Excavation at this site revealed two Beaker pits, the first of their kind in the area. These were followed by a possibly defensive late Iron Age boundary ditch. An adjacent enclosure – perhaps serving a mortuary function – may have originated in the middle of the first century AD and continued in use until around the late second century AD. Within the enclosure lay a cremation and two inhumations with unusual grave goods marking them out as the burials of significant local people.

Location, Geology and Topography

Archaeological investigations were conducted on former arable land to the north of Lancaster Way Industrial Estate which lies east of Witchford village, just within the western boundary of the city of Ely (Figs. 1 and 2). The underlying geology comprises mid-Pleistocene glacial tills overlying beds belonging to the Middle Jurassic Kimmeridge Clays (British Geological Survey 1980). The southern part of the site lies on the plateau of a small knoll at c. 15.50m OD. The land slopes down to the north to lie at 11.81m OD adjacent to Witchford Road.

Project Background

Oxford Archaeology East undertook archaeological works between 2008 and 2010 in advance of the construction of a new recycling centre. Geophysical survey in 2008 found two possible Iron Age or Roman ditches in the southern part of the site (Masters 2008). Subsequent evaluation uncovered several further Iron Age and Roman features (Atkins 2009); excavation followed in 2010 (Atkins 2010). The site archive is currently held at OA East’s offices under the site code ELYREC and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course. This article is designed as a synthesis of the excavated findings and is supplemented by the full analytical report which can be freely accessed at http://library.thekumanjourney.net/view/subjects/UK-Roman.html

Archaeological and Historical Background

Numerous archaeological sites lie immediately to the south and east of the excavation area (Fig. 2), with those in its wider landscape setting being shown in Fig. 3. A ‘Roman Camp’ was recorded 0.4km to the south (Walker 1910, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) 06912) and Roman pottery was found nearby in 1927 (CHER 06912a). During World War II the site became part of a large airfield: from 1946 onwards the land was gradually cleared and converted back to arable fields. In 1977/8, directly to the north of the 1927 record, more Roman pottery was found ‘by the bucketful’ (CHER 17276).

Over recent years several archaeological investigations have resulted from the increasing expansion of Lancaster Way Business Park. Initial work made few discoveries (Robinson 1995, CHER 11801; Leith 1996, CHER 00055), although in 2000 and 2003 evaluation and excavation in the same location as the 1927 record found four phases of occupation spanning the Roman period (Crank 2000; Ralph 2003; CHER 15366). Further evaluation and excavation took place to the east in 2006–07 during work on the Ely to Haddenham water pipeline (Hancock 2006, Area A, trench 16; Thompson 2009; CHER 17824). Another Iron Age to Roman settlement was found c. 1km to the south-west (Hancock 2006, Area B, trenches 12 and 13; Thompson 2009; CHER 17823). In 2008, Northamptonshire Archaeology evaluated a large area to the east, some of which has subsequently been excavated (Holmes 2008, CHER 2862; Simmonds and Mason 2008, CHER 3017; Holmes and Simmonds 2009, CHER 3073). This investigation found further evidence of middle Iron Age and Roman settlement to the east of Area A and an Iron Age settlement near Area B.

Period 1: Neolithic to Bronze Age

The earliest features found at the subject site were two late Neolithic/early Bronze Age pits (549 and 575), spaced 14m apart (Fig. 4) and lying on the northern edge of the knoll plateau overlooking the valley to the
Figure 1. Location of the 2008 evaluation trenches and the 2009 excavation area.
Figure 2. Site location in relation to other archaeological work (showing Cambridge Historic Environment Record numbers).

Figure 3 (see also Plate 2). Terrain model, showing the site with the fens and surrounding Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British sites (after CHER records; Hall 1996, fig. 18; Evans 2003, fig. 142; Atkins and Mudd 2003, fig. 28; Evans et al. 2007, fig. 1 and further additions). [Flint deposits not included].
north. Both were shallow, sub-oval features. Pit 549 yielded 40 Beaker sherds from four vessels, as well as three small late Bronze Age sherds from a single vessel. Two flakes of flint debitage were recovered, along with small fragments of hazelnut, charred cereal grains and large quantities of charcoal. The small

Figure 4. Phased plan of the excavation and evaluated land to the south.
fragments of burnt animal bone found could not be
detected to particular species. The second pit (575)
had been severely truncated and its fills were undated.
Adjacent fills of the early Roman ditch which cut
through it notably contained a Grooved Ware frag-
ment and two Beaker sherds which may have come
from the earlier feature.

Period 2: Iron Age to Roman

Iron Age

In the western part of the site, two sub-rectangular
shallow pits contained late pre-Roman Iron Age pot-
ttery and animal bone (Fig. 4, 518 and 587). The north-
ermost example was cut by a late Iron Age boundary
ditch (656) which probably served as the main north-
ern boundary for the settlement known to have exist-
ed to the south into the early Roman period. The ditch
only partially survived, having been totally removed
on its western side by a recut (Fig. 4, S.119). In its early
form, the ditch was more than 2.8m wide and 0.92m
deep. The few finds from this initial phase included
a substantial sherd from a La Tene style carinated jar.
The boundary ditch and its recut followed the line of
the crest of the hill and were recorded in the geophys-
ical survey over a 60m distance, running roughly east
to west through the excavation area before curving to
the north-east near Stirling Way. The land directly to
the south was devoid of contemporary features, per-
haps suggesting the presence of a bank.

Early to Middle Roman

Boundary ditches

The substantial recut of the boundary ditch (657) was
up to 3.15m wide and 1.16m deep (Fig. 4, S.119). A sig-
nificant proportion of the finds from the site came
from this feature, including 641 pottery sherds. The
latter notably included 39 sherds from a suspended
bowl. Metalwork comprised two copper alloy objects
(a hair pin (SF 7) and a strip), a late third-century coin

Figure 5. Cremation 528. Photograph is looking north-west.
and three iron objects (two strips and a collar ferrule). Other finds included a glass bead of Guido Group 7(i) type (Guido 1978, 69) and an unguent bottle fragment.

To the south of the main excavation, another boundary ditch (79) was noted during the geophysical survey; it ran broadly from east to west over a recorded distance of c. 50m and was sectioned twice in the 2008 evaluation. It was up to 1.65m wide and 0.70m deep. The westernmost slot excavated across it (Trench 40) yielded few finds whereas the easternmost (Trench 38) produced 1.607kg (191 sherds) of pottery, and small quantities of animal bone, burnt clay and oyster shell.

Funerary and related features

Directly to the north of the main boundary ditches, and thereby presumably outside the settlement’s domestic area, was an enclosure and associated burials (Fig. 4). This activity may have commenced in the very late Iron Age and was certainly established by the early Roman period. The enclosure measured 14m south-east to north-west and 7m north-east to south-west, being subdivided into two roughly equal sized compartments. The eastern element comprised four ditches (147, 534, 85 and 571) enclosing an internal area of c. 6.5m by 5.5m, with two possible entrances on the eastern side (0.7m and 1.7m wide) and one to the south (0.7m wide). It seems unlikely that these ditch-
**Figure 7. Burial 564 and associated finds.**

SF 37 Plain copper-alloy finger-ring of D-shaped section, the uppermost of three on the middle finger of the left hand. Diameter 21 mm, height 3 mm, 2 mm thick.

SF 38 Plain copper-alloy finger-ring of rectangular section, the central one of three on the middle finger of the left hand. Diameter 21 mm, height 1.5 mm, 1 mm thick.

SF 39 Plain copper-alloy finger-ring of square section, the lowermost of three on the middle finger of the left hand. Diameter 21 mm, height 2 mm, 2 mm thick.

SF 40 Plain copper-alloy finger-ring of D-shaped section, in fragments; one of two on the forefinger of the left hand. Diameter 21 mm, height 1.5 mm, 1.5 mm thick.

SF 41 Plain copper-alloy finger-ring of D-shaped section, in fragments; one of two on the forefinger of the left hand. Diameter approximately 21 mm, height 1.5 mm, 1.5 mm thick.
es functioned as construction slots for a building(s) since they were generally V-shaped in profile with slightly rounded bases. They shared similar dimensions and fill types, being a maximum of 0.89m wide and 0.28m deep. The western half of the enclosure had no western or southern ditches, perhaps suggesting that the area was open, but more probably the result of truncation. Alternatively, the western limit of the enclosure may have been formed by a fence line since three postholes ran southwards from the northern ditch. Other postholes lay to the south of the enclosure, between it and the boundary ditch (657), perhaps indicating the presence of another fence line.

Ditch 571 contained two pottery vessels that may have been deliberately placed. A complete Nene Valley folded beaker was found to the east of burial 564 (see below) and the substantial remains of another vessel (88 sherds weighing 0.419kg) were located some 3m to the south. This sandy reduced ware jar (er vessel (88 sherds weighing 0.419kg) were located 564 (see below) and the substantial remains of another vessel (88 sherds weighing 0.419kg) were located some 3m to the south. This sandy reduced ware jar

Two inhumations, a cremation and five postholes which could have been part of an internal structure(s) lay in the western part of the enclosure, with a single posthole surviving in the eastern part. The shallow cremation burial (528) had been heavily truncated (Fig. 5) and lay within the north-western part of the enclosure. Two jars which may date to the conquest period were placed against the southern edge of the pit. The southernmost vessel (SF 32; context 526) was a funerary urn containing the remains of a cremated adult (158g) which could not be sexed. Directly to the east lay an accessory vessel (SF 33; context 530). The fills of both vessels were sieved but the only finds were cremated bones from the funerary urn.

One of the inhumations (550, Fig. 6) lay parallel to and just to the north of the major boundary ditch (657). This north-west to south-east aligned sub-rectangular grave measured 1.58m long, 0.7m wide and 0.24m deep. At the base of the grave were two bone spindle whorls, associated with the relatively well preserved remains of an adult woman (sk. 551), estimated to have been 1.65m tall, and at least 45 years old. She was buried on her right side with her head to the east, her hands roughly together in front of her pelvis and her legs together in a semi-flexed position. One spindle whorl lay beneath the ribs/vertebrae (SF 47) and the other was placed close against the upper back, near the left shoulder (SF 46). The fact that this latter whorl rested on its side in the correct position for use may suggest that it was buried while still fitted onto a wooden spindle, which has not survived burial (Nina Crummy, pers. comm.). The spindle would have reached up as far as the back of the skull, possibly to the top. Two environmental samples were taken: one from the backfill against feet proved to contain charcoal, while the other from the region of the head yielded a few abraded cereal grain seeds.

To the north-east, grave 564 contained a moderately to poorly preserved fragmentary skeleton (sk. 610, Fig. 7). This burial lay close to the subdivision within the enclosure and was aligned north-east to south-west. It was sub-rectangular, measuring 1.89m long, 0.7m wide and 0.59m deep. This was a relatively deep grave, estimated to have had an original depth of c. 0.9m deep (allowing for truncation). The skeleton was of an adult and was probably a woman but the bones did not survive well enough to give other information, such as height. The individual was placed in the grave in a supine, largely extended, position. The right hand was over the pelvis, while the left hand lay across the upper arm against the western side of the pit. The legs were placed together in a flexed position with the feet against the middle of the southern edge of the pit. Although the grave was dug to the appropriate length to have accommodated the burial laid supine and fully extended, a 0.2m gap had been left between the northern edge of the grave and the skull, perhaps to accommodate organic grave goods which had not survived. The individual had lost all her teeth except a single premolar, possibly as a result of poor diet. Only three fingers of the left hand survived, with these bones in good condition, albeit stained green by leaching from the copper-alloy rings. There were three rings on the middle finger (SF 37–39) and two rings on the forefinger (SF 40 and 41).

The lower grave fill contained three sherds of pottery dating to the Iron Age and middle first century to second century AD. Soil samples taken from the chest and head area and around the legs proved sterile. No finds came from the two later fills.

**Pits**

Three inter-cutting Roman pits were found in the extreme south of Trench 40, cutting into boundary ditch 79 (Fig. 4). They were sub-circular in plan and fairly large, being up to 2.5m in diameter and 0.85m deep. These were probably not quarries since far better clay deposits were found in evaluation trenches further down the hill to the north. The quantity of domestic waste found in the backfill of the latest pit suggests nearby domestic settlement. This pit contained 138 sherds (nearly 2kg) of largely unabraded pottery. Only one residual late pre-Roman Iron Age sherd was recovered; all the remainder are mid first or second century. Other finds include a copper-alloy disc (SF 6) which was pierced off-centre. Soil samples from two pits yielded a single cereal grain.

**Late Roman**

A late Roman layer or trampled footpath (560) ran into the former boundary ditch (657; Fig. 4). Three of the four coins recovered from the layer or nearby were late third century with the other being mid fourth century. Several other late Roman items, including a coin, were found in the topsoil or unstratified across the site and perhaps derive from manure scatters from the nearby late Roman settlement.
Beaker Pits and a probable mortuary enclosure on land off Stirling Way, near Witchford, Ely

Post-Roman

Furrows crossing the site contained pottery and roof tile dating into the eighteenth century but also yielded a few residual Roman finds including an early first century AD Colchester brooch. The furrows were cut by eighteenth or nineteenth century field boundaries and drainage pipes.

The Finds

Flint

David Mullin

The 33 pieces of worked flint found (five blades, seven flakes and 21 chunks) all date to the Neolithic or Bronze Age but were recovered as residual items, mostly in Roman features. Two flake debitage pieces from Beaker pit 549 could pre-date the feature. The chunks and flakes indicate small scale activity in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, but the assemblage is too small to inform on the precise nature of the occupation or the range of activities undertaken.
Earlier Prehistoric Pottery
David Mullin

Some 46 sherds of earlier prehistoric pottery were recovered (weighing 174g). While the majority is Beaker, a single sherd (12g) of Grooved Ware in fabric G+Q2 came from ditch 571 (Table 1). This sherd is decorated with four narrow diagonal grooves below a horizontal groove, but could not be placed within a narrower Grooved Ware sub-style. Grooved Ware of similar fabric has been recovered from Church Farm, Fenstanton (Chapman et al. 2005) and from North Fen, Sutton (Webley and Hiller 2009).

The Beaker pottery comprises 40 sherds (144g) from pit 549 and two sherds (14g) from ditch 571. The remains of at least four Beaker vessels from pit 549 are predominantly represented by decorated body sherds (Fig. 8). No vessel profiles could be reconstructed. Vessel 1 (not illustrated) comprises three sherds in fabric G+Q3 decorated with diverging incised lines, possibly part of a chevron. Two rims sherds of Vessel 2 in fabric G+Q4 were found, and are decorated by incised vertical lines bounded by parallel lines of cord impressions. The decoration is very worn but can be paralleled with Beakers from Fentage, Peterborough (Clarke 1970, fig. 858), and by two vessels from Ely itself (Clarke 1970, figs. 885 and 994). The 10 body sherds from the vessel appear to have been decorated by curving incised lines filled by parallel incised decoration, again possibly part of a chevron which can also be paralleled with the Ely vessels illustrated by Clarke. A further commonality between these three Beakers is the poorly executed decoration. Vessel 3 is represented by 23 sherds in fabric G+Q5, mainly from a carination on the body of the vessel. This is demarked by horizontal rows of comb impressions, below which is a zone of diagonal comb impressions. This emphasis on the carination or change in vessel profile is fairly common amongst Beakers. A single, small fragment of a simple rim of this vessel was also found. Vessel 4 is represented by only four sherds in fabric G+Q6, two of which are decorated by fingernail impressions. Again, fingernail decorated, or ‘rusticated’ Beakers are fairly common and have been found at Snailwell, Cambridgeshire (Clarke 1970, fig. 791) and North Fen, Sutton (Webley and Hiller 2009). All of the material from pit 549 is fragmentary and shows old breaks and worn surfaces. One body sherd in fabric G+Q1 from ditch 571 is decorated with a pair of parallel impressed lines below which were two diagonal lines, probably part of a chevron. A total of three late Bronze Age sherds (16g) of a fine-walled, flint tempered fabric were recovered from pit 549.

The Beakers from pit 549 are a fairly typical assemblage of Beakers recovered from pit contexts and can be paralleled locally with those from Church Farm, Fenstanton (Chapman et al. 2005), where fragments of 37 Beakers were recovered from one feature. The decoration of the Fenstanton sherds is very different, however, and the Ely Beakers are best paralleled with other Beakers from the Ely region (Clarke 1970, figs. 885 and 994). The fabrics of the Ely Beakers are also fairly typical of Beakers from the region being predominantly grog with added sand.

Table 1. Prehistoric pottery fabrics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fabric code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>frequent angular crushed flint up to 3mm. Interior and exterior surfaces light brown, black core. Late Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Q1</td>
<td>frequent grog, occasional sand. Interior and exterior red-brown. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Q2</td>
<td>frequent, poorly sorted grog up to 2mm. Exterior light brown, interior grey, grey core. Late Neolithic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Q3</td>
<td>sparse sand and grog up to 2mm. Exterior burnished, dark brown. Interior light brown, black core. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Q4</td>
<td>frequent grog, moderate sand. Exterior light brown, interior black, black core. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Q5</td>
<td>finely crushed grog and sand. Light brown exterior and interior, black core. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Q6</td>
<td>moderate grog sand. Exterior light brown, interior and core black. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lipid Analysis
Lucija Šoberl and Richard P. Evershed

Four sherds from each of the four Beaker vessels within pit 549 were analysed for the presence of lipids (including fats, waxes and fat soluble vitamins). Preliminary results found relatively good lipid preservation in two sherds. Gas chromatograms of pottery lipid extracts show the presence of compounds, indicative of partially degraded animal fat with free fatty acids (palmitic and stearic acid predominantly), mono-, di- and triglycerides. Both pottery extracts also display the presence of odd-carbon number fatty acids with their branched varieties that indicate the presence of ruminant animal fat. The ruminant source of one lipid extract (vessel 4) has also been indicated by its triglyceride distributions.

Further work is being done with gas chromatography-combustion-isotope ratio mass spectrometry to measure δ13C values which will provide a more accurate and secure assignation of commodities that were processed within the Beakers. The preliminary results of the lipid residue analyses fit well within the ongoing study of British early Bronze Age pottery from domestic and funerary contexts, where both Collared Urns and Beakers have shown the presence of lipids, originating from various food sources, mainly animal meat or dairy products (Šoberl, unpublished data).

Iron Age and Roman Pottery
Stephen Wadeson, with Alice Lyons

A total of 1673 sherds of Iron Age and Romano-British
pottery, weighing 10.58kg was recovered. The early and middle Iron Age pottery consists of 10 sherds (0.024kg) in a flint and quartz tempered fabric (F1). The majority of the Iron Age pottery (79 sherds, 0.558kg) dates to the late Iron Age (third to first centuries BC). Significantly abraded, the average sherd weight is just 7g. Fabrics containing quartz sand make up the remainder of the late Iron Age assemblage although there is a single sherd in a vegetable/organic-tempered, moderate quartz sand. This assemblage finds parallels in other sites around Ely which seem to show a preference for quartz rich fabrics utilizing the local boulder clays, despite a local supply of shell rich sources being readily available (Hill with Horne 2003,171). The most substantial sherd is the partial profile from a handmade La Tène style carinated jar (Thompson 1982) from ditch 656. The presence of this vessel suggests the beginning of the adoption of ‘Belgic’ styles. Twenty-four sherds of late pre-Roman Iron Age date were found, with a total of six fabrics identified in two fabric groups. Most of the vessels recovered are grog-tempered wares accounting for c. 57% by weight. While no vessel types were identified, the assemblage probably consists of a small number of utilitarian coarse ware vessels occasionally decorated with combed surfaces. The remaining ten sherds are handmade and produced in a finer sand-tempered reduced ware.

A relatively large assemblage of early Roman and Romano-British pottery (1560 sherds, 9.687kg) was recovered. The small and abraded sherds suggest that the majority of the domestic pottery probably reached the site through secondary processes such as middening and general site clearance. Most of the material is associated with early Roman deposits, especially ditch fills (c. 67%) and pit fills (c. 19%). A total of thirty-two main fabrics were identified.

The early Roman assemblage consists predominantly of locally produced utilitarian coarse wares, particularly sand-tempered coarse wares. Nearly half of the assemblage (c. 48% by weight) consists of unsourced, but locally produced, sandy grey ware sherds. This includes two reduced ware flat-bottomed jars recovered from cremation burial 528 (Fig. 5). These vessels are heavily fragmented and abraded due to post-depositional processes with only the lower third of the vessels remaining making specific identification impossible. The cinerary urn (526) is a locally produced hand made jar. The accessory vessel (530) is wheel made in a similar fabric but better fired. Both vessels are local copies of Gallo-Belgic in late pre-Roman Iron Age style. They are likely to have been produced either side of the Conquest i.e. middle first century AD. Due to their fragmentary state, it is not possible to assign a definite date and they could be slightly later, perhaps even as late as the very early second century.

Other locally made coasewares account for most of the remainder of the assemblage. A small quantity of fine wares (c. 5% by weight) was recovered and is generally early Roman in date. There is a small range of products from the regional pottery production centres in the Lower Nene valley. The bulk of this assemblage consists of a single indented beaker with applied barbotine scale decoration (c. 4%) of mid to late second or early third century AD date (Fig. 7; Perrin 1999, 93–5). This drinking vessel is the latest material associated with the main area of excavation. Forms and fabrics traditionally associated with specialist wares are rare within the assemblage as are continental imports with, for example, only five samian sherd being recovered. This assemblage has many similarities with the pottery recovered from Hurst Lane reservoir site (Lucas et al. 2007, 56–58) and would suggest activity in the vicinity of the site during the mid first to mid-late second century AD. The assemblage is typical of a utilitarian domestic assemblage recovered from low order settlements within this region, with a general lack of imported wares (Evans J 2003, 105). The presence of a few unstratified later Roman sherds suggests that settlement of this period may lie nearby.

**Metalwork**

*Nina Crummy*

**Awl**

An awl was found c. 25m to the south of the Beaker pits within a post-medieval ditch (Fig. 8, SF 23). Used for punching stitch holes into leather or hide, Bronze Age awls usually, as here, have a square or circular-section working point and a square-section tang for insertion into the handle. This example may be contemporary with the Beaker pits found nearby, since a similar double-pointed awl was found at Abingdon, Oxfordshire, in a female Beaker burial radiocarbon dated to 2460–2220 cal. BC (Allen and Kamash 2008, 9, 54, 61, 71, fig. 6). However, an early date for SF 23 cannot be fully confirmed, as the form is long-lived, with both iron and copper-alloy examples appearing together in the Iron Age (Clarke 1970, 448).

**Finger Rings**

Five rings were found on the left hand of the woman in grave 564, three on the middle finger and two on the forefinger (Fig. 7). All are plain copper-alloy bands, varying from square to D-shaped in section, although the distinction between the two forms is sometimes very slight. Finger-rings are rarely the only dress accessories deposited in a grave as they often formed part of a suite of jewellery buried with young females (Clarke 1979, 318–20, table 2; Crummy et al. 1993, 142–3; Philpott 1991, 130). Sometimes only one ring might be present in a burial, and in this case it might have been a symbol of marriage (Philpott 1991, 130). Of eleven late Roman burials with finger-rings at Lankhills, Winchester, one contained eight and only four had one, leaving the majority with either two, three or four rings. In most cases the multiple groups of finger-rings were not worn and, because of the decay of the bones, the evidence for wear in the graves with one to three rings is often not clear (Clarke 1979, table 2). The burial from Lankhills that
is most pertinent to that from Ely is of a 20–25 year old adult and contained three rings, two of which were found on the same phalanx of the left hand while the third was in close association; the other hand bones were not well preserved but it is likely that this ring had been on an adjacent finger (Clarke 1979, 68–9; grave 326). In general, late Roman burials of juveniles or young adults with multiple finger-rings in a suite of unworn jewellery imply that it was fashionable to wear several rings at once. Several burials contain two or three (Clarke 1979, 318–20; Crummy et al. 1993, Table 2.56; Philpott 1991, 130), but a grave at Ospringe, Kent, had four rings, and graves 155 and 438 at Lankhills had four and eight rings respectively, all of the thin hoop style noted at Ely, although many had some element of decoration (Whiting 1926, 145–6; Clarke 1979, table 2).

Burial 564 with its five finger-rings is therefore not unique in containing a large number of finger-rings, but it is an unusually clear indicator of a fashion for wearing many rings on one hand and often on one finger. Pliny observed in the mid first century AD that when Britons and Gauls wore rings they placed them upon the middle finger, and it may be no coincidence that in burial 564 the three rings were placed on the middle finger but only two on the forefinger (Nat. Hist. XXXIII, 24). He also notes that among the Romans rings were worn on all fingers except the middle one, the others being ‘loaded with rings, smaller joints of the fingers’ (ibid.). A combination of the two practices seems to have survived sporadically in Roman Britain.

Worn by an adult woman and unaccompanied by any other jewellery, the plain finger-rings in burial 564 are comparatively unostentatious, the expenditure of both metal and skill being minimal. Such stark style points to local manufacture, and they do not imply great wealth, yet even so they would have marked out the woman wearing them as special within her community, either economically or socially.

Hairpin
A complete copper-alloy hairpin (Fig. 8, SF 7) is not matched in Cool’s study of Romano-British metal hairpins (1990), although it makes use of the same decorative traditions of several of her groups. It can be assigned a broad date-range from the mid first century to the second century AD.

Other Metalwork
A small collection of other metal artefacts was found, comprising six coins which range in date from the early second (Hadrian) to mid fourth century (AD 350–60), two brooches (Colchester brooch, c. AD 10–50, and a Hod Hill brooch fragment, c. AD 43–60/5), an iron coiled collar ferrule which may be contemporary with either or both of these brooches and an iron fish-hook which points to local watercourses supplying the inhabitants with food. No tools or other equipment were recovered, the remaining objects consisting only of two iron strip fragments, both from the same context in boundary ditch 657 and thereby possibly from the same object.

Bone Spindle Whorls
Nina Crummy
Two bone spindle whorls came from grave 550, associated with skeleton 551 (Fig. 6; SF 46 and 47). The spindles formerly attached would have varied considerably in diameter, as the minimum diameter of the perforation through SF 46 is only 4 mm, and that through SF 47 is 11 mm. The whorls both weigh the same, so the narrower spindle does not reflect a lighter weight for its whorl and perhaps a change of implement for a finer thread.

Each whorl is made from the articular condyle, or head, of a cattle femur. Bos femur heads were utilised in this way from the Iron Age to the Saxo-Norman period, being both a readily available source where cattle formed part of the local economy and an ideal shape requiring little adaptation beyond drilling or cutting the spindle hole, which was usually done from both sides to produce a hole with an hour-glass-shaped profile (Rees et al. 2008, 244). Iron Age examples have been found at Glastonbury and Meare lake villages and at Danebury, where they come from contexts phased to 300–100/50 BC and later (Bulleid and Gray 1917, 1948; MacGregor 1985, 187; Coles 1987, 51; Sellwood 1984, 395, fig. 7.39, 3.212–13; Cunliffe and Poole 1991, 366, fig. 7.37, 3.369). They are scarce in the Roman period, and there is some possibility that they almost went out of use. One example comes from a second- to third-century context at Colchester and one from a late Roman context at Hacheston, Suffolk (Crummy 1992, 198, no. 1722; Seeley 2004, 144, fig. 103, 347). They occur in their greatest numbers in the Anglo-Scandinavian/late Saxon periods at urban centres such as York, Lincoln, Thetford and Winchester (Walton Rogers 1997, 1741–3; Mann 1982, 22; Rogerson and Dallas 1984, 179; Woodland 1990, 222–4; Rees et al. 2008, 243–6).

The whorls in grave 550 are a valuable source of information about the local economy of the dead woman’s community. They are unlikely to have been used to spin a vegetable fibre such as flax, as it does not do well in waterlogged soils, making the Ely area unsuitable for such a crop. They imply that cattle were kept and at least some slaughtered locally rather than driven to a large settlement to supply its demands, and that their bones were made available for utilisation after slaughter. They also point to the keeping of sheep and/or goats with many allowed to reach maturity so that they would provide wool, instead of slaughtering most in their first or second year as would be the case for a flock kept for milk and meat (Payne 1973, 292–4).

In the eastern region during the Roman period there is considerable material evidence for fibre preparation, spinning and cloth finishing, all pointing to sheep and their wool forming a major element of the economy (Frere 1994, 290–1). Medium-sized shears for shearing sheep and iron wool-combs as well as dis-
associated wool-comb teeth have been found across the region; there are also many examples of spindle whorls, particularly those made from recycled pot sherds, and the only large cloth-cropping shears known from Britain come from Great Chesterford (e.g. Manning 1966; 1985, 34; Seeley 1995, 77; Crummy 1983, 67, 1992, 156; 2003, 112–13, fig. 44, 96; 2006, 71; Major 1999, 102; Seeley 2004, 120, fig. 81, 140, 144, fig. 103, 346–7; Gardiner et al. 2000, 88, pl. 13, 117). In addition, the Notitia Dignitatum mentions the post of procurator of an imperial fulling mill at Venta, the Venta in question perhaps being Caistor-by-Norwich rather than Caerwent or Winchester (Manning 1966).

The female burial with bone whorls at Ely adds further weight to the evidence for wool and cloth production in the eastern region. In the use of cattle femur head whorls it also introduces an element of the pre-Roman Iron Age tradition of self-sufficiency, that is, making tools from materials to hand rather than purchasing a workshop-made item, and to this extent the Ely burial differs from several female graves in southern Britain that contained commercially produced lathe-turned whorls of shale or antler (Clarke 1979, 369; Philpott 1991, 184). Even so, the dead woman can be assumed to have enjoyed a degree of wealth and status by association with the flocks that would have supplied the wool for spinning. The whorls are also well worn, and therefore represent skill as well as status. She would have been expert at her craft, which was one generally carried out when other tasks had been completed. The deposition of spinning equipment in her grave may also have been intended to signify that she had leisure to spin, in the same way that the wool basket and spinning equipment coupled with a jewellery box depicted on the South Shields tombstone of the Catuvellaunian freedwoman Regina, shown seated on a basket chair, implied comparative wealth and freedom from physically hard domestic tasks (Collingwood and Wright 1995, no. 1065).

The Zooarchaeological and Botanical Evidence

Human Skeletal Remains
Zoë Uí Choileáin

Cremation 528 had been truncated by ploughing with the total weight of the remaining bone being 158g. The cremation was excavated in the laboratory in 2cm spits. It was sieved for analysis into >5mm, <5mm >2mm and <2mm fractions. Recognisable fragments of a humerus and ulna survive including a humeral head. Numerous fragments of skull, vertebrae and ribs are also present suggesting a bias towards the upper half of the body although as half of the urn is missing this cannot be fully confirmed. It was possible to identify the individual as an adult but neither age nor sex could be estimated. The skull, vertebrae and ribs are buff-white in colour meaning that these bones were exposed to temperatures of over 600 degrees centigrade while the arm bones were a more blue-white suggesting a slightly lower temperature in this area. The urn contained no charcoal or evidence of pyre debris indicating that the remains had been carefully picked from the pyre rather than scooped up.

Of the two inhumations, the individual wearing the multiple rings (sk. 610) is less than 25% complete and highly fragmented. The pelvis is almost entirely missing meaning that this individual was sexed on skull traits alone. Most of the long bones are represented by shaft fragments only with badly damaged epiphyses/ joint surfaces only present on the left humerus and the femurs. The surface condition of the bones is good-fair with, however, some root damage present. This is consistent with McKinley’s grade 3 because the general morphology of the bones has been retained, but most of the bone surfaces have been affected by some degree of erosion, which has masked the detail of some parts (McKinley 2004, 16).

This individual is probably female and the broad age range of adult was assigned based on the degree of osteoarthritis observed. While it appears than the skeleton is younger than sk. 551 (below), insufficient diagnostic traits survived to confirm this. Although a stature estimate was not possible the robustity of the bones suggests a slighter build than that of sk. 551. Exaggerated muscle attachments on all of the long bones are present. The mandible is fully present although badly fragmented but the maxilla is absent: all of the teeth with the exception of one lower first premolar are missing. The mandible shows almost total resorption meaning that the teeth were lost some time before the individual’s death. Tooth loss often occurs later in life but, as the bones show very little porosity or signs of degenerative joint disease, it is possible that here it is at least in part the result of the individual’s diet. The premolar showed almost no enamel with no signs of wear or breakages. This trait is a congenital condition known as ‘peg tooth’.

The second inhumed skeleton, associated with the spindle whorls (sk. 551), is better preserved and is between 50 – 75% complete; fragmentation was scored as moderate. The arms are the most complete bones with the left humerus being suitable to use for stature estimation. Most epiphyses/joint surfaces survive, as does a large amount of the cancellous bone. As with sk. 610 the surface condition of the bones is consistent with McKinley’s grade 3. The individual could be identified as a mature adult female: the auricular surface and pubic symphysis suggest an age upwards of 45 although probably not any higher than mid-fifties. Severe osteoarthritis is apparent on the joint surfaces, most particularly that of the hip and knee joints, with osteophytes also beginning to appear on the shoulder joints which is rare. Extra bone growth and lipping are present on the pelvis, lumbar and lower vertebrae, with a sign of degenerative joint disease which becomes more common in old age. As with sk. 610, sk. 551 displays very exaggerated muscle attachments on all of the bones including the remaining wrist bones. This in conjunction with the extreme osteoarthri-
tis displayed could suggest a life including a large amount of physical activity although there are many causes of this condition including not just age and activity but also diet and genetic predisposition. The teeth of this individual were almost all present. Of the upper teeth all four incisors, both canines, three upper premolars and three upper molars were worn down to the dentine. The three lower molars were also worn down to the dentine with caries being present on all three. Tooth wear, or dental attrition, progresses with the advancement of age because older people would have used their teeth to masticate (chew) for a longer period than younger people. Dental attrition can also be a sign of an agricultural diet with rougher foods such as grain being consumed.

**Animal Bone**

*Chris Faint*

An assemblage of 229 fragments (5.2kg) of animal bone was recovered, both by hand collection and environmental sampling. Some 92 bones were identifiable to species (40% of the total sample). The assemblage is dominated by domestic mammals with roughly equal numbers of remains from cattle (n=35) and sheep/goat (31), along with smaller numbers of pig (4), horse (9), dog (11), domestic fowl (1) and unidentified bird (1). In addition, two slow worm scales were recovered. Whilst some late Iron Age features contained faunal material, the vast majority by number (77%) was recovered from early Roman (mid first to late second century) contexts. The Iron Age faunal material is limited, consisting of fragmentary cattle and pig scapulae and a single portion of sheep/goat tibia.

Cattle remains from the early Roman assemblage consisted largely of lower limb elements, portions of the axial skeleton and loose teeth. Only two upper limb elements were recovered. The majority of these elements were from adult animals, with 58% of the sample showing evidence of butchery. The sheep/goat assemblage shows similar patterns, again consisting of lower limb elements, especially radii and tibiae. Seventy-seven percent of the sample showed evidence of butchery. Pig remains are limited, consisting of a fragmentary adult mandible and first phalanx. Horse remains from early Roman contexts comprise a single portion of tibia and a number of loose mandibular molars. Two of these display developmental defects in the shape of deformed roots leading to abnormal wear on the occlusal surfaces. Morphological and metrical analysis of the enamel folds on an M1/2 tooth from boundary ditch 657 could suggest the presence of mule in the assemblage (Baxter 1998, 10), however identification from a single tooth is tenuous. Whilst mules were certainly employed both by the army and the cursus publicus – the Roman postal system – their presence in North-West European deposits is rare, with the majority of these being complete mandibles (Baxter 1998, 6; Armitage and Chapman 1979, 345–9).

Dog remains are mostly fragmentary, consisting largely of loose teeth, mandible fragments and carpal and tarsal bones. Only one portion of long bone (an adult humerus) was recovered. Bird remains were limited to two fragmentary femora, one from a domestic fowl and the other an unidentified wader. Identifiable material from environmental samples consisted of two slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) scales.

The high prevalence of lower limb and cranial elements in the domestic mammal assemblage suggests on-site processing/primary butchery of carcasses, with meat bearing elements possibly being transported elsewhere (or at the very least outside the limits of this excavation). It has been suggested that some Iron Age settlements in the area may have supplied beef and mutton in particular to possible local centres such as Wardy Hill (Davis 2003). The slow worm remains are indicative of the general environment at the time, suggesting the presence of fields, meadows, scrub or heathland in the vicinity.

**Plant Macrofossils and Other Remains**

*Rachel Fosberry*

Twenty-five bulk samples were taken from across the evaluation and excavation. Preservation is by carbonisation and is generally poor. A sample from Beaker pit 549 contains pieces of Beaker pottery, small fragments of hazelnuts (* Corylus avellana*) and occasional cremated bones. Charred cereal grains occur in just four of the samples in quantities of less than five specimens in each. Wheat (*Triticum spp.*) grains are present although identification is tentative due to poor preservation. No chaff elements occur. Charred weed seeds are extremely rare and only occur in a posthole from a possible fenceline relating to the burial enclosure; here goosefoot (*Chenopodium spp.*) and cleavers (*Galium aparine*) were noted in the flot. Animal bone fragments came from some of the residues along with occasional small rodent bones.

**Discussion**

**The Site in Early Prehistory**

The Witchford site is the only excavation in the immediate area to provide evidence for pre-Iron Age features. Both of the Beaker pits lay in the same general location as most of the flints and the awl, near the top of the knoll. Some domestic activity evidently took place and the preliminary lipid results show that the pottery vessels had been used for food preparation. The upper fill of one of the Beaker pits contained flecks of charcoal and burnt clay: similar fills of Beaker pits at Fenstanton have been interpreted as deposition of hearth debris (Chapman et al. 2005, 18). The Witchford pits are similar to an isolated early Bronze Age pit found at Bluntisham; the latter contained a considerable number of hazelnuts which produced a date of 2290–2030 cal BC (Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre; SUERC...
The discovery of the remains of several Beaker vessels may be significant as it has been argued by Gibson (2000) that the depositing of sherds from many vessels denotes rituals designed to ensure the fecundity of the earth and her resources. Alternatively, their presence may simply reflect deliberate recycling of grog.

The flints from the site, although relatively small in number (n=33), contrast with the far smaller numbers of flints (14) recorded in all the archaeological work to the south and east (collectively, many times the size of the development area; Fig. 2).

Hall's extensive fieldwalking survey of the Isle of Ely and Wisbech found the main monuments of the prehistoric period to be barrows, with other activity taking the form of flint scatters (Hall 1996, fig. 87, 157). A search of the Cambridgeshire HER for Bronze Age sites and find spots within a 5km radius of the site produced no other Beaker pits (Fig. 3). The HER notes seven Bronze Age records possibly associated with human remains (including barrows) between 3.5km and 5km from the subject site to the north-east, south-east and south-west (Fig. 3); two are in Ely (two adjacent sites recorded as CHER 06136 and another as CHER 07245), one in Soham (CHER 07020), two at Wilburton (CHER 05827 and CHER 05882) and one at Wisbech (CHER 06993).

Bronze Age flint scatters are more numerous in the Ely area and it is tempting to view the relatively large numbers of Bronze Age axes and other lithic and metal artefacts within the 5km search area of the site (collectively 49 of the 57 HER records), as suggesting that activities such as tree felling and hunting were widespread here throughout the Bronze Age. The earliest evidence for permanent agricultural and domestic activity occurs here in the late Bronze Age. The HER lists two possible late Bronze Age causeways at Little Thetford (CHER 06987) and Soham (CHER 07064). A possible late Bronze Age field system has been found in Ely (CHER 17963; Bush 2008; Hunter 1992), while evidence of the same period was found at Trinity Fields (CHER 15553; Masser 2001; Evans et al. 2007, fig. 16). Most of the known late Bronze Age sites demonstrate a background scatter of late Neolithic and Bronze Age flint and, in the case of West Fen Road, some Neolithic pits (Masser 2001; Robinson and Bray 1998; Mortimer et al. 2005).

One of the main reasons for the lack of evidence for early Bronze Age domestic occupation in the local archaeological record may be due to the topography; in the early Bronze Age the water levels were lower and most early Bronze Age domestic occupation may have lain at c. 0m to 2m OD (see below). At this low level, there is presently very little housing development, meaning that few sites have been excavated. There are three major domestic sites all at around this height relatively close by: Sutton Gault, less than 10km to the west (Connor 2009; Rees 2009; Webley and Hiller 2009); Shippea Hill, c. 15km to the north-east (Clark 1933) and Hockwold-cum-Wilton, c. 25km to the north-east (Bamford 1982). At Sutton Gault, archaeological work has found widespread late Mesolithic to early Bronze Age agricultural, domestic and funerary remains at between 0m to 2m OD but significantly, no later sites are known on the Sutton Gault island or in its near vicinity (Rees 2009). This is presumably because during the later Bronze Age and afterwards, this area became uninhabitable due to rising flood levels and these earlier features were generally sealed by a peat layer (Rees 2009). At Hockwold-cum-Wilton, the site (over several fields) was just below the then fen peat and was only found in the late 1950s and early 1960s after the peat had shrunk (Bamford 1982, 8). Many hearths and floors were uncovered with a vast quantity of artefacts recovered including several thousand pottery sherds. The Shippea Hill occupation site was on low islands, just above and surrounded by contemporary fresh water fen (Clark 1933). The Fenstanton site lay slightly higher at 6–7m OD and its occupants may have exploited the fen edge. Both the Bluntisham site (Burrow and Mudd 2010) and the subject site lie considerably higher at 14m OD and 15.5m OD respectively, with both sites having far fewer earlier features than the lower lying ones.

Iron Age to Roman Settlement

In the middle Iron Age to early Roman periods, two separate domestic foci are evident in the vicinity, one at the subject site and the other c. 300m to the east (CHER 2862, 3017 and 3073; Holmes 2008; Simmonds and Mason 2008; Holmes and Simmonds 2009). No Iron Age pottery was found in other excavations to the east and south. The middle to late Iron Age start date of both settlement foci is of broadly similar date to many of the other nearby Iron Age/Roman settlements such as Prickwillow Road, Hurst Lane and Wardy Hill (Atkins and Mudd 2003; Evans et al. 2007; Evans C 2003), suggesting that both population and farming were expanding in this period.

The presence of a large embanked ditch at the Witchford site may suggest that a defensive element was required in the Iron Age. The ditch followed the upper contour of a meandering ridge at c. 16m OD, running roughly parallel to a causeway route (across a stream or drain) to the west, giving it a good view of the valley bottom. The postulated internal bank probably survived until its destruction by the building of the airfield. Notably, in 1910 Walker recorded the Witchford site as a Roman Camp. The place name is also suggestive: Witchford may derive from the Watch on the Ford, its important strategic position controlling the causeway route from Grunty Fen into West Fen/The Cove meaning that the siting of Iron Age sites here may have been equally strategic (Evans C 2003, 266; Fig. 3). The excavated ditch is of the same size as the concentric circuits at Wardy Hill, while the main sub-square enclosure at West Fen Road also had substantial ditches leading to the suggestion that
these two sites can be classed as defended (Evans et al. 2007, 74). Some of the middle and late Iron Age ditches found at the Northamptonshire Archaeology evaluation site, 300m to the east, were also more than a metre deep (Holmes 2008), but how these relate, if at all, to the development area is unknown. At Witchford, the large boundary ditch fell from use in the early Roman period possibly at the same time that Wardy Hill ringwork went out of use in the last quarter of the first century AD and here the inhabitants were seemingly displaced (Evans C 2003, 270–1).

Although relatively small scale, the Witchford excavation has increased the otherwise low levels of late Iron Age/Conquest period broch sites in the Ely area, with a Colchester and a Hod Hill type being recovered. Only six or seven other broch sites of the late Iron Age or Conquest period have yet been found in the Ely area, from five excavations and an evaluation: the lack of brooches and coins of the Conquest period from Ely compared to March has led to the suggestion that Ely’s inhabitants were poorer (Evans et al. 2007, 72). The status of the subject site’s settlement was probably relatively low, as is suggested by the pottery and other finds. The animal bone assemblage provides some evidence for the on-site processing/primary butchery of carcasses, with some pastoral farming evidently taking place in the vicinity. Crop processing evidently took place away from the development area. Overall the evidence, as with most sites of this period, suggests that the settlement was largely self-sufficient and may have been engaged in many different activities. Domestic occupation continued into the Roman period. At the Northamptonshire Archaeology site to the east, significant amounts of refuse were found within ditches of this date (Holmes 2008). The settlement here appears to have increased in size, now spreading to the west of the Iron Age focus at Site CHER 17824 (Thompson 2009). Occupation at the Witchford site developed, with the probable mortuary enclosure ditches perhaps remaining open into the third century. The low level of late Roman finds suggests that related settlement probably moved from the development area to the known sites just to the east and south (CHER 17824 and CHER 15366).

**Probable Mortuary Enclosure and Burials**

The probable mortuary enclosure did not have the typical form of a temenos with internal shrine, but the use of the eastern part of the enclosure for such activity and the western side as a part-enclosed mortuary enclosure and burial ground is possible. A similar late Roman mortuary enclosure at Claydon Pike, Fairford, Gloucestershire, also lies against the boundary of a much larger enclosure (Alex Smith, pers. comm.). In terms of the local setting, a probable Iron Age temple has been postulated 1.5km to the north-west from an aerial photograph which shows a double-ditched enclosure (Fig. 3, CHER 07155).

The development area is only the fourth site in the Ely area where more than one Roman burial has been found (the others being Prickwillow Road, West Fen Road and Watson’s Lane, Little Thetford). The lack of burials around Ely is mirrored at many other Roman rural sites in Cambridgeshire. A survey of Roman burials in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough found that most burials/cemeteries lay near former Roman towns with relatively few from rural parts including Ely’s environs (Taylor 1993, fig. 6).

What makes the Witchford burials of particular interest is that all three lay within the probable mortuary enclosure which, on the basis of the pottery, seems to have been in use between the late pre-Roman Iron Age and the early/middle Roman period. None of the other excavations with burials within the Ely area were associated with such burial structures/enclosures, either being buried in a designated location within the settlement or singularly. In the Ely area, the mixed rites of cremation and inhumation are paralleled only at Prickwillow Road, where the cemetery contained five cremations and 15 inhumations, with an additional burial placed in a ditch some distance to the north-east of the cemetery (Atkins and Mudd 2003, 15–19). Further afield such mixed cemeteries seem to be more common. At Duxford to the south of Cambridge, for example, a mixed rite late Iron Age and Roman cemetery associated with a shrine has been found (Lyons in press).

The Witchford cremation may be of mid-first century date, making it the first late pre-Roman Iron Age type cremation yet found within the Ely area, perhaps a local version of a Gallo-Belgic type cremation. The site lies in East Cambridgeshire, an area previously thought to have been beyond the limits (South Cambridgeshire) of La Tène III type cremations (Philpott 1991, 6). It was once suggested that the fact that Iron Age cremations have not previously been found in Ely confirms the suggestion that the Aylesford-Swarling border was to the west of the city, providing a distinct archaeological divide (Evans et al. 2007, 72). Aylesford-Swarling type pottery has been recovered from many sites in and around Ely, although admittedly in relatively low quantities (e.g. at Prickwillow Road; Atkins and Mudd 2003). On the basis of the new evidence, it is perhaps more likely that Ely falls within an area which did not embrace the Aylesford-Swarling culture to the same extent as some other places to the west. Small quantities of this pottery type were, however, evidently being brought into the area and a few locally made copies were being produced.

The relative paucity of ‘grave goods’ is typical of other later cremations found elsewhere in the Ely area. The cremations at Prickwillow Road may have originated in the late first or second century, possibly continuing into the third century AD. All five of the cremations found here were placed in Sandy Ware vessels, only one of which had an associated vessel. None had any other grave goods, although two contained hobnails (Atkins and Mudd 2003, 14). At Sutton, 5km to the east, a second-century cremation was placed within a large storage jar, with another jar also placed inside (Fig. 3; SMR 5744; Hall 1996, 58).
The two inhumations at Witchford probably date to the second century, while those at Prickwillow Road may date to the third to fourth century (Atkins and Mudd 2003).

Given the items they contained, the Witchford burials may have been those of important local women. Many of the local burials of this date did not contain grave goods. Of the 15 inhumations from Prickwillow Road, for example, only three were buried with grave goods (all women) and these ranged from single bracelets in two graves and five in the other (Atkins and Mudd 2003).

Two bone spindle whorls were associated with the mature woman (sk. 551), one of which came from near the neck. This was repeatedly a favoured position for personal objects in female burials over the entire Roman period. For example, a fourth-century burial at Prickwillow Road had five intertwined bracelets behind her neck (Atkins and Mudd 2003). In the case of Witchford, it is likely that the objects were seen as functional, the two whorls perhaps remaining attached to their spindles (as with an example at Lankhills) although the wood did not survive (Clarke 1979). The association of females with spinning may suggest an equivalent of the agricultural implements or tools often found in male graves (Philpott 1991, 184). Spindle whorls associated with Roman inhumation burials comprise only a tiny fraction of recorded burials and this scarcity is reflected in the slightly dated statistic that by 1991 they are known from only 12 other sites in England with normally only a single whorl present: nine examples come from the southwest (Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire), one from Humberside, one from North Yorkshire and one from Peterborough at Normangate, Castor (Philpott 1991, fig. 30; Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England 1969, 24). Both the Peterborough and Witchford examples emphasise the use of wool and cloth production in the eastern region.

The second inhumation burial at Witchford was probably another woman, wearing five rings on two fingers of her left hand. The wearing of rings forms part of the placement of offerings.

Conclusions

Despite its small scale, this excavation found important archaeological evidence. The two Beaker pits constitute the first such ‘domestic’ site of this date from the Ely area. Later, the possible defensive ditch running along the ridge would have served as an important strategic watching point on the causeway leading from Grunty Fen to West Fen/The Cove in the very late Iron Age/early Roman period, at a time of change and uncertainty. The probable mortuary enclosure is a rare example of its type, with the associated burials being interesting and unusual. The lack of other burials and the inclusion of particular grave goods suggest that these women were respected and important people within their local community.

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Plate 2. Witchford: terrain model, showing the site with the fens and surrounding Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British sites (after CHER records; Hall 1996, fig. 18; Evans 2003, fig. 142; Atkins and Mudd 2003, fig. 28; Evans et al. 2007, fig. 1 and further additions). [Flint deposits not included].