ROUNDHOUSES BUT NO ROUNDHEADS: EXCAVATION ON THE SITE OF THE FIRST BATTLE OF NEWBURY (1643)

PAUL GAJOS, MICHAEL J. ALLEN, ROWENA GALE, CHRIS J. STEVENS AND RACHEL EVERY

ILLUSTRATIONS: S.E. JAMES

SUMMARY

An excavation was carried out within the site of the First Battle of Newbury (1643) but evidence of the battle was limited to the find of a 17th century musket ball. The excavation produced some evidence of a Romano-British field system, most notably a trackway or droveway aligned on the nearby villa site. A roundhouse, four-post structures, postholes and ditches belonging to an unenclosed Middle Iron Age farmstead, were also found. Sites of this date are rare in the Lower Kennet Valley. The distribution of pottery and loomweights in relation to the roundhouse indicated some ordered use of space, while environmental samples provided evidence of the local economy and for two types of on-site crop storage.

INTRODUCTION

In autumn 1643, Parliamentarian forces led by the Earl of Essex marched from London to relieve the siege of Gloucester. They reached Newbury on 20 September and there encountered some 14,000 Royalist troops, including cavalry under the command of Prince Rupert. A bloody battle then ensued. By the end of the day, the First Battle of Newbury had claimed the lives of around 3500 men but no decisive victory could be claimed by either side. The Royalists, their ammunition exhausted, withdrew during the night, leaving the field to Essex (Guest and Guest 1996: 122-A proposal to build houses on part of the 5). battlefield site (as defined in the English Heritage Battlefields Register) led to an archaeological investigation. The only possible find related to the battle was a single musket ball of probable 17th century date found during a metal-detector survey of the site.

There was some evidence of Bronze Age occupation but the main discovery was an unenclosed farmstead of Middle Iron Age date. Sites of this date are rare in the Lower Kennet Valley. Roman activity on the site is represented by a trackway that runs towards the site of a nearby villa and is likely to be related to its estate. The trackway is on the same alignment as some of the ditches of the Middle Iron Age farmstead suggesting some form of continuity in land use.

BACKGROUND

The excavation took place within a 0.4 hectare parcel of land centred on NGR 445850 166550 (Figure 1). The site was bounded to the north by the mainline railway, in the south by Enborne Road, between the lane to Enborne House and a school playing field.

The site lies within the valley of the River Kennet, on Pleistocene gravel terrace deposits (Geological Survey 1:63,360, Sheet 267) overlain by the slowly permeable, loamy clay soils of the Wickham 4 association (Soil Survey 1:250,000, Sheet 6). The site slopes gently south to north towards the river at an average height of about 83m OD. At the time of the excavation it was under rough pasture and cartographic regression analysis indicated that it had been undeveloped farmland since at least Rocque's map of Berkshire of 1761.

Clearly the principal importance of this otherwise unremarkable piece of land was its association with the Civil War battle, although the site lies within a general area of considerable known earlier activity and therefore archaeological potential. The part of the Kennet valley around Newbury and Thatcham has produced extensive evidence for early prehistoric activity, in the form of numerous Lower Palaeolithic finds and Early and Late Mesolithic sites (see, for instance, Froom 1972a; 1972b; 1976; Wymer 1959; 1999; Healy *et al.* 1992; Ellis *et al.* 2003).

A Late Bronze Age pit, pottery, and Early Iron Age features, including ditches and pits, have been recorded in earlier excavations nearby at Enborne Gate Farm (Wessex Archaeology 1986).

Evidence of Romano-British occupation in the vicinity was found in 1907 during building works in Salcombe Road, 0.3km to the south-east of the site (Peake 1931). Investigations revealed the extensive remains of a villa covering about 1.5 hectares and a cremation cemetery (SMR 2888). A 3rd century coin of Carausius was found here in 1933. Early and Late Romano-British occupation material was recorded c. 1km to the west of the site during excavations in advance of the construction of the A34 Newbury Bypass (Enborne Road: Birbeck 2000, 21-3) including pits, postholes, a possible midden deposit and quantities of ceramic building material and roof tiles. Occupation at Enborne Gate Farm (Wessex Archaeology 1986) seems to have extended into the Romano-British period.

Saxon occupation in the area around Newbury and Speen is well documented (Lobb and Rose 1996). In the more immediate area, several sherds of 6th century pottery were recovered at Enborne Gate Farm (Wessex Archaeology 1986) and Lobb and Rose (*ibid.*: 93 and figure 18) suggest the presence of a settlement here.



Figure 1. Site location plan ©Crown copyright Wessex Archaeology 100028190

RESULTS

Three phases of activity were recognised (Figure 2).

Phase 1. Late Bronze Age

Four pits (one found in the evaluation) were seen at the southern extremity of the site. They were of roughly similar proportions (c.1m in diameter and 0.1m to 0.24m depth). All contained dumps of burnt flint and may be associated with cooking. Environmental samples from one pit (1398) contained charcoal but no charred grain. Taxa identified included hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). Although these features produced no dating evidence similar features are known from other sites in the area dating to the Late Bronze Age, for example, Enborne Gate (Lobb and Rose 1996). Other evidence of activity dating to the Late Bronze Age is limited and consists of residual pottery in Middle Iron Age contexts (roundhouse gully 1428, ditch 1359 and posthole 1249). Thirty-four undiagnostic worked flints, from a variety of features (Table 1), are probably all residual and may be Bronze Age in date.

Phase 2. Middle Iron Age

The main phase of activity at Enborne Road was represented by an unenclosed farmstead of Middle Iron Age (400-100 BC) date. Sites of this date are rare in the Lower Kennet Valley, perhaps due to over



Figure 2. Site plan showing all features

exploitation of the land in the Bronze Age (Butterworth and Lobb, 1992). The farmstead consisted of two ditches, a roundhouse, two four-post structures and several pits and postholes.

The roundhouse (1428) (Figure 3) comprised a circular drip gully (12m in diameter) with a 4m wide east facing entrance and associated postholes. The gully was cut in two places by ditch 1429.

Structural features of the roundhouse consisted of six or more postholes. Of these, 1315 and 1330 situated *c*. 2.5m apart mark the position of the doorposts, 1374 was at the rear and 1317 was beyond the drip gully.

Two posts (postholes 1390 and 1368) would have cut the inside edge of the drip gully and probably represent running repairs to the original structure. Posthole 1368 quite clearly cut the primary fill of the gully but not the secondary fill. Within the gully, on either side of the entranceway, were apparently deliberately placed deposits of material (Figure 3). On the north side (1360), 1.6m from the terminal, were three triangular loomweights (two partial and one complete) lying on top of a broken pottery vessel (a rounded jar see Figure 4.1). The northern terminal (1328) contained a minimum of two vessels (including a jar: see Figure 4.2). Sherds from a deposit in 1372

	Animal bone	Burnt flint	Burnt stone	СВМ	Fired clay	Worked flint
Roundhouse 1428		8585		1/11	23/2290	10/97
Ditch 1241		333				2/12
Ditch 1359	4/1	5102			11/209	1/18
Ditch 1429		1613				5/31
Ditch 1430		83		1/64		2/23
Misc. pits	4/2	15744		1/11	47/554	2/8
Misc. postholes		5512	3/264		19/389	4/24
Subsoil						8/92
Topsoil				1/44		
TOTAL	8/3	36972	3/264	4/130	100/3442	34/305

Weight only given for burnt flint; CBM = ceramic building materia	l
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Table 1. Finds other than pottery by feature (number/weight in grams)



Figure 3. Roundhouse plan

(Figure 4) appear to derive from a single vessel, in the same fabric as those from 1360. The vessels were deposited within the lower part of the secondary fills. This could indicate that they were deliberately deposited either during the use of the building or, perhaps less likely, were associated with its abandonment (Hill 1993, 34).

The loomweights recovered from the roundhouse drip gully provide the only indication that weaving took place on the site; other associated artefacts, such as combs and pin beaters, were not present in this assemblage.

Environmental samples taken from the roundhouse gully produced quantities of poorly preserved oak



Figure 4 Finds from roundhouse: 1. Jar (type 1) context 1361; 2. Jar (type 1) context 1333; 3. Saucepan pot (type 2) context 1297.

charcoal along with some charred grain and chaff. (Tables 3 and 4). This material was notably in greater quantities near to the entranceway and somewhat more prolific on the southern side. Such a distribution may reflect the sweeping of hearth material through the entranceway becoming incorporated into the gully.

As with most Iron Age roundhouses the example from Enborne Road has the entrance facing to the east (Hill 1996: 103 and figs 8.8-9). Few structural elements of the house survive but those that do emphasise the eastwest orientation of the structure (Figure 3). The doorposts are solidly marked, as is the opposing post at the rear of the house. There is no obvious structural reason why this posthole and presumably the post should be more substantial than other posts in the

Feature type	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Mean sherd weight (g)
Pits	27	141	5.2
Ditches	45	225	5
Postholes	19	138	7.2
Ring gullies	334	4148	12.4
TOTAL	425	4652	10.9

Table 2. Quantities of pottery by feature type

structure except to emphasize this alignment. A posthole placed at the rear of the house opposite the entrance was also seen in the Dunston Park house (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1995). Unlike the Dunston Park house, the distribution of finds produced no indication of any left/right division. The distribution of finds from the roundhouse does, however, show a marked concentration on either side of the entranceway.

The mean sherd weight and the quantity of the pottery from the 'placed' deposits are much greater than those from other feature types and from the rest of the roundhouse gully (Table 2). Other feature types (ditches, pits and postholes) seem to have been used only sparingly for the deposition of pottery. There is a distinct difference between the mean sherd weight from the roundhouse (12.4g) and the ditches (5g), pits (5.2g) and postholes (7.2g), suggesting the differential deposition of primary and secondary refuse. The evidence follows a pattern observed for other Iron Age sites involving the differential deposition of primary and secondary refuse, the former deposited largely within specific zones of the roundhouse drip gully, and including deliberately placed deposits, and the latter in ditches, pits and postholes. The same argument can be applied to the loomweights. Α cluster of 36 postholes was found 10m to the eastsouth-east of the roundhouse entrance. Many of these features had distinct post-pipes and some contained burnt flint and fired clay packing. Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from nine of the 28 excavated postholes. The undated postholes were assumed to be of the same date due to their proximity and similarities in character with the dated examples.

Eight of these postholes, of similar character (shape, size and fill sequence) were identified as forming two four-post structures commonly interpreted as raised floor granaries (Cunliffe 1991, 169) (Figure 2: 1434 and 1435). Structure 1434 had sides of between 2.88m and 3m in length. The postholes ranged in diameter from 0.8m to 1.0m, were between 0.27m to 0.48m in depth and all had flint packing with a high proportion of burnt flint. Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from three of the four postholes. Structure 1435 partially overlapped one side of 1434 and was of similar character, although the flint packing was sparser and no dating evidence was recovered. Its western-most posthole was cut by ditch 1429, which has been dated to the 1st to 2nd century AD (see below).

Ditch 1241, 34m to the north of the roundhouse, ran for at least 80m extending beyond the limits of excavation in both directions (Figure 2). It was up to 0.8m wide and no more than 0.32m deep. Each of the four slots put through this ditch revealed a single fill. Four sherds of Middle Iron Age pottery were recovered along its length.

Ditch 1359, 47m north of the roundhouse, was not fully uncovered, being seen in three separate places and extending for at least 103m and beyond the limits of excavation (Figure 2). It had a maximum depth of 1.03m and in the three excavated sections a similar sequence of fills. Its upper fills contained relatively large quantities of burnt flint. The fills indicated a possible bank on the southern side. Twenty-eight sherds of pottery along with pieces of fired clay, animal bones, burnt and worked flint and charcoal were recovered from the fills (Tables 1 and 3).

Pit 1411 was to the north of ditch 1359 (Figure 2) and was 1.2m in diameter and 1.1m deep with undercutting sides typical of a grain storage pit. Middle Iron Age pottery, burnt flint and fired clay with wattle impressions were recovered from the fills of this pit. Charcoal was particularly abundant in the basal (1412) and upper (1418) layers. The former included small fragments of charcoal (Table 3). Its original function may have been for grain storage. However, it was later used as a dump for material, possibly representing waste from crop processing as evidenced by the presence of small amounts of charred grain, chaff and burnt flint.

Pit 1420, located 3m west-north-west of 1411, was 1.83m in length and 0.7m in width, though the full extent was not seen due to the pit extending beyond the limits of excavation. It was somewhat irregular in plan and profile with a maximum depth of 0.43m and of uncertain function. Its lower fill consisted of redeposited clay whilst the upper fills were dumps of waste containing large quantities of burnt flint. This pit has been tentatively dated to the Middle Iron Age due to similarities in the fills with other datable features and the presence of fired clay, which is likely to date to this period.

Pottery assemblage

The bulk of the pottery assemblage is undecorated, of Middle Iron Age date and, with the possible exception of some glauconitic wares, of local manufacture. There is little diagnostic material, and local parallels

FEATURE TYPE		Roundh	ouse Gully		Ditch	Storage Pit
Feature		1360	1291	1372	1227	1411
Context		1361	1295	1373	1236	1412
Sample		1	3	4	10	13
Sample Valume (litrae)		101	01	71	101	10.1
Sample Volume (nices)		10 L. 20 ml	0 L. 50 ml	7 L. 28 ml	10 L. 55 ml	10 L. 30 ml
		2011	00 111	20111	00 111	00 111
Hordeum sl vulgare. (grains undiff.)	Barley grain	2	2	2	1	1
Hordeum sl vulgare. (rachis fragments)	Barley rachis	1	26 (1 pair)	-	-	_
Triticum dicoccum/spelta (spikelet forks)	Emmer/spelt chaff	3	1	-	-	-
Triticum dicoccum/spelta (grain)	Emmer/spelt grain	6	4	-	2	3
Triticum dicoccum/spelta (glume bases)	Emmer/spelt chaff	4	72	-	-	8
Triticum spelta (glume bases)	Spelt chaff	6	27	-	-	8
Cereals indet. (grains)	Cereal grains	7	2	2	-	8
Cereals indet. (culm internodes)	Straw stems	-	-	-	1	-
Cereals indet. (culm nodes)	Straw nodes	-	-	-	-	1
WILD SPECIES						
Stellaria/Cerastium sp.	Chickweed	-	-	-	-	5
Silene sp.	Campion	-	1	-	-	-
Montia fontana ssp. chondrosperma	Blinks	-	-	-	-	1
Chenopodium album	Fat-hen	-	7	-	1	1
Chenopodium polyspermum	Goosefoot	1	1	-	-	-
Atriplex sp.	Orache	-	1	-	-	2
Crataegus cf. monogyna	Hawthorn	-	-	-	-	1
Vicia cf. tetrasperma	Smooth Tare	-	-	-	1	-
Vicia/Lathyrus sp.	Vetch/Field Pea	-	1	-	-	-
Trifolium sp.	Clover	1	-	-	-	1
Trifolium sp. (smaller than T. repens)	Clover	-	-	-	-	3
Fallopia convolvulus	Black Bindweed	-	-	-	1	-
Rumex sp.	Dock	1	-	-	-	4
Rumex acetosella (group)	Sheep's Sorrel	-	1	-	1	1
Rumex cf. crispus	Curled dock	-	-	-	-	1
Corylus avellana (nut fragments)	Hazel	2	-	1	-	2
cf. Odontites vernus	Red Bartsia	-	-	-	-	5
Stachys sp.	Woundwort	-	1	-	-	1
Plantago lanceolata	Plantain	-	-	-	-	3
Galium aparine	Cleavers	1	-	-	-	cf. 2
Sherardia arvensis	Field Madder	-	-	-	-	1
Tripleurospermum inodorum	Scentiess mayweed	-	-	-	-	4
Poaceae indet. (basal culm node)	Grass rooms	-	-	1	-	-
Poaceae indet (stems/culm internodes)	Moodow gross	-	2	-	-	-
Poa sp.	Cate' tails	-	15	-	-	4
Prileum cr. pratense	Meadow/Cats' tails	-	-	-	-	4
Poa sp./Prileum sp.		-	1	-	-	-
Avena sp. (grains)	Oat awns	-	5 2	-	3	-
Avena sp. (awiis) Bromus sp	Brome grass	-	2	-	-	-
Seed indet <2 5mm	Small weed seeds	-	1	-	1	2
Ouercus sn (charcoal)	Oak charcoal	+	-	+	+	<u>د</u>
Parenchyma type	Soft plant tissue	-	-	т -	-	-
Parenchyma/imploded grain	,	-m	-	22	-	_
Parenchyma/imploded grain		-m	-	22	-	-

Table 3. The data for the five Middle Iron Age samples examined from Enborne Road.The nomenclature for non-cereals follows that of Stace (1997).

Sample	Context	Feature	Acer	Alnus	Corylus	Fraxinus	POMOI- -DEAE	Prunus	Quercus
ROUNDHOUSE DRIP GULLY									
3	1295	1291	-	-	-	-	-	-	10h
4	1373	1372	-	-	-	-	-	-	24h, 1s
DITCH									
10	1236	1227	-	-	1	-	1	-	42h, 6s
PITS									
12	1400	1398	-	-	32	2	-	-	-
13	1412	1411	2	6	-	2	-	1	9h, 3s

Key: h = heartwood; s = sapwood

Table 4. Charcoal from Iron Age features

are scarce. Assemblages of this date are relatively rare within the lower reaches of the Kennet valley, where occupation seems to have been much more intensive during the preceding Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age period. During the Middle Iron Age period regional styles of pottery continued to evolve, and the site at Enborne Road falls close to the periphery of Cunliffe's 'central southern region', typified by straight-sided saucepan pots (Cunliffe 1991, 93). Only two vessel forms could be identified on the basis of rim form (Table 2). Vessel form 1 is a rounded jar (Figures 4.1-2) with a small rounded rim and short neck; some are carefully finished and/or burnished. Generally they occur in a glauconitic sandy fabric, but a small number are found in organic- and flinttempered fabrics. Vessel form 2 is a straight-sided 'saucepan' pot (Figure 4.3). These vessels are straight-sided or slightly convex with rounded and slightly everted undifferentiated rims, and some are carefully finished and/or burnished. They generally occur in a glauconitic sandy fabric.

Local assemblages within which to find parallels for the Enborne Road material are rare and often in different fabrics. Comparable forms were found at Aldermaston Wharf site III (Cowell et al. 1978: fig.13) and at Park Farm, Binfield (Booth 1995: fig. 52). A small assemblage, including 'saucepan' pots and rounded jars directly comparable to the Enborne Road vessels, all in organic-tempered fabrics, came Other from Lea Farm, Hurst (Laidlaw 2011). comparable assemblages have been found in East Berkshire at Riseley Farm, Swallowfield (Lobb and Morris 1994) and Thames Valley Park, Reading (Mepham 1997). All these sites produced plain wares, which are likely to represent localised pottery production, in contrast to the better finished and more frequently decorated assemblages of the 'saucepan' pot heartland of Hampshire which may have resulted from more regionalised production (Morris 1994). 'Saucepan' pot assemblages are generally dated between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC (Cunliffe 1991: figs. A15-A17).

Plant remains and the economy

The plant remains found on the site arise from the analysis of environmental samples taken from the roundhouse gully, two sections of ditch and pit 1411. Table 3 identifies the cereals and species found in the samples. This analysis also identified a quantity of charcoal from the gully, ditch 1359 and pit 1411. The most likely origin for the charcoal would seem to be domestic fuel debris from hearths. From the gully this includes oak (Quercus sp.), mostly heartwood, and a quantity of unidentifiable bark. The charcoal from ditch 1359 and pit 1411 includes a wider range of species than in the roundhouse gully (Table 4). Fragments of fired daub with wattle impressions recovered from pit 1411 could be from an oven or hearth. The firewood would almost certainly have been gathered from local sources.

The charred evidence indicates the cultivation of barley, *Hordeum vulgare (sensu lato)* and emmer or spelt, (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*), as well as the exploitation of wild resources, indicated by the presence of hazelnut shell. This compares well with sites to the south: Popley (Pelling 2009), Lains Farm (Carruthers 1992), Danebury hillfort (Jones 1984) and to the north: Groundwell West (Stevens 2001) and Half-Penny Lane (Carruthers 1990).

As with the charcoal, it is most probable that the charred cereal remains relate to the routine processing of crops taken from storage and the charring of the waste within domestic hearths (Stevens 2003). For hulled wheat, such as spelt, stored in spikelet form, this often results in the presence of glume rich assemblages, as seen for the three samples from the ring gully 1360, 1291, and pit 1411. The distribution of material therefore relates more to the deposition of hearth material than to the processing activities themselves.

Grain storage on site is represented in two forms, the four-post granaries (1434 and 1435) and storage pit 1411. It is probable that pits were used for longer-term storage of crops, and would be emptied in one

action while above-ground granaries would be utilised to store the grain for everyday use.

Relatively few Middle Iron Age sites have been excavated in the Newbury area and little is known of the extent of occupation and/or associated land-use or the extent of woodland (Birbeck 2000).

While wetland species are not uncommon within Iron Age assemblages only a single seed of a wetland species, in this case blinks (*Montia Fontana*), was found. The remainder of the flora indicate relatively dry to damp conditions. Similarly there is no indication of strongly acidic, calcareous or heavier soils.

Unfortunately a near absence of animal bone (Table 1) means that no comment can be made on this aspect of the farming economy.

Phase 3. Romano-British

The main evidence of activity in this period is represented by a trackway, defined by two parallel ditches (1429-30), c. 9m apart, running south-east to north-west across the site beyond the limits of excavation in both directions (Figure 2). There was at least one recutting of the northern boundary. The trackway runs towards the site of a villa in Salcombe Road (see above) and is likely to be related to its estate. The trackway is on the same alignment as the Middle Iron Age ditches described above, suggesting some form of continuity in land use. Ditch 1429 of the trackway cut the gully of roundhouse 1428, clearly indicating that it was no longer a feature in the landscape. The only other feature of this date, a single pit (1215) of uncertain function, was located about 6m north of the roundhouse. Both the ditches and the trackway contained Romano-British pottery.

CONCLUSION

The single musket ball recovered by metal-detector is most likely to be a relic of the Civil War but no further information relating to the First Battle of Newbury was recovered. The presence of the trackway or droveway and of other similarly aligned ditches supports the suggestion that the Enborne Road site lies within the estate of the nearby Roman villa. Of much greater significance is the identification of the Middle Iron Age farmstead. This small establishment was clearly involved in agriculture with on-site facilities for storage of grain both above and below ground indicating year-round occupation. The roundhouse gully contained placed deposits of pottery and loomweights suggesting the use of secondary products of sheep if not actual animal husbandry (little animal bone survived). These deposits lay above the primary silts of the gully but below the secondary silts, suggesting that they were made during the life of the settlement rather than as closing deposits. Crops included both barley, which may have grown on wetter or more clayey soils towards the river, and wheat. We cannot discount a possible hiatus in settlement generally in this area of the Kennet valley in the earlier part of the Iron Age, as has previously

been suggested (Lobb and Rose 1996), but the limited evidence from Enborne Road rather refutes the idea that the soils had already been exhausted for agriculture during the Bronze Age.

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Further details of the finds and environmental analyses can be found in the site archive. The project will be archived under Wessex Archaeology project number 50852 Enborne Road – Newbury Museum. NEBYM:2002.42 – not deposited

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