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FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS AT THE LATER NEOLITHIC DOMESTIC SITE AND NAPOLEONIC 'CAMP' AT BULLOCK DOWN, NEAR EASTBOURNE, EAST SUSSEX

by Robin Holgate

with contributions by Caroline Cartwright, Roger Grace, Dennis Britton, Peter Northover, David Atkinson, Phil Carstairs, Gloria Polizzotti Greis and David Rudling

Excavation and surface collection in advance of construction work by the Ministry of Defence produced a later Neolithic domestic assemblage, including Peterborough ware, beaker pottery and flintwork. Pottery, clay pipes, faunal remains, gun flints, musket shot, coins, buttons and other metalwork of mainly 18th- and 19th-century date were also recovered, some of which relate to activity during the Napoleonic War.

INTRODUCTION

The Bullock Down later Neolithic domestic site (settlement site C: TV 968591) was located by surface collection survey, carried out as part of the Bullock Down Project undertaken by the Field Archaeology Unit (then known as the Sussex Archaeological Field Unit) in 1976–80 (Drewett 1982a, 47–57) (Fig. 1). Sample excavations in 1976–77 established that an horizon of flintwork and pottery survived in a relatively undisturbed condition on the surface of the Clay-with-Flints subsoil, despite ploughing in recent years (*ibid.*, 49: Fig. 1C). Further surface collection by the tenant farmer, Mr E. Williams, produced a considerable quantity of post-medieval material, some of which relates to the use of this area during the Napoleonic War (Fig. 2). For three weeks in June-July 1985, the Field Archaeology Unit carried out a second programme of sample excavations in advance of the installation of an electronic navigation system for the Royal Navy (Fig. 2); a watching brief during construction work in April and November 1986 was also undertaken. Both the 1985 excavations and the post-excavation work were funded by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission as part of the Unit's Neolithic and Bronze Age Settlement Project.

THE LATER NEOLITHIC DOMESTIC SITE

The fieldwork carried out in 1976–80 defined an area of Neolithic domestic activity covering just under 0·5 km.^{2}, represented by a dense scatter of humanly-struck flints (Figs. 1B and C). The 1976–77 excavations produced further flintwork and sherds of Peterborough ware, including both Mortlake and Fengate style vessels, from the surface of the Clay-with-Flints subsoil (Drewett 1982a, 49–53). The excavations in 1985 consisted of thirteen trenches: three in the field where the 1976–77 excavations took place, and ten in the adjacent field to the north (Fig. 2). The topsoil in trenches A, L and N in the southern field was *c.* 0.25 metre deep, resting directly on Clay-with-Flints; eight flint flakes were recovered. The subsoil encountered in

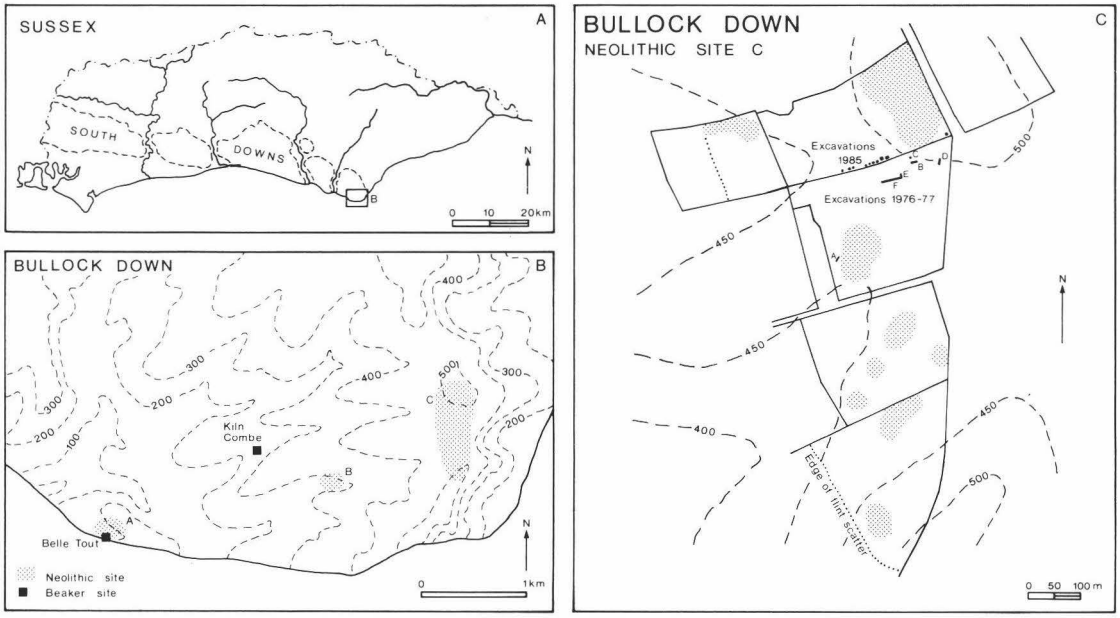

Fig. 1. Location maps of Bullock Down Neolithic site C. Contours in metres above O.D. The stippling in C represents areas of flint flake density of over one flake per 10 m.^{2}

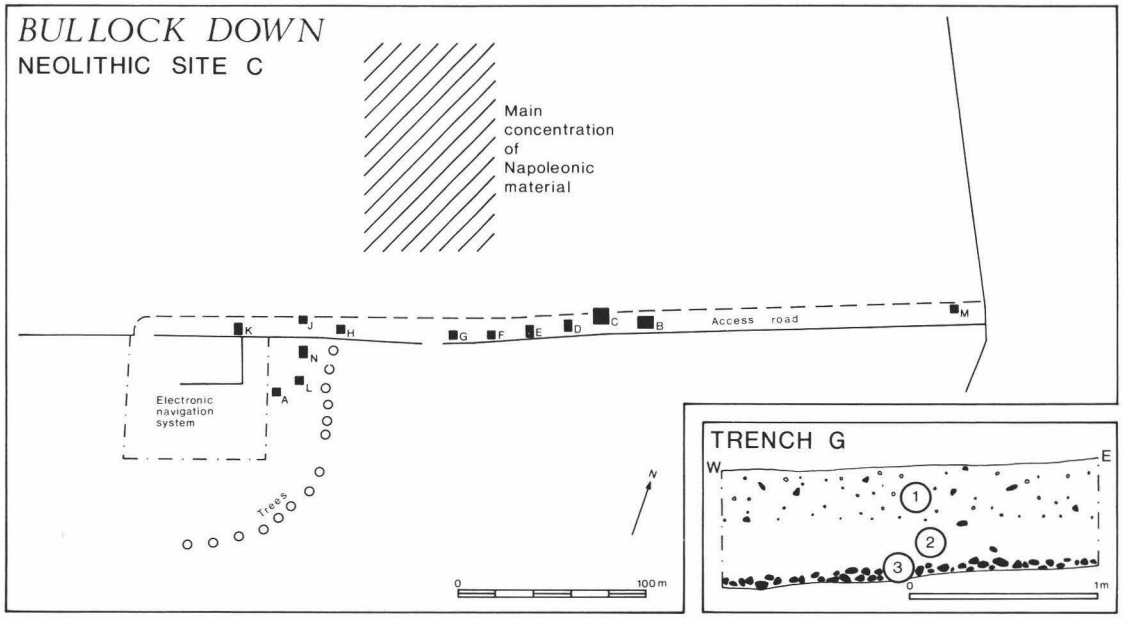

Fig. 2. Plan of the 1985 excavations and south-facing section of trench G: 1. brown ploughsoil; 2. light orange brown stone-free horizon; 3. light orange brown stony horizon.

trenches B-K and M in the northern field differed from that revealed in the southern field. Here, a *c.* 0.3 metre depth of ploughsoil rested on a relatively stone-free clay-loam which had been worm-sorted (Context 2); a stony horizon (Context 3) lay at a depth of *c.* 0.2 metre below the surface of the subsoil (Fig. 2). Marling has taken place in this field, resulting in the defloculation of the ploughsoil and upper portion of the Clay-with-Flints subsoil. Consequently this has encouraged earthworm activity to a much greater degree than in the southern field. Substantial quantities of later Neolithic pottery, flintwork and geological material were retrieved from the base of the worm-sorted horizon (Context 2) and the stony horizon (Context 3); in addition, Mr E. Williams found a bronze object in the ploughsoil between Trenches F and G.

Prehistoric pottery

The excavation yielded 72 pieces of prehistoric pottery (see 6–8 on microfiche for context details). The surfaces on most sherds are badly eroded. The pottery can be divided into five groups.

Group 1: Peterborough wares (18 sherds). Coarse to fine flint-tempered ware with, on occasion, fine sand and pieces of grog; oxidised exterior surface and reduced interior surface and core. Body-sherd sections up to 1 cm. thick. The main form represented is the Mortlake style round-based bowl (Smith 1974, 112). At least eight pieces have finger-tip (e.g. Fig. 3, nos. 1 and 2) or possibly twisted cord 'maggot' impressions (e.g. Fig. 3, no. 3). Similar pottery fragments were recovered during the 1976 excavations in the field immediately to the south (e.g. sherds 11 and 13: Drewett 1982a, 49–50). One rimsherd has internal cord impressions (Fig. 3, no. 4) and is similar to sherd 2200 from Kiln Combe (Bell 1983, 123 and 128). These pieces were all recovered from trenches B and C (see 2 and 3 on microfiche).

Date range: late 3rd millennium b.c.

Group 2: domestic Beaker wares (3 sherds). Grog-tempered ware with coarse to fine flint inclusions; oxidised exterior surface and reduced interior surface and core. Body-sherd sections up to 1 cm. thick. Rusticated decoration is present on two sherds (Fig. 3, nos. 5 and 6). All three sherds were recovered from trench B (see 2 on microfiche).

Date range: early 2nd millennium b.c.

Group 3: Beaker finewares (37 sherds). Grog-tempered ware with medium to fine flint inclusions and, on occasion, fine sand; oxidised exterior surface and reduced interior surface and core. Body-sherd sections up to 6 mm. thick. Decoration, consisting of horizontal bands of either twisted cord (e.g. Fig. 3, no. 10) or comb impressions (e.g. Fig. 3, nos. 7 and 9), is discernible on nine sherds. This material is comparable

Fig. 3. Peterborough ware (nos. 1–4), domestic Beaker ware (nos. 5–6), Beaker fine ware (nos. 7–10) and copper-alloy ?axe (no. 11).

with the decorated Beaker finewares from Belle Tout (Bradley 1970, 335–44) and Kiln Combe (Bell 1983, 123 and 127–8). All pieces were recovered from trenches B–F (see 2–5 microfiche).

Date range: early 2nd millennium b.c.

Group 4: Pre-Roman Iron Age (4 sherds). Fabric with numerous iron oxide inclusions in pisolithic form and medium abundant fine and medium-sized flint grits. Body sherd sections up to 6 mm. thick. Elsewhere in East Sussex the use of iron oxide-rich clays appears to relate to the Iron Age, e.g. Hollingbury (Hamilton 1984, 55). All four sherds came from trenches C–E.

Group 5: fired clay (10 pieces). Oxidised clay body with no obvious inclusions, recovered from trenches C, E, F and J.

Ceramic thin-sectioning (by Caroline Cartwright)

Five sherds were thin-sectioned.

Peterborough ware. One sherd was thin-sectioned (P.37 from context C/2c: see 6 on microfiche), revealing moderately frequent large angular flint inclusions and small sub-rounded quartz grains. The occasional large iron mineral inclusion was also present in the clay matrix.

Beaker fineware. Three sherds were thin-sectioned. The first (P.61 from context D/3: Fig. 3, no. 10) proved difficult to section, because of the unconsolidated nature of the clay matrix. After impregnation, sectioning revealed much grog and a regular scatter of small and medium-sized quartz grains. Some medium and small angular flint inclusions and a few iron minerals were also present. The second (P.51 from D/3: see 7 on microfiche) and third (P.60 from context D/3: Fig. 3, no. 7) sherds revealed fabrics closely similar to that of P.61.

Domestic beaker ware. Thin-sectioning of one sherd (P.5 from context B/3: Fig. 3, no. 6) revealed a fabric closely similar to, but more consolidated than the beaker fineware sherds described above.

The clays used to produce these wares were probably obtained locally.

Flint

A total of 1,387 prehistoric flints was recovered during the excavations; these are summarised in Table 1. Nearly three-quarters of the flint assemblage was recovered from trenches C–E (see 9–10 on microfiche for further context details).

Raw material. This comprises nodules of grey or brown flint with cream cherty patches derived either from Clay-with-Flints deposits, the beach or from chalk exposures, possibly cliff-slumps along the coast. Sixty-six pieces had a blue-white patination. A study of the cortex, colour and quality of the flints suggests that just under half of the flint came from Clay-with-Flints deposits, while the remainder consists of beach pebbles and a small quantity of fresh chalk flint.

Technology. Five bladelets with minimal butts, detached from carefully-prepared blade cores using a soft hammer, were recovered from trenches C, K and M. These probably date to the Mesolithic period and are thus residual to the main period of prehistoric activity represented on the site. The remainder of the flint was flaked to produce either core tools or flakes which could be used as blanks for making implements.

TABLE 1
The Flint assemblage

Flakes/blades	656
Mesolithic bladelets	5
Biface-thinning flakes/blades	545
Flake cores	15
Hammerstones	3
Roughout fragments	2
Flakes off ground flint implements	3
Scrapers	51
Piercers	3
Knives	13
Cutting flakes/blades	32
Semi-abruptly retouched implement	1
Denticulate	1
Combination tools	2
Notched flakes	4
Fabricator	1
Petit tranchet arrowheads	3
Oblique arrowhead fragment	1
Triangular arrowhead fragment	1
Miscellaneous retouched flakes	15
Fire-fractured flints	30
Total	1,387

The flints associated with core tool production included 545 biface-thinning and finishing flakes, part of an axe roughout (Fig. 4, no. 3), a possible pick or chisel roughout fragment (Fig. 4, no. 2) and three flakes off ground flint implements (Table 1), one of which was definitely detached from a flaked and ground axe. Virtually all of these flints were grey with few flaws; these had been obtained as nodules from either the beach or chalk exposures, although at least three biface-thinning flakes had unabraded cortex compatible with nodules from Clay-with Flints deposits. The majority of the biface-thinning flakes had been detached using soft hammers and less than 4 per cent had ended in hinge fractures. Thirteen of the larger flakes had been retouched into implements: five into scrapers, one into a piercer and seven into cutting flakes.

The remainder of the assemblage had been flaked using a different core reduction strategy, involving the use of stone hammers to detach mainly flakes from flint nodules without making any attempt to prepare either the striking platform or the flaked surface prior to removing each flake. The three hammerstones (Table 1) are flint pebbles from the beach. In addition, one of the cores showed signs of use as a hammerstone, and three flakes had also come off beach pebble hammerstones. The majority of cores had two platforms at right angles to one another, although a rough, multiplatform core and a discoidal core were also recovered. One core consisted of beach pebble flint; the remainder were nodules from Clay-with-Flints deposits. Most flakes had wide butts, while just over 15 per cent had ended in hinge fractures.

The Implements. A variety of tool types is present (Table 1). Scrapers, the most abundant tool type, include both end (Fig. 4, nos. 4, 6–7; Fig. 5, nos. 15–17) and side (Fig. 4, no. 5) scrapers, along with a scraper/knife and a scraper/piercer

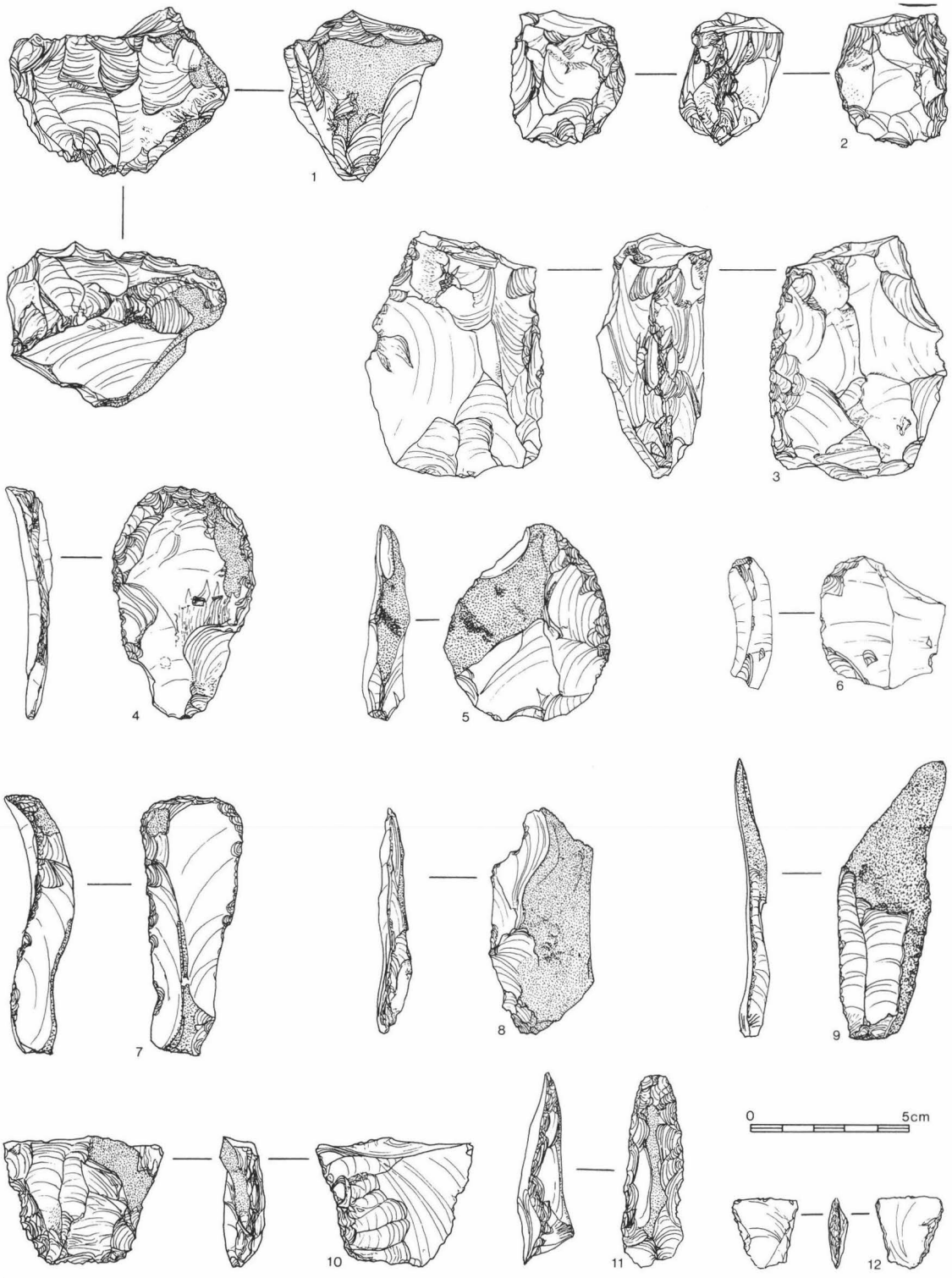

Fig. 4. Flintwork. 1. two platform flake core; 2–3. roughout fragments; 4–7. scrapers; 8–9. cutting blades; 10. scraper fragment, retouched on ventral surface to facilitate hafting; 11. semi-abruptly retouched implement; 12. *petit tranchet* arrowhead.

(Fig. 5, no 19) combination tools. The proximal end of one scraper and another broken scraper (Fig. 4, no. 10) were invasively retouched along one or both lateral edges on the ventral surface, probably to facilitate hafting in an organic handle. Most scrapers were abruptly or semi-abruptly retouched, although six end scrapers (Fig. 5, no. 16) had invasive retouch. Traces of probable use wear were detected on five scrapers (see below), while another end scraper was fire-fractured. The assemblage also included a semi-abruptly retouched implement (Fig. 4, no. 11) of unknown function; it could have been used either as a chisel or as an end scraper, but no wear traces were discernible (see below).

The knives are flakes or blades with invasive retouch along one or both lateral edges (Fig. 5, no. 14); one knife had bifacial retouch on one edge (Fig. 5, no. 18). Six knives were backed, i.e. had invasive retouch along one edge and abrupt retouch on the other. It is possible that one or two scrapers were originally knives, before being resharpened into scrapers (e.g. Fig. 5, no. 15). A number of flakes and blades (Fig. 4, nos. 8–9) with edge damage through use (see below) were also recovered and are classified as cutting flakes/blades (Table 1).

The arrowheads (Table 1; Fig. 4, no. 12) are all later Neolithic forms. One of the *petit tranchet* arrowheads (Fig. 4, no. 12) has fractures along the transverse edge consistent with impact fractures, but the extent of post-depositional surface modification prevents further analysis of the use wear traces on this piece (see below).

Use wear analysis (by Roger Grace)

Ten of the flint implements were examined microscopically for polishes and striations resulting from use (see 11 on microfiche for further details). Observations are only really possible on blackish, fine-grained flint. The presence of post-depositional polish makes it difficult to say more than that an edge was used. The implements having most wear traces are the end scrapers. This is probably because these 'formal tools' would have the most extensive use, so that use wear polish would be more developed on these tools and thus more likely to resist the post-depositional effects. Consequently, any further use wear analysis on this material should be concentrated on 'formal tools'.

Bronze object (by Dennis Britton)

Description. Two conjoining pieces of a bronze artefact came

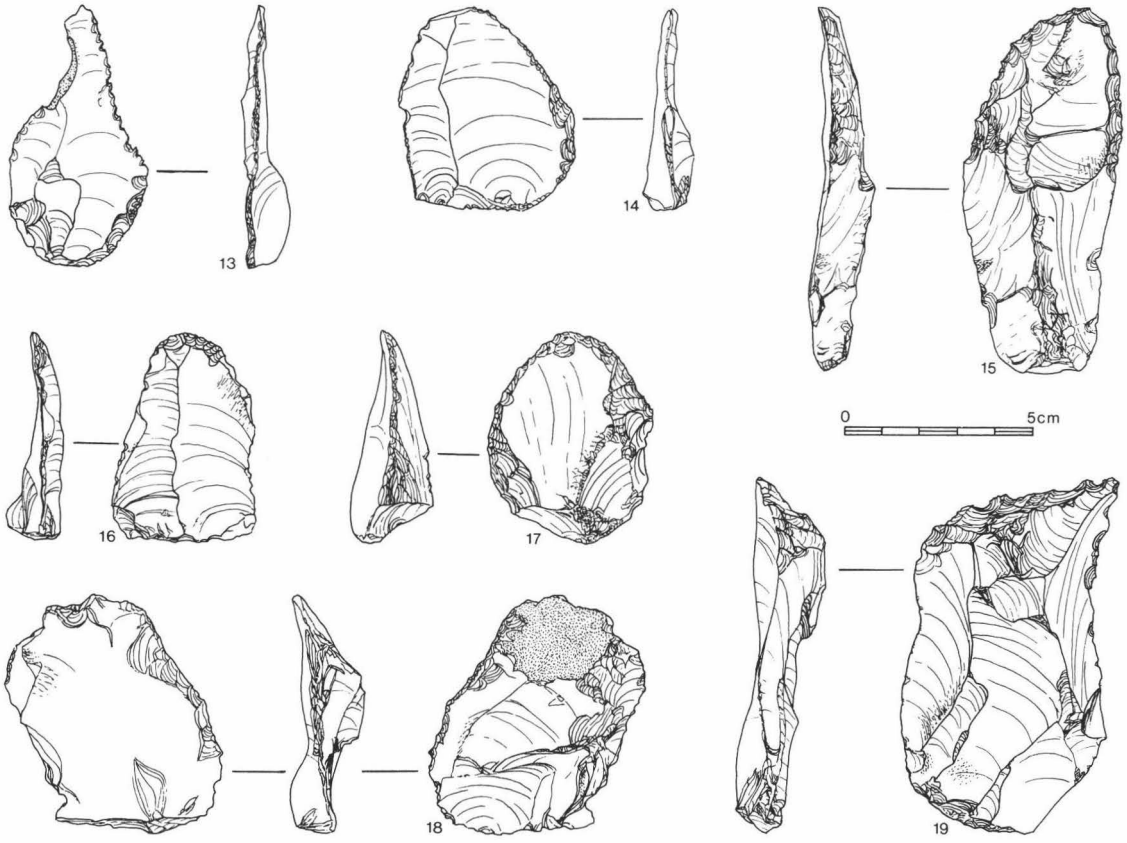

Fig. 5. Flintwork. 13. denticulate; 14. Knife; 15–17. scrapers; 18. knife; 19. piercer/scraper combination tool.

from the plough soil between trenches F and G (Fig. 3, no. 11). All the surfaces are corroded. The broken edges, although corroded, still fit together quite well. In its present state the object has two parallel faces, which are very roughly triangular. In side view the middle portion is seen to be thicker and the object becomes gradually thinner towards the apex and towards the opposite end of the triangle. Length now *c.* 65 mm. Maximum thickness now *c.* 8 mm.

Metallurgical examination. The object has been analysed by Dr. Peter Northover (Department of Metallurgy and Materials Science, University of Oxford). The material is a tin bronze, and in addition to copper the analysis is as follows:

tin:	13.79%	silver:	0.03%
arsenic	0.05%	gold:	trace
lead:	0.05%	zinc:	trace
nickel:	0.04%	bismuth:	0.03%
iron:	trace		

Antimony and cobalt were sought but not detected above 0.01%.

Dr. Northover comments:

> 'If the object is Bronze Age the analysis would tend to place it in the Early Bronze Age. On the other hand I have seen similar results in the Iron Age; from the limited quantity of results available it is unlikely to be Roman.'

Comment. Because of the degree of corrosion, the details of the original shape and size must be rather conjectural. The present appearance might perhaps suggest a small axe blade of simple design: with flattish faces and a fairly narrow body, which tapers from the cutting-edge towards the butt. Bronze axe blades of this general form are known from the Early Bronze Age in Britain, and specifically from the earlier part of that period. Most of them are much larger than this object, but smaller versions sometimes occur. They may have been lighter cutting tools which could have been used for various purposes.

Geological material (by Caroline Cartwright)

A total of 13 beach pebbles and four fragments of Greensand were recovered from trenches C, E, F and K (see 12 on microfiche for further context details).

DISCUSSION

The excavations did not produce any structural features or pits. However, a dense concentration of pottery and flints was located in trenches B–F. The fact that later Neolithic pottery has survived suggests that this material has not moved far from its place of deposition. Use wear analysis of some of the flint implements shows that a number of pieces have traces of post-depositional surface modification, but this could result from downward movement caused by worm activity as opposed to horizontal displacement. This material could be interpreted as the remains of a midden.

The concentration of pottery and flintwork does not constitute a sealed archaeological context; thus the Peterborough ware and the Beaker pottery were not necessarily deposited at the same time. The flintwork is typical of a later Neolithic domestic assemblage, but a large proportion of the assemblage would not be out of place on a purely Beaker site, e.g. Kiln Combe (Bell 1983: see Fig. 6). A date range of *c.* 2500–*c.* 1500 b.c. can be put on this material, but it is impossible to be more precise. It is also possible that the bronze object was originally associated with this material.

The site occupies a large area along a north-south running ridge. It is likely that a small farmstead existed here, which was probably permanently occupied and surrounded by cultivated fields and activity areas. The farmstead itself probably shifted location slightly during the later Neolithic period, as buildings fell into decay and new structures were built (cf. the later Bronze Age farmstead at Black Patch, East Sussex: Drewett 1982b). The material in trenches B–F could relate to either a house or an activity area situated nearby.

A number of later Neolithic and Beaker domestic sites in East Sussex have been investigated recently (Fig. 6). On the Downs, these occur either in dry valleys, e.g. Belle Tout, or along ridges. It is not yet clear if these were all equal status sites fulfilling similar functions, or whether different activities were practised at particular sites. Future fieldwork should concentrate on locating further sites of this date and excavating well-preserved sites which are capable of providing absolute dating, economic and environmental information.

POST-MEDIEVAL MATERIAL

Post-medieval material recovered during the excavations from the ploughsoil and worm-sorted horizon (context 2) in trenches A–D, F–H, K and L includes 19th- and early 20th-century pottery, a 19th-century clay pipe stem, three

late-18th or 19th-century buttons, a gunflint, lead shot and faunal remains; surface collection by Mr E. Williams produced further pottery, clay pipe stems, buttons, gunflints and lead shot, as well as 57 coins, nine tokens, a medal, miscellaneous metal objects and a whetstone fragment.

Pottery

The pottery includes red-bodied, lead glazed earthenware, underglazed transfer-printed earthenware and stoneware (see 13 on microfiche for context details). It is possible that the red-bodied earthenware and some of the stoneware dates to the 18th century; the remainder is mostly of mid- to late-19th century and early-20th century date.

Clay pipe fragments (by David Atkinson)

Fragments of clay pipe stems were collected from the field surface; the excavations produced a further fragment from the ploughsoil in trench B. Datewise, they can broadly be placed in the 1800–1900 bracket which could perhaps be diminished to *c.* 1820–80. The absence of any identifying features makes closer dating impossible.

Buttons (by Phil Carstairs)

A total of 101 buttons was recovered: three were found during excavation and 98 on the field surface. A detailed inventory is included with the site archive.

The decorated buttons. Thirteen buttons of the Royal Ordnance Corps. (three cannons and three cannon balls set within a shield) were found, one of which came from ploughsoil in trench D. A variety of sizes and forms are represented; they date from 1790–1830. At the time of the Napoleonic wars, the R.O.C. was in charge of garrisons and forts; a similar group of R.O.C. buttons was found at Portchester Castle, a garrison and prisoner-of-war camp (Carstairs, forthcoming). Four buttons of one of the Sussex regiments are present, dating from 1800–20. Six other military buttons were retrieved; they date to 1800 or later. One decorated button not marked with military insignia dates from the mid- to late-18th century.

The plain buttons. Eighteen zinc alloy 'tombac' buttons with cone shanks, some with lathe-turned backs, occur in a variety of sizes. They date from the second half of the 18th century to the 19th century. One of these buttons was found during the excavations (context B/2). A group of five similar cone-shanked and 14 loop-shanked buttons, made of pewter, are contemporary. The majority of the other plain buttons date from the late 18th or early 19th century; they are machine stamped and have machine-made loop shanks. Some are 'gilts', a common early 19th-century button with a thin gold wash. One four-hole sew-through button is 20th-century. Another two-hole linen-covered button found in the excavations (context L/1) is post–1841.

Conclusion. The assemblage is slightly later in date than that from Portchester Castle. However, unlike at Portchester,

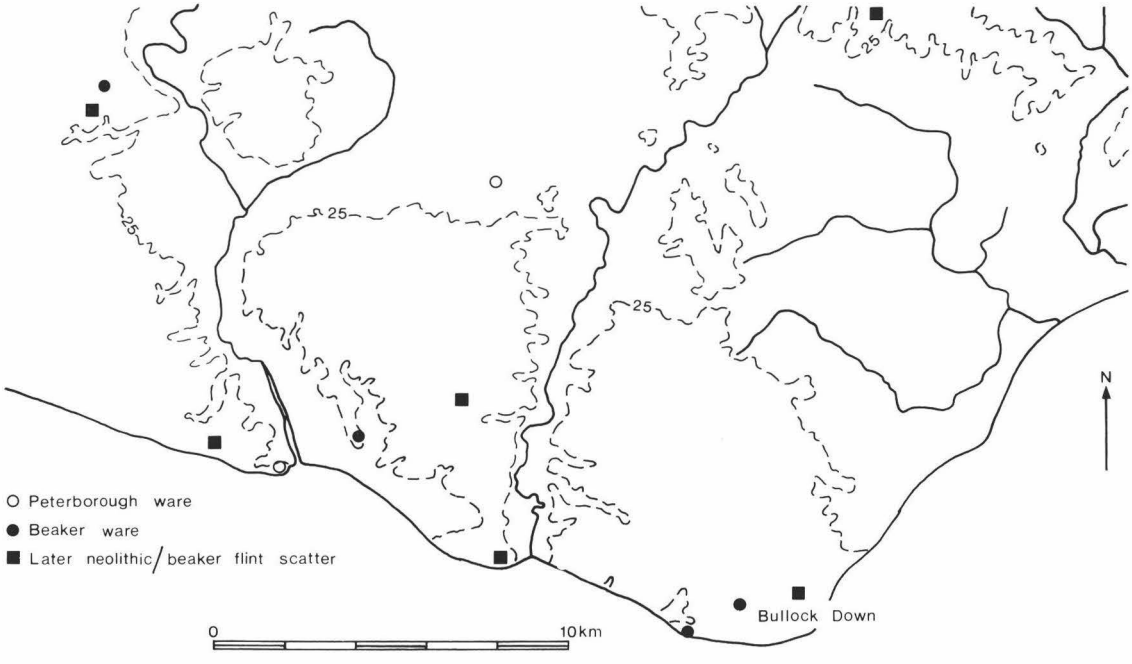

Fig. 6. Later Neolithic and Beaker sites around Bullock Down.

there are no foreign buttons present. The assemblage dates mainly from 1750–1830, perhaps between 1780 and 1810. The assemblage is evidence for British military occupation of the site during the Napoleonic wars, but this does not suggest the presence of a prisoner-of-war camp.

Gunflints

Nine gunflints, including one with a piece of lead 'casing' wrapped around it, were recovered, one of which came from the ploughsoil in trench C. The flint is dark grey-brown in colour and would be consistent with the flint used by the Brandon gunflint knappers in Norfolk.

Lead shot

A total of 73 lead shot was retrieved, including one from the excavations (context G/2a). Most of the shot weighs between 25 and 30 g.

Faunal remains (by Gloria Polizzotti Greis)

Nine animal bone fragments were recovered during the excavations from contexts C/2b and E/2b. Eight could be identified as sheep/goat (see 14 on microfiche for further details).

Coins and tokens (by David Rudling)

The surface finds from the site include: 57 coins; seven copper token halfpennies; two lead token; and one medal. They range in date from a coin of Tetricus I (A.D. 270–3) to a halfpenny of George V (for full details see 15–16 on microfiche). There are two finds of Tudor coinage (the only ones so far discovered on Bullock Down): a Henry VIII halfgroat (see Rudling 1982, 163) and a sixpence of Elizabeth I (dated: 156?). Of particular interest, however, is the large number of coins and tokens of the late 18th century, and this assemblage offers an interesting insight into the problems of low denomination currency at this period. Most of the coins are extremely worn and illegible, and include a high proportion of contemporary imitations. The seven token halfpennies, which date *c.* 1794–5, are generally in much better condition. It is interesting to note that at least three of the tokens were issued fairly locally, with two of the tokens being of Sussex towns (Hastings and Chichester) and one from Portsmouth, Hampshire.

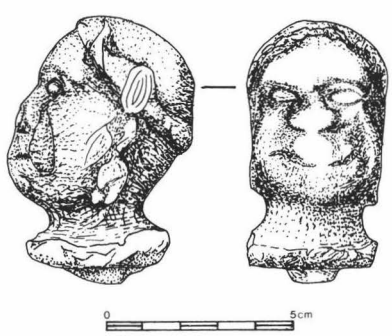

Fig. 7. Lead negro's head.

Metal objects

A number of miscellaneous iron objects, mostly nails or unidentifiable fragments, was collected from the field surface. A few pieces of lead, including two possible bullets, were also recovered. The only object of interest is a lead negro head (Fig. 7) of unknown date.

Whetstone (by Caroline Cartwright)

The surface collection produced a fragment of a fine-grained quartz-sandstone whetstone, weighing 35 g.

DISCUSSION

Amongst the post-medieval material are numerous items datable to the late 18th and early 19th centuries: coins, tokens, military buttons and probably gunflints and lead shot. This material suggests British military occupation of the site sometime during the Napoleonic War (Fig. 2). There is, however, no documentary evidence for a fort or other defensive works on Bullock Down; moreover, the steep cliffs here would have made this quite unnecessary (Ann Hudson, pers. comm.). The presence of a prisoner-of-war camp is also unlikely, as no foreign artefacts have been recovered (see Carstairs above). What could be represented is a military training area or camp in use at some stage during the Napoleonic War (Ann Hudson, pers. comm.).

Contents of microfiche

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Note: The finds and site archive have been deposited at Eastbourne Museum.

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