

A RE-ANALYSIS OF THE RING-DITCH SITE AT PLAYDEN, EAST SUSSEX

by R. M. J. Cleal

The prehistoric ring-ditch site at Playden is reconsidered in the light of the work that has been done on the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age since 1935. The writer concludes that Bradley's (1978) interpretation of the site as having a mound of white sand in its second phase is correct, but that the first phase, in which there is an unusual timber structure within the ring-ditch, may be of a ritual nature rather than a settlement. Other anomalous ring-ditch sites of the mid- to late second millennium are illustrated to demonstrate broad similarities. The pottery is considered in detail. It is concluded that there is no evidence for any round-based vessels, and that although the vessels are not easily classifiable, they may belong to a transitional phase between the Grooved Ware and Deverel-Rimbury traditions. There is a radiocarbon date of 1740±115 b.c. for the first phase of the site.

INTRODUCTION

The prehistoric site at Playden, East Sussex, was excavated by H. J. Cheney in the early 1930s, and was published by him in the *Antiquaries Journal* (1935, 152-164); a note about the site, by Christopher Hawkes, appeared later in the year, in the same volume (1935a, 467-471). Recently a reinterpretation of the site has been published by Richard Bradley in the second Fengate report (Bradley 1978).

This note is not intended as a further interpretation of the site itself, but mainly as a reassessment of the material remains, forty years on from their original examination. In view of this, and because the site was published in a national journal, only a brief description of the site and its location will be given.

Location

The site at Playden lies on a knoll between the Tillingham Valley and Romney Marsh, 50 m above sea-level. It is sited on land forming part of the Mockbeggar estate, and is approximately 300 m south-east of Mockbeggar House.

The subsoil is of Wadhurst Clay, which in this area contains large pockets of white sand, one of which occurs very close to the site. Cheney noted that although most of the knoll was sandy the site was located on a patch of yellow clay.

The Excavation

The excavation of the site was conducted by Cheney during 1930. From the photographs of the site, and from comments from Mr. John Owen, who visited the site, it would appear that the excavation was marred by bad weather. There appear to be no site notes surviving and the recording seems to have been rudimentary. There is no indication on the published plan of the extent of the excavation; the photographs show that quite long stretches of the ditch were

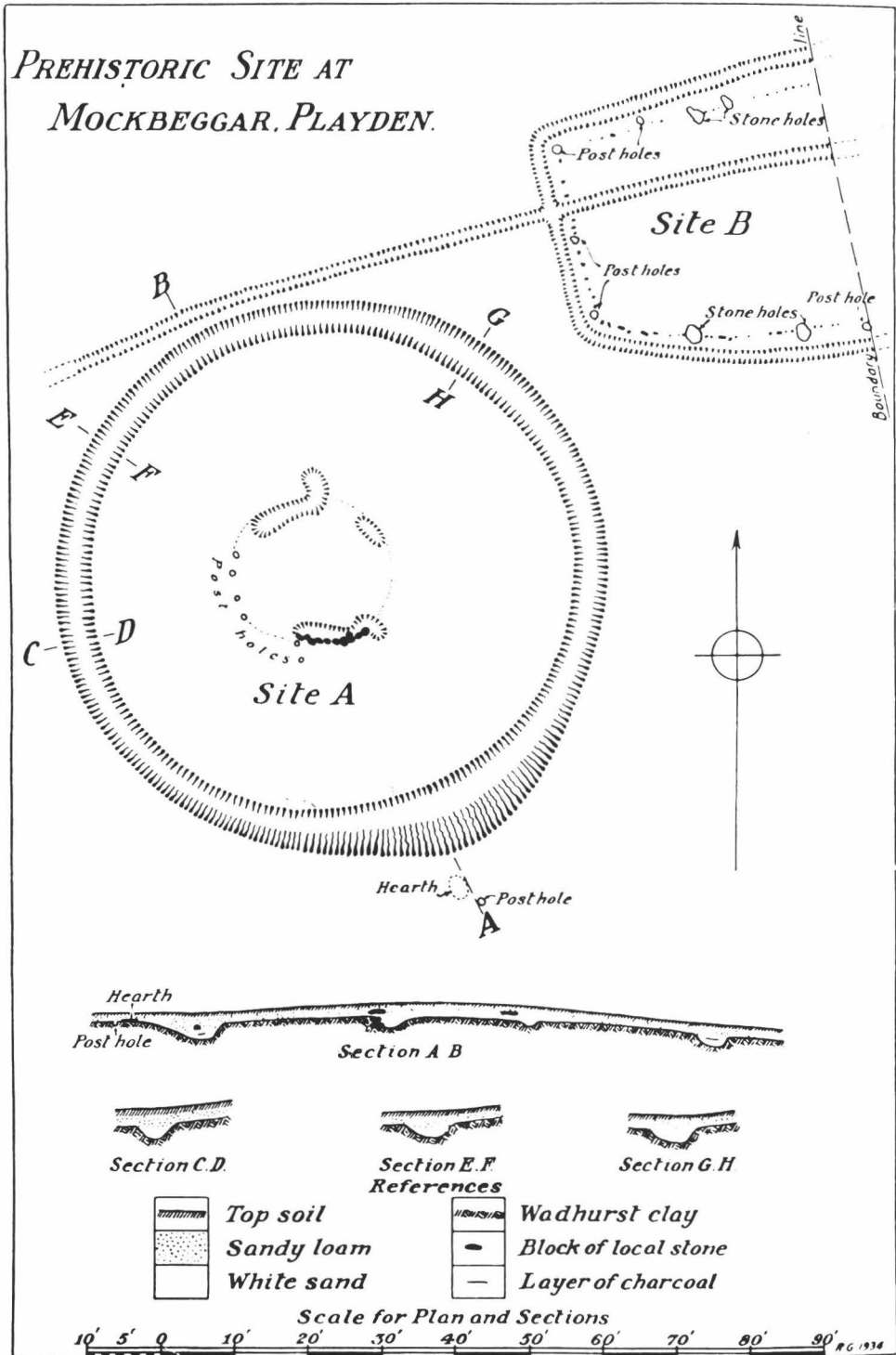


Fig. 1. Site Plan, reproduced by permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

cleared, and from a remark by Curwen (1935, 163) it appears that eventually the entire ditch was excavated. Two main areas were excavated, Site A and Site B, the former being the ring-ditch and the latter the rectangular enclosure.

Site A

The ditch was on average 1.5 m wide and 0.75 m deep and enclosed an area *c.* 19.8 m in diameter, apparently without a break. The primary fill of the ditch was 'much charcoal and burnt timber, one patch extending for a distance of 15 ft (*c.* 5 m). These remains were of oak, and in some cases were 5 ft or 6 ft (*c.* 1.5–2.0 m) long and from 1 in to 6 in (*c.* 2–15 cm) in diameter, and gave the impression that they might have been the timbers of a hut or huts, destroyed by fire' (Cheney 1935, 154). This was sealed by a layer of clean white sand, which also covered the interior, although from the published section it appears not to have extended across the whole site, only remaining in the centre and in the ditch. This sand occasionally contained small patches of wood ash, but was otherwise sterile. The burnt timbers from below the sand have produced a radiocarbon date of 1740±115 b.c. (BM 450).

Above the sand was a layer which Cheney refers to as an occupation layer, but he admits that there was no real stratification, and that this layer merged into the ploughsoil and contained both medieval pottery and iron slag as well as prehistoric pottery and flint flakes (Cheney 1935, 152). In the centre of the enclosure, lying above the white sand, were three groups of sandstone blocks, with many more in the ploughsoil, and Cheney noted that flint chips and flakes were more abundant in the area of these blocks than elsewhere. Beneath the sand were three hollows, one partly revetted by more sandstone blocks. Four possible post-holes *c.* 30 cm in diameter were cut through the sand and into the natural clay.

Cecil Curwen, in a note appended to the excavation report (Curwen 1935, 163–4), interpreted the site as domestic, with a timber hut at the centre, and the sand forming a replacement floor. However, Bradley (1978) has suggested that a primary timber structure, surrounded by a ring-ditch, and probably of a domestic nature, was replaced by a mound of white sand. This was possibly revetted by the four post-holes (and the nature of the excavation suggests that others may well have been missed), and capped by the numerous sandstone blocks which Cheney found lying on the white sand, forming 'three small pavements, or parts of a partially destroyed pavement' (Cheney 1935, 154), and in the plough soil. This hypothesis is based mainly on the large amount of sand in and around the enclosure, which would have formed far too thick a floor to have been practical.

THE POTTERY

The pottery from the site was originally examined by Stuart Piggott; the re-examination was felt to be warranted not by deficiencies in the original report, but by the developments in Neolithic and Bronze Age studies which have taken place since that time.

The pottery will be considered in the groups used by Piggott, in order to facilitate reference to the earlier report.

Group A (Figs. 2 and 3)

This group is described as a 'primary deposit' (Piggott 1935, 161). A1 comes from the ditch, below the white sand, A2 from one of the hollows, again sealed by the white sand, and A3, A4 and A5 from above the white sand in the ditch. Strictly, therefore, A3, A4 and A5 are not part of a primary deposit.

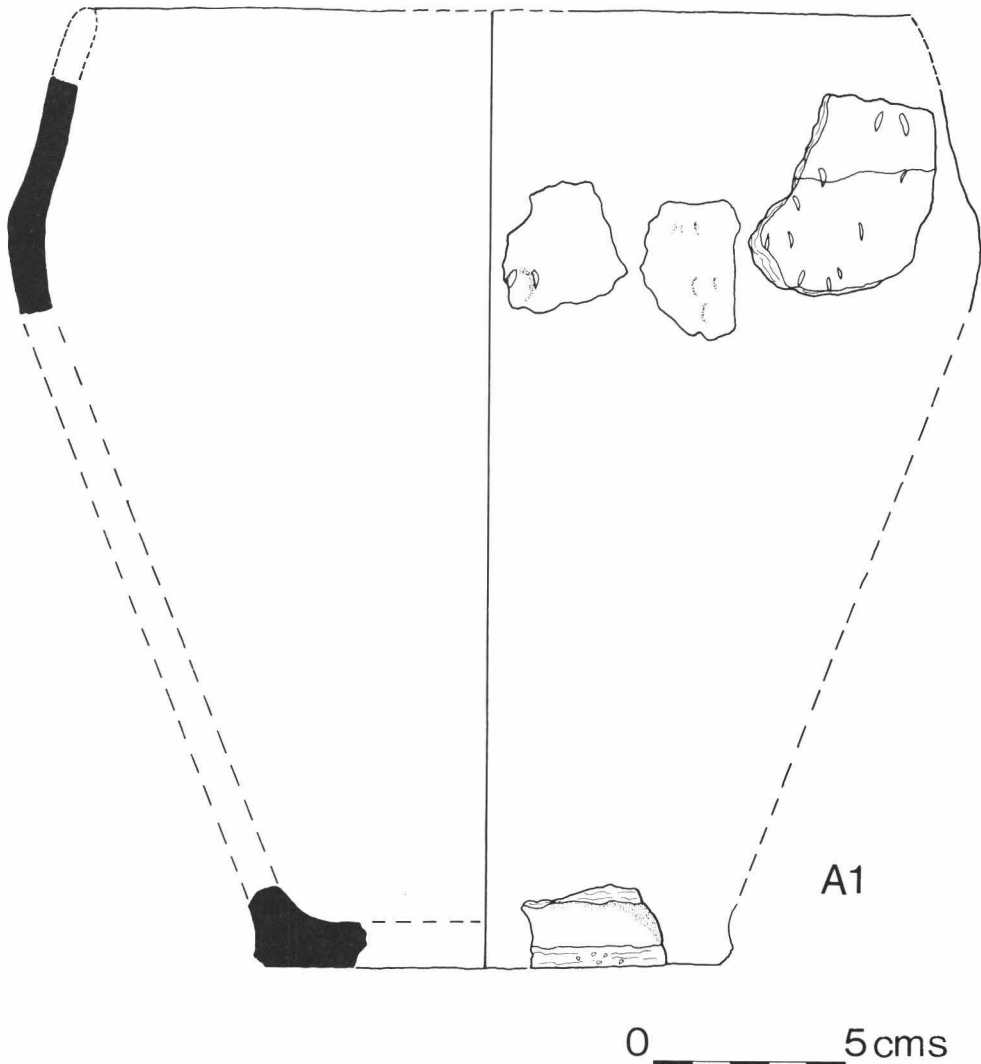


Fig. 2. Vessel A1, Group A.

Vessel A1: the fabric of this vessel is quite different from that of the others, being very soft and crumbly, with small rounded particles of grog. The sherds are all pink throughout. The small rim sherd drawn by Piggott appears to be missing.

The vessel is decorated by shallow, mostly paired, fingernail impressions, with only the slightest hint of pinching in one pair. The form is not certain, but the base and shoulder sherds are undoubtedly from the same vessel. The sherds are all very abraded.

Fingernail decoration of this sort is a feature of Beaker pottery and Grooved Ware, also occurs on Peterborough Ware, and there is at least one sherd with very similar decoration from the Deverel-Rimbury site at Itford Hill, Sussex (Burstow and Holleyman 1957, Fig. 22C). The

form of this vessel suggests that it is more likely to belong to the Grooved Ware or Deverel-Rimbury traditions, and the associated radiocarbon date of 1740 ± 115 b.c. would suggest the former. This is supported by the occurrence of such decoration at the North Carnaby Temple sites 1, 3 and 4, in Yorkshire (Manby 1974, Figs. 17, 19, 20). At sites 1 and 3 sherds with paired

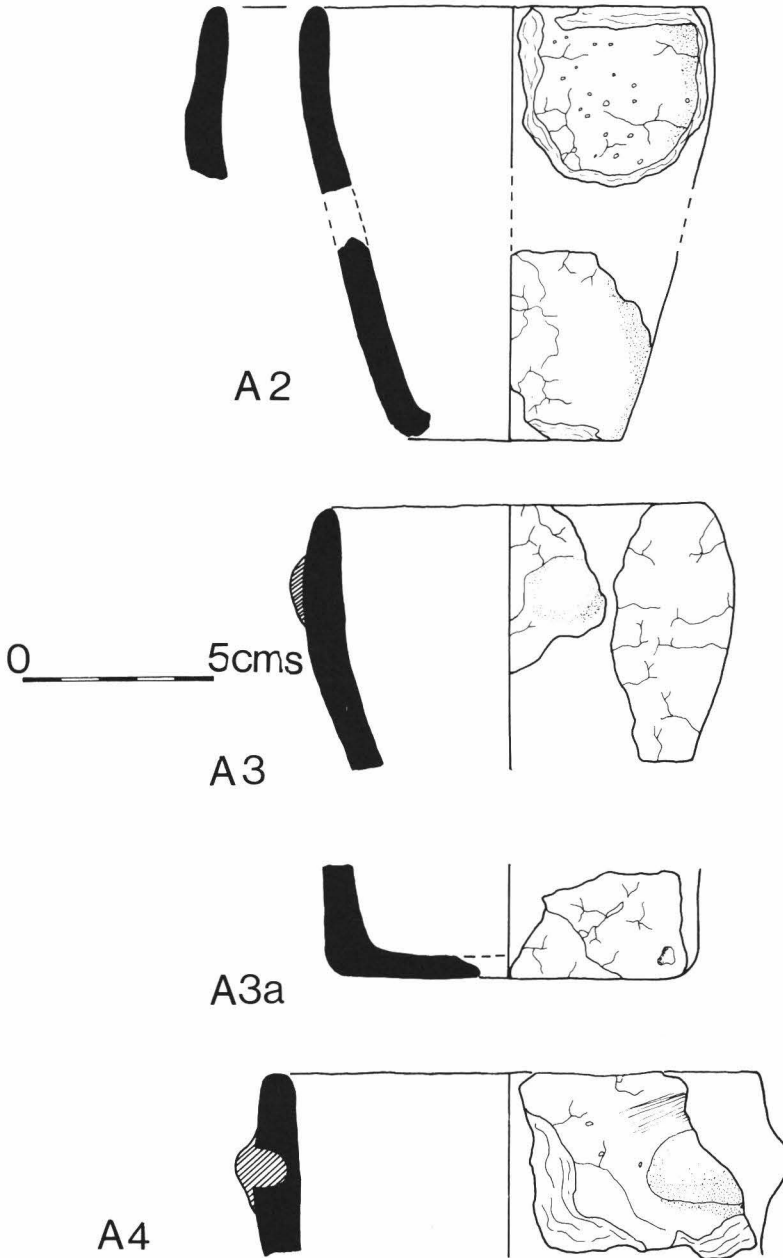


Fig. 3. Vessels A2-4, Group A.

fingernail decoration are associated with flat-bottomed, plain vessels with lugs, and with Durrington Walls style Grooved Ware. Two of the sherds at Site 3 (Manby 1974, Fig. 19:30), have applied vertical ribs as well as paired fingernail decoration, which firmly places them within the Grooved Ware tradition. The form of one of the Grooved Ware vessels from the same site (Fig. 19:29) is not unlike that of vessel A1, except that the change of angle is marked by a horizontal rib.

Vessel A2: nine sherds in a soft, laminated, coarse fabric, with very sparse flint filler (fragments up to 2 mm long), with a moderate to dense amount of grog. Exterior: patchy, orange to black; core: black; interior: pale orange. The sherds are generally abraded.

Vessel A3: eleven sherds, in a fairly hard fabric, with a slightly 'soapy' feel. No flint fragments are visible, the only filler being very sparse and small fragments of grog. Exterior: patchy, buff to pale brown; core and interior: black. There is one round applied lug. This vessel is illustrated with a flat base in the original report, but the base sherd, illustrated here as A3a, is of a hard flint gritted fabric, with a sparse to moderate amount of flint filler (fragments up to 6 mm long). Exterior: patchy, orange to grey and black; core: black; interior: grey. The fabric is slightly laminated. It seems unlikely that only the lower part of the vessel would be flint gritted, and it is possible that this represents either the base of A2, or another vessel. The writer would favour the latter, as although the basal diameter of A2 is uncertain it would seem to be smaller than that of A3a.

Vessel A4: one sherd of a hard fabric, with a slightly 'soapy' feel. There are one or two flint grits (c. 1 mm long), and a sparse to moderate amount of grog. Exterior: pale orange to buff, with a patch of black; core: black; interior: patchy black, buff, grey. The exterior is smoothed, and there are traces of wiping, possibly with grass or twigs. The oval lug appears to have been inserted as a plug and then smoothed down. The writer found no reason to believe that this vessel had a round base, as originally illustrated.

As with vessel A1, these vessels have parallels at the North Carnaby Temple sites (Manby 1974, Figs. 17:6, 19:24,32,36), which would again suggest a place in the Grooved Ware tradition. There are also plain vessels without lugs, but of a similar form to the Playden vessels A2, A3 and A4 at Durrington Walls (Wainwright and Longworth 1971, Fig. 60). However, there are also strong parallels among vessels of the Deverel-Rimbury tradition in the south, at, for instance, Latch Farm urnfield, Hampshire (Piggott 1938, Fig. 5:72A), and Plumpton Plain A (Hawkes 1935, Figs. 1: e,f; 2: a,b,d).

Vessel A5: this is not illustrated by Piggott, but is described as 'two sherds of thin grey ware with simple rim; very sparse fine flint grit' and came from the same place as A3 and A4. They were not seen by the writer.

Group B (Fig. 4)

This consisted of sherds from the sandy loam, lying above the white sand, and there were later sherds, including medieval pottery, mixed with the prehistoric material. Only those sherds which appeared to be more or less contemporary with those from the ditch were published.

Vessel B1: Piggott mentions six sherds of a heavy, coarse fabric, probably from one vessel (Piggott 1935, 162). The writer found nine thick sherds, in a very coarse flint gritted fabric. However, there are also two other thick sherds (maximum thickness 14 mm) with moderate to

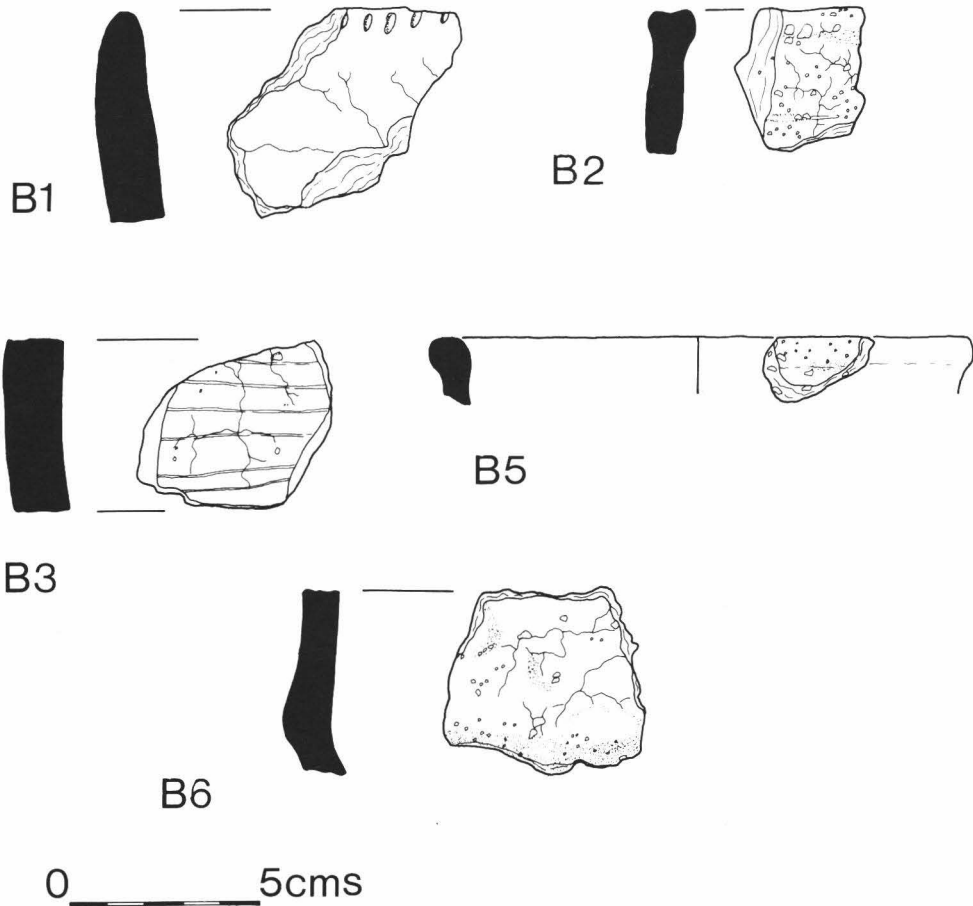


Fig. 4. Group B.

dense grog filler, which were illustrated as part of B1 by Piggott, but which do not seem to belong to the same vessel as the other six sherds. The grog gritted vessel (illustrated here as B1) is decorated below the rim with single impressions, probably fingernail, which again are paralleled in the Deverel-Rimbury tradition (e.g. at Latch Farm, Fig. 4:77, and Thorny Down, Wilts, Stone 1941, Fig. 5:8), although the rim form is equally well paralleled by the undecorated Grooved Ware from Durrington Walls (Wainwright and Longworth 1971, Fig. 60), some of which has grog filler.

Vessel B2: two rim sherds with an expanded, almost T-shaped form.

Vessel B3: represented by one sherd of a thick, coarse, fabric, with very sparse and fine fragments of grog. The decoration is of shallow grooving. This might well suggest the Grooved Ware tradition, although grooving does occur in other styles. It is not, however, a feature associated with Deverel-Rimbury pottery.

Vessel B4: this sherd could not be located; it is illustrated by Piggott, and is a small, featureless, and abraded simple rim.

Vessel B5: represented by a simple rim. The fabric is hard and flint gritted.

One sherd not mentioned in the original report, but illustrated here as B6, shows a pronounced shoulder and faint fingertip impressions. The fabric is coarse and gritted with very large fragments of flint (up to 10 mm long).

FLINT

Only the flint from Site A was listed in the original report, as the following (Cheney 1935, 157):

'45 lb unworked flint flakes

40 edged or serrated flakes

5 hammer stones

40 scrapers, 1 small thumb scraper with the unusual feature that part of the scraping edge is worked from one surface, and part from the other (F3)

25 lb pot-boilers

8 microliths

1 'strike-a-light' with square end; the end itself and one corner have been much softened by use'

It should perhaps be mentioned that Grahame Clark, commenting on the flints, only mentions one serrated flake, the others listed by Cheney presumably being simply retouched flakes (Clark in Cheney 1935, 157).

The flints now with the pottery from the site are only a part of this assemblage. The history of the finds is unclear, and it would seem likely that a large number of the flints were discarded by the excavator. Of the unworked flakes, the worked flakes, and the burnt flints, almost none survive, and only half the scrapers remain with the pottery. All the pieces illustrated in the original report were examined by the writer, with the exception of four of the microliths, which are missing. There is very little reference to the position of the flints, only the provenance of a few pieces being mentioned. However, Cheney's remarks do suggest that most of the flint came from above the white sand, within the enclosure.

Implements

Scrapers: (F1,2,3,4,5,6,7)

Sixteen scrapers are now with the collection:

End scrapers	2 (F1)
End and right side scrapers	1
End and left side scrapers*	5 (F2,3)
Right side scrapers	1
Horseshoe scrapers	5 (F4,5,6)
Discoidal scrapers	1 (F7)

*One of the end and left side scrapers also has a hollow scraping edge on the right side, but is counted only with the end and left side scrapers.

The large scrapers, such as F1 and F2, are long-lived forms, used throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age. However, the small scrapers F4 and F7 are typical of Beaker contexts, occurring in large numbers on Beaker sites at Dovercourt and Walton in Essex (Warren 1912) and elsewhere. The peculiar scraper F3 is paralleled at the Bronze Age site at Mildenhall, Suffolk (Clark 1936, Fig. 11, and see below in Discussion).

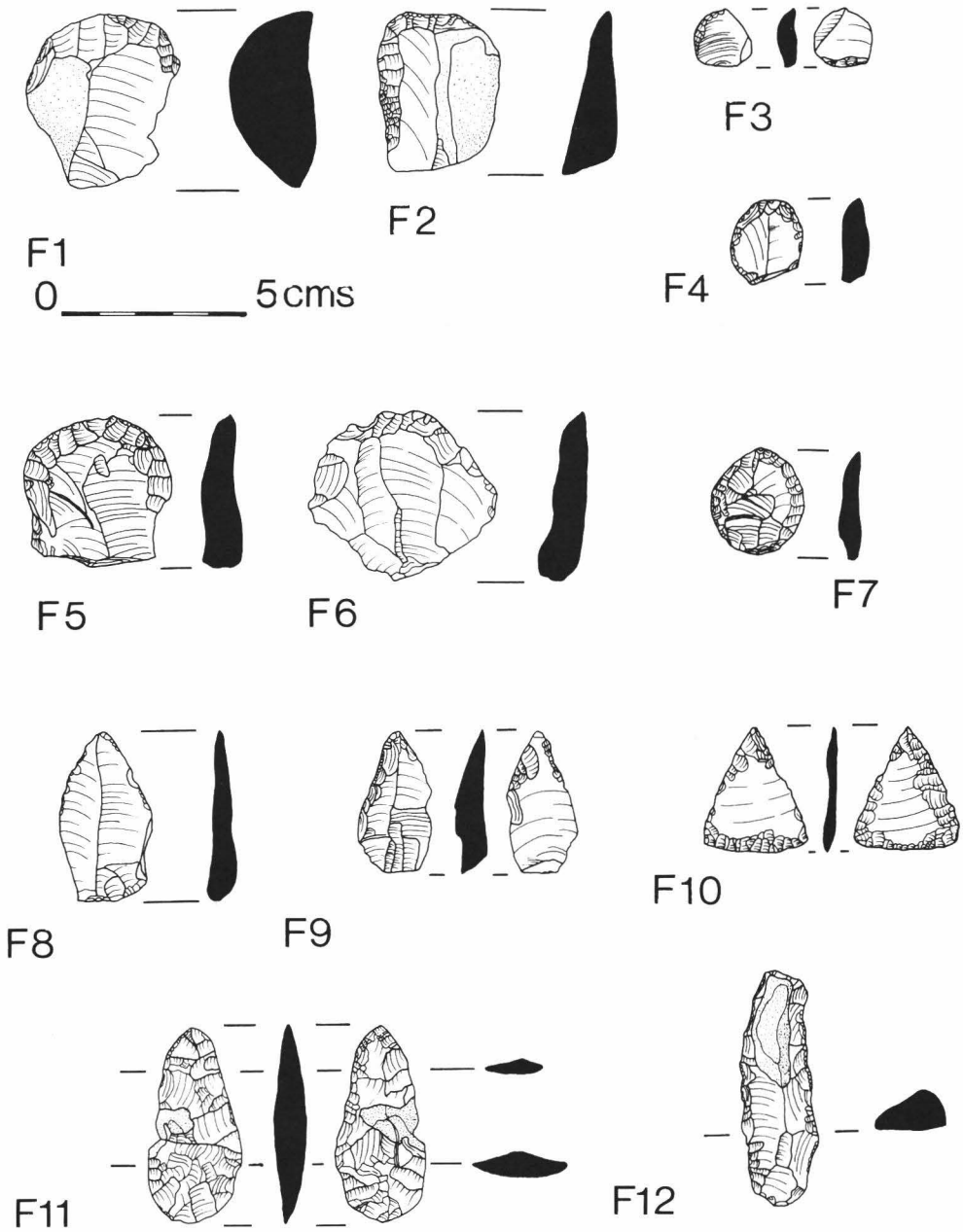


Fig. 5. Flint implements.

Projectile points: two of these, F8 and F9, were roughly worked to a point and approximate to leaf-shaped form. Of the other two, one, F11, was described in the original report as a large leaf-shaped arrowhead, and the other, F10, as a triangular arrowhead. F11 has been fire-damaged. It is too thick in section to be really convincing as a leaf-shaped arrowhead, but neither is it of laurel leaf form, so that a large, leaf-shaped projectile point seems the only possible description, albeit a rather unsatisfactory one. It is noted as coming from the ditch, above the white sand. There are no exact parallels for the triangular arrowhead, F10, and Clark did suggest that it may be a roughout for a barbed and tanged form (Clark in Cheney 1935, 159). This explanation is also followed by Green (1980, 142) who remarks on the generally late occurrence of triangular forms, which would seem to support the theory that they are unfinished barbed and tanged arrowheads. F10 was found in the ditch, below the white sand, and therefore associated with the date of 1740 ± 115 b.c.

Fabricator (F12): the provenance of this implement is not mentioned, but the cortex is typical of chalk-derived flint, and Cheney remarks that the flints found below the white sand were exclusively pebble flint (Cheney 1935, 164). Above the white sand most of the cortical flints were apparently chalk-derived, so it seems that F12 must have been found above the white sand.

Waste: only seven waste flakes and five retouched flakes remain with the collection.

Other Stone

The bottom of a saddle quern was found in the ditch, above the white sand, with fragments of the top stone scattered nearby (Cheney 1935, 154). The stone was not identified in the report, and was not seen by the present writer.

DISCUSSION

Bradley (1978) argues that Playden was a domestic site, enclosed by a ring-ditch, and was later replaced by a mound of white sand. The argument for the existence of a mound is convincing, but the interpretation of the first phase as domestic is more open to doubt. The main argument against a domestic function is the paucity of occupation debris in the primary fill of the ditch (i.e. below the white sand). It is interesting to note that a hearth and post-hole were found just outside the ditch on the south-east side, and that it was in the south-east section of the ditch that the only primary finds noted, the vessel A1 and arrowhead F10, were found. The ditch also widens, and has a shallower slope on the outside, near the hearth. There were patches of burning and flint debris under the sand within the enclosure, and a few flint flakes came from below the sand in the ditch (Cheney 1935, 153; Curwen 1935, 164).

The published plan of Playden is slightly misleading in that four of the post-holes, around the dotted circle (Fig. 1), were visible in the top of the white sand, and therefore are unlikely to have formed part of the primary structure. The timbers found in the ditch suggest that the primary structure was dismantled, and it seems unlikely that four minor posts would be left standing and the mound constructed around them. This writer would prefer to see these post-holes as belonging to a revetment of the mound, as suggested by Bradley (1978, 221–2). Without these four post-holes the primary structure is much less convincing as a hut, and appears rather as an irregular horseshoe setting, with large gaps, and outward ‘kinks’, or possibly as a timber ‘cove’, with the timbers set in trenches, one having a packing of sandstone blocks.

There are no exact parallels for Playden, either as a domestic site or a ritual one. Barrows occasionally have timber settings beneath them, but at Playden there is apparently no grave, and timber structures beneath barrows are generally stake-built. It is possible that the hollows are graves; the approximate dimensions of both are given as 8 ft (c. 2.4 m) long, 2 ft (c. 60 cm) wide, and 1 ft 6 in (c. 40 cm) deep, with a fill of 'sandy loam intermixed with fragments of charcoal and burnt rock, and some flint flakes' (Cheney 1935, 155). The southern hollow appeared to be revetted on the south side by a 'wall' of sandstone blocks. These hollows could be interpreted as graves, although their shape would be unusual, with all bone destroyed by the acid nature of the subsoil. However, the deposit of burnt timbers in the ditch does strongly suggest that several posts must have stood within the enclosure, and these hollows would seem the likeliest setting for them.

Timber structures do of course occur within henges, although the excavated examples are rather elaborate, as at Mount Pleasant and Durrington Walls (Wainwright 1979, Wainwright and Longworth 1971). However, at Marden (Wainwright 1971), a smaller, more irregular structure was found, with only one circle of posts, of approximately the same diameter as the Playden setting (c. 10 m). Arminghall, Norfolk (Clark 1936a), also has a horseshoe setting of posts, although on a larger scale and in a more regular layout than at Playden.

Playden cannot strictly be classed as a henge, as it has no entrance, but there are sites, such as Dorchester, Oxon., Sites I and XI (Atkinson *et al.* 1951) which are obviously related to the henge monument tradition, but lack entrances. There are also several sites which are similar to Playden, in that they have internal timber structures or settings (Figs. 6 and 7). These are illustrated merely to demonstrate broad similarities, rather than to draw exact parallels, and the function of these sites is also in doubt.

At Bleasdale, Lancs. (Varley 1938) the inner structure, which was probably primary, consisted of a circular setting of timbers, which was replaced by a mound, formed of upcast from a pennanular ditch, dug around the timber circle and respecting its entrance. The central grave, which contained two collared urns with a cremation, probably belongs to the phase in which the ditch was dug and the mound erected. A date of 1810 ± 90 b.c. came from wood of either the inner or outer structure. The sequence at the inner site is similar to that at Playden, although there the mound cannot have been formed of ditch upcast, as the ditch was cut through hard yellow clay, not sand. Cheney assumed that the ditch was contemporary with the timber setting, although this is not necessarily the case.

Corbridge, Northumberland, is a much more dubious case, discovered during the excavation of the Roman fort (Richmond and Gillam 1955). The shallow ditch appeared to have been a palisade trench. Six clay-packed post-holes and a slot with two post-holes within it were found, and there may well have been more, destroyed by the stripping of the surface prior to the construction of the fort. The excavators pointed out the resemblance to Bleasdale.

Litton Cheney, Dorset, had an internal bank, one entrance and an oval ditched structure. The shallow ditch of the internal structure appeared to have held posts, with flint nodules used as packing (Catherall 1976), which is rather reminiscent of the discontinuous bedding trench at Playden. There were two pits within the structure. The site was later used for cremation burial, associated with collared urn sherds, and may have had a stone circle on its bank (Piggott 1939). The excavator considered the structure to have been roofed, and to have been domestic, partly because its entrance faces away from the prevailing wind. There were no finds firmly associated with the first phase. The excavator's hypothesis was that the site was a temporary summer camp, and that flint implements and pottery might not have been required (Catherall 1976, 92).

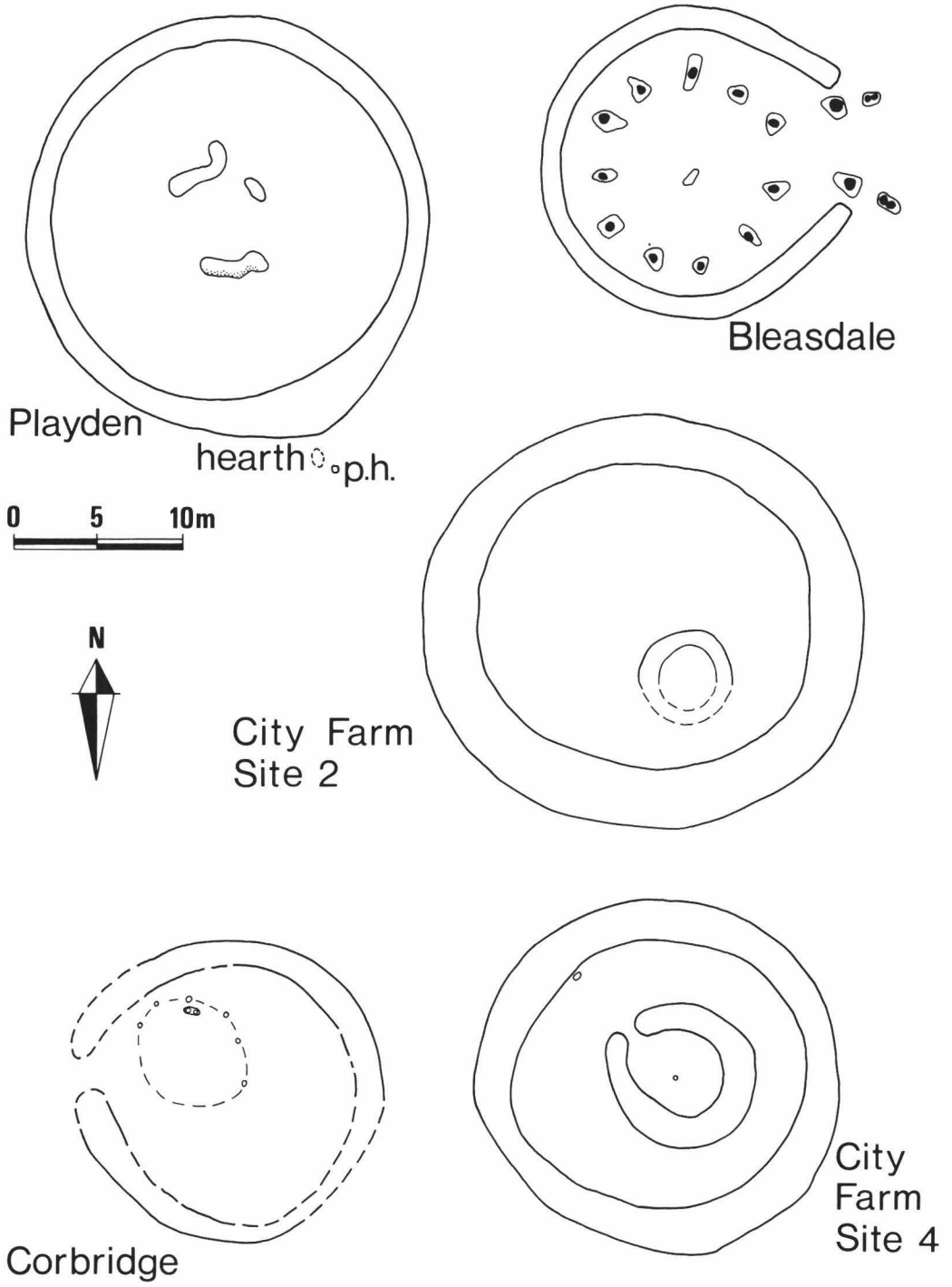
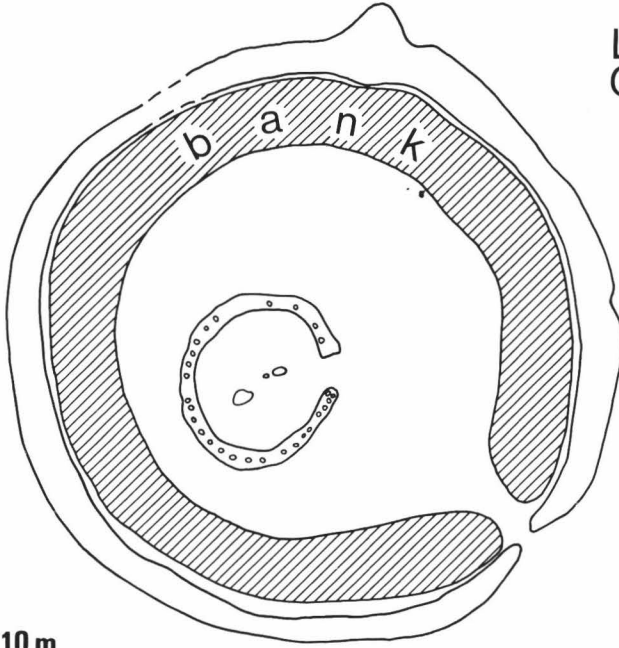
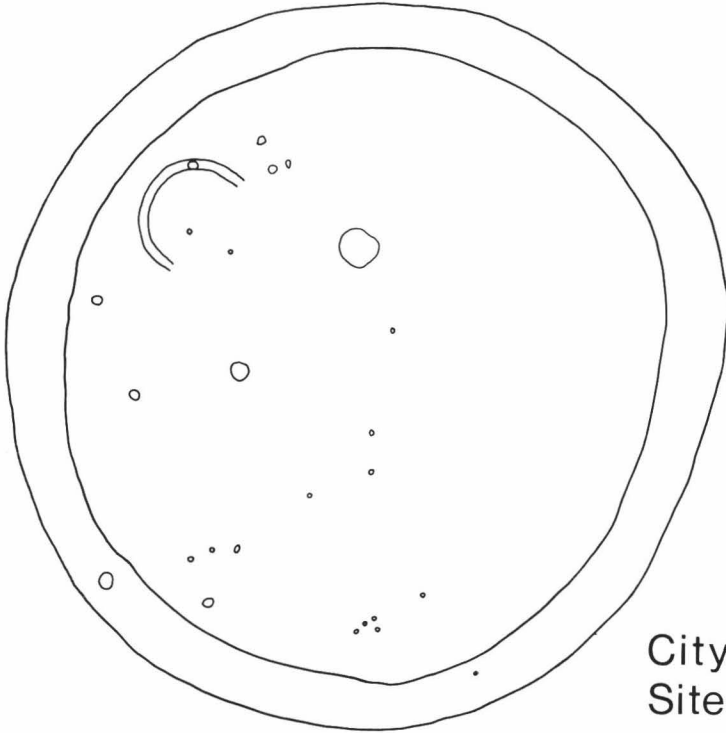


Fig. 6.

Litton
Cheney



0 5 10 m



City Farm
Site 3

Fig. 7.

This argument could also be applied to Playden, which would have been close to coastal marsh, more usable in the summer, but this writer feels that there are other possible explanations for a lack of artefacts, as, for instance, have been advanced for Avebury (Smith 1965).

At City Farm, Hanborough, Oxon. (Case *et al.* 1964) there were three ring-ditch sites with internal features. Site 4 had two possibly contemporary ditches, both refilled deliberately. The inner had a timber revetment within it, although the ditch sections could also be interpreted as a palisade trench, with the timbers removed. Sherds of long-necked Beaker were found in the primary, natural, fill of the outer ditch, and in the deliberate backfill of the inner ditch. A date of 1510 ± 65 b.c. came from charcoal of the inner ditch's 'revetment'. At Site 3 there was a continuous ring-ditch, possibly with an outer bank, surrounding a cremation cemetery. One cremation was placed in the ditch at an early stage in the fill. Within the enclosure was a shallow, incomplete ditch, possibly a gully trench for a structure. Site 2 was similar in having a continuous outer ring-ditch, and a small shallow inner one, set eccentrically within it. The outer ditch may have had an internal bank. Site 2 was not fully excavated, but Site 3 produced mainly collared urn sherds.

There are then monuments of the mid-second millennium which do not fit readily into the known categories of henge, settlement, or burial site, and this writer only wishes to suggest that there are aspects of Playden which do suggest a ritual rather than a domestic function for the first phase; in particular the form of the internal structure, which need not be interpreted as a hut, and the scarcity of occupation debris below the white sand. Bradley (1978) draws attention to the similarities between Playden and the ring-ditch site at Fengate, Peterborough, which was first used as a domestic site and then for burial. Apart from Fengate, the fact that domestic ring-ditch sites do exist appears to be demonstrated by Lawford, Essex (unpublished, material in Colchester Museum), where a ring-ditch with an entrance surrounds a Grooved Ware settlement. However, the main argument for the Fengate ring-ditch site initially being domestic was the high concentration of finds in the vicinity. The secondary use of the site for burial is interesting as this also occurs at Litton Cheney, Bleasdale, and City Farm 3.

Whatever the similarities between Playden and the other sites noted, including Fengate, which has the only large artefactual assemblage, the material remains are not comparable. At Fengate the pottery was Grooved Ware, and although the Playden vessels may be related to Grooved Ware (see discussion of vessels A1, A2, A3 and A4 above) they are certainly not typical of the tradition. However, there is another fen-edge site, at Mildenhall, Suffolk, which, although not a ring-ditch site has some relevance to the Playden material assemblage.

At Mildenhall an apparently contemporaneous assemblage on an old land surface was sealed by peat which began to form towards the end of the second millennium b.c. There are sherds belonging to several ceramic traditions, including sherds from collared urns (Clark 1936, Fig. 4:1-4), biconical urns and related vessels (Clark 1936 Fig. 6 and possibly Fig. 7, although no. 3 in particular is anomalous), cord-impressed sherds (Clark 1936, Fig. 5:1 and 4), which may belong with the collared urn sherds (and may in fact be residual, as Clark notes, 1936, 36), and fingernail decorated sherds (Clark 1936, Fig. 5:9 and 10), one of which has a lug. The latter are most easily placed within the Deverel-Rimbury tradition. One sherd (Clark 1936, Fig. 5:13) has an applied fingertip decorated horseshoe cordon, which occur frequently on Ardleigh urns. Three other vessels from the site, which fall into no recognisable category, were named Mildenhall Ware by Clark (this was before Isobel Smith's use of the term for a sub-style of the Windmill Hill tradition), and are in a finer fabric than the other pottery, and are decorated in a style reminiscent of late Beaker decoration (Clark 1936, Fig. 8, especially no. 4). The sherds of

these vessels were mixed in with the other sherds in the occupation level and presumably are contemporary with them. The resemblance of the Mildenhall and Playden assemblages lies chiefly in the Deverel-Rimbury component (particularly Clark 1936, Fig. 5:9) and the rim forms (e.g. Clark 1936 Fig. 4:8 and 9) which may be included in this category. Several vessels at Mildenhall show the pronounced shoulder of the biconical urn (notably Clark Fig. 6:1-4, and possibly 8), but as Burgess states (1974, 182), biconical urns show similarities with Deverel-Rimbury vessels 'to a point where distinction becomes difficult', so to try and strictly distinguish the two styles in an assemblage where they are clearly contemporary would seem an unnecessary exercise. Vessels A1 and B6 from Playden also show fairly well-defined shoulders, but are acceptable within the Deverel-Rimbury tradition. The importance in recognising these different components in the Mildenhall assemblage lies in the chronological implications. Smith and Butler (1956) have argued for an Early Bronze Age date for biconical urns, and urns with horseshoe bands and other applied decoration. Smith also argues, in the same article, that Deverel-Rimbury urns (excluding the Globular type) and biconical urns, are derived from the southern facies of Grooved Ware. This then places Mildenhall within the Early Bronze Age, rather than the Late Bronze Age, which was where it was considered to belong in the 1930s. A fairly early date for Mildenhall is also suggested by Clark's Mildenhall Ware. As Clark recognised, the Mildenhall style of decoration is related to late Beakers, on which incised 'floating' motifs, often lattice-filled triangles and lozenges, are common (Clark 1970). At Wattisfield, Suffolk, a late Southern Beaker assemblage has a radiocarbon date of 1570 ± 150 b.c. (BM 77), so that the Mildenhall assemblage is extremely unlikely to be earlier than the period covered by that date (i.e. 1720-1420 at one standard deviation), and at the other extreme is unlikely to be later than the end of the Wessex 'Culture', on the dating of biconical urns.

Playden does have a date of its own, mentioned above, of 1740 ± 115 b.c. (BM 450). Taking into account one standard deviation this gives a range of 1855-1625 b.c., but this is only firmly associated with the vessel A1 and the triangular arrowhead F10, the lugged vessels being deposited at a later date. Although the Grooved Ware affinities of A1 have been pointed out above, there is a possibility that the decoration at least may be derived from Beakers, although this argument is applicable to Grooved Ware generally. Non-plastic paired fingernail occurs commonly on coarse pottery associated with Beakers, and although it occurs on Grooved Ware and Fengate Ware it may not be a primary feature of those traditions, but be derived from the Beaker complex.

The association of the triangular arrowhead F10 with the radiocarbon date is used by Green (1980, 142-3) to support his theory that such arrowheads are early to mid-second millennium b.c. in date and are probably blanks for barbed and tanged forms. This would be consistent with there being a possible Beaker element in vessel A1. Mildenhall has two barbed and tanged arrowheads, the rest of the industry being dominated by large horseshoe and convex scrapers (Clark 1936, 44-7, Figs. 9, 10, 11). However, one feature of the industry was a group of flakes 'struck at a remarkable angle, and with trimmed striking platform' (Clark 1936, 47, and Fig. 11). The main feature of these was the edge of the striking platform was retouched to form a scraping edge, and on some the edge of the flake was also trimmed. This is very similar to the treatment of F3 from Playden, although this is slightly smaller than the Mildenhall examples.

The main interest of the Mildenhall site lies in its demonstration of change and experimentation during the middle to late second millennium b.c. Although Clark's 'Mildenhall' vessels have remained unique they suggest that at that time there was local development from Beakers, which here did not evolve into a recognisable style, but which

occurred at a time when collared, biconical, and Deverel-Rimbury urns were current or themselves developing. Playden would seem to belong to broadly the same period, although at Playden the Beaker element, if present at all, is represented by the random paired fingernail decoration of vessel A1.

It is clear that certain stylistic traits continue throughout the second millennium b.c., as Longworth (1961), Smith and Butler (1956), and Manby (1975), have pointed out, with Deverel-Rimbury and biconical urns inheriting Grooved Ware characteristics, Collared Urns inheriting Peterborough and some Beaker elements, and Manby's Rudston Ware developing into Yorkshire Food Vessel forms. The Grooved Ware — Deverel-Rimbury relationship is most clearly demonstrated by the bucket-shaped form, often with a slight in-turning towards the rim, which is shared by Deverel-Rimbury and Grooved Ware vessels. Lugs also occur on decorated Grooved Ware vessels (e.g. at Durrington Walls, Wainwright and Longworth, 1971; Lawford, Essex, unpublished material in Colchester Museum), but only appear to be common on undecorated vessels, such as those at the North Carnaby Temple sites (Manby 1974). There is a date of 1690 ± 70 b.c. (HAR 2146) for Low Caythorpe (Pierpoint 1979), a site with undoubtedly Grooved Ware vessels about 1500 m from the North Carnaby Temple sites. This date is statistically indistinguishable from the Playden date, and if it is assumed that the North Carnaby Temple and Low Caythorpe sites were broadly contemporary this would help to support a Grooved Ware derivation for the Playden vessels, although on purely stylistic grounds they are acceptable within the Deverel-Rimbury tradition, which is in fact how Hawkes classified them in a note on the site (Hawkes 1935a).

As has been stated above, the idea of Deverel-Rimbury pottery being at least partly derived from Grooved Ware is not a new one; Barrett has summarised the arguments and references in his article on the Deverel-Rimbury tradition (Barrett 1976), and he also sees it as emerging in the Early Bronze Age. The similarity of some Deverel-Rimbury urns to Grooved Ware vessels, particularly of the Durrington Walls sub-style, is undeniable (compare Latch Farm, Piggott 1938, Figs. 7 and 8, with Durrington Walls, Wainwright and Longworth 1971, Figs. 34, 35, 39, 41). The same may well be true of Arleigh urns in East Anglia, although the derivation there being mainly from the Clacton sub-style of Grooved Ware, with its emphasis on impression (Longworth 1960).

Summary

The evidence for Playden being a domestic site in its first phase seems dubious to the present writer, although Bradley's interpretation of the second phase as a mound does seem to fit the evidence. Playden seems to belong to a group of anomalous mid-to-late second millennium b.c. sites which may or may not be of a ritual nature, although features of their construction, and the re-use of some of the sites for burial would seem to suggest that they are not purely functional. The pottery is unusual, and is difficult to place within any one tradition, but may belong to transitional phase between the Grooved Ware and Deverel-Rimbury traditions.

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Author: R. M. J. Cleal, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading, Berks.

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