Iron Age grain storage pits, although, excepting perhaps the cereal grains found in the primary fill of two of them, they yielded no very clear evidence to confirm this interpretation. Subsequently they may have been reused as rubbish pits, or have acted as traps for material discarded elsewhere.

To this spatial structure corresponds a pattern of deposition. The faunal remains in Pit Group 2 are predominantly of sheep, whilst those in Pit Group 3 are dominated by cattle. Human remains were deposited in the ditch, which contained very little other material. Not surprisingly, given the differences in their form and probably also their functions, plant remains, especially cereals, seem to be more common in Pit Group 2 than in 3, although the samples taken from the site were insufficient to definitively establish this fact.

The significance of this patterning is unclear. In part it probably reflects the fact, as has been suggested at other Iron Age sites, that sheep bones were better preserved in the deeper pits of Pit Group 2 than they were in the shallower pits of Pit Group 3. It may also derive from differences in the ways in which different kinds of waste were disposed of. It has been noted on other Iron Age sites that cattle bones tend to occur more commonly in peripheral areas of the sites than do those of sheep. Such a pattern may derive from the presence of different activity areas within the site, or it may only reflect differences in the deposition of different kinds of material. Although such patterning could arise for purely practical reasons, it may also have ritual origins.

The ritual significance of one part of this spatial pattern is clear. The end of ditch 731 was the location of a sequence of activity which extends into phase 2. This sequence began in phase 1, when pit 633 was cut into the lower fills of the ditch, and fragments of human long bones were lain within it. Further human bones were found in the fill of this ditch where it was cut by the Roman trackway, but it is unclear to which phase they belong. It has been noted elsewhere that particularly in the early Iron Age, human remains were often deposited near or in the periphery of settlements, often in enclosure ditches, though there does not appear to be a particularly strong focus upon deposition in ditch terminals.[69] A close parallel, however, for this group of pits was found at Pimperne in Dorset.[70] There, a human femur and the right half of a skull were sealed by a flint capping in the ditch forming the N. side of one of the entrances, while a pit cut into the fill on the S. side contained a deposit of animal bones. Especially in the early Iron Age, such burials often consist of individual bones, or groups of disarticulated bones.[71]

That human remains might be selected for deposition in a particular location is unsurprising. It may also be the case, however, that the bones of particular animal species, or of animals used in some particular way, might be selected for deliberate deposition. It could thus be argued that whilst the sheep bones in Pit Group 2 represent quotidian food remains, and were disposed of with relatively little attention (most of the gnawing was found on sheep bones) in disused storage pits, the cattle deposited in Pit Group 3 constituted food that was in some sense special, perhaps used in feasts or as sacrifices, and was thus deposited in a particular way, in a particular place. If the suggestion that the line of trees which became Pit Group 3 had a continuing significance is correct, it may not be coincidence that such remains were deposited in the holes left by the trees. The limited evidence from the excavations is, of course, insufficient to prove such an interpretation.

69 C. Wilson, 'Burials within Settlements in Southern Britain during the Pre-Roman Iron Age', *Bull. of Inst. of Archaeol. of Univ. of London*, 18 (1981), 127-69; G.A. Wait, *Ritual and Religion in Iron Age Britain* (BAR Brit. Ser. 149, 1985), 98-102.

70 RCHME, *An Inventory of Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset* 4, *North Dorset* (1972), 54.

71 Wait, op. cit. note 69, 88-98; R. Whimster, *Burial Practices in Iron Age Britain: a Discussion and Gazetteer of the Evidence, c. 700 B.C.-A.D. 43* (BAR Brit. Ser. 90, 1981), 182-3.

That the site was a settlement, however, and not a specifically religious site, is indicated by the evidence for grain processing. The antler and bone combs also perhaps provide evidence for weaving. The absence of the usual kinds of evidence for houses found on settlements is perhaps due to the fact that the excavated area may only encompass a rather small, relatively feature free area of the site near its entrance. This area may have had a particular significance. Entrances were commonly the focus for structural elaboration in the Iron Age, though usually this consists of post-built structures or ditches, rather than of pits, although special deposits were sometimes placed in ditch terminals.[72] It is noticeable that most of the change in the early and middle Iron Age phases of the site is focused in and around the area originally marked by the causeway between the ditches.

The apparently clear spatial structure of the site may thus be partly illusory: other parts of the site may have been organised in a very different way. The apparently chaotic distribution of pits and other features often found at other Iron Age sites is usually due to the superimpositioning of features over a long period. It is, therefore, also possible that the first phase of occupation at Steeple Aston was relatively brief. Nonetheless, the arrangement of features and their contents at Steeple Aston serves as a reminder, attested frequently elsewhere, that Iron Age settlements were not just the location of domestic activities, but also of rites of various kinds.

Phase 2 (middle Iron Age): Pit Group 1

There was strong continuity between the first phase of the site's development and its second. Some of the pits in Pit Groups 2 and 3 may still have been open, and may have retained their earlier significance. The most significant change occurred around the entrance between ditches 724 and 731, and even these changes may be seen as a continuation of the sequence of activity in the end of ditch 731. Both ditches had been allowed to completely fill, but the location of the entrance between them may have retained some significance, for a new group of pits, Pit Group 3, was dug in the area in and around it.[73]

With the exception of pit 583 which may have been a tree-throw hole, the pits in Pit Group 1 were generally regular in form, unlike those of Pit Group 3, and though they were shallower than those of Pit Group 2, this may be partly due to later truncation. Whether or not they were originally grain storage pits is unclear. Their contents were, however, generally similar to those of Pit Group 2: sheep predominate amongst the animal bones and plant remains, especially of cereals, occur in large quantities. The contents of this group of pits thus appears to modify the pattern of deposition identified in the early Iron Age, establishing groups of pits with sheep remains and plant remains, on either side of Pit Group 3.

Although the general characteristics of the pits in Pit Group 3 thus seem to link them to the more 'usual' pits of Pit Group 2, rather than the 'special' pits of Pit Group 3, there is, nonetheless, some indication that this area retained a particular significance. Fragments of possibly human bone were found in pit 565 and in posthole 582. Although in both cases the bone could be derived from disturbance of human remains in pit 663 below and thus be no more than accidentally redeposited material, it could also mark the fact that this area continued to be a location in which small quantities of human bone were deposited. The two postholes, 582 and 558, cut into the tops of pits 565 and 583 also suggest some special significance for this area. These postholes were cut after both pits had filled and thus belong to a later phase in the development of this area. Their size suggests they held large posts, but

[72] Cf. Hill, op. cit. note 68, 80-1.

[73] The phenomenon of enclosure ditches being allowed to fill or being deliberately filled has also been noted elsewhere, e.g. Hill, op. cit. note 68, 80-1.

it is unclear what kind of structure they may have formed. It is possible that they may have formed a simple gateway in the area previously occupied by the causeway, although oriented in a slightly different direction. More or less complex arrangements of postholes commonly occur at the entrance into Iron Age enclosures, though they usually seem to be contemporary with the associated ditches.[74] These postholes mark the last phase of the development of this, the most obviously changing area of the site.

Phase 3 (later Iron Age?): Ditches 732 and 612 and 735

It is uncertain whether there was a hiatus in activity between this phase and phase 2, but the site seems nonetheless to have been completely reorganised. All the earlier features seem to have gone out of use, and a completely new set of features was created. This restructuring of the site may have partly been brought about by the declining fertility of the surrounding area indicated by some of the charred plant remains. The absolute date of this phase is uncertain but it seems likely that it dates to a later phase of the Iron Age or early in the Roman period.

The new features constructed in this phase consist of three stretches of ditch in a rectilinear arrangement. They probably defined a trackway and field boundaries. The lack of continuity with the preceding phase is underlined by the fact that these features have a different alignment and appear not to respect any of the earlier features. Furthermore, no evidence for domestic activity, or indeed any other features indicating residence were found in the area excavated, though the settlement, if it continued to exist, need not have moved far.

Numerous examples of similar trackways and field boundaries have been identified in aerial photographs in the Upper Thames Valley.[75] In a number of cases, such as Wyndyke Furlong[76] and Farmoor,[77] earlier settlements were replaced by trackways and field boundaries.[78]

Phase 4 (Roman): Trackway and ditch 629 (including the burials which were placed within it and probably the other inhumations (671 and 574) nearby)

The common alignment of the Roman trackway and ditches 732 and 612 of Phase 3 suggests that the Roman trackway was a development of the earlier Iron Age features, and that there was not a significant hiatus between these two phases. Similar continuity in the course of a trackway has been noted elsewhere in the Upper Thames, at, for example, Farmoor.[79] The more careful and substantial construction of the Roman trackway, however, suggests that the route may have gained a new importance in this phase. It may be related to a Roman settlement somewhere nearby. What was probably a Romano-British villa (SP 478 253, PRN 1749) was unearthed in 1658 and although its precise location is uncertain, it is generally thought to be S. of the village. The way in which the trackway was constructed appears to have been related to the nature of the natural substrate: where this consisted of sand, it was necessary to dig down to the clay below and provide a firm surface with laid cobbling, but where the natural geology consisted of a limestone bedrock, very little road construction was necessary.

74 Hill, op. cit. note 68.

75 R. Hingley and D. Miles, 'Aspects of Iron Age Settlement in the Upper Thames Valley', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles, *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (Oxf.Univ. Comm. for Archaeol. Monograph 2, 1984), 65.

76 J. Muir, *Excavations at Wyndyke Furlong, Abingdon, Oxfordshire*, 1994 (Thames Valley Landscapes 12, 1999).

77 Lambrick and Robinson, op. cit. note 12.

78 Hingley and Miles, op. cit. note 75, 65.

79 Lambrick and Robinson, op. cit. note 12.

The most notable change is marked by the placing of inhumations in the ditch alongside the trackway and nearby. Such a location is common in the Roman period, and the extended position also reflects Roman influence. This tradition of burial was, however, long-lived, and is thus difficult to date accurately.[80]

Following this sequence of activity there was a long hiatus until the next traces of human activity were left on the site in the post-medieval period.

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[80] R. Philpott, *Burial Practices in Roman Britain: a Survey of Grave Treatment and Furnishing, AD 43-410* (BAR Brit. Ser. 219, 1991), 222-3.