A LATE BRONZE AGE ARTEFACT SCATTER AND MEDIEVAL DITCH ON ST PETER'S HILL, CAVERSHAM

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SUMMARY

A small area excavation at St Peter's Hill, Caversham, revealed a limited number of cut features including a medieval ditch. It also uncovered a moderately dense spread of Late Bronze Age pottery and flints within the subsoil.

INTRODUCTION

The Thames Valley gravel terraces are rich in prehistoric material. 19 St Peter's Hill lies on the Boyne terrace, one of the terraces that is noted for the number of Palaeolithic flint and stone tools that have been found during survey and excavation.

An area in the back garden of 19 St Peter's Hill was examined prior to development and features found included a medieval ditch and other gullies and post holes dated to the Late Bronze Age. Over 300 pieces of pottery, dated to the Late Bronze Age were found. Most of this has parallels with pottery of the same period found on other sites around Reading.

LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

Caversham stands on the north bank of the Thames opposite Reading (see map page 80), of which it is now a suburb, although historically separate. Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd carried out an archaeological excavation at 19 St Peter's Hill, Caversham (Figure 1). The site lay on the south-west side of St Peter's Hill, within the rear garden of number 19 (SU 7062 7512). It occupied an area of *c*. 1700 sq m. The ground is almost level, at a height of *c*. 68m above Ordnance Datum and part of the area had been levelled to form a lawn. Other areas of disturbance were caused by the presence of large mature tree roots. The underlying geology is depicted on the geology map as plateau gravel (BGS 1947), now known as the Boyn Hill terrace (Wymer 1968: 155). The geology encountered was variable. Most areas comprised a clayey gravel with a thin lens of clayey silt (brickearth) overlying the gravel towards the north. The gravel deposit was quite thin with underlying chalk present at a relatively shallow depth (<1m). Two large soil-infilled hollows are thought to be solution hollows.

The archaeological potential of the site stemmed from its location within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley. There were several entries of archaeological interest in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record relating to the surrounding area, though prior to the evaluation there were none for the site itself. The higher gravel terraces of the Thames Valley are particularly noteworthy for the presence of Palaeolithic flint and stone tools, representing the earliest known human occupation in the British Isles. Many flint finds from the Palaeolithic period were found at Toots Pit just to the north-east of the site on the same gravel terrace (Wymer 196: 142). Fieldwork at Richmond Road to the north revealed both Palaeolithic and later flintwork (Taylor and Pine 2003) but a watching brief nearby (Ford 2008) and another limited watching brief on the adjacent parcel of land to the south (no 17) (Bennett 2009) did not reveal any finds or deposits of interest.

Evaluation of the site in October 2010 located a ditch and posthole, along with a collection of mostly Late Bronze Age pottery and struck flint. A section across the ditch produced a quantity of Bronze Age pottery but the results of the excavation (below) indicate that the material in this ditch is residual.

RESULTS

This work identified a number of ditches and recorded several ditch sections (Figures 1 and 2).

Ditch 100, previously identified in the evaluation, traversed the site E-W with a slightly sinuous plan. It was examined in four slots (2, 3, 8, 9) which revealed it to vary between 0.8–1.4m across and 0.40–0.47m deep, with a v-shaped profile. It became smaller to the east, and contained a single fill. The ditch traversed two chalk solution hollows where its line was lost, but it is reasonably certain it was a continuous ditch. Three of the slots produced artefacts, but it is a single large sherd of medieval pottery from the base of slot 8 which provides the dating evidence. It shows that the Bronze Age flints and pottery recovered from slots 2 and 3 were all residual. Two horse metacarpals were also recovered from slot (8).

Gully (101) was investigated by three slots (5–7). It was up to 0.65m across and 0.17m deep, with a single fill. Slot (5) produced a single sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery which might provide the date for the filling of the ditch, but comparison with ditch 100 shows that this cannot be taken for granted.

Posthole (1) was 0.3m across and 0.16m deep with a single grey/brown silty clay fill (50) with some gravel and rare charcoal flecks but no datable finds. Posthole (4) was 0.45m across and 0.17 deep with a single brown clayey sand fill (55) with some gravel and rare charcoal flecks. It contained a small sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery, two struck flints and a fragment of burnt flint. Although again this is meagre dating evidence, this material is considered more likely to date the post hole than the single sherd of pottery in gully (101). Pit (10) was 0.48m across but only 0.08m deep with a single brown clayey sand fill (50) with some gravel, rare charcoal flecks and burnt flint, but

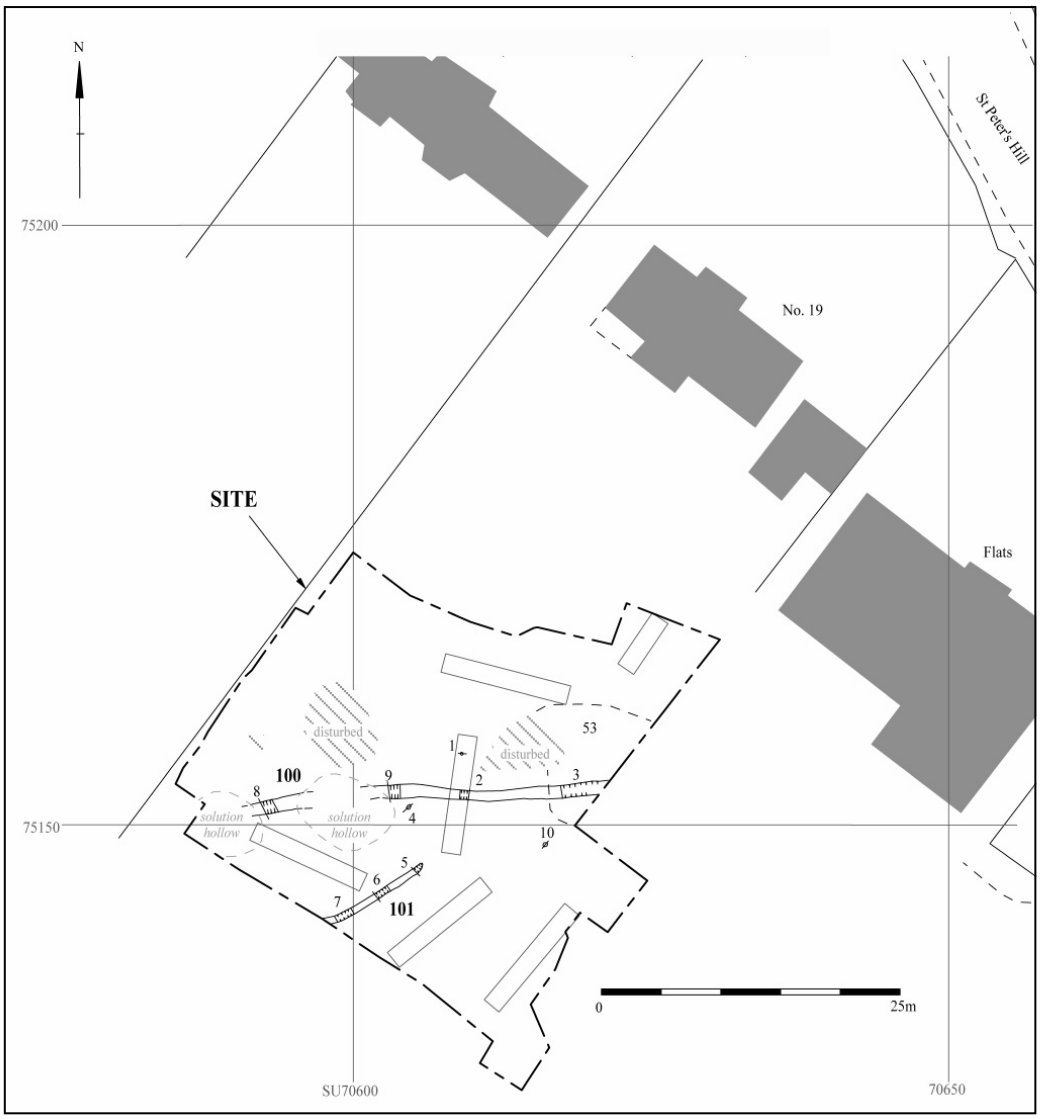

Figure 1. Site Plan of St Peter's Hill, Caversham

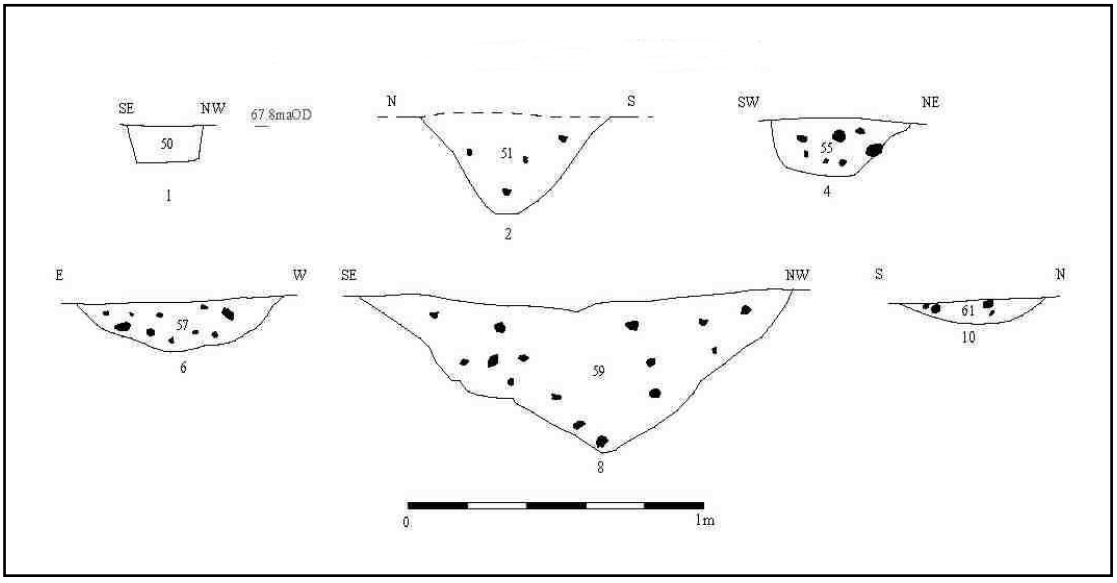

Figure 2. Sections of features excavated at St Peter's Hill, Caversham

no datable finds. A soil sample was sieved for charred plant remains but produced a little wood charcoal.

Artefact clusters (Figure 3)

An area of about 10 sq m of dark brown clayey silt (53) with charcoal flecks on the eastern margin of the site was found to be artefact-rich. The deposit was about 0.05m thick, above gravel. The pottery from (53) was very fragmented suggesting that it was not primary midden material, or, if it was, it had been much disturbed by ploughing.

A second dense cluster of artefacts occupying an area of *c*. 9 sq m was present further to the west but without an obvious area of discoloration of the brown clayey silt. Whereas spread (53) had been truncated by a tree root, this cluster ended abruptly to the south and east without any obvious truncation. This could

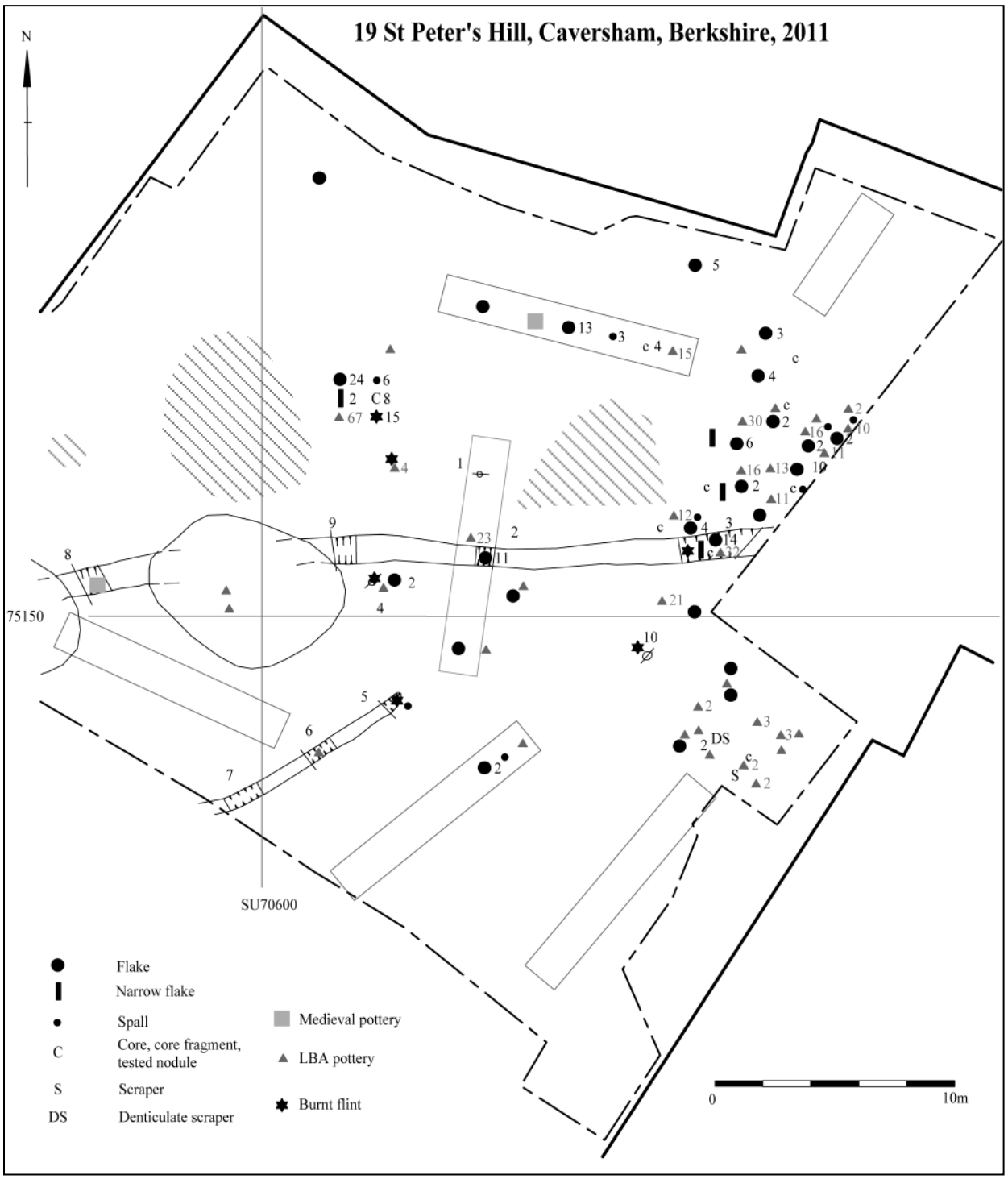

Figure 3. Distribution of artefacts at St Peter's Hill Caversham

Trench	*Cut*	*Deposit*	*Date*	*No.*	*Wt (g)*	*Fabric*
2		topsoil	Medieval	1	13	N/A
2			Late Bronze Age	8	56	FS/1
2			Late Bronze Age	5	46	FS/2
2			Late Bronze Age	16	54	FS/5
3	2	51	Late Bronze Age	1	4	FS/2
3	2	51	Late Bronze Age	2	15	FS/5
3	2	51	Late Bronze Age	2	8	S/1
3	2	51	Late Bronze Age	3	9	F/1
3	2	51	Late Bronze Age	1	1	Indeterminate shell
5			Late Bronze Age	1	7	FS/6
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	6	61	FglS/1
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	14	113	FS/1
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	3	29	FS/2
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	1	7	clFS/1
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	2	35	FS/3
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	1	9	FS/4
	3	54	Late Bronze Age	5	24	FS/2
	4	55	Late Bronze Age	1	3	S/1
	6	57	Late Bronze Age	1	5	FS/1
	8	59	Medieval	1	18	N/A
			Late Bronze Age	1	3	FS/1
			Late Bronze Age	3	8	FS/2
		?53	Late Bronze Age	9	31	FS/6
		?53	Late Bronze Age	11	30	FS/1
		?53	Late Bronze Age	4	17	FS/2
		?53	Late Bronze Age	2	3	F/2
		53	Late Bronze Age	2	7	F/1
		53	Late Bronze Age	2	1	F/2
		53	Late Bronze Age	1	5	FglSV/1
		53	Late Bronze Age	54	353	FS/1
		53	Late Bronze Age	21	153	FS/2
		53	Late Bronze Age	4	16	FS/3
		53	Late Bronze Age	8	34	FS/5
		53	Late Bronze Age	10	61	FS/6
		53	Late Bronze Age	3	73	FS/7
		53	Late Bronze Age or Iron Age	3	9	S/1
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	4	23	clFS/1
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	1	14	clFS/2
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	1	10	clS/1
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	19	90	F/1
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	14	40	FS/1
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	30	181	FS/2
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	7	65	FS/3
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	3	2	FS/5
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	9	48	FS/6
		SURFACE	Late Bronze Age	3	48	S/1

Table 1. Catalogue of pottery

represent a deliberate dump, though again the pottery was very fragmented suggesting a non-primary location.

POTTERY

Frances Raymond

An assemblage of 312 Late Bronze Age sherds (weighing 1.821kg) came from superficial deposits and from clearly later contexts (Table 1). The quantity and character of the pottery would suggest it was derived from nearby settlement. The technological and stylistic attributes indicate an emphasis on the second part of the Late Bronze Age, between *c*. 800 and 600/550 BC.

The pottery was recorded by context following the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 1997). Details of fabric, form, decoration, surface treatment and colour, wall thickness, fragmentation and condition are available in the archive. The sherds were sorted into fabric groups with the aid of a binocular microscope at x20 magnification, while the descriptions were prepared using this and a higher magnification of x40. Each of the wares was identified by an alpha-numeric code based on the initial letters of its non-plastic inclusions. The fabrics were defined broadly because of the limited potential for a correlation between ware classes and vessel types. The assemblage provided only limited evidence of form, being too fragmented for the identification of specific vessel categories. Similarly, the motifs used for the more complex decoration were incomplete and of unclear character. None of the featured fragments have been illustrated as all of the diagnostic elements were typical components of the Late Bronze Age ceramic repertoire, represented by better examples from other sites in the region.

Vessel Form

All ten rims were simple rounded or flattened types and where evidence survived they were on vessels with upright necks, including five short-necked forms. Nine were in fine to medium grade Group 1 wares, with one example made from a fine Group 2 ware. The twelve shoulder fragments had angled or carinated profiles, while the few bases were mostly simple including one slightly splayed example. All of these fragments were in fine to medium Group 1 wares with the exception of a single sherd in a sandy Group 3 fabric from a vessel with a raised foot, effectively forming a low pedestal.

Decoration

The outer edges of four rims were decorated: two with diagonal slashes and two with a fingertip or fingernail row. Six of the seven decorated shoulders were each embellished in a similar manner with a single fingertip or fingernail row. The seventh had a horizontal cordon on the shoulder angle set below diagonal rows of closely spaced punched dots (0.8mm in diameter; possibly produced by a round toothed comb).

The four decorated wall sherds, all in fine Group 1 wares, included three burnished examples with fragmented geometric motifs of unclear type. On one a narrow incised line defined a relatively broad zone in-filled with punched dots (1mm in diameter; possibly produced by a round-toothed comb). Partial rows of similar impressions appeared to form the apex of a triangle or chevron on another vessel fragment, but this was very unclear. The third sherd was embellished with two parallel incised lines; while the fourth had an applied horizontal neck cordon flanked by broad grooves. It had traces of internal burnishing, but its external surface had not survived.

Surface Treatment

Evidence of surface treatment was preserved on 173 sherds (55%). Fourteen per cent had burnished exteriors (25 sherds), of which approximately half also had burnished interiors, suggesting that they were derived from open forms, probably bowls. Half of the burnished sherds were black to dark grey, while the rest were in various oxidized hues ranging from red and reddish grey to reddish brown and brown. There was only one example with a red surface coating.

Fifty-four percent of the better preserved fragments had smoothed exteriors (94 sherds) and most (85%) had similarly treated interiors. The remaining wall sherds were partly smoothed or have apparently untreated surfaces (29%, 50 sherds). The exteriors of the majority in both groups were in various shades of red, reddish brown, reddish yellow and brown (*c*. 80%), with grey examples being in the minority.

Four base sherds from different vessels had dense flint grits applied to their exteriors. These were fine on three fragments (up to 2mm) and fine to medium grade on the fourth (0.2–4mm).

Fabric

Sixteen fabrics were identified, which fell into four broad groups. All but two of the flint tempered wares (F/1 and F/2) incorporated common to abundant quartz sand. There was little indication that the quantity of sand was being altered in proportion to the amount of burnt flint tempering. It may well have been a natural component of the clay and if so differences in character suggest the exploitation of three sources: one with glauconite; one with fine sand; and the third incorporating predominantly coarse grained material. The presence of clay pellets in three of the wares pointed to yet another source of raw material. All of the visible inclusions were represented in local geological deposits, including the glauconite which occurs in some clay horizons in the Reading Beds.

The majority of fabrics were well fired and hard and all have evenly distributed inclusions. Two sherds were distorted with an open vesicular appearance typical of pottery which had been over-fired or re-fired.

Ware Group 1 – Sandy Fabrics with sparse to moderate flint tempering
Seventy-eight percent of the sherds were made from one of nine fabrics within Ware Group 1 (245 sherds, weighing 1.452kg). Those with fine (0.2–2mm) flint tempering were in the majority (66%, 162 sherds, 840g). The group was dominated by wares with very common silt-sized to fine angular quartz sand (<0.06–0.25mm) or abundant medium to coarse rounded quartz sand (0.25–1mm; FS/1 and FS/6, 156 sherds, 798g). Minority fabrics included two with abundant silt-sized to fine angular quartz sand (<0.06–0.25mm.) and sparse rounded clay pellets (up to 3mm; clFS/1 and clFS/2, 5 sherds, 37g); and one with common medium to coarse, rounded quartz sand (0.25–1mm), moderate glauconite (0.06–0.5mm) and sparse rounded voids that were probably leached calcareous inclusions (0.5–3mm; FglSV/1, 1 sherd, weighing 5g).

Thirty-three percent of the Group 1 wares were tempered with medium grade burnt flint (0.2–4mm; 82 sherds, weighing 603g). The three fabrics in this category additionally incorporated common to very common, rounded to sub-rounded quartz sand (0.2–1mm; FS/2 and FS/7), which in one was accompanied by moderate glauconite (0.2–0.8mm; FglS/1). There was only one sherd (9g) with coarse flint (0.2–8mm), which also included abundant silt-sized to fine angular quartz sand (0.06–0.25mm.; FS/4).

Ware Group 2 – Fabrics with common to very common flint tempering
Fragments made from the four Group 2 wares comprised a small but significant component of the assemblage (18%, 56 sherds, weighing 290g). The proportion of those in fine fabrics was lower than in Group 1 (34%, 19 sherds, 68g; flint in size range 0.2–2mm). The majority were made from a ware that also incorporated abundant silt sized to fine, angular quartz sand (0.06–0.25mm; FS/5, 15 sherds, 64g). The rest were in a purely flint tempered fabric (F/2, 4 sherds, 4g).

The remaining 37 sherds (222g) in Group 2 were characterized by medium grade flint tempering (0.2–4mm). This included 24 sherds (106g) in a ware with no other visible inclusions (F/1). The rest (13 sherds, 116g) were made from a fabric that also containsed abundant silt sized to fine, angular quartz sand (0.06–0.25mm; FS/3).

Ware Group 3 – fabrics with common to abundant sand
Three percent of the assemblage was made from one of two sandy fabrics (10 sherds, weighing 78g). Most of the Group 3 sherds contained angular to well-rounded poorly sorted sand (<0.06–1mm.; S/1, 9 sherds, 68g). The one exception additionally included common rounded clay pellets (0.5–2mm) and rare burnt flint (up to 3mm; clS/1).

Ware Group 4 – Shelly fabric
One tiny fragment of pottery (1g) had a series of voids characteristic of leached shell.

Discussion
Although the phasing of a residual and/or unstratified assemblage of this type was problematic, the various attributes suggested an origin during, rather than at the beginning of, the Late Bronze Age. The closed and ovoid forms more typical of the earliest post-Deverel-Rimbury transitional assemblages from Pingewood (Bradley 1985: figs 7 and 8) and Reading Business Park 2 (Morris 2004: figs 4.8 to 4.17) were not represented at St Peter's Hill; while the angled and carinated shoulders from this site were rare or absent from those earlier groups (Morris 2004: 66 to 67; Bradley 1985: figs 7 and 8).

Some of the stylistic elements were in use over a long period spanning most of the Late Bronze Age and are not chronologically sensitive. Bowls and jars with short upright necks occur, for example, in the transitional Pingewood assemblage (Bradley 1985: figs 7.9 and 7.10), the plain ware groups from Aldermaston Wharf and Knights Farm 2 (Bradley *et al*. 1980: Figs 11.2, 11.8, 11.9 and 33.51); and were part of the later 'decorated' ceramic repertoire from Knights Farm 1 (Bradley *et al*. 1980: fig. 36.74, 36.80 and 36.81) and Rams Hill (Bradley and Ellison 1975: 3:6.42 and 3:6.65). Simple rims had a similarly extended currency with their dominance throughout the Late Bronze Age being illustrated by the assemblages from Pingewood (Bradley 1985, figs 7.9 and 7.10), Reading Business Park 2 (Morris 2004: figs 4.8 to 4.17), Aldermaston Wharf (Bradley *et al*. 1980: figs 12 to 18), Knights Farm (Bradley *et al*. 1980: figs 33 to 36) and Rams Hill (Bradley and Ellison 1975: fig. 3:6).

Much of the decoration can be attributed more precisely to the latter part of the Bronze Age or Earliest Iron Age, spanning the period between approximately 800 and 600/550 cal. BC. Simple rows of diagonal, fingertip and fingernail impressions were present from the beginning, but were used less frequently on the transitional and plain ware vessels (Bradley *et al*. 1980: 234). There also seems to have been a change in position through time, with fingertip and fingernail rows being confined to the interiors or tops of rims in the earliest groups from Reading Business Park 2 and Pingewood (Morris 2004: 68–9; Bradley 1985: figs 7.14, 7.16, 7.29 and 8.39) and to the rim tops or necks of the Aldermaston Wharf plain ware (Bradley *et al*. 1980: figs 17.128 and 17.134). Such simple motifs were entirely absent from vessel shoulders in the transitional and plain ware assemblages of the middle Thames and Kennet valleys. This form of embellishment seems to have been a later introduction, represented amongst the 'decorated' groups from Reading Business Park 1 (Bradley and Hall 1992: 79; Hall 1992: fig. 45.66–9 and figs 50.183, 50.194), Knight's Farm 1 (Bradley *et al*. 1980: figs 34.4, 34.15, 34.21 and 35.22) and Dunston Park (Morris and Mepham 1995: figs 39.5 and 39.13), where (as at St Peters Hill) such motifs also focussed on the outer lips of rims. This trend is echoed further to the east in Area 16 at Runnymede

Bridge, where finger-tipping on the outside of rims emerged sometime after *c*. 800 BC in the later part of the stratigraphic sequence (Needham 1996: 112).

Cordons and the various geometric motifs have a comparable origin in the latter part of the Late Bronze Age or Earliest Iron Age. Cordons are absent from the plain ware assemblage at Aldermaston Wharf (Bradley *et al*. 1980: 242), but appear on the necks of several of the Knights Farm 1 vessels (Bradley *et al*. 1980: figs 34.15v and 35.30v). These include a close parallel for one of the St Peter's Hill plain cordons on a convex Form 8 jar (Bradley *et al*. 1980: fig. 35.30v). Geometric motifs infilled with punched dots are known from Reading Business Park 1 (Hall 1992: fig. 50.185), Knight's Farm 1 (Bradley *et al*. 1980: fig. 35), Rams Hill (Bradley and Ellison 1975: figs 3:6.53–8) and Uffington (Brown 2003: figs 9.4.12 and 9.4.21).

Various aspects of the technology have a similar chronological emphasis on the 8th to 6th centuries BC. The red surface coating is a typical but relatively rare feature of the 'decorated' assemblages from Uffington (Brown 2003: 172) and Rams Hill (Barrett 1975: 110), which was apparently used with greater frequency during the 7th century BC or possibly slightly later at Dunston Park (Morris and Mepham 1995: 80), a trend which is reflected by its increased application elsewhere during the Early Iron Age. The dominance of fabrics with low densities of finer flint at St Peter's Hill points to a principal production date in the final stage of the Bronze Age or Earliest Iron Age. A trend from around 800 BC onwards towards the preferential production of such fabrics coupled with an increase of wares made from sandy clays has been noted in the assemblage from Area 16 East at Runnymede (Needham 1996: 111 and fig. 93) and is similarly reflected by the 7th to 6th century BC ceramics from Petters Sports Field, Egham (Surrey) (O'Connell 1986: 61–2). A low proportion of vessels in purely sandy fabrics seem also to have been in circulation by this stage on sites like Dunston Park (Morris and Mepham 1995: 78–9, Group Q).

STRUCK FLINT

Steve Ford

A small collection of 160 struck flints was recovered during both the evaluation and excavation phases of the project as detailed in Appendix 3. The collection comprised 119 flakes, 5 narrow flakes, 11 cores, 16 spalls (pieces less than 20x20mm), 6 core fragments, a tested nodule, a scraper and a denticulate scraper. All the pieces were made on gravel flint and most were fairly fresh with few patinated or weathered pieces present. Most, if not all, of the pieces appear to have been made with a hard hammer with no particular flair for flint knapping nor thoughtful design. A few pieces with the proportions of narrow flakes are likely to be fortuitous by-products of knapping. The pieces recovered are more likely to represent *ad hoc* preparation of flints from any piece of raw material to hand obtained from the nearby gravel for use as and when necessary.

The only flintwork which is securely stratified is clearly residual within the fill of a medieval ditch, but the remainder is associated with the spread of Late Bronze Age pottery. The nature of this material is consistent with the use of flint when bronze and perhaps iron tools are also in use (Ford *et al*. 1984; Collard *et al*. 2006).

Trench/ Cut	*Deposit*	*Intact Flake*	*Intact Blade*	*Broken flake*	*Broken Blade*	*Spall*	*Core*	*Other*
Tr 2		13	-	-	-	3	4	
Tr 3		1	-	-	-	-	-	
Tr 5		2	-	-	-	1	-	
	subsoil	1	-	2	-	-	-	
	53	32	2	10	-	5	3	2 core fragments, 1scraper?
2	51	10	-	-	-	-	-	
3	54	9 (1 burnt)	1	6	-	-	-	core fragment
4	55	2	-	-	-	-	-	
5	56	-	-	-	-	1	-	
	unstratified	16	1	15 (1 burnt)	1	6	4	3 core fragments; bashed lump; scraper; denticulate scraper

Table 2. Catalogue of struck flint

CONCLUSION

The fieldwork has examined a scatter of artefacts of Late Bronze Age date along with a number of cut features, one of which is certainly of medieval or later date. For the cut features other than ditch (100), the chronology is unclear. Ditch (100) cut through the Bronze Age artefact scatter and its fill incorporated a.large amount of residual pottery and flintwork, yet it is unambiguously of medieval or later date, but not recent. Gully (101) contained a single sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery and this could easily be a residual find in this setting, though again it is not a recent structure. Posthole (4) is more plausibly Late Bronze Age and the undated features may be too

Much evidence for earlier prehistoric occupation now resides in the topsoil only, and is usually represented by clusters of durable flint tools (Schofield 1991). In the general environs of the site, extensive and dense clusters of flint tools have been recorded from the golf courses to the north at Mapledurham (Ford 1991; Hull and Ford 1998). Either due to the impermanence of prehistoric occupation sites as a result of a mobile, nomadic way of life, or simply the effects of later ploughing, below ground deposits can be infrequent or absent. Yet in favourable circumstances, artefact scatters can become preserved beneath modern plough soil and this appears to be what has happened here.

It is considered that the artefact spreads here are either a product of general occupation debris, or more specific dumping of material to form middens. It is not entirely clear if this cluster of material is the entirety of the site, or simply one focus of a much larger complex. Leaving the question of the landscape setting of the site aside, there are some grounds for considering that at least the bounds of this focus have been determined. Both the monitoring of the overburden stripping and the evaluation phase of this project suggest limits to the observed clustered pattern to the south, west and north and a previous watching brief to the east (albeit in difficult conditions), located nothing of any archaeological interest.

The medieval ditch presumably represents a boundary although it is at some distance from any known medieval settlement. Medieval occupation, the parish church and a religious establishment are recorded to the south-east further down St Peter's Hill at Caversham but these are 300m away (McNicoll-Norbury and Milbank, this volume). Similarly, a probable medieval farm has been recorded at Mapledurham, over 1km to the north-west (Hull 1998). The speculation that there is another medieval settlement nearby will have to await an opportunity for investigation.

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The site code is PHC10/100. The archive will be deposited at Reading Museum, with accession code REDMG:2011.337.

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