# **NAU Archaeology**

Report No. 1187

# An Archaeological Strip and Record Excavation at Longdell Hills, Easton, Norfolk

36414 EAS

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BAU 1297
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Location: Longdell Hills, Easton

District: South Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 1425 1110
HER No.: 36414 EAS

Date of Fieldwork: 2nd May to 5th June 2006

# Summary

Archaeological strip and record excavation was carried out at Longdell Hills in advance of quarrying (Phase 5). Pits, ditches and possible post-holes were recorded. Some of the ditches were continuations of those boundaries revealed to the south and west in 2005. They were mainly undated although at least one was of post-medieval date and one contained a couple of sherds of pottery of later Neolithic early Bronze Age and Iron Age date. Some burnt pits, similar to those found previously at the site, were excavated – these subcircular burnt pits were undated but one other isolated pit contained pottery and flint of probable earlier Neolithic date, a cluster of pits and possible post-holes were dated by Beaker-type pottery to the later Neolithic early Bronze Age and two pits contained earlier Iron Age pottery. Other pits were undated and a few features were probably of natural origin.

## 1.0 Introduction

NAU Archaeology was contracted to undertake archaeological work in advance of gravel quarrying at Longdell Hills, Easton. The work constituted Phase 5 of a six-phase programme of work and included the striping of topsoil and the subsequent excavation and recording of archaeological features and deposits that were revealed by this process. The area covered by the work lay in the eastern part of the total area designated for mineral extraction (Fig. 1). It included a main area measuring 98m x 70m with a narrow strip along the southern edge of the site to the south of the quarry haul road. Another narrow strip was cleared to the north-west of the main area. This was an extension northwards of the area stripped in 2005, when it had been left undisturbed as cover for pheasants from the adjacent woodland shooting area.

This report forms an interim statement. It follows six previous interim reports. These comprised an archaeological evaluation of the site (Trimble 2002a), a watching brief that monitored the installation of the haul road (Trimble 2002b), and four strip and record excavations on successive phases of topsoil stripping (Boyle 2004, Tatler 2004, Trimble 2004 and Boyle 2006). A full report incorporating the results of all the phases of the work will be produced on completion of all the fieldwork.

The work was commissioned by Roger Cooper and funded by Cemex, RMC Eastern.

This archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by the NAU Archaeology (NAUA Ref: BAU 1297/DW) and approved by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. The work was undertaken to define the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidance set out in Planning and Policy Guidance 16 – Archaeology and Planning (Department of the Environment 1990) and following research priorities outlined in the East of England Research Framework (Brown and Glazebrook 2000).

The site archive, which follows the relevant policy on archiving standards, is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

# **2.0 Results** (Fig. 2)

# Introduction

The stripped area encompasses approximately 12,000 square metres. Its main part (Area B) lay to the east of the area stripped in 2005 with a narrow strip (Area A) extending westwards, to the north of the previously stripped area. To the south of Area B, another narrow strip (Area C), along the southern side of the quarry haul road, was also cleared of topsoil, excavated and recorded.

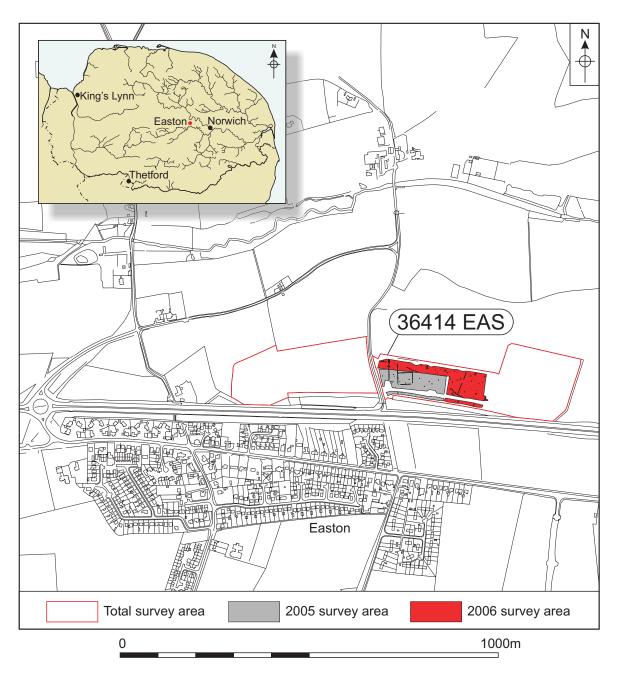


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

The recorded features included ditches, pits and post-hole type features. Most of them were truncated by ploughing and were fairly shallow. Some distinctive, but undated, burnt pits, similar to those found during earlier phases of work at the quarry, were excavated and one group of pits contained charcoal-rich fills and pottery of late Neolithic early Bronze Age date.

### **Ditches**

Towards the western end of Area A, two quite small ditches which ran from north to south ([2009] and [2187]) were continuations of those excavated in 2005 (Boyle 2006, 5 and fig. 2). The westernmost ditch had a short length of another quite shallow ditch ([2011]) close to, and running parallel with, its northern part. None of these ditches were dated by finds (in 2005, the equivalent ditches produced, respectively, a fragment of post-medieval brick and two sherds of Romano-British pottery). A short length of east-to-west ditch ([2003]) to the north-west of these and extending beyond the corner of Area A looked as though it was probably of relatively recent origin due to its dark silty fill and an iron nail that was found by metal detecting its unexcavated area (and was not retained).

Two other quite shallow and slightly curvilinear east-to-west ditches ([2206] and [2209]) in the western part of Area A were also undated.

In the eastern part of Area A, two other ditches ([2036] and [2042]) ran roughly from north-to-south. They were only traced in the northern half of the strip and may have been truncated or terminated to their south; neither of them was observed southwards in 2005. A small sherd of LNEBA pottery and a flint flake came from the easternmost of these ditches.

To the east, in Areas B and C, some more fairly slight ditches ran on a slightly different alignment. In the western part of Area B, ditch [2071] ran from north-north-east to south-south-west with, at its southern end, two roughly parallel and intermittent ditches ([2141]/[2088] and [2118]) perpendicular to it. It is possible that the three ditches were related as [2071] appeared to terminate to respect [2088]. Two flint flakes from one segment of [2141] were the only finds from any of these ditches. To the south of these ditches, in Area C, another probable ditch ([2106]) was orientated roughly north-to-south and might possibly also have related to them. A few struck flint flakes came from its fill.

In the south-eastern part of Area B ditch [2073] was up to 0.25m in depth. It was truncated or, possibly, terminated to its north. A sherd of middle Iron Age pottery and a few struck flints came from its fill. To the south, in Area C, ditch [2098] was almost certainly part of the same boundary although it was more substantial. Sherds of pottery of LNEBA date, as well as twenty struck flints, came from its fill.

In the south-eastern corner of Area B were bisecting ditches [2113] and [2115]. Neither contained any finds.

## **Earlier**

A small pit ([2177]), located at the eastern end of Area A, contained a significant number of sherds of pottery of probable earlier Neolithic date in its silty sand fill. Sherds from at least three vessels were recovered.

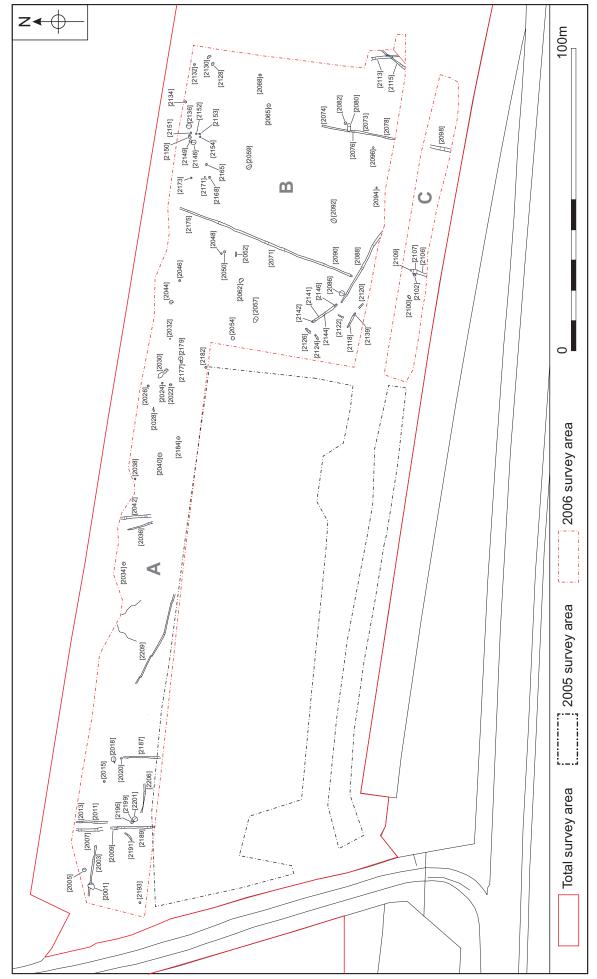


Figure 2. Location of excavated features. Scale 1:1250

Eighty-four struck flints also came from pit [2177]. They include four cores, a number of quite large slightly curving flakes, which appeared to have come from the same core, and twenty-three blades; many of them small neat pieces, some of which might refit to each other. Three utilised pieces, two of them blades, are also present. The pit was cut by another, slightly larger, one ([2179]) but that contained no finds.

# Later Neolithic early Bronze Age (LNEBA)

In the northern part of Area B was a cluster of seven small pits (possibly, some of the smaller ones were post-holes, which may represent a structure) ([2148] – [2154]). Four of them contained pottery (including Beaker–type) of LNEBA date. Most of them also contained struck flints.

About twenty metres to the south of the cluster of pits, pit [2059] was slightly larger and more irregular, with a silty sand fill. Two sherds of LNEBA pottery came from it.

About 140m to the west, in Area A, pottery of LNEBA date was also found, along with two struck flints, in isolated pit [2034].

# Early Iron Age

Pottery of earlier Iron Age date was found in pits [2057] and [2062] in the north-western part of Area B.

In both pits, patchy reddish-coloured scorching of the lower sides and bases showed that burning had occurred *in situ*.

# **Undated burnt pits**

Three subcircular pits ([2065], [2184] and [2136]) showed signs of *in situ* burning of their sides or bases but were undated – although [2065] and [2184] both contained a few struck flints in their fills. The three pits were dispersed across the northern part of the site; [2136] was immediately to the north-east of the group of LNEBA pits but was dissimilar to them. These pits were very similar in nature to others excavated during previous phases of work at Longdell Hills (Boyle 2006, 5). Pit [2065] had two or three large irregular rounded flint 'pebbles' 'set' into its upper edge which were scorched and might have been the remnants of a hearth (although, considering the degree of truncation which seems likely to have occurred, the level of the scorched flints seems unlikely to represent the original 'top' of the pit).

## **Undated features**

Other small pits and possible postholes, although none of the latter related obviously to any structure, were excavated across the site. Just to the west of the group of LNEBA pits, one of a group of small undated features had a number of burnt (non-flint) stones in its fill which may have been from a hearth or derived from their use as 'potboilers'.

#### Natural features

A few small pit-like features may have been of natural origin. These include, for example, some very shallow irregular scoops ([2100], [2102]) in Area C, a small irregular feature ([2130]) in the north-eastern corner of Area B and a few others in Area A ([2182], [2032] and [2028]). A larger irregular feature ([2030]) towards the eastern end of Area A was also interpreted as being of natural origin.

In the south-western part of Area B, there were three linear/ovate features ([2122], [2126] and [2124]), some of which may have formed naturally. They were well-defined but [2122] and [2126] had asymmetrical cross-profiles with one side almost slightly under-cutting the natural gravel. Feature [2122] contained patches of burnt silty sand in its fill including some which had 'fused' into lumps of 'fired clay'.

# 3.0 The Finds

# **Prehistoric Pottery**

by Sarah Percival

Two hundred sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing 2.219kg were recovered from twelve contexts. The pottery is chiefly of earlier Neolithic date. Small quantities of later Neolithic earlier Bronze Age and Iron Age sherds were also found. The assemblage is fragmentary and contains no complete vessels or vessel profiles. Sherd condition varies, but is generally moderate to poor.

## Earlier Neolithic

One hundred and twenty earlier Neolithic sherds weighing 1.617kg were recovered from a single feature, pit [2177]. The sherds are in two flint-tempered fabrics. Fabric F5 has common angular white to grey flint up to 8mm long, and fabric F6 has sparse white angular flint of mixed sizes up to 12mm in length. The most common fabric (F5) makes up 88% of the total earlier Neolithic assemblage (1.424kg), possibly representing two vessels. Fabric F6 represents the remains of a single vessel (0.193kg). The latter fabric is of an unusual cream colour throughout and has a laminated texture, perhaps suggesting that it had been misfired during manufacture. All vessels found are undecorated, round-based bowls with simple rounded, slightly out-turned rims and slack, sub-angular shoulders, and probably date to the early or developing Neolithic, perhaps around 3850–3650 BC (Cleal 2004, 181).

# Later Neolithic earlier Bronze Age

Sixty sherds of later Neolithic earlier Bronze Age pottery weighing 0.390kg were recovered from nine features, principally pits (Table 1). Three sherds (0.018kg) were found in ditch fills and probably represent redeposited or residual material.

Eight fabrics in three fabric groups were identified. Fabrics with flint as the principle component are the most numerous, making up 57% of the total assemblage (0.221kg, Table 2). Grog-tempered fabrics make up 28% (0.111kg) and quartz sand-tempered sherds 15% (0.058kg). The range of fabrics is consistent with most Beaker sites in northern East Anglia (Healy 1988, 72) and throughout the south of England (Cleal 1995, fig.16.2).

The assemblage contains rims from two vessels; however, it is likely that a minimum of seventeen vessels is represented. The exact forms of the Beakers are unclear due to the highly fragmentary and abraded nature of the sherds. Two large rim sherds in flint-tempered fabric F1 are from a coarse fingertip-rusticated vessel with an elongated neck and simple rounded rim ending. The Beaker has a diameter of 25cm at the rim. The second rim is also simple with a rounded rim ending but comes from a small, thin-walled Beaker decorated with incised bands filled with incised lattice in grog-tempered fabric G2. Fingertip-impressed rustication is the

most common form of decoration, comb-impressed sherds forming bands or lattice designs, and incised filled bands and floating lozenges filled with lattice are also found.

Feature Type	Feature	Quantity	Weight (kg)
Ditch	2042	1	0.007
	2098	2	0.011
Pit	2034	15	0.146
	2059	2	0.009
	2148	31	0.153
	2149	1	0.001
	2150	1	0.003
	2151	6	0.054
	2153	1	0.006
Total	•	60	0.390

Table 1: Quantity and weight of later Neolithic earlier
Bronze Age pottery by feature

Fabric	Description	Quantity	Weight (kg)
F1	Common white angular flint common voids left by	13	0.142
	?grog, some sand		
F2	Sparse small angular flint, moderate quartz sand	8	0.035
F4	Frequent small to medium white angular flint	4	0.044
G3	Common grog	19	0.092
G1	Frequent sub-angular grog	3	0.012
G2	Common grog sparse angular flint	1	0.007
Q1	Common sand sparse small grog	12	0.058
Total		60	0.390

Table 2: Quantity and weight of later Neolithic earlier Bronze Age pottery by fabric

The small Beaker assemblage is typical of pit-derived material comprising small sherds representing several vessels. These sherds were probably selected for deposition in the pit from a surface deposit or other primary place of discard (Gibson forthcoming). Mixed assemblages of vessels with comb-impressed, incised and rusticated decoration similar to those found here have been recovered from numerous sites on the Fen edge and throughout East Anglia (Gibson 1982, Bamford 1982). Dating of the assemblage is uncertain due in part to the well-attested problems associated with Beaker chronology (Kinnes *et al.* 1991) and in part to the small size of the sherds found. The presence of the comb-impressed filled bands and lozenges, however, suggest that the assemblage is stylistically late, perhaps dating towards the middle of the period of Beaker currency, 2600–1800 BC (Kinnes *et al.* 1991).

#### Iron Age

Eighteen sherds of Iron Age pottery weighing 0.208kg were recorded as coming from pit [2062] (although some of this pottery, it was later discovered, was mis-labelled in the field and actually came from nearby pit [2057], this has now been rectified). The assemblage contained perhaps three vessels including a heavily flint-tempered flat-based jar with a single row of fingernail impressions marking the shoulder of

the vessel. The second vessel is also flint-tempered and is represented by a simple base and undecorated body sherds. An undecorated round-ended rim in quartz sand-tempered fabric Q2 was also found. The assemblage is not closely dated; however, the fingertip impressions to the slack shoulder suggest that it may be of earlier Iron Age date, perhaps contemporary with an assemblage recovered during previous excavations at Longdell Hills within a putative earlier Iron Age structure. These sherds also feature distinctive fingertip-impressed decoration to the shoulder and to the rim and are made of coarse flint-tempered fabric (Percival 2003).

# The Fired Clay

by Sarah Percival

Nineteen pieces of fired clay weighing 0.271kg were recovered from two contexts. Eight pieces from pit [2034] are of a bright orange sandy fabric with multiple small irregular vacuoles, perhaps indicating a leached-out inclusion. Pottery of later Neolithic earlier Bronze Age date was also recovered from this feature. Eleven pieces in a similar orange sandy fabric to those found in pit [2034] came from feature [2122], though these had a dense texture with no evidence of lost inclusions. One piece has two surviving flattened surfaces of which one has a possible rod impression. No pottery was found in this feature.

Fired clay is frequently found alongside Beaker pottery. Some pieces found during excavations at Weasenham Lyngs are described as being brick-like, with one or more flattened surface(s), and are made of similar dense sandy fabric to those described above (Biek 1986, 98). These pieces have been interpreted as being crude 'kiln furniture' made to support vessels during bonfire firing (Petersen and Healy 1986, 101)

#### **Ceramic Building Material**

A small fragment of sandy brick came from pit [2068] and a piece of sandy roof tile was found in pit [2092]. Both are of 18th- to 19th-century date.

## **Flint**

A total of 186 pieces of struck or shattered flint were recovered from the site. Thirty-six fragments of burnt flint, weighing a total of 0.534kg, were also found; they have been discarded. Almost all of the flint is sharp or quite sharp, with a small amount of the material being slightly edge-damaged. The assemblage is summarised in Table 1.

Six pieces are broadly classified as cores. They include three flake cores, a blade core and two tested pieces. They are, mostly, quite small. One larger piece, a very thick flake (from the fill of pit [2177]), has had flakes struck from its edges on its dorsal face. It may have been used as a core but seems more likely (due to the small size of the flakes that would have been produced) to have been a crude scraper-type tool.

Just over half of the assemblage consists of unmodified flakes. These vary from small irregular pieces to a few larger smooth curving flakes – most of these latter from pit [2177]. There are also several blade-like flakes, many of them quite thin neat pieces. There are also a very small number of spalls, some irregular shatter pieces and one chip.

Туре	Number
Multi platform flake core	1
Single platform blade core	1
Single platform flake core	1
Keeled core	1
Tested piece	2
Struck fragment	1
Shatter	20
Core/tool	1
Flake	98
Blade-like flake	16
Blade	26
Chip	1
Spall	4
Scraper	6
Retouched flake	1
Piercer	1
Retouched flake	1
Utilised blade	2
Utilised flake	2
Total	186
Burnt fragment	36

Table 1: Summary of the flint

There are twenty-six blades. Almost all of these are from the fill of pit [2177] and are mostly small thin pieces. Many of them appear to be quite similar; it is possible that some may be from the same core and might even refit to each other.

There are very few formal tool types. Six pieces are classified as scrapers due to their steeply retouched edges but the retouch is generally quite minimal; the scrapers are not of diagnostic 'types'. One piece has been classed as a piercer but is not retouched. Simply, its distal point appears to have been utilised. A small number of miscellaneous retouched or utilised pieces are also present.

#### Discussion

There are few diagnostic/datable pieces in the assemblage but the nature of the flint is mixed, with some quite nicely struck flakes and blades and some more irregular material. The flint from pit [2177] seems likely to be of relatively early Neolithic date and is sharp. Others of the flints are probably of LNEBA date, and some may even be of later date.

# 4.0 Environmental Evidence

by Val Fryer

## Introduction and method statement

Excavations at Longdell Hills, undertaken by NAU Archaeology in advance of quarrying work, revealed a number of pits of probable prehistoric (Late Neolithic to

Early Iron Age) date. Samples for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from five of the pit fills, four of which exhibited signs of *in-situ* burning.

The samples were processed by manual water flotation/washover, and the flots were collected in a 500 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Appendix 1. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (1997). All plant remains were charred. Modern contaminants including fibrous and woody roots and seeds were present at a low density throughout.

The non-floating residues were collected in a 500 micron mesh sieve and sorted when dry. All artefacts/ecofacts were retained for further specialist analysis.

## Results

Charcoal/charred wood fragments formed the major component of all five assemblages. The majority of pieces within samples 1 (pit 2148) and 5 (pit [2062]) had a flaked appearance, possibly indicative of charring at very high temperatures. Occasional small fragments of charred root/stem were also recorded, and a single charred bud was noted in sample 3 (pit [2136]). Cereals/seeds were only recovered from samples 4 (pit [2148] and 5. These comprised hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell fragments, a single barley (*Hordeum* sp.) grain, a persicaria (*Persicaria maculosa/lapathifolia*) seed and a possible large grass (Poaceae) fruit.

Other material types were particularly scarce. The fragments of black porous and tarry material are possible residues of the combustion of organic remains at very high temperatures.

## **Conclusions and recommendations for further work**

In summary, two distinct types of context appear to be represented namely, pits with evidence for *in-situ* burning and a possible refuse pit. The burnt pits (samples 1, 2, 3 and 5) initially appear to be characterised by the high density of charcoal/charred wood within the fills. However, it should be noted that at least two of these features burnt at temperatures which were sufficiently high to scorch the underlying soil and produce 'flaked' charcoal, and such conditions are not conducive to the preservation of more delicate plant remains. Sample 4 is more typical of a small prehistoric (Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age) refuse deposit, containing a moderately high density of both charcoal/charred wood and hazel nutshell fragments.

As all the assemblages are predominantly composed of charcoal, no further analysis is required, However, three (samples 2, 3 and 4) contain the following materials which may be suitable for C14/AMS dating:

Sample No.	Material	Purpose	Potential
2	Charcoal	Identification and possible dating	Moderate/high
3	Charcoal	Identification and possible dating	Moderate
4	Nutshell	Dating	High

The cereal grain/seeds within sample 5 may also be suitable although the quantity of material available is very low and contemporaneity with the context cannot definitely be proved.

## 5.0 Conclusions

The latest phase of work at Longdell Hills has added to the corpus of evidence recorded over the last four years. All the results will be assessed and analysed together once the fieldwork at the site has been completed.

The recent work has revealed more evidence for activity across the area of the site during the prehistory.

The earliest activity dated to the earlier Neolithic period. A single pit contained pottery and flint of this date. Some evidence for activity during this period has previously been found further to the west (Trimble 2004, 2; Boyle 2004, 2), but the pottery assemblage from the pit excavated in 2006 appears to be the most significant assemblage of this date from the site so far.

The majority of the pottery found in 2006 is of later Neolithic early Bronze Age date and this follows the pattern set in 2005 – although, then, only three features contained ceramics of this date (Boyle 2006, 4). The cluster of pits and possible post-holes found in the northern part of the site in 2006 are, therefore, a significant group.

Previous evidence for activity during the earlier Iron Age includes some pottery from a cluster of features in the vicinity of the recent finds (Trimble 2002a), some pits and pottery from further westwards (Trimble 2004), pottery from features representing a structure of some kind (Boyle 2004), pottery from pits and post-holes (Tatler 2004) and from two post-holes (Boyle 2006, 4). Of the features excavated in 2006 two small pits contained pottery of Iron Age date.

Environmental evidence suggests that *in situ* burning occurred in some of the excavated pits, including two of probable Iron Age date. Charred remains from another pit, dated by pottery to the later Neolithic early Bronze Age, suggest that it was probably a rubbish pit. Material from some of the sampled pits shows potential for Carbon 14 dating and this will be considered during the assessment and updated project design of the Longdell Hill sites, after all phases of fieldwork are completed.

# **Acknowledgements**

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The fieldwork was carried out by Sarah Bates, Mick Boyle, Matt Ratcliff and Juha-Matti Vuorinen. Site surveying was by Sandrine Whitmore, assisted by Gary Trimble and other staff.

Finds were processed by Lucy Talbot and examined and reported on by Sarah Bates (flint), Alice Lyons (Romano-British pottery), Sarah Percival (prehistoric pottery and fired clay) and Lucy Talbot (ceramic building material). The site plans were digitised by Sandrine Whitmore.

This report was illustrated and produced by David Dobson and edited by Sarah Harrison.

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# Appendix 1: Plant macrofossils and other remains

Sample No.	4	5	1	2	3
Context No.	2158	2064	2058	2067	2137
Feature No.	2148	2062	2057	2065	2136
Provisional date	?LNEBA	?EIA	?EIA	U/D	U/D
Plant macrofossils					
Corylus avellana L. (nutshell frags.)	XX	xcf			
Hordeum sp. (grain)		Х			
Persicaria maculosa/lapathifolia		Χ			
Large Poaceae indet.		xcffg			
Charcoal <2mm	xxxx	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX
Charcoal >2mm	XX	Χ	XXXX	XXXX	XXX
Charred root/stem		Χ	Х	Х	Χ
Indet.bud					Χ
Indet.seeds		Χ			
Other material					
Black porous 'cokey' material		Χ		Х	Χ
Black tarry material		Χ			
Burnt/fired clay		Χ			
?Pottery	xcf				
Small coal frag.		Х			
Vitrified material					Х
Sample volume (litres)	10	10	10	8ss	8ss
Volume of flot (litres)	0.2	10%	0.6	0.6	0.5
% flot sorted	50%	100%	12.50%	12.50%	25%

# Key to Appendix

x - 1 - 10 specimens xx - 10 - 50 specimens xxx = 50 - 100 specimens

xxxx = 100 + specimens

cf = compare fg = fragment ss = sub-sample LNEBA = Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age EIA = Early Iron Age U/D = undated

M = moderate H = high