Middle Bronze Age and medieval occupation at Upper Clayhill Farm, Ringmer, East Sussex

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An evaluation and watching brief in the Ouse Valley at Upper Clayhill Farm, Ringmer, revealed early prehistoric flintwork and evidence for middle Bronze Age occupation. A key find was a pit containing a semi-complete Deverel-Rimbury vessel, burnt and worked flint, charcoal and fired clay, possibly representing a placed deposit. Other features included ditches forming enclosures or elements of a field system. The find is significant as a rare example of a middle Bronze Age occupation site from the Low Weald of East Sussex, away from the more favoured South Downs. Medieval features containing pottery dated to the 13th to 14th century were also present, suggesting a nearby settlement. Following the fieldwork, the site has been left to be preserved in situ.

INTRODUCTION

Oxford Archaeology carried out an evaluation and watching brief at Upper Clayhill Farm, Ringmer, between February and June 2015. The investigations were undertaken on behalf of CgMs and Solar Development Ltd in advance of the creation of a new solar park. The site comprised pasture fields 250m to the east of the River Ouse and alongside its tributary, the Iron River (Fig. 1; TQ 44601565). The underlying geology is mapped as Weald Clay Formation mudstone, capped by river terrace sand and gravel on the higher ground and alluvial clay on lower ground.

No archaeological remains had previously been recorded at the site, although there is evidence for prehistoric activity within the surrounding area (Millum 2012). There is an old record of a possible round barrow about 700m to the south-east of the site, although its exact location is uncertain (HER no. MES1897). Evaluation trenching in this area failed to find any trace of a barrow, but did uncover part of a late Iron Age settlement (McGregor 2016). Yeakell and Gardner's map of Sussex of 1778–83 shows the site as farmland, with rough grassland or marsh fringing the Iron River.

METHODOLOGY

The investigations began with a geophysical survey (WYAS 2014) revealing the presence of a possible rectilinear ditched enclosure in the northern part of the site. This was followed by the excavation of ten evaluation trenches (Fig. 2). Most of the trenches were placed so as to assess the potential of the wetland/dryland interface zones for prehistoric archaeology, while Trench 6 was targeted on the possible enclosure. Geoarchaeological test pits (2m x 2m) were excavated by machine to record the sedimentary sequence at the end of each trench. A watching brief was subsequently carried out along two access roads. In the light of the results of these investigations, archaeologically sensitive areas of the site were removed from the development impact and preserved *in situ*.

RESULTS

The geoarchaeological test pits identified a general sequence of bedrock, overlain by thin Head deposits and Holocene colluvial subsoil, sealed by the modern topsoil. In the low-lying parts of the site, close to watercourses, alluvial deposits lay beneath the colluvium or were interleaved with it. Middle Bronze Age and medieval features cut into the colluvium were encountered during the evaluation and watching brief. These remains were restricted to

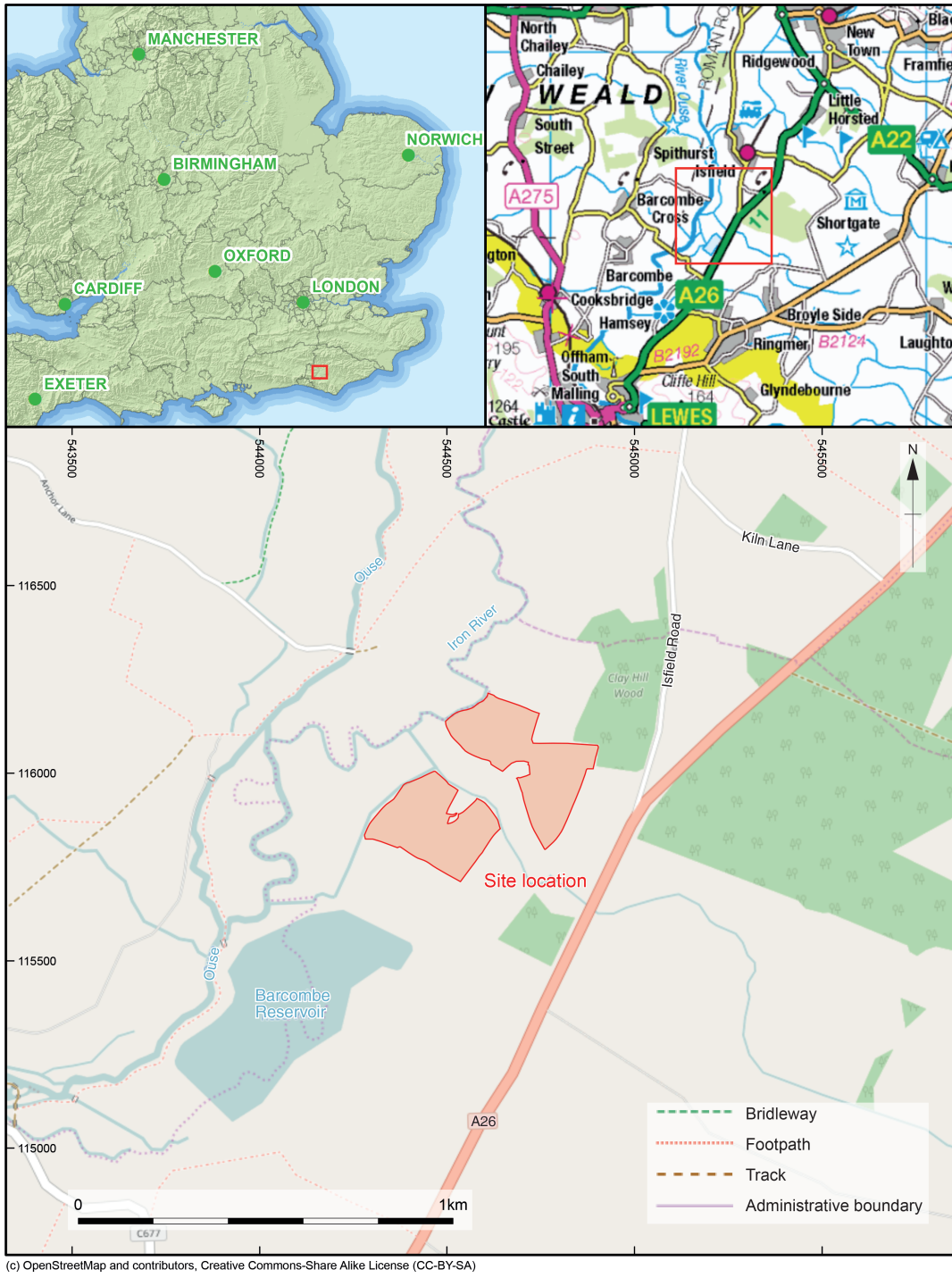


Fig. 1. Site location.

Fields 1 and 2, in the northern and southern parts of the site respectively (Figs 2–4). Two small trenches excavated in Field 3, to the east, encountered no archaeological features or finds.

EARLY PREHISTORIC FLINTWORK AND ALLUVIAL DEPOSITS

A small assemblage of early prehistoric flintwork was recovered, including a mesolithic element (*see* Donnelly below). Much of this material was residual in later features, or in disturbed subsoil and topsoil horizons. Alluvial clay deposits in the lower-lying areas of the site also produced flintwork and may be of prehistoric origin. In the western edge of Field 1, the subsoil sealed an alluvial clay layer (107) that yielded burnt flint and six pieces of worked flint. These included a fresh mesolithic microlith, but also a flake of possible later prehistoric date. The clay overlay a deposit of clay silt (108) that produced one piece of worked flint and could possibly represent an early Holocene land surface.

At the southern edge of Field 1, the edge of a possible palaeochannel (15/18) with clay and silt fills was recorded. This produced seven pieces of worked flint and a few small fragments of burnt flint and fired clay. The flintwork includes a core of possible early prehistoric date, but also a probable later Bronze Age piercer. The edge of a further possible palaeochannel (26) was observed in the watching brief in Field 2 and this produced a single flint flake.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE OCCUPATION

Middle Bronze Age activity was concentrated in Field 1. The most notable feature was pit 205, which was 1.4m in diameter and 0.42m deep, with sloping sides and a fairly flat base (Fig. 3). The lower fill contained worked flint and small pieces of fired clay, probably derived from a hearth or oven (identified by Cynthia Poole). This was overlain by a lens of dark, charcoal-rich material containing worked flint and more than one kilogramme of pottery, including large fragments of a semi-complete coarse jar in the Deverel-Rimbury tradition. An environmental sample from this layer produced wheat, barley and wood charcoal (*see* Meen below). The upper fill produced further worked flint, including diagnostically later Bronze Age pieces.

Pit 610 produced no finds, but had a very similar basin-shaped form and sequence of fills to pit 205, again with a charcoal-rich lens as its middle fill. It may thus be of a similar date. Pit 4, at the northern edge of the site, was a more irregular feature measuring 1.86m in diameter and 0.34m deep. Its lower fill contained sherds of middle Bronze Age pottery.

The geophysical survey identified a possible rectilinear enclosure of about 30 x 20m on a north-east–south-west alignment. Trench 6 was located to investigate this feature, but its date remains ambiguous. Ditch 612 (0.2m deep) corresponds with the western side of the enclosure and produced a few fragments of pottery, some dated to the middle Bronze Age but others medieval. As the ditch was cut by a medieval pit at this point, it is possible that the medieval sherds are intrusive or have been wrongly assigned to the ditch. Shallow, curvilinear ditch 616 could possibly represent the north-east corner of the enclosure and produced only a single piece of worked flint. Other than pit 610, no features were observed in the interior of the enclosure that could date to the Bronze Age.

A number of other ditches may relate to boundaries or a field system associated with the middle Bronze Age occupation. These ditches were up to 0.5m deep with U-shaped cuts. In Trench 1, two parallel ditches on a north-east–south-west alignment (103 and 105) were spaced 1.3m apart. They produced worked flint, including a piercer of probable later Bronze Age date from ditch 105. Three other ditches in Field 1 had varying alignments and are undated (7, 13 and 211). In Field 2, to the south, parallel ditches 404 and 406 share a similar alignment to 103/105 and were again spaced 1.3m apart. Ditch 404 contained a few sherds of pottery dated to the middle Bronze Age. A small pit or post-hole (408) a short distance from this ditch produced two pieces of worked flint.

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY

As discussed above, the western ditch (612) of the putative rectilinear enclosure contained medieval pottery, though this could be intrusive. It was cut by a shallow pit (614) containing further medieval sherds. Immediately to the west of the enclosure, and on a differing north–south alignment, was ditch 618. This produced a single sherd of medieval pottery. Ditch 604, lying 15m to the east within the area of the enclosure, had a similar alignment to 618 and may be contemporary. The pottery from 612, 614 and 618 probably dates to the 13th century.

Medieval activity to the south, in Field 2, may be slightly later in date, with most of the pottery

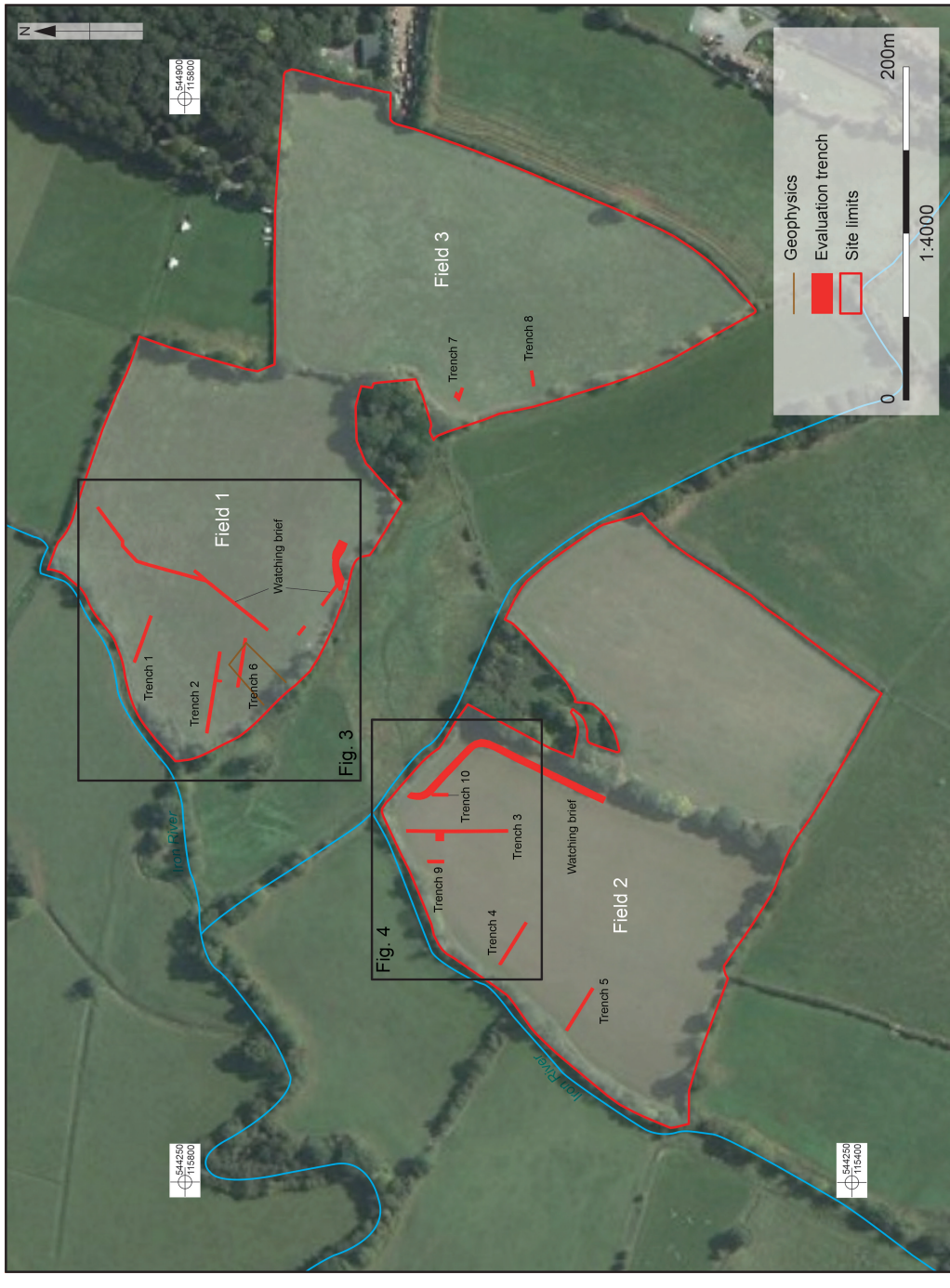
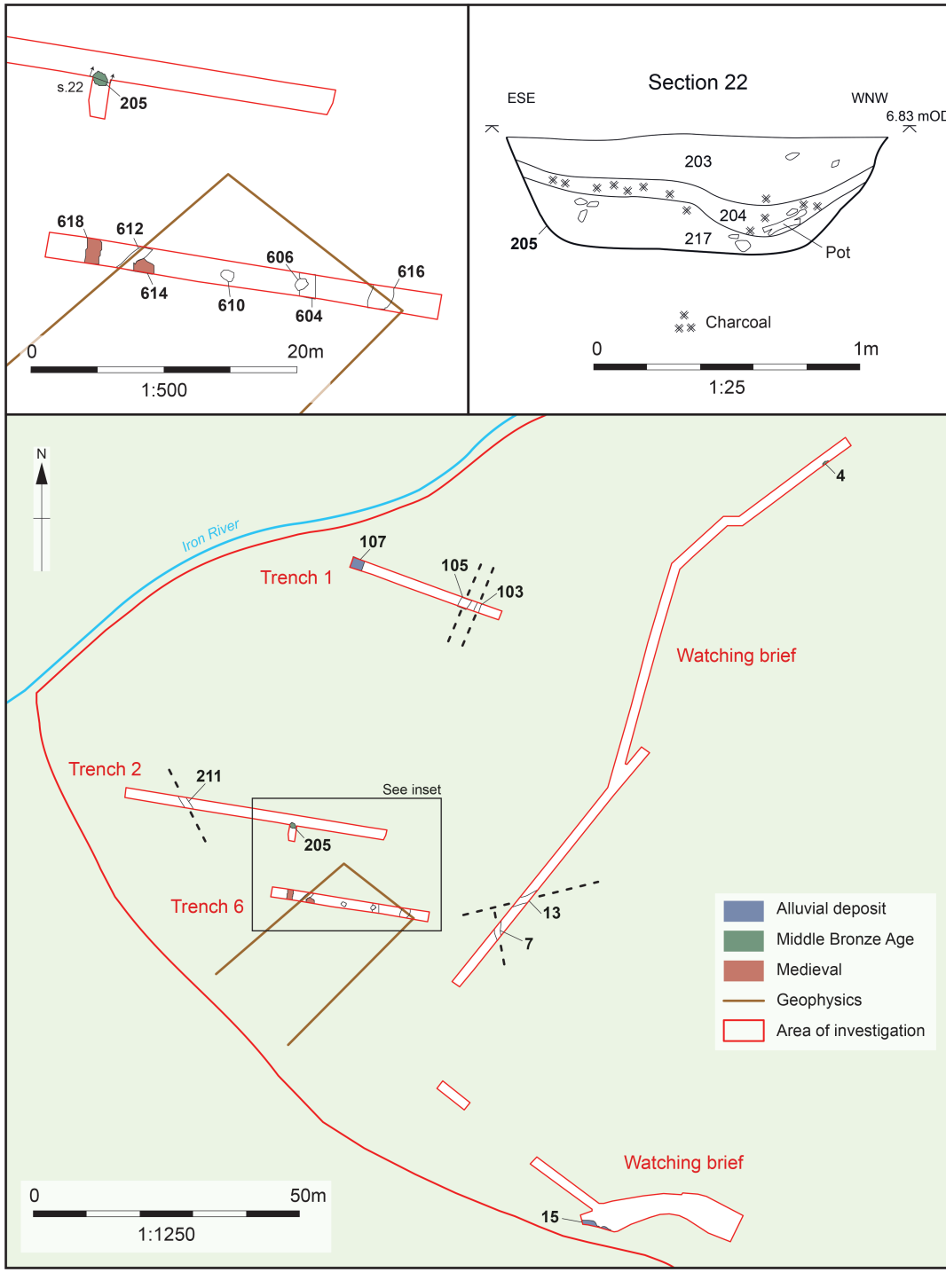


Fig. 2. Trench location.


s.22
205
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612
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Iron River
Trench 1
107
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Watching brief
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205
Trench 6
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Middle Bronze Age
Medieval
Geophysics
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Fig. 3. Field 1.

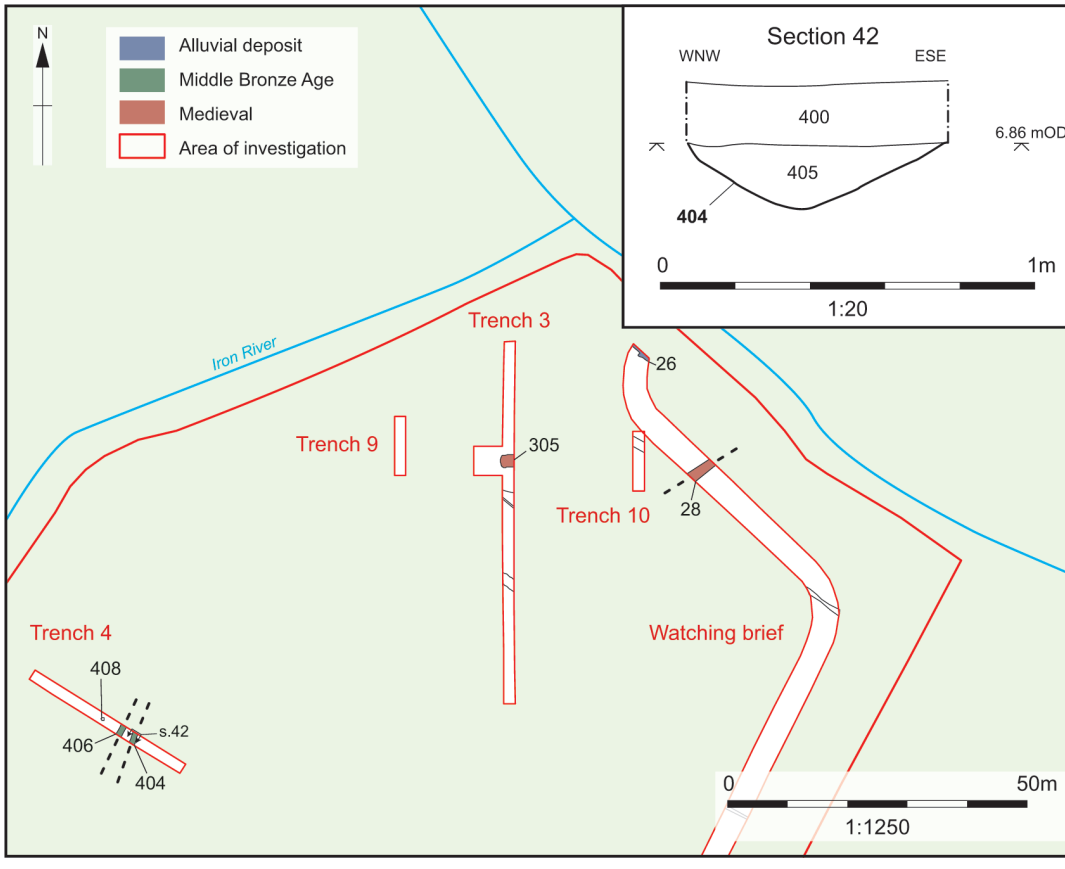

Fig. 4. Field 2.

probably belonging to the late 13th to 14th centuries. The most notable feature was the western terminus of a shallow ditch or possible trackway (305) aligned east–west. Two areas of gravel spread at either end of the feature may relate to wheel rutting. The fill contained flint cobbles, significant amounts of pottery and a fragment of ceramic tile. To the east of this feature, a shallow ditch (28) on a north-east–south-west alignment produced a single sherd of medieval pottery. A number of gullies on a north-west–south-east alignment in Field 2 probably relate to post-medieval drainage.

FINDS

FLINT by Michael Donnelly

The fieldwork yielded a small assemblage of struck and burnt flint (Table 1; Fig. 5), made up of three main components. Firstly, a limited, early prehistoric background-scatter across the site; secondly, a redeposited, later prehistoric element from topsoil, subsoil and later features; and thirdly, a later prehistoric, *in-situ* component, recovered from features of certain or possible middle Bronze Age date, centred on Field 1. The discussion below summarises a longer report available from the OA Library, which includes details of the methodology (https://library.thehumanjourney.net/).

Raw material and condition

Flint was the only raw material exploited, but it varied considerably in quality, reflecting various direct or indirect sources. Some pieces displayed quite thick chalk cortices, while others, from secondary sources, displayed weathered or heavily rolled surfaces, typical of very disturbed gravel or

Table 1. The flint assemblage by area.

Category type	Field 1	Field 2	Total
Flake	46	15	61
Blade	5	2	7
Bladelet	5	1	6
Blade-like	3	2	5
Blade index	22% (13/59)	25% (5/20)	22.8% (18/79)
Irregular waste	17	8	25
Chip	1	1	2
Axe sharpening flake		1	1
Sieved chips 10–4mm	1		1
Sieved chips 4–2mm	10		10
Rejuvenation flake	2		2
Crested piece	1	1	2
Core opposed platform blades		1	1
Core multi-platform flake	1	1	2
Core fragment	2		2
Core tested nodule	1		1
End scraper	2		2
Microlith	1		1
Denticulate	1	1	2
Piercer	3		3
Retouched blade	1	1	2
Retouched flake	2		2
Total	105	35	140
Burnt unworked flint no./g	155/231g	23/787g	178/978g
No. burnt (exc. sieved chips) (%)	21/94 (22.3%)	7/35 (20%)	28/129 (21.71%)
No. broken (exc. sieved chips) (%)	21/94 (22.3%)	6/35 (17.1%)	27/129 (20.9%)
No. retouched (exc. sieved chips) (%)	10/94 (10.6%)	3/35 (8.6%)	12/129 (10.1%)

even beach pebble sources. Flint is available in the immediate vicinity of the site and obtaining it would not have been difficult. Most of the flint recovered is in fresh condition or has low levels of edge damage; much of the more heavily damaged material is also burnt. Only three pieces are heavily plough-damaged, suggesting that the flint had not moved far, even though a considerable amount was recovered from the topsoil, subsoil or later features.

Early prehistory and the wetland/dryland interface zones

The best candidate for any potentially surviving mesolithic scatters was in alluvial clay layer 107, where a small assemblage was recovered including a snapped blade and a rare, tanged point microlith (G-type, Clark 1932; Fig. 5.2). This assemblage also yielded several fragments of burnt, unworked flint. Other examples of residual early material include an opposed platform blade core from Trench 9, several blades, including residual bladelets, in pit 205, a fine retouched blade from medieval feature 305 and a tranchet axe sharpening flake from subsoil in Trench 4.

In addition, several crested pieces, numerous blade forms and several thin flakes with a regular flaking pattern and soft-hammer bulbs all attest to flint knapping at some time between the late upper palaeolithic and the earlier neolithic. The earlier date is highly unlikely, but stray finds of late-glacial material are being made in Sussex, as at Rock Common (Harding 2000) and more recently at the Bexhill to Hastings link road, where several small clusters of bruised blades have been found (Oxford Archaeology forthcoming).

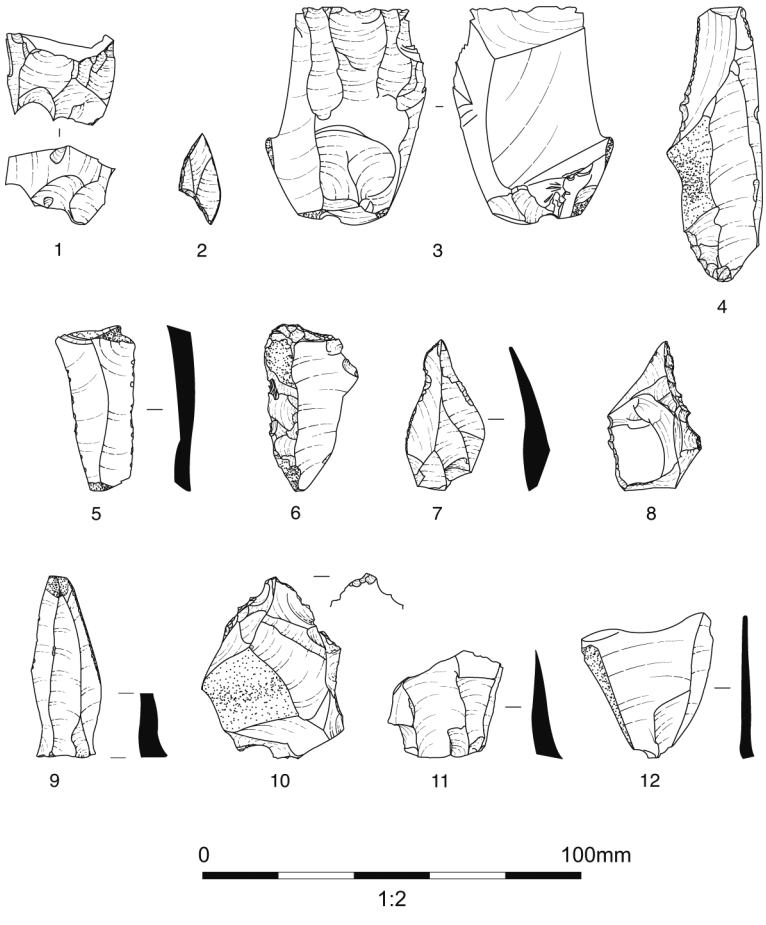

Fig. 5. Worked flint (catalogue numbers in brackets). 1. Core fragment (cat. 160), flake producing; layer 19 in palaeochannel 15/18. 2. G-type tanged microlith (cat. 19), late mesolithic; clay layer 107. 3. Opposed platform blade core (cat. 128), early prehistoric; subsoil layer 902, Trench 9. 4. Retouched blade, early prehistoric (cat. 83); fill 306 of medieval feature 305. 5. Distal trimming blade (cat. 152), later Bronze Age; subsoil layer 2. 6. End scraper on trimming flake (cat. 149), later Bronze Age; subsoil layer 2. 7. Piercer on an inner flake (cat. 162), later Bronze Age; layer 19 in palaeochannel 15/18. 8. Piercer on a thermal chunk (cat. 14), later Bronze Age; fill 104 of ditch 105. 9. Retouched blade (cat. 70), later Bronze Age; fill 217 of pit 205. 10. Piercer on a trimming flake (cat. 53), later Bronze Age; fill 203 of pit 205. 11. Hard-hammer inner flake (cat. 55), later Bronze Age; fill 203 of pit 205. 12. Thin hard-hammer side trimming flake (cat. 65), later Bronze Age; fill 203 of pit 205.

The unequivocally mesolithic component of the assemblage consists of the tanged point microlith and the tranchet axe sharpening flake, but it is likely that many of the blades, cores and crested pieces described above also belong to this period. The retouched blade from possible trackway 305 is also a good candidate for a mesolithic date, while the second example, from pit 205, has some technological attributes that suggest it may be a rare and unintentional example of a Bronze Age blade form.

Tanged point microliths are rarely common in any given assemblage and may represent specialised hunting equipment rather than the standard scalene triangle or A-type form of early mesolithic point and barb. Tanged points were quite common at Streat, nine kilometres west of the site, where they are argued as being early mesolithic or part of a transitional early/late mesolithic industry (Butler 2007, fig. 10, nos 33 and 39). Small tanged points make up a minor component of many Horsham industries (Clark 1934), and this would support the idea of a transitional date for these microliths. Five were recovered at the Bexhill to Hastings link road and were found in scatters of both early and late mesolithic date and also as stray finds.

Residual later prehistoric material

The residual later prehistoric material included many squat, hard-hammer flakes and a lone example of a very chunky blade with plain, cortical or thermal platforms, prominent platform spurs and simple flaking patterns. The assemblage also included a number of tools consisting of a piercer, two end scrapers, a denticulate and some retouched flakes, one of which may be neolithic in date. Most

Table 2. The flint assemblage by period.

Category type	Early prehistoric	Later prehistoric stray	Later prehistoric *in situ*
Flake	**3**	**27**	**31**
Blade forms	**14**	**2**	**2**
Irregular waste		**15**	**10**
Axe sharpening flake	**1**		
Chips		**1**	**12**
Rejuvenation flake		**2**	
Crested piece	**2**		
Core opposed platform blades	**1**		
Core multi-platform flake		**1**	**1**
Core fragment		**1**	**1**
Core tested nodule			**1**
End scraper		**2**	
Microlith	**1**		
Denticulate		**1**	**1**
Piercer		**1**	**2**
Retouched blade	**1**		**1**
Retouched flake		**2**	
Total	**23**	**55**	**62**

of these tool forms are typical of later prehistoric assemblages and match many from contemporary features. Some could be expedient, early prehistoric examples, or less well-made neolithic ones.

Middle Bronze Age pit and ditch assemblages

The range of forms present in the middle Bronze Age features indicate a domestic setting, as does the frequent presence of moderate quantities of burnt, unworked flint. Given the location of the site, by the wetlands edge, and taking into consideration the quantity and relatively small size range of the unworked pieces, it could be argued that there may be burnt mounds nearby. The truncation of these features by ploughing may have incorporated these fragments into many of the later features and into topsoil/subsoil horizons. Contemporary disturbance of such features may account for the presence of burnt flint in contemporary pit fills, but these fragments may also relate to a more domestic use of flint as pot boilers (pit 205 had 110 small fragments, weighing just 98g).

The most significant assemblage here is from pit 205. Flint was not evenly spread throughout its fills, with only a very few pieces from its basal fill (217), fine waste in its middle fill (204) and the bulk of the larger pieces in its upper fill (203). Six of the 27 non-chips were burnt and nine were broken; most were fresh and lightly patinated. The status of the assemblage must reflect either intentional deposition of waste, or the redeposition of midden material. The breakage could reflect trampling prior to deposition but may also reflect knapping accidents or breakage through use. The burning also reflects a range of domestic events such as the expedient deposition of a broken flint into a hearth, followed by its incorporation in a midden or pit when the hearth was cleaned out. The assemblage clearly points to a domestic setting but it could also be argued that it reflects more ritualised activity, such as feasting.

The probable Bronze Age ditches on site also yielded varying amounts of flint. In Trench 1, ditch 103 had seven pieces from its single fill, while ditch 105 had 12 pieces from two fills. These ditches contained mostly squat flakes, but also had a multi-platform core and a core fragment geared towards flake production, and a piercer on a thermal chunk (i.e. on a flint with a non-conchoidal fracture).

Discussion

The flint assemblage provides good evidence for a mesolithic presence in the landscape, particularly

near the wetland interfaces, but the limited size of the assemblage and the absence of diagnostic artefacts precludes accurate dating or consideration of the activities undertaken. The majority of the flint assemblage dates from the later Bronze Age, but few pieces are contained within contemporaneous contexts. To some degree, this reflects the deposition practices of the period, where material was commonly deposited in surface middens and on land surfaces. This material has subsequently been dispersed and redeposited across the site. The flake-orientated reduction strategies employed, and the comparatively limited range of tools, with a dominance of scrapers, is typical of the period.

BRONZE AGE POTTERY by Lisa Brown

A total of 89 sherds, weighing 1327g, was recovered from four features. Most of the material (63 sherds, 1105g) came from fill 204 of pit 205. This group represents the remains of two large vessels in the middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury tradition.

One vessel is a barrel-shaped urn in a fabric containing very coarse, ill-assorted grey and white burnt flint pieces up to 10mm in size (Fig. 6.1). It is a straight-sided jar with flat rim, slightly expanded by compression from the application of decoration in the form of irregular slash or (possibly) fingernail marks. A series of small perforations (4–5mm diameter), executed pre-firing, run about 20mm below the rim top. These may have been intended to allow suspension, or to tie down a leather or cloth cover. A surviving fragment of base is flat and slightly kicked out. A non-joining sherd in the same fabric, that may be part of the same vessel, has an applied elongated (horizontal) knob; it may be a vestigial, decorative or functioning handle. The vessel has an oxidised external surface and reduced core and inner surface. It corresponds to Ellison's (1980) 'heavy-duty' type.

The second vessel from this pit is smaller and finer, with abundant flint temper mostly restricted in size to <3mm, but with occasional pieces up to 5mm (Fig. 6.2). It is a bucket-shaped 'urn', with a simple, slightly incurving, internally-bevelled rim. It is oxidised almost consistently throughout, although with patchy reduction on the inner surface. It corresponds to Ellison's (1980) 'everyday' wares.

A group of 20 sherds (197g) of similar pottery recovered from pit 5 belonged to a single large Deverel-Rimbury vessel, but the only diagnostic sherd is a simple flat base. The remaining sherds from ditches 404 and 612 share traits with these vessels, including fabric and temper, and are likely to be of a similar date.

All of the vessels belong to the Deverel-Rimbury tradition of the middle Bronze Age (around 1700–1150 BC) and the fabrics are typical of the middle Bronze Age in this part of southern England. Most known Deverel-Rimbury Wares from Sussex are flint-tempered, although East Sussex material may also incorporate grog (not seen in this collection), as at Black Patch (Seager Thomas 2008).

The flint had been burnt and, in the most common fabric type, crushed into fragments measuring up to 5–6 mm. It may be significant that burnt flint was also recovered from site as this may have been used as a source of raw material for the pottery. This has previously been suggested for the middle Bronze Age pottery from Hassocks, West Sussex (Mullin *et al.* 2010), where it was noted that the transformation of flint by fire in order to cook food may have parallels with the transformation of clay by fire to create pottery. The spread of burnt flint at Hassocks may well have been used as a source of raw material for the pottery, but it is not certain if the burnt flint spread was a result of the production of burnt flint for temper, or of another activity which was subsequently exploited as a convenient source of material.

BRONZE AGE BOTANICAL REMAINS by Julia Meen

A single 80l bulk environmental sample was taken from the middle fill (204) of middle Bronze Age pit 205. The flot was almost entirely composed of charcoal, but also included a few grains of glume wheat (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*), grains of hulled barley (*Hordeum* sp.) and glume bases and spikelet forks of emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) (Table 3). Wood from a variety of species was utilised, including *Corylus avellana* (hazel), *Quercus* sp. (oak), *Fraxinus* sp. (ash), *Prunus* sp. (includes blackthorn, wild cherry and bird cherry) and Pomoideae group (a group difficult to distinguish anatomically which includes crab apple, rowan, hawthorn and whitebeam).

MEDIEVAL POTTERY by John Cotter

A total of 69 sherds of pottery, weighing 585g, was recovered from seven contexts. The assemblage most likely dates to the 13th and 14th centuries. The assemblage is domestic in nature, with a limited range of cooking pots, possible bowls and

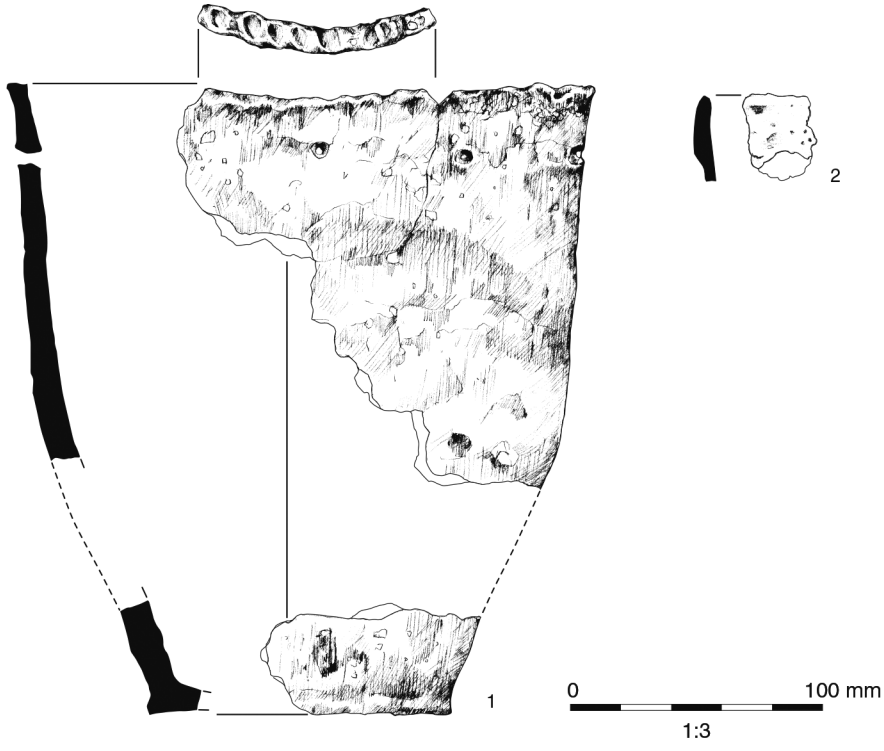

Fig. 6. Middle Bronze Age pottery.

Table 3. Charred plant remains other than charcoal from middle Bronze Age pit 205 (fill 204).

Species	Common name	Item	Number
Hordeum sp.	hulled barley	grain	8
Triticum dicoccum/spelta	glume wheat	grain	15
Cereal (indet.)		grain	19
Triticum dicoccum	emmer wheat	glume base	22
Galium sp.	bedstraw	nutlet	1

jugs. Several cooking pot sherds are heavily or lightly sooted from use. The assemblage therefore comprises domestic settlement debris rather than kiln waste, a distinction of some importance as the Ringmer area is a well-known centre for medieval pottery production (Barton 1979, 180–2; Hadfield 1981; Millum 2012, 92–115; Bleach 2013; Gregory 2014). It is very likely that all the pottery was locally produced, apart from a single whiteware jug sherd which may be a regional import.

The most up-to-date overview of the medieval Ringmer pottery industry and the several kilns located and excavated is provided in Millum's dissertation on the archaeology of Ringmer parish (Millum 2012). The dating of the known kilns and their products provided by Millum, together with documentary research on local potters (Bleach 2013), makes it fairly clear that the main period of pottery production at Ringmer was in the 13th and 14th centuries, although potting continued in the area on a smaller scale into the post-medieval period.

The potters dug and used local Gault Clay, mixed with sand, which in an oxidising kiln fires to a light

orange-red or orange-buff colour, but appears grey when fired in a reducing atmosphere (or burnt). Nearly all the pottery from the present excavation is in sandy orange-brown or orange-red fabrics. The author has examined samples of Ringmer pottery previously in the national reference collection of medieval pottery housed in the British Museum; some of the fabrics here conform with those samples.

The six sherds of pottery from Trench 6, which are all fairly worn, are in a very sandy, orange-brown coarseware, with moderate to abundant angular flint inclusions. This sandy-flinty ware also occurs in Trench 3, where one of the vessels has a greenish-brown internal glaze (context 301). The few other sandy-flinty sherds in Trench 3 include a cooking pot rim with notched decoration on the rim apex. A sherd from ditch 612 is from the shoulder of a cooking pot with an unusual decoration of oblique/diagonal grooves made with the fingertip.

These few sherds in sandy-flinty ware (paralleled in the British Museum) appear to be from handmade vessels and have an 'early' look, suggesting a date in the region of 1200–1325, or broadly 13th century. Their appearance conforms with descriptions of the local Clay Hill ware, which is dated to the late 12th and early 13th centuries (Millum 2012, 114). It is suggested that the Trench 6 sherds are all 13th century, while the few sherds of this fabric in Trench 3 are probably residual in contexts containing later pottery types.

Trench 3 has the majority of sherds from the site (62 sherds, 539g). Nearly all of this is an orange-red coarseware, including cooking pots, possible bowls and a jug or two. Some of these are glazed, mainly the more abundant cooking pot sherds, which have an internal greenish-brown glaze on the base. The forms are all wheel-thrown and more in keeping with pottery of the High Medieval period. This predominant orange, sandy ware probably dates to the period 1250–1350/75, and this is the date of most of the pottery from Trench 3 (mainly context 306). The fabric conforms with descriptions of the main types of 13th- to 14th-century coarseware pottery fabrics from Ringmer (*ibid.*). Also in Trench 3 is a single sherd from a wheel-thrown jug in a fine, sandy whiteware with a speckled, green glaze and boldly rilled decoration. This may be a contemporary Surrey whiteware product (e.g. Kingston-type ware, 1240–1400, or an early example of Cheam ware, 1350–1500?).

STONE by Ruth Shaffrey

A piece of worked Upper Greensand from subsoil layer 401 in Trench 4 shows traces of pecking on one face and possible tooling on another. Upper Greensand is commonly used in the manufacture of querns and also as structural stone.

DISCUSSION

Activity at the site before the middle Bronze Age is demonstrated by the flint assemblage. The recovery of flintwork from palaeochannels and alluvial deposits highlights the potential for prehistoric archaeology in the wet/dry interface zones of the Ouse valley. While the flintwork is of varying dates, a mesolithic element is notable. It is likely that the margins of the River Ouse provided attractive locales for post-glacial hunter-gatherers (Holgate 2003), as suggested by the possible hunting camp of the 7th millennium BC excavated along a tributary stream of the Ouse at Streat, nine kilometres to the west (Butler 2007). Locally, mesolithic flintwork has been recovered from fieldwalking in the Ringmer, Laughton and Barcombe areas and from the Culver Project excavations at Barcombe (Jones 2016). Jones has argued for a wide-ranging mesolithic presence in the Ouse valley, suggesting that the main home bases lay on the chalk and sandy tracts.

The discovery of occupation in the middle Bronze Age is significant, despite the limited scale of the investigations. Our knowledge of middle Bronze Age settlement in Sussex has traditionally been dominated by sites located on the South Downs and, to a lesser extent, the coastal plain (Ellison 1978; Drewett 1982; Greig 1997; Rudling 2002; Hamilton 2003, 70–71; Tapper 2011; Hart 2015). Until recently, there has been less evidence for contemporary activity in the Low Weald, other than a few scattered finds of metalwork (Yates 2007, fig. 12.9; Fisher 2016), leading to perceptions that this was a sparsely settled, forested landscape.

These perceptions have begun to be dispelled by the findings of modern fieldwork. In the immediate local area, the Culver Project excavations in the Barcombe area, about 2.5km to the southwest, have uncovered a middle Bronze Age ring ditch at the Barcombe Villa site, and an urned cremation burial at Pond Field (Fisher 2016). At the Wilderness, a test pit in a former tributary of the Ouse recovered an oak stake which was radiocarbon dated to 1680–1530 cal BC (Allen 2011). The discoveries at Upper

Clayhill Farm contribute to the growing evidence for settlement of this period in the Low Weald of East Sussex.

The form and organisation of the occupation in the middle Bronze Age are difficult to discern, given the narrow confines of the excavated trenches. The features were spread over an area of about 350m, suggesting an extensive site, or more likely a series of dispersed areas of activity. The rectangular enclosure identified in the geophysical survey could hint at the presence of an enclosed middle Bronze Age 'farmstead' comparable to those known on the South Downs. Unfortunately, the date of the enclosure remains ambiguous. Even if it did have a Bronze Age origin, its interior does not seem to have been a focus for contemporary features or artefacts, and it could therefore have been used for livestock management rather than settlement. Perhaps the most likely interpretation is that the site consisted of a field system containing small, scattered areas of settlement activity, a pattern seen at many middle Bronze Age sites in other areas of lowland southern England (Yates 2007; Brossler *et al*. 2013, 127–8).

The finds from the site are consistent with settlement activity, including worked flint, unworked burnt flint, 'heavy-duty' and 'everyday' pottery, fired clay possibly deriving from hearths or ovens, cereal remains and charcoal. By far the richest feature was pit 205, which contained significant amounts of flintwork and pottery, including a semi-complete Deverel-Rimbury jar and parts of a second vessel. This may represent the discard of domestic waste, though the presence of a semi-complete vessel hints at a deliberate act. This may be comparable to the deliberate deposits marking episodes in the history of settlements and people observed in the middle and late Bronze Age sites on the South Downs (Tapper 2011).

The fieldwork also uncovered ditches and a possible trackway dated by pottery to the 13th to 14th centuries. The pottery largely derives from the local kilns in the Ringmer area. No kiln waste was present, however, and sooting on the pottery suggests domestic use. It is likely that a previously unknown medieval settlement lies in the immediate vicinity of the site.

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