

The Excavation of
Mesolithic Flint and
an Early Medieval
Enclosure at

Rushey Weir Burcot



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THE EXCAVATION OF MESOLITHIC FLINT AND AN EARLY MEDIEVAL ENCLOSURE AT RUSHEY WEIR, BURCOT

By BEN FORD and STEVEN TEAGUE

with contributions by JOHN BLAIR, JOHN COTTER, MIKE DONNELLY,
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SUMMARY

Small-scale excavations in advance of the construction of a fish pass were focused on an important area of cropmarks just south of Rushey Weir and Lock, thought to represent a Neolithic causewayed enclosure and mortuary enclosure. In the event, the excavations found nothing of this date, but recovered a rare assemblage of probably late Mesolithic flint, and evidence for an enclosure of the late 10th or early 11th century that surrounded a post-built building. It is likely that the enclosure and building were associated with control of the Thames crossing.

INTRODUCTION (FIG. 1)

The Environment Agency has been working for a number of years to improve facilities at Rushey Weir, near Bampton, Oxfordshire. This has included the upgrading of the existing paddle and rymer weir and the construction of a fish pass on the southern bank of the Thames. These works initiated several phases of archaeological work, including a Strip, Map and Sample excavation in 2012 (Fig. 1, BURUWE12), followed by further excavation in 2013 (Fig. 1, BURF13).

The site measures roughly 0.1 ha in size and is situated on the southern bank of the River Thames at Rushey Weir, eight miles south of Witney and approximately

two miles south of Bampton (NGR SP 3225 9998). The site is at about 66.5m above OD on Holocene alluvium (clays and silts) overlying Pleistocene sands and gravels. However the archaeological work revealed no evidence for alluvium and the existing topsoil and sub-soils directly overlay either sand or gravel.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located within a complex of cropmarks recently discovered from aerial photographs as part of the National Mapping Programme (Fig. 1). To the west are alignments of ditch segments forming a rough D-shape abutting the south bank of the Thames, interpreted as a probable Neolithic causewayed enclosure measuring some 225m across at its widest point. Much of the central and north-western part of the interior has been obscured by later disturbance, but the south-west part of the enclosure is dotted with what appear to be pits. It is not known if these are contemporary with the enclosure. Parts of two small sub-circular features, possibly barrows, are also visible, one just outside the enclosure to the south, the other within the eastern sector of the interior. To the south are the remains of a rectangular feature measuring approximately 90x34m, which has been interpreted as a possible long mortuary enclosure. There appear to be several breaks in the boundary ditch but an entrance is thought to lie on the northern side, facing the causewayed enclosure to the north-west. A small rectangular feature is visible at the centre of the enclosure, along with a scatter of smaller features, interpreted as pits, across the whole of the interior.

Cutting across the east of the causewayed enclosure is a substantial north-south aligned ditch that forms the western side of a smaller sub-rectangular enclosure preserved in post-medieval field boundaries and visible on the Tithe Map of 1842 and the first edition Ordnance Survey plan, although partially lost today. Immediately to the south of the causewayed enclosure are the clear cropmarks of two intersecting trackways, one of which leads towards the south-west corner of the small enclosure, while the other appears to cross the interior of the causewayed enclosure towards the river. Neither trackway appears on the 1842 Tithe Map and they may well be much earlier features; their significance is discussed further by John Blair, below. In 1086 the king received 20s a year from fisheries in Bampton, of which one was presumably at Rushey by the Thames, given to Osney Abbey by the Count of Boulogne c. 1170.¹

¹ A Crossley and C R J Currie (eds) *The Victoria History of the Counties of England*:

Thirteenth-century deeds refer to a weir at Rushey and the minor watercourse that enters the Thames at this point (approximately 150m north-west of the site) is probably a medieval bypass-canal from Faringdon.² Early records from 1425 refer to the use of land near Rushey Weir for the grazing of ‘horses or ploughbeasts’ suggesting the land was used as part of grazing land associated with nearby Bampton.³

There had been a flash lock further upstream known as Old Nan’s Weir, which had been deemed unsuitable for a pound lock in 1790, and was eventually removed in the mid 19th century. In 1871 Rushey Weir was in a bad state of repair and was subsequently repaired. A new lock keeper's cottage was built in 1894 and the lock was later rebuilt in 1898.⁴

FIELDWORK METHODS AND RECORDING

The area of the archaeological excavation (BURF13) was defined within the footprint of the fish pass, a U-shaped channel c 117m long. The evaluation showed that archaeological levels occurred at c 66.0m OD which would be impacted by the depth of the channel, the construction level of which was proposed to be 64.19-64.93m OD at its deepest levels. Since the sides of the channel were sloped, archaeological levels were calculated from the design profiles to be below the construction levels in the area between c 1-2m from the edges of the channel. Consequently it was this remaining area that was subject to archaeological excavation.

An area measuring 322m² for a crane platform had previously been stripped under archaeological supervision (BURUWE12). This work identified a large modern disturbance adjacent to the river that covered the majority of the area, although archaeological features survived to the south. A machine-excavated slot within the outlet area of the fish pass (east arm) revealed the southern edge of this disturbance, which confirmed its southward continuation in the outlet area of the fish pass. Consequently archaeological investigation was not required in this area.

The modern topsoil and underlying subsoil were removed using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and under constant archaeological

Oxfordshire Volume 13, Bampton (1996), 31-43

² Blair pers. comm.; J. Blair, *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England*, (OUP Oxford (2007).

³ Crossley and Currie, *Bampton* pp. 31-43.

supervision. This exposed the surface of the natural sand and gravel at which archaeological features were revealed at a depth of around 0.45m. A targeted hand-excavated sample of all the exposed archaeological features was undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out in a detailed brief.⁵

DISCUSSION (FIGS 2 AND 3)

Prehistoric evidence

The excavations produced an assemblage of 75 struck flints including many blade forms that are likely to be of Mesolithic, probably late Mesolithic, date (see Fig. 7). It included characteristic pieces with typical debitage of crested bladelet and bladelet cores. They were found largely within tree-throw holes, possibly of later prehistoric date, and within the fills of medieval features that cut into the exposed gravel terrace. The relatively good condition of the flint suggests that it had not been heavily disturbed and is likely to represent nearby activity. Assemblages of Mesolithic flint are very rare in Oxfordshire, although a number that have come to light in recent years are discussed by Donnelly (Flint report, below). Unfortunately it is not clear whether the Rushey Weir assemblage represents a single short visit by hunter-gathers or a more intensively used location but it adds to the increasing evidence for more widespread remains of this date on the lower gravel terraces of this part of the Thames Valley. The absence of alluvium from overbank flooding that was noted on the site suggests that it occupied a raised point in the former floodplain, which may explain the subsequent siting of Neolithic and later monuments here, and its adoption as a possible crossing point of the river.

No firm evidence for Neolithic activity was found during the excavations, although there were no investigations of the interiors of the causewayed enclosure and the mortuary enclosure where most of the evidence visible on the aerial photographs seems to be concentrated. The tree-throw pits of Phase 1 (e.g. Group 672; Fig. 2) may have resulted from Neolithic woodland clearance prior to the construction of the two monuments. However, a sherd of possible late Bronze Age pottery was recovered

⁴ F. Thacker, *The Thames Highway: Volume II Locks and Weirs*, (1920).

⁵ Oxford Archaeology, Rushey Weir Fish Pass: Detailed Brief for Archaeological Mitigation

from Pit 104 within this group, pointing to later activity within the area during this period, perhaps focused towards the circular cropmarks, potentially the ring-ditches of barrows. Similarly two sherds of Roman pottery found residually within later features suggest activity nearby, perhaps associated with the use of the trackways, which may have been of Roman origin.

Medieval evidence

The next phase of activity represented on the site dates from the late 10th or early 11th century AD, when a network of broadly rectilinear enclosure ditches was laid out (Figs 2 and 3). At least two phases of enclosure ditches were identified, the earlier of which was associated with a good quantity of Cotswold-type pottery datable generally to around 900-1250. A single sherd of a wheel-thrown late Saxon ware, possibly Portchester ware or a variant of Kennet Valley A/SW Oxon ware, was also recovered (from Ditch 610). A late Saxon date for this first phase of activity is strongly supported by a radiocarbon date of cal AD 967-1046 (89.0% probability) obtained on a charred wheat grain from the same ditch (cal AD 905-1148 at 95.4% probability; SUERC-53300).

Post-built structure (Group) 670 has been tentatively assigned to this phase of enclosures. Although no direct dating evidence was obtained from this structure, it was stratigraphically earlier than Ditch 517, which probably formed part of the later enclosure system (see below). Structure 670 comprised two rows of postholes, forming a rectangle approximately 5.8x4.5m. These appear to be aligned with a second group of postholes (671) recorded within the eastern arm of the fish pass. If all the postholes belonged to a single structure, it would have measured about 20.2m in length and about 6.0m in width. While this would be a large structure it would not be impossible for the period.⁶ Certainly there is some degree of symmetry in the layout of the structure, at least in the areas of it that were exposed at its western end, with its regular placement of opposing posts. It has been suggested that many such buildings were built to 'standard' measurements, perhaps in multiples of around 5m (or the 5.03m rod), and the Rushey Weir structure would seemingly conform to this, at least

(unpublished report, 2013)

⁶ H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Oxford, 2012), Figs 2.1 and 2.3.

in its length.⁷ It cannot be established from the limited area of excavation whether the structure was an isolated building or part of a larger settlement, but nearby cropmarks that follow the alignment of the smaller cropmark enclosure may also be of this period, including a north-south row of small pits, and several small north-south ditches of similar size to the excavated examples (Fig. 1).

A second phase of rectilinear enclosure ditches was subsequently laid out on the site, and cut across the former post-built Structure 670 implying that it had gone out of use (Fig. 2). The pottery from the second phase of enclosure ditches dates from the 12th to mid 13th centuries. There was no evidence within the excavated area for any associated buildings of this date.

There is little from the artefactual and environmental evidence to shed light on the status and activities of the inhabitants of the site. Much of it derives from the ditches of the second phase of enclosures, although a possible stone fishing net weight was recovered from Phase 2 Ditch 103. The plant remains were poorly preserved, but were mostly wheat, together with some broad beans and possible garden peas; these are likely to derive from crop drying waste, which would imply the presence of a hearth or oven on the site. Much of the animal bone, largely the remains of a young horse, came from the upper fill of Pit 543/204. This pit might have been contemporary with Structure 670 directly to the north, although the pottery from its fills is more characteristic of the later phase of activity. It may have been dug to extract gravel, either for flooring or the upkeep of the nearby trackways. A second pit of similar size is indicated by the crop-mark evidence within the unexcavated area in the middle of the site and could have served a similar purpose. What is notable about the small animal bone assemblage, however, is the low representation of the common domesticates, along with unusually numerous remains of horses (including at least one foal).

The early medieval context by *John Blair*

Despite its small scale and relatively slight results, this excavation makes a valuable contribution to the emerging picture of activity on the Upper Thames between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Its significance can only be understood in relation to the

⁷ E.C. Fernie, 'Anglo-Saxon Lengths and the evidence for buildings', *Medieval Archaeology* 35 (1991), pp.1-5; P.J. Huggins, 'Anglo-Saxon Timber Building

course of the Thames, to the surrounding complex of cropmarks, and to the development of the local road-system in relation to Thames crossings.

It is necessary, given the instability of watercourses in this part of the floodplain, to reconstruct the configuration of the Thames, and of the lock at Rushey, at the earliest possible date. **Figure 4** is an interpretation of the layout in the early nineteenth century, using the available map evidence.⁸ It suggests a complex history: the pound lock built in 1790⁹ had succeeded at least two earlier artificial cuts, presumably navigation channels, which must themselves have modified the inherently unstable natural course.

As noted above, the cropmarks fall into three groups: the Neolithic causewayed enclosure and mortuary enclosure; the crossroads of trackways defined by roadside ditches; and the broad linear ditches to the west and north-west of the excavated site. The relatively later date of the third group is demonstrated both by their survival on the surface as earthworks,¹⁰ and by the field-boundaries that still partly reflected them on the nineteenth-century maps. With this evidence correlated in **Figure 4**, the features can be recognised as an early incarnation of the navigation-channel, abutted southwards by a sub-rectangular enclosure. This enclosure contained the late Anglo-Saxon posthole building, which conforms to the projected alignment of the early navigation-channel, and there seems to be a strong probability that all these features were contemporary.

This in turn has implications for the crossroads, of which the eastwards-pointing arm looks as though it could have led into the sub-rectangular enclosure. Although this kind of ditched trackway tends to be interpreted as Roman, it could be of almost any date, and the circumstantial evidence pointing to the early middle ages should be given due weight.

The local topographical context strengthens this interpretation (**Figure 5**). The early medieval centre of this region was Bampton, upon which important roads converged from the north. However, the present southwards road from Bampton to

Measurements: Recent Results', *Medieval Archaeology* 35 (1991), pp. 6-28.

⁸ The following sources, re-drawn on an OS base, have been used: Buckland inclosure map, 1803 (photograph of unlocated original in Berkshire Record Office, TM 90/3); Bampton inclosure map, 1821 (Oxfordshire Archives); Buckland tithe map, 1842 (National Archives, IR 30/2/28); OS 25-inch map, 1st edn., c.1875. It is enigmatic that two different configurations of the pound-lock cut are shown: the maps of 1803 and 1842 agree on one, the maps of 1821 and c.1875 on the other. The second of these, as plotted reliably by the OS, is shown here.

⁹ *VCH Oxon.* xiii, 42.

¹⁰ They are visible, unlike any of the other crop-marks, on Lidar imaging.

the Thames is strangely configured: it dog-legs westwards to Clanfield, then equally abruptly southwards to cross the river at Radcot. This road, which links places in west Oxfordshire to Faringdon, is obviously artificial: it is built in a series of straight sections, partly causewayed, and is associated with an early twelfth-century castle at Radcot.¹¹ It is fairly clear, given the configuration of these routes, that the Radcot crossing is a deliberate replacement – probably created in the eleventh or early twelfth century – of an earlier one due south from Bampton. Whether this diversion was prompted by the physical difficulty of the Bampton crossing (which traversed twice as much alluvial floodplain as the Radcot one), or by seigneurial efforts to funnel traffic into Faringdon, it goes a long way to explaining Bampton's later medieval decline.¹² It does, however, look significant that two canals (from Black Bourton to Bampton and from Radcot to Rushey), probably dug in the eleventh or twelfth century,¹³ made connections between the new road-route and the old one.

The original crossing-route must be represented by a green track that runs southwards from Bampton town across fields and meadows: in 1789 it was called 'Barcote way', referring to a hamlet south of Rushey.¹⁴ Given the chronology suggested above, it seems distinctly possible that the double-ditched track preserved as a cropmark was also part of this route. Further south, it can be traced as still-functioning roads from Barcot to Hatford and Stanford-in-the-Vale, where it joins the main road from Lechlade and Faringdon to Wantage.

In the eleventh century, therefore, the excavated site was not in a marginal location, but at one of the most important crossings on the Upper Thames; indeed, its relationship to the Rushey crossing looks comparable to that of the Norman keep to the Radcot crossing. This may have implications for its status and function. Notwithstanding the limited range of pottery, the hall-type building (if it can indeed be interpreted as a single structure) was, at nearly 20 metres long, very substantial. The ditch bounding the rectilinear enclosure in which it stood was up to seven metres wide, which may simply reflect the drainage requirements of this floodplain location, but could also have been defensive. The integral association between this enclosure and the relict artificial watercourse suggests that both were connected with the concerted attempts to improve transport on this uppermost section of the navigable

¹¹ *VCH Oxon.* xvii, 250-8.

¹² *VCH Oxon.* xiii, 11-13, 38.

¹³ J. Blair, 'Transport and Canal-Building on the Upper Thames', in J. Blair (ed.), *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England* (2007), 254-94, at pp.272-83.

Thames that can be identified in the eleventh century.¹⁵

The simple and obvious interpretation might seem to be that the excavated site is an earlier phase of the house at Rushey lock, which was an important fishery in the middle ages. But there is a problem: whereas from the thirteenth century onwards, and presumably by 1086, Rushey was in Oxfordshire and attached to Bampton manor,¹⁶ the excavated site is immediately south of the Thames and parish boundary, in Buckland parish. Moreover, it is in the township of Carswell, whose boundary with Buckland parish skirted the north-east corner of the enclosure. The assumption must therefore be that the site's early medieval history is associated with Buckland and specifically with Carswell, not with Bampton, and that although it adjoined Rushey it was not part of it.

Domesday Book shows that *Chersvelle* (probably Carswell) was held by Queen Edith in 1066, and by 'Alwold' (probably Ælfwold, Ælfwald or Ælfweald) the chamberlain in 1086.¹⁷ In context, that is unexpectedly interesting. Immediately after the Conquest, this stretch of the Upper Thames was dominated by royal officials: Ælfsige of Faringdon at Radcot and Langford, Robert d'Oilly at Oxford, Hugh of Buckland both at Buckland and (in succession to Ælfsige) at Radcot.¹⁸ Late Anglo-Saxon and Norman Bampton also contained a remarkably dense concentration of land-holdings supporting minor royal servants.¹⁹ To find a royal chamberlain in possession of Carswell, and presumably therefore of the enclosed settlement, can hardly be coincidence. Ælfwold's name shows that he, like Ælfsige of Faringdon, was one of those lucky Englishmen who were trusted and supported by William I. His association with a site so closely linked to the use – and possibly defence – of the Thames adds one more piece to an increasingly complex and fascinating jigsaw.

STRATIGRAPHIC SUMMARY

¹⁴ Ibid. 9.

¹⁵ Blair, 'Transport and Canal-Building'.

¹⁶ *VCH Oxon.* xii.42.

¹⁷ Great Domesday Book fo.63v. The identification is likely but not certain, and the holding is puzzlingly located in Sutton hundred (M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Berkshire*, ii (1974), 386); possibly it had been attached administratively to the royal manor of Sutton Courtenay. The same individual had also held Pangbourne at some date between 1066 and the Domesday survey: GDB fo.58.

¹⁸ J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (1994), 174-7. *V.C.H. Oxon.* xvii, 258.

¹⁹ S. Baxter and J. Blair, 'Land Tenure and Royal Patronage in the Early English Kingdom: a Model and a Case-Study', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 28 (2006), 19-46.

Phase 1 (Prehistoric?) (Fig. 2)

Pit Group 672

A number of shallow irregular pits (Group 672), probably tree-throws, were revealed towards the north of the inlet arm of the fish pass. All contained fills that were predominantly mid-reddish brown to olive brown, in contrast to the darker grey fills of the Phase 2 and 3 features, suggesting some broad contemporaneity. The majority were no deeper than 0.20m and all contained compact, sterile sandy fills. The largest pit (105) measured at least 3.5x 1.5m and was 0.5m in depth. It had an irregular profile and contained two fills, the lower a yellowish brown sandy silt and the upper the more characteristic reddish brown sandy clay. The pit produced the majority of the struck flint (41 pieces) from the site, including flakes, blade forms, knapping waste, a core, core maintenance pieces and tools of late Mesolithic or (less probably) early Neolithic date. A further eight pieces of flint debitage were recovered from pits 605, 611 and 650. Pit 104 produced a single small sherd of late Bronze Age pottery. Three further shallow pits containing similar fills were revealed close to the eastern edge of the site, one of which (642) produced part of a crested blade scraper of late Mesolithic or early Neolithic date. A possible shallow posthole (549) that was cut by Phase 2 ditch 610 has been assigned to this phase on account of its fill of compact mid-orange brown sandy silt.

Phase 2 (Earlier medieval - 950-1150?) (Figs 2 and 3)

Posthole Group 670

Located towards the northern part of the western arm of the excavation was a rectangular arrangement of postholes/small pits that probably formed part of a post-built structure. The western part of the structure had been terraced into the slight north-south slope in order to form a level platform at *c* 65.80m OD. The structure measured about 5.8x 4.5m although further possible postholes located immediately to the east on the alignment of its southern wall suggests that it may have continued eastwards (see posthole 531 and Group 671). The irregularity of many of the postholes suggests that the posts may have been deliberately removed after the structure had ceased to function and no other evidence for the posts survived. The postholes were roughly circular and shallow, most measuring no more than 0.77m in diameter and 0.18m in depth and their fills were predominantly loose greyish orangey-brown sand/clay. Several postholes along the western side of the structure contained worked flint of late Mesolithic or early Neolithic date, which are considered to be redeposited; otherwise no other dating evidence was recovered from the structure. A fragment of cattle mandible from one posthole was submitted for radiocarbon analysis but contained insufficient carbon for dating. Postholes on the west side of the structure were cut by a

shallow ditch (517); the alignment of this ditch suggests it was contemporary with Ditch 617 to the south, which formed part of the Phase 3 enclosure system (see below).

Posthole Group 671

A second cluster of five possible postholes were recorded on the eastern arm of the site suggesting the presence of further structures. Although no coherent arrangement was apparent, they appear to be aligned with posthole structure 670 to the west, suggesting that they are contemporary. The postholes contained similar fills and the only find was a residual flint microlith of Mesolithic date.

Ditches

The eastern arm of the fish pass cut through an area in which components of a ditch system were evident as cropmarks. The excavations revealed that these formed part of a system of enclosure ditches that are broadly of two phases, the earlier probably datable to the period *c* 950-1150 and the later to the period *c* 1150-1350. The earlier ditch system is represented most clearly by NS aligned ditches 646 to the east and 610/573 to the west. A number of less well-preserved ditch segments may have formed part of the same system. North-south aligned Ditch 646 was the most substantial ditch on the site. It was flat bottomed with moderately concave sides, up to 1.9m wide and 0.62m deep. The northern part of the same ditch had previously been revealed in the Strip, Map and Sample area to the north (Ditch 1031), and its south terminus in Evaluation Trench 4 (Pit 414). The various components of Ditch 646 were traced for a length of 23m northwards from its terminus before it narrowed and turned eastwards. An excavated section revealed two fills, the lower of compact laminated dark brown-grey silty sand and the upper of compact mid-brown orange silt that contained a sherd from a jar of Cotswold-type ware (*c* 900-1250) and a pelvis from a foal. Several sherds of pottery dating to *c* 1150-1300 (Medieval Oxford and East Wilts ware) were recovered from one of the upper fills of the ditch during the evaluation and a single sherd from an East Wiltshire-ware sagging cooking pot (*c* 1175-1350) was recovered from the upper fill of Ditch 1031. A fragment of eighteenth-century clay-pipe that was also recovered from the latter is probably intrusive given that the upper fill was reported to have been heavily disturbed by rooting. Ditch 646 was cut by Ditch 619 (Phase 3).

North-south aligned Ditch 584 was very shallow and discontinuous, measuring less than 0.09m in depth and had been filled with light greyish sand containing no finds. It was probably the same shallow ditch revealed in Evaluation Trench 4 (404) which was cut by Phase 3 Ditch 619, which formed part of the Phase 3 ditch arrangement. It did not appear to extend beyond the terminus of Ditch 646 with which it was aligned, suggesting the two were associated and therefore contemporary.

A second shallow north-south aligned ditch (593) ran approximately parallel 4-5m to

the west of Ditch 584 and may have continued northwards as Ditch 635 where it joined a second ditch (639). All three ditches were flat-bottomed and measured between 0.12-0.24m in depth and contained mid greyish orange brown silty sand that contained no finds. No relationship with the Phase 3 ditch arrangement was established as it lay outside the excavated area, although it would seem unlikely the two were contemporary. However the northern extent of these ditches apparently respected the south side of possible post-built structure 671, suggesting some contemporaneity between the two sets of features.

Ditch 610 ran approximately north-south within the western arm of the site. It measured up to 1.3m wide and 0.60m deep at its northern extent but became considerably shallower towards its southern terminus. A narrow slot measuring 0.30m in width ran along its western edge and may have aided drainage. The ditch essentially contained a single fill of mottled dark grey-brown silty sand that also filled the slot and may have been deposited rapidly. The ditch terminated immediately north of the later, Phase 3 ditch 619. Two excavated sections produced a total of 19 largely fresh sherds of Cotswold-type ware that can be broadly dated to *c* 900-1250 though the presence of a single sherd of late Saxon wheel-thrown ware (possibly Portchester or Kennet Valley A/ SW Oxon ware) could suggest a date of *c* 950-1100. A radiocarbon date (SUERC-53300) of cal AD 905-1148 (95.4% probability) was obtained from a charred wheat grain from the ditch with a high probability (89.0%) of a date of cal AD 967-1056, which would favour the earlier part of the date range suggested by the pottery.

Ditch terminus 573 seen at the south edge of the site was later re-cut (ditch terminus 676, Phase 3, below) and may therefore also have belonged to the earlier arrangement. There was no definite evidence to prove this, however. It was at least 1.1m in width and 0.42m in depth with concave sides and a flat base and contained two fills of firm mid-dark grey brown silt from which a single fragment of mammal bone was recovered. It is possible that a second ditch terminus (536) revealed at the base of one of the east-west Phase 3 ditches (619), located about 2.5m to the south-west of the terminus of Ditch 610 may have also been contemporary.

Pit 543 (which was also investigated in Evaluation Trench 2 as Pit 204) was cut by an element of Phase 3 Ditch 617 (see below) and was located immediately south of Structure 670. It was roughly oval in shape measuring *c* 4.6m x 2.3m with steep sides and a flat base and was 0.46m in depth. It had a thin lower fill of fine grey sandy clay that may have accumulated over a period of time and contained sherds of East Wilts/Newbury B ware suggesting a date of *c* 1150-1250. Its main upper fill, probably rapidly deposited, comprised mid-dark yellow brown sandy clay. It contained large fragments of horse bone and sherds of pottery, including Minety and Brill/Boarstall ware, perhaps suggesting a date in the range 1225-50. However it is quite possible that the horse remains were contained within an unrecognised shallow feature cutting the northern part of the pit.

Phase 3 (Later medieval - 1150-1350+?) (Fig. 2)

This phase saw the modification of the ditches of Phase 2 with the installation of a more continuous rectilinear arrangement. This may have formed at least six enclosures of which the northernmost occupied the majority of the excavated area. This enclosure was defined to the east by Ditches 619/1030, to the west by Ditch 517/617 and to the south by Ditches 620/621. Ditch 619 cut Phase 2 Ditch 646, which may have marked an earlier enclosure to the east. Similarly the western extent of this enclosure also respected earlier Ditch 610 and cut across Structure 670 and adjacent Pit 543 (see Phase 2 above).

Sections across the intersections of these ditches revealed that they were all contemporary and all broadly contained a similar single fill of compact reddish grey brown clay with silt and sand. The flat-bottomed ditches were no more than 1.5m in width and largely under 0.30m in depth though ditches 619 and 676 to the south-west were slightly deeper at 0.40 - 0.44m. Ditch 617 that defined the west side of the main north enclosure was significantly shallower and measured less than 0.10-0.15m in depth, its discontinuous nature probably the result of later truncation rather than the existence of entrances across its line. However, the clear terminuses of Ditches 559 and 576 suggest there was a 0.80m wide entrance between the two southernmost enclosures. Several postholes (304, 561 and 563) positioned around the northern terminus probably marked the position of a gate. It is not clear why the southern ditch of the main enclosure comprised two separate, but closely spaced ditches (620 and 621). It is possible that one was a re-cut of the other, although investigation of their interception with the other ditches within the eastern arm revealed that all the ditches at this point were stratigraphically contemporary. Fresh sherds of pottery were recovered from several contexts from Ditches 619 and 576 and included possible West Country type dishes in Cotswold-type ware, which date to *c* 1100-1250. The remains of a young dog were found in ditch 621.

Phase 4 (Post-medieval?)

A single narrow ditch (668), which cut the subsoil and cut across Phase 3 Ditch 664, was the only feature that could definitely be shown to post-date the Phase 3 enclosure ditches. It was filled with firm mid orangey brown clay that contained fragments of animal bone and is assumed to be a post-medieval land drain.

THE POTTERY by JOHN COTTER (FIG. 6)

Introduction and methodology

A total of 71 sherds of pottery weighing 943g was recovered from the site. This includes 10 sherds (85g) from the evaluation phase. The pottery is mainly of post-Roman date but includes a small worn sherd of prehistoric flint-tempered pottery (from Pit 104) and two small worn sherds of Roman pottery residual in medieval contexts. The post-Roman pottery is mainly in a single fabric (Cotswold-type ware) and mainly dates from the 10th or 11th century to the first half of the 13th century. A few late post-medieval sherds were also recovered. An intermediate level catalogue of pottery types was constructed (in Excel), following standard procedure and spot-dates produced for each context. The catalogue includes, per context and per pottery fabric, quantification by sherd count and weight. Because of the small size of the assemblage and small number of rim sherds present vessel forms were not systematically quantified but details of vessel form (where recognisable), vessel part, decoration, cross-joins and any other features of note were recorded in a comments field. Full details remain in archive. As better parallels exist elsewhere, only a very small number of more significant pieces have been illustrated.

Date and nature of the assemblage

The assemblage (which is nearly all from the western half of the site) is in a fragmentary condition with worn and fresh sherds sometimes present in the same context. Seven rim sherds are present (5 medieval, 2 post-medieval), some of them quite large and fairly fresh. Ordinary domestic pottery types are represented. The pottery is described in detail in the catalogue and summarised below. Medieval pottery fabric codes are those of the Oxfordshire county type series²⁰ together with one post-medieval code as used by the Museum of London (MoLA). A breakdown of fabric types and quantities present is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Breakdown of fabric types in roughly chronological order

The assemblage is dominated by Saxo-Norman pottery - mostly local and some regional types - and mainly datable within the 10th to the 13th centuries. There may be a 12th-century emphasis to the material (or at least that from Ditch Group 619), but the evidence for this is a little ambiguous. The dominant fabric type here is Cotswold-type ware or 'calcareous gravel-tempered ware' (OXAC, c 875-1250) which is common throughout the Cotswolds area and

²⁰ M. Mellor, 'Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia* 59, (1994), pp. 17-217.

central and north-west Oxfordshire.²¹ Some of the pottery from this site is therefore potentially of late Saxon date, but vessel and rim forms in this handmade oolitic limestone-tempered tradition show very little typological development from the late Saxon period through to the 13th century. In Oxford the peak currency of this ware is considered to be narrower (*c* 1050-1250) where it overlaps with, and follows on from, wheel-thrown St Neot's-type ware (OXR/NEOT, *c* 850-1100), which is also fairly common in the city - but entirely absent here (see below). West of Oxford, towards the likely production area, the currency of Cotswold-type ware is thought to be from *c* 875. In a fairly small rural assemblage such as this where Cotswold-type ware is often the only pottery type in the context a broad spot-date of *c* 900-1250 is usually the only one that can be applied. The assemblage of 47 OXAC sherds from the features excavated here probably represents around a couple of dozen vessels. The four rims in this fabric are all from large-diameter vessels which may include large jars and very probably wide bowls, or indeterminate wide jar/bowl forms (**Fig. 6 Nos 1-4**). One rim has a diameter of 260mm while the other three are in the 280-310mm range. The surviving rims are from vessels showing little vertical wall curvature - which might suggest bowls - but other body and base sherds present include some definite globular jars/cooking pots. The rims also have a fairly consistent look - heavily flanged and slightly angled and in the case of **Fig. 6.1** quite developed-looking and more like the squared rims of later wheel-thrown pottery from the 13th/14th-century pottery - although one could argue they were inspired by similar forms in St Neot's-type ware. The three measurable sagging bases are in the 220-280mm diameter range. Most sherds of OXAC exhibit external sooting or heat-scorching suggesting a cooking function. One base sherd also has a thick internal deposit of limescale and sooting - possibly carbonised food residue. On other jar sherds the limestone inclusions have been dissolved from the internal surface probably by the corrosive action of acidic stews and/or repeated boiling.

OXAC was the only fabric from context (547), in Ditch Group 610 at the western edge of the site with its radiocarbon date of 967-1046AD, but present only as jar body sherds. The developed-looking rim (**Fig. 6.1**), however, is from another context (548) in the same ditch group. The three other illustrated pieces (**Fig. 6.2-4**) are all from Ditch Group 619 in the south-west of the site and appear to be from wide bowls with unusual inward-leaning walls. The fourth very similar bowl rim (not illus.), from a separate vessel, is also from this group (535). Context (534), in the same group, also produced a small OXAC body sherd with a small (7mm diam.) circular perforation made before the vessel was fired. These typological characteristics suggest these sherds might come from so-called 'West Country' dishes - squat conical bowl-like vessels with a series of perforations through the wall. The precise function of West Country dishes (or 'incurved dishes') remains unknown but the sooting on some

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 44-52.

examples suggests some kind of specialised cooking function. They are found over a wide area of Wessex and south Wales in 12th- and 13th-century contexts and were produced by several different ceramic industries within this.²² If correctly identified this suggests that some of the OXAC assemblage here should be of post-Conquest date and possibly even as late as the first half of the 13th century. It is unfortunate that no complete profiles survive to demonstrate the presence of West Country dishes beyond any shadow of doubt, but the internal lower wall of **Fig. 6.2** appears to be curving inwards as if to join a base or mark a change of angle and is therefore very nearly a profile; the perforated sherd is also fairly convincing evidence for the presence of this unusual form. From a regional point of view the OXAC assemblage at Rushey Weir seems to have a higher than usual proportion of wide-diameter vessels, probably bowls, compared to broadly contemporary assemblages from sites at Oxford further east where smaller jars/cooking pots with simpler rim forms are the norm. This may reflect a more regional typological style at Rushey Weir or it may be a reflection of a specialised vessel function again perhaps linked to regional modes of food preparation. Given the proximity of the Thames, one might suggest a link to fish preparation but the predominance of bowls on some rural sites in England has also been linked to dairying practices.²³ The sample unfortunately is too small to reach any firm conclusions.

A small number of medieval sherds in regional fabrics other than OXAC are also present and are detailed in Table 1. The condition of these is generally small and scrappy and none occurs in quantity. Most of these are later types or overlap with the last century or so of OXAC currency. They provide some indication of limited external contact and of continued but perhaps more superficial activity on the site extending throughout the 13th and perhaps into the 14th century. Two sherds of medieval Oxford ware (OXY) comprise almost the only medieval pottery from the eastern half of the site. These came from a fill of Pit 414 (416) and comprise a hammerhead-form jar/cooking pot rim and a worn green-glazed jug sherd - the latter suggesting a late 12th- or 13th-century date. A sherd of East Wiltshire/Kennet Valley B ware (OXAQ) came from the same context. A few other body sherds from OXAQ jars/cooking pots came from other contexts (mainly Pit 543) making this the second commonest medieval pottery type after OXAC. Locally, the most likely source for both flint-tempered OXAQ and its coarser predecessor Kennet Valley A ware (OXBF) is in the Marlborough area (Savernake Forest). OXBF (c 875-1250) is a minor contemporary of OXAC at Rushey Weir but represented here by only two small body sherds. One unusual sherd from Ditch Group 610 (520) has been catalogued as miscellaneous (MISC M) or unidentified. This is a small thin-walled body sherd from the shoulder of a wheel-thrown jar-

²² M.R. McCarthy and C.M. Brooks, 1988 *Medieval Pottery in Britain AD 900-1600*, (Leicester University Press, 1989), p. 125.

²³ D.H. Brown, 1997 'Pots from Houses', *Medieval Ceramics* 21 (1997), pp. 92-3.

like form in a hard dark grey fabric with coarse quartz and flint-temper fabric. Superficially it looks quite like the products of a number of regional late Saxon wheel-thrown pottery industries such as Portchester-type ware - which is also flint-tempered. The fabric of this piece and its inclusions however compares very closely with the OXBF sherds from Rushey Weir and it may be an unusual variant of that industry - perhaps from a very carefully turned and finished vessel rather than the more usual handmade and roughly finished products that one generally finds?

Several of the latest medieval pieces from the site derive from the fills of Pit 543/204 including a wheel-thrown green-glazed jug rim in Minety ware (544) which dates to c 1225/50-1350 and a small worn sherd of Brill/Boarstall ware (OXAM) from the upper fill of the pit (205). The latter is from a green-glazed jug of c 1250-1350+ with applied red strip decoration with lozenge rouletting. The medieval sequence ends with these few small sherds. The latest pottery from the site is represented by a few sherds of post-medieval red earthenware (PMR) from two late-looking vessels of c 1750-1900 both from the same topsoil context. A single clay pipe stem is probably of this date too.

Discussion

The pottery assemblage comprises typical local and (limited) regional medieval wares dating from perhaps the 10th to the middle of the 13th century. There is nothing in the character of the pottery assemblage to suggest anything other than a low-status rural settlement with very limited trading contacts beyond its immediate hinterland. Within the nearby area of west Oxfordshire it is possible to make comparisons with larger and broadly contemporary medieval pottery assemblages from Radcot²⁴ and Bampton²⁵ where all the fabrics present at Rushey Weir can be paralleled. Detailed comparisons however are of limited use owing to the small sample size available from Rushey and the ambiguity of the few medieval vessel forms that can be identified on the basis of surviving rims (i.e. only five medieval rims). What is noticeably absent from the Rushey assemblage is St Neot's-type ware - usually a good indicator of late Saxon activity. The presence of Cotswold-type ware (OXAC) alone in a context is not usually sufficient evidence to prove a late Saxon dating, but in combination with St Neot's-type ware the case is considerably strengthened. St Neot's-type ware is broadly dated from c 850 or c 900 to c 1100 in the south-east Midlands, but in Oxford has a

²⁴ Wessex Archaeology, 'Radcot, Oxfordshire: Archaeological evaluation and assessment of results' (Report ref: 68733.01, 2009).

²⁵ P. Blinkhorn, 'The post-Roman pottery', in A. Mayes, A. Hardy, and J. Blair, 'The excavation of Early Iron Age and medieval remains on land to the west of Church View, Bampton, Oxon', *Oxoniensia* 65 (2000), pp. 280-3; J. Cotter, 2014 'Pottery' in R. Peacock and T. Allen, 'Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief at Cobb House, Bampton, Oxfordshire' (Oxford Archaeology, unpublished client report, 2014).

main currency of *c* 950-1050 and probably endured a little later than this (Mellor 1994, 57). In most sizeable Saxo-Norman (10th-13th century) pottery assemblages from Oxford St Neot's ware is usually a fairly minor (and sometimes residual) element and OXAC (or OXY) is usually the major tradition present. This is probably the situation in west Oxfordshire too and thus the absence of St Neot's-type ware from a small rural assemblage such as Rushey is not particularly surprising and neither supports nor disproves that some of the material from the site is of late Saxon date. Fortunately the radiocarbon date - which suggests some late Saxon activity - makes this discussion largely irrelevant. It may be that the excavated sample from Rushey was just too small to locate the very few St Neot's vessels that may have been used here, or there may never have been any? Local OXAC vessels were probably adequate for most everyday needs.

The medieval pottery assemblage from the castle site at Radcot comprises 1,314 sherds of which 200 are OXAC and only two St Neot's-type ware - both sherds probably residual in 12th/13th-century contexts. Kennet Valley B ware (OXAQ) is also well-represented there (891 sherds) and Minety and Brill/Boarstall wares are also common. A hint of luxury is suggested by the presence of a sherd of late 13th/14th-century Saintonge monochrome ware from south-west France.

A similar range of medieval pottery fabrics (104 sherds) is reported from an excavation at Church View, Bampton, although this mainly dates from the mid 11th to the 15th century; OXAC predominates again but there is no definite late Saxon or post-medieval material (Blinkhorn 2000). Another small assemblage (also 104 sherds) has recently been excavated at Cobb House, again in Bampton, where a range of late Saxon to post-medieval pottery was produced. Two pits here were dated to the late Saxon period by the presence of 11 sherds of St Neot's-type ware and 13 sherds of OXAC - all large/fresh sherds from jars. Two sherds of Oxfordshire late Saxon shelly ware (OXB, *c* 775-1050) were also present. Together these wares suggested a late 10th- to early 11th-century dating for the two pits at Bampton - a level of precision only made possible by the association of OXAC and St Neot's-type ware in reasonable quantity and fresh condition. It also seems to suggest that St Neot's-type ware is more likely to be found in urban areas (such as Bampton and Oxford) than on rural sites such as Rushey Weir.

Illustration catalogue

Fig. 6.1. Cotswold-type ware (OXAC). Jar or possibly bowl rim (diam 310mm). Dark grey fabric. Ctx (548). Ditch 610.

Fig. 6.2. Cotswold-type ware (OXAC). Bowl rim (West Country dish?) (diam 290mm). Dark grey ext, probably sooted, browner int. Ctx (552). Ditch 551, Ditch Group 619.

Fig. 6.3. Cotswold-type ware (OXAC). Lower part of wide bowl with inward-leaning wall and sagging base (West Country dish?) (diam 280mm). Grey-brown ext, possibly sooted, dark grey int. Ctx (534). Ditch 533, Ditch Group 619.

Fig. 6.4. Cotswold-type ware (OXAC). Bowl rim (West Country dish?) (diam 280mm). Dark grey ext, probably sooted. Ctx (534). Ditch 533, Ditch Group 619.

STRUCK FLINT by MICHAEL DONNELLY

A small assemblage of 91 flints was recovered from several phases of work at Rushey Weir, Burfield, Oxfordshire. The assemblage included 16 natural unworked fragments leaving a total of 75 struck flints (**Table 2**). The flints represent earlier prehistoric activity dating to the Mesolithic and possibly also the earlier Neolithic. Many are either blade forms or show clear evidence of blade reduction in their dorsal scars. Most of the flints recovered are heavily patinated but they do not display very high levels of edge damage indicative of heavily disturbed material.

Table 2: Struck flint by category

Methodology

The artefacts were catalogued according to OA South's standard system of broad artefact/debitage type,²⁶ general condition noted and dating was attempted where possible. The assemblage was catalogued directly onto an Open Office spreadsheet. During the initial analysis additional information on condition (rolled, abraded, fresh and degree of cortication), and state of the artefact (burnt, broken, or visibly utilised) was also recorded. Retouched pieces were classified according to standard morphological descriptions.²⁷ Technological attribute analysis included the recording of butt type,²⁸ termination type, flake type,²⁹ hammer mode,³⁰ and the presence of platform edge abrasion.

²⁶ P. Bradley, P, 'The worked flint', in A. Barclay et al., 'Excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire', *Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph*, 11 (Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit, 1999), pp. 211-27.

²⁷ For example H. Bamford, *Briar Hill: excavation 1974-1978*, (Northampton: Northampton Development Corporation 1985), pp. 72-7; F. Healy, 'The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham. Part VI: Occupation in the seventh to second millennia BC', *East Anglian Archaeology*, 39, (Gressenhall: Norfolk Archaeological Unit, 1988), pp. 48-9; Bradley, 'The worked flint', pp. 211-27.

²⁸ M.L.Inizan, et al., 1992 *Technology of knapped stone*, Cercle de Recherches et d'Etudes Préhistoriques, (CNRS, Meudon, 1993).

²⁹ P. Harding, 'The worked flint', in *The Stonehenge environs project*, (London, English Heritage, 1990).

³⁰ K. Onhuma and C.A. Bergman, 'Experimental studies in the determination of

Provenance

The struck flint recovered during the first phase of work was very strongly concentrated in two related contexts, 106 and 107, with small amounts in three further contexts. In contrast, the flint from the second phase of work was scattered around 13 separate contexts and none produced more than five pieces. Interesting groups were present in several contexts, most obviously 106 and 107 that yielded 10 and 31 flints respectively. These were both fills of the same pit or tree throw 105. Context 107 contained many flakes (23) and blade forms (5), knapping waste (5), a core, core maintenance pieces (2) and five tools. None of the tools were truly diagnostic but they included a microdenticulate fragment, a burin on a blade blank and an odd piece that may have represented either an atypical microlith or some form of elongated microburin. A piercer and a retouched flake completed the tool assemblage. The core and a crested bladelet all clearly indicated an early prehistoric date; the core was very typical of late Mesolithic examples and was pyramidal in shape with evidence of core tablets having been removed. The single platform was used for the production of bladelet forms. Context 106 contained seven flakes and three blade forms, and several of the flakes appeared to have been utilised.

Minor assemblages of note included two blades amongst four pieces from context 520, two blades and a chip from context 614, an end scraper on a crested blade from context 643 and a flake, bladelet core and probable microlith from context 658. In the cases of the small numbers of blades from contexts 520 and 614, the condition of the pieces was very varied indicating re-deposition of potentially non-contemporary material.

Raw material and condition

The flint was typically moderately to heavily patinated; 27 pieces displayed heavy and 10 pieces displayed very heavy levels of patina. Twenty-six pieces displayed very low to moderate levels of patina and there was one iron stained example. The actual condition of the flint was less varied and of the 68 pieces categorised, two were fresh and 43 displayed low levels of edge damage, while 17 had moderate and five had heavy damage. This variation between heavy patina with low edge damage may be due to fluctuating ground water levels at the edge of the river.

Discussion

The flint assemblage from Rushey Weir represented a very small collection of flints of early prehistoric date. Many of the retouched pieces were clearly early. This includes one slightly atypical obliquely blunted microlith, although another form of retouched tool such as an end

flake mode', *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology, London*, 19 (1982), pp. 161-71.

truncation or scraper could not entirely be ruled out. A second possible microlith of similar type could also have been an unusual form of microburin, but either way would be Mesolithic in date. An end scraper was also present formed on a crested blade. The burin and microdenticulate fragment are also likely to be early, but with both, an early Neolithic date is also a possibility. The assemblage also contained undiagnostic pieces such as a piercer on a preparatory flake and a miscellaneous retouched flake. Both of the cores recovered were of a type common in the late Mesolithic. They were single platform bladelet examples, worked around their full circumference with evidence of core tablet removals. Many blade forms were recovered including some very regular parallel-sided examples that most likely date to the Mesolithic, however, for these an early Neolithic date cannot be entirely ruled out, especially given the proximity of the site to an early Neolithic causewayed enclosure and a probable Neolithic mortuary enclosure. In many cases Neolithic monuments contain evidence of Mesolithic activity sealed below them or in the immediate vicinity so either way, the identification of this assemblage in such proximity to these monuments is of importance.

However, it is more likely that the assemblage is late Mesolithic in date. Despite containing only atypical obliquely blunted microliths, a form more often associated with the early Mesolithic, the examples here are very short and these are often found on late Mesolithic sites.³¹ Mesolithic activity is very rare in Oxfordshire with very few scientifically investigated sites.³² Until quite recently, the bulk of the material identified consisted of quite dispersed surface collections,³³ but several excavations in the last 30 years or so have altered this picture. Most of these sites date to the early Mesolithic. Tubney Wood produced two main concentrations of struck flint containing primarily 'A' type points of Deepcar affinity, but it also yielded later Mesolithic microliths suggesting a degree of contamination.³⁴ Windmill Hill, Nettlebed also yielded early Mesolithic material mixed with Neolithic artefacts.³⁵ A recently excavated assemblage from Didcot represented a rare example of a pure early Mesolithic assemblage from Oxfordshire uncontaminated by later finds.³⁶ More

³¹ R.M. Jacobi, 'Northern England in the eighth millennium bc: an essay', in P.A. Mellars (ed), *The Early Postglacial Settlement of Northern Europe*, (Duckworth. London, 1978), pp. 295-332; M. Reynier, 'A stylistic analysis of ten Early Mesolithic sites from south east England', in N. Ashton and A. David (eds), 'Stories in Stone', *Lithic Studies Society, Occasional Paper*, 4, (1994), pp. 199-205.

³² H. Case, 'The Mesolithic and Neolithic', in G. Briggs et al., *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region*, (Oxford University Department for External Studies, 1983).

³³ R. Holgate, 'Mesolithic, Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age Settlement Patterns south-west of Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, 51, (1986) pp. 1-14.

³⁴ P. Bradley and G. Hey, 'A Mesolithic Site at New Plantation, Fyfield and Tubney, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 58 (1993), pp. 1-26.

³⁵ W.A. Boismier and L.N. Mephram, Excavation of a Mesolithic site at Windmill Hill, Nettlebed, Oxon, *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), pp. 1-19.

³⁶ (C. Hayden et al., 'Great Western Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire: Post-excavation assessment, (Oxford Archaeology unpublished report , May 2014)

recently, and closer to Rushey Weir, Oxford Archaeology has discovered an early assemblage of probable Mesolithic date from Gill Mill, but the fact that this assemblage was the first of its kind to be found here after over 20 years of large-scale open-area investigations outlines the paucity of Mesolithic activity along the Thames gravel terraces.

The admittedly tentative identification of this assemblage as late Mesolithic suggests that late Mesolithic activity along the Thames gravels to the west of Oxford may be more substantial than has previously been considered. The identification is based on some idiosyncratic microlithic pieces alongside some very good examples of typical late Mesolithic debitage such as the crested bladelet and the two bladelet cores. Moreover, the blade forms are of a size and display a single platform flaking pattern more in keeping with Mesolithic rather than Neolithic knapping strategies. If true, the presence here of late Mesolithic activity associated with either a pit or more likely a tree throw shows that Mesolithic populations here, as elsewhere in Britain, utilised river systems to penetrate inland into the densely forested interior. Whether these visits were very fleeting or may relate to as yet undiscovered settlement activity remains to be seen.

STONE by RUTH SHAFFREY

A total of 13 pieces of oolitic limestone were retained during the excavation. Of these, one is worked. These may have been used structurally but they do not retain evidence of tooling or working. One large slab from Ditch 646 retains a deliberate perforation on one edge (**Table 3**). This is the size and shape of perforations seen on stone roofing; however, the stone is very thick with irregular faces and lacks original edges. Possibly it is a weight of some kind - given the location on the river, perhaps a net sinker although it is of atypical form if so.

Table 3. Stone

OTHER FINDS

A single iron nail was found in Posthole 582 and a piece of slag weighing 8g was recovered from Ditch 646.

ANIMAL AND FISH BONE by REBECCA NICHOLSON

The animal bone assemblage comprised 636 fragments, many of which were small splinters of

bone classified only as large or medium mammal. A full report and record of the assemblage as a Microsoft Access database will be available with the project archive. The majority of bone was in good condition, with variable levels of fragmentation and very low levels of gnawing and burning, apart from a small number of fragments from Phase 1 (pit/tree-throws) all of which were burnt.

Table 4. Animal Bone

The Phase 2 assemblage comprised 354 fragments, most of which came from pit 543. The common domesticates (cattle, sheep and pig) were relatively infrequent. Bones from pit 543 included 23 disarticulated fragments from at least one equid, probably a small horse of at least 3.5 years old, as well as a small number of bones from cattle, sheep and sheep or goat. Ditch fill 647 included pelvis fragments from a foal of less than a year old, as well as a metapodial from a small or immature equid, and a dog ulna also came from this context. Two fish bones were recovered from sample 506 (ditch fill 656), both vertebrae from a small (<15cm) cyprinid (Cyprinidae) and a very small pike (*Esox lucius*). It is likely that these were fished locally and may well have been eaten, as freshwater fish of similar small size are not infrequently found in collections of domestic refuse from urban sites.

The most notable remains from Phase 3 were the partial and fragmented remains of a small dog of about 8-9 months old, from ditch fill 569. This animal had several dental abnormalities, including a congenital supernumary first premolar in the maxilla, a rotated second mandibular premolar and missing fourth mandibular premolars, probably also congenital. Extra teeth in domestic dogs are not uncommon, particularly in certain breeds, but absent teeth are less frequent.³⁷ Although anomalous dentition is known in early dogs, some varieties of modern dog are known for having high levels of crowding and malpositioning of teeth (Brothwell 1991).³⁸ It is therefore tempting to attribute the abnormalities seen here to the kinds of problems found as a result of inbreeding.

Horse bones were present in five of the Phase 3 ditch fill contexts and comprised three metapodials, a tibia and a radius. Bones of the three common farmed domesticates were again rare.

The relative frequency of horse and dog bones in the Phase 2 and Phase 3 assemblages can probably be attributed to the disposal of the bodies of animals kept by the household as pets or working animals.

³⁷ A.E.W. Miles and C. Grigson, *Colyer's Variations and Diseases of the Teeth of Animals*, (Cambridge University Press 1990), pp. 83.

³⁸ D. Brothwell, 'Malocclusion and methodology: the problem and relevance of recording dental malalignment in archaeology', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 1 (1991),

PLANT REMAINS by KATHRYN HUNTER

Six samples processed by water flotation, were recorded from the fills of several Phase 2 and Phase 3 ditches and a single Phase 2 pit, only three of which produced more than a few seeds.

Table 5 Plant remains

All the samples included variably preserved material, which might suggest a mixing of material from more than one source after charring. Much of the grain appeared degraded and vacuolated, suggesting either several burning episodes or that the grain had a high moisture content. The majority of the identifiable grains were of a rounded wheat type similar to modern free threshing type grains, with five tetraploid wheat (*Triticum durum/ turgidum*) rachis fragments present in two samples (sample 502 from Phase 2 ditch 546 and sample 500 from Phase 3 ditch 533). Apart from cereals, broad bean (*Vicia faba*) and possible garden peas (cf. *Pisum sativum*) were present in several samples. All these remains are fairly typical for a medieval rural site and the samples probably represent generally poorly preserved crop drying waste mixed in with general rubbish. Accidentally charred grains and seeds might accumulate and possibly be re-burnt several times until cleared out from a nearby drying oven.

pp. 27-37.

Table 1: Pottery; breakdown of fabric types in roughly chronological order

Fabric	Common Name	Date	No. Sherds	% Sherds	Weight (g)	% Weight
PRE	Prehistoric pottery (residual)	LBA	1	1.4%	2	0.2%
ROM	Roman pottery (residual)	43-410AD	2	2.8%	3	0.3%
OXAC	Cotswold-type ware	875-1250	47	66.2%	712	75.5%
OXBF	SW Oxon ware (Kennet Valley A)	875-1250	2	2.8%	8	0.8%
MISC M	Misc. medieval wares	900-1500	1	1.4%	1	0.1%
OXY	Medieval Oxford ware	1075-1300	2	2.8%	15	1.6%
OXBB	Minety ware (Wilts)	1120-1525	2	2.8%	22	2.3%
OXAQ	East Wilts ware (Kennet Valley B)	1150-1350	8	11.3%	57	6.0%
OXAM	Brill/Boarstall ware (Bucks)	1225-1625	1	1.4%	1	0.1%
PMR	Post-medieval red earthenwares	1550-1900	5	7.0%	122	12.9%
TOTAL			71	100.0%	943	100.0%

Table 2: Struck flint by category

CATEGORY TYPE	Evaluation	Excavation	Total
Flake	24	13	37
Blade	1	4	5
Bladelet	7	1	8
Blade-like	1		1
Blade index	9/33 (27.27%)	5/18 (27.78%)	14/51 (27.45%)
Irregular waste	3	5	8
Chip	2	1	3
Rejuvenation flake	1		1
Crested bladelet	1		1
Core single platform bladelets	1	1	2
Scraper end		1	1
Piercer	1	1	2
Microlith		1	1
Microdenticulate	1		1
Burin	1		1
Retouched flake	1		1
Retouched miscellaneous	2		2
Total	47	28	75

No. burnt (%)	5/47 (10.64%)	5/27 (18.52%)	10/75 (13.33%)
No. broken (%)	16/47 (34.04%)	10/27 (31.04%)	26/75 (34.67%)
No. retouched (%)	6/47 (12.77%)	3/27 (11.11%)	9/75 (12%)

Table 3: Stone

Context	Function	Notes	Wt (g)	Lithology	Size
647	Possible weight or roof stone	Large stone with perforation but no original edges	1922	Oolitic limestone	Measures >240 x >160 x >55mm

Table 4: Animal bone by species

Species	Phase				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Cattle		11	9		20
Horse		26	3		31
Sheep/goat		6	37		43
Pig		1	1		2
Dog		1	33		34
Mouse/vole		1			1
Large mammal	6	205	21	6	238
Medium mammal		9	115		124
Small mammal		2			2
Mammal	7	65	33		105
Frog/toad		23	1		24
Bird		1			1
Fish		1			1
Cyprinid		1			1
Pike		1			1
Indeterminate			8		8
Total	13	354	263	6	636

Table 5: Charred Plant macrofossils

TAXA	COMMON NAME	COMPONENT	HABITAT	Sample 501	502	506	500	503	504	505	
				Context545	547	656	538	552	572	609	
				Feature Pit 2	543Ditch 2	546Ditch 2	646Ditch 3	533Ditch 3	551Ditch 3	571Ditch 3	
				Phase	2	2	2	3	3	3	
				vol/L	30	25	22	24	7	26	27
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	free threshing wheat type	grain	cult			8		85		18	
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	grain	cult		1		2	1			17
cf. <i>Triticum</i> sp.	possible wheat	grain	cult		2	13		20	1	6	5
cf. <i>Triticum</i> / <i>Secale cereale</i>	possible wheat/rye	grain	cult			1					
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	barley	grain	cult			1					
cf. <i>Hordeum</i> sp.	possible barley	grain	cult								5
<i>Avena</i> sp.	oat	grain	cult			1		13		1	7
cf. <i>Avena</i> sp.	possible oat	grain	cult/grassland					4			5
<i>Avena</i> / <i>Bromus</i> sp.	oat/brome	grain	cult/grassland			1		3			
Cereal NFI	unidentified cereal	grain fragments	cult	*	*						***
<i>Triticum durum/turgidum</i>	pasta/rivit wheat	rachis fragment	cult					4		1	
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	free threshing wheat	rachis fragment	cult			1		4			
Cereal NFI	unidentified cereal	straw culm node	cult					1			
<i>Vicia faba</i> L.	broad bean	seed	cult					1		1	
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (4mm)	vetch/pea	seed	disturbed arable,cult			5		20			9
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (2mm)	vetch/pea	seed	disturbed arable,cult			2					2
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (2mm)	vetch/pea	seed pod fragment	disturbed arable,cult								1
cf. <i>Pisum sativum</i> L.	possibleGarden pea	seed	cult					2		1	
large legume fragment		seed fragment	cult					1			
<i>Rumex</i> sp.	dock type	achene									1
<i>Stellaria media</i> (L.) Vill.	common stitchwort	seed	cultivated and open ground					1			
cf. <i>Scleranthus</i> sp.	knawel	seed in capsule	sandy dry soils					2			
<i>Euphrasia/Odontites</i> sp.	euphrasia/bartsias	seed						1			
Apiaceae	carrot family	seed								1	
<i>Eleocharis</i> sp.	spike-rushes	nut						1			
Poaceae	grass family	caryopsis						3			
<i>Lolium</i> sp.	rye grass type	caryopsis								1	
Unidentified		amorphous organic fragments		*	**						***

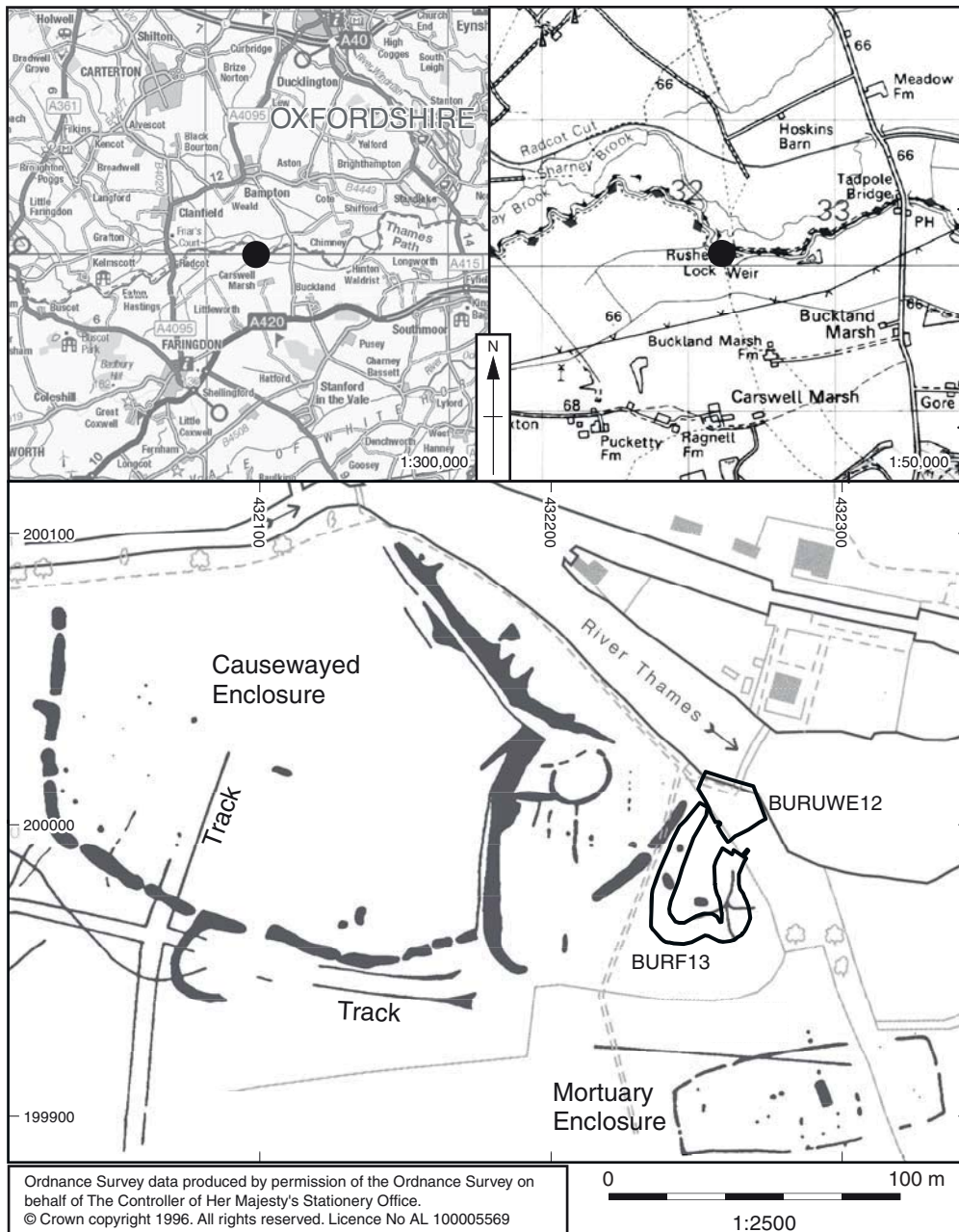


Figure 1: The excavations in relation to the cropmark evidence (after Blair)

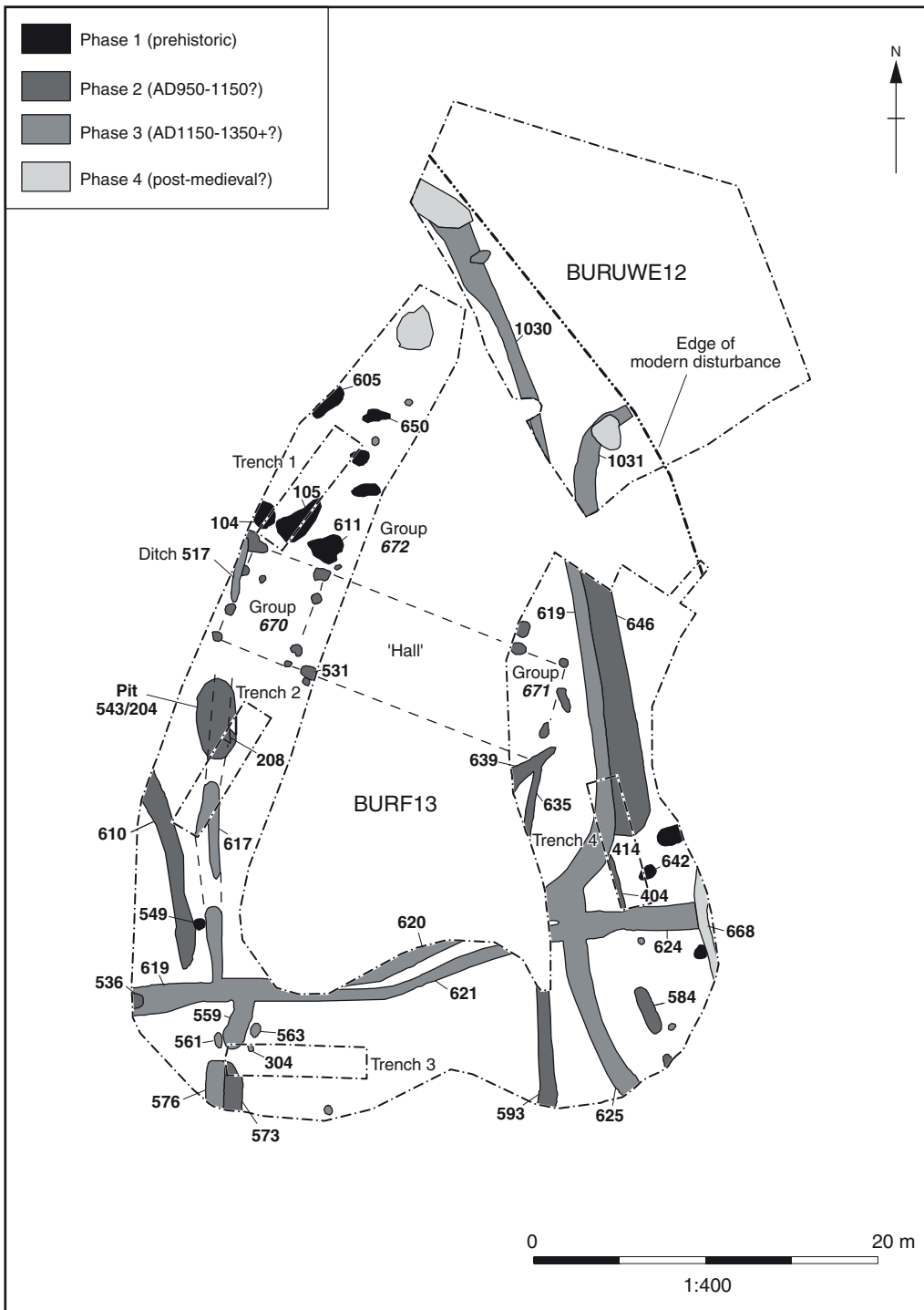


Figure 2. Plan of features



Figure 3: Structure 670

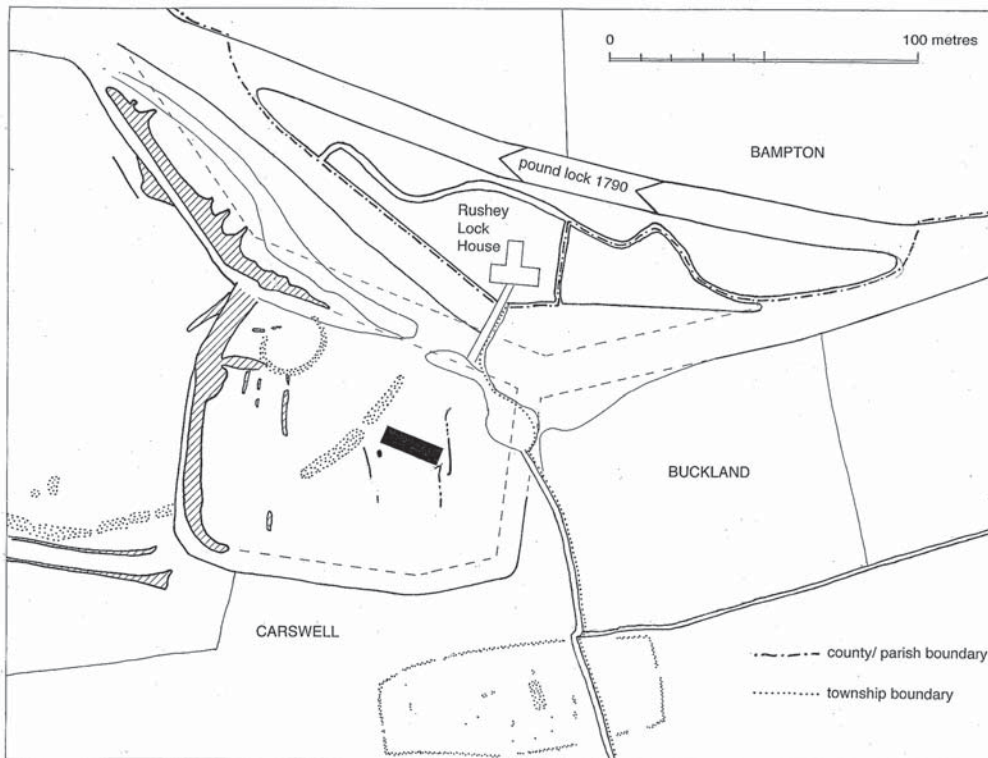


Figure 4: Cropmarks and topographical features around Rushey Lock. Neolithic features are stippled, probable early medieval ones are hatched. The footprint of the late Anglo-Saxon building (on the assumption that the two groups of postholes belong to the same structure) is in solid black

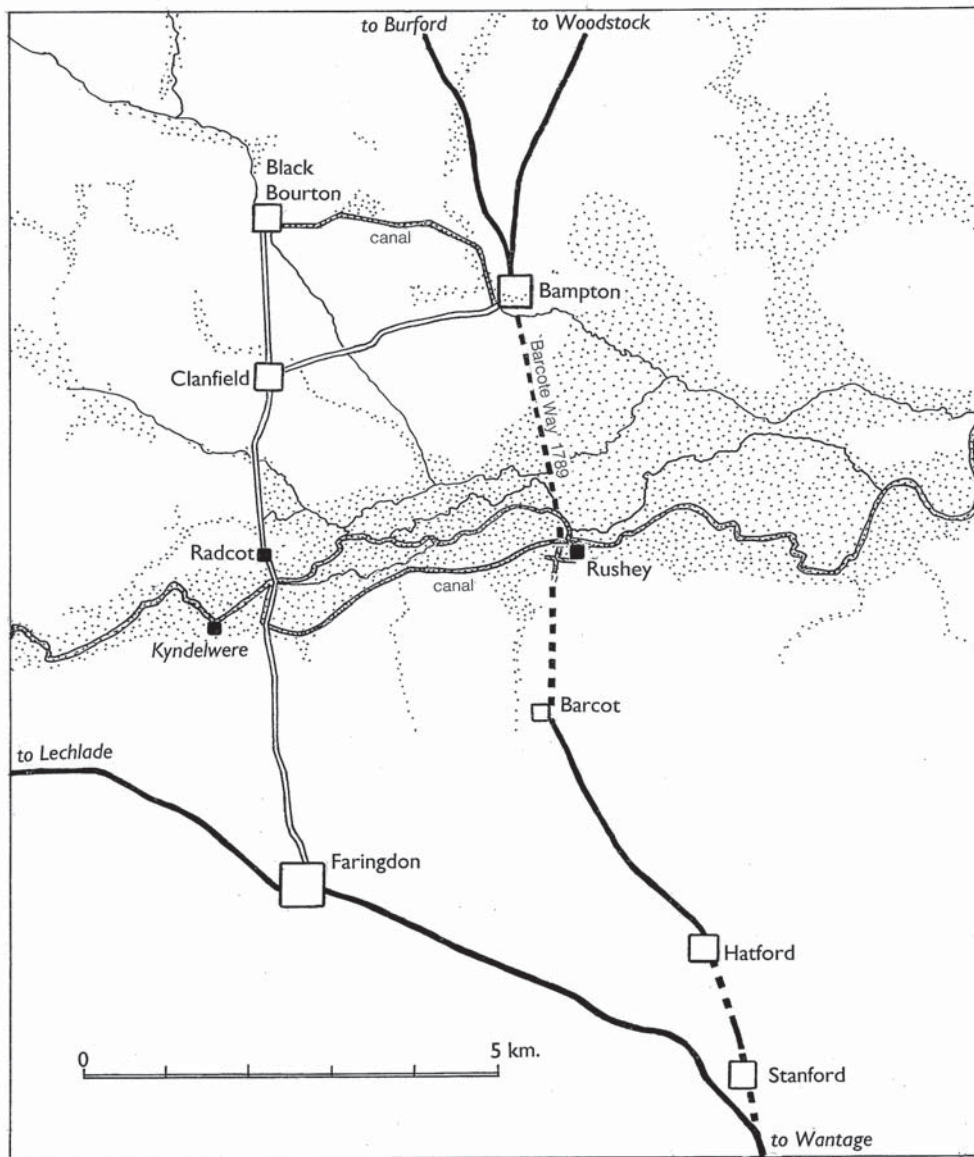


Figure 5: Outline map to illustrate the proposed succession of cross-Thames routes.

Roads likely to have existed before 1000 are shown in continuous black line where they remained in use, in broken black line where they were reduced to tracks or disappeared; suggested eleventh-century replacement roads are shown in open line.

Watercourses and the alluvial floodplain are stippled

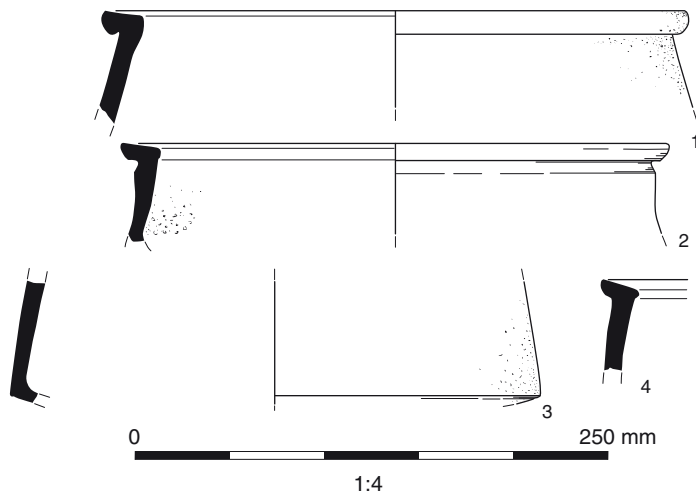


Figure 6: Pottery

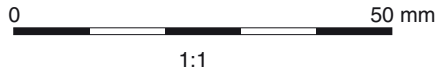


Figure 7: Flints



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