Chapter 3: Mesolithic and Earlier Neolithic Activity

by Alistair Barclay and Philippa Bradley

MESOLITHIC

by Philippa Bradley

Mesolithic finds from Oxfordshire have been summarised by Case (1952–3, fig. 1; 1986, map 2) and Holgate (1986, fig. 5). Contemporary material from the vicinity of Barrow Hills is relatively sparse. Mesolithic flintwork has been recovered from Radley, near Goose Acre Farm (PRN 9867), Thrupp (PRN 2083), near Thrupp Farm (PRN 11462), S of Pumney Farm (PRN 13711), Abingdon (PRN 12275; P Bradley forthcoming) and Kennington (PRN 1425). A geometric microlith from near Goose Acre Farm (PRN 9867) and an unstratified subtriangular backed bladelet from the Abingdon causewayed enclosure (Avery 1982, 40) are the only certain later Mesolithic finds in the vicinity.

Scant evidence for Mesolithic activity was found in the course of the excavations. Two fragmentary microliths (Fig. 4.6, F14; Fig. 4.8, F20), two microburins and a *tranchet* axe sharpening flake (Fig. 4.6, F16) were found redeposited in later contexts.

In some features, for example 601, 918 and 953, there were heavily corticated and abraded flakes. Some of this material may derive from Mesolithic activity. It cannot, however, be distinguished from the Neolithic material on technological grounds.

NATURAL FEATURES

by Philippa Bradley and Alistair Barclay

A number of treethrow holes, solution hollows and other natural features were excavated. The treethrow holes (features 2, 3, 8, 612, 3430, 3424 and 5353) were subrectangular to suboval in plan and up to 4 m wide. They varied in depth and had irregular bases. Their fills generally consisted of a brown sandy loam and layers of gravel. The characteristics of these features are discussed and illustrated by Moore and Jennings (1992, 13, fig. 6).

Feature 5353 (51438 98254; Fig. 3.1)

This was irregular in plan with a maximum dimension of 4 m and a maximum depth of 1.65 m. A layer 0.35 m thick of clean gravel at the bottom of the feature represents disturbed or overcut natural. The feature was filled with layers of yellow-brown gravel, red-brown loam and patches of charcoal. It has been interpreted as another treethrow hole and, together with the others, may represent an episode of clearance. A Mesolithic date for this activity is indicated by a radiocarbon determination of 7450–6600 cal BC (95% confidence)(8100±120 BP; OxA-1883)[1] for oak charcoal from layer 4 which also contained the bone fragment described below. The associated molluscs indicate a woodland environment (Table 7.26).

Animal Bone[T]

5353/4. Indeterminate large mammal tibia fragment.

The single bone is part of the shaft (maximum dimension = 180 mm) from the proximal end of the right tibia of a large ungulate. Part of the lateral border and medial face with muscular lines survive.

The bone has incipient longitudinal cracks and the surface is eroded by rootlets. It also has some deeper indentations and pitting on the external surface which are probably natural in origin. The origin of the bone breakage is unclear; none of the fractured surfaces clearly results from a smash or chop, though butchery cannot be excluded. No cut marks can be seen. In three respects it is a better match with cattle than red deer: the angle of the lateral border, the orientation of the lines for the muscle attachment, and the thickness of the shaft wall. It is from a beast larger than the domestic cattle, possibly from a female aurochs *(Bos primigenius).*

The bone is compatible with the presumed Mesolithic date, but its age and even its origin as part of a humanly generated assemblage are uncertain.

Other natural features

Features 10 and 3422 were thought to be solution hollows. Features 4, 5, 9, 12–15, 3283, 3425 and 3426 were irregular hollows and may represent natural undulations in the gravel.

Several of the linear features visible on aerial photographs (Fig. 1.8) were excavated. From the air these features formed no coherent pattern and had previously been interpreted as ice wedge casts. It had, however, been suggested that some of them might form a field system pre-dating the barrow cemetery (Parrington 1977, 38).

Those investigated in 1983–5 were of uniform appearance and had all the characteristics of ice wedge casts (Evans 1972a, 78). They were irregular in plan,

[1]*Radiocarbon assessment*[I]: sealed context of long duration (natural silt accumulation). The sample is possibly of mixed origin (from more than one charcoal lens?). The age-at-death offset is possibly considerable; the depositional offset is probably minimal for each charcoal layer, though open to contamination from redeposited charcoal. *Evaluation:* Low-value date: possibly mixed sample origin, context of long duration, and quite possibly considerable age-at-death offset.

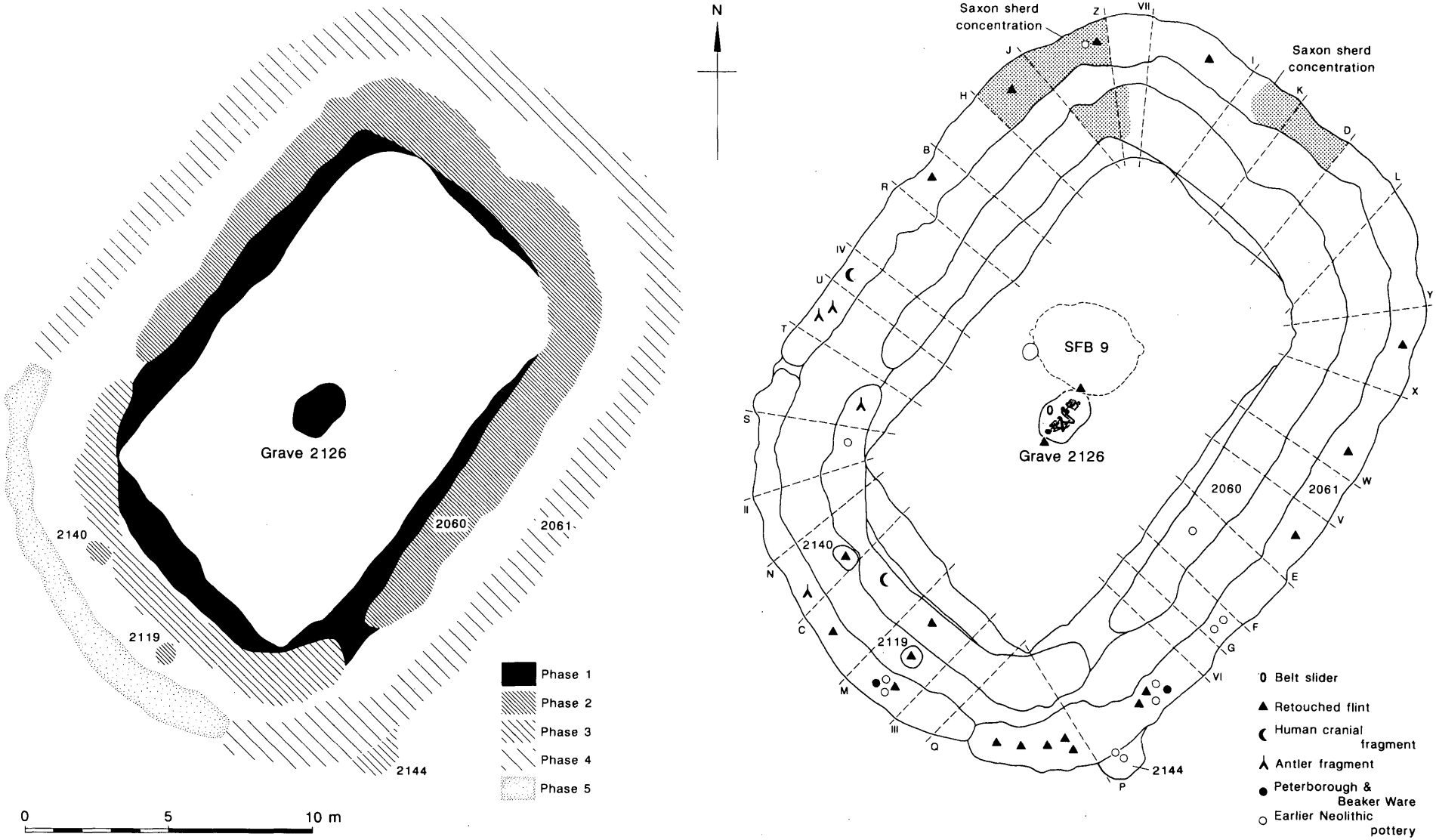

Figure 3.2 The oval barrow: phasing and finds distribution

approximately 1.5 m wide and filled with a yellow- or red-brown sandy loam. Blocks of conglomerate with a maximum dimension of 0.30 m were found in some of them. The conglomerate fills of the ice wedge casts had sometimes made the original excavation of the monument ditches difficult. This is best illustrated by the segmented ring ditch, where a ditch segment (2147) to the SW was unusually shallow where it coincided with an ice wedge cast (Figs 4.7–8). Causeways were sometimes left in barrow ditches to avoid digging through the conglomerate, for example in barrow 12 (Fig. 4.48).

EARLY TO MIDDLE NEOLITHIC

Material of this period has been recovered across the site over an area of approximately 1 sq km. Contemporary activity was concentrated towards the SW and near to the Abingdon causewayed enclosure (Fig. 9.6).

Middle Neolithic burials were scattered across the northern edge of the 1983–5 area, to the N of the late Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows. They took the form of the oval barrow, just outside the causewayed enclosure, a small 'flat' grave cemetery (5354–6) in the north field, and a linear mortuary structure (5352). One sherd of Abingdon Ware was found at Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986, 4); a probably early or middle Neolithic pit was found on an Iron Age site NE of the barrow complex (Leeds 1935, 39); another (2144) lay near the oval barrow; and pits 910/912 at the SW end of the cemetery may date from the middle Neolithic. Fieldwalking recovered a thin scatter of earlier Neolithic flintwork across Dry Piece. Comparable material was redeposited in later features across the site, with a notable concentration of blades and cores in the upper fill of the inner ditch (602) of barrow 12 (Fig. 4.55, F58–F60). An Abingdon Ware rim (Fig. 4.55, P55) was found in the outer ditch (601) of the same barrow and a single sherd in an Abingdon Ware fabric was found in grave pit 1 of barrow 15 (Ch. 5).

The oval barrow (51244 98195; Figs 3.2–3.4)

A full report on the excavation has already been published (R Bradley 1992a).The phasing shown in Fig. 3.2 is that proposed by Bradley. A brief summary of the report and an alternative structural sequence are included here. Bradley's interpretation of the sequence is phase 1: a rectangular mortuary enclosure with central grave, phase 2: a U-shaped enclosure which was then closed off and phases 4–5: an enlarged oval long mound. The double inhumation burial could have been associated either with phase 1 or 2. Alternatively the central grave could belong to phase 4–5, as discussed below and by Barclay and Garwood in Chapter 9.

The barrow ditches and internal features were clearly visible as cropmarks (Fig. 1.8).

Structural Sequence

The original monument is interpreted as a rectangular enclosure (phase 1). This was then transformed into a U-shaped enclosure which was eventually closed off (phases 2–3). In its final form the monument was redesigned as an oval barrow (phases 4–5). The central grave belongs with either the U-shaped enclosure or, more probably, the oval barrow.

Rectangular enclosure (Phase 1)

An area 15 m x 9 m was defined by a continuous flat-bottomed trench. At least six posts were set into the primary gravel fill. Small quantities of flint flakes and animal bones were found in the central NE section (D) of ditch.

U-shaped enclosure (Phase 2–3)

Phase 2. The enclosure was redefined by a more substantial U-shaped ditch open at the SW end. The ditch spoil was probably used to construct an earthwork. Posts were set in a bedding trench within the ditch. Two split timber posts were erected outside the open SW end of the monument, in postholes 2119 and 2140. Worked flints, including a knife (Fig. 3.4, F4) and a retouched flake, were deposited in the two postholes.

A sherd of earlier Neolithic pottery was found in the secondary fill of the ditch near the S terminal of the enclosure. Fragmentary animal bone was distributed through the upper fills of the ditch.

Phase 3. An arc of ditch was dug across the SW end of the monument, curving out away from the line of the phase 1 ditch but respecting the two timber posts (postholes 2119 and 2140). This could suggest that the posts were still in position. Causeways were left between the terminals of the new ditch and the U-shaped enclosure. An oval pit (2144), which dates to at least this phase, was dug near to the SE causeway. Sherds of Abingdon Ware, including a rim (Fig. 3.4, P1), and worked flints were deposited in it.

Posts were set in a bedding trench cut into the primary fill of the ditch, perhaps contemporaneously with the comparable insertion of posts into the phase 2 ditch.

A fragmentary antler rake (AB1) was recovered from the base of the NW terminal of ditch 2060, and animal bone was found in the upper fills of the ditch. Two sherds of Abingdon Ware were found in the upper ditch fill, section S, and a human skull fragment came from section C (Fig. 3.2). A radiocarbon determination of 3370–3030 cal BC (92% confidence) (4500±60 BP; BM-2392)[2] was obtained from the collagen from the antler rake.

[2]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: Discrete, possibly deliberate, deposit from a sealed context. The possibility that the antler was intentionally placed on the ditch's bottom suggests it may have been a short duration event. The age-at-death offset is minimal and the depositional offset is unknown. The sample provides a *tpq* for the silting and backfilling of the phase 3 ditch, possibly directly associated with digging of the phase 4/5 ditch. *Evaluation:* High (?)-value date, though sample source possibly redeposited.

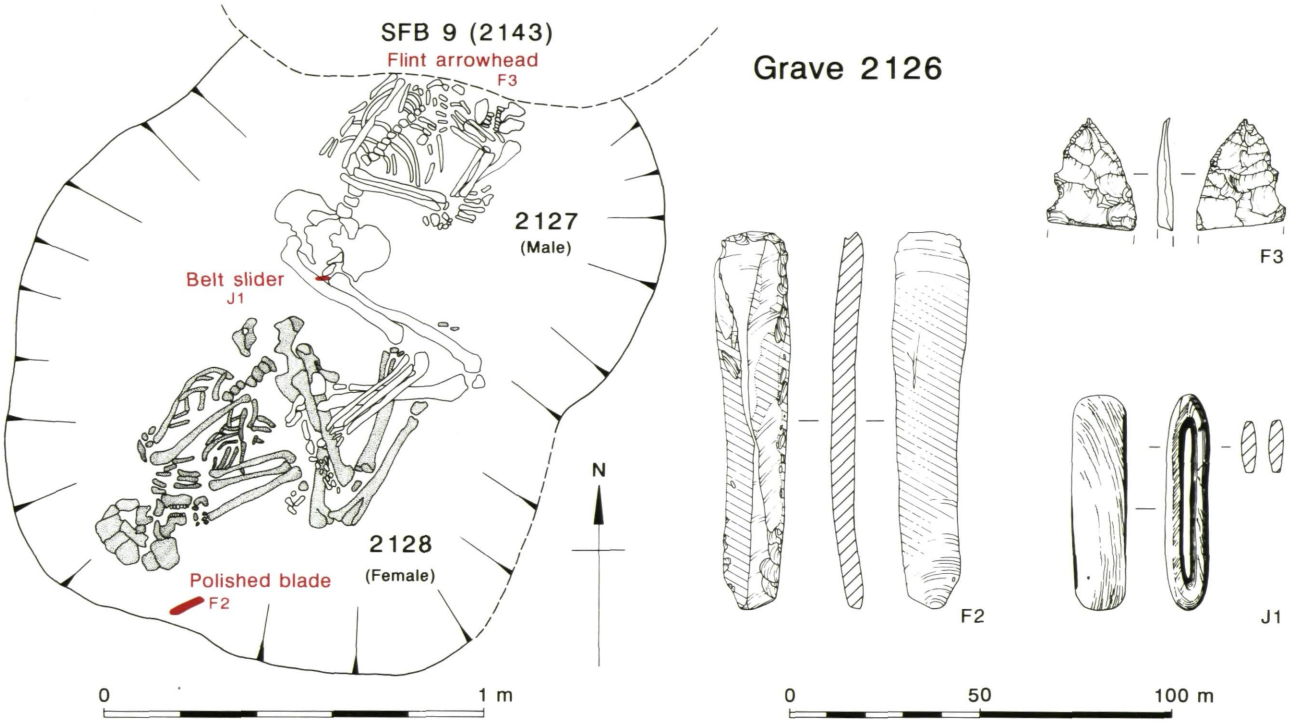

Figure 3.3 The oval barrow: central burial

Central Grave (Phase 2–3 or 4–5?)

An oval grave (2126) was dug at the centre of the enclosure, aligned on its long axis and possibly cutting through an existing earthwork. The remains of two adults were placed in the grave (Fig. 3.3). The SW burial (2128) was of an adult female, accompanied by a polished flint knife placed near the head (Fig. 3.3, F2). This was overlain by the legs of the NE burial (2127), which was of an adult male, accompanied by a jet or shale belt slider which had been placed near the hip (Fig. 3.3, J1) and probably by a leaf-shaped arrowhead (Fig. 3.3, F3). The arrowhead was found in a sunken-featured building cutting the grave, and could originally have had been placed near the head. The radiocarbon determinations for these burials, both on human longbone collagen, do not quite overlap. That for 2127 is 2890–2570 cal BC (91% confidence)(4120±60 BP; BM-2707), that for 2128 is 2490–2190 cal BC (94% confidence)(3860±50 BP; BM–2708)[3]. The excavator has argued that they are anomalous, on the grounds that the almost symmetrical layout of the two bodies suggests that they were contemporaneous, that the dates are late for the associated grave goods, that they conflict with determinations on samples from the ditches (listed below), and that the poor preservation and shallow burial of the skeletons could have led to misleadingly young radiocarbon ages (R Bradley 1992a, 138). The problems of humic acid contamination are discussed in Appendix 1.

Oval Barrow (Phase 4-5)

Phase 4. The enclosure was redefined by a more substantial U-shaped ditch, segmented with at least 13 causeways and open at the SW end. The ditch spoil could have been used to construct a barrow mound. Posts were set into the primary fill. Two fragments of red deer antler (AB2–3) were deposited in the middle fills of the N ditch terminal and a human skull fragment was deposited in the adjacent ditch segment (Fig. 3.2). Two radiocarbon determinations, 3340–2910 cal BC (95% confidence)(4420±70 BP; BM-2393) and 3350–2600 cal BC (95% confidence)(4320±130 BP; BM–2390)[4]

[3]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: Both samples were from a sealed context of short duration (burial events). Both the age-at-death and depositional offsets are minimal. The samples date the burials, grave form and artefact depositions, and gives a *tpq* for the grave backfill. The location of the grave suggests a spatial association with the barrow although there was no stratigraphic relationship. *Evaluation:* High-value dates for the burials and grave context contemporary with ritual use of oval barrow site, although see main text.

[4]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: Both samples represent discrete, possibly deliberate, deposits from a sealed context, sample BM-2393 was below BM-2390. As a natural silt accumulation the context, a middle section of the ditch fill, may have a long duration. The age-at-death offsets are minimal, while the depositional offsets are unknown as the antler fragments may be redeposited. The samples provides a *tpq* for the backfilling of phase 4 ditch. *Evaluation:* Moderate-value dates: context of long duration, antler fragments possibly redeposited.

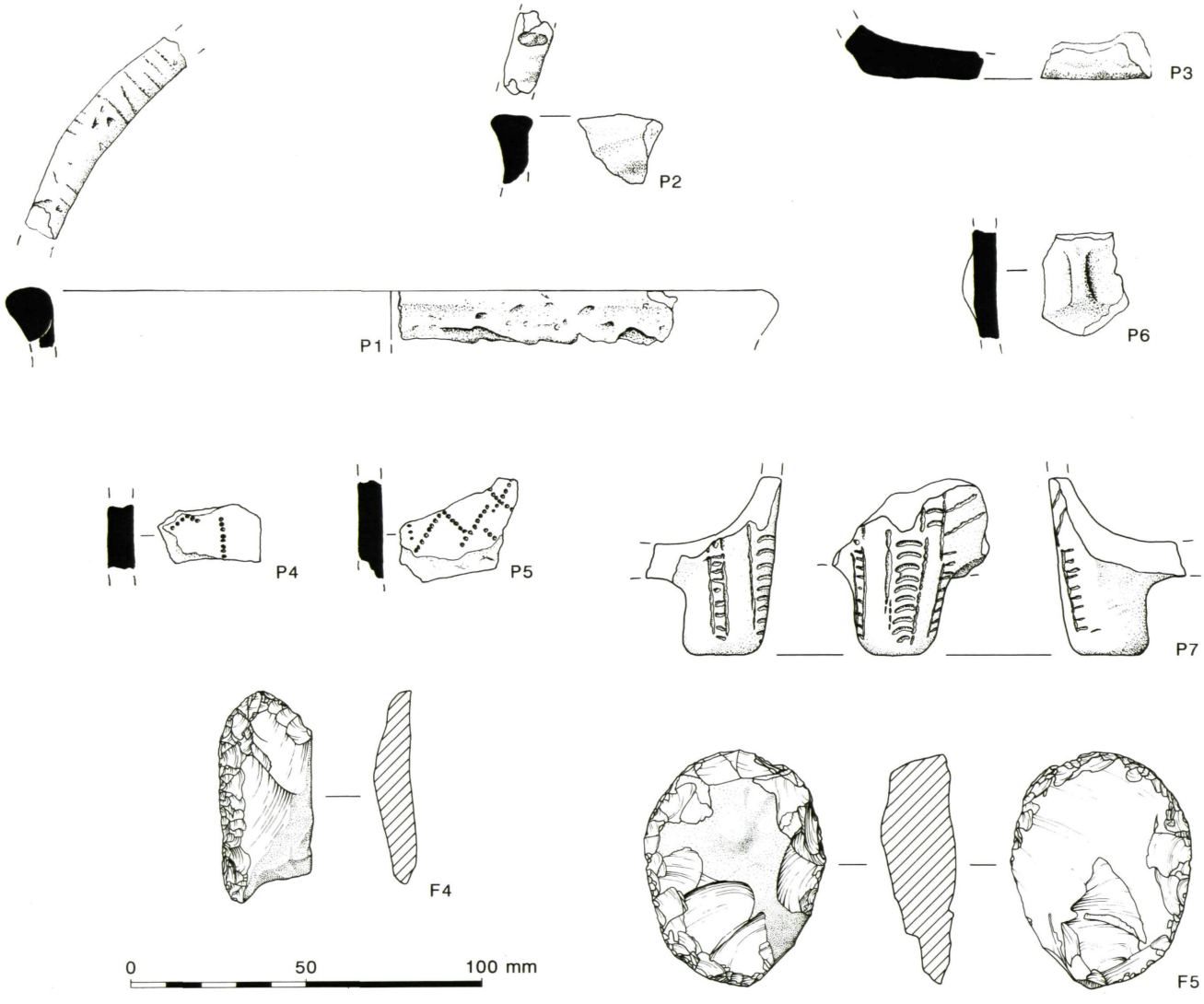

Figure 3.4 The oval barrow: finds from contexts other than the central burial

respectively, were obtained from the collagen of antler fragments AB2 and AB3.

Retouched flints and Neolithic sherds were deposited near the S terminal (Fig. 3.2, sections Q and P). Some of this material could have been derived from pit 2144 which was cut by the phase 4 ditch.

Phase 5. The SW end of the enclosure was blocked by the continuation of the phase 4 ditch. Redeposited gravel in the upper fill of the inner ditch could have come from the cutting of the outer ditch or could indicate the erosion of an internal earthwork, probably a barrow mound.

Antler AB4, with a radiocarbon date of 3330–2660 (4330±80 BP; BM–2391)[5] was possibly deliberately deposited in the primary fill of the ditch, while a retouched flint, a Beaker sherd and Abingdon Ware sherds were deposited in the upper ditch fill.

Continued Use

Later Neolithic/early Bronze Age. Four pits were dug at the SE 'front' end, and, episodically, the open end of the monument (Fig. 4.24). Grooved Ware was placed in two (2179 and 2180), Beaker in one (2181), and material of indeterminate prehistoric date in the fourth

[5]*Radiocarbon assessment*[l]: sealed context, possibly a deliberate deposit, of long duration (natural silt accumulation). The age-at-death offset is minimal; the depositional offset is unknown (possibly redeposited). The sample gives a *tpq* for the later silting of the phase 5 ditch segment. *Evaluation*: Moderate-value date: context of long duration, sample source possibly redeposited.

Table 3.1. Pottery from the oval barrow and associated features

Context	SSh'A:1/Neo		Sh(V)'C':1/Neo		U:1/Pet		GS:2/Bkr		S:2/Bkr		FQ:1/D-R		F:1/D-R		G'A':1/indet.		Q:1/indet.		S:-		Sh:-		SV:-		S:3/indet.		GQS:2/indet.	
2060	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1*	1 g	-	-	-	-	-	-
2060/G/3	6*	17 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2060/I/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1*	6 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2060/K/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7 g	-	-	-	-	1	8 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2060/S/2	2*	15 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2060/Z/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/D/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	13 g	1*	8 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5 g
2061/G/1	10*	25 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/G/2	1*	5 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/K/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1*	3 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/M1-M/2 interface	1*	2 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/M/1	1	20 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	17 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/P/1	5	16 g	1*	2 g	1	4 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1*	2 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2061/Z/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3*	31 g	-	-
2061/VI/1	2*	3 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2144	4	20 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2144/A	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1*	1 g	-	-	-	-
2143 (SFB 9)	1*	2 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Uncertain	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	48 g	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3.2. Struck flint from the oval barrow and associated features

Context	Irregular waste	Cores	Core rejuvenation flakes	Flakes and blades	Chips	Hammer-stones	Retouched	Totals	Burnt worked	Broken
2060/6	1	-	-	5	-	-	-	6	-	4
2060/4	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	1
2060/3	1	-	-	15	-	-	-	16	2	10
2060/2	-	-	-	16	-	-	-	16	2	12
2060/1	1	1	1	35	-	-	1	39	-	21
2060/-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	3	-	3
2061/4	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	4	-	2
2061/3	-	-	-	6	-	-	1	7	-	5
2061/2	1	-	-	11	-	-	2	14	1	9
2061/1	1	3	3	79	-	-	17	103	3	62
2119/1 Posthole	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
2127 Cent. burial	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	3	1	1
2128 Cent. burial	-	-	-	6	-	-	1	7	1	4
2140 Posthole	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	3	-	1
2144 Pit	-	-	-	9	-	-	-	9	1	3
2143 SFB cutting central burial	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	-	2
2175/1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
Topsoil	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	4	1	3
Totals	5	4	4	202	-	-	25	240	12	143

(3421). Probably Bronze Age comb-decorated sherds (Fig. 3.4, P4–5) and sherds of Deverel-Rimbury pottery (Fig. 3.4, P6) were found in the upper fills of the phase 2 and 4 ditches, and a Beaker sherd (Fig. 3.4, P3) in the upper fill of the phase 5 ditch. The foot of a polypod Beaker bowl (Fig. 3.4, P7) came from a Saxon context within the area of the barrow.

Saxon. A sunken-featured building (SFB 9) was cut into the centre of the oval barrow, damaging the NE end of the central grave (Fig. 3.3). SFB 9 was relatively shallow compared with other SFBs on the site and this has been adduced as evidence for a barrow mound (R Bradley 1992a, 132–4). Saxon pottery was found in the upper fills of both the inner and outer ditches, where it was restricted to discrete areas. Two notable concentrations occurred at the N corner of both ditches and in the centre of the NE side of outer ditch (Fig. 3.2). Very little Saxon material was found in the remaining ditch sections. The two concentrations appear to represent the deliberate dumping of domestic refuse. The upper ditch fills consisted of virtually gravel-free silt representing relatively stable conditions with little or no human disturbance (R Bradley 1992a, fig. 3), so that this material was probably dumped into the top of a stable hollow.

Formal Deposition and Ceremonial Activity

Both temporal and spatial patterns of deposition can be seen in the distribution of artefacts and other finds. This is particularly clear at the front of the monument, away from the area of Saxon activity (Fig. 3.2). It must be borne in mind that much of the material in the upper ditch fills could have been deposited incidentally to later activity.

Phase 1. Small quantities of worked flint and animal bones were found in the ditch.

Phase 2–3. The lower fills of the phase 2–3 barrow ditches contained very few finds. Two retouched flints, including a knife (F4), were deposited in the two postholes, 2119 and 2140, at the open SW end of the U-shaped ditch. A small quantity of animal bone and a single worked flint were deposited in the central, 'back', section of ditch 2060. A sherd of Neolithic Bowl pottery and worked flints were deposited near the S terminal of the phase 2 U-shaped enclosure. Sherds of an Abingdon Ware bowl (Fig. 3.4, P2), worked flint and animal bone were deposited in a pit (2144) near the open end of the monument.

Phases 4–5. A polished flint blade, a belt slider and perhaps a leaf arrowhead, accompanied the burials in the central grave (Fig. 3.3). Some suggestion of

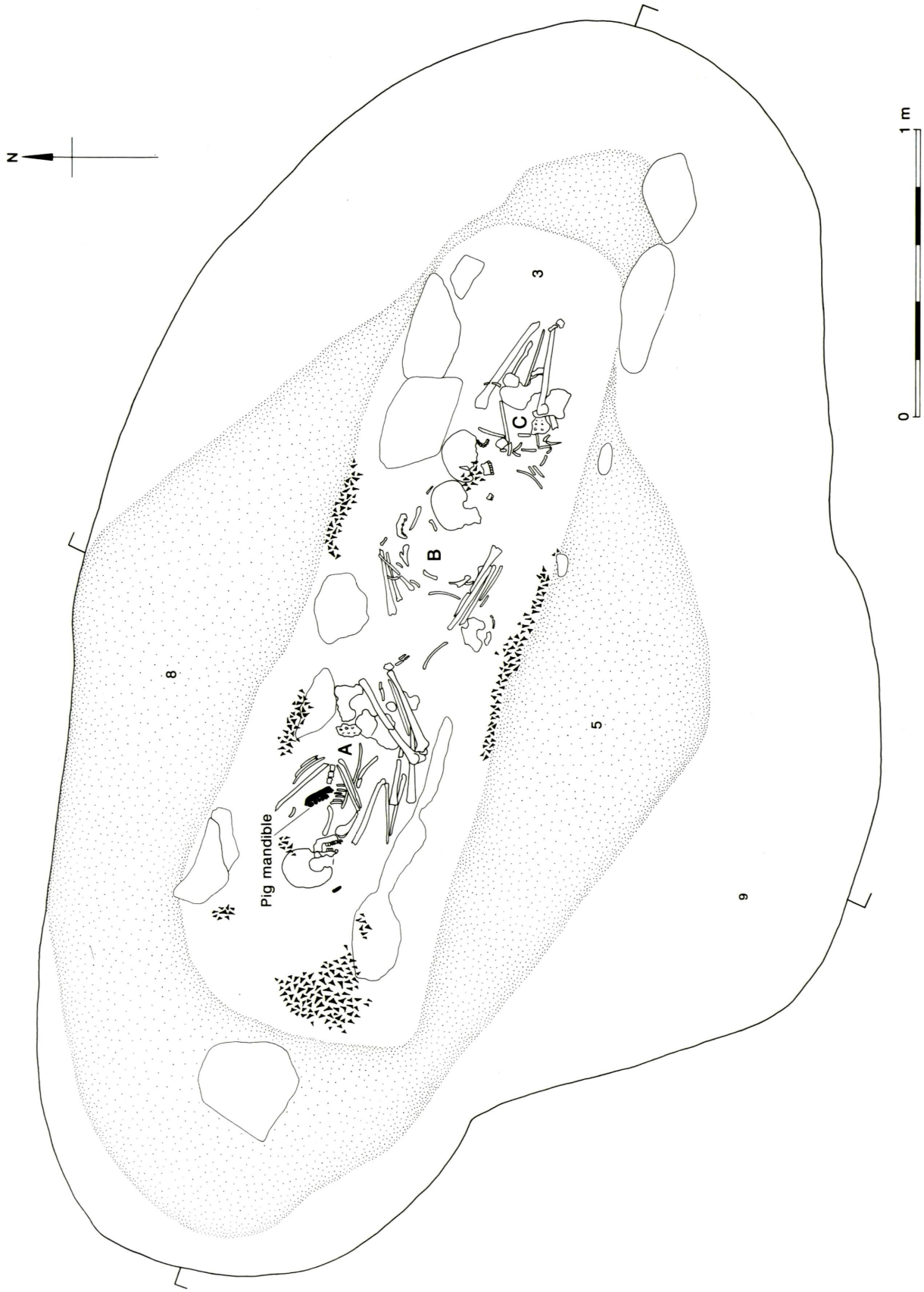

Figure 3.5 Linear mortuary structure 5352

patterned deposition was noted in the phase 4–5 ditches, in the phase 3 ditch and in the upper fills of the phase 2 ditch, again at the open end of the monument: antler and human skull fragments were restricted to the W side of the barrow and were complemented by retouched flint and Neolithic pottery on the S side. Unretouched flint and fragmentary animal bone were distributed throughout layer 1 in both the inner and outer ditches.

Human Remains[C,J]

Burial 2128 was an adult female who was believed to fall into the age range 30–35 years. Degree of completeness of the skeleton was category B and the preservation of individual bones was 3–2. Stature was estimated at 1.65 m.

Burial 2127 was an adult male. The age of the individual was believed to be in the range 30–35 years approximately, this estimate being based on completed fusion of clavicle and the degree of attrition. Degree of completeness of the skeleton was category C and the preservation of individual bones was 3–1. A slight swelling noted at the distal end of the tibia and fibula was associated with a mild periostitis. This may represent a haematoma which occurred as a result of some minor injury to the lower leg. This individual also had a midshaft fracture of the left clavicle. Stature was calculated at 1.76 m (Trotter and Gleser 1952; 1958).

The skull of 2127 was partially cut away by the SFB and a small quantity of loose bones from both individuals was recovered from the grave fill. The preservation of the individual bones of each of these skeletons was extremely variable. This is almost certainly due to disturbance consequent on the shallowness of the grave.

Two skull fragments were found in the fill of SFB 9, along with a proximal left femur and what may be a fragment of charred sacrum. The skull fragments almost certainly belong to the disturbed inhumation 2127. The skull fragments from the ditches could not be relocated for further study.

Pottery[G] *(Fig. 3.4, Table 3.1)*

P1. Pit 2144. Earlier Neolithic. Fabric SSh'A':1. One rim and two body sherds of a vessel with shallow grooved lines running across the top of the rim and oval impressions on the exterior. Much of the shell has leached out of the fabric (shell fragments survive in fresh breaks but not in ancient ones). The rim is heavy and has been thickened externally, and the rim sherd has broken along a coil joint. Colour: exterior pale brown, core grey, interior pale grey. Condition: all sherds are considerably worn.

P2. 2061/P/1. Earlier Neolithic. Fabric SSh'A':1. One rim, internally and externally expanded. The exterior is plain and the rim top apparently plain, although the rim top is worn.

P3. 2061/M/1. Beaker. Fabric S:2. One sherd showing the base angle of a Beaker with single non-plastic fingernail impressions. Colour — exterior and underside of base: orange; core: bi-coloured as for surfaces; interior: black. Condition: worn.

P4-5. 2060/K/1 and /Z/1. ?Bronze Age. Fabric Q:1. Two body sherds of a vessel with round-toothed-comb decoration. The decorative motif is not clear, although it seems to be complex and triangular. Colour — exterior: orange; core: black; interior: black. Condition: fair to worn.

P6. 2060/K/1. Deverel-Rimbury. Fabric FQ:1. A single body sherd with a sharply defined lug. Colour — Exterior: buff; core: black; interior: black. Condition: fair.

P7. Unstratified, but from a Saxon context in the area of the oval barrow. Beaker. Fabric GS:2. Foot of a polypod bowl, clearly of the Beaker tradition. The foot is decorated with ladder motifs on the exterior, and the bowl body also appears to carry a complex decorative motif. The 'rungs' of the main ladder motif are in a crescentic stamp and the 'uprights' in a very fine comb, but the motifs on either side do not appear to have the crescentic stamp, the 'rungs' being incised. Colour — Exterior: orange; core: dark grey; interior: pale brown. Condition: worn.

Flint[D] *(Figs 3.3–4, Tables 3.2–3)*

F2. 2128. Female inhumation in central grave of oval barrow. Polished knife on a blade. Polishing extends over much of both faces. Flake scars remain on dorsal face, where polishing is incomplete. Both edges are also polished. Hinge fractured. Sf 275.

F3. 2143. SFB cutting the central grave (2126). Leaf-shaped arrowhead, broken. Small area of cortex remaining at tip. Some more recent damage to left-hand edge. The arrowhead seems to have been already broken when deposited. Sf 294.

The arrowhead was probably associated with burial 2127 either as a grave good or as a weapon embedded in the corpse.

F4. 2140. Posthole at SW end of the oval barrow. Knife. Slightly invasive retouch along one lateral edge. Sf 271.

F5. 2061/P/1. Outer ditch of oval barrow. End and side scraper, chunky removals around the majority of the artefact. Scraping angle *c.* 50–75°. Sf 284.

The ditches of the oval barrow were comparatively clean. The outer ditch (2061) contained a greater overall quantity and variety of retouched pieces than the inner (2060); see Table 3.2 for overall composition. Material in both ditches was concentrated in the upper layers, the primary fills being relatively clean.

Only very small samples of complete flakes were available for metrical analysis (Table 3.2). Flakes from the inner ditch tend towards the small end of the size range and possess some soft-hammer characteristics. Only one flake over 20 mm long has a breadth:length ratio of 2:5 or less.

A similar pattern emerges from the metrical analysis of the material from the outer ditch. Again only a very small sample of complete flakes was available. Some soft-hammer characteristics were also noted. Of the flakes over 20 mm long only three have a breadth:length ratio of 2:5 or less.

A single-platform flake core was recovered from layer 1 of the inner ditch. A core on a flake, a

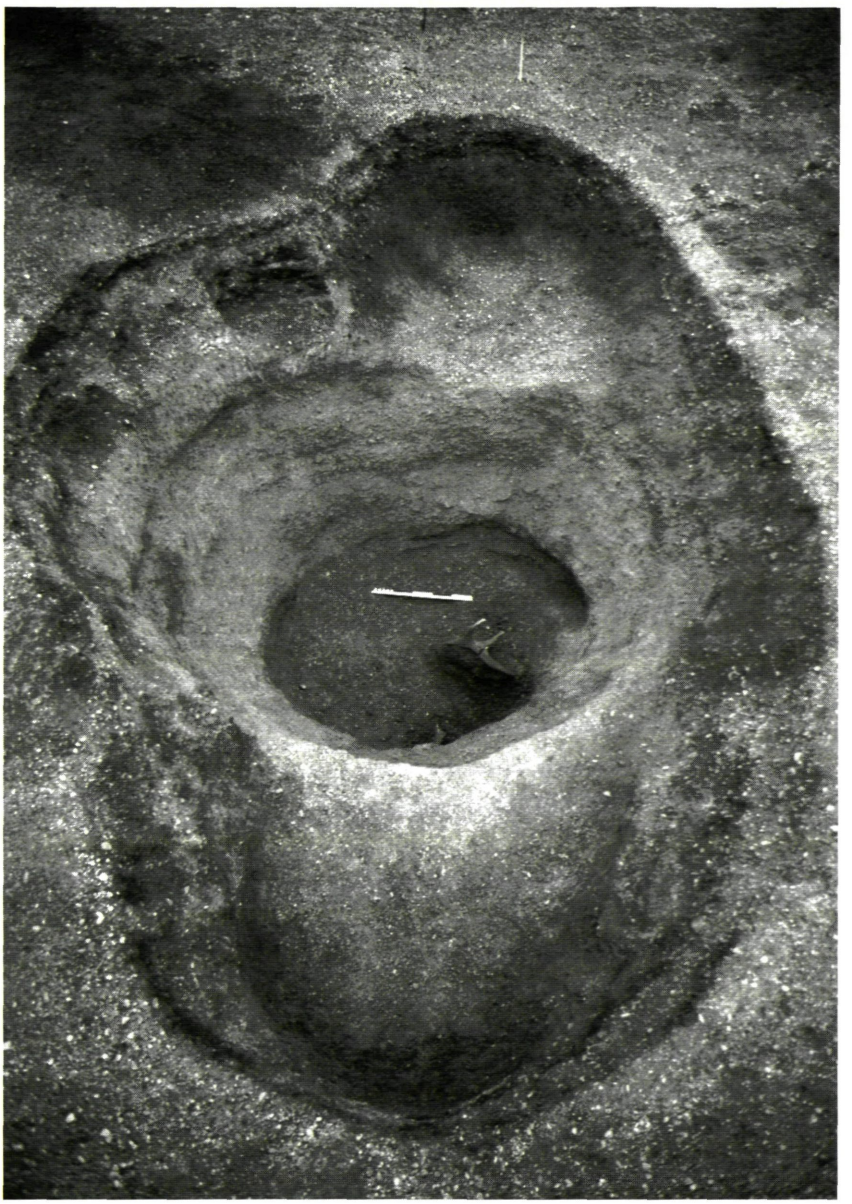

Figure 3.6 Linear mortuary structure 5352 and underlying pit after excavation, showing antler in base of pit. © OAU

single-platform blade core and a fragmentary core were found in layer 1 of the outer ditch.

Technologically some of the flint from the primary layers of the oval barrow is similar to the material from the causewayed enclosure, although the total quantity of material is small. Some of the flint in the upper fills has probably been redeposited through successive recutting of the ditches. A large end and side scraper (Fig. 3.4, F5) from the outer ditch (section P, layer 1) is similar to examples from the Grooved Ware pits, perhaps indicating continued use of the monument.

The polished knife (F2), possibly a utilized blade-like flake (not illustrated) and the leaf-shaped arrowhead (F3) have been inter-preted as grave goods. Unretouched flakes from the fills of 2127 and 2128 are probably redeposited and/or intrusive.

Nine unretouched flakes from pit 2144 were technologically similar to flint from the oval barrow.

Jet/Shale[A,V] *(Fig. 3.3)*

J1. 2127/8. Male inhumation in central grave of oval barrow. Jet/shale belt slider. The perforation is very narrow and has pointed ends. The profile is rounded. The slider has been cut from a piece of jet/shale and polished. The length is much greater than the width and therefore the slider falls within McInnes' group II (1968, 137). Length 56 mm, width 11 mm, height 14 mm.

Table 3.3. Retouched flint from the oval barrow and associated features

	Leaf arrowhead	Scrapers	Awls and piercers	Serrated flake	Knives	Misc. retouched	Totals
2060/1	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
2061/3	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
2061/2	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
2061/1	-	9	2	-	3	3	17
2119/1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
2128/-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
2140/-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
2143/1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Totals	1	10	2	1	5	6	25

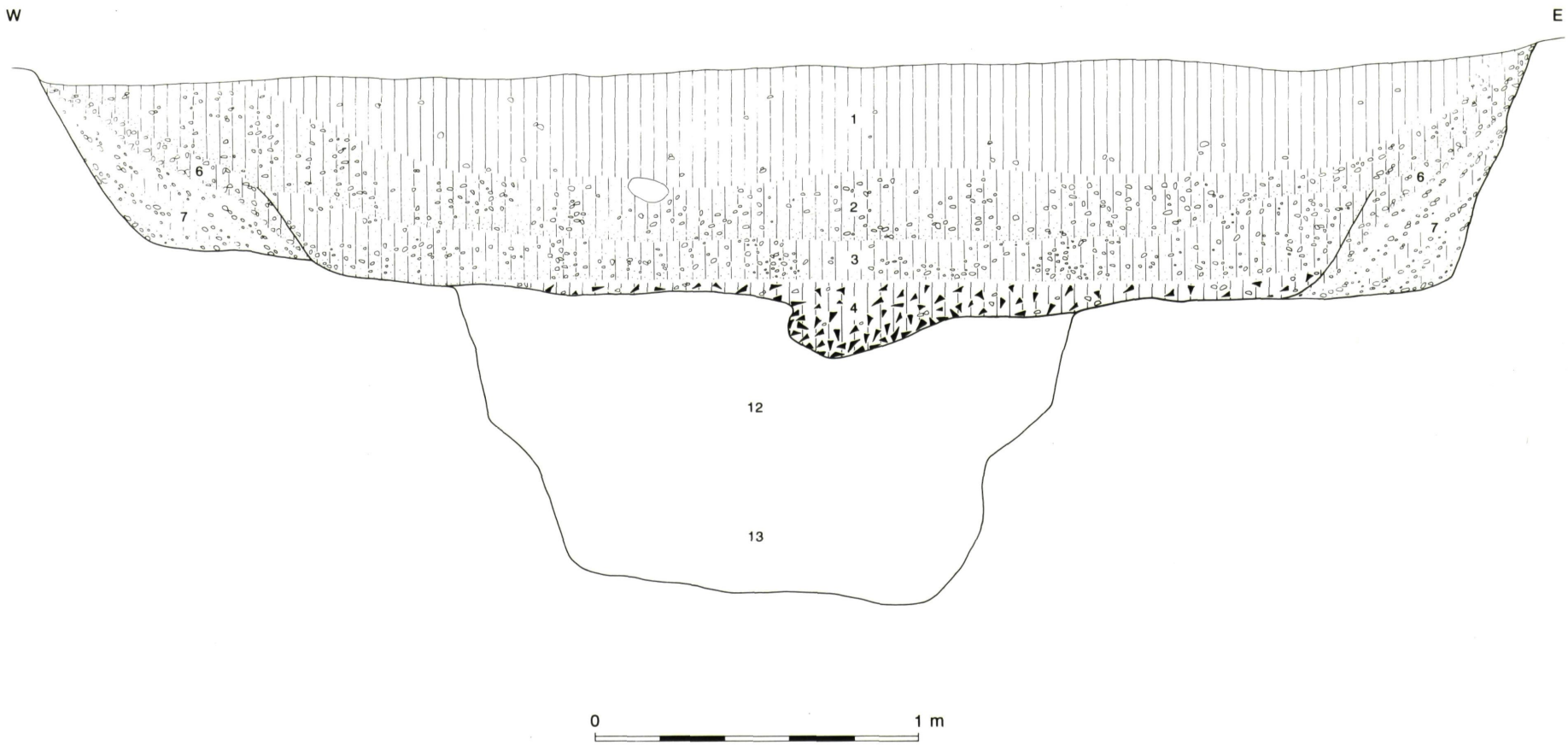

Figure 3.7 Linear mortuary structure 5352 and underlying pit: longitudinal section

***Antler*[N,T]**

Four groups of red deer antlers (AB1–4) were found in the ditches of the monument (Fig. 3.2). They were identified by Annie Grant, and were subsequently used as samples for radiocarbon dating.

AB1. 2060/T/2. Inner ditch, phase 3. Crown with three tines; beam broken below the crown. A photograph shows that the tine tips were well worn, almost certainly by use. Other antler crowns with very worn tines were found in ring ditch 611 (Ch. 4). These have been interpreted as rakes.

AB2. 2061/U/2. Outer ditch, phase 4. Crown with three tines, one broken in excavation; beam broken below the crown. Not a pair with AB1, as the crown has a different morphology. A photograph shows some wear on the tips, which may have been caused by use, but this is less certain than in AB1.

AB3. 2061/U. Outer ditch, phase 4 and AB4. 2061/N. Outer ditch, phase 5. No photographs located.

***Animal Bone*[N,T]**

2127. Central burial. One indeterminate fragment.

Barrow ditches 2060 and 2061. The lowest layer of the ditches, layer four, contained eight bones, including two incomplete cattle bones.

The upper levels (2–3), which could have been subject to later disturbance, contained 18 identifiable bones, eight of cattle, six of pig and four of sheep or goat. Layer 1 contained 39 further bones.

Linear mortuary structure 5352 (51461 98253; Figs 3.5–8)

The linear mortuary structure was visible on aerial photographs as an irregular oval cropmark.

Method

The ploughsoil was stripped mechanically down to the natural gravel and the feature was excavated by quadrants.

Underlying Pit

The pit had been dug 1.6 m in to natural gravel, it had a flat bottom 1.5 m wide and steep sides. The bottom of the pit had been backfilled with clean gravel (5352/13). Two pieces of antler (AB5) were deposited within the gravel. A radiocarbon determination of 4250–3700 cal BC (95% confidence)(5140±100 BP; OxA-1881)[6] was obtained from one of them. Above the gravel was a natural accumulation (layer 12) of loam with gravel. A further deposit of clean gravel, again possibly redeposited, occurred in the middle of the pit. Layers of loam with gravel spills in the top of the pit would suggest that it was left open. The pit appears to have been completely backfilled before being cut through by the grave described below. If this was the case then it is likely that the pit position was marked in some way, possibly by a surrounding earth bank.

Mortuary Structure

The mortuary structure was 'housed' in a suboval trench 4.70 m x 2.30 m. The trench had been dug 0.65 m into the gravel and cut the top of the pit (Figs 3.7–8). The outline of a 'coffin' 2.95 m x 0.75 m was visible in plan after the removal of layer 2. Traces of oak charcoal were found near the edges of layer 2 and are thought to have been the remains of a charred tree trunk coffin or mortuary chamber. Patchy horizontal spreads of charcoal were found at the top of layer 3, above the human skeletal remains (Fig. 3.5). Blocks of conglomerate lined the grave and defined the extent of the 'coffin' which they may have supported. The area between the coffin and the trench was backfilled with dirty gravel (layers 5, 6, 7 and 8). The grave contained three inhumation burials (A–C).

Burial A. At the W end was the crouched skeleton of an adult male. The corpse was articulated when buried, and had been placed on its right side with the head to the W and facing S. Both arms had been folded up across the chest with the hands placed near to the face. The legs were flexed with the knees drawn up above the pelvis and pointing S. The feet were below the pelvis and a pig mandible had been placed on the chest. Other animal bones were recorded near the head. A radiocarbon determination of 3650–090 cal BC (95% confidence) (4600±70 BP; BM-2716)[7] was made on a sample of longbone.

Burial B. Placed at the centre of the grave were the disarticulated remains of an adult ?female skeleton. The longbones lay in two heaps near to the feet of burial A. The pelvis was broken and lay in two separate areas, and the skull lay to the E next to the skull of burial C. A radiocarbon determination of 3360-3020 cal BC (84% confidence) (4470±70 BP; BM-2714)[8] was obtained from a combined sample of tibia, fibula and femur.

[6]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: sealed context, probably of short duration (primary backfill or silt accumulation). The age-at-death offset is minimal, while the depositional offset is unknown as the antler is possibly redeposited. The sample gives a *tpq* for later natural silting and the recutting for long mortuary structure. *Evaluation:* Moderate-value date for primary pit deposit: context possibly of long duration, antler possibly redeposited.

[7]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: sealed context of short duration (burial event). The age-at-death offset is minimal and the depositional offset is probably short as the skeleton is articulated and presumed buried shortly after death. The sample dates the body and ritual use of the mortuary structure, and gives a *tpq* for its backfilling. *Evaluation:* High-value date for use of mortuary structure: indirect association between death of individual and construction of grave; however it is possible that the structure was reused over a long period of time. Relationship to other burial deposits uncertain (both disarticulated).

[8]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: sealed context of short duration (burial event). The age-at-death offset is minimal, and the depositional offset is unknown as the skeletal remains may be redeposited from another context. The sample dates the body and gives a *tpq* for its disarticulation and subsequent deposition, and the backfilling of the mortuary structure. *Evaluation:* Moderate-value date for use of mortuary structure: indirect association between death of individual and final deposition in burial context.

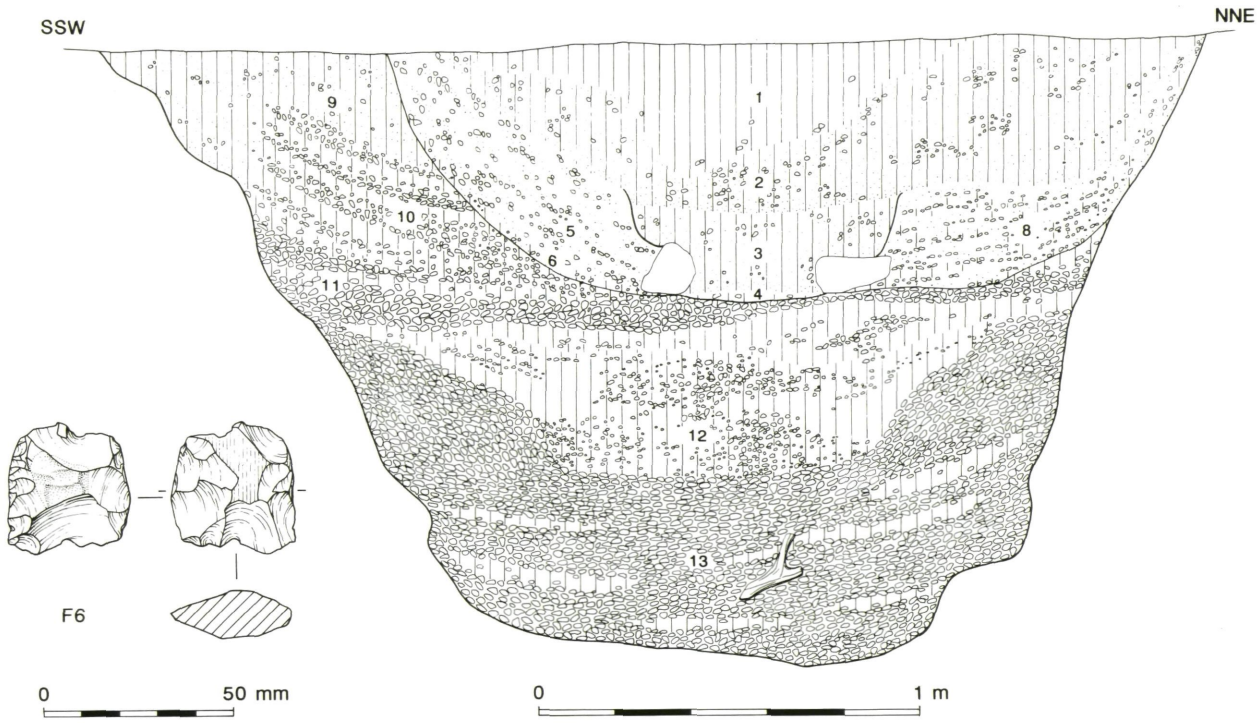

Figure 3.8 Linear mortuary structure 5352 and underlying pit: transverse section

Burial C. Placed at the E end of the grave were the remains of an adult female. Only the lower arm bones and some of the vertebrae were found to be articulated. The skull lay to the W, next to the skull of burial B. The remaining bones had been placed in a single heap. The pelvis lay above the longbones which in turn lay above the bones of the arms, ribs and vertebrae. A radiocarbon determination of 3350-2550 cal BC (95% confidence)(4270±100 BP; BM-2709)[9] was made on a combined sample of tibia and femur.

Organisation of the Burials

Burial A was the most completely articulated skeleton. It occupied nearly half of the grave and probably represented the primary burial. The bones of two further individuals (B–C) had been respectively buried in an articulated and semi-articulated state. The positioning of the individual bones suggested that they had been placed in organised heaps. The grave/coffin was backfilled with a mixed layer of brown loam and gravel (layers 2 and 3). A reworked fragment from a polished flint axe (Fig. 3.8, F6) and some fragmentary animal bone were deposited in layer 2. There was no surviving evidence for a barrow mound over the mortuary structure.

Human Remains[C,J]

Burial A. This skeleton is probably that of an adult male, and the degree of dental attrition suggests an age of perhaps 50 years. The assessment of sex is uncertain because, despite the probable male character of the skull, the postcranial bones were not at all robust and the estimation of stature at 1.59 m is unusually small for a male. Given the suggested age range, it is possible to argue that we are in fact seeing a female whose skull has begun to develop more rugged and masculine skull features, as is relatively common among ageing adult females (Molleson 1981). Degree of completeness of the skeleton is category C and the preservation of individual bones is 3. Two upper molars were lost prior to death and two teeth are carious. Two palatine tori were present. There was slight to medium calculus.

This individual had sustained a midshaft fracture of the left ulna and radius. Healing has occurred though both shafts remain thickened and there is marked malalignment of the radius, although the alignment of the ulna is more-or-less normal.

Burial B. The remains were those of an ageing adult female. The assessment of age is based largely on the condition of the dentition, as well as the level of degenerative osteo-arthritis. Attrition was extremely

[9]*Radiocarbon assessment*[1]: sealed context of short duration (burial event). The age-at-death offset is minimal, while the depositional offset is probably minimal, as even if the burial is redeposited from another context the time lapse would have been relatively short as some of the skeleton was still articulated. The sample dates the body and gives a *tpq* for its disarticulation and subsequent deposition, and the backfilling of the mortuary structure. *Evaluation:* Moderate-value date for use of mortuary structure: indirect association between death of individual and final deposition in burial context.

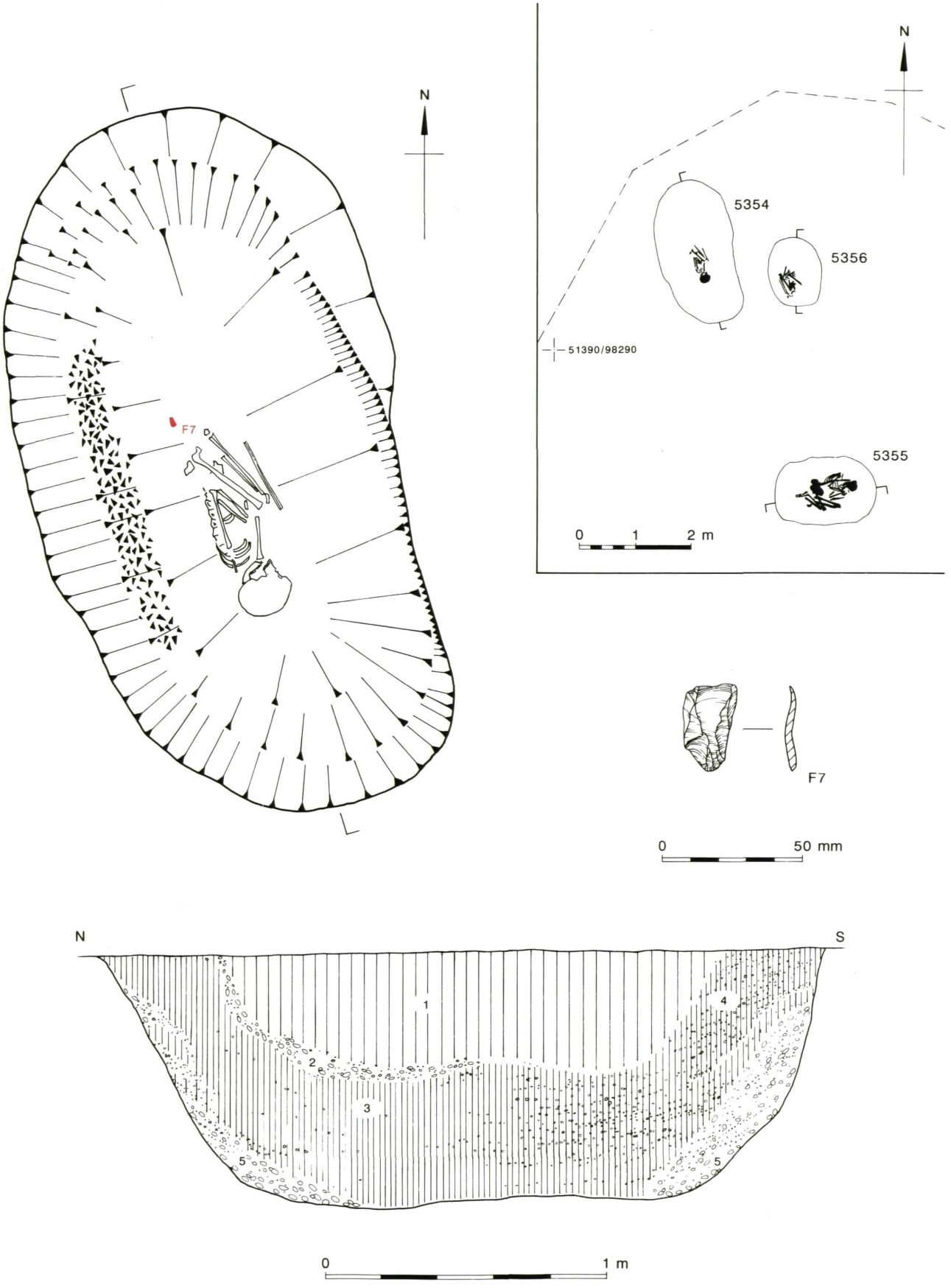

Figure 3.9 Middle Neolithic 'flat' graves and detail of grave 5354

severe and uneven where teeth survived and there were two abscesses, which affected the right mandibular second premolar and molar. All of the upper dentition had been lost prior to death and the alveolus was completely resorbed.

Marked degeneration of the articular facets of all surviving vertebrae had occurred alongside osteophytes. The inferior articular facets of the atlas and the superior articular facets of the axis were very severely affected. Eburnation and lipping were seen to affect the left scapula and humerus as well as the distal right humerus and the proximal right radius and the articulation of the right talus at the ankle. Three palatine tori were present. Degree of completeness of the skeleton was category B and the preservation of individual bones 3–2.

Flint[D] *(Fig. 3.8)*

***F6. 5352/2.* Exact position not recorded.** Reworked axe. Areas of polish remain on both faces, a side facet can be seen on the right-hand side. The burial also contained a blade-like flake (not illustrated).

Animal Bone[N,T]

AB5. 5352/13. Red deer. Two pieces of antler, a fragment of beam and a second incomplete antler anciently broken with butchery cuts, which was sent for radiocarbon dating.

5352/3. Cattle: distal humerus.

AB6. 5352/3. Pig: mandible, with teeth at Grant wear stages:

$$M_1\ f,\ M_2\ d,\ M_3\ C$$

By analogy with modern wild boar this suggests an age at death of 21–26 months; or up to six months younger if compared with unimproved domestic pigs (Bull and Payne 1982). The jaw was found lying over burial A (Fig. 3.5), and must be considered as a possible grave good.

'Flat' graves 5354-6 (centre 51393 98293; Figs 3.9-10)

Three 'flat' graves were located near to the NW edge of the larger of two areas stripped in the north field (Fig. 1.10). They may have originally formed part of a small cemetery.

Method

The overlying ploughsoil was removed mechanically to reveal features cut into clean gravel. The graves appeared as reddish-brown soilmarks.

Grave 5354

After the removal of the ploughsoil the grave appeared as a large suboval soilmark 2.60 m x 1.40 m. It was orientated N–S and had been dug 0.9 m into natural gravel, with steep sides and a flat base. A layer of clean gravel (5354/5), probably representing natural collapse of the sides, was recorded on the floor and around the edges of the grave. The crouched skeleton of a child had been placed above this layer, and a blade-like flake (Fig. 3.9, F7) was found near the pelvis. The body had been placed on its right side with the head towards the N. The left arm was folded and the legs were tightly flexed with the knees placed near to the chest.

A thin layer of charcoal (species unidentified) was found along the W side of the grave near to the body. This may have been the remains of a mortuary structure or coffin. The grave had been backfilled with clean sand and gravel (5354/4) and sandy loam (5354/3). The top of layer 4 may have been dug into (Fig. 3.9). The base of this second cut was marked by a layer of clean gravel which had been deposited from the N end of the grave. This cut was probably left open as it contained dark, gravel-free, red-brown loam. A small sherd of shell-tempered pottery of probable prehistoric date was found in the grave. Its exact context was not recorded. A sample of human bone (unspecified) was submitted for accelerator dating and gave a measurement of 3650–3100 cal BC (95% confidence)(4650±80 BP; OxA-1882)[10].

Grave 5356

After the removal of the ploughsoil the grave appeared as a small suboval soilmark 1.20 x 0.90 m. It was orientated N–S and had been dug 0.10 m into natural gravel. The profile was shallow and irregular: the E side was much deeper, 0.22 m, and had probably been disturbed by human or animal activity. The original grave profile suggested by the W side was probably shallow with steep sides and a flat base.

The incomplete, possibly disturbed, remains of a crouched inhumation, perhaps an adult female, were found in the S half of the grave (Fig. 3.10). The corpse had originally been placed on its right side with the legs tightly flexed. Probable damage to the pit had removed the head and upper body. A radiocarbon date of 3800–3100 cal BC (95% confidence) (4700±100 BP; OxA-4359)[11] has been made on the skeleton. The grave fill was of red-brown sandy loam.

Grave 5355

After the removal of the ploughsoil the grave appeared as an oval soilmark, 1.80 x 1.20 m. It was orientated E–W and had been cut 0.8 m into natural gravel. It had steep, almost vertical, sides and a flat base, and it contained the crouched skeleton of a man aged between 40 and 45 years. The body had been placed on the left side with the head towards the E. The arms were folded up towards the chest with the hands near to the

[10]*Radiocarbon assessment*[I]: sealed context of short duration (burial event). Both age-at-death and depositional offsets are minimal. The sample dates the burial and grave context, and gives a *tpq* for the grave backfill. *Evaluation:* High-value date for burial and grave context.

[11]*Radiocarbon assessment*[I]: probably sealed context, though disturbed at one end, of short duration (burial event). Both age-at-death and depositional offsets are minimal. The sample dates the burial and grave context; and gives a *tpq* for the grave backfill. *Evaluation:* High-value date for burial and grave context.

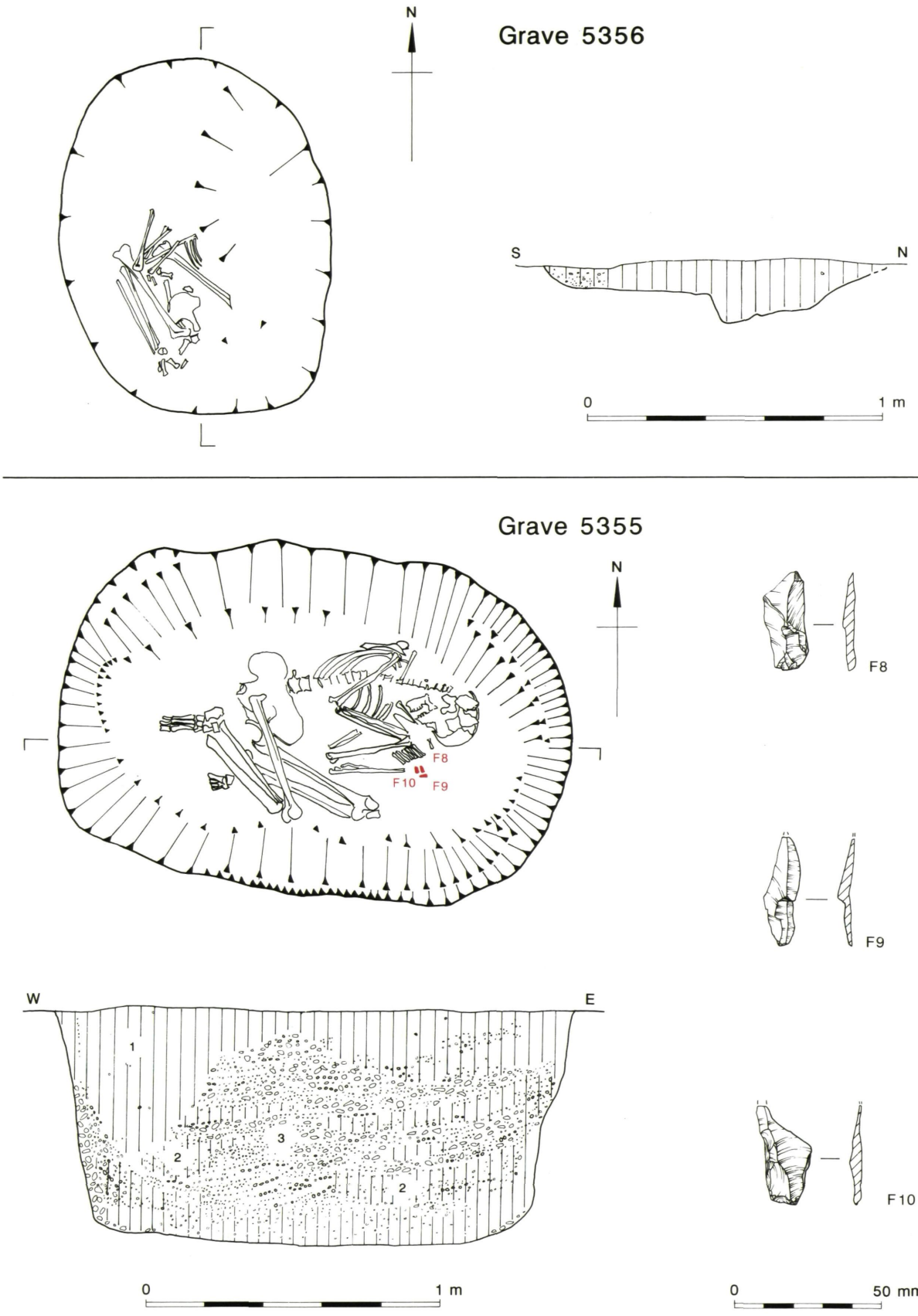

Figure 3.10 Middle Neolithic 'flat' graves 5356 and 5355

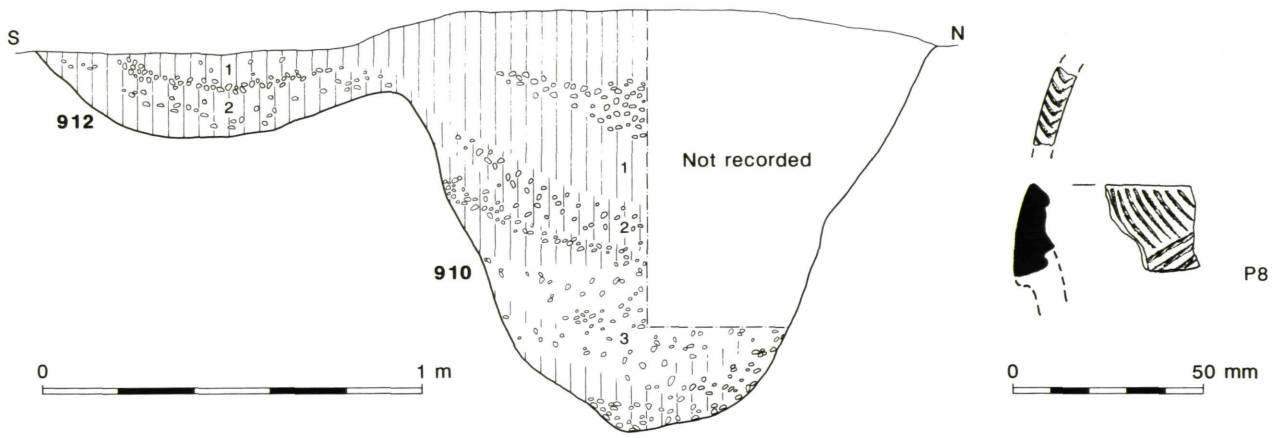

Figure 3.11 Pits 910 and 912

face and the legs were flexed with the knees drawn up towards the body and the feet placed below the pelvis. A radiocarbon determination of 3380–3090 cal BC (92% confidence) (4530±50 BP; BM-2710)[12] was made on the skeleton. Two blade-like flakes (Fig. 3.10, F8-9) were placed near to the hands and a third (Fig. 3.10, F10) was found near the left arm. The grave fill consisted of layers of clean sand and gravel (5355/3) interspersed with layers of loamy sand and gravel (5355/2). The grave had been disturbed at the W end (Fig. 3.10) where it contained red-brown silt (5355/1).

Human Remains[C,J]

Grave 5354 contained the remains of a child aged approximately 10–12 years. Degree of completeness of the skeleton was B and the preservation of individual bones 3–2. No extremities had survived and little of the torso was present. All four of the upper deciduous molars were affected by caries. There was slight calculus. Cribra orbitalia was present in both orbits. The aetiology of pitting of the roof of the orbits is not fully understood. It is generally seen as a response to iron deficiency anaemia which can be caused by an iron deficient diet, chronic disease, excessive blood loss through injury and parasitic infection (Roberts and Manchester 1995, 166). The evidence for infectious disease as a major aetiological factor in the development of iron deficiency is summarised by Stuart-Macadam (1992). At least three wormian bones were present in the lambdoid suture and a possible inca bone was located just above the lambda.

Grave 5356 contained the remains of an adult, possibly female, who showed no signs of extreme age. The right humerus had a septal aperture. Stature was calculated at 1.47 m. Degree of completeness of the skeleton was C and the preservation of the individual bones 3–2.

Grave 5355 contained the remains of an adult male. Degree of attrition suggests an age of perhaps 40–45 years. Degree of completeness of the skeleton was B and the preservation of the individual bones was generally 3–2. Abscesses are present around the lower left molars and an upper right premolar. This is likely to have made the process of eating extremely uncomfortable. Some degeneration of articular facets of the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae had occurred and minor osteophytes were present. There were squatting facets on the left and right tibiae. Stature was estimated at 1.71 m.

Pottery[G]

Grave 5354. A single small sherd of shell-tempered pottery (1 g) was found in the grave fill.

Flint[D] *(Figs 3.9-10)*

F7. 5354. Blade-like flake, hinge-fractured. Sf 685.

F8. 5355. Blade-like flake. Sf 682.

F9. 5355. Blade-like flake, slight damage at distal end. Sf 683.

F10. 5355. Blade-like flake, slight damage to distal end. Sf 684.

Summary of flint from 5354 and 5356. All four blade-like flakes (F7-10) are soft-hammer-struck with punctiform or linear butts and some previous blade scars on their dorsal faces. Platforms have been abraded

[12]*Radiocarbon assessment*[I]: sealed context of short duration (burial event). Both age-at-death and depositional offsets are minimal. The sample dates the burial and grave context, including the grave goods, and gives a *tpq* for the grave backfill. *Evaluation:* High-value date for burial and grave context.

to remove overhangs. The flake from grave 5354 (F7) was found underneath the pelvis. F8-9 from grave 5355 were placed near the hands, the other flake, F10, was to the S between the arms. The flakes are fresh and do not appear to have been used. Their position within the graves would seem to indicate that they were deliberately deposited as grave goods.

Pits 910/912 (51281 98066; Fig. 3.11)

Pit 910

This was the larger of two intercutting pits. It was suboval, 2.60 m x 1.50 m wide, and 1.10 m deep. It contained a thick primary fill of gravel with tip lines of red-orange loam (910/3). Above this was a layer of clean pebbly gravel (910/2). The upper pit fill (910/1) consisted of red-brown loam with clean gravel lenses and contained a rim sherd of Fengate Ware (Fig. 3.10, P8). Pit 910 probably cut pit 912 although the relationship was ambiguous.

Pit 912

This pit was shallow with a bowl-shaped profile. Its primary fill (912/2) was of dirty gravel with runs of fine red-brown loam; its upper fill (912/1) was of red-brown loam with gravel. Fragmentary animal bone, including cattle, came from layer 1.

Pottery*[G] *(Fig. 3.11)

P8. 910/1. Fengate Ware. Fabric U:1. One rim sherd of Fengate Ware with a convex collar and a well-defined rim bevel. The rim bevel is decorated with an incised chevron motif, and the collar with what appears to be a filled triangle motif, executed in continuous fingernail impressions (ie impressions overlapping or end to end, to form a continuous line).

There is also 1 sherd/1 g of sand-tempered pottery from the same layer.

Flint*[D] *(Table 3.4)

A group of possibly earlier Neolithic flint, including flakes, a single platform flake core and an end scraper, was recovered from this feature. Technologically this material is similar to flint from the oval barrow.

***Animal Bone*[N,T]**

910/1. Indeterminate fragments and a pig LI.

910/2. Indeterminate fragments.

912/1. Cattle astragalus and LP3; large mammal fragment, rib and pelvis (distal end chewed).

Table 3.4. Struck flint from pits 910/912

Context	Irregular waste	Cores	Core rejuvenation flakes	Flakes and blades	Chips	Hammer-stones	Retouched	Totals	Burnt worked	Broken
910	-	1	1	32	1	-	1	36	4	11
912	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	1
Totals	-	1	1	33	1	-	1	37	4	12