

## A PICTURE OF THE BRONZE AGE

As revealed in 2000, the Bronze Age settlement set at the fen-edge of Whittlesey Island near Peterborough proved one of the most important excavations in Britain in recent years. It presented a remarkable picture of later prehistoric life in its regional setting. It illustrates a neat and 'neighbourly' arrangement of houses, fields and watering holes spread along the eastern edge of the Flag Fen embayment. The houses were round and without exception had doorways facing towards the east and away from the edge of the embayment. The field system was made up of small rectangular fields bounded by ditches and banks. Its principle boundary stretched out along the edge of the island delineating the division between the dry terrace and the 'wet' basin. Situated at the fen-edge were a series of large watering holes. Found in the base of one was a cut-down length of a logboat that clearly had been re-utilised as a processing trough, probably relating to cooking. Each watering hole was encircled by compacted gravel surfaces which had been put down to consolidate the surrounding soil. Large mounds of burnt stone and flint covered the ground to the southern side of the watering holes and obscured small groups of pits and postholes.

Votive metalwork deposits of fine weaponry had been set along the fen-ward side of the site and out at the marsh edge. This included individual spears and at one point three had been planted upright into 'the wet' in a line (their handles presumably marking their position). Even more extraordinary was a single hoard deposit of more than 20 weapons, consisting of intentionally broken spears and swords. The Peterborough area has long been renowned for the wealth of its Bronze Age metalwork 'gifted' to the marshes. Yet this is the first time that ritual deposits have been recovered in a settlement context, and evidence of metalworking was also found on the site itself.



## BRADLEY FEN, WHITTLESEY



Further ritual activity was also evidenced within the settlement. 'Loose' human bone was recovered and also complete skeletons, the latter including one individual who had been tightly bound and stuffed upside down into a large posthole. Perhaps even more remarkable was the burial of an aurochs - the wild and massive ancestor of modern cattle - in a large pit within the middle of the settlement itself. Though the skeleton was complete and thereby still fleshed at the time of its deposition, it had clearly been skinned (not an easy task with such a huge animal). Reminiscent of the ox hides known to wrap human burials of the period on the Continent, taking on the aurochs hide may have been to assume its strength.

At this time the site's vast pottery and animal bone assemblages are still being analysed. Upon completion and when putting together its many components, the site will offer an singularly detailed picture of life in this fen-edge settlement - intermeshing its everyday routines and the drama of ritual events.

