Report on a Programme of Archaeological Works at Whitehouse Farm, Upper Lambourn, West Berkshire

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This document sets out the results from a programme of archaeological works carried out by West Sussex Archaeology Ltd at Whitehouse Farm, Upper Lambourn, West Berkshire. The works, involving the excavation of eight trial trenches, were carried out in June 2019 in order to evaluate the site of a proposed new racing stable complex.

Only two trenches contained any archaeological features or artefacts: in Trench 1, adjacent to the modern road, a drain and a trench were found associated with a row of five 20th century buildings seen on a map of 1960 and probably linked to the use of Upper Lambourn in WWII by the US military; and Trench 2 in the northern corner of the site, where a single small pit of Middle Bronze Age date was excavated, together with three associated stake-holes.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Figure 1 Site location. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

1. Whitehouse Farm lies within the upper reaches of a valley of the Lambourn Downs, in West Berkshire, on the south-west side of the village of Upper Lambourn. To the south-east, and further down the valley, lies the larger settlement Lambourn, with the source of the River Lambourn lying between the two (see Figs.1 & 2). The site itself sits at 135m aOD and is centred at OS grid reference SU 3171 7982. The underlying geology of the site is the White Chalk Subgroup, overlain to the north-east by Head deposits.

2. The landowner has received planning permission from West Berkshire Council for the formation of a racing stable complex (18/02967/COMIND). Condition 4 of that permission stated that: "No development hereby permitted shall take place within the application site until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall incorporate and be undertaken in accordance with the approved scheme."

3. West Sussex Archaeology Ltd (WSA) was appointed by the landowner to write and submit the Written Scheme of Investigation required by this condition (Anelay 2019) and this report details the results of the ensuing archaeological work which consisted of eight trial trenches excavated between 24th – 28th June 2019, by George Anelay of WSA. The project archive will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum (Acc No. NEBYM:2020.2).

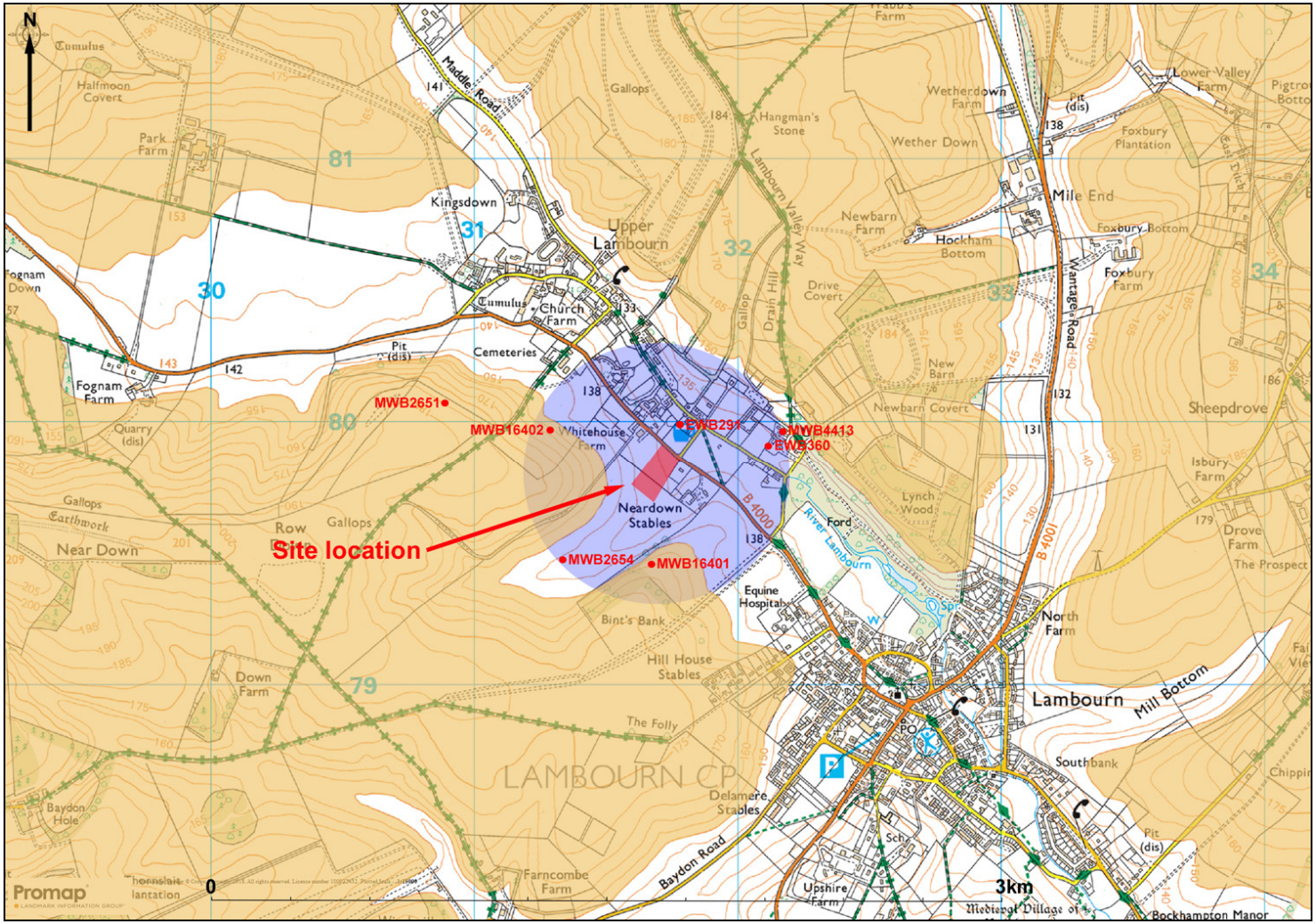


Figure 2 Site location, with HER data. Land above the 150m contour is shaded in buff.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

1. While no known archaeological artefacts or features have been previously found within the site of the proposed racing stable, it is located within a wider area rich in prehistoric and Romano-British remains. With reference to the current site, the cropmarks and earthworks of lynchets and terraces of this period have been previously recorded on the valley sides to the south-west (WBC HER Nos. MWB2651, MWB16402 & MWB16401), together with two possible Bronze Age barrows (WBC HER No. MWB2654), and, c.100m to the north, three Roman burials (WBC HER No. EWB291). A further burial, of probable prehistoric date, was found c.425m to the north-east of the site (WBC HER No. MWB4413). Later evidence of a Late-Saxon date for the origins of the existing village of Upper Lambourn was found in the form of pits, ditches and artefacts c.350m to the north-north-east of the site (WBC HER No. EWB360).

2. The evidence summarised above indicates that the site lies within a farmed landscape dating from at least the Bronze Age onwards, with the valley sides covered by a network of fields, with settlement probably located in the valley bottoms. The latter is suggested by the presence of prehistoric and Romano-British burials, and certainly later by the finds of Saxon features and artefacts. It was therefore considered possible that the development site, situated as it is towards the centre of the valley, may contain further such remains.

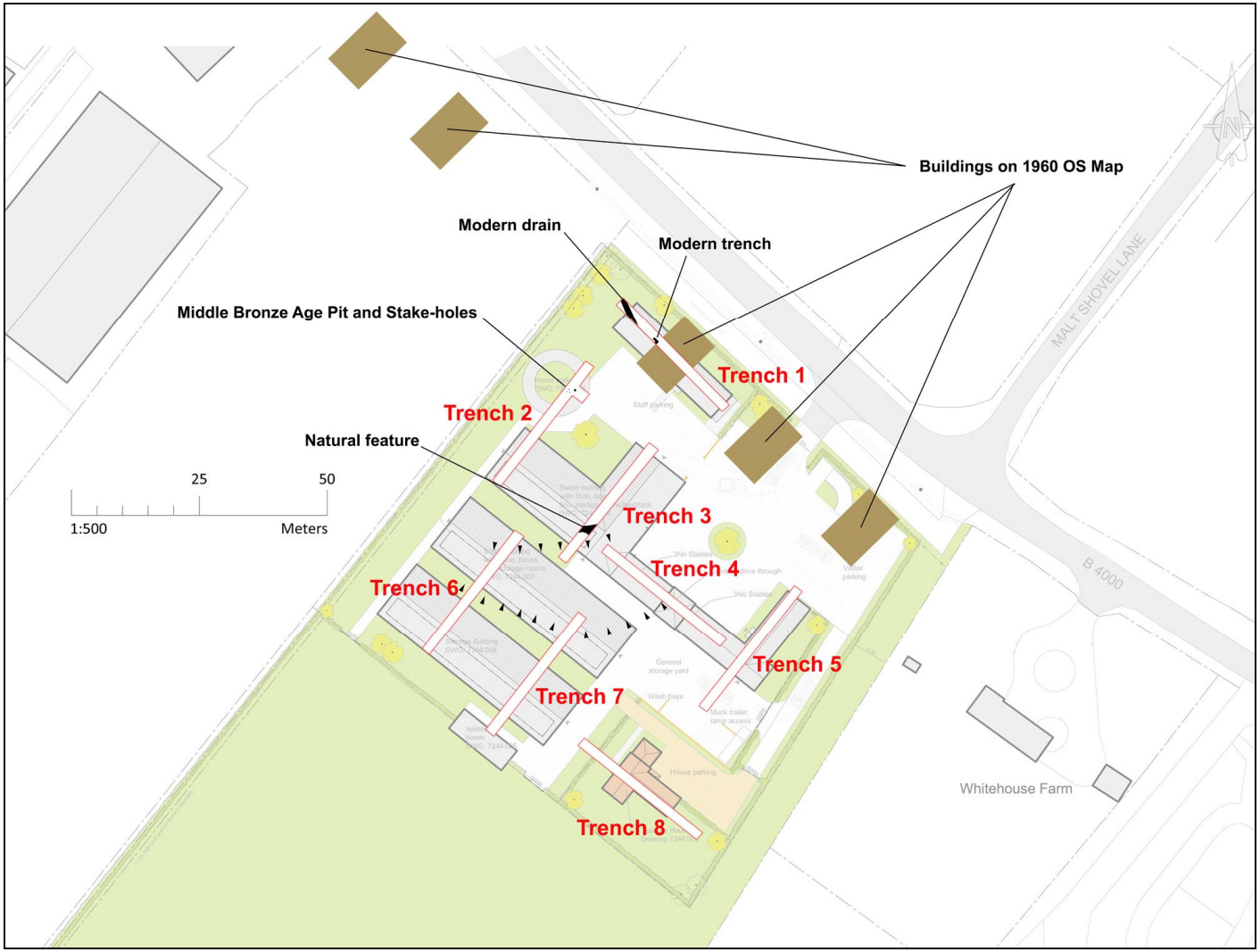


Figure 3 Plan of trenches and features

RESULTS

1. Eight trenches were excavated in total, all 30m long and 1.8m wide, with the exception of Trench 2, where a 2.5m extension was made off its south-eastern side, towards its north-eastern end, in order to fully expose an archaeological feature. Within all the trenches the base geology consisted of abraded chalk overlain by an orange/red clay, which infilled widespread pockets and channels in the chalk's surface.

2. **Trench 1** contained 0.35m of dark brown topsoil overlying 0.2 – 0.35m of mid brown subsoil (thickening to the north-west), over the natural orange/red clay and chalk. Two archaeological features were identified within the trench: at its north-west end a modern ceramic drain trench was revealed, c.1m wide and running approximately north-west to south-east; and to the south-east, c.4m beyond where this drain met the south-west baulk of the trench, an "L"-shaped trench was revealed, 0.45m wide where it cut the subsoil layer and 0.3m at its base, which lay 0.5m below the modern ground surface. It was capped with a thin layer of concrete. Contained within the dark brown silt filling this trench were fragments of broken glass, charcoal, twisted strips of angle iron and steel springs (the latter likely to be the remains of a bed). Both these modern features, the drain trench and the "L"-shaped trench, are almost certainly associated with one of a line of rectangular buildings shown on the OS 1:10,560 map of 1960 (but not on that of 1925), probably erected during WWII (the 501st US parachute regiment were stationed here in the build-up to D-Day) and later demolished.

Figure 4 Section across the "L"-shaped trench in Trench 1, looking south-west and showing the angle iron, concrete and a mid-20th century glass bottle from its fill

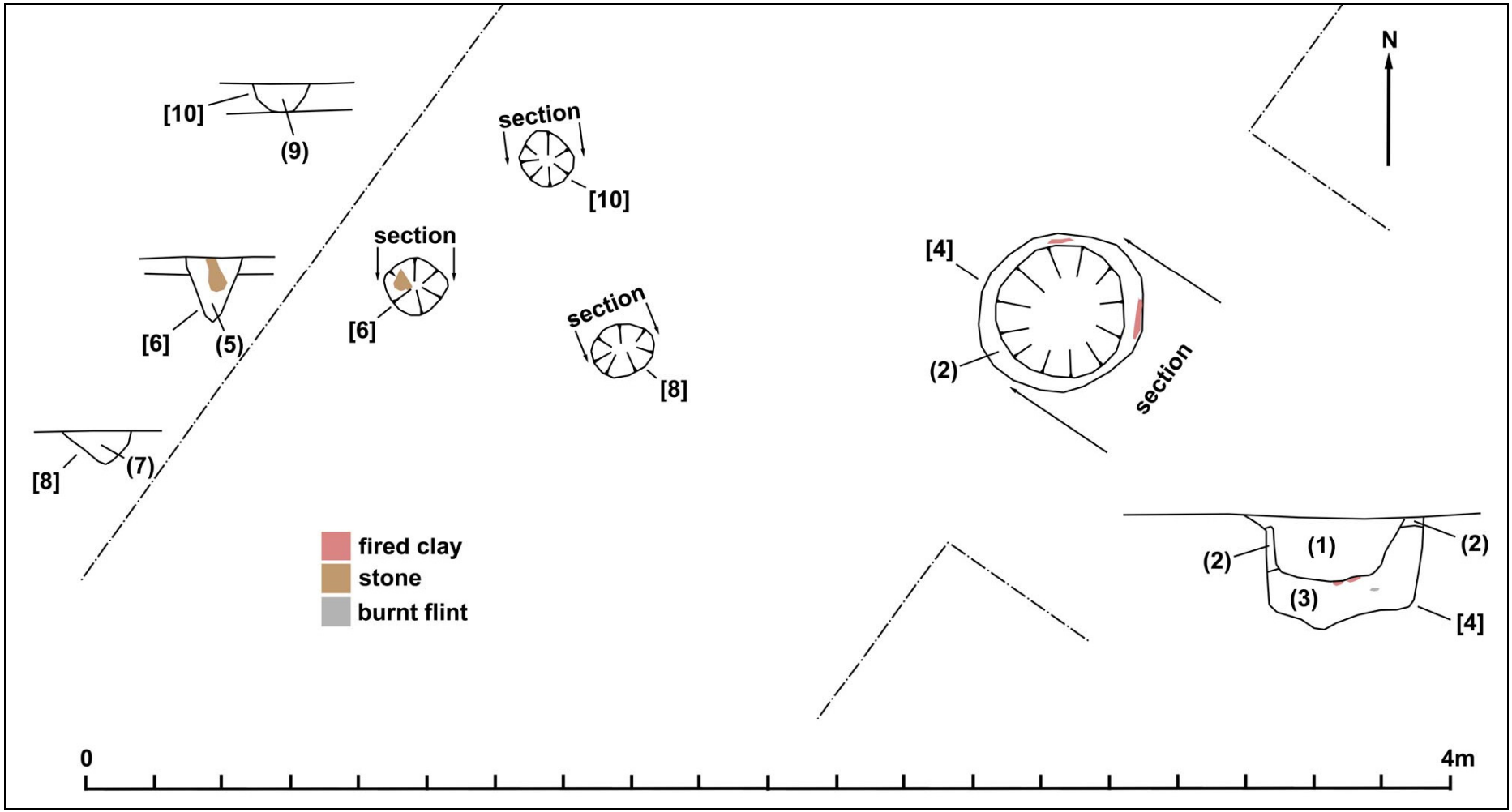


Figure 5 Plan and sections of features in Trench 2

Figure 6 Pit [4] and Stake-holes [6], [8] & [10] in Trench 2 after excavation, looking west

3. **Trench 2** contained 0.3m of dark brown topsoil overlying 0.35 – 0.45m of mid brown subsoil (thickening to the north-east), over the natural orange/red clay and chalk. Four archaeological features were identified within the trench: a small circular pit [4], with three, probably associated stake-holes ([6], [8] & [10]), lying 1.5m to the south-west.

Figure 7 Pit [4] as first recorded in the side of Trench 2, before the latter it was extended to the south-east

1. Pit [4] was circular, 0.45m in diameter, with near vertical sides, a flat base and was *c.*0.3m deep (measured from the surface of the natural clay). It would appear to either have been cut before much of the build-up of the colluvial subsoil above, even allowing for subsequent ploughing. It was filled with a base layer (3) of clay/silt, *c.*0.1m thick, containing a high percentage of charcoal, occasional unworked burnt flint and burnt chalk fragments, but no fired clay. Above this was an upper fill (1) of a red/brown clay silt, *c.*0.2m thick, containing occasional to frequent fragments of fired clay and charcoal. Around the upper part of the pit was band of red/brown clay silt containing much more frequent fired clay and occasional charcoal. In places the natural clay of the upper sides of the pit had been burnt red *in situ*. The nature of these layers would suggest that a charcoal fire had been lit within the base of the pit of sufficient strength to fire its sides above the level of the charcoal itself. While it is possible that the pit once had a clay superstructure, none of the surviving fragments were sufficiently large to provide any clue as to its form, and they may all have originated merely from the burning of the pit's sides. The charcoal came largely from oak, but with some *Maloideae* (hawthorn, apple, service/rowan etc.) (see Appendix 1). A radiocarbon date obtained from the latter

gave a calibrated date of 1388-1207 cal BC (95.4% probability) (see Appendix 2), firmly within the Middle Bronze Age. No artefacts were recovered from the pit's fills. The lack of any metal-working debris, or charred plant remains (see Appendix 3), would suggest that the pit was not associated with a metal-working furnace or bread oven.

Figure 8 Pit [4] after half-sectioning and the removal of Fill (1), looking north-west

Figure 9 Stake-holes [6], [8] & [10] after half-sectioning, looking north

2. Stake-holes [6], [8] & [10] were laid out in a rough triangle to the south-west of Pit [4]. They were broadly comparable in size, being 0.17-0.2m in diameter and 0.1-0.2m deep. All were filled by a brown clay silt ((5), (7) & (9)) containing occasional small fragments of charcoal. The distance between [10] & [8] was 0.6m, between [8] & [6] 0.65m, while that between [6] & [10] was 0.55m. The fill of stake-hole [6] contained a single broken block of sarsen stone (see Figure 5), showing some signs of percussive wear on one face. It may have acted as packing for a stake, but the lack of any other examples suggests instead that it may have been discarded into the stake-hole after use as a possible hammer stone.

3. It is probable that Pit [4] and its neighbouring stake-holes form a contemporary group, judging by their relative position, the lack of any other surrounding features, and the presence of charcoal within all their fills. Pit [4] is clearly a fire-pit of some form, although for what purpose, and how it then related to its neighbouring triangle of stake-holes is unclear.

4. **Trench 3** contained 0.35m of dark brown topsoil overlying 0 – 0.35m of mid-brown subsoil (thickening to the south-west), over the natural orange/red clay and chalk. Approximately 8m from the trench's south-west end a seemingly linear feature was excavated in the belief that it could represent an infilled ditch. In the event it proved to be of a very irregular profile, filled with the natural orange/red clay, suggesting that it is in fact merely another of the clay-filled pockets found in the surface of the chalk throughout the trenches. An equally irregular spread of orange/brown clay silt which partly overlay this feature was almost certainly created by root disturbance. No artefacts were found in either deposit.

Figure 10 Natural feature in Trench 3, looking west

5. While **Trench 4** contained no archaeological features or artefacts, at its north-west end was an infilled natural gully within the chalk, 1.4m deep, the edges of which were also picked up at the south-west end of Trench 3 and the north-east ends of Trenches 6 & 7 (see Figure 3 where its limits are marked with hacheurs). It was infilled with 0.3m of natural orange/red clay, below 0.15m of a pale red/brown clay silt, then 0.5m of the mid-brown subsoil and 0.15m of mid grey/brown silt, capped by 0.45m of dark brown topsoil. These are all likely to be colluvial layers that have built up within the gully to the extent that the field no longer shows any evidence of a depression at all. At the south-east end of the trench, outside of the gully, the topsoil lay directly over the natural chalk.

Figure 11 The natural gully observed in Trenches 3, 4, 6 & 7, here as it crosses Trench 6, looking south-west

6. **Trench 5** contained 0.35m of dark brown topsoil, overlying the natural orange/red clay and chalk at either end of the trench, but lying above up to 0.2m of mid brown subsoil towards the centre of the trench where there was a slight depression in the underlying chalk.

7. Towards the north-eastern end of **Trench 6** was a further stretch of the same infilled gully found in Trench 4, although here slightly shallower in depth at 1.1m. It was infilled with 0.25m of orange/red clay and 0.5m of mid-brown subsoil under 0.4m of dark brown topsoil. Outside of this gully the topsoil (0.35m thick) lay directly on the natural orange/red clay and chalk.

8. **Trench 7** contained 0.3m of dark brown topsoil overlying the natural orange/red clay and chalk, except at its extreme north-east end, where part of the same gully found in Trenches 3, 4 & 6 was observed. Here the gully was infilled with 0.2m of mid-brown subsoil under the topsoil.

9. **Trench 8** contained 0.3m of dark brown topsoil, overlying 0.3m of mid brown subsoil over the natural orange/red clay and chalk, except at its south-eastern end, where the subsoil was absent as the underlying chalk sloped upwards.

CONCLUSION

1. The present flat and even appearance of the field within which these archaeological works took place belies a more convoluted surface to the chalk beneath. This would appear to centre upon a broadly west-east running gully that once crossed the centre of the site, running down from the slopes to the west. The infilling of this gully, and the resulting smoothing out of all the earlier contours, probably took place gradually, possibly beginning during the Middle Bronze Age, since a pit dating to this period is cut from low down in the overlying colluvial deposits. The processes behind the washing of these soils down the slopes are likely to have been associated with the cultivation of the landscape, which presumably accelerated in the centuries following.

2. The Middle Bronze Age pit represents the earliest evidence for any human activity on the site, although its exact nature is uncertain. It was clearly used as a fire-pit, judging by the charcoal within its base and the burnt nature of the clay forming its sides, but no further evidence survives to indicate what the fire was for. A triangle of stake-holes immediately adjacent is probably directly associated with the pit, possibly forming the support for a tripod arrangement of stakes, but again its function is unknown. It would appear that these features are isolated remains, since no other contemporary artefacts or features were found on the site.

3. Indeed no further artefacts of features of any period were found within the trenches, save for a drain and small trench dating to the mid-20th

century, associated with a series of buildings that were probably utilised by the US military when they were stationed in Upper Lambourn in the lead-up to D-Day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anelay, G. 2019 ***Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Works at Whitehouse Farm, Upper Lambourn, West Berkshire***. Unpublished.

APPENDIX 1 Report on Charcoal for radiocarbon dating by Dana Challinor

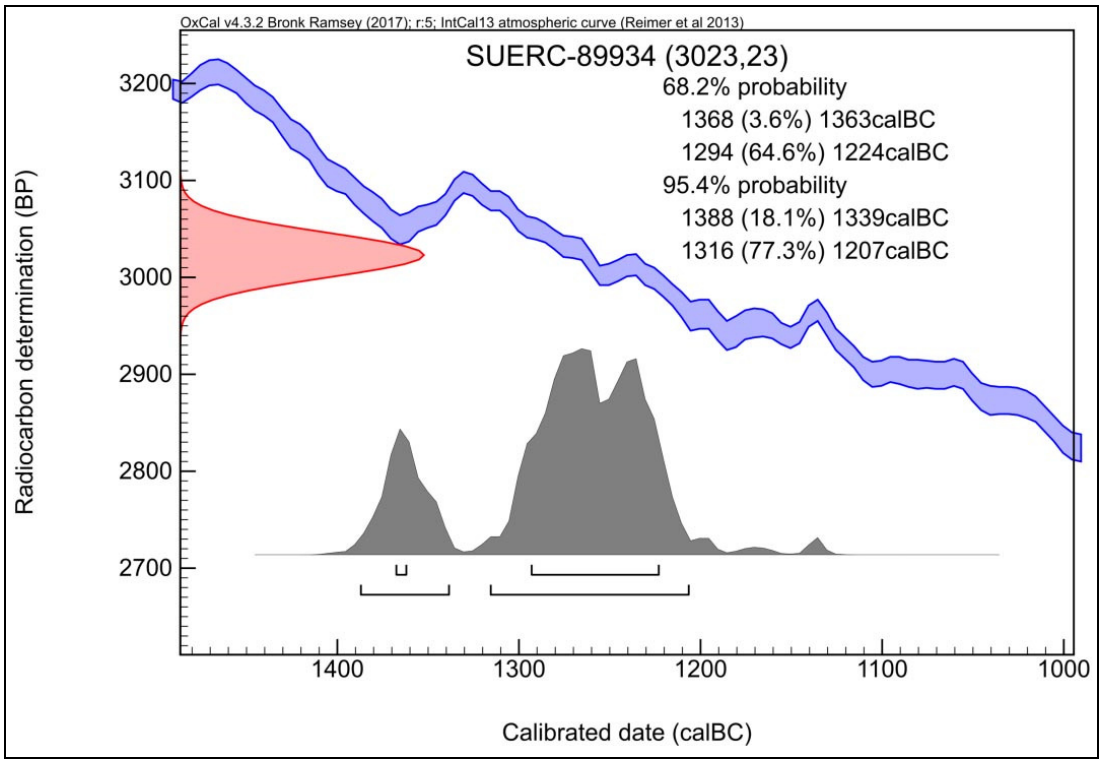
A single sample (3) was submitted for the identification and selection of charcoal for radiocarbon dating. Standard procedures for the identification of charcoal were followed, with fragments mounted in a sand bath for examination at high magnification.

Some large fragments were preserved but the condition of the charcoal was fair to poor, with a strong covering of sediment, moderate to high levels of vitrification and frequent radial cracks. Most of the charcoal appeared to be *Quercus sp*. (oak), with occasional roundwood fragments of *Maloideae* (hawthorn, apple, service/rowan etc.). The oak included lots of heartwood, some with slow growth and 20+ growth rings.

A single fragment of short-lived roundwood was selected for dating and placed in a separate tube:

- *Maloideae* x 1; roundwood with preserved bark (no pith), 12 years+

APPENDIX 2 Radiocarbon Date (SUERC)



APPENDIX 3 Environmental assessment of samples from Whitehouse Farm, Upper Lambourn (Berkshire) By Julie-Anne Bouchard-Perron

Introduction

A 100% sample of Pit [4] was collected during the excavations at Whitehouse Farm in Upper Lambourn, Berkshire. One flot from the feature was submitted for charcoal assessment and to select material for radiocarbon dating (Challinor, 2019). Two additional flots were submitted for environmental assessment to determine whether further information could be drawn from other lines of evidence.

Method

The samples were floated by George Anelay using a 250µm mesh to collect the flots and a 1mm mesh to collect the residues. The flots and residues were left to dry at room temperature.

All the material submitted for assessment was scanned using a stereomicroscope between 2x and 40x magnification with the aim of recording the representation of different plant categories (grains, chaff, other plants) on an abundance scale (Table 1). At the same time, the occurrence of taxa that could be identified quickly was noted. The presence of charcoal, bones, molluscs and finds was also noted.

The results of the assessment are presented in Table 2. The taxa discussed in the text are designated by their English name first and by their scientific name in brackets. Nomenclature follows Stace (1997) for wild plants and Zohary and Hopf (2000, tables 3 and 5 - traditional classification) for cereals.

Results and discussion

Besides relatively high densities of charcoal, the flots from Whitehouse Farm comprised very few organic remains. They included low quantities of molluscs some of which belongs to the genus Cecilioides, small burrowing land snails. Their number is not enough for analysis to provide significant results, especially as they may well be intrusive. In addition, Sample 3 comprised some uncarbonised plant remains belonging to knotweed (Fallopia convolvulus (L.) Á. Löve) and the daisy family (Asteraceae). These remains are too few in number to support any interpretation and it is possible that they are also intrusive. The only other organic remains recorded in Samples 1 and 2 are amorphous carbonised fragments. Their overall state does not allow for identification. Further analysis of this material is not recommended.

References

Challinor, D. 2019 Whitehouse farm, Upper Lambourn - Charcoal for radiocarbon dating. Unpublished report submitted to George Anelay.

Stace, C 1997 New Flora of the British Isles. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Zohary, D, and Hopf, M 2000 Domestication of plants in the Old World, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Table 1: Abundance scale used

Abundance scale		Number of items
x	Rare	1-5
xx	Frequent	6-25
xxx	Common	26-100
xxxx	Abundant	101-500
xxxxx	Super abundant	500+

Table 2: Assessment results

Sample	Fraction	Charcoal	Molluscs	Uncarbonised plant remains	Indeterminate	Notes
1	Flot	xxx	xx		x	Molluscs incl. cecilioides; Amorphous carbonised organic remains
2	Flot	xxxx	x		x	Molluscs incl. cecilioides; Amorphous carbonised organic remains
2	Residue	xxx				
3	Flot	xxxx	xxx	x		Molluscs incl. cecilioides; Uncarbonised knotweed (*Fallopia convolvulus* (L.) Á. Löve) and daisy family (Asteraceae) seeds
3	Residue	xxxxx				