A Late Bronze Age burnt mound site at The Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, Kensington

Peter Moore
Timothy Bradley
Barry Bishop
with Mike Seager Thomas, Sue Hamilton and K. L. Hunter

The redevelopment of the former Queen Elizabeth College, part of King's College, University of London, at The Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, Kensington, London W8 (TQ 2520 7980), by Phillimore Hill Ltd, led to the requirement for an archaeological evaluation of the site. The site is located about halfway up the southern side of Campden Hill, on a slight natural terrace running east-west at the junction of Campden Hill Road and the Duchess of Bedford's Walk (Fig. 1).[1] As its status as a Conservation Area has limited development in the area, little was known about the archaeological resource near the site.

An archaeological watching brief on twenty engineering test pits, and the evaluation of three archaeological test pits and two trenches, was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd between 9 October and 3 November 2000 in the grounds of the former college.[2] No archaeological deposits were found in any of the test pits or the south-western evaluation trench, which contained only modern made ground, clays and hill-wash gravels, all heavily truncated by the construction of the college buildings. However, the evaluation trench located in the tennis court in the south-east corner of the site revealed a natural brickearth terrace, protected by the overlying construction of the tennis court, into which several prehistoric features were cut. Surrounding test pits showed any archaeological deposits confined to the area of the tennis court.[3]

As the location of the surviving archaeological deposits corresponded to the footprint of the proposed construction of an underground car park, which by virtue of its depth would totally destroy the archaeology, a rescue excavation of this area was agreed to be the most suitable archaeological mitigation strategy.[4] The area of excavation was entirely within the tennis court but was constrained by trees with preservation orders to the south. Whilst ground reduction was undertaken by mechanical excavator over most of the area, all areas beneath the tree canopies and near root systems were hand excavated. The excavation (Fig. 2), undertaken between 10-24th June 2001, measured between 7m and 9m north-south by 22m east-west and was dug to a maximum depth of 1.10m.

Archaeological and historical background

The geology of the area consists of London Clay with bands and swathes of gravel, washed down the hillside from more substantial deposits to the north. On top of the clays rests a deposit of brickearth which had been removed right across the site by terracing and previous development, apart from the area of the tennis court. Here it was found at levels varying from 23.46m to 22.58m OD.

Very little is known about the prehistory of the area. Recent archaeological investigations of land around the Sir John Atkins Building, immediately north-west of the site, have revealed an area of concentrated prehistoric activity, which appears to have been located along a higher gravel terrace.[5] Features including probable Iron Age pits and postholes have been identified, suggesting relatively settled activity in the area. Other than this, two early stone tools,[6] two bronze

Fig. 1: site location, area of excavation and local contours of Campden Hill

weapons,[7] a Late Bronze Age metalwork hoard from around Kensington Church to the south-east of the site, and several residual sherds of Iron Age pottery[8] represent the entire pre-Roman period in the area! The hoard was found near Kensington Church in 1867, just 500m south-east of The Phillimores. It consisted of ten pieces including axes, knives, gouges, horsegear (a ribbed button, Llangwyllog type), bronze sheet and bits of scrap metal,[9] which have been dated to the Ewart Park phase of the Late Bronze Age, circa 900-600 BC.[10] Metalwork hoards of this date are numerous and widespread especially in the Thames Valley, making it likely that the group which buried these objects was part of an extensive community and culture.

Two Roman roads running westwards from the City of London are thought to have traversed the borough. One exited at Newgate and is represented by the course of Oxford Street, Notting Hill, Holland Park Avenue, and

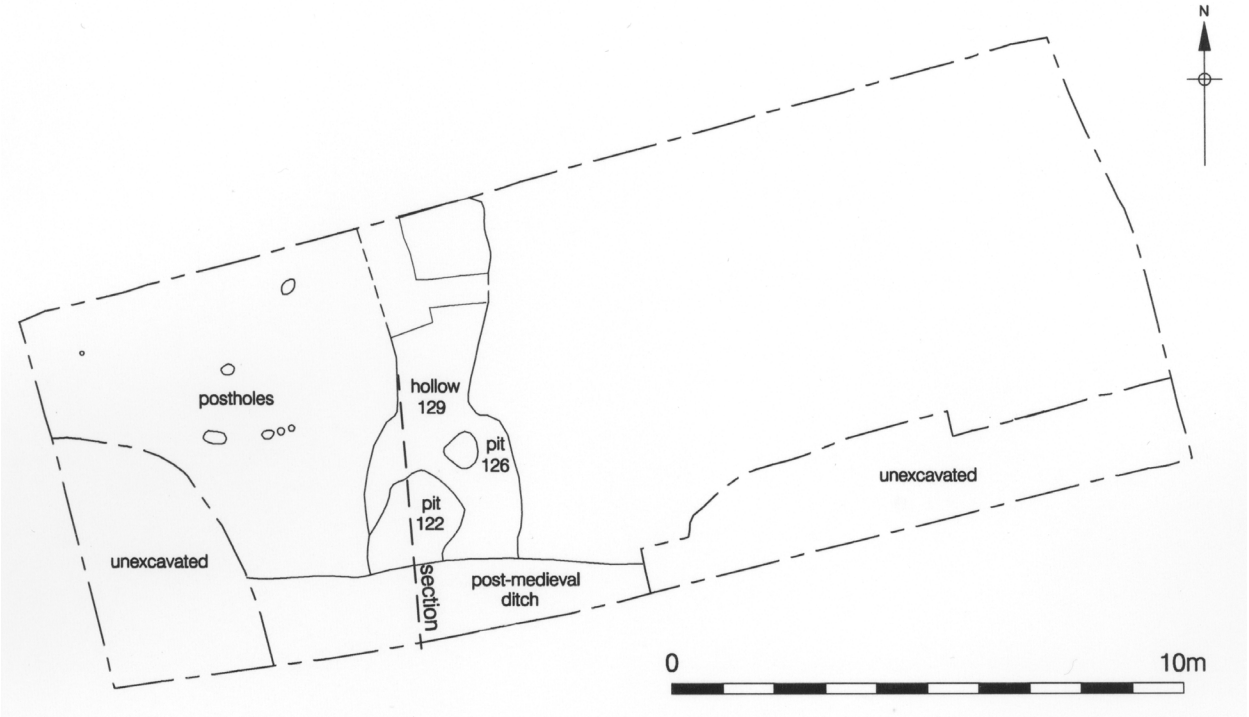

Fig. 2: area of excavation showing the hollow, Late Bronze Age pits and postholes, the post-medieval ditch, lying parallel to the Duchess of Bedford's Walk to the south and areas unexcavated because of tree roots.

Goldhawk Road. The other passed through Ludgate and is thought to be aligned with the Strand, Kensington Road, then Hammersmith and Chiswick.[11] No Roman settlements have yet been found in the borough, although evidence of Roman occupation was recorded at 6-16 Old Church Street.[12] The investigations to the north of the site also produced at least one early Roman ditch and a slightly later pit.

An early medieval church is known to have occupied the site of St Mary Abbots Church, at the junction of Kensington Church Street and Kensington High Street to the south-east of the site. It is uncertain when this church was built but it probably existed before 1100 AD.[13] The remains of Saxo-Norman settlement were found at Earls Terrace on Kensington High Street[14] south-west of the site, implying the continued use of the route of the projected Roman road. A single sherd of probably medieval pottery (see below) was found at The Phillimores in a layer of mottled dark orange-brown silty sandy clay. This deposit was found at the top of the prehistoric hollow covering an area measuring 3.8m by 13.0m (Fig. 3). While it did contain quantities of burnt flint, its stratigraphic position and the single sherd of medieval pottery suggest that it may have been a medieval arable deposit which included residual prehistoric flint through ploughing, and which had survived later truncation because of its position in the hollow.

The post-medieval landscape around the site consisted of arable land with extensive quarrying of the gravel and brickearth deposits. Rocque's mid-18th century map of the area records substantial quarry pits to the north-west and north-east of the site, and it is not unreasonable to assume that quarrying activity occurred over most of the area over time. Indeed, the investigations at the Sir John Atkins Building to the north produced evidence of two quarry pits that appeared to be fronting onto Campden Hill, which was presumably used for access to them.

The three roads around the site boundaries, Campden Hill Road, Campden Hill, and Duchess of Bedford's Walk, are marked on Rocque's map as tracks, but due to a lack of earlier cartographic evidence, it is not possible to say how long these routes had been in use. The Duchess of Bedford's Walk takes advantage of the natural terrace noted

above, and it is therefore possible that this route is of some antiquity. An east-west running ditch was identified along the south of the area of excavation (Figs. 2 and 3). Its alignment was seen to respect that of the Duchess of Bedford's Walk directly to the south, suggesting that this was for roadside drainage. The earliest cut of this ditch was undated, although the cartographic evidence suggests that the Duchess of Bedford's Walk existed at least as far back as the mid-18th century. It was recut in the 19th century and other ditches and gullies were excavated and found to be contemporary with or superceding it.[15]

In the early 19th century the area was extensively developed for villas, which can be seen on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map. By the early 20th century most of the villas had been replaced by larger houses, terraces and apartment blocks. King's College for Women was set up at the site in 1913, and this building, by architects Percy Adams and Charles Holden, is listed Grade 2.[16]

Prehistoric Archaeology

The excavation revealed a natural brickearth terrace at heights of between 23.34m OD towards the north of the excavated area, and 23.03m OD towards the south. It is likely, however that this natural slope would have been more pronounced prior to the subsequent terracing activities associated with the existing buildings.

The evaluation located a linear feature which the subsequent excavation showed to be a large amorphous natural hollow with maximum dimensions of 7.8m by 3.4m by 0.5m deep. The southern end of the hollow was totally destroyed by the post-medieval roadside ditch and its later recut (Fig. 3), running along the southern limit of excavation. This ditch also removed the stratigraphic relationship between the hollow and the base of a feature identified immediately to the south.

Two pits were found cut into the base and sides of the hollow. The southernmost of these, pit [122], was sub-rounded in plan, with steep regular sides and two rounded depressions in the base. The southern side of the pit was also slightly truncated by the east-west running roadside ditch. It measured 1.88m by 2.05m by 0.5m deep and its primary fill, predominantly located within the two depressions in the base of the cut, was a grey silty clay which contained frequent charcoal flecks and 210g of burnt flint. This deposit yielded 41 pottery sherds, derived from a small jar (Fig. 4). Both typologically and in terms of its fabric (Fabric 3), this vessel could be dated to the early first millennium BC (LBA). The sherds were abraded and there were few conjoins between them, but the completeness of the vessel and the absence of later finds suggest that both vessel and context were coeval.

The jar was small and slack-shouldered (Fig. 4). Its original surface proved difficult to reconstruct but it was oxidized (there was no evidence that this resulted from post-firing burning) and, given its coarse fabric, it was likely always to have been rough. Shouldered jars of this general form, albeit somewhat larger, are a frequent and widespread component of the post Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition. They are dated by a large number of ^{14}C associations to the early first millennium BC. Within this tradition plain rounded or slack shoulders are characteristic of early assemblages,

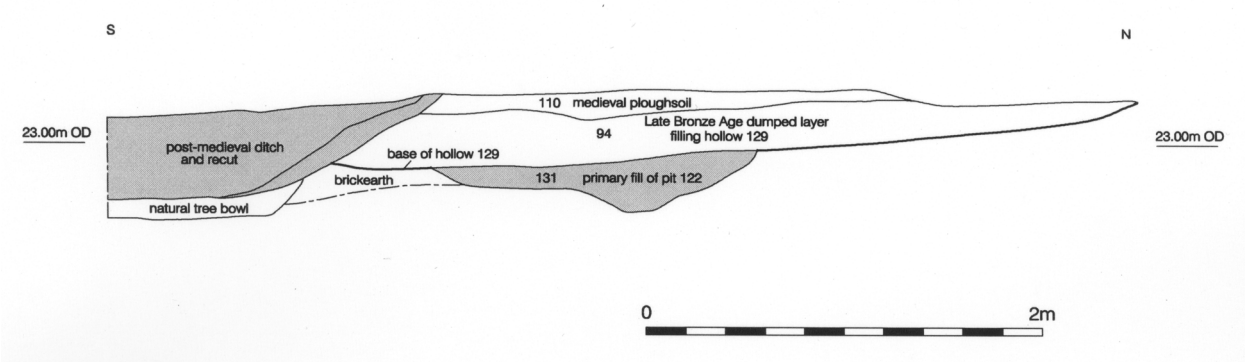

Fig. 3: east-facing section through base of hollow [129], showing pit [122] at it base and its truncation by the post-medieval ditch to the south.

whereas vessels with body decoration are dated a little later. Both of these traits occurred in the vessel from The Phillmores, and make more precise dating difficult. It probably falls somewhere in the ninth century BC, the likely date of its closest, well contextualized parallel from Runnymede Bridge. This makes it broadly contemporary with the Ewart Park metalwork that comprises the Kensington Church hoard. Fragments of the pottery from this vessel also provided evidence for the presence of plant and animal residues.

Situated immediately to the north east of pit [122] was pit [126]. This was sub-rectangular in plan with steep straight sides and a flat base, and measured 0.72m by 0.68m by 0.3m deep. Its dimensions resembled the two depressions within the base of pit [122], which together with its location, suggested that it was associated with the same activities.

Overlying the primary fill of pit [122] was a blue-grey clay which was very similar to the fill of pit [126]. Both were gleyed, indicating the presence of waterlogging in the past, and were subsequently sealed by layer [94] which entirely filled the natural hollow. This was a 0.5m thick compact brownish grey loam containing 9550g of burnt flint and a single sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery similar to that comprising the shouldered jar from pit [122], and probably belonging to the same ceramic tradition. Context [94] also produced a few small fragments of cereal grain, although they possessed none of the diagnostic characteristics required to identify them to a genus. This deposit showed no characteristics of hillwash and appeared homogenous, suggesting that it had been deliberately dumped. A charcoal sample from this context produced a C14 date of 3160 ± 79 BP.

As the discussion above has shown, a large quantity (just over 17kg) of burnt flint was recovered from the Phillimores, almost entirely from various fillings of the large hollow and the pit cuts. It exhibited 'fire crazing' and it had become a greyish white colour, consistent with deliberate burning in a hearth. The large quantities involved would seem to preclude an origin as incidental waste from simple domestic hearth use, but would be more characteristic of waste from larger scale operations.

Seven items of struck flint were also recovered from within or immediately surrounding the natural hollow. All of the pieces were in good condition showing little evidence of extensive post-depositional damage. The raw material was likely obtained from derived deposits such as the gravel terraces common in the area.

One flake, of relatively good quality flint, was recovered from the surface of the natural brickearth. It had a narrow and carefully prepared striking platform and narrow, parallel dorsal scars. It appeared to be the product of soft-hammer percussion and a systematic narrow flake or blade technology. Such items are most consistent with Early Neolithic or earlier industries and it is likely that this piece considerably pre-dated the Later Bronze Age activity recorded at the site.

The other six pieces were manufactured from poorer quality flint. They appeared to be hard-hammer struck, consisting of rather crudely produced thick and squat flakes, mostly still retaining high proportions of cortex and with wide, unmodified striking platforms. One piece had been crudely retouched, with one margin blunted and the opposed margin exhibiting shallower retouch, probably representing a knife. No diagnostic types were present, although technologically they would be consistent with flintworking traditions dating to the Middle Bronze Age or after, and may have been contemporary with the currency of the Later Bronze Age activity identified. They were

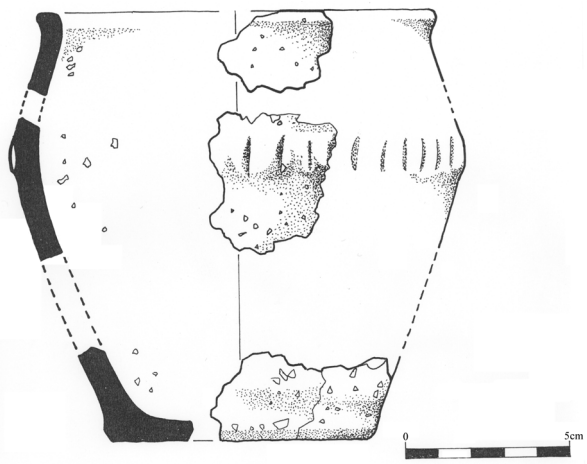

Fig. 4: shouldered jar from context [131].

recovered amongst large quantities of burnt flint from Late Bronze Age contexts and as none were burnt it would preclude accidental incorporation, their condition suggesting that they were discarded along with the burnt material.

The linear nature of the hollow itself, following the slope of Campden Hill, and its gleyed waterlogged soil deposits suggests that this feature may have represented a stream or spring perhaps flowing on a seasonal basis. The presence of very large quantities of burnt flint in the material dumped into the hollow suggests that a considerable waste deposit must have accumulated in the immediate vicinity. This evidence would be consistent with the site being a burnt mound site, now widely recognised as being widespread in the British Isles and Ireland.

The fact that this hollow was temporarily or seasonally abandoned (allowing the gleyed soil deposits to form), and then deliberately infilled suggests that the use or purpose of the site changed. Although there is no stratigraphic evidence, and only fragments of burnt flint within their fills as dating evidence, this change of use may relate to the presence of seven postholes found immediately to the north-west of the hollow. These postholes had diameters of between 0.42m and 0.09m and depths of between 0.09m and 0.34m, though significant later truncation is almost certain to have taken place. No structure is discernible in the positioning of these postholes and they could represent activities associated with or subsequent to the use of the hollow. Almost certainly more postholes would have once existed to the north and west of this excavation.

Discussion

This archaeological excavation has significantly added to our knowledge of Bronze Age activity in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Whereas evidence of Late Bronze Age settlement and other activities in Greater London may be relatively limited compared with the regions to the east and west, the paucity of known contemporary activity in this borough compared with the other London boroughs along the Thames is striking. Only three Bronze Age findspots are known and they consist of a metalwork hoard and two individual finds of an axe and a spearhead, found between 1846 and 1935. The quantity of archaeological features, pottery and food debris found at The Phillimores is slight, but combined with large quantities of burnt flint and pits associated with a water source suggest it may have been a burnt mound site. The mere presence of a domestic activity, even if only seasonal, suggests a more widespread community, yet to be archaeologically discovered. That there was a later deliberate change of use suggests that people may have returned to, and used this site over a considerable period of time. The archaeological investigations on the site of the Sir John Atkins Building immediately to the north-west certainly suggest occupation slightly further up Campden Hill by the early Iron Age, and it is likely that the gravel terrace on which it was situated would have been utilised prior to this time.

The close proximity of The Phillimores to the Late Bronze Age metalwork hoard from the Kensington Church area may also be of significance. While both in their nature are not typical of archaeological features associated with settlement, they suggest the location of such activity nearby, or that this area, or route, was popular or important for other cultural activities. The low quality nature of the objects could indicate an economically peripheral activity.

In a wider context burnt mounds have received widespread attention and debate. They were once considered to be a northern phenomenon, but mounds have now been identified throughout most of Britain and Ireland, and several have recently been recognised in the London region. Characteristically they comprise large burnt spreads, often associated with pits and are located close to water sources, all features found at the Phillimores site. Most are interpreted as cooking locations, and the possible functional association of a small pot with a cooking place, as identified here, adds compelling evidence to this theory. Not only does it suggest a possible use for the vessel itself, but it may also indicate that these features relate to settlement activity. The identification of animal and plant residues from fragments of this pot would also suggest it was associated with food preparation. Despite waterlogging and the survival of a small quantity of uncarbonised seeds, however, no bone or

midden material was recovered, which could cast doubt on this cooking interpretation. It is possible, however, that the debris *in situ* in the pits may have reflected only the last use. Any other debris may have been deposited beyond the limits of the feature.

Another interpretation of the use of such sites is of them being associated with steam or sauna baths. The evidence here would be comparable to that of other excavated and ethnographic examples. They seem to utilise excavated or natural hollows of a suitable size over which to erect a tent-like structure. Hot stones would be brought in and water sprinkled on them producing the steam.

Such sites also have possible ceremonial associations such as the deliberate placing of pottery and other objects in pits. Although the vessel identified within the base of pit [122] may be associated with the activities represented by the burnt flint, its careful placement, especially considering the scarcity of other 'rubbish', may suggest that it also fulfilled another, non-utilitarian role. Such special deposits, including the deliberate placement of food, animal and human remains, as well as what might loosely be termed rubbish and other everyday items, are often recorded from Late Bronze Age contexts and seem to reflect concerns with marking boundaries and entrances, as well as marking foundational or closing events. Its stratigraphic position may suggest that the pot was broken and then placed at the bottom of the hollow, presumably just before the hollow was abandoned and backfilled. In this instance, therefore, the backfilling could itself indicate some degree of a 'closing' event rather than change of usage.

The most likely interpretation of the function of The Phillimores burnt mound site is as a cooking place, although the effort which would have been required to prepare food at such a site may not be consistent with day to day use. Such an interpretation should therefore consider special occasions such as feasting as possible activities. The deliberate placement of the vessel would certainly suggest that ritual was associated with its abandonment, and also possibly its use. This interpretation must, however, remain speculative, and ethnographic and archaeological evidence remain inconclusive, possibly suggesting differing or even multiple functions for individual 'burnt mound' sites.

Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Phillimore Hill Ltd for their generous funding of the project and Eric Norton, Norton Thompson Associates, Fraser Aitken and Andrew Parker, Mace Ltd, for their help and encouragement throughout the project. The authors would like to thank Frank Meddens for his post-excavation management and editing, Josephine Brown for the illustrations, the site staff for their hard work and Vanessa Straker for her assistance with the charcoal identification.

---

1. E. Norton *The Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, London W8, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. Specification for Archaeological Monitoring of Site Investigation Works (Evaluation)*, Norton Thompson Associates unpublished report (2000).

2. The evaluation was supervised by Toby Cuthbertson, the subsequent excavation was supervised by Timothy Bradley and the project was managed by Peter Moore.

3. T. Cuthbertson *An Archaeological Watching Brief and Evaluation at the Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London W8* Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd unpublished report (2000).

4. E. Norton *The Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, London W8, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. Project Design for an Archaeological Excavation*, NTA unpublished report (2001).

5. T. Bradley 'An Excavation at the Sir John Atkins Building, Campden Hill, Royal Borough of Kensingston and Chelsea' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* (forthcoming).

6. J. Lewis 'The Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Periods' in The Museum of London *The archaeology of Greater London. An assessment of archaeological evidence for human presence in the area now covered by Greater London* (2000), 60.

7. N. Brown and J. Cotton 'The Bronze Age' in The Museum of London *The archaeology of Greater London. An assessment of archaeological evidence for human presence in the area now covered by Greater London* (2000), 97.

8. J. Partridge *The Cheyne Hospital, Cheyne Walk, SW3, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea: an archaeological post excavation assessment* MoLAS unpublished report (1997), 17.

9. Brown and Cotton (2000) see note 7; B O'Connor *Cross Channel Relations in the Later Bronze Age* BAR (Int Ser) 91 (1980), 199.

10. S. Needham 'Discussion' in M. O'Connell *Petters Sports Field, Egham. Excavation of a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Site* Res Vol Surrey Archaeol Soc 10, 57.

11. I. D. Margary *Roman Roads In Britain* Vol I (1955), 50.

12. S. Farid 'An Excavation at 6–16 Old Church Street, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **51** (2000) 115–141, ref 120.

13. D. Whipp *The Archaeology of Kensington and Chelsea* Inner London Archaeological Unit (1975).

14. A Douglas, 'Saxo-Norman Buildings in Kensington' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **52** (2001) 113–126.

15. T. Bradley *Phased Summary and Assessment Document of an Archaeological Excavation at The Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London W8* PCA unpublished report (2001).

16. A. Blee *King's College, Campden Hill (Main Campus). Appendix AB2* Anthony Blee Consultancy unpublished report (1998).

17. J. Barrett 'Pottery of the later Bronze Age in Southern England' *Proc Prehist Soc* **46** (1980), 311; S. Needham 'Chronology and periodisation in the British Bronze Age' *Acta Archaeologica* **67** (1996), 134–7.

18. D. Longley 'The Late Bronze Age Pottery' in S. Needham *Excavation and Salvage at Runnymede Bridge, 1978* (1991), 78:15.

19. O'Connor, see note 9.

20. P. Finch *Report on Analysis of Pottery Sherd for Organic Residues* Royal Holloway Centre for Chemical Sciences unpublished report (2002).

21. H. Keeley *Report on a site visit to the Phillimores, Campden Hill Road, Kensington, London, on 22 May 2001* Environmental Archaeology Consulting Services unpublished report (2001).

22. *Ibid.*

23. University of Waikato Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory (Wk 10452).

24. N. Brown and J. Cotton 'The Bronze Age' in The Museum of London (2000) see note 7, 91.

25. *Ibid*, 97.

26. D. O'Drisceoil 'Burnt Mounds: Cooking or Bathing' *Antiquity* **62** (1988), 671–80; M. Hodder and L. Barfield *Burnt Mounds and Hot Stone Technology: Papers from the 2nd International Burnt Mound Conference Sandwell 1990* (1991).

27. M. Bennell *Under the Road: Archaeological Discoveries at Bronze Age Way, Erith* (1998); J M. C. Bowsher 'A Burnt Mound at Phoenix Wharf; South-East London: A Preliminary Report' in Hodder and Barfield (eds) *Burnt Mounds and Hot Stone Technology* (1991), 11–19; Framework Archaeology Perry Oaks Sludge Works Phase 2 Project Design Update Note 1 unpublished report (1999); K. Heard 'A post-medieval tawyers' yard in Bermondsey' *London Archaeol* **9** (2000), 137–143; R. Masefield 'Prehistoric activity at the Townmead School site, West Drayton' *London Archaeol* **9** (2000), 168–173; B. Bishop *Excavations at Lower Edmonton and the prehistoric development of the Lower Lee Valley* forthcoming; L. Darton *Assessment of an archaeological excavation of land at Brentford Lock, High Street Plot, London Borough of Hounslow, London TW8* forthcoming.

28. L. Barfield and M. Hodder 'Burnt Mounds as Saunas, and the Prehistory of Bathing' *Antiquity* **61** (1987), 370–379.

29. *Ibid*; H. Bamford *Beaker Domestic sites in the Fen Edge and East Anglia* East Anglian Archaeological Report 16 (1982), 36; C Butler 'A Mesolithic Site at Streat, East Sussex' *CBA Southeast Newsletter* 14 (1998), 4.

30. S. Needham ' The structure of settlement and ritual in the Late Bronze Age of South-east Britain' in C. Mordant and A. Richard (eds) *L'habitant et l'occupation du sol à l'Age du Bronze en Europe* (1993), 49–69; Bruck 'A place for the dead: the role of human remains in Late Bronze Age Britain' *Proc Prehist Soc* **61** (1995), 245–277.