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Neolithic Pits and Middle Iron Age Settlement at Salisbury Road, Marlborough

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with contributions by Lee Broderick, Lisa Brown, Michael Donnelly, Louise Loe, Julia Meen, Cynthia Poole, Ian Scott and Ruth Shaffrey

SUMMARY

Excavation by Oxford Archaeology on the southern outskirts of Marlborough uncovered a probable early Neolithic pit, a late Neolithic pit that contained a deposit of worked flint and Grooved Ware pottery, and part of a middle Iron Age settlement. The settlement evidence comprised eight substantial storage pits, two of which had possible deliberately-placed deposits at the base. A pair of parallel ditches were not well dated but may have enclosed the settlement or, perhaps more likely, defined a trackway leading to a Roman villa that has been identified from cropmark evidence in the field to the south. A Roman coin was recovered from the topsoil and some undated human remains were found nearby by a member of the public.

INTRODUCTION

During April and May 2017, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a programme of archaeological investigations on land west of Salisbury Road, Marlborough, for CgMs Consulting Ltd on behalf of Redrow Homes South West. The site lay on the southern outskirts of Marlborough and was bounded to the east by Salisbury Road, to the north-west by the disused line of the Midland and South Western Junction Railway, to the south-east by farmland and to the south-west by the Grade II* listed Registered Park and Garden of Tottenham House and Savernake Forest (Fig. 1). It encompassed an area of *c.*9ha of mixed arable and uncultivated land extending across two fields and was centred at NGR SU 19120 68145. Following two phases of trial trench evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2012; 2015), three areas were targeted for excavation and a watching brief was undertaken during the creation of a new pond, but the latter uncovered no archaeological evidence. The work was undertaken in accordance with a condition attached to planning permission for a residential development. This report includes summaries of the analyses of the artefacts and environmental evidence. The full specialist reports and accompanying data can be downloaded from the OA Library (<https://library.thehumanjourney.net/>). The excavation archive will be stored at OA until a suitable depository becomes available.

Topography and Geology

The site was situated within the base and lower slopes of a coombe that drains eastward into the valley of the River Kennet. The upper slopes lie at *c.*155m aOD and fall to below 145m aOD. The underlying solid geology of the study site is mapped as chalk, overlain by superficial river terrace deposits comprising sand and gravel.

Archaeological Background

The site is situated within a landscape that is rich in prehistoric monuments, including the Avebury complex *c.*9km to the west and the Marlborough Mound *c.*1km to the north-west. More locally, an evaluation at Duck's Meadow, *c.*400m north-west of the site, revealed late Neolithic/early Bronze Age pits and possible postholes and finds including Grooved Ware pottery and worked flint (Harrison 2001). Iron Age occupation in the area is attested by a number of hillforts in the wider area, including Forest Hill just over 1km to the south-east. A cropmark of a polygonal enclosure in the field immediately to the south of the one in which the excavation was undertaken has been interpreted as a prehistoric or Romano-British settlement. The Roman town of Cunetio was located *c.*2.5km north-east

of the site and a large early Roman pottery industry had its kilns situated within the Savernake Forest at Purton, dating from probably the late pre-conquest period up until around AD 200. A winged villa has been identified as a cropmark in the field immediately south of the site (Scott 1993, 204).

A geophysical survey and evaluation of the site during 2012 and 2015 identified a single late Neolithic pit in the northern part of the development area and a concentration of pits and ditches of middle Iron Age date to the south (Wessex Archaeology 2012; 2015).

RESULTS

Early Neolithic

Pit 3077 (not illustrated), located in Area 3, was only 0.22m deep. It produced a small but fresh flint assemblage containing several blade forms, likely to be either Mesolithic or, more probably, early Neolithic in date.

Late Neolithic (Fig. 2)

A single late Neolithic pit (1007) was situated in Area 1, close to the similarly dated pit 205 that was recorded by the evaluation. The pit was circular in shape with a steep, conical profile and measured 0.6m in diameter and 0.28m deep. The lower fill was the result of redeposition of the surrounding natural. The main fill (1006) was a dark deposit with frequent charcoal inclusions and contained 13 sherds (225g) of grog-tempered pottery, several of the larger sherds exhibiting corded decoration characteristic of a large Grooved Ware vessel. A total of 49 pieces of worked flint were also recovered, including three blades and two blade-like flakes.

Three other features (1009, 1011, 1013) were excavated to the west of feature 1007. None produced artefacts although the two furthest to the west (1009 and 1013) were of a very similar size.

Neolithic-Middle Bronze Age (Figs 3 and 4)

Pit 3003 contained seven sherds (12g) of pottery that could only be attributed broadly to the Neolithic-middle Bronze Age. The feature measured 0.82m x 0.76m and was 0.25m deep. Its profile was very irregular and contained debris including large amounts of oak charcoal, perhaps representing the deposition of hearth debris.

Middle Iron Age (Figs 3-5)

Areas 2 and 3, which lay on the higher ground of the southern part of the site, revealed part of a middle Iron Age settlement represented by a group of pits. They had a variety of profiles but two (3011, 3076) had the distinctive beehive-shaped profile characteristic of storage pits and others were larger and more concave in shape.

Beehive pits

Pit 3011 (Fig. 4, section 3004) was oval in shape and measured 1.05 x 0.85m and 0.92m deep. Its sides had a convex shape and the pit widened towards a flat base. The lower fills contained a small assemblage of middle Iron Age sherds and animal bone and two very large chalk weights.

Pit 3076 (Fig. 4, section 3021) was circular and measured 1.1m in diameter and 1.4m deep. It had a distinctive, undercut profile that narrowed slightly to a diameter of 0.95m at a depth of 0.4m, before gradually widening to a maximum diameter of 1.6m at the base. The basal fills (3082 and 3081) consisted of a thin layer of silting overlain by a deposit of eroded material from the feature edge. The main part of the lower portion of the pit was filled with a deposit (3080) that contained a large assemblage of 68 sherds (1612g) of pottery, with many refitting sherds. Several fragments of a single large jar lay directly on the base of the pit, where it may have been placed deliberately. This was overlain by a deposit rich in ash and charcoal (3075) that may represent a dump of burnt material into the partially infilled pit, perhaps from a hearth. The upper part of the pit was filled by a single

homogeneous deposit (3074) that contained a further 51 sherds (862g) of pottery. Cross-fits were present between all three fills, suggesting that infilling took place rapidly, as a single event.

Concave pits

Pit 3024 (Fig. 5, section 3006) was the westernmost pit and measured 2.6m in diameter and 1.2m deep. The lower fills (3021-3023) probably derived from natural silting and represented the accumulation of 0.3m of sediment that contained no artefactual material. Above this was a dump (3020) that contained large flint nodules. A further silting deposit (3019) was followed by a second, larger dump of flint nodules (3026) that filled the rest of the pit.

Pit 3042 was sub-circular in shape with steep sides and a flat base. It measured 1.9 x 1.8m and 0.97m deep. After the initial accumulation of silt along the western edge, the deposition of a dump of loose large flint nodules (3054) suggests the deliberate backfilling of the feature.

Pit 3045 (Fig. 5, section 3010) was particularly large, measuring 3m in diameter and 1.16m deep. The earliest deposit comprised a mound of large flint nodules (3050) in the centre of the feature. The upper fills contained a fairly small assemblage of pottery that included a rim and body sherd from an ovoid jar as well as animal bone of several species including sheep/goat, cattle and pig.

Pit 3035 (Fig. 5, section 3009), which was the easternmost of the group, was cut by ditch 2028/3086 and measured 2.22 x 2.08m and 1.07m deep. A dog skull was recovered from the earliest fill (3041). The final fill (3036) contained frequent large flint nodules that may have been dumped into the pit as infilling to facilitate construction of the ditch.

A scatter of smaller, shallow pits was present, of which only pits 3017 and 3030 contained artefactual material. These included a line of four shallow features extending to the north-east from the outer side of the enclosure which may represent a fence line, although they contained no artefactual material.

Undated Ditches

A pair of ditches (2028/3086 and 2029/3085; Fig. 3) extended through Area 3 and curved to the west through Area 2. The eastern ditch (2029/3085) was shallow and narrow, although substantial horizontal truncation may have removed a significant portion of its original depth. It survived to a width of 0.6m and was up to 0.2m deep. No finds were recovered from this ditch. The western ditch (2028/3086) was more substantial and measured a maximum of 1.81m wide and 0.48m deep. It had moderately sloping sides and a concave base. The fills contained little in the way of finds, yielding only two very small sherds of middle Iron Age pottery and two fragments of animal bone. The silting profile of the earlier of its fills suggested that it was deposited from the northern and eastern side, perhaps representing slumping from an adjacent bank. Ditch 3086 truncated middle Iron Age pit 3035.

FINDS

Pottery

By Lisa Brown

A total of 242 sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing 3708g was recovered. The pottery came from a small pit in Area 1, a ditch in Area 2, and 10 pits in Area 3. Apart from a collection of later Neolithic pottery from the pit in Area 1, and sherds of a possible earlier prehistoric vessel from a pit in Area 3, the assemblage is entirely of middle Iron Age date. The pottery is in a moderate to poor state of preservation, with some 60% of sherds recorded as highly abraded. Only a group of large jar fragments from pit 3076 are in an unabraded condition.

Late Neolithic

The main fill (1006) of pit 1007 produced sherds weighing 255g. Several body fragments of a late Neolithic Grooved Ware jar in a grog-tempered fabric belong to a large vessel that could have stood to perhaps 0.40-0.50m high (Fig. 6, no. 1). The decoration surviving on this vessel conforms to the 'Durrington Walls' sub-style (Longworth 1971; Parker Pearson 2007; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2006). Pots of this sub-style are large bucket and barrel forms decorated with horizontal or vertical cordons that divide the body of the vessel into panels. On some examples, the panels are filled with elaborate zig-zag or spiral designs, but the Salisbury Road vessel has plain vertical cordons and the spaces between are undecorated. It is possible that the missing area below the rim may have been further elaborated by decoration. During the evaluation stage of the investigations, sherds of Grooved Ware pottery representing three vessels were found in pit 205, all with vertical cordons, which suggests that they are of the same Durrington Walls sub-style as the vessel from pit 1007 (Wessex Archaeology 2012), and that the pits were probably contemporary.

A single body sherd belonging to a second, smaller vessel was found in the same pit fill. This 10g fragment is in a grog-tempered fabric and decorated with parallel lines of twisted cord impressions (Fig. 6, no. 2). This decorative technique is common within both the Grooved Ware and Beaker traditions and an overlap in the currency of Grooved Ware and Beaker pottery at around 2400-2500 BC would allow for the possibility that the sherd belonged to either type of vessel. A small rim sherd of indeterminate diameter decorated with parallel lines of twisted cord impressions was found at the nearby site at Duck's Meadow, Marlborough. This sherd, along with a thicker, larger undecorated rim were described as examples of Durrington Walls sub-style Grooved Ware (Timby 2001, 221, fig. 3). Although the identification of the cord-impressed sherd may be correct, and the larger plain rim is almost certainly Grooved Ware, the incurving shape of the decorated rim does not disqualify it as a Beaker, as incurving rim tops are not uncommon features of Wessex region Beakers. Additionally, the flint assemblage from the Duck's Meadow feature includes a pressure-flaked triangular arrowhead which could be a blank for a Beaker period barbed-and-tanged arrowhead (Walker 2001, 222, fig. 3). There is a possibility, therefore, of a co-occurrence of Grooved Ware type and Beaker sherds at both Salisbury Road and Duck's Meadow.

It was a feature of late Neolithic deposition practices for Grooved Ware to be deliberately placed in specific arrangements in pits, either as complete vessels or arranged as a lining around the pit base or stacked in piles, as in the Salisbury Road pit. The pottery is sometimes accompanied by other materials, including worked flint and carbonised plants (Garwood 1999; Pollard 2001; Richards and Thomas 1984).

Seven highly abraded sherds (12g) of grog-tempered pottery from fill 3004 of pit 3003 in Area 3 may be of the same late Neolithic date, but these cannot provide a secure date for the feature as they lack any diagnostic features and may, in any case, be residual.

Middle Iron Age

The range of Iron Age fabrics is relatively narrow, reflecting a ceramic tradition using locally acquired raw materials. The Iron Age flint-tempered and sandy wares reflect the chalkland geology of the Marlborough Downs on which the site lies, with outcropping Greensand beds providing the glauconite content of the clay matrices. Fossil shell and limestone-rich Jurassic clays are available a short distance to the west of the site. The 218 sherds (3431g) probably date to the same broad phase of the middle Iron Age. However, the more fragmentary material cannot be precisely characterised or dated, so an earlier Iron Age presence on the site cannot be ruled out, and a single sherd from the upper fill of pit 3076 may be a curated late Bronze Age/early Iron Age fragment.

A middle Iron Age date is indicated by the restricted range of fabric groups almost entirely confined to glauconitic sandy wares. Earlier Iron Age pottery groups typically include a more diverse range of fabrics, suggesting procurement of raw materials from a wider range of sources, while a shift towards a more standardised fabric range and a preference for sandy fabrics is detectable in the pottery of much of southern Britain as the middle Iron Age progressed. Sandy fabrics Q1 and its finer variant Q2 account for a full 198 sherds (3179g) of the total Iron Age collection, representing 91% of the sherds (92% by weight). There are five sherds (133g) in a fabric containing small inclusions of weathered limestone from pit 3076, four conjoining sherds of which from upper fill 3074 belong to an

ovoid jar. The other sherd (13g) is from the lower fill of the same pit and may originate from the same vessel. This vessel, although distinct from the dominant fabric group, could nonetheless have been sourced close by and so is not an 'exotic' as such.

A few sherds in two varieties of fossil shell-tempered fabrics were identified but cannot be closely dated because they are all body sherds with no distinguishing features. Several of the 10 sherds (68g) in the coarser variety (S1) from pits 3011, 3024, 3042, 3045 and 3076 are highly leached, suggesting that they may have been exposed to weathering prior to deposition. The upper fill of pit 3076 also produced four sherds (49g) in a finer fabric, S2, which are highly burnished and thin-walled, features typical of fineware bowls or small jars. Again, the raw materials for these shelly fabrics could have been procured locally.

Of the dominant sandy ware group, the finer variety, Q2, forms 87% by sherd count and 96% by weight. This is clearly a coherent group, which was found in pits 3011, 3017, 3024, 3030, 3035, 3042, 3045 and 3076 and ditch 3038 – a good indication that these features were filled at approximately the same time. Sherds in the less common fabric Q1 came from pits 3011, 3042 and 3045.

There are very few diagnostic forms represented, even in this fairly large ware group, and the vessel range is limited to ovoid jars with simple upstanding or beaded rims (Figs 6 and 7, nos 3-10), one in fabric Q1 from pit 3045 and six in fabric Q2, all from pit 3076 (both the lower and upper fills). The latter were associated with fragments of four simple flat jar bases. None of the Iron Age pottery is decorated, apart from a possible curated sherd (see below). This suggests that the pit assemblages date to the earlier part of the middle Iron Age (perhaps before c.300 BC) when the local ceramic style was at a formative stage. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that the classifiable vessel forms have weak or unpronounced rim shapes. During the later middle Iron Age in the Wiltshire region, ceramic production attained a developed stage (after c.300-250 BC), with a range of forms that included ovoid jars and straight-sided pots ('saucepan pots') with well-defined bead rims and a distinctive decorative repertoire characterised by shallow-tooled arcs and dots/depressions – Cunliffe's (2005, 104; 628) so-called Yarnbury-Highfield style.

A small, worn body sherd weighing only 12g from fill 3074 with an incised linear motif with white inlay of chalk paste (Fig. 7, no. 9) is the only decorated sherd. The motif resembles decoration seen in the All Cannings Cross type site assemblage (Cunnington 1923; Barratt and McOmish 2006) and at several sites in the Vale of Pewsey, including Potterne (Lawson 2000) and East Chisenbury (McOmish 1996; McOmish *et al.* 2010). This distinctive ceramic tradition, dating from the 9th-7th centuries BC (Gibson 2002, 115), is characterised by highly decorated jars and fine bowls with white inlay. Pottery of this type is often recovered from midden sites, which are described as monumental ceremonial sites designated for communal events that involved feasting and livestock exchange. As such, the fragment may be a residual piece, perhaps curated as an object of significance, dating from as early as the 9th-8th centuries. Interestingly, there is a graffito scratched on the inner surface of the sherd in the form of a chevron. This appears to be ancient marking rather than recent damage and would also suggest that the fragment was somehow valued.

The presence in the lower fills (3080 and 3075) of pit 3076 of conjoining sherds, weighing 1265g, belonging to at least two jars indicates deliberate deposition of large vessel parts (Fig. 6, no. 5; Fig. 7, no. 8). This type of deposition is a very common feature of Iron Age pits and, although no similar deposits were apparent in the other pit assemblages, it is important to bear in mind that selective deposition was not confined to ceramics. Animal bone, a wide range of artefacts in a variety of materials, and even organic materials are represented in the assortments of pit deposits at sites across Britain.

Pottery dated to the middle Iron Age was found in pits 2303 and 2305 excavated during the evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2012). Descriptions of a vessel with a 'tooled' surface suggest a similar finish to a jar in fabric Q2 with a faceted surface from pit 3076.

Worked Flint

By Michael Donnelly

The excavations recovered an assemblage of 84 pieces of struck flint (**Table 1, Fig. 8**). The majority of the assemblage originated from early Neolithic pit 3077 and late Neolithic pit 1007. The remainder of the assemblage amounts to just ten pieces including one crude knife formed on a thermal chunk, probably of post-Neolithic date. The bulk of the assemblage was made from good quality chalk flint although a small amount displayed more weathered cortex that suggests secondary sources of material. Pit 1007 contained flint from at least five nodules but two of these cores/nodules accounted for the majority of the pieces including one probable source for all three scrapers. Given the site's location, obtaining good quality raw material would not have proven difficult. The flintwork tended to be in very good condition, some of the edge damage probably relating to use rather than trampling or other post-depositional agencies. The assemblage from pit 1007 was actually less fresh than that from contexts here, but the assemblages are not large and caution must be exercised when using these figures

Pit 3077

Pit 3077 contained a small but fresh assemblage comprising 25 flints including 19 sieved chips. Four of the remaining six pieces were blade forms and several pieces of the finer debitage looked to have been struck during blade production. The dominance of blades is likely to indicate a Mesolithic or early Neolithic date. Mesolithic pits are very rare so the latter date is more likely and it may even be the case that the flintwork is residual in a pit of later date.

Pit 1007

The flint assemblage is of note for its high numbers of tool forms and low levels of burning and breakage. This is most evident for pit 1007, which contained five tools out of 35 significant pieces (14.29%). Fourteen of its 49 flints were pieces of fine knapping waste, indicating that either primary or more likely secondary working had contributed to the assemblage and had almost certainly occurred in the immediate vicinity. The pit contained a low blade index of 15.39%, indicative of later Neolithic activity (Ford 1987). The flake assemblage included some quite small curved examples that may have related to the retouching of scrapers, knives or other tools. The tools included two disc scrapers where the retouch runs almost to the bulb on either side (Fig. 8, nos 1 and 2) while the third was a more typical end scraper on a blade-like flake (Fig. 8, no. 3). All three had signs of use including damage to the lateral margins of the end scraper that was suggestive of hafting. One knife on a blade-like flake with ventral applied invasive retouch on its right hand side and dorsal retouch along its left edge had also clearly been used but was also still in good order (Fig. 8, no. 4). One retouched blade had unusual heavy invasive retouch on its ventral surface that suggested an unfinished and probably quite complex tool. Two Levallois flakes were also present and are also typical of Grooved Ware assemblages where they were often preferred as tool blanks. The lack of fine debitage, high incidence of largely functional tools, low levels of breakage and fresh condition of the assemblage all suggest that this was a selected and probably deliberately placed deposit.

The pit was situated close to the similar pit 205, which had been recorded during the evaluation phase. Pit 205 contained a flake-based assemblage in very good condition and while no refits were identified, it appeared that the flints originated from a limited set of cores or nodules. The tool inventory was also very similar, with two scrapers and three knives, two of which were fashioned on blade-like flakes. The pit also contained microdebitage that suggested the retouching of tools/secondary working. These two pits were found in close proximity but may not have constituted a pair such as is often seen in early and middle Neolithic contexts. They differ from typical Grooved Ware assemblages (Lamdin-Whymark 2008, 102) in some respects, such as in having lower levels of breakage and burning than is usual. These assemblages appear to be more than simple domestic refuse in that there has been a clear selection process. The rules governing these practises are not well understood and it is likely that improvisation may have been common (Thomas 1999).

Worked Stone
By Ruth Shaffrey

Two perforated chalk objects were found in the lower fills of pit 3011 (3013, 3014, Fig. 9). The larger of these (SF1) weighs 1456g and the smaller (SF2) weighs 643g, although damage across the lower face suggests it was a little heavier originally. Both items are weights of a form usually interpreted as having been used on a warp-weighted loom. The weight of piece SF2 is consistent with that of known loomweights, almost all of which are Saxon in date (e.g. Walton Rogers 2009, 293). The larger example, however, is on the cusp of what would have been a practical weight for a loomweight; the vast majority of proven examples weigh significantly less than 1.5kg (Shaffrey 2017). It is therefore reasonable to assume that either this weight was used on a different type of loom, such as the Skolt Lappish loom, or that it (and possibly the smaller example) are evidence for other uses of weights, such as door/gate weights or thatch weights.

Other finds

By Ian Scott and Cynthia Poole

A coin of Roman as or dupondius size was recovered from the topsoil. The obverse was very worn but exhibited a bust and the reverse bore a horse with no harness or rider. No legend was visible on either side. The coin may be associated with the Roman villa that has been identified from cropmarks and findspots in the field immediately south of the site.

A small quantity of natural chalk marl, burnt chalk and burnt clay was recovered from middle Iron Age pits 3011 and 3076. Pit 3011 produced *c.*1kg of red burnt natural clay that exhibited no evidence of having been prepared or shaped in any way. It had the appearance of a deposit of burnt natural clay of the sort that might occur below or around an oven, hearth or similar structure. A small fragment of fired clay and two fragments of burnt chalky material found in a dump of ash and charcoal (3075) in pit 3076 could be fragments from a puddled chalk hearth.

Animal Bone

By Lee Broderick

Middle Iron Age animal bone assemblages remain relatively rare in Wiltshire. Few Iron Age assemblages from the county have been published so far (Hambleton 2008; Powell *et al.* 2008) and even fewer have a specifically middle Iron Age component (e.g. Hambleton and Maltby 2004; Coy 1982). Moreover, many of these sites are associated with hillforts, such as Battlesbury Bowl, Bury Wood and Budbury. Although small, then, the assemblage from Salisbury Road takes on added importance as a rare window into what was happening away from these conspicuous sites.

In all, 388 specimens were recovered from the site, mostly through hand collection, although environmental samples contributed eight specimens. Most of the material could not be identified further than broad categories and 59.8% of the assemblage was accounted for by large mammal (i.e. cow or horse sized) fragments (**Table 2**). This suggests a large degree of fragmentation. The bone was generally in moderate to poor condition and fairly brittle, no doubt due to the alkaline conditions created by the underlying chalk bedrock.

Economic evidence

The high proportion of caprine specimens is typical of the Iron Age in Britain, although it tends to be greater in the late Iron Age than the middle (Albarella 2007) and this is especially true of the Wessex region. Some caution might need to be applied though, since large mammal fragments were so common in the assemblage and 71% of the identified caprine specimens (NISP=22) were of foetal/neonatal individuals from a single fill of pit 3011. We might, therefore, suppose cattle to in fact have been rather more common on the site. This would be unusual in Wessex, although cattle are slightly more common on sites in the neighbouring Upper Thames region (Hambleton 1999). Many of the Wessex assemblages, especially those in Wiltshire, come from hillforts which might have had a different economy to other settlement sites. That said, the best studied non-hillfort settlement in the region, Gussage All Saints, also had a high proportion of caprines (Harcourt 1979). Given the very small number of identified specimens in the assemblage it is probably best to treat any economic

interpretations with extreme caution and just note that all the principal domesticates were present on the site.

A total of 14 wood mouse specimens were found, all but one from fill 2014 of pit 3011. These may suggest a woodland edge type environment on the site at the time, or possibly that the wood mouse was able to fill a more commensal role before the introduction of the house mouse.

Associated Bone Groups

Fourteen of the thirty-two caprine specimens were from at least three (based on left metacarpals) foetal or neonatal individuals. Length measurements of nine limb-bones from these individuals suggest that the lambs were as much as a month pre-parturition (McDonald *et al.* 1977). Ordinarily, this would be interpreted as evidence of on-site breeding and lambing and this is probably the case. However, part of that argument rests on the assumption that such small animals have little to no economic value and so are unlikely to be killed so young or, as natural casualties, have their carcasses transported back to a habitation site for disposal. This interpretation is made problematic by the presence of oblique cut marks on the proximal end of two of the measured metacarpals, including the smallest one. In both cases these cuts were on the caudal side of the bone, one on the caudal-medial and one on the caudal-lateral, demonstrating that the carcass was dismembered before deposition. All fourteen of these foetal/neonatal specimens, as well as eight others, were recovered from the fills of pit 3011. The lowest fill of this pit (3015) contained nothing but caprine and medium mammal specimens, that above (3014) contained some medium mammal and caprine as well as a large number of mouse and amphibian bones, suggesting some disturbance, and the upper layers (3013) and (3012) had much less material but contained horse, domestic cattle and pig. Given this setting, it seems reasonable to suggest that the three butchered, pre-term, lambs represent a deliberate deposit. In a recent survey of Associated Bone Group (ABG) deposits in Britain it was found that, in the middle Iron Age, half of all complete caprine ABGs were neonates, as well as 30% of all partial ABGs (Morris 2011, 50) and that caprines are the most common species to be recovered as an ABG from Iron Age southern Britain (35%) (Morris 2011, 130). Although such a deposit should certainly not be considered normal, it evidently fits an emerging observed pattern. Against this background, just 6% of reported Iron Age caprine ABGs have butchery marks, including those from eight middle Iron Age sites (Morris 2011, 139-44), making those recorded here far more unusual. It has been noted that butchery marks on an ABG may make interpretations of ritual behaviour more likely than where they are absent, since many ethnographic records of rituals involving animals include their slaughter and formal dismemberment (Wilson 1992; Broderick 2012).

The three dog specimens may also be considered a partial ABG, consisting of a cranium and left and right mandibles. This was recovered from the basal fill of pit 3035. Like the foetal/neonatal caprines described above, this was the only faunal material recovered from its context (3041), with the fill above it (3036) containing medium and large mammal. Given its situation and the absence of other material from the context it may be considered as having some importance and bears comparison with similar deposits from Danebury (Grant 1984; Hill 1995; Wait 1985). This is far more equivocal than the caprine deposit mentioned above, however, since it may be supposed that crania and mandibles are more often disposed of together than other articulating bones.

Charred Plant Remains, Wood Charcoal and Molluscs

By Julia Meen

The samples selected for quantification of charred plant remains, snails and charcoal consisted of one sample from late Neolithic pit 1007, one from early prehistoric pit 3003, two from middle Iron Age pit 3030 and one from middle Iron Age pit 3035 (Tables 3-5). No identifiable plant remains were recovered from pit 3003 and no snails from the lower of the two fills from pit 3030. Analysis of the range of wood charcoal was undertaken on each of the samples.

Late Neolithic

Pit 1007 produced a fairly small assemblage of charred material. This was almost entirely charcoal, mostly of small dimensions and this restricted the number of identifiable fragments. The charcoal was mostly of Pomoideae type, belonging to a group of anatomically similar woods that includes hawthorn, apple, rowan and whitebeam, with two fragments of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and a single piece of blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). No roundwood was noted, indicating that the wood was taken from mature trees.

Five small fragments of charred hazelnut shell were also recovered. A small number of snails was also found in this sample. As in the similarly dated pit 205 that was recorded during the evaluation stage (Wessex Archaeology 2012), the snail assemblage was dominated by *Trochulus hispidus*, but the range from pit 1007 also included two species of Vallonia (*V. excentrica* and *V. pulchella*) as well as *Vertigo pygmaea*. Both Vallonia species and *Vertigo pygmaea* are open country taxa, intolerant of shade and woodland, with *V. excentrica* in particular indicative of drier conditions (Kerney 1999). The presence of mostly scrubby trees amongst the charcoal assemblage – hawthorn, hazel, blackthorn – also points to a local environment that had been, at least temporarily, cleared of primary woodland and had either areas of regenerating and more open, secondary woodland, or possibly hedgerows that had been established to delineate the landscape.

Neolithic-Middle Bronze Age

A large quantity of charcoal was recovered from pit 3003, and on this basis the deposit has been interpreted as a dump of debris from a hearth. Analysis of selected fragments showed that all but one was oak (*Quercus* sp.), with further scanning of the deposit indicating that the remaining material was very similar in character. A number of the oak fragments contained tyloses in their xylem vessels, indicating they are heartwood from mature trees. This may indicate deliberate selection of mature oak – a wood with high calorific values and therefore an excellent fuel; it also points to the presence of established woodland in the vicinity. No charred plant remains were recovered from this deposit, and the single burrowing snail is likely to be intrusive.

Middle Iron Age

The two fills of pit 3030 are both dominated by oak charcoal, including at least some from heartwood. The lower fill produced a large quantity of charcoal; this deposit has been suggested to be a dump of hearth residue. The other charred plant remains from this feature are limited to occasional poorly preserved cereal grains and wheat glume fragments, as well as a small number of weed seeds including small legumes and bedstraws. The charred material in pit 3035 was relatively sparse, with few fragments of charcoal of sufficient size for identification. The larger fragments were mostly oak, with a little Pomoideae type and hazel. However, charred plant remains were recovered, mostly grains and glume bases of wheat (*Triticum* sp.) with occasional weed seeds including bedstraws (*Galium* sp.) and small grasses (Poaceae). A partially charred, articulated barley rachis (*Hordeum vulgare*) is unlikely to be contemporary, and the presence of numerous shells of burrowing *C. acicula* further suggests there has been reworking of later material into the deposit.

Human Remains

By Louise Loe

A total of 13 disarticulated bones was found in the immediate vicinity of the site by a member of the public. The material comprised bones from the skull, arms, legs, thorax, hand and foot. They were generally in good condition, having well-preserved surface morphologies, but the majority were incomplete. One fragment of tibia had an unfused joint surface indicating an individual of less than 20 years. All of the other bones were morphologically consistent with those of an adult (over c.18 years). Based on the non-repetition of elements and factoring in age, at least one adult and one juvenile/young adult are present.

DISCUSSION

The excavation uncovered evidence for activity during the Neolithic period, middle Iron Age and possibly the Roman period. Evidence for activity during the early and late Neolithic period was provided respectively by a small but blade-rich flint assemblage from pit 3077 and by a possible structured deposit of pottery and flint in pit 1007. Pit 1007, situated at the base of the coombe, was situated close to the very similar pit 205, which was excavated during the evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2012). At least one similar feature has been excavated at Duck's Meadow (Harrison 2001) and together the group highlight a focus of broadly contemporary late Neolithic activity in this part of the Kennet Valley, down river from the monumental complex at the Avebury World Heritage site and the nearby Marlborough Mound, which has recently been dated to this period (Leary *et al.* 2013). The identification of three very similar pit or large posthole features within close proximity is significant, particularly due to the similarity of the assemblages contained within them and that no features of this date had previously been identified in the vicinity. All three pits contained large sherds of Grooved Ware, and two also contained individual sherds that could be either from Grooved Ware or Beaker vessels. If these are Beaker sherds, this could suggest that the assemblages were deposited within a transition period between c.2500 and 2400 BC. Along with the pottery, the pits also all contained fresh flint assemblages and pits 1007 and 205 both contained charred hazelnut shell.

It has been suggested that pits containing Grooved Ware and special flint assemblages may have been dug specifically to receive these items as part of closing deposits when settlements were abandoned, or at other significant occasions within the life of the community (Pollard and Healy 2012). A distinction between settlement evidence and ritual activity is often difficult to distinguish in the archaeological record from this period, with sedentism not likely to have been the norm (Pollard and Healy 2012), and it is possible that both were intertwined and ritual activity evident in everyday practices. The deposition of fresh and useful tools in this pit, along with Grooved Ware pottery and hazelnut shell, demonstrates the placing of domestic items deliberately in a landscape of possible ritual significance, given the proximity of the Marlborough Mound.

The most substantial element of the site comprised the excavation of a group of middle Iron Age pits. Such pits are a characteristic element of the small farmsteads that populated the landscape of the period and attest to domestic occupation on the north-facing slope of the coombe. The results of the geophysical survey undertaken as part of the evaluation indicated that pit-like features extend for at least another 50m to the south, suggesting that the excavated features may represent only the northern tip of a much more extensive settlement (Wessex Archaeology 2012). The evidence for settlement activity at Salisbury Road was limited to pits but this is not unusual, as the postholes or penannular gullies marking the footprints of structures would have been shallower and consequently more susceptible to truncation by the extensive ploughing evidenced on the site. Alternatively, it is possible that structural remains were situated outside the limits of the excavation area, particularly since the results of the geophysical survey suggest that the excavation uncovered only the northern periphery of the area of occupation.

It is not certain whether the settlement had an open or enclosed form; the pair of ditches that curved through the site were undated but might conceivably have formed part of an enclosure around the settlement, analogous to the double-ditched polygonal enclosure that has been identified from cropmark evidence in the field immediately to the south of the one in which the investigation was undertaken. The western ditch cut middle Iron Age pit 3035, which might indicate that the ditches are of more recent date than the settlement, but the relationship with a single pit need not be conclusive, since it is not uncommon for Iron Age settlements to exhibit evidence for episodes of enclosure alternating with phases when there was apparently no physical boundary (Hill 1996, 102). The ditches at Salisbury Road formed a rather mismatched pair, the western ditch being more than twice as deep as its companion, and they were not strictly parallel, the distance between them ranging from 3.6m to 6.4m. The only artefactual dating evidence from them comprised two sherds of middle Iron Age pottery from the western ditch, one of which came from the intervention where the ditch cut middle Iron Age pit 3035 and may therefore be residual from the pit. Examination of aerial photographs held at the NMR was not able to identify any evidence for a continuation of the putative enclosure in the areas adjacent to the excavation. An alternative, and perhaps more persuasive interpretation is that the ditches may in fact be Roman in date, since they were aligned roughly on the villa that has been

identified from cropmark evidence in the field to the south and may have defined a trackway that lead to it.

Unenclosed settlements were certainly a common element of the Iron Age landscape of Wiltshire, although they are by their nature difficult to identify and easily destroyed by ploughing, and so are likely to be under-represented in the archaeological record (Field and McOmish 2017). The Salisbury Road site bears close comparison to a settlement at West Lavington, where stripping of a corridor for a water pipeline exposed a site that was similarly dominated by pits (Morris and Powell 2011). Two concentrations of features were uncovered, situated c 20m apart on a chalk ridge. The southern group comprised 40 pits extending along a 60m length of the easement and the northern group contained 14 pits and 13 postholes; the pits were very similar in form and dimensions to the corresponding features at Salisbury Road, suggesting a common function. A substantial area of open settlement is also associated with the Battlesbury hillfort (Ellis and Powell 2008). Only a handful of open settlements have been identified in the Marlborough area, comprising a group around Fyfield Down and three sites strung along the southern edge of the Marlborough Downs (Bowden 2005, 157). This might suggest a distinct preference for the high downs and the down edge, perhaps indicating that such settlements occupied a very specific economic niche, but the pattern may be biased by the aforementioned difficulties in identifying them. The location of the site at Salisbury Road within a coombe adjoining the River Kennet contrasted with this distribution.

Evidence pertaining to the economy and lifestyle of the community at Salisbury Road was very limited. The pits, particularly beehive pits 3015 and 3076, were characteristic of grain storage silos and suggest that arable cultivation was a significant focus, but only occasional cereal grains were recovered from the soil samples. Possible lambing within the settlement is suggested by the number of foetal or neonatal caprine bones that were recovered, although some of these bones showed evidence of dismembering before deposition and were found at the base of pit 3011, perhaps representing a structured deposit. The presence of wood mouse in pit 3011 and elsewhere on the site suggests a woodland edge location, and access to mature woodland was also indicated by the use of oak as the main source of fuel. This supports the characterisation of the Iron Age landscape as one of arable, pasture and managed woodland, dotted with farmsteads (Fitzpatrick 2012). A possible structured deposit was identified in pit 3035, where a dog cranium and left and right mandible were found at the base of the pit, bearing comparison with special deposits recorded elsewhere in southern Britain (Cunliffe 1992; Hill 1995). The two chalk weights recovered from the base of pit 3011 may represent another such deposit, since deposition of chalk or clay weights has been described by Cunliffe (1992, 75).

During the excavation a member of the public found human remains in a field close to the excavation, comprising parts of the skeletons of an adult and a juvenile. Since their precise provenance are not known, little can be added, except that the bones presumably derive from one or more disturbed burials of unknown date.

The pits representing the settlement therefore provide a good range of material, particularly valuable due to an historic focus on hillforts for study in the region. The animal bone assemblage is particularly valuable, since few assemblages have been published from middle Iron Age farmsteads in Wiltshire. The site represents a previously unknown settlement, comparable to other sites in Wessex and beyond, and characteristic of the emergence of smaller settlements in the middle Iron Age.

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Neolithic Pits and Middle Iron Age Settlement at Salisbury Road, Marlborough – Tables

Table 1: Summary of the flint assemblage

Category type	Pit 1007	Pit 3078	Total
Flake	20	2	23
Levallois flake	2	1	2
Blade		3	2
Bladelet	4		8
Blade index	15.39% (4/26)	66.67% (4/6)	28.57% (10/35)
Irregular waste	3		5
Burin spall	1		1
Sieved chip 10-4mm	1	6	10
Sieved chip 4-2mm	13	13	26
Scraper end	1		1
Scraper disc	2		2
Knife other	1		2
Retouched blade	1		1
Retouch miscellaneous			1
Total	49	25	84
No. burnt (%)	0%	0%	2/84 (2.38%)
No. broken (%) (not including waste)	4/35 (11.43%)	3/6 (50%)	9/48 (18.75%)
No. retouched (%) (not including waste)	5/35 (14.29%)	0%	7/48 (14.58%)

Table 2: Quantification of animal bone

	Hand Collected	Sieved
domestic cattle	13	
domestic cattle?	2	
caprine	31	1
pig	3	
horse	6	
dog	3	
mouse	2	
wood mouse	15	1
wood mouse?	1	
harvest mouse		
house mouse		1
house mouse?	1	
micro mammal	4	
medium mammal	31	3
large mammal	232	
Total Mammal	344	6
frog/toad	4	
Total Amphibian	4	0
Total NISP	348	6
Total NSP	380	8

NISP = Number of Identified Specimens; NSP = Number of SPecimens

Table 3: Summary of charred plant remains

		Sample no.	7	4	2	3
		Context no.	1006	3075	3031	3032
		Feature	Pit 1007	Pit 3035	Pit 3030	Pit 3030
		Phase	Late Neolithic	Middle Iron Age	Middle Iron Age	Middle Iron Age
		Vol Processed	18L	35L	7L	7L
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	grain		8		
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	glume base		6	3	
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	spikelet fork base		3	5	
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	barley	grain				
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	barley	rachis		2		
Indet cereal				4	6 + F	4
Fabaceae	2mm legume	seed		1 + 3 cot.	2	
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	hazel	nutshell fragment	5	1	1	
Polygonaceae	knotweed family	seed		3		
<i>Chenopodium/Atriplex</i>	goosefoot/orache	seed			2	
<i>Galium</i> sp.	bedstraw	seed		5	3	2
Cyperaceae	sedge family	seed			1	
Poaceae	small grass	seed		2		
indet		seed		4		

F fragments
cot cotyledons

Table 4: Summary of charcoal

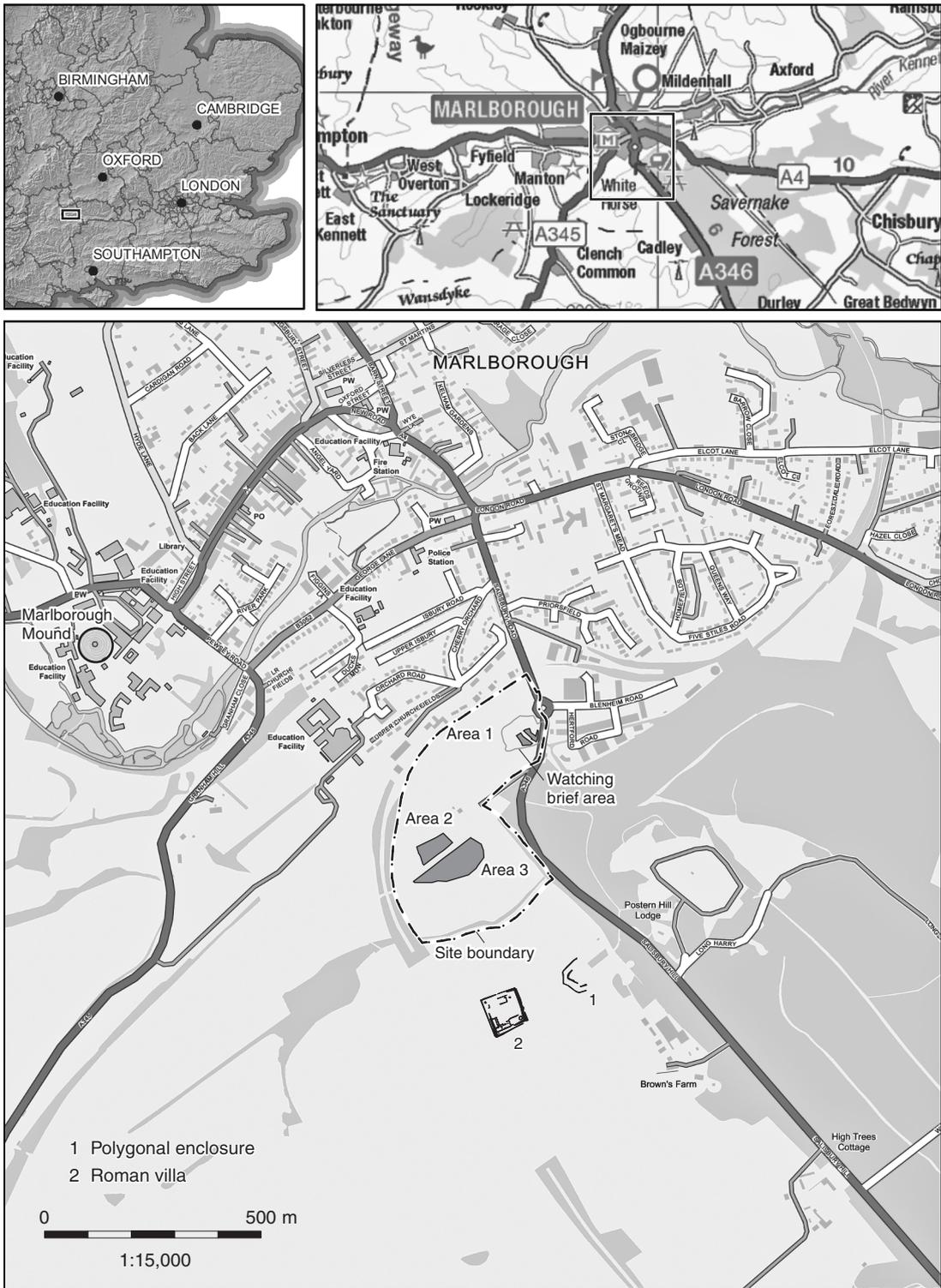
	Sample no.	7	1	4	2	3
	Context no.	1006	3004	3075	3031	3032
	Feature	Pit 1007	Pit 3003	Pit 3035	Pit 3030	Pit 3030
	Phase	Late Neolithic	Neolithic-middle Bronze Age	Middle Iron Age	Middle Iron Age	Middle Iron Age
	Vol Processed	18L	24L	35L	7L	7L
<i>Prunus spinosa</i> L.	blackthorn	1				
Pomoideae	hawthorn/apple/rowan type	36				
cf Pomoideae	cf hawthorn/apple/rowan type	3		2		
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak		52 (h)	14	45 (h)	50
cf <i>Quercus</i> sp.	cf oak				1	
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	hazel	1	1		2	
cf <i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	cf hazel	1		1 r		
indet		2		3	2	
TOTAL		44	53	20	50	50

h heartwood

r roundwood

Table 5: Summary of molluscs

Sample no.	7	1	4	2
Context no.	1006	3004	3075	3031
Feature	Pit 1007	Pit 3003	Pit 3035	Pit 3030
Phase	Late Neolithic	Neolithic-Middle Bronze Age	Middle Iron Age	Middle Iron Age
Vol Processed	18L	24L	35L	7L
<i>Cecilioides acicula</i>		1	10	3
<i>Trochulus hispidus</i>	12		1	1
<i>Vallonia excentrica</i>	3			1
<i>Vallonia pulchella</i>	2			
<i>Vallonia sp.</i>	3			
<i>Vertigo pygmaea</i>	1			



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Figure 1: Site location

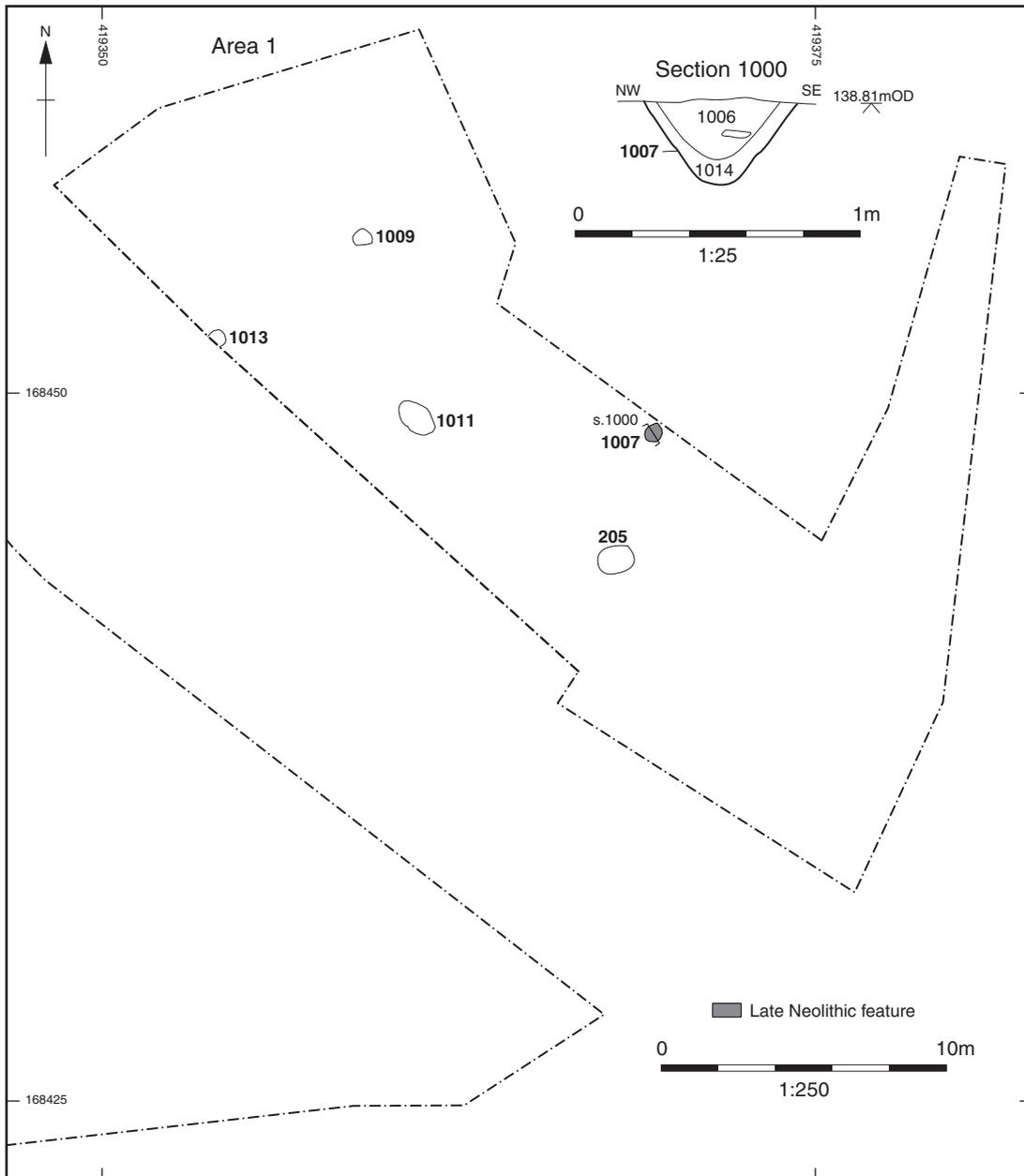


Fig 2: Plan of Area 1 and section of late Neolithic pit 1007

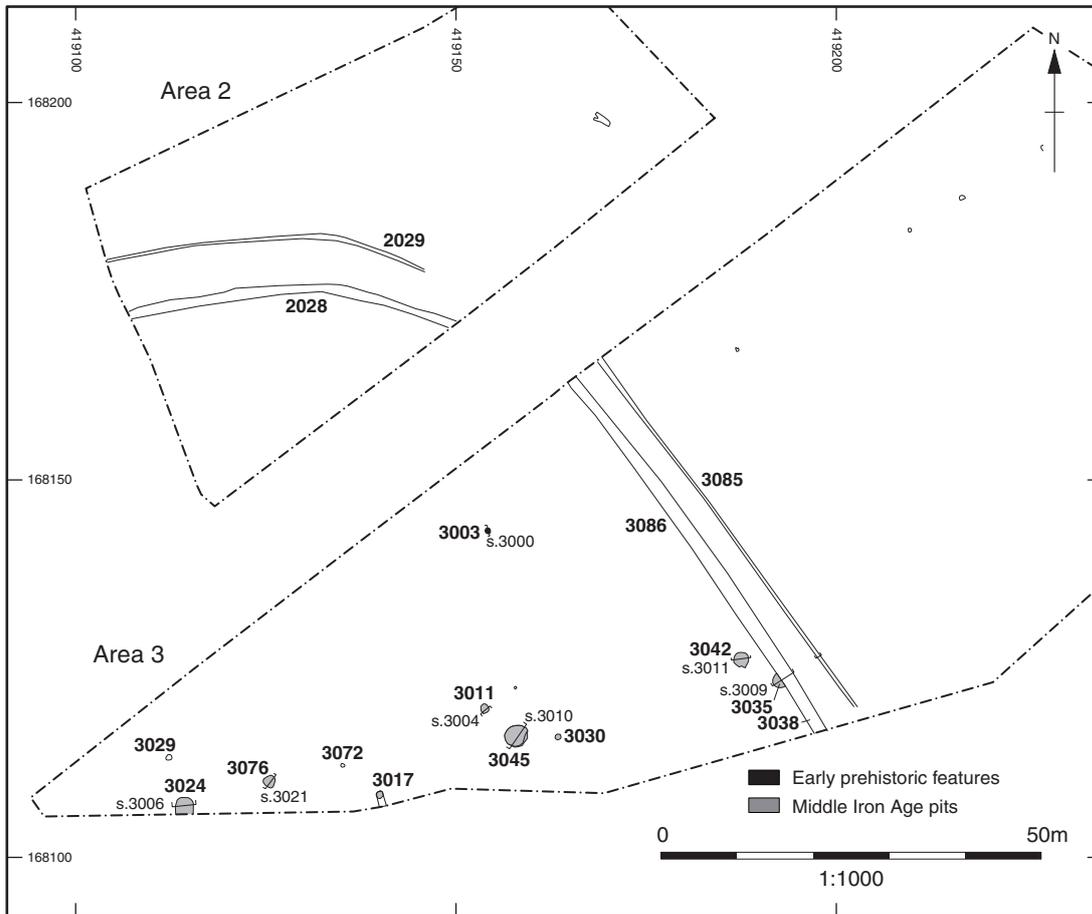


Fig 3: Plan of areas 2 and 3

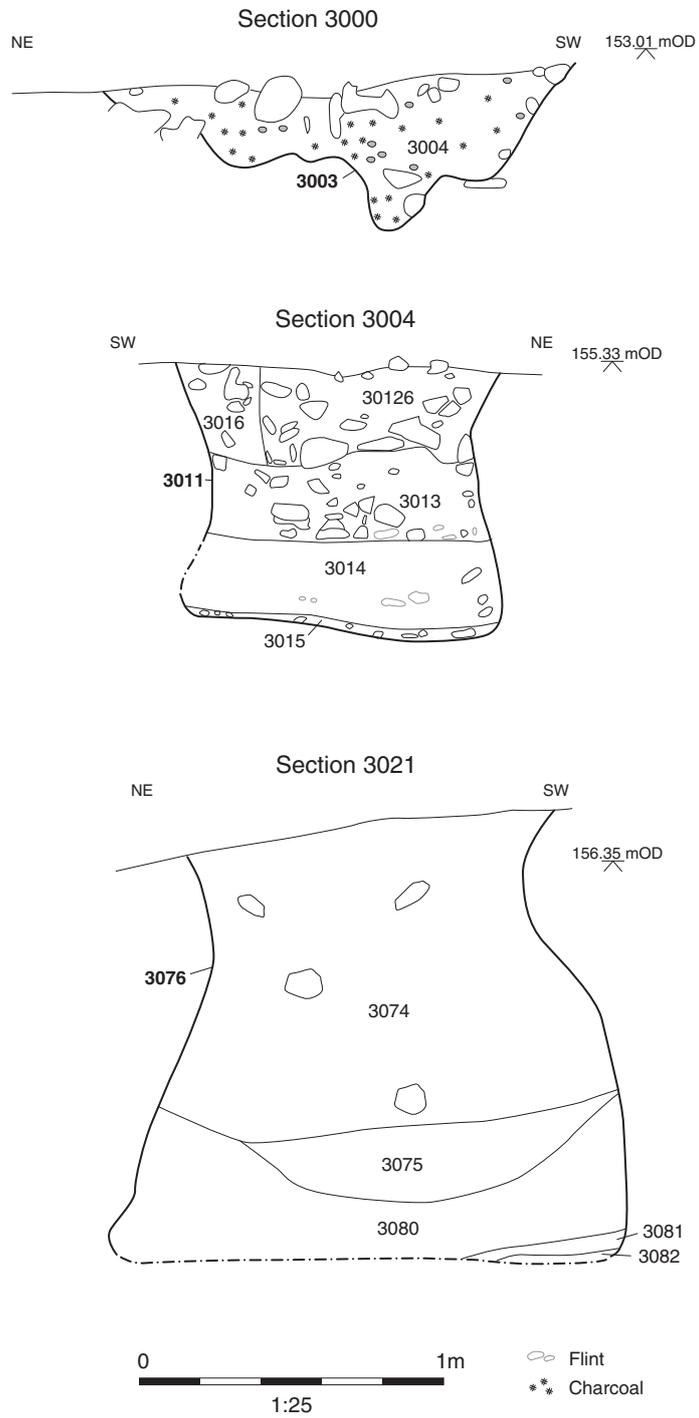


Fig 4: Sections of earlier prehistoric pit 3003 and beehive pits 3011 and 3076

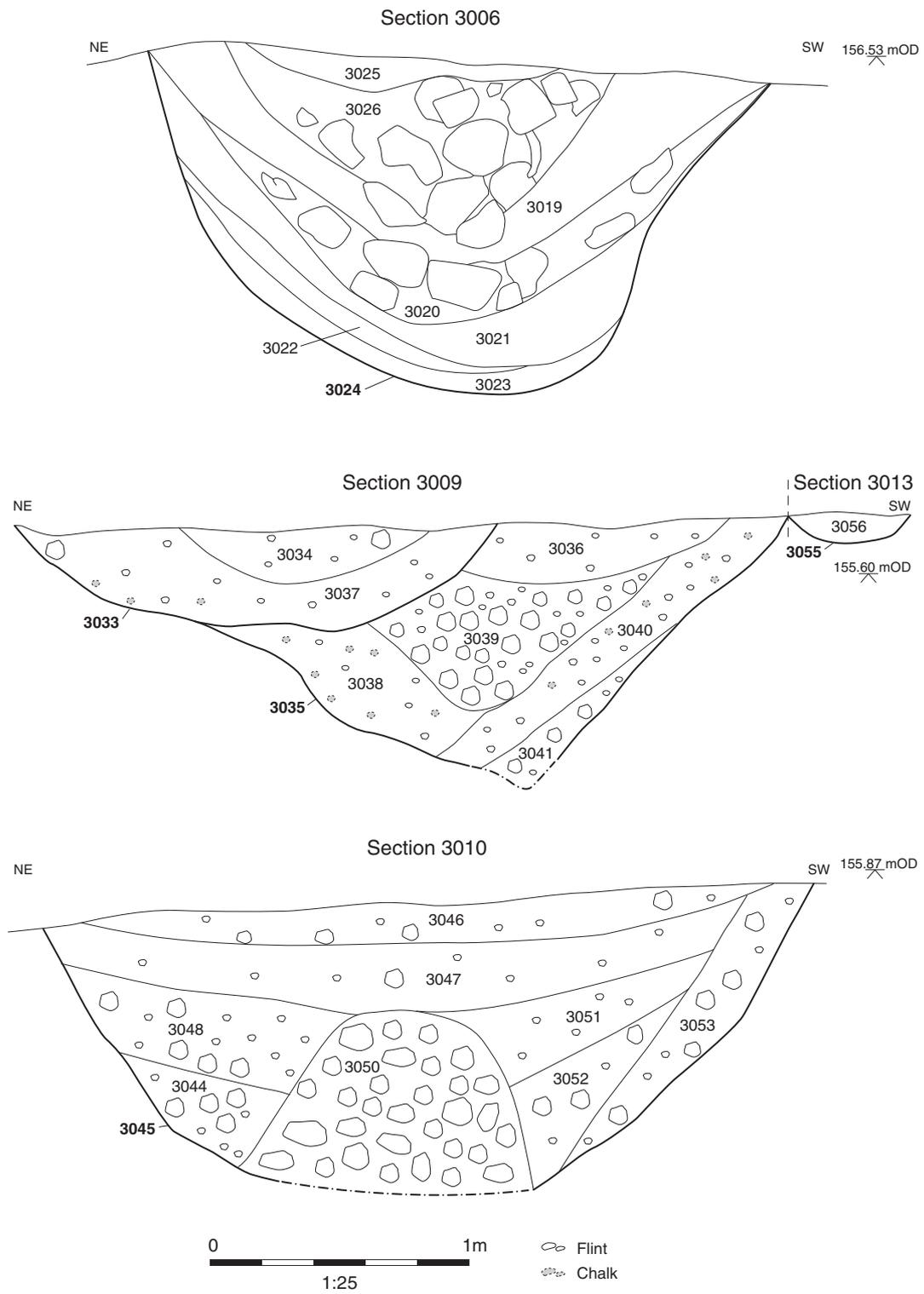


Fig 5: Sections of concave pits 3024, 3035 and 3045

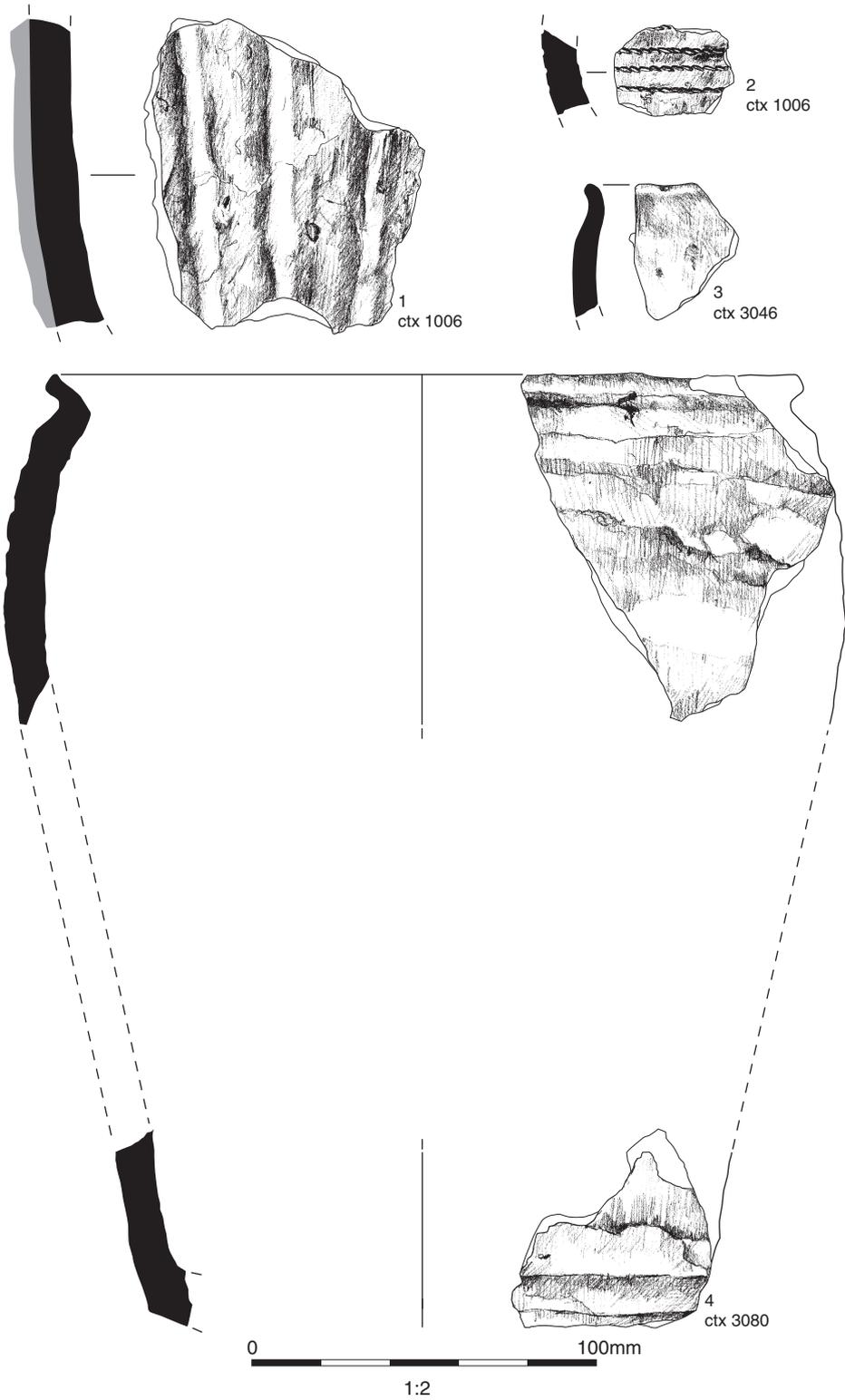


Figure 6: Pottery from late Neolithic pit 1006 (nos 1 and 2) and middle Iron Age pits 3045 (no. 3) and 3076 (no. 4)

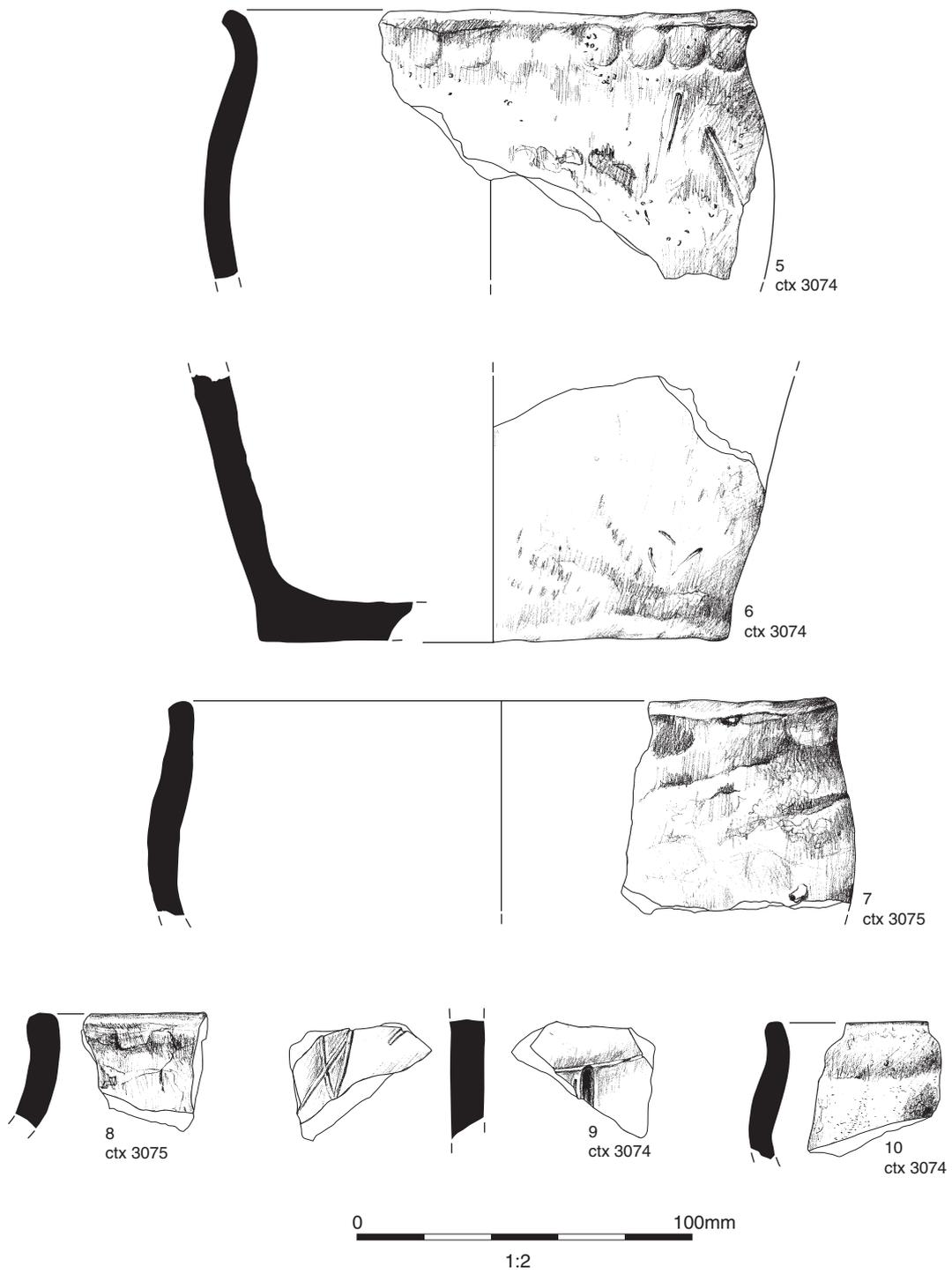


Figure 7: Pottery from middle Iron Age pit 3076 (nos 5-10)

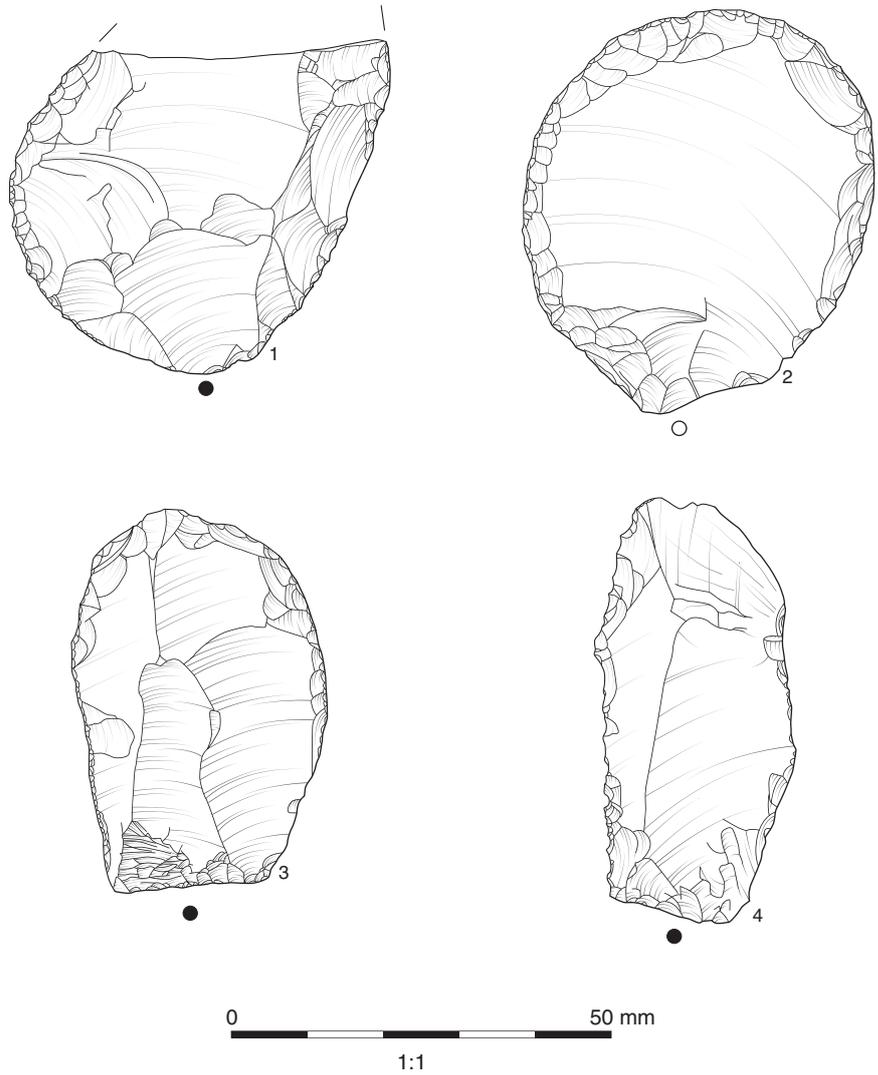


Figure 8: Worked flint



Figure 9: Chalk weights from middle Iron Age pit 3011



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