FORMER COUNCIL DEPOT
HASLERS LANE
GREAT DUNMOW
ESSEX

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EXCAVATION

Essex County Council
Planning

Field Archaeology Unit

April 2003

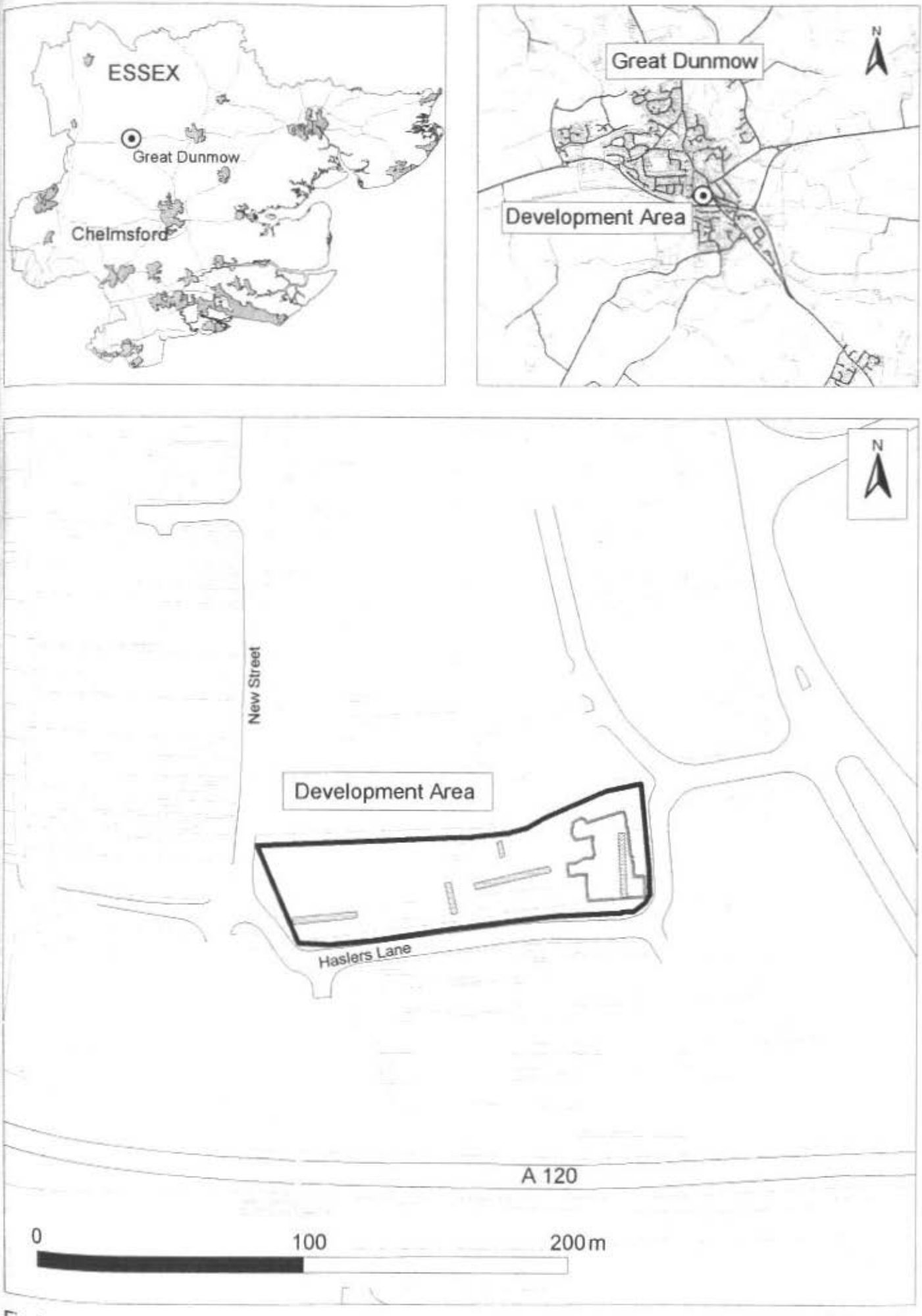

Fig.1 Site Location Map

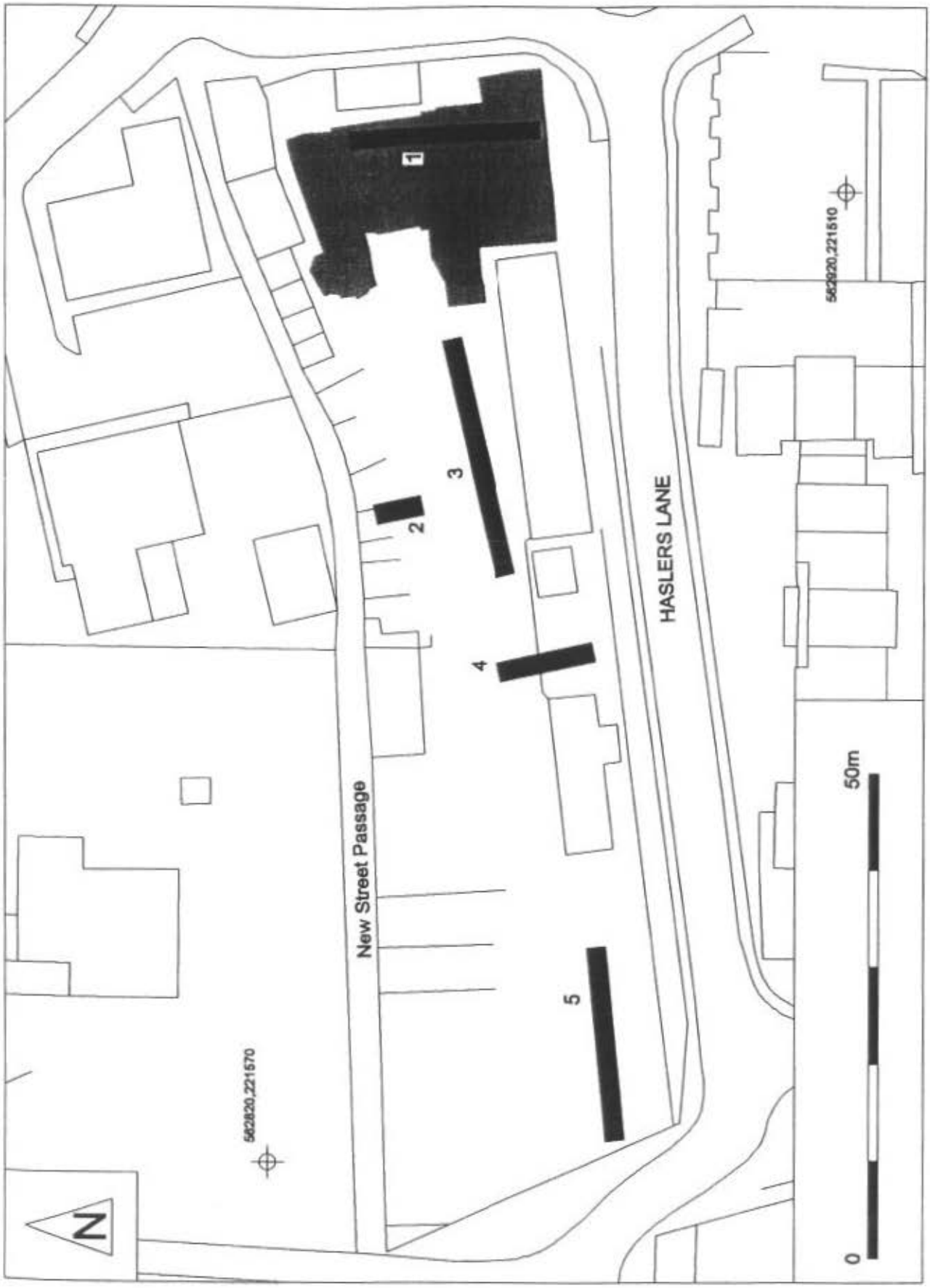

Fig.3 Site plan showing trenches and open area

All discrete features were half-sectioned, that is, one half of the feature was excavated and the cross section drawn. If burial deposits were encountered (usually whole vessels) the pit was fully excavated and recorded in plan at a scale of 1:10 with the grave goods *in-situ*. Photographs were taken at this point. The backfill of each burial pit was sampled in full. If possible, pots were lifted whole, with their fills. However, when the vessel was too crushed and fragmentary, its contents were sampled separately. The finds and samples were processed and examined by ECC FAU specialists. The soil samples were either wet sieved or hand sorted, depending on an assessment of their potential.

All work was carried out in accordance with IFA standards and by-laws.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

(See Fig.4)

The overburden and majority of a homogenous buried ploughsoil (27) was removed by mechanical excavator until archaeological features (mainly cremation burials) became visible (two islands of the plough-soil, contexts 146 and 334, were left *in situ* to be excavated by hand for finds retrieval). Down to this level, the ploughsoil contained Roman and medieval pottery as well as medieval or post-medieval roof tile and clay pipe fragments. The cremation burials visible at this level were excavated before the rest of the ploughsoil was excavated by hand. At this lower level the ploughsoil contained only Roman pottery. The cremation burials were found at various depths; the shallowest sometimes being heavily truncated by ploughing, or crushed, probably as a result of compaction from the laying of the concrete surfaces and use as a council yard. The deepest burials had remained relatively undisturbed. Several had been severely truncated by modern disturbance in the form of pipe trenches and fuel tanks associated with the council depot. The fuel tanks had caused a considerable amount of ground contamination, especially in the western portion of the site.

In total, investigation revealed four ditches or gullies, twenty-five small pits or post-holes, sixty-nine cremation burials containing whole pots, twenty-six unurned cremation burials and twenty other features which may be unurned cremation burials. For further details, see appendices 2 and 3.

Burials

Approximately 110 burials (in fact between 95-115) were excavated over an area of 413m sq., giving a density of 1 burial every 3.75m sq. The eastern and southern edges of the

cemetery area are reasonably defined. The eastern part of evaluation Trench 2 was re-excavated and extended in order to re-evaluate the nature of the stratigraphy during the area excavation stage of the work. A single cremation burial [535] was found approximately 0.3m beyond the east of the end of the original trench. This was the most westerly burial found and probably indicates the position of western edge of the cemetery. The distribution of the burials, as excavated, suggests three foci of activity (see Fig. 4). One focus for the burials appears in the centre of the open area, another towards the northern edge and possibly another to the west.

Only four cases of intercutting burial pits were recorded, in two cases a possible unurned cremation burial appears to have been dug in to the top of an earlier burial with urns or ancillary vessels. This very low incidence of intercutting graves suggests that the positions of the burials were marked in some way. However there was no evidence of posts or stakes in close association. It appears likely that the only marker may have been the small pile of spoil placed back on top of the pit.

There appears to have been a considerable variety of burial practices, spread fairly evenly across the site, as shown in Appendix 3. The major types of burial practices were:

- Cremated remains contained in an urn, often accompanied by ancillary vessels and/or other grave good objects
- Cremated remains contained in a wooden box or bag, again often accompanied by ancillary vessels and/or other grave good objects
- Cremated remains not within any form of container, either with or without ancillary grave goods.

There is considerable diversity of detail within and across these three basic grave types at Haslers Lane. A number display the presence of wooden linings to the grave pits, in the form of the remains/stains of planking and that define sides, bases and lids. Few seem to have constituted entire boxes and the majority appear to represent the simple shuttering of the sides of the pit. Where shuttering/boxing occurred, the pits were generally square or rectangular in plan.

The greatest diversity is evident in the presence/absence, quantity and type of grave goods that accompanied the cremated human remains. The most numerous and conspicuous were the ceramic vessels. Large jars were often used as cinerary urns with ancillary vessels represented by a range of smaller forms that included platters, jars, beakers, cups and

flagons. The quantity and type of pottery vessels included in graves varied from none to as many as six, including cinerary urns. Two burials contained two cinerary urns apiece, suggesting the interment of more than one set of human remains in each grave. Twenty-six burials featured no cinerary urns, ancillary vessels or any other form of container accompanying the cremated remains.

Many graves included generally fragmentary burnt artefacts such as pottery, metalwork, glass and bone items. These were accompanied by varying quantities of charcoal and indicate the incorporation of what probably constitutes token amounts of cremated goods/offerings, and perhaps debris, collected from the pyre. This probably represents some sort of symbolic act undertaken as part of the wider funerary ritual. The presence of smaller quantities of similar burnt material in the associated 'non-burial pits' (see below) is best regarded in the same light.

While all of the features identified as graves contained fragments of burnt bone, representing the burial of cremated human remains collected from the pyre, there was considerable variation in quantity. Few contained amounts of cremated bone that constituted the majority of an individual's entire remains (i.e. over 1kg); the majority falling within the range 100-600g. This is likely to be the result of incomplete and token collection of remains from the pyre. It would seem that a representative sample of an individual was sufficient to constitute their incorporation in the grave. The quantity of bone present does not appear to be relative to other criteria such as apparent wealth of grave good assemblages or burial form.

In summary, the burials show a wide variety of forms and apparent richness. A few stand out as being particularly rich in comparison with the rest. Burial [340] comprised a wooden lid, sides and base, a wooden casket containing the bone, a broken mirror, a bead, and a flagon. [372] had wooden sides, five ancillary vessels, a complete mirror and possibly a casket. Burial [535] contained the burnt remains of four vessels, a glass counter, two bone dice and over 200 hobnails; the latter suggesting the presence a pair of shoes.

Not only the composition, but the arrangement of grave goods is likely to have been of significance. It is evident that at least some of the artefacts were deliberately placed and that such acts perhaps had symbolic meaning. One burial featured an inverted urn (249) while another, (472), had the broken sherds of a platter arranged carefully around the edges of the base of its pit. Further detailed analysis of grave good composition and arrangement will no doubt reveal further such traits.

Fig.4 Open area site plan

Non-burial Features

Twenty-five small pits or post-holes either contained no cremated bone or very small amounts. Some of these features, and perhaps some of those termed 'unurned cremation burials', may be pits dug to receive pyre debris in the form of charcoal, burnt clay and small amounts of burnt bone (See appendix 1). These are likely to be integral components of the early Roman cemetery and should be regarded as having a specific and significant role in the funerary practices carried out.

Two linear features (207/347 and 527) appear to be contemporary with the cemetery and may represent internal divisions. (207/347) was a small, north-south orientated gully, cutting through burial [209], but cut by burial [118]. (527) was a larger (0.6m wide by 0.47m deep)

6.0 FINDS by J. Compton

N.B. Finds data are presented more fully in appendix 2.

6.1 Pottery

Pottery from the Burials

Approximately 115 cremation burials were identified, 104 of which contained pottery, mainly in the form of once-intact vessels. Sherd count and weight are considered to be unnecessary, as these are regarded as individual vessels, even when fragmented. Each vessel has been recorded by fabric, and by form where possible. In some instances, where he pots are too fragmentary for specific identification of form, generic types only have been provided. Some burials included additional sherds, not part of any of the main vessels; other burials contained sherds only, sometimes burnt. These have all been recorded by sherd count and weight, in grams, by fabric, in accordance with standard Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit pottery recording methods. All vessel forms were identified using the typology devised for Chelmsford (Going 1987, 13-54), with additional references to the pottery types found in the Romano-British cremation cemetery at Skeleton Green, Hertfordshire (Partridge 1981, 249-58). Full details can be found in the archive; a table showing the vessels from each grave is presented in Appendix 2.

Note: The pottery statistics are based on graves containing recognisable vessels. Unurned cremations, and other features, which contained a few sherds only have been excluded from this interim study.

130 individual vessels were recorded, with a date range of mid 1st to early 2nd century AD. Just 10% are complete or near-complete, and a further 10% will be easily reconstructable, mainly comprising samian ware in both cases. The most fragmented vessels are the cremation urns themselves, probably due to their large size and vulnerability to crushing and truncation by later agricultural activity. Further work on the pottery assemblage will probably identify additional vessels used as grave goods, but the final number will not be significantly higher. The average number of pots per grave at Haslers Lane is 1.6, whereas the average for the south-east of England has been calculated at 2.7 (Philpott 1991, 33). Thirty-six graves contained single vessels, twenty-eight of which were cremation urns, seventeen contained two pots, eight contained three, and a further eight contained either four, five or six vessels.

Jars used as cremation urns are the most common, being present in more than 60% of the graves which had pottery. Two graves contained two cremation urns each. Due to the fragmentary nature of the urns, only half of the jars have been closely identified and dated. The dating of cremation urns is notoriously difficult and the problem has been noted elsewhere (Philpott 1991, 31). The jars used are long-lived utilitarian types, reflecting those in common use in the settlements served by the cemeteries, and are therefore probably locally made (Partridge 1981, 265). In many instances it can be seen that some jars may have had other purposes before their use as cinerary containers. Thin-walled vessels are common, and repaired or cracked jars may also be used. This may reflect a symbolic role in the grave, rather than simply reflecting poverty. Most of the jars at Haslers Lane are necked, with plain rims, and have neck or shoulder cordons. At least 25% of the urns are grog-tempered and are likely to be the earliest vessel types, with a probable date of AD40-70. The use of grog as a tempering agent is gradually superseded by sand during the third quarter of the 1st century (Going 1987, 10) and the transition from grog to sand is clearly seen in the cremation urns at Haslers Lane. Some jars have rilling or wavy line decoration on the shoulder; and these are probably the latest types present. Wavy line decoration only occurred on jars in fully-Romanized sandy grey ware at Haslers Lane. Jars with rilling on the shoulder are known as Braughing jars and are common in Hertfordshire, where some are dated late 1st to early 2nd century (e.g. Partridge 1981, fig.92, no.4). Typologically-later Braughing jars are not present at Haslers Lane.

Closer dating for cremation burials is mainly provided by vessels other than jars, usually samian. This imported ware occurred in fourteen of the burials and, apart from a single *terra nigra* platter, is the only continental import found in the cemetery. Samian vessels, especially dishes and platters, can be dated to within a couple of decades because they are usually

stamped with the potters' names. Unfortunately, most of the samian at Great Dunmow has been badly affected by the soil conditions, and the stamps will need to be read by an expert. The types of vessel present can be placed into fairly tight date brackets following typological details. Many of the dishes are flat-bottomed with steep sides; these are almost certainly Claudio-Neronian in date (i.e. AD40-70). One or two can be dated to as late as AD90-120, but all of the cups present are 1st century types. The samian assemblage comprises thirteen dishes and four cups, plus a small globular, mould-decorated beaker with an everted rim. The beaker is one of the less common samian types found in Britain. One of the cups is also a rare type, as its micaceous fabric has been identified as an early Lezoux product, manufactured before the main period of export for this industry.

Twenty-two graves contained beakers, half of which are globular types with short everted rims, dating to the second half of the 1st century AD. The second most popular beaker type is sharply carinated at the mid girth, *Cam* form 120, which is a typically mid 1st century AD form in central and north-east Essex. In Hertfordshire, the vessel continues, in modified form, into the 2nd century and beyond. Four examples of the later beaker type were found at Haslers Lane, all in fully-Romanized sandy grey ware, providing an early 2nd century date. Two Late Iron Age-type butt beakers were also present, both of which had been used to contain the cremated bone. One butt beaker is grog-tempered, the other is in a red-surfaced fabric imitating *terra rubra*; both are mid 1st century in date.

Flagons were found in eighteen burials, not all of which can be identified to type due to the severely fragmented nature of many of the vessels. At least half of the flagons have been burnt, probably on the pyre, resulting in an average sherd weight for these vessels of just a few grams. Of the identifiable flagons, six are ring-necked and round-bodied, typical of the mid to late 1st century. Most are in soft buff ware and may be Colchester products, but at least three are in Verulamium region white ware. One flagon example, from burial 91, may also be a Verulamium product, although the fabric of this vessel is more common during the period *c.* AD130-60 (Partridge 1981, 249, Fabric D). This flagon contained the cremated bone, but unfortunately, the vessel has been truncated and only the bottom half survives. Burial 305 also had a flagon which may have held the cremated bone; flagons used for this purpose are not unknown, but generally are not a popular choice for the container (Philpott 1991, 30). Other mid 1st-century flagon types are present; a probable 'Hofheim' flagon was found in burial 205, and two *Cam* types, 148 and 154, in burial 535, both of which had been burnt.

Platters and bowls form a minor component, being present in just seven of the burials. Most are mid 1st century types, as would be expected for these vessel types. A vessel of note is the *terra nigra Cam* 16 platter, with a central, internal potter's stamp, from burial 472. Interestingly, this platter must have been broken before burial, as several large fragments seem to have been deliberately placed in separate parts of the grave. Evidence such as this for the ritual deposition of grave goods can also be seen in some samian vessels, where sections of the rim have been removed before burial. This activity was also noted in the Chequers Lane cemetery (Wickenden 1988, 22-3).

Dating of pottery in the graves is hampered by the lack of vessels other than urns. Of the 130 pots found, fifty-three are jars, which are commonly long-lived types. Those which originate in the mid 1st century AD are usually still current well into the 2nd century. Many of the beakers and some of the flagons date to the second half of the 1st century, with typological differences only becoming apparent during the 2nd century. Reconstruction of at least the profile of many of the fragmented vessels may refine some dating. The best dating evidence will come from the samian, although this will provide close dates for just fourteen of the burials. A large proportion of the burials, approximately a half, are Claudio-Neronian, and a further thirteen date broadly to the 1st century. Only twelve are firmly dated to the later end of the given date range of late 1st to early 2nd century. There are no rough-cast Colchester beakers, current in the mid 2nd century, nor any Antonine samian forms. The cemetery appears to have been most active in the middle decades of the 1st century, with burials of early 2nd century date being the least represented. Burial activity would appear to have ceased before the middle of the 2nd century.

Pottery from other contexts

Pottery was recovered from a further twenty-six contexts, including those from the evaluation, and a small quantity of unstratified material was also recorded. This amounts to a total of 409 sherds, weighing 2448g. Most of the sherds are small and undiagnostic, with an average sherd weight of 6g. Prehistoric pottery was recovered from nine contexts; this includes seven which are the back-fills of cremation burials. Small groups of medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered from three contexts, which represent the plough-soil. The remaining pottery is all Roman in date; that which is closely datable is mostly contemporary with the burials. No fabrics or forms are present which can be dated to later than the mid 2nd century. Samian was recovered from six non-burial contexts, and seems mainly to be the remains of individual vessels, perhaps from disturbed burials. A table providing details of the pottery from contexts other than burials can be found in Appendix 2.

6.2 Ironwork

1886 nails and fragments, weighing 4593g, were recovered from a total of 117 contexts. Almost all are from cremation burials and are, in the main, readily recognisable as nails. A further 17 nails, weighing 158g, are unstratified. Two principal nail types are represented; structural and small nails or tacks.

The structural nails may have been used during construction of the funeral pyre, or perhaps in a funerary couch, or similar. The small nails and tacks could represent hobnails, or may have come from caskets. Various plate fragments and fittings are present in some contexts; these may be the remains of box lock-plates, although most are too fragmentary for certain identification. The average number of nails per context is quite low at sixteen, and there are just fourteen contexts that contain 30 or more nails. Burial 171, noted as having a box or vooden lining, contained 123 nails, and burial 205 produced 124. Burial 472 contained 130 nails, some of which are probably hobnails, and burial 535 had at least 240. Many of the latter are very small and may also be hobnails. If so, there are sufficient nails to represent the remains of a pair of nailed shoes. The remaining ten contexts each contained fewer than 100 nails.

Several contexts contained currently unidentifiable or undiagnostic iron objects, some of which may be several nails fused together. X-ray photography will clarify the position with these. There are three iron objects whose function is more certain. The first is a clenched binding found with the cremated bone contained in urn 323. Burial 405 produced a near-complete knife blade, found amongst the cremated bone, and a second blade, in fragments, was recovered from burial 372. Knife blades deposited in graves are thought to represent ood utensils, rather than weapons, and may be seen as the continuation of a Late Iron Age practice (Philpott 1991, 176). While metalwork has been found amongst the cremated bone, ascertaining whether some or all of these iron objects have been burnt is particularly problematic.

6.3 Cu Alloy Objects

A number of personal items were recovered from many of the cremation burials, some of which are not readily identifiable, for instance the small fragments of copper alloy recovered from burials 237 and 340. These are probably the burnt remains of items which were placed on the pyre, although the ring fragments from burial 340 may be fittings from a wooden casket. A metal pellet, probably melted silver, was recovered from the fill of urn 238 (burial 237). Identifiable pieces include four copper alloy brooches and two mirrors, all from burials.

Brooches:

None of the brooches is complete, although a near-complete Thistle brooch, SF17, was found among the cremated bone in urn 83 (burial 81). The brooch is in good condition, and does not appear to have been burnt, although must surely have been placed on the pyre. The pin and catch-plate are missing and the edges of the central circular plaque are chipped. The brooch is similar to Stead and Rigby's F3 (1989, fig.49) dated AD40-60.

The remaining brooches are much more fragmentary, and there is evidence of burning. The catch-plates and pins of all three are missing, and the springs are also absent from all but one. Identifiable features indicate that these brooches may be Colchester types, although further work following conservation will provide closer identifications. The most complete of these brooches, SF32, was found amongst the cremated bone of burial 405. Burial 458 produced two brooches, both of which comprised the bow of the brooch only. One brooch, SF37, was recovered from the fill of the grave pit, and the second, SF41, was found in the fill of beaker 461, accompanied by the detached spring. Brooch springs were also found in burials 22 and 46, and further brooch fragments came from burials 105 and 370.

Mirrors:

Two high-tin, bronze mirrors were found, both of which had probably been carefully deposited in each grave. The first, SF21, from burial 340, is a Group G handled mirror (Lloyd-Morgan 1981, 37-43), and is now in many pieces with the handle detached. The original diameter of its reflecting surface is *c.* 100mm. Other grave goods included a ring-necked flagon and a blue glass annular bead, SF22. The mirror may have been placed on the pyre. A similar mirror was recovered from Burial 9 at Folly Lane (Niblett 1999, fig.88), dated to the late 1st century AD. Another was found in Cremation I at Stanley Avenue in Norwich (Gurney 1998, 23; figs 16 and 17), dated to the mid-60s AD. This mirror was also accompanied by a ring-necked flagon and a blue glass annular bead, among other items, and is thus a very close parallel for burial 340 at Haslers Lane.

The second mirror, SF24, is near-complete and had been placed on the floor of the grave of burial 372. The circumference is chipped, but there is no evidence for a handle, so the mirror may belong to Lloyd-Morgan's Group F (1981, 30). The mirror is *c.* 60mm in diameter. It is possible that it may have been placed on the pyre, although there is little evidence of burning. The mirror was accompanied by at least five pottery vessels, three of which are burnt. Six Group F mirrors were found at King Harry Lane (Stead and Rigby 1989, 103); two were found with the cremated bone and at least one appeared to have been broken at burial.

The presence of Roman mirrors in graves could be seen as the continuation of a Late Iron Age tradition of the burying of large handled mirrors which have highly-decorated backs. By the Roman period, however, mirrors seemed to be regarded simply as toilet items, and not as status symbols. Their deposition in graves can be looked upon as yet another personal offering, rather than an expression of prestige (Struck 2000, 87). Highly decorated 'Celtic' mirrors are British in manufacture, whereas the smaller, simple Roman mirrors are probably imported, perhaps from the Rhineland. Small hand-mirrors are known to have been made in Nijmegen (Lloyd-Morgan 1981).

6.4 Glass

Ten burials produced items of glass, although no intact vessels were found. Seven burials contained sherds from vessels, two had beads, and one a blue glass counter. Glass sherds from two burials, 105 and 500, consisted of tiny undiagnostic chips, one of which, recovered from the fill of the urn, was melted. Melted sherds were recovered from four of the burials which contained vessel glass. No glass was recovered from contexts other than burials.

Vessel glass:

A near-complete tubular phial in natural blue-green glass came from burial 458. This is a common 1st-century AD form with a cylindrical neck and body, rounded base and constriction between neck and body (Price and Cottam 1998, 169-70; fig.75). The phial is broken at the constriction, extant height 55mm; whether the break was deliberate is uncertain. Burial 237 contained a similar phial, height *c.* 70mm, in three joining fragments, but melted and distorted, indicating that the vessel had been placed on the pyre. A second melted phial came from burial 529, although this example is very distorted. Tubular phials are frequently found in Claudio-Neronian contexts, for instance at Colchester (Cool and Price 1995, 160), and melted phials often occur in 1st and 2nd century burials (Price and Cottam 1998, 6). As such, they are likely to have been part of the funerary process, with the contents perhaps sprinkled over the deceased and the empty vessel then consigned to the flames.

Melted glass was also recovered from burial 245, comprising nineteen blue-green body sherds, some bubbled and distorted, one or two fused to fragments of cremated bone. In the same burial are twelve blue-green sherds which have not been exposed to heat. It is possible that all of the sherds are from the same vessel; in any event, the vessel was broken before being subjected to severe heat, as the edges of most of the melted sherds have been fire-rounded. Lastly, several unburnt vessel sherds were found in a badly disturbed burial,

319, comprising many fragments of pale yellowish-green glass with fine, applied ribs. The form of the vessel is not certain, but is likely to have been a jug.

Glass beads:

Burial 399 contained a complete segmented bead, 15mm in length, dark green, appearing black, and apparently unburnt. Segmented beads are very common and are found throughout the Roman period and beyond (Guido 1978, 92). A second complete bead, this one annular, diameter 17mm, was found with the cremated bone in burial 340. The bead is dark blue with a marvered white zigzag trail around the circumference. This is an example of an 'exotic' bead of the early Roman period, of Late Iron Age tradition and falling out of fashion during the 2nd century (Guido 1978, 101). The surface of the bead is slightly pitted but otherwise shows no sign of having been placed on the pyre.

Glass counter:

An opaque, blue glass gaming counter was found, along with a pair of bone dice, with the cremated bone in burial 535. The counter is oval in shape, measuring *c.* 12mm by 13mm. The surface is matt and pitted, probably as a result of being heated, although there are no other signs of extreme heat being applied.

6.5 Worked Bone Objects

The dice from burial 535 have obviously been burnt. Both have split longitudinally into many fragments and slivers, and many of the slivers are also distorted. As the fragments of dice accompanied the cremated bone, some parts, mainly plain fragments, have not been recognised. In spite of this, one die, and most of the second, has been sufficiently reconstructed to allow comments to be made. The dice appear to be a matching pair, with spots on both sets of opposing sides adding up to seven. Both are unevenly cuboid in shape, measuring *c.* 20mm by 18mm by 18mm, and the spots are delineated by ring-and-dot motifs. The dice are probably made from long bones and are hollow. The hole at each end seems to have been filled a bone plug or inset, although the plain plugs from each 'four' end have not been recovered. Each plug from the 'three' end has a central ring-and-dot motif. The plugs are smaller than their holes and may have been fixed in place with adhesive of some sort. Similar dice with insets have been found in Southwark (Cowan 1992, 110; fig.33) and Richborough (Bushe-Fox 1949, 125, no.81), both 1st century in date.

Worked bone was also recovered from amongst the cremated bone of burial 372, in the form of three small annular objects. Each measures 7mm by 5-6mm, with a hole diameter of 2mm. The ?upper aspect of each object is slightly domed, but the underside is flat. Their

function is obscure, but they may be spacer beads from an item of jewellery or similar. A fourth annular object was retrieved from the burial backfill during wet sieving. This is slightly larger, 10mm x 8mm, hole diameter 2mm, with a flat upper surface. The underside appears to be unfinished. The function remains obscure.

A further small fragment of worked bone was found in burial 112; this appears to be part of the turned rim from a vessel, possibly a *pyxis* (small box). The item seems to have been placed on the pyre and may be heat-distorted. Although small, the rim is clearly defined, with a turned bead beneath and an internal groove, possibly the seating for a lid. The diameter is difficult to estimate, but is in the region of 30-40mm. A complete bone *pyxis*, with cover, has been found in a Roman grave in London (Barber and Bowsher, 2000, 188; fig.95), of a type dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries. The fragment from Haslers Lane has similar characteristics, but its identification as a *pyxis* is tentative.

6.6 Other Finds

The main components of the assemblage from Haslers Lane comprise pottery, cremated bone (see section 7.2) and metalwork. Few other categories of finds were recovered, and these are minimal in quantity.

Tile

Roof tile fragments were recovered from seven contexts, with a total weight of 3807g. More than 80% is of late medieval or later date, and was retrieved from the ploughsoil or from ditch segments. The few fragments of Roman tile came from the same contexts.

Clay Pipe

The ploughsoil also contained three post-medieval clay pipe stems.

Animal Bone

Just four contexts contained animal bone, three of which, 334, 526 and 528, are post-Roman in date. The bone from these contexts is unburnt, fragmentary and in poor condition, consisting mainly of tooth enamel and long bone shaft fragments. The fourth context, burial 285, produced five fragments of burnt bone during the wet sieving of environmental samples. These consisted of bird bones, plus a fragment from a sheep/goat metapodial. It is possible that further burnt offerings of animal bone could be included amongst the cremated bone. Expert analysis will be necessary to segregate this.

Baked Clay

Baked clay, weighing 337g in total, was retrieved from twenty-one contexts, all but one are burials. That cremation burials contain baked clay pieces is perhaps not unexpected if pyre debris was included in the fill.

Worked and Burnt Flint

Flints were collected from ten contexts and their presence must be purely incidental. Quantities of burnt flint were also collected from many of the environmental samples, perhaps indicating pyre debris. These have not been quantified.

6.7 Conclusion

Although some burials (for instance, 81) seem to be fully Late Iron Age in character, the cemetery is unlikely to have had a start date much before the conquest. Of the twenty burials which contained grog-tempered pottery, five had South Gaulish samian and a further nine included other pottery of probable Roman date. The deposition of samian and other 'Roman' items, such as mirrors and glass phials, is known to increase after the conquest (Philpott 1991, 217). This is an indication of the greater availability of these objects, rather than a change in burial practice. Most personal items represent individualistic selection and generally occur in less than 1% of the total burials in cemeteries (Philpott 1991, 189).

Single-urned cremations are the most numerous and the average number of pots per context is lower than expected, but there are several burials which are more well-furnished. Interestingly, these appear to be burials in which a jar is not used as the cinerary container. Burials, 48, 305 and 372 all had at least five pots, and 372 contained three which are samian. Further work on the artefacts from the Haslers Lane burials will identify the differing levels of furnishing in the cemetery, and perhaps indicate some patterning.

7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL by K. Campbell and J. Compton

A total of 183 bulk soil samples (c.273 bags) were collected during excavation. These derived from the fills of both cremation urns and ancillary vessels, unurned cremation deposits and general backfills of grave pits. All selected deposits were 100% sampled for the recovery of cremated bone, small artefacts and environmental material such as charred plant remains.

7.1 Method

Due to the large number of samples, a programme of prioritised and selective processing was carried out. Priority was given to the sieving of the contents of cremation vessels, particularly those identified as cinerary urns. Such samples were washed over a 1mm mesh in the sieving tank and any lightweight materials (flot) floated off into a 0.5mm mesh. Artefacts and cremated bone were extracted by hand during the process. Once the sediment was removed the residue was rinsed, dried and sieved through 4mm, 2mm and 1mm meshes, primarily to separate the cremated bone as required for specialist analysis. A record was kept of fraction weights, relative amounts of cremated human bone and finds, and of any environmental material in the residue and flot (e.g. charcoal). In all, the fills of 85 vessels were wet sieved, 53 of which were from cremation urns. Several samples from definitely-identified unurned cremation deposits were also processed by this method.

Priority was also given to 55 bulk soil samples identified as certain, or probable, unurned cremation deposits. These were processed in the same way as the vessel deposits, except that where burnt bone proved to be of minimal quantities, fragments were hand-picked from the 4mm fraction and retained, while the fraction from the 2mm mesh and <2mm fraction were kept intact and unsorted.

Due to the large number of grave backfill samples (53 in total), and their envisaged low potential for recovery of cremated bone and finds, the decision was made to 'hand sort' these samples rather than wet sieve them. Such samples were spread out and scanned by eye, larger fragments of cremated bone (>1cm) and any finds present were extracted; the remainder of the sample was then discarded. However, where samples appeared to be richer in cremated bone and finds on preliminary inspection, they were then subjected to the full wet sieving procedure.

All samples identified in the field as unurned cremations that appeared to have a low cremated bone content were also processed by hand-sorting.

7.2 Results

The various processing methodologies employed seem to have been efficient in recovering relevant material from the range of deposit types sampled. Full wet sieving, flotation and careful sorting of residues carried out on the high priority samples established that the presence and/or survival of plant remains, other than charcoal fragments, was very poor. The processing was therefore an exercise in artefact, rather than ecofact, recovery. The details of this are discussed below.

Cremated bone

Cremated human bone was recovered from 190 contexts, representing 115 cremation burials and cremation-related features. The majority of the bone was retrieved from vessel fills, mainly the cremation urns. Some ancillary vessels also contained burnt bone, in addition to the urn, and in two cases (burials 160 and 478) two cremation urns seem to have been placed in the graves. Two individuals may be represented in these burials, and this will need to be established by the human bone specialist. Varying amounts of cremated bone were recovered from both urned and unurned cremations, ranging in weight from 2g to 2090g (Appendix 2). Generally, very little cremated bone was recovered from the grave pit backfill samples.

Environmental material

Recovery of environmental material from urned and unurned cremation deposits was poor. Charcoal fragments were small and few in number, while carbonised seeds and grains were very rare. These ecofacts are not considered sufficient for further analysis. The recovery of environmental material was not facilitated by the hand-sorting method employed on the grave backfill samples, but was observed as being low; charcoal fragments, where present, were small and few in number.

Other material and artefacts retrieved

Several pieces of metalwork, as well as vessel glass and mirror fragments were extracted from samples derived from both urned and unurned cremation deposits. A brooch was recovered from one grave backfill sample, a glass bead and a fragment of worked bone from others. However, finds were generally low in number and restricted to pottery sherds, largely derived from ceramic grave goods, and iron nails.

Full records of all processing undertaken have been made, and these, plus a detailed list of the cremated bone weight by context, can be found in the archive.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

By far the most important aspect of the excavation was the early Roman cemetery. This was also the earliest activity evidenced on the site, apart from that which may be inferred from the presence of residual prehistoric pottery.

Three likely limits to the cemetery were discovered; the east, south and west. The northern extent was not ascertained due to the presence of standing buildings, although it is likely that the density of burials was decreasing in this direction.

Despite the cemetery being relatively short lived (mid 1st to early 2nd century), it seems to be part of a tradition stretching from the late Iron Age period, through to the end of the Roman period. Two excellent parallels are the King Harry Lane site at St.Albans (Stead and Rigby 1989) and the Westhampnett site (Fitzpatrick 1997). Both of these were Late Iron Age cemeteries continuing into the Roman period. There are also a number of further parallels for individual burials and their assemblages from across southern England (Gurney 1998, 23-7; Niblett 1999). The Haslers Lane cemetery is unlikely to date to before the Roman conquest.

The Haslers Lane cemetery appears to fall out of use at the beginning of the 2nd century. In 1970-72 at Chequers Lane, Great Dunmow, a smaller cremation cemetery was discovered dating to the 2nd century (Wickenden, 1988), which may have been a successor of the Haslers Lane cemetery.

The position of the cemetery in relation to the Roman town of Great Dunmow is typical of many cemeteries associated with towns large and small; just outside the bounds of the town and close to the major roads leading into the town. The positioning may suggest that the 1st century focus of the town was around the crossroads, only 150m to the northeast of the site. In that case, the 2nd century cemetery at Chequers Lane may indicate an expansion of the settlement area along the road to Braughing/St.Albans. Ditch [527] may relate to post-cemetery, but still Roman, use of this site. Alternatively, it may, like ditch [207/347], relate to a subdivision of space within the cemetery.

The evidence of the upper portion of the ploughsoil (context 27) and the presence of post-medieval ditches, suggests that the post-cemetery land use was essentially agricultural.

9.0 ASSESSMENT AND FURTHER WORK

This site has importance in the study of Roman burial practice due to its transitional later 1st century date range and wide variety of detail in its funerary features and the artefactual assemblages they contain. The study of this cemetery has potential to shed light on the early development of the Roman town and, perhaps, the uptake of *Romanisation* among its

population. As such, the cemetery element of this site requires detailed academic publication. The county journal 'Essex Archaeology and History' may be a suitable vehicle for dissemination. An outline publication proposal is outlined in Appendix 5.

The excavation of the site has thrown up several research questions that merit consideration during further analysis and reporting. Some of the most pertinent are as follows:

- What is the significance of deposits of pyre debris? Did deposition constitute debris disposal, burial, memorial or something else? What is the meaning of the presence of pyre debris within graves?
- What is the nature and purpose of boxed or shuttered graves? How do they differ from other burial practice?
- Are any patterns to be found in the selection and placement of grave goods?
- Are there any patterns to be discerned in the distribution of graves in terms of form, date or goods?
- Are there any patterns in the selection and placement of the human remains? If the whole body does not get deposited in the grave, are remains selected for burial? What happens to the rest of the remains?
- Are there any relationships between the location of the grave, the grave goods included and the age and sex of the individual?
- What is the function and symbolism of grave goods?
- What can we infer about the cremation stage of the funerary process? Why are some grave goods apparently burnt with the body and some not?
- Are grave goods evidence of actual or aspired status and/or wealth?
- Can we gauge the level of Romanization of the local community from these graves and their contents?

In order to address these, and other, research questions and to bring the site to the point of publication, further work is required on aspects of both the stratigraphic and artefactual datasets. Further work should concentrate on the following:

Stratigraphic:

Definitive interpretation of feature/deposit types (i.e. urned vs unurned cremation burials, pyre debris pits, etc.) needs to be finalised. This will, in part, be informed by further analysis of artefact assemblages (see below). Further consideration of spatial distribution on the basis of differing date, burial types and apparent wealth/status is necessary.

Finds, general:

Further work needs to be done on distinguishing between burnt and unburnt objects (i.e differentiation between redeposited pyre material and grave goods). Parallels need to be sought for all grave goods of significance, individually and collectively. Selection of artefacts for publication illustration needs to be undertaken.

Pottery:

The pottery from the burials should be more fully recorded, in accordance with FAU guidelines (i.e. sherd count and weight by fabric, and by form where pertinent). Examination of the stray sherds in some features may lead to the identification of pyre debris, although determining the residuality of these sherds will be hampered by the early date and nature of the assemblage. The samian requires specialist identification; in particular the potters' stamps. Some reconstruction work will be necessary, in order to identify vessel forms more closely, and enable publication of at least a representative sample of the pottery assemblage. Study of the vessels deposited in graves might shed light on detail of funerary practices within this cemetery that can be compared to studies elsewhere (e.g. Philpott 1991, 33; Partridge 1981, 249). The post-Roman material may need closer identification, along with a short note.

Human remains:

The human bone requires specialist identification in terms of sex, age and number of individuals as well as consideration of the process of cremation itself. Determination of the presence and species of any animal bone amongst the human remains should also be undertaken.

Metalwork:

The iron objects require selective conservation and X-ray to enable further identification and study (especially the possible hobnails and box fittings). The copper alloy mirrors and three brooches are currently undergoing conservation. Four further items of copper alloy have been recommended for cleaning, and two items recommended for metal identification. Metallurgical analysis would be beneficial on the mirrors and perhaps brooches.

Material requiring no further work:

Detailed wet sieving of soil samples has shown that there is no significant potential for the study of plant remains. No further work is required for the small amounts of tile, baked clay, clay pipes or animal bone (with the exception of any burnt animal bone identified amongst the human cremated bone).