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Editorial

My first task in this volume is to thank and pay tribute to the retiring editor, Audrey Meaney. She took the Proceedings through several difficult years, from 1993–7, coping in particular with new publishing technology and increasingly complex archaeological reports. In this time she made tremendous efforts to catch up with annual publication, so that, by September 1998, we are only nine months behind the date for which the issue is intended. This is despite the size and professional standards required for the only vehicle for regular reporting of most archaeological discoveries to a wide local and international readership in Cambridgeshire, as well as publishing historical and other antiquarian research.

1996-7 once again had a well-filled programme for the Society, with two conferences, on Fenland Waterways in March and on recent archaeological excavations in November. There was an impressive programme of lectures, headed by Barry Cunliffe and our own ex-President Christopher Taylor, and some enjoyable excursions. It was also a year when the Council, and in particular its President and Secretary, were involved in efforts to protect local services for archives, archaeology and local studies. Sadly, just as this volume was being prepared for the press, we heard of the deaths of two of our stalwart members and supporters. Nesta Rooke, for many years Sites and Monuments Officer for Cambridgeshire, and Brian Charge, Director of the Haverhill and District Archaeological Group, died in July 1998.

This volume contains a few minor changes in design, principally with the intention of making better use of expensive space, and it follows the usual format except for the revival, after several years, of a Reviews section. As a first attempt it perhaps appears rather incestuous, but I hope that in future we will receive a wider range of books, and I would also welcome offers of suitable reviews by other writers. This is an important way to bring works that might easily be missed to the attention of members, and to entice them to read reports which are often more interesting than their titles suggest.

Alison Taylor

An Iron Age Square Barrow at Diddington, Cambridgeshire
Third Interim Report of Excavations at Little Paxton Quarry: 1996

Alex Jones
with contributions by Lynne Bevan and Ann Woodward

Summary

This report presents an interim summary of the third stage of an on-going programme of archaeological investigations at Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire (centred: TL 202 651: Figs. 1a–b), undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of CAMAS Aggregates Limited (now Bardon Aggregates Limited). Investigations involved excavation of a rectangular enclosure, possibly the remains of an Iron Age square barrow, located in the east of the quarry concession (Area D), and testing two circular, adjoining cropmarked features (Area C): (Fig. 1c). These excavations followed trial-trenching (Jones 1992), and fieldwalking and test-pitting (Bevan 1996; 1996a).

Previous work

Fieldwork within the quarry has investigated settlement and activity dating from Neolithic to Romano-British periods. Neolithic activity is represented by clusters of small pits, possibly forming pit circles (Area B, Fig. 1C), and by flint artefacts within the topsoil. Two roughly circular features, also in Area B, may have formed eaves-drip gullies surrounding huts measuring 15m and 8m in diameter. The Mid-Late Iron Age is represented by farmstead enclosures (Area B), further enclosures examined by trial-trenching in Field 2, and by the enclosure/barrow discussed in this report. Romano-British activity was focused towards the south of the quarry concession (Area A) and comprised a 'ladder' enclosure containing traces of timber-framed buildings, wells and a possible 'drinking trough', all dating to the 3rd–4th centuries.

This work forms part of a programme of excavation and research within the quarry concession which is intended to determine the changing function and economy of the area, in particular focusing upon the potential for future comparison of structural and economic data from four discrete Iron Age foci. Integrated analysis of settlement forms and patterning is also intended to contribute towards a broader, multi-period, landscape-based study of changes in settlement in the Ouse Valley and in other river valley environments. Preliminary results of excavations of prehistoric and Romano-British settlements in the quarry have been published in two interim reports (Area A: Jones and Ferris 1994; Area B: Jones 1995).

Aims

The aims of the 1996 excavations were to recover a ground-plan of the cropmarked enclosure (Area D), and to identify and excavate any associated features; to determine the origin of the cropmarked features within Area C, and to define their form, dating and function, to identify any associated features and, more generally, to contribute towards a landscape-based analysis of the later prehistoric economy and the wider appreciation of changes in settlement forms and patterns.

Methodology

Ploughsoil was removed by a 360° excavator. Ditches and other negative features were sampled as widely as possible to identify their form and fill sequence: where several cuttings were hand-excavated across a single feature, the fill sequences in each cutting were separately recorded, to allow the reconstruction of the spatial distribution of artefacts and artefact types. Feature intersections were also dug to test the chronological sequence. Pits and postholes were half-sectioned. All datable feature fills were sampled objectively to recover charred plant remains and small bones. Twenty litre samples were flotted on-site to allow selective re-sampling on an informed but judgmental basis.

Excavation Results

Neolithic-Bronze Age (Areas C and D)

The only feature was an elongated pit (F561: Area D, Figs. 2–3), cut into the gravel subsoil (2158). It was sub-oval, 2.5m in length, and was backfilled with brown silt-sand (2137). It contained four flint flakes and one sherd of Late Neolithic pottery in the Peterborough tradition, Mortlake style, and three sherds of Early Bronze Age pottery. This period was also represented by residual flint artefacts from Mid-Late Iron Age features in Areas C and D, and by

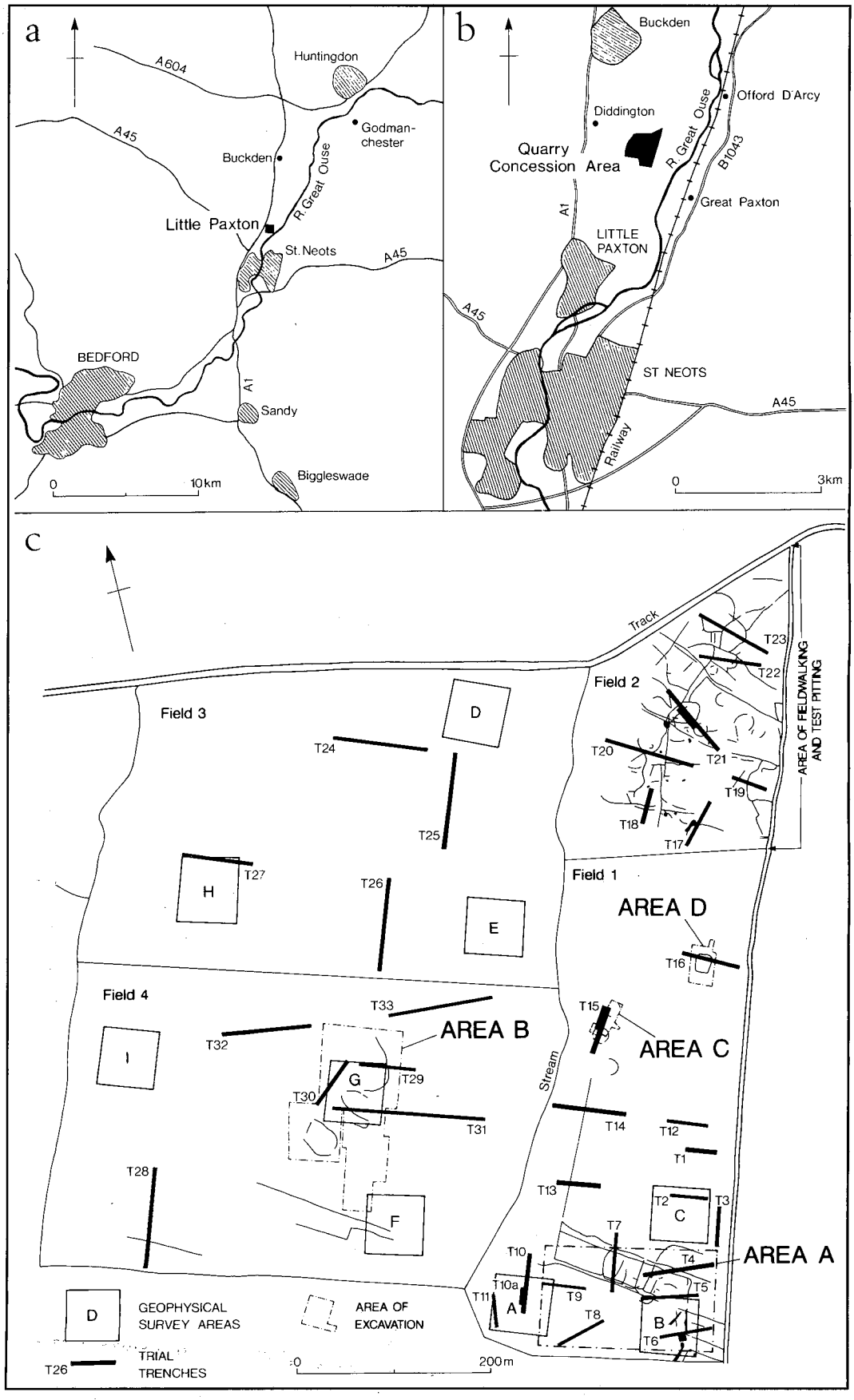

Figure 1a. *Little Paxton site and the River Great Ouse Valley;* ***Figure 1b.*** *St. Neots and the Little Paxton site;* ***Figure 1c.*** *Little Paxton site: areas of archaeological investigation*

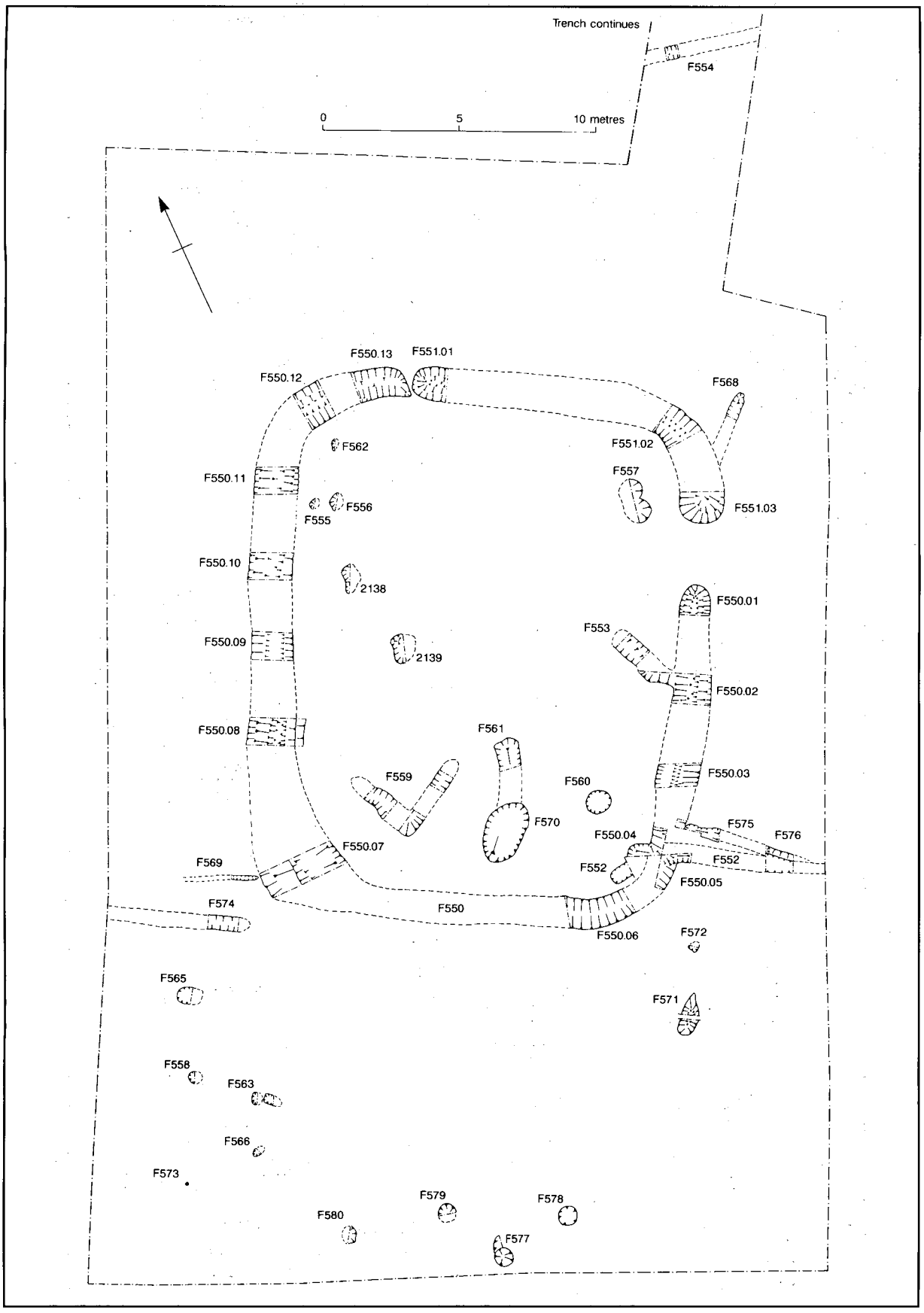

Figure 2. Area D: main features

clusters of Neolithic-Bronze Age flint artefacts found by fieldwalking (Bevan 1996).

No evidence was found in Area C of any feature corresponding to the southern of the two cropmarked features tentatively interpreted as a ring-ditch (Fig. 1c), despite repeated cleaning and observations during a subsequent watching brief.

Mid-Late Iron Age (Areas C and D)

Barrow/enclosure

The main feature was a rectangular barrow or enclosure, defined by an encircling ditch (F550, F551). Other features comprised pits and postholes, all cutting the subsoil (2154). Evidence for the interpretation of this feature as a barrow is discussed below. The feature measured 9m northeast to southwest, and 7m southwest to northeast (measured from the innermost edges of the ditches). Two gaps, 1m and 0.1m wide, were recorded. The depth and profile of ditches F550 and F551 varied throughout their lengths. Ditch F551 had an irregular, U-shaped profile and was a maximum of 0.6–0.8m in depth and 1.2m–1.7m in width. The remainder of the ditch (F550) was U-shaped with a basal slot, more pronounced along the western side. The ditch was 2.5m wide at its southwestern corner, narrowing to 1.4m in the northwest (F550.13). Ditches F550 and F551 were backfilled with brown silt-sands. Upper ditch fills on the eastern side of the barrow or enclosure had a high stone content, in contrast to the upper fills on its western side, which were mostly stone-free.

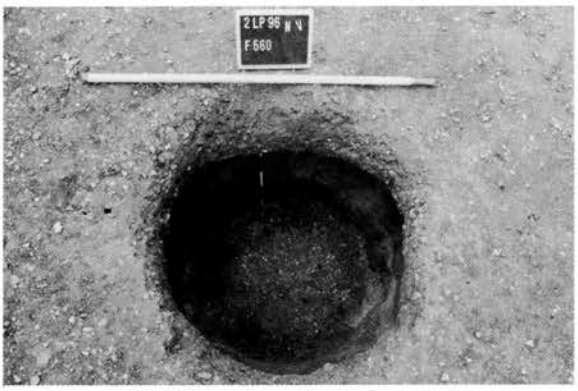

Plate 1. *Pit F560 (Photo: R. Cuttler). Scale is 1m.*

Features within the area enclosed by ditches F550 and F551 included a large, flat-based pit (F560: Fig. 2, Plate 1) with a barrel-shaped profile, which contained a large fragment of greenstone and fragments of quern stone. An oval pit (F570) was cut into Neolithic-Bronze Age feature F561 and two gullies (F559), formed a right-angled intersection. A group of postholes (F556, F562, F555), measuring an average of 0.3m in diameter, and a double posthole (F557) and a gully (F553), were also recorded. Other possible features (2138, 2139) were probably of natural origin. Ditches F550 and F551 contained pottery of Mid Iron Age date.

External features

Postholes and narrow gullies were mostly aligned approximately northwest to southeast. One gully (F552) was cut by ditch F550. A second gully (F575), was cut into infilled ditch F550, but could not be traced to the west of it. Other shallow, ditched, possible field boundaries (F569, F574) were recorded in the west of Area D, and a vertically-sided gully (F554) in the north. A cluster of small postholes (F558, F563, F565, F566, F571, F572, F573, F577, F578, F579, F580), an average of 0.3m in diameter and 0.1m in depth, was located in the south of Area D. Features attributed to this period in Area C (not illustrated in plan) comprised an irregular gully and two pits. One pit (F478) was backfilled with soft charcoal (2008) which contained a group of plain, shell-tempered sherds of probable Iron Age date. Remaining features contained no datable artefacts.

Romano-British (Area C: Fig. 1c)

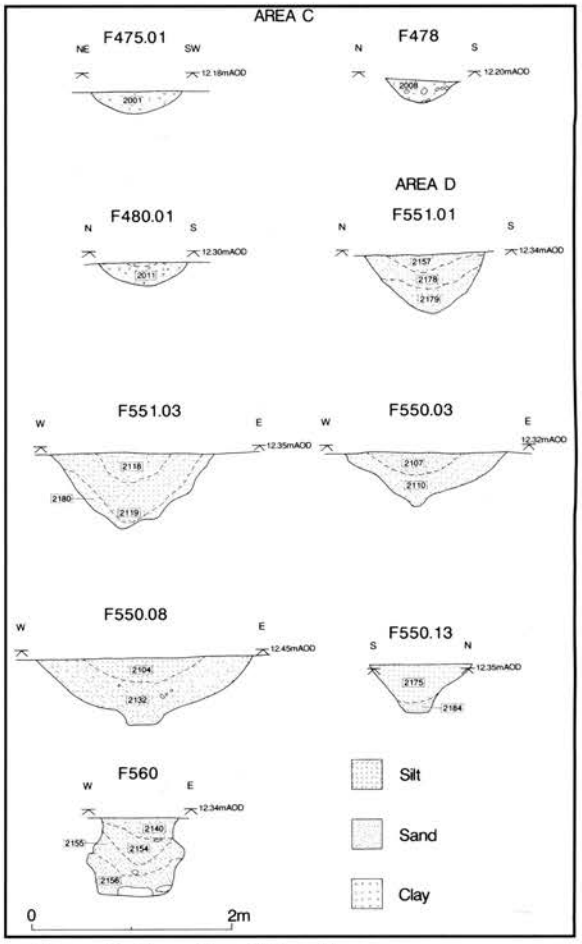

Figure 3. *Areas C and D: sections*

Three ditches with no datable artefacts were attributed to this period on the basis of the alignment of two of the ditch groups perpendicular to the axis of the ladder enclosure excavated to the south (Fig. 1c; Jones and Ferris 1994, Fig. 1), the identification of the third ditch as the cropmarked ditch aligned

perpendicular to the ladder enclosure, forming a continuation of its western end, and, finally, the lack of contrary dating evidence.

Artefacts

Flint

Lynne Bevan

The small assemblage from Areas C and D consisted of one barbed and tanged arrowhead, five scrapers, a knife, three cores, one denticulate piece and 54 flakes, including eight retouched, and one serrated, flakes. The raw material used was pebble flint from secondary deposits, light to dark grey and beige in colour with the thin compacted cortex characteristic of a river gravel origin. The flint exhibited a high incidence of water-rolling and re-cortification.

Stratified material came from a Neolithic-Bronze Age pit (F561), comprising four flakes, including a serrated flake of opaque light grey flint with iron staining on the surface and a flake, 97mm in length, of high quality dark grey flint from a very large pebble nodule. This feature also contained Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pottery with which the flint is considered contemporary. There were only two chronologically-diagnostic flints, a (residual) Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead from Mid-Late Iron Age ditch F550, found with an ovoid, shallow-flaked scraper and a retouched flake, and a 'denticulate', possibly a scraper (also from ditch F550), of a form dated to the Mid-Late Bronze Age (Saville 1981, 21; Harding 1991, fig. 45.84–85).

Remaining flints are considered to be Neolithic to Bronze Age in date, and were residual in later features and topsoil. Their size indicates that very small pebble nodules were being utilised. Interesting items were a knife, retouched and utilised on either side with the tip missing, and a flake which had been retouched through re-cortification, indicating the re-use in a later period of a previously small flake (both from the topsoil in Site D).

Pottery

Ann Woodward

From the total of 198 sherds recovered only four were Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. These sherds, from pit F561, were in grogged fabric and included one decorated rim sherd which apparently had been refired. It bore incised herringbone decoration on and below the rim and belongs to the Peterborough Ware tradition.

Most of the pottery was Iron Age. As in the enclosures excavated previously, no diagnostic Early Iron Age types are present. Almost all pottery derived from the enclosure/barrow ditch in Area D and adjacent features. However, one small group of plain, shell-tempered pottery, probably Iron Age in date, was found in a posthole (F478) in Area C. Pottery was found in ten out of the 15 cuttings excavated through the enclosure/barrow ditch (F550 and F551). Unabraded, medium to large sherds were the norm and some vessels were represented by several sherds, including:

(1) approximately half a vesicular scored ware jar with vertical neck, rim diameter *c.* 140mm, from cutting F550.04; a base angle sherd apparently belonging to the same vessel from cutting F551.02.
(2) large fragments from the mid-wall of a larger vesicular scored ware jar – from cuttings F550.03 and F550.06.
(3) larger sherds from the lower wall of a large sandy jar, from cutting F550.06.
(4) large flat rim sherd from a necked jar of wide diameter, *c.* 210mm, in a fine micaceous sandy fabric, from cutting F551.02.

Most pottery was found on either side of the eastern entrance gap, although not at the terminals themselves. Parts of vessel (1) were found on different sides of this entrance. Within the ditch assemblage sandy and shell-tempered fabrics were in roughly equal proportions. The occurrence of scored ware by sherd count was 11%, although this may have been biased by good survival of the scored ware jar, vessel (1).

Gully F552, which was cut by the enclosure or barrow ditch F550, contained 23 sherds, none bearing scored surface treatment. A micaceous sandy rim sherd with internal bevel carried wide ribbing below the rim. Pit F560, possibly associated with gully F552 or the enclosure/barrow ditch, produced 34 sherds, many in a fine micaceous sandy fabric. The complete profile of an ovoid jar was present. One vesicular (originally shelly) rim sherd was from a scored ware jar.

In comparison with pottery from the enclosures previously excavated (Woodward in Jones 1995A), the forms present and overall percentage occurrence of scored ware in Area D indicate that this pottery is probably of Mid rather than of Late Iron Age date. Such a conclusion is strengthened by the complete absence of finger-rusticated rim treatments.

Discussion

The fieldwalking assemblage, particularly the presence of 14 scrapers, suggests some form of settlement in the near vicinity (Bevan 1996). Pit F561 may be one of a very few features of this date to survive plough truncation. The discovery of posthole clusters of Late Neolithic date, interpreted as possible pit-circles, and two hut circles of Early Bronze Age date (Jones 1995, figs. 2–3) during earlier excavations in the adjoining Field 4 (Fig. 1c), suggests early prehistoric activity of both ritual and domestic character nearby.

The regular rectilinear form, and comparatively small size of the Area D barrow/enclosure, does not, on present evidence, appear to be paralleled at Little Paxton or Diddington, the remainder of the Iron Age enclosures being irregular or of curvilinear form. Analysis of air photograph evidence can form the basis of the assessment and classification of enclosures (e.g. Whimster 1989, 26–34; Jones 1994, 100–108). Comparison of the measurements of the cropmarked and excavated Iron Age enclosures from Little Paxton highlights the comparatively small size of the Area D example.

Plate 2. *Area D: barrow or enclosure, view north (Photo: E. Newton). Scales are 1m and 2m.*

Sizes of Mid-Late Iron Age Enclosures at Little Paxton/Diddington

(see Fig 1c for field numbers)

Field	Enclosure	L	W	
Measurements from innermost ditch edges.				
1	(Area D)	9m	7m	
2	(Tr. 19) +	40	38	(incomplete)
2	(Tr. 21) +	30	23	
2	(Tr. 22) +	28	22	
2	(Tr. 23) +	40	32	
2	(Tr. 23) +	30	24	
4	1 *	40	30	
4	2 *	32	30	(incomplete)
4	3 *	28	28	
4	4 *	26	28	(incomplete)

+ See Jones 1992 for numbering.
* See Jones 1995A for numbering.

The rectilinear form and size of this feature is perhaps most closely paralleled by ditched square enclosures of Iron Age date, such as those excavated at Maxey (Pryor 1985, Fig. 44, enclosures 17 and 18, measuring 6m and 8m square respectively; Simpson 1985, Fig. 168, various enclosures measuring an average of 6m by 10m), which are interpreted as ditched barrows of Arras type, principally found in East Yorkshire (Stead 1991). Such barrows originally comprised a mound of material dug out of the encircling quarry-ditch, enclosing an internal burial. The form of these ditched sites is described by Whimster (1981, 111) as 'almost invariably square although in many cases the sides are not absolutely parallel, and it is normal for the corners to show marked round angles'. In addition to Maxey, a cluster of six cropmarked square barrows has been located in Cambridgeshire at Hemingford Grey (Whimster 1981, appendix D3), Fulbourn, Fenstanton, Brampton, Willingham, near Cambridge, and at Hinxton (excavated: Alexander and Hill 1996). The wider distribution of square barrows includes examples in Derbyshire (e.g. May 1970), Essex (e.g. Lavender 1991), Lincolnshire, Dorset, Sussex and Gloucestershire (Whimster 1981, 123).

This site is distinguished from barrows catalogued by Whimster by the absence of an internal burial and the presence of an eastern, and possibly a northern, entrance causeway. No trace of a burial was found despite repeated manual cleaning and subsequent monitoring. Plough truncation may have removed all trace, as suggested for the barrow at Aston upon Trent Derbyshire (May 1970) where the excavator suggested that the original grave-cut may have been shallow, like the earliest examples from Yorkshire (Pryor 1985, 260), for example at Garton Station, Yorkshire (Stead 1991, 22).

Entrance causeways were considered by Whimster to be an attribute indicative of a domestic function, as in the case of the ditched square enclosures at Lockington, Leicestershire and Tixall, Staffordshire (1981, 123). The presence of an entrance causeway does not necessarily militate against the interpretation of the enclosure at Little Paxton as a barrow. Stead interprets a number of square ditched enclosures from Garton Station (Stead 1991, Fig. 20: enclosures G, H, J, L) and Kirkburn (*op. cit.* Fig. 23: enclosures K3 and K4)

as barrow enclosures, despite the presence of a single entrance causeway. Although the interpretation of this square barrow group from Garton Station is complicated by the insertion of multiple Anglian burials into three of the Iron Age barrow group, and the absence of burials in seven such square barrows, Stead (1991, 24) interprets all these ditched features as Iron Age barrows, because of their form, size, and the proximity of other datable Iron Age barrows containing burials. Stead suggests that causeways were retained at the Garton Station barrows because access was required to their interior, leading to the construction of an internal bank instead of an overall mound. Following this interpretation, ditches F550 and F551 in Area D at Little Paxton may be quarry ditches, interrupted by a single entrance causeway. The narrow gap between ditches F550 and F551 on the northern side of the ditched barrow is an unusual feature. It is too narrow to define an entrance causeway, and it may be due to gang-work. The narrow gap between ditches F550 and F551 would not be unusual if features F550 and F551 were quarry-ditches, but would be more unexpected in a farmstead enclosure.

Another typical attribute of square barrows is their clustering. Whimster (1981, 112) suggests this may be more apparent than real, since over a quarter of the sites he identified were solitary. Statistics suggesting clustering are perhaps misleadingly affected by some very large cemeteries, and by numerous small square barrows measuring less than 4m in diameter. In Cambridgeshire, both clusters and single examples are recorded.

Other pits and postholes were excavated within the barrow/enclosure interior and in the south of Area D. Although the relationship between the two feature groups is not possible to determine, the pits and postholes may be earlier features. Other features may belong to an east-west aligned field system of Roman date.

Datable pottery from Mid-Late Iron Age features in Area D may be attributed to the Mid Iron Age. An excavated enclosure complex of Mid Iron Age date has been excavated at Little Paxton, to the southwest of Area D (Area B, Fig. 1c), comprising ditched enclosures, interpreted as farmsteads, with associated features (Jones 1995, 14–16). Other enclosures located to the north of Area D (Field 2: Fig. 1c) have been broadly dated to the Early-Late Iron Age by trial-trenching (Jones 1992). The possible square barrows excavated at Maxey were both cut by features of Mid Iron Age date, and were dated to the Early-Mid Iron Age (Pryor 1985, 237. Pottery from the barrow/enclosure ditch could either be derived from earlier Iron Age activity or be associated with contemporary or subsequent activity in the vicinity. Most of the pottery derived from the southwest corner, close to pit F560, which also contained pottery. However, the ditch terminals contained no pottery, in contrast to the pattern observed at other excavated Iron Age enclosures at Little Paxton/Diddington, interpreted as farmsteads (e.g. Fig. 1c, Area B: Jones 1995A). The absence of finds from the possible square barrows at Maxey was one factor contributing to their interpretation. An alternative interpretation of the Area D ditched feature is a small enclosure associated with farming, its form and small size determined by functional factors.

Conclusions

Fieldwalking and area excavation in Field 1 have provided further, mainly artefactual, evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity. Excavation has recorded more evidence of Mid-Late Iron Age activity. Based only upon a preliminary analysis of the structural and artefactual data, the interpretation of the Area D ditched feature as a square barrow of Arras type must be provisional. The excavated feature corresponds with the form and size of published examples. Absence of evidence of a burial, and the presence of an entrance causeway, need not be inconsistent with this interpretation, which adds an element of diversity to the Iron Age landscape, hitherto populated by farmsteads alone. Also notable is the negative evidence provided by this fieldwork for activity here in the Early Iron Age, which suggests a hiatus in activity at that time.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations used:

BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BUFAU	Birmingham Archaeological Field Unit
CAU	Cambridge Archaeological Field Unit
EAA	East Anglian Archaeology
PCAS	Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society
PPS	Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society
RCHME	Royal Commission for Historical Monuments (England)

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Articles in books: Hines, J. 1998. 'The sixth-century transition in Anglian England: an analysis of female graves from Cambridgeshire'. In J. Hines (ed), *Studies in Early Medieval Chronology.* Oxbow Monographs.

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