

PREHISTORIC RING DITCHES AND LATE IRON AGE ACTIVITY AT PINCET LANE, NORTH KILWORTH, LEICESTERSHIRE

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with contributions from:

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Archaeological investigations by ULAS in 2019, to the east of Pincet Lane, North Kilworth, revealed evidence for a range of activities, notably from the Middle Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age/Early Roman periods.

In the Early Bronze Age, a circular palisaded enclosure (c.20m diameter) with a small entrance was constructed. In the centre was a crouched burial with the head orientated south-easterly towards the entrance. Further suspected burials or offerings were also found within the enclosure. Some of these had pots placed into the features, but no bone survived. Later, the entrance was blocked with two posts and the enclosure was redefined with a shallow ditch. A large (c.42m diameter) ring ditch, over 2m in depth, was excavated around the enclosure. The lower part of the ditch had naturally silted, whilst the upper part appears to have been deliberately infilled during the Iron Age period.

In the late Iron Age, three roundhouses, and several enclosures, were constructed; some were dug into the top of the outer ring ditch. Evidence indicates one roundhouse was modified during the first century into a 'C' shaped enclosure; all of them were used into the Early Roman period. The locations of the Iron Age and Early Roman features suggests that by this point there was no trace of the outer Bronze Age ring ditch in the landscape. In contrast, all the features from this period respect the inner enclosure and the most likely explanation for this is that it was covered by a visible mound. An earthwork may have survived as late as the post-medieval period, as a later trackway may also be respecting this area.

INTRODUCTION

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) undertook archaeological investigations on land east of Pincet Lane in North Kilworth, Leicestershire, between August and December 2019. The work took place in advance of a proposed residential development.

The site is located at the northern edge of the village of North Kilworth at the corner of Pincet Lane and Station road. Forming a plot of land (approximately 0.9 hectares) of roughly square shape, it slightly slopes down to the south-east (145m aOD). The field had formerly been under crop. Early maps show the site as a field from the early nineteenth century; ridge and furrows were recorded during the investigations running north to south, forming part of the medieval agricultural field system, with the village core further to the south.



Fig 1. Location of the site.



Fig. 2. Iron Age roundhouse and other features being revealed during the soil stripping.

The site lies close to an area previously investigated by ULAS that located evidence for an Early Bronze Age pit, and Iron Age occupation (Shean 2017). Further from the site, two elements of prehistoric activity were identified: a Neolithic burial is known 600m north-west; and a possible barrow was recorded 995m north-east.

A trial trench evaluation of six 30m-long trenches was undertaken in August 2019. The results of the trenching indicated a concentration of archaeology located in the central part of the site. In this area a small ditch, a gully and several pits were found, along with a large layer. These contained Iron Age pottery, worked flints and charred grains, indicating there was nearby domestic activity. The work identified the site as having a research potential to contribute towards the *East Midlands Historic Environment Research Framework* (Cooper 2006; Knight *et al.* 2012; <https://researchframeworks.org/emherf/>), specifically in the land-use during the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods. As such, a mitigation excavation was required by the planning authority, in advance of development.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

The archaeological excavation revealed a complex sequence of activity from the Mid-Neolithic, Early Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and post-medieval periods.

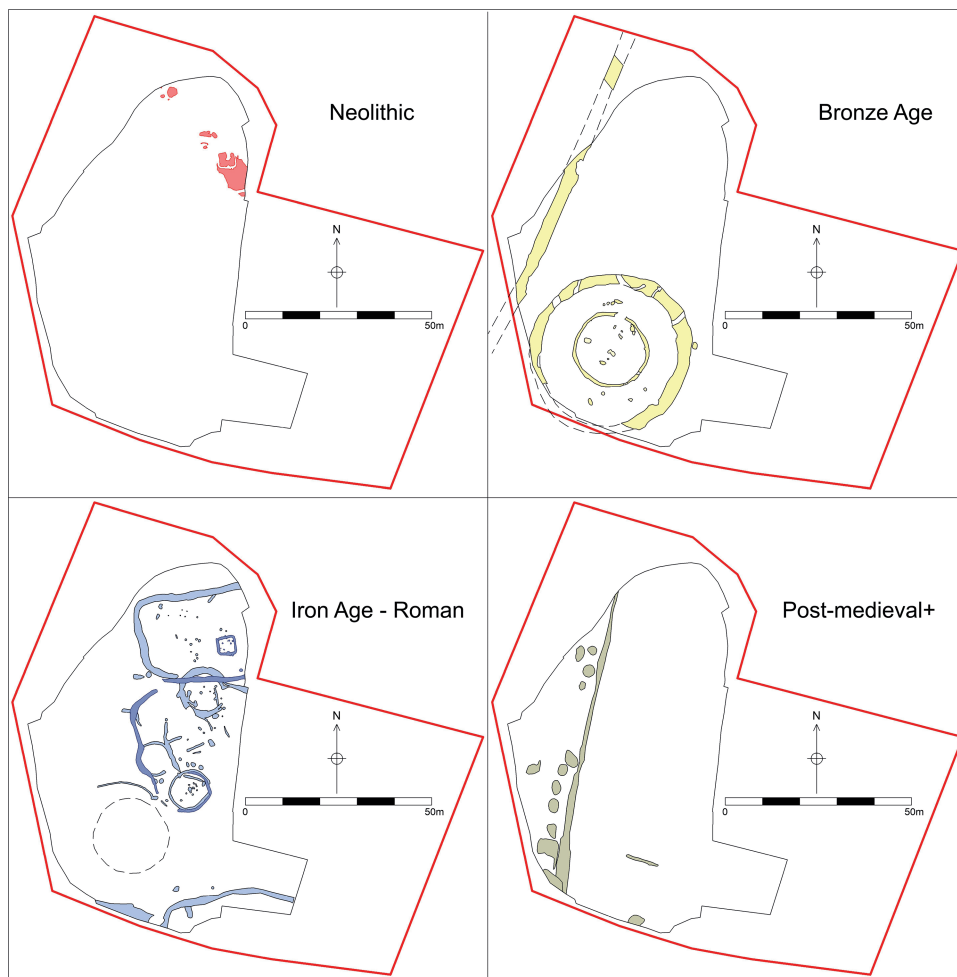


Fig. 3. Phased archaeological activity at Pincet Lane, North Kilworth (earlier activity dashed for reference).

Middle Neolithic

The mid-Neolithic activity was confined to the northern part of the site and most of the artefacts were recovered from a layer. Beneath the layer were several post holes and two small gullies. To the north several pits were found, which may be contemporary with this activity (Fig. 4).

A layer containing 49 sherds of mid-Neolithic pottery, fragments of fired clay and 11 pieces of worked flint (mostly flint debitage, a plunging blade and a single utilised flake) were found in the north-eastern part of the site. The layer measured more than 10m long, 10m wide and up to 0.2m deep. It was truncated by a later structure and a tree bole, which also produced sherds of Neolithic pottery. Two small gullies and three small post holes were found beneath the layer and Neolithic

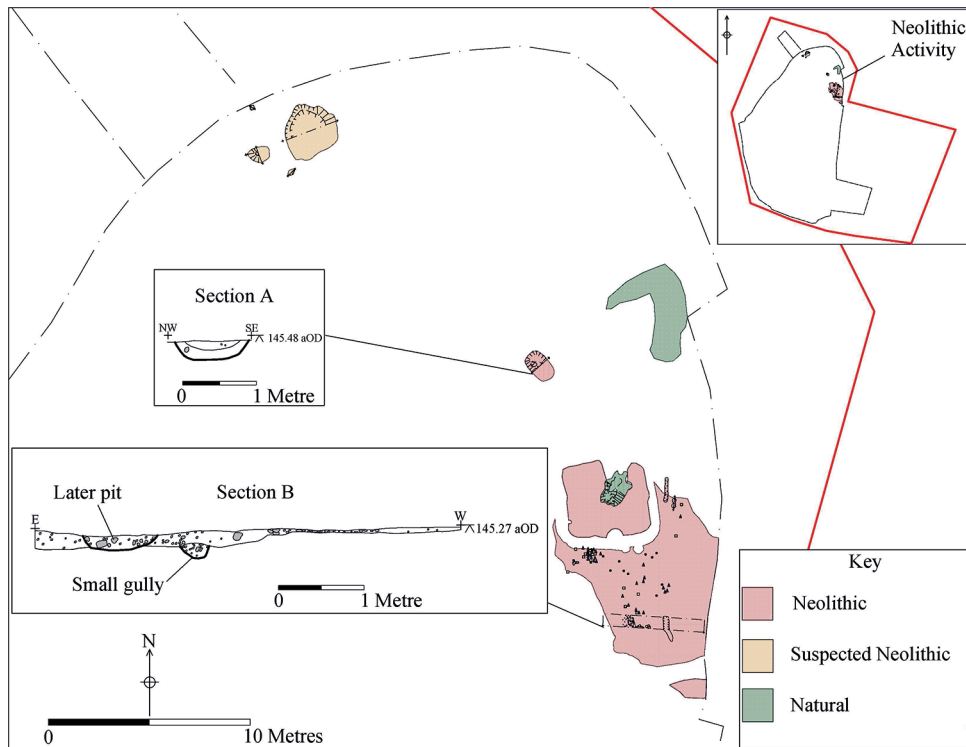


Fig. 4. Plan and sections of the Mid-Neolithic features.

pottery was found in these. It was unclear whether the two gullies were the truncated remains of the same feature.

A sub-oval pit measuring 1.6m long, 1m wide and 0.6m deep was found to the north of the layer. The pit had a sub-rectangular post hole in the base, and both features were filled with silty clay containing Neolithic pottery and worked flint.

Further north a large pit was found that measured almost 3m wide. It was filled with sandy clay and contained patches of burnt clay and worked flints. To the west was a smaller pit and two post holes, and it was uncertain whether this group of features was Neolithic or Iron Age.

Bronze Age

The Bronze Age features were in the southern and western parts of the site. They consisted of two Early Bronze Age circular ring ditches adjacent to a large boundary ditch. The ditch was undated, but appears to respect the location of the ring ditches and may be broadly contemporary. The inner ring ditch likely had a palisade with a crouched burial located in the centre. Several other suspected graves or offerings were also found within the enclosure. No bone survived in these; however, Early Bronze Age

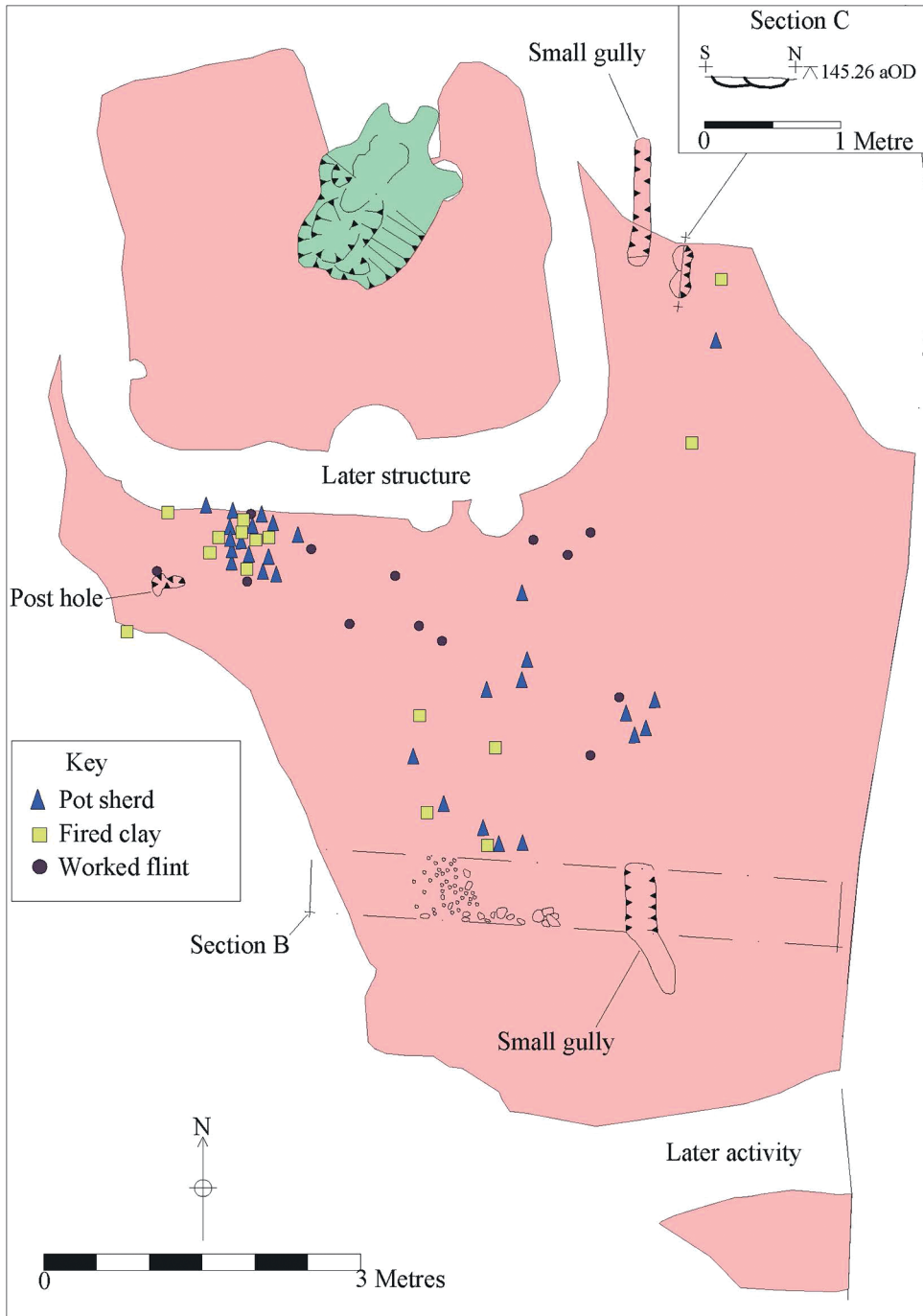


Fig. 5. Plan of the Neolithic layer showing the locations of artefacts and the features beneath it.

vessels were found within several of them. Post holes were also found close to these features and around the southern edge of the enclosure. The inner ring ditch contained a narrow entrance, but no corresponding gap was found in the outer ring ditch.

Inner ring ditch

The inner ring ditch had an overall diameter of 20m and was found to consist of two phases of activity. The earliest phase consisted of a steep-sided trench varying between 0.5–1.1m wide and 0.25–1m deep. The trench was in a roughly circular polygonal shape and the impressions from several post holes were identified in the base. Tip lines from the backfill were also found, showing the feature to have likely been a palisade. A narrow entrance was left in the south-eastern side, although this was subsequently blocked with two posts. The second phase of use saw the palisade re-defined as a shallow ditch, along the same alignment as the palisade had gone.

Large outer ring ditch

A second larger ring ditch surrounded the central enclosure, maintaining a consistent 8m gap between the two features. This ditch was cut by later activity, including Iron Age roundhouses, enclosures and post-medieval activity. The ditch was large, with an external diameter of 43m, a width of 2.5–3.5m and a depth ranging between 1.9m and 2.3m. This ditch may have formed a complete loop around the outside of the enclosure; however, this was not proved as the south-westerly edge extended beyond the edge of the excavation. Because of the size of the ditch it was excavated using several techniques, ranging from hand-digging to machine excavation and a combination of the two.

The base of the ditch was found to contain a layer of silty sand, with a thicker layer of clay overlaying it. These layers could have formed if the ditch contained standing water, since this would allow the particles to separate. The deposits above this were characterised by numerous layers of silt or sand that were often falling in from either side. These deposits are characteristic of material being washed into the ditch and the sides eroding. In contrast the deposits found in the upper half of the ditch were different, and mainly composed of silts and clays. It is possible that the upper section of ditch is a later re-cut; however, the change in composition could show the ditch changing from a period of slow natural silting to a quicker period of infilling. No artefacts were found in the lower part of the ditch; however, the upper section contained Iron Age pottery, worked flints and animal bone.

The Bronze Age features were not typically found beyond the outer ring ditch, although two intercutting pits adjacent to the eastern edge may be broadly contemporary with this period. These features were undated, but (unlike the later Iron Age activity) appear to be respecting the outer ditch. One contained a large smooth stone with marks on the end, suggesting it was utilised for grinding or pounding.

Burial and features within the central ring ditch

In the centre of the inner ring ditch a crouched burial was found orientated south-east to north-west. The body was poorly preserved and most bones had decayed. Despite

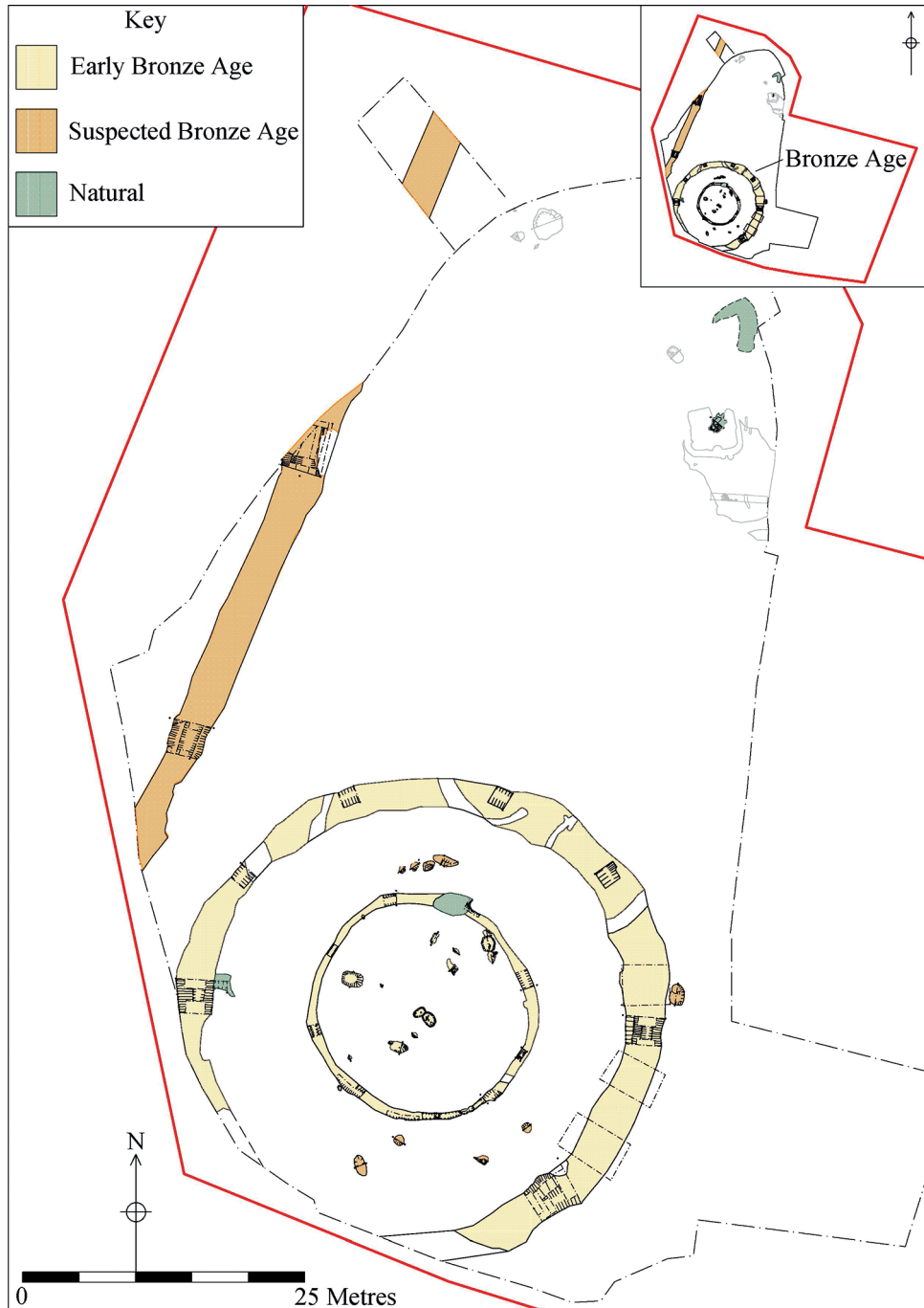


Fig. 6. Plan of the Bronze Age features.

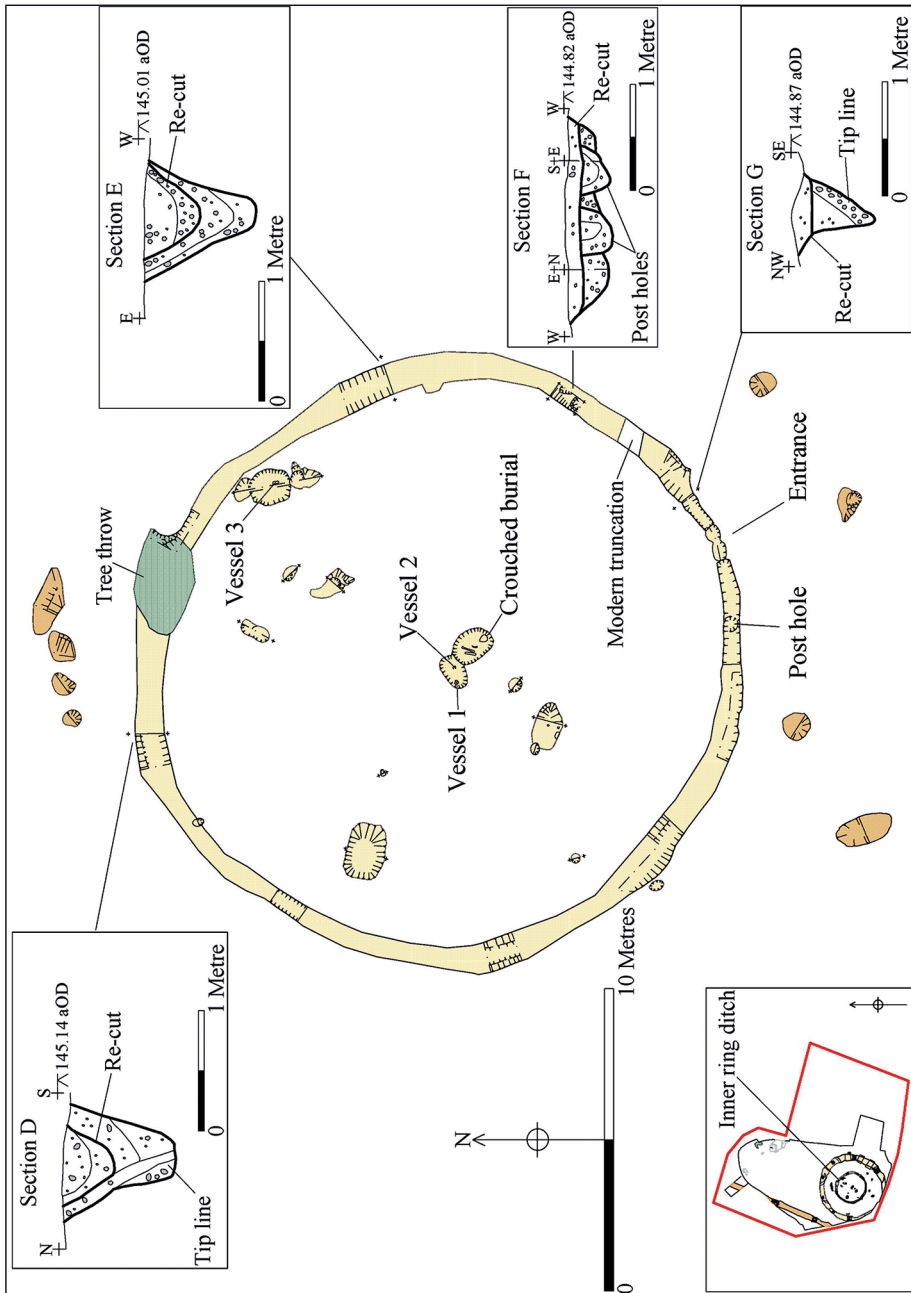


Fig. 7. Plan of inner ring ditch.

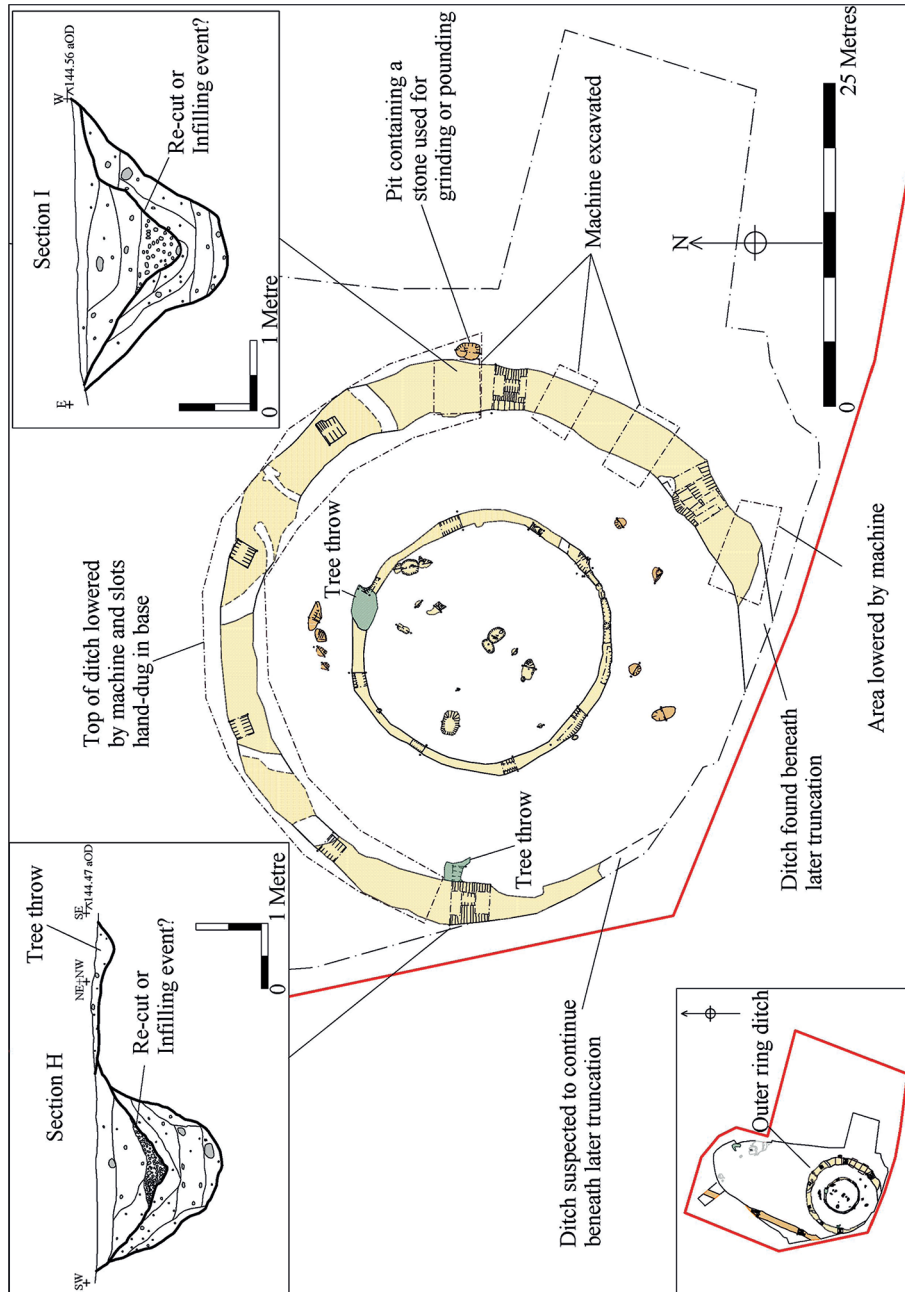


Fig. 8. Plan of the outer ring ditch and sections.

the preservation, a few bones had mineralised or appeared as a stain showing the general positioning of the body. The head was found at the south-eastern end, the body was lying on its left side and the right arm was possibly flexed. A femur, along with part of the lower leg (possibly belonging to the right side of the body), were present and these were flexed – indicating the body to be in a crouched position. The body was placed in a sub-oval shaped grave measuring 1.4m long, 1m wide and 0.45m deep. The grave had straight vertical sides with a flat base, and within the fill fragments of a flint flake and a blade were found.

The grave was truncated at its north-western edge by a second smaller feature, likely to be another grave. This grave measured 1m long, 0.7m wide, 0.2m deep and also had straight vertical sides with a flat base. No bone was found within it, but the fill contained several abraded sherds of Beaker pottery, along with hazelnut shells that were radiocarbon dated to 7000 BC and are likely to be residual. The excavation of the grave revealed two Bronze Age Beakers or Food Vessels dated to c.2200–1800 BC. Vessel 1 had a flaring neck with twisted cord decoration on the outside and was partially complete. Vessel 2 was part of a handled bowl and had stabbed herringbone decoration on the outside. Vessel 1 was inverted and placed at the south-western end of the grave, whilst Vessel 2 was found in the top of the fill at the north-eastern end. Because it was positioned in the top of the grave it is possible Vessel 2 is a later addition.

Close to the north-eastern edge of the inner ring gully three intercutting features were found. The central one had a diameter of 1.35m, a depth of 0.45m and contained another partially complete Beaker (Vessel 3), along with four abraded sherds of Neolithic pottery. Vessel 3 was found on its side on the base of the feature and had been crushed by the overlaying deposits. This feature could be a pit or another grave, but no evidence of bone was found. Charred plant remains were radiocarbon dated to 2800–2500 BC; however, these and the abraded sherds of Neolithic pottery may be residual. The two more oval-shaped features were located on either side measuring 0.85–1.2m long, 0.55–1m wide and 0.3–0.4m deep. The northernmost was a pit and was cut by the central feature, whilst the southern feature resembled an irregular post hole and truncated the central feature. The southern feature was deepest to the north and its irregular shape could have been caused if a post had been physically removed. A small group of post holes were also found a couple of metres to the west and no bone or artefacts were found in any of these.

A sub-rectangular pit was found to the north-west of the crouched burial measuring 1.5m long, 1m wide and 0.6m deep. This was also another possible grave; however, no bone or artefacts were found within it. This feature was also accompanied by a post hole located a short distance to the east. In the south-western part of the inner ring gully another sub-oval feature was found measuring 1.6m long, 0.95m wide and 0.25m deep. This may also be another grave, although again no bone or artefacts were found within it. The western edge of this feature was truncated by a post hole and two more were found a short distance to the east and west. Two large stones were also found within the inner ring ditch: one was unworked and found close to the entrance; and it was unclear whether the second was worked but it had a regular trapezoidal shape. This was unstratified, but found near the centre, and it was unclear whether they had been deliberately introduced into the monument.



Fig. 9. Photogrammetric image of the crouched burial and Vessels 1 and 2 to the west.



Fig. 10. Vessel 3 (660) from a feature close to the north-eastern edge of the ring gully.

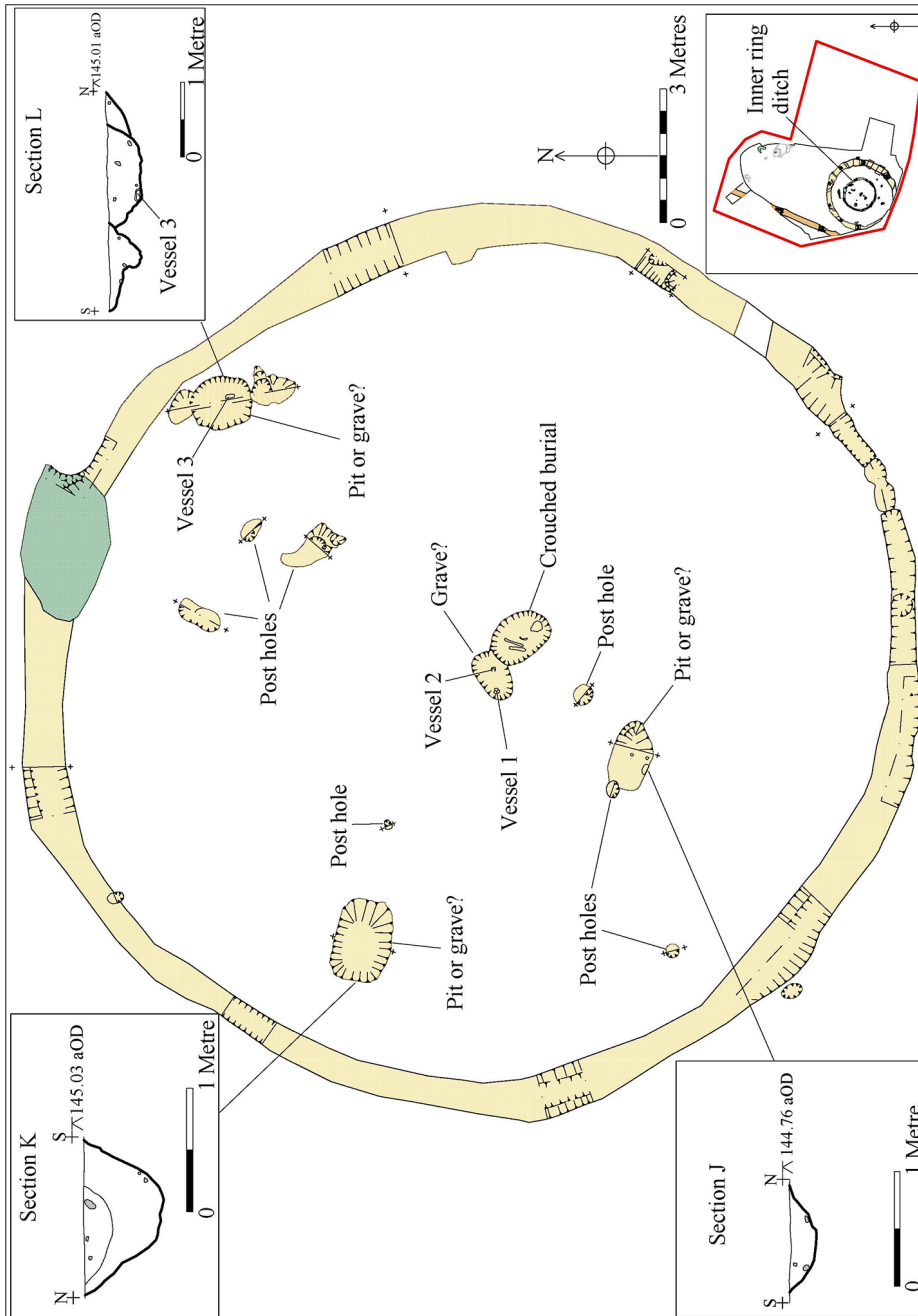


Fig. 11. Plan and sections of the features within the inner ring ditch.



Fig. 12. View of outer ditch, hand-dug section being recorded.

Features surrounding the inner ring ditch

Several undated post holes and pits were also found between the inner and outer ring ditches, which may represent contemporary activity. Two post holes were found to the south-east and were equidistant between the inner and outer ring gullies. The westernmost was in front of the entrance and crouched burial. Two more post holes were found to the west and one close to the outer edge of the palisade measured up to 1m deep. Another possible pit was found in this region, but due to a large proportion of bioturbation it was difficult to interpret. The only other features to possibly date to the Bronze Age were a group of small oval pits located to the north of the inner ring gully. Iron Age features were found in this area and it was unclear whether they were contemporary with the ring ditches or the later activity.

Large ditch in the west

A large ditch orientated north-east to south-west and was found close to the western edge of the excavation. The ditch measured more than 67m long, 2.5m wide and ranged from 1.5m to 2.2m deep. The ditch had a steep sided 'V' shaped profile with a narrow flat or 'U' shaped base. It was mostly filled with a series of silty sands and the northern part was re-dug several times. A single flint flake was found in the lower layers and a few animal bones were recovered from the upper fill. The ditch

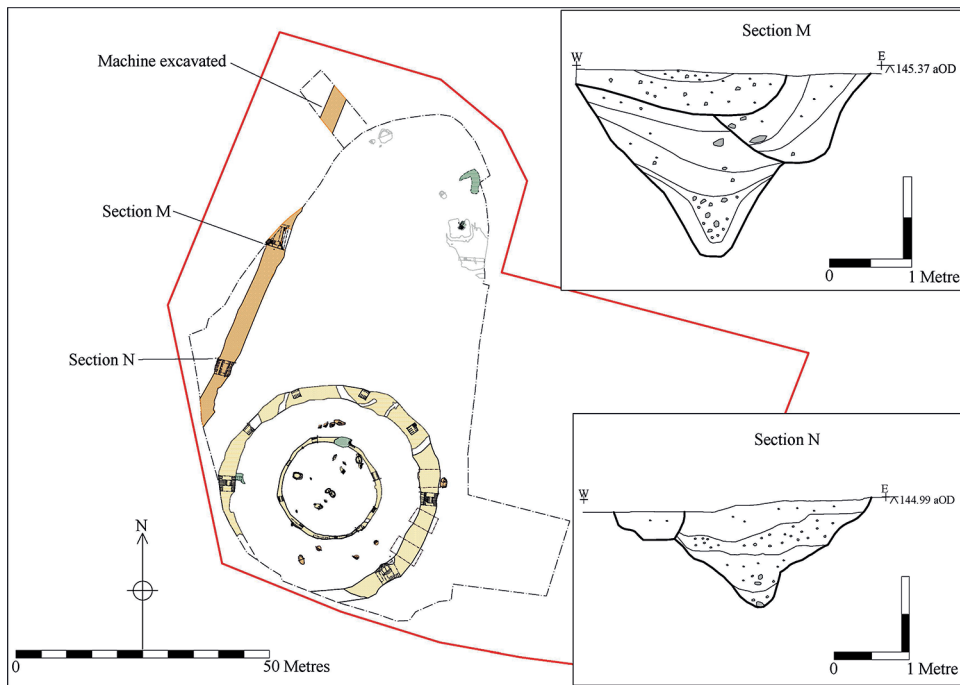


Fig. 13. Plan and sections through the large western ditch.

was undated, but unlike the later Iron Age activity it appears to be respecting the outer ring ditch, implying it is either Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.

The Prehistoric and Early Roman pottery and fired clay (Nicholas J. Cooper)

The assemblage comprises 66 sherds of Neolithic pottery and 83 sherds of Early Bronze Age date (from four vessels). Nearly 0.5kg of fired clay was also recovered. The assemblage, aside from the Early Bronze Age pottery, is in a consistently abraded condition and the average sherd weight of under 5g reinforces the contention that a lot of the material results from secondary deposition. The assemblage was analysed by fabric and form in accordance with *The Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (Barclay *et al.* 2016), using the Leicestershire Prehistoric and Roman Fabric Series (Pollard 1994, 110; Marsden 2011 with amendments, see Table 2 below), and the Iron Age form typology developed by Elsdon in her study of the pottery from Enderby (1992a).

The Middle Neolithic pottery

A total of 66 sherds, weighing 254g, were recovered, primarily from a layer (55 sherds) and the gully beneath it (one sherd). A further three sherds came from the rectangular structure and tree bole that were truncating the layer. Three sherds came from a pit to the north of the layer and four more were found in the fill of the pit

or grave containing Vessel 3. All the pottery occurs in a distinctive crushed pebble quartz fabric, Q5, known from Early and Middle Neolithic assemblages in the county such as Rothley Lodge, Rothley Temple Grange (Cooper 2015; 2016) and Husbands Bosworth (Percival in prep). Often the quartz is white in colour, giving a distinctive visual appearance, as seen at Rothley and at Aston on Trent (Carney 2012, 99; Gibson 2012a, 98), and sometimes the pebble source also includes flint, which would be available locally in the boulder clay.

The collection is heavily abraded and encrusted with deposits, but in seven cases from the layer impressed decoration, including ‘maggot’ motifs, has been identified, along with the distinctive neck and rim form of bowls of Peterborough Ware in the Mortlake sub-style, dating between c.3500 BC and 2900 BC. Whether all the material belongs to the Peterborough Ware tradition is uncertain as a thin-bodied sherd form had a burnished surface consistent with the earlier Neolithic (Modified) Carinated Bowl tradition, as seen at Rothley Temple Grange (Cooper 2015, 13). The condition of the material would suggest that the layer is perhaps the remains of a domestic midden.

The Early Bronze Age beaker or food vessel pottery

The partially complete remains of three decorated vessels, and three plain sherds from a fourth (totalling 83 sherds, 1020g), were recovered from two features within the area enclosed by the inner barrow ring ditch. Vessels 1 and 2 came from the feature cutting the crouched burial, at the centre, whilst Vessel 3 came from a feature to the north-east. Each is described and illustrated in Fig. 14.

VESSEL 1

A partially complete beaker or food vessel (38 sherds, 413g), manufactured in a fine grog-tempered fabric (Fabric G), with flaring neck and in-sloping, internally decorated rim, is shown in Figs. 14 and 15. Its profile is carinated with linear decoration above the carination or shoulder. Decoration comprises parallel horizontal lines of twisted cord impressions, ten in all, evenly spaced, with three more on the inside of the internally sloping rim. Between the parallel cord impressions are two rows of dots separated by a blank row, but the upper row has an extra row of dots above for some of the circumference – diameter 110mm, height 115mm.

There are many examples of beakers with in-sloping rims with decoration in the Clarke corpus (for example, no. 18 AOC1259 from Cave, Yorks) as in the present example, the decoration only goes down to carination. The squat, carinated profile is also paralleled on the beaker no. 39 AOC 1408 from Willerby 235, Yorks. Another similar vessel, identified as a food vessel, came from the late 1970s’ excavations at Orton Meadows, Peterborough, sharing the same carinated form and in-sloping rim decorated with lines of twisted cord; the upper body is decorated with rows of ‘maggots’ rather than twisted cord (Bamford 2020, 79–80, fig.50.9).

VESSEL 2

A single sherd (42g) from a vessel with rounded profile, a plain in-curving rim, and a handle stub just below, is shown in Figs. 14 and 15. It is manufactured in a fine fabric tempered with grog and shell (Fabric G1). The vessel has all-over herring bone decoration with rows of oblique stab marks. The bone tool used for

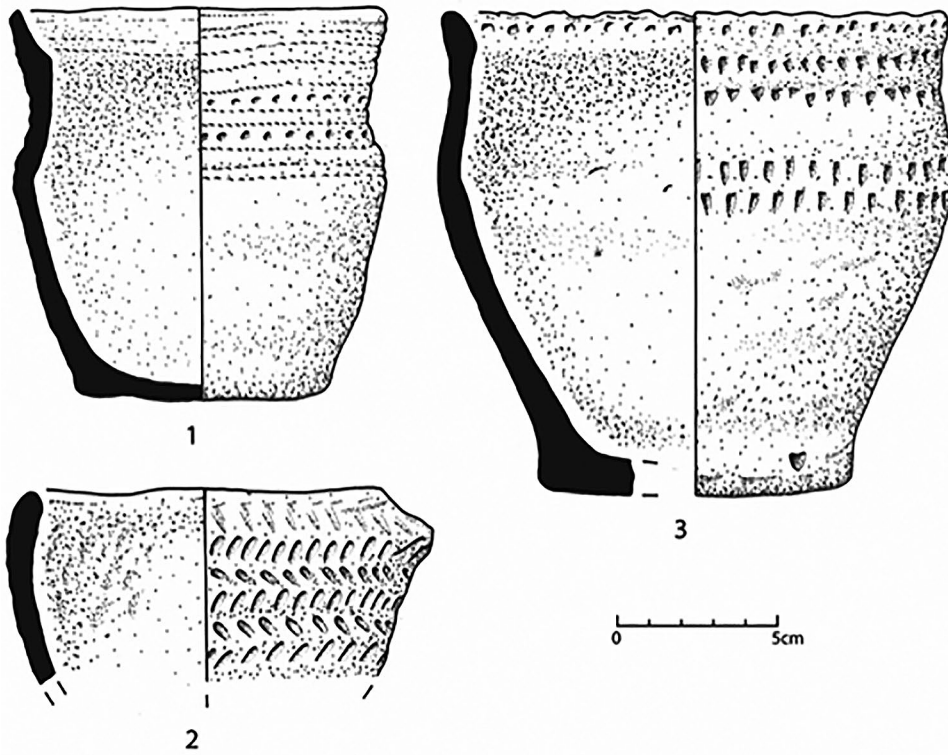


Fig. 14. The decorated Early Bronze Age vessels from within the ring ditch.



Fig. 15. Vessel 1. Beaker with decoration on interior of rim.



Fig. 16. Vessel 2. Herring bone decoration and stub of handle in centre.

the impressions has a distinctive oblique groove cut across it, left in relief in the impression – diameter 110mm.

The rounded profile suggests this is a handled bowl rather than a straight-sided mug or taller beaker, and no.1035 in the Clarke corpus, from Frome Whitwell, Dorset, is most similar in terms of shape. Another handled vessel, described as a food vessel, comes from Orton Meadows, Peterborough (Bamford 2020, 79–80, fig.50.8). The use of herring bone arrangements of motifs is widely paralleled on beakers such as no. 435 FP396 and no. 436 FP 922 from Dover, Kent and Lakenheath, Suffolk, respectively.

VESSEL 3

A partially complete crushed beaker (41 sherds, 560g), manufactured in a fine grog-tempered fabric (G), and with lines of stabbed decoration above a carination, arranged in two pairs of rows with a single row beneath lip, corresponding to another around the inside of the elongated bead rim, is shown in Figs 14 and 17 – diameter 150mm, height 145mm.



Fig. 17. Vessel 3 with stabbed decoration.

The use of rows of stabbed motifs are paralleled in the Corpus on vessel no. 378 FN972 from Kew, Surrey, and no. 379 FN906 from Ipswich, Suffolk. The carinated form, although more rounded than Vessel 1, is again broadly similar to the example of the food vessel from Orton Meadows cited above.

VESSEL 4

Three thin-bodied undecorated and abraded sherds (5g) were found in the same feature as Vessels 1 and 2. These sherds are manufactured in a fine shell-tempered fabric (S1) and do not belong to Vessels 1 and 2.

DISCUSSION

This group of three decorated vessels adds considerably to the corpus of Early Bronze Age pottery from the county, which, nevertheless, remains woefully small. It is of particular interest because of its association with an inhumation burial, and because the vessels are not long-necked beakers, as seen elsewhere in the county (for example, at Asfordby (Cooper 2012)), but are squat and wide mouthed, and similar in

proportion to food vessels. The vessel height and width proportions of Vessels 1 and 3 are almost equal, and the form of Vessel 1, with its in-sloping rim, cavetto zone and carinated profile, is closest to the food vessel definition (Wilkin 2013), whilst Vessel 3 is less angular in profile with an elongated bead rim. Vessels 1 and 3 are similar in proportions and shape to the food vessel from Barrow 2 at Cossington accompanying the central burial of a child (Allen 2008). The lack of reliable radiocarbon dates for these deposits makes it difficult to date these vessels precisely, but assuming they belong to the latter part of the Beaker tradition, and overlapping with the food vessel tradition, then a date between *c.*2200 and 1800 BC is likely.

The worked lithics (Lynden Cooper)

Some 147 worked lithics were recovered from the excavation and a further twenty pieces were recovered from soil samples (13 flakes, six chips and a retouch chip/spall). The raw material of the worked material is generally greyish or yellowish brown semi-translucent flint, derived from superficial till deposits and probably of local origin. This may indicate a rarity of useful flint raw material on site and possibly that workable raw material had to be sought in the site environs. The lack of primary flakes in the collection might suggest that raw material nodules were prepared elsewhere.

Remarkably, there was very little lithic material recovered from the possible Neolithic and Bronze Age features. Certainly, for the features that contained Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery, there was a single flake from the rectangular structure, and fragments of a flake and blade from the fill of the crouched burial. The layer that produced the most Neolithic pottery contained 11 pieces of flint, mostly flake debitage, a single utilised flake and a plunging blade. The latter was



Fig. 18. Triangular arrowhead, possibly an unfinished barb and tanged arrowhead (nb slight concavities on proximal edge); 5mm grid.

patinated and had bladelet scars indicative of Mesolithic technology, contrasting with the later prehistoric flake technology of the remainder.

With the collection treated as a single assemblage there is a small component of 16 tools (12 per cent), with the remainder representing flake technology of domestic Neolithic/Bronze Age activity (bar the aforementioned Mesolithic blade, a bladelet and a bladelet core). The tools comprised five retouched flakes, four scrapers, a utilised flake, a piercer and a small, triangular arrowhead (Fig. 18). The latter may be an unfinished example of a barb and tanged arrowhead of Early Bronze age date.

The small collection of lithics has characteristics of a late prehistoric domestic assemblage. The largest component is from the layer associated with Middle Neolithic ceramics. Together these might be taken as a small midden deposit. There is a lack of material from the large circular 'ring ditch' and the flint from the crouched burial may be residual.

Pollen analysis (Suzi Richer)

A pollen assessment was undertaken on 16 subsamples from two monoliths: one from the large outer ring ditch; and one from the large linear ditch to the west of it. Pollen and spores were present in extremely low concentrations and the interpretations should be regarded cautiously.

Large linear ditch

Eight subsamples were assessed, all of which showed poor survival of pollen, both in terms of degradation and concentration. Compared to the outer ring ditch, slightly more pollen grains were preserved; however, oxidisation accounts for the poor overall preservation. One grain of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) was present and the rest were from herbaceous taxa, primarily grasses (Poaceae) and dandelion (*Taraxacum* is included within *Crepis*-type). Dandelion pollen is extremely resistant to decay and its presence here is likely to be overrepresented. Of note was the spore of *Sordaria*-type, which is a fungal spore associated with rotting vegetation – usually herbivore dung. Only one other spore was noted that was from an algal source. Concentrations of microcharcoal was high, primarily from burning wood, but two subsamples had equal or higher amounts of microcharcoal from burning leaves/grasses.

Outer ring ditch

The high sand content has likely contributed to the decay of pollen grains (due to its abrasive nature) and oxidisation has contributed to the poor preservation. Pollen was largely absent from these subsamples. Single pollen grains from oak (*Quercus robur*-type), grass (Poaceae) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) were found, along with two possible cereal (Cerealia-type) pollen grains. The cereal pollen was badly broken and crumpled, but the pore size suggested that these were cereals rather than grasses.

The most prevalent spore type in this monolith has been tentatively identified to type Hdv-984. Little is known about this spore, but it has been found in Spain

(Carrión and van Geel 1999), where it was associated with algal spores and it is generally attributed to being present in very shallow fresh water. It is thought to be similar to the zygospores from species of certain green algae, in particular *Euastrum ansatum/oblongum* (West 1971; cited in Non-Pollen Palynomorph Image Database, nd.) that are part of the Charophytes division. Charophytes need water that is still, or only slow flowing, with low to moderate levels of biological activity within in it and little pollution from sewage.

Pollen discussion

The preservation of pollen was extremely poor, but some spores and microcharcoal were preserved. The pollen grains that were observed suggest the presence of grasslands around the site with evidence of some oak and hazel; however, given the poor preservation of the pollen, this interpretation should be viewed cautiously.

The large linear ditch contained higher levels of microcharcoal and evidence in the lowest level of a dung fungal spore, suggesting that animal dung could be found either local to the ditch, or it was placed into the ditch itself. Given the high levels of microcharcoal, it would seem likely that either waste material was placed in the ditch or was located very close-by.

In contrast, the outer ring ditch had lower levels of microcharcoal, and contained a Charophytes algal spore that is intolerant to sewage and/or large amounts of organic/biological material in the water. This suggests that the shallow water that formed in the base of this ditch was a lot cleaner by today's standards. Whilst it is unclear whether the linear ditch and the outer circular ditch are contemporary, the evidence does suggest that they were used in different ways. The linear ditch has limited evidence for household/agricultural waste disposal, and the outer circular ditch is slightly 'cleaner' or further away from smoke and waste.

Late Iron Age to Early Roman

In the late Iron Age period three roundhouses were constructed, two over the earlier large outer ring ditch. Several enclosures were identified on the site, along with other settlement activity, and many of these features were still being used into the Early Roman period.

Rectangular enclosure

In the northern part of the site was a large ditch, forming part of a rectangular enclosure. This was orientated east to west measuring more than 30m long, 20m wide and extended beyond the eastern limit of the site. The ditch measured more than 1.2m wide, 0.5–0.7m deep and had steep sides with a broad concave base. The ditch was mainly filled with a mixture of silty or sandy clay, depending on the surrounding geology. Later the ditch was re-cut with a more 'V' shaped ditch, which contained a mixture of silty clay or sand. Iron Age pottery and worked flints were recovered from the upper fills of both the original ditch and re-cut.

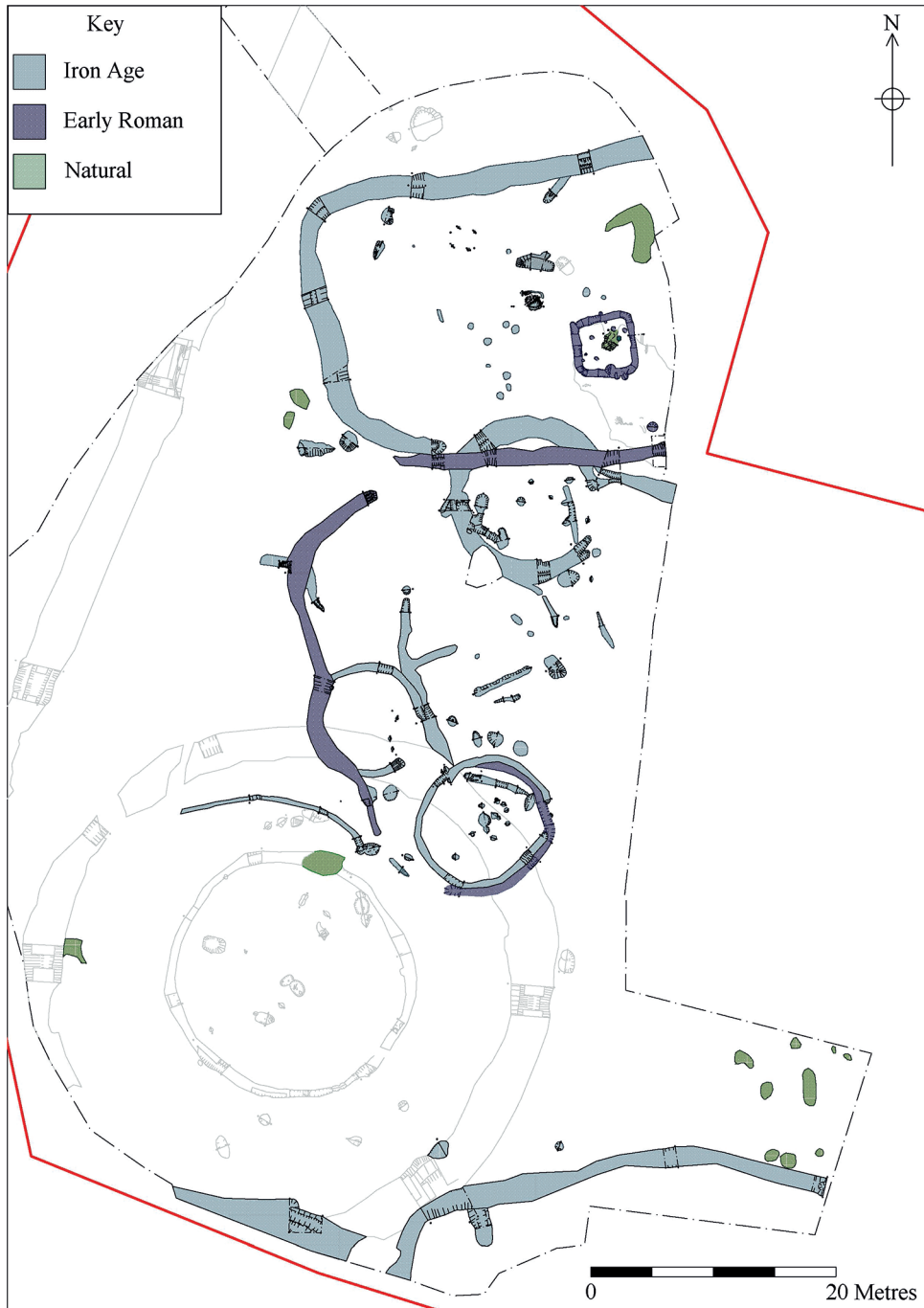


Fig. 19. Plan of the Iron Age and Early Roman features.

A single terminal was located on the southern edge of the enclosure, which terminated in advance of Roundhouse 1. Extending from the easterly edge of the roundhouse, two ditches continued beyond the eastern limit of the site and this may represent the return of the enclosure. Both features appeared to be contemporary and were filled with the same deposit.

Within the large rectangular enclosure was evidence for two structures and associated activity. A quadrilateral/sub-square structure was found in the south-eastern corner of the rectangular enclosure. The feature was formed from a gully enclosing an area measuring 5.22m long and 4.3–5m wide. The gully widened to the east forming a trapezoidal shape. The structure was fully excavated, which revealed each side to be formed from three elongated oval-shaped segments which occasionally overlapped or extended beyond the edge of the structure. The segments each measured 1.15m long, 0.45–0.75m wide, 0.2–0.35m deep and typically had moderately sloping concave sides with a concave base. The northern and western edges were heavily disturbed by animal burrows and another was recorded in the southern edge. The burrows appeared to be following the softer fills that formed the feature. The segmented gully contained a thin primary fill of sandy clay that contained flint flakes. This was covered by a mixed layer of clayey sand with silt that contained worked flint, fired clay, Neolithic and Early Roman pottery and a few cereal grains.

Three sub-circular post holes with a diameter of 0.5–0.85m and a depth of 0.2–0.3m truncated the southern edge of the structure. These were filled with a mixed deposit of sandy clay and silt that contained fired clay, worked flint and mid to late Iron Age pottery. A circular post hole measuring 0.3m diameter and 0.18m deep was also found against the northern edge, but had an unclear relationship with the gully. A spread of circular post holes or stake holes were found across the inside of the structure. They had a diameter of 0.1–0.4m, a depth of 0.1–0.18m and were filled with sandy clay containing worked flint. An irregularly shaped feature within the centre of the structure is likely to be a tree bole.

In the north-western corner of the enclosure was a group of four square post holes. They each had a diameter of 0.2–0.24m, a depth of 0.15–0.18m and were filled with loamy sandy silt. The post holes were spaced 1.15m apart and appeared to form a four-post structure.

An irregular elongated pit measuring 3m long, 1.5m wide and 0.65m deep was found to the east. The feature resembled a tree throw and was filled with sandy clay containing Iron Age pottery. A large quantity of charcoal and burnt cobbles seem to have been dumped into it and to the south a hearth was found. It was surrounded by a patchy metallised surface that was enclosed at the northern end by a small curving gully with a post hole at the end. This could represent the remains of a small structure such as a windbreak or reflecting wall. The hearth contained a single worked flint and was undated; however, due to its proximity to the tree throw, it is potentially the source of the burnt material and Iron Age.

Two sub-oval pits measuring 1.45–1.65m long and 0.75–1m wide were also found in the north-western corner of the enclosure. Both were filled with silty clay and contained Iron Age pottery and flint. To the east of the pits were several circular or oval features measuring 0.2–0.7m long, 0.24–0.4m wide and 0.18m deep. These

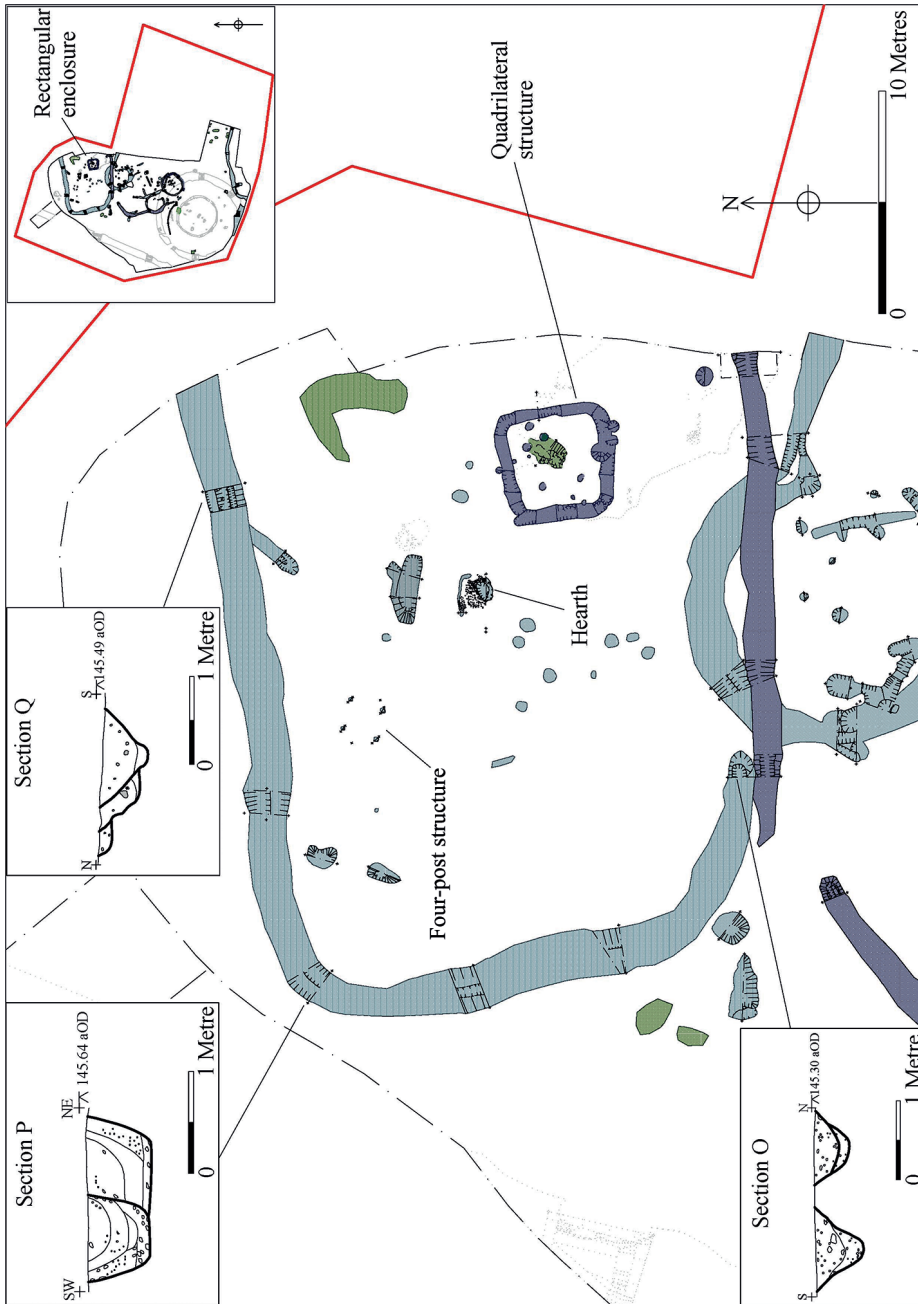


Fig. 20. Plan of the rectangular enclosure.



Fig. 21. Plan and sections of the quadrilateral structure.

are likely to be post holes or small pits, and another amorphous spread of similarly sized features were also found in the centre of the enclosure. These were typically filled with sandy silt or silty clay and contained Iron Age pottery.

Two undated oval pits were found outside of the enclosure to the south-west. They were filled with sandy clay and one contained concentrations of charcoal with a cereal grain. Another sub-circular pit filled with sandy clay was found in the opposite corner of the enclosure.

Roundhouse 1

Three roundhouses were found on the site and Roundhouse 1 was found next to the large rectangular enclosure. This roundhouse was surrounded by a complex series of ditches, gullies and pits, which terminated on the eastern side to form an entrance. The south-western side of the roundhouse was not accessible due to the presence of a pylon. The majority of the roundhouse was formed by two ditches, although a third was found along the deeper north-western side. They measured 0.4–1.2m wide, 0.1–0.4m deep and were all filled with a mixture of sandy or clay silt. The earliest ditch contained Iron Age pottery, a fired clay oven plate (Sf. 1) and charred cereals. The re-cut contained burnt stones, Iron Age pottery, a sherd of Early Roman pottery, worked flint, fired clay, a quern stone (Sf. 2) and several types of cereal grains. The latest ditch, dug around the north-western edge, contained Iron Age pottery and worked flints.

The north-eastern side of the roundhouse was complicated with several gullies modifying the original ditches. The terminal had been extended to the east by the addition of a gully that measured 0.15–0.8m wide and 0.25m deep. This was then re-cut by another similarly sized gully that fed into a ditch to the east. Both the gully and the ditch contained the same fill and are probably contemporary.

Several other gullies measuring 0.4–0.7m wide and 0.1–0.25m deep were found projecting away from the ditches surrounding the southern and western sides of the roundhouse. These were all filled with a mixture of silty clays and appeared to be the latest additions. Several more gullies containing Iron Age pottery were found on the inside edge of the roundhouse and appeared to be feeding into the surrounding ditches. Shallow oval pits measuring 0.75–1m long, 0.5–0.8m wide and 0.08–0.25m deep were also found. These were all filled with silty or sandy clay, and contained Iron Age pottery and worked flint. Three sub-circular post holes were also found in the centre of the roundhouse. They had a diameter of 0.3–0.35m, a depth of 0.1–0.27m and were filled with sandy silt with sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Roundhouse 2

A second roundhouse was found 11m to the south-west and was partly dug into the large outer ring ditch. Two ditches surrounded most of the roundhouse and these terminated in the east to form an entrance. The earliest ditch measured 0.7–0.75m wide, 0.25–0.65m deep and had moderately sloping sides except for the southern terminal, which was steeper. The fills were either a silty clay or sand containing burnt stones, flecks of charcoal, flint, Iron Age pottery and cereal grains.

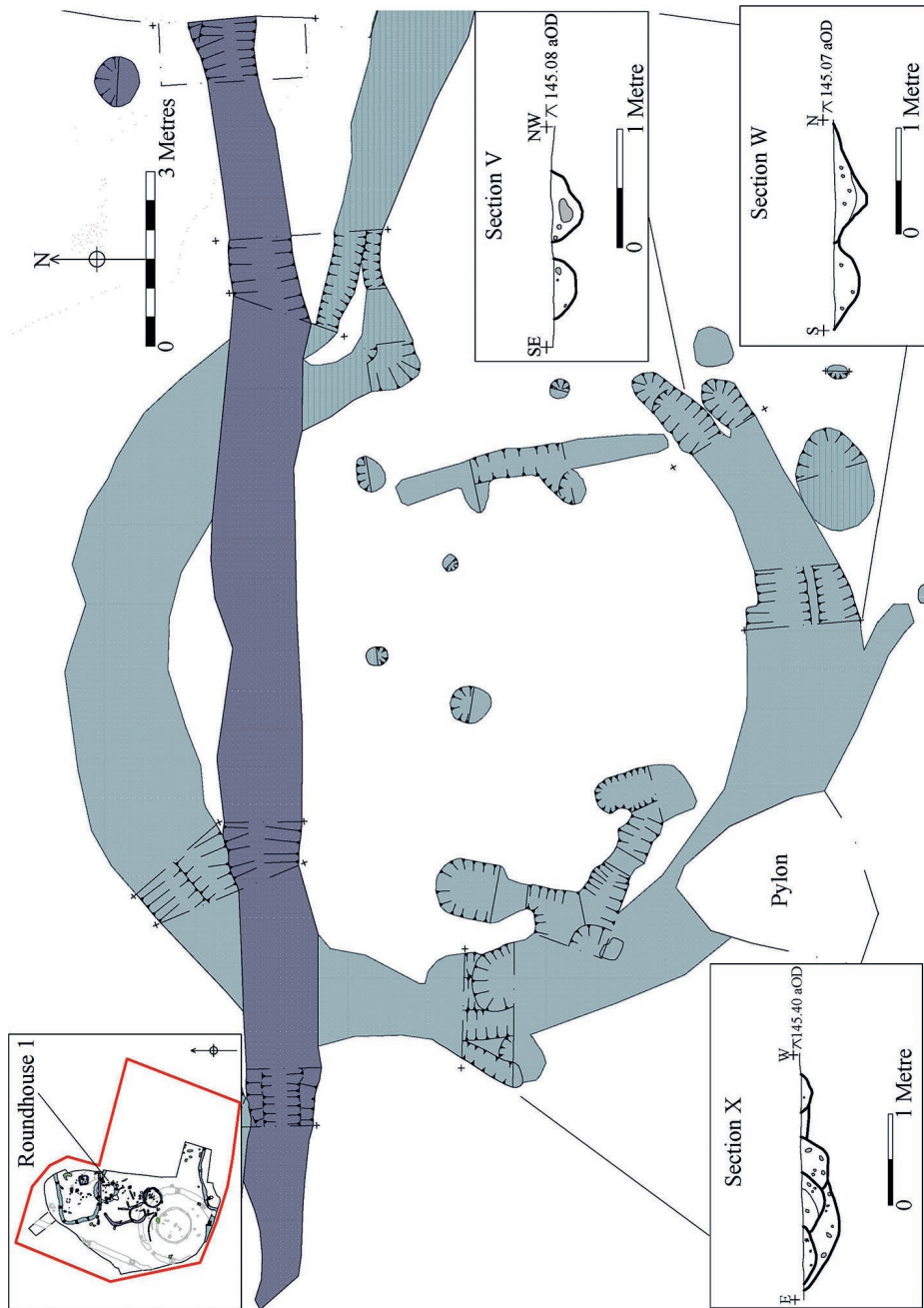


Fig. 22. Plan of Roundhouse 1.

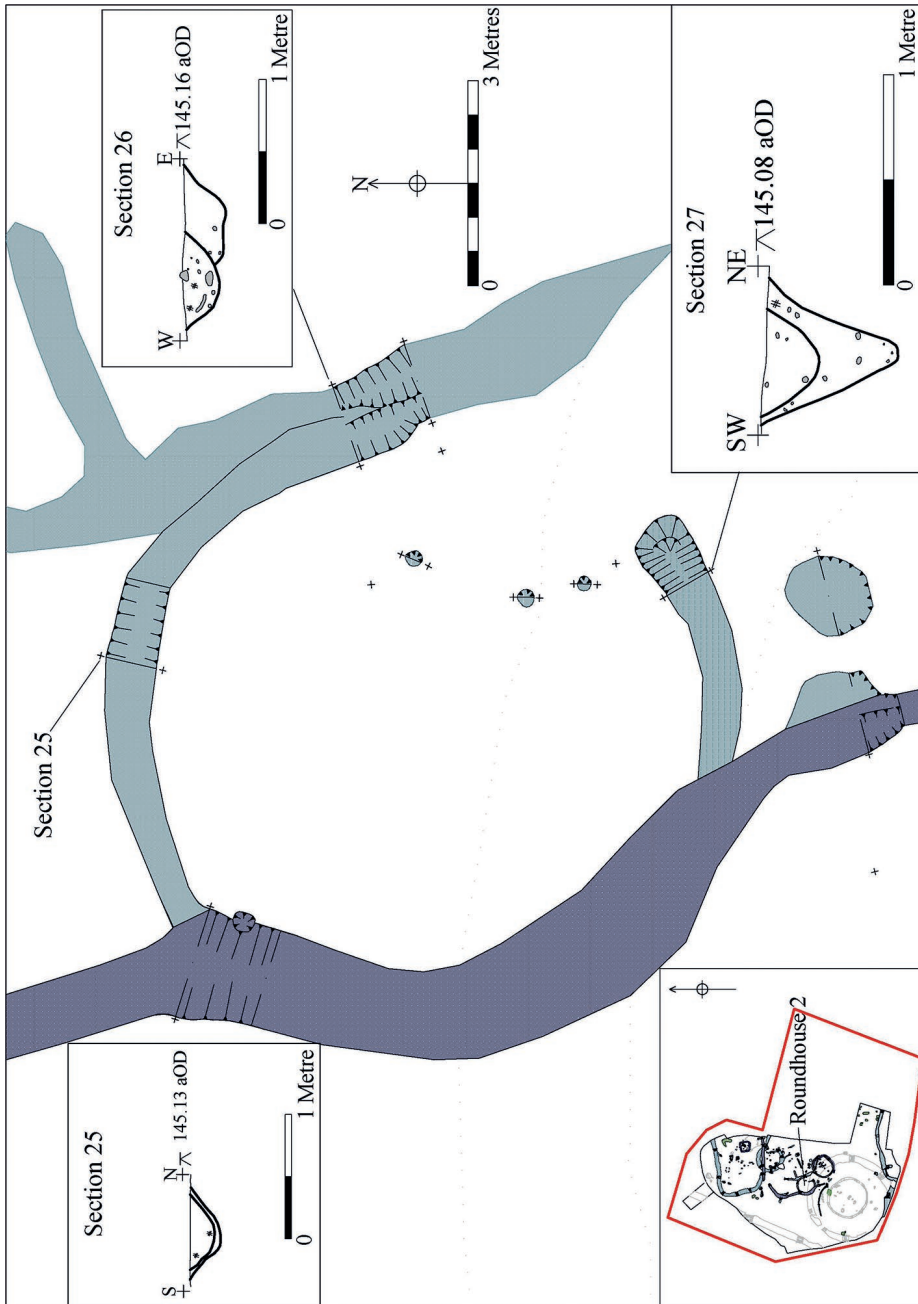


Fig. 23. Plan and sections of Roundhouse 2.

Three shallow post holes were found inside the roundhouse close to the entranceway. The post holes were circular with a diameter of 0.2–0.25m, a depth of 0.1–0.15m and were filled with silty clay. Close to the southern side of Roundhouse 2 was a circular pit with a diameter of 1.1m and a depth of 0.3m. It was filled with clayey sand that contained abraded sherds of Iron Age pottery and cereal grains.

Roundhouse 3

A third roundhouse was found to the south-east and this was also dug into the earlier large outer ring ditch. The ditch that surrounded the outside of the roundhouse had been considerably modified during a later period. The original ditch had moderately sloping sides and measured 0.5–0.65m wide and 0.15–0.3m deep. It was filled with silty clay containing flecks of charcoal, Iron Age pottery, fired clay and worked flint. Cereal grains that possibly included emmer wheat were also found.

The earliest ditch terminated on the eastern side to form an entrance; however, a later ditch truncated it. The southern terminal of the latest ditch was identified; however, the northern terminal was unclear, but probably ended in the wider northern section of the roundhouse. This ditch did not extend into the western side and appeared to form a 'C' shape. It measured 0.5–0.8m wide, 0.15–0.3m deep and was deepest on the eastern side. It was filled with silty clay containing Late Iron Age to Early Roman pottery, flint and fired clay. It was also found to contain a higher density of cereal grains than the earlier ditch.

A gully first identified in the eastern end of Trench 3, during the evaluation, was found inside the roundhouse close to the northern edge. The gully was orientated east to west, measured 5.5m long, 0.5m wide and 0.1–0.4m deep. It was filled with silty clay that contained Late Iron Age pottery, flint and cereal grains. A sub-oval pit filled measuring 1.5m long, 0.75m wide and 0.12m deep was found at the eastern end of the gully. It was filled with silty clay and had an unclear relationship with the gully.

A large oval pit (Section 30, Fig. 24) measuring 1.17m long by 0.98m wide was found in the centre of the roundhouse. The pit had a depth of 0.61m and was infilled with several deposits that were all mixtures of silts and clays. The lowest layer contained charcoal and dense concentrations of cereal grains. Tip lines were found along the edges, indicating material had fallen back into the pit. A quern stone (Sf. 6) and a small quantity of cereal grains were found in the central fill. The upper layers were thin and stained a red colour, indicating they were heat affected. Iron Age pottery, fired clay, worked flint and cereal grains were also found in these layers.

A concentration of sub-rectangular or sub-oval post holes and small pits were also found in the centre of the roundhouse. They measured 0.2–0.6m long, 0.2–0.5m wide and 0.15–0.7m deep and were filled with silty or sandy clay. The post holes closest to the central pit had concentrations of charcoal within them, along with Iron Age pottery, barley and possibly emmer wheat.

Several small circular post holes and stake holes were also found against the inner and outer edges of the roundhouse ditch. They had a diameter of 0.15–0.25m, a depth of 0.1m and were filled with sandy silt. Two shallow pits measuring 0.4–

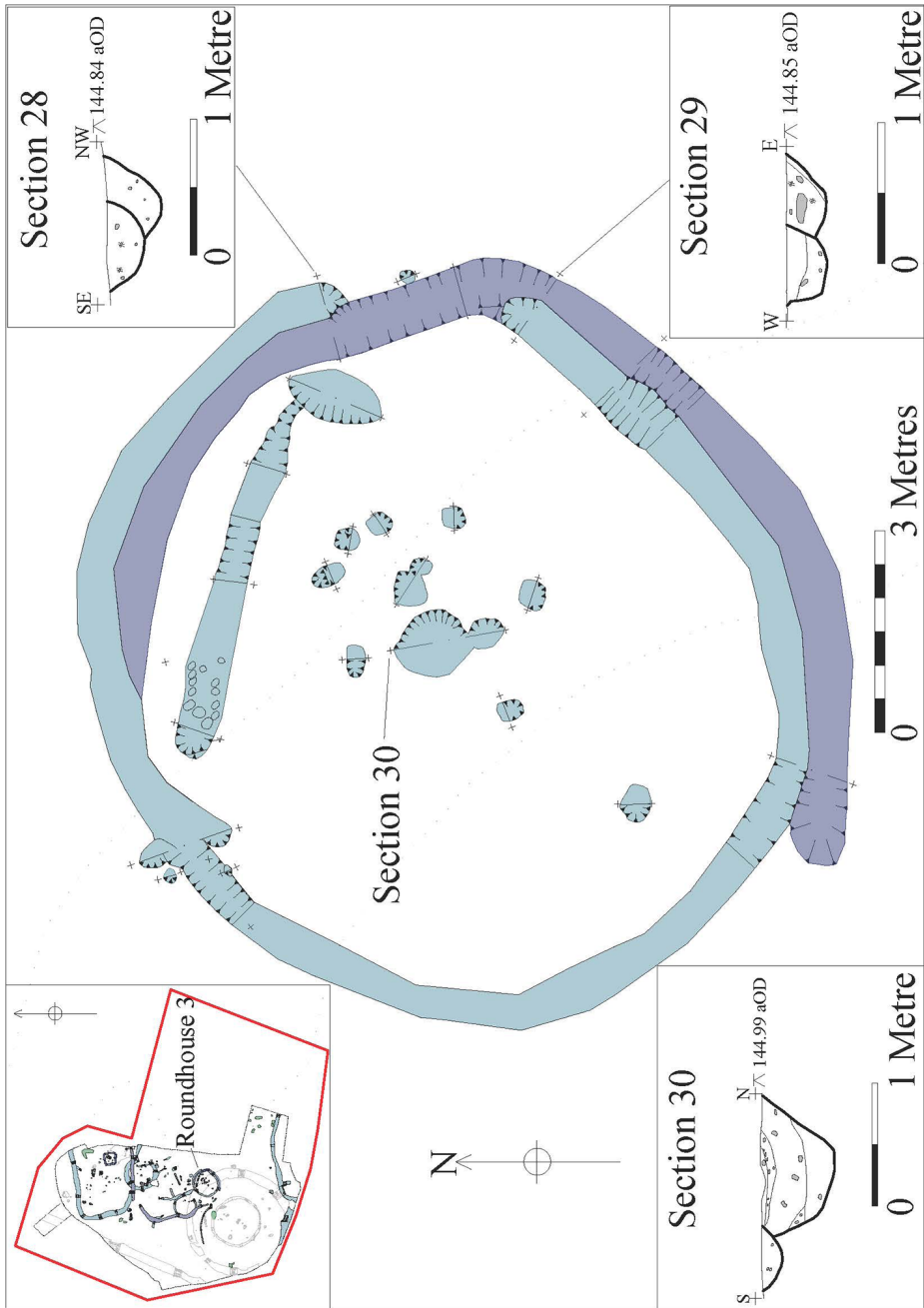


Fig. 24. Plan of Roundhouse 3.

0.6m long, 0.4m wide and 0.05–0.1m deep were also found by the roundhouse ditch. One appeared to be truncating the top of the ditch and both were filled with sandy silt containing fired clay.

Features located between the roundhouses

A spread of pits, post holes and gullies were also found between the three roundhouses. Two sub-oval pits measuring 1.5–2m long, 1–1.4m wide and 0.3–0.6m deep were found close to the southern edge of Roundhouse 1. Both appeared to be respecting the roundhouse ditch, and were filled with silty clay containing mid to late Iron Age pottery, Early Roman pottery, fired clay and flint.

A line of circular post holes with a diameter of 0.25–0.54m and a depth of 0.1–0.56m extended to the south-west. They were all filled with silty sand that contained flecks of charcoal and Iron Age pottery. Two north-west to south-east orientated gullies measuring 3m long, 0.3–0.6m wide and 0.1–0.3m deep were found to the south of Roundhouse 1. They were filled with a silty or sandy clay that contained Iron Age pottery. One of the gullies may have originally extended into the southern part of the roundhouse ditch. Two more gullies orientated north-east to south-west were found between Roundhouse 1 and 2. These measured between 2–5m long, 0.35–0.5m wide and 0.1–0.2m deep. They were filled with a mixture of sandy silt, which contained sherds of Iron Age to Early Roman pottery and barley.

Several sub-oval shaped pits were found close to the gullies and around the northern edge of Roundhouse 3. They measured 0.75–1.3m long, 0.6–1.6m wide, 0.3m deep and were filled with clayey silt that contained a small amount of cereal grains. One of these pits also contained a small sub-square stake hole in the base. The eastern edge of Roundhouse 2 was dug into an earlier north to south orientated ditch. The ditch measured 8.5m long, 0.7–0.85m wide, 0.15–0.35m deep and had a small pit at the northern terminal. Both features were filled with sandy clay and the ditch shallowed as it approached the large outer ring ditch.

Several features were found between the two earlier ring ditches to the south-west of Roundhouse 2 and 3. A curvilinear gully measuring 21.6m long, 0.3–0.75m wide and 0.1–0.25m deep had been dug. It was filled with sandy clay containing Iron Age pottery and appeared to follow the curve of the ring ditches. Several oval pits measuring 0.5–1.25m long, 0.5–1m wide and 0.5m deep were also found in this area. These were filled with sandy silt containing flint and Iron Age pottery. One of these contained frequent flecks of charcoal and burnt stones. This pit appeared to be burned *in situ* and a charred grain of wheat was also found within it.

Ditches truncating the roundhouses

The northern edge of Roundhouse 1 was truncated by a 21m-long ditch orientated east to west. It terminated close to the end of the large rectangular enclosure and it was unclear whether this formed the southern side of the enclosure. The ditch varied from 1–1.3m wide to 0.5–0.6m deep and was filled with silty clay. Flint, animal bone and late Iron Age to Early Roman pottery was found in it. Another ditch terminated 2.5m to the south-west and appeared to be forming an entranceway with

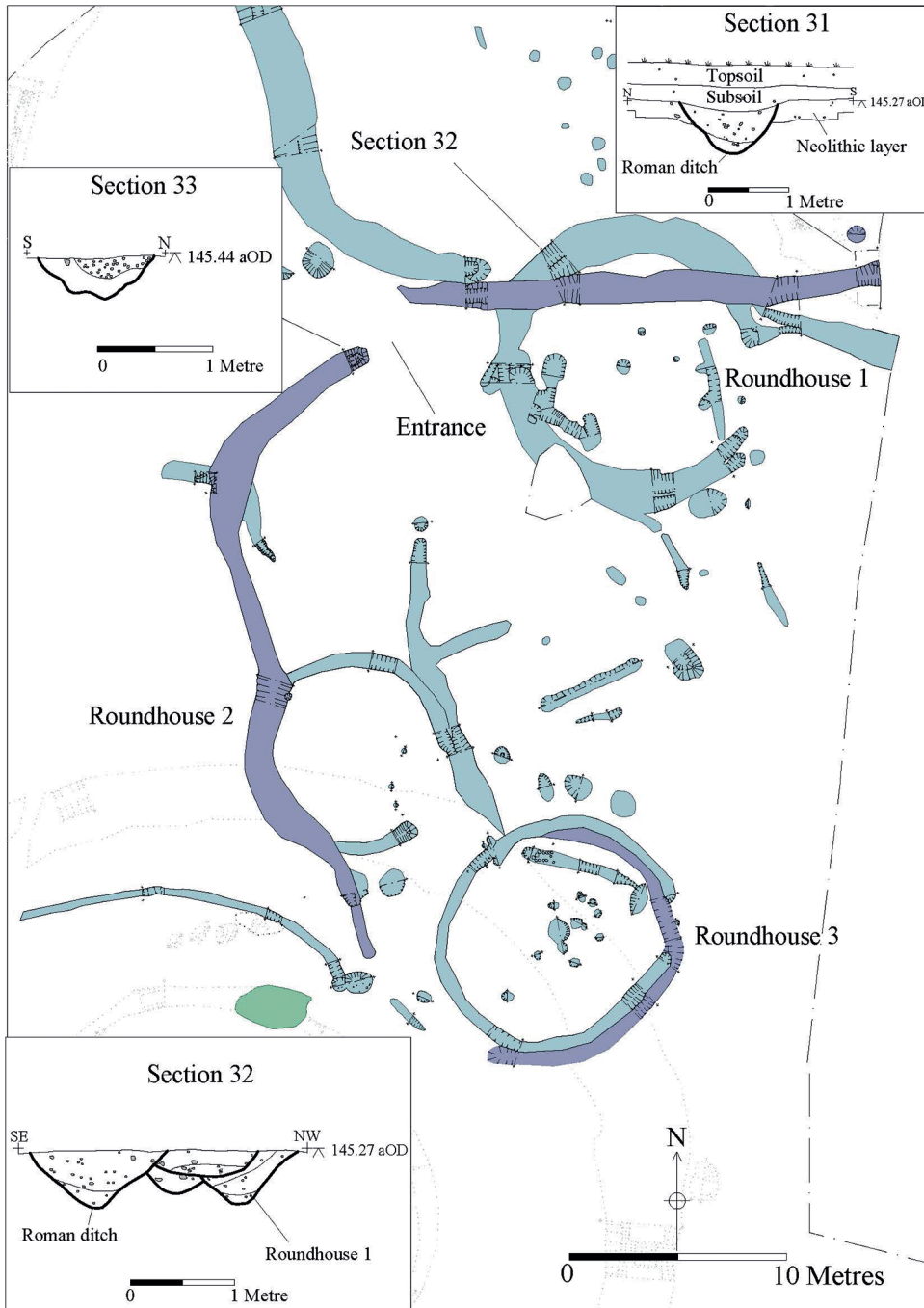


Fig. 25. Plan of the features surrounding the roundhouses.

it. This ditch measured 30m long and curved to the south, where it bent around the western edge of Roundhouse 2 and truncated the original ditch. It ranged from 0.85–2m wide to 0.3–0.45m deep and was filled with silty sand that contained mid-late Iron Age pottery and flint. A small ditch measuring 4.5m long, 0.5–0.85m wide and 0.2m deep was also truncated by the ditch.

Features in the south-east

An enclosure ditch measuring 30m long, 1.6m wide and 0.2–0.65m deep was located in the south-eastern corner of the site. The western end curved to the south, where it truncated the outer ring ditch. It was filled with silty clay that contained Iron Age pottery and a single animal tooth. A pit measuring 3m long, 1.3m wide and 0.2m deep was found within it, which may represent contemporary activity. Another smaller sub-circular pit truncated the edge of the enclosure. Both were mainly filled with silty clay; however, the smaller pit also contained a layer of charcoal with a cereal grain in the base. Several irregular features were found to the north of the ditch and these were all naturally formed. Two sub-circular pits with a diameter of 0.75–1.2m and a depth of 0.2–0.75m were also found. The pits were filled with silty clay containing Iron Age pottery, fired clay and a grain of wheat. One of these truncated the inside edge of the outer ring ditch.

Another curving enclosure measuring more than 15m long was found at the southern edge of the site. It was formed from two ditches that truncated the large outer ring ditch and continued south beyond the edge of the excavation. The original ditch had moderately sloping sides, but the later re-cut had steeper sides and was ‘V’ shaped. The ditches measured 1–2m wide, 0.75m deep and were filled with layers of loamy silt or silty clay that contained late Iron Age to Early Roman pottery.

The Iron Age and Early (transitional) Roman pottery (Nicholas J. Cooper)

A total of 188 sherds (1,060g) of Iron Age and Early Roman pottery were recovered from the Iron Age settlement. The average sherd weight of 5g is low and is coupled with high levels of abrasion, and a lack of diagnostic rim sherds and decoration. However, scoring does occur on nine sherds, indicating a Middle to Late Iron Age date, and the presence of Transitional Roman fabrics such as sandy wares and shell-tempered wares indicates that the settlement was still occupied in the middle decades of the first century AD.

A quantified summary of the assemblage, in terms of the proportions of vessel fabrics represented, is presented in table 1. As would be expected for a site in the south of the county, 70 per cent of the Iron Age pottery is made from clay recipes incorporating opening materials of fossil shell (Fabrics S1 and S2) from Northamptonshire, but it also includes those employing granitic rock from the Mountsorrel outcrops of granodiorite in the Charnwood Forest area (Fabric R1), to the north, (Knight *et al.* 2003), making 3 per cent of the assemblage (one uses syenite from the Croft outcrop). A further 4 per cent comprises fabrics tempered with quartz sand (Fabrics Q1 and Q4). Only six rims from slack-shouldered, or barrel-shaped, jars were recovered; all upright (or direct) with plain, flat or triangular lips,

Fabric	Fabric code	Sherds	Weight (g)	% Sherds
Iron Age Granite	R1	6	152	3
Iron Age Quartz	Q1/Q4	7	32	4
Iron Age Shelly	S1/S2	132	501	70
E. Roman Shelly	CG1A	33	263	17
E. Roman Sandy	SW2	12	112	6
Total		190	1,060	100

Table 1. Quantified summary of the Iron Age and Early Roman pottery assemblage by fabric.

and all typical of the Middle to Late Iron Age scored ware tradition. Scoring was only recorded on a small number of sherds, although the abrasion to many sherds may have prevented its preservation.

The transitional Roman fabrics are, again, typical, including jars and storage jars in shell-tempered ware (CG1A) (17 per cent) and jars in finer, sandy wares with 'Belgic'-style features (SW2) (6 per cent). Spatially, transitional wares occur in limited areas, making up all of the later pottery from the rectangular structure. A shell-tempered storage jar was found in the ditch surrounding Roundhouse 1, whilst a carinated bowl in sandy ware was recovered from a gully between Roundhouses 1 and 2. Another sherd with a cordon came from the rectangular structure.

An assemblage of 121 fragments of fired clay or burnt daub weighing 970g was recovered, comprising small, amorphous fragments, including many from the Neolithic layer weighing less than a gram each. Diagnostic fragments: one with finger smoothed surfaces from within the rectangular structure; and another with a wattle impression came from a pit to the south-east of the large outer ring ditch; 36 fragments (367g), probably from a perforated oven plate (Sf. 1), also came from the ditch surrounding Roundhouse 1.

The worked stone (John Thomas)

Four examples of potentially worked or modified stone were recovered during the excavation, comprising two sandstone saddle querns (Sf. 2 & 6), an unstratified but regularly shaped block of limestone (Sf. 3), and a long, sandstone cobble with modified ends.

The pair of large saddle querns (Fig. 26 and Fig. 27) were both recovered from Late Iron Age/Early Roman contexts associated with roundhouses. Saddle querns have been found in many other Iron Age contexts on Leicestershire sites (Thomas and Roe 2011), but these are usually associated with Early and Middle Iron Age dates and are, on the whole, smaller objects. The two saddle querns from this site are more substantial and have clearly seen some use, going by their significant wear patterns. It seems likely given the earlier activity on the site that these are either Neolithic or Bronze Age objects that were later incorporated into Iron Age deposits. Sf. 6 is interesting in that it has two centrally positioned holes that may have been

intended for a spindle, similar to those associated with rotary querns of the Iron Age – indicating that it was re-used as the base of such a quern by the Iron Age occupants of the site.

The third object (Sf. 3) has an unusual geology for the local area and may have been introduced to the site, possibly as a glacial erratic. It is unclear if the object was deliberately worked, although it does have a regular trapezoidal shape. Unfortunately, it was unstratified and so cannot be associated with any particular phase of occupation on the site.

The fourth object (Fig. 28) was found in a pit of uncertain date, just outside the outer Early Bronze Age ring ditch. The ends of the smooth sandstone cobble are rough and pitted, as if modified through a pounding or grinding action. The fact that the cobble was found in the lower fill, with no other associated finds, suggests that it was selected out for use, as large cobbles are only found deeper down in the natural site.

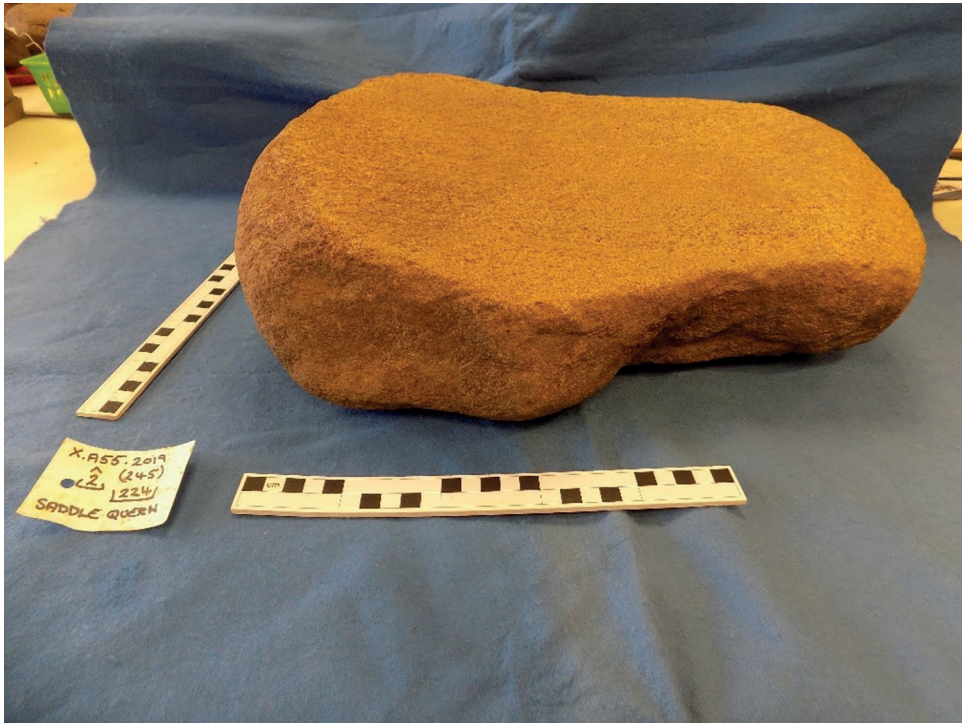


Fig. 26. Saddle quern (SF2) from (245) [224] Roundhouse 1.



Fig. 27. Saddle quern (SF6), modified for insertion of a rotary quern spindle, from (477) Roundhouse 3.



Fig. 28. Pounding or grinding stone from (683).

The animal bone (William Johnson)

Bone was recovered from ten contexts, including the fills of pits, linear ditches, the large outer ring ditch and a roundhouse gully (Table 2). Two of the features, a large ditch and the ring ditch, are thought to be of Bronze Age date, but infilled during the Iron Age. In total, 94 fragments of bone were recovered.

In addition to the material collected by hand, animal bone was also recovered from the heavy residues of bulk environmental samples. Bone was recovered from 12 additional contexts from the samples and from one context that also had hand-collected material.

Period	Feature	Contexts	Fragments	Specimens
Iron Age	Ditches	3	33	21
	Pits	2	26	22
	Ring ditch	1	22	22
	Gully	1	1	1
Sub total		7	82	66
Post medieval	Ditches	1	1	1
	Pits	2	7	4
Sub total		3	12	5
Overall total		10	94	71

Table 2. Fragment and specimen counts by period and feature.

Results

Reassembly and grouping of associated bone and tooth fragments reduced the assemblage count from 94 fragments to 71 specimens.

PRESERVATION AND FRAGMENTATION

The surface preservation of the bone was poor. The majority of specimens had lost large areas of their outer surfaces and some of the larger surviving fragments had a soft, leathery texture, and layers of bone were observed to be peeling away (see Fig. 29). Only the bone recovered from the top of the large outer ring ditch was recorded as having a good level of preservation. No difference in preservation was observed between the material from the pits and the ditches, with all specimens being rated as poor.

Fragmentation within the assemblage was very high, likely a result of the poor preservation of the material. This even impacted the survival of teeth with many existing only as enamel fragments, and no complete specimens of bone or tooth being present. The poor preservation and high levels of fragmentation had a significant impact on the analysis of the material, with only 27 per cent of specimens able to be identified to species.



Fig. 29. Cranial and caudal view of cattle metatarsal from a post-medieval ditch showing erosion of bone and peeling of surface (red arrow).

Species representation and NISP

Only a small range of species could be identified from the remains, and included horse, cattle and sheep/goat (see Table 3). The poor preservation and high fragmentation is likely to have led to a high degree of biasing within the assemblage, in favour of the survival and identification of bones from larger taxa such as horse and cattle.

The relatively high frequency of horse remains was due to the survival of tooth fragments, the hard enamel and distinctive shape aiding in survival and identification. Fragments of three cheek teeth were recovered from fills of an Iron Age pit and ditch, as well as a partial mandible from a post-medieval pit, which could be identified by

		NISP	%NISP
Iron Age	Horse	6	50
	Sheep/goat	4	33.3
	Cattle	2	16.7
	TOTAL	12	100
	Large mammal	14	
	Medium mammal	17	
	Indeterminate	23	
TOTAL	66		
Post med	Cattle	3	75
	Horse	1	25
	TOTAL	4	100
	Indeterminate	1	
TOTAL	5		

Table 3. NISP and %NISP of hand-collected animal bone presented by period.

the presence of four cheek teeth. A small group of horse bone was recovered from the large outer ring ditch.

Fewer cattle teeth were present and were more highly fragmented than those of horses. One specimen came from the top of the large linear ditch, while ten associated fragments were recovered from the Late Iron Age to Early Roman ditch that truncated Roundhouse 1. A small number of cattle bone was also present, all deriving from post-medieval contexts. A very poorly preserved nearly complete femur and metacarpal were recovered from a quarry pit and a distal metatarsal fragment from a trackway ditch.

Sheep/goat remains were present in a single context, an Iron Age pit in the centre of Roundhouse 3, where a small number of calcined elements were present including fragments of two calcaneums, a pelvis and tibia.

Ageing

Epiphyseal fusion data was recorded for six hand-collected elements, three sheep/goat bone, two cattle bones and one horse bone (Table 4). In all cases the bones were fully fused, providing only minimum ages for the animals. A fused distal cattle femur from a post-medieval quarry pit indicates the presence of a mature animal.

Context	Period	Element	Taxa	Proximal fusion	Distal fusion	Age (months)
497	Iron Age	Femur	Horse	Fused		
548	Iron Age	Calcaneum	Sheep/goat	Fused		>23
548	Iron Age	Calcaneum	Sheep/goat	Fused		>23
548	Iron Age	Tibia	Sheep/goat		Fused	>15
185	Post-med	Metacarpal	Cattle		Fused	>24
260	Post-med	Femur	Cattle		Fused	>42

Table 4. Data from epiphyseal fusion.

Bone from samples

In addition to the hand-collected material, bone was recovered from 12 Iron Age and Early Roman contexts through the sorting of heavy residues from environmental samples. The bone recovered was all tiny indeterminate fragments and was all calcined except for the bone from a post hole within the rectangular structure. In addition, 18 indeterminate calcined fragments were recovered from the Iron Age pit in the centre of Roundhouse 3.

Discussion

The poor preservation and high fragmentation limit the conclusions that can be drawn from the data. Due to the biases brought about by the taphonomic alterations to the assemblage, the true relative representation of taxa and age groups are unlikely

to be represented in the assemblage. The lack of this useable data, combined with uncertainties regarding the dating of features, precludes an attempt to investigate animal husbandry and the use of animal resources. The horse remains are likely to derive from working animals and the group of calcined sheep elements from the Iron Age pit in the centre of Roundhouse 3 could indicate the presence of a hearth.

Charred plant remains (Rachel Small and Adam Santer)

Charred plant remains (CPR) were recovered from 49 samples (53.8 per cent). The majority were recovered from the flots, except 11 samples that were retrieved from the heavy residues. Generally, samples contained mixtures of cereal grains, chaff and wild seeds in low densities. However, denser concentrations of CPR were recovered from a pit near Roundhouse 2, the later ditch surrounding Roundhouse 3 and the pit in the centre. All of them dated to the Late Iron Age to Early Roman period and the preservation of the remains was fair.

Middle Neolithic

The layer was sampled and ten were selected for processing. Three contained plant remains in low quantities. A barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) grain, indeterminate cereal grain and large grass (Poaceae) seed were recovered. A post hole of possible Neolithic date was also sampled, and contained a spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta* L.) grain and an indeterminate cereal grain.

Early Bronze Age

Samples were taken from multiple slots of the large outer ring ditch and targeted the initial silting of the outer ring ditch. All samples were processed but did not contain any CPR. Similarly the upper fills did not produce any remains. Samples were taken from both phases of the central ring ditch. Samples were from the earlier palisade and further samples from the later ditch fill. All four samples contained CPR but in low quantities. Cereal grains were present and it was possible to identify glume wheat (*Triticum* spp.). Hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana* L.) fragments were also present in one sample and vetch (*Vicia* spp.) type seeds in another.

Within the central ring ditch was a crouched burial and samples from the grave fill did not produce any CPR. The grave was truncated by a similarly shaped feature that contained two partially complete beakers or food vessels (Vessels 1 and 2). A sample taken from this fill contained a small number of cereal grains, including barley, hazelnut shell fragments, and a large grass and vetch seed. The content of Vessel 2 was also processed but did not contain any material.

The other possible grave located close to the north-eastern edge of the central ring ditch also contained a partially complete beaker (Vessel 3). The fill from the feature contained two cereal grains, including glume wheat, a hazelnut shell fragment, a large grass seed and an indeterminate seed.

Late Iron Age to Early Roman

Samples from a pit close to the southern side of Roundhouse 2 show that seeds were most abundant (49.9 per cent), and these were predominantly large grass. The proportion of glume bases (32.5 per cent) and cereal grains (17.5 per cent) was also notable, only a small amount of nutshell was present (0.1 per cent). For cereal grains that could be identified to species/genus, glume wheat, some of which could be identified as spelt, was most common. A small amount of barley was also present (2.3 per cent). Both emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) and spelt wheat glume bases were identified, and the latter seems to have been more common. As stated, large grass seeds were found in abundance, but smaller numbers of cleavers (*Galium aparine* L.), dock (*Rumex* spp.), common chickweed (*Stellaria media* L.), stinking mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum* (L.) Sch-Bipand) and vetch seeds were also present.

Several pits and post holes were found close to the edge of the rectangular enclosure. Soil from a pit next to the rectangular enclosure was processed and contained an indeterminate cereal grain, alongside three cleaver seeds. An irregular pit or tree throw that contained dumps of charcoal and burnt stones was processed, along with the fill of the nearby hearth, but did not produce any CPR.

The segmented gully of the quadrilateral structure was sampled at regular intervals. Samples from each side, and from both the primary and secondary fills, were selected for processing. The primary fill did not produce any CPR, but a small amount was recovered from the secondary layer (a single false oat (*Arrhetherum elatius* (L.) P. Beauv)) seed and four cereal grains (one tentatively identified as free-threshing wheat). Within the centre of the structure samples contained a single indeterminate cereal grain, and a cereal grain identified as spelt wheat. A series of post holes that truncated the quadrilateral structure were also sampled and contained a single free-threshing wheat (*Triticum* spp.) grain.

Several samples were taken from the complex ditch and gully system surrounding Roundhouse 1. The earliest ditch contained a small number of cereal grains, including spelt wheat, glume bases, several wild seeds (goosefoot (*Chenopodium* spp.), knotgrasses (*Polygonum* sp.), grass seeds, buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp.), dock and false oat). The re-cut contained cereal grains including barley, emmer, and spelt wheat, alongside glume bases and large grass seeds. The gully that truncated the northern terminal of the ditch system contained a possible emmer grain, an indeterminate cereal grain and a dock seed. The fill of a post hole in the centre of the roundhouse contained four barley grains, ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata* L.) seeds and a large grass seed; whilst the fill of a nearby pit contained a spelt grain and a wheat glume base.

A medium density of remains, 11 items per litre, was found in the earliest ditch surrounding Roundhouse 2. The deposit included a mixture of cereal grains, chaff and wild seeds. Most of the cereal grains were indeterminate, but it was possible to identify barley and spelt wheat grains, and roughly a quarter of the glume bases could be identified as spelt wheat. Large grass seeds were common in the deposit and a single seed of scentless mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum* (L.) Sch-Bip) was present.

The ditch surrounding Roundhouse 3 contained several cereal grains, predominantly barley, but wheat grains (possibly including emmer) were also identified. A large grass seed was also present. The small gully found close to the inside northern edge of the roundhouse contained a spelt grain and a large grass seed. There was also a series of post holes inside the roundhouse that were sampled. A total of eight cereal grains were found in one post hole, three of which could be identified as barley. A possible emmer grain was found in a different post hole and another had a dock seed. The large pit in the centre of Roundhouse 3 contained five deposits that were each sampled. The lowest contained a dense concentration of remains, circa 49 items per litre. Most abundant was cereal grains and in total 273 were found; both spelt wheat and barley were present in significant numbers. Large grass seeds were commonly identified (99 in total) and small numbers of other wild seeds including dock, knotgrass and vetch. Four glume bases and a straw culm node were also present. The other deposits in the pit contained much smaller concentrations of cereal grains, chaff and wild seeds. Barley, spelt and emmer grains were identified, alongside seeds of cleavers, false oat, knotgrass, vetch, dock and large grass. *Prunus* spp. stones were also present, including sloe (*Prunus spinosa* L.), as well as fragments of hazelnut shell.

The roundhouse re-cut contained three cereal grains; two were identified as barley and seeds including large grass. The samples were of similar composition with cereal grains being by far the most abundant. Most were indeterminate, but for those which could be identified to species/genus, specimens of barley and glume wheat were both numerous. A small number of glume bases and a straw culm node were also present, alongside wild seeds including holly (*Ilex aquifolium* L.), grasses, and vetch.

Plant remains discussion

The Middle Neolithic and Early Bronze Age features sampled produced small amounts of cereal grains, hazelnut shell fragments and wild seeds. Cereal grains identified included barley generic wheat, spelt wheat and the wild seeds including vetch and large grass. Low densities of remains are typically recovered from sites dating to earlier periods; for example, at Oakham, Rutland (Monckton 1998, 323). The age of the feature that contained the spelt wheat was uncertain and since the earliest confirmed example of spelt wheat from the region dates to the Bronze Age (Monckton 2006, 267), it is likely that the grain is either intrusive or the feature relates to later activity at the site.

Cereal grains recovered from Late Iron Age to Early Roman features included barley, and this seems to have been the dominant crop at the site alongside spelt wheat, with emmer and free-threshing wheat present in smaller quantities. The latter two cereals are generally found in small quantities at other sites dating to this period (Monckton 2006, 270). However, there is the possibility that the emmer grains may be residual from the earlier periods and free-threshing wheat, which is more common of the medieval period, intrusive.

Most of the deposits encountered were low-density mixtures of cereal grains, chaff and seeds, and probably represent waste from processing cereals for consumption

that was burnt on a hearth and formed a general scatter across the site. It is thought that during the Iron Age, processing of glume wheat spikelets was carried out on a day-to-day basis in small batches. This involved parching and pounding to free the grain from the chaff, followed by fine sieving, and handpicking to remove glume bases and agricultural seeds (Monckton and Hill 2011, 130).

A small number of deposits did, however, contain a greater number of remains. A pit near Roundhouse 2 contained the densest concentration of CPR for the site at 52 items per litre. It contained notable quantities of both grains, chaff and grass seeds. This could represent a denser deposit of domestic processing waste. However, it could also represent the subsequent use of the residues as tinder or fodder (see Monckton 2006, 275).

A dense deposit was also recovered from the lower layer in the pit in the centre of Roundhouse 3. Many barley and spelt wheat grains were recovered, alongside a notable quantity of large grass seeds; very little chaff was recovered. Deposits with large concentrations of cereal grain were also recovered from the re-cut of Roundhouse 3. These three deposits may represent grain that was accidentally burnt during heating prior to storage or milling, or represent food spilt during cooking. The grass seeds may have been tolerated. It appears that Roundhouses 2 and 3 are where areas of cereal processing/consumption was centred.

Typically, Leicestershire sites dating to this period only produce low-density scatters of charred plant remains, deposits containing greater than five items per litre tend to be rare, so the latter samples are of note and form an important contribution to the regional dataset (Monckton 2011). Regarding the post-medieval period, little material was recovered, so it is not possible to draw further interpretations due to the limited results.

Post-medieval and modern activity

A small bank was visible in the western side of the field and the excavation found a ditch adjacent to it (Fig. 3). Pebble metalling was found to the west, and the ditch appeared to form one side of a trackway (with sandy silt containing post-medieval pottery dated seventeenth–eighteenth century, eighteenth–nineteenth-century bottle glass and ceramic building material). The trackway heads south into the village, and if it is extended to the north it would merge with Pincet Lane. It is possible the trackway is a predecessor to Pincet Lane, which has been shifted to the west as it enters the village. Following this change in direction, quarry pits have been dug along the line of the original road.

Discussion (Richard Huxley & Gavin Speed)

The archaeological work on land to the east of Pincet Lane, North Kilworth revealed a complex sequence of activity, principally from the mid-Neolithic, Early Bronze Age and Late Iron Age to Early Roman periods. Prior to this work, little prehistoric activity had been found in the immediate surrounding area. The discovery of the prehistoric activity is significant both locally and regionally, contributing well to the growing dataset of activity from these periods in the region.

Middle Neolithic occupation

There were hints of pre-Neolithic activity, with some Mesolithic flint identified in the layer/midden deposit. Charred hazel nut shells radiocarbon dated to 7960–7709 BC were also found in the possible grave containing Vessels 1 and 2. Of the analysis of 17 places interpreted as Neolithic ‘core areas’ across both counties, 12 also showed evidence for Mesolithic occupation (Clay 1999, 3–4).

Neolithic occupation evidence is rare both regionally and nationally (Clay 2006), and the discovery of middle Neolithic activity is of regional significance. Just two elements of prehistoric activity were previously recorded within 1km on the HER (PCA 2016) both were some distance away from the site (a Neolithic burial south-east of the Grange (600m NE), and a possible barrow located 995m north-east at Station Farm).

The Neolithic activity is situated on a south-facing slope, approximately 0.3km from the nearest water source. This is comparable to other earlier Neolithic sites within Leicestershire and Rutland, of which 51 per cent were located on south-facing slopes, and the average distance to water was 0.34km (Clay 2006). The features primarily consisted of a layer or midden deposit beneath a later Iron Age/Early Roman rectangular structure. The layer contained very abraded sherds of Peterborough Ware and flint debitage, indicative of domestic activity. Beneath the layer were several small post holes and a small gully. A pit to the north of the layer contained Neolithic pottery. A possible grave in the inner ring ditch contained sherds of Neolithic pottery, and hazel nut shells within it were radiocarbon dated 2800–2500 BC. However, the vessel placed on the base of the feature (Vessel 3) is likely to date to the Early Bronze Age and the Neolithic activity is probably residual.

Early Bronze Age: From enclosure to barrow

In the southern part of the site, a large ring ditch was constructed. Round barrows are the most common form of prehistoric monument in Britain, with over 30,000 known examples (Parker Pearson 1993, 91). In Leicestershire, 250 ring-ditches are known from cropmarks, 27 showing evidence of surviving mounds (Clay 2006). However, only a few have been excavated. The notable examples include Sproxton and Tixover (Clay 1981), Lockington (Hughes 2000), Cossington (Thomas 2008), Eye Kettleby (Finn 2011), and Ketton (Chapman & Jones 2013); these all lie some distance from North Kilworth.

The North Kilworth barrow likely dates to the Early Bronze Age, and the interpretation offered is of two phases of construction and use (Fig. 30). An initial phase consisted of sub-circular palisaded enclosure with internal burials, this was followed by the blocking of the entrance, and excavation of a surrounding much larger (*c.*3m wide, *c.*2m deep) outer ring ditch. It is uncertain if there was an external bank or internal mound.

The initial phase consisted of a sub-circular palisaded enclosure of *c.*20m diameter. This contained a narrow (1.2m wide) entrance in the south-east. Centrally placed was a crouched burial, which had been orientated with the head of the body pointing south-east, towards the entrance. On the north-western edge of the grave

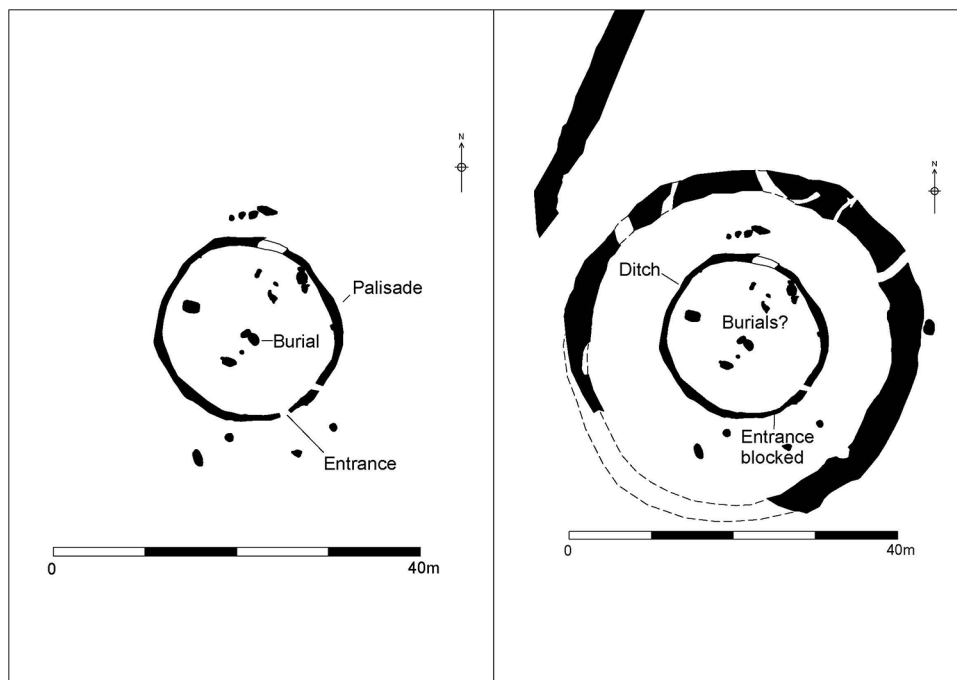


Fig. 30. Ring ditches phased plan.

was a small feature containing two partially complete beakers or food vessels (dating perhaps between *c.*2200 and 1800 BC). One was placed inverted at the western end, whilst a handled bowl was found in the top of the backfill at the eastern end. Since the handled bowl was found in the top of the feature it could be a later addition. It is possible the crouched burial is the primary burial, and the feature containing Vessels 1 and 2 is an associated offering; however, it is more likely to be another grave (a secondary burial) and the body decayed. Support for this comes from the shape of the feature, which had vertical sides with a flat base and is identical to the grave containing the crouched burial. If it is a second grave the size of the feature would suggest a younger person had also been buried. Since the crouched burial survived in an extremely poor condition, and appeared as a mineralised stain in the soil, it is very unlikely the remains of a juvenile would survive.

Other pits within the enclosure may have been graves, although no bone evidence survived. One feature close to the north-eastern edge of the enclosure had a beaker (Vessel 3) placed on the base. Two smaller features were found either side of this, but nothing was found within them. Two more possible graves were found to the north-west and south-west of the central burial, although again no bone or vessels were found within them. Post holes were located in the same vicinity as these features and one even truncated the edge of a possible grave, but the majority were too far away to be grave markers. There are also several other large post holes around the southern edge of the enclosure, and these may also represent contemporary activity.

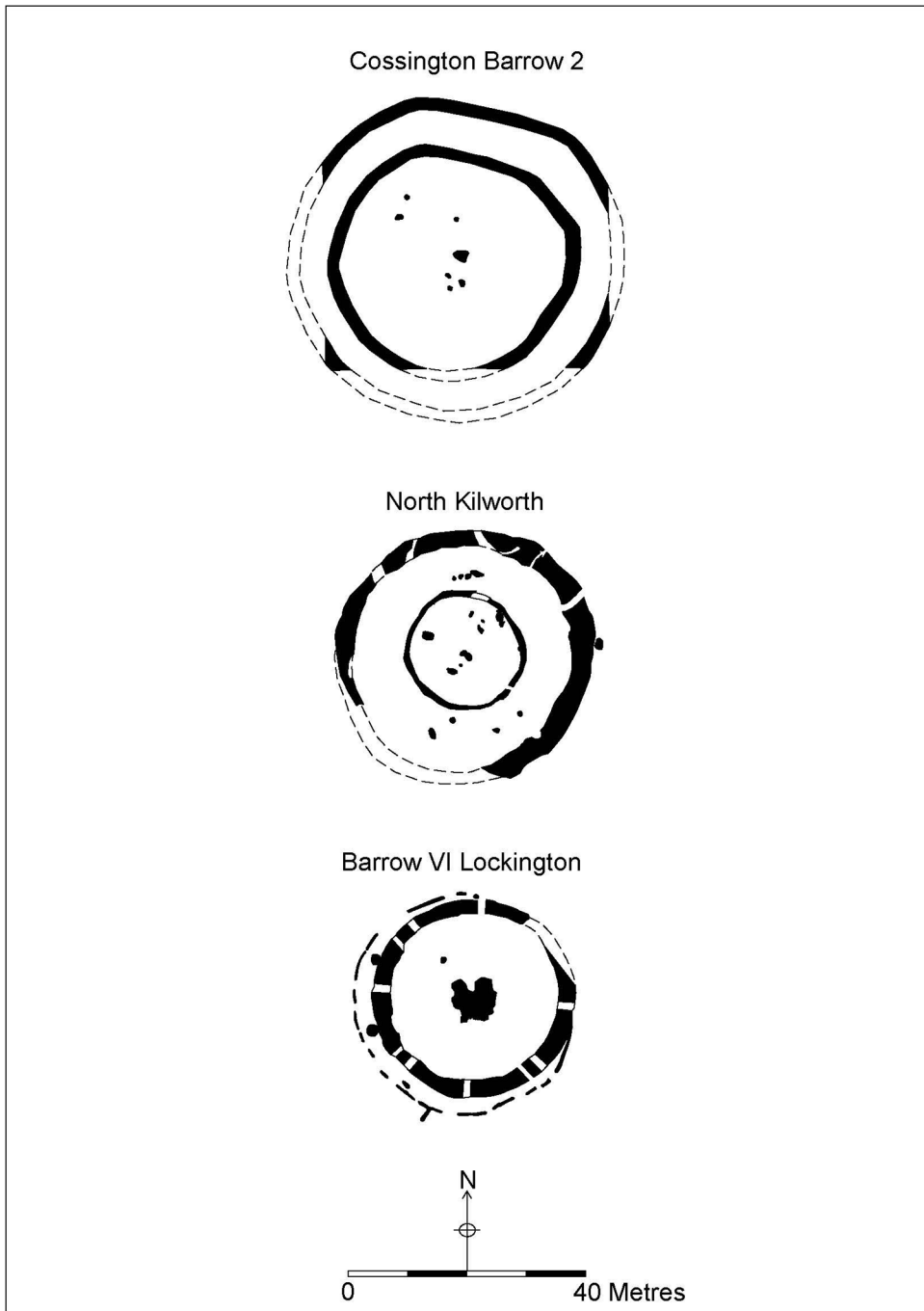


Fig. 31. The North Kilworth Barrow compared to the other similar barrows.

The central enclosure can be compared to other local excavated examples of barrows. At Cossington, Barrow 2 had a central ring ditch constructed in a similar shape. Whilst this example did not contain any evidence that it was structural, or have an entrance (Thomas 2008), it may be comparable to the final phase of the enclosure at North Kilworth. At Lockington, the earliest phase of Barrow VI consisted of a similarly shaped 38m diameter palisade gully. At this site the entrance was thought to be in the north due to the shallow nature of the gully (Hughes 2000, 97). The barrow ditch at Lockington differs to North Kilworth as it had been added to the inside of the palisade and partially truncated it, rather than surrounding it and respecting the location. Another barrow at Lockington (Barrow I) had a large outer ring ditch surrounding a central area that was formed by a series of posts (Posnansky 1955, 20). At Eye Kettleby (also north Leicestershire), a similar sequence was seen (Finn 2011, 40).

Other examples elsewhere in Britain contain central palisade ring gullies that are respected by outer ring ditches. One example is Barrow IM at Heselton (North Yorkshire, Powlesland 1986), although no entrance was found into the enclosure. At Hanborough (Oxfordshire) a palisaded enclosure with a small entrance to the north-west was found. Both the palisade and the outer ring ditch had been re-cut with shallow ditches and whilst this site has similarities to North Kilworth, it is smaller and did not contain any burials (Case *et al.* 1956; Gibson 2012b). A variation of the palisaded enclosure was found at Crick (Monmouthshire), where a similar shaped enclosure was formed by a stone and clay wall instead of a wooden palisade (Savory 1940). This was then surrounded with a ditch and covered with a mound. Some barrows contain structural elements that are interpreted as being revetments for the mound and other barrows are interpreted as having pre-barrow activity, such as that identified at Eaton, Sproxton (Clay 1981) and Lockington Barrow VI (Hughes 2000).

Later the enclosure was remodelled and access through the entrance was removed by it being blocked with two posts. The enclosure was redefined with a shallow ditch, although it was not clear whether the palisade had decayed by this point or was physically removed. The larger outer ring ditch (42m diameter, 2.5–3.5m wide and 1.9–2.3m deep) maintained a consistent 8m gap with the central enclosure and must have been excavated when its position was known.

The excavation of the large outer ring ditch appears to be the final phase of activity and transformed the area. The lower part of this ditch may have contained standing water with material being washed in from the sides. This is evidenced by the sorting of the layers and the presence of algae spores associated with standing water. The upper half contained a different sequence of layers and was marked by a dense layer of cobbles that had fallen into the ditch from the inside edge. It is possible the ditch was re-cut; however, the difference in composition could show a change from a period of slow natural silting to a period of quicker infilling. Iron Age pottery was found in the upper layers, and the outer ditch may have been deliberately infilled during this period.

It was not clear whether the outer ring ditch completely surrounded the central enclosure as it extended beyond the southern boundary. Other comparable examples do form a complete loop and at North Kilworth its excavation would

have generated at least 400m³ of earth. This would primarily be the sand and gravel natural substratum, and weigh a minimum of 670 tonnes if it was dry. No evidence of this material was found during the excavation, and it was not clear whether any had been piled around the external edge of the ditch. However, the presence of a mound covering the inner ring ditch can be inferred from the distribution of the later features. All the later phases of archaeology truncate the outer ring ditch, but respect the central enclosure and the most likely explanation is that it was protected beneath a mound. A post-medieval trackway ditch may even be respecting the central enclosure, indicating the potential presence of a mound into the post-medieval period.

The large linear ditch located to the west of the barrow appears to respect the outer ring ditch, and unlike the later Iron Age activity may have been excavated when it was a visible feature. The implication from this is that the large linear ditch dates between the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age periods. This ditch may be a boundary ditch; however, a lack of dating evidence prevents a firm conclusion.

Approximately 50m to the west, in earlier archaeological work by ULAS, a pit containing Early Bronze Age pottery and worked flint was discovered (Shean 2017, location shown on Fig. 32). The pottery appeared to be from at least three collard urns, which are vessels usually associated with Bronze Age cremations. However, these were interpreted as being a rare example of the vessels being used in a domestic setting (Shean 2017, 16). No evidence of Early Bronze Age settlement was found during the recent excavations and whilst it is possible this was occurring to the west of Pincet Lane, another explanation is that the collard urns are disturbed cremations and funerary activity is extending to the north-west. Other evidence of Early Bronze activity was found 2.5km to the south-east at Husbands Bosworth. This site contained evidence of an Early Neolithic causewayed enclosure with several Early Bronze Age pits and a nearby burial (Speed 2020, 14–15). The Bronze Age features may have been positioned along a route to the nearby river and whilst the causewayed enclosure is likely to be earlier than the Neolithic activity at North Kilworth, the Early Bronze Age features could be contemporary and have had some local significance (Harvey 2021).

Iron Age and Early Roman settlement

During the late Iron Age (*c.*100 BC) until the mid first century AD, the site was utilised as a small settlement consisting of roundhouses, enclosures and other associated features. These were spread across the majority of the site and many have contained sherds of Early Roman pottery, indicating its continued use into the middle of the first century. The activity appeared to be continuing beyond the limits of the excavation to the north-east, and also to the south. Other enclosure ditches on a similar alignment were located in earlier work by ULAS, 50m to the west (Shean 2017; see Fig. 32).

Three late Iron Age roundhouses were found on the site, and the two southerly roundhouses (Roundhouses 2 and 3) truncated the earlier outer ring ditch. This implies the earlier Bronze Age ditch had been completely removed from the landscape by this point. A similar sequence of re-use was observed in Rothley, where

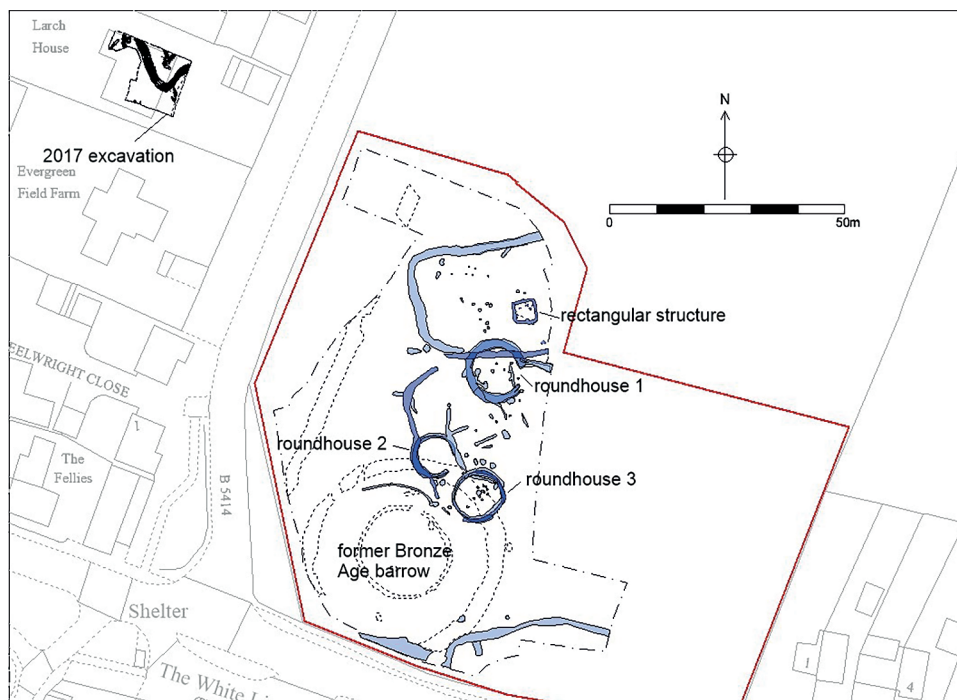


Fig. 32 Late Iron Age and Early Roman activity; note similar orientation of ditches to 2017 excavation to the north-west.

later Iron Age enclosures had been dug across the location of a ring ditch dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Age (Speed 2018). However, unlike Rothley, the North Kilworth roundhouses are both approximately 5m from the inner ring ditch and may be respecting the central part of the monument. A curving gully was located to the south of the roundhouses and none of the Iron Age features appear to progress beyond it. Because of this it is possible a low mound was still visible during this period, and the gully could be forming a boundary between the roundhouses and the earthwork. The Iron Age enclosures in the southern side of the site also truncate the outer ring ditch, but all turn to the south afterwards.

The eastern edge of Roundhouse 2 was dug into an earlier ditch and several small perpendicular gullies were found extending to the east. These features may form part of an earlier Iron Age field system and a row of post holes along the northern edge could be a fence line separating this area from Roundhouse 1. The roundhouses all contained evidence for domestic activity, including two querns and a fired clay oven plate. A pit in the centre of Roundhouse 3 was burnt at the top and this may be a hearth within the structure, although it is unclear which phase of activity this relates to. The charred plant remains associated with the structures show cereals, including barley, spelt and emmer wheat, were being processed. Roundhouses 2 and 3 contained the highest concentrations, and appear to be the centres for cereal processing and consumption. Hazelnut shells were found along with stones from

fruit belonging to the *Prunus* genus, of which sloe was identified. These may have been foraged from trees or shrubs in the surrounding area.

All the roundhouses had re-cuts or modifications containing Early Roman pottery, and appear to be used into this period. The ditch surrounding Roundhouse 3 had been re-cut into a 'C' shaped enclosure and the entrance had been moved to the west. Roundhouse 1 was the most complicated and had been re-cut with many smaller gullies. These fed into neighbouring ditches or extended southwards down the slope. This complexity was not evident at the other roundhouses and could indicate it was used over a longer period; however, Roundhouse 1 had been dug into an area rich in clay, and the other roundhouses were dug into sand and gravel. The clay rich natural substratum may have created problems with standing water and it is possible the complex sequence of gullies, are repeated attempts to drain standing water away from the structure, which was not necessary at the other roundhouses. Excavations on the opposite side of Pincet Lane revealed a similar complicated sequence of ditches and gullies and these were also dug into clay (Shean 2017). Roundhouse 1 had been re-cut in the Early Roman period; however, the northern part of it was truncated by an Early Roman ditch, which implies its use may not have extended far into this period. This differs from Roundhouse 2, which has a ditch from the Early Roman period bending around the outside of it as if it was avoiding an existing structure.

A rectangular enclosure was found to the north of Roundhouse 1 and since the terminal respects the roundhouse it is likely to be contemporary with its use. The Roman ditch that truncates Roundhouse 1 could form part of the enclosure; however, since it does not respect the roundhouse it is likely to be a later modification. The terminal of the Roman ditch progresses beyond the rectangular enclosure and appears to be forming an entrance with another ditch to the west.

A four-post structure was found within the rectangular enclosure, along with several small pits, post holes and a hearth. Four-post structures are often thought to be associated with grain storage, although there are a variety of other interpretations. A quadrilateral structure was located in the south-eastern corner of the enclosure and contained a mixture of Early Roman and residual Neolithic pottery. The structure was dug into the Neolithic midden and this is likely to have incorporated the earlier pottery. The ditch forming the sides of the structure appeared to be segmented and each side was formed by three oval shapes. These may have been formed by logs being set or pressed into the ground and used as a foundation for a wall. Post holes were found throughout the interior and could indicate a structure with a raised floor, such as a small Early Roman granary.

CONCLUSION

The excavation off Pincet Lane, North Kilworth has considerably expanded knowledge on the prehistoric activity of the area, being of local and regional significance. The excavation located finds and features associated with domestic activity from the Middle Neolithic period. This is a rare occurrence both regionally and nationally, and the information adds to the growing number of sites from Leicestershire. A small amount of Mesolithic activity was also found, hinting that

the Neolithic occupation is a re-use of the site, which has been evidenced at other sites in the region (Clay 1999).

The most prominent features found during the excavation were created during the Early Bronze Age. A palisaded enclosure was built with a crouched burial at the centre, and another possible grave containing beakers or food vessels was added next to it. Several other potential graves or offerings were added around the enclosure and one of these contained another vessel. The entrance was blocked, with two posts, and later the position of the enclosure was redefined with a small ditch. The enclosure was surrounded by an even larger circular ditch and the excavated material is likely to have been mounded over the central area. The presence of a mound would account for the later Iron Age occupant's avoidance of the space and an earthwork may even have survived as late as the post-medieval period.

Following the completion of the barrow the landscape began to change and a large boundary ditch was likely added to the west. Since its creation the large outer ring ditch contained standing water and had been filling up slightly with material being washed in from the sides. It is likely that the outer ditch was deliberately backfilled in the late Iron Age, evidenced by pottery found in the upper layers.

By the late Iron Age any evidence of the outer ring ditch had been removed from the landscape and the occupants of the site utilised this area as a small domestic settlement, consisting of three roundhouses. A rectangular enclosure was located to the north and at least two further enclosures were positioned to the south. The gap between the roundhouses and the southern enclosures may be due to the presence of the barrow mound.

The roundhouses were modified and other ditches were added, often respecting the presence of the structures. The presence of Early Roman pottery within several roundhouse ditches implies they were still being used into the mid-first century AD. During this period a small quadrilateral feature was added to the north of Roundhouse 1, which is possibly a small structure such as a granary.

Following the decline of this settlement the landscape changed again, and existed as fields alongside a post-medieval ditch and trackway. The trackway had shifted to the west, to the position of Pincet Lane, and modern quarry pits were excavated along its former route. If any evidence of the Bronze Age earthwork survived, it was levelled by the modern period and all visible traces of the prehistoric activity at Pincet lane was removed from the landscape.

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report (Huxley 2021) is listed on the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS), held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. Available at: <http://oasis.ac.uk/> under the reference universi1-420233. Records are deposited with the Leicestershire County Council under Accession number X.A.55.2019.

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