Chapter 9: discussion

NEOLITHIC ACTIVITY

by David Jennings

Excavations in the 7000 area uncovered 118 pits and 34 postholes which have been dated to this period. The precise dating of this activity is difficult to establish as the flint assemblage seems to contain elements of both early and late Neolithic industries. However, certain factors would tend to favour the suggestion that the flint should be seen as being a unitary, transitional assemblage (see Chapter 7: Worked flint – Neolithic), possibly dated to some point within the mid 3rd millennium BC. These factors include the restricted area over which the activity occurred (c 120 m x 40 m), the absence of Neolithic activity in the other parts of the site and the possibility that intentional depositional selection may have biased the character of assemblages from specific contexts, creating a false dichotomy between those with a high blade-like element and those composed of cores and unusable flakes. Finally, the longevity of certain forms of artefact should be kept in mind.

Pits

Clusters of pits in southern and eastern England have been identified as providing evidence of occupation sites of Neolithic date since the 1960s (Clark 1960, 208–11; Smith 1964). Initially it was suggested by both Clark and Smith that these pits were used for the storage of grain, but it has since been recognized that storage pits could contain a wide range of products. In addition, pits on gravel sites may have been dug to extract new flint for knapping or for infilling natural hollows.

It is difficult to establish the function of the pits in the 7000 area. The original dimensions of the pits are impossible to establish, as there was no indication of the level of the early Neolithic ground surface, but the recorded dimensions of the pits (average diameter of 1.16 m, average depth 0.23 m) give the impression that many of these features would not have had a large storage capacity. One factor regulating the depth of these pits may have been the level of the gravel and/or the permanent water table. Very few of the pits penetrated into the gravel, the majority being cut only into the loess subsoil, and to the N where the loess disappears and the gravel directly underlay the topsoil only three pits were located. It seems, therefore, that digging into the gravel was explicitly avoided, possibly because of the increased effort this would have required and the potential instability of the sides of the feature. In this instance it is thus certain that the pits were not dug in order to obtain flint supplies or gravel.

In addition, 43% of the pits were intercutting, which implies that the pit itself, rather than the loess subsoil into which it was dug, was of importance. A significant factor which possibly influenced the frequency with which pits were intercut may have been the importance of their location in relation to other activities on the site. In particular, this reason may have applied in Area I (Fig. 8) where 55% of the pits intersected and had been consistently dug around a blank area some 15 m E-W by 10 m N-S.

This blank zone contained only three postholes, one of which was considered to be dubious (7146), having been badly disturbed by the subsoiler. No post pipes were visible in any of these postholes and the fills contained no artefacts. The three postholes do not possess any significant spatial patterning. However, it is apparent that this area had been kept clear of pit-digging activity and the number of intercutting pits in this area means that the activity which generated this spatial patterning may have been maintained for some considerable time.

Another potential blank zone of similar dimensions, 15 m E-W by 15 m N-S, circumscribed by pits and obscured by later Roman ditches 7089 and 7254, was located to the W of Area III (Fig. 8). This was demarcated to the N by pits 7204 and 7247, to the W by pits 7159 and 7222, to the S by a series of intercutting pits including 7199 and 7162, and to the E the pits may have been cut away by the Roman ditch 7254. In contrast with the blank zone defined in Area I these pits, with the exception of contexts 7204 (74 flints) and 7159 (12 flints), contained far fewer flints. It seems unlikely that these features can be associated with domestic occupation, which is the orthodox interpretation of these pit clusters. Normally these pits contain substantial quantities of domestic debris including flints, pottery, animal bones and charcoal, and this is often taken to be indicative of deliberate infilling of the pits with midden material.

The low flint densities within the majority of the pits at the Reading Business Park, the lack of any contemporary pottery, the small quantities of charcoal and the low incidence of animal bones (excluding the animal burial from 7057, only 43 bones were recovered from 14 contexts), even allowing for the fact that the soil conditions were not conducive to the preservation of bone, lead one to conclude that these pits cannot be considered as conforming to the standard notion of this class of feature. Only a few pits contained convincing assemblages of potentially 'midden-derived' material, in particular 7106 and 7128. Pit 7128 contained large quantities of charcoal, in addition to 81 flints and 16 animal bones, and pit 7106 had frequent charcoal inclusions, 51 flints and 3 animal bones. In other pits the small quantities of bone may be explained by the unfavourable soil conditions, which meant that only the more substantial bones would be preserved, but it is not so

easy to explain the absence of pottery and the low incidence of charcoal. The evidence from this site does not conform to the conventional interpretation applied to these pit clusters; rather than 'normal' domestic occupation it seems that either more specialized or simply more sporadic activity was being carried out. The flints suggest that a large number of them were being used in cutting and whittling activities (see Chapter 7: Worked flint – Neolithic). This activity nevertheless was spatially structured and organized, with the pits arranged in Area I around a 'blank' zone, with another possible blank zone defined to the E.

Postholes

The 34 postholes which were recorded within the area of Neolithic activity contained only five pieces of flint which could date these features to this period. The postholes were not preserved to any great depth (average depth was 0.08 m) and no post pipes were detectable in the sections.

In Area II four pairs of postholes were uncovered and another pair was found to the E of Area II and also in Area I, on the periphery of the pits dug around the blank area. The posts within each pair were located 1.0 m apart, but the lack of post pipes and the fact that there was only limited preservation of these features mean that it was not possible to determine the angle at which the posts were placed in the ground. One can suggest a variety of functions for these features, for instance as drying racks, hay racks, skinning and butchery frames and racks for curing hides. It is not possible to distinguish between these possibilities given the quality of the information which could be extracted from the site. Whatever their function they do not seem to have been as closely associated with the blank zones as the pits defining these areas. This may be the result of the pit-digging activity destroying the evidence of earlier postholes; but if this is not the case, it suggests either that the postholes were functionally unrelated to the blank areas, or that they were intentionally placed at some distance (c 30 m) from them.

The burial of a juvenile/sub-adult cow in pit 7057 may be indicative of ritual activity, and in support of this interpretation it should be noted that the bones displayed no signs of butchery marks. However, none of the other finds in the area is sufficiently conspicuous to be considered as the result of ritual processes, and it is also possible that the animal may have died of disease, its carcass simply being disposed of in the pit.

In a broader context the low density of artefacts recovered from the site is consistent with the observations made of surface sites in the Thames basin, dated to the Neolithic period, as a result of fieldwalking (Ford 1987; Holgate 1988). The site may also be an example of the spread of settlement onto the lower valley slopes and river terraces, which Holgate postulates occurred throughout the Thames basin from the mid third millennium BC (op. cit., 135). Holgate also mentions the presence of task-specific or ancillary working sites in the Middle and Lower Thames catchments in the later Neolithic period (eg Fawley Court Bucks. (op. cit., 256) and perhaps the site can also be understood in this context.

BRONZE AGE ACTIVITY: THE SITE IN ITS LANDSCAPE (Figs. 1 and 58)

by John Moore

The excavations at the Reading Business Park must be seen as a small element in the wider study of the later Bronze Age landscape in the Kennet Valley. Investigation of the area between Theale and Reading in the last five years, both by excavation and fieldwalking, has altered our interpretation of the results of earlier fieldwork. Future fieldwork in advance of the development which is proposed for the next decade will no doubt also change the views presently held, as areas between sites which are already known will become available for study.

The excavations described in this volume point to a density of settlement and land use hitherto not considered possible for this period. Not only have major foci of settlement been identified on both sides of Kybe's Lane (Fig. 2: Areas 5, 3100 and Area A), but additional occupation evidence has been identified in Areas 6000 and 7000/3017. The distances between these contemporary sites are as follows: Areas 5 and 3100 are c 500 m apart, Areas 3100 and A are c 350 m apart, and Areas 7000/3017 and 6000 are about 350 m from Area 3100 to the NE and NW respectively.

This intensity of land use continues westwards, where the next known sites of this period are at Pingewood (Johnston and Bowden 1985) and a site identified by an assessment at Moores Farm (OAU 1989), c 1 km WSW of Area A (Fig. 58). Another assessment has recently revealed a late Bronze settlement site at Hartley Court Farm (OAU 1991), some 500 m SE and SW of Areas 3100 and 5 respectively. In addition to these, evidence of contemporary activity in the area includes the excavated site at Knights Farm (Bradley *et al.* 1980) 1.75 km W of Reading Business Park, the occupation evidence investigated at Field Farm just to the W and the artefacts and features seen in the vicinity of Anslows Cottages close to the late Bronze Age waterfront less than a kilometre NW of the Business Park (S Lobb pers. comm.). It appears to be the case that where systematic excavation of the ground prior to development (mainly gravel extraction) has taken place between Reading and Theale, late Bronze Age sites have been discovered with some frequency. It is sobering to reflect how many sites may have been destroyed unnoticed in the past.

One of the perennial problems of archaeology in the Kennet Valley is the presence of middle Bronze Age cemeteries and the absence of contemporary settlements. The excavations at Reading Business Park, so far from clarifying this issue, tend to confuse it further. The presence of Deverel Rimbury pottery (although in small quantity) in association with late Bronze Age Plain Ware is paralleled at Pingewood. Additional middle Bronze Age cemeteries have been added to the list (Barrett and Bradley 1980, 251)

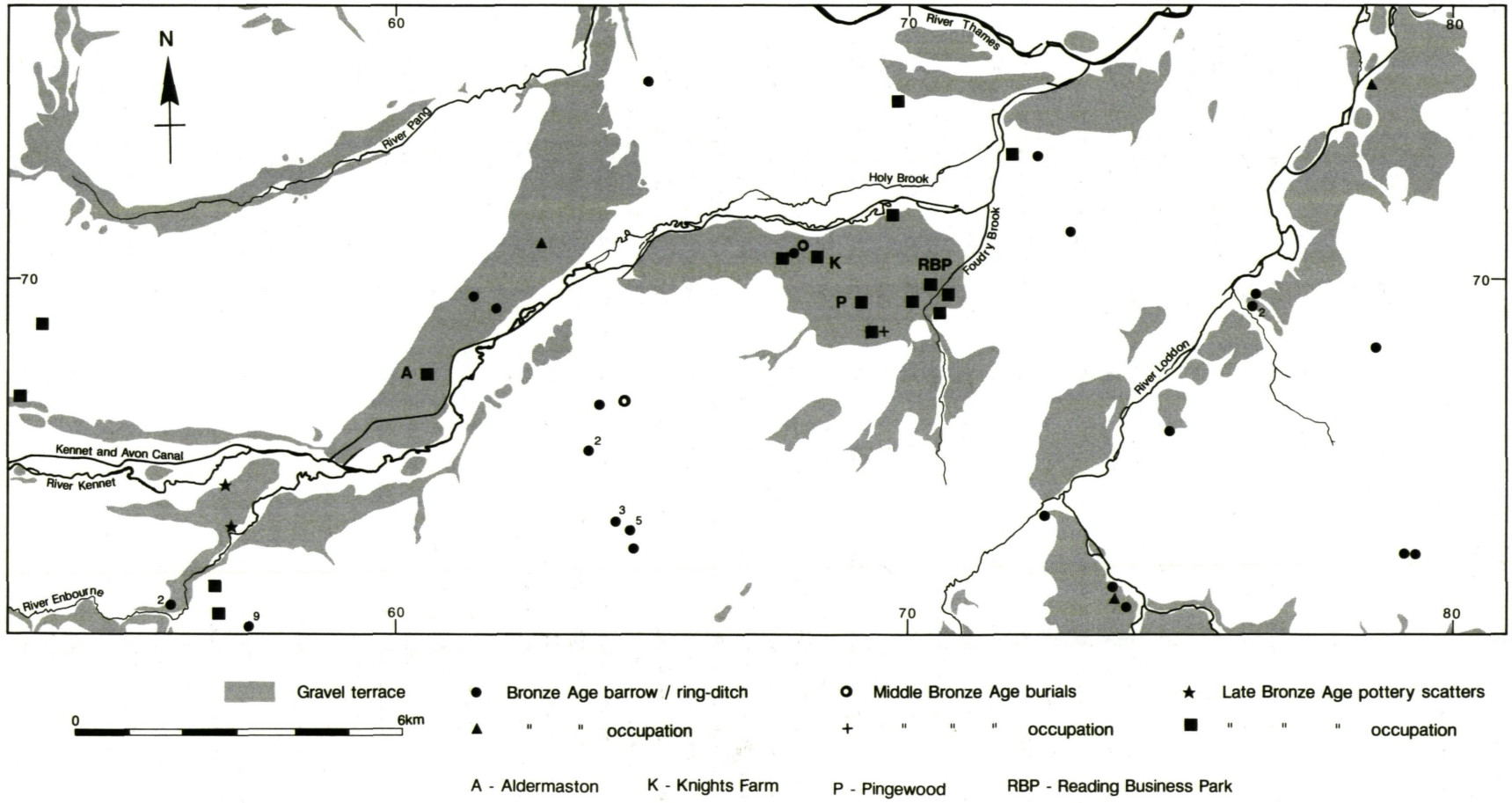

Figure 58 Bronze Age sites in the area of Reading Business Park

as at Field Farm, Burghfield, and Shortheath, Sulhampstead Abbots (S Lobb pers. comm.), but little settlement for this period has been discovered, although the assessment at Moores Farm, Pingewood, indicates the possible presence there of a small scale settlement or activity area.

Field systems

The previous excavations in the Kennet Valley at Pingewood (Johnston and Bowden 1985), Aldermaston and Knights Farm (Bradley *et al.* 1980) did not locate field systems associated with the settlements. At the Reading Business Park site field systems were found in Area 5000/6000 and have been described in detail in Chapter 5. The system in Area 3100 continues southwards (either as part of the pre-settlement system or as part of one which is contemporary with the settlement) through Area 2000, where parts of it were found in assessment trenches, and also S of the motorway where a rectangular system of small fields (c 0.5 ha.) on a similar alignment is indicated by further assessment trenches at Hartley Court Farm. In this area ditches occur singly and in pairs between 1.0 m and 5.0 m apart, and the system continues to the foot of the plateau gravel terrace on which the settlement is located. To the E and S of this settlement another system of larger fields (c 1 ha.) is indicated. The assessment at Moores Farm suggested that the fields in that area were large, and the differing size of the fields may be an indication of variations in land use.

The fields of excavation Area 3100 predate the settlement; their small size may have been associated with flax growing. Flax is a demanding crop that needs either to be rotated or manured intensively. In the 19th century it was grown for one year in seven, or one year in three if the land was heavily manured (M Robinson pers. comm.). Either method of cultivation would require areas which were well defined; rotation would need to be managed systematically and animals would have to be controlled during manuring.

The slightly larger fields of Hartley Court Farm with their double ditched boundaries may have been for stock control. It is argued that these closely spaced paired ditches are intended to create a bank with hedge on top which would form an enclosure for animals (Lambrick 1979). The evidence from the waterlogged deposits in the two ponds clearly indicates that grazing was taking place in the area, but it does not appear to have been very extensive.

The extensive field systems of the late Bronze Age which have only recently been discovered in the Kennet Valley excavations have led to the recognition of middle to late Bronze Age systems in the middle and upper Thames Valley. Extensive systems covering at least some 15 ha. and recognisable as cropmarks on the higher gravel islands (Carstairs 1986) have recently been dated to this period by trial excavations at Dorney Common (OAU 1987 and 1990), and rectangular field systems at Dorchester (Bradley and Chambers 1988) have been found to have been associated with middle Bronze Age pottery (R Bradley pers. comm.). Further upstream at Lechlade late Bronze Age or early Iron Age land division has been recognised at Butlers Field and Rough Ground Farm with major land boundaries of pit alignments and ditches at the former (Miles and Palmer 1986) and ditches at the latter (Allen *et al.* forthcoming). The segmented subsidiary boundaries at Butlers Field are similar to those of Areas 5000 and 6000 at Reading Business Park and again are thought from the pottery to be earlier than the continuous ditches.

Seasonal occupation

One question that cannot be answered satisfactorily at this stage is how much of the known settlement in the Kennet Valley was permanent. It is claimed that the sites at Knights Farm and Pingewood were seasonally occupied. Knights Farm is situated in the wettest location of all the excavated sites, and the environmental results confirm this, but the site at Pingewood is claimed to have been seasonal on the grounds of modern winter flooding. This must be disputed, as the flooding is a reflection of post-Bronze Age alluvial deposition causing runoff and contributing to overflowing streams and ditches.

The planned, organised site represented by Area 3100 must surely have been a permanent settlement. The site was laid out with a trackway parallel to the stream with apparently paired houses arranged in a linear fashion between the two. Between the houses and the non-defensive ditched settlement boundary was a cleared area perhaps used for livestock. On the other side of the trackway was what is interpreted as a threshing area with above ground storage units. Part of the south side of the trackway was defined by flax retting pits. Area 5, however, may have been in seasonal use, although again it exhibits some form of organisation. The houses here were sited towards the edge of the gravel island with associated pits on the edge and slopes of the 'island'. The central area contained above ground storage units. Area 3100 was certainly longlived, as is demonstrated both by the successive phases of house building in the southern part of the site and the ceramic evidence, which included a higher ratio of Deverel Rimbury pottery, whereas there is a slightly restricted assemblage of pottery from the Area 5 subsite which may suggest a more limited range of activities (R Bradley pers. comm.). This possibly limited range of activities may indicate seasonality, but the types of feature present in Area 5 do not confirm this. Round houses, storage pits, scoops, four and six post structures and an activity area like those in Area 3100 were all present.

Why should the site be in seasonal use? The density of settlement in this area suggests that the land was being fully exploited. Stock rearing must have formed part of the economy, and indeed it has been suggested that in the Bronze Age the amassing of large herds of livestock may have been a symbol of status and prestige (Lambrick forthcoming). The environmental results from Reading Business Park suggest that grazing was taking place, although not to the extent that all the scrub was being controlled. This may mean that animals were brought to this part of the

Kennet Valley during the summer months, when the damp conditions would have meant relatively lush grass, but were taken to drier ground during the rest of the year. The presence of the ponds, at least one apparently some distance from any settlement, reinforces the suggestion that the area was used for grazing.

We have already suggested that settlements on drier, slightly higher ground, would have been necessary for cereal production, with Aldermaston perhaps fitting into this category, although the apparent lack of chaff argues against processing in the immediate vicinity. We should perhaps also be looking for sites on higher ground which controlled livestock management. Two other sites on higher ground are known: one at Dunston Park. Thatcham, which is currently being excavated (S Lobb pers. comm.), and one c 1 km higher up the slopes at Hartshill Copse, Buckleberry, where a large settlement with associated cemetery has been located through assessment. It is, however, possible that the settlements in the valley bottom were associated with livestock and they were permanent, with winter transhumance of animals to higher ground.

Pits

The importance of pits of Aldermaston has perhaps been overstated (R Bradley pers. comm.) and at least one more roundhouse probably exists to the NE of Structure 1, but the ratio of pits to houses is far higher than for the Reading Business Park sites. Aldermaston is situated on higher dry ground at the junction of the Hamble and Sonning soils (Jarvis 1968), ideal for growing cereals, and the higher grain storage capacity of the pits is seen as having been utilised for the storage of surplus food which might be used in social transactions (Bradley *et al.* 1980, 255). Extensive carbonised arable material is lacking from the Kennet Valley sites with the exception of Aldermaston, which produced cereals (M Robinson pers. comm.).

Structures

There is an extensive literature on houses of this period, and it is proposed to offer only a few comments here. The identification of the roundhouses at Reading is based on the interpretation of the postholes as forming a ring which supported the roof (Avery and Close-Brooks 1969), with the outer porch posts lying on the line of the wall some distance outside the roof support ring. The layout in Area 3100 and large number of structures in the southern part of Area 5 suggest that buildings occurred in pairs as at Aldermaston, Rams Hill (Bradley and Ellison 1975), Chalton (Cunliffe 1970) and at Cock Hill and Thorney Down (Ellison 1981). Unfortunately, ploughing has meant that the artefact distribution and survival are of no help in attempting to define different functions for the buildings.

Structures B3111 and B3112 from Reading reinforce the argument for semicircular buildings. Although the arguments for the existence of this building form have been dismissed in the past (Pryor 1984) the occurrence of so many examples cannot be lightly dismissed. Ellison and Rahtz (1987) have discussed and ably argued for a number of examples; to these can be added others at Beedon Manor (Richards 1984) Cock Hill (Ratcliff-Densham 1961), Stanton Harcourt (Williams 1951) and Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979). The additional posts outside the arc of the posts of the Reading structures can be paralleled at Hog Cliff Hill Site E, structure 4, where the three features 63, 3 and 23 (Ellison and Rahtz 1987, Fig. 12) lie in comparable positions to those associated with the Reading structures (Figs. 24 and 25).

The 'boat-shaped' structure B3110 is an unusual design, but a parallel for this type can be found at Thorney Down in Hut III (Ellison 1987). The occurrence of a four part structure in Building 9 of Area 5 was thought to be coincidental (like that at Rams Hill (Bradley and Ellison 1985), but it should be pointed out that Harding (1974, 40) argues for a central scaffold for the building and repairing of the roof at Little Woodbury, and at Crickley Hill in the earliest Iron Age phase a number of the roundhouses include more massive and widely spaced squares which are probably not supports (Dixon 1973).

The detailed discussion of other aspects of building construction at Reading, for example the presence of central roof supports in some buildings and not others and the fact that only some buildings exhibited bilateral symmetry, as at Moel y Gaer (Guilbert 1983), is best left until further excavations in the area have been completed, by which time it is hoped that many more such buildings will be revealed.

Ring ditch

The ring ditch in Area 3100 is interpreted as a small funerary structure positioned either at the corner of a field belonging to the pre-settlement field system or alternatively just outside to the entrance through the settlement boundary ditch. Other similar features have been found at Knights Farm (Bradley *et al.* 1980), where cremated bone was found in close association, and at Shorncote, Glos., where one was found in the Middle Bronze Age cemetery (H Glass pers. comm.).

Postholes

A comparison of the percentage of postholes found and assigned to structures for Areas 5 and 3100 has been carried out and shows that 56.7% were assigned for Area 5 and only 33.73% for Area 3100 (Table 34). The variation probably reflects the difference between the excavated areas. In Area 5 the main settlement area and an associated activity area were excavated, whereas in Area 3100 only part of the area of buildings connected with the activity areas could be investigated. It will be interesting to see if the figures for Area 3100 compare to those from Area 5 when the excavation has been completed. These figures can also be compared with the future excavations on other sites in the area. It may then be possible to reassess past and future excavations in terms of the extent of settlement which was recovered.

Economic evidence

Textile production

One feature common to the valley floor sites is the presence of clay weights and absence of spindle whorls. Aldermaston is the only site in the immediate area of Reading Business Park to have both. It is argued for Pingewood that the presence of the weights coupled with the numbers of bones of fully grown sheep from that site indicates cloth production and perhaps a surplus from the valley gravel sites. If this is so, spindle whorls must have been made from material that has not survived, such as wood; drop spindles are regularly manufactured from wood in the modern Near East (E McAdam, pers. comm.). The lack of surviving bone from the Reading Business Park sites does not assist in the identification of fully grown sheep. The absence of clay weights from the sites of large areas of the Wessex chalk (Bradley *et al.* 1980) suggests that the objects recovered from the Kennet Valley and elsewhere are not roof weights and are probably associated with weaving. If roofing material needed weighing down, then one might expect to find these weights in association with all roundhouses, with findspots usually just outside wall lines. The large number from the Kennet Valley indicates that cloth production played an important part in the local economy.

The evidence for cloth production in the Kennet Valley is further enhanced by the discovery of flax retting pits at the Business Park. These large circular pits strung out along one side of the trackway of Area 3100 were found to contain seeds and capsule fragments of cultivated flax and a pod fragment of gold-of-pleasure, which is generally associated with flax. Flax remains were present in each of the waterlogged pit samples studied and were also one of the most abundant remains. While no flax stems or fibres were identified, this could either be a result of poor preservation or alternatively the remains could represent waste from flax beating or rippling. The presence of standing water in the pits as suggested by the wetland plants recovered in the samples and by the insect evidence would make them very suitable for flax retting. All but one of the flint scrapers with the ragged edges were found associated with these pits. It has been suggested (Chapter 7: worked flint - late Bronze Age) that these may have been used in connection with flax stripping.

Abundant seeds of stinging nettle were recovered from the retting pits, but the amount is not unusually high (G Campbell, pers. comm.). The possibility of fabric production using nettles should not be dismissed, however, as nettle fabric is attested from the late Bronze Age in Denmark and at Pyotdykes, Angus (Wild 1988, 22). The fibres, which are up to 50 mm long, are extracted by the same series of processes — retting, breaking, scutching and hackling — as flax.

Cereal production

Cereal processing was certainly taking place in Area 3100, although the grain must have been grown on slightly higher ground. The type 6 Sonning soils are not ideal for cereal growing and are more suited for dryer pasture (Jarvis 1963). The nearest suitable site for cereal cultivation is only 0.5 km to the S on the plateau gravels near Hartley Court Farm, where field systems of the late Bronze Age have been discovered which are probably associated with the settlement found here. It is possible that when excavation of all the sites earmarked for development over the next years in the area has been completed a pattern of settlements associated with specialised land use will emerge. It is tempting to speculate that Area 3100 was perhaps specialising in flax growing and processing and Hartley Court Farm in cereal growing.

Metalworking

The large numbers of bronzes recovered from the river Thames and Kennet Valley have identified the region as one which was of particular importance during the Bronze Age. It has been suggested that the sites on the river at Runnymede, Bray and Wallingford controlled the exchange of prestige goods (Barrett and Bradley 1980), and the putative enclosure at Marshalls Hill (Bradley 1984), which overlooks

Table 34: Comparison of percentages of postholes found and assigned to structures in Areas 5 and 3100

	Postholes recorded	Postholes assigned
Area 5	610	359
Buildings	37.69%	67.41%
4 and 6 post structures	4.75%	8.08%
2 post structures	12.13%	20.61%
Fence lines	2.13%	3.62%
Area 3100		
	928	313
Buildings	14.98%	44.41%
4 and 6 post structures	10.34%	30.67%
2 post structures	8.41%	24.92%

the confluence of the Thames and the Kennet, can be included among these high status sites. Bronzes have been found associated with high status sites, but they also occur on sites lower down the hierarchy, such as Area 3100 at Reading Business Park, and the production of bronze objects was clearly not restricted to the more important sites, since evidence for bronze production has been found at both Aldermaston and Reading Area 5, and at Dunston Park ironworking has been recovered in association with late Bronze Age pottery (S Lobb pers. comm.).

The metalwork emphasises the importance of the Kennet Valley, with its trade links with Europe. The copper in the alloy of Business Park pin had its ultimate origins in the Alps of central Europe (see Appendix 1): the composition of the alloy of the pin is typical of Ewart Park metalwork, and might possibly be earlier rather than later in that period. Similar compositions have been found in metalwork from the site at Wallingford, and evidence for bronze working has also been found at Wallingford in the form of oxidised bronze hearth debris. The most important known metalworking site in the region is the one at Runnymede Bridge, which is associated with the extensive settlement there. It must be pointed out that the availability of metal in the area did not preclude the continued and extensive use of flint for tools.

Conclusions

The investigations in this area to date suggest a high density of settlements which in most instances were longlived, although it is suggested that the long life of Knights Farm involves a shift in occupation. The claim for a relatively short duration of occupation at Pingewood should not necessarily be taken at face value as alternative interpretations of the posthole arrangements are possible, giving more buildings than claimed. In fact, no stratigraphical relationships or dating evidence are presented in the report to substantiate the two published phases. The high density of occupation in the Kennet Valley throughout the late Bronze Age points to a high level of organisation and interrelation between the sites, especially if specialised agricultural activities were being controlled by different settlements.

The intensive landscape study of this area is due to recommence in the summer of 1993 with the excavations in advance of phase 2 of Reading Business Park and the excavations at Moores Farm and Hartley Court Farm. This will be the largest area of Bronze Age landscape study in the country and will afford an opportunity for the examination of the settlements in association with the extensive field systems indicated at each site. The large amount of pottery which is expected to be recovered from these sites will permit the development of the landscape to be dated and it is hoped that an estimate of population will be possible.

ROMAN ACTIVITY (Fig. 59)

by David Jennings

The principal area of Roman activity detected during the excavations was in area 2000, where activity seems to have ranged from the 1st to the 4th century AD. A system of enclosures was also recorded in area 7000.

Due to the restrictions of time imposed on the excavations, in area 2000, only two comparatively small areas could be opened up for excavation. This has led to difficulties in interpreting the site, and in particular in attempting to assess the exact nature of the field system. Nevertheless, a broad reconstruction of the sequence of activities in the area can be proposed.

It can be argued that the two 1st-century ditches 2212 and 2277 formed a circular enclosure, which in conjunction with the curvilinear intercutting ditches, 2234, 2255 and 2263, demarcated a settlement site (Fig. 38). This type of site, defined by curvilinear and penannular ditches, is well known in the Thames Valley in both the late Iron Age and Roman periods. For instance, a reasonably close parallel to the partial remains uncovered in area 2000 was found at Old Shifford, in the Upper Thames Valley, and consisted of a penannular ditch enclosed within a larger enclosure (G Hey pers. comm.). Elements of correspondence between the two sites consist in the entrance formed between the penannular ditch and the inturning element of the larger enclosure. Corroborative evidence for this hypothesis may be found in the quantities of 1st-century pottery recovered from the excavations, which it is thought indicates some form of pre- or post-conquest occupation in the vicinity. Also in this context one can consider the two bronze coins of Vespasian/Titus and the glass roundel, recovered from Trench 2008. This settlement must have been comparatively small, as it would have been constrained by the Foudry Brook to the E and no evidence of Roman occupation was detected in the assessment Trench 2003 c 40 m to the NW. The penannular enclosure, defined by ditches 2212 and 2277, must have gone out of use when it was cut by ditch 2205 (Fig. 38), which had been filled by the 2nd century. It may be at this time that the settlement in Area A, known to the W, was established.

Also in the 2nd century or possibly slightly earlier, a series of ditches forming linear boundaries and enclosures was laid out in Trench 2004. This field system seems to have been redefined at least three times (Fig. 40), respecting the common axes of SW-NE and NW-SE. No coherent plan of the field system in Trench 2008 can be established for this period.

Whatever the precise details the 2nd century seems to have witnessed significant changes in the land use of area 2000. It is seems most likely that the possible 1st-century occupation site went out of use and that an extensive field system was laid out across the area, this being seen most clearly in Trench 2004. This may have been related to the development of the known Roman settlement in Area A, c 300 m to the W.

In the 2nd or 3rd century a series of pits was excavated in a restricted area in Trench 2005. The majority of the pits were intercutting, indicating that the location of the pits was

of greater significance than the material excavated from them. The pits only contained one or two discernible fills, which seem to have been derived largely from the subsoil, and little charcoal or animal bone. It is unlikely that the fills were derived from domestic debris, and the character of the fills makes it difficult to decide whether they are derived from silting or intentional filling with relatively 'clean' material.

These pits are unlikely to be quarry pits, as they do not penetrate to the natural gravel. Most of the pits were shallow with gentle sides and flat bottoms, which means that their storage potential would have been limited, and no evidence of lining, which might indicate that the pits did have a storage function, was found. Other possible functions could include pits dug for a water supply or rubbish pits. These pits seem to be peripheral to any settlement and closely associated with the field system.

In the 3rd century more ditches were dug, most probably related to a field system, but they formed no coherent pattern.

In the assessment Trench 2003 a ploughsoil was cut by a ditch which had been filled with 2nd-century material. Elsewhere on both sides of the Foudry Brook except in Trenches 8–11 a Roman ploughsoil was detected in the sections of the assessment trenches. In the northern half of Trench 2008 a ploughsoil had developed which dated to the 4th century or later. This was subsequently covered by a belt of alluvium, which was spread over an extensive area on both sides of the Foudry Brook. These ploughsoils provide evidence for the arable exploitation of the area during the Roman period. The absence of any ploughsoils in Trenches 8–11, on the eastern side of the Foudry Brook, suggests that area had been used only for meadows or pastoral agriculture.

The series of shallow ditches detected in area 7000 formed a set of at least four enclosures (Fig. 5). These were laid out on common axes of NE-SW and NW-SE, and thus were on approximately the same orientation as the field system located in area 2000. The quantity of pottery recovered from the Roman features in area 7000 was substantially less than that found in area 2000, suggesting that this field system was considerably further from a focus of Roman settlement than that found in area 2000. No precise dating for this series of enclosures could be established from the small quantities of pottery recovered.

The Roman activity within the excavated areas is at present only partially understood, and it is most likely that the full context of this activity will only be apparent when the watching brief is carried out during the building operations in Area 2000 and with the excavation of Area A (Fig. 2), in the third phase of the development of the Reading Business Park. In this area an extensive Roman site has been located by both aerial photography and archaeological assessment. This seems to consist of a series of enclosures with a set of trackways leading off from the site.

Immediately S of Area 2000 (c 300 m away), on the other side of the Foudry Brook and the M4 motorway, a recent assessment by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at Hartley Court Farm has revealed another area of Roman occupation. Initial appraisal suggests that the site is late Roman and consists of a settlement area with a tiled building(s) within a set of paddocks and enclosures.

The excavations at Pingewood by the Berkshire Archaeological Committee approximately 1 km SW of Area A located a trackway and related field system, a well and a cluster of postholes, which it was felt defined a centre of domestic occupation (Johnston 1985, 36). This level of activity seems to correspond broadly with that found in area 2000.

In addition, the Kennet Valley and Foudry Brook seem to have been a focus of Roman occupation (Fig. 59), substantial remains being recorded on the Berkshire SMR at several sites immediately NE of the Business Park along the course of the Foudry Brook. A possible Roman road from Verulamium to Silchester, four potential sections of which are recorded on the Berkshire SMR and which is catalogued as number 163 by Margary (1973, 180–1), passes approximately 2 km to the S of the site.

The evidence recovered from our excavations therefore increases our impression of the intense activity occurring in this area during the Roman period. This contrasts with the area to the S where the settlement pattern seems to have been relatively unintensive and was possibly largely influenced by Silchester 10 km to the S.

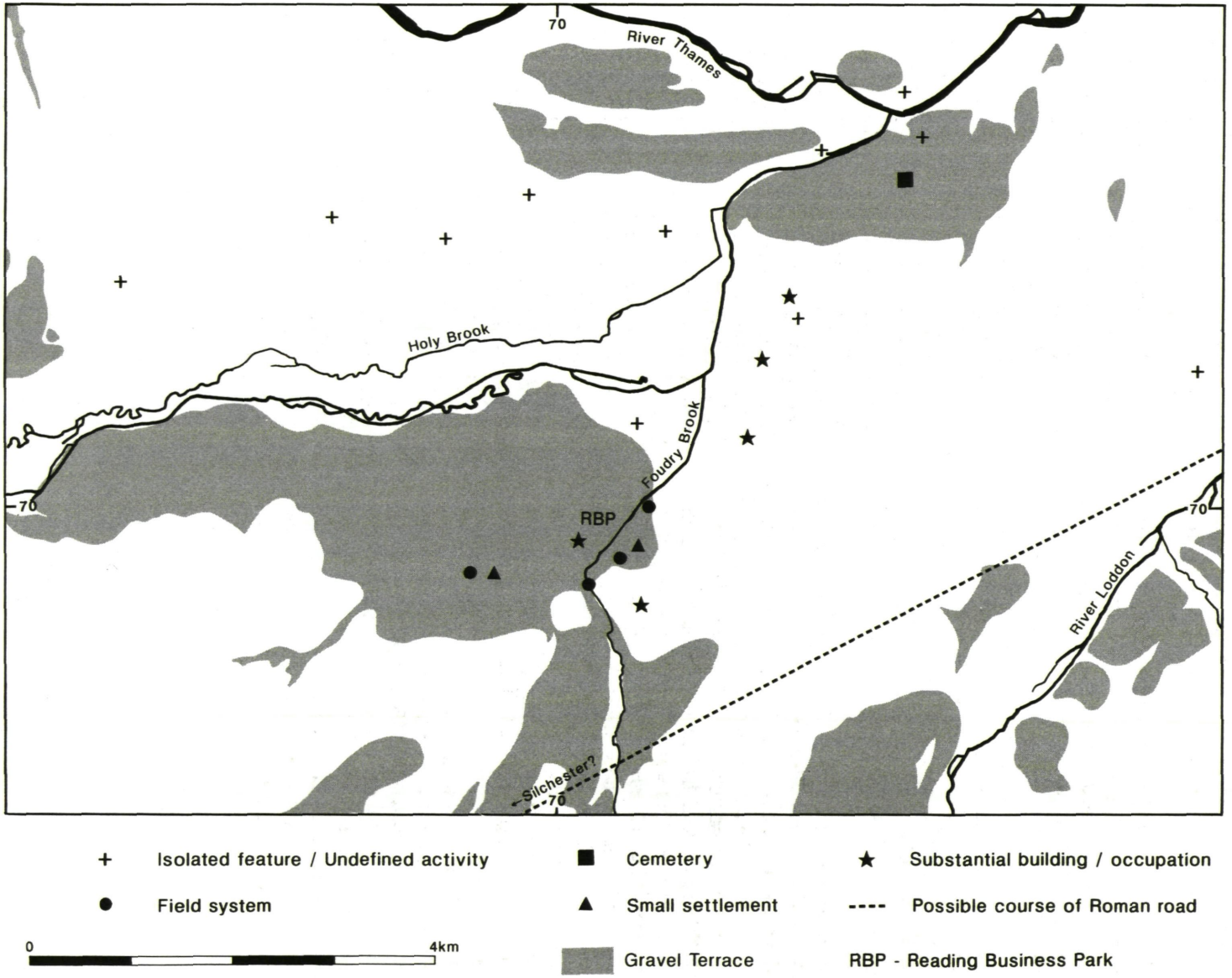

Figure 59 Romano-British sites in the area of Reading Business Park