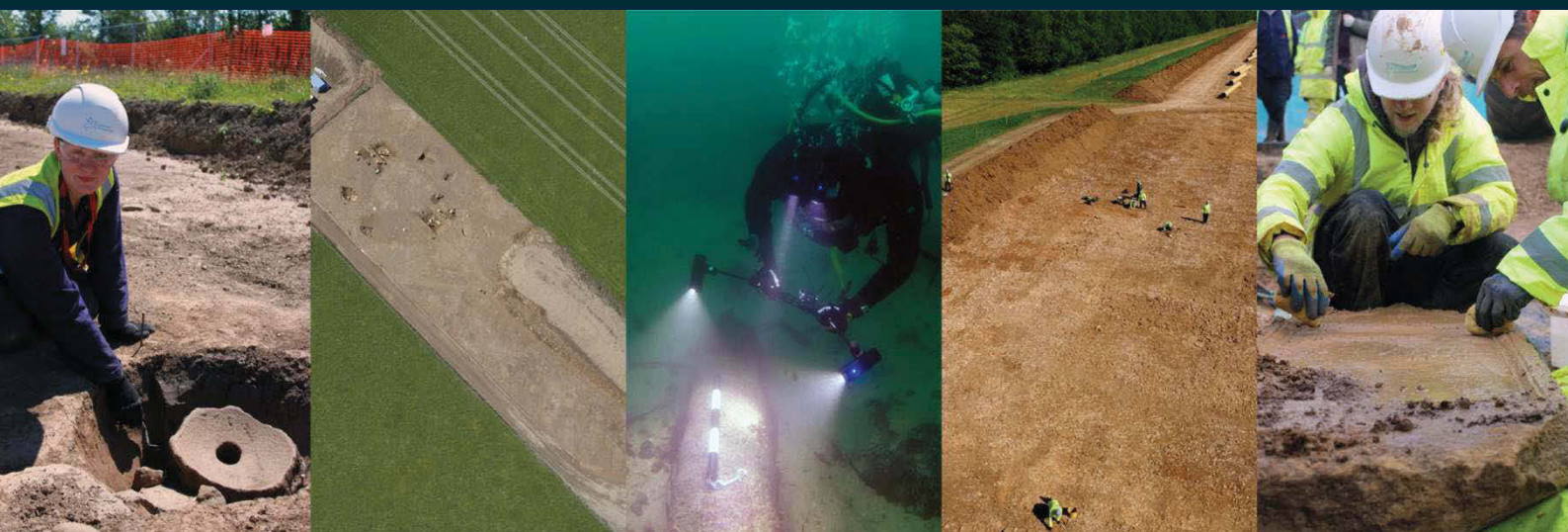


Cloakham Lawns Axminster Devon

*Publication report for Proceedings of the Devon
Archaeological Society*



on behalf of
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CA Report: 16671

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Publication report for Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society

EARLY NEOLITHIC PITS AND A LATER IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT CLOAKHAM LAWNS, AXMINSTER

by JONATHAN HART and STEPHEN SHELDON

*with contributions by Sarah Cobain, E.R. McSloy, Jacky Sommerville and
Dr T.P. Young*

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Table 1 Radiocarbon dating results

Excavation on the edge of Axminster, overlooking the River Axe, identified a possible Early Neolithic settlement consisting of pits and a possible post-built structure. These features were associated with radiocarbon determinations within the mid fourth millennium BC.

During the later Iron Age an unenclosed roundhouse settlement was created. This included what was probably a dwelling with an ancillary working area or building. The site remained in use during the Late Iron Age/Early Roman period, possibly retaining some elements of the later Iron Age settlement, and may have been contemporary with the founding of the Roman fort at Woodbury, 2km to the south, during the AD 50s–70s.

INTRODUCTION

During January and February 2014 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) undertook excavations at Cloakham Lawns, Axminster (centred on NGR: SY 3037 9921; Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Bovis Homes Ltd as part of a condition attached to planning permission for mixed residential, commercial and recreational development, and was monitored by Stephen Reed, Archaeological Officer, Devon County Council Historic Environment Team.

The development area lies on the northern edge of Axminster adjacent to the A358 and consisted of pasture and parts of a sports ground prior to development. Its highest point, alongside the A358, is at 50m aOD and the ground level falls away westwards, forming the eastern slope of the River Axe valley. The wider landscape comprises rolling hills cut by tributaries of the Axe, themselves often within steep-sided valleys. The Blackdown Hills are 8km to the north and the Axe meets the coast 10km to the south-west. The underlying bedrock comprises Jurassic and Triassic Blue Lias Formations (limestone and mudstone) overlain by superficial deposits of Quaternary River Terrace Sand and Gravel (BGS 2013) on which the site sits.

Archaeological background

No prehistoric remains were recorded within the development area prior to the works reported on here (CA 2009). The earliest known remains within the immediate vicinity comprise the Fosse Way Roman road, broadly followed by the A358. A Roman fort of the AD 50s–70s is located 2km to the south at Woodbury Farm (Fig. 1), which was also the location of later Roman civilian settlement. Medieval settlement was focused close to the north of the site at Weycroft and to the south at Axminster, and the development area probably lay within open fields throughout the Middle Ages. The earliest map to depict the development area, the 1778 *Map of the Manor of Axminster* (extract shown as Fig. 9), shows the site as having lain within fields. During the Second World War the development area lay

on the defensive Taunton Stop Line, remains of which survived within the development area at the time of fieldwork, including an anti-tank cube, an infilled anti-tank ditch and a buried pillbox.

Archaeological works undertaken in advance of the development began with a desk-based assessment (CA 2009). A subsequent geophysical survey identified two possible ditches as well as modern remains, including the buried pillbox (PCG 2010). A trial trench evaluation revealed ditches close to the A358 (CA 2010). These were on a different alignment to post-medieval and later boundaries and contained Roman pottery and metallurgical residues. As a result of these preliminary works, the part of the development area containing the Roman ditches was identified as requiring further excavation, and this area, henceforth 'the site', an area of 0.6ha (Figs 1–3), was excavated in January and February 2014.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Archaeological features were concentrated within the southern part of the site and included ditches, pits and postholes dating to the Early Neolithic to modern periods (Figs 2 and 3). Plough scars (not shown) across the southern part of the site suggest that this area may have been horizontally truncated, which may have resulted in the loss of shallow features and layered deposits; no obvious truncation was noted in the northern part of the site. In general, features were well defined, but the acidic soils preserved very little bone.

Period 1: Early Neolithic (c. 3750–3500 BC)

Early Neolithic features were found within the southernmost part of the site and comprised pits and postholes (Fig. 4). They were dated by three radiocarbon determinations which fell within the mid fourth millennium BC, along with the presence of flints consistent with Early Neolithic dating, and a small assemblage of pottery.

The main concentration of Early Neolithic features comprised five large pits and three smaller pits/postholes. The five large pits were oval cuts with fairly bowl-shaped profiles and were 2.5–3.2m long and 0.3–0.5m deep (Fig. 5, sections AA–CC). All were filled by homogenous grey-brown clay sand deposits and together yielded a small assemblage of flint and chert flakes, cores and blades. Pit 10318 contained the second largest lithic assemblage on the site along with twenty sherds of Early Neolithic pottery, including a rimsherd from a plain bowl-type vessel, the only closely identifiable early prehistoric vessel form from the site. A charcoal fragment from this pit was radiocarbon dated to 3766–3647 cal. BC (SUERC-62306; 95.4% probability).

Pit 10318 truncated pit/posthole 10320, which was therefore earlier and may also have been Early Neolithic. This and the two other pits/postholes (10311 and 10332) located near the larger pits were up to 0.5m wide and 0.25m deep with bowl-shaped profiles (Fig. 5, sections CC–EE). They contained dark grey-brown clay sand fills; that within pit/posthole 10332 included a sherd of Early Neolithic pottery and two flint flakes. Pit/posthole 10311 contained a further Early Neolithic potsherd along with a scrap of unidentifiable animal bone and the largest assemblages of lithics, charred plant remains and charcoal from the early prehistoric features. Amongst these were burnt unworked flints, unburnt flint and chert blades and knapping debris (cores, chips, shatter and flakes), charred hazelnut shells, a few unidentifiable charred cereal grains and fuelwood charcoal, mainly from oak. A charred hazelnut shell from this fill was radiocarbon dated to 3649–3522 cal. BC (SUERC-62301; 95.4% probability).

A further bowl-shaped pit/posthole, 10316, was found 10m south-west of the main concentration of Early Neolithic features. It was comparable in size and shape (Fig. 5, section FF) to the other small pits/postholes and contained two sherds of Early Neolithic pottery, a worked flint flake and a fragment of unidentifiable animal bone. Charcoal from this pit was radiocarbon dated to 3695–3529 cal. BC (SUERC-62302; 95.4% probability).

Flint and chert, by Jacky Sommerville

In total, 372 flint and chert items (1.034kg) were recovered from the site, along with 216 pieces (293g) of burnt but unworked flint or chert. The distribution (by count) of the flints, excluding burnt flint and chips, is shown on Figure 6. The raw material is mostly flint but includes 59 Greensand chert items (17%). Surviving cortex elements suggest sources were mixed and include primary sources such as chalk flint, and secondary sources such as (potentially very local) river gravels. The chert most likely derives from the Blackdown Hills Upper Greensand whilst the nearest source of flint to Axminster is 8km north at Furley/Membury (Newberry 2002, 8). Almost half of the worked lithics came from Neolithic features and these exhibited little damage. The remainder came from undated deposits, or were residual within later deposits and were more frequently damaged (Fig. 6).

A particularly high proportion of chips (débitage measuring <10mm) was present. Three multi-platform cores were retrieved from Neolithic deposits, which had been used to produce flakes, blades and possibly bladelets. One of these cores from pit 10311 was characteristic of the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic periods. In contrast, the proportion of retouched items was notably low, at 2%. A figure of c. 6% is more typical in southern Britain and closer to 10% in areas where flint resources are not readily available (H. Anderson-Whymark, pers. comm.). Retouched items from the site include simple flake tools and two scrapers, none of which are closely dateable. Although most of the flints cannot be used to

date their associated deposits, those consistent with Early Neolithic dating include blades, a blade/bladelet core, evidence of soft hammer percussion (on 11 flakes and blades) and of preparation/abrasion of the striking platform (on 17 items of débitage). Nine bladelets from the Neolithic features are more typical of Mesolithic flintworking and may represent residual items. These were mostly broken and are not sufficient to suggest that the Neolithic features had earlier origins.

Early prehistoric pottery, by E.R. McSloy

Neolithic pottery was recorded from four feature fills and amounted to 70 sherds (169g). A significant proportion (mainly small scraps) came from bulk soil samples. The Early Neolithic dating is supported by evidence from associated lithics and by radiocarbon determinations. The fabrics are described below, integrating comments from Rob Ixer. Most common is a coarsely-gritted polyolithic type utilised for illustrated vessel P1 (Fig. 10). All types are probably local and the chert and sandstone (containing glauconite) inclusions probably derive from the Blackdown Hills Greensand. Although small, the assemblage is noteworthy in not containing any of the gabbroic fabrics which were relatively common at the Hembury causewayed enclosure (Peacock 1969a) and Honeyditches, Seaton (Darvill 1981, 57–8).

Some 65 sherds (146g) are in a coarse polyolithic fabric (POLc) and amount to 0.04 EVE. This fabric is soft with moderately well-smoothed surfaces, though with protruding inclusions resulting in a rough feel. These sherds are either dark grey-brown throughout or have patchy red-brown/dark grey surfaces. They display irregular fracture and contain abundant, angular/sub-rectangular crushed rock (0.5–4mm), including polycrystalline quartz, weathered feldspathic rock and litharanite (coarse-grained sandstone).

Three sherds (18g) occur in a coarse chert-tempered fabric (CHc). This is soft with a rough feel where inclusions protrude and is patchy dark grey-brown and grey-brown. The sherds display irregular fracture and contain abundant, poorly-sorted angular (calcined) chert (0.5–3mm).

Three sherds (5g) are in a fabric with sparse sandstone inclusions (SS). This is soft with moderately well-smoothed surfaces and is dark grey-brown throughout. It has an irregular fracture and contains sparse, sub-angular medium-grained glauconitic sandstone (up to 4mm).

Vessel form is identifiable in only one instance, a sherd from the largest single context group, which came from pit 10318 (Fig. 10, P1). Vessel P1 appears to be a bowl with curving walls and an undifferentiated rounded rim. It is undecorated and belongs within the Early Neolithic plain bowl tradition and to forms Cleal (2004) has described as simple with an open profile. The occurrence of similar forms from the causewayed enclosures at Raddon Hill, Stockleigh Pomeroy (Quinnell 1999), and Maiden Castle, Dorset (Brown 1991),

suggests that they date to 3700–3500 BC, a range compatible with the radiocarbon dates from the current site.

Illustrated sherds (Fig. 10)

P1 Plain bowl with curving walls and simple rim. Fabric POLc. Pit 10318.

Charred plant remains and charcoal, by Sarah Cobain

Samples taken from features 10246, 10318, 10320 and 10316 yielded low concentrations of plant macrofossils and charcoal, amongst which were the charred remains of hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) shells, indeterminate cereal grains/grain fragments and the remains of fuelwood charcoal from oak (*Quercus*), alder/hazel (*Alnus glutinosa*) and hawthorn/rowan/crab apple (*Crataegus monogyna*/*Sorbus*/*Malus sylvestris*). In contrast, a sample from pit/posthole 10311 produced 57 hazelnut shell fragments, a few indeterminate cereal grains and abundant charcoal, mainly from oak, with smaller amounts of maple (*Acer campestre*), alder/hazel, hawthorn/rowan/crab apple and cherry (*Prunus*) species. This material is typical of that found in Neolithic features, with hazelnut being a commonly collected food stuff and cereal used to produce bread or used whole in soups/stews. The charcoal identified suggests that local woodland consisted of stands of oak and maple with shrubby areas of alder/hazel, hawthorn/rowan/crab apple and cherry.

Radiocarbon dating, by Sarah Cobain

Radiocarbon dating was undertaken in order to confirm the dates of three presumed Early Neolithic features; the results are presented in Table 1 and have been calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2009) using the IntCal13 curve (Reimer *et al.* 2013).

Period 2: later Iron Age (c. 200 BC–AD 1)

The site was next occupied during the later Iron Age when two roundhouses (Roundhouses 1 and 2) were built in an apparently unenclosed settlement (Fig. 7). Roundhouse 1 consisted of a penannular ditch (Ditch G), 10.5m in diameter and with a south-east-facing entrance marked by well-defined ditch terminals. The ditch was fairly slight, comprising a flat-based cut up to 0.7m wide and 0.15m deep (Fig. 8, sections GG–HH). Despite almost all of the ditch having been excavated, no post settings were found along its base but it could have supported a non-load bearing wattle and daub wall for a roundhouse. A group of features were found around the roundhouse entrance. Postholes 10066, 10068 and 10058 may have supported upright posts for a doorway just outside the suggested wall-line. All were clearly truncated (Fig. 8, sections II–JJ) but postholes 10058 and 10066 retained the remains of

stone post-packing. Some evidence for repairs was found; posthole 10058 was re-cut by posthole 10060 whilst the shape in plan of posthole 10066 suggests that this too had been re-cut, perhaps at the same time. The function of the outermost posthole, 10072, isn't readily apparent, although it could have supported an external structure, such as a marker post, or have supported part of the doorway. Internally, a further posthole was found, 10052. Again, its function is not certain but it may have been the only remnant of an internal post-ring supporting the weight of the roundhouse roof. Externally, Ditch F was found along the northern and eastern sides of Roundhouse 1. This was a steep-sided, u-profiled cut, 0.6m wide and 0.2m deep (Fig. 8, section KK) and may have provided an eavesdrip or small annexe to the roundhouse. Together, Ditches F and G yielded a small assemblage of fired clay and handmade later Iron Age pottery, much of it concentrated within the northern terminal of Ditch G and along Ditch F. Flints within the ditch fills were probably residual, although it is possible that five chert flakes from the southernmost terminal of Ditch G had been curated in the Iron Age and deliberately deposited.

A cluster of postholes was found immediately south of Roundhouse 1. Of these, only posthole 10219 contained dateable material, comprising two sherds of later Iron Age pottery. However, this pottery and the features' locations close to Roundhouse 1 suggest that these postholes were part of the Iron Age settlement. It is often difficult to reconstruct structural ground plans from such posthole clusters but the settings of at least three four-post structures are suggested on Figure 7. These included evidence for repairs in the form of intercutting postholes (Fig. 8, section LL). A few other features in the same area were probably pits but these were shallow and not comparable to the vertical-sided pits used for grain storage on other late prehistoric sites. The pits and postholes were partially enclosed by a somewhat curvilinear boundary (Ditch L). This ditch was 13m long, 0.7m wide and 0.2m deep with a u-shaped profile. The only finds from Ditch L were six sherds of Early Roman pottery and a prehistoric worked flint flake and although it may have been a Late Iron Age/Early Roman feature, its curving alignment appears to partially enclose the Iron Age four-post structures and it has therefore been interpreted as part of the later Iron Age settlement.

Roundhouse 2 was 8m north-east of Roundhouse 1. Its form is less easy to discern because it extended beyond the edge of excavation and since it was intercutting with later ditches. It included curvilinear Ditch H, with a shallow u-shaped profile up to 0.65m wide and 0.05–0.2m deep (Fig. 8, section MM). Ditch 10135 to the north-east may originally have been a continuation of Ditch H, together perhaps having formed a wall foundation trench analogous to that of Ditch G in Roundhouse 1. Ditches K and 10259 may have provided external boundaries to this roundhouse but the functions of the pits and postholes found within the area enclosed is less clear. Pits/postholes 10171 and 10145 might have been part

of a doorway, but others may have related to activities occurring within the roundhouse, perhaps indicating that this was a working area, although no evidence was found as to the nature of any activities taking place here. Given this, an alternative interpretation for Roundhouse 2 is that this was not the setting of a roundhouse but rather the ditches may have supported structures such as windbreaks, partially enclosing a working area.

Pit/posthole 10035, 8m north-east of Roundhouse 2, contained fragments of fired clay, one of which came from a late prehistoric loomweight (Fig. 11, 1). A second late prehistoric loomweight (Fig. 11, 2) was retrieved from the fill of oven/hearth 10263, 25m south of Roundhouse 1. This was a bowl-shaped cut, 0.9m wide and 0.25m deep, and the substrate around its base and sides had been scorched. Although no lining survived, its fills contained a few fragments of fired clay which may have derived from a superstructure, along with abundant charcoal from oak, a species which provides high temperatures when burnt. Pit/posthole 10300, 12m north-west of oven/hearth 10263, was a steep-sided cut, 0.5m wide and 0.25m deep (Fig. 4; Fig. 8, section NN), and contained two sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Later Iron Age pottery, by E.R. McSloy

The later Iron Age pottery assemblage amounts to 284 sherds (1168g). The largest groups came from Roundhouse 1: Ditch F (100 sherds) and the northernmost terminal of Ditch G (32 sherds). The assemblage is moderately fragmented with a mean sherd weight of 4.3g. All sherds came from handmade vessels and the assemblage is comparable to that from Honeyditches, Seaton (Bidwell and Sylvester 1981, 61–3), with rounded quartz and vesicular types most abundant. The rounded/'polished' quartz grains and chert inclusions seen with fabrics QZc and QZcCH support a local origin from the Blackdown Hills Greensand. The vesicular fabric probably results from leaching of calcareous limestone/fossil shell inclusions, perhaps from the Jurassic outcrops of Dorset although a more local source from the Blackdown Hills is possible (Allan and Langman 2002). Rock-tempered fabric (RT), which is represented by a single 'south-western decorated' vessel (below) must come from a source to the west, most likely the Permian geology of the Exe valley. Peacock's (1969b) study of 'Glastonbury wares' placed material within six groups and an 'unclassified' grouping. Vessels from Cloakham Lawns attributable to this style fall within Peacock's Group 4/'Shell' (fabric VES) and Group 6/'Volcanic' (fabric RT). The majority of decorated vessels however occur in local rounded quartz-bearing fabrics, Peacock's 'Unclassified' grouping.

Forty-nine sherds (420g; 0.50 EVEs) occur in a coarse quartz with sparse flint/chert fabric (QZc). This is hard with a sandy feel and an irregular/hackly fracture and is dark grey or grey-brown throughout. It contains common and moderately-sorted rounded/polished quartz (0.5–0.8mm) which is typically clear or brown-stained; sparse, moderately sorted chert or flint (0.5–1mm) and sparse red-brown iron oxide (0.5mm).

Three sherds (16g) occur in a coarse 'polished' quartz and flint/chert fabric (QZcCH). This is soft with a smooth feel and an irregular fracture and is dark grey throughout. It contains common moderately-sorted polished quartz (0.5–1.5mm) and poorly-sorted angular chert/flint (0.5–3.5mm).

Seventeen sherds (105g; 0.10 EVEs) occur in a fine quartz fabric (QZf). This is hard with a smooth feel and a finely irregular fracture and has a red-brown core and margins with patchy grey/brown surfaces. It contains abundant, well-sorted sub-angular quartz (up to 0.3mm) and sparse rounded/polished quartz (0.5mm).

One hundred and eight sherds (194g; 0.12 EVEs) occur in a vesicular fabric (VES). This is soft with a smooth feel and an irregular fracture. It is grey-brown throughout or with lighter brown surfaces and has an open 'corky' appearance with common sub-rounded voids (0.5–1.5mm).

Thirty-two sherds (168g; from one partial vessel) occur in a 'Rock'-tempered fabric (RT) which is soft with a slightly sandy feel and a dense, finely irregular fracture. It is dark grey throughout and contains common, well-sorted dark-coloured sub-angular igneous or metamorphic rock (0.5–1.2mm); sparse sub-angular quartz (0.5mm) and sparse red-brown iron oxide (0.5mm).

The assemblage includes rim sherds from only nine vessels and the degree of fragmentation makes identification of form difficult. Fineware bowls are present (Fig. 10, P2–P4). P2 is of necked form without-curved, thickened rim, rounded shoulder and narrow cordon at the base of its neck. Six vessels (41 sherds) exhibit decoration comprising scored/incised and impressed motifs including zoned geometric and curvilinear designs. Seven vessels are likely to be of jar/deep bowl proportion, neckless and with bead-like rims (Fig. 10, P5–P6). Most are undecorated; the exception, vessel P6, has a scored geometric zone below the rim. Some evidence for cooking comes from internal carbonaceous residues recorded in three examples.

The fineware bowls compare with the 'South-Western Decorated Ware style' characteristic of later Iron Age assemblages in the south-west (Peacock 1969b; Cunliffe 2005, 108). Although the roots of this style may be earlier, Cunliffe sees its floruit as the 3rd–1st centuries BC, with continuation to the Roman period in some areas. In East Devon, comparable material occurs at the Hembury and Blackbury Castle hillforts (*ibid.*; Young and Richardson 1954, 54–65), and at Seaton (*ibid.* 64, fig. 11, no. 89). The plain jar forms with ovoid or barrel-shaped profiles are a feature of later Iron Age assemblages from southern and south-western Britain. At Maiden Castle they are considered to span the late 2nd century BC and early to middle 1st century BC (Brown 1991), from deposits also containing 'Glastonbury ware'. More locally, at Seaton, bead-rim jars occurred with late pre-Roman

pottery (Bidwell and Silvester 1981) and for the current site an approximate date range of 200 BC–AD 1 is suggested.

Illustrated sherds (Fig. 10)

- P2 Necked bowl crosshatch and geometric zone decoration (South-west decorated ware style). Fabric QZf. Period 2 Ditch F.
- P3 Sherd with scored curvilinear and impressed border (South-west decorated ware style). Fabric QZcCH. Period 2 Ditch F.
- P4 Bead rim from ?bowl. Scored decoration to neck; impressed chevron to rim (Southwest decorated ware style). Fabric VES. Period 2 Ditch F.
- P5 Jar with bead rim and thickened internally. Fabric QZc. Period 2 Ditch F.
- P6 Bead rim from ?jar. Scored geometric zone at neck (Southwest decorated ware style). Fabric VES. Period 2 Ditch G.

Fired clay, by E.R. McSloy

A substantially complete clay weight of corner-perforated triangular form came from pit/posthole 10035 (Fig. 11, 1). It weighs 613g, measures 125mm along its complete face and is 55mm thick with perforations 8–10mm wide. Its fabric contains common fine quartz sand and sparse angular flint inclusions 5–8mm. Less complete triangular clay weight fragments were recorded from oven/hearth 10263 (210g: Fig. 11, 2) and Period 3 Ditch J (26 fragments; 2kg). All are in similar silty fabric containing no flint or burnt-out organics. The common interpretation of such objects is as loomweights for use with vertical (warp-weighted) looms. Tri-perforated forms are characteristic of the Iron Age but were probably used beyond the invasion so the fragments from Ditch J need not be residual. A further 59 fired-clay fragments were too fragmented for certain identification but some contained voids indicative of an organic temper and may have been burnt daub.

Charred plant remains and charcoal, by Sarah Cobain

Charred plant remains and charcoal from Roundhouses 1 and 2 were present in low concentrations and included hazelnut shells, a few grains of wheat and emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) as well as charcoal from oak, maple, alder/hazel, birch (*Betula*), hawthorn/rowan/crab apple, cherry species and blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). Similar remains came in small quantities from the pits and postholes south of Roundhouse 1, although posthole 10186 contained a large assemblage of charcoal, all from oak. The latter potentially represents a post burnt *in situ*, but could equally be hearth or oven debris. Oven/hearth 10263 contained no charred plant remains but instead had abundant charcoal, all oak. Given that residual flints were present in some Iron Age deposits, it is possible that

some of these remains, such as hazelnuts and emmer wheat, derived from the Neolithic activity.

Period 3: Late Iron Age/Early Roman (c. AD 1–100)

During the Late Iron Age/Early Roman period, Ditches B, C, E and J were laid out across the southern part of the site on a co-axial arrangement (Fig. 2). Ditch J cut across Roundhouse 2, which must have been dismantled by this period, although it is conceivable that Roundhouse 1 was retained, in light of which a single Roman sherd from the fill of its wall foundation trench, and the sherds of Roman pottery from Iron Age boundary Ditch L, may not have been intrusive. The ditches were broad and shallow, up to 1m wide and 0.35m deep, and gaps between the ditches were probably entrances. Ditches B, C and E all contained natural infills which included a few sherds of Late Iron Age/Early Roman pottery. Ditch J contained a greater concentration of pottery as well as an iron needle (Fig. 12, 1), iron slag and fragments of fired-clay tuyères (Fig. 12, 2 and 3); Roman finds also came from a probable continuation of this ditch found during the evaluation (ditch 614). Ditch 616, also identified during the evaluation, was probably a roadside ditch alongside the Fosse Way (Fig. 2) and included a sherd of Black-Burnished Ware pottery embedded within iron slag.

Late Iron Age/Roman pottery, by E.R. McSloy

Including material from the evaluation, 145 sherds (1278g) of Late Iron Age/Early Roman pottery were retrieved. Most (124 sherds) came from Ditch J and the overall assemblage is in good condition. Almost all sherds comprise south-east Dorset Black-burnished ware (hereafter BB1), originating from the Poole Harbour area. The only other fabric, ?wheelthrown type LOC BS, is represented by a single base sherd from Ditch J, an open vessel form with a deep foot-ring. Pre-Roman origins for BB1 are well established (Brailsford 1958), including within East Devon (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 90; Bidwell and Sylvester 1981, 66). Identifiable vessel forms among BB1 sherds comprise a jar (cooking pot) with everted rim and a high-shouldered/pedestalled jar (Fig. 10, P7), the full profile of which is preserved. The latter vessel corresponds to Brailsford's 'Durotrigian' Type 2 bowls (Brailsford 1958, 116), forms probably beginning before the conquest and certainly continuing into the first decades afterwards (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 100–1). Overall, the assemblage suggests that Period 3 dates to between the late pre-Roman Iron Age and the early decades of the Roman period and there is no ceramic indication of a significant hiatus from Period 2.

Contemporaneity with the Neronian to earlier Flavian (c. AD 50s–70s) military occupation, evidenced at Woodbury, 2km to the south (Holbrook 1993), is a possibility. Differences in the composition of the assemblages from these sites are apparent, most

notably the absence of the tablewares/specialist wares from Cloakham Lawns, which were a feature of the Woodbury site.

Illustrated sherd (Fig. 10)

P7 High-shouldered jar/deep bowl with bead rim Burnished line decoration below shoulder. (Brailsford 1958 Type 2; Seager Smith and Davies 1993, Type 16). Fabric DOR BB1. Ditch J.

Fired clay and archaeometallurgical residues, by T.P. Young

Ditch J yielded 1120g of ironworking slag and 4195g of fired clay. The slag includes three smithing hearth cakes (SHCs) weighing 286g, 300g and (estimated) 400g, and the fired clay includes at least 26 fragments of block tuyères of unknown length (Fig. 12, 2 and 3). The surviving evidence suggests that the tuyères were approximately square in cross section and were formed from a silty paste, mostly fired to a buff colour. The slags derive from iron smithing and the SHC weights are comparable with those from Roman assemblages, in particular from secondary smithing (blacksmithing), rather than bloomsmithing. The use of ceramic tuyères is unusual for an assemblage of this date. Examples probably used in smithing hearths are known from the Middle to Late Iron Age iron production site at Truro, where dates from four roundhouses spanned the 4th to 1st centuries cal. BC (Young 2008, 4–5). Ceramic tuyères are even rarer from Roman metalworking sites, being only relatively common on iron-smelting sites in south-eastern England. Their use perhaps suggests a persistence of native traditions into the Early Roman period.

Periods 4 and 5: post-medieval and modern

During the post-medieval period parallel ditches were laid out across the site, at right angles to the Fosse Way (Fig. 2). All were cut through the subsoil and they contained post-medieval pottery. These ditches clearly correspond with the boundaries of strip fields depicted on the 1778 *Map of the Manor of Axminster* (Fig. 9) and may have had medieval origins. Curvilinear ditch 10314, near the northern baulk, contained an iron ‘corkscrew picket’ post used for supporting barbed wire. Although this was not *in situ*, it may have related to the Second World War defences.

Undated

A few features remained undated. Most notable were eight pits/postholes, two of which were intercutting, found on a curving alignment in the south-eastern part of the site (Fig. 4). These were circular to oval cuts with profiles that varied widely from steep-sided and flat-based to

pointed with more sloping edges, and were 0.2m–0.6m wide and up 0.35m deep. Each contained up to two silty clay fills. Although these seem in plan to form a coherent group, the alignment included an additional two features of which pit/posthole 10316 produced an Early Neolithic radiocarbon date whilst pit/posthole 10300 contained Iron Age pottery (see above).

DISCUSSION

By Jonathan Hart

The Early Neolithic pits contained a range of finds including pottery, flints, charred food remains and fuelwood charcoal. This assemblage, which includes a high proportion of flint knapping waste, is suggestive of occupation debris. Small clusters of Neolithic pits are not common but development-led archaeology is revealing that they have a widespread distribution across much of Britain, and this holds true for Devon (Henrietta Quinnell, pers. comm.) with examples having been reported on recently from Hayes Farm, Clyst Honiton (Hart *et al.* 2014) and Pixies Parlour, Ottery St Mary (Mudd and Joyce 2014, 16). Such pits are commonly seen as indicative of occupation (Jones and Quinnell 2011, 200; Smythe 2012; Garrow *et al.* 2005). They bear no relation in form to the cylindrical pits used during the later prehistoric period for grain storage, and indeed have no obvious function. Recent interpretations see them as having been excavated to memorialise episodes of occupation (Carver 2012, 111; Thomas 2012, 2). Based on comparison with data from the Exe Valley, the landscape during this period was probably dominated by woodland (Fyfe *et al.* 2003, 179). Within this wooded landscape, clearings would have been made or augmented for occupation by small groups subsisting by a mixture of farming and hunting-gathering. The duration of such occupations may have varied but were presumably measured in years, given the investment involved in creating woodland clearances. It is clear that some of these sites were revisited, often many times: radiocarbon dating of several pit clusters at Kilverstone, Norfolk, showed that each cluster represented a separate episode of occupation (Garrow *et al.* 2005, 156). Living within this tree-dominated landscape, far-ranging views would have been scarce; instead, notable trees, water courses and former clearings would have provided points of physical and conceptual reference. Memorialising settlement sites through the burial of debris representing daily life would have included these within the repertoire of such landmarks.

No contemporary structural remains were found but it is possible that Neolithic houses at this site were built in a form which has left no trace, perhaps using cob or turf walls. However, the alignment of pits/postholes to the east of the Early Neolithic pits is potentially significant but the discrepancy in the two dated examples within this apparently

homogenous group is puzzling. It is possible that the Neolithic-dated pit/posthole (10316) was the only one amongst this alignment to be of that period, with the rest perhaps relating to activities occurring around the Iron Age oven/hearth, 12m to the east. Alternatively, the Iron Age pit/posthole (10300) may be the anomaly, and this alignment (excluding 10300) could represent a series of Neolithic post settings. What these might have supported is not obvious, but they cover an area at least 15m by 6m, a range comparable to that of excavated Neolithic longhouses (Darvill 1996). Such buildings are rare, and their interpretation as dwellings is not always certain, but in Devon a post-built example was recorded at Haldon (Willock 1936; Darvill 1996, fig. 6.4; Gent and Quinnell 1999), whilst a possible trench-founded building of Neolithic date but uncertain size may have been present at Hayes Farm (Hart *et al.* 2014). The finds from Cloakham Lawns reflect a range of activities including flint knapping, wild food gathering and cereal consumption (evidence as to whether or not they were actually cultivated at the site was absent). The few scraps of surviving animal bone could have come from hunted and/or domesticated beasts; both sources were used during this period. Beyond this, the settlement's location would have provided access to a range of resources, including the River Axe, its floodplain and the higher wooded hills to the east, all of which were within easy walking distance. The coast, 10km to the south-west along the River Axe, would also have been readily accessible.

There was no evidence that the site was re-occupied until the later Iron Age when, between c. 200 BC–AD 1, an unenclosed roundhouse settlement was established. This included what was probably a dwelling (Roundhouse 1) with an ancillary working area or building (Roundhouse 2). In the case of Roundhouse 1, the penannular ditch is comparable to the steep-sided, flat-based Late Iron Age example at Middle Burrow Farm, East Worlington, Devon, there interpreted as a wall-foundation trench (Gillard *et al.* 2012, 110). In contrast, later Iron Age penannular ditches at Willand Road, Cullompton, had more rounded profiles and were interpreted as eavesdrip gullies (Hood 2010, 80). The Middle Burrow Farm example included an inner post-ring, which would have supported the weight of the roof, and this may also have been the case for Cloakham Lawns Roundhouse 1. At 10.5m in diameter, the wall line of Roundhouse 1 is slightly smaller than that at Middle Burrow Farm (12.25m) but sits within the size range of the fairly limited corpus of Iron Age dwellings known from Devon (Gillard *et al.* 2012, table 5). The form of Roundhouse 2 was less certain, and it may have been either an ancillary roundhouse or an unroofed working area.

There was little evidence forthcoming for the economic basis of this Iron Age settlement. The provision of four-post structures suggests that grain was stored, and perhaps produced, although these structures alternatively might have held fodder for livestock. The grains used included non-specific wheat and emmer wheat but these were found in low concentrations, which might have been an accident of survival, or perhaps

points to a more pastoral emphasis. The emmer may have been residual from the Neolithic occupation. Animal bones were absent, lost to the acidity of the local soils, and so the make-up of any pastoral activity cannot be determined. The loomweights provide evidence for local production of textiles, but the precise function of oven/hearth 10263 is unknown, located as it was, outside the core of the settlement. The settlement would seem to represent a single household as further remains were absent from the development area. It is possible that remains of this date were present along the eastern side of the Fosse Way, but none have been recorded. Evidence for repairs to Roundhouse 1 and to at least one of the four-post structures suggests that this occupation was measured in years, perhaps in terms of one or two generations, although this cannot be determined with any real resolution.

There was a change in settlement organisation at some point in the Late Iron Age or Early Roman period. Roundhouse 2 was dismantled and co-axial boundaries were set out. The quantity of pottery, fired clay and metallurgical residues from this period, mainly from Ditch J, suggests that the site continued to be occupied. Late Iron Age/Roman pottery was found within Ditch L, adjacent to Roundhouse 1, which may have been retained into this period. A similar situation may have pertained at Willand Road, Cullompton, where at least one of the later Iron Age roundhouses may have been retained within an Early Roman enclosure (Hood 2010, 82). The Cloakham Lawns site seems to have been the setting for ironsmithing during the Late Iron Age/Early Roman period. The products made are unknown; the needle might have been a product or an import. Although the site's roadside location would have facilitated trade, the scale of the iron production is also unknown and might have been at a domestic scale or undertaken on a needs basis by itinerant smiths.

The latest finds from the Iron Age to Early Roman remains date to around the time of the Roman Conquest and the occupation was perhaps contemporaneous with the establishment during the AD 50s–70s of the Roman fort at Woodbury, 2km to the south (Holbrook 1993, 93). If so, it is possible that the military presence stimulated the changes apparent at Cloakham Lawns. It is also possible that metalworking at or near the settlement expanded to serve the fort, and that remains of this await discovery or have been lost to previous developments.

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Austin, Anthony Beechey, Sikko van der Brug, Emily Knight, Andy Loader, Rob Scott and Alex Thompson. The post-excavation work was managed by Andrew Mudd. Stephen Sheldon undertook the stratigraphic analysis; other authors are credited in the text. The illustrations are by Sam O'Leary. CA gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Adrian Winstone (Bovis Homes) and the advice of Stephen Reed (Devon County Council Historic Environment Team), Henrietta Quinnell, Hugo Anderson-Whymark and Rob Ixer during the course of this project. The archive will be deposited with the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter and a copy posted on the Archaeology Data Service website. The finds will also go to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, with the agreement of the legal landowner.

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Cartographic sources

Devon Record Office

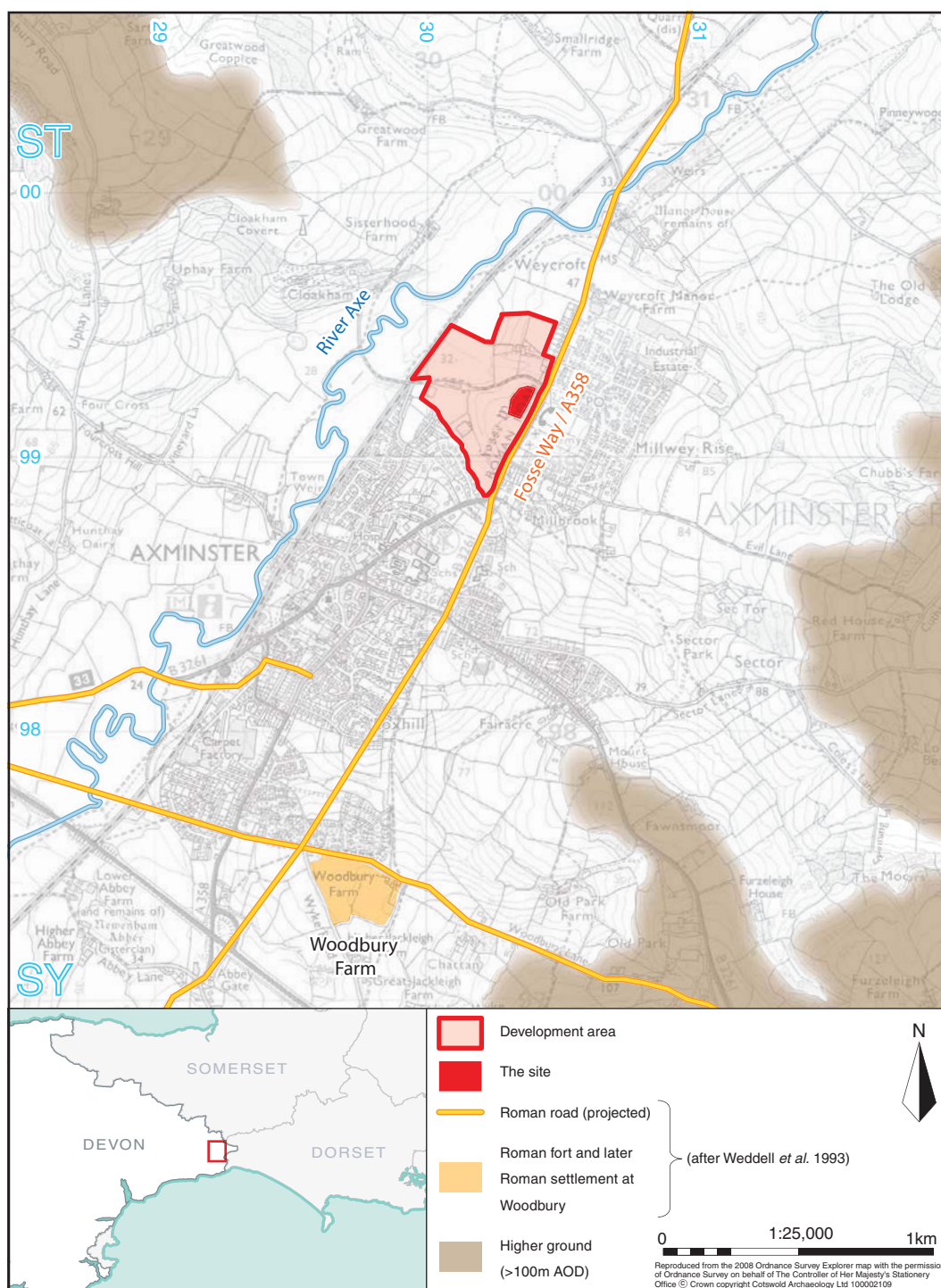
DRO 123M/E75 1778 Map of the Manor of Axminster,

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Table 1 Radiocarbon dating results

Feature	Lab No.	Material	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$	Radiocarbon age yr BP	Calibrated radiocarbon age 95.4% probability	Calibrated radiocarbon age 68.2% probability
Context 10312 Pit 10311	SUERC-62301	Carbonised plant remain - <i>Corylus avellana</i> (hazelnut shell)	-24.1‰	4799 ± 30	3649–3621 cal BC (19.8%) 3606–3522 cal BC (75.6%)	3640–3630 cal BC (11.6 %) 3580–3534 cal BC (56.6%)
Context 10317 Pit/posthole 10316	SUERC-62302	Charcoal - <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> / <i>Sorbus</i> / <i>Malus sylvestris</i> (hawthorn/rowan/crab apple)	-26.0‰	4835 ± 30	3695–3678 cal BC (3.5%) 3669–3627 cal BC (53.3%) 3587–3529 cal BC (38.6%)	3655–3632 cal BC (45.4%) 3558–3538 cal BC (22.8%)
Context 10319 Pit/posthole 10318	SUERC-62306	Charcoal - <i>Prunus</i> (cherry species)	-28.0‰	4920 ± 30	3766–3647 cal BC (95.4%)	3707–3656 cal BC (68.2%)



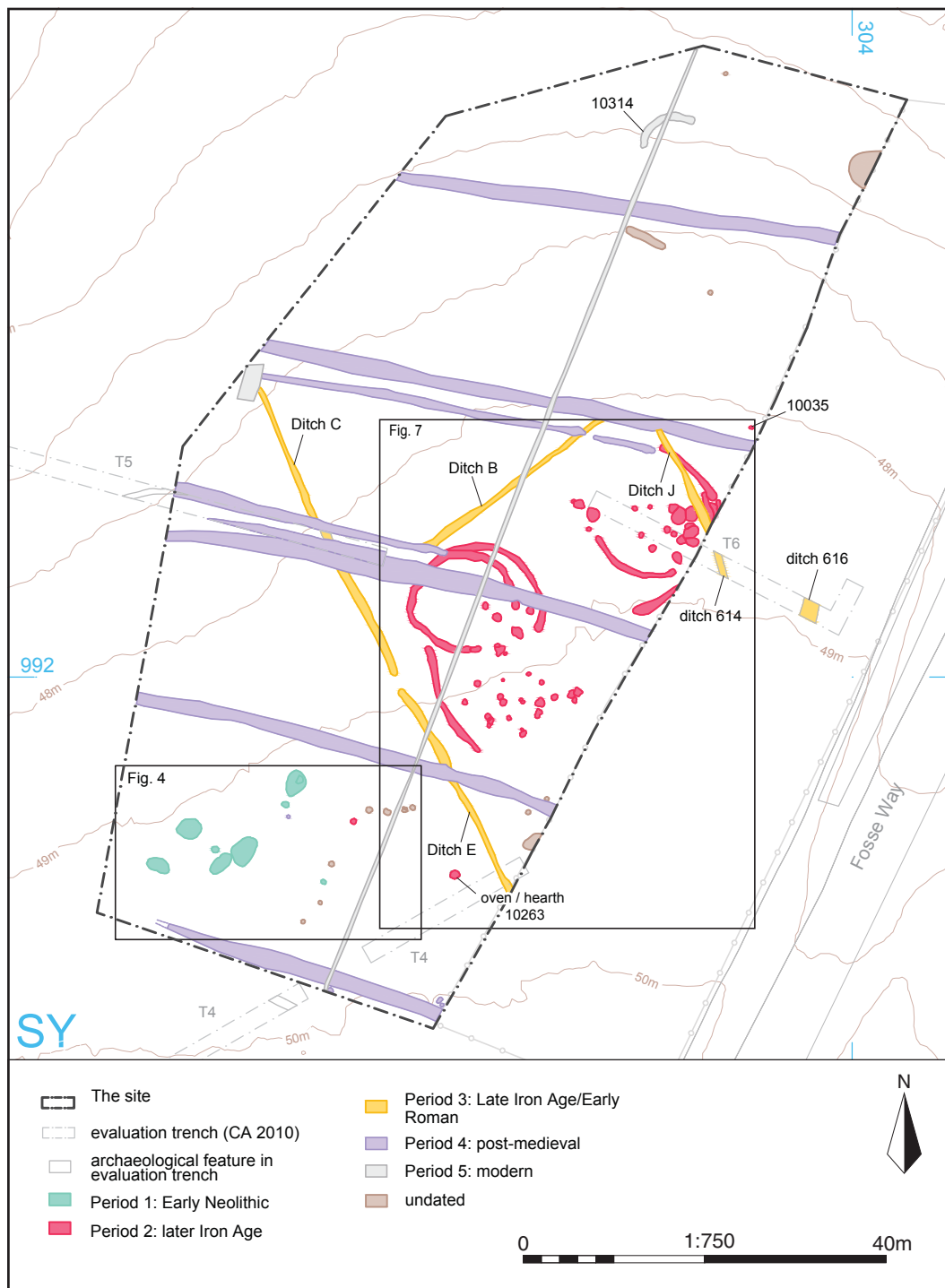


Fig. 2. Site plan (1:750)



Fig. 3. Photograph: the site in its landscape setting, looking north-east

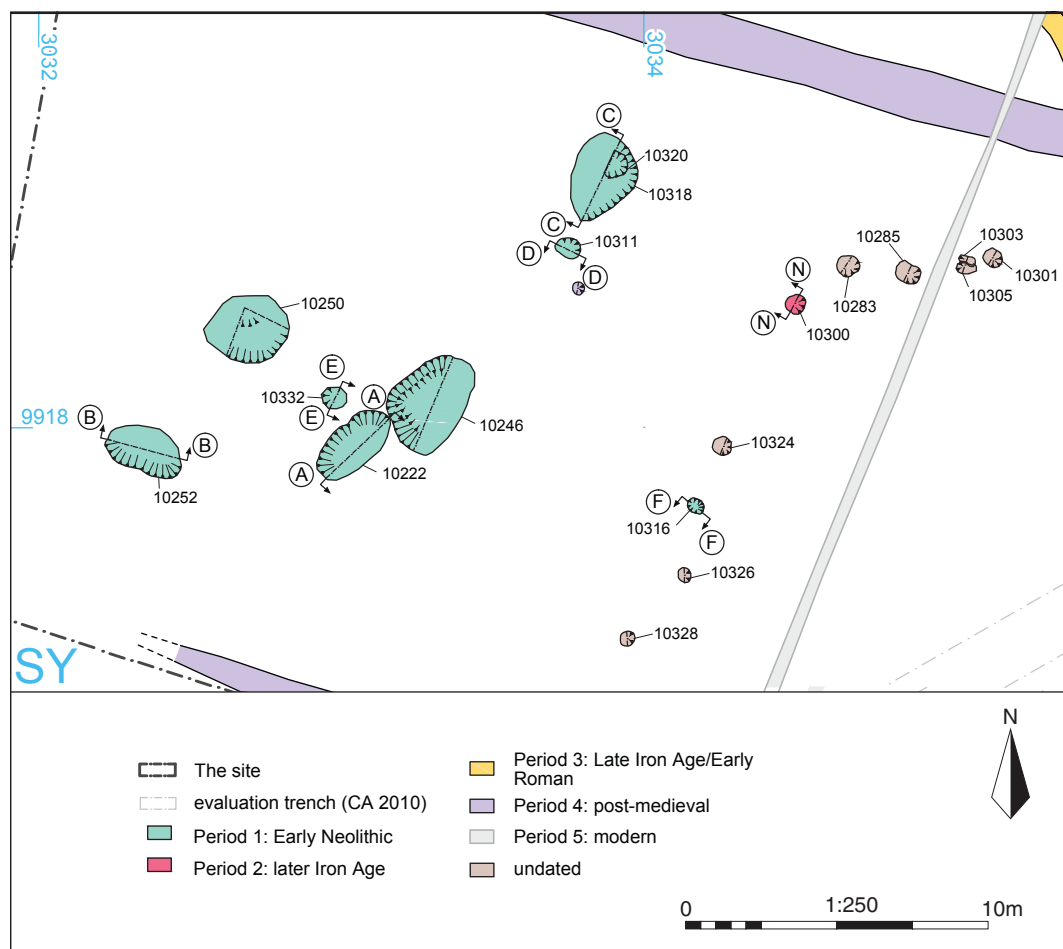


Fig. 4. Detail plan of Early Neolithic features (1:250)

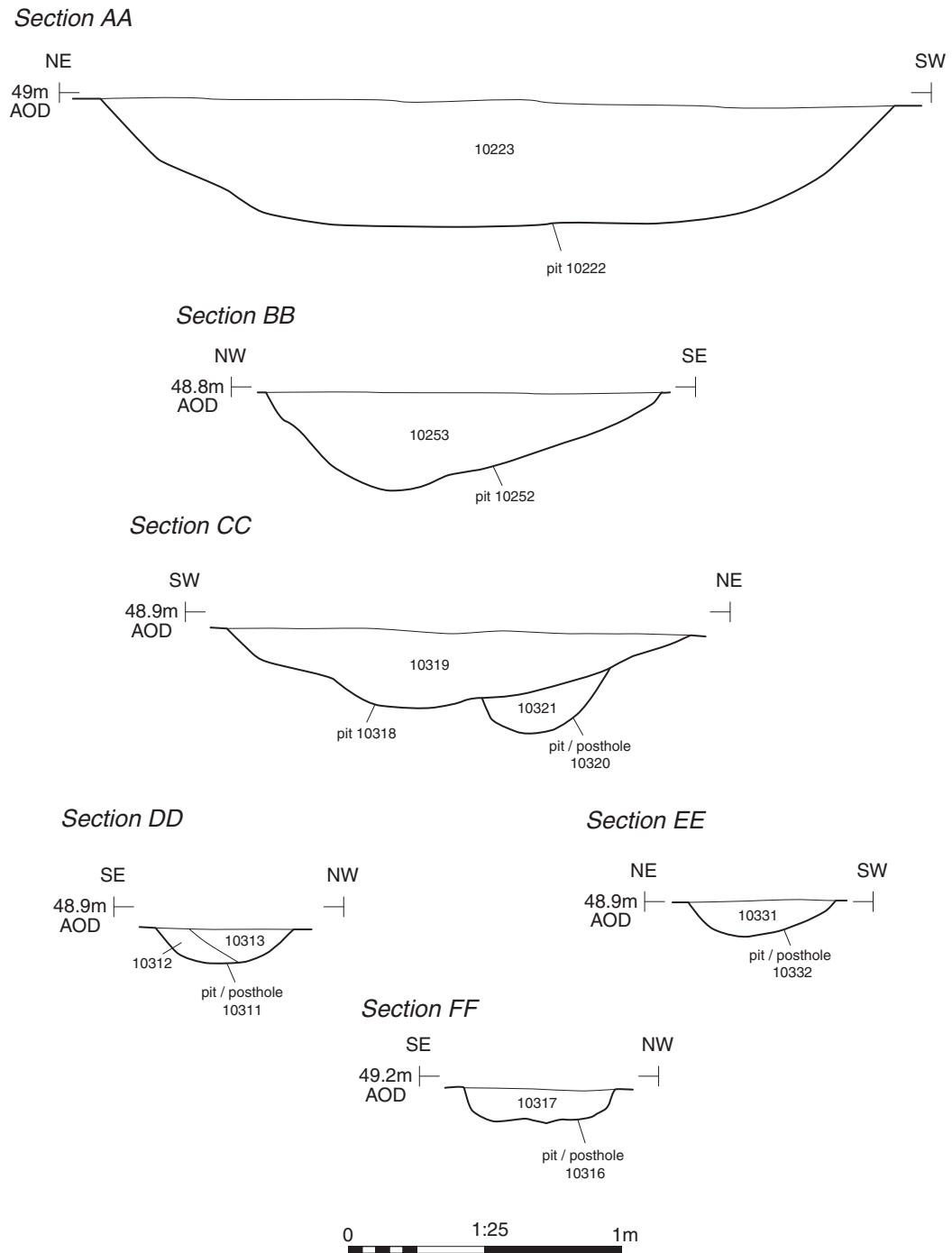


Fig. 5. Sections through selected Early Neolithic features (1:25)

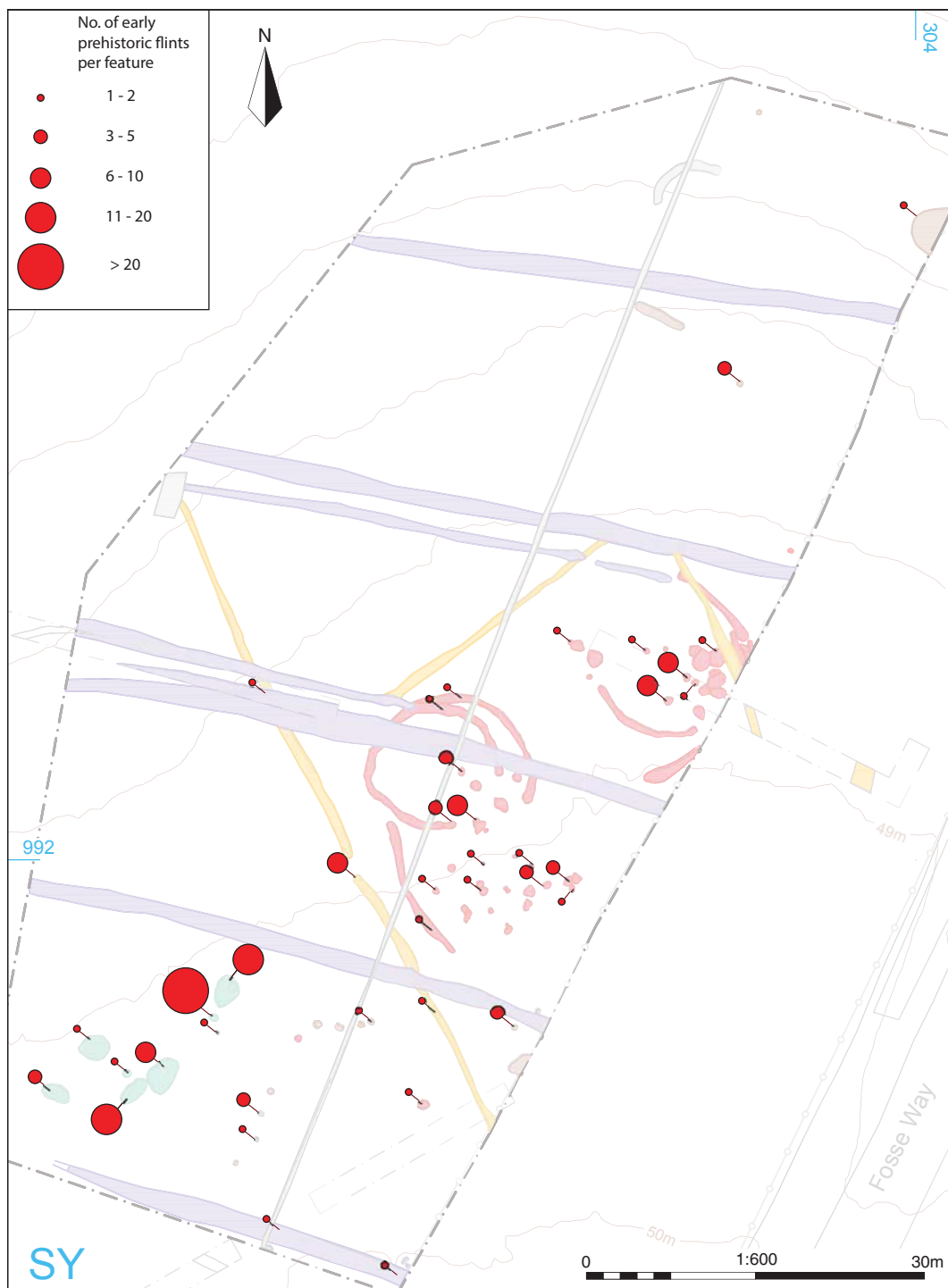


Fig. 6. Plan showing distribution of early prehistoric flints (1:600)

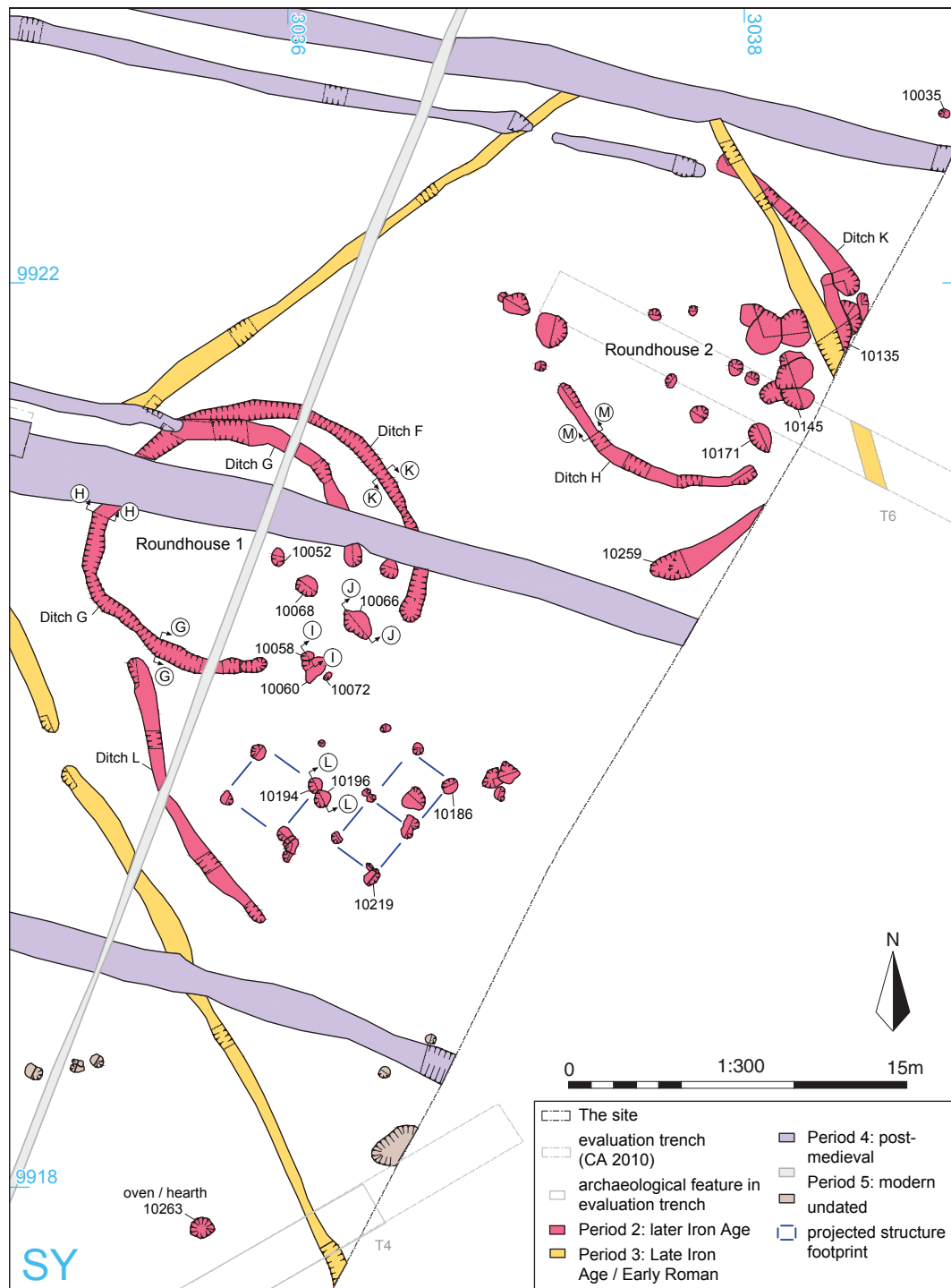


Fig. 7. Detail plan of later Iron Age features (1:300)

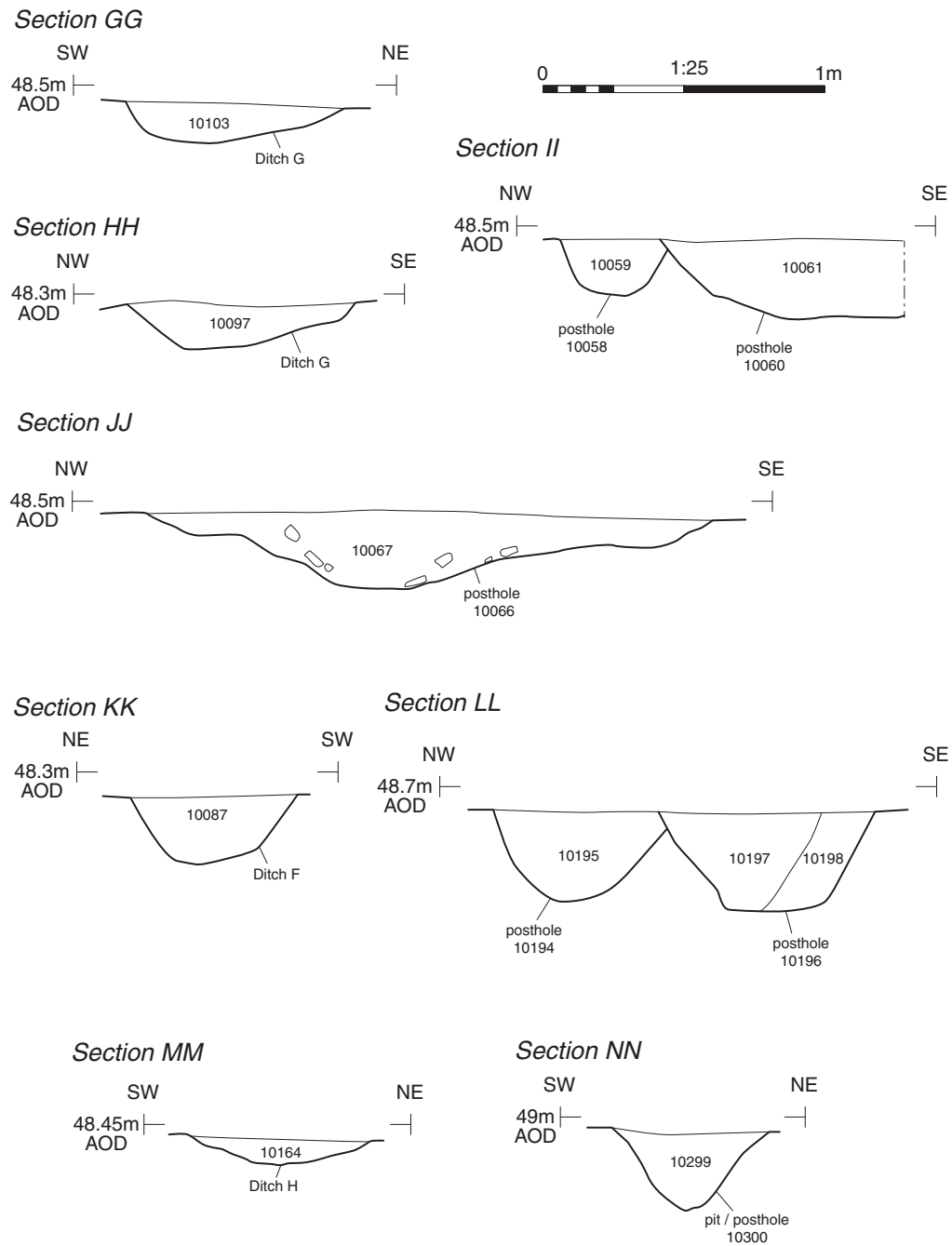


Fig. 8. Sections through selected later Iron Age features (1:25)

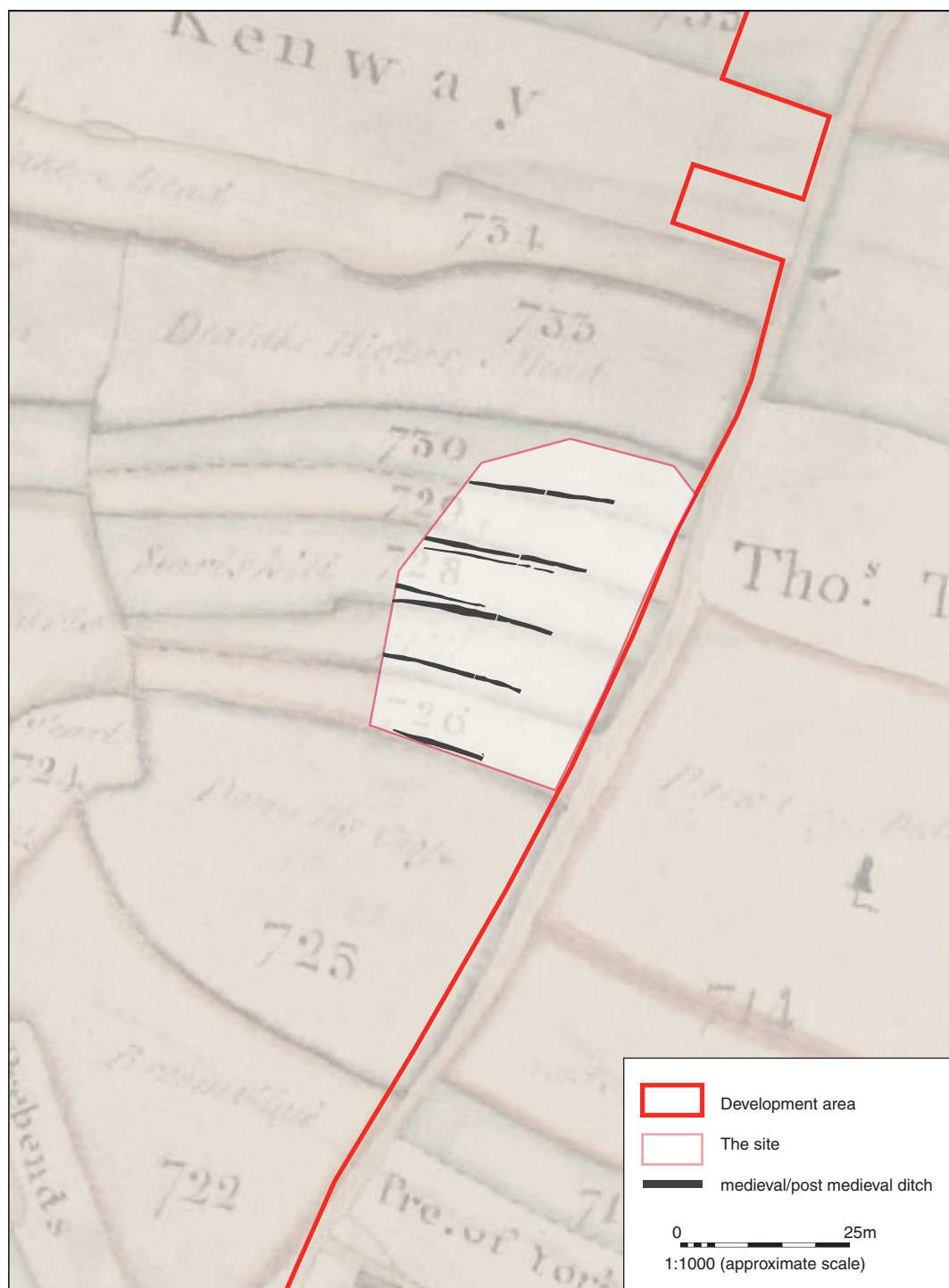


Fig. 9. Extract from the 1778 Map of the Manor of Axminster, showing excavated ditches (c. 1:1000)

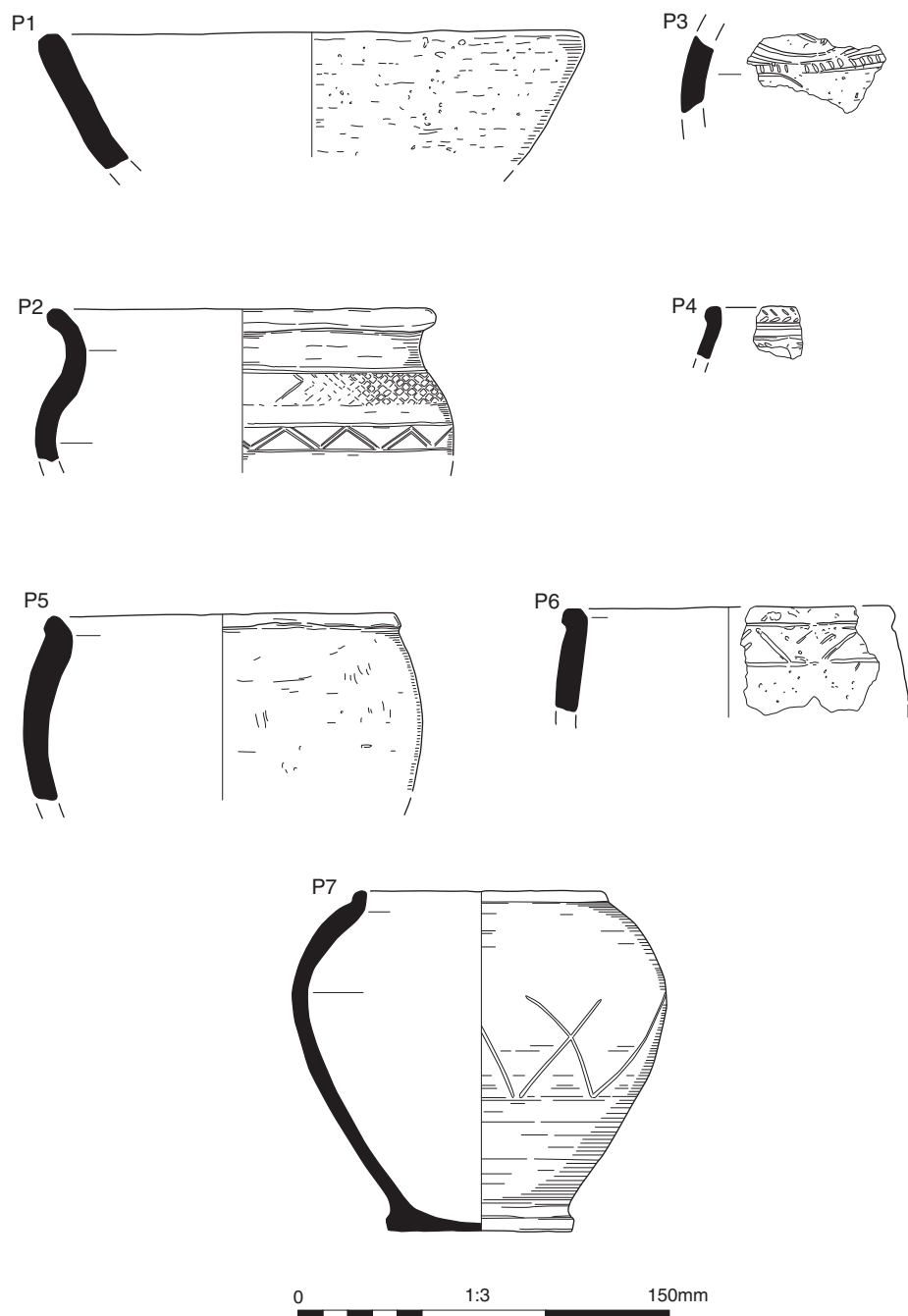


Fig. 10. Illustrated pottery (1:3)

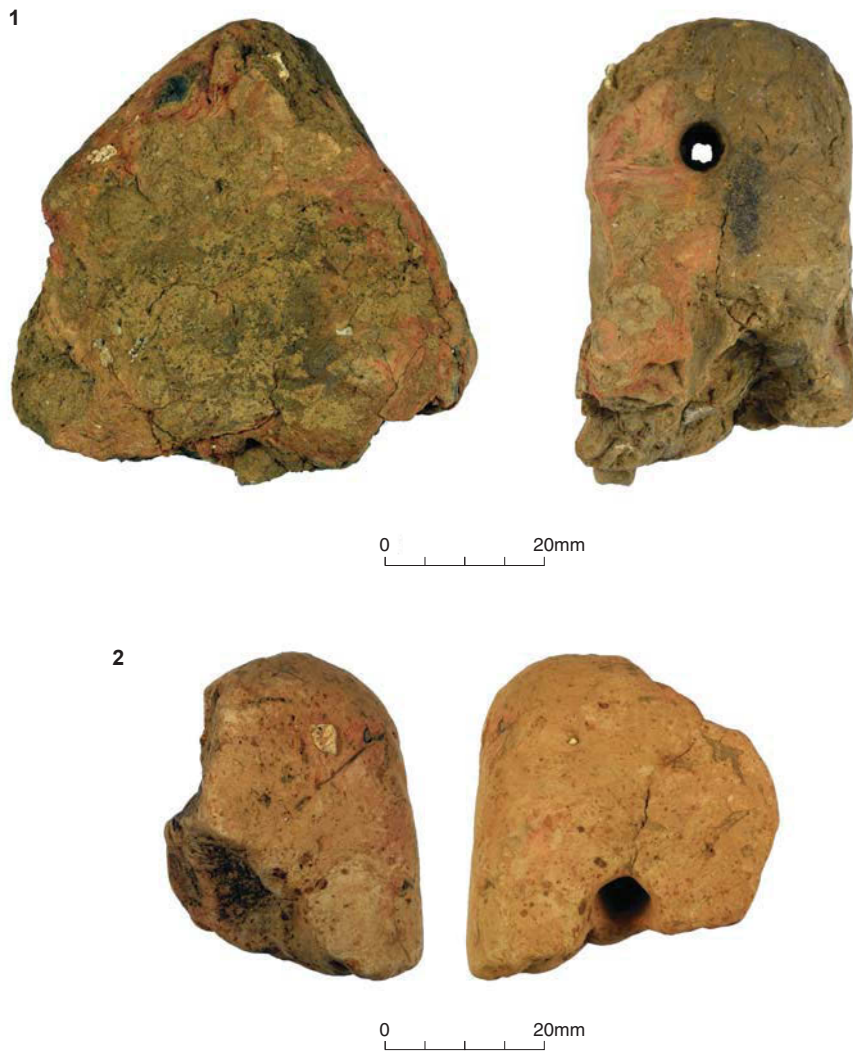


Fig. 11. Photographs: fired-clay loomweights from pit/posthole 10035 (1) and oven/hearth 10263 (2)



Fig. 12. Photographs: iron needle (1) and tuyères (2, 3) (1:1 and 1:2)

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