

NOTES

Early Neolithic activity near Compton, Guildford

In December 2006 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group on ground reduction in advance of the construction of a substantial earth bund, located to the west of Compton village, near Guildford (SU 94530 46697; fig 1). The area excavated measured *c* 40 x 40m, and identified activity associated with the Early Neolithic period.

During the course of the archaeological investigations two circular pits, located *c* 25m apart, were identified. The larger of the two pits (005) measured 0.8 x 0.65m across and 0.3m deep (fig 2). A primary and secondary fill were identified, the primary fill being the more substantial. The assemblage from the fills of the pit consisted of 146 sherds of Early Neolithic pottery and 69 pieces of worked flint, the majority of which were from the primary fill.

All the pottery fragments recovered were of the Plain Bowl tradition (fig 3), dating to between *c* 3700 and 3300 BC, with the vessels deriving from similar coarse flinty fabrics. Two basic vessel types were identified: larger neutral bowls with either rolled-over or beaded rims (fig 3, nos 1–3) and simple open small bowls/cups (fig 3, nos 4 and 5). Rim sherds indicate at least three individual vessels, although more may be represented – one of which may have been deposited in a semi-complete state (fig 3, no 1). No carinated or decorated sherds were identified during the analysis of the pottery (Doherty 2008). Pottery dating from this period is rare in Surrey, with the closest comparable assemblages deriving from the causewayed enclosure at Staines (Robertson-Mackay 1987) and the settlement site at Runnymede (Needham 1991). A selection of Early Neolithic pottery sherds has also been recovered from sites in the Farnham area (Field & Cotton 1987).

The flint assemblage from the pit consisted predominantly of unmodified debitage, most of which was soft-hammer struck. Five examples within the assemblage were recorded as implements or utilised pieces. These were identified as two scrapers, a possible denticulate, and two small blade-like flakes, which had been utilised along one of the lateral edges. The

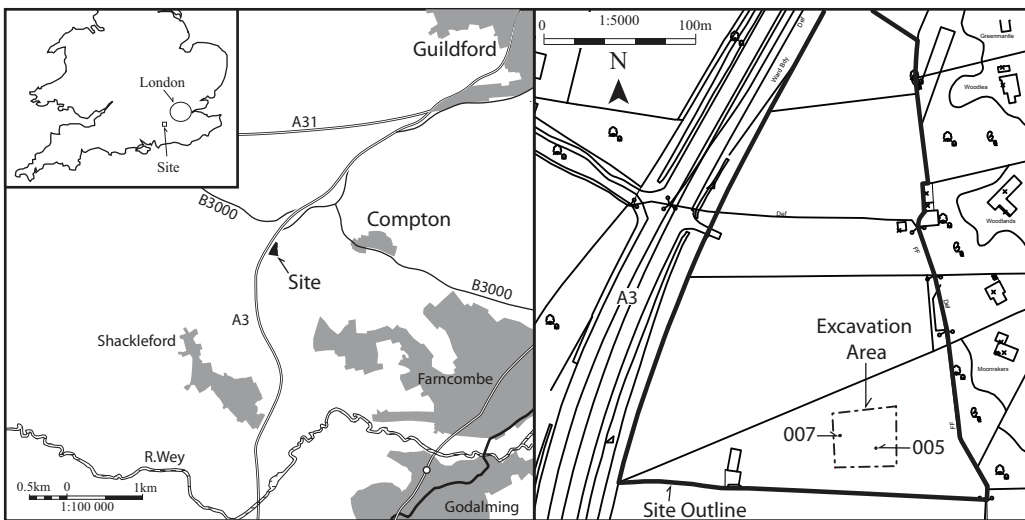


Fig 1 Early Neolithic activity near Compton: site location. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

assemblage is typical of Early Neolithic flintwork, although the presence of bladelets suggests that either the feature represents activity in the Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic transition, or that residual Mesolithic material had been present in the locality and was later incorporated into the pit deposits (Butler 2008).

Analysis of soil samples taken from the fill of the pit revealed the presence of a moderate quantity of charred hazelnut (*Corylus avellana* L.) shell fragments, and a small quantity of charcoal from a broad range of taxa: deciduous oak (*Quercus* sp.), hazel/alder (*Corylus avellana/Alnus* sp.), sloe/cherry (*Prunus* sp.), birch (*Betula* sp.), common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* L.), and taxa from the Maloideae group – apple, pear and hawthorn (Allot & Green 2008).

The second, smaller pit (007) was 0.8m in diameter and 0.2m in depth (fig 2), with a single fill containing a moderate quantity of charcoal fragments, and a single flint flake and flint chip. In contrast to the larger pit, the charcoal recovered originated from a single species – deciduous oak (*Quercus* sp.) (Allot & Green 2008). The uniformity of the species present in the deposit supports the theory that the charcoal was from a single burning event such as the disposal of hearth debris. The smaller pit contained no firm dating evidence, but because of the lack of any other activity identified on site, it is strongly suspected that both features are associated with the same period of activity.

The Surrey Historic Environment Record (HER) contains a number of entries relating to Neolithic activity within a 4km radius of the site. All relate to findspots of Neolithic implements, primarily leaf-shaped arrowheads and fragments of flint axe head; no Neolithic features were recorded. Five of these findspots are recorded as being within 1km of the site at Compton, and comprise two leaf-shaped arrowheads (HER: 1505), fragments of two flint and one polished stone axe head (HER: 1479, 3301 and 3302), and a small cluster of non-specific Neolithic implements (HER: 1479). This cluster of finds suggests there has been Neolithic activity in this area, but is not specific enough to confirm whether it is contemporary with the Early Neolithic pottery discovered. The remaining finds of Neolithic origin appear to cluster around Puttenham Common, 3km to the west of the site, and the Hurtmore/Godalming area, 3km to the south-east.

The discovery of Early Neolithic pottery in southern Surrey is a significant one, even though there were a limited number of features associated with it. This is due to the small number of confirmed sites in the county associated with this period. The scatter of finds recognised from the surrounding area begins to indicate that the site exists within a landscape frequented by Neolithic people. The evidence suggests further Neolithic activity may be present in close proximity to the site.

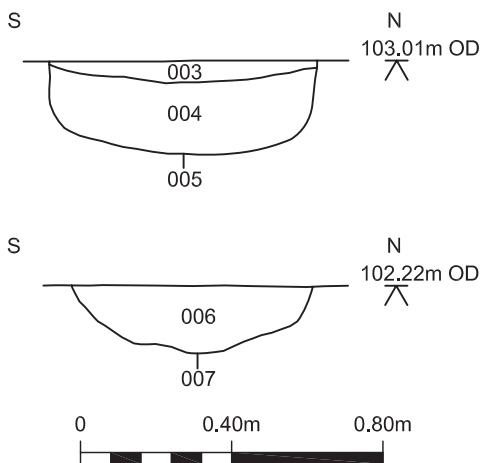


Fig 2 Early Neolithic activity near Compton: pit sections.



Fig 3 Early Neolithic activity near Compton: the pottery assemblage, pots 1–5.

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