

PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT AT STANFORD: EXCAVATIONS AT LYNFORD QUARRY, NORFOLK 2000–2001

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SUMMARY

Between 2000 and 2002 the Norfolk Archaeological Unit carried out archaeological investigations at Lynford Quarry, Stanford. Occupation evidence dating to the Later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age was found, along with a Mid–Late Iron Age settlement. Both are important additions to the existing knowledge of prehistoric settlement in Breckland, Norfolk and East Anglia. Of particular importance was the discovery of six butchered rabbit bones from a Late Iron Age or Early Roman pit. These represent the earliest recorded evidence of rabbit in Norfolk, and some of the earliest in Britain.

Introduction

(Figs 1 and 2)

Background

In March 1998 an application to extend the existing Lynford Quarry, Stanford, was submitted to Norfolk County Council by Ayton Asphalte. The proposal involved tree clearance, topsoil stripping, the extraction of sand and gravel, and subsequent reinstatement. Planning permission was granted subject to a programme of archaeological investigation. An archaeological evaluation of the c. 8.46ha application area — Historical and Environment Record (HER) Sites 5090 and 35165 — was carried out in March 2000 (Birks 2000). This was followed by a watching brief on a smaller area (HER 35165) in August and September 2000 (Birks 2001) and a small-scale excavation in January and February 2001. In 2002 further evaluation of a specific area (HER 37140) was undertaken (Birks 2002). All phases of work were carried out by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit.

Geology and topography

The application area (centred on NGR TL 8250 9480) is located c. 0.5km to the south-east of the village of Ickburgh and c. 2km north-east of the village of Mundford, in the Breckland region of south-west Norfolk. It is situated on the southern floodplain of the River Wissey and on land rising up from it. The local relief generally slopes down from the south, with surface elevations between 10m OD and 15m OD.

Breckland is a low plateau with gentle slopes and low rainfall, and represents a very distinctive region in south-west Norfolk and north-west Suffolk (Corbett and Dent 1994; Williamson 1993, 11). The site geology is typical of Breckland, with solid chalk overlain by glacio-fluvial sands and gravels of Late Pleistocene date. Topsoil and subsoils are composed of sandy and peaty soils of the Isleham 2 Association (Hodge *et al.* 1984) with a maximum depth of 0.3m. At the time of the initial evaluation most of the land was covered with grass and scrub, with a number of cleared areas. Pine plantations bordered the site on the south and east (Fig. 2), while water-filled former quarry pits lay to the west.

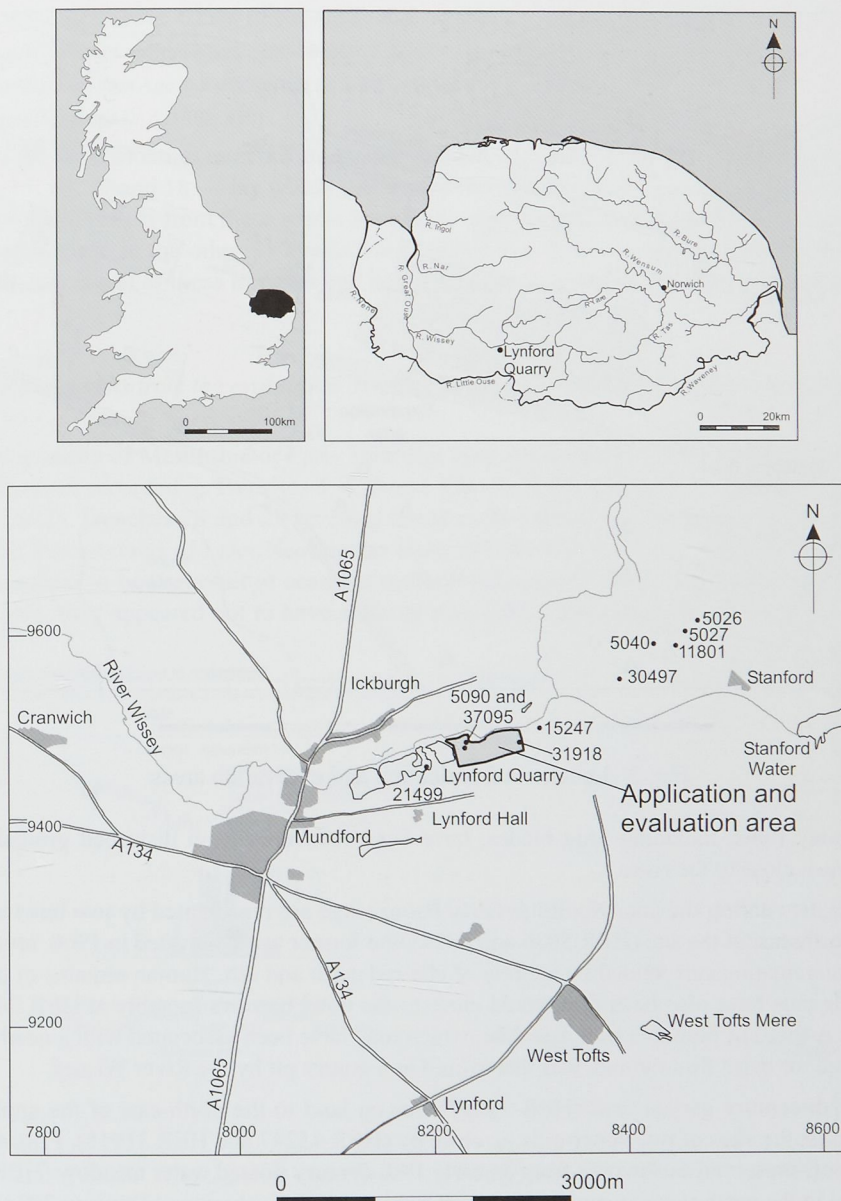


Fig. 1 Location of Lynford Quarry

Archaeological and historical background (Figs 1 and 2)

Palaeolithic hand-axes and flakes have been found in spoil heaps or during working of the former quarry pits located to the west (HER 21499). Within the northern part of the application area (HER 37095) a Middle Palaeolithic palaeochannel containing the remains of mammoths and Mousterian artefacts was excavated in 2002 (Boismier 2003). Hand-axes and Late Upper

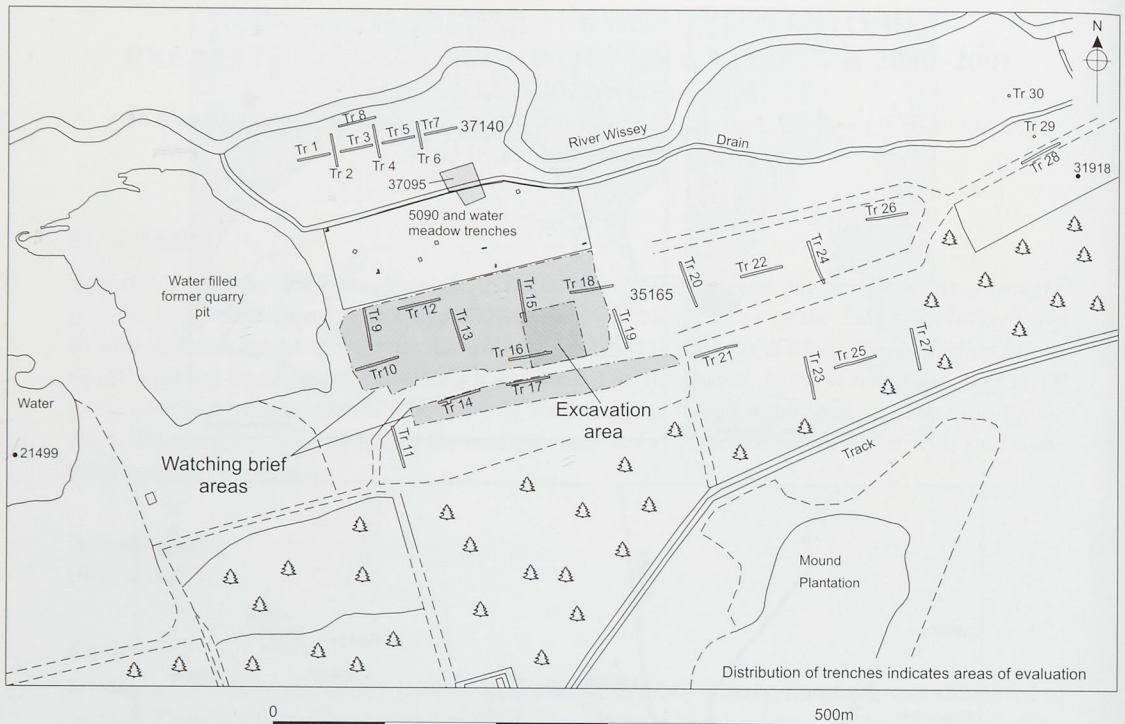


Fig. 2. Location of evaluation and excavation areas

Palaeolithic flints, including long blades, have been recovered from disturbed ground to the north-west, close to the river.

Activities during the later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age are represented by two bowl barrows to the north-east of the site (HER 5026 and 5027); the former was excavated in 1900, revealing a skeleton/cremation surrounded by a circle of charred earth and ash. Human remains of possible Neolithic date have also been discovered close to the bowl barrows (notably at HER 5040 and 11801). A sherd of probable Iron Age date, which may have been associated with a nearby 'pot-boiler site' or burnt flint mound, was discovered in a quarry pit by the River Wissey.

A 17th-century garden wall (HER 30497) lies on land to the north-east of the application area, whilst the sites of two watermills lie close by (HER 15247 and HER 31918). Prior to quarrying, well-preserved earthworks from an early 19th-century floated water meadow (HER 5090) survived in the north-western part of the site (Cushion 1996; Cushion and Davison 2003). Since 1946 the area has variously been used for pig-rearing (Ordnance Survey aerial photography, 1971) and as a timber yard. More recently it was allowed to become grass and scrub-covered waste, possibly because much of it was very wet or lay under standing water until a fall in the water table caused by the flooding of a neighbouring quarry pit.

Structure of the report

This report synthesises the findings of the archaeological investigations carried out at Lynford Quarry in 2000 and 2001. Four broad chronological periods have been identified and applied to all dated contexts except topsoil and subsoil.

Period I: Later Neolithic to Early Bronze Age (c. 2600–1800 BC)

Period II: Mid to Late Iron Age (c. 300–50 BC)

Period III: Late Iron Age to Early Roman (c. 50BC–AD 100)

Period IV: Roman (c. AD 100–410)

Nine of the 40 evaluation trenches excavated in 2000 and 2002 (Fig. 2) — Trenches 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 — lay within the area of the watching brief and excavation areas. The archaeological results from these works have been incorporated into the body of the report. The discoveries made in the other 31 evaluation trenches are, however, summarised briefly below. Detailed discussion of these trenches can be found in the evaluation reports (Birks 2000; Birks 2002).

Summary of results from the evaluation trenches located beyond watching brief and excavation areas

A small quantity of Mesolithic or Early Neolithic flint artefacts were recovered from a possible palaeochannel recorded in Trenches 4, 5, 6 and 8 in the north-west part of the application area (Birks 2002). Trenches 28 and 29 revealed a mid to dark grey silty sand alluvium from which over 500 flint artefacts of Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date were collected. Most of the objects appear to be the result of seasonal primary reduction of flint; despite seasonal flooding of the area, they appeared not to have suffered much post-depositional movement. As plans to

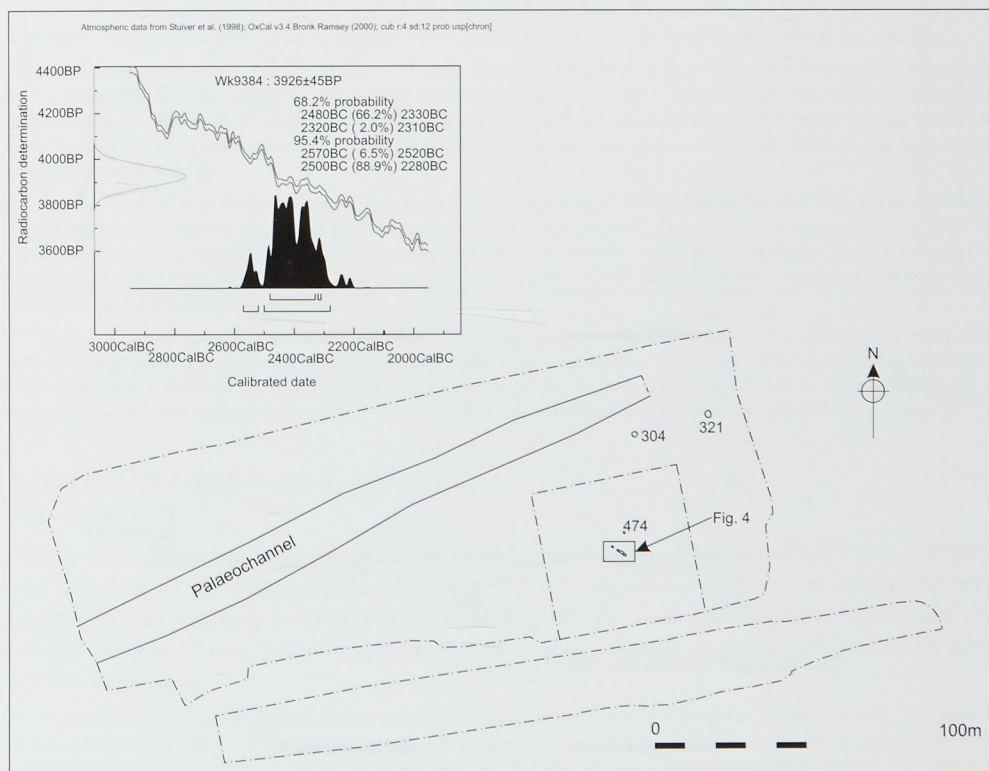


Fig. 3 Period I features, with radiocarbon determinations for possible hearth 451

quarry this very easterly area of the quarry extension were on hold at the time of the excavation and watching brief, no further work was undertaken in the area of Trenches 28 and 29. A number of ditches and banks of the floated water meadow were also examined (Birks 2000).

Excavation results

(Figs 2–8)

During the watching brief an area of c. 6.82ha was stripped of topsoil using a tracked 360°

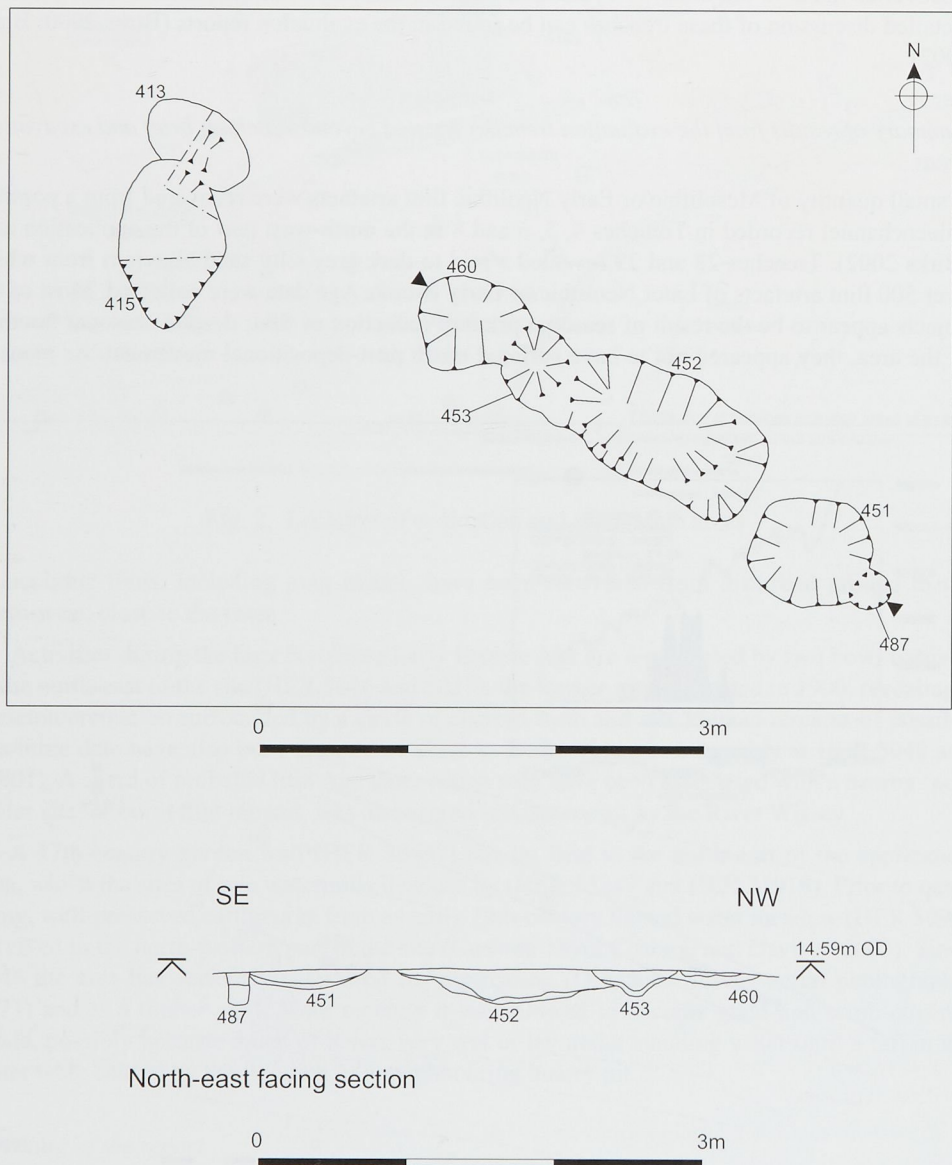


Fig. 4 Period I hearths

excavator with a toothless bucket (Fig. 2); stripping was monitored closely and the topsoil metal-detected. Within this area a 50m by 50m square was marked out for open area excavation. All archaeological features were identified after stripping, excavated by hand and recorded in accordance with the *County Standards for Field Archaeology in Norfolk* (Norfolk Landscape Archaeology 1998).

Period I: Later Neolithic–Early Bronze Age (c. 2600–1800 BC)
(Figs 3 and 4)

A series of hearths found in the centre of the excavation area were amongst the earliest features on the site (Figs 3 and 4). All displayed very similar patterns of infilling (Fig. 4), with charcoal-rich silty sands overlying ‘linings’ of compacted flint pebbles, some which were cracked and reddened from burning.

Hearth 451 was circular, 0.8m in diameter and 0.13m deep. Fifty-eight sherds of a single Beaker vessel, three flint flakes and charcoal were collected from it. A poorly preserved short length of burnt and cut timber was also found; a radiocarbon determination (Fig. 3) of 3926±45 BP (Wk-9384: 2570–2280 cal. BC at 95.4% confidence) was obtained from this. A circular post-hole 487, which measured 0.24m in diameter and was 0.22m deep, containing a flint blade and a flint core, was located against the south-western side of the feature.

Located just to the north-west was an ovate hearth 452 which measured 1.45m in length, 0.76m wide and was 0.23m deep. A utilised flake, eight flint flakes and four flint blades were recovered from two of its fills, one of which contained plantain seeds, charcoal and a piece of wood which was radiocarbon dated to 3881±47 BP (Wk-9385: 2470–2200 cal. BC at 95.4% confidence). Close by was a roughly circular feature 460 which measured 0.64m in diameter by 0.08m deep and held charcoal. The upper fills of both these features were cut by a circular hearth 453 which measured 0.52m in diameter by 0.18m deep and contained two flint flakes, six flint blades and charcoal. A piece of uncut wood collected from one of its fills provided a radiocarbon determination of 3941±45 BP (Wk-9386: 2570–2290 cal. BC at 95.4% confidence).

Another possible hearth 413 lay to the north-west. This was oval in plan and measured 0.78m by 0.48m and was 0.15m deep. Although no pottery or wood were found in its fills to provide a relative or absolute date, it contained a utilised flake, two flakes, three blades, a core shatter piece, charcoal-rich silty sands and a flint pebble ‘lining’ similar to those in the features to the south-east. As such, it is thought to be broadly contemporary with them. It had been cut by an undated ovate pit, 415.

Worked flints dating to the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age were recovered from three pits located to the north-east of the possible hearths, and these finds suggest dates for these features. The nearest to the possible hearths (474) contained three flakes and a blade, and was truncated by a tree-hole. Flints collected from this feature may have originally come from the pit. Of the other two pits, 304 contained two scrapers and four flakes, whilst sixteen flint flakes were found within the charcoal-rich fills of pit 321.

A possible river palaeochannel was identified aligned north-east to south-west across the width of the excavation area. Although it contained no datable finds, its upper fills were truncated by a group of Mid–Late Iron Age post-holes which suggested it had infilled by the Middle Iron Age at the latest. As no Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age features cut its fills — all were located to the south — it is possible that palaeochannel was open whilst they were in use.

Period II: Mid–Late Iron Age (c. 300–50 BC)
(Figs 2 and 5–7)

During the evaluation, watching brief and excavation, pottery of Middle to Late Iron Age date was found in 57 contemporary features (Fig. 5): all but one were identified within the area covered by the watching brief and excavation (Fig. 2). The features suggest occupation of the site and comprised pits, post-holes, four-post structures, possible structures, ditches and a large infilled depression.

Three parallel north-to-south aligned ditches were identified in the eastern half of the area. The easternmost, 200, curved at its southern end to become aligned east-to-west, and three sherds of Mid–Late Iron Age organic-tempered pottery were collected from one of the four segments excavated through it. Although the segments excavated through the other two ditches produced no finds, and their phasing must remain tentative, the fact they shared alignments with the easternmost ditch suggested that they were contemporary with it. The ditches both cut and were cut by pits of Mid–Late Iron Age

date, which suggests that they were integral to occupation activity on the site.

Located between the two easternmost ditches was a cluster of features comprising three trapezoidal shaped four-post structures, five possible structures, a large infilled depression and pits. The northernmost four-poster (S3) measured 2.33m by 2.1m (Figs 5, 6 and 7). One of its four post-holes, 479, was truncated by a fifth, 481, providing a hint that the structure had been repaired during its lifetime. The post-holes ranged in diameter between 0.5m and 0.69m, and in depth between 0.1m and 0.21m. Four held sherds (22 in total), one (439) contained residual flint artefacts, two (437 and 441) held charcoal and one (439) contained burnt flint.

A second four-post structure (S2) was located to the south-west of S3 (Figs 5 and 7). It was 2.4m square, with post-holes measuring 0.48–0.59m in diameter and 0.08m–0.25m deep. One post-hole contained three sherds, whilst charcoal and hazelnut shell fragments were collected from another. The third four-post structure (S1) was situated rather to the south-east (Figs 5 and 7). It measured 2.6m square and its post-holes had diameters of 0.38–0.51m and depths of 0.20–0.29m. Their fills yielded a flint flake, charcoal, a few cereal grains, fungal spores, and grass and alder pollen.

To the south of structure S2, three undated post-holes (S4) described a neat right angle (Figs 5 and 7) and probably formed a similar structure. The 'missing' post would have been located in the north-east corner, exactly where a later tree-disturbance 415 was discovered.

West of S4 were five post-holes (S5; Figs 5 and 7) which may also have represented a structure. Four of them formed an irregular rectangle measuring 3m by 3.5m; another was located a short distance to the north-east. All were 0.11–0.24m in depth and measured 0.40–0.59m in diameter, except the north-western post-hole which was larger (0.88m deep by 0.44m diameter). A sherd was gathered from one of the four corner post-holes, along with eleven sherds, a residual flint flake and burnt flint from the north-western post-hole. South of S4 and S5 were three post-holes (S7) which may also once have been part of a four-post structure. They contained two fragments of pottery each; one also produced a possible hammerstone whilst another had burnt flints.

Between S1 and S3 was an isolated post-hole 403 from which 52 sherds, cereal grains and charcoal were recovered. Directly to the south of S1 was a large shallow depression (536) which measured approximately 11m by 9m in plan and was up to 0.5m deep (Figs 5 and 6). It was filled with three dark grey-black silty sands which contained twenty sherds,

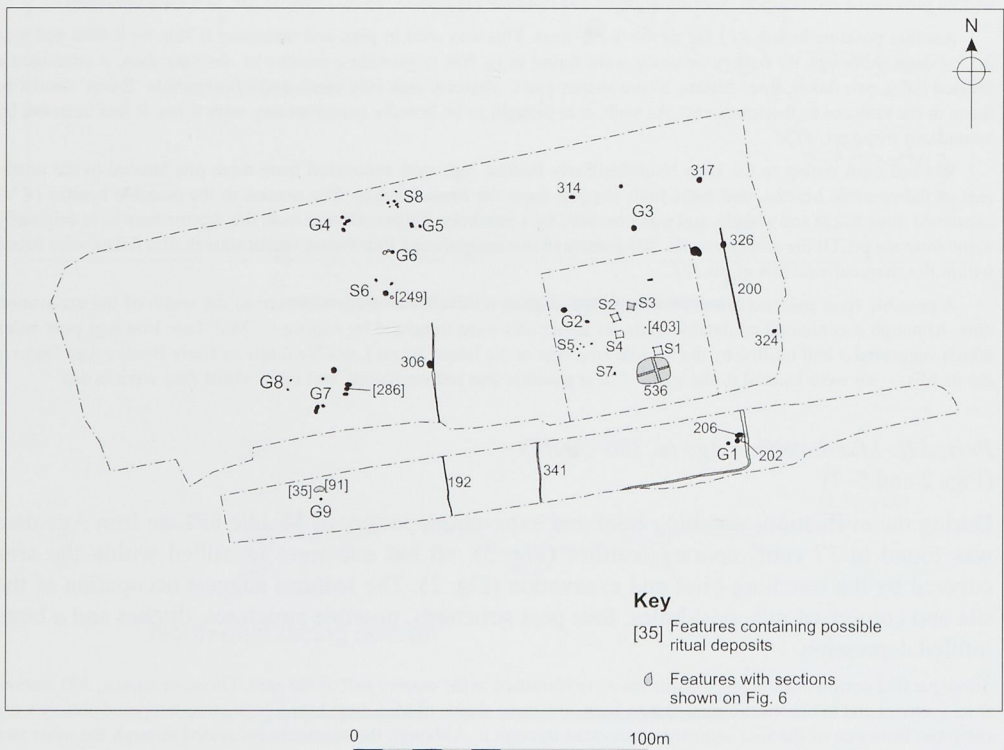


Fig. 5 Period II features

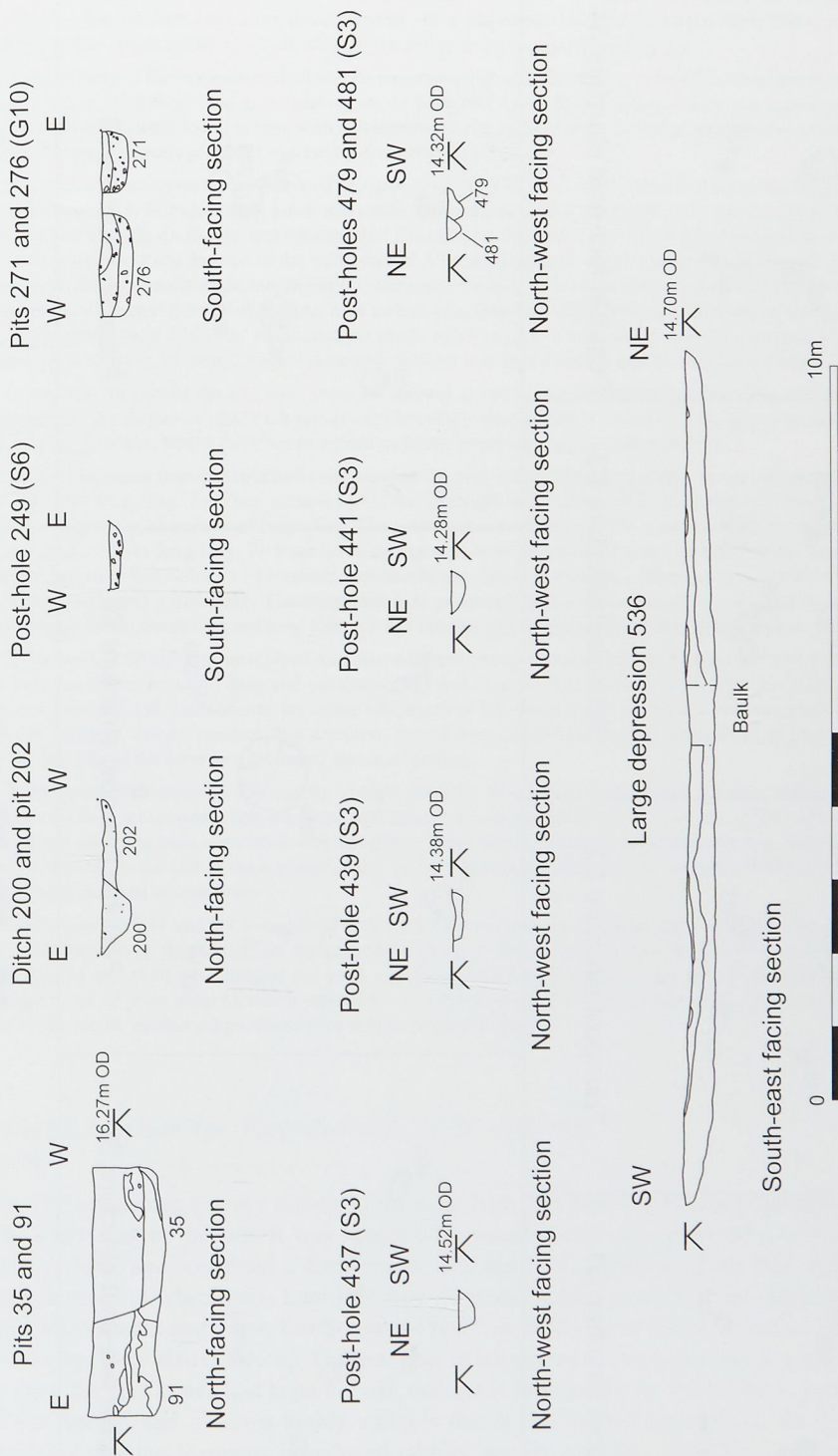


Fig. 6 Mid-Late Iron Age features: sections

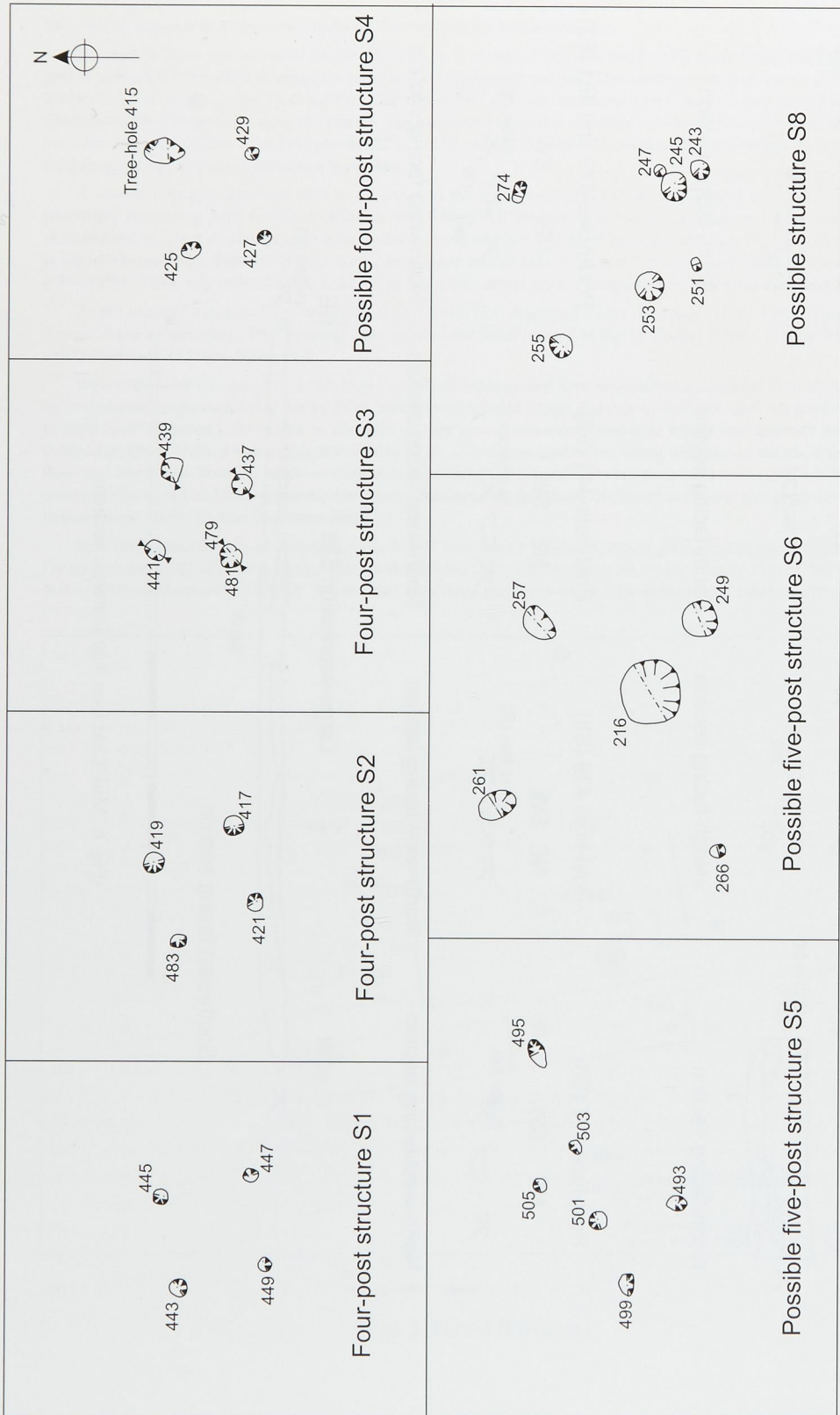


Fig. 7 Mid-Late Iron Age structures

265 residual flint artefacts (including three scrapers and a Mesolithic microlith), sixteen burnt flints, a piece from an unidentified iron object (SF8), charcoal, alder, birch and grass pollen and fungal spores.

In the vicinity of the two eastern ditches, pits containing cultural material were found in three specific locations. One group of five pits (G1) was sited in the curving arc of ditch 200. All of these contained pottery, one producing 43 sherds. Residual flint flakes were found in two, with two hammerstones and a re-used Neolithic groundstone axe recovered from pit 206. The most easterly pit (202) was cut by ditch 200 (Fig. 6).

To the west of structure S2 lay a second group (G2) of two pits. The most southerly contained a fragment of pottery, a residual flint flake, 58 burnt flints, butchered cattle bones, cereal grains, fragments of weed species and charcoal. The north-western pit held six sherds, two residual flint flakes, burnt flint and charcoal, fat hen and hazel nutshell fragments. The third group (G3) was located to the north-east of S3 and comprised seven widely spaced pits within an area of c. 40m square. All produced sherds, ranging in number from one to 41. Five contained residual flint artefacts (a Mesolithic microlith was collected from 314) and one held a shale ring fragment (SF3; 317). To the south of this group and to the east of the easternmost ditch was an isolated pit (324) which produced four sherds and two flint flakes. An apparently isolated pit containing 30 sherds, animal bone and charcoal was found further east in evaluation Trench 21.

In the western part of the site there were 22 features in seven discrete concentrations. This distinctive clustering suggested that the features within each group were broadly contemporary with each other. Two of the groups may have been part of structures, whilst the other five were probably groupings of domestic refuse pits.

The northernmost possible structure comprised seven post-holes (S8) arranged in a rough triangle measuring 3–5m wide by 5.5m long (Fig. 7). They were 0.18–0.75m in length and 0.16–0.29m in depth, with one containing three fragments of pottery, charcoal and burnt flint. The southernmost collection (S6) comprised five post-holes 0.17–0.42m deep and 0.41–1.87m long (Fig. 7). Four were arranged in a rough rectangle with the fifth located centrally amongst them. Of the outer post-holes 257 contained four sherds and 249 (Fig. 6) held a complete inverted vessel, a sherd from a different vessel and a flint flake. The inner post-hole produced twelve pieces of pottery, residual flint artefacts, two hammerstone flakes, burnt flint and fired clay. All five cut through the upper fill of the palaeochannel.

To the west of S8 lay a group (G4) of four pits. All were circular or oval, varied in length between 1.00m and 1.78m, were between 0.15m to 0.33m deep and yielded pottery and residual flint artefacts. Two ovate pits (G5), both of which contained charcoal and seven sherds, lay to the east, south of S8. South of G5 were three circular pits (G6; Fig. 6). One produced eighteen sherds, residual flint artefacts, animal bone, cereal grains and seeds/fruits of grassland and weed species. The fills of the other two produced sherds of pottery.

To the south of structure S6 was a group of eight pits (G7). Five pits contained pottery sherds, with pit 286 producing 110 sherds. Three held residual flint artefacts, with animal bone collected from one. Two post-holes (G8) were located to the west and may have been associated with this group. Three sherds were recovered from the first, with eleven collected from the second. To the east of these groups, close to the westernmost ditch, was an isolated pit 306 which produced 44 sherds, burnt flint and animal bone.

To the south of G7 and G8 a spread of dark sand 98 was revealed in evaluation Trench 14 (Fig. 2). It was 0.2m thick, contained seven sherds and was truncated by a group of three pits (G9). The earliest, 91 (Fig. 6), was filled with an interleaved deposit of ash, charcoal and sand, 185 sherds weighing 900g, fired clay and residual flint artefacts. It was truncated by pit 35 (Figs 5 and 6), which yielded 539 sherds weighing 3844g, fired clay, residual flint artefacts and animal bone. To the south, another pit produced nine sherds (93g) of pottery.

Period III: Late Iron Age–Early Roman (c. 50 BC–AD 100) (Fig. 8)

A pit 401 containing pottery dating to the Late Iron Age and Early Roman periods was found in the south-east of the site. It was square with rounded corners, measured c. 1.01m across by c. 0.31m deep, and contained a dark brown silty sand fill. Eighty-six Late Iron Age handmade sherds, a sherd of wheelmade Late Iron Age–Romano-British pottery, a few cereal grains, charcoal, fungal spores and grass, heather, weed and tree pollen were found within it. Six butchered rabbit bones were also collected. These appear to have been in a secure context within the pit fill: it is clear the feet bones had been cut off, making it impossible for the rabbit to have burrowed into the feature, and it seems highly unlikely that it had been dragged there. As it is generally considered that the Normans introduced rabbits into Britain after 1066, the bones are of some significance.

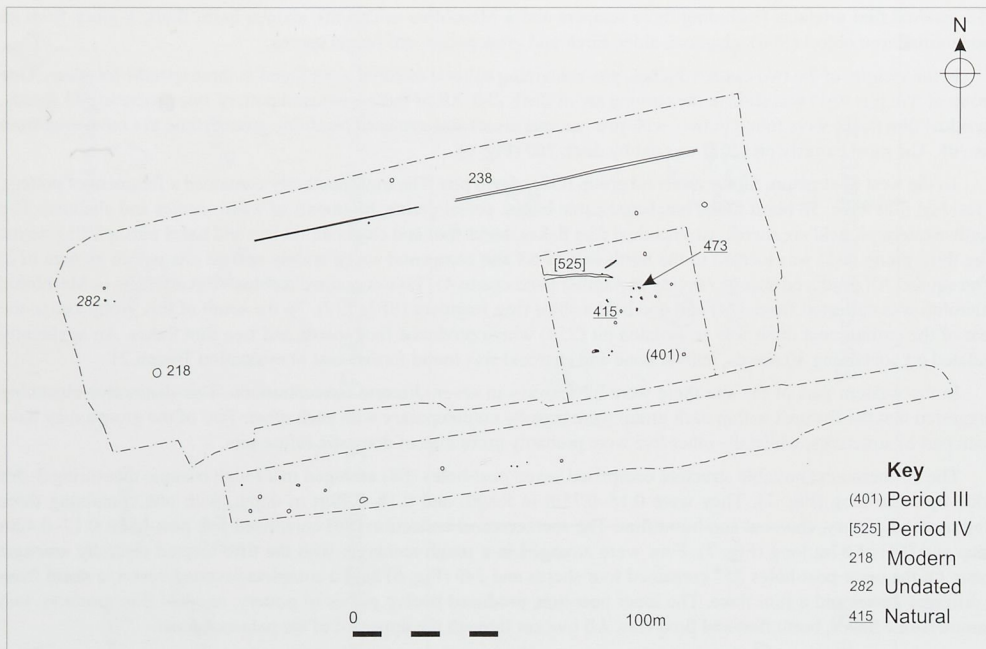


Fig. 8 Period III, Period IV, modern, undated and natural features

Period IV: Roman (c. AD 100–410)

(Fig. 8)

Artefacts of Roman date were collected from a field boundary ditch 525. It was aligned roughly east-to-west, varied in width between 0.51m and 1.74m, and was between 0.32m and 0.42m deep. A sherd of Romano-British pottery, a late 3rd-century Barbarous Radiate coin, a lava quern fragment, burnt flint and residual artefacts (two Iron Age sherds and a flint flake) were collected from the five sections excavated through it. Environmental samples produced cereal grains, fungal spores and pollen from grass, weed, arable and tree species.

Undated and modern features

(Fig. 8)

Thirty-two undated features were excavated and comprised fourteen post-holes, fourteen pits, three tree-holes and a ditch. Of the post-holes, four groups or possible lines were identified which could have been parts of structures. Two of the tree-boles 415 and 473 produced residual struck flints. A modern pit 218 and ditch 238 were identified and were probably associated with forestry workings.

Specialist reports

Lithics

by W.A. Boismier with Sarah Bates
(Fig. 9)

Introduction

A multi-period assemblage of 500 pieces of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age worked flint and ground stone was recovered from 46 features and unstratified contexts. Manufacturing debitage class groups make up 95% (n=417) of the assemblage, with various 'waste' types generated by core preparation and reduction activities in blank production and the manufacture of retouched tools present. Retouched tools, utilised pieces and ground stone tools comprise respectively 3% (n=15), 0.4% (n=2) and 0.2% (n=1). Four hammerstones and three hammerstone flakes were also recovered.

The great majority of the pieces are unpatinated; where patination is present it ranges from a light film to a blue mottling. Most of the artefacts are in an excellent state of preservation, with only twelve exhibiting identifiable traces of post-depositional edge damage or breakage. There is no clear indication of systematic intentional breakage. Three artefacts exhibit water-rolled edges and facets characteristic of fluvial transport.

The assemblage

Raw material

Four hundred and ninety-nine pieces (99.8%) are flint, with one (0.2%) a non-local greenstone. Cortical condition for the flint artefacts indicate that the raw material was obtained primarily from terrace gravel and glacial-fluvial deposits situated within the immediate vicinity. Nodules available from these sources vary in size and shape, ranging from irregular to round. Core and debitage characteristics indicate that a variety of nodule sizes and shapes were selected for tool production from these different sources, including small to medium sized pebbles and nodules. The non-local greenstone is represented by a groundstone axe of probable Cornish origin and is distinguished by a greenish-grey colour and a rough surface. The exact source of this material has not been determined but it is likely to belong to one of the major petrological groups identified for the area (Groups I-V and XVI).

Cores and related artefacts

Thirteen cores and three core fragments were recovered. Three complete examples and one core fragment are prepared single-platform cores; platforms do not survive on the other two core fragments. Four are prepared two-platform flake cores with flakes detached from opposing ends, and one is a multi-platform core. Three are unclassifiable, with one or more platforms utilising unprepared thermal surfaces. One is a prepared single-platform blade core. Three of the single-platform pieces and three two-platform cores exhibit one or more narrow flake or blade scars, indicating that they were also utilised for blade and/or narrow flake production. All cores exhibit step fractures on worked faces, indicating that they were abandoned after repeated failures to detach reasonable sized blanks. One flake core had been utilised as a scraper.

Twenty-seven pieces are shatter or trimming debris produced by core shaping and initial reduction. They include both cortical and non-cortical examples of variable shape and, in general, possess prominent bulbs of percussion. These indicate that they were largely detached from the nodule or core by direct percussion with a hard hammer. Three core tablets, removed in order to rejuvenate stepped, battered or otherwise flawed, striking platforms are present. All are complete and comprise the entire platform area of the core.

Flakes and blades

Unretouched flakes comprise 58% (n= 289) of the assemblage. For the complete flakes three distinctive shapes occur: narrow, squat and irregular. They can be divided into primary (dorsal surface wholly cortical), secondary (dorsal surface partially cortical) and tertiary (dorsal surface non-cortical) class groups to determine the relative occurrences of flakes



Fig. 9 Worked flint: residual geometric rod microlith of Later Mesolithic date from the fill (313) of pit 314

produced at different stages during the process of core reduction. Primary flakes account for less than 2% of the total, with the majority secondary or tertiary.

The few primary flakes are characterised by cortical and non-cortical platforms with more pronounced bulbs of percussion indicating that they were removed by direct percussion using both hard and soft hammers. Platform and bulbar characteristics for secondary and tertiary flakes are more variable and reflect detachment from the core by both direct and indirect percussion techniques. In general, however, they possess relatively narrow platforms and less pronounced bulbs of percussion or thick, often cortical, platforms with pronounced bulbs of percussion.

Unretouched blades comprise 28% (n=139) of the assemblage and consist of 84 complete artefacts, 49 fragments (such as Fig. 9) and seven burnt pieces. Partially cortical secondary blades account for 34% of the total number of complete blades and tertiary pieces 66%. Platform and bulbar characteristics for secondary and tertiary blades are dominated by narrow platforms and more diffuse and/or smaller bulbs of percussion, indicating that they were largely removed by soft hammer/indirect percussion techniques.

Tools and tool manufacturing debris

Recognisable tools comprise 3.6% of the assemblage (n=18) and consist of thirteen complete and one broken retouched artefacts, two utilised pieces and one ground stone axe.

Two microliths were recovered. One is a geometric rod microlith (Fig. 9) of Late Mesolithic date (post-c. 6500 BC). The proximal end of the piece has been snapped off with retouch extending along the entire length of its right lateral. The second is a basally retouched obliquely blunted point characteristic of both the Earlier and Later Mesolithic (c. 8300–4500 BC). Six scrapers with steep overhanging retouch are present: one is a double-ended end-scraper manufactured on a narrow flake; four are flake end-scrapers; three possess retouch on their proximal ends and one on its distal end.

One retouched artefact — a complete tertiary flake with a single notch located on the proximal part of the right lateral — can be described as a notched piece. Two awls/piercers were recovered. One is an irregular shaped piece of core shatter with a retouched point. The other is a secondary blade retouched on its distal end. One complete artefact and one retouched fragment possess recognisable but undiagnostic marginal retouch. The complete piece exhibits retouch on its ventral surface along the right lateral. The fragment is a piece of core shatter with retouch along one edge.

One combination notch/marginally retouched flake occurs in the assemblage. Retouch is located on its ventral face, with the notch on its left lateral and the marginal retouch on its right. Two artefacts exhibit patterns of edge damage attributable to use. One is a tertiary flake with small utilisation scars and polish along its distal edge. The second is a tertiary blade with utilisation scars characteristic of scraping motions on its distal end.

A groundstone axe of probable Cornish origin was recovered from an Iron Age pit. The artefact has a thick rounded butt with a blunted cutting edge. Secondary utilisation of the piece as a hammerstone is indicated by evidence of battering on both faces and along its edges and ends. Three hammerstones and three hammerstone flakes were also recovered. The complete hammerstones are unmodified flint nodules. All six pieces exhibit traces of battering on their surfaces.

Two pieces of tool manufacturing debris were recovered. One is an axe/adze thinning flake; it is a tertiary flake with its dorsal surface possessing a series of flake scars, including one transversely struck flake scar situated on its proximal end. The other, a microburin, is a tertiary proximal piece with the snap originating from its right lateral.

Discussion

In technological terms, the majority of the artefacts conform to the general characteristics of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age industries (Pitts 1978; Jacobi and Pitts 1979; Ford *et al.* 1984). Blades are characterised by narrow platforms and more diffuse and/or smaller bulbs of percussion. Flakes are characterised by either relatively narrow platforms and less pronounced

bulbs of percussion or thick, often cortical, platforms with pronounced bulbs of percussion and hinge terminations. Technological characteristics for the blades indicate a Mesolithic and/or an Early Neolithic date while those for flakes indicate a broader date range extending from the Mesolithic/Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age. No technological characteristics are diagnostic of the Iron Age.

The two microliths and a groundstone axe of probable Cornish origin are typologically dateable to the Mesolithic and Neolithic. The geometric microlith is a characteristic artefact of the Late Mesolithic (post-c. 6500 BC) with the axe falling within the period c. 3000–2000 BC (Smith 1979). All three of the artefacts were recovered from Iron Age contexts, with the groundstone axe reused as a probable hammerstone and associated with two flint hammerstones of indeterminate date.

The assemblage is largely residual. Approximately 78% (n=392) was recovered from Mid–Late Iron Age features, 0.2% (n=1) from a Roman ditch, 0.4% (n=2) from a modern ditch, 0.8% (n=4) from a modern pit and 8% (n=38) from unstratified contexts. Contemporary artefacts were deposited within Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age features, consisting of 6% (n=30) of the assemblage. Some 8% (n=39) of the assemblage was recovered from undated features; this group was collected from a post-hole 282 (Fig. 8), a possible hearth 413, two natural features 415 and 473 and two pits 304 and 321. The pits and the hearth may probably be dated to the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age on the basis of technological characteristics of the artefacts recovered. The small number of artefacts recovered from the post-hole and the natural features suggests that their occurrence is likely to be residual.

The temporal mixture of different technologies in the assemblage prevents any meaningful comparisons with other datable assemblages within the area. The chronological diversity of the assemblage, however, does indicate that the prehistoric occupation of the site was long and varied, if intermittent.

Burnt flint

A total of 95 pieces of burnt flint was recovered from various contexts. Burnt flint is not typologically dateable, although it can be assumed that the majority recovered is probably either Mid–Late Iron Age in date or similar in date to the worked flint.

Prehistoric pottery

by Sarah Percival
(Figs 10 and 11)

Introduction

One thousand five hundred and sixty-five sherds of prehistoric pottery (weighing 13,029g) were recovered from the area of the watching brief, the excavation, and evaluation Trench 21. A small quantity of Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age pottery dating between the 3rd to early 2nd millennia BC was found within the fill of a hearth. The majority of the assemblage, however, is of Mid–Late Iron Age date (c. 300–50 BC). One pit also contained examples of Late Iron Age–Romano-British transitional forms dating to the 1st century BC–1st century AD.

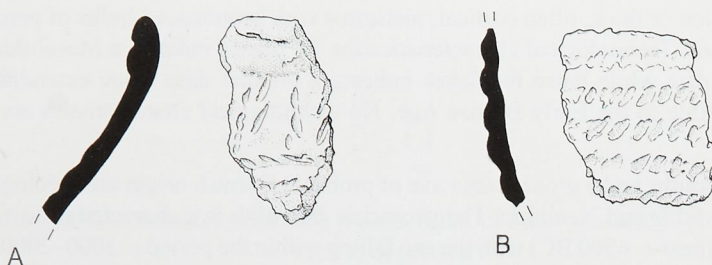


Fig. 10 Early Bronze Age pottery

Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age pottery

(Fig. 10)

Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age pottery (58 sherds, weighing 194g) was recovered from hearth 451. The fabric is extremely crumbly and contained grog or crushed-fired clay, along with small quantities of burnt flint. All the sherds appear to be from a single vessel, probably a Beaker, which had been placed in the ground semi-complete. The vessel has a rounded profile with an upright rim and had been pierced once below the rim before firing. The neck of the vessel is decorated with fingernail impressions forming vertical cordons with bands of horizontal cordons below. Similar fingertip-impressed designs have been found on 'domestic' Beaker sites throughout Norfolk and Suffolk (Gibson forthcoming) where it is often associated with 'fine' comb impressed wares (*cf.* Bamford 1982; Gibson 1982). Beaker pottery has been suggested as having a broad currency spanning *c.* 2600-1800 BC (Kinnes *et al.* 1991) and rusticated vessels are believed to date from towards the later part this period. Fingertip-impressed Beakers have traditionally been interpreted as being used for storage, though recent finds in graves suggest that they may have had a broader range of uses (Boulter 2001; Gibson forthcoming).

Illustrated sherds

- A** Fingernail-impressed rim; fabric G1; 454 (hearth 451)
B Fingernail-impressed body sherd; fabric G1; 454 (hearth 451)

Mid-Late Iron Age pottery

Altogether, 1507 sherds of Iron Age pottery (weighing 12,835g) were recovered from 61 features. The majority of the assemblage dates from the Mid-Late Iron Age (*c.* 300-50 BC) with 'transitional'-type Late Iron Age/Early Roman sherds (perhaps of the 1st century AD) found within pit 401.

Fabrics

Quartz-sand fabrics (Q1 and Q2, 1001 sherds) dominate the assemblage. Smaller numbers of sherds containing a quartz-sand and organic temper (probably grass: O1, 371 sherds) are present, along with grog-tempered sherds (G1, 50 sherds) and a shelly tempered ware (S1, 15 sherds). Recent studies of Iron Age pottery suggest that the simple presence or absence of sand-tempered fabrics cannot in itself be used as a chronological indicator (Ashwin 1996a). Pottery assemblages with a large or dominant quartz-sand tempered component are, however, most commonly attributed to the Middle and Late Iron Age in Norfolk (Percival 1999, 174). The presence of grog, organic and shell tempered fabrics also suggest a Late Iron Age date. Grog-tempered wares are related to the 'Belgic'-type ware of the latest pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England (Thompson 1982; Gregory 1992, 158). Organic tempered vessels are rarely found within Iron Age assemblages from Norfolk and do not appear within the archaeological record until the end of the Middle Iron Age, *c.* 400-300 BC. Shell-tempered wares are also rare in Norfolk during the Iron Age generally but became more common during the latest Iron Age and the Iron Age/Romano-British transitional period (A. Lyons, *pers. comm.*).

Form and decoration

The assemblage is characterised by biconical vessels with simple everted rims and rounded or flattened rim-tops above a slightly angled shoulder (Figs 11A and B). Nearly all come from open jar and bowl forms of the Mid-Late Iron Age date, with two clear exceptions. The first is a small bowl (fragmentary and unillustrated) with a rounded everted rim, long neck and rounded angular shoulder and a proto-pedestal base. It is undecorated with a finely burnished surface and was

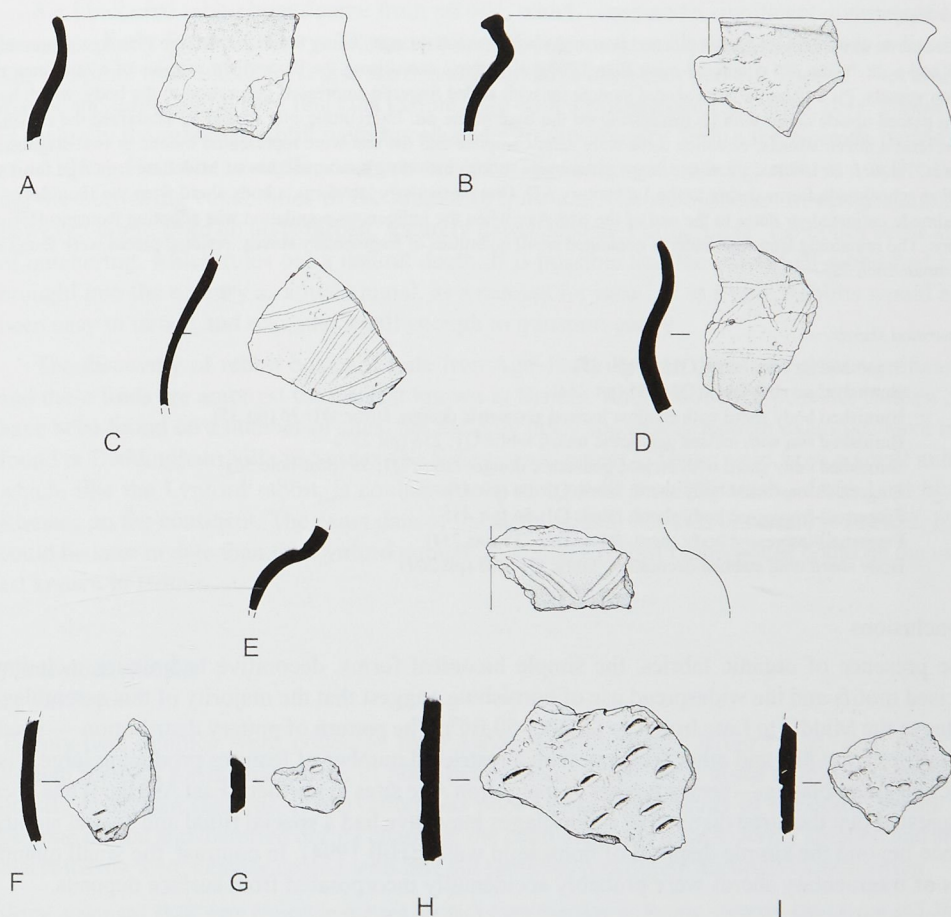


Fig. 11 Mid-Late Iron Age pottery

found in post-hole 249. Similar vessels have been found at Little Waltham (Drury 1978, fig. 38, F13) where they are most common in Period III, the late 2nd to mid 1st centuries BC. The second was recovered from pit 401 and is a handmade carinated jar dating to the late Iron Age, when Romano-British forms were being adopted by the indigenous population.

The decoration and surface treatments used are limited to a small number of techniques. Incised lines forming irregular geometric designs appear on 28 sherds (Figs 11C, D and E). Fingertip and fingernail impressions are present on 33 sherds but are restricted to the shoulder and the body of the vessel below the shoulder (Figs 11F, G and H: cf. Martin 1988, figs 20 and 24). No fingertip-impressed rims are present. Seven sherds feature irregular stabbed decoration produced using a sharp-ended tool (Fig. 11I) and eight sherds bear rough scoring running vertically down the body of the vessel. Vessels with scored decoration form a small and unusual component of Iron Age pottery in Norfolk and this particular example has no local parallel. Scored wares were the dominant courseware used throughout the East Midlands from 600 BC until the mid-1st century AD (Elsdon 1989). It is unlikely that the Lynford sherds represent true scored ware, however, and are more likely to represent a regional variation, or else coincidental use of scoring to enable larger vessel to be gripped more easily. Burnishing is the most common form of surface treatment, occurring on 343 sherds (Figs 11B, C, D and E). Surface roughening or rustication is present on 86 sherds. The range of decorative techniques, along with the high proportion of burnished vessels, means the assemblage is similar to those from Mid-Late Iron Age sites at Longham and Bittering, in central Norfolk (Percival 1999).

Deposition

Most sherds were recovered from pits and post-holes with a small quantity being found in the large Iron Age depression 536 and a ditch. Pit 286 contained more than 1000g of pottery, comprising the incomplete remains of a minimum of seven vessels. Pit 249 had a large scored storage jar with added fingertip-impressed decoration to the body, which had been placed upside down with its rim resting on the base of the pit. Intercutting pits 35 and 91 contained the remains of at least a dozen vessels, of which three were semi-complete and the rest were represented by one or two diagnostic sherds. Pit 401, an isolated pit with a large assemblage (696g) including handmade jars of Mid-Late Iron Age form as well as wheelmade forms dating to the 1st century AD. One particularly late form, a body sherd from the shoulder of a handmade carinated jar dates to the end of the Iron Age when the indigenous population was adopting Romano-British forms. The remaining Iron Age features contained small quantities of fragmentary sherds; residual pieces were found in a Roman ditch 525.

Illustrated sherds

- A Smoothed jar rim; fabric O1; 54 (pit 35)
- B Burnished jar rim; fabric Q1; 235 (pit 234)
- C Burnished body sherd with shallow incised geometric design; fabric Q1; 36 (pit 35)
- D Burnished rim with incised geometric motif; fabric Q1; 258 (pit 257)
- E Burnished body sherd with incised geometric design; fabric Q1; 59 (post-hole 58)
- F Fingernail-impressed body sherd; fabric Q1; 54 (pit 35)
- G Fingernail-impressed body sherd; fabric Q1; 54 (pit 35)
- H Fingernail-impressed body sherd; fabric Q1; 235 (pit 234)
- I Body sherd with stabbed decoration; fabric Q1; 205 (pit 204)

Conclusions

The presence of organic fabrics, the simple biconical forms, decorative techniques including incised motifs and the widespread use of burnishing suggest that the majority of this assemblage dates to the Middle to Late Iron Age (*c.* 300–50 BC). The pattern of pottery distribution — small quantities from pits and other features, with a restricted number of features producing large, distinctive assemblages — seems typical of many Iron Age sites in northern East Anglia. It has been suggested that the large distinctive assemblages may have had a special ritual and spatial significance beyond the simple disposal of household waste (Hill 1994). In contrast, the small quantities of fragmentary sherds were probably accidentally incorporated from surface deposits.

Roman pottery

by Alice Lyons

A sherd of wheelmade Late Iron Age/Romano-British type was retrieved from pit 401. It was found alongside considerable amounts of Mid-Late Iron Age pottery and some early Roman handmade pottery (possibly as late as the 1st century AD).

The only other Roman-British pottery retrieved was a single sherd from field boundary ditch 525. Its form and fabric are consistent with the later type of colour coat beaker produced in the Nene Valley during the 4th century AD, such as the slit-folded beaker (Howe *et al.* 1990, 20–1, fig. 5 no. 53; Tomber and Dore 1998, 118). It is from the base of a vessel that was decorated with an orange-brown colour coat, which has survived in remarkably good condition.

Faunal remains

by Julie Curl

A total of 1.423kg of faunal remains was recovered from eight features. Five of the features were Mid-Late Iron Age in date, with one Late Iron Age–Early Roman and two undated. Pig, cattle, sheep, rabbit and fragmentary bird specimens were present, some chopped and some partly burnt. Most represent the remains of butchering and food waste.

Six butchered rabbit bones came from pit 401, which contained a significant quantity of Late Iron Age–Early Roman pottery. All are small but fully-fused, and belong to an adult individual. The proximal tibia and distal femur are missing and have been chopped off. There are several cut marks, including some very fine cuts visible only with a microscope (S. Parfitt, *pers. comm.*). It is normally thought that rabbit were introduced into this country during the Norman period (*ie.* after 1066). Remains in earlier contexts are normally dismissed as being intrusive and reflecting the burrowing capabilities of the animal in question. The rabbit bones in this assemblage, however, come from an undisturbed, securely dated deposit. Furthermore, the bones show signs of butchering, which rules out a natural death. It is possible that the individual rabbit had been brought into the country as a live animal, as a carcass for meat, or as a pelt. Rabbits would have been easy to obtain and rear, and small enough to transport easily.

The discovery of rabbit bones of Late Iron Age–Early Roman date is of great significance, and these finds are amongst the earliest known in Britain. Rabbit bones of possible Roman date have been found on a number of sites, but the only other apparently Roman examples have been found at Beddingham villa in Sussex (N. Sykes, *pers. comm.*). These were from a small animal which, like the Lynford rabbit, is comparable in size to the small Spanish rabbits kept by the Romans on the continent. The exact date of the Beddingham rabbit is uncertain at present, but it could be later in date than the Lynford animal. If so, the Lynford rabbit bones could be the earliest known in Britain.

Plant macrofossils

by Val Fryer

Twenty-two samples were collected from Later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman features for the extraction of plant macrofossils. They were noted at a low to moderate density in sixteen samples. Preservation was poor to moderate. Many of the cereal grains had become puffed and distorted during charring; the chaff elements were severely abraded and some macrofossils were heavily coated with fine silt particles precluding accurate identification.

Cereal grains and chaff were present in thirteen samples from Iron Age or Roman contexts. Oat (*Avena* sp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.), rye (*Secale cereale*) and wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains were recorded. A single asymmetrical lateral grain of six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) came from Mid–Late Iron Age post-hole 403. Spelt wheat (*T. spelta*) glume bases were present in Mid–Late Iron Age features (four post-structures S1 and S3, four pits and a post-hole) and Late Iron Age–Early Roman pit 401.

Seeds/fruits of common weed and grassland plants were recorded from Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age hearths 452 and 453, Mid–Late Iron Age features (four-post structures S2 and S3, five pits and the large depression) and Late Iron Age–Early Roman pit 401. Taxa noted included brome (*Bromus* sp.), medick/clover/trefoil (*Medicago/Trifolium/Lotus* sp.), knotgrass (*Polygonum aviculare*), wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum*), dock (*Rumex* sp.), sheep's sorrel (*R. acetosella*), fat hen (*Chenopodium album*), black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), indeterminate grasses, corn spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*) and vetch/vetchling (*Vicia/Lathyrus* sp.). A single tuber of onion-couch (*Arrhenatherum* sp.) type was noted from four-post structure S2.

Wetland plant and tree/shrub macrofossils were extremely rare. Sedge (*Carex* sp.) fruits were found in two pits (Mid–Late Iron Age 498 and Late Iron Age/Early Roman 401) and an immature oak (*Quercus* sp.) cupule was noted from Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age hearth 452. Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell fragments were recovered from Mid–Late Iron Age four-post structure S2 and pit 507.

Charcoal fragments were noted at varying densities in all samples, along with pieces of charred root, rhizome or stem. Heather (*Ericaceae* indet.) stem fragments were found in two Mid–Late Iron Age pits (259 and 263) and Roman ditch 525. Charred buds and/or bud scales were especially common in samples from Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age hearths 451, 452, and 453. Other plant macrofossils included indeterminate florets, fruitstone fragments, seeds, twigs and tubers. The fragments of black porous 'cokey' material and black tarry material noted in many samples are probably residues of the combustion of organic materials, including cereal grains, at very high temperatures. Small fragments of mammal bone and coal were also noted.

With the exception of charcoal fragments, the samples from five features of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date contain only a low to moderate density of material. However, the assemblages from hearths 451, 452, and 453 do contain charred buds, twig and tuber fragments and seeds of grassland plants. These assemblages would appear to be consistent with the use of twigs and dried grasses/grassland plants as kindling for fires. Similar assemblages have been noted in association with contemporary cremation deposits at (for example) Moverons Farm, Brightlingsea (Murphy 1990).

The assemblages from the three Mid-Late Iron four-post structures and isolated post-hole 403 all contain a low to moderate density of material. Four samples were taken from four-post structure S1 and cereal grains and chaff are present at an extremely low density. It appears most likely that the material was accidentally included within the contexts and probably derived from a low density scatter of refuse, possibly including domestic waste and cereal processing debris. The assemblages from the Mid-Late Iron Age pits and the large depression are probably dumps of similar refuse. The cereal grains and charcoal from the Roman ditch 525 are probably indicative of the dumping of small quantities of refuse in available open features.

Pollen

by F.M.L. Green

Seven samples were collected from a range of archaeological features for the extraction of pollen. These came from pits, post-holes, the large infilled depression and ditches of Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age, Mid-Late Iron Age and Late Iron Age-Early Roman date. As most of the samples were very sandy, relatively large volumes of sediment (c. 50ml) were processed. Despite efforts to concentrate the pollen, the frequencies were very low; samples from Late Neolithic-Early Bronze hearth 413 and the lowest fill 522 of the Mid-Late Iron Age depression contained no pollen at all. Many grains showed signs of post-depositional weathering, implying that some of the most delicate taxa may have been lost.

Two samples from the possible Mid-Late Iron Age depression contained pollen. The central deposit 521 contains a single grain of *Betula* (birch) pollen and some ascospores of type 20 which are most frequently found in *Calluna* (heather) peat. The ascospores are too few to suggest that *Calluna* was present in the area, either as imported bedding or naturally growing on the sandy soils. The upper deposit 509 held only two grains of very corroded Poaceae (grasses) and a single grain of *Alnus* (alder). Three grains of Poaceae (grasses) and a single grain of *Alnus* (alder) were recovered from post-hole 447, part of Mid-Late Iron Age four-post structure S1.

Late Iron Age-Early Roman pit 401

Pollen was found at low frequencies. It is in fair condition but 20% of total land pollen (tlp) is unidentifiable. Although only 59 grains were identified, these can be used to infer some details about the local environment in the period. The most abundant pollen is of *Taraxacum* (dandelion) and is indicative of open disturbed ground. *Polygonum* (knotweed) is from a similar habitat but may also have been associated with arable ground. Areas of grassland and pasture were indicated by Poaceae (grasses) and *Gentianella* (gentian). Tree pollen includes *Pinus* (pine), *Quercus* (oak) and *Alnus* (alder), suggesting the presence of mixed oak woodland at some distance from the site. The presence of *Calluna* (heather), a heavy pollen grain which does not travel far, indicates local heathland or the use of heather as bedding material which was then thrown away.

When analysing pit fills, it is difficult to distinguish between pollen derived from the local natural vegetation and that derived from plant material used for other reasons and then dumped. It is possible that thistles or dandelions grew on the margins of the pit as it lay open, resulting in the high values of *Taraxacum* pollen. Alternatively, the high values may be due to the preferential preservation of this resistant pollen grain in a deposit where there is some loss of pollen. With possible exception of *Calluna*, no pollen is present from plants that would have been utilised in a domestic, agricultural or industrial process. The assemblage, therefore, suggests the pit was being used in an open grassy area with some areas

of long grass and thistles on the most recently disturbed areas, possibly surrounding the pit itself. Woodland was at some distance from the site, probably with *Pinus* growing the furthest away on the drier sandier soils and *Alnus* growing on the wetter land near the river.

Pit 401 also contained a low frequency of fungal spores, most of which appeared to belong to the Sordariaceae family. Three spores are tentatively attributed to *cf.* Type 112 of the sordariaceous *Cercophora* family, with ten spores of Type 466 from coprophilous genera *Podospora* and *Zopfiella*. These spores are predominantly coprophilous (living on animal dung) or occur on decaying wood. As coprophilous species tend prefer cow and horse dung more than that other animals (van Hove and Hendrikse 1988), their presence suggests that cattle and or horses were probably grazed in adjacent meadows. Byre waste may have been thrown in, or the fungal spores may have blown in from dung in adjacent fields.

Roman ditch 525

A high frequency of hyphae of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi suggests the deposits within the ditch had undergone soil formation processes. Low proportions of fungal spores were identified, mainly from the Sordariaceae family with spores attributable to the genus *Cercophora*. As with that from pit 401, this assemblage of fungal spores indicates the presence of cattle or horses in the adjacent fields.

A moderate count of 150 land pollen grains is present. All the grains are thin, corroded and crumpled. Although 40%t/p is unidentified, a reasonable range is preserved and reflects fairly accurately the Roman local and regional vegetation. The open nature of the landscape is reflected by the dominance of non-tree pollen (75%t/p). Poaceae (grasses) are the most common (50%t/p), with a relatively high proportion of Chenopodiaceae (goosefoot family) and Caryophyllaceae (pink family) which are indicative of open disturbed ground or arable land. Other taxa indicative of arable/pastoral land-use include *Centaurea nigra* (common knapweed), *Taraxacum* (dandelions) and Umbelliferae (including chervil parsley and carrot). The clearest indicator of arable land close to the site is the presence of Cereale pollen, which does not travel great distances. *Calluna* (heather) pollen is also present and is more likely to be derived from local vegetation than imported bedding material. Its presence suggests acid heathland on local sandy soils, possibly indicating local over-use and acidification of soils. Tree pollen contributes 15%t/p and is dominated by *Alnus* (alder). This is probably *Alnus* which would have grown, together with *Corylus* (hazel), close to the River Wissey about 50m to the north of the site. A mixed oak, lime and birch woodland was growing some distance from the site as suggested by the relatively low proportions of *Quercus*, *Tilia* and *Betula*.

Discussion

The earliest indications of activity on the site are provided by two residual Mesolithic microliths, both of which were recovered from Mid-Late Iron Age contexts. As no objects of this date have been previously found within the immediate vicinity they, along with artefacts of similar date found during evaluation to the north of the site, are important discoveries.

The topsoil and subsoil were relatively shallow and in a number of places had been severely disturbed by recent forestry and quarrying activity. A consequence of these was that many of the observed archaeological features and deposits had been truncated, with original depths and profiles not surviving. This placed restrictions on interpretation, particularly of the post-holes, pits and hearths.

Later Neolithic–Early Bronze Age activity

A series of hearths provided evidence for the occupation during the later 3rd millennium BC. Samples from three of them provided radiocarbon determinations of *c.* 2600–2200 cal. BC and one contained a semi-complete Beaker vessel. Three pits located close by contained worked flints dating to the Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age and were probably broadly contemporary features. They may all been dug at the same time as part of a large group or during a number of different visits to the site, perhaps taking place on a seasonal or cyclical basis. The southernmost example was very close to the possible hearths and may have been associated with them.

The three pits are typical of Later Neolithic–Early Bronze Age features so far found in Breckland and East Anglia as a whole. Although occupation features are only exceptionally

encountered (Ashwin 1996b, 52–3), where they have been they tend to be characterised by pit groups and isolated pits, some of which may originally have been part of pit groups. Comparable examples to those found at Lynford have been found in Breckland at Shropham (Whitmore 2002, 6–7) and at Snetterton (Robertson 2004). Other published examples elsewhere in Norfolk include those at Hockwold (Bamford 1982, 13–17), Witton (Lawson 1983, 13–28), Hunstanton (Healy *et al.* 1993), Longham–Bittering (Wymer and Healy 1996; Ashwin 1998), Gorleston (Timms and Ashwin 1999), the Norwich Southern Bypass excavations (Ashwin and Bates 2000), Bowthorpe (Percival 2002) and Broome (Robertson 2003). The hearths are rather more unusual: possible comparanda include a hearth and spreads of charcoal at Hockwold (Bamford 1982, 8–20) and a probable hearth at Longham (Ashwin 1998, 10).

It has been suggested that many Later Neolithic–Early Bronze Age pits were dug to receive domestic waste and this may have been true of the Lynford pits. The flint artefacts and pottery found within the hearths imply that they were also used in this way. Some pits of this date have been interpreted as possible ritual or ceremonial features, however (Healy *et al.* 1993, 75–6; Ashwin 1998, 26). Recent research has considered how prehistoric ‘domestic’ and ‘ritual’ activities need not have been mutually exclusive, but instead may have been closely related, or indeed indivisible within the material recorded at ‘settlement’ sites (Barrett 1994; Hill 1995; Ashwin 2001). The large quantity of Beaker pottery in possible hearth 451 raises this possibility at Lynford. Perhaps the hearths were used in a domestic context, with the Beaker ceremonially placed to signify the end of activity on the site.

The occupation represented by the hearths and the pits would have represented one element within a wider landscape of activity. This is evidenced by the two bowl barrows to the north of the excavation area and by the discovery of over 500 flint artefacts in river alluvium to the west. The flint scatters may have been part of *in situ* knapping floors or they could represent surface waste disposal. A great proportion of Later Neolithic–Early Bronze Age occupation evidence in Breckland and East Anglia generally comes from surface and ploughsoil artefact spreads (Ashwin 1996b, 52; Ashwin 2001; Healy 1995, 176). Breckland itself has produced some of the highest densities of flint scatters in the region (Sussams 1996, 57).

Although the flint raw material could have been collected from the vicinity of the site, flint was extensively mined at nearby Grimes Graves during this time. At Grimes Graves, antler picks and stone axes imported from Cornwall were used to extract the flint (Parker-Pearson 1993, 63), and the groundstone axe from Lynford was similar to these items. Its final use seems to have been as a hammerstone during the Iron Age, being found with battering on its faces and edge alongside two hammerstones in a Mid–Late Iron Age pit.

Pollen evidence from Hockham Mere suggests that the Early Neolithic, from *c.* 3800 BC onwards, saw widespread woodland clearance in Breckland. This may have because of a reliance on stock-grazing rather than cultivation. As a consequence, the Breckland landscape would have featured open, dry and sandy environments, with the only water provided by rivers and isolated meres (Sussams 1996, xi and 55). In such a landscape, it is likely that sites close and adjacent to water sources would have been at a premium for activity and occupation. Lynford was such a site, with its location on a sloping floodplain and the River Wissey just over 100m to the north. The recently excavated site at Honeydots Wood, Shropham lay in a broadly comparable situation, about 200m south of a tributary of the River Thet (Whitmore 2002, fig. 1). At Snetterton pits were also found on sloping site close to water, though on this occasion they were adjacent to Ashby Mere rather than a river (Robertson 2004).

Iron Age and early Roman settlement

The pits and pit groups identified are comparable to examples found on a number of excavated Mid–Late Iron Age sites in Breckland. Similar features have been recorded at Thetford (Davies 1993), Shropham (Whitmore 2002) and Snetterton (Robertson 2004), with examples from elsewhere in Norfolk discovered at Methwold (Silvester and Northover 1991), Fincham (Percival 1995), Spong Hill (Rickett 1995, 5–12 and 147–51), Silfield (Ashwin 1996a), Longham–Bittering (Ashwin and Flitcroft 1999), Harford Farm and Trowse (Ashwin and Bates 2000). As with Neolithic and Bronze Age pits, Iron Age pits have been seen as possibly linking domestic and ritual activities (Davies 1996; Hill 1995). Many of the pits contained burnt flint, charcoal and plant macrofossils alongside small quantities of pottery, suggesting the presence of domestic refuse. However, the discovery of relatively large quantities of broken pottery in three pits (35, 91 and 286) may reflect some kind of deliberate placement in a ritual context. These three features were located in the western part of the site, which might have been of significance here.

Eight post-hole groups and one isolated post-hole were observed. Four-post structures are relatively common discoveries on Iron Age settlements. They have been found in Breckland at Shropham (Whitmore 2002, 11) and further afield at Silfield (Ashwin 1996a, 248), Longham–Bittering (Ashwin and Flitcroft 1999), Harford Farm and Trowse (Ashwin and Bates 2000). They are typically interpreted as raised-floor granaries. Five-post concentrations are less common, but where they have been found they have been interpreted as variations of four-post structures (Cunliffe 1991, 376; Gent 1983). This may not have been the case with the two five-post Lynford examples, however, as both were far less rectangular in plan and larger than the four-post structures on the site. The westernmost five-post concentration had a maximum length of 5.87m, whilst the easternmost had a maximum length of 3.3m. In comparison, the four-post structures measured between 2.6m and 2.9m long. A difference is also suggested by the fact that once the original function of the westernmost five-post concentration had come to an end, a complete pot had been placed upside down at the base of one of the post-holes 249. This suggests a ritual or ceremonial event later in the structure's life. The large quantity of pottery found in the isolated post-hole 403 hints at a similar situation. This feature was the only one found in the eastern part of site containing a possible ritual deposit.

The three definite and two possible four-post structures were all located in the eastern part of the excavation area; maybe this zone served as an area for the storage of cereal crops. It seems likely that related activities, such as cereal processing, took place close by, and adjacent depression 536 may be related to these: its fill could represent an accumulation of corn-processing waste, items that were broken during the use of the granaries and spoiled grain. The presence of a large quantity of residual flint artefacts within the feature may be explained if the area around had been stripped of overburden and earlier features were disturbed during the construction of the granaries, waste from this being dumped into the depression. It is equally possible, however, that the feature was a pond or natural hollow that was occasionally used for the casual disposal of rubbish over the course of several thousand years. The spread of dark sand 98 found in the western part of the site may have represented a comparable feature to the depression.

As the three north-to-south orientated ditches were similarly aligned, and because the east-to-west aligned section was at right angles to them, they have been (somewhat tentatively) phased together. The three easternmost ditches appear to have formed an enclosure, with the two western examples probably defining the edges of a trackway. Although few stratigraphic relationships survived, it was possible to derive some information about how the ditches related to the other features. Two pits, 202 and 306, had been truncated by the westernmost ditch, which suggests that the ditches were not part of the initial phase of activity. As these pits were found in both the

east and west of the site, the earliest unenclosed occupation would have spread across much of the excavation area. After a time, a ditched enclosure was constructed around the eastern part of the site and the probable trackway laid out or delimited. Since both enclosed (Davies 1996, 68) and unenclosed (Ashwin and Bates 2000) sites are known in Norfolk, Lynford would not have been unusual in either respect. The probable trackway could have been sited to distinguish between two distinct areas of activity; three of the four the features with indications of ritual activity were located to the west whilst the four-posters lay further to the east. Activity continued, during which the easternmost ditch at least was infilled. Once this had happened, probably towards the end of the occupation, a pit (326) was dug though its backfill.

While the Lynford site appears to represent a settlement, the duration and character of occupation is more difficult to establish. It is possible that it was permanently settled, with the evidence for any roundhouses not surviving. Another possibility is that it was visited occasionally and occupied temporarily, perhaps on a seasonal basis. If this was the case, dwelling structures which were more shallowly founded than the four-posters may have been constructed, or tents may have been used. At Snetterton there were few broadly spaced pits with no recorded structural features, suggesting activity was occasional and seasonal (Robertson 2004). Ditched enclosures, ditches, a trackway, two roundhouses, at least eight four-post structures and numerous pits at Shropham might suggest a permanently occupied settlement there, however (Whitmore 2002).

It seems likely that the western extremity of the settlement area was observed during excavation, since features petered out towards the western edges of site. Features were found close to the other edges, however, and it is possible that the settlement extended both northwards, eastwards and southwards. In the south and east this suggestion is supported by the discovery of a pit found in Trench 21. A greater extent to the north seems less likely, however, as evaluation excavation within and to the north the floated water meadow (HER 5090) produced no evidence of Iron Age date.

The settlement was located on a gentle south-facing slope on a floodplain, about 100m from the River Wissey. As in the Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, such a riverside site would have appeared highly desirable in the dry and sandy Breckland landscape. This kind of situation is typical of the Iron Age settlement pattern in Breckland, Norfolk and Suffolk during the Iron Age. Farmsteads were often scattered along in river valleys, in the case of that of the River Lark at regular intervals of approximately half a mile (West 1989, 109–11). Having said this, the nearby sites at Snetterton and Shropham (the latter parish slightly outside Breckland proper) do not fully conform to this pattern. The Shropham settlement was situated close to a tributary of the River Thet, but on a hilltop rather than in valley (Whitmore 2002, fig. 1). Temporary occupation at Snetterton took place within an arc of the River Thet, but was located on a slope just beyond and facing away from the river valley — the water source of Ashby Mere was more important here in the choice of site (Robertson 2004). Perhaps the Breckland meres attracted occasional Iron Age occupation, whereas sites near to rivers were more permanently occupied.

The pottery evidence suggests that occupation came to an end at the end of the Iron Age or early in the Roman period, perhaps in the 1st century AD. The area may have reverted to waste/damp grassland, or may have been used for arable and pastoral activities. At the end of the Iron Age, possibly in the 1st century AD, a pit (401) was dug in the south-east of the site. Six butchered rabbit bones from its fill represent some of the earliest rabbit remains known in Britain. It is commonly held that rabbits were introduced into Britain by the Normans but the Lynford bones, and other examples recently found at Beddingham, Sussex, suggest that the Romans brought the first rabbits. They may have transported live and kept in leporariens (rabbit enclosures), or have reached the site either as carcasses or as pelts with some bones still attached. Both pollen and

plant macrofossils recovered from the pit suggest that it lay within an area of open grassland. Fungal spores hint that cattle and/or horses probably grazed nearby. Cereal grains and chaff indicate arable land-use in the area, perhaps on the drier, better drained land to the north of the river. Woodland existed at some distance, with pine on the drier, sandier soils and alder on the wetter ground near the river.

Roman fields

A Roman field boundary ditch was located in the eastern part of site. It seems probable that other ditches or hedgerows would have existed alongside it, although none were recorded. As the pollen and plant macrofossils recovered from the ditch suggest a similar local environment to those found in the Late Iron Age–Early Roman pit, it seems unlikely that this was the result of a change in land-use. Instead it may be a result of a decision to impose more formal divisions on the landscape or a change of land ownership. The coin and sherd of Romano-British pottery collected from the ditch suggests that it fell out of use during the 3rd or 4th centuries.

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