

Chapter 4: The Manger, Dragon Hill and the Barrows

by Alistair Barclay, Paul Booth, Anne Marie Cromarty, Chris Gosden, David Miles and Simon Palmer

THE MANGER

This is a long narrow dry valley, which stretches for half a kilometre north-west of White Horse Hill, then opens out and turns north towards Woolstone village (Fig. 4.1). The western side is slightly less steep and cut by a series of large furrows, or fluted valleys, known as the Giant's Stairs. Hughes (1889) describes them as 'Giant's seats' which perhaps fits their shape slightly better.

A series of low banks, or lynchets, are visible on the sides of the valley although it is not known whether these features are natural or if they mark old boundaries. In his description of features surrounding the White Horse, Flinders Petrie (1926, 12) suggested that the banks were of human construction and for ceremonial rather than agricultural use. The base of the valley is narrow, and reasonably flat with a low bank or terrace at the foot of the slope in the narrow, upper end of the valley. The flat valley bottom has

been cultivated, and it is possible although not certain that the terrace had an agricultural origin.

Excavations

The 1990 project did not allow for an extensive investigation, but a carefully targeted sample excavation was undertaken in the valley bottom. This consisted of an L-shaped trench designed to sample the colluvial deposits accumulated in the head of the valley and to investigate the terrace and sediments on the valley floor (Fig. 4.2).

It is known that colluvial deposits move down slope under the force of gravity to accumulate where there is a pronounced break of slope, in this case in the bottom of a dry valley. The initial movement of the sediment can be triggered by a number of processes (Bell 1981, 75). Colluvium can provide environmental information on the use of the surrounding area, particularly as little or no sorting occurs within colluvial deposits during transport, so environmental or archaeological material may be included in the eroding sediment as it is transported down the slope. In the case of White Horse Hill, despite the unusually steep slopes of the Manger, it was hoped that the sequence of colluviation might add significantly to the record of past land use and activities around the Horse and hillfort.

Method

A trench was excavated in the middle of the valley floor at its southern end, in a position cutting both the valley sediments and the terrace along the eastern side of the valley floor. The shorter north-west section of the trench was 10 m in length, and the longer section of the trench lay at right angles and stretched north-east for 15 m (Fig. 4.3). This part of the trench was located to cut a flat-topped bank in the bottom of the Manger. Both arms of the trench were 3 m wide, with the sides stepped for safety reasons due to the depth of the deposits encountered.

The methods used during this excavation were generally similar to those employed in studies in the South Downs (Bell 1983, 120–1). The trench was deturfed by hand and then dug by machine to the depth considered to be natural deposits, 0.65 m in the southern end and 1.2 m in the northern end. An exploratory box section 2 m by 1 m was then dug, also by machine, in the north-western corner to check the interpretation of these deposits and find the level of the underlying bedrock, but this had not

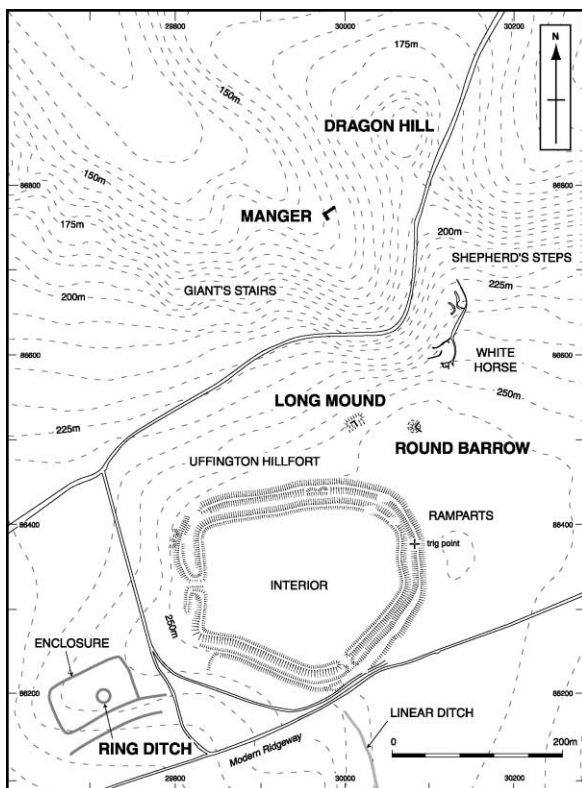


Figure 4.1 White Horse Hill, showing location of the Manger, Dragon Hill, and the long mound and round barrow, and the ring ditch.

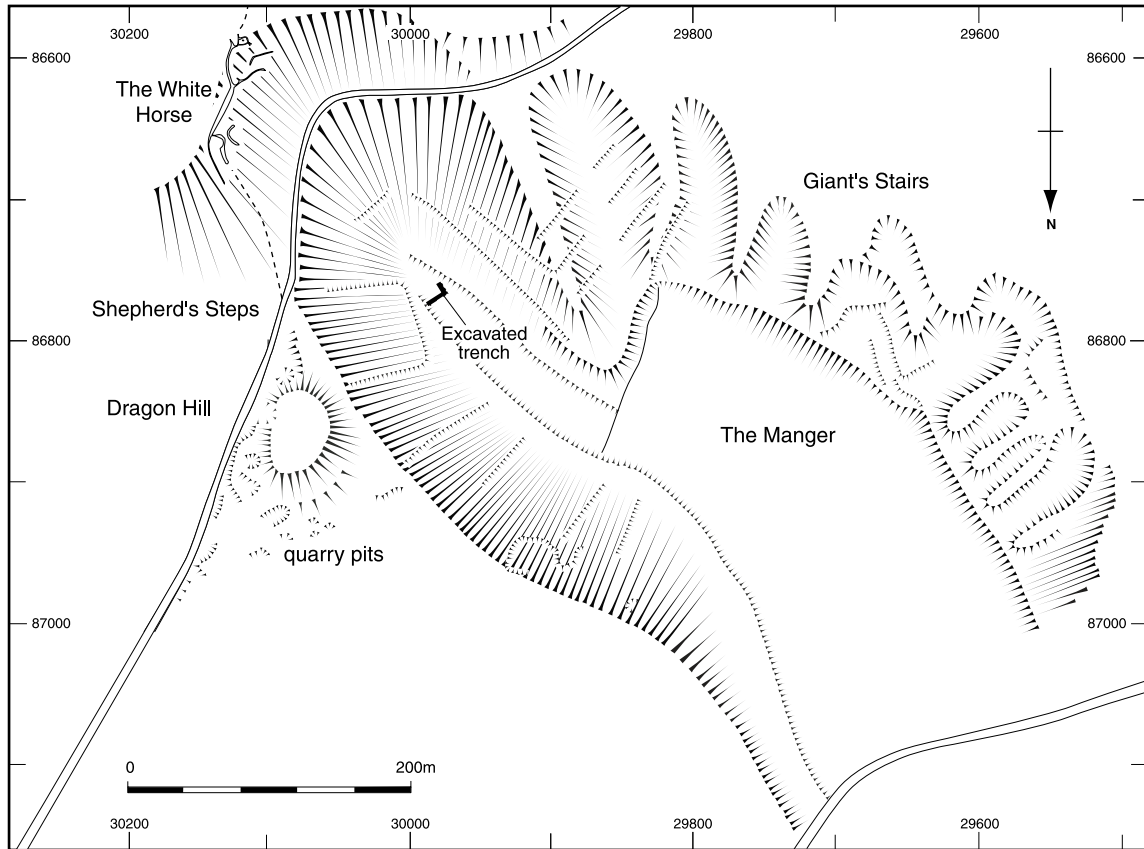


Figure 4.2 Area of the Manger, Dragon Hill, Giant's Stairs and the White Horse, indicating the location of the trench excavated within the valley of the Manger in 1990.

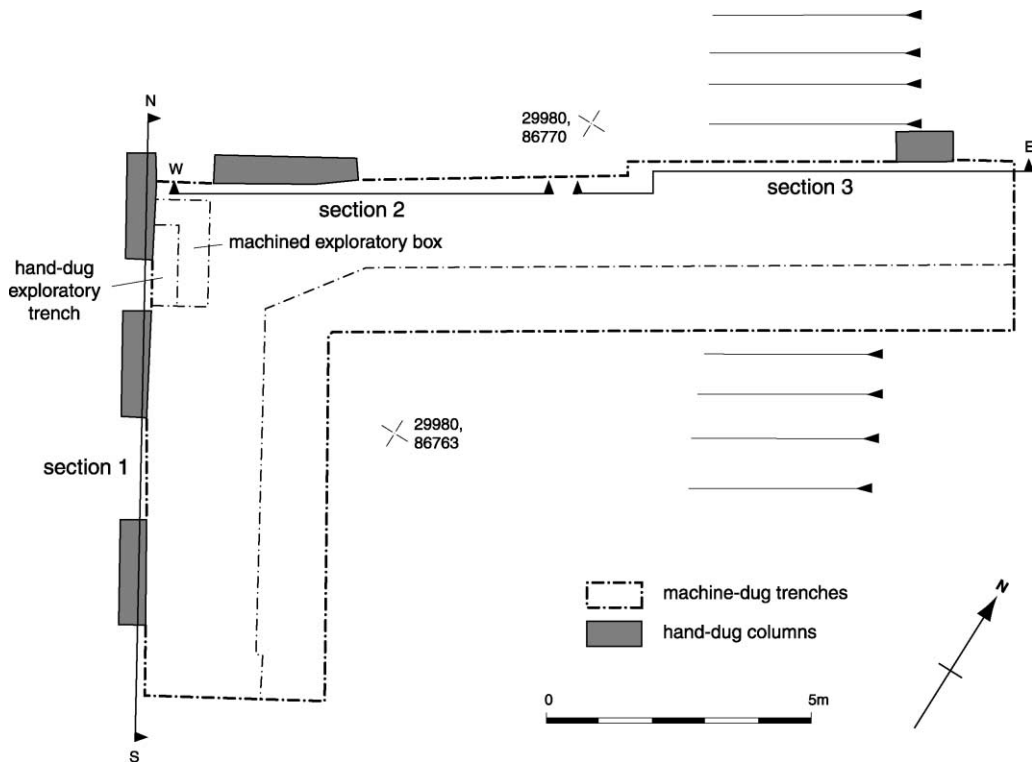


Figure 4.3 The Manger: the area of the trench showing areas excavated by machine, columns excavated by hand and location of sections.

been reached when the excavation was stopped after a further metre. Part of this exploratory trench was extended down for a further 1.16 m by hand before the chalk bedrock was reached.

Little datable material was recovered, and therefore a finds recovery strategy was employed. A number of columns 2 m by 0.5 m were hand excavated at 1 m or 2 m intervals along the west edge and at either end of the north edge of the trench (Fig. 4.3). Most of the material recovered from the trench originated in these small columns, and provided the main basis for the dating of the

colluvial layers. Other finds noted were apparent in the exposed sections of the machined trenches.

Results

The results of excavations and the deposits and soils layers apparent are shown in Table 4.1. These composed the natural glacial deposits, early soils, colluvium and modern soils. The stratification in the three sections examined is illustrated on Figure 4.4.

Samples were taken for micromorphological analysis from layers 2001 to 2004, but preliminary

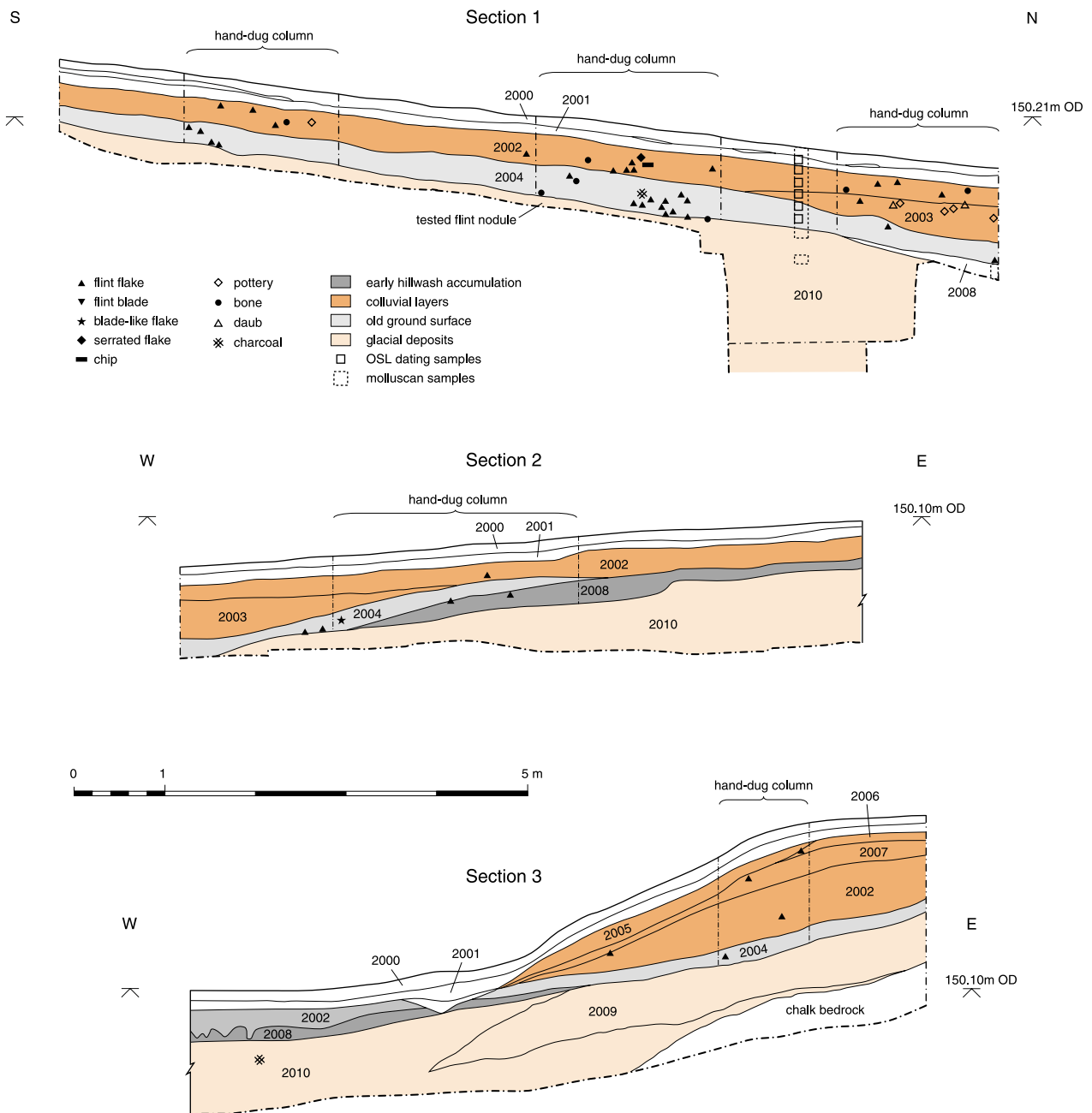


Figure 4.4 The Manger: sections 1, 2 and 3 illustrating stratigraphy and location of finds and samples.

examination indicated that no further information of value could be obtained from these (M Canti, pers. comm.). Samples of sediments were taken for magnetic susceptibility analysis by the Geophysics Department of Liverpool University, but unfortunately no useful result was apparent.

Geomorphology

The Manger is a dry valley, although springs do rise at the edge of the Lower Chalk, beneath the layer of Head and younger Coombe deposits that fill the valley floor and spread out onto the floor of The Vale. These springs are the source of the River Ock, a young stream in the lower part of the valley, but this is small in proportion to the size of the valley as a whole. The western, north-east facing side of this valley is cut by a series of furrows, or small fluted valleys, of uncertain origin (Plate 4.1).

There is no consensus on the causes of dry valley development. Explanations include the operation of natural processes through time, changes in base-level as a result of marine transgression and major climatic changes during glaciation of the Pleistocene (Goudie 1980, 12). There is some evidence to support the periglacial hypothesis, particularly in the case of the Manger. The site is south of the maximum extent of the ice during the last glaciation so glacial ice is unlikely to have been acting directly on the area, but it would have experienced a periglacial climate. The

combination of deep freezing and varied weathering processes in periglacial regions generates hill slope mantles of ill-sorted debris, with particles ranging from clay to large boulders. These mantles tend to become water-saturated due to disruption of the drainage system by a deep layer of permafrost. Permafrost would have reduced the naturally high permeability of the chalk to near zero, preventing the normal absorption of precipitation.

Such conditions give rise to a type of mass movement known as solifluction, or soil flowage caused by the flow of water-soaked debris and the creep of surface material by freeze-thaw action. This is facilitated by silty soils, which hold a great deal of moisture, a moderate slope and a limited amount of binding vegetation. The chalk wash deposit 2010 is the result of this type of process, and deposit 2009 would seem to relate to a separate higher energy event and may relate to sudden thawing of permafrost particularly since it comes late in the sequence, rather than merely smaller scale snow-melt and summer rain, which may have been involved in the more gradual build up of 2010. The fan of head deposits, such as 2010 and 2009, that front the Manger, may be similar to those in valleys near Brook in Kent, which have been dated to the late Devensian Loch Lomond Advance (Kerney *et al.* 1964).

It is possible that the accumulation and flow of meltwater and debris was influenced by the presence of a pre-existing valley formed in the scarp edge by



Plate 4.1 The White Horse, Dragon Hill, the Manger and the fluted valleys below the Hill, looking south towards Uffington Hillfort (Copyright: Cambridge University).

other processes, such as headward spring erosion, before the onset of glaciation. No spring rises in the valley head at present but it is likely that one did in the past (Ahnert 1998). Such a valley would have been accentuated by the sort of periglacial action described above to form the spectacular dry valley known today.

The origin of the smaller fluted valleys on the north-east facing side of the Manger is unknown but seems to post-date the creation of the main valley. The excavations undertaken as part of this project could not add to what is known about them since these features lie outside the area of investigation. Goudie (1980, 13–14) gives details of these flutes and compares them with other similar examples known from some other areas of the northern scarp of the Berkshire Downs. It is suggested that they may result from a combination of avalanche activity and surface runoff from chalk, rendered impermeable by permafrost during the last glaciation.

Discussion

The Manger is clearly a natural feature and has never been a centre of human activity. The accumulated sediments preserve some indications of the pattern of use of the complex as a whole, which enhances the knowledge of the site gained from the other sources.

Prehistoric soils

Following the accumulation of deep deposits of the chalk wash and scree rubble, caused by the enhanced erosion and failure of the valley sides during the periglacial or immediate post-glacial period, the valley sides stabilised and accumulation in the valley bottom slowed. The first deposits of this period of stability contained very little datable material and probably derived from the early Holocene when there is little known human activity on the Berkshire Downs.

More significant human activity in the vicinity begins during the Neolithic period and is reflected in the succeeding soil layer. This fairly shallow layer was found to contain worked flint of Neolithic to early Bronze Age date. These flints could indicate some limited activity within the dry valley during this period but were more probably secondarily deposited in this soil, brought down by surface wash or soil creep from the valley sides or hilltop above.

Flints from this layer correspond closely to those retrieved from the old ground surfaces beneath the barrows and hillfort ramparts on the hilltop above. The flint, pottery and faunal remains from these soils suggest some limited, possibly sporadic, settlement activity, particularly during the Beaker period. The soils of the valley floor confirm that there was some disturbance of the slopes at this time but that this was never intensive, nor involved extensive ground breaking.

Roman colluvium

This situation changed substantially during the Roman period as can be seen from the deep accumulations of colluvium which seal the prehistoric soil. Finds from these deposits included two pottery sherds of Romano-British sandy wares and one sherd of south Gaulish samian datable to the mid to late 1st century. There was no later or earlier material suggesting that the colluviation dated to the Roman period. The separate layers of colluvium that make up this phase of the development of the Manger relate to separate episodes of rapid accumulation. Rapid accumulation of this sort could not have occurred without substantial disturbance to the turf cover on the surrounding valley sides or hilltops. This disturbance was almost certainly anthropogenic despite the slight deterioration in the climate around this time apparent from other sites in the Thames Valley bottom where a rising watertable may have caused abandonment of some low-lying sites. Such changes would not have affected the Downs or this dry valley.

This build up of colluvium coincides with the pattern of expanding arable cultivation of the Downs indicated by the extensive field systems known from the evidence of aerial photographs and excavation on the other side of the escarpment. It is unclear how many of these field systems originated in the Roman period but the evidence indicates many were in use as arable fields at that time (Bowden *et al.* 1991–3a). The Upper Thames Valley, just to the north of Uffington, similarly shows evidence of alluviation on floodplain sites which was a result of increased agricultural activity within the adjacent slopes of the Cotswolds (Robinson 1984).

The colluviation in the Manger at this time does suggest that White Horse Hill was also subject to repeated ploughing in the same way as other parts of the region, and that any special feeling for the site did not exempt it from cultivation. It should be noted also that it is in the Roman period that the interior of the hillfort appears to be subjected to some disturbance when hollows produced by incompletely filled Iron Age pits were levelled out, possibly for agricultural use. There is no evidence that the Horse or other monuments were damaged during this time, but the area around it and possibly the lower slopes of the valley side must have been ploughed, for colluviation to occur. The only other possible source of colluviation in this area may have been Dragon Hill itself although no significant disturbance to this western side of Dragon Hill has been suggested.

It is possible that the ridges observed by Petrie (1926, 12 and fig. VII) along the sides of the Manger are associated with cultivation, though the slopes appear steep for this purpose. These could be the products of sediment accumulation similar to the bank excavated around the edges of the valley floor. This bank, cut by the 1990 excavations, was not completely a product of cultivation, as it seems to have been formed by deeper accumulations of

colluvium gathering at the break of slope. The form of the terrace suggests some later moulding of the feature. The terrace may have been made into a narrow step, to maximise the area suitable for cultivation, during periods of pressure on land or perhaps it was flattened for some other purpose. This happened after the Roman period ruling out any ceremonial or other use during prehistory. The form of the feature may also have been exaggerated by the cultivation of the valley floor digging into the deposits on its lower slopes. Cultivation of the valley floor is known in modern times and may have occurred during earlier periods.

The findings of this limited excavation cannot explain all the ridges observed by Petrie, but suggest that they are more likely to be natural features, than deliberately constructed 'ceremonial' banks associated with the White Horse.

DRAGON HILL

Dragon Hill is a small spur of lower chalk lying between the dry valley of the Manger to the west and another similar, but north-east aligned, dry valley to the east. The summit of the hill at 197 m OD, is flat and circular, in contrast to the more triangular shape of the hill at its base (Plate 4.2 and Fig. 4.2). It is joined to White Horse Hill by a narrow ridge with a footpath known as the Shepherd's Steps, which leads up, past the White Horse, to the eastern end of the hillfort. Parts of the

northern and eastern sides of the hill have been quarried for chalk. Usually there are patches of bare chalk on the top and sides of the hill, which are slow to revegetate, due to erosion caused by walkers and visitors.

The work carried out at Dragon Hill was restricted to a detailed contour survey, a geophysical survey of the top and extensive background research. Some new data and ideas are presented and the hill and its place in the complex is considered in the light of current knowledge.

Contour survey

The hill was surveyed by means of aerial photogrammetric survey by W S Atkins under commission from English Heritage in 1989, and a plan was produced with a series of contours at 0.5 m intervals which elucidates its unusual shape. The regularity of the upper part of the hill is marked, with only slight undulations in the otherwise flat top and slightly steeper slopes around the southern side nearest to White Horse Hill. There is a marked break of slope all round this upper part of the hill, and a slight lip can also be observed particularly on the south and east sides. A ledge, around 2 m wide runs along the south-western side of the upper part of the hill dividing it from the steep slope down into the Manger. Along the eastern and northern edges are numerous small irregular hollows cut into the hill, which have the



Plate 4.2 Dragon Hill showing the flattened hilltop and the exposed surface (Copyright: Oxfordshire County Council).

appearance of quarry pits and it is known from documentary sources that the hill has been quarried at various times. A further group of former quarry pits is located to the north-western corner of lower slopes of the hill. All these are now grassed over and the date and sequence of the episodes of quarrying are not known.

Geophysical survey

by Andrew Payne

Magnetometer and resistivity surveys were carried out by CfA over the summit of Dragon Hill in 1990. The purpose was to examine the area for traces of any near surface archaeological features, such as bedding trenches, which would indicate that a structure had formerly occupied the flat-topped summit. The survey was not designed to examine the deeper internal structure of the mound, which would require more complex and deeper penetrating geophysical methods such as electrical imaging and ground probing radar. The instrumentation and methodology employed for the survey was identical to that used on the barrows on White Horse Hill, and is described in detail in Appendix 3.

Resistance was much higher around the sides of the hill than over the summit area due to the influence of topography and drainage. A zone of increased resistance near the middle of the hilltop coincided with an area where the turf had been eroded exposing compacted bare chalk and was therefore not suggestive of a former structural feature.

Apart from responses to ferrous objects, likely to be mainly of modern origin, the magnetometer survey of the hilltop revealed no other significant magnetic anomalies. A very slight positive increase in background magnetic activity combined with a high concentration of ferrous signals was associated with the zone of ground disturbance and higher resistance noted above and was therefore unlikely to be of any archaeological significance.

The magnetic susceptibility readings from Dragon Hill were low for chalk, and untypical of the range of readings usually obtained from occupation sites on this type of geology (Payne 2000). Results from Dragon Hill also clearly contrast with those obtained from samples extracted from known areas of archaeological activity on White Horse Hill. A sample from the ring ditch located between the White Horse and the hillfort produced a laboratory measured magnetic susceptibility reading over ten times more than the highest reading obtained from Dragon Hill.

The surveys unfortunately provide very little data about the past utilisation of the site, but do suggest a lack of intensive former occupation activity on the hilltop. This would not preclude occasional use of the area for ceremonial or other purposes as some forms of activity might not necessarily leave physical traces in the ground detectable by geophysical means.

Names and interpretations

In addition to its unusual appearance, the names used to denote it at different times have attracted interest in Dragon Hill, and speculation on its name and form continue to the present day. As discussed in the previous chapter the hill has been associated with several names and interpretations. The name of the hill in Anglo-Saxon charters as *eceles beorh* might relate to a British word for a Christian church, suggesting that the hill had been the site of a church of late Roman date. Late Roman finds recovered from the hilltop and the late Roman evidence recovered from the hillfort interior, the enclosure to the south-west and the barrows, show a considerable amount of activity on White Horse Hill during this period. However, there is no other evidence for a church although the Christianisation of pagan sites is known (Grinsell 1986). Alternatively it is possible that the word may relate to a personal name employed in conjunction with the word for a barrow (Hooke 1987).

Another idea has been that the hill was a Norman castle mound, as it has sometimes been known as Uffington Castle, while the hillfort on White Horse Hill, now known by that name, was referred to as Uffington Camp. However, there is no documentary or artefactual evidence and a castle built on the flat top of Dragon Hill would have been overlooked from the hilltop, allowing any approaching enemy a full view of the interior, making a castle difficult to defend.

The name of Dragon, or Dragon's, Hill has long been associated with a local legend that Sir, or King as he is known locally, George killed the Dragon on the hill and buried it in the hilltop. The Dragon's blood made a pool on the top before running down the steps on the eastern side of the hill, 'where the grass has never grown since' (Hughes 1889). Another interpretation explained by Hughes was that this was the site of Pendragon's Hill referring to a British chief Uter Pendragon, who was slain in battle against the Saxons in the area and was buried here.

This last interpretation returns to the idea that the hilltop was a large and elaborate barrow. It is uncertain when it first arose, but has been repeated by various scholars from the early 18th century onwards. In *Magna Britannia et Hibernia Antiqua and Nova* (Cox 1720, 171), 'a barrow called Dragon Hill' was discussed. Gough's enlarged edition of Camden's *Britannia* (1789) stated there was a barrow called Dragon Hill, probably of British date lying below the White Horse. This text upholds Aubrey's (1665-93) view that this was a mausoleum of earth like Silbury Hill, and supposes it to be the burial place of Uter Pendragon.

Previous work

Dr John Wilson of Oxford University and Mr Way walked over the eastern side of the hill next to the road in 1851, and collected three or four sherds of

prehistoric pottery and eight or nine of Roman date. In the opinion of these two men 'all the ground towards the summit, and that on the sides below, had been moved'. This appeared to add support to the idea of an artificial mound, and a small excavation on the hilltop was undertaken the following year. The summit of the hill was opened by workmen in 1852, in the presence of the Earl of Craven, and it was decided from this excavation that the natural soil had never been disturbed (Wilson 1871b, 182). It was thought though, that the lower part of the hill might have been shaped to give the appearance of a large barrow.

During the course of this investigation, a human tibia was observed projecting from a bank overhanging the road just in the hollow between White Horse and Dragon Hill and subsequently three inhumations were excavated. These were found lying side by side and together with other inhumations, which were known to have come to light from time to time on this side of the White Horse Hill (Wilson 1871b, 182), were enough to maintain the idea that the hill had been used as a barrow or funerary monument. The burials known from the other barrows on White Horse Hill seemed to support this theory.

Martin-Atkins may also have been present at the opening of Dragon Hill in 1852, as the Oxfordshire SMR records show that he was responsible for the excavations, but Dr Wilson makes no mention of him. Nevertheless, Martin-Atkins was sufficiently interested to plan excavations to investigate the hill, as mentioned in a letter dated 31 August 1857 to Dr Wilson. In this letter Martin-Atkins agrees with Wilson that Dragon Hill should not lie open during the revel, that is the Festival organised to celebrate the scouring of the White Horse, but would be investigated afterwards (Bodleian MS Top Berks e8). However, it is unclear if Martin-Atkins ever excavated the hill, and it is not referred to in later correspondence to Dr Wilson.

No later formal archaeological excavations have been carried out on this hill, though chalk may have been quarried from the sides and top at various times, and over the years several finds of Iron Age and Roman pottery, and Roman coins have been recovered from the hill (now held in Reading Museum). In 1925 the late Professor Stuart Piggott found an exposure of chalk on the eastern side of Dragon Hill, and he observed that this was not of solid chalk, but of chalk rubble make-up (S Piggott, pers. comm. 1995). Lodged within this material he found a bone awl made from a sharpened metapodial (Fig. 4.5: now held in the Vale and Downland Museum, Wantage).

Discussion

The question of whether Dragon Hill is entirely natural or shaped by man cannot be settled without further excavations. The chalk rubble make-up containing a bone awl observed by Piggott in 1925

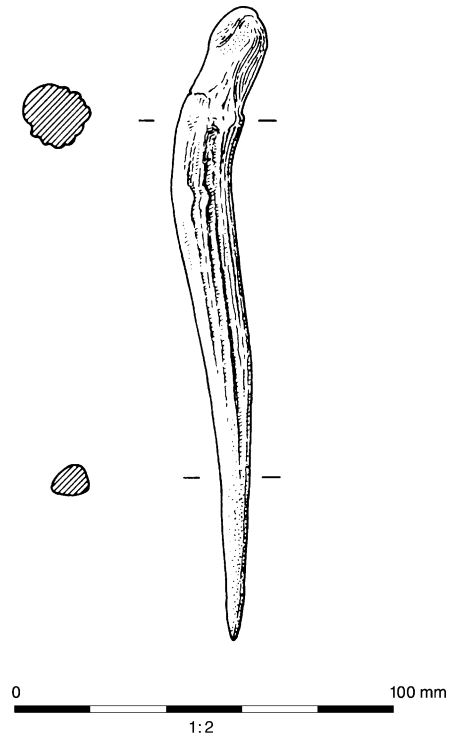


Figure 4.5 Bone awl found at Dragon Hill in 1925 by Professor Stuart Piggott.

suggested that parts of the hill were not merely undisturbed geology. However, it is unclear whether the shape has been remodelled or if debris cleared from levelling the top has been spread down the sides, and the location of the exposure noted by Piggott is uncertain. The hill has been a convenient source of road material for tracks in the area, and quarry pits are apparent around the site, so it is possible that the chalk rubble noted may have been the remains of one of these pits and that surface finds in the area were disturbed by similar quarrying activity.

The geophysical surveys proved inconclusive, but the resistivity survey of the hilltop did show a difference between the central and south-western parts, and the eastern edge. This could indicate some difference in the composition of these parts of the hill. The legendary scar on the hilltop (see Plate 4.2) suggests that there may be bedrock close to the surface in the central area of the hilltop, possibly accounting for the difference in the resistivity. It seems possible that the present form of the hill was deliberately created by removal of part of the top, and that the eastern side was built up with spoil to create a steep sided, flat-topped mound, although when this was done is unclear. The remodelling may predate the Saxon period given the Anglo-Saxon name, but it may have taken place in the Roman period although there is no evidence for this.

The hill could equally well have been reshaped in prehistory to form an integral part of the White

Horse Hill complex, but the lack of colluvial deposits within the Manger prior to the Roman period provides no evidence. The inhumations reported by Wilson (1871b, 182) from the southern side of the hill may suggest its use as a burial mound, though the position of the burials may suggest reuse of an existing feature. The idea of a ceremonial place remains unproved, although the dimensions compare well with those of Silbury Hill and the possible prehistoric mound at Marlborough (see Table 4.2).

Modification of the natural shape of the hill may suggest that it was created to provide some sort of platform, yet no evidence of any use was detected by the geophysical surveys. The range of interpretations and the difficulties of applying them to such monuments as Dragon Hill and Silbury are apparent (Whittle 1997, 141). However, if Dragon Hill was reshaped in some way it would have appeared as a white hill in the green downland possibly alongside the White Horse and possibly the white ramparts of the hillfort. Dragon Hill would therefore have been a prominent visual feature of the landscape.

The original function of Dragon Hill is unclear and the conclusions drawn are based on a small amount of evidence and can therefore only be tentative. Further investigations would be necessary to clarify the date and extent of any activity. It is possible that Dragon Hill was used during gatherings associated with White Horse Hill. It could have formed a hilltop or flattened platform for ceremonies in full view of the hilltop, or from which the White Horse and other parts of this important area could be viewed. Even today, with changes which may have taken place through time, an excellent view of the surrounding area and of the White Horse is apparent from Dragon Hill.

THE BARROWS

Background

Two barrows or burial mounds, one a long mound and the other round, lie on the upper slopes of the north-eastern side of White Horse Hill above the Manger and the ridge connecting Dragon Hill to the main part of the chalk escarpment. A ring ditch of a third round barrow is known as a cropmark and was partially excavated as part of this project. The locations of the three sites are indicated on Figure 4.1. These monuments have, unfortunately, been eroded over time as a result of weathering and antiquarian excavations.

Local tradition considered that the two mounds on the Hill marked burials, perhaps of the heroes of the Battle of Ashdown believed to have been fought here in AD 871. In 1857 and 1858 human remains were found within the barrows, when local antiquarian Edwin Martin-Atkins excavated both barrows. The first of these barrows was described as an oblong mound rising one or two feet above the turf lying on

the sloping side of the hill a little to the east of Uffington Castle, and just above the White Horse. This mound was slight and may not have been recognised but for the surrounding ditch. The second mound was the round barrow which lay further up the hill. This too was only a slight mound said to resemble an irregular figure of eight. Unfortunately, Martin-Atkins died shortly after the excavations so the results were not published, but he had been in close contact with a number of interested academics, who were able to include the findings in their own work (Davis and Thurnam 1865). Martin-Atkins' widow donated the finds from the excavations to the British Museum in 1862. Records of each item in the museum's catalogue are sufficiently detailed to give an accurate impression of many of the finds (Table 4.3).

These finds were used as a basis for the dating of the barrows to the Roman and Saxon periods. However, in the light of more recent knowledge of such sites, it would seem more likely that the long mound was of Neolithic origin and the round mound of the early Bronze Age period, and the finds, therefore, did not provide the date of the construction of the monuments. If the mounds were prehistoric they were reused for burial in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, indicating a long tradition of use.

John Thurnam, an academic well known for his research into ancient human remains, had witnessed some of the excavations at Martin-Atkins' invitation, and continued the study of the human skulls retrieved. In 1865 Thurnam and J Bernard Davis published their major work on the skulls of the aboriginal and ancient peoples of the British Isles, *Crania Britannica*. This work included the material from White Horse Hill with a description of the site, its setting and the results of the excavations. This report (Davis and Thurnam 1865, vol. 2, plate 51, 1–6) formed the basis of much of the later references to these barrows, together with accounts of the excavations Martin-Atkins had sent to Dr John Wilson and other academics. No further excavations were undertaken on these sites until the present project.

Investigations

The investigation aimed to confirm that the two slight elevations identified during a contour survey of the hilltop carried out by English Heritage in 1989 were the barrows excavated in the 1850s by Martin-Atkins, and to assess the extent of the 19th-century excavations and see what remained. It was also hoped to recover any dating material and investigate the potential for environmental analysis, and if possible to confirm the structural sequence referred to in the earlier reports. During a later phase of the project, when the nature and date of cropmarks to the south-west of the hillfort was being investigated, a ring ditch was found within a later enclosure. The ring ditch was considered to be the ploughed out remains of a third barrow.

Geophysical survey

by A Payne

CfA undertook magnetometer and resistivity surveys at the two barrow sites on White Horse Hill in 1990. The purpose of these surveys was to assist the targeting of research excavations to be undertaken by OAU in 1993, and to provide basic information on the form, structure and sub-surface component of the round and larger oblong burial mounds. The survey area was extended to examine the landscape between the barrow sites in order to test the area for any further traces of previously unrecorded burial monuments or other archaeological activity.

Resistivity and magnetometer survey were both employed, as the two methods when used in combination can provide complementary information on the structure of barrows (Cole 1995). Magnetometry is particularly suited to mapping external quarry ditches which are often no longer clearly visible on the surface as a result of silting. Resistivity, on the other hand, will often provide useful information on the internal structure of burial mounds, particularly of long barrows. The survey *methodology* is described in detail in Appendix 3.

Long mound

The long mound was most clearly defined in the resistivity survey. The oblong outline of the mound was defined as a simple block of uniformly high resistance lacking any internal detail and any evidence for burial deposits, stone cists or chambers (Fig. 4.6). There is a tentative suggestion of a side, possibly quarry, ditch on the south side of the mound in the form of a weak linear low resistance response, also visible as a weak positive magnetic anomaly in the magnetometer data. Several localised positive magnetic anomalies near the south-east corner of the mound may indicate pits or possibly areas of burning. Any burning could equally be modern or related to cremation pyres but it is worth noting that Martin-Atkins' excavations in the south-east part of the mound encountered cremations. The mound itself did not produce a recognisable magnetic signature.

Round barrow

The magnetometer data proved the most informative in the case of the small round barrow, clearly identifying its location (Fig. 4.6). The barrow is defined by a slightly oval ring ditch approximately 15 m in diameter detected as a positive magnetic anomaly. Adjacent but much weaker positive linear anomalies may be indicative of smaller ditches or gullies projecting south from the main barrow. These features may explain the description as a figure of eight earthwork excavated by Martin-Atkins in 1857 (Davis and Thurnam 1865). A further localised magnetic anomaly 4 m north-west of the ring ditch suggests the presence of an outlying archaeological

feature, possibly a large elongated pit, a series of closely grouped pits, an area of burning or a natural clay pocket. The latter type of feature is relatively common in the area and they are known to sometimes produce magnetic anomalies similar to man-made pits. An intensely strong magnetic source recorded near the centre of the ring ditch is probably linked to ferrous material discarded in the process of earlier excavation.

An arc of three closely spaced discrete high resistance anomalies coincided with the position of the ring ditch of the round barrow defined by the magnetometer survey. These may represent displaced mound material, disturbance to the barrow or stone or flint burial cairns. Pits loosely filled with chalk rubble or dumps of bone material might also account for the localised high resistance anomalies.

The remainder of the survey area

A line of three small discrete positive magnetic anomalies accompanied by several broader positive anomalies occurred in the area north-east of the round barrow and immediately south of the head of the White Horse. The smaller anomalies most likely represent a line of pits and the larger ones may indicate more substantial quarry-type pits, areas of burning or possibly pockets of more magnetic clay embedded in the surface of the chalk, as also present in the north-western sector of Uffington Hillfort. Several localised areas of high resistance also occurred in the same general area which may be of archaeological significance given the association of high resistance with the ring ditch to the south-west, and it is possible that the combined group of anomalies could indicate a second but badly disturbed barrow site. A further isolated pair of discrete positive magnetic anomalies is present 25 m south-west of the ring ditch. These are similar in form to anomalies from pit-type features recorded within the nearby hillfort.

A number of features of relatively recent origin were also mapped by the surveys. These included the vestiges of a former metallic fence boundary indicated by a linear strip of fluctuating positive and negative magnetic activity near the eastern limit of the survey. There was also a large mainly negative peak in the magnetic readings from a ferrous source north-east of the round barrow, probably produced by a permanent survey marker of some kind. The modern pathway leading from the car park to the White Horse which passes close to the north side of the long mound was also clearly apparent as a wide straight linear low resistance anomaly.

THE LONG MOUND

The slight oblong mound was identified by the geophysical survey, and this seemed very likely to be

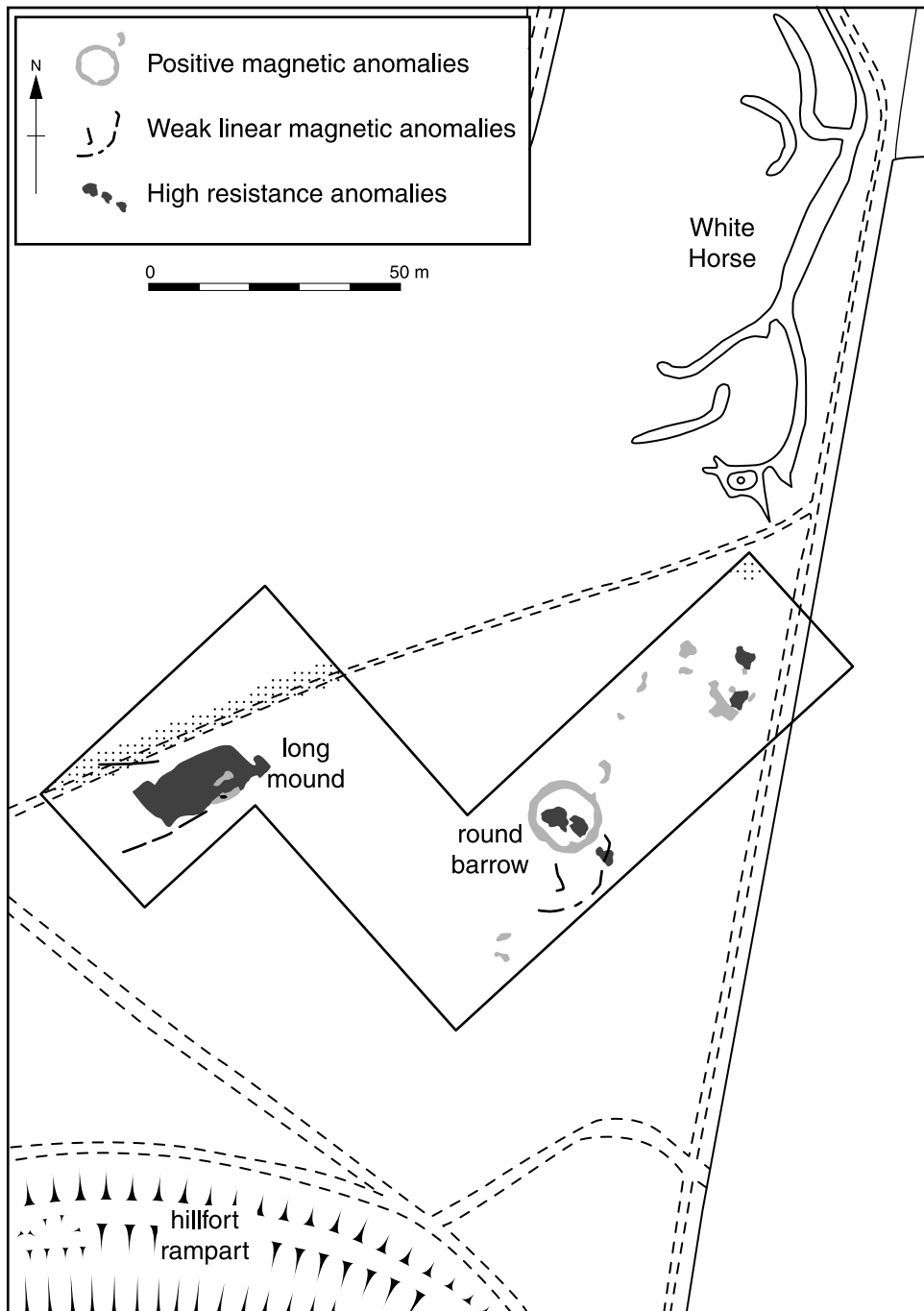


Figure 4.6 Round barrow and long mound or barrow on White Horse Hill: results of geophysical survey in 1990.

Martin-Atkins' oblong mound (Fig. 4.7). It lies around 120 m south-west of and slightly higher than the Horse's ears, overlooking the Manger and Dragon Hill at approximately 249 m OD. The barrow would have been visible on the skyline when viewed from below. It is aligned east-west and measures 24.5 m by 12 m. A slight depression noted in the middle of the mound was probably the result of the 19th-century excavation. At the time of Martin-Atkins' excavation the barrow stood to a height of only 0.3–0.6 m above the turf, and was

surrounded by a ditch. No ditch could be observed when the mound was surveyed in 1989.

19th-century excavations

In his 1857 and 1858 excavations Edwin Martin-Atkins found 46 inhumations and a few cremation burials within this mound. The graves were concentrated towards the southern and western sides of the mound, as shown in his sketch reproduced in Figure 4.7a (from Davis and Thurnam 1865, vol. 2, 2).

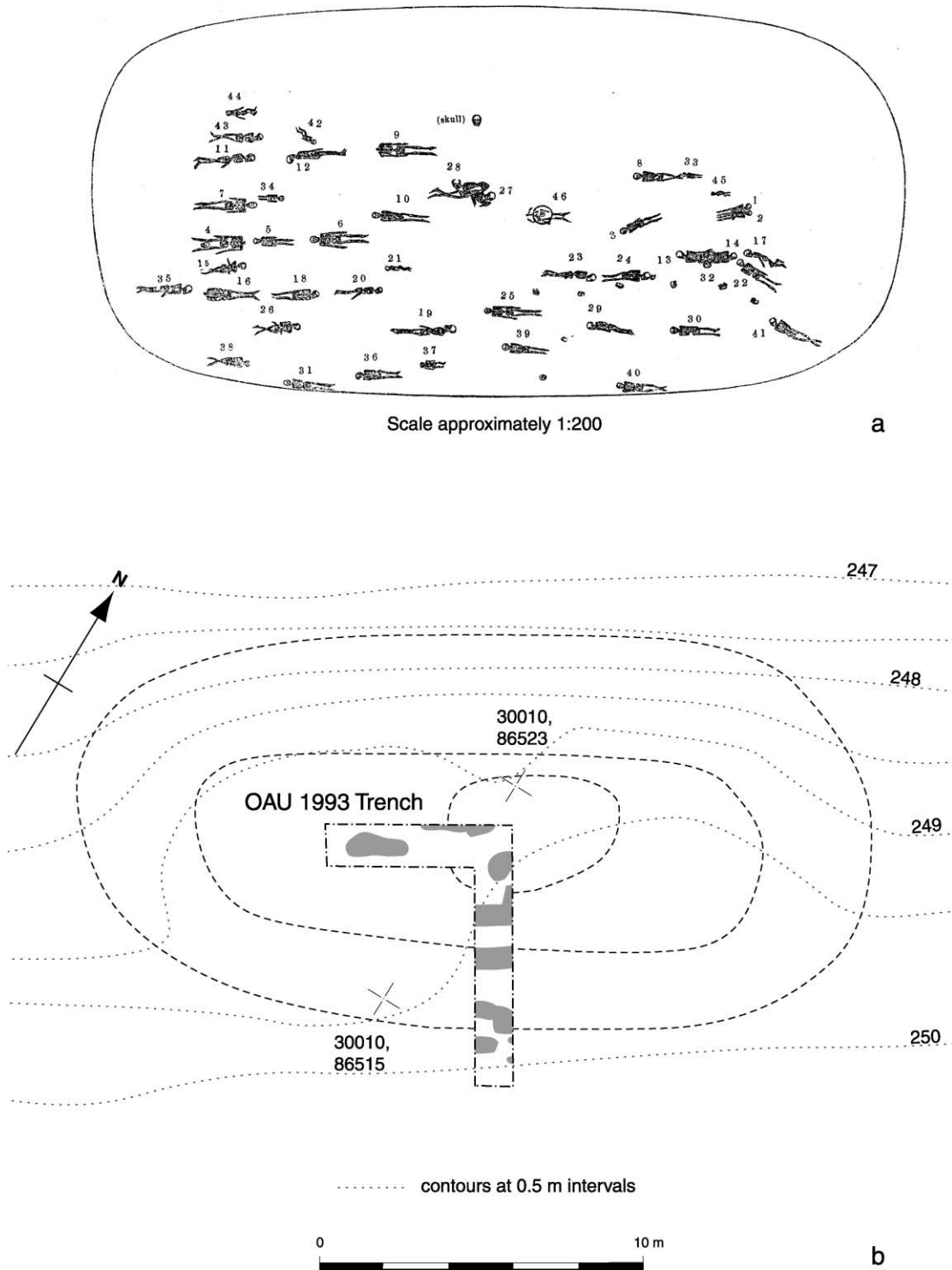


Figure 4.7 Long mound: a) Martin-Atkins' sketch plan of the burials (from Davis and Thurnam 1865, vol. 2, 2), b) plan of the 1993 excavations showing the location of the trench.

These were recorded as 'clearly of Roman date, though an early British interment was found near the centre of the mound'.

This central burial took the form of a large urn of coarse pottery with two handle-like bosses, filled with burnt bones, and protected by a circular wall

crudely covered with sarsen stones. From Martin-Atkins' description (Davis and Thurnam 1865) it is thought that the deposit is more likely to be prehistoric, and probably Bronze Age, although a Neolithic date is not impossible. If the long mound is Neolithic then it is unlikely to be the primary burial,

but unfortunately the vessel which contained the cremation is now lost. There is no record of it with the other finds from Martin-Atkins' excavation that were deposited in the British Museum after his death.

The other burials were inhumations which occupied 42 graves, three having containing more than one skeleton. This included both sexes and all ages, from 1 or 2 years old to 70 years and over. The graves themselves varied in depth from 0.23 to 0.91 m. All were aligned east-west, with four exceptions which were aligned north-west to south-east. Twenty-seven inhumations were facing the west, while 19 faced east. There was a great deal of variety in the disposition of the bodies; in five cases the skeletons were found to have been placed face down, in several cases the bodies had been decapitated and in one double burial the skeletons had been placed end to end. One of the inhumations (skeleton 46 in the centre of Fig. 4.7a) had been inserted over the central cremation burial. Part of this skeleton was mixed with the capstones of the burial.

In the south-eastern quarter of the mound nine urns were located. These were all fragmentary, and described in the original report as coarse Roman pottery. The dating of these burials rested on the accompanying finds, and on the idea that the measurements of the skulls confirmed that the skeletons were of Roman date. The dating of burials through skull type, said in this case to be 'platycephalic [of flattened form] and [therefore] Roman' (*ibid.*), is no longer acceptable, but the dating of the finds is still valid. The finds were relatively sparse, but included small 'brass' coins that had been placed in the mouths of five of the skeletons. Four coins were found placed between the cheeks and the jaws of one of the skeletons. These coins appeared to have been wrapped in 'brown felt-like material' (*ibid.*).

In addition, hobnails were found in two of the graves. Square double-sided bone combs accompanied two of the female skeletons and a small vase of fine red pottery had been placed near the right shoulder of another. An iron spike was found in one grave, several large nails with wood attached in two of the others. One of these two also yielded a square iron plate with a hole in the centre. Some pieces of iron, bronze hairpins and a bronze needle were found among the pottery sherds and burnt bones of the nine cremations. These were assigned to the 4th or 5th century AD (Davis and Thurnam 1865, vol. 2, 4), particularly on the basis that cremation was beginning to supersede inhumation. Most of the finds were donated to the British Museum in 1862, and their dates, probably late Roman in the main, and reinterpretation are given in Table 4.3.

1993 excavation

An L-shaped trench, 1.2 m wide, was excavated through the mound, with the angle of the trench

intersecting the mid-point of the feature (Fig. 4.7b). The longer arm of this trench ran from north-west to south-east for 8 m, and was designed to locate the estimated position of the surrounding ditch, no longer visible. The shorter arm of the trench ran at right angles for 4.5 m, along the main south-west to north-east axis of the mound. This trench was carefully located to target the research aims and care was taken to reinstate the ground surface.

During these excavations and recording it was evident that the site had been heavily disturbed by previous excavation and that there had been more than one episode of excavation. However, many of the features found correlated well with those recorded by Martin-Atkins, confirming that this was the same monument.

The old ground surface

The old ground surface (4012, Figs 4.8 and 4.9: 4018, 4030, 4042, 4043, Fig. 4.9: consisting of a dark grey silty loam with chalk) was found to have been preserved by the construction of the mound. This formed an horizon 0.08–0.14 m deep, contrasting with the lighter chalk rubble deposits of the mound. Examination of this soil revealed that it was very disturbed and had either been ploughed, or extensively excavated and perhaps partly removed, prior to construction of the barrow. Later intrusions, associated with the burials and the 19th-century excavation of the numerous inhumations, had substantially truncated this deposit. Within part of the old ground surface, beneath the central pit of the 19th-century excavations (4012), were found 13 flint flakes, some animal bone and 67 sherds of later prehistoric pottery. In context 4042 part of a middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury Bucket Urn was found. However, due to the disturbed nature of these layers it was thought unlikely that these finds were associated with the construction or possibly even the use of the barrow.

Barrow construction

The barrow mound was of earth and chalk construction (small to medium-sized chalk rubble in a generally light grey/mid brown silty loam), and remained as a band ranging in depth from 0.08–0.5 m (4015, 4029, 4031, 4041, 4058, 4054, Fig. 4.9). This material only survived in small, isolated sections which had not been excavated by Martin-Atkins' diggers. Generally there were few finds from this layer and the material was probably derived from the ditch. Only within deposit 4015 of the mound material were there finds. These included a large number of pottery sherds, both middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury and Iron Age, flint flakes, animal bone and one disarticulated piece of human bone. Nineteenth-century excavations had clearly disturbed this deposit. The ditch (4019), lying parallel to the mound (Fig. 4.8), was 2.1 m wide and 0.54 m deep

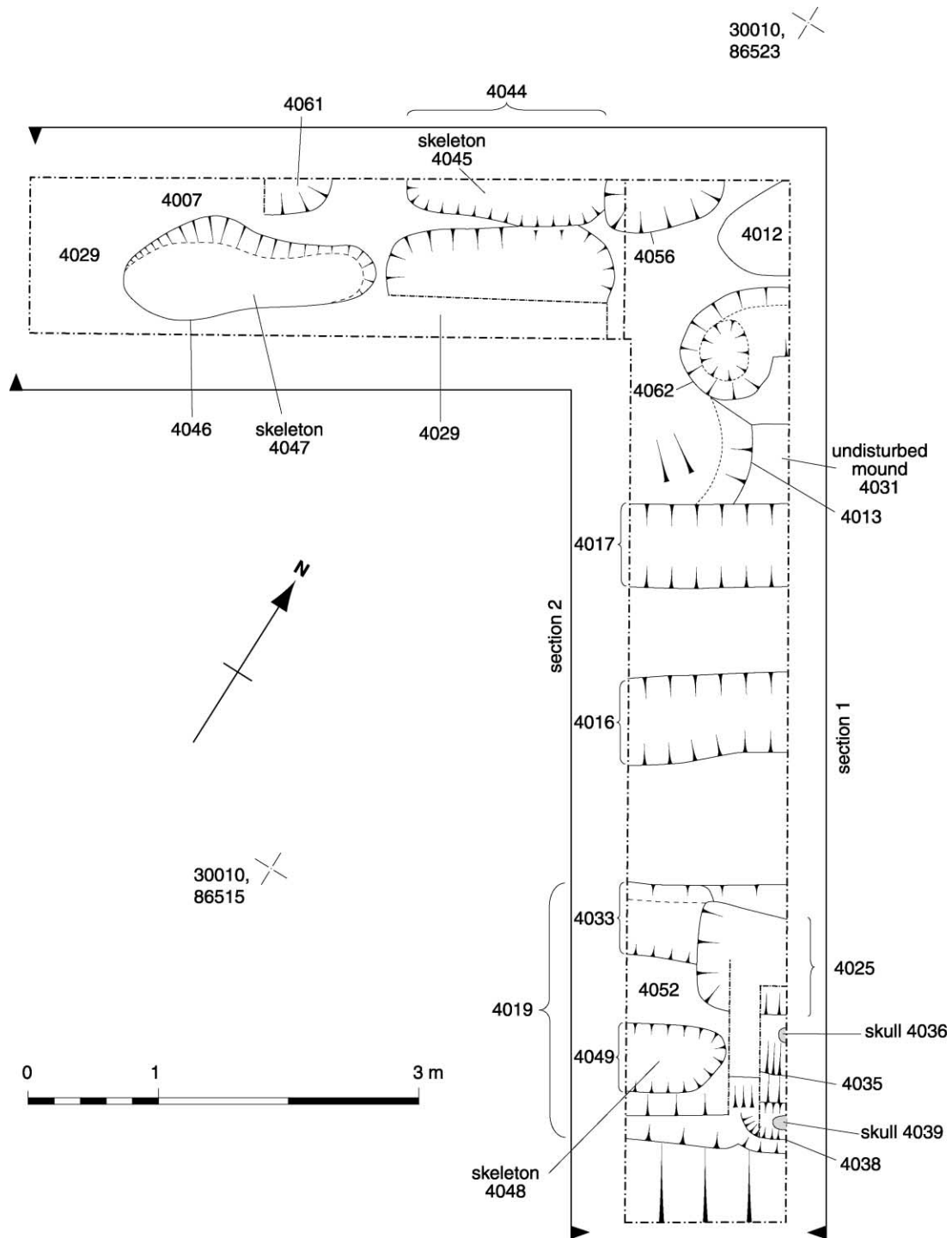


Figure 4.8 Long mound: plan of the 1993 trench excavated, indicating the location of the burials.

with a U-shaped profile and flat base 1.1 m wide. It seems possible that any primary burial and any others relating to its first use had been removed previously.

Early ditch fills

The primary fills (4056 & 4052, light brown and orange grey silt with frequent chalk) extended to a

depth of 0.46 m. Only a narrow section was dug through this material to establish the profile of the ditch, in order to leave the previously undisturbed burials *in situ*. The early infill of the ditch would appear to have been the product of natural silting with material eroded from the sides, the mound and the hill slope above, though this material was not investigated very extensively. Unfortunately, no

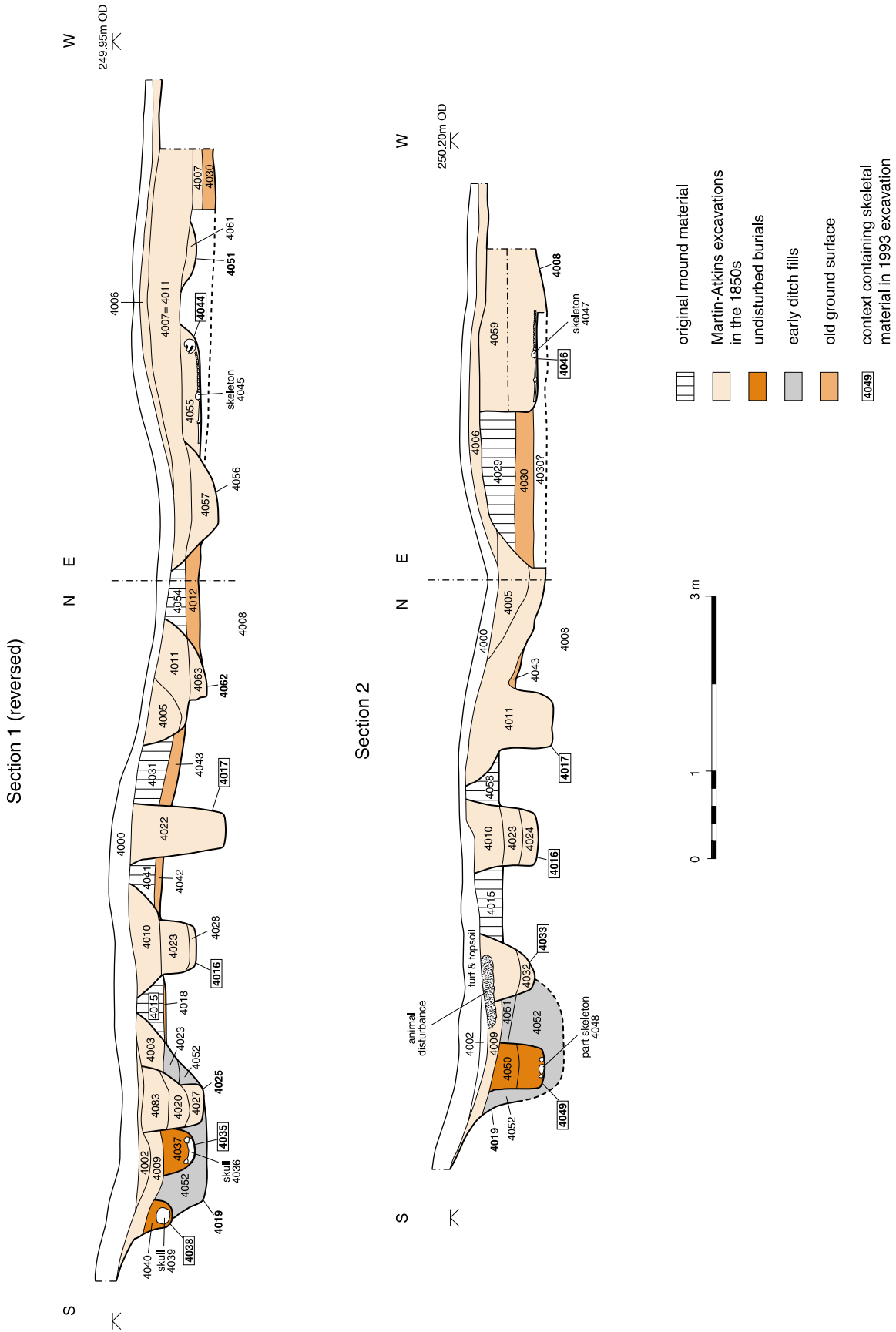


Figure 4.9 Long mound: section 1 (reversed) and section 2 of the 1993 excavations indicating the original mound material and the mound ditch with undisturbed burials, and areas excavated in the 19th century.

finds or material was recovered from these deposits, which would have assisted with dating the phases of construction and primary use of the barrow.

Undisturbed burials

Martin-Atkins had excavated almost all the burials associated with this barrow, but remains of three undisturbed burials were found within the upper fills of the ditch (graves 4035, 4038 & 4049, Fig. 4.9). All three were aligned on the same axis as the ditch and as most of the other burials excavated by Martin-Atkins. All three graves were filled with light brown sandy loam and all were overlain by a deposit of orange brown sandy loam with frequent small-medium chalk rubble (4009). Within this deposit 28 sherds of later prehistoric pottery and 13 of early to middle Bronze Age date were recovered together with two pieces of worked flint.

Grave 4035 – The edge of the western end of this grave extended from the eastern baulk of the trench. The excavated part of the grave was 0.17 m long, 0.52 m wide and 0.38 m deep, with a rounded end and U-shaped profile. Only approximately half of the skull (4036) was visible and the rest disappeared into the section. The thickness of the skull suggested that it was from an immature individual.

Grave 4038 – Only the skull (4039) was visible in the western end of the grave within the area of the trench. The cut appeared to be irregular in plan, 0.35 m long, up to 0.38 m wide and 0.6 m deep, with a U-shaped profile. The skull lay on its side facing north. Complete suture closure did not appear to be under way suggesting that this belonged to a subadult individual.

Grave 4049 – This feature extended beyond the western edge of the trench, with only the eastern 0.75 m lying within the trench and available for investigation. The cut was irregular in plan with a pointed eastern end, a maximum width of 0.48 m and a U-shaped profile, 0.6 m deep. Only the legs of the skeleton up to the femur were revealed, together with part of a skull (4048, Fig. 4.10 and Plate 4.3) and the body had been laid face down with the skull placed between the thighs. As only a part of the grave was excavated and this skeleton, as with the other previously undisturbed skeletons, was left *in situ*, it is impossible to be sure that the skull belonged to the rest of the human remains in this grave, although it seems likely looking at the other decapitated inhumations seen in Martin-Atkins’ excavations (Fig. 4.7a). These three inhumations are likely to have been contemporary with the others from the mound, despite no finds having been recovered from any of these graves.

Martin-Atkins’ excavations

Most of the area of the barrow mound and part of the ditch was dug over and backfilled during Martin-Atkins’ excavations, with some small areas

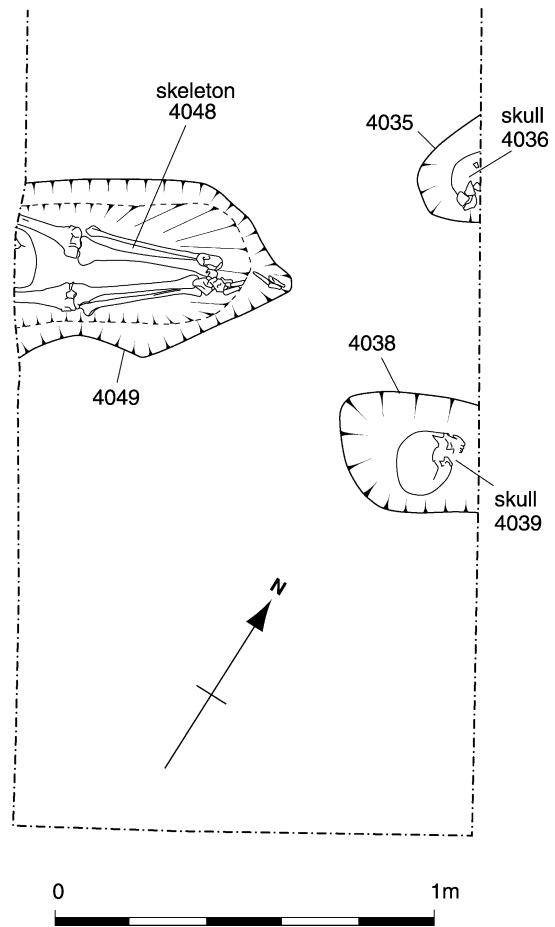


Figure 4.10 Long mound: partial burials located in southern ditch 4049/4019, 4048 has a skull between the legs, 4039 and 4036 skulls only.

of original mound material left between the excavated sections (Fig. 4.9). Other areas had been opened and graves excavated where these features had been identified.

The excavated features were generally roughly rectangular in plan with rounded ends and U-shaped profiles, though other less regular features were also found. The fills varied with the majority being silty loam or clay with frequent chalk flecks and small rubble. The earlier deposits tended to be light to mid grey or grey brown, while the stratigraphically later fills were often darker brown.

Finds of animal bone, fired clay, flint, mostly flakes, and Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery were found in a number of contexts (4003, 4006, 4010, 4002/4007/4011, 4015, 4020, 4023, 4027). The pottery included a few small early prehistoric sherds of middle Bronze Age type (Fig. 9.3.1–2) and several hundred later prehistoric sherds. These were mainly small, abraded body sherds of earlier Iron Age type, and there were also some plain rim sherds and the base from a miniature vessel (Fig. 9.4.3–8). This material seems most likely to be the residue of pottery assemblages discarded by Martin-Atkins



Plate 4.3 *The long mound: Roman burial, partial skeleton (4048) uncovered within the ditch in a grave (4049): the head was found placed between the legs.*

from his excavations around the hillfort and used for backfilling of the mound. These small sherds were probably not regarded as worthy of preservation.

Martin-Atkins' diggers investigated at least six graves which lay in the area of the current trench. Skeletal material (4034 – subadult 11 to 13 years old, 4028 – subadult less than aged 12 years, 4032, 4045 & 4047) was found redeposited in five of these graves (4016, 4017, 4033, 4044 & 4046 respectively) and a single piece of disarticulated human bone was recovered from backfill deposit 4015. Much of this material was disturbed, broken or disarticulated and some parts of these skeletons were missing completely (see Boyle in Chapter 10 for full descriptions of these remains). By comparing the 1993 excavation plan (Fig. 4.7b) to the Martin-Atkins' plan (Fig. 4.7a) it was possible to tentatively link features from the two excavations.

Grave 4046 which contained the most complete skeleton excavated in 1993 (4047, Fig. 4.11 and Plate 4.4) appears to be skeleton 10 of Martin-Atkins' excavations (centre left of Fig. 4.7b). Unfortunately this was not described in Davis and Thurnam (1865) so no comparison of the descriptions could be made to ascertain whether or not the skeletons were reinterred in their own graves. In the 1993 excavations this burial was identified as a young adult male. Skeletons 27 and 28, which appear one above the other in the 1857 plan, may be cut by 4044 and the smaller cut 4056 immediately to the east. If cut 4044 is equivalent to skeleton 27, the body (4045, Fig. 4.12) has changed orientation, with the head now being towards the west. As the body had been disturbed,

it is possible that the change occurred during reburial. In the original report, skeleton 27 is described as a male of mature age, the only one to exceed 5' 9" in stature as calculated by Davis and Thurnam (1865). The skull received particular attention as it had a large gash in the frontal area, which was considered to have been a fatal wound. Cut 4056 (Fig. 4.9) may correspond to the location of skeleton 28. No bone was found in its fill during re-examination, though the cut was deeper than the rest of the trench, suggesting that Martin-Atkins located and excavated a feature. The skeleton is depicted in the ground plan as a flexed burial lying on the right side, with the head to the west.

The correlation of features in the north to south arm of the trench is not as good, although the relative positions of the features in this arm suggest that their correlation is correct and match Martin-Atkins' sketch plan of the site. Remains in cut 4017 may be skeleton 25, which is described as a female with four coins placed between the cheek and jaw. The ground plan indicates a supine extended burial, with the head to the west and both arms and legs laid out straight, while the recent excavation recovered the remains of a much disturbed juvenile. Human remains (4034) in cut 4016 could be Martin-Atkins' skeleton 39, which is not described in the text, though the ground plan suggests an extended supine burial, head to the west, legs straight and arms possibly folded across the pelvis. It is possible that cut 4062, close to the intersection of the two arms of the 1993 trench represents the remnants of Martin-Atkins' central interment in a cist, described in the text as

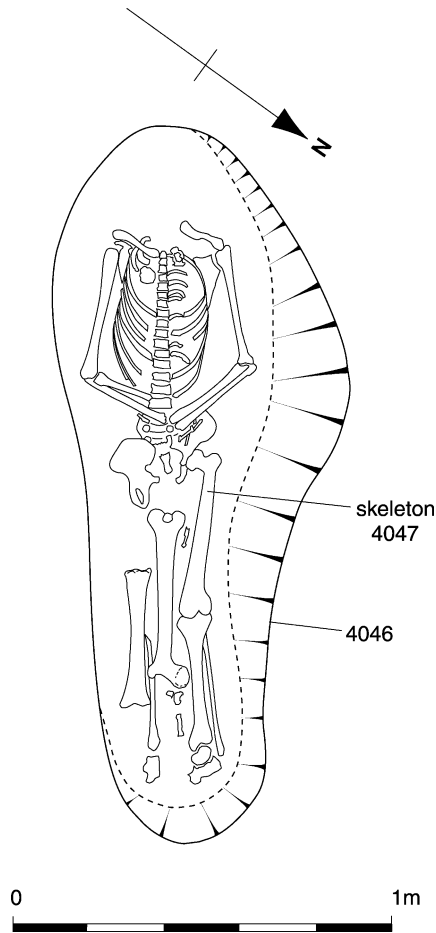


Figure 4.11 Long mound: 4047 partial skeleton found to the west of the centre.

‘circular dry walling’ and the later inhumation skeleton 46. The plan of Martin-Atkins’ work does not indicate any inhumations close to the edge of the barrow where grave 4033 with bone remains were excavated.

The available evidence does not allow the linking of the skeletons, though the graves seem to be correctly identified, despite the limitations of the original sketch plan. It is not clear if the bodies, or the remains of them, were returned to their original graves after examination. The fills of two of the graves contained over 100 sherds of pottery each, which represent dumps in the backfill. The processing of the finds from this and the other nearby sites may have taken place in the locality, but not necessarily exactly in step with the excavation of each grave, and it is therefore possible that each grave no longer contains the skeleton that was recorded by Martin-Atkins.

Later deposits and topsoil

The slight depression that marked the presence of the ditch in Martin-Atkins’ time was infilled with a layer of dark grey silt loam with sparse chalk fragments

(4002), following the backfill of his excavations. A similar layer (4001) also developed over the edge of the mound. Both these deposits contained a similar range of finds to that found in the backfill of Martin-Atkins’ excavations and are likely to have been derived from the erosion of these deposits before turf developed to stabilise the surface. These were overlain by topsoil of dark brown silty loam with sparse chalk rubble (4000). This also yielded a number of sherds of later prehistoric pottery.

THE ROUND BARROW

A low round mound was identified further up the hill, midway between the White Horse and the north-eastern corner of Uffington Castle, on the northern crest of the hill at 258 m OD (Fig. 2.1). This was thought to be the other barrow, which was also investigated by Martin-Atkins. The mound measures around 12.5 m in diameter. The ditch survived as a very slight depression forming an almost complete circular ring round the mound (Fig. 4.13).

Uncovering Martin-Atkins’ 19th-century excavation

In a letter to Dr Wilson of September 1857, concerning his ongoing excavation of the oblong mound, Martin-Atkins said that he would not be satisfied until he had examined the figure of eight shaped earthwork higher on the hill, which he called barrow 1. The strange shape of the mound may indicate that it had been disturbed previously, and this interpretation would appear to be borne out by the state of the human remains which were found.

Martin-Atkins stated in another letter to Dr Wilson of October 1857 that nine skeletons had been discovered and he was still expecting to uncover more as part of the barrow had still to be excavated. Nothing more seems to have been found, however, as Davis and Thurnam (1865) described the finds as: six carelessly buried skeletons, a confused heap of bones and two detached skulls. In a later report Clay (1926) stated that eight skeletons and several skulls were found, but as his report seems to be based on Davis and Thurnam this may not be correct.

Three of the skeletons had been decapitated. The skull of one young person was found beneath the knees of one of these skeletons; and a bronze fibula inlaid with blue and red enamel was found near its right shoulder. Neither Martin-Atkins nor Davis and Thurnam gave a date to this item. It was merely assumed to be contemporary with the other artefacts recovered from these burials. Dickinson (1976, 216) describes it as an escutcheon with knot interlace and suggests it may date to the 7th century AD. There is no record of the item at the British Museum or the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

The two other headless skeletons were thought to be male, part of a lower jaw was found with the larger of the two but there was no trace of a skull. A knife, the boss, handle, and silver-headed studs of a shield



Plate 4.4 The long mound: Roman young adult male skeleton (4047) found in a grave (4046): the skull is missing, and may have been removed by 19th-century excavators.

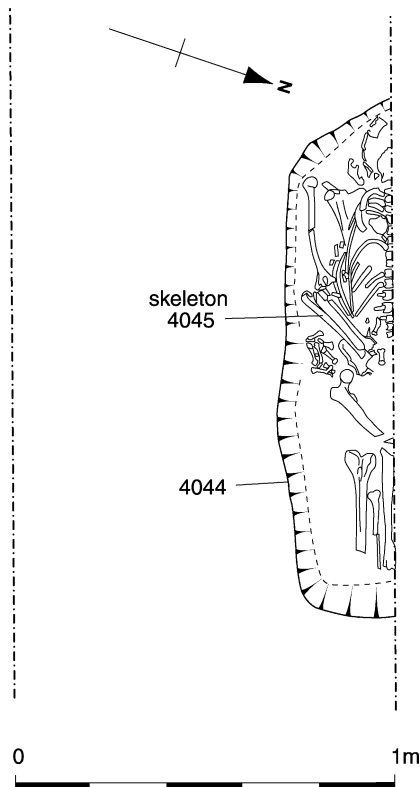


Figure 4.12 Long mound: 4045 partial skeleton found at centre of the mound.

were found with this skeleton. All these items were of iron and were deposited in the British Museum in 1862. Dickinson (1976) published details of these items and an illustration of the shield boss, and dated the material to the 6th century AD. Unfortunately the knife had been lost, though a sketch of the item is included in the British Museum catalogue.

The central burial in this mound was a complete male skeleton, with that of a child by its left side. To the east of this group lay the sixth of these skeletons; this was of a subadult with knees flexed. On either side of this skeleton lay two detached skulls. Both of these were middle-aged males on the description of Davis and Thurnam. It was suggested that they might have belonged to the decapitated skeletons, or the heap of bones. Unfortunately, no plan of Martin-Atkins findings in this mound survives to show how they were arranged within the mound.

1993 excavation

An L-shaped trench 1.2 m wide was excavated through the mound in 1993, with the two arms intersecting at the approximate centre of the mound (Fig. 4.13). The longer arm of the trench, 9.6 m in length, was excavated through the apparent gap in the ditch to see whether this was a valid break. The shorter arm extended at right angles to the first for

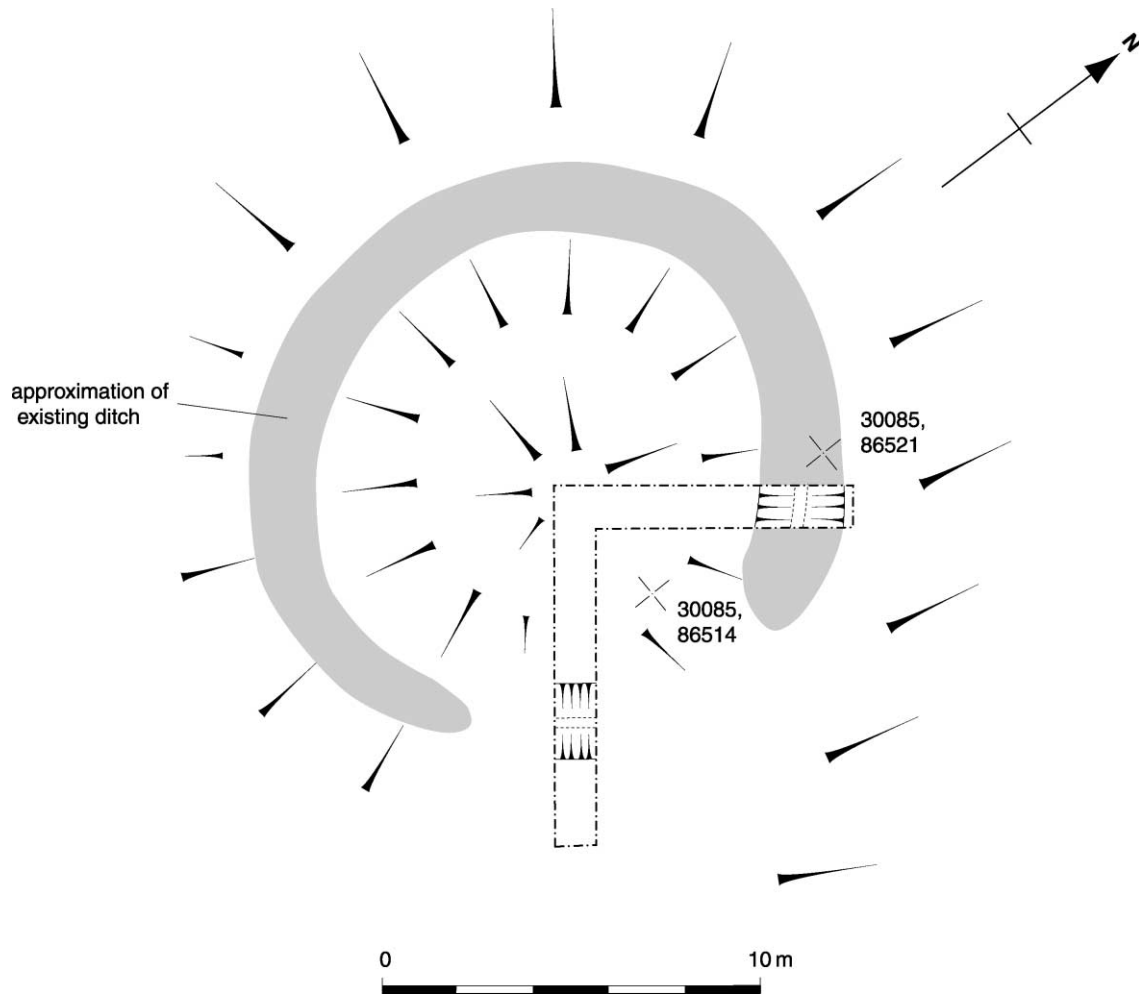


Figure 4.13 Round barrow on White Horse Hill: location of trench excavated in 1993.

6.8 m to cross the anticipated location of any surrounding ditch. As with the other barrow, this small trench was targeted to meet the stated research aims and care was taken to minimise physical and visual damage to the monument and the remains contained within it.

It was evident that this mound had been extensively disturbed by more than one episode of previous excavation, making it almost certain to have been the second mound to have been excavated by Martin-Atkins. It was possible that this barrow had suffered some earlier excavation, but almost all the observed disturbance was attributed to the 19th-century excavation.

The natural

The natural was more variable here than beneath the long mound further down the slope. The underlying geology is mainly solid chalk, and there were pockets and layers of clay (3013) and yellow clay and chalk (3011), and various combinations of clay and chalk (3049 & 3050), beneath the barrow

structure. The relic soil layer (3006) with small chalk inclusions overlay the natural clay, and survived beneath the mound, although much had been cut away by later intrusions, and a single sherd of later prehistoric pottery recovered from this layer was probably intrusive and cannot be used to date the barrow structure.

Barrow construction

The ditch (3024 & 3042, Fig. 4.14) was found to survive in both arms of the trench, though it had been partially destroyed by later intrusions in the southern part of the circuit. A complete profile of the original ditch remained in the eastern end of the trench, showing it to have been V-shaped in profile, about 2.8 m wide with a relatively narrow flat base about 0.46 m wide. The ditch cut into the chalk bedrock to a maximum depth of 1.2 m. Only the lower part of the ditch survived in the southern part of the trench, but this was enough to suggest that the ditch had been roughly uniform all round (Fig. 4.15). Nothing was found of an original barrow mound.

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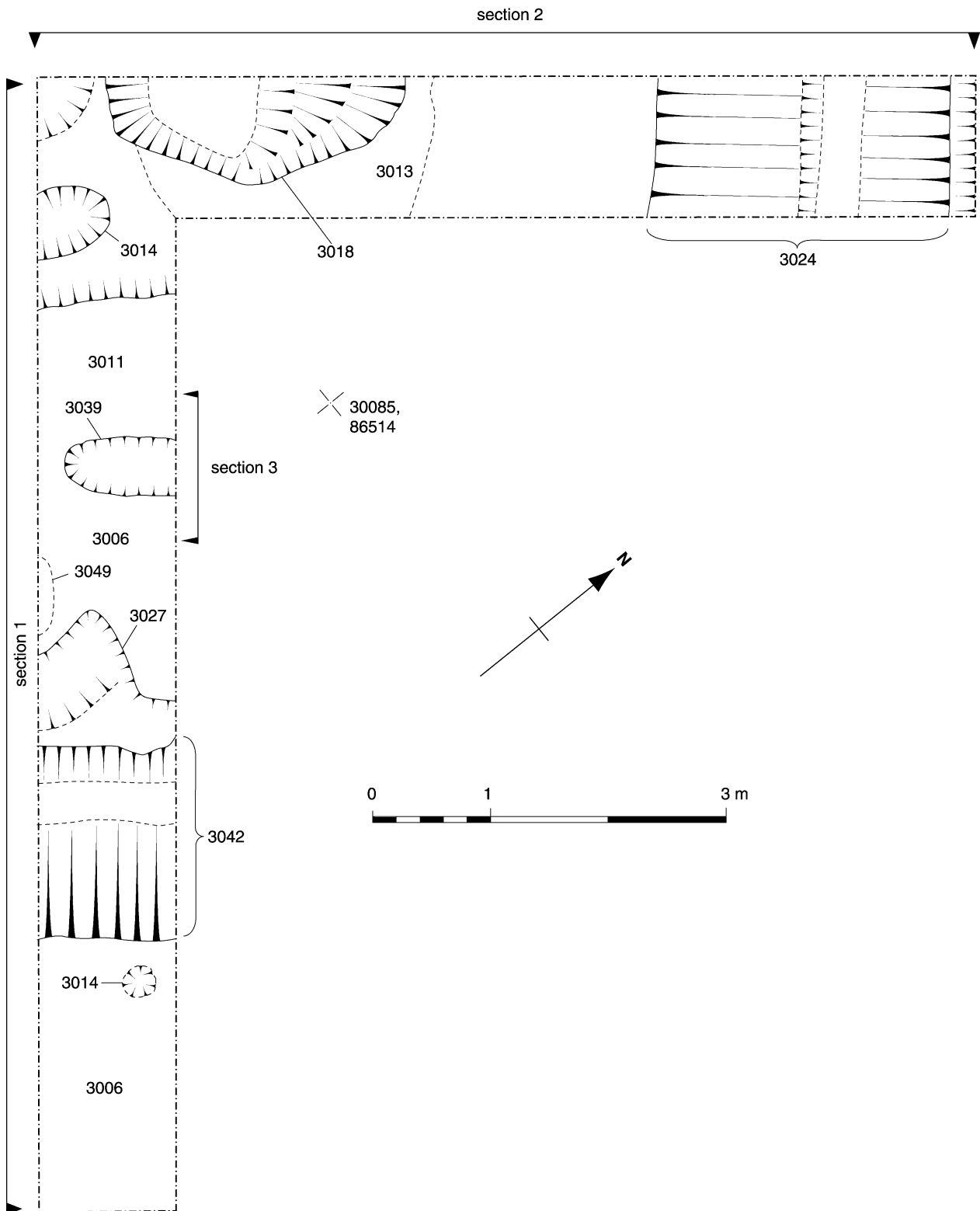


Figure 4.14 Round barrow: plan of trench showing location of ditch in the south and east.

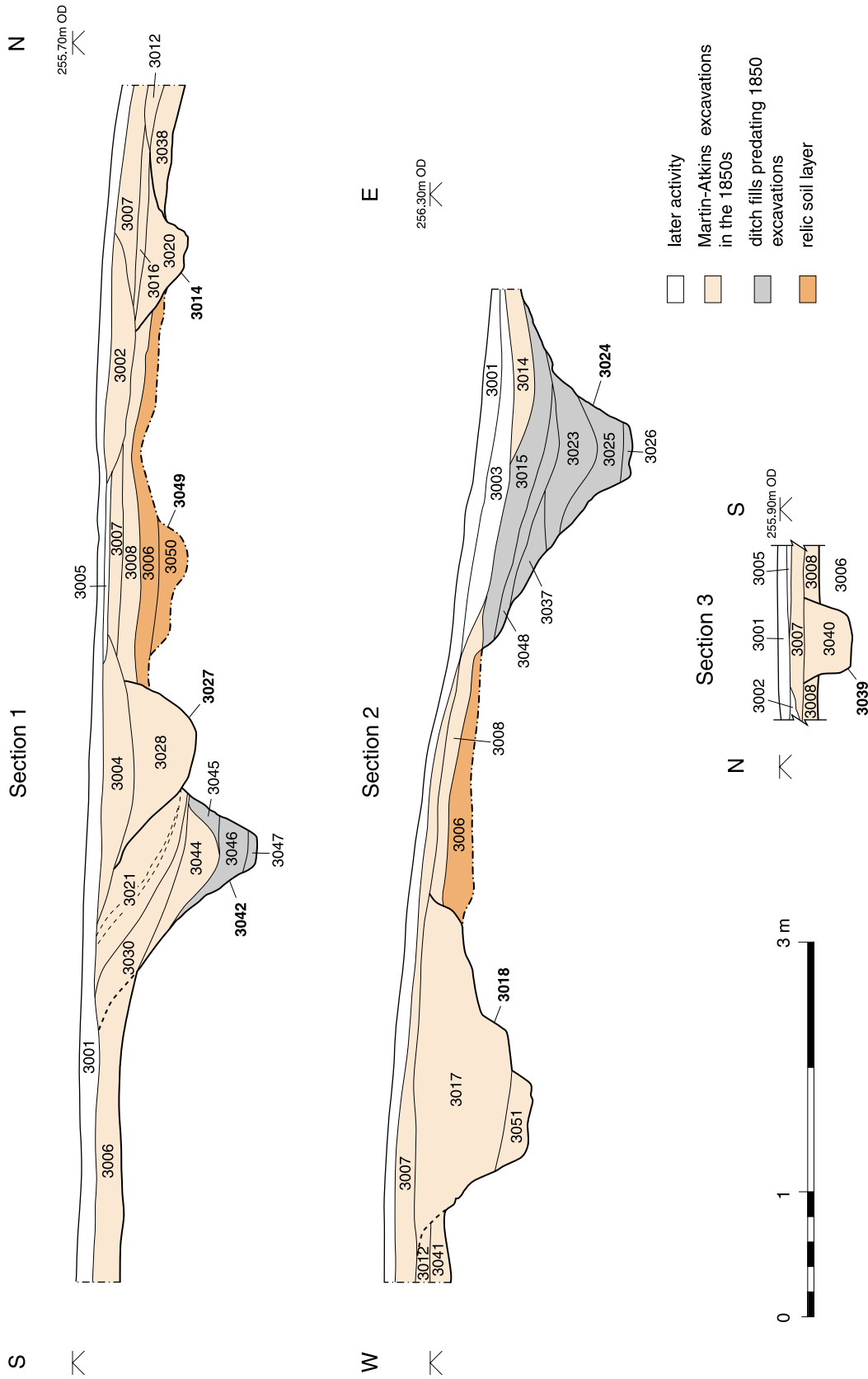


Figure 4.15 Round barrow: sections 1, 2 and 3, showing areas disturbed by the 19th-century excavations.

Ditch fills

The earliest fills of the ditch survived in both sections. The primary fill (3026 & 3047, orange brown silty clay with some chalk rubble) was up to 0.08 m deep, and could be the result of natural silting. This was overlain in the eastern section by three deposits (3025, 3023 & 3037, weathered chalk rubble in a mid dark orange brown silty clay), which are likely to have originated from the weathering of the mound or the ditch sides. Five pieces of flint and some animal bone were found in these deposits. Similar deposits (3046 & 3045, chalk rubble in a dark orange brown silty clay) were present in cut 3042 in the southern part of the trench. These deposits yielded no finds and were truncated by later activity. Over these deposits in 3024 were further layers (3048 & 3015, dark brown silty loam with some chalk rubble). These deposits are humic rich loams indicating they accumulated slowly after the mound had stabilised. In the latter deposit a number of pottery sherds, 15 flints and some animal bone were found. The pottery included five sherds of early Bronze Age biconical or Bucket Urn, one sherd of which had a fingertip design (Fig. 9.3.4), and there were also five sherds of later prehistoric date considered to be intrusive.

Martin-Atkins' excavations

This phase consists of a number of features, some of which are intercutting, indicating that they represent activity over a period of time. The whole area of the barrow appeared to have been stripped and back-filled (3008 & 3041 – grey silty loam with chalk rubble). Context 3008 yielded numerous finds including flints, animal bone, several nails which could be of Roman date and human bone, representing the disarticulated remains of at least one adult. At the junction of the two arms of the trench context 3041/3038 was found to contain the remains of at least three individuals, which had evidently been examined and redeposited among the backfill by Martin-Atkins.

Other graves had been excavated subsequently, and may have coincided with the second phase of Martin-Atkins' excavation. A large sub-rectangular pit (3018) was found to have been cut through layer 3008. It was 2.5 m long, by 0.8 m wide and up to 1 m deep. This pit was orientated east-west and may have been a grave, despite the irregularly shaped base. The primary fill of this feature was a trampled deposit (3051) overlain by a deep backfill deposit (3017), which yielded worked flint, clay pipe fragments, a single sherd of early Bronze Age pottery and human bone. This bone represented the remains of at least one adult and a subadult, but it is unknown if these are the remains of the central burial recorded by Martin-Atkins' excavations.

A layer (3012, redeposited orange brown silty clay) was cut to the south by a crudely excavated grave 0.9 m wide and 1.75 m long (3014) which

protruded from the south-western section (Fig. 4.14). The only finds recovered from this deposit were a single brick of 19th-century date, and human bone (3020) representing at least two adult individuals. A third grave (3039) on this alignment lay a little to the south, protruding from the north-eastern baulk of the southern arm of the trench (Fig. 4.15, section 3). This cut was rectangular with vertical sides and a flat base, and measured 0.5 m wide, by 0.9 m long as revealed, and was 0.3 m deep. There were no finds but a redeposited human skeleton was found just to the north. This skeleton (3010) was the disarticulated remains of an adult.

These cuts were sealed by another layer (3007, dark grey silty loam with chalk rubble) that was up to 0.18 m deep and which had been spread over the whole of the area of the barrow inside the ditch. A variety of finds came from this layer including; 35 sherds of later prehistoric pottery, one of early Bronze Age date, some amorphous fired clay, worked flint, numerous small sherds of vessel glass and several nails which could be of Roman date. It is possible that Martin-Atkins piled the remainder of the spoil from his excavations after backfilling, to restore the profile of the barrow. Martin-Atkins had partially excavated the barrow ditch to 0.3 m from the base, and it was backfilled before being truncated on the inner edge by a further cut (3027) which had destroyed the relationship between layer 3008 and the 19th-century excavation of the ditch. Cut 3027 was irregular and roughly oval in plan with a U-shaped profile, 0.52 m deep, and projected for 1 m into the area of the trench from the south-western section (Fig. 4.14). It was filled with a fairly typical backfill deposit for these excavations, and also contained some fairly large blocks of chalk up to 0.25 m. Sherds of early Bronze Age and later prehistoric pottery were recovered from this deposit together with animal bone.

The ditch cut was initially filled with a mix of redeposited material (3044, orange brown silt clay and dark brown silt with chalk), and covered by further backfill deposit (3030 & 3021), containing clear tip lines (Fig. 4.15). These deposits contained a variety of finds with a wide date range including worked flint, animal bone, pottery and iron. The iron has been identified as a cleat of 3rd- to 4th-century AD date and the pottery included seven middle Bronze Age sherds and 14 of later prehistoric date.

Later activity

A shallow hollow (3004) was found in the surface of this site after backfilling of the 19th-century excavations, and within this was found a clay pipe bowl and stem fragments, animal bone, one sherd of later prehistoric pottery, worked flint and two small pieces of iron, one of which could have been Saxon or medieval in date. Other shallow scoop-like features found are likely to also have been

the result of recreational activities taking place on this popular site. These shallow scoops were sealed by an undulating layer of medium brown silty loam topsoil (3001).

**The book on Demonology and Witchcraft
by Alan Hardy**

A book was found within deposit 3001, located immediately south of the southern ditch section, and approximately 0.23 m below the present ground surface. The book was a buckram bound copy of *Demonology and Witchcraft* by Walter Scott, published in 1831 (Plate 4.5). The inside front cover was daubed with red ink and crudely inscribed with the words 'Demon de Uffing'. Some decay was evident to the cover and the edges of the pages although it was generally in very good condition. Its state of preservation may well have been due to the surrounding matrix of chalk and soil, which maintained a dry environment. The excavator was confident that the ground around the location of the book's burial had not been recently disturbed, and therefore a pre-excitation joke by persons

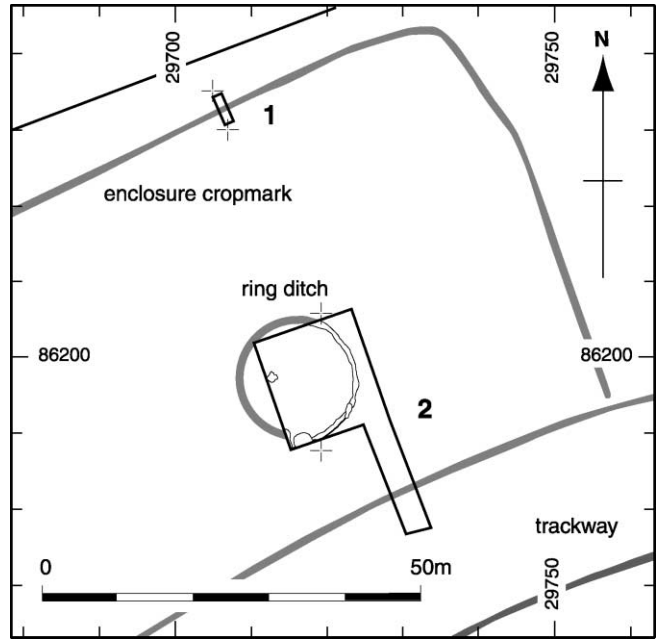


Figure 4.16 Ring ditch west of the hillfort: showing the enclosure cropmark and the location of the 1995 excavation trenches.

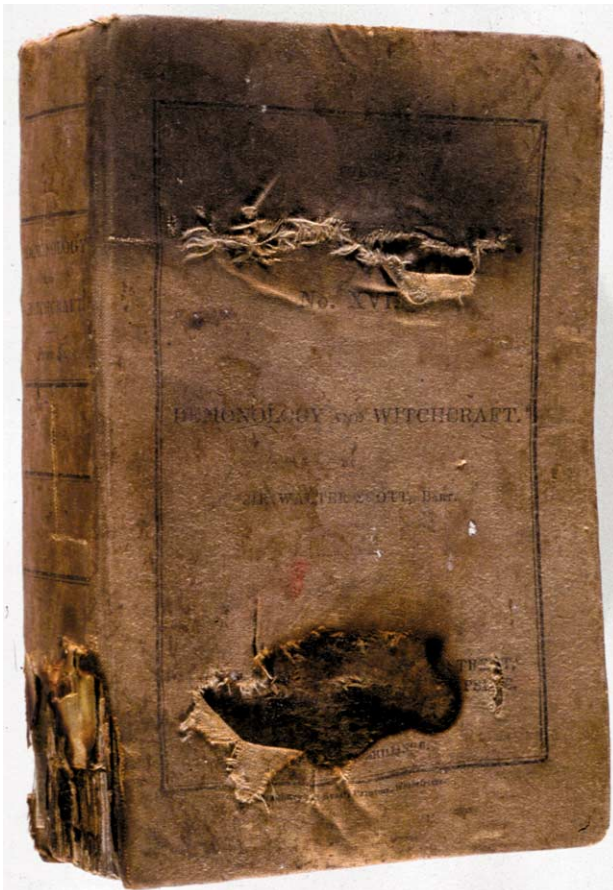


Plate 4.5 Buckram bound book found in the round barrow on Uffington Hill in 1993, *Demonology and Witchcraft* by Walter Scott published in 1831, daubed in red paint with the words 'Demon de Uffing'.

unknown was ruled out. In theory the book could have been deposited during the 19th-century excavations, but it is more likely that its burial is related to one of the more recent revivals of interest in the mystical aspects of the White Horse and its surroundings.

**THE RING DITCH EXCAVATIONS 1995
by Chris Gosden**

Excavations also took place on a hilltop just southwest of the hillfort (Fig. 2.1), and were primarily aimed at understanding the nature of a rectangular enclosure, which had been located initially on aerial photographs (see Chapter 7). The ring ditch, which is sited in the centre of the enclosure, was previously unknown, although once it had been detected by excavation it was located on the aerial photographs.

Two trenches, 30 m by 4 m, were excavated running down the northern and southern sides of the hill, which were placed to look at the enclosure ditch and any possible internal features. Where the southern trench reached the hilltop, part of a ditch was found. When the trench was extended this was seen to be circular in plan, with roughly half the feature revealed by the excavation (Fig. 4.16). It is estimated that the internal diameter of the ditch was approximately 15.5 m, and the width varied between 0.4 and 0.9 m. Two segments of the ditch were excavated totalling about 15 m in length. The ditch was cut into the natural chalk bedrock with a profile which varied between V-shaped and a more flat-bottomed profile (Fig. 4.17).

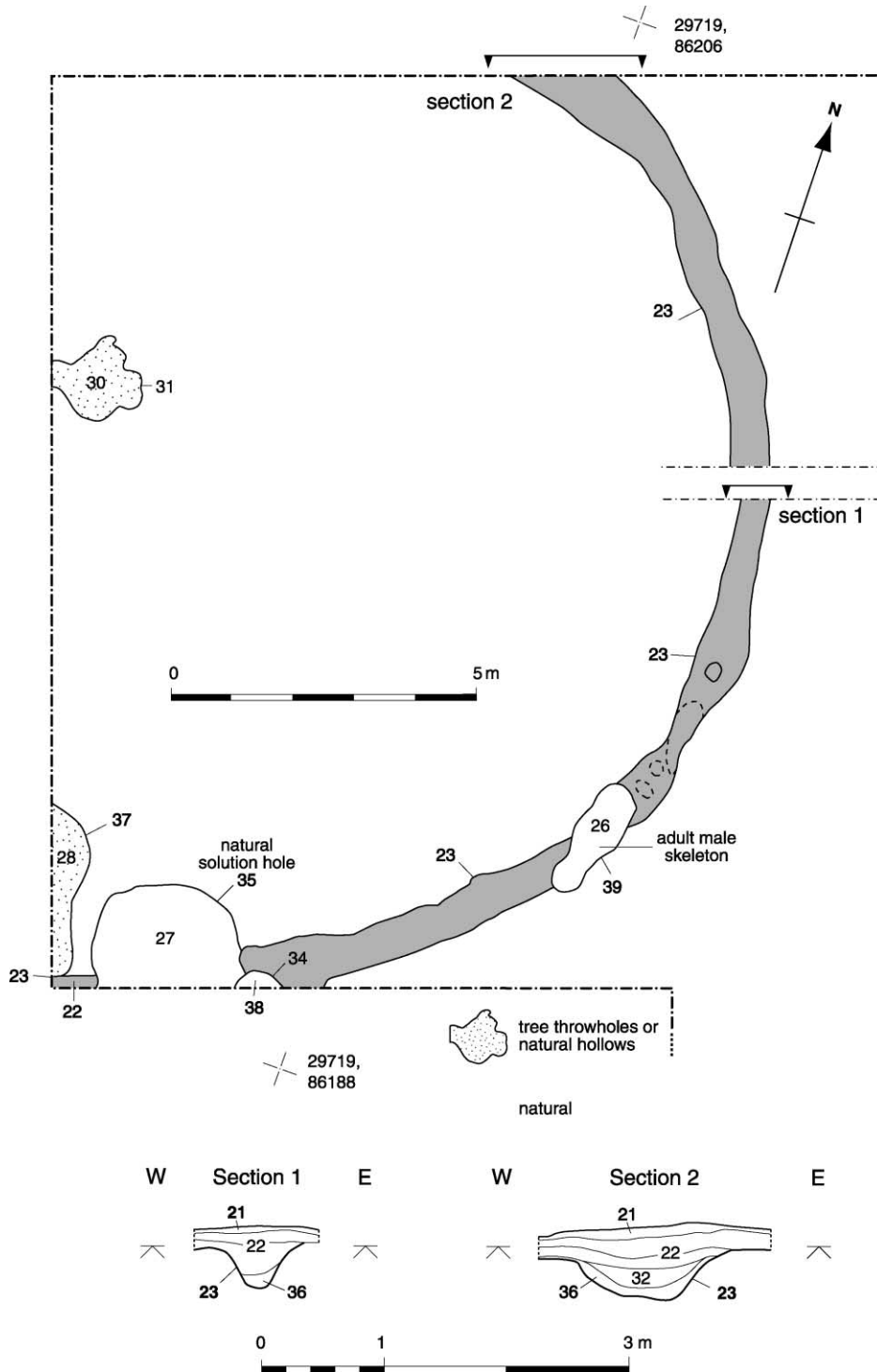


Figure 4.17 Ring ditch: plan and sections of the excavated portions of the ditch.

The upper fill of the ditch (22/32, chalk rubble in a clay matrix) contained worked flint, including an unfinished Neolithic arrowhead of either leaf-shaped or transverse type (Fig. 9.9.6) and a small amount of bone, and the lower fill (36, grey chalky clay) which was devoid of finds. The lower fill appears to have been the result of natural silting and the upper chalky fill could have been due to the natural

weathering of a burial mound inside the ditch, or deliberate infill, or a combination of the two. The ring ditch may represent the outer perimeter of a round barrow, but there was no indication of a mound although this could have been totally destroyed, either by modern ploughing or at some earlier time. There were no interior features and modern ploughing had left score marks in the chalk.

Two shallow irregular depressions (31, 37) found in the chalk within the ring ditch, may be tree-throws or weathering hollows.

Cut into the top of the upper fill of the ditch was a shallow pit (39) of oval shape, 2 m long and a maximum of 0.7 m wide, which was orientated north-south. The fill of the feature contained an almost complete adult skeleton set in a light brown soil with chalk fragments (26). The head was lying to the north and the body was on its left side, and this was identified as an adult male, about 25 to 35 years old at death, and 1.71 m tall (see Boyle in Chapter 10). The body was accompanied by iron objects, and pottery of Roman date. A bronze brooch (Fig. 9.1.1) was also found nearby but this was unstratified. If there was a barrow mound and it was still apparent in the Roman period there could have been other Roman burials within the barrow mound, which have been destroyed subsequently.

In the south-west corner of the extended trench a further feature (35) was found which cut the barrow ditch and ran into the baulk of the excavation. This was a circular feature some 1.7 m in diameter and it was excavated down to a depth of almost 2 m. It was a vertical shaft filled with Clay-with-Flints, but devoid of any finds. Subsequent excavation down to over 4 m from the present ground surface led to the conclusion that this was a natural solution hole, of a type found elsewhere on the Ridgeway excavations. However, the fact that it cuts a prehistoric ring ditch appears to contradict this conclusion, but it appears likely that the solution pipe may have had some of its natural fill of Clay-with-Flints removed for use at some time after the ditch was dug. A pit (34), approximately circular in plan and vertically sided, appears to have been cut into the top of the fill and into the ring ditch (23). It had a fill of Clay-with-Flints (38) but contained no artefacts, and the date and function are unknown. Only further excavation of the solution pipe will elucidate its original cause and possible subsequent reuse.

Discussion

The ring ditch may originally have surrounded a round barrow, which has subsequently been destroyed. The date of the ring ditch is unknown but it could be Neolithic or more likely of the early Bronze Age. The only evidence for this date comes from the arrowhead, although the ditch obviously predates the Roman burial in its top fill. However, the ring ditch is rather different from that revealed by the other round barrow excavation, being both narrower and less deep, although this could be due to greater truncation through modern ploughing. The fills were similar in the grain-size of sediment, having clays at the base and chalk blocks and clay above. There were far fewer finds here than in the barrow further west. A further interesting difference is found in the later use of the barrows, with the barrow excavated by Martin-Atkins containing secondary burials of Anglo-Saxon date and this

western barrow having a Roman secondary burial. This suggests that there was some variability of reuse of older monuments, contradicting the idea of Roman secondaries in long mounds and the Anglo-Saxon reuse of round barrows.

DISCUSSION OF THE BARROW GROUP

Barrow form and date

The small group of monuments includes two round and one long barrow. None of these barrows can be precisely dated. Long mounds are generally of early to middle Neolithic date, while round barrows and ring ditches were built in the Neolithic, early Bronze Age and also the post-Roman periods.

The exact form of the long barrow is uncertain, although the mound which is 24.5 m long and 12 m wide would be similar to other sites in the Thames Valley area and Wessex (Kinnes 1992). Unfortunately the precise nature of the ditch of the long mound is unclear and could have taken a variety of forms from flanking ditches, open at one end or a single enclosing ditch. Similarly there is no evidence for related structures or for the presence of a façade. Also no kind of mortuary structure within the barrow was located either from the results of the resistivity survey or from the excavations.

The only possible evidence for a prehistoric burial is suggested by Martin-Atkins' excavations as a cremation urn housed in a stone-built cist. This vessel has since been lost but the account given by Davis and Thurnam suggests a cremation deposit of early or middle Bronze Age date although this cannot be certain. Similar secondary cremation deposits housed in sarsen built cists were found by Martin-Atkins during his excavation of Barrows 1, 9 and 18 at Lambourn (Case 1956-7). If the mound was a Neolithic long barrow this burial must have been inserted into the centre. Middle Bronze Age pottery found in the 1993 excavation could then have originated from secondary Bronze Age cremation burials that were inserted into the barrow mound. It is interesting that similar material was also recovered from the long barrow and one of the round barrows at Lambourn (Case 1956-7; Wymer 1965-6).

The context of the barrow group

In the earlier prehistoric period the place of White Horse Hill was enhanced by the construction of a series of chalk mounded barrows. The first of these was most probably the long mound which was constructed on the north side of the hill and above the Manger and possibly built in a woodland clearing. This barrow was aligned east-west with the top of the chalk scarp to present a raised crest when viewed from lower ground. When freshly constructed the chalk mound would have increased the barrow's visibility from the surrounding lower

lying area of the vale. At Wayland's Smithy only 5 km to the west a long barrow was built on a lower lying part of the chalk escarpment. This White Horse Hill barrow may have been visible from there if the intervening land was cleared of vegetation. There is little evidence for contemporaneous activity on White Horse Hill apart from flintwork.

The round barrow and the ring ditch which probably surrounded a barrow may have been constructed in the Bronze Age. One was built near to the top of the hill and above and to one side of the long barrow, and a second larger barrow was built on the western side of the hill. Neither round barrow was associated with burials with fine artefacts which have survived, as at Lambourn cemetery (Case 1956–7).

Beaker pottery and flintwork found beneath the Iron Age ramparts of the hillfort could be broadly contemporary with the construction of these barrows (see Barclay and Bradley, Chapter 9). Similarly the recovery of early to middle Bronze Age pottery from the interior of the hillfort hints at further domestic activity on the hilltop, again not far from the barrows.

The reuse of prehistoric earthworks for burial in the Roman and Saxon periods is not common but has been seen both in and beyond the Upper Thames Valley (Ashbee 1970; Blair 1994, 32). Prehistoric barrows were occasionally reused for Roman burials (Ashbee 1970, 152–3), but most are isolated burials within mounds, unlike these on White Horse Hill where a large part of the mound was used for a number of burials. Several graves cut the silted ditch fill on the south side so it is possible that the cemetery extended further up the slope towards the hillfort.

Round barrows were fairly commonly reused for Saxon burial in the Upper Thames and elsewhere in southern England, and the Saxon reuse may have been part of a deliberate attempt to reinvent the past by placing the graves within a barrow. The intention was to express a link with the pre-Roman past at a time of opposition to the increasing influence of a Christian world (Bradley 1998).

WHITE HORSE HILL ROMAN CEMETERY

Reuse of the long mound

There are no other certain examples of reuse of prehistoric monuments for burial in the Roman period from the region, though there was a rare Roman regional tradition of cremation burial in small ditched enclosures, which may have surrounded mounds. Probable examples of this rite are known from Duntisbourne Abbots (Mudd *et al.* 1999, 111–12) and Rough Ground Farm, Lechlade (Allen *et al.* 1993, 52–3), both in Gloucestershire, and from Appleford (Hinchcliffe and Thomas 1980). However, there is no indication of any close similarity of practice between these burials, all of which are individual, and probably of early Roman date, and the communal use of the long mound at White Horse Hill.

A different situation was seen at the Radley II cemetery (Boyle and Chambers in prep.), where several late Roman cremations were associated with a small ditched enclosure. Again it is unclear if this feature originally enclosed a mound, nor is it certain how many of these burials were secondary to the original scheme. The parallel is of interest because Radley II and White Horse Hill are the only two late Roman cemeteries in the region which incorporate a number of cremations alongside inhumations.

Number of burials

Many Roman burials are known from the region but most were found as individuals or in very small groups. In addition to White Horse Hill some 17 late Roman Oxfordshire sites, plus Roden Downs, Berkshire (Hood and Walton 1948), have ten or more burials, the number arbitrarily selected as defining the cut-off point between small 'random' clusters of burials (or very small family groups) and more organised 'cemeteries' (Booth 2001). A further five inhumation cemeteries probably of late Roman date or with a late Roman component are known from West Berkshire, but none has been fully reported.

Only six of these sites have evidence for more than 50 burials of which four, Cassington, Frilford and the two Dorchester cemeteries, Queenford Farm (Chambers 1987) and Church Piece, Warborough, exceed 100 burials. The last of these is included on the basis of aerial photographic evidence, only six burials having been revealed by excavation (Harman *et al.* 1978, 11). The Dorchester cemeteries and that at Frilford (Akerman 1867; Rolleston 1869; 1880; Buxton 1921) were associated with small towns, so of the rural cemeteries only that at Cassington (with c 110 burials) clearly exceeds White Horse Hill in size.

The burial total at White Horse Hill, a probable minimum of 49 inhumations and perhaps nine cremations on the basis of the number of recorded 'urns', may not represent the total cemetery population. The three burials found in the barrow ditch in 1993 suggest that others may remain in similar locations, which were not examined by Martin-Atkins in 1857. Nevertheless it is likely that the bulk of the cemetery has been revealed, and the figures of known burials compare well with those at Radley II where 57 inhumations and 12 cremations were found. On present evidence this cemetery exceeds the totals of most other known rural sites and for some of the cemeteries from larger settlements, such as the almost complete cemetery of 30 inhumations from the northern extramural settlement area of Alchester (Booth *et al.* 2001).

Inhumations and cremations

The combination of inhumations and cremations, if correctly understood, is relatively uncommon but is seen in the region, particularly at Radley II, though occasional cremations were also seen at Asthall (Booth 1997, 64–5) and possibly at Alchester and

Cassington. At Asthall and Radley II there is no reason to believe that the date of the cremations was significantly different from that of the inhumations, and on this basis, as well as on the grounds of their immediate juxtaposition, it is likely that the White Horse Hill cremations and inhumations were at least broadly contemporary. Dickinson considered the possibility that these might be Saxon (1976, 215).

Finds

It is regrettable that the finds from the 19th-century excavations could not be traced, since the coins, in particular, would have provided the most reliable indication of the general date of the cemetery. However, the surviving descriptions, both in the published account of the excavation and in the British Museum's Accessions Register, strongly suggest that the coins are all likely to have been of 4th-century date. This conclusion is again supported by comparative evidence from the region. Eight of the 18 comparable cemetery sites from the region have coins recorded either from graves or closely juxtaposed and without exception these are of 4th-century date, ranging from the House of Constantine to the House of Theodosius. Coins of the latter period are in fact rare in burials in the region, but occur at Roden Downs (Hood and Walton 1948, 43) and most notably in the small group from a burial at nearby Rams Hill, with a date early in the 5th century. It seems very likely, therefore, that most if not all of the coins recovered in the 19th-century excavations would have been of 4th-century date, though greater precision is not possible.

Five of the skeletons were noted as having coins in the mouth, which is not common in the region. One burial at Roden Downs had two coins in the mouth, and a further three were found close by. All five coins (of the period AD 364–78) may originally have been contained in a leather purse laid on the face of the deceased (Hood and Walton 1948, 40), and this practice was also noted at Frilford (Rolleston 1869, 427). The record of four coins from one of the White Horse Hill graves 'placed between the cheek and the jaws ... wrapped in felt-like material' (Davis and Thurnam 1865, 4) may be a reference to a similar tradition. A group of nine early 4th-century coins from a grave in the Radley I cemetery was similarly wrapped in linen (Atkinson 1952–3, 34).

Of the other associated finds little can be said in detail, but the one recorded pottery vessel is, on the basis of the sketch in the British Museum records, an Oxford colour-coated ware pedestal beaker of Young type C38, dated *c* AD 340–400 (Young 1977, 155–6). The two bone combs, also drawn in these records, are typical late Roman double-sided composite types, such as were found in some numbers in the cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester (Galloway 1979, 246–8). Such combs are never common in late Roman cemeteries in the region, but single examples occur at; Crowmarsh (unpublished excavation by

Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society, 1994–6), Queenford Farm, Dorchester (Chambers 1987), Frilford (Rolleston 1880, 405) and Roden Downs (Hood and Walton 1948, 36). Where the evidence was recorded the location of the comb was usually under or by the head, suggesting that the deceased wore it at the time of burial, though this was not invariable practice (Philpott 1991, 180). Evidence from Roman Britain as a whole suggests that the great majority of burials with combs are dated to the second half of the 4th century (*ibid.*).

The only other significant object type associated with the White Horse Hill burials was footwear, iron nails being located at the feet in two graves. This is another well known late Roman characteristic, though it is less common in Oxfordshire cemeteries than in some other regions (*ibid.*, 168). Documented examples come from Curbridge (5), Radley II (2), Stanton Harcourt, Uffington (2) and Roden Downs. At Curbridge only one of the five groups of hobnails was recovered from the area of the feet, the others being located elsewhere in the grave (Chambers 1976, 45). The placing of shoes away from the feet is quite typical (Philpott 1991, 167–8) and it is perhaps possible that at White Horse Hill other groups of hobnails, not located by the feet were not recognised. While such finds are characteristic of late Roman cemeteries in the region they need not be exclusively of this period (*ibid.*) so they cannot necessarily be regarded as chronologically specific. However, the limited evidence is consistent in suggesting a 4th-century date for the cemetery, with indications that some of the burials should be assigned to the second half of the century.

Location and alignment of the cemetery

The layout of the cemetery appears to have been dictated by the orientation of the reused mound, and the majority of graves were aligned along its long axis (roughly east-west), though some four graves were placed at an angle to this alignment. Generally, the alignment of late Roman cemeteries in the region tends to follow that of pre-existing features and boundaries, though in some cases, such as Radley I, there is no evidence on the ground for the presence of such features, which has led to the suggestion that that cemetery was located in an undefined open area (Boyle and Chambers *in prep.*). On balance it seems unlikely that this was the case, however, and the very poor preservation of a north-south linear feature which lay adjacent to and almost certainly determined the alignment of the cemetery at Crowmarsh, serves as a reminder that these boundaries may not have been particularly substantial and were thus highly susceptible to plough damage.

Only in a small number of cases is it likely that cemeteries were located within purpose built enclosures, where the orientation might have been determined by factors other than those of pre-existing landscape boundaries. The clearest cases of

such enclosures are probably those of the 'managed' and 'urban' cemeteries of Queenford Farm and Church Piece, at Dorchester, and another small town cemetery, at Asthall. The Roden Downs cemetery also lay within what probably originated as a mortuary enclosure, but this was of early Roman date and there is no clear evidence of continuity of use between the early phase and the late Roman cemetery (Hood and Walton 1948, 24).

The approximately east-west alignment of the majority of graves at White Horse Hill is, in fact somewhat unusual in the context of late Roman cemeteries in the region. This alignment, with a certain amount of variation, is only common at cemeteries associated with the major nucleated settlements such as Alchester, Dorchester, Asthall and Frilford. The principal orientation of many of the rural cemeteries was approximately north-south. This alignment accounted for all the graves at Radley I (Atkinson 1952–3) and Stanton Harcourt (McGavin 1980) and was dominant at Curbridge (Chambers 1976) and Radley II (Boyle and Chambers in prep.). An alignment between north-south and north-east to south-west was dominant at Bloxham (Knight 1938, 45–6) and Crowmarsh. Only at Cassington (Harding 1972, plate 27) and at Roden Downs (Hood and Walton 1948, fig. 3) does the principal alignment of burials seem to have been significantly removed from the cardinal points of the compass.

Graves

Not surprisingly, in view of the constricting nature of the mound, the burials were quite closely spaced. The extent to which the cemetery layout was organised is slightly unclear, particularly as it cannot be certain that the complete plan was revealed. There was a fairly well defined row of eight graves towards the western end of the mound, but otherwise rows were not particularly clear. Some hint of the arrangement of burials in lines rather than rows is evident in the plan, which may have been easier to maintain.

The absence of specific evidence for grave cuts in the 19th-century excavation, as opposed to the location of positions of skeletons on the published plan, makes it difficult to assess the extent of intercutting of graves. This intercutting has implications for interrelated aspects of the longevity of cemeteries, the nature of grave markers and attitudes to the disturbance of the dead. In this cemetery there are at most some four or five possible instances of intercutting, of which only two seem to involve significant intermingling of skeletal remains in a manner paralleled at Curbridge (Chambers 1976, 44). One of the other possible instances (burials 1 and 2) may in fact consist of two burials side by side in the same grave.

Intercutting graves are generally rare in the region and where present usually involve a minority of graves in any one cemetery. In these cases the most frequently observed relationship is that between north-south and east-west aligned graves, with

the latter always later in date. Only in the northern suburbs of Alchester have relatively numerous relationships between grave cuts with the same basic orientation been observed (Booth *et al.* 2001, 152–8).

Coffins

Evidence for coffins was limited, but the presence of these may be inferred from the record of iron nails with wood attached in two of the graves (Davis and Thurnam 1865, 4). Only at Roden Downs is there reasonably clear evidence that all ten interments were contained within coffins. Indirect evidence comes from Radley II and also from Queenford Farm, where post-decomposition skull positions and movements are consistent with the decay of the body in a void such as a coffin (Chambers 1987). This implies the use of very simple or perhaps jointed coffins.

Nails and other coffin fittings were not always noted in early excavations, and in more recently recorded sites nails are not common, suggesting that few burials were in nailed coffins. In the Alchester northern suburbs cemetery only nine out of 30 graves produced coffin nails, and there were insufficient numbers to have been used in all the coffin joints (Booth *et al.* 2001, 439). Although the widespread use of jointed or nail-less coffins is possible, this cannot be demonstrated at White Horse Hill. The absence of evidence for coffins at a number of cemeteries suggests that many of the burials in the region contained few or no burials in coffins. This may also have been the case at White Horse Hill.

Body position

A wide range of variation in details of body position is found in the cemetery, for the most part clearly shown on the plan published by Davis and Thurnam, and this is again characteristic of the region. Burials were aligned with the head either to the east or to the west. The latter were in the majority but the ratio was only *c* 3:2, whereas a higher proportion of west-east burials, that is with the head to the west, is generally observed in cemeteries where this alignment is common. The majority of burials were extended supine, but well-recognised minority variations such as prone and decapitated burials were both present, with five of the former and probably three of the latter. Prone burials are noted from Queenford Farm, Radley I, Radley II (6) and Stanton Harcourt (3), but may not have been systematically recorded at all sites. The rite seems to have been confined almost entirely to rural sites, a single example at Queenford Farm being the only exception.

Decapitations are perhaps more likely to have been commented upon even in early excavations and it is therefore not surprising that they are generally better represented in the record than prone burials. In the nine cemeteries, excluding White Horse Hill, in which decapitations occur their representation ranges from *c* 3% at Bloxham to 14% of burials at

Curbridge, but most commonly have between 6% and 10%, a range which includes White Horse Hill. It is notable that the rite was well represented (c 13%) in the largest rural cemetery of the group, at Cassington, where 15 examples were recorded. It has been observed (Philpott 1991, 81) that decapitation is generally a rural rite. This is true of this region, where it is only recorded in association with a major settlement at Alchester and conversely is only absent in one rural cemetery, the small group from Roden Downs.

Cemetery population

A wide age range 'from 1 or 2 years to 70 and upwards' was uncovered (Davis and Thurnam 1865, 3), but it is notable that neonates appear to be absent. This could indicate the failure of the workmen to locate tiny burials, but in view of the quality of the 19th-century recording this would be surprising. Their absence may reflect the frequent use of settlement sites for burials of very small infants, though there is no indication of burials of any kind within the adjacent hillfort, which was presumably the location of the settlement associated with this cemetery, although it is characteristic of rural cemeteries in the region that the settlements with which they were associated are very imperfectly known.

It has been suggested that the presence of infant burials can indicate the existence of Christian cemeteries (Watts 1989, 380), the corollary of which is that cemeteries lacking such burials are likely to have been pagan. Even so, the incidence of infant burials in some urban cemeteries which might be seen as Christian tends to be quite low (Philpott 1991, 99). Only one neonate was present in the Dorchester cemeteries (Harman 1988, 60), which are the most likely examples of Christian cemeteries in the region. Without complete cemetery plans, however, the absence of neonates may not be significant. Evidence from Asthall suggests that when present, such burials may be located in restricted and marginal areas within established cemeteries (Booth 1997, 156).

The wider context

Aspects of the reuse of prehistoric monuments in the Roman period have been quite widely discussed, most recently by Williams (1998). He defined three broad categories of reuse in southern and eastern England, for temples, artefact deposits and burials, with particular concentrations of such activity, 'in the Cotswolds, Wessex and the Peak district, with a wider scatter throughout lowland Britain', (*ibid.*, 72). Of eight long or oval barrows reused for burial in the Roman period White Horse Hill is the only certain example of a cemetery (other sites have 1–4 burials), apart from Wor Barrow, Dorset, with some 19 burials, which is given as 'probable' (*ibid.*, 81). Within the region the only clear association of Roman burials with round barrows is at Radley II,

though here the cemetery lay adjacent to rather than impinged upon the monument complex. Components of the latter were still upstanding at this time and it has been suggested that the avoidance of the area for Roman settlement 'may suggest a certain degree of respect' (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 325). The implication is that this area was suitable for ritual or ceremonial but not for domestic activity.

The White Horse Hill cemetery was of course also closely adjacent to the Iron Age hillfort. The association of burials and features such as Romano-British temples with sites of this type is well known, but again there is no direct comparison for White Horse Hill in the vicinity, and association of temples and cemeteries with hillforts are found more commonly south and west of the region. The location of individual or small groups of burials at or near hillforts was more common, and local examples include the burials at Rams Hill (Sutherland 1940) and Wittenham Clumps, though the latter are undated and either a late or a post-Roman date was considered possible by the excavator (Chambers 1986, 48).

Substantial cemeteries at or adjacent to hillforts are known in only a limited number of cases even in the south-west. Discussions of these sites have focused principally on their chronology, which is frequently problematic, and on the evidence for Christian associations. At Cannington, Somerset, use of the cemetery probably began in the late Roman period but extended at least as far as the late 7th century (Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 121–9), while at Henley Wood, adjacent to Cadbury-Congresbury, the cemetery may have been entirely 'post-Roman' in date, depending on whether all or only part of it post-dated the late Roman temple on the site (Watts and Leach 1996, 145–6). A number of other similarly dated sites have also been discussed in relation to Cannington (Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 422–3). In terms of their chronological range, therefore, these sites are not closely comparable with White Horse Hill. Moreover both are located several hundred metres from their respective hillforts and in the case of Henley Wood a simple relationship between the cemetery and contemporary (post-Roman) occupation at Cadbury-Congresbury has been questioned (*ibid.*, 147). The association of hilltop temple and burials (but with no hillfort) is also noted in the south-west, but at Lamyatt Beacon, for example, the burials were again thought to post-date the Roman use of the temple, though the excavator suggested the possibility that these and analogous cemeteries 'were deliberately sited close to what was known to have once been a sacred place' (Leach 1986, 273).

The one unequivocal instance of a large late Roman cemetery lying right next to a hillfort site is Poundbury, Dorset (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Here the location was principally dependent upon the proximity of the Roman town of Durnovaria, but it is possible that even here there were additional factors influencing the siting, such as the idea of associating

the dead with ancestors with whom they may have served as intermediaries (Williams 1998, 76). In this case, however, the significance of the fact that a substantial part of the Poundbury cemetery population was probably Christian remains uncertain.

Conclusion

The cemetery is in many aspects a typical example of regional burial practice in the late Roman period and appears exceptional only in respect of its reuse of a prehistoric monument. It is slightly unusual in including a number of cremation burials, but this is seen elsewhere. The most distinctive traits, such as the incidence of prone and decapitated burials and the occurrence of footwear, are all characteristics of rural cemeteries, in which they occur consistently but at a relatively low level, as would be expected. There is insufficient evidence to support any conclusion about the religious affiliation of the inhabitants of the cemetery and the prevailing west-east alignment of burials, sometimes seen as a Christian characteristic, cannot be accepted as such uncritically (Philpott 1991, 239). Moreover, at White Horse Hill this alignment was very likely a consequence of reuse of the earlier feature and may have been entirely fortuitous in this respect, while the typically 'rural' characteristics are inconsistent with such a status. It is unclear if the use of the cemetery extended up to

or beyond the end of the 4th century but there is no suggestion that its principal use was in the post-Roman period, in contrast to the situation observed in a number of cemeteries associated with hillforts in the south-west.

WHITE HORSE HILL SAXON CEMETERY

This cemetery along with the probable Roman one discussed above have been reconsidered by Dickinson (1976, 215–16) who also illustrates some of the finds which are currently held at the British Museum. Dickinson noted that the burials from the barrow are more characteristic of so-called 'gallows cemeteries' but that the presence of Saxon objects casts doubt on such an interpretation. Of the ten burial deposits at least five appeared to have involved decapitation of which two had grave goods. This has been noted as a common feature of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries most probably attached to superstitious beliefs concerned with protecting the living from dead (Wilson 1992). Two of the burials, both decapitations, were accompanied by grave goods. One burial (1) had a red and blue enamelled escutcheon or shield and the other (4) had the remains of a shield and a knife (Table 4.1). Such finds are quite common in 6th- to 7th-century burials in the Upper Thames Valley (Hawkes 1986; Boyle and Dodd 1995, 142–3).