AN IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AND POST-MEDIEVAL FARMSTEAD AT OXLEY PARK WEST, MILTON KEYNES

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with contributions by

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Excavations by Oxford Archaeology at Oxley Park West, Milton Keynes, revealed a middle Iron Age settlement. Initially, the settlement comprised a linear arrangement of roundhouses, pits and a small enclosure. This was later overlain by boundary ditches on the same alignment, incorporating two larger enclosures. The striking linearity of the settlement throughout its history suggests that it was placed along an existing landscape boundary. The community was engaged in mixed farming and carried out a range of domestic crafts. Finds of human remains provide evidence for mortuary practices. There was only limited activity at the site during the late Iron Age, suggesting that the settlement was abandoned by the late 1st century BC.

The remains of Shenley Common Farm North – demolished without record in the mid twentieth century – were also investigated. The excavations demonstrated a late eighteenth century origin for the farm, and revealed details of its construction, layout and development.

Introduction

The Milton Keynes area is one of the most fully investigated Iron Age landscapes in the country. From the 1970s onwards, the expansion of the city has led to the excavation of a series of Iron Age settlements of varying size and character (Williams 1993a; Kidd n.d.). Recent fieldwork by Oxford Archaeology (OA) at Oxley Park West on the western outskirts of the city has added to this picture by revealing a middle Iron Age settlement with a strikingly linear form. The site can be compared with contemporary linear sites elsewhere in the region, contributing to debates on settlement organisation and landscape use during the Iron Age. The remains of the demolished Shenley Common Farm North were also excavated. This provided a rare opportunity to investigate a vernacular farmhouse of 18th to early 20th century date, untouched by modern alterations.

After setting out the background to the investigations, this report will discuss the Iron Age settlement and post-medieval farmstead in turn. The report incorporates the results of earlier work at the site by Archaeological Investigations Ltd (see below). A digital research archive including full versions of the specialist contributions will be made available on the Oxford Archaeology website (www.thehumanjourney.net), and the finds and paper archive deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum (accession code AYBCM:2004.95).

Site location and geology

The site is located at the western edge of Milton Keynes (centred at NGR SP 8176 3509: Fig. 1), within the former parish of Shenley Church End. Prior to excavation the site was under pasture. The underlying solid geology is Oxford Clay overlain by a drift deposit of till (boulder clay) (BGS 2002, sheet 219). The site is on a plateau sloping gently from *c* 120 m OD at its north-eastern end to *c* 115 m OD at its south-western end.

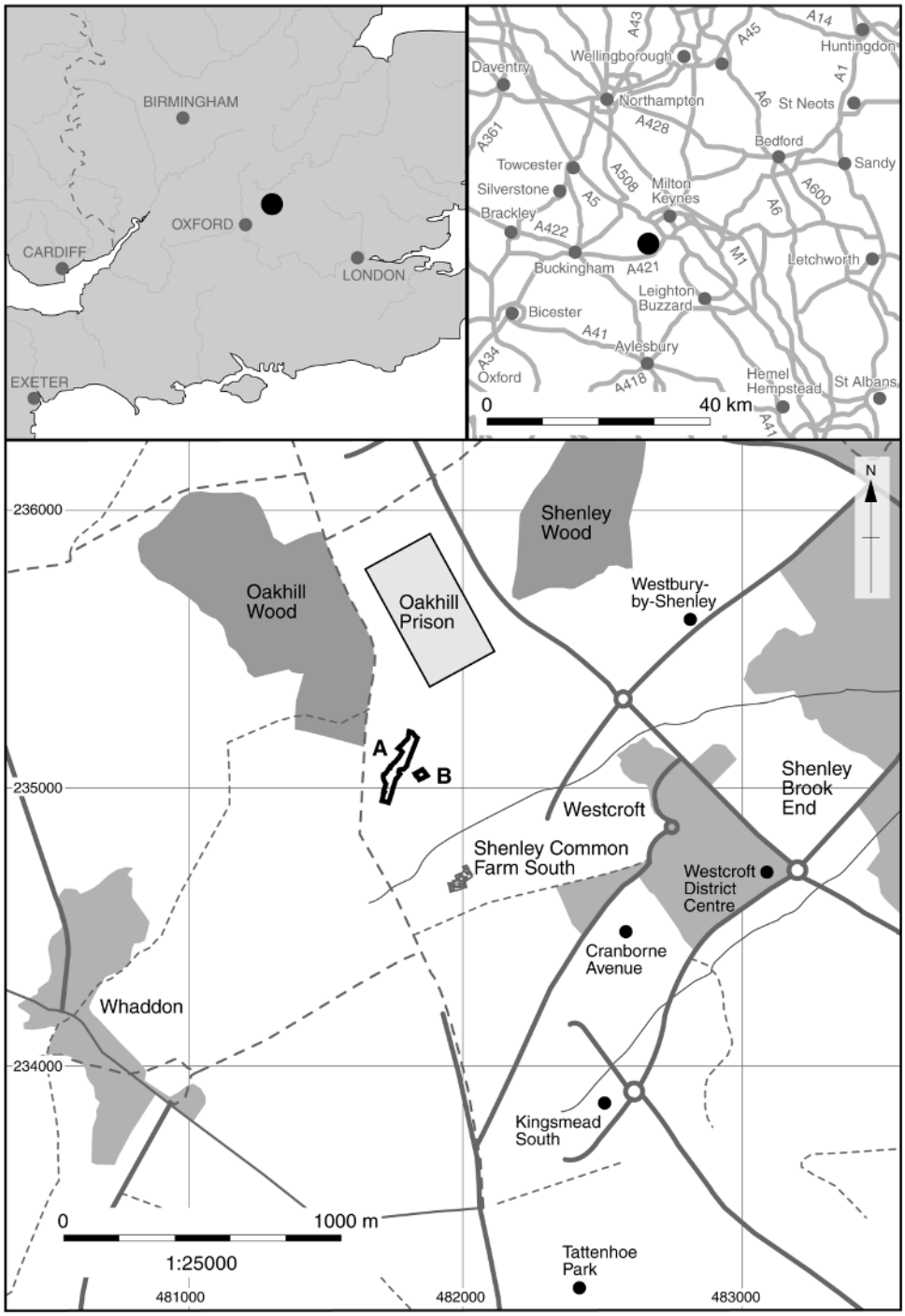


FIGURE 1 Oxley Park West, Milton Keynes: site location. A: Middle Iron Age settlement; B: Shenley Common Farm North. Black dots show other excavated sites. Kings Mead South, see this volume also.

Archaeological and historical background

The archaeological and historical background of the area has been discussed by Ivens (1993; 1996). Little evidence has been found for occupation in the vicinity of the site during early prehistory, although a few fragments of Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery have been found at the Westcroft District Centre, 1.5 km to the south-east (Ford 2000). Six middle to late Iron Age settlements have been excavated within a 3.5 km radius, the nearest being the site at Cranborne Avenue, Westcroft, 1 km to the south-east (Anthony 2003). The local Iron Age landscape will be discussed in more detail below (*Discussion: a middle Iron Age community*). There is significant evidence for Roman activity in the area. Pottery, glass, coins, brooches and a small bronze statue have been found by metal detectorists on the site of Oakhill Prison, 500 m to the north of the site. A field system, settlement features and cremation burials have been excavated at Westbury-by-Shenley, 1.25 km to the north-east (Ivens *et al*. 1995), and a tessellated pavement from a high-status building has been recorded at Dovecote Farm, 2 km to the east. A hoard of 140 Roman coins was found in 1857 near Snelshall Priory, *c* 500 m south-west of the site, and a further hoard of 124 coins has been recorded to the south of Shenley Common Farm South.

Middle Saxon occupation features and burials were found during excavations at the deserted medieval settlement of Westbury-by-Shenley (see above). A Saxon strap end has been found by metal detectorists at the Oakhill Prison site, and further Saxon metalwork has been found at the Westcroft District Centre, 1.5 km to the south-east (Farley 2000). The villages of Shenley Church End, Shenley Brook End and Whaddon are probably of Saxon origin. Snelshall Priory, *c* 500 m south of the site, was founded as a Benedictine priory before 1219 and was dissolved in 1535. The Salden Estate Map of 1599 depicts the late medieval landscape; all of the boundaries shown within the vicinity of the site persist within the modern landscape (Croft and Mynard 1993).

Shenley Common Farm North is shown on maps from the late 18th century onwards, and survived prior to the excavation as low earthworks in an area of scrub. The historical and cartographic context of the farm will be discussed in more detail below.

Background to the excavation

The fieldwork was carried out on behalf of Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd and Charles Church North London, in advance of housing development. The initial stage of work, carried out in 1997, comprised a survey of the wider Oxley Park development area by Archaeological Investigations Ltd. This included a site walkover, aerial survey using infra-red and panchromatic film, magnetic susceptibility survey, and limited magnetometry survey (Boucher and Bartlett 1997). The survey identified nine sites of potential archaeological interest within the development area, including the site of Shenley Common Farm North and an area of enhanced magnetic susceptibility *c* 100 m to the north-west. A subsequent field evaluation recorded linear features within a single trench in the latter area (Porter 2003).

Open-area excavation by AI Ltd, targeted on this trench and the surrounding area of enhanced magnetic susceptibility, commenced in July 2004. Iron Age features were uncovered and then followed to the north-east and south-west, resulting in a *c* 1ha open area of excavation (Porter 2005). Limited hand excavation and recording were completed before adverse weather conditions and access constraints forced the suspension of work in October 2004. OA was subsequently commissioned to complete the excavation. This involved investigation of the remaining features in the area stripped by AI Ltd, and extension of the excavation area to the north-east and south-west, creating a combined excavation area of 270 x 50 m. In addition, a separate area of 30 x 30 m was excavated 50 m to the east, targeted on the site of Shenley Common Farm North. The work was carried out between September 2005 and July 2006.

Excavation methodology

The overburden was stripped under archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. Machine excavation continued until either archaeological deposits or the natural geology was encountered. All archaeological features were then excavated by hand; discrete features were half-sectioned, while a sufficient proportion of each linear feature was excavated to characterise and date the feature. All recording followed procedures detailed in the OA Fieldwork Manual (Wilkinson 1992).

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT

Archaeological sequence

by Daniel Stansbie

Introduction

The settlement can be divided into two stratigraphic phases (Figs 2–4), both dated on ceramic grounds to the middle Iron Age (*c* 400/300–50 BC), with only limited activity occurring at the site during the late Iron Age (*c* 50 BC–AD 50). The first phase comprised a linear settlement made up of roundhouses, pits and an enclosure. In the second phase occupation seems to have been confined to two enclosures associated with a series of boundary ditches, which cut through the earlier settlement. There were also a number of features which could not be assigned to either phase on stratigraphic grounds but were clearly of middle Iron Age date on the basis of pottery from their fills. These included pits, postholes and two four-post structures. The fills of most features consisted of grey-brown silty clay; only fills differing markedly from this norm will be described.

Phase 1

In its first phase the settlement comprised a group of roundhouses (defined by eaves gullies), pits and a sub-rectangular enclosure, on a NE-SW alignment running along the entire length of the excavated area. There were a minimum of seven roundhouses, at least one of which was rebuilt during the life span of the settlement. The sub-rectangular enclosure lay in the south-western corner of the excavated area and had a south-east facing entrance.

Roundhouses

The roundhouses (Figs 3–4) are described from north to south.

Roundhouse 12000, at the northern limit of the excavation, was represented by a segmented penannular gully enclosing an area 10.5 m in diameter (Fig. 3). The northern curve was deeper and wider than the rest, possibly representing a recut or a separate feature. The gully fills produced pottery and small quantities of animal bone and burnt stone. A sub-rectangular recut of the north-western arm of the gully (1302) contained charred wood and parts of a fired-clay oven base. It is unclear whether this represents material dumped within the gully or the remains of an oven set within the gully after the roundhouse had gone out of use. The entrance gap was east facing and two postholes, 1328 and 1306, set back from the entrance probably held door posts. A further two postholes or small pits (10139 and 15500) in the centre of the roundhouse may have been structural, and a shallow pit (15501) close to the entrance may also have been associated with the building. Other excavated features within the enclosed area proved to be tree-throw hollows. A shallow linear ditch, 10022, intersected the north-western arc of the roundhouse gully but the relationship between these two features was not clear. A short linear gully (12006) lay to the north-west of the roundhouse and may have been contemporary with it.

Roundhouse 12001 lay *c* 35 m to the south-west of structure 12000 (Fig. 3). It was represented by a discontinuous penannular gully enclosing an area 11 m in diameter. A gap in the north-western arc is likely to be a result of truncation, but a double causewayed entrance was identified on the south-east. Two large postholes, 10141 and 10162, measuring over 1 m in diameter and sited adjacent to the entrance probably represented door posts. Posthole 10162 contained burnt-stone packing and a post-pipe. A group of postholes (15123) lying within the enclosed area may represent internal structures. Two internal pits (10020 and 10178) and another (10108) located outside of the gully could also have been contemporary with the structure. A small quantity of pottery was recovered from the gully and pits. The gully also produced fuel ash slag and a small copper-alloy sphere, suggesting that metal-working had taken place in the area.

Roundhouse 9002 lay immediately south-west of 12001 (Fig. 3). It was represented by two curvilinear gullies enclosing an area *c* 12.5 m in diameter, slightly larger than the other structures at the northern end of the site. Truncation and disturbance by the construction of later roundhouse 9004 and boundary ditch 9008 (see below) may account for the irregular plan. No pottery or other dateable artefacts were recovered from the gullies.

Roundhouse 9004 cut roundhouse 9002 and was centred slightly to its north-west. It was represented by two lengths of curvilinear gully enclosing an area just under 12 m in diameter. The gully fills produced middle Iron Age pottery. The entrance was south-east facing and a possible door post, 1124, lay roughly centrally within the gap. No

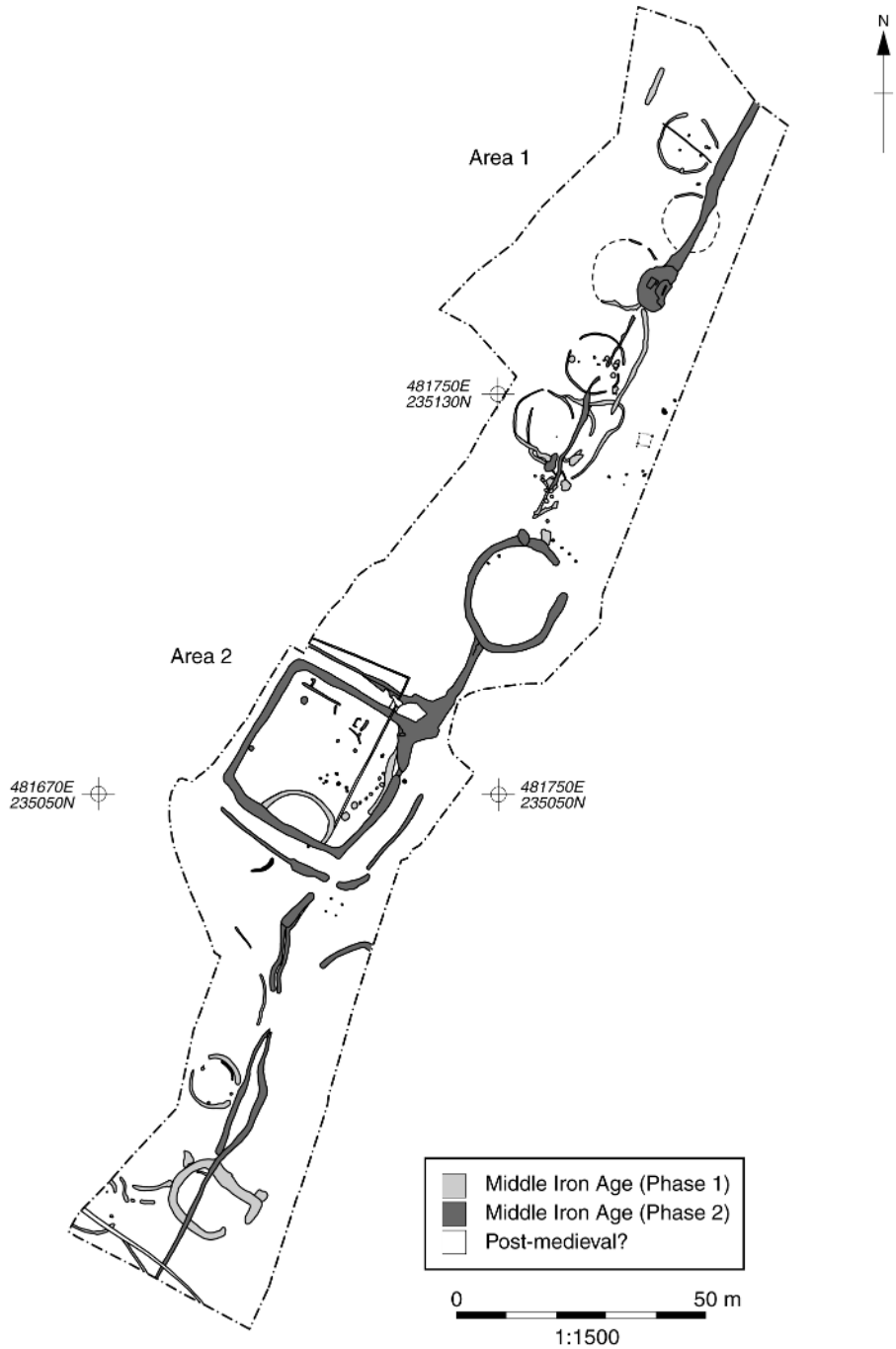


FIGURE 2 Oxley Park, Middle Iron Age settlement.

other associated features were identified. A group of three shallow, sub-circular pits (1244, 1275 and 1276) to the south-west of the roundhouse, along with a scatter of postholes/small pits (15124), may have been associated with it. One of the features within group 15124 produced part of a triangular oven brick.

Shallow, sinuous ditch 9009 may have been associated with roundhouses 9002 or 9004, enclosing their eastern and northern sides. The ditch was 0.70 m wide and 0.15 m deep, was U-shaped in profile and contained middle Iron Age pottery.

Gully 15007 (Fig. 4) and its recut 15082 were partially cut away by rectangular enclosure 15006 (see below) but probably represent the remains of a fifth eaves gully for a roundhouse. Gully 15007 had filled by natural silting whereas 15082 was deliberately filled with a dump of occupation material, including pottery and charcoal. A row of seven postholes and two pits (15126) may have been contemporary with ring-gully 15007, given their proximity to it.

Roundhouse 15008, in the south-western part of the site, was the smallest of the roundhouses, measuring 9 m in diameter (Fig. 4). The structure was represented by two curvilinear gullies, which produced middle Iron Age pottery. A narrow gully (15273) running along the inside of the north-eastern eaves gully may have been a wall slot. An evaluation trench had removed a 4 m stretch of the north-western side of the structure, but a clear entrance gap was visible on the south-eastern side. Posthole 15316 lay centrally within the entrance gap, perhaps representing a door post. Posthole 15123 and a pit or double posthole (15125) located just inside the drip gully may have held supports for walls.

Probable roundhouse 15127 at the south-western end of the site comprised the terminals of two curvilinear gullies, 16012 and 16022, the former producing middle Iron Age pottery (Fig. 4). Postholes 16005 and/or 16020 may represent door posts. Features 16009, 16003 and 16024 immediately to the north-east may have been structural, linking the roundhouse to enclosure 15009 (see below). The fill of 16009 contained a deposit of burnt stone and charcoal along with middle Iron Age pottery, and the fill of 16003 also produced middle Iron Age pottery. Ditch 16016 to the south-east of curvilinear gully 16012 may also have been contemporary with this complex.

Possible roundhouses

Curvilinear ditch 10201, 4 m to the south-east of roundhouse 12000, may have formed part an eaves gully, the remainder of which had been truncated (*Roundhouse 15129*; Fig. 3). The ditch measured 5.5 m in length by 0.41 m in width and 0.11 m in depth. It had a flat base and steeply sloping sides, and contained a sherd of middle Iron Age pottery.

Gullies 10191, 10208 and 10231 may have formed part of an eaves gully belonging to another roundhouse (*Roundhouse 15130*) situated 16 m to the south-west of roundhouse 12000 (Fig. 3). The gullies had rounded bases and steeply sloping sides, and were 0.31–0.37 m wide and 0.10–0.24 m deep. All the fills produced middle Iron Age pottery, and the fill of gully 10231 also produced fuel ash slag.

Enclosure 15009

Ditched enclosure 15009 was located at the southern limit of the excavation (Fig. 4). It was roughly sub-rectangular in shape, with a south-east facing entrance, and measured *c* 14.5 m by 22 m. The ditch fill was mostly the product of natural erosion but deliberate dumps of domestic material including over 200 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery and fragments of triangular oven brick were exposed in the western and northern stretches. No evidence of features was found inside the enclosure, although the size of the ditch and the quantity of pottery recovered from its fills suggests that it was a focus for occupation, with any evidence of structures having been truncated by ploughing.

Boundary ditches

Two curving boundary ditches, 9017 (Fig. 3) and 15149 (Fig. 4) have been ascribed to this phase. Both followed approximately NE-SW alignments. Ditch 15149 lay to the north-east of roundhouse 15007, perhaps comprising a boundary similar to ditch 9009 (see above).

Pits

Pit 1022, 10 m to the south of roundhouse 9002 (Fig. 3), was sub-circular, and measured 0.66 m in diameter by 0.26 m in depth. It was flat based with near-vertical sides. The upper fill consisted of a layer of stones, and the lower fill produced sherds from a middle Iron Age vessel.

Pit 1217 was immediately adjacent to phase 2 enclosure 9001, being partially cut away by the

enclosure's north-eastern arm (Fig. 3). It was sub-rectangular and contained ash, charcoal and middle Iron Age pottery.

Pit 15146 (not shown on plan) was cut by the sump/waterhole (15142) that formed part of the north-eastern corner of phase 2 enclosure 15006 (Fig. 4). It was sub-circular and contained middle Iron Age pottery.

Pit 15370, immediately to the north-west of enclosure 15009 (Fig. 4), was sub-circular and produced burnt and unburnt stone, a fragment of a sandstone quern, animal bone and over 100 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery, including a semi-complete jar.

Phase 2

The second phase of middle Iron Age settlement comprised two substantial enclosures (9001 and 15006) and intermittent stretches of ditch (15010, 15103, 15106, 15109, 15110, 9007, 9008, 12002 and 12005) forming a boundary which ran along the length of the excavated area on a NE-SW axis. The ditches cut many of the phase 1 features – including roundhouses 9002, 9004 and 12001 and enclosure 15009 – but followed the axis of the earlier settlement.

Enclosure 9001

Enclosure 9001 was penannular in plan and was *c* 24 m in diameter, with a 6 m wide east-facing entrance (Fig. 3). The ditch was 1.5 m wide and 0.7–0.8 m deep with a U-shaped profile. Its primary fill had formed mostly through natural silting, although a decorated chalk spindle whorl was recovered from the primary fill at the northern terminus. The upper fill produced much more pottery and occupation debris, and must have resulted from deliberate backfilling, at least in places. While most of the pottery dates to the middle Iron Age, a few small sherds of wheel-made pottery from one context suggest that the final infilling of the enclosure ditch occurred during the late Iron Age.

The fills of the two ditch termini produced particular concentrations of finds. The upper fill of the north-western terminus produced 1032 g of pottery, 1492 g of animal bone, numerous fragments of a fired clay oven cover, fragments of tap slag and a piece of iron strip. The fills of the south-eastern terminus produced 444 g of pottery, 725 g of animal bone and fragments of an adult human humerus (Ceridwen Boston, archive report). The enclosed area was largely devoid of features apart from two postholes, 1018 and 1063. The enclosure ditch was cut by a shallow, oval pit (1115), which produced fragments of oven furniture and middle Iron Age pottery. An alignment of four postholes, 1043, 1037, 1025, 1030, was set along the north-western side close to the entrance. These were all stone packed and of similar dimensions, suggesting that they were of one build.

Stratigraphic evidence indicated that enclosure 9001 was contemporary with a linking ditch, 9007, which abutted its southern side. This ditch was 1.60 m wide and up to 0.84 m deep. The fills produced a relatively large assemblage of middle Iron Age pottery. The southern end of this ditch was linked to the ditches defining the north-eastern corner of rectangular enclosure 15006 (described below). At the junction of these was a wide irregular feature, 15142, probably a soakaway, which may also have served as a waterhole or a clay extraction pit for producing daub (Fig. 4). It was broadly contemporary with the life span of the enclosures as both ditches and soakaway shared the same upper fill. The feature was machine excavated to a depth of 1 m but the base was not reached; it cut phase 1 pit 15146 and ditch 15149. The three fills of the soakaway produced small quantities of animal bone and middle Iron Age pottery. Micromorphological analysis of the fills suggests animal trampling under wet conditions (Richard Macphail and John Crowther, archive report).

Enclosure 15006

A square-ditched enclosure (15006) to the south-west of enclosure 9001 lay at the heart of the phase 2 settlement (Fig. 4). A V-shaped ditch, averaging just under 2 m wide and 0.80 m deep, enclosed an area of 27 x 28 m. The original ditch had been recut along some of its length. It had, for the most part, filled by natural silting, but the upper fill contained some middle Iron Age pottery and animal bone. An entrance on the eastern side was indicated by rounded terminals linked by or post-dating a shallow linear slot, 15361. This slot was only 0.15 m deep and may have been simply the result of wear in the entranceway.

Traces of a possible rectilinear building, approximately 15 m long by 5 m wide, lay parallel to the north-eastern enclosure ditch. This is indicated by beam slots 15190 and 15192, gully 15344, several

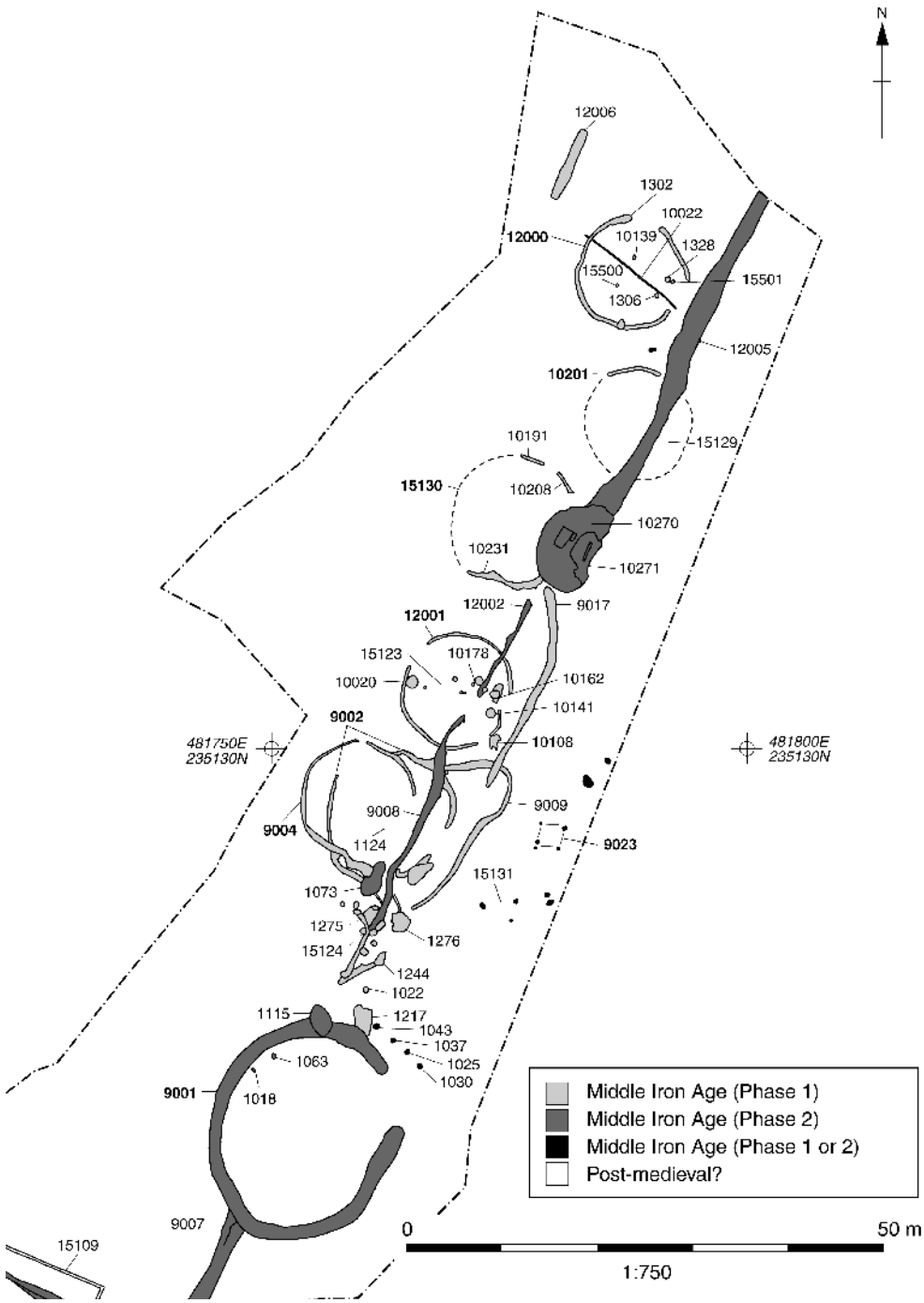


FIGURE 3 Oxley Park, Middle Iron Age settlement: northern area.

unexcavated postholes and a linear gully with returns at both ends (15368). Postholes 15033 and 15031 and gullies 15216 and 15155 may also have been associated with this building. Pit 15137, a sub-circular feature with a bowl-shaped profile, could not have been contemporary with the building given its position. Chemical and thin section analysis of the fills of this (Richard Macphail and John Crowther, archive report) revealed exceptionally strong phosphate enrichment and very abundant fine bone fragments, including a tooth fragment probably from a young human (minimum age *c* 2 years).

A complex of ditches (15011) surrounded the main enclosure, forming a less substantial outer enclosure. The ditches of this outer enclosure measured on average 0.7 m wide and 0.2–0.5 m deep. They produced a few small sherds of middle Iron Age pottery. At the south-eastern corner the outer ditch was discontinuous, creating a double causeway opening into the space between the outer and inner enclosures. Stony spreads lying in the area between ditches 15006 and 15011 may be remnants of metalling, or perhaps the remains of a bank between the two sets of ditches.

Possible enclosure 15005

A shallow curvilinear ditch, 15005, lying to the south-east of enclosure 15006/15011 (Fig. 4), also produced middle Iron Age pottery and may have been the ditch terminal of another enclosure with a south-west facing entrance.

Boundary ditches

A number of narrow boundary ditches followed a NE-SW axis, in alignment with the eastern side of enclosure 15006. Most of these had been recut at various stages, probably to maintain them as open ditches. They cut across several of the phase 1 roundhouses, but maintained the axis of the earlier settlement.

Commencing at the southern end of the excavated area, ditch 15010 cut the phase 1 enclosure 15009, and also cut the terminal of linear ditch 15103 (Fig. 4). The latter probably post-dated roundhouse 15008 (ascribed to phase 1), as it would have blocked the entrance to the house had it been contemporary. The linear ditch complex continued northwards in the form of ditch 15109, recut as 15110. These ditches were 0.30–0.46 m deep, with steep sides and flat bases, and all contained middle Iron Age pottery.

To the north of enclosures 15006 and 9001, the phase 2 ditch complex, here identified as ditch 9008 and 12002, cut across the site of roundhouses 9002, 9004 and 12001 (Fig. 3). These ditches were 0.20–0.30 m deep and contained middle Iron Age pottery. A wider, deeper, U-profile ditch, 12005, ran north of ditch 12002 to the east of roundhouse 12000. This ditch was up to 3 m in width and 0.45 m in depth. The lower fills contained middle Iron Age pottery and fragments of a triangular oven brick. The upper fills at the southern end (10270/10271) comprised layers of redeposited stone, but produced no dating evidence.

Pit 1073

Pit 1073 was a shallow, oval feature which cut the gullies of phase 1 roundhouses 9002 and 9004 (Fig. 3). The upper fill produced over 300 g of middle Iron Age pottery.

Phases 1 or 2

Two four-post structures – probably raised granaries – and two further groups of postholes may have belonged to either phase of the settlement. A number of other pits, postholes and gullies scattered across the site could not be phased; details are available in the site archive.

Four-post structures

The remains of four-post structure 15036 lay just outside the south-east corner of Enclosure 15006, adjacent to the entrance complex formed by the outer ditches (Fig. 4). The postholes were 2–2.5 m apart and only the base survived in each case. Cranium and cervical vertebra fragments from a human foetus (35–36 weeks gestation) were found in the south-western posthole (Ceridwen Boston, archive report). A second possible four-post structure measuring *c* 2.25 x 2.5 m (9023) lay approximately 4.5 m to the south-west of ditch 9009 (Fig. 3).

Posthole/pit group 15128

A group of eight postholes and a pit in the south-eastern corner of enclosure 15006 may have been contemporary with the enclosure, or alternatively, with phase 1 roundhouse 15007 (Fig. 4).

Posthole group 15131

A scatter of relatively deep, isolated postholes lay

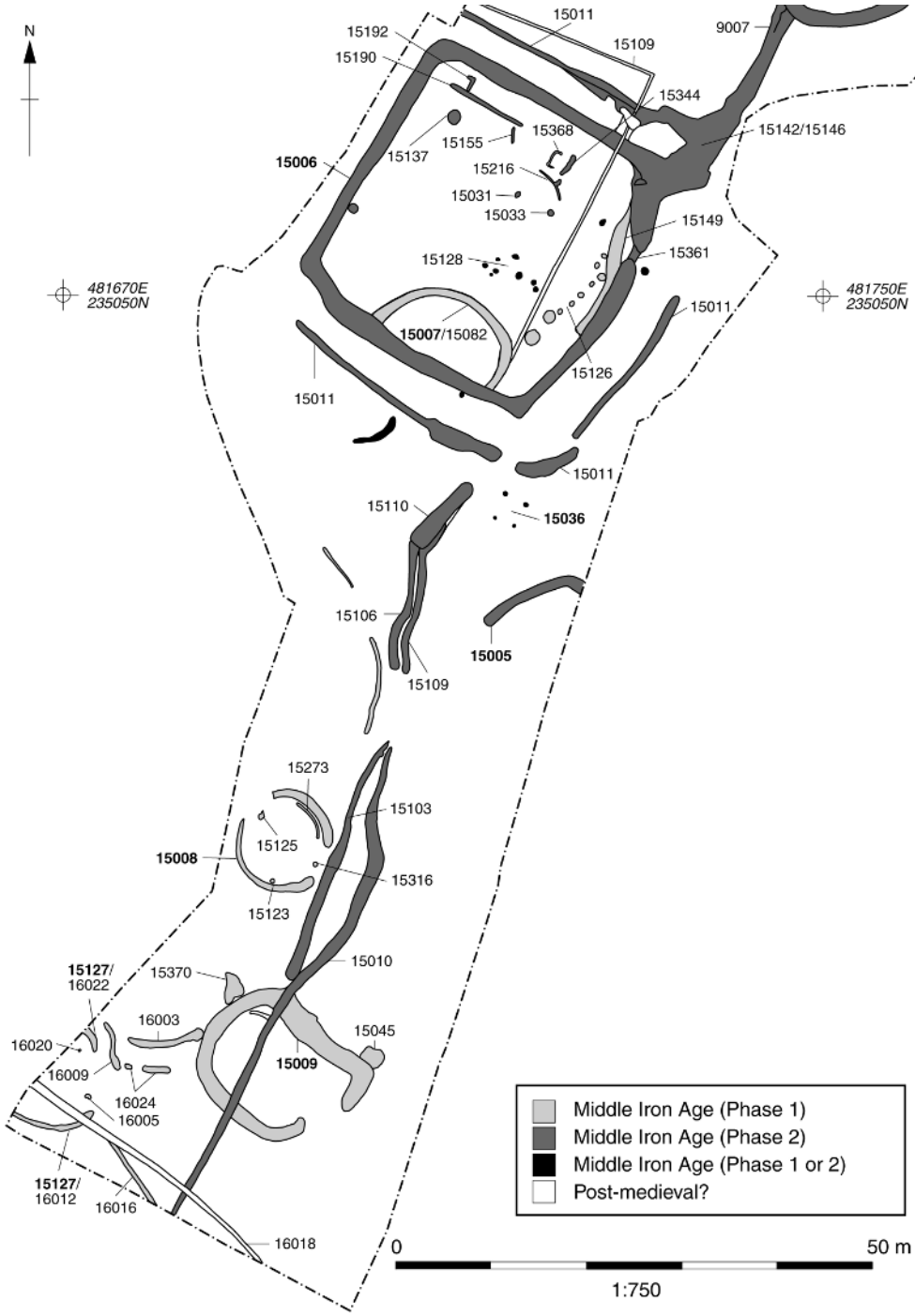


FIGURE 4 Oxley Park, Middle Iron Age settlement: southern area.

to the south-east of ditch 9009 (Fig. 3). Several produced middle Iron Age pottery. These may have formed fence lines, but it was not possible to establish which phase of the settlement they belonged to.

Later activity

Evidence for later activity on the site was very limited, although a single sherd of 13th or early 14th century pottery (Brill/Boarstall ware) was recovered from the topsoil. Two very straight and regular linear gullies (15109 and 16018) were excavated in the south-western half of the site (Fig. 4). Gully 15109 was orientated NE-SW with an E-W return and cut enclosure 15006. Gully 16018 ran across the extreme south-western end of the site on a NW-SE alignment, cutting possible roundhouse 15127. Neither feature produced any dating evidence, but both would appear to be post-medieval on the basis of stratigraphic relationships and their extreme regularity.

Artefacts

Pottery

by Leo Webley

An assemblage of 3286 sherds (12,725 g) of later prehistoric pottery was recovered. Almost all of the material belongs to the middle Iron Age, though there are also a few sherds of late Iron Age pottery, along with a single residual flint-tempered sherd of probable later Bronze Age/early Iron Age date. The condition of the material is poor, with a mean sherd weight of less than 4 g. No complete vessel profiles and very few partial profiles are present.

Twenty fabrics were distinguished, details of which are held in the site archive. For this report, the fabrics have been divided into nine broad groups on the basis of their principal inclusion type (Table 1).

Fabrics

The largest fabric group within the later Iron Age assemblage (group A) consists of pottery with a soapy feel and containing dark argillaceous inclusions, probably mudstone/siltstone. Mudstone inclusions have previously been identified in later Iron Age assemblages from the Milton Keynes area at sites such as Pennyland and Hartigans (Knight 1993). The bulk of the remaining assemblage was characterised by sand or limestone inclusions; shelly fabrics were present only in small quantities. Shelly wares were similarly scarce at Cranborne Avenue (Blinkhorn 2003) and Kingsmead South (Blinkhorn: this volume), both within a 1.5 km radius of the site. This may be a local pattern,

Table 1 Summary of later prehistoric pottery by fabric group

Fabric group		*Sherd no.*	*Weight (g)*	*% by weight*
A	Soapy fabrics with mudstone/argillaceous inclusions (can also contain sand and/or organic inclusions; rare bone <5 mm seen in a few sherds)	1440	5169	40.6
AC	Soapy fabrics with mudstone/argillaceous and calcareous inclusions (can also contain sand)	106	474	3.7
C	Calcareous inclusions, mostly limestone (can also contain sand and/or organic inclusions)	501	2513	19.7
F	Burnt flint. Later Bronze Age/early Iron Age	1	6	<0.1
G	Wheelmade fabric with fine sand and grog/mudstone. Late Iron Age	19	20	0.2
O	Organic inclusions, probably chaff/chopped grass	151	550	4.3
Q	Sandy wares (often also contain organic inclusions, sparse flint and/or iron oxide)	921	3431	27.0
S	Bivalve shell	132	475	3.7
X	Unidentified mineral inclusions	4	55	0.4
Z	'Clean' clay with no macroscopically visible inclusions	3	14	0.1
	Indeterminate	8	18	0.1
	TOTAL	3286	12,725	100

contrasting with sites in the wider Milton Keynes area such as Pennyland, Hartigans and Bancroft (Knight 1994), where shelly wares formed 35–85% of the assemblage.

One unusual fabric included within group A contains rare bone fragments up to 5 mm in size along with sand and sparse mudstone (represented by 14 sherds, 68 g). A sufficient amount of bone is present to suggest that this may have been deliberately added temper, as opposed to an incidental inclusion. Bone-tempered pottery is known from the Bronze Age, but is not normally encountered in Iron Age assemblages from Britain.

Vessel form and chronology

The bulk of the assemblage consisted of handmade vessels in forms typical of the middle Iron Age (*c* 400/300–50 BC). Forty-four of these vessels could be ascribed to a rim category on the basis of rim and shoulder profile. These comprised 38 slack-shouldered bowls or jars with upright or everted rims (fabric groups A, AC, C and Q; eg Fig. 5.1 and 5.3–5), and 6 ovoid jars with no shoulder and a simple incurving rim (fabric groups A and Q; eg Fig. 5.2). Very few rim fragments were large enough for accurate measurement, but recorded diameters ranged from 150–200 mm. One small rim sherd in fabric group C has a small pre-firing perforation just beneath the rim top. This is unusual, but is paralleled by a slack-shouldered vessel from Hartigans that has a series of similar perforations across its body (Knight 1993, fig. 99.122). Most of the pottery was undecorated, but the rims of four slack-shouldered vessels were ornamented with fingertip impressions (eg Fig. 5.4). Scoring on vessel bodies was seen on 29 sherds (282 g), matching the low frequency of 'scored ware' seen at other sites in the Milton Keynes area.

Some limited continuity into the late Iron Age is shown by small fragments of a wheelmade cup or bowl with a cordon beneath the rim, found in enclosure 9001 (context 1001). A single body sherd with combed decoration from a stratigraphically late layer (context 1277) can also be placed after *c* 50 BC.

Pottery manufacture

Several spalled sherds in fabric groups A and C were found in the upper fill (context 1008) of the northern terminus of enclosure 9001, in association with numerous fragments of fired clay oven/kiln structure and abundant charcoal. The middle fill (context 1215) of neighbouring pit 1217 also contained a few similar spalled sherds and oven structure fragments, along with a heavily refired, partially vitrified sherd. This material could represent dumped waste from small-scale pottery manufacture.

Vessel use and deposition

Charred food residues were observed on the interior of 33 sherds (164 g). Unfortunately, all were body and base sherds that cannot be ascribed to any form category.

While the pottery from most contexts is fragmentary and mixed in character, three deposits stand out by containing substantial parts of only a single vessel. Pit 1253 (context 1254) contained almost half (0.40 EVEs) of a slack-shouldered bowl (Fig. 5.1), pit 15370 (context 15375) contained the fragmentary remains (137 sherds, 948 g) of a slack-shouldered jar, and gully 15216 (context 15217 and 15218) contained much of the lower part of a jar (132 sherds, 497 g). No significant differences can be seen between the pottery from the two stratigraphic phases of the settlement.

Catalogue of illustrated pottery (Fig. 5)

1 Slack-shouldered bowl, fabric group Q. Pit 1253, context 1254
2 Ovoid jar, group A. Ditch 9009, context 1296 and 1297
3 Slack-shouldered vessel with T-shaped rim, group Q. Ditch 15008, context 15140
4 Slack-shouldered vessel with fingertip impressions on rim top and scoring on body, group C. Pit 15370, context 15388
5 Slack-shouldered jar, group AC. Gully 16012, context 16013

Fired clay

by Cynthia Poole

The small assemblage of fired clay represents material derived from ovens or hearths (Table 2). The assemblage was produced from local clay sources readily available on site.

Three fabrics were identified. Fabric E was fired buff-grey and contained quartz and mica sand and occasional rounded chalk grit up to 5 mm. Fabric F

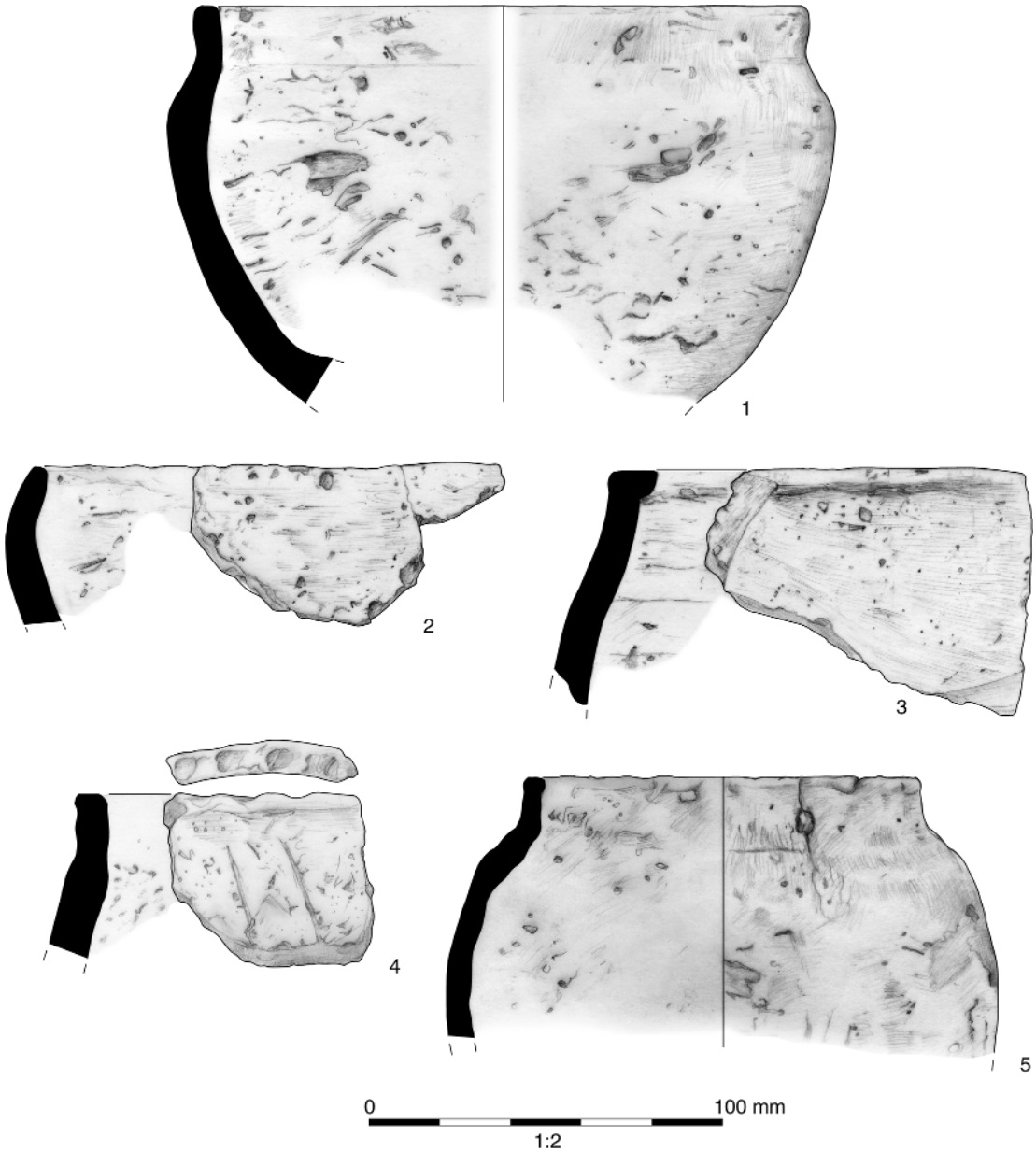


FIGURE 5 Iron Age pottery.

contained a high density of medium-coarse sand and grit of quartz and quartzite plus occasional angular flint grit up to 10 mm. It generally had a black-dark grey core and variable surface fired brown, maroon or red. Fabric K was a fine red clay, slightly mottled with no inclusions. Fabrics E and F probably both derived from the local glacial till/boulder clay deposits, which underlay the site. Fabric K is likely to derive from a purer clay deposit, possibly within the Oxford Clay facies.

TABLE 2 Summary of fired clay

Type	*No.*	*Weight (g)*	*Fabric*	*Comments*
Oven base	27	582	F	Lower oven wall/base 30-45 mm thick with possible recessed ledge. Context 1301
Oven plate	9	154	F	Fragments from flat plate 30 mm thick or more; unperforated.
Oven cover	38	706	K	Cover pierced by large circular flue or vent hole *c* 180 mm diameter. Context 1008
Triangular oven brick	13	374	F, K	Fragments with perforations 14-16 mm diameter. One *c* 70 mm thick.
Oven furniture	3	48	E	Uncertain type (oven plate/oven brick/fire bar?)
Furnace/hearth lining	1	8	~	Very vesicular, but not vitrified.
Utilised/undiagnostic	71	181	F, K	Most fragments have a single surface.
TOTAL	162	2053		

Some of the less diagnostic fragments with just a single surface are likely to be parts of oven wall, base or lining, and fragments of an oven base with a recessed ledge were recovered from feature 1302, possibly an *in situ* oven/hearth structure. Other structural elements are represented by fragments of oven cover with a central large circular vent or flue *c* 180 mm in diameter, recovered from the northern terminal of enclosure 9001 (context 1008). Small vesicular fragments of fired clay may represent furnace or hearth lining, but no vitrification was present and there is little evidence for industrial activity generally. Such material can form in non-industrial processes.

Oven furniture accounts for portable items used within the oven structure, such as bricks and plates. Fragments of flat plate 30 mm or more thick are likely to have formed an internal floor or surface. The surviving small fragments were unperforated. One piece had fine organic impressions on the surface. Triangular oven bricks were the most recognisable form. No complete examples were recovered but all diagnostic fragments had part of a perforation piercing the side surface at an angle. These objects (traditionally described as loomweights) were probably used as pedestals or supports within ovens or as kerbs or floors for hearths.

Slag

by Luke Howarth

Two fragments (186 g) of tap slag from iron smelting were recovered, from the northern terminal of enclosure 9001 (context 1008) and from roundhouse gully 9002. An environmental sample from gully 10208 also contained small amounts of black glassy slag associated with metal working. In addition, a small amount (162 g) of fuel ash slag was recovered from features across the site. Fuel ash slag may be formed in any fire in the presence of potash or soda and silicate materials, for example a burning building, dung fires, ovens or kilns.

Worked stone

by Ruth Shaffrey

The worked stone assemblage includes three saddle querns, a lump of Hertfordshire Puddingstone, a spindle whorl and two possible sling shots. Two small fragments of unworked shale are also notable.

The saddle querns are all made of quartzitic sandstone. Two adjoining fragments of a large saddle quern made from a boulder were found in pit 10162 (Fig. 6.3). The quern is incomplete and is not shaped other than the grinding surface, but appears to have been circular and thus fairly unusual; saddle querns are usually sub-rectangular at the grinding surface. An almost complete saddle quern was found in the same pit (Fig. 6.2); it is neatly rectangular with straight sides. A further possible saddle quern fragment was found in pit 15370, and the fragment of a rubber was recovered from gully 10264.

A large chunk of Hertfordshire Puddingstone was recovered from ditch 15010. Although it is a grey type, typical of the outcrops in Hertfordshire,

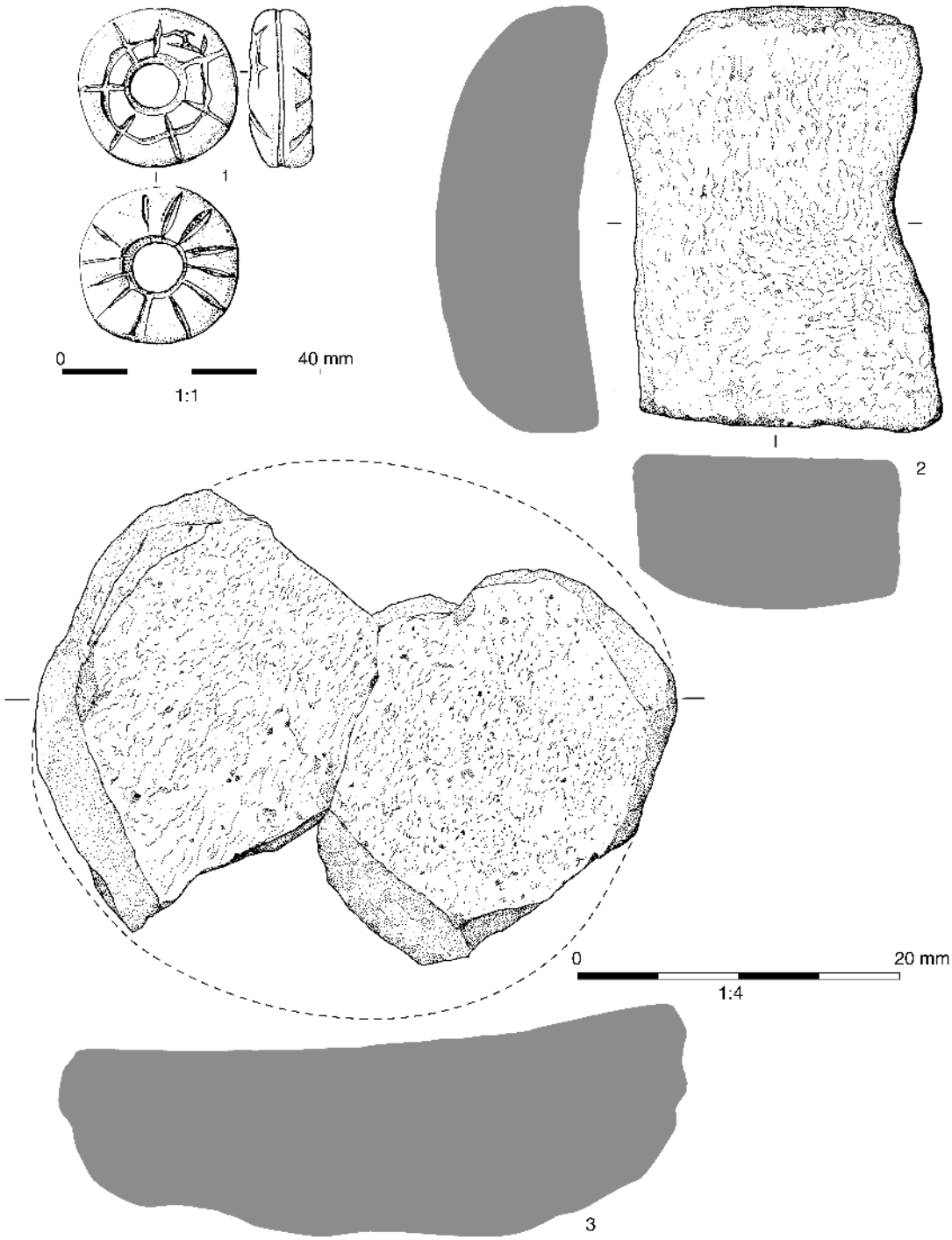


FIGURE 6 Worked stone.

erratic boulders of Puddingstone also occur in a wider area (King 1980, 69) and it is possible it was obtained from a much more local source. The stone seems to have a worked surface but does not appear to be either a saddle or a rotary quern and it is not entirely clear whether it was used. Its presence is of note, however, as finds of this stone from prehistoric contexts are unusual. Excavations at Stansted Airport, Essex, produced a saddle quern from a Bronze Age context and a single probable hammerstone in an early Neolithic context (Shaffrey 2008) but generally objects of this stone are of very late Iron Age or early Roman date (Major 2004).

The chalk spindle whorl was found in the northern terminal of penannular enclosure ditch 9001. It is of disc design and is light for a spindle whorl at 6 g. It is incised with crude linear decoration in the form of radiating lines on both faces (Fig. 6.1), and is similar but not identical to a whorl from Danebury (Brown 1984, 422, figs 7.61 and 8.60). At 7.5 mm, the perforation is at the upper end of the scale for Iron Age spindle whorls, which normally measure 4–8 mm (Walton Rogers 1997, 1731) and it seems a large hole for such a small spindle whorl. It is possible that it actually served an entirely different purpose, such as a pendant, although there are no wear marks consistent with this.

The two possible pebble sling shots were recovered from posthole 1134 and pit 1251. Both have been shaped into spheres and one is slightly pointed.

Other artefacts

Two metal items were recovered from roundhouse gully 12001: a small fragment of iron strip or blade, and a solid copper-alloy sphere (10 mm diameter) with evidence of iron corrosion indicating it was originally part of a larger object. The copper alloy sphere is not readily recognisable as an Iron Age object and it is possible that it is intrusive. In addition, an irregular iron strip, 33 mm long, was recovered from enclosure 9001 (context 1008).

A bone awl fragment was recovered from enclosure ditch 9001 (context 1120). The awl is made from a long bone of a medium-sized mammal. It is highly polished with a complete tip, which has been sharpened to a point.

Faunal and plant remains

Animal bone

by Lena Strid

The assemblage consisted of 1507 refitted fragments, of which 223 (14.8%) could be determined to species (Table 3). The species present included cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse and dog. The relative scarcity of pig and the predominance of cattle and sheep/goat is similar to other Iron Age assemblages from sites in the Milton Keynes area (Fig. 7). This contrasts with many other parts of Iron Age southern England, where sheep dominate. Regardless of species, bones from almost all body parts were retrieved, which would indicate that cattle,

TABLE 3 Summary of animal bone assemblage

	Total (NISP)	*% by NISP (identified species)*	*MNI (identified species)*	*Weight (g)*
Cattle (*Bos taurus*)	104	46.6	4	2217
Sheep/goat (*Ovis aries/Capra hircus*)	67	30.0	2	191
Pig (*Sus domesticus*)	13	5.8	2	86
Horse (*Equus caballus*)	38	17.0	2	1330
Dog (*Canis familiaris*)	1	0.4	1	6
Small mammal	1			<1
Medium mammal	141			156
Large mammal	270			1470
Indeterminate	872			1010
TOTAL	1507			6466

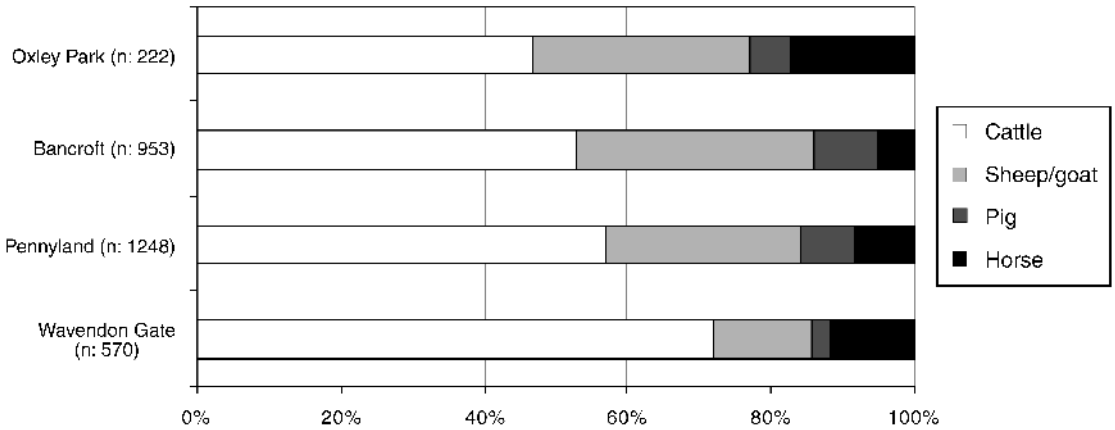


FIGURE 7 Percentage of NISP for cattle, sheep/goat, pig and horse from Oxley Park and three other Iron Age assemblages from the Milton Keynes area

sheep/goat, pig and horse were slaughtered and butchered on the site.

The number of cattle bones suitable for ageing is low, but the proportions of fused epiphyses are similar to those found at other Milton Keynes sites. The epiphyseal data suggests that most cattle were sub-adult or adult when slaughtered. No ageable mandibles were recovered at Oxley Park, thus limiting the interpretation of cattle husbandry. Tooth eruption and occlusal wear data in the comparative assemblages from Bancroft (Holmes and Rielly 1994), Pennyland (Holmes 1993) and Wavendon Gate (Dobney and Jaques 1996) suggest some neonatal mortality or slaughter of calves, while most cattle were slaughtered as adults.

The numbers of ageable sheep/goat, pig and horse bones are too few to discern a slaughter pattern. In the three comparative assemblages, sheep were mainly slaughtered at 0.5–1 and 2–4 years of age, indicating a joint focus on meat and wool production. The surplus lambs were slaughtered early for meat, probably to free milk for dairy production. The remaining sheep would have yielded some clips of wool before slaughter. The small number of pigs precludes further discussion of pig rearing. Most horse bones derived from adult horses, probably killed when they were too old or too sick to work. The presence of juvenile bones from all species indicate that animals were bred locally.

Butchery marks were rare, and occurred mainly on cattle bones. These displayed marks deriving from disarticulation (calcaneus), filleting (scapula) and marrow extraction (metacarpal). Cut marks deriving from disarticulation were also found on a proximal pig ulna. As well as cut and chop marks deriving from disarticulation and filleting, butchering marks indicative of skinning were also observed at contemporary sites close to Oxley Park (Holmes and Rielly 1994, 533).

Pathological conditions were found on a cattle pelvis and a cattle first phalanx. They displayed eburnation on the acetabulum and proximal joint surface respectively. The phalanx also had exostoses around the distal joint surface. These pathologies are commonly interpreted as relating to use of cattle for traction, and it is not surprising to find them on rural sites.

In conclusion, the Oxley Park assemblage is similar to contemporary assemblages in the Milton Keynes area. Cattle were the predominant species, but sheep/goat and pig were also reared locally and eaten. Wild mammals were not found in Oxley Park, and were rare or absent on the nearby sites. The main focus of cattle husbandry was meat and traction, and to a lesser extent, dairy products. Sheep were mainly used for meat and wool, with dairy probably being a secondary product.

Charred plant remains
by Ruth Pelling

Forty-two bulk samples were taken from the site, and processed by mechanical flotation, following standard OA methodologies. Charred plant remains other than charcoal were rare in the samples. Grain was noted in 14 samples in quantities of two or three. Four samples contained wheat grains – in two cases identified as spelt (*Triticum spelta*) – and two further samples contained barley grains (*Hordeum* sp.). A single wheat (*Triticum spelta/dicoccum*) glume base was noted in one sample. Single weed seeds were noted in four samples, comprising plantain (*Plantago lanceolata/media*), brome grass (*Bromus* sp.) and goosegrass (*Galium aparine*). The range and quantities of charred seeds and chaff are in keeping with redeposited background scatters of crop processing waste or stored crops.

Charcoal
by Denise Druce

Small quantities of charcoal were present in all of the 42 bulk samples assessed for charred plant remains. Three samples contained larger assemblages which were analysed further. The two samples from pit 15045 were dominated by oak (*Quercus* sp.) wood charcoal with very few small roundwood fragments, consistent with the burning of a large log. A sample from ditch 9017 contained a more varied assemblage, dominated by hawthorn-type (Maloideae) but also containing blackthorn/cherry-type (*Prunus* spp.), oak (*Quercus* sp.), purging buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch (*Betula* sp.) and hazel (*Corylus* sp.). The relatively diverse charcoal assemblage from this ditch suggests that some of the area surrounding the site consisted of scrub, hedgerows and/or woodland borders.

Discussion: a middle Iron Age community
by Leo Webley

Landscape and economy
The site appears to have seen little occupation prior to the middle Iron Age. No worked flint was recovered, and only a single residual pottery sherd attests to a human presence in the later Bronze Age or early Iron Age. Within the Milton Keynes area as a whole, colonisation of the heavy boulder clays for permanent settlement seems to have first occurred in the middle to late Iron Age (Williams 1993a; 1993b), a pattern also seen in many other parts of the south Midlands (Webley 2007). Williams (1993a; 1993b) has argued that this expansion was a result of population pressure, combined with the introduction of iron ploughshares and hardier cereal varieties which made cultivation of the clay-lands a more viable prospect. Arguably, however, the relationship between demographic and social change is likely to have been more complex. Population growth can be a consequence as much as a cause of social developments, and the perception of, and response to, 'pressure' on land will always be culture-specific. A range of other social and cultural factors are likely to have influenced developments in settlement patterns. For example, it has been argued that this period saw significant changes in systems of kinship, land tenure and inheritance across southern Britain, and such developments could have encouraged the colonisation of new land (Thomas 1997).

Recent fieldwork associated with the westward expansion of Milton Keynes has shown that the boulder clay landscape immediately around the site was heavily settled during the middle to late Iron Age (Fig. 1). Excavated sites include a middle to late Iron Age roundhouse and enclosure at Cranborne Avenue, Westcroft, 1 km to the south-east (Anthony 2003); a group of middle to late Iron Age pits and other features at Westcroft District Centre, 1.5 km to the south-east (Ford 2000); two late Iron Age roundhouses and associated enclosures at North Furzton Site A, 2.75 km to the east (Williams 1988); a pair of late Iron Age enclosures at North Furzton Site B, 3.25 km to the east (*ibid*.); an unenclosed middle Iron Age settlement with 10 roundhouses at Kingsmead South, 1.5 km to the south (Taylor, this volume); and a multiphase middle to late Iron Age site with at least 21 roundhouses, post-built structures and enclosures at Tattenhoe Park, 2 km to the south (Taylor 2006). A roundhouse and other features broadly ascribed to the Iron Age have also been found at Emerson Valley, 2 km to the south-east (BCMAS 1996). Though not all of these sites need have been occupied at the same time, the impression gained is of a dense pattern of farmsteads and hamlets, in some cases spaced less than 1 km apart.

The most striking feature of the Oxley Park West

settlement is its linearity (Fig. 2). In its initial form, the settlement consisted of a NE-SW-aligned row of roundhouses – up to eight of which could have been contemporary – and one small enclosure. This was later overlain by a linear boundary ditch complex on the same alignment, integrated with two enclosures, one sub-circular and one sub-rectangular. Contemporary settlements in the Milton Keynes area vary in layout, but there are two sites, Bancroft (Zeepvat and Williams 1994) and Salford, Bedfordshire (Dawson 2005), which have a comparable linear arrangement of roundhouses (Fig. 8). At Bancroft, some of the roundhouses are linked by short lengths of ditch. Further similar linear settlements can be found elsewhere in the Midlands and in the Thames Valley. In some cases, these settlements are laid out alongside, or are succeeded by, a linear ditch. A close parallel to the sequence at Oxley Park West is provided by the Upper Thames Valley site of Latton Lands, Wiltshire, where a row of roundhouses was overlain during the middle Iron Age by a ditch which closely followed the same sinuous alignment (Powell *et al*. forthcoming).

It seems likely that these linear settlements were laid out along landscape boundaries of some kind. Lambrick and Allen (2004) have suggested that a group of linear early and middle Iron Age settlements in the Stanton Harcourt area of Oxfordshire were located at a division between areas of the landscape under arable and pastoral use. The Oxley Park West settlement could also have been laid out along a similar land use boundary, or perhaps a division between the fields associated with the settlement and 'common land' shared with other settlements. At some point, it was felt necessary to demarcate this boundary more clearly by marking it with a ditch. Perhaps this was carried out in the context of an increasingly full landscape, in which it had become more important to define use rights

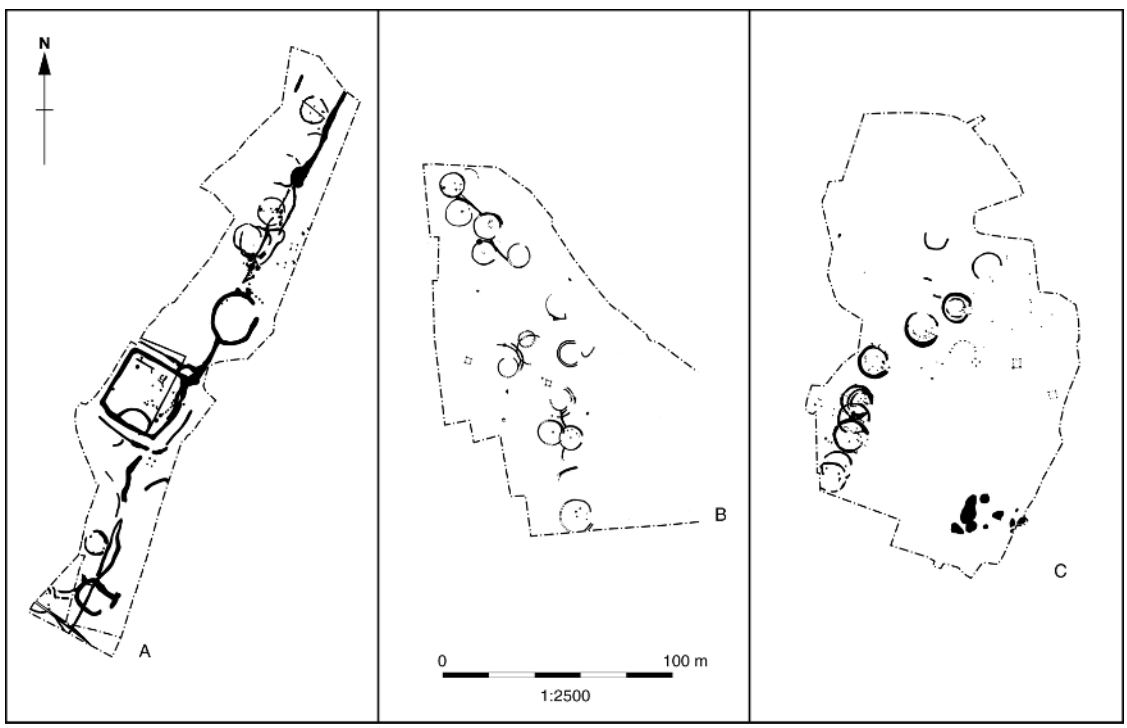


FIGURE 8 Linear middle Iron Age settlements in the Milton Keynes area. A: Oxley Park West; B: Bancroft (Zeepvat and Williams 1994); C: Salford (Dawson 2005).

to land in order to avoid disputes.

The inhabitants of the settlement appear to have had a typical Iron Age diet of cereals, meat and dairy produce. The dominance of cattle and relatively high representation of horse within the bone assemblage fits the pattern of husbandry seen in the wider Milton Keynes area (see Strid above). While grain was recovered from 14 environmental samples, there is little evidence for on-site processing of grain as cereal chaff was found in only a single sample. This makes it theoretically possible that the grain was not grown in the immediate vicinity of the site, but brought in from elsewhere. It has often been argued that the heavy clay soils of the Midlands would have been used much more for raising livestock than for arable farming during the Iron Age (eg Clay 2002, 116). Several sites on the boulder clays of the Milton Keynes area are claimed to have had an economy largely or exclusively based on pastoral farming, including Kingsmead South (Taylor, this volume), North Furzton (Williams 1993b, 214), Stoke Hammond Northern Bypass (Edgeworth 2006, 143) and Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass (Moore *et al*. 2007, 34). In a review of the Iron Age of the region, Kidd (nd, 5) argues that the Milton Keynes area shows "a strong pastoral element to the economy with sites on the heavy clay soils perhaps specialising in this niche". This consensus can be questioned as clay soils have been shown to seriously hinder recovery of charred plant remains (de Moulins 1996). They may also hinder preservation, with fluctuating wet and dry conditions in clay soils likely to lead to decomposition of plant remains, chaff probably being particularly susceptible due to its fragile nature (Rebecca Nicholson pers. comm.). The types of depositional context found on clay soils may not be conducive to preservation either, in particular the absence of storage pits. It is true that boulder clay does not make prime arable land, and in recent centuries most of the area around the site has been used as pasture and woodland (Ivens 1993). On the other hand, ridge and furrow is ubiquitous in the area (Ivens *et al*. 1995, fig. 114), as across the claylands of the region in general, demonstrating that extensive arable cultivation was possible during the medieval period and hence presumably also during the Iron Age. Arguably, farming regimes during the Iron Age would not have been dictated merely by soil type, but intertwined with social and cultural priorities.

Besides farming, a range of other 'domestic' or 'craft' activities was carried out by the inhabitants of the settlement. Querns and pottery vessels with charred residues attest to food preparation. Textile production is suggested by a single spindle whorl. Fired clay objects traditionally classed as loomweights are also present, but are here interpreted as oven bricks (see Poole above). Small-scale iron working and pottery production is attested by finds of waste material.

Settlement architecture

Recognisable buildings within the settlement included both roundhouses and 'four-post structures'. The roundhouses were typical of the period, being constructed in a manner that left little subsurface trace, perhaps using turf or cob walls (Williams 1993b). Though one roundhouse did show possible slight traces of a wall line, in most cases all that survived of the buildings were their surrounding drainage gullies and, in some cases, entrance postholes. As customary, the houses were built with their entrances facing east or south-east (Oswald 1997). The houses were all of a similar size, with drainage gullies ranging from 9–12 m in diameter, corresponding with other sites in the area (Fig. 9). It is not clear whether each house represented a discrete residential unit, though certainly there is no sign of the 'pairing' of large and small houses seen at some other sites in the region such as Hartigans (Williams 1993b).

The two four-post structures were both located to the east of the roundhouses and boundary ditches. Structures of this kind are traditionally interpreted as raised granaries, though various other interpretations have also been proposed, including excarnation platforms (Ellison and Drewett 1971; Gent 1983). The presence of foetal human skull and vertebra fragments in one of the postholes of the southern four-post structure could be cited as support for the excarnation platform theory, though caution is needed as human bone fragments were also found elsewhere on the site (see below).

Small sub-circular and sub-rectangular enclosures similar to those seen at Oxley Park West are a recurring feature of middle Iron Age settlements in the region. They rarely contain any obvious traces of buildings, leading to arguments that they were compounds for livestock (eg Williams 1993b). However, given the lack of deep founda-

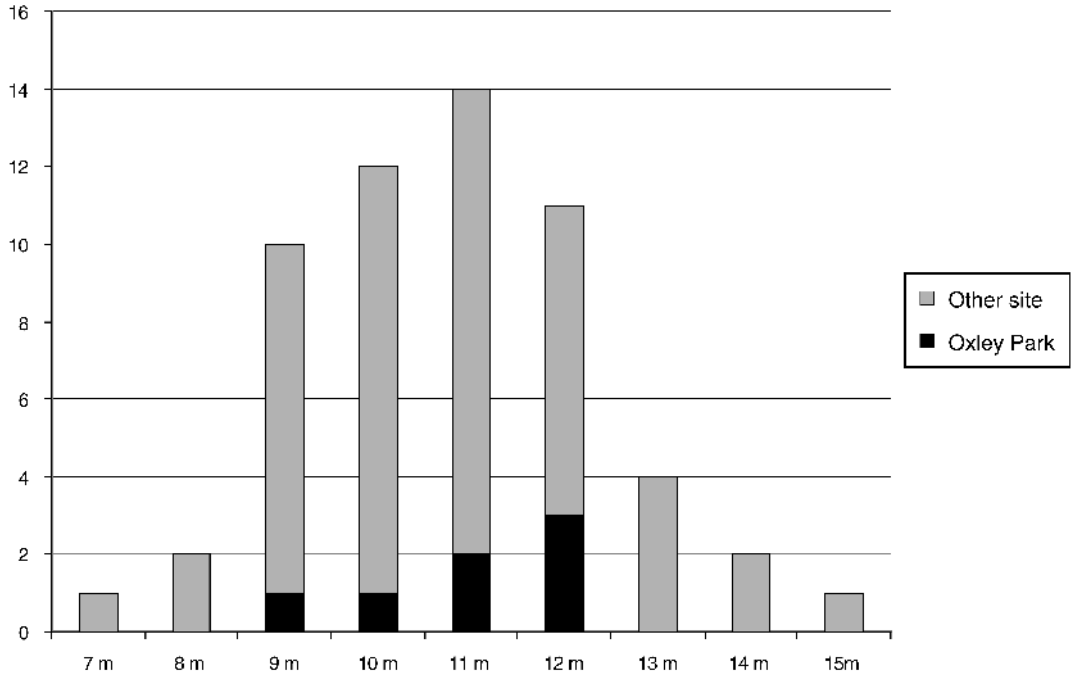


FIGURE 9 Roundhouse size (eaves gully diameter) at Oxley Park West and other middle Iron Age sites in the Milton Keynes area (Bancroft, Cranborne Avenue, Hartigans, North Furzton, Pennyland, Salford, Stoke Hammond Northern Bypass, Wavendon Gate (Williams *et al*. 1996)).

tions typical of domestic buildings in this period (see above), any buildings constructed within a ditched enclosure and perhaps not therefore requiring its own surrounding drainage gully would probably be difficult to identify through excavation. Rectangular enclosure 15006 did in fact contain possible beam-slots in its northern half that might relate to a building of some kind, although the form this took is unclear. Enclosure 9001 contained no features other than two postholes, but its penannular form and east-facing entrance raise the possibility that it encircled a roundhouse.

Artefact deposition and mortuary practices

The largest concentrations of pottery, animal bone and other artefacts occurred in the northern half of the site in and around enclosure 9001 and the roundhouses to its north, with a minor concentration around enclosure 15009 at the southern end of the site (Fig. 10). Finds from rectangular enclosure 15006 were relatively modest by comparison. This pattern could be a reflection of the distribution of activities within the site; in particular, the strong concentration of slag and oven/kiln waste in the northern part of the site might suggest that this area was a focus for high temperature crafts. Clearly, however, selective deposition also played a role in creating the pattern of finds distributions. Entrances were often selected for unusual deposits at Iron Age sites, and this is illustrated by the finds from the entrance terminals of enclosure 9001.

The northern terminal contained an unusual decorated spindle whorl in its lower fill, and in its upper fill a substantial dump of pottery, oven/kiln debris and animal bone. The southern terminal also contained significant amounts of pottery and animal bone, along with human humerus fragments. Coincidentally or not, this mirrors deposits seen in an enclosure at Hartigans, which also had a dumped oven in one entrance terminal and human bone (cranium and femur fragments) in the other (Williams 1993b).

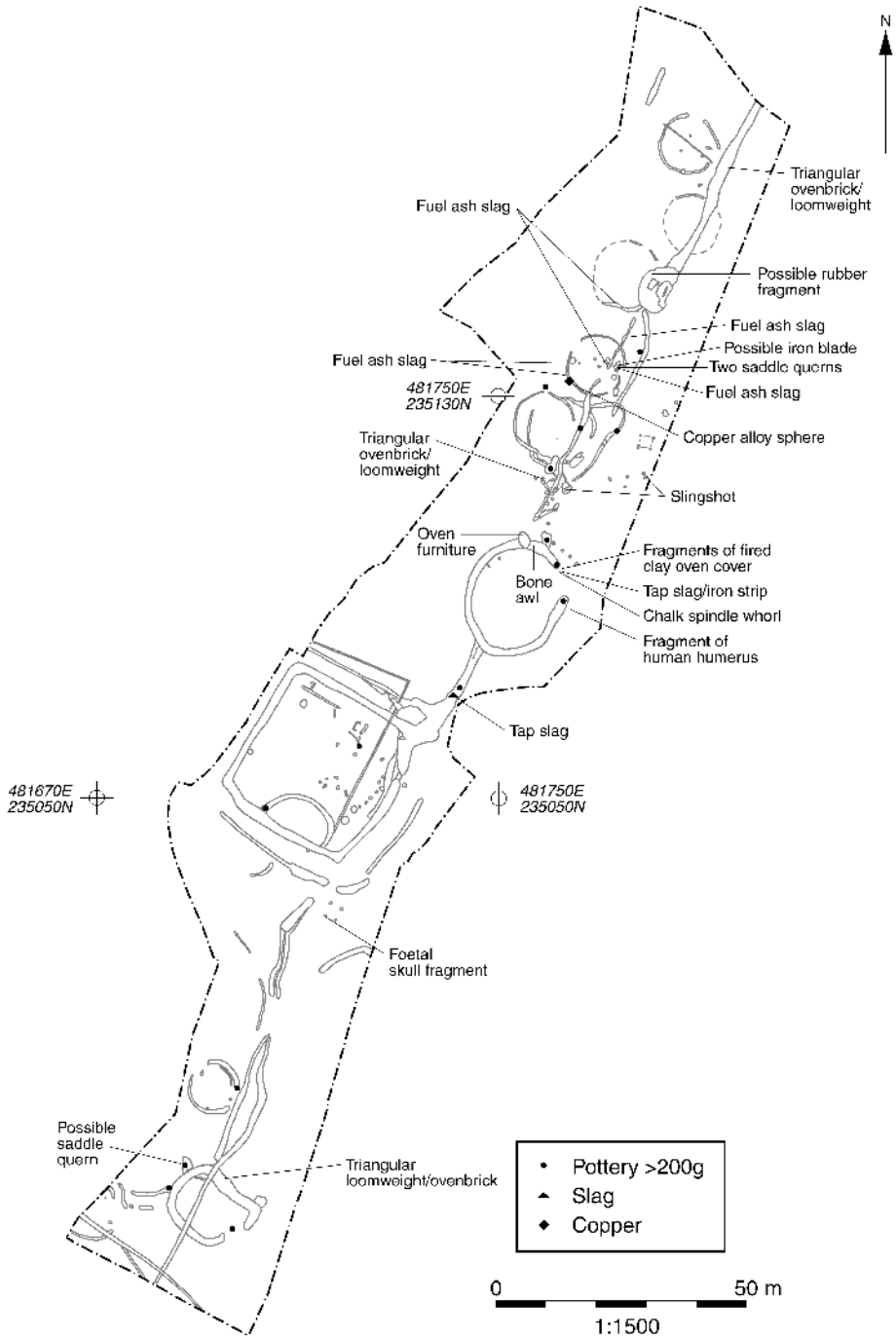


FIGURE 10 Distribution of artefacts.

Other human remains from the site comprised foetal skull and vertebra fragments from four-post structure 15036, and a probable child's tooth from a pit within the rectangular enclosure. While the latter could simply have been a casually lost milk tooth, the other human remains reflect attitudes to the dead seen more widely in Iron Age southern Britain. Mortuary practice during this period often involved excarnation (Carr and Knüsel 1997) followed by retrieval of selected bones, certain of which were then buried within settlements, in some cases generations later (Webley 2007). Skulls and limb bones were most commonly selected for deposition (Moore 2006, 72–3; Webley 2007, 63), a trend reflected in the remains from Oxley Park West.

Settlement abandonment

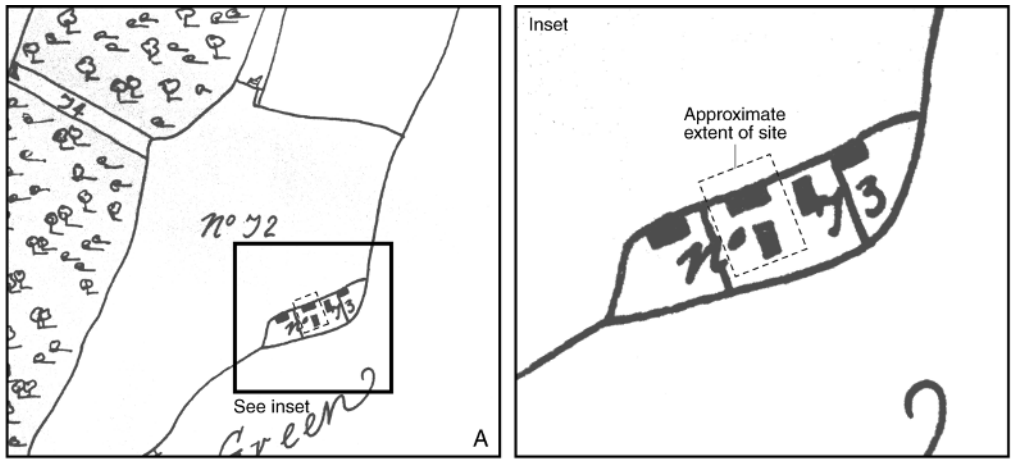
Only a few sherds of late Iron Age pottery were recovered from the site, suggesting that the settlement had largely been abandoned by the late 1st century BC or the earliest part of the 1st century AD. No obvious 'successor settlement' is known, although Roman finds have been recovered from the site of Oakhill Prison, *c* 500 m to the north (see *Archaeological and historical background* and Figure 1 above). It is notable that none of the six excavated middle and/or late Iron Age settlements within a 3.5 km radius of the site (see above) continued in use into the Roman period, hinting at a radical reorganisation of the local landscape during the 1st century AD. A rectilinear field system originating in the 1st century AD has been found at Westbury-by-Shenley, 1.25 km to the north-east (Ivens *et al*. 1995), perhaps suggesting that the form of land use represented by the linear landscape boundary at Oxley Park West had been abandoned by this time.

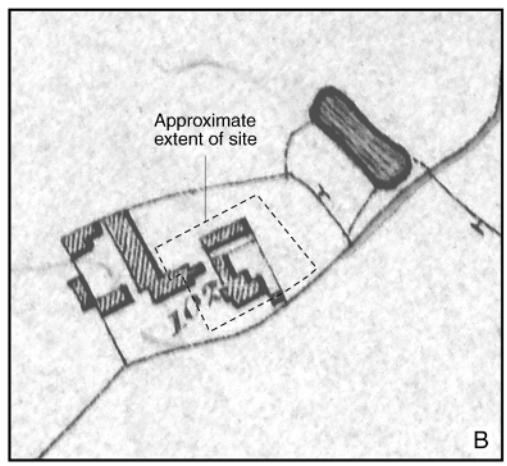
Shenley Common Farm North

by Kate Brady with Kelly Powell and Simon Underdown

Historical and cartographic evidence

Little is known of the origin of Shenley Common Farm North. The farm does not appear on the two earliest cartographic sources for the area, the 1599 Salden estate map and 1693 Shenley Church End estate map (Croft and Mynard 1993), though the significance of this was unclear prior to the excavation given the often selective nature of such early maps. The site of the farm lies within an area labelled on the 1693 map as 'Wood Common'. The first record of the farm appears to be Thomas Jefferys' 1770 map of Buckinghamshire (surveyed in 1766–8), which shows two unnamed buildings on the approximate site of the farm, though the layout of these cannot be clearly seen (Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society 2000). On the 1771 map of 'part of the Lordship of Shenley...belonging to John Knapp Esq.', five separate small buildings are shown (Fig. 11A). These are labelled as a 'homestead and orchard' occupied by Isaac Whitney, who farmed a total of 94 acres. Bryant's 1825 map of Buckinghamshire shows only four buildings but in a similar configuration, suggesting that the 1771 plan is reasonably reliable, and it names the farm as 'Wood Common Farm' (Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society 2000). The location of the farm is shown on the Ordnance Survey one-inch map of 1834, though it is not named. The more detailed Shenley Church End tithe map of 1840 depicts a farm layout different to that shown by the earlier maps (Fig. 11B). There is an L-shaped farmhouse with what appears to be a porch on the south-western side. A rectangular outbuilding lies directly to the north of the farmhouse, a substantial four-sided farmyard complex to the north-west, a small square structure to the south-east, and a large pond to the east. The deed records that the farm consisted of two pastures, a meadow and a farmhouse and homestead owned by M Knapp and occupied by Richard Clark. The same basic farm layout is maintained on Ordnance Survey maps from 1881 onwards, though with some alterations to the north-western farmyard buildings over time. The 1881 map is the first to record the name Shenley Common Farm North. By the early 20th century the farm was a tenant farm forming part of the Whaddon Hall Estate, and in 1919 it was auctioned along with other nearby properties. The sale particulars include a plan of the farm (Fig. 11C), and describe the farmhouse as comprising 'parlour, living room, kitchen, four bedrooms, two box rooms, dairy', while the farm buildings included 'two piggeries and a hen house, all tiled, slated calf shed, cart lodge, mixing room and loose box, nine-cow lodge, open lodge for yard and stabling' (Fig. 12). The farm was demolished some time between 1946 and 1968.





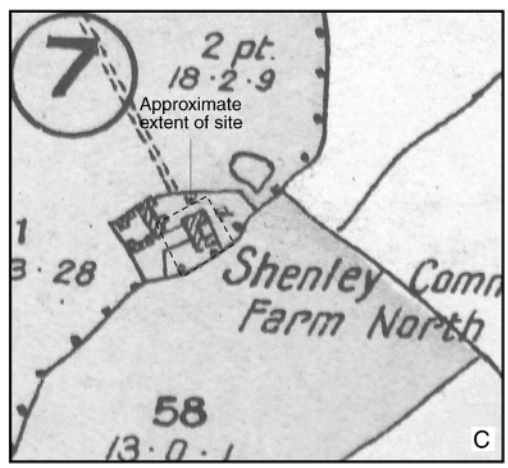
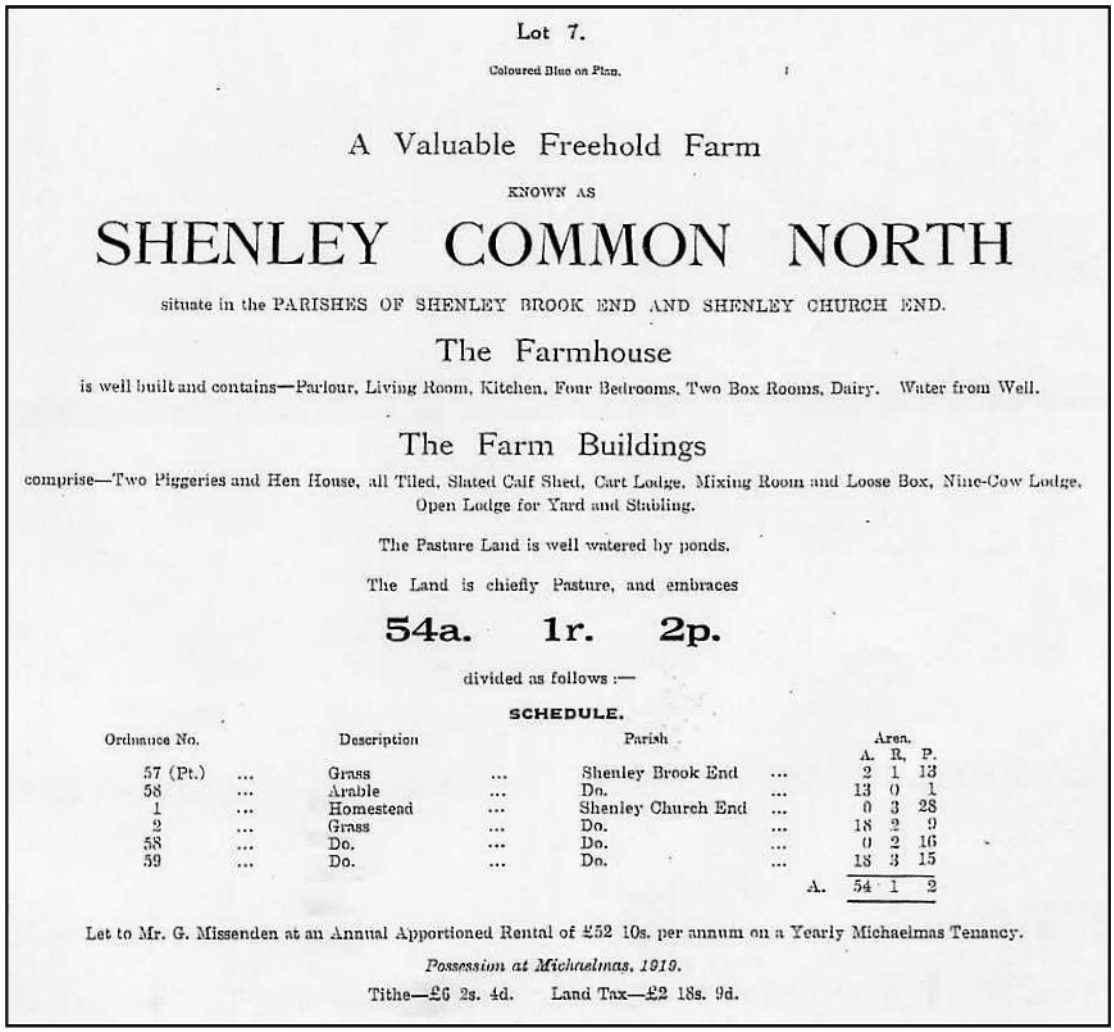


FIGURE 11 Shenley Common Farm North: cartographic evidence. All maps courtesy of the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies.



Lot 7.

Coloured Blue on Plan.

A Valuable Freehold Farm

KNOWN AS

SHENLEY COMMON NORTH

situate in the PARISHES OF SHENLEY BROOK END AND SHENLEY CHURCH END.

The Farmhouse

is well built and contains—Parlour, Living Room, Kitchen, Four Bedrooms, Two Box Rooms, Dairy. Water from Well.

The Farm Buildings

comprise—Two Piggeries and Hen House, all Tiled, Slated Calf Shed, Cart Lodge, Mixing Room and Loose Box, Nine-Cow Lodge, Open Lodge for Yard and Stabling.

The Pasture Land is well watered by ponds.

The Land is chiefly Pasture, and embraces

54a. 1r. 2p.

divided as follows :—

SCHEDULE.

Ordnance No.		Description		Parish		Area. A.	R.	P.
57 (Pt.)	...	Grass	...	Shenley Brook End	...	2	1	13
58	...	Arable	...	Do.	...	13	0	1
1	...	Homestead	...	Shenley Church End	...	0	3	28
2	...	Grass	...	Do.	...	18	2	9
58	...	Do.	...	Do.	...	0	2	16
59	...	Do.	...	Do.	...	18	3	15
					A.	54	1	2

Let to Mr. G. Missenden at an Annual Apportioned Rental of £52 10s. per annum on a Yearly Michaelmas Tenancy.

Possession at Michaelmas, 1919.

Tithe—£6 2s. 4d. Land Tax—£2 18s. 9d.

FIGURE 12 Shenley Common Farm North: sale particulars, 1919. Courtesy of the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

Archaeological sequence

The 30 x 30 m excavation area was targeted on the site of the farmhouse; the former farmyard and farm buildings to the north-west were not investigated. The excavation showed that the farmhouse was built and extended in at least three stages (Fig. 13). The reuse of building material hindered dating of the phases, and the sequence is based primarily on stratigraphic relationships, aided to some extent by the cartographic evidence.

Phase 1

From the extant remains it appears that the earliest phase of the farmhouse was centred around the south-eastern half of room 14004. Brick walls 14047 and 14097 appear to have been constructed around a large limestone cornerstone, which may have been part of an earlier building. The limestone remains of the north-eastern wall (14035) of room 14003 may also have been part of this earliest phase, perhaps part of an external structure, but this

is not conclusive. The remains of a probable hearth or chimney base were at the centre of the building and there appears to have been a doorway in the northern end of wall 14047. The remains of a wall to the north-west of the chimney/hearth structure suggest that the room was divided in this phase, but too little of these earlier walls survive to be able to ascertain whether these were individual rooms. No evidence of the west wall survived, but there was a passageway between two blocked openings at the west end of the room which may mark the original extent.

It is possible that the NW-SE aligned building shown at the centre of the farm complex on the 1771 map can be identified with the phase 1 farmhouse (Fig. 11A). If so, the building shown on the map immediately to the north-west of the farmhouse could be outbuilding 14006. This was a rectangular room measuring 3 x 5 m. It comprised a series of brick- and limestone-built walls with a possible entranceway through the south-eastern wall. The internal floor surface was of clay, soil and stone. The building may have functioned as a store or outhouse.

Phase 2

Room 14003 probably represents the first modification to the main building, extending north-east (and perhaps using previously external wall 14035) to create another room. This room had a sunken, tiled floor and was accessed by stairs from the south and east. Structures to the east of the southern stairs may have been supports for shelves. The sunken floor and the presence of internal drains suggest that this room might have been a dairy.

Another room in the eastern part of the building, possibly a pantry or kitchen (room 14002) may also have been created in this phase or slightly after. This room was created by extending to the north east and thickening wall 14097, and wall 14029 formed the south-western wall of the room. Although the phasing of these walls is not clear it is possible that wall 14029 formed the earliest outer wall of the building, and that this room enclosed an existing courtyard. The only surviving internal features were a possible stairway between this room and room 14003 and a doorway at the north-eastern end of wall 14028.

Phase 3

Next, red brick walls 14023–6 were added, creating room 14001, which had a drain beneath floor level and was probably a workshop or another dairy. Wall 14026 is likely to have been a rebuild of the original wall of room 14002. Steps lead from room 14003 to room 14001. Subsequently, the wall dividing this new room from room 14002 was enlarged and all of the walls of room 14001 were plastered. An internal course of bricks may have functioned as a shelf. A limestone post-pad/pillar base suggests the addition of extra roof support. This post-pad was laid before the addition of a red-tiled floor. A small area of yellow floor tiles at the southern end of the room were probably a later addition.

The large original room 14004 was extended to the north-west during this phase. This extension consisted of walls 14052, 14053, 14056 and a small buttress. The exact position in the sequence of this extension is not certain; it certainly post-dates the construction of the dairy (14003) but whether it was built before or after room 14001 is not known. The north-western wall of the room included a fireplace. To the south of this was a yellow-tiled rectangular basin, back-filled with broken crockery dated to *c* 1815–40. All the walls of the extended room were plastered and the floor was tiled.

Outbuildings and yard areas (phase 2 or 3)

Two outbuildings to the north of the farmhouse (14008 and 14014) were probably built during phase 3. Earlier outbuilding 14006 was extended to the north-east (14008) to create an additional sheltered area, 6 m long. A path or corridor ran between building 14006 and this extended sheltered area, with a doorway in the north-west. This passageway had a packed clay floor, with patchy remains of tile, limestone and cobbled surfaces. Building 14014 was much larger, measuring over 14 m long and 4 m wide. It may have functioned as a pigsty or similar. A pitched limestone floor survived in the north-eastern end of the building. Outbuilding 14006 was connected to room 14004 of the main farmhouse by a red-brick wall (14065), creating a probable working area to its north-east. This wall overlaid a disused cistern.

Directly to the north of the main farmhouse building (outside rooms 14003 and 14004) was a hardcore surface (14010), east of which was a cobbled path and open courtyard area (14007). Between the farmhouse and building 14014 was another cobbled path. It was walled on both sides

for most of its length and may once have been covered over. The pathway also incorporated a drain. To the south-west of this path was another cobbled area (14011) around a brick-built well and a drain.

In the north-east of the excavated area were several drains and a ditch feeding into a soakaway. One of these drains contained a secure pottery assemblage dated *c* 1780–1830.

Finds

(based on archive reports by John Cotter, Cynthia Poole, Kelly Powell and Ruth Shaffrey)

Brick and tile were sampled from 23 locations, but analysis revealed that the fabrics used did not correspond to the development of the building as shown by the stratigraphic record. Some of the stratigraphically earliest walls were constructed of bricks of late 18th- to 19th-century date. Three samples showed that bricks of 16th- to 17th-century date had been used in both the earliest walls and in those of the later extensions. These early bricks were clearly reused, with mortar covering broken surfaces, and presumably originate from an earlier structure in the vicinity.

The vast majority of the other finds were recov-

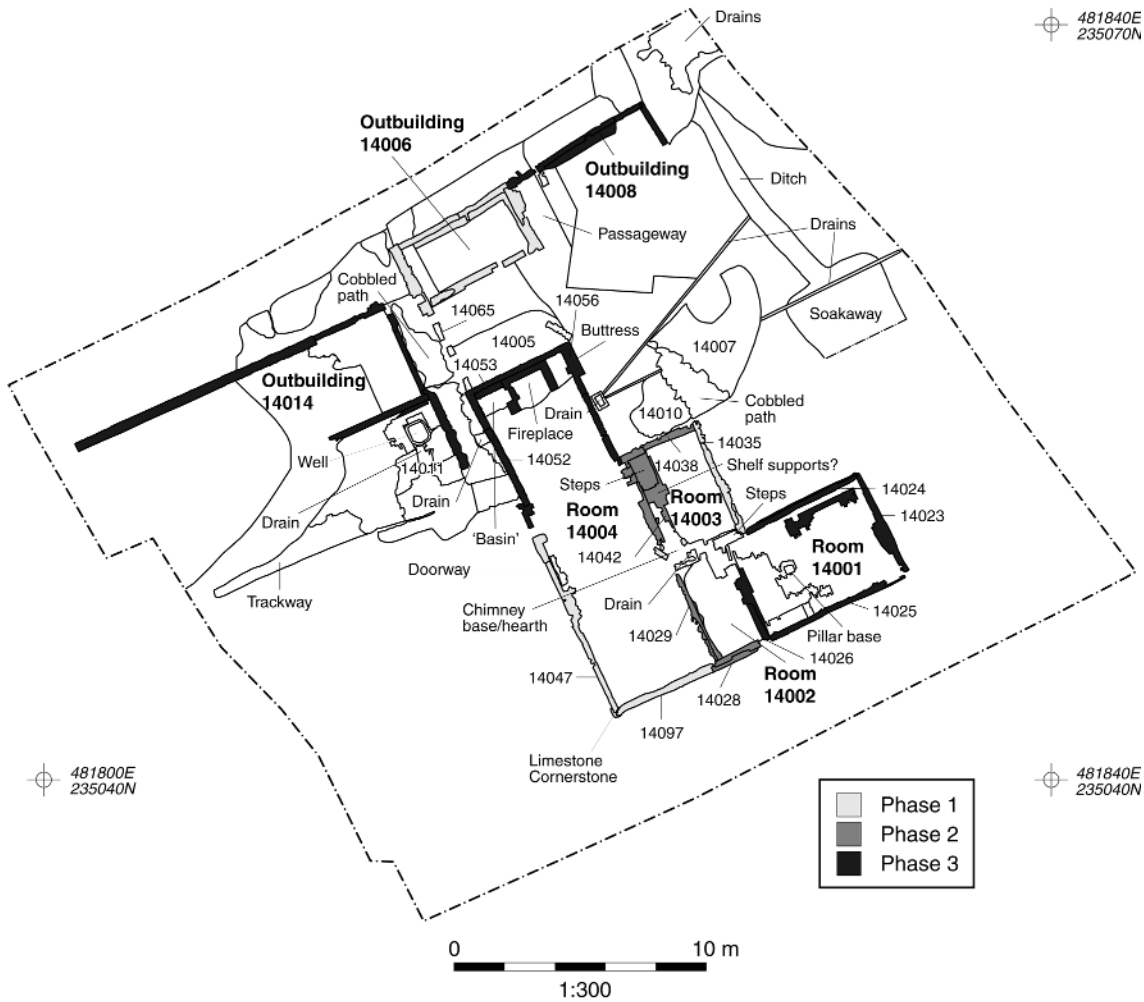


FIGURE 13 Shenley Common Farm North: excavation plan.

ered from the overburden and demolition layers covering the site. Consequently, they can only be used to help date the span of habitation of the farmhouse and not the chronological development of the building. The vast bulk of the finds are of late 18th- and 19th-century date. The pottery assemblage was dominated by common mass-produced wares, most of early 19th-century date. Rarer, pre-industrial, 18th-century pottery types include Staffordshire-type slipware vessels, an ointment jar in plain white English tin-glazed earthenware, and glazed red earthenware vessels of probable local origin. A few coins and tokens were recovered, the earliest being a cartwheel penny of 1797 and a token of 'JOHN WILKINSON IRON MASTER' dated 1792. Other finds included clay tobacco pipe fragments, a grinding stone, a range of domestic and agricultural metal artefacts, and animal bone.

Discussion

The dating of the building materials and artefacts indicates that the farm was founded in the mid to late 18th century. This complements and refines the cartographic evidence that the farm probably originated some time between 1693 and 1768. The building provides a good example of a vernacular farmhouse belonging to a small tenant farm, lacking modern alterations that would otherwise have obscured the layout.

The farmhouse seems to have begun as a simple rectangular building, which was then progressively extended. The L-shaped plan created as a result of the phase 3 alterations corresponds with the layout shown by maps dating from 1840 onwards (Fig. 11). The various additions and alterations made to the building during phases 2 and 3 may suggest that the early 19th century was a relatively prosperous time for the inhabitants (or at least the owners) of the farm. Tile floors were laid throughout over earlier clay floors, walls were plastered, doorways and walls were remodelled and internal structures were added. The vast majority of the pottery dated to 1825–1850/75, again perhaps suggesting a time of relative prosperity, although the pottery and other artefacts are mostly of common types that do not suggest any great wealth.

The farmhouse is likely to have been a fairly poor-quality timber-framed building with brick infill, similar to Shenley Common Farm South, which is still standing (albeit in ruins) 450 m to the south (Fig. 1). The use of timber framing for farm buildings continued into the 19th century in Buckinghamshire (Evans 1994). Though Shenley Common Farm South may possibly have had an earlier origin in the 16th or 17th century (Woodfield 1986), it seems to have had a similar sequence of development. It too began life as a simple rectangular building to which extensions were added in the 18th and 19th centuries, including a sunken dairy (Mayes 2003). It is likely that the two farms were similar in appearance and developed along similar lines, particularly as both were owned by the Whaddon Hall Estate by the early 20th century.

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The fieldwork was managed for OA by Steve Lawrence and supervised on site by Bryan Matthews. The post-excavation programme was managed by Lisa Brown and Leo Webley. Jill Hind carried out documentary research. Illustrations are by Georgina Slater and Sarah Lucas. Thanks are also due to the many other OA staff who worked on the project, both in the field and during the post-excavation work.

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[*Editors' Note*

The article above describes investigations carried out on an Iron Age site, initially by Archaeological Investigations Ltd and subsequently by Oxford Archaeology. The next article describes excavations by Thames Valley Archaeological Services on another Iron Age site only 1.5 km distant from the first. A remarkable picture of dense middle Iron Age occupation is emerging for Milton Keynes, on land once seen as unpromising for early settlement.

One of the many challenges for developer-funded contract archaeology, is finding the time and resources to tie in new finds in an area with those previously made by other organisations. In these two articles the lead authors have made good use of published background information but neither was able, of course, to make much allowance for the final report of the other. Some contrasting approaches will be obvious such as differences in plan and pottery drawing scales and in the fabric series utilised for pottery, all of which can be frustrating for the reader. These are not issues that editors can readily address, given a competitive commercial environment, although professional archaeological bodies might take a stronger lead here. However, the results are promptly and effectively in print and for that we are grateful.]