Archaeological Investigation at land off Haughton Road and Newport Road, Shifnal, Shropshire

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Contents

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Summary

An archaeological project (strip, map and record) was undertaken across approximately 0.6ha of land off Haughton Road, on the northern edge of Shifnal in Shropshire (NGR SJ 747 088). It was commissioned by Paul Clark and Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, acting on behalf of their client Bovis Homes Limited.

Multiple phases of activity were evident across the site but the majority of features comprised pits and postholes thought to be of prehistoric origin. Few were securely dated during the fieldwork stage, with only limited and in many cases very fragmentary pottery present. However, a programme of radiocarbon dating during post-excavation analysis made it possible to further define and identify two distinct phases of activity; Neolithic and Iron Age.

Small and shallow pits with few fills were typical of the early prehistoric period of activity. These pits were dispersed, but clustered in two main groups, and were often found as pairs. Two pits produced early and middle Neolithic radiocarbon dates of the 4th millennium BC and numerous others compared well in size and survival with these pits. Artefacts of early/middle Neolithic date included flint, Peterborough ware pottery and worked stone, including the significant discovery of a stone axe polisher (*polissoir*). Although small-scale and ephemeral, the pattern of earlier prehistoric pit digging suggests that the area was an important locale during the Neolithic, one that was perhaps returned to on numerous occasions.

Larger and deeper pits that contained multiple infill deposits, or postholes in structural arrangements representing probable four-posters used for storage, demonstrated a range of Iron Age dates, from the 8th century BC to the 1st century AD. In a number of instances residual flint was present that was typologically Neolithic in origin (eg a transverse arrowhead), confirming the presence of the earlier phase. It is considered that the later prehistoric features represent the northern edge of a wider spread of Iron Age occupation, activity that perhaps continued into the early Roman period. This phase was also attested by a small quantity of pottery and briquetage, worked stone associated with grain processing, and large quantities of daub likely to have come from one of the four-post structures within the site area.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological project (strip, map and record) was undertaken across approximately 0.6ha of land off Haughton Road, comprising the western half of a single field on the northern edge of Shifnal in Shropshire (NGR SJ 747 088). It was commissioned by Paul Clark and Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, acting on behalf of their client Bovis Homes Limited, and was undertaken in advance of residential development of the site. Planning permission has been granted for this development by Shropshire County Council.

The archaeological background to the site is provided in a desk-based assessment (DBA) produced by The Environmental Design Partnership (EDP 2012; ESA7583) and an evaluation report produced by Worcestershire Archaeology (Bradley 2015; ESA7582). The DBA indicated that the site had only low potential to contain any hitherto unrecorded archaeological remains of significance; there were no previously identified designated or undesignated heritage assets present within the site boundary and there is very limited evidence for either prehistoric or Romano-British activity in the immediate vicinity. However, it was also noted that in the wider surrounds of the site, the major Roman road of Watling Street and substantial remains of a Roman fort and settlement of *Uxacona* are located approximately 2.5km to the north and north-west (NHLE 2015 1006272), and that a small Roman fort existed 1.8km to the north-east (NHLE 2015 1020283). The medieval and post-medieval settlement of Shifnal also lies immediately to the south (HER 05359; see Buteux 1995), the historic core of which is designated as the Shifnal Conservation Area.

The evaluation largely confirmed the predictions of the DBA, with the exception of an area in the south-west part of the site, where seven pits were identified in three trenches across an area approximately 90m by 60m in size (Figure 1). Of these, five pits were excavated and sampled and nearly all included charcoal and heat-cracked stones, whilst one contained clearly identifiable charred hazelnut shells, another some burnt bone and a fragment of fired clay. These features were identified in association with a large sherd of Middle Neolithic Peterborough ware pottery. This evidence was understood to be representative of a dispersed group of Neolithic pit features and provided an important addition to the small but growing number of examples of this type of site and ceramic association in the region. Therefore, the development site was considered to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets, with a high potential to further inform understanding of early prehistoric Shropshire.

The project conforms to an outline scope of works provided by CgMs Consulting and agreed by the Curator (Charlotte Orchard; Archaeological Advisor, Shropshire Council) before the commencement of the project, for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2015).

The project also conforms to the national professional standards and guidance for archaeological excavation detailed by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014a).

The event reference for this project has not yet been allocated by Shropshire Historic Environment Record (HER).

2 Aims

In the light of the identification of a dispersed scatter of Neolithic pits during the evaluation, an area of high potential was defined and agreed in discussion with the Curator. This was focused around the evaluation trenches in the south-west of the site and determined the extent of the current project.

The aims and scope of the project were to:

- identify and recover a plan of the extents of the pit scatter (strip and map);

- 100% excavate any pits present of this date (sample); and
- to make comparison of the site with comparable sites within the region and beyond and with reference to Neolithic research frameworks.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Richard Bradley (BA (hons.), MA; ACIfA), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2008, assisted by Jamie Wilkins (BA (hons.)), James Spry (BA (hons.); MA), Jessica Wheeler (BA (hons.)), Elspeth Iliff (BA (hons.); MSc) and Nina O'Hare (BA (hons.)). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Robin Jackson (BA (hons.); ACIfA).

Elizabeth Pearson (MSc; ACIfA) contributed the environmental report and Robert Hedge (MA Cantab) and Robin Jackson the finds report. Specialist osteological analysis was undertaken by Tania Kausmally (PhD). Illustration was completed by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA), Laura Templeton (BA; PG Cert; MCIfA) and Steve Rigby (BA).

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) of the site had been previously prepared by EDP on behalf of Lioncourt Homes Limited (EDP 2012; ESA7583). This document provides the detailed background research information for the project and therefore only a brief summary of the results are presented here (Section 4.2).

Shropshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and Shropshire Archives were consulted during preparation of the DBA to access records of archaeological sites, monuments and findspots within the vicinity, as well as readily available archaeological and historical information from documentary and cartographic sources relating to the site and the surrounding area. Aerial photographs held by the National Monuments Record (NMR) were also examined and a site walkover survey was conducted.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

Two phases of fieldwork were undertaken following the detailed specification prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2015); a consecutive programme of work could not be completed due to restrictions caused by the presence of an 11kv overhead electricity cable crossing the southern part of the site (Plates 1 and 2) and as a result fieldwork was undertaken in two phases.

The overall area of archaeological interest comprised *c* 6000m², covering the zone of evaluation trenches 25, 28 and 30, with the initial focus of investigation taking place in two areas to either side of an 18m wide exclusion corridor along the route of the overhead cable (Figure 2). This took place during site preparation works, between 2nd September and 24th September 2015. Once agreement regarding full access beneath the overhead cable had been arranged, a second phase of work took place from 14th December until 17th December 2015 using height-restricted machinery. This was undertaken concurrent with ongoing site construction works, which had begun in the intervening months.

As the areas were initially separate from each other, recording was undertaken whereby features were assigned context numbers specific to the part of the site they were in, for ease of location. Contexts to the south of the overhead cable were assigned in sequence from '4000', to the north '5000', and in the corridor in between from '6000' (Figures 2-5).

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 13 tonne 360º tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and operating under constant archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

3.4 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources (eg scientific dating).

3.5 Scientific dating strategy

Contexts selected for the scientific dating programme were chosen in the first instance through the presence of securely stratified environmental remains representing short-lived flora (e.g. hazelnut). These were selected from features thought to be representative of structures, or those that contained or were associated with artefactual evidence. They were deliberately spread across the site area so as to date as many features or (by association) clusters of similar features as possible. Four contexts were initially targeted as 'range-finders'; these were then followed up with an additional five contexts that sought to clarify the initial dating sequence.

3.6 Artefact methodology, by Rob Hedge

The finds work reported here conforms with the relevant sections of *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b; http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/ifa), with archive creation informed by *Archaeological archives: a guide to the best practice in the creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (AAF 2011; http://www.archaeologyuk.org/archives/), and museum deposition by *Selection, retention and dispersal of archaeological collections* (SMA 1993; http://www.socmusarch.org.uk/publica.htm).

3.6.1 Recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

3.6.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on pro forma sheets.

Artefacts from environmental samples were examined and are included within this report.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form according to appropriate fabric reference series.

3.6.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- unstratified material except that of prehistoric date,
- post-medieval material, and;
- generally where material has been specifically assessed by an appropriate specialist as having no obvious grounds for retention.

See the environmental section for other discard where appropriate.

3.7 Environmental archaeology methodology, by Elizabeth Pearson

The environmental project conforms to relevant sections of the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological excavation* (CIfA 2014a), *Environmental Archaeology: a guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation* (English Heritage 2011) and *Environmental archaeology and archaeological evaluations* (AEA 1995).

3.7.1 Sampling policy

Samples were taken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (2014). Samples were taken from deposits considered to be of high potential for the recovery of environmental remains. A total of 76 samples (each of up to 40 litres) were taken from the site during evaluation and excavation phases. A total of 34 were selected for assessment. From these, material was selected for radiocarbon dating but as only low levels of environmental remains were recorded, no further analysis was undertaken. Results of the assessment scanning are, therefore, also presented.

3.7.2 Processing and analysis

The samples were processed by flotation using a Siraf tank. The flots were collected on a 300mm sieve and the residue retained on a 1mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds.

The residues were scanned by eye and the abundance of each category of environmental remains estimated. A magnet was also used to test for the presence of hammerscale. Flots were scanned using a low power MEIJI stereo light microscope from 21 of the processed samples (selecting the most significant contexts). The remaining samples were used to assess suitability for radiocarbon dating and assessment of artefactual material. and plant remains identified using modern reference collections maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology, and a seed identification manual (Cappers *et al* 2012). Where plant remains were required for radiocarbon dating these were sorted from residues and flots. Nomenclature for the plant remains follows the *New Flora of the British Isles, 3rd edition* (Stace 2010).

A small selection of charcoal fragments was examined under a low power MEIJI stereo light microscope in order to determine the presence of oak and non-oak charcoal and select material for radiocarbon dating. Subsequently the cell structure of some non-oak fragments was examined in three planes under a MEIJI dark illumination microscope. Identifications were carried out using reference texts (Schweingruber 1978; Hather 2000) and reference slides housed at Worcestershire Archaeology.

3.7.3 Discard policy

Remaining sample material and scanned residues will be discarded after a period of 6 months following submission of this report unless there is a specific request to retain them.

3.8 Animal bone methodology, by Tania Kausmally

Bone was both hand collected and recovered from sampled contexts, with a total of 434 very small fragments of animal bones from 42 contexts. Of these, 246 fragments were from the environmental samples of 28 contexts.

3.8.1 Method of analysis

The aim of the analysis was to identify the main characteristics of the bone from site. Identification follows English Heritage MAP2 (1991) and other English Heritage Guidelines for assessment of animal bones (Baker and Worley 2014,18-20).

The small quantity of bone allowed for all fragments to be included in the assessment. The bone was identified using Schmid (1972) and Hillson (1996). The total number of identifiable fragments (NISP) was recorded for each context. Fragments not identified to Taxon were separated into size categories; small (Cat/rodent size), medium (sheep/goat/pig size) and large (cattle/horse size). Indeterminate fragments were approximated for each context.

State of preservation was recorded in a four stage system of preservation; excellent (surface clearly visible), Good (lacks fresh appearance), Fair (solid but with >49% flaking) and poor (unobservable surface). The presence of gnawing, weathering, burning and erosion was further observed (Lyman 1994). Skeletal completeness was noted in 20% intervals. Butchery was recorded distinguishing knife marks, chop marks and helical breaks.

Isolated teeth were considered ageable if they consisted of a 4th deciduous premolar, 4th premolar or a 1st, 2nd or 3rd molar with recognisable wear, using Grant (1982).

Bones were considered ageable if the state of epiphyseal fusion could be observed or if they consisted of foetal/perinatal remains, included where the bone ends were damaged or unformed to show the epiphyseal fusion. Age of fusion followed Sisson and Grossman (Getty 1975).

Von den Driesch (1976) was used in assessment of measurable bones, excluding all unfused bones. Bones were considered measurable if one or more measurements could be taken.

The results were recorded onto an MS Excel Spreadsheet, with the summary table showing NISP and identification by context retained in the site archive.

3.9 Overall statement of confidence in the methods and results

The investigations have produced some interesting and significant results, with this report establishing the site sequence as thoroughly as possible; however, the following observations are made with regard to the fieldwork methods adopted.

As noted above, it was understood at the outset that no excavation could be undertaken within the overhead power line corridor until this cable had been removed; the initial fieldwork was therefore designed with provision for a second stage of work to cover the corridor. In the event, a haul road was constructed through the corridor during the first stage of work and as a result some features were exposed in isolation without immediately adjacent areas being visible. Although this is a frequent occurrence in commercial archaeological investigations and an overall geo-referenced site plan was easily produced, this resulted in the construction crew believing that areas within the corridor were accessible for installation of drainage and plant access. This was therefore undertaken without archaeological supervision and resulted in disturbance to part of the corridor area (Plate 3; area shown on Figure 2) prior to formal investigation.

Whilst overall it is considered that the conclusions of the project are valid and the aims of the investigation have been achieved, as a consequence of these unmonitored works in the drainage area some features may have been missed and this has potentially limited understanding of the site.

4 The site

4.1 Topography, geology and current land-use

The site was, until recently, under arable cultivation, existing as rural space at the northern edge of the small urban area of Shifnal. The field in which it is located is mainly bounded and defined by roads; the M54 forms the northern boundary, the B4379 Newport Road is to the east, Haughton Road to the south and a small wooded track to the west. The field gradually slopes downwards from north to south, from around 100m AOD to 92m AOD, towards the shallow valley formed by the Wesley Brook which is located to the south of Haughton Road. The excavation area itself was positioned in the southern part of the field on broadly level ground, at around 93m AOD.

Geologically, the site is situated on bedrock geology of the Bridgnorth Sandstone Formation, overlain by mixed superficial geology of glaciofluvial sands and gravels in the southern half of the field and glacial till in the northern part (BGS 2015). During the site evaluation, this natural substrate was observed and noticeably changed between the northern and southern parts of the site, in line with the British Geological Survey mapping information (Bradley 2015, 6). The soils across the area are defined as the stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the Salwick Association (Ragg *et al.* 1984, 290).

4.2 Archaeological context and previous work

As detailed in the desk-based assessment (EDP 2012; ESA7583), there are no designated heritage assets on the site or in the immediate vicinity, although a scheduled monument identified through aerial photography as a small Roman fort exists 1.8km to the north-east (NHLE 2015

1020283). A series of listed buildings are also located in the wider surrounds of the site, particularly focused in the centre of Shifnal to the south.

Shifnal has been postulated as the site of an Anglo-Saxon minster and, although this has not been located, a church and manor certainly existed at the time of Domesday (Buteux 1995). It is likely that in this period, if not before, there was settlement around the church and manor. A market and fair was granted in the 13th century and burgage tenure was recorded in the 15th century, with the plots laid out as part of the planned town and developed on both sides of the main north-south road (Buteux 1995). This early linear settlement (which is still evident) became a small market centre for local farming communities throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. Only a few archaeological projects have taken place over the past 60 years within the settlement, but include trial trenching across the moated manorial complex prior to its destruction by housing development that revealed 13th to 14th century occupation (Barker 1961-64). An archaeological evaluation, subsequent to a desk-based assessment, took place at the site of a former tanyard in use from the 18th to early 20th century just off the High Street (Birmingham Archaeology 2006) and a number of small watching briefs have taken place (eg Birmingham Archaeology 2005), including at St Andrew's church (BUFAU 1998).

The current site is positioned around 700m to the north of the town centre on well-drained land close to a water source, a classic location for prehistoric activity, but there are no records of previously identified undesignated heritage assets on the site or in the surrounds on the Shropshire HER. The closest prehistoric find appears to be a polished stone axe recovered around 2km to the south by Manor Farm (HER 00754) and there was a possible Iron Age enclosure excavated in 1980 at Castle Farm 2.5km to the west (Roe 1991; HER 00281). Indeed, outside of the wider landscape evidence for Roman activity some distance from the site, and prior to the medieval period and the development of Shifnal as a market town (HER 05359; HER 05360), there is no evidence for the discovery of any archaeological remains within the immediate locale (see Buteux 1995). It is probable that the site was part of an open agricultural landscape surrounding the settlement from at least the medieval period onwards.

Furthermore, numerous historic aerial photographs that cover the site were examined during the preparation of the DBA, but these did not reveal any evidence for previously unrecorded archaeological remains in the site area. Likewise, the site walkover survey did not identify any earthworks of archaeological significance; former field boundaries that are visible on historic mapping can be traced across part of the field but these are not considered to be of more antiquity than the post-medieval period. As such, the DBA concluded that there was limited potential for the survival of archaeological remains of significance in the site area.

There are no records of previous archaeological investigation on the site or its immediate environs, other than the preceding site evaluation (Bradley 2015; ESA7582). As mentioned above, this evaluation largely confirmed the predictions of the DBA, with the exception of an area in the south-west part of the site. Thirty 50m trenches were excavated in a grid array during late July 2015 and for most of the area, particularly in the northern and central part of the site, very few archaeological features were recorded, all of which appeared to relate to post-medieval and modern agricultural activity. However, the seven pits identified in the three trenches that became the target of the archaeological investigation reported on here were considered to be representative of a dispersed group of Neolithic pit features.

5 Structural analysis

The excavation area and features recorded are detailed in Figures 2 to 16.

A series of seven site periods have been defined and archaeological features separated into individual periods within this chronological outline, as presented below (numbered 1–7, Table 1). Contexts that could not be defined to be of a particular period, mainly due to irregularity in form, a lack of stratification and an absence of artefactual or environmental evidence, were allocated as 'Un-phased', although they are thought most likely to be of general prehistoric date.

Other than plough furrows and modern services, the features were restricted in range, comprising only pits and postholes. Few were securely dated during the fieldwork stage of the project, with only limited and in many cases very fragmentary pottery present. In post-excavation analysis, however, a distinction become evident through a programme of radiocarbon dating (in combination with the recovery of small ecofacts and artefacts from environmental samples) that identified some were likely to be Neolithic in date as anticipated, but that others were of Iron Age origin. An attempt was therefore made to differentiate contexts thought to be early prehistoric or late prehistoric (Periods 2 and 3). In the first instance, if a deposit within a feature had been scientifically dated, then this was used as an anchor whereby features similar in size or shape, or with comparable inclusions or deposit formation, could be similarly bracketed. Some of these deposits contained, for example, small pieces of pottery, flint, iron or copper slag, charred cereal grain or charred hazelnut shells which further refined or disproved the initial allocated period.

Smaller and shallower pits, often with just one or two fills, included either only flint or charred hazelnut shells, rare small fragments of calcined bone, or very fragmentary pottery. These compared well in size and survival to pits that produced early and middle Neolithic radiocarbon dates (4th millennium BC) from samples of the charred hazelnut shells. The pits appeared to cluster in groups and were often visible as adjacent pairs or in linear groupings, and the majority did not have recuts or interrelationships with other features. These have been allocated to the early prehistoric period (Period 2; Figure 3).

Site period and date	**Character**
1 Natural deposits	Natural sand and gravel substrate
2 Early prehistoric (4000-3000 BC)	Small and shallow dispersed pits of early to middle Neolithic date, often paired, and with occasional charred hazelnut shells
3 Late prehistoric (800BC to AD43)	Larger pits and numerous postholes of broadly Iron Age date, some of which were stone-lined and formed structures
4 Late medieval (15th to 16th century)	Single isolated but substantial pit, dated to the 15th or 16th century
5 Late medieval to post-medieval (16th to 19th century)	Linear north-south aligned furrows
6 Modern (19th to 20th century)	Modern, backfilled service trench
7 Un-phased	Small number of pits or postholes dissimilar to other features, lacking in artefactual or ecofactual evidence, but probably of broadly prehistoric date

Table 1: Site period and character

Larger and deeper pits that included multiple infill deposits and postholes containing stone packing produced either fragments of slag, small pieces of calcined bone and larger animal bone, pottery, possible quern stone, or radiocarbon dates that demonstrated an early, middle or late Iron Age date; these spanned the 8th century BC to the 1st century AD. Notably, features dated to this period were the only ones that formed evident structures or intercut with others. In a number of instances residual flint was also present that was typologically Neolithic in origin (eg a transverse arrowhead), further demonstrating the presence of the earlier phase and indicating that elements of this earlier period of activity had probably been truncated in antiquity as well as by more recent agricultural practice. Where this was the case, very occasional hazelnut shells were also recovered. These features are identified as part of late prehistoric activity on the site (Period 3; Figure 4).

5.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

In all excavation areas the natural substrate, although slightly variable, could be consistently identified. This comprised light yellow-orange brown sand with gravel patches and was encountered between 0.40m and 0.50m below the ground surface.

A number of undated and diffuse features identified as shallow irregular pits may actually be of natural origin, but only one feature in the southern part of the site was clearly a tree throw [6056].

5.2 Phase 2: Early prehistoric deposits (4000-3000BC)

Pits considered to date to the early prehistoric period, specifically the early to middle Neolithic, were located in all areas of the site, but were mainly clustered in two broad groupings (Figure 3). It is possible that the split is an artificial construct, created by the unintentional disturbance to the central area of the site during groundworks that may have removed some archaeological features, but there was a noticeable 20-30m gap. A division is also suggested by a difference in scientific dating from features in each group and this may indicate that the pit groups were indeed not contemporary.

Western group

The western group formed a roughly linear array aligned north-east to south-west (Figure 3). Iron Age activity somewhat distorted the picture but the group is focused around two closely associated pits, [3005] and [3007], that were originally identified during the evaluation stage (trench 30; Figure 6). Although no artefacts were recovered from the pits themselves, a large fragment of mid to late-Neolithic Peterborough ware pottery in the Mortlake sub-style was retrieved from the subsoil between the two, probably in a furrow (Figure 17). This was in relatively good condition and had clearly not been moved far from the original point of deposition.

Pit [3005] was a slightly irregular 1m by 0.86m oval shape, 0.19m in depth, and contained two distinct fills (Plate 4). The lower of these (3004) was dark brown sandy silt, rich in charcoal and charred hazelnut shell fragments, as well as including occasional heat-cracked stones, but did not have any evidence of *in situ* burning. This was sealed by sterile and homogenous brown sandy silt (3003), covering over the lower burnt remains. Some of the hazelnut fragments from (3004) were sent for radiocarbon dating and returned a date of 3500-3100 cal BC (SUERC-64305; 4581±38 BP). This dates the pit to the middle Neolithic, consistent with the nearby pottery find. Two metres to the north-west, pit [3007], a shallow (0.10m) sub-circular feature 0.56m in diameter, had a single homogenous sandy fill (3006) containing occasional charcoal and heat-cracked stones.

To the south-west of the location of the mid to late-Neolithic pottery was a sub-circular pit [4050], around 1.10m in diameter and 0.21m in depth. The single homogenous orangey brown sandy silt fill included charcoal flecking as well as two small fragments of burnt bone (4049). To the north, within an area of later prehistoric features but of a very different character so probably not associated with these, was a shallow (0.07m) and irregular oval pit, 0.70m by 0.50m in size [4024] (Plate 9). Further east, oval pit [6006] was 1.34m by 1.10m in size but only 0.17m in depth. The greyish brown sandy silt fill included heat-cracked stone, fragments of burnt bone, charred hazelnut shell and early prehistoric flint (6005).

Just over 8m to the north of [6006] was another irregular oval pit, [6058], 0.26m in depth. The single fill comprised sterile mid orange-brown sand lacking in finds, but it was heavily truncated by a later, securely dated Iron Age pit [6053] that included early prehistoric pottery and early prehistoric flint (see below). It is possible that the residual flint and pottery within the later pit, combined with the stratigraphic sequence, demonstrate that [6058] was part of the earlier phase.

Eastern group

The eastern early prehistoric group was characterised by a series of paired pits, as well as pit clusters, some in linear arrangements. In the south-east part of the area, undoubtedly reflecting the impact of modern agricultural practice on the area of the excavation, there was also a noticeable concentration of early prehistoric flints within the topsoil. These may have come from ploughed out

features or perhaps reflect plough disturbance of flint that had been deposited on the former ground surface.

Towards the eastern edge of the site was a slightly larger pit feature that did not fit this pattern, but which also appears to be early prehistoric in date [5016] (Figure 8). An irregular oval shape, 1.62m by 1.26m, it was up to 0.46m deep and contained three fills, the uppermost of which included numerous large and flat packing stones in a slightly irregular spread (5017). Of these stones, one is identified as a *polissoir* – a portable axe polisher – of Neolithic date (Figure 18, no. 2). Below this was a dark grey-brown charcoal-rich fill that included a small piece of early prehistoric pottery (5018) and a slumped layer of re-deposited natural (5019) at the eastern edge. The packing stones may indicate that this feature was perhaps a socket for a post or a stone, rather than a pit, and the irregular arrangement of these could suggest that they were disturbed during removal or collapse (Plate 6).

To the immediate west of [5016] were two adjacent and near circular pits, [5044] and [5046], 1.5m apart (Plate 7). These were clearly paired, being almost identical in size (around 1m diameter and 0.17m in depth) and each with a comparable dark grey-brown silty sand single homogenous fill (Figure 9). There was no dating evidence, but these features are characteristic of an early prehistoric date and their proximity to [5016] may be of significance.

Around 7m further west, was another pair of shallow pits, [5055] and [5057], 1.70m apart. These were both irregular sub-oval in shape, 0.63m by 0.56m in size, and 0.17m and 0.12m in depth respectively. Again, they had comparable, homogenous single fills. Of particular note were a small possible hammerstone and a piece of quartz in the fill (5056) of pit [5055]. This suggests an early prehistoric date for this pit and, by extension, the pair. It is possible that this represents a specific depositional event following end of use, rather than casual discard of waste, but this is not conclusive.

Around 6m to the north was a cluster of four pits, some of which had been previously identified during the evaluation stage (trench 28). The southernmost of these, [5031], was an irregular oval 1.56m long and 1.10m wide, 0.40m in depth, with two fills (Plate 5). The upper fill (5043), dark greyish brown silty sand, included flint, fired clay, charcoal and charred hazelnut shells. Fragments of the shells were sent for radiocarbon dating and returned a radiocarbon measurement of 3950-3710 cal BC (SUERC-64309; 5027±38 BP). This indicates an early Neolithic date for the feature, at variance with the dating of the pit in the western grouping.

Immediately adjacent, less than 0.30m to the north, was sub-circular pit [5030], only the truncated and slightly irregular base of which remained. The pit was 1.13m in diameter and just 0.09m in depth, but the homogenous dark brown silty sand fill included charcoal and fragments of burnt bone. Part of the same cluster of features were pits [2804] and [5029], both sub-circular and around 0.85m in diameter, but with different profiles. Pit [5029] was 0.16m deep with a gradual, concave cut and a dark, blackish brown upper fill (5038) that included charcoal and one small fragment of unidentifiable burnt bone. The lower fill (5040) also contained fragments of burnt bone and some charcoal. Pit [2804] was deeper (0.34m) and more bag-shaped, with a single charcoal-rich fill (2803) but no other finds.

Just over 4m to the south-west of the cluster, paired pits were again in evidence. Pits [5062] and [5063] were 2m apart, both sub-circular in shape and around 0.80 in diameter, with similar 0.24m deep profiles. They had single orange-brown silty sand fills and contained burnt clay.

Another four shallow pits formed a 5m long, slightly curving linear alignment, marking the western edge of the eastern pit group (Plate 8; Figure 7). The two northernmost examples, [5003] and [5005], were 0.20m apart, oval in shape, both 0.60m wide and 0.18m and 0.15m in depth respectively, although [5005] was slightly longer. They included dark orange-brown silty sand homogenous fills with charcoal, possibly being a pair. Pit [5007] was also close by and similar in depth (0.17m), with a comparable profile, but more irregular in shape. The southernmost, pit [5009], was larger, being 0.98m by 0.90m in size, but only 0.16m in depth. Both [5007] and [5009] had sterile fills lacking in finds.

Isolated pits

Along the southern boundary of the site were a series of small and shallow pits that, although lacking in clearly datable material, with no clear distribution or obvious pairing, are considered to be of early prehistoric date due to their form and the nature of the inclusions.

Located close to limit of excavation in the central part of the site, pit [6051] was oval in shape, 0.70m wide and 0.87m in length, but very shallow (0.16m). The single greyish-brown fill (6052) included charcoal and flint, although this was an undiagnostic piece.

Around 23m to the east, also on the southern edge of the site area, were two further pits. Pit [6034] was a moderately large sub-oval feature, 1.35m by 1.10m in size, but shallow at 0.16m in depth. The largely sterile sandy fill did include occasional charcoal and heat-cracked stone. Pit [6040] was smaller and more irregular in shape, being 0.95m long and 0.68m wide, again 0.16m in depth.

5.3 Phase 3: Late prehistoric deposits (800BC - AD43)

A series of large pits were identified alongside stone-packed postholes that formed arrangements indicative of probable four-post structures and, although there was a distinct paucity of artefactual evidence for this phase of activity, scientific dating has demonstrated that the features ranged in date from the early to late Iron Age. These covered a broadly dispersed arc across the entire width (105m) of the southern part of the excavated area (Figure 4).

Post structures

Only one four-post structure was definitively identified, but it is probable that there were at least three others. Despite areas being cleaned on numerous occasions, all the posts relating to a single structure were not always located; two of these remained as three-post structures, another was only observed as two posts.

The two-post structure was located in the south-west of the excavated area. Postholes [4046] and [4052] were both oval in shape (0.61m and 0.54m long, 0.31m and 0.33m wide), with steep sides and u-shaped profiles. They included numerous small packing stones in their greyish-brown silty sand fills and were 0.38m and 0.26m in depth respectively. Although no dating evidence was recovered, these are comparable in form to securely dated Iron Age examples elsewhere on site. The distance between the centre points was 2.40m and if the same measurement is projected westwards to form a four-post structure, it suggests that the other half had been removed by a later plough furrow in this location (or was masked by it). Assuming the identification as two parts of a four-post structure is correct, and that it was roughly square in shape, the footprint would have covered close to 5.90m² (Figure 12).

Just over 30m to the east was a clear square arrangement of postholes, between 2.20-2.70m apart (centre points), and occupying a 5.80m² footprint – [4003], [4008], [4028], [4039] (Figure 10). All were circular or sub-circular in shape, 0.51m to 0.63m in diameter and 0.35m to 0.46m in depth. The two on the south-east side of the structure were slightly larger and more regular; both of these also contained packing deposits (4004; 4012) comprising large stones around the south-east edge, undoubtedly for addition external support (Plates 16 and 17). A dark brownish-black stain marking the residue of a timber post-pipe (4010) was noted in the space defined by the stone packing (4012) in posthole [4008]. Fragments of copper slag and a small iron object were recovered from three of the postholes, and charcoal from the stone packing in [4008] was radiocarbon dated 350-50 cal BC (SUERC-65620; 2122±30 BP).

In addition, close to the south-west corner of the four-post structure (0.35m away), were three small postholes or stakeholes, [4037], [4042], [4044]. These were circular or sub-circular, 0.25m to 0.40m in diameter, and between 0.19 and 0.21m in depth. There was no dating evidence but these are considered to relate to the structure, possibly being either external repairs, or the locations of a ramp or ladders/steps for access.

To the east, a single posthole packed with stone was also identified, but was isolated and not related to any other features [4067]. Oval in shape, 0.58m by 0.48m, it was 0.38m in depth. The

size of this and the stone packing would suggest it is of comparable date to the other Iron Age examples on site.

A further 60m eastwards, towards the eastern edge of the site and 12m apart from each other, were two three-post structures, similar in shape and form to the four-post structure and almost certainly representing the remains of comparable structures. The southern example had three posts in an 'L'-shape, [6022], [6025], [6028], 2.60m apart on the north-south axis and 2.90m apart on the east-west axis (centre points). Assuming a fourth post once existed but was either no longer present or perhaps not visible during the excavation, the structure would have had a footprint of 8m² (Figure 11). Correlating well with this slightly larger footprint than the structures to the west, the postholes were also of larger dimensions in plan (although not in depth). Oval in shape, these were 0.84m to 0.94m long and 0.61m to 0.72m wide, each between 0.30m and 0.40m in depth. All contained large stones probably used as packing, but this was most obvious in posthole [6028] where it was lined around the western (external) side (6029) (Plate 15). Charcoal from within this feature returned a radiocarbon date of 790-540 cal BC (SUERC-66202; 2507±29 BP). Posthole [6025] was notable for containing numerous pieces of residual flint *debitage* of early prehistoric origin (fills 6026; 6027), alongside a piece of iron slag that confirmed its later prehistoric date. As noted above, there was a noticeable concentration of early prehistoric flints within the topsoil in this area of the site, and it is likely that similar material was incorporated into the posthole.

The final posthole structure, the northern of the two at the eastern edge of the site, also had three posts in an 'L'-shape, [5027], [5037], [5051], 2.60m apart on the north-south axis and 2.80m apart on the east-west axis (centre points). Once again, assuming a fourth post had once existed but had not survived, the structure would have occupied a 7.40m² footprint. The postholes were sub-circular in shape, being 0.68m to 0.78m in diameter, and 0.29 to 0.44m in depth. None were dated, but the sizes would suggest this structure is more comparable with the one to the south rather than the smaller examples to the west. However, as with the four-post structure to the west, there was an additional small posthole close to the south-west corner of the structure (0.50m away). This posthole, [5023], was 0.20m in diameter and 0.13m in depth and had stone packing in the base.

Pits

Associated with the post structures were a series of pits, again dispersed across the area. Although not always conclusively dated, these were noticeably different in character to those thought to be of early prehistoric date. They often contained dumps of burnt waste and although still relatively limited, this material contained more artefactual and ecofactual evidence.

A cluster of similar pits was located 3m to the north-west of the clear four-post structure, (Figure 13). The smallest, pit [4017], was a 0.78m by 0.49m oval shape, 0.30m in depth, with a flat base and a lower fill that appeared to consist of re-deposited natural gravels. The upper charcoal-rich fill was a dump of burnt material, but with no finds. Adjacent to this were pits [4013] and [4020] that, although of slightly varying size and shape, included comparable infill sequences (Plates 9 – 11).

Pit [4013] was oval in shape, 1.48m by 1.19m, 0.40m in depth with a flat base. It contained three fills: a lower deposit of natural gravel (4014), probably eroded in; a dump of burnt waste rich in charcoal and heat-cracked stone (4015), with dried clay-rich material (probably daub), larger fragments of animal bone, a broken quartzite rubber stone and a small quantity of charred grain; and a silty sand sealing layer on the top (4016), which included fired clay and one tiny fragment of early Roman pottery (Plate 10). The early Roman pottery appears to have been pushed into the top, perhaps into a slight depression caused by subsidence of the 'primary' fills of the pit below, and does not securely date this feature, as charred grain from within the main fill (2015) returned a radiocarbon date of 390-200 calBC (SUERC-66207; 2228±29 BP). The same tripartite sequence of infilling was noted in [4020], a smaller sub-circular pit 0.92m by 0.74m and 0.37m in depth that again had a flat base but, although low quantities of grain were noted, this lacked the frequency of finds or environmental remains of [4013]. The similarity in stratigraphy was noticeable and may suggest that the formation of these pits occurred at the same time (Plate 11).

Two large pits identified to the west and south of this area were also comparable in their size and infill sequence, although they were some distance apart. Pit [4026], originally identified during the evaluation (trench 30; 3008), was an irregular sub-circular feature, 2.30m by 2.80m, and 0.84m in depth with a flattened base (Plate 13; Figure 15). The pit appeared to have been left open for some time as two sandy slumped deposits had formed in the lower part, before a dump of grey-brown silty sand rich in charcoal and heat-cracked stone had been deposited (4027/3013). Two sterile orange-brown sand deposits sealed this, but another charcoal-rich dump that included heat-cracked stones and low quantities of charred grain overlay these (4035/3010). A final orange-brown sand sealed this and infilled the upper part of the pit (4036). A small fragment of possible briquetage was recovered and the size and the similarly in form to pit [4058], 26m to the south-east, suggests that it is part of the Iron Age phase of activity.

Pit [4058] was 0.81m in depth, a slightly irregular sub-circular feature 2.12m by 2.04m, located 5m to the south-east of the four-post structure (Plate 14; Figure 14). It contained six fills, the lowest of which, orange brown sandy gravel, appeared to be re-deposited natural (4059). Two dark silty deposits (4060; 4061) above contained charcoal and heat-cracked stone along with fired clay, occasional charred grain, slag and animal bone, and these were sealed by brownish orange sand (4062). The main upper infill (4063) included numerous heat-cracked stones as well as residual flint; this was sealed by what appeared to be subsoil (4064), perhaps built up in the depression left by the pit. This uppermost deposit included an abraded transverse arrowhead of Neolithic date, as well as piece of late medieval pottery. The latter is undoubtedly intrusive from the ploughsoil, as two radiocarbon dates confirmed a mid to late Iron Age date for the pit. Charred plant remains from (4061) returned a radiocarbon date 380-110 cal BC (SUERC-64311; 2183±38 BP), and similar material from (4060) a date of 360-160 cal BC (SUERC-66208; 2172±26 BP). These dates suggest the deposits occurred at the same time, and correlate well with the dating for the similar deposit in pit [4013] to the north-west.

Around 20m to the east was another sub-circular pit [6049], 1.84m by 1.54m and 0.70m in depth that, although it lacked clear dating evidence, was of a comparable size and profile to suggest it may be of similar origin. The dark brown charcoal-rich silty sand infill included numerous heat-cracked stones. It truncated the edge of a large oval pit feature of uncertain use and unknown date, [6045], that was 2.56m long and 0.74m in depth. Further north were two large pits - [6007] and [6009] - heavily disturbed by a modern trench and therefore not fully visible in plan (but each at least 1.20m across). Adjacent to these, pit [6004] was 1m in diameter, 0.30m in depth, and included fired clay and burnt stone. Whilst these features are not securely dated, their size suggests that they probably also relate to this phase of activity.

To the north-east was irregular pit [6053]; this truncated earlier feature [6058] and was 1.58m by 1.64m in size and up to 0.26m in depth. The dark brown silty sand fill (6055) was charcoal-rich, with numerous heat-cracked stones, and included early prehistoric flint and early prehistoric pottery. Charcoal from this fill was radiocarbon dated as 400-200 cal BC (SUERC-66201; 2266±29 BP); the flint is probably residual and related to the earlier pit.

At the southern limit of excavation was pit [6039], a steep-sided oval feature 0.44m in depth. This was fairly isolated and dissimilar in profile to nearby pits which are probably of the earlier phase, but pottery from within dated it to the early Roman period (Plate 12). Given the surrounding archaeology, it is most likely to be of similar origin to pit [4013] (mid to late Iron Age) which included similarly dated pottery in the top. This is one of the few examples of pottery from the site and could suggest that there was once more extensive settlement remains beyond the site limits to the south and south-east. It is also possible that this suggested settlement continued to be occupied into the early Roman period.

5.4 Phase 4: Late medieval deposits

Perhaps the most enigmatic feature identified on the site was an isolated, but substantial, near circular pit located in the northern area [5015]. It was 3.70m by 3.80m in size and 0.95m in depth, with a wide u-shaped profile, infilled with a series of re-deposited natural sands and gravels only distinguishable by rare charcoal flecking (Plate 18; Figure 16). No finds were recovered but

occasional charred oat grains were identified from environmental sampling. The function of this pit is unclear; the size could indicate that it was used for extraction, yet the infill suggests that little of the natural material was taken away, and there was no obvious lining that may denote use as a waterhole or other storage receptacle for perishable goods. There was also a lack of any organic material or waste within it. To further compound the issue, the charred grain returned a radiocarbon date of 1430-1620 cal AD (SUERC-66206; 411±26 BP), and most likely dating the infill of this pit to the late medieval period. The absence of any similarly dated features or deposits on the site is problematic and suggests that the pit probably existed within an undeveloped agricultural landscape, remote from any settlement activity.

5.5 Phase 5: Late medieval to post-medieval

Numerous north-south aligned furrows traversed the site and demonstrated the arable land use of the area in later periods. Building material of 13th to 19th century date was recovered from a single furrow [6013], but the presence of a large late medieval pit in the field may suggest that significant post-Roman agricultural use only began from this point onwards.

5.6 Phase 6: Modern deposits

On the same alignment as a furrow, linear feature [5061/6015] extended north-south across the entire width in the centre of the site. This had a lower fill of clean and sterile fine grade sand, and included modern glass in the upper fill. Similar features had been identified across the wider area during the evaluation and it is possible that these are former service trenches, perhaps used for a water system in the field.

5.7 Un-phased deposits

A number of pits or postholes did not compare closely with the examples assigned to other periods. These were either lacking in finds or environmental evidence, or were isolated, and thus remain unphased. It is inferred, however, that these are most likely to be of prehistoric date (either Period 2 or 3) due to the surrounding archaeology, in combination with the relative absence of later activity.

Five pits were dispersed across the western part of the site [2505], [6020], [4066], [4055], [4057]. These were often irregular, between 0.12m and 0.49m in depth, with sterile fills, but occasionally included small amounts of charcoal or heat-cracked stone.

In the north-east of the site, two irregular pits, [5049] and [5054], lacked finds or inclusions, and to the south, pit [5021] was similarly irregular and devoid of dating evidence. Along the southern edge of the site, three features, [6031], [6037] and [6042], were shallow, irregular and diffuse, and not clearly part of any phase. In some cases, it is possible that these were of natural origin.

6 Artefacts

6.1 Artefactual analysis, by Rob Hedge

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Table 2.

The bulk of the assemblage comprised prehistoric fired clay and daub, flint and other worked stone and slag, with a small quantity of pottery. This came from 33 stratified contexts and could be dated from the Mesolithic/Early Neolithic period onwards (see Table 2), with the majority of stratified finds relating to two periods of activity: Neolithic and Iron Age.

Artefact condition was highly variable: most of the ceramic artefacts were small and displayed high levels of abrasion, with the notable exception of a single very large sherd of Neolithic pottery. The majority of the worked stone, however, was in relatively fresh condition, with the exception of several of the larger residual pieces.

The following section discusses artefacts by phase, then by artefact type.

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)
prehistoric	ceramic		fired clay	56	205.9
prehistoric	stone	flint	chip	6	2.4
prehistoric	stone	flint	chunk	2	2.6
prehistoric	stone	flint	flake	4	2.2
prehistoric	stone	flint	flake fragment	1	0.5
prehistoric	stone	flint	notch	1	0.8
prehistoric to medieval	ceramic		fired clay	3	12.5
early prehistoric	stone	flint	?truncation burin on blade	1	1.9
early prehistoric	stone	flint	chip	7	0.4
early prehistoric	stone	flint	chunk	1	3.7
early prehistoric	stone	flint	?core rejuvenation flake	1	1.6
Mesolithic/ early Neolithic	stone	flint	?crested blade	1	1.9
Mesolithic/ early Neolithic	stone	flint	microdenticulate/serrated blade	1	4.9
Neolithic	bone		burnt bone	1	0.6
Neolithic	ceramic		fired clay	1	1
Neolithic	ceramic		pot	4	132.3
Neolithic	stone	?	polissoir	1	3740
Neolithic	stone	flint	arrowhead	1	1.5
Neolithic	stone	quartz	stone	2	176
Neolithic	stone	unidentified	?hammerstone	1	126
Bronze Age/Iron Age	slag	slag(cu)	slag	19	9.1
Iron Age	organic		daub	81	2449
Iron Age	metal	iron	unident	1	0.2
Iron Age	organic		dried clay	1	0.6
Iron Age	slag	slag(fe)	smithing slag	1	0.1
Iron Age	slag	unident	slag	1	18
Iron Age	stone	?	burnt stone	5	43
Iron Age	stone	shale	?whetstone	1	4
Iron Age	stone	quartz	rubber/smoother	1	2901
Iron Age/early Roman	ceramic		briquetage	2	16
Roman	ceramic		pot	2	8.2
late med/early post-med	ceramic		pot	1	2.1
medieval/ post-medieval	ceramic		brick/tile	1	5
modern	bone	animal bone	mammal bone	1	1
modern	glass		vessel	2	9
modern	metal	steel	spoon	1	20
undated	bone	animal bone	animal bone	2	1
			Totals	219	9906

Table 2: Quantification of the assemblage

6.1.1 Phase 2: Early Prehistoric (4000-3000BC)

Ceramic artefacts, by Robin Jackson and Rob Hedge

Pottery

A single large rim sherd of pottery weighing 121g was found during the evaluation phase, in trench 30 (context 3001; Figure 17). This was recovered from subsoil deposits and was clearly not *in situ,* having almost certainly been disturbed by cultivation; however, the large size and fresh unabraded condition of the sherd strongly indicate recent disturbance and that it had not been moved far from the original point of deposition.

Two pits - [3005] and [3007] - identified in the immediate vicinity are considered the most likely source of the pottery, although the possibility should not be excluded that the sherd derived from another feature in the surrounding area.

context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	Count	weight(g)	Artefact date	Context start date	Context end date	Context TPQ date range
Tr 30 U/S	stone	flint	crested blade?	1	1.9	Mesolithic/ early Neolithic	2015	2015	2015AD
3001	ceramic		pot	1	121	Neolithic	-3500	-2700	3500BC - 2700BC
3011	ceramic		briquetage	2	16	Iron Age/ early Roman	-700	100	700BC - 100AD
3013	bone	animal bone	animal bone	2	1	undated			
4000	stone	flint	chunk	1	1.9	prehistoric	-8000	43	8000BC - 43AD
4004	slag	slag (cu)	slag	3	0.1	Bronze Age/ Iron Age	-2500	43	2500BC - 43AD
4004	metal	iron	unident	1	0.2	Iron Age	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
4012	ceramic		fired clay	34	102	prehistoric	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
4015	ceramic		fired clay	6	47	prehistoric	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
	organic		daub	80	2442	prehistoric	-700	43	
	stone	flint	flake fragment	1	0.5	prehistoric	-700	43	
	stone	quartz	rubber/ smoother	1	2901	Iron Age	-700	43	
4016	ceramic		fired clay	1	0.8	prehistoric	-700	43	43AD - 200AD
	stone	shale	whetstone	1	4	Iron Age	-700	43	
	ceramic		pot	1	1.8	early Roman	43	200	
	organic		dried clay	1	0.6	Iron Age	-700	43	
4022	stone		burnt stone	5	43	Iron Age	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
4029	slag	slag (cu)	slag	3	0.6	Bronze Age/Iron Age	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
4040	slag	slag (cu)	slag	13	8.4	Bronze Age/Iron Age	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
4060	ceramic		fired clay	8	27	prehistoric	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
	stone	flint	blade	1	1.9	early prehistoric	-700	43	
4061	slag	slag (fe)	smithing slag	1	0.1	Iron Age	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
	ceramic		fired clay	3	21	prehistoric	-700	43	
	ceramic		fired clay	4	8.1	prehistoric	-700	43	
	stone	flint	chip	1	1.2	prehistoric	-700	43	
4063	stone	flint	flake	1	0.8	prehistoric	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
	stone	flint	chunk	1	0.7	prehistoric	-700	43	
4064	stone	flint	arrowhead	1	1.5	Neolithic	-700	43	1475AD - 1675AD
	ceramic		pot	1	2.1	late med/early post-med	1475	1675	
5017	stone	sandstone	polissoir	1	3740	Neolithic	-4000	-2500	4000BC - 2500BC
5018	ceramic		pot	1	4.4	Neolithic	-4000	-2500	4000BC - 2500BC
5042	bone		burnt bone	1	0.6	Neolithic	-4000	-2500	4000BC - 2500BC
5043	ceramic		fired clay	1	1	Neolithic	-4000	-2500	4000BC - 2500BC
	stone	flint	chip	2	0.1	prehistoric	-4000	-2500	

context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	Count	weight(g)	Artefact date	Context start date	Context end date	Context TPQ date range
5045	ceramic		fired clay	2	1.9	prehistoric to medieval	-4000	1600	4000BC - 1600AD
5056	stone	quartz	stone	2	176	Neolithic	-4000	-2500	4000BC - 2500BC
	stone	unident	hammerstone	1	126	Neolithic	-4000	-2500	
5059	glass		vessel	2	9	modern	1800	2000	1800AD - 2000AD
	bone	animal bone	mammal bone	1	1	modern	1800	2000	
5064	organic		daub	1	7	prehistoric	-4000	43	4000BC - 43AD
6000	stone	flint	micro-denticulate/ serrated blade	1	4.9	Mesolithic/early Neolithic	-8000	-3000	1900AD - 1950AD
	stone	flint	chip	2	0.9	prehistoric	-8000	43	
	stone	flint	flake	1	0.4	prehistoric	-8000	43	
	metal	steel	spoon	1	20	modern	1900	1950	
6003	ceramic		fired clay	1	10.6	prehistoric to medieval	-4000	1600	4000BC - 1600AD
6005	stone	flint	chip	1	0.1	early prehistoric	-8000	-3000	8000BC - 3000BC
6014	ceramic		brick/tile	1	5	medieval/ post-medieval	1200	1800	1200AD - 1800AD
6026	stone	flint	flake	1	0.2	prehistoric	-8000	-3000	8000BC - 3000BC
6027	slag	unident	slag	1	18	Iron Age	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
	stone	flint	chip	6	0.3	early prehistoric	-8000	-3000	
	stone	flint	flake	1	0.8	prehistoric	-8000	43	
	stone	flint	notch	1	0.8	prehistoric	-8000	43	
6038	ceramic		pot	1	6.4	early Roman	43	200	43AD - 200AD
6052	stone	flint	chunk	1	3.7	early prehistoric	-8000	43	8000BC - 43AD
6055	stone	flint	chip	1	0.2	prehistoric	-700	43	700BC - 43AD
	stone	flint	core rejuvenation flake?	1	1.6	early prehistoric	-700	43	
	ceramic		pot	2	6.9	Neolithic	-700	43	

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

The fabric resembles Worcestershire fabric 5.8 (Quartzite tempered ware; www.worcestershireceramics.org), but with some variation likely to be due to local raw material sources. It was black throughout, with laminated fractures. Inclusions consisted of occasional, medium to large (4-7mm diameter) fragments of white and translucent angular quartz, and rare large (6-9mm diameter) fragments of an unidentified, hard igneous/metamorphic stone. The vessel has a wall thickness of up to 10mm. The rim form was heavy, slightly in-turned and rounded on the outside with a pronounced neck (cavetto) below.

The rim was heavily decorated with impressed decoration comprising numerous finger nail impressions occupying a broad band on and below the rim both internally and externally. Internally a row of closely spaced, diagonal impressions formed a defined narrow band along the top of the decorated zone while below this overlapping, diagonally applied long finger or thumbnail impressions filled triangular zones. Externally shorter more deeply applied fingernail impressions

covered the rounded rim in rough diagonal rows as far as the sharp break into the neck of the vessel. The latter was undecorated but the small area of surviving rounded body below this featured twisted cord impressions also arranged in a diagonal pattern.

The form, decoration and fabric all indicate that this pottery is middle Neolithic impressed ware of the Peterborough Ware tradition. Although the three stage progression of Peterborough Ware through Ebbsfleet-Mortlake-Fengate styles as identified by Smith (1956) has now been recognised as inadequate for Britain as a whole, the terminology remains widely in use though in a modified form (Gibson 1995). Probably the most relevant regional work on Peterborough Wares is that undertaken in Wales (Gibson 1995), with further more recent work by Jackson and Ray (2012) having examined the distribution and context of Neolithic pottery recovered from pits across the Severn-Wye region, which encompasses the current site. Locally the nearest examples of Peterborough Wares have been recovered from Morville Quarry (Jackson 1999) and Meole Brace (Hughes and Woodward 1995) and regionally the Mortlake style material (highly decorated vessels; Gibson 1995) appears to be the most common. This is typically characterised by large angular quartz tempering and profuse decoration and generally heavy rounded or moulded rims, as is the case here. Radiocarbon dates associated with the Welsh Peterborough Wares cluster between 3500 and 2500 BC (Gibson 1995) and it is likely that dating of the Shifnal material can be similarly bracketed. This is further supported by the radiocarbon date of 3500-3100 cal BC (SUERC-64305; 4581±38 BP) secured on a charred hazelnut shell sample from one of the Period 2 pits excavated in the immediate vicinity of this find spot.

One further abraded sherd, from fill (5018) of posthole [5016] in the eastern zone of the site, bears some resemblance to the quartz, grog and organic-tempered fabric of some Fengate-style Peterborough Ware known from the region (Worcestershire fabric 5.15). Conclusive identification is precluded by the small size and very poor condition of the sherd – both surfaces are missing – but it is considered highly likely to be Neolithic in date.

Fired clay

A number of small fragments of fired clay were considered likely to be of Neolithic date, including a piece from fill (5043) of pit [5031], for which radiocarbon dating suggested an early Neolithic date.

Worked stone

Flint

A total of 27 flint implements and fragments of debitage were recovered from the site, weighing 24.4g.

Although the majority was not typologically diagnostic, there are various elements that point towards a Mesolithic/early Neolithic date for the assemblage, including:

- a microdenticulate/serrated blade from topsoil (6000) (Plate 21),
- a possible crested blade from the backfill of evaluation trench 30,
- a possible truncation burin on a finely worked blade, residual within fill (4060) of Iron Age pit [4058] (Plate 20).
- a somewhat abraded transverse petit tranchet arrowhead from a subsoil deposit (4064) above Iron Age pit [4058] (Plate 19).

Although the latter are typically associated with later Neolithic assemblages (Butler 2005, 158), transverse arrowheads and associated debitage have also been found in early Neolithic Plain Bowl contexts (e.g. Anderson-Whymark 2011, 18). A number of pieces of debitage exhibit characteristics consistent with blade production and/or soft-hammer percussion, and have thus been categorised as early prehistoric. On balance, therefore, an earlier Neolithic date is likely for the majority of the assemblage, although the presence of debitage of earlier/later date cannot be ruled out.

• Period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)
Prehistoric	stone	flint	chip	6	2.4
Prehistoric	stone	flint	chunk	2	2.6
Prehistoric	stone	flint	flake	4	2.2
Prehistoric	stone	flint	flake fragment	1	0.5
Prehistoric	stone	flint	notch	1	0.8
early prehistoric	stone	flint	?truncation burin on blade	1	1.9
early prehistoric	stone	flint	chip	7	0.4
early prehistoric	stone	flint	chunk	1	3.7
early prehistoric	stone	flint	?core rejuvenation flake	1	1.6
Mesolithic/ early Neolithic	stone	flint	?crested blade	1	1.9
Mesolithic/ early Neolithic	stone	flint	microdenticulate/serrated blade	1	4.9
Neolithic	stone	?	polissoir	1	3740
Neolithic	stone	quartz	stone	2	176
Neolithic	stone	vesicular basalt	?hammerstone	1	126
Neolithic	stone	flint	Arrowhead (transverse)	1	1.5
			Totals:	31	4066.4

Table 4: Quantification of the worked stone by period and type

Unfortunately, few of the pieces of worked flint were associated with earlier prehistoric (Phase 2) features, and this is likely to be due to the extensive truncation of features of this date in the later prehistoric period, a hypothesis supported by the appearance of several diagnostically early pieces occurring within Iron Age pit [4058]. Two exceptions were small pieces of debitage within fills (6005) and (6052) of Neolithic pits [6006] and [6051] respectively.

Other worked stone

A large piece of red-brown sandstone from fill (5017) of posthole [5016], in the eastern pit group, exhibits a distinctive polished and indented upper surface, with two deep parallel grooves scored into the vertical face, perpendicular to the smoothed edge. This highly unusual pattern of wear indicates that the object is likely to be a portable *polissoir*, used in the grinding, polishing and sharpening of Neolithic axes (Figure 18). This is an unusual and significant find. It is worth noting that a number of Neolithic polished stone axes have been recovered from the Shifnal area (e.g. Chitty 1972).

Within fill (5056) of pit [5055], also within the eastern pit group, several unusual pieces of stone are worthy of comment. A dense, rounded piece of stone thought to be vesicular basalt exhibits signs of abrasion on one edge suggesting use as a hammerstone. Under 20x magnification, a small quartz grain is visible, seemingly embedded in the vesicular surface of the stone. Within the same context were several extremely abraded lumps of quartz. In the Lugg Valley, Herefordshire, the association of crushed quartz with early Neolithic pottery is suggested to be indicative of the preparation of material for use as temper in pottery production (Jackson and Miller 2011, 99); a similar function is possible in this case. Although little pottery was recovered from this site, the degree of truncation is extensive, and the presence of the large sherd of quartz-tempered Peterborough ware is an indication that pottery utilising quartz temper was in use.

6.1.2 Phase 3: Late Prehistoric (800BC to AD43)

Ceramic artefacts

Pottery

No pottery contemporary with this phase could be conclusively identified. There was a just a small amount of residual pottery, probably Neolithic (fill 6055), and two highly abraded very small sherds of a fine, sandy fabric likely to be early Roman in date (4016 and 6038). The latter were from the tops of features are so could well represent their final (later) infilling, possibly as a result of agricultural activity.

Briquetage

Two small fragments of possible organic-tempered briquetage salt containers, of Iron Age to early Roman date, were found within fill (3011) of pit [4026/3008]. The fabric resembled organically tempered Droitwich briquetage (Worcestershire fabric 2, Hurst and Rees 1992). Although Cheshire briquetage (VCP) is more common in the region, Droitwich briquetage is known from nearby sites, including Sharpstones Hill (Barker *et al* 1991, 38). Distribution of Droitwich material extended north as far as Shifnal in the Early Iron Age, but changed to the west and south of Droitwich from the 5th century BC onwards (Morris 1985, 346-352), with Shifnal being 10km beyond the known distribution zone in the later Iron Age.

Fired clay

Large quantities of fired clay were found within a number of contexts of Iron Age date, notably fill (4012) of posthole [4008] (where it appeared to have been used to line the posthole before the addition of stone packing), and in dark fills (4015) of pit [4013] and (4060) of pit [4058], both comprising deliberate deposits of burnt material.

Worked stone

Two fragments of worked stone found within separate fills of pit [4013] are thought to be Iron Age in date. A large quartz rubber (Figure 18) from fill (4015), with a highly polished, flat working surface and smoothed upper surface where it had been held during use, is likely to have been used in association with a saddle quern. The uppermost fill (4016) of this pit also contained a fragment from a portable whetstone, fashioned from a green-grey micaceous and finely laminated stone, thought to be shale. Under magnification, small parallel cutmarks are visible (Plates 23-24).

Other artefactual material

A total of 2.4kg of dried clay-rich material, representing 80 sizeable fragments and substantial quantities of very fragmentary pieces, were also present within burnt fill (4015). The material comprises a poorly-sorted mixture of clay, sand, voids left by large pieces of organic material including straw, and a wide range of stone from frequent <3mm quartz fragments to large rounded pebbles upwards of 25mm in diameter (Plate 22). Many fragments have larger, linear impressions where the material has dried around wooden wands or poles: it is therefore highly likely that this represents daub from a structure on the site, possibly that represented by the nearby four-post feature.

6.1.3 Phase 4: Late medieval (15th to 16th century)

Pottery

A single sherd from a late medieval Cistercian-type cup, fabric 30 (Bryant 2002, 110), was found within subsoil deposit (4064) infilling a depression in the top of Iron Age pit [4058]. It is likely to be late 15th to 16th century, although vessels of this type do stretch into the mid-17th century.

6.1.4 Phase 5: Late medieval to post-medieval (16th to 19th century)

Ceramic building material

A single highly abraded fragment of later medieval or post-medieval brick/tile was recovered from furrow (6014).

6.1.5 Phase 6: Modern (19th to 20th century)

The few modern finds were restricted to fragments of vessel glass and animal bone from fill (5059) of linear [5061], and a stainless steel spoon from topsoil (6000).

6.2 Period discussion

6.2.1 Phase 2: Early Prehistoric (4000-3000BC)

Given the size and condition of the Peterborough Ware sherd from (3001), it is surprising that so little other pottery of this date was recovered. However, the apparent truncation of Neolithic features during the later prehistoric period, and the ensuing incorporation of Neolithic material into Iron Age features, might account for this. Arable cultivation from the late-medieval period onwards may also be a factor.

The worked flint assemblage is consistent with an early or early to middle Neolithic date. Although only a small proportion of this material was recovered from Neolithic features, it is all likely to be broadly contemporary, and distributed across the site by truncation during later prehistoric (Phase 3) and then late medieval/post-medieval (Phases 4 and 5) activity.

Distribution of finds within early and middle Neolithic paired pits has been shown by Lamdin-Whymark (2008, 104) at sites in the Middle Thames Valley such as South Stoke to follow a distinct pattern: each pair contains a 'rich' pit containing the majority of worked flint tools, pottery and animal bone, and a 'poor' pit containing higher proportions of burnt unworked flint, debitage, worked stone and charred organics, suggesting each pit within a pair had a specific function. Unfortunately, the eastern grouping of apparently paired Neolithic pits on this site are too truncated and artefact-poor to demonstrate such a pattern here, although it is tempting to associate the occurrence of charred hazelnut and oak alongside a piece of flint debitage and fired clay in fill (5043) of pit [5031] with a 'poor' pit. Similar patterns of paired pits with markedly differing contents have been observed at Wellington, Herefordshire (Jackson and Ray 2012, 151), where it was possible to suggest that a post-hole within a cluster of paired pits held a marker within the landscape, and that each pair of pits may represent discrete episodes of activity at the same site.

The presence of a portable *polissoir* indicative of axe production and maintenance is significant, as such artefacts are uncommon in this region. They are often associated with structured deposits or significant monuments. This may lend weight to the hypothesis that feature [5016], with which the *polissoir* was associated, represents a post-socket for a marker for a significant locale in a similar fashion to that observed at Wellington, perhaps for repeated visits to a favoured site (Jackson and Ray 2012, 151).

6.2.2 Phase 3: Late Prehistoric (800BC to 43AD)

The scarcity of Iron Age domestic ceramics on this site may, in part, be due to the 'consistently deleterious' local soils (Carver 1991, 6), where finer fabrics have deteriorated drastically whilst leaving relatively coarse earlier prehistoric ceramics unaffected. Another factor may be the apparent location of the site at the periphery of settlement activity. However, there is now an emerging realisation that Iron Age pottery can be a relatively infrequent find in this area (Hurst in press), as is also the case further to the north (eg Irby, Cheshire; Philpot and Adams 2010), and this is perhaps a more likely explanation.

Of particular note, however, were the finds from pit [4013], associated with a four-post structure. Here a rubbing-stone (4015) suggests grain-processing and supports interpretation of the structure as a grain store, while the large quantities of unabraded probable daub material from the same context are likely to have come from a structure, possibly the four-poster itself.

7 Ecofacts

7.1 Plant macrofossils and charcoal, by Elizabeth Pearson

The results are summarised in Tables 5 to 8 below.

Numerous small fragments of bone were both hand-collected and recovered from samples taken from early and late prehistoric features. These are discussed separately (see Section 7.2).

Uncharred remains, consisting of mainly root fragments, are assumed to be modern and intrusive as they are unlikely to have survived in the soils on site for long without charring or waterlogging.

context	sample	feature type	fill of	period	phase	sample volume (L)	volume processed (L)	residue assessed	flot assessed
2803	Eval8	Pit	2804	?Early prehistoric	2	20	20	Yes	Yes
3003	Eval1	Pit	3005	Early prehistoric	2	20	20	Yes	Yes
3004	Eval2	Pit	3005	Early prehistoric	2	20	20	Yes	Yes
3010/4035	Eval5	Pit	3008	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	Yes
3013/4027	Eval7	Pit	3008	Late prehistoric	3	10	10	Yes	Yes
4004	16	Posthole	4003	Late prehistoric	3	10	10	Yes	Yes
4006	2	Posthole	4003	Late prehistoric	3	30	10	Yes	Yes
4011	6	Posthole	4008	Later prehistoric	3	20	10	No	No
4010	5	Posthole	4008	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	No
4012	13	Posthole	4008	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	Yes
4015	9	Pit	4013	Late prehistoric	3	50	10	Yes	Yes
4016	8	Pit	4013	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	Yes	No
4022	11	Pit	4020	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	Yes	Yes
4023	10	Pit	4020	Late prehistoric	3	30	10	Yes	Yes
4029	13	Posthole	4028	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	No
4043	17	Posthole	4042	Late prehistoric	3	5	5	Yes	Yes
4048	22	Pit	4046	Late prehistoric	3	10	10	Yes	No
4059	31	Pit	4058	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	No
4060	30	Pit	4058	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	Yes	Yes
4061	29	Pit	4058	Late prehistoric	3	50	10	Yes	Yes
4062	28	Pit	4058	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	Yes	No
4063	27	Pit	4058	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	No	No
4069	25	Posthole	4067	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	No
5011	42	Pit	5015	Late medieval	4	20	20	Yes	Yes
5018	32	Posthole	5016	Early prehistoric	2	40	10	No	No
5038	35	Pit	5029	?Early prehistoric	2	40	10	Yes	Yes
5040	36	Pit	5029	?Early prehistoric	2	10	10	Yes	Yes
5043	39	Pit	5031	Early prehistoric	2	30	30	Yes	Yes
5047	38	Pit	5046	Early prehistoric	2	20	10	Yes	Yes
6003	45	Pit	6004	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	No
6005	46	Pit	6006	?Early prehistoric	2	20	10	Yes	Yes
6018	47	Pit	6019	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	No	No
6026	52	Posthole	6025	Late prehistoric	3	20	10	Yes	No
6027	51	Posthole	6025	Late prehistoric	3	30	30	Yes	No
6029	59	Posthole	6028	Late prehistoric	3	30	30	Yes	Yes
6038	56	Pit	6039	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	Yes	No
6050	61	Pit	6049	Late prehistoric	3	40	10	Yes	No
6055	63	Pit	6053	Late prehistoric	3	30	30	Yes	No

Table 5: List of bulk samples by context, as processed

7.1.1 Phase 2: Early prehistoric (4000-3000BC)

Charred hazelnut shell fragments were abundant in pit fill (3004) but in other contexts only occasional charred hazelnut shell and oak charcoal fragments were identified, along with a single unidentified charred wheat grain in pit fill (3003).

The features in this phase date from the early to middle Neolithic period. Hazelnut shell fragments from pit fill (5043) were radiocarbon dated to 3950-3710 cal BC, and from pit fill (3004), hazelnut shell was dated to 3500-3100 cal BC.

7.1.2 Phase 3: Late prehistoric (800BC to AD43)

Only small quantities of charred plant remains were recovered, for example emmer/spelt wheat (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*), oat (*Avena* sp) and possible hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) grain. Occasional fragments of charred hazelnut shell were recovered, but many of these may be residual as they were identified in features which included residual Neolithic artefacts.

Charcoal fragments included oak, alder/hazel (*Alnus/Corylus* sp), pear/apple/whitebeam/hawthorn (*Maloideae*) and possible identifications of birch (*Betula pendula/pubescens*) and guelder rose (*Viburnam* sp).

Radiocarbon dating shows that these features range in date from the early Iron Age (790-540 cal BC) to the late Iron Age (350-50 cal BC).

7.1.3 Phase 4: Late medieval (15th to 16th century)

Only occasional charred oat (*Avena* sp) grains were identified in pit fill (5011). This feature was probably dated to the 15th to 16th centuries.

context	large mammal	small mammal	charcoal	charred plant	uncharred plant	comment
2803	8		occ	occ	abt*	*mostly unidentified herbaceous fragments
3003	1		occ	occ	abt*	occ ?burnt stone, *mostly unidentified, probably intrusive
3004	2		occ	abt	abt*	abt hazelnut shell, * mostly unidentified and probably intrusive
3010/4035	5		mod	occ	occ*	*mostly unidentified root fragments, probably intrusive, occ heat-cracked stones.
3013/4027	7	occ?	abt	occ - mod	occ*	occ CBM, ?burnt clay, heat-cracked stone, * unidentified root fragments
4004	occ		mod'		abt*	occ Fe objects, occ Cu alloy slag, heat affected stones, * = probably intrusive
4012	occ			occ	abt*	occ heat affected stones, * = probably intrusive
4015	occ		abt	occ		occ fired clay, mod heat affected stones
4022	occ		abt		occ	abt heat affected stones
4023	occ			occ		heat-cracked stones
4043	occ		occ	occ		possible worked flint
4060	occ		mod	occ	occ*	occ heat-cracked stones, * = probably intrusive
4061	occ		mod	occ		occ Fe slag, heat-affected stone
5011			occ	occ	mod*	occ heat affected stone fragments, * = probably intrusive
5038	occ		abt		occ*	
5040	occ	occ	mod	occ	mod*	
5043			occ	occ		occ flint flakes
5047	occ		occ		mod*	occ heat-cracked stones
6005	occ		occ	occ		occ hazelnut shell, flint flakes, heat affected stones
6029			occ		occ*	occ seed-other, flint/chert, heat-cracked stones, * = probably intrusive
6055	occ		occ		occ*	occ flint/chert flakes, heat-cracked stones, * = probably intrusive

*Table 6: Summary of environmental remains from fully scanned samples (flot and residue); occ = occasional, mod = moderate, abt = abundant, * = probably intrusive*

context	large mammal	small mammal	charcoal	comment
4006	occ		occ	possibly worked sandstone
4010	occ		occ	occ heat affected stone fragments
4016	occ		mod	occ fired clay, occ pot, heat-cracked stones
4029	occ		occ	occ Cu alloy slag, heat affected stones
4048	occ		mod	occ heat-cracked stones
4059	occ		occ	
4062	occ		occ	occ heat-cracked stones
4063	occ		occ	occ heat affected stones
4069	occ		occ	
6003			occ	occ heat affected stones
6026	occ		occ	occ flint flake
6027	occ		occ	occ seed-other,Fe slag ?occ flint flakes, heat-cracked stones
6038			occ	occ hazelnut shell
6050	occ		occ	occ heat-cracked stone

Table 7: Summary of remains from partially scanned samples (residue only); occ = occasional, mod = moderate, abt = abundant

context	sample	preservation type	species detail	category remains	quantity/ diversity	comment
2803	Eval8	?wa		seed	+/low	
2803	Eval8	?wa		misc	+++/low	unidentified herbaceous fragments, fine roots
2803	Eval8	?wa	*Galium aparine*, *Chenopodium album*	seed	+/low	
3003	Eval1	?wa		seed	+/low	
3003	Eval1	?wa		misc	+++/low	unidentified herbaceous root fragments
3003	Eval1	ch	*Triticum* sp grain	grain	+/low	
3003	Eval1	ch	*Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	
3004	Eval2	?wa		seed	+/low	
3004	Eval2	?wa		misc	+++/low	unidentified herbaceous root fragments
3004	Eval2	ch		seed	+++/low	abundant hazelnut fragments
3010/4035	Eval5	?wa		seed	+/medium	
3010/4035	Eval5	ch	*Lolium/Festuca* sp	grain	+/low	
3013/4027	Eval7	?wa		misc	+/low	unidentified herbaceous root fragments
3013/4027	Eval7	ch		seed	+/low	
3013/4027	Eval7	ch	*Triticum dicoccum/spelta* grain, *Hordeum vulgare* grain (hulled)	grain	+ - ++/low	
4004	16	?wa		misc	+++/low	unidentifiable herbaceous root fragments
4004	16	?wa	*Galium aparine, Sambucus nigra*	seed	+/low	
4004	16	ch		misc	+/low	small unidentifiable charcoal fragments

context	sample	preservation type	species detail	category remains	quantity/ diversity	comment
4012	15	ch	*Triticum* sp grain	grain	+/low	
4012	15	?wa		misc	+++/low	fine herbaceous root fragments
4012	15	ch		misc	++/low	small unidentifiable charcoal fragments
4015	9	ch	*Triticum dicoccum/spelta* grain, *Triticum* sp grain, *Avena* sp grain, Poaceae sp indet grain	grain	+/low	quern stone hand-collected from this context
4015	9	ch	*Persicaria/Polygonum* sp, *Sambucus nigra*	seed	+/low	
4022	11	ch	unidentified wood fragments	misc	+++/low	
4022	11	ch	*Persicaria*/*Polygonum* sp	seed	+/low	
4022	11	ch	*Triticum dicoccum/spelta* grain, cf *Hordeum vulgare* grain (hulled)	grain	+/low	
4023	10	ch	*Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	
4043	17	ch	*Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	
4060	30	ch	*Triticum dicoccum/spelta* grain, Cereal sp indet grain	grain	+/low	
4060	30	ch	*Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	
4060	30	?wa	unidentified herbaceous fragments	misc	+/low	
4060	30	ch	Maloideae sp, *Quercus robur/petraea* wood, *Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	
4061	29	ch		misc	+/low	small unidentifiable charcoal fragments
4061	29	ch	*Triticum dicoccum/spelta* grain, *Triticum* sp grain, Cereal sp indet grain, *Avena* sp grain	grain	+/low	
4061	29	ch	*Atriplex* sp, *Lapsana communis*	seed	+/low	
5011	42	?wa		misc	++/low	fine unidentifiable herbaceous material
5011	42	ch		misc	+/low	small unidentifiable fragments of charcoal
5011	42	ch	*Avena* sp grain	grain	+/low	
5017	33	ch	*Quercus robur/petraea* wood	misc	+/low	
5038	35	ch	*Quercus robur/petraea* wood	misc	+++/low	all oak charcoal
5038	35	?wa	*Fumaria* sp, *Raphanus raphanistrum* (seeds), *Galium aparine*	seed	+/low	probably modern and intrusive
5040	5040	36	*Galium aparine*	seed	+/low	probably modern and intrusive
5040	36	?wa	unidentified herbaceous fragments	misc	++/low	probably modern and intrusive
5040	36	ch	unidentified wood fragments	misc	+/low	
5043	39	ch	*Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	hazelnut frags
5043	39	ch		seed	+/low	unidentified

context	sample	preservation type	species detail	category remains	quantity/ diversity	comment
5043	39	ch	*Quercus robur/petraea* wood, cf *Viburnum* sp wood	misc	+++/low	fragments oak charcoal, poorly preserved
5047	38	ch	unidentified wood fragments	misc	+/low	
5047	38	?wa	unidentified herbaceous fragments	misc	++/low	probably modern and intrusive
6005	46	ch	*Corylus avellana* shell fragment	misc	+/low	hazelnut frags
6029	59	?wa	*Galium aparine*	seed	+/low	
6029	59	ch	Maloideae sp, cf Maloideae sp, cf *Betula pendula/pubescens* wood, non-oak wood	misc	+/low	mostly small unidentifiable fragments charcoal, some non-oak
6029	59	ch	Maloideae sp, cf Maloideae sp	misc	+/low	
6055	63	?wa	*Chenopodium* album, *Galium aparine*	seed	+/low	probably modern and intrusive
6055	63	ch	Maloideae sp, *Alnus/Corylus* sp wood, non-oak wood	misc	+/low	mostly small unidentifiable fragments charcoal

Table 8: Summary of plant remains

Key:

preservation	quantity
ch = charred	+ = 1 - 10
min = mineralised	++ = 11- 50
wa = waterlogged	+++ = 51 - 100
?wa = waterlogged or uncharred	++++ = 101+
	* = fragments

7.1.4 Discussion

The composition of these samples is consistent with the early to late prehistoric phasing, in which charcoal and charred cereal crop remains are commonly found in small quantities, but hazelnut shell can be particularly abundant, especially in early prehistoric deposits. This was certainly the case in one pit fill, (3004), which is middle Neolithic in date.

A number of possible four-post structures of late prehistoric date were identified on site, from which only occasional charred wheat grains were recovered. This may imply that these structures were not definitely granaries and served another storage purpose. Preservation of charred grain is most likely to be dependent on accidental destruction of these structures by fire however, and hence absence of charred remains may only reflect an absence of fire and replacement of structural posts. Moreover, what appears to be a rubbing stone found in pit fill (4015) does indicate some grain processing on the site.

Overall, the low level of environmental remains in the prehistoric features could be the result of the excavated area not including settlement-related activity, or indicate that it occupied the margins of a settlement, where disposal of cereal crop waste was limited. There was little information to contribute towards interpretation of past diet and farming economy, but some of the material was suitable for radiocarbon dating.

7.2 Radiocarbon dating

Samples were submitted to SUERC for Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) radiocarbon dating, the results of which are summarised in Table 9 below. The full radiocarbon reports are appended

as Appendix 2. All calibrated date ranges cited in the text are those for 95.4% confidence and calibrated dates are identifiable by the prefix 'Cal' (OxCal v4.2.4).

Labratory code	Context number	Site phase	Material	$\delta^{13}C$ (‰)	Conventional Age	OxCal calibrated age (95.4% probability or 2 sigma)
SUERC 64305 (GU39241)	3004	Early prehistoric	*Corylus avellana* nutshell	-24.2 ‰	4581 ± 38 BP	3500-3100calBC
SUERC 64309 (GU39242)	5043	Early prehistoric	*Corylus avellana* nutshell	-27.7 ‰	5027 ± 38 BP	3950-3710calBC
SUERC 65620 (GU39883)	4012	Late prehistoric	*Triticum* sp grain, frag of cereal grain, FAILED – resubmitted with wood charcoal, *corylus avellana*	-25.4 ‰	2122 ± 30 BP	350-50calBC
SUERC 66207 (GU40080)	4015	Late prehistoric	*Triticum* sp, *Triticum dicoccum/spelta*, *Avena* sp, *Poaceae* sp	-22.1 ‰	2228 ± 29 BP	390-200calBC
SUERC 66208 (GU40081)	4060	Late prehistoric	*Corylus avellana* nutshell	-25.4 ‰	2172 ± 26 BP	360-160calBC
SUERC 64311 (GU39244)	4061	Late prehistoric	*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*, *Triticum* sp, Cereal sp, *Avena* sp	-23.9 ‰	2183 ± 38 BP	380-110calBC
SUERC 66202 (GU40078)	6029	Late prehistoric	Maloideae sp, cf Maloideae sp, cf *Betula pendula/pubescens*	-25.5 ‰	2507 ± 29 BP	790-540calBC
SUERC 66201 (GU40077)	6055	Late prehistoric	Maloideae sp, *Alnus/Corylus*	-27.0 ‰	2266 ± 29 BP	400-200calBC
SUERC 66206 (GU40079)	5011	Late medieval	*Avena* sp	-23.9 ‰	411 ± 26 BP	1430-1620calAD

Table 9: Radiocarbon dating results, by site phase and context

7.3 Animal bone, by Tania Kausmally

Phasing showed the presence of animal bones in contexts dating from the early prehistoric, late prehistoric and post medieval periods (Table 10).

phase	period	no. of contexts	NISP
Phase 2	Early Prehistoric	10	38
Phase 3	Late Prehistoric	29	331
Phase 5	Post Medieval	2	61
Phase 7	Undated	1	4
Total		42	434

Table 10: Animal bone fragments (by Phase)

The total of 434 very small fragments of animal bone came from 42 contexts. Of these, 246 fragments were from the environmental samples from 28 contexts. Due to the high fragmentation of the assemblage further analysis was of limited value. Only 4.83% (21/434) could be identified to species. These revealed the presence of at least two cattle, one younger (<24-30mos) with un-erupted molars (fill 4015) and one mature showing wear to a maxillary molar (fill 4061), and one sheep/goat shaft of a metacarpal fill (3013/4027), all in the late prehistoric period (Phase 3). Fragments of a cattle molar were also uncovered from a fill in an un-phased pit (6035).

None of the remains allowed any detailed analysis including fusion, metrics, non-metric traits or sexing. Butchery information was severely limited due to the nature of the material.

7.3.1 Phase 2: Early prehistoric (4000-3000BC)

A total of 38 small fragments were uncovered from Phase 2 contexts. The fragmentation was very high with the bones measuring between 4-11mm in size. All fragments were less than 20% complete. Preservation was poor with 94.73% (36/38) poorly preserved and 5.26% (2/38) of fair preservation. None of the fragments could be identified to species. A large proportion (84.21% (32/38)) of this phase consisted of very small white burnt bone, suggesting temperatures above 700 degrees Celsius, such as seen in cremation pyres and oak fire coals (Lyman 1994, 386).

7.3.2 Phase 3: Late prehistoric (800BC - AD43)

Phase 3 contexts yielded a total of 331 fragments. Fragmentation was high with the largest piece measuring 60mm and the smallest 2mm. The majority (94.26% (312/331)) were less than 20% complete. Preservation was poor with 85.20% (282/331) poorly preserved and only 6.65% of good preservation. A total of 305 fragments could not be identified to species, 18 fragments derived from fragmented cattle molars, seven from large mammal and one fragment of metacarpal from sheep/goat. The cattle dentition revealed a younger individual (<24-30mos) through fragments of unworn or un-erupted molar from (4015). One almost complete maxillary molar of cattle showed significant wear, suggesting this was from a more mature individual (4065). One metacarpal of sheep/goat was present in (6035); this was very small and may have been from a young individual. A large proportion (90.63% (300/331)) consisted of small burnt fragments. A total of 91.67% (275/300)) of these were white burnt, suggesting temperatures above 700 degrees Celsius, whilst the remaining 8.33% (25/300) were black, suggesting temperatures of 400-500 degrees Celcius. It is possible some of the black fragments were remains of burnt wood rather than bone. The assemblage was too fragmented to identify any cut marks or helical breaks. Only one fragment of long bone from a larger mammal has evidence of parallel surface knife marks consistent with skinning activities (4061). No sexing data was available for observation.

7.3.3 Phase 5: Late medieval to post-medieval (16th to 19th century)

A total of 61 fragments were uncovered from post-medieval contexts, all subsoil layers. Fragmentation was high with fragments measuring between 39mm and 60mm. All were less than 20% complete and were deemed fair or poor in preservation. A total of 24 heavily fragmented ribs of medium mammal were uncovered from (4001) but the remaining fragments could not be identified. None of the fragments from this period were burnt. There were no butchery marks, and measurements or sexing was not possible.

7.3.4 Discussion

The assemblage was heavily fragmented and consisted predominantly of white burnt bone fragments and a very small number of identifiable fragments of cattle and sheep/goat. The high number of burnt fragments, which were very small, do not inform on the nature of the site. It was, however, possible to conclude that no burning was present in the post medieval assemblage and only appears to be a feature of prehistoric activity in the area.

The animal bone assemblage is of very little value as a comparative with contemporaneous sites of the region, as there is simply insufficient information to draw any significant conclusions.

8 Synthesis

Multiple phases of activity were evident within the excavated area but, apart from plough furrows and modern services, the features were entirely identified as pits and postholes.

Small and shallow pits were typical of the early prehistoric period of activity, and probably early to middle Neolithic in date. These pits were dispersed, but were clustered in two main groups and often found as pairs. Larger and deeper pits that included multiple infill deposits, or postholes in structural arrangements, provided a range of Iron Age dates, from the 8th century BC to the 1st century AD. These features define the late prehistoric period of activity on the site.

8.1 Early prehistoric

Overview

The pits considered to relate to the early prehistoric phase occupied an 80m by 30m area, situated on the sand and gravel natural substrate less than 60m from the watercourse of the Wesley Brook. All of these were small in size and an irregular oval or sub-circular shape in plan (ranging from 0.56m to 1.45m in diameter; average 0.89m), being characteristically shallow (ranging from 0.07m to 0.46m in depth; average 0.20m) and often with a single-event, homogenous fill. It is possible that the two main pit clusters identified, the western and eastern groups, are of varying dates as indicated through the scientific dating, although the limited other dating evidence recovered means that this remains inconclusive.

Truncation from agricultural activity is potentially a factor in the shallow survival of these features and, as a result, may have also affected the amount of dating evidence recovered. In a number of cases only the very base of a pit was revealed whilst a large sherd of Peterborough ware pottery and numerous flint pieces of early prehistoric date were found in subsoil and topsoil, or residual in Iron Age features across the excavated area. Some of these had probably originated from within discrete features that have been partially or wholly truncated, although others may have been deposited on the Neolithic ground surface or within middens and subsequently been dispersed by ploughing or other post-depositional processes. These all confirm the presence of an important Neolithic component to the site, even if this was small-scale and ephemeral. It is perhaps of consequence, therefore, that there appears to be a lack of any activity during the Bronze Age; it may be that landscape had lost its earlier importance and had become entirely agricultural, with initial truncation beginning at this time, before Iron Age activity further truncated and disturbed the remains of the Neolithic phase.

Pits and society in the Neolithic

Neolithic pit groups such as those identified here, although a relatively rare find in the region, are regularly paralleled nationally. Certainly numerically, but also in terms of survival of evidence of cultural material, pits are now shown to be the dominant indicator of Neolithic activity across Britain (Garrow 2012, 218), and are recognised as a class of evidence integral to any understanding of society and culture during the 4th and 3rd millennia BC (see, for example, Thomas 1999, chapter 4; Lamdin-Whymark 2008; Anderson-Whymark and Thomas 2012). This is in many ways a direct result of an increase in archaeological knowledge brought about by large scale development-led projects across the country, but is also due to a wider change in theoretical ideas relating to what feature types reflect the cultural unity of the early prehistoric populace (see Garrow 2012, 217).

Pits of this date are generally small and bowl-shaped, demonstrably unsuitable for storage of plant foods in a damp climate and rarely exhibit signs of weathering or natural silting (Thomas 1999, 64-66; Thomas 2012, 2). Rather, as demonstrated here at Shifnal, they appear to have been infilled rapidly, either with a single homogenous fill or successively deposited layers, suggesting that their primary use was to be excavated and then filled in, possibly being created so as to facilitate specific depositional acts (Thomas 2012, 2). This deposition often involves an infill comprised of burnt material, be that charcoal or other organics, and a selection of artefacts that appear, in general, unrepresentative of used tools or everyday waste (Thomas 1999, 64-66). This has led to the interpretation that these features represent more than just ordinary waste receptacles, perhaps being used as explicit acts of an organised, ritualised digging process so to demonstrate ownership or control over an area of land through collective and remembered social activity, or even as a deliberate marker to represent the formalised beginning or end of a specific life cycle for individuals, buildings or settlements (Thomas 2012, 3-9). They typically occur in isolation or small clusters and are often thought to be the fragmentary remains of occupation in the vicinity; settlement evidence of this period rarely includes certain evidence of buildings and it is likely that contemporary domestic structures were ephemeral with limited, or no, earthfast components (Thomas 1999, 64; Garrow 2012, 217-218).

A number of the characteristic features identified in comparative studies are identifiable in this instance. The excavated pits are not thought to represent permanent settlement and are characteristic of non-intensive temporary activity. The presence of burnt material, as evidenced by the charcoal inclusions, charred hazelnut shells, very small and occasional fragments of calcined bone and the heat-cracked stones, but a lack of indicators for *in situ* burning, suggests that they are unlikely to have served as hearths (Thomas 1999, 64). Equally, none were lined with clay or other sealing material that could demonstrate that they were used for storage, and, as noted above, the majority of the pits were small and shallow with unweathered edges. The size range (average diameter 0.89m and average depth 0.20m) correlates particularly well with comparative studies for the size range of Neolithic pits elsewhere. For example, in a study of depositional practices in the middle Thames Valley, Lamdin-Whymark illustrated that pit features associated with Peterborough ware pottery had an average diameter of 0.91m and an average depth of 0.29m, all containing between one and three fills (2008, 101-102). Thomas (1999, 64-66) has also demonstrated the small number of fills in Neolithic pits when compared with Iron Age examples, something immediately apparent in the pits at Shifnal.

The instances of paired pits within the eastern grouping are also of note, especially in the almost exact correlation in size and shape in a number of cases. A lack of secure dating evidence is problematic, but the similarities in profile and deposition are strongly suggestive of contemporaneity in creation and infilling. The presence of a hammerstone and a piece of quartz in one of these paired arrangements may hint at selectively deposited items. In the absence of complex fill sequences, or noticeable weathering to the sides, it is probable that these were open for a limited period of time, perhaps with each pairing representative of a separate event of short duration. This would be consistent with a wider economic pattern of seasonal occupation reflecting a society defined by population mobility and short-term sedentism, rather than permanent agricultural settlement (see Thomas 1999, 7-11; Whittle 1999, 63-65).

Slightly incongruous with the patterns highlighted here was the larger and deeper pit in the eastern group that contained slumped natural sand as an initial fill and irregularly placed large packing stones in the upper part (also including a used tool – the axe polishing stone), although it did exhibit burnt material with charcoal and heat-cracked stones in the middle fill. It is possible therefore that this feature may be a deliberate exception to the trend; it could have been a socket for a large post or a stone, rather than a pit. If this feature is considered to be a post socket, then it is tempting to suggest that it acted as a marker for successive, temporally discrete, episodes of pit-digging activity, a stable reference point for the paired pits in the vicinity. The axe polishing stone (*polissoir*) is a particularly interesting and important find and may hint that there was a special place within the landscape here. These are often associated with significant locales. Beyond the possible hammerstone in a nearby pit however, there was little indication of specifically placed or selected artefacts in the features on the site and it could be that this polishing stone had actually just been opportunistically re-used and incorporated into the packing deposit.

Regional frameworks

Regionally, the pits identified here form part of a growing body of evidence that demonstrates that the west midlands area was a landscape of Neolithic activity comparable to other areas of the country, but that is so far largely devoid of examples of the classic funerary monuments seen elsewhere (Ray 2007, 51-53; Jackson and Ray 2012, 144-145). Pits are the most prominent Neolithic feature of the area, which is characterised by the riverine terrace systems and associated floodplains of the Rivers Severn and Wye, and it is often the case that Neolithic activity is concentrated at or near river confluences or along the courses of minor streams (Jackson and Ray 2012, 144). A particularly relevant parallel is found with two pit groupings of early and middle Neolithic date along the Wellington Brook in Herefordshire to the south, where a number of examples were clearly paired and of comparative size (Jackson and Miller 2011). It would appear, therefore, that the early prehistoric pit features here at Shifnal fit comfortably into a similar model, being situated in close proximity to the Wesley Brook. Perhaps of significance is the reported discovery in 1934 of a Neolithic polished stone axe 2km to the south of the site, also in the vicinity of the same brook (Section 4.2); it is difficult to avoid an immediate association between this and

the portable axe polishing stone found on site (see also Chitty 1972 for details on Neolithic finds in the wider area around Shifnal). In general, the sourcing and distribution of stone axes within the west midlands is currently poorly understood (Garwood 2011, 43), so the recovery of a portable *polissoir* is significant, being a rare occurrence.

In Shropshire, a recent regional study by Jackson and Ray (2012) incorporating the south of the county found evidence for only two Neolithic pits, at Bromfield near Ludlow (Stanford 1982). Further to the north, pits containing middle Neolithic Peterborough ware have been discovered in association with later Bronze Age funerary activity at Meole Brace and at Sharpstones Hill, both near Shrewsbury (Hughes and Woodward 1995; Barker *et al* 1991). Similarly, at Morville Quarry, close to Bridgnorth, a possible pit was recorded during trenching that included a small collection of middle to late Neolithic pottery sherds of the Peterborough ware tradition (Hurst and Bretherton 1999). It is thus evident that whilst Neolithic pits are known within Shropshire, they are not a common occurrence, and that those here at Shifnal add significant new information to the knowledge base regarding early prehistoric Shropshire.

8.2 Late prehistoric

Overview

There was no evidence of any activity falling between the Neolithic and Iron Age periods, although the site was clearly a desirable location as it was again utilised in the late prehistoric period. This pattern of re-establishment or sequence of intermittent exploitation upon favourable sites during the prehistoric period in areas of lowland Shropshire has previously been identified by Carver (1991, 5-6). As noted above, although there is an absence of Bronze Age activity, it is possible that the site was subject to cultivation and truncation in the interim. Shifting settlement patterns appear to have protected the later Iron Age features from a similar impact until at least the late medieval period, perhaps even the post-medieval and modern period.

The pits and post structures considered to be of late prehistoric date were spread across a 105m by 25m area, were broadly dispersed and, as with the earlier period, were not indicative of intensive occupation. Rather, the small quantity of finds, the low level of intercutting features, an absence of enclosure or field system ditches, and the non-continuation to the north, suggests that the excavated area lies on the northernmost edge of an unenclosed settlement, or outside the boundaries of an enclosed site. The core area is likely to have existed to the south and south-east, probably occupying the gravel terrace along the edge of the Wesley Brook.

Radiocarbon dating produced a range of dates, from the 8th century BC to the 1st century BC, but suggested the focus of activity was in the mid to late Iron Age (400BC onwards) with only one clear outlier to this in the six dates secured. It is possible that activity continued into the early Roman period, although the pottery evidence for this was very slight. The limitations of site stratigraphy and pottery remains ensure that no separate periods of activity or sub-phases could be established within this range and this is further compounded by the broad date ranges produced by radiocarbon dating within this period.

Features from this phase are noticeably larger and better preserved when compared to the early prehistoric; pits also included multiple infill deposits (up to seven, but an average of three) and, although relatively limited, more artefactual and ecofactual evidence. The postholes were typically lined with stone around one edge and these formed structural arrangements.

Posts and pits

The postholes are considered to define the presence of four-post structures; even where only two or three posts were identified this is felt to reflect truncation of the remaining posts. Although they are each almost square in plan there is variation in the projected footprint occupied; this ranged from approximately 5.80m², up to 8m² in area. Two were at the lower end of this range, two towards the upper. As could be expected, posthole size appeared to increase proportionally with the size in footprint of the structure. Associated elements were defined by external small post or

stakeholes. These additional posts were located on the south-west corner of two structures and are considered to represent either external repairs, or the locations of access ladders/steps.

Previous interpretations have proposed the function of four-post structures to have been shrines (Downes 1997), lookout towers (partly because they are usually at the edge of settlements; Ellison and Drewett 1971) or domestic structures (Moore 2003), but these are more commonly recognised as raised granaries (as discussed in Gent 1983). Storing grain in structures above ground is primarily to keep it dry and above water inundation, but also to prevent germination and protect from vermin attack, and means that small amounts of grain can be accessed and removed on a daily basis. Small numbers of these structures are commonly found on lowland settlement sites, although particularly extensive arrays of these features have been uncovered through large open area excavations across riverine gravel terraces on quarry sites, such as Horcott Quarry in Gloucestershire (Oxford Archaeology 2009) or Clifton Quarry in Worcestershire (Mann and Jackson forthcoming). The four-post structures at Clifton are especially significant in demonstrating their use as granaries due to the quantities of charred grain recovered. Only a limited amount of grain was noted here at Shifnal - emmer/spelt wheat, oat and hulled barley grain - but preservation of grain is dependent on material becoming burnt as a result of accidents during processing or destruction of the structures by fire before incorporation of charred material into the postholes, and therefore the limited grain may only reflect small qualities of charred material being present in the vicinity of the structures.

A broad focus of Iron Age pits was evident in the western part of the excavated area and the size of some of these features suggested a possible use as storage, perhaps associated with, or serving a function at variance from, the post structures nearby. However, in general, there was very little evidence for their primary function, such as a lining or basal dumps of charred grain. Charred cereal remains were recovered from pits in small amounts, and one did include a broken quern fragment, but this and many of the other infill deposits were more indicative of disposal of general burnt and organic waste. One in particular suggested that a dump of broken up daub, possibly from a nearby four-post structure, had been included. It may be that a number were specifically dug out for waste dumping, to keep rubbish away from a core area of settlement, and there were some indications for longevity of use or at least being open long enough for weathering to occur. The presence of four-post structures lends support to this inference of a division of space; the layout of the (assumed) settlement could be a product of practical necessity, such as an attempt to limit the exposure of the storage areas to fire within and around domestic areas. This may also explain the widely dispersed spread of the post structures.

Due to the lack of domestic structures within the excavated area, the nature of the settlement is not altogether evident, but the presence of four-post structures and absence of stock enclosures or boundaries in the surrounds imply that economic activity was, to some degree, based on arable cultivation within an unenclosed landscape. It is also possible the site was within a local landscape where land pressure was not significant enough to require formal delineation of the settlement area. Although the site showed no indication of being enclosed, it may have been defined in ways that are not archaeologically visible, such as hedgerows, perhaps in combination with the Wesley Brook. This is likely to have formed a natural boundary to the south and thus required only the formation of small boundaries on the other sides to define its limits. The use of river bends and brooks as field or territorial boundaries has been suggested elsewhere, particularly to the south, at Iron Age sites along the Severn and Avon valleys (eg Dinn and Evans 1990; Mann and Jackson forthcoming).

Regional frameworks

The Iron Age evidence from Shifnal is compatible with an emerging picture of a spread of enclosed and unenclosed settlement activity across both lowland and high ground in Shropshire and the neighbouring counties, dating from the 5th century BC through to the 2nd century AD (see Wigley in press). These most likely formed discrete, localised clusters of settlement linked to each other through economic and social transactions, connected to a wider network of hillforts, the closest of which to Shifnal is at The Wrekin, 11km to the west. Nearby sites of possible Iron Age settlement

include an enclosure excavated at Castle Farm 2.5km to the west (Roe 1991) and numerous cropmark sites closer to the River Severn that are thought to represent Iron Age enclosures. Castle Farm was similarly associated with the Wesley Brook, which probably offered a varied combination of accessible resources for the local inhabitants, and appeared to date to the late Iron Age into the early Roman period. The fragmentary early Roman pottery from a couple of the features here at Shifnal may suggest a continuity of activity that is comparable to both Castle Farm and other sites of the same date, such as Bromfield (Stanford 1985), 41km to the south-west, and Sharpstones Hill (Barker *et al* 1991), 25km to the west.

There are suggestions from the southern reaches of the wider Severn valley that large areas began to act as specialised production centres for the cultivation of cereals in the Iron Age (eg at Clifton and Ryall; Mann and Jackson forthcoming, Barber and Watts 2008), where large-scale cultivation took the place of a mixed farming system. It is possible that similar practices developed through the mid to late Iron Age in Shropshire along the upper Severn valley, of which Shifnal is at the edge, creating surplus product to provide a means for the inhabitants to trade and acquire other materials at a time when other regional production zones were being developed.

8.3 Late medieval onwards

It is apparent that following the end of the Iron Age period the site reverted to an undeveloped agricultural landscape. This may reflect abandonment or shifting of settlement in the decades following the Roman conquest. There is no evidence for activity on the site again until the late medieval period when a large pit was dug out, probably within an open field system. Aside from the insertion of a modern service trench system, the plough furrows demonstrate that it was only agriculture taking place on the site from at least the late medieval period until the current programme of site investigation.

9 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication:

An archaeological project (strip, map and record) was undertaken across approximately 0.6ha of land off Haughton Road, on the northern edge of Shifnal in Shropshire (NGR SJ 747 088). It was commissioned by Paul Clark and Paul Chadwick of CgMs Consulting, acting on behalf of their client Bovis Homes Limited.

Multiple phases of activity were evident across the site but, apart from plough furrows and modern services, the majority of features comprised pits and postholes thought to be of prehistoric origin. Few were securely dated during the fieldwork stage, with only limited and in many cases very fragmentary pottery present. However, in post-excavation analysis, a programme of radiocarbon dating identified two distinct phases of activity; Neolithic and Iron Age.

Small and shallow pits with few fills were typical of the early prehistoric period of activity. These pits were dispersed, but clustered in two main groups, and were often found as pairs. Two pits produced early and middle Neolithic radiocarbon dates of the 4th millennium BC and numerous others compared well in size and survival to these pits. Artefacts of early/middle Neolithic date included flint, Peterborough ware pottery and worked stone, including the significant discovery of a stone axe polisher (polissoir). Although small-scale and ephemeral, the pattern of earlier prehistoric pit digging suggests that the area was an important locale during the Neolithic, one that was perhaps returned to on numerous occasions.

Larger and deeper pits that included multiple infill deposits, or postholes in structural arrangements, demonstrated a range of Iron Age dates, from the 8th century BC to the 1st century AD. In a number of instances residual flint was present that was typologically Neolithic in origin (eg a transverse arrowhead), confirming the presence of the earlier phase. It is considered that the Iron Age features represent the northern edge of a wider spread of occupation, activity that perhaps

continued into the early Roman period. This phase was also attested by a small quantity of pottery and briquetage, worked stone associated with grain processing, and large quantities of daub likely to have come from one of the four-post structures within the excavation area.

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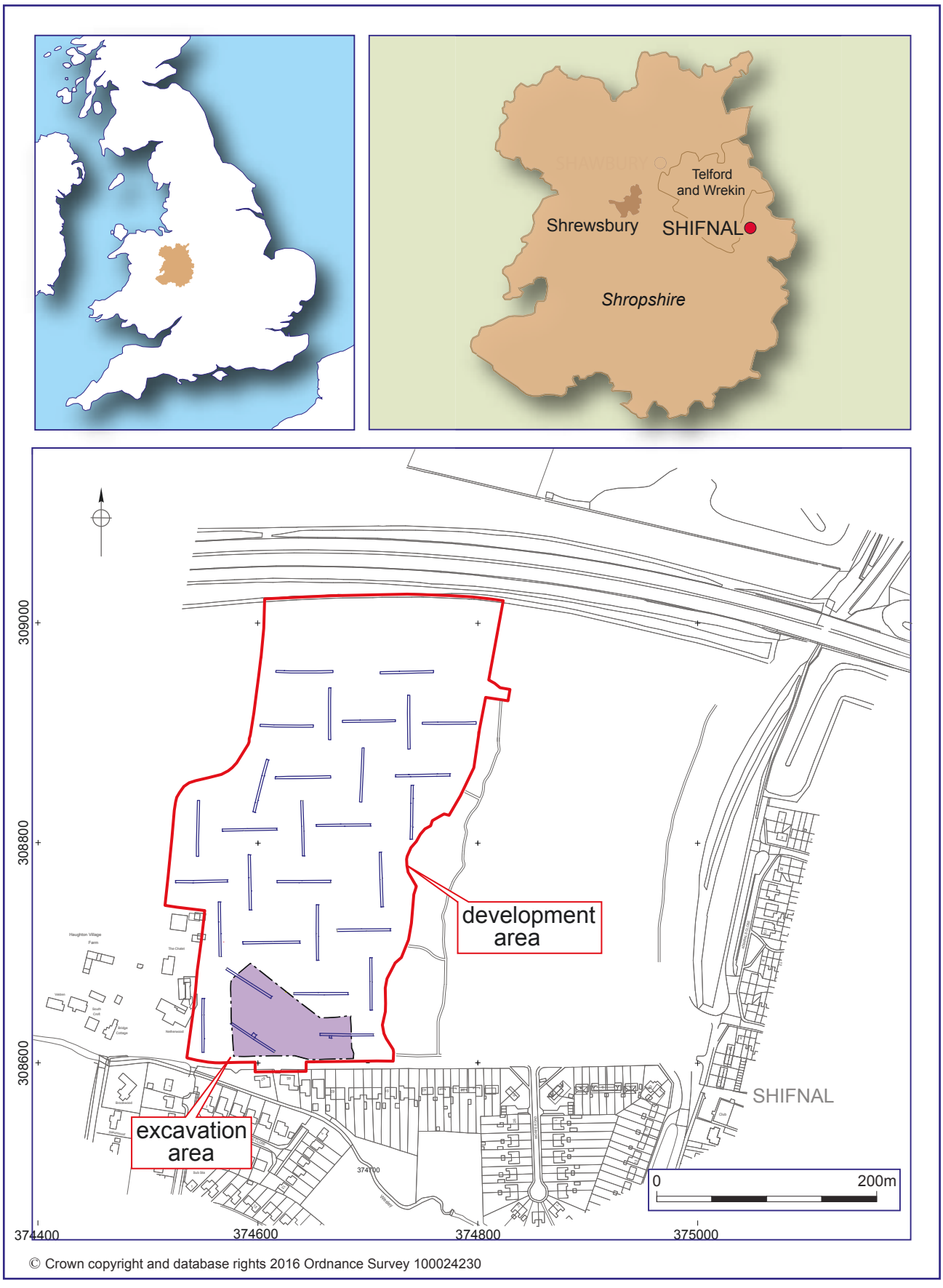
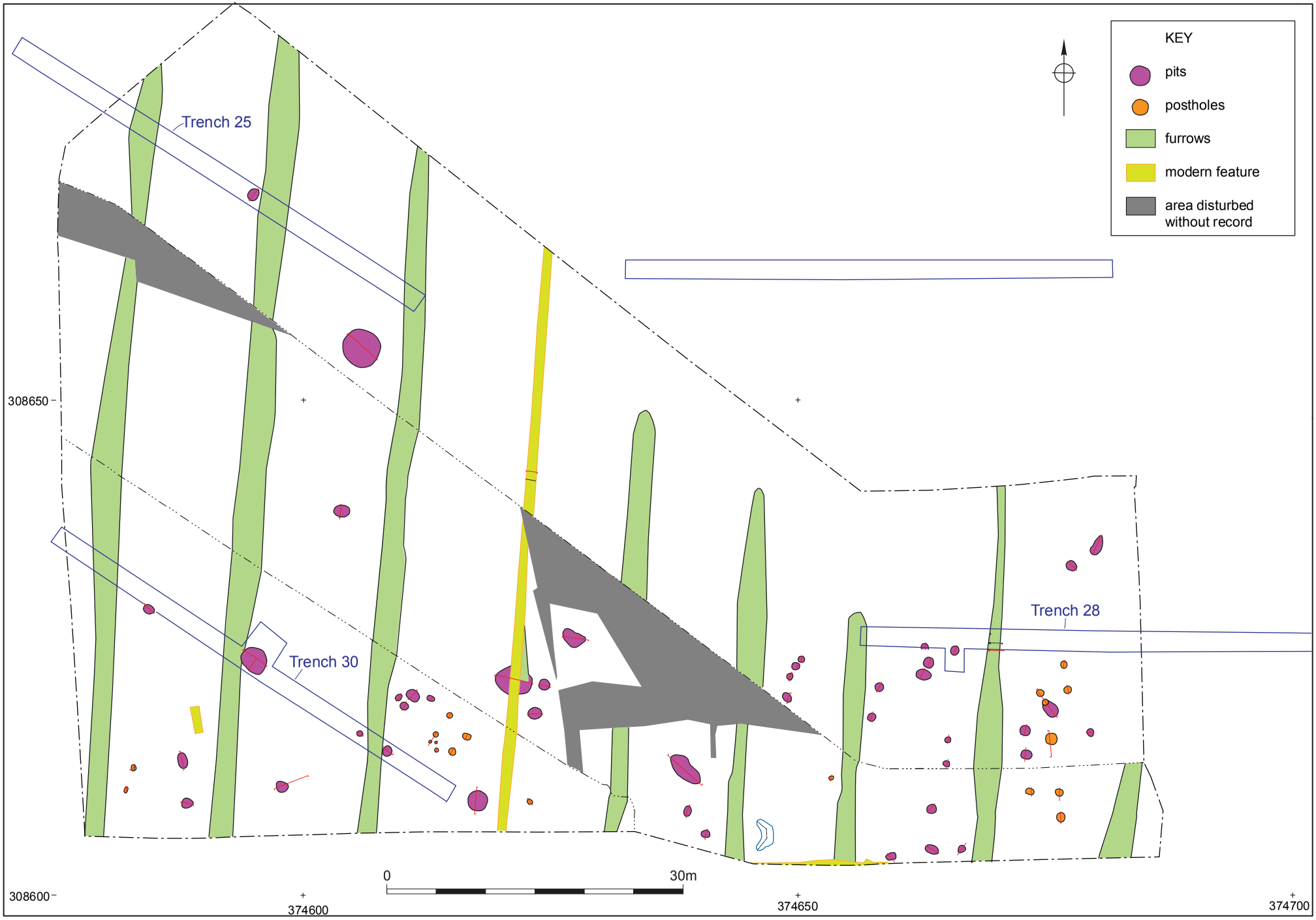
Figures

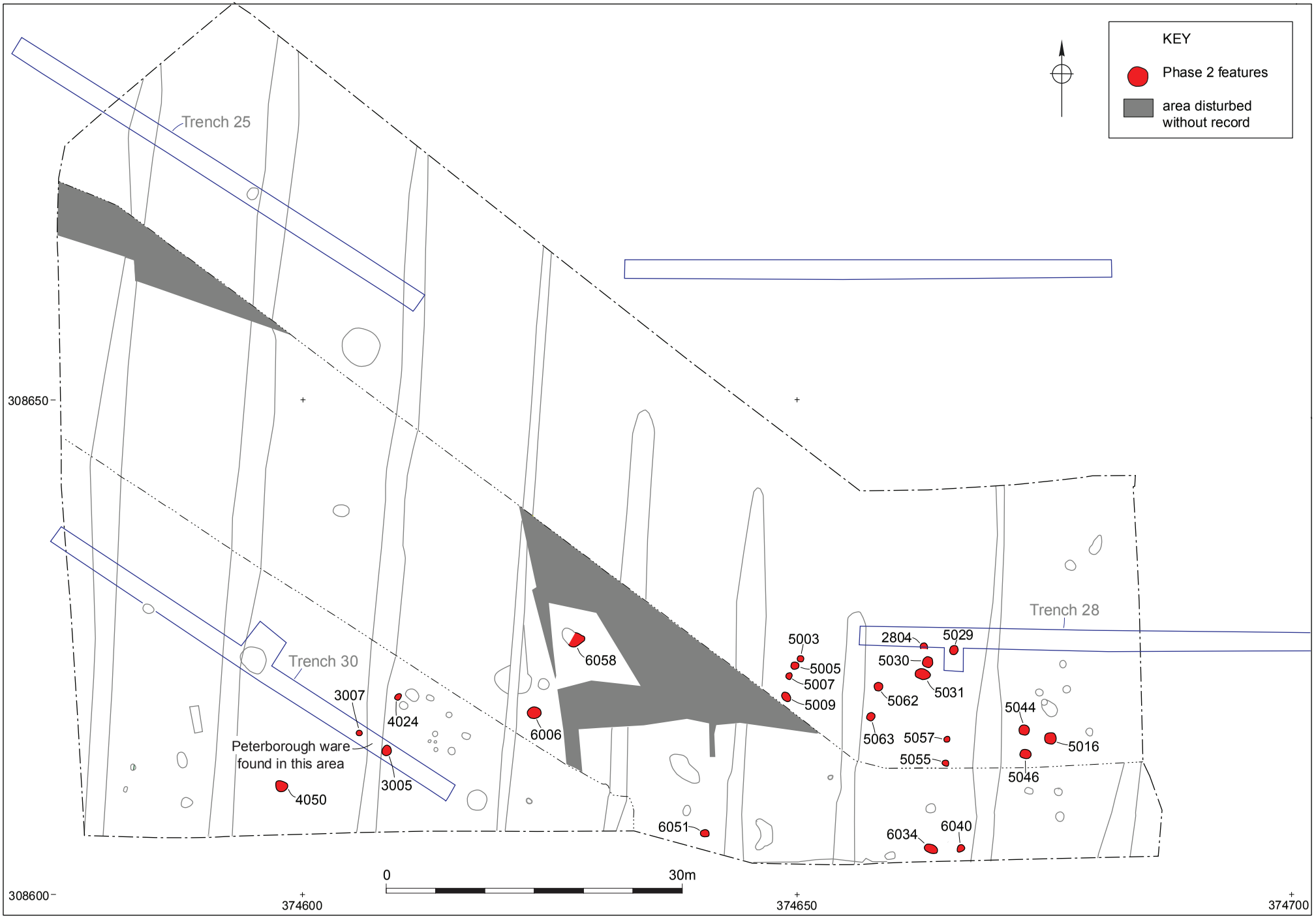


Location of the site *Figure 1*



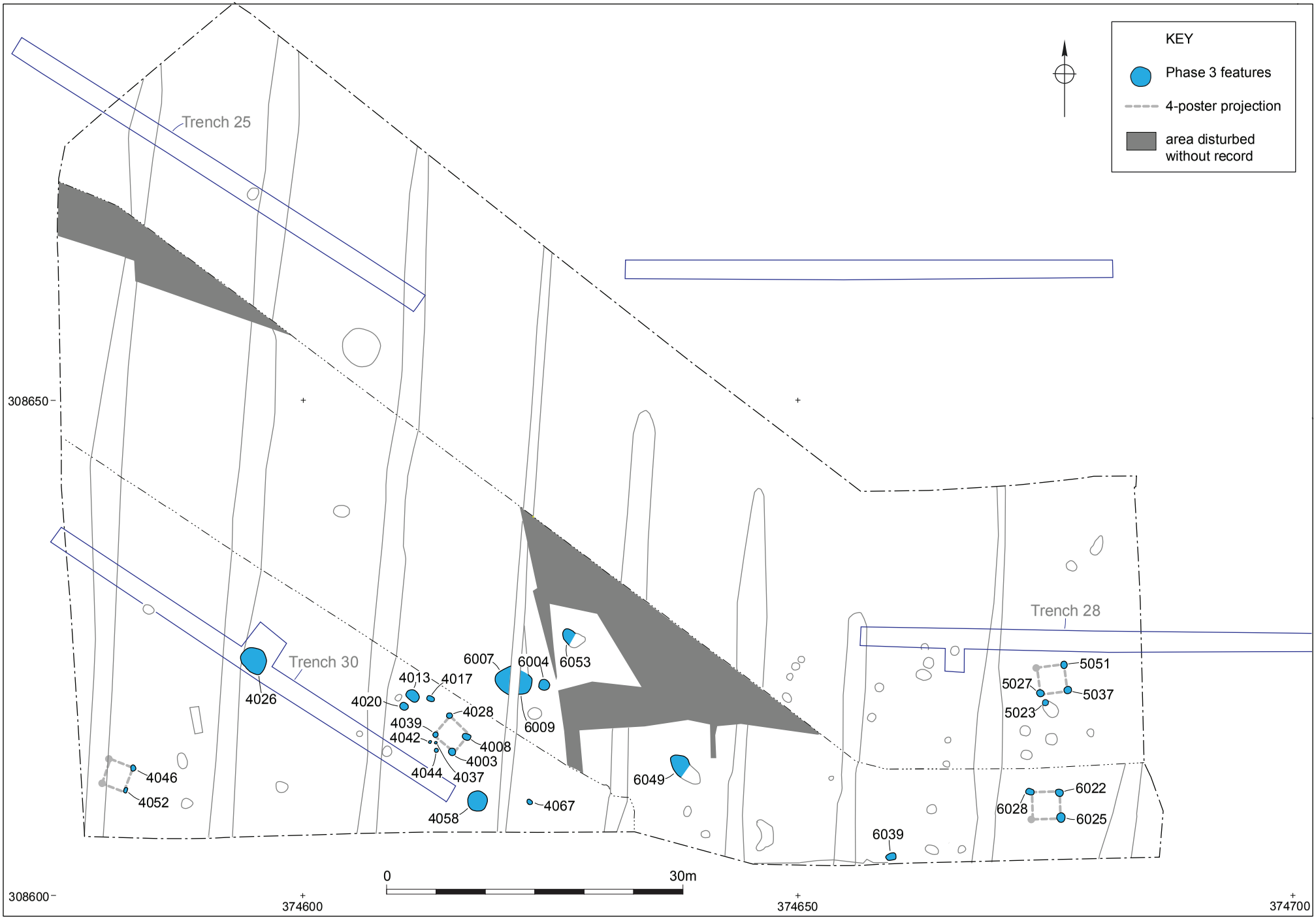
Excavation area with all features

Figure 2



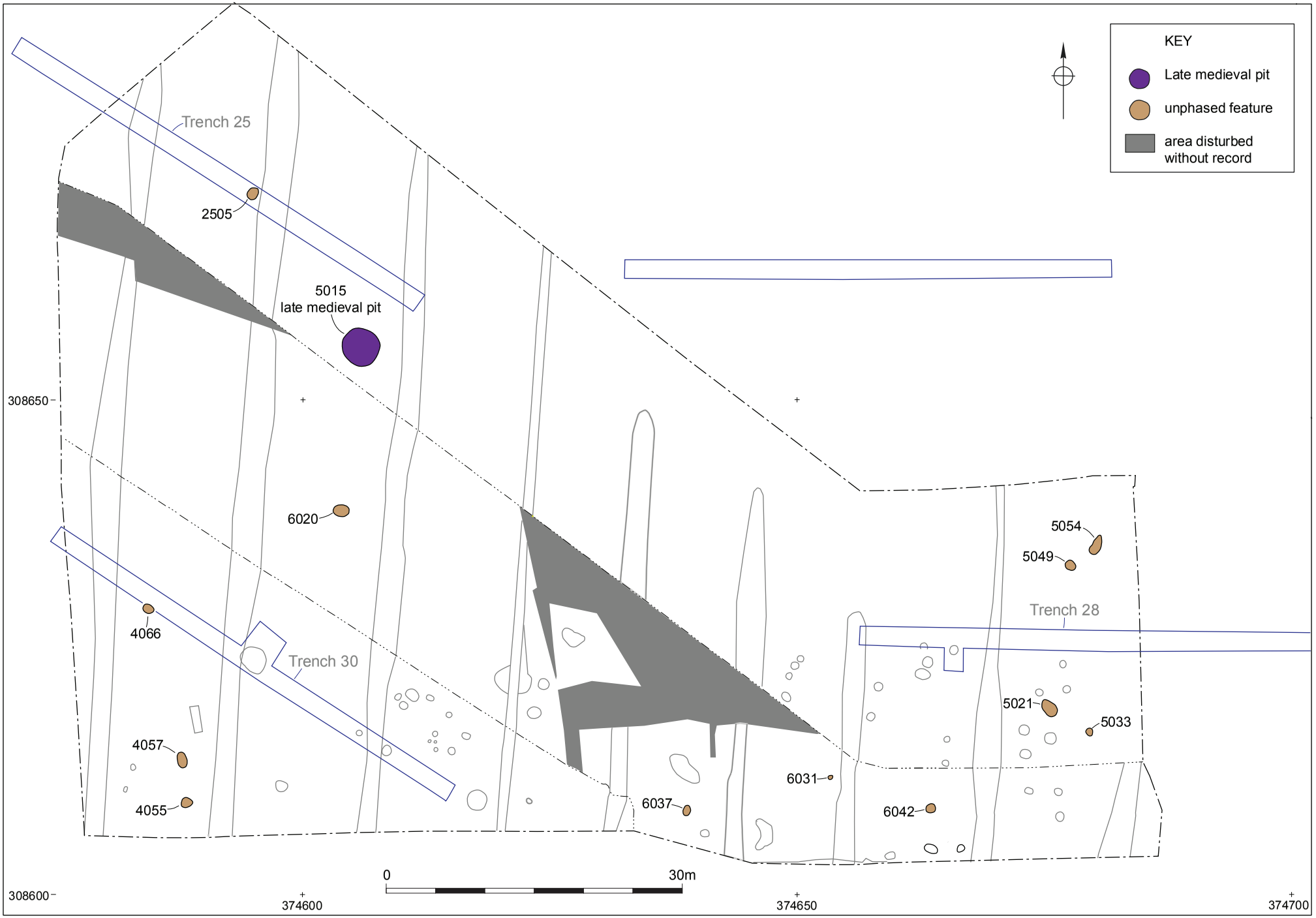
Phase 2: Early Prehistoric features

Figure 3



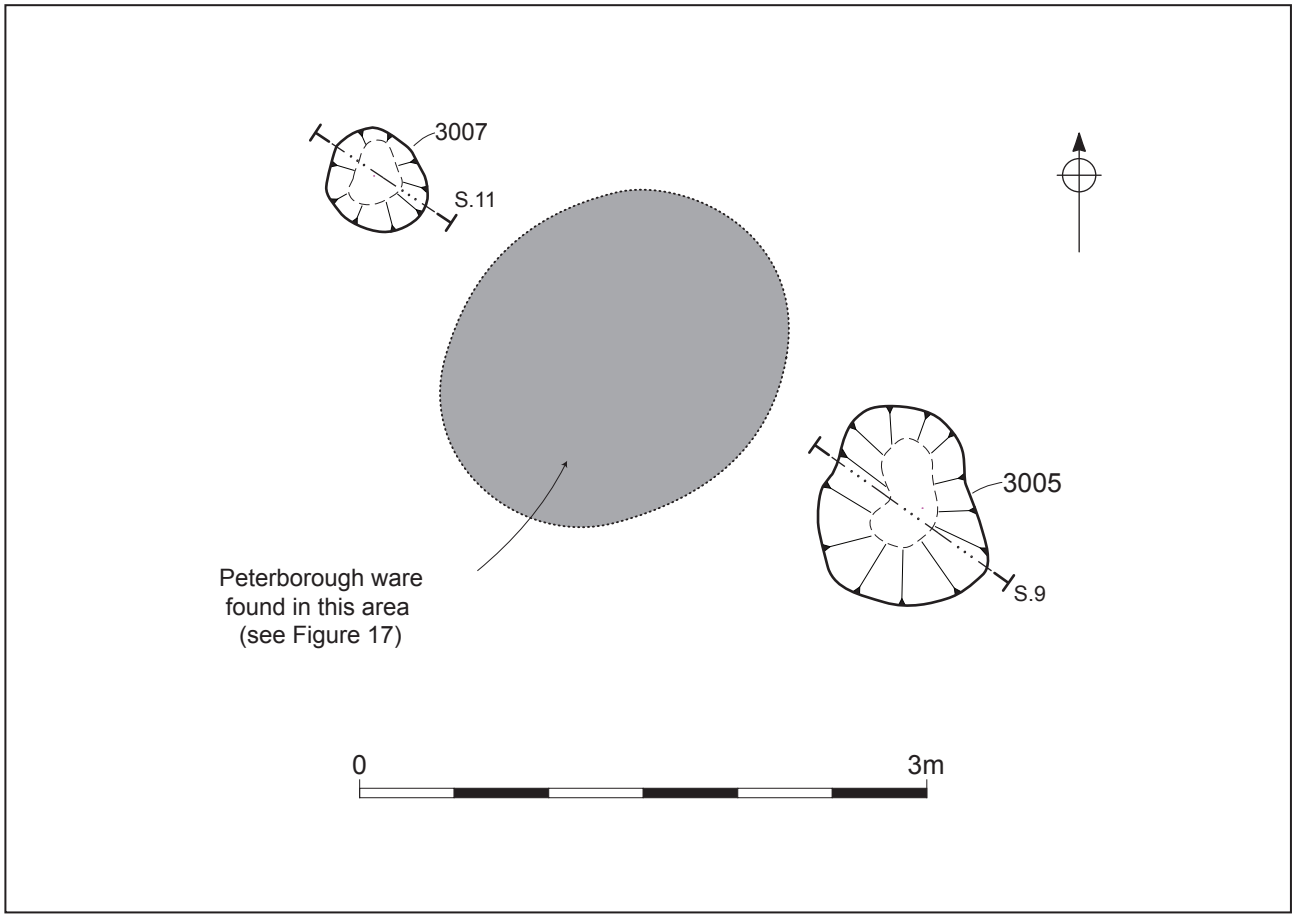
Phase 3: Late Prehistoric features

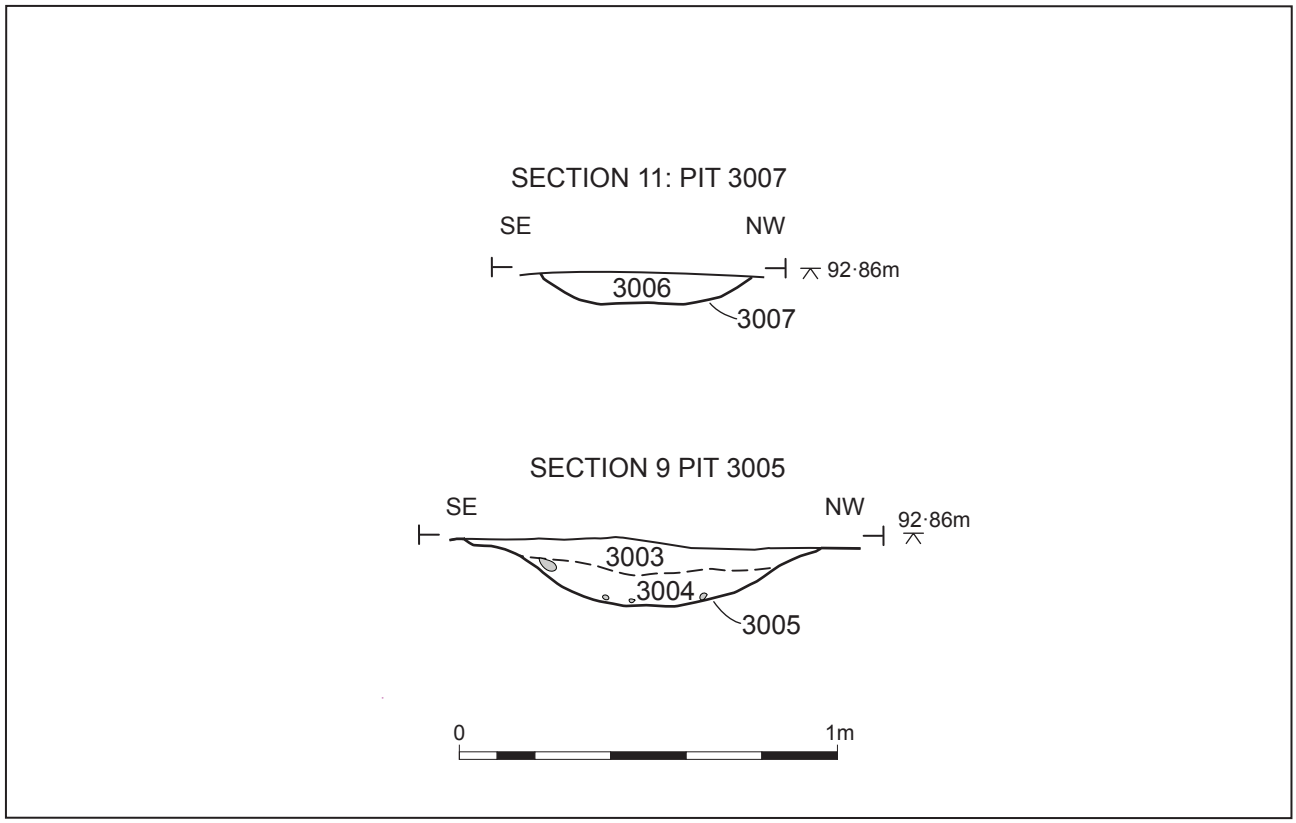
Figure 4



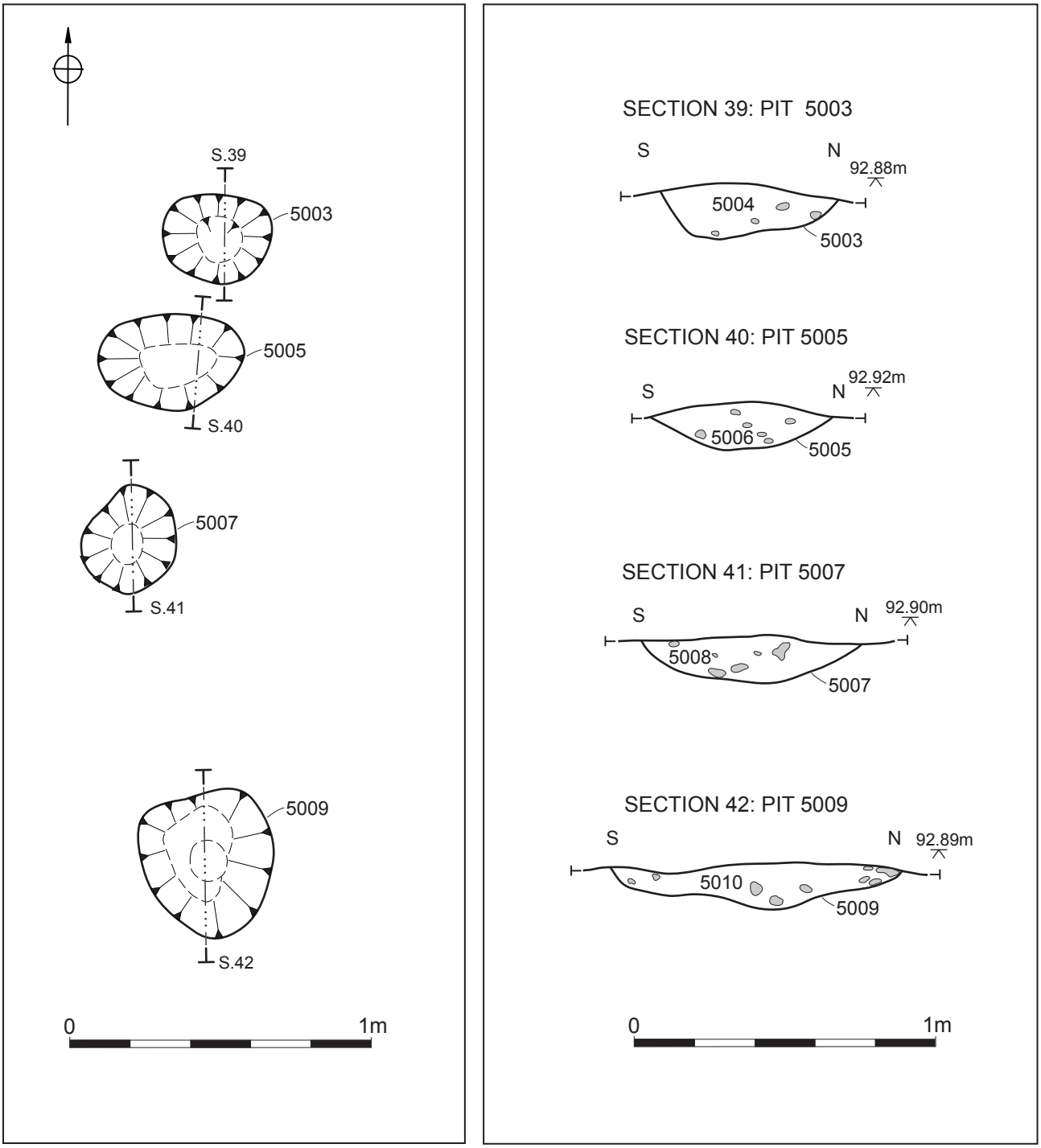
Unphased features and late medieval pit

Figure 5

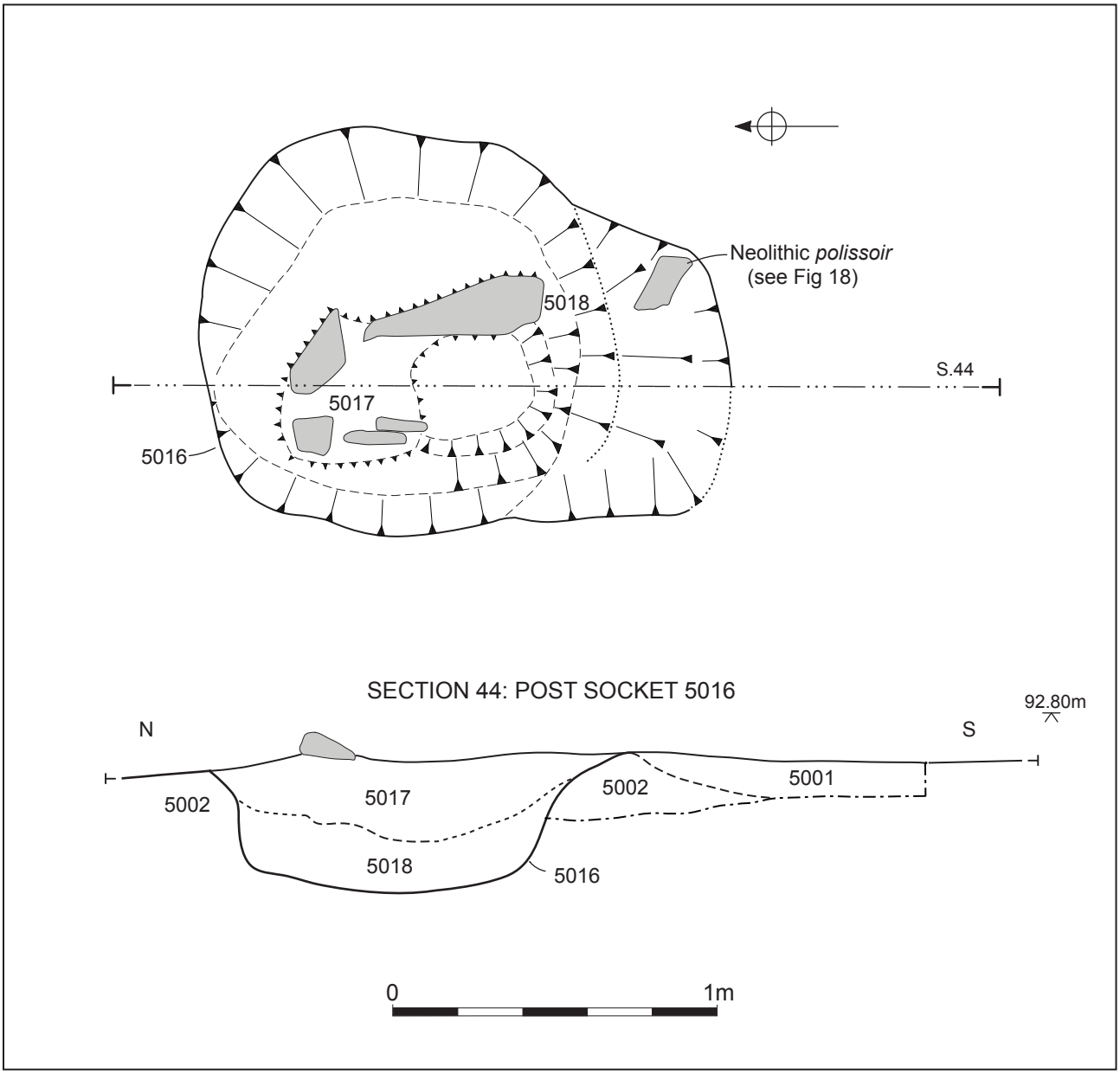




Early Prehistoric pits 3005 and 3007 in Trench 30: plans and sections *Figure 6*

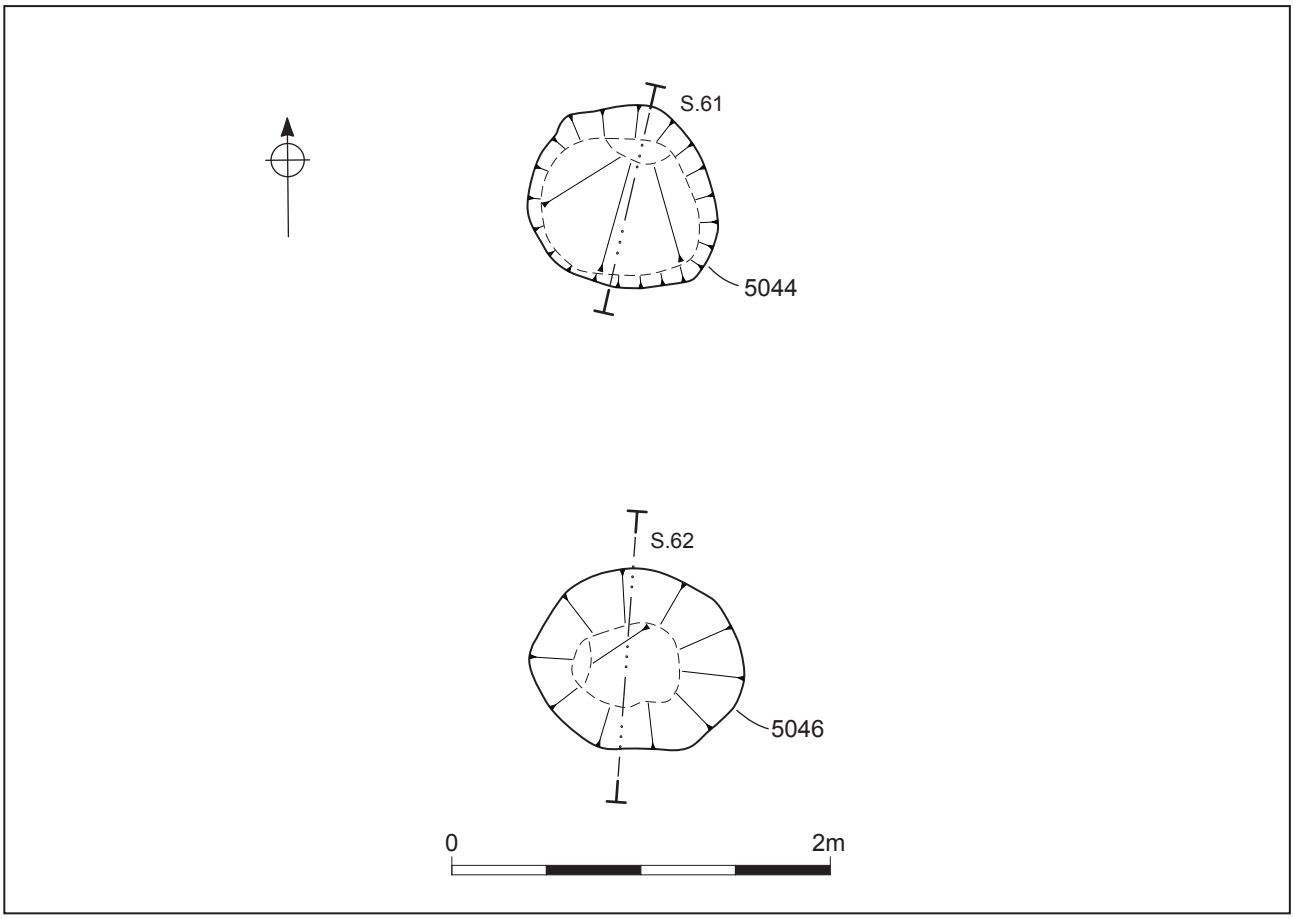


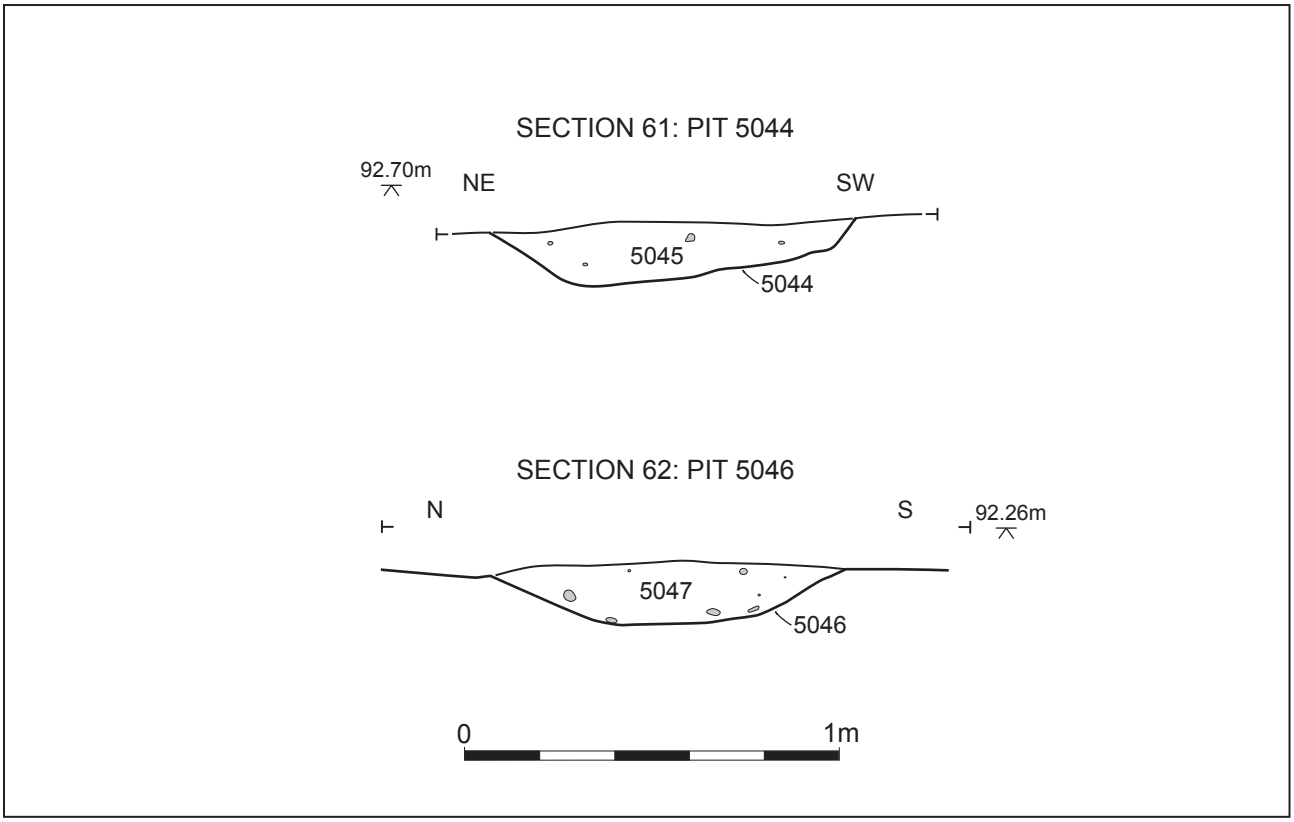
Early Prehistoric pits 5003, 5005, 5007 and 5009: plans and sections *Figure 7*



Early Prehistoric post socket 5016: plan and section

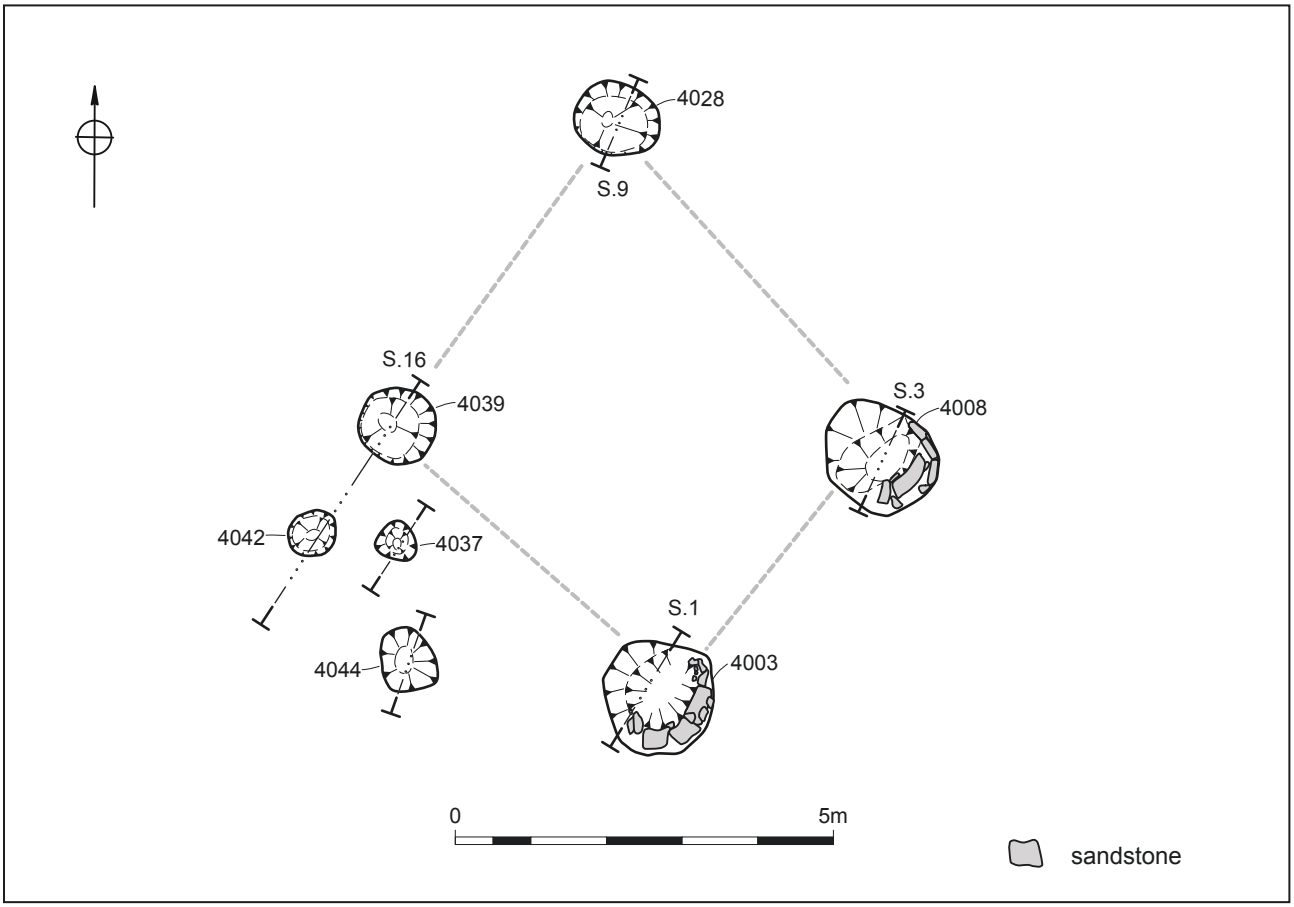
Figure 8

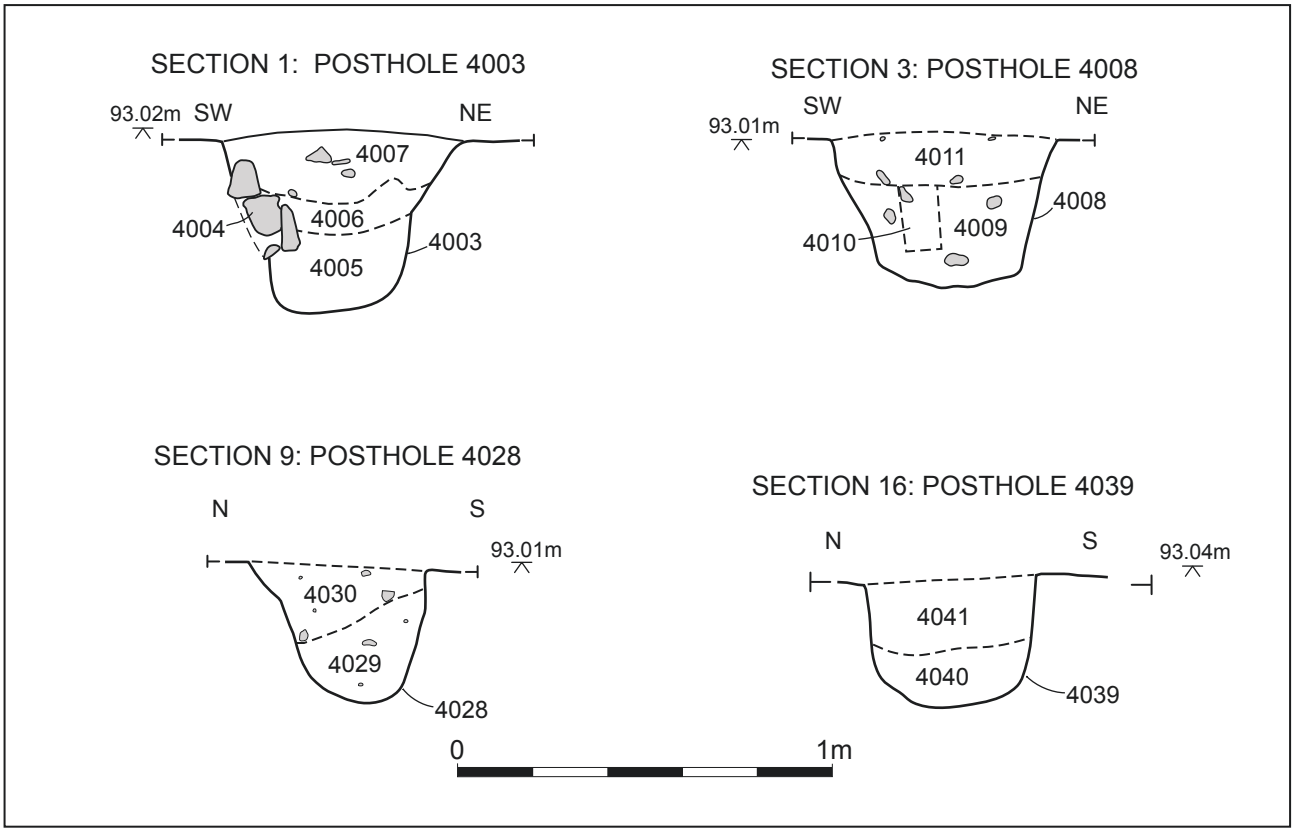




Early Prehistoric paired pits 5044 and 5046: plans and sections

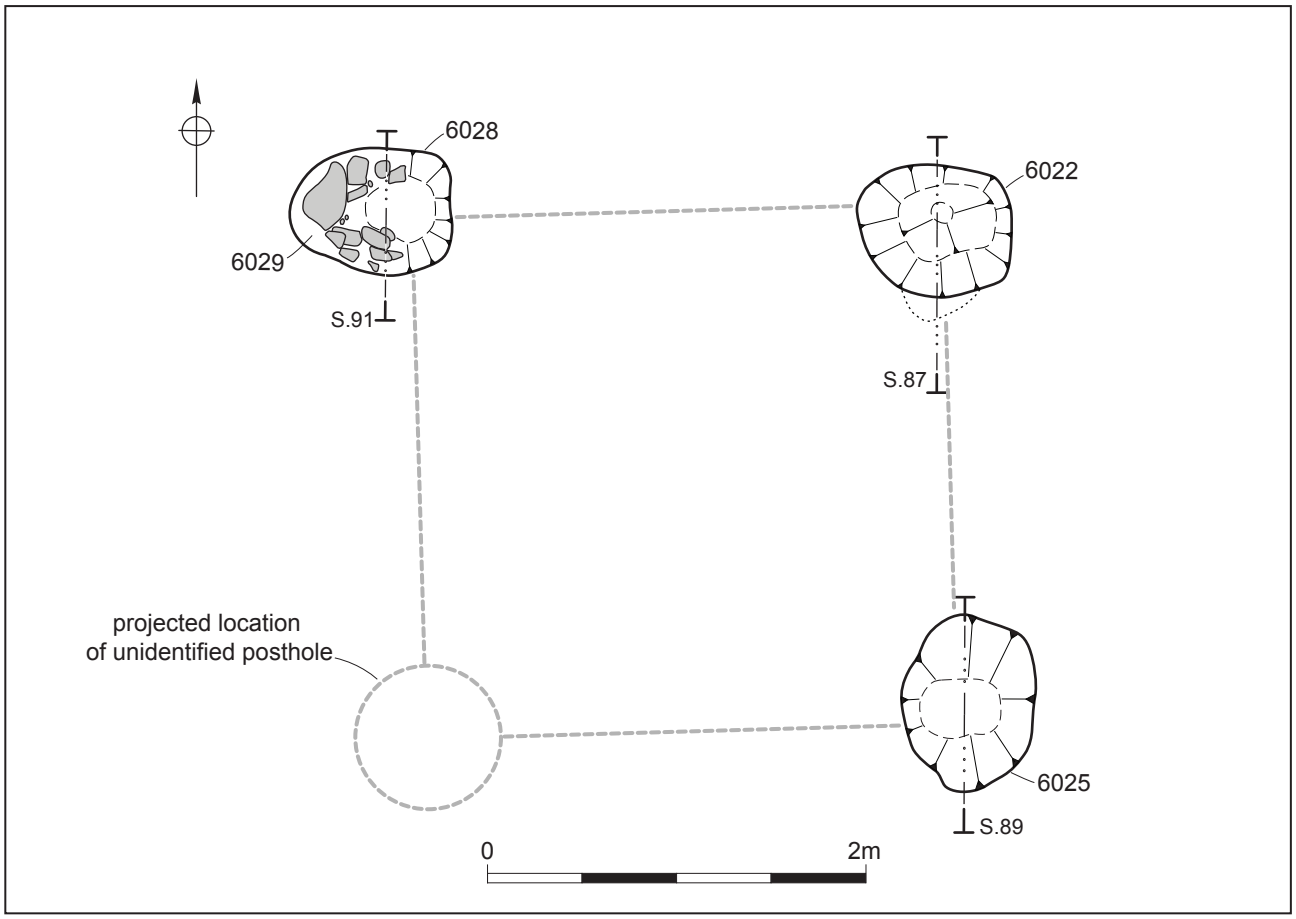
Figure 9

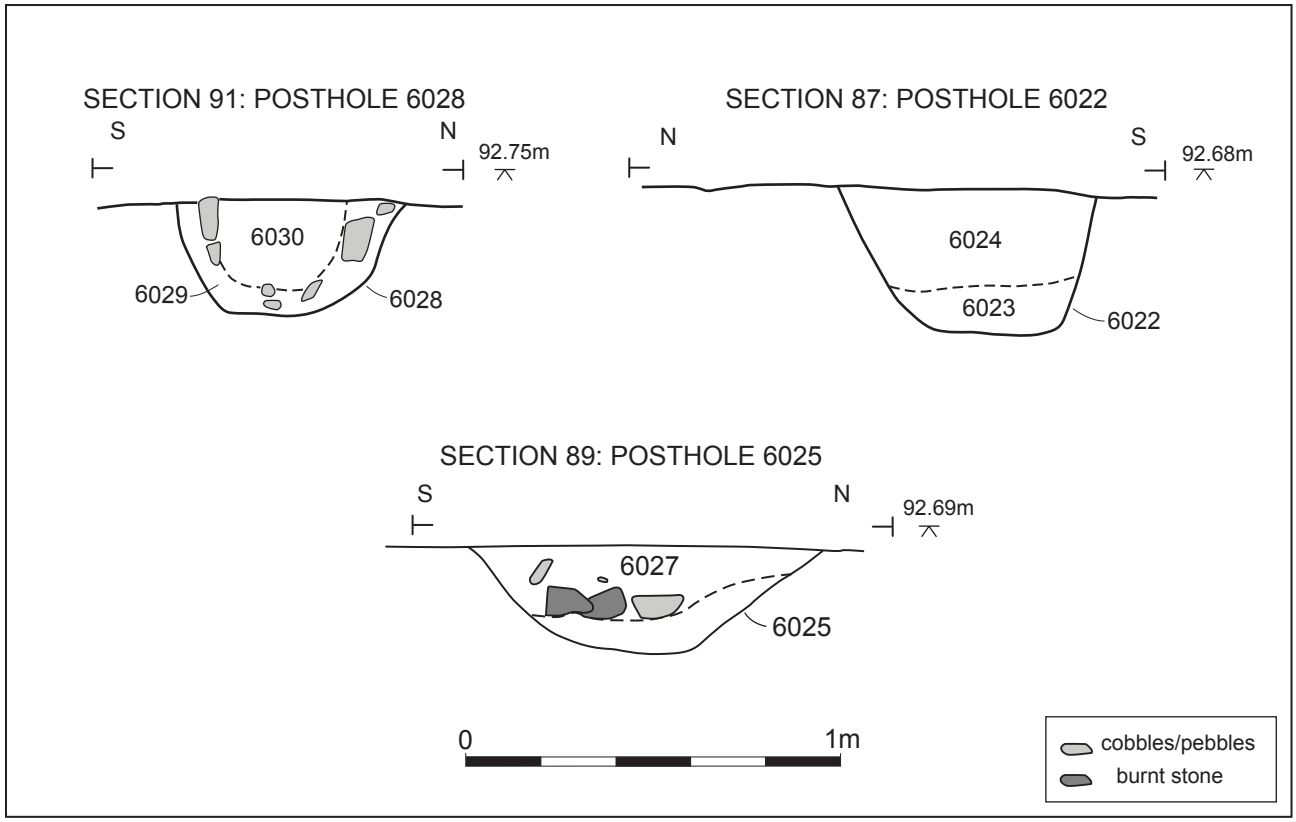




Late Prehistoric four-poster: plan and sections

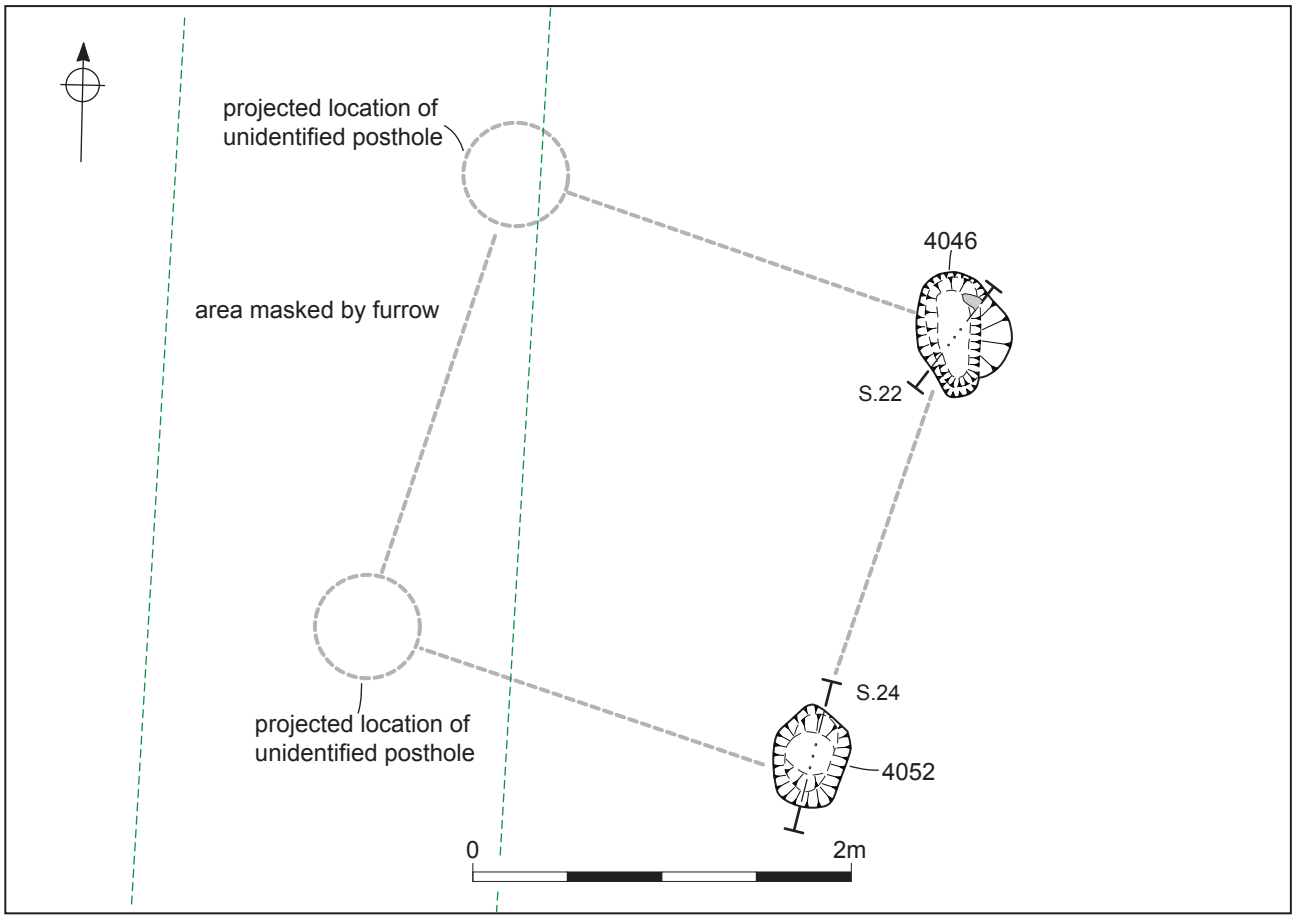
Figure 10

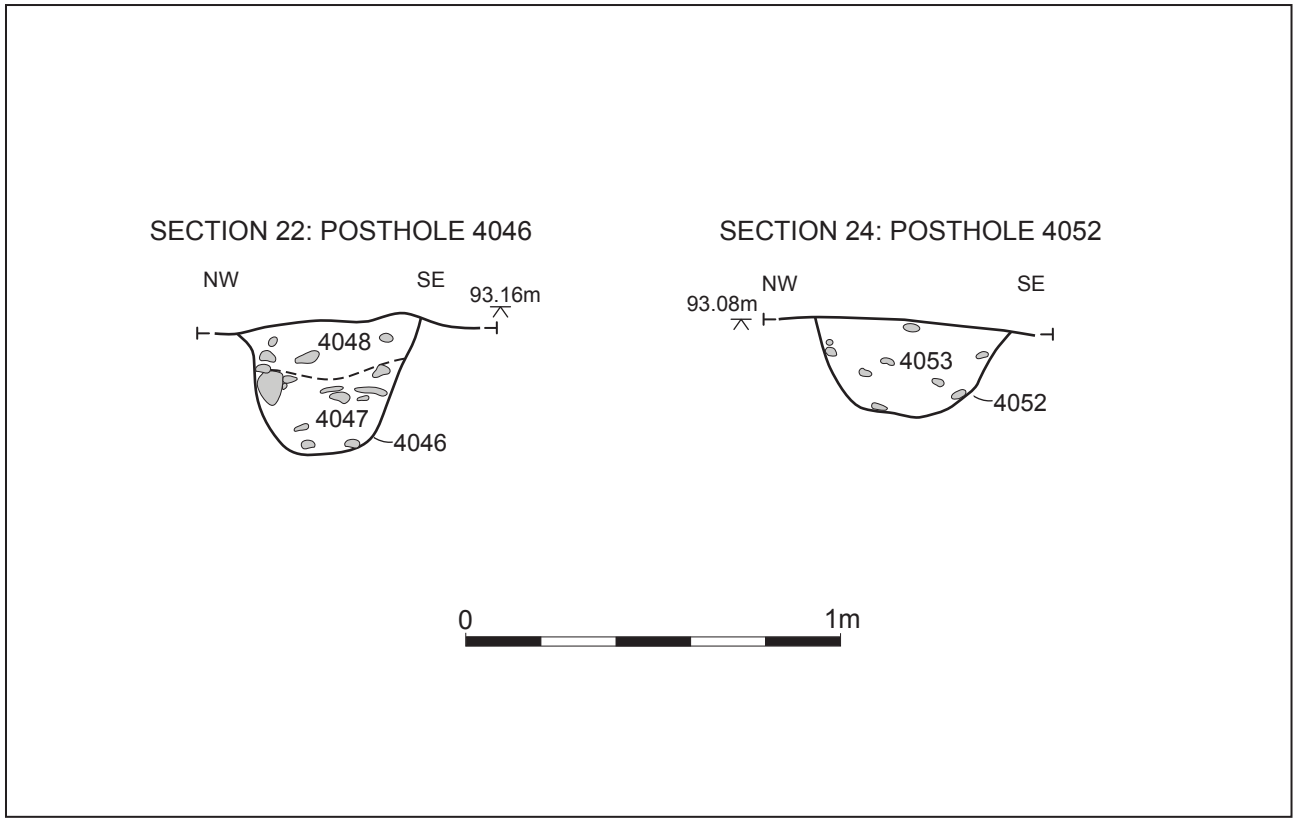




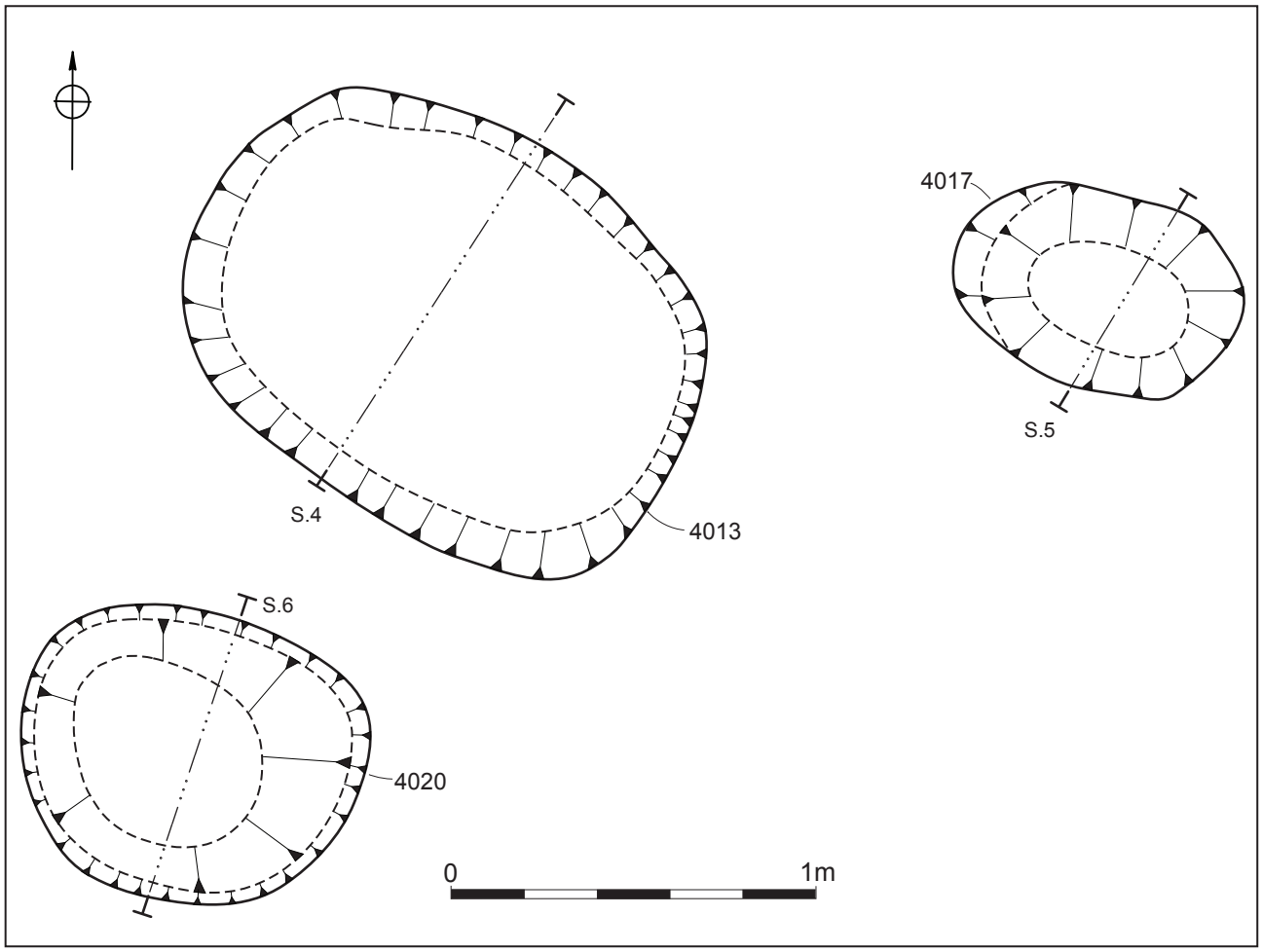
Late Prehistoric possible four-poster: plan and sections

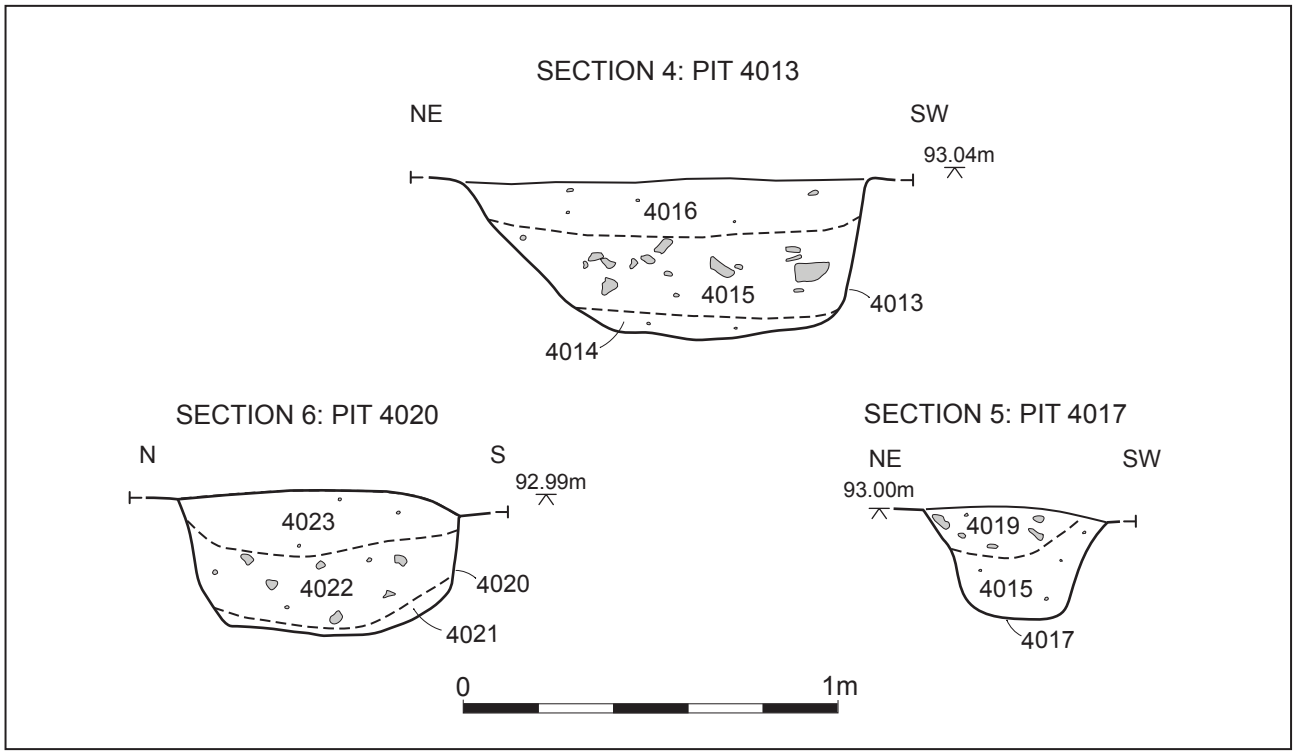
Figure 11





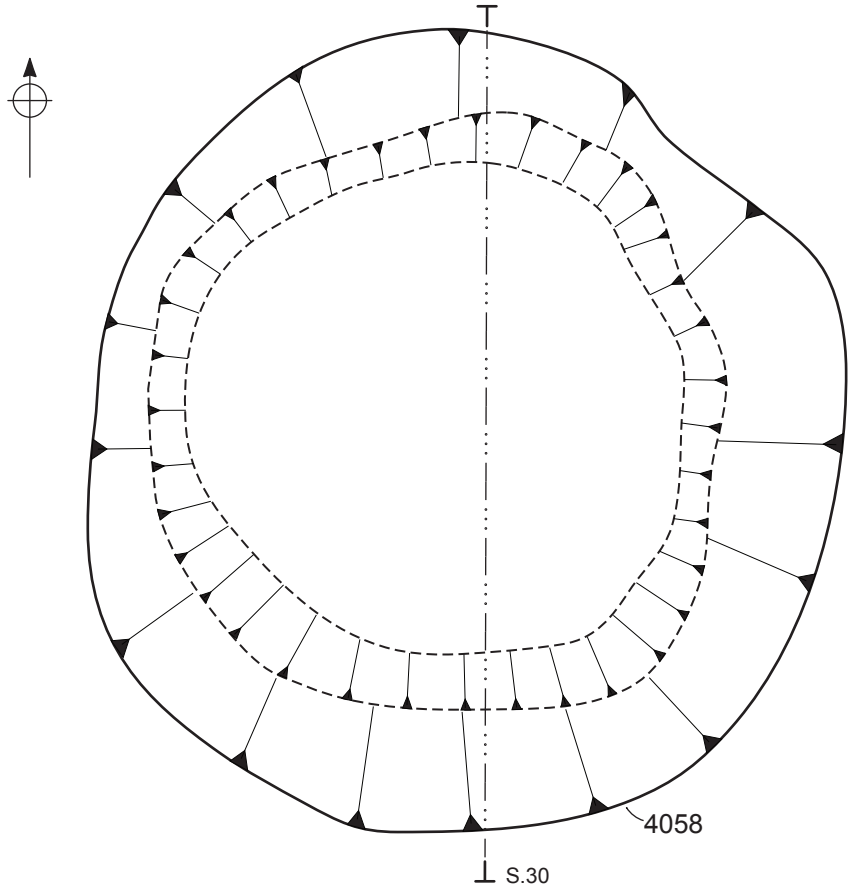
Late Prehistoric possible four-poster: plan and sections *Figure 12*



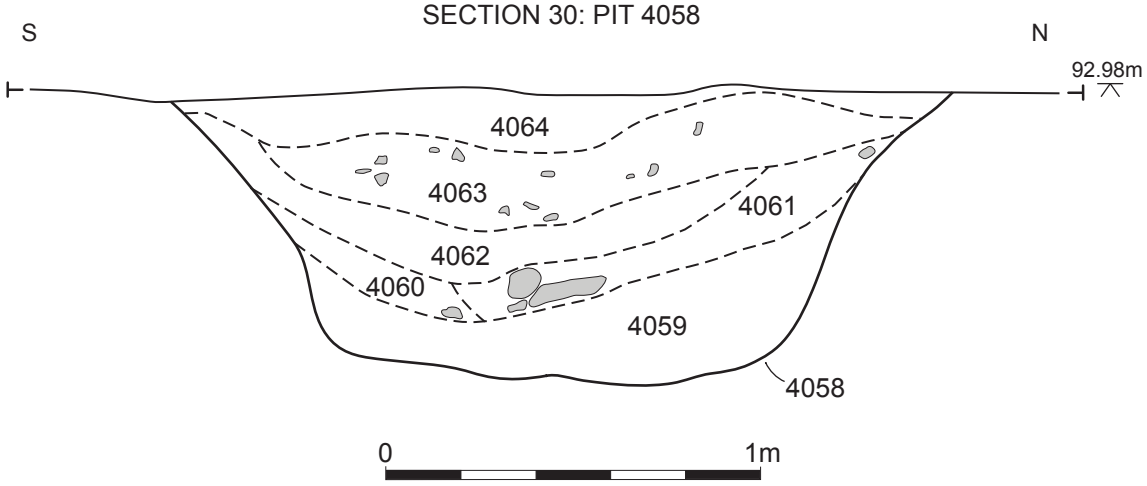


Late Prehistoric pit cluster 4013, 4017 and 4020: plans and sections

Figure 13

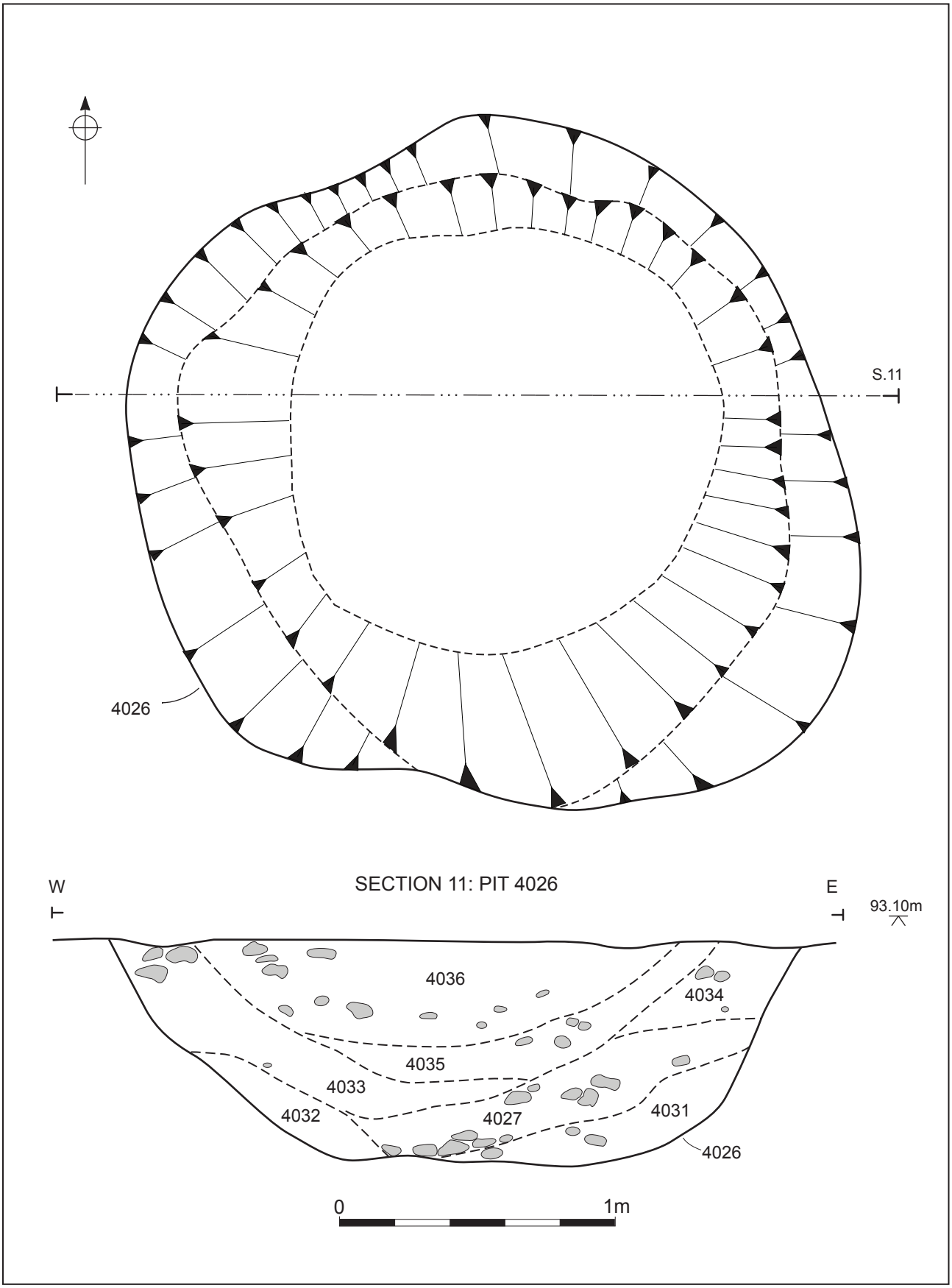


SECTION 30: PIT 4058



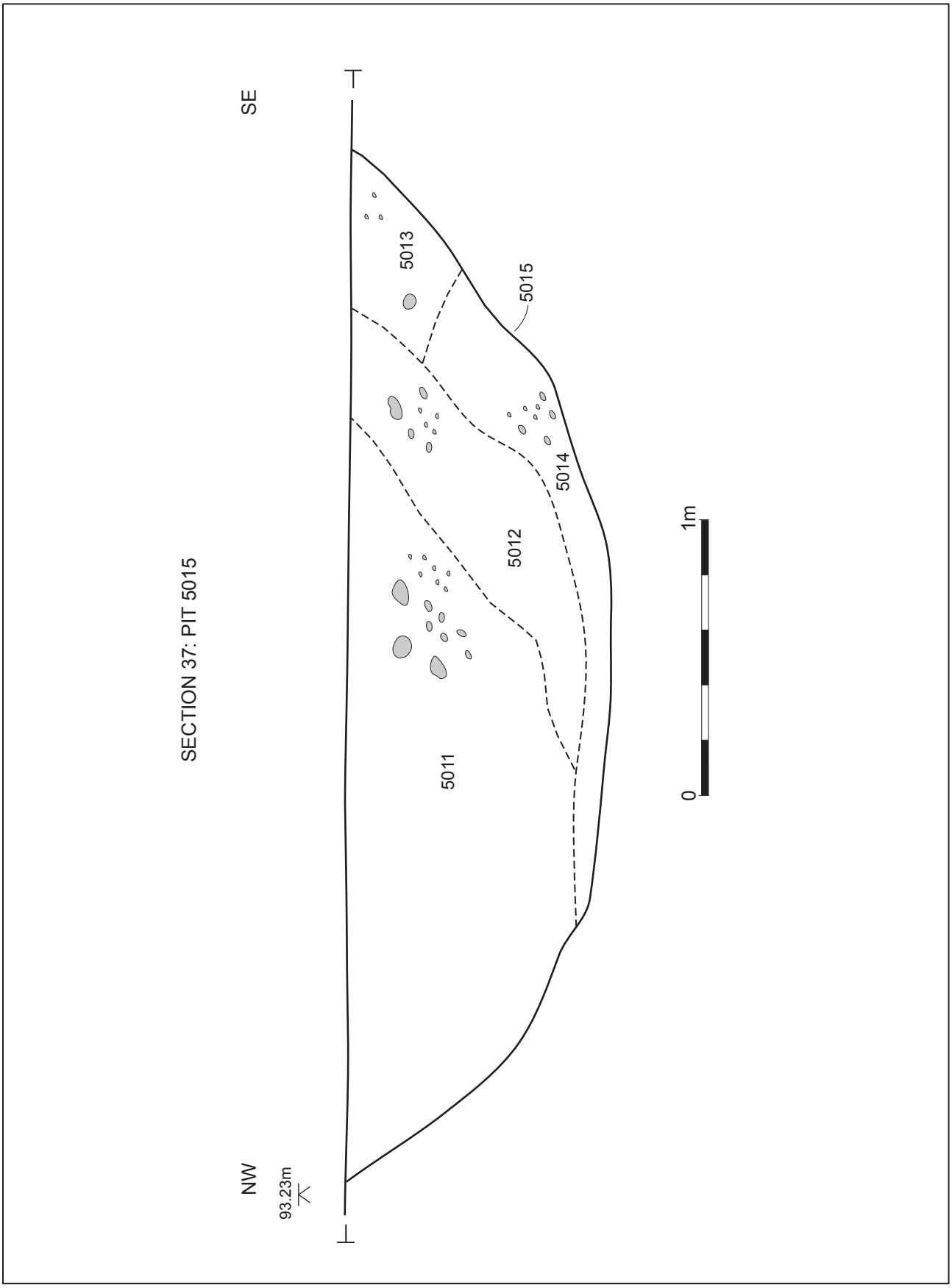
Late Prehistoric pit 4058: plan and section

Figure 14



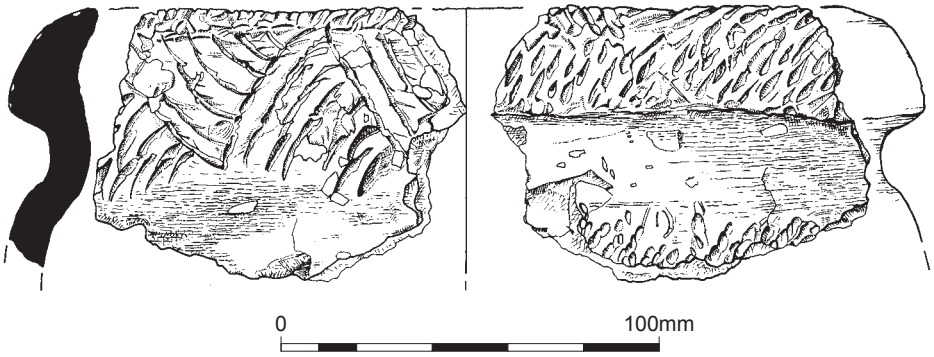
Late Prehistoric pit 4026: plan and section

Figure 15

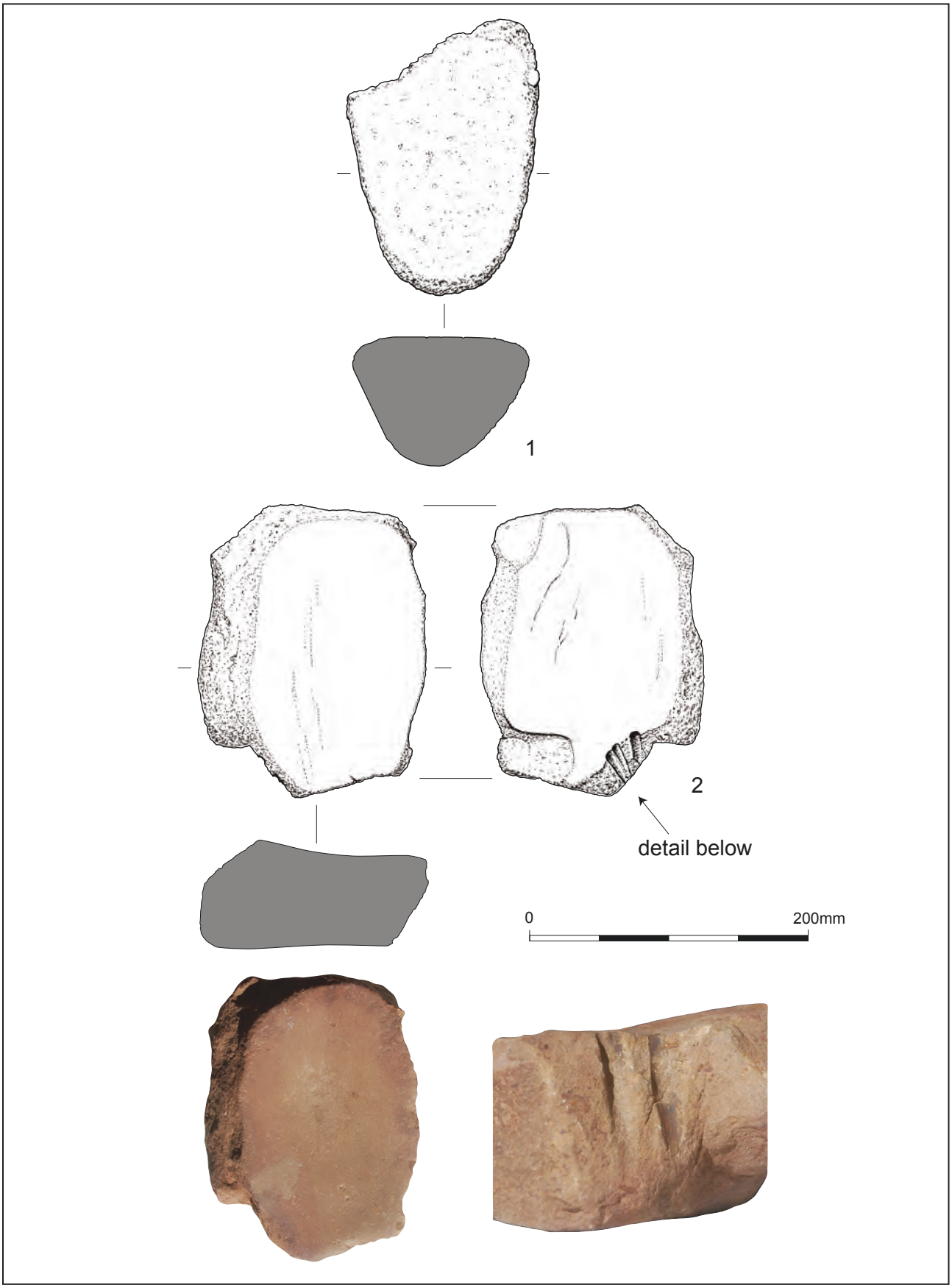


Late medieval pit 5015

Figure 16



Peterborough ware *Figure 17*



Worked stone: (1) Late Prehistoric quartz rubber stone; (2) Early Prehistoric polissoir *Figure 18*

Plates

Plate 1: The site area before excavation, facing west

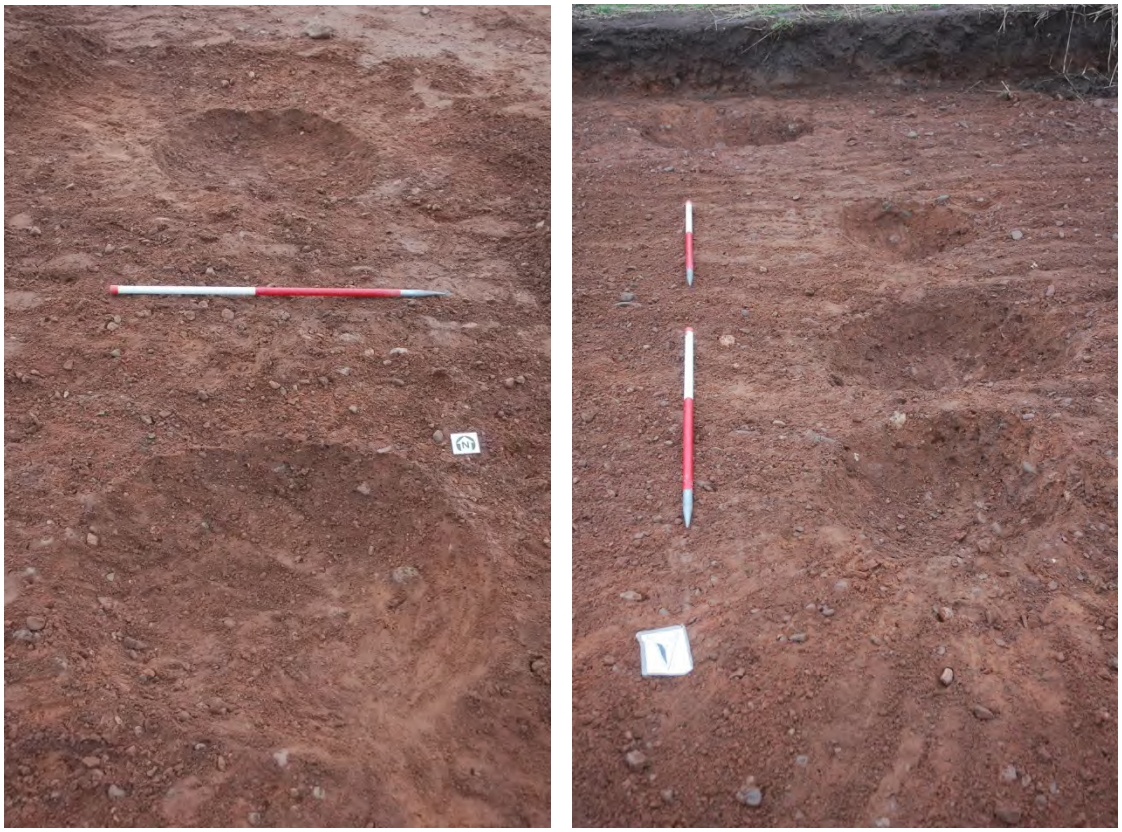
Plate 2: The northern part of the site during machine excavation, facing west

Plate 3: Area of archaeological investigation disturbed by drainage before observation

Plate 4: Shallow pit 3005, dated to the middle Neolithic

Plate 5: Pit 5031, dated to the early Neolithic

Plate 6: Early prehistoric pit/posthole 5016 during excavation with axe polishing stone to left



Plates 7 and 8: Early prehistoric paired pits 5044 and 5046 (left) and alignment of pits 5003, 5005, 5007, 5009 (right)

Plate 9: Iron Age pits 4013, 4017, 4020, fully excavated, with early prehistoric pit 4024 half-sectioned in foreground showing difference in depth and form

Plate 10: Section of Iron Age pit 4013

Plate 11: Section of Iron Age pit 4020

Plate 12: Iron Age pit 6039, fully excavated

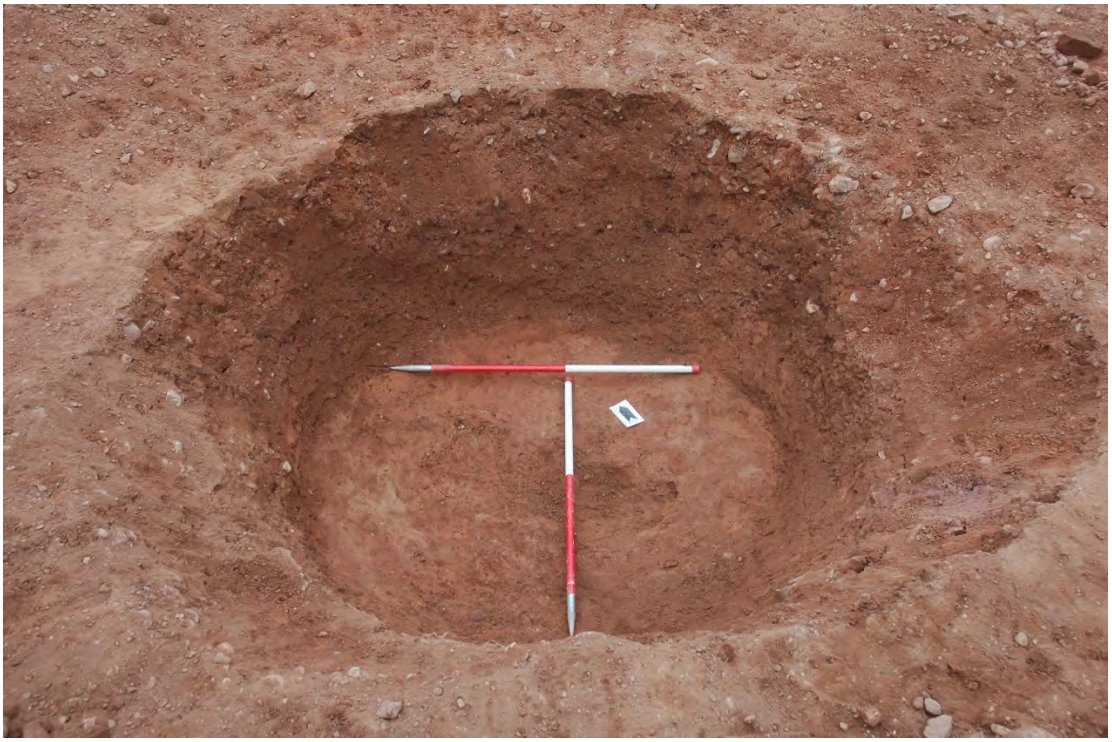


Plate 13: Iron Age pit 4026, fully excavated

Plate 14: Section of Iron Age pit 4058

Plate 15: Early to middle Iron Age posthole 6028, with stone lining 6029

Plate 16: Late Iron Age posthole 4008, with stone lining

Plate 17: Iron Age posthole 4003, with stone lining

Plate 18: Large late medieval pit 5015

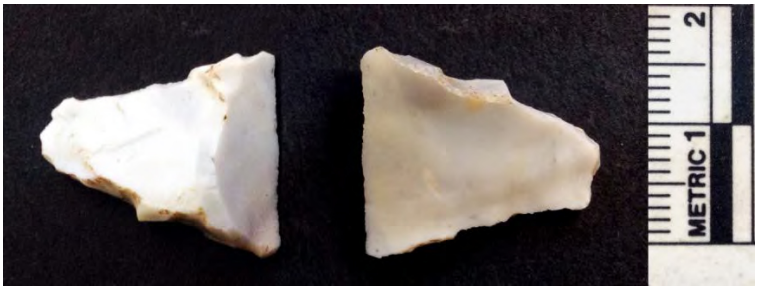
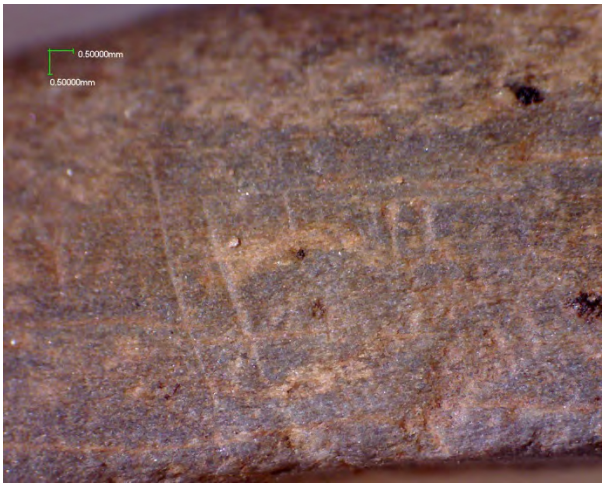


Plate 19: Abraded transverse arrowhead from context 4064

Plate 20: Flint blade from context 4060

Plate 21: Flint blade from context 6000

Plate 22: Dried clay from context 4015



Plates 23 and 24: Small whetstone from context 4016, with cut marks visible

Appendix 1 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

192	Context records AS1
10	Field progress reports AS2
10	Photographic records AS3
4	Black and white photographic films
425	Digital photographs
2	Drawing number catalogues AS4
111	Scale drawings
3	Context number catalogues AS5
1	Recorded finds records AS13
1	Sample number catalogues AS18
1	Box of finds
1	CD-Rom/DVDs
1	Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed with Shropshire Museums Service.

Appendix 2 Radiocarbon dating reports

Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre

Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0QF, Scotland, UK
Director: Professor R M Ellam Tel: +44 (0)1355 223332 Fax: +44 (0)1355 229898 www.glasgow.ac.uk/suerc

RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

14 December 2015

Laboratory Code	SUERC-64305 (GU39241)
Submitter	Suzi Richer and Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PD
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	3004
Sample Reference	P4573/3004/2
Material	Charred plant remains : Hazelnut shell fragment
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-24.2 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	4581 ± 38

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

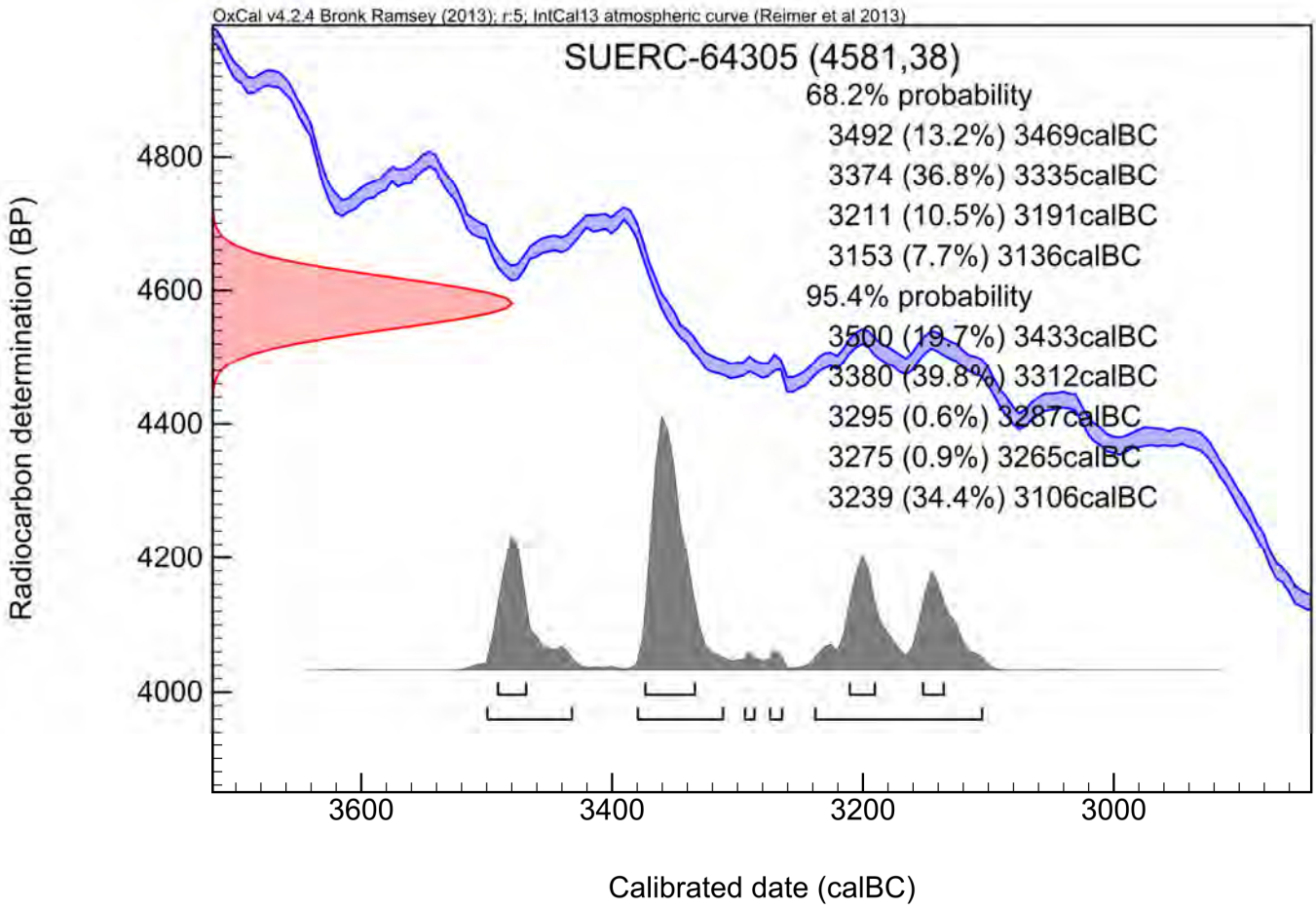
The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

Samples with a SUERC coding are measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility and should be quoted as such in any reports within the scientific literature. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should also quote the GU coding given in parentheses after the SUERC code. The contact details for the laboratory are email Gordon.Cook@glasgow.ac.uk or telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- P. Naysmith Date :- 14/12/2015

Checked and signed off by :- E Dunbar Date :- 14/12/2015

Calibration Plot



Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre

Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0QF, Scotland, UK
Director: Professor R M Ellam Tel: +44 (0)1355 223332 Fax: +44 (0)1355 229898 www.glasgow.ac.uk/suerc

RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

14 December 2015

Laboratory Code	SUERC-64309 (GU39242)
Submitter	Suzi Richer and Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PD
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	5043
Sample Reference	P4573/5043/39
Material	Charred plant remains : Hazelnut shell fragment
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-27.7 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	5027 ± 38

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

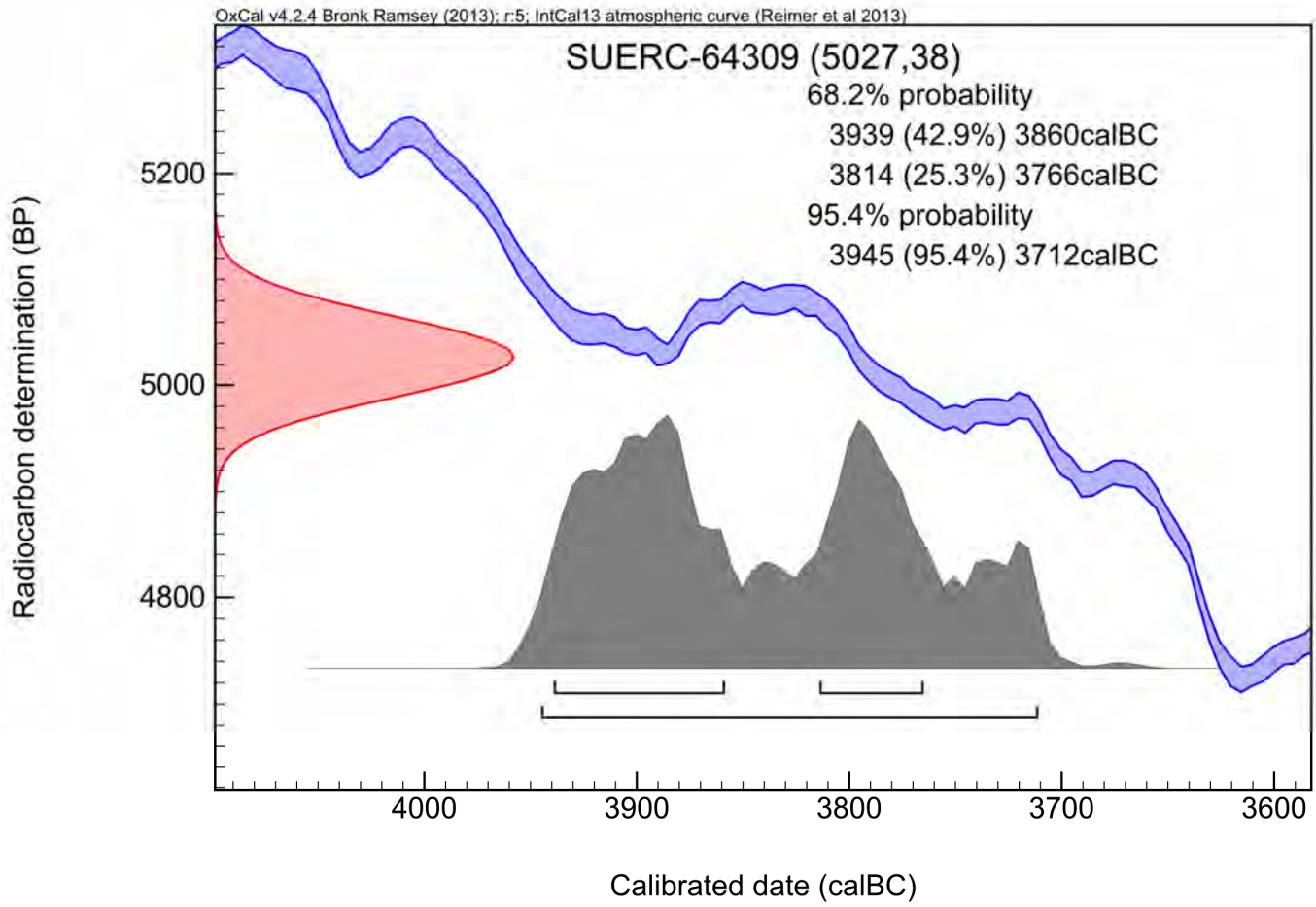
The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

Samples with a SUERC coding are measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility and should be quoted as such in any reports within the scientific literature. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should also quote the GU coding given in parentheses after the SUERC code. The contact details for the laboratory are email Gordon.Cook@glasgow.ac.uk or telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- P. Naysmith Date :- 14/12/2015

Checked and signed off by :- E Dunbar Date :- 14/12/2015

Calibration Plot



Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre

Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0QF, Scotland, UK
Director: Professor R M Ellam Tel: +44 (0)1355 223332 Fax: +44 (0)1355 229898 www.glasgow.ac.uk/suerc

RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

14 December 2015

Laboratory Code GU39243

Submitter Suzi Richer and Liz Pearson
Worcestershire Archaeology
The Hive
Sawmill Walk
The Butts
Worcester WR1 3PD

Site Reference Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference 4012
Sample Reference P4573/4012/15

Material Charred plant remains : Triticum sp grain

Result Failed on AMS.

N.B. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should quote the GU coding given above.

The contact details for the laboratory are email Gordon.Cook@glasgow.ac.uk or telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Checked and signed off by :- E Dunbar Date :- 14/12/2015

Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre

Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0QF, Scotland, UK
Director: Professor R M Ellam Tel: +44 (0)1355 223332 Fax: +44 (0)1355 229898 www.glasgow.ac.uk/suerc

RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

14 December 2015

Laboratory Code	SUERC-64311 (GU39244)
Submitter	Suzi Richer and Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PD
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	4061
Sample Reference	P4573/4061/29
Material	Charred plant remains
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-23.9 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	2183 ± 38

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

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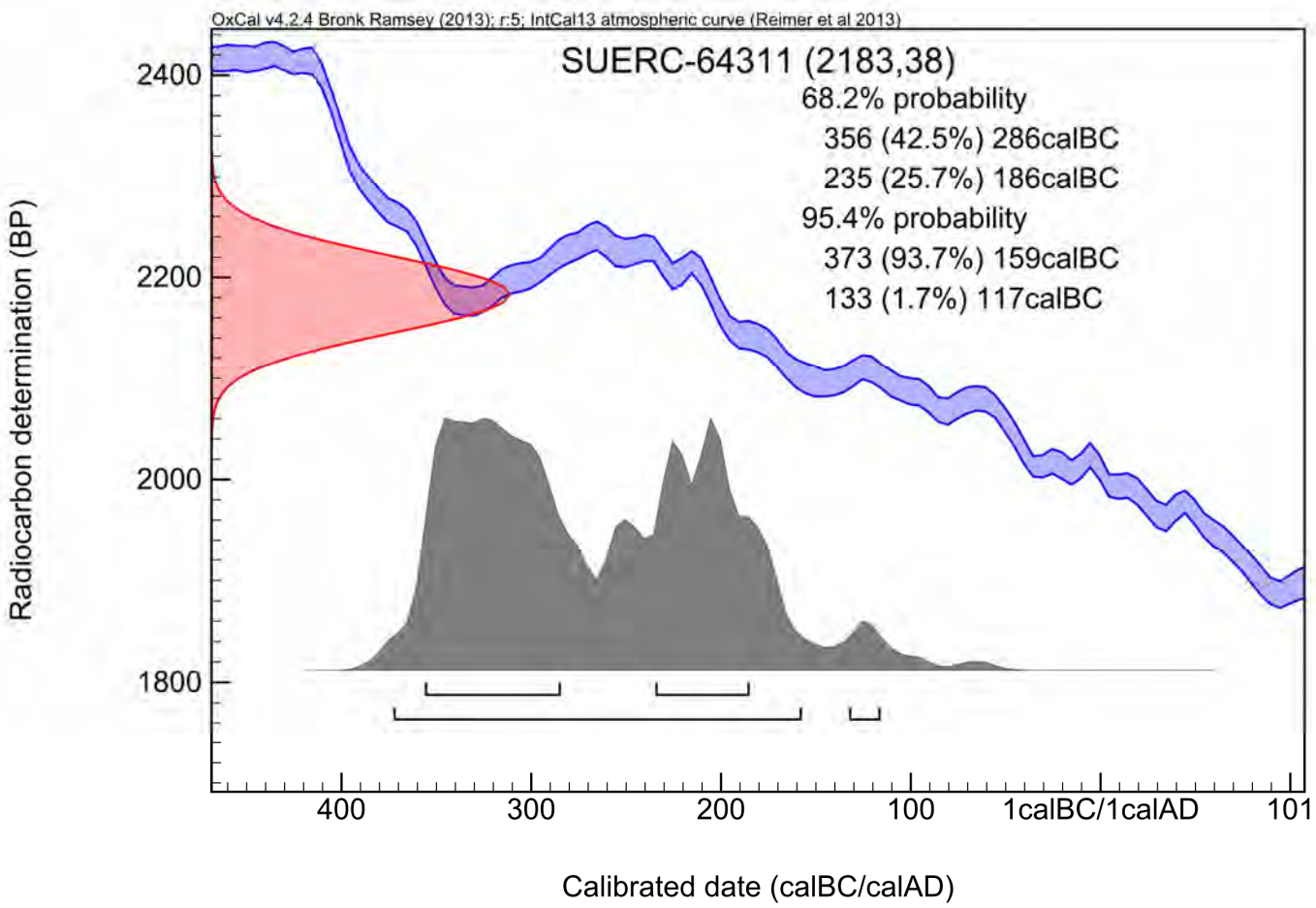
Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- P. Naysmith Date :- 14/12/2015

Checked and signed off by :- E Dunbar Date :- 14/12/2015

Calibration Plot



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RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

22 February 2016

Laboratory Code	SUERC-65620 (GU39883)
Submitter	Suzi Richer and Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PD
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	4012
Sample Reference	P4573/4012/15
Material	Charcoal : Corylus avellana
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-25.4 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	2122 ± 30

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

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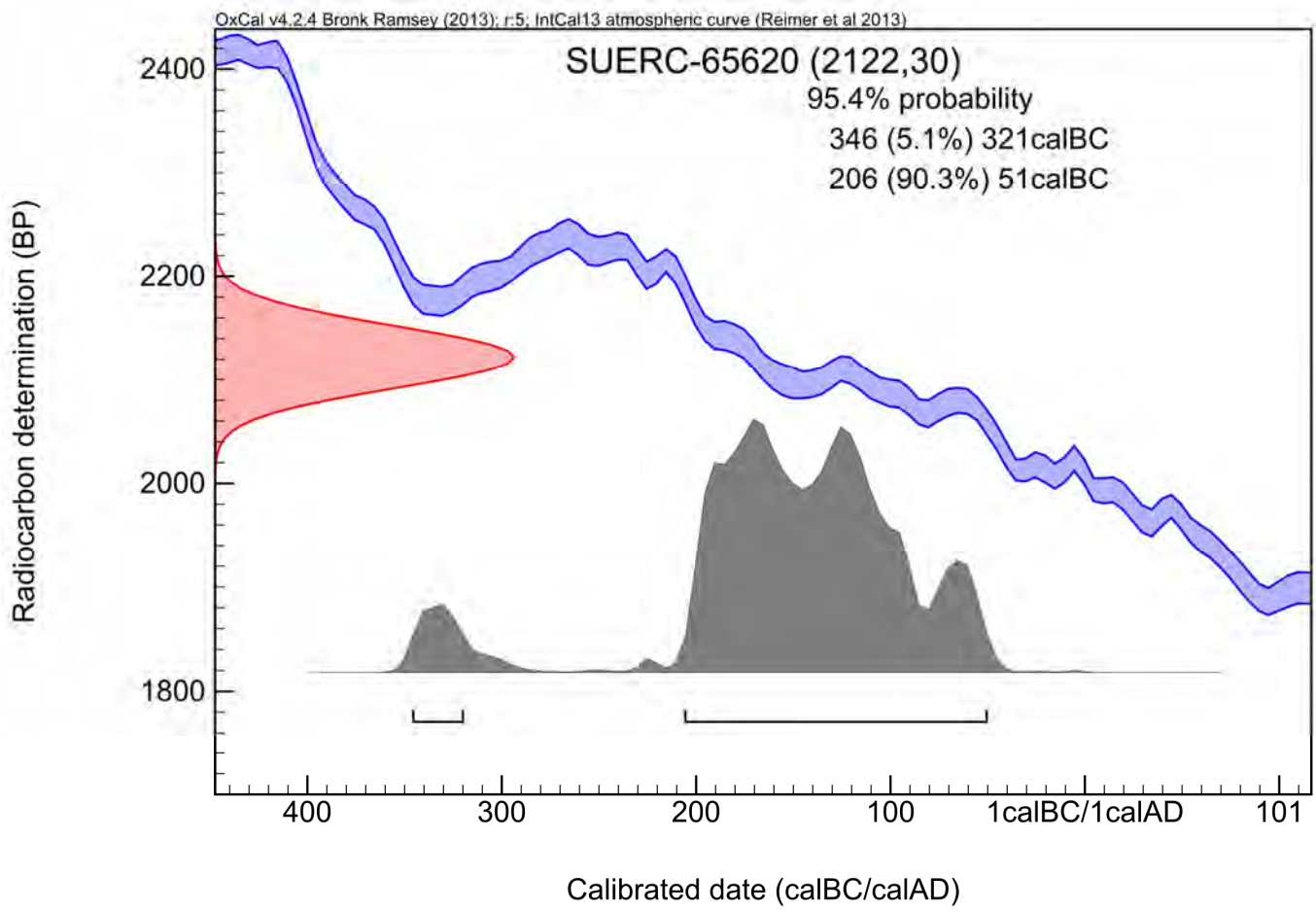
Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- E Dunbar Date :- 22/02/2016

Checked and signed off by :- B Tripney Date :- 22/02/2016

Calibration Plot



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RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

16 March 2016

Laboratory Code	SUERC-66201 (GU40077)
Submitter	Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PB
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	6055
Sample Reference	P4573/6055/63
Material	Charcoal
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-27.0 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	2266 ± 29

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

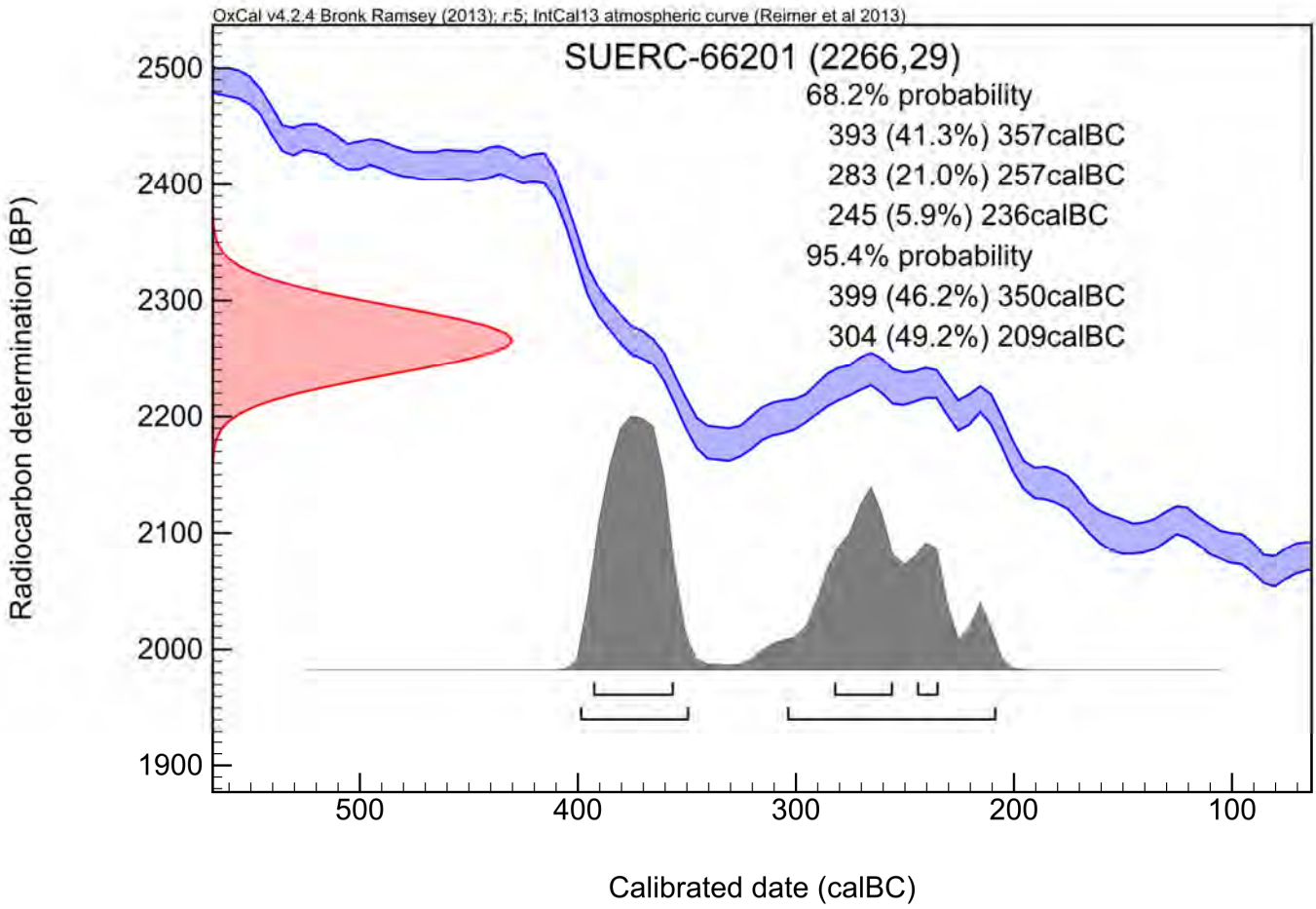
The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

Samples with a SUERC coding are measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility and should be quoted as such in any reports within the scientific literature. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should also quote the GU coding given in parentheses after the SUERC code. The contact details for the laboratory are email Gordon.Cook@glasgow.ac.uk or telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Checked and signed off by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Calibration Plot



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RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

16 March 2016

Laboratory Code	SUERC-66202 (GU40078)
Submitter	Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PB
Site Reference	Shifnal,Shropshire
Context Reference	6029
Sample Reference	P4573/6029/59
Material	Charcoal
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-25.5 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	2507 ± 29

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

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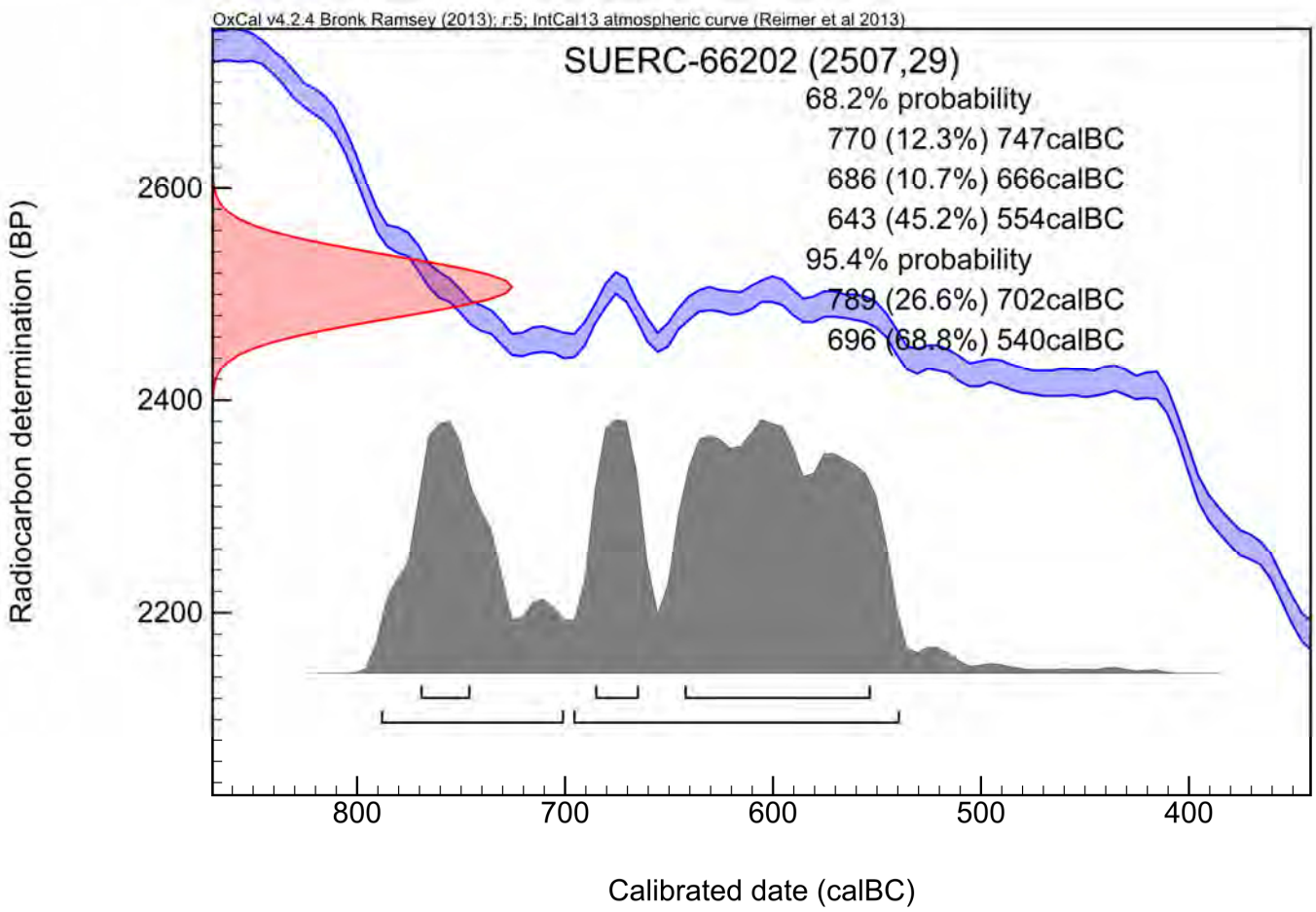
Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Checked and signed off by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Calibration Plot



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RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

16 March 2016

Laboratory Code	SUERC-66206 (GU40079)
Submitter	Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PB
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	5011
Sample Reference	P4573/5011/42
Material	charred plant remains : Avena sp
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-23.9 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	411 ± 26

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

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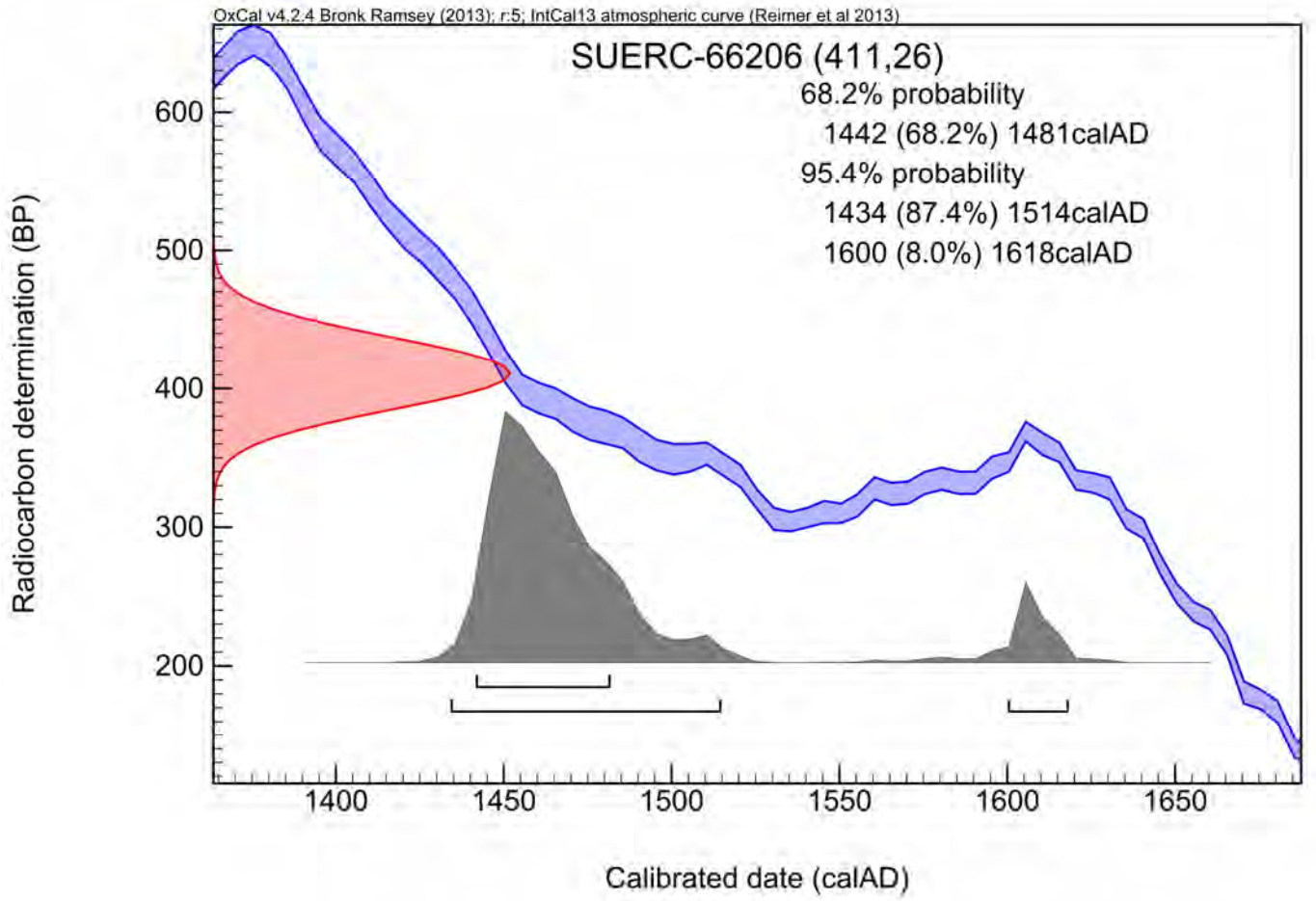
Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Checked and signed off by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Calibration Plot



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RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

16 March 2016

Laboratory Code	SUERC-66207 (GU40080)
Submitter	Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PB
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	4015
Sample Reference	P4573/4015/9
Material	charred plant remains
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-22.1 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	2228 ± 29

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

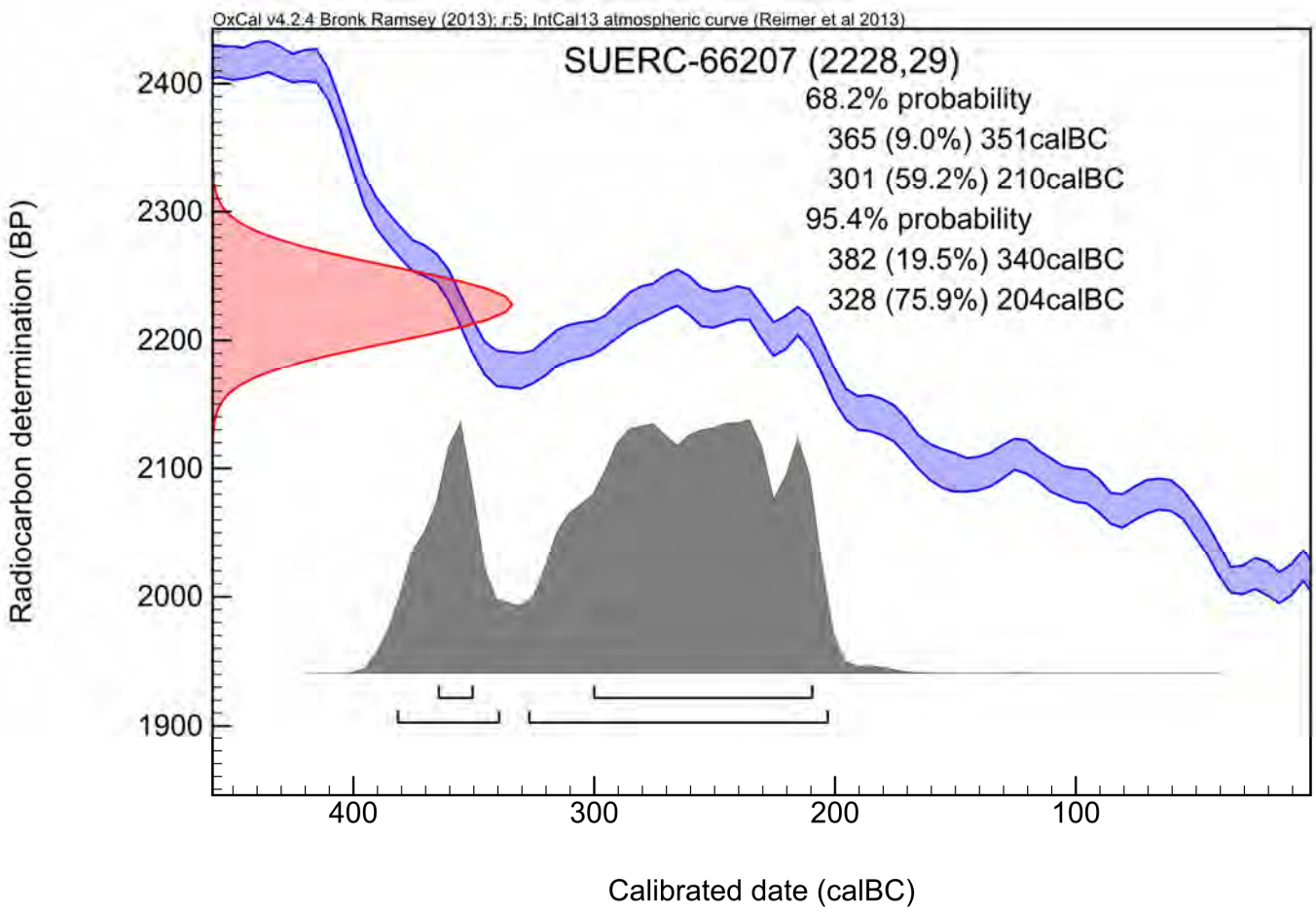
The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

Samples with a SUERC coding are measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility and should be quoted as such in any reports within the scientific literature. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should also quote the GU coding given in parentheses after the SUERC code. The contact details for the laboratory are email Gordon.Cook@glasgow.ac.uk or telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Checked and signed off by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Calibration Plot



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RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

16 March 2016

Laboratory Code	SUERC-66208 (GU40081)
Submitter	Liz Pearson Worcestershire Archaeology The Hive Sawmill Walk The Butts Worcester WR1 3PB
Site Reference	Shifnal, Shropshire
Context Reference	4060
Sample Reference	P4573/4060/30
Material	charred plant remains : Corylus avellana (nutshell)
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-25.4 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	2172 ± 26

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

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Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Checked and signed off by :- Date :- 16/03/2016

Calibration Plot