

# Middle Bronze-Age Urns and Middle Iron-Age Settlement at Little Martin's Field, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell

ANDREW SIMMONDS and JOHN BOOTHROYD

with contributions by MARTYN ALLEN, EDWARD BIDDUPH, LISA BROWN, SHARON COOK, JOHN COTTER, MICHAEL DONNELLY, CYNTHIA POOLE, IAN SCOTT and RUTH SHAFFREY

## SUMMARY

*Excavation by Oxford Archaeology at Little Martin's Field, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell uncovered two middle Bronze-Age Deverel-Rimbury urns that had been buried in purpose-dug pits. The vessels contained no human remains but analogy with contemporary cremation burials and with similar features found within cremation cemeteries elsewhere suggests that they may represent cenotaphs or other deposits associated with funerary rites. Part of a middle Iron-Age settlement was uncovered, comprising two possible roundhouse locations, a ditched enclosure and associated pits and postholes. A boundary ditch with several recuts was attributed to the Roman and/or Anglo-Saxon period.*

Oxford Archaeology undertook an excavation at Little Martin's Field, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell in advance of a proposed residential development. The work was commissioned by Kingerlee Homes Ltd in accordance with a condition attached to planning permission. The site comprised two adjacent pasture fields situated at the western end of the village, at NGR SU 5785 9115 (Fig. 1), and lay between 55 metres and 59 metres OD. The geology of the area is mapped as Upper Greensand Formation siltstone and sandstone. The extreme southern end of the site is at the interface with the Northmoor Sand and Gravel Member, a superficial deposit often described as the first gravel terrace.

An evaluation comprising twenty-one trial trenches was undertaken in 2017 and revealed evidence for middle Iron-Age settlement in the southern part of both fields, including a possible roundhouse, as well as a few sherds of Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery.<sup>1</sup> The excavation comprised two areas targeted on these features; Area 1 was located in the smaller, eastern field and encompassed some 0.14 ha and Area 2 lay within the western field and measured 0.37 ha in area (Figs. 2–4).

This report includes summaries of the analyses of the artefacts and environmental evidence. The full specialist reports can be downloaded from the OA Library at <https://library.oxfordarchaeology.com/5552/>.

<sup>1</sup> S. Leech, 'An Archaeological Evaluation at Little Martins Field, Land East of Waterman's Lane North East of Didcot Road, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Oxfordshire OX10 0RY', unpublished JMHS report (2017).

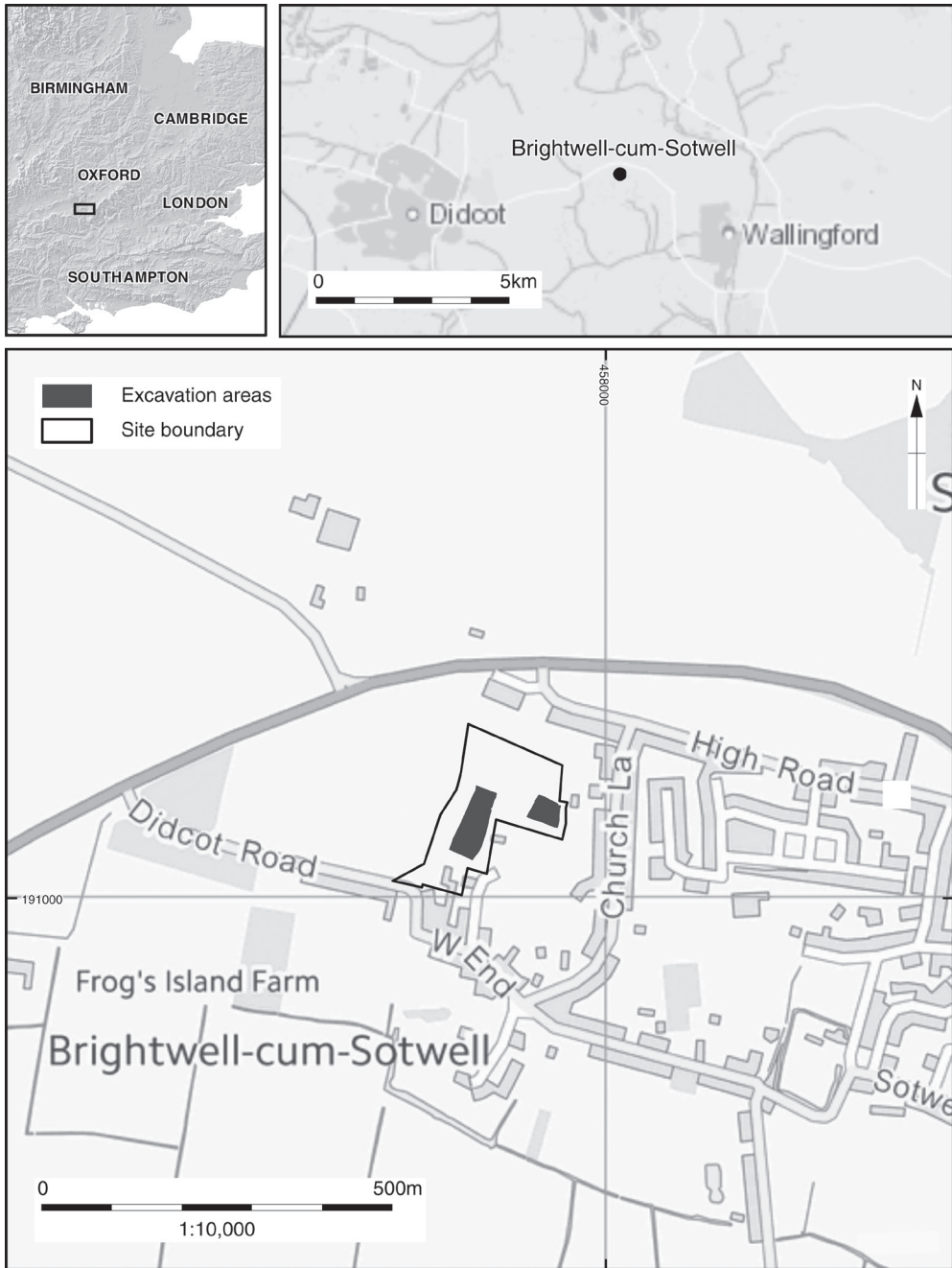


Fig. 1. Site location.

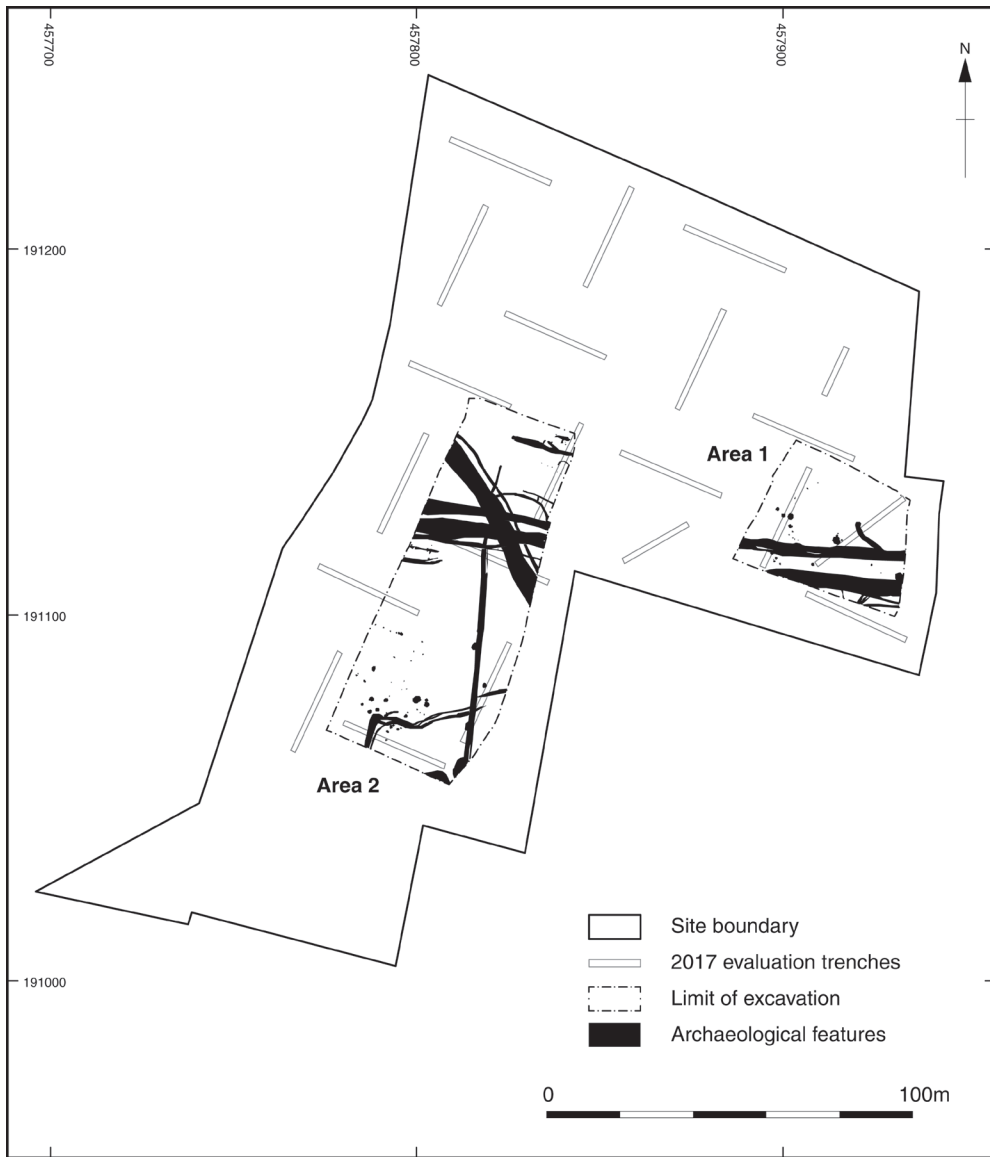


Fig. 2. Plan of excavated features.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The landscape around the site is rich in archaeological remains. Brightwell Barrow, a Bronze-Age bowl barrow, is situated *c.*750 metres to the north, and fieldwalking in the vicinity of this monument has produced late Bronze-Age and Iron-Age pottery, along with worked flints and burnt flint. The site is situated between the hillforts at Castle Hill, which lies 1.5 km to the north and was in use from the late Bronze Age until the Roman period, and Blewburton Hill, *c.*6 km to the south-west and occupied during the fifth–sixth centuries BC with reuse and partial rebuilding during the first century BC.<sup>2</sup> The presence of a further hillfort at Cholsey Hill, *c.*3.5 km to the south, has been postulated but not confirmed. Part of a middle Iron-Age farmstead with a ring gully and associated pits and postholes has been excavated at Sherwood Farm, Mackney,<sup>3</sup> 1.25 km to the south, and settlement features from the early, middle and late Iron Age have been found *c.*1 km to the west of the site in excavations for the Chalgrove to East Ilsley gas pipeline.<sup>4</sup> Excavations 1.75 km to the south-east at Slade End Farm, Wallingford, have uncovered extensive remains of a middle Bronze-Age field system with associated burials, and settlement from the earliest, early and middle Iron Age.<sup>5</sup> During the late Iron Age, the hillfort at Castle Hill was superseded by a substantial oppidum at Dyke Hills, where the River Thames has its confluence with the River Thames.

A walled town subsequently developed during the Roman period at Dorchester, and the road from the town to Silchester passes north–south through the village, *c.*210 metres east of the site. Several Roman pottery scatters have been noted during fieldwalking to the north and north-west of the village. To the south of the village, pottery and coins of Magnentius and Decentius have been found at Mackney Court Farm, and a substantial Roman ditch was found at Sherwood Farm.<sup>6</sup> Roman settlement and burials were also found west of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell on the Chalgrove to East Ilsley gas pipeline.<sup>7</sup>

The current village developed during the medieval period through the amalgamation of the three medieval hamlets of Brightwell, Sotwell and Mackney, and includes the twelfth-century church of St Agatha's as well as medieval and later listed buildings.

## DISCUSSION

*Middle Bronze-Age Urns*

Perhaps the most intriguing discoveries were a pair of Deverel-Rimbury urns that had evidently been deliberately placed in purpose-dug pits, *c.*1.75 metres apart (2014 and 2103, Fig. 4). The upper parts of both vessels had been truncated by subsequent ploughing, but sufficient of each remained to be certain that they were devoid of deliberately placed contents, the soil within them being identical with the general backfill of the respective pits. Soil samples from the fills produced some evidence for cultivation of emmer or spelt wheat and probably barley. Vessels set into the ground in this way may have functioned as storage receptacles, with the mouth of the vessel at ground level, although due to truncation it was not possible to estimate the relative levels of the vessel or the contemporary ground surface. The absence of other evidence for domestic occupation may militate against this interpretation, however, and it is perhaps more

<sup>2</sup> T. Allen et al., *Castle Hill and its Landscape: Archaeological Investigations at the Wittenhams, Oxfordshire* (2010); D.W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972).

<sup>3</sup> S. Crabb, 'New Barn, Sherwood Farm, Mackney, Wallingford, Oxfordshire', unpublished TVAS report (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5284/1019763>.

<sup>4</sup> T. Wilson, *A Narrow View Across the Upper Thames Valley in Late Prehistoric and Roman Times*, BAR BS, 467 (2008).

<sup>5</sup> 'Slade End Farm, Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Post-Excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design', unpublished OA report (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Crabb, 'New Barn, Sherwood Farm'.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, *A Narrow View*.

likely that they represent less mundane practices, particularly since vessels of this type were commonly used as containers for cremation burials. Small cremation cemeteries of burials interred in Deverel-Rimbury urns have been excavated within the middle and upper Thames valley at sites such as Burghfield (Berks.), Shorncote (Glos.), Standlake, and Stanton Harcourt,<sup>8</sup> and it is therefore possible that the features at Little Martin's Field were similarly funerary in character, although they certainly did not contain any human remains. It has been suggested that such instances may represent cenotaphs, perhaps for an individual whose body was not available for burial or was buried elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the frequently low weight of bone recovered from prehistoric cremation burials may indicate that burial of the cremated remains may have been relatively unimportant and that some or all of the remains may have been retained, distributed amongst the mourners, or disposed of in some other way.<sup>10</sup> If this were the case, then burial of a token quantity of bone, or even a vessel with no bone at all, may have been considered sufficient to satisfy the liturgical requirements of the funerary rite. Alternatively, the vessels may have had some other significance, perhaps as a dedication of vessels that had been used in the funerary rite, or they may have contained offerings such as liquids which have not survived. Whatever the precise significance of the deposition of the vessels, another possible example of this practice may be represented by cremation 6 within ring ditch 4 at Stanton Harcourt, which was recorded as a shallow pit that contained a small bucket urn 'but no bones.'<sup>11</sup> A similar interpretation could be posited for 'cremation burials' 146 and 123 at the early Bronze-Age cremation cemetery at Mount Farm, Berinsfield, which comprised vessels that contained charcoal but no bone, while the token character of cremation deposits is amply demonstrated by burials 121 and 193 at the same site, which contained 1 g and 5 g of bone respectively.<sup>12</sup> Although the two features at Little Martin's Field are situated in an ostensibly isolated location, it is possible that it was selected because it held some significance for the community that is not readily apparent, or that it became a significant location because of the interment of these deposits. It is unlikely to be coincidental that they were buried within sight of the Brightwell barrow, which is situated on a low hill c.800 metres to the north and, although unexcavated, is likely to date from the early Bronze Age and to have been a pre-existing feature of the landscape when they were inserted.

#### *Middle Iron-Age Settlement*

The majority of the features were dated to the middle Iron Age and comprised a range of elements indicative of domestic settlement including pits, postholes, curvilinear gullies and part of an enclosure ditch. It was clear that only part of the settlement lay within the excavated area and that it was more extensive, particularly to the south, although its full extent is unknown. Broadly contemporary settlement had previously been recorded nearby at Sherwood Farm, Mackney, 1.25 km south of Little Martin's Field, and to the west within the easement of the Chalgrove to East Ilsley gas pipeline.<sup>13</sup> The latter project had also uncovered a larger area of settlement at Berrick Salome, and a large settled landscape had been revealed by aerial photography, geophysical survey and excavation around Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, 2 km to

<sup>8</sup> C.A. Butterworth and S.J. Lobb, *Excavations in the Burghfield Area, Berkshire* (1992); A. Barclay et al., 'Excavation of Neolithic and Bronze Age Ring Ditches, Shorncote Quarry, Somerfield Keynes, Gloucestershire', *Transactions of Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 113 (1995), pp. 21–60; D.N. Riley, 'A Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Site on Standlake Down, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 11–12 (1946–7), pp. 27–43; A. Hamlin, 'Excavation of Ring-Ditches and Other Sites at Stanton Harcourt', *Oxoniensia*, 28 (1963), pp. 1–19.

<sup>9</sup> J.I. McKinley, 'Cremation: Excavations, Analysis and Interpretation of Material from Cremation-Related Deposits', in S. Tarlow and L. Nilsson Stutz (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial* (2013), p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 154.

<sup>11</sup> Hamlin, 'Excavation of Ring-Ditches and Other Sites at Stanton Harcourt', p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> G. Lambrick, *Neolithic to Saxon Social and Environmental Change at Mount Farm, Berinsfield, Dorchester-on-Thames* (2010), p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Crabb, 'New Barn, Sherwood Farm'; Wilson, *A Narrow View*.

the north-west.<sup>14</sup> The distribution of features at Little Martin's Field suggested that the settlement may have been divided into areas of different character, dedicated to separate activities or used by particular groups within the community, suggesting that it may have been comparable to the features around Hill Farm.

No definite evidence was identified for domestic buildings, but two curvilinear features (2312 and 2323) were recorded that may have been parts of penannular gullies surrounding roundhouse locations. Such gullies are often all that remains after the slighter elements of the building have been truncated by ploughing.<sup>15</sup> The roundhouse at Sherwood Farm and the buildings at both settlements along the gas pipeline were represented by a gully of this type, as were several buildings at Hill Farm, including one with a clearly defined internal post ring. The western structure (2312) lay toward the northern end of Area 2 and comprised a curving gully 16 metres long and 0.3 metres deep with a 'V'-shaped profile. The southern part of the circuit was absent and may have been truncated by later ditches, several of which converged in this area. Gully 2323 was situated at the south-eastern limit of Area 1 and only a very small part lay within the excavation area. However, it had been recorded beyond this in Evaluation Trench 16, where its curving alignment was more clearly evident. The part of the feature within the excavation area was not excavated, but it was recorded in the evaluation trench as a curving gully 0.46 metres wide and 0.32 metres deep with steeply sloping sides and a concave base (16/11=16/08). Furthermore, evidence was found for a possible earlier phase (16/06) and a partial concentric gully outside it (16/04). The excavation area and evaluation trench only uncovered the southern part of the circuit, and as with gully 2312 it is possible that much of the feature had been destroyed by post-medieval ditches. The only possible evidence for structures associated with the gullies was a pair of postholes (92 and 94) that lay within the projected footprint of gully 2323. Both gullies may have had a projected diameter in the region of c.20 metres, although it is difficult to be certain since only a small part of the circuit of each survives and their shapes need not have been regular. This is rather large for a roundhouse – a national survey concluded that they typically measured up to 14 metres, and none of the twelve certain and eight possible roundhouse gullies at Berrick Salome measured more than 17.4 metres.<sup>16</sup> This suggests that they were probably ditches surrounding roundhouses rather than structural features representing the actual wall line. The dating evidence from both gullies was slightly problematic, as the pottery assemblages were small and of mixed date; although six sherds (35 g) of middle Iron-Age pottery were recovered from ditch 2312 during the excavation, a sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery was recorded in the evaluation, and ditch 16/08=16/11 produced two sherds of middle Iron-Age pottery, two Roman sherds, and one Anglo-Saxon.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore possible that the features are in fact later in date, but a middle Iron-Age date is preferred here given the association with occupation features of that date and the similarity to better-dated examples elsewhere – both the recutting of gully 2323 and the concentric gully, for example, find parallels at Hill Farm.

The enclosure ditch (2321) was only partly exposed at the southern end of Area 2 and was L-shaped in plan, representing parts of the west and north sides of an enclosure that extended beyond the excavated area. Occupation features, comprising pits and postholes, were situated both within and beyond the area thus enclosed, and the enclosure is therefore likely to represent an element within the settlement rather than a ditch delimiting the settlement area, as, for example, at Mingies Ditch and Watkins Farm.<sup>18</sup> Similar rectilinear or polygonal arrangements

<sup>14</sup> Allen et al., *Castle Hill and its Landscape*, pp. 129–44.

<sup>15</sup> T. Allen et al., 'Iron Age Buildings in the Upper Thames Region', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (1984), p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> R. Pope, 'Roundhouses: 3000 years of Prehistoric Design', *Current Archaeology*, 222 (2008), p. 17; Wilson, *A Narrow View*, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> Leech, 'An Archaeological Evaluation at Little Martins Field', p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> T.G. Allen and M.A. Robinson, *The Prehistoric Landscape and Iron Age Enclosed Settlement at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford, Oxon* (1993); T.G. Allen, *An Iron Age and Romano-British Enclosed Settlement at Watkins Farm, Northmoor, Oxon* (1990).

of ditches enclosing areas within a settlement have been recorded in the vicinity at Hill Farm and Great Western Park, Didcot.<sup>19</sup> The area of pits and postholes beyond the enclosure ditch was delimited to the north by a fenceline (2322), which clearly defined this as a distinct area within the settlement. Fencelines are rarely observed on Iron-Age settlements, most likely due to truncation of such shallow features by subsequent ploughing, but their use has been widely inferred from the arrangement of surviving features.<sup>20</sup> The area immediately beyond the fence was devoid of features and penannular gully 2312, at the northern end of the site, was associated with a stack ring (2021) but lacked the pits and postholes that characterised the southern part of the excavation area.

The area of pits and postholes enclosed by fence 2322 does not appear to have extended into the eastern part of Area 2, where there was only a single, isolated pit (19/08), and no features were uncovered in the evaluation trenches between the two excavation areas, which would appear to indicate that the features in Area 1 represented a discrete focus of activity, separate from the enclosure and fenced area. This comprised penannular gully 2323 and a scatter of pits, as well as a possible four-post structure defined by postholes 97, 99 and 136 with the fourth corner absent.

The arrangement of the various elements that constituted the settlement, comprising the ditched enclosure, the fenced area, penannular gully 2312 and the focus in Area 1, clearly suggests a complex settlement with a deliberately planned layout, with zoning of specific activity areas. The putative roundhouse locations were situated a little over 80 metres apart, and comparison with the results of the geophysical survey at Hill Farm or the clustering of pen-and-paddock settlements at Farmoor suggests that it was not unusual for domestic units to be situated in this way.<sup>21</sup> This may reflect the way the population viewed their position within the wider community, close enough to imply commonality but distant enough to express some level of independence, and contrasts with the apparently simple plan of the site at Sherwood Farm, which may be a discrete farmstead of a single roundhouse. There was not a sufficient quantity or range of artefactual material to recognise any distinctions in activities between the various areas of the settlement – although the concentration of pits within the fenced area may suggest a focus on storage, the pits within the ditched enclosure and in Area 1 were of identical form and the possible four-post structure also provides evidence for crop storage in the latter area. The pits, postholes and possible four-post structure in Area 1 may comprise infrastructure associated with the eastern roundhouse, whereas the western structure does not appear to possess such features, unless they lie beyond the excavation area. The enclosure ditch and fence may have been constructed to enclose livestock pens, but could alternatively have excluded livestock from areas where they would be a nuisance.

Evidence pertaining to the lifestyles of the Iron-Age inhabitants was very limited. The pottery was presumably used in domestic activities such as storage and preparation and serving of food and drink, and the sandstone cobble that had been used as a pestle may derive from a similar context. The assemblage of 175 animal bone specimens were predominantly of cattle and sheep/goat, with pig, horse, and dog each represented by only a handful of bones. Evidence for butchery practices was provided by marks on some of the cattle bones, which indicated that one jaw had been fairly delicately removed from the skull, possibly to extract the tongue, and a metacarpal had been split to access the marrow or to use the bone for tool manufacture, while a large mammal rib fragment exhibited cut marks along the shaft to cut the intercostal muscle. The animal bone assemblage was too small to provide much information regarding husbandry practices, other than to indicate that sheep and cattle were predominant and that pig and horse

<sup>19</sup> Allen et al., *Castle Hill and its Landscape*, pp. 134–6; C. Hayden et al., *Great Western Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire: Phase 1 Excavations, 2010–2012* (forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> For example, G.H. Lambrick and M.A. Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman Riverside Settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire* (1979), pp. 67–71.

<sup>21</sup> Allen et al., *Castle Hill and its Landscape*, fig. 5.2; Lambrick and Robinson, *Iron Age and Roman Riverside Settlements at Farmoor*, fig. 3.

were also present. Evidence for the provisioning of this livestock is provided by penannular gully 2021, which was very shallow and measured only c.3.5 metres in diameter and is characteristic of a class of feature interpreted as enclosing stack rings for animal fodder.<sup>22</sup> Charred plant material was a ubiquitous inclusion in the soil samples, but only in small quantities, indicating that it derived from wind-blown material and piecemeal disposal of crop-processing debris that had been burnt for disposal. The chaff would seem to indicate small-scale crop processing and storage, largely in the glume, which is consistent with the prevalence and relatively small size of most of the storage pits. The crops represented include spelt, emmer and hulled barley, which is consistent with the evidence from the much larger assemblage at nearby Great Western Park, Didcot, although generally emmer had been replaced by spelt in the region by this time.<sup>23</sup> In the absence of evidence for specialisation, it must be concluded that the community practised a mixed farming regime.

#### *Roman/Anglo-Saxon Boundary*

The date of gully 2314 and ditch 2315, which extended across Area 2 on parallel north-west to south-east alignments, was uncertain. The only dating evidence from these features comprised a sherd of late Roman colour-coated ware and sherds from an Anglo-Saxon globular jar/cooking pot that were both recovered from the same fill of ditch 2315, as well as three fragments of tegula from another fill. It is possible either that the features were Anglo-Saxon with residual Roman inclusions or that the features were Roman and the Anglo-Saxon sherd intrusive. No other features of either date were found, although a Roman sherd and an Anglo-Saxon sherd were recovered from post-medieval ditch 145. Evidence from these periods has proved similarly slight at other investigations in the village, comprising single sherds of Roman pottery at Ebees Cottage and Bell Lane and two possibly Anglo-Saxon gullies at the latter site.<sup>24</sup> Ditch 2315 had been recut several times, indicating that it may represent a significant boundary with considerable longevity. It is similar in appearance and alignment to an undated ditch at Ebees Cottage, c.600 metres east of Little Martin's Field, suggesting that they may form elements of a landscape comprising boundaries thus aligned. The co-occurrence of Roman and Saxon material could suggest that the ditch defined a long-lived boundary with a period of use that spanned the two periods and is not without parallel – early Saxon pottery has been recorded within the upper fills of enclosure ditches at a Roman settlement at Sutton Courtenay and a sunken-featured building at Mongewell contained an assemblage of late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon domestic objects including pottery, bone needles and a well-preserved bone comb that is thought to be of fifth-century date.<sup>25</sup> These sites provide rare examples of evidence for continuity between these periods, and their location within a short distance of the Roman town at Dorchester may be associated with the continued importance of the town, which appears to have continued in some form and went on to become headquarters of the bishopric of the kingdom of Wessex.<sup>26</sup>

## EXCAVATION RESULTS

### *Middle Bronze Age*

Two features (2014, 2103) at the southern end of Area 2 appeared to have been deliberately dug as settings to hold individual urns. Both features had been truncated by later ploughing, as a

<sup>22</sup> Allen et al., 'Iron Age buildings in the Upper Thames Region', p. 91.

<sup>23</sup> S. Boardman, 'Charred Plant Remains', in Hayden et al., *Great Western Park, Didcot*.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, 'An Archaeological Watching Brief at Ebees Cottage', p. 6; Lewis, 'Land off Bell Lane', p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> P. Booth and C. Poole, 'Bridge Farm, Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Post-Excavation Assessment Report', unpublished OA report (2017); 'Wallingford Rowing Club, Mongewell, Oxfordshire', unpublished OAU report (1998), <https://library.oxfordarchaeology.com/5680/>.

<sup>26</sup> W.A. Morrison, *A Synthesis of Antiquarian Observations and Archaeological Excavation at Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire* (2009), pp. 47–55.

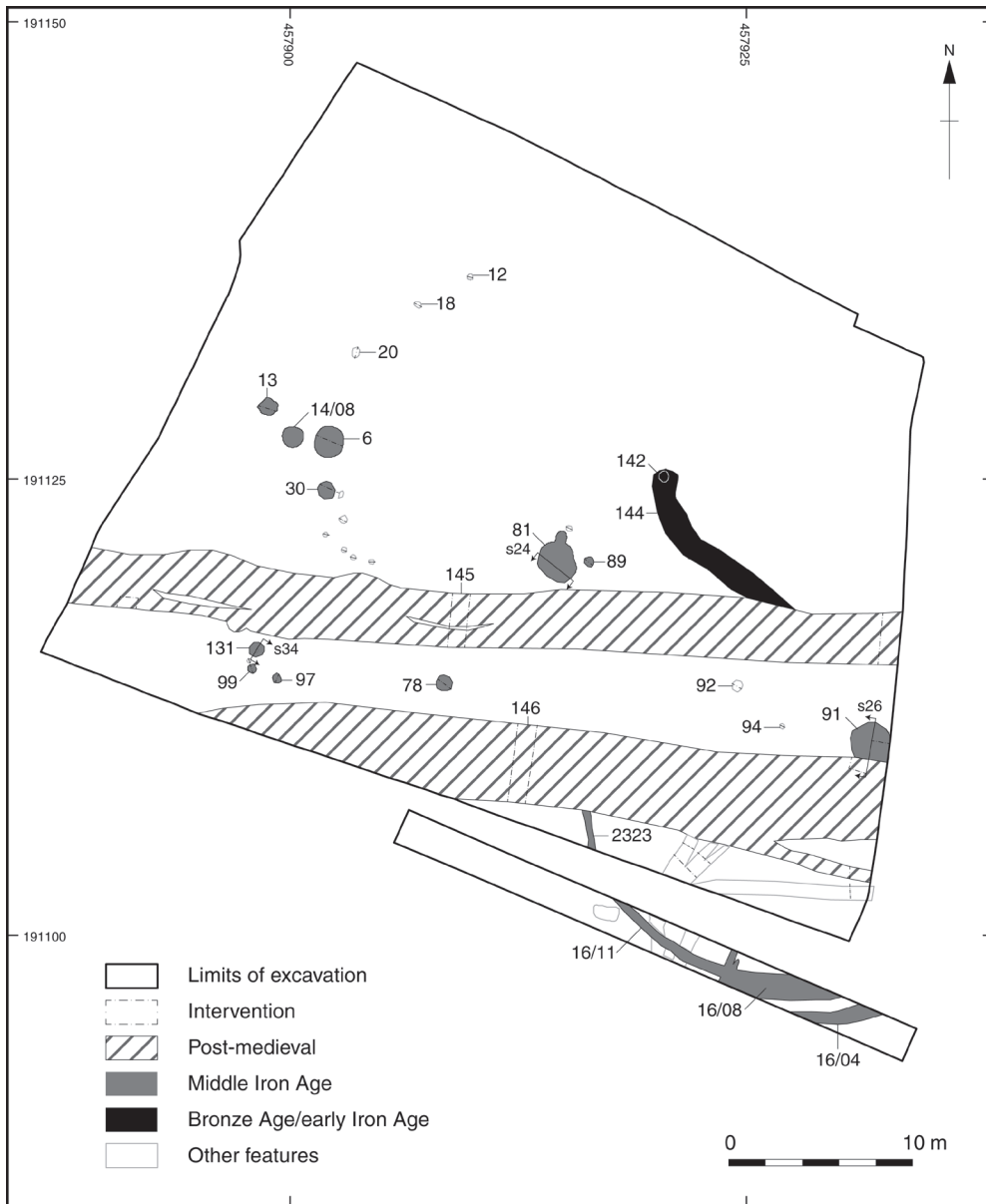


Fig. 3. Plan of Area 1 and evaluation Trench 16.

result of which only the lower part of the vessels survived. Pit 2014 was the shallower of the two, surviving to a depth of only 0.04 m. It contained the lower part of a vessel of indeterminate form, but whose large diameter suggests a bucket or barrel urn of substantial size (SF 1, Fig. 6). Pit 2103 was situated 1.75 m north of pit 2014 and was better preserved, with a depth of 0.25 m, as a result of which a greater proportion of the vessel survived, comprising a barrel urn, represented by the base and lower section, a few rim sherds and a section of the upper wall (SF 2, Fig. 6). Analysis of the soil within the urn concluded that it represented the backfill of the pit and that



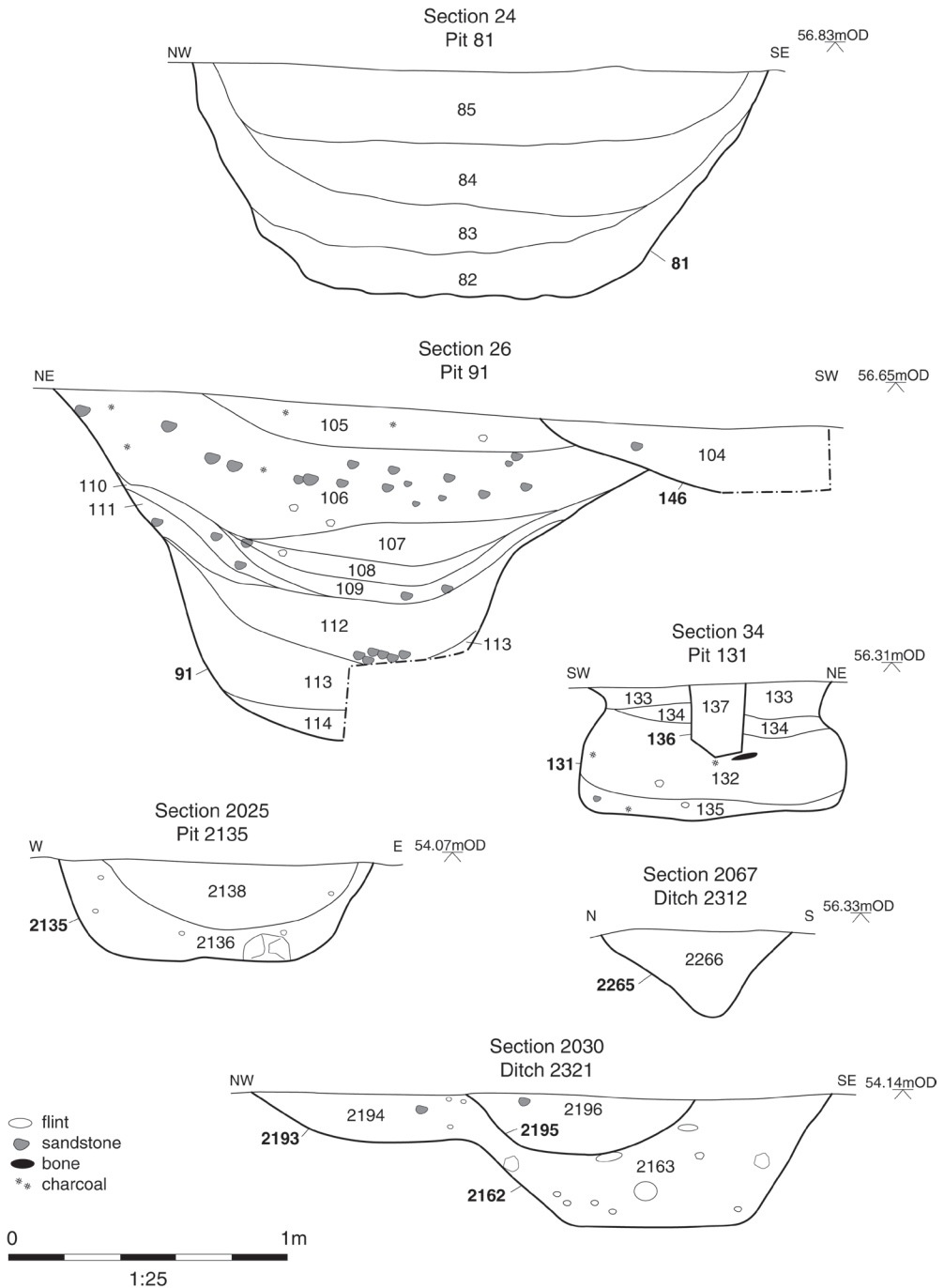


Fig. 5. Sections of selected features.

the vessel contained no deliberately placed material (Cook, below). Other than the urns, no artefactual material was recovered from either feature.

#### *Bronze Age to Early Iron Age*

Ditch 144 was located in Area 1 and was exposed for a total distance of 11 m on a north-west to south-east orientation, the south-eastern end having been completely removed by post-medieval ditch 145 (Fig. 3). The north-western end curved towards the north before ending in a rounded terminal. A posthole (142) was cut into the fills of the terminal and may represent the insertion of a post to mark the end of the feature when it had largely silted up and become difficult to discern. The ditch was 1.2 m wide and 0.5 m deep, and it was noted that the fills were rather paler than those of the later features. A single sherd that was recovered from the upper fill could only be dated broadly to the Bronze Age or early Iron Age on the basis of its flint temper.

#### *Middle Iron Age*

*Area 1 (Fig. 3)* Middle Iron-Age activity in this area was represented by a total of eight pits and at least twelve postholes, as well as three features (89, 97, 99) that were intermediate between the two categories, and part of a possible penannular gully. The features were generally situated in the southern half of the excavation area, with only tree-throw holes to the north. The pits could be divided into three categories on the basis of their size and profile, comprising two large pits (81, 91), a group of four smaller features (30, 78, 131, 14/08) and two very shallow pits (6, 13). The fills of these features comprised deposits of fairly homogeneous mid- and dark-grey silty clay, and even in the few pits in which more than one fill was defined these represented slight gradations of such material rather than clearly distinct episodes of infilling.

Neither of the two larger pits produced any artefactual material and it is not certain whether they were in fact Iron Age in date, particularly since they were notably different in size and shape from the more securely dated pits. Both had steep sides, although pit 81 had a flat base whereas pit 91 comprised a narrower shaft with a concave base. Pit 81 (Fig. 5, section 24) was situated in the central part of the excavation area and measured 2.05 m in diameter and 0.82 m deep. It was filled by a sequence of four deposits of grey silty clay (82–5) and the only artefactual material was a flint flake from the uppermost fill (85). Pit 91 (Fig. 5, section 26) lay at the eastern edge of the excavation area and was cut by post-medieval ditch 145. It was slightly larger than pit 81, measuring 2.2 m in diameter at the surface and 1.2 m deep, although the diameter narrowed rapidly with depth to a typical diameter of c.1 m. The lower half was filled by layers of grey clay (109–114), including a discrete deposit of sandstone pieces (112), above which was a dark layer of charred or organic material (108). Further clay layers occupied the remainder of the feature. No artefactual material was present.

Pits 30, 78, 131 and 14/08 (which was excavated during the evaluation stage) measured 0.25–0.50 m deep and were all distinguished by slightly undercut sides. Pits 30 and 14/08 each contained a single fill, and pit 78 two fills, but pit 131 (Fig. 5, section 34) had a slightly more complex sequence, comprising a thin primary silt (135), a main fill (132) and two thinner upper layers (133, 134). Fill 132 yielded a few pieces of pottery and animal bone, as well as some heat-discoloured stones that had evidently been used as pot-boilers. Artefactual material from this group of pits was otherwise limited to twelve sherds from pit 14/08 and some crumb-sized fragments of pottery from pit 30. The shallower pits 6 and 13 measured 0.8 m and 1.7 m in diameter respectively but were each only 0.15 m deep.

The postholes could not be resolved into any coherent structures, but the concentration of most of these features in the south-western part of the excavation area suggested that they represented a building of some sort in this location. The only direct relationship between a posthole and a pit was represented by posthole 136, which was dug into the centre of pit 131 – if this was deliberate it may have been intended to mark the location of the back-filled pit. It is alternatively possible that the arrangement of posthole 136 and the nearby postholes 97 and 99 represented three elements of a four-post storage structure with dimensions of 1.75 x 1.15 m, although the putative fourth

corner was absent. A group of three undated postholes to the north of the main distribution (12, 18, 20) may also have been part of the settlement, but this was not certain.

An unexcavated gully (2323) at the southern edge of the excavation area may be part of a possible penannular gully (16/11) that was recorded in evaluation Trench 16 (Fig. 3). The feature was represented in the evaluation by a curving gully 0.46 m wide and 0.32 m deep with steeply sloping sides and a concave base. Undated postholes 92 and 94 may have lain within the area thus enclosed.

*Area 2 (Fig. 4)* Middle Iron-Age features were distributed throughout the excavation area, but with a notable concentration toward the south; part of a probable enclosure ditch (2321) was exposed at the southern end of the site, adjacent to which was an area of pits and postholes that were delimited to the north by a fenceline (2322), beyond which lay very few contemporary features, although a curvilinear ditch (2312) lay in this area.

Ditch 2321 was 'L'-shaped as exposed within the excavation area, extending for *c.* 9 m from the southern baulk then turning sharply towards the east and following a somewhat sinuous alignment for 37 m before continuing beyond the limit of the excavation. Three phases of the ditch were identified, extending on slightly varying alignments. The two earliest phases comprised a steep-sided ditch that was 1.3 m wide and 0.46 m deep (2162, Fig. 5, section 2030) and a shallower feature with a more concave profile and a greatest depth of 0.30 m (2193). Due to the similarity of their fills it was not possible to determine which of these iterations of the ditch was the earlier. The third and final phase comprised a shallow ditch up to 0.26 m deep (2195) that followed the most sinuous alignment and cut across both the earlier ditches. The ditch produced 42 sherds (288 g) of pottery, representing almost 17 per cent of the site total, but with a low average sherd weight of 7 g, typical of prehistoric ditch assemblages. The pottery is almost entirely body sherds. One jar sherd is a typical middle Iron-Age form, but a sherd from another vessel could be as late as the early first century BC. A small quantity of animal bone was recovered from the ditch, as well as a pestle and some burnt stone. The area enclosed by the ditch contained four pits (2164, 2166, 2281, 2283) and a posthole (2199), and an additional pit (2294) was exposed beneath the ditch. In addition to pit 2294, the ditch cut pits 2164 and 2281 and posthole 2199, indicating that they pre-dated at least one phase of the boundary. Pit 2164 was very shallow, with a depth of only 0.12 m, but pit 2166 was a little more substantial, measuring 0.34 m deep, and contained a dump of burnt stone, of which 14 kg was recovered from the excavated half. Pits 2281 and 2283 were not excavated but were noted to contain a significant quantity of pot-boilers.

Immediately north of ditch 2321 lay a concentration of pits and postholes that were delimited to the north by fenceline 2322, situated *c.* 23 m from the ditch. The fenceline extended into the excavation from the eastern baulk on a west-north-west to east-south-east alignment and extended for at least 14 m, encompassing six postholes. It was not certain whether this represented the full original extent of the boundary or whether further postholes had been lost to plough-truncation. No return defining the eastern limit of the associated activity was positively identified; it is possible that postholes south of the easternmost element of the fenceline (posthole 2225) may represent such a boundary, but no definite alignment could be defined.

The area between the ditch and fenceline contained a total of fifteen pits and fifteen postholes. The pits were mostly situated close to the ditch, apart from pit 2133, an extremely slight feature only 0.06 m deep that lay in a slightly isolated location further north, and intersecting pits 2233 and 2235, which were situated between the postholes of fenceline 2322. Pits 2135 (Fig. 5, section 2025), 2137, 2189 and 2210 were all quite alike, with steep sides and flat bases, and measured 0.8–1.3 m in diameter and 0.3–0.5 m deep. Pit 19/08, which was situated in an isolated location east of the main concentration and was excavated during the evaluation stage, was similar, as was pit 2157, although the latter had a more irregular profile with a concave base. Pits 2153, 2155, 2168 and 2212, by contrast, were all shallow features no more than 0.2 m deep. Pit 2187 was intermediate in depth and atypically wide, measuring 2.4 x 2.1 m and 0.3 m deep. Pit 2287 was not excavated. The only instance of intercutting pits was provided by pits 2187 and 2189, the

former being the earlier feature. Artefactual assemblages from the pits were typically limited to small quantities of pottery and animal bone, the latter including a complete, though fragmented cattle skull and foot bone and scapula fragments from pit 2157, although it is not possible to be certain whether these came from an individual animal. A possible clip or hook of copper alloy was recovered from pit 2212, in addition to which 2.2 kg of burnt stone was recovered from pit 2187 and 1.7 kg from pit 2157. The largest pottery assemblage was a collection of 21 sherds (500 g) from pit 2137, which includes sherds from a bead-rimmed jar and a hemispherical bowl, along with other highly burnished or smoothed sandy wares. The high-shouldered, bead-rimmed jar in particular suggests the pit was filled during the later middle or late Iron Age. A short segment of curving gully (2313), 4 m long and up to 0.37 m deep, was also situated in this area, but its function was unclear. The postholes in this area, none of which contained artefactual material, did not form any definite structures, although it is possible that postholes 2185, 2220 and 2223 represented three corners of a four-post structure measuring c.2.5 x 2.5 m.

There were no contemporary features in the area immediately north of fenceline 2322, although a small group of undated features, cut by post-medieval boundary ditches, was situated c.25 m further north and included a pit (2150) that contained an assemblage of fired clay from a wattle structure. Toward the northern end of the excavation area lay curving ditch 2312, which extended for c.16 m and was 0.3 m deep with a 'V'-shaped profile (Fig. 5, section 2067). The western end was truncated by Roman/Anglo-Saxon ditch 2315 and the eastern end extended beyond the edge of the excavation area. A mere six sherds (35 g) of pottery was recovered, and a sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery was recovered during the evaluation. A much smaller curving feature (2021) was situated to the north, comprising a gully 0.1 m deep with a projected diameter of only c.3.5 m, and is similar to features found on Iron-Age settlements elsewhere but produced no artefactual dating evidence.

#### *Roman/Anglo-Saxon Period*

Area 2 was crossed by ditch 2315, which was not well dated but has been attributed broadly to the Roman/Anglo-Saxon period, although a later date is possible. The feature was aligned north-west to south-east and continued beyond the limits of the excavation area in both directions. It measured 4.4–5.9 m wide and 0.45–0.6 m deep, but this width evidently derived from a rather narrower ditch that had been recut repeatedly on slightly variant alignments. The fills of the various iterations were very similar and it was consequently difficult to distinguish them, but there appeared to be at least four phases, with widths that varied from 1.2 m to more than 2.2 m. A mixed assemblage of pottery comprising a sherd of late Roman colour-coated ware and sherds from an Anglo-Saxon globular jar/cooking pot was recovered from a single fill, as well as three fragments of tegula.

Ditch 2314 ran alongside ditch 2315 and is likely to represent another iteration of the same boundary. It was 0.6 m wide and up to 0.3 m deep, and yielded no artefactual material.

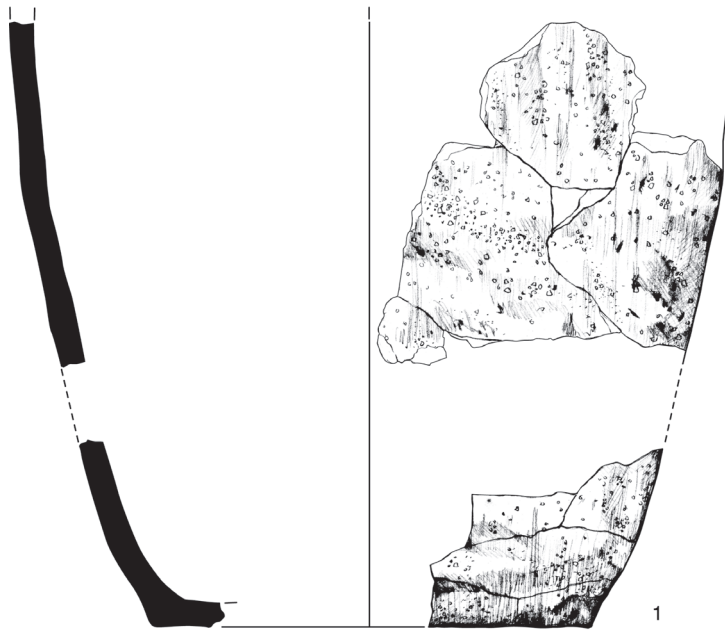
#### *Post-Medieval Period*

The excavation areas were crossed by an east–west boundary (145=2316 and 146=2317) and a subdivision to the south (2320) which contained tile, clay tobacco pipe and metalwork indicating an eighteenth or nineteenth century date.

## POTTERY by LISA BROWN, JOHN COTTER and EDWARD BIDDULPH

### *Middle Bronze Age*

Two partially preserved middle Bronze-Age urns were recovered from highly truncated but apparently purpose-dug features in the southern part of Area 2. Pit 2014 yielded the complete basal and undecorated lower wall sections of a vessel of indeterminate form, but a 260 mm diameter indicates this was probably a bucket or barrel urn of substantial size (SF 1, Fig. 6).



0 250mm

1:4

Fig. 6. Deverel-Rimbury urns SF 1 and SF 2.

The fabric is a lightly sanded, slightly micaceous clay with sparse red iron oxides incorporating abundant black and white angular calcined flint up to 4 mm in size.

The vessel from pit 2103 was more complete than SF1, with an entire base and lower section, a few rim sherds, and a section of the upper wall preserved (SF 2, Fig. 6). The fabric resembles that of SF1 and sufficient survives to determine that the vessel is a barrel urn decorated with applied vertical clay ribs rising to form a loop resembling a horseshoe-shaped handle, linked to an applied horizontal cordon. Both the cordons and the 'handle' are elaborated with fingernail-impressed decoration. This 'horseshoe' handle feature is found on vessels of the slightly earlier Bronze-Age biconical urn tradition. The so-called Ardleigh urns found in middle Bronze-Age cemeteries in East Anglia and elsewhere in southern Britain borrowed elements from biconical urns with horseshoe handles.<sup>27</sup> As the tradition developed during the middle Bronze Age, the initially predominant grog temper was gradually replaced by inclusions of burnt crushed flint, vessels evolved more of a barrel shape, and fingertip-impressed decoration and applied ribs or cordons appeared. The fingertip impressions could be applied all over the body of the vessel or restricted to the rim top and/or applied cordons. Fingertip-impressed vertical ribs are also a characteristic of the Wiltshire South Lodge urns.<sup>28</sup> The Little Martin's Field urn lacks the profuse fingertip decoration on the body that typifies many Ardleigh type urns, but the vertical ribs and horseshoe-shaped looped cordons show some affinity with this and the South Lodge tradition.

#### *Iron Age*

The main component of the prehistoric assemblage, amounting to 186 sherds weighing 1,947 g, is dated to the middle Iron Age, middle to late Iron Age, or indeterminate Iron Age. The assemblage, although small and fragmentary, clearly lacks any early Iron-Age component. The rounded shapes with smoothed or burnished surfaces and the predominance of glauconitic sandy fabrics indicate that the entire group dates to the middle and/or late Iron Age. However, the size, character and condition of the collection precludes detailed comparative analysis. There are few sherds that are diagnostic of vessel form, and none of the pottery is decorated. Nonetheless it was possible to classify three basic forms – ovoid jars with either an upstanding flattened rim, short everted rim or beaded rim, a hemispherical bowl with a simple rim, and a straight-sided jar (saucepan pot).

#### *Roman*

Two sherds of Roman pottery were found, including an abraded sherd with traces of a dark brown colour-coat, possibly from the Oxford industry, that was recovered from ditch 2315 with Anglo-Saxon sherds.

#### *Anglo-Saxon*

Five sherds of Anglo-Saxon pottery weighing 80 g were recovered, representing two separate handmade vessels in organic-tempered ware. Ditch 2315 yielded four very fresh sherds from a single vessel, comprising two groups of joining sherds including a rim and shoulder and two large joining body sherds, which together provide a near-complete profile from a slightly squat globular jar/cooking pot with a plain everted or cavetto rim. The other vessel was a small body sherd from a post-medieval ditch. Organic-tempered ware (sometimes called chaff- or grass-tempered ware) is widespread throughout the Thames valley where it mainly dates from the early to middle Anglo-Saxon period (c. fifth to eighth century).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> F.H. Erith and I. Longworth, 'A Bronze Age Urnfield on Vincens Farm, Ardleigh, Essex', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 26 (1960), pp. 178–92.

<sup>28</sup> J. Barrett et al., *Landscapes, Monuments and Society: The Prehistory of Cranborne Chase* (1991); A.H.L.F. Pitt Rivers, *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, vol. 4 (1898).

<sup>29</sup> P. Blinkhorn, 'The Pottery', in A. Hardy et al., *Aelfric's Abbey: Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1989–92* (2003), pp. 159–206; P. Blinkhorn, 'Anglo-Saxon Pottery', in R. Chambers and E. McAdam, *Excavations*

## OTHER FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

by MARYN ALLEN, SHARON COOK, MICHAEL DONNELLY,  
CYNTHIA POOLE, IAN SCOTT and RUTH SHAFFREY

A small assemblage of thirty-four struck flints was largely recovered as residual finds in later features. Formal tools are absent and the solitary core recovered was undiagnostic. Overall, the assemblage was chronologically mixed and very sparse, probably representing material accumulated from several flint-using episodes spanning the prehistoric period.

Other finds include 249 fragments (33,819 g) of burnt stone, mostly from middle Iron-Age deposits, and features of this period also included a possible clip or hook of copper alloy from pit 2212 and a quartzitic sandstone cobble from ditch 2321 that had been used initially as a pestle and subsequently as a hammerstone/pounder. A total of 1,852 fragments (5,562 g) of fired clay was recovered, most of which came from sieved samples from pit 2150. All the diagnostic material was characterised by wattle impressions on the back face of fragments, comprising over 400 wattle impressions representing rods interwoven around upright sails. The size of the wattles is consistent with those found in daub associated with oven structures rather than buildings, although the latter cannot be entirely discounted.<sup>30</sup>

Nine pieces of Roman tile were recovered, comprising four fragments of tegula, a single fragment of imbrex and a probable fragment of brick. The only evidence for metalworking was a fragment of tap slag from Roman/Anglo-Saxon ditch 2315. A single piece of clay tobacco pipe stem and medieval and post-medieval tile and metalwork were recovered from post-medieval boundary ditches and the ploughsoil. The animal bone assemblage amounted to a total of 348 specimens from hand excavation and a further 108 g from environmental samples. The majority (175 pieces) derived from middle Iron-Age and post-medieval features, while a small number were recovered from Roman/Anglo-Saxon ditch 2314 and undated features.

Twenty bulk soil samples were collected during excavation and following assessment sixteen were selected for analysis for charred plant remains. The samples produced generally small flots with little charred material, the results of which are incorporated into the discussion above.

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at Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire, 1983–5. Vol. 2: *The Romano-British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (2007), pp. 229–47.

<sup>30</sup> B. Cunliffe and C. Poole, *Danebury: An Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire. Vol. 4, The Excavations, 1979–1988: The Site* (1991), p. 141.