

Evidence for prehistoric settlement and medieval activity at Yarl's Wood, Clapham

MIKE LUKE

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and illustrations by Cecily Marshall

SUMMARY

During 2000 Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (now known as Albion Archaeology) undertook archaeological investigations, in line with PPG16, in advance of the construction of the Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the outskirts of Clapham. These revealed a prehistoric settlement along with elements of a medieval field system.

The settlement was unenclosed and comprised buildings, two- and four-post structures, fencelines and pit groups, the layout of which suggested a degree of organisation. Only a very small quantity of artefacts and ecofacts were recovered, but comparisons with other sites locally and regionally suggest the settlement dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age. Locally this represents one of the first open area excavations on the clay uplands of North Bedfordshire. If the dating of this site is correct, it can be added to the small, but increasing, number of settlements of this period. They are characterised by the survival of insubstantial, below ground remains and often small artefact/ecofact assemblages. This may, in part, reflect their temporary nature as one element in a transitory/seasonal way of life.

Ditches were investigated that form part of a field system predating the 19th century historical maps for this area. Given the absence of ridge and furrow, along with the relationship of one of the ditches with the Yarl's Wood moated site, it is possible they have their origins as woodland boundaries in the medieval period.

INTRODUCTION

During 2000 the Home Office put forward a proposal to build an Immigration Detention Centre within the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) complex at Yarl's Wood, Clapham, Bedfordshire.

As Crown Land, planning permission was not required. However, under the procedures of the Department of the Environment's Circular No. 18/84: Crown Land and Development, government departments are required to consult Local Planning

Authorities (LPA) before proceeding with a development which would otherwise require planning permission. Following advice from the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC), the LPA suggested that a programme of archaeological investigation be undertaken: initially to assess whether archaeological remains were present and subsequently to investigate the remains that were located before they were destroyed by the development. This was in line with Local Plan Policy and the Department of Environment guidance contained in PPG 16 *Archaeology and Planning*.

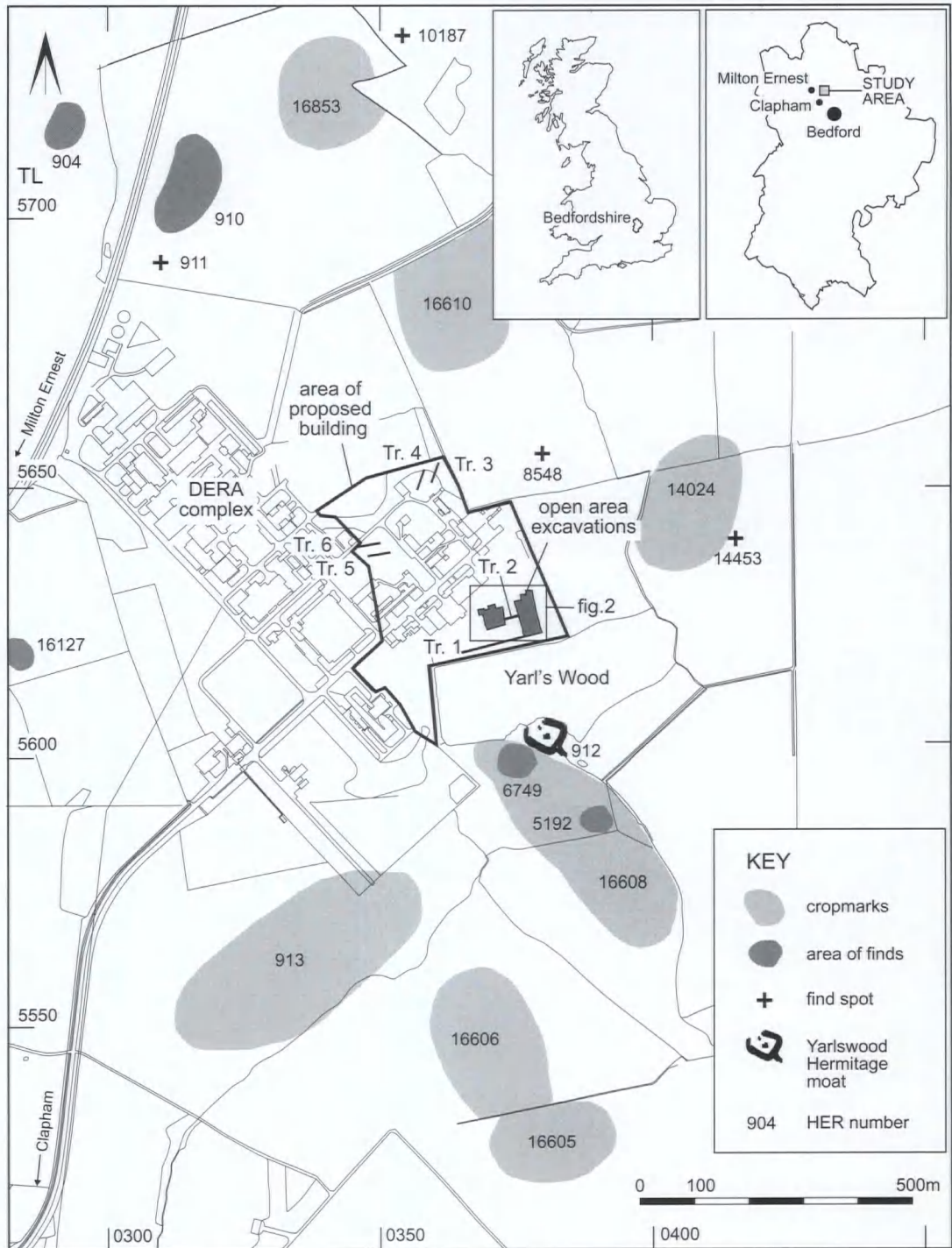
The programme of archaeological investigation was co-ordinated by The Home Office's archaeological consultant, CgMs Consulting. The field evaluation and open area excavation were undertaken by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS, renamed Albion Archaeology during the preparation of this article). This report presents the evidence for prehistoric settlement and a medieval field system recovered during the open area excavation.

SITE LOCATION AND CONDITIONS

The detention centre was to be located over the SE half of the DERA complex 1.8km E of the village of Milton Ernest and 3.5km N of the village of Clapham in north Bedfordshire (Fig 1). The main archaeological investigations were centred on TL 03745625.

Topographically the site is on a ridge of high land between Milton Ernest and Clapham. The River Great Ouse is approximately 1.6km to the W. The underlying geology comprises glacial boulder clays, with localised deposits of sand and gravel, overlying Oxford Clay.

During the field evaluation the buildings within the eastern part of the site were being demolished and therefore trial trenches were situated to avoid these areas. Open area excavations were undertaken once the demolition programme was complete and at the same time as the initial earthmoving associated with construction of the detention centre.



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Figure 1 Site location and Archaeological Background

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Given the high security associated with the DERA establishment it is not surprising that no archaeological remains had been identified within the complex prior to the field evaluation (Fig 1). There are, however, a number of known archaeological sites in the vicinity of the complex, recorded in BCC's Historic Environment Record (HER).

Cropmarks of irregular and rectangular enclosures which may be of Iron Age/Roman date, have been found adjacent to the site to the N (HER's 16583 and 16610), S (HER's 913, 16605, 16606 and 16608) and E sides (HER 14024). Scatters of iron slag and Iron Age pottery within the ploughsoil are recorded in the HER as 911, 913, 8548, 5192 and 6749. Three of these, HER's 5192, 8548 and 6749, are within c. 300m of the excavation area and the latter is associated with cropmarks HER 16608. The presence of these sites would appear to demonstrate intensive occupation during this period.

Up until enclosure in 1803 the site appears to have been part of the open fields of Milton Ernest (Hutchings 1969, Fig 1). The medieval moated site sometimes called Yarlswood Hermitage (HER 912), a Scheduled Ancient Monument, is only c. 250m to the S. The name given to the detention centre, Yarl's Wood, is derived from the name of the wood immediately to the S.

The DERA complex was constructed in the post-war decade on arable fields to the N of the wartime airfield known as Twinwood Farm. It originated as a research establishment and wind tunnel testing played an important part in its work (Bowyer 1983, 66).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

A staged programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken with the results of the earlier stages determining the nature of the next stage.

DESKTOP STUDY

A desktop study was undertaken in July-August 2000 which confirmed the archaeological potential of the proposed development (CgMs 2000a, 33-34).

FIELD EVALUATION (Fig 1)

As a result BCAS was commissioned to carry out an archaeological field evaluation which was undertaken in late August 2000 (BCAS 2000a). Of the six trial trenches (with a combined length of 400m) only two (1 and 2) contained probable archaeological remains (a small number of postholes, pits and ditch-

es). The only datable find, recovered from one of the pits, was an Iron Age pottery sherd. Modern features were identified within trenches 3 and 4 but these were insufficiently deep to have destroyed any archaeological features if they had been present.

OPEN AREA EXCAVATION (Fig 2)

As preservation of the remains *in situ* was not feasible the CAO and CgMs Consulting agreed that further investigation in advance of construction would be appropriate. The Specification required the implementation of an open area excavation at the eastern ends of trenches 1 and 2 where archaeological features had been identified (CgMs 2000b). Originally it was envisaged that three areas, A, B and C would be investigated. However, two areas (A and B) were combined and are referred to as B in this report. A total area of c. 0.4ha was subject to investigation between 18th September and 13th October 2000 while construction commenced on adjacent land.

All hand excavation and recording was carried out in accordance with the BCAS *Procedures Manual* (BCAS 2000b). The site recording sequences started during the evaluation were continued. The majority of the isolated archaeological features were half-sectioned. Due to the scarcity of artefacts from the evaluation, soil samples were routinely taken from the majority of features regardless of whether a visual inspection suggested environmental or artefactual potential. This produced 90 samples, mostly between 5 and 10 litres.

ASSESSMENT

On completion of fieldwork a MAP 2 style assessment of the potential of the site archive for further analysis was submitted in early February 2001 (BCAS 2001). This included an Updated Project Design, which was approved by the CAO and CgMs Consulting in March 2001, after which post-excavation analysis commenced.

POST-EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

During analysis a structural hierarchy was defined. This comprised:

- sub-groups (indivisible unit of interpretation, e.g. the primary fills of the same ditch);
- groups (more interpretative entities, e.g. a building or concentration of pits);
- landscapes (a collection of broadly contemporary and spatially coherent groups, e.g. a settlement focus or a field system);
- phases (broad, chronological divisions, e.g. late Bronze Age/early Iron Age or medieval).

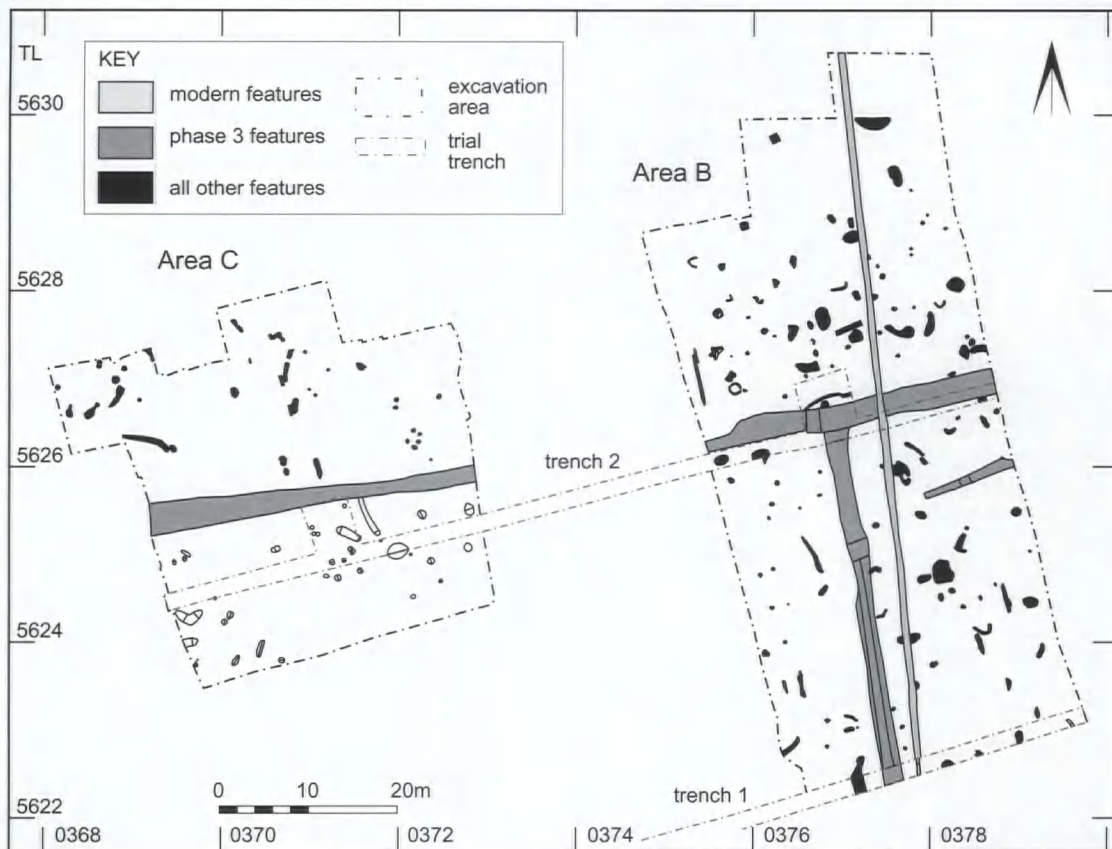


Figure 2 All features

STRUCTURE AND TERMINOLOGY IN THIS REPORT

After this introductory section, this report presents the results of the investigations within a chronological framework. The site narrative is arranged by Landscape (L prefix) and Group (G prefix), and where necessary a feature number is provided and labelled on the illustrations (*see above*). Along with describing the archaeological features the site narrative integrates a summary of the artefactual and eco-factual information, which is presented in more detail within individual sections for the various specialisms. The final section of this report discusses the results of the investigations.

RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATIONS

Tony Walsh and Mike Luke

PHASE 1: THE NATURAL GEOLOGY

The natural geology revealed within all the trial

trenches and open areas comprised Boulder Clay (brown grey in colour with few stones) with localised deposits of sand and gravel.

PHASE 2: THE SETTLEMENT FOCI

The majority of the archaeological features within excavation areas B and C were assigned to this phase. They were characteristic of settlement remains e.g. pits, postholes etc. and they appeared to be concentrated in three main foci. Typically the foci contained a possible building, two or four-post structures and a cluster of pits.

All features were filled by a homogenous grey/red brown silty clay with occasional small stones. Any variations to this are noted in the text.

Settlement focus L4 (Fig 3)

This focus was located within the N half of excavation area C. It comprised a possible rectangular structure G7, a two-post structure G59, a four-post

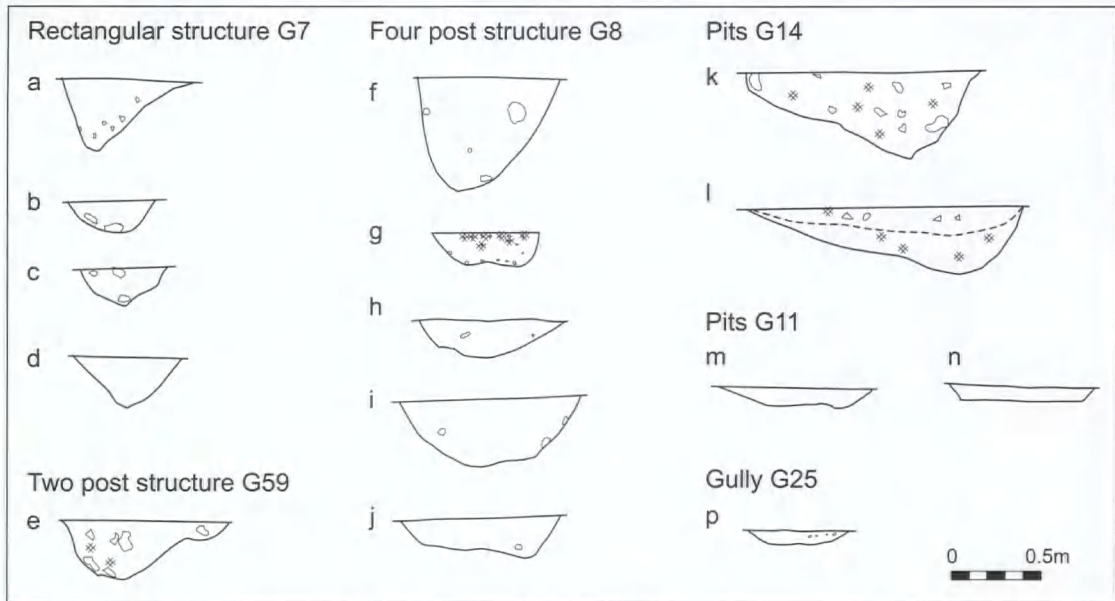


Figure 4 Landscape 4 selected sections

(Fig 4e). Its fill contained moderate flecks of charcoal and occasional moderate sized stones.

Four-post structure G8

Sub-rectangular four-post structure G8 was located 2.9m S of G59. The centres of the posts were *c.* 1.5m apart on the NE-SW alignment and *c.* 1m apart on the NW-SE alignment. On the SE side a fifth posthole was present approximately halfway between the corner posts. All the postholes were sub-circular, between 0.35m and 0.5m in diameter, usually with concave profiles and between 0.1m and 0.3m deep (Fig 4g-j). That to the N was deeper with steeper sides (Fig 4f). Two of the postholes had unusual inclusions: that to the N contained moderate sized stones suggestive of post packing and that to the NE contained frequent flecks of charcoal.

Pits G14

Three pits G14 dug in close proximity to structure G7 were oval in plan and orientated generally N-S. Two were *c.* 1.1m by 0.7m and 0.25m deep with asymmetrical sides, almost with a stepped profile (Fig 4k and l). Pit 859 was half as long again, but had a similar width and depth. The fills of all pits included occasional charcoal flecks. Pit 859 was exceptional in that it also contained burnt stones (including heat affected, unworked flint) and amorphous fired clay fragments weighing 12g.

Pits G11

A cluster of 12 pits G11 was located *c.* 11m to the W of structure G7. Seven of the pits were circular and five elongated in plan. The circular pits had a variety of profiles from concave to steep sided but had flat bases (Fig 4n). The majority were 0.5m in diameter. The irregular pits were between 1.3m and 2.6m in length with 45 degree sides and usually had flat bases (Fig 4m). All the pits were under 0.3m deep. Several of the pits truncated other pits indicating that they were not all contem-

porary and the shape in plan of the irregular pits suggests they may have been dug in more than one episode.

Gullies G25 and G61

Two gullies G25 and G61 were situated adjacent to pit group G11. Gully G25 was orientated N-S, over 1.6m in length continuing beyond the limit of the excavation, 0.4m wide and 0.05m deep. Gully G61 was orientated NW-SE 3m S of G11, orientated W-E, turning slightly to S. It was 5.5m long, 0.55m wide and 0.1m deep with 45 degree sides and a concave/flat base (Fig 4p). Possible postpits were located at the southern ends of both gullies for example 810, but it is uncertain if these are related. Environmental sample 16, taken from the fill of G61, contained significant quantities of charcoal including oak and one grain of rivet or bread wheat. A radiocarbon determination was obtained from the charcoal (see Table 3).

Settlement focus L5 (Fig 3)

Focus L5 was located S of L4 and contained a similar range of elements including a rectangular structure G6, two two-post structures G58 and G21, a four-post structure G9, two areas of pitting G12 and G13 and a gully G19. The spatial relationships of these settlement elements were similar to those observed in L4.

Rectangular structure G6

Structure G6 comprised three postholes aligned parallel to a linear slot. These are presumed to have defined the two sides, *c.* 4m apart, of a structure orientated NNW-SSE. The two northern postholes were inter-cutting. The postholes were sub-circular in plan with diameters of between 0.4m and 0.7m. The northern pair had steep sides and flat bases (Fig 5b), but the

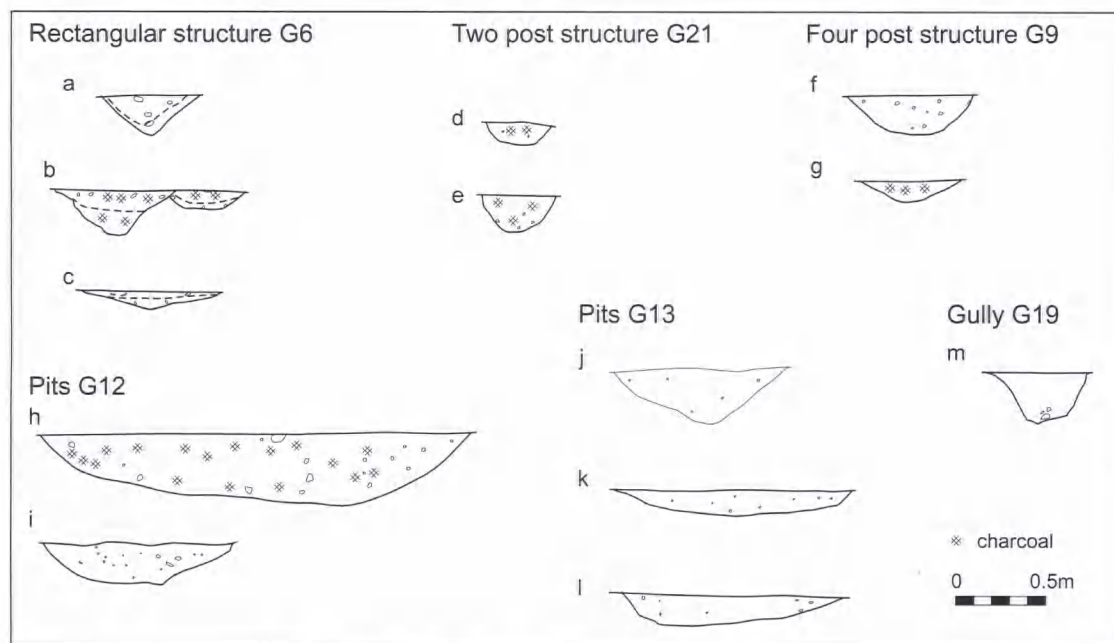


Figure 5 Landscape 5 selected sections

one to the S was very shallow (Fig 5c). The slot was 2.3m in length with a V-shaped profile 0.5m apart and 0.2m deep (Fig 5a). The two intercutting postholes contained moderate flecks of charcoal.

Two-post structures G21 and G58

Two-post structure G21 was located 15m SW of structure G6 and may have been associated with a short linear feature. The postholes were 1.2m apart, oval and circular, c. 0.5m in diameter, with concave sides and bases, up to 0.2m deep (Fig 5d and e). Their fills contained occasional charcoal flecking (environmental sample 20). A radiocarbon determination was obtained from the charcoal (see Table 3). The second two-post structure G58 was located 15m to the E and comprised three unexcavated postholes. These were oval in plan, c. 0.4m in diameter and 1m apart.

Four-post structure G9

A four-post structure G9 was located 3m S of two-post structure G58. The centres of the posts were c. 2.6m apart E-W and c. 2.1m N-S. They were circular with diameters of between 0.4m and 0.7m, with concave sides and bases, all under 0.2m deep (Fig 5f and g). The posthole to the SE contained occasional charcoal flecks (Fig 5g).

Pits G12

A cluster of five pits G12 was located c. 3m E of four-post structure G9. Four of the pits were evenly spaced between 4.5m and 5.3m apart and appeared to be paired. They were sub-oval or sub-circular, usually with concave profiles (Fig 5i). The fifth pit 2m to the W was much larger c. 2.1m by 1.75m and 0.4m deep with a fairly flat base (Fig 5h). Pit 703 contained a single struck flint flake.

Pits G13

Pit cluster G13 was located c. 11m to the SW of four-post structure G9. It comprised eight pits within a diameter of c. 6-7m. They varied in size and shape from large sub-oval, small circular to small linear. Most of the pits had concave sides and bases. The exceptions to this were the two large sub-oval pits at the NW, which had steeply sloping sides (Fig 5j). These were c. 3m by 1.2m, approximately twice the size of the next largest. The circular pits were between 0.3m and 0.85m in diameter, but usually only 0.1m deep (Fig 5l). The linear pits were between 1.3m and 1.9m long, c. 0.6m wide and 0.15m deep (Fig 5k). Although no intercutting between pits was identified the V-shaped plan of pit 840 strongly suggested it was two features.

Gully G19

Gully G19 was 5m SE of structure G6. It was orientated NW-SE curving slightly to the E at its S end and was over 4.8m in length. It was truncated by later ditch G15. It had steep sides with a flat base, was 0.5m wide and 0.3m deep (Fig 5m).

Settlement focus L1 (Fig 6)

This focus was located within excavation area B. It comprised three possible sub-circular buildings G1, G2, G3, rectangular structure G4, posthole cluster G56, gullies G18, isolated pit S61, gullies G18 and three fencelines G5, G20 and G55. An alternative interpretation for the northern arrangement of postholes G5 is that it was a rectangular building.

Two of the sub-circular buildings, G1 and G2,

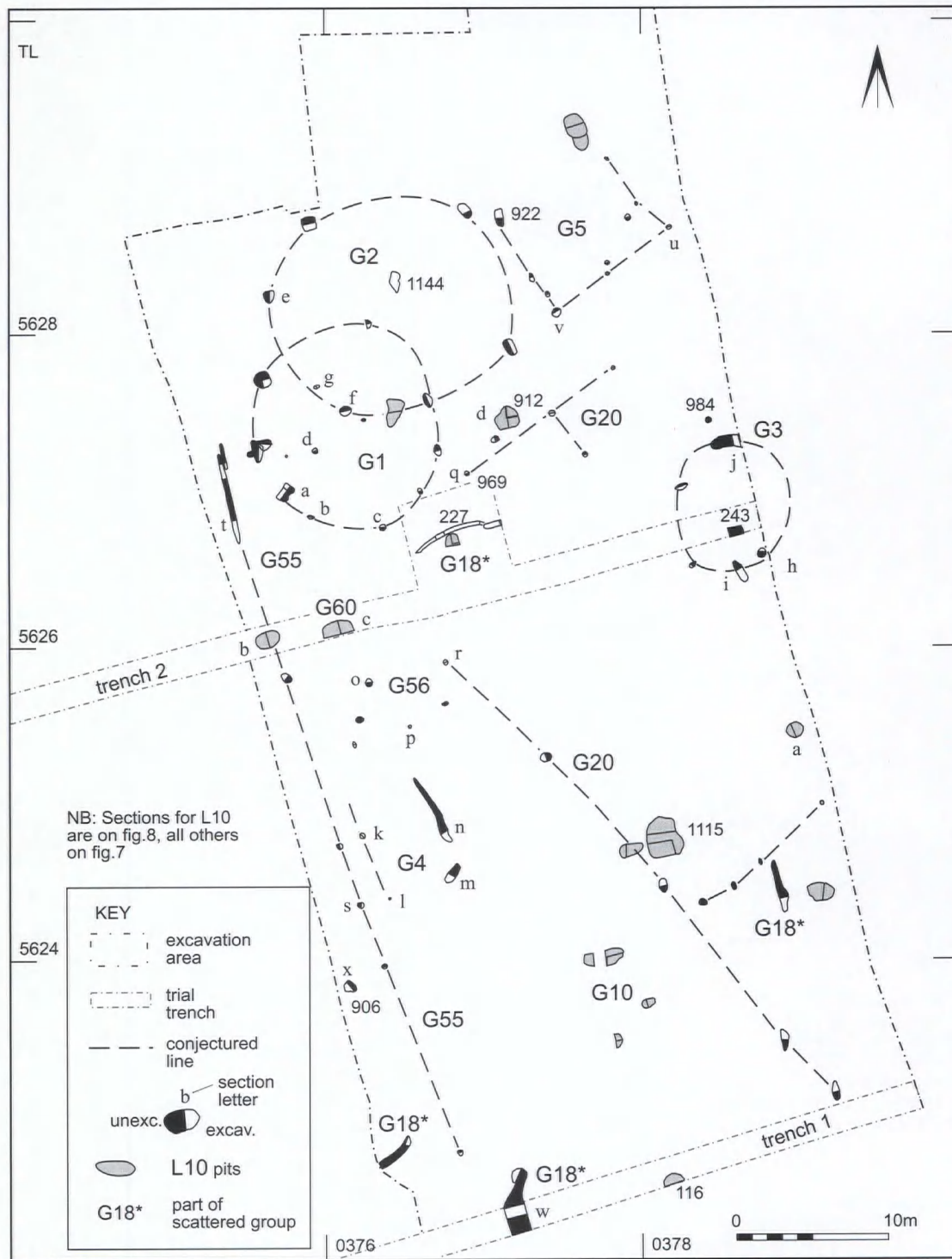


Figure 6 Phase 2 Area B settlement foci L1 and pits L10

were clearly not contemporary and presumably represented the replacement of one building by another. It is also unlikely that fencelines G20 and G55 were contemporary.

Sub-circular building G1

This building comprised twelve postholes or postpits positioned in a sub-circular arrangement with a diameter of c. 12.5m. A possible entrance to the SW is suggested by the presence of two inter-cutting postholes, 2.6m apart (Fig 7a). Both of the postholes within the interior of the building are located near this possible entrance. The postholes and postpits were generally circular or sub-circular in plan. The six with concave bases (Fig 7b and c) were located on the opposite side of the building to those three with near vertical sides. They ranged from 0.12m to 1.0m in diameter and were generally under 0.2m deep. Generally those on the S side were smaller. The fill of the larger internal posthole contained medium sized stones suggestive of packing (Fig 7d).

Sub-circular building G2

Building G2 was defined by eight postholes or postpits positioned in a sub-circular arrangement with a diameter of c. 15.5m. It partially overlapped with roundhouse G1, the centre of which lay c.8m SW of the centre of G2. An irregular feature 1144 near the centre of the building may indicate the presence of a central post. The features were variable in plan, profile and diameter. They were sub-rectangular or circular in plan, mainly with steep or near vertical sides, between 0.25 and 1.1m in diameter, and up to 0.35m deep (Fig 7e, f and g). Two adjacent postholes to the SW contained moderate charcoal flecking (Fig 7f and g) and may be doorposts (they are in a comparable location to the doorway of G1).

Possible sub-circular building G3

Approximately 11m to the E of G1 and G2 was the less conclusive evidence for another possible building. It continued beyond the limit of the excavation and comprised an arrangement of six postholes or postpits in an arc with a projected diameter of c.7.5m. On the N side a curving slot-like feature 0.8m wide and 0.45m deep with steep, slightly stepped sides and an uneven base, may be associated (Fig 7j). Two other features may be associated with this building, pit 243 would be within the interior of the building and posthole 984 situated 1.2m to the N. The postholes and postpits were generally oval in plan, but varied greatly in diameter (between 0.3m and 1.5m) and 0.2m deep (Fig 7h and i). Only one of the postholes contained occasional charcoal flecks.

Rectangular structure G4

Possible structure G4 was aligned N-S and measured c. 9m by 6.5m. Its W side was defined by two postholes and the E by a linear gully and postpit. The gap between the gully and postpit might suggest a doorway in the SE corner. The gully was 4.8m in length, 0.6m wide with steep sides and a flat base 0.2m deep (Fig 7n). Adjacent to this was an oval postpit, 1.4m by 0.5m, with concave sides and an uneven base 0.15m deep (Fig 7m). The two postholes were circular with diameters of 0.1m and 0.4m. They were equally shallow at 0.1m (Fig 7k and l).

Posthole cluster G56

A cluster of five postholes was located to the N of structure G4. They were generally sub-oval or circular with concave

sides and bases (Fig 7o), although one at the S had near vertical sides (Fig 7p). All had diameters of between 0.2m and 0.5m and were only c.0.2m deep.

Fencelines G20

Perpendicular arrangements of at least three fencelines were identified to the SE of G1 and G2. The NW-SE alignment comprised five postholes extending for over 45m, apparently aligned on the entrance side of roundhouse G1. Perpendicular to this were shorter alignment of postholes. The postholes were circular or oval in plan, with concave or near vertical sides and concave bases (Fig 7q and r). They had an average diameter of 0.5m diameter and were all under 0.3m deep. Several of the postholes contained moderate quantities of charcoal flecks (environmental sample 53) and one contained a large stone suggestive of post packing. A single radiocarbon determination was obtained from charcoal from posthole 969 (see Table 3).

Fenceline G55

A possible fenceline extending for at least 48m was located to the W of structure G4, but parallel to it. At the N it was defined by intercutting gullies which were similar with near vertical sides and flat bases (Fig 7t). They extended for 5.8m and were 0.3m wide and 0.2m deep. The remainder of the boundary was defined by small concave postholes or postpits (Fig 7s).

Fenceline/rectangular building G5

A rectangular arrangement of ten postholes G5, was located adjacent to the NE side of roundhouse G2. These appear to form a rectangular area on three sides, open to the NW. They are parallel or perpendicular to fencelines G20 and would appear to be aligned on roundhouse G2. However, an interpretation as a rectangular building cannot be ruled out. The postholes are mainly oval or circular in plan, with concave bases (Fig 7u and v). They are all approximately c.0.3m in diameter and under 0.25m deep. Postpit 922 produced a struck flint.

Gullies G18

Four separate gullies were assigned to G18 so they could be considered together. They shared some similarities with the gullies that were part of G55 and may therefore be part of fencelines. They were parallel and perpendicular to fenceline G55 and may therefore have been associated. Gully 227 to the N, was slightly curved and had been truncated by later ditch G15. The gully to the S had steep sides and a flat base (Fig 7w). The fills of both features contained occasional medium sized stones.

Pit 906

Isolated pit 906 was located 2m W of fenceline G55. It was sub-oval, 0.8m by 0.65m with gradual sloping sides and a concave base 0.15m deep (Fig 7x). The lower fill consisted of loose, dark blue grey clay with frequent charcoal and 14 undiagnostic fragments of animal bone (weighing 35g). It also contained a single struck flint flake. This appeared to represent a deliberate dump of waste into the small pit. The upper fill was the usual grey brown silty clay and may have been a deliberate sealing of the pit.

Pits L10 (Fig 6)

Two irregular scatters of pits G10 and G60 were assigned to L10. Some of the pits were clearly not contemporary with some of the activity in L1 or L6,

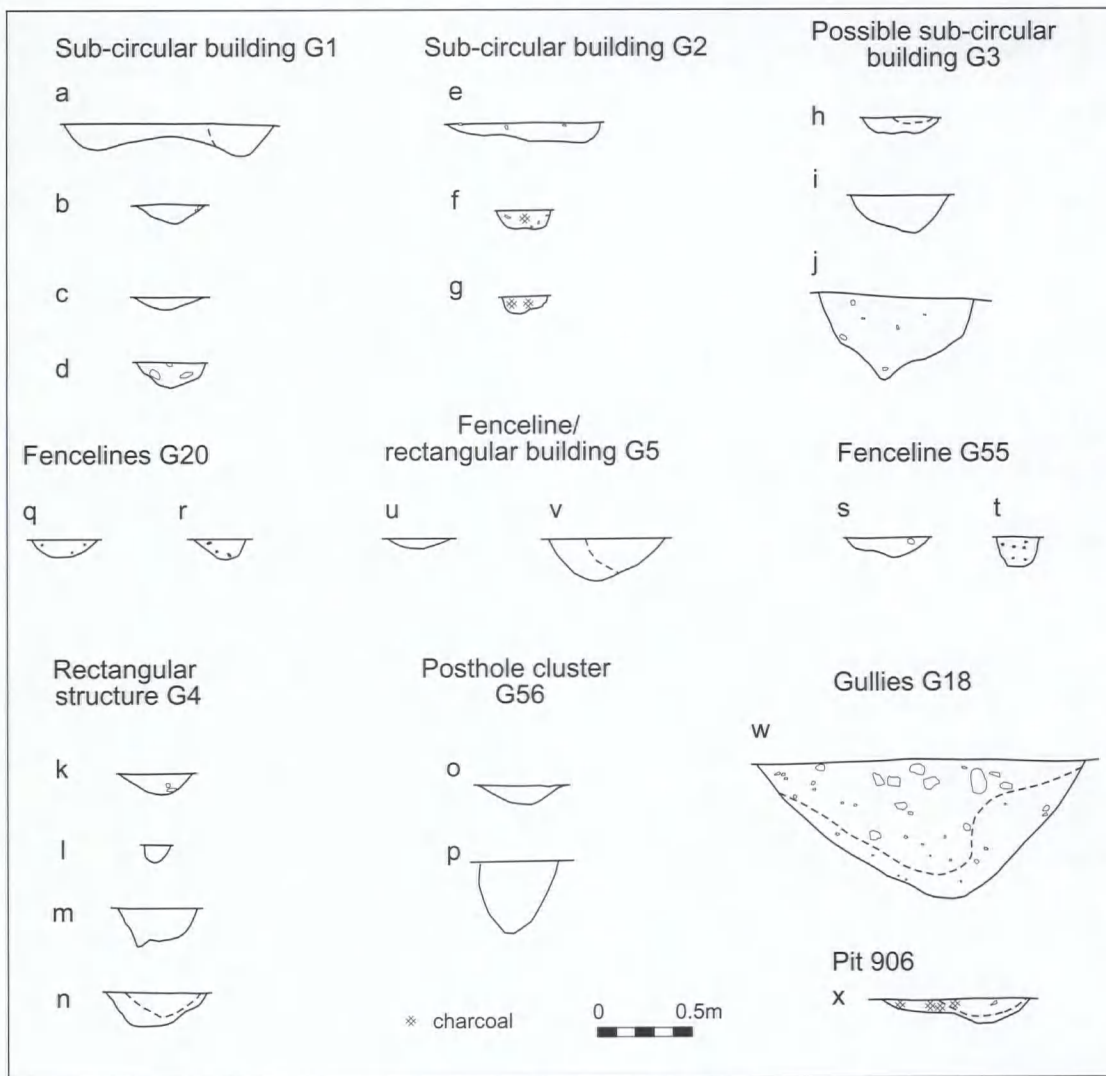


Figure 7 Landscape 1 selected sections

for example sub-circular building G2, fencelines G20 and G55. The two scatters appeared to share a common SW-NE alignment and were 20-22m apart. The significance of the gap between them is unclear, although they could have been dug either side of a routeway.

No patterning could be determined in the distribution of different types of pits. However, only in one instance did two pits inter-cut.

Pit group G10

An irregular scatter of eight pits extended over an area of 30m by 10m towards the S of Area B. The pits were generally oval or circular in plan with steep or near vertical sides. Four had

concave bases (Fig 8a) and two were flat. Four of the pits were less than 1m in diameter and three were between 1.7m and 2.6m. Their depths varied between 0.1m and 0.7m. Several of the pits contained a darker, almost grey black fill, which included occasional charcoal flecks and medium sized stones. Pit 116 yielded a single pottery sherd (weighing 2g) of possible early-middle Iron Age date. Ten fragments of burnt clay (weighing 79g) were recovered from pit 1115, one of the largest in this group.

Pit group G60

Pit group G60 was an irregular scatter of seven pits covering an area of 40m by 10m located NW of G10. Most of the pits had steep or near vertical sides, with generally flat bases (Fig 8b, c and d). All the pits were between c. 1.4m and c. 1.8m in length and between 0.8m and 1.2m wide. They were usually

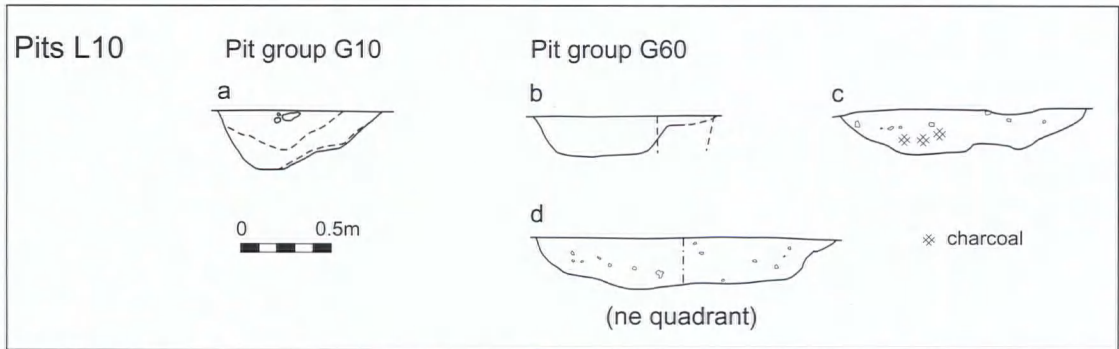


Figure 8 Landscape 10 selected sections

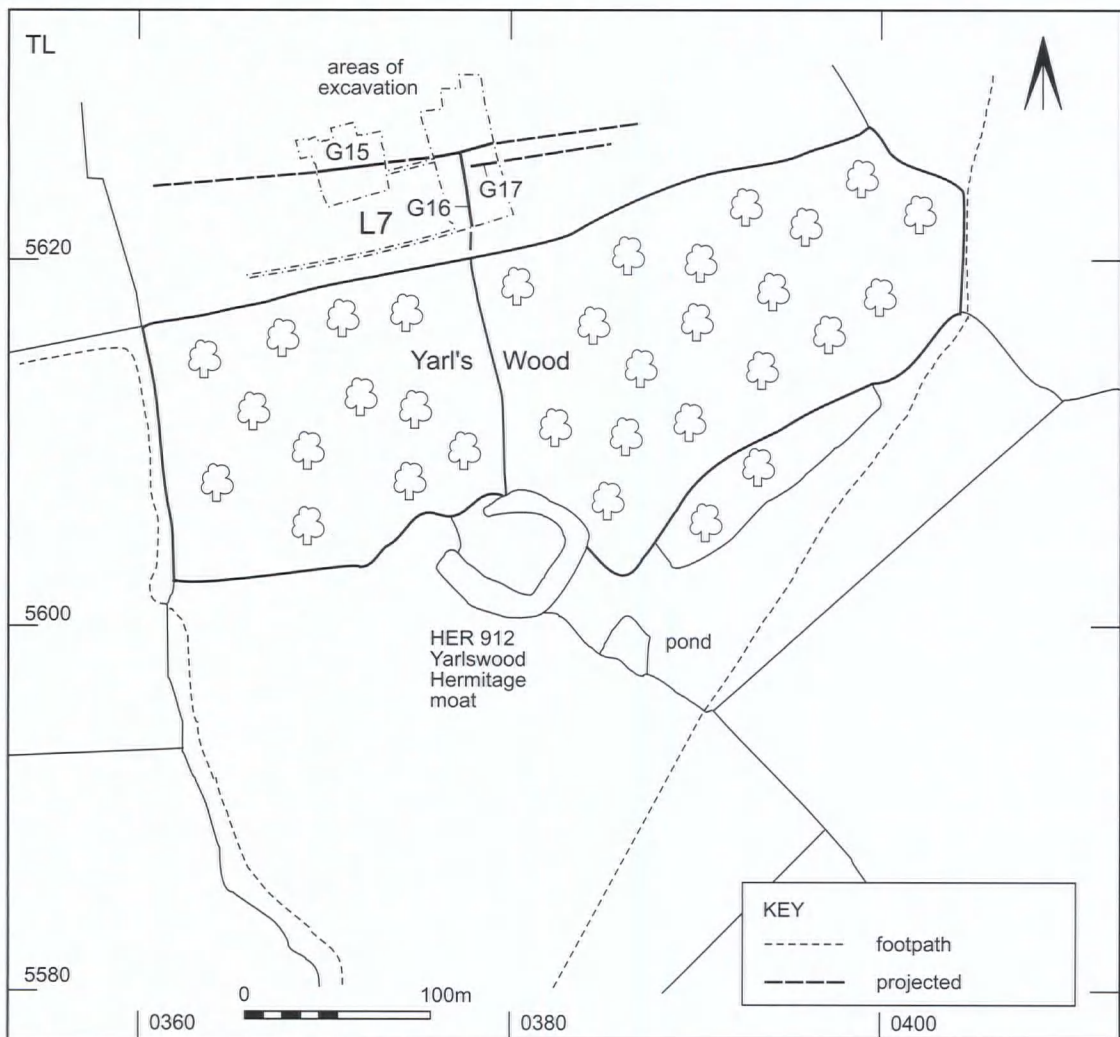


Figure 9 Phase 3, Field System L7, incorporated with 1882 OS map

0.3m deep with the exception of the northern most pit which was 0.65m deep. Only two pits intercut suggesting they were broadly contemporary. Pit 912 contained moderate charcoal flecking (environmental sample 40), from which a radiocarbon determination was obtained (see Table 3).

PHASE 3 ?MEDIEVAL FIELD SYSTEM (Figs 2 and 9)

Field System L7

Three ditches, G15, G16 and G17, were located within excavation areas B and C (Fig 9). They were aligned perpendicular or parallel to each other and are therefore believed to be part of a contemporary field system. Two of the ditches truncated Phase 2 elements. There was no evidence for internal activity, ploughing or furrows.

Boundary Ditch G15

Ditch G15 was orientated E-W and bisected excavation areas B and C. It had a V-shaped profile c. 2.2m wide and c. 1.0m deep. The ditch contained frequent chalk lumps and chalk flecking. The disposition of this in section suggested the presence of a bank to the N.

Boundary Ditch G16

Ditch G16 was orientated N-S and joined ditch G15. It had steep sides 2.4m wide and a concave base 0.6m deep. One of its lower fills comprised a black ashy deposit, which produced one fragment of animal bone. Environmental sample 37 from this deposit produced significant quantities of oak charcoal and sample 82 contained charcoal flecks but was otherwise unproductive. A radiocarbon determination was obtained from sample 37 (see Table 3). A later modern pipe trench heavily truncated the upper fill of the ditch.

Boundary Ditch G17

A third ditch G17 was parallel to G15 c. 7.5m to the S and butt ended c. 7.5m from G16. It had a similar profile to the larger ditches, but at 0.9m wide and 0.2m deep it was much shallower. The fill of the ditch contained occasional large stones, probably naturally derived from the sides of the feature.

PHASE 4: MODERN INTRUSIONS

With the exception of modern land drains located in all trenches the only modern features were located in trenches 3 and 4. These included 20th century brick

rubble hardstanding (just below the grass) and several rectangular steep sided pits containing 20th century debris (tins, china etc).

ARTEFACTS

Jackie Wells

Twelve pieces of flint weighing 76g were identified from Phase 2 features. The majority comprise unworked, burnt or heat affected fragments, deriving from pits G14 (L4) and 906 (L1). Struck pieces comprise two hard hammer struck flakes of indeterminate date (Table 1).

Pit 1115 in G10 (L10, Phase 2) yielded 10 fragments of burnt clay (weighing 79g). None of the fragments appear to represent structural daub and it is possible that the material represents accidentally burnt or fired natural clay. Pit 116, also in G10 (L10, Phase 2), contained a single undiagnostic sand and/or shell tempered pottery sherd (weighing 2g), of possible early-middle Iron Age date. The sherd is moderately abraded, and too fragmentary to be further classified.

ECOFACTS

Animal bone

Jackie Wells

Fourteen undiagnostic fragments of animal bone (weighing 35g) were recovered from pit 906 (L1). The material survives in very poor condition, with much surface erosion.

Environmental samples

Jenny Robinson

Samples were taken from the majority of the archaeological features irrespective of whether a visual inspection suggested environmental or artefactual potential. This produced 90 samples, mostly between 5 and 10 litres.

Landscape	Group	Feature	Quantity	Description
1	5	922	1:1	Flake
1		906	6:36	Flake and heat affected pieces
4	14	859	4:37	Unworked, heat affected pieces
5	12	703	1:2	Flake
Total			12:76	

Table 1 Quantity of flint from Phase 2, by fragment count and weight (g).

Methods

The samples were floated onto a 0.3mm mesh. The residues were sieved down to 1.0mm, the fraction above 5.6mm being sorted, the fraction below 5.6mm being retained for laboratory analysis. The flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at x10 magnification. Any seeds, chaff items etc were identified and recorded. Charcoal was broken and examined at magnifications of up to x50 under a binocular microscope, provisionally identified and recorded. This technique is appropriate for the identification of *Quercus* but the other charcoal identifications must be regarded as tentative. Ten residues below 5.6mm were scanned under a binocular microscope, but biological remains proved to be absent.

Results

Only six flots contained charred plant remains, of which only one was a seed (Table 2). Although the flots also contain modern root fragments from herbaceous vegetation, some fragments of modern insects and, in some instances, fungal fruiting bodies, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the deposits were modern.

Charred remains were very sparse, with only samples 16 and 37 containing significant quantities of charcoal. The range of taxa represented by charcoal is unexceptional, with *Quercus* sp. (oak) the most abundant, followed by *Prunus* sp. (sloe, plum etc). The quantity of charcoal in samples 16 and 37 con-

firms that they were from features that were open to receive charcoal. The only other charred plant item is a single grain of free-threshing *Triticum* sp. (rivet or bread wheat) in sample 16. It is most likely that it is Saxon to post-medieval in date, although a Neolithic or Roman date would also be possible.

Radiocarbon determinations

The very sparse artefactual assemblage did not allow the settlement remains to be dated with any confidence. Therefore, a series of radiocarbon determinations were undertaken to try and provide a more robust chronological framework (see Table 3). However, given the scarcity of suitable charred material especially from primary fills, uncertainties over its taphonomy and the absence of multiple samples from individual structures, it was recognised that the chances of obtaining a series of statistically meaningful dates were not great.

This proved to be the case with the dates spanning the Mesolithic to modern periods. The sample from pit group G60 (Sample 40) did produce a date, compatible with the interpretation of the Phase 2 features as a Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement. However, morphological comparison with better dated sites still provides the best dating evidence for the remains uncovered on the site.

	SAMPLE	16	20	37	40	53	82
	GROUP	61	21	16	60	20	16
	TYPE	Gully	Two-post	Ditch	Pit	Fence	Ditch
	LANDSCAPE	4	5	7	10	1	7
	PHASE	2	2	3	2	2	3
	FEATURE				912	969	
SEEDS ETC							
<i>Triticum</i> sp.							
	short free-threshing grain	rivet or bread wheat	1	-	-	-	-
CHARCOAL							
	cf. <i>Prunus</i> sp.	sloe, plum etc	-	-	++	-	-
	cf. Pomoideae	hawthorn, apple etc	-	-	-	+	-
	cf. <i>Betula</i> sp.	birch	-	-	-	-	+
	<i>Alnus/Corylus</i> tp.	alder or hazel	-	-	+	-	-
	<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak	++	-	+	-	-
	indet? root		-	+	-	-	+

Table 2 Charred plant remains

P	L	G	Type	Results	S
2	4	61	Gully	Beta - 154166 Measured radiocarbon 960 +/- 50 bp 13c/12c ratio -25.4 o/oo Conventional radiocarbon age 950 +/- 50 bp 2 sigma calibration : cal ad 1000 to 1200 (cal bp 950 to 750)	16
2	5	21	2-poster	Beta - 154167 Measured radiocarbon 4080 +/- 40 bp 13c/12c Ratio -24.2 o/oo Conventional radiocarbon age 4090 +/- 40 bp 2 sigma calibration : cal bc 2860 to 2800 (cal bp 4810 to 4750) and cal bc 2760 to 2550 (cal bp 4710 to 4500) Cal bc 2540 to 2490 (cal bp 4480 to 4440)	20
3	7	16	Ditch	Beta - 154168 Measured radiocarbon 260 +/- 40 bp -13c/12c Ratio -27.3 o/oo Conventional radiocarbon age 220 +/- 40 bp 2 sigma calibration : cal ad 1640 to 1680 (cal bp 310 to 260) and cal ad 1730 to 1810 (cal bp 220 to 140) cal ad 1930 to 1950 (cal bp 20 to 0)	37
2	10	60	Pit 912	Beta - 154169 Measured radiocarbon 3190 +/- 40 bp 13c/12c Ratio -26.5 o/oo Conventional radiocarbon age 3170 +/- 40 bp 2 sigma calibration : cal bc 1520 to 1390 (cal bp 3460 to 3340)	40
2	1	20	Posthole 969	Beta - 154170 Measured radiocarbon 6060 +/- 40 bp 13c/12c Ratio -26.2 o/oo Conventional radiocarbon age 6040 +/- 40 bp 2 sigma calibration : cal bc 5035 to 4810 (cal bp 6985 to 6760)	53

P= Phase, L= Landscape, G= Group, S= Sample

Table 3 Radiocarbon determinations

DISCUSSION

This discussion covers the phase 2 settlement and the phase 3 field system. The modern landuse is briefly discussed where it is considered relevant to archaeological features considered to be of much greater antiquity.

THE 'EARLIER' PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT

The nature and distribution of the archaeological features assigned to phase 2 is suggestive of settlement. It is clear that at some similar settlements domestic debris is also rare and, if present, is restricted to a small number of features, for example Aldermaston, Berkshire (Bradley *et al* 1980) and Biddenham Loop, Bedfordshire. (Albion in preparation). The lack of dating evidence from Yarl's Wood is of some concern. However, a comparison of the settlement's components with other excavated examples suggests a date in the prehistoric period, most likely the late Bronze Age / early Iron Age (Fig 10).

In the following discussion individual components of the settlement will be examined and comparisons drawn with similar elements on other settlements. The spatial arrangement between and within the identified foci will then be considered, before the dating and function of the settlement is discussed.

Components of the settlement

Sub-circular buildings G1, G2 and G3

Three possible sub-circular buildings were identified in L1, although G3 is the least convincing. Wall lines were represented by a range of features including 'typical' postholes (relatively small, circular, concave features), along with larger postpits and in the case of G3, a gully.

It is easy to be sceptical of wall lines 'created' by archaeologists from widely spaced, differing, small features. However, there are a number of aspects that

suggest some of these buildings are genuine. Firstly they are located close together (within 25m of each other), all within excavation area B. With regard to G1 it is interesting to note that features in the S wall line were generally smaller, which may be a reflection of prevailing winds or associated with the removal of the posts. G1 also has evidence for a SW doorway in the form of pairings of intercutting features presumably door posts. Although no internal features could be assigned with certainty, of the three isolated features in this area, two postholes are adjacent to G1's possible doorway and the other, an irregular scoop is approximately central within G2. Two adjacent postholes to the SW of G2 positioned in a similar location to the proposed doorway of G1 were the only ones to contain charcoal flecks.

At c. 13m the diameter of G1 and G2 is slightly larger than Late Bronze/early Iron Age circular buildings at Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep) and Reading Business Park Area 5 (Moore and Jennings 1992, 19). The spacing between surviving postholes at c. 3m is slightly larger than a number of the round-houses on the latter site (*ibid* Fig 13). The shallow depths of the recorded postholes suggests that some may have been completely removed by ploughing.

It is always possible that some two- and four-post structures (*see* below) represent entrances/porches into circular buildings. The majority of the circular buildings at Danebury, Hampshire, had two door-post entrances (Cunliffe and Poole 1991, 45-46 and Fig 4.10) and nine of the 20 circular buildings at Reading Business Park Area 5 had four-post entrance structures (Moore and Jennings 1992, 14). The peripheral location of the two- and four-post structures at Yarl's Wood, isolated from other features, would ensure sufficient room for a circumference of wall posts.

Rectangular structures/buildings G4, G5, G6 and G7

Four rectangular structures/buildings were tentatively identified and with the exception of G5, all included a slot/gully component. Inevitably with this kind of evidence it is possible that elements of the so-called structures are in fact fences or fenced enclosures, for example G5.

Slots/gullies appear to represent side walls in G4 and G6, with a parallel arrangement of pits/postholes. Isolated gullies, for example those assigned to G18, may also therefore be related to structures. Similar short lengths of slots of uncertain function were present within the late Bronze/early Iron Age settlement at the Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.).

The slot in G7 was different and appeared to divide the structure into two, but with a central doorway. Structure 2 at Lofts Farm, Essex, of late Bronze Age date, also contained an internal partition, formed by postholes, and a gully which was interpreted as a possible drain (Brown 1988, Fig 10). Like Structure 2 at Lofts Farm which was only c.2m wide, Structures G6 and G7 at Yarl's Wood are narrow (c. 3.5-4m). They would presumably have served a non-domestic function or, as suggested by Brown for Lofts Farm, represent the central posts of an aisled building (*ibid*).

Four-post structures G8, G9

Two four-post structures were identified, G8 c. 1.2m and G9 c. 2.2m square, both approximately aligned SW-NE. A fifth posthole was associated with G8 and may represent a later supporting timber.

Four-post structures are frequent occurrences on late Bronze/early Iron Age sites for example at Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.), Reading Business Park (Moore and Jennings 1992, Fig 9 on 15 and 27) and Danebury (Cunliffe and Poole 1991, 110-112). The four four-post structures at Biddenham varied from 1.3m to 4.6m, showed little consistency in alignment and were located like those at Yarl's Wood towards the periphery of activity areas. These structures are usually interpreted as granaries (Gent 1983, 246-252), although it seems likely that they were used to store other products (Cunliffe and Poole 1991, 115). Alternatively they could have functioned as watch towers, chicken pens, excarnation platforms etc (Knight 1984, 154-5) or even represent porch/entranceways to circular buildings which have left no other trace (as discussed above).

Two-post structures G21, G58 and G59

Three two-post structures were identified. These are perhaps the most tentative type of structure to identify given the ease with which the human eye automatically links two postholes. They were 0.9m (G59), 1.2m (G21) and 1m (G58) apart. The structures did not share a common alignment.

Again, this type of structure is frequently found on late Bronze Age/early Iron Age sites for example at Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.), Lofts Farm (Brown 1988, 260), Reading Business Park (Moore and Jennings 1992, 39) and Danebury (Cunliffe and Poole 1991, 113). The Yarl's Wood two-post structures were very similar to those identified at Lofts Farm (structures 5-11) being similarly spaced, with one posthole considerably larger than the other

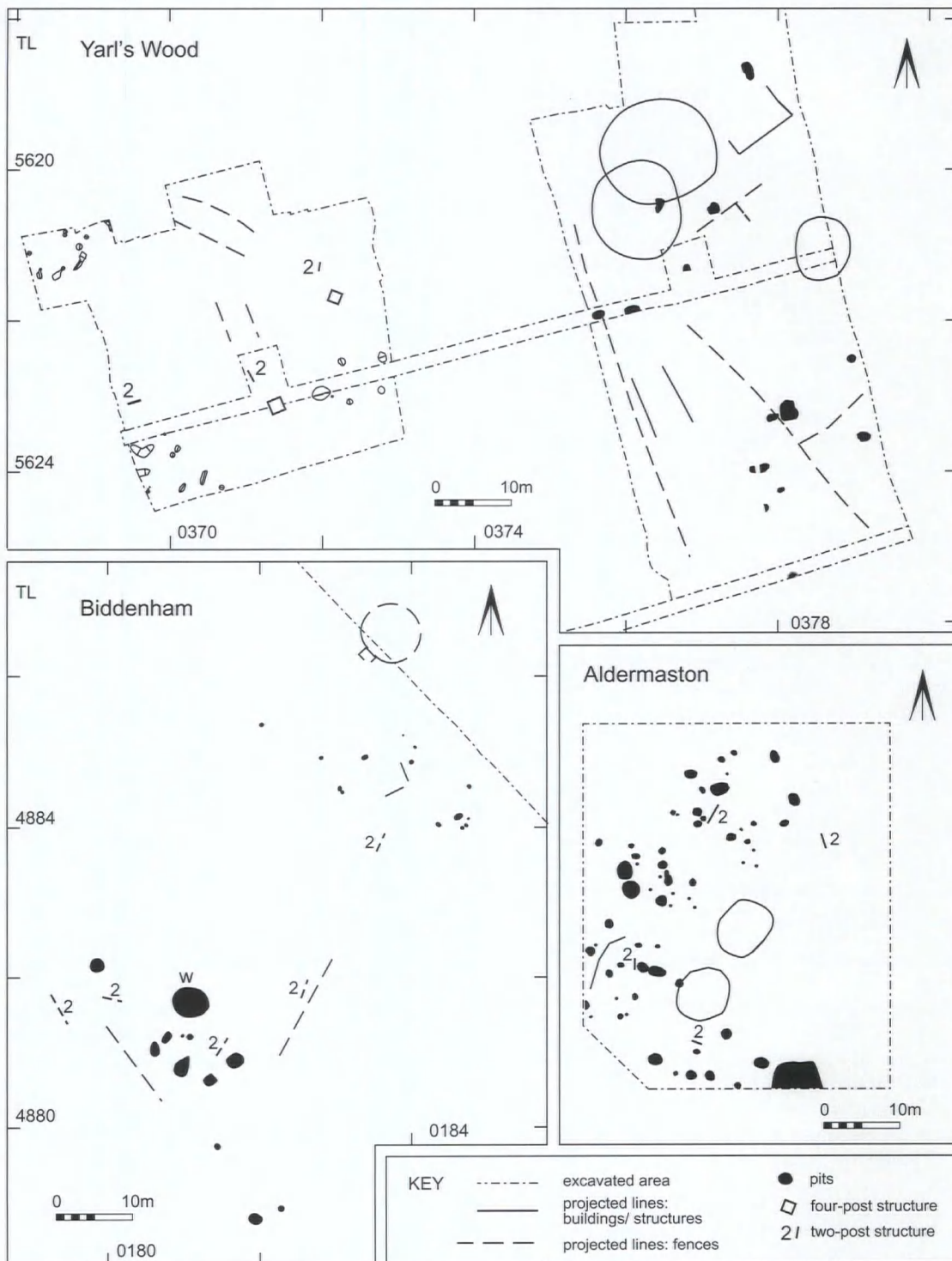


Figure 10 Comparison between Yarl's Wood and other Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlements

(Brown 1988, 260). They could have served as the foundations for variety of structures including drying racks, looms, seating etc (Knight 1984, 159) and some may have served as door posts of buildings for which no other evidence survived (as discussed above).

Pit groups G10, G11, G12, G13, G14 and G60

The pit groups occurred in quite tight clusters, often on the periphery of the foci. They usually contained five or more pits (rarely intercutting). An exception was pit group G14, adjacent to rectangular structure G7. Only one pit (906, L1) occurred in isolated, although unfortunately this was adjacent to the limit of excavation.

Similar discrete clusters of pits have been located at late Bronze/early Iron Age sites at Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.), Lofts Farm (Brown 1988, 261) and Aldermaston Wharf (Bradley *et al* 1980, 221). Pits are often divided into scoops (with shallow, very gentle profiles) and basin profile pits (generally deeper with steeper sides). The majority of the pits at Yarl's Wood could be classed as scoops. At Aldermaston the smaller pits occurred in clusters adjacent to buildings (Bradley *et al* 1980, 251 and 288), a comparable situation to G14. Bradley believed that the scoop type pits may have been formed by gravel extraction with the basin profiled pits serving a storage function (*ibid*, 290). If a similar interpretation is applied to the pits at Yarl's Wood, then the majority would, given the natural, have been small clay quarries, possibly associated with building construction. This may explain the presence of burnt clay within one of the pits. The pits at Lofts Farm are not described in detail because, like at Yarl's Wood, they produced no finds (Brown 1988, 261). Only a small number of pits at Biddenham Loop and Aldermaston contained domestic debris.

Fencelines G20 and G55

Only two fencelines G20 and G55 (both in L1) were identified, both within excavation area B. They are on different alignments and therefore are unlikely to be contemporary. They appeared to respect other settlement elements (*see later*) and G20 incorporated perpendicular alignments suggestive of enclosures. Fenceline G55 included a slot like element to the N and to the S its association with two gullies may suggest an entranceway.

Short lengths of fencelines were associated with the settlement at Biddenham Loop and Lofts Farm (Brown 1988, 260). Inevitably the identification and therefore the interpretation of posthole alignments as

fencelines will always be tentative. The discontinuous linear feature interpreted as the bedding trench for a fenceline at Lofts Farm (Structure 12) is similar to the slot-like element of G55 (L1) at Yarl's Wood (Brown 1988, 260).

Spatial arrangement between and within the foci (Fig 10)

The variations in settlement elements on the two adjacent excavation areas (investigated at the same time by the same archaeologists) is striking. Area B contains possible roundhouses and fencelines which are not present in area C. Area C contains two- and four-post structures which are not present in area B. This type of occurrence has been used to distinguish the settlement foci.

Settlement foci L4 and L5 were identified because they contained the same elements: rectangular structure, four-post, two-post and pit clusters. These elements appear to share similar locations within both foci and could reflect different activities being undertaken in different areas. For example the main pit clusters are furthest away from the rectangular structures and the two-post structures lay between the rectangular structure and the four-post structures. A similar pattern can be deduced from the distribution of settlement elements at Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.), Lofts Farm (although this was contained within an enclosure) (Brown 1988, Fig 8 on 257) and Aldermaston (Bradley *et al* 1980, Fig 9 on 230). At Lofts Farm pit groups occur on the periphery (unfortunately not described in any detail but see Brown 1988, 261), along with two- and four-post structures. All this evidence would tend to suggest a degree of zoning within the settlements with quarrying, working and living all taking place in specific, separate areas.

The arrangement of elements within the settlement foci at Yarl's Wood is also of interest. For example roundhouses G1 and G2 would appear to be just N of the corner of fenced area G20. Fenceline G55 appears to respect the W side of roundhouse G1. The pits L10 appear to form two broadly parallel alignments suggesting they were positioned on either side of a routeway.

Dating evidence

As demonstrated above, the settlement elements present are suggestive of a late Bronze/early Iron Age date. Buildings of this period comprise both circular, e.g. Reading Business Park Area 5 (Moore and Jennings 1992, 19), and rectangular forms, e.g. Structure 2 at Lofts Farm (Brown 1988, 260). Their

identification is always tenuous because, unlike later Iron Age roundhouses, they are rarely defined by drainage ditches (Allen *et al* 1993, 47). Two- and four-post structures, for example at Biddenham (Albion in prep.) are often dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age (Williams 1993, 44).

Stratigraphically several of the settlement components are earlier than the ditch system L7 and modern land drains. Dating evidence based on artefacts is restricted to one piece of Iron Age pottery.

Despite extensive sampling of the settlement features only three deposits produced charred plant remains that were suitable for radiocarbon determination. Only one (Sample 40 from pit group G60) fell within the expected late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date for the settlement. Clearly a single radiocarbon determination cannot be used to date the settlement.

The best dating for the Yarl's Wood settlement is therefore the comparison in settlement morphology with other sites (Fig 10). As described above the layout of the settlement is comparable with those at Biddenham Loop, Lofts Farm and Aldermaston. At these sites a small number of features contained sufficient datable artefacts to demonstrate that they are late Bronze/early Iron Age in date.

Function of the settlement

The evidence uncovered at Yarl's Wood comprised elements typical of settlement. However, its overall interpretation is hampered by the almost non-existent artefact and ecofact assemblage. Both Knights Farm, one of the Aldermaston sites (Bradley *et al* 1980, 286) and Heselton, Yorkshire (Powlesland 1986, 158-159) were similar in layout. Their artefactual and ecofactual evidence suggested they were seasonally occupied or transitory in nature. However, at the Reading Business Park the apparently planned (or organised) nature of the settlement suggested to the excavators that this was more permanent in nature (Moore and Jennings 1992, 120-121). Perhaps a better comparison for Yarl's Wood is with Biddenham Loop, where the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement exhibited zoning, but where there was also a limited number and range of both artefacts and faunal remains.

The near absence of cereal remains at Knight's Farm (Bradley *et al* 1980, 291) and Roughground Farm, Gloucestershire (Allen *et al* 1993, 35), although not precluding crop cultivation, led to the suggestion that the basic economy was pastoral. Although minute, the charred plant assemblage from Yarl's Wood included a single grain of free-threshing

Triticum sp. (rivet or bread wheat), most likely to be Saxon to post-medieval in date, although possibly considerably older. However, the four-post structures suggest cultivation was taking place. The animal bone assemblage is tiny, like that from the Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.) and Fenny Lock, Milton Keynes (Ford and Taylor 2001, 117). In the case of Yarl's Wood the very poor condition of the bone suggests that this material would have only rarely survived in this type of soil. It is therefore uncertain what type of livestock was kept in the settlement. If pasture were present, as presumably it was, it would have been unenclosed.

THE ?MEDIEVAL FIELD SYSTEM

The ditch system L7 is truncated by modern land drains and radiocarbon determination suggests it may be of post-medieval date (for at least one of the ditches). It is not shown on 19th century maps (1884 Ordnance Survey and 1803 pre-enclosure maps). However, a N-S ditch still visible within Yarl's Wood today, is on the same alignment as ditch G16 within the excavation area. This ditch is shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map and to the S joins Yarl's Wood Moat (HER 912). Hutchings in his examination of the Milton Ernest field systems claims that the 1803 boundary to Yarl's Wood was a 'moat-like ditch, much of which is double' (Hutchings 1969, 73). This would appear to correspond with the nature and arrangement of W-E ditches G15 and G17. The former was 2.2m wide and appeared to have been associated with a bank on its N side. Given that G15 is joined by G16 it seems likely that this represents an earlier boundary to Yarl's Wood c. 60m to the N of the present one.

According to Hutchings 'in 1803 Yarl's Wood was joined on its northern side by another wood, Lawn Wood' (1969, 72-3). Hutchings believed that he had identified ridge and furrow within Yarl's Wood, which, if correct, would suggest that this wood post-dates these and is therefore of more recent origin (*ibid*). However, the absence of furrows within the excavation area might suggest Yarl's Wood is indeed of medieval origin.

The medieval moated manor house to the S of Yarl's Wood, sometimes called Yarlswood Hermitage was probably occupied from the 12th to the 16th century. Although the continuation of ditch G16 to the S joined the moat, this may have been a latter addition (Fig 9).

MODERN

Modern features identified within the open area

excavations are restricted to land drains. Hardstanding and other features associated with the post-war establishment were only located in trial trenches 3 and 4 to the NE (Fig 1). The nature and content of the latter were in complete contrast to the pits investigated and assigned to the Phase 2 settlement. Therefore, it is believed that the area of the open area excavation had never been anything other than open space.

CONCLUSION

Bradley has suggested a high degree of population mobility during the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age (1986, 39-40) with few large, permanent settlements. The majority of settlements were temporary and left very little trace below the ground. The evidence from Yarl's Wood, unenclosed, scattered features with few artefacts, fits this model well.

By their very nature, sites of this type are extremely difficult to detect. The Yarl's Wood settlement was located by trial excavation. However, even this is not always successful. For example, within the Biddenham Loop (Albion in prep.) settlement foci of this period were only identified during open area excavation, despite extensive cropmark analysis, non-invasive survey and trial trenching. The relative invisibility of this type of site goes some way to explain their apparent absence in areas like Yarl's Wood. Here, the historic landscape seems to be dominated by Iron Age and Roman settlements, producing the well-defined cropmarks recorded in the HER (Fig 1).

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