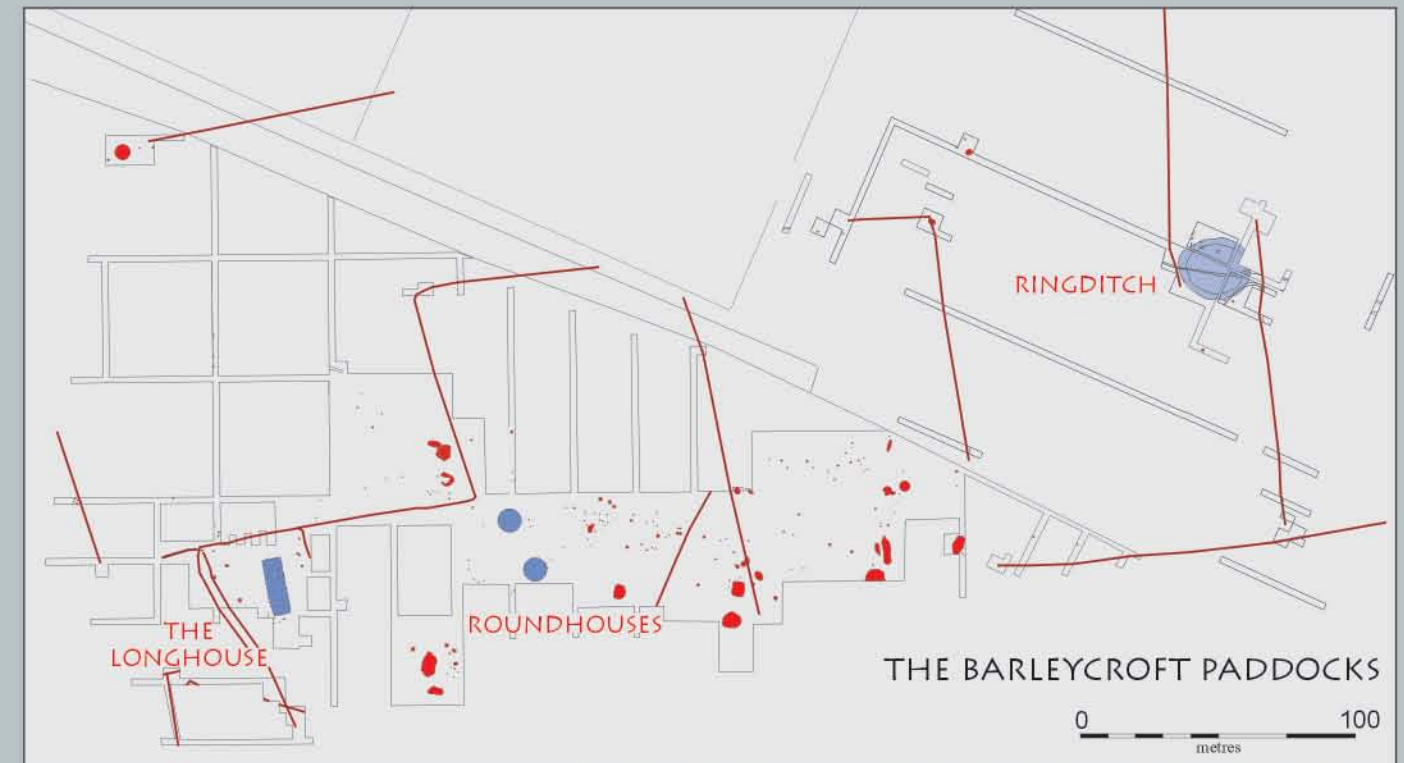


THE LIVING AND THE DEAD



CREMATION URN



RINGDITCH

Houses and burials/cemeteries represent poles of human experience and are often the main focus of many excavations. The reconstruction to the left shows in detail one of the Bronze Age settlement hamlets set amidst the ditches of the fieldsystem. Based on the data of the excavation plan (the Barleycroft Paddock Sub-site, above), in the mid-ground are a pair of roundhouses. These are directly comparable to those found at Bradley Fen, Whittlesey and are entirely typical of the period's buildings. Much rarer was the evidence of the large longhouse which commands the foreground of the picture. This dates to c. 1200-1000BC and is one of only a handful of such rectangular buildings that can be formerly attributed to the Bronze Age. Set as it was in its own ditched paddock, and with moulds for the production of bronze spearheads recovered nearby, does this attest to emergent social hierarchy? In other words, was this the house of some manner of local chieftain or headperson? Certainly its occurrence raises key questions concerning by what means such vast fieldsystems were laid-out and maintained.

The highlighted circle in the right of the Barleycroft Paddocks plan above indicates the location of still another ring-ditch monument. Notice how it became a nodal point or 'seam' within the fieldsystem. Whilst its basic form is comparable to the Butcher's Rise ring-ditches discussed in the panel above, in this case it lacks any kind of cemetery elaboration. The photographs immediately above relate to features of the Butcher's Rise ring-ditches. The photo on the right shows the excavation of the main double-circuit 'circle', with the chequer-board pattern being produced by alternate metre-square excavation of the buried soil layer (rich in contemporary artefacts) that sealed the monument. The photograph to the left shows one of the cremation urns, half-sectioned. The white fragments in the base are burnt human bone. Such cremation burials - the main interment rite of the later 2nd millennium BC - only rarely include any grave goods and this makes it very difficult to establish any sense of social distinction or status from the dead alone.