Above the Fen Edge: Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age Activity on land off Broadlands, Peterborough

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Illustrations by Caroline George and Tansy Collins.

Excavations between 1998 and 2006 have revealed significant prehistoric activity on land off Broadlands, Peterborough (NGR TF 2142 0001), to the north of the well known Fengate sites. The main period of activity at this site was in the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age. This activity seems to have been primarily agricultural (pastoral) in nature, with features including a stockyard and two waterholes, one containing two preserved log ladders. A single crouched burial, dating to the early Iron Age and marked by a wooden post, was also present. Its location may have been influenced by the presence of a Beaker period barrow, c. *100m to its north-north-east, and/or by its position between the contemporary agricultural features and the edge of the fen. A middle Bronze Age field system and small-scale late Iron Age to early Romano-British activity was also recorded but is not presented herein.*

Introduction and background

Between 1998 and 2006, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS, formerly Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust) carried out four stages of excavation on land off Broadlands, Peterborough (NGR TF 2142 0001) (Figs. 1 and 2). The archaeological potential of the site had been predicted on the basis of its position, on the fen edge to the north of the Fengate area, and demonstrated by a trial trench evaluation (Vaughan 1998).

Broadlands lies in Peterborough's 'Eastern Industry', an industrial area which has been developed since the late 1960s. The site comprises a rectangular area of *c.* 4.3ha between Newark Road and a parallel service road to the west; it is bounded by Broadlands to the south and a playing field to the north. The site was formerly part of an area of playing fields (and was agricultural land prior to that), but has become derelict since the commencement of development in 1998.

The site lies at *c.* 5m OD (ordnance datum) on the landward side of the former fen edge, where the upland areas of Nene terrace gravels give way to the Flandrian alluvial and peat deposits which fill the low-lying basin between the western fen edge and Northey island. The solid geology is of cornbrash limestone overlain by first terrace gravels and Oxford Clay.

Intensive activity from the Neolithic to the Roman period is well attested on the western fen edge at Peterborough. Investigations in the area began with G. Wyman Abbott's recording of finds and features revealed by gravel working in the early 20th century (Leeds 1922; Hawkes and Fell 1945). Modern investigations commenced with the Fengate excavations in the 1970s and 1980s (Pryor 1974; 1978; 1980; 1984), and have continued until the present day. The prehistoric to Roman development of the area is summarised in Pryor's volume *The Flag Fen Basin* (2001). Only a brief overview of this information will be presented here; additional information from specific sites will be given as relevant in the following text. The locations of sites mentioned in the text are shown in Figure 1.

The first human subdivision of the Fengate area dates to the early Neolithic, but the extent of the cleared landscape associated with this is unclear. The main areas of activity were *c.* 600m to the south of Broadlands (Pryor 2001, 406–407). Late Neolithic settlement is also attested in this more southerly area, concentrated around Storey's Bar Road; the landscape of the time is thought to have been an open one (Pryor 2001, 407–408). Contemporary Neolithic activity is attested by pits containing struck flint and Grooved Ware pottery and by tree hollows at a site on Edgerley Drain Road, just c. 110m east of Broadlands (Beadsmoore 2005). Similar activity continued at Edgerley Drain Road in the Beaker period (Beadsmoore 2005), and three barrows (Cambridge Historic Environment Record (HER) 3002, HER 3111 and HER 50420) are located close to the site.

The Bronze Age landscape of the Fengate area consisted of droveways running westwards from the fen edge to higher ground, with fields, paddocks, stockyards and areas of occupation located in between. Similar contemporary landscapes have been identified on the eastern side of the Flag Fen Basin, at Northey and Bradley Fen. The main elements of the Fengate system are shown in Figure 1. It can be divided into a southern and a central/northern zone, the latter characterised by droveways and including an

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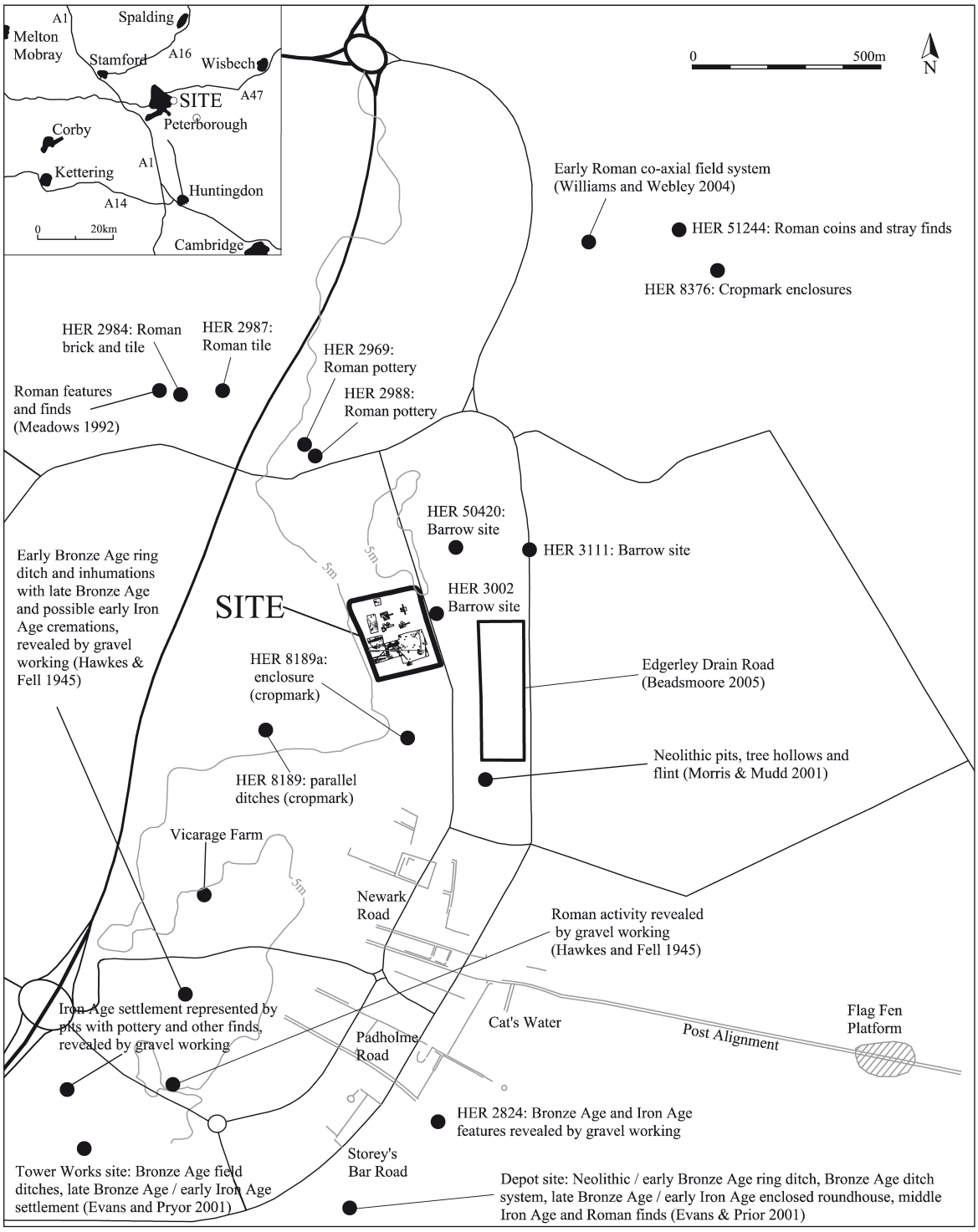


Figure 1. *Site location.*

area of 'community stockyards' (Pryor 2001, 408), *c.* 700m south of Broadlands. The features of the Bronze Age Fengate landscape are thought to have gone out of use in/by the late Bronze Age (Pryor 2001, 410 and 411–412). A middle Bronze Age system of land division at Edgerley Drain Road had also gone out of use by the late Bronze Age (Beadsmoore 2005).

The field systems on the eastern edge of Flag Fen were also redundant by the late Bronze Age, but settlement continued at Bradley Fen and King's Dyke West. The main period of deposition of metal artefacts and other items around the Flag Fen post alignment and platform dates to this time. Known late Bronze Age to early Iron Age activity in the Fengate area includes a roundhouse set within a palisaded enclosure and a possible road flanked by ditches at

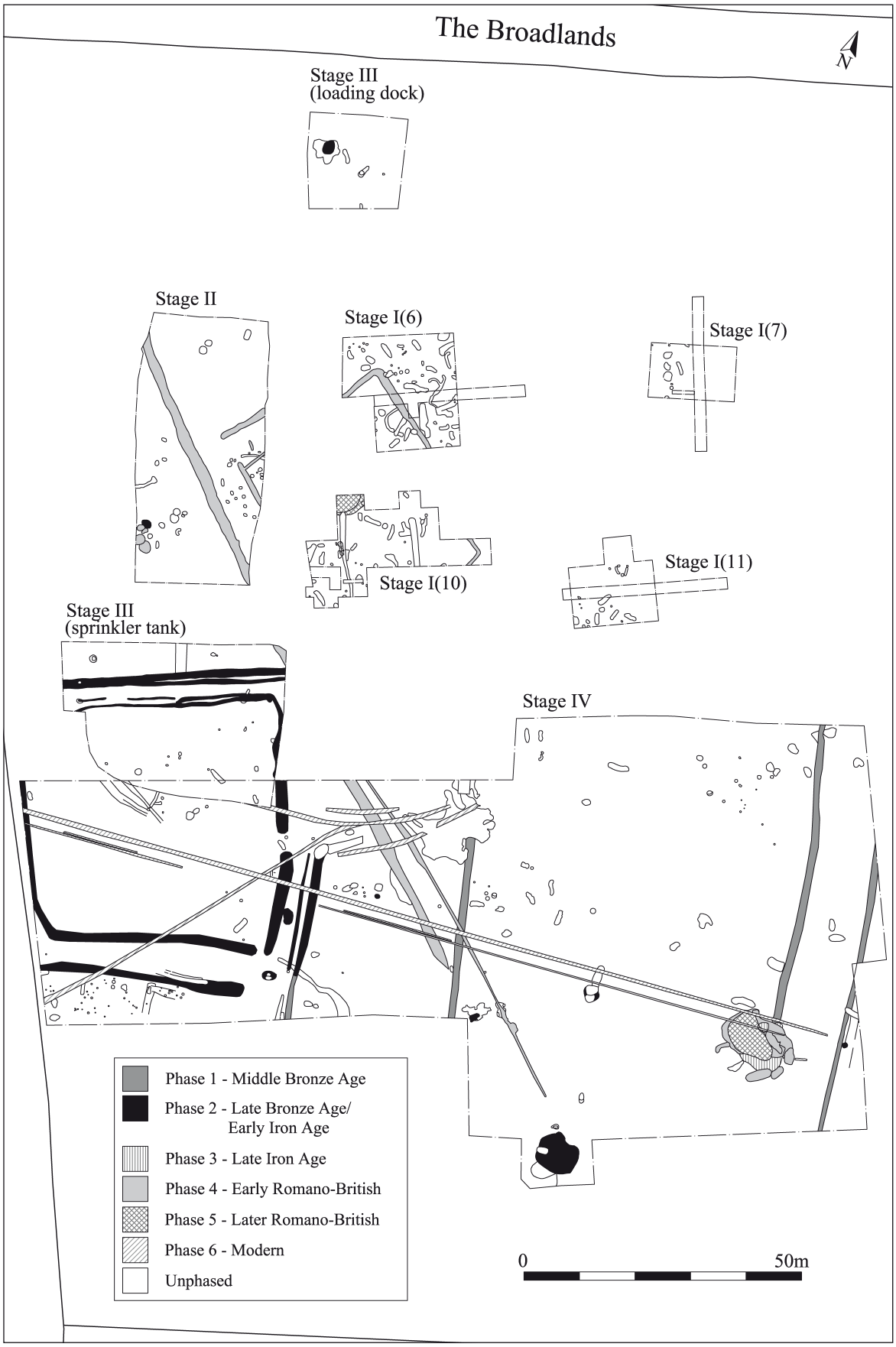


Figure 2. *All features plan.*

the Depot site (Evans and Pryor 2001, 23–24, 28–29). Occupation is also attested at the Tower Works site by pits containing large assemblages of animal bone and pottery (Evans and Pryor 2001, 33–36). By the 5th century BC, occupation is attested by pitting at the Vicarage Farm site, *c.* 400m to the south-east of the Broadlands excavation (Pryor 1974, 15–22; 1984, 7–10), and the buildings and yards of the fen-edge Cat's Water settlement are thought to have their origins in the middle Iron Age (Pryor 1974, 15–22; 1984, 7–10).

Occupation at Cat's Water, *c.* 600m south of Broadlands, continued until the mid-1st century AD, the abandonment of the settlement coinciding with evidence for renewed activity (pitting) at Vicarage Farm (Pryor 1984, 228). Wet conditions persisted in the area during the Roman period, although there may have been a brief drier period in the late 1st century AD when the Fen Causeway was constructed. However, wetter conditions had resumed by the 3rd century (French 2001, 403). The Cat's Water site was briefly reused in the mid to late 2nd century AD, for livestock paddocks rather than for settlement (Pryor 1984, 125), and Roman fields (possibly used until the 3rd century AD) have been identified at the Depot site (Evans and Pryor 2001, 24). A Roman droveway identified at Cat's Water has also been seen to extend into the Tower Works site, and further Roman features ('settlement features', not recorded in detail) were identified in this area during early 20th century gravel quarrying (Pryor 2001, 414). A 2nd to 3rd century AD field system, possibly associated with occupation, has been identified *c.* 900m north-east of Broadlands (Williams and Webley 2004), and finds and features from the Newark/Newark Hill area suggest settlement to the north (Meadows 1992; HER 2969, 2984, 2987, 2988).

Summary of results

The latest investigations revealed five phases of activity, identified on the basis of datable artefacts, stratigraphic relationships and spatial/functional associations. The earliest features at the site were middle Bronze Age boundary ditches (Phase 1), although very sparse evidence hints at a Neolithic presence prior to this. The main period of activity at the site was the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (Phase 2); features of this date include a stockyard, water-holes and a crouched burial. Although some isolated Phase 2 features may extend into the middle Iron Age, there was a clear hiatus in activity following this period of pastoral activity. Phase 3 dates to the late Iron Age and comprises only a small cluster of pits; early Romano-British (Phase 4) activity followed on directly from this and included pits cutting their Phase 3 predecessors. The main elements of the Phase 4 site were a square enclosure (probably used for livestock) and a significant boundary ditch, alongside which ran a gully from which a possible votive deposit of cattle bone was recovered. The remains were in stark contrast to the otherwise sparse faunal assemblage from the site and comprised an articulated skull and spine as well as numerous articulated limb bones.

A similar deposit model was identified in all four stages of the investigation; this comprised recent deposits and topsoil overlying a palaeosol which sealed all Phase 1 to 4 features and the vast majority of the site's undated features. In Stages I–III of the investigation only the B horizon of the palaeosol was present; in the southern part of the Stage IV area only, its A horizon (which had been subjected to alluvial aggradation from over bank flooding) was also present (French 1998). The palaeosol sealed natural deposits of yellowish orange silty sand with gravel, into which Phase 1 to 4 features were cut.

The final pre-modern phase of activity (Phase 5) at the site comprised two large pits and a small oven, all of which cut the palaeosol, and dated to the late 3rd to 4th century AD. The following text focuses on the Phase 2 activity; a full account of the archaeology is presented in the Research Archive Report (see Nicholson 2007).

The late Bronze Age to early Iron Age

The stockyard

Description of features

Phase 2 at Broadlands was dominated by a subsquare ditched enclosure (internal dimensions *c.* 40 x 45m (the stockyard); Fig. 3) in the Stage III (sprinkler tank) and Stage IV areas (F4286, F4328 (recut as F4311), F4029 (=F4011), F1035 and F1028; Fig. 4). The enclosure was aligned almost parallel/perpendicular to the Phase 1 ditches, though the alignment tended more towards north-west/south-east than in Phase 1 (Fig. 3). Two entrances to the enclosure were identified, one (3.4m wide) at the centre of its eastern side and one (1.40m wide) at its south-eastern corner. The stratigraphic relationship between Ditches F1035 and F1028 suggests that in the later part of its use, the enclosure was unbounded (or incompletely bounded, by gullies F1061 and F1065) on the western part of its northern side.

The enclosure was flanked by additional ditches to the north (F1018, recut as F1016; Fig. 4) and south (F4316 (=F4033, F4021)), separated from it by gaps of *c.* 4–6m. The western edge of the enclosure lay at the boundary of the excavated area, but a similar flanking ditch ran along the southern part of its eastern side. This ditch (F4084) cut and followed the line of a Phase 1 Ditch. Its northern and southern termini were in line with those of F4328, and it seems likely that the recutting of this feature (as Gully F4178 or possibly as a double boundary also incorporating Gully F4071 (=F4076)) was contemporary with the recutting of F4328 as F4311. The courses of the northern and southern flanking ditches beyond the corners of the enclosure remain unknown. F1018 and F1016 did not terminate within the sprinkler tank area, but showed no signs of turning parallel to the corners of

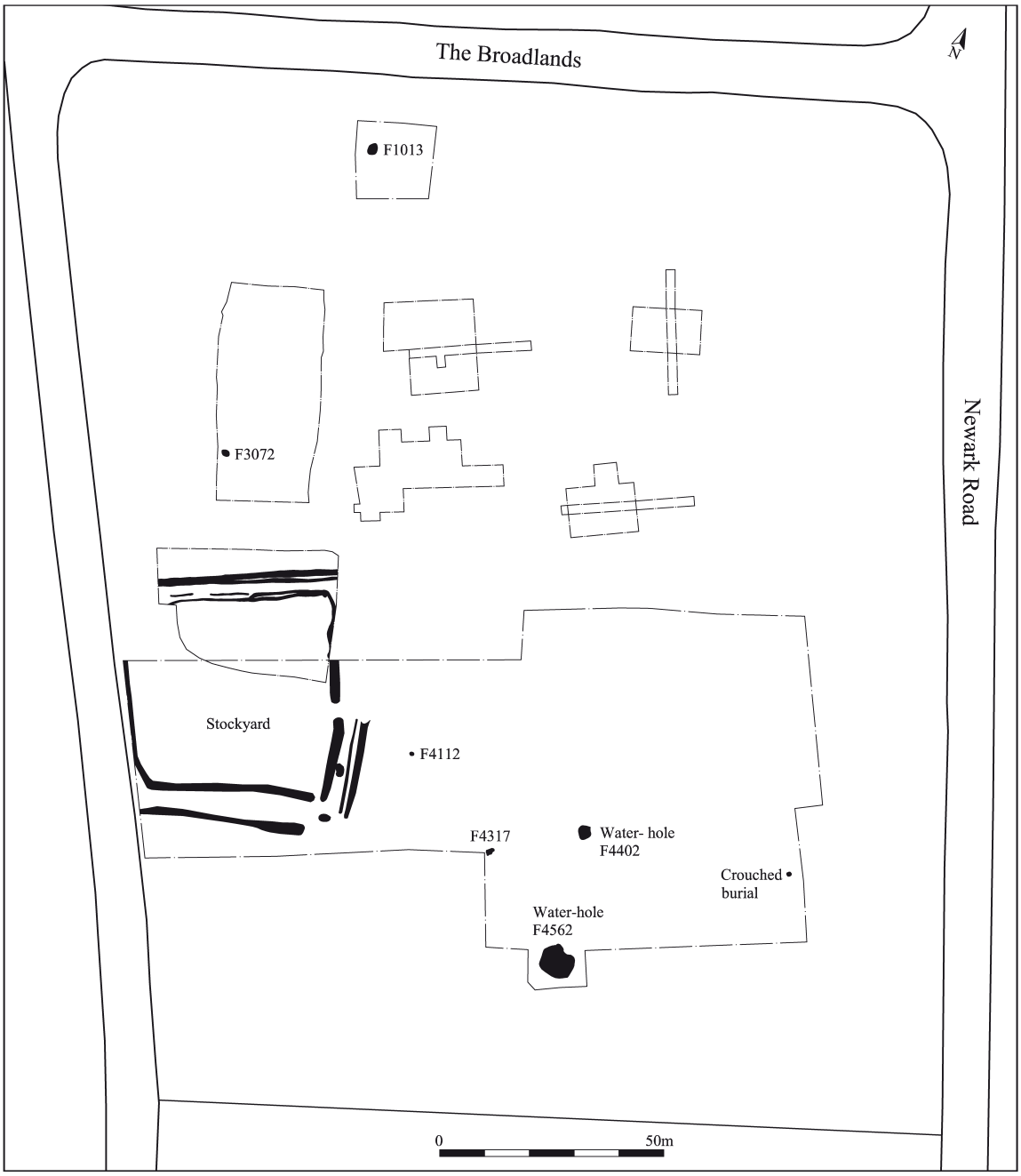


Figure 3. *Phase 2 features.*

the enclosure; the same was true of the western end of F4316 (=F4033, F4021), but its eastern end terminated in line with that of Ditch F4029.

Very few finds were recovered from the enclosure ditches, the only datable items being seven small pot sherds from F4328. However, Ditch F4316 contained a large dumped deposit of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age pottery (317 sherds, 1269g) and crude daub (370 fragments, 2350g) in its penultimate fill, just west of its terminus. Much of the pottery in this deposit had been burnt post-firing. The general absence of finds from the ditches is consistent with their interpretation as parts of a stock handling system.

Large Posthole F4413 was located at the eastern entrance to the enclosure, between the termini of Ditches F4316 (=F4033, F4021), F4029 and F4328. It was of great size (2.60 x 1.54 x 1.12m) and is thought to have held a substantial post. The configuration of its fills suggests that this was removed and the feature left to silt up for a time, though the presence of two (undated) smaller, consecutive recuts probably indicates that the post was re-erected twice after this, albeit on a smaller scale.

To the south of the eastern entrance, undated

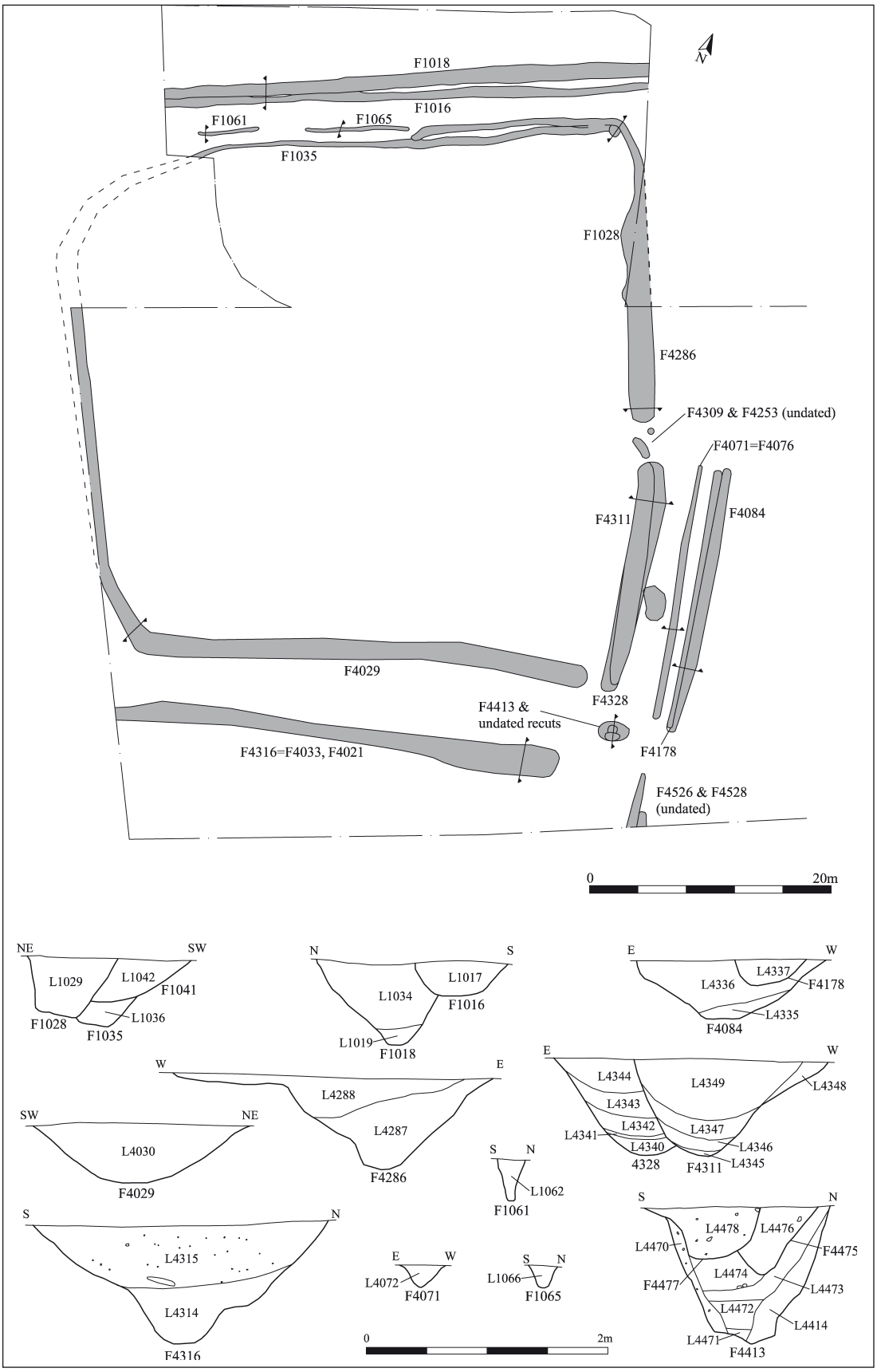


Figure 4. *The Phase 2 stockyard.*

Ditches F4526 and F4528 ran on the same alignment as F4084 and F4328. Although they may have been contemporary with Phase 1 features, it is also possible that these ditches represent the northern part of the extension of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age land divisions southward from the stockyard.

There were no datable features present within the enclosure, and the undated pits, gullies and post-holes which were sealed by the palaeosol showed no sign of spatial/functional patterning.

Interpretation of features

The enclosure and its associated features are thought to represent a stockyard, either with a double boundary, or flanked by ditches forming part of a droveway system, extending westwards from the site. If the latter, then the presence of additional ditches to 'partner' F1018/F1016 and F4316 (=F4033, F4021) as they run westwards from the enclosure is postulated.

The water-holes

Description of features

Large Pits F4562 and F4402, located (respectively) *c.* 54m south-east of and *c.* 51m east of the eastern entrance to the stockyard, were identified as water-holes (Fig. 3). In profile, both resembled water-holes from other sites in the Fengate area, having steep or moderately sloping sides and flattish bases; both also contained multiple layered fills (Fig. 5), the lower of which were waterlogged. The presence of water-holes, to provide water for livestock, is consistent with the interpretation of the Phase 2 enclosure as a stockyard. F4562 was exceptionally large (7.40 x 7.00 x *c.* 1.33m), though water-holes of similar size have previously been excavated in the Fengate area (e.g. Pryor 1978, 39).

Apart from waterlogged wood, F4562 contained few finds (12 sherds of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age pottery, a small assemblage of struck flint and several animal bone fragments). Finds from F4402 were more plentiful, and included three pieces of a (residual) Deverel-Rimbury type bucket urn, as well as 36 sherds representing two early Iron Age fine ware vessels. Animal bone from the lowest fill of this water-hole included three fragmented cattle skulls, one of which was largely complete at the time of excavation.

The preserved wood from the water-holes

Maisie Taylor

Introduction

Forty-seven pieces of wood from the Phase 2 water-holes were examined in detail; material that appeared to be 'natural' deposits or root (e.g. F4208, L4578) was also sampled. Using the scoring scale developed by the Humber Wetlands Project (Van de Noort, *et al.* 1995, table 15.1), most of the material scores 4 or 5. These high scores denote material that is identifiable to species, permits analysis of production technologies and past woodland management and can be dated by dendrochronology. A score of 5 further signifies material that is worthy of museum conservation. Species identification was possible for only three of the waterlogged wood samples: two instances (one tentative) of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and one of oak (*Quercus* sp.).

The log ladders

Two log ladders were recovered from Pit F4562. The first, SF19, is a ½ split log, which has one end trimmed from three out of four sides to a point (Figs. 5–7). One and a half steps have survived, one with a toolmark on the step, which is 42mm wide and 6mm deep (42:6). The log was found driven into the base of F4562 to a depth of 0.15m, and leaning at an angle of *c.* 45° against the side of the feature. This is thought to have been the position of its last use: the concretion of L4572 and accumulation of clay silt deposits L4572 and L4574 around its broken-off base while the water-hole was still in use enabled it to remain *in situ*.

The second log ladder (SF26) was found lying horizontally within L4572 (Figs. 5–6 and 8). It is more complete that SF19, with 3 steps surviving, and is generally in better condition, though no tool marks are preserved. The shaft of the log is slightly curved.

Until recently, log ladders were comparatively rare finds. One of the first to be recorded was found further down Newark Road, between Newark Road and Fengate (Pryor 1978, fig. 27 and plate 12). Pryor could only offer ethnographic parallels as nothing similar was known at the time. A number of these ladders have been found recently, particularly in the Peterborough area, but also in the Thames Valley and other gravel areas. They seem to be a feature of access to deep water-holes, particularly where the water-hole or well has been cut into fairly loose sand/gravel. The pair of ladders from the Broadlands site are of two different designs: one (SF19), is a ½ split log, while the other (SF26) is a full log (i.e. roundwood). The ends are different, with SF19 trimmed to a point on three out of four sides, and SF26 trimmed from two directions to a flat tapered point. SF26 is also slightly curved, possibly helping the log to lie securely against the side of the pit.

Other categories of preserved wood

Roundwood was by far the best represented category of preserved wood from the Phase 2 water-holes (38 pieces). Much of the material is probably derived from coppice with long, straight stems, and mostly below 50mm in diameter. This is classic debris from coppice being harvested for wattle and fencing (Forestry Commission 1956). There is some evidence for slightly larger (over 90mm diameter) trees. Water-hole F4402 contained roundwood with a diameter of 90–110mm, showing clear evidence for felling. The log ladders are derived from slightly larger trees: 180mm diameter in the case of SF19 and 80–90mm in the case of SF26. None of the material is from forest trees, but this is often the case with domestic material.

Three pieces of bark were also recovered from F4402. Two of these (both 15mm thick) came from

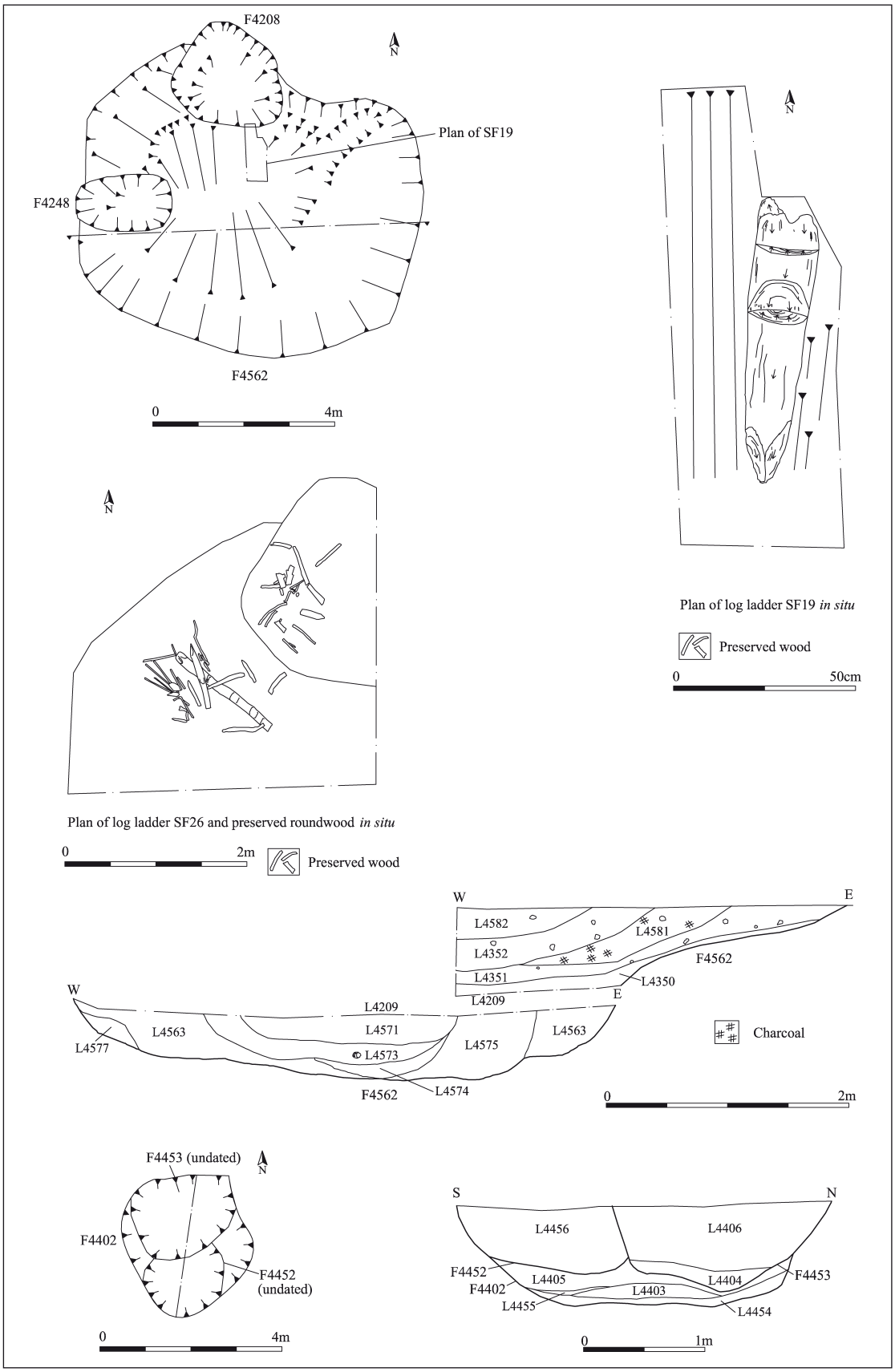
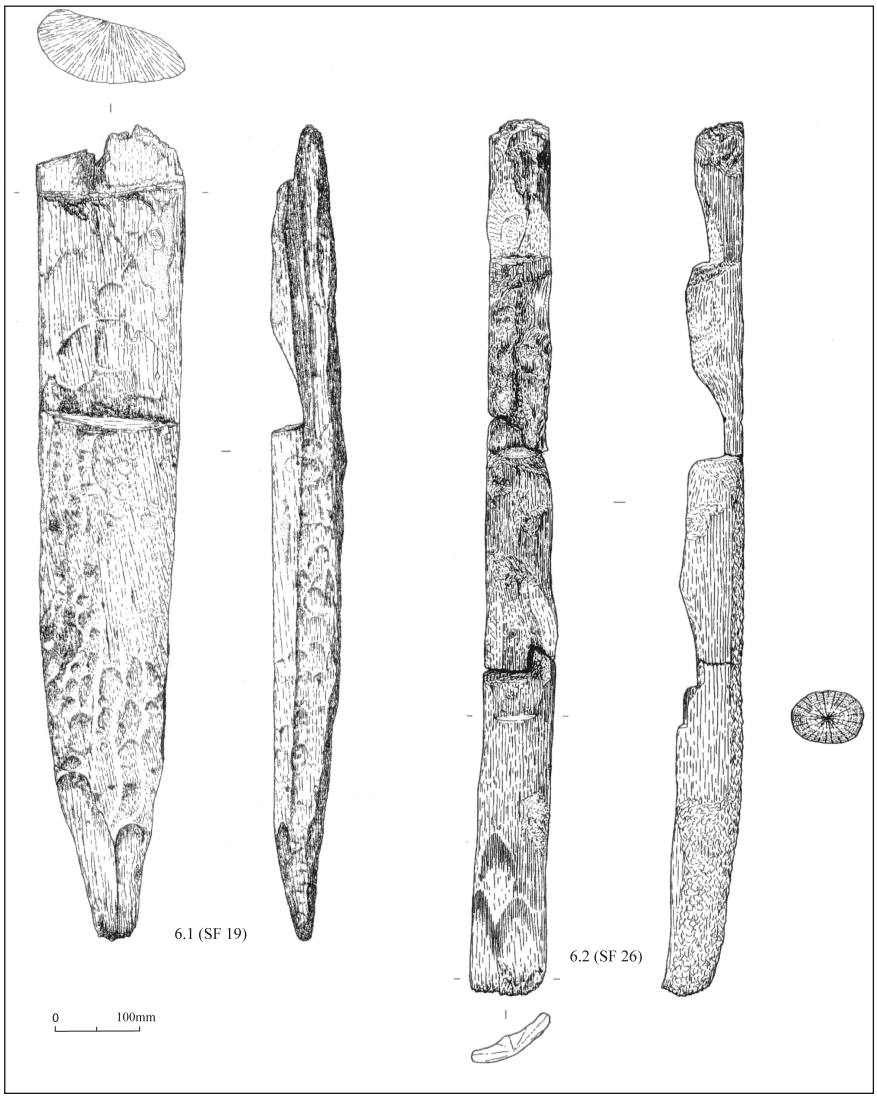


Figure 5. *The Phase 2 waterholes.*



Left, Figure 6. *Log ladders*

Below, Figure 7. *Log ladder SF19*

reasonably mature trees, possibly not attested elsewhere in the preserved wood assemblage. The only other category of preserved wood recovered was timber debris: two derived from roundwood (F4402 and F4562), one hacked from a lump of heartwood (F4402) and a charred stake tip. These pieces are appropriate to roundwood of the size and character recovered from the water-holes.

Toolmarks

The assemblage of toolmarks (two) is too small to discuss in detail, but it is interesting to note that both of the toolmarks recorded on the wood from this site are quite small. Both are only 42mm wide, but one displays a deeper curve on the blade. The mark on the trimmed Roundwood from Water-hole F4402 is almost straight, with a curve only 2mm deep, while the one on the step of the log ladder (SF19) from Pit F4562 is more deeply curved at 6mm deep. Given the dates of the deposits which produced these toolmarks, it is not surprising that the blade width falls centrally within the range for socketed axes in the area (Taylor 2001, table 7.28), so testifying to the probable means/technology of manufacture.

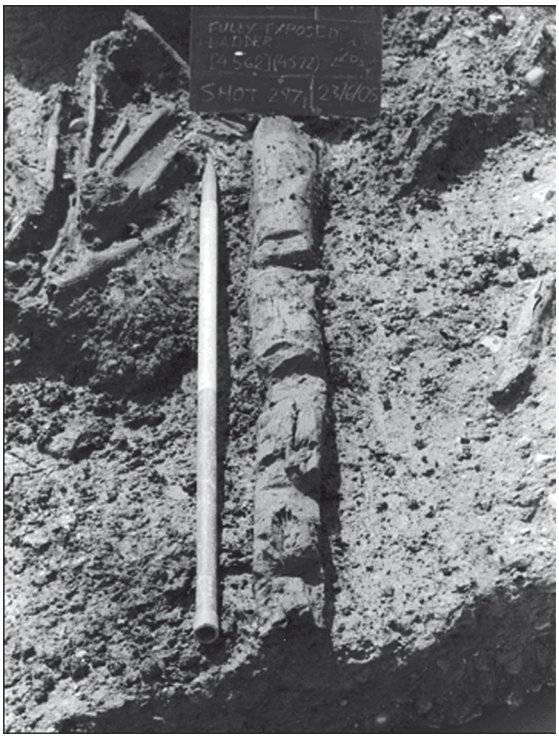


***Figure 8**. Log ladder SF26.*

The burial

The human remains

Carina Phillips

The only human bone recovered from the site was SK4382 (Figs. 3 and 9). The bones of this skeleton were poorly-preserved, exhibiting erosion, splintering and incompleteness. Estimation of sex and stature was not possible due to the condition of the skeleton, related to the poor bone survival.

SK4382 was *c.* 50–75% complete. It was not possible to estimate stature, although the remains were observed to be small and gracile. Although gracile appearance is usually associated with females, it may also be due to the young age of the individual and cannot therefore be used to infer sex. Analysis of dentition and bone fusion (cf. Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994 and Ferembach *et al*. 1980) agree in suggesting that SK4382 was in late adolescence/young adulthood at time of death. Eruption of the mandibular and maxillary 3rd molars, and absence of wear on the 2nd molars gives an age estimate of 15–21 years (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994).

Most of the long bones were incomplete; it was possible however to record the fusion state of the right distal humerus and right iliac crest. The distal humerus was completely fused, which occurs between the ages of 14–18 years. The iliac crest was unfused; fusion of this element occurs between the ages of 21–24 years. The epiphyseal lines are visible for approximately 1–2 years after ossification (Ferembach *et al*. 1980, 531). It thus seems that the individual was aged 15–21 years. Dental attrition fell in the 17–25 age group (Miles 1963). No other skeletal pathologies or non-metric traits were observed, a factor associated partly with fragmentation of the bone.

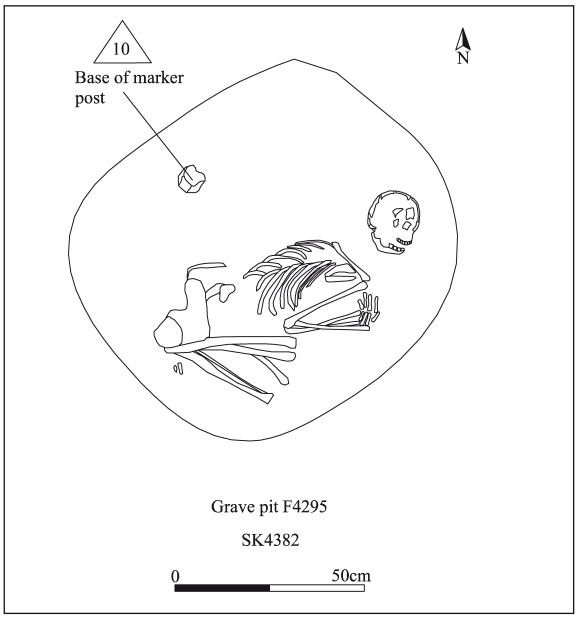


***Figure 9.** The crouched burial.*

Description of the burial

SK4382 was buried in a crouched position in a subcircular pit (F4295), cutting a Phase 1 Ditch, on the eastern edge of the Stage IV area (Figs. 2, 3 and 9; Fig. 10). No items which could be specifically identified as grave goods were found, but the fill of the pit contained a large assemblage (60 sherds; 58 in the same

Figure 10. *The crouched burial.*

fabric) of early Iron Age pottery and two tertiary flint flakes.

The position of the burial was marked by a wooden post, the base of which (SF10) was preserved in the material into which it had been driven, through the base of the pit (Fig. 9 and 11). The grave marker is very soft, partly mineralised roundwood; the grain of the wood towards the base is slightly swirly and it is possible that it has a coppiced end.

Other Phase 2 features

Pits in the north of the site

Pits F1013 and F3072 were both located in the north of the site, in isolation from each other and from other Phase 2 features (Fig. 3); both could potentially post-date other Phase 2 features. The pottery from F1013 comprised 11 sherds of a jar dated to the early or middle Iron Age. Charcoal representing oak and hazel was recovered from samples from Pit F3072 (Gale 2007), which also contained a few fragments of prehistoric pottery and a tanged, leaf-shaped iron knife blade (length 73mm, maximum width 20mm). Traces of organic material adhered to the tang, probably indicating a wooden handle. The section of the blade is distorted by corrosion, but given the outline and centrally-placed tang, it must have been double-edged. Blades of this form are not common in the Iron Age, but there are two of this shape and size among the assemblage from Danebury, Hampshire (Sellwood 1984, fig. 7.10, 2.33; Cunliffe and Poole 1991, fig. 7.11, 2.231). The scarcity of the form suggests it may have had a specialised use. Craft knives are most likely to be single-edged, as is shown by medieval illustrations of blades in use (Cowgill *et al*. 1987, 51–7). Double-edged blades are designed for penetration, and may have been used as hunting knives or daggers.

Pits F4112 and F4317 were also located in isolation from each other, and from other Phase 2 features, in the Stage IV excavation area (Fig. 3). They had similar dimensions in plan (0.95 x 0.80m and 1.40 x 1.00m, respectively), but F4317 was deeper (up to 0.40m) and less regular in both plan and section (Fig. 12). The configuration of fills in F4112 was distinctive (Fig. 12). Both of the initial deposits were described on-site as containing 'burnt material'; samples taken from them were found to contain charred hazelnut shell fragments as well as charcoal (Fryer 2007). Finds were recovered only from L4115, though small amounts of animal bone (including some burnt fragments) were recovered from the residues of samples from L4114 (Phillips 2007). L4115 contained 70 sherds of early Iron Age pottery, all in the same fabric. A similarly large pottery assemblage (74 sherds) from the two fills of F4317 is thought to derive from a single vessel of the same fabric and of similar date. This feature also

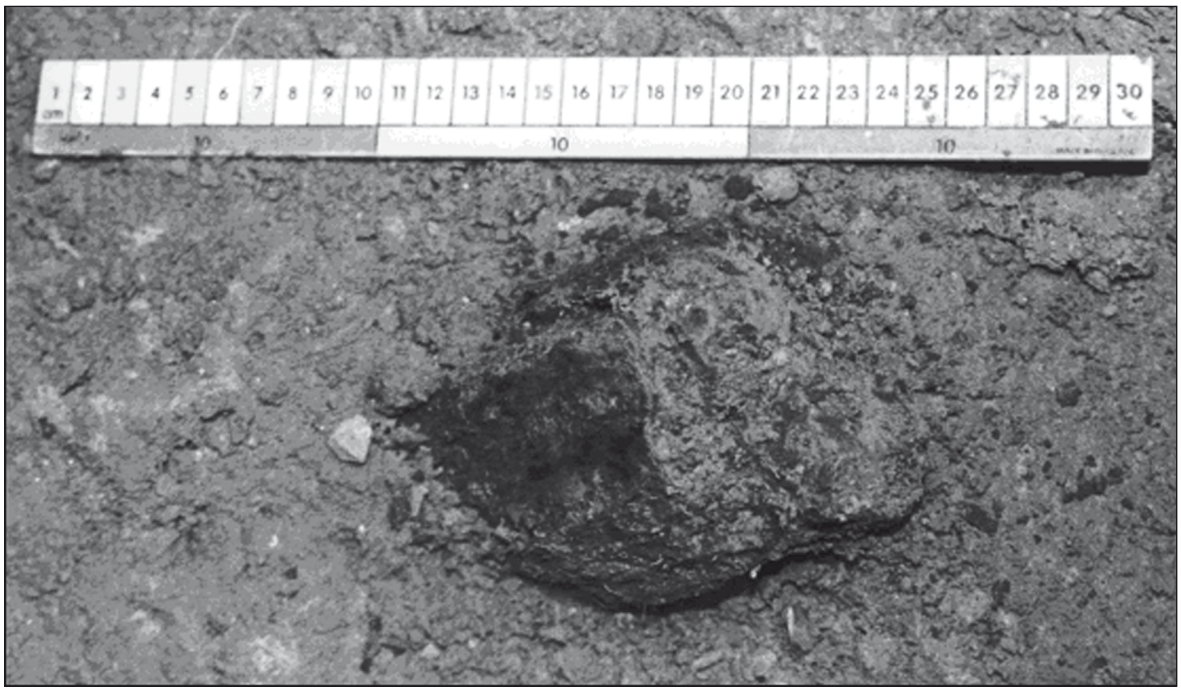


Figure 11. *Preserved grave marker* in situ.

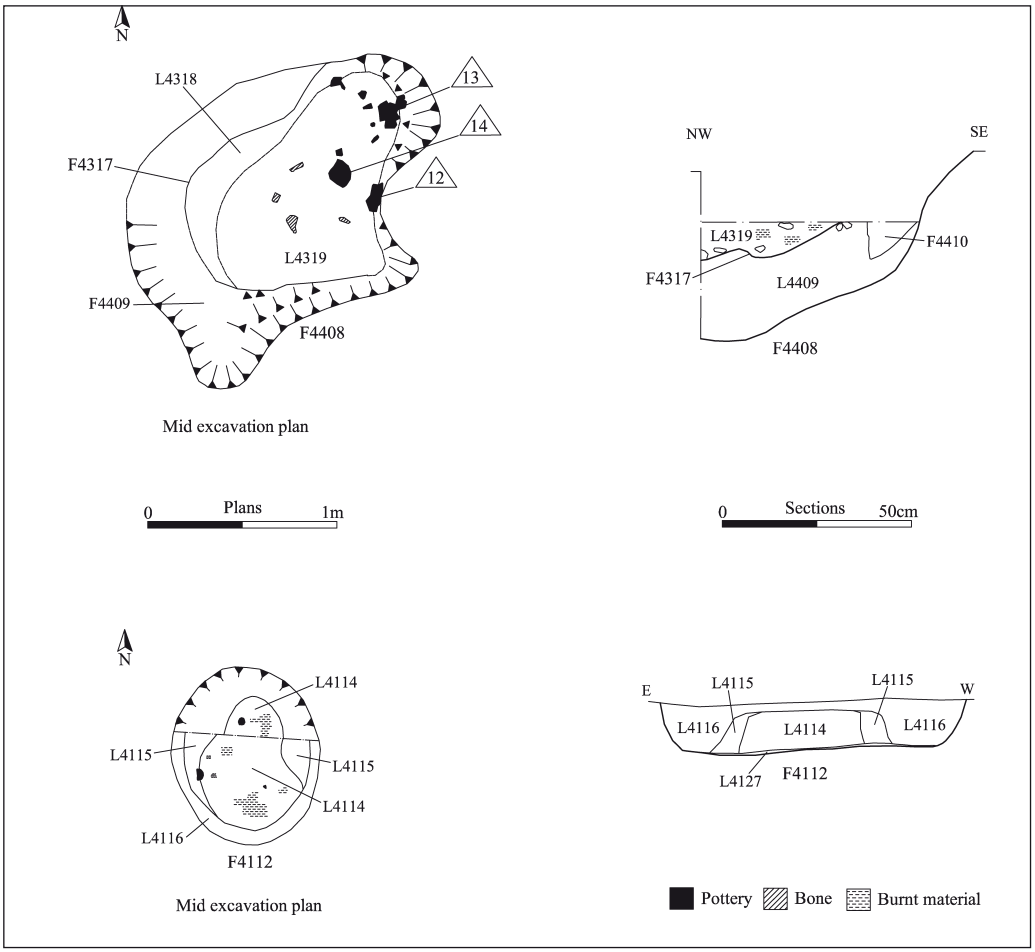


Figure 12. *The burnt pits.*

contained a large assemblage of worked and burnt flint, although this material may have been residual. Charcoal was the only non-contaminant material present in a sample taken from F4317 (Fryer 2007).

The pottery assemblages from these features were two of the largest recovered at the site. Other large Phase 2 assemblages were from the dumped deposit in Ditch F4316 (317 sherds), Grave Pit F4295 (60 sherds) and Water-hole F4402 (39 sherds). Pottery assemblages from the remaining Phase 2 features were generally less than 10 sherds, most less than five sherds.

Pits F4112 and F4317 seem to represent the same kind of activity, characterised by the deposition of pottery (single vessels?) and burnt plant material. The flots and residues of samples taken from these features were carefully examined, but no evidence was found to support the theory that they represent damaged cremations. The nature and significance of these features thus remains unknown.

The animal bone
Carina Phillips

A small assemblage of 133 fragments came from Phase 2 features. Like the assemblages from all phases, the majority of the bone was poorly-preserved, with concretion of salts (caused by a waterlogged anaerobic environment) affecting a large proportion. The friable nature of the bone resulted in much of the assemblage fragmenting during excavation. Poor preservation may also have obliterated butchery marks, particularly cut marks. The hand recovery technique used may be biased towards the recovery of larger bones, possibly resulting in an under-representation of small species particularly birds, fish and small mammals.

Small numbers of cattle (*Bos taurus*; number of identified specimens (NISP) 35, minimum number of individuals (MNI) 4; calculated from the most frequent left or right skeletal element), sheep/goat (*Ovis aries*/*Capra hircus*; NISP 15, MNI 3), pig (*Sus scrofa*; NISP 3, MNI 1) and horse (*Equus caballus*; NISP 1, MNI 1) bones were identified. Two cut marks were the only evidence of butchery in the assemblage. Carnivore gnawing was evident on three bone fragments. Age estimates based on tooth wear were possible for two cattle mandibles, aged respectively as young adult and senile and one sheep/goat mandible aged at 4–6 years.

The fragmented remains of at least three cattle skulls were recovered, in addition to other disarticulated animal bone, from Water-hole F4402 (L4454). One of the skulls was recorded in the excavation records as being substantially complete when recovered. It is possible that these skulls could represent a structured act of deposition, but due to the presence of other animal bone and the fragmentation and mixing of the skulls this cannot be confirmed.

The pottery
Peter Thompson

Introduction
The combined excavations recovered a total of 621 sherds (2401g) of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age pottery. The pottery is generally poorly-preserved, comprising small and often abraded sherds with a mean weight of just 3.87g. The fabrics are predominantly in shelly wares (>97%), although in many cases the actual shell has dissolved due to the acidity of the soil, leaving voids and pitted surfaces. However, some contexts, e.g. F4402 (L4454 and L4561) and F1013 (L1014), contained pottery preserved in relatively good condition; L1014 was also the only context to provide an example of an almost-complete vessel profile.

Fabrics and forms
The late Bronze Age/early Iron Age fabrics are still mainly coarse and shelly (vesicular where shell has dissolved), but the sherds have grey cores and pale brown surfaces and are thinner and generally less coarse than the earlier Deverel-Rimbury wares (see Thompson 2007). However, a fine ware component is also apparent along with an increase in vessel types. Shelly wares are not generally diagnostic of period and appear in the Fengate area in nearly all prehistoric periods, although Barrett notes some trends over time (Barrett 2001, 251; Last 2003, 20).

Although the assemblage is fragmentary, there are a dozen or so partial profiles that are more informative than the rest of the assemblage. In particular, there is a large urn base from Pit F4402, two necked forms from Pit F3021, two carinated jar forms from Pit F3083 and Pit F4402, a small bowl from Pit F4402 and a jar rim with a flaring neck from Pit F1013. The diagnostic sherds are discussed by period below.

Coarse wares
Ditch F4316 (=F4033, F4021) yielded 317 sherds (51% of all prehistoric sherds from the site), of which 302 came from L4533. Many of the latter were pink or red throughout, having been burnt post-firing. The only diagnostic sherd present in this feature is a simple upright rim from a large vessel, possibly of cylindrical shape (Fig. 13.1). This, together with a fairly upright simple rim containing very coarse platy shell from L4209 (Pit F4208 or Pit F4561; The difficulty of ascertaining the relationship between these two pits and L4209 is detailed in the site Research Archive Report (Nicholson 2007, 6), bears similarities to Post Deverel-Rimbury forms of the East Midlands region (Knight 2002, 129). At Aldermarston Wharf in Berkshire an assemblage of this type, one of the relatively few well-stratified assemblages of the late Bronze Age, consisted mainly of undecorated bowls, plain straight-sided jars and rounded jars with little decoration; it was assigned a date, partly through radiocarbon dating, between the 11th–9th centuries BC (Bradley *et al*. 1980, 232–248).

Pit F3083 (L3084) at Broadlands contained three

carinated forms in shell with sand and grog temper (Fig. 13.2); this feature also contained late Iron Age to early Romano-British sherds. Such S-profile or carinated hollow-necked forms can be found both in Post Deverel-Rimbury assemblages and in the Iron Age proper, the latter seen at early Iron Age Fengate sites and at Gretton on the river Welland, Northamptonshire (Knight 2002, 128 No. 9; Hawkes and Fell 1945, 202 No. F2; Jackson and Knight 1985, 78 No. 26).

Pit F3021 (L3022) contained two partial-necked profiles with flattened or expanded rims (Figs. 13.3 and 13.4) and a body sherd with a single fingertip impression, which is almost the only example of decoration from the site. Again, the general lack of decoration suggests Post Deverel-Rimbury 'plain wares', although the profiles are also quite similar to decorated and undecorated early Iron Age examples from Gretton (Jackson and Knight 1985, 78). Similar forms to Figures 13.2, 13.3 and 13.4 were found at the Tower Works site, Fengate, some with fingertip decoration, and it is suggested these date to the period *c.* 900–700 BC (Lucas 1997). A date of 10th century BC is therefore possible as the earliest Post Deverel-Rimbury wares are not typified by angular forms (Last 2003, 21). However, this needs to be treated with caution due to the general lack of decoration on the site, even from the contexts containing typical early Iron Age pottery.

Burnt Pit F4317 (L4318 and L4319) contained a flaring rim profile with a pinched-out lip indicative of a very early Iron Age date, as is a flattened, squared rim from Burnt Pit F4112 (M. Knight pers. comm.).

Finer wares

Fragments from several finer ware vessels were recovered from Broadlands, including black burnished carinated body sherds from Grave Pit F4295 (in sand) and Water-hole F4402 (in sparse, fine shell) (Fig. 13.6). These are in the early Iron Age Fengate-Cromer tradition, with parallels at Fengate including a vessel described as a degenerate situlate jar, although this contained flint temper (Hawkes and Fell 1945, 210 fig. 8 U8). The Broadlands sherds are similar in appearance to burnished shelly wares from the Iron Age settlement at Bradley Fen, on the south-eastern edge of the Flag Fen basin (M. Knight pers. comm.).

Pit F4402 also contained sherds (from L4561 and L4556) of a third fine vessel, a thin-walled cup or tiny bowl (Fig. 13.7). This is also of the Fengate-Cromer tradition, which includes globular bowls with flaring rims and encircling grooved lines (M. Knight pers. comm.). It can be matched with an S-profile example from Fengate (Hawkes and Fell 1945, fig. 7 no. R6). A similar vessel excavated from a roundhouse in a settlement at Kings Dyke West, Whittlesey, provided a radiocarbon date centred on *c.* 500 BC (M. Knight 1999). Another partial fine bowl profile in a fine shelly fabric came from Pit F3072.

The only virtually complete profile of the Broadlands assemblage came from Pit F1013 (L1014), which contained eleven sherds comprising a jar with a flaring neck (Fig. 13.8). This profile could be early or middle Iron Age in date, but is again similar to an early Iron Age example from Gretton (Jackson and

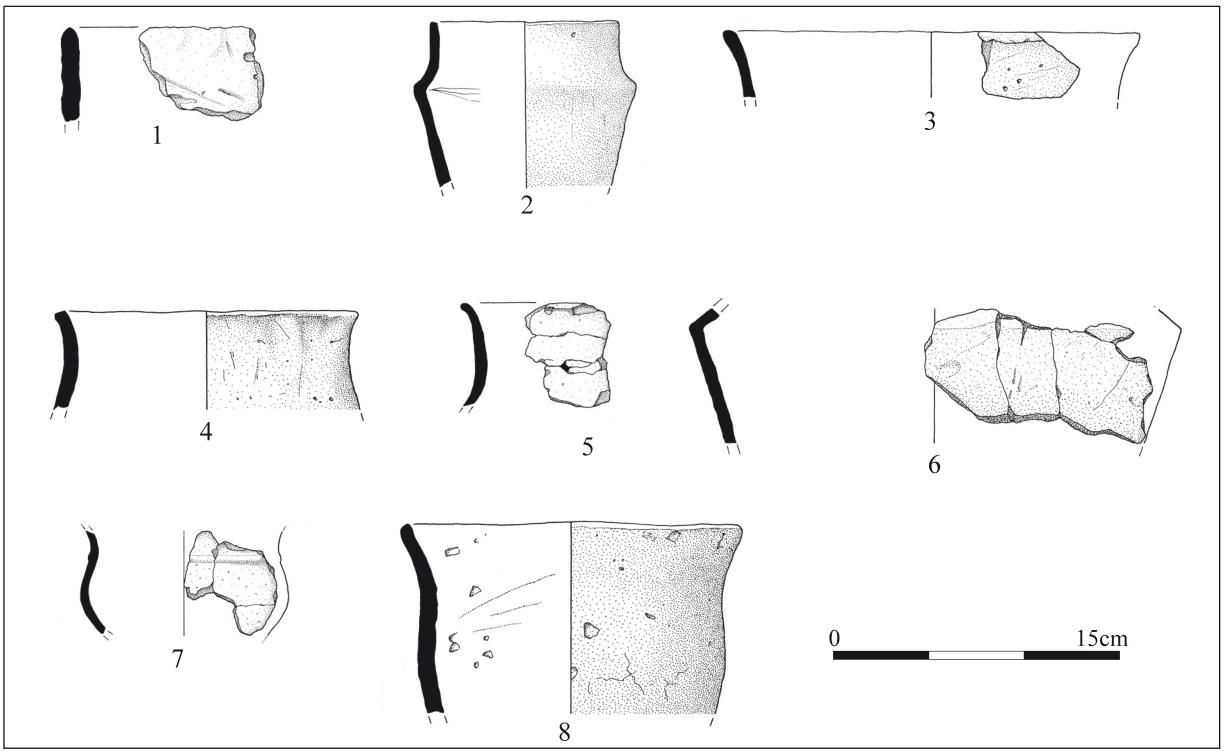


Figure 13. *Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age pottery.*

Knight 1985, 79 no. 64), indicating that it need not be later than any of the Iron Age pottery discussed above.

Discussion

Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age site environment and economy

The pottery
Peter Thompson

Fragments of rim sherds from Ditch F4316 and Pit F4562/F4208 (Figs. 13.1 and 13.2) are possibly of Post Deverel-Rimbury 'plainware' type but could also be particularly coarse early Iron Age wares. The squared rim from Pit F4112 and flaring rim from Pit F4317 (Fig. 13.5) are of a very early Iron Age date. The black burnished carinated body sherds and the thin-walled cup with a single ridged cordon from Pit F4402 (Figs. 13.6 and 13.7) are of the Fengate tradition, which was current from the 8th century BC until the end of the early Iron Age (Barrett 1980, 313). Pit F4402 and possibly Pit F1013 are the latest demonstrable Phase 2 features at Broadlands. The absence of middle Iron Age forms or scored decoration, which first appeared in the 5th/4th centuries BC, in the Broadlands assemblage, indicates that none of the assemblage can be much later than *c.* 500 BC.

One slightly unusual feature of this late Bronze Age/early Iron Age assemblage is the virtual lack of decoration. Pryor (1974, 39) suggests that as the area was separated from East Anglia by the Fens, it should be seen rather as a part of the south-east Midlands and western Fen Margins, with possible contacts further in along the Welland and Nene valleys. This theory is supported to a degree by the similarity of some of the Broadlands pottery with the early Iron Age assemblage from Gretton.

The preserved ecofact evidence
Kate Nicholson, Maisie Taylor, Val Fryer, Rowena Gale and Carina Phillips

Much attention has been given over the last 25 years to the assessment of the nature and development of the palaeoenvironment of the Fengate and Lower Nene Valley area (summarised by French 2001). The investigation at Broadlands has revealed nothing to contradict that interpretation. Evidence of the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age has been gleaned from recovered wood (preserved through waterlogging and, in very small quantities, as charcoal), animal bone and environmental samples.

Most of the roundwood is consistent in diameter with coppice, although the presence of some larger trees was also attested (e.g. the pieces used to make the two log ladders); two thick pieces of bark indicated the presence of still larger trees. Charcoal was present in environmental samples taken from a variety of features; it was probably accidentally incorporated from scattered/wind-blown refuse. Charcoal from Phase 2 Pit F3072 represented oak and hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Hazel nutshell fragments were present in an environmental sample taken from Phase 2 burnt Pit F4112. This evidence is consistent with interpretation of the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age landscape of this part of the fen edge as being essentially open, with areas of scrub and hedgerows, surviving as relics of the earlier field system (French 2001, 402–403; Pryor 2001, 413). Oak and hazel would have grown on the drier ground, whilst alder would have been collected at the fen edge.

The natural woodland of the Fengate area is thought to have been cleared by the early 2nd millennium BC (French 2001, 400). From this time on, people would have continued coppicing and producing material for domestic use from local material. The gradual flooding of the adjacent fen might have affected the quantities and species of coppiced roundwood, but the same type of woodworking (coppicing, hurdling, bodging etc) would have continued. At Broadlands, wood would have been used for any posts, gates or hurdles associated with the Phase 2 stockyard, as well as in the construction of any of the structures which were contemporary with this activity. Its use as a grave marker (SF10) and for the construction of log ladders (SF19 and SF26) is also clearly attested. One piece of roundwood from Water-hole F4562 may have been a piece of wattle, but no others could be identified as such; water-holes at Fengate sites including Vicarage Farm and Storey's Bar Road contained preserved wattle linings (Pryor 1974, 25; 1978, 26–29).

The presence of charcoal (the analysed pieces and further pieces in environmental samples from a variety of features) indicates that, although the site is not thought to have been used for occupation, wood was burnt as fuel in the vicinity. However, the use of alternative fuels such as peat charcoal (which has successfully been used in areas where wood is largely unavailable, e.g. Orkney and Shetland; Fenton 1978), may have been relevant at Broadlands.

The hazel nutshell fragments in Pit F4112 may have been brought to the site accidentally, along with hazel wood, but they could also be indicative of a gathered food resource accidentally preserved through charring in this one feature. The nature of activity represented by F4112 (and F4317) remains unknown. No cereal remains were present in any of the analysed environmental samples, suggesting that no crops were grown or processed at/in the immediate vicinity of Broadlands. Though small, the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age animal bone assemblage was dominated by cattle (*Bos taurus*) and sheep/goat (*Ovis aries/Capra hircus*), consistent with the pastoral activity represented by the stockyard (below). The small size of the assemblage further emphasises the agricultural/pastoral nature of the area during the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age; a settlement landscape would almost certainly have yielded a larger and more complex accumulation of remains associated

with the day-to-day processing of foodstuffs and other primary and secondary resources. Poor preservation is also thought to have affected the quantity and state of the animal bone recovered.

The stockyard

The ditched enclosure and its associated features have been interpreted as a stockyard. According to Pryor's figure of *c.* 0.47m^2/animal as the recommended space for retaining modern sheep (which are larger than prehistoric breeds) within a collecting pen, the Broadlands stockyard (*c.* 1800m^2) could have handled *c.* 3600 sheep at a time. This is approximately the same number as Yard B of the middle Bronze Age 'community stockyards' at Newark Road (Pryor 2001, 417), *c.* 750m south of Broadlands. This system was earlier and undoubtedly far more complex than that at Broadlands, acting as a focus for trade and social interaction and being positioned at the western landfall of the Flag Fen post alignment (see Pryor 1996, 317; 2001, 415–416). Nonetheless, the principles of its use, and that of the Storey's Bar Road stock-handling system, as explored and discussed by Pryor (1996; 2001, 415–420; 2006, 89–109) are of relevance to considerations of how the Broadlands stockyard was used.

The narrow droveways and 'races' around the edges of the yards at Newark Road are thought to have been designed to allow animals to be easily inspected, taking advantage of the tendency of sheep to behave more docilely in restricted spaces; the layout of the entrances/exits to the droveways and races allowed the animals to be sorted into groups following inspection. The use of two- or three- way drafting gates at strategic points would have allowed animals to be directed into the appropriate enclosures. A feature of this system, but more markedly of the simpler stock handling system at Storey's Bar Road, is the location of entrances at the corners of enclosed spaces, allowing animals to be easily channelled.

The spaces between the enclosure and flanking ditches at Broadlands would have formed races, within which animals could be inspected and sorted. Posthole F4413 is thought to have supported a drafting gate, allowing animals to be sorted at this point. The direction in which animals would have been moved is not known. If they approached from the south-west, between F4316 (=F4033, F4021) and F4029, they could have been inspected in this confined space and sorted at the drafting gate into three groups – one channelled into the enclosure, another into the space (maybe a second enclosure, bounded to the east by F4526/F4528) south of the race, and the third into a second race between F4084 and F4328.

The dimensions of the proposed races of the Broadlands stockyard were larger than those of the races at Storey's Bar Road or Newark Road. This could potentially indicate that the Broadlands stockyard was used to manage cattle, rather than sheep/goats. Both species were represented in the animal bone assemblage; it is possible that the cattle skull deposit in the base of Water-hole F4402 had a ritual element, indicative of the importance of this species at the site, although this cannot be asserted with any degree of certainty. A system identified as probably for cattle (or mixed species) management at Welland Bank, Lincolnshire, was characterised by massive ditches and large enclosures, spread over an extensive area (Pryor 2006, 116–117). Although cropmarks *c.* 325m west-south-west of the site resemble the large enclosure at Welland Bank (Pryor 2001, 410) the features at Broadlands do not bear an obvious resemblance to this large-scale system.

The Broadlands stockyard is not contemporary with the other stockyards and droveways of the middle Bronze Age Fengate landscape. Rather, it dates to a period (late Bronze Age/early Iron Age) in which these were being abandoned, as increasingly wet conditions resulted in the flooding of what had been (seasonally) dry pasture land (French 2001, 402). The resultant landscape is thought to have been essentially open, though probably with hedges surviving as indicators of past (possibly maintained) land divisions (Pryor 2001, 413; French 2001, 402–403).

It is possible that activity shifted onto the higher ground during the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age (cf. French 2001, 402). It is notable that, like Broadlands, the Tower Works (late Bronze Age to early Iron Age settlement) and Vicarage Farm (early Iron Age pitting) sites are set back from the fen edge at *c.* 5m OD. No other evidence of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age land division or stock management features has yet been identified in the Fengate area, but investigation to date has been concentrated in the (more southerly and) lower-lying areas. Extensive systems of land partition, similar in appearance to the middle Bronze Age system at Fengate, are known to have been in use in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age on other parts of the fen edge (e.g. at West Deeping and Welland Bank in the lower Welland Valley; Pryor 2006, 109–123). There is no reason to think that similar activity may not have continued, on suitably elevated land, in the Fengate area. The scale of the system represented at Broadlands is not yet clear: it is possible that it extended westwards, beyond the limits of the investigation.

At Edgerly Drain Road, immediately east of Broadlands, the middle Bronze Age system of land division had gone out of use by the late Bronze Age (Beadsmoore 2005). The cutting of pits through the fills of its ditches began in the middle to late Bronze Age, and continued in the late Bronze Age; the latter period also saw the cutting of postholes (including a possible structure blocking the route of the earlier droveway), the cutting of a ditch on a new alignment, and the laying-down of a large metalled surface (18 x 71m) in the northern part of the site. This may have been related to activity at Broadlands, though Phase 2 features were not located particularly close to the Edgerley Drain Road site; the nature of any such association is not clear.

The crouched burial and Post Deverel-Rimbury mortuary practice

A single inhumation was present at Broadlands.

SK4382 was buried in a crouched position in a discrete, apparently purpose-dug, pit, marked by a wooden post. Sixty sherds of pottery date the inhumation to the early Iron Age, though it was isolated from other Phase 2 features.

In the middle Bronze Age droveways and related features of the Fengate system, human burials occurred in the bases of the large ditches, placed either directly on the ditch bottom, or in shallow scrapes cut through it (Pryor 1980, 5, 39, 168, 175). Two further crouched burials of similar date, deposited in the same manner, were found in a ring ditch at Storey's Bar Road (Pryor 1978, 34). The Broadlands burial bears little resemblance to these earlier examples, being apparently unassociated with the site's landscape division/stock management features, and being placed in a deliberately cut (and clearly marked) subcircular grave. In this respect, it has greater affinities with the six (probable) middle Iron Age crouched burials at the Cat's Water settlement (Pryor 1984, 116–122). Disarticulated human bone was deposited along with the metalwork and other items in association with the Flag Fen post alignment (Halstead and Cameron 1992; Halstead, *et al*. 2001). A single, decayed, human skeleton, thought to be of Iron Age date, was recovered from the fen area *c.* 50m north of the post alignment; it is thought to represent an act of special deposition (Pryor 1992, 524).

The position of the burial, *c.* 100m from the stockyard and 44m from the nearest Phase 2 feature (Water-hole F4402), may have been influenced by the presence of a barrow (HER 3002) *c.* 100m to its north-north-east (Fig. 1). The barrow, known as Herdsman's Hill, was destroyed by gravel quarrying before 1912, but records indicate that it contained a Beaker period inhumation accompanied by two flint daggers and a quartzite axe hammer.

Wooden grave markers may not have been rare in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, the mortuary practices of which are not well-attested archaeologically, but it is not thought that any other preserved examples have been identified through excavation. The pottery in the grave fill does not apparently represent a single vessel deposited as a grave good, but the assemblage from this feature stands out clearly as one of the largest at the site. Needham (1995, 166) suggests that potsherds (as opposed to whole vessels) could have been used in rites associated with the dead, but it is unusual for more than a few sherds of pottery to be recovered from inhumations of this period (Brück 1995, 160).

Human remains dating to the Post Deverel-Rimbury, late Bronze Age to early Iron Age, period are not common in the British archaeological record (Wilson 1981; Needham 1995, 165–172; Brück 1995; Taylor 2001, 39–40). Though some examples of crouched inhumations are thought to date to the late Bronze Age, their dating is generally problematic (Needham 1995, 167), and some may in fact be collections of disarticulated bone (Brück 1995, 247). The recognised methods of 'deposition' of un-cremated human remains in the earlier 1st millennium BC involved the deposition of single or fragmentary bones at settlement sites, in 'watery locations' such as rivers, lakes and bogs, with hoards of metalwork, or (more rarely) in caves or at the sites of earlier funerary monuments (Brück 1995, 248–251). The securely-dated crouched inhumation of SK4382 is thus distinctive.

Though most known instances of reuse of early to middle Bronze Age barrows for funerary activity date to the far removed Roman and (especially) Anglo-Saxon periods (cf. Williams 1998; Semple 1998; Taylor 2001, 58), a few Post Deverel-Rimbury examples are also known (Whimster 1981, 33–34; Brück 1995, 251; Taylor 2001, 80). These include a (probable Iron Age) burial close to a barrow at Barrington, Cambridgeshire (Malim and Hines 1998, 64, 67–68), and a middle or late Iron Age burial inserted in a Bronze Age barrow beneath the ramparts of Battlesbury Hillfort, Wiltshire (Wilson 1981, 145, 159). Examples involving fragmented bone, rather than complete burials, are also known (Brück 1995, 251, 274, 275, 277). In the south Fengate area, the reuse of an early Bronze Age ring ditch (originally associated with inhumations) for cremation burials (Hawkes and Fell 1945, 190) has been re-interpreted by Pryor (2001, 7–8) as dating to the Deverel-Rimbury period, rather than the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, as was originally postulated.

Although it remains possible that the juxtaposition of the crouched inhumation at Broadlands and the barrow known as Herdsman's Hill was coincidental, the barrow would have been a highly visible feature in the early Iron Age landscape. It thus seems likely that this was an influencing factor in the location of the burial, if not in determining the unusual manner in which the body was treated.

The proximity of the site to the ('watery') fen may also have been a significant factor in determining the manner and location in which SK4382 was buried, though it is unlikely that this was unrelated to the proximity of the barrow. Being located significantly east of the stockyard, with only the barrow to the north and the abandoned Edgerley Drain Road area (Beadsmoore 2005; see Fig. 1) separating it from the fen, the crouched inhumation could be said to be in a liminal/transitional area, between the agricultural high ground and the wet expanse of the fen. Brück (1995, 257–262) explores the possible perceived relationship of the transition from life to death (as represented by human remains) to the physical and social boundaries which people would have encountered in everyday life. She suggests that pressure on good, dry agricultural land in the late Bronze Age was behind the emphasis on ancestral connections to the land implicit in the use of human remains to mark boundaries.

Gosden and Lock (1998, 6) postulate that when the objective history of a large landscape feature (such as a barrow) is lost to time, it can retain significance/power in the minds of a population, derived from the perception of its age, and from the potential for a re-creation of the past, based on its obscure origins. Brück (1995, 257) describes the dead of the late Bronze

Age/early Iron Age as "a symbolic resource that could be drawn upon in a variety of contexts…". In view of these theories, it is suggested that the location and manner of the burial of SK4382 were deliberately chosen to resemble remembered past burial practices (i.e. buried whole, crouched, marked and close to a barrow), and so to draw upon a link with the past.

It has been suggested (Pryor 1992, 519–20) that the votive deposits around the Flag Fen post alignment were intended by the occupants of the dry land, seeking to protect their land from the displaced populations of the newly-expanded fen, as the reinforcement of a territorial boundary. It is proposed that SK4382 was a part of that votive activity, positioned at the limits of their dry land territory. Given Brück's ideas about the use of human bone to emphasise ancestral connections to land, the burial may have been intended to strengthen the Fengate occupants' claim to the land by demonstrating a perceived link to the earlier farming community of the Fengate area, the remnants of whose fields (and homes) would have been visible across the landscape (Pryor 2001, 413; French 2001, 402).

If this (tentative) interpretation is accepted, then questions are raised as to the chronological and symbolic relationships of the burial at Broadlands to the Iron Age human skeleton recovered from the fen north of the post-alignment (Pryor 1992, 524), and as to whether further contemporary inhumations remain to be found in/on the edge of the fen in this area.

Conclusions

The Eastern Industry is an area with a well-understood prehistory, having been the subject of several archaeological investigations since the 1970s, as well as in the early 20th century. The significance of the findings of the Broadlands investigation is that the site is located above, rather than on, the fen edge, and that the main period of activity represented (late Bronze Age to early Iron Age) is not one already well attested and understood in the area.

The late Bronze Age to early Iron Age stockyard and related features provide evidence of how pastoral activity shifted onto higher ground when the fen edge features of the Fengate area became inundated. Evidence of pastoral farming/stock management features of this date have not previously been recorded in the area. The crouched burial may be linked to votive deposition around the Flag Fen post alignment and platform, giving us a glimpse of the ways in which people coped with the new pressures brought about by the altered landscape.

Prepared for publication by Antony Mustchin

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