Chapter 5: Discussion

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LIMITS OF THE CEMETERY

It is likely that the excavated area represents only a half to two thirds of the original extent of the cemetery. A large number of burials were probably lost to quarrying immediately S of the site, before the cemetery was recognised. However, the limits of the cemetery to the S can be estimated. In the trench to the S of the quarry (Fig. 6) three graves, 161, 164 and 152 were found, suggesting that the cemetery may have continued underneath the modern road, but not to the S of it where excavations did not record any Anglo-Saxon burials (Sutton 1961/2). Three further outlying graves, 120, 133 and 151, were found at the extreme northern end of the main excavation, which suggest the probable limits of the cemetery in that direction. Removal of the concrete and tarmac surface immediately W of the excavation revealed no further burials, nor did examination of the area to the E which was being quarried.

The numbers of individuals recorded from the site may considerably under-represent the original total number of burials, as the entire excavation area was stripped by machine in preparation for gravel extraction and this caused a certain amount of damage, especially to the cremations. Only four cremations were located and it is likely that many had been destroyed by quarrying and earlier ploughing.

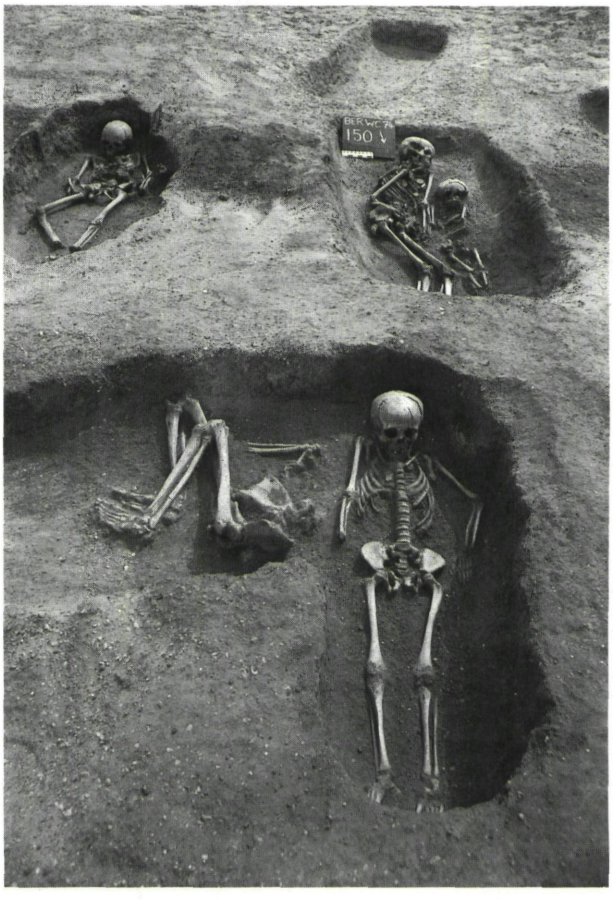

Figure 24 Detail of the cemetery: grave 149 right foreground, cutting grave 148: right background grave 150: left background grave 128. (Roman gully 132 in background being cut by graves 128 and 150)

AGE, SEX AND CEMETERY POPULATION

The cemetery population, as found, comprised a maximum of 118 individuals, in 100 graves and 4 cremations. However, a number of these were only represented by very fragmentary remains and are likely to be charnel deposits (see below).

On the basis of the osteological evidence (discussed in detail by Harman, this volume) it was possible to assign the sex of 62 adult individuals while, in keeping with current practice, no attempt was made to sex the 33 subadults represented. On this basis there were 30 males, 32 females and a further 18 adult individuals who could not be sexed, although the associated objects indicate that two of these, graves 51 and 72, were probably male. Artefacts associated with subadults imply that a further three of these were male and nine female. There was no data for the individual in grave 151. Two cremations were identified as adult but could not be sexed. A further two cremations were unidentified.

In the case of grave 104 the evidence was contradictory: the skeleton identified as a probable male aged 20–25 years was buried wearing a pair of small-long brooches and a selection of beads. The bone determination is not an entirely reliable one, however, as it is only based on the sexually diagnostic features of the skull and certain fragmentary long bones. The degree of accuracy of determinations based only on the skull without mandible has been variously assessed as anything in the range from 80% to 92% (Krogman 1962). The association of both brooches and beads, however, is one that is generally accepted to be indicative of a female (eg Owen-Crocker 1986) and given the unreliability of the skeletal evidence it is likely that the artefactual evidence indicating a female is more reliable, albeit one who falls into the intermediate group which comprises 5 to 10% of the population (Brothwell in Evison 1987, 123).

Brothwell has argued (1972, 84) that the majority of earlier populations contained an almost equal number of males and females, with, if anything, a

Table 32 Principal characteristics of graves

Grave No.	Age	Sex by bone	Sex by grave goods	Body position	Orientation	Grave depth (in metres)	Evidence for grave structures
1	20–25y	m	m	supine	s–n	0.20	
2	*c* 5y	–	f?	supine	s–n	0.10	
3	20–25y	?	ud	?	s–n	0.10	
4	20–25y	f?	nf	supine	s–n	0.15	
5	20–25y	f	f	supine	s–n	0.20	
6	25–30y	m	m	supine	s–n	0.08	
8	25–30y	f	f	supine	s–n	0.16	
10/1	adult	f	na	??supine	?	0.20	
10/2	13–14	–	na	?	?	0.20	
10/3*	adult	?	na	?	?	0.20?	
11	adult	m	m	?	?sse–nnw	0.05	limestone fragment, charcoal staining
13/1	adult	?	nf	?	sw–ne	0.15	
13/2	1–3y	–	nf	?	?	0.15	
14	*c* 8y	–	nf	supine	s–n	0.20	
15	10–11y	–	ud	supine	s–n	0.20	
18	17–23y	f	f	supine	s–n	0.10	
19	*c* 1.5y	–	nf	?	?s–n	0.10	
20	45+y	m	m	supine	w–e	0.16	
21	adult?	f?	f	?	??sse–nnw	0.05	
22	30–35?	f?	f	?	??s–n	0.10	
24	30–35	m	m	supine	wsw–ene	0.20	two limestone blocks, two nails
25	adult	f	nf	supine	?ssw–nne	0.15	
26/1	35–40y	m	m	supine	w–e	0.20–25	
26/2*	?	?	nf	?	?	0.20–25?	
27	adult	f	nf	?	?	?	
28	40–45y	m	m	supine	ssw–nne	0.25	
29	*c* 16y	m?	m	supine	w–e	0.18	lined with limestone blocks
30/1	40–45y	m	m	supine	w–e	0.16	
30/2*	adoles.	?	nf	?	?	0.16?	
32	45++y	m	ud	supine	s–n	0.27	
33	adult?	m?	nf	?	se–nw	0.27	
34	25–30y	m	m	supine	s–n	0.20	one block of limestone
35	11–12y	–	f	supine	w–e	0.25	
37/1	17–22y	m	na	?	?	*c* 0.10	
37/2	*c* 4y	–	na	?	?	*c* 0.10	
38	neonate	–	nf	?	?	?	
42	45+y	f	f	supine	sw–ne	0.36	
43/1	adult	m	m	supine	?sw–ne	0.20	
44	adult	?	nf	?	??s–n	?	

Table 32 (cont.) Principal characteristics of graves

Grave No.	Age	Sex by bone	Sex by grave goods	Body position	Orientation	Grave depth (in metres)	Evidence for grave structures
47	*c* 4y	–	nf	supine	??sse–nnw	0.10	
48	*c* 7y	–	ud	supine	ssw–nne	0.45	
49	45++y	f	f	supine	ssw–nne	0.30	
50/1	adult	f	ud	supine	sw–ne	0.40	
50/2*	adult	?	nf	?	?	?	
51	20–25y	?	m	supine	wsw–ene	0.25	
52	30–35y	m	m	supine	sse–nnw	0.40	
53	30–35y	m	m	supine	sse–nnw	0.45	
54	30–35y	f	f	supine	wsw–ese	0.40	
55	*c* 7y	–	ud	supine	w–e	0.07	
56	35–40y	m	ud	on right side	se–nw	0.50	
57	*c* 9y	–	ud	supine	w–e	0.08	
58	13–14y	–	f	supine	w–e	0.15	
59	*c* 8y	–	f	?	w–e	0.05	
60	35–40y	f	f	supine	w–e	0.25	
61	11–12y	–	m	supine	w–e	0.25	limestone blocks, nail
62	adult	?	nf	?	s–n?	?	
63	20–25y	f	f	supine	w–e	0.15	
64	1–1.5y	–	f	?	ssw–nee	0.30	
66	adult	f	f	supine	w–e	0.60	
67	30–35y	m	nf	?	n–s	?	
68	*c* 1.5y	–	f	supine	s–n	0.05	
69	25–30y	m	m	supine	s–n	0.10	
72	20–25y	?	m	supine	w–e	0.20	
73	20–25y	f	f	supine	w–e	0.30	rough limestone blocks
74	*c* 1.5y	–	nf	?	w–e	0.05	
75	adult	?	nf	?	?	?	
76	45++y	m	nf	supine	wnw–ese	0.30	limestone blocks and quartz pebbles
77	35–40y	f	f	supine	sse–nnw	0.25	
78	*c* 1y	–	ud	?	w–e?	0.15	
81	25–30y	f	nf	?	?	?	
82	20–25y	m	m	supine	wnw–ese	0.10	
83	adult	f	f	on right side	wnw–ese	0.10	
86	*c* 7y	–	ud	on left side	w–e	0.20	
91	20–25y	f	f	supine	ssw–nne	0.25	
92	*c* 6y	–	ud	supine	sse–nnw	0.28	nail
101	30–35y	m	ud	supine	s–n	0.08	nail?
102	15–20y	f	f	supine	s–n	0.40	rushes
103	*c* 4y	–	ud	supine	sw–ne	0.26	
104	20–25y	m?	f	supine	ssw–nne	0.44	charred timbers
106	45++y	f	ud	on left side	s–n	0.20	

Table 32 (cont.) Principal characteristics of graves

Grave No.	Age	Sex by bone	Sex by grave goods	Body position	Orientation	Grave depth (in metres)	Evidence for grave structures
107/1	15–20y	f	f	supine	sse–nnw	0.40	
107/2*	15–20y	?	nf	?	?	?	
108	20–25y	f?	nf	supine	sse–nnw	0.40	
109	45+y	f	nf	supine	wnw–ese	0.10	
110	45++y	m	m	supine	sw–ne	0.15	
117	30–35y	m	nf	supine	s–n	*c* 0.20	
118	1.5–2y	–	f?	on right side	ssw–nne	0.05	
120	?	?	ud?	?	sse–nnw?	?	
121	adult	m	m	supine	s–n	0.35	
122	*c* 8y	–	ud	supine	s–n	0.08	limestone blocks
125	*c* 11y	??f	f	supine	s–n	0.30	limestone blocks, carbonised wood, nail
126	?	?	nf	supine	sse–nnw	?	
127	17–19y	?	ud	supine	ssw–nne	0.18	
128	*c* 9y	–	m	supine	s–n	0.22	
129	9–10y	–	nf	supine	sse–nnw	0.25	
130	35–40y	f	f	supine	s–n	0.35	charcoal flecks
133/1	40–45y	m	ud	supine	sse–nnw	?	
133/2	adult	f	nf	?	?	?	
134/1	45+y	f	f	supine	n–s	0.35	four-post structure to S
134/2*	adolescent /adult	?	nf	?	?	?	
135	6–7y	–	nf	on right side	sse–nnw	0.10	
136	*c* 10y	–	ud	supine	sse–nnw	0.50	
141/1	30–35y	m	m	supine?	s–n?	0.20	
141/2	*c* 14y	–	nf	supine?	sse–nnw?	0.20	
141/3*	adult	?	nf	?	?	?	
148	adult	f	nf	?	?w–e	0.15	
149	6–7y	–	ud	supine	s–n	0.30	
150/1	*c* 14y	–	f	on left side	s–n	0.20	
150/2	*c* 3y	–	nf	supine	s–n	?	
151	no data	no data	ud	?	sw–ne	?	
152	17–19y	f	ud	supine	wsw–ene	0.05	limestone blocks, posthole, nail
161	30–35y	m	m	supine	sw–ne	0.10	nail
164	35–40y	m	nf	supine	w–e	0.40	

Key

f = female
m = male
– = no attempt at sexing/remains subadult
? = sex unknown
ud = undiagnostic
nf = no finds
na = non attributable

* not certain that double grave is represented, 'second' individual may represent charnel deposit

slight male bias. This pattern is broadly reflected at Berinsfield and as there is no evidence for any segregation according to sex this may be an accurate reflection of the male/female ratio of the population, despite the unsexed element of the group.

It was not possible to assign a precise age at death to 21 adult individuals and there were two adolescents and an adolescent or adult who could not be aged more precisely. No data was available to age the inhumations 26/2 and 151. Among those for whom a more precise age range could be assigned all age groups from 20 years to above 45 years were well represented. There were eight ?adolescents aged between 15–20 years, eight children aged 10–15 years, 13 aged 5–10 years, 13 under fives which included only a single newborn infant. This under representation of infants is not unusual (eg at Dover (Evison 1987, 146) there was only one child under five years), and as neonatal mortality is generally thought to have been high it is concluded that a different method of disposal was employed. Crawford (1991) has argued that infants and juveniles (a term which is often insufficiently defined in the majority of cemetery reports) should be excluded from any attempt at population reconstruction as their recorded presence within Anglo-Saxon cemeteries does not provide a true reflection of life expectancy or population structure. Full details of age and sex where known appear in Table 32.

The categories into which the supplied age ranges (Harman, this volume) have been fitted are broad ones, and as the different categories of non-adult used in cemetery reports are rarely defined direct comparison with other sites is often difficult. No attempt has been made here to define categories of non-adult as they are not made sufficiently explicit in the bone report. A greater difficulty to be faced is that we do not know when an Anglo-Saxon child came to be treated as an adult (Crawford 1991); however, a 12 year old non-adult/adult threshold is becoming apparent at sites like Sewerby (Hirst 1985), Portway (Cook and Dacre 1985) and Dover (Evison 1987), and is indicated by the data at Berinsfield (see below). In addition it should also be recognised that from the perspective of physical anthropology, the age when a child begins to be treated as an adult, and the time at which sexually diagnostic skeletal traits begin to appear, do not necessarily coincide. We are then faced with the choice of deciding whether or not an individual should be classified as an adult when sexually diagnostic traits do appear, regardless of age range, as with the 16 year old probable male in grave 29.

As Stirland (1989) has recently emphasised any attempt at a reconstruction of the size of the population who used a cemetery is difficult. Archaeological considerations involve attempts to estimate the temporal and spatial extent of the cemetery, often with imprecise results; in addition it is not clear that every category of individual within a given population was buried there, in particular the infant component (see above). Anthropological problems arise from the inability to estimate age with any degree of precision, making it very difficult to determine the potential size of the group at any one time. A maximum of 118 individuals (114 inhumations and four cremations) were recovered from the cemetery, buried over a period of approximately 150 years. The excavator has estimated that as many as 50% of the burials may have been lost to ploughing or quarrying (see above), and the real population of the cemetery may have been as many as 150–200 individuals. A working estimate of a 30-year generation span has been adopted elsewhere (Arnold 1988, 166; Down and Welch 1990, 108) and, if applied to Berinsfield, would imply that over five generations the cemetery was serving a population of at the most 30–40 people at any one time.

BODY POSITION

The most common body position at Berinsfield, as at other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, was supine. It was possible to determine the position of the skeleton in 82 cases, and of these 53 were buried supine (1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15, 18, 24, 25, 26/1, 28, 29, 30/1, 32, 42, 43/1, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 60, 63, 66, 68, 72, 73, 76, 77, 82, 92, 102, 103, 107, 108, 109, 110, 121, 122, 125, 127, 128, 129, 130, 133/1, 134/1, 136, 149, 152, 164). A further ten burials appeared to be supine, although disturbance and missing bones made the determination less certain (2, 10/1, 20, 34, 47, 50/1, 126, 141/1, 141/2, 150/2). The burial in grave 161 was supine but turned to the right. Ten individuals were buried supine with the legs semi-flexed (5, 35, 55, 61, 69, 91, 101, 104, 117, 148) and six burials lay on their side (56, 83, 135 on the right side and 86, 106 and 150/1 on the left side). A further two burials, 118 and 151, appeared to have been on their sides, but both skeletons were extensively damaged and the determination of position was therefore less secure. In 32 cases it was not possible to determine the burial position (3, 10/2, 10/3, 11, 13/1, 13/2, 19, 21, 22, 26/2, 27, 30/2, 33, 37/1, 37/2, 38, 43/2, 44, 50/2, 59, 62, 64, 67, 74, 75, 78, 81, 107/2, 120, 133/2, 134/2, 141/3).

Twenty one supine burials had the head turned to the left, and 16 to the right. As has been noted elsewhere (Evison 1987, 129), this feature did not appear to relate to the sex of the burial. At Berinsfield seven males had their heads turned to the left (1, 28, 32, 51, 69, 72, 164) and five to the right (24, 29, 82, 101, 161), eight females had heads turned to the left (5, 8, 18, 60, 63, 73, 107/1, 109) and five to the right (77, 102, 108, 130, 134/1), and five children had their heads to the left (14, 57, 92, 125, 136) and six to the right (48, 55, 58, 61, 103, 129). One unsexed adult had its head turned to the left.

The heads of the individuals in graves 4, 35, 66, 110, 128, 149 and 152 appeared to have been propped up when placed in the graves. The heads of grave 4, 35, 128 and 149 were recorded as propped against the grave side, and the head of

grave 4 was projecting from the grave fill when discovered. A lump of iron slag was found at the head end of grave 128, while a stone was found by the head of the woman in grave 152. In both cases the objects may have supported the heads; in other cases the heads may have rested on objects of perishable material as has been suggested for graves 12 and 38 at Portway, Andover (Cook and Dacre 1985, 56).

Eight individuals were buried with their legs crossed; of these, two were definitely male (28, 51) and one possibly male (33); three were female (50/1, 60, 104); one was a child (14) and one was unsexed.

Arm positions among supine burials were variable within a limited range. Eighteen burials had both arms straight by the sides (8, 15, 24, 26/1, 29, 30/1, 32, 43/1, 49, 68, 72, 103, 104, 120, 122, 125, 134, 149). Twelve burials had both arms slightly and symmetrically flexed to meet over the pelvis (1, 52, 57, 60, 63, 92, 101, 127, 136, 152, 161, 164) and four had both arms resting on the femurs (20, 51, 61, 128). Four supine burials had both arms flexed over the upper chest at angles of 90% or less (35, 66, 107/1 and 109). A further 24 supine burials had asymmetrical arm positions. Of these, four had their left arms straight and their right slightly bent (48, 76, 102, 108) while 11 had their right arms straight and their left slightly bent to rest on their pelvis or femur (5, 28, 42, 53, 54, 55, 57, 77, 82, 121, 129, 130). The burial in grave 58 had her right hand resting on her femur but her left hand bent and resting by her side. A further eight burials had one arm much more strongly flexed. The man in grave 110 had his left shoulder raised and left hand resting on his hip, while the woman in grave 91 appeared to have her right shoulder raised and her right arm resting on her hip. The burials in graves 4, 6, 18 and 73 had their right arms bent at right angles with their hands resting on their stomachs, while the burials in graves 69 and 117, both males with semi-flexed legs, had their right arms drawn up at an acute angle.

In general, the body positions at Berinsfield were very consistent, with the majority (69%) of burials, where data was available, being supine with extended or slightly flexed arms and legs. In this context, the relatively small number of variants — individuals buried on their sides or supine with semi-flexed legs, or with flexed arms — seem all the more conspicuous. There were no completely crouched burials at Berinsfield, although the angle of the legs to the trunk approached 90% in the case of graves 83, 106 and 135 (buried on their sides) and graves 61, 69, 117 and 148 (in which the upper part of the body appeared to be supine).

The significance of body position remains very unclear, although a number of trends have been identified. Both Evison (1987, 133) and Hirst (1985, 37–8) have noted an association between wealthy burials and the supine position, in which grave goods can best be displayed. At Berinsfield, the nine wealthiest males (24, 26/1, 28, 34, 51, 52, 53, 110, 141/1) were buried supine, with their legs extended and, where data was available, they had their arms straight by their sides (24, 26/1), or slightly flexed and resting on the pelvis or thighs (28, 51, 52, 53, 110). Amongst women and children, however, there was greater variation. Four (54, 77, 102, 107/1) of the seven wealthiest women were buried supine with their legs extended, two (5, 104) were supine with their legs semi-flexed and one (83), with five grave goods, lay almost crouched on her side. The woman in grave 107/1, the wealthiest burial in the cemetery, had her arms folded across her stomach, although the remainder had slightly flexed or extended arms. Of the eight wealthiest child burials (individuals aged less than 15/16), four were supine with extended legs (2, 47, 125, 128), two were supine with semi-flexed legs (35, 61) and one lay on her side (150/1). The position of the infant in grave 64 was unknown. The girl in grave 35 had her arms tightly flexed across her chest; where data was available, the remainder had straight or slightly flexed arms.

It has been suggested that flexed burials may result from a grave being dug too small for the body, which was then bent to fit in the grave (Down and Welch 1990, 19), and the evidence from Berinsfield offers some support for this. The mean length of adult graves at Berinsfield was 2 m and only three graves (56, 83, 106) were more than one standard deviation shorter than this (SD = 0.22 m). These three graves all contained burials lying on their sides, of which one, the man in grave 106, was clearly too tall (1.68 m) for his grave (1.58 m). Of the larger graves, the burial in grave 101 had semi-flexed legs, and the grave was only slightly longer (1.9 m) than his estimated height (1.82 m). The burial in grave 109 may be a similar case; the woman was buried with her arms tightly flexed and her grave was exceptionally narrow (0.37 m wide). Nevertheless, it is difficult to sustain this argument in the case of other burials in variant positions, where there seems to have been ample unused space in the grave. The man in grave 69, buried with his legs semi-flexed, was estimated to have been 1.7 m tall; the grave was considerably longer, at 2.10 m. There seems also to have been ample unused space in grave 91 (2.15 m long) and in grave 35 (approx 1.45 x 1.01 m), the widest child's grave in the cemetery. It is possible that apparently empty space may have been used for grave goods of perishable material, such as wood or cloth.

Hirst (1985, 36) has noted that a crouched position may be indicative of hasty or careless burial, since smaller graves were less effort to dig. There may be some support for this view from the evidence of grave 117, which appeared to have been cut into an apparently earlier grave (10) in which 2 or possibly 3 individuals had already been buried. Grave 117 may therefore represent an attempt to fit an extra burial into an existing grave with the minimum of effort. Down and Welch have suggested (1990, 19) that family graves may have been reused, and it is notable that graves 10 and 117 contained the remains of an adult male (117), an adult female (10/1) and an adolescent (aged 13–14)

in a cemetery in which there was generally very little intercutting of burials.

In other cases, however, it was clear that considerable care had been taken over the preparation of the burial. Grave 56 was exceptionally short (see above), but was one of the deepest graves in the cemetery, cut about 0.5 m into the gravel. Inhumation 104, whose legs were semi-flexed to the left and crossed, was buried in a grave which was lined with two courses of carbonized timbers, while inhumation 61 had limestone blocks placed around the head end of his short grave. It is also notable that some of the individuals in variant positions were comparatively rich in grave goods and it seems unlikely that they would have been buried carelessly or with a minimal expenditure of effort. Amongst these, grave 61 was one of the wealthiest child burials and one of the three children in the cemetery who was buried with a small spear. Both grave 104 and grave 83 were among the wealthiest female burials, while grave 69 was one of the ten men in the cemetery buried with both a spear and a shield.

It has been variously suggested that burial position may reflect ethnic or cultural associations, religious beliefs or the individual's social identity. Faull has argued (1977, 5–11, 24–36) that crouched burials may in some circumstances represent a survival of pre-Roman and Romano-British burial practices, and Down and Welch have noted this possibility in relation to the cemeteries at Apple Down (1990, 19–25). Evison (1987, 133) considered that four isolated burials in variant bone positions at the Buckland cemetery, Dover, might reflect a different religious background, and Filmer-Sankey has suggested that the wide variety of body positions at the cemetery at Snape may be one of a number of indicators of variation in religious belief (Filmer-Sankey, 1992). Detailed work on the possible relationship between burial position and social identity has been carried out by Pader (1980; 1982).

Variant body positions were a small minority at Berinsfield and this, together with the probable loss of many graves to gravel quarrying, made it unlikely that any strong conclusions could be reached concerning their possible significance; nevertheless, a number of interesting points have emerged. All but one (grave 6) of the eight burials with one or both arms flexed at 90° or less were adult women. In general, variant body positions were most common amongst adult women, where they represented 12 out of 26 burials for which data were available. Amongst men, the level of variant positions was much lower, at 5 out of 27, and amongst children it rose to 7 out of 24.

Further analysis of these burials has suggested that a relationship might exist between the date of burial and the likelihood of a variant body position. Just over half of these burials (13 out of 24) were datable, and of these, the latest was grave 107/1, dated to the mid 6th century. Three other burials (91, 104 and 66) could be only broadly dated to the 6th century (Phase 2/3), but the remaining nine were all Phase 2 graves (5, 6, 18, 35, 61, 69, 73, 83, 150/1). Of the undated graves, grave 148 might also be considered early, since it was cut by grave 149 which contained a bucket tentatively dated by Cook to the beginning of the 6th century (this volume).

Burials with variant body positions occurred in all areas of the cemetery, but there was some evidence of clustering. Of the six definite burials lying on one side and the two further possibilities, four occurred in the SW sector of the cemetery, and three of them (118, 83 and 86) up against the western limit of the excavation. Grave 151 was in an isolated position to the N of the main cemetery area. There were only three burials in variant positions among the predominantly male/child group in the E sector, of which it could be argued that grave 150/1 was a special case, as it seems likely that the body position was influenced by the personal circumstances — perhaps a family relationship — of the two children. Moreover, Grave 148 (which was aligned W-E) was cut and partly destroyed by grave 149 which was on the dominant S-N alignment of this sector, and it could be argued that grave 148 dated from an earlier period of the cemetery's use and was not associated with the remaining graves in the area. By contrast, burials in variant positions appeared to cluster among the predominantly female/child group in the N sector. Here nine burials in variant positions were aligned along the main N-S ditch and the smaller ditch, F99.

There was also some evidence that variant burial positions were more likely to be associated with certain types of object. Three of the four burials with small-long brooches had variant body positions, and one of these was the partially-crouched burial 83, who also had a Roman disc brooch and a perforated Roman coin. Down and Welch (1990, 19) have noted that a Roman coin occurred with the crouched burial 85, at the Apple Down cemetery. It may also be significant that burial 69 was the only man with two weapons who was not buried supine with extended arms and legs. Instead, he was curled on one side of the grave, and his shield appears to have been deposited over his face, a custom which Härke notes is more typical of Anglian than Saxon cemeteries (this volume). Shields in Saxon cemeteries are more usually deposited over the chest or legs, and it is notable that of the two other burials at Berinsfield where a shield was deposited higher up on the body (82, 121), one (82) was buried with the woman and children on their sides at the western edge of the cemetery. It was also notable that of the four accompanied male burials without weapons, two were in variant positions — grave 56 on his side and grave 101 with semi-flexed legs.

The position of the skeleton in grave 25 was most unusual, and is not readily explicable. The body of an adult female, without grave goods, was found curved along the alignment of the main S-N ditch. It may be possible that this grave, and grave 24 which was also cut into the ditch edge slightly to the SW, were marking the extent of a family burial plot.

MULTIPLE BURIALS

In a number of cases the remains of more than one individual derived from a single grave. Unfortunately the degree of disturbance made it very difficult to determine relationships. It is possible, however, to suggest a distinction between those graves which clearly contained multiple burials (10, 13, 37, 43, 133, 141, 150) and those in which the few fragments of the second individual seem likely to be a form of charnel deposit (26, 30, 50, 107, 134, 141).

At least three individuals were recovered from grave 10/117, which was a difficult context to excavate and interpret as it had been extensively damaged by quarrying activities. During excavation it was not possible to determine whether one grave had been re-used or if more than one existed. The relationship of 10/1 to 10/2 was clear as the latter appeared in plan to be lying on top of the former in a single grave. However, despite the parallel position of skeleton 117, its relationship to grave 10 is unclear. This feature is further complicated by the remains of inhumation 10/3, recorded as deriving from context 10, which is represented by only a few fragments of an adult. Inhumation 10/3 may represent a charnel deposit, or it may be a part of skeleton 117 (also an adult; it is unclear if the bone specialist was supplied with the relevant contextual information to link the two). The very fragmentary nature and small size of 10/3 tends to discount the possibility that it was the intentional burial of a fourth individual.

In grave 13 an infant (13/2), aged 1–3 years, was located in the torso area of the adult burial 13/1. Two individuals 37/1 and 37/2 were buried in the terminal of a Roman gully but they were completely disarticulated and any evidence of their relationship had been destroyed. Grave 133 appears to have been re-used for the interment of 133/1, thereby causing disturbance to the earlier burial 133/2. The explanation of the three burials in grave 141 is complicated by animal activity (Fig. 25). Two individuals, 141/1 and 141/2, were clearly visible in the shared grave at the time of excavation but due to the considerable degree of disarticulation (probably caused by foxes, whose skeletons were also found in the grave), the relationship of 141/1 and 141/2 with 141/3 cannot be determined. In grave 150 (Figs 24 and 50) two subadults, aged *c* 14 and 3 years lay side by side in a relatively large grave. The elder of the two, 150/1, lay on its left side looking towards the younger child, 150/2, who was supine. The legs of 150/2 were curved slightly around the knees of 150/1 and it is therefore probable that these individuals were buried simultaneously.

In the remaining graves small amounts of bone representing second individuals were only recognised during post-excavation processing and

Figure 25 Grave 141

there was therefore no contextual information to support the analysis. In grave 26, 26/2 comprised one axis vertebra. In grave 50, 50/2 consisted of part of an ulna, but it is impossible to determine whether this represents a charnel deposit or part of one of the other individuals present in a very damaged context which also contained grave 43 (a double burial), grave 81 (represented only by a skull), fragmentary remains recorded as grave 75, and a dog burial. The stratigraphy of this context is discussed in detail below. The remains represented by 30/2 consisted of long bone shafts and were slightly more substantial than 107/2 which comprised only a fragment of mandible. The foot bones which constituted 134/2 are of particular interest because grave 134 (Fig. 8) was cut into a large prehistoric pit (F116), which may have been the centre of a pond barrow, and it is possible that 134/2 represents a disturbed prehistoric burial rather than an intentional Anglo-Saxon burial or charnel deposit.

GRAVE DIMENSIONS

Measurements of grave length, width and depth were obtained for 88 graves. The depths, however, represent only the depth of the cut into the gravel, since the soil layers had been stripped by quarrying before the cemetery was recognised. In places the top of the gravel had also been removed, and depths for the very shallowest graves should therefore be regarded as only approximations.

Excluding graves containing multiple burials, and graves recorded as truncated, adult graves ranged in length from 1.54 m (grave 56) to 2.63 m (grave 52), and children's graves (individuals aged less than 15/16 years) from 0.93 m (grave 68) to 2 m (grave 125). The mean length of adult graves was 2 m (Standard Deviation 0.22 m) and of children's graves, 1.46 m (SD 0.28 m).

The adult graves included one excessively narrow example, grave 109, which was 0.37 m wide; otherwise the range of widths was from 0.56 m (grave 3) to 1.1 m (grave 25), with a mean width of 0.83 m (SD 0.14 m). Children's graves ranged in width from 0.42 m (grave 86) to 1.01 m (grave 35), with a mean width of 0.67 m (SD 0.17 m).

The depth of the grave cuts into the gravel ranged, for adults, from 0.05 m (graves 11, 21, 152) to 0.6 m (grave 66), with a mean depth of 0.23 m (SD 0.13 m). Children's graves ranged in depth from 0.05 m (grave 59, 68, 74) to 0.5 m (grave 136), with a mean depth of 0.19 m (SD 0.12 m).

There was no obvious patterning in the distribution of deep and shallow graves to suggest that local variations in the subsoil had affected grave size. The deepest graves (42, 48, 52, 53, 54, 56, 66, 102, 104, 107, 108, 136 and 164), which were one SD or more above the mean grave depth, occurred in the N and SW sectors of the cemetery. However, a number of the shallowest graves (55, 57, 59, 101 and 109), which were one SD or more below the mean grave depth, also occurred in these areas. There was no evidence that graves cut into the Romano-British ditches were dug especially deep, although the soil may have been easier to work.

It has been suggested that grave sizes may have related to the status of the individuals buried in them, with greater effort being expended to dig large graves for important people. Limited evidence to support this argument occurred at Sewerby (Hirst 1985, 30). However, at other cemeteries it has been noted that no consistent relationship was demonstrable between grave size and the social status of individuals as reflected in their grave goods (Cook and Dacre 1985, 54; Evison 1987, 150–2; Down and Welch 1990, 15).

The evidence at Berinsfield was similarly inconclusive. While the mean depth of all measurable adult graves was 0.23 m, the mean depth of the 16 wealthiest adult graves was only slightly greater, at 0.28 m. Similarly, while the mean depth of all measurable child graves was 0.19 m, the mean depth of the eight wealthiest children's graves was only 0.21 m.

Of the 11 deepest adult graves (one SD or more above the mean grave depth), six belonged to the wealthiest group of burials (52, 53, 54, 102, 104 and 107/1), but two (108, 164) were unaccompanied. No wealthy male burial was less than 0.15 m deep, but two of the three wealthiest, graves 28 and 26/1, were of only average depth (0.25 m and 0.2–0.25 m respectively). Four of the seven wealthiest women were in graves between 0.4 and 0.44 m deep, but a fifth, grave 83 who was almost crouched, was only 0.1 m deep. The two wealthiest children (graves 64 and 125) were in comparatively deep graves (both at 0.3 m), but two other children, each of whom had only one grave good, were in deeper graves (graves 48 and 136, 0.45 m and 0.5 m deep respectively). It has been noted in several recent cemetery publications (Cook and Dacre 1985, 53; Evison 1987, 161; Down and Welch 1990, 14–15) that graves may have been covered by earth mounds. It is therefore possible that status which is not evident in the depth of the grave cut may have been marked in the creation of a mound; however, it must be noted that no evidence for ring ditches surrounding graves was found at Berinsfield.

Analysis of grave lengths also failed to identify any consistent relationship between large graves and wealthy burials. The largest grave in the cemetery (grave 52) belonged to one of the three wealthiest men. However, there was no general tendency for the wealthiest graves to be the longest; of the 16 wealthiest adult burials, seven were in graves longer than the mean, and nine were in graves equal to or shorter than the mean (2 m). Similarly, only half of the eight wealthiest child burials were in graves longer than the mean (1.46 m). Five child graves were more than one SD longer than the mean; of these one (152) was very wealthy, while another (19) had no grave goods.

This result was mirrored when the poorest burials (with no grave goods, or only one) were

analyzed, although many of these graves had suffered extensive damage and 12 burials had to be omitted for lack of data (27, 33, 38, 44, 62, 67, 75, 81, 118, 120, 126, 148). Four of eight remaining adult burials were shallower than the mean depth and six out of eight were shorter than the mean length. Among child burials, seven out of 15 were shallower than the mean depth, and seven out of 15 were shorter than the mean length.

GRAVE STRUCTURES

Grave 104 (Fig. 27) was lined with charred oak logs on either side of the body. The logs measured up to 0.58 x 0.15 m and two courses were apparent on the left side. There was no trace of burning in the grave despite the fact that the timbers were carbonized. It has been suggested (Dr M Robinson pers. comm.) that either the timbers were placed in the grave after charring or were allowed to smoulder there at a relatively low temperature. One block of carbonized wood lay at the foot end of grave 125 which was lined with limestone blocks.

Bands of charcoal staining 0.1 to 0.2 m wide in grave 11 lay across the short axis of the grave bottom and are thought to indicate the presence of charred logs at time of burial. The slightly darker fill within the stone-lined area of grave 152 may hint at a similar practice, while charcoal flecks in the fill of grave 130 provided only inconclusive evidence.

Evidence for wooden structures has been recovered from a number of cemeteries, for instance Standlake Down grave 24 (Dickinson 1973), Abingdon 29, 77 and 78 (Leeds and Harden 1936), Harwell grave 6 (Kirk and Marshall 1956, 27), Droxford graves 4 and 5 (Aldsworth 1979, 162), Spong Hill 31 (Hills 1977, 1984) and Lechlade 18 and 92 (Boyle *et al.* forthcoming). At Standlake the remains of wood were extensive and appeared to be carbonized (Dickinson 1973). Charred wood remains were also recovered from Taplow (Meaney 1964) and Asthall (Leeds 1924) and *in situ* burning was apparently not indicated by the available evidence. The example from Spong Hill (Hills 1977) was located within a ring-ditch. It lay in a wooden box or chamber which had been placed in a rectangular pit, and had flint packed around it. There was evidence of a floor to the container but no certain evidence for a lid. Despite the absence of nails corners were neat and precise, which suggests that wooden pegs may have been used. The individual in Droxford grave 5 lay within a plank box though no evidence of a bottom was recovered. Hills (1977) suggested a date in the second half of the 6th century for this type of structure, from the evidence of the Continental examples which are fairly widespread in the 6th and early 7th centuries. However, such a date may be too precise since the examples cited above potentially range in date from the late 5th to the 7th century (Droxford and Standlake Down respectively). The association of the Spong Hill structure with an annular ring-ditch might support a slightly later dating as 7th-century examples are discussed by Hogarth (1973) and one of the examples from Lechlade is of a similar date.

At Appledown the presence of wooden lining and occasional signs of a rotted or charred plank laid across the body in certain graves suggested the likely presence of coffin structures, while fly larvae cases recovered from brooch surfaces in two graves led the excavators to suggest that the corpses may have been exposed for some time before being sealed by the soil of the grave (Down and Welch 1990, 18). The authors have linked these suggestions to the earlier argument advanced by Reynolds (1976) and Aldsworth (1979) that at Empingham and Droxford the presence of wooden structures, particularly if linked to a degree of disarticulation and movement of objects, indicated exposure of corpses. They argued that wooden planking was laid over the grave at ground level thus leaving the space within the grave clear, and that the fill was subsequently placed on top of the planks to form a small mound at ground level. With the gradual decay of the wood the grave filled up, disturbing both corpse and grave furniture. However, the placing of the body in a closed container followed by immediate backfilling of the grave and the effect of factors like the decay of the container, frost action or putrefaction of the body might equally well account for some movement of both bones and objects. As regards the evidence of fly larvae cases it is not necessarily the case that these accumulated on objects while they were in the grave, as we have little knowledge of how rapidly burial followed death in the Anglo-Saxon period.

Single nails were found in graves 61, 92, 101, 125, 152 and 161, while two were recovered from grave 24. These do not necessarily indicate that the body had been contained in a coffin, while conversely the absence of nails should not be taken to signify the lack of a coffin, as wooden pegs may have been used in their construction (Hills 1977).

The evidence for stone lining is extremely variable and ranges from one to several blocks (see Fig. 26; Table 32). Indeed where very few stones are present we must accept that they may have served another function, and it would seem that only four graves (29, 73, 76, 125) showed clear evidence of actual stone lining. Stone lining of graves is a common feature of Anglo-Saxon graves, found at sites like Lechlade (Boyle *et al.* forthcoming), Portway (Cook and Dacre 1985) and Minster Lovell, Oxon. (Meaney 1964), and it may be the case that the practice represents continuity of the Roman tradition of burial in stone cists. However, where linings are insubstantial they should probably be seen as a token or ritual deposit.

The body in grave 102 was partially covered by an organic deposit, identified as the remains of decayed rushes, which possibly represented a mat placed over the burial. Parallels to this burial have been found at Lechlade where reed or rush impressions were recorded in grave 92 and are thought to indicate a type of woven mat laid over

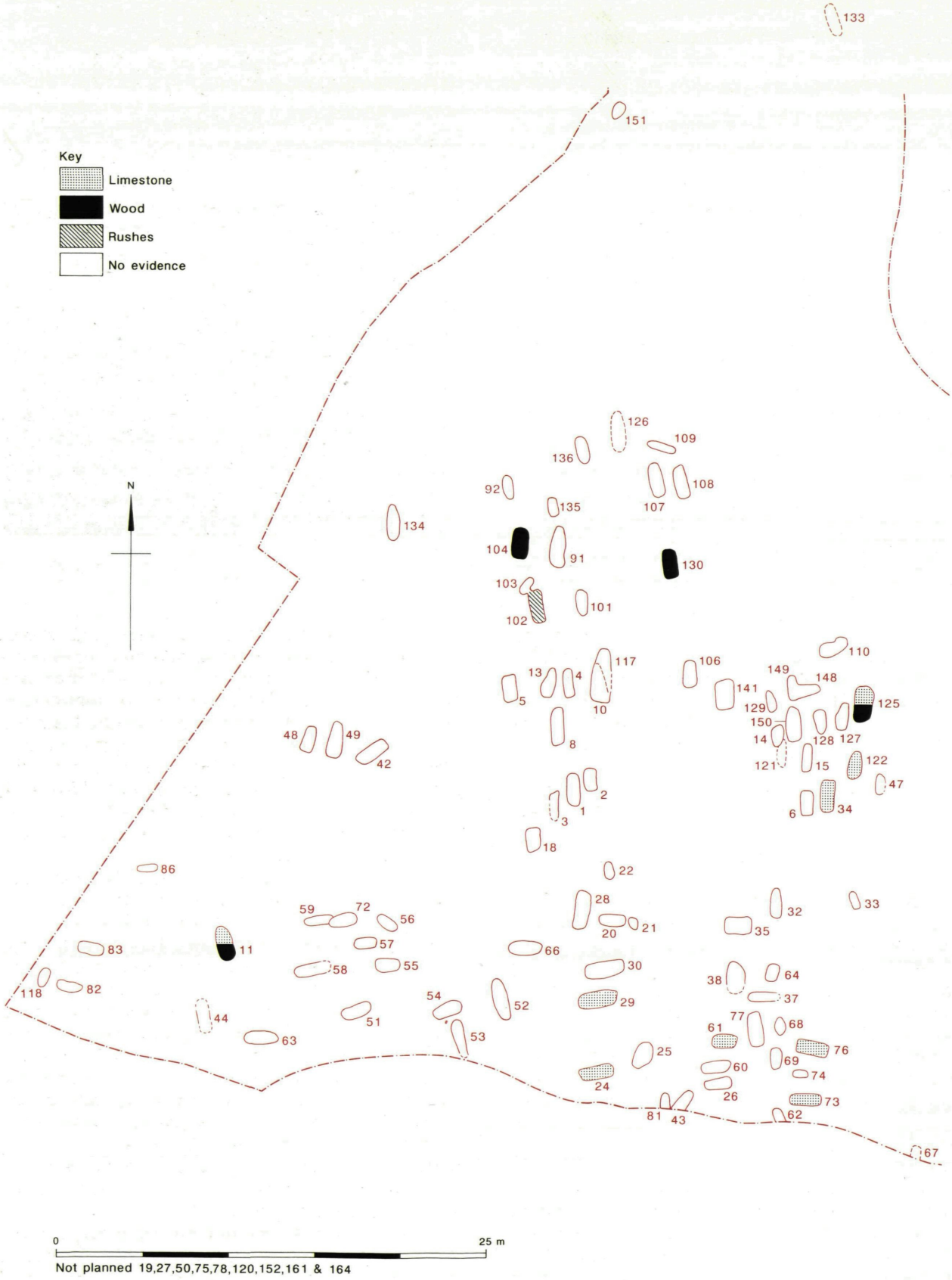

Figure 26 Distribution of grave structures and furniture

the body (Boyle *et al.* forthcoming), and bracken and grass impressions were noted in graves at Mucking (Jones and Jones 1975, 175).

Evidence of a grave marker was only found in one instance where a posthole was located at the head end of grave 152 (posthole at head or foot end of grave = Hogarth (1973) type IIa). The relationship between the posthole and grave was unclear, while at Appledown the marker posts present at the head ends of graves 19 and 22 appear to have been inserted during backfilling (Down and Welch 1990, 15).

Grave 134 (Fig. 8) was dug into the fill of a prehistoric oval pit (F116), which may have been the centre of a pond barrow (Barclay and Thomas, this volume.), and given the relatively isolated position of the burial within the cemetery it is possible that the grave may have exploited the vestigial bank or pond of the barrow in order to mark the burial conspicuously. However, the prehistoric feature may not have been visible by the Anglo-Saxon period, especially as the upper fill of the pit might have been a Roman ploughsoil, and the location of the grave could therefore be fortuitous, or it may have been aligned on the only other burial in the immediate vicinity, cremation 111, which was 4 m S of grave 134 and had been conspicuously placed inside a four-post structure (F112–F115). All four postholes had a fill of yellow-brown sandy loam with 10% gravel content. Diameters were on average 0.30 m and depths varied between 0.07 and 0.15 m. It is not possible to determine the chronological relationship between the cremation and the burial, as grave 134 has been tentatively dated to the latest phase within the cemetery with a range from the mid 6th to the early 7th century and a possible 6th-century date has been assigned to the cremation urn 11. However, their proximity in an area which is otherwise empty does suggest that their siting was deliberate and possibly made with respect to each other.

The four-post structure is paralleled in other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries with examples known from Alton, Hants. (Evison 1988), Lechlade, Glos. (Boyle *et al.* forthcoming) and Appledown, West Sussex, (Down and Welch 1990). Two examples from Appledown appear to have inhumations rather than cremations as their focus as do those from Bradstowe, Broadstairs and Barham Down (Hogarth 1973, 119). At Lechlade, the only other Upper Thames valley site where these structures have been located, the four-post structure had a central cremation which was only represented by the base of an urn, and no associated finds or stratigraphic relationships could provide any dating evidence.

At Appledown, 33 timber structures were discovered, 32 of which seemed to be associated with cremations, while a further two four- and six-post structures had inhumation burials as their central focus. The excavators of Appledown have suggested (Down and Welch 1990, 10) that these structures were miniature houses of the dead or

Figure 27 Grave 104 with the charred logs visible either side of the grave

family shrines, utilised over several generations. The fact that they vary in size and number of posts is thought to strengthen the argument that they were purpose-built structures, each intended to house the cremated members of individual families who maintained them over successive generations. This is further supported by the evidence for the replacement of a number of corner posts. However, the small quantity of cremated deposits is difficult to reconcile with the long-term use of these structures as family shrines.

Evidence for pyre construction that has been found on the Continent, at sites like Liebenau (Cosack 1982), has not been seen in England although Evison (1988, 36) has nonetheless suggested that these posts supported the funeral pyre upon which the remains were burnt (Evison 1988, 36), even though the evidence of burning at Alton was confined to the urns and cremation pits. Down and Welch (1990) also support the view that cremation was an activity carried out within the cemetery, but inside the family shrine rather than on top of a pyre structure. All have ascribed the lack of evidence for burning to both a lack of awareness on the part of past excavators and to the degree of soil erosion and/or disturbance to which cremation structures are clearly vulnerable.

There is no direct dating evidence for the Appledown structures nor indeed for that at Berinsfield, but it has been suggested (Down and Welch 1990, 33) that a probable introduction before the end of the 5th century is likely, with continuity

of use until the conversion to Christianity in the 7th century. A possible 5th-early 6th-century date was assigned to the Alton structure based on the association of two fragments of silver work which may be part of an equal-armed brooch (Evison 1988, 85, Fig. 40), although Down and Welch consider that this dating is rather tenuous (1990). The four-post structures which are associated with central inhumations may be slightly later as the grave goods suggest 7th- (Barham Down) and early 8th-century (Bradstowe) dates. Appledown grave 99 which was a warrior burial within a four-post structure has been assigned a date in the early 7th century on the basis of associated artefacts.

ORIENTATION

(Note: the position of the head is always given first)

The majority of graves at Berinsfield are broadly aligned on two main axes, at right angles to each other, of S-N and W-E. Examples of alignment modes at right angles are also known from Lechlade, Glos. (Boyle *et al.* forthcoming) and Burwell, Cambs. (Lethbridge 1931). Stratigraphic evidence at Alton, Hants. (Evison 1988, 42) indicated a shift from a W-E to a S-N alignment, while at Berinsfield there was only one instance of one alignment cutting the other, where grave 149 which was orientated S-N cut grave 148 orientated W-E (Fig. 24). Grave 149 contained a bucket decorated with spangles, for which a date in the early 6th century has been suggested (Cook, this volume). A chronological explanation for the shift at Berinsfield does not seem likely as both alignments occur in phases 1, 2 (Fig. 28) and probably phase 3 (there are clear S-N examples in this phase but the W-E examples are not certainly dated). Undated graves are also orientated in both directions.

Numerous explanations have been advanced for the choice of a particular alignment. Faull has argued (1977, 8) that in Northern England crouched burial, particularly when combined with a N-S or S-N orientation could in some cases indicate the presence of native British inhabitants as both are characteristic of pre-Roman and Romano-British burial practices in that area. This may not apply in other areas of the country, although recently Down and Welch (1990, 19) have suggested that at Appledown crouched S-N burial may represent a British component in a population that is ethnically mixed. The wide chronological and spatial distribution of crouched burial must be considered in the evaluation of such a hypothesis. Evidence for Iron Age burial practices is generally limited while extended burial seems to have been the predominant practice in the Roman period. Therefore such a hypothesis must be seen as extremely tentative. Only grave 83 was clearly crouched at Berinsfield and it did not have a precise S-N orientation. Hawkes suggested that in the case of W-E alignments a belief in Christianity may be the determining factor (1976, 1982), although Boddington (1990) has recently emphasised that the majority of pagan cemeteries are aligned on the same axis. Tuckwell (1975) and Hirst (1985, 28) have both discussed the possibility that burials may have been orientated on the sun, while Wells and Green (1973) and Hawkes (1976) advanced a seasonal model which explains the apparent variety of orientation as a reflection of the position of the sun and therefore of the time of year when the grave was dug. All of these suggestions have been variously disputed by Kendall (1982), Brown (1983), Boddington (1990) and Down and Welch (1990, 16). Hawkes suggested (1982) that cemeteries may have been aligned in relation to their corresponding settlement, while Kendall (1982) and Hills (1984, 2) both advance a more basic topographical explanation that graves were orientated in relation to an adjacent fixed point.

At Berinsfield, this latter explanation would appear to be the most likely, as the graves seem to be aligned in relation to the large Roman ditch (36/46/100: Fig. 6) which runs in a N-S direction through the centre of the excavation. At the southern end of the site the ditch turns in an E-W direction, and correspondingly most of the W-E burials lie in close proximity to this section of ditch. As a result orientation on a local topographical feature, the Roman field system, may have served simply to introduce some order into the cemetery, while a limited degree of variation in alignment can be ascribed to random error, which is unavoidable when attempting to orient a series of graves in relation to a fixed point or indeed in a particular direction (Boddington 1990).

CHRONOLOGY (Fig. 28)

There was very little intercutting of burials at Berinsfield, and only a few relative dates can be established from stratigraphic relationships. They are as follows.

Grave 59 was earlier than grave 72 which cut it at the foot end. Both burials were orientated W-E, and grave 72 broadly dated from the 6th or early 7th century (see below). Cremation 31 was earlier than grave 77, as sherds from the cremation urn were found in the grave fill; grave 77 is probably datable to the mid 6th century (see below). Both burials were set into the Roman gully, 70. Grave 148, a crouched burial orientated W-E, was earlier than grave 149 which contained the supine burial of a child, orientated approximately S-N; the entire upper part of the body of grave 148 was cut away by the insertion of grave 149. A decorated bucket was found in grave 149, for which an early 6th-century date has been suggested (Cook, this volume).

Grave 103, a child of $\underline{c}$ 4 years, was buried at the feet of grave 102; the excavator recorded that the graves were just touching and there was no clear

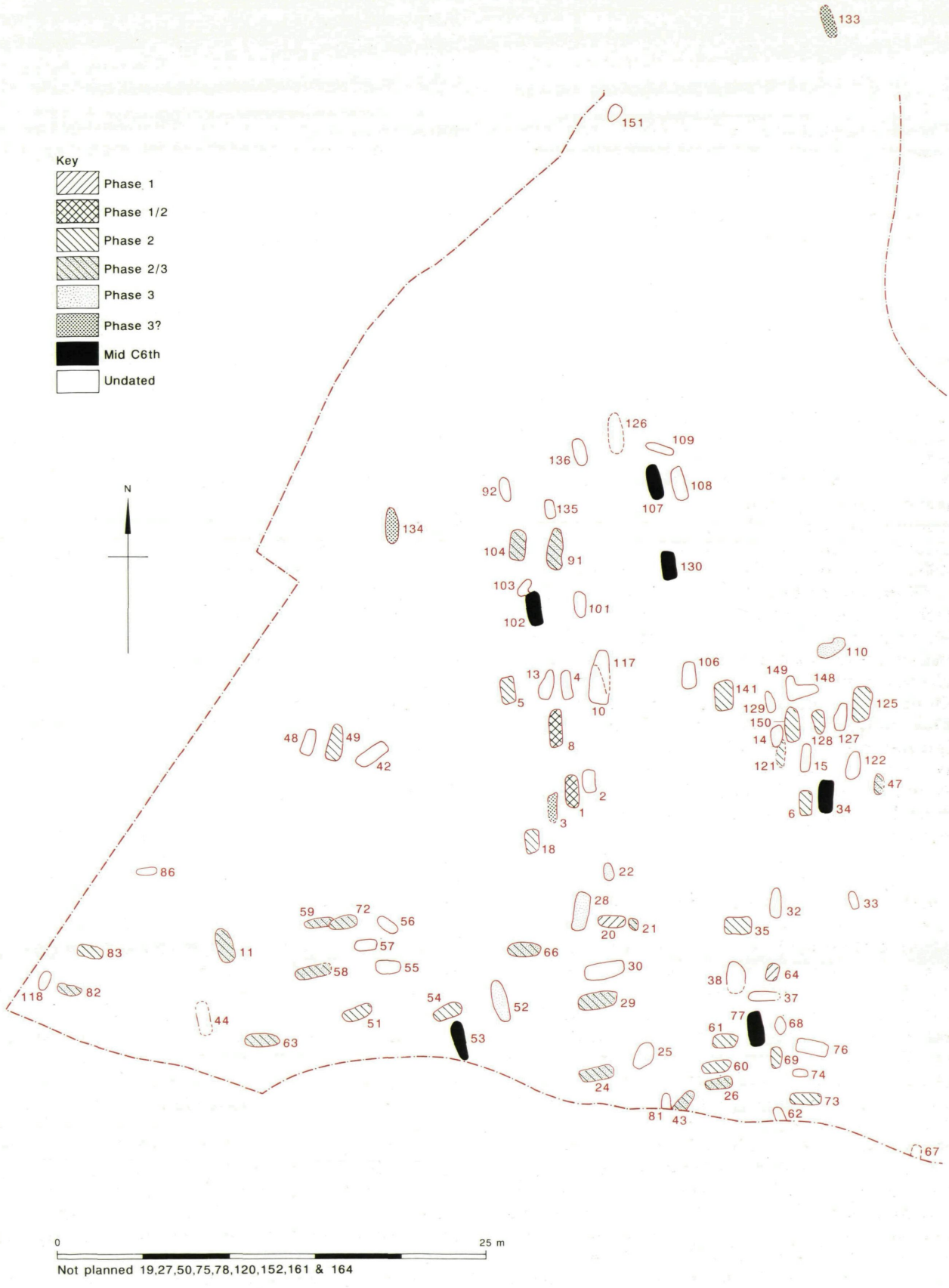

Figure 28 Distribution of datable graves

stratigraphic relationship between them. The relationship between grave 117 and the burials in grave 10 was unclear. Three burials and further fragmentary remains were found, and recorded as grave 10/1, grave 10/2, grave 10/3 and grave 117, but it was not apparent whether they were in one grave or two. Grave 10/1 appeared to be the earliest, followed by 10/2 and 117. All three were supine and orientated approximately S-N.

The most complex stratification occurred in a group of burials cutting the southern end of the main ditch F100/46. The earliest was grave 81. It was overlain by the burial recorded as grave 50, which lay on a W-E orientation; dog bones also occurred in the vicinity of this burial. Grave 50 was in turn overlain by the burials recorded as grave 43, although the excavator noted that the two burials were probably in the same grave. Grave 43 was orientated S-N and is stratigraphically the latest of the three; it contained a shield boss which is dated very broadly, between the early 6th-early 7th century. Grave 75, consisting only of the remains of a lower leg, lay on the E side of graves 50 and 43.

The dating of burials at Berinsfield has therefore been derived chiefly from the dating of associated grave goods, although the weaknesses of this method are acknowledged (see the discussion by Hirst, 1985, 98). Just under half the graves at Berinsfield contained artefacts of datable types, although in many cases the dating is very broad. A full discussion of individual artefacts is given in Chapter 4, where problems of dating and divergences of opinion are considered in greater detail.

The earliest datable objects found at Berinsfield are Roman. Objects of Roman date occur frequently in Anglo-Saxon burials, but their chronological significance is questionable. Evison (1988, 42) considers that many Roman objects tend to occur in the earliest graves and so indicate contact with established Romano-British residents. White (1988) has argued, however, that the peak period of deposition of Roman objects is the 6th century, when Roman objects may have been used to imitate luxury items only available to the wealthiest groups in society.

Roman coins of the late 3rd and 4th centuries occurred in four graves at Berinsfield (graves 26, 64, 83 and 152), although it was unclear whether the example in grave 152 was a grave good or a redeposited find. The coins in graves 64 and 83 had been perforated for reuse as pendants and both graves are interesting contexts. Grave 64 is one of the earliest burials in the cemetery (see below), while grave 83 contained a Roman disc-brooch in addition to the coin, and the burial was crouched and relatively isolated on the W edge of the cemetery. It is datable to the later 5th century on the basis of the small-long brooch (83/1) and amber beads. The man in grave 26 was found with an unperforated coin below his lower spine, and the burial is broadly dated, on the basis of its spear, to the late 5th or 6th century. The early 5th-century official belt-fitting from grave 6 was probably redeposited and cannot support an early dating of this burial.

The burials at Berinsfield can be divided into three chronological phases on the basis of their grave goods (Fig. 28 and Table 33): phase 1 covering the period up to the last quarter of the 5th century, phase 2 the period from the last quarter of the 5th century to the mid 6th century, and phase 3 the period from the mid 6th century to the early 7th century.

These broad chronological phases are comparable with the phases identified at similar recently published sites (Hirst 1985, 95; Cook and Dacre 1985, 108; Evison 1988, 43–44, Tables 18 and 19).

Table 33 Proposed phasing of the site

	Graves
Phase 1	20, 64
Phase 1/2	1, 8
Phase 2	5, 6, 18, 35, 49, 51, 54, 60, 61, 69, 73, 83, 121, 125, 128, 141, 150 (?149)
Phase 2/3	11, 21, 24, 26, 29, 43, 47, 58, 63, 72, 82, 91, 104, 161
Mid 6th century	34, 53, 77, 102, 107, 130
Phase 3	22, 28, 52, 110
Phase 3?	3, 133, 134
Undated	2, 4, 10, 13, 14, 15, 25, 30, 32, 33, 37, 38, 42, 44, 48, 55, 56, 57, 62, 67, 68, 74, 76, 81,92, 101, 103, 108, 109, 117, 122, 126, 127, 136

Only two graves at Berinsfield can be confidently assigned to the earliest phase (graves 20 and 64), and a further two graves (1 and 8) may belong either in phase 1 or early in phase 2. Grave 20 is dated to phase 1 on the basis of its spear, which was assigned, with reservations, to Swanton's type B2 (Härke, this volume). Grave 64 contained a *Stützarmfibel*, which is datable to the first half of the 5th century ; its occurrence with a very young child suggests that it had previously belonged to another member of the community and it may have been deposited a generation or more after its manufacture. Grave 1 contained a *Stachelbuckel*-derivative shield boss, dated to the 5th century, which Härke considers would have been buried shortly after grave 20 (this volume). Grave 8 contained an equal-armed brooch datable to the second half of the 5th century.

Seventeen graves can be attributed to phase 2, from the later 5th century to the middle of the 6th century (graves 5, 6, 18, 35, 49, 51, 54, 60, 61, 69, 73, 83, 121, 125, 128, 141 and 150), and grave 149 may also be datable to phase 2, although this must rest solely on the tentative dating of the associated bucket (see Cook, this volume). A 5th-century date is favoured for grave 83, on the basis of the cross-potent derivative small-long brooch, and a further four burials (graves 18, 54, 61 and 128) are unlikely to be earlier than the beginning of the 6th century. The button brooches in grave 18 are a type

which probably originated in the late 5th and early 6th centuries (following Dickinson's dating — see Dodd, this volume); the grave 18 examples had a repaired pin-catch and were associated with 18 amber beads, favouring a 6th-century deposition date. The pair of six-scroll saucer brooches in grave 54 are a type which developed in England at the end of the 5th century. They were buried in association with a toilet set and silver closed-band finger ring, which would suggest a 6th-century date. Grave 61 contained a Swanton type E1 spearhead, datable to the first half of the 6th century, while grave 128 is securely dated to the early-mid 6th century by its type E1 spearhead and rectangular gilt-copper-alloy buckle plate with red glass setting and Style 1 ornament.

A number of graves overlap periods 2 and 3. In many cases this is because they can be only very broadly dated between the late 5th and late 6th centuries (graves 11, 21, 24, 26, 29, 43, 47, 58, 63, 72, 82, 91, 104 and 161). A few burials, however, can be dated to the middle decades of the 6th century (graves 34, 53, 77, 102, 107 and 130). Graves 34 and 53 both contained Swanton type H1 spearheads and Dickinson and Härke group 3 shield bosses. Graves 77, 102 and 107 all contained square-headed brooches in association with other artefacts. The brooches in grave 77, including a miniature square-headed brooch worn at the waist, cannot be precisely dated within the early 6th century, but a date in the middle third of the century is probably indicated. Grave 102 and grave 107 both contained great square-headed brooches, for which a date of manufacture of c AD 510–550 has been suggested by Hines (this volume), and probably later rather than earlier within this range. A deposition date around the middle of the 6th century is supported for grave 107 by the dating of its associated cast saucer brooch, and for grave 102 by the shield-on-tongue buckle which Mrs Hawkes dates to the first half of the 6th century. However, Dickinson has suggested that the size of the cast saucer brooches may suggest later 6th-century affinities (Dodd, this volume). Grave 130 contained the only decorated applied saucer brooches at Berinsfield, of 'Kempston-cross' type, which were probably manufactured in the middle decades of the 6th century.

Four graves can be assigned to phase 3 (graves 22, 28, 52, and 110). Grave 110 is dated to the late 6th century on the basis of its Swanton type D spearhead and its transitional Dickinson and Härke groups 3/6 shield boss. Probably later, and the latest datable male burials in the cemetery, were graves 28 and 52 with spearheads of Swanton types C4, E3/4 and E4, and shield bosses of Dickinson and Härke group 6, which have a low curved cone and are datable to the late 6th or early 7th century. Grave 22 contained a large cast saucer brooch decorated in a style imitative of Kentish garnet-inlaid disc brooches. The late 6th to early 7th century dating this implies is supported by the associated Böhner type C knife which has a predominantly 7th–8th century distribution.

Three further graves (graves 3, 133 and 134) contained objects which less confidently may be assigned a later 6th- or 7th-century date. Grave 3 and grave 133 (the northernmost grave on the site) both contained knives of Böhner's type C, which have a late distribution. Neither grave contained any other datable artefacts. It is possible that grave 134 was also late 6th century or early 7th century. It was poorly equipped with grave goods, but contained a bone pin which had traces of hipping on the lowest third of the shaft. This feature, in more pronounced examples, is dated to the 7th century.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

During the last decade considerable research effort has been directed at the development of methods for inferring social organisation from burial data. Recent surveys of the theoretical basis and applications of this work are given by Hirst (1985, 96–7), Richards (1987, 1–15), Arnold (1988, 142–161) and Welch (1992, 71–81). Much of the research has been carried out in the context of comparative studies of data from different burial sites, and the Berinsfield cemetery was included in one of the earliest published analyses, by Arnold (1980, esp. 117–123 and Fig. 4.18). Since Arnold's article, the preparation of this report for publication has resulted in revision of some earlier interpretations and it should be noted that the results given below will differ from Arnold's work.

The degree of emphasis placed on social analysis has varied considerably in recent cemetery publications and as yet no standard approach has emerged. There has been a preference, however, for the presentation of information in a simple and accessible form and two relatively straightforward methods of analysis have been used here. The first, applied by Arnold (1980, 108), measures relative wealth by the number of object types occurring in each grave. Although this is only a very crude measure, and has the major weakness of assigning all types an equal score regardless of factors such as the materials used or the quality of workmanship, it has been effective elsewhere (Hirst 1985, 97–104) and Welch has recently commented that it seems to work well as a means of simplifying and regularising comparisons between different assemblages (1992, 80). The second analysis was carried out using the social status computer program developed by the Institute of Archaeology, London (Duncan *et al.* 1989). Details of this can be found in Appendix 2; it was considered that the application and results of this analysis were essentially exploratory and they are given here for comparative purposes.

The results of the simple object-type count are given below. The occurrence of all grave goods is shown in Table 4, but for the purpose of analysis these have been reduced to a number of functional types (Tables 34-36). Following the suggestions made by Hirst (1985, 97), a pair of shoulder

Table 34 Object-type count for female burials

	102	107.1	152	18	4	108	5	63	73	91	104	81	8	22	54	60	77	130	109	42	49	106	134.1	25	27	133.2	148	21	50.1	66	83
Brooch	XX	X		X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	XX	X		X	X									X	X
Belt	X														X	X	X			X	X								X		
Ring															X													XX			
Pin		X					X		X	X					X	X	X						X								
Bead	X	X		X			X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X		X	X		X					X		X	X
Chain																															
Knife	X	X					X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X						X		
Spindlewhorl																															
Crystal															X																
Brushholder		X		X																											
Tweezers																					X										
Toilet set		X													X																
Comb								X																							
Ivory bag ring		X																													
Girdle group	X	X					X				X																				X
Bucket	X																														
Pot											X																				
Flint																															
Nail			X																												
Coin			X																												X
Misc metal	X	X									X			X				X				X									X
Shield																															
Spear																															
Arrowhead																															
Score	8	9	2	3	0	0	5	4	2	4	6	0	3	4	8	4	6	4	0	4	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	5
Age L	15	15	17	17	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	25	25	30	30	35	35	35	45	45	45	45	45	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Age U	20	20	19	23	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	30	30	35	35	40	40	40	+	+	++	++	++	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

Age L - lower limit of possible age range
Age U - upper limit of possible age range

Table 35 Object-type count for child burials

	38	64	78	19	74	68	118	13.2	47	103	2	92	149	135	48	55	86	14	59	122	128	57	129	136	15	125	35	61	58	141.2	150.1
Brooch		X																	X							X	X		X		X
Belt		X							X		X									X	X										
Ring																															
Pin			X														X									X					
Bead		X				X	X				X															X	X	X	X		
Chain		X																													
Knife									X		X				X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X		X			X
Spindlewhorl																										X					
Crystal																															
Brushholder																															
Tweezers																															
Toilet set																															
Comb																															
Ivory bag ring																															
Girdle group											X															X					X
Bucket													X																		
Pot		X								X																		X			
Flint		X																													
Nail												X														X		X			
Coin		X																													
Misc metal		X																								X	X				
Shield																															
Spear									X												X							X			
Arrowhead																															
Score	0	8	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	1	4	1	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	2	3	1	0	1	1	8	3	5	2	0	3
Age L	0	1	1	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	4	4	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	9	10	10	11	11	11	13	14	14
Age U	0	1.5	1	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	10	10	11	11	12	12	14	14	14

Age L - lower limit of possible age range
Age U - upper limit of possible age range

Table 36 Object-type count for male burials

	29	1	51	72	82	6	34	69	67	117	24	52	53	101	141.1	161	164	26.1	56	28	30.1	133.1	76	20	32	110	33	11	43.1	121
Belt					X	X						XX										X			X	X		X	X
Pin													X								X									
Bead	X																			X										
Knife		X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X		X	X		X	X	XX	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Bucket	X		X					X																						
Pot																		X												
Flint																										X				
Nail											X			X																
Coin																		X												
Misc metal							X					X		X	X	X		X		X								X	X	X
Shield	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X			X		X				X		X		X	X	X
Spear			X	X			X	X			X	X	X		X	X		X		XX	X			X		X				
Arrowhead																														
Score	3	2	4	2	3	3	4	3	0	0	4	6	4	2	4	3	0	6	1	7	3	2	0	2	2	5	0	2	3	3
Age L	16	20	20	20	20	25	25	25	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	35	35	35	40	40	40	45	45	45	45	A	A	A	A
Age U	16	25	25	25	25	30	30	30	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	40	40	40	45	45	45	++	+	++	++	A	A	A	A

Age L - lower limit of possible age range
Age U - upper limit of possible age range

brooches have been scored as one type and a third brooch as another type. This principle has been extended to score a belt buckle and fitting as one type, while conversely a second knife, spear, ring or buckle are scored separately since they appear as 'extra' to the functional types normally associated with these burials.

While it has been widely accepted that burial practices reflect social organisation and status (Hirst 1985, 96), there is less certainty about the type of social identity which is being consciously marked (Arnold 1988, 152–3). Recent research has tended to stress the variety of factors at work and has emphasised the likelihood that age- and gender-related status are particularly strongly represented. Pader (1980, 155), for example, noted that females tended to be buried with a greater number of objects than males and that the status relationship between females and children was closer than that between adult males and either adult females or children. Most recently Welch has suggested that the quantity and quality of grave goods may reflect the relative status of individuals within the family, rather than the relative status of different families (1992, 109).

Shephard, in a study of barrow burials, argued that the commonly observed differences in grave good selection between males and females showed that males had less freedom of choice, suggesting that the restrictions operating on male grave good selection had more to do with status than with wealth (1979, 58). At Berinsfield, male burials demonstrated a comparatively constrained selection with a range of only 13 object types, while 21 object types occurred with women and 24 with women and children. Five female and child burials had wealth scores of eight or more, while only one man scored as much as seven.

Härke (this volume) has commented that the large number of 'shield-only' burials at Berinsfield, representing incomplete fighting equipment, suggests that the weapon burial rite possessed a largely symbolic meaning. He has argued that a correlation exists between weapon burial and certain epigenetic traits, and infers from this that weapon-burying and weaponless men came from different 'descent-groups' or families.

However, the most marked associations appeared to be between grave goods, sex and age. Since the Berinsfield cemetery, with 100 graves, was an adequate size for analysis, and reliable information concerning age and sex was available, it was decided to analyze the grave assemblages in such a way as to test these associations. Tables 34 and 35 show the occurrence of grave goods, counted as functional types, with female and child burials arranged in ascending order of age. Table 36 gives the same information for adult male burials. The 'wealth score' (ie the number of object types in each grave) and age of each burial are given at the bottom of the tables. Sex and age determinations are from skeletal evidence alone, with the exceptions of grave 104, which presented particular problems

(discussed above) and is here taken to be female, and graves 51 and 72, which were not sexed by the bone specialist but contained weapons and have here been taken as male. Burials where sex was determined but age was given only as 'adult' are listed separately at the right of the tables. For the purposes of this analysis, burials under the age of 15/16 have been tabulated separately, as 'children', and burials over the age of 15/16 have been tabulated as adult males or adult females. This division was adopted since sex determinations were available only for skeletons aged 15/16 or over; it does not imply the existence of a status threshold at this point, the evidence for which is discussed in detail below.

A number of extensively damaged adult burials for which sex determinations could not be established have been excluded from the analysis (graves 3, 44, 62, 75, 120, 126, 127 and 151). The occurrence of multiple burials was a complicating factor and individuals from multiple graves were excluded if there was no sex or age data or if the attribution of grave goods between multiple burials was unclear (10/1, 10/2, 10/3, 13/1, 26/2, 30/2, 37/1, 37/2, 43/2, 50/2, 107/2, 134/2, 141/3, 150/2). Very few grave goods occurred with these burials (see Table 4). This must in part reflect the level of damage they suffered from quarrying, but it should be noted that the social status analysis has been carried out using only 80% of the inhumations, and the number of unaccompanied burials is probably considerably under represented.

Predictably, weapons were strongly associated with men and brooches with women; only 4 out of 25 accompanied adult male burials had no weapons, and only 5 out of 23 accompanied adult female burials had no brooches. (Grave 30 has been counted here as a spear burial, although only a ferrule was found.)

However, the results also showed a clear association between such gender-specific grave goods and the age of burial, marking particularly clearly the likely existence of age-related status thresholds. Crawford (1991, esp 63–89 and 234–265) has recently given detailed consideration to the definition of childhood in Anglo-Saxon society and to the ways in which the threshold between child and adult status may be marked in the archaeological record. From her assessment of data from 12 cemeteries, and of evidence from written sources, she has argued that children gained adult status from the age of 10–12 (1991, 87, 247, 265), being able to inherit property, to be held accountable for their crimes and being given adult attributes in the grave ritual. Full adult status, however, which involved responsibilities such as marriage, was probably still delayed.

Nevertheless, while awareness of this likely threshold may clarify the identification of status markers at individual sites (1991, 86–9), it remains the case that symbols are not static and that the objects associated with status thresholds may differ from one site to another. At Sewerby, for example, it was considered possible that girdle hangers, girdle or purse rings and keys were indicators of adult-female high status (Hirst 1985, 102), and at Portway, Andover it appears from Crawford's analysis that girdle hangers and spears may have had this function (1991, 87).

At Berinsfield, shields were associated with adult males; the youngest individual buried with a shield was about 16 years old, and Härke has commented that this conforms to age association patterns elsewhere (this volume). Although spearheads occurred with a 4-year-old (grave 47), a 9-year-old (grave 128) and an 11–12-year-old (grave 61), Härke has noted that all three were small spearheads shorter than 210 mm. Crawford has noted (pers. comm.) that spearheads found with children are invariably small, although it must be noted that small spearheads also occurred with two adult burials at Berinsfield (34 and 53) and it cannot be argued here that they were specifically made for children.

The strength of the association at Berinsfield between weapon burial and age was tested using the Chi-squared test, applying Yates' continuity correction. The test was restricted to accompanied burials, and compared the frequency of weapon burials amongst males and children aged 11–12 and over with the frequency of weapon burials amongst individuals aged less than 11–12. Since the sex of children was unknown, only half the number of accompanied child burials were included, relying on the assumption that the male/female ratio amongst children was approximately equal, as it was amongst adults. Although the true sex ratio of children was an unknown factor, this approximation was adopted in preference to the possible distortion of the results by an unknown number of girl burials. The observed frequencies were therefore as follows:

Table 37 Contingency table of weapon frequencies with male burials

Age	Weapon	No weapon	Row total
< 11/12	2	10	12
> 11/12	22	4	26
Column totals	24	14	38

The resulting Chi-squared value was 13.51, which was significant at the 0.1% level of confidence, and this implies that there is good evidence of a real association between these two variables.

The tabulation of female and child burials suggested that a similar division existed at age 11–12, marked by the wearing of brooches which occurred only sporadically amongst younger individuals but highly consistently thereafter. Of the 28 accompanied burials over the age of 11, all but 5 had brooches (excluding grave 61, buried with a spear and therefore presumed to be a boy). The strength of the association between brooches and age was also tested using the Chi-squared test,

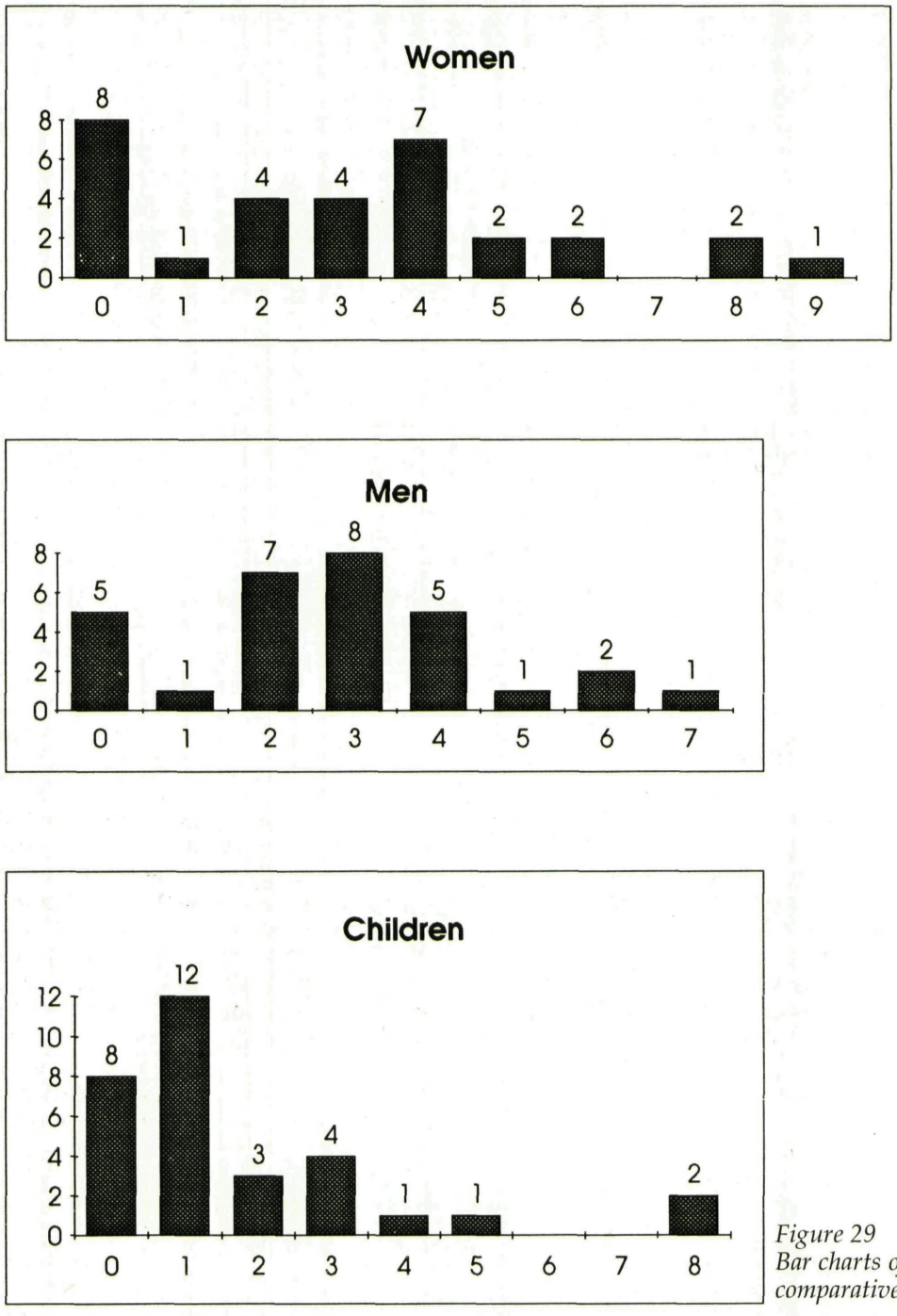

Figure 29
Bar charts of comparative wealth scores

applying Yates' continuity correction. As with male burials, the test was restricted to accompanied burials, since factors other than age- or gender-related status were probably associated with the occurrence of burials without grave goods. Similarly, as with the test for association with weapon burials, only half the accompanied burials below the age of 11–12 were included. No approximation was necessary for individuals aged between 11 and 15/16, since the only accompanied unsexed burial without brooches in this group, grave 61, could be omitted as he had a spear. The observed frequencies of brooches were therefore as follows:

Table 38 Contingency table of brooch frequencies with female and child burials

Age	Brooch	No brooch	Raw total
<11-12	2	7	9
>11-12	22	5	27
Column totals	24	12	36

The resulting Chi-squared value was 8.16, which was significant at the 1% confidence level, and this implies that there is good evidence of a real association between these two variables.

The relationships between the relative status of graves as suggested by grave goods, and other aspects of the burial rite such as body position, grave depth, grave markers and grave furniture, are considered in more detail above. In general, there was no evidence of a consistent relationship between wealth in grave goods and the size of graves. The wealthiest men were buried supine with extended legs and arms, but there was more variation in the position of wealthy female and child burials.

The proportion of female, child and male burials with different wealth scores is shown as a bar chart, in Figure 29. A division of the burials into three status groups is suggested by the observation that in each population approximately half the burials fall into an intermediate status group: amongst females 16 burials have 1–4 types, amongst males 16 burials have 1–3 types, and amongst children 15 burials have one or two types. In each population roughly a quarter of burials have no grave goods, and roughly a quarter score higher. In Figure 30, these three suggested status groups are shown plotted on the cemetery plan, and it appears that there was an even distribution of graves of differing status over most of the cemetery area.

It has been suggested at other sites (Hirst 1985; Down and Welch 1990) that a general mixture of status groups throughout a cemetery is an indicator that burial took place on a 'household' basis, with each sector containing burials of the heads of households, their relations, dependants and servants. The data presented here strongly suggests a similar interpretation for the Berinsfield community. Although there is some concentration of wealthy burials in the N group, no sector predominates in terms of wealth and this may suggest that the households represented were of broadly similar status.

UNACCOMPANIED BURIALS

The distribution of unaccompanied burials provides some help with their interpretation. The position of several unaccompanied burials on the outside of groups of graves (graves 74, 76, 108 and 109) implies that they were later, while the proximity and alignment of graves 150 and 14 might imply that they were contemporary. It is notable that only one unaccompanied burial occurred in the SW sector of the cemetery, containing the group of burials which can be distinguished from the rest of the cemetery by their lack of epigenetic traits. Conversely, elsewhere in the central area of the cemetery, unaccompanied burials of adults as well as children are clearly included in burial groups, and it is hard to see any evidence here that lack of grave goods marked out people regarded as alien by the community on the grounds of ethnic, cultural or religious differences.

CEMETERY PLAN AND ORGANISATION

The cemetery seems to have developed around, and over the remnants of a Roman field system of which the largest ditch, 36/46/100 (Fig. 6), divided the burial area in two. Graves 24, 25 and 126 were cut into the upper fill of the ditch 36/46/100 which indicates that the ditch was largely silted up during the lifespan of the cemetery, although the feature must still have been visible and it may possibly have been demarcated by a fence, hedgerow or vestigial bank. The majority of burials on either side of the ditch respect its alignment. The smaller Roman gullies (16/45, 41 and 132: Fig. 6) are cut numerous times by what appears to be a coherent group of graves and these features are unlikely to have been visible by the Anglo-Saxon period.

The cemetery was not organised into rows, nor does there appear to be any evidence for discrete groups based on age and sex attributes. Large gaps in the cemetery contrast with tightly packed grave groups and the excavator noted that featureless areas were carefully trowelled over numerous times and only a few more graves were located. Therefore the apparent gaps in the cemetery are likely to be real. The lack of intercutting graves strongly suggests the existence of burial markers, although the only other evidence of this was the posthole at the head end of grave 152.

It has been argued above that the cemetery layout probably reflects use by a number of small communities or households in the area. This is supported by the presence of diagnostic epigenetic traits amongst the cemetery population (Fig. 31). It is not known whether variations in the occurrence of epigenetic traits are controlled by one or many genes, nor to what extent they are modified by the environment; however, most research supports the predominance of genetic influence and the occurrence of these traits may well indicate familial relationships. It is interesting to note that the three commonest traits coincide in grave 8, the earliest adult female identified in the cemetery. Härke has noted (this volume) that a correlation seems to exist between weapon burial and epigenetic traits (Fig. 12). In addition, some correlation between epigenetic traits and the grouping of graves can be noted from the distribution (Fig. 31). The occurrence of 6th lumbar vertebrae and of the combination of septal apertures and wormian bones is exclusive to the SE group, while among the SW group epigenetic traits were lacking amongst the predominantly W-E orientated graves, occurring only with graves 28 and 53 which were S-N orientated.

This distribution might suggest the existence of three different groups containing burials of individuals related to each other. The distribution of male, female and child burials adds weight to this interpretation (Fig. 32). The sexes were generally in balance in the cemetery (see above), and there is a fairly even distribution of male and female burials in the SW and SE sectors. However, the group in

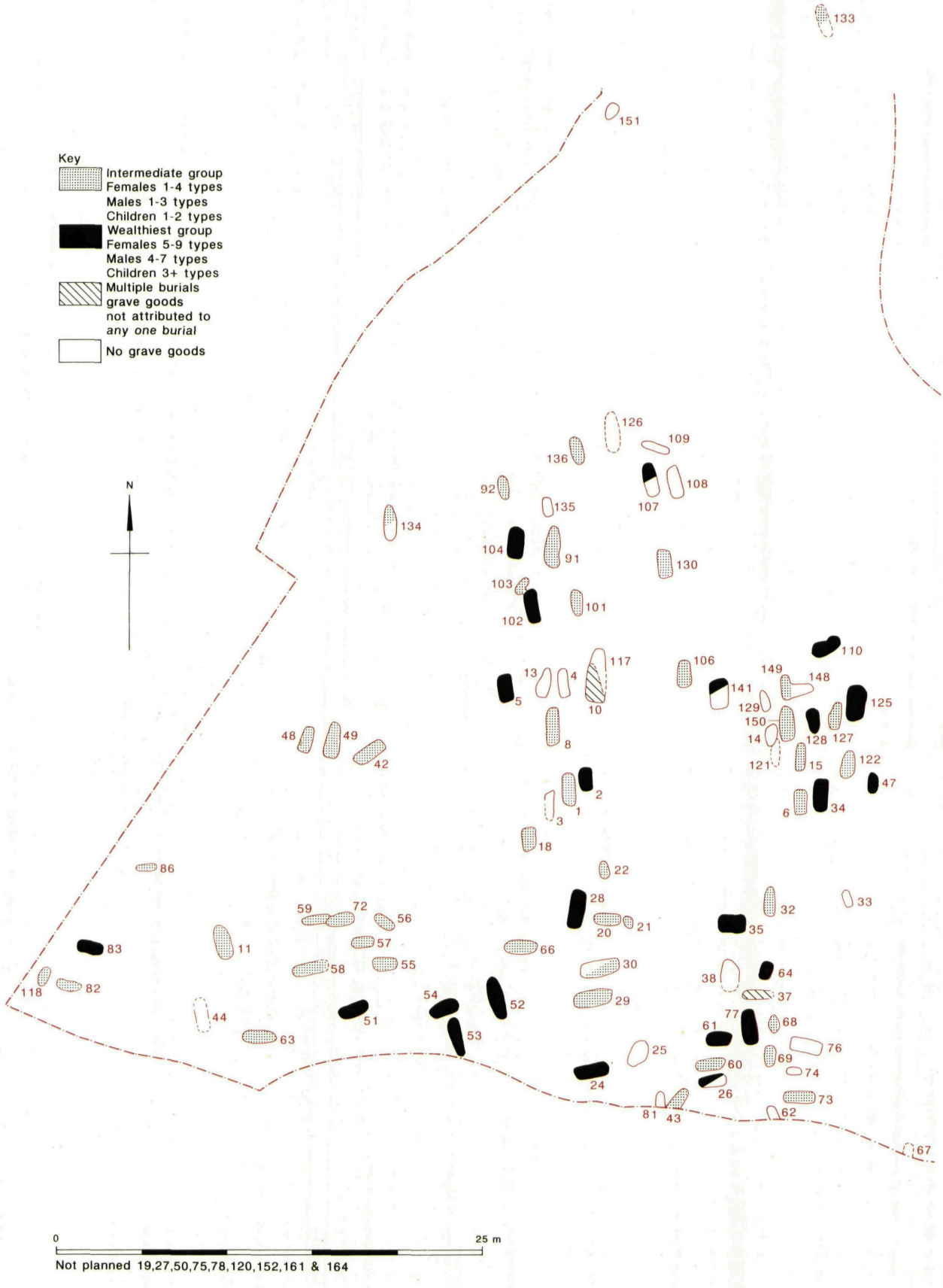

Figure 30 Distribution of wealth scores by object-type

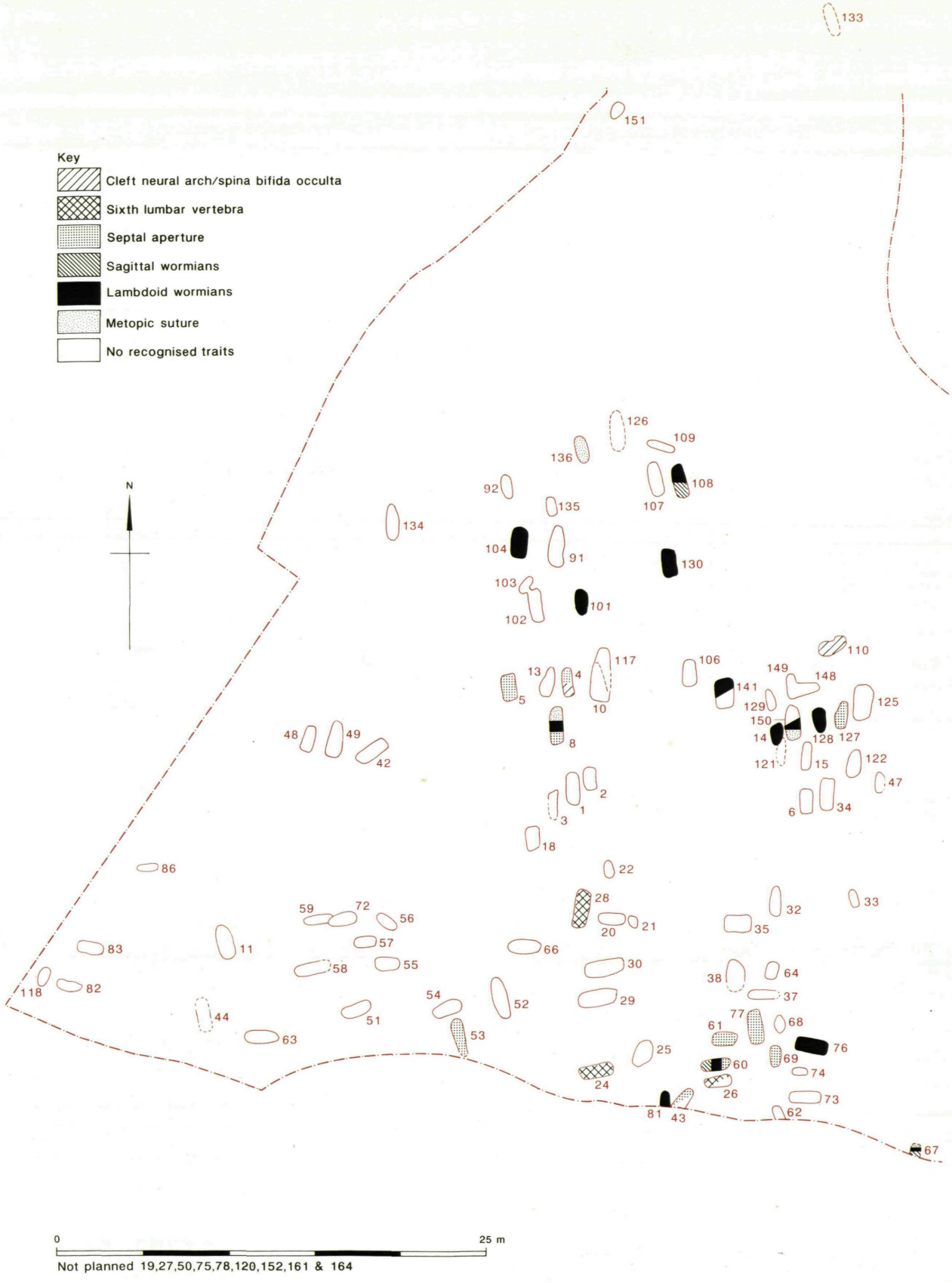

Figure 31 Distribution of epigenetic traits in the cemetery

Figure 32 Distribution of male, female and child burials

the N part of the central area contains a disproportionately high number of female burials, while the central eastern group contains a disproportionately high number of male burials. Both groups share a predominantly S-N grave orientation and it is possible that they should be associated as one household group. In contrast to this, the group which had very few burials with epigenetic traits, in the SW of the cemetery, is aligned predominantly W-E. The group in the SE sector may well be under-represented in the excavation, since it seems likely that further burials would have existed in the area destroyed by quarrying to the S before the cemetery was recognised.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The local context of the Berinsfield cemetery is of notable archaeological and historical interest. The cemetery lay c 1 km N of the Roman 'small town' of Dorchester-on-Thames, where it has been suggested there is evidence of contact between the late Roman population and the earliest Saxon settlers. There is considerable and well-attested early Saxon activity throughout the area (Fig. 33), and present evidence suggests that it was a focus of the earliest Saxon settlement in the Upper Thames valley. Dorchester became the site of the first see of Wessex in AD 635, and this may be indicative of the importance of this area in the evolving West Saxon kingdom.

The most important documentary source for the early Anglo-Saxon settlement of the Upper Thames valley is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Historians have, however, long been aware of major difficulties in reconciling its account of the foundation of Wessex with the archaeological evidence, and recent work has tended to favour the archaeologically-attested primacy of the Upper Thames valley in the early settlement and development of the kingdom (Hawkes 1986; Yorke 1989; Yorke 1990). In particular, Yorke has recently cast doubt on the accuracy of the *Chronicle*'s association of Cerdic and Cynric (the founders of the West Saxon dynasty) with a primary settlement on the S coast. She argues that Jutish foundation traditions relating to the settlement of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight may have been annexed by the West Saxons and attached to Cerdic and Cynric, together with substantial chronological revisions to emphasise their leading role (1989, 95–6). In the later 6th century the important West Saxon king Ceawlin, whose people seem to have been known as the Gewissae until the late 7th century, was clearly associated with the Upper Thames valley. His reign, on present evidence, can be roughly dated to 581–588 (Yorke 1990, Table 15) and he seems to have pursued a career of aggressive territorial expansion. Yorke has suggested that he may have united disparate groups of Saxons within a framework of military successes (1989, 96), and the extent of his influence is reflected in Bede's reference to him as the second *bretwalda* (*HE* II, 5).

Cynegils, the first Christian king of the Gewissae, was baptised at Dorchester-on-Thames in 635, and the town was granted by Cynegils and Oswald of Northumbria to St Birinus as his episcopal see (*HE* III, 7). Yorke argues that the choice of this site reflects the importance of the Dorchester area in the emerging kingdom of the Gewissae, and that it may well represent their original heartland (1989, 94). In the event, the see at Dorchester was short lived and it was transferred to Winchester *c* 660 (Yorke 1989, 94), probably in the face of increasing Mercian aggression.

However, the archaeological evidence for the Dorchester area during the 5th–7th centuries, and particularly that for the town itself, remains frustratingly ambiguous.

Hawkes has suggested that Dorchester may have been a centre of sub-Roman power in the 5th century, within a chain of British defensive emplacements along the Thames, at which Germanic mercenary soldiers, or *foederati*, were employed (1986, 71). Böhme has suggested that a temporary independent administration by the *civitates* in the years after 408 seems to have ended with the re-establishment of Roman civil and military organisation, for which the *Notitia Dignitatum* of 425 is 'eloquent testimony'(1986, 560–1).

Such an interpretation, however, stands in marked contrast to current opinion in Britain, which tends to the view, expressed by Esmonde Cleary (1989, 161), that the collapse of the Roman empire in Britain in the generation after 411 was total, and that it was succeeded by an ill-understood period in which society was neither Romano-British nor Anglo-Saxon (1989, 187).

The association of Dorchester with a Romano-British defensive strategy as proposed by Hawkes and Böhme relies on the discovery there of three famous early 5th-century burials, which have been interpreted as those of a Germanic officer and two Germanic women with military associations. A man and a woman were found at the E end of the Dyke Hills Iron Age ramparts, in an area also used for Roman burials, and a woman was found in unknown circumstances at the Minchin recreation ground (Fig. 34). The women were buried with characteristic early forms of Germanic brooches, while the man was buried with a range of weapons; in addition, belt fittings which occurred in the graves belong to official types manufactured in the Roman empire for issue to civilian administrators and military personnel. The contents and significance of these burials have been extensively discussed (Kirk and Leeds 1952/3 and Hawkes and Dunning 1961; for recent discussions see Hills 1979 and Hawkes 1986).

Roman scholars have expressed reservations about the interpretation of Germanic burials containing Roman military metalwork, however,

and recent opinion is summarised by Esmonde Cleary (1989, 34–5). He discounts the view that the belt equipment was exclusive to German troops, arguing that it has no particular ethnic associations. While the belts were undoubtedly official issue, functioning as a mark of office, they were worn by civilian administrators as well as military personnel. Hamerow (1987, 186–9) has recently considered the possible presence of *foederati* at Mucking, Essex, and notes that, while the use of *foederati* in England is a historically plausible model, it nevertheless remains an assumption postulated on somewhat insubstantial evidence, for example that contained in the western *Notitia Dignitatum* and Gildas.

A date in the second quarter of the 5th century is suggested for the settlement of *foederati* in England (Hawkes 1986, 70), which allows the possibility that the earliest burials at Berinsfield (as also at Frilford and Abingdon I) may have been those of *foederati* and their families (Hawkes 1986, 74–5). However, as Esmonde Cleary has noted in the context of the Dorchester burials, it must be concluded that this is only one of several possible interpretations (1989, 54–6). Hamerow (1987, 188) has similarly concluded that while the handful of early 5th-century burials at Mucking, Dorchester and elsewhere may represent military personnel, there is no clear evidence of how their late Roman metalwork was acquired, and she concurs with Hills (1979, 388) that the earliest graves in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery might represent the earliest independent settlers as readily as the latest mercenaries.

A tubular-sided end plate from an official belt suite was found with the man in grave 6 at Berinsfield, but it was recovered from the upper fill of the grave and cannot therefore be securely associated with the burial.

Nevertheless, it is clear (Fig. 33) that the Dorchester area is, on present evidence, the main focus of the earliest identifiable Saxon burials in the Upper Thames. The archaeological evidence for Dorchester itself continuing to function as an urban and administrative centre in the 5th century is, however, extremely limited. It has been noted that an unusually high proportion of Theodosian coinage has been found in the town, implying the continuing arrival of coinage for official payments until the end of the 4th century.

The strongest evidence for continued occupation at Dorchester comes from Frere's excavations in the allotments in the SW sector of the walled town, in 1962 and 1963 (see Fig. 34). Here he revealed a small, three-roomed building with stone footings, which overlay a worn coin of Honorius (AD 394–5) and which was itself cut by a Saxon foundation trench. He considered this building to date to the first quarter of the 5th century (1962, 121). In the same area he recovered the remains of a structure interpreted as a mid 6th-century Saxon sunken featured building, which appeared to lie alongside the line of the Roman N-S street, onto which its entrance seemed to lead (1962, 123–6). It is therefore possible that the street was still visible, and in use, at this date.

Against this must be set evidence recovered by Bradley and by Rowley for characteristic decline in urban standards during the 4th century. Bradley's excavations on the Old Castle Inn site in the E of the walled town (see Fig. 34) recovered evidence for the demolition of Roman timber buildings in the 4th century, and much of the site was then covered by a layer, up to 0.30 m thick, of uncleared building debris and domestic rubbish (Bradley 1978, 21, 37). Rowley's excavations on the Beech House hotel site in the NW of the walled town (Fig. 34) revealed that a modest 3rd-century town house had been demolished and the site converted to industrial use, probably for the manufacture of agricultural lime; this industrial phase is probably datable from the 4th century until the site's abandonment in the late 4th or early 5th century (Rowley and Brown 1981, 9, 24).

In addition, there is no evidence that the town's defences were substantially improved in either the late- or sub-Roman period. The walls were constructed at the end of the 3rd century and the existence of a wide shallow ditch beyond the wall may imply the addition of external towers in the 4th century. However, no towers have yet been found and both Frere (1984, 125) and Burnham and Wacher (1990) have noted that the ditch may be contemporary with the walls. Although parts of the walls may have remained standing into the medieval period (Rowley 1985, 24), there is definite evidence of only modest refortification at Dorchester after the late 3rd century. On the S line of the defences, Frere noted traces of two small outer ditches dug to replace the wide late Roman ditch, and similar evidence was recovered on the line of the N defences in 1981 (Frere 1984, 127), which Frere considered to be of Saxon date.

Substantial late Roman cemeteries have been excavated at Queenford Farm (Chambers 1987) and at Church Piece, Warborough (Harman *et al.* 1978). Both cemeteries were in use in the 4th century and into the 5th century, and five uncorrected radiocarbon dates obtained from skeletal material at Queenford Farm give a date-range between the early 5th and the early 6th century (Haddon-Reece 1987, 58). Neither cemetery was completely excavated, but the excavators have estimated that, if fully utilised, they may have contained in excess of 2,500 burials. This implies that the population of late Roman Dorchester may have been in the region of 500 people (Harman *et al.* 1978, 15). There is, however, no conclusive evidence that burial continued at these sites substantially later than the 5th century, although the radiocarbon dates and the discovery of a 'private' burial enclosure dug into the silted-up line of the cemetery boundary ditch at Queenford Farm may imply the possibility of later activity (Chambers 1987, 65–6).

The evidence for early Saxon occupation within the town does not at present suggest any concentration of settlement. A small number of

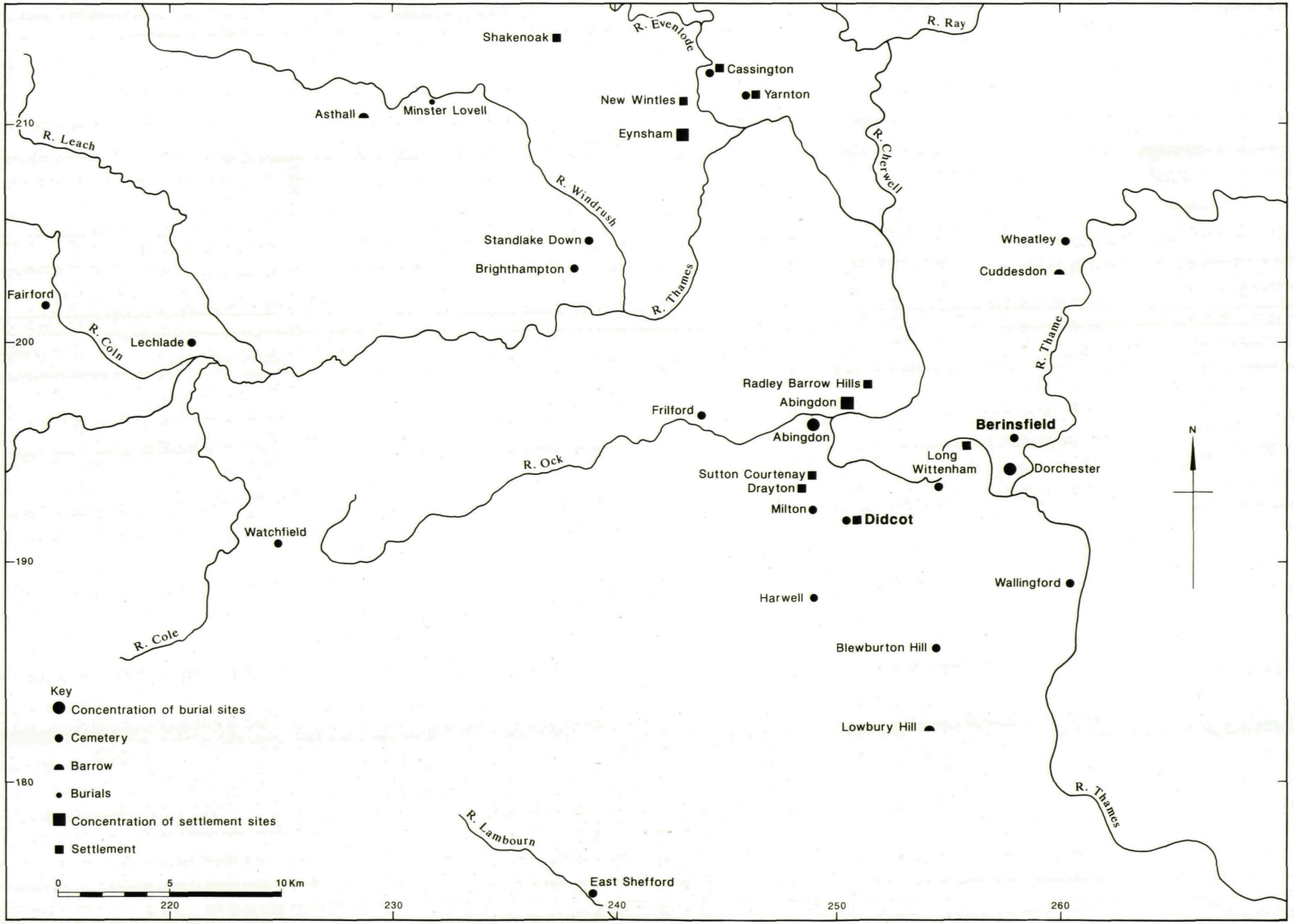

Figure 33 Location plan of the principal early Saxon settlements in the Upper Thames valley

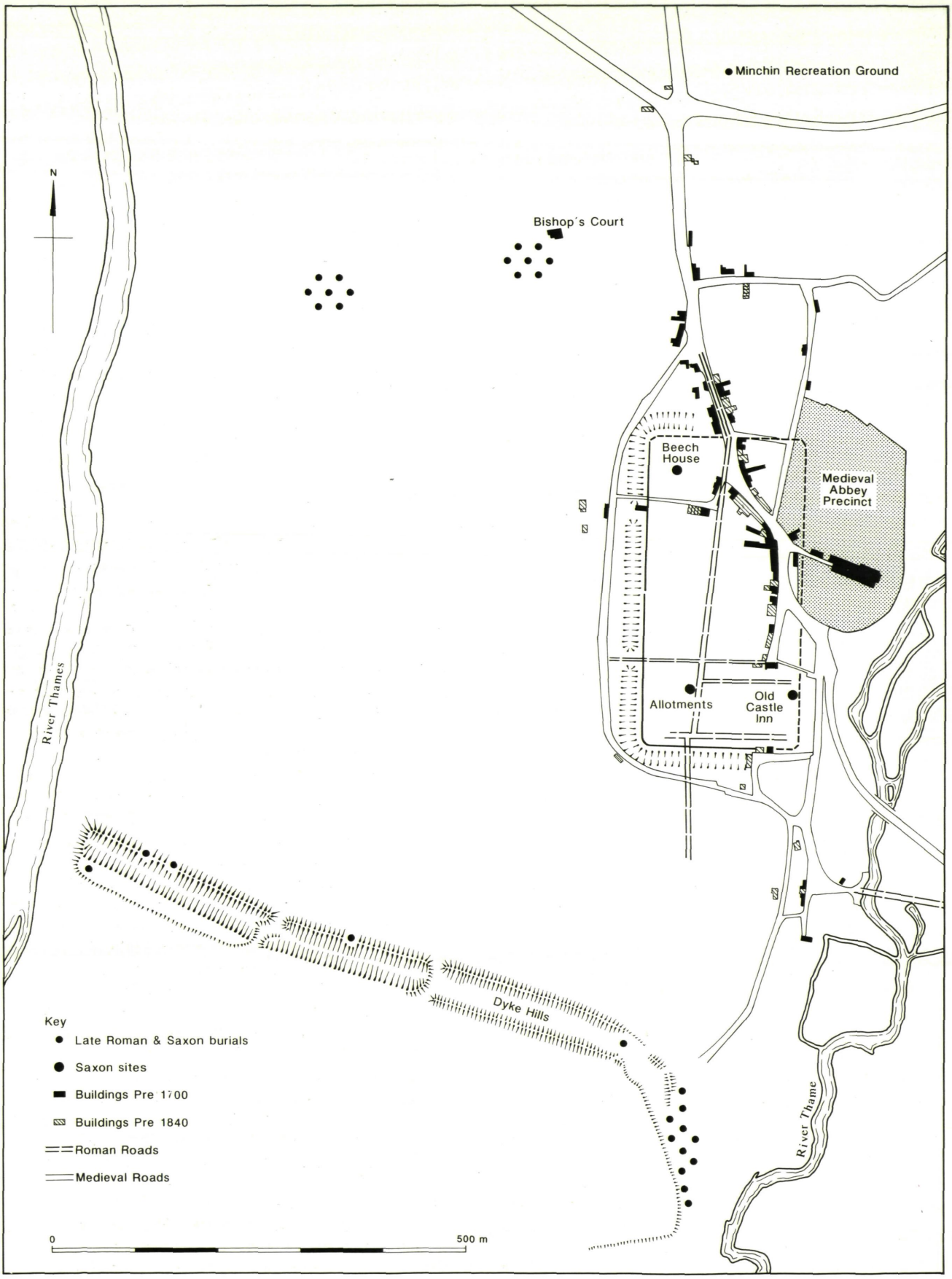

Figure 34 Map of Dorchester showing the excavated sites

possible sunken featured buildings have been recovered inside the walled town. The most substantial of these was recovered by Frere in the SW corner of the town, mentioned above (Frere 1962, 123-5 and Figs 7, 8 and 9), and was considered to be of mid 6th-century date. Excavations in the E and NW of the town also revealed substantial pits and depressions which have been interpreted as sunken featured buildings, although both Bradley and Rowley in their respective excavation reports have expressed a degree of uncertainty about these identifications, and neither has been able to assign any date to the features (Bradley 1978; Rowley 1981).

Much more substantial evidence for occupation at Dorchester has been found for the mid Saxon period. The destroyed remains of Frere's sunken featured building were cut by a larger, more regular wooden building (1962, 125–6, Fig. 9), of which a main wall trench was recovered, which had held regularly-spaced uprights. Much of this building remains unexcavated but it appears to have been a structure of some size and pretensions and it had an internal partition. There was no good dating evidence for this structure, beyond the fact that it clearly postdated the mid 6th-century sunken featured building. Hawkes has suggested that this area may have been a palatial complex predating the arrival of St Birinus (1986, 88).

A number of other features considered to be of Saxon date were recovered in the allotment area, which Frere suggested might represent the foundation trenches of buildings, as well as boundary fences and drains. Bradley has argued, however, that many of these are more likely to have been gullies representing internal divisions within the walled area (1978, 38); similar gullies were noted in his own excavations and he has suggested that a reorganisation of the town with a network of internal boundaries at some time between the 6th and 9th centuries would be consistent with contemporary developments at other sites (1978, 39). The clearest sequence of structures was recovered in Rowley's excavations in the NW of the walled town. Three phases of framed buildings post-dating the Roman period were identified (1981, 12–17, Figs 5–8 and Plate 3). In the earliest phase, six possible buildings were identified from timber staining and well-defined concentrations of stone, bone and pottery. Rowley considered that these buildings were timber-framed and rested directly on the ground surface. No date is given for these buildings, though it is suggested that they were not all contemporary. In the succeeding phase, two buildings were identified which appeared to have used limestone sills, possibly for a cob superstructure. The final phase of building, which may have been rather later, was also in stone; a coin of Burgred of Mercia (852–874) was recovered from the main wall. Both sill-beam and stone construction are generally considered to occur predominantly in the late Saxon period. However, it has been noted (Rahtz 1976, 85–6) that the use of stone for foundations occurs typically at late or sub-Roman sites, and early examples of sill-beam construction are also known from sub-Roman contexts. James, Marshall and Millett have noted that fully framed surface built structures may have been in general use in late Roman Britain (1984, 201–3), and that the early occurrence of sill-beam construction may be indicative of Romano-British influence on Anglo-Saxon buildings (1984, 205–6). The possibility exists, therefore, that these buildings at Dorchester were influenced by a surviving Romano-British building tradition, and by the readily-available stone which was robbed from the town walls and from demolished Roman buildings.

In general, therefore, there is currently little secure archaeological evidence of a major sub-Roman presence at Dorchester, or of continuity of occupation on the site on any scale, in the early Saxon period. Although the possibility exists of substantial Saxon activity in the SW of the town from the second half of the 6th century or later, most of the structures identified in the NW by Rowley are undatable and it remains possible that the demonstrable internal development of the town could lie anywhere between the 6th and 9th centuries, and could equally well be associated with the West Saxon bishopric, the Mercian bishopric, or with a phase of activity unrelated to either.

A number of unassociated finds from the town suggestive of high status occupation have been noted by Dickinson (1976 vol. 2, 90): three gold coins probably deposited in the 7th century, and a gold and garnet cloisonné pyramidal sword stud (now lost), probably made in the Sutton Hoo workshop, which Dickinson considers is evidence for a royal burial in the vicinity, some time in the first third of the 7th century (1974; 1976 vol. 2, 90).

There is much clearer evidence for early Anglo-Saxon settlement concentrated in the surrounding countryside (see Fig. 33), and it seems likely that the focus of the community was one of the substantial sites recognised from cropmarks in the vicinity. At Drayton an L-shaped alignment of rectangular structures has been identified, the largest of which appears to be a great hall approximately 25 x 8 m (Hawkes 1986, 88; Benson and Miles 1974, 61–2, Map 33). Nearby lay the rich 7th-century Milton II cemetery (Dickinson 1976 vol. 2, 181–4). Probably earlier is the cropmark site at Long Wittenham, which appears to consist of sunken featured buildings around an L-shaped arrangement of at least three hall-houses (Hawkes 1986, 89; Benson and Miles 1974, 65–6, Map 35). Hawkes considers that this settlement must have been associated with the 5th to early 7th century Long Wittenham I cemetery, which contained a number of high-status objects, and she suggests that the complex represents a royal vill (1986, 89; for the cemetery, see Dickinson 1976 vol 2, 148–175). It is also likely that the princely burial at Cuddesdon should be associated with communities in the Dorchester area. This burial has been discussed by Dickinson (1974) and contained objects datable to

the late 6th or early 7th century, which may be indicative of a period of Kentish patronage (Hawkes 1986, 90).

Further limited evidence for early Saxon occupation, derived from excavations, has occurred at Bishop's Court (May 1977) and at Mount Farm (Lambrick forthcoming) which is only c 1 km N of the Berinsfield cemetery and may be considered in some detail. At Mount Farm, a waterhole lined with a barrel or tub, a wattle-lined well and two areas of pits were found; one of the pits, in the northern area of the main excavations, may have been the bottom of a sunken featured building. Loomweights and pottery suggestive of a domestic context occurred in the upper fills of the wells, and it was noted that the wells were too steep-sided for animals to have drunk from. Environmental material obtained from the excavations showed little evidence for the presence of woodland or scrub. The presence of dung beetles from animal droppings suggested the existence of pasture, and a number of Saxon crop species were identified (hulled wheat, barley, flax/linseed, field/broad bean and one apple seed — not necessarily from a cultivated tree).

There is mounting evidence from a number of sites nationally that pagan cemeteries were often located very close to the settlements they serve (Boddington 1990, 195) and it seems quite possible that a farmstead at Mount Farm may have been one of a group of small settlements to the NE of Dorchester which used the Berinsfield cemetery.

At least two other cemeteries were in contemporary use by the Saxon population of the area, at Amey's Pit, Burcot (Dickinson 1976 vol 2, 77–8) and at Long Wittenham (see above), and further possible early Anglo-Saxon burial sites have been located at Bishop's Court House (Dickinson 1976 vol. 2, 79) and Castle Hill, Little Wittenham (Chambers 1986). Only ten burials were recovered at Burcot, but the cemetery at Long Wittenham was probably rather larger than Berinsfield, and Arnold has estimated that it represented a population of approximately 38 people per generation (1988, 166 Table 5.5). The maximum population using Berinsfield has been estimated at 30–40 (see above). It therefore seems very likely that these cemeteries, including Berinsfield, were the local burial grounds of different settlements in the Dorchester area, and that these settlements were comparatively small throughout the early Anglo-Saxon period. It is interesting to compare these populations with the Romano-British cemetery at Queenford Farm, where the excavator estimated that over 2,000 people had been buried (Chambers et al. 1987, 35).

THE SITE IN ITS CONTEXT

The cemetery at Berinsfield, Wally Corner, was in continuous use for a period of approximately 150 years, from the early-mid 5th century to the early 7th century. The earliest burials (graves 64 and 20) belong to the earliest identified phase of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Upper Thames valley; objects datable to the first half of the 5th century are also known from Dorchester Dyke Hills and Minchin recreation ground (see above), Frilford I, 159, Abingdon I, B106 and B122, from recent excavations near Wantage (Hamerow 1990), and a less certain identification at Minster Lovell 3. A number of other sites contain graves datable within the 5th century, and it is probable that some of them came into existence before AD 450 (Dickinson 1976, vol 1, 401–6).

The community at Berinsfield was clearly neither isolated nor impoverished. The two early brooches, the *Stützarmfibel* from grave 64 and the equal-armed brooch from grave 8, are both comparatively rare types in England, and associate the Berinsfield Saxons with the earliest areas of Anglo-Saxon settlement, predominantly in the E of England, and with the Continental homeland of the Saxons between the Elbe and the Weser (Dodd, this volume; Böhme 1986; Evison 1977). In the later 5th century and 6th century, the grave good assemblages from the cemetery are typical of Saxon material culture in the Upper Thames valley and Arnold's analysis of 17 cemeteries in the S of England suggested that the Berinsfield graves were comparatively rich in grave goods (1988, Table 5.4). The occurrence of ivory and an abundance of amber implies that the community had access to imported goods, and the presence of two great square-headed brooches, the elaborate buckles in graves 102 and 128 and the large saucer brooch in grave 22 suggests that by the middle of the 6th century and later, some elements within the population could aspire to costly and ostentatious personal wealth.

A degree of interaction with other areas of England is suggested by the presence of the 'Kempston Cross' applied saucer brooch, which Dickinson considers to be an import from a production centre in the SE Midlands (Dodd, this volume), and the shield-on-tongue buckle in grave 102 which is a rare find for the Upper Thames valley. This is a characteristically Frankish buckle type and English examples occur predominantly in Kent; the presence of an example at Berinsfield is strongly suggestive of links with Kent in the mid-later 6th century. A parallel to this buckle has been found at the cemetery at Watchfield, Oxon. in grave 67 (I am grateful to Mrs S C Hawkes for drawing my attention to this example: Scull 1992). The Watchfield shield-on-tongue buckle occurred with a Dickinson and Härke Group 3 shield, of a type more commonly found in Kent or on the Merovingian Continent, and a balance and set of weights; Mrs Hawkes has suggested (pers. comm.) that this may be evidence of an individual involved in trade with these areas.

The latest datable burials at Berinsfield (graves 22, 28, 52 and 110) are of the late 6th or early 7th century. Although a few other 5th-6th century cemeteries in the Upper Thames valley also contain early 7th century material (Abingdon I, Harwell, Long Wittenham I and Wheatley), the majority do

not, and Dickinson considers that this must result from a shift away from burial with ostentatious grave goods (1976 vol. 1, 438). The latest phase of use of the major Upper Thames valley cemeteries is marked by a large proportion of simple burials and, as at Berinsfield, by a few wealthy graves containing weapons and large and costly saucer brooches (Dickinson 1976 vol. 1, 439). It is therefore difficult to define the end of the Berinsfield cemetery precisely, since unaccompanied burial may have continued there for some time. The absence of consistent orientation among the unaccompanied burials, and the lack of any regularity in their arrangement might nevertheless suggest that there was not a significantly large 7th-century element present, and certainly no evidence to suggest continuing use into the Christian period.

The apparent abandonment of 5th-6th-century cemeteries in the 7th century has been frequently noted, and only one site in the Upper Thames valley (Lechlade: Boyle et al. forthcoming) is definitely known to have been in continuous use from the mid 5th century until at least the end of the 7th century. A shift of site can be seen clearly at Long Wittenham, where the predominantly 5th–6th century cemetery I was abandoned in favour of a site some 400 m to the W in the 7th century (Hawkes 1986, 93). The balance of evidence suggests that the Berinsfield site, too, would have been abandoned in the earlier part of the 7th century, and it is tempting to associate this with the establishment of the bishopric at Dorchester in 635. However, no secure evidence of a Christian burial ground at Dorchester has yet emerged, and to date the only 7th-century burials excavated in the area have been at the Bishop's Court rectangle, where ten burials were found, one of which was accompanied by two seaxes (Dickinson 1976 vol. 2, 78–9; May 1977, 52–3). It is likely that this burial ground was the direct successor to an earlier cemetery located at Bishop's Court House, to the NE (Hawkes 1986, 93; Dickinson 1976 vol. 2, 79). Boddington has recently criticised the view that there was an extensive replacement of pagan cemeteries by Christian burial grounds in the 7th century, and suggests that the whole process of cemetery shift should be seen as part of a constant process of addition and abandonment as the Anglo-Saxon landscape evolved. An amalgam of pressures deriving from landscape, social, economic and religious change may have been at work, and Christianity should not be seen as the determining factor (1990, 196).

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the evidence presented above, a number of conclusions can be suggested. The occurrence of objects datable to the early-mid 5th century suggests that the first burials at the cemetery date from the earliest phase of Saxon settlement in the Upper Thames valley. Early Saxon burials in the area cluster around Dorchester, and may reflect an association between the first settlers and the sub-Roman town, although the evidence of significant sub-Roman activity there remains slight.

In the later 5th and 6th centuries, the cemetery seems to have functioned as one of a number of burial grounds around Dorchester which served a community whose burial practice was characteristically Anglo-Saxon. It may be noted that the Romano-British cemeteries in the area appear to have gone out of use by this time and it is possible that a rurally-based British population in the area was burying its dead at Wally Corner, Long Wittenham and elsewhere, in an increasingly Saxon-dominated cultural environment. Esmonde Cleary's general point is worth noting here; the British population may have adopted Anglo-Saxon material culture ultimately because it was all that was available (1989, 201).

Present evidence from cropmarks and excavations in the area suggests that the early Saxon population was rurally based, predominantly around rather than within the town of Dorchester, and that a high-status site may have existed at Long Wittenham. There is some evidence that the town of Dorchester itself may have seen a degree of reorganisation and rebuilding at some time from the mid 6th century on, and this may be associated with the choice of the site as the first see of the West Saxons in 635.

Evidence from the internal organisation of the cemetery supports the view that it was used by two or three distinct groups, which may represent household or farmstead units living in the surrounding district. The community appears to have been relatively homogeneous in status, with an even distribution of wealthy graves, although there may have been greater differentiation towards the end of the cemetery's life. In general, the material culture represented is typical of Saxon material culture of the period in the Upper Thames valley and suggestive of a moderately prosperous community which, although based on family farmsteads, was nevertheless part of a wider society through whose mechanisms it was able to obtain both imported and prestigious material.