# Chapter 8: Tower Hill, Ashbury

*by David Miles, Greg Campbell and Anne Marie Cromarty*

## BACKGROUND

Tower Hill lies 4 km south of White Horse Hill (Fig. 1.1). Investigations at this site were prompted by a chance find of a hoard of bronze metalwork. Due to the regional importance of this find and the threat of further damage to the location, an extensive investigation of the find area was carried out by OAU with funding from English Heritage. Therefore, the hoard and its context were recorded before it was further damaged by ploughing or opportunist recovery.

### Discovery of the hoard

In March 1993 a local schoolteacher, Mrs Liz Philips, found a dozen bronze axes and other objects while walking her dog along a farm track which ran up through a ploughed field at the northern end of a ridge known as Tower Hill (Fig. 8.1). This ridge lies on the chalk in the parish of Ashbury in south-west Oxfordshire (SU 2846 8397). Mrs Philips reported her find to the landowner, Mr Erik Penser, the Ashmolean Museum and Wantage Museum. Subsequently the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist, Paul Smith, visited the site with Mrs Philips, and the landowner contacted the OAU Director Mr David Miles. With the aid of a metal detector they located and recovered other material from the same hoard during a snow storm (Plate 8.1).

Shortly afterwards Paul Robinson of Devizes Museum, Wiltshire informed the Oxfordshire County Museum Service that early in 1993 a socketed bronze axe had been found in the same area as the hoard by Mr Farren of Highworth. Mr Farren was contacted and confirmed that the axe was from the same location as the hoard, and he then kindly handed over the axe so that the hoard became complete.

The material was thought on initial identification to be late Bronze Age date, and appeared to be a metalworker's hoard, as some stages of the manufacturing process were seen to be present, including casting jets and slag. Such a hoard was unique in the region, and it was recognised by David Miles that such a hoard might well indicate that this was the location of a contemporaneous settlement.

A programme of further work on the site was developed and executed later in the same year to clarify the context of the hoard and to seek evidence

*Plate 8.1 Recovering the Tower Hill hoard during a snow storm in March 1993 (By kind permission of Eric Penser).*

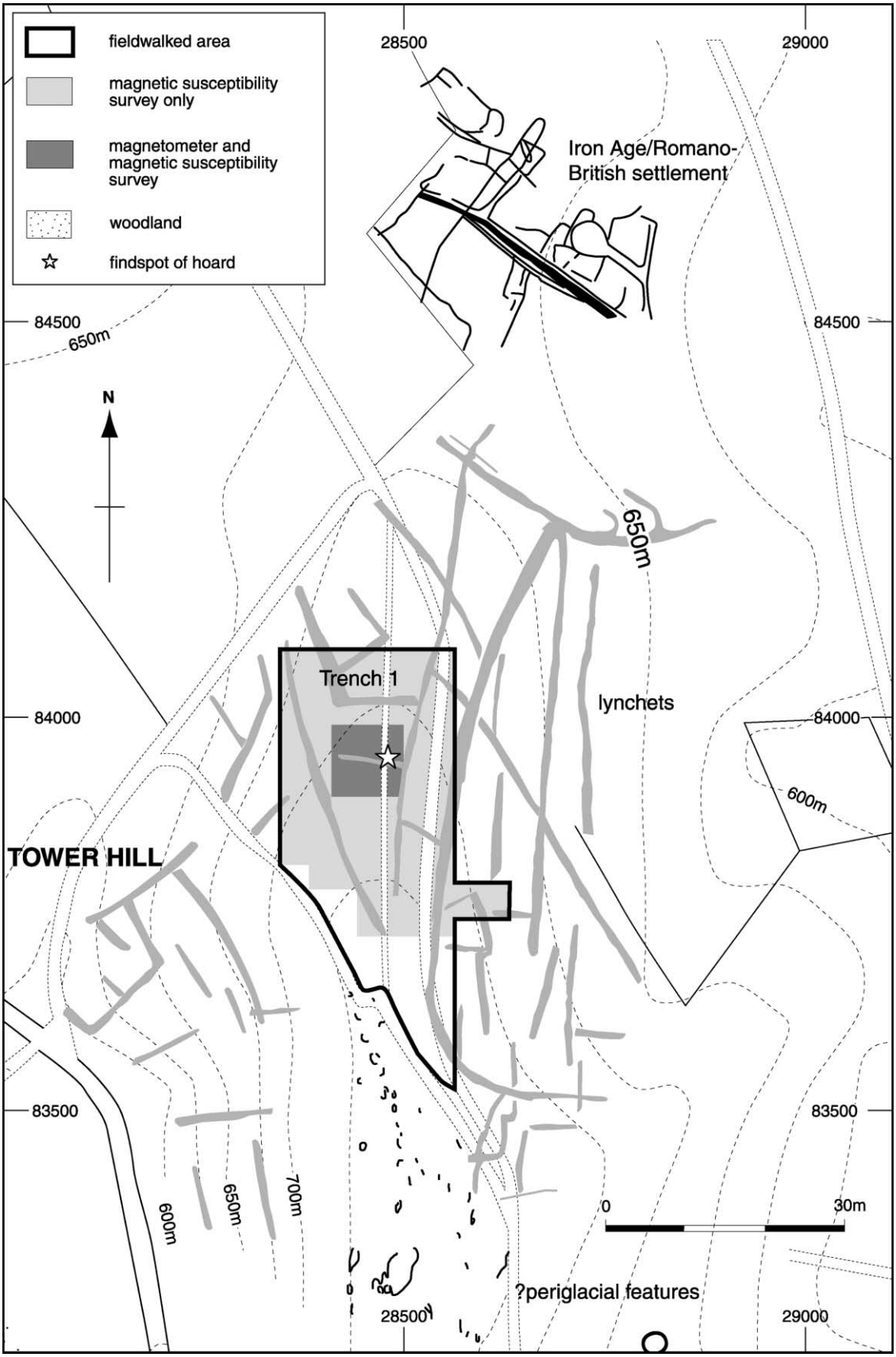


*Figure 8.1 Tower Hill and its associated cropmarks: plan showing location of hoard and trench 1, field survey area and extent of geophysical surveys.*

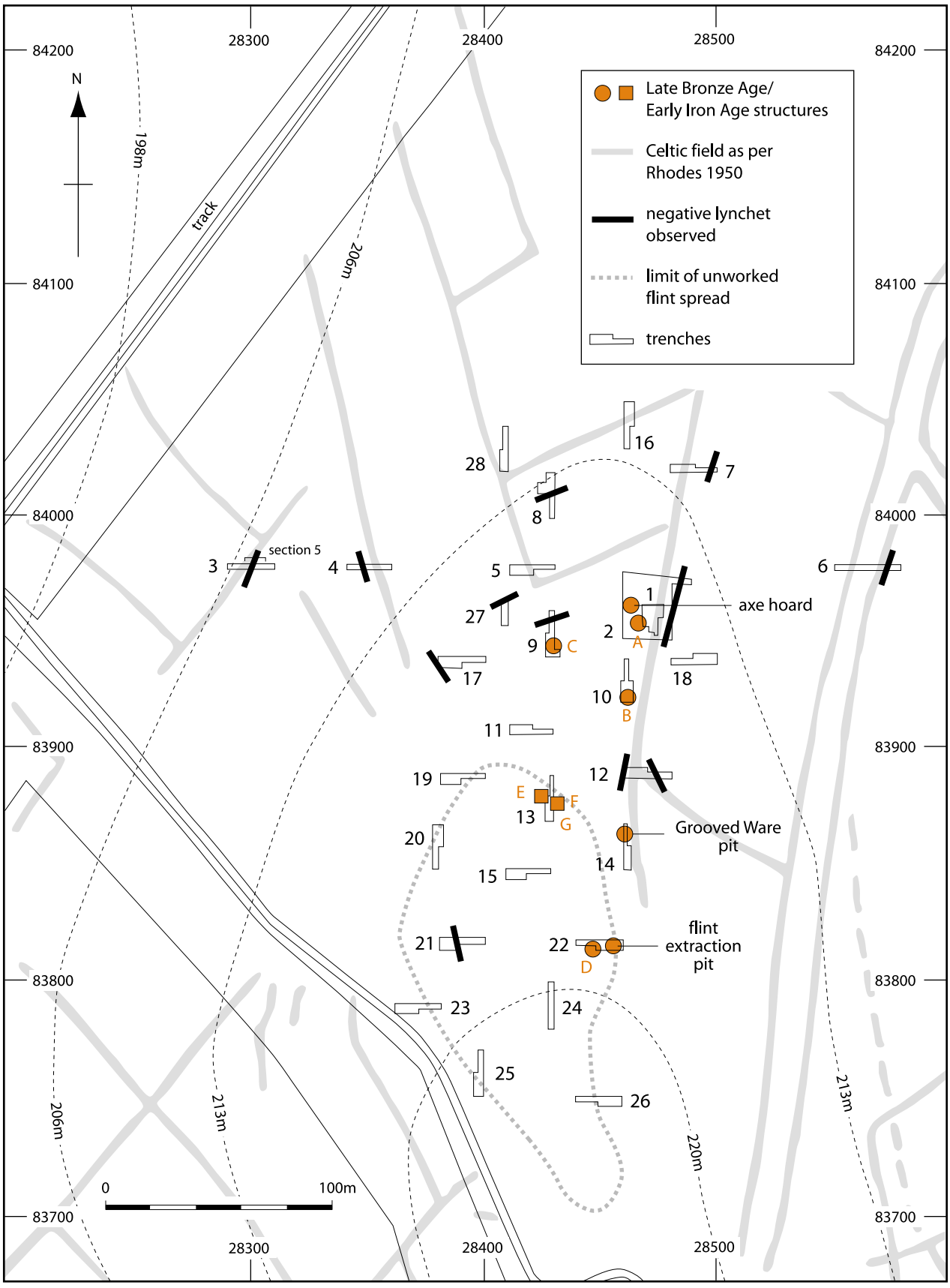


*Figure 8.2 Trench location plan for the evaluation and excavation stages showing the distribution of all major features.*

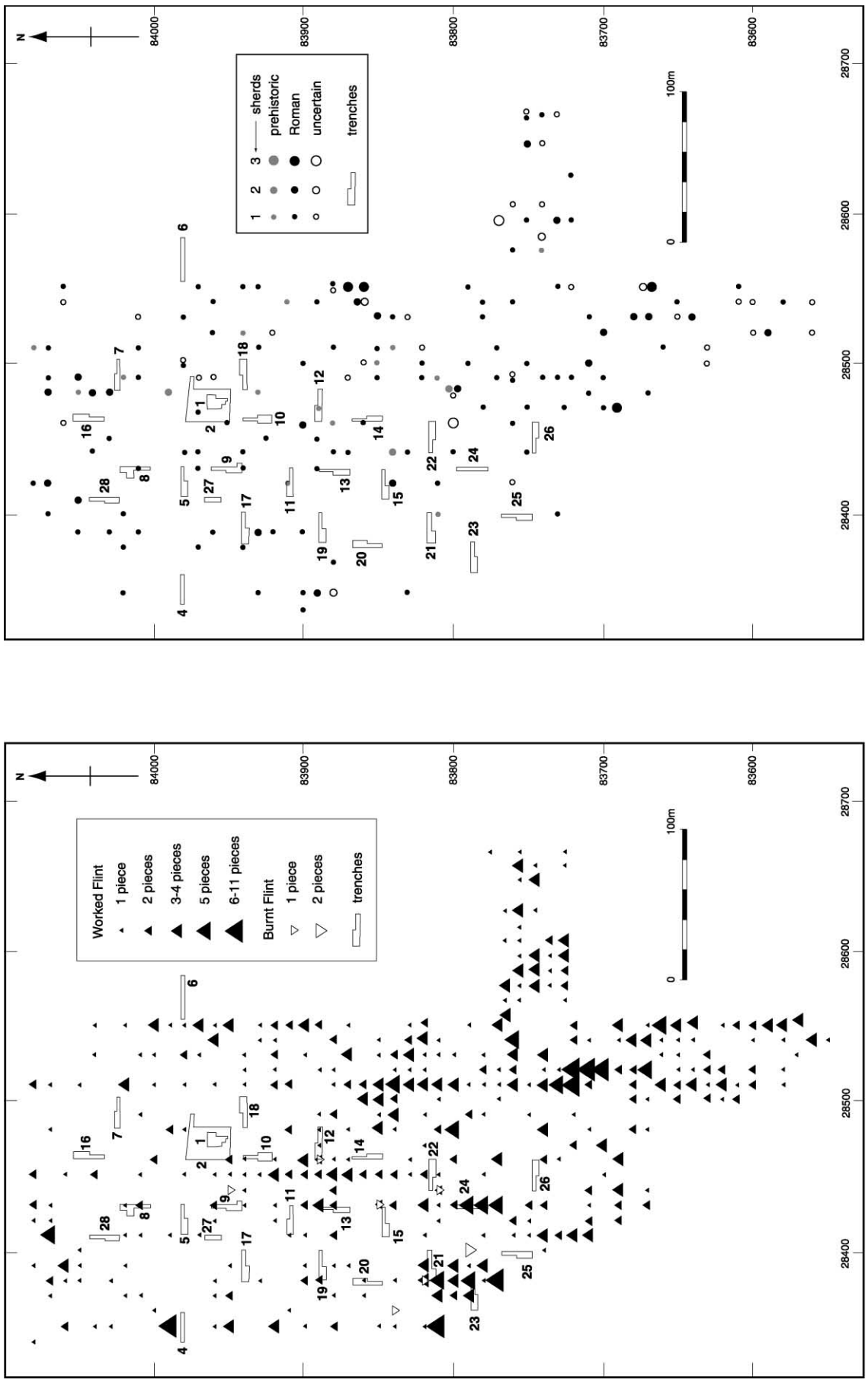


*Figure 8.3 Results from fieldwalking, a) distribution of worked flint, b) distribution of pottery.*

for a settlement. A geophysical survey of the area around the hoard was undertaken to locate buried settlement features, and also metalworking features such as hearths. A systematic surface collection survey was carried out in the same area based on transects 10 m apart (Fig. 8.3). In addition an area approximately 15 m square over the hoard find-spot was excavated (Fig. 8.1).

CfA (previously AML) carried out a geophysical survey, but this revealed no obvious anomalies either in the vicinity of the hoard or the central part of the field in which the hoard was found. The surface collection survey was carried out by OAU on 10 m transects, and recovered a comparatively small number of artefacts (Fig. 8.3a and b). The struck flint was of Neolithic or early Bronze Age character, and a few of the pot sherds were thought to be prehistoric, but the majority were found on initial examination to be Roman, and possibly indicative of manuring or a rural site of low status. Both types of artefact were spread thinly across the whole of the survey area. The slight concentration of flint to the south-west corner of the survey area and of both flint and pot along the eastern side is probably due to down-slope movement.

A small excavation (trench 1, Figs 8.2 and 8.5) revealed an arc of postholes thought to be part of a circular post-built structure, cut into the plough-scarred surface of the chalk (Fig. 8.5). An irregular area of pale blue staining with small hollows of loose chalk lay between one of the postholes in the arc and a larger offset posthole. This stained chalk was identified as the most likely original location of the hoard. Artefacts recovered during these excavations were similar to those recovered by surface collection. No copper alloy objects or fragments were recovered, although the existing topsoil was scanned with a metal detector and sieved through 10 mm mesh. Hand cleaning of the chalk beneath the ploughsoil showed no areas of burning, and it was judged more likely that the small number of burnt chalk pieces from topsoil sieving were from recent stubble burning, rather than ploughed hearths or casting moulds.

## Objectives and strategy

The initial phase of work had revealed a possible structure adjacent to the hoard, which implied some occupation of the site. This work had also made it clear that all archaeological deposits on the hillside, including lynchets of the Celtic field system, were under severe threat from ploughing. Therefore a programme of further work was undertaken to define the age, duration and state of preservation of the field system and of the possible settlement, as well as the extent and character of the settlement.

The strategy developed to meet these objectives consisted of three elements. Firstly, a larger area (trench 2, Fig. 8.5) was opened around the previously excavated area to examine the structure. A series of samples was taken across the blue staining to study the vertical and horizontal movement of copper corrosion products in the chalk, to see if the staining was caused by copper corrosion. Secondly, a 4% sample of the end of the ridge was excavated as a series of $2 \times 20$ m evaluation trenches to sample the field system and to establish the extent of any settlement. Soil marks and earthworks of the field system, visible on aerial photographs, were plotted as accurately as possible to locate the ditches for evaluation by the trenches. An east to west aligned trench was excavated extending from the eastern side of trench 2 to further investigate an east-north-east to west-south-west field boundary seen to the north of the structure (Fig. 8.2).

One square metre of topsoil was sieved from each trench to evaluate the presence of artefacts across the area. Where critical features were found to be plough-truncated and extend outside a trench, a sample of the ploughsoil was also sieved to identify possible artefact concentrations associated with those features. Samples for carbonised and mollusc remains were taken from a number of features, in particular from the negative lynchets, where found, to reconstruct the agricultural basis of the settlement and fields. Thirdly, a metal detector survey of the area previously covered by the phase 1 surface collection survey was undertaken by a metal detector group from Wantage, in order to recover any other metalwork.

Provisional analysis indicated an open settlement covering an area of approximately 4 ha aligned north to south along the ridgeline, but the exact limits were not obvious. The field system could provisionally be dated to the late Iron Age and Roman period, considerably later than the settlement, but only negative lynchets were recovered and not all coincided with the 1950s aerial photographic plot. Later aerial photographs showed a more detailed and consistent picture, and that the field system extended into a scatter of unworked flint at the top of the hill. This area had appeared blank in the earlier plot, but lynchets were confirmed here by excavation during this phase of fieldwork. The metal detector survey produced a very thin scatter of Roman coins, a handful of copper objects possibly contemporaneous with the hoard (principally irregular droplets of possible casting waste), and an Anglo-Saxon brooch. A more detailed account of the findings of these excavations is given below combined with additional information from the earlier phases of excavation.

## Further work and results

Two further surveys were carried out to elucidate the organisation and layout of the settlement and the field system, and to aid future management of the site. The major collections of aerial photographs were searched for coverage of the Tower Hill site. The soil and crop marks were accurately plotted to refine the plan of the Celtic fields and lynchets observed in the earlier fieldwork, and to locate

possible features of Neolithic, late Bronze Age and early Iron Age date.

The aerial photograph survey found that the clearest photograph for Tower Hill's Celtic field system was taken in 1969 (held by the County Sites and Monuments Record: Fairey survey 1:10,000 vertical run 6905 frame 12.937). This shows a more detailed and consistent picture than the initial 1950s plots, and also indicates that at the Tower Hill site the system appeared to be of one period. A broad line of penannular cropmarks were observed along the top of the chalk ridge which runs south from the Tower Hill site (NMR film 106G/UK/1416 frame 4304, of April 1946), but as these were not observed on any other photographs, they could represent natural features. To the north of the site (SU 2873 8460) a previously unknown banjo enclosure possibly of middle Iron Age date and a hollow-way or old stream course was identified.

Secondly, a detailed contour survey on a 1.0 m grid was undertaken to identify any terraces similar to those on which many of the excavated archaeological features appeared to lie, and record the surviving traces of the Celtic fields before their final destruction. Combined with the aerial photographic survey it was hoped that this would help distinguish those terraces that form part of the field system and those that did not, and were hence more likely to represent activity areas within the settlement. The contour survey was less successful, and failed to show the field system, and as a result comparison with the aerial photograph data was not carried out. Only a few short lengths of negative lynchet known from trenches 2, 12, 17 and 21 could be identified, and only terraces for the buildings known from excavation could be determined.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Tower Hill is the northern end of a chalk ridge south of Wayland's Smithy and the Ridgeway, and lies within a triangle formed by the three Iron Age hillforts of Uffington Castle, Hardwell Camp and Alfred's Castle (Fig. 1.1). The enclosure at Rams Hill lies on the Ridgeway, east of Uffington Castle and in addition this area of the Lambourn Downs has a scattering of early prehistoric burial monuments, both long and round barrows. A line of ring ditches probably representing round barrows (Oxfordshire Sites and Monument Record Nos 7517, 9734, 11003, 7869 and 9739) lying along the valley bottom between Tower Hill and the Ridgeway are now visible only on aerial photographs. The Maddle Farm Project (Gaffney and Tingle 1989) had demonstrated the intensity of settlement in this area of the Downs. The sample transects of this project examined land north and south of the hoard site but not the site itself or its immediate vicinity.

Excavations have taken place at the Rams Hill enclosure (Bradley and Ellison 1975, 52–5) and the site has been re-dated to commence at the end of the 2nd millennium cal BC and at the hillfort around the 8th century cal BC (Needham and Ambers 1994). Near to Tower Hill, late Bronze Age activity has also been identified at Wayland's Smithy (Whittle 1991, 87) and Weathercock Hill (Gaffney and Tingle 1989, 70; R Taylor, pers. comm.). A late Bronze Age artefact scatter, including pottery, flint and prehistoric bronze metalwork, on the eastern side of Weathercock Hill has been excavated to assess the quantities of finds within the soil compared to concentrations identified by fieldwalking of the area (Bowden *et al.* 1991–3b).

The Tower Hill hoard was located about 360 m south-west of an irregular ditched enclosure (SMR 7907) at the northern end of Odstone Down. When this was excavated in 1952 it was found to be a Roman farmstead surrounded by trackways, in use from the 1st to 4th centuries AD (Rhodes 1950). This site was an earthwork in 1953 but has since been ploughed flat. Excavations have identified a villa at Maddle Farm and enclosure at Knighton Bushes (SMR 7910) of the Roman period (Gaffney and Tingle 1989).

Both Odstone Down and Kingstone Down, to the east, were covered by part of an extensive group of small square and linear fields (SMR 9737) centred on the Knighton Bushes enclosure (Rhodes 1950, 18 and fig. 6). Where such Celtic fields or lynchets are well preserved, they are defined by a low and shallow bank. In this field system a lynchet still exists at Honeybunch Corner at the base of Tower Hill (SMR 9736). Celtic fields are well known on the Berkshire Downs, but their period of use is not certain, with evidence indicating they are of either the Bronze Age or Iron Age to Roman date. The Maddle Farm Project summarised the evidence and arguments for dating Celtic fields for this part of the Downs (Gaffney and Tingle 1989, 93). The principal axis of the field system runs north-north-west to south-south-east along Odstone Down and was used to lay out the boundary between Ashbury and Compton Beauchamp parishes, perhaps in early medieval times. At Rams Hill a lynchet containing Bronze Age pottery was found under the Iron Age rampart, and the outer edge of this rampart was cut by a lynchet containing late Iron Age pottery (Bradley and Ellison 1975, 67–9).

## THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY
***by Neil Linford***

A geophysical survey was conducted over the findspots (Fig. 8.1) by CfA. The aim was to locate any further archaeological activity and in particular to determine whether the hoard was associated with *in situ* metalworking activity, but unfortunately the results were disappointing. Full details are presented in the archive (Linford 1999), and the methodology employed is described in detail in Appendix 3.

Magnetic survey was chosen as the most suitable geophysical technique given the favourable geology of the site (Upper Chalk), which has produced a

wealth of successful results in the locality (Payne 1996) and possible highly magnetised thermoremanent features related to metalworking.

Readings were collected from a 90 m × 90 m grid centered on the findspot with a Geoscan FM36 fluxgate gradiometer at a 0.25 m sample interval along parallel north-south orientated traverses separated by 1.0 m. In addition, topsoil magnetic susceptibility values were recorded at a 15 m sample interval over 2.5 ha of the surrounding area with a Bartington MS2 susceptibility meter and MS2D field coil. The magnetometry survey showed the magnetic response of the site to be extremely subdued with the majority of the recorded readings falling in a range between $\pm 0.8$ nT, close to the practical noise limit of the instrument itself. The only magnetic anomalies that could be identified with any confidence were a scatter of intense responses apparently caused by near surface ferrous litter. Topsoil magnetic susceptibility fell within a range of $5 \rightarrow 30 \times 10^{-5}$ (SI) over the site with no apparent concentration of enhanced readings either in the vicinity of the findspot or elsewhere within the wider area encompassed by the survey. Slight variations in the topsoil susceptibility were found. These appear to reflect the topography of the site with lower values recorded over the crest of the hill, where plough action has promoted topsoil erosion, and this has led to greater admixture of low susceptibility chalk with the remaining soil.

The failure of the magnetometer survey to detect the more ephemeral features revealed by the subsequent excavation, such as the postholes, was perhaps not surprising given the features' small size and weak magnetic contrast with the surrounding subsoil. However, the absence of any thermoremanent anomalies was more intriguing and suggests that any metalworking activity in the vicinity of the hoard was either short-lived or severely truncated by ploughing. Due to the limited extent of the magnetometer survey a more remote metalworking site some distance from the hoard might exist. However, it would be remarkable for such semi-industrial activity, even if highly truncated, not to be preserved as a discernable topsoil susceptibility anomaly.

## THE EXCAVATIONS

### Geology and natural features

The natural in all but one of the trenches excavated during the second phase of this project was chalk, and this was rich in flint nodules in a band just below the top of the ridge. This band being especially noticeable in trench 13. The upper surface of this bedrock was fissured, stained slightly pink, yellow or brown, where it was decaying. Repeated episodes of gouging by modern ploughs were evident in the chalk surface of most trenches. Trench 6 at the eastern extent of the excavated area showed the solid chalk to be overlain by a layer of chalk rubble in a loose mid-brown silty loam matrix up to 0.2 m thick, surviving below the later plough lynchet. This layer may have been more widespread before the area was ploughed, but only survived at the bottom of the eastern side of the ridge. Trenches 1, 10, 13, 18 and 22 along the eastern side of the edge of the ridge showed the chalk bedrock to have been cut by irregularly shaped fissures, filled by similar brown silty loam with chalk rubble but no anthropogenic inclusions. These features were interpreted as natural, possibly solution holes or other features derived from periglacial activity. An undated probable tree-throw hole was excavated in trench 15.

### Neolithic features

An intentionally backfilled pit (1403) containing Grooved Ware was found in trench 14 (Fig. 8.2). The pit was circular, 1.1 m in diameter and 0.5 m deep (section 1, Fig. 8.4: pottery, Fig. 12.2). The lower layer (1404) of dark grey clay silt contained worked flint, small amounts of burnt flint and stones, fragmentary and complete bones, and small sherds of late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery. There were clear indications of discrete groupings of animal bone within this fill, though these did not occur throughout. Another layer of compact brown silty loam (1402), that yielded more animal bone fragments and some later, possibly intrusive, pottery overlay this. The high density of small chalk and flint rubble in this fill indicated intentional backfilling of the pit with its own upcast. Once the importance of the feature became clear the trench was extended to encompass the whole pit and the artefacts were recorded as small finds. Half of the upper fill and all of the lower part were retained, sieved and floated to recover charred remains and the small element of the bone and artefact assemblage. A small feature (1407), possibly a posthole, appeared to be cut into the top fills of this pit, but the relationship was uncertain and there were no finds.

No other features definitely dated to the Neolithic period were found during the course of these excavations. However, in the eastern end of trench 22 an irregular feature (2211, Fig. 8.2) was found with undercut sides which had been dug through the fragmented Middle Chalk down to the solid chalk containing flint (Fig. 8.4, section 2). This pit had then been backfilled with a deposit of chalk rubble (2216) 0.9 m thick, probably derived from the upcast of its initial digging. The topmost 0.14 m of the pit infill consisted of a deposit of light grey brown clay loam with smaller chalk fragments (2208), which was thought to have resulted from leaching by rainfall. This feature, and a similar unexcavated feature (2218) to the north-west within the same trench, were interpreted as likely flint extraction pits and tentatively attributed to the Neolithic.

During sieving 1 $m^2$ of the modern topsoil to the eastern side of trench 13 the north-eastern corner of a shallow pit or ditch terminus (1334) was revealed. This was excavated to reveal a friable mid-red brown silt fill (1332) 0.06 m deep overlying more compact mid-red brown silty loam primary fill (1333) 0.04 m deep with moderate chalk inclusions. Both fills yielded flint but no other finds.

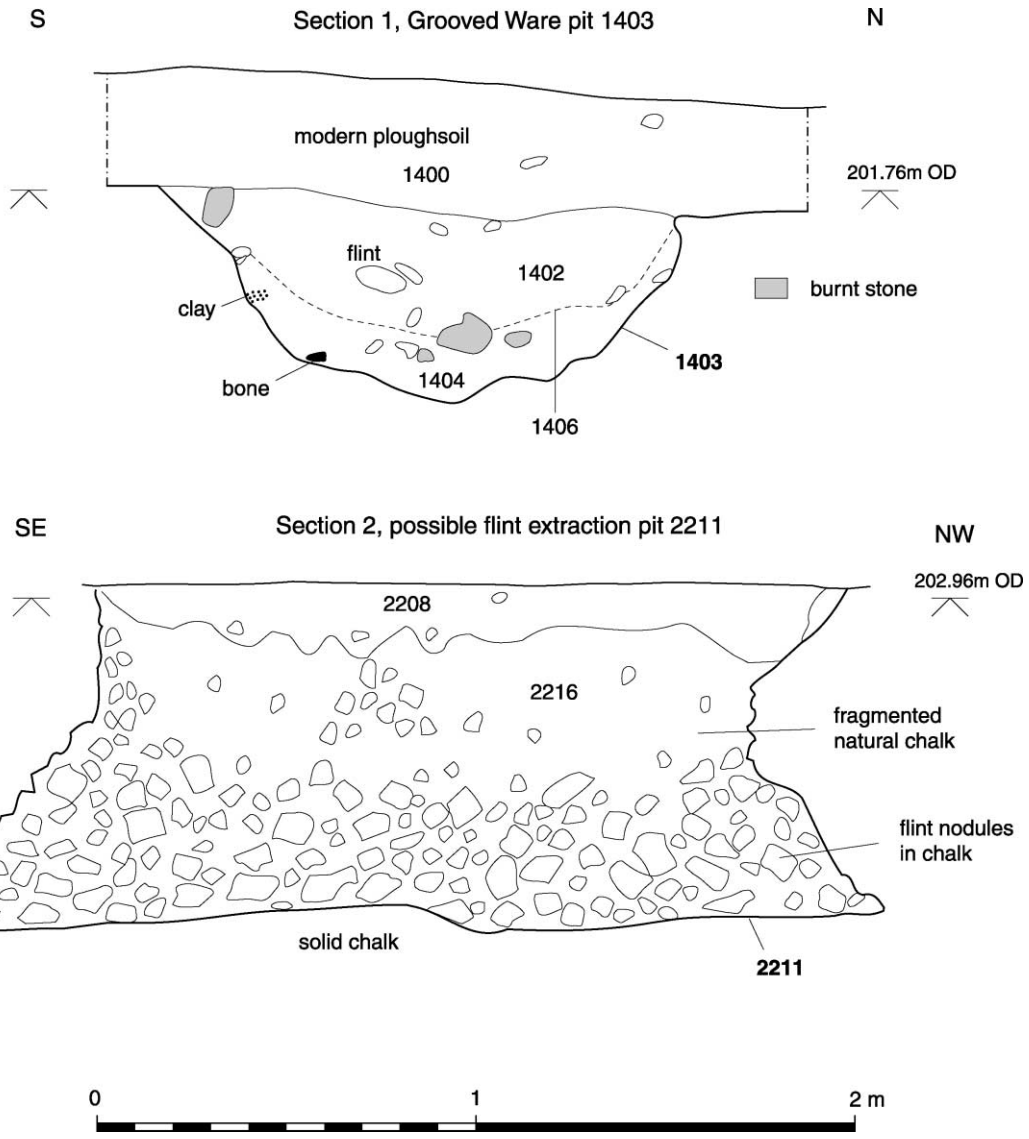


*Figure 8.4 Sections of Neolithic features.*

**The hoard and its immediate setting**

Following the finding of a dozen bronze axes and other bronze copper alloy objects on this site, a further nine axes and three copper alloy rings were located with the aid of a metal detector. All were recovered from the topsoil, spread over an area of around 5 × 7 m during this initial recovery, and the location of each object was plotted from an arbitrary baseline and each was given a small find number. The hoard included a cluster of four axes embedded in the upper surface of the chalk (Plate 8.2). The location plot of the initial recovery was related to the arbitrary grid used in later phases of the project, and the find spots of these objects is recorded relative to the excavated features.

The field in which these finds were made had been under cultivation for sometime, but had been subjected to unusually deep ploughing in an attempt to incorporate straw. This ploughing had disturbed and scattered the hoard that had been buried on the surface of the bedrock as a coherent group, as all the material was in excellent condition. Some evidence of structured deposition was recorded in the cluster of four axes that remained *in situ*. All were placed pointing downwards and several of the axes were found during conservation to contain other copper alloy objects, which had been deliberately placed within them.

The hoard itself had been located by chance and initially was excavated in isolation. However, when a wider area around this point was excavated the original location of the plough-scattered hoard was identified as a blue stain in the natural chalk. This stain was thought to be distinct from other staining on the chalk surface and this was confirmed by

*Plate 8.2 Axes from the Tower Hill hoard embedded in the chalk (By kind permission of Eric Penser).*

sampling and analysing the chalk. Traces of leached copper were only identifiable in the samples from this stain (Maskall, Chapter 11). The hoard had evidently been placed directly on the natural chalk surface close to the entrance of building A (Fig. 8.5). Any stratigraphic relationship between these features had been lost due to the later ploughing, but the coincidence of the locations of the house and the hoard suggests an association.

### The late Bronze Age–early Iron Age settlement

Settlement evidence consisted of a number of pits and groups of postholes, some of which could be grouped to form structures despite the heavy plough truncation of the site (Fig. 8.5).

#### *Building A and associated features in trenches 1 and 2*

The first structure to be recognised, adjacent to the hoard findspot, was building A in trenches 1 and 2. This structure was marked as a circle of 12 postholes 6.5 m in diameter, with the entrance aligned to the south-east. These postholes (63, 68, 70, 72, 87, 85, 89, 122, 91, 93, 95 & 97) were all of similar size and shape. They were oval, about 0.23–0.25 m long and 0.15–0.17 m wide, and varied in surviving depth from 0.03–0.17 m. Most were U-shaped in profile, with the exception of 89 and 122, both of which were so heavily truncated by modern ploughing that little of the sides survived. Feature 87 was found to have a very irregular profile, and it is likely that it had suffered some sort of disturbance. Another post, 85, may have been inserted to support this part of the structure, after the chalk around 87 had become unstable, explaining the proximity of these two features. The other posts were spread relatively regularly around the circuit at approximately 2 m intervals.

Set about 1.5 m out from this circuit to the south-east are another set of post settings interpreted as doorposts (65, 76, 99 & 101). These postholes form two pairs, probably representing replacement and enlarging of the entranceway. The original entrance, marked by postholes 76 and 99 was 1.1 m wide. This was replaced and expanded to 1.6 m wide (postholes 65 & 101). All were roughly the same size and shape, 0.34–0.39 m × 0.2–0.28 m across and U-shaped in profile, but the replacement posts (65 & 101) were set deeper than the earlier set had been. Postholes 76 and 99 survived to depths of 0.07–0.14 m while 99 and 101 survived to depths of 0.18–0.22 m. As the degree of truncation on the site is unknown it is impossible to estimate the original heights of these posts, but the replacement set may have been slightly higher than the originals, or merely more firmly set. The shape in plan of all four postholes indicated the possibility that the doorposts were made from cleft circular timbers.

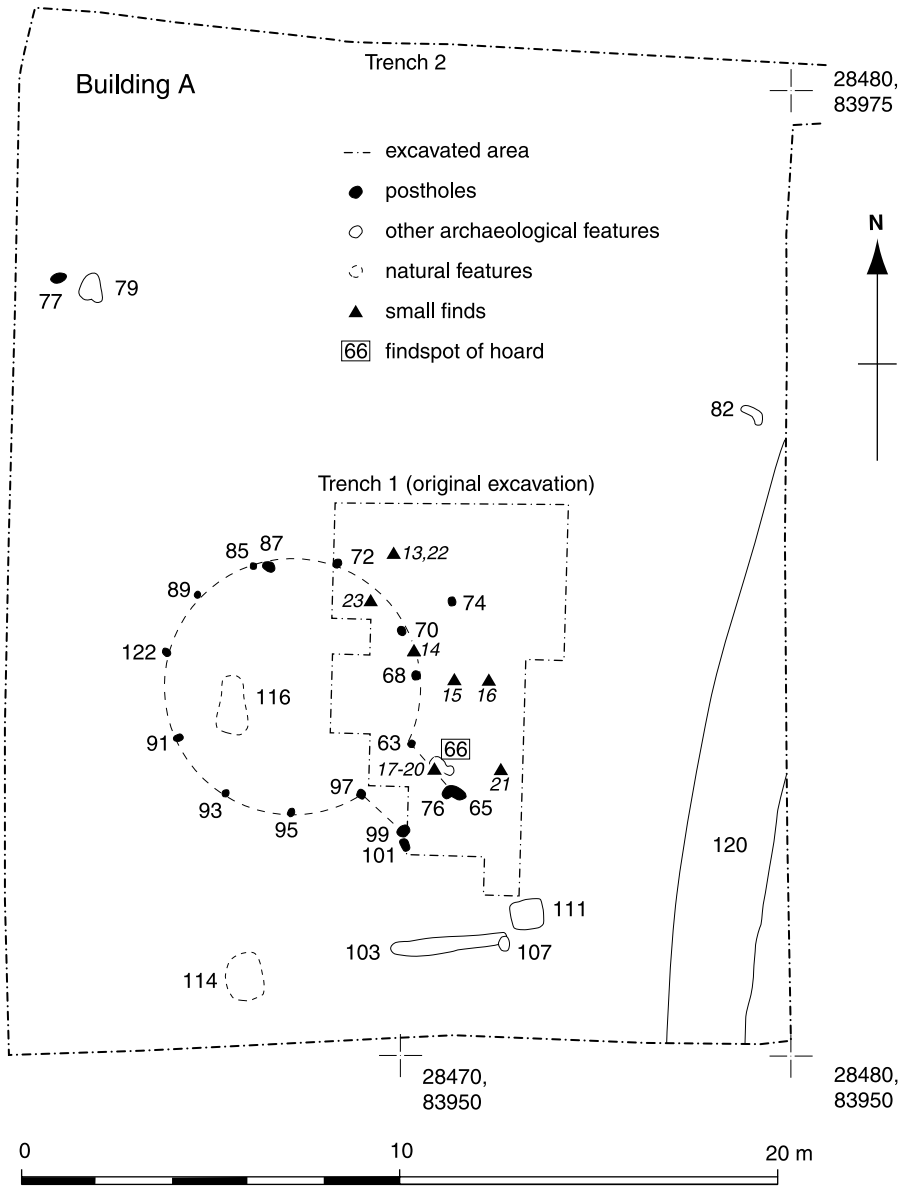


*Figure 8.5 Plan of trenches 1 and 2 showing structure A.*

The irregular area of blue staining (66), which indicated where the hoard had been placed, lay just to the north-east of a line between the north-east doorposts (65 & 76) and the nearest posthole in the main part of the structure (63).

All postholes forming this structure were filled with mid-brown silty clay or silty loam with moderate small angular chalk fragments, very similar to the overlying topsoil. One sample of these fills was wet sieved and the charred plant remains analysed. This sample was from posthole 63 (fill 62) near the entrance and was found to contain one indeterminate cereal grain (Robinson, Chapter 13). Only two postholes (72 & 101) contained a primary fill around the base and sides of the feature. In both cases this consisted of thin layers of grey brown silty clay with a higher percentage of chalk fragments derived from the bedrock into which the feature was cut. The only finds to be recovered from any of these features were a few fragments of animal bone from 70 (fill 69) and 72 (fill 71). No datable material was recovered from the feature, but its proximity to the hoard suggests that it could be of the same or similar date.

Other associated features outside this structure included an east to west aligned gully (103) south of the entrance, and a posthole-like feature (107). This feature (107) was circular, 0.25 m in diameter and 0.12 m deep, with steep sides and an irregular base. It was filled with a deposit (108) of friable grey white decayed chalk powder with some larger fragments of chalk. The eastern end of the gully (103) cut this feature. Gully 103 was linear, steep

sided, 0.5 m wide and up to 0.2 m deep with a concave base and extended for 3 m. This feature contained three successive fills. The primary fill (106) in the middle of the gully to a maximum depth of 0.12 m was friable light brownish white silty clay with a fairly high percentage of angular chalk fragments. Another fairly similar layer 105 with fewer, more rounded chalk inclusions overlay this. The third fill (104) friable dark grey-brown clay silt similar to the overlying topsoil, was recorded only in the ends of the feature.

The gully south of the entrance may be a drain, and soakaway associated with building A. The chalk bedrock is well drained but in periods of heavy rain some run off may have occurred and this gully would have prevented any flooding into the building, as well as functioning to drain wastewater from the settlement. The nature of the fills and lack of finds weaken the probability of the latter use. A single piece of flint from the primary fill (106) of the gully was the only find to be recovered from either of these two features. A nearby feature (111) was sub-rectangular, roughly 0.7 × 0.9 m and 0.11 m deep, with an irregular profile. It was filled by light whitish grey clay silt (112) with some rounded chalk inclusions and no anthropogenic material. This may be an area subject to heavy trampling near the entrance.

Roughly 8 m to the north west of building A, an irregular pit (79, Fig. 8.5) around 0.7–0.8 m across and 0.14 m deep, was fully excavated. It was very irregular in profile, as well as plan, and is interpreted as a tree-throw hole.

This feature contained two fills. The primary fill (81) was of friable, mid-grey brown clay silt with moderate angular chalk inclusions, and the second fill (80) was similar to the fills of the building A postholes with fewer chalk fragments than 81. It seems likely that this tree throw was of the same date as the occupation of this structure and was used for dumping domestic waste. A sample from this was analysed and was found to contain seven charred weed seeds. Both fills contained early Iron Age pottery sherds and some animal bone fragments in the secondary fill (80). Again this could be contemporaneous with building A and with the hoard.

Three other postholes recorded in this trench may also have been associated with this settlement activity. These were posthole 77 (0.5 m to the north west of 79, near the western edge of the trench), posthole 74 (1.5 m to the north-east of the structure), and 82. The first of these was half sectioned and found to be oval in plan, 0.4 × 0.25 m × 0.09 m deep, with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with compact, light brown clay silt with moderate angular chalk inclusions. The second was not fully excavated but could be seen in plan to be roughly circular with a diameter of around 0.2–0.22 m. The surviving depth was in excess of 0.11 m, with a similar fill to that of the other postholes in building A. The third of these features, 82, to the north-west of the structure, was irregular in shape and profile, and contained two fills (83–4), which were grey brown silty loams with varying quantities of chalk rubble inclusions. The lower of these two fills was restricted to within an almost square depression around 0.14 m square and 0.095 m deep near the eastern end of the feature. This led to the interpretation that this was a possibly grubbed-up posthole. None of these features yielded any artefacts or charcoal.

### *Building B and internal features*

A second possible structure was located in trench 10 immediately to the south (Fig. 8.6). This was originally a 2 m wide evaluation trench, but was widened when archaeological features were located in the southern end. These features comprised an ellipse of postholes thought to form part of a structure approximately 7 m in diameter and similar to building A. As the whole area of this circuit was not excavated no entrance was identified.

The postholes making up this structure (1023, 1031, 1025, 1008, 1015, 1017, 1021, 1028 & 1029) were all slightly oval, varied in size from 0.2–0.28 × 0.15–0.21 m and survived to depths of 0.11–0.22 m. All were generally U-shaped in profile. Posthole 1031 appeared to cut 1023, but this relationship was not clear. Almost all of these postholes were filled with similar deposits of friable, light-mid silt loam with moderate chalk and flint gravel inclusions. This was similar to, but somewhat lighter than the topsoil in this trench. The only exception was posthole 1029 in the south-western corner of the trench, which was filled with a tenacious mid-brown clay loam deposit (1030). Finds recovered from these features were flint from 1017 (fill 1018) and pottery from 1025 (fill 1026). This pottery was of early Iron Age date.

Within the circuit of these postholes were several other features which could be contemporaneous with the occupation. A pair of slightly smaller postholes (1013 & 1019) was located a little off-centre of the structure. These features were almost circular, approximately 0.17–0.2 m in diameter and filled with loose light brown sandy loam with moderate chalk and flint gravel inclusions. Feature 1013 was excavated and survived to a depth of 0.09 m with a U-shaped profile. A third similar feature (1006), 0.06 m deep, lay 0.8 m inside the northern edge of the posthole circuit, close to another small feature (1004), which contained a fragmentary iron nodule (sf 100).

### *Building C and associated features*

An elliptical arc of postholes found near the southern end of Trench 9 was identified as a third possible structure around 30 m to the west of the building A (Fig. 8.6). The postholes (937, 920, 919, 935 & 929) in this arc were less uniform than those in building B.

All the postholes were generally slightly oval, but varied in length between 0.19–0.4 m. Some were more heavily truncated by modern ploughing and surviving depths varied between 0.07–0.19 m. While the deeper examples were U-shaped in profile the others were asymmetrical, irregular or shallow and V-shaped, which may be the result of truncation. The fills of these features were loose, mid-dark brown silt loam with moderate pea grit and chalk fragment inclusions. The only finds to be recovered were two sherds of Iron Age pottery from 919 (fill 918).

Within this arc of postholes lay an almost circular pit (912) of diameter 0.7 m and depth of 0.52 m with a U-shaped profile (Fig. 8.8). Another similar pit (924) lay just to the north-east of building C (Fig. 8.6). This pit was more oval in plan and extended beyond the excavated area, but had been filled in a similar manner. In both cases the base of the pit was covered

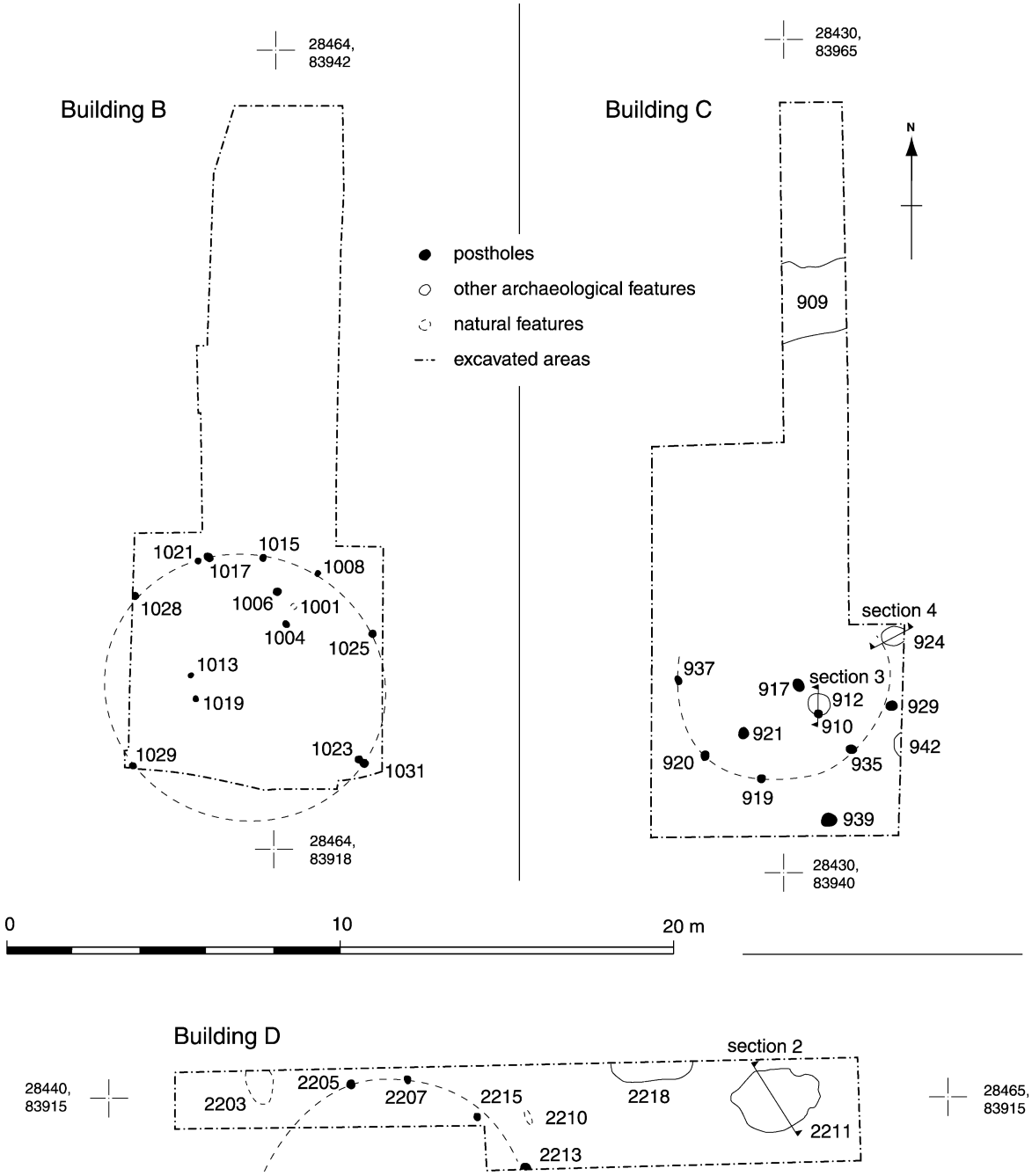


*Figure 8.6 Plans of trenches 10, 9 and 22 showing structures.*

in a deliberate backfill layer of friable light grey brown clay loam with a high percentage of chalk fragments, occasional pieces of flint and charcoal flecks (Robinson, Chapter 13).

In pit 912 (fill 915) were worked flint, animal bone and early Iron Age pottery sherds, and in pit 924 (fill 933) animal bone and early Iron Age pottery were found (Fig. 8.8). Another possibly deliberately placed deposit of large pieces of burnt flint overlay these fills in each pit (914 and 932), followed by deposits of friable grey brown clay loam with chalk and flint fragments, and charcoal flecks (913 and 931). Deposit 913 in pit 912 also contained some burnt stone, animal bone and flint, while 931 in pit 924 contained charred grain and weed seeds (Robinson, Chapter 13) together with animal bone and early Iron Age pottery (Brown, Chapter 12). In pit 912 this layer was overlain by a deposit of friable dark grey brown silt loam (905) with a high percentage of small stones and pea-sized grit including flint, which yielded more finds of flint and early Iron Age pottery. This was subsequently sealed with another layer of burnt

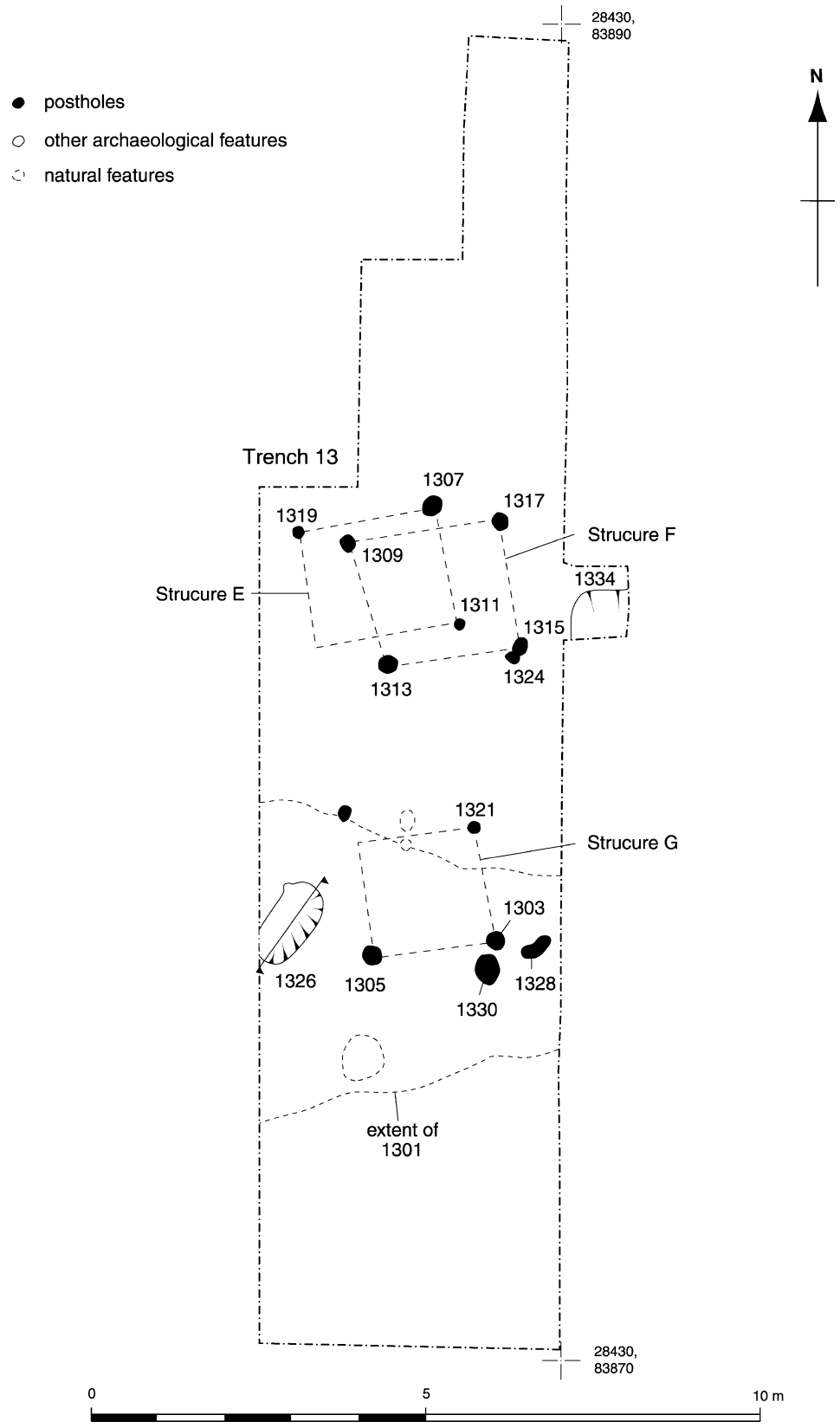


*Figure 8.7 Plan of trench 13 showing structures.*

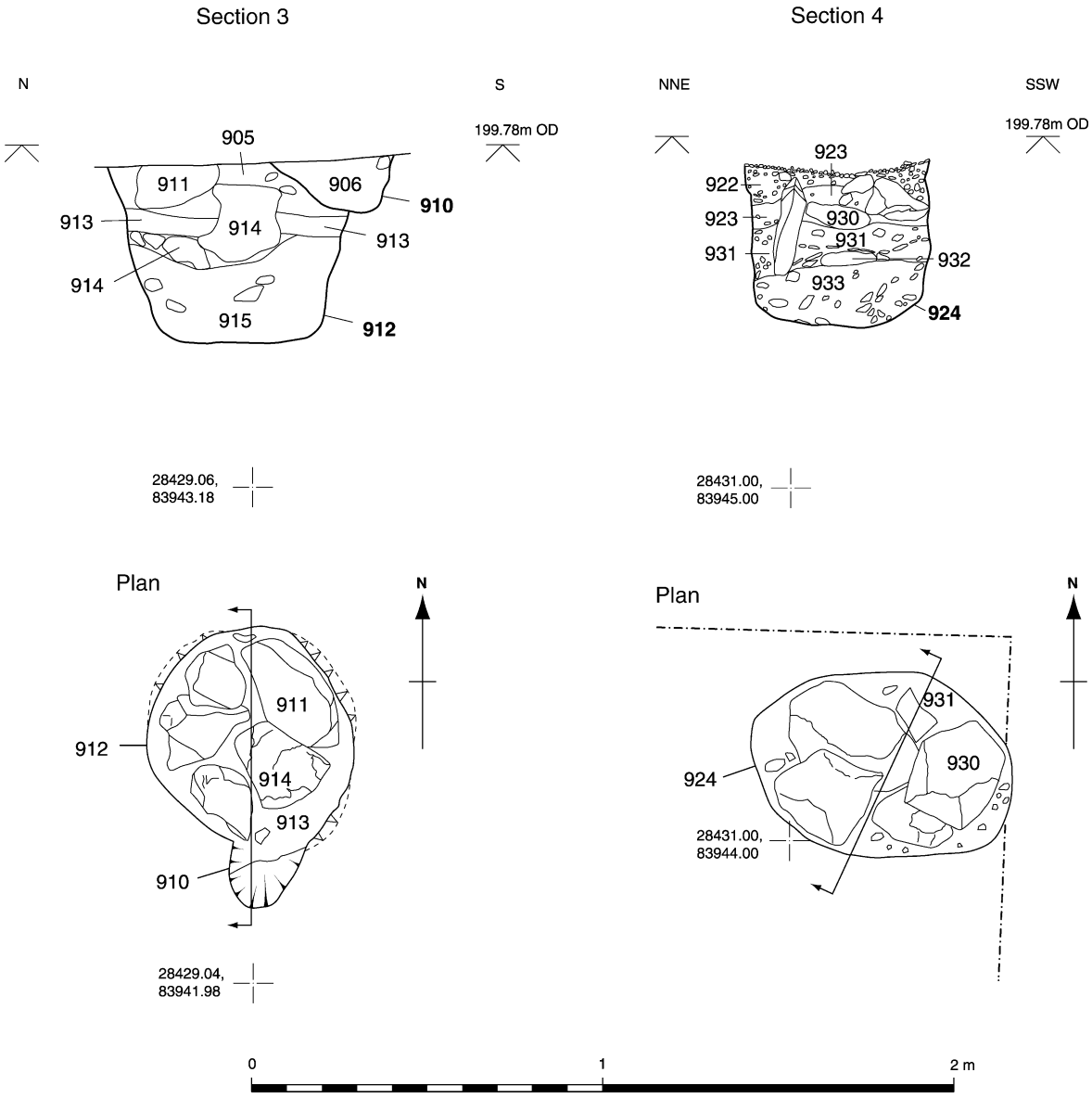


*Figure 8.8 Plan and sections of pits 912 and 924.*

rock (911). The lack of charcoal in this deposit showed that these had not been burnt *in situ*.

Pit 924 contained a further more unusual layer of quernstone fragments (930). A deposit of friable mid-dark, grey clay loam (923) with moderate small stones and pea-sized grit concentrated at the base of the layer over the quernstones. No finds were recovered from this layer. This pit was sealed with a deposit of friable mid-dark, grey brown silt loam (922) with occasional charcoal and a high percentage of small rounded and well-sorted stones, and flint and pottery were recovered from this deposit (Bradley and Brown, Chapter 12).

A third pit (942) lay to the east of building C on the edge of the excavated area. This pit may have been circular, 0.62 m in diameter and 0.19 m deep, and was infilled in a different manner. It appeared to have been deliberately backfilled with domestic waste with none of the structured deposition suggested for pits 912 and 924. Pit 942 had two fills. The primary fill (941) covered the base of the pit and consisted of compact, dark, grey clay loam with moderate chalk fragments. Overlying this was the main fill of friable mid-dark grey brown clay loam (940) also with moderate chalk inclusions, with finds of early Iron Age pottery and animal bone. All three pits could be of the same date as building C and the rest of the early Iron Age settlement activity on the site.

Three postholes lay within the arc of building C (Fig. 8.6, 910, 917 & 921/927). The first (910) cut the upper fills of pit 912, and was roughly circular, about 0.34 m in diameter

and 0.16 m deep. This feature was filled with loose, mid-dark red brown, silt loam (906) with a very high percentage of small gravel and chalk fragments that could have been derived, in part, from the overlying ploughsoil by worm action, and this contained flint. The second U-shaped posthole (917) lay a little to the north-west near to the centre of the arc of postholes known as building C, was oval, and 0.36 m long and 0.07 m deep. It was filled with friable, dark, grey brown silt loam (904) with moderate pea-sized grit and chalk fragments, and some pottery. The third posthole (921/927) lay to the south-west in line with posthole 920 in the south-eastern side of building C, was oval, 0.23 m long, and inclined towards the east, with a surviving postpipe (925), which had a packing of friable mid-dark grey brown silt loam (926), with a high percentage of chalk fragments. There were no finds from this feature. A fourth posthole (939) lay outside the building towards the southern baulk of the trench. This feature was slightly larger than the majority of the other postholes, being 0.37 m long and 0.24 m deep, with a U-shaped profile, and need not necessarily be associated with building C. The single fill of this posthole was a friable, dark, grey brown, clay loam (938) with moderate chalk and flint inclusions and occasional charcoal.

### *Building D*

A fourth circular building was located further south towards the top of the ridge in trench 22 (Fig. 8.6). An arc of four postholes (2205, 2207, 2215 & 2213) within the narrower western part of this trench were thought to represent a building, which extended beyond the southern edge of the trench. All were circular, of diameter 0.2–0.24 m × 0.1–0.11 m deep, with U-shaped profiles, with the exception of 2215. Posthole 2215 was more oval, 0.26 m long and much shallower at only 0.07 m deep. All were filled by deposits of brown silty loam with moderate chalk fragments. There were no finds in these features, but some early Iron Age pottery was recovered from the topsoil, suggesting that this was also part of the settlement associated with the hoard.

### *Structures E and F and associated features*

At least two 4-post structures were located within trench 13 (Fig. 8.7). The most complete of these was structure F, about 2 × 2 m, made up of four postholes (1309, 1313, 1317 & 1315/1324) one of which appeared to have been recut. All four original postholes were circular, U-shaped in profile and varied between 0.2–0.24 m in diameter and 0.06–0.2 m in depth. The postholes were filled with friable, grey brown silty loam (1310, 1314, 1318 & 1316) with moderate inclusions of chalk and flint, with the exception of 1324 which was filled with friable orange brown silty clay with moderate chalk fragment inclusions (1325). Fill 1310 also included a single large piece of sarsen (1323) interpreted as deliberate stone packing. Pottery recovered from postholes 1309, 1317 and 1315 indicated an early Iron Age date contemporaneous with the other structures on the site, although fill 1316 of posthole 1315 also yielded a single sherd datable to the 1st century AD. This may suggest that the feature was much later, rather than a contemporary recut. Flint was also found in all of these postholes with the exception of 1324. In posthole 1313 some animal bone was found.

The second 4-post structure (structure E) recorded in this trench was of a similar size, overlapped the area of structure F, and cannot, therefore, have been of the same date. Due to the truncated nature of the site no vertical stratigraphy existed to separate these features and it remains uncertain which was the earlier. Structure E was less complete than F, with only three of the four postholes remaining (1307, 1311 & 1319), which were also circular with U-shaped profiles but were more variable in size. These postholes varied between 0.15–0.27 m in diameter and 0.02–0.11 m in depth. The fills were very similar to those in the structure F group of postholes and yielded similar flint and early Iron Age pottery finds.

To the south of these features the trench was crossed by a large natural fissure in the rock into which was cut another group of three postholes. These postholes (1303, 1305 & 1321) together with a fourth, no longer extant, may have formed a slightly smaller 4-post structure G, with sides 1.75 m long. All the postholes were roughly circular and U-shaped in profile, and ranged from 0.17–0.3 m in diameter × 0.09–0.17 m in depth, with fills of similar deposits (1306, 1308 & 1322) to others with similar finds.

### *Other features*

Several features in other trenches may be contemporaneous with the early Iron Age settlement or at least were found to predate the lynchets of the later field system. This group included three features (811, 813 & 815) in trench 8 (Fig. 8.9). Postholes 813 and 815 lay 0.5 m apart, were roughly circular, U-shaped in profile, around 0.2 m in diameter and surviving to a depth of 0.12–0.15 m. The latter was truncated by a negative lynchet (804) which may have been of the same date. About 0.5 m south lay another feature (811), a shallow, oval pit, 0.46 × 0.39 m × 0.2 m deep with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with light brown clay silt with chalk fragments and contained flint finds and two large stones, one of which had been burnt before being placed in the pit in the same way that several large burnt stones had been placed in the pits in trench 9.

Two further small features in trench 27 may also predate the later field system. One oval posthole (2710) with postpipe (2708) was located in the northern end of this trench. It was filled with friable brown clay loam with chalk fragments forming the packing around the post, but no finds or other datable material was retrieved from this feature. Two metres to the south-west of this feature at the western baulk of the trench lay another posthole (2707) of similar dimensions, from which sherds of early Iron Age pottery were recovered.

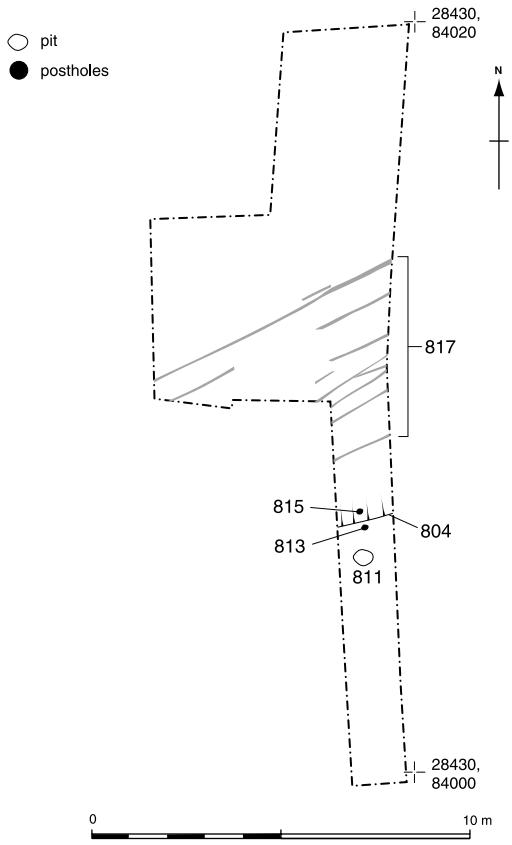


*Figure 8.9 Plan of features in trench 8.*

A gully (2103) cutting obliquely across trench 21 may also have been associated with this settlement (Fig. 8.10). This gully was cut and flanked by a number of stakeholes (2109) which had been truncated by later ploughing. It is uncertain how this feature should be interpreted, but it may have functioned as some sort of boundary around the western side of the ridge top. The fill (2104) of this gully yielded a number of sherds of mid-late Iron Age pottery and pieces of flint.

### *Later field system*

The whole of the investigated area was crossed by a series of negative plough lynchets which could be related to the field system known from the aerial photographic survey (Fig. 8.2). These features were broad shallow, concave linear ditches stretching across the excavated trenches, infilled by successive layers of relic ploughsoil. In trenches 6, 8 and 27 apparently contemporaneous plough marks were also observed. These narrow linear features, averaging 0.07 m wide, ran parallel with the lynchets across the width of the trenches roughly 0.4 m apart. The depth of material that had accumulated in the lynchet over time had preserved these.

The sequence of this build up was most clearly seen in trench 3 (Figs 8.2 and 8.11). A shallow, flat-bottomed ditch (312), possibly marking the edge of the field was the first feature in the sequence.

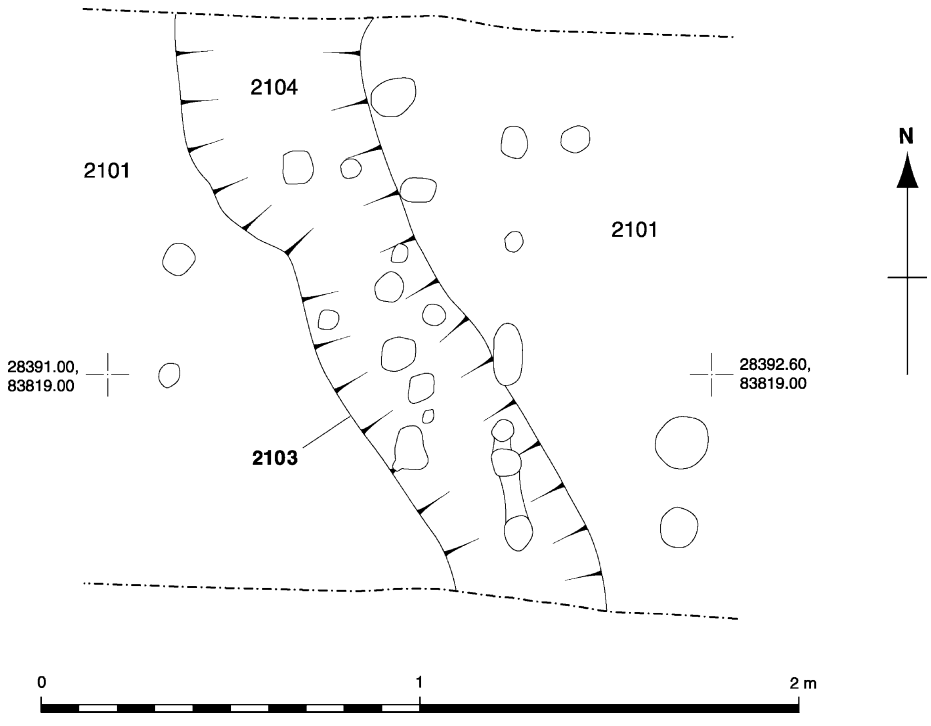


*Figure 8.10 Plan of gully 2103 with associated stakeholes in trench 21.*

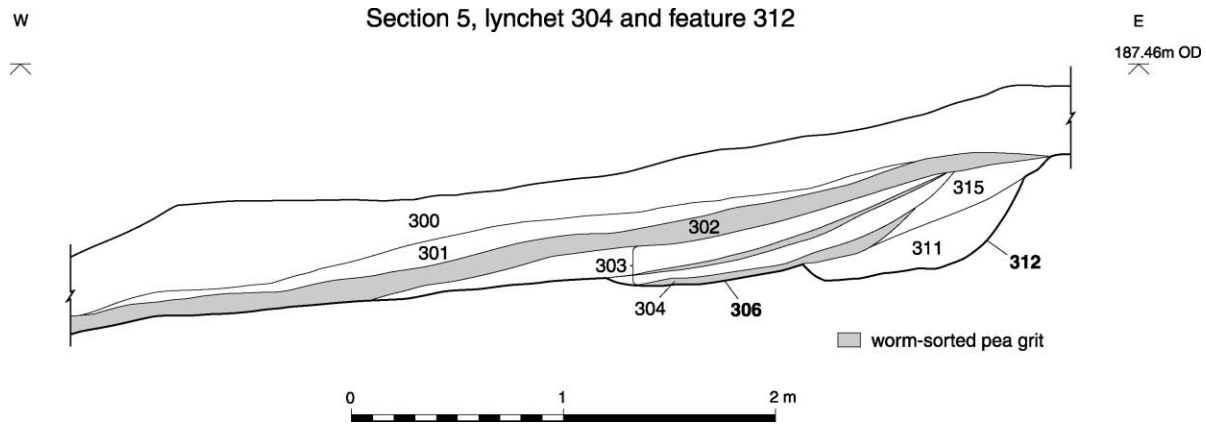


*Figure 8.11 Section through plough lynchet in trench 3.*

A deposit of friable, light grey, silt loam (311), possibly eroded from cultivated land to the east, further up slope, filled this ditch. This was succeeded by a layer of friable mid-red brown, silt loam (315) with moderate chalk inclusions, probably also derived from ploughing up slope. This feature had later been truncated by the negative lynchet (306). The primary fill of the lynchet was a compact, pale pinkish brown, silt loam (304) with moderate chalk inclusions derived from worm sorting. This was overlain by another similar deposit (303) which contained alternating layers of friable stone free soil and thin bands with chalk fragments derived from worm sorting. The whole feature was overlain by a deposit (302) of friable mid-brown silt loam, which contained a higher percentage of small rounded chalk fragments that had been worm sorted from the overlying ploughsoil (301). This deposit was similar to the underlying one, but was stone free.

The shallower lynchet remaining in trench 8 nearer the top of the ridge did not show all three of these episodes of worm sorting, probably having suffered more heavily from truncation by modern ploughing, but retained evidence of activity during one of the periods. The primary fill (802/820) of lynchet 804 was very similar to that in lynchet 306, but showed a series of three small, shallow depressions in its surface. These features (805, 807 & 809) may have been the truncated bases of small post or stakeholes forming a temporary fence line perpendicular to the edge of the field as marked by the plough lynchet. No artefacts were recovered from any of these features and the fills (806, 808 & 810) were indistinguishable from the overlying stone free layer of relic ploughsoil (801).

In the upper three fill layers within lynchet 306, flint and pottery were found. The pottery was a mix of prehistoric and late Iron Age and Roman wares. In the relict ploughsoil which was observed to fill the other lynchets on the site, and also seen to underlie the modern ploughsoil in some of the trenches where lynchets were not observed, a similar range of pottery and other artefacts were found, and these are likely to have been parts of the same system. No artefacts later than Romano-British in date were found in these layers indicating that the lynchet and ploughsoils filling it were probably of late Iron Age to Romano-British date.

### Subsequent landuse

A thick layer of modern topsoil was observed throughout each of the trenches, sealing all the earlier features, which had escaped destruction by ploughing up to that time. Aerial photographs provide evidence that during the Second World War Odstone Down was used as an airfield for bombing practice, and one photograph clearly shows the target. Tower Hill is named after the airfield's flight control tower, with Weathercock Hill probably being the site for the wind direction indicator. Aerial photographs also indicate the modern ploughing of the fields early in the 1950s, probably the first since the 'Celtic' field system was finally abandoned.

## DISCUSSION

### Earlier prehistoric activity

Some earlier prehistoric activity is represented by a small number of features and a surface scatter of worked flint. The features are likely to be of Neolithic date, while the flint scatter was of mixed date, and both might indicate occupation activity in the area. The flints included a blade-based assemblage more characteristic of the earlier Neolithic as well as material diagnostic of the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age (Bradley, Chapter 12). Tower Hill is only 2.5 km south of the Wayland's Smithy long barrow and it is possible that the two sites had social and economic links. Other early Neolithic sites have been noted in the area, at Rams Hill and Weathercock Hill, both of which are within 5 km of Tower Hill.

#### *The Grooved Ware pit*

The main evidence for Neolithic activity on the site is the apparently isolated example of the Grooved Ware pit (1403, Fig. 8.4), although it is possible

that further pits may well exist. Such pits are a characteristic of late Neolithic sites in southern England and especially the Upper Thames Valley. Typically the pit contained a fill of burnt material including both wild and cultivated plant remains and wood charcoal, the bones from wild and domesticated animals, flintwork and pottery. There is some evidence from the pit for structured patterning. Discrete deposits of animal bones had been placed among the rest of the deliberate backfill of the feature. Analysis of these bones revealed that the deposit was highly selective, and did not suggest simple domestic waste (Clark, Chapter 13).

At Tower Hill animal bones from this pit suggest that young animals of reproductive age had been butchered, but deposited after minimal meat extraction. The pig and sheep or goat remains could have been the result of meat consumption. A meal or deliberate wasting of prime meat specially killed for the occasion, may have been part of the ritual associated with this pit. The charred plant material consisted mainly of gathered food species such as hazelnuts and sloe berries, with only traces of cultivated species in the form of a single wheat grain. The neonatal and foetal animal remains suggested that this deposit was made in spring or early summer, the nuts and berries indicate later in the season, or their having been preserved from the previous year's crop.

The cattle remains in the primary pit fill may represent a hide, which had been placed in the pit together with a number of other artefacts. This hide can be compared to the folded hides deposited with some (rather later) early Bronze Age human burials with Beakers. Cowhides possibly had a special significance and were thus employed in traditions or rituals other than human burials at this time. The other artefacts placed in the pit included an antler rake and a wild boar canine, and it may be that some special significance was also attached to these items. A fairly large assemblage of undiagnostic worked flint was included; some of which had been used and later broken. This was placed in the primary fill of this pit with other special deposits, and may have had some presently unknown importance to the people who dug and filled this pit in the late Neolithic. The pottery recovered from this pit can be placed within the Clacton sub-style of the Grooved Ware tradition (Barclay, Chapter 12), which is relatively rare within the region. The pottery was highly fragmentary but it is possible that parts of at least two vessels were deposited within the pit.

The occurrence of Grooved Ware with a range of other material is very typical for this type of deposit. It is possible that such pit deposits represent the residues from a range of activities that were connected to ceremonial feasting, in which the act of digging the pit and the material selected for deposition could have formed part of the final act of a series of connected ritual activities. These activities may have taken place elsewhere and the material could have been brought to the site for burial. Alternatively the pit deposit could have been related to other activities that were taking place on this hill. There is also the possibility that the hill was marked by pit digging because of its prominence and its views of other sites. Finds of Grooved Ware are not common on the Downs, although this could simply represent a lack of suitable opportunities for modern excavations. One similar pit deposit was found at Sparsholt, Oxfordshire, only 500 m from the Seven Barrows cemetery (Howell and Durden 1996, 21). This feature was only partially excavated but contained deposits very similar to the pit at Tower Hill.

### *Flint extraction*

Most flint procured during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods was from surface exposures. Examples of such sites have been found at the interface between the Clay-with-Flints and the Upper Chalk on the Marlborough Downs in Wiltshire (Holgate 1988, 64). The ridge top at Tower Hill is a very similar location and may have been used in this way. A concentration of flint finds was recovered from surface collection in the vicinity of the south-western corner of the field-walked area, where flint was observed to outcrop on the ridge (Fig. 8.3a).

Other flint extraction pits have been identified in areas of Oxfordshire (Holgate 1988, 336) and this includes possible examples on the Downs near Liddington. At Tower Hill a pit (2211, trench 22, Figs 8.4 and 8.6) may have been used for flint extraction, and this interpretation was extended to other similar, unexcavated features in the area. The only finds from the pit were 117 flints.

## The late Bronze Age/early Iron Age occupation and the context for the hoard

These limited investigations of the site revealed a short-lived, apparently open settlement covering an area of approximately 4 ha. This settlement was occupied during the 8th century BC, at the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age period. Human activity at the site following the Neolithic period and preceding the use of the settlement was of very low intensity, and that following it was restricted to a field system. This ensured that the spatial distribution of artefacts and structures across the site genuinely indicated contemporaneous areas, rather than a slow migration across the site.

### *Structures within the settlement*

Limited excavation revealed that the open settlement at Tower Hill consisted of both post-built round-houses and 4-post structures that are usually interpreted as raised granaries. Of the four houses only the plans of buildings A and C were totally revealed in the excavation trenches.

### *Building A*

Building A was a typical roundhouse with circular post-ring, 7 m in diameter, and south-east facing entrance with a post-built porch, although it did have a number of features that sets it apart from the other buildings. This type of house can be found on both late Bronze Age and Iron Age sites in the adjacent areas (Moore and Jennings 1992, figs 10–1; Allen *et al*. 1984). It was evidently a dwelling from the nature of the domestic waste dumped in nearby, contemporary tree-throw hole 79. A high percentage of featured sherds of early Iron Age All Cannings Cross type pottery were recovered from among this material, but may only have represented two or three vessels. It may be that this represented a special deposit (Brown, Chapter 12). This dump yielded the majority of the pottery of this date.

This structure was the only one for which an entrance was located, and the entranceway had been widened at some point during its use, with both doorposts carefully reset. Due to the limitations of the excavation it is not known if the other structures had similar entranceways, but the corresponding side of building C was also revealed but did not have an entrance.

Heavy metal analysis of the area of blue staining and the surrounding chalk (Maskall, Chapter 11) showed the hoard had been placed inside the entrance to the house. It is not certain that this occurred in the lifetime of the building, but the coincidence of the features makes it likely that the hoard was deposited within the entranceway while the structure was standing. The pieces of the hoard found within the blue staining were all pressed tightly together as though to fit into the minimum space possible, and all with points basically downwards and then pressed firmly into and onto the surface of the chalk. The hollow into which they were placed was not dug to any depth into the solid rock, but merely the depth of the soil at that point, as though the effort involved was kept to a minimum. This arrangement appears to have been a quick hiding place in a well-marked spot, for easy recovery later. However, the position within the doorway at the threshold to the building may have other significance.

### *The evidence of the hoard*

The hoard contained 92 separate bronzes, comprising 22 completed socketed axes, 24 fragments from socketed axes, 6 complete and 5 partial rings, 2 partial bracelets, a piece of coiled strip, part of a ring headed pin and 2 partial rods. Also present were 8 pieces of casting jets, 19 pieces of scrap, an unidentified fragment and a piece of slag.

One of the rods was considered to be Roman from the metallurgical analysis, but the remainder of the material is of late Bronze Age date. A date at the end of the late Bronze Age is considered as most likely for these axes, at the time of the transition from bronze working to iron, and therefore a date in the 8th to 7th centuries BC would seem appropriate for the hoard (Coombs and Northover, Chapter 11).

The axes are described in detail in the catalogue (Chapter 11) and are of Sompting type, named after the Sompting hoard from Sussex (Curwen 1948). These are the largest and heaviest type of axe known of British and Irish types. The sides tend to be straight, with a heavy collar, and have a socket with a distinctive back-to-front plan. This axe type is often decorated, as are some in this hoard, and the style may have continental origins. Associations with metalworking in northern Europe may also be suggested as a source of the raw materials used on this site. However, comparisons with other sites (Chapter 11), indicate that there is much regionalisation in the type of alloys being produced. Even within the Tower Hill hoard itself, there are variations in the metal content, suggesting different generations of castings.

The ornaments in a hoard of this type are more unusual, and comprise a number of rings some of which may have been bracelets or armlets, for example, the rings shown in Figure 11.14.22, 23 and 24 and the small torc-like ring seen in Figure 11.14.26 (Plate 8.3). Other items seem to have been both decorative and functional, such as the pieces illustrated in Figures 11.14.25 and 11.15.28, which have holes and loops suitable to take leather straps or bands. The exact function of these pieces is uncertain but they seem likely to be connected with harness and gear for a horse and cart (Plates 8.3 and 8.4).

Unusually in a hoard of this type there is also evidence of the process of metalworking in the form of unfinished objects (axe 1, Plate 8.5), scrap, sprue and waste. No moulds or crucibles were found, but the finding of casting waste, drips, runlets, residues and oxidised bronze are rare in hoards of this period (Northover, Chapter 11). There is an interesting and puzzling discrepancy between the composition of the waste and the axes and items produced by the casting process on the site. This could be explained by the mixing of different sorts of bronze in the crucible to make a suitable alloy.

It seems certain that metalworking was taking place on Tower Hill in the late Bronze Age and that the smith was manufacturing Sompting axes and other items. This is confirmed by the presence of a number of part-finished axes. Also, the evidence for rapid cooling rates identified in the metallography suggests the use of metal moulds, even though these were not found on the site. The sprue found on the site matches the composition of the axes well.

A feature of Sompting axes is that often they are in an as-cast state and do not seem in some cases to have been used. In this hoard some axes, for example axe 1 (Plate 8.6.1), appears to be straight from the mould, whereas other axes, such as axe 2 (Plate 8.6.2), have been hammered and sharpened. This raises the question of the purpose of the manufacture of such axes and their intended function. As some of the axes are hammered it suggests that they were destined for use, but the Sompting axes do share a

*Plate 8.3 Flat ring 28, of unknown function, and bracelet-type rings 27 (left) and 26 (right) (By kind permission of Eric Penser. Photograph by Michael Dudley).*

*Plate 8.4 Ring 25, possible horse gear (By kind permission of Eric Penser. Photograph by Michael Dudley).*

*Plate 8.5 Axe 1 (By kind permission of Eric Penser. Photograph by Michael Dudley).*

number of features with Armorican axes, which seem to have been a non-functional type. It has been suggested that many axes in this period were largely used with exchange or ritual (Thomas 1989, 273). Therefore, in this Llyn Fawr phase, when iron was taking over the functional role of axes, it could be that the bronze axes reflect social transformation and the shifting place of bronzes in society rather than technological changes. The reason for the deposition of these bronzes at Tower Hill remains unknown but could be quite complex, perhaps reflecting a tradition or a ritual of changing times.

### *Buildings B, C and D*

Buildings B and D could also have been roundhouses, and although incomplete in plan both appear to have diameters over 8 m. Only part of building D was exposed and it is therefore difficult to interpret. Building C appeared incomplete, but it could have originally been part of a roundhouse and


*Plate 8.6 Axe 1, showing the body and edge straight from the mould, and axe 2, showing the hammered and sharpened edge (By kind permission of Eric Penser. Photograph by Michael Dudley).*

it is possible that the missing postholes were removed by ploughing or there may never have been a full circuit of posts. On other sites of late Bronze Age and Iron Age date a number of examples of semi-circular structures have been recognised. This includes two buildings at the late Bronze Age settlement at Reading Business Park, Berkshire (Moore and Jennings 1992, figs 24–5) and a similar structure at an Iron Age settlement at Gravelly Guy, Oxfordshire (Lambrick and Allen forthcoming).

Such buildings could have had a variety of functions that might have included storage, or could have been non-domestic, perhaps serving some ritual purpose such as a shrine. At Tower Hill building C was closely associated with two pits that contained burnt and broken sarsen, some of which came from saddle querns, in their upper fills. Pit 912 was cut by one of its postholes, while the other pit 924 lay just beyond the structure.

Building C may have been contemporaneous with the waste dump in pit 942, but clearly post-dated pit 912. One of the internal posts of the building (posthole 910) cut the fill of this pit. Both pit 912 and pit 924, which seems likely to be roughly contemporary, would have been backfilled relatively quickly, so the structure need not have been very much later. Similar pottery sherds were recovered from the fills of these pits and the fill of one of the postholes. An attempt to obtain a thermoluminescence date on a pottery sherd was unsuccessful, as the background radiation at the site was too strong. Both pits had been backfilled in a similar, structured, possibly ritualistic, manner. No similar pits were found in any of the other excavated areas and the activity may have been restricted to this particular part of the settlement.

### *Structured deposits*

Two of the buildings were associated with deposits which were very probably deliberately placed. The most important was the hoard within the entrance of building A, while two pits containing stone were found within building C. These deposits could have been made at different stages during the lifecycle of each building and their associated inhabitants, and could be seen in terms of foundation or ritual deposits. The placing of the hoard near the entrance to house A recalls the general practice of placing deposits near to entrances and boundaries

(Parker-Pearson and Richards 1994, 49), and as Sompting axes were probably largely non-functional, perhaps for exchange or ritual, the occurrence in such a context would seem appropriate (Thomas 1989, 273). Metalwork hoards of this date could fulfil a variety of functions (Taylor 1993, 104), but a principal purpose was developing status. If the remodelling of the entrance to the structure was an attempt at display, the hoard may have been buried beside it at the same time emphasising the prestige of the occupants.

The pits associated with building C contained in their upper fill blocks of sarsen, some of which had been used as saddle querns, while their lower fills were largely devoid of material. One pit was cut by an internal posthole indicating that it may have been contemporaneous or predated construction. The other pit would have been located near to the inner edge of the wall. In plan the structure appears incomplete, although other semi-circular structures are known. The features and the structure may well have been created for some traditional or ritual activity. The stones within the pit deposits had been broken and burnt before burial and had been placed near the top and not at the base of the pits. This activity was clearly structured and evidently cannot simply be dismissed as rubbish disposal.

### *Settlement organisation*

Restricting particular types of activity to different areas within the settlement is also apparent for the grain storage. The 4-post structures were not of the same date but the finds recovered suggested that they were contemporaneous with the occupation of the other structures. All were restricted to a single area of the site, on the crest of the ridge above the settlement. Such features are known from both Bronze Age and Iron Age sites, and are generally interpreted as grain stores, although other interpretations are known (Knight 1984). The limited evidence for charred grain from the fills of these features is not sufficient to confirm or deny this interpretation, but the exposed location could have been selected to keep stored grain dry.

Neither the houses nor the settlement appear to have been enclosed by an earthwork. Apart from the structures other features such as pits appear to have been scarce and overall the character of the settlement seems to have been one of low-density occupation. This could be taken to indicate that it may have been occupied on a semi-permanent basis with elements of the community moving between different sites, and occupation may have been short lived. Unfortunately the limited excavation failed to identify any features with significant environmental assemblages which could have provided economic data (Robinson and Ingrem, Chapter 13). From the animal bone assemblage it is possible to say that sheep/goat and cattle were present on the site.

### *The later field system*

It was clear from the earlier aerial photographic plots that the field system was quite extensive, stretching for several kilometres to the north, east and south-west of Tower Hill. The excavations and new aerial photographic plot carried out on Tower Hill as part of the current project showed that the field system had also covered the hilltop. It had been more extensively truncated by ploughing and less obvious from the air. The system was fairly complex being composed of numerous, mainly rectilinear plots of various sizes. The largest of these appeared to have been around 200 m long, while others were as small as 35 m long. The smaller plots could have been the result of division of larger units, though it is impossible to say why some units should have been so divided. It may have related to the size of land grants given to different individuals depending on their wealth or status, or splitting of the holdings of the deceased among their heirs. It is likely that a number of factors were involved in the production of the observed field pattern which included plots of different shapes, and was the end of a long process of evolution.

The evidence retrieved by excavation enabled the nature of the system visible from the air to be characterised and dated. The excavated negative plough lynchets corresponded fairly closely with the aerial plots, and showed that these fields had been bounded by lynchets that had resulted from cultivation of individual plots by ploughing. The three episodes of worm sorting recognised in the sequence in trench 3 suggested cultivation of these fields had not been continuous but rather had been broken by two periods of fallow or grass cover during the use of the Celtic fields and another such period following their abandonment. The artefacts recovered in this way and from the surface collection of a wider area of the field system enabled the field system and this sequence of episodes of cultivation and periods without cultivation to be dated to the late Iron Age to early Roman period. The manuring of the fields with domestic waste suggested by the thin spread of pottery of these dates across the area probably occurred several times through this sequence at times of cultivation.