

# ◆ Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation at Chichester Road, Selsey, West Sussex

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*Excavation in advance of a housing development revealed traces of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement and landscape features, exhibiting continuity of layout across the two phases. Boundary ditches defined land divisions, all apparently part of a single system extending at least 350 m along a terrace edge. Clustering close to these boundaries, isolated pits characterized the two northern areas of the site, while the southern area was occupied by structures and a dense concentration of pits of both periods. The only evidence of ritual activity was a tiny secondary deposit of cremation pyre debris in a ditch fill. The chronology is not particularly clear, but it is possible that both phases fall into the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age, in the 8th century BC.*

## INTRODUCTION

An excavation, required as part of the planning process in advance of a housing development, was undertaken on an area of c. 0.8 ha at Chichester Road, Selsey, West Sussex (SZ 8600 9400) (Fig. 1) by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd (TVAS), supervised by Stephen Hammond, between August and October 2001.

The western side of the site, adjacent to Chichester Road, slopes gently down to the east from 9 m to 6 m above Ordnance Datum, where it levels off. According to geological maps, the underlying geology on the higher, western part of the site is Bracklesham beds, with aeolian 'brickearth' elsewhere (BGS 1979). The brickearth was confirmed by the evaluation trenches, and although solid gravel outcrops were few, the subsoil to the west was often quite gravelly. The excavated areas were mainly on brickearth.

The archive will be deposited with Chichester Museum; the site code is CRS00/56 and the museum deposition code is 7506.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Until recently, relatively little was known of earlier prehistoric Selsey, predating its apparent prominence in the Late Iron Age. It had been

hypothesized that settlement of the Sussex coastal plain may have begun in the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age but that climatic deterioration in the Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age may have driven settlement inland from the rising sea (Bedwin 1983). Recent investigations, however, have shown clear evidence for Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age occupation of Selsey (Seager Thomas 1998; 2001; Kenny 1989). One of the most important (and earliest) finds of prehistoric pottery (of various dates) was made only some 150 m or so from the site (White 1934).

An evaluation by TVAS over the entire development area during September 2000 uncovered a number of shallow features (pits, post-holes, a gully and a hearth) which appeared to date to the Bronze and Iron Ages. As a result, three areas were designated for excavation (Fig. 1c), including what seemed likely to be Bronze Age occupation (A), an area that was perhaps a Bronze Age cemetery or occupation site (B), and an area with both Bronze Age and Iron Age features (C).

## EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The three excavation areas (A, B and C) gave a combined area of 8130 sq. m. The complete area stripped and its relationship to the evaluation trenches, are shown in Figure 1c. Topsoil and overburden were removed by a 360° mechanical

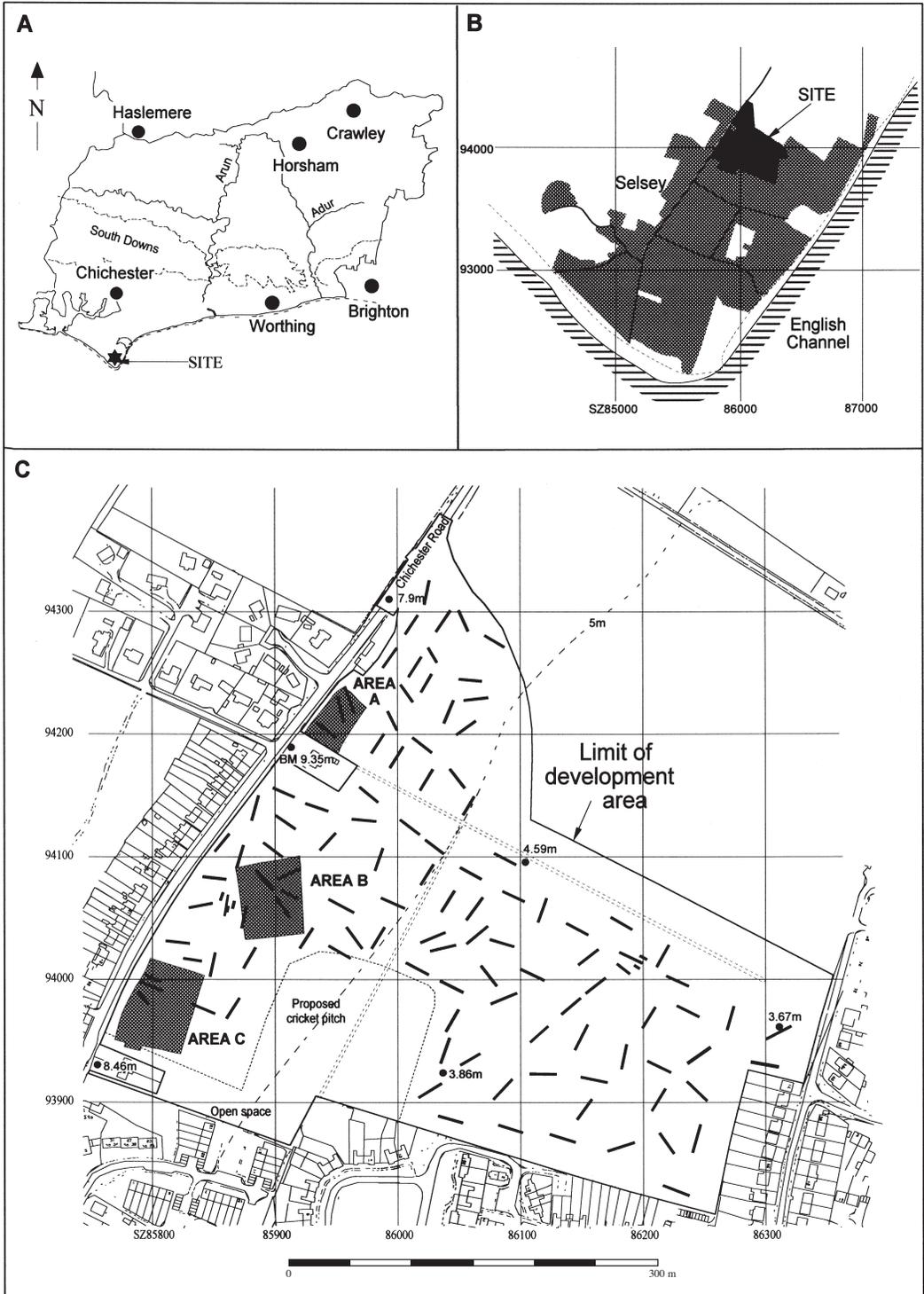


Fig. 1. Composite illustration showing a) the location of site within West Sussex; b) the location of the site within Selsey; c) evaluation trenches and excavation areas within the development site.

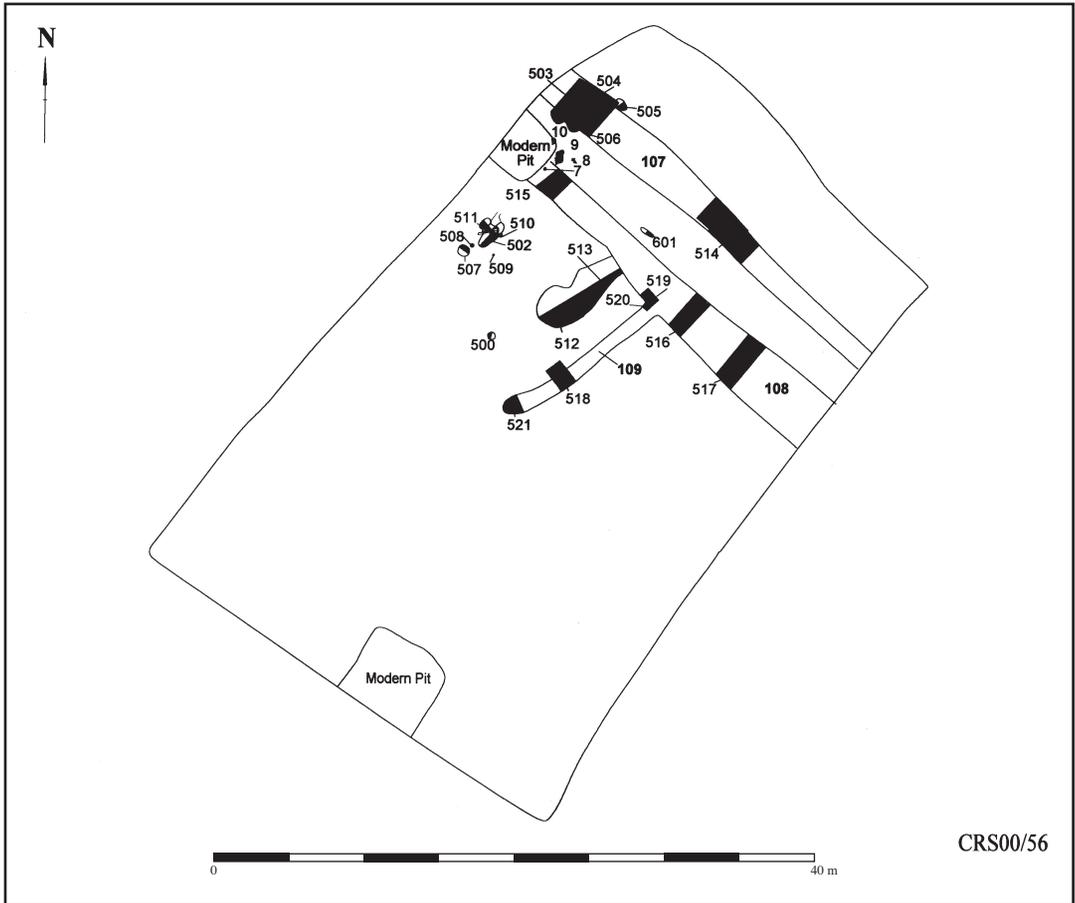


Fig. 2. Plan of excavated features in Area A.

excavator fitted with a toothless bucket to expose the uppermost surface of archaeological deposits. Just over 200 archaeological deposits were recorded, including ditches, gullies, small pits and post-holes. All features were half-sectioned as a minimum, with the majority of post-holes being fully excavated. A sample of 15% of linear features was excavated in slots.

#### RESULTS (FIGS 2-4)

All three areas of the site contained ditches or gullies aligned approximately perpendicular to the Chichester Road. Most of the features were found in the southernmost Area C, including short stretches of two penannular or ring gullies and a major ditch line aligned SSW-NNE (or, broadly, parallel to Chichester Road and along the edge of the gravel terrace).

Finds of any kind from all features were unfortunately rare and in poor condition. The pottery, for example, was so fragmentary (average sherd weight of only 4.6 g) that much of it was almost impossible to identify closely enough to date. Even where tentative identifications could be made, different slots across the same ditch often produced apparently different dating. Compounding these problems, almost all the feature fills comprised indistinguishable natural silting, and stratigraphic relationships between the ditches in particular were difficult to disentangle. This difficulty is, of course, common on brickearth sites. However, the major relationship was clear enough in plan (ditch 105 cut ditches 102 and 106). As a result of this combination of factors, the phasing offered here is uncertain in both relative sequence and absolute chronology, but all of the phased features have been assigned to the Late

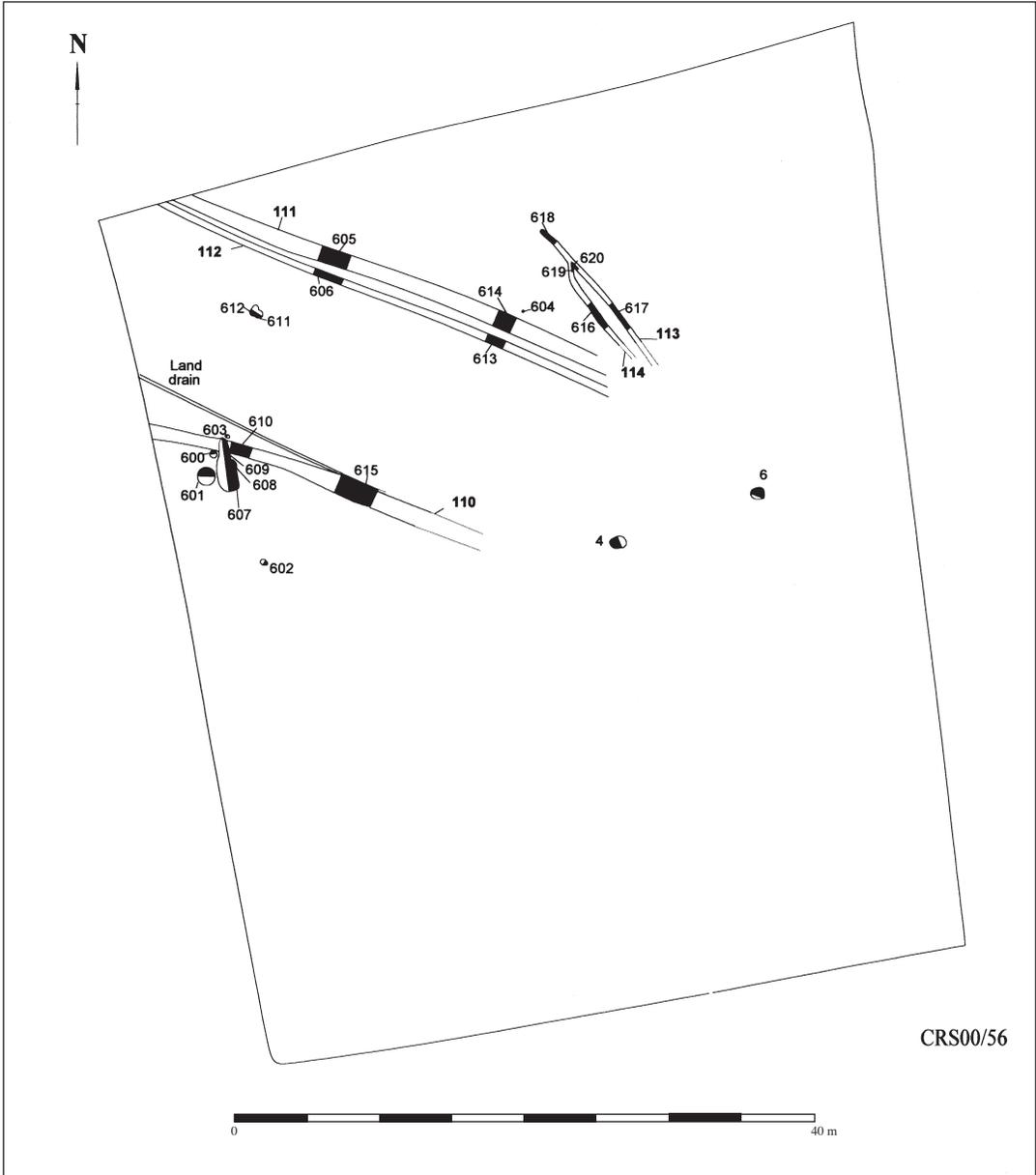


Fig. 3. Plan of excavated features in Area B.

#### Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.

What is remarkable about the site is the almost total lack of any later activity. No Roman, medieval or post-medieval features or even disturbance were encountered and only a few areas of modern disturbance (field drains, omitted from the plans for clarity).

#### PHASE SUMMARY

Detailed feature descriptions are given on the ADS website; this report focuses instead on the dating evidence. Much of the pottery can scarcely be dated more closely than Bronze Age or Iron Age, and often a single feature contained both. The very tiny amounts of later pottery (Late Iron Age or Roman)

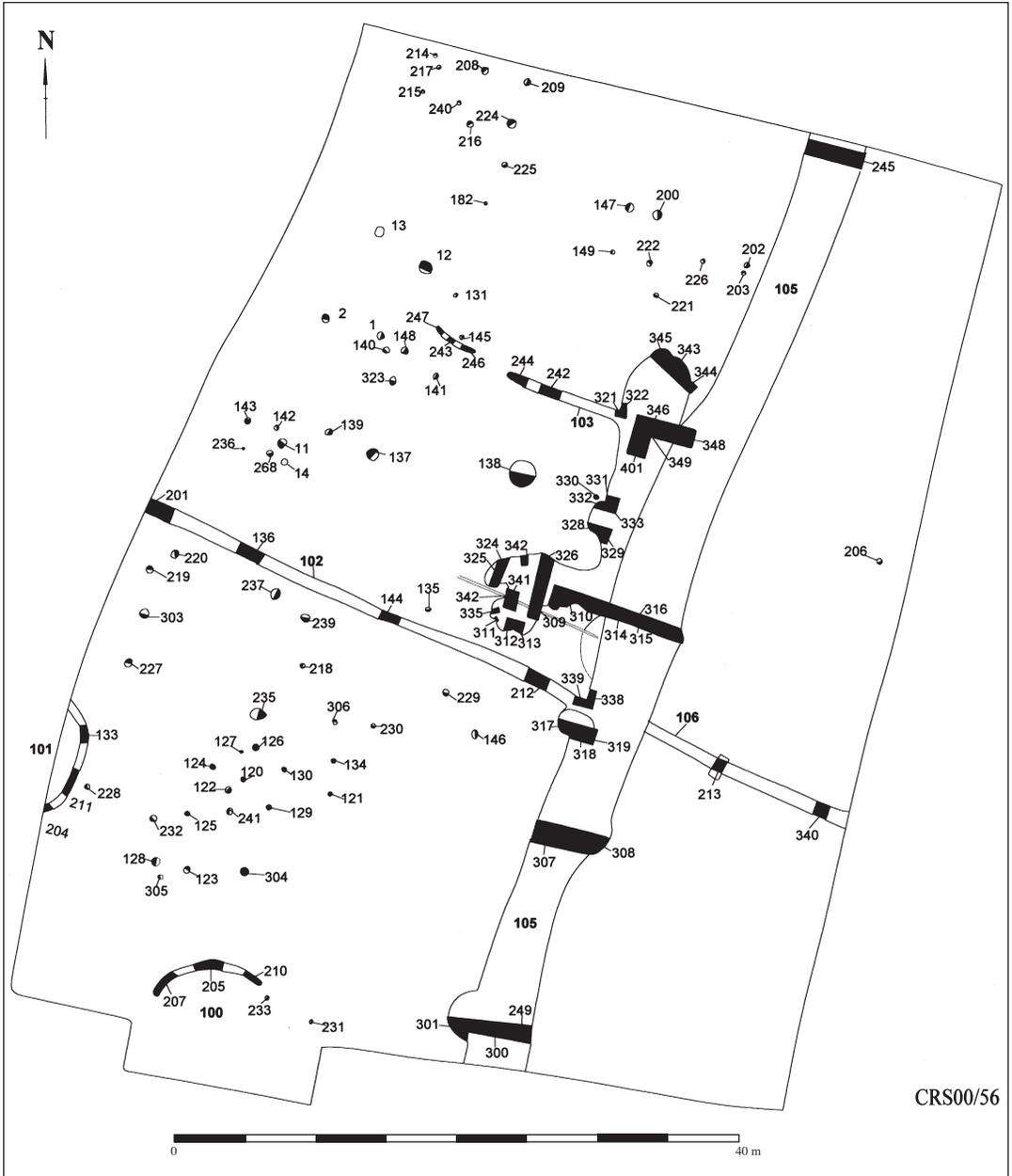


Fig. 4. Plan of excavated features in Area C.

in three features are probably intrusive. Only two phases are therefore posited, namely Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. Phase 2 also includes features whose pottery may be called 'Later Bronze Age / Iron Age', but in truth, there is no certainty that such a division really exists.

**PHASE 1: LATE BRONZE AGE**

The flint assemblage suggests some activity earlier than the Later Bronze Age, and some of the pottery may be Middle Bronze Age (features 1, 2 and 11, in Area C and 7, in Area A), but evidence for occupation prior to Phase 1 is tenuous at best. The

likelihood is that Phase 1 represents activity at the very end of the Bronze Age.

The main features assigned to this period are ditches 102, 103, 106, 107 and 109. It is conceivable that ditch 105 was originally cut in this Phase and only its recuts belong in Phase 2.

All of the features in Area A, except ditch 108, appear to fall into Phase 1. Fills of ditches 107 and 109 both contained Bronze Age pottery. It is tempting to associate ditch 107 with the Phase-2 ditch 108 to which it ran parallel; however, the pottery suggests they were not contemporary.

Other features in Area A included several shallow pits, little more than scoops, with moderate charcoal and occasionally ash content, which may have been the seats of fires or hearths. The density of burnt flint in these features is also noticeable.

None of the gully features in Area B yielded any dating evidence. However, the prevailing alignment of the linear features (110, 111, 112) was virtually parallel to that of ditch lines 102, 103 and 106 in Area C, so these can probably be considered to have been part of a contemporary landscape. The lack of finds from these features suggests this area lay well away from any settlement in this period.

Area C provided the greatest concentration of Phase-1 features. Ditch lines 102 and 106 may originally have been a single feature, cut by Phase-2 ditch 105. The dating of ditch 102 is problematical, as almost every slot across it yielded different pottery, but it is simplest to see it as Late Bronze Age with a tiny amount of intrusive material from the 1st century BC/AD in slot 144. The pottery from ditch 106 is barely datable at all, but probably Bronze Age.

Both north and south of this gully line, but invariably west of ditch 105, a small number of post-holes may belong to this phase. Only rarely can the post-holes even be tentatively dated, but some patterning can be discerned and a number of structures can be suggested (Fig. 4).

Entirely confined to the area north of ditch 102 and west of ditch 105, six pits can confidently be dated to this period, and several more may straddle the phase division. Very few finds were recovered from the pits.

## PHASE 2: IRON AGE

As with Phase 1, chronological distinctions within the Iron Age period almost certainly exist. All

features producing LBA/IA pottery have been assigned to Phase 2 by default; any or all could belong to Phase 1, and it is possible that the two phases are not widely separated; certainly there is no discernible difference in the nature of the site. Only one feature produced pottery characteristic of the end of the Iron Age or early Roman period (a sherd of amphora from ditch slot 144, which is probably intrusive).

The main features assigned to this period are ditches 105 and 108, and curving gullies 100 and 101. Both the main ditches seem consistent with the pattern of land division already established in Phase 1.

In Area A, ditch 108 consistently produced later pottery than ditch 107, so that despite the appearance that these two could flank a trackway, it appears that ditch 108 was later. Indeed, slot 516 contained Roman pottery (3 sherds in an otherwise early assemblage), suggesting that it could have remained open beyond the end of the Iron Age. It is more likely that this pottery should be regarded as intrusive. Ditch 108 was laid out approximately perpendicular to the edge of the gravel terrace, arguing for a consistent pattern in the land divisions here. Among the finds from the fills of ditch 108, a tiny amount of cremated human bone (from two separate slots) is notable. In both cases (deposits 572, 574) this was concentrated with other burnt matter (burnt flint, burnt clay, charcoal, ash), but with no sign of *in situ* burning or of special treatment such as a fresh cut. These deposits, with tiny amounts of bone and little other formal treatment, probably represent the secondary deposition of pyre debris rather than primary disposal of the dead.

In Area B, a small number of small pits and post-holes (600, 602, 607, 608), were dug in this period, in an area which had been marginal in Phase 1. Pit 4 contained a substantial quantity of carbonized seeds (*see below*) and has yielded two radiocarbon dates which appear to place it in the 8th century BC (although as late as the middle of the 6th century cannot be ruled out).

Ditch 105 actually represents at least three ditches, all cut or recut in the same place. Its position parallel to the edge of the gravel terrace (on the brickearth or downslope side) would have tended to facilitate very rapid filling, so that a long existence need not necessarily be posited. However, the very mixed nature of the finds assemblages

from different sections does suggest this line was marked and remarked over a lengthy period, probably throughout phases 1 and 2.

Curving gullies 100 and 101 are both assigned to this phase (Fig. 4). Gully 100 appears to be the partial remains of an Iron Age roundhouse which when complete would have described a circle of around 10.5 m diameter, possibly with an east-facing porch (although only a single post-hole, 233, was found). A fragment of crucible from slot 205 suggests a metalworking role, although no hearth was found.

Gully 101 is also interpreted as a roundhouse gully. It produced only a single tiny sherd of pottery. Its projected diameter would have been very comparable to that of gully 100, at 11 to

11.5 m.

Other post-hole structures can also be posited, both alongside the roundhouses, and further north, including possible four-post structures of the type often interpreted as granaries (Fig. 4), but none of these can be dated.

Clustered west of ditch 105 was a dense mass of intercutting, shallow pits; most of these appear to belong in Phase 1. Only pit 344 at the north of the cluster is more clearly of Iron Age date, while pit 301 at the extreme south of the area is probably also late. However, the relationships of all these pits, to one another and to ditch 105, suggest a long period of essentially the same activity spanning the two phases here. Finds were again rare in all of the pits.

## THE FINDS

### **POTTERY** by Jane Timby

The pottery assemblage from the excavation comprises some 1054 sherds weighing 4873 g to add to 144 sherds (1227 g) from the evaluation. The excavation material was recovered from 100 individual contexts, which means that most of the groups were very small. Most of the pottery was recovered from Area C, some 873 sherds with 162 sherds from Area A and just 19 sherds from Area B. Only one rim sherd was recovered from Area A and only two rims, both from jars, came from Area B.

The assemblage has proved exceptionally difficult to date and any conclusions offered here must be regarded as provisional. One problem is that the assemblage is clearly multi-period in date and distinctive elements of Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Middle Iron Age or Saxon, Later Iron Age, Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery can be recognized. Having said this, 90% of the assemblage comprises various flint-tempered wares, the majority of which are completely featureless, which have the potential to date to the Neolithic, Bronze or Iron Age periods. Many contexts produced just small pot crumbs, which are almost impossible to date as other than 'prehistoric'. The stratigraphy gives few clues as to which features should be seen as contemporary. Whilst initial impressions suggest that the bulk of the assemblage is likely to date to the Late Bronze Age, this does not preclude the possibility of there being earlier prehistoric sherds present.

The condition of much of the assemblage was poor, reflected in a low average sherd weight of 5 g. Much of the prehistoric material comprised very small friable sherds with abraded edges and even the later material appears to have suffered from hostile ground conditions.

As far as possible the assemblage was sorted into wares based on macroscopic observation and quantified by sherd count and weight for each context. Most of the sherds were flint-tempered and whilst some clear distinctions could be made, for example, the use of calcined flint versus gravel flint, it was difficult to categorize the material in terms of grade and density of inclusions. Moreover, some of the more subtle

differences observable in the hand specimen are difficult to qualify on paper. Featured sherds were sparse and even some of the rim sherds were slightly ambiguous in terms of attribution to a specific period.

### **Earlier prehistoric**

A very small, unstratified, rim fragment with a sparse calcined flint temper shows a flat upper rim surface decorated with diagonal slashes. This could be of Neolithic date, but is too small for certainty. Otherwise, the earliest material present appears to be 15 coarse flint-tempered, handmade sherds from thick-walled, urn-like vessels from pit 7 (Area A), which would be compatible with material dating to the Middle Bronze Age. One vessel was decorated with a finger-impressed cordon. Accompanying these sherds were 41 thinner-walled, unfeatured sherds with a finer, calcined flint temper perhaps suggesting a domestic assemblage. Features 1, 2 and 11 (Area C) collectively produced a further 20 coarse flint-tempered sherds, which may be contemporary with those from pit 7.

### **Description of fabric:**

FL1: a very coarse calcined flint-tempered fabric with inclusions reaching 4 mm in size in a brown, fine textured, sandy paste. Could include Middle and Late Bronze Age material. In total 59 sherds of this fabric were recorded, 5% of the total.

### **Later prehistoric**

Most of the assemblage would appear to date to the later prehistoric period. At least five ware-groups can be discerned: flint, sand, grog, ferruginous and organic-tempered. The flint and sandy groups can be subdivided. In addition, there were a number of one-off fabrics noted in the discussion below. All the inclusions or tempering agents identified are locally available and the viability of the coastal plain brickearth for potting has been noted by Hamilton (1987, 58).

### **Description of fabrics:**

#### *Flint-tempered wares*

FL2: A reduced sandy textured ware with a moderate to common frequency of sub-angular to angular calcined flint

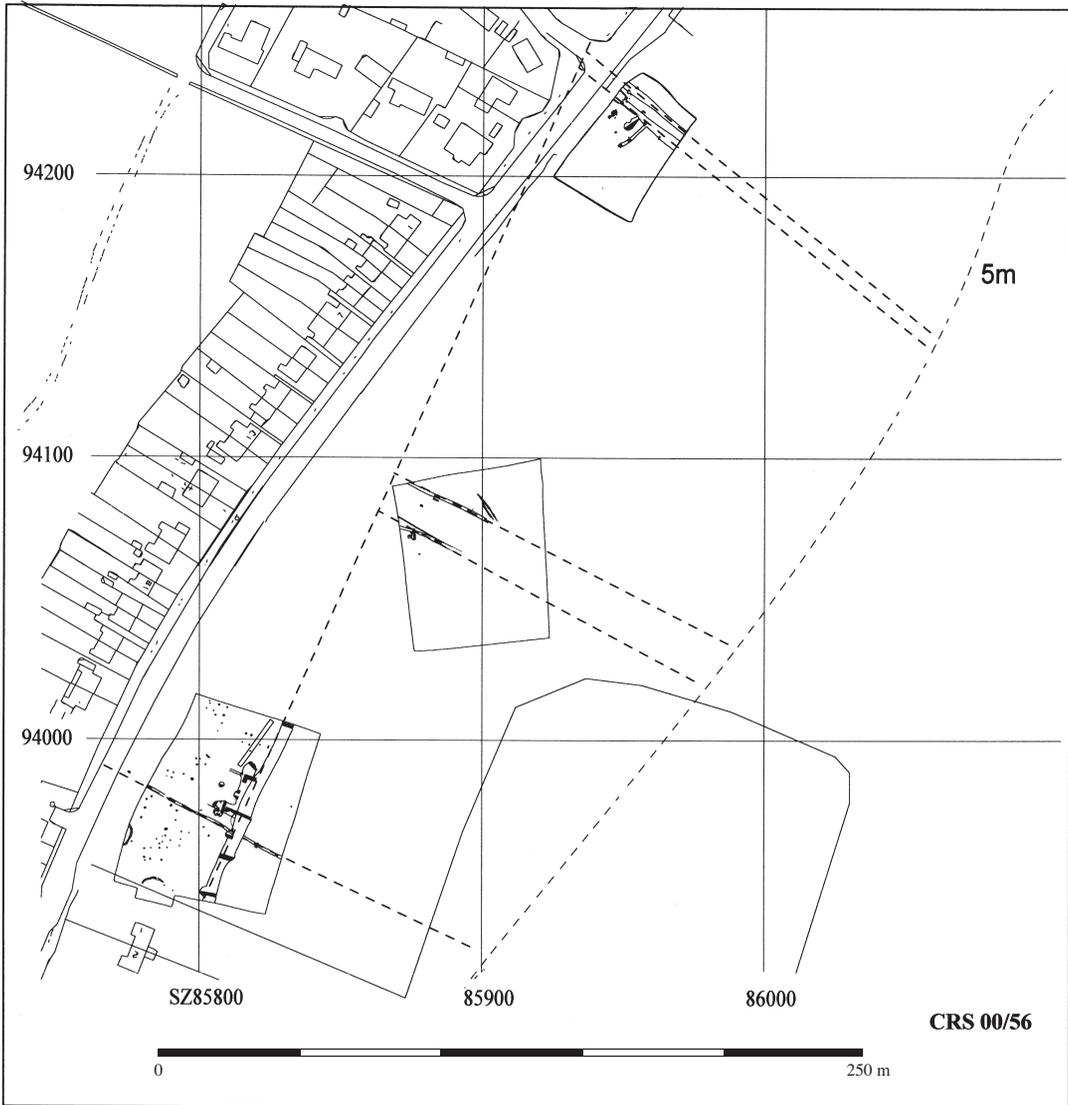


Fig. 5. Projected lines of land divisions.

generally up to 2 mm in size. In total 475 sherds of this fabric account for 45% of the total assemblage.

FL3: A brown ware with a black core and interior. The paste contains a sparse to moderate frequency of sub-angular to angular patinated flint up to 2 mm. The paste has a fine sandy texture with mica and rare organic inclusions. This fabric accounts for 2% of the total assemblage.

FL4: A generally orange, quite soft ware with sparse coarse, angular calcined flint up to 5 mm and clay pellets or rounded grog in variable amounts.

#### *Sandy wares*

SA1: A fine sandy fabric with sparse fine angular flint. Nine sherds of this ware were present from features 310, 313 and 519.

SA2: A hard black fabric with a common to dense frequency of fine quartz sand. Sixteen sherds of this fabric were recorded from two contexts, pit 319 and ditch 107 (514).

SA3: A fine to medium sandy ware with a sparse fine mica and occasional red iron. Six sherds only from ditch 517.

SA4: A glauconitic sandy ware. Three sherds only from pit 319.

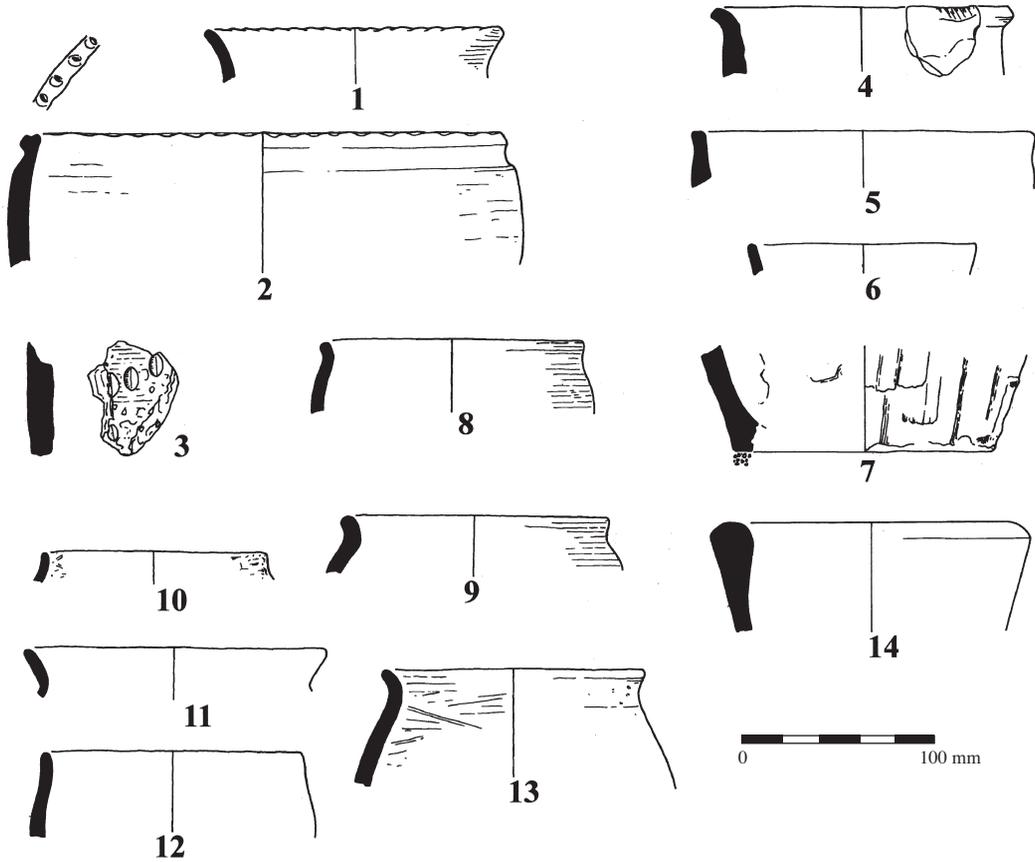


Fig. 6. Pottery (see text for details).

#### *Grog-tempered ware*

GR: A soft oxidized sandy paste with sub-rounded dark orange grog inclusions. A single sherd from pit 324.

#### *Ferruginous and organic wares*

FE: A moderately hard ware distinguished by a moderate to common frequency of dark brown ferruginous inclusions up to 2 mm in size accompanied by variable amounts of sub-angular to angular quartz, flint and organic matter. Represented by a single jar from post-hole 602.

OR: A fine sandy textured paste, sometimes with fine mica and a common to dense frequency of coarse organic inclusions visible as linear voids. Includes a variant with occasional flint. The flint variant was from pits 344, 319 and 318, a total of 47 sherds whilst the finer variant without other inclusions was from 318, 319, 600 and 607, a total of 14 sherds. A single sherd of a sandy variant came from pit 344.

#### **Discussion**

A small amount of featured material was present suggesting Later Bronze Age to Early Iron Age activity on the site. In particular this includes vessels with finger-tipping on the

rims (Fig. 6:1–2) or finger-depressions on the body, usually as a single line marking a shoulder or body carination, but with at least one sherd with what appear to be multiple impressions (Fig. 6:5). Specific features with this distinctive material include pits 137, 327 and 401, and ditch 105 (slot 245). Ditch 105 as a whole produced a total of 144 sherds. Cut 249 produced a group of 10 sherds with a burnished or smooth finish.

A small number of finewares may date to the Early Iron Age period. These include four very tiny thin-walled sherds from post-hole 148 which have a dark reddish haematite-like smooth finish, and a small rim sherd from pit 310 (Fig. 6:6) which may be from a fineware bowl. Also from pit 310 is a base with distinctive vertical smearing or ridging (Fig. 6:7), a feature observed on Late Bronze Age pottery (Barrett 1975). Other decorated sherds were sparse. One sandy ware sherd from ditch 102 (201) had a single incised line, which may have been from a wider design. A single tongue-shaped lug was noted from post-hole 343. A similar lug featured amongst the assemblage from Plumpton Plain site B (Hawkes 1935, fig. 9c).

Comparable Sussex assemblages include those from Yapton (Hamilton 1987) and the post-Deverel-Rimbury

Table 1. Calibrated radiocarbon dates.

|                  |  |                |                     |
|------------------|--|----------------|---------------------|
| <b>KIA19526</b>  | Pit 4, Context 53, Seeds                 |                |                     |
| Radiocarbon Age: | BP 2440 ± 25                             |                |                     |
| Calibrated Ages: | cal BC 517, 458, 453, 437, 432, 416, 415 |                |                     |
|                  | One Sigma Range:<br>(Probability 68.3%)  | cal BC 755–718 | (Probability 15.6%) |
|                  |  | 539–527        | (Probability 5.4%)  |
|                  |  | 524–478        | (Probability 21.0%) |
|                  |  | 471–445        | (Probability 11.5%) |
|                  |  | 445–411        | (Probability 14.9%) |
|                  | Two Sigma Range:<br>(Probability 95.4%)  | cal BC 760–681 | (Probability 27.4%) |
|                  |  | 667–635        | (Probability 5.7%)  |
|                  |  | 590–578        | (Probability 1.9%)  |
|                  |  | 556–406        | (Probability 60.5%) |
| <b>KIA19527</b>  | Pit 4, Context 53, Seeds                 |                |                     |
| Radiocarbon Age: | BP 2541 ± 27                             |                |                     |
| Calibrated Age:  | cal BC 780                               |                |                     |
|                  | One Sigma Range:<br>(Probability 68.3%)  | cal BC 795–760 | (Probability 35.5%) |
|                  |  | 681–667        | (Probability 10.9%) |
|                  |  | 627–622        | (Probability 2.0%)  |
|                  |  | 613–592        | (Probability 13.7%) |
|                  |  | 576–562        | (Probability 6.1%)  |
|                  | Two Sigma Range:<br>(Probability 95.4%)  | cal BC 799–757 | (Probability 37.2%) |
|                  |  | 695–656        | (Probability 15.3%) |
|                  |  | 650–542        | (Probability 42.9%) |

settlement on Plumpton Plain (Hawkes 1935). At Yapton all the sherds were flint-tempered. Variants were noted with added grog and sparse organic matter. Some similarity in vessel types can be seen with this assemblage with jars showing hooked-over or incurving rims, and a low proportion of decorated wares taken to be characteristic of a post-Deverell-Rimbury repertoire where plainwares still dominate (Barrett 1980). The plainware assemblage, which dates from the 11th to 8th centuries BC, is characterized by a series of plainware jars, and later by a range of fineware bowls. Around the 8th century the plainware phase was succeeded by a decorated phase. Barrett (1980, 311) cites other possible plainware assemblages from Selsey (close to the present site) and Kingston Bucii.

The assemblage finds some parallels in other published later Bronze Age assemblages, such as that at Petters Sports Field, Egham (Surrey), where there are sherds similar to that in Fig. 6:5 with multiple finger impressions (O'Connell & Needham 1986, fig. 51.178; 57.270), and Weston Wood, Albury (Russell 1989).

Another component of the assemblage recovered from the excavations is less easy to place. There are a number of rounded jars with everted rims (cf. Fig. 6:8–13). Some such as Fig. 6:8 and 6:9 in flint-tempered fabrics with a burnished finish are clearly Iron Age in origin. Others such as those from pits 319 and 607 are less clear. Pit 319 contained 16 sandy wares, 24 organic with some flint, three organic-tempered wares and 33 flint-tempered wares. There are some

slight differences in these sherds compared to the general flint-tempered material documented from the other features. Pit 607 had a mixture of flint, sand and organic sherds. Also from pit 607 was a curved handmade sandy orange fragment which may have been a piece of Roman roof-tile, suggesting that this was a post-Roman feature. The use of organic tempering has been observed at Yapton and other Late Bronze Age sites but usually in association with other materials. Post-hole 602 contained a single jar in an iron-rich fabric (Fig. 6:13), not encountered elsewhere in the assemblage. These groups could be Saxon or Middle-Late Iron Age.

### Roman and later

The Roman and later material is reported on the ADS website.

#### *Catalogue of illustrated sherds (Fig. 6)*

1. Everted rim jar with a light finger-tipped rim. Grey-brown in colour with a grey core. Fabric F4. Pit 137 (167).

2. Wide-mouthed bowl with a finger-depressed rim. Finger-smoothed groove below rim. Red-brown interior with a grey-brown exterior. Fabric F2. Pit 327 (361).

3. Thick-walled bodysherd with lightly impressed oval impressions. Orange exterior with a black core and brown interior. Fabric F1. Pit 401 (387).

4. Handmade jar, with irregular rim and visible coil joins on the interior. Red-brown with a grey-brown interior. Fabric F2. Ditch 318 (352).

5. Handmade vessel, light grey in colour with a mid-brown interior. Fabric F4. Pit 310 (293).

6. Fineware bowl, black with a red-brown core. Fabric S1. Pit 310 (293).

7. Base from a slab-built vessel with a finger-smearing finish. Fine calcined flint gritted base. Fabric F2. Pit 310 (293).

8. Ovoid jar with everted rim. Black in colour with a well-burnished finish. Fabric F2. Ditch 245 (278).

9. Globular jar with a short everted rim and a burnished finish. Fabric F2. Burnt area 503 (553).

10. Jar with inturned rim. Red-brown exterior, black core/interior. Organic tempered. Fabric OR. Pit 319 (294).

11. Everted rim jar. Hard, black sandy ware. Fabric S2. Pit 319 (294).
12. Slack-sided jar in a fine paste with a common frequency of organic matter. Fabric OR. Pit 319 (294).
13. Handmade round-bodied jar with everted rim. Grass-marked interior. Fabric FE. Post-hole 602 (652).
14. Pascual 1 amphora. Gully 144 (174).

**HUMAN BONE** by Jacqueline I. McKinley

Cremated human bone (44.5g) was recovered from two fills of Iron Age ditch 108. Both contexts potentially represent the same individual.

**PLANT MACROFOSSILS** by Ruth Pelling

A 2-litre soil sample from pit 4 produced in excess of 1000

charred plant remains, almost entirely composed of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), including 6-row barley. Other species were few: grains of emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) and Bromo grass (*Bromus* subsp. *eubromus*) were both present, probably as weeds. No wood charcoal was observed. Samples from other contexts provided only small amounts of charcoal.

**RADIOCARBON DATING** (Table 1)

Two subsamples of the seeds from pit 4 were submitted to the University of Kiel for radiocarbon dating. Both samples gave reliable results. The ages differ by  $100 \pm 37$  years, which is statistically significant. Different  $C^{14}$  concentrations for samples of almost the same age might be found around 760–755 BC or at 690–660 BC. Another possible explanation for the age difference could be a remnant of recent rootlet contamination in KIA19526.

Other finds from the site are reported on the ADS website.

## CONCLUSIONS

The excavations revealed evidence of an orderly division of the landscape, early in the 1st millennium BC, which seems to have created large areas of roughly equal dimensions (c. 150 m across) bounded by the 5-metre terrace edge to the east and ditch 105 to the west. The NW–SE ditches in the separate areas did not run quite parallel, but may be responding to the topography of the terrace. The evidence from Area C suggests that ditch 105 may have been at the centre of the system, rather than being one edge, with further divisions leading off to the west.

Although all these elements would make sense as part of a single landscape (Fig. 5), the chronology is far from clear. It is most likely that all the main elements belong to two phases dated to around the 8th century BC, but there are hints of Middle Bronze Age, Middle Iron Age, Late Iron Age, possibly Roman and even Saxon activity. Even with the uncertainty, what is clear is that the two phases are more alike than dissimilar, emphasizing the essential continuity across the increasingly blurred LBA/EIA ‘transition’ (cf. Hamilton 2003).

The spaces defined by the ditches do seem to have been differently used. In Area C, all the pits were dug adjacent to ditch 105, west of it and north of ditch 102. Structural features were also all located west of ditch 105, and the most coherent of these were all south of 102. This southernmost plot may have been occupied, the northern plot used for storage and rubbish disposal. In Area A, all the cut features were south of ditch 108. It would

seem, then, that ditch 105 was the eastern limit of an occupation area, with ditched fields to the east and an occupied area with further ditched subdivisions to the west.

The settlement here does not appear to have been specifically enclosed, but rather to have sat within a more broadly bounded landscape (a distinctive Sussex trait; Hamilton 2003, 73–7). Late Bronze Age land divisions are increasingly recognized in many parts of England, especially on the downlands. Evidence for earlier origins for such field systems remains elusive or unconvincingly dated (Ford *et al.* 1990). Evidence for such divisions on the coastal plain is, however, rare.

There was no evidence that either of the curving gullies (100, 101) were the ditches from round barrows. They were more likely to belong to Iron Age roundhouses. The Bronze Age pottery has not been confirmed typologically as characteristic of funerary contexts, nor were any significant human remains found. The evidence is much more consistent with domestic occupation with no apparent ritual element. This would concur with the evidence from the nearest Bronze Age sites along the seafront (Seager Thomas 1998). Unfortunately, apart from the pottery and the features themselves, the site produced nothing which could help to characterize the Bronze Age occupation. This is by no means unusual for the period, however, and the data nevertheless contribute towards the growing picture of Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation of Selsey.

Iron Age evidence was also somewhat patchy

and subject to similar chronological uncertainty. However, the landscape can be more readily reconstructed, at least in broad outline, with major field boundaries and probably droeways, and occupation clustered in Area C. At least some metalworking was taking place, and barley was being cultivated. The identification of a small amount of cremated human bone as a secondary deposit of pyre debris in a ditch would be by no means unusual in this period, and should imply a cremation cemetery nearby.

The serial recutting of ditch 105 (and indeed, of 107 and 108) suggests that the site was prone either to flooding or to considerable solifluction along the gravel terrace edge. The whole site makes most sense if ditch 105 is allowed to represent a major feature throughout the entire occupation. It does seem to have marked the edge of the settled area, on the higher gravel terrace, leaving the lower

coastal plain, on the brickearth, for agricultural use, a pattern observed elsewhere in Sussex (Ellison 1978, 36).

Finally, the lack of later features on the site could offer some support for the idea that after the initial period of settlement, rising sea levels forced occupation back inland (Bedwin 1983), but even if so, the date of any such contraction remains unclear (Woodcock (2003) emphasizes the extent of local variation).

#### Acknowledgements

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