

PENNY'S FARM, CRANBORNE, DORSET

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Report W549

Project No 35841

**Wessex Archaeology
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CONTENTS

Summary.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Project background.....	3
1.2 Geology and topography	3
1.3 Archaeological background	3
2. Methodology.....	4
2.1 Project specification	4
2.2 Methodology	4
3. Results	4
3.1 Natural deposits.....	4
3.2 Archaeological features	6
4. Finds and environmental evidence.....	8
4.1 The cremation deposit	8
4.2 Medieval and post-medieval pottery	9
4.3 Worked flint.....	9
4.4 Burnt flint	10
4.5 Other finds	10
5. Discussion.....	10
6. The project archive.....	11
7. References.....	12
Appendix 1: Trench summaries.....	13
Figures	
Fig. 1: Location of trenches.....	5
Fig. 2: Plans and sections - Trenches 1 and 3	7
Tables	
Table 1: Quantification of finds by feature / deposit.....	8

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken during November 1992 of a c. 8500m² area of land adjacent to Penny's Farm, Cranborne (NGR SU059132). The evaluation was commissioned in association with a planning application for a proposed small-scale residential development on the site. Four evaluation trenches were opened by machine and a range of deposits and features of archaeological interest were located. Overall finds and features dating to the earlier prehistoric (Neolithic and Bronze Ages), Romano-British, medieval and later periods were recorded. The evidence for Romano-British activity consisted of a human cremation deposit contained within a pottery vessel dated to around AD 200. Overall, the evaluation has demonstrated that the proposed development area contains preserved archaeological deposits with a broad chronological (Neolithic to post-medieval) and typological range (burial, settlement, agricultural).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The evaluation was commissioned by Ken Morgan Architects acting on behalf of the Gascoyne Cecil Estates. Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Ken Morgan for his assistance during the course of the project. Thanks are also due to Mr M. J. O'Lone of the Gascoyne Cecil Estates. Acknowledgment is due to Jake Keen (of the Ancient Technology Centre, Cranborne) and Laurence Keen, County Archaeological Officer, for helpful comments during the course of the fieldwork.

The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by C. M. Hearne and was directed on site by M. N. Rawlings with assistance from R. Montague and R. Stalker. This report was written by M. N. Rawlings and C. M. Hearne. Comments on the finds and environmental material were provided by the following: E. L. Morris (Roman pottery); L. N. Mepham (medieval and later pottery); P. Harding (worked flint); M. J. Allen and S. Wyles (bone and carbonised plant material). The illustrations were drawn by J. Cross and S. E. James.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

Wessex Archaeology were commissioned by Ken Morgan Architects, acting on behalf of the Gascoyne Cecil Estates, to carry out an archaeological evaluation of a c. 8500m² block of land adjacent to Penny's Farm, Cranborne. In response to an application for residential development the County Archaeological Officer had recommended that an evaluation should be carried out prior to a planning determination. This is in line with the Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guideline No. 16 - Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16, November 1990).

1.2 Geology and topography

Penny's Farm (NGR SU059132) is located on the eastern side of Cranborne village, to the north of the River Crane (Fig. 1, inset). Relatively recent valley gravels form the flat floodplain of the Crane which has cut into the underlying Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1:50,000 sheet 314).

Most of the proposed development covers the field immediately to the south-east of Penny's Farm. It is located at the base (c. 56m OD) of the south-west facing valley side and has an overall gentle slope down to the south-west. At the south-eastern end of the field are several irregular subcircular hollows. The date and function of these earthworks is unclear but they may be the result of small-scale gravel extraction. The north-eastern field boundary is located along the top of a large positive lynchet which becomes less distinct to the north-west. The main earthworks and surface features visible in the field at the time of the evaluation are shown on Fig. 1.

1.3 Archaeological background

To the north-west of the site a pit containing occupation debris of the Middle Saxon period was discovered during construction of houses on the Penny's Mead estate. Subsequently an archaeological evaluation of the field immediately to the north-west of Penny's Farm revealed several pits, one of these contained a Late Neolithic flint assemblage and another may have been of medieval date (Wilson and Chowne 1987).

Within the proximity of the village, several sites are recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record held and maintained by Dorset County Council. Two Neolithic stone axes (SMR SU01SE 51/49 and 53) have been found at separate locations: one in the village itself and one to the east of the evaluation site close to the River.

Roman activity is represented by stray finds (for example pottery found below Castle Hill - SMR 42) but also by concentrations of material and some evidence for building remains. Less than 1km to the north of the village, pottery, tile, oyster shell and a coin of Constantine I (early fourth century) have been discovered in ploughed fields in 1964 (SMR 38). A Roman building (SMR 33), including two areas of red tessellated pavement, was found in 1867 at Holwell, 1.3km down the valley from Penny's Farm.

A monastery was established at Cranborne in AD 980 and the present parish church was constructed c. AD 1250 (Penn 1980, 49). The motte and bailey on Castle Hill was probably

constructed in the early 12th century by the Earl of Gloucester although the village later became part of a royal estate. The church was enlarged during the 13th century and this may be a reflection of settlement growth (*ibid*).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project specification

The project specification was devised by Wessex Archaeology at the request of the client and was subsequently approved (with minor amendments) by the County Archaeological Officer. Overall the specification allowed for a 2.8% sample of the proposed development area by means of machine trenching.

2.2 Methodology

Four trenches totalling 120m in length were excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator. Three of these trenches (Fig. 1, Trenches 1, 2 and 4) were located directly on proposed areas of housing. As these trenches were aligned along a similar axis, a fourth one (Trench 3) was located perpendicular to this axis in order to provide a transect from the river to the edge of the floodplain.

Each trench was machined as a series of horizontal spits under close archaeological supervision, and excavation was halted whenever archaeological features were revealed. Such features were cleaned by hand and the majority were excavated. Bulk samples were retrieved from the fills of some features and were examined in the laboratory in order to recover environmental material. No trench or feature was excavated beyond a total depth of 1.20m below the present ground surface, and all of the trenches were subsequently backfilled.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Natural deposits

In the north-western and central part of the field the natural base encountered was a loose gravel composed mainly of rounded flint pebbles up to 100mm in size. These were bound within a friable matrix of sand and flint grit. This gravel was observed to be at least 0.8m deep in places and pieces of worked flint were recovered from within the whole depth of deposit (see 4.3 below).

Underlying the gravel was a calcareous cream-coloured silty clay within which were patches of harder material. This deposit is thought to be a form of redeposited chalk, probably soliflucted, which has moved downslope from the *in situ* Upper Chalk to the north-east of the site. It is possible that this material seals earlier gravels but this supposition was not investigated during the current work. In the south-eastern part of the field this chalky deposit was located directly below the subsoil.

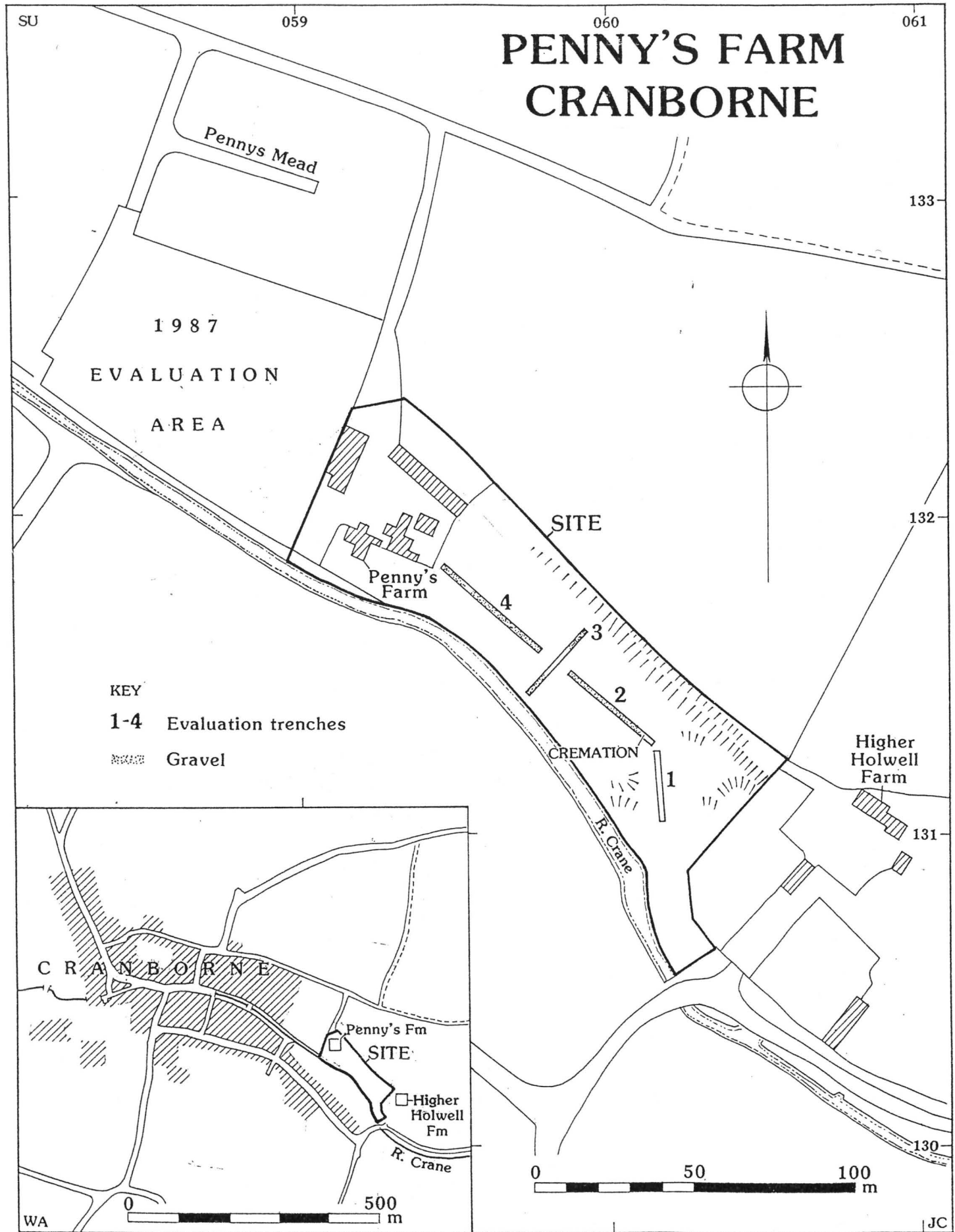


Fig. 1: Location of trenches

In most of the field the topsoil (200 - 250mm thick) sealed a subsoil of dark greyish-brown sandy loam containing many small flint pebbles. This is the lower part of the worm-sorted soil horizon. In Trench 3 this layer was up to 600mm deep at the north-eastern end but became progressively shallower and did not extend along the full length of the trench. In the other trenches it varied in depth from 150-200mm. In Trenches 1 and 2, where the soliflucted chalk was not sealed by the gravel, a lighter-coloured subsoil was also present below the darker one.

3.2 Archaeological features

With the exception of the cremation deposit (Trench 2) whose location is shown on Figure 1, the archaeological deposits and features observed are shown on Figure 2. More detailed summaries of each trench are included in Appendix 1. No archaeological features were recorded in Trench 4 although some pieces of worked flint were recovered from the underlying gravels.

Trench 1

At the southern end of the trench the natural gravel/soliflucted chalk was not exposed. An irregular feature (13) filled mainly with burnt flint (27) was excavated and was found to be 0.15m deep. A 10 litre sample of this fill was taken for laboratory examination. The edges of this feature were indistinct except where excavated and more than one feature may be represented. Feature 13 was cut into a deposit of flint gravel (32) which was darker than the natural gravel recorded elsewhere, probably due to an overlying dark subsoil layer (15). This layer was of variable thickness, and was thicker over features where it had filled any depressions caused by consolidation within underlying feature fills. A small number of worked flints were recovered from the fill of feature 13, including a scraper.

Further north a similar deposit (16) filled a shallow pit (12) cut into the soliflucted chalk. This pit was rounded in plan, 2.15m in diameter and 0.36m deep. Again the homogenous fill contained much burnt flint and a 10 litre bulk sample was extracted for laboratory examination. A small number of worked flints were recovered from pit 12.

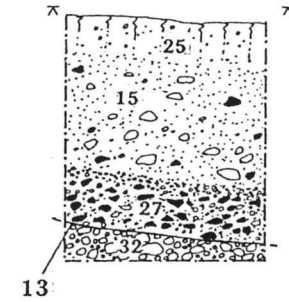
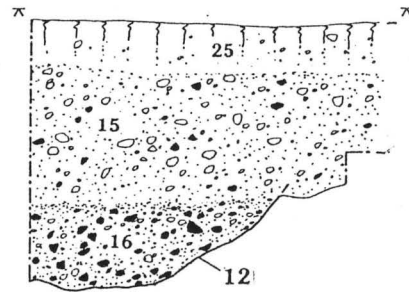
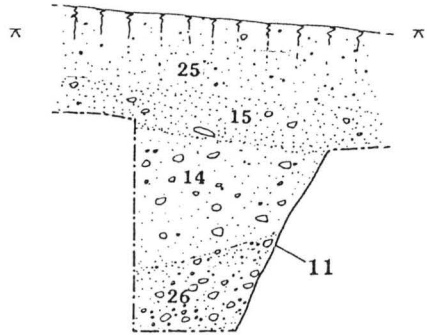
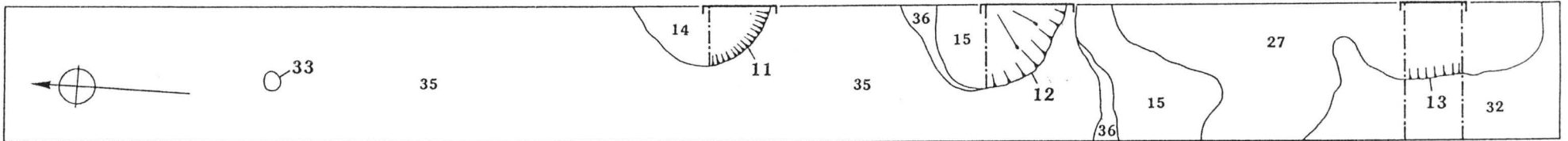
Only a few metres from this pit was a similarly shaped feature (11) partially concealed beneath the eastern baulk of the trench. The upper fill (14) of this feature contained five sherds of medieval pottery and a single sherd of late medieval pottery. An underlying fill (26) also contained three sherds of medieval pottery. This pit was 1.8m in diameter and was excavated to a depth of 0.8m below the surface of the soliflucted chalk but the base was not reached.

At the north end of the trench was a small circular feature (33) 0.34m in diameter cut into the soliflucted chalk. This was interpreted as a posthole and was not excavated, although large pieces of burnt sandstone (possibly heathstone) were present in the fill.

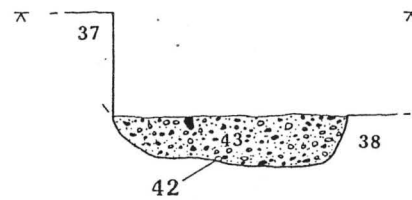
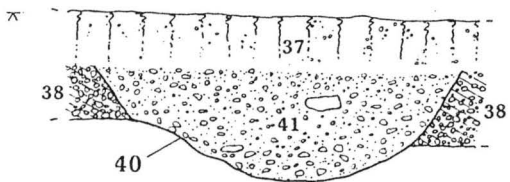
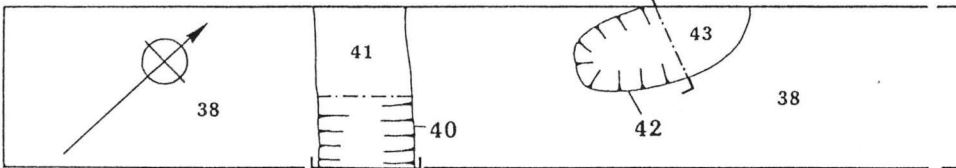
Trench 2

At the south-east end of the trench a human cremation (18) in a ceramic pot was found embedded in a subsoil layer (see Figure 1 for location). No cut was observed through this layer but it is likely that the cremation vessel was placed in a pit cut through the contemporaneous topsoil and positioned directly on the surface of the underlying soliflucted

Trench 1



Trench 3



KEY

- Limit of excavation
- Flint
- Burnt flint
- Topsoil
- Sandy loam
- Sandy clay
- Gravel

Sections: 0 1 2 m

Plans: 0 5 10 m

Fig. 2: Plans and sections - Trenches 1 and 3

chalk. The vessel was disturbed and partially removed during machining and a quantity of burnt bone and pottery was recovered from the adjacent spoil-heap (23). The undisturbed part of the vessel was removed with its contents intact for analysis in the laboratory. The vessel is a Black-Burnished Ware jar of Romano-British date (see 4.1 below).

Trench 3

Close to the south-western end of the trench was a shallow ditch (40) 0.95m wide and 0.35m deep, aligned north-west/south-east, parallel to the river. Three sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the fill (41) of this ditch. Immediately to the north-west of the ditch was a shallow elongated pit (42) 1.95m long and 0.9m wide. The fill (43) contained much burnt flint, around 10%, and was similar to the fills of features recorded in Trench 1. This burnt flint was not collected and no bulk sample was taken.

4. FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

The overall quantification of finds, by category, recovered during the evaluation is summarised on Table 1.

TABLE 1: quantification of finds by feature / deposit (no/wt in grammes)
C.B.M - ceramic building material

Trench - Feature	Roman pottery	Medieval and later pottery	C.B,M	Worked flint	Burnt flint	Stone	Human Bone	Animal bone
1 - Pit 11	-	9 / 152g	-	3 / 39g	252g	1 / 170g	-	3 / 27g
1 - Pit 12	-	-	-	3 / 4g	6794g	-	-	-
1 - Cut 13	-	-	-	6 / 90g	1640g	2 / 81g	-	-
1 - layer 15	-	-	-	25 / 260g	390g	-	-	1 / 3g
2 - cremation 18	37 / 369g	-	-	-	-	-	221g	-
2 - gravel	-	-	-	6 / 68g	33g	-	-	-
3 - Ditch 40	-	3 / 26g	5 / 220g	9 / 76g	8g	-	-	5 / 6g
3 - Pit 42	-	-	-	10 / 98g	-	-	-	-
4 - gravel	-	-	-	2 / 20g	-	-	-	-
unstratified finds	-	23 / 200g	-	66 / 1051g	76g	-	-	5 / 53g
TOTALS	37 / 369g	35 / 378g	5 / 220g	130 / 1706g	9193g	3 / 251g	221g	14 / 89g

4.1 The cremation deposit

The vessel

A single vessel containing cremated human bone was recovered from Trench 2, with conjoining sherds from contexts 18 and 23. Only the lower third of the pot remained and numerous fresh fractures were visible. It is a thin-walled, Black-Burnished Ware (BB1) jar from the Poole Harbour potteries. The vessel bears obtuse lattice decoration in a panel around the girth and its outer surface is burnished below the decoration. The obtuse lattice dates the vessel to the later Roman period, from about AD 200 onwards. It is suggested that a 3rd century date is most appropriate due to the absence of any internal rough wiping often

found on 4th century and later vessels (Hearne and Smith 1992, 100; Seager Smith and Davies in press).

The cremated bone

The entire contents (18) of the vessel were processed by flotation at Wessex Archaeology's offices in Salisbury and the cremated bone from the coarse fraction (>4mm) was extracted and weighed. It is considered that the cremated bone recovered by hand (23) is also from this vessel. Large fragments (up to 49mm) of human long bone were recognised together with more fragmentary cremated bone, presumed to be human. The majority of the identifiable fragments were long bone and also probably rib. No cranial or scapula fragments were recognised during the scan. It has not been possible to yet determine whether an adult or a juvenile is represented by the cremation.

Weight of cremated bone (>4mm) from within vessel: context 18..... 184g
Weight of cremated bone recovered from spoil: context 23 37g
Total weight of cremated bone 221g

The carbonised plant remains

A number of cereal grains of at least two species were recognised in the flots and fragments of others were present in the 2mm residue fraction at least. One species may be rye (*Secale* spp.) and the other wheat/barley (*Triticum/Hordeum*). Charcoal, however, was only present as small comminuted fragments, most of which are unidentifiable. The cereal grains are very likely to be contemporaneous with the cremation and thus relate to the Roman agricultural economy if not to the funerary practice itself.

4.2 Medieval and post-medieval pottery

A total of 34 sherds identified as medieval in date were derived from pit 11 in Trench 1, ditch 40 in Trench 3 and from unstratified contexts. The majority of the sherds are comparable to pottery produced by the kilns at Laverstock outside Salisbury (Musty *et al.* 1969). These include both coarsewares, occasionally scratchmarked, found in handmade cooking pot forms, and two sherds from glazed jugs. This material has a broad date range of late 12th to early 14th century. Also present were two sherds of a pale-fired fabric, unglazed, which have a possible source in the Poole Harbour area and a probable date of 13th/14th century.

A single sherd of 19th/20th century whiteware was recovered from an unstratified context in Trench 1.

4.3 Worked flint

Small quantities of worked flint were recorded from a range of features and deposits, and at least two separate industries can be identified within the assemblage. One is distinguished by the unpatinated or lightly patinated mint condition of the pieces, most of which are crude hard-hammer struck flakes, and two broken cores displaying alternate flaking. The only tool was a piercer manufactured on a thermal fragment. A Bronze Age date (c. 2500 - 1000 BC) is considered most likely for this industry.

The pieces which represent the second identified industry were patinated and more rolled, and indicated a slightly more sophisticated technology. Again the assemblage was dominated by flakes, one of which had a faceted butt, and also included two broken cores

and two undiagnostic scrapers manufactured on flakes. This industry is considered to be of Neolithic date (c. 4500 - 2500 BC).

Worked flint was distributed across all aspects of the evaluation area, being found in most of the features and also in the whole depth of the natural gravels wherever they were exposed. The presence of worked flint within the valley gravels is attested elsewhere in the village (J. Keen, pers. comm.) and the mint condition of the pieces associated with the Bronze Age industry indicates knapping activity close to or actually on the gravels. The patination and rolled appearance of the Neolithic material suggests that it has been washed into the valley from the surrounding chalk slopes although it is possible that the movement through the gravels of highly calcareous water could also cause the patination.

Given the presence within the gravels of so much worked flint of both recognised industries, it is not surprising that some pieces were recovered from the features, including those shown to be medieval in date. Only fresh unpatinated material (Bronze Age) was recovered from the burnt flint-filled feature **13** in Trench 1, but both patinated and unpatinated pieces were found in the similar feature **42** in Trench 2.

4.4 Burnt flint

Quantities of burnt flint were recorded from various features (see Table 1) and were also recovered from bulk samples which were taken from the fills of features **12** and **13** in Trench 1. All of the burnt flint was fire-cracked and speckled which indicates that the flint had been heated and then plunged into cold-water. None of the burnt flint was worked. In feature **12**, burnt flint constituted 60% of the fill (**16**) by volume, whereas in feature **13** this figure was reduced to 20%.

4.5 Other finds

The other finds recovered during the course of the evaluation are summarised on Table 1. They comprised small quantities of ceramic building material (probably of medieval date), stone (including a small smoothed piece from feature 13 which may have been used as a whetstone) and animal bone. The animal bone fragments are fragmentary and include long bones from small mammals, along with a rib and tooth fragment.

5. DISCUSSION

The evaluation at Penny's Farm produced evidence of activity across a wide chronological spectrum. Worked flint assemblages of probable Neolithic and Bronze Age date located within the valley gravels can be added to similar previously known material, such as that recovered from a pit in the neighbouring field at Penny's Mead (Wilson and Chowne 1987). Taken together this indicates the high potential for settlement activity on or close to the Crane floodplain in these earlier prehistoric periods. This is of great importance when viewed alongside the well-known monuments, mostly ceremonial, of these periods located within and around Cranborne Chase, including the Dorset Cursus, numerous long barrows and round barrows, and the series of henge monuments at Knowlton.

It is likely that the features filled with large quantities of burnt flint are also prehistoric in date, although the few pieces of worked flint recovered from these fills could have been

derived from the surrounding gravels. The burnt flint is crackled in a distinctive manner as a result of being used for direct heating of water, and this material type is usually associated with activities of Bronze Age date.

A single Romano-British cremation was perhaps the most unexpected find. Although this burial type is well-known within most of the areas occupied during this period, it is very rare within Dorset, where the Durotrigian tradition of inhumation seems to have been preserved. Although cremations have been found in and around the *Civitas* capital at Dorchester, few are known from the more rural areas. In the Cranborne area the only example is a group of four found in the enclosure ditch of a Romano-British settlement on Oakley Down, 5km to the north-west of the village (RCHM 1975, 100).

The discovery of an urban or semi-urban burial tradition at Penny's Farm suggests that a Romano-British settlement is located nearby, possibly focused on the known building at Holwell mentioned above (1.3) which is 1.3km along the valley. It is likely that further Romano-British cremations are located within the development area as these burials are usually found in groups rather than as isolated phenomena.

A pit and a ditch were shown to be of medieval date and may be associated with agricultural activity. The earthworks recorded within the field remain undated and were not examined by excavation during the evaluation. These too could be associated with medieval or later agricultural activity or with small-scale gravel extraction, although the possibility that the earthworks conceal large sub-surface features should not be discounted.

6. THE PROJECT ARCHIVE

The project archive (WA Ref. W549) including the finds is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury. In due course the paper archive will be deposited at the Priest's House Museum, Wimborne. Subject to the prior approval of the landowner, it is also hoped that the finds will be deposited at the museum with the rest of the archive. Wessex Archaeology have notified the Home Office about the discovery of human remains and have applied for a licence to cover the removal of these remains (under Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857) in accordance with legal requirements.

The project archive consists of:-

- File 1:**
- 1.1 Archive index
 - 1.2 The evaluation report
 - 1.3 Background to the project (including project specification)
 - 1.4 Site day book
 - 1.5 Number record / abbreviated context record
 - 1.6 Context record
 - 1.7 The photographic record
 - 1.8 The graphics record
 - 1.9 The level record
 - 1.10 Environmental sample record
 - 1.11 Context finds record
 - 1.12 Finds list by category record

- 1.13 Spot dating and scanning sheets
- 1.14 Worked flint notes
- 1.15 Cremation deposit / environmental material notes
- 1.16 Finds box index

- File 2:**
- 2.1 The project drawings
 - 2.2 The monochrome negatives
 - 2.3 The monochrome contact prints
 - 2.4 The colour transparencies

The finds - 1 box

7. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARIES

Depths given from present ground surface

Trench 1	Description	Context
0m - 0.20m	Dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil	25
0.20m - 0.73m	Very dark greyish brown gravelly sandy loam subsoil	15
Feature 11	Steep, straight sided pit, 1.80m in diameter, partially under the eastern baulk in the central part of the trench. Excavated to 1.20m limit and not bottomed. Filled with 26 , a brown chalky loam, which was overlain by 14 , a dark brown silty loam	
Feature 12	Shallow pit with irregular sides and bottom, 2.15m in diameter, partially under the eastern baulk in the southern part of the trench. 0.36m deep. Filled with 16 , a black sandy loam with frequent burnt flints	
Feature 13	A shallow irregularly shaped feature with gently sloping sides and a flat bottom. 5.75m long and <1.80m wide. Filled with 27 , a black sandy loam with frequent burnt flints	
Feature 33	A circular feature 0.34 in diameter, not excavated but interpreted as a post-hole. Filled with 34 , a dark brown silty clay containing fragments of burnt sandstone	
> 0.46m	Degraded chalk layer	36
> 0.51m	Soliflucted chalk, relationship with 32 unknown	35
> 0.73m	Flint gravel with a sandy matrix	32
	Unstratified finds	45

Trench 2		
0m - 0.25m	Very dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil	19
0.25m - 0.40m	Very dark greyish brown sandy loam subsoil, stonier than overlying 19	20
0.40m - 0.55m	Greyish brown clay loam subsoil	21
Feature 17	Circular scoop, 0.13m in diameter with straight sides and a flat bottom, into which was deposited the pot containing cremation 18	
> 0.55m	Flint gravel with a silty clay matrix	24
> 0.55m	Soliflucted chalk, relationship with 24 unknown	22
	Unstratified finds, probably derived from cremation 18	23

Trench 3		
0m - 0.20m	Very dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil	37
0.20m - 0.80m	Dark brown sandy loam subsoil	44
Feature 40	Shallow linear feature, 0.95m wide and 0.35 deep, running NW/SE across the trench, with concave sides and a concave base. Filled with 41 , a dark brown stony sandy loam	
Feature 42	A shallow elongated pit, ovoid in plan, measuring 1.95m long, 0.90m wide and 0.20m deep, with concave sides and base. Filled with 43 , a very dark grey sandy loam containing burnt flint	
> 1.20m	Flint gravel with a sandy clay matrix	38
> 1.20m	Redeposited chalk, underlies 38	39

Trench 4		
0m - 0.16m	Very dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil	28
0.16m - 0.37m	Dark brown sandy loam subsoil	29
> 0.37m	Flint gravel with a sandy clay matrix	30
> 0.37m	Redeposited chalk, underlies 30	31