Chapter 2:
Early Prehistoric Activity (Phase 1)

by Kate Cramp

INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire, and the Midlands more generally, have long been considered marginal to the main areas of prehistoric settlement in the southern and eastern counties of Britain, but traces of early prehistoric activity in the region are beginning to proliferate. Recent research (eg Gibson 1989; Cooper 2006), combined with the results of multidisciplinary fieldwork projects (eg Parry 2006), have served to populate the empty landscape and have 'brought life to a desert' (Chapman 2006, 1). The results of the excavation at Higham Ferrers have made an important contribution to the growing corpus of early prehistoric evidence in the county.

Although no Mesolithic features or *in situ* deposits were identified during the excavations, the discovery of an extensive redeposited flint assemblage attests to significant (probably early) Mesolithic occupation. This collection includes microliths, microburins, burins, a probable tranchet axe fragment and several flakes from *tranchet* axe manufacture, along with flakes and blades that probably belong broadly to the Mesolithic or early Neolithic period.

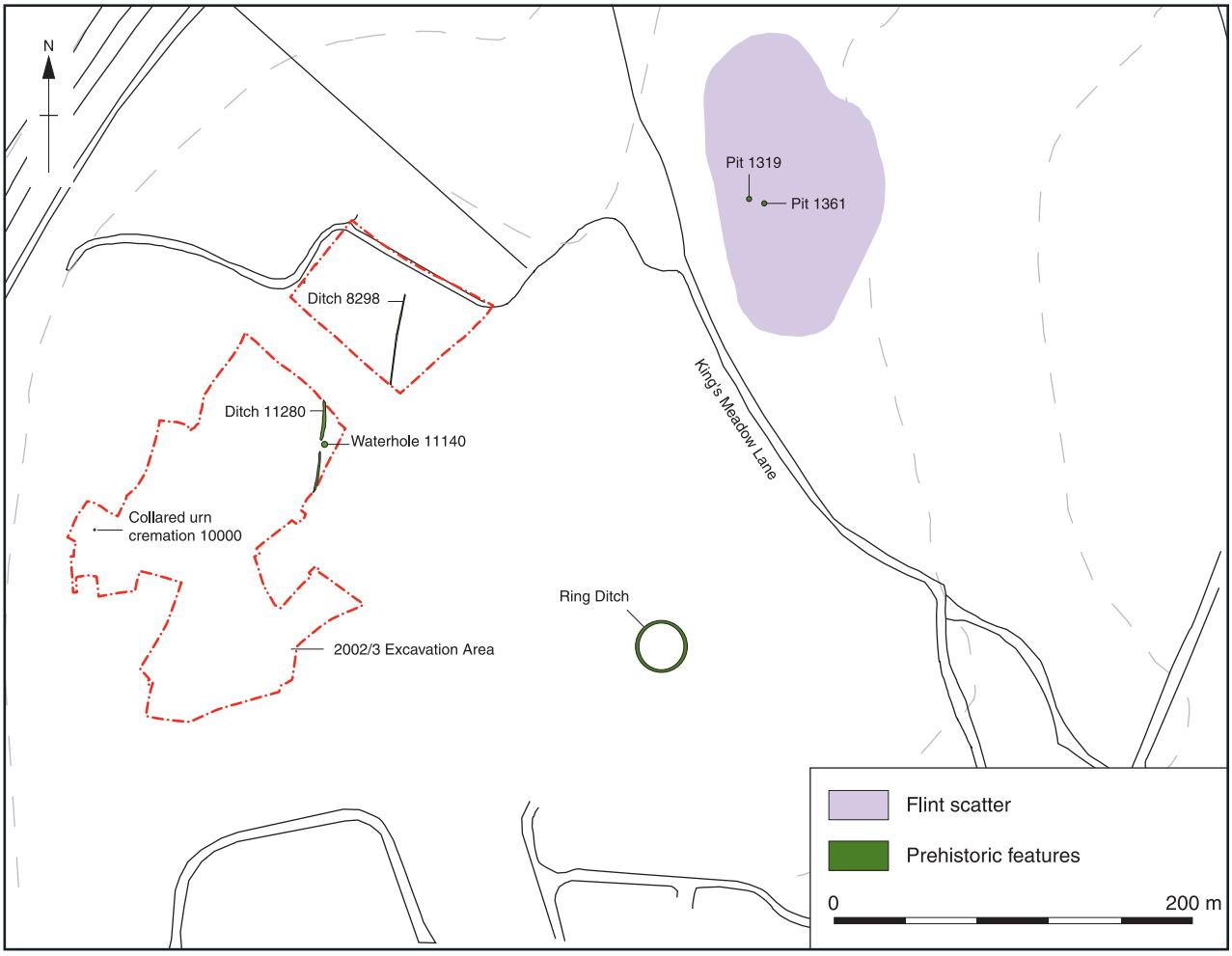

Fig. 2.1 Location of early prehistoric features

Two pits, one of which contained two sherds of Mortlake Ware, were encountered in an area of Saxon settlement (Fig. 2.1). While neither feature produced any flintwork, Neolithic tools were found scattered across the site in later features. These included a complete polished axe, a laurel leaf point, a chisel arrowhead and a flake from a polished implement.

A late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ring ditch, visible in aerial photographs, was found to the east of the Roman settlement on the south-western slope of the Kings Meadow Lane valley. The ditch, which had been recut at least one occasion, surrounded a series of internal features including a probable cremation burial. A second cremation burial, this time contained within an inverted early Bronze Age Collared Urn, was found in the far western part of the site. Other potentially prehistoric features include two parallel ditches that lay in the northeast of the site; these may have been associated with a waterhole positioned at the putative entrance of the westernmost of the pair.

MESOLITHIC (*c* 8000 BC-3500 BC)

In the absence of any earlier evidence, the narrative of human occupation at Higham Ferrers must begin with the Mesolithic period, which is represented by a relative abundance of these typologically diagnostic tools. No structural remains, cut features or *in situ* deposits were dated to this period, and reconstructions rely on an extensive but redeposited scatter of flintwork from the topsoil and subsoil that covered the site. In the absence of organic remains, structures and land surfaces, lithic assemblages provide the 'most durable, widespread and readily recoverable form of evidence for this period' (Myers 2006, 3) and can yield remarkably detailed information about such aspects as subsistence, seasonality, spatial organisation, mobility, territorial ranges and wider cultural groupings.

The flint assemblage from Higham Ferrers contains thirteen microliths, seventeen microburins, nine burins and three burin spalls (see Cramp and Lamdin-Whymark below). Although only one possible fragment of a *tranchet* axe was recovered, the presence of an axe-thinning flake and two axe-sharpening flakes attests to the probable on-site manufacture and maintenance of these tools. A considerable number of the blades and blade cores are also likely to be Mesolithic products, along with several of the crested blades and other core preparation flakes. While many of these pieces cannot be more closely dated within the Mesolithic period, the microliths all correspond to early Mesolithic types (see Cramp and Lamdin-Whymark, below).

Both spatial and compositional aspects of the lithic assemblage need to be considered when characterising the structure of settlement patterns across a region (Spikens 2000). The Mesolithic assemblage from Higham Ferrers is, however, neither stratified nor can it be safely assumed that it has not been significantly contaminated with later flintwork. Of the 278 flint-producing contexts excavated at Higham Ferrers, the greatest quantity of struck flints came from the topsoil (10500). This collection, which comprises 773 struck flints, provides 46.3% of the total assemblage and contributes a similar proportion of the diagnostic Mesolithic assemblage. However, the same layer contained an early Neolithic laurel leaf point, three late Neolithic/early Bronze Age thumbnail scrapers and a plano-convex knife (see Fig. 2.5.3 below), which confirm the mixed chronology of the flintwork. It is not possible, therefore, to closely define the limits of the Mesolithic scatter, which was clearly visible in the topsoil (10500) but also extended across the site in the fills of later features. An interpretation of the type of settlement and activity that the Mesolithic collection represents must therefore be advanced with caution.

Through a combination of typological, metrical and raw material analyses, it is possible to assign the collection to the early Mesolithic with reasonable confidence. The collection of microliths, for example, is composed entirely of early Mesolithic types. Two unclassifiable fragments probably originate from early Mesolithic shapes, and there are no geometric microliths present in the assemblage to indicate a late Mesolithic presence. Microlith typology thus implies an early Mesolithic date. This is supported by the presence of *tranchet* axe thinning and sharpening flakes, along with a possible axe fragment, which reflect the use of a tool that had effectively disappeared by the late Mesolithic, at around 8650 BP (Myers 2006, 5).

Metrical analyses (eg Pitts and Jacobi 1979) have demonstrated the generally greater length:breath ratio for blades in earlier Mesolithic assemblages, a morphological distinction that has since been applied to the dating of Mesolithic debitage. However, most of the metrical data have been gathered from assemblages in Southern England which, until a similar corpus exists for the Midlands and the North, casts doubt on the wider applicability of the approach (Myers 2006, 6). Although no formal metrical analysis was undertaken, the blades in the Higham Ferrers assemblage are generally long with straight, parallel lateral margins and straight dorsal ridges that are often paired, producing a trapezoidal cross-section often associated with early Mesolithic microlith types. The debitage does not, therefore, contradict the view that the assemblage is largely early Mesolithic in origin, but it cannot be taken as undeniable evidence for an early date.

The early-to-late Mesolithic transition apparently involved a departure from the use of high quality chalk flint to that of low-grade gravel flint, the latter usually of local origin (eg Pitts and Jacobi 1979). Where it can be determined from the condition of the cortex, the raw material used at Higham Ferrers came almost entirely from secondary sources and seems to have been adequate for most routine

knapping purposes. Small gravel flint cobbles with battered cortices are typical, but these are not readily attributable to the Mesolithic period and, as most were used for flake rather than blade production, may in fact belong to the Neolithic and Bronze Age phase of occupation. Possible sources include the local gravel deposits and the Boulder Clay plateau, which extends from Raunds to Hargrave less than 10 km to the northeast of Higham Ferrers. The latter was probably of poorer quality than the material from the gravel terraces (Brown 2006, 30).

There is some evidence to support the idea of early Mesolithic dependence on high quality flint that has been reported from other sites. The bladelet cores, for example, are generally made on flint nodules with a smooth cream or cream-yellow cortex and a brown-coloured, fine-grained interior (eg Fig. 2.5.3). While these nodules seem to have occurred locally in the gravels, it does suggest that they were being deliberately selected over their coarser-grained, frost-shattered counterparts. Most of the diagnostic Mesolithic pieces (eg microliths) are made from a similar high-quality flint but, as they are non-cortical pieces, it is difficult to quantify accurately the contribution made by different flint sources to the Mesolithic assemblage.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Mesolithic sites in Northamptonshire are found to cluster in riverine locations on well-drained soils and in areas of topographic prominence; gravel islands within the floodplain and on the slopes of the Nene Valley were evidently favoured locations for Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. Phillips (2006) describes the preferential location of Mesolithic sites in upland areas on permeable geologies, rather than heavy clays, and suggests that the concentrations of sites in river valleys may relate to the use of the valleys as a way of navigating the wooded landscape and exploiting plant, fish and animal resources. In the East Midlands more generally, surface collection surveys have shown that Mesolithic activity favours high points, ridges, headlands and other promontories (Myers 2006).

The distribution of datable flints found during fieldwalking as part of the Raunds Area Survey also implies that Mesolithic and early Neolithic habitation favoured the valley floors and sides. Compared to surface assemblages from the lower slopes and valley bottom, the flint collection from the Boulder Clay plateau seemed to contain a much smaller quantity of Mesolithic flintwork; microliths and microburins were entirely absent from the collection (Parry and Humble 2006, 38). This suggests that Mesolithic activity was generally confined to the lower slopes of the valley, and only infrequently reached the upper plateau.

The location of the Mesolithic flint scatter from Higham Ferrers seems to reflect the same preferences. The scatter was found on a natural slope (*c* 55 m OD) overlooking the Nene Valley to the east. The underlying geology is Northampton Sand and Ironstone, which border the floodplain gravels. The factors motivating this choice of location may be summarised in terms of visibility, resources and drainage. The river provided a passable route through a densely wooded environment, and may have been an important navigational landmark in the territorial range of a hunter-gatherer group. It would also have supplied food resources, including fish and waterfowl, as well as attracting larger animals, such as red and roe deer. The permeable qualities of the underlying sand and ironstone geology would have been suitable for habitation, and these lighter soils may have supported a less impenetrable vegetation than that of the dense glacial clays and Lias Clays found in the north-west of the county. A valley-slope location would thus be an ideal place to establish a temporary campsite to re-tool while monitoring the movements of herd animals. Broadly, from the extent and composition of the collection, it seems plausible that the scatter from Higham Ferrers represents such an event.

There are more than fifty Mesolithic findspots recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record for Northamptonshire, ranging from single finds to surface scatters of varying size (Phillips 2006). With a few exceptions, notably the early Mesolithic features at Chalk Lane (Williams and Shaw 1981) and the stratified deposits at Thrapston Quarry, Aldwincle (Jackson 1976; 1977), few surviving Mesolithic deposits have been encountered in the region. Several unstratified flint scatters of early and late Mesolithic date have been recorded, including sites at Alwincle and Ecton, while a group of 11 microliths, three microburins and five burins were present in the surface collection from the Raunds Area Survey (Humble 2006b, 57). To date, the collection from Honey Hill, Elkington (Saville 1981a) remains the only uncontaminated Mesolithic assemblage in the county to have been formally analysed.

A large collection of redeposited Mesolithic flintwork came from below and within the Neolithic long barrow at West Cotton (Windell *et al*. 1990), which is located on the valley floor some 5 km to the north of Higham Ferrers. This assemblage had presumably been dug from the surrounding ground surface and incorporated in the upcast mound during construction. The collection included both obliquely-blunted and edge-blunted forms. Along with additional Mesolithic flints found during fieldwalking immediately east of the excavation trench, this collection provides the most extensive evidence of late Mesolithic activity in the Raunds Survey Area (Humble 2006a, 43), and remains the closest significant Mesolithic site to Higham Ferrers.

The often close spatial association between Mesolithic flintwork and Neolithic features, as at West Cotton, is also seen at Higham Ferrers. Here, Neolithic and Bronze Age features appear to have been dug into a Mesolithic ground surface littered with the remains of flint manufacture and use. The Mesolithic collection from Higham Ferrers appears to date entirely to the earlier part of the period, which implies an interval of some three thousand

years before the site is demonstrably re-occupied in the Neolithic period. While there is thus no evidence for continuity of occupation, it does suggest that the location held a particular attraction for both early Mesolithic and Neolithic populations.

NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE (*c* 3500 BC-1000 BC)

At Higham Ferrers, a small number of features could be assigned to the early prehistoric period on stratigraphic or typological grounds (Fig. 2.1). Evidence for middle Neolithic activity was found, in the form of two small pits containing flintwork and two Mortlake Ware rim sherds (see Edwards below). A substantial ring ditch with the remains of a central cremation burial was located first by aerial photography, and then later excavated in one of the 2000 evaluation trenches. Finds from this ring ditch suggest that it was in use during the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age period, and it was recut on one occasion during this time. An isolated cremation burial in an inverted Collared Urn (10000) was also revealed in the far western area of the site. The cremation contained the remains of two individuals, one adult female and one unsexed juvenile aged between 13 and 17 years (see Witkin below). A N-S aligned ditch (11280) and an associated waterhole (11140) probably date to the Bronze Age or later; a second ditch (8298) sharing the same alignment may belong to the same phase (Fig. 2.1). Datable material from these features was scarce and, in several cases, phasing has been based upon stratigraphic and spatial factors. None of the prehistoric features was radiocarbon dated, as neither the ring ditch, waterhole (11140), nor the two ditches (8298 and 11280) contained suitable samples. The cremation pit containing the Collared Urn could be dated on typological grounds, although this does not allow for the possibility that 'heirloom' vessels were curated and re-used in mortuary contexts.

Early/middle Neolithic

On the north-eastern slope of the Kings Meadow Lane valley, within an area otherwise dominated by the Saxon settlement (Area A), two pits of middle Neolithic date were revealed (Fig. 2.1). One of these features (1319) was fully excavated, while visible finds were recovered from the fill of the other (1361). Pit 1319 was sub-circular in shape with steep sides and a concave profile. The cut measured 0.88 m in diameter and 0.3 m in depth. The primary fill (1334) was a dark grey sandy silt with a high concentration of ash, charcoal and pottery fragments; the ash and charcoal may have originated from inside the crushed pot. Above this, fill 1381 was a mid brown silty deposit containing a patch of charcoal within it. This deposit contained pieces of flint and two Mortlake Ware rim sherds (Fig. 2.7.1-2).

Pit 1361 appeared to be very similar to pit 1319, with a silty layer overlying a deposit of charcoal and pottery. Although the excavation of this feature was not completed, it is almost certain that the two adjacent features were of similar Neolithic date.

Beyond these two pits, evidence of Neolithic activity from Higham Ferrers is limited to a few diagnostic flint tools, including a flake from a polished axe, a laurel leaf point and a leaf-shaped arrowhead. It seems likely that some of the flake material in the assemblage also dates to the Neolithic period, but is less easily isolated on technological grounds alone.

One of the most remarkable Neolithic finds is a complete polished axe (Fig. 2.6.1) from the single stony fill of a Roman ditch (11249) that cuts two possibly prehistoric ditches and a waterhole (discussed below). It seems unlikely that this piece would have gone unnoticed in the boundary ditch, and complete polished axes are otherwise very rare from the Raunds area (Humble 2006b, 57). It is tempting to interpret it as a curiosity brought in from elsewhere, perhaps originally part of a hoard like that found at Stanwick village in 1938 (RCHME 1975, 79), and perhaps placed in the ditch as a foundation deposit during the Roman period.

Another example of a polished axe from a Roman feature came from Blackbird Leys, Oxfordshire (Shaffrey 2003a, 244). In this case, the axe displayed a secondary polish that suggested it had been used as a pot burnishing tool, probably in the Roman period; there is no visible evidence that the example from Higham Ferrers was used in this way.

Several flakes and fragments from polished axes were also recovered during fieldwalking undertaken as part of the Raunds Area Survey; some of these were made from a light white-grey opaque flint with small cherty inclusions (Humble 2006b, 51), similar to that of the Higham Ferrers axe; a common source seems likely.

Elsewhere in Northamptonshire, Neolithic settlement sites are rare – particularly those belonging to the early part of the period – and are usually represented by flint surface scatters identified during fieldwalking. No unequivocal evidence of settlement was detected during excavation between the monuments of the Raunds project (Humble 2006a, 45), for example. An early Neolithic pit without artefacts was identified below the Long Mound at West Cotton, but its purpose and relationship to the wider early Neolithic landscape is unclear; it may have had a similar significance to the two small pits from High Ferrers, neither of which was rich in finds.

Monumental sites of this period are more readily identifiable, and include the four founding monuments in the Raunds Study Area: the West Cotton Long Mound and Turf Mound, an avenue formed by pits and interrupted ditches, and a possible henge enclosure on the valley side about West Cotton. These early monuments seem to have been respected by later monument building (Humble 2006a, 43-4). The Long Enclosure, for example, was

later built on the same alignment as the Long Mound and Turf Mound at West Cotton.

A few early Neolithic causewayed enclosures are known elsewhere in the county, including the excavated example at Briar Hill and the nearby site at Dallington. A third example has been identified at Southwick, in the north of the county. A causewayed ring ditch was also excavated at Stanwick. Henges, meanwhile, are unusual features in Northamptonshire, which has led some authors to suggest that their particular function was fulfilled by other monument types (Chapman 2006, 5).

Other Neolithic mortuary monuments and enclosures have been excavated at Redlands Farm, less than 1.5 km to the north-east of Higham Ferrers, Tansor, Aldwincle and Grendon. These sites, along with an example from nearby Orton Longueville, in Peterborough, are found distributed at roughly regular intervals along the Nene Valley and all show evidence of continued use and re-use into the early Bronze Age (Chapman 2006, 6). At this time, there is also growing evidence for ritual activity at Higham Ferrers.

Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age

The Higham Ferrers round barrow appears from the geophysical survey to be an isolated monument, but it may have stood within a small cemetery of equivalent features centred in an area to the east and south now covered by housing or obscured from aerial visibility by repeated ploughing. The ring ditch at Higham Ferrers has been degraded in this way, and no more than a trace of the original upcast mound was found in the deposits of the ditch. The ring ditch encompassed one or more cremation burials, and had been recut and redefined after a period of silting on at least one occasion. No evidence of grave goods was recovered from the ring ditch, but it is possible that these were removed by later ploughing and distributed within the ploughsoil; the plano-convex knife from the topsoil (Fig. 2.6.3), for example, may represent such an object.

A lack of dating evidence has precluded refinement of the chronology of its use, but the stratigraphic evidence suggests that the monument was maintained for some time after its initial construction. Its setting in an area predating extensive Iron Age and Roman occupation hints at the persistent appeal of the location, perhaps in the same way that the Neolithic mortuary enclosure at Tansor appears to have attracted later re-use as a Saxon inhumation cemetery.

Round barrows and other prehistoric monuments are relatively common in Northamptonshire and can be found distributed throughout the county. The majority, like the Higham Ferrers example, have suffered the effects of intensive arable farming since the Middle Ages and are detectable only as cropmarks on aerial photographs. Gravel extraction has also led to the destruction – and discovery – of a great many prehistoric sites, including the mounds and Neolithic timber platform at West Cotton, Raunds (Windell *et al*. 1990).

Round barrows have also been discovered at nearby Aldwincle (Kinnes and Jackson 1971; Jackson 1976; 1977) and Grendon (Gibson 1988). A number of early prehistoric monuments, including more than one barrow cemetery, were excavated at Redlands Farm (Keevill 1991; 1992), Stanwick (Neal 1989) and Irthlingborough (Halpin 1987). The four barrows at Irthlingborough, three of which have been excavated, had survived as earthworks (Hall and Hutchings 1972, 14). One of these contained two inhumations along with a wealth of grave goods reminiscent of those accompanying the burial in the large mound at West Cotton (Humble 2006a, 45). These sites are thought to part of a single monument complex (Harding and Lee 1987, 4). Environmental evidence from nearby sites, including Ecton, Redlands Farm and Irthlingborough, suggests that there was a period of localised vegetation change that may have been related to valley clearance prior to monument construction in the area (Brown 2006, 26-9; Robinson 2006, 31-3).

The cremation burial in an inverted Collared Urn is less readily paralleled by other sites in the region, as such features are usually excavated as chance finds without the foresight of aerial photography or geophysical survey. Two Collared Urns, one containing a cremation, copper alloy dagger and bone pin, were found in barrow 3/1 at Irthlingborough. No potential grave goods were recovered from the Collared Urn cremation pit at Higham Ferrers, although there is always the possibility that these were of an organic nature and thus have not survived.

Whether or not the early Bronze Age cremation burial from Higham Ferrers was part of a wider cemetery or settlement is uncertain, and the question cannot easily be resolved by recourse to non-invasive survey techniques. Future excavation beyond the boundaries of the excavated area may, however, provide a more complete picture of its immediate surroundings.

There is no direct evidence of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age habitation at Higham Ferrers, although the slight traces of ephemeral surface structures may not have survived. Most sites are represented only by flint distributions detected during fieldwalking, such as those encountered during the Raunds Area Survey (Parry and Humble 2006, 38-42). The nearest – and so far, only – later Neolithic habitation site excavated in Northamptonshire is at Ecton, Northampton, which was discovered during gravel extraction (Moore and Williams 1975). A series of shallow pits and hollows was exposed, some associated with hearth debris, along with a pottery assemblage and flint scatter.

At Higham Ferrers, both the ceramic and lithic assemblages seem to have been deposited in non-domestic circumstances, being generally small and found in mortuary contexts. Where the settlement

lay is unclear. A concentration of flintwork was found in the topsoil directly overlying the barrow during fieldwalking (NAU 1991), but it seems unlikely that the excavated area was a focus of domestic habitation. The surviving excavated traces all relate to mortuary activity, suggesting that the area was reserved for activity of a ceremonial nature.

Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ring ditch

The two-phase ring ditch was identified by aerial photography approximately 200 m east of the Roman settlement on the south-western slope of the Kings Meadow Lane valley (Fig. 2.1). The feature was partially revealed by a trench excavated during the 2000 evaluation and was more fully excavated during the excavation of the same year (Fig. 2.2).

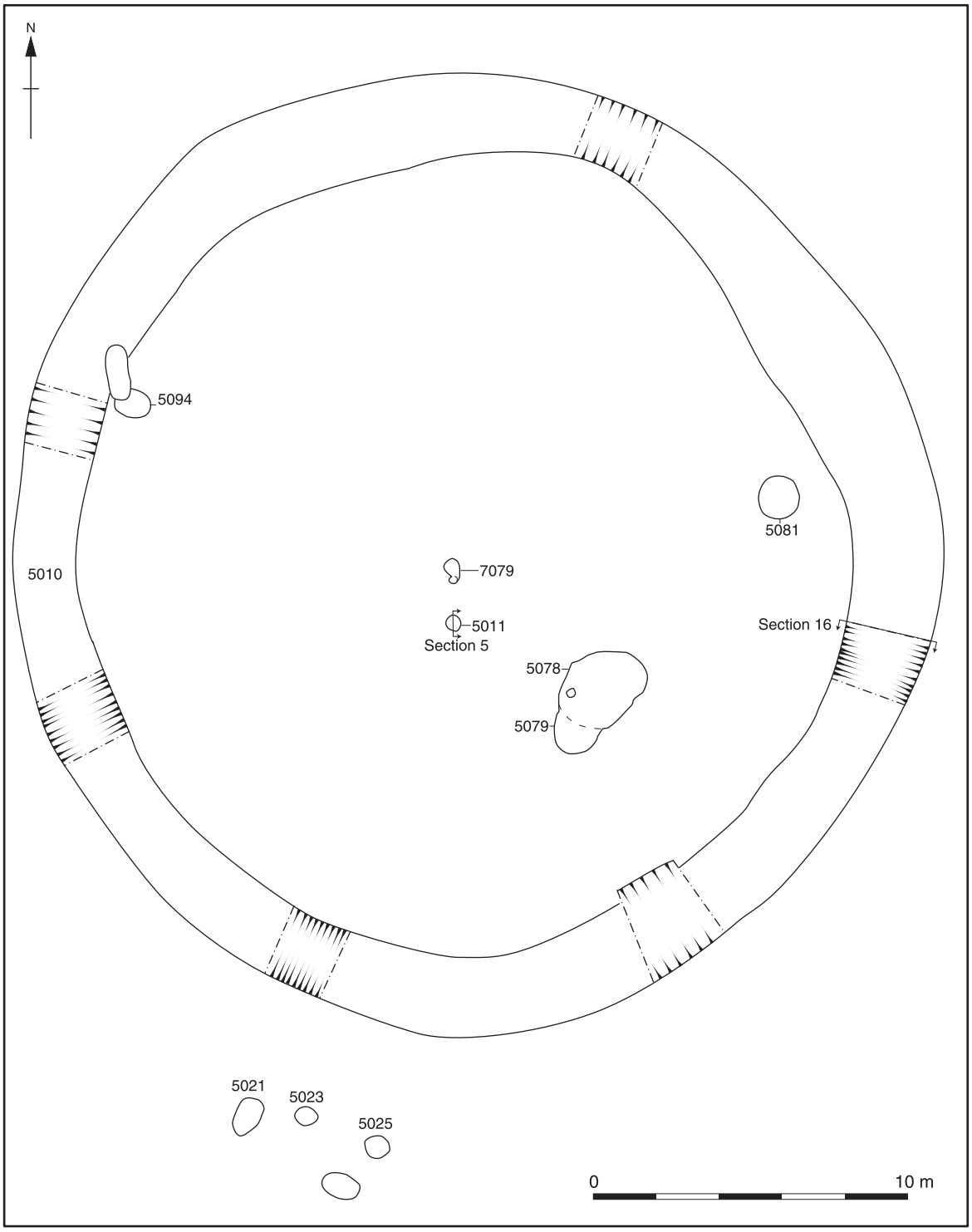

Fig. 2.2 Plan of ring ditch 5010

The remains were plough-truncated, with no preservation of associated soil horizons. In total, 12 % of the ring ditch was excavated, and each section showed a re-cut, largely following the course of the original ditch.

The earliest cut (5010) was Y-shaped in profile, with a narrow, flat base (Fig. 2.3, Section 16). The upper sides sloped at approximately 40º and, nearer the base, at approximately 80º. Where the full profile of this ditch was seen in section, the cut measured 2.4 m in width and between 0.74 m and 0.94 m in depth.

In two of the sections (including Fig. 2.3, Section 16), the stony primary fill appears to have been deposited from the central area of the ring ditch monument, and may have been eroded from a positive feature here. In all the other sections, the fill was evenly distributed in the base of the cut. The remaining four fills were mid orange-brown silts containing varying amounts of ironstone, perhaps representing interspersed episodes of silting and deposition of eroded mound material, although there is no indication from which side of the ditch this material originated. In the evaluation slots, the inside slopes were found to be shallower than the outside ones, perhaps due to greater deposition on this side. No dating evidence was recovered from the earliest ring ditch phase.

The re-cut (5030) largely followed the course of the earlier ditch, but in most sections lay towards the inside edge of the original cut (Fig. 2.3, Section 16). It was concave in profile, and was narrower and shallower than the original cut. It may have been dug to redefine the monument, in contrast to the earlier ditch, which may have had a dual function of definition and a source for mound material, necessitating a bigger cut. Most of the sections revealed two fills, the first of which was a stony mid brown sandy silt. The remainder of the cut was filled with a more friable and homogenous dark orange-brown sandy silt; this recut contained pottery of uncertain prehistoric date. These straight-sided body sherds are very abraded and not particularly diagnostic. They are most likely to date to the middle Bronze Age, but this is not certain.

Features in the ring ditch interior

Several features were located in the area enclosed by the ring ditch (Fig. 2.2), two of which displayed the characteristics of cremation burials. One of these small pits (5011) was centrally located and had been very disturbed by modern ploughing with the remains of the possible cremation deposit scattered beyond its definable limits, The pit itself was 0.4 m wide and 0.1 m deep; its sides sloped at approximately 50º on to a flat base (Fig. 2.3, Section 5). The single fill (5012) was a light orange-brown silty sand and contained occasional fragments of charcoal and burnt bone, probably human, that suggest it may have held the remains of a cremation deposit.

Early Bronze Age cremation burial

Situated in the far western part of the site on the upper slope of the Nene Valley overlooking the river (Fig. 2.1), cremated human remains were found interred in an inverted Collared Urn (Group 10000; Pls 2.1 and 2.2). The cut (10002) was oval-shaped in plan (Fig. 2.4) and measured 0.6 m in diameter and 0.35 m in depth with vertical sides and a flat base. The north-eastern side of the cut featured a ledge, upon which the urn (10003) had been placed, with a further cremated bone and charcoal deposit filling the base of the larger and deeper pit (Fig. 2.4, Section 1301). The form and

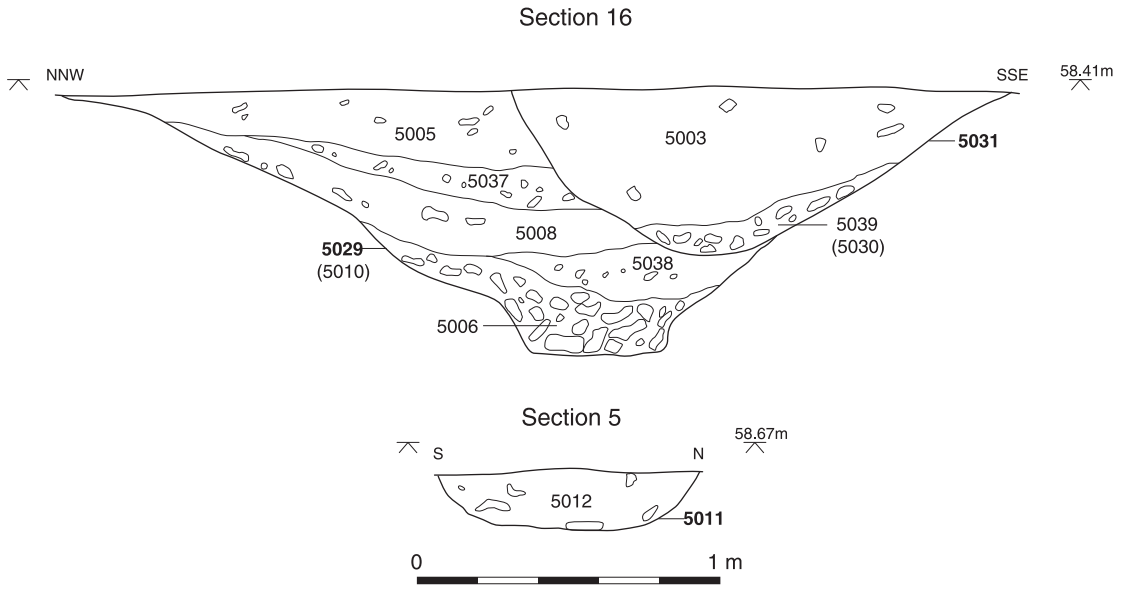

Fig. 2.3 Section drawings: ring ditch 5010 and central pit 5011

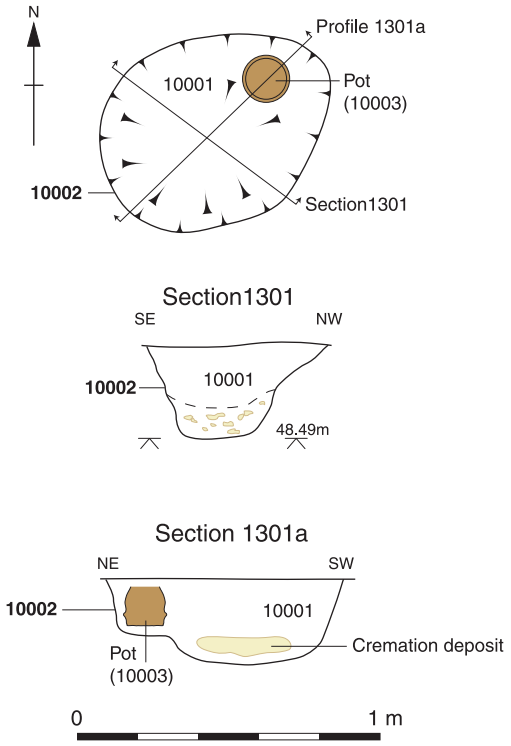

Fig. 2.4 Plan and section drawing of cremation pit 10002

decoration of the early Bronze Age Collared Urn suggest a date range of roughly the 19th to 18th centuries cal BC (see below). Due to the elevated position of the urn in the pit, the urn base was damaged during the initial machine stripping of the area.

The urn contained 557 g of cremated human bone. The remainder of the pit was filled with deposit 10001, which included a dense concentration of cremated human remains near to the base of the pit, apparently deliberately placed, and a smaller amount dispersed throughout the fill. The cremated bone weighed a total of 1212 g. Also included in the fill was a small amount of charcoal. The bone fragments within the pot and within the surrounding deposit represent the partial remains of at least two adult individuals. No nearby features belonging to this phase were identified in the excavation, but it is very possible that such features could have been located as little as 20 m to the north or west of the cremation burial, just beyond the site boundary. The location of the cremation burial, close to the far western limit of the site, thus precludes detailed spatial analysis.

Surface finds

The excavated evidence for early prehistoric activity at Higham Ferrers is corroborated by finds recovered by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 1991

Plate 2.1 The excavation of the inverted Collared Urn cremation from a ledge within pit 10002

(NAU 1991). During a fieldwalking survey, a concentration of worked flints was found around the area north of the ring ditch and east of the Neolithic pits. Finds recovered included flakes, cores, a leaf-shaped arrowhead and a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead. During this survey, a concentration of flakes and a possible blade or scraper were recovered from the topsoil immediately overlying the ring ditch.

Middle/late Bronze Age

While there is convincing evidence for ritual activity in the early Bronze Age, there is no certain evidence either for mortuary practice or habitation in the middle and late Bronze Age. The only possible exception lies with two ditches (11280 and 8298) and a waterhole (11140) – see Figure 2.1, which were stratigraphically earlier than the Roman settlement and which may have been the remnants of a middle Bronze Age field system similar to that seen at Stanwick (Humble 2006a, 46). However, artefacts of this date are conspicuously absent from both the ceramic and flint assemblages. Following this apparent hiatus in settlement (at least in the areas excavated), occupation resumes in the middle Iron Age (see Chapter 3).

Elsewhere in Northamptonshire, middle/late Bronze Age habitation sites are similarly rare. Two roundhouses and a series of boundary ditches were identified at Stanwick around 3 km to the north-east of Higham Ferrers, while a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age enclosure was excavated at Thrapston some 10 km to the north-east. Three later Bronze Age cremation cemeteries, each containing more than 20 burials, have so far been recorded in the county. These include sites at Kelmarsh, Chapel Brampton and Briar Hill, which are all found to the west of Higham Ferrers and within approximately 25 km of the site; the latter was found within an early Neolithic causewayed enclosure.

FLINTWORK

by Kate Cramp and Hugo Lamdin-Whymark

Introduction

A total of 1669 struck flints and ten pieces (42 g) of burnt unworked flint of all periods was recovered during excavations carried out between 2000 and 2002 (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). Excavation of the Roman settlement (2002/3 excavation area) produced the largest quantity of flintwork, a total of 1380 struck flints and six pieces (23 g) of burnt unworked flint.

The flint assemblage was largely recovered from unstratified or redeposited contexts, with very few pieces demonstrably *in situ* within contemporary features. Substantial quantities of Mesolithic flintwork were recovered from reworked topsoil and subsoil layers (eg 10500 and 10502), while smaller amounts came from deposits of Roman or later date. A few, possibly Neolithic, flints from the evaluation are in an exceptionally fresh condition, and may have been recovered from contemporary features. Of particular note is a complete Neolithic polished axe from a Roman boundary ditch.

Methodology

All the flints within the assemblage were individually examined and classified typologically using a series of defined categories that break down into three broad groups: debitage, cores and retouched forms.

Debitage was further divided into flakes, blades, bladelets, bladelike flakes, irregular waste and chips. A blade or bladelet is here defined as a long narrow removal, conventionally described as a flake whose length is at least twice its breadth (Bordes 1961, 6). Bladelike flakes include both blade fragments and flakes approaching blade dimensions. Irregular waste refers to those shattered pieces, frequently non-bulbar, which are produced during knapping. Particular unretouched flake types, such as those from polished or ground implements, core

Table 2.1 Summary of the struck and burnt unworked flint assemblages from Higham Ferrers

	HFKML 00		HFKML 01	HFKML 02	
Category:	*Evaluation*	*Excavation*	*Excavation*	*Excavation*	*Total*
Flakes*	20 (71.4**)	124 (71.7)	61 (69.3)	1002 (72.6)	1207 (72.3)
Chips (<10 mm^2)	1 (3.6)	6 (3.5)	13 (14.8)	9 (0.7)	29 (1.7)
Cores	5 (17.9)	22 (12.7)	3 (3.4)	129 (9.3)	159 (9.5)
Retouched tools	2 (7.1)	21 (12.1)	11 (12.5)	239 (17.3)	273 (16.4)
Hammerstone				1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)
Total:	28 (100)	173 (100)	88 (100)	1380 (100)	1669 (100)
No. of burnt unworked flints		2	2	6	10
Weight (g) of burnt unworked flints		2	17	23	42

* Including all unretouched removals (e.g. rejuvenation flakes, crested blades, flakes from polished implements, etc.)

** Percentage of total struck flint assemblage from each evaluation or excavation

rejuvenation flakes and thinning flakes, were recorded separately. Chips were defined as pieces whose broadest surface was less than 10 mm^2, including small flakes or fragments of flakes (Newcomer and Karlin 1987, 33). In order to avoid any sampling bias, a distinction was made in the database between chips that were excavated by hand and those that were recovered by sieving.

Cores were classified according to removal type and the number of platforms present (eg multi-platform flake core or single platform blade core). All complete cores were weighed.

The terminology for retouched forms follows standard morphological descriptions, for example Bamford (1985, 73-7), Healy (1988, 48-9) and Saville (1981b, 7-11). Microliths were classified according to Jacobi (1978, 16, fig. 6), and microburins according to Clark (1934, 68-9).

Additional details concerning the condition (rolled, abraded, fresh, corticated) and state of the artefact (burnt, broken, utilised) were also recorded, along with a description of any distinctive cortical surfaces that may contribute to a discussion of possible flint sources.

A separate category of burnt unworked flint was used to describe burnt pieces with no struck surfaces or obvious signs of use. This material was quantified by piece and by weight and, where possible, the source of the nodules was identified (eg chalk flint or bullhead flint).

The data was entered directly into a Microsoft Access database. A printout of the catalogue will be deposited with the archive and, where possible, a digital copy will be made available.

Condition

The condition of the flintwork is fairly typical of redeposited material recovered from topsoil layers or from the fills of later features. While generally in fresh condition, most flints display some post-depositional damage, usually in the form of minor edge nicks. A small number of flints are heavily rolled and worn, probably as a result of repeated redeposition.

The majority of flints are uncorticated, although a small number exhibit an incipient blue-white cortication. Spots of iron-staining are also occasionally present. One flint has clearly been reworked in antiquity: the original flake surface had developed a white cortication, which has been truncated by later (uncorticated) retouch to form an end scraper.

Raw material

For the most part, the flint nodules used for knapping purposes seem to have been collected from local gravel deposits. Where present, the cortex varies from a heavily abraded and pitted surface, to a worn and stained yellow-white crust a few millimetres thick. Several of the cores suggest that the raw material was collected in the form of small, river-worn pebbles. Indeed, few of the blades and flakes exceed 60 mm in length, perhaps reflecting the limitations of raw material size. Similar sources seem to have supplied the flint used for burning, although these pieces tend to be much smaller.

Around six flints possess a thick, white, unweathered cortex and dark brown or black interior that may represent the use of chalk flint sources available in East Anglia at a distance of some 50 km. This group includes one opposed platform blade core (context 10500) and one partially-worked nodule (context 10531). Other pieces of chalk flint may also be present but, without cortex, cannot confidently be distinguished from gravel flint nodules. Flint nodules from the Boulder Clay plateau, an area of drift that extends from Raunds eastward to Hargrave, may also have been used for knapping but are unlikely to have been as good in quality as the gravel flint nodules. Cortical flakes are generally under-represented in the assemblage, suggesting that core preparation was mostly performed off-site.

The assemblage

The flintwork is quantified in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. Most of the flintwork was thinly scattered across some 270 individual contexts, the majority of which contained a single flint; larger groups came from contexts 5000 (27 pieces), 5002 (25 pieces), 5036 (31 pieces), 5048 (20 pieces) and 10500 (773 pieces), 10502 (74 pieces), 10657 (29 pieces) and 11253 (96 pieces).

Despite the evidence that it has been redeposited, it seems that a substantial proportion of the assemblage dates to the Mesolithic period and may represent a relatively discrete phase of occupation. This material was mostly found in contexts 10500 (topsoil) and 10502 (finds reference layer), although stray Mesolithic finds occurred elsewhere on site. The collection includes numerous diagnostic early Mesolithic artefacts, including several microliths, and it is likely that the majority of the flakes and cores are also of this date. The Neolithic and Bronze Age period is recognised by the presence of several chronologically distinctive pieces, including a complete polished axe, a chisel arrowhead and a plano-convex knife. There is little doubt that many of the flakes, tools and cores within the assemblage also belong to this period, but these pieces are less confidently attributed on technological and morphological grounds alone.

Due to the redeposited nature of the assemblage, the discussion below is structured by broad chronological period, beginning with the Mesolithic, rather than by site phasing. Particular attention, however, is given to the few cases in which the flintwork may be contemporary with the feature in which it was found. A discussion of the Neolithic and Bronze Age flintwork then follows.

Table 2.2 Detailed quantification of the struck flint assemblage

Category:	*HFKML 00* *Evaluation*	*HFKML 00* *Excavation*	*HFKML 01* *Excavation*	*HFKML 02* *Excavation*	*Total*	
Flake	12	68	42	472	594	
Blade	2	17	6	212	237	
Bladelet		7	4	38	49	
Bladelike flake	3	11	1	126	141	
Rejuvenation flake tablet				5	5	
Core face / edge rejuvenation flake		4	1	17	22	
Crested blade	2	3	1	16	22	
Flake from ground implement	1				1	
Axe sharpening flake				2	2	
Axe thinning flake				1	1	
Burin spall				3	3	
Microburin		2		15	17	
Unclassifiable waste		12	6	95	113	
Chip	1	6	1	9	17	
Sieved chips 10-4mm			12		12	
Single platform flake core		6		8	14	
Multi-platform flake core	2	11	1	43	57	
Levallois / other discoidal flake core				2	2	
Single platform blade(let) core	2	1	1	12	16	
Opposed platform blade(let) core		3	1	30	34	
Unclassifiable blade core				6	6	
Core on a flake				10	10	
Unclassifiable / fragmentary core	1			8	9	
Partially-worked nodule		1		10	11	
Retouched flake		5	3	56	64	
Retouched blade		7	2	42	51	
End scraper	2	1	1	15	19	
Double-ended scraper		1		3	4	
Side scraper				4	4	
End-and-side scraper		2		4	6	
Thumbnail scraper				3	3	
Scraper on a non-flake blank			1	1	2	
Unclassifiable scraper		2		2	4	
Notched flake				13	13	
Notched blade		1		20	21	
Denticulate				1	1	
Serrated flake			1	7	8	
Piercer		1		19	20	
Burin				9	9	
Microlith			1	12	13	
Tanged point				1	1	
Truncated flake				1	1	
Truncated blade				6	6	
Fabricator				1	1	
Laurel leaf				1	1	
Chisel arrowhead				1	1	
Plano-convex knife				1	1	
Unclassifiable knife				2	2	
Polished axe				1	1	
Unclassifiable heavy implement (possible tranchet axe fragment)					1	1
Unclassifiable retouch		1	2	12	15	
Hammerstone				1	1	
Total:	28	173	88	1380	1669	
No. of retouched flints:	2 (7.1*)	21 (12.1)	11 (12.5)	239 (17.3)	273 (16.4)	
No. of burnt struck flints:	5 (17.9)	26 (15)	8 (9.1)	129 (9.3)	168 (10.1)	
No. of broken struck flints:	14 (50)	75 (43.4)	52 (59.1)	580 (42)	721 (43.2)	

* Percentage of total struck flint assemblage from each evaluation or excavation

Mesolithic flint assemblage (Fig. 2.5)

The assemblage from Higham Ferrers is dominated by Mesolithic flintwork, with diagnostic types including 13 microliths, 17 microburins, nine burins, three burin spalls and a small collection of flakes from *tranchet* axes. A possible fragment of a *tranchet* axe was also recovered. From their technological appearance, most of the unretouched material and cores also belong to a Mesolithic industry. This collection represents a careful, blade-based industry, involving considerable investment in platform preparation and maintenance typical of Mesolithic industries. The flintwork occurred mostly in subsoil layers, but small quantities were found scattered throughout the fills of later features. The Mesolithic flintwork forms a technologically coherent collection that seems to belong perhaps entirely to the earlier part of the Mesolithic period.

While the assemblage is dominated by unretouched flakes (594 pieces), blades are well represented and their relative abundance supports the mostly Mesolithic origin of the collection. Blades, bladelets and bladelike flakes together provide 427 pieces and account for 35.4% of all unretouched removal types (excluding chips), a percentage that falls comfortably within the range predicted for uncontaminated Mesolithic assemblages (Ford 1987, 79).

The blades are generally narrow with parallel lateral edges. The scars of previous blade removals

Table 2.3 Classification of the microliths (after Jacobi 1978, 16, fig. 6)

Microlith class	*Description*	*Total*
1a	Obliquely blunted point	3
1ac	Obliquely blunted point	3
1b	Obliquely blunted point	2
1bc	Obliquely blunted point	1
1bc/3c	Obliquely blunted point	1
3a?	Bi-truncated rhombic point	1
4	Convex backed point	1
Unclassifiable	Early Mesolithic shape	2
Total:		14

Table 2.4 Classification of the microburins (after Clark 1934, 67-8)

Microburin class	*Description*	*Total*
A1 (a)	Proximal, left-hand notch	5
A1 (b)	Proximal, right-hand notch	2
A2 (a)	Distal, left-hand notch	4
A2 (b)	Distal, right-hand notch	3
Other	Medial	3
Total:		17

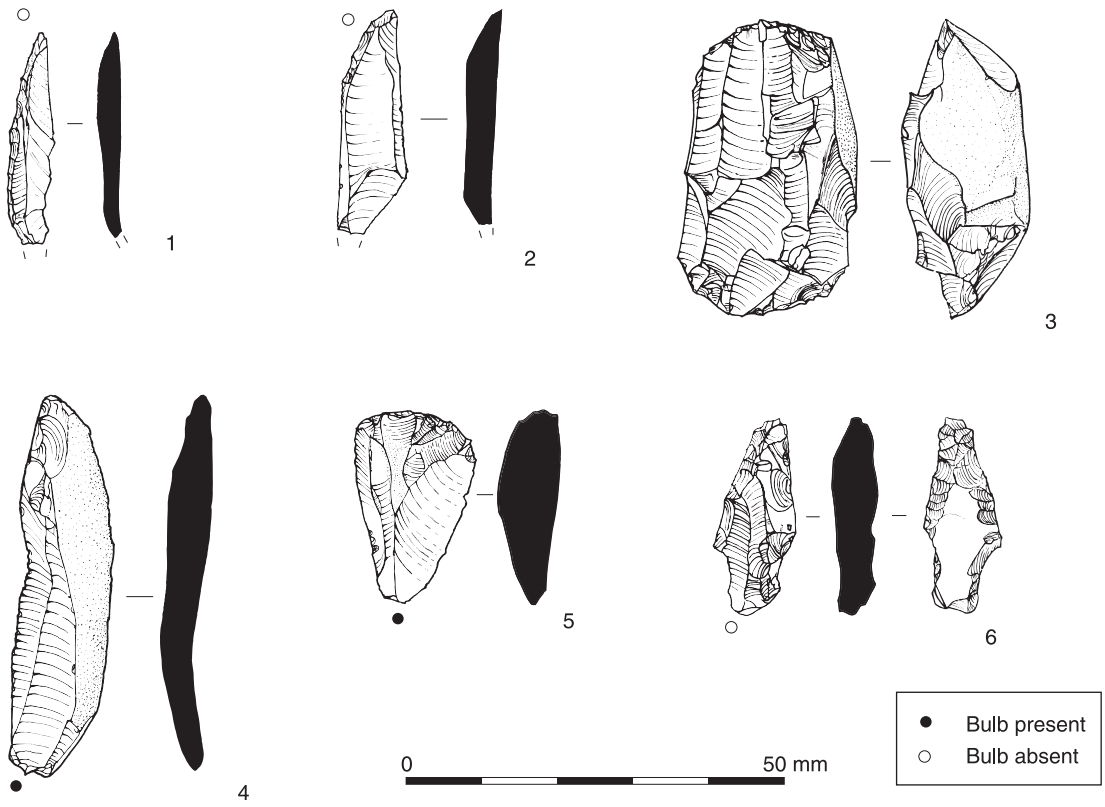

Fig. 2.5 Mesolithic flint from topsoil layer 10500

can be seen on the dorsal surfaces of both flakes and blades, indicating their position within a reduction sequence aimed primarily at blade production. Platforms are typically plain, but linear and punctiform platforms are also common and particularly occur in association with blades. Platform edge abrasion, which involved grinding or chipping the edge of an overhanging striking platform to encourage a more regular and predictable removal, is visible on cores and in remnant form on many flakes, blades and chips.

The presence of 49 rejuvenation flakes, including five tablets and 22 crested blades, suggest careful core preparation and maintenance. Two *tranchet* axe sharpening flakes indicate that axes were sharpened on site and, although only one possible axe fragment was recovered, limited evidence of production was present in the form of one thinning flake. A small number of chips were retrieved, during excavation (17 pieces) and from sieving (12 pieces). Many of these represent broken (and often burnt) fragments of larger flakes or blades, but a few may result from genuine knapping activity. The small quantities involved, however, do not support significant amounts of on-site knapping activity, although an allowance must be made for collection biases.

The majority of the Mesolithic cores were aimed at blade production, and the technology seems heavily dominated by the opposed platform approach (34 pieces). Typical examples were made on a small, elongated nodule with simple flaked platforms at each of the shorter ends (eg Fig. 2.5.3). The blade removals were usually taken along one face, with the back of the core often left cortical or sometimes shaped by a few flake removals. The dominance of the opposed-platform technique is reflected by the blades themselves, almost all of which have at least one dorsal removal from an opposite platform. Plunging blades that remove a large part of the opposite platform are also common. These pieces are presumably knapping accidents, although several were nonetheless later used or retouched. Single platform blade cores were used alongside opposed platform cores, together with a number of irregular forms that appear to have been more opportunistically reduced.

A wide variety of retouched tools were recovered, ranging from simple edge-retouched flakes to notched and serrated flakes. A total of 20 piercers were recorded, many of which had been made on blades (eg Fig. 2.5.4). Nine burins were also identified, and the presence of three burin spalls indicates that these tools were probably being retouched on site. Scrapers occurred in a variety of forms, including double-ended types, but are typically small and neatly-retouched (eg Fig. 2.5.5); a good number have been made on blades.

Along with several truncated blades and one tanged point (Fig. 2.5.6), the assemblage contains 14 microliths (Table 2.3). The collection is dominated by class 1 microliths (eg Fig. 2.5.2), which are characteristically found in Maglemosian industries dating from the first half of the 8th millennium BC (Jacobi 1978, 16). One class 4 microlith (Fig. 2.5.1) was also identified, along with one possible class 3a microlith and two further fragments that probably derive from early Mesolithic shapes. No diagnostically late Mesolithic microliths are demonstrably present in the collection. A total of 17 microburins were identified (Table 2.4), outnumbering microliths in a ratio of 1.3:1 and perhaps indicating slightly more production on site than use. Proximal, distal and medial examples are all represented, and it seems likely that several of the notched blades in the assemblage represent unfinished attempts at microlith manufacture using the microburin technique (Inizan *et al*. 1992, 69, fig. 24).

The significance of this Mesolithic flint assemblage within a local and regional context is discussed above. A catalogue of illustrated Mesolithic flints is shown in Table 2.5.

Neolithic and Bronze Age flint assemblage

Neolithic flint

A small quantity of Neolithic flintwork was identified in the assemblage, although comparatively few diagnostic artefacts were found. Typologically Neolithic artefacts include a complete polished flint axe from the 2002/3 excavation area (Fig. 2.6.1) and a flake from a polished implement recovered during the excavation to the north-east (pit 1319; Fig. 2.1). A

Table 2.5 Catalogue of flints illustrated in Figure 2.5

No.	*Feature*	*Context*	*Category*	*Description*
1	Topsoil	10500	Microlith	Class 4. Possibly utilised
2	Topsoil	10500	Microlith	Class 1ac. Tiny amount of tail lost. Possibly utilised
3	Topsoil	10500	Opposed platform	Small bladelet core. Removals taken down one face from opposed blade(let) core simple platforms. Platform edge abrasion. Gravel flint. 18 g. Mesolithic
4	Topsoil	10500	Piercer	Side-trimming blade with sharp point retouched at distal end. Mesolithic.
5	Topsoil	10500	End scraper	Small triangular scraper. Semi-abrupt, slightly invasive retouch to distal end. Mesolithic.
6	Topsoil	10200	Tanged point	Tang at proximal end. Bifacially retouched. Relatively thick piece. Mesolithic

Fig. 2.6 Neolithic and Bronze Age flint

possible broken laurel leaf point was also recovered from the 2002/3 site (context 10500). This piece was manufactured on a thick, hinged tertiary flake with invasive covering retouch on the dorsal surface and a few sporadic retouch removals on the ventral surface. A broken chisel arrowhead (Fig. 2.6.2) from the same area (context 12242) can be dated to the mid or later Neolithic, along with two Levallois-style cores (both from context 10500). The re-appearance of Levallois technology in the Neolithic period is thought to be associated with the production of blanks for transverse arrowheads (eg Green 1974, 84) and, as such, these cores probably belong to broadly the same phase as the chisel arrowhead from the same site.

The Neolithic assemblage, although largely redeposited, indicates the presence of Neolithic communities within the general area. The concentration of residual flintwork around and within the fills of the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ring ditch might suggest that the significance of this location was also recognised in the Neolithic period and may have been a focus of particular activities and perhaps settlement.

Bronze Age flint

Diagnostic types belonging to this period are virtually absent from the Higham Ferrers assemblage, although it is possible that non-distinctive flake material of Bronze Age date is present but has been overlooked. The distal fragment of a plano-convex knife (Fig. 2.6.3) was recovered from the topsoil (context 10500), and perhaps originated from a ploughed-out Beaker burial. It may also be significant that two blades were found among cremated bones within an early Bronze Age Collared Urn; both blades were burnt and may represent grave goods. The neatly worked serrated flake (Fig. 2.6.4) is unlikely to date later than the early Bronze Age, but could equally belong to a Mesolithic or Neolithic industry. An unusual tanged flake (Fig. 2.6.5) from context 12102 may represent a knife or an unfinished barbed-and-tanged arrowhead which, in the latter case, would align it with an early Bronze Age industry. Otherwise, there is little material that can be conclusively assigned to the early part of the period, and later Bronze Age material is conspicuously absent.

It seems that the limited activity in the Bronze Age period was mostly related to non-domestic practices, including a Collared Urn cremation burial. It is possible that the plano-convex knife also originated from a burial context, but has since been redeposited in the ploughsoil. There are no groups of flintwork that could be related to general settlement activity nearby.

A catalogue of illustrated Neolithic and Bronze Age flints is shown in Table 2.6.

EARLY PREHISTORIC POTTERY

by Emily Edwards

Introduction

A total of 173 (1402 g) sherds of pottery were recovered, including a Collared Urn, two Mortlake rim sherds and two groups which were associated with the ring ditch.

Methodology

The assemblage was quantified by weight and sherd number. The pottery is characterised by fabric, form, surface treatment, decoration and colour. The vessel fabric was examined macroscopically. OA standard codes are used to denote inclusion types (G = Grog; V = voids left by leached shell

Table 2.6 Catalogue of flints illustrated in Figure 2.6

No.	*Feature*	*Context*	*Small find no.*	*Category*	*Description*
1	Ditch 11249	11248	1433	Polished axe	Partially polished axe. Complete, with modern ?plough knock to butt end. 127 x 48 x 23 mm. Blade edge finely-ground, perfunctory grinding to rest of surface. Lateral edges finely ground and shaped. Neolithic. 158 g.
2	Robber trench	12241	12242	Chisel arrowhead	Broken chisel arrowhead. Mid/late Neolithic.
3	Topsoil	10500		Plano-convex knife	Distal end of plano-convex knife made on secondary flake with thermal areas. Semi-abrupt invasive retouch. A few sporadic inverse removals. Deliberately snapped? Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age.
4	Robber trench	12154	12376	Serrated flake	Broad tertiary flake with serrations to length of left-hand edge. Silica gloss present on ventral surface of edge. Small, neat notch retouched below bulb on right-hand edge, perhaps for hafting purposes.
5	Colluvium	12102		Unclassifiable knife	Tanged piece - possible knife or unfinished barbed & tanged arrowhead? Made on broad secondary flake with inversely retouched tang and notches at distal end; proximal end apparently snapped.

or calcareous inclusions; F = flint) and the size range of inclusions (1 = <1 mm fine; 2 = 1-3 mm fine-medium; 3 = 3 mm < medium-coarse).

Fabrics

G1 The clay matrix was hackly and contained rare pieces of grog up to 5 mm
F1 10% flint, sized from 1-3 mm
V1 5-10% plate-like voids up to 1 mm. Leached shell
V3 20-30% small voids, either leeched shell or calcareous inclusions

Middle Neolithic pits

A total of two Mortlake rims were recovered from pit 1319 and are illustrated in Figure 2.7 (1 and 2). The fabrics and expanded rim form are typical of this style. The decoration on the first rim is slightly unusual, as it was applied, using the end of a sharp implement, to the area underneath the external expansion of the rim. The second rim is very similar to rims noted at Yarnton, Oxon (Edwards and Barclay forthcoming) and Horcott Quarry, Gloucestershire (Edwards forthcoming).

Early Bronze Age cremation burial (10000)

One inverted Collared Urn (Pl. 2.2; Fig. 2.7.3), weighing 853 g and containing a cremation burial, was recovered from a ledge within a pit at Higham Ferrers (context 10003, pit 10002). This is a Tripartite Form 1a according to Longworth (Longworth 1984), the collar of which has been decorated with filled triangles and horizontal lines, by means of a length of twisted cord. The vessel was handmade and smoothed before being open fired for a short amount of time at a low temperature. The form is internally moulded with a wide, concave collar and a pronounced but rounded shoulder. The collar has been exaggerated using an applied, smoothed cordon. It is clear that this vessel was deposited whole and that damage took place during excavation (see above).

It is still uncertain whether Collared Urns had a domestic function or whether they were specifically made for funerary rituals, although there is strong evidence to support the former (Tomalin 1995, 102; Burgess 1980, 84; 1986, 341). Without evidence such as a positive lipid residue result, it could not be established that this vessel was made for the cremation ritual alone.

Deposit from the ring ditch recut

A total of 122 sherds (416 g) was recovered from the recut of the ring ditch. These sherds were very abraded and the average weight was 3.4 g. The rims were equally small and, given the absence of decorated sherds and the ubiquitous nature of shell tempering during the prehistoric in this region, dating was difficult. The small squared rims and plain, straight walled body sherds do not fit with an early Bronze Age date; the rim shape and thickening below the rim are suggestive of middle Bronze Age Globular Urns. This date is by no means certain, however, as the diagnostic sherds were too small for confident identification.

Prehistoric sherds from the shrine interior soil layer

Four residual sherds (12 g) were recovered from context 12721 within the Roman shrine area, near to the cremation burial. These were manufactured from the same V1 fabric used for the manufacture of the Peterborough Ware fragments from pit 1319 and were low fired, unoxidised and smoothed. The refitting rim and shoulder fragment (Fig. 2.7.4) was decorated with a single line of impressions that were either fingernail or cord impressions. The vessel was apparently coil built and the shoulder had been formed by means of an applied, smoothed cordon which had been drawn up to thicken the rim and thus to create a putative collar. One body sherd was covered with what may either have been iron staining or the remains of charred residue, the latter of which would be extremely unusual for earlier Neolithic pottery.

It is difficult to be certain of the date of this little vessel due to its size, condition and the fact that the decoration is so minimal and worn. Cordons and single lines of decoration are very unusual for middle Peterborough Ware vessels; these features are more reminiscent of early Bronze Age urns such as Collared Urns and Food Vessels.

Given the fabric, simple flattened rim form, smoothed cordon, minimal decoration and general proportions of the sherds, a middle Neolithic or early Bronze Age date is most likely.

Discussion

Mortlake Ware was recovered in reasonable quantities from hollows at the habitation site at Ecton (Moore and Williams 1975), from the barrow ditch and a pit cut into the Long Barrow at Redlands Farm (Barclay pers. comm.), from West Cotton (Humble 1994), from Aldwincle (Jackson 1976), Grendon (Gibson and McCormick 1985) and from a central pit at the Neolithic mortuary enclosure/oval mound at Tansor Crossroads (Chapman 1997). The mound at Tansor was covered over and enclosed by a ditch around 2000-1900 cal BC, but it is not associated with early Bronze Age pottery. The fabrics and forms of the pottery from Earls Barton (Mercer 1984) suggests that these may be of Peterborough Ware date rather than being Collared Urn (Gibson 1995, 30).

A Collared Urn cremation was recovered from cremation pits at Redlands Farm, Stanwick (Barclay pers. comm.), which was excavated as part of the Raunds Area Project. Six Collared Urns were recovered from cremation pits at Grendon Quarry, four of which were recovered from one grave group; one

was bipartite and three were tripartite (Gibson and McCormick 1985). A total of 48 Collared Urns are listed in Longworth as having been recovered from Northamptonshire, three of which are of a similar form to the Higham Ferrers urn. The three comparable vessels are from Great Brixworth (987), Corby (992) and Rothwell (1017). Two of these urns were identified by Longworth as primary vessels and one as a secondary vessel (see below); the latter also contained a cremation.

Longworth's system was reviewed by Burgess (1986), who simplified the criteria and established an Early, Middle and Late Series, each relating to a phase of the early Bronze Age. Research by Needham (1996) has been used in order to place Burgess' series in a more up to date chronology. A Middle Series vessel is required to possess a minimum of three Early traits and no more than two Late traits (Burgess 1986, 345-48). The Higham Ferrers Collared Urn possesses internal moulding, an upright rim and a shoulder, all of which are Early traits. It also has a very narrow base and bold decoration with none below the collar, which are Late traits. This would place the urn in Burgess's Middle Series, which equates with the Wessex 1 or Bush Barrow phase of roughly the 19th-18th centuries cal BC (Burgess 1986, 350; Needham 1996, 131-2).

Catalogue (Pl. 2.2 and Fig. 2.7)

1. SF 95. Fabric V1. Small Mortlake rim with expanded rim and internal smoothed cordon. Decorated internally and on the rim with herringbone applied with a sharp implement. Decorated externally with the same sharp implement, pattern loosens into widely spaced zigzags. Firing, black throughout.

2. SF 96. Fabric F1. Small Mortlake rim with externally expanded rim. Decorated externally and internally with widely spaced herringbone, applied using a whipped cord motif. The top of the rim is decorated with faded cord or bone impressions. Firing: external, grey; core, grey; internal, grey; rim top, yellow brown.

3. Pit 10002. Context 10003. Fabric G1. Typologically Early, Tripartite Form 1a Collared Urn. Decoration: filled triangles and horizontal lines, applied using twisted cord. Depth of collar, 40 mm; rim diameter, 139 mm; peak of collar diameter, 130 mm; shoulder

Plate 2.2 The Collared Urn, after excavation and cleaning

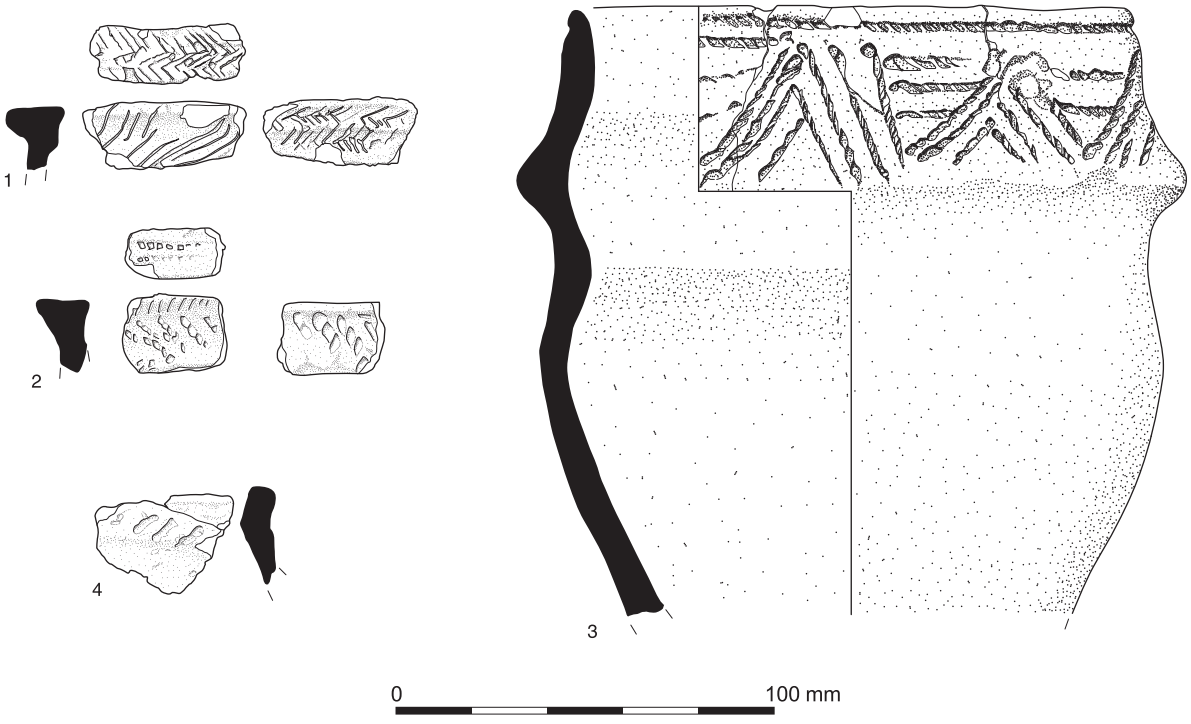

Fig. 2.7 Early prehistoric pottery

diameter, 120 mm; height, 140 mm. Weight 853 g.

4. Shrine Interior. Context 12721. Fabric V1. Small refitting, fingernail decorated shoulder and simple flattened rim from a small vessel.

THE BRONZE AGE CREMATION BURIAL

by Annsofie Witkin

The methodology for the analysis of the cremated bone can be found in Chapter 6.

Provenance

One cremation burial dated to the early Bronze Age was located on the far western edge of the site (Fig. 2.1). One deposit of cremated bone (10010) was within an inverted collared urn (10003), which had been placed on a ledge at the north-eastern edge of a pit (10002) (Pl. 2.1; Fig. 2.4). A separate substantial deposit of cremated bone (10001) was present on the base of the pit.

Condition of the bone and disturbance

The pit was 0.35 m deep and no bone was visible on the surface of the feature, which indicated that the burial was undisturbed. The cremated bone from both the urn and the pit was in good condition; none of the fragments were chalky or eroded.

Demographic data

The deposits (10001 and 10010) contained two individuals as indicated by the duplicate skeletal elements such as the dense, morphological differences of hand phalanges, and the presence of unfused as well as fused bones. Individual A was a female and aged between 27 and 39 years and individual B was of unknown sex aged between 13 and 17 years. A catalogue of the Bronze Age cremated human bone can be found in the site archive.

Pyre technology and ritual

The cremated bone was generally white, which is indicative of full oxidation (Holden *et al.* 1995a and b; McKinley 2000, 40). Observations at modern crematoria have shown that collectable fragments (<2 mm fraction) from an adult cremation weigh between 1000-2400 g with an average of 1650 g. Weights between 1600-3000 g have also been cited but it is unclear whether these figures also includes the weight of bone dust (McKinley 1997, 68). The total weight of the bone deposit 100010 within urn 10003 was 507 g and deposit 10001 weighed 1641 g. The majority of the bone from both deposits could not be assigned to either individual so the weight of bone specifically ascribed to each was therefore very low (Table 2.7). However, the weight of all bone (10001 and 10010) was 2148 g. This is quite a substantial amount which may well represent two complete individuals.

A number of factors may affect the level of fragmentation of cremated bone. These factors are the cremation, collection, burial, excavation and post-excavation treatment (McKinley 1997, 69). The largest fragment from the urned deposit (10010) was 79.8 mm long. This was slightly larger than the maximum fragment from the unurned deposit (10001) which was 68.3 mm. The majority of the bone from both deposits (61.5% from deposit 10001 and 63.7% from deposit 10010) was also represented within the 10 mm category. This indicated that the container had provided some protection against further fragmentation in the burial environment and that little further fragmentation had been caused by later activities such as ploughing.

In any cremation, the majority of the bones are unidentifiable fragments of long bone shafts and spongy bones. Some areas of the skeleton, for example the skull, are easier to identify than other bones (Table 2.7).

It was clear from the elements identified from both of the individuals that fragments from all skeletal areas and from both individuals were represented in both of the deposits. There was no preference in skeletal elements included in the burial. There was no great difference in the cortical thickness of the bone fragments because the individuals comprised a female and an individual who was near adult in age. It was therefore impossible to decide to which individual the majority of the bone belonged (Table 2.7).

Discussion of burial ritual

This single cremation burial comprised two individuals mixed through two deposits within a pit. The burial urn is assumed to symbolise a roundhouse of

Table 2.7 Weights of cremated bone within anatomical categories

Context	*Individual*	*Skull*	*Axial*	*Upper limb*	*Lower limb*	*Unidentified*	*Total weight*
10001	A	47 g	25 g	1 g	18 g	19 g	110 g
10001	B	39 g	3 g	1 g	24 g	21 g	88 g
10001	A and B	44 g	51 g	70 g	212 g	1066 g	1443 g
10010	A	24 g	17 g	2 g	6 g	0 g	49 g
10010	B	15 g	4 g	1 g	3 g	0 g	23 g
10010	A and B	45 g	59 g	25 g	71 g	235 g	435 g

the living and is therefore the symbolic home of the cremated remains, which implies a symbolic bond between the settlement and the burials (Ray 1999, 31). The commingling of the remains may also allude to this emphasis on the community since individuality has been denied.

CHARCOAL AND CHARRED PLANT REMAINS *by Dana Challinor and Mark Robinson*

Charcoal

A single sample was selected for charcoal from the Bronze Age cremation pit (10002), with results of the analysis outlined in Table 2.8. The methodology is outlined in Chapter 6.

The sample from pit 10002 came from a deposit (10001) of cremated bone and charcoal at the base of the feature. The assemblage was dominated by *Quercus*, heartwood and sapwood, with a few fragments of *Corylus avellana* and *Prunus spinosa.* Since fragments of hazelnut shell were recovered from the sample (Robinson, this volume), it is possible that the hazel wood entered the fire with food remains, rather than as a deliberate fuelwood. Indeed, since *Prunus spinosa* also produces edible fruits (sloes), this may explain the presence of this species in the charcoal assemblage. On the other hand, both of these species have been recovered as charcoal from cremation deposits of similar date, often assumed to be part of the brushwood infilling of the pyre structure, or used as kindling (Challinor forthcoming). Some cremation burials are even dominated by these species, suggesting that they were utilised as the main fuelwood on occasion (eg Challinor 2007; Gale 1992; Jones 1978).

It is of interest that the assemblage is dominated by a single species, since this trend has been noted at other sites and may be of ritual significance (Thompson 1999). Certainly, there is some suggestion that fuelwood was more carefully selected for cremations than for domestic purposes at other sites (eg Dorney, see Challinor 1999). Oak is commonly used for fuel and construction and since it would have been a valuable timber tree, it is likely to have been managed by pollarding or coppicing for most purposes, rather than felled in entirety. The presence of heartwood as well as sapwood in the Higham Ferrers sample indicates that timber of some age was included in the pyre and may support the theory that a single mature tree may have been felled for cremations. Of course, the careful selection of oak fuelwood may be related to the practical requirements of cremating a human body, for which oak is highly suited (Edlin 1949), rather than ritual significance.

The results from the nearby site of Raunds are interesting and initially appear to contrast with those from Higham Ferrers, since many of the Bronze Age cremation deposits produced charcoal assemblages of mixed species (Robinson 2006, 33). The authors suggest that there may be a correlation between the age/sex of the deceased and the fuelwood used, where infants and adults tend to be associated with a single species and children with mixed assemblages. Like the burial at Higham Ferrers, a couple of the Raunds burials represented two individuals, one adult and one sub-adult; and in each case the charcoal assemblages were dominated by oak. The burial from Higham Ferrers clearly fits into the hypothesis, although the fact that the adult was female suggests that there was no distinction between the sexes.

Table 2.8 Results of the charcoal analysis from the Bronze Age cremation pit
(r=roundwood; s=sapwood; h=heartwood)

	Feature type	*Cremation pit*
	Feature number	10002
	Context number	10001
	Sample number	600
	% flot identified	12.5
Quercus sp.	oak	159hs
Corylus avellana L.	hazel	3
Prunus spinosa L.	blackthorn	2
Indeterminate		1
Total		165

Charred plant remains

A single sample was selected from the Bronze Age collared urn for detailed charred plant analysis. The methodology is outlined in Chapter 6.

Sample 600, Context 10001, Feature 10002 (Phase 1: early Bronze Age).

Apart from a single unidentified cereal grain, the carbonised food remains from the fill of the early Bronze Age cremation burial were all of fruit and nuts. Most numerous were nut shell fragments of *Corylus avellana* (hazel) but there were also a couple of acorns (*Quercus* sp.) and a stone of *Crataegus* cf. *monogyna* (hawthorn). Carbonized hazelnut shell fragments are a frequently found class of food processing waste on Neolithic and Beaker settlements. It is possible that these remains were of a food offering placed on the cremation pyre. However, the acorns of the two native species of oak, *Q. robur* and *Q. petraea*, are rendered toxic by their very high tannin levels. Whereas acorns of some of the Southern European species of oak with lower tannin levels were commonly eaten in prehistory, there is no evidence for the human consumption of acorns in Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain. It is thought likely that the acorns and the hawthorn fruit had been on branches used to effect the cremation, along with the hazel catkins.

Since some of the charred remains from the early Bronze Age cremation were perhaps part of the fuel rather than a food offering, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the results. However, they do suggest that woodland food resources in the form of hazelnuts were being used.