

# Iron Age Settlement at Swan Valley Business Park, near Rothersthorpe, Northampton

by

MARK HOLMES and PAT CHAPMAN

with contributions by

Andy Chapman, Mary Iles and Dennis Jackson

## SUMMARY

*Two middle to late Iron Age settlements were excavated in 1994 on land adjoining the M1-Motorway near Rothersthorpe Service Station, Northampton, on the site of the Swan Valley Business Park. The sites were characterised by geophysical survey followed by selective excavation of parts of the enclosure system and several of the associated ring ditches. The southern settlement comprised a large rectangular enclosure, only part of which was available for investigation, containing at least four roundhouse ring ditches and associated small enclosures. A settlement 200m to the north comprised at least three ring ditches and a D-shaped enclosure or pen set within a large enclosure. The presence of globular bowls in the northern settlement suggests that it was in use later than the southern enclosure, most probably continuing into the first century BC. Both settlements were associated with east-west linear ditches that may have formed territorial boundaries, perhaps indicating that these two settlements were facing one another across a pair of such boundaries rather than representing contemporary or successive elements of a single settlement. A previously undetected Roman site, 100m to the west of the Iron Age sites, was identified and briefly examined during the watching brief in 1996.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1989 Swan Hill Developments applied for permission to develop 91ha of agricultural land adjacent to junction 15A of the M1-Motorway as a business park near Rothersthorpe Service Station

on the outskirts of Northampton (NGR SP 720 578, Fig 1). An archaeological evaluation of the area was carried out in 1989 by the Northamptonshire County Council Archaeology Unit (NCCAU) (Shaw 1989, Shaw and O'Hara 1990). The study identified two middle Iron Age settlements within the application area, situated 200m apart to the east of Banbury Lane.

The sites lay in the floodplain of the River Nene and were overlooked by the Iron Age hillfort at Hunsbury. Despite previous excavations along the Hunsbury Ridge and to the north of the River Nene, comparatively little detailed archaeological work had been carried out in this area of the floodplain at the time. Therefore, the curatorial section of NCCAU advised the Planning Authority to request pre-emptive archaeological sampling at each of the Iron Age settlements prior to development in order to further characterise the sites (Foard 1991).

The archaeological recording action was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology acting on behalf of Swan Hill Developments. The southern settlement, Site 1, was investigated between March and April 1994, followed by the northern settlement, Site 2, in December 1994 (Fig 2). A subsequent watching brief by Dennis Jackson, comprising regular site visits throughout the construction of access roads and the installation of buried services until March 1996, resulted in the discovery of Romano-British enclosures (Site 3, Figs 1, 9 and 10).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was carried out under the direction of Mark Holmes, with Michel Audouy as project

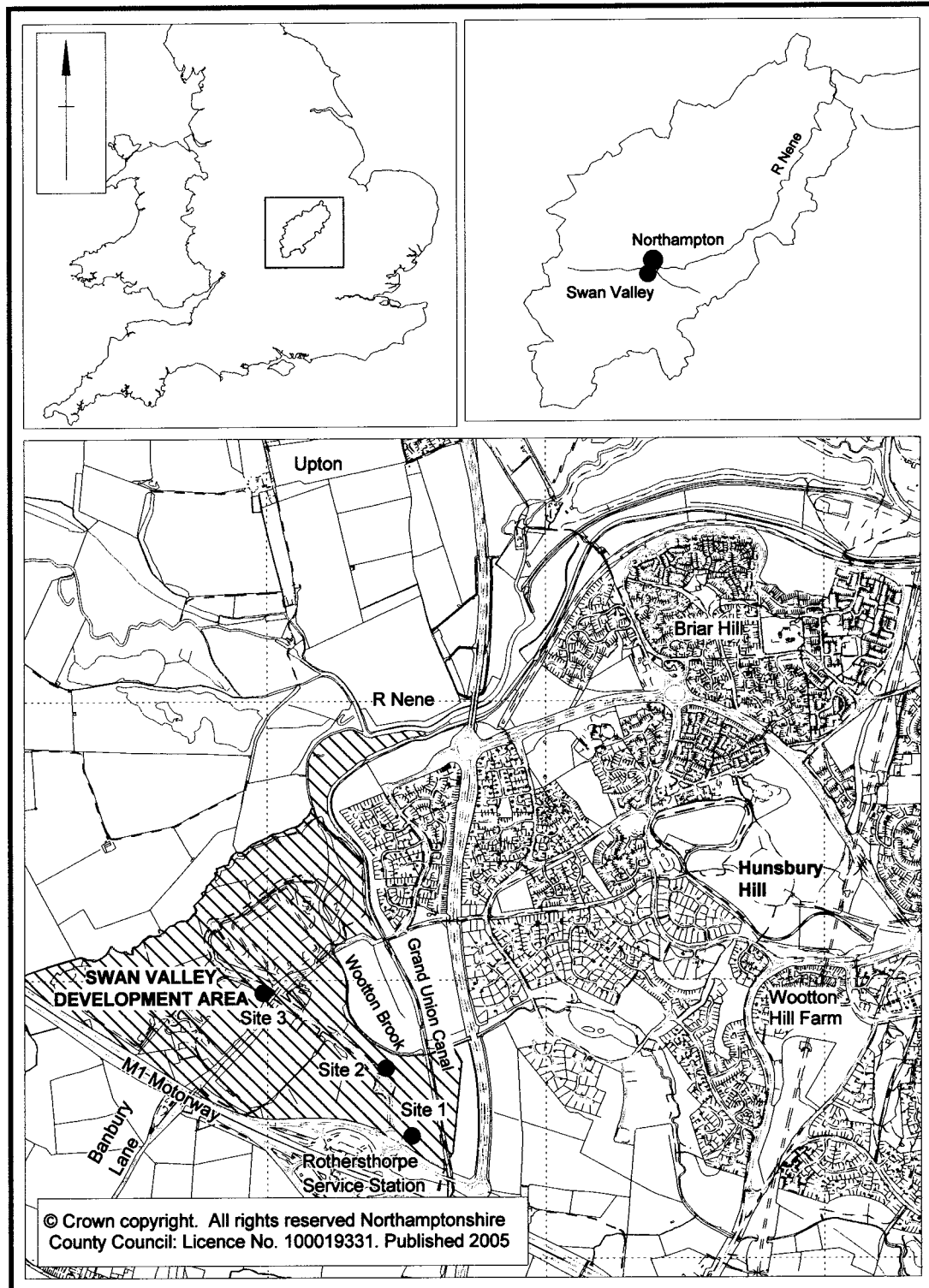


Fig 1 General location plan

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

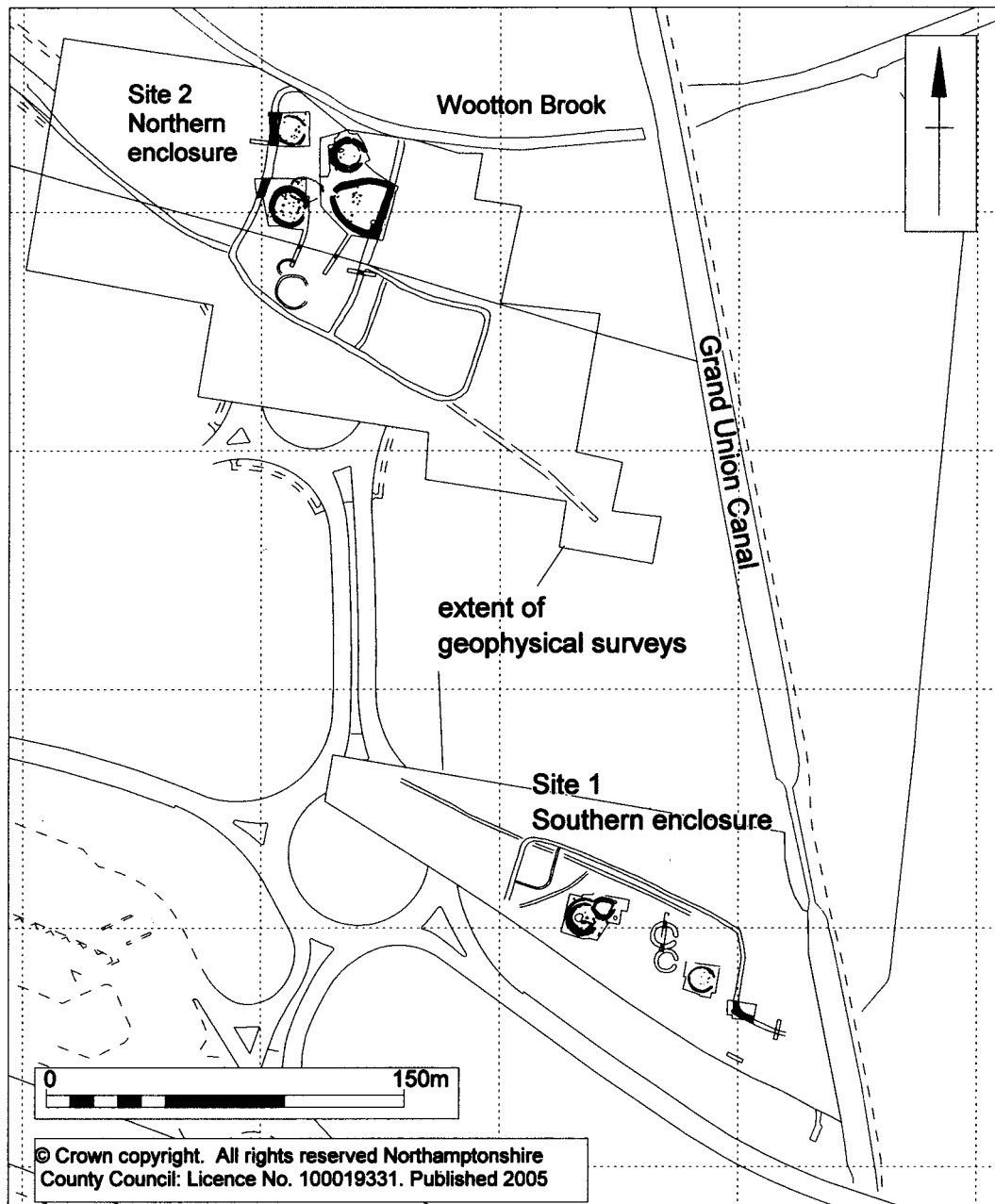


Fig 2 The Iron Age enclosures

manager. The excavation team comprised Tora Hylton, Steve Lawrence, Peter Masters, Lesley Mather, Steven Morris and Michael Webster. Peter Masters also carried out the geophysical

survey. Dennis Jackson provided valuable advice and assistance on site as well as undertaking the subsequent watching brief and the pottery analysis. The animal bone was analysed by Mary Iles of

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the Centre for Human Ecology, University of Southampton, the illustrations are by Alex Thorne with additional work by Mark Roughley and Andy Chapman. It should be noted that both the pottery and the animal bone reports were written in 1994 and reflect the state of knowledge at that time. Since then many more contemporary sites have been excavated in Northamptonshire, although much of this additional data also still awaits full publication. The final editing and preparation of the report for publication was carried out in 2005-06 by Pat Chapman.

### TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The development site comprised low lying agricultural land situated between 60-70m OD in the flood plain of the River Nene (Figs 1 and 2). It is bounded at the east by the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal and the Wootton Brook and at the west by a small tributary stream, forming the boundary of the development area, which converges with the Wootton Brook 1km further to the north-west shortly before joining the River Nene. The M1-Motorway skirts the site at the south. The area is divided into two unequal parts by Banbury Lane, which runs from Northampton to Rothersthorpe village 1km to the south and is possibly a routeway of some antiquity (see below, Roman enclosures).

To the west of the Banbury Lane, geology comprises Middle Lias silts and clays while to the east it changes to Middle Lias marlstone with outcrops of well draining glacial gravels. It appears that the Iron Age sites were located to take advantage of the underlying geology, with at least some of the excavated ring ditches being dug on the slightly higher and better draining gravel islands. The archaeological sites occupied two modern set-aside fields adjacent to the Grand Union Canal and at the time of fieldwork the land was flat, with the exception of a high motorway embankment at the south.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The settlements at Rothersthorpe are part of a wider landscape of known Iron Age sites in the Upper Nene basin which have been recognised through cropmarks, excavation, fieldwalking and stray finds (Fig 3). The site is overlooked by the Hunsbury

Hillfort, 1.5km to the north-east. The hillfort was implanted at the western extremity of a prominent ridge in the early-middle Iron Age and probably went out of use sometime in the first century BC although there is some evidence that it was re-occupied in the early-middle Saxon period (Jackson 1994a and RCHM(E) 1985, 282). The site is noted for the variety and quality of its finds, including highly decorated pottery, metalwork and a large collection of querns, which indicate wide-ranging trade contacts throughout Britain (Ingle 1994, 32).

Other, smaller Iron Age sites also occupied the Hunsbury Ridge. Two of these, at Wootton Hill Farm and Briar Hill may have belonged to a distinctive group of small defended enclosures which were located upon high ground situated along the county's main river valleys (Dix and Jackson 1989, 158). Three small rectangular enclosures, also possibly contemporary with the Hunsbury Hillfort, were examined during excavations of the Neolithic causeway enclosure at Briar Hill (Bamford 1985). None of these latter enclosures contained evidence of structures although a number of pits were found. Evidence for other Iron Age sites on the Hunsbury ridge has largely come from watching briefs. Sites at Hunsbury Hill Farm and Hobby Close included pits and ditches containing quantities of slag, suggesting exploitation of the ironstone outcrops for smelting (Jackson 1994b, 44). Occupation has also been found at Mereway and Rowtree Road (Jackson *op cit*). Further to the east along the Hunsbury Ridge there was Iron Age settlement at Hardingstone (Woods 1969) and Great Houghton (Chapman 2000-1).

At Pineham Barn, 1km to the north-west of the Swan Valley sites, a possibly contemporary middle to late Iron Age enclosed domestic settlement comprising at least three roundhouses was discovered by geophysical survey and archaeological trial excavation during the initial evaluation of another development area (Shaw 1989). The similarity in date and form between this site and those at Swan Valley suggests a pattern of farmstead settlements along the floodplain. Further Iron Age activity in the area is attested to by scatters of pottery found at the south and west of Rothersthorpe village, possibly indicating the location of settlement (RCHM(E) 1982, 96 and 127).

Further afield and north of the River Nene, Iron Age sites have been excavated at Moulton Park and Blackthorn to the north and east of Northampton

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

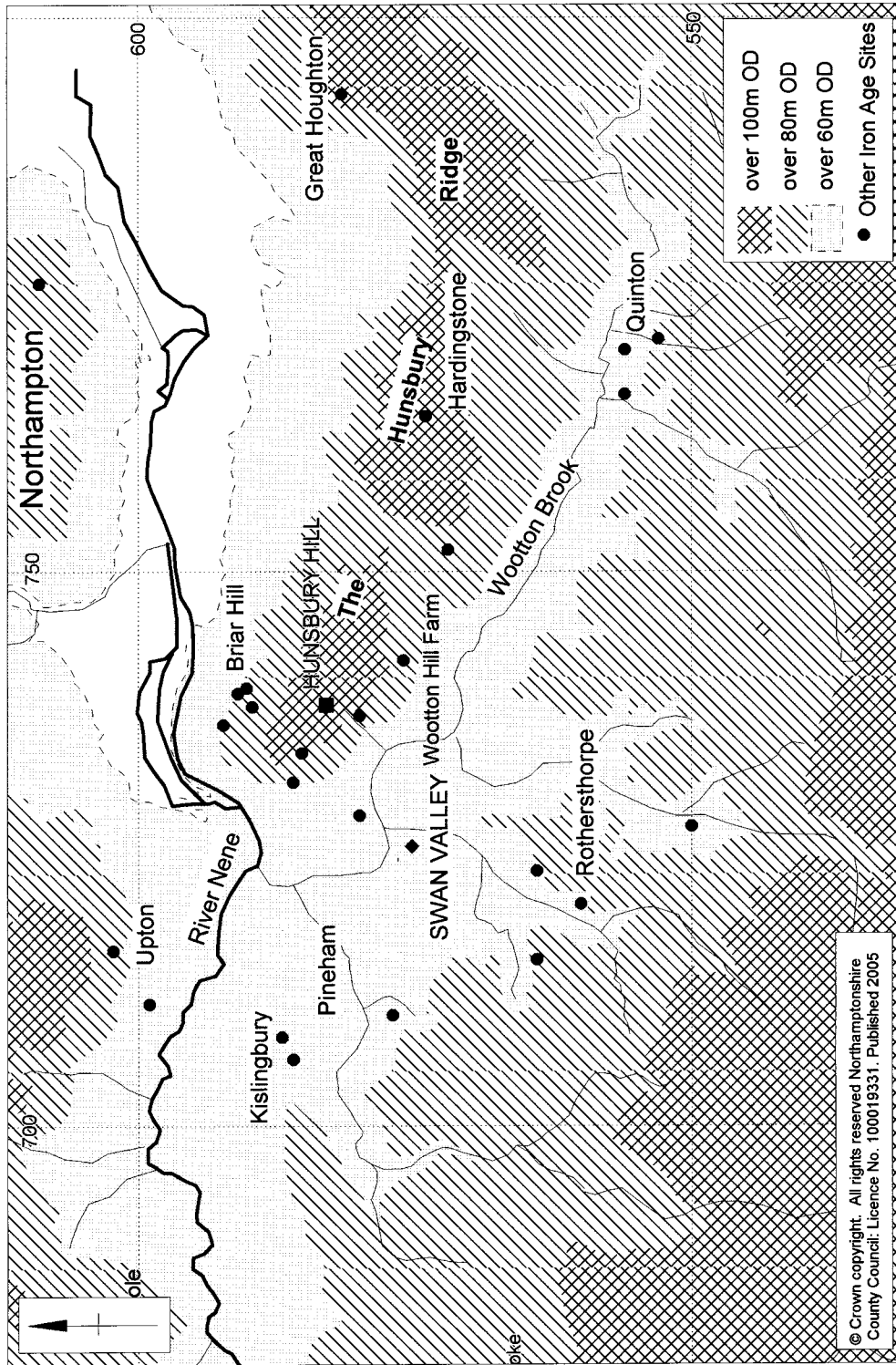


Fig 3 Iron Age sites along the Hunsbury ridge

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(Williams 1974). To the west of Northampton, at Upton, a possible ditched enclosure and a number of pits dating to the third-second century BC were found during road construction (Jackson et al 1969) and more recently a middle Iron Age settlement comprising a group of small enclosures succeeded by a late Iron Age settlement with a trackway and two enclosures was excavated in 2000 (Maul 2001). These may have been precursors to the development of the nearby Roman town at Duston.

Roman occupation has also been found in the Hunsbury area. Two villas, occupied between the first and fourth centuries AD, have been excavated: one south of Hunsbury (RCHME 1985, 2830) and the other to the east at Wootton Fields (Chapman and Thorne 2002). In Hardingstone seven Roman pottery kilns, probably first century in date, have been investigated (Jackson 1966 and Woods 1969). To the south-east, near Quinton, a Romano-British settlement spanned the first to fourth centuries AD (Friendship-Taylor 1979).

#### METHODOLOGY

Following the evaluation, which had been based upon cropmark evidence, a detailed geophysical survey was undertaken at both sites in order to recover the overall ground plan of each settlement and guide the subsequent excavation strategy (Fig 2).

The excavation strategy was discussed and agreed with the curatorial section of Northamptonshire County Council prior to fieldwork and was intended to establish the layout, date-range, character and function of the settlements. To this end, the excavations only focussed upon the main enclosure boundaries and the principal internal features in restricted discrete areas at each settlement, rather than as open area excavations.

At each site the topsoil, which was 0.30m thick, and the subsoil, 0.15m to 0.60m thick, were stripped in controlled spits using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket in order to expose archaeological features. These had been cut into the natural geology, but had been truncated by the furrows of a medieval ridge and furrow field system. Each area was cleaned by hand to enhance the definition of features which were then sampled by hand-digging.

Sections of ditches, gullies and other linear features were excavated to clarify stratigraphic

relationships. The terminals of each ring ditch were fully excavated while pits and postholes were sectioned. At the end of the excavation the remaining fills of selected features were removed in order to collect further material. The acidic soils at the site lead to poor environmental preservation and it may be that the relatively small amount of bone recovered is not a true reflection of the original assemblage. Bulk soil samples were collected from ditch and pit fills to retrieve environmental data, but preservation on the site was very poor and no useful information was recovered.

### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

#### INTRODUCTION

A small quantity of residual worked flint was recovered at both sites, and is indicative of earlier prehistoric activity in the vicinity.

Both Iron Age settlements were characterised by ditched enclosures containing circular ring ditches that had either encircled timber-built structures, roundhouses, or demarcated other activity areas. Settlement appeared to originate in the early-middle Iron Age *c* 350-250 BC, but the principal period of occupation was probably the second century BC, but with the northern enclosure probably continuing into the first century BC.

The affects of medieval ploughing were clearly visible on both sites. On the southern settlement the remains of east-west orientated furrows ran across the site, whilst at the northern settlement the furrows ran north-south. This, and subsequent agricultural activity, was the principal cause of truncation of archaeological features. Despite the evidence of ploughing, no medieval or earlier pottery was recovered from the subsoil or spoil-heaps during the excavations. Some disturbance was also caused by the presence of modern land drains which traversed both areas.

#### THE SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT

The southern settlement comprised a ditched rectilinear enclosure with an entrance to the south-east (Fig 4). There were five ring ditches in the northern half of the enclosure, comprising two pairs and a single ring ditch to the east just inside the entrance, but the southern half had been lost under the M1. Just south of and parallel to the northern

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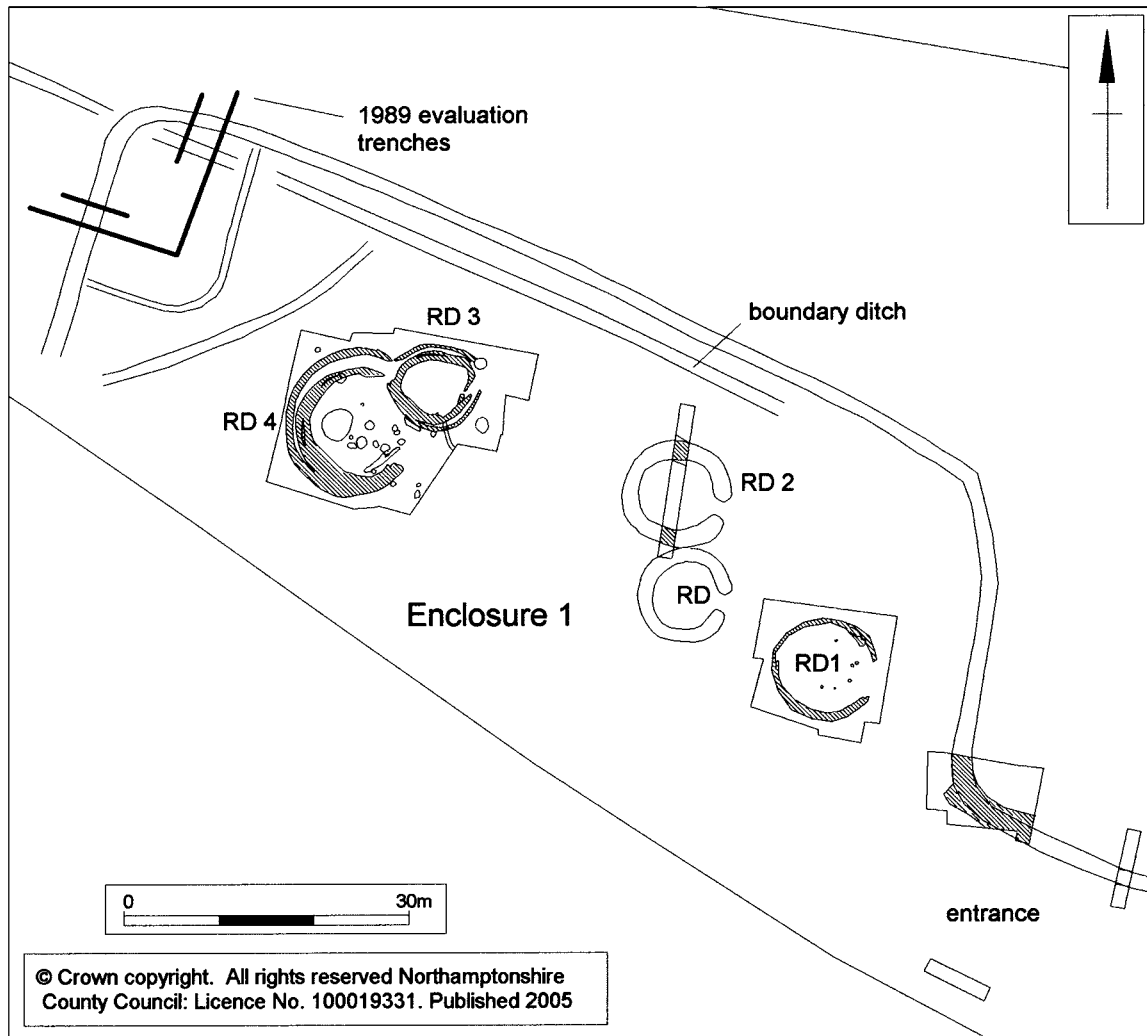


Fig 4 The southern enclosure

enclosure ditch there was a V-shaped ditch 0.90m deep, only excavated in the evaluation, which continued at least 20m further to the west (Fig 4). Unfortunately, the relationship between the enclosure and the linear ditch was not established, but the less intense magnetic response of the linear ditch indicated that it contained less occupation debris, suggesting that it pre-dated the enclosure. It is suggested that it was perhaps a pre-existing linear land boundary that dictated the location of the enclosure on that boundary.

THE ENCLOSURE

The enclosure measured 100m east to west and at least 40m north to south. It was therefore a minimum of 0.4ha in extent and if the entrance was central that it may have enclosed 0.7ha or even more. At the south-eastern entrance the ditch turned and continued eastward for at least 20m. This was presumably the northern side of an elongated approach, but the southern side was not found (Fig 4). The ditch at the entrance was 2.0-2.3m wide with at least three phases of cuts, but due to the high water table excavation had to stop at a depth of 0.30m so a full profile could not be obtained and the recuts were not fully understood.

The enclosure ditch on the northern and western sides was excavated in the evaluation, and it was U-shaped measuring

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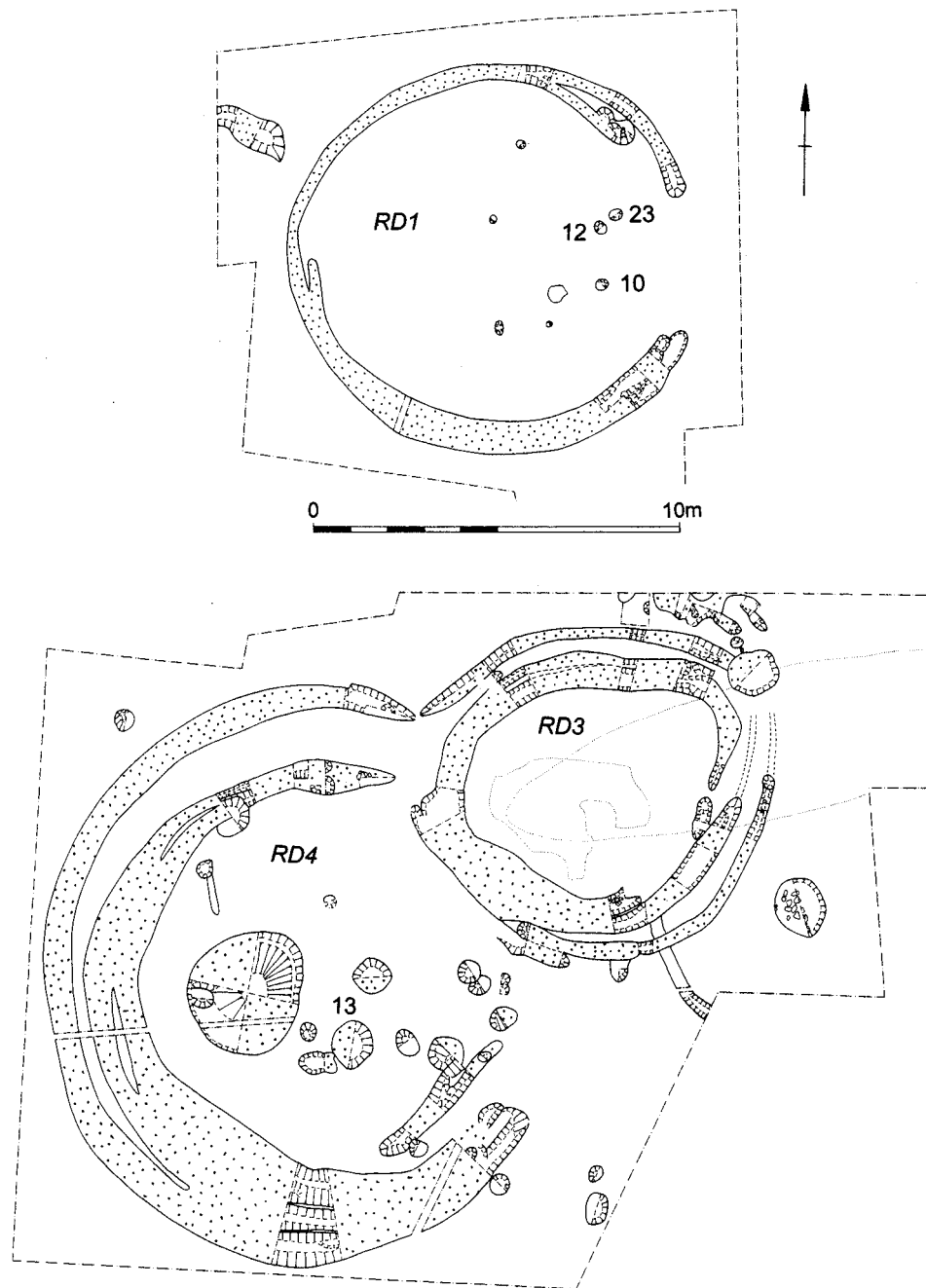


Fig 5 Ring ditches 1, 3 and 4

2.30m wide by 0.75m deep (Shaw and O'Hara 1990). The ring ditches all lay at least 10m from the main enclosure ditch, which would have left plenty of space for an internal bank although there is no other evidence to confirm its former presence.

Geophysical survey located a length of ditch, which was not excavated, cutting across the north-western corner of the enclosure to demarcate a triangular area, measuring 25m on the short sides, and within this there was a further ditch forming



IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

a rectangular enclosure, 17m long by 12m wide. These were probably stock corrals, as has been suggested for similar sub-enclosures occupying the corners of other domestic enclosures.

INTERNAL STRUCTURES

*Ring ditch 1*

This ring ditch lay to the east, just north of the entrance (Figs 4 and 5, RD1). A shallow ditch enclosed an area 9.5m in diameter with a 3.7m wide opening at the east.

At the southern terminal, the original ditch was 0.50m wide and 0.35m deep with a rounded profile and a homogeneous loam fill. It had been recut twice on the inner side. The fill of the first recut contained large rounded pebbles and a quantity of near complete pottery vessels, including the remains of four scored ware jars (Fig 11, 8 & 9; Fig 12, 7 & 10; Plate 1). This assem-



Plate 1 Terminal of ring ditch 1, showing recutting and pottery deposit (2m scale)

lage is distinctive since only another five small sherds of scored ware were recovered from the rest of the southern settlement and none from the northern settlement. The sherds from the scored ware jars could have derived from containers bringing produce to the site. The northern ditch terminal was 0.25m wide and 0.20m deep, with a U-shaped profile. As with the southern terminal, it was later recut on the inside to a shallower profile, 0.11m deep.

Three postholes (10, 12 and 23) define the probable doorposts for a roundhouse entrance at least 1.50m wide. Set nearly 2.0m inside the ditch, they suggest that the roundhouse had a diameter

of only 6.0m, if concentric to the ditch, and at most 7.5m. The postholes had flat bases but only survived to a maximum depth of 0.18m.

*Ring ditch 2*

Of the two other ring ditches in the eastern half of the enclosure one was sampled in a single trial trench (Fig 4). It had a diameter of 7.0m and the ditches to the north and south were 2.45m and 1.75m wide respectively. The geophysical survey indicated that the second ring ditch was of similar or slightly smaller size. Both had eastern entrances.

*Ring ditches 3 and 4*

A shallow arc of gully, 0.35m wide, cut by the southern ditches of RD3, may have belonged to an earlier ring ditch (Fig 5).

Ring Ditch 3 was egg-shaped. It comprised two elements, a continuous inner ditch and a partial outer ditch that was related to a similar outer ditch system encircling Ring Ditch 4 (Fig 5). The inner ditch had been recut and was characterised by a near vertical sided, flat-based gully enclosing an area 7.0m east to west and 6.0m north to south. In its earliest phase much of the south-eastern side of the oval was apparently open, with a detached pit near the northern ditch terminal leaving a 2.0m wide entrance. In the second phase, a new ditch completely blocked this open side and formed a narrow staggered eastern entrance, 0.50m wide.

The outer ditch system comprised two arcs of flanking ditches on the north and south sides. They were 0.30m to 0.50m wide with rounded profiles and up to 0.22m deep. There were stakeholes and a posthole at the terminal of the southern ditch, while the eastern terminal of the northern ditch was cut by a pit, 1.5m diameter and 0.35m deep, filled with a dark brown sandy loam.

There were no internal features and given its shape and small size it could only have enclosed a small timber structure, and it may have had some other function. A series of irregular intercutting pits lay immediately to the north. To the south-east there was a pit with a flat base and steep sides, 1.5m in diameter and 0.35m deep. Its dark grey, clayey fill contained numerous large burnt river pebbles and 26 sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Ring Ditch 4 also comprised two elements, with continuous inner and outer ditches, up to 0.4m deep, mirroring the arrangement of RD3 (Figs 4 and 5; Plate 2). The inner ditch enclosed an area 10m in diameter that was open to the east, although RD3 occupied much of this space leaving a 4m wide entrance immediately south of east. To the north and west the inner and outer ditches ran parallel, but recutting of the inner ditch around the southern side had caused the two ditches to merge.

A linear gully, 4.50m long and 0.18m deep, adjacent to the southern terminal had a shallow posthole cut into its base. This feature, together with the adjacent postholes just to the north, may have been associated with an entrance structure, perhaps a gated entrance rather than the doorway of a roundhouse.

The internal features comprised a number of pits and postholes which formed no obvious pattern. To the west there was a large shallow pit, measuring 3.4m by 3.0m and 0.25m deep. It had been recut once and the fill contained quantities of burnt angular stones and charcoal, which may be the remains of hearth material. Of the smaller pits, oval pit (13) had a small open Iron Age bowl in the fill (Fig 11, 6).

These two ring ditches were clearly set out together, although their purpose is not clear. RD4 could have enclosed a small roundhouse, but the density of pits in this area may indicate that there were other usages.

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Plate 2 Ring ditch 4 under excavation

#### THE NORTHERN SETTLEMENT

The northern half of a rectangular enclosure contained three ring ditches, a small subsidiary enclosure and there were probably further structures in the southern half (Fig 6). Although not excavated, the southern side of the enclosure appeared to link with a major boundary ditch, and there was at least one further enclosure to the east (Fig 2).

#### ENCLOSURE 2

This rectilinear settlement enclosure measured approximately 85m north to south by 50m east to west, enclosing just over 0.4ha (Fig 6). Its extent was largely recorded by geophysical survey, although the north-western corner was identified in the watching brief. Little of the circuit was exposed and no entrance locations were established. It might be expected that there would have been an entrance to the east, immediately south of the D-shaped enclosure and facing what may have been the principal roundhouse (RD6).

To the west the V-shaped ditch was 3.2m wide and 0.95m deep. The fills were a complex series of silts, but there was no certain evidence of recutting. To the east the ditch had a broad U-shaped profile and was between 2.0m and 3.0m wide and 1.10m deep. There was probably a recut on the outer edge of the ditch, and in its later use the ditch cut the fills of the D-shaped enclosure, suggesting that it had fallen out of use. The earliest surviving fills of the ditch comprised silty clays whilst later fills had a higher sand content.

To the west, a shallower ditch or slot with a steep sided U-shaped profile, 0.70-0.80m wide and 0.35m deep, lay along the inner edge of the ditch (Figs 6 and 7). There was no direct evidence that it had held timbers, but it seems best interpreted as palisade slot. A similar arrangement of a palisade slot along only part of an enclosure circuit has also been seen at the Long Dole Iron Age settlement site at the Rail Freight Terminal, Kilsby, Northamptonshire (Chapman forthcoming a). Two, and possibly three, ring ditches, as well as the D-shaped enclosure all lay close to the enclosure ditch indicating that there was no internal bank.

#### INTERNAL STRUCTURES

##### Ring ditch 8

This oval ring ditch pre-dated the principal roundhouse (RD6). The enclosure comprised a series of shallow, U-shaped ditch segments to the west (Fig 7, 62, 67 & 106) and the northern terminal of an entrance lay to the east (Fig 8, 10). It measured 13.0m east-west by 9.0m north-south (Fig 6).

Of the 24 sherds of pottery from the fill, two rim forms are thought to date to the early third century BC and therefore represent some of the earliest pottery found in the settlement (Fig 11, 1-3). These, together with a further early sherd from the palisade slot to the west suggest that this oval enclosure was part of an earlier phase of occupation, probably pre-dating the establishment of the main enclosure.

A small gully or pit (108) lay near the intersection of RD8 and RD5 and may belong with either structure. It was 0.45m deep, with vertical sides and a flat base, and the fill contained a number

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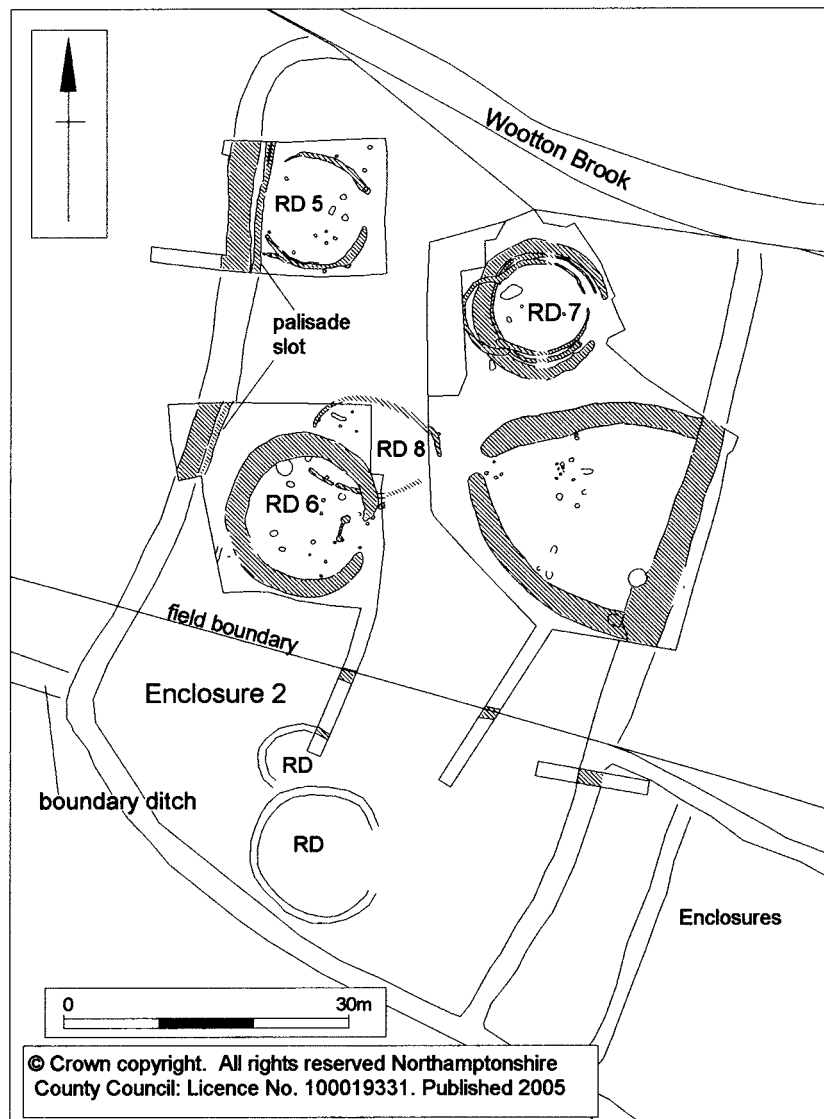


Fig 6 The northern enclosure

of large stones that had been used for packing. Much of the scatter of pits and postholes to the south, within RD6, may have been contemporary with this early enclosure.

*Ring ditch 5*

This ring ditch, with an internal diameter of 11m, comprised two curvilinear ditches that ran to the palisade slot to the west with a 3.5m wide entrance at the east (Fig 7). The southern ditch was 0.30m deep with a rounded profile and had been recut at least twice. The primary fill contained a large number of fire-cracked pebbles, while part of the second recut had been partially filled by

a layer of dumped clay. The northern ditch only showed evidence of a single recut.

Postholes (5) and (10), 0.76m to 0.64m in diameter and 0.20m to 0.26m deep, with near vertical sides and flat bases, would have held the door posts of a roundhouse. They were set 2.0m apart and suggest that the roundhouse would have been 8.0m in diameter, with a berm of at least 1.5m between the wall and the ring ditch.

*Ring ditch 6*

This was the largest and best preserved of the excavated ring

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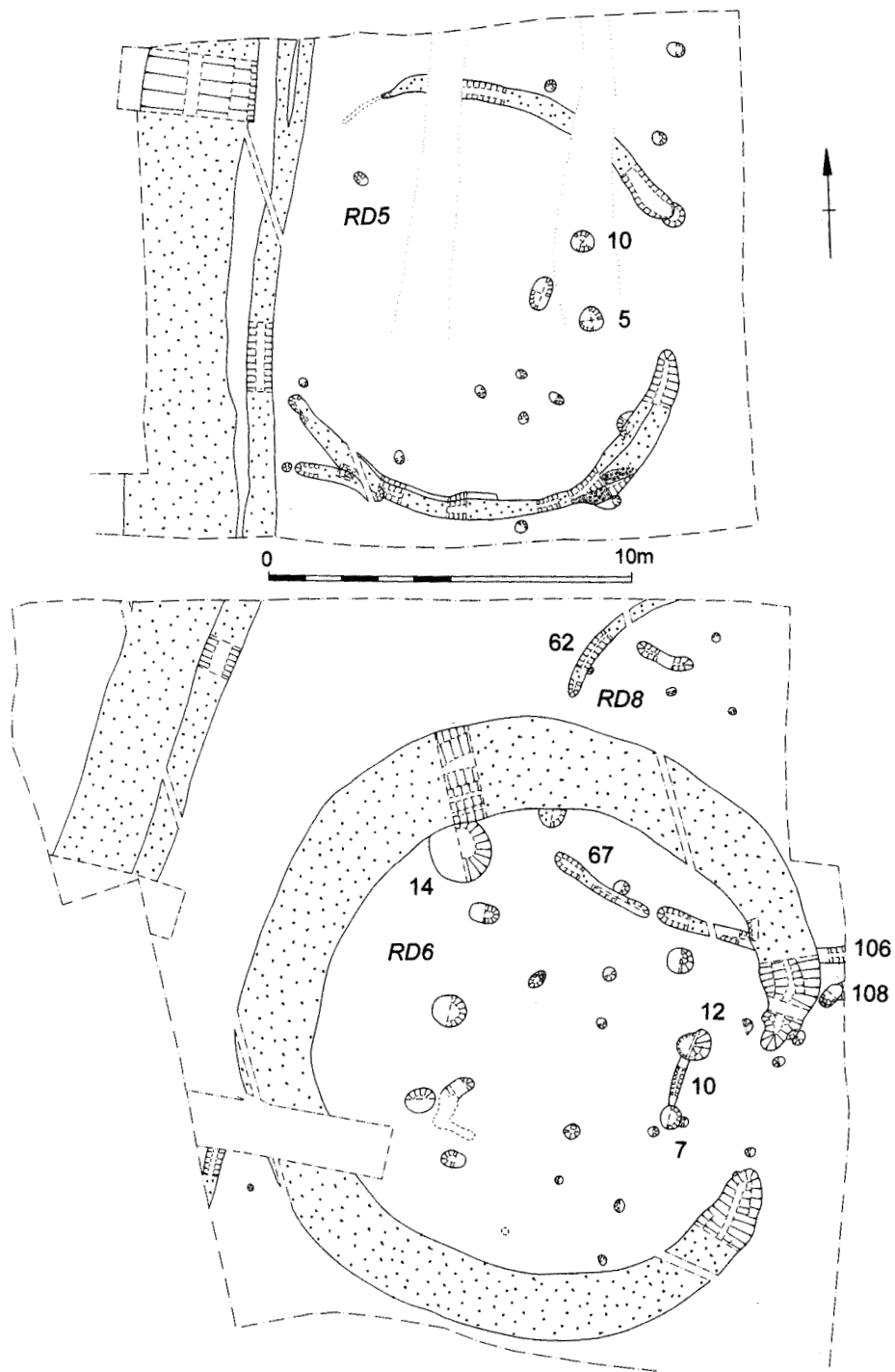


Fig 7 Ring ditches 5, 6 and 8

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON



Plate 3 Ring ditch 6 with enclosure ditch to west (right)

ditches, and it probably contained the principal roundhouse within the northern enclosure (Fig 7 and Plate 3). The ditch enclosed an area 13.0m in diameter and there was a 3.0m wide entrance to the east-south-east. The ditch was up to 2.5m wide in total, with a broad V-shaped profile. The outer and latest recut to the north was the broadest at 1.90m wide and 0.60m deep. The ditch fills were sandy loams, but the latest recut also contained moderate quantities of large rounded stones some of which were burnt.

The ditch terminals were 1.40m to 1.50m wide and 0.60 to 0.66m deep, with at least two recuts. The upper fill of the southern terminal included charcoal fragments and large sherds from several near complete or partial pottery vessels (Figs 13-14, 11-19), which comprised the majority of the pottery from the northern settlement. The greatest quantity of animal bone from one structure, comprising 180 fragments, half of all the bone found in both settlements, also came from this ring ditch, with cattle and sheep/goat present in similar quantities.

Inside the entrance there were two large post-pits for the roundhouse door jamb posts, which contained stone packing and post-pipes with diameters of 0.45m (12) and 0.20m (7). They were set 1.5m apart and were connected by a shallow slot 0.10m deep (10) that may have held a sill beam (Plate 4). Smaller postholes at the ring ditch terminals indicate either the provision of a gate at the entrance or perhaps a porch 2.2m long. The door locations indicate that there was a 1.5m wide berm between the ditch and the roundhouse, which may have been 8.5m in diameter. A further 15 postholes were scattered across the interior and may be earlier in date, perhaps contemporary with RD8.

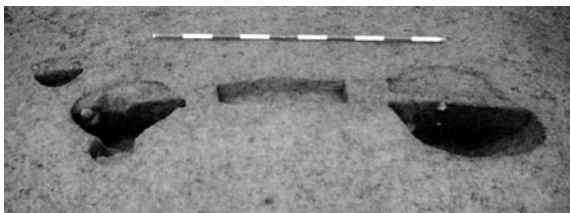


Plate 4 Ring ditch 6, doorway post-pits with slot (2m scale)

*Ring ditch 7*

In its original form RD7 comprised a narrow slot (71) within a broader ring ditch (69) (Fig 8). They enclosed an area 10.0m in diameter with a broad eastern entrance 4.5m wide.

The outer ditch (69) was up to 1.50m wide and 0.60m deep. The northern terminal was V-shaped with a rounded base, 0.35m deep, and it had a sandy fill which contained numerous burnt pebbles. The southern terminal was of a similar depth, but had a wider base and contained no burnt pebbles.

There was a 0.50m wide berm between the outer ditch and the concentric inner ditch (71), which had an eastern opening 5.50m wide. It had a narrow U-shaped profile, and was 0.40m wide and between 0.12m and 0.27m deep. The inner ditch seems narrow enough to have been a wall slot, holding the main wall of a roundhouse, but the large diameter and the absence of any door posts does not support this interpretation.

The second phase comprised new narrow ditches as arcs to the north (76) and south (75), which joined a semi-circular ditch to the west (68) that formed an apsidal annexe, 6.8m wide, cutting across both of the original ditches. The new arrangement had a slightly smaller internal diameter of 9.5-10.0m, and there was a narrow entrance, only 1.50m wide, to the north-east facing the main outer ditch terminal.

The northern ditch (76) had a V-shaped profile and was 0.51m deep at its western terminal. The southern ditch (75) was only 0.25m deep with a flat base at its western end. Both ditches became narrower and shallower towards the east. The western ditch (68) was up to 0.95m wide by 0.35m deep, with a broad rounded profile. It contained a dark brown loam fill with occasional burnt pebbles and there was a single recut.

If the ring ditch contained a roundhouse, as seems likely, then the addition of the semi-circular ditch to the west might suggest that there was a western doorway perhaps giving access to some attached structure.

*Southern ring ditches*

In the southern half of the enclosure geophysical survey suggested the presence of further ditches, tentatively interpreted as two ring ditches. One of these was partially investigated in a trial trench, and produced a pottery rimsherd of possible early Iron Age date (Fig 11, 5).

*The D-shaped enclosure*

A pair of curving ditches running westward from the main enclosure ditch formed a D-shaped enclosure, measuring 20m east to west and 20m north to south (Figs 6 and 8). There was a narrow, 2.0m wide entrance to the west, and an irregular group of four postholes indicate the provision of a gated entrance. It may have served as a stock pen.

The northern terminal of the enclosure ditch was 1.80m wide and 1.23m deep, and the lowest fills appeared to have been subject to waterlogging in antiquity. The southern ditch was up to 2m wide and its upper fills had been cut by the latest recut of the main enclosure ditch. There was an irregular cluster of postholes at the centre of the compound. Similar enclosures with western entrances have been investigated at Top Lodge, near Ringstead, Northamptonshire (Shaw 1992, fig 4, enclosure 7) and Coton Park, Rugby (Chapman forthcoming b).

Two larger pits to the south-east seem to post-date the filling of the D-shaped enclosure ditch. Pit 50 was square-sided and flat-bottomed, 1.0m square and 0.60m deep. The lower fill included frequent fragments of charcoal, while the upper fill contained

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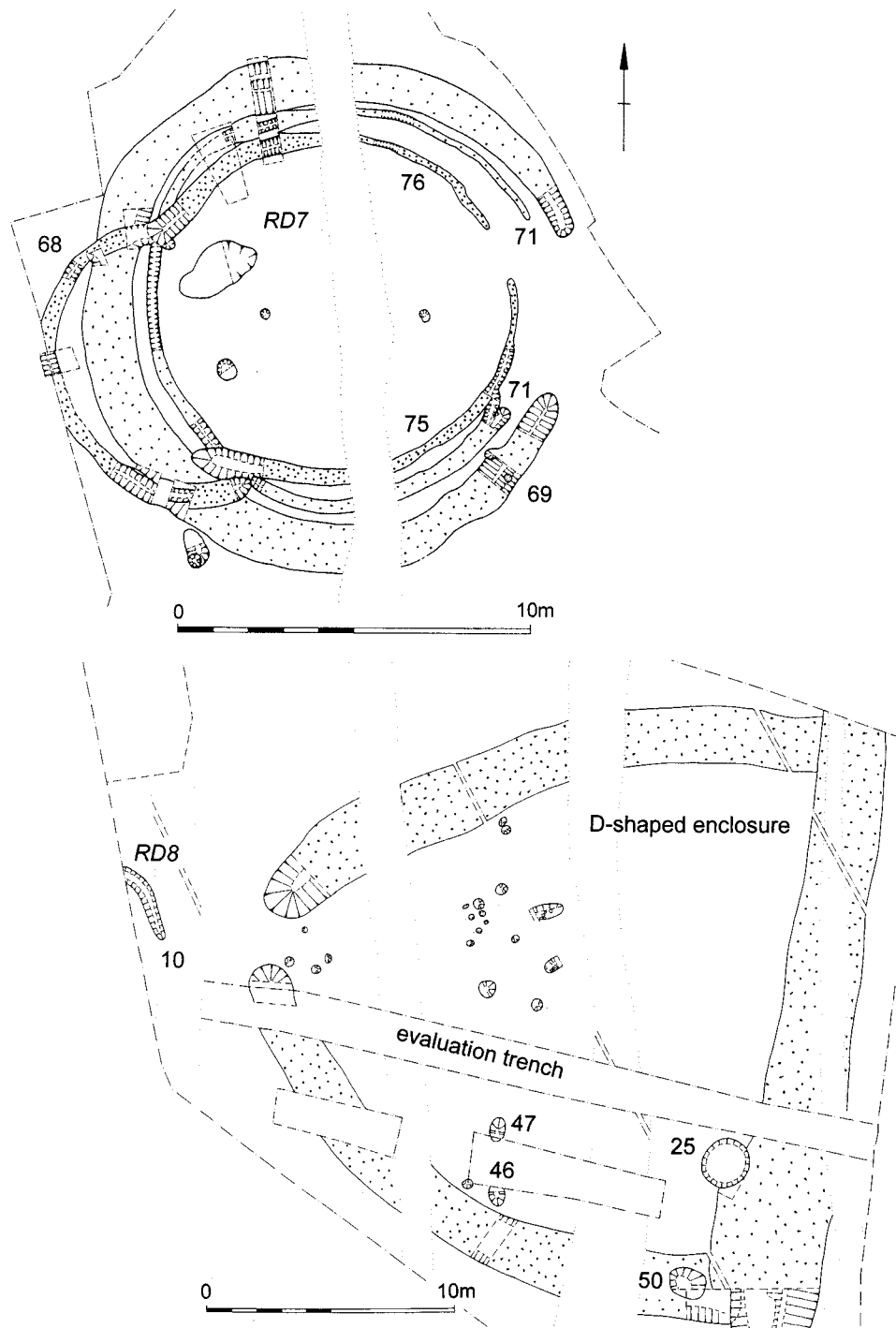


Fig 8 Ring ditch 7 and enclosure 3

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43 sherds of Iron Age pottery, including one possible early rim form.

*The boundary system and other enclosures*

The southern boundary of the enclosure was not excavated, but a combination of aerial photography and geophysical survey indicates that it coincided with a ditch system that ran on a north-west to south-east alignment for at least 300m (Fig 2).

This ditch also formed the southern boundary to an enclosure system lying to the east of the main enclosure, and measuring up to 60m west to east by 40m north to south. There was no indication that these contained any structures so they appear to

be paddocks or small fields attached to the domestic enclosure. An east to west ditch that ran across the enclosure system was a modern field boundary (Fig 6).

ROMANO-BRITISH ENCLOSURES  
by Dennis Jackson

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the extensive earthmoving operations involved in the construction of the business park's infrastructure between September 1995 and March 1996 (Fig 9). Observation of the large area used as

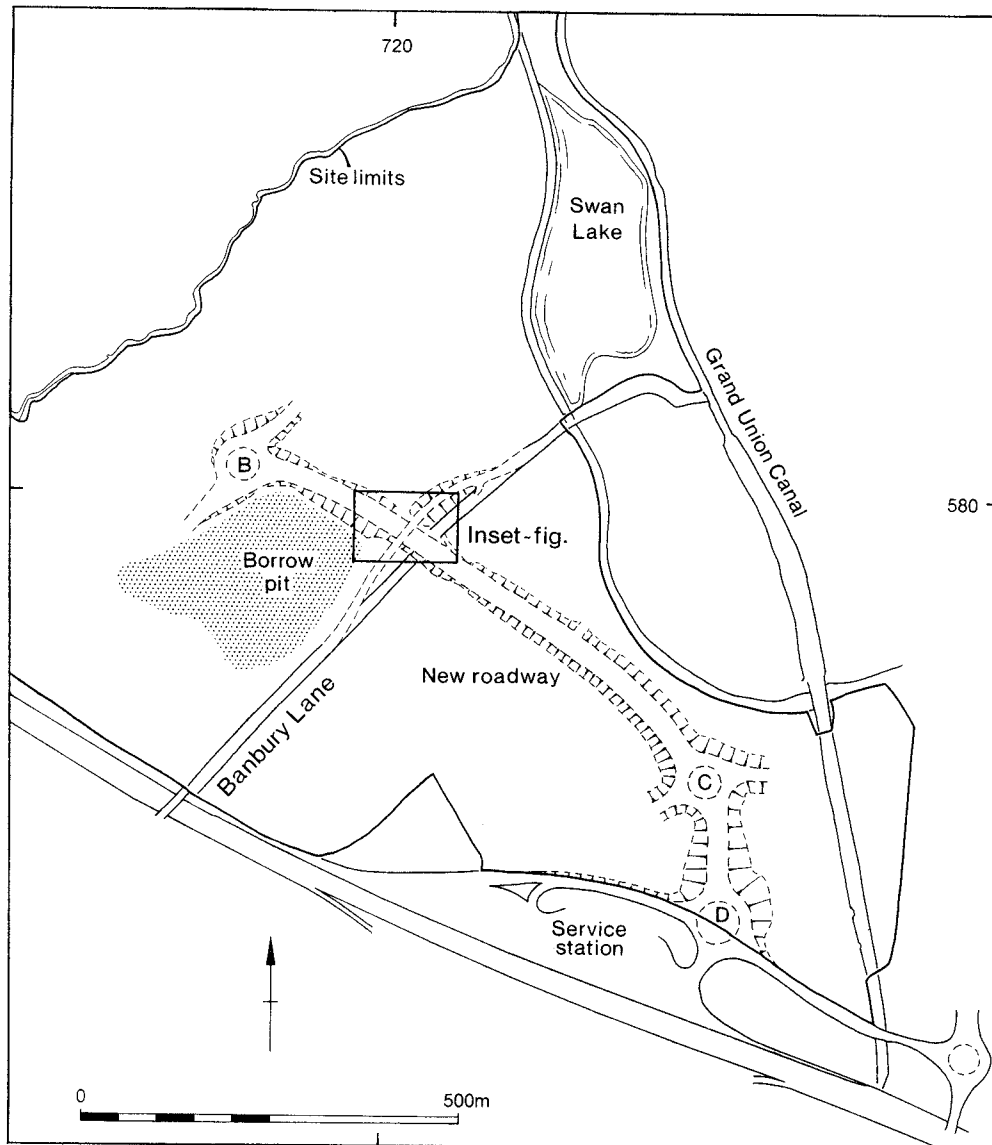


Fig 9 Location of watching brief area

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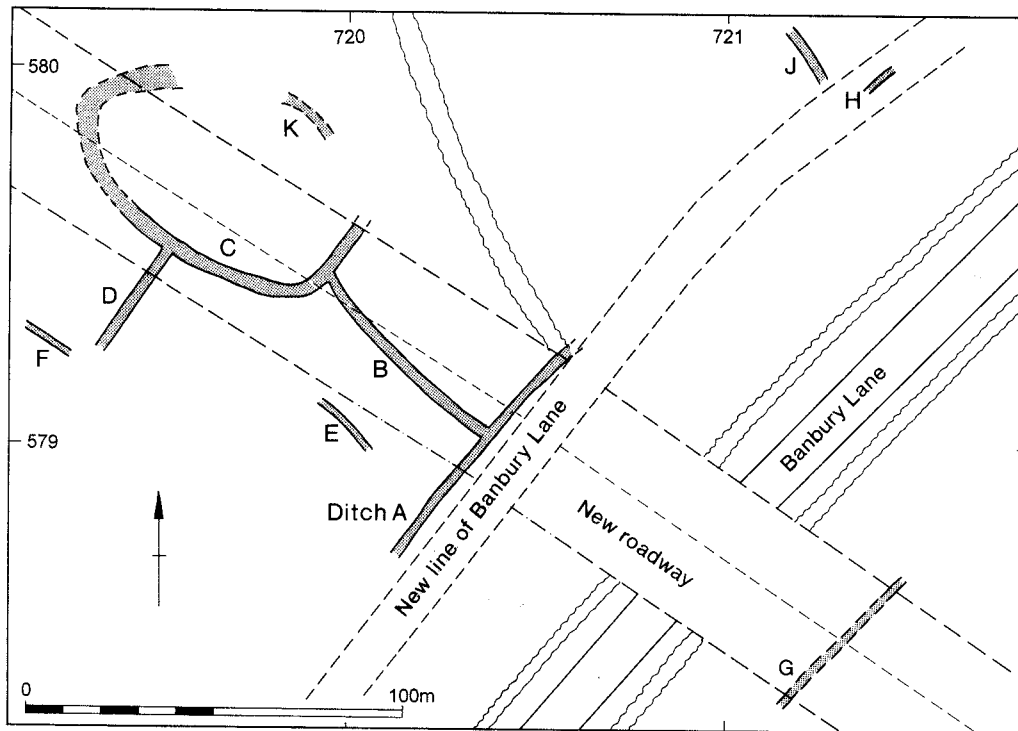


Fig 10 The Romano-British enclosures

a borrow pit was periodically undertaken, but no archaeological features were revealed. During this time a number of ditches were revealed in an area covering 300m by 200m, where the newly constructed Business Park road intersected Banbury Lane (Fig 1, Site 3 and Fig 10). The pottery recovered suggests that they dated to the early Roman period.

Ditches C and K formed a roughly oval enclosure, measuring 70m north-west to south-east and 50m north-east to south-west. Some dark earth or silt occurred in the filling at the east end of C, but elsewhere it had probably silted naturally. A small amount of pottery probably dates the enclosure to the mid to late first century A.D.

This enclosure was connected with a series of ditches. Ditch D ran for 40m to the south-west to join ditch F. Both were filled with clean silt or clay. Ditch B ran to the south-east for 60m, and had a fill of dark earth with charcoal, which was similar to the fill of ditch E, which ran parallel 20m to the south-west.

Ditch B connected to ditch A, which was on a similar north-east to south-west alignment as Banbury Lane, which lay to the immediate east. 100m to the north-east, ditch H was on the same alignment and might have been a continuation of ditch A, a ditch at right angles to it, J, contained sherds of Belgic type pottery dating to the first century AD. Where seen in section both ditches A and H were about 1.0m deep and flat bottomed. No dating evidence was recovered, but ditch A was clearly associated with ditch B, which has been dated to the Roman period. The alignment and position of ditches A and H may suggest that they bounded a track running south-west from Hunsbury Hillfort,

which may have been the precursor of Banbury Lane. Further to the south-east was Ditch G, which had fills of brown loam or silt unlike those from the Roman ditches.

## WORKED FLINT

by Andy Chapman

Twenty-six pieces of worked flint were recovered as residual finds in ditches and pits of Iron Age date. These are typically in grey to black vitreous flint, with a brown cortex, although a few pieces are patinated and light grey to blue grey in colour. The group comprises 17 assorted flakes, three blades struck from prepared cores, a small blade core and large irregular core formed on a previously retouched piece. The worked implements comprise two end/side scrapers, a single discoidal scraper and a flake with miscellaneous retouch on one edge.

The presence of a few good blades and the end/side scrapers suggests that some of the material is of Neolithic date, while the single discoidal scraper is characteristic of the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age. The larger core comprises an irregular chunk of flint, 62mm long. One edge had been retouched and the adjacent end had been roughly fashioned into a blunt piercer. However, the retouch had been partially removed when several large squat flakes were struck from around its circumference. The retouching suggests that this piece is of Neolithic/Bronze Age date, but the reuse as a flake core is so crudely executed that it might have occurred in the Iron Age.



## IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

## THE IRON AGE POTTERY

by Dennis Jackson

## INTRODUCTION

A total of 893 sherds (16430g) of Iron Age pottery was recovered from the two settlement areas (Tables 1 and 2). The southern terminal of a single ring ditch in each settlement, RD1, and RD6, produced major primary deposits of pottery comprising large sherds derived from limited numbers of vessels (Figs 11-14, 7-10 and 11-19). The total of 358 sherds (10710g) of pottery from these two contexts represents 40% by sherd count and 65% by weight of all the recovered pottery.

Table 1: Southern settlement, quantification of pottery

Features	Sherd number	Sherd weight (g)
enclosure ditch	30	207
ring ditch 1	196	5389
ring ditch 2	4	117
ring ditches 3 and 4	149	2013
<i>Totals</i>	<i>379</i>	<i>7726</i>

Table 2: Northern settlement, quantification of pottery

Features	Sherd number	Sherd weight (g)
ring ditches 7 & 8, D-shaped	133	1645
ring ditches 6 and 8	310	6328
ring ditch 5	67	624
southern ring ditch	4	107
<i>Totals</i>	<i>514</i>	<i>8704</i>

## FABRICS

Most of the pottery can be lightly scratched with the finger nail and is neither very hard nor soft. A small quantity of sherds ascribed to the early middle Iron Age on the basis of their distinctive rims forms are also notable for their particularly hard, and often gritty, fabrics (Fig 11, 1-5).

In colour the core of the sherds is generally grey to dark grey; the internal surfaces are most often a uniform grey while the external surfaces are usually mottled ranging from orange-buff through grey-browns to black. Most of the pottery is slightly weathered and there is little indication that the breaks were fresh when the sherds were buried.

The inclusions in the pottery are mostly sparse with the predominant material fine shell and limestone grits. Other inclusions derive from the Northampton Sand and Ironstone beds. Grog occurs in only a small number of sherds. Four fabric types are defined although the division between them is often arbitrary:

1. Moderate shell and/or limestone grits
2. Moderate to sparse shell and limestone grits
3. As 2 with inclusions of soft sandstone or ironstone
4. Inclusions very sparse or absent

Fabrics 2 and 4 are the most commonly occurring fabrics, accounting for some 85-90% of the assemblage in the southern settlement and 70% in the northern settlement (Table 3). The lower percentage for the northern settlement results from a lower incidence of fabric 4 and a higher incidence of vessels in fabric 3. Fabric 1 is uncommon in both settlements.

The greater number of thick walled jars in fabric 2 recovered from the southern settlement accounts for the marked difference between the two settlements in the sherd number/weight ratio for this fabric group.

The fabric of the pottery from Swan Valley is basically similar to that of assemblages from the Hunsbury Hillfort (Fell 1936, and material held in Northampton Museum), and sites such as Wootton Hill Farm (Jackson 1988/9) and Upton (Jackson, Harding & Myers 1969), two settlements which also lie to the south and west of the hillfort. A petrological survey of a small number of sherds from Hunsbury, by Dr D F Williams, shows the clay used in their manufacture is likely to have derived from local Jurassic sources and the same is almost certainly true of the bulk of pottery from Swan Valley. Variations in the quantity and density of the inclusions may only reflect the clay source, with grog the only material added to the clay.

## FORMS

*JARS*

There are eleven vessels with rim diameters of 250-350mm and although their depth is often uncertain they are all likely to have derived from larger jars. They are globular or slack-sided in

Table 3: Quantification of the pottery by fabric type

Fabric	Southern settlement				Northern settlement			
	Sherd number	%	Sherd weight (g)	%	Sherd number	%	sherd weight (g)	%
1	9	3	680	9	16	3	987	11
2	138	36	3535	50	281	55	3312	39
3	21	6	356	5	110	24	1806	20
4	208	55	2812	36	91	18	2520	30

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profile and the rim forms are simple and either rounded, beaded, or expanded internally (Figs 11-13, 7-9 and 11-14). Each of the four fabrics are represented in the jar forms. Five examples of vessels with handles or lugs are probably all from jars (Fig 11, 9 and Fig 13, 14).

The jars are on average smaller than the jars from Hunsbury Hillfort, where there are around 20 jars with diameters in excess of 350mm and one that is over 500mm in diameter.

*BOWLS*

The bowl forms are mostly globular in profile with plain direct rims (Fig 14, 15-18). There was only a single small bowl of open form (Fig 11, 6). It is estimated that between 20% and 25% of the rim sherds derive from bowls, but only 10% of the body sherds are from the finer wares associated with bowl forms. This could be explained by the greater number of sherds emanating from the jars, which typically include the larger vessels. A majority of the bowl forms occur in fabric 4, with only sparse inclusions, but sherds in fabrics 2 and 3 are also present.

At Hunsbury Hillfort at least 30% of the vessels appear to be bowls and the different proportions could reflect the different status or function of the two sites. Many of the bowls from Hunsbury have a better surface finish than those from Swan Valley.

## SURFACE TREATMENT AND DECORATION

The majority of sherds from both jars and bowls have fairly smooth but sometimes uneven surfaces. There is little evidence of special surface treatment, although the finer globular jars typically have well smoothed or lightly burnished external surfaces (Fig 14, 15 and 16).

Scored ware was recovered as large sherds from four jars found in association in the southern terminal of RD1 (Fig 11, 8 and Fig 12, 7). However, only another five small sherds of this type was recovered from the rest of the features at the southern settlement and none at all from the northern settlement, although one jar from the northern settlement was ornamented with shallow oblique and vertical grooves which had formed a series of low ridges (Fig 13, 11). Around 8% of the pottery from Hunsbury has scored surfaces, and the percentage is low in the Northampton area compared to sites in the north of the county.

Fingertip or finger nail ornamentation on top of the rims was confined to five examples, four from the northern settlement and one from the southern (Fig 13, 11); and a similar number had shallow fingertip indentations below the rim either internally or externally (Figs 11-14, 9-11 and 18).

## CHRONOLOGY AND AFFINITIES

The assessment of the chronology of the pottery is based almost entirely on the diagnostic rim forms and profiles as compared to other Iron Age assemblages from Eastern England and the Thames valley and, in particular, to the relative chronological sequence established for many of the pottery groups from Northamptonshire. The absolute dating depends on the broad margin of error provided by radiocarbon dating.

*Early Iron Age (Ceramic phase 2, c 650-350 BC)*

A thin-walled rim sherd of early Iron Age type (not illustrated) may suggest that there was occupation in the area at an earlier

period. It was recovered from the narrow palisade slot adjacent to the western enclosure ditch at the northern settlement.

*Early middle Iron Age (Ceramic phase 3, c 350-250 BC)*

Some of the assemblage recovered from the northern settlement, is ascribed to the early middle Iron Age (c 350-250 BC) on the basis of the distinctive rim forms. Two rim sherds from RD8 have wide internal grooves below the rim (Fig 11, 1), and a further rim and a footing base recovered from the same feature may be contemporary (Fig 11, 2-3). Similar rim forms were found during the excavation of an early Iron Age site at Gretton, Northamptonshire, and are associated with two radiocarbon dates in the early third century BC (Jackson and Knight 1985). Single rims from pit 50 in the D-shaped enclosure and ditch 4 (Fig 11, 4 and 5) may also date to this early phase.

*Middle Iron Age to late Iron Age (Ceramic phases 4 and 5)*

The majority of the pottery can be dated to the middle Iron Age (c 250-150 BC). However, the lack of decoration and the presence of vessels which may be regarded as of transitional forms suggests an overlap into the later Iron Age (c 200 BC- 30 AD). This may indicate that the major period of occupation was during the second century BC.

Much of the pottery from the gully terminals of RD6 in the northern settlement (Figs 13, 14; 11-19) can be paralleled at the southern settlement as well as at Hunsbury and other local sites. There are more tripartite vessels from this context, however, and it is possible this pottery dates to a transitional phase. The small amount of pottery from RD7 nearby also appears to date to this later phase.

A more precise dating cannot be provided as it is uncertain how early the fine globular bowl form found in the Northampton area originated. There is an assemblage of similar pottery from Weekley, Northamptonshire spanning the second and first centuries BC (Jackson and Dix 1986/7).

The pottery assemblage can be paralleled at Hunsbury and other locally excavated sites. However, the lack of middle Iron Age pottery at Hunsbury Hill and many of the other nearby sites might suggest that the earliest occupation at Swan Valley predated many other local sites.

There was none of the curvilinear decorated pottery that occurred at Hunsbury, which may suggest a slightly earlier date for the Swan valley enclosures, but as curvilinear decorated pottery has been found on sites to the north and east of Northampton but not to south and west the difference may be a product of distribution rather than of chronology. In addition, given the small excavated sample from these sites and low level of occurrence of curvilinear decorated pottery its absence could just reflect the small sample size available.

## CONCLUSIONS

Settlement at Swan Valley appears to have originated by the early middle Iron Age but the majority of the pottery from the site is later in date, perhaps centred on the second century BC.

The pottery deposits found in the southern terminals of RD1, southern settlement and RD6, northern settlement, are of interest as they each comprised a number of near complete or partial vessels perhaps deliberately deposited as groups. The scored ware jars found in the ring ditch terminal of RD1 could have derived from containers bringing produce to the site.

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

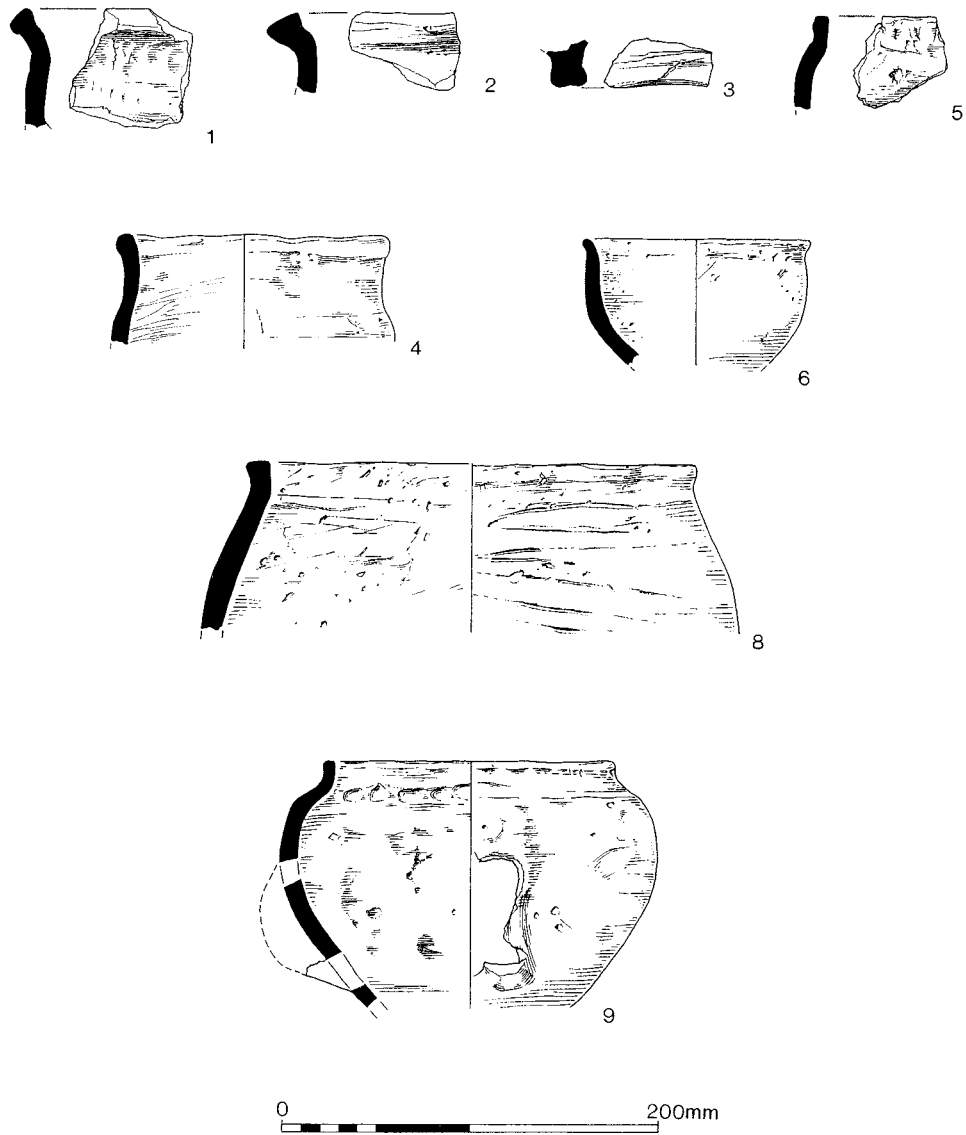


Fig 11 The Iron Age pottery, 1-8

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED POTTERY (FIGS 11-14)

*EARLY/MIDDLE IRON AGE*

- 1 Rim sherd; grey/black cores and inner surface, brown/black external surfaces; fabric 1, hard and gritty. Northern settlement, RD8, ditch 10
- 2 Rim sherd; grey/black cores and inner surface, brown/black external surfaces; fabric 1, hard and gritty. Northern settlement, RD8, ditch 10

- 3 Footring base; grey core and surfaces; fabric 2, hard. Northern settlement, RD8, ditch 10
- 4 Small jar; smoothed surfaces, grey/black core and inner surface fabric, mottled grey to brown exterior, fabric 2, hard. Northern settlement, D-shaped enclosure, pit 50
- 5 Rim sherd; grey black core and external surface, brown inner surface; fabric 1, hard and gritty. Northern settlement, southern ring ditch 4

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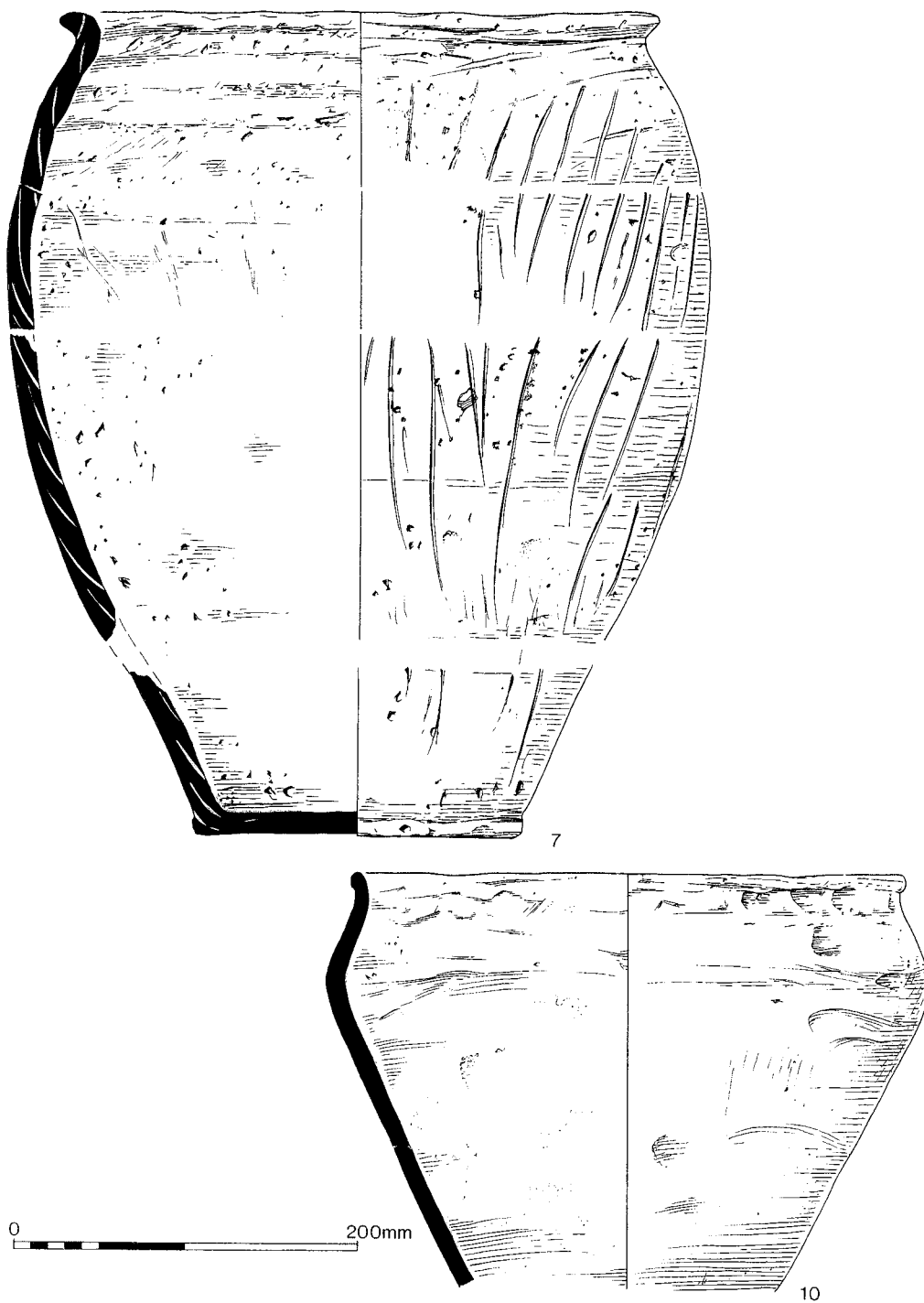


Fig 12 The Iron Age pottery, 9-10

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

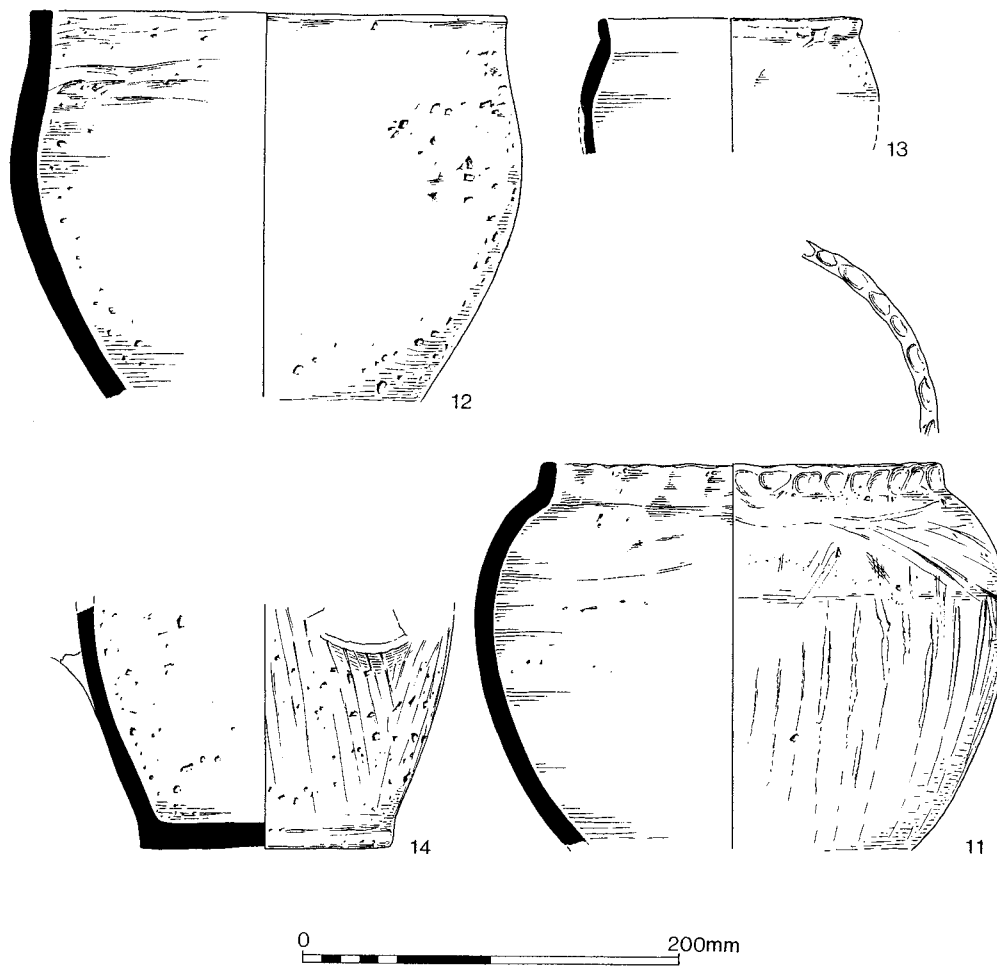


Fig 13 The Iron Age pottery, 11-14

*MIDDLE TO LATE IRON AGE*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>6 Small open bowl; smoothed surfaces, grey core, mottled brown to grey surfaces; fabric 2. Southern settlement, RD4, pit 13</p> <p>7 Jar; thick-walled, poorly finished, near vertical parallel scoring; expanded base; grey core and interior, orange/brown exterior; Fabric 3. Southern settlement, RD1, southern terminal</p> <p>8 Jar; flat-topped rim; thick-walled, poorly finished, horizontal scoring; fabric 1. Southern settlement, RD1, southern terminal</p> <p>9 Small jar, handled; shallow finger impressions on interior at base of neck; body perforated to accommodate handle, now largely lost; uniform grey/black core and surfaces; fabric 2. Southern settlement, RD1, southern terminal</p> <p>10 Jar, carinated; shallow thumb impressions below rim,</p> | <p>11 Jar; flat-topped rim with finger tip impressions along top and outer edge; body decorated with broad shallow, probably finger tip applied, grooves, oblique on neck and vertical on lower body; grey core, uniform light brown interior and mottled orange-brown to grey exterior; fabric 4. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal</p> <p>12 Jar; thick walled, poorly finished; flat-topped rim; light grey core and interior, mottled grey to grey/brown exterior; fabric 2. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal</p> <p>13 Small jar; grey/black core and exterior, black/brown interior; fabric 3. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal</p> <p>14 Jar; faint vertical striations on body with applied moulding at base of lost handle/lug; grey core, uniform</p> |
|--|---|

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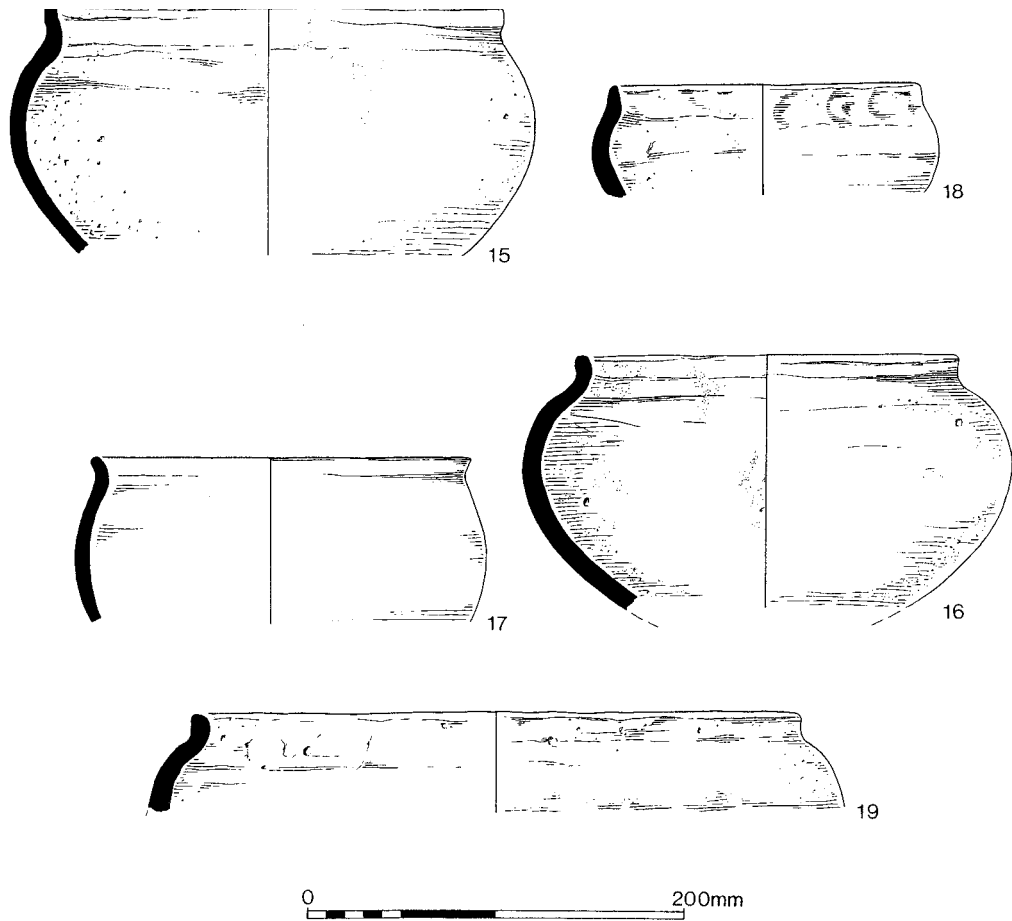


Fig 14 The Iron Age pottery, 15-19

- black interior and mottled brown to grey brown exterior; fabric 4. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal
- 15 Globular bowl; well finished, smoothed exterior; flat-topped rim; grey core, interior and exterior brown with extensive grey mottles, fabric 4. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal
- 16 Globular bowl; well finished, smoothed to lightly burnished exterior; uniform grey core and surfaces; fabric 4. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal
- 17 Globular bowl; plain, well finished; grey core and interior, exterior mottled grey to brown; fabric 2. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal
- 18 Small bowl; well finished, smoothed exterior; shallow dimples below rim; fabric 4. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal
- 19 Large jar; poorly finished, ironstone inclusions of 1-4mm protruding from surface; grey core and interior, mottled orange to grey exterior; fabric 3. Northern settlement, RD6, southern terminal

THE ANIMAL BONE  
by Mary Iles  
(Centre for Human Ecology & Environment  
Southampton University)

There are 341 fragments of bone, 32 from the southern settlement, and 309 from the northern settlement. Many bones were highly fragmented, often with recent breaks that probably occurred during excavation. Where several fragments were identifiable as coming from one bone they have been counted as one fragment. Bone was identified to species where possible and recorded following the zone method of Serjeantson (1991). The minimum number of elements and the minimum number of individuals have not been calculated because of the small quantity of identifiable bone recovered. Where possible teeth were assigned wear stages after Grant (1982). Cattle teeth were aged according to Legge (1992) and sheep/goat teeth according to Moran & O'Connor (1994). The timing of epiphyseal fusion is taken from Sissons (1975). Measurements were taken following

## IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

Table 4: Southern settlement, summary of identified bone by feature type

Species	(Number of Identified Species, NISP)				Total
	Enclosure ditch	Gully	Pit	Ring Ditch	
Cattle	4	2	3	3	12
Sheep/goat	-	-	2	1	3
<i>Total identified to species</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>15</i>
cow size	3	-	-	-	3
sheep size	1	1	5	-	7
unidentified	2	-	4	1	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>32</i>

von den Driesch (1976). The presence of butchery, burning and gnawing was also noted.

*THE SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT*

The bone recovered from the southern settlement is mainly from the enclosure ditch and pits associated with RD3 and RD4 (Table 4). Cattle and sheep/goat are both present, although fragments of cattle bone are more frequent. This may be due to poor preservation of the bone. Bones from the head, limbs and extremities are represented for cattle. Body part representation cannot be ascertained for sheep/goat because of the small sample size.

A fragment of cattle mandible had chop marks on both the buccal and lingual sides below the mandibular hinge, suggestive of its removal from the skull. One other bone showed evidence of butchery; a proximal shaft fragment of cattle tibia with cut marks on the posterior surface indicative of filleting.

Two fragments of bone had been gnawed by carnivores. This and the limited butchery evidence reflects the poor condition of much of the bone, in many instances the outer surface has been destroyed or severely damaged.

No fragments of ageable bone, mandibles or loose teeth were present and none were recognised as coming from juvenile individuals. The porous nature of the bone from these animals, that is those about six months in age, decreases their chances of survival in adverse conditions for preservation.

*THE NORTHERN SETTLEMENT*

Bone recovered from the northern settlement (Table 5) included 62 fragments of bone from the enclosure ditches and 43 from the D-shaped enclosure. Few fragments were identifiable to species, but cattle, sheep/goat and horse are represented.

The greatest quantity of bone came from RD6, but although 180 fragments were retrieved from this feature only 16% were identifiable to species. Remains of cattle and sheep/goat were present in similar quantities, but poor preservation tends to favour the larger and denser elements so that in adverse conditions the remains of sheep/goat and pig are likely to be under represented in comparison to cattle. Very little bone was recovered from RD8, RD5 and RD7.

Both epiphyseal fusion and dental ageing information are very limited. There is no evidence of immature individuals, and its absence is probably due to similar reasons as postulated for its absence from the southern enclosure.

There is little evidence for butchery; a tibia shaft fragment of cattle had cut marks running up the posterior and anterior surfaces which are probably the result of meat removal. A distal shaft fragment of cattle humerus and two cattle-sized limb bone fragments were spirally fractured, perhaps suggesting that marrow was consumed at the settlement. All parts of the cattle and sheep/goat carcasses are represented in small quantities. Evidence for pig and horse is severely limited because of the small quantity of bone recovered from these species.

Table 5: Northern settlement, summary of identified bone by feature type (NISP)

Species	Enclosure ditches	Gully	Pits	Post holes	Ring Ditches	Total
Cattle	8	2	3	1	17	31
Sheep/goat	8	-	5	-	14	27
Pig	-	-	-	-	3	3
Horse	3	-	-	-	1	4
<i>Total identified to species</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>65</i>
Cow size	19	-	5	1	19	44
Sheep size	3	-	10	-	9	22
Unidentified	21	-	23	6	128	178
<i>Total</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>309</i>

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A few bones (2.6%) had evidence of carnivore damage. A large number of the bones were again in an eroded state and, as at the southern settlement, it seems likely that much of the evidence for butchery and gnawing has been destroyed by the poor preservation of bones at the site.

Two bones were measurable, a bovine distal tibia and a sheep/goat astragalus. Both fragments fall within the expected range for Middle and Late Iron Age material (Centre for Human Ecology 1995).

#### DISCUSSION

The paucity of published Iron Age settlements with substantial animal bone assemblages from the area means that this collection is of importance in expanding our understanding of the animal economy of the region.

Two late Iron Age enclosures, Moulton Park and Blackthorn, were excavated on the outskirts of Northampton (Orr 1974a & b). The assemblages from both settlements were small and highly fragmented. At Blackthorn cattle and sheep/goat remains appear to have been present in similar quantities both on fragment counts and minimum numbers of individuals. Horse and pig were also represented. At Moulton Park, however, cattle remains were present in greater numbers based on fragment counts, but sheep/goat became more important when minimum numbers were calculated. A larger assemblage of animal bone was retrieved from Hardingstone, Northampton (Gilmore 1969). Both sheep/goat and cattle remains were an important aspect of the assemblage at 48% and 38% of the bone fragments respectively. The hillfort of Rainsborough is situated approximately 15 miles to the south (Banks 1976), and here the remains of the domestic species are represented in similar proportions: cattle 38%, sheep/goat 50% and pig 12%.

At each of these sites sheep/goat remains were present in similar proportions to cattle or were marginally more frequent. With this in mind, the assemblage from the northern settlement at Swan Valley is apparently typical for the area. Sheep/goat remains at the southern settlement are infrequent, but the sample size is small and the poor condition of the bone is probably a major contributing factor in their absence.

On the basis of the present evidence it would appear that cattle and sheep/goat were an important aspect of the economy with cattle, despite being marginally less represented, contributing more meat to the diet because of their greater size. The picture of husbandry is similar for all the lowland settlement sites and also at the hillfort of Rainsborough. This is in contrast to the upper Thames Valley where there is marked difference in the relative proportions of the domestic species from lowland settlements and hillforts (Grant 1984), where sheep remains are much more frequent from hillforts and cattle remains are more frequent on settlements in the valleys. Grant (1984) has attributed this variation to the lower availability of water and the poorer quality of grazing on the chalk downland, a factor that does not apply on the frequently boulder clay capped hillsides in Northamptonshire

## DISCUSSION

### THE IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS

The two settlements comprised rectangular enclosures of similar form less than 200m apart. The northern enclosure had an area of just over 0.4ha, while the southern enclosure was certainly larger at around 0.7ha. They both had similar arrangements, containing several ring ditches and an internal enclosure probably used as a stock pen. Settlements of this type and size are the most common middle to late Iron Age type as recorded by field survey and aerial photography, and more recently excavation, in Northamptonshire and the midlands (Kidd 2004). These would probably have been occupied by single or extended family groups occupying one or two roundhouses, whilst the other structures were used for various activities associated with the agricultural economy, whether craft or stock based.

In the northern enclosure there was a principal roundhouse, identified by its size and by possession of a substantial door surround, with this house perhaps acting as the main domestic dwelling for an extended family group. Two subsidiary roundhouses lay to the north and perhaps another one or two to the south. These may have been used for agricultural or craft functions or partly as further accommodation. The D-shaped stock pen was enclosed by a substantial ditch, and was perhaps used for prize animals, such as the breeding stock or the plough oxen, although it appeared to have later fallen out of use.

The southern enclosure was broadly comparable. Of the five known ring ditches some evidently enclosed roundhouses, but the pair to the west seem to have had some other function, and there was probably a stock pen in one corner. None of the structures seems large enough to form a principal house but this may have lain in the unexcavated southern part of the enclosure. The greater size may suggest that it was occupied by a larger population.

Given the problems of dating sites in this period the chronology is inevitably uncertain (Kidd *nd*; Willis 2001), but it seems likely that both sites were in contemporary use through the second century BC, perhaps following some earlier smaller scale occupation, with the northern enclosure perhaps continuing into the first century BC. An explanation for the need for two such similar settlements so close together may lie in the north-west to south-east



#### IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT SWAN VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, NEAR ROTHERSTHORPE, NORTHAMPTON

extended boundary ditches that were associated with both settlements. The northern side of the southern enclosure had apparently replaced an existing length of linear ditch that certainly continued to the west of the enclosure, while the southern side of the northern enclosure was attached to a more extensive linear boundary. It may be that they were contemporary settlements situated on the northern and southern margins of their own territories, with the 150m between the two near parallel land boundaries perhaps forming a neutral zone or 'no man's land' between them.

It has been suggested that, prior to the Roman Conquest, the area was mostly populated by small, possibly single-family communities, a view based largely upon the morphology of the enclosed cropmark sites which constitute the majority of recognised Iron Age settlements (RCHM(E) 1985, 34). To date, no major synthesis of this historic landscape has been undertaken, but the number of excavations that have now taken place around Northampton will allow for the possibility of an increased understanding of the Iron Age in this part of Northamptonshire once all the data has been made available.

#### ROMAN ENCLOSURES

The possibility that the origin of Banbury Lane was a trackway from Hunsbury Hillfort, perhaps formalised as a minor road in the Roman period when it was provided with side ditches, would explain the presence of the enclosure and the other associated ditch systems. The proximity of the Roman enclosures, which lay 500m to the west of the Iron Age settlements, may suggest that there was a broad continuity of occupation within this landscape, but with a relocation of the settlement sites in the early first century AD.

#### THE METHODOLOGY

By Andy Chapman

It is appropriate to make a few final comments on the methodology used in relation to the excavation of the two Swan Valley enclosures. The combination of geophysical survey and targeted excavations has gone a considerable way towards providing an understanding of the structure and organisation of the enclosures, and a model has been proposed for how they may have faced each other whilst

each stood on one of a pair of parallel territorial boundaries. However, it is also evident that a number of key aspects are left uncertain or undefined although they could have been resolved either by the excavation of further specific areas or within the open area excavation of each main enclosure and its immediate environs.

For instance, the overall model would be more secure if the relationship between the two domestic enclosures and the linear boundaries had been explored, and it may even have been possible to date the establishment of those boundaries. In addition, the small quantity of earlier pottery at the northern enclosure may have been associated with a pre-enclosure phase, perhaps partly represented by the excavated small oval enclosure but perhaps also by other similar features that would not have been recorded on the geophysical survey.

No entrance was found for the northern enclosure, leaving this crucial aspect of its organisation undefined. At the southern enclosure it is also to be regretted that two of the identified ring ditches were not investigated as the evidence from more extensively excavated sites does indicate that Iron Age ring ditches exhibit a great variety of sizes, shapes and plan form, which are all likely to denote variations in usage and the social organisation of the communities. Even if the nature of those uses and the form of the social organisation still eludes us, it will only be by compiling a larger body of data that patterns may emerge that will help to unravel these complexities.

It is therefore concluded that at Swan Valley the potential of the archaeology that was uncovered cannot be quite fully realised when other aspects were left undefined. Such sites should preferably always be subject to full open area stripping, when this is possible, in which a full ground plan is recovered and is then used as a basis for the selection of priority areas for further investigation. The joy and the frustration of archaeology is that, despite the great value of geophysical survey, you still never know quite what you have got until its uncovered, and in much prehistoric archaeology even once you have uncovered and excavated it the meaning and significance is still often far from clear.

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