

Bronze Age occupation of Newbury Park: further evidence of prehistoric Redbridge

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with M. Seager Thomas (pottery)

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Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by CgMs Ltd on behalf of Bellway Homes (Essex) to carry out archaeological investigations on the site of the King George V Hospital, Eastern Avenue, Newbury Park. (TQ 4480 8845; Fig. 1). The hospital was divided into two parts, separated by war memorial gardens, with the western part being approximately a third of the size of that to the east. The work was carried out in advance of the site's redevelopment and immediately followed the demolition of the hospital buildings. The excavation was preceded by an archaeological evaluation carried out between 27 February and 4 March 2002. It showed that the eastern part of the development area had undergone extensive truncation relating to the hospital occupation, and only features dating from the late 19th and 20th centuries were recorded. In the east and far south of the western part, however, truncation was limited and evidence of Late Bronze Age to Late Iron Age occupation survived. This led to the open area excavation of two trenches measuring 877m² (Area 1) and 242m² (Area 2) exposing the parts of the development area with limited truncation. The open area excavation was carried out between 5 and 22 March 2002.

The site overlies London Clay, which is capped in places by a superficial deposit of gravel, thought to be part of the Corbets Tey (Lynch Hill) series. The site lies a short distance from the Cran Brook, which is now partly covered. This watercourse is likely to have influenced early settlement patterns in the vicinity. Until recently, little was known of the prehistoric settlement of this part of London. What little information there was came from 19th- and early 20th- century find-spots and, subsequently, archaeological

excavations in advance of gravel extraction. One such site is Fairlop Quarry which lies approximately 2 miles to the north-east. Here limited evidence of domestic occupation during the Bronze Age has been discovered. The Bronze Age features were found within one of two later Iron Age enclosures. These features along with residual material of a similar date may indicate the presence of a settlement predating the Iron Age enclosures. The evidence for Iron Age occupation of the area is further indicated by aerial photographs taken to the east of the site which are thought to show a field systems of that date.¹ Evidence of Late Bronze Age settlement in the area also comes from pile dwellings in Wanstead, 2.5 miles to the west, while enclosures and an associated cemetery are known from excavations at Uphall Camp in Ilford.

The excavation at Newbury Park exposed boundary ditches, postholes and quarry pits demonstrating continued occupation throughout the Late Bronze Age. This occupation spanned four centuries, during which time the existing land divisions were reasserted and in places realigned. Environmental analysis has suggested that these boundaries were set in a landscape of mixed woodland with large clearings occupied by scrub and meadow vegetation.

Late Bronze Age (I) Activity (Fig. 2a)

The earliest activity on the site comprised pits and postholes, the former containing small quantities of burnt flint. Burnt flint was found in many of the features of this phase, but was thought to represent background or accidental incorporation into the features. In Area 1 the pits may have served as a primary northwest – southeast

boundary with the associated postholes forming alignments perpendicular to it. These postholes were thought to represent fence lines with Fence 1 extending to the north-east of Ditch 1 and Fence 2 extending to the south-west of Ditch 1. The pottery recovered from the postholes of Fences 1 and 2, along with the pit in Area 2, was of the post-Deverel-Rimbury tradition of plainware jars. Although a number of fabric types were identified, no local parallels exist. However, radiocarbon dates associated with post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery from other sites place the use of plainwares between 1150 and 950 BC. (Fig. 3).

In Area 1, the creation of two large boundary ditches (Ditches 1 and 2) laid out along a similar alignment to the pits may have served to consolidate the major land divisions with the minor internal boundaries being maintained as superficial structures. Ditch 1 ran northwest – southeast and the basal fills produced fragments of plainware jars indicating the contemporary nature of this ditch and the postholes of Fence 1 and 2. Ditch 2 was less substantial and was aligned roughly north–south. The similarity in a comparison of the basal fills of both Ditch 1 and the Ditch 2 immediately to its east allowed the inclusion of the latter in this early activity. The only worked flint found on the site was attributed to this phase of activity. Both were waste flakes and were found in the fill of Ditches 1 and 2.

The pit and postholes in Area 2 appear to have remained a minor, ill-defined boundary. The pit produced fragments of plainware jars in the same tradition as those described above. Two postholes in the extreme east of Area 1 were discrete from features other than themselves and remained enigmatic.

Late Bronze Age (II) Activity (Fig. 2b)

This phase of the occupation was characterised by the re-establishment of the large boundary ditch (Ditch 3), recut along its original alignment. The ditch to the east (Ditch 4) was slightly realigned so as to run perpendicular to Ditch 3. The fills of both ditches produced post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery attributed to the ‘developed’ plainware tradition although sequentially the gully was later and appears to have been maintained beyond the infilling of the larger boundary. As with the earlier phase of pottery, only jar forms were

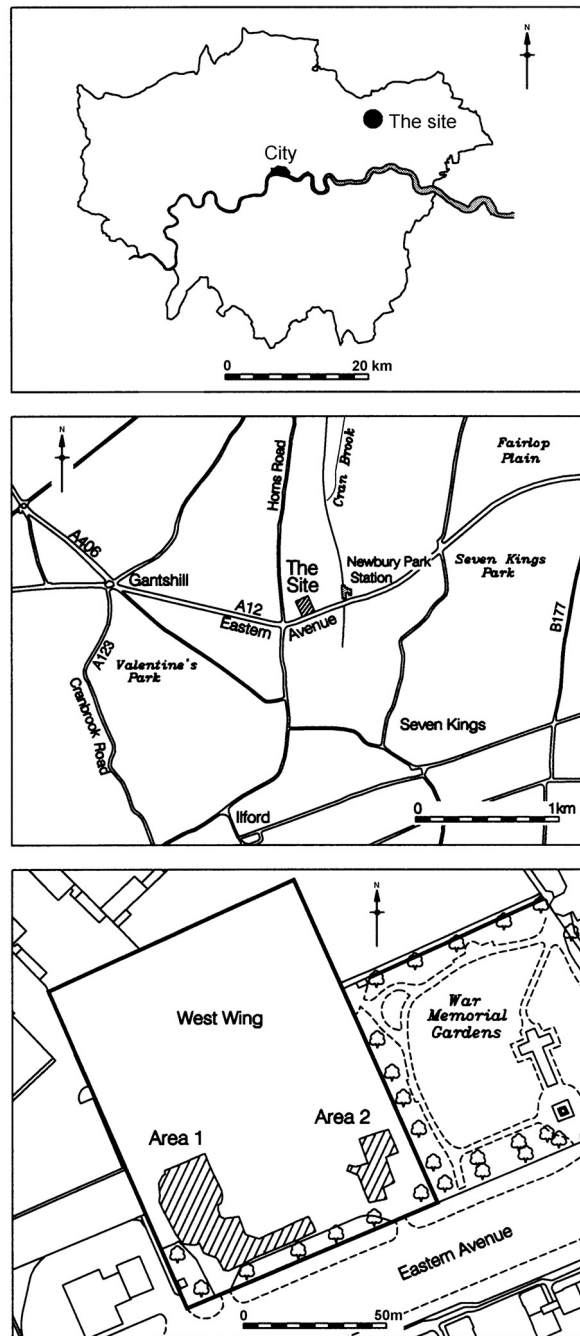


Fig. 1: site and trench locations

recovered on site but the ‘development’ of the pottery here was accompanied by the adoption of a new range of fabrics. The new fabrics included three sandy wares and previously unseen flint and shell tempered wares. The ‘development’ of post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery has been dated to 950 – 750 BC and is often associated with craft

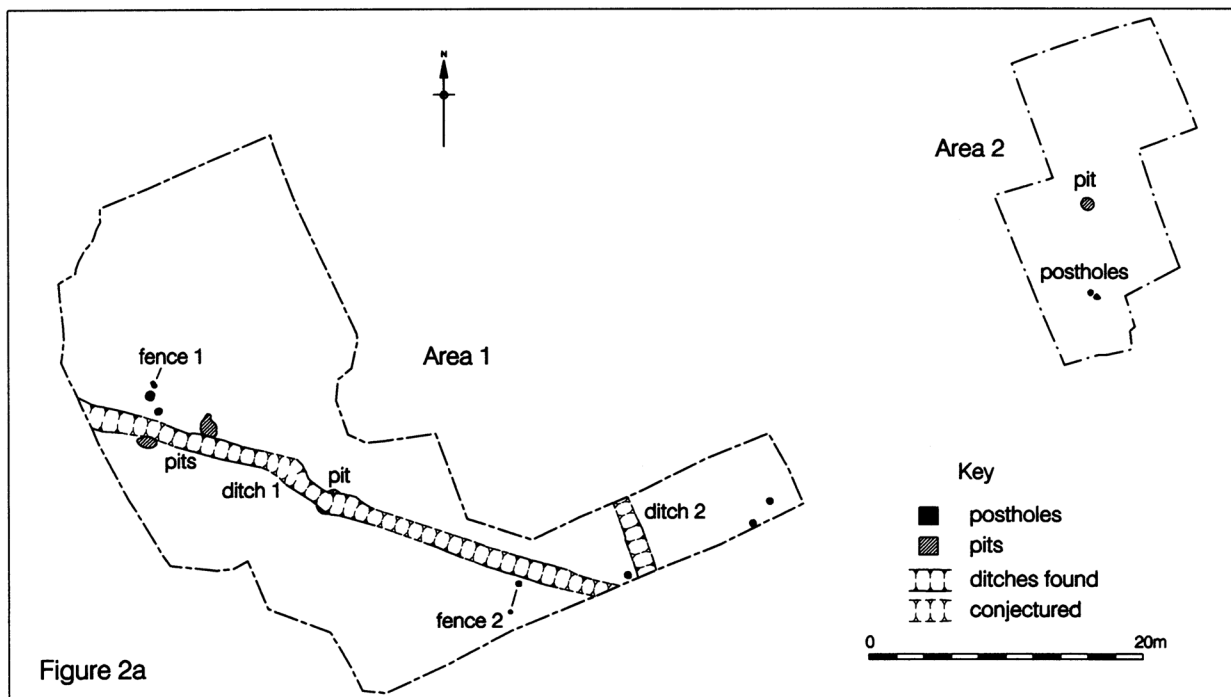


Figure 2a

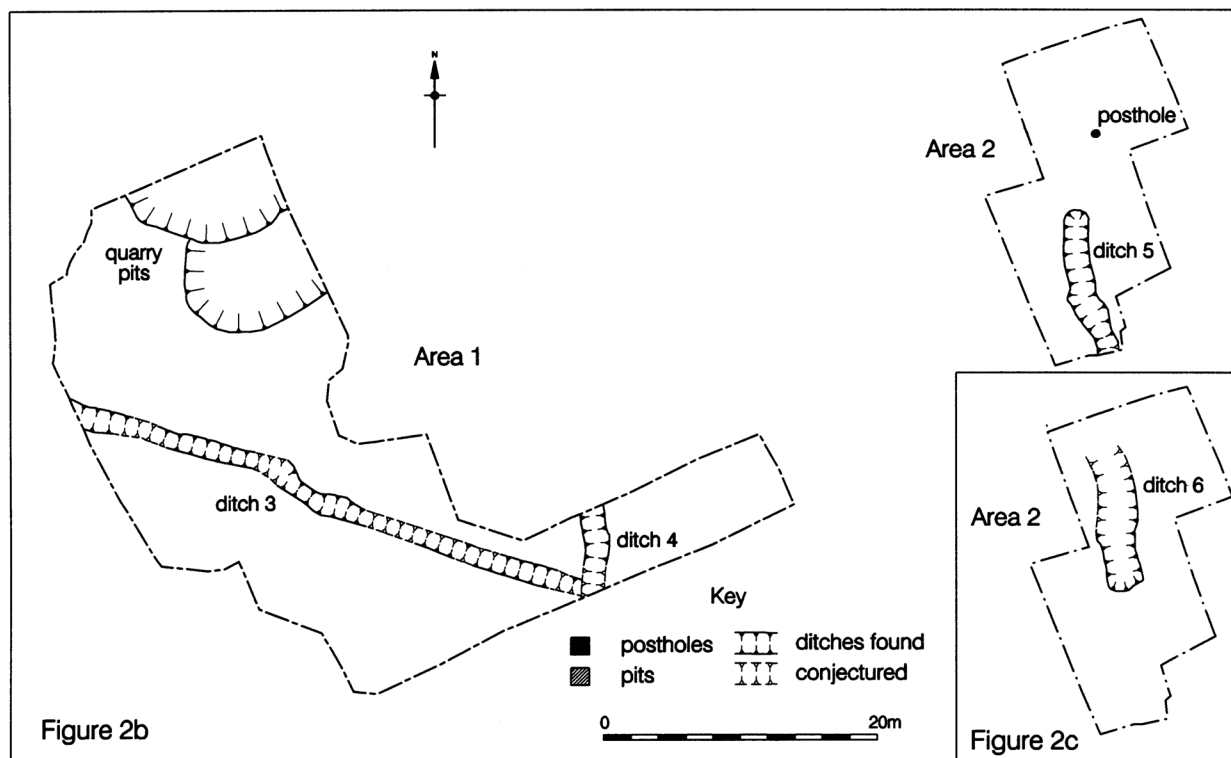


Figure 2b

Figure 2c

Fig. 2: Bronze Age activity

specialisation.² It was during this phase of activity that the quantity of burnt flint contained within the fills of Ditches 3, 4 and 5 becomes sufficiently high to suggest either the presence of

hearths or that the features were used to deposit the refuse from hearths. The only two fragments of stratified animal bone were also collected from the fill of Ditch 4 and were from a goat or sheep.

Although these animals frequently occur in the archaeological record for the Bronze Age little could be determined from such a small assemblage.

The consolidation of boundaries from pit alignments to ditches represented earlier in Area 1 appears to have taken place in Area 2 during this phase of occupation. The alignment south from the pit to the two postholes was redefined with a substantial ditch (Ditch 5). The northern end of this ditch terminated over and truncated the infilled pit of the earlier phase. Subsequent to the infilling of Ditch 5, a second north-south ditch (Ditch 6) was cut (Figure 2c). Ditch 6 was a large 'V'-shaped boundary, which also terminated over the earlier pit but extended northwards where it may have been aligned to other earlier boundary markers beyond the northern limit of the investigations. The boundary was subsequently recut as a much more modest 'U'-shaped gully along its eastern edge. Recovered from the terminus of Ditch 6 was a semi-complete 'developed' plainware shouldered jar dating to the Late Bronze Age (II) period. The placing of vessels in the terminal of a ditch ordinarily indicates a votive or ritualistic placement.

Samples of the latest fill of this northern ditch were the subject of archaeobotanical analysis. This suggested that at the time of infilling, the site was situated in an area of open ground with meadow plants such as grasses, buttercups and scrub vegetation. Charcoal recovered from the sample indicated that a wide variety of trees were used for firewood including oak, field maple and hawthorn. The maple is usually considered to be a marginal tree growing on the edge of the forest and in association with hawthorn gives a picture of broken woodland with large clearings of long grass, meadow flowers and occasional low bushes and trees. The presence of a fragment of burnt root wood in the sample was intriguing but ultimately uninformative other than to say that on this site it is unlikely to represent the deliberate use of root-wood as a fuel when there is no apparent restriction on the supply of stem- or branch-wood.³

Evidence for the extraction of gravel was found in the north of the site in the form of two very large round pits. These were *c.* 0.5m deep and contained a quantity of burnt flint. Although the

northernmost pit was stratigraphically later the two features were thought to be broadly contemporary.

Late Iron Age activity

A small quantity of Late Iron Age pottery was recovered from the fills of Ditches 5 and 6. However, this assemblage included only three small, abraded sherds, all of which were thought to have been intruded into the deposits in which they were found. This may have resulted from burrowing animals or root action, both of which were noted in the area. Although this Late Iron Age material does not necessarily date the ditch itself it may give an indication of the duration of settlement in this locality.

Discussion

The excavations have produced evidence for the development of Late Bronze Age society in north-east London. Although no direct evidence for agricultural land-use was discovered, the utilisation of boundary markers and their subsequent development into well-defined land boundaries within a wider agricultural landscape would seem to be the most likely interpretation of the exposed remains. It was clear that the site was the subject of continued activity throughout the last five centuries of the Bronze Age but the absence of earlier artefactual material fits well into the model of increasing importance of the Lower Thames Valley during the Middle and Late Bronze Age.⁴ Evidence for the prehistoric cultivation and enclosure of this area is more readily associated with Iron Age occupation but this site is testament to a sustained and organised occupation throughout the Late Bronze Age and possibly later.

The dating of the site was based exclusively on the development of the post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery tradition. Only a few sites in the London area have demonstrated the succession of post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery from plainwares to 'developed' plainwares, as most of the assemblages are of a later date. This development of the pottery is sometimes associated with the advent of craft specialisation which in turn can be seen, along with the development of the hillforts and other settlement trends, as a major step in the transition towards Iron Age traditions.

Furthermore, with the site showing continued occupation throughout the Late Bronze Age and the assemblage reflecting the broad trends and changes elsewhere in the region at this time, the site is thought to have been fully integrated into contemporary society.

The pottery (Fig. 3)

Mike Seager Thomas

The prehistoric pottery assemblage from Newbury Park comprises 224 sherds weighing approximately 2.5 kg. The vast majority of sherds belong to an early phase of the post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery tradition, broadly dated to the Late Bronze Age. Stratigraphically, and in terms of the fabrics comprising them, they divide into two chronologically sequential sub-groups, Late Bronze Age (I) and Late Bronze Age (II). The remaining sherds – three only – are of Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British date. Late Bronze Age dated features focus on Area 1. They include Ditch 1 which yielded a Late Bronze Age (I) assemblage, Ditches 3 and 4 which yielded Late Bronze Age (II) assemblages, and posthole of Fence 2 which yielded a Late Bronze Age assemblage. Posthole 168 has a Late Bronze Age *terminus post quem*. In Area 2 Ditches 5 and 6 along with 206 and the recut of Ditch 6 all have Late Bronze Age *termini post quem*. The identification of two chronologically sequential sub-groups within the post-Deverel-Rimbury assemblage indicates settled occupation of the area through the Late Bronze Age. It also provides a local date for a broadening of site resource strategies paralleled on Late Bronze Age sites outside the region.

The Late Bronze Age assemblage

Previous work in the region has yielded numerous assemblages of Late Bronze Age pottery. These comprise pottery belonging to the post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery tradition. For the Thames Valley this has been discussed in detail by Barrett (1980). The present report compliments this work by considering the relationship of the Newbury Park assemblage, which comes from an area largely devoid of contemporary settlement, to broadly coeval assemblages from a number of regionally proximate sites, and by placing it in the context of Late Bronze Age pottery traditions of

southeast England as a whole. The site assemblage to which the present assemblage is most closely related is from Runnymede Bridge on the Surrey/Berkshire border.⁵

Late Bronze Age fabrics

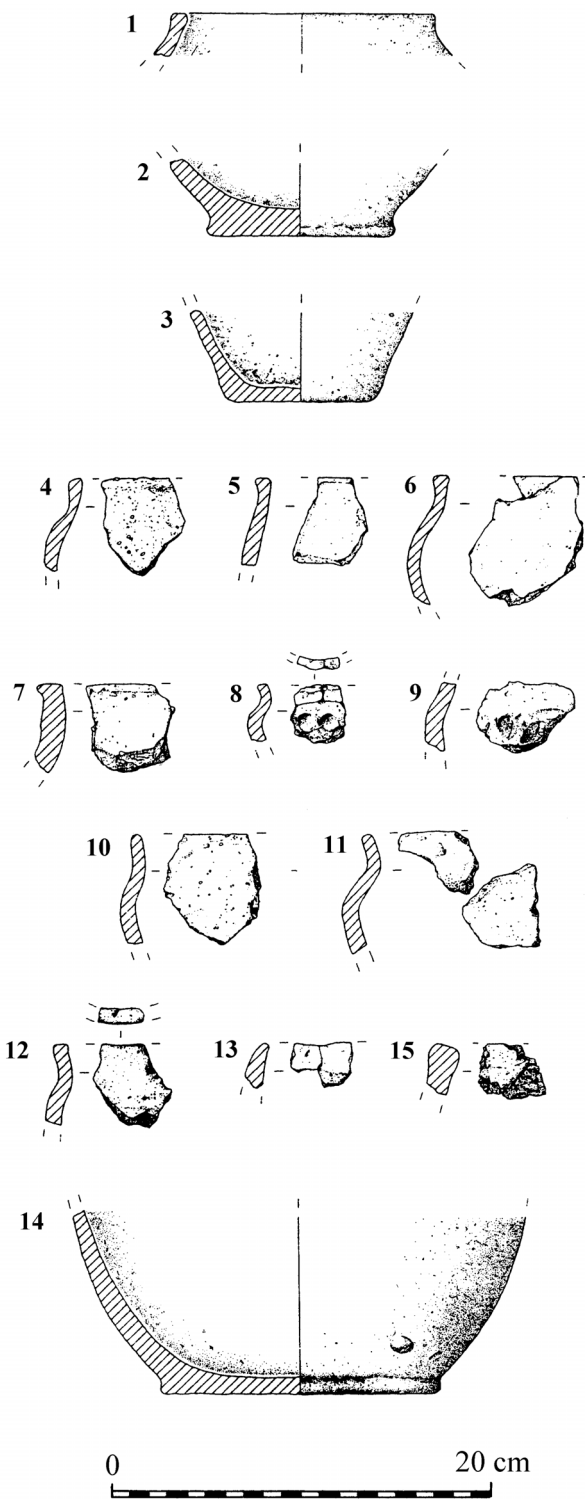
The Late Bronze Age assemblage comprises twelve distinguishable fabric types. All of these occurred in chronologically diagnostic forms on site or were consistently associated with dated material. Amongst them are both fine and intermediate wares but the assemblage as a whole is dominated by intermediate wares. It is divisible into two sub-groups, which, in the stratigraphic relationship of Ditch 1 to Ditch 3 and Ditches 3 and 4, are shown to be chronologically sequential. These are Late Bronze Age (I) and Late Bronze Age (II). Feature assemblages belonging to Late Bronze Age (II) incorporate fabric types *additional* to those present in feature assemblages belonging to Late Bronze Age (I). As a group these 12 fabrics are unparalleled locally but individually all have parallels in assemblages from Late Bronze Age sites elsewhere in the region.

Typology

The assemblage includes sherds from two post-Deverel-Rimbury types, the convex-sided jar and the shouldered jar, as well as sherds displaying traits of manufacture such as thin bodies and finger-pinching, which, though not attributable to a particular vessel type are characteristic of the tradition.⁶ One convex jar and five shouldered jar variants are distinguishable. This comprises a small selection only of the post-Deverel-Rimbury repertoire. Notable absentees include both the cup and bowl, which, along with the convex and the shoulder jar, characterize post-Deverel-Rimbury assemblages elsewhere.⁷

The date of the assemblage

The post-Deverel-Rimbury tradition is divisible into three chronologically sequential phases represented by plainware assemblages, 'developed' plainware assemblages, and decorated assemblages. Individual Newbury Park vessels can be paralleled in assemblages belonging to all three of these phases, but, collectively, the types associated with the Late



Bronze Age (I) ditch are best paralleled in plainware assemblages and the types associated with the Late Bronze Age (II) ditches in 'developed' plainware assemblages. At Newbury

Fig. 3: prehistoric pottery illustrations

Late Bronze Age (I)

Ditch 1

1. Concave/upright neck of shouldered jar with flat, squared rim. Cut 29/fill 26.
2. Flat, pinched base. Cut 108/fill 106.
3. Flat base. Cut 108/fill 106.
4. Slack, angular to rounded shoulder and upright, finger-squeezed neck of shouldered jar with flat, squared rim. Cut 108/fill 107.
5. Slightly convex upper shoulder of ?shouldered jar with flat, slightly out-turned/externally expanded rim. Cut 116/fill 115.

Undifferentiated Late Bronze Age

Recut Ditch 6

6. Rounded shoulder, concave/upright neck of shouldered jar with flat, slightly externally expanded rim. Cut 183/fill 182.

Late Bronze Age (II)

Ditch 4

7. Concave/upright neck of shouldered jar with flat, externally and internally expanded (hammerhead) rim. Cut 32/fill 31.

Ditch 3

8. Rounded, finger-tip impressed shoulder, concave/upright neck of small shouldered jar with cabled or finger-tip impressed rim. Cut 141/fill 140.
9. Finger-tip impressed shoulder of shouldered jar. Cut 141/fill 140.
10. Slack, rounded shoulder and concave/upright neck of shouldered jar with rounded to flat, squared rim. Cut 141/fill 140.
11. Rounded shoulder and slightly flared neck of shouldered jar with rounded rim. Cut 141/fill 140.
12. Upper shoulder and slightly flared neck of shouldered jar with finger-tip impressed, squared rim. Cut 141/fill 140.

Ditch 6

13. Rounded rim of closed mouthed convex jar. Cut 189/fill 185.
14. Pinched base. Cut 189/fill 186.

Intrusive Late Iron Age or later

Ditch 6

15. Beaded rim of closed mouthed jar. Cut 189/fill 186.

Park 'development' appears to have been accompanied by the adoption of a range of new fabrics. Radiocarbon dates associated with post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery from elsewhere place plainwares between *c.* 1150 and 950 cal BC and 'developed' plainwares between *c.* 950 and 750 cal BC.⁸ The same chronology is recommended for Newbury Park. Close regional parallels for the Newbury Park post-Deverel-Rimbury plainware

assemblage come from Weston Wood, Albury (Area 2)⁹ and the lowermost deposits at Runnymede Bridge (Units G to I).¹⁰ Close regional parallels for the Newbury Park post-Deverel-Rimbury 'developed' plainwares come from Cliffe, in Kent,¹¹ Kensington,¹² and the uppermost deposits at Runnymede Bridge (Units J to L).¹³

Evidence for craft specialization

Further up the Thames Valley the proportion of sandy fabrics in early first millennium BC pottery has been shown to increase over time.¹⁴ Much the same occurred at Newbury Park although here the new sandy fabrics were accompanied by a previously unseen flint tempered fabric (F1) and a shelly fabric (SQ). The bulk of these early first millennium BC Thames Valley fabrics are assumed to be local. Similar introductions elsewhere in southeast England, however, incorporate non-local material and are taken as an indicator of craft specialization.¹⁵ It is possible that the changes evident at Newbury Park are of a similar nature. Certainly the bias in the assemblage towards jar forms and intermediate fabrics suggests some sort of specialization. If these new fabrics do indeed reflect craft specialization, the stratigraphic division between Newbury Park's Late Bronze Age (I) and Late Bronze Age (II) assemblages dates it for the London area. The advent of craft specialization, together with the development of hill-forts and other changes in settlement patterning, marks a major turning point in early first millennium BC society.

The Iron Age assemblage

Relevant Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British traditions have been discussed by Cunliffe¹⁶ and Thompson.¹⁷ The present report is informed by but, owing to the small size of the assemblage, adds nothing to this work. It is important only in so far as it contributes a dot to our distribution maps of Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British London.

Late Iron Age fabrics

Only one fabric (S) occurred in a Late Iron Age form but it is likely that some of those with which it was associated, and which are here dated to the

Late Bronze Age, re-occurred on site during the Late Iron Age. This applies particularly to Fabric GS, which, although present in a Late Bronze Age (I) context, has close parallels in both Kent and Sussex Late Iron Age assemblages (identical fabrics have been noted by the author in unpublished Late Iron Age assemblages from Norton in Sussex and Hawkinge in Kent).

The date of the assemblage

The assemblage includes a very small rim sherd in Fabric S which belongs to a closed-mouthed storage jar (Fig. 3:15). Owing to its size it is difficult to reconstruct, but probable parallels occur in Late Iron Age assemblages, in which form and fabric alike are associated with 'Belgic' sand and grog tempered vessels, and Early Romano-British assemblages, in which they are associated with fully Romanised pottery. No unequivocally Late Iron Age or Early Romano-British pottery was identified in the Newbury Park assemblage. A pre-conquest date is favoured for the present vessel, however, because of the absence of Romano-British associations and because of the presence of fabrics like GS which *could* be Iron Age. Pre-conquest parallels occur in assemblages from Great Dumnow in Essex,¹⁸ Ewell in Surrey¹⁹ and Cliffe in Kent.²⁰

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(continued from p. 100)

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