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Iron Age settlement by the Dam Brook at Scotland Farm, Dry Drayton

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An excavation by Albion Archaeology in 2007 at Scotland Farm, south of Dry Drayton, revealed part of a late Iron Age enclosure, previously visible as a crop-mark. The excavated area occupied a subdivision of the overall enclosure, containing structural remains and a concentration of settlement-related features. Ceramic evidence indicates that the settlement had a short lifespan, beginning no earlier than the late 1st century BC and falling out of use by the mid-1st century AD. It was located next to the Dam Brook, and may have replaced an earlier farmstead to the south-west.

Introduction

In 2007, Albion Archaeology evaluated the proposed construction site of a grain store and access area at Scotland Farm, south-west of Dry Drayton (Fig. 1). The site lies within an area of crop-marks listed in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER 11441). Reassessment of the relevant aerial photograph initially cast doubt on the archaeological origin of the crop-marks, but trial trenching subsequently identified them as evidence of an enclosed Iron Age settlement (Albion Archaeology 2007). The remains within the access area were buried deeply enough to be preserved *in situ* beneath the development, but an excavation was carried out within the footprint of the grain store (Fig. 2).

The site, centred at TL 3662 6016, lies in the base of a shallow valley adjacent to the Dam Brook, at a height of 55m OD. The underlying geology consists primarily of Boulder Clay, with occasional outcrops of degraded chalk. Though primarily open grassland immediately prior to excavation, the site had been ploughed during the 20th century, and the remains of ridge and furrow cultivation indicate a history of ploughing as far back as the medieval or post-medieval period. The presence of late prehistoric settlement in the area had previously been established by the discovery of a middle to late Iron Age farmstead further south along the Dam Brook (Fig. 4), while the brook itself is thought to have been canalised during the middle Iron Age (Abrams & Ingham 2008, 30). There is little evidence for earlier prehistoric activity. However, both this site and the one to the south contained a layer of orange colluvium tentatively thought to have formed in the Mesolithic period (Fig. 2, G13; Abrams & Ingham 2008, fig. 1.11). An incomplete, patinated flint microlith of that period, which was recovered from G13 during trial trenching, lends support to this theory.

Late Iron Age settlement (Fig. 2)

Excavation revealed the south-western end of a large enclosure. Crop-marks suggest it measured 60m by 80m in total, although this end of the enclosure had been subdivided by ditch G2. The ditch that defined the enclosure (G1) was up to 4.2m wide and 1.6m deep, with a mostly 'V'-shaped profile (Fig. 2, d); no deliberate backfilling was evident, and its infill was largely homogenous. It appears that the ditch terminated shortly beyond the eastern limit of excavation, as it was not located in the trial trenches to the east. Ditch G2 was similar in size, although little of it was revealed within the excavation area. It was stratigraphically later than G1, suggesting that the enclosure was not originally subdivided.

The enclosure contained a penannular gully (G3) that was 8m in diameter, with a wide opening on its eastern side. The angularity of the gully and the flatness of its base (0.3–0.35m wide) suggest it may have held ground beams. However, no trace of these was evident in section, and it may just have been designed to catch rainwater. Few finds were recovered from the gully and it was located away from the concentration of pits to the east, suggesting that it was associated with an agricultural structure such as an animal pen, rather than a domestic building.

Pit groups G5 and G6 represent the main evidence for settlement activity within the enclosure, although no specific function could be identified for any of them. The pits revealed within the excavation area (G5) were mostly small — up to 2.3m by 1.5m in area and no more than 0.5m deep — but one of the pits

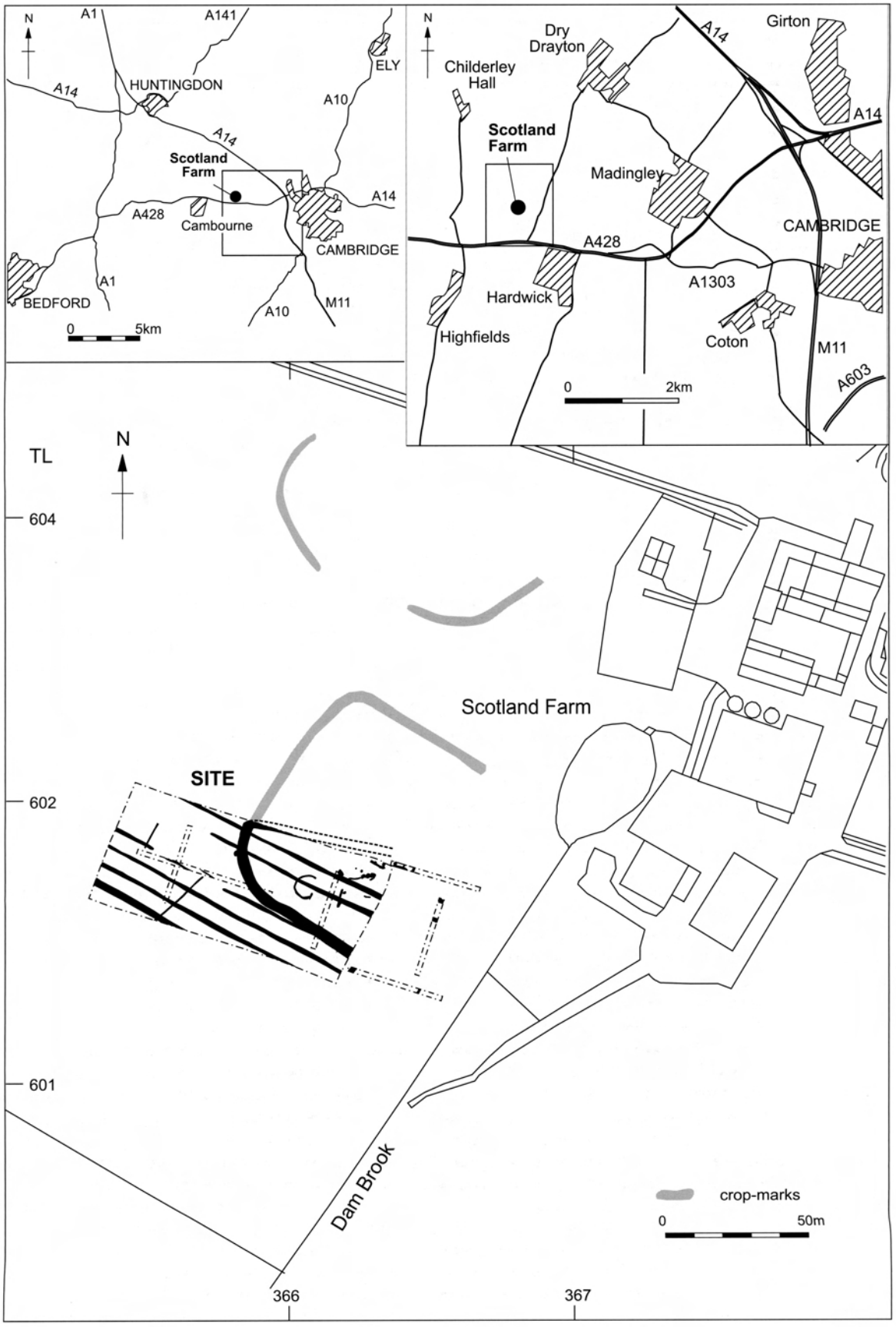

Figure 1. Site location plan showing excavated area, all features and crop-marks.

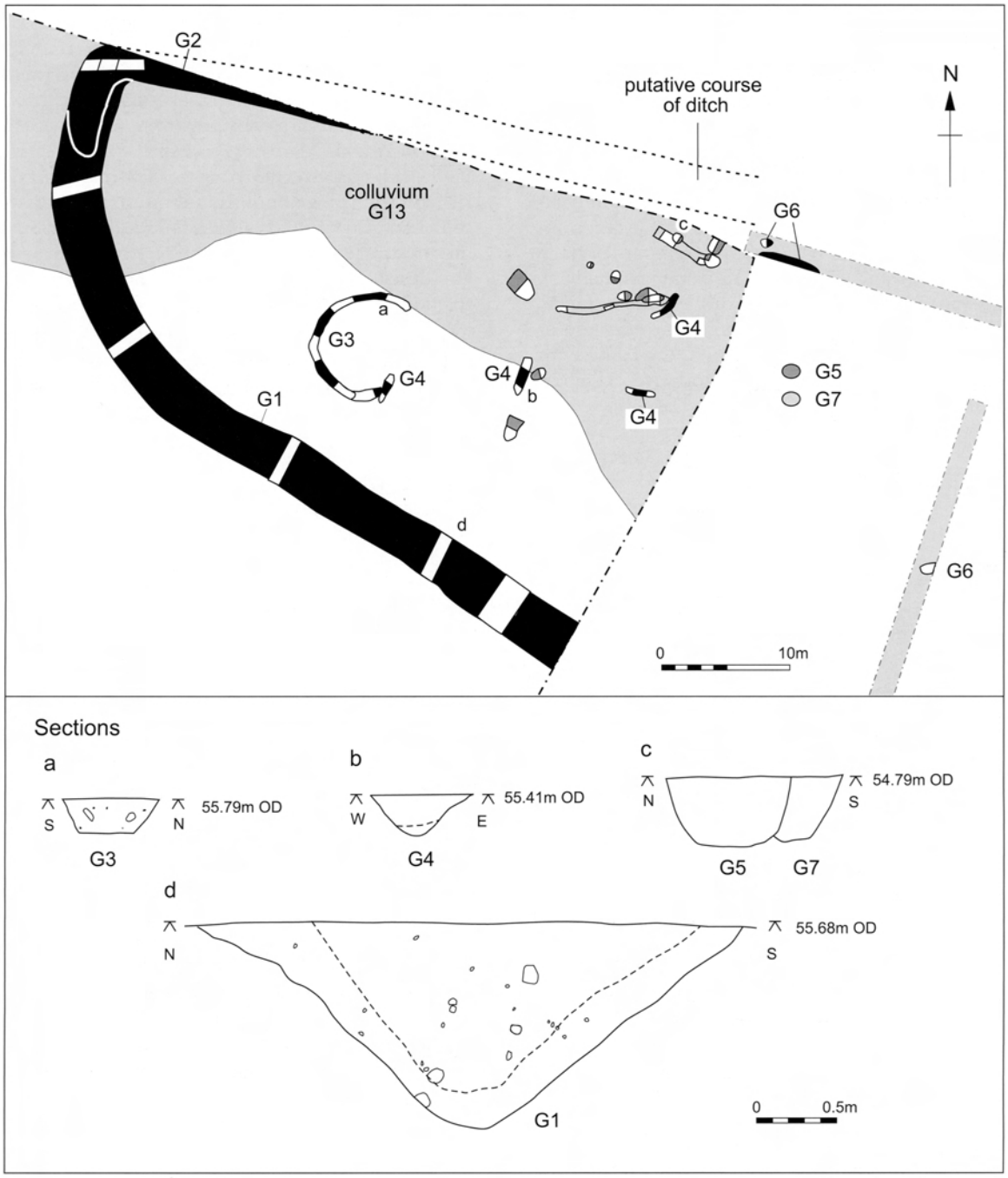

Figure 2. Plan of Iron Age enclosure, with representative sections.

partially revealed in the trial trenches to the east (G6) appears to have been substantially larger. Despite the small size of the pits, they contained more than half of the pottery assemblage recovered from the site (Table 2). Interspersed with the pits were four possible beam slots (G4), measuring 2.3–3m long, up to 0.7m wide and up to 0.25m deep. The beam slots each appear to have been part of separate structures, the form of which is unknown. One may have been associated with the penannular structure G3, despite being stratigraphically later. The function of gullies G7 is also unclear; stratigraphically earlier than pits G5, they may have been associated with an earlier use of the enclosure prior to the main settlement activity within this part of it.

Pottery

The excavation found 267 sherds (3,309g) of pottery, which form a homogenous assemblage tightly dated to the later pre-Roman Iron Age (LPRIA). The pottery is moderately well-preserved with a mean sherd weight of 12g, and includes some partial profiles.

Fabrics

All of the vessels are handmade or perhaps slow-wheel-finished from unsourced local fabrics (Table 1). The assemblage consists primarily of sandy fabrics (57.81% 1,913g), including some micaceous proto-grey-wares (Table 1), but also contains a high proportion of grog-tempered vessels (38.71% 1,281g). The use of a mix of sand- and grog-tempered fabrics is highly characteristic of the LPRIA of the area (Thompson 1982, 17), and despite Cambridgeshire's location on the periphery of the main grog-tempered pottery areas of Essex and Hertfordshire (Thompson 1982), grog-tempered fabrics are still fairly common (Lyons 2008). Several grog-tempered fabrics are present at Scotland Farm, including a later Iron Age fabric with numerous dark grog inclusions similar to examples identified at Patchgrove (Tomber & Dore 1998, 167). A pink-surfaced, reduced, grog-tempered ware is also present (Tomber & Dore 1998, 210). This ware is commonly found at the broadly contemporary sites of Bobs Wood, Hinchingbrooke, and Loves Farm, St Neots (Alice Lyons, pers. comm.) and has also been identified at numerous sites around Milton Keynes (Marney 1989, fabric 46).

The presence of grog-tempered vessels, particularly in large quantities, appears to be most prevalent on later Iron Age sites which continued in use through the LPRIA and into the Roman period (Hancocks 2003). In the area around Scotland Farm, little grog-tempered pottery was found during excavations on the middle to late Iron Age site immediately to the south-west (Percival 2008) or at Cambourne (Leivers 2005). In contrast, occupants of a later Iron Age site at Little Paxton, St Neots, used handmade, grog-tempered fabrics from around 100BC; by AD60, wheel-thrown grog-tempered fabrics had become the dominant type (Hancocks 2003, 76). Similar patterns were observed within the assemblage from nearby Loves Farm (Alice Lyons, pers. comm.). However, at some sites such as Caldecote Highfields, less than 2.5km south-west of Scotland Farm, grog-tempered pottery (both handmade and wheel-thrown) was present in the LPRIA phases (100–75 BC) but declined in use by the mid-1st century AD, despite continued occupation at the site well into the Roman period (Sealey 2006, 8).

Very few shell-tempered sherds were found, accounting for less than 3% of the total assemblage. Shell-tempered wares often make up a large proportion of Iron Age assemblages from Cambridgeshire (Hancocks 2003, table 7.6; Percival 2008), with clay for the pots being selected from the fossiliferous, shell-rich Jurassic formations common in the south-west of the county (Williams 2003, 76; Percival 2008). The dearth of shell-rich fabrics at Scotland Farm is perhaps due to the later date of the assemblage, well after the middle Iron Age floruit for the use of shell temper, although they were similarly uncommon in the assemblage from the middle to late Iron Age farmstead south of Scotland Farm (Percival 2008).

Forms

A minimum of eighteen vessels are represented, based on rim count. The range of forms present is greater than might be found within a middle Iron Age assemblage (Hill 2002, 145), but is entirely utilitarian in character and does not include fine wares or imported wares. Five examples of simple everted-rim jars were found, of which four have a sandy fabric (Fig. 3, P1) and the fifth (Fig. 3, P4) is grog-tempered (Thompson Type C2-3). This ubiquitous utilitarian form dates from the late 1st century BC to the mid 1st century AD (Thompson 1982). A wide-mouth jar in grog-tempered fabric with a single cordon high up under the rim (Thompson Type B3-3) was probably made in the 1st century AD (Fig. 3, P3), and two examples of closed jars/bowls (Fig. 3, P5), also in grogged fabrics (Thompson Type C3), are of similar date. The assemblage includes three wide-mouth bowls in sandy (Fig. 3, P6) and grogged fabrics (Thompson Type D1-4) and three plain, wide-mouth, everted-rim cups in sandy, grogged and micaceous fabrics. Two large thick-walled storage vessels were also found: one (Fig. 3, P2) has a rolled rim and is made of dark, grog-tempered fabric, perhaps suggesting a later Iron Age date; the other is a wheel-thrown vessel (Fig. 3, P7) in a sandy fabric and features coarse-combed

Table 1. *Quantity and weight of pottery by fabric type.*

Fabric	Description	Quantity	% of total quantity	Weight (g)	% of total
C1	Sand with rounded chalk inclusions	2	0.75	17	0.51
DGTW	Dark grog-tempered ware	1	0.37	112	3.38
GS	Grog and shell	1	0.37	37	1.12
GTW	Grog-tempered ware	45	16.85	435	13.15
GTW P	Grog-tempered ware with pink surfaces	52	19.48	572	17.29
GTW R	Reduced grog-tempered ware	18	6.74	125	3.78
MPGW	Micaceous proto-grey ware	88	32.96	1,501	45.36
MSOW	Micaceous sandy oxidised ware	4	1.50	48	1.45
MSRW	Micaceous sandy reduced ware	5	1.87	21	0.63
PGW	Proto grey ware	4	1.50	46	1.39
Q	Sandy handmade ware	9	3.37	4	0.12
Q1	Coarse sandy handmade ware	17	6.37	163	4.93
Q2	Medium sandy handmade ware	11	4.12	131	3.96
SOW	Sandy oxidised ware	2	0.75	3	0.09
STW	Shell-tempered ware	8	3.00	94	2.84
Total		**267**	**100.00**	**3,309**	**100.00**

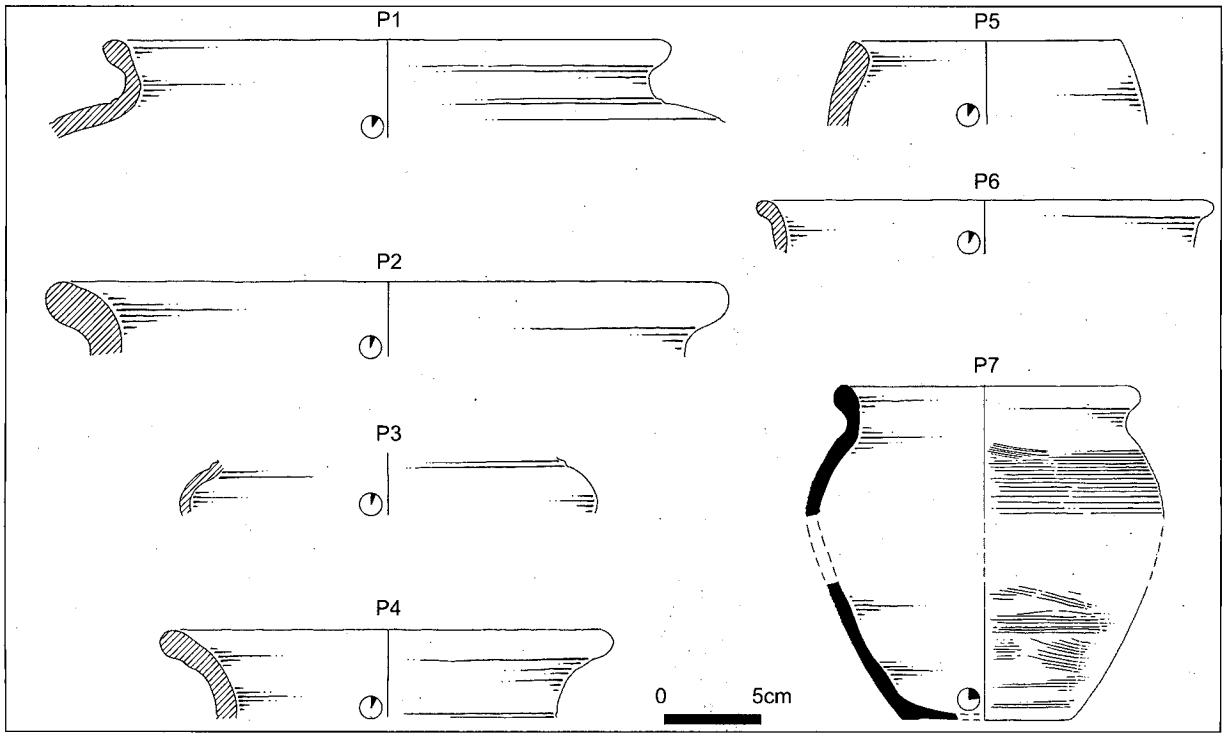

Figure 3. Illustrated pottery.

Catalogue no.	Fabric	Description	Group
P1	MPGW	Plain everted-rim jar	1
P2	DGTW	Rolled-rim storage jar	1
P3	GTW R	Cordoned jar	1
P4	GTW P	Plain everted-rim jar	1
P5	STW	Closed plain jar, no true external rim	5
P6	MSOW	Wide-mouth bowl	5
P7	MPGW	Round-shouldered jar; combed decoration on shoulder; everted rim	5

decoration. Decoration is fairly limited and consists of neatly executed combing, present on three vessels (Percival 2007, fig. 10), or vertical incised scratching or scoring (also on three vessels).

Deposition

Although pottery was recovered from all of the main feature types excavated, more than half of the assemblage came from pits G5 (Table 2). The remainder came largely from the structural slots (G4) and gullies (G7) within the enclosure, and from the enclosure ditch itself (G1/G2). The largest and best preserved sherds were found in the enclosure ditch, suggesting that material had been placed into this feature during the occupation of the site and had remained there relatively undisturbed. Reasonably large sherds were also recovered from the pits and gullies, but it is likely that the sherds found in the other features, with a significantly lower average size, represent redeposited or reworked material.

Table 2. Quantity and weight of pottery by Group

Group	Quantity	% of quantity	Weight (g)	% weight	Mean sherd weight (g)
1	41	15.35	839	25.35	20.4
2	4	1.50	56	1.69	14.0
3	5	1.87	43	1.30	8.6
4	26	9.74	97	2.93	3.7
5	156	58.43	1,968	59.47	12.6
6	7	2.62	26	0.79	3.7
7	24	8.99	251	7.59	10.5
13	4	1.50	29	0.88	7.3
Total	**267**	**100.00**	**3,309**	**100.00**	**12.4**

Discussion

The assemblage of handmade jars and bowls in a mix of grog- and sand-tempered fabrics is consistent with those identified by Thompson as spanning the end of the 1st century BC, perhaps beginning as early as 140 or 130BC and continuing into the 1st century AD. The absence of fully Romanised forms or imported fine wares such as samian indicates that activity had ceased before the end of the 1st century AD. Hill has noted that many communities in the region were slow to adopt these more Romanised forms, perhaps as a statement of cultural identity (Hill 2002, 159), although the lack of fine wares may equally reflect the low status of the site. Sources of supply for the pottery may well have been local; several contemporary production sites such as Greenhouse Farm (Gibson & Lucas 2002), Swavesey (Willis *et al.* forthcoming), Hutchison Site, Addenbrooke's Hospital (Alice Lyons, pers. comm.), Cherry Hinton (Evans 1990) and Water Newton (Perrin 1999, 44–5) have been identified, producing both grog-tempered and sandy coarse wares.

The range of open and closed bowls and jars and carinated forms is similar to that recovered from Structures 2 and 6 at Hurst Lane Reservoir, Ely, where both pottery and stratigraphic evidence indicated occupation into the mid 1st century AD (Evans *et al.* 2007). However, at the Ely site the vessels were made of sandy and shell-rich fabrics rather than grogged fabrics, perhaps continuing the fabric traditions begun in the middle Iron Age phases of occupation at the site (Percival 2007, 54). The settlement at Scotland Farm had no such direct middle Iron Age predecessor; shell-tempered fabrics may simply not have been chosen, or the fabric traditions established by the middle to late Iron Age farmstead south of Scotland Farm may have been followed, where shell-tempered fabrics were similarly infrequent (Percival 2008).

Animal Bone

A total of 180 fragments of highly-fragmented but moderately-preserved bone, weighing approximately 2.0kg, were recovered by a combination of hand-collection and wet-sieving. Each fragment was recorded in terms of standard parameters. Fragments not identifiable to species, genus or family level were assigned to an approximate category, 'ox-sized', 'sheep-sized' or 'mammal, unidentified'.

Although the identified bones derive largely from ox (*Bos taurus*) and sheep/goat (*Ovis aries/Capra hircus*), with 'ox-sized' and 'sheep-sized' fragments, the assemblage includes occasional finds of chicken (*Gallus gallus*), pig (*Sus scrofa*), horse (*Equus caballus*) and dog (*Canis familiaris*) (Table 3). Sheep was positively identified, but there is no definite identification of goat. There was no recovery of fish, amphibians or any wild bird or mammal species.

Carcass-part representation derives from all skeletal areas, including those of prime, moderate and negligible meat-bearing quality, but is heavily biased towards elements and areas of greatest robustness. Evidence from epiphysial fusion and dental eruption and wear indicates the recovery primarily of adult, or at least sub-adult, animals, with only occasional recovery of juveniles and no representation of foetal/neonate or infant animals. No complete long bones were recovered and all partially-complete bones with fully-fused epiphyses are too poorly preserved to allow accurate measurement; no metrical data or stature estimates were therefore recorded.

Clear butchery evidence was seen from two ox bones only, probably a result of only moderate preservation of the bone surface. Evidence of canine gnawing was seen on three ox bones, but there were no signs of rodent gnawing. One of the G5 pits contained charred 'sheep-sized' long bone, while a second contained calcined 'sheep-sized' long bone; calcined ox bone was recovered from one of the G7 gullies. Charring and calcination respectively indicate combustion temperatures of 400–500 degrees Celsius, equivalent to a campfire, and >700 degrees, equivalent to a much more intensive fire such as a cremation pyre (Lyman 1994, 386). There was no evidence for bone or horn working, pathological change, or any other modification.

Charred plant remains

Nine of the eighteen soil samples, all 10 litres in volume, produced very small amounts of charred plant remains, with no significant concentrations. The remains consist mostly of cereal grains, as well as sev-

Table 3. *Number of hand-collected and wet-sieved animal bones. HC: hand-collected; S: sieved*

Group	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		Total	
	HC	S	HC	S	HC	S	HC	S	HC	S	HC	S	HC	S	HC	S
Horse	4														4	-
Ox	27		2		1				4	1	1		7		42	1
Ox-sized	1				1				12						14	-
Sheep						2									-	2
Sheep/goat	11		3				1		6	3			5		26	3
Sheep-sized		7		1			1	14	5	48			1		7	70
Pig			1				1								2	-
Dog			1						4	1					5	1
Mammal/ unident.				1					1						1	1
Chicken													1		1	-
Total	**43**	**7**	**7**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**3**	**14**	**32**	**53**	**1**	**-**	**14**	**-**	**102**	**78**

eral chaff fragments and a few weed seeds (Table 4). There were also small amounts of very fragmented charcoal in all the samples. Hulled wheat, emmer/spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*) and possibly emmer (*T.* cf. *dicoccum*) were identified on the basis of several well-preserved grains and a few wheat glume bases, while barley (*Hordeum* spp.) was identified from two rachis fragments. The few weed seeds, from vetch/tare/vetchling (*Vicia/Lathyrus* spp.), dock (*Rumex* sp.) and possibly brome (cf. *Bromus* sp.), are probably from arable weeds, harvested incidentally with the cereals.

The charred plant remains show that hulled wheat and barley, the two cereals most commonly found on Iron Age sites in Britain (Greig 1991), were being used and probably cultivated in the vicinity. The material represents background cereal-processing debris which may have derived from activities taking place some distance away; this corresponds with the archaeobotanical data from the middle to late Iron Age farmstead excavated to the south (Fig. 4), where hulled wheat and hulled barley were the main cereals represented within a similarly small assemblage (Giorgi 2008). The paucity of remains allows little further comment on Iron Age crop husbandry at Scotland Farm.

Discussion

Late Iron Age occupation at Scotland Farm

The late Iron Age settlement at Scotland Farm was unusual in that it had a short lifespan which did not continue into the Roman period. Occupation at most contemporary sites in the region was subsumed by Roman activity, particularly field-systems, as at Bobs Wood, Hinchingbrooke (Mark Hinman, pers. comm.) and Hurst Lane, Ely (Evans *et al.* 2007, 49). There are perhaps indications of why occupation of this site was so short-lived; these are discussed below in relation to wider evidence for settlement along the Dam Brook.

The enclosure was occupied by a small agricultural community, which the pottery assemblage suggests may have dwelt there for as little as one generation. However, there may not have been settlement activity within the enclosure from its beginning: despite its short lifespan, two phases of activity can tentatively be identified. Stratigraphic evidence suggests that there was initially a single large enclosure used primarily for livestock, contemporary with which were animal pen G3 and gullies G7. Occupation perhaps only began with the subdivision of the enclosure, at which time beam slots G4 and pits G5 and G6 were constructed. The uniformity in date of pottery recovered from across the site suggests, however, that there was not a lengthy time period between the enclosure's formation and its occupation.

An absence of fine wares and imported wares ostensibly suggests that the settlement was not a high status site, yet its wealth may have been invested primarily in livestock rather than artefacts. The size of the enclosure suggests that it was used for holding animals, with domestic activity perhaps confined to the subdivided area at the south-western end. The faunal assemblage suggests that cattle and sheep or goats were the main animals being kept, though not apparently bred, while the presence of horses, pigs, chickens and dogs is also indicated. Such a limited range of species, with no apparent utilisation of wild animals, may be a factor of the small size of the assemblage, yet it corresponds with the evidence from the larger faunal collection from the middle to late Iron Age farmstead to the south (Abrams & Ingham 2008, 20–33). The negligible quantity of charred plant remains recovered from soil samples suggests that the settlement's economy was primarily pastoral; it is at least unlikely that crop-processing took place in the immediate vicinity, which again reflects evidence

Table 4. *Charred plant remains.*
Frequency of items: + = 1–10 items; ++ = 11–50 items; +++ = 50–100 items

	Group	1	1	2	3	4	4	4	5	5
	Sample	4	11	5	8	9	14	16	12	17
	Flot vol. (ml)	10	1	<1	30	2	30	20	10	1
Cereal grains										
Triticum cf. *dicoccum* Schubl.	?Emmer					1				
T. dicoccum/spelta	Emmer/Spelt					1			1	
Triticum sp(p).	Wheat				1	5		1		2
cf. *Hordeum* spp.	?Barley					2				
Hordeum/Triticum spp.	Barley/Wheat					2				
Cerealia	Indet. Cereal			1		4		2	2	1
Cereal chaff										
Triticum spp.	Wheat glume base		1							1
Hordeum spp.	Barley rachis	1	1							
Other plants										
Vicia/Lathyrus sp.	Vetch/tare/vetchling					1		1		
Rumex sp(p).	Dock							1		
cf. *Bromus* sp.	Bromes						1			
Indet.	Charcoal	+	+++	+	+	++	+++	++	+	++
	Total	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**16**	**1**	**5**	**3**	**4**
	Item density	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.6	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.4

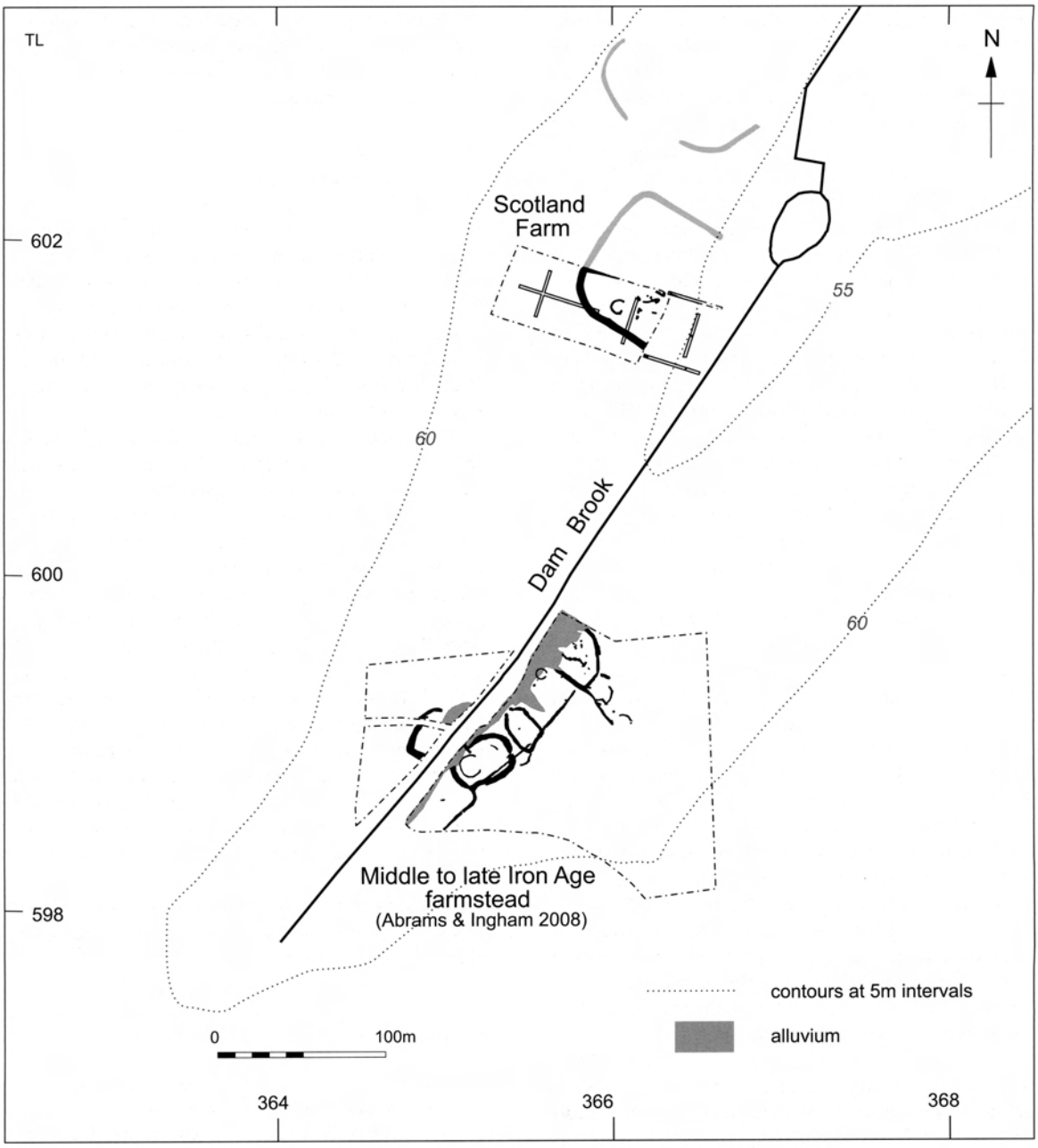

Figure 4. *Iron Age settlement along the Dam Brook.*

from the farmstead to the south. Indeed, the pastoral economy, waterside location and large enclosure ditches of the two settlements all closely resemble each other, raising the possibility of a direct connection between the two sites, separated by a distance of little more than 150m.

Settlement along the Dam Brook

Recent years have seen the accumulation of a growing body of evidence for higher population densities in areas of clay geology than was traditionally thought. This has been brought about principally by the increase in developer-funded excavations since 1990, as well as by the deliberate taking of aerial photographs in conditions conducive to the appearance of crop-marks on clay soils (Mills & Palmer 2007). Iron Age settlement in the vicinity of Scotland Farm was first identified as a result of a road-building project (Abrams & Ingham 2008). Widespread Roman activity was also identified along the course of the A428 west of Cambridge, although continuity between the two periods was more evident in the character of the settlements than in their location.

Excavation at Scotland Farm has helped to demonstrate a concentration of Iron Age settlement stretching for at least 400m along the course of the Dam Brook (Fig. 4). No settlement activity was identified along the Callow Brook to the east of Scotland Road

during work on the A428, but the Dam Brook may simply have been preferred due to the gentler gradient of the slope on either side. Aerial photographs suggest the presence of another large enclosure north-east along the brook; no further activity can be identified beyond that, yet the failure of the farmstead south of Scotland Farm to appear as a crop-mark demonstrates that the absence of crop-mark evidence may not be significant. Even the crop-marks that first suggested the presence of enclosures at Scotland Farm were initially thought not to be archaeological in origin: rather than appearing as customary darker lines on the aerial photographs, the ditches are visible as white lines, which led to a suspicion that they were related to modern agriculture. The identification of a circular crop-mark 600m west of Scotland Farm as a ring-ditch had already been shown to be erroneous (Abrams & Ingham 2008, 17). The confirmation of the archaeological origin of the Scotland Farm crop-marks is therefore significant in validating them, and potentially in helping to identify other crop-marks in similar ground conditions that may otherwise have been regarded as modern.

Although a concentration of settlement remains has been identified along the Dam Brook, it is clear that not all of them were contemporary. The farmstead to the south was middle to late Iron Age in date; ceramic sequences for Cambridgeshire are poorly refined for this period, but the site probably went out of use in the 1st century BC. The enclosure at Scotland Farm, however, was late Iron Age in date. It was established in the 1st century BC, at about the same time as the southern farmstead was abandoned. Both settlements were enclosed by large ditches; both had a pastoral economy with little evidence for crop-processing; both produced ceramic assemblages containing little of the shell-tempered pottery common to Cambridgeshire — the evidence is circumstantial, but it is at least plausible that a north-eastward shift in settlement occurred along the brook.

If settlement migration did occur, then it may have been due to changing climatic conditions. There are clear indications that the farmstead south of Scotland Farm suffered from excessive groundwater, particularly at its north-eastern end (Abrams & Ingham 2008, 29–30). Observations from sites such as Little Paxton, 20km west of Scotland Farm (Roseff 2000, 32), suggest that water tables rose between the Iron Age and the Roman period, meaning that a settlement located directly next to a watercourse may have become too wet to remain viable. The earlier community on the Dam Brook perhaps abandoned the farmstead and moved a short distance downstream to a new site at Scotland Farm; yet the short life of this new settlement may indicate that it too quickly became uninhabitable on a permanent basis. There is no indication that the settlement was destroyed by fire, or that Roman reorganisation of the area forced the people off the land; instead, the features were apparently allowed to fall into disuse, silting up gradually, despite the amount of effort that it must have taken to dig the enclosure ditch. The Roman sites identified during work on the A428 all occupied relatively high ground, and a wetter climate in the Roman period may simply have meant that the Dam Brook was no longer a viable location for settlement.

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