

Chapter 6: The Later Bronze Age and After

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LATER BRONZE AGE BURIALS

It is possible that no new barrows were constructed after the end of the early Bronze Age, instead the evidence would indicate reuse of existing barrows. At least three of these, pond barrow 4583, barrow 13 and barrow 16, contained funerary deposits and/or artefacts which can be dated to the later Bronze Age. The limited artefactual evidence could also indicate non-funerary activity.

Isolated finds of single sherds of Deverel-Rimbury pottery came from the upper ditch layers of the oval barrow (2060/K/1), the segmented ring-ditch (2043) and barrow 12 (601/D/3). Redeposited sherds and worked flints were found in Saxon buildings, SFBs 17/8 (3441) and 26 (4001), which respectively cut ring ditch 801 and inner ditch 602 of barrow 12, and in animal burrows 4713 and 4716.

At the SW end of the barrow complex Deverel-Rimbury and post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery was found the upper layers of the ditch of barrow 13 (Table 4.29). Some of this pottery could have derived from the weathering of a central barrow mound and it is possible that the Deverel-Rimbury sherds are the only tangible remains of cremation deposits. However, it must be noted that no cremated human bone was recovered from the barrow ditch and the sherds could equally represent domestic refuse.

At the NW end of the barrow complex Leeds (1938a, 31–9) excavated part of a secondary Deverel-Rimbury cremation cemetery in barrow 16, and sherds were found in the ditch of barrow 11 (Ch. 5). Although only part of the interior of barrow 16 was excavated, the remains of Deverel-Rimbury urned cremations appear to have been concentrated towards the SE edge of the interior. It is important to note that many of the cremation deposits survived within features cut into the preserved ground surface and did not penetrate the underlying gravel.

Two inhumation burials were inserted into the infilled 'pond' of barrow 4583 and have already been described in Chapter 4. The earlier burial was placed in two semi-articulated deposits near the centre of the hollow (Fig. 4.12, A and B), and was radiocarbon dated to 1310–1000 cal BC (95% confidence)(2930±50 BP; BM-2701). A second, tightly crouched, inhumation burial placed near the NW edge of the infilled 'pond' (Fig. 4.12, C) was radiocarbon dated to 1020–810 cal BC (95% confidence)(2760±50 BP; BM-2702).

IRON AGE SETTLEMENT

There is no clear evidence for Iron Age occupation or agricultural activity in the immediate area of the barrow cemetery. Early Iron Age material has been recorded towards both the NE and SE (Fig. 1.11) at Eight Acre Field (Leeds 1935; Mudd 1995), and middle Iron

Age activity was recorded to the S (Ainslie 1992). Similarly, large scale excavations just to the SW at Barton Court Farm demonstrated the lack of early and middle Iron Age settlement (Miles 1986, 27).

THE ROMAN LANDSCAPE

Evidence for Roman settlement comes from both cropmarks and excavation (Miles 1986; Benson and Miles 1974, 57–60). These indicate that areas of Roman settlement would have been peripheral to the area occupied by the barrow cemetery. The evidence from the Saxon period (discussed below) would suggest that many of the barrows still existed as visible earthworks within the Roman landscape. The cropmark evidence (Fig. 1.11) illustrates the extent and organisation of settlement and land division surrounding an area which would have had extant barrow earthworks. The evidence would also suggest an absence of land divisions, indicating that the area was probably not used for arable. Instead part of this area was set aside for Roman burials, with a number of cemeteries and graves. Two small late Roman cemeteries have been excavated, both of which were situated to the N of the row of barrows. The area was almost certainly the burial place for the Romano-British settlement at Barton Court Farm and possibly also for a small Romano-British settlement to the S on the Abingdon peripheral road (Wallis 1981a).

To the immediate SE of barrow 13, a pit (411) containing charred wheat grains paradoxically has an acceptable Roman radiocarbon determination of cal AD 130–510 (1710±70 BP; OxA-1885). The location and date of this pit are difficult to reconcile with an immediate area devoid of Roman settlement and arable fields.

SAXON SETTLEMENT AND BURIALS

The early Saxon settlement was located within Dry Piece field and extended NW across Daisy Banks Fen, which was at that time dry (Parker, Ch. 7), into the interior of what had been the Abingdon causewayed enclosure (Avery and Brown 1972, 66–81; Chambers and McAdam in prep.). The Anglo-Saxon features at Barton Court Farm may be regarded as part of the same dispersed settlement (Miles 1986).

From the excavation of the barrow cemetery it is possible to suggest that many of the barrows still existed as earthworks and were to some extent respected by the Saxon population. Saxon burials were recorded in barrow 2 (Parrington 1977, 37) and possibly barrow 5 (Williams 1948, 9) and it is probable that a late 6th- or early 7th-century burial was deliberately placed within a ring-bank surrounding pond barrow 4866 (Fig. 4.60). A single Roman sherd, a small quantity of Saxon sherds

and an almost complete dog skeleton were recovered from the uppermost level of the 'pond' itself.

A number of Saxon buildings (SFBs 14, 17–8, 23, 24 and 26) were constructed across the ditches of barrows 12, 13 and 801, and it is possible that the ditch of 801 was backfilled with gravel excavated in the construction of Saxon buildings. The ditches of barrows 12 and 13, and to a lesser extent barrow 1, were used as rubbish dumps by the Anglo-Saxon occupants.

A pit or treethrow hole (2142) was recorded within the segmented ring-ditch and a radiocarbon date of cal AD 390–600 (1570±50 BP; BM-2705) was obtained for oak charcoal from it. This would suggest clearance contemporary with the early Saxon settlement.

ANTIQUARIAN INTEREST

There is no recorded evidence for antiquarian interest in the barrow mounds. However, at least two of the excavated barrows showed signs of disturbance. The excavator of barrow 4A recorded 'the craters of earlier investigations' (Williams 1948, 5) and a medieval sherd was found in the top fill of the disturbed grave in barrow 15. However, these two instances could equally have other explanations and it can be stated that antiquarian interest appears to have been negligible.

AGRICULTURAL DESTRUCTION

The barrow mounds may well have survived into the medieval period and there is no direct evidence for their deliberate slighting. The extent of ridge and furrow across the entire barrow complex is not known. Geophysical survey in advance of the 1983–5 excavations showed that it certainly covered the larger, southern area surveyed, apparently running over the barrows and ring ditches, and that more closely-spaced ridges on a different alignment were present in the smaller, northern area (Fig. 2.2). There is evidence for the furrows from the 1983–5 excavations, and it has been suggested that ridge and furrow overlay the barrow group as far E as barrow 4 (Parrington 1977, fig. 1). The cropmark evidence would suggest that by the 1930s all the barrows had been reduced to ring ditches.

The excavations in the 1930s demonstrated that the barrow mounds had been all but removed, although the pre-barrow land surfaces still remained. The recording and observation of the monument complex as clear cropmarks from the 1930s onwards was a measure of the gradual destruction of the barrows. The

barrows excavated in 1983–5 had no preserved mounds, with modern ploughsoil directly overlying natural gravel. To some extent the total destruction of the barrow earthworks could be localised, as Parrington was still able to identify both mound material and pre-barrow soil in 1976. The complex was also threatened and partially destroyed through gravel extraction, housing and road construction (Fig. 1.4).

VICTORIAN TREE CIRCLE (51350 98050; FIG 6.1)

by Philippa Bradley

A subcircular ring of pits, approximately 15 m in diameter, was located 15 m S of barrow 12. Several internal and some outlying features were recorded.

Prior to excavation by Martin Cook, the cropmark of this site had been interpreted as either an early henge, like some of those at Dorchester-on-Thames, or a multiple post circle like Woodhenge (Bradley *et al.* 1984).

The area was stripped mechanically, and an E–W baulk across the pit circle was excavated by hand. The features were hand-excavated in quadrants.

The pit circle was made up of 16 subcircular pits. The features had a maximum diameter of 1.5 m and were approximately 0.2 m deep. They were generally flat-bottomed with shallow sloping sides. They were filled with a dark brown loam. Modern material in the form of pieces of slate, coal, brick and tile, was recovered from the fills. Some late 19th-century pottery was also recovered (Bradley *et al.* 1984). Nineteen slightly smaller features were located within the centre of the post circle. These were of similar character to the post circle features.

Pit 2083 of the circle cut SFB 8. This relationship, together with the modern finds from the pits, makes a recent date for the pit circle likely. The pit circle has been interpreted as a 19th-century tree plantation which either failed to grow or was removed at some time. Several similar circular tree plantations survive in the area today.

Although the pit circle was found to be recent in date, the exercise has been invaluable in demonstrating that features cannot be interpreted on their appearance from the air alone.

Flint (Fig. 6.1)

F101. 2009. ? from topsoil stripping across Victorian tree circle. Fabricator. Extensive retouch along LHS and RHS; some inverse removals. Some crushing at distal end and both edges. Sf 258.

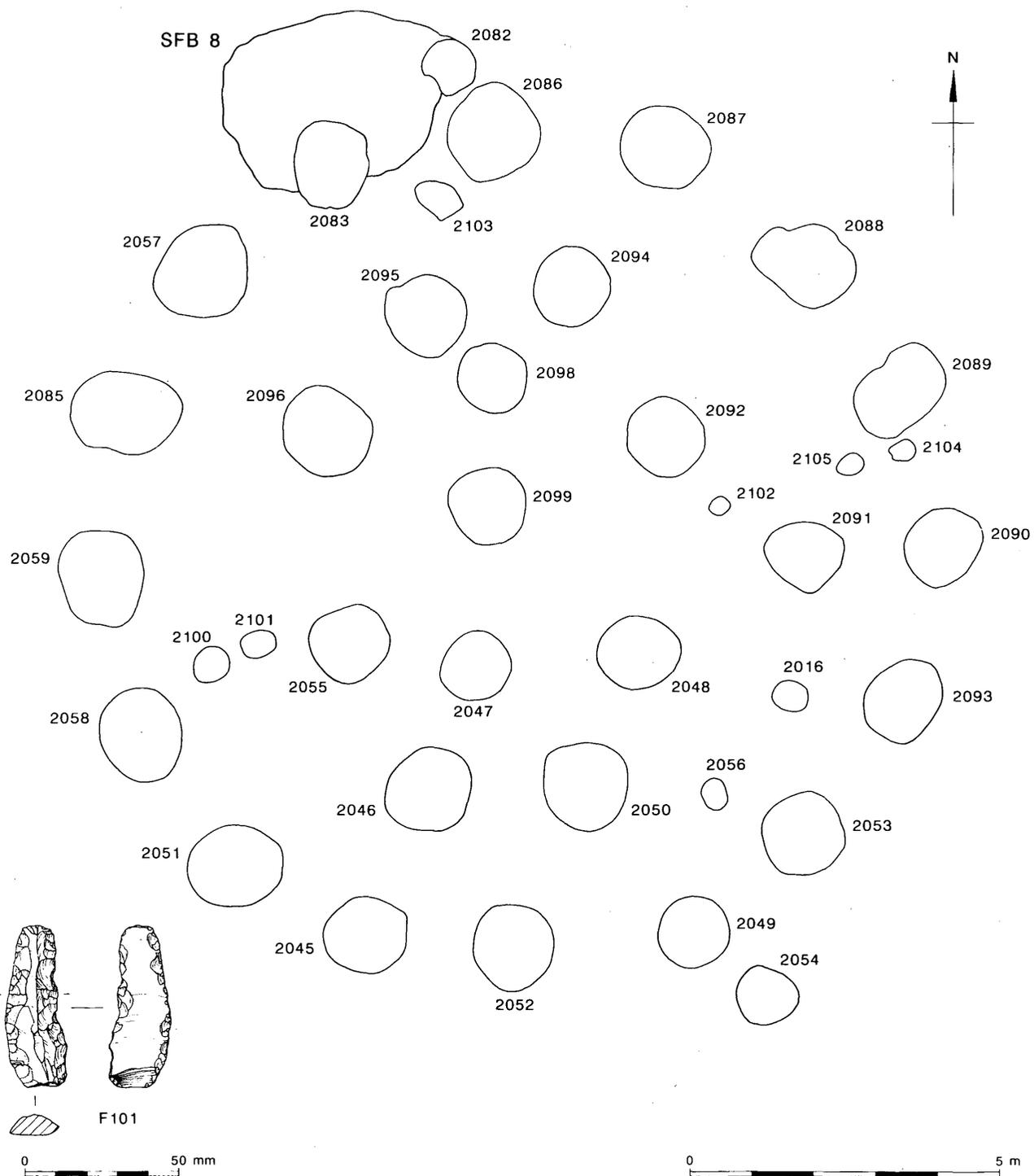


Figure 6.1 Victorian tree plantation

Table 7.1. Middle Neolithic inhumations

	Context	Degree of completeness	Preservation of individual bones	Degree of articulation	Age	Sex	Stature	Skeletal pathology	Dental pathology	Non-metric traits
Oval barrow	2127	C/B	3-1	Fully articulated, crouched	30-35	M	1.76 m	Minor osteophytes affecting cervical vertebrae and femoral head, possible haematoma, midshaft fracture of clavicle	-	-
	2128	B	3-2	Fully articulated, crouched	30-35	F	1.65 m	-	-	2 probable septal apertures on left humerus, 1+ lambdoid wormians
Linear mortuary structure 5352	Burial A	C	3-1	Fully articulated, crouched	50+	M?	1.59 m	Cervical osteophytes, midshaft fracture of left ulna and radius	3 caries, marked attrition, 2 lost ante-mortem	2 palatine tori
	Burial B	B	3-2	Disarticulated	Ageing	F	-	Degenerative osteo-arthritis affecting left shoulder and elbow, right talus, vertebral osteophytes	Severe attrition, 2 abscesses, 17 lost ante-mortem	3 palatine tori
	Burial C	C/B	3-1	Semi-articulated	35-40	F	1.58 m	Degeneration of temporo-mandibular articulations, slight osteo-arthritis	-	Upper thoracic cleft neural arch, 1 lambdoid wormian
'Flat' graves	5354	B	3-2	Fully articulated, crouched	10-12	-	-	Osteoporosis	4 caries	3+ wormian bones, possible inca bone
	5355	B	3-2	Fully articulated, crouched	40-45	M	1.71 m	Vertebral degeneration, osteophytes	3 abscesses, 3 lost ante-mortem	-
	5356	C	3-2	Fully articulated, crouched	Adult	F?	1.47 m	-	-	Septal aperture on right humerus