

# Chapter 6: Prehistoric settlement at Green Park and Moores Farm – an overview

## Introduction

Green Park 3 and Moores Farm cannot be understood in isolation, as they form only part of an intensively investigated archaeological landscape. This chapter discusses the results from the two sites in the context of the other work to date in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape (Fig. 1.2), including the Green Park 1 and 2 excavations (Moore and Jennings 1992; Brossler *et al.* 2004), the Hartley Court Farm (OA 1991a) and Green Park Substation (OA 2001) evaluations and the Reading Sewage Treatment Works watching brief (OA 2002). The key issue that will be explored is: how did the inhabitation of this landscape develop through prehistory? Particular attention will be paid to the character of middle Bronze Age settlement and land use, as it is here that the evidence from Green Park 3 and Moores Farm makes the greatest contribution.

In order to better understand the development of this landscape, comparative evidence will also be drawn from the wider area of the Lower Kennet Valley, defined here as the stretch of the river downstream from the confluence with the Enborne. Many prehistoric sites have been excavated out in this area (Fig. 6.1), mainly in advance of gravel quarrying, though much of this work was carried out on a rescue basis prior to the 1990s under less than ideal conditions.

## Land and water

Green Park and Moores Farm occupy a fairly flat and low-lying gravel terrace landscape to the south of the modern course of the River Kennet. The area is crossed by numerous palaeochannels, which show that shifting or braided river systems existed in the area during the earlier Holocene, though none of the channels can be closely dated. At Moores Farm, two palaeochannels demarcated the northern and southern edges of the main area of prehistoric settlement. It seems likely that the southern channel had largely silted up by the early Iron Age, as pottery of that date was found within a layer overlying the edge of the channel. A palaeochannel 350m to the north-east of Green Park 3 at Area 3000B (Green Park 2) had largely silted up by later Bronze Age (Robinson 2004).

Today, seasonal flooding affects much of the area. However, claims that the area therefore could not have supported permanent settlement or arable farming in later prehistory (Johnston 1985; Lobb and Rose 1996, 82) fail to take into account changes

in hydrology over the last two to three thousand years (Moore and Jennings 1992, 120). Current evidence suggests that the onset of frequent over-bank flooding in the Lower Kennet Valley did not occur before the late Bronze Age at the earliest (Collins *et al.* 2006); in the Thames Basin as a whole it is commonly a feature of the Iron Age/Roman period onwards (Booth *et al.* 2007, 17-18). This is consistent with the evidence from the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape. At Moores Farm, alluvial layers sealed many of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age features, while at Green Park 1, Area 2000, similar layers sealed Romano-British features (Robinson 1992).

## Early prehistoric communities

### Mesolithic

Good evidence for Mesolithic activity was found at Moores Farm, where small-scale occupation occurred in an area close to the northern palaeochannel. Two hollows or tree throw holes contained early Mesolithic flint assemblages, and further Mesolithic flintwork was recovered from later features and from the subsoil, suggesting the existence of surface scatters. The flint assemblage includes a range of retouched forms, indicating that a variety of activities were carried out at the site. The features at Moores Farm fit into a wider pattern of Mesolithic use of tree throw holes and natural hollows across southern Britain (Evans *et al.* 1999). Evidence was much sparser at Green Park 3, where the excavations produced only a few pieces of residual flintwork broadly dated to the Mesolithic or early Neolithic. In the wider Green Park landscape, no evidence for a Mesolithic presence was identified in the flint assemblages from Green Park 1 and 2. A Mesolithic blade was recovered from the Substation evaluation, however, and a group of microliths was found in a single evaluation trench at Hartley Court Farm, c 200m from a palaeochannel.

The evidence from the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape is suggestive of relatively brief and small-scale episodes of occupation, a pattern that seems to hold for the Lower Kennet Valley as a whole. The best evidence comes from the Kennet floodplain, where Mesolithic flint scatters sealed by peat or alluvium have been found at Haywards Farm, Theale (Lobb and Rose 1996, 75) and Ufton Nervet (Allen and Allen 1997), the latter site possibly representing a specialised, temporary kill and butchery

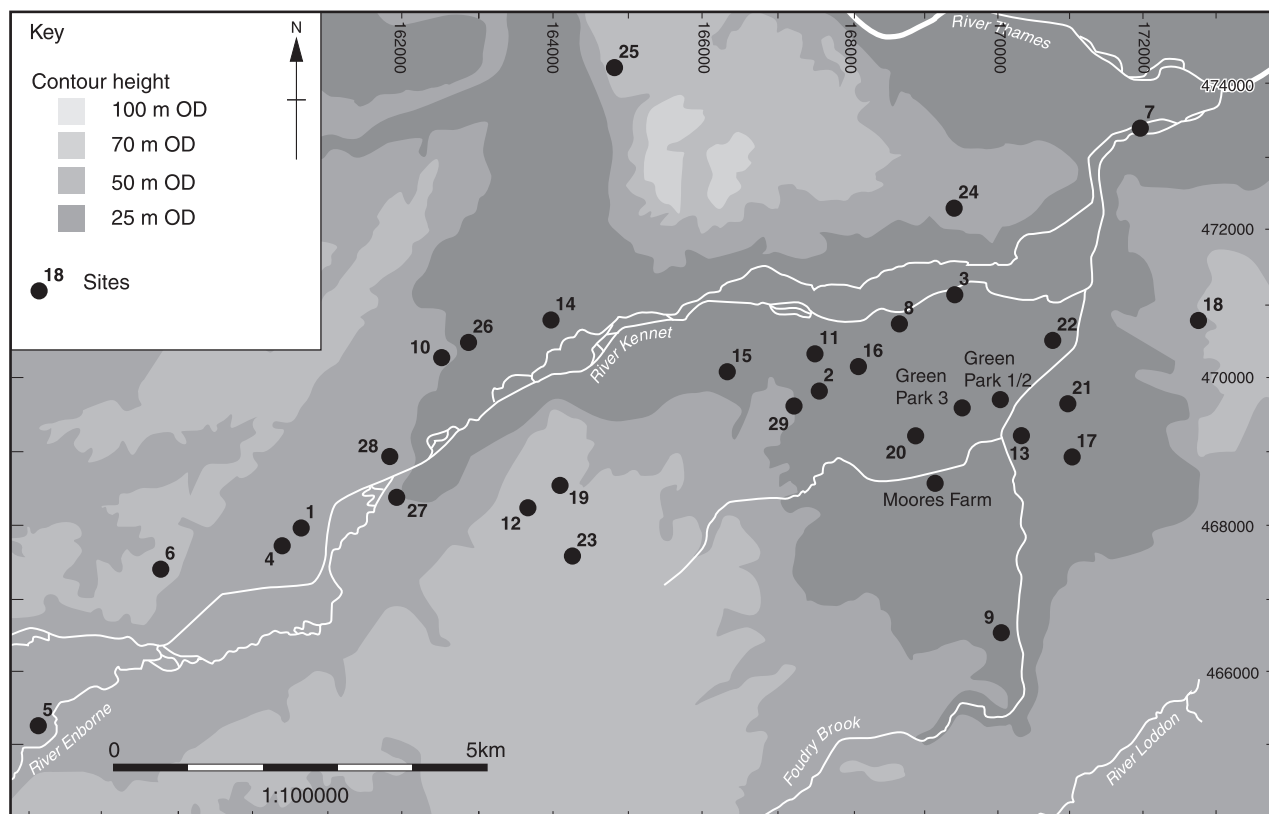


Fig. 6.1 Excavated prehistoric and Romano-British sites in the Lower Kennet Valley mentioned in Chapter 6. 1: Aldermaston Wharf; 2: Anner's Farm, Burghfield; 3: Anslow's Cottages; 4: Beenham; 5: Brimpton; 6: Cod's Hill; 7: Crane Wharf, Reading; 8: Cunning Man, Burghfield; 9: Diddenham Manor Farm, Grazeley; 10: Englefield; 11: Field Farm, Burghfield; 12: Field Farm, Sulhamstead; 13: Hartley Court Farm, Shinfield; 14: Haywards Farm, Theale; 15: Heron's House, Burghfield; 16: Knight's Farm, Burghfield; 17: Little Lea Park; 18: Marshall's Hill, Reading; 19: Meales Farm, Sulhamstead; 20: Pingewood; 21: Reading Football Club; 22: Reading Sewage Treatment Works; 23: Shortheath Lane, Sulhamstead; 24: Southcote; 25: Sulham; 26: Theale Ballast Hole; 27: Ufton Nervet (Allen and Allen 1997); 28: Ufton Nervet (Manning 1974); 29: Wickhams Field, Burghfield. © Crown Copyright 2013, Ordnance Survey 100005569

site (Chisham 2006). On the gravel terraces, a small flint scatter has been found adjacent to a palaeo-channel at Field Farm, Burghfield (Butterworth and Lobb 1992), and individual pieces of Mesolithic flint have been recovered at Pingewood (Care 1985, 33) and Anslow's Cottages (Harding 1992, 106). Further stray finds of Mesolithic flintwork, particularly tranchet axes, have been made at a number of places along the river Kennet corridor, along with a few on the higher plateau gravel around Sulhamstead (Lobb and Rose 1996). The evidence as a whole suggests that the floodplain and lower gravel terraces were the main focus of Mesolithic activity, with locations close to watercourses often favoured. While it is assumed that much of the landscape would have been forested at this time, river margins may have been characterised by a mosaic of woodland, low vegetation and grasses which would probably have made them attractive to Mesolithic hunter-gatherers (Chisham 2006).

The evidence for widespread but small-scale activity in the Lower Kennet Valley can be contrasted with the situation in the Middle Kennet Valley between Woolhampton and Hungerford, an area

famed for its high concentration of large, stratified Mesolithic sites. Sites such as Thatcham Reedbeds, which produced an assemblage of 18,400 flints, are of a quite different order of magnitude from the Lower Kennet sites and may have been repeatedly revisited or perhaps even continually occupied over extended periods of time (Chisham 2006). Chisham (*ibid.*) suggests that the Middle Kennet Valley was the 'main base area' for Mesolithic groups in the region, from which visits to surrounding areas such as the Lower Kennet Valley were made.

#### Early Neolithic

No evidence for early Neolithic activity was found at either Green Park 3 or Moores Farm, aside from the few pieces of residual flint from Green Park 3 ascribed a broad Mesolithic/early Neolithic date. Elsewhere in the wider Green Park landscape, the only good evidence for occupation in this period comes from Green Park 1, where a cluster of pits in Area 7000 produced a flint assemblage argued to include elements of both earlier and later Neolithic industries (Bradley and Brown 1992, 89). The inter-

pretation was that the assemblage is transitional in date, although an alternative possibility would be that this location was revisited over an extended period of time through the course of the Neolithic.

The paucity of evidence for early Neolithic activity in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape is replicated within the Lower Kennet Valley as a whole. The only feature of this period yet identified is a single isolated pit at Field Farm, Burghfield, containing a few flints and a single piece of plain pottery (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 7). Otherwise, evidence is essentially limited to occasional finds of diagnostic early Neolithic flint, such as a leaf-shaped arrowhead from Wickhams Field, Burghfield (Harding 1996). An alder stake from Kennet palaeochannel deposits at Crane Wharf, Reading, has been radiocarbon dated to 3820–3570 cal BC (Har-7028: 4950±80 BP), but there were no other associated artefacts (Hawkes and Fasham 1997).

From this it might be concluded that the Lower Kennet Valley was not densely inhabited at this time. However, the possibility that early Neolithic activity has simply not been recognised should also be considered. Until recently, it has been common practice in the middle Thames Valley to date plain, flint-tempered pottery to the late Bronze Age. However, recent work at Heathrow led to the reclassification of much of this material as early Neolithic plain ware, substantially increasing the evidence for early Neolithic activity at the site (Framework Archaeology 2006, 32). The late Bronze Age plain ware assemblages of the Lower Kennet Valley sites might thus repay re-evaluation, to investigate whether they too might reveal an early Neolithic element. In particular, the ‘intrusive’ late Bronze Age pottery recorded in many of the Neolithic pits at Green Park 1 (Moore and Jennings 1992, 6) may be open to reassessment.

### *Middle Neolithic to early Bronze Age*

From the middle Neolithic onwards, a human presence in the landscape becomes more tangible. At Moores Farm, two features – a pit and a posthole – contained middle Neolithic Impressed Ware pottery and worked flint. The two semi-complete pottery vessels from the pit probably represent a deliberate deposit. An unstratified later Neolithic oblique arrowhead was also recovered. Subsequent activity at the site is represented by a few residual sherds of Beaker and early Bronze Age pottery. No features of this period were identified at Green Park 3, although the majority of the flint assemblage was ascribed a broad later Neolithic/early Bronze Age date, and one residual sherd of Beaker pottery was also found.

Within the wider Green Park/Moores Farm landscape, a middle/late Neolithic segmented ring ditch was uncovered at Green Park 2 (Area 3017). Two samples of animal bone from the upper ditch fills were radiocarbon dated to the early 3rd millennium cal BC (NZA 9411: 2900–2580 cal BC; NZA 9478: 2920–2620 cal BC), though a third

produced a date of 1740–1440 cal BC (NZA 9508). An unurned cremation burial was found in the same upper ditch fill as the latter sample, and may have been interred long after the monument was first constructed. The ring ditch formed the focus for a dispersed group of pits, postholes and tree throw holes, many of which produced Neolithic flintwork. One pit also contained two sherds of Impressed Ware pottery, and another a single sherd of Grooved Ware. Activity continued 60m to the north in Area 7000 (Green Park 1), where as noted above a group of pits produced a flint assemblage argued to show aspects of both earlier and later Neolithic industries. Three further ring ditches in the Green Park area produced no finds but could date broadly to this period. A tiny ring ditch (3m diameter) was found at Area 3100 (Green Park 1). A C-shaped ditch found to the north of Green Park at Reading Sewage Treatment Works had an internal diameter of 13m and enclosed an irregular hollow or tree throw hole (Fig. 6.2). A more typical ring ditch, 15m in diameter, was uncovered 150m to the south of Green Park 3 in the Pingewood excavations (Lobb and Mills 1993).

Elsewhere in the Lower Kennet Valley, numerous ring ditches—presumed in most cases to represent levelled round barrows—are known from cropmark evidence (Fig. 6.3). Most occur on the river terrace gravels, and in particular in two distinct clusters to the west of Green Park/Moores Farm in the Burghfield and Englefield areas, though there is also a further cluster on the higher ground around Ufton Nervet and Mortimer Common (Gates 1975; Butterworth and Lobb 1992, fig. 58). Where excavated, a number of these ring ditches have produced late Neolithic and/or early Bronze Age pottery and flint, as at Field Farm, Burghfield (Butterworth and Lobb 1992), Amner’s Farm, Burghfield (Lobb 1985), Englefield (Healy 1993) and Beenham (Anon. 1964, 99; Holgate 1988, table 29). Some of these ring ditches seem to have been foci for contemporary activity, being associated with pits or flint scatters. At Field Farm, a sequence can be seen in which a hollow containing a Neolithic hearth and an Impressed Ware vessel was later enclosed by a ring ditch that produced a radiocarbon date of 2130–1710 cal BC (HAR-9142: 3560±70 BP) from a lower fill; three cremation burials contained within Collared Urns were found close to the inner edge of the ditch. Away from known burial monuments, traces of occupation are sparse. A middle Neolithic pit containing Impressed Ware pottery has been found at Wickhams Field, Burghfield (Crockett 1996), but otherwise evidence is limited to a few residual or unstratified finds such as a late Neolithic flake and Beaker sherds from Anslow’s Cottages (Butterworth and Lobb 1992). A paucity of structural features associated with settlement in the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age is a common pattern in many areas of southern England, and suggests that material was often deposited in surface spreads or middens rather than cut features (Garrow 2006).

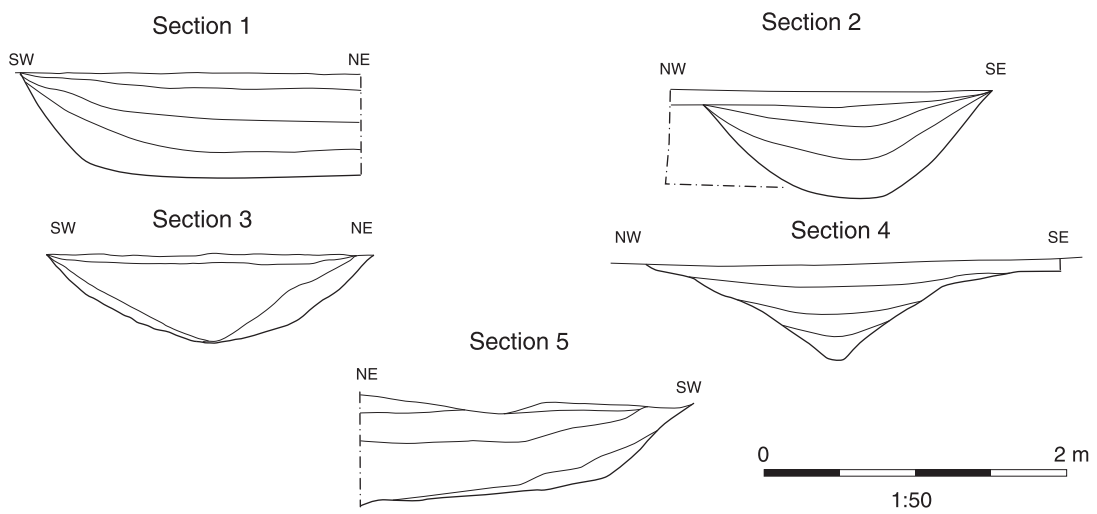
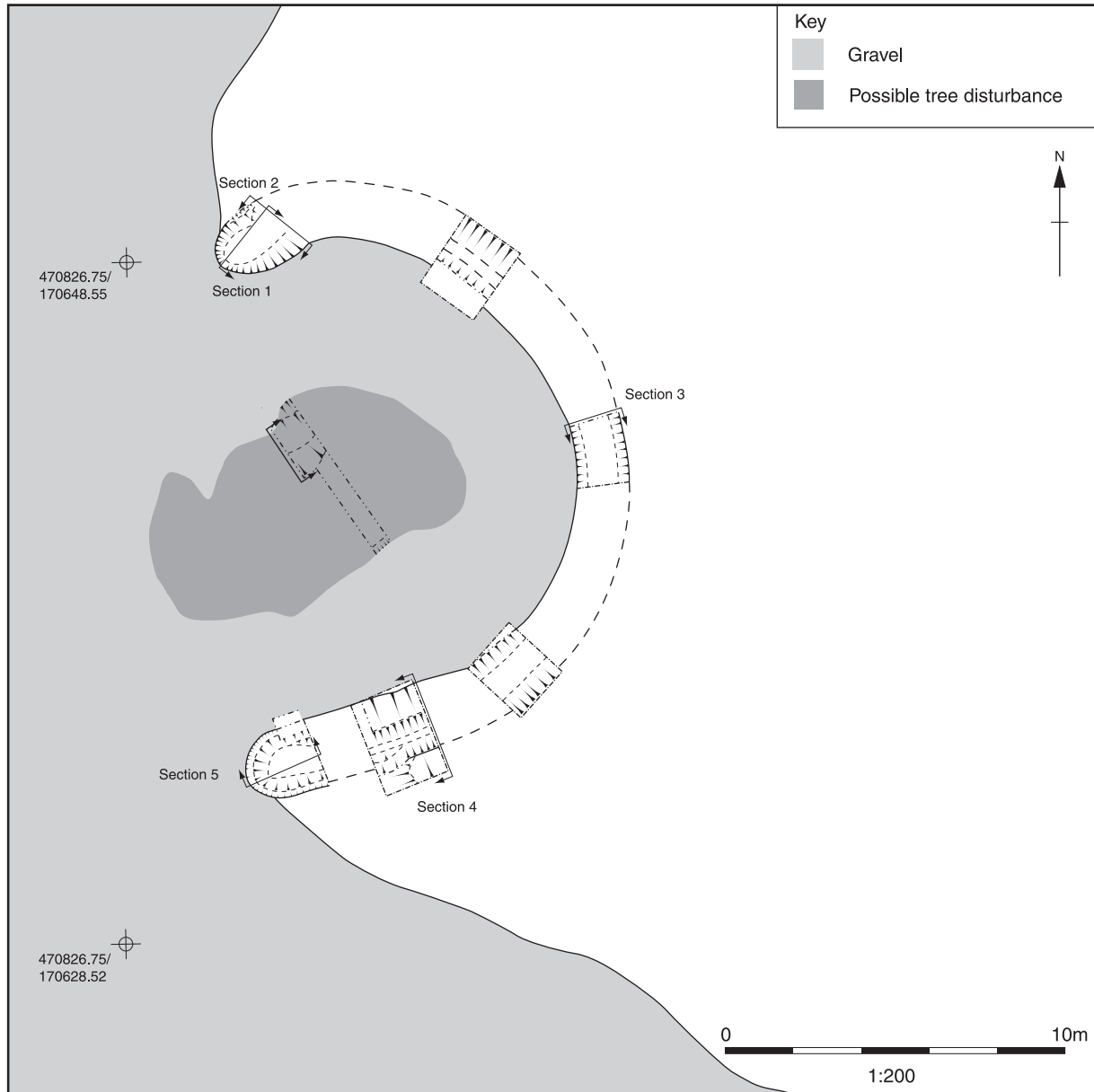


Fig. 6.2 C-shaped ring ditch, Reading Sewage Treatment Works

Little is known of the contemporary environment of the Lower Kennet Valley, although at Anslow's Cottages it has been argued that alder carr on the floodplain had been partly cleared for grazing by the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, with the higher gravel terrace supporting some arable agriculture (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 172).

The evidence suggests that the Lower Kennet Valley was similar to much of southern England during this period in that settlement was fairly mobile, with people moving through the landscape on a seasonal basis, coming together and dispersing at different times of year. Burial monuments provided 'fixed points' in the landscape that were foci for repeated visits or seasonal gatherings (Brück 1999a). In this way the monuments may have helped to articulate claims to land and resources, perhaps instituting a system of land tenure that prefigured the field systems of the later Bronze Age (see below).

### Later Bronze Age settlement and farming

#### *Middle Bronze Age settlement at Green Park 3 and Moores Farm*

At both Green Park 3 and Moores Farm, field boundary ditches were laid out during the middle Bronze Age, and waterholes or pit-wells were constructed to secure the supply of water for people and livestock. Artefacts from the field boundaries and waterholes, as well as scattered pits and other features, provide evidence for episodes of settlement within the field systems.

At Green Park 3, a fairly regular layout of rectangular fields was constructed. Five waterholes were distributed across the field system, all located close to field edges or corners. One of the waterholes produced a piece of 'plashed' roundwood suggesting that the field boundaries were augmented by hedges. The main period of use of both the field system and waterholes appears to have been in the middle Bronze Age. Radiocarbon dates from the lower fills of the waterholes indicate that these were in active use between c 1450–1250 cal BC. The ceramics from the waterholes and field boundary ditches consist mostly of middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury wares, but also include some non-Deverel-Rimbury or 'transitional' material. Morris (Chapters 2, 4 and 5) argues that both pottery types were in contemporary use during the later 2nd millennium BC at this site, but the possibility that some of the deposition of non-Deverel-Rimbury pottery relates to continued use of the field system into the late Bronze Age 'proper' cannot be discounted. Other than the material from the field boundary ditches and waterholes, evidence for occupation was limited to two small pits. Overall, finds from the Bronze Age features were generally very sparse, though with a distinct clustering in the north-western part of the excavated area, in and around waterhole 2690 (Fig. 2.3). The sparseness of the features and finds from the site as a whole could

imply that it was peripheral to a settlement core lying outside the excavated area, but this need not necessarily be the case given the slight character of much of the middle Bronze Age settlement evidence from the wider region (see below).

The field system at Moores Farm was laid out across the area between the two palaeochannels. While the full extent of the field system was not uncovered, it seems to have consisted of fields of varying sizes and forms, demarcated by both straight and curving ditches. In some places the field boundaries consisted of a pair of parallel ditches, which may have lain either side of a bank or hedge, as seen in other Bronze Age field systems in the region (Yates 1999, 165–6). Middle Bronze Age occupation within the field system was concentrated in Area 16, where shallow pits, postholes, and two possible ovens were found in a loose swathe 125m across. No buildings could be identified, and the sparse distribution of finds gives little indication of any focus to the activity. A number of contemporary waterholes were also found within the field system, scattered around the periphery of the settlement area. There is little evidence that the field system continued in use beyond the middle Bronze Age. No diagnostic late Bronze Age finds were recovered from the field boundary ditches or waterholes, and it seems likely that the ditches had already largely silted up by the time the site was resettled in the early Iron Age (see below). Fragments of two late Bronze Age-type ovoid jars were, however, recovered from the site as unstratified material.

It has often been argued that later Bronze Age field systems in southern England were primarily associated with livestock husbandry (Pryor 1996; Yates 2007). The environmental evidence from the waterholes at Green Park 3 and Moores Farm might support this. Pollen analysis, augmented by insect evidence at Green Park 3, suggests an open landscape dominated by grassland; cereals provide no more than 2% of the pollen totals at either site. Given, however, that cereal pollen tends not to travel far from its source, it remains possible that some arable cultivation was occurring in the vicinity. Either way, the sparse charred plant remains provide no evidence for large-scale cereal processing at either site; just a few grains of barley were found, along with a single grain of wheat from Moores Farm. Survival of faunal remains was poor, but cattle, sheep/goat, horse and red deer were present at both sites, with pig also found at Moores Farm.

The repertoire of artefacts recovered from the two sites was fairly limited, including pottery, worked flint and saddle querns. Wooden bowls, a wooden ladle and a shale bracelet fragment were also found within the waterholes at Green Park 3 (see below). Thus while food processing and consumption were certainly taking place, direct evidence for crafts such as textile production or metalworking is lacking. It is notable that there are no examples of the cylindrical fired clay 'loomweights' (or oven

bricks: Woodward 2009) found at Green Park 1 and 2 and many other later Bronze Age sites in the Lower Kennet Valley (Bradley *et al.* 1980; Johnston 1985; Lobb 1990; Piggott 1938).

### *Waterholes: use and decommissioning*

Waterholes or pit-wells are a characteristic feature of later Bronze Age field systems and settlements in southern England. Indeed, the later Bronze Age was the period in which such features first appear in the archaeological record in any numbers (Evans 1999; Yates 2007).

At Green Park 3, the waterholes could be divided into two categories. There were three teardrop-shaped waterholes, each with a sloping access ramp leading to a timber-revetted platform, and two steep-sided waterholes that lacked surviving timber structures. Coincidentally or not, each of the steep-sided waterholes appears to have been paired with a ramped waterhole, one pair occurring within the eastern block of the field system and the other in the western block. At Moores Farm, only steep-sided waterholes were present, none of which produced any evidence for timber structures. It is likely that the two categories of waterhole were used and thought of in different ways. It would be tempting to suggest that one type of waterhole provided water for human consumption and the other for livestock, but this is difficult to demonstrate. In fact, it is not obvious that either type of waterhole was particularly well suited for use by livestock. During times when the water level was low, many of the steep-sided waterholes would have required ladders or a suspended bucket to draw water. The ramped waterholes could be directly accessed, but it is questionable whether the wooden revetment/platform structures would have survived for long under livestock trampling. It is of course possible that livestock were watered from either category of feature through the rather labour intensive method of using buckets to transport water to nearby troughs; alternatively they were simply driven to rivers or other natural water sources.

Another characteristic which distinguishes the two categories of waterhole is the nature of the material deposited within them during and after their period of use. While the steep-sided waterholes generally produced few finds, the ramped, timber-revetted waterholes at Green Park 3 contained some unusual objects (Table 2.2). Material entering the waterholes while they were still in use included wooden vessels, a human tibia fragment and a buzzard bone. After the waterholes had gone out of use, material deposited in their upper fills included a large group of pottery sherds (waterhole 2690) and a shale bracelet fragment from a source *c* 120km away in Dorset (waterhole 3091). Small amounts of cremated human bone were also recovered from the upper fills of two of the waterholes. Any wooden objects within the upper fills would of course not have survived.

Material recovered from later Bronze Age waterholes is often interpreted in terms of 'special', 'structured' or ritual deposition (Yates 2007, 16; Lambrick 2009, 285, 287). This is particularly the case where complete artefacts or other 'odd' finds occur. Examples from the Thames Valley include a complete globular urn placed at the base of middle Bronze Age waterhole at Kingsmead Quarry, Horton, Berkshire (TWA n.d.) and complete pots and a Neolithic stone axe head from waterholes at Perry Oaks, West London (Framework Archaeology 2006). The lower fill of a late Bronze Age waterhole at Green Park 1 (see below) contained a worked human skull fragment, shaped into a disc and perforated, along with a perforated wooden disc of a similar size – perhaps a representation of a second skull. Human remains have also been recovered from later Bronze Age waterholes at sites such as Shorcote Quarry, Gloucestershire (Brossler *et al.* 2002) and Watkins Farm, Northmoor, Oxfordshire (Allen 1990, 8–10). Brück (1999b) has drawn attention to comparable deliberate deposits in a range of feature types within later Bronze Age settlements, arguing that these acts of deposition served to mark significant points in the life cycle of the settlement and its inhabitants, such as the foundation or break up of a household unit. It is possible that the wooden objects and human tibia from the lower fills of the ramped waterholes at Green Park 3 were deliberate deposits of this kind that marked the construction of the waterholes, or served as offerings to maintain a supply of good, fresh water. The significance of the material from the upper fills of the waterholes is more difficult to resolve. Morris (Chapter 2) suggests that pottery from the upper fills of waterhole 2690 was carefully selected to include particular elements of both Deverel-Rimbury and non-Deverel-Rimbury vessels. This is an intriguing possibility, but overall the fragmented and mixed character of the pottery and other material from the upper fills of the waterholes arguably shows little to distinguish it from general 'occupation' or midden material. The presence of small amounts of cremated human bone within two of the waterholes may seem inconsistent with this. However, similar tiny deposits of cremated human bone are commonly found at later Bronze Age settlements in association with otherwise typical occupation material (Brudenell and Cooper 2008). At Green Park 2 (Area 3000B), for example, three pits and postholes within the later Bronze Age settlement area each contained 1–11g of cremated bone (Boyle 2004b). It has generally been assumed that cremated bone deposits of this kind were deliberate and meaningful, often being described as 'token burials' (Brück 2006a, 2006b; Guttman and Last 2000). This approach has been critiqued by Brudenell and Cooper, who argue for more attention to the complexities of depositional processes at later Bronze Age sites. They argue that cremated human bone may often have been incorporated into middens or the general occupation matrix some

time before their ultimate deposition. "It has perhaps too often been assumed that formality was enacted at the moment that human fragments were interred in the ground, rather than much earlier in their pre-depositional histories...By the time that human remains were caught up in cut features of the settlement, their previous identities, and even their presence in the material being deposited, may not have been clear" (2008, 29–30). While the material from the upper fills of the waterholes thus need not have been consciously 'structured', it remains possible that there was some significance behind the incorporation of midden or occupation material into these features at the time of their decommissioning. The fact that it was specifically the ramped, timber-revetted waterholes that were a focus for such acts of deposition could possibly hint that these were particularly important as sources of water for human consumption.

### *Interpreting the field systems of the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape*

The fields at Moores Farm and Green Park 3 formed only part of a wider pattern of later Bronze Age land division extending across the local landscape (Fig. 6.3). The Green Park 3 fields appear to be a direct continuation of the rectilinear field system uncovered 200m to the north-east in Area 3000B/3100 (Green Park 1 and 2), which followed an identical NNE-SSW axis. This shared axis breaks down further to the north, in Areas 5000, 6000 and 7000 (Green Park 1), where an irregular group of fields or enclosures on varying alignments has been uncovered. A few ditches probably representing further field boundaries were also found to the east in Areas 3, 5 and 6 (Green Park 1). The field boundary ditches investigated during the Green Park 1 excavations were ascribed to the late Bronze Age, though dating evidence was evidently scant; no pottery from the ditches is illustrated in the report, and it appears that the only diagnostic late Bronze Age form recovered was a single coarse jar from Area 7000 (Moore and Jennings 1992, table 15). Those ditches investigated during the Green Park 2 excavations contained both middle and late Bronze Age pottery, though only in the upper fills (Brossler *et al.* 2004, 15). Importantly, however, a clear stratigraphic sequence could be seen in Area 3000B/3100 whereby the field system was replaced by a 'nucleated' late Bronze Age settlement (see below). Elsewhere in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape, two ditches containing Bronze Age pottery and flint were encountered in the Substation evaluation, and at Hartley Court Farm a number of shallow ditches were uncovered that may belong to this period, although few finds were recovered.

Later Bronze Age fields thus covered much of the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape, extending across a total area of *c* 2 x 2km. However, it should be stressed that the fields did not form a single, coherent system similar to the very large coaxial

landscapes seen in some other parts of the Thames Valley, although at locations such as the Heathrow area of west London these coaxial systems (eg Framework Archaeology 2006, fig. 3.1) are only part of the story, as subsequent work has demonstrated the existence of broadly contemporary coaxial and 'aggregate' field landscapes, as well as unenclosed 'common' land (eg Framework Archaeology 2010, fig. 3.1) and increasing diversity of field system arrangements (*ibid.*, 375). At Green Park/Moores Farm, on a similar scale, although less intensively examined, there were small blocks of fields on varying alignments, possibly with unenclosed areas between (such as Area 3017 at Green Park 2). It is also noted that the fields show more than one phase of development. At both Moores Farm and Green Park 1 and 2 (Area 3000B/3100), ditches were realigned and fields added and altered over time. Overall, the evidence is suggestive of a landscape that developed fairly organically over an extended period, rather than being created in a single grand act of landscape planning. Compared to the large-scale coaxial landscapes seen elsewhere, the Green Park/Moores Farm field systems may have been created within a very different social context. Tenure may have been articulated on a more local level, with decisions being made by smaller social units (*cf.* Johnston 2005; Cooper and Edmonds 2007).

It is likely that this process of decision-making referenced pre-existing landscape arrangements or systems of tenure. Elsewhere in southern England, later Bronze Age field systems often respected or were aligned upon earlier monuments such as barrows or ring ditches. It has thus been argued that these monuments were in effect precursors of the field systems, marking claims to land which were subsequently developed or made more explicit by the ditched field boundaries (Evans and Knight 2000; Johnston 2005; Yates 2007, 134; Cooper and Edmonds 2007, 133). In the Green Park landscape, it is notable that the ring ditch in Area 3100 and that found in the Pingewood excavations (see above) together form a NNE-SSW alignment identical to axis followed by the surrounding field system (Fig. 6.3). In fact, a major ditch corner within the field system lay directly adjacent to the ring ditch in Area 3100. While the lack of finds from the ring ditches leaves their chronological relationship to the field system unproven, it can be suggested that the fields were laid out following an existing alignment of monuments.

There is as yet no evidence that the creation of field systems in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape was replicated elsewhere in the Lower Kennet Valley. It has been claimed that ditches found in an evaluation 2km to the south-west of Moores Farm at Diddenham Manor Farm, Grazeley represent a middle Bronze Age field system (Yates 1999, 158; 2007, 152), but in fact these features produced no dating evidence (Lobb and Rose 1996, 121). There is no sign that field systems continued

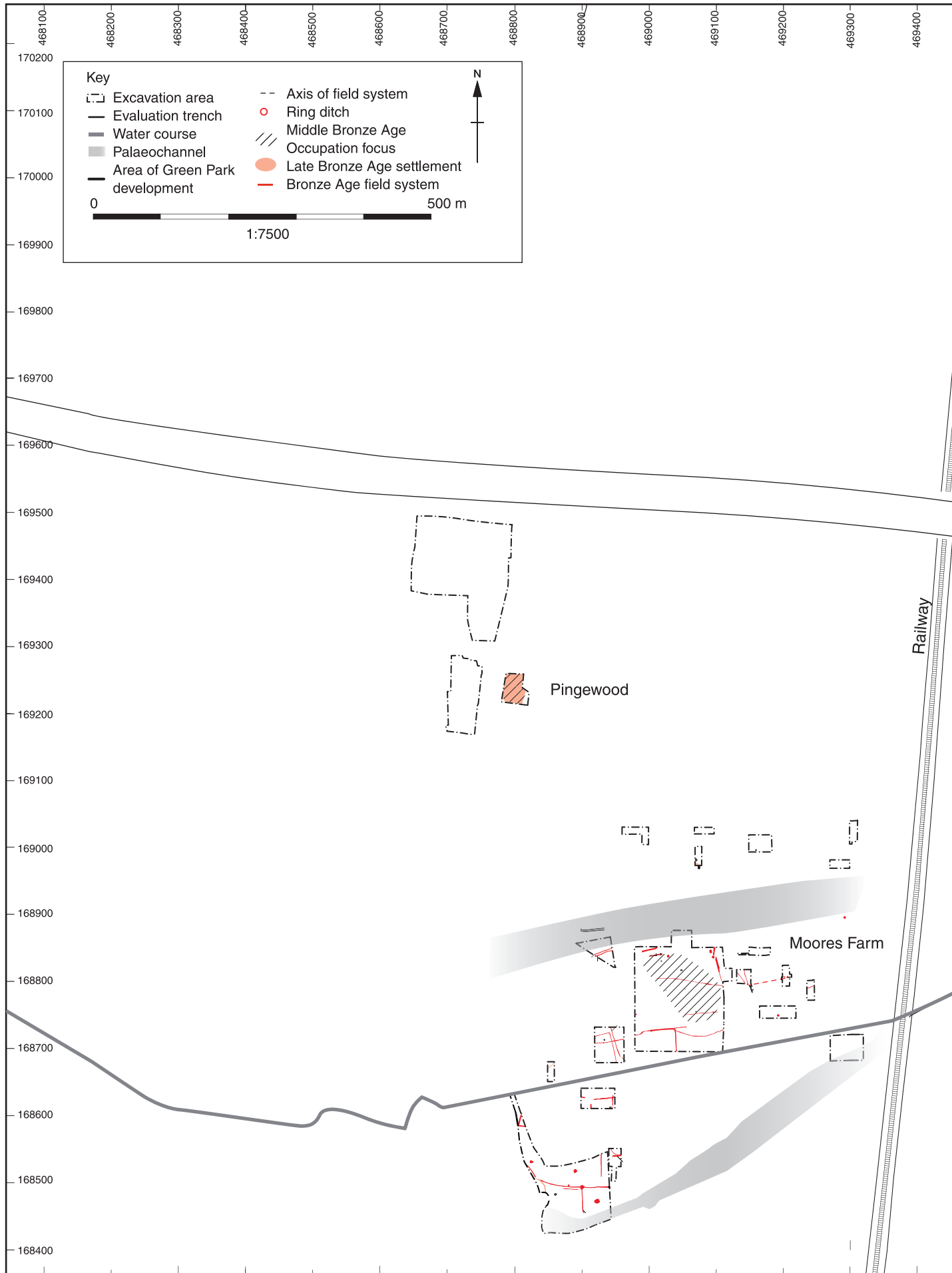






Fig. 6.3 The Green Park/Moores Farm landscape in the later Bronze Age, © Crown Copyright 2013, Ordnance Survey 100005569

along the gravel terrace to the west of Green Park/Moores Farm at excavated sites such as Pingewood (Johnston 1985), Field Farm (Butterworth and Lobb 1992), Knight's Farm or Aldermaston Wharf (Bradley *et al.* 1980), despite the presence of later Bronze Age occupation in each case. Further excavation could alter the picture, of course, and it should also be acknowledged that shallow field boundary ditches might have been missed in the problematic conditions of some of the earlier rescue excavations in the Kennet Valley. Nonetheless, it does seem that ditched field systems were not an essential element of settlement complexes in this period.

*The development of later Bronze Age settlement in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape and beyond*

As we have seen, middle Bronze Age occupation within the field systems at Green Park 3 and Moores Farm left only slight archaeological traces in the form of shallow pits and postholes, and sparse scatters of finds from field boundaries and waterholes. Any buildings must have been constructed in a manner that did not deeply penetrate the ground. Elsewhere in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape, middle Bronze Age settlement evidence is similarly 'scrappy'. In Area 3000B (Green Park 2), occupation within the field system was attested by a few sherds of pottery recovered from the field boundary ditches and a waterhole, and a single pit containing a semi-complete Deverel-Rimbury vessel. An urned cremation burial radiocarbon dated to 1260–840 cal BC was also found adjacent to a field boundary. In Areas 5 and 7000 (Green Park 1), some late Bronze Age settlement features produced small quantities of middle Bronze Age pottery, but contemporary features were elusive.

The inhabitation of this landscape changed character in the late Bronze Age, with the appearance of well-defined settlements associated with plain ware TLBA pottery (see Morris, Chapter 5) in Areas 5 and 3000B/3100 (Fig. 6.3). In Area 5, two clusters of post-built roundhouses were uncovered, with associated four- and six-post 'granary' structures, fence lines and pits. Twenty roundhouses were present in total, although many of these overlapped, so that the number of buildings standing at any one time must have been much lower. While plain ware pottery predominated, small amounts of decorated pottery were also recovered, indicating that the settlement continued to be occupied into the latter part of the late Bronze Age or the earliest Iron Age. This material was concentrated in the southern cluster of roundhouses, suggesting a southwards shift in the focus of occupation over time. The late Bronze Age settlement in Area 3000B/3100 consisted of two discrete clusters of roundhouses, four- and six-post structures, pits and waterholes. It is clear that the settlement post-dated the field system in this area, demonstrated by the fact that a number of settle-

ment features cut the field boundary ditches. Fifteen roundhouses were identified, though again there were many overlaps. A sharply demarcated 'blank' area between the two settlement clusters could represent a thoroughfare or trackway. Decorated wares were concentrated in the southern cluster, again suggesting a southwards shift in the focus of occupation over time. Probably at around the same time as this southwards settlement shift, a large burnt mound began to accumulate at the northern edge of the site. Pollen analysis of one of the waterholes associated with the settlement in Area 3000B/3100 produced greater evidence for arable cultivation (8% cereal pollen: Scaife 2004) than the middle Bronze Age waterholes at Green Park 3 and Moores Farm, perhaps implying a shift to increased cereal production during the late Bronze Age. Elsewhere in the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape, pit clusters representing smaller-scale foci of late Bronze Age activity were found in Areas 3017 (Green Park 2) and 7000 (Green Park 1), and two concentrations of late Bronze Age features were found in the Hartley Court Farm evaluation.

There is abundant evidence for middle and late Bronze Age settlement elsewhere in the Lower Kennet Valley, forming one of the densest known concentrations of occupation of this period in southern England. During the middle Bronze Age, several sites are known on the gravel terrace to the west of Green Park and Moores Farm. The 1977 excavations at Pingewood uncovered a swathe of pits and postholes in an area 50m across, producing 10kg of Bronze Age pottery. Some of the postholes were interpreted as belonging to fence lines or buildings, though in no case is the plan of these structures clear (Johnston 1985). The pottery included both Deverel-Rimbury and non-Deverel-Rimbury material, and Morris (Chapter 5) argues that this represents a 'transitional' assemblage similar to that from Green Park 3. A subsequent watching brief showed that the excavated features at Pingewood formed part of a much more extensive, dispersed spread of later Bronze Age occupation, though few details are available (Lobb and Mills 1993). To the west of Pingewood, at the adjacent sites of Knight's Farm (Bradley *et al.* 1980) and Field Farm (Butterworth and Lobb 1992), Burghfield, middle Bronze Age pits and postholes were found across an extensive area in and around a major ring ditch cluster. Features dating to the late Bronze Age and earliest Iron Age were also found, and the evidence suggests a polyfocal, shifting settlement pattern. At Field Farm, cremation burials contained within Deverel-Rimbury vessels were interred within or close to a number of ring ditches, one of which had previously been a focus for burial during the early Bronze Age. Fragments of middle Bronze Age pottery not associated with human remains were also found in the fills of several ring ditches at this site. Nearby, ring ditches at Heron's House (Bradley and Richards 1980) and Amner's Farm (Lobb 1985) also produced Deverel-Rimbury

pottery, in the latter case inserted into the upper fills of a monument that had previously seen use in the early Bronze Age. Further to the west, at Brimpton, hollows and soil layers overlying a silted palaeochannel contained finds including pottery, animal bone and a bronze spearhead (Lobb 1990). As at Green Park 3 and Pingewood, the pottery assemblage combines Deverel-Rimbury and 'transitional' elements (Morris, Chapter 5). Little is known of settlement on higher ground surrounding the valley, but a middle Bronze Age cremation burial has been found close to a ring ditch at Field Farm, Sulhamstead (Stoten 2008), and Deverel-Rimbury cremation cemeteries not associated with monuments are known at Sulham (Shrubsole 1907; Barrett 1973) and Shortheath Lane, Sulhamstead (Lobb 1992).

During the late Bronze Age, in addition to the scattered occupation at Knight's Farm and Field Farm, Burghfield, a settlement has been investigated on the gravel terrace at Aldermaston Wharf (Bradley *et al.* 1980). A pair of roundhouses was uncovered, lying within a fairly compact cluster of pits and postholes, associated with plain ware TLBA pottery. Large quantities of pottery and other finds were recovered, comparable in size to the assemblages found at Green Park 1 and 2 (Fig. 6.4). On the Kennet floodplain at Anslow's Cottages, a timber structure found at the edge of a palaeochannel is interpreted as a possible landing stage or revetment. One of the timbers produced a radiocarbon date of 840–510 cal BC (HAR-9186: 2570±70 BP), placing it in the latter stages of the late Bronze Age or in the early Iron Age. Burnt flint concentrations at the edge of the river channel could represent burnt mounds. Late Bronze Age pottery was recovered from pits and palaeochannel fills, though it was argued that there was no permanent settlement on the site during this period (Butterworth and Lobb 1992). Late Bronze Age activity is also attested at Cod's Hill (Lobb and Rose 1996, 81), Reading Football Club, Theale Ballast Hole and Marshall's Hill, though few details are known about these sites. At Reading Football Club, a short distance to the east of Green Park, late Bronze

Age/early Iron Age pottery has been recovered from a palaeochannel and a pond (TWA 1997; 1999). At Theale Ballast Hole, late Bronze Age pottery and cylindrical loomweights were recovered during quarrying in the early 20th century (S Piggott 1935; C M Piggott 1938). At Marshall's Hill, on the high ground overlooking the eastern end of the Kennet Valley, a circular earthwork described as a possible disc barrow was observed in 1907–9 but subsequently destroyed without record. Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery (including haematite-coated wares) was found 'within' the earthwork, and Bronze Age metalwork in its vicinity, but there is no stratigraphic context for these finds (Seaby 1932). Bradley (1986) has suggested that the site could have been a high-status late Bronze Age ringwork similar to examples known elsewhere in the Thames Valley, and Yates (1999; 2007) includes it in his class of late Bronze Age 'aggrandised enclosures'. However, the enclosure appears to have been very small and seems unlikely to have been related to this category of site (Allen *et al.* 2010, 250).

Drawing together the evidence from Green Park/Moores Farm and other local sites, the following observations can be made about the inhabitation of the Lower Kennet Valley between c 1500–800 BC. The stereotype of middle Bronze Age settlement in southern Britain is of farmsteads or hamlets consisting of a cluster of roundhouses and other structures, often set within an enclosure – an image derived largely from excavations on the chalk downlands of Wessex and Sussex (Brück 2000, 285; 2007, 25). Although a number of middle and transitional Bronze Age occupation sites have now been found in the Lower Kennet Valley, none correspond to this stereotype. Rather, the signature of settlement consists of loose swathes of pits and postholes, and deposits of pottery and other material within field boundary ditches, waterholes and ring ditches. The postholes indicate that structures of some kind existed, but as no clearly interpretable building plans survive these were probably quite lightly built. Whether these occupation areas represent permanent, long-lasting settlements must

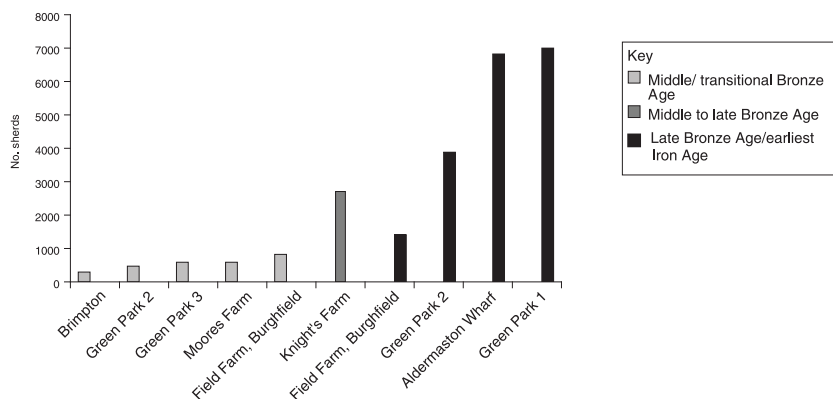


Fig. 6.4 Pottery assemblages from later Bronze Age sites in the Lower Kennet Valley, quantification by numbers of sherds

be open to question. An alternative possibility would be that there was a pattern of shifting settlement within this landscape of fields and burial monuments, with people perhaps moving on a seasonal basis or at intervals of a few years. The situation changed in the late Bronze Age with the appearance of well-defined settlements with more robust post-built roundhouses at Green Park 1–2 and Aldermaston Wharf, similar buildings occurring in a slightly different context at Hartshill Copse (Collard *et al.* 2006). Crucially, it is clear that one of the Green Park settlements post-dated the abandonment of the network of field boundaries at this site. Ring ditches were also no longer maintained during this period, or at least ceased to be a focus for deposition of burials or artefacts. It is notable that many of roundhouses at the Green Park settlements were rebuilt one or more times on the same spot, suggesting a long-term investment in place of residence not seen at the middle Bronze Age sites (cf Brück 1999b; 2007). It is also instructive to compare the quantities of finds recovered from the middle and late Bronze Age sites in the area. Figure 6.4 shows the size of the pottery assemblages from sites for which data is available. This is only a crude measure, which takes no account of variations in the areas or proportions of features excavated, but it does demonstrate that late Bronze Age sites typically produce much greater quantities of material. This may be a reflection of a trend towards longer and more intense occupation in a single location, although changes in depositional practices could also have played a role.

It could be merely fortuitous that well-ordered middle Bronze Age farmsteads and hamlets producing large quantities of finds have not been found in the Lower Kennet Valley, and further excavation may yet change the picture. It is possible, for example, that the main focus of settlement in this period was in a different part of the landscape, away from the fields and monuments on the gravel terraces. However, the possibility that middle and late Bronze Age settlements were genuinely very different in character should be entertained. Looking beyond the Lower Kennet Valley, the stereotypical middle Bronze Age 'farmstead' has been equally elusive in neighbouring parts of the Middle Thames region, despite extensive excavation over the past two decades (Ford 2003, 157; Lambrick 2009). Excavated field systems at sites such as Eton Rowing Lake (T Allen pers. comm.) and Weir Bank Stud Farm, Bray (Barnes and Cleal 1995) have produced scattered traces of middle Bronze Age occupation similar to those seen at Green Park and Moores Farm, with buildings again difficult to identify. A post-built roundhouse was found within the Bray field system, but this produced late Bronze Age pottery as well as Deverel-Rimbury material and probably post-dated the use of the field system (Barnes and Cleal 1995, 48), mirroring the sequence at Green Park 1–2. Many of the field systems in the wider

Middle Thames region respected barrows or ring ditches (eg at Eton Rowing Lake), which often continued to be foci for activity. For example, a ring ditch at Cippenham near Slough contained what is described as a 'midden deposit' in its upper fill, comprising middle Bronze Age pottery, flint, fired clay and charcoal. While this deposit could have resulted from some form of mortuary ritual, the excavator argues that it is more likely to represent the residues of occupation in the vicinity of the monument (Ford 2003).

The middle Bronze Age has often been seen as a turning point in southern British prehistory, marking a decisive shift from the 'ritual landscapes' of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age to the more familiar settled agricultural landscapes that characterise later periods (eg Yates 2007). The appearance of field systems at this time is certainly a significant development, likely to relate to developments in farming practices, even if assumptions of widespread 'intensification' of agriculture at this time can be questioned (Brück 2000). In the Lower Kennet and Middle Thames, however, the evidence suggests that in at least some respects the middle Bronze Age may not have been so very different from the early Bronze Age. The newly laid out field systems often respected existing monuments and hence perhaps existing tenurial arrangements. The traces of middle Bronze Age occupation found within and beyond the field systems are suggestive of a pattern of dispersed, shifting settlement, challenging the assumption that the appearance of fields must have gone hand in hand with the appearance of permanent farmsteads (Lambrick 2009). The continued significance of barrows and ring ditches as foci for burial and other activity also links the middle Bronze Age to the preceding period. Perhaps the construction of field systems, rather than marking an entirely new regime of settled agriculture, aimed to regulate land allotment in the context of an existing system of shifting settlement. Only in the late Bronze Age do we see the appearance of well-defined settlements with recognisable domestic buildings, which could occupy the same location for generations. The maintenance of field boundaries was probably abandoned at this time in many places, as at Green Park and Moores Farm, and across the region ring ditches seem to have lost much of their role as focal points in the landscape, to judge by the paucity of late Bronze Age finds. These developments may mark an important change in the way that the relationship between people and landscape was articulated. Before, family or community ties to land had been physically expressed by burial places and field systems, which contrasted with the ephemeral nature of settlements. Now, there was greater emphasis on the place of residence, expressed by the construction of more robust and permanent timber buildings, and the deposition of greater quantities of material culture in the domestic sphere.

It should be stressed that these arguments are specific to the Lower Kennet Valley and adjacent areas of the Middle Thames. Other regions of southern Britain, such as the chalklands of Wessex and Sussex (see above) clearly show different trajectories. This underscores the importance of acknowledging regional variation during the later Bronze Age.

### Early Iron Age settlement shift

As we have seen, decorated late Bronze Age pottery shows that the late Bronze Age settlements at Green Park Areas 5 and 3000B/3100 continued to be occupied into the closing stages of the Bronze Age or the earliest part of the Iron Age, albeit on a reduced scale and with a slight southwards shift in focus in each case (Morris 2004, 78–80). It seems clear, however, that these settlements had been abandoned by the latter stages of the early Iron Age. In contrast, Moores Farm was resettled around this time. A swathe of early Iron Age pits and postholes was found across the area previously occupied by the middle Bronze Age settlement, focused on a discrete cluster of pits set into a shallow hollow (pit group 2042), which produced a large proportion of the finds from the site. Two radiocarbon dates from the pit group calibrate to the late 8th to 4th centuries BC, and the pottery suggests that this can be narrowed down to *c* 700–400 BC (Brown, Chapter 4). The significance of the pit group is unclear, partly as a result of difficulties in disentangling the stratigraphic relationships of the individual pits. The pits are difficult to explain as quarries, but equally they do not closely resemble the cylindrical or bell-shaped storage pits known from other Iron Age sites. One possibility could be that the dense tangle of features relates to a multiple phase building of some kind; certainly, the sub-circular area of *c* 9m across occupied by the pit group falls within the size range of contemporary round-houses. Aside from pottery, finds from the early Iron Age settlement included saddle querns and fired clay loomweights or oven bricks. Environmental and economic evidence was scant, though cattle, horse, pig and red deer bone was recovered, along with a few grains of wheat and barley.

Elsewhere in the Lower Kennet Valley, there are a few other sites belonging to the period following *c* 800 BC. The neighbouring late Bronze Age sites of Knights Farm and Field Farm, Burghfield, seem to show at least some continuity of occupation into the early Iron Age. At Knight's Farm, the latest radiocarbon date of 750 cal BC–50 cal AD (BM-1595: 2240±120 BP) was associated with a fingertip-decorated vessel of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age type (Bradley *et al.* 1980, 274), while at Field Farm a good early Iron Age pottery assemblage was recovered from a single pit (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 46). At Wickhams Field, an enclosure and trackway were laid out during the early Iron Age (Crockett 1996), and pottery of this period has also

been recovered from Theale Ballast Hole (Piggott 1938). The finds from Moores Farm and Wickhams Field dispel earlier arguments that this part of the Kennet Valley 'was clearly abandoned' in the early Iron Age (Lobb and Rose 1996, 84), though interpretation of the character of settlement and land use in this period remains difficult, in part due to the paucity of environmental evidence.

### The end of prehistory

Occupation at Moores Farm had ceased by the end of the early Iron Age, and there is no evidence for further significant activity at the site prior to the post-medieval period. Alluvial layers sealed many of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age features, suggesting that increased wetness and seasonal or periodic flooding became an issue at some point from the later prehistoric period onwards. However, as the date of these alluvial deposits is uncertain it is not known whether flooding was a factor in the abandonment of the early Iron Age settlement.

At Green Park 3, a series of ditches demarcating boundaries or enclosures was established in the middle to late Iron Age. Other contemporary features were limited to a few shallow pits and a late Iron Age cremation burial placed within a wheel-thrown vessel. The low density of finds and paucity of charred plant material from the pits and ditches suggest that the main focus of occupation lay outside the excavated area, although no other evidence for later Iron Age activity has yet been found elsewhere at Green Park. The Iron Age boundaries developed into a more regular, rectilinear field system in the 1st to 2nd centuries AD. The sparse finds indicate that these boundaries remained peripheral to contemporary settlement. The Romano-British fields were probably associated with the settlement 250m to the east in Area 2000 (Green Park 1), where enclosures and pits ranging in date from the 1st to 4th centuries AD were uncovered (Moore and Jennings 1992). The fields at Green Park 3 appear to have formed one element of much more widespread land division across the Green Park area during the Roman period. Further Romano-British fields or enclosures have been found in Area 7000 (Green Park 1), 600m to the north-east of Green Park 3 (Moore and Jennings 1992), and at Pingewood, 150m to the south (Lobb and Mills 1993). Further possible Romano-British field boundaries were encountered during the evaluation at Hartley Court Farm, 200m to the south-east of Green Park 3, though these could be associated with the late 3rd to 4th century settlement found at the southern end of the evaluated area (OA 1991a; Keevill 1992). Probable ploughsoils of Roman date found in the vicinity of the settlement in Area 2000 indicate that arable farming was carried out.

A pattern of dense later Iron Age and Roman settlement and enclosure can be seen across the Lower Kennet Valley, an area that lay within the

hinterland of the late Iron Age 'oppidum' and Roman town of Silchester, 10km to the south-west of Green Park. At Little Lea Park, 2km south-east of Green Park 3, a small middle Iron Age enclosure developed into a larger ladder-like enclosure system with associated roundhouses during the late Iron Age and Roman period (Lambrick 2009, 117, there labelled 'Lower Lea Farm'). At Pingewood, 1km south-west of Green Park 3, excavations within an extensive cropmark complex identified at least two late Iron Age cremation burials and a settlement of the 1st-2nd centuries AD, comprising a series of enclosures flanking a trackway (Johnston 1985). On the Kennet floodplain, a late Iron Age cremation burial and Roman occupation levels have been found at the Cuning Man site (Boon and Wymer 1958). Further to the east, excavated sites include a middle Iron Age settlement at Southcote (Piggott and Seaby 1937); middle to late Iron Age activity at Theale Ballast Hole (S Piggott 1935; C M Piggott 1938); successive

middle to late Iron Age and late Roman settlements at Aldermaston Wharf (Cowell *et al.* 1978); Roman settlement enclosures and a trackway at Wickhams Field (Crockett 1996); late Iron Age and Roman enclosures at Ufton Nervet (Manning 1974); and a Roman settlement at Meales Farm, Sulhamstead (Lobb *et al.* 1990). While a number of these sites show continuity from the later Iron Age into the Roman period, it is notable that continuity from the early to later Iron Age is generally absent. The one possible exception is Theale Ballast Hole, where both early and later Iron Age pottery were recovered, but the absence of stratigraphic information for these finds (made during quarrying in the early 20th century) leaves the relationship between the two phases of occupation unclear. The evidence from the Lower Kennet Valley as a whole thus seems to match that from the Green Park/Moores Farm landscape in suggesting a dislocation in the settlement pattern between the early and later Iron Age.