NEOLITHIC TO SAXON SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AT MOUNT FARM BERINSFIELD, DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES

BY GEORGE LAMBRICK

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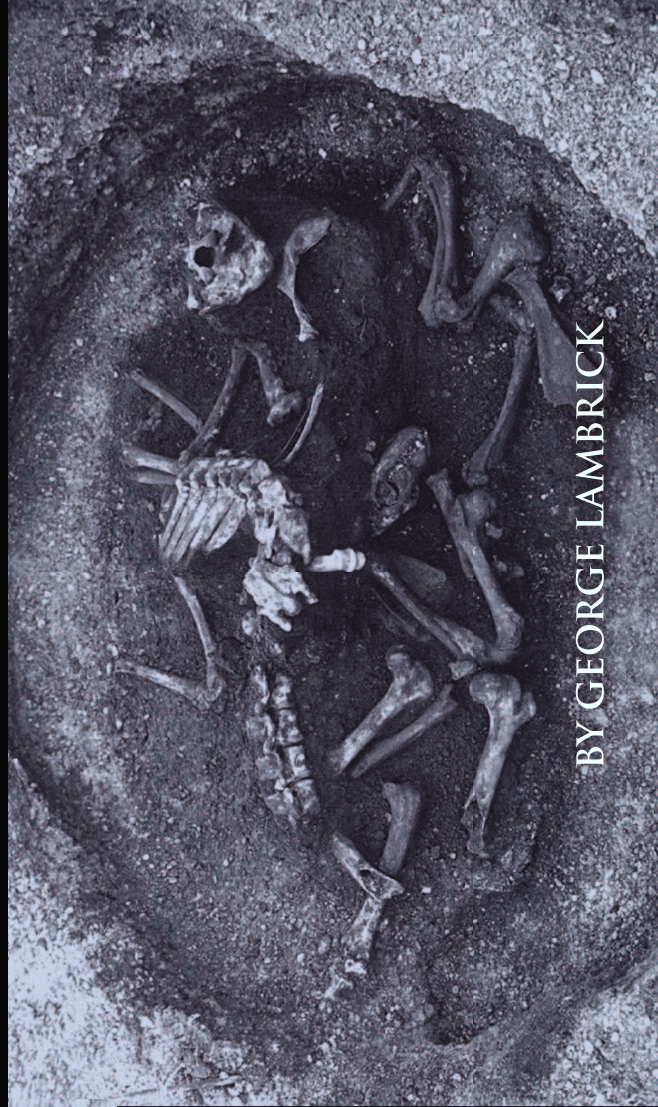
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Excavations in the late 1970s at Mount Farm revealed evidence for human activity extending from the early Neolithic to the early Saxon periods. The site, which lies on the Thames gravels north of Dorchester-on-Thames, contained an array of significant prehistoric features, including an oval barrow enclosing middle Neolithic and beaker burials, a post circle and a Bronze Age ring ditch with cremation and inhumation burials, along with evidence for domestic and agricultural activity. An early to middle Iron Age settlement and field system developed continuously through into the Roman period, while traces of early Saxon settlement were also encountered.

The long sequence of activity at Mount Farm is matched by an unusually long sequence of environmental evidence, which has revealed important information on landscape changes over the millennia.

This report contains summaries of, and discussion based upon, more detailed reports
which are available as a digital archive at: http://library.thehumanjourney.net/

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by George Lambrick

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Summary

Mount Farm is a multiperiod cropmark site on the Thames gravels north of Dorchester-on-Thames. It was initially excavated by J N L Myres in 1933, and this report covers more detailed work carried out in 1977-8 prior to the destruction of most of the site through gravel extraction. This established a longer chronological sequence than had previously been recognised, extending from the early or middle Neolithic to the early Saxon periods (3500 cal BC – cal AD 650) with all intervening-periods at least sporadically represented and the apparently continuous existence of a farming community from the Iron Age until the 3rd century cal AD.

Aspects of interest include:

- Early/middle Neolithic and late Neolithic domestic pits
- An oval barrow enclosing middle Neolithic and beaker burials
- A Neolithic or Bronze Age post ring
- An early to middle Bronze Age ring ditch with cremation and inhumation burials and small quantities of domestic or feasting debris;
- A pit associated with burnt stone and charcoal and a middle to late Bronze Age waterhole
- Part of an early or middle Bronze Age double-ditched field system aligned on the barrow
- Early Iron Age ard cultivation marks
- Early Iron Age to late Roman settlement with an unusually early network of paddocks or fields that developed continuously from the middle Iron Age through to the 2nd century cal AD, including a succession of further waterholes
- Traces of early Saxon settlement including two wells, one using the remains of a wooden tub.

Mount Farm provides an unusually long, though somewhat patchy sequence of environmental evidence, and indications of the nature of a relatively low-key site within the hinterland of a series of major focal complexes in and around Dorchester-on-Thames.

Résumé

Mount Farm est un site d'occupation diachronique, visible par prospection aérienne, du *Thames gravels* au nord de Dorchester-on-Thames. Les premières fouilles sur ce site furent initiées par JNL Myres en 1933, et ce rapport couvre les études plus détaillées conduites entre 1977 et 1978, avant que la majeure partie du site ne soit détruite par des travaux d'extraction de graviers. Il présente une séquence chronologique plus longue que celle qui fut initialement établie, remontant du néolithique ancien/moyen jusqu'au début de l'ère saxonne (de 3500 av. J.-C. à 650 ap. J.-C.). Il présente toutes les périodes intermédiaires, y compris celles qui n'existent que de manière sporadique, et révèle la présence d'une communauté agricole depuis l'Âge de Fer, jusqu'au IIIème siècle après J.-C.

Eléments importants:

- Des fosses domestiques du Néolithique ancien/moyen et du néolithique final.
- Un tumulus ovale contenant des sépultures du néolithique moyen et de l'ère campaniforme.
- Un cercle de poteaux datant de l'Âge de Bronze ou du néolithique.
- Une fosse circulaire datant de l'Âge de Bronze ancien à moyen, contenant des crémations et inhumations, ainsi que de petites quantités de déchets domestiques ou de festin.
- Une fosse associée à de la pierre rubéfiée et du charbon, et un point d'eau de l'Âge de Bronze moyen à final.
- Une partie d'un système de champs à double-fossé de l'Âge de Bronze ancien à moyen, aligné sur le tumulus.
- Des traces de culture aratoire du début de l'Âge de Fer.
- Un habitat du début de l'Âge de Fer et la fin de la période romaine, dotée d'un réseau inhabituellement précoce d'enclos et de prés qui se sont développés de façon continue depuis le milieu de l'Âge de Fer jusqu'au IIème siècle après J.-C., comprenant une série de points d'eau supplémentaires.
- Des traces d'un habitat du début de la période saxonne comprenant deux puits, dont un reprend les restes d'un bac en bois.

Mount Farm fournit une séquence environnementale, inhabituellement longue bien qu'assez inégale, et des indications sur la nature d'un site d'importance relativement modérée dans l'arrière-pays d'une série de grands ensembles majeurs à la fois dans Dorchester-on-Thames et dans ses alentours.

Translated by Catherine Person

Zusammenfassung

Mount Farm ist ein auf den Thames Gravels nördlich von Dorchester-on-Thames gelegenes Areal mit einer Anhäufung von Bewuchsmerkmalen verschiedenster Perioden.

Die Stätte wurde ursprünglich 1933 von J. N. L. Myres ausgegraben. Der hier verfasste Bericht beschäftigt sich mit der Grabung die 1977-8 durchgeführt wurde und der Zerstörung eines Großteils der Stätte durch Kiesgewinnung vorausgegangen war.

Durch die Grabung wurde an dieser Stelle eine länger als bisher angenommene chronologische Sequenz nachgewiesen, welche durch alle Perioden - zumindest sporadisch - vom frühen oder mittleren Neolithikum bis zur Sachsenzeit reicht (3500 v. Chr. - 650 n. Chr.) und scheinbar in Form einer Farmgemeinschaft von der Eisenzeit bis ins 3. Jhr. n. Chr. vortgeführt wurde.

Interessante Gesichtspunkte dieser Stätte sind:

- Früh-/mittelneolithische und spätneolithische domestische Gruben
- Ein ovaler Grabhügel mit mittelneolithischen und Beaker Bestattungen
- Ein neolitischer oder bronzezeitlicher Pfostenring
- Ein früh- bis mittelbronzezeitlicher Kreisgraben mit Brand- und Erdbestattungen, sowie einer Anzahl domestischer Ablagerungen, bzw. Ablagerungen die auf Festivitäten hinweisen
- Eine Grube, welche mit verbrannten Steinen und Holzkohle in Verbindung steht sowie einem bronzezeitlichen Wasserloch
- Ein Teil eines früh- bis mittelbronzezeitlichen Doppelgrabensystems, welches auf dem Grabhügel angelegt war
- Früheisenzeitliche Pflugspuren
- Eine früheisenzeitliche bis spätrömische Siedlung mit einem ungewöhnlich frühem Netzwerk von Koppeln oder Feldern, welche sich kontinuierlich von der mittleren Eisenzeit bis zum 2. Jhr. n. Chr. weiterentwickelten, einschließlich einer Anreihung weiterer Wasserlöcher
- Spuren einer frühsächsischen Siedlung mit zwei Brunnen, einer davon nutzte die Überreste eines hölzernen Kübels

Mount Farm liefert eine ungewönlich lange, zweitweise jedoch löchrige Abfolge von Besiedlungs spuren und Hinweise auf ein recht unbeachtetes Dasein im Hinterland von und um Dorchester, einem Gebiet, welches sich durch eine Reihe hochprofilierter Siedlungskomplexe auszeichnet.

Translated by Markus Dylewski

Acknowledgements

PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Geology and soils

The site at Mount Farm is situated about 58 m OD, almost exactly on the top of a gentle rise in ground between the Rivers Thames and Thame, about 2.5 km north of their confluence at Dorchester-on-Thames (Fig. 1). Immediately west of the site there is a small stream running south to the Thames, while to the east streams run into the Thame.

The site is situated on a small island of Second (Summertown-Radley) Terrace gravel resting in a saucer of Gault Clay, with more extensive gravel terraces on the floor of the two river valleys to the west, south and east (Fig. 1). The surrounding area is geologically diverse: within a radius of 6 km there are areas of Corallian Limestone, Portland/ Kimmeridge Sands, Kimmeridge Clay, Lower Greensand, Gault Clay, and across both rivers more elevated areas of Upper Greensand, Lower Chalk and Plateau Drift.

The gravel at Mount Farm has been an important source of Palaeolithic material (MacRae 1991). The underlying clay provides a perched water table which may have been an important inducement to later settlement, as is reflected in a sequence of waterholes and wells, some of which preserved waterlogged biological remains and a few wooden artefacts.

The soils of the immediate area have not been systematically surveyed, but their considerable diversity may be inferred from Jarvis's (1973) survey of soils on corresponding geological strata around Abingdon to the west.

Post-glacial archaeology of the Dorchester area

(Note: the following account was written before Wendy Morrison's (2009) review of antiquarian and archaeological discoveries in the Dorchester area was published.)

Rather little Mesolithic activity is indicated by flints from the area around Mount Farm, but such activity has been identified at a number of locations within the general Dorchester area (Holgate 1988). The wide gravel terraces of the Upper Thames where it crosses the clay vales were the chief areas of Neolithic activity in the valley, and Mount Farm was in the midst of a series of ceremonial complexes around the confluence of the Thames and the River Thame at Dorchester. To the south and west there was the major Dorchester cursus and Big Rings complex as well as another possible complex at Warborough (Whittle *et al.* 1992; Loveday 1999), while to the east and north-east there were the Drayton St Leonard cursus, long barrow oval enclosure and interrupted ditch enclosure complex, and, further up the valley of the Thame, another cursus, oval barrow and causewayed triple-ditched circular enclosure at Stadhampton (Barclay *et al.* 2003, 225-32).

Of these, only the Dorchester complex has seen extensive investigation, first by R J C Atkinson in the 1940s and later by the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit in the 1980s (Atkinson *et al.* 1951, Bradley and Chambers 1988; Whittle *et al.* 1992). The Dorchester complex consisted of mortuary enclosures, a cursus, smaller hengiform enclosures some with late Neolithic cremation burials, a timber circle, the Big Rings double-ditched class 2 henge monument, and various other ring ditches. There were also pits possibly associated with domestic occupation, and parts of a Bronze Age field system. While most of the ceremonial complex was later Neolithic, the complex as a whole (including the domestic activity and fields) developed over about 2000 years from the earlier Neolithic to the mid to late Bronze Age. This may well also apply to the Drayton St Leonard and Stadhampton complexes. The Mount Farm site is of interest in this context because of its topographical location on top of a slight rise between the rather larger neighbouring complexes, which are not intervisible with each other.

The group of complexes near Dorchester are one of a series of major Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial foci in the Thames Valley, with others around Lechlade, Stanton Harcourt, Oxford, Abingdon, Drayton, Benson and North Stoke (Barclay *et al.* 1996; Case and Whittle 1982; Lambrick and Allen 2004 ; Wallis 2009; Barclay and Halpin 1999; Barclay *et al.* 2003;).

In the middle to late Bronze Age some barrows continued to be used for occasional burials but construction of ceremonial monuments effectively ceased. A greater concern with management and control of land, probably within the context of pressure on how resources were shared by a growing population, was reflected in the appearance of archaeologically detectable field systems, of which a number are now known from around Dorchester, including Mount Farm itself, the Dorchester cursus site, Crowmarsh Gifford, Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham, Appleford, and Didcot (Lambrick with Robinson 2009). Traces of settlement activity including waterholes, pits and roundhouses also became more evident. Locally, the most significant focal places were the recently discovered late Bronze Age enclosure *c* 5 km distant across the Thames on Castle Hill, Little Wittenham (Allen *et al.* forthcoming), and, much closer to hand, the major late Bronze Age or early Iron Age enclosure at Allen's Pit, only 1 km SW of Mount Farm which was partly excavated under salvage conditions in the 1940s (Bradford 1942) before being destroyed by gravel digging.

The Castle Hill enclosure was accompanied by a major open settlement on the SW facing side of the hill and was succeeded by a univallate hillfort associated with ongoing open settlement. Other Iron Age enclosures and settlements are known from cropmarks and small scale excavation south of the river in the vicinity of Long Wittenham and
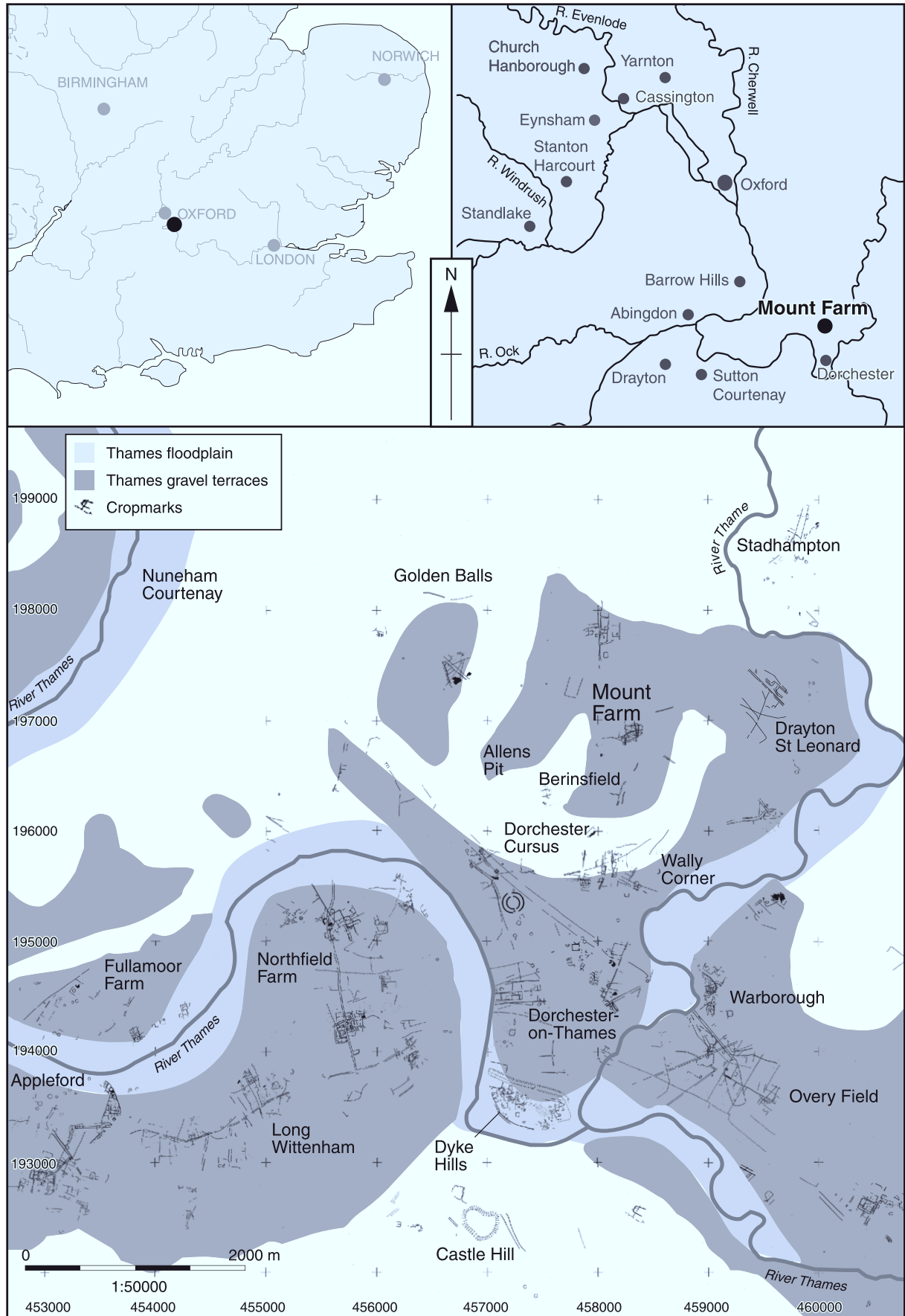
Fig. 1   The location of Mount Farm

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Appleford, but apart from Allen's Pit and Mount Farm there is rather little excavated evidence of early Iron Age activity around Dorchester. For the middle Iron Age, after the demise of Allen's Pit, there is still less evidence of settlement in the local area, though in the absence of excavation it is possible that the dense area of settlement enclosed by the later Iron Age Dyke Hills earthwork had origins earlier in the Iron Age, as is the case for the similar site at Abingdon. Recent work on pipelines, and other accidental finds, have started to suggest that there was significant activity somewhat further away, the other side of the Thame, around Chalgrove and east of Warborough.

By the late Iron Age, when the Thames seems to have become increasingly important as political boundary, the section of the valley from north of Oxford to south of Wallingford was an area where expressions of territorial authority in the form of linear dykes and riverside enclosures became a notable feature of the landscape, marked locally by the construction of the massive Dyke Hills enclosure which occupied a wide peninsular of land formed by the confluence of the Thames and the Thame. But apart from some evidence that the settlement at Dorchester itself had pre-Roman origins, there remains rather little evidence of late Iron Age settlement in the area around Dorchester.

It is generally thought likely that the presence of the major Iron Age defensive site at Dyke Hills was a stimulus to locate a Roman fort at Dorchester, though its military occupation was quite quickly superseded: recent work at Alchester suggests it was a much more significant military base (Sauer 2000). Dorchester lay at the junction of Roman roads running N-S and smaller ones running E-W, and developed into a small town with outlying cemeteries. There is rather more evidence of settlements in the surrounding area in this period, especially along the main roads, with that running north to Alchester becoming the focus for a major rural pottery-making industry, integrated into the pattern of farming, as is indicated by kilns just NW of Mount Farm at Golden Balls, and to the SW, now partly under the modern settlement of Berinsfield. Other ordinary farming settlements with extensive paddocks and fields have been investigated at Bishops Court and Wally Corner, where there was some intensification of occupation in the later Roman period. Some of the most coherent indications of the nature of Romano British farming settlements in the Thames Valley comes from cropmarks and excavations across the Thames to the south-east in the Long Wittenham and Appleford areas.

The Dorchester, Sutton Courtenay, Drayton and Abingdon areas were especially significant parts of the Thames Valley for occupation in the early Saxon period, which is known mainly from numerous cemeteries, some with notably early (5th-century) artefacts. There is also growing evidence (from cropmarks and occasional excavations) of contemporary settlement. In the immediate vicinity of Mount Farm, the Saxon cemetery at Wally Corner, only 1.5 km to the south (Boyle *et al.* 1995) is notable. Evidence of Saxon settlement is known from Bishops Court and Dorchester itself which went on to become the see of the first Bishop of Dorchester, St Birinus.

Previous work at Mount Farm

The site at Mount Farm was identified from aerial photographs by Major G W Allen (Plate 1), and first excavated by J N L Myres with the Oxford University Archaeological Society in 1933 (Myres 1937). Apart from Stone's work at Standlake (Stone 1856-9), Myres' work at Mount Farm was one of the earliest investigations of Bronze Age ring ditches and Iron Age settlements in the Upper Thames Valley, and his results remained significant for several decades because of the long Bronze Age to Roman sequence, the range of Iron Age settlement features (including pits, then still interpreted as dwellings), and one of the most significant properly excavated assemblages of Iron Age pottery from the region.

Myres was able to demonstrate the stratigraphic relationship between the Bronze Age ring ditch and some early Iron Age pits, which indicated a break in continuity, but from the pottery, and more particularly the layout of various elements in the ditch system, he concluded that from then on there was a remarkable degree of continuity throughout the early Iron Age and early Roman periods: 'the population and manners of agricultural life seem to have altered little for perhaps five hundred years' (Myres 1937, 40).

This early insight into the nature of Iron Age and Roman rural settlement in the region has received less attention from subsequent writers than it deserved, but the pottery played an important part in the assessment of local Iron Age assemblages. It was one of a number of important sources for Harding's synthesis of the region's late prehistoric pottery typology (Harding 1972, 73-125), and was cited by Barrett (1980) in his discussion of the character of late Bronze Age pottery.

Although Myres' limited excavation succeeded in establishing some of the main conclusions to be drawn about the site, he himself recognised that it left many questions of detail unanswered. The subsequent work reported here has revealed several additional unexplored aspects of the site. Nonetheless, allowing for the more limited investigative techniques and interpretive models of his day, it is a tribute to Myres' skill that most of his basic conclusions about the sequence and character of what he found have stood the test of time.

The site remained an arable field for several years after Myres' excavation, but the area was requisitioned for a wartime airfield in 1940, initially for RAF bombers, subsequently as a US Air Force reconnaissance base (http://www.pixture.co.uk/Airfields/Main.html, accessed Jan 2010).
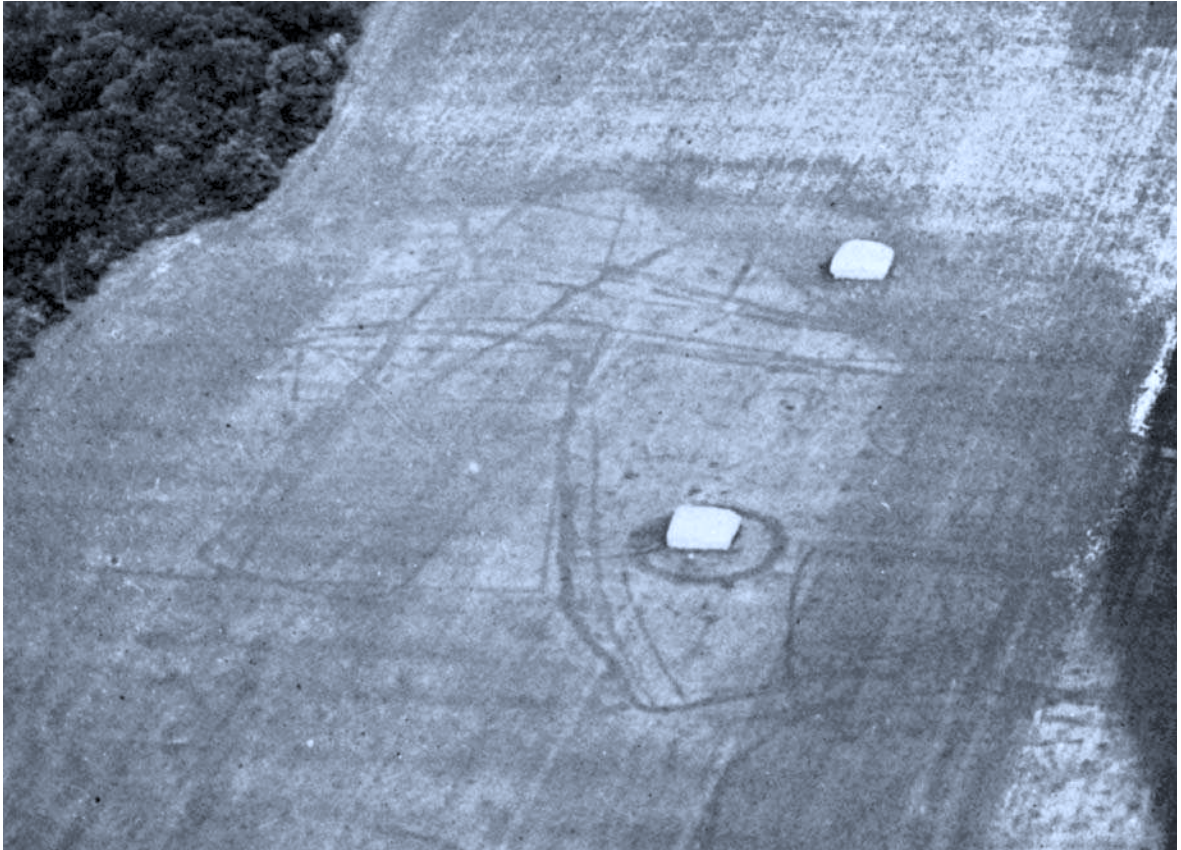
Plate 1   Air photographs of Mount Farm taken by Major G W Allen, 1933: a) from the west; b) from the south (copyright reserved Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

After the war it reverted to agricultural use until the mid 1970s, when planning permission was given for the extraction of gravel from the site. This began in 1977, and the company, ARC (now Hanson PLC), kindly altered their programme of work so that the main part of the site could be excavated prior to the gravel extraction.

Research aims and methodology

Compared with some areas of cropmarks, such as those around Stanton Harcourt (Benson and Miles 1974, Maps 21-22), the Mount Farm complex is small and appeared to be fairly well-defined, so that it was hoped that a relatively complete picture of the sequence of activity represented could be obtained.

Early in the excavation, once a thorough assessment of realistic aims could be made, a detailed table of objectives was drawn up, subdivided by period and the type of evidence to be recovered, including the sampling methods to be used. One of the overall objectives was to investigate sampling methodology itself, and a further set of aims covering this field was prepared at the same time. The detailed objectives are held in the archive, but can be summarised as being to:

- Develop sampling methodology and assess recovery bias from the collection of artefactual and ecofactual material

- Establish the site chronology and development

- Elucidate the social and economic basis of human use of the site

- Examine changes in the character of the natural environment

- Identify potential zones of activity within the settlement area through the analysis of artefacts, ecofacts and contexts

- Investigate taphonomic processes with particular reference to rubbish disposal and the formation of archaeological deposits

- Elucidate patterns of continuity within the settlement and the evidence for changes in the site economy

- Examine how the site fits into local and regional settlement patterns

These objectives were further refined during the post-excavation analysis and preparation of the report for publication.

The detailed re-examination of the site at Mount Farm on a larger scale than Myres' work provided some scope for interpreting the cropmarks beyond the limit of excavation (Fig. 2). During the excavation, the discovery of Neolithic and Saxon remains and waterlogged deposits of several periods made the project considerably more valuable than had originally been anticipated. It meant that the deposits not only covered the same time span as all the major Dorchester sites, but also provided a much richer source of environmental evidence covering an unusually long overall sequence. This greatly enhanced the site's potential to enhance our understanding of long-term environmental and socio-economic change in the immediate hinterland of the major prehistoric to Saxon focus of activity around Dorchester-on-Thames.

The investigation of taphonomic issues and sampling methodologies formed important subsidiary objectives that reflect an important preoccupation of 1970s and 1980s archaeology. The main areas of methodological study were pre-excavation survey; the effects of topsoil stripping methods on deposit survival; measurement of finds distributions; and assessment of finds recovery rates. Some of the main results have already been published in relation to sampling strategies (Jones 1978), and the taphonomic interpretation of Iron Age pottery (Lambrick 1984) and animal bones (R Wilson 1992; 1996; 1999). Many of the lessons learnt from these studies were assimilated into excavation methodologies used elsewhere, such as at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004). Some further results from these methodological investigations are included in this report where they are still pertinent, and more detail is contained in the site archive.

Circumstances of the excavation and survival of evidence

Mount Farm was excavated because of the threat of gravel extraction and because the site's long chronological span offered the possibility of exploring the local context of the main periods when the Dorchester area acted as an important centre of activity. Funding for the overall direction and administration of the excavation came from the then Department of Environment, while a Job Creation Programme scheme funded by the Manpower Services Commission provided most of the workforce.

The excavation was conducted on an open area basis and continued for nine months from September 1977 to June 1978. Winter conditions and to a limited extent the relative inexperience of some of the labour tended to make progress slow and at times difficult, but without any obviously detrimental consequences, except that less time was spent on salvage work than would have been desired. Bad weather conditions greatly hampered the company's programme of topsoil stripping, and round the main areas of controlled excavation the method of stripping (by bulldozing the topsoil and the top of the gravel away) precluded very effective salvage work. Elsewhere this problem was less serious, and in the area north of the main site, for example, a rather more reliable plan of surviving features was recovered, though comparison with aerial photographs suggests that here too information must have been lost without excavation (cf Fig. 2 with Figs 3-8).

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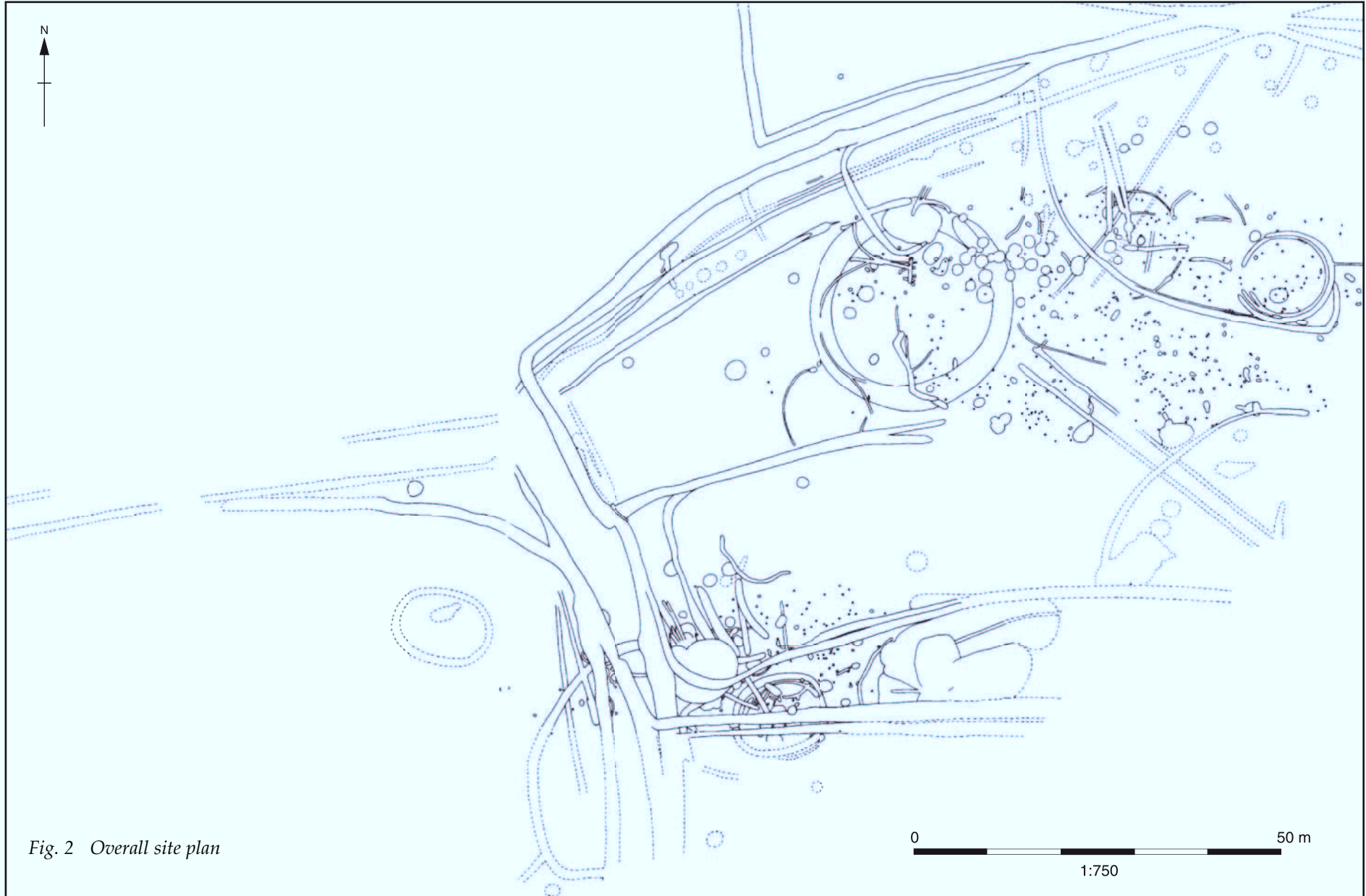
Fig. 2   Overall site plan

0 ────────── 50 m

1:750

Overall the evidence available comes from four levels of investigation:

- Aerial photography (supplemented in the main area of investigation by resistivity and test pitting)

- Areas of uncontrolled topsoil stripping to 0.2-0.3 m below the top of the gravel, which were subject to salvage recording of the deeper features

- Two (northern and southern) areas of controlled stripping to the top of the gravel by JCB – the main areas of investigation

- Within the northern area hand stripping (including gridded collection of topsoil finds) of the areas of a Bronze Age ring ditch and west-facing Iron Age penannular enclosure

Mount Farm is a typical ploughed gravel site, but the perched water table afforded the preservation of organic remains in waterholes and wells, which is rather unusual for sites on the higher gravel terraces in the Upper Thames Valley.

Until the excavation of 1977-78 and the gravel extraction programme which led to it, human disturbance to the site other than the 1933 excavation had principally been from centuries of ploughing (there were visible traces of the base of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation) and the construction of a wartime airfield, of which a significant proportion of the perimeter track still survives.

Three phases of destructive ploughing were recorded. An episode in the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age (of archaeological interest in its own right) contributed to the infilling of an early Bronze Age ring ditch (F101) and middle to late Bronze Age waterhole (F162). Medieval ridge and furrow was responsible for the truncation of many deposits and probably the total obliteration of others, as is reflected in the distribution of postholes in the northern area of controlled excavation. Modern cultivation had largely levelled off the ridge and furrow, and one or two post-war episodes of deeper
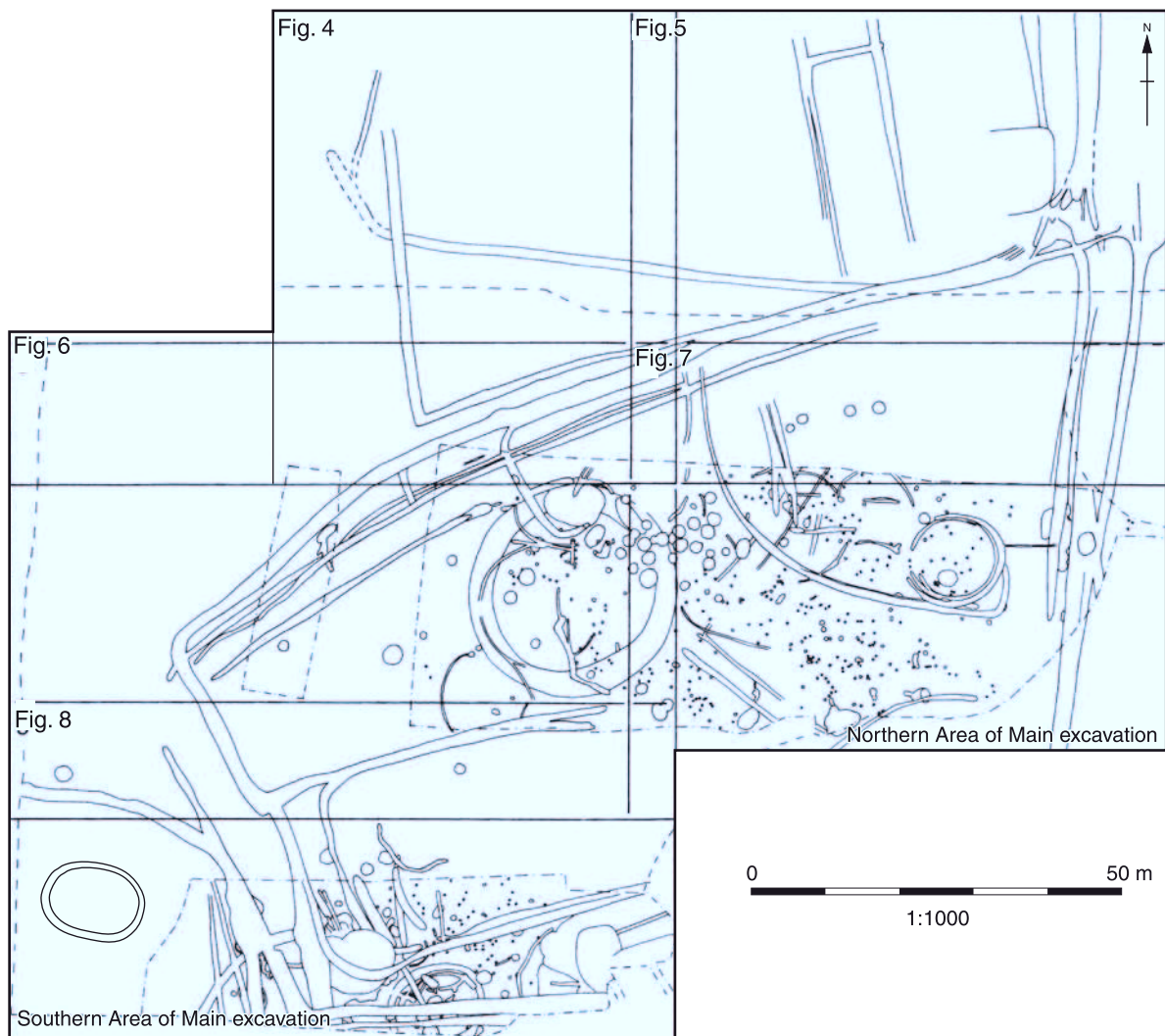
Fig. 3   Key to detailed site plans

Fig. 4   Detailed site plan: NW

N

905

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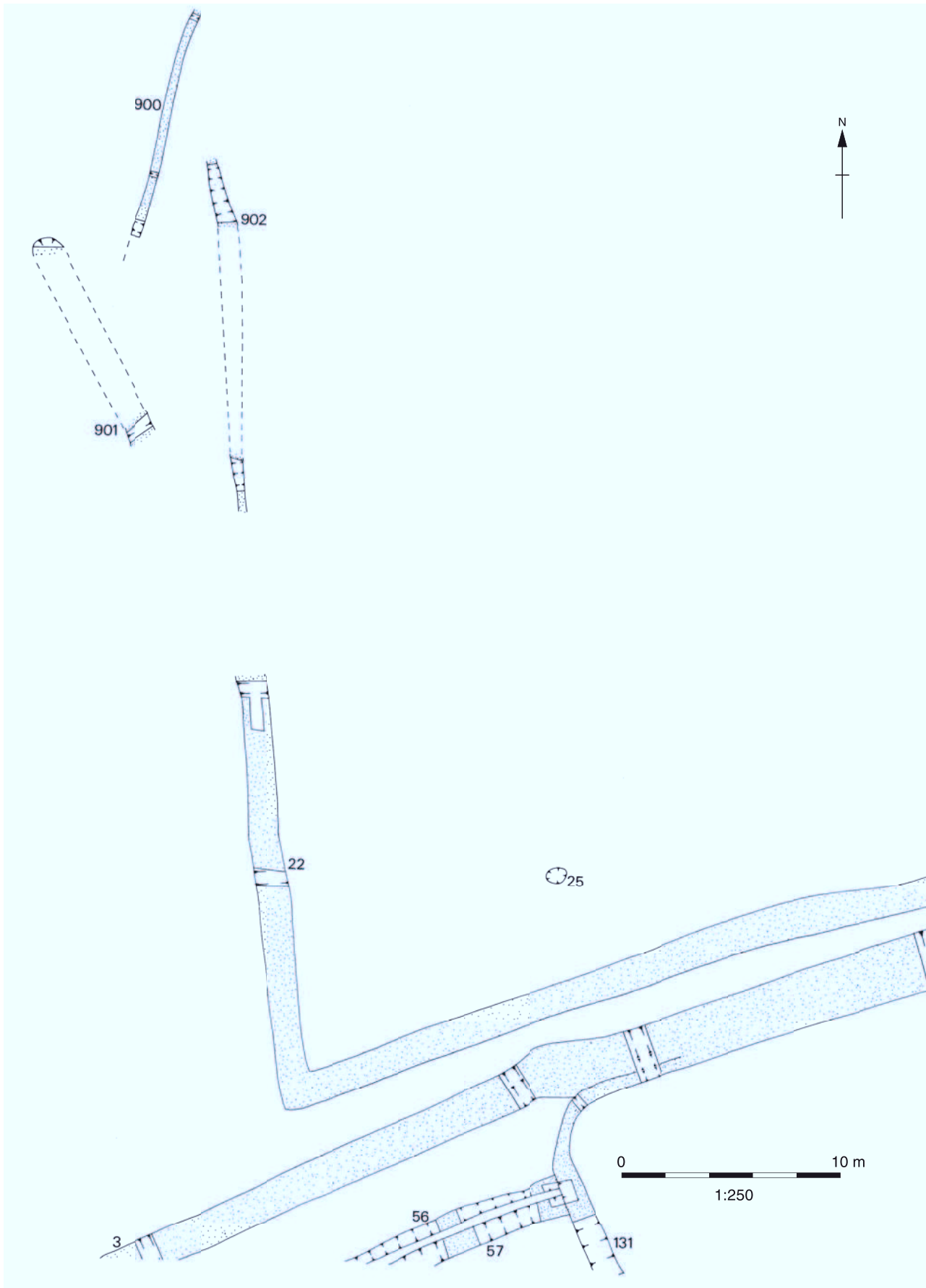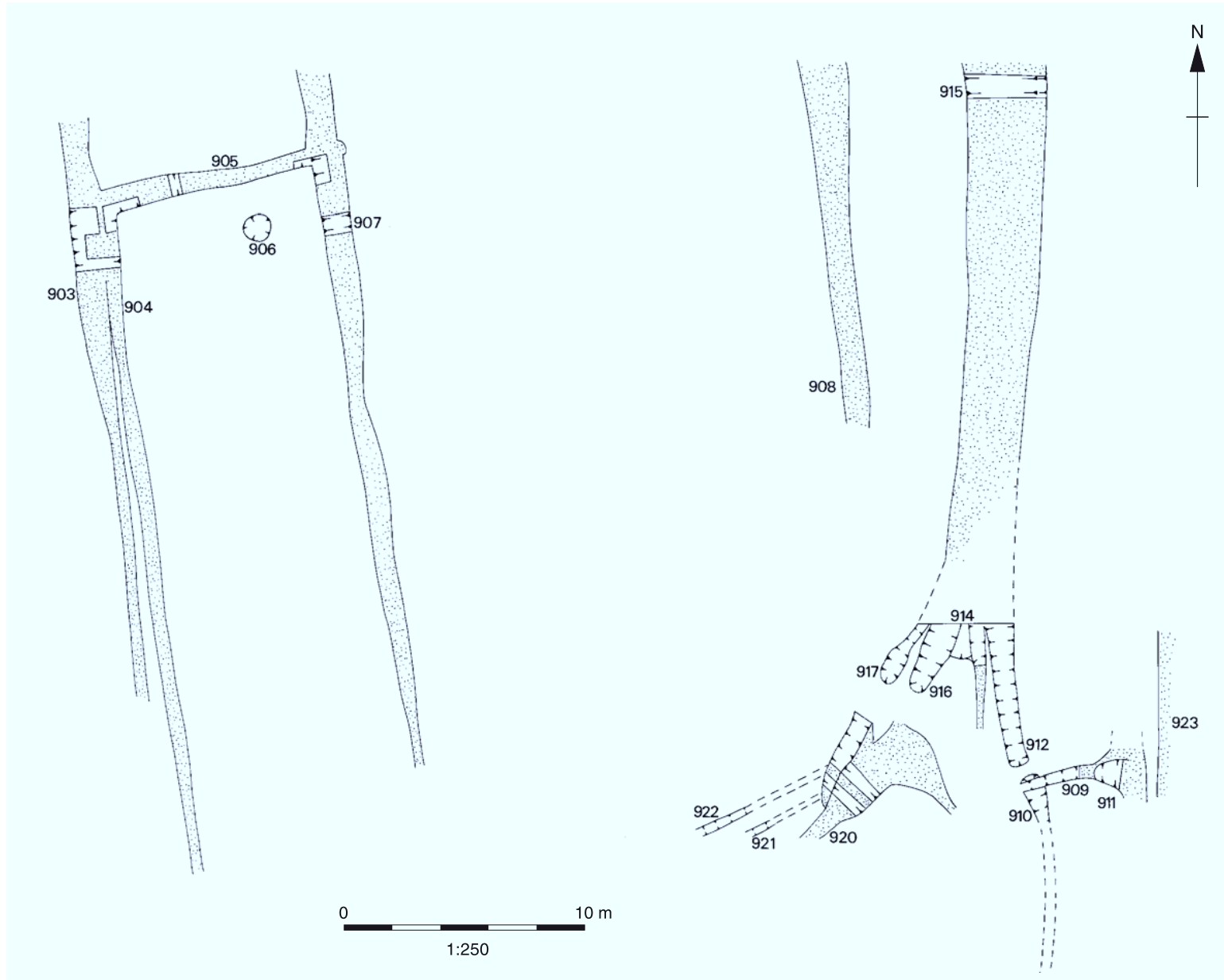
Fig. 5   Detailed site plan: NE
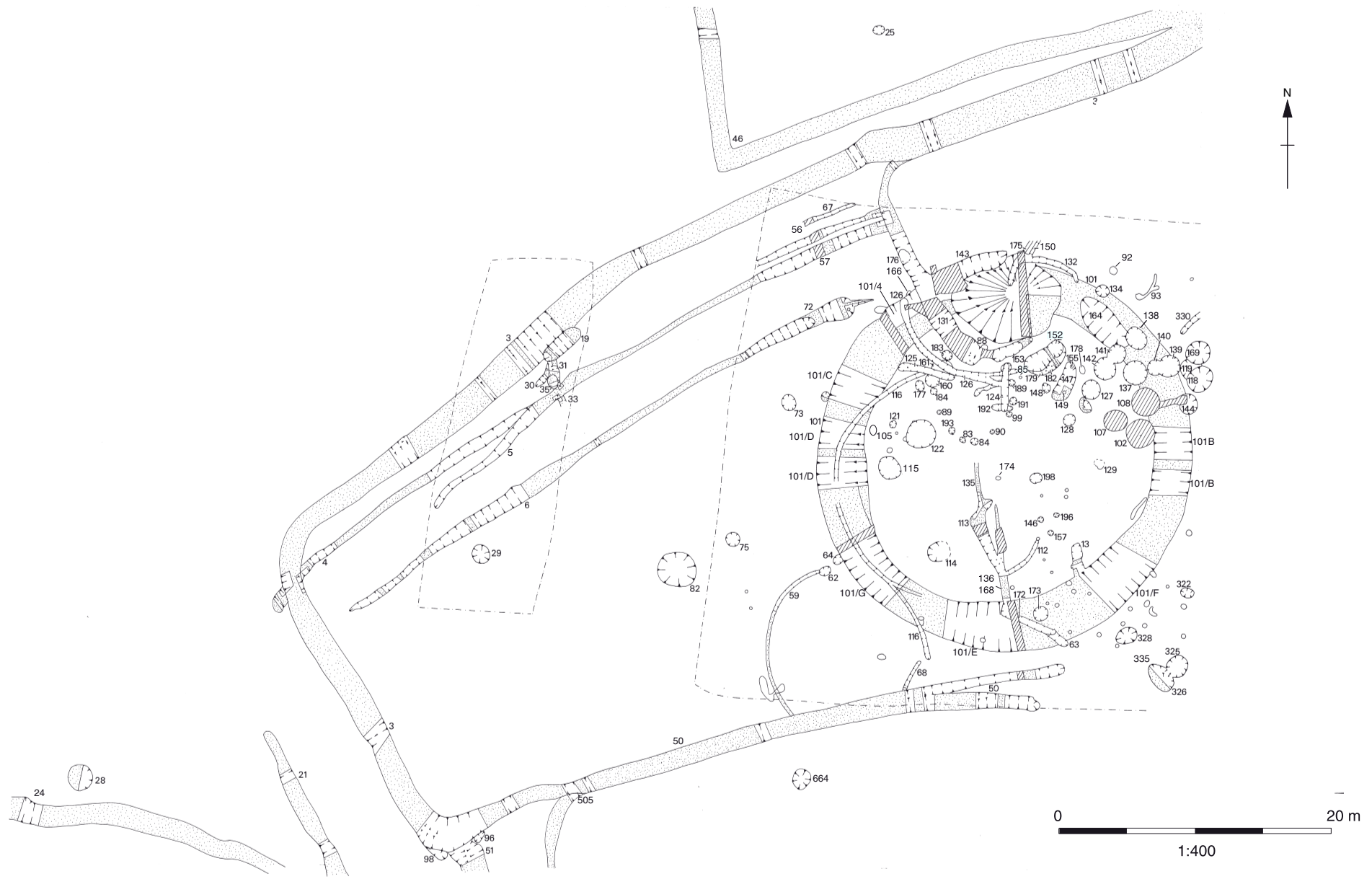
Fig. 6   Detailed site plan: centre W

11
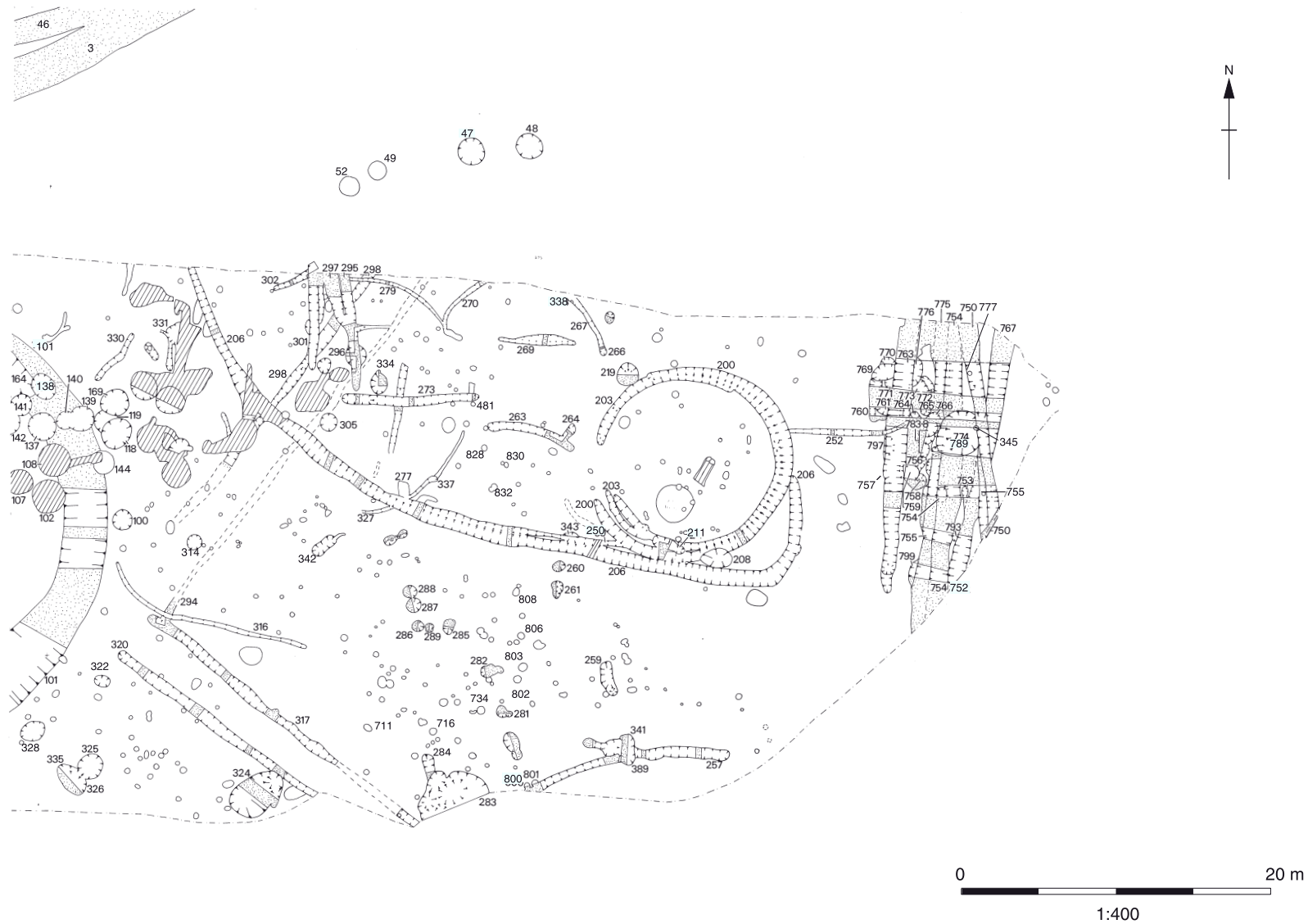
Fig. 7   Detailed site plan: centre E

0   20 m

1:400

Fig. 8 Detailed plan: S
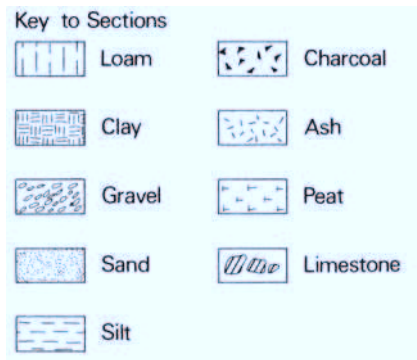
Fig. 9   Key to sections

ploughing than was normal were responsible for additional truncation.

In general, the construction of the wartime airfield was not very destructive, but removal of part of the concrete perimeter track resulted in the obliteration of relationships at a complex junction of ditches on the eastern side of the site. Otherwise the deeper features seem to have survived beneath the runways. Had the excavation at Mount Farm been carried out 20 years later, more attention would have been paid to the 20th-century military archaeology of the site. There is considerable interest in its history, including its association with the fate of the wartime flying ace, Wing Commander Adrian Warburton. (http://www.pixture.co.uk/Airfields/Main.html, accessed Jan 2010).

Analysis and presentation of results

The various stages of post-excavation analysis and eventual publication fell foul of the well-known problems of pre-MAP 2 procedures, and after various failed attempts to restart the work, English Heritage provided support through a grant from the Aggregates Sustainability Levy Fund. This has coincided with a time when the Dorchester area is again under scrutiny as a potential area for renewed gravel extraction, and the establishment of a new research initiative led by Oxford University and Oxford Archaeology.

The report is presented largely as originally conceived in the early 1980s, though with the advantage of using digital publication. The purpose of the rest of this printed report is to provide a chronological and thematic framework within which the development of all the main aspects of land-use, settlement and society at Mount Farm can be considered and discussed.

Some more detailed thematic issues are discussed in the Appendices in the digital report (http://library.thehumanjourney.net/), where specialist reports will also be found. In general, interpretations are rooted in the original specialist analyses, though where possible with at least some updating to take account of more recent work. Some of the

specialist reports (on radiocarbon dating (Appendix 2), flint (Appendix 3), early prehistoric pottery (Appendix 4), Saxon pottery (Appendix 7) and fired clay (Appendix 8)) are new. Others retain more or less their original form but have, to varying extents, been updated (late Iron Age and Roman pottery (Appendix 6), catalogue of metal, fine stone and bone objects (Appendix 9), bone implements (Appendix 10), and querns (Appendix 13). The remaining specialist reports have not been updated since they were originally written.

Further details are held in the site archive which has been deposited at the Ashmolean Museum Oxford, where the Myres archive is also housed. Microfiche copies of the written and drawn archive are held by the National Monuments Record, Kemble Road, Swindon.

The attempt to integrate description and interpretive analysis and discussion has meant that much of the illustrative material for the specialist reports has also been integrated into the main text. Very broadly the illustrations fall into the following groups:

Part 1, Introduction and background: Figs 1 to 9 – location plans and, immediately following this introduction, mosaic site plans and the key to the sections

Part 2, Overview of site development and chronology: Figs 10 to 61 – interpretative phase plans, details of particular structures, burials, Neolithic to Bronze Age finds assemblages, and Iron Age, Roman and Saxon pottery

Part 3, General discussion: Figs 62 to 75 – Iron Age, Roman and Saxon finds assemblages other than pottery and environmental evidence

PART 2: OVERVIEW OF SITE DEVELOPMENT AND CHRONOLOGY

The chronology of the long sequence of activity at Mount Farm is based principally on the finds (Appendices 3 to 11) together with stratigraphic relationships (see below) and a selected number of radiocarbon dates, discussed in detail in Appendix 2 and summarised here in Table 1.

Mesolithic

An early Mesolithic radiocarbon date was obtained from charcoal in a small pit (F343) which may denote a human presence around 8320–7750 cal BC (HAR-4820: 8960 ± 100 BP), but apart from one piercer there is no Mesolithic flintwork from the site. The flints from the pit were fresh and not Mesolithic in character. Samples from the same deposit also produced carbonised grain. The date thus seems anomalous. The reasons for this anomaly are discussed further below.

Table 1: Summary of radiocarbon dates

Lab ID	Context	Material	Contextual information	Radiocarbon Age (BP)	Calibrated Date (95%)
Prehistoric pit					
HAR-4820	343/A/1S	charcoal	Neolithic pit (cereals)	8960±100	8320–7750 cal BC
Early Neolithic pits					
HAR-4819	160/A/2S	charcoal	Neolithic pit (flintwork)	5120±110	4240–3650 cal BC
HAR-4821	38/A/1	charcoal	Neolithic pit (flintwork)	5030±90	4040–3640 cal BC
Middle Neolithic burial					
HAR-4673	602/A/1	human bone	burial in oval barrow	4460±90	3490–2890 cal BC
OxA-15748	602/A/1	human bone	replicate of HAR-4673	4738±35	3640–3370 cal BC
Beaker burial 618					
HAR-4792	618/A/1	human bone	burial in oval barrow	3710±90	2460–1880 cal BC
OxA-15747	618/A/1	human bone	replicate of HAR-4792	3814±34	2440–2140 cal BC
OxA-15787	618/A/1	boar's tusk	recovered with burial 618		2460–2150 cal BC
Early–middle Bronze Age burials					
HAR-4822	121/A/2S	charcoal	cremation deposit in ring ditch	3380±100	1940–1430 cal BC
OxA-15785	178/A/1	human bone	burial in ring ditch	3372±38	1750–1530 cal BC
OxA-15786	177/A/1	human bone	burial in ring ditch	3359±32	1740–1530 cal BC
HAR-4791	161/A/1	human bone	burial in ring ditch	3170±70	1610–1290 cal BC
HAR-4796	101/G/1	animal bone	ring ditch upper fill	3080±90	1520–1050 cal BC
Later Bronze Age waterhole					
HAR-4797	162/A/16	Oak sapwood	later Bronze Age waterhole	3000±80	1440–1000 cal BC
HAR-4798	162/A/16	Oak sapwood	later Bronze Age waterhole	2850±70	1260–830 cal BC
Early Iron Age pits					
HAR-4790	118	bone	early Iron Age pit	2210±80	410–40 cal BC
HAR-4674	328/A/1	bone	early Iron Age pit	2130±80	390 cal BC–cal AD 50
HAR-4793	652/A/1	articulated bone	early Iron Age pit	1980±90	200 cal BC–cal AD 240
Middle–late Iron Age ditch and waterhole					
HAR-4795	676/B/2	bone	mid-late Iron Age waterhole	2330±70	740–200 cal BC
HAR-4794	505/C+D/1	bone	?middle Iron Age ditch	2100±80	280 cal BC–cal AD 70
Saxon well					
HAR-4799	82/-/21	wood stakes	early Saxon well	1420±80	cal AD 430–770

Neolithic and Beaker (Fig. 10)

Early/middle Neolithic to Beaker domestic activity

Earlier prehistoric domestic activity is evident from a series of pit deposits (Table 2), a disturbed surface layer and artefacts (mainly lithic material) redeposited in later contexts including the modern ploughsoil. The small pits were widely dispersed over the site including the areas recorded during salvage excavation (Fig. 10). They contained a varied range of flintwork, pottery, bone and antler implements, animal bones, and charred plant remains (Table 1 and Figs 11-13; see also Appendices 2-4, 9, 10 and 15-19).

Pit 160 in the northern area of controlled excavation is associated with a radiocarbon determination of 4231-3700 cal BC (HAR-4819: 5120 ± 110 BP), and contained early to middle Neolithic flintwork, including serrated blades and a chisel arrowhead,

two bone pins, two worked antlers (Fig. 11), and some cereal remains and hazel nut shells.

A badly truncated pit, F38, in the western salvage area was dated 4040–3640 cal BC (HAR-4821: 5030 ± 90 BP) and produced rather more flintwork of similar though less diverse character (Fig. 12, nos 1-5), together with some cereal remains and hazel nuts

Early or middle Neolithic pottery was found in pits F512 and F518 in the southern area of the site, where F555 was another small pit of similar character (Fig. 13, nos 1-3).

A number of pits with fragments of late Neolithic and Beaker pottery were found. In the northern part of the controlled excavation, about 70 m N of the oval barrow, there was a group of five small pits (F285, F286, F287, F288 and F289) of which F287 produced Grooved Ware pottery (Fig. 13, nos 4-5), and F288 a few flints (Fig. 10). The others had very similar fills but produced no finds. A number of other features such as F260 and possibly F261 might also have belonged to this group (Fig. 7). These

Table 2: Summary of Neolithic and Beaker pits

Context and form	Diam depth (m) + extrapolated depth of original topsoil	Fill	Flints	Pottery (no. sherds Ware)	Other objects	Charred plants	C14 date
F160 Steep-sided bowl	1.1 +0.2? 0.4 +0.3?	Multilayer	1 arrow 4 scraper 4 serrated blade 3 retouch 6 blade 45 flake 11 chip 1 core	-	2 bone pins 2 antler	10 grain 0 chaff 414 nutshell 7 weeds	4240-3650 cal BC
F38 Bowl? (salvage)	1.5 +0.5? 0.1 +0.5?	Multilayer	4 arrow 2 scraper 1 serrated blade 1 retouch 22 blade 101 flake 34 chip	-	-	1 grain 0 chaff 11 nutshell 4 weeds	4040–3640 cal BC
F518 Bowl?	0.4 +0.2? 0.1 +0.2?	Simple	6 serrated blade 2 retouch 6 blade 44 flake 17 chip 2 core	12 Ebbsfleet	-	-	-
F512 Bowl?	0.7 +0.4? 0.2 +0.4?	Simple	1 serrated blade 10 flake 1 chip	1 Ebbsfleet	-	-	-
F555 Steep-sided bowl?	0.7 +0.2? 0.1 +0.2?	Simple	1 arrow 1 scraper 3 retouch 4 bladelet 9 flake 2 chip	-	-	-	-
F287 Bowl	1.0 +0.3? 0.3 +0.3?	Simple	1 worked flake	4 Grooved Ware	-	-	-
F288 Steep-sided bowl	0.8 +0.2? 0.3 +0.3?	Multilayer	3 worked flake	-	-	-	-
F906 Steep-sided bowl	1.0 +0.2? 0.3 +0.3?	Simple	1 serrated flake 1 retouch 14 flake 3 chip	4 Beaker	1 utilised limb bone	-	-
F343			9 flake	-	1 bone pin	23 grain 0 chaff 640 nutshell 4 weeds	8320-7750 cal BC

Table 3: Summary of burials in the Neolithic oval ring ditch

Context	Age	Content	Grave goods and dating
F602	Male 30+ years	Nearly complete	Middle Neolithic flint blades *c* 3640-3370 cal BC (human bone)
F618 (and F544)	Female 17-24 years	Nearly complete	Beaker, scraper, bone pin, boars tusk pendants *c* 2460–2150 cal BC (human bone and pendants)
F528	Adult	2 bones	-

Fig. 10   Interpretation plan: Neolithic to Beaker period

0   200 mm
Flint 2:3

0   100 mm
Antler and bone 1:2
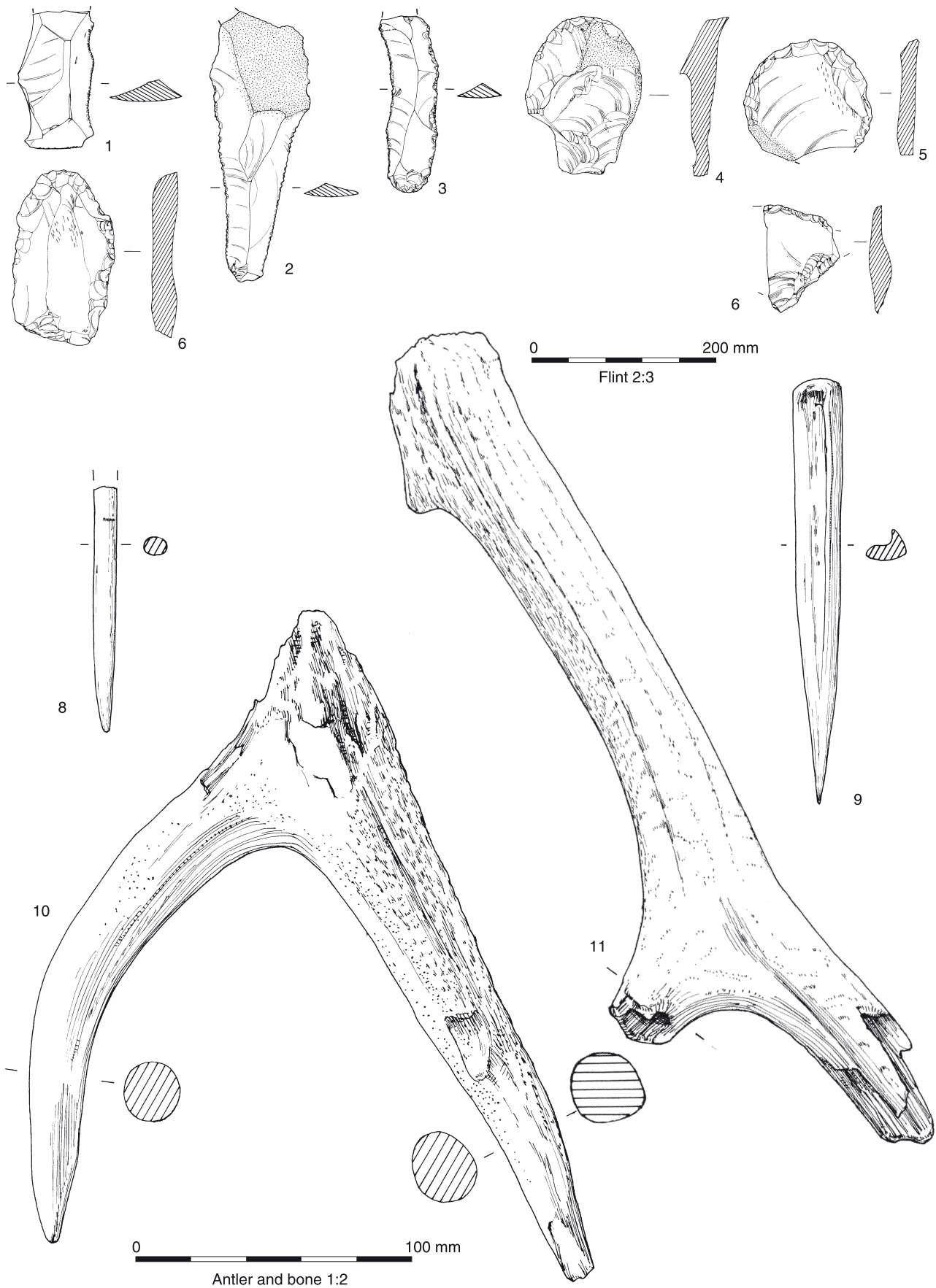
Fig. 11   Objects from middle Neolithic pit F160
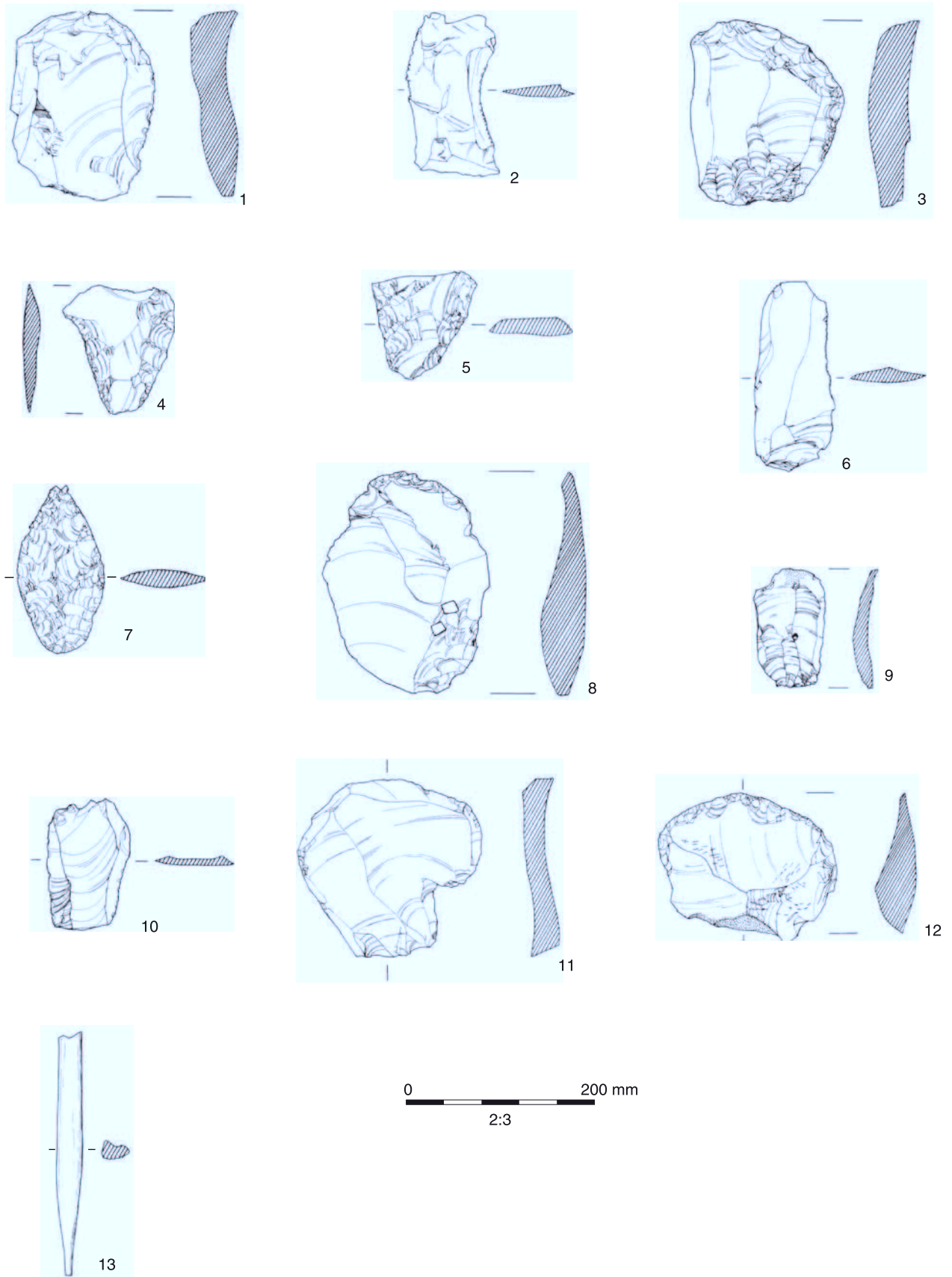
Fig. 12   Objects from Neolithic pits: 1-5 pit F38, 6 pit F512, 7-8 pit F555, 10 pit F906, 11-12 Roman ditch F534, 13 pit F343
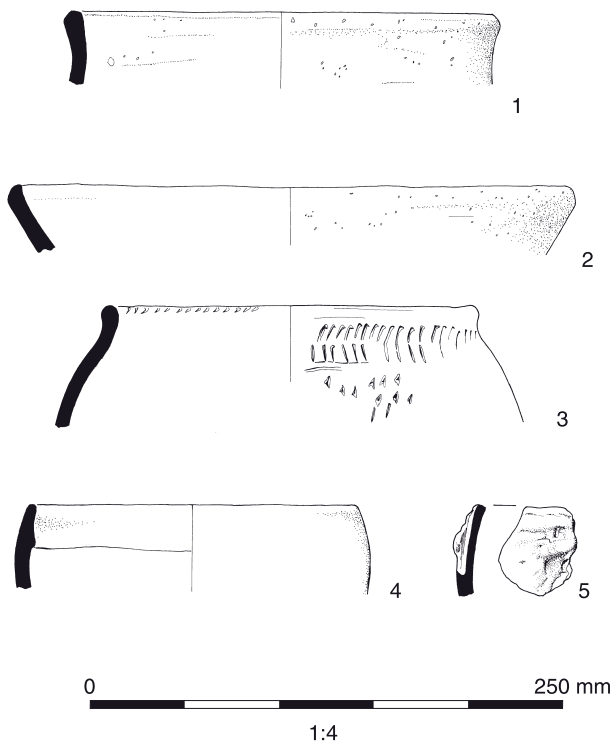
Fig. 13 (left)   Pottery from Neolithic pits: 1 pit F512, 2-3 pit F518, 4-5 pit F287

could have been part of a row with F343, the small pit cut by Iron Age ditch 206 discussed above which contained fresh flint knapping debris, a bone pin and carbonised cereals and hazelnut shells. An early Mesolithic radiocarbon date of 8320-7750 cal BC (HAR-4820: 8960 ± 100 BP) on charcoal from this context is not consistent with the presence of cereals, and the flintwork and bone pin are also more likely to be Neolithic or date from the Beaker period. As the radiocarbon analysis is not thought to have been faulty, it suggests either that the cultural material was mixed with a much older but not entirely disturbed deposit that was not distinguished in excavation, or that some administrative error occurred in selecting and labelling or processing the sample.

In the northern area of salvage excavation, another small pit (F906) was located which contained a sherd of Beaker and a few flint flakes.

No major concentrations of unstratified flintwork were encountered, either in later features or in the areas of topsoil over which scatters were examined (Fig. 10; see archive).

Discussion

Thin scatters and occasional clusters of Neolithic and Beaker pits are not uncommon on sites in the Upper Thames Valley where fairly large areas of gravel have been exposed to archaeological examination, both in the vicinity of burials and barrows and elsewhere. Mount Farm has a typically low

number of early and middle Neolithic pits (Holgate 1988) though in recent years sites with a greater number of pits have been excavated at Benson (Pine and Ford 2003, 135-7) and South Stoke (Timby *et al.* 2005, 229-32). Such pits tend to be rather more common in the later Neolithic and Beaker periods, as at Gravelly Guy and Yarnton (Lambrick and Allen 2004 35-45; Hey in prep.) than in earlier periods.

The varied contents of these pits are typical of the Neolithic and Bronze Age in the Upper Thames Valley which was characterised by patterns of residential mobility with little if any permanent settlement (Hey *et al*. forthcoming c). Like other sites in the Upper Thames Valley such as Barrow Hills, Gravelly Guy and Drayton, they should probably be seen as being indicative of occasional impermanent occupation perhaps within the context of a site used for low key funerary and ceremonial activities (see below; cf Barclay and Halpin 1999; Lambrick and Allen 2004; Barclay *et al.* 2003).

Pit F160 might have been large enough for storage, and perhaps the much truncated F38, but the other pits were very small (Table 5). It is often suspected that at least some degree of symbolism was involved in selecting what was buried in such pits (Thomas 1991), though apart from the fine quality of the flint work in F160 this seems less evident here than in some other cases. It is not clear to what extent such symbolic selection varies chronologically or in relation to the presence and significance of any nearby funerary or ceremonial monuments (Barclay and Halpin 1999; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 44-5; Pine and Ford 2003; Timby *et al.* 2005, 228-32, 305; Hey in prep.).

The bones and charred plant remains from the earlier prehistoric pits at Mount Farm are consistent with the area being at least partly wooded, though the evidence is both slight and potentially biased by what people may have chosen to deposit in the pits. The high proportion of pig bones is unusual but may be the product of bias. Cereal remains occur in very low numbers, alongside much more numerous hazel nut shells but also with some large seeded wild plants which may indicate an emphasis on gathering and gardening rather than larger scale cultivation (see below, Part 3).

Oval barrow with middle Neolithic and Beaker burials (Fig. 14)

In the southern area of controlled excavation, an oval ring ditch (F528), 12 m long and about 10 m across, surrounded two burials, neither of which was at its centre (Fig. 14). Details of the individuals buried are given in Table 3.

The earlier of the two burials (F602) was the grave of a man associated with a flint knife and blades of early to middle Neolithic character (Fig. 15). This date has been confirmed by two radiocarbon dates of 3640-3370 and 3490-2890 cal BC

(OxA-15748: 4738 ± 35 BP; HAR-4673: 4460 ± 90 BP). Although the calibrated date ranges overlap by 120 years the dates are statistically inconsistent, and the earlier date from the more recent determination by the Oxford accelerator laboratory is considered more reliable (Appendix 2).

The small oval grave pit was shallow and had only just missed being truncated by two much later ditches either side. The body of the man had been placed in a crouched position on his left side with his head to the south-east. The flints that accompanied the burial were not all found or their positions recorded before the bones were lifted, but they came from at least two locations, one close to his shoulder the other under his arm. The largest blade is similar to one buried with a woman in the double burial associated with the middle Neolithic oval barrow at Barrow Hills (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 19-20).

Adjacent to F602, there was a second grave (F618) containing the burial of a young woman in a crouched position on her right side with her head the west (Fig. 16). A plain beaker was placed at her feet, and she was also accompanied by a flint scraper, a bone pin and a pair of perforated boar's tusks, one of which was found by her waist. The grave had cut an earlier feature (F618/2) and was again off-centre within the oval ring ditch (F528).

Other grave-like features with similar fills of reddish brown loam but no finds include a largely destroyed pit (F604 just west of grave F602) and F620 to the east, while F624 was a small gully or perhaps part of a tree throw hole with similar fill,
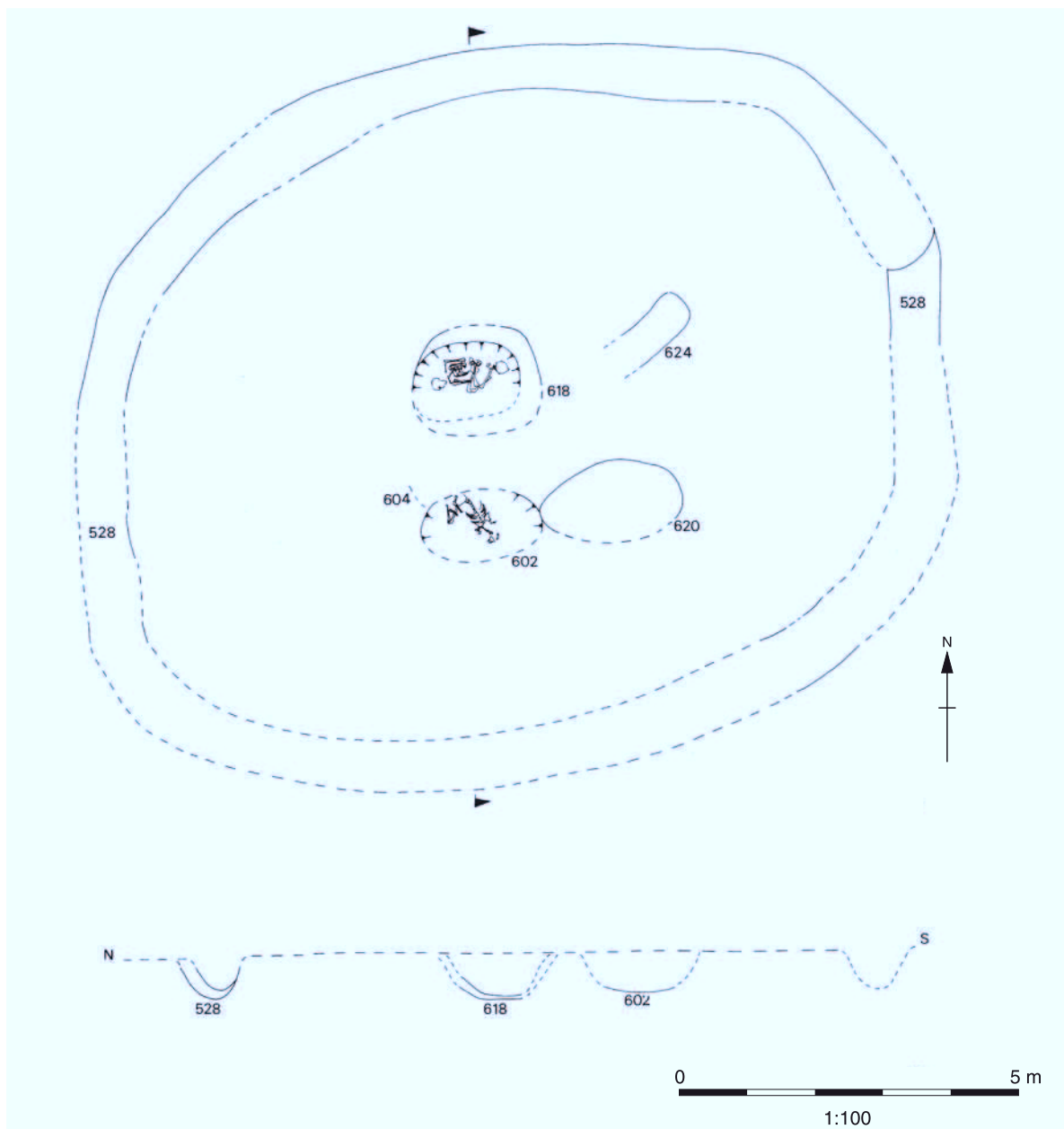
Fig. 14   Plan and section of oval ring ditch with middle Neolithic and Beaker burials and other associated features

which produced a carbonised grain and a rachis fragment of wheat (Fig. 14). Just to the south there was a small gully (F617: Fig. 8) running E - W, which contained reddish gravelly loam similar to F528. On the basis of this characteristic soil colour it was also probably early, but could not definitely be assigned to any one of the pre-Iron Age phases.

The oval ring ditch (F528) surrounding this cluster of features was itself recut round its northern side, the recut butt-ending in the north-east part of the ditch. It is unclear whether the south side was also recut, because little survived, but the fill of the south-east part of the ditch did not suggest it (Fig. 14).

No other Neolithic or Beaker period human remains were recovered at Mount Farm, but another oval ring ditch of similar size is visible on aerial photographs *c* 35 m to the west. Unfortunately it had already been destroyed in the area of deeper stripping when the excavation began and no more is known of its date or whether it contained Neolithic or Beaker burials. 1.5 km south-west of Mount Farm a series of communal cremation cemeteries were associated with small henges within and beside the Dorchester Cursus (Whittle *et al.* 1992).

Discussion

Individually, neither of the graves was centrally placed within the ring ditch, though as a group with F620 and F624 they were more or less central to it (Fig. 14). It seems very unlikely that the juxtaposition of these burials was coincidental. When the burial site was reused for the burial of a young woman in F618 in the earlier 3rd millennium cal BC, there must have been something to show the position of the much older burial. Various interpretations can be put forward regarding whether or not the ring ditch was contemporary with the middle Neolithic burial, and why neither of the graves was at its centre.

One possibility is that the burial (F602) was a 'flat grave' unmarked by a ring ditch, and either it was sufficiently visible for the Beaker burial to be positioned alongside, or that it displaced a second original burial alongside it, represented by F618/2,
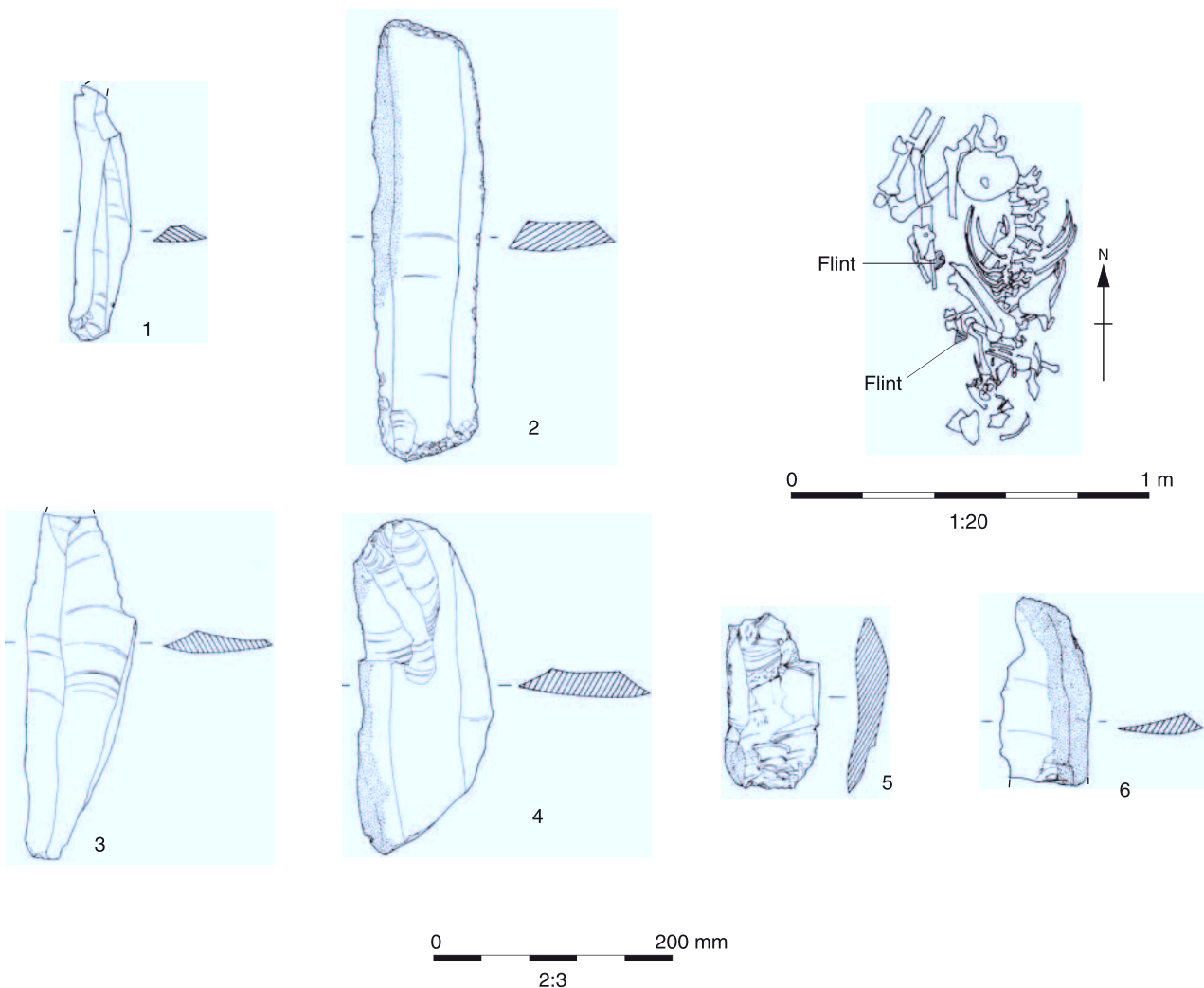
Fig. 15   Middle Neolithic burial F602 and associated flint blades

21

which was almost entirely destroyed by the Beaker burial. An original juxtaposition of two middle Neolithic burials is plausible given the existence of examples elsewhere, and it is worth noting that the only find from F618/2 was a bone pin not dissimilar to one of those in Pit F160 (see Fig. 11, no. 9 and Fig. 16, no. 3).

At Barrow Hills (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 19-34) there was a group of three 'flat graves' of which two, a child and a possibly disturbed woman, were side by side about 1 m apart whilst the third, a man over 40, lay about 3 m to the south. Other paired or multiple burials at Barrow Hills include the man and woman buried side by side in the middle of the oval barrow (which may or may not have been a later addition) and the complete body of a man and the remains of two disarticulated female bodies in a linear mortuary structure.

At Drayton two possible middle Neolithic flat graves containing crouched inhumations were found within or close to the Drayton cursus. One burial group was of a woman, child and infant with no grave goods; the other a single crouched inhumation with four flints of earlier Neolithic character (Barclay *et al.* 2003, 16-20).

At Eton Rowing Lake two middle Neolithic graves were found *c* 30 m apart just outside a ring ditch, one containing the tightly bound body of a young woman dated to 3370-2930 cal BC, the other a child of five years dated to 3330-3220 or 3120-2900 cal BC (Allen *et al.* 2000, 71-3).

A key issue for whether the oval ring ditch F528 was originally created to mark the middle Neolithic burial or burials is whether it is plausible that the Beaker burial would have been located so accurately next to burial 602 1000 years later if the location was not also marked out as a burial place by a ring ditch. It is also pertinent to consider whether its form is comparable to other middle Neolithic ring ditches.

The long time span between the juxtaposed burials within the ring ditch might mean that the earlier burial(s) must have been marked by a reasonably substantial monument. In this scenario, the off-centre positioning of F602 would be explained by the putative destroyed burial in F618/2, an arrangement comparable with the double burial in the rather later, larger oval barrow at Barrow Hills, Radley (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 19-34). The slightly polished flint knife amongst the flint blades associated with F602 bears some resemblance to the more highly polished flint knives accompanying the burials at Barrow Hills and the large circular ring ditch surrounding the grave of a woman at Linch Hill, Stanton Harcourt (Grimes 1960), though both these burials were also distinguished by jet belt sliders. However, the burial of the woman in a similarly sized ring ditch at Newnham Murren, Wallingford was associated with much more modest finds – a few flint blades and a piece of Abingdon ware (Moorey 1982). If the Mount Farm

ring ditch is contemporary with burial F602 it could be seen as an earlier, smaller, less elaborate predecessor of the Barrow Hills, Stanton Harcourt and Newnham Murren barrows.

If the ring ditch was an original feature it seems likely that its recutting might have marked the reuse of the site for the Beaker burial, perhaps leaving a causeway at the eastern end marked by the butt end of the recut of the northern side of F528. Nonetheless, for the Beaker burial to have been positioned so accurately adjacent to F602 (and perhaps exactly in the putative earlier grave alongside) it is still necessary to assume that the original burial place was still visible as a slight mound or hollow.

However, if it is assumed that such earthworks were still visible, there is also less need for there to have been a ring ditch or other monument to mark the original burial(s): the place may have been well-recognised as an ancient burial ground by oral tradition, discernible on the ground from particular trees, a clearing or other characteristics. If so, people may well have recognised the slight traces of the graves *c* 1,000 years later, enabling the Beaker burial to be inserted beside one of them, and perhaps exactly into the other destroying everything but a sliver of surviving fill and a solitary bone pin.

In support of the possibility that the middle Neolithic burial was a flat grave unmarked by any ring ditch, it can be pointed out that the form of F528 does not closely resemble other local Neolithic oval barrows. At only about 12.5 m long and 10 m wide, it would have been smaller and less elongated than some other excavated Neolithic ring ditches and oval barrows. It is also different from the rather larger oval barrow (in its later form) with the double inhumation at Barrow Hills, and the radiocarbon dates for the Barrow Hills burials were distinctly later than Mount Farm, while the jet belt slider and polished flint knife grave goods there are more similar to the Stanton Harcourt barrow than the less highly polished Mount Farm knife and unworked blades. At New Wintles Farm near Cassington, the segmented method of excavation of the middle and late Neolithic ditches are also very different from the Mount Farm oval ring ditch, and only scraps of cremated bone were found rather than any inhumation (Kenward 1982). The full character of the possible oval barrow at Uffington is uncertain (Miles *et al*. 2003).

Alongside these few examples of excavated middle Neolithic ring ditches and oval barrows, the oval ring ditch at Mount Farm also seems to differ from some other potential Neolithic monuments of this general form tentatively identifiable from aerial photography. These include examples at Stanton Harcourt (Barclay *et al.* 1995, 101-3, fig. 55), Barrow Hills (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 3, figs 1.5-1.6), Wally Corner (Boyle *et al*. 1995, figs 4-5), Drayton St Leonard, Stadhampton and Benson (Barclay *et al.* 2003, figs 10.2, 10.5 and 10.7) and North Stoke (Case 1982, fig. 33), though some others may be more

Boar's tusk pendant

618

Beaker

0   1 m

1:20

0   100 mm

1:2

4

5

2

0   200 mm

Flint 2:3

3

0   50 mm

1:1
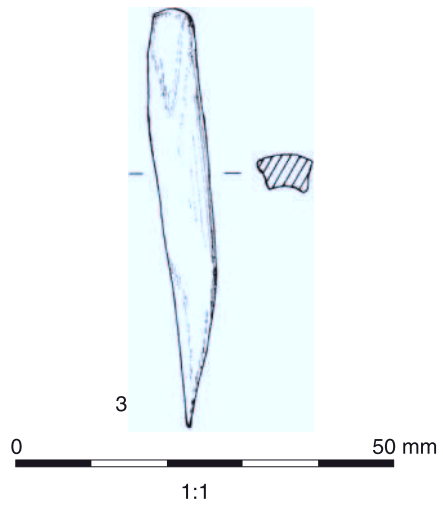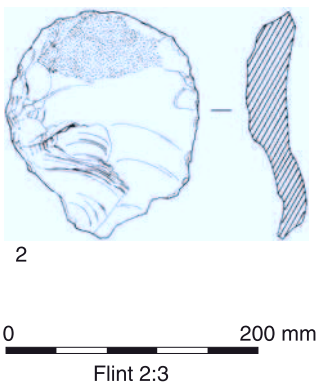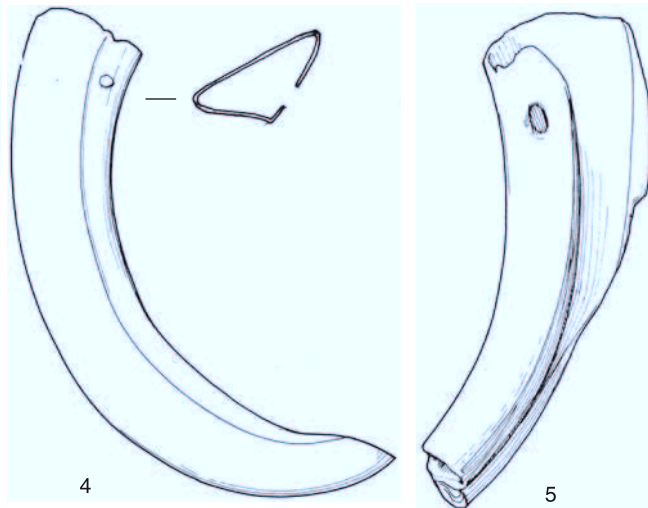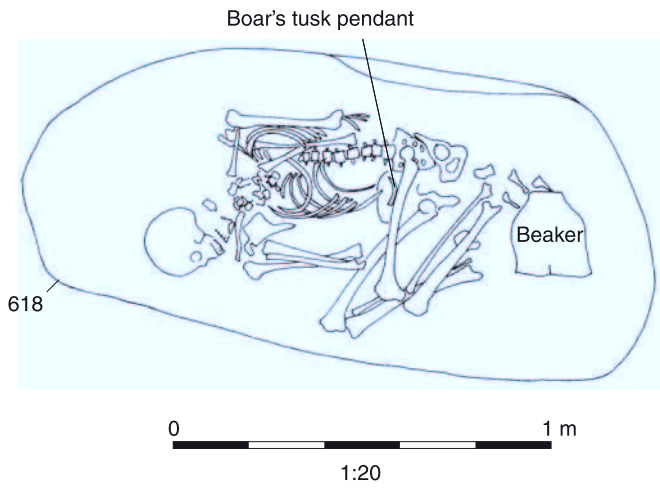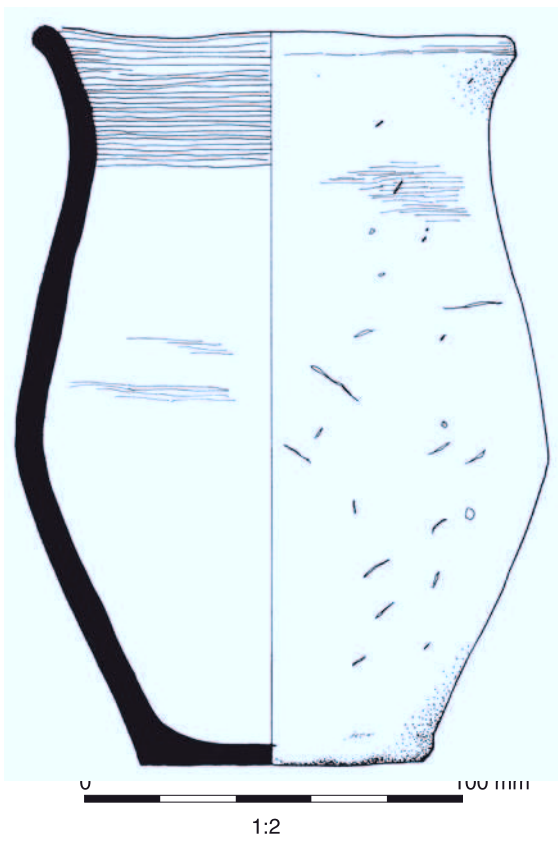
Fig. 16   Beaker burial F618 and associated beaker, flint scraper, bone awl and boar's tusk pendants

comparable in size (cf Barclay *et al*. 2003, figs 10.3 and 10.6).

If the middle Neolithic burial was a flat grave like most other complete inhumations of comparable date, and its location was still discernible in some way as a burial place, it is reasonable to suggest that the oval ring ditch was added at the time of the Beaker burial. Its size and form are rather more similar to the slightly irregular shape and often small diameters of other Beaker ring ditches, though most were more circular in plan. Examples include Site XII at Dorchester (Whittle *et al*. 1992, 175-84); barrows 4a and 12 and ring ditch 201 at Barrow Hills (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 314-5); and ring ditches X/6 (Gravelly Guy), XV/5 (Aerodrome site), and XXI/1a (Linch Hill) at Stanton Harcourt (Barclay *et al*. 1995, 89-101).

Whatever the details of the sequence, it is clear that the Beaker burial was inserted into a pre-existing, much older burial place, presumably out of respect or to gain spiritual strength from a sacred location (as noted below, this is not incompatible with an earlier burial being disturbed in the process). In general terms, the sequence is comparable to Linch Hill, Stanton Harcourt where the middle Neolithic burial with a flint knife and jet slider was found at the centre of a substantial double ring ditch – probably a round barrow (Grimes 1943-4; Barclay *et al*. 1995, 99-101). In this case the later Beaker burial, containing a very similar beaker to that at Mount Farm and surrounded by its own small ring ditch, was inserted across the ditches of the much larger earlier monument.

In relation to 'empty' graves and the disturbance of earlier burials, the possible sequence at Mount Farm has resonances with Beaker ring ditch 201 at Barrow Hills which either cut or was cut by what seems to have been a symbolic grave with a fine beaker but only token deposits of human bone (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 19-34, 133-41). Taken as a whole, the Barrow Hills cemetery produced several instances where earlier burials had been disturbed by later ones, sometimes only a few years afterwards but in other cases several centuries later (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 318). Other instances of such 'graves' include one at Stanton Harcourt (Hamlin 1963, 4). At Drayton there was a small, 16 m diameter ring ditch with an undated empty central 'grave', and also a distinctly grave-like pit that produced a complete though crushed beaker decorated with close horizontal incised lines, several blade-like flints and an arrowhead, but no human remains (Barclay *et al*. 2003, 84-6; 91-2). Another example is recorded from Thrupp (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 320-5).

Post ring (Fig. 17)

Neolithic pit 160 lay between two postholes (F184 and F91) which were part of an oval ring of 14 posts, 7.5 m by 6.5 m across (Fig. 17). There were two other postholes (F182 and F148) *c* 2-2.5 m east of the ring. Unfortunately none of the postholes produced any dating evidence, and the relationship between early Neolithic Pit 160 and the post circle is uncertain. The two postholes either side of the pit contained darker soil than the others in the circle, suggesting that their infilling was not earlier than Pit 160. One of these postholes (F91) was cut by an early to middle Bronze Age burial (F161) dated to 1610-1290 cal BC (HAR-4791: 3170 ± 70 BP).

Various other features with 'early' reddish fills were noted in the vicinity of the post ring, any of which might have belonged to this period. These include two lengths of irregular 'gully' (F190 and F192; Fig. 17) and an L-shaped 'pit' (F147; Fig. 6) just to the east of the post ring which contained a struck flint and one flint-tempered sherd. In the light of subsequent work at Drayton (Barclay *et al*. 2003) it is possible that these features might be tree throw holes, which would not have been recognised at the time.

Discussion

The post ring is too small relative to the size of the postholes (which lack any evidence of post-pipes) for its precise geometrical form to be defined accurately, and could have been either a free standing structure or a building.

The location of the early/middle Neolithic pit F160, fitting exactly between two of the postholes in the ring (F91 and F184 just to its south), seems unlikely to be fortuitous; but while it is possible that the pit was dug between the two posts, F160 is large enough to have survived as a clearly visible hollow long after it was initially infilled, so the posts could have been deliberately positioned either side of it.

In the absence of direct dating evidence for the postholes in the ring, the stratigraphy leaves open a very wide possible date range for the structure, from the early or middle Neolithic to the middle Bronze Age. Within this range it is possible that the post ring was still standing when ring ditch F101 was created (see below), but unlikely to have been later: it is off-centre and the locations of the burials and cremation deposits encountered also suggest that they did not respect the post ring, particularly as one of the later burials (F161) cut posthole F91.

There is no definitive evidence for its role either in a ceremonial or domestic context, but the possibilities are worth discussing.

It is worth noting that Sites I and XI at Dorchester consisted of penannular rings of small pits or short gully segments surrounded by ditches. The Site I group was 13 m across and consisted of 13 pits one of which was dated to 3940-3190 cal BC, while the Site XI group was 12 m across and composed of 14 pits, and the earliest ditch has been dated to 3300-2660 and 3090-2780 cal BC (Atkinson *et al*. 1951, 5-18; Whittle *et al*. 1992, 162-6, 195-8).

Despite these similarities, the Mount Farm ring is much better interpreted as a ring of posts rather than pits, though if middle Neolithic pit F160 is seen as having been placed between two of the uprights,

it would be unusually early for a post ring (Gibson 2005), and even more so as a building (Darvill and Thomas 1996; Grogan 1996; Gibson 2005).

There are virtually no comparable structures for the early to middle Neolithic period that are confidently interpreted as buildings, but it is worth noting a few doubtful possibilities.

Not far from Mount Farm at St Helen's Avenue, Benson, a scatter of around 25 early to middle Neolithic pits has been investigated where there were also a number of possible posthole structures and a rather smaller number of late Bronze Age features (Pine and Ford 2003). There was almost twice as much Neolithic as late Bronze Age pottery

(687 and 386 sherds respectively), and the possible structures included four possible arcs and irregular rings of up to 10 unevenly spaced small postholes from 5.4 m to about 8 m across. These are much less convincing than the Mount Farm post ring, but one had a small pit or large posthole containing 33 sherds of earlier Neolithic pottery roughly in the middle, and two of the other rings included two postholes containing five sherds of pottery each and another with a single sherd. Despite the presence of Neolithic but not late Bronze Age pottery in the postholes, the excavators concluded that if these structures were real, they were probably later prehistoric with the Neolithic sherds being redeposited.
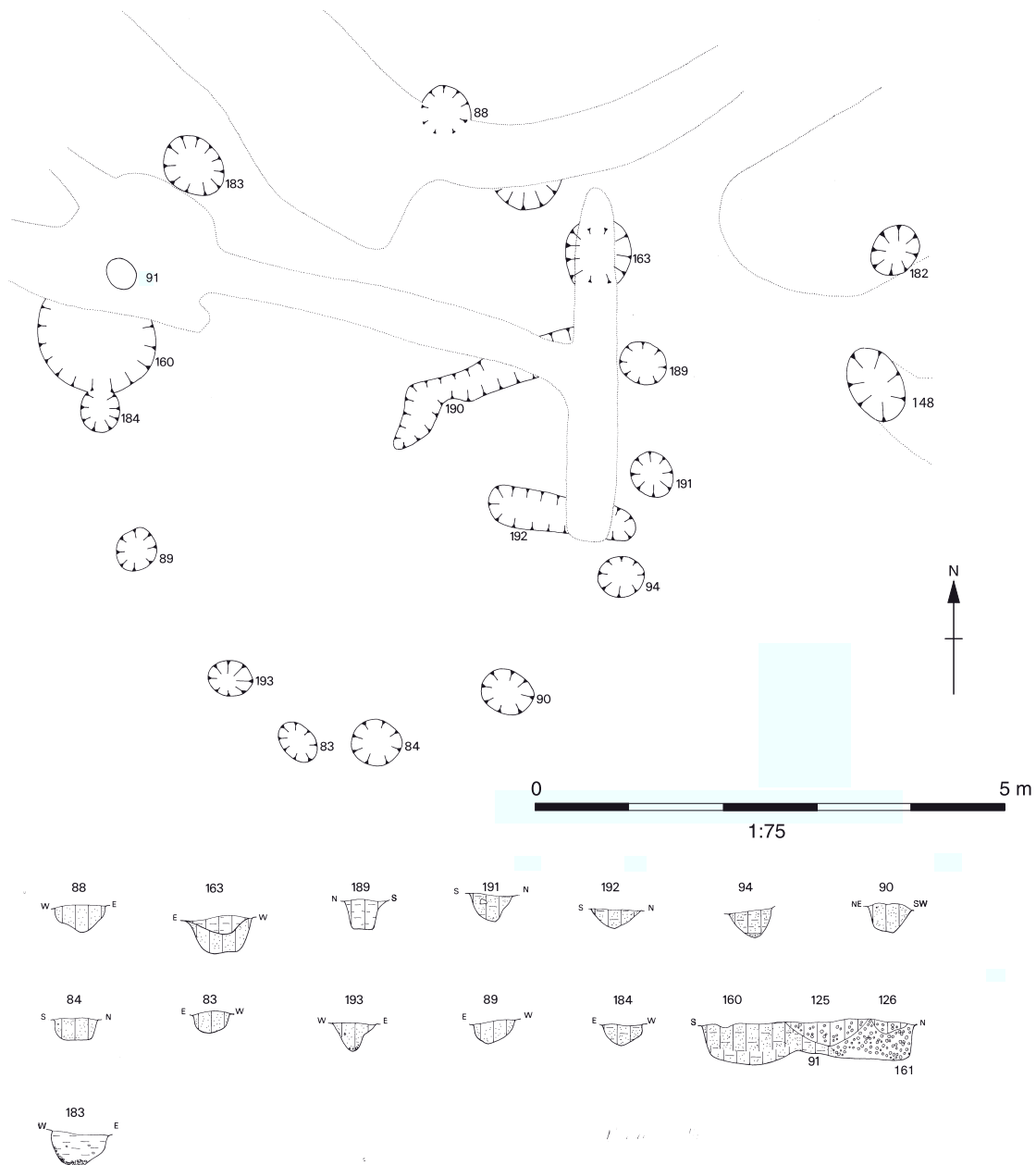
Fig. 17   Plan and sections of Neolithic or Bronze Age post ring

In the Cotswolds, a number of post settings have been recorded beneath long cairns. These include an alignment and arc of postholes, small pits and a hearth at Hazleton North (Saville 1990, 16-22), gullies and an arc of postholes 5 m across surrounding a possible hearth at Sale's Lot (Darvill 1982, 60), and a comparably amorphous group of postholes and a hearth beneath Ascott-under-Wychwood (Benson and Whittle 2007). None of these is as clearly defined as the Mount Farm ring.

As a free-standing post ring there are also rather few convincing middle Neolithic comparanda. Amongst the most securely dated structures of this period is a very small (2.5 m diameter) cluster of six or seven quite substantial closely spaced postholes with postpipes containing early Neolithic pottery at Yarnton. This structure is dated by four radiocarbon determinations clustering around 3600 cal BC (Hey forthcoming).

Much further afield, but more similar in scale and form to the Mount Farm ring is an example at Templewood, Argyllshire, where a possible post ring with charcoal dated to 4320 to 3380 cal BC may have predated a diminutive stone circle *c* 9 m across with 17 stone or post settings (Scott 1988-9, 71-3, 93, 115, fig. 16). Another small potentially early post ring similar to Mount Farm originally thought to predate a stone circle is Croft Moraig, Perthshire. It has, however, recently been redated to the Bronze Age (Piggott and Simpson 1971; Bradley and Sheridan 2005). Gibson (2005, 46, fig. 31) has suggested that the posts forming Ring B at North Mains, Perthshire might be early, though it was not directly dated, while the much more substantial timber ring at Arminghall, Norfolk was dated to 3500-2700 cal BC.

If it is accepted that the Mount Farm post ring does not have to be contemporary with pit F160, it can be seen as being similar in plan to the much more substantial late Neolithic timber rings at the nearby Dorchester complex. The ditches of the three hengiform cremation cemeteries at Sites IV, V and VI were formed respectively by 8, 13 and 12 large oval pits or segments of ditch with what appeared to be the bases of postholes in the bottom of them, 2 m to 2.5 m below ground surface (Atkinson *et al.* 1951, 35-59). Gibson (1992) has suggested that these were the last vestiges of penannular timber rings, which would respectively have been 7.5 m, 8 m and 9 m in diameter with entrances to the SE, NNW and N. He suggests that their posts had been dug out and the resultant pits more or less conjoined to create the ditched enclosures that were then used as cremation cemeteries. At Site III a larger (19 m by 21 m) egg-shaped timber ring, which was formed by posts 0.6 m in diameter, set 1.5 m into the ground, had been burnt down, four of the resulting hollows having human cremation deposits in them (Whittle *et al.* 1992). The dating evidence indicates that all these monuments were late Neolithic, with radiocarbon dates for Site III centring around 2920-2300 cal BC.

However, while the Mount Farm post ring is broadly similar to the Dorchester timber settings in size, plan, and the number of posts, and like them preceded subsequent funerary use of its site, the Dorchester structures were built of very much more substantial timbers set deep into the ground, and would have been much more impressive monuments. A much more similar (if anything even more modest) post ring in the Upper Thames Valley is the roughly oval setting of small posts at the centre of the late Neolithic Devil's Quoits henge circle, but this has even less dating evidence than Mount Farm (Barclay *et al.* 1995, 42-3, 71-3, figs 26 and 36).

There are several other instances of small post rings of late Neolithic to early Bronze Age date (Gibson 2005), including a number of post structures beneath round barrows (Marshall 2007), though unlike Mount Farm these are usually concentric with the barrow and are often build of stakes or quite small posts. Some were probably open ceremonial or funerary enclosures, and some barrows have Neolithic origins, though the post rings are generally later; some may have revetted initial mounds, as at Hodcott Down barrow A and Farncombe Down on the Berkshire Downs and Gravelly Guy at Stanton Harcourt (Richards 1986-90; Rahtz 1962, 4-11, fig. 7; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 52, fig. 2.8). In the middle of a local ring ditch at Clifton Hampden seven posts formed an almost circular group with a diameter of 2.5 m, set slightly off centre round a central undated cremation pit. One of the most comparable post rings is at Bleasdale, Lancashire where a small post ring with east-facing 'entrance' posts similar to the Mount Farm structure formed part of a low burial mound surrounded by a penannular ditch set on one side of a much larger palisaded enclosure (Varley 1938).

There are also cases of free standing Bronze Age post rings, of which local examples include Gravelly Guy, where a much larger penannular ring built of split timbers had its axis aligned on the Stanton Harcourt Barrow (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 61-3, plate 2.6). Other possibly later Bronze Age post rings in the Upper Thames Valley include examples at Standlake, Abingdon and possibly Lechlade (Catling 1982; Allen and Kamash 2008; Williams 1946-7; see Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

As a domestic building of early to middle Bronze Age date the form of the Mount Farm structure also has potential parallels, such as a small early Bronze Age post ring structure at Yarnton and a number of middle Bronze Age post rings both there and elsewhere interpreted as houses (Hey *et al.* forthcoming; Barnes and Cleal 1995; Lambrick with Robinson 2009). Nonetheless, the posts to the east are set rather too far from the main ring, too asymmetrically, and too far apart to be convincing as a typical 'porch' to a roundhouse, and there are other reasons why this does not seem to be the best explanation. There is no obvious reason why the posts should have been set out to respect any

hollow left by pit F160, and although Case (1963) argued for a domestic origin for some ring ditches in the region, the Mount Farm structure lacks a clear association with any domestic refuse or other evidence of domestic activity. In particular, as indicated in the sections below, it predates one of the burials which the radiocarbon dating indicates was probably earlier than the Deverel-Rimbury domestic debris in the upper fill ring ditch F101 and in the pit associated with burnt stone and charcoal (F164).

In conclusion, the most plausible explanation of this post setting is that it was probably erected in the Neolithic or early Bronze Age, possibly as early as the middle Neolithic, to form a free-standing ring of posts probably with an east-facing axis marked by two outliers. As such it seems broadly comparable with other post structures predating or associated with places that became funerary monuments, though there are few very close parallels, leaving its date uncertain.

It was positioned about 55 m away from the middle Neolithic and Beaker ring ditch to the south, and might have been intended to reinforce the local significance of the low eminence at Mount Farm between the cursus and other monument complexes at Dorchester, Stadhampton and Drayton St Leonard. Even though it may not have been contemporary with the middle Neolithic pit (F160), its precise siting seems to have been intended to incorporate it, perhaps as the only visible trace of earlier human activity in the immediate area apart from the nearby oval barrow(s). If the post ring was intended as a kind of landmark or location for local communal or ceremonial gatherings, not a funerary site, the choice of location away from the oval barrow might have been deliberate. It may then in turn have become the focus for a new burial place marked by the much bigger ring ditch discussed below.

Overview

Thin scatters and occasional clusters of Neolithic and Beaker pits and occasional burials associated with ring ditches or barrows are not uncommon on sites in the Upper Thames Valley where fairly large areas of gravel have been exposed to archaeological examination, and Mount Farm adds to the evidence of early and middle Neolithic domestic activity more recently found at Yarnton, South Stoke and Benson (Pine and Ford 2003). Traces of such occupation are generally not as common as evidence of later Neolithic and Beaker occupation, as at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004). The middle Neolithic burial and Beaker burials associated with an oval barrow are especially notable, raising a number of issues concerning how such burial places continued to be respected and reused, with similar issues arising for the enigmatic post ring that preceded the Bronze Age ring ditch discussed in the next section.

There is thus clear evidence of intermittent domestic, funerary and ceremonial activity at Mount Farm through the early, middle and late Neolithic and Beaker periods, but it may have been of a very transitory, impermanent nature – perhaps quite infrequent recurrent visits to a favoured location marked by a burial ground. The presence of cereals throughout the sequence is noteworthy but need not imply permanent settlement and may only reflect small-scale horticulture. The nature of this activity is further explored in Part 3.

The position of Mount Farm on a slight rise between the three major early Neolithic to Bronze Age ceremonial complexes at Dorchester, Drayton St Leonard and Stadhampton may well be relevant to why this activity took place here, whether or not the site was actually intervisible with them. Of these centres of ceremonial and funerary monuments, the Dorchester cursus was much the largest, and was the focus of the most elaborate complex of monuments (Whittle *et al.* 1992; Loveday 1999).

Early to middle Bronze Age

Ring ditch and burials (Figs 18-20)

A circular ring ditch (F101) 27 m in diameter lay in the northern area of controlled excavation (Figs 18-19). There was no central burial and no dating evidence was recovered from the primary silting of the ditch,

Table 4: Summary of burials in the Bronze Age ring ditch

Context	Age/type	Content	Grave goods and dating
F146	Accessory?	Charcoal	Small decorated Collared Urn
F121	Child 1-5 years	Token cremation 1 g	Small slightly shouldered plain urn 1940–1430 cal BC (charcoal)
F123	Accessory?	Charcoal	Small shouldered plain urn
F159	?	Calcined fragments	-
F196	Infant/child	Token cremation 5 g	-
F117	Adolescent/adult	1 bone	-
F178	Neonatal	Inhumation half complete	Small plain urn with horseshoe bosses; 1750–1530 cal BC (human bone)
F177	Child *c* 8 years	Inhumation nearly complete	1740–1530 cal BC (human bone)
F161	Female 17-21 years	Inhumation nearly complete	1610–1290 cal BC (human bone)
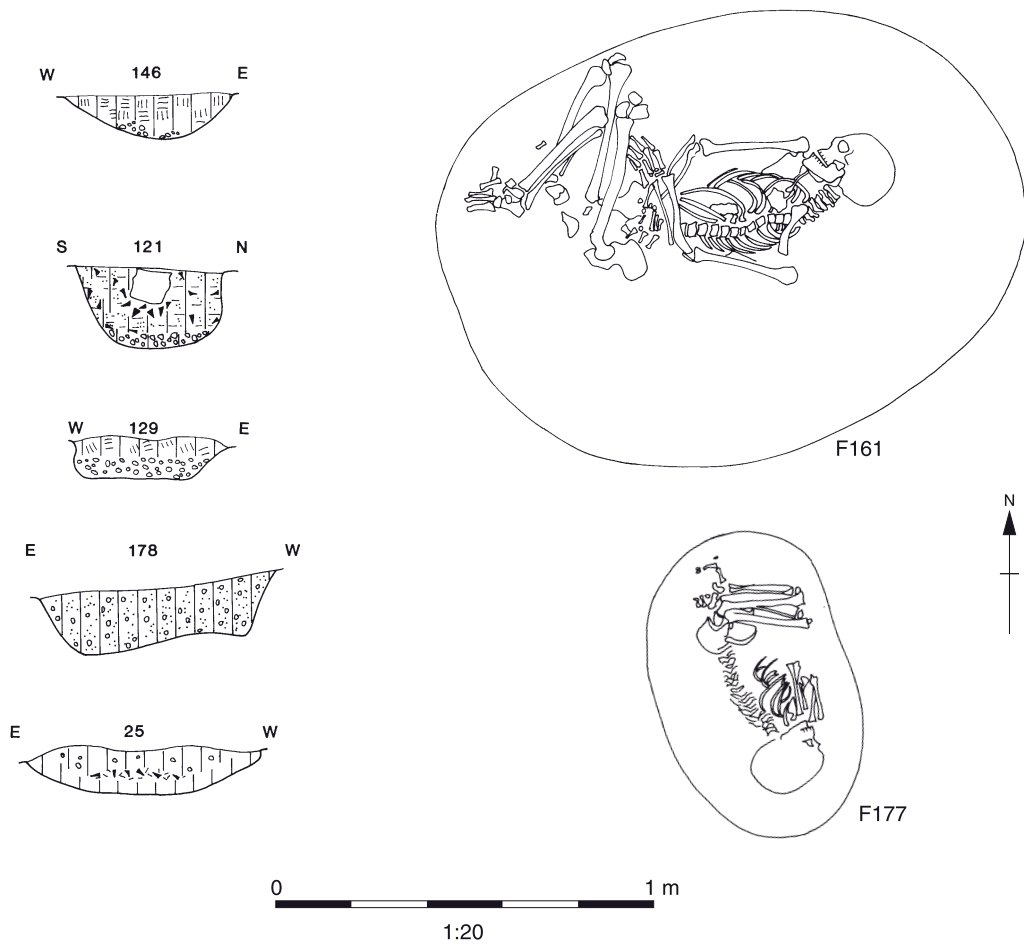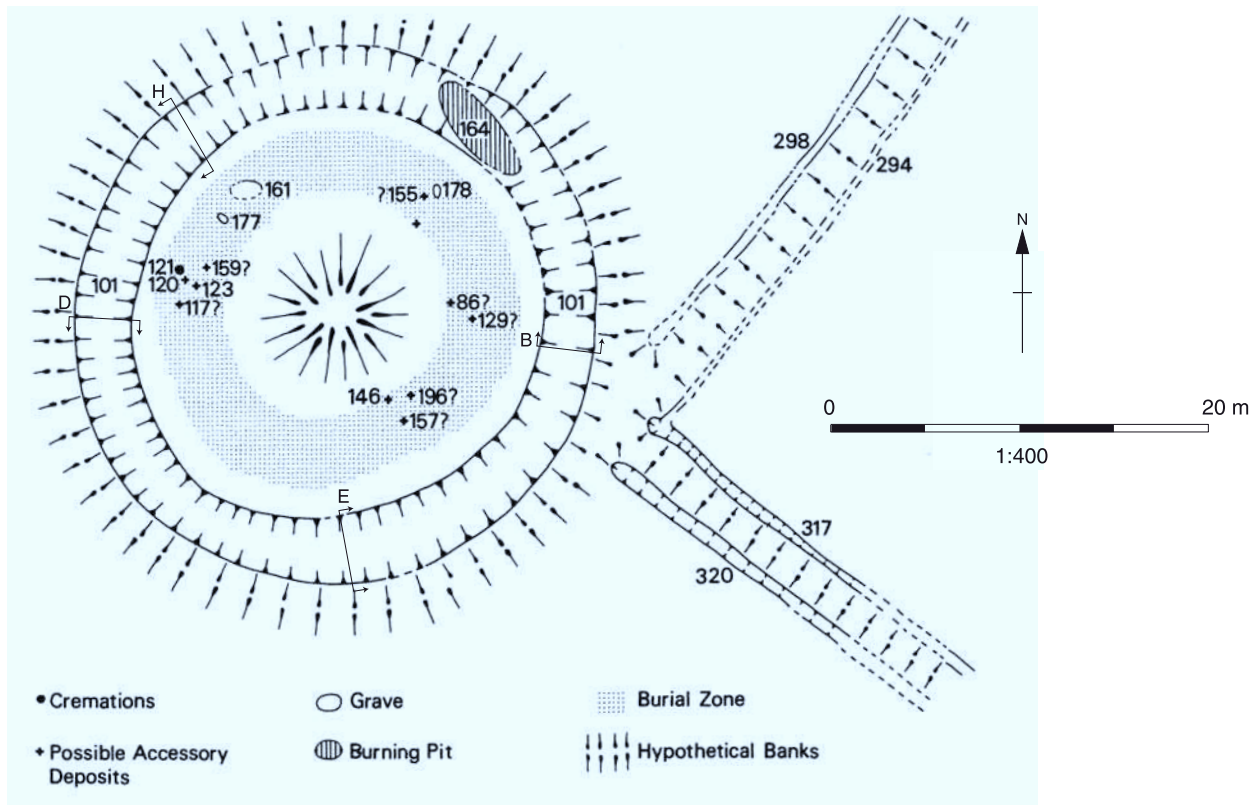
Fig. 18   Interpretive plan of early to middle Bronze Age ring ditch F101 and double ditched boundaries F317/320 and F294/298 with detailed plans of inhumations F161 and F177 and sections of cremations and other funerary deposits

but morphologically it is most likely to belong to the earlier Bronze Age (Case 1963) in keeping with a series of funerary deposits between the central area and the inner edge of the ditch (Fig. 18).

Of the burials, or potentially associated deposits (Table 4, and Figs 18 and 20), the most distinctively early Bronze Age find was the rim of a Wessex style Collared Urn (Fig. 20, no. 1; Appendix 4) from F146, a small charcoally deposit with no cremated bone, but which may have been an accessory to a cremation. Two other shallow holes, also with charcoally fill (F157 and F196, F196 being very similar to F146) but no dating evidence, were found nearby. Another shallow depression with charcoally fill (F129) lay 5 m north-east of these features, but similarly produced no finds.

Plate 2   Middle Bronze Age burials within ring ditch F101

F121, in the western part of the ring ditch interior, was a cremation burial in a small urn placed in a pit with charcoally fill which was radiocarbon dated to 1940–1430 cal BC (HAR-4822: 3380 ± 100 BP). This lay close to four other smaller charcoally deposits (F123, F117, F159 and F120), of which F123 produced part of another small urn and some burnt bone. About 2.5 m north of this group were two unaccompanied inhumations, a child (F177) radio-carbon dated to 1740–1530 cal BC (OxA-15786: 3359 ± 32 BP), and a young woman (F161; Plate 2) dated to 1610–1290 cal BC (HAR-4791: 3170 ± 70 BP). Around 10 m east of this was a small pit (F178) which contained an infant inhumation, radiocarbon dated to 1750–1530 cal BC (OxA-15785: 3372 ± 38 BP), accompanied by a small upturned lugged urn (Plate 3).

A few other features within the ring ditch may also belong to this period: this could apply to the post ring referred to above, the large deep hollow F147, and two small holes (F149 and F155) cutting it (Fig. 6). F149 contained one piece of flint-tempered pottery. A little further west, F85 (Fig. 6) was another small hole with dark loamy fill which, however, contained no dating evidence.

After the initial slumping of the ditch, it continued to fill up slowly. A layer of charcoal-flecked fine loamy soil (Fig. 19, layers 101/H/2, 101/E/1, 101/D/2, 101/B/2) which contained sherds of Deverel-Rimbury pottery, numerous animal bones, mainly of cattle, accumulated. The layer has been radiocarbon dated to 1520–1050 cal BC (HAR-4796: 3080 ± 90 BP). In section E this layer also contained the skeleton of a baby, and one bone of a 6 year old child.

Plate 3 Middle Bronze Age infant burial with inverted lugged urn within ring ditch F101

Twenty-five metres north of the ring ditch was an apparently isolated cremation burial (F25) probably of similar date (Figs 6 and 18). There was no evidence of it ever having been surrounded by a ditch. A fairly complete (579 g) cremation burial of an adult of unknown age was recovered with a small number of sherds from different Deverel-Rimbury vessels which were not obviously funerary urns.
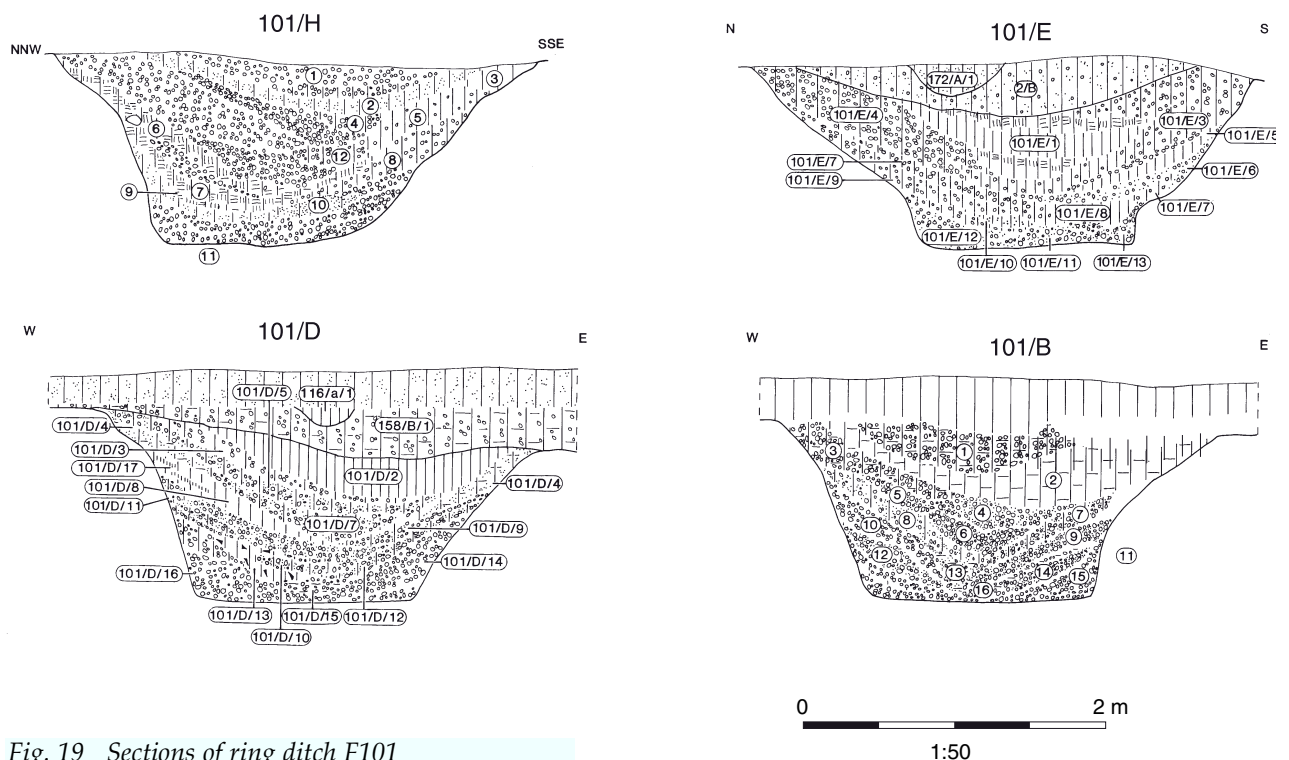
Fig. 19   Sections of ring ditch F101

Discussion

Ring Ditch 101 with its probably associated burials and cremation deposits provides the main evidence for funerary practice in the Bronze Age, though the isolated cremation burial (F25) to the north indicates that burials were not confined to this monument.

The ring ditch is best interpreted as a disc barrow of a form typical of the Thames Valley (Case 1963). There are three reasons to suggest an external bank: first, the ditch filling tended to be derived from the outer edge of the ditch, though in some sections this was not very clear (Fig. 19); second, the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age ploughing (see below, Fig. 41; Plate 5) had dug into the surface of the gravel on the inside edge of the ditch but not the outside edge, suggesting that a greater depth of soil may have protected the outer edge; and third, the Bronze Age double ditches (F317 and F320) butt-ended 4 m from the outer edge of the ring ditch as though respecting an intervening bank (Fig. 18). There is no direct evidence for a central mound: unlike some local examples, no trace of one had survived the centuries of ploughing. Nevertheless, funerary deposits, distributed in a band *c* 5 m wide inside the ditch, appear to avoid a blank central area where there might have been a small mound (Fig. 18).

No central inhumation or cremation burial was discovered either in 1933 or 1977/8. If one had been incorporated within a central mound that was subsequently ploughed out, no finds indicative of this were found in the topsoil although the whole area of the ring ditch was stripped by hand to try to ensure that any evidence of disturbed burials would be found.

The ditch was probably flat bottomed and originally straight sided. This is a typical shape for Bronze Age ring ditches on the Thames gravels, though the basal fills of very clean gravel slumped from the sides with no addition of soil are not always fully distinguished, as was almost the case here. The ditch was almost exactly circular, with an outer diameter of 28 m enclosing an area 21-23 m across

A hypothetical reconstructed plan suggesting the size of the bank and mound that could be created from the available spoil from the ditch (and its relationship to the field boundaries aligned on it) is shown in Figure 18. Disc barrows with or without central mounds seem to be a common form of ring ditch on the gravels (cf Case 1963, 39-47, type 2a).

While no 'primary' (ie central) burial was found, the various funerary deposits indicated in Figure 18 can be associated with the ring ditch on the basis of their location, some dating evidence, and the nature of their fills. Somewhat unusually for the Thames Valley, though comparable to Shorncote (Barclay and Glass 1995), both inhumation and cremation burials were present. The burials appeared to occupy a broad band or zone between the central area of the ring ditch and its inner edge, mostly in the northern half of the area. There was no obvious chronological distinction between the two forms of burial, though it is possible that the cremation burials were earlier.

The young woman of 17-20 and a single bone of an adolescent or adult were the oldest individuals buried within the area of the ring ditch, all the others being young children, though given the small number of individuals represented it is not certain whether this is significant.

When calibrated at 95% confidence, the earliest and latest limits of the radiocarbon dates obtained from four of the funerary deposits were 750 years apart at 1940 cal BC and 1290 cal BC (HAR-4822: 3380 ± 100 BP; OxA-15785: 3372 ± 38 BP; OxA-15786: 3359 ± 32 BP; HAR-4791: 3170 ± 70 BP); but all the date ranges also overlap for the 190 years from 1610 to 1420 cal BC. The pottery evidence (from a small
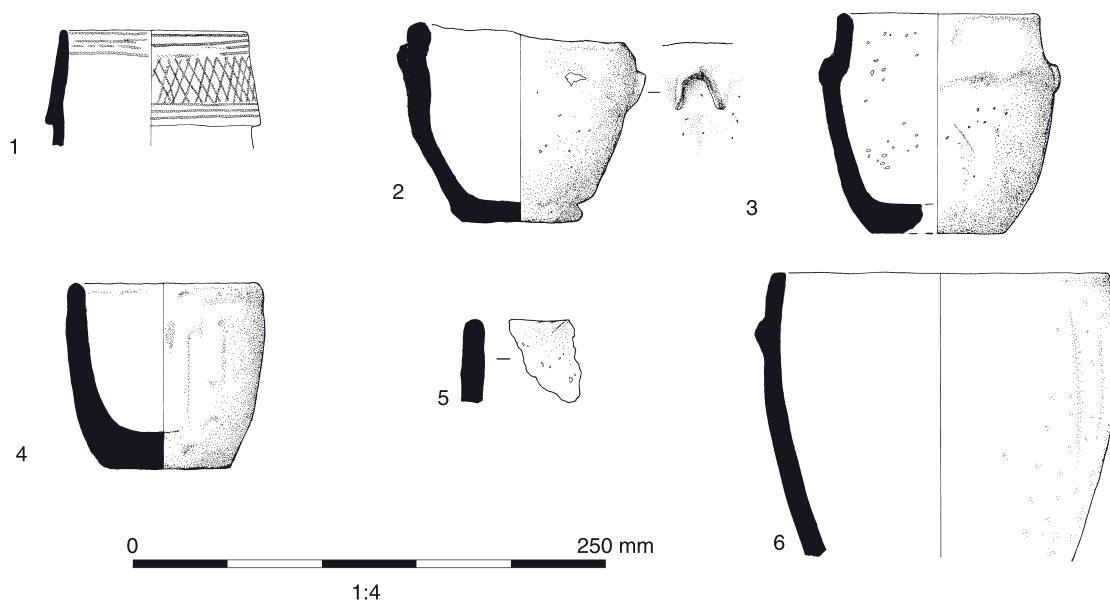
Fig. 20   Early to middle Bronze Age pottery

collared urn in F146 and small biconical or sub-biconical urns in F121, F178 and F123) are consistent with the burials having been made in the latter part of the early Bronze Age (after *c* 1700 cal BC).

On balance the dating evidence coupled with the fairly limited number but varied kinds of burials suggests that the ring ditch may have been used as a cemetery for a few generations, but probably not several centuries. The bias towards children and young people may also suggest that it had a particular role that could have lasted for a few generations.

The overall sequence is not closely matched amongst other ring ditches in the Upper Thames Valley at Standlake, Stanton Harcourt, Cassington, or Dorchester (Case 1963; Case and Whittle 1982; Barclay *et al.* 1995; Whittle *et al.* 1992). The most similar sequence appears to be that from Field Farm, Burghfield, where the Bronze Age cremation burials similarly appeared to occupy a broad band round the centre of the ring ditch, with a few outlying cremation burials, of which some were associated with small ring ditches (Butterworth and Lobb 1992)

The upper filling of ring ditch F101, particularly its south-eastern parts, contained small quantities of Deverel-Rimbury pottery (see Appendix 4) and animal bones (mainly of cattle). A radiocarbon determination of 1520–1050 cal BC (HAR-4796: 3080 ± 90 BP) overlaps with that obtained for the young woman in grave F161, and it is possible that the pottery and bones reflect feasting at a funeral wake rather than indicating the existence of a settlement nearby, for which there is no other evidence. The bones were predominantly meat bearing joints of beef, though not exclusively so; one piece of pottery was the base of a large bucket urn with cooking residues, which was of a size suitable for catering for several people (Fig. 21, no. 6).

Another possibility is that the deposits in the upper fill of F101 and the dump of burnt stone and charcoal (but not bone or cremation ashes) in F164 were associated with some use of the large water-hole F162 which was cut through the ring ditch when it was still a visible hollow (see below).

Bronze Age field boundaries (Figs 18, 22 and 23; Plate 4)

There is no indication of any form of enclosure or trackway before the early to middle Bronze Age when two pairs of parallel ditches (F294 and F298, and F317 and F320) converged at right angles on the eastern side of ring ditch F101 and were clearly aligned on it (Figs 18 and 22; Plate 4). F317 and F320 headed straight towards, but stopped 4 metres short of, the ring ditch, possibly respecting an outer bank. F294 and F298 were only very partially preserved, particularly F294 which was no more than a stain of slightly disturbed gravel, but they also appear to have respected the ring ditch in a similar way. The details of the intersection had been lost, though F317 and 320 were clearly noticeably deeper than the others.

The ditches clearly respect the ring ditch, and must therefore be contemporary with it or post-date it. Amongst a few flints F320 produced a barbed and tanged arrowhead (see Fig. 21, no. 1 and Appendix 3), but no other datable material was found in the ditches. They could be early Bronze Age but this is not certain, as the arrowhead might well be redeposited. A similar pair of ditches recently found at Crowmarsh produced a few scraps of early Bronze Age pottery as well as flints (Ford *et al.* 2006), but at Eight Acre Field, Radley, double-
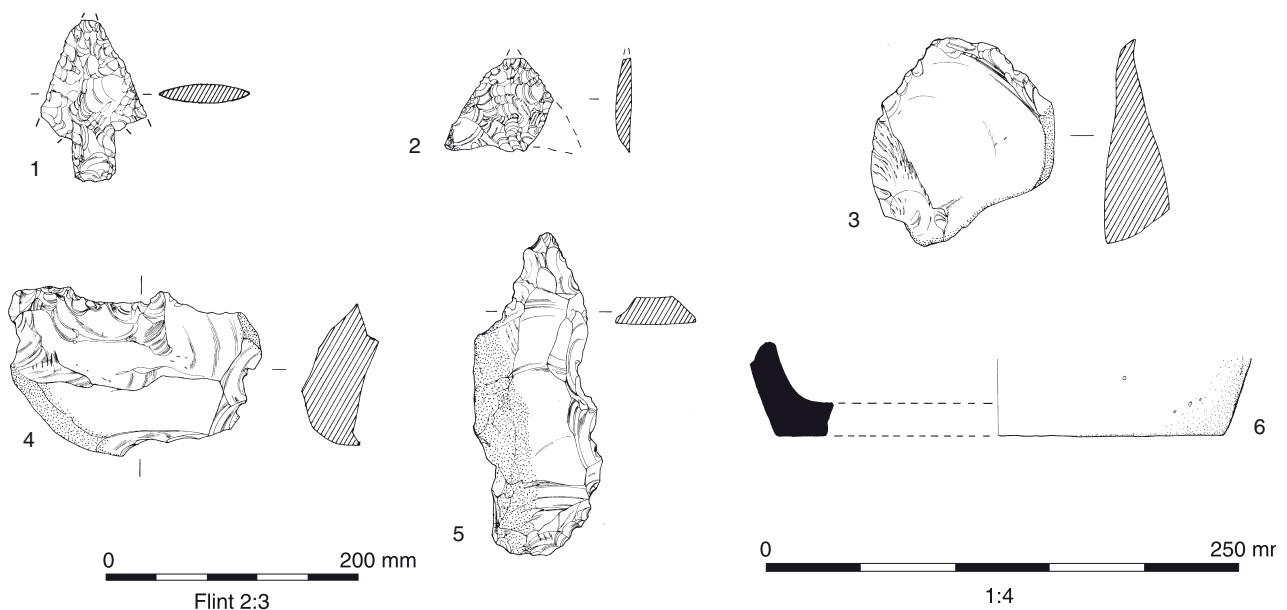
Fig. 21 Objects from early to middle Bronze Age boundaries and middle Bronze Age fill of ring ditch F101

Plate 4   Bronze Age field boundary

ditched boundaries were of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date (Mudd 1995, 31). Other probable double-ditched field boundaries are known locally at Dorchester Cursus (Whittle *et al.* 1992) Northfield Farm (Gray 1977; Thomas 1980) and Radley (Mudd 1995), but are also not well dated.

The ring ditch F101 continued to be a prominent feature into the middle Bronze Age after formal burials had ceased, and as noted above, it is uncer-

tain whether the pottery and bone debris in its upper fill reflect later domestic activity or funerary use.

Discussion

The dating of the double ditches at Mount Farm is not entirely clear. The barrow on which they are aligned appears to have been a sufficiently important landmark or social focus to act as a key point in the layout of the ditches. This is the case with other Bronze Age field systems in the Thames Valley (Lambrick with Robinson 2009), but their dating is uncertain. As the barrow is of early Bronze Age origin and the only datable object from them is a barbed and tanged arrowhead, they may also have been early Bronze Age. This would fit with the rather stronger though still slight dating evidence for the short length of paired ditches recently found at Crowmarsh (Ford *et al*. 2006). However, this has to be set against the absence of other good evidence of fields of early Bronze Age origin in the Middle or Upper Thames Valley and a middle or later Bronze Age origin may be more likely (Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

Double-ditched boundaries of this type, characterised by small parallel ditches about 2-4 m apart, are a distinctive feature of some rectilinear Bronze Age enclosure systems on the gravels, most notably at Fengate (Pryor 2001). They are often considered to be narrow tracks – probably pedestrian paths (Pryor 2001; Framework Archaeology 2006), and Pryor has suggested that in some instances such pairs of ditches can be interpreted as 'races' leading to drafting gates for separating individual animals into different groups.

However, some examples seem to enclose fields rather than leading through them, having no
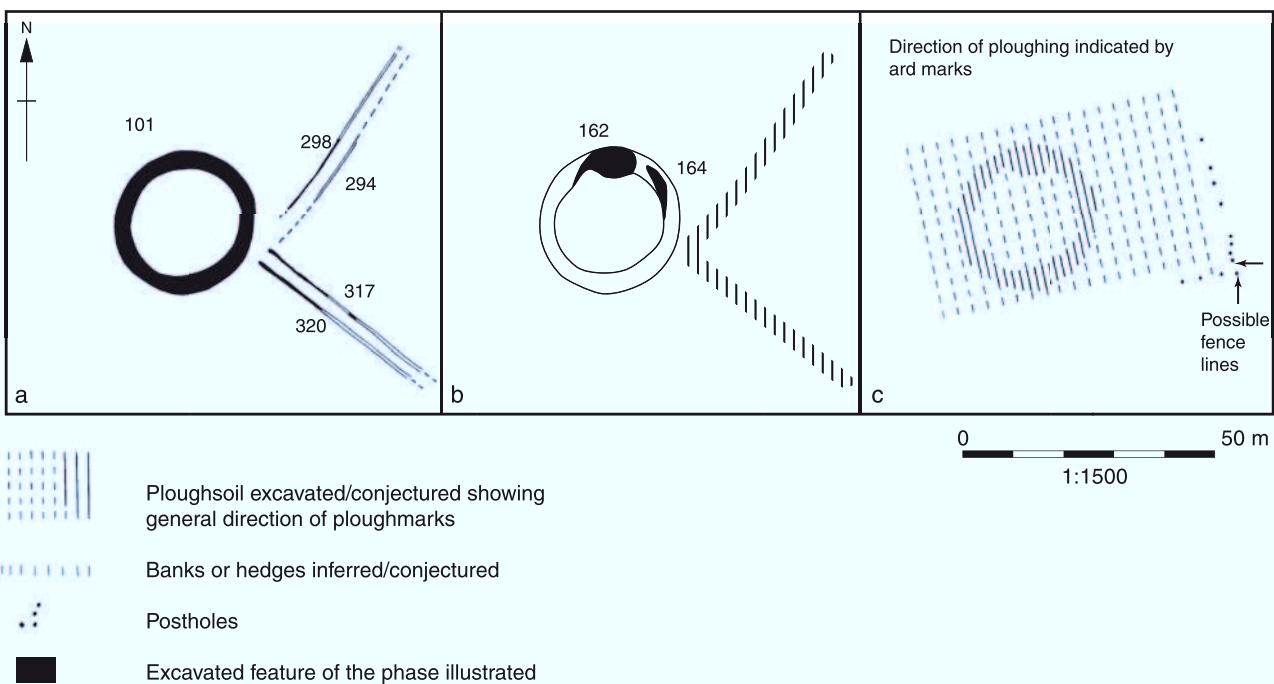
Fig. 22   Interpretation plan: a) early to middle Bronze Age, b) middle to late Bronze Age, c) early Iron Age

openings at their corners. Furthermore, sometimes there are gaps through both ditches marking gateways between enclosures or out into a trackway (Gray 1977; Pryor 2001). In these cases it is reasonable to infer that the double ditches mark the position of hedge banks, the bank material being derived from the ditches on both sides (Fig. 23). This seems most likely to be the case at Mount Farm, with the ditches marking the corner of a field bounded by hedge banks set out from the Bronze Age ring ditch (Figs 18 and 22).

The evidence of a largely grassland landscape from the later Bronze Age waterhole might suggest that the double-ditched boundaries should be seen in the context of established pastoralism, but this evidence is of uncertain value: it need not reflect land use in the immediate vicinity, and evidence of a mature grassland environment from a ditch surrounding a Roman ploughed field at Drayton shows that such evidence should not be overstretched (Barclay *et al.* 2003).

Waterhole (Figs 6, 22 and 24)

A large ramped waterhole (F162), 5.5 m across and 8 m long, dug 2.1 m into the gravel, was cut into the silted up ring ditch 101 on its north side just west of the hollow (F164) with burnt material (Figs 6, 22 and 24). It was steep sided to the north-west, north, east and south-east, but with a much gentler sloped access to the south-west, exploiting the hollow left by the earlier ring ditch (F101) to allow access for people to collect water. Gravel upcast from the ramp of the waterhole extended along the ring ditch as F101/H/1, overlying its loamy secondary filling, F101/H/2 (Figs 19 and 24 – it should be noted that the longitudinal E-W section was not aligned on the centre of the ramp).

The bottom of the well was significantly below the original water table. Organic preservation was very good at the bottom and some preservation was found as much as 0.8 m above this. It probably contained water throughout the year and supported a range of aquatic insects and crustacea but need not have been foul. Dung beetles were not as numerous as would have been expected if the pond had been used as a frequent watering place for a herd of cattle.

There was no lining and no other obvious artificial aid to access; some substantial pieces of wood found in the lower levels of the waterhole (L162/-/12) were not worked and did not obviously form a revetment step.

This wood from the basal silts was radiocarbon dated to 1440–1000 cal BC (HAR-4797: 3000 ± 80 BP), consistent with the slightly earlier date for the bone in the secondary fill of the ring ditch. Another piece of wood slightly higher in the fill (L162/-/9) was dated to 1260–830 cal BC (HAR-4798: 2850 ± 70 BP; Table 1 and Appendix 2). The radiocarbon dates overlap and could be contemporary in the latter part of the middle Bronze Age, but the difference between them is also consistent with their stratigraphic relationship, which would then suggest the waterhole was in use over a period of perhaps 200 years or more, spanning the middle to late Bronze Age. No distinctively middle or late Bronze Age pottery was recovered to clarify this. Nonetheless, the material from the waterhole included a fine quern stone (Fig. 25, no. 7), animal bone and carbonised remains, as well as the earliest waterlogged material from the site, provide useful insights into middle to late Bronze Age activity at Mount Farm (see Part 3 below).

Discussion

The waterhole is a good example of a ramped well, a well-recognised form of waterhole that includes both later prehistoric (especially middle to late Bronze Age) and Roman examples (Lambrick with Robinson 2009; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 197-204).

The fairly considerable original depth of water would have meant that artificially induced erosion
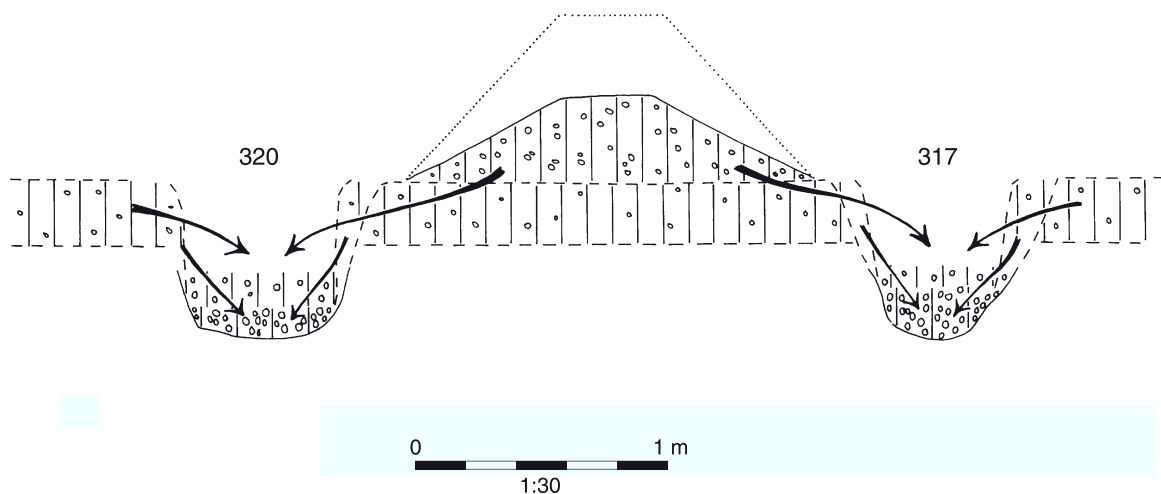
Fig. 23   Diagrammatic cross-section of double-ditched boundary F317/320
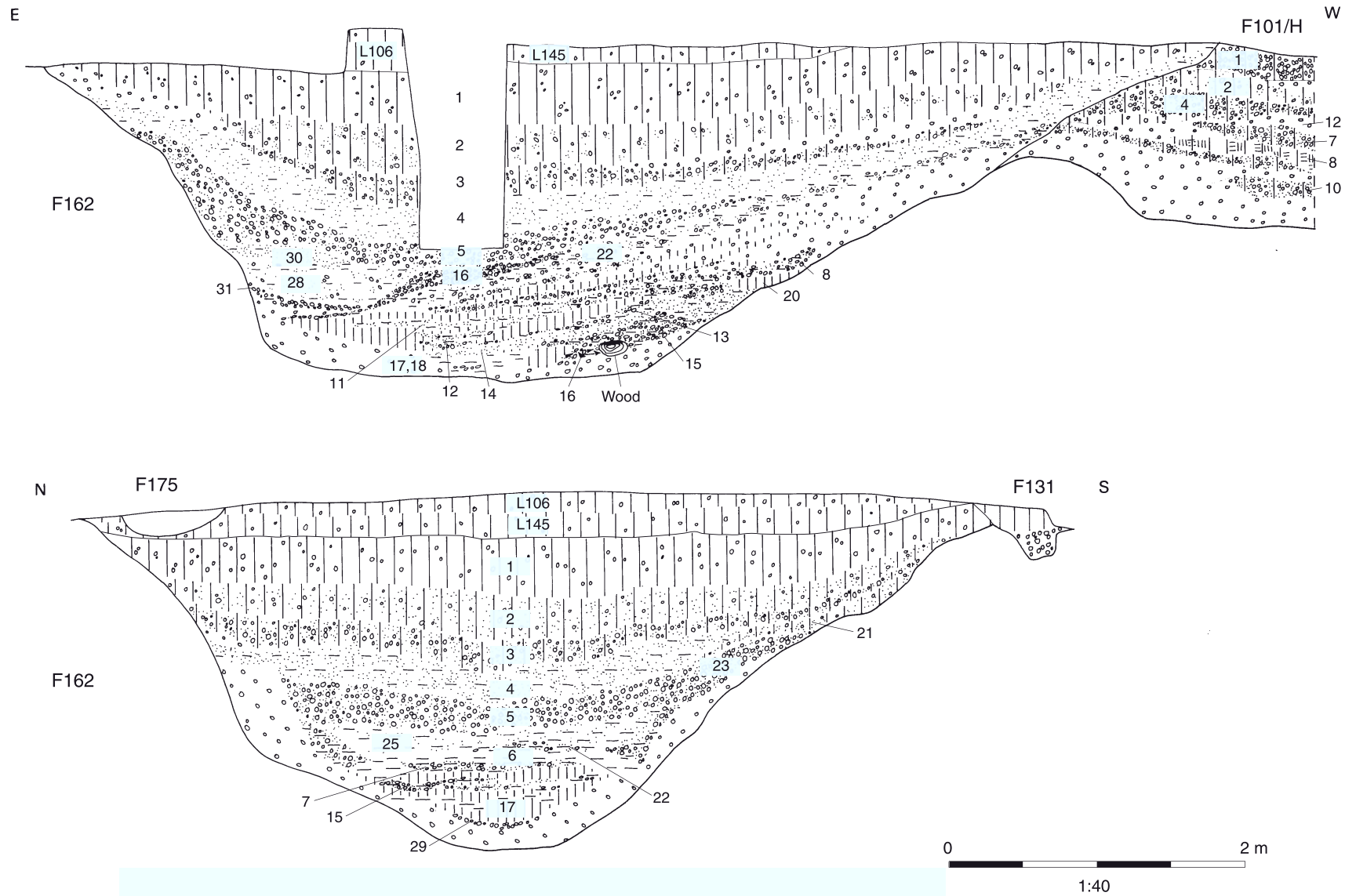
Fig. 24   Sections of middle to late Bronze Age ramped well F162

from the sides of the well and down its access ramp could have gone on quite a long time before the waterhole became unusable.

It is unclear what was done with the spoil excavated from the hole, except that some gravel was thrown out into the ring ditch hollow (perhaps to prevent it getting too muddy). The rest of the gravel may have been taken for use elsewhere. If it had formed a spoil heap or bank, there was no sign of where it was. The complicated sequence of irregular sandy and gravelly layers and lenses in the lower fills of the pond must have resulted from material being artificially eroded down the ramp; these deposits are much thicker than the slumping which occurred at the bottom of the other slopes despite those being steeper (Fig. 24).

It is worth noting the proximity of the waterhole to F164, a hollow filled with charcoal and burnt stones immediately to the east (see below; Figs 6, 18 and 22). Stratigraphically, this hollow and the waterhole are in equivalent positions in the sequence, both cutting the secondary loamy layer in the ring ditch. The Deverel-Rimbury pottery from the hollow suggests a date not much later than the similar material from the ring ditch (Appendix 4), and it is possible that the waterhole was kept cleaned out for many decades before pieces of timber and slumped gravel were allowed to accumulate in the bottom. Allowing for worm sorting of the pottery and animal bone into the loamy fill of the ring ditch, it is also plausible that initial use of the waterhole, the burning activity and occupation deposits in the upper fill of the ring ditch were all more-or-less contemporary.

Hollow filled with burnt stone and charcoal
(Figs 6, 18 and 22)

On the north-east side of the ring ditch the loamy layer overlying its primary fills was cut by a shallow oval hollow (F164) filled with charcoal and burnt quartzite pebbles (F164/A/2-3). It contained pottery similar in fabric to that from F101, and two sherds very similar to the vessel from F123. Its top fill was much more loamy and though it contained more Deverel-Rimbury-style sherds, a few probable Iron Age sherds were also present, suggesting worm-sorting, bioturbation or more serious disturbance (possibly by late Bronze Age or early Iron Age cultivation - see below).

Discussion

The charcoal and fire-shattered quartzite pebbles in hollow F164, in the top of the ring ditch F101 adjacent to waterhole F162, might have been rake-out from a cooking fire. It was much smaller than the large deposits of burnt stone associated with Irish *fulacht feidh* cooking places (O'Kelly 1954) and other burnt mounds such as that at Green Park (Brossler *et al.* 2006). It is more comparable to numerous other small pits and hollows on middle and late Bronze Age settlements such as Knights

Farm or Yarnton (Bradley *et al.* 1980; Hey in prep; Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

As found, the volume of the deposit was roughly two cubic metres, but probably decidedly less than a cubic metre of it was actually burnt stone, though it had also been truncated by prehistoric and later ploughing. O'Kelly (1954) has shown that different quantities of stone might be used for different types of cooking: half a cubic metre would boil a large leg of lamb; less was required to roast it. This would suggest that if the deposit here does represent a cooking place, only quite modest sized meals were prepared. Although there was some horizontal layering in the deposit (the charcoal and stones being denser at the bottom), there is no evidence of how many episodes of use and reuse the burnt material might represent.

The association of this deposit with cooking is by no means certain. There was no great concentration of animal bones (though the bones in the upper fills of F101 could be contemporary) and no carbonised grain was found. But nor was there any slag or burnt human bone to suggest a metalworking or funerary use. Other burnt mound deposits have been interpreted as having had other uses, as saunas or for cloth processing (Hodder and Barfield, 1991; Denvir nd: http://www.angelfire. com/fl/burntmounds, accessed Jan 2010), and if the adjacent waterhole was still extant these are also plausible explanations of the deposit.

Other possible Bronze Age material

No other features can be confidently assigned to this period, and flintwork of this date is not sufficiently diagnostic to be identified among the unstratified material. However, a few sherds of unstratified Deverel-Rimbury-style pottery was recovered from F126 and from the topsoil between burials F161 and F178. The distribution of flint-tempered pottery (probably mostly of this date) generally indicates a pattern of activity broadly similar to that indicated by the Neolithic to Bronze Age features.

Overview

The form of ring ditch 101 is typical of the region (Case 1963), though the mixture of the early to middle Bronze Age inhumation and cremation burials associated with it is an unusual survival (it is not unusual for such ring ditches without central burials to appear 'empty').

The absence of domestic debris in the lower fills of the ring ditch is also typical. The parallel ditches meeting at right angles east of the ring ditch probably formed boundaries to fields or paddocks and the absence of much occupation material in them is consistent with the immediate site not actually being inhabited at this period. It is not unusual for the layout of such fields to be aligned on or respect features such as barrows (Lambrick with

0   200 mm

Flint 2:3

0   250 mm

Pottery 1:4

0   100 mm

Bone 1:2

0   250 mm

Quern 1:4
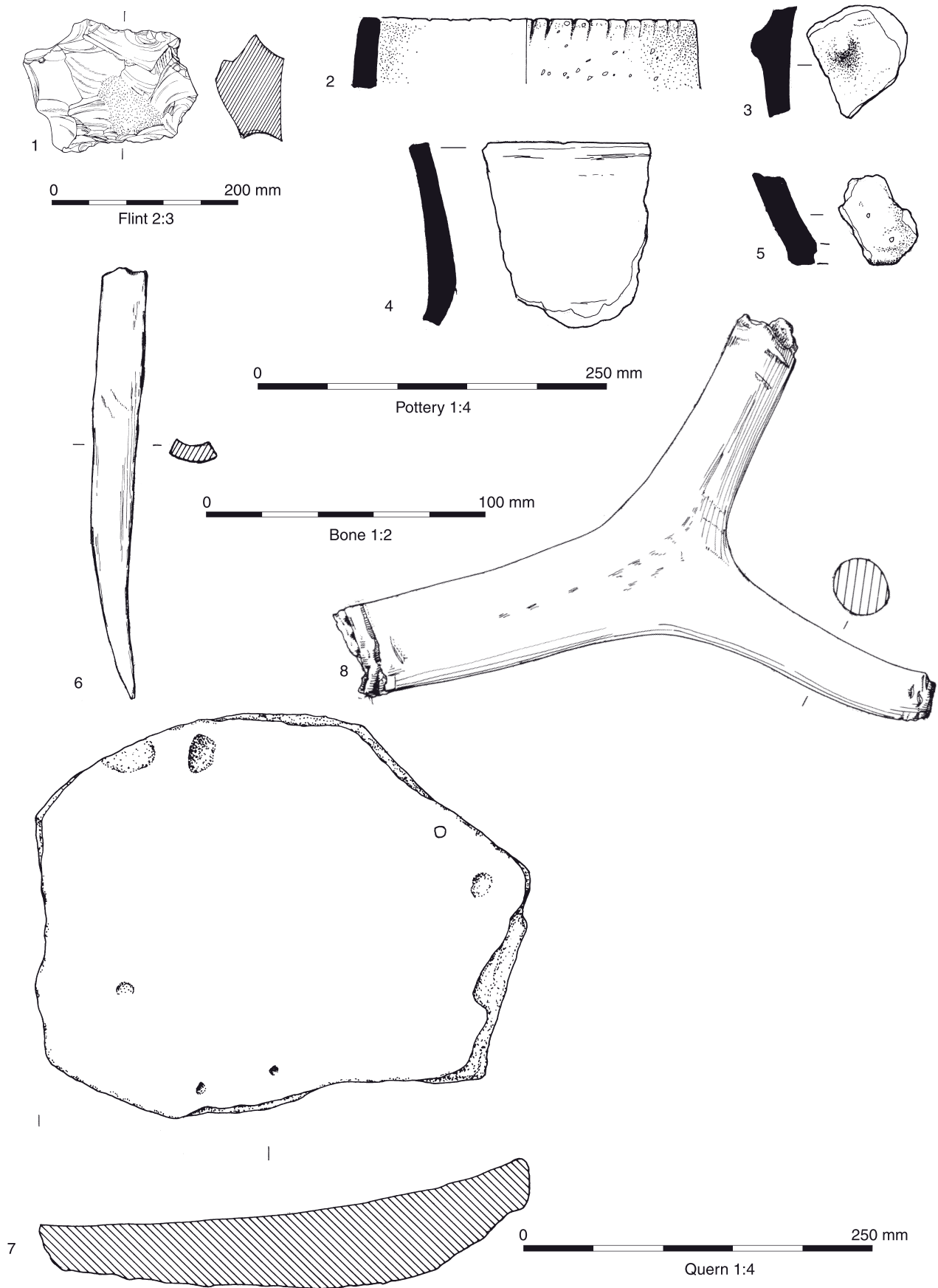
Fig. 25   Objects from middle to late Bronze Age burnt hollow F164 and ramped well F162: 1- 2 flints, 4-5 pottery from F164; 6 saddle quern, 7 bone awl, 8 worked antler from ramped well F162

Robinson 2009), but this can often include much older monuments, and it is unfortunate that there is not clearer dating evidence for these boundaries.

Compared with other sites in the region such as Corporation Farm, Appleford Sidings or Yarnton (Barclay *et al.* 2003; Booth and Simmons forthcoming; Hey *et al.* forthcoming b) no deposits at Mount Farm can definitively be regarded as evidence of middle Bronze Age settlement on the site, but the 'domestic' debris in F101 and F164 could plausibly be seen as a transition to greater non-funerary use of the area, perhaps also associated with the creation of waterhole F162. Such a transition may also be reflected in the character of the human bone deposits. In the early to middle Bronze Age these consisted of formal graves and deliberate cremation deposits, some associated with urns, but in the middle to late Bronze Age they consisted of an infant skeleton associated with occupation debris in the upper fill of F101, and a few other stray human bones in this deposit and in F164 and F162. Such deposits are quite typical of later prehistoric settlement sites, both here and elsewhere (see below; Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

Late Bronze Age and early to middle Iron Age

While in general terms the sequence of development from the late Bronze Age to the middle Iron Age is fairly clear, there are some problems with establishing the actual chronology and with assigning some contexts to particular subperiods within this range.

Although there are some useful stratigraphic and spatial relationships, the chronology of the later prehistoric sequence at Mount Farm is heavily reliant on ceramic dating, and before outlining the development of the site in this period it is important to note some particular issues of interpretation that underpin the pottery evidence for the chronology of development.

Possible late Bronze Age acivity

Commenting on the material from Allen's Pit and Myres' work at Mount Farm, John Barrett (1980) noted that there are many sherds that are consistent with late Bronze Age forms and decoration. However, it is important to appreciate that these sherds do not occur in groups which are characterised as a whole by distinctively late Bronze Age rather than early Iron Age forms and fabrics (Appendix 5). For example, flint-tempered pottery is present, but never dominant or even significant in the assemblages at Mount Farm, unlike late Bronze Age assemblages at Appleford (De Roche and Lambrick 1980, 57-9) and at Little Wittenham (Hingley 1980). There is other evidence, especially from middle to late Iron Age and Roman features, that redeposition was significant at Mount Farm (Lambrick 1984, 164-7; Appendix 5), and this could also apply to early Iron Age contexts. Even so, the total quantities of flint-tempered pottery and distinc-

tive late Bronze Age forms are still very limited.

On this basis it appears that there continued to be little or no significant domestic occupation at Mount Farm for much of the period from the later Bronze Age to the early Iron Age. However, the site probably was in agricultural use.

Later prehistoric pottery and chronology

The following summary briefly outlines some of the main issues of ceramic dating with some of the parameters used in dating illustrated being illustrated in Figure 26. The more important assemblages, including those for which radiocarbon dates were obtained are illustrated in Figures 27 to 40. The radiocarbon dates are given in Table 1. The ceramic dating is more fully discussed in Appendix 5.

A total of 5,332 later prehistoric sherds (81 kg) was recovered at Mount Farm. The condition of the pottery was very variable and redeposition was a significant issue. Much of the pottery was, however, in good condition. Burnished surfaces, red slip coatings and white inlay decoration all survived to a greater or lesser extent, and there were many cases of cooking residues adhering to sherds, making the analysis of their use a worthwhile exercise (Fig. 66). Enough complete or substantial profiles could be reconstructed to get at least a reasonable idea of the broad range of vessel sizes.

The range of forms and fabrics present at Mount Farm appear to reflect a reasonably diverse range of vessels serving various purposes including storage and cooking. Throughout the sequence there are remains of attractive, well-made pots that are not just utilitarian items. Mount Farm was not, however, a site of special status, and virtually all the pottery can be paralleled on other local farming settlements (Appendix 5). The diversity of fabrics appear to reflect the natural diversity of the local geology within 5 km of the site, not more distant contacts, and it is reasonable to suggest that almost all the pottery was made locally, though some pieces could come from similar geologies further afield. It is perhaps rather less likely that much pottery was made on site. However, the reasons for differences in the diversity of wares on Iron Age farming settlements in the Upper Thames Valley are not well understood, as is exemplified by the contrast between the diverse pottery at Watkins Farm, Northmoor compared with the very restricted range of fabrics at nearby Mingies Ditch (Allen 1990; Wilson 1993).

The problem of redeposition is self-evident on intensively occupied sites such as Ashville, Gravelly Guy as well as at Mount Farm, where, for example, some of the larger middle Iron Age assemblages contained significant quantities of early Iron Age sherds alongside rather few definite middle Iron Age ones. Far from invalidating a quantitative approach, however, problems of residuality make it all the more desirable in trying to unravel the real picture. The dangers of relying on form alone, with no attempt to

Context No.	% Shelly to Sandy Fabrics	% Early Sherds	% Mid IA	%Small Sherds	Character of Rubbish	Character of Fill	No. Sherds	Type of Context
303						○	27	P
305						○	29	P
326					●	●	107	P
127					●	○	30	P
328					○	○	109	P
531						○	23	G
118					○	○	57	P
608					●	●	44	P
63					●	○	39	P
75						○	31	P
652					○	●	118	P
541						○	33	D
142					●	○	47	P
661/2					●	●	61	W
116					●	○	32	G
545					●	●	41	D
137					○	○	89	P
655					●	●	47	P
122						○	65	P
115					○	○	99	P
138					●	○	100	P
172						○	50	D
671						●	150	P
257					●	○	65	D
656						○	42	G
145						○	40	L
62					○	○	60	P
657						○	21	D
169						○	31	P
615						○	24	P
263						○	45	G
506					○	●	240	D
106					●	○	68	L
141						○	37	D
6&72					●	○	105	D
206					○	○	887	P
211						○	58	P
119						○	22	D
525					●	○	41	D
505						●	279	D
200&203					○	○	454	G
126					○	○	53	G
503						○	23	D
140						○	28	P
661/1						○	41	W
4						○	27	D
125						○	29	G
584						○	48	P
661/C						●	24	W
625						○	27	P
677					●	●	51	W
676						●	22	W

0 _____ 100%

Fabric % by weight, other by No.

P   Pit   W   Waterhole/pond   ●   Heterogeneous

D   Ditch   G   Gully   ○   Homogeneous

L   Layer

Fig. 26   Iron Age pottery assemblage statistics

quantify fabrics, are considerable: in practice this approach relies on the dating of the latest types present, but this provides valid dates only if the *absence* of yet later types is reliable (Lambrick 1984). Thus the relative frequency of occurrence for chronologically different types is an important consideration, and for any particular assemblage, its size, the proportion of fineware and the proportion of redeposited pottery are all relevant in assessing the significance of the particular vessels present.

The value of fabric proportion as a chronological indicator is well established in the region (Lambrick and Robinson 1979; De Roche and Lambrick 1980; Hingley 1980; Lambrick 1984, fig. 11.6; Duncan *et al.* 2004). The proportion of shelly to sandy fabrics was chronologically significant at both Farmoor and Ashville and these two fabric groups represent the bulk of the Mount Farm pottery, though the recognition of a third major group based on alluvial clay has complicated the picture. The data for Mount
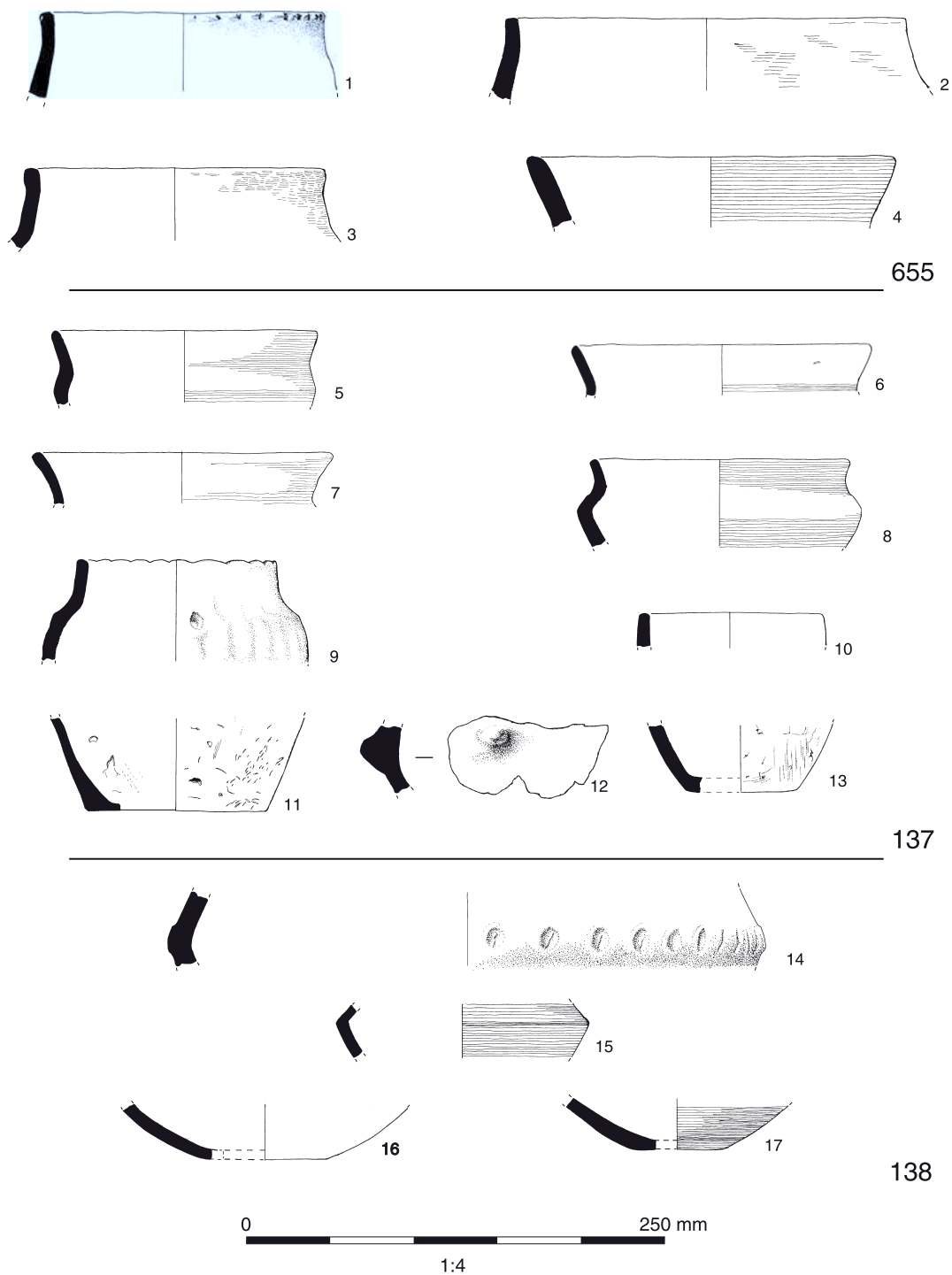
Fig. 27   Iron Age pottery

40

Farm are presented in Figure 26.

The chronological change associated with increasing proportions of sandy wares is again detectable at Mount Farm, but is less clear than at Ashville or Farmoor (Fig. 26). There may be a genuine overlap of pottery styles during which 'early' and 'middle' Iron Age forms were produced concurrently for some time before the early forms were abandoned. If the shelly-sandy fabric ratio represented a genuine sequence rather than merely a rough guide to the chronology, there would be evidence for such an overlap, but the stratigraphy is not sufficient to demonstrate the sequence. This is consistent with the pattern at long-lived settlements such as Ashville (De Roche 1978; Lambrick 1984, fig. 11.6) and Gravelly Guy (Duncan *et al.* 2004), and contrasts with Farmoor where the break was so sharp that a gap in occupation was suggested (Lambrick and Robinson 1979).
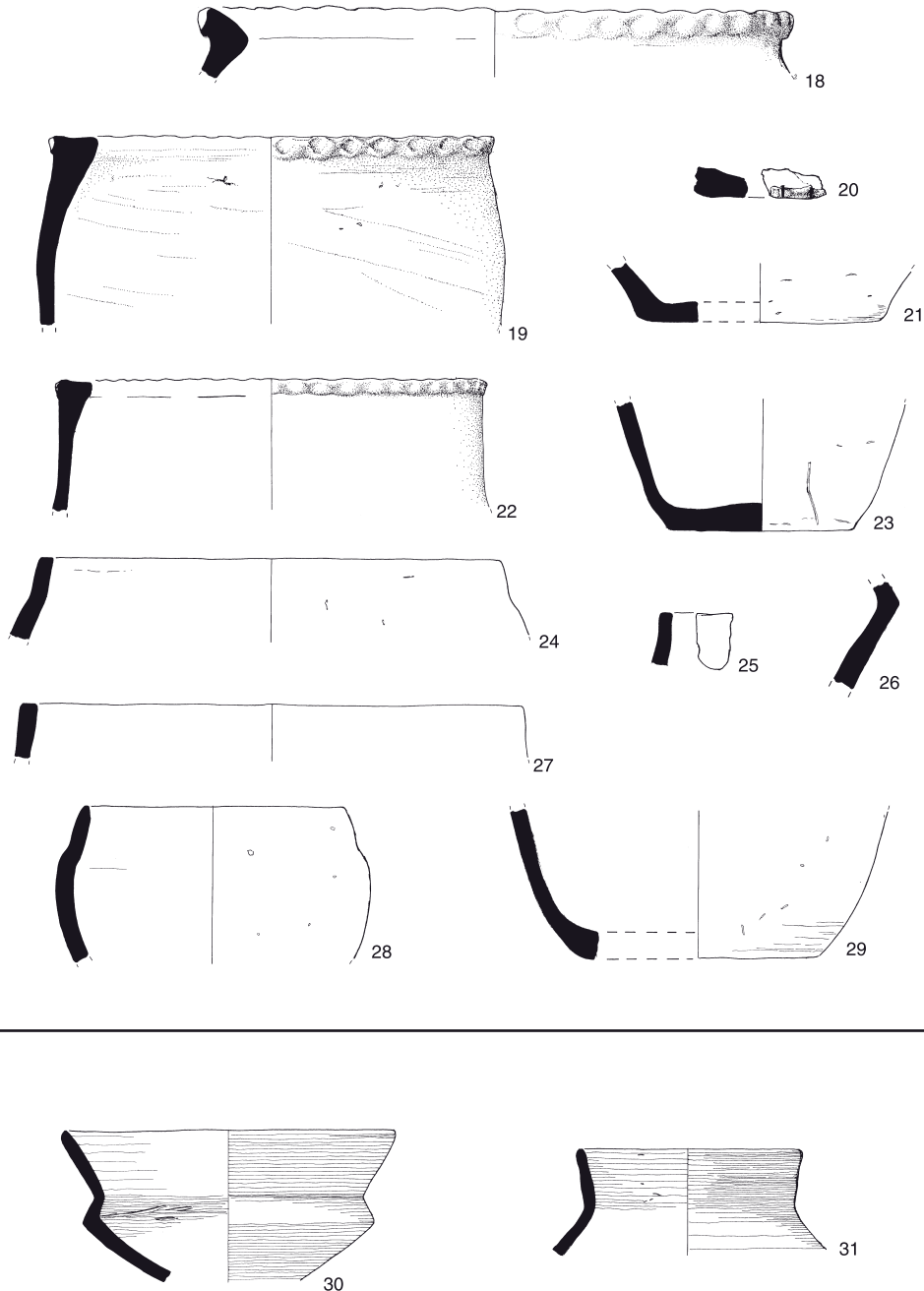
Fig. 28   Iron Age pottery

41

Catalogue of illustrated early-middle Iron Age pottery

Figure 27

Context 655
1.   655/A/1 Fab 029 finger tip
2.   655/A/1 Fab 153
3.   655/A/1 Fab 021
4.   655/A/1 Fab 112 burnish
Context 137
5.   137/B/1 Fab 672 burnish
6.   137/B/1 Fab 112 burnish
7.   137/A/1s Fab 026 burnish
8.   137/A/1 Fab 152 burnish
9.   137/A/1 Fab 151
10.   137/A/2s Fab 553

11.   137/A/2 Fab 032
12.   137/A/1 Fab not recorded (NR) boss
13.   137/A/1 Fab 523
Context 138
14.   138/A/1 Fab 553 finger tip
15.   138/A/1 Fab 111 burnish
16.   138/A/1 Fab 721 burnish hole in base
17.   138/A/1 Fab 112 burnish

Figure 28

Context 326
18.   326/A/2 Fab NR finger tip
19.   326/A/1 Fab 523 finger tip
20.   326 Fab 112 finger tip
21.   326 Fab 122
22.   326/A/1 Fab 523 finger tip
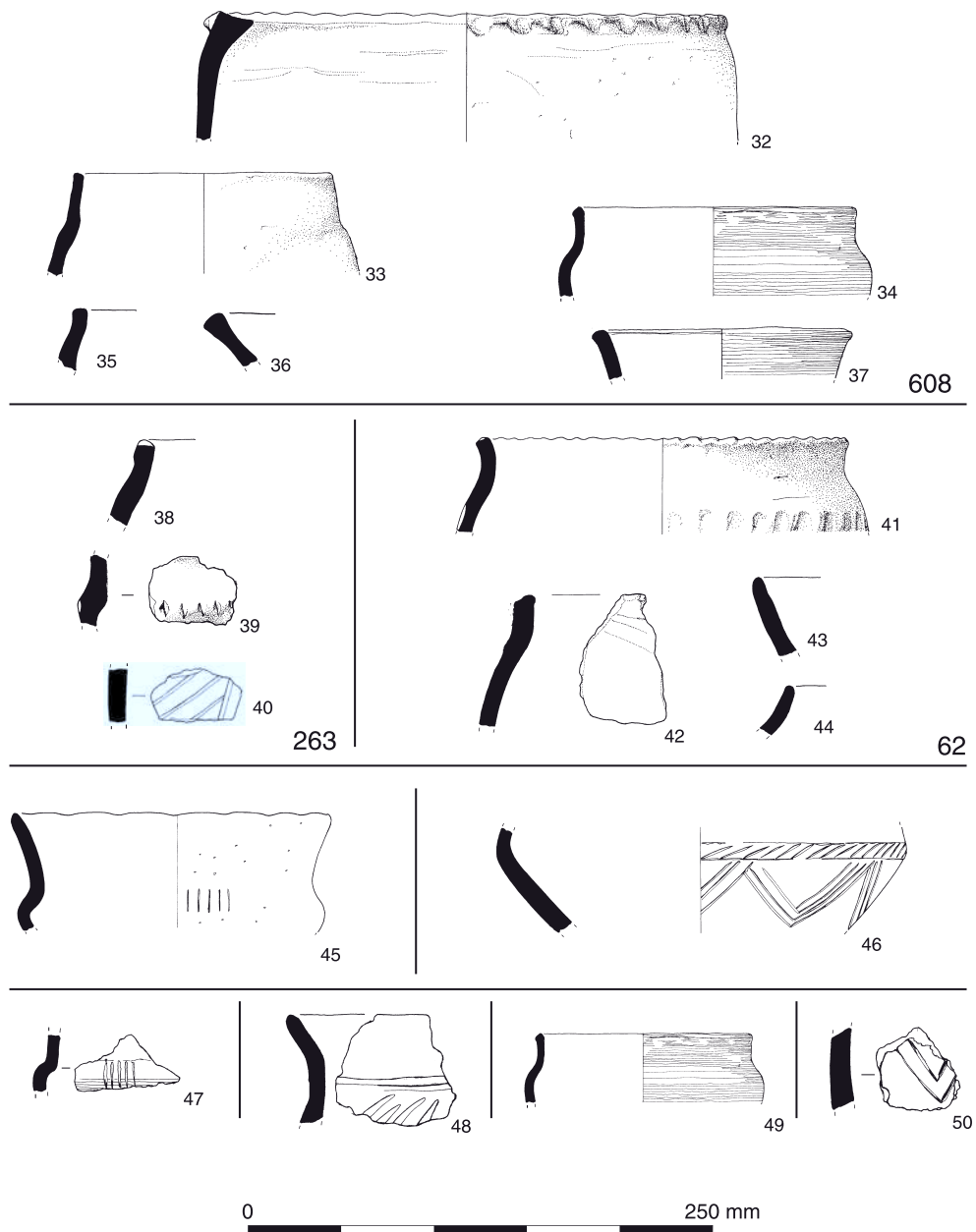
Fig. 29   Iron Age pottery
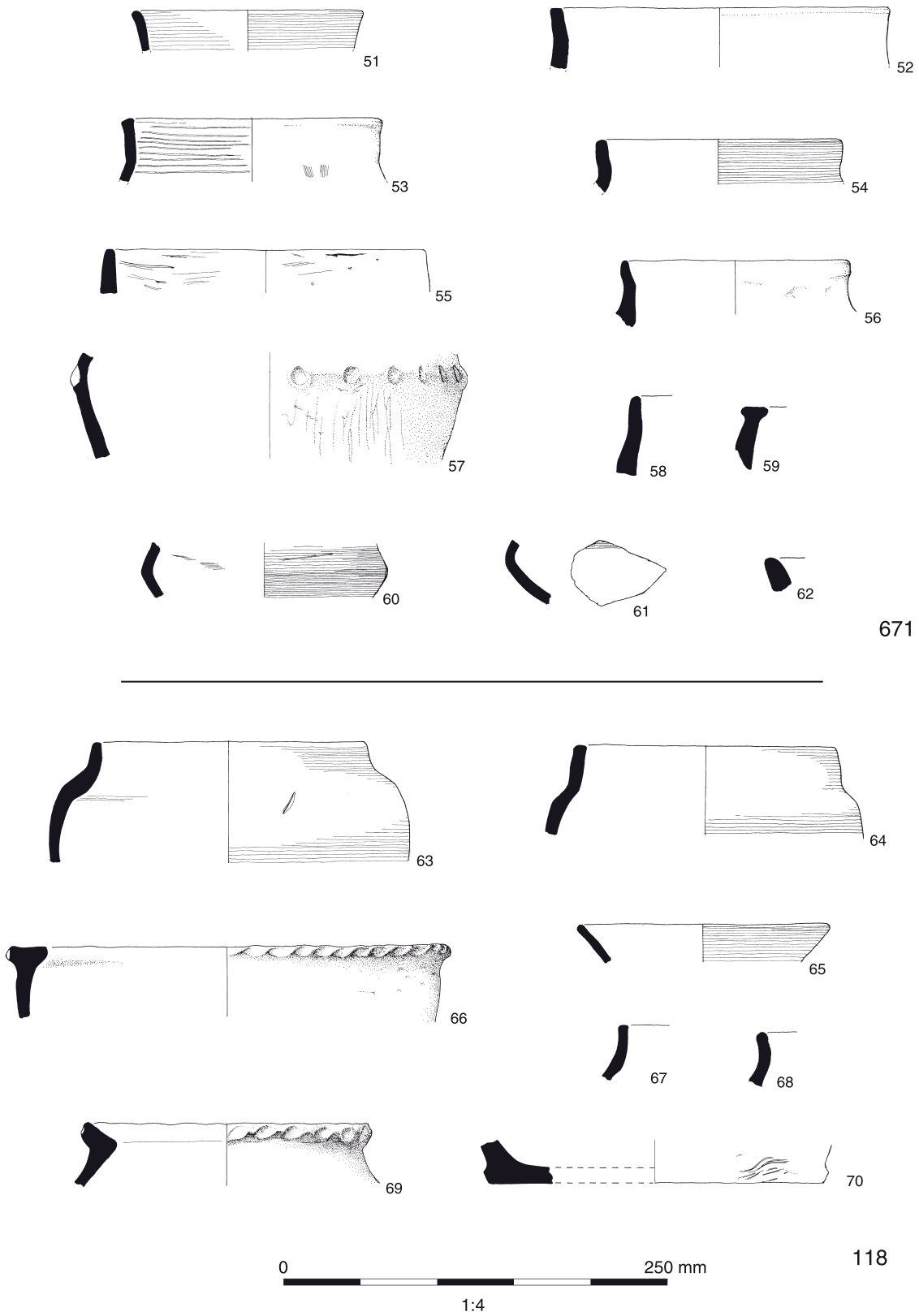
Fig. 30   Iron Age pottery
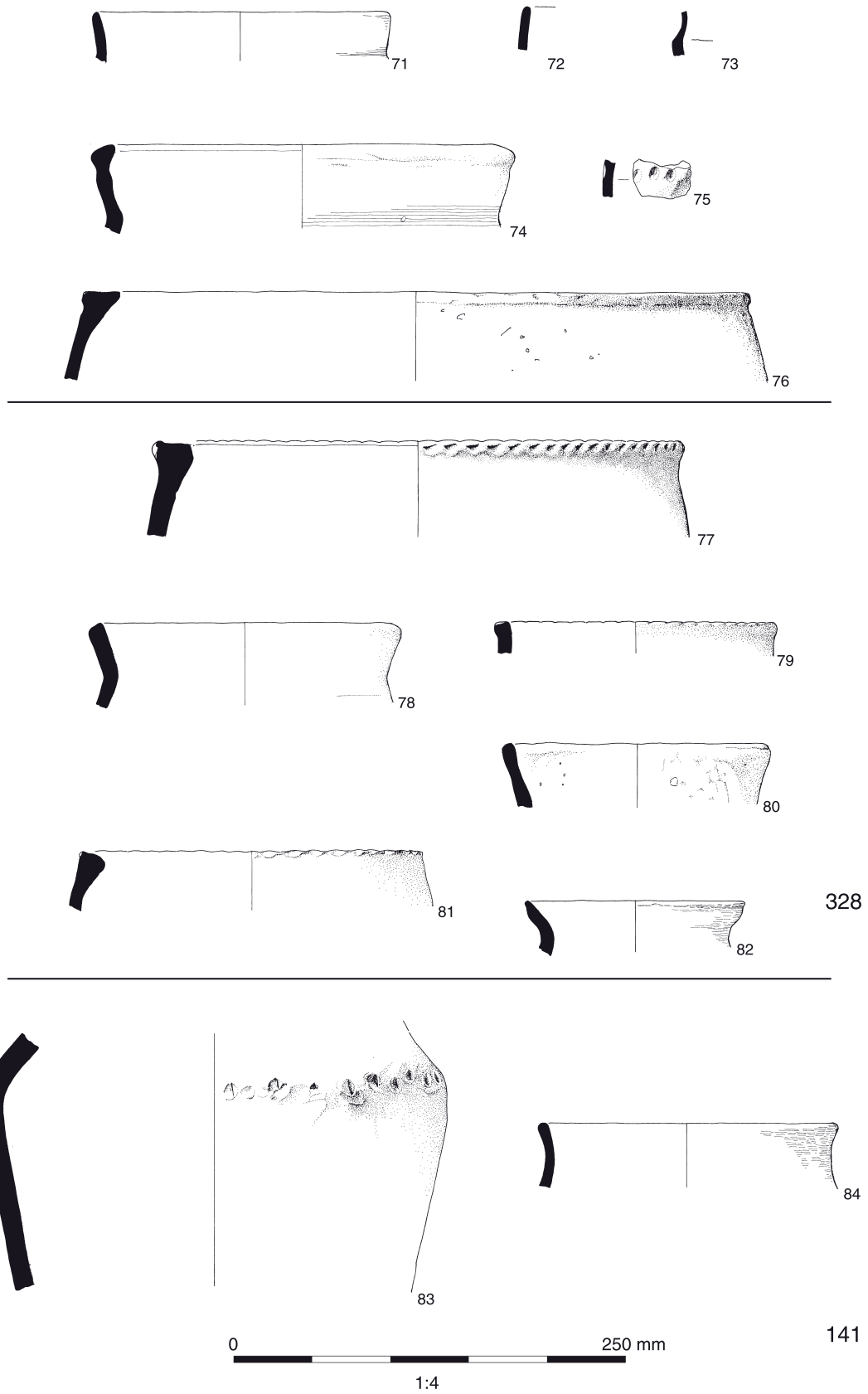
Fig. 31   Iron Age pottery
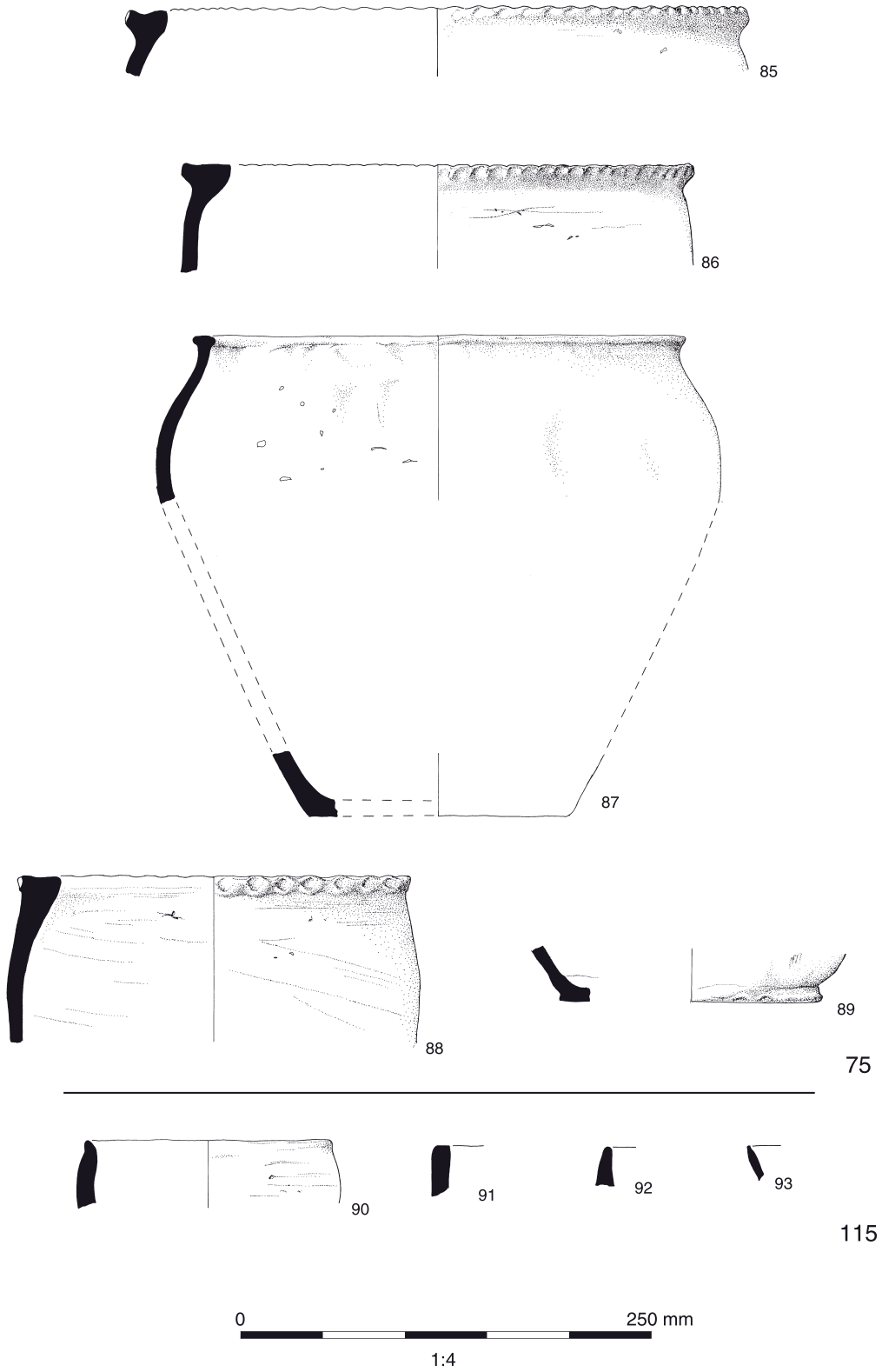
Fig. 32   Iron Age pottery

23.   326/A/1 Fab 117
24.   326/A/1 Fab 722
25.   326 Fab 112
26.   326/A/5 Fab 721
27.   326 Fab 722
28.   326/A/4 Fab 723
29.   326/A/1 Fab 117
Context u/s
30.   u/s Fab NR burnish
Context 603
31.   603/A/6 Fab 112 burnish

Figure 29

Context 608
32.   608/A/6 Fab 026 finger tip
33.   608/A/6 Fab 152
34.   608/A/10 Fab 117 burnish
35.   608/A/9 Fab 111
36.   608/A/7 Fab 552
37.   608/A/10s Fab 722 burnish
Context 263
38.   263/A/1 Fab 112 finger tip
39.   263/A/1 Fab 173 finger tip
40.   263/A/1 Fab 112 incised lines

94

95

96

454

97

98

99

100

101

652

0   250 mm

1:4
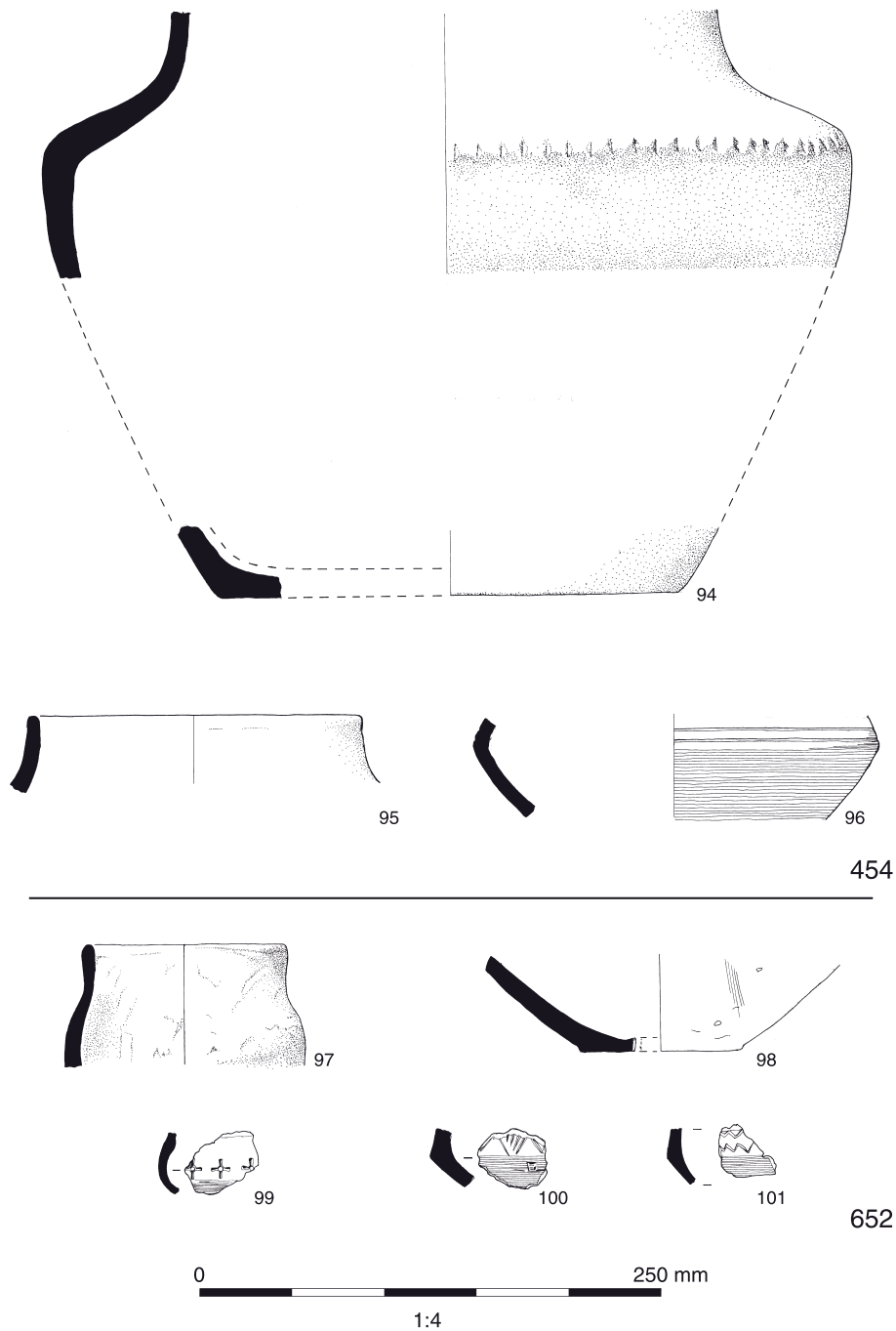
Fig. 33   Iron Age pottery

Context 62
41.   62/A/1 Fab 112 finger tip
42.   62 Fab 180
43.   62/1/-s Fab 118
44.   62/A/1 Fab NR
Context 507
45.   507/A/1-2 Fab NR incised lines
Context 808
46.   808/A/1 Fab NR incised lines
Context 656
47.   656/C/1 Fab NR burnish, white inlay
Context 273

48.   273/A/1 Fab NR tooled lines
Context 51
49.   51/A/1 Fab NR incised lines
Context 308
50.   308/A/1 Fab NR incised lines

Figure 30

Context 671
51.   671/A/7 Fab 174 burnish
52.   671/A/7 Fab 112
53.   671/A/8 Fab 121 burnish

0   250 mm

1:4
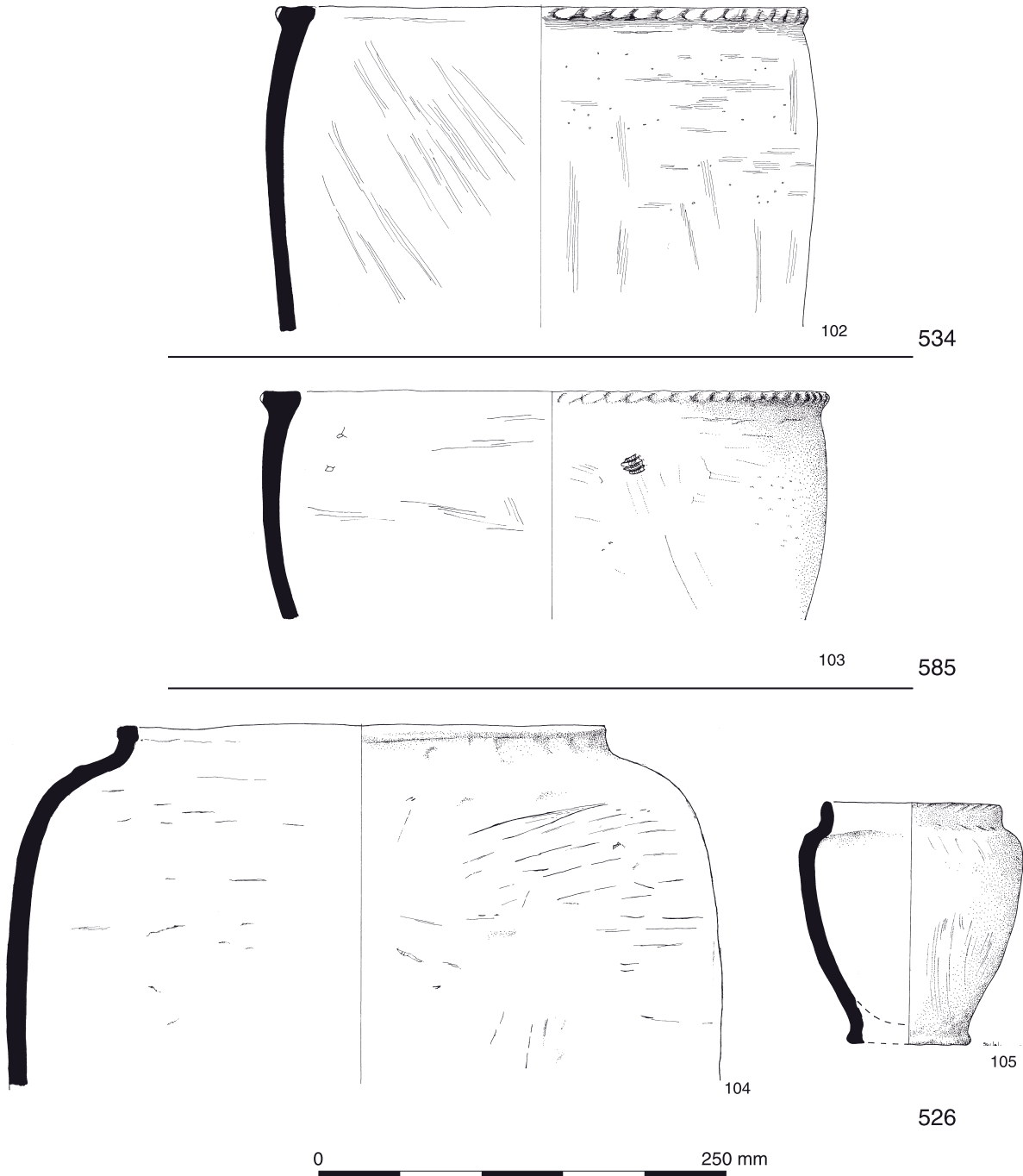
Fig. 34   Iron Age pottery
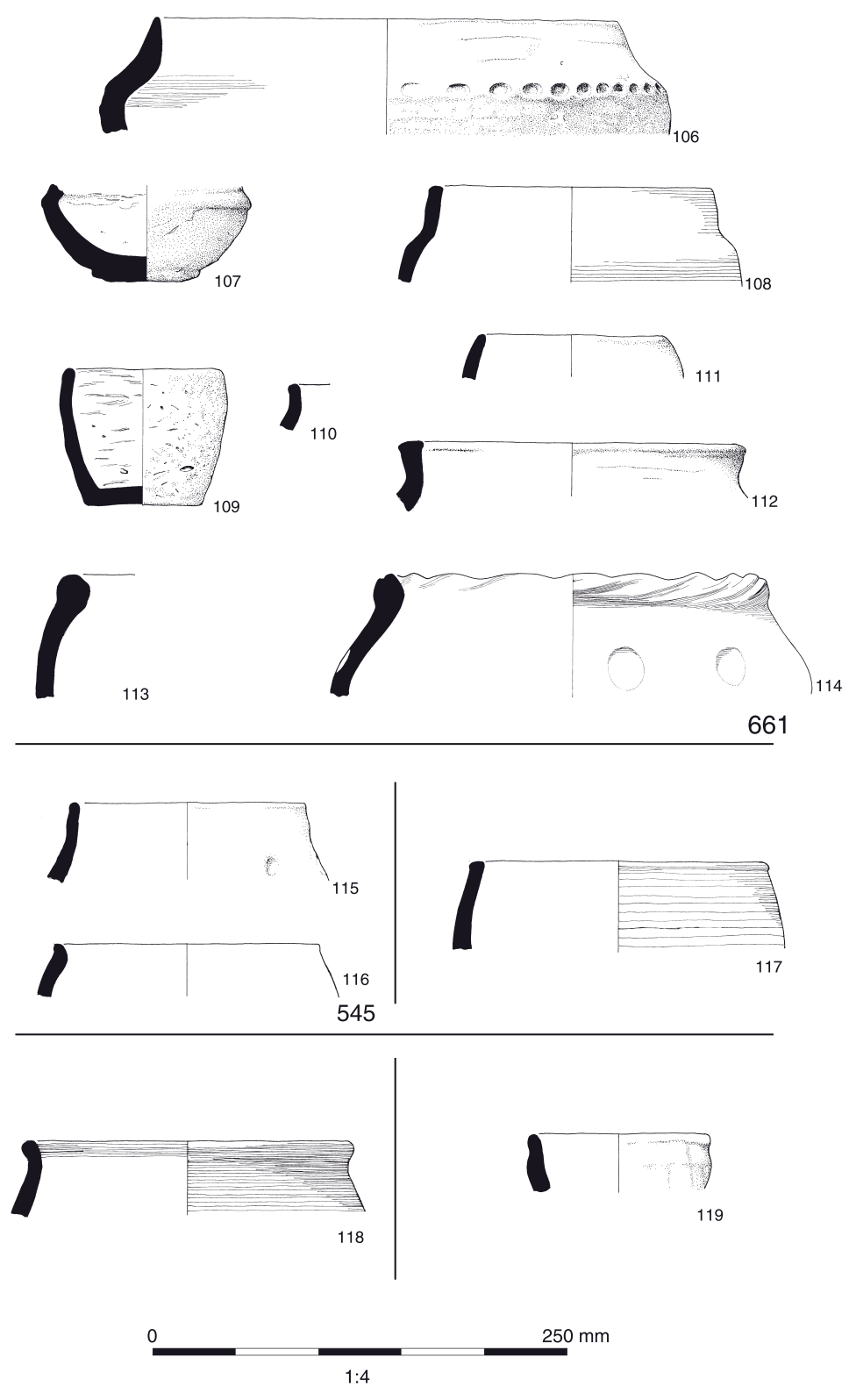
Fig. 35   Iron Age pottery

54.   671/A/1 Fab 112 burnish
55.   671/A/4 Fab 553
56.   671/A/7 Fab 112
57.   671/A/6 Fab 722 finger tip
58.   671/A/6s Fab 722
59.   671/A/1 Fab 153
60.   671/A/7 Fab 174 burnish

61.   671/A/7 Fab 112 burnish
62.   671/A/2 Fab 112
Context 118
63.   118 Fab 112 burnish
64.   118/A/1s Fab 159 burnish
65.   118 Fab 151 burnish
66.   118 Fab 032 finger tip
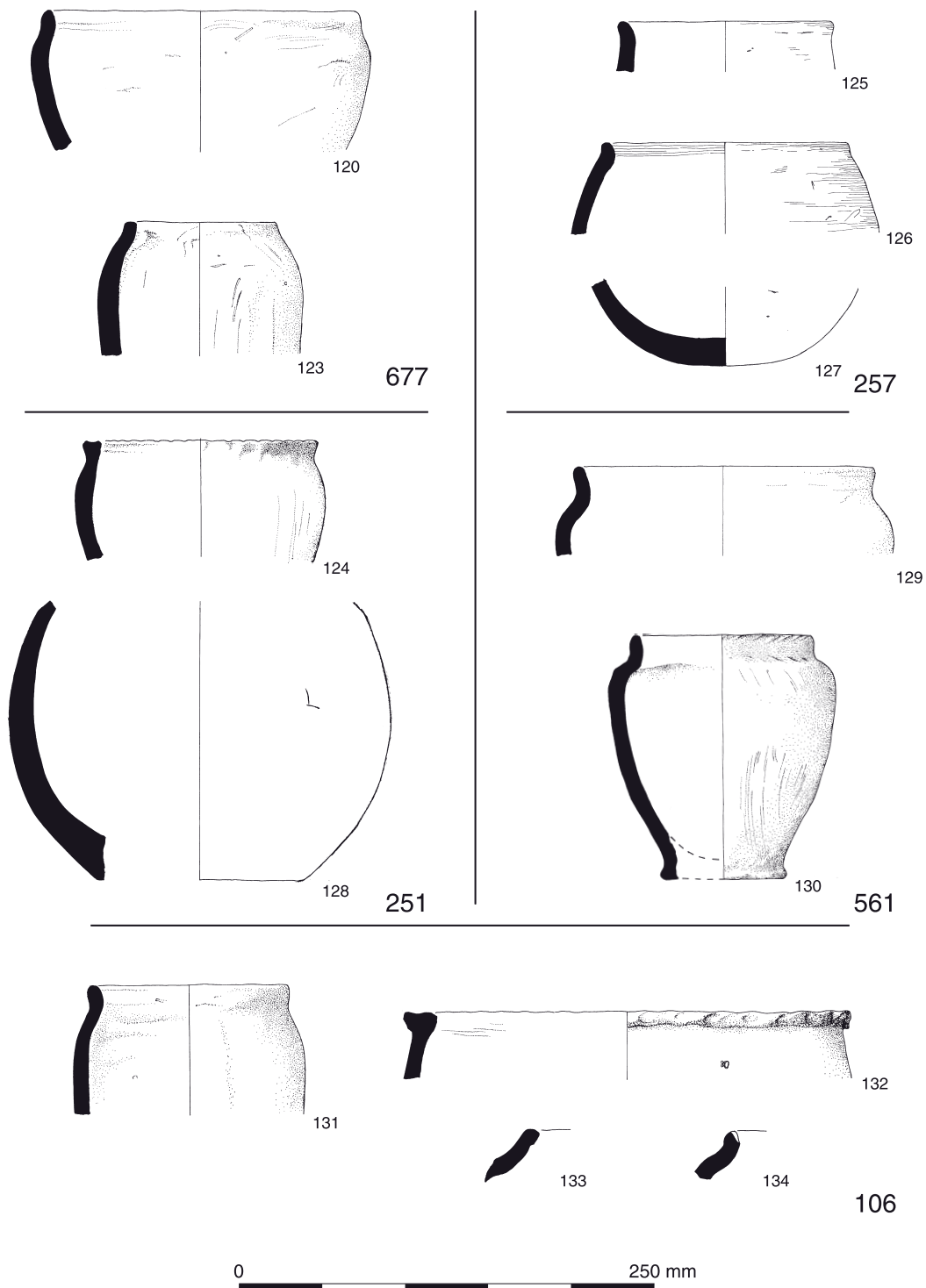
Fig. 36   Iron Age pottery

67.   118/A/1s Fab NR
68.   118 Fab 112
69.   118 Fab 032 finger tip
70.   118/A/1s Fab 723

Figure 31

Context 142
71.   142/A/1 Fab 112 burnish
72.   142/A/1 Fab 112

73.   142/B/1 Fab 112
74.   142/B/1 Fab 112
75.   142/A/1s Fab 112 finger tip
76.   142/B/1 Fab 032

Context 328
77.   328/A/1 Fab 523 finger tip
78.   328/A/1 Fab 122
79.   328/A/1 Fab 312 finger tip
80.   328/A/1 Fab 322
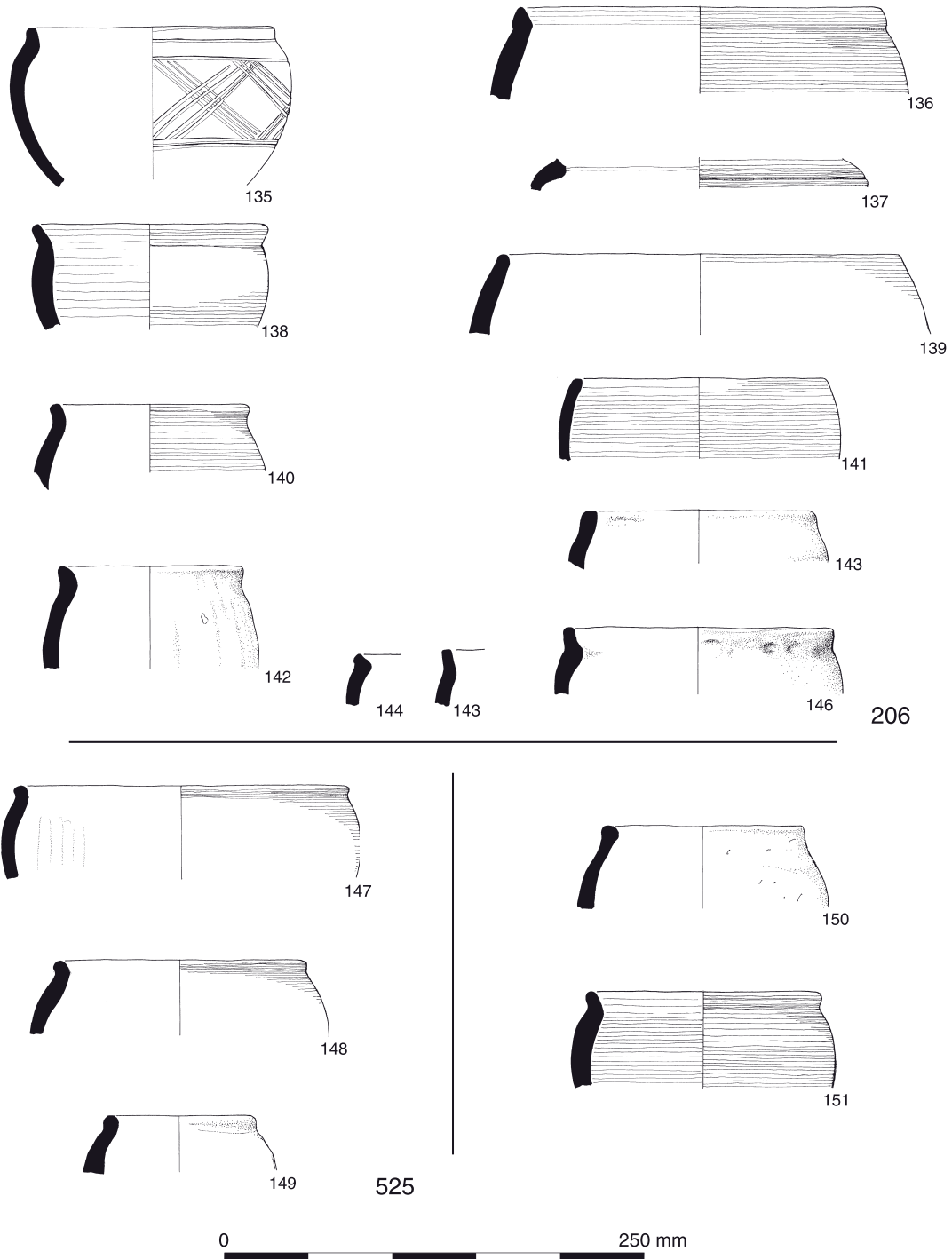
Fig. 37   Iron Age pottery

81. 328/A/1 Fab 523 finger tip
82. 328/A/1s Fab 722
Context 141
83. 141/A/1 Fab NR finger tip
84. 141/A/1 Fab 132 burnish

Figure 32

Context 321
85. 321 Fab 523 finger tip

Context 75
86. 75/A/1 Fab 553 finger tip

87. 75/A/1 Fab 758
88. 75/A/1 Fab 722 finger tip
89. 75/A/1 Fab 751 finger tip?
Context 115
90. 115/A/1 Fab 112
91. 115/A/1 Fab 722
92. 115/B/1s Fab 159
93. 115/B/1s Fab 111

Figure 33

Context 454
94. 454/A/1 Fab 553 finger tip
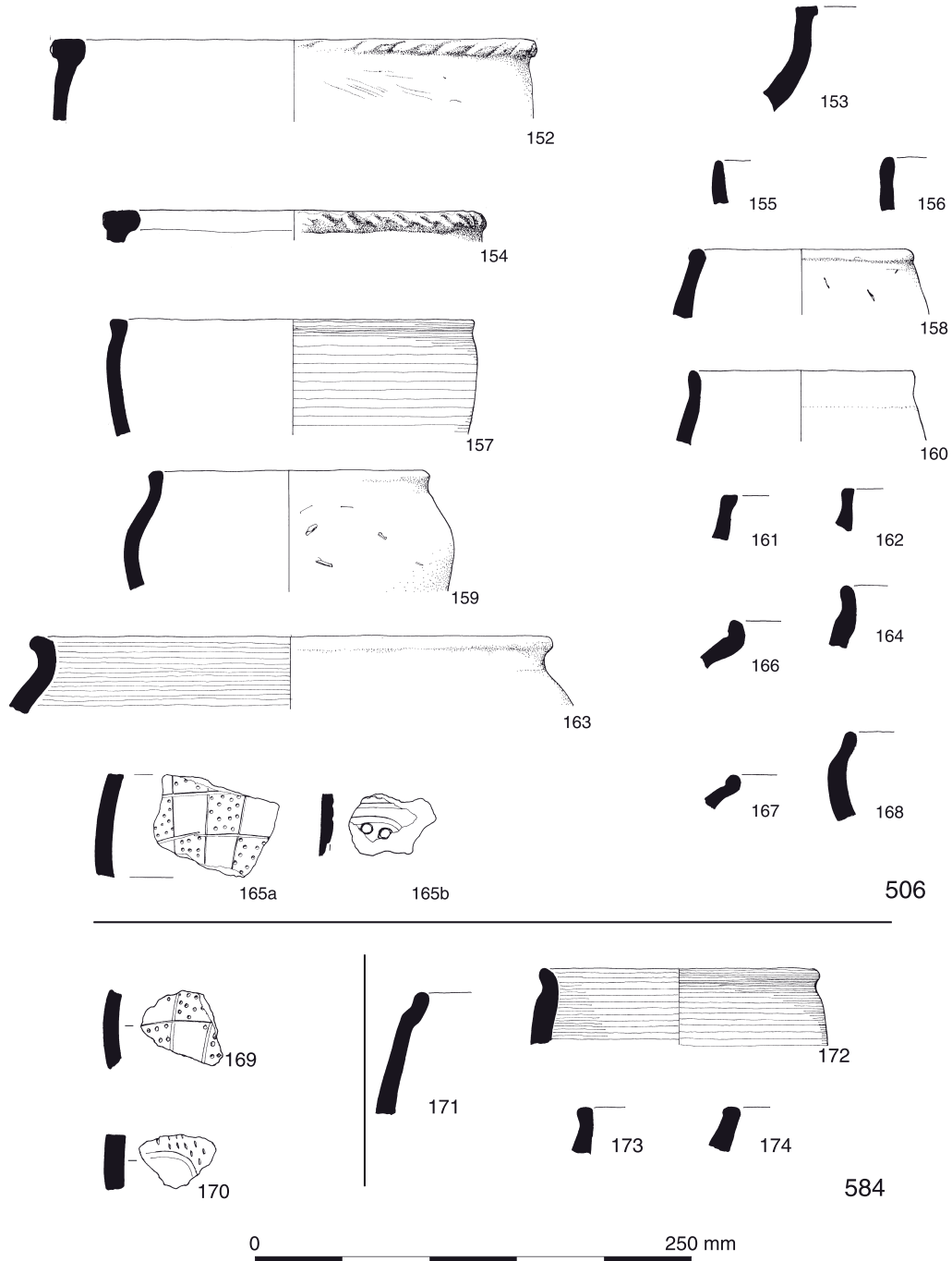
Fig. 38   Iron Age pottery

95.   104454/A/1 Fab 122
96.   454/A/1 Fab 112 burnish, incised lines
Context 652
97.   652/A/1 Fab 111
98.   652/A/1 Fab 112 hole in base, burnish
99.   652/A/1 Fab NR burnish, impressed
100. 652/A/1 Fab NR burnish, incised lines
101. 652/A/1 Fab NR burnish, incised lines

Figure 34

Context 534
102. 534/D/1 Fab NR finger tip

Context 585
103. 585/A/1 Fab 723 finger tip
Context 526
104. 526/A/1 Fab NR finger tip?
105. 526/A/1 Fab 118

Figure 35

Context 661 (earlier phase)
106. 661/A/12 Fab 173 finger tip
107. 661/A/8 Fab NR
108. 661/A/9 Fab 141 burnish
109. 661/3 Fab NR

0   250 mm

1:4

505
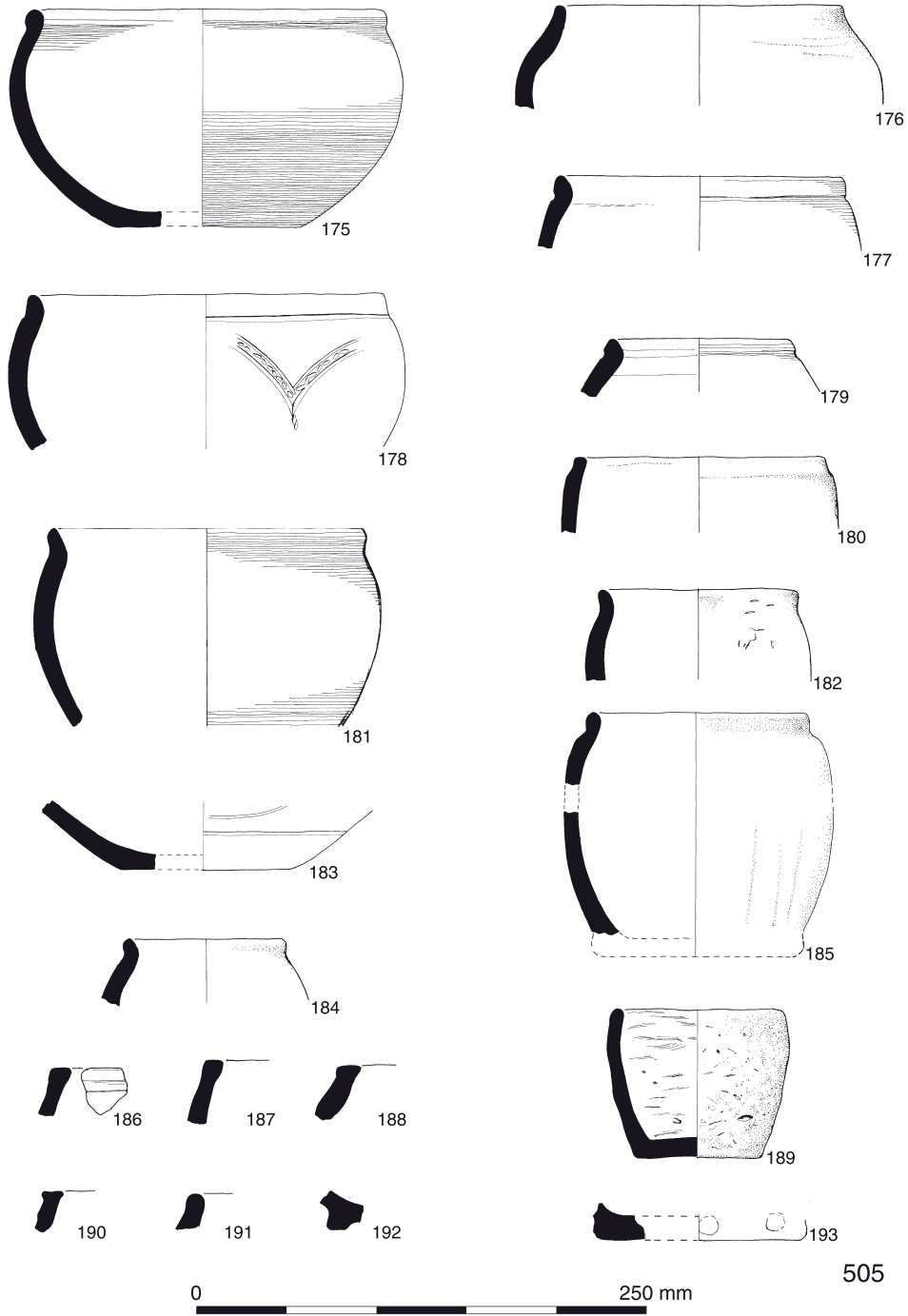
Fig. 39   Iron Age pottery

110. 661/A/3 Fab 112
111. 661/A/8 Fab 112
112. 661/A/3 Fab 112
113. 661/A/3 Fab 037
114. 661/C/2 Fab NR burnish, cabling, impressed dimples
Context 545
115. 545/A/1 Fab NR one finger impression
116. 545/C/1 Fab 721
Context 508
117. 508/A/2 Fab 552 burnish

Context 531
118. 531/A/1 Fab 112 burnish
Context 63
119. 63/A/1 Fab 112

Figure 36

Context 677
120. 677/A/3 Fab 142
123. 677/A/3 Fab 112
124. 677/A/1 Fab 122*Context 257*
125. 257/E/1 Fab 111
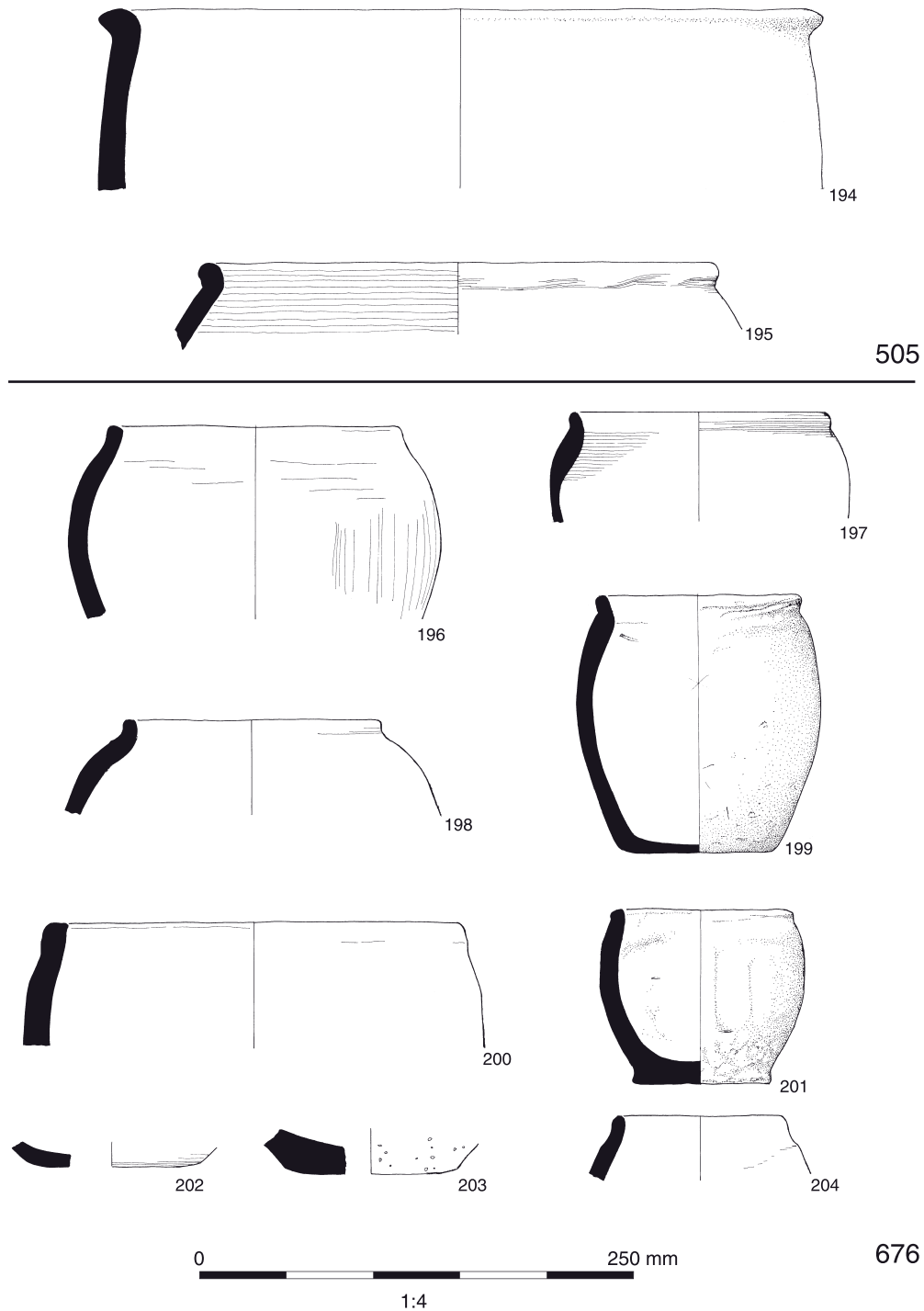
Fig. 40   Iron Age pottery

126. 257/D/2 Fab 111 burnish
127. 257/E/2 Fab 717
Context 251
128. 251/E/2 Fab 148
Context 561
129. 561/A/1 Fab 122
130. 561/A/1 Fab NR slashing
Context 106
131. 106 Fab 721
132. 106 Fab 032 finger tip
133. 106 Fab 122
134. 106 Fab 112 finger tip

Figure 37

Context 206
135. 206/G/-s Fab NR burnish tooled lines
136. 206/C/1 Fab 112 burnish
137. 206/H/1 Fab 112 burnish tooled line
138. 206/D/-s Fab 174 burnish
139. 206/B/5 Fab 112 burnish
140. 206/K/1 Fab 174 burnish
141. 206/D/5 Fab 151 burnish
142. 206/E/1 Fab 112
143. 206/I/1 Fab 112
144. 206/I/1s Fab 112 burnish
145. 206/G/-s Fab 028
146. 206/M/2 Fab 037 finger impressions?
Context 525
147. 525/C/1 Fab 721 burnish
148. 525/A/1 Fab 721 burnish
149. 525/A/1s Fab 722
Context 200/203
150. 200/203 u/s Fab 151
Context 213
151. 213/A/1 Fab 174 burnish

Figure 38

Context 506
152. 506/A/1 Fab 723 finger impressions
153. 506/A/1 Fab 513
154. 506/B/1 Fab 512 finger impressions
155. 506/A/3 Fab 717
156. 506/A/1 Fab 115
157. 506/A/1 Fab 144
158. 506/A/1 Fab 172 burnish
159. 506/A/1 Fab 142
160. 506/A/1 Fab 112
161. 506/B/1 Fab 011
162. 506/A/1 Fab 121
163. 506/A/1 Fab 172 burnish
164. 506/A/1 Fab 552 burnish
165a. 506/A/1 Fab NR burnish, tooled lines and stabbed dots
165 b. 506/A/1 Fab NR burnish, tooled lines
166. 506/A/1 Fab 112
167. 506/A/1 Fab 141
168. 506/A/1 Fab 122
Context 605
169. 605/A/3 Fab NR burnish, tooled lines and stabbed dots
170. 605/D/2 Fab NR burnish, tooled lines and stabbed dots
Context 584
171. 584/A/1 Fab 112
172. 584/A/1 Fab 174 burnish
173. 584/A/1 Fab 722
174. 584/A/1 Fab 722

Figure 39

Context 505
175. 505/D/1 Fab NR burnish
176. 505/A/1 Fab 112
177. 505/C/1 Fab 122 burnish, tooled line
178. 505/C/1 Fab NR burnish, tooled lines and dots
179. 505/P/1 Fab 174 burnish, tooled line
180. 505/D/1 Fab 553 burnish
181. 505/C/1 Fab 174 burnish
182. 505/A/1s Fab 153
183. 505/A/1 Fab NR burnish, tooled lines
184. 505/B/1 Fab 132
185. 505/C/1 Fab 721
186. 505/C/1 Fab 112 burnish, tooled lines
187. 505/D/1 Fab 112
188. 505/A/1 Fab 111
189. 505/B/1 Fab NR
190. 505/A/1 Fab 442
191. 505/F/1 Fab 112
192. 505/B/1 Fab 174
193. 505/A/1 Fab 153 finger impressions

Figure 40

Context 505 (cont.)
194. 505/A/1 Fab NR
195. 505/A/1 Fab 112 burnish
Context 676
196. 676/A/2 Fab 102 vertical scoring?
197. 676/A/2 Fab 174 burnish
198. 676/B/3 Fab 112
199. 676/B/2 Fab NR
200. 676/B/3 Fab 722
201. 676/B/3 Fab NR
202. 676/B/2 Fab 142 burnish
203. 676/B/2 Fab 445
204. 676/A/3 Fab 142

Arable fields (Figs 19, 22, 24 and 41; Plate 5)

Continuing the stratigraphic sequence in the area of the ring ditch (F101), its topmost fill (variously L2, L101/A/1, L158, L167) was a gravelly loam overlying the ditch's secondary filling of fine loam (see above; Fig. 19). This deposit survived all round the ditch except on its eastern side where a medieval plough furrow followed the line of F101. The top fill of the hollow containing stone (F164, L164/A/1) may also correspond to this deposit. On the western side of the ring ditch the gravely ploughsoil (here L158 and L167) overlay the gravel upcast from the waterhole (F101/H/1) and sealed ploughmarks which were cut into the fine loam filling of the ditch (L101/C/1 and D/1) and the natural gravel on its inside edge (Plate 5; Fig. 41).

The relatively thick build-up of gravelly soils in the deep hollow left by the waterhole F162 after it went out of use indicates a more complicated combination of erosion, deliberate backfilling and plough-wash than the thinner, probably more heavily reworked layer in the top of the ditch. The later fills in particular (L162/A/1-5) appear to reflect the more extensive plough soil described above (Fig. 24).
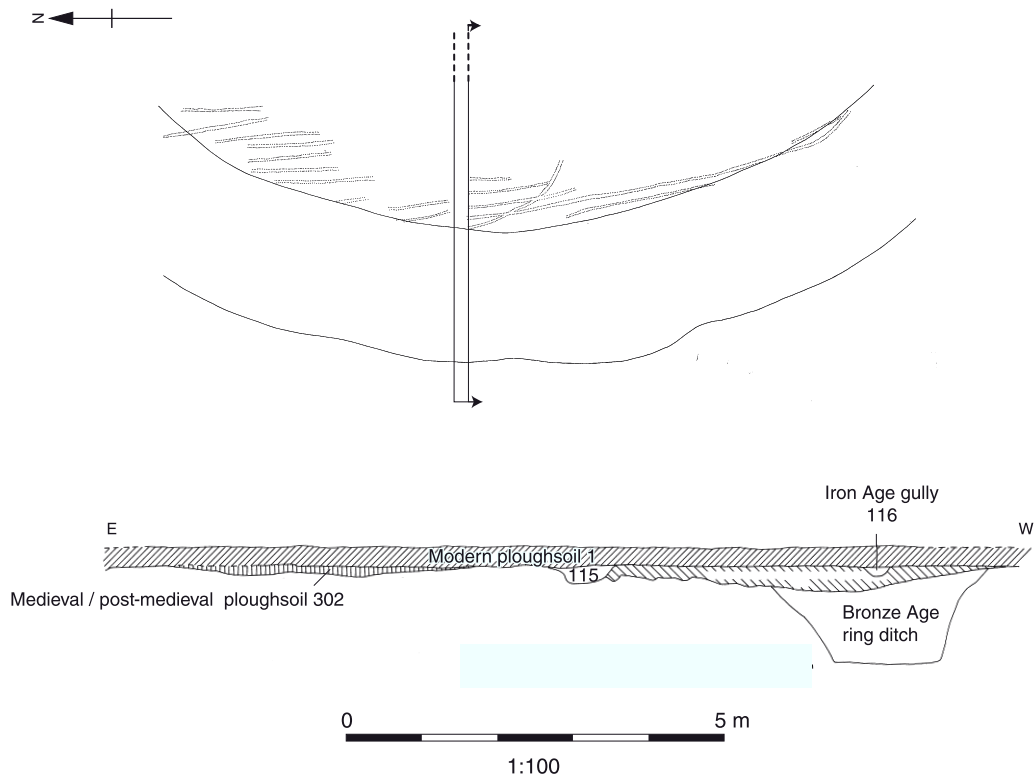
Fig. 41   Plan and section of early Iron Age ard marks on the western side of ring ditch F101
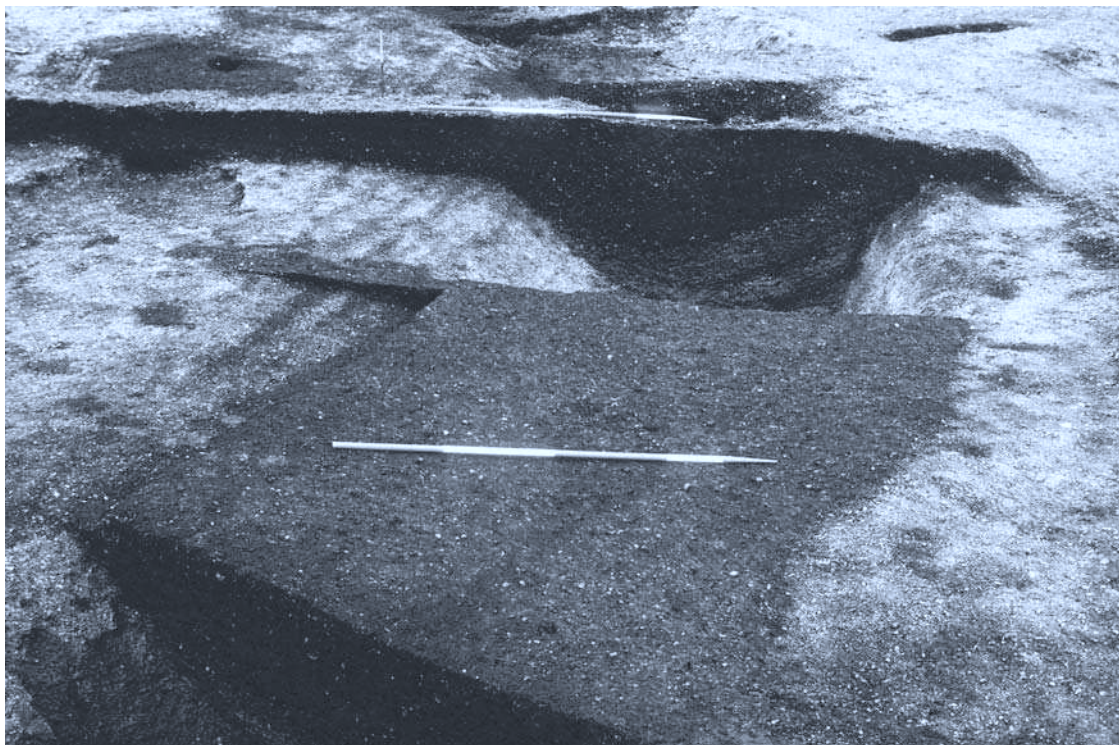
Plate 5   Early Iron Age ard marks beneath a ploughsoil in the top of ring ditch F101 which is cut by middle Iron Age gully F116, visible as a dark streak at the top of the section through F101

In the absence of clear artefactual evidence, the dating of the ploughsoil is uncertain, but is broadly indicated by its being stratigraphically sandwiched between middle to late Bronze Age deposits (described in the previous section) and various early and middle Iron Age contexts. This included a relatively artefact-rich dark 'occupation' layer (L145) overlying the uppermost ploughsoils in the hollow left by the waterhole, F162, which contained early Iron Age pottery (and was in turn overlain by a similar layer, 106, which contained middle Iron Age pottery; Fig. 24). The ploughsoil was also cut by early Iron Age pits F12 and F63; and a gully (F116) containing middle Iron Age pottery (Plate 5; Figs 19 and 41).

In addition to these stratigraphic relationships, it may be noted that the alignment of the plough marks beneath the ploughsoil did not match either the orientation of the Bronze Age double-ditched boundaries or the later Iron Age paddocks and enclosures (Figs 18, 22 and 43). Tentatively, therefore the ploughsoil is seen as representing a period within the later Bronze Age or early Iron Age that is not otherwise well-represented on the site.

It could be that it represents part of the fields that may have belonged to the major enclosed settlement at Allen's Pit. There is no indication that the field was within a ditched field system, but before any connection with the ploughsoil was considered, a study of the postholes produced two alignments, roughly at right angles to each other (F802, F803, F806, F808, F832, F828 etc running north; and F734, F716, F711 etc running west from F802) that are on much the same orientation as the plough marks (Figs 7 and 22c). Although the size and spacing of these postholes is not especially convincing (one might have been destroyed by F206), and they peter out largely inexplicably to the north and west, F808 contained a useful though small group of pottery probably belonging to the earliest Iron Age (Fig. 29, no. 46) and similar pottery was found in F806, possibly including a sherd from one of the vessels represented in F808. Other sherds of early Iron Age type, but less diagnostic of its earliest phase, were recovered from F734, F748 and F832. The possibility of this representing a fenced field is consistent with examples of fenced boundaries potentially associated with the division of arable fields in the Stanton Harcourt area (Williams 1951; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 146-7).

Overall pattern of Iron Age settlement (Figs 42-43)

Early to middle Iron Age (Fig. 42)

The main areas of early Iron Age activity were reflected in two scatters of pits, both rather vaguely defined, without clear-cut boundaries. One (partly excavated by J N L Myres in 1933) was in an area on the north-east side of ring ditch F101, mostly within the northern area of controlled excavation; the other

was a smaller group in the southern area (Figs 6-8 and 42).

The limits to these scatters are hazy because of the problems of salvage work and the limit of quarrying. In the early Iron Age the areas are defined by two small clusters of pits, which were absent in some other areas of controlled excavation or careful salvage observation, such as south-east and west of the northern cluster and in the salvage area to the north of it across the former airfield perimeter track. The gap between the northern and southern clusters of pits seems genuine: except for a few isolated examples, such as F326 and F328 (Fig. 7), the stripping between the two main excavation areas was watched carefully and only revealed Iron Age pits on the northern edge of the southern group (Fig. 7); resistivity surveying of this area also proved negative with the exception of the few features excavated. The aerial photographs (Plates 1a and 1b) show some further pits, notably west of the southern group, but these are undated.

In the middle Iron Age there were fewer pits but more ditches and gullies representing pens and enclosures. The quantity and quality of finds give some indication of the main areas of domestic activity. In the northern area the focus of activity seems to have shifted somewhat to the east, while the main activity in the southern area may have shifted southwards, emphasising the gap between the areas.

Later middle Iron Age (Fig. 43)

The clearest evidence for later middle Iron Age domestic activity was in the southern part of the site where there was a notable concentration of domestic material in F505, F506 and some roughly contemporary pits (Fig. 43; Appendices 5, 9 and 10). This seems most likely to be associated with a probable house within a rather fragmentary penannular drainage gully, F529/F539. Some sense can be made of these fragmentary gullies if they are related to the possible existence of a bank and/or hedge alongside F505, which may also explain the concentration of material in some of the neighbouring enclosure ditches but not others (Fig. 43d).

Another possible domestic area is the F200/203 enclosure, although its interpretation is less clear (Fig. 43b). Its probable pastoral origin has already been noted above, and evidence of its use for domestic occupation relies largely on the distribution of finds, particularly the higher quality pottery (see Appendix 1). The existence and possible functions of possible post built structures on the south side of the penannular enclosure (F200) and curving linear ditch (F206) are uncertain, but an abundance of slag was noted in F203 and F200. Smaller quantities of slag were also noted in F206.

A third area of occupation may have been demarcated by middle Iron Age ditch F257 (Fig. 43a) and given the presence of early Iron Age pottery in this part of the site, it is possible that this too had origi-

Fig. 42 Interpretation plans: a) early to middle Iron Age, b) detailed development of middle Iron Age penannular gully complex, with interpretative configuration of hurdles in Iron Age penannular gully complex

nated in the early to middle Iron Age, but it was too close to the edge of the excavation area for this to be clear (Fig. 7).

Apart from ditches F200/203, F206, F506, and F508 (Figs 8 and 43), relatively high proportions of fineware pottery were found in F257, F125 and F126 (Figs 6 and 43) and the waterhole or ponds in the southern area. Taken together these areas are also those which produced the greatest evidence of craft activity (see below Part 3).

Structures (Figs 44-45)

Although numerous sites in the Upper Thames Valley have produced clear evidence of post-built structures such as houses, workshops and 'four-posters' (Lambrick with Robinson 2009), the apparent absence of such evidence is not unusual (eg Case *et al.* 1964-5; Parrington 1978; Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980; Weaver and Ford 2004; Cook *et al.* 2004).

Such structures could have existed at Mount Farm, but have not definitely been identified within the extensive scatter of postholes. As already noted, the distinctively early Iron Age pottery from two postholes (F806 and F808) in the area east of the ring ditch may be associated with a fence line, illustrating the possibility that other structures may have existed on the site in the early Iron Age the form of which cannot be determined. No definite four-posters were identified. However, these are a less regular feature of Iron Age sites in the Upper Thames Valley than they are in other regions, although several were found at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 144-6) and a number have also been recorded on low-lying sites at Mingies Ditch and Claydon Pike (Allen and Robinson 1993; Miles *et al.* 2007).

The most plausible groups of postholes that might have been parts of roundhouses or workshops were a series of posthole arcs along the north side of ditch F206 and in the southern half of penannular gully F200+203 (Fig. 44). Another possible circular structure is identifiable in the southern area of excavation (Fig. 45). In several cases these circular arcs of postholes are interrupted
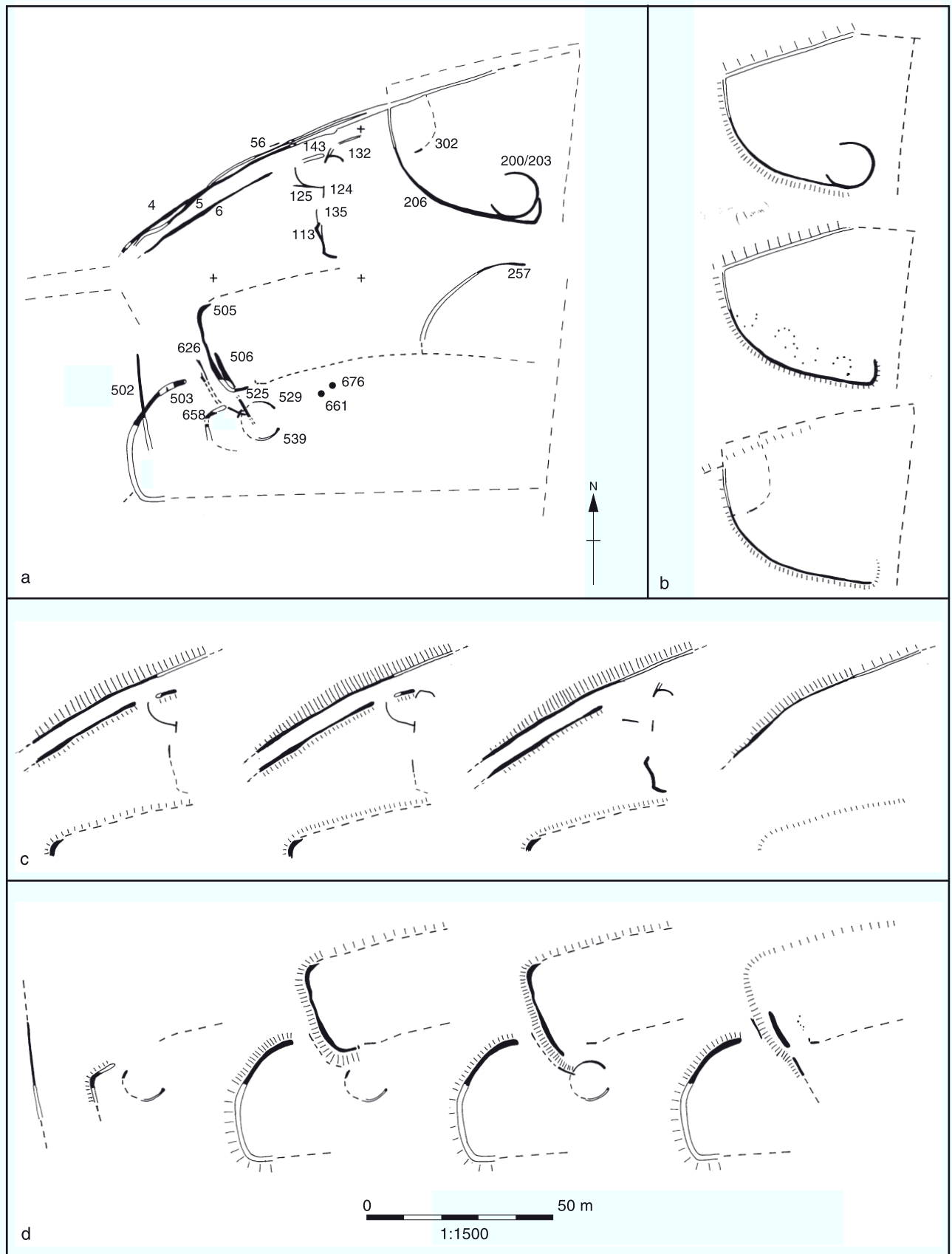
Fig. 43   Interpretation plans: a) middle to late Iron Age, b), c) and d) detailed development of NE, NW and SW parts of site (Key as Fig. 42)

by ditches which may have destroyed some elements, making their identification as structures uncertain, though at least one could have been a semicircular structure (cf Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

There was no group of postholes that was convincingly concentric with the penannular enclosure, though this area produced more daub and slag than any other part of the site and the density of household debris around it might indicate domestic occupation or craft-related activity (see below and Appendices 8 and 14).

Occupation soil (Fig. 24)

Apart from the pits, L145, overlying the final filling of waterhole 162 in the area of the Bronze Age ring ditch, appears to be occupation debris that accumulated in the slight hollow which still remained after its main infilling. This layer was succeeded by L106, of similar character, which contained middle Iron Age pottery (Fig. 24).

The presence in L145 of 20 bones of a child of nine and a neonate, may be noted, but such remains also exist within Iron Age pits and ditches (see below). Overall the character of these soil deposits is unremarkable – they contained a very typical range of fragmented pottery and bone, with no special characteristics, either in their density or in their content, to suggest that they represent a special midden area. They are perhaps best seen as simply the result of differential survival due to the underlying hollow left by waterhole 162. Elsewhere Iron Age soils would have been truncated and mixed into the modern topsoil, leaving L145 and L106 as a remnant of undisturbed Iron Age topsoil.

The significance of these soils relates less to their specific content and more to the evidence they provide for the character of the Iron Age topsoil. It was characterised by very fragmentary pieces of bone and pottery (sherds in L145 and L106 weighing, on average, 11 g and 15 g respectively) with a significant presence of earlier material in the later deposit. Nevertheless, the vertical distinction in the pottery dating suggests that at least within this hollow these soils had not been ploughed.

These deposits were similar to the more homogenous fills of pits and ditches with heavily fragmented pottery. Such soils would have been the principal source of material to backfill disused pits and ditches.

Pits

The Iron Age pits varied considerably in terms of fills, depths and diameter (Table 5), broadly within a range very typical of the Upper Thames gravels (Parrington 1978; Lambrick and Allen 2004; Lambrick with Robinson 2009). Some contained possible 'special deposits' of animal bone, human remains and other material.

Most of the pits appear to have been early Iron Age on the basis of their pottery, but some are middle Iron Age. Some relatively late (post 400 cal BC) radiocarbon determinations (410-40 cal BC, HAR-4790: 2210 ± 80 BP; 390 cal BC-cal AD 50, HAR-4674: 2130 ± 80 BP; 200 cal BC-cal AD 240, HAR-4793: 1980 ± 90 BP) on bone from pits F118, F328 (Fig. 6) and F652 (Fig. 8), which contained assemblages of early Iron Age pottery may indicate a relatively long currency of some early Iron Age forms, though it is also possible that they contained significant redeposited early material (this is perhaps most likely for F652 where the date of 200 cal BC – cal AD 240 (HAR-4793: 1980 ± 90 BP) was for articulated animal bones which may have been buried and backfilled with soil containing earlier pottery – see below).

The possible uses of the pits for storage, rubbish disposal or as latrines are further discussed below and in Appendix 1, and their use for burials and 'special deposits' is discussed below. One middle

Table 5: Summary of pit dimensions

Pit Dimensions	NEO/BKR	EIA	MIA	IA	LIA	RB	SAX
Min Rec Depth (m)	0.15	0.15	0.20	0.10	0.35	0.20	0.30
Max Rec Depth (m)	0.60	0.90	0.40	0.70	0.35	0.60	0.30
Min Proj Depth (m)	0.25	0.40	0.50	0.30	0.65	0.40	0.70
Max Proj Depth (m)	0.75	1.40	1.20	1.30	0.65	1.00	0.70
Min Diam (m)	0.60	0.85	1.30	0.60	1.10	0.60	1.60
Max Diam (m)	1.50	2.30	1.80	2.10	1.10	1.70	1.60
Min Rec Vol (m^3)	0.14	0.31	0.57	0.22	0.61	0.38	0.76
Max Rec Vol (m^3)	0.69	2.12	1.07	2.31	0.61	1.60	0.76
Min Proj Vol (m^3)	0.38	0.63	1.42	0.57	1.13	0.76	1.76
Max Proj Vol (m^3)	1.48	4.30	3.21	4.30	1.13	2.27	1.76

Note: Dimensions are taken from section drawings and plans. The 'Rec Depth' is recorded depth below the stripped gravel surface; 'Proj Depth' is the projected estimate of the depth from the original ground surface – assumed to have been similar to the modern surface which has been extrapolated for each feature. The 'Rec Vol' and 'Proj Vol' are the figures for the approximate volume calculated using diameters against the recorded and projected figures for depth. All figures are approximate.

0   20 m

1:400

Fig. 44   Possible post-built structures (northern area): Neolithic or Bronze Age post circle (left), three possible circular or semicircular structures (?Iron Age), two possible rectilinear structures (?Saxon)
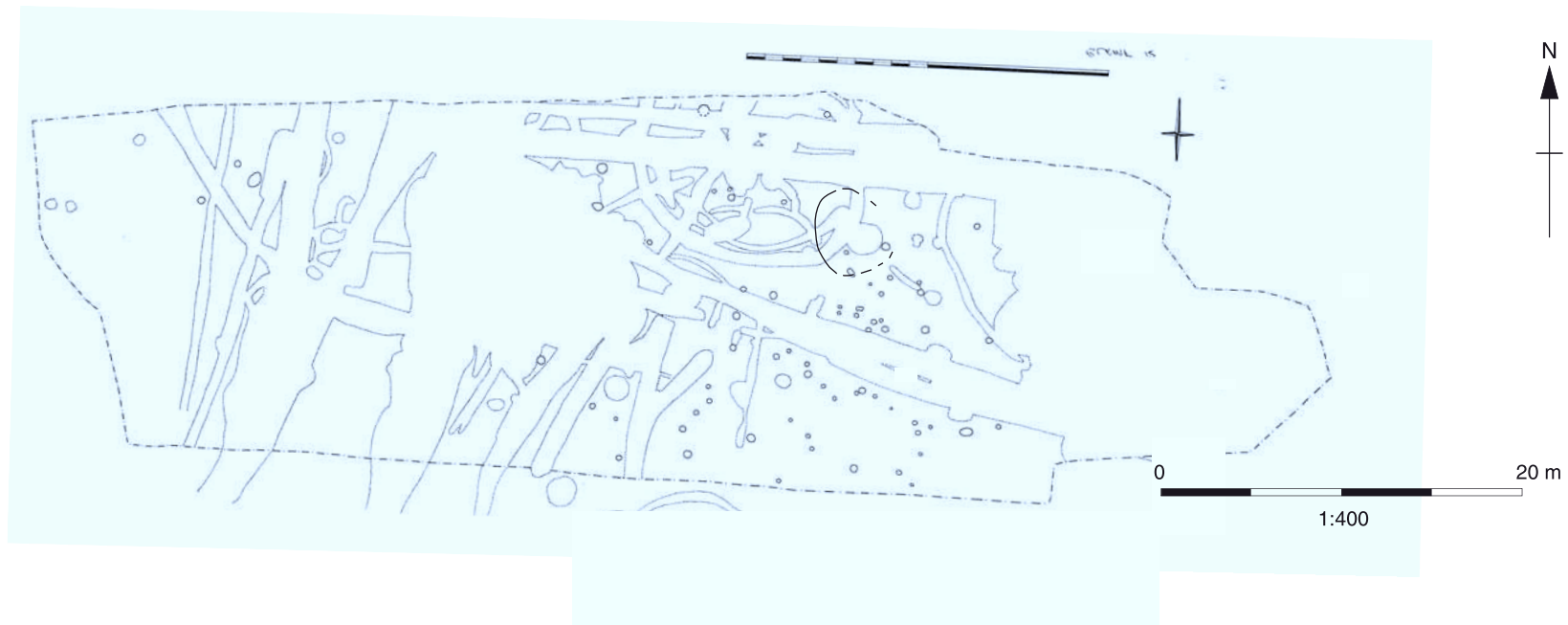
Fig. 45   Possible post-built structures (southern area): possible circular or semicircular structure (?Iron Age)

Table 6: Summary of Iron Age pits

Pit no.	Period	Projected Depth (m)	Recorded Depth (m)	Diameter (m)	Projected volume (m³)	Shape (profile and base)	Fill
326	Early Iron Age	1.4	0.9	1.5	3.30	?undercut flat? bottom	complex layers
671	Early Iron Age	1.4	0.8	1.6	3.52	cylinder/bowl flat? bottom	complex layers
608	Early Iron Age	1.3	0.7	1.4	2.86	undercut flat bottom	complex layers
678	Early Iron Age?	1.3	0.55	2.1	4.30	cylinder/bowl flat bottom	complex layers
655	Early Iron Age	1.1	0.4	1.5	2.60	undercut round bottom	complex layers
685	Iron Age?	1.3	0.7	2.1	4.30	cylinder/bowl flat? bottom	complex layers
625	Middle Iron Age	1.2	0.4	1.3	2.45	bowl round bottom	layers

Iron Age pit (F659) had a clay lining. Most of the other Iron Age pits at Mount Farm were shallow with projected original depths of *c* 0.30 m to 0.75 m deep, but a limited number were large enough to be more obvious candidates for grain storage (Table 6). However, the size range of 'storage' pits and their possible uses are still surprisingly poorly understood on the gravels (Lambrick with Robinson 2009)

Compared with the earlier Iron Age, pits became a less common component of the middle Iron Age settlement layout, but their distribution does not seem significantly different from that of the early Iron Age. Some may genuinely be transitional between the early and middle Iron Age, as is the case for much denser clusters of pits at Ashville, Gravelly Guy and Yarnton (Parrington 1978; Lambrick and Allen 2004; Hey and Timby forthcoming).

Burials and other human remains (Figs 46-47)

The occurrence of human remains within later prehistoric settlements as inhumations, partial corpses and stray bones is well-recognised in the Thames Valley as elsewhere (Lambrick with Robinson 2009; Whimster 1981; Wilson 1981; Wait 1985). The distribution of later prehistoric and Roman human remains is shown in Figure 46, and details of the skeletons, and other bones recovered from late prehistoric contexts are given in Table 7.

Two deliberate pit burials of complete bodies (F105 and F134) were identified (Plate 6; Fig. 47). F105 cut the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age ploughsoil (L158) sealing the ring ditch, which together with the common prehistoric position of the body suggests it was Iron Age; F134 was also later than the ring ditch, and produced Iron Age pottery. Neither of them was accompanied by personal objects or other grave goods. Both burials were extremely shallow and judging by the base of the early ploughsoil cut by F105 (Fig. 41), the bodies were probably buried only 0.20 m - 0.30 m below the ground surface. This is comparable to some examples at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004, figs 6.1-2).

Both these burials were in the area of the Bronze Age ring ditch, and despite the intervening periods when waterhole F162 was dug, and the earthworks ploughed over (see above), there were several other human bones in the upper fills of the barrow ditch and waterhole (generally datable to the later Bronze Age or early Iron Age) which seem to be part of a wider pattern of seemingly unceremonious disposal of still born babies and infants and occasionally older children or adults. The isolated bones of a child and an adolescent in the middle Bronze Age fill of the ring ditch (F101/E/2) suggests that this kind of practice may have begun at much the same time as the latest formal burials were being made within the ring ditch.

Amongst other pits and ditches there were two complete and two half complete neonates and 18 other instances of between one and 20 'stray' bones of adults, children or neonates in Iron Age contexts (Appendix 15). These are not in themselves exceptional, but along with Gravelly Guy, Mount Farm is

Plate 6   Iron Age burial F134

Fig. 46 *Distribution of early to middle Iron Age and Roman human burials and bones*

Legend:

● Grave or Burial Pit
⊗ Cluster of Adult/Child bones
✕ Single Adult/Child bone
⊗ Cluster of Neonate bones
✖ Single Neonate bone

N

0   50 m

1:750

unusual in the Thames Valley for the density of human remains, including neonates, associated with the Iron Age settlement (Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

Unusual deposits of animal bones

In addition to the human remains, a number of Iron Age features contained groups of articulated animal remains and unusual deposits of objects might be classed as 'special deposits,' There were also some instances of relatively complete pots, but none were recorded as being in an obviously significant position.

'Special deposits' are now recognised as a normal aspect of virtually every earlier prehistoric occupation site and almost all Iron Age and Roman rural settlements. But the degrees of deliberate ritual purpose or symbolism – as opposed to structured deposition in terms of reflecting specific outcomes of more mundane activities is far from clear-cut, and particular deposits can often be interpreted in different ways within sliding scales of deliberateness and symbolism, from the highly ritualised to the purely coincidental (Wilson 1992; 1999; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 488-91).

An early Iron Age pit, F153 (Fig. 6), produced the remains of the carcass of a short tailed type of sheep, and 40 sheep bones came from a small pit or possible post hole F588 (Fig. 8). Pit F53 produced the remains of three sheep carcasses which were buried whole but where subsequently damaged by modern disturbance. The absence of butchery marks suggest that these sheep died of disease, and there is little evidence to date the burial, except that the animals conformed to Iron Age types.

Also in the northern part of the site, there were contexts with numerous bones of a butchered dog (F166: Fig. 6) that had suffered numerous injuries, some elements of an early Iron Age puppy or fox cub (F75: Fig. 6) and part of a fox (F174: Fig. 6, undated but possibly Iron Age).

Excavation of EIA pit F652 (Fig. 8) in the southern part of the site uncovered an apparent jumble of ten variously articulated butchered limbs of cattle, segments of backbone of cattle and horse, and upside down crania of a dog and a polled cattle-beast (Plate 7; Fig. 48). The presence of two crania might be taken as symbolically significant, as with examples at Iron Age Gravelly Guy and Roman Barton Court Farm (Wilson 1999; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 245; Wilson 1986). However, there is no clear evidence of formal placement of the bones, and the assemblage can also be seen as having the

Table 7: Summary of late prehistoric burials and other human remains

Date	Context	Sex	Age	Content
Mid/late Bronze Age	101/E/1	-	Neonatal	Skull and upper torso
Mid/late Bronze Age	101/E/1	-	4-6 years	1 bone
Mid/late Bronze Age	162 (Myres)	-	-	1 bone
Mid/late Bronze Age	162/A/1	-	Adult	2 bones
Mid/late Bronze Age	162/A/1	-	Juvenile	1 bone
Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age	145	-	*c* 9 years	*c* 20 bones
Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age	145	-	Neonatal	*c* 20 bones
Early Iron Age	118	-	Neonatal	1 bone
Early Iron Age	122/A/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Early Iron Age	134/A/1	F	40+ years	Nearly complete
Early Iron Age	137/A/1	-	Infant	4 bones
Early Iron Age	140/A/1	-	0.5-1 years	18 bones
Early Iron Age	671/A/5&6	-	17-23 years	17 bones
Middle Iron Age	4/C/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Middle Iron Age	6/A/1	-	Neonatal	Nearly complete
Middle Iron Age	6/B/1	-	Neonatal	Half complete
Middle Iron Age	126/A/1	-	Neonatal	5 bones
Middle Iron Age	126/B/1	-	Neonatal	4 bones
Middle Iron Age	126/C/1	-	Neonatal	1 bone
Middle Iron Age	206/M/1	-	Neonatal	Nearly complete
Middle Iron Age	131/C/1	-	Neonatal	1 bone
Middle Iron Age	136	-	3-9 months	1 bone
Middle Iron Age	505/A/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Middle Iron Age	505/A/1	-	Neonatal	Half complete
Iron Age	105	F	35-40 years	Nearly complete
?Iron Age	314/A/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Iron Age	522/A/1	-	3-9 months	*c* 25 bones
?	(Myres)	-	-	1 bone

F134

F105

F176

F562

F542

0   1 m

1:20

N
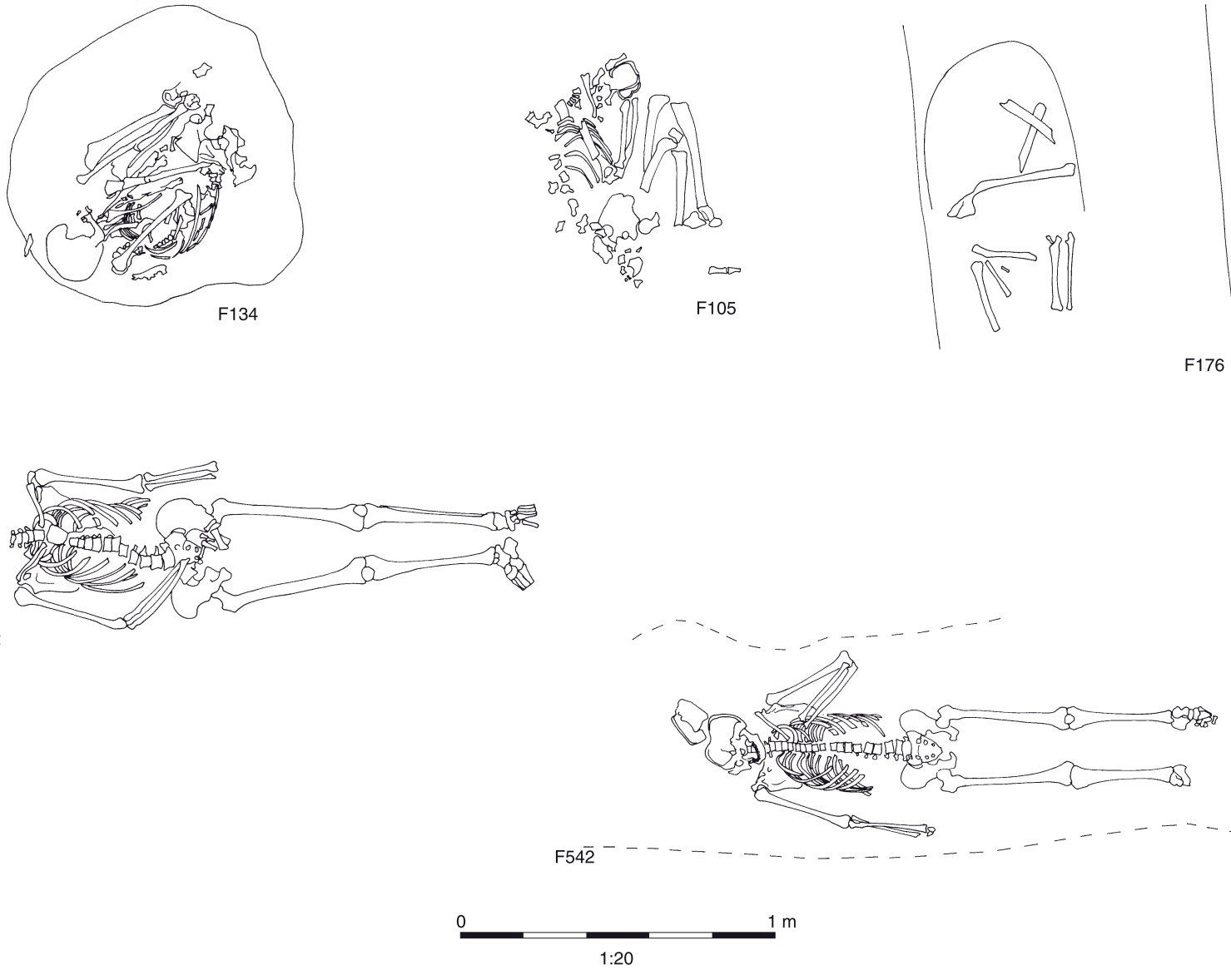
Fig. 47   Early to middle Iron Age and Roman burials in pits and ditches

character of buried meat joints rather than special disposal of particular animals. The evidence of cut marks makes it reasonable to treat this material primarily as remains from normal Iron Age butchery.

While some sort of deliberate 'special deposit' might be imagined, the bones can also be interpreted as meat storage (either not recovered or gone bad) or rubbish disposal (whether or not the debris came from some special meal). It is worth noting that the radiocarbon determination on an articu-

lated cattle vertebrae and pelvis (Table 1: 200 cal BC - cal AD 240: HAR-4793: 1980±90 BP) was distinctly later than the pottery would suggest, possibly indicating that the broken sherds, fragmentary bones, and carbonised seeds in the fill might all have been in the soil used to backfill the pit after the disposal of the meat joints and crania.

Other articulated remains of cattle occurred in early Iron Age pit F671 (Fig. 8), only 4 m from F652, but again with little positive indication of being a deliberate 'special deposit'.
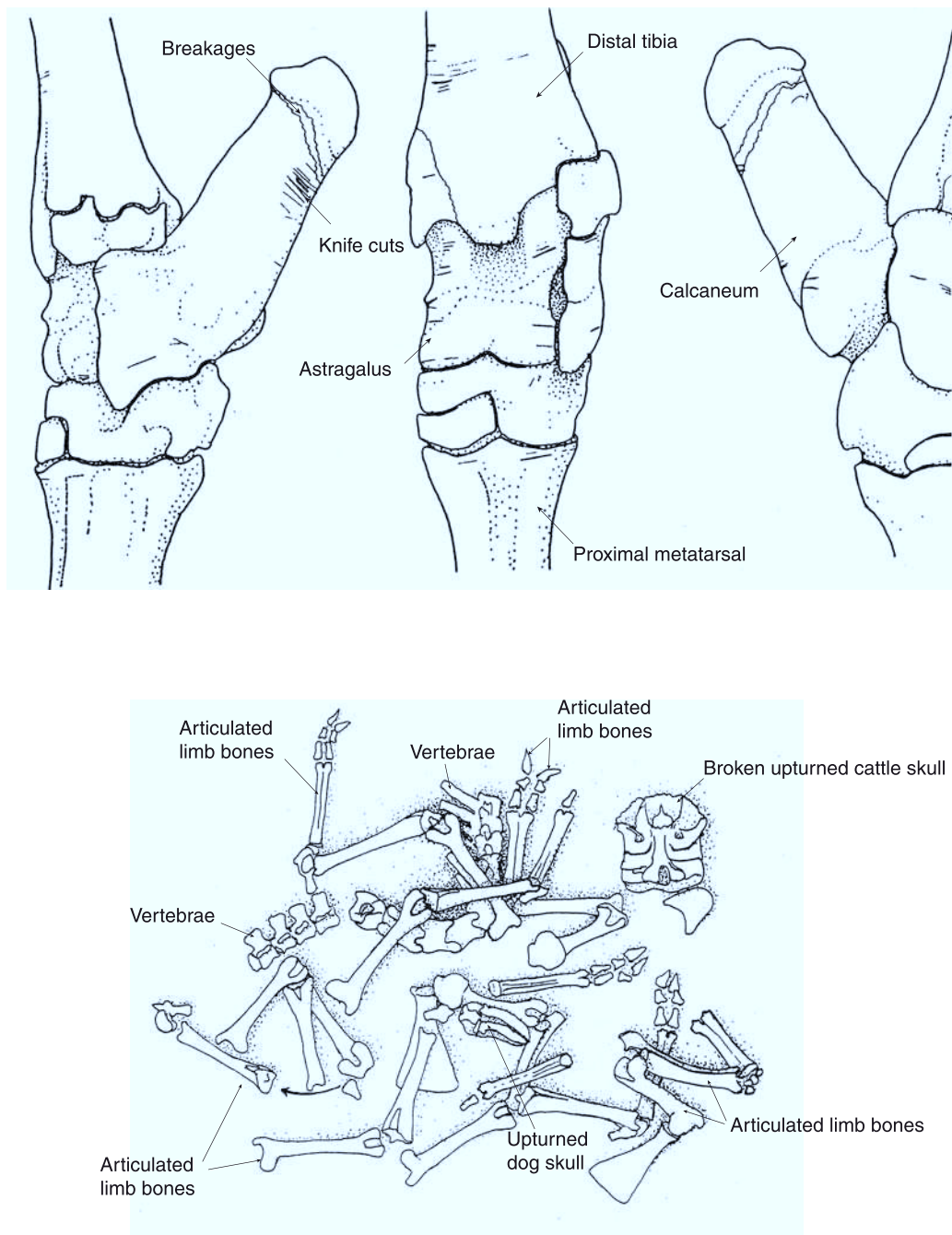
Fig. 48   Deposit of animal limbs, cattle and dog skull in F652, and cumulative pattern of knife cuts on cattle hock joints from F652 illustrating evidence of butchery techniques

Plate 7   Butchered animal limbs and skulls in pit F652

Waterholes (Fig. 49)

In the southern area of controlled excavation and extending beyond it a series of waterholes were dug not far from the southern margin of the gravel to exploit the perched watertable. The earliest cut of Waterhole F661 (Plate 8; Fig. 8) probably belongs to the earlier Iron Age, and was the first stage of complex of active waterholes or artificially dug ponds that included later recuts of F661, F677 (below features 674, 675 and 676) and F676 (Fig. 8). Unfortunately none of the deposits excavated produced good waterlogged preservation (see Part 3 below, and Appendices 1 and 18).

The form of these waterholes was amorphous with the lowest layers of infilling suggesting that they were reworked and recut several times before being allowed to silt up (Fig. 49). The recuts tend to be progressive and dug from quite a low level. It appears that the clearing out process was achieved mainly by cutting the steep sides back, ending up with one edge being not only steep but in some cases substantially undercut. The layers of backfilling slope up gently over the earlier recuts. This pattern of recutting suggests that there would always have been access for animals, and that these waterholes were 'ponds' rather than 'wells' (Lambrick with Robinson 2009), though the complexities of the recuts and the limited area excavated make it difficult to be certain. More details are given in Appendix 1.

Ponds and waterholes are arguably somewhat less common in the region as a feature of Iron Age sites than of Bronze Age sites: a middle Iron Age example was excavated at Farmoor on the first gravel terrace (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, 12-13, figs 4-5) but they have not been located before on the higher gravel terraces of the Upper Thames (eg at Gravelly Guy or other Stanton Harcourt sites, Ashville or Yarnton). This could be because the water table at these other sites is normally deeper than it was at Mount Farm, as a result of specific geological conditions, but might be because streams were closer to hand, or because the agricultural or domestic water requirements were different at the other sites.

Penannular gullies and pens (Figs 6-8 and 42-43)

Various groups of penannular and other curving gullies are best seen as having been created in the earlier part of the middle Iron Age, though in several cases the dating evidence is slight.

Towards the eastern end of the site, F327+279, F270+267, F263, and F200+203 (Fig. 42) appear to have defined a cluster of three interlinked circular and subcircular pens. The very shallow, incomplete F327+279 opened eastwards, opposite the much more substantial west-facing penannular gully F200+203, with F263 acting as a link between the two, whilst also forming the south side of the pen
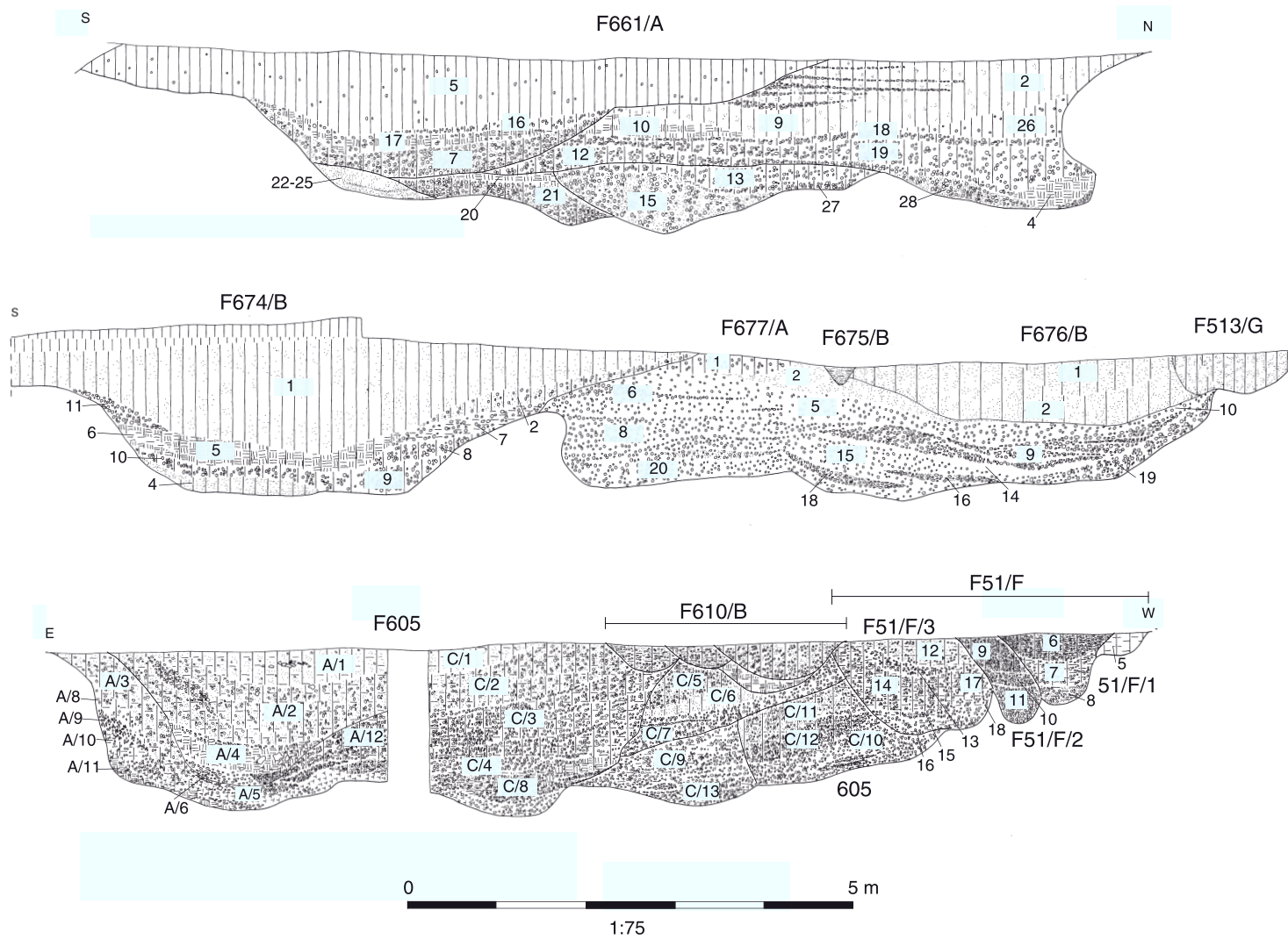
Fig. 49   Sections of Iron Age and Roman waterholes in the southern area of the site

defined by F270+267. F200+203 was recut several times, and it can be suggested that the group went through a series of modifications probably related to how their entrances were organised to facilitate the handling of animals (Figs 7 and 43b).

In the area of the Bronze Age ring ditch there was another group of very shallow, partly ploughed out gullies (F112, F116 and F59) that formed another pair of pens. Another gully (F316) half way between the two northern groups of pens may also have been related to them (Figs 6-7 and 43a).

In the southern part of the site fragmentary traces of another group of curving gullies were found, of which only F656 was clearly defined, other elements (eg F531) being substantially disturbed by later ditches and waterholes (Figs 8 and 43a).

The origins of these small enclosures or pens is not entirely clear, but it is noticeable that clusters of pits, some of early Iron Age date, cluster round them, suggesting that the pits were positioned to respect areas used for other activities which were eventually marked by gullies or ditches. This kind of pattern is also evident at Ashville (Parrington 1978, fig. 3) and Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 129, figs 3.2-3 and 3.6).

The quantity, quality and distribution of the pottery from most of the gullies does not particularly suggest domestic use for any of them. The west-facing penannular gullies represented by F200/203 are the most substantial, but even here there was no concentration of domestic debris either side of the entrance, nor any convincing evidence of door posts or other indications of a house apart from a rather unconvincing arc of postholes in the southern part of the enclosure which need not have been contemporary or for domestic use. For this enclosure a non-domestic origin with the other enclosures in the group would explain its western

Plate 8   Section through Iron Age and Roman waterhole F661

entrance, which for a house site would be somewhat unusual (though cf Lambrick with Robinson 2009). The relative abundance of slag from F200/203, originally recorded in the 1933 excavations, might support Myres' (1937) suggestion that smithing was carried out in this enclosure, though this may well have been only one of its uses. Recent work on a similar west-facing penannular gully with a significant concentration of slag at Segsbury suggests that it may have resulted from intense burning of a structure rather than metal working (Salter in Lock *et al.* 2005) and the Mount Farm material has not been re-examined to check in detail whether this might also have been the case.

The penannular gully F200+203 may well have been used as an animal pen, as suggested by its spatial relationship to other pens to the west, including a possibly interlinked sequence of rearrangements of their entrances. The recuts suggest about three modifications to this group of pens, which are of possible interest with reference to how they would have changed the openings where gaps were left between the ends of gullies (see Fig 42b). The dimensions of these gaps (allowing for a posthole placed in the middle of the entrance to penannular gully F200+203) suggest that these arrangements might have been designed to enable the pens to be opened and closed using hurdles of a fairly standard width (*c* 1.5 m), which would have been used either singly or in multiples of two, three or four to form different configurations for the management of animals, singling them out through narrower gaps and allowing group movement through wider openings (Fig. 42). Such asymmetrical openings are a feature of a number of small enclosures, as is exemplified in two cases at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 119-31; Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

Subrectangular paddocks and enclosures (Fig. 43)

These small, possibly interlinked clusters of small penannular pens were replaced in the later part of the middle Iron Age with a larger scale network of paddocks. The west-facing penannular gully F200+203 probably continued in use after other elements had been abandoned as it was respected by a long curving ditch (F206) running west from its southern side to meet a new WSW-ENE boundary (F6+72, F4 etc) to the north. F206 was mirrored to the south by a similar curving ditch (F257) extending beyond the area of excavation, which may have abutted an E-W ditch running east from the southern group of pens. These too were succeeded by other parts of the subrectangular network of fields and paddocks (F503, F505 and F506) which were also associated with penannular gullies (F529 and F539, and F541: Fig. 8). The pens in the area of the Bronze Age ring ditch were replaced by a series of irregular gullies that seem to represent a sequence of boundary features that may have facilitated management and movement of animals

between different elements of the new field/paddock system.

The most obvious parts of the rectilinear ditch system that are datable to the middle iron Age period were F505 and F506 and F257 in the southern area, probably F4, F5+57, and F6+72, F206 to the north (Fig. 43). It is not clear exactly how these ditches related to what was to become a trackway to the east, but it is possible that F206 may have been incorporated so as to divide off an area, and F257 may have had a similar purpose. Although some of the pottery from a few of these ditches is earlier Iron Age (eg F4, see Appendix 5), it is likely to have been redeposited from earlier Iron Age occupation in the vicinity. This is especially clear in F206 where the amount of pottery and the proportion of early sherds and early fabrics all increased in the vicinity of earlier Iron Age pits (data plots in archive).

Although F4 and F6+72 ran parallel to each other, as if they were part of a double-ditched boundary or a trackway, it is at least as likely that one was a replacement for the other. Elsewhere, maintenance of the ditch system is evident, both from recutting of the ditches and from their replacement (as with F505 and F506 and later ditches). Some original parts have already been lost in later replacements (eg where F505 was cut by F50: Fig. 8). More fragmentary remains indicating other parts of the ditch system, modifications or additions in the southern area include F502, F503 and F625 west of F505, and F657 (possibly the original cut of F513: Fig. 8), F525 and perhaps F541 (Fig. 8).

In the northern area such remains may include F126 (Fig. 6), F124 and a complex of north-south gullies and ditches within the area of the ring ditch consisting of various parts of F113, F135, F136, F168 and F172 (Fig. 6). Other gullies such as F132, F150 and F269 (Fig. 6) may also belong to this phase.

The interpretation of the development of the enclosure/paddock system presented in Figure 43 relies in part on the assumption that ditched boundaries were accompanied by banks and/or hedges, which would help to explain the spatial relationships between them (see Appendix 1 for further discussion). This is probably born out by F56, a broad shallow gully with a pockmarked base running parallel to F5+57, which is interpreted as a shallow trench in which a hedge was planted, the pock marks resulting from the difficulty the roots had in penetrating the gravel (Plate 9).

Overview

Chronology of the settlement

The pottery suggests that there was not a clear break between the early and middle Iron Age such as that at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979), and a more gradual development may be envisaged, as at Ashville, Gravelly Guy or Yarnton (Parrington 1978, Lambrick and Allen 2004, Hey and Timby forthcoming). As with these other sites, some features are
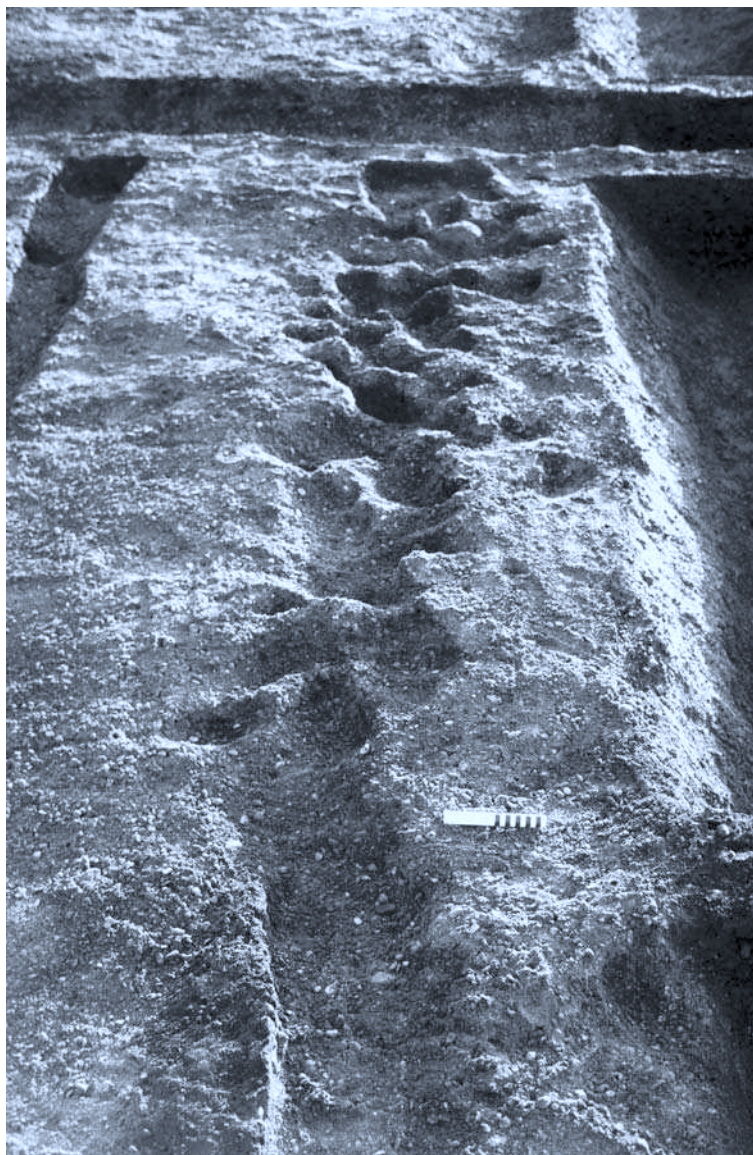
Plate 9   Possible base of a hedge F56, alongside ditch F5 and 57

not clearly assignable to earlier or later periods within the Iron Age, and may genuinely reflect the period of transition between dominant pottery styles. As discussed in Appendix 5, there are problems with assigning contexts to this period because of the vagaries entailed in the presence and absence and rate of occurrence of distinctive pottery forms. The likelihood of a more or less continuous occupation of the site through the Iron Age is therefore based more on the overall character of the pottery assemblage and broad patterns of spatial and stratigraphic relationships than a clear cut sequence of individually well-dated contexts.

Three radiocarbon determinations on animal bone, selected to reflect a typical range of the earlier Iron Age pottery assemblages (Table 1; Appendix 5) produced rather later date ranges than would be expected for the early Iron Age (F118 at 410 to 40 cal BC, HAR-4790: 2210 ± 80 BP; F328 at 390 cal BC to cal AD 60, HAR-4674: 2130 ± 80 BP; and F652 at 200 cal BC to cal AD 240, HAR-4793: 1980 ± 90 BP), though the early end of the 2-sigma limits for F118 and F328 are not incompatible with the latter end of the early Iron Age. A determination of 280 cal BC to cal AD 70 (HAR-4794: 2100 ± 80 BP) on bone from a middle to late Iron Age ditch F505 is very much in line with what would be expected from the pottery, while a date of 740 to 200 cal BC (HAR-4795: 2330 ± 70 BP) on bone from a middle to late Iron Age waterhole F676 is too broad to be very informative, though if anything seems relatively early. Overall the error margins of these Iron Age radiocarbon determinations, which did not have the benefit of more recent improvements in preparation and other techniques, are too broad to be of much help, and where they do not agree well with the dating indicated by the pottery it is difficult to know what weight should be given to them.

Development of settlement and agricultural activity

Despite the lack of obvious domestic structures, there is evidence for an apparent transition from largely if not entirely agricultural use in the late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age to domestic occupation later in the early Iron Age. One possibility is that the cultivation was being carried out from the nearby enclosed settlement at Allen's Pit, and that occupation began as a quite ephemeral pattern of outlying domestic activity which may have become rather more established after the demise of the Allen's Pit site.

Despite the absence of clear structural remains, the basic distribution of the pits and waterholes, together with the deposits, artefacts, human and biological remains that they contained, provide some useful insights into the socio-economic aspects of the early Iron Age settlement, indicating some differences in the character of activity in different parts of the site (see Part 3 and Appendix 1).

The middle Iron Age occupation seems to have been concentrated in roughly the same areas as the earlier occupation. A study of the quantitative distribution of the finds provides only limited information as to the detailed character of occupation, but there is much useful evidence of broader socio-economic and environmental conditions (see Part 3).

Compared with the earlier Iron Age, the latter part of the middle Iron Age, probably datable to the last century or two cal BC, was innovatory in the physical division of the site into rectilinear enclosures which were to remain important well into the Roman period. This change from small pens to the much larger middle Iron Age paddocks or fields may reflect developments in farming, such as more intensive control of grazing, shifts in the balance between arable and pastoral farming, or in herd structure, which may be indicated by changes in the animal bones, with more cattle, more horses and rather fewer pigs and sheep (see below Part 3 and Appendix 16). The sequence of development is rather unusual for this period in the Upper Thames Valley, where most middle Iron Age field or paddock systems are known from lower-lying, First Terrace and floodplain sites, and rather few continued to be maintained into the Roman period (Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

Late Iron Age and earlier Roman (*c* 50 cal BC to *c* cal AD 200)

This period was differentiated from the middle to late Iron Age largely through the appearance of more distinctive late Iron Age necked jars and new pottery fabrics, and eventually wheel-thrown pottery (Appendix 6). As is typical of farming settlements in the Thames Valley, the conservatism in pottery styles either side of the Roman conquest makes it very difficult to distinguish pre- and post-conquest contexts, and hence to recover any firm evidence to explore what changes may or may not have taken place. Indeed this difficulty is itself part

of the evidence that this political event had relatively little discernible impact within the broader gradual adoption of Roman tastes and technologies before and after the conquest (see Henig and Booth 2000; Booth *et al.* 2007).

Overall pattern of late Iron Age to early Roman activity (Fig. 50)

The distribution of artefacts was not studied in as much detail for the Roman period as it was for the Iron Age, but it appears that the main area of domestic activity probably shifted away from the northern part of the site, where much of the Iron Age activity was focussed, to more peripheral parts of the area investigated and probably beyond, making detailed consideration of the character of the settlement problematic.

Rectilinear enclosures and trackways (Figs 3-8 and 50)

The rectilinear pattern of enclosures laid out in the middle Iron Age was renovated with new ditches in the late Iron Age. In the northern area such elements include the ditch F3, the northern of two terminals at the eastern end of F50, possibly ditch F131 (running south at right angles to ditch F3 before turning east in the area of the Bronze Age ring ditch) and possibly also Myres' ditch 9 (somewhat to the east, also at right angles to F3, stopping well short of it).

In the southern part of the site, F511, F508 and F507 were all possibly pre-conquest. The most certain pre-conquest feature in this area was an oval pit (F530: Fig. 8), which also provided the best evidence for occupation. Two of the waterholes, the upper levels of F676 (Fig. 8) and one of the earliest cuts of F605 in the same area, may also be late Iron Age. Even more dubious is a small pit (F563: Fig. 8) nearby.

Maintenance of the ditch system continued into the late 1st and early 2nd centuries cal AD with various recuttings of ditches F3 and F50. Other sections of ditch (F511, F507, F508 and F131) probably went out of use at an early stage in the sequence. In the southern area, waterhole F605 continued to be recut, but slightly further east, leaving room for a new ditch (F51) to be dug through its earlier fills. At its northern end, the junction of this ditch with F3 and F50 exhibited an extremely complicated sequence of recutting: F51 figured early in the sequence, and if it entirely post-dates F505 (Fig. 8) it is likely that F3 and F50 may also be somewhat later.

On the western side of the site, ditch F51 may represent the creation of a droveway of which the other side was formed by F501. The dating of F501 is doubtful however, and it could be a later addition. To the north it may have continued either as F21 (Fig. 8) or F23, but neither of these was well dated, nor could they be proved to be a continuation of F501. Ditch 537, running east from F51, may

have been dug relatively late in this sequence. This cut the earlier parts of F51, but its relationship with the later recuts was not established.

On the eastern side of the site another north-south trackway may also have originated at about this period, though only a short section was investigated and the earliest cuts were much disturbed by later features. In both cases, early courses of the ditches cut through small irregular pits, usually with very few or no finds, notably F756, F757 to F759, F761, F769 to F773, and F776, beside the eastern trackway (Fig. 7). It is of interest that these occur only on the line of the trackway ditches and not elsewhere, possibly suggesting that they were small gravel pits dug to get gravel to improve the tracks. If so, this would imply that the line of the tracks - again perhaps defined by above ground features, predated their ditches: F51 may have been respecting a surviving hedge or bank running outside ditch F505 (Fig. 8), and it has already been suggested that F757 (Fig. 7) may have had earlier origins than is evident from the surviving recuts of the feature.

It is unclear whether the tracks were new additions of the Roman period, or simply formalised pre-existing routeways by the addition of ditches. Both were probably in use at the same time, though the western one may have been laid out earlier, and probably went out of use earlier when ditch F504 (Fig. 8) was cut across its line in the 3rd or 4th century cal AD (see below). Actual usage of the eastern trackway seems to be confirmed by the high resistivity readings for the area between the ditches, which also suggest possible gateways into enclosures alongside (see colour plot of geophysics in archive).

Other ditches and gullies which may belong to the early Roman period include Myres ditch 9, and ditches F301, F297, F295 and F273, aligned at right angles to F3 (Figs 7 and 51), while in the southern area gullies F633, F675 and F683 cut through the upper fills of middle to late Iron Age waterholes (Fig. 8). In other cases (F316, F311, F259 and F552), the odd Roman sherd may be intrusive in earlier features. The difficulty of securely dating many of these features again reflects the absence of much occupation material.
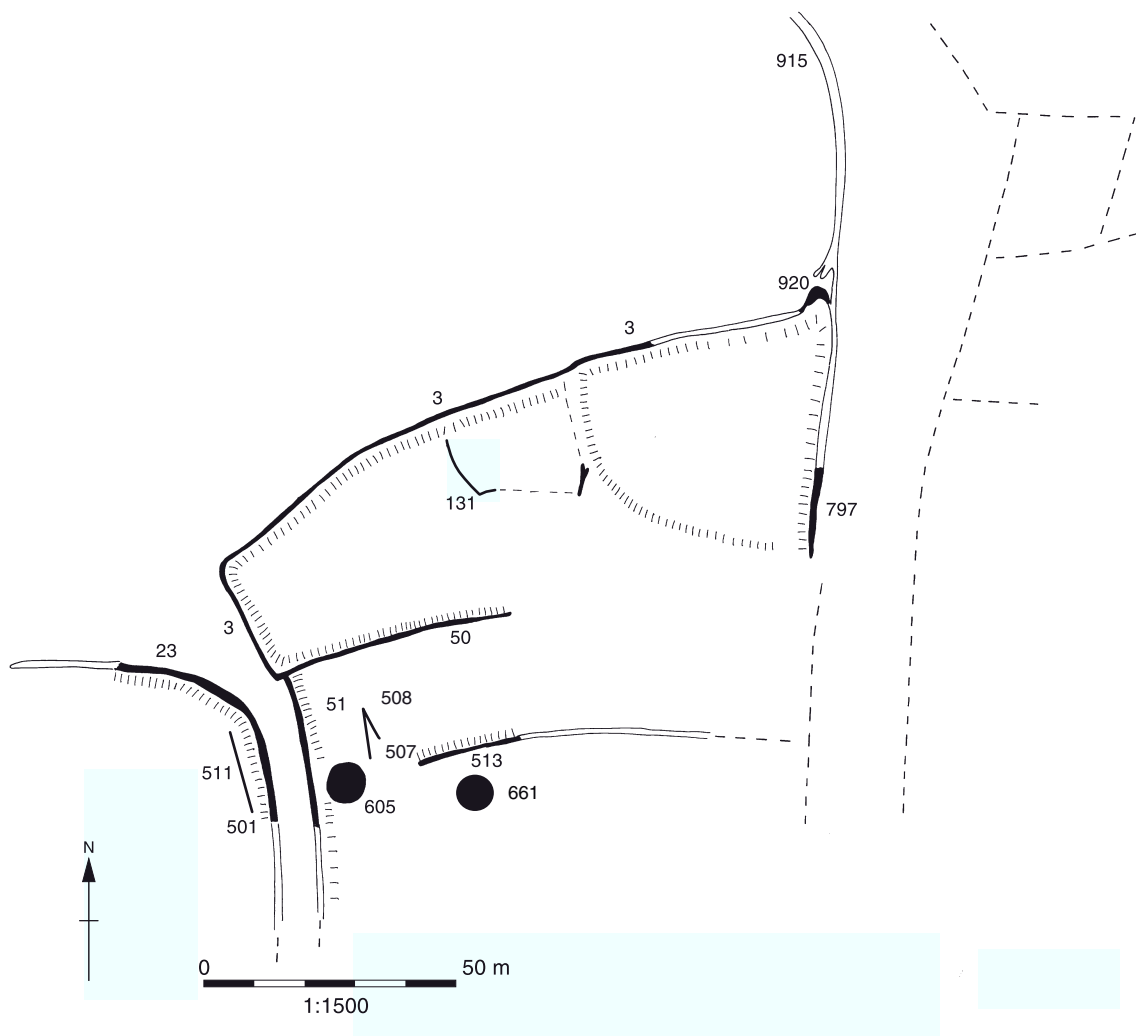
Fig. 50   Interpretation plan: late Iron Age to early Roman

Waterholes (Figs 8, 49 and 50)

As with the Iron Age ponds, the full extent of the Roman waterholes was not established, and there may have been other unexcavated examples that were in use at the beginning of the period. Even the examples excavated, however, indicate continual use from the mid 1st to the 3rd or 4th century. The final cut of Iron Age waterhole F661 was not filled in until some point in the early to middle Roman period, while F605 may have originated in the mid 1st century cal AD, remaining in use with several recuts until the 2nd century cal AD (Fig. 49). More details are given in Appendix 1.

Pits and postholes (Figs 6-8)

The problem of dating evidence is also evident in the small number of features other than ditches datable to the period. Three pits, Myres' pit ⌣, and pits F173 (Fig. 6) and F563 (Fig. 8), are attributable to the period on the basis of their pottery, and pit F619 (Fig. 8), which was cut by F605, is probably also of this date. Otherwise, there were various features containing Roman pottery that was not accurately datable. Pits F19 (adjacent to F3), F340 and F341 (close to the east end of F257) were of interest because they contained significant quantities of possible oven lining or cob walling and fired clay slabs (so-called 'Belgic brick' – see Appendix 8). The remainder are a miscellaneous collection of scattered pits and postholes (F73, F92 (Fig. 6), F481 (Fig. 7), F24, F524, F542, F572, F574, and F575 (Fig. 8)).

None of the postholes produced good evidence of the form of any structures, and there are no finds that clearly provide evidence of buildings, though a large quantity of cob-like material might either be from an oven or (perhaps less likely) mass walling.

Burials and other human remains

The upper half of a woman over 30 years old was found in a shallow grave (F176: Fig. 47) cut into ditch F131 (Fig. 50). The body appears to have been buried incomplete rather than having been later disturbed. Otherwise, several instances of single stray bones of adults and neonates were found in Ditches F501, F508, F511 and F513, and some human bones were found in the backfill of waterholes (see Table 8 and Appendix 15).

Mount Farm seems to illustrate a recurrent pattern in which earlier Iron Age practices regarding disposal of human bodies continued largely unchanged into the later Iron Age and Roman period (Lambrick with Robinson 2009; Booth *et al.* 2007), but some caution is needed given the possibility of redeposited single bones.

Animal burials and special deposits

In terms of special deposits, there is rather limited evidence that earlier practices may have continued at Mount Farm. The remains of a new born calf skeleton in waterhole F605 were possibly associated with the semi-articulated bones of a cow, but it is not obvious that they were disposed of with any particular symbolic intent. The same applies to articulated animal bones in Roman ditches F51 and F513.

Overview

The system of paddocks and small fields that began to be established in the middle Iron Age was maintained, modified and extended in several steps, but probably with no radical change of use. There is some question of whether domestic occupation of the site declined in the late Iron Age, and there is more evidence of occupation in the earlier Roman

Table 8: Summary of burials in late Iron Age, Roman and Saxon contexts

Date	Context	Sex	Age	Content
Late Iron Age	176 & 131/G/1	F	30+ years	Half complete
Late Iron Age/Roman	508/A/11	-	Infant	1 bone
Late Iron Age/Roman	508/B/2	-	0.5-1.5 years	1 bone
Late Iron Age/Roman	511/a/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Late Iron Age/Roman	513/B/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Late Iron Age/Roman	513/D/1	-	Neonatal	1 bone
Roman	3 (Myres)	-	-	1 bone
Early mid Roman	501/A/1	-	Adult	1 bone
Mid Roman	301/a/1S	-	Adolescent/adult	1 bone
Mid to late Roman	605/A/3	-	Neonatal	20 bones
Late Roman	543	M	30-35 years	Nearly complete
Late Roman	562 (534)	M	Adult	Nearly complete
Saxon	82/A/6s	-	Infant	1 bone
?	654/A/1	-	Infant	1 bone
u/s	103	-	9-14 years	1 bone
u/s	207	-	Adult	1 bone

period than can definitely be attributed to the late Iron Age, perhaps suggesting a gradual increase in the amount of activity on the site after a lull. It is rather questionable where any permanent late Iron Age and early Roman settlement may have been, but the amount of domestic debris relative to redeposited Iron Age material suggests that the centre of domestic settlement may have shifted south compared with most of the early to middle Iron Age activity. If the domestic activity was not actually within the area excavated, it must have been very close by. As is quite usual for sites of this period in the Thames Valley, there is no evidence of any buildings, while the finds include only a rather limited range of small domestic objects.

Although there is again quite good evidence for the economy of the site from the carbonised remains and the bones, the evidence has to be treated with caution because of the amount of redeposited Iron Age material in some of the features sampled, especially in the northern and western parts of the excavated area. Unfortunately the waterlogged samples of this period were poorly preserved.

Middle to late Roman (2nd to 3rd centuries cal AD)
(Figs 3-8 and 51-53)

Ditched enclosures

The main 1st- to early 2nd-century ditches (F3, F50, F51 and perhaps F501 and F537) probably continued in use into the 2nd century (Fig. 51). The later cuts of F3 may have continued to link in to the eastern trackway where there was a complex sequence of ditch ends, junctions and sumps, of which F922, F912 and F910 are amongst the earliest. In the southern part of the site, the earliest cuts of ditch 513, running parallel to F50 and east of water-hole F605 may also be early. Although its earliest surviving cuts belong to the 2nd century, there is good reason to suspect that they destroyed earlier cuts on this line. It cut the northern end of waterhole F676 (Fig. 8).

Apart from the poorly dated features mentioned in the previous section which might alternatively have originated in this period, the next main new development was a ditch (F902+22+46) forming the corner of an enclosure north of F3 (Fig. 52). Its
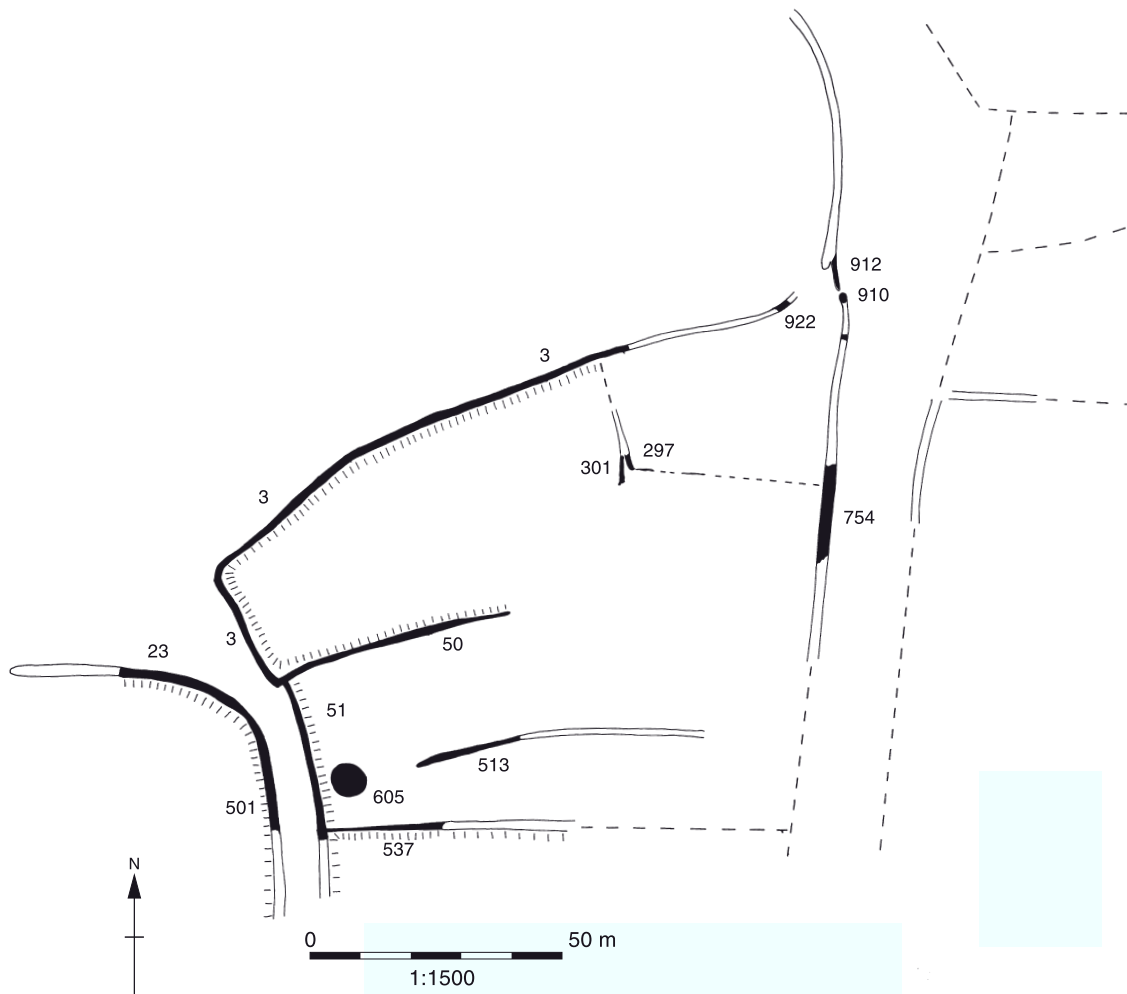
Fig. 51 Interpretation plan: mid Roman, phase 1

southern side (F46) ran adjacent to the earlier ditch, apparently replacing it since this part of ditch F3 produced no 2nd-century pottery. In the salvage area to the north, ditch F909, with a possible sump at its eastern end, was 2nd century (or later), and, on the basis of the aerial photographs, this may have been the eastern terminal of ditch F46. Although the northward extension (F902) was recorded, its relationship with other ditches could not be established. Their extent and rectilinear layout (eg with F903, F904 and F907: Fig. 5) suggests, however, an episode of remodelling and addition to the fields.

In the eastern part of the site, the droveway ditches, which probably originated in the later 1st century, were frequently recut or replaced in the 2nd century (F755, F754 and F763+757: Fig. 7).

Probably still within the 2nd century (a single sherd of later colour coat is considered intrusive), F513 was recut and extended westwards, cutting the uppermost filling of F605, which by then little more than a shallow hollow, to curve northwards (as F610) along the line of F51 (Fig. 53). F610 was itself recut several times. A new ditch, F534 (Fig. 8) was dug

parallel to F537 on its northern edge. This cut through the upper fill of waterhole F674 which was possibly finally filled in by the early 3rd century. To the west, the ditch turned north into F504, a ditch cutting obliquely across the droveway bounded by F501 and F51, intersecting the eastern ditch (F51; Fig. 51) at the edge of the excavation and continuing south, as is evident from the aerial photographs. F504 had been recut several times and it was unclear where F534 came in the sequence. The northern ends of F504 and F610 were not located for certain, although at least one cut of F504 appeared to butt end near junction F21 and F23 (Fig. 8), others may have continued further. A possible continuation of F610 (F95) cut across the top of the junction of F3, F50 and F51 (Fig. 8), and others ran northwards parallel to the east side of F3 (just visible on the aerial photographs). There is no evidence that it extended further round F3 (where it was relatively well preserved), and the absence of much recutting of the northern enclosures (F46 (Fig. 7) + F22+F902 (Fig. 4) and F903, F904 and F907 (Fig. 5)) may indicate that these ditches were no longer being maintained.
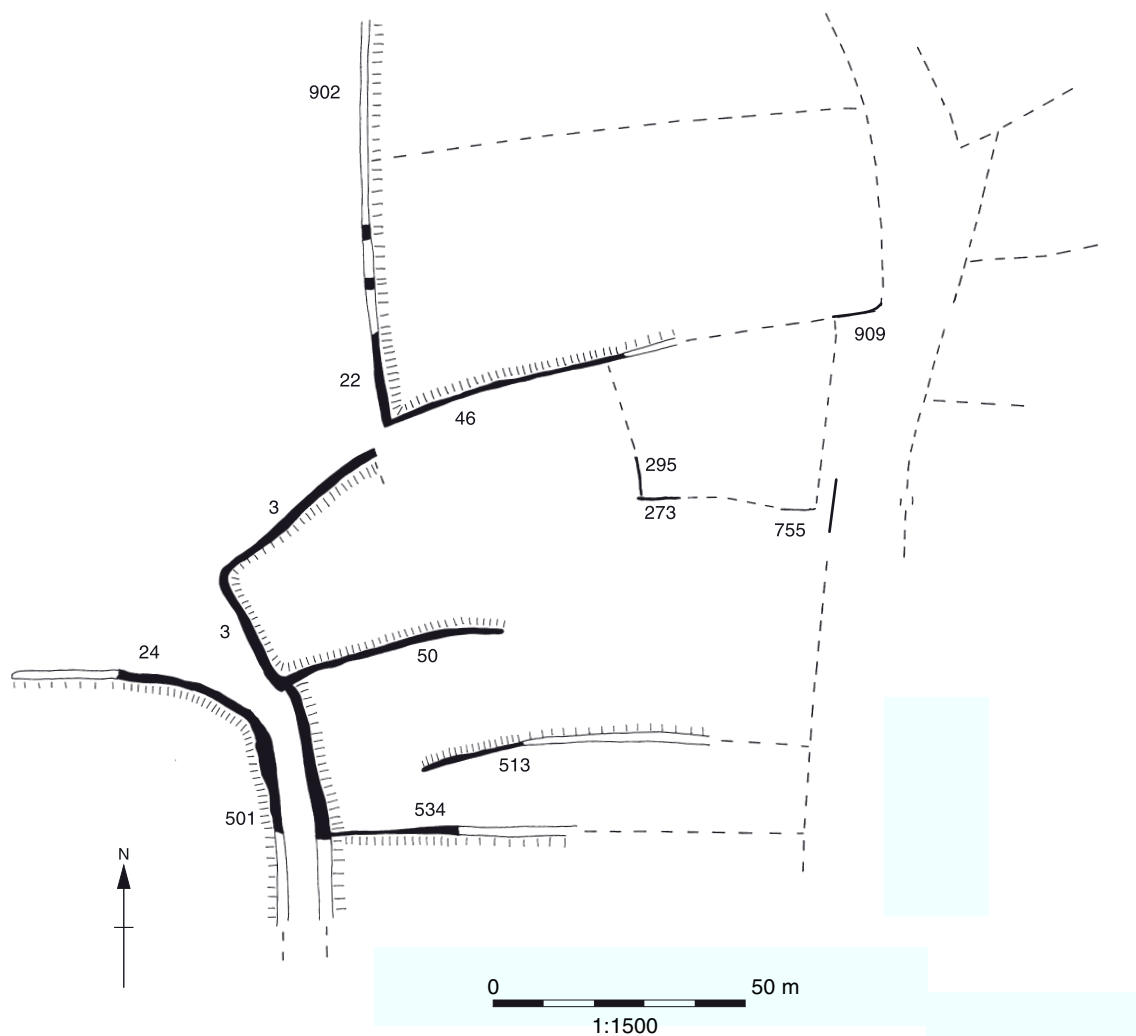
Fig. 52   Interpretation plan: mid Roman, phase 2
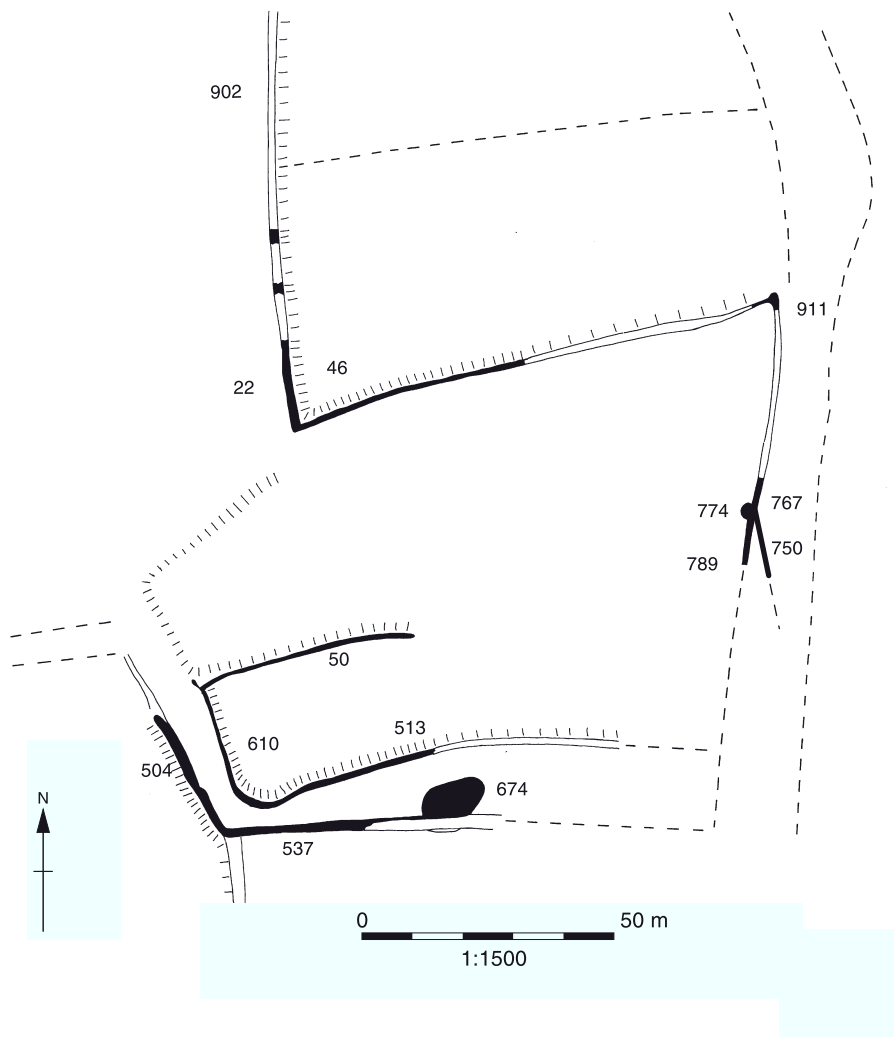
Fig. 53   Interpretation plan: late Roman
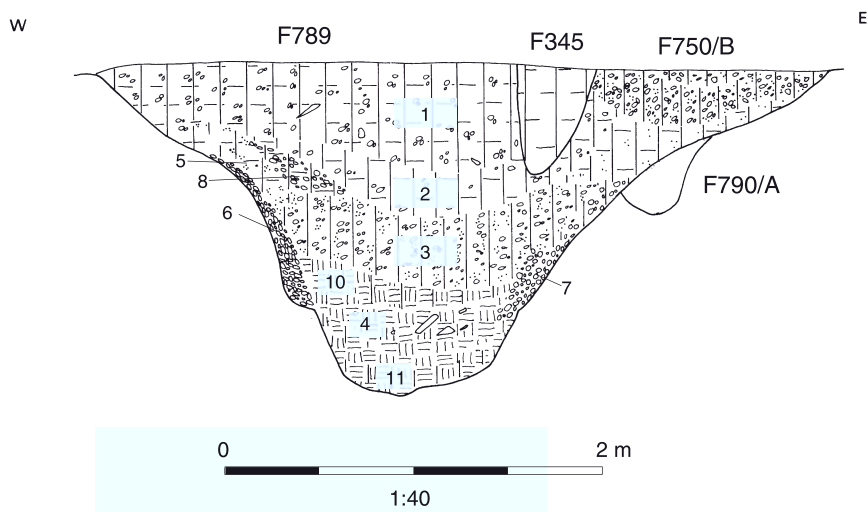
Fig. 54   Section of waterhole F789 in eastern trackway

In the eastern area, waterhole 789 was perhaps created, recut and certainly filled up in this period (see below; Fig. 54). One of the earlier cuts of the droveway ditch just to its west may have been redug while it was in use (F763: Fig. 7). After the waterhole had filled up, a ditch was dug across its eastern side (F767+752). This in turn was recut, and finally a ditch (F750) was cut (and recut) obliquely across the ditches. From the aerial photographs this appears to be a continuation of F908 (Fig. 5), which from its soft, loose fill was suspected of being modern, though no modern finds were recovered from it. A line of three postholes (F777, F345 and F751: Fig. 7) on the same alignment, one of them cutting the fill of the ditch suggests a fence line (again possibly modern). One of the pits beside the droveway ditches in this area produced 3rd-century pottery.

Pits and waterholes

In respect of other features, only one pit (F533: Fig. 8) and perhaps two others (F623: Fig. 8) and F295: Fig. 7) can certainly be attributed to the later part of the Roman occupation of the site. More doubtfully, two others (F514 and F563) that were more likely to have been 2nd century than earlier, had clay linings and may have been tanks. They were estimated as originally having been 0.7 m - 0.9 m deep.

In the area of the eastern droveway, a new waterhole (F774+789) was probably dug at this period, cutting through the earlier ditches (Fig. 54). It contained numerous quern fragments (Appendix 13), and mostly 2nd-century pottery. Although a few distinctive 3rd-century sherds were also recovered from its fill, they were from relatively late recuts which had probably largely accumulated after the feature had gone out of use.

In the southern area, waterhole F605 (Fig. 8) went out of use and may have been replaced by F674 (Fig. 53) which was cut through the Iron Age waterholes (F661 and F676: Fig. 8). It had almost completely filled in by the time it was cut by a later Roman ditch F534 (Fig. 49).

Buildings

The continued lack of clear structural evidence of Roman buildings on non-villa sites in the Upper Thames Valley is a common problem (Henig and Booth 2000; Booth *et al*. 2007). At Mount Farm no clear buildings either of earlier or later Roman origin were evident from subsoil foundations such as postholes, beam slots, masonry or cob wall footings, and only two or three possible bits of roofing tile were found (Appendix 8)

Burials and other human remains

As in the previous periods, there were a number of stray adult and neonate bones from various ditches (Fig. 46), which may well reflect some continuity of practice, but could also reflect problems of redepo-

sition (Table 8). This is perhaps less likely with 20 neonate bones from the upper fill of waterhole F605.

Two undated adult male skeletons (F562 and F543) were found lying head-to-toe in shallow graves cut into the upper fill of one of the latest Roman ditches on the site, F534 (Fig. 47; Table 8, Appendix 15). The burial of the body in F543 had probably disturbed that in F562 which was missing his head, but part of a skull probably belonging to this skeleton was found in the ditch nearby. The skull of skeleton 543 was notable for four deep clefts across the top of the cranium, with three more under the left and right ears and in the left side of the mouth (Appendix 15; Scott 2006). These cuts were certainly the cause of death if they were not mutilations immediately after death. If the body was mutilated they might be explained as attempts to prevent the wanderings of an undesirable spirit, a possible explanation for the decapitated burials of this period (Harman *et al*. 1981; Philpott 1991; Booth 2001).

Whatever the origins of the gashes in the skull of F543, they need not be related to why the burials were in a ditch rather than a cemetery: it was not until the late Roman period that specific cemeteries began to be established in Oxfordshire, both in the countryside and to serve towns (Booth 2001), and in any case there are similar cases from the Queenford Mill cemetery 2 km to the south just outside Dorchester (Harman *et al*. 1978, 6) and others are known (for example, at Dunstable: Matthews 1981). Adult burials are quite common at boundaries, other local examples including those at the University Museum in Oxford and Gravelly Guy (Hassall 1972; Lambrick and Allen 2004). A number of explanations can be advanced for such burials (Philpott 1991; Pearce 1999).

However, the stratigraphic context of these two burials does not have to be Roman since it appears that they were dug into the fill of one of the latest ditches on the site. As there is no associated dating evidence, it is also quite possible that they were post-Roman, and, for example, a remarkable mass grave of later Saxon burials exhibiting violent death has recently been found in Oxford (Wallis 2009).

The Roman pottery

Based upon a report by Paul Booth (Appendix 6)
Approximately 3000 sherds of late Iron Age and Roman pottery were recovered from the site (Table 9). The great majority of the assemblage was of 1st-2nd century date and was recovered from large linear ditches (F3, F50, F51, F501, F504, F513, F534, F537, F754, F755 and F763) and two pits (F605 and F674). Various subsidiary ditches, small pits and a few postholes produced smaller quantities. Some residual pottery was associated with Saxon pottery. Large numbers of residual Iron Age sherds were associated with the Roman pottery in several features, notably ditches F50 and F534. It was not possible in every case to confirm whether particular sherds were of pre- or post-conquest date.

Table 9: Summary of Roman pottery

Fabric	Summary description	OA code	No. sherds	%
Ra	Grog-tempered reduced fabrics	E80	1550	55.1
Rb	Sand-tempered reduced fabrics	R20 and R30	791	28.1
Rc	Very fine reduced fabric	R11	152	5.4
Rd	Fine reduced fabric	R10	34	1.2
Re	Fine reduced fabric	R10	37	1.3
F	Flint tempered fabrics	E60	41	1.5
Oa	Fine oxidised fabrics	O10	93	3.3
Ob	Sandy oxidised fabrics	O20	22	0.8
Wa	Fine white fabrics	W10	14	0.5
Wb	Sandy white fabrics	W20	15	0.5
C	Oxfordshire red-brown colour-coated ware	F51	6	0.2
BB	Black-burnished ware (BB1)	B11	4	0.1
WC	Oxfordshire white-slipped ware	Q21	6	0.2
BW	Oxfordshire burnt white ware	W23	2	0.1
M	Oxfordshire white mortarium fabric	M22	3	0.1
Samian	Samian ware, all sources	S	10	0.4
Misc	Unclassified sherds	-	35	1.2
Total			2815	

The key groups

A number of key groups of pottery have been selected for publication in catalogue form in order to illustrate the range of types present. More detailed discussion of each group can be found in Appendix 6. Unfortunately, few of the Roman features seemed to contain pottery groups of unquestionable contemporaneity, without possible residual or intrusive sherds. This problem is represented in the selection below. Groups had to be chosen on the basis of additional criteria such as the variety of types, the presence of sherds suitable for illustration, and their intrinsic interest. It can be said, however, that the groups of contexts below seem to be of reliably Roman date in spite of the occasional presence of Iron Age and Saxon sherds. Many of the vessels have parallels in the Oxfordshire repertoire (Young 1977), while the earliest forms relate to the relatively well-understood late Iron Age types of the region (Harding 1972, plates 69-72).

Catalogue of illustrated Roman pottery

Figure 55 Group 1: Ditch 51 i (51/B/1, C/1, B/3, E/2)

1. Cordoned, carinated bowl/jar. Fabric Rb2. Partly burnished, lattice design. Wheel thrown. 51/E/2. 1st century AD?
2. Bead-rim jar. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 51/B/1. To AD 200.
3. Bead-rim jar with rolled rim. Fabric Ra1. Wheel finished. 51/B/1. To AD 200.
4. Everted rim jar. Fabric Re. Wheel thrown. 51/E/2. To AD 200.
5. Jar with elongated, slightly indented rim. Fabric Rb4. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 51/E/2. 1st-4th century AD.

6. Neckless jar with everted rim. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 51/B/1. To AD 200.
7. Jar rim, coarsely made, resembling fabric Re. Burnished. Handmade. 51/B/1. 1st century AD.
8. Narrow neck jar. Fabric Ra3. Burnished. Wheel thrown or wheel finished. 51/C/1. 1st-4th century AD.
9. Necked bowl or jar. Fabric Ra3. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 51/B/1. 1st-4th century AD.

Figure 55 Group 2: Ditch 51 ii (51/F/2, E/1, C/2, B/4)

10. Jar with elongated bead rim. Fabric Re. Wheel thrown. 51/E/1. To AD 200.
11. Rim of necked bowl or jar. Fabric Ra4. Burnished. 51/B/4. 1st-4th century AD.
12. Short necked jar. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 51/B/4. 1st-4th century AD.
13. Narrow necked jar. Fabric Ra3. Overall burnish. Wheel thrown. 51/B/4. 1st-4th century AD.
14. Jar with everted rim. Fabric Rb1. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 51/E/1. 1st-4th century AD.
15. Small fragment of ?wide mouthed jar. Fabric Ob. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 51/E/1. AD 50-400.

Figure 55 Group 3: Ditch 513/F/5, F/1, A/1, A/5, A/15, B/1, C/1, D/1, E/1, 610/a/1, B/1, B/2, A/1, C/1

16. Storage jar. Fabric Ra. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 513/F/1. 1st-2nd century AD?
17. Globular jar. Fabric Re? Handmade. 513/F/1. Pre-Roman?
18. Bead rim jar. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 513/E/1.
19. Necked jar or beaker of Young (1977) form O20, cordon on neck. Fabric Oa. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 513/F/1. 240-300 AD?
20. Bead rim jar with sharply out-turned, squared bead. Fabric Ra4. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 513/D/1. To AD 200.
21. Beaker with expanded rim. Fabric Ob. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 513/D/1. 1st-4th century AD.
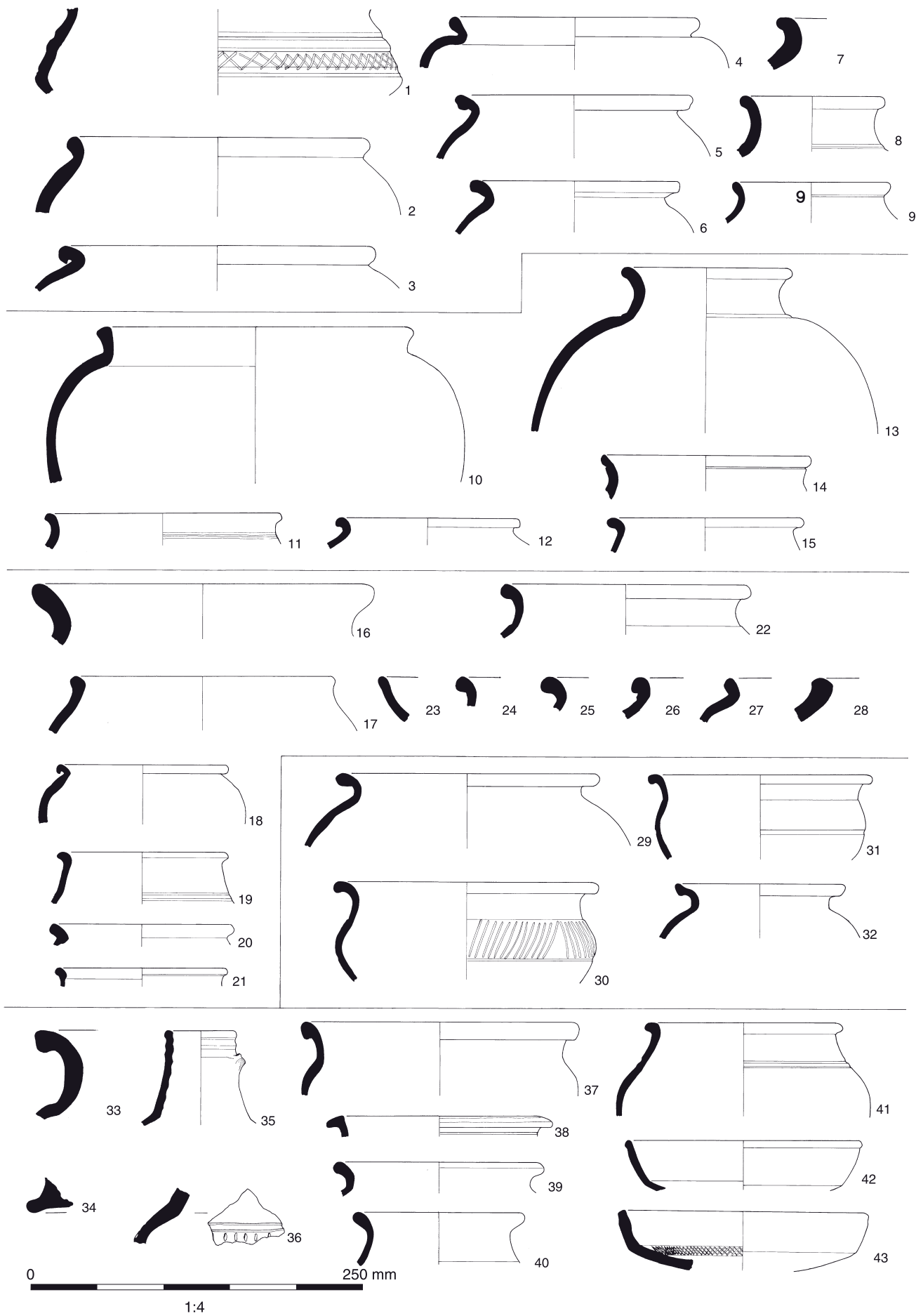
Fig. 55   Roman pottery

80

22. Necked jar. Fabric Oa. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 513/B/1. 2nd century AD.
23. Straight-sided dish. Fabric Ra4. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 513/D/1.
24. Jar with sharply out-turned bead. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 513/A/1. To AD 200.
25. Thickened everted rim jar or bowl. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 513/A/1. To AD 200.
26. Jar with moulded, upright rim. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 513/A/1. To AD 200
27. Necked jar or bowl. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 513/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.
28. Globular bowl/jar with squat bead rim. Fabric Rd. Turned on slow wheel? 513/D/1. To AD 150.

Figure 55 Group 4: Posthole 575
29. Short-necked jar. Fabric Rb1. Wheel thrown. 575/A/1. To AD 200.
30. Necked bowl. Fabric Rb5. Burnished oblique lines. Wheel thrown. 575/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.
31. Necked bowl. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 575/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.
32. Necked jar. Fabric Ob. Wheel thrown. 575/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.

Figure 55 Group 5: Waterhole 605/A/2, A/4, A/7, C/2, D/1, D/2
33. Storage jar with long neck. Fabric Ra2. Partly burnished. Wheel finished. 605/A/4. 1st century AD +.
34. Pedestal base, from carinated jar? Fabric Ra4. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 605/A/2.
35. Handled ring-necked flagon, with topmost rings broken off and smoothed. Fabric Wb, probably a Verulamium product. Wheel thrown. 605/A/4.
36. Decorated body sherd. Fabric Ra2. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 605/A/4.
37. Necked jar. Fabric Rc. Wheel thrown. 605/A/2. AD 80-180.
38. Straight-sided bowl with out-turned rim. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 605/A/2. AD 100-180?
39. Necked jar/bowl. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 605/A/4. 1st-4th century AD.
40. Narrow-neck jar. Fabric Rb3. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 605/D/2. 1st-4th century AD.
41. Necked jar. Fabric Rb4. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 605/A/4. 1st-4th century AD.
42. Straight-sided bowl/dish with beaded rim and chamfered base. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 605/A/4. Late 2nd century AD?
43. Dish. Fabric Re. Burnished design on interior of base. 605/A/4 (joins with sherds from 605/B/1). 1st century AD?

Figure 56 Group 6: Waterhole 674
44. Storage jar rim. Fabric Ra2. Burnished. Wheel finished? 674/B/1. 1st century AD onwards.
45. Storage jar rim. Fabric Ra2. Partly burnished. Wheel finished. 674/B/1. 1st century onwards.
46. Necked jar. Fabric Wb/Rb. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. 1st-4th century AD.
47. Necked bowl or jar. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 80-180.
48. Necked bowl. Fabric Rc. Burnished design. Wheel thrown. 674/A/1. 1st-2nd century AD.
49. Necked jar. Fabric Ra4. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. 1st-4th century AD.
50. Straight-sided bowl with out-turned rim. Fabric Rb5. Wheel thrown. 674/A/1. AD 100-400.
51. Bowl with out-turned flattened rim. Fabric Wb. Partly burnt outer surface. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. 2nd century AD?
52. Beaker with roughcast decoration. Fabric Oa. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 75-105?
53. Bowl with out-turned flat topped rim. Fabric Rc. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 80-180.
54. Body sherd decorated with incised lines. Fabric Rc. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 80-180.
55. Poppy-head beaker? Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. 2nd century AD.
56. Everted rim jar. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/A/1. 2nd century AD.
57. Everted rim jar. Fabric Rc. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/A/1. 2nd century AD.
58. Neckless jar. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. To AD 200.
59. Mortarium rim, similar to Young type M7 but not exactly paralleled. Fabric M. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 100-170.
60. Mortarium rim (cf Young type M18.3), but with no grits. Fabric M. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 240-300?
61. Necked jar rim. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 674/A/1. 1st-4th century.
62. Necked bowl. Fabric Rc. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 80-180.
63. Jar rim. Fabric S (late Roman shell-tempered ware). Wheel thrown. 674/B/1.
64. Shallow necked bowl. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 674/B/1. AD 80-180.

Figure 56 Group 7: Ditch 755/A/1, 775/A/1
65. Carinated beaker. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 755/A/1. 1st century AD?
66. Short necked jar. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 755/A/1. To AD 200.
67. Necked bowl/jar. Fabric Rc. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 755/A/1. AD 80-180.
68. Mortarium, copying Young type M2.9. Fabric Wc. Wheel thrown. 775/A/1. Mid 2nd century AD.
69. Necked bowl. Fabric Rb5. Burnished decoration. Wheel thrown. 755/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.
70. Necked bowl. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 755/A/1. AD 80-180.
71. Necked jar. Fabric Ob. Wheel thrown. 775/A/1. D 50-400.

Figure 56 Group 8: Ditches 757/A/1, 763/A/2, B/2
72. Storage jar. Fabric Ra2. Partly burnished. Wheel finished. 763/A/2. 1st-4th century AD.
73. Short everted rim jar. Fabric Rb4. Wheel thrown. 757/A/1. To AD 200.
74. Narrow-necked jar. Fabric Ra1. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 763/B/2. 1st-4th century AD.
75. Necked jar. Fabric Rb2. Partly burnished. 757/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.
76. Necked jar with thickened rim. Fabric Rb2. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown. 755/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.
77. Bead rim bowl or jar. Fabric Ra3. Wheel thrown. 763/B/2. To AD 200?
78. Bowl copying samian form Drag 30, decorated with barbotine dots. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 757/A/1. Late 1st-early 2nd century AD.
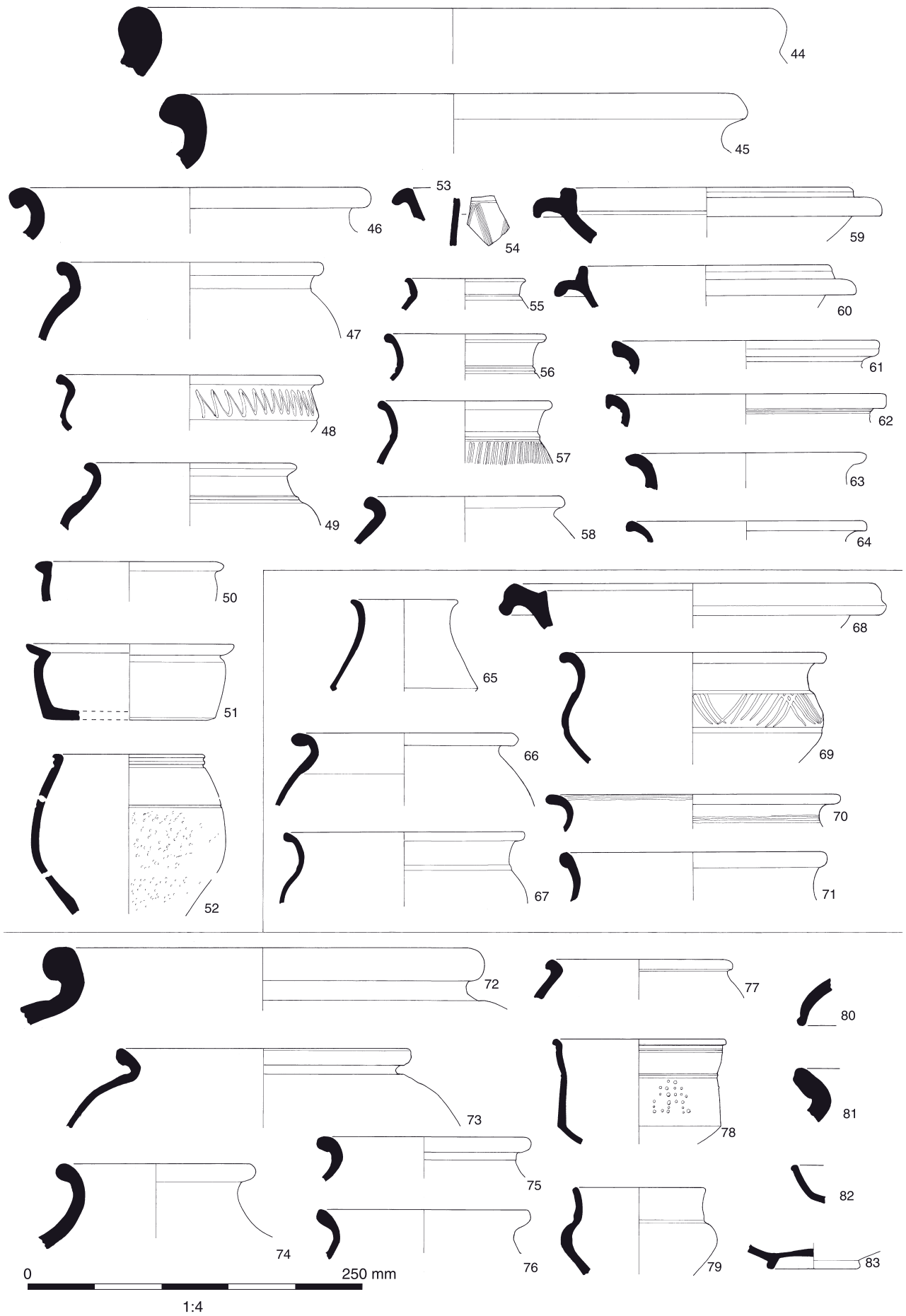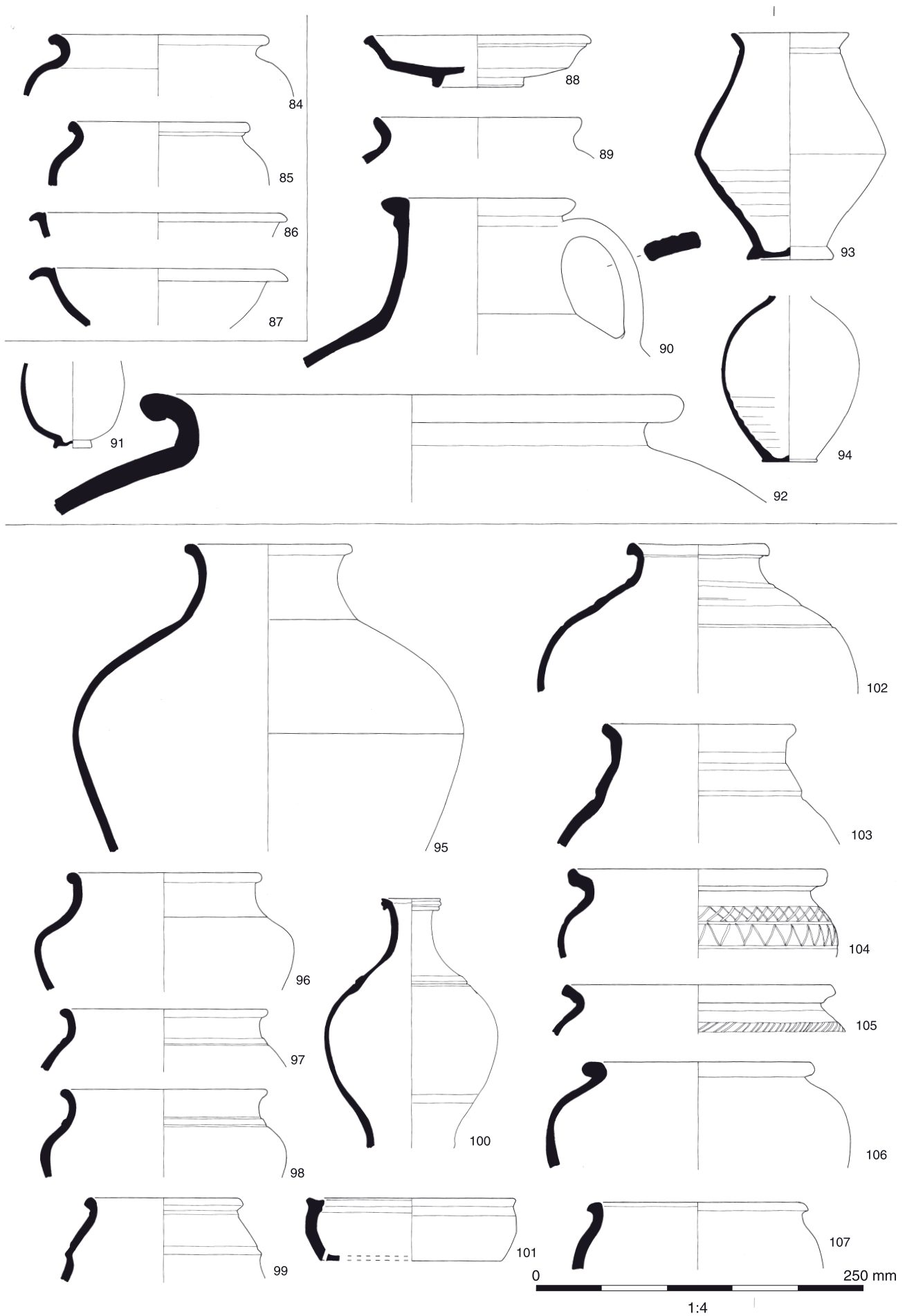
Fig. 56   Roman pottery

Fig. 57   Roman pottery

79. Bowl with upright neck, Belgic form. Fabric Re. Partly burnished. Wheel thrown and knife-trimmed. 763/B/2. 1st century AD.

80. Dish with bead rim. Fabric Rb2. Wheel thrown. 763/B/2. 1st-2nd century AD.

81. Storage jar. Fabric Ra2. Burnished. Wheel finished?. 757/A/1. 1st-4th century AD.

82. Samian (South Gaulish?) form Drag 18/31. 757/A/1.

83. Base of bowl copying samian form Drag 18/31. The edge of a potter's stamp is extant. Fabric Oa. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 757/A/1. AD 100-300.

Figure 57 Group 9: Ditch 763/B/1

84. Necked jar. Fabric Rb1. Wheel thrown. 763/B/1.

85. Neckless jar. Fabric Ra2. Wheel thrown. 763/B/1. To AD 200.

86. Straight-sided bowl with out-turned rim. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 763/B/1. AD 100-180.

87. Flange-rimmed bowl. Fabric Rc. Burnished. Wheel thrown. 763/B/1. Late 1st-early 2nd century AD.

Figure 57 Group 10: Waterhole 789/A/2, A/4, A/7

88. Bowl copying samian form Drag 18/31. Fabric Oa. Wheel thrown. 789/A/2. AD 100-300.

89. Necked jar? Fabric Rc. Wheel thrown. 789/A/2. 2nd century AD?

90. Handled flagon. Fabric Rb2. Burnished stripe decoration. Wheel thrown. 789/A/4.

91. Beaker base and lower body. Fabric Oa. Wheel thrown. 789/A/7. AD 50-150.

92. Storage jar. Fabric Ra2. Partly burnished. Wheel finished. 789/A/4. 1st-4th century AD.

93. Carinated beaker. Fabric Oa. An oxidised version of Oxfordshire reduced form R25 (Young 1977, 215-6). Wheel thrown. 789/A/4. 1st century AD?

94. Flagon. Fabric Wa. Wheel thrown. 789/A/4.

Figure 57 Miscellaneous vessels

95. Narrow necked jar. Fabric NR. Context 508/B/2.

96. Medium necked jar. Fabric Ra4. Burnished on rim and shoulder. Context 98/A/2.

97. Medium necked jar. Fabric F. Burnished overall. Context 340/A/1 and 341/B/1.

98. Medium necked jar. Fabric F. Context 340/A/1.

99. Medium necked jar. Fabric Ra1. Context 3/A/2, 3/A/3 and 3/B/2.

100. Flask or bottle. Fabric NR. Context 98/A/1.

101. Cheese press. Fabric Ra3. Context 605/A/3.

102. Narrow necked jar. Fabric NR. Context 173/A/1.

103. Medium necked jar. Fabric Ra3. Context 50/C/1.

104. Medium necked jar. Fabric Ra2? Context 336/A/1.

105. Medium necked jar, with burnished band on shoulder and oblique burnished lines beneath. Fabric Rb2. Context 296/A/2.

106. Heavy bead rimmed jar. Fabric NR. Context NR.

107. Medium necked jar. Fabric F. Context 341/B/1.

Overview

In general there seems to have been continued intensification of activity in the site in the 2nd century cal AD, with the possible (though uncertain) extension of the field system, but as is typical, still no sign of substantial buildings. The predominance of coarse wares in the pottery, so evident in the late Iron Age and early Roman deposits, continued into the 2nd century, perhaps suggesting either the relatively low status of the settlement, or that the site was peripheral to the centre of settlement activity. Evidence of the economy is again useful (see Part 3), though the amount of redeposited material remains a problem.

Except in the southern and eastern parts of the site, there is no evidence of the main parts of the ditch system being used into the later Roman period. This may indicate a further shift away from the former area of Iron Age settlement activity. A significant proportion of fineware pottery was recovered from the waterhole and ditches in the eastern fringes of the excavated area, but this may reflect nothing more than the growth of locally mass-produced finewares in the area north of Dorchester in the later Roman period (Young 1977).

More broadly, the dearth of Roman small finds and the lack of buildings and building materials give no suggestion of intensive occupation, though the biological samples provide further useful evidence of the economic and environmental background of the settlement. It is probably most realistic to see the site as being on the fringes of a settlement mainly focussed beyond the limits of the excavated area, probably to the east or south.

As explained in the Roman pottery report (Appendix 6, and see below), there is no convincing evidence that occupation continued after the 2nd century: although a few sherds of pottery datable to after *c* 240 cal AD were found, they were very sparse and all in late cuts and upper fills. Their occurrence is consistent with occupation of the site having ceased whilst it remained in use for farming. The two male burials, at least one of whom had been deliberately killed before being buried in a ditch on the southern side of the site, were amongst the latest Roman features and may be a further indication that the area was peripheral to any nearby settlement.

The absence of a significant amount of late Roman pottery is especially noteworthy given the local presence of very prolific pottery industry (Young 1977). By contrast it dominated the settlement not far away at Wally Corner, where there was little sign of earlier Roman occupation (Sutton 1961-2; Boyle *et al*. 1995), and it is reasonable to suggest that Mount Farm may have been abandoned as a farming settlement in favour of that or another local settlement. Although the dating is disappointingly ill-defined because of the relative dearth of fineware pottery, this may well be part of a much wider pattern of abandonment of old farming settlements in favour of new that commonly occurred in the Upper Thames region in the 2nd century (Lambrick 1992, Henig and Booth 2000; Booth *et al*. 2007).

This would have left a distinct gap of several centuries in the observable domestic activity on the site before the appearance of low-key Saxon settlement, probably in the late 5th to 7th century. However, the thriving settlements around Dorchester and the very open character of the

landscape indicated by the environmental evidence from Saxon contexts suggests that in the intervening period the site probably continued to be farmed (see Part 3 below).

Saxon

Indications of Saxon activity (Fig. 58)

There is no clear evidence of Saxon recutting of any of the earlier boundary ditches (though a low level of Saxon body sherds could have been overlooked amongst the significant presence of redeposited Iron Age pottery), but it is quite possible that the layout of fields and paddocks still survived as hedges.

The traces of Saxon occupation at Mount Farm were scattered and sparse. In the western salvage area a waterhole (F43) and a large irregular pit complex (F39) were found. F39 did not seem deep enough for a waterhole and was perhaps a gravel pit.

In the northern part of the main excavation there was a wattle lined well (F82), a bowl-shaped pit (F664) and two irregular shallow pits (F324 and F283) with a third possible example (F660: Fig. 8) intersecting F257 (see Appendix 1, Figs A1:1-3 for sections of these features). F283 was in fact a series of small pits with a wider shallow scoop across the top them. While this shallow scoop might conceivably be the bottom of a shallow *Grubenhaus*, it was irregularly shaped and there were no postholes to confirm this.

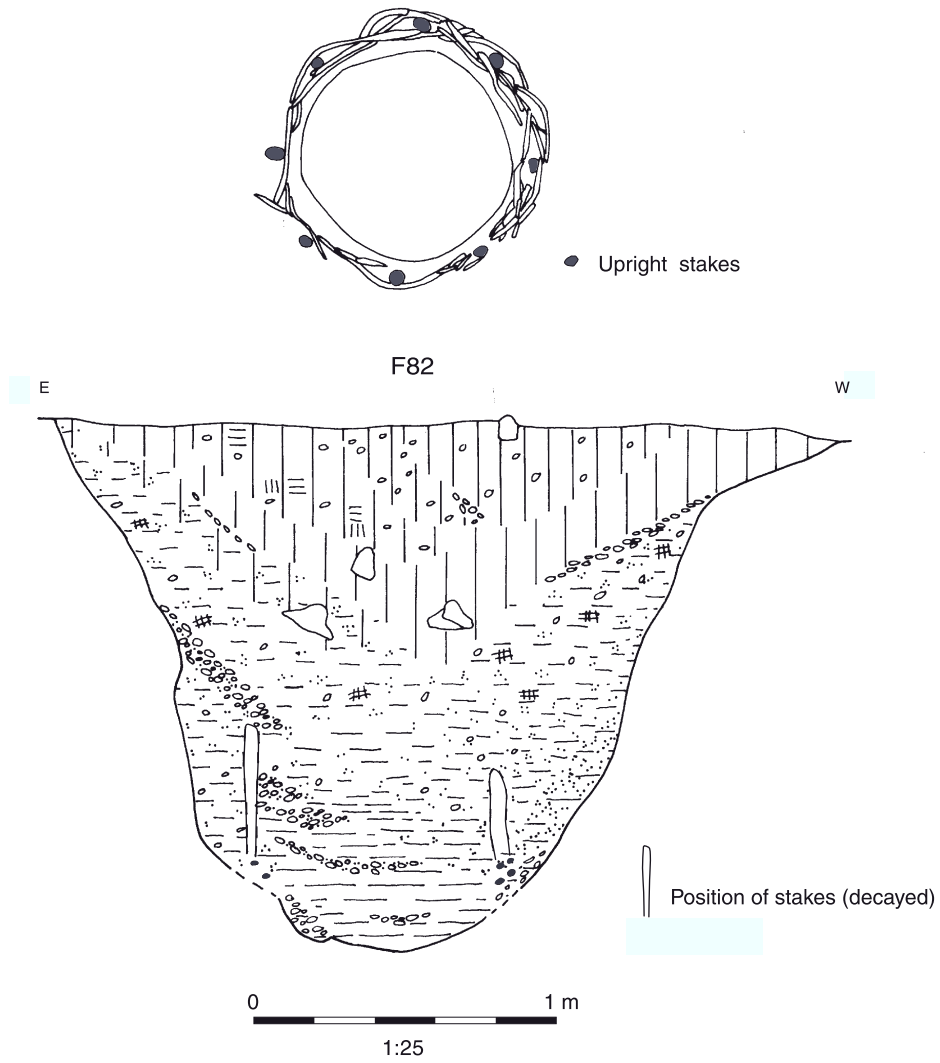*Fig. 58 Interpretation plan: early to middle Saxon*

Upright stakes

F82

E   W

Position of stakes (decayed)

0   1 m

1:25

Fig. 59   Section and plan of wicker lining of Saxon well F82

Plate 10   Saxon tub F43

Structures

Despite the clear evidence of Saxon occupation from wells, waterholes and pits, no *Grubenhäuser* were found, although they are a very typical feature of Saxon settlements in the region. Rectangular post-built structures, which can vary greatly in size and sophistication, are also typical (Booth *et al*. 2007). A couple of groups of postholes (Fig. 44) are suggestive of the ends of one or more small rectangular buildings, but the post holes are not directly datable (the few bits of Iron Age pottery found in them could easily be redeposited), and if they were the ends of rectangular buildings there is no obvious reason why more did not survive. Possible remains of cob walling were recovered from the upper fill of one of the deep pits (F43) in the salvage area to the west (Appendix 8).

The site produced no definite Saxon burials, though single human bones were found in two Saxon features – possibly as a result of redeposition from earlier deposits (Table 8). The Saxon activity at Mount Farm covers a period (the 5th to early 7th century) which is similar to that of the pagan Saxon cemetery at Wally Corner only 1.2 km south (Boyle *et al*. 1995). This might have been the last resting place of the Saxon inhabitants of Mount Farm, perhaps accessed along the old Roman tracks heading in that direction.

Wells

Two Saxon wells were found, one (F82) inside the enclosures originally formed by F3 and F50, the other (F43) in the western area of salvage excavation (Fig. 59). Both were lined, F82 with woven wickerwork of hazel rods and uprights, F43 with part of an old tub or barrel (Plate 10; Appendix 12). Other examples of Saxon barrels used in wells have been recorded at South Elmham, Hamwic and Westminster (Wade-Martins 1980 74-83; Andrews 1997, 194-6; Cowie 2001).

There is evidence that both saw a good deal of use. The bottom of well F82 was very rounded and had probably been deepened by usage since it was found 0.25 m below the base of the lining. Well F43 presented a more complicated sequence (Fig. 60). It began as a much larger unlined waterhole or pond with quite steep sides. Infilling of silty sand and gravel from the western side (L43/17-19, L43/21) resulted in the asymmetrical profile noted in the earlier waterholes. The gradual restriction of the available water as a result of infilling on the western side may have necessitated its conversion to a well by inserting an old tub as a lining.

Whereas water in the wicker-lined well (F82) would have been drawn from ground level, F43 seems to have originated as an accessible water-hole and was later turned into a lined well, albeit probably retaining some form of ramped access to a trodden platform next to the tub almost at water level with a post to hold onto while collecting water.
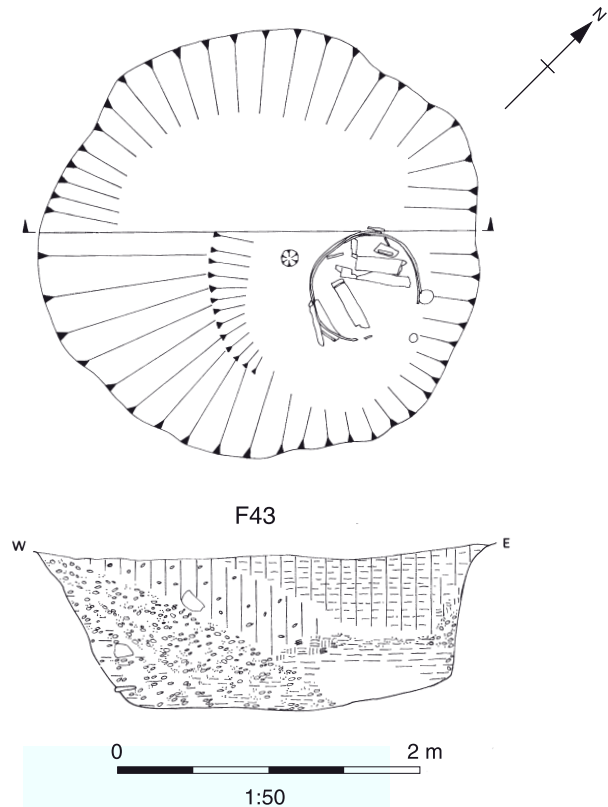
Fig. 60   Section and plan of reused tub lining of Saxon well F43

Preservation of organic remains in well 43 was not very good, so it may have dried out periodically, probably not providing a continuous supply of water throughout the year. Well F82 seems to have been a more reliable source of water.

Unlike some of the Iron Age and Roman ponds and waterholes, the Saxon wells were too steep-sided for cattle to have ventured down to the water's edge to drink. They might have provided a domestic water supply though a more purely agricultural function is also possible: F82 was located in the middle of a possibly extant Roman paddock and the biological evidence demonstrated both pastoral and arable farming in the vicinity.

Burials and other human remains

As noted above, it is possible that the two burials (F562 and F543) found lying head-to-toe in shallow graves cut into the upper fill of one of the latest Roman ditches on the site (F534) were post-Roman and perhaps Saxon, but this is not certain and no other human remains dating to the Saxon period were found.

Anglo-Saxon pottery

Based upon a report by Paul Booth (Appendix 7)
Some 221 sherds (3.5 kg) of Anglo-Saxon pottery (Table 10) were recovered from features 39, 43, 82,

Table 10: Summary of Anglo-Saxon pottery fabrics

Fabric	No. sherds	% sherds	Weight (g)	% Weight	Vessels
AN	5	2.3	76	2.1	
AR	7	3.2	126	3.6	1
A(V)	11	5.0	654	18.5	1
AV	149	67.4	2107	59.5	8
VA	33	14.9	423	11.9	2
VAM	13	5.9	138	3.9	
V(A)	3	1.4	16	0.5	
Total	221		3540		12

283, 324 and 664. The pottery was mostly in quite good condition. Seven fabric groupings were defined, usually on the basis of their two most common inclusion types. The latter were identified by alphabetic codes: A - quartz sand; M - mica; N - none evident; R - rock (sandstone in this assemblage); and V - 'vegetable/grass', organic.

Summary fabric descriptions

AN. Only sparse to moderate sand grains visible. This type of fabric is common in the middle Iron Age, and it is possible that some of the sherds assigned to it here were not of Anglo-Saxon date.

AR. Sand-tempered with the addition of sparse to moderate inclusions of sandstone up to *c* 2 mm, the concreted grains of which are clearly visible at x20 magnification. All the sherds in this fabric were notably well-finished, being burnished overall both externally and internally. Mica is fairly prominent in the surfaces of some sherds.

A(V). Sand-tempered with sparse organic inclusions. This type of fabric is also relatively common in Iron Age contexts and an Iron Age date is possible for some of the sherds recorded in it.

AV. Sand- and organic-tempered. In some cases the organic inclusions, or the characteristic voids indicative of them, appear more prominent than the sand grains, but examination at x20 magnification showed that the quartz sand inclusions were generally more common.

VA. As fabric AV, but the relative proportions of organic and quartz sand inclusion are reversed.

VAM. As fabric VA, but with the addition of prominent mica inclusions. All the sherds in this fabric came from fills of feature 283.

V(A). As fabric VA, but the sand inclusions appear to be very sparse.

This small assemblage can be paralleled by published material from a number of sites in the near vicinity, including Dorchester (Frere 1962; May 1977; Rowley and Brown 1981; Wilson 1984), the cemetery at Wally Corner, Berinsfield (Booth 1995a) and Benson (Timby 2003), as well as from the older excavations at Sutton Courtenay, slightly further afield. One of the most obvious characteristic of the present assemblage in comparison with the more recently published groups is its lack of sherds with calcareous tempering, whether of limestone or shell. Such fabrics tend to be a consistent minority component of most of these groups. Their absence here may be a consequence of the small size of the assemblage, but it is also possible that such sherds were not identified amongst Iron Age material in very similar fabrics. the assemblage was dominated by sand- and organic- ('grass') tempered fabrics. The two inclusion types usually occurred in combination, although there was a clear distinction between vessels at the extremes of the range. At least in the context of the present assemblage this suggests that the sand and organic tempered traditions, clearly closely linked, were contemporary.

The chronological range of the pottery cannot be defined closely. The preferred chronological model for the region (eg Avery and Brown 1972 79-81; Booth 1995b, 231; Timby 2001) sees 5th-century assemblages dominated by sand-tempered fabrics, which are then supplemented, perhaps from the later 5th century but certainly in the 6th, by organic-tempered fabrics. Whether the latter ever came to totally dominate assemblages in the 7th century is less clear, however. Alternatively, Blinkhorn (eg forthcoming) prefers a cultural rather than a chronological explanation of the differential appearance of organic-tempered pottery, but this interpretation is not followed here. On this basis, the present assemblage can be assigned broadly to the late 5th-7th century, and in view of the relative scarcity of fabrics VA, VAM and V(A), a late 5th-6th century date may (subjectively) be preferred.

Catalogue of illustrated Anglo-Saxon pottery (Fig. 61)

1. 39/A/1. Fabric AV. Jar with upright slightly expanded rim. Irregularly fired exterior, otherwise unoxidised. Smoothed internal and external surfaces.
2. 39/A/5 and 39/A/6. Fabric AV. Jar with curving everted rim. Irregularly fired exterior, unburnished. External sooting and internal charred residue in places.
3. 43/A/1. Fabric AV. Jar with curving everted rim. Unoxidised firing throughout. Burnish on top of rim and shoulder, and wavy burnished line on shoulder.
4. 283/A/1. Fabric AV. Jar with curving slightly everted rim. Unoxidised firing throughout, burnished internally and externally. Some external sooting.
5. 283/A/1. Fabric A(V). Base with slight, roughly formed footring. Irregularly fired throughout.
6. 283/A/2. Fabric AV. Jar with tapered curving everted rim. Exterior irregularly fired in places, but mostly unoxidised. Burnished on top of rim and shoulder. External sooting.
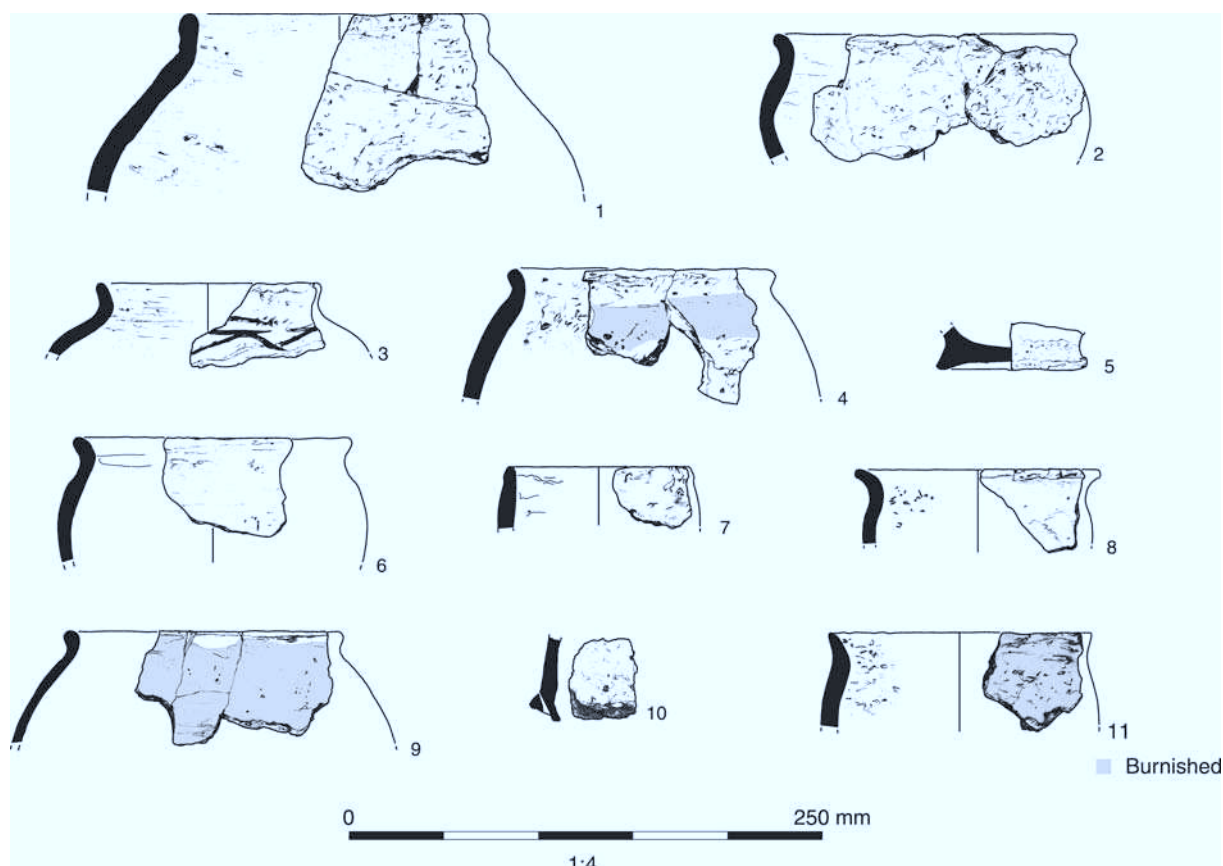
Fig. 61   Saxon Pottery

7.   283/C/3. Fabric AV. Jar with simple upright rim. Irregularly fired exterior, unburnished.
8.   283/C/4. Fabric A(V). Jar with tapered curving everted rim. Unoxidised firing throughout. Unburnished. External sooting.
9.   324/A/1. Fabric AR. Jar with slightly expanded upright rim. Unoxidised firing throughout, burnished overall on interior and exterior. Burnt internal residue.
10. 324/A/2. Fabric AV. Irregular possibly vertical lug with small perforation. Irregularly fired exterior surface. Burnt internal residue.
11. 664/A/1. Fabric VA. Jar with tapered curving everted rim. Firing mostly unoxidised throughout. Overall interior and exterior burnish.

Overview

These scanty traces of occupation cannot be viewed as a settlement, such as those investigated at Radley, Yarnton, Drayton or New Wintles, but might be seen as having been on the periphery of such a settlement, or part of a more isolated small farming community.

Although the structural remains are poorly preserved compared with some domestic sites of this date, the rather sparse distribution of features with scanty evidence of buildings is quite typical of settlements of this period (Booth *et al.* 2007). The biological evidence at Mount Farm, including waterlogged remains as well as bones and carbonised seeds, gives a useful if limited glimpse of the economy and landuse of the settlement (see Part 3).

Undated remains

There were many deposits over most parts of the site for which either no dating evidence or only very scanty dating evidence was obtained. Most were postholes and small hollows (a few of which could be natural though almost all were not). They do not all figure in the preceding general description of the site's different periods, but some are shown on the accompanying period plans as a way of suggesting a coherent overall interpretation of the chronological development of the site.

The most intractable issue is the dating of the numerous postholes that were recorded: although a few groupings have been suggested in the forgoing discussion, these account for only a small proportion of those excavated. Further details of the analysis of dating evidence, soil characteristics and sizes of postholes, including colour-coded site plans showing only postholes, are held in the site archive.

PART 3: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Chronology

Taking the conventional divisions of archaeological chronology, each period and almost every subperiod from the early Neolithic to the early Saxon is represented at Mount Farm. The radiocarbon dates obtained (for all but the late Iron Age to Roman periods) provide some useful fixed points for the earlier prehistoric and Saxon periods, but attempts to date the Iron Age sequence were (perhaps predictably) much less useful.

The representation of all periods from early Neolithic to Saxon provides insights into the use of the area over an unusually long period, albeit on an often very sporadic basis. Nevertheless, the sequences of reuse associated with the two ring ditches and the long development of the Iron Age and Roman paddocks and enclosures suggest two very broad sequences of consistent usage of the area.

In the earlier prehistoric periods Mount Farm was used intermittently over a millennium and a half or more as a small funerary and/or ceremonial complex perhaps related to other, larger complexes in the surrounding area.

This low key, intermittent recurrence of use and respect for the site as a local sacred place was broken in the later Bronze Age, as other requirements emerged. This break was marked most clearly by the ploughing over of the former Bronze Age ring ditch and waterhole and the abandonment of the earliest land enclosure layout which had respected it.

What then gradually emerged from the early to middle Iron Age onwards was a farming settlement that established a basic layout of enclosures that lasted at least until the later Roman period, and may have still been extant at the time of Saxon settlement, again suggesting long term continuity of use over another millennium or more. This is rather different from the more common changes in the location or character of activity that seem to have been a recurrent feature of farming settlements in the Upper Thames Valley in the periods around the turn of the 1st millennium and the 2nd century cal AD (Lambrick 1992; Booth *et al.* 2007). Nevertheless, the relative lack of much late Iron Age material, shifts in the location of domestic activity and some reordering of the enclosure pattern in the later Roman period do suggest that Mount Farm may not have been entirely immune to these changes.

By the middle ages the area had become open fields, and it is clear that the pattern of ridge and furrow did not respect the earlier pattern of enclosures (see plans in archive), but did influence later field patterns. Apart from the brief interlude of wartime use as a military airfield and small gravel pit, this use of the area as arable fields represents a third long-term period of use, which so far has lasted another millennium or so.

The changing environment

A detailed interpretive account of the changing environment is presented in Appendix 1, which is summarised here.

Neolithic to early Bronze Age

The evidence of the natural environment in the earlier prehistoric period is very limited, relying on the composition of carbonised plant and animal bone assemblages from various pits. The predominance of pig, presence of deer, and the large numbers of hazel nut shells might all be taken at first sight as an indication that woodland was important. But this is far from definite: apart from the fact that the remains are not abundant, their deposition may reflect complex cultural and taphonomic effects that have little or nothing to do with the immediate surroundings. Equally, however, the presence of a few cereal grains in most samples, and possible visual relationships with the more important ceremonial complexes of the area, do not definitely indicate that the earlier prehistoric features were set in a cleared open environment.

Later Bronze Age

Insects, pollen and other plant remains from the late Bronze Age waterhole are much more helpful in indicating that the area was predominantly covered by relatively lightly grazed flowery grassland and some scrub. Cereal pollen was at a level that suggests arable land was also present in the wider environment, and that this may have increased in the later Bronze Age.

Iron Age and Roman

Unfortunately none of the Iron Age waterholes contained well-preserved waterlogged deposits, and our understanding of the wider environment relies on the much more indirect and partial evidence of animal bones and charred plant remains. The presence of single bones of marten, wildcat and raven in the bones might suggest the survival of some relatively wild habitats in the general vicinity though the number of deer bones was typically low, and it is likely that the generally open environment indicated by the later Bronze Age evidence persisted. Domestic animals are indicative of grazed grassland, while the much greater evidence of charred crop remains and associated weeds is indicative of arable land.

Roman waterlogged deposits again show that the environment was open, and if anything rather more so than had been the case in the later Bronze Age. There was more evidence of disturbed ground around the waterholes and perhaps on the margins of arable, and the very low levels of beetles associated with grazed grassland suggest that pastureland was not an important habitat. There were only a few hints of meadowland species, and these could

have been growing in other habitats. There was only a slight increase in cereal pollen as compared with the later Bronze Age, though rather more indication of arable from beetles that live in cultivated ground, while the charred plant remains for the Iron Age and Roman periods provide hints of expanding arable (see below), and the waterlogged seeds suggest a possible diversification of crops. As might be expected from the relative levels of occupation indicated by artefactual and stratigraphic evidence, there was also more evidence of human habitation and neglected ground than in the late Bronze Age.

Saxon

Despite an apparent gap in occupation of the site, the environment at Mount Farm reflected in the Saxon wells was if anything even more open than it had been previously, with very low levels of tree and shrub pollen and no wood and tree dependent insects. This might partly be a legacy of the impact of the late Roman pottery industry in the area, with kiln sites nearby at Berinsfield to the south-west and Golden Balls to the north-west. Clearly a constant supply of wood was required for pottery making, and Petra Day's (1991) analysis of the pollen sequence at Sidlings Copse, also not far from other areas connected with the pottery industry, showed that tree pollen was at its lowest in the Roman period. However, the pottery industry would have been sustained on woodland resources and was not entirely independent of farming. The apparent lack of woodland recovery by the Saxon period at Mount Farm (as at Sidlings Copse) may indicate that the main environmental impact of the thriving late Roman economy locally was not the pottery industry itself, but clearance of woodland for agriculture.

As might be expected from the relatively sparse evidence of occupation, there is less evidence of disturbed habitats and more of grazed grassland in the Saxon period compared with the Roman deposits. The grassland species are also less diverse than they had been the case in the later Bronze Age, as might be expected after a millennium of relatively intensive farming.

Arable remained important, with the ratio of cereal to grass pollen increasing from 7% to 13% of total grass and cereal pollen. The weeds associated with arable were characteristic of both damp and dry ground and relatively acidic soils, suggesting that cultivation was occurring over a wider area even though the site at Mount Farm was less intensively occupied than it had been 500 years earlier in the 2nd century cal AD.

Overall the impression is of a very open landscape with a mixture of grazed grassland and arable over a diverse range of soils, which may have been managed less intensively than they had been in the Roman period, without any sign of reversion to woodland or even general grassland.

Overall conclusion

Although the environmental evidence is variable and patchy both chronologically and in quality, it provides a useful impression from the later Bronze Age onwards of a generally cleared landscape in which the impact of human habitation and farming continued to alter the environment. While the changing intensity of human occupation and landuse at different periods is reflected in the fluctuating levels of species characteristic of disturbed ground and nutrient-rich waste materials, longer term impacts included some further loss of woodland, diminished diversity in grassland, and more cultivation. By the middle Saxon period there was little indication of these trends being reversed, even if the pattern of human exploitation had become less intensive. In very general terms these trends fit with the overall pattern for the Upper Thames, but they may in particular reflect the general significance of the Dorchester area for settlement and farming throughout the periods represented.

Economic and social basis of activity at Mount Farm

As with the previous section, more detailed accounts of various aspects of settlement and landuse are provided in Appendix 1. These include food procurement and farming, enclosures, fields and paddocks, water supply, storage and processing of farm produce, the character of domestic occupation, personal ornaments and crafts, and exchange. Several of these are only touched upon very briefly in this overview.

Neolithic to early Bronze Age

There is too little evidence to say anything much about the economic basis of Neolithic to early Bronze Age activity at Mount Farm, except that it was almost certainly sporadic, probably impermanent, perhaps occurring in an environment that was only partially cleared. It is most likely that at least until the middle to late Bronze Age occupation, activity at Mount Farm was based on shifting subsistence based mainly on animal husbandry (especially pigs and cattle) with some hunting and gathering. The unusually high proportion of pig from Neolithic and Beaker contexts may not be truly representative because the sample size is small and may reflect particular activities rather than being typical of general consumption.

The evidence of cereal growing is more definite than on some other Neolithic and Beaker sites in the region, but is still typically sparse among the charred plant remains, with samples containing a few grains of cereals, very little crop-processing debris and various edible wild plants (especially nuts). All these are characteristic of the period and suggestive of small-scale horticultural production in which gathering of both cultivated and non-culti-

vated species provided food. However, the extent to which such remains really reflect the range or proportions of plant foods consumed rather than some sort of more symbolic reference to them is open to question.

Although these remains might also be taken as indicating some degree of clearance and sufficient seasonal residence to see crops through from culti-vation and sowing to harvest, it is equally possible that the edible plant remains that became charred at Mount Farm were brought from elsewhere. As noted above, it is probably most realistic to see Mount Farm in this period as a locally significant place amongst surrounding ceremonial and funerary complexes, so this basis for occupation activities was probably linked to local ceremonial and funerary activity and exchange.

Later Bronze Age

By the middle to late Bronze Age – and very possibly much earlier if intervisibility between monument complexes was important – Mount Farm had become an area of open grassland with a barrow used to mark the corner of an area of enclosed land. The economy still seems to have been based mainly on the raising of livestock, with some cereal cultivation. Unfortunately the limited amount of evidence available means it is not possible to assess the relative importance of these two aspects in detail, but some insight is gained by comparison with earlier and more particularly later periods. The pollen and other plant remains suggest mainly open, non-intensive grassland in which a variety of scrub species were still present, but not much bare ground. Arable agriculture made some contribution to the economy, but charred cereal remains were still nothing like as abundant as they became in later periods. The predominance of relatively large cattle (rather than pigs as in earlier

periods or the increasing proportion of sheep in later periods) would fit with an economy in which cattle rearing was important.

It is not clear from the very limited range of artefacts and structures at Mount Farm whether or not domestic settlement had become permanent: if it was the settlement was probably not within the area excavated. But one indication of more perma-nent occupation, even if it was still partly seasonal, is the presence of the double-ditched field bound-aries, which suggest some investment in the perma-nent infrastructure of farming.

Although rather tenuous, these indications of landuse and economy are consistent with other evidence more widely recognisable in the Thames Valley at this period, as is the evidence of early investment in land division (Lambrick with Robinson 2009). This may reflect quite a major change in the local pattern of landuse with the abandonment of the major ceremonial complexes and the establishment of fields, in some cases respecting the position and orientation of the earlier monuments (Whittle *et al.* 1992; see above).

There is some suggestion from the radiocarbon dates from the mid to late Bronze Age waterhole, and the absence of definite late Bronze Age rather than early Iron Age pottery assemblages, that the site was not directly occupied for perhaps a few centuries in the latter part of the Bronze Age.

Iron Age and Roman

Like other sites in the Thames Valley, the nature of the Iron Age structural remains of pits and postholes, animal pens and paddocks, together with the finds, cereal remains and bones, all suggest that important socio-economic changes had taken place by the early Iron Age (Lambrick with Robinson 2009).

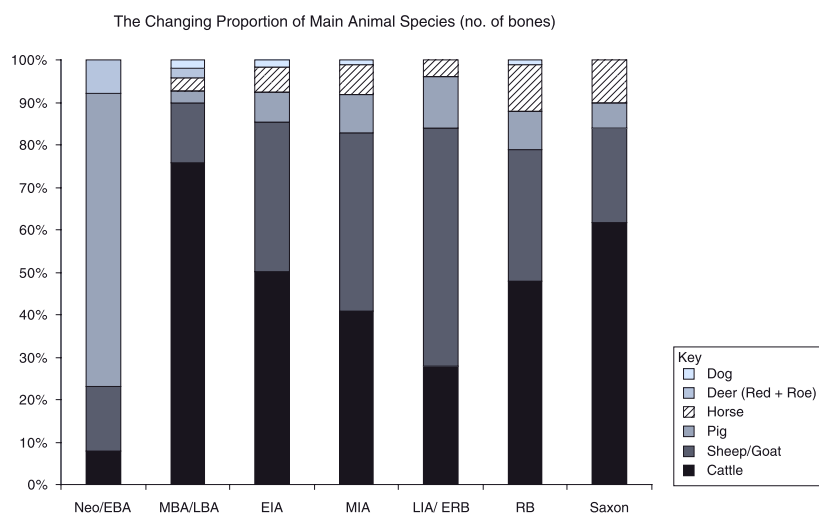In most respects Mount Farm exhibits very typical ranges of craft related objects with few items

Fig. 62   Proportions of the principal domestic animals though time

brought very far. In terms of status, the Iron Age settlement had access to a good range of ceramics from several sources, and other materials typical of ordinary farming settlements in the region. In the Roman period the ceramics and almost every other aspect of material culture points to Mount Farm being a quite lowly farming settlement.

The overall pattern of animal and crop husbandry is fairly typical of the Upper Thames Valley, but the detailed trends differ from some other sites in the region, reflecting some diversity in the emphasis of farming.

For example, the number of bones from the main domestic species (Fig. 62) suggests a gradual shift towards more sheep farming upto the early Roman period, whereas the proportion of sheep more

usually tends to peak in the early or middle Iron Age (Hambleton 1999; Lambrick with Robinson 2009). Kill-off patterns for both cattle and sheep (Fig. 63), and a high proportion of cows among the older cattle suggest that herds and flocks were managed for dairy and other secondary produce as well as meat. Although the trend in species proportions was towards more sheep, cattle would have remained more important in terms of overall yield of food and secondary products.

Pastoralism probably became less important in the Roman economy of the site and its environment. Whereas the Iron Age settlement seems likely to have generated some animals or animal produce for exchange, it is possible that the altered ratio in the sexes of cattle and the increased representation of
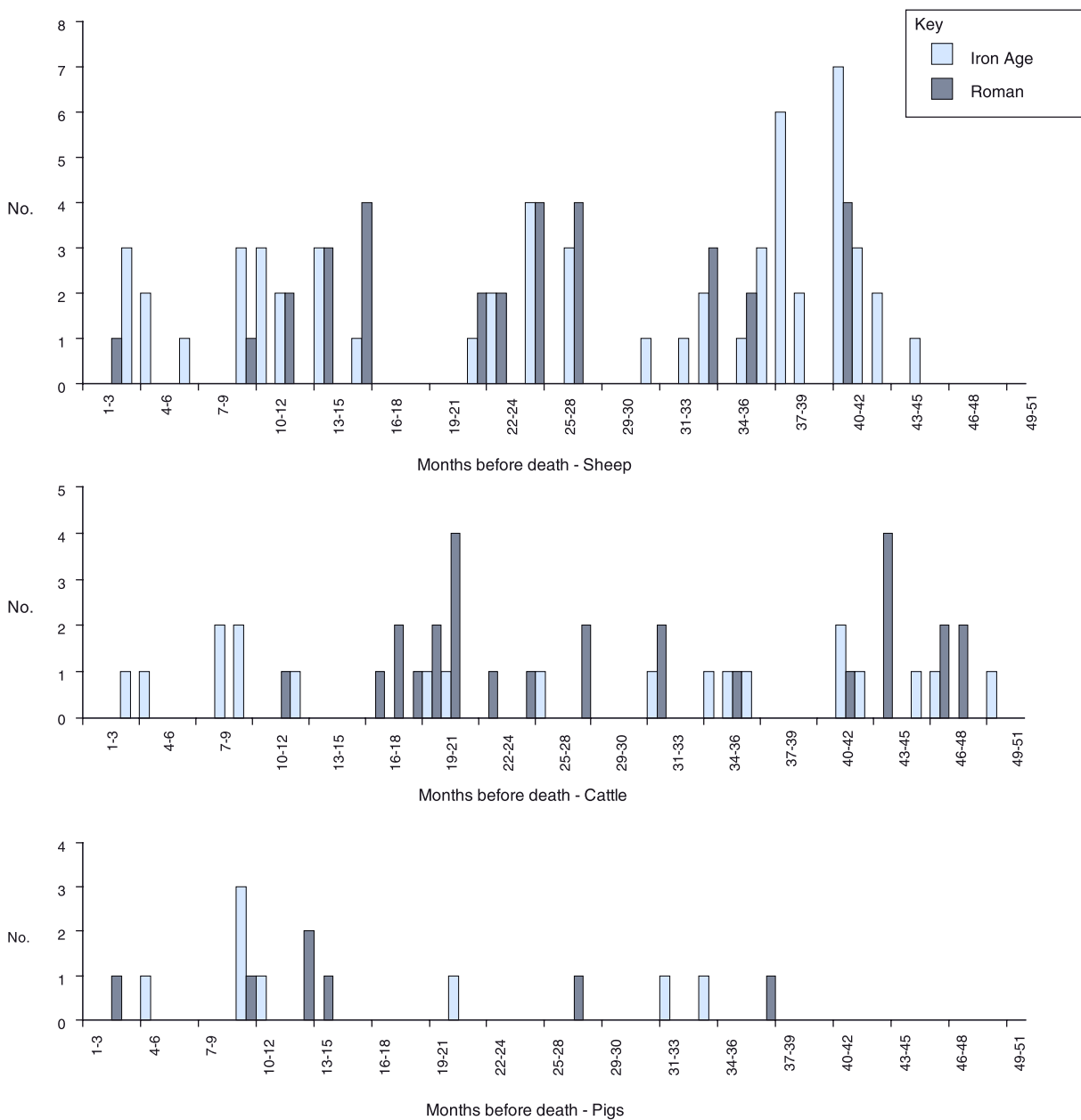

Fig. 63 *Iron Age and Roman mandible wear stages for cattle, sheep and pig*
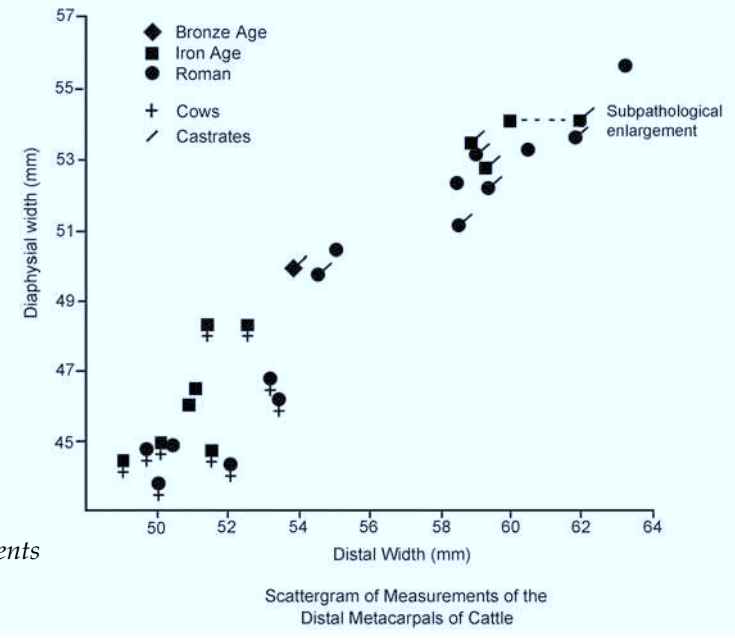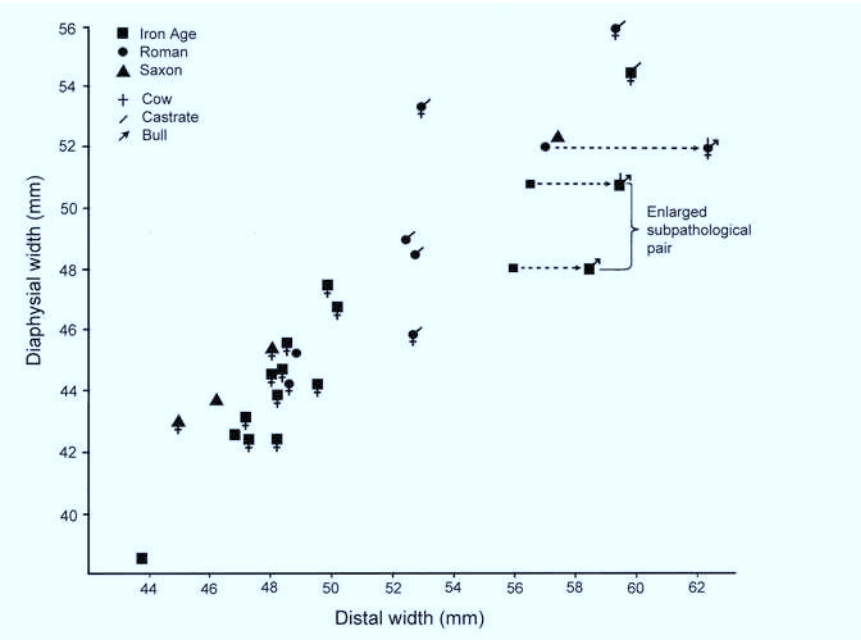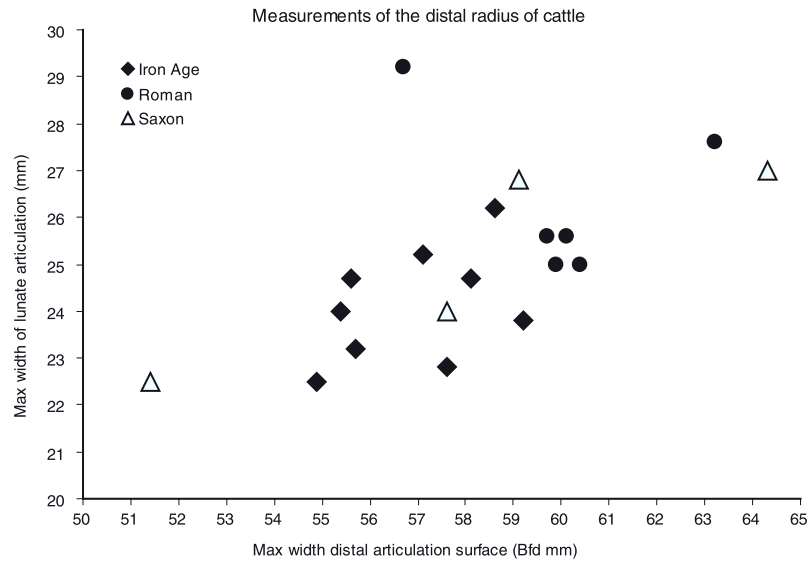
Fig. 64 Bone measurements for cattle

draught oxen in the Roman period indicate that the beasts raised on site were mainly for traction or for meat for consumption by its occupants, with less emphasis on dairy products (Fig. 64).

Direct evidence of arable cultivation survived, very unusually for the Thames gravels, in a small area of probably early Iron Age ard marks. More typically, the occurrence of cereal grain and crop processing debris is much more abundant than it was in earlier periods (Fig. 65). Spelt wheat and hulled barley became the standard cereal crops, displacing bread wheat and emmer. A steep rise in the presence of nitrogen-fixing leguminous weeds from the early Iron Age through to the 2nd century cal AD, matched by an opposite trend in the occurrence of species of the genus *Chenopodium* which

prefer nitrogen-rich soils, suggest a decline is soil fertility which was then reversed in the later Roman and Saxon periods (Fig. 65; Jones 1981, though cf Stevens 2003). This trend is now recognised as having been more variable than it had at first seemed to be the case (Lambrick with Robinson 2009), but whatever the detailed interpretation, it would appear to be indicative of changes in soil chemistry and/or husbandry practice. A decline in grass weeds (*Bromus* sp.) may indicate a deepening of cultivation with time, while a decline in spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*), also noted at Ashville and elsewhere may indicate better drainage.

Arable produce may have become the main element of the site's economy and of any surplus it generated for exchange. The proximity of the town

Fig. 65   Cereals: proportions of grain, chaff and weeds, and percentage of selected weed species

of Dorchester may also have enabled Roman Mount Farm to develop some specialism in small-scale cultivation of other crops like flax and perhaps culinary plants such as celery. This, however, is largely speculative: most vegetable crops and herbs are not allowed to run to seed, and although th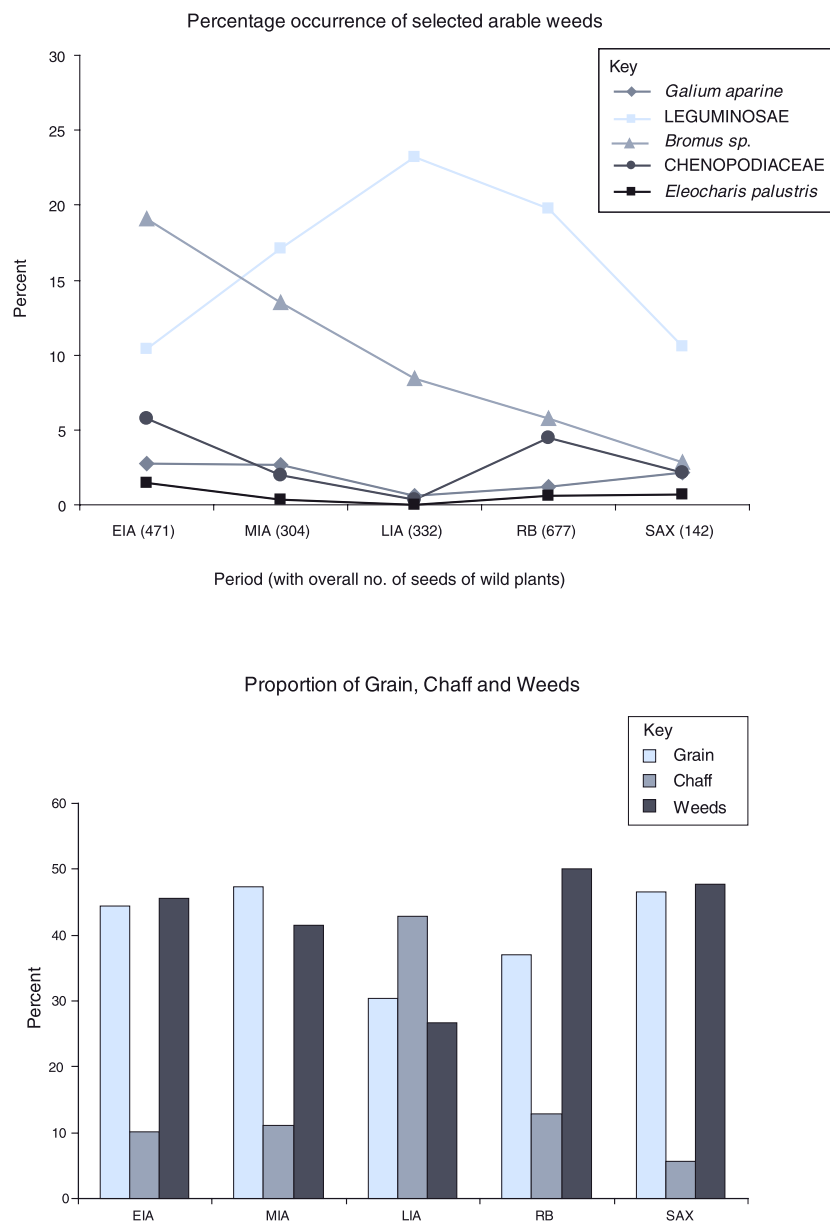e presence of a few seeds could be more significant than it might at first appear, it is very difficult to evaluate their significance.

In terms of social status, the settlement remained a minor farm with only very ordinary trappings of Romanised material culture. The continuance of some Iron Age burial practices and 'special deposits' is not unusual for the region, as also exemplified by Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004). This, and the slow evolution of the local irregular layout of fields and paddocks, all point to gradual adaptation of pre-conquest ways to suit the new economic and social environment rather than any more positive Roman acculturation or economic development.

In this very slow adaptation, Mount Farm is somewhat unusual in not showing shifts in activity around the turn of the millennium that are as marked as those that than has been noted as a recurrent pattern in much of the Upper Thames Valley (Lambrick 1992; Booth *et al.* 2007). In this Mount Farm is comparable to Yarnton where only rather gradual shifts in location and patterns of activity are evident (Hey *et al*. forthcoming a). At Mount Farm there is some suggestion of a late Iron Age shift away from the northern area of middle Iron Age settlement activity, and a marked decline and then absence of late Roman domestic activity in the 3rd and 4th centuries cal AD, when the site may have been abandoned as a settlement in favour of others nearby to the south-west at Berinsfield (where remains of a stone building were noted) and to the south-east at Wally Corner (Sutton 1961-2; Boyle *et al*. 1995). This shift of settlement focus is earlier than the main expansion of the nearby pottery industry in the mid to late 3rd century, but is difficult to pin down more accurately, making it difficult to tell whether it fits the more general regional disruption of settlement that seems evident in the 2nd century at other Roman sites in the region (Lambrick 1992; Henig and Booth 2000; Booth *et al.* 2007).

Saxon

In the early Saxon period, the Abingdon to Dorchester part of the Thames Valley was an important area of settlement (Booth *et al.* 2007). The site was not itself a settlement of any significance, and the traces of crafts, personal life and other activities are rather limited.

Nonetheless, the area seems to have had at least some domestic use, and has produced some evidence of farming activity. There is some indication of further diversity in crop cultivation which included beans. Mount Farm was in a fully cleared landscape on the edge of the gravels, with cultiva-

tion very possibly expanding onto more acidic soils. The hints of more damp ground weeds might also indicate some expansion, or alternatively could reflect poorer drainage with the silting up of earlier field ditches.

It appears that in the middle Saxon period the farming economy was quite active, even if the local urban market for any agricultural produce had declined or disappeared. Presumably some of the arable crops were still exchanged but there may have been a trend towards self-sufficiency which could also have resulted in an increase in livestock compared to the Roman period.

Food preparation and cooking (Fig. 66)

The remains of crops, bones of animals and objects such as querns and cutting implements provide good evidence of what was eaten and how it was prepared for storage and cooking. This evidence is discussed in more detail in Appendix 1 as well as in particular specialist reports in other appendices. Further evidence of cooking is provided by a range of finds including burnt stone (and more unusually a possible middle Bronze Age cooking pit, F164, noted above), fired clay fragments that may be the remains of hearths, ovens or cooking plates, and perhaps also by so-called loomweights which are sometimes interpreted as oven bricks (Appendix 8). Pottery vessels and the cooking residues found on them provide even more direct evidence (Appendices 5 and 6).

While much of this evidence is relatively commonplace, the investigation of residues on Iron Age pottery at Mount Farm remains a rare example of this kind of analysis, even though, since it was originally carried out (Lambrick 1984), a few other studies of this aspect of pottery have been undertaken where relatively large assemblages are available. Details are given in Appendix 5, and a few examples are illustrated in Figure 66. The analysis was carried out to establish what could be learnt from macroscopic examination of cooking residues consisting of sooting, thick charred deposits (characterised as 'burnt stew'), limescale and leaching.

It was found that a wide range of vessel sizes were used in cooking, including some small bowls and pots with capacities of 0.6 litres or less. There was, however, no positive evidence from limescaling or thick carbonised residues for the use of large pots with capacities of over *c* 2 litres.

Pots for cooking relatively solid food such thick soups and stews were used low on an open fire, and consisted almost exclusively of unburnished coarseware jars and pots. Some coarseware vessels used for cooking had both limescale and carbonised residues, indicating some unsurprising variation in the use of pots.

A significant proportion of the vessels associated with heating water were burnished fineware bowls, which occasionally were decorated. The absence of burnt residue on such vessels suggests that they

External sooting and 'burnt stew'
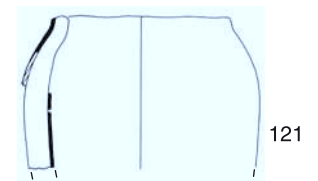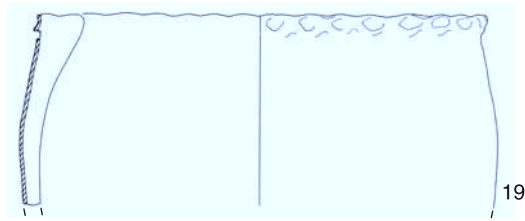
Internal 'burnt stew'
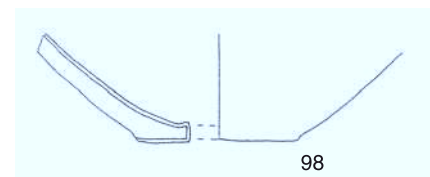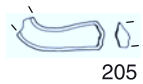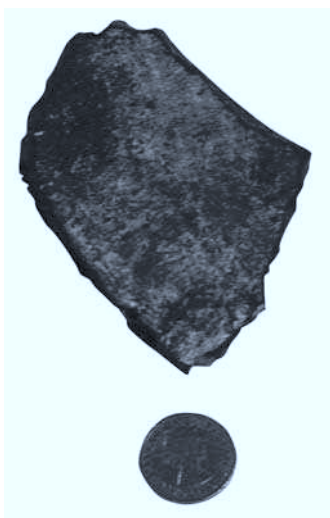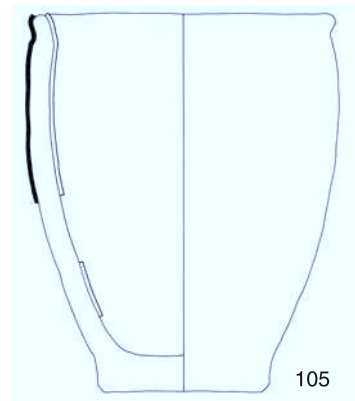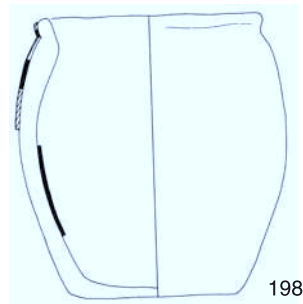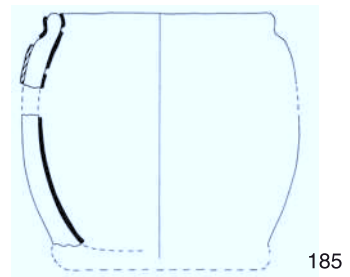
Fig. 66   Evidence of cooking practices from residues on Iron Age pottery

Fig. 67   Iron Age metal, antler and bone personal and craft-related objects

were not usually used to cook more solid food such as stews. The presence of limescaling extending through the holes in the bases of a few small bowls could either reflect a double cooker arrangement or perhaps the straining curds to make cheese.

Occasional differential leaching of the inside of pots with calcareous temper could result either from boiling relatively acidic fruit or vegetables, or just the physical wear and tear of cycles of soaking and drying, or mechanical abrasion from stirring during cooking or from serving food.

At Claydon Pike, Jones (2007, 48-9) found that between a third and half of middle Iron Age pots and jars had external sooting or internal burnt residues, but only 10-20% of bowls had cooking residues. Some types of vessel were seldom used for cooking. As at Mount Farm, most pots used for cooking at Claydon Pike were small to medium pots and jars (perhaps 0.5-6 litres), though sooting was noted on two very large vessels (up to 30 litres). The general conclusion, similar to that reached at Mount Farm, was that people usually prepared and consumed food in small family groups, but that the preparation and consumption of food may occasionally have occurred on a more communal scale.

At Gravelly Guy and Yarnton less correlation was found between fine- or coarse-wares and types of cooking residues, but unlike Mount Farm, the distinction of 'wares' was based primarily on fabrics, rather than finish (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 278; Hey and Timby forthcoming). This suggests that any distinction between 'fineware' and 'coarse-ware' vessels should primarily be made on the basis of finish (and perhaps form), not fabric.

For the late Iron Age and Roman periods, cooking residues were less common, perhaps because the quality of the mainly wheel-thrown, higher fired pottery was rather better and less likely to retain such deposits (Appendix 6). From the point of view of vessel function, the late Iron Age and earlier Roman pottery reflected a position similar to that in the early-middle Iron Age, with a restricted range of storage jars, cooking pots and some quite well finished necked jars and bowls, but very few fineware vessels that would be regarded as separate 'table ware'. This gradually changed in the 2nd century in that pots were made in rather finer wares. It was, however, only late in the site's history that much specialist fineware was in use.

Personal Ornaments (Figures 16, 67-68 and 70-71; Appendices 1, 9 and 10)

A small number of objects that can be regarded as personal items of ornament, toiletry or dress were found. It should be noted that some of the craft-related objects referred to below, such as fine flint knives and scrapers, and antler combs (Figures 11-12, 15-16, 21 and 68) may well have been objects of personal value or status as well as having functional uses.

Amongst the Iron Age objects, a broken copper alloy finger- or toe-ring, a fragment of a possibly jet ring or bracelet and an antler strap union are the most obvious personal ornaments (Fig. 67, nos 2, 4, and 8). Fragments of charred and polished antler found in ditch F505, along with one of the antler combs (Fig. 68, nos 3 and 6) might also have derived from objects such as combs or 'plaques' which
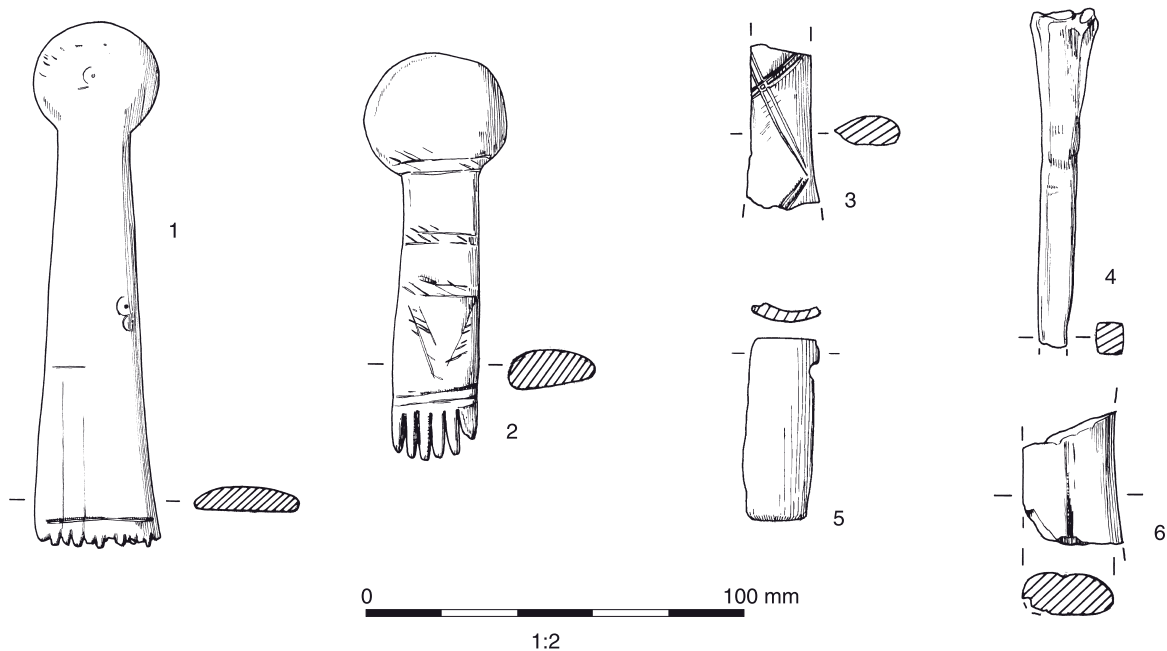
Fig. 68 Iron Age antler and bone personal and craft-related objects
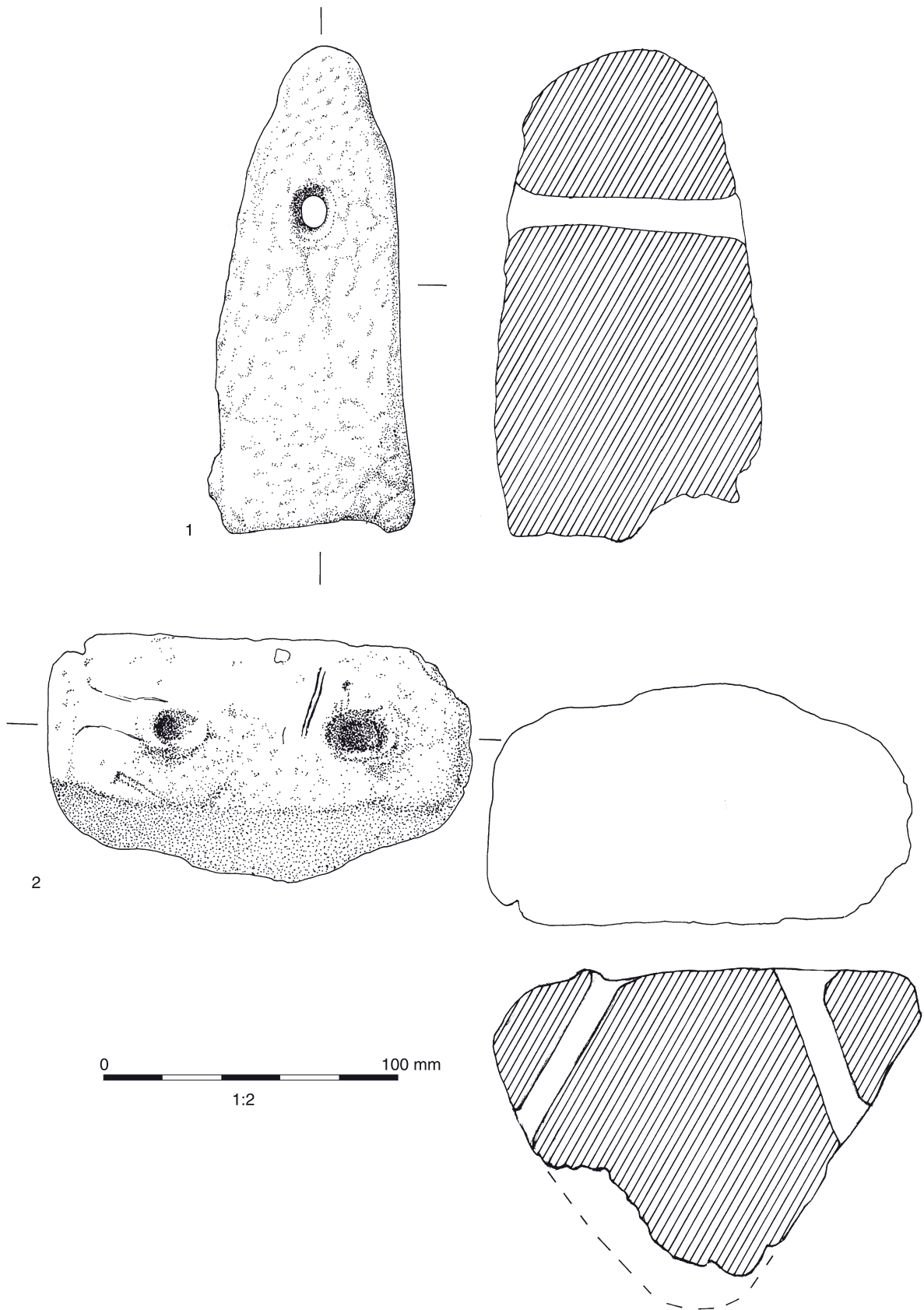
Fig. 69   Iron Age loomweights

0   100 mm

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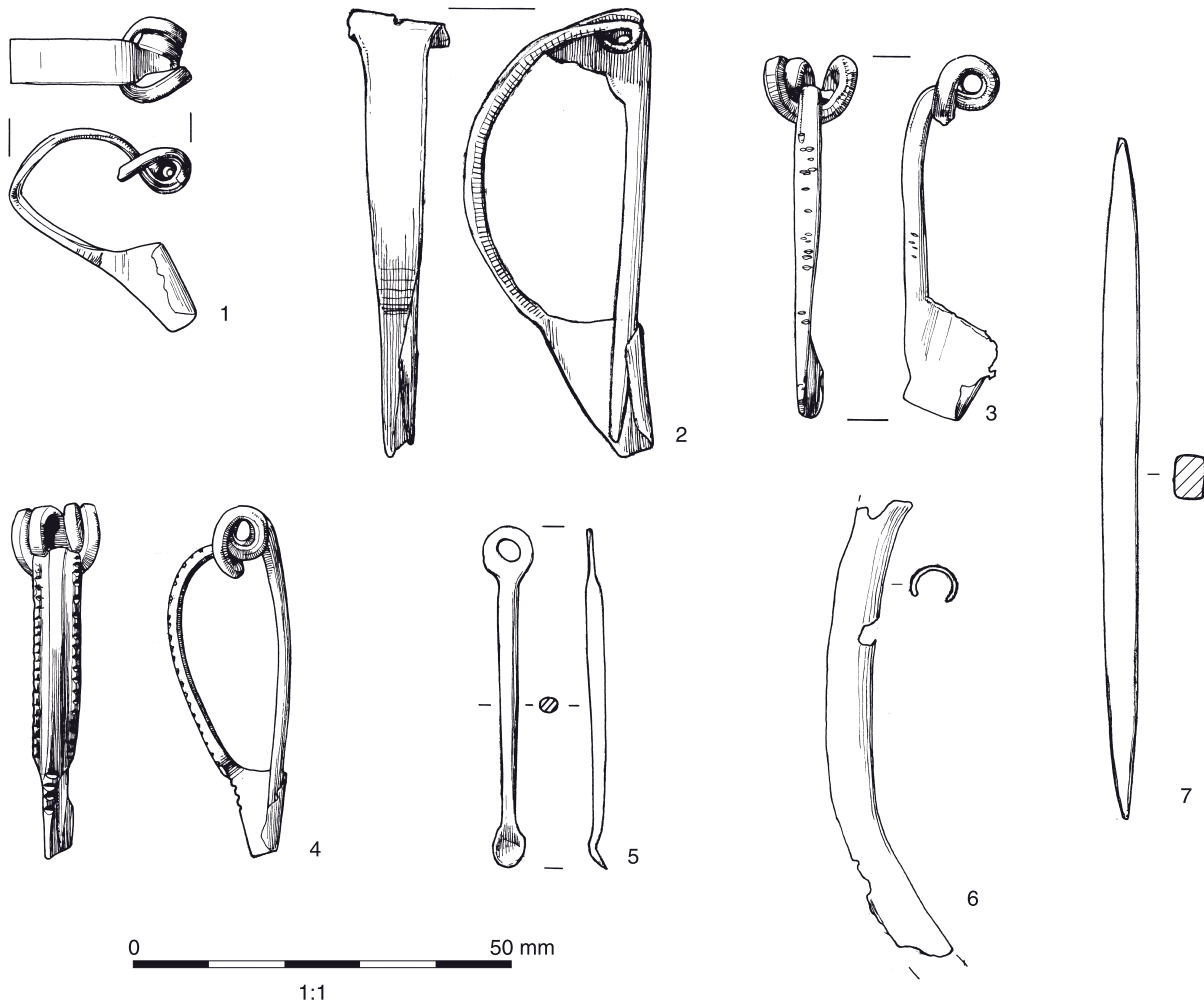
Fig. 70   Roman metal and bone personal and craft-related objects

belong in this category. The blackened surfaces of these objects might be accidental but their polished finish suggests that they may have been deliberately charred before being polished to achieve a shiny black decorative finish.

Amongst the Roman objects there were a small number of fibulae (three of copper alloy, two of iron), an ear scoop from a standard toiletry set, and a small fragment of a possible shale bracelet (Fig. 70, nos 1 to 4, 5; Fig. 71, no. 7). All are typical personal objects for Roman rural settlements in the region.

Crafts (Appendices 1, 3, 9 and 10)

No in situ remains of structures directly connected with manufacturing activities (such as kilns, furnaces, loom settings etc) were identified, but the finds illustrate both the crafts practised by the occupants of the site, and those carried out elsewhere the products of which were used at Mount Farm (see Appendix 1 and specialist reports in Appendices 1, 3, 9 and 10 for more detail).

The early Neolithic flintwork includes good evidence of fine working (Figs 11, 12 and 15), and while there was little diagnostic late Neolithic, Beaker or early Bronze Age flintwork (Fig. 16), some of the flints from middle Bronze Age contexts (F101 and F164) exhibit relatively crude working typical of the opportunistic exploitation of flint in the period when metal was becoming more widely used (Figs 21 and 25; Ford *et al.* 1984; Cromarty *et al.* 2006).

The groove-and-splinter technique of bone working, already a well-established method of producing blanks from which finished objects could be made, is evident at Mount Farm from the early to middle Neolithic onwards (Fig. 11, no. 9; Fig. 12, no. 13; Fig. 25, no.7). Some bones were used almost 'as found,' while others were simply shaped to make usable points, blades and holes (Fig. 67, nos 9-11 and 13-15). Only a few objects, almost all of antler, were fully carved, shaped and polished (Fig. 67, no. 8; Fig. 68, nos 1-3 and 5-6), and a few had been burnt before being polished to create a shiny black surface. Antler was selected for objects requiring high tensile strength such as the Neolithic rake or pick in F160, a possible late Bronze Age handle blank from F162, and the Iron Age combs and strap

union. Specific bones from particular species were selected for other types of implement.

Evidence for making textiles, leather and basketry is provided by a variety of objects (Appendices 3 and 8-10). These include scrapers, serrated and retouched flakes and bone points or awls from Neolithic to Bronze Age contexts (Figs 11, 12, 16 and 25). The Iron Age settlement produced a large broken copper alloy needle or bodkin and a fairly typical range of bone implements that are perhaps most likely to have been used for textiles, leather

and basketry, though their exact usage is uncertain (Figs. 67-68). A typical late Bronze Age pyramidal clay 'weight' and over 40 fragments of typical triangular Iron Age 'loomweights' were recovered (Fig. 69), which may be evidence of weaving, though these objects have alternatively been interpreted as 'oven bricks' (Cunliffe and Poole 1991). Slightly surprisingly, no spindle whorls were found. The range of late Iron Age and Roman objects adds nothing to the earlier Iron Age evidence, perhaps indicating a general conservatism of domestic crafts.
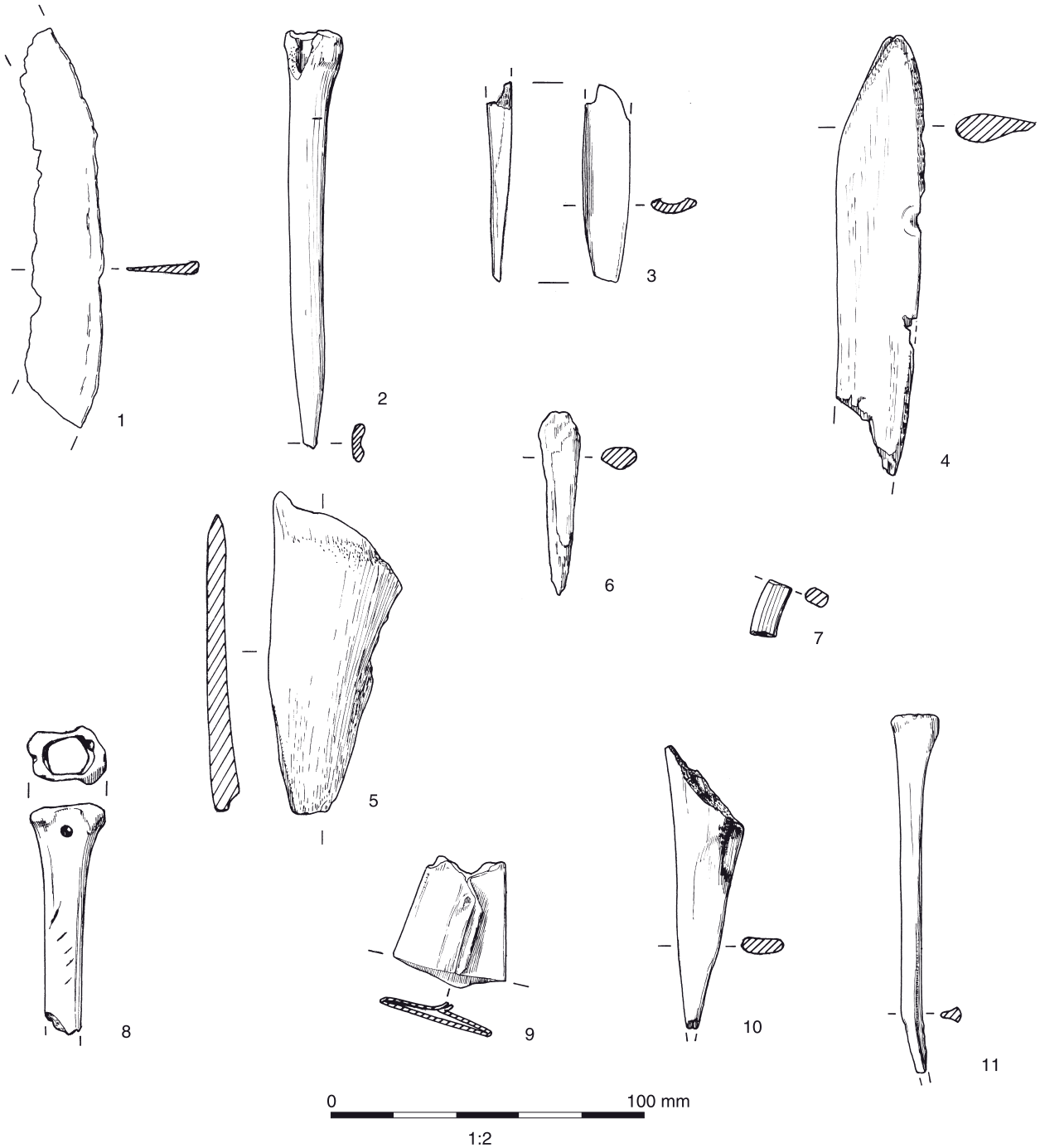

Fig. 71 Roman and Saxon metal and bone personal and craft-related objects
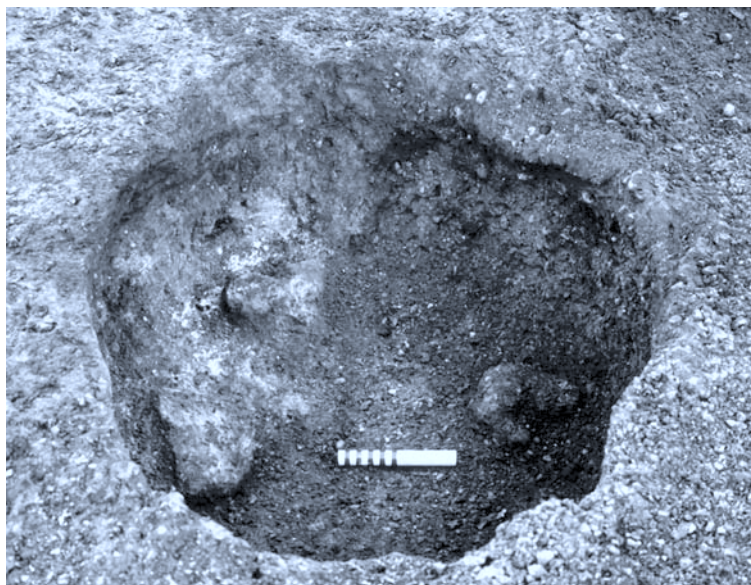
Plate 11   Unfired loomweights in a middle Iron Age pit

Ceramic crafts (Appendices 4-7) are evident from a small amount of Neolithic and bronze Age pottery most of which would have been produced locally, although there is no particular reason to suppose that they were made at Mount Farm (Appendix 4). The late prehistoric pottery is made from a variety of predominantly local fabrics, suggesting several different sources in the surrounding area (Appendix 5). Some fabrics such as those containing malm-stone and fine glauconitic sand from the Upper Greensand almost certainly come from sources within 4-5 km of the site. Differences between the Mount Farm and Castle Hill ceramic fabrics suggest that production was very localised for some wares. On-site production is certainly a possibility, and may be reflected in the chaff impressions on some sherds (Appendix 19), but there were no obvious cases of firing damage that might positively indicate this (cf Lambrick with Robinson 2009). However on-site manufacture of other ceramic objects is indicated by a possible unfired triangular loomweight and semifired lumps of clay in a middle Iron Age pit (Plate 11; cf Allen and Robinson 1993, 43 and plate 12; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 118, 336). In the late Iron Age and through the Roman period similar fabrics were used to make soft-fired flat slabs c 20-40 mm thick (sometimes known as 'Belgic bricks') with very smooth upper surfaces and often dense plant impressions from crop processing debris on their base (Appendix 8). There was no evidence of late Iron Age and early Roman pottery production at Mount Farm (Appendix 6), but sources of the grog-tempered fabrics are assumed to be local. By the early 2nd century the pottery-producing site at Allen's Pit only 1 km from Mount Farm was producing white mortaria in the mainstream Oxford tradition, as well as reduced coarse wares (Harden 1936, 83-94). A few specialist wares (eg a butt beaker and mica coated sherds) may also be of local origin. The sources of the Saxon pottery are also likely to be local.

Evidence of metalworking comes from iron-working slag mainly from middle Iron Age contexts (Appendix 14) with fairly low quantities of slagged clay and low density and glassy slags suggesting blacksmithing on a modest scale. There are notable concentrations of the material in particular areas of the site, especially in the northern area of main excavation around the main west-facing penannular enclosure (ditches F200 and F203, sections J and M) and in the southern area near another penannular enclosure (gully F539 and ditches F505 and F506 immediately adjacent). The overall pattern fits with the evidence at Gravelly Guy, where the metal working debris was concentrated in more restricted areas than other craft-related debris (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 339, 344, fig. 8.3).

Although woodworking crafts must have been important at Mount Farm, there is hardly any evidence before the Saxon period. The Saxon evidence includes the wattle lining of well F82 and, more interestingly, the evidence of coopering provided by the remains of two wooden bands and two fragmentary staves from a Saxon tub or barrel reused as a lining for well F43 in the salvage area west of the main site (Fig. 75; Appendix 12).

Exchange

The evidence for exchange from the Neolithic to Bronze Age deposits at Mount Farm is limited. There is little indication of imported flint but the leaf-shaped arrowhead (Fig. 12, no. 7) is sufficiently fine and large to have been an item of exchange, and much the same applies to the middle Neolithic

blades from grave F602. Three pieces of pottery are also likely to have been obtained by exchange: the Ebbsfleet bowl, the Beaker and the Collared Urn (Appendix 4).

The evidence for Iron Age exchange include a number of stone objects (Appendices 9 and 13) including some pieces such as a fine saddle quern from F162 made of lower calcareous grit which outcrops c 5 km away at Sandford (Fig. 25, no. 8), a fragment of nearby Lower Greensand (possibly a quern), a piece of quartzitic sandstone of uncertain origin, and a few pieces of burnt limestone from the Portland or Corallian beds which occur c 2.5-8 km from the site. A tiny fragment of jet (Fig. 67, no. 4) is evidence for the most distant exchange link. Iron for blacksmithing may well have been obtained locally as scrap. The two bronze objects from F106 (Fig. 67, nos 2-3) may have been obtained as complete objects. Most of the Iron Age pottery was made from a wide range of locally available clay sources with a variety of inclusions from local gravels, alluvial deposits, and less commonly, greensand and malmstone almost all sources being within 7 km or 8 km.

The extent to which the minor settlement at Mount Farm was meshed into the local exchange network in the Roman period is uncertain, though in addition to local farm tracks like those at Mount Farm there, were many minor roads that linked to the main N-S route between Alchester, Dorchester and Silchester. Typically for a low status farming settlement, there are only a few brooches and other personal objects (Fig. 70), and it is not until quite late in the sequence that even local fineware pottery becomes at all common on the site (Appendix 6). The only coin, an unusual semis of Nero (c 65 AD) that would be more at home on a military site (Appendix 11), is possibly evidence for
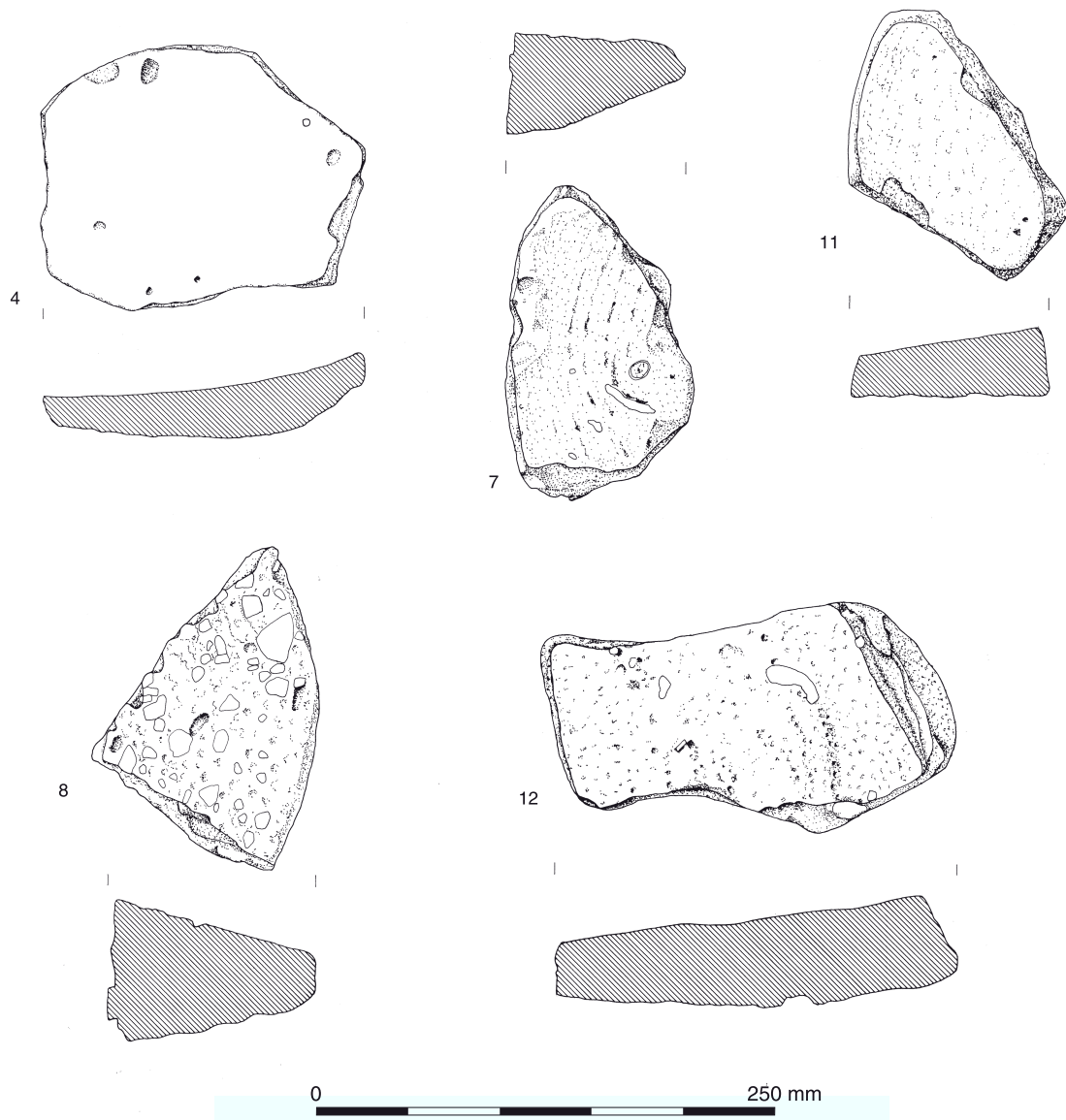
Fig. 72   Roman quernstones
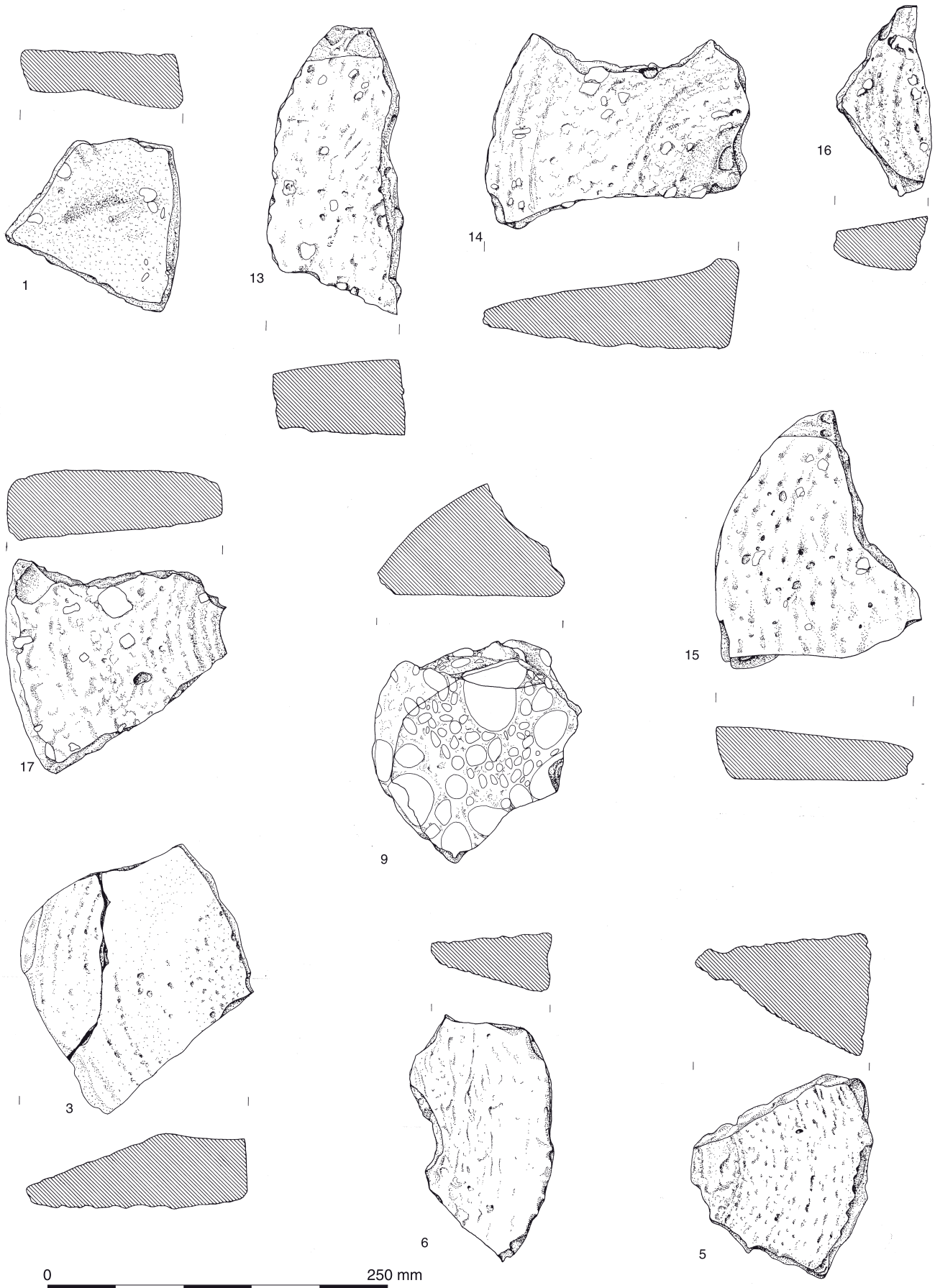
Fig. 73   Roman quernstones

0   250 mm

1:4

contact between the inhabitants of the site and the nearby Roman garrison at Dorchester, but the lack of any other coins suggests that they were not fully embedded in the money economy. The small fragment of a possibly shale ornament and the querns are of some interest in indicating quite a wide range of sources (Appendix 13). This range is generally typical of the wider pattern in the Thames Valley, but lacks internationally traded lavas and stone from sources to the north of the Thames Valley in Derbyshire and the Midlands which are found on some higher status sites (Booth et al. 2007).

It is clear from local cemetery sites like Wally Corner that the Saxon community was linked into well-established and very extensive trading networks for prestige objects, but the character of more local exchange to supply domestic needs is less clear. The quantity of pottery and other objects of Saxon date at Mount Farm is too limited to reveal much in this respect.

Catalogue of illustrated early-middle Iron Age finds
by Joy Browning

(For more detailed discussion see digital appendices)

Figure 67
Metal
1   A thick bronze needle or bodkin broken off at the base of the eye, and with the point missing. L 67 mm. *SF38 EIA F75/1*
2   Bronze finger- or toe-ring. Ring of flat ribbon-strip of bronze with overlapping terminals, one broad and the other tapering. Broken. Late Iron Age type. Diam. 20 mm. (cf Wheeler, 1943, 265-7 nos 10-17, Maiden Castle; Bulleid and Gray 1911, 209-11, plate xli, Glastonbury). *SF3 M1A L106*
3   Fragment of Cu alloy sheeting with rivet. L 8 mm. *SF2 MIA L106*
5   Strip of Iron in four pieces. One rivet hole. L 63 mm. *SF28 MIA F505/A/1*
6   Corroded square shank of an iron nail with the top and point missing. L 47 mm *SF62 MIA L106*
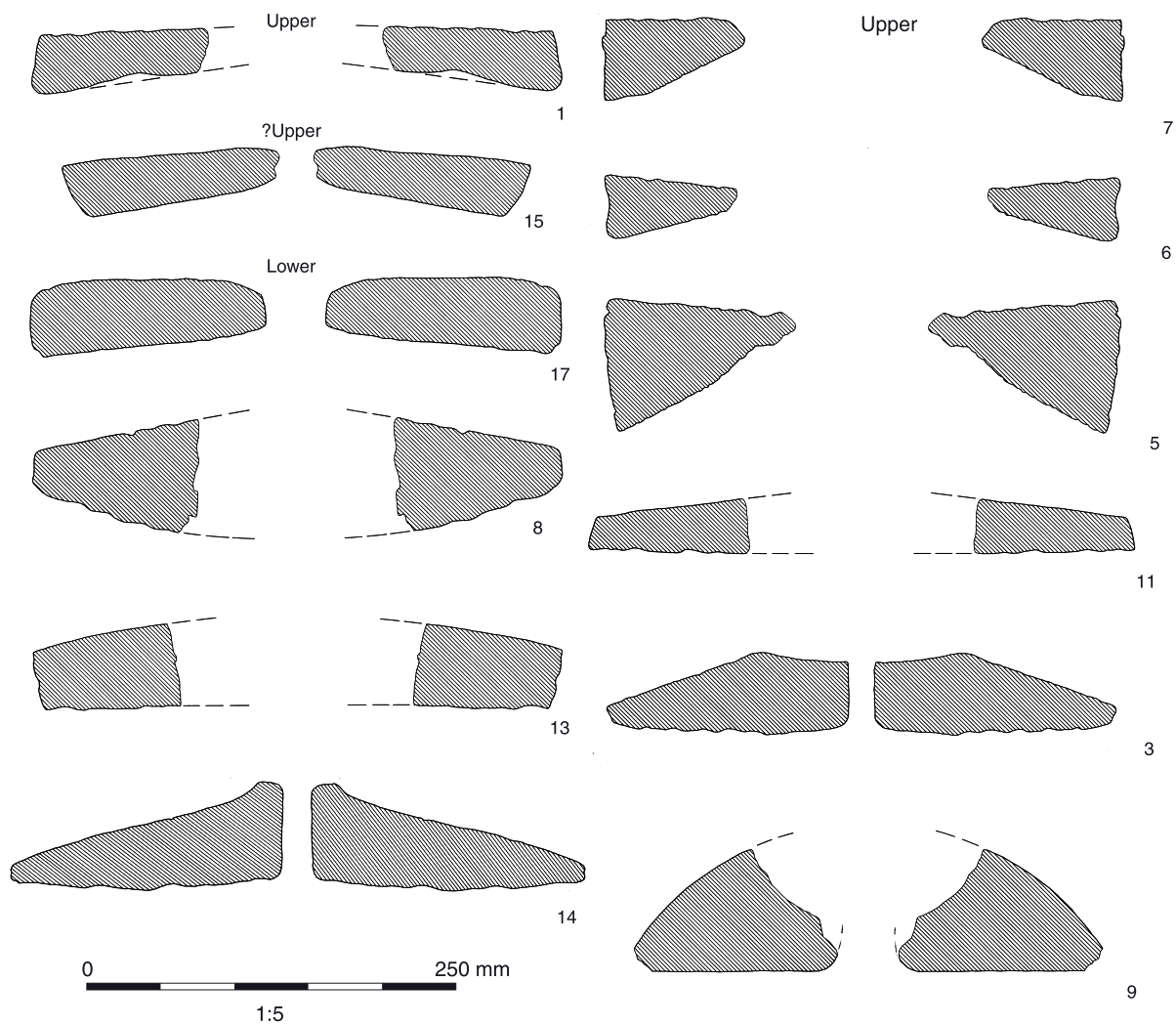
Fig. 74   Roman quernstones: profiles
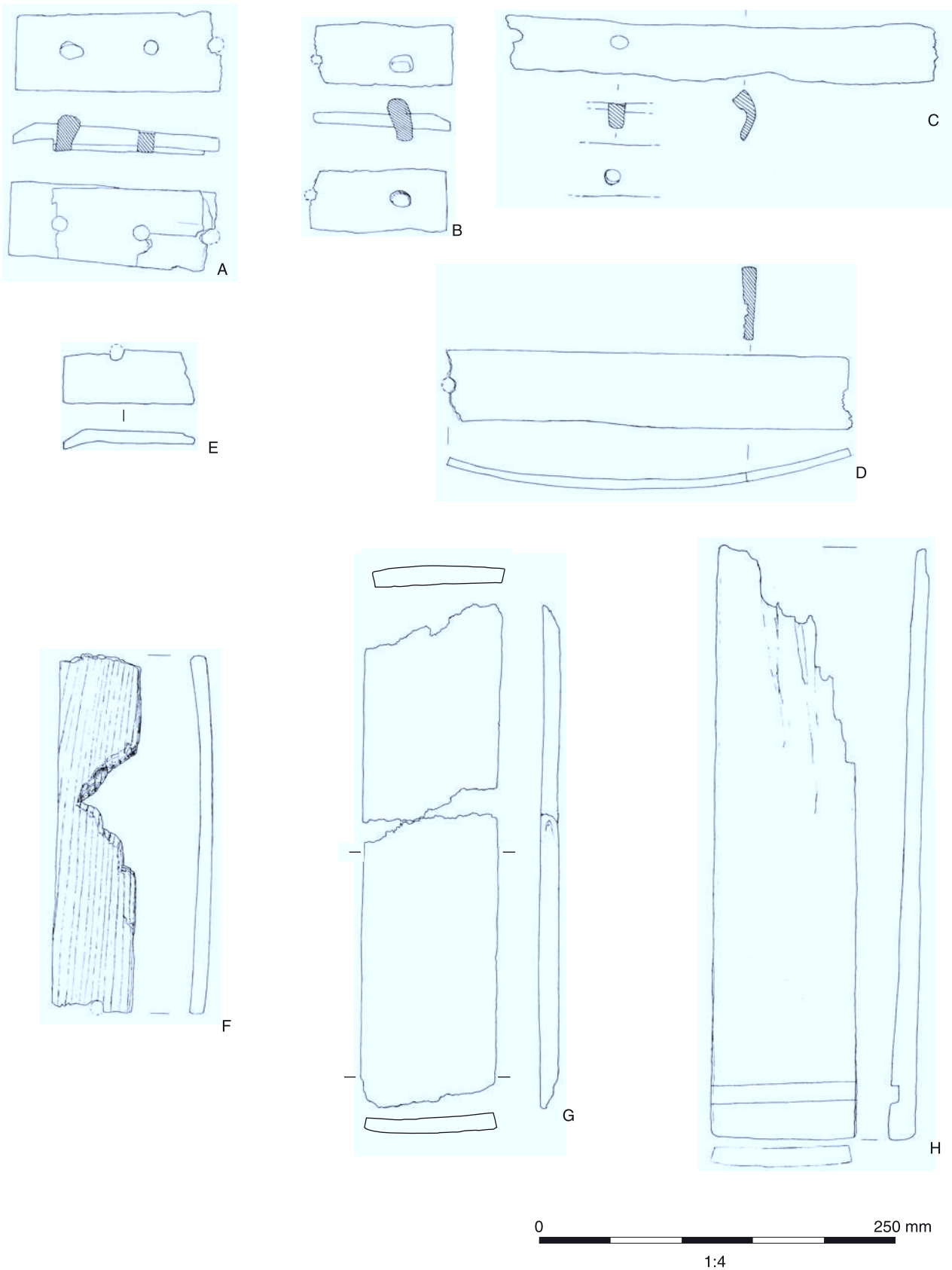
Fig. 75   Saxon tub: details of staves and hoops

0   250 mm

1:4

7   Iron nail, possibly intrusive.
     SF68 MIA F206/F-S

Shale or Jet
4   Fragment of possibly jet ring or bracelet. L 12 mm.
     SF56 MIA F203-200/F

Bone and Antler
8   Possible strap union made from antler. Originally a squared-off tube with an oblong perforation, allowing a strap or cord placed across the perforation to be held in place by another crossing over it at right angles through the sections of tube at either end (one of the end 'tubes' was broken in antiquity). The main face has finely incised lattice decoration. L 36 mm; W 24 mm. A similar decorated object is known from Rollright (Lambrick 1988, 96-7, fig. 65, no. 1).
     SF36 EIA F671/A/3
9   Bone point made from a dog's ulna. The point is lightly polished along its shaft. L 162 mm; W 21 mm.
     SF59 EIA F326/A/1
10   Lateral metapodial of a horse trimmed to a point with a light polish near the end denoting use. L 120 mm; W 16 mm.
   *SF49 EIA F661/A/3*
11   Bone pin fragment, broken top and bottom. Good condition. L 54 mm; W 12 mm.
     SF 53 661/A/7
12   Bovine metatarsal worn through to the cancellous tissue at the distal end. The natural bone surface of the shaft has been badly fractured, and the entire bone has been treated with PVA so any other work has been obscured. L 140 mm; W 30 mm.
     SF5 EIA F127/A
13   Possible 'bobbin' made from an unfused sheep metacarpal. Incomplete, having been broken at the point of its transverse perforation. L 54 mm; W 21 mm.
     SF 40 uncertain date u/s
14   Sheep tibia with longitudinal and side perforations at the distal end. L 56 mm; W 27 mm.
     SF29 MIA 505/C/1
15   Sheep metatarsal with longitudinal and side perforations at the end. L 146 mm; W 24 mm.
     SF25 MIA 545/A/-

Figure 68
Bone and antler
1   Antler comb, complete except for its broken teeth which are worn almost to the base. The comb has a rounded enlargement of the butt. Halfway down the right side there are two faint punched ring and dot decorations. The comb is lightly polished and subsequently weathered. L 137.5 mm; W 30 mm.
     SF41 EIA F661/A/9
2   Complete antler comb, decorated with parallel incised hatched lines. It has a round head and six teeth; the outer ones are more worn. L 106 mm; W 17 mm.
     SF 46 MIA F661/C/l
3   Fragment of a calcined antler comb which has been decorated with incised parallel lines   The worked side is lightly polished. L 36 mm; W 17 mm.
     SF29a MIA F505/C/l
4   Grooved and polished sheep metatarsal (broken and carbonised). L 86 mm; W 16 mm.
     SF29b MIA F505/C/1 and 505/A/1
5   Fragment of sawn and hollowed red deer antler

which has been perforated. The outside is smooth. L 46.5 mm; W 1.7 mm.
     MIA F661/C/1
6   Calcined antler fragment. It is lightly polished, otherwise unworked. L 34 mm; W 23 mm.
     SF55 MIA F584/A/l

Figure 69
1.   A typical late Bronze Age pyramidal weight, has a single 10 mm diameter hole through the apex (which has broken off on the line of the hole). The base was also broken, possibly in firing. One side was fired black, the other oxidised; little sign of wear in the hole. u/s.
2.   Typical Iron Age equilateral triangular 'loomweight' of medium size with one corner missing; 8-10 mm diameter holes through two surviving corners, possible wear on two of inner edges of hole; broken off part not caused by another hole, probably only ever two holes. u/s.

Catalogue of illustrated late Iron Age and Roman finds by Joy Browning and Martin Henig
Figure 70
Metal
1   Bronze fibula, Nauheim derivative with spring. The bow is flat and undecorated. Now bent; pin missing. L originally *c* 30 mm (cf Cunliffe 1968, 77-8, nos 4, 5 and 9, plate xxvi).
     SF22 RB 1st-2nd cent F3/F/2
2   Iron fibula (2 pieces). Perhaps wrought locally in imitation of the Gaulish Aucissa type. L 58 mm. (cf Cunliffe 1971, 104-5, no. 37, for a bronze example of Aucissa C).
     SF20 RB 2nd cent F563/A/1
3   Bronze fibula. Nauheim derivative with spring, of round wire and a spring. L 47 mm. (cf Cunliffe 1968, 77-8, no. 2 plate xxvi).
     SF30 u/s
4   Bronze fibula. Nauheim derivative. It has a flat bow, tapering towards the foot. The bow is ornamented with a central spine. The edges are raised and decorated with short transverse cuts. There are four horizontal nicks above the foot. The spring has two coils on either side of the bow. L 46 mm. (cf Cunliffe 1971, 100-1, fig. 36, no. 1).
     SF14 RB 2nd cent F533/A/1
5   A bronze ear scoop, with a head flattened and pierced, for attachment. Undecorated. L 44 mm. (cf Cunliffe 1971, 109-10, fig. 42, nos 72-3).
     SF10 RB F180/A/1
6   Piece of bronze binding. Broken (5 pieces, one separate shown). L 60 mm.
     SF58 and SF 17 RB 2nd cent F533
7   A small bronze double pointed rod. L 90 mm. (cf Crummy 1983, 168 fig 206 no. 4666).
     SF21 RB 2nd to 3rd cent. F534/D/1

Figure 71
Metal
1   Blade of an iron knife? L 123 mm.
     SF33 RB F752/A

Shale
7   A piece of shale. Possibly part of a plain bracelet. L 15 mm.
     SF63 RB 1st-2nd cent F51/B/-

Bone and antler

3   Part of a sheep tibia shaft trimmed to a point and subsequently broken. Punctured by a scavenger. L 63 mm W 0.4 mm.
     SF 16 LIA-RB F508/B

4   Section of large cattle or horse rib with tapered point and very worn edges, possibly used as scraping or smoothing tool. These objects are characteristic of early and middle Iron Age sites in the south-west (Britnell 1977, 92; fig. 27, no. 172), so this example may be redeposited L 140 mm; W 28 mm
     SF 34 2nd cent RB 757/A/1

5   Piece of horse or bovine tibia shaft; unworked apart from the wider edge of the triangular shape which has been worn down and smoothed, probably as the result of scooping dry abrasive material. L 103 mm; W 40 mm.
     LIA-RB 508/A/2

6   Bone point, lightly polished and weathered on most of the natural bone surface. Possibly made from the lateral metapodial of a horse. L 56 mm; W 11 mm.
     SF42 RB F676/A/1

8   Sheep tibia with longitudinal and side perforations at the distal end. This shaft has been trimmed all round, and small cut- and possible teeth-marks marks can be discerned. L 72 mm; W 21 mm.
     SF15 LIA-RB F508/B/2
     RB 1st-2nd cent F605/A/4

Catalogue of illustrated quern stones
Based upon a report by F Roe and S Brown (Appendix 13)

Figure 72
4.   Saddle quern, about 2/3 complete, concave grinding surface. Lower Calcareous Grit. 8.6 kg. Buff coloured calcareous sandstone with shell fragments, from Corallian. MBA-LBA. Waterhole 162/A/5

7.   Segment from rotary quern upper stone. Lodsworth. 0.98 kg. Lower Greensand Hythe Beds. RB 3rd-4th century AD. Ditch 513/A/1

8.   Segment from rotary quern, lower stone. Old Red Sandstone. 1.36 kg. Upper ORS quartz conglomerate. RB late 1st century AD. Ditch 911/A/2

11.   Fragment from saddle (or lower rotary??) quern . Culham. 0.708 kg. Lower Greensand. RB 3rd century *c* 250+ AD. 537/B/3. Ditch

12.   Fragment from rotary quern, lower stone. Old Red Sandstone? 1.71 kg. Coarse-grained, pebbly sandstone. RB. Ditch 916/A/1

Figure 73
1.   Fragment from rotary quern, upper stone (hollow in grinding surface suggests re-use). Old Red Sandstone. 0.78kg. Upper ORS pebbly sandstone. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/4

3.   Part of above. Old Red Sandstone. Upper ORS sandstone. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/4

5.   Segment from rotary quern upper stone. Lodsworth. 1.526 kg. Lower Greensand Hythe Beds. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 605/A/4

6.   Segment from rotary quern upper stone. Lodsworth. 0.72 kg. Lower Greensand Hythe Beds.

RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/1

9.   Segment from small rotary quern upper stone. Hertfordshire Puddingstone. 2.5 kg. Tertiary.. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/1

13.   Fragment from rotary quern, lower stone, partly burnt. Old Red Sandstone. 1.51 kg. Upper ORS quartz conglomerate. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/1

14.   Fragment from rotary quern, lower stone, partly burnt. Old Red Sandstone. 1.607 kg. Upper ORS quartz conglomerate. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/4

15.   Segment from rotary quern, upper stone. Old Red Sandstone. 1.465 kg. Upper ORS quartz conglomerate. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/4

16.   Fragment from rotary quern, probably lower stone. Old Red Sandstone. 0.34 kg. Upper ORS quartz conglomerate. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/2

17.   Segment from rotary quern, upper stone. Old Red Sandstone. 1.54 kg. Upper ORS quartz conglomerate. RB 2nd century AD. Waterhole 789/A/4

Catalogue of illustrated Anglo-Saxon finds
by Joy Browning

Figure 71
Metal
9   A piece of bronze sheet, folded-over and flattened. Length: 19 mm.
     SF12 Saxon F82

Bone and Antler
10   Bone point made from the lateral metapodial of a horse. The surface is lightly polished and striated. L 90 mm; W 21 mm.

SF52 Saxon F283/C/3
11   Trimmed and lightly polished pig fibula shaft with a utilised point. L 113 mm; W 10 mm.
     SF1 Saxon F43/A/1

Mount Farm in a wider context

The dominance of Dorchester as a focal centre for the region throughout the late Neolithic to Saxon periods would have been a significant factor in how people living at Mount Farm related to their wider world. The area is well situated, being central to an essentially north-south stretch of the Thames Valley which links the three principal east-west ridges of the Downs and Chilterns to the south, the Corallian ridge in the middle and the Cotswolds to the north. Dorchester's unbroken early predominance in the area may reflect its topographical potential as a hub of communication routes, coupled with the local advantages of an extensive area of well drained, easily worked land in the immediate vicinity, and a wide variety of soils in the surrounding area. But it also reflects Dorchester's emergence as a culturally important place that may well have been recognised, reinforced or modified over time.

Earlier prehistoric

The early to middle Neolithic burial monument and pits at Mount Farm lie more or less directly between three other important monument complexes with Neolithic origins: the variety of mortuary enclosures, hengiform cemeteries and post-circle adjacent to the Dorchester cursus and Big Rings henge monument to the south-west; the similar monuments in the vicinity of the Stadhampton cursus to the north-east; and the Drayton St Leonard interrupted ditch enclosure, long barrow, oval barrow and cursus to the east (Barclay *et al.* 2003, 216-32). With its own oval barrow (very possibly two of them) positioned on a local eminence not far from a spring, Mount Farm may well have been on a natural routeway linking these monument complexes from the time of the major cursus monuments were constructed in the middle or later Neolithic, if not before. It is worth noting that while the extent of clearance is unknown, all three of these monument complexes are potentially visible from Mount Farm, but they are not themselves clearly intervisible.

The recurrent, if rather slight and sporadic activity at Mount Farm through the early, middle and later Neolithic, Beaker period and early to middle Bronze Age thus fits in with it being part of an increasingly extensive ceremonial landscape. The recurrent use of this low eminence for a succession of middle Neolithic, Beaker and early to middle Bronze Age funerary monuments is perhaps the most telling indication of its long-term local significance in the wider landscape, whether or not clearance was sufficient for its potential intervisibility with the nearby monument complexes to be a relevant factor.

Late Bronze Age to Iron Age

By the late Bronze Age and Iron Age cultural values had shifted, and with the demise of the ceremonial complexes at Dorchester, Stadhampton and Drayton St Leonard, Mount Farm may also have lost much of its local significance as a subsidiary funerary site. For a few centuries either side of 1000 cal BC it is not clear that it was more than part of the agricultural land in the vicinity of other foci of domestic activity.

Mount Farm may well have re-emerged as a small farming settlement in relation to the important early Iron Age enclosure at Allen's Pit, but there is no indication that Allen's Pit continued to be occupied into the middle Iron Age. By then an increasing diversity of small farming settlements were flourishing in the Upper Thames Valley and Mount Farm is not unusual in having continued to develop into the Roman period, remaining a minor agricultural settlement (Lambrick with Robinson 2009; Booth *et al.* 2007).

In terms of neighbouring settlements or higher status sites, there are relatively few indications of other late prehistoric settlement north of the Thames in the Dorchester area, although this may be more to do with the limitations of cropmark evidence and a dearth of excavations rather than a real absence, as is suggested by the results of excavations at Site 11 and elsewhere on the Chalgrove to West Ilsley pipeline between Brightwell Baldwin and Berrick Salome (Wilson 2008).

The obvious high status sites in the area were the late Bronze Age enclosure, Iron Age hillfort, midden and extensive, long-lived extramural settlement at Castle Hill, just across the Thames at Little Wittenham, and the major presumed late Iron Age oppidum at Dyke Hills (Allen *et al.* forthcoming). How settlements like Mount Farm related to such places is not entirely clear, especially given the possible role of the river as a territorial boundary (Lambrick with Robinson 2009), but in this context the presence of pottery with malmstone tempering at Mount Farm is at least suggestive of some contact with the Castle Hill area, and before the late Iron Age it was probably the major focal point for much of this part of the Thames Valley.

Roman

The conquest period fortress at Alchester (Sauer 2000) presaged the development of a N - S communication route that became an important part of the local network of Roman roads, including that from Silchester, through Dorchester and Alchester, to Towcester, passing just west of Mount Farm.

The possible military origins of Dorchester may have given it particular stimulus as a redistribution centre, but the authenticity of the altar set up by Marcus Varicus Sevenis, a *Beneficiarius Consularis*, which is often quoted as evidence of this (eg Cook and Rowley 1985) is questionable (Morrison 2009). Later in the Roman period the Oxford pottery industry which stretched as far south as Berinsfield provides relatively direct evidence of the commercial context in which Dorchester communications would have been important (Booth *et al.* 2007).

The trackways at Mount Farm are typical of many local roads and country lanes that would have criss-crossed the Roman countryside serving small villages, farms and small holdings. The N-S alignment would have linked the minor farming settlement at Mount Farm into the local communication network, of which other fragments seem to be detectable from cropmarks to the north and south.

Mount Farm would thus have been linked in to an extensive, far reaching network of communication routes that, if anything, emphasise the relatively low level of Romanised cultural material noted above.

Saxon

The Abingdon to Dorchester section of the Thames Valley is well-known as a key area for early Anglo-Saxon settlement (Booth *et al.* 2007), and cemetery sites like Wally Corner show how the Saxon community was linked into well-established and very extensive trading networks for prestige

objects, though the character of more local exchange to supply domestic needs is less clear. The quantity of pottery and other objects of Saxon date at Mount Farm is too limited to reveal much about how this modest farming settlement fitted into the wider social and economic pattern.

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