

Summary

Archaeological investigations in response to the expansion of Pode Hole sand and gravel quarry exposed a well-preserved prehistoric Fen-edge landscape covering an area of approximately 58 acres (c. 23.5ha). Pottery dates and a series of radiocarbon determinations reveal that the site was occupied throughout the second millennium BC, with activity apparently intensifying later in that period.

A broadly linear group of four ring-ditches, probably the remains of an Early Bronze Age barrow cemetery, provided the focus for later Bronze Age fields. These formed a rectilinear field system which was aligned on the barrow cemetery, which itself reflected the alignment of the nearby Fen-edge. Midden areas and scores of waterhole pits were found within the field system. The latter features were key in allowing the partial reconstruction of the Bronze Age environment, as they contained well-preserved organic deposits. Although no evidence of domestic structures was found on the site, the type and amount of the artefacts that were recovered from it indicate that it was occupied, possibly by a series of small farmsteads.

Environmental analysis of the waterholes revealed that its Bronze Age inhabitants were subsistence agriculturalists, with cattle representing the mainstay of the economy. These animals grazed the damp, largely deforested grassland that covered the site and the wider area. Little was found to indicate arable agriculture, and the remains preserve only limited evidence that hunting and fishing were carried out, although it is likely that hedges provided some wild foodstuffs. As well as waterlogged environmental data, the waterhole pits and ponds also contained quantities of preserved wood, including artefacts such as wattlework panels, a probable ard and a well-preserved two piece vessel, as well as occasional human remains.

Saltmaking also featured in the lives of the area's Bronze Age inhabitants; early briquetage was found on the site, including vessels and utilised supports. However, it is thought that salt collection must have occurred elsewhere, as the environmental data records an overwhelmingly freshwater habitat.

A substantial assemblage of locally made Bronze Age pottery and other ceramic artefacts was gathered during the excavations. Analysis of this material records that during the Bronze Age, shell-gritted clays completely replaced all use of grog temper in pottery fabrics and continued to be used well into the post-Deverel-Rimbury Late Bronze Age. This is interpreted as being symptomatic of a shift in attitudes towards ancestors and the land during this period. Grog-tempered pottery

represented the continuation of the old into the new, and its use perhaps expressed attitudes to lineage and ancestors given form through the materiality of pot-making. By contrast, the abandonment of grog-tempered pottery in the later Bronze Age, in favour of clays tempered with shell- a more directly natural resource- may be a further manifestation of the growing importance of land tenure and ownership that this period witnessed.

During the early first millennium BC, environmental changes saw the area around Pode Hole become too wet for human occupation, and peat grew across the site. This period marks the start of a hiatus in occupation of the site that lasted for approximately 2500 years. It was not until the post-medieval period, when drainage improvement schemes allowed the area to be returned to agriculture, that the archaeological narrative resumes. When fieldwork commenced in 1999, the site contained open arable fields, raked by scores of infilled claying trenches as well as the remains of grubbed-out Enclosure-era field boundaries.

The prehistoric remains uncovered at Pode Hole are part of a much larger buried agrarian landscape that once ringed the Cambridgeshire Fen-edge. The scale and quality of this archaeological resource has only become apparent in recent times; this is largely due to developer-funded excavation.