



Ledbury Trunk Main

Archaeological Programme of Works

Section 3

PART THREE: Archaeological Excavation
- Access Pits (AP) 4 continued

Further evidence of the potential range of activity undertaken in this area of the site during the Romano-British period was revealed immediately to the west of ditch [4067], where the remains of a probable kiln were revealed (**Plates 61 & 62; Figs. 31 & 41**). This structure comprised a rough north-south 'figure-of-eight' cut forming a shallow pit measuring 2m × 0.7m × 0.2m, with a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and steeply sloping/vertical sides breaking sharply to a slightly convex base. The remains of an internal masonry structure (4082) consisting of uncoursed reddish coarse sandstone blocks of varying size (maximum dimensions 210mm × 220mm) extended across the central part of the pit measuring 0.49m × 0.22m × 0.1m and forming a possible support for an upper kiln floor or some kind of partition incorporating the remains of channel or flue. Traces of a lining material were identified at the southern end of the structure. The interior of the kiln was filled by moderately compact to firm dark reddish-brown charcoal-rich gritty clay (4070) containing a moderate amount of small sandstone fragments and several sherds of presumably residual pottery of largely 2nd century date, together with a large amount (672g) of very fragmented fired clay. Sediment samples taken from this deposit produced vertebrate remains consisting of 175 small unidentified cranium and large mammal vertebra fragments, many of which were burnt and which exhibited a range of colours from black (scorching) to blue to white. As for function, one possible interpretation has been discounted: based on a complete absence of charred cereal remains, the structure appears not to have been a grain-drier; a sub-surface firebox for an updraught ceramic kiln seems more likely, with the internal masonry structure supporting an above ground firing-chamber that has left no trace in the archaeological record.

In addition to burials and structural remains, a number of ditches and pits/postholes were revealed. The ditches appear to represent several sub-phases of activity within the main Romano-British occupation phase and include examples of intercutting features, possibly connected with the reorganisation of activities on the site or the redefinition of established boundaries. The function of these ditches is uncertain, although they have formed part of a field system on the edge of a farmstead or higher-status building, such as a small villa, as suggested by the presence in the vicinity of fragmentary box-flue tile from a hypocaust heating system and by finds of decorated samian ware in context (4003=4047) and a metal key in (4064), the fill of east-west ditch [4063].

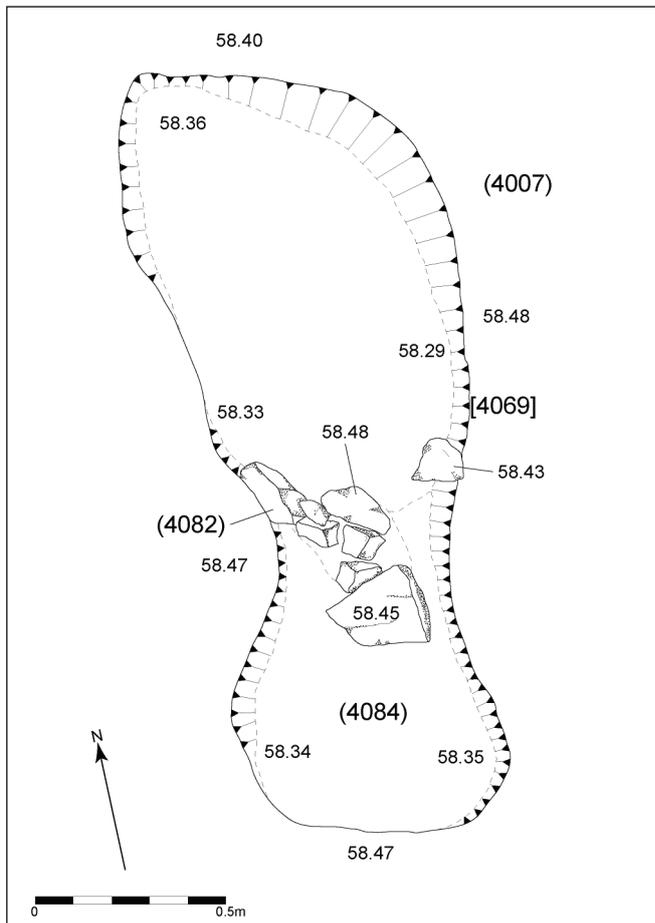
Among the earliest of these linear features, probably dating to the 2nd century, based on the pottery within its fill, was [4025] measuring 3.75m × 0.9m × 0.17m. This feature revealed a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and gradually sloping sides breaking gradually to a concave base (**Plate 63; Figs 31 & 32-5**) and was filled by (4026), a moderately compact, charcoal-rich silty clay containing occasional larger pieces of charcoal and fired clay. Included within the pottery assemblage from [4025] was a body sherd of central Gaulish samian ware of the Antonine period, together with examples of both oxidised and reduced Severn Valley wares and local grey ware exhibiting rusticated decoration typologically dating to the early 2nd century. The feature also contained animal remains, including a fragment of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) bone, and a number of small mammal and amphibian remains, as well as abundant chaff, suggesting some crop processing or cleaning was taking place at the site.

Linear [4106], also of probable 2nd century date, was oriented approximately east-west and measured 5m × 0.85m × 0.16m, with a moderate break of slope at the top of the profile, gently sloping sides and a concave base (**Plate 64; Figs. 31-5 & 43**). The linear was filled with a moderately compact greyish-brown silty clay (4107) containing oyster shell and occasional small stones, animal bone and ceramic sherds, including examples of central



(Above left) Plate 61: View north showing kiln feature

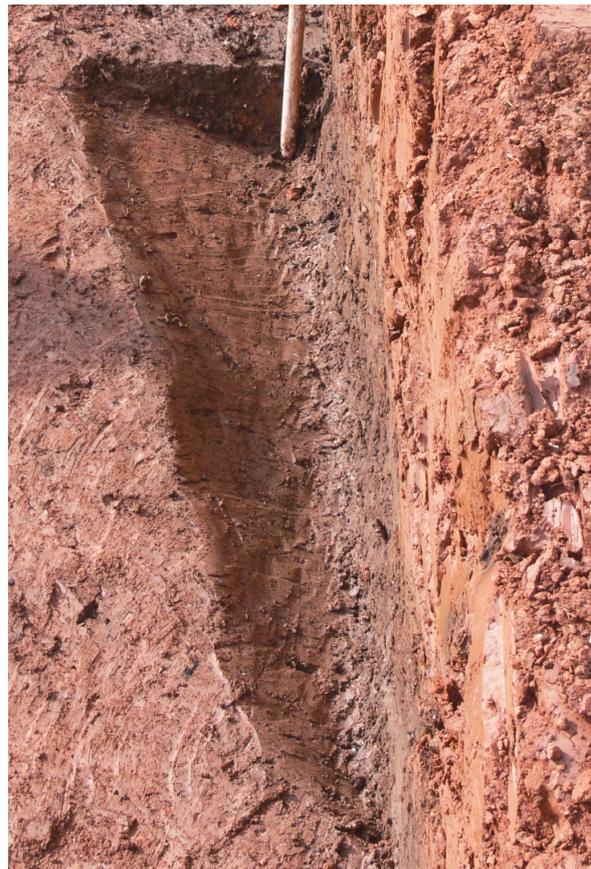
(Above right) Plate 62: View of kiln, looking south



(Left) Fig. 41: Plan of kiln



(Above left) Plate 63: View north showing ditch [4025]



(Above right) Plate 64: View west showing ditch [4106]

(Below left) Plate 65: View east of circular pit [4057]

(Below right) Plate 66: View northwest of feature [4089]



Gaulish samian (probably Antonine in date), Dorset black burnished ware and oxidised and reduced Severn Valley ware.

On the basis of the pottery present within their fills, pits [4057] and [4089] are included among this group of earlier features (**Plates 65 & 66; Figs. 31 & 32-5**). Pit [4057] consisted of a roughly circular cut measuring 0.8m × 0.78m × 0.22m with a gradual to moderate break of slope at the top of the profile and concave sides breaking to a slightly concave base. The pit contained typical domestic waste material (4058), consisting of moderately compact dark brownish-red silty clay with frequent charcoal/charcoal dust and small white rounded stones, together with evidence of coal/shale, cow bone and unidentified burnt and unburnt bone, fish scales and the charred remains of wheat (spelt and possibly emmer) and oats, together with hazelnut shell and a wild plum fruit stone, the presence of which suggests at least a partial reliance on gathered foods. The pottery recovered from this feature included Dorset black burnished ware, locally produced grey sandy ware and sherds of oxidised and reduced Severn Valley ware; a single body fragment of blue/green glass also recovered from this fill has been dated to the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. Pit [4089] comprised a sub-circular cut measuring 1m (east-west) × 0.57m (north-south) × 0.25m, with a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and vertical sides breaking sharply to a flat base. This was filled by a firm charcoal-rich, reddish-brown silty clay (4090) containing frequent chaff from spelt and/or emmer wheat and animal remains, predominantly cattle bone, but also including a small mammal femur shaft and 38 fragments of unidentified bone, together with occasional oyster shell. This deposit also produced sherds of oxidized Severn Valley ware, Dorset black burnished ware and central Gaulish samian ware, the latter identified as dating from the Antonine period.



Plate 67: View of pit [4091]

The ceramic material recovered from pit [4091] (**Plate 67; Figs 31 & 32-5**) was not closely datable, comprising three sherds of Severn Valley ware and a fragment of CBM; however, the fill of this pit was similar to the fill of [4089] both of which appeared to represent an accumulation of domestic waste. Pit [4091] comprised a roughly ovoid northwest-southeast cut measuring 1.2m x 0.5m x 0.18m with a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and



Plates 68 & 69 (above & right): Northeast 'terminus' of ditch [4063], although it is possible that [4063] continued northeast as [4106]

gradually sloping sides breaking gradually to a flat base. The fill (4092) consisted of firm mid brown silty clay containing frequent charcoal flecks and larger fragments, moderate amounts of animal bone—predominantly cow, but also including sheep, pig and cat—and oyster shell, together with charred cereal remains, including barley, bread wheat, spelt and/or emmer wheat. The oyster shell from [4089] and [4091] included complete valves, some of which bore characteristic V- or W-shaped notches on their margins indicating that they had been opened with a knife or similar implement.

Ditch [4063] may have possibly represented a westward continuation of ditch [4106], as it appeared to be on an identical alignment, although this could not be confirmed, as any relationship was obscured by the presence of a number of infant burials that remained *in situ*. [4063] produced a large assemblage of 196 sherds, with a range of material dating from the mid 2nd century AD onwards (**Plates 68 & 69; Fig. 31 & 32-5**). However, the presence of at least two 4th-century jars of Dorset black burnished ware, one semi-complete, together with coins of the early to mid 4th century, would suggest the ditch was finally abandoned at around this time. The feature consisted of a curvilinear cut measuring >12m × 0.98m (east)/1.74m (west) × 0.52m (east)/0.3m (west). The break of slope at the top of the profile was moderate at the western extent of the feature and sharp at the east. The sides were gently sloping at the west and tapering at the east, breaking gradually to the base, which was concave at the west and V-shaped at the east.



Plate 70: Semi-complete late jar missing the base fragments found within fill of ditch[4063]

The uppermost fill (4064) consisted of loose to moderately compact dark greyish-brown clay-sand-silt and was characterised by general domestic waste material, including fish and animal (caprovid, pig, chicken) bone, oyster shell, charcoal, mortar flecking, charred grains, glass shards and frequent pottery sherds and CBM fragments (including a fragment of *imbrex*). Several small finds were also recovered from this waste material, including a complete silver pin, a heavily corroded iron knife and key and a two bronze coins dating to 318-19 AD (Constantine I) and 330 AD, minted in Pavia and Constantinople, respectively, together with small metal objects, such as hobnails. In addition, (4064) also contained evidence of possible ironworking slag and fragmentary land snail shell (*Helix* sp.), amphibian remains and unidentified bird and small mammal bone. The large pottery assemblage recovered from this deposit comprised a range of material dating from the mid 2nd century AD onwards, including sherds of south Gaulish samian ware of the Flavian-Trajanic period and



(Above) Plate 71: View east showing ditch [4067] (right of picture)

(Below) Plate 72: View west of ditch [4067]



central Gaulish samian of Hadrianic-Antonine date, Mancetter-Hartshill white ware *mortarium* dated to pre-AD 140, Dorset black burnished ware with oblique decoration of late 2nd-3rd century AD date and an inverted, semi-complete late jar missing the base fragments (**Plate 70**). Vivianite deposits were also detected within the fill (4064), these being produced by the interaction of phosphate, iron and water in the natural environment and occurring typically in association with human remains, human and animal waste deposits, industrial waste deposits and areas rich in iron (McGowan & Prangnell, 2006).

Underlying (4064) was a primary fill (4065) extending along the length of the ditch to a depth of 0.3m and width of < 0.25m. This basal fill was also composed predominantly of domestic waste material, consisting of moderately compact mid grey clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecks, small mammal bone and mollusca shell, with evidence also of coal, copper alloy fragments and very occasional pottery, including sherds of oxidised Severn Valley ware and Dorset black burnished ware of late 2nd to 3rd century AD date. A diverse range of well-preserved uncharred seeds was recovered from (4065) indicative of waterlogged conditions at the base of the ditch, including the arable weeds fat-hen (*Chenopodium album*) and black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*), together with hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), a wetland species.

Cut across [4063], apparently at some point during its earlier period of use, was curvilinear ditch [4067], which produced an assemblage of 52 sherds, the latest of which appeared to be mid to later 2nd century AD in date (**Plates 71 & 72; Figs. 31 & 32-5**). The function of this ditch is unclear; however, its form suggests it may represent the corner of an enclosure of some description, perhaps relating to burial activity, although there is no clear evidence to indicate this. Whatever its purpose, the cutting of this feature appears not to have signalled the end of [4063], which evidently remained open and in use until possibly the 4th century.

[4067] extended 11.5m out from the west-facing baulk at the eastern extremity of the excavation area, before turning northwest and continuing for another 8m, at which point it appeared to terminate. The ditch measured 0.95m wide and 0.3m deep and revealed a V-shaped profile, with evidence of slumping at the base represented by a moderately compact-to-firm greyish-red, charcoal-flecked silty clay (4083) measuring 0.65m (north-south) × 0.24m (east-west). This material appeared to represent a collapse of the sides some time after the feature was dug but before it began to fill with (4068), a firm mid greyish-brown silty clay with moderate gravel inclusions and pottery sherds, including both oxidised and reduced Severn Valley wares, Dorset black burnished ware, Mancetter-Hartshill white ware and central Gaulish samian, including a sherd from a decorated Hadrianic-Antonine hemispherical bowl (form 37).

Somewhat later during the Romano-British occupation two intercutting ditches [4109] and [4074] were dug on the eastern side of the excavation area (**Plates 73-5; Figs 31 & 32-5**). Of these, ditch [4109] appears, in stratigraphic terms, to have been the earlier and its fill and part of the cut on the southern side were subsequently truncated by the cutting of a parallel ditch [4074]. This appears to be consistent with the pottery evidence recovered from these two features, as ditch [4109] contained 3rd century or later sherds, while the pottery from ditch [4074] produced material typical of the 4th century.

Ditch [4109] was oriented roughly east-west, measuring (visible extent) 9m × 0.5m × 0.35m with a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and steep sides breaking moderately or sharply to a slightly concave base. The fill (4110) consisted of moderately compact, mid greyish-brown silty sand containing occasional pottery and CBM, charcoal and bone,



(Above) Plate 73: View west showing Slot 1 through ditches [4074] and [4109]

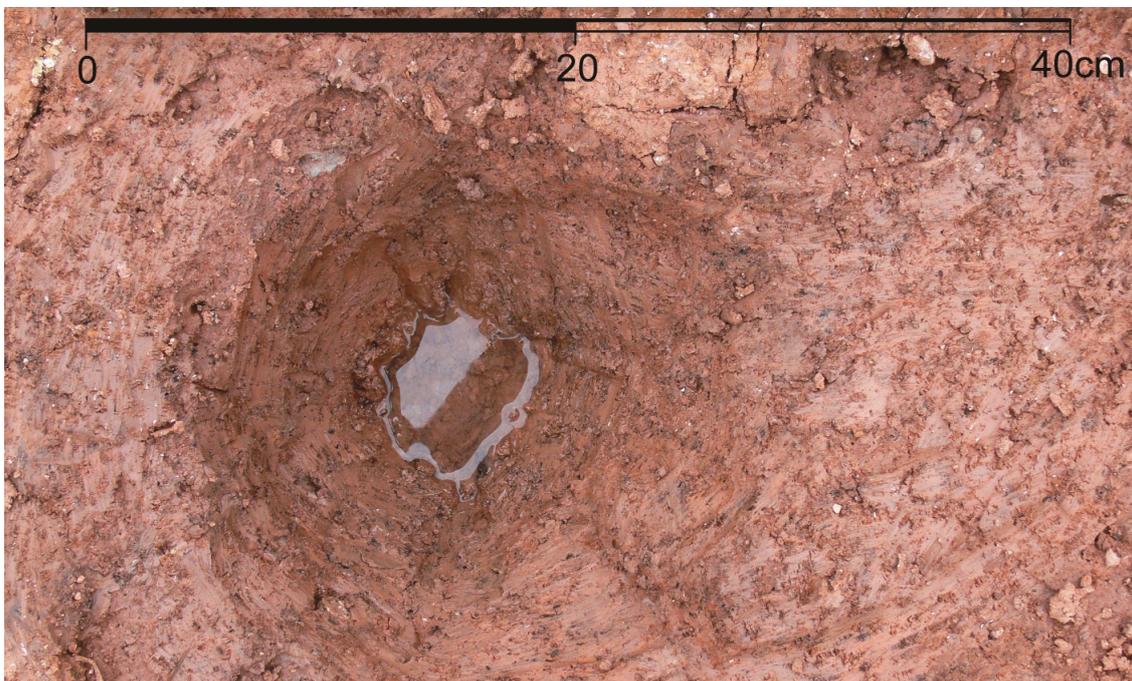
(Below) Plate 74: Profile of ditch [4074]





(Above) Plate 75: Profile of ditch[4109]

(Below) Plate 76: Posthole [4061]



including a fragment of unidentified bird bone and 24 small, unidentified bone fragments. The pottery assemblage included fragments of Dorset black burnished ware jar with probable oblique burnished lattice decoration, local grey ware and oxidised and reduced Severn Valley wares. The later ditch [4074] was cut on the same alignment and measured (visible extent) 13m × 0.7-1m × 0.35m, with a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and moderately to steeply sloping sides breaking moderately or sharply to a slightly concave base. This was filled by (4108), consisting of firm mid orangey-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal flecking and fragments of Baetican *amphora*. Overlying (4108) was (4111), consisting of a moderately compact, mid grey silty sand containing occasional charcoal and daub flecking and measuring 0.22m in thickness. Overlying both ditches was a 0.15m thick firm dark brownish-grey silty clay with frequent charcoal patches (4075) containing sherds of Flavian-Trajanic south Gaulish samian ware, Dorset black burnished ware, oxidised and reduced Severn Valley wares, Baetican *amphora*, fine grey ware with rouletted decoration and a possible example of New Forest colour-coated ware, together with CBM and fired clay. A bronze coin of Constantine I minted at Arles and dated 315-16 AD was also recovered. Caprovid and pig were represented within the fill, which also contained a possible rabbit incisor fragment, a small mammal femur fragment, four fragments of amphibian bone and a number of unidentifiable pieces. Ditch fills (4075) and (4110) also contained horse incisors representing animals that were at least 12 years old when they died.

The reason for the cutting of a new ditch adjacent to and on the same alignment as the existing ditch is far from clear but could be associated with some kind of redefinition of boundary/drainage features towards the end of the Romano-British occupation.

Also apparently of the later period was a sub-circular posthole feature [4061] (**Plate 76; Figs. 31-5**) oriented east-west and measuring 0.28m × 0.26m × 0.17m, with a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and steeply sloping sides breaking sharply to a slightly concave base. The charcoal-rich fill (4062) of this feature produced evidence of spelt wheat and indeterminate cereal remains and contained a bronze coin of AD 330-35, although no pottery was recovered.

Within the southern part of the site was what appeared to be a natural depression or shallow cut feature [4095] of uncertain function. This feature consisted of an elongated ovoid cut oriented east-west and measuring 0.97m × 0.48m × 0.08m, with a moderate (irregular) break of slope at the top of the profile and variably sloping sides (steep on the south and gradual to moderate on the north) breaking gradually to an irregular, slightly concave base. The fill (4096) of this feature appeared largely to consist of occupation debris consisting of moderately compact mid grey silty clay containing frequent small rounded gravelly sandstone fragments, occasional fired clay and Dorset black burnished ware, together with animal bone, including a cat phalanx, and three fragments of unidentified marine shell (to 26mm), the largest of which was probably oyster.

Located immediately north of this feature was a sub-circular pit [4059] oriented north-south measuring 0.47m × 0.39m × 0.1m, which revealed a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile and moderately sloping sides breaking gradually to a slightly concave base (**Plate 77; Figs. 31-5**). The fill (4060) was composed of moderately compact, dark charcoal-rich silty clay containing occasional very small rounded sandstone pebbles. Perhaps significantly, the identified animal bone recovered from (4060) was exclusively caprovid and comprised predominantly head and forelimb elements and cervical vertebrae. The assemblage consisted of three mandible fragments, a scapula fragment, three proximal radius fragments, three distal humerus fragments, maxillary and mandibular teeth (some scorched), a distal



(Above) Plate 77: Pit [4059]

(Below) Plate 78: Linear feature [4093]





femur fragment, one carpal, a single atlas, several cervical vertebrae and phalanges. Proximal radii fragments indicated the presence of at least two individuals (although the rest of the material seemed to represent just one) and nearly half of the fragments had been burnt or scorched. The possibility that this deposit had a ritual purpose cannot be ruled out.

The Romano-British features were all found to cut deposit (4007), which consisted of firm mid to dark charcoal-flecked reddish-brown silty clay measuring 32m × 18m × 0.48m. This deposit contained bone, complete oyster shell valves, occasional nails and what appears to be a heavily corroded iron wall hook, together with occasional CBM and fired clay. The pottery included sherds of Dorset black burnished ware, Severn Valley ware, Baetican *amphora* and Malvernian metamorphic ware, a type of pottery with pre-Roman origins which continued in use well in to the 2nd century AD. A single body sherd with quartzite trituration grit appears to be from the West Midlands or possibly Caerleon; an everted rim beaker in a fine grey fabric, probably obtained from a local source, was also recovered. The occurrence within (4007) of fragmentary human bone, generally representing babies and infants, suggests an earlier phase of burial activity, although no discernible pattern could be identified due to later disturbance. The entirety of this deposit, apart from the area of the original access pit remained *in situ*, although it should be noted that the features cutting it were fully excavated.

Underlying (4007) was a thin lens of material (4019) consisting of firm, charcoal-flecked dark grey silty clay measuring 6m × 5m × 0.05m from which no ceramic finds or other artefactual evidence was recovered. Underlying (4019) was evidence of an abandonment phase consisting of a deposit of firm orangey-brown silty clay (4020) measuring 6m × 5m × 0.15m overlying the fill (4094) of a linear feature [4093], which appeared to represent the earliest evidence of activity on the site, although its anthropogenic origin was not conclusively demonstrated, as, due to its very limited exposure, no detailed investigation was possible (**Plate 78; Fig. 31**). The extent of [4093] remained undetermined; however, its visible dimensions were 0.62m (east-west) × 0.4m (north-south) × 0.13m and the observed profile consisted of a sharp break of slope at the top, with steeply sloping sides breaking sharply to a flat base. The waterlogged fill (4094) consisted of a moderately compact charcoal-flecked brownish-grey clay, which contained a range of well-preserved uncharred plant remains, including fat-hen, fumitory, nettle, elder, sedge, hemlock and cinquefoil, together with a very limited faunal assemblage that included sheep bone.

This feature was cut into (4021), an alluvial deposit composed of moderately compact, bluish-grey silty clay with occasional gravels, wood fragments and charcoal flecking, measuring 6m × 5m × 0.32m. This in turn overlay a sandy deposit (4079) composed of loose greyish-yellow sandy gravel measuring >3m × >2m × 0.26m, which overlay a 0.6m-thick alluvial deposit (4080) consisting of moderately compact to firm bluish-grey gravels containing lenses of humic matter and occasional charcoal flecking and fragments. This alluvial material also contained a high concentration of uncharred hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana*) and a large number of wood fragments of varying size, which, unlike the fragments from Access Pit 2 and Access Pit 5, appear not to have been worked. The basal deposit revealed within Access Pit 4 consisted of an earlier accumulation of alluvial deposition (4081) consisting of compacted orangey-yellow gravels.

3.5.3 Summary Conclusions

The archaeological record as revealed in Access Pit 4 reflects two phases of burial activity, dating from the Romano-British and post-Roman periods, with a clear distinction evident between these two principal phases of use, both in terms of stratigraphy and cultural practice.

The earlier, Romano-British phase was characterised by cremation burial and several north-south inhumations, including two adult burials in wooden coffins—one of which, radiocarbon dated to the period AD10-210, has survived in a remarkably well-preserved condition—and by the apparent proximity of domestic activity, such as crop-processing and pottery production. The low density of burials and their rather informal layout (although all inhumations are aligned north-south) suggest this may represent a family burial ground attached to a farmstead or small villa, rather than a formalised cemetery serving a more urbanised community. A number of the cremation burials were interred in pottery vessels and, significantly, appear to have been deposited in ditches. It should be noted that the relationship of this burial ground to the east-west Roman road cannot be established based on existing evidence.

The later burials, by contrast, appear randomly oriented and to represent possibly marginalized individuals, those considered 'deviant' in some respect by their peers and consigned to the outer margins of the community. These included a decapitated adolescent, possibly a criminal or battle/murder victim (radiocarbon dated to AD 550-660), and a middle-aged woman with severe curvature of the spine. Neonates, infants and children are also represented, suggesting that premature death may have been regarded with fear and superstition at this time. So-called 'deviant burial grounds' appear during the Anglo-Saxon period and, given the date range AD 550-660, it seems entirely possible that such a cemetery was established at Stretton Grandison by the *Magonsaetae*, who by this time exerted control over much of north Herefordshire and south Shropshire.

The intensity with which this part of the Frome Valley has been utilised throughout prehistory and the early historical period has no doubt been influenced partly by cultural factors, although inevitably governed to a large extent by environmental pressures, and periods of significant hydrological change have thus been identified where possible and tied to occupation phases. The end of the Romano-British occupation, which probably occurred at some point during the 4th century AD, appears to have coincided with a more intensive period of flooding, although political developments no doubt played a decisive role. Subsequent reoccupation of this now marginal environment during the post-Roman/early medieval period appears to have been limited to its use as a burial ground for the disposal of social outcasts, situated probably at some distance from any settlement focus, although evidently with some more mundane activity taking place within the vicinity. The decision to reoccupy the site may have been influenced by the continuing cultural significance of the Romano-British well, which appears to have remained as a visible feature within the local landscape.

The pottery assemblage from AP 4, comprising some 1857 sherds, spanned a broader chronological range than the assemblages from Access Pits 1 to 3. AP4, together with AP8, also produced the bulk of the vertebrate remains, although its condition was generally poorer than that from AP8, probably as a result of disturbance relating to the digging of graves, suggesting that some of the bones in these contexts may be residual. A predominance of cattle bone from Access Pit 4 largely comprised butchery waste, with secondary activities, such as the splitting of limb bones for the extraction of marrow taking place on or near the



site, with ditches evidently used for the disposal of such potentially noxious refuse. Caprovid, pig and horse remains were also present and human bone was found throughout the deposits. The presence of charred cereal grains and chaff, predominantly of wheat, suggests that arable crops were processed *in situ* during the Romano-British period and that cereals were therefore also probably grown locally.

Residuality has been identified as a significant problem in Access Pit 4 due to successive phases of ground disturbance resulting from the excavation of graves and the cutting and re-cutting of pits and ditches, the earth displaced by the digging of these features having almost certainly been redeposited on the site, resulting in any pottery sherds within this material being out of sequence. The pottery and other artefactual evidence cannot thus be taken as a wholly reliable indicator of date, as discussed by Timby and Wild (**Appendices 4-6**). Bioturbation has also been identified as the agency responsible for the presence of modern intrusive material in some contexts, specifically with reference to plant remains, but possibly relevant also to other categories of evidence. Overall, reliance has been placed on establishing an accurate relative chronology, with absolute dates obtained by radiocarbon assay where possible.