

A LATE BRONZE AGE TO ROMAN SITE AT THE FORMER NURSES HOME, OXFORD ROAD, STONE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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with contributions by

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An evaluation and excavation of the former Nurses Home, on the north side of Oxford Road, Stone, Buckinghamshire, was undertaken during 1999. These investigations revealed Late Bronze Age activity that included a possible hut gully, a large number of pits and post holes, and two lengths of a field boundary. An unurned cremation was also present. Later Iron Age features were also noted in areas not coincident with the Late Bronze Age features. They included two sides of a ditch, which may have constituted a rectangular stock enclosure, two gullies and three pits. A re-cut ditch of Roman date was also found.

INTRODUCTION

Following an evaluation in May 1999, two phases of archaeological excavation were undertaken by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) during September and October of the same year, at the former Nurses Home, on the north side of Oxford Road, Stone, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 778 123) (Figs.1 & 2). The work was commissioned by Crest Homes (Eastern) Ltd in advance of the residential development of the site.

SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is located 0.5 km to the west of the centre of Stone, and approximately 4 km south-west of Aylesbury (Fig. 1). It covers an area of *c.* 2.1 hectares and extends northwards from the main A418 road (Aylesbury to Thame) at a height of 112 m AOD, and rises gently to 115 m at the north and east. It is bounded by pasture to the north, a modern residential development to the west and by a green lane to the east (Fig. 2).

The solid geology of Stone comprises a gently sloping ridge of Portland deposits. The south-western part of the site sits on Portland Stone and sand overlying Kimmeridge Clay, while the north-eastern part is composed of Lower Cretaceous

Whitchurch Sands overlying Purbeck Limestone, marl and clay (EnviroClean 1997, 6).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The high fertility of the soil around Stone is well suited for agriculture and this has encouraged long-term settlement since antiquity. Many sites of importance have been discovered near the current excavation (Fig. 2). Much of the evidence was, however, discovered by chance (e.g. during the construction of the vicarage and asylum), resulting in poor documentation. The extensive development in the immediate vicinity of the site has been archaeologically destructive. For example, the evaluation of the former St John's hospital directly south of the Nurses Home, revealed no features earlier than the nineteenth century (Jones 1996).

Possible Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement is attested by flint scatters to the north-east and south of the site (Fig. 2.3, 2.6 & 2.20). Iron Age activity is suggested by the discovery of a ditch containing Iron Age pottery during the excavation of a pipeline 40 m north of the site in 1980 (Fig. 2.11 & 2.12). There is also evidence of a Late Iron Age shaft well, reused as a Roman burial chamber (Fig. 2.21), found in the 1850s (Akerman 1851, 26).

Although evidence for later prehistoric activity

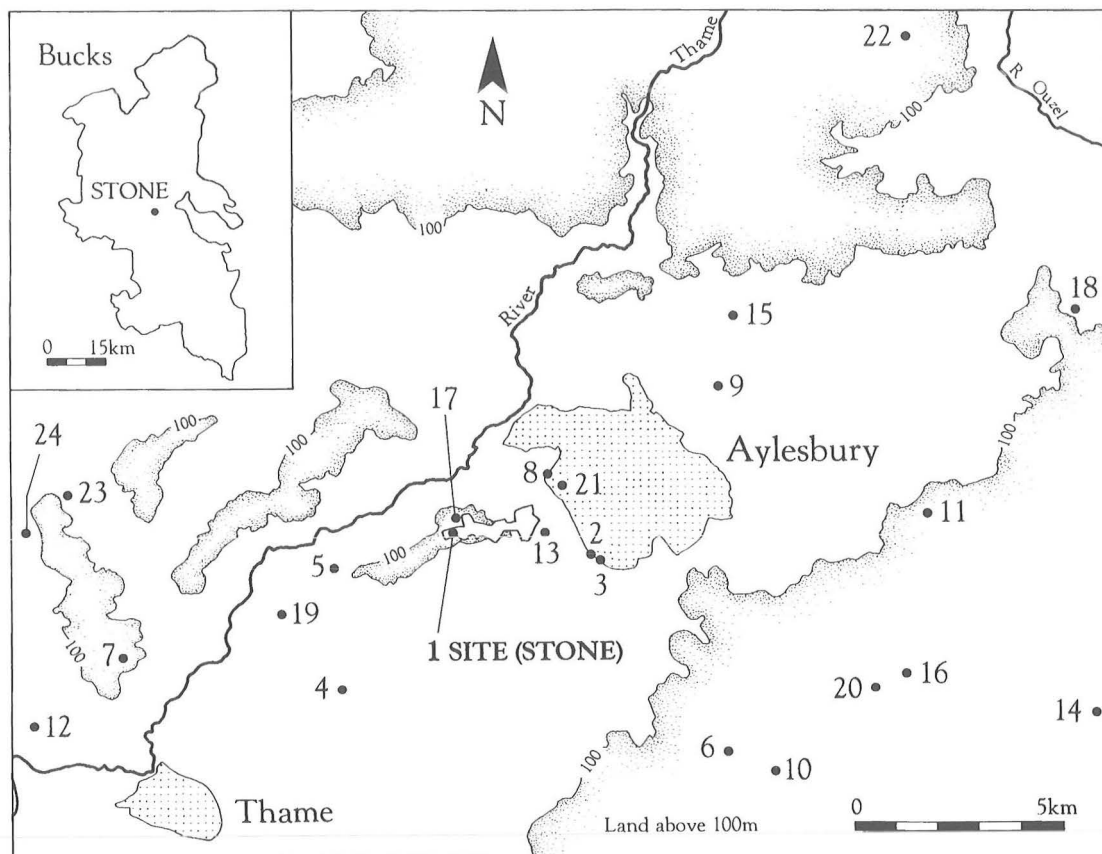


FIGURE 1 Excavation at Former Nurses Home, Stone, Buckinghamshire

is relatively thin on the ground, Roman finds are more abundant. In particular, finds of Roman coins, mostly dating to the 4th century, are common (e.g. Fig. 2.7-8, 2.10 & 2.15-19). Roman pottery scatters in the vicinity of the site provide more substantial evidence of settlement activity, along with a possible Roman road (Fig. 2.13). Evidence for Roman burials includes a Roman inhumation from Burn Hill, and a Roman cemetery near St John's Hospital (Fig. 2.2 & 2.14; Carstairs and Lawson 1992).

The principal sites in the region that relate to the archaeological periods represented at Stone are as follows:

Fig.1.

1. Former Nurses Home, Stone. LBA, LIA and ?Roman. **2.** Walton Court, Aylesbury. LIA-Roman settlement. **3.** Walton Court, Aylesbury. Find of

LBA socketed axe. **4.** Haddenham. Romano-British pottery scatter. **5.** Cuddington. Romano-British settlement. **6.** Ellesborough. Small LBA hoard (socketed axes, knife and leaf-shaped spearhead). **7.** Long Crendon. Large MIA pottery scatter. **8.** Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. EIA – Roman enclosed ditched settlement (with roundhouses). **9.** Bierton, Aylesbury. LIA and Roman enclosed settlement. **10.** Ellesborough. LBA-EIA enclosure settlement. **11.** Buckland. IA and Romano-British settlement. **12.** Shabbington. E-MIA ditched settlement. **13.** Ellen Road, Aylesbury. LBA-EIA ditched settlement. **14.** Cholesbury. LBA-EIA hillfort. **15.** Hulcott. LBA-EIA ditched enclosure settlement. **16.** Halton. IA hillfort. **17.** Stone. EIA-MIA ditched enclosure. **18.** Ivinghoe Beacon. LBA-EIA hillfort. **19.** Haddenham. Possible LBA-EIA enclosure. **20.** Boddington. IA hillfort. **21.** Hartwell. IA

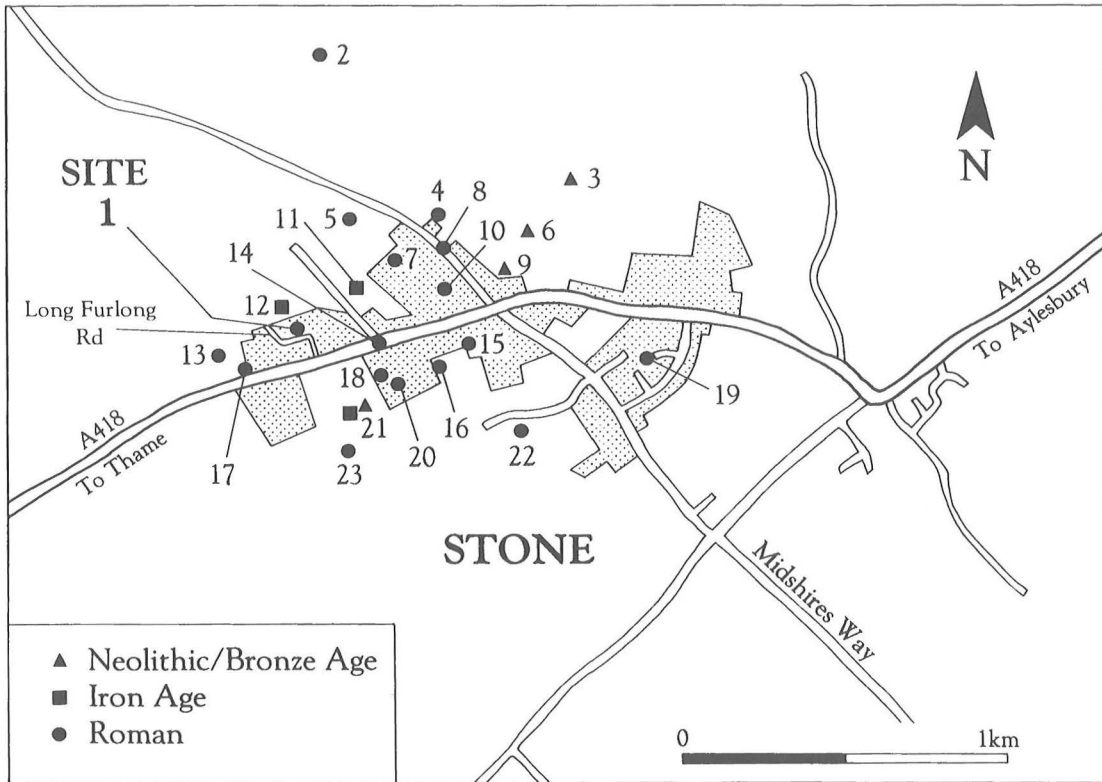


FIGURE 2 Location of site in relation to Sites and Monument Records

enclosure settlement. **22.** Soulbury. IA-Romano-British enclosure. **23.** Dorton. LIA – cremation. **24.** Chilton Grove. M-LIA ditched enclosure site

Fig. 2

1. Former Nurses Home, Stone. **2.** SMR 0445: Burn Hill barrow with Roman inhumations. **3.** SMR 4457: flint scatter. **4.** SMR 0672: coins. **5.** SMR 0670: pot scatter. **6.** SMR 2992: flint scatter. **7.** SMR 0671: coins. **8.** SMR 5207: coins. **9.** SMR 2470: Arrowhead. **10.** SMR 0669: coins. **11.** SMR 4753: ditch. **12.** SMR 4752: ditch. **13.** SMR 6197: ?road. **14.** SMR 0679: cemetery. **15.** SMR 0678: coins. **16.** SMR 0688: coin. **17.** SMR 0674: coin. **18.** SMR 0687: pot scatter. **19.** SMR 2371: coin. **20.** SMR 5713: settlement. **21.** SMR 0675: IA shaft well with later Roman burials. **22.** SMR 0691: coins. **23.** SMR 1021: Coins.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The evaluation consisted of 11 trial trenches distributed across the site (Fig. 3). Only one trench was archaeologically sterile. Trenches 1, 2, 4, 5 and 11 had the greatest archaeological potential and it was decided that the two excavation trenches should be focussed in these areas.

The trench layout was dependent upon the position of trees. The first phase of the excavation comprised an area 1015 m² (Area A), and was centred upon Evaluation Trenches 4 and 5 in the north-eastern sector of the development area. The second phase opened up an irregularly-shaped area of 2640 m² (Area B), and focussed on Evaluation Trenches 1, 2 and 11 in the northern sector of the site (Figs. 3 & 4).

Table 1 Features by excavation phase

<i>Area</i>	<i>No. of features</i>	<i>No. of dated pits</i>	<i>No. of dated ditches/ gullies</i>	<i>No. of dated post holes</i>
Evaluation	26	5 LBA	3 LBA, 1 Roman	LBA
Area A	11	1 LBA	3 LBA, 1 Roman	
Area B	54	5 LBA, 3 IA	3 IA	2 LBA

QUANTIFICATION OF FEATURES AND FINDS

Ninety-one features were revealed in the evaluation trenches and Areas A and B. They comprised 20 ditches or gullies, 32 pits, 31 post holes and eight possible pits/post holes. However, only 27 of these produced datable material (Table 1), the majority of which was Late Bronze Age (post-Deverel-Rimbury). The small number of finds recovered is not entirely surprising since many features were small pits and post holes, and the site had been truncated by ploughing, often leaving only the base (0.0.5-0.1m) of the features.

A total of 148 sherds of pottery were found. The majority of the Late Bronze Age pottery came from pits (73%), while the small number of Middle to Late Iron Age sherds came predominantly from ditches (61%). Most of the animal bone was retrieved from Iron Age features, primarily ditch fills. In general, no dense concentrations of finds came from any of the features.

PHASE 1 LATE BRONZE AGE

Evidence for LBA activity was widely scattered across the development site, comprising 11 pits, six ditches and three post holes (Fig. 4). The ditches/gullies were all rather narrow and shallow and, with one exception, were concentrated in the north-eastern sector of the site. They include two ditches (F2030 and F2032) which may represent the northern and western sides of a field enclosure. These were aligned north-north-east – south-south-west, and east-west respectively. Although no datable finds came from F2032, it runs almost at right angles to F2030 and may be contemporary (Fig. 4 inset). Both were shallow, measuring between 0.65-0.7 m in width and 0.12-0.19 m in depth. A curvilinear gully, F2016 (length 12.8 m; width 0.31 m; depth 0.08 m) lay 4 m to the north-west of ditch F2032. It may be the remains of

a hut gully. It was truncated by Roman ditch F2020.

A further shallow gully, F2006 (width 0.33 m; depth 0.13 m) was orientated north-north-east – south-south-west and lay 5.5 m to the east of ditch F2032 (Fig. 4 inset). It followed a slightly meandering course, contained two sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery and was roughly parallel with F2032. Its northern terminus curved to the west, implying an association with two small gullies, F2022 and F2024. Both were aligned north-west – south-east, and were 3.2 m in length, 0.2-0.4 m in width and 0.1 m in depth. F2024 cut F2032, suggesting that the features F2006, F2022 and F2024 may have formed a later field enclosure, constructed once ditches F2030 and F2032 had filled up. The other gully, F1010, lay in the south-west of the development area and was revealed in Evaluation Trench 11 (Figs. 3 & 4). It was 8 m long and 0.8 m wide, but only 0.1 m deep.

All the other features that dated to the Late Bronze Age consisted of small pits and post holes. Although these were scattered widely across the entire developmental area, most were clustered in the western half. The majority were relatively small and shallow, suggesting heavy truncation (Figs. 4 & 5). The average dimensions of the pits were 0.84 m in length, 0.67 m in width and 0.17 m in depth. Most were circular or oval in plan with steep to vertical sides and concave bases. Their random distribution and general lack of finds make it difficult to be precise about their functions. However, they tended to contain more pottery than animal bone. Several were next to post holes and may have been associated with structural features. Pit F1021 (Figs. 2 & 3), located in Trench 1 of the Evaluation, produced the densest concentration of finds from the site (24 fragments of animal bone and 16 sherds). The other pits produced between one and five sherds of pottery, and between one and four fragments of animal bone.

Only one Late Bronze Age pit warrants special mention. This was a relatively unusual rectangular

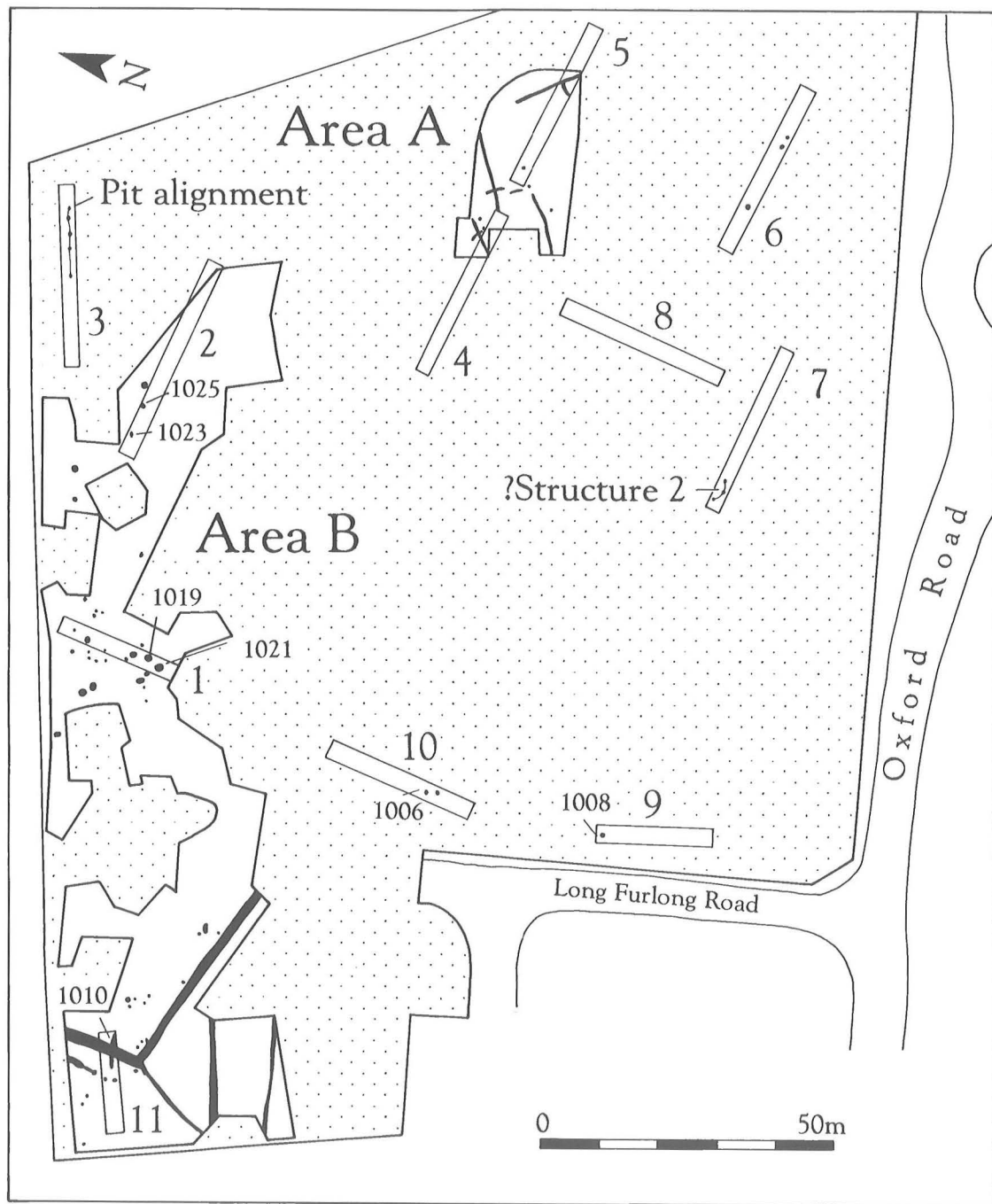


FIGURE 3 Detailed site location plan showing the evaluation trenches (Nos.1-11) and areas of excavation (A & B)

pit, F2052 (length 1.3 m; width 0.65 m; depth 0.18m), situated in the northernmost part of Area B. It was vertically sided and contained 38 sherds of pottery, 23 of which formed part of a shouldered jar (Fig. 6.7 & 6.8), together with a small quantity of animal bone (2 fragments of which were burnt). It may have been associated with two other pits, F1023 and F1025. The three were roughly 3 m apart on a north-north-eastern alignment (Fig. 4). Interestingly, pit F1023 also contained a large quantity of broken pot (20 sherds) that could be reconstructed to form three partially complete vessels (Fig. 6.3-6.5 & 6.11).

A large number of post holes or post-hole bases were detected, but only three (F1006, F2126 and F2138) contained pottery that dated to the Late Bronze Age. None were spatially related but all were similar in form and size (sub-circular in plan, steep-sided profile, with mean dimensions of 0.38 m in length, 0.32 m in width and 0.15 m in depth).

PHASE II MIDDLE TO LATE IRON AGE

Few features dated to the Iron Age, and those that did were spatially isolated. The principal feature was ditch F2130. This formed two sides of a possible rectangular enclosure, which was orientated north-south – west-east (Fig. 4). The northern arm was exposed for a length of 15 m and the eastern arm for 38 m. The width and profile of this ditch varied throughout its length in the nine sections cut (A-I). The ditch ranged between 1.2 – 1.7 m in width and 0.27 – 0.60 m in depth. Its profile varied from rounded (section C), U-shaped (section E) and V-shaped (section H) to stepped (section G) (Figs. 4 & 5). A short gully, F2134 (length 1.7 m; width 0.4 m; depth 0.05 m), cut the corner of ditch F2130. It lacked finds but was cut by another narrow gully, F2132 (length 17+ m; width 0.4 m; depth 0.11 m), which continued southwards from the corner of ditch F2130. It contained four sherds of Iron Age pottery, thus confirming the Iron Age date of gully F2134. Four nearby features contained Middle – Late Iron Age pottery. Three of these were situated within the enclosure. F2136 was the base of a small pit or post hole (length 0.5 m; width 0.35 m; depth 0.05 m) that contained a single Iron Age pot sherd. A circular pit, F2150 (diameter 0.9 m, depth 0.06 m), lay 8 m to its north-east. It also contained a single Iron Age pot sherd. A crescentic tree hollow, F2050, lay 3 m to the north of ditch

F2130. This natural feature may have been used as a rubbish pit, since it contained a relatively dense quantity of animal bone (16 large fragments), in comparison with other features.

The only other Iron Age feature was a circular steep-sided pit, F2010, adjacent to the possible Late Bronze Age hut gully, F2016. It contained one sherd of Middle – Late Iron Age pottery and a large amount of burnt clay or brick-like material. This pit also contained a fragment of what was originally thought to be a clay mould, but later identified as a triangular-shaped piece of burnt daub (see Report below).

PHASE III ROMAN

Roman activity was represented by a single shallow re-cut ditch (F2020) containing three sherds of Roman pottery. This was located in the south-west corner of Area A and cut the possible Late Bronze Age hut gully, F2016. It was aligned north – south (length 14.5 m; width 0.22 m; depth 0.15 m) and terminated to the north within the trench. It had irregular sides and an uneven base. The re-cut, F2014, produced a V-shaped profile to the ditch and was evident along its eastern side (length 9.45 m; width 0.87 m; depth 0.32 m) (Fig. 5). This re-cut contained four sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery, presumably residual from gully F2016.

UNPHASED

Many small pits, post holes and two gullies did not contain datable finds. Most of these features were small and shallow, with mean dimensions as follows:

Post holes:	0.30 m in diameter and 0.10 m deep
Pits:	0.75 m in diameter and 0.10 m deep
Small ditches/gullies:	6.7 m in length, 0.50 m in width and 0.14 m deep

With the exception of some of the ditches and gullies, few stratigraphic relationships could be discerned on site. Some of the pits and post holes, however, may be phased by spatial association with the dated features.

Late Bronze Age features were dispersed across the whole site, but some clusters of activity were

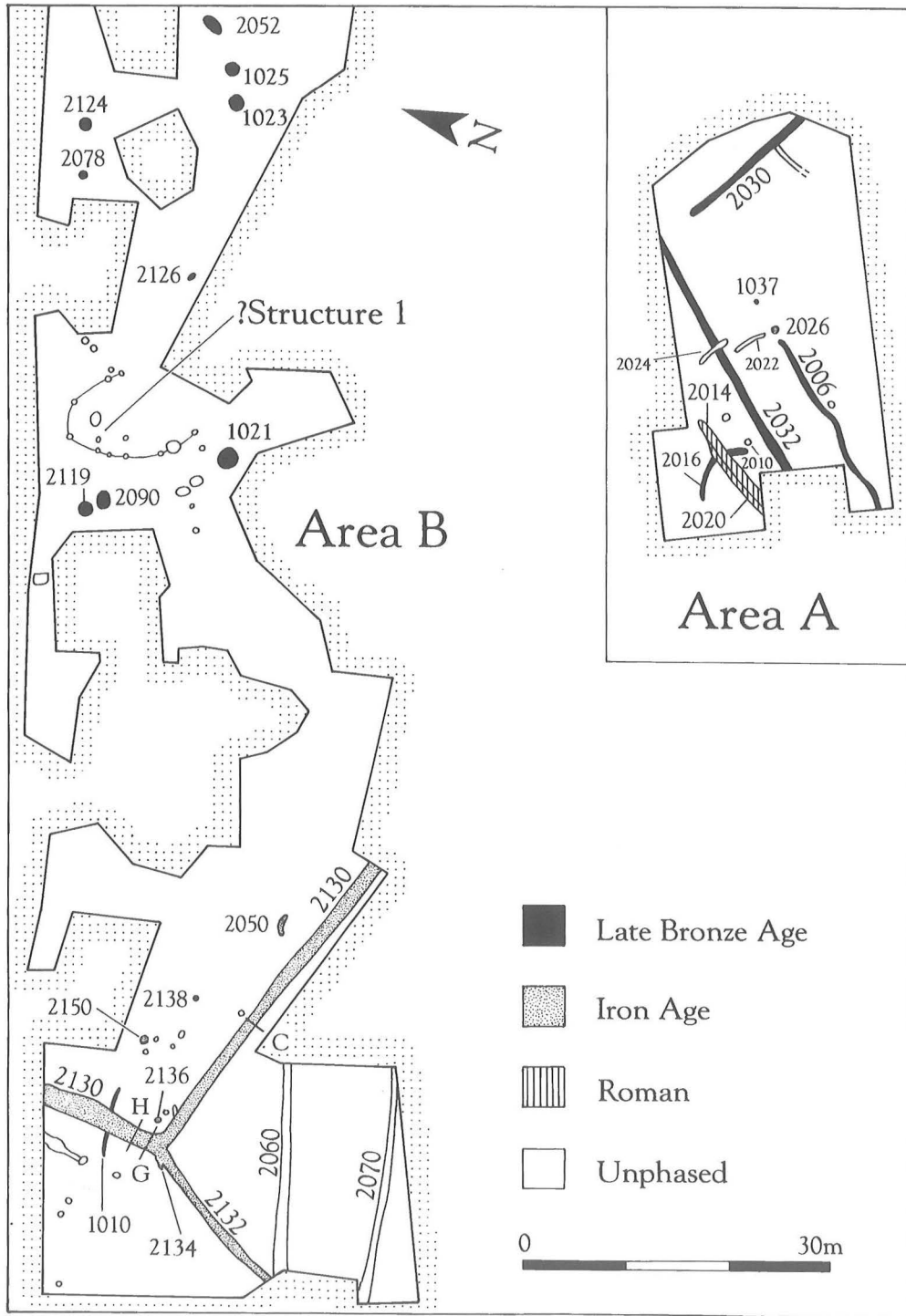


FIGURE 4 Phase plan

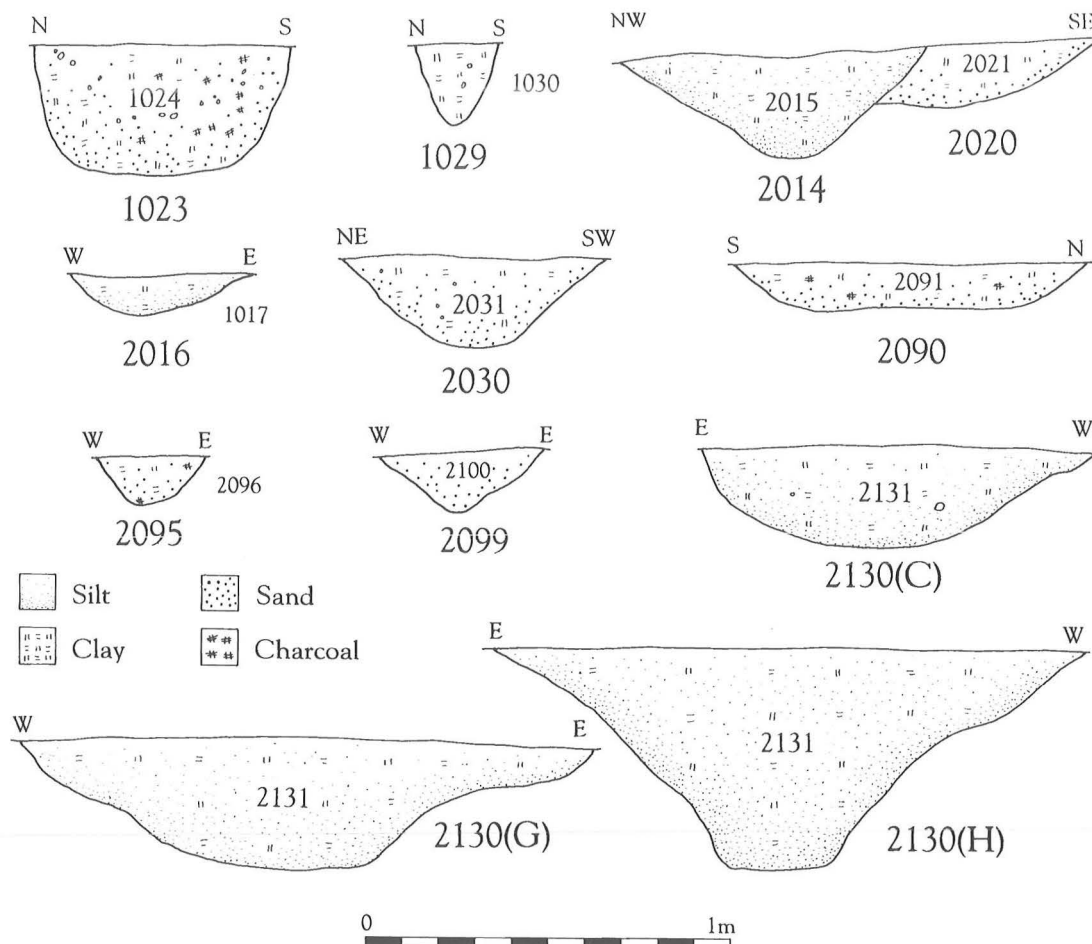


FIGURE 5 Sections (see Fig. 4 for ditch sections marked C, G and H)

noted. Pit F1037 (length 2.3 m; width 0.84 m; depth 0.26 m) was found in Trench 5 of the Evaluation (Figs. 3 & 4). It contained numerous fragments of cremated human bone and charcoal (see Report below). No other finds were present, but it may represent a LBA unurned cremation burial, since it is near a number of Late Bronze Age features. Furthermore, it respects the position of the possible Late Bronze Age field enclosure delineated by gullies F2030 and F2032.

There was a concentration of pits and post holes in the central part of Area B. These were surrounded by features dated to the Late Bronze Age only, suggesting by association that they may be of

a similar chronology. In particular, a group of post holes or stake holes – F2107, F2099, F2092, F2080, F2105, F2101, F2103, F2117 and F2011 (?Structure 1) – followed a roughly curvilinear arrangement (Fig. 4). Both groups and the nearby Late Bronze Age pits contained fragments of daub, perhaps implying their contemporaneity. Furthermore, most of these post holes contained very similar fills to the ones dated to the LBA (mid-brown compact coarse silty clay with charcoal flecks). One possibility is that the post holes originally supported a relatively flimsy wattle and daub fence line that functioned as a wind break.

Although there were no finds from the two

ditches F2060 and F2070, both ran roughly parallel a few metres south of ditch F2130, and may have been associated with it. They may be the remains of a Late Iron Age or 'Belgic' driveway, perhaps dating to slightly later than the rectangular enclosure itself (Fig. 4).

Other unphased features that showed little connection with dated features included a possible post hole and pit alignment from Evaluation Trench 3 (F1027, F1029, F1031 and F1033) and a slightly curvilinear post hole arrangement from Trench 7 (F1047, F1057 and F1059 – ?Structure 2). On the basis that almost all the datable post holes were Late Bronze Age in date and that Late Bronze Age features were more common on site, it is likely that these post hole arrangements date to this period rather than later.

THE FINDS

POTTERY by JONATHAN LAST PHD

Quantification

The total ceramic assemblage from the evaluation and excavation (Phases 1 and 2) consists of 148 sherds weighing 3.1 kg, broken down as follows:

TABLE 2

<i>Phase</i>	<i>No. sherds</i>	<i>Total wt</i>
Evaluation	66	1578 g
Excavation Phase 1	10	30 g
Excavation Phase 2	72	1472 g

All the pottery is prehistoric in date, except for one sherd of Roman greyware from ditch F2014 and another (very abraded) from the spoil heap in Area A (not counted in the total). The assemblage derives from 28 contexts, but only five features produced more than five sherds, together accounting for 60% of the assemblage by count. The table shows that mean sherd weights (and therefore formation processes) vary between the pits and ditches. The three pits are the only assemblages with partially reconstructable vessels (Fig. 5.3, 5.7, 5.8 & 5.10), though other relatively large sherds came from pits F1008, F1025, F2078 and F2090.

TABLE 3

<i>Feature</i>	<i>No. sherds</i>	<i>Mean wt</i>
pit F1019	9	5.8 g
pit F1021	16	24.9 g
pit F1023	20	44.2 g
pit F2052	36	29.5 g
ditch F2130	11	8.3 g

Fabrics

Two major and three minor fabric groups are represented. The major fabric group is calcareous (Fabric 1), and flint (Fabric 2) follows as the second most common type. Of the minor fabric groups, grog-tempered sherds (Fabric 3) were fairly widespread (pits F1019, F1023, F2010, F2050, F2124, F2136, F2150; ditches F2014, F2130, F2132; layer L1044) but the others far more restricted (Fabric 4 from F1019 and F2132 only; Fabric 5 from pits F1021, F2050 and perhaps post hole F2126). The fabrics may have some chronological significance. Flint temper (Fabric 2) is, on the whole, characteristic of the later Bronze Age and gradually declines in frequency through the Iron Age (see below) to be replaced by sandy and (in the Late Iron Age) grogged fabrics. Shell temper is not particularly diagnostic of period and could be Bronze Age or Iron Age. Grog is rare in 1st-millennium BC assemblages (Late Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age).

Fabric 1 – calcareous (83 sherds or 56% by sherd count)

Tempered with moderate to common generally coarse calcareous inclusions (including fossil shell and limestone). Often dissolved and represented by voids within the fabric. Various firing conditions, including completely oxidised and completely unoxidised fabrics. There may be a distinction between a very coarse ware (1a) and a finer ware with smaller and sparser inclusions, sometimes with added sand (1b).

Fabric 2 – flint (40 sherds; 27%)

Tempered with moderate to common very coarse angular flint (2a), with common fine and sparse very coarse flint (2b), with flint, sand and sparse other coarse mineral (2c), or with flint and sparse fine calcareous inclusions (2d). Generally with unoxidised fabric and partly oxidised surfaces.

Fabric 3 – grog (16 sherds; 11%)

Tempered with coarse grog and various combinations of other materials, including calcareous material (3a), finely crushed flint (3b) or smaller quantities of sand and coarse flint (3c). One sherd (F2010) contained grog and organics. Grog/clay particles also represent a minor component in some sherds of other fabrics.

Fabric 4 – sand (4 sherds; 3%)

Tempered with quartz sand and sometimes finely crushed flint; unoxidised fabric.

Fabric 5 – quartz (4 sherds; 3%)

Tempered with common rounded reddish quartz(ite). One sherd (2127) also contained shell.

Forms, Manufacture and Use

Seven rims, six base junctions (along with five other likely base sherds) and one handle were found. Vessel forms include weakly-shouldered jars, and bowls with upright or everted rims. One open bowl from F1023 has finger-impressed decoration on the rim (Fig. 6.5), while the jar rim from F2052 has similar rim decoration as well as a

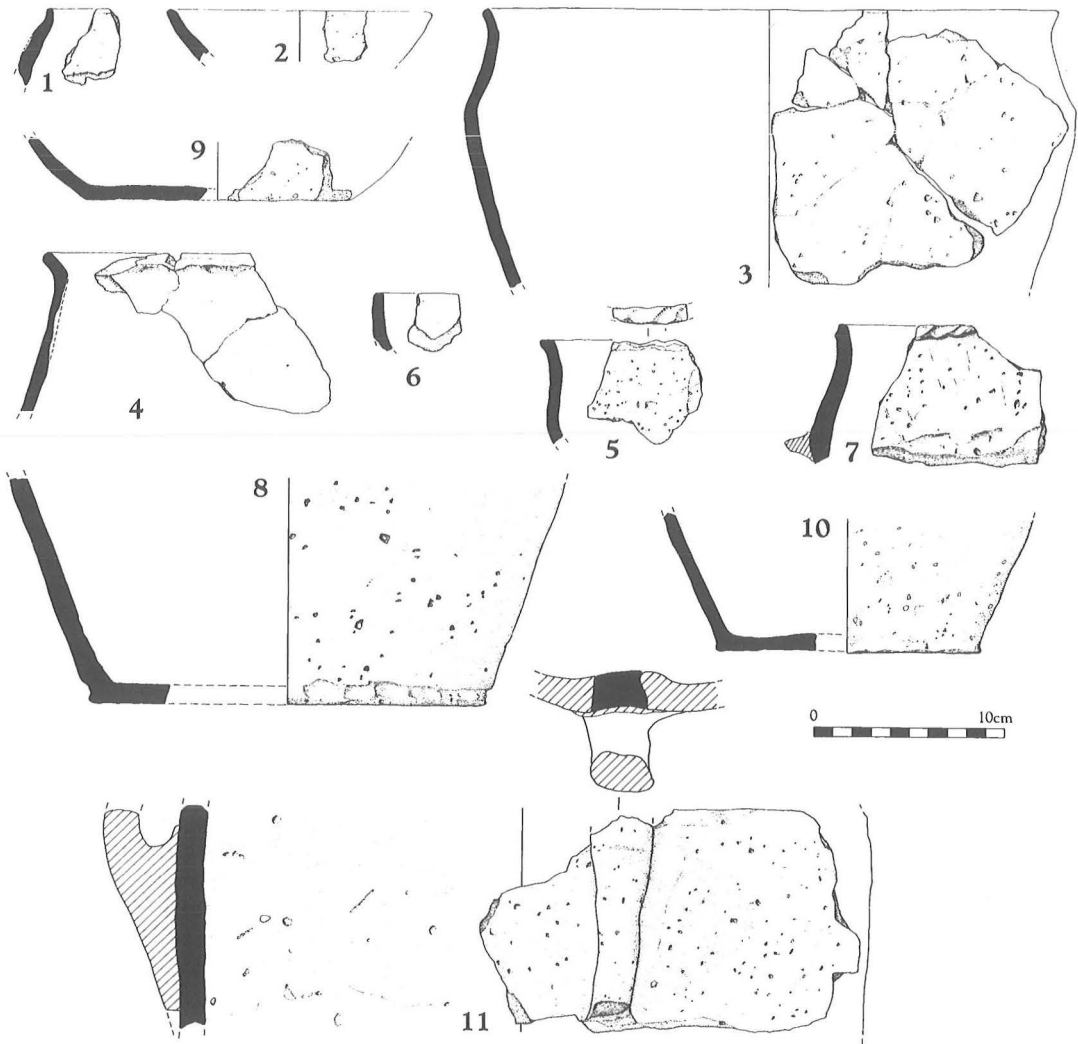


FIGURE 6 Pottery (Scale 1: 4)

shoulder or carination decorated with diagonally-set, elongated finger impressions (Fig. 6.7).

The assemblage from pit F2052 comprises several joining sherds, and all the pieces from L2054 and L2056 could belong to the same pot, since the groups differ mainly in surface colour, which might vary considerably over a large vessel. Uneven vertical striations cover much of the outer surface, indicative of smoothing with fingers and/or grass wiping. The flat base with a slight pinched-out foot (Fig. 6.8) indicates a steep-sided, bucket-shaped vessel, while the rim (Fig. 6.7) shows a short, more or less upright neck. The body shape is uncertain, because the pot broke along the shoulder; however, despite the oblique angle of the break, there is no reason to infer a sharp change of angle in the vessel profile.

The remaining bases are also flat, sometimes with a slight foot; one or two show some sooting on the interior. They generally appear to belong to steep-sided jars. That from F1021 (Fig. 6.10) has a coating of finely crushed flint on the underside, indicating that the vessel was set down on this material when still wet. Similar 'sandy bottoms' have been noted on Late Bronze Age pottery from the Kennet valley and elsewhere (e.g. Richards 1984). Such a treatment would serve to prevent slipping when placed on a smooth surface, and increase resistance to abrasion. The base from pit F1008 showed heavy abrasion on the underside, indicating that it had been well-used (Fig. 6.9). The bases from F1021 and L1044 had sooty deposits on their interiors suggestive of cooking, as did an unrelated body sherd in F1021.

The handle from F1023 is vertically-placed on a large barrel-shaped jar (Fig. 6.11). The preserved half was apparently made from a plug of clay applied into a hole in the vessel wall, and then covered by a broad strip of clay to form and anchor the handle.

The only definite decoration, apart from that on the rims in F1023 and F2052, was a series of fingernail impressions on a small body sherd from post hole F1006 (fabric 2d). A few sherds had traces of potential decoration: possible abraded shallow tooling on a body sherd (fabric 1b) from ditch F2130, possible finger-pinched rustication on a small fragment (fabric 2c) from post hole F2138, and possible scoring on a thin-walled sherd (fabric 1a) from F2052. However, these pieces are too small or worn for the identification to be certain. Some other sherds have impressions and depres-

sions caused during manufacture. Surfaces were generally rough, with two exceptions. These were a closed jar rim from F1023 which has a smoothed exterior with few visible temper voids, and the only authentic 'fineware' (Fabric 4) sherd, from F1019.

Typology and Dating

The combination of fabrics and forms from the site is consistent with the majority of the pottery belonging to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. The assemblage is distinct from the 5th–3rd-century BC 'Middle Iron Age' (perhaps more properly Early/Middle Iron Age) finds from George Street, Aylesbury, which included expanded rims, a number of incised sherds and a high proportion (34%) of sandy fabrics (Allen and Dalwood 1983). Angular forms and incised decoration are characteristic of the Early Iron Age proper at Chiltern sites like Chinnor and Bledlow. A similarly high proportion of sand (quartz)-tempered sherds was found at Coldharbour Farm, where flint-gritted fabrics were almost entirely absent (Farley in Stewart 1990). These undecorated sherds are now assigned to the earlier Iron Age (Farley and Smith in Bonner and Parkhouse 1999), although there are few angular profiles. Finger-tipped, everted rims, like those from F1023 and F2052, are compared with Late Bronze Age Ivinghoe Beacon, where flint-gritted fabrics predominate. Middle Iron Age assemblages like that from Woodham, dated to 2280±80 BP, are dominated by sandy fabrics and globular bowl forms (Farley *et al.* 1984). Perhaps the best comparison among published local sites is the small Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age assemblage from Walton Lodge, which is mostly flint-tempered (Dalwood *et al.* 1989, fig. 9); it is also clear that the Middle Bronze Age bucket-shaped vessels from that site are not present at Oxford Road.

The handle fragment from F1023 (Fig. 6.11) appears to resemble examples from e.g. Leckhampstead near Buckingham (Vaugh *et al.* 1974, fig. 11.16) and the Pennyland and Hartigans sites in Milton Keynes (Williams 1993, fig. 94.57, etc.). The form has a long life, however, and handles are also found in Middle Iron Age assemblages (e.g. Woodham).

The vessels from F2052 are particularly interesting (Fig. 6.7–6.8). Shouldered jars are essentially a 1st-millennium (post-Deverel-Rimbury) feature, and the slightly out-turned rim and concave neck of the F2058 are a typical Late Bronze Age/Early Iron

Age form. Finger-impressed shoulders are also common in post-Deverel-Rimbury assemblages, though raised cordons are more typical of the Middle Bronze Age. However, later examples from sites further east include Foxholes Farm (Partridge 1989, fig. 96.53) and Thundridge (Kiln 1970, fig. V) near Hertford (the cordons are on the neck in both cases), as well as Broomfield, Essex (Brown in Atkinson 1995, figs. 7.8, 8.34). The single sherd decorated with fingernail rustication from F1006 (not illustrated) is not unknown in the Late Bronze Age, although similar decoration has also been recorded on Late Iron Age pottery in Aylesbury (Bonner and Parkhouse 1999, fig. 25.42). Such decoration, however, could also belong to the earlier Bronze Age (rusticated Beaker type).

With respect to the later material (Middle to Late Iron Age), the sandy sherds from gully F2132 are probably indicative of this date, as are the grog-tempered pieces from large ditch F2130. Since only small body sherds were retrieved, precise dating is difficult but the feature is probably 'Belgic' in date with some residual earlier sherds (a sherd from a modern ceramic drain is assumed to be intrusive). An unusual, oxidised sherd from F2010 with grog and organics may be Middle/Late Iron Age. Other coarsely grogged fabrics (F2014, F2050, F2124, F2150) seem more likely to be later Bronze Age. *Illustrated Pottery (Fig. 6)*

- 1 ?globular bowl; dark grey exterior and core, reddish brown to grey interior; fabric 2b; F1008.
- 2 open bowl; light brown exterior, dark grey interior and core; fabric 2a; F1019.
- 3 weakly-shouldered jar; greyish brown throughout; fabric 1a; F1023.
- 4 closed jar with everted rim; orange throughout; fabric 1b; F1023.
- 5 weakly-shouldered open bowl; orange/mid-brown exterior and core, partly grey interior; fabric 2a; F1023.
- 6 simple bowl; orange/grey core, orange/brown surfaces; fabric 5; F2050.
- 7 shouldered jar; greyish exterior, dark grey core, buff/brown interior; fabric 1a; F2052.
- 8 flat base with slight foot; mottled greyish brown to orange exterior, generally dark grey core and interior; fabric 1a; F2052.
- 9 flat base; dark grey exterior and core, greyish brown interior; fabric 1b; F1008.

10 flat base; orange-brown exterior, dark grey core and interior, some sooting on interior; fabric 2a; F1021.

11 handle; orange throughout; fabric 1a; F1023.

BURNT BUILDING MATERIAL FROM PIT F1010 by JONATHAN LAST PHD

Pit F1010 produced numerous amorphous lumps of dense, brick-like material. These were deep red in colour, with a sandy fabric that also included sparse organic matter and clay particles. In small patches it appears vitrified, but there is no trace of surface or form to suggest a structural function. Also in this deposit was a wedge-shaped fragment of burnt daub, lighter in weight and more friable than the other material. It has uneven, oxidised surfaces, a mid-grey core, and contains moderate organic voids. This material may represent debris resulting from the collapse and destruction by fire of an organic, perhaps wattle and daub, structure.

THE HUMAN BONE FROM PIT F1037 by MALIN HOLST MA

The cremated bone fragments from pit F1037 were human. The preservation of the cremated bone was good, and most of the bone fragments were 10 mm in size or larger, which is unusual in cremation burials (McKinley 1994, 340). The weight of the cremated bone was 406g. This is considerably less than the weight of bone produced by modern crematoria, which varies from 1600g to 3600g (McKinley 1989, 66), while archaeological cremation burials tend to range from 200g to 2000g (Wahl 1982, 25). The burial could therefore be classed as a 'symbolic interment' (ibid), suggesting that only certain skeletal elements were selected from the pyre for subsequent burial. This was supported by the fact that none of the large and compact skeletal elements which tend to survive the cremation process, were present, such as the petrous temporals.

The colour of the bones varied from white to light grey, suggesting that they had been cremated thoroughly at a high temperature. Most fragments were white and well calcined, indicating that the bone had lost its organic portion completely. The majority of the remains (94%) were identifiable and consisted mainly of long bone shaft fragments, although 24 skull and 22 axial (vertebral, axial and

rib) fragments were also recognised. While long bones are commonly recovered, ribs are rare in cremation burials. The survival of so many rib fragments from Oxford Road may be due to the good preservation of bone on the site.

Discussion

The burial from Oxford Road contained a single individual. Few skeletal age indicators were apparent, but the presence of fused joint surfaces indicated that this was the burial of an adult. None of the characteristics necessary for sex determination were preserved, and none of the bone present suggested evidence of palaeopathological lesions. The evidence implies that the adult had been cremated on a pyre which was consistently hot throughout, resulting in a uniformly burnt skeleton. After burning, the pyre remains were examined and certain skeletal elements were selected for burial. These did not include any of the small bones of the hand and feet, or teeth. Some of the charcoal was also removed and buried with the bone in a shallow pit. Although the date of the burial is uncertain, single cremation burials are known from both the Bronze Age and Iron Age, and can occur on domestic sites or within field systems, such as at Biddenham Loop in Bedfordshire (Holst 1999).

ANIMAL BONE by IAN BAXTER

A total of 154 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the site, of which 30, or 20%, have been identified to species (Table 4). This assemblage is too small to provide information regarding the relative frequency of species or the economy during the various phases of occupation of the site. Cattle remains comprise the main taxon in both the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age features, and most belong to adults. Groups of cattle-sized vertebrae were recovered from sections C and G of the

Iron Age ditch F2130 (L2131). These probably represent butchery waste. The three Late Bronze Age sheep/goat fragments derive from pit F1021. The distal humerus of a medium-sized dog and an equid calcaneum came from Iron Age ditch F2130 (L2131). A very small quantity (2 fragments) of cremated animal bone of indeterminate species was retrieved from pit F2052.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the high number of features revealed and excavated within the large development area, few artefacts were retrieved. The small quantity of ceramics and animal bone contrasts markedly with evidence from other neighbouring Late Bronze Age and Iron Age-Roman settlements, such as Pennyland and Hartigans in Milton Keynes and Bierton, where tens of thousands of sherds and animal bones were recovered (Allen 1986, 16; Williams 1993, 19). The scarcity of finds implies that this site was not subject to intense activity, and that the activity was not primarily of a domestic nature. Instead the evidence would support the proposal that this was a rural site, utilised occasionally during the Late Bronze Age and again in the Iron Age-Roman period, for agricultural and pastoral activities. The limited number of associated internal structures would support this suggestion.

The Late Bronze Age evidence consists of one possible hut gully (although this may have been for shelter rather than occupation), a number of ditches and gullies related to field enclosures, and post holes associated with linear/curvilinear fences that acted as wind breaks. This implies slightly more intense activity than during the Iron Age. The Late Bronze Age pits may have been dug to procure clay from the natural marl for the construction of wattle and daub fences, although a few appear also to have been employed for occasional rubbish discard.

TABLE 4

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>LBA</i>	<i>M-LIA</i>	<i>?Roman</i>	<i>Undated</i>	<i>Total</i>
Cattle (<i>Bos f. domestic</i>)	9	9	1	2	21
Sheep/ goat (<i>Ovis/Capra f. domestic</i>)	3	1	-	-	4
Pig (<i>Sus f. domestic</i>)	1	1	-	1	3
Dog (<i>Canis familiaris L.</i>)	-	1	-	-	1
Equid	-	1	-	-	1
Total	13	13	1	3	30

Although the single unurned cremation, F1037, was undated, cremations of this type tend to date to the Late Bronze Age. Furthermore, it was positioned almost centrally within the possible Late Bronze Age field enclosure, and its specific location may have been imbued with both territorial and ritual meaning. Perhaps this burial was linked with connotations of fertility, rebirth and the agricultural cycle, as well as showing a connection with ancestral lands. There are few published Late Bronze Age cremations in Buckinghamshire. One from Church Farm, Berton (Allen 1986, 4) was dated to the Middle Bronze Age, since it was placed within an inverted Deverel-Rimbury urn. Excavations at the Late Bronze Age settlement of Gadebridge Road, Hemel Hempstead (HAT excavation, in prep.), produced at least six unurned cremation burials in small pits or post holes that were located near roundhouses and other structures. Two of these were radiocarbon-dated between 1055-885 cal BC (2820±40 BP; Beta-136012) and 1140-820 cal BC (2810±70 BP; Beta-136015). It is possible that the cremation from Stone was of similar date, and that, while the unurned pit cremations from Gadebridge Road were deposited within a domestic settlement context, the former was placed in the landscape, but a tamed landscape that was enclosed by field boundaries.

Several of the large Iron Age settlements from the surrounding region have provided evidence for a predominance of pastoral – and in particular cattle – based economies. At Pennylands, a number of enclosures were identified as cattle corrals (Williams 1993, 19). Recent excavations at Ellen Road, in Aylesbury, revealed a number of Late Bronze Age – Iron Age ditches and pits that were related to ancient agricultural field boundaries (Parkhouse 1999, 163). Excavations at Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury (Bonner and Parkhouse 1999) produced abundant evidence for Iron Age settlement activity, including four possible roundhouses. Parallels for the possible hut gully F2016 at Oxford Road may be sought at this site (*ibid.*, 94, figs. 14 & 20), since at least two interrupted pennanular gullies, thought to have been the eaves-drips of circular buildings, were detected. Unfortunately, not enough of gully F2016 was exposed to determine with certainty whether it might be classed as an eaves-drip.

At Coldharbour Farm, two small stock enclosures within a larger rectilinear enclosure were also

noted, and these were associated with a droveway, drainage gullies and several fence-lines. They were dated to the end of the Early Iron Age and exhibit parallels with the possible rectangular stock enclosure F2130 in the south-western area of the site. Although the enclosure ditches from Coldharbour Farm contained significantly more finds, they were immediately adjacent to roundhouses. This may further corroborate the idea that the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age site of Oxford Road Stone, was predominantly agricultural and pastoral in nature, with no convincing evidence for related domestic activity. The discarded, burnt, animal bones and semi-complete pots from pits F1023 and F2052 may represent the remains of occasional feasts by the Late Bronze Age groups who worked the land.

To conclude, the excavations at Oxford Road, Stone, have provided evidence for a Late Bronze Age field enclosure with associated agricultural and possibly ritual activity, through pits, post holes and a possible single Late Bronze Age cremation. In the Middle-Late Iron Age, the focus of activity shifted to the west of the site, and centred around a possible animal enclosure, related to stock raising. The evidence for both periods implies that the site was rural, and subject to sporadic activity of an economic rather than domestic nature.

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