

A Middle Iron Age settlement at Banbury Lane, King's Sutton

by

David Ingham

with contributions by Emily Edwards, John Giorgi, Mark Maltby, Mike Trevarthen and Jackie Wells

Summary

Albion Archaeology carried out an excavation in 2013 at Banbury Lane, King's Sutton, in advance of residential development. The earliest activity comprised a late Neolithic Grooved ware vessel, probably a secondary deposit into one of two undated boundary ditches, which may have been part of a middle/late Bronze Age field system. A middle Iron Age settlement comprised a roundhouse, small enclosures, four-post structures and pits, which produced moderately sized assemblages of pottery and animal bone. The settlement may have had a primarily pastoral economy and is likely to have been used over the course of two to three centuries, probably coming into use in the 3rd century BC, as indicated by radiocarbon dating of two early dog burials, and falling out of use in the late Iron Age, probably the 1st century BC. Subsequent activity was limited to medieval ridge and furrow cultivation and two medieval and/or post-medieval buildings, with further associated agricultural remains.

Introduction

A planning application by Banner Homes, subsequently CALA Homes (Midlands), for a housing development west of Banbury Lane, King's Sutton, led to a programme of archaeological works (NGR SP 4961 3647, Fig 1). The initial exploratory work was carried out in 2009 by Northamptonshire Archaeology, before the developer's archaeological consultant, CgMs Consulting, commissioned Albion Archaeology to undertake the remainder in 2013.

The development area is situated on level ground to the east of the River Cherwell on the slightly higher ground of the first gravel terrace at a height of 85m aOD. It lies close to the boundary between outcropping Marlstone of the Middle Lias series, and the Lower Lias sands and clays of Lower Jurassic date that have been exposed by the River Cherwell. Prior to excavation, the site was used as pasture, with earthwork remains of ridge and furrow cultivation visible in the southern half.

Although Northamptonshire's Historic Environment Record hints at widespread activity from the Iron Age onwards in the surrounding area, little fieldwork has been carried out to confirm this. A salvage excavation

immediately south-west of the development area, identified a middle to late Iron Age settlement comprising ditched enclosures, possible roundhouses, a droveway and a hearth or kiln (ASC 2004; Fig 2). Evaluation of the development area in 2009 suggested a continuation of this settlement (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2009), leading Northamptonshire County Council's Archaeological Advisor to request the archaeological excavation of an area of 1.2ha. This was carried out by Albion Archaeology between May and July 2013.

Acknowledgments

Albion Archaeology would like to thank Michael Dawson of CgMs Consulting, who commissioned the archaeological work on behalf of Banner Homes, subsequently CALA Homes (Midlands). We are also grateful to Lesley-Ann Mather, who monitored the excavation in her role as Archaeological Officer for Northamptonshire County Council.

The excavations were supervised for Albion Archaeology by Kathy Pilkinton, under the management of Rob Wardill. All Albion Archaeology projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff. Kathy Pilkinton was assisted with the excavation and recording by Ben Carroll, Gary Manning, Slawek Utrata, Allan King, Adam Williams and Adrian Woolmer. Processing of the soil samples was undertaken by Slawek Utrata and Ben Carroll, with initial processing of the finds carried out by Jackie Wells. Site drawings were digitised by Joan Lightning. The project archive has been prepared for deposition by Helen Parslow.

This report has been prepared by David Ingham, Albion Archaeology, with contributions by Jackie Wells, Albion Archaeology: pottery and fired clay; Emily Edwards, freelance: early prehistoric pottery; John Giorgi, freelance: charred plant remains and Mark Maltby, Bournemouth University: animal bone. Radiocarbon dating was carried out by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC). The structural illustrations were created by David Ingham, with finds illustrations by Mike Trevarthen, freelance. Andy Chapman, as editor for NAS, has added a contribution discussing the radiocarbon results and the chronology of the settlement, utilising his understanding of the local Iron Age pottery.

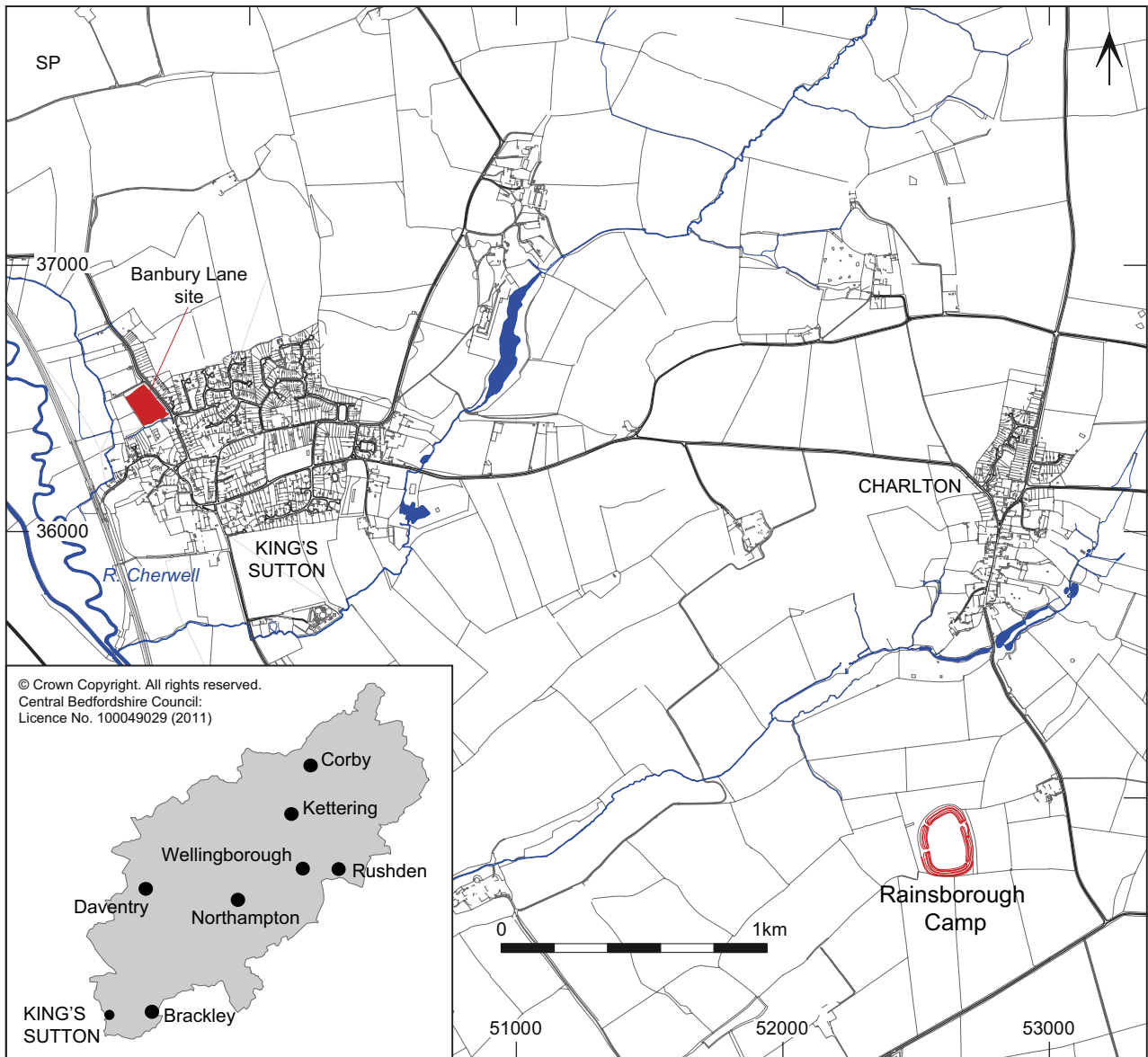


Fig 1: Site location

Summary of site chronology

The earliest activity comprised late Neolithic Grooved ware pottery from a single vessel, probably residual within one of two ditches that pre-dated the Iron Age settlement but otherwise produced little dating evidence.

The middle Iron Age settlement, comprising round-houses, small enclosures, four-post structures and pits, produced moderately sized assemblages of pottery and animal bone, and forms the main focus of this report. The remaining features also produced very little dating evidence, but are typologically and stratigraphically likely to have been medieval or post-medieval.

The text below provides a chronological account of what was found, with summary information about the artefacts and ecofacts recovered. More detailed information about these can be found in the subsequent sections of this article, while further information is also available in

the site archive report (Albion Archaeology 2016), available online through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). For ease of reference, the features within each phase have been combined into groups, indicated by a 'G' prefix.

Late Neolithic Grooved ware

Ditch G1 (Fig 3) contained seven sherds of late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery, all from a single ditch segment and a single vessel. It is most likely that they were residual, perhaps a result of the ditch disturbing or eroding into an earlier pit.

Deposits of middle and late Neolithic and early Bronze Age pottery are frequently recovered from single or small clusters of small pits, and these probably mark temporary occupation sites of these periods, as at Banbury Lane, Middleton Cheney, where two pits produced a significant

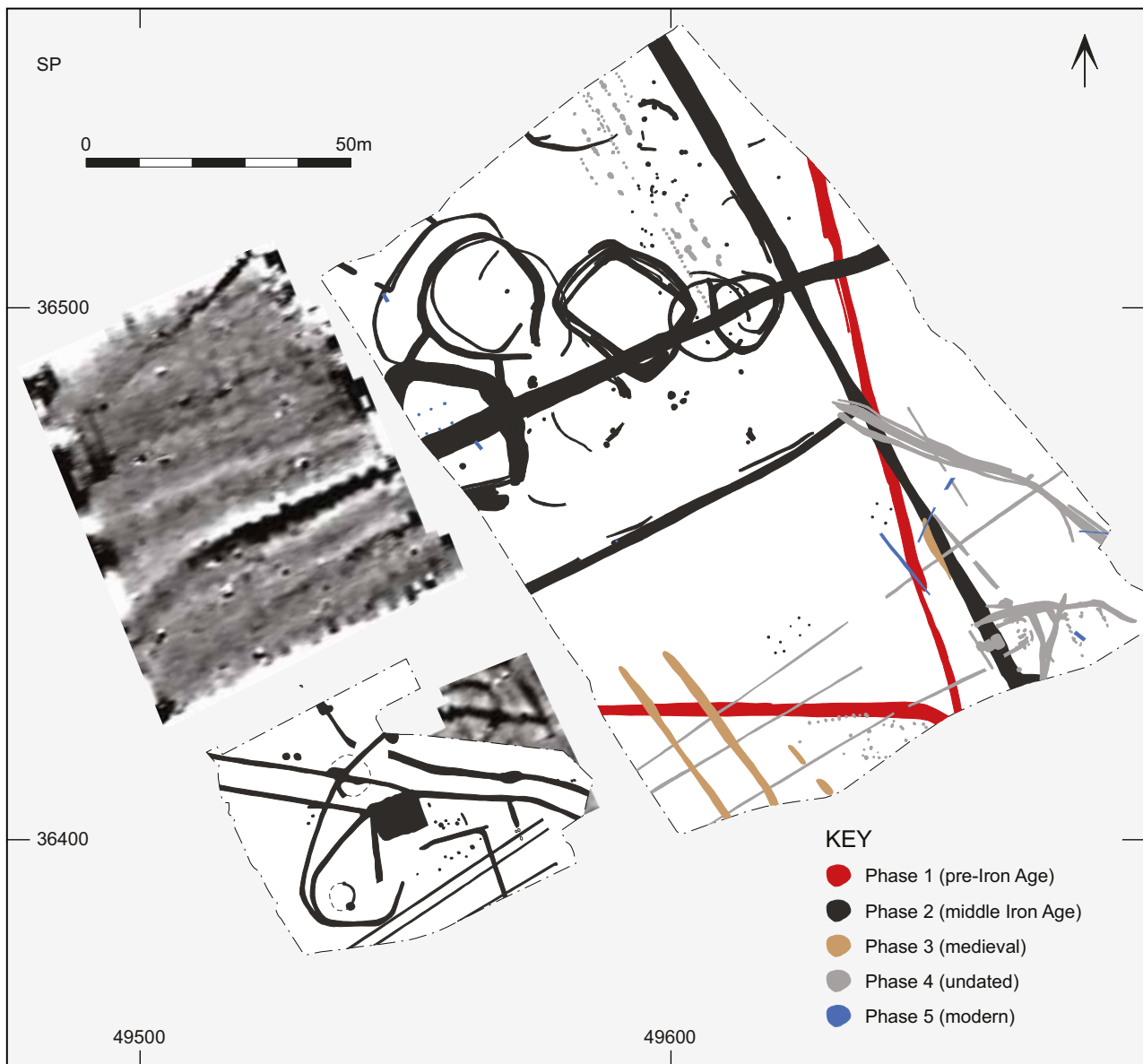


Fig 2: Plan of excavated features in relation to adjacent watching brief (ASC 2004) and geophysical survey (Malone 2013)

Grooved ware assemblage (Cuthbert and Zeepvat 2017, this volume).

Late Neolithic pottery by Emily Edwards

Seven abraded sherds, weighing 144g, are from a single vessel of Durrington Walls-style Grooved Ware, decorated with vertical, raised cordons, which have been moulded from the body of the sherds rather than applied. The external faces appear to have been given a sparse sand coating. The fabric is well-fired, well wedged clay containing rare to sparse flint and ferruginous pellet inclusions, ranging in size from under 1mm to 2mm.

Pre-Iron Age field system

Ditches G1 and G2 belonged to a landscape earlier than the middle Iron Age settlement (Fig 3), although their precise date is uncertain. Ditch G1 had a distinctive V-shaped profile, 1.6–2.3m wide and 1.0–1.3m deep (Fig 3, Section a). Ditch G9 varied considerably in profile and size (Fig 3, Sections b and c), perhaps as the result of re-cutting; it was earlier than the middle Iron Age settlement, but the only artefact recovered was a single abraded sherd of middle Iron Age pottery, which is likely to have been contamination from later occupation.

It is uncertain whether these two ditches were contemporaneous, as the junction lay just beyond the excavated area, but they seem most likely to have formed parts of a field system dating somewhere between the middle Bronze Age and the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age, with the curving ditches near the junction perhaps forming a

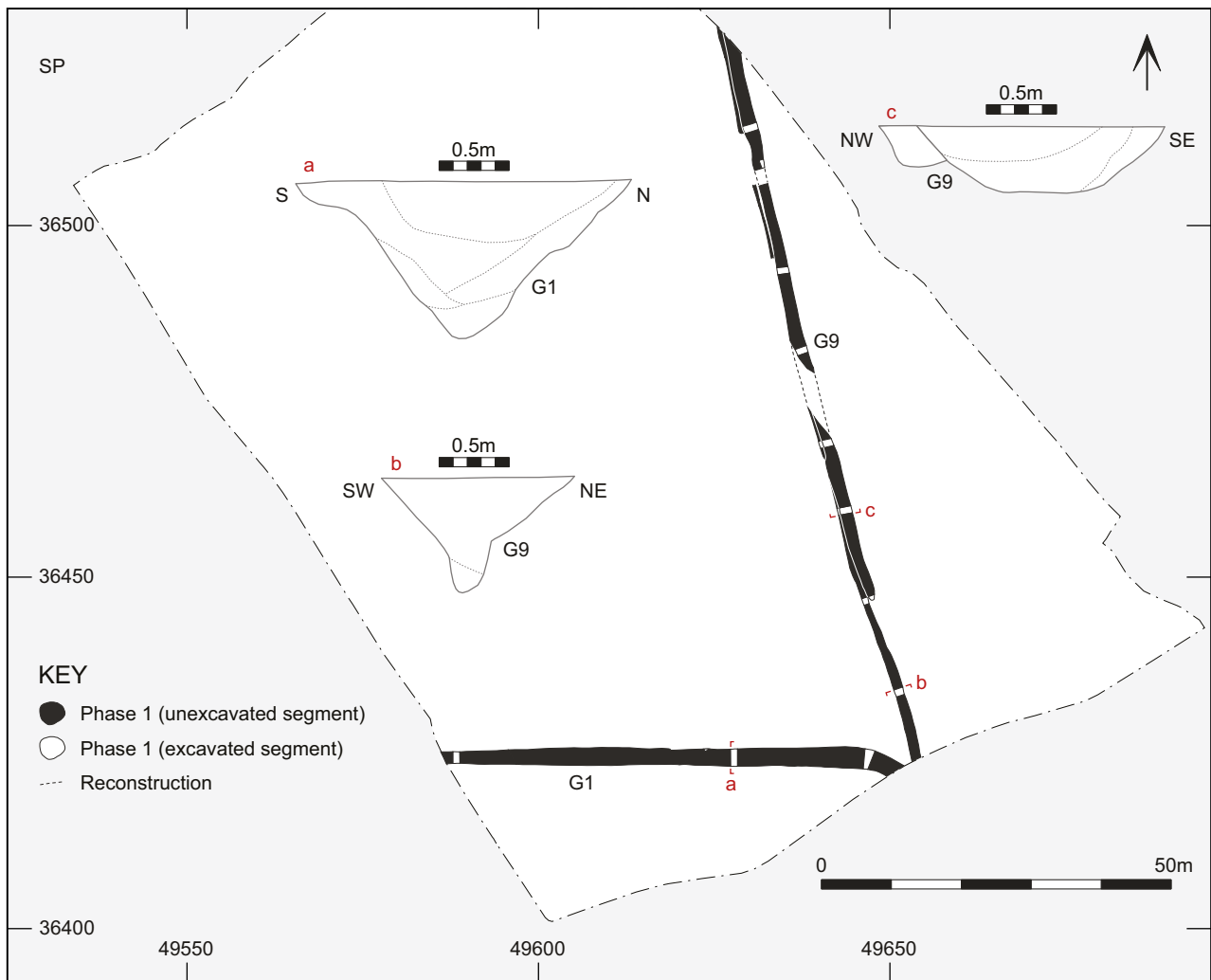


Fig 3: Pre-Iron Age features

stock-control entrance, a feature commonly encountered on early field systems around the Fen edge. This would suggest that they were primarily used as pasture paddocks rather than for arable, although use in a mixed farming regime is also possible.

Middle Iron Age settlement

Two early roundhouses were replaced by a sequence of square and penannular enclosures, characterised by heavy re-cutting of the original eastern boundary ditch (Fig 4). The entrances to both the enclosures and the roundhouses predominantly faced south-east. There was probably a gradual shift in the focus of activity from east to west.

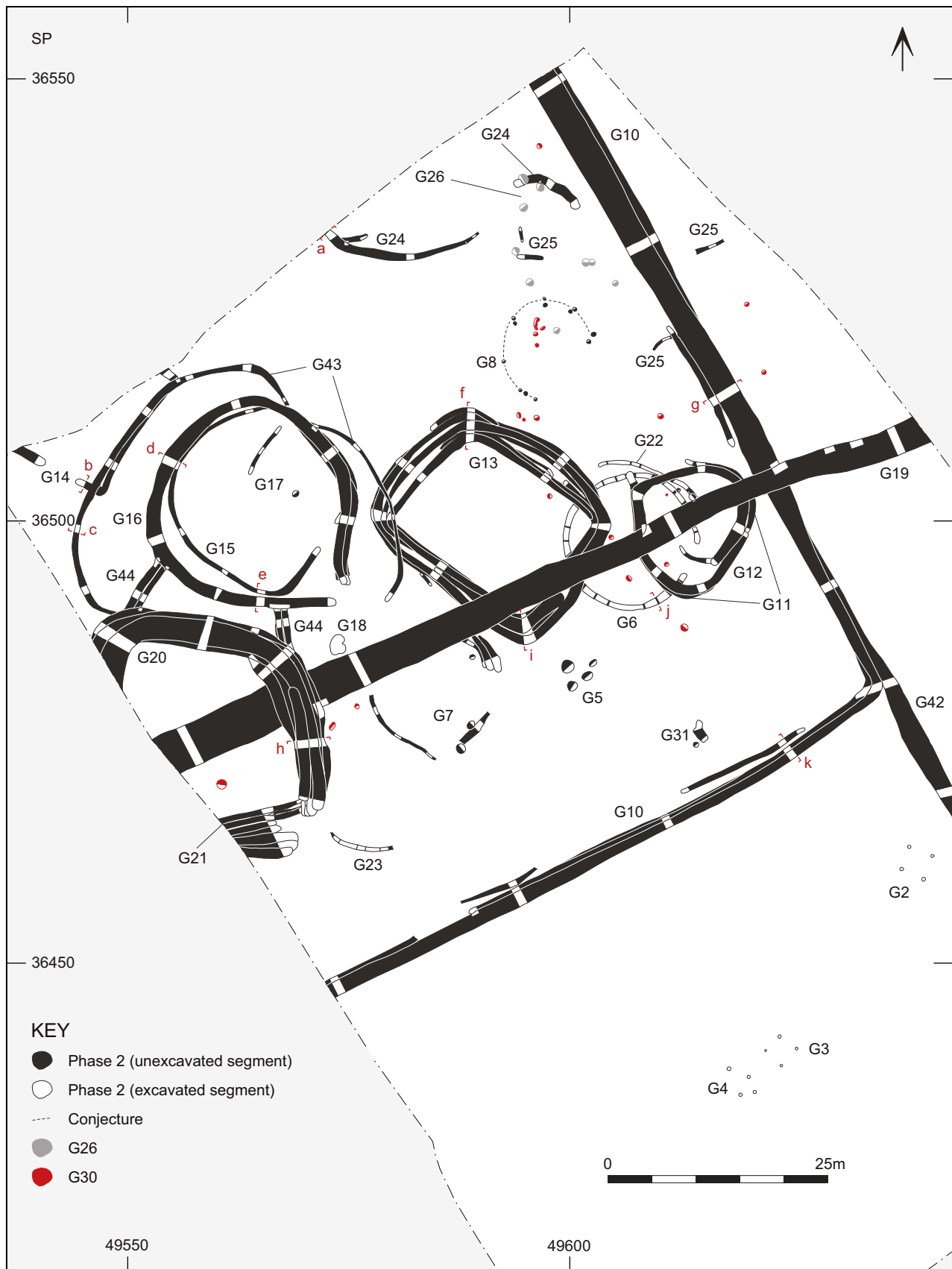
Boundary ditches

The earliest boundary, G42, was a linear ditch aligned NW–SE, which crossed the entire excavated area. It was generally V-shaped and increased in depth from 0.4m at the northern end to 1.1m to the south. At the southern edge

of site (Fig 2), the original ditch continued south-eastwards, while a later recut turned eastwards.

The southern end of ditch G42 was later abandoned and replaced by a larger ditch, G10, set at a right angle, to form a southern boundary to the settlement area. The recut eastern arm was generally V-shaped (Fig 5, Section g), decreasing from 3.3m wide and 1.2m deep to the north, to 1.2m wide and 0.5m deep at the westward turn. The southern arm comprised a smaller V-shaped ditch, 0.5m deep, with a slightly shallower re-cut (Fig 5, Section k). There were also lengths of shallow gully running parallel to the two main ditches, perhaps marking an earlier phase of this boundary, or perhaps an adjacent fence or palisade.

At a later date, a new boundary ditch, G19, aligned E-W and continuing eastward beyond the original eastern boundary, had a wide but shallow profile, 2.5m wide by 0.5m deep in the east, increasing to 5.0m wide by 0.9m deep at the western end. The upper fill contained a large amount of redeposited clay, in contrast to the largely dark, silty deposits representing the disuse of many of the ditches on site, which is suggestive of deliberate backfilling. The comparative lack of artefacts recovered



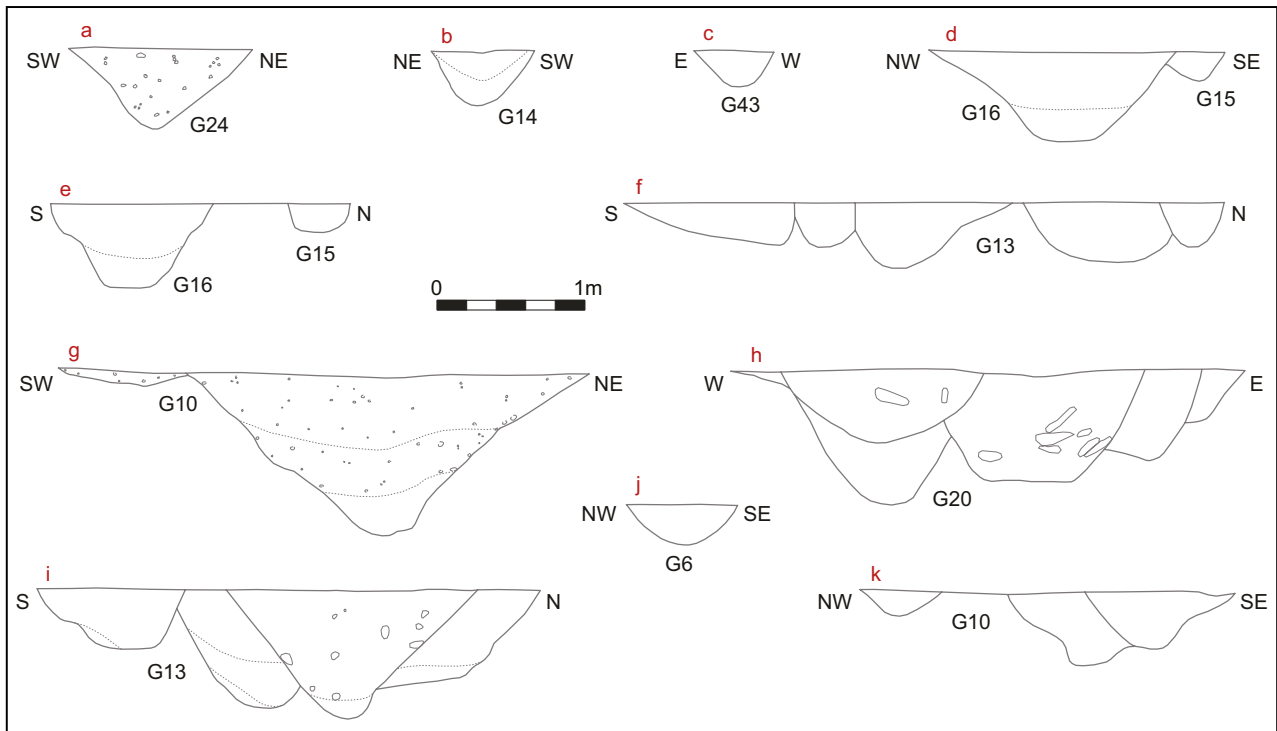


Fig 5: Sections of middle Iron Age features

and its stratigraphic position within this phase all suggest a short period of use.

Ditch G19 cut across the earlier phases of boundary and internal enclosures, but pre-dated Enclosure G20/21, which along with the latest phases of the enclosure system to its north, G16, would have been the latest features in use.

Roundhouses

Roundhouse G6 was the most complete ring gully (Fig 6), despite being truncated by later boundaries and enclosures. It measured *c.*14m in diameter with a south-east facing entrance, 3.6m wide. The gully itself was up to 0.3m deep (Fig 5, Section j), reaching its greatest depth on the south-west side and at the terminals. A similar arc of gully on the north-east side, G22, was probably associated with the roundhouse. A partial dog skeleton from the ring gully has given a two radiocarbon dates centred on 380–200 Cal BC (95% confidence, 2220±35BP, GU35658 & GU35659), indicating date in the early middle Iron Age for this early stage in the development of the site.

There is no evidence to indicate whether any of the features within the area defined by the roundhouse ring gully were contemporary with it. However, a posthole *c.*2.0m inside the southern entrance terminal might have been a doorpost for a central roundhouse, which suggests a diameter of *c.*10m for the roundhouse, which is towards the upper end of size range for roundhouses of this date; where 11–12m in diameter is around the maximum encountered.

To the south-west of roundhouse G6, there were heavily truncated remains of a possible second roundhouse,

G7, *c.*13m in diameter. The entrance faced eastwards, although only the re-cut northern terminal and the single southern terminal survived. The gully to the south-west was no more than 0.1m deep. Two shallow circular pits and a posthole may have been associated with the roundhouse.

To the north, a group of oval postholes, on average 0.4m wide, 0.5m long and up to 0.3m deep, may have formed either a further roundhouse or a less substantial structure, G8. The distinctive pairs of postholes on the north side appeared to form a curve.

To the south-west, near enclosure G21, a shallow curving gully, G23, no more than 0.1m deep, may represent the heavily truncated remains of another roundhouse, although it may have formed part of a lesser structure.

Four-post structures

Lying well to the south-east of the main area of settlement, Structure G2 (Fig 4), comprised four postholes, 0.3–0.4m in diameter and up to 0.45m deep, forming a square measuring 2.8m (Fig 4). Another four-post structure, G3, to the south-west, measuring 2.4m across, consisted of less substantial postholes, no more than 0.2m deep.

Structure G4, next to G3, comprised three postholes, but a fourth posthole to form a square was not located, although there was a stray posthole to the east. The only posthole in these three structures that contained any finds was the easternmost posthole in G2, which held a large amount of middle Iron Age pottery.



Fig 6: Roundhouse G6, looking north

Enclosure G13

Enclosure G13 was rectangular, measuring 19m by 14m. The ditch, which had been re-cut at least six times, all on slightly different courses, was no more than 0.4m deep (Fig 5, Section f); however, in the southern corner and to a lesser extent the east, the ditch became significantly wider, acquiring a V-shape, up to 0.9m deep (Fig 5, Section i). This deepening may have allowed this corner of enclosure to act as a sump on the downslope side. It is likely that there was an entrance on the south-eastern arm, in common with most of the surrounding enclosures, but the evidence was destroyed by linear ditch G19. The ditch fills were typically dark and silty, and re-cuts were often difficult to distinguish in section, suggesting rapid infilling with dumped domestic debris

Enclosure G12/G12

This small D-shaped enclosure, lay to the east of enclosure G13 and adjacent to the eastern boundary G10. It measured *c.* 11m across, and was defined by a gully, G11, 0.25–0.50m deep, with an entrance to the north-west. An internal gully, 0.5m deep, may also have been associated with this phase of use. Gully G11 was replaced by a more substantial ditch, G12, up to 1.4m wide and 0.35–0.55m deep. The deeper and steeper southern and south-eastern sides contained a high concentration of closely-packed ironstone, which may have served as an entrance causeway.

Enclosure complex G14-G17 & G44

To the west of G13, there was a long-lived, complex and much altered enclosure system, G14-G17 & G44. At the centre was a sub-square enclosure, G15, measuring *c.* 18m by 18m, with a south-east facing entrance 3.2m wide. It was defined by a shallow gully, up to 0.2m deep (Fig 5, Sections d and e), and was probably directly replaced by enclosure, G16, which had removed most of the northern side of G15. A shallow gully and pit, G17, lay within enclosure G16.

Enclosure G16, a re-cut of sub-square enclosure G15, was 20m in diameter, with a V-shaped ditch with a broad flat base, up to 0.6m deep and 1.75m wide (Fig 5, Sections d and e). It was heavily re-cut along its eastern arm, with four visible terminals. The projecting entrance, facing south-east, was only 1.75m wide. Two shallow ditches, G43, formed auxiliary annexes wrapped around the western and eastern sides of G16; these were probably contemporary and worked in conjunction with G16. Two ditches, G44, branched off the south-west side of enclosure G16, either predating or contemporary with the final re-cut of G16, and apparently linking G16 with enclosure G20.

Enclosure G14

A square enclosure, G14, measuring *c.* 14m by 13m, was partially seen to the west, cut by the annex G43 to enclosure G16, with the remainder recorded by geophysical survey (Clark and Walford 2009). The ditch was up to 1.0m wide by 0.3–0.5m deep, becoming deeper and more

prominently V-shaped at its terminals, which flanked an entrance, 4.0m wide, which faced south-west, in contrast to most of the other enclosures entrance (Fig 5, Section b). A substantially complete dog skeleton was found in the base of the ditch (Fig 7), and bone from the dog has given a pair of radiocarbon dates centred on 390–340/330–200 Cal BC (95% confidence, GU35658 & GU35659, 2240±35BP), indicating a date in the early middle Iron Age (400–200BC).

Enclosure G20

Lying to the SW, Enclosure, G20, measuring c.19m square, was the latest in the series of enclosures, cutting boundary ditch G19, although it may have been contemporary with at least the later use of the complex to its north, G15, G16 etc.

There was a long sequence of re-cutting, similar to enclosure G13, yet the ditches themselves were significantly more substantial, with the deeper re-cuts 0.9m deep (Fig 5, Section h). The ditch fills frequently contained large fragments of ironstone, particularly the latest deep re-cut, with a greater concentration at the terminals in the SE corner. An abraded left humerus shaft from a sub-adult human was also recovered from the enclosure ditch, providing possible evidence for excarnation. Three shallow gullies, G21, on the inner edge of the ditch appeared to close off the enclosure's entrance towards the end of its use.

Isolated ditches, pits and postholes

The remains of a series of small, curving ditches in the north corner of the site, G24, generally had shallow V-shaped profiles, 0.2–0.5m deep. The geophysical survey suggests that this pattern of ditches continued to the north-west. This corner of the site also contained small sections of isolated shallow gullies, G25, probably truncated and generally aligned either N–S or E–W.

A number of shallow, circular pits, G26, were typically 0.8m in diameter and 0.2m deep, with fills of dark, silty material and flecks of charcoal. A small cluster of shallow pits, G31, south of the centre of occupation, produced a

small amount of middle Iron Age pottery, while a similar pit to the west, G18, contained a small amount of burnt animal bone. Larger volumes of pottery were recovered from pit group G5, a group of four shallow, oval pits in the centre of the site, near rectangular enclosure G13.

A number of shallow postholes and pits, G30, scattered across the site, were probably associated with the Iron Age enclosures, however, they produced no dating evidence and had no obvious association with any one enclosure.

Iron Age finds and environmental evidence

Middle Iron Age pottery by Jackie Wells

The middle Iron Age settlement yielded 350 sherds (4.3kg) with a mean sherd weight of 12g, slightly exceeding the typical mean of <10g for Iron Age assemblages in the county (Chapman 2010, 12). Single sherds range in weight between 1g and 128g. Few vessels are represented by more than one sherd, and there are no complete profiles.

Fabrics

In common with many Iron Age sites in the county, shelly wares are dominant (*cf.* Kidd 2004, 49), totalling 85% of the assemblage by sherd count and 88% by weight. They comprise a number of variants containing combinations of fine or coarse shell, sand or grog inclusions. Coarse shelly fabrics, characteristic of thicker-walled vessels, are prevalent within this group. More delicate sherds representing smaller, finer vessels contain sparser, well sorted shell inclusions. The remaining wares contain quartz sand, organic matter and grog (Table 1). While the grog represents a deliberate inclusion, the quartz and organic material may have occurred naturally in the clay. Vessels are generally well made and occur in both oxidised and reduced examples.

Table 1: Summary of pottery fabric types

Fabric Code	Description	%	%
		Sherd	Weight
SHCC	Coarse shell	32.0	23.9
SHCF	Fine shell	5.5	3.6
SHCF/QUMF	Sandy fine shell	15.8	12.8
SHCC/QUMM	Sandy coarse shell	14.6	29.0
SHMF/GRMF/QUSF	Shell, grog and sand	16.8	18.8
GRSM	Grog	4.9	3.2
GRSM/QUSF	Grog and sand	4.0	5.4
QUMF	Sand	3.7	2.6
QUMF/VEMM	Sand and organic	2.7	0.7

Fabrics

Fabrics are summarised below in accordance with PCRG Guidelines (2011). Due to their similarity, the divisions between some wares must be considered a little arbitrary.



Fig 7: Dog skeleton in the base of enclosure ditch G14 (Scale 0.4m)

SHCC: Coarse shell. Moderate to dense temper of angular coarse shell fragments, up to 10mm, with rare quartzite, grog, flint, organic material or ironstone

SHCF: Fine shell. Sparse to moderate angular shell fragments, up to 5mm, although most are usually below 2mm. Other material occurs as SHCC

SHCF/QUMF: Sandy fine shell. As SHCF, but with moderate sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, giving sherds a sandy texture

SHCC/QUMM: Sandy coarse shell. As SHCC, but with moderate sub-rounded quartz, up to 1mm, giving sherds a sandy texture

SHMF/GRMF/QUSF: Mixed shell, grog and sand. Variant of SHCC, with grog and sand occurring in greater quantities, and, less commonly, flint

GRSM: Grog. Abundant grog, up to 2mm with rare sand
GRSM/QUSF: Grog and sand. Abundant grog, up to 2mm, and moderate sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, giving sherds a sandy texture

QUMF: Sand. Abundant sub-rounded quartz, up to 1.5mm

QUMF/VEMM: Sand and organic. As QUMF, but with frequent elongated voids, where organic matter has burnt out

Forms

Diagnostic forms are poorly represented, with only a small number of vessels retaining rim to shoulder profiles (Fig 8). Most are variants of slack- or round-shouldered, fairly open vessels with either ovoid or globular profiles. Feature sherds comprise simple upright, rounded or flat rims, some with internal bevelling; one T-shaped rim; and single examples of a flat base and a small lug or handle. Vessel wall thickness varies between 6mm and 18mm. Rim diameters typically span 120–220mm, with a coarse shelly outlier at 360mm. Although the assemblage is dominated by plain body sherds, three fine-ware examples have a burnished finish. Seven vessels are scored, and two have impressed fingernail and fingertip decoration restricted to rim tops and neck. One vessel (Fig 8, P3) has tooled curvilinear and dot decoration (*cf.* Knight 2002, 131) and is probably one of the latest vessels in the assemblage.

Deposition

Pottery was collected from 95 ditch/gully segments, pits and postholes, 90% of which yielded less than 100g. Enclosure and boundary ditches represent the main focus of deposition, containing 67% of the assemblage (by sherd count): pits contained 24%, and structural deposits associated with the buildings the remainder. Pottery concentrations weighing over 500g derived from enclosures G12 and G20, and from pit group G5 (Table 2).

Catalogue of illustrated pottery (Fig 8)

- P1 Rounded bowl with beaded rim, fabric GRSM/QUSF, G10: ditch
 P2 Large vessel with upright rounded rim; faint fingertip impressions at the neck and shallow scoring on the body, fabric SHCC/QUMM, G12: Enclosure ditch

Table 2: Iron Age pottery quantification by Structural Groups

Group	Sherds	Wt (g)
G2 Four-post structure	28	139
G4 Four-post structure	4	7
G5 Pit group	58	669
G6 Roundhouse gully	20	235
G7 Possible roundhouse gully	8	58
G10 Ditch	7	70
G11 Enclosure ditch	2	16
G12 Enclosure ditch	12	682
G13 Enclosure ditch and re-cuts	35	322
G14 Enclosure ditch	5	42
G15 Enclosure ditch	4	7
G16 Enclosure ditch and re-cut	22	221
G18 Pit	10	87
G19 Ditch and re-cuts	20	153
G20 Enclosure ditch	46	962
G21 Gullies	1	28
G22 Possible roundhouse gully	8	45
G23 Possible roundhouse gully	8	46
G24 Curvilinear gullies	5	59
G26 Pit group	11	41
G31 Pit group	3	10
G42 Ditch	5	43
G43 Enclosure ditches	17	176
G44 Ditches	11	133
Total	350	4,251

- P3 Vessel base angle with curvilinear tooled lines infilled with double row of dots, fabric SHCF, G20: Enclosure ditch
 P4 Vessel with upright rounded rim, fingertip impressed decoration and faint brushing/scoring, fabric SHMF/GRMF/QUSF, G20: Enclosure ditch
 P5 Fine-walled vessel with flattened rim decorated with delicate fingertip impressions, fabric S H M F / GRMF/QUSF, G14: Enclosure ditch
 P6 Vessel with flattened rim, fabric SHCC, G16: Enclosure ditch and re-cut
 P7 Vessel with flattened rim and slight internal ledge, fabric SHCC, G5: Pit group

The radiocarbon dates and settlement chronology by Andy Chapman

Double bone samples from each of two dog skeletons, one from an early roundhouse, G6, and the other from an early enclosure G14, were submitted for radiocarbon dating (Table 3).

Two of the demonstrably earliest elements of the Iron Age settlement, as shown by their stratigraphic relationship with the later enclosures, were roundhouse gully G6 and enclosure G14 (Fig 4). Samples for radiocarbon analysis from dog skeletons in the two gullies have given similar dates, which when calibrated span most of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.

This broad span results from a peak in the calibration curve that provides double dates, one in each century,

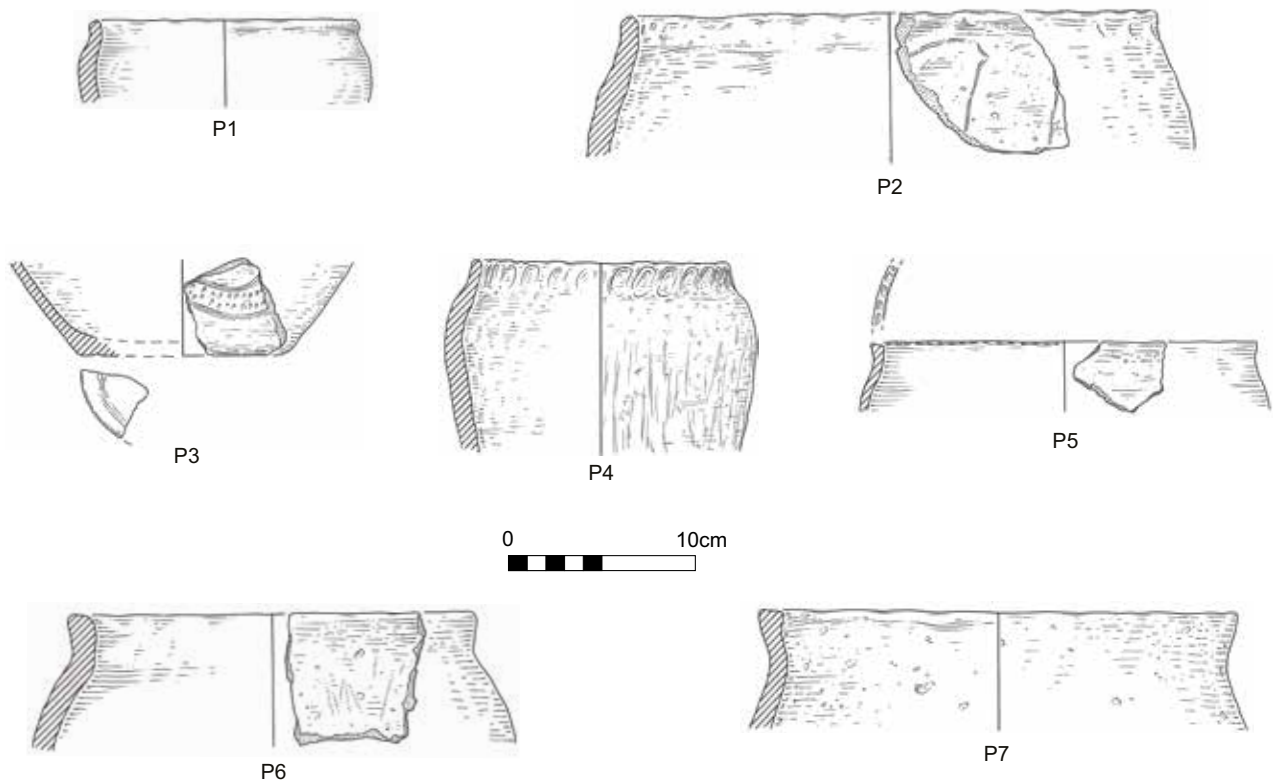


Fig 8: Illustrated Iron Age pottery (Scale 1:4)

typically with comparable levels of confidence, leaving it impossible to discriminate between them. However, these dates do serve to confirm that settlement began in the early middle Iron Age (400–250/200BC), possibly in the 4th century BC but perhaps more likely in the late 4th or the 3rd century BC.

Both the roundhouse gully G6 and the enclosure G14, lay at the beginning of an extended sequence of occupation. The presence of scored ware pottery indicates a continuation of occupation into the 2nd century BC, when use of thick-walled storage jars, either plain or sometimes with bold scored decoration, was at its peak. The dominance in the pottery assemblage of vessels without necks (see Fig 10), also indicates that much of the pottery assemblage belongs with the scored ware in

the later middle Iron Age (250/200–100BC), as shouldered vessels with well-defined necks are a characteristic of the early middle Iron Age.

Also, nearly 9% of the pottery contains grog and there is also a vessel with curvilinear decoration. These two characteristics indicate that occupation continued into the late Iron Age, 1st century BC, but there is no indication from the pottery assemblage that occupation continued into the early 1st century AD.

Medieval fields

Once the Iron Age settlement had been abandoned, there was no evidence for further activity until the land was used for ridge and furrow cultivation in the Middle Ages (Fig 2).

Table 3: Radiocarbon dates

Lab. ref	Context	Sample details	d13C d15N	Conventional Radiocarbon Age BP	Cal BC 68% confidence 95% confidence
GU35656 & GU35657	Partial dog skeleton Roundhouse gully G6	Animal bone	–21.2/–21.1 9.4/9.6	2210 ± 35 & 2220 ± 35	360–350/320–270/260–210 380–200 360–350/310–210 380–200
GU35658 & GU35659	Complete dog Enclosure ditch G14	Animal bone	–20.3/–20.4 10.0/10.2	2240 ± 35	380–350/300–230/220–210 390–340/330–200

Laboratory: GU= Scottish Universities Research & Reactor Centre
Calibration: Intcal13

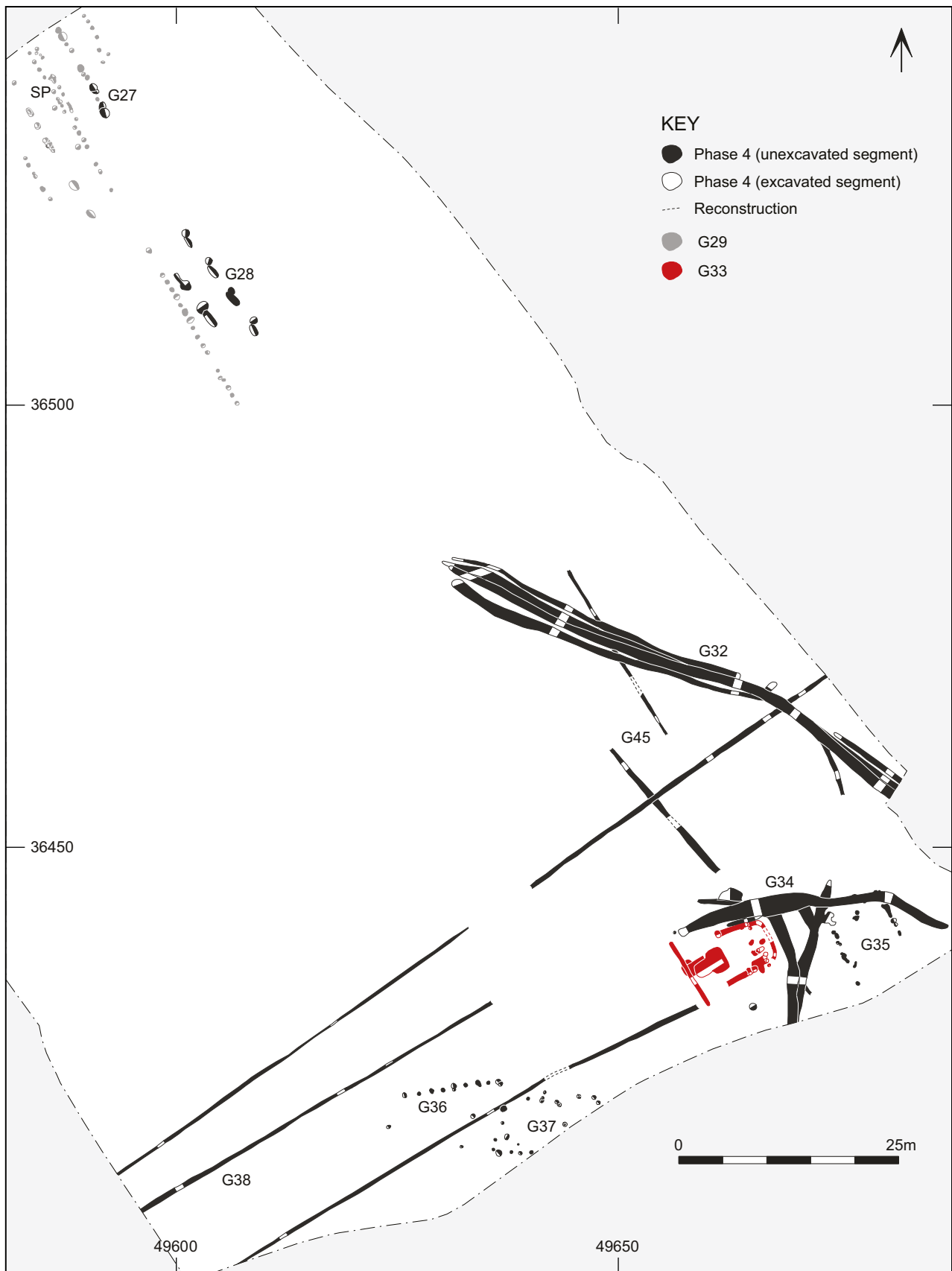


Fig 9: Medieval/post-medieval features

Medieval to post-medieval buildings and boundaries

Numerous other remains also post-dated the Iron Age settlement, but the date of these is mostly uncertain due to an almost complete absence of datable finds. Some were recognisably modern, but the rest are likely to have been either medieval or post-medieval.

Building, G37, defined by several lines of postholes and seems to have consisted of at least two rooms, with its east end lying beyond the limit of excavation. The post-in-ground construction suggests a medieval date. Fence G36 may have defined a yard outside the building.

A stone-built hearth lay within a probable timber-framed building, G33 (Figs 9 & 10). Its construction looked typologically medieval to post-medieval, while the charred plant remains recovered from it suggest at least a post-Roman date.



Fig 10: Hearth within medieval/post-medieval building G33, looking north-west (Scale 1m)

Ditches G32 and G38 presumably formed part of a field system, but little can be said about them. The relationship between G38 and the furrows makes it likely that these ditches were post-medieval. A similar date is probable for several lines of postholes, G29, in the northern corner of site, which are thought to have been agricultural in origin; they may have formed fence lines, but their precise nature is uncertain. A more amorphous group of pits on the same alignment, G27 and G28, may have been associated with tree planting or cultivation.

Fired clay by Jackie Wells

Seventeen fragments of daub, weighing 1.1kg, are distinguished by the presence of wattle impressions, measuring 15–25mm in diameter: these came from Iron Age ditches G10 and G42; and from medieval/post-medieval building G33 and enclosure ditches G34. One fragment from G34 has a finished edge, probably representing either the top or bottom of a wall, and one retains impressions of a square-sectioned lath.

Of the 37 pieces of fired clay (1.7kg), the majority are from medieval/post-medieval features. All pieces

occur in a micaceous, oxidised fine sandy fabric, and are mostly amorphous and abraded. The fragments represent secondary deposition of occupation material, which, with the possible exception of those from building G33, cannot be directly associated with the use of the features from which they were collected.

Animal bone by Mark Maltby

A total of 930 fragments of animal bone were recovered (Table 4), including 468 specimens identified to species. Most were in a moderate state of preservation, though gnawing damage was observed on 73 of the identified domestic mammal elements, and 138 were recorded as weathered. Sieved samples produced 220 fragments, but only fourteen of these were identified.

Pre-Iron Age

Twenty fragments were recovered from ditches G1 and G9, of which only three were identified: ditch G1 produced a cattle humerus fragment, while ditch G9 produced a fused cattle distal tibia and an associated astragalus.

Middle Iron Age settlement

Table 5 shows the distribution of animal bones recovered from Iron Age features, which are discussed below.

Cattle

Cattle provided 45% of the identified Iron Age mammal fragments, excluding bones from associated groups (Table 3). Cattle and sheep/goat have been the main species represented in Iron Age assemblages examined from the East Midlands, although their relative abundance has varied on different sites (Hambleton 1999; Maltby 2008). Most of

Table 4: *Animal bone species counts*

Species	Pre-Iron Age	Iron Age	Med/post-med	Sieved
Cattle	3	170	11	1
Sheep/Goat	–	117	6	10
Pig	–	16	2	2
Horse	–	60	6	–
Dog	–	104	–	1
Hare	–	–	1	–
Heron	–	1	–	–
Total	3	468	26	14
Unid.				
Mammal	17	383	32	205
Unid. Bird	–	1	–	1
Total				
Unidentified	17	384	32	206
Total	20	852	58	220

Counts are of numbers of individual specimens (NISPS)
Phase totals include 93 dog and 4 cattle bones in associated bone groups and bones from sieved samples

the assemblage was obtained from enclosure ditches, in which cattle were consistently well represented (Table 4). Preservation conditions and retrieval biases favoured the recovery of cattle bones, and they were outnumbered by sheep/goat in sieved-sample NISP counts and minimum-number counts. However, given their carcass size, it is likely that cattle would have provided by far the most meat to the diet of the site's inhabitants.

Metapodials, mandibles, tibiae and radii were well represented in the cattle assemblage, suggesting perhaps a bias towards the deposition of bones of low-meat quality from primary butchery in peripheral areas of the settlement. Butchery marks were observed on fifteen cattle elements; nine of these were fine incisions, while the remainder consisted of deeper blade cuts or chop marks. Incisions associated with dismemberment were observed on an astragalus, a mandibular ramus, a humerus, an acetabulum, and metatarsals, while fine cuts on a humerus and tibia and on a mandible are likely to have been made during filleting. The use of fine-bladed knives for such processing was common on Iron Age sites (Maltby 2007).

Only six cattle mandibles provided ageing evidence; three belonged to adults, and three to animals of three years or younger. Similarly, the limited epiphyseal fusion evidence revealed that 58% of the surviving latest-fusing epiphyses had fused and belonged to fully grown adults. Porous bones from young calves formed only around 5% of the cattle assemblage. The proportion of such bones would usually be higher in husbandry regimes in which dairying was important; this suggests that cattle were raised mainly for meat and possibly as working animals,

though the sample is too small to place great confidence in this conclusion.

The estimated withers height of cattle, based on lengths of complete limb bones, ranged between 0.99m and 1.17m, with a mean of 1.10m. These were animals typical of the small stock found elsewhere in Iron Age Britain, with no evidence for the introduction of the larger cattle that have been found on Roman sites in the southern half of England (Albarella *et al* 2008).

Sheep/goat

Eleven elements were identified specifically as sheep, but there were no positive identifications of goat. Most, if not all, of the sheep/goat assemblage is therefore likely to have consisted of sheep, as is typical of British Iron Age sites. No associated groups of sheep bones were encountered.

Despite slightly adverse preservation conditions and their small size comparative to cattle and horse, sheep/goat elements were well represented, providing 32% of the identified mammal NISP counts (Table 3). They outnumbered cattle in minimum number calculations, although they were probably much less important in terms of their contribution to the diet.

Fifteen mandibles provided tooth ageing evidence. There were no marked peaks in slaughter, with the sheep represented ranging from lambs of a few weeks old to mature adults. No mandibles of neonatal or very old animals were recovered, however. No sheep withers heights could be calculated.

Table 5: Iron Age animal bone species counts by Structural Group

Group	Type	Cattle	Sheep/ goat	Pig	Horse	Dog	Heron	Mammal	Bird	Total
2	Four-post structure	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
5	Cluster of four pits	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
6	Roundhouse gully	11	17	1	3	6	—	58	—	96
7	Possible roundhouse gully	11	5	1	3	—	—	12	—	32
10	Ditch	4	7	3	9	—	—	24	—	47
11	Enclosure ditch	7	4	—	1	—	—	7	—	19
12	Enclosure ditch	6	5	—	1	—	—	23	—	35
13	Enclosure ditch and re-cuts	44	20	3	10	1	—	50	—	128
14	Enclosure ditch	3	3	—	1	88	—	17	—	112
15	Enclosure ditch	—	1	—	1	—	—	3	—	5
16	Enclosure ditch and re-cut	11	10	2	5	—	1	13	—	42
17	Pit and gully	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
18	Pit	1	5	1	2	—	—	32	—	41
19	Ditch and re-cuts	3	2	2	—	1	—	8	1	17
20	Enclosure ditch	47	22	1	16	4	—	56	—	146
21	Three gullies	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
22	Possible roundhouse gully	1	1	—	2	—	—	2	—	6
23	Possible roundhouse gully	—	4	—	—	3	—	5	—	12
24	Two curvilinear gullies	4	3	—	—	—	—	3	—	10
25	Short dispersed gullies	1	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	3
26	Nine pits	2	2	—	—	1	—	42	—	47
31	Two pits	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	3
42	Ditch	6	1	—	4	—	—	4	—	15
43	Curving enclosure ditches	2	4	2	2	—	—	8	—	18
44	Ditches	3	1	—	—	—	—	7	—	11
Total		170	117	16	60	104	1	383	1	852

Counts are of numbers of individual specimens (NISP)

Pig

Pig elements were very poorly represented, providing only 4% of the identified mammal fragments, excluding associated groups (Table 3). Pigs have sometimes provided less than 10% of the cattle, sheep/goat and pig counts on Iron Age and Roman sites from Bedfordshire (Maltby 2011), but this is at the bottom end of the scale. Several other sites in Northamptonshire have produced around 10% pig, for example at Rainsborough (Banks 1967) and Wilby Way, Great Doddington (Maltby 2003). The presence of a humerus from a neonatal piglet and a pair of pig mandibles from an animal of under six months old suggests that pigs might have been kept at the settlement, but probably only in small numbers. Apart from the humerus, all the identified pig elements came from the cranium or scapula. Tooth ageing evidence from five other jaws indicated that two belonged to pigs killed in their second year, and three probably to pigs slaughtered in their third year. Some of the scapulae could have been from preserved joints imported to the settlement.

Horse

Horse elements were well represented in the assemblage, providing 16% of the identified mammal fragments (Table 3). This is an unusually high proportion of horse; for example, at Marston Moretaine in Bedfordshire, horse never provided more than 9% of the identified elements in any of the Iron Age phases, although they were found in quite large percentages in some individual deposits (Maltby 2013). Similarly, at Wilby Way, Great Doddington, horse bones were deposited in quite large numbers in some areas of the site (Maltby 2003).

Horse humeri were unusually abundant at King's Sutton, with portions of at least eight different bones represented. Metatarsals and pelvises were also well represented. In contrast, there were very few cranial elements or metacarpals. This suggests that horse carcasses must have been processed or manipulated in some way, resulting in imbalances in deposition. Fine incisions, very similar to those found on the cattle bones, were observed on a horse humerus, and deep cut marks were recorded on an ischium near the acetabulum of a pelvis. These marks indicate dismemberment, and although horse carcasses were not exploited as intensively as cattle, it appears that horsemeat was consumed at the settlement, possibly more regularly than pork. There were also no significant groups of associated horse bones that are so characteristic of deposition practices in some areas of Iron Age Britain (Grant 1984; Morris 2011), but the variations in element representation cannot be explained simply in terms of natural taphonomic or retrieval biases. Some of the horse phalanges may have been associated with skins brought to the site or processed there, but no cut marks were observed on them.

Epiphyseal data from a distal radius and a proximal humerus indicate relatively young horses, possibly under five years of age, while two mandibular premolars came from horses that were around six years old (Levine 1982). Neither of these premolars had been damaged by bit wear. This may imply that some horses were culled for meat at a relatively young age, although all other

epiphyses had fused, and it is likely that many horses were more highly valued for their working qualities than for their flesh.

Withers height estimates were obtained from three limb bones, averaging 1.35m. Although these were relatively small horses, they were larger than all six specimens recorded from Iron Age features at Marston Moretaine (Maltby 2013). This raises the possibility that different types of horses were being bred in the region, but this requires further research.

Dog

In contrast to the other species, most of the dog bones formed associated groups (Table 3), indicating that their carcasses were not usually processed. Most of the bones came from the adult skeleton, possibly of a female, deposited in ditch G14, probably as a complete burial. This specimen had an estimated shoulder height of c.0.50m and was similar in height to the dog represented by six bones in roundhouse gully G6 (c. 0.52m). These were both medium-sized dogs similar to many found on British Iron Age sites (Harcourt 1974; Clark 1995), where dogs were commonly buried as complete skeletons (Morris 2011). There is no evidence for carcass processing on any of the dog bones.

Other species

No bones of wild mammals were positively identified, nor were any fish bones, despite the sieving programme. The only bird bone belonged to heron (*Ardea cinerea*), and domestic fowl bones were notably absent.

Charred plant remains by John Giorgi

Twenty-two bulk soil samples were taken. Most produced identifiable charred plant remains, but the whole assemblage consisted of only 300 quantified items. Cereal grains accounted for almost 50% of the quantified remains, with cereal chaff fragments and weed seeds making up the remainder. Most of the individual assemblages were very small, consisting of only occasional or low numbers of grains that had been accidentally burnt during activities associated with the final cleaning and preparation/cooking of food.

Iron Age

The general paucity of charred plant remains does not allow detailed insight into the site's agricultural economy and the activities that were undertaken over time, although the limited evidence does provide some information on crop husbandry.

The only Iron Age feature that produced a relatively large assemblage was Iron Age pit G18, which, in addition to cereal grains, contained hulled (spelt) wheat chaff from the de-husking of hulled wheat, as well as large weed seeds, which may have been debris from the final cleaning of grains nearby. The smaller weed seeds in this sample could, however, represent by-products from sieving of the grain from an earlier stage of cleaning.

There is therefore evidence to suggest that both hulled and free-threshing wheat, together with hulled barley, were being used during the middle Iron Age, although spelt was the main hulled wheat at this time. The weed seeds from the Iron Age samples suggest that cultivation was carried out nearby.

Medieval/post-medieval

The rich grain deposit from the probable post-medieval hearth/oven, G33, contained a range of cereals: free-threshing (including bread) wheat, rye, hulled barley and oats, all of which are typical of post-Roman cereal assemblages.

Discussion

The only evidence of prolonged settlement comes from the middle Iron Age, during which a sequence of roundhouses and enclosures were constructed, used and abandoned over the course of perhaps two or three centuries, probably the 3rd to 1st centuries BC. The following discussion examines how the use of the land changed over the course of the site's history, and considers in particular what the middle Iron Age remains represent.

Settlement morphology and chronology

Few Iron Age sites have been excavated within the area around King's Sutton, but the chronology of the Banbury Lane site fits with its contemporaries in the surrounding region. Middle Iron Age settlement (or at least activity) was recorded at Whitelands Farm in Bicester (Martin 2011), Jugglers Close in Banbury (Stevens 2004) and at Slade Farm, Bicester (Ellis *et al* 2000); all of these were at least fundamentally middle Iron Age in origin, and were abandoned either during or before the late Iron Age.

The nature of the middle Iron Age settlement at King's Sutton seems to have remained broadly constant over time, albeit with frequent reworking and renewal. T

The presence of at least one roundhouse, G6, points to domestic occupation at the start of the settlement's lifespan, which may date to the 4th or 3rd century BC, and set to the west of a linear boundary ditch.

Roundhouse G6 was directly supplanted by a small D-shaped enclosure, G12, and a rectangular enclosure, G13. It is possible that a new roundhouse, G7, lay to the west. This reformed settlement may have been contemporary with the reformation of the boundary system, so that the domestic occupation then lay in the angle of the L-shaped boundaries, G10.

Roundhouse G7 and enclosures G11 and G13 were clearly no longer in use when a new east-west boundary ditch, G19, was dug through the middle of the area. There is no evident replacement for the roundhouse, unless a roundhouse had stood within enclosure G15. However, the fragmentary remains in the northern corner of the site, together with features shown on the geophysical survey beyond this area (Clark and Walford 2009), make it possible that there were contemporary buildings lying to the north.

In the final phase of occupation, the late Iron Age (1st century BC), boundary ditch G19 fell out of use, and there was a sub-square enclosure, G20, with multiple recuts to the ditch, and a complex to the north comprising a sub-square/sub-circular enclosure with a narrow entrance, G16, and annexes to the north-west and east, ditches G43. The function of this complex is uncertain, but the central enclosure, G16, could have enclosed a very substantial roundhouse, as much as 15m in diameter with a doorway to the south-east, although no evidence for the presence of such a building had survived. As a roundhouse, within an enclosure with a narrow entrance and surrounded by two narrow annexes, the roundhouse complex would have been at the height of its development only shortly before the site was abandoned.

As there was never more than a single substantial roundhouse in this area during each phase of development, it is unlikely that the settlement was ever intensively occupied, probably being used by no more than a single extended family group, with a principal house, one or more adjacent enclosures for prime stock, and beyond this the arcs of gully and the ring of postholes, G8, are all best interpreted as ancillary enclosures, perhaps workshops, and including at least two and perhaps three, four-post granaries, set well to the south of the domestic focus.

Economy and environment

There was little evidence to indicate the character of the surrounding environment, but it is likely that there was a combination of pasture and arable land in the vicinity. Few charred plant remains were recovered, but the presence of charred weed seeds in the Iron Age soil samples suggests that cereals were grown locally. The inhabitants may have taken advantage of the heavier and damper soils towards the River Cherwell to grow hulled and free-threshing wheat, with barley grown on the better drained soils to the east and south.

Despite the evidence that crops were probably grown nearby, it is likely that the settlement had a primarily pastoral economy. This is partly suggested by the number of enclosures that were constructed, even if they were only used one at a time. Their function is uncertain, but the lack of internal features and their spatial relationship to the adjacent roundhouses makes it likely that they were not for human occupation, and they may well have been for livestock.

Even though cattle bones were outnumbered by sheep/goat, it is likely that cattle contributed most to the population's diet. Marks on fifteen cattle elements show that butchery was practised on site, and the low percentage of porous bones indicative of calves suggests that cattle were raised mainly for meat and possibly as working animals. The sheep/goat assemblage, however, includes bones from lambs a few weeks old to mature animals, and even though no evidence of neonatal or very old animals was recovered, this may well have been a factor of the frequently poor preservation.

Pigs seem to have played an unusually small part in the pastoral economy, although the presence of a humerus from a neonatal piglet and a pair of mandibles from a

pig of under six months old at least suggests that pigs were kept at the settlement. In contrast, horse elements were unusually well represented, providing 16% of the identified mammal fragments and 27% of the total cattle and horse fragments. Metatarsals and pelves were well represented, yet there were very few cranial elements or metacarpals, suggesting that horse carcasses must have been processed or manipulated in some way in order to result in this imbalance in deposition. Fine incisions, very similar to those found on cattle bones, were observed on two of the horse bones, suggesting that horsemeat was consumed at the settlement, perhaps more regularly than pork. As commonly occurs at small Iron Age settlements, there is very little evidence for the exploitation of wild species.

Funerary activity

The only fragment of human bone recovered was an abraded left humerus shaft from a sub-adult, from the late sub-square enclosure ditch G20. This may be an indication that excarnation was practised, evidence for which is found relatively often on Iron Age settlements. Hill (1995, 105–8) has argued that individual bones were specifically selected and placed around the margins of a settlement as part of a mortuary practice. In addition, a largely complete dog skeleton was recovered from enclosure ditch G14. It was a medium-sized dog similar to many found on British Iron Age sites (Harcourt 1974; Clark 1995), where dogs were commonly buried as complete skeletons (Morris 2011).

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