

Chapter 2: The sites

The sites: an introduction and summary

The excavations along both the Jubilee River and the Eton Rowing Course are distributed along a transect which runs parallel to the present day course of the Thames, downstream from Taplow in the north-west to between Eton and Datchet. The site at Widbrook Common lies beyond this transect further to the north-west, between Maidenhead and Cookham.

This transect includes areas of floodplain and gravel terrace, as well as palaeochannels. Reconstruction of the development of these environments, and of the ways in which they were exploited, were amongst the major aims of the project. The contrasting exploitation of these zones is shown most clearly in the larger areas examined as part of the Eton Rowing Course project (see, in particular, the excavations in Areas Ex1-3, 1 and 11, and Chapter 3).

The descriptions of the sites and finds given below have been divided into five phases: the Mesolithic, the earlier Neolithic (comprising both Bowl and Ebbsfleet Ware pottery), the middle Neolithic (associated with Mortlake and Fengate Ware), the late Neolithic (associated with Grooved Ware), and the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age (comprising both Beakers and Collared Urns). Whilst this division hopefully provides the clearest picture possible of the evidence within particular periods, it is not without drawbacks, making it more difficult, for example, to follow the development of a site over time. It also poses problems with respect to the less certainly dated evidence. The degree of precision with which particular features and groups of finds can be dated is very variable. Many features, for example, can be dated only on the basis of the associated worked flint, to which sometimes only a rather broad chronology can be attributed (eg late Mesolithic or early Neolithic). In an attempt to avoid dividing the descriptions of sites and finds too much, we have attempted to include the less certainly dated evidence alongside the most relevant of the better-dated evidence from the same site. The reader should, however, be aware that the division of the evidence into chapters by phases is not absolute, and further evidence relevant to a particular phase may be found in Chapters other than that devoted to that phase. It is worth noting in particular, that many of the flint assemblages (although the same is true of artefacts in other materials), whilst appearing to date predominantly from one period, also contain a few chronologically diagnostic types which clearly belong to other periods. Because it is impossible to

divide the remaining, undiagnostic flint between the periods represented, these assemblages are generally described as wholes in the most appropriate chapter.

Given these issues, this introduction to the sites provides brief site by site summaries of the most significant features and finds. Table 2.1 provides a chronological summary by broad phases of the same information. More detailed site-specific reports are available online at <http://library.thehumanjourney.net>.

The Eton Rowing Course sites

The Eton Rowing Course Sites lie just to the north of the present day course of the Thames in an area which was divided into gravel 'islands' by a number of former channels. Letters were assigned to the different components of this landscape (Fig. 2.1). Five gravel islands were distinguished: Sites F East and West at the north, Sites G and X at the centre, and Site I at the south. A smaller and lower area of gravel south of Site F East was called Terrace Y. Between Gravel Islands F West and X, and south of F East, was a wide and deep basin, R, and another, basin, W, lay south of gravel island G between Islands X and I. These areas were filled with water at the end of the last glaciation, and were linked by a channel between Gravel Islands X and G, but gradually silted up.

The gravel islands were divided by a number of different palaeochannels. Channel P ran from Lot's Hole down the north-east side of the site to join the Thames at Eton Wick, and its line is followed by the present day Cress Brook. In the late Glacial period a branch of Channel P, Channel N, ran south-west, then turned south-east, cutting between Gravel Islands F West and F East and between F East and Terrace Y, and continued across Gravel Islands G and I. Before the start of the Holocene another major palaeochannel, Channel Q, was created running eastwards from the modern Thames across Basin R, continuing as Channel T between Gravel Islands F East and G until it met Channel P to the north-east of Gravel Island G. It was probably the creation of this channel that choked parts of the older continuation of Channel N across Island G with sands and gravels, leaving only a shallow hollow, though further downstream the channel survived as Inlet Z. The newer Channel T cut through most of the silts of Channel P but turned southwards again, separating Gravel Islands G and I, to rejoin the modern Thames towards the south-east end of the site. The length of this channel cutting between

Table 2.1 Chronological summary of features and finds

	Flint and other artefact scatters	Tree-throw holes	Midden deposits	Pits	Ring ditches	Inhumation burial	Cremation burial	Other human remains	Human remains from palaeochannel contexts	Burnt flint deposits	Gullies	Residual and stray finds
Early Mesolithic												
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1	x											
Areas 20 and 24	x											
Mesolithic												
Agar's Plough												x
Roundmoor Ditch												x
Area 6												x
Area 10												x
Areas 3 and 5	x											x
Area 16		x										x
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1		x										
Amerden Lane West												x
Late Mesolithic/early Neolithic												
Areas 3 and 5		x		?								
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1	x	x										
Early Neolithic												
Roundmoor Ditch												x
Area 6		x	x	x	?	?						
Area 10		x	x									x
Areas 3 and 5	x											x
Area 16		?		x				x				x
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1	x	x		x			?					x
Area 18 and Site F East												x
Areas 20 and 24		?										x
Lake End Road East												x
Lake End Road West		?	x	?								
Lot's Hole				x								x
Lot's Hole Gravel Storage Area												x
Marsh Lane East Site 2		?		x	?							x
Marsh Lane East Site 1		x										
Marsh Lane West		x										
Amerden Lane West												x
Taplow Mill Site 2		?										
Middle Neolithic												
Area 6		x				x				x		x
Area 10		x		x								x
Areas 3 and 5	?											x
Area 16		x		?					?			x
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1		x						x				x
Area 18 and Site F East												x
Areas 20 and 24		?										x
Lake End Road West				x								
Marsh Lane East Site 1				x								
Taplow Mill Site 1				x								
Taplow Mill Site 2				?								
Widbrook Common												x

Table 2.1 (continued) Chronological summary of features and finds

	Flint and other artefact scatters	Tree-throw holes	Midden deposits	Pits	Ring ditches	Inhumation burial	Cremation burial	Other human remains	Human remains from palaeochannel contexts	Burnt flint deposits	Gullies	Residual and stray finds
Late Neolithic												
Area 6									x			x
Areas 3 and 5	?											x
Areas 3 and 5										?		
Area 16				x								
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1		x										x
Areas 20 and 24				x								
Taplow Mill Site 2				?								
Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age												
Area 6					x	?						x
Area 4												x
Area 10		?										x
Areas 3 and 5	?											x
Area 16												x
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1	x			x	?					x		x
Area 18 and Site F East				x								
Lake End Road West												x
Marsh Lane East Site 1				x								
Amerden Lane East												x
Taplow Mill Site 2	x	?									?	
Early Bronze Age												
Roundmoor Ditch												x
Area 6												x
Area 4												x
Areas 3 and 5	?											x
Area 16					?	?						x
Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1												x
Marsh Lane East Site 2					x		x					
Amerden Lane West	?											

Islands G and I was called Channel V. Inlet Z drained into Channel V, but the new channel choked its continuation across Island I with sand and gravel, just as Channel T had done further upstream, leaving only a shallow hollow crossing Island I. These hollows later became the sites of Neolithic middens (see Areas 10 and 6 below).

Areas 20, 24, RC1 and 2 and NAR

Areas 20, 24, RC1 and 2 and NAR lay on the gravel terrace at the northern end of the Rowing Course, to the north-east of Palaeochannel N. The excavations in Areas 20 and 24 were dug to investigate a large area of cropmark enclosures crossed by the main Rowing Course (Area 20) and by the Return Lane (Area 24). Further small areas were dug where access roads were to be constructed, along the line of a road to the gravel processing area (Road

Corridors 1 and 2: RC1 and RC2), and the Northern Access Road (NAR), along the line of the access to the boathouse.

Evaluation trenches were dug in 1987 and 1990 to investigate the character and date of the cropmark evidence and some of the blank areas off the gravel terrace. In 2000, two areas were stripped by machine: Area 20 (2.85 hectares) and Area 24 (0.876 hectares), which included the slopes on both sides of the main lake and on the north-east side of the Return Lane. Several smaller areas were excavated in 2003 due to the widening of the Return Lane, which involved narrowing the area left between the Rowing Course and the Return Lane. More than a third of the strip between Area 20 and Area 24 was investigated (Areas 24b and 24c). A noise protection bund covering the southern edge of the Return Lane was removed, and an additional area (Area 24a) was excavated.

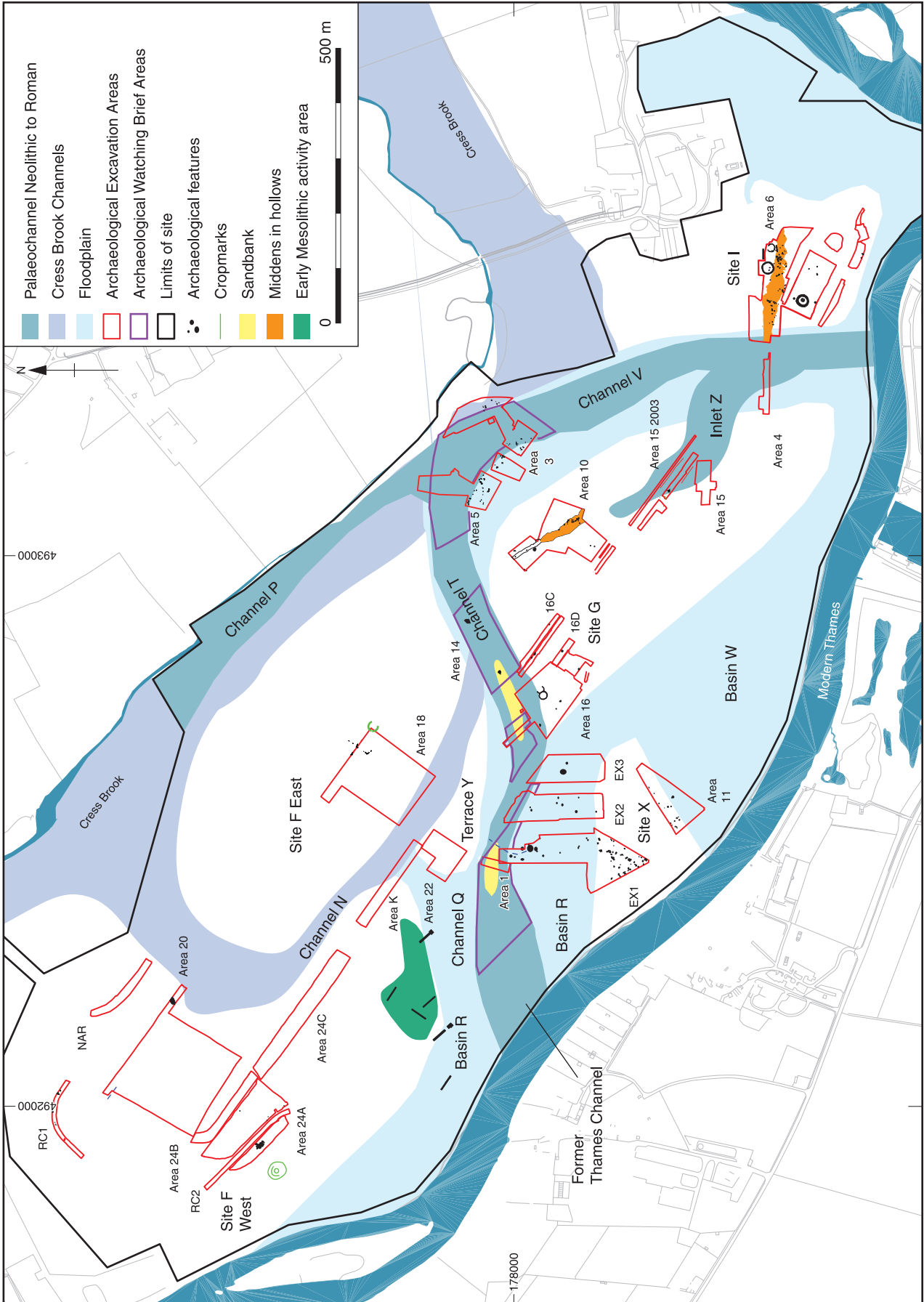


Fig. 2.1 The channels and gravel islands in the area of the Eton Rowing Course (Crown copyright 2013 Ordnance Survey 100005569)

Activity in these areas in the Mesolithic comprised a sparse scatter of flint in a deposit adjacent to Channel N, and another in the top of a large periglacial hollow.

Residual early Neolithic pottery was recovered from later features in both Areas 20 and 24. It was also recovered from a tree-throw hole which may have dated from this period.

Ebbsfleet Ware and struck flint were found in a small number of tree-throw holes in RC1. A much smaller quantity of probably middle Neolithic pottery was found in Area 24.

A late Neolithic pit containing worked flint, burnt flint, a burnt cattle rib and Grooved Ware was found in Area 24. Two further pits in Area 24 which contained worked flint, burnt bone and animal bone may have been of similar date.

Area 18 and Site F East

Area 18 lay on the Site F East gravel island, near the eastern edge of the Rowing Lake. Palaeochannel N defined the south-western edge of the Site F East gravel island.

Aerial photographs had indicated that this part of the Rowing Course ran along the south-western edge of a large block of gravel terrace (Site F East) on which a significant network of ditched enclosures was visible. Evaluation in 1987 had investigated both the lower-lying silt filled basin and the cropmark enclosure ditches on the edge of the gravel terrace. The latter were dated by pottery to the middle/late Bronze Age. Within the development proposals, the major area of Bronze Age enclosures on the gravel terrace was to be buried and protected by raising the ground level. South of this, the area was lower-lying, and appeared to consist of silts, though a small area of gravel within the silts was visible on aerial photographs. Evaluation revealed few features except close to the edge of the gravel terrace. Due to the small area of known archaeology affected by the Rowing Course, and the limited nature of the archaeological discoveries, a programme of salvage excavation and recording following stripping by the Rowing Lake contractor, supplemented by a limited area of targeted excavation, was agreed for this area. As most of the cropmarks were located on the small area of gravel with the silt, this was the area chosen for detailed excavation, but a watching brief was carried out on the machine stripping of the rest of the area.

The development of the palaeochannel was investigated in Area 18 and in various evaluation trenches.

Of the various features found on the gravel terrace only one, probably late Neolithic/early Bronze Age pit, can be dated to the earlier prehistoric period, although a number of other pits were found which contained burnt flint. Residual early and middle Neolithic pottery was also found. To the north, at the edge of the gravel terrace, a scatter of pits, gullies and more irregular features was found

in Evaluation Trenches H, I and J, of which most contained only Neolithic or early Bronze Age finds. A penannular cropmark on the very edge of the Rowing Course was not clearly identified in salvage, but may represent a former barrow.

The north-western side of Basin R: the floodplain and terrace edge (evaluation trenches)

The northern side of Basin R, between Channel Q and the Site F West gravel island, was investigated only through evaluation trenches. Several thousand early Mesolithic flints were found in three evaluation trenches (166, 180 and 173) on the northern edge of Basin R, and suggest a significant occupation site here. Evaluation trenches across the basin recovered early Mesolithic peat deposits indicating a contemporaneous reedswamp, showing that this was a lakeside base camp. Later, alder carr developed, and was succeeded by alluvial floodplain deposits, on which small clusters of struck flint were deposited. An early Bronze Age hearth was found in one evaluation trench, but no area excavations were carried out as this area was to be preserved *in situ*.

Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1

Areas Ex1-3, 11 and 1 lay on the south-western side of Basin R, on the south side of Channel Q. They extended from the Site X gravel island across the floodplain of Basin R to the north and into the southern edge of Channel Q. Area 1 continued across the channel. Area 11 covered the southern part of the gravel island and extended south-eastwards into Basin W.

Although not in the line of the Rowing Course, much of this area was excavated to provide storage for clays and other soils excavated from the adjacent Rowing Course. Evaluation trenches were dug in 1990 and 1994. Because of the clear importance of the area, it was decided to excavate three parallel areas (Ex1-3) in successive years from the edge of the gravel terrace (Site X) north-eastwards across the floodplain and underlying basin into Channel Q. The aim was not only to obtain a picture of the changing character of the basin and of human activity from the edge of the gravel terrace out into the basin, but also to look at variability of use through the three adjacent areas of the floodplain and the channel. Due to the depth of the deposits and the difficulty of predicting where human activity would occur, the positioning of the three areas was arbitrary. Large areas were chosen to ensure that the overall pattern of activity was recovered, and within these a targeted approach was adopted.

The method of excavation was adapted from that used at West Heslerton, North Yorkshire to examine successive land surfaces buried by aeolian deposits. As evaluation had shown that the occupation horizons were only evident where there were extant

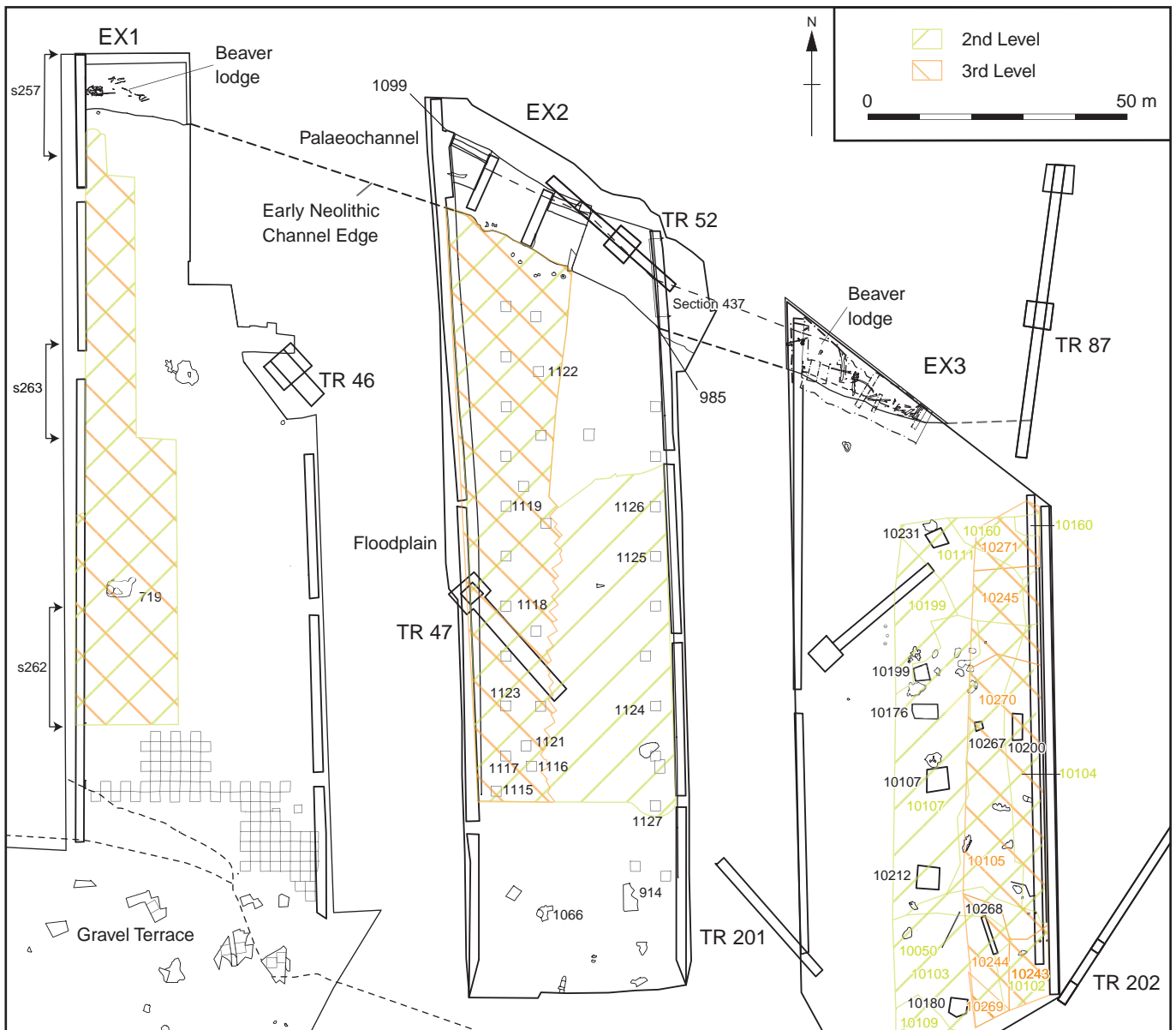


Fig. 2.2 Levels of excavation in Areas Ex1-3

traces of human activity, guide trenches one bucket wide were excavated by machine along both sides of the area to expose the stratigraphic sequence (Fig. 2.2). The whole area was then stripped down to the first occupation horizon and was planned. The area was then divided lengthwise into three parallel strips, and the third containing the most archaeology was left for detailed excavation. Over the remaining two thirds, archaeological features and artefact spreads were summarily excavated, and then machining continued down to the next archaeological horizon. At this level the process was repeated, one of the two remaining strips being selected for detailed excavation, and the remaining third being stripped again by machine down to a third horizon.

In Area Ex2, very little was found at the first archaeological horizon, so test-squares 2m across were excavated by hand across the area to ensure

that no significant archaeology was being missed before further machining took place.

At the northern end of Area Ex1, the southern edge of Palaeochannel Q and its levee were found. These were sample-excavated independently of the strips across the floodplain. Also in Area Ex1, a considerable area of the northern side of the gravel terrace island was excavated as a sample of the activity on dry ground. Little of the terrace, however, was included in Areas Ex2 or Ex3.

Due to the lack of clear layer distinctions on the floodplain, finds clusters were usually recorded in spits. In 1995 the artefacts (including flint clusters) were recorded manually, giving an individual small finds number to each artefact, the locations of which were then plotted two-dimensionally using planning grids at a scale of 1:20 or larger. Polaroid photographs of the artefact clusters and scatters

were also taken and annotated. The vertical height of each spit was recorded using a dumpy level. From 1996 onwards individual artefacts were recorded digitally in 3 dimensions using a data-logger.

In Area Ex1, the edge of the floodplain next to the gravel terrace proved to contain a quite high density of artefactual material, but no clear focus, and so was gridded into 2m squares and alternate squares were excavated by hand. Additional squares were excavated where finds concentrations or features were found.

South of the gridded area, where numerous dark irregular surface patches were evident, but very few finds, the layer overlying the edge of the gravel terrace was removed by machine under archaeological supervision to check that archaeological features were not being missed. Where machining exposed clearly burnt areas containing finds, or potential features, these were left as islands of soil for excavation by hand.

At the very end of the 1995 excavation season, when much of the early Neolithic activity area had been excavated, what was intended to be final clearance of the area revealed further spreads of struck flint below the central burnt area. For speed of excavation these areas were excavated in squares 0.2m across, from which all finds were bagged together, rather than as individual small finds.

More detailed evaluation of the basin south of the gravel island (Basin W) did not reveal such a high density of activity as had been found in Basin R, and it was therefore decided to excavate only the southern edge of the gravel terrace and the adjacent part of the basin (Area 11).

Palaeochannel Q (Area 1 and the northern parts of Areas Ex1-3)

A composite section across the palaeochannel and Basin R was obtained from the excavations in Area 1 and along the western edge of Area Ex1. Further details were obtained from evaluation trenches and excavations in other areas.

The Mesolithic backswamp deposits filling Basin R south of Channel Q (against Gravel Island X) were shallow and poorly-preserved in comparison to those on the northern side of Basin R. A small area of a pre-Neolithic phase of Channel Q may have survived in Ex3, but the earliest main phases of channel have been dated to the early Neolithic, and were associated with small quantities of struck flint, pottery, and animal bone, including a jumbled cattle skeleton which gave a radiocarbon date of 3650-3370 cal BC. A beaver-gnawed natural timber from these layers gave a similar radiocarbon date of 3640-3360 cal BC.

Middle Neolithic radiocarbon dates were obtained from a cattle skull (3370-3020 cal BC) and a red deer antler (3330-2910 cal BC) found one on top of the other close to the northern bank of the channel during a watching brief just upstream of Area 1.

Two human skulls were also recovered from the middle of the channel during the watching brief, one of which, from the upper fills of the channel, gave a radiocarbon date of 3330-2900 cal BC. These finds cannot, unfortunately, be tied precisely to the stratigraphy of the channel. A sandbank developed in the middle of Channel Q, the upper layers of which included finds of middle Bronze Age and later date. This sandbank was therefore present earlier than this, but was not dated in Area 1. More information came from further downstream (see Channel T and Area 16 below).

The floodplain within Basin R on the northern side of Site X (northern parts of Areas Ex1-3)

Overlying the compressed backswamp deposits were alluvial sediments containing tree-throw holes, one of which (in evaluation Trench 46) contained late Mesolithic worked flints and burnt unworked flint below organic remains dated to 5260-4850 cal BC. Other tree-throw holes also included Mesolithic or early Neolithic flints.

Scatters of predominantly early Neolithic flint were found within a soil in the sequence of floodplain deposits. As a result of the analysis of the flint in these scatters (of which 17 were found), they have been classified as knapping scatters, dumps of utilised material or as activity areas. The largest activity area surrounded a burnt area which probably represented a hearth. Within the surrounding scatters detailed evidence of the techniques used to knap arrowheads was found. A pit containing burnt flint was found nearby, and a deposit of burnt bone – possibly a cremation burial – was also found lying upon this soil.

This early Neolithic soil was cut by numerous tree-throw holes (some of which contained flint and, in one case, animal bone).

Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age artefacts scatters consisting largely of flint but including some pottery were found in later alluvial layers.

Close to Gravel Terrace Site X the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age alluvium was overlain by another soil horizon that contained pottery ranging in date from the early Neolithic to the Roman period. Prominent amongst this was Beaker pottery. This horizon also contained a number of scatters of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint which do not appear to have been significantly disturbed, suggesting a focus of activity of that date in this area.

A small number of shallow pits, some containing burnt bone and charcoal, and a tree-throw hole, were cut into this layer.

Site X: the gravel island (southern parts of Areas Ex1-3 and northern part of Area 11)

A large number of features – mostly pits and tree-throw holes, but also a few postholes and two linear features – were found on the Site X gravel island, but only a few of them could be dated. Burnt flint

was spread widely across the area. On the basis of the rather scant artefacts recovered, four tree-throw holes have been dated to the Mesolithic, six to the early Neolithic, one to the middle Neolithic and three to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age. Two pits have also been dated to the early Neolithic and one to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age.

Basin W: the floodplain to the southeast of Site X (southern part of Area 11 and evaluation trenches)

The floodplain deposits on the south-eastern side of the Site X gravel island were investigated in Area 11 and in various evaluation trenches.

As in Basin R, peat of probable early Mesolithic date was found in the deepest, western part of the basin. This was overlain by alder carr as the basin silted up, and then by a sequence of alluvial fills. Scatters of late Mesolithic or early Neolithic flint, as well as burnt deposits, were found within the alluvial sequence.

Further up the sequence, a small number of middle to late Neolithic/early Bronze Age worked flints were found, as well as burnt mound-like deposits of burnt flint. In Area 11 charcoal from a hearth cut into a deposit of burnt flint gave a radiocarbon date of 2200-1930 cal BC. Several stakeholes were sealed by the burnt flint spread. Within the alluvial sequence, potsherds ranging in date from the early Neolithic to the late Iron Age/early Roman period were found, showing the continuing deposition of alluvial material to the very end of prehistory.

Area 16

Area 16 lay on the north-western edge of the Site G gravel island, on the southern side of Channel T, east of Gravel Island X and Areas Ex1-3.

Cropmarks were clearly visible in Area 16, and the site was listed in Carstairs' survey of the area (Carstairs 1986, 167, Site G). The cropmarks were investigated by evaluation in 1990. On the basis of the evaluation, and in accordance with the mitigation strategy, an area of 0.82 ha was laid out to examine the cropmarks as well as an area of the adjacent channel (Channel T) to the north-west.

Subsequently it became obvious that additional areas of archaeology would be affected by the grading of the sides of the Rowing Lake and Return Lane. In 1999 and 2000, therefore, additional areas (16C and 16D) were stripped and recorded. Work in Area 16C was carried out in two parts, as the grading of the 8m nearest to the Rowing Lake was needed urgently to make the Lake usable in the spring of 2000. In the summer of 2003, a further strip alongside the 1997 and 16D excavation areas was stripped and excavated. This left only a strip 12-13m wide unexcavated between the 2003 excavation and the Area 16C excavation. In addition, Eton College kindly provided additional funding to strip the area immediately south-west of a building discovered in Area 16D.

A section was cut across the upper part of Channel T, and radiocarbon dates of 2930-2870 cal BC and 2900-2620 cal BC were obtained from charcoal associated with burnt flint which lay along the edge of the second channel cut, sealing the deposits within its first phase. Channel T cut an earlier channel linking Basins R and W, the fills of which were backswamp deposits.

An assemblage of probably late Mesolithic flint was recovered from a tree-throw hole on the edge of the gravel terrace. The only other Mesolithic finds were residual flints in later features.

Early Neolithic activity on the gravel terrace in Area 16 was evidenced by two small pits which contained pottery, flint and, in one case, a fragment of human skull, and in the other, animal bone. Two tree-throw holes may also have dated from this period. Residual early Neolithic pot and flint was recovered from later features.

Three features – two probably tree-throw holes, and one either a pit or a tree-throw hole – are the only features attributed to the middle Neolithic. They contained small quantities of pottery, worked flint, burnt unworked flint and animal bone. Small quantities of residual Peterborough Ware were also found in later features.

The radiocarbon dates from the spread of burnt flint on the edge of the palaeochannel mentioned above indicate that it dates to the late Neolithic. Other late Neolithic activity was represented by two pits which contained burnt flint, Clacton-style Grooved Ware, animal bones (predominantly piglet) and charred plant remains (predominantly hazel nutshells but including also emmer wheat). Radiocarbon dates of 2880-2620 cal BC and 2880-2570 cal BC were obtained from the pits.

Although only two sherds of Beaker pottery and four early Bronze Age sherds were recovered from the site, there is stratigraphic evidence to suggest that two ring ditches probably date from the early Bronze Age. An inhumation cutting one of the ring ditches has been dated to the late Bronze Age (1200-890 cal BC) and a second inhumation, outside the ring ditches, although it could not be dated, may belong to the same period.

Areas 3 and 5

Areas 3 and 5 lay further downstream along Channel T, Area 5 at its junction with earlier Channel P, and Area 3 further south-east where the later channel turned south-east and diverged again from the earlier Channel P. This length of the later channel is called Channel V. Areas 3 and 5 both extended from the edge of Gravel Island G across the early backswamp deposits of Channel P that later became the floodplain of Channel V, and continued across the later channel to the gravel terrace forming the opposite bank.

This part of the Eton Rowing Course site was designated for extraction to provide an area in which to deposit materials other than gravel

excavated from the Course. A series of evaluation trenches was dug in 1994 and 1995 because of the presence of cropmarks. On the basis of the results of the evaluation, Area 3 was excavated in 1995 and Area 5 in 1996. In the southern part of Area 3, guide trenches were dug along the edges of the excavation area to provide a preview of the floodplain deposit sequence. On the north side of the channel such guide trenches were not thought necessary, although following the excavation of a finds-rich ploughsoil, the underlying holocene soil was trenched in three places to ensure that the stratigraphic sequence had been properly understood. The excavations across the palaeochannel were stepped at 1.2m intervals because of the depth of deposits, resulting in stepped sections with occasional discontinuities. The excavations did not reach the bottom of the palaeochannel except at the northern and southern edges, ending at an arbitrary horizontal level some 2.5m below the modern ground surface.

In Area 5, guide trenches were dug at the edges of the excavation across the early Holocene floodplain south of the later palaeochannel, and the area in between was stripped down to the first horizon at which finds appeared. A machine-dug section was excavated at right angles to the palaeochannel, stepped in at a depth of 1.2m, to a total depth of 2.4m. This trench exposed the gravel bottom of the palaeochannel at the southern and northern edges, but did not reach the bottom over most of its width, stopping at an arbitrary horizontal level for reasons of safety and because of the water level. A narrow northern extension crossed into Channel P, which proved to be broad and shallow at this point. Gravel deposits were exposed all along the base of this extension.

The Archaeological Mitigation Strategy specified a continuous watching brief on the Rowing Course contractor's excavation of the channel between these areas, with contingency for further excavation.

Eight major phases of the former Thames channel were identified in this area where, because of lateral accretion on the southern side of the bend in the channel, the channel sequence was particularly well preserved. The northern side of the palaeochannel was formed by the gravel terrace at the edge of the Rowing Course project area. To the south, however, it cut into a sequence of backswamp and floodplain deposits. A number of radiocarbon and OSL dates were obtained from the channel sequence and from floodplain deposits.

Evidence of later Mesolithic activity was recovered from the floodplain. A number of tree-throw holes and pit-like features cut the alluvial deposits on the floodplain, some of which contained late Mesolithic or early Neolithic flint, burnt flint and charcoal. A number of surface scatters of Mesolithic, early and middle-late Neolithic worked flint were also found in this area, of which two might have been *in situ* late Mesolithic scatters and one an *in situ* middle or late Neolithic scatter. A further flint

scatter probably dates from the middle or late Neolithic.

On the gravel terrace which formed the northern bank of the channel, a large number of worked flints, ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age, were found in a Roman ploughsoil. A possibly *in situ* late Neolithic or early Bronze Age flint scatter was found below this ploughsoil. Refitting of the flint from this scatter has provided detailed information about the flint working techniques employed.

Area 10

Area 10 lay south of Areas 5 and 3 on Gravel Island Site G, and east of Area 16. It was first investigated during evaluation in 1987 (see Fig. 1.3, Trench A), when several indeterminate features containing prehistoric finds were discovered. During further evaluation in 1995 evidence of more significant archaeological activity was discovered in Trenches 86 and 88. On the basis of these discoveries, and of the negative results from the 1987 Evaluation Trenches B and E to the west and 1995 Trenches 90 and 91 to the east, a T-shaped area of 0.8 ha was laid out, starting at the southern edge of the Rowing Lake (adjacent to Trench 88), running north-east to surround Trench 86 and extending west to include the northern part of Trench A. Trench 86 had been plotted in the wrong place, and in fact lay north-west of Trench A, not south-east of it. As a result the area was subsequently extended north-west by another 0.22 ha, the total site area being 1.02 ha.

This area of the gravel terrace was cut by a glacial palaeochannel which probably continued through Areas 15 and 4 as Inlet Z. The part of this channel crossing Area 10 had been choked with sands and gravels before the start of the Holocene, leaving only a broad shallow hollow, but the channel deepened south-eastwards and remained wet throughout prehistory in Area 15 (see below).

Mesolithic activity was represented in Area 10 only by residual flint.

The most significant discovery was early Neolithic midden deposits which had been preserved in the hollow left where the glacial palaeochannel had been. A 30m length of the hollow was divided up into numbered 2m squares, of which alternate squares were excavated by hand. The hollow was excavated in spits 20-50mm deep, and all of the finds were individually numbered and plotted in 3 dimensions using a data-logger. A number of tree-throw holes were found which continued into unexcavated squares, and in some cases additional squares were excavated to expose these features.

The numbers of finds appeared to diminish rapidly towards the north-west as the hollow narrowed, but in order to test this two smaller areas further north-west were divided into 2m squares and each alternate square was excavated in the same manner as those in the large area.

The midden deposits in Area 10 contained large quantities of early Neolithic finds. The pottery consisted largely of early Neolithic Plain Bowl pottery, although a few Carinated Bowl sherds and sherds of Decorated Bowl with Mildenhall-style affinities were also present. A small quantity of later pottery, including Mortlake Ware, as well as late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, late Bronze Age and Iron Age or Roman pottery, was also recovered. The midden deposits also contained large quantities of worked flint, including some probably *in situ* knapping deposits. Cattle was the best represented species amongst the animal bone, although sheep/goat, pig and deer were also present. Parts of two articulated cattle skeletons, one dated to 3490-3020 cal BC, were also found within the midden deposits.

Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates from the midden deposits gave less precise estimates of the chronology of the midden deposits than was the case for Area 6, suggesting that deposition began between 3750 cal BC and 3100 cal BC and ended between 3370 and 2770 cal BC. These dates are not entirely consistent with the ceramic evidence which suggests that deposition in Area 10 occurred primarily in the same period as that in Area 6.

A number of features were cut from within and into the midden deposits. Most of these were tree-throw holes, but a small pit was also identified. Some of these features may have dated from the early Neolithic, but others contained middle Neolithic and middle Bronze Age pottery.

Beyond the hollow, most of the early Neolithic finds were residual in later features, but a few tree-throw holes may have dated from the early Neolithic.

Middle Neolithic activity was evidenced by pottery concentrated in the south-eastern end of the hollow, and by a possibly contemporary pit, as well as by residual finds in later features.

Activity in the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age was also evidenced by residual sherds, although three pits and a couple of tree-throw holes might have dated from this period.

Area 15

Area 15 lay further south-east on Gravel Island G, and was laid out to cut across Inlet Z, the relict length of the late Glacial channel. Early Holocene radiocarbon dates were obtained from some of the earlier deposits within this channel, and Neolithic flint, animal bone and other finds were recovered from its later fills.

Area 15 was identified as an area of archaeological significance by evaluation in 1995. A dark broad cropmark had tentatively been identified as an inlet (Inlet Z). Since Evaluation Trenches 95 and 96 to the south-west and west, 93 and 92 to the north-west, 90 and 91, 125 and 126 to the north and 124 to the north-east were blank, or only contained a very few residual struck or burnt flints, it was decided to open up a small area within Inlet Z and to the west,

focussed around Trenches 94 and 101. This was stripped of topsoil and ploughsoil by machine. A truncated relict early Holocene soil identified in Trench 94 overlying the gravel was also partially machined off to clarify the archaeological sequence; the remainder was left intact for hand excavation. Inlet Z was excavated by machine down to the first significant archaeological horizon. A trench was then excavated by hand along the south edge of the inlet to expose the stratigraphic sequence but was not bottomed due to the height of the water table. A sequence of environmental samples was obtained, but since no archaeological features were apparent within this sondage, it was decided not to excavate the remainder of the channel deposits.

In 2003, following a decision to widen the Return Lane and in so doing to remove part of the Return Lane Island, an additional strip 175m long and 15-20m wide across Inlet Z and the adjacent gravel terrace was excavated.

Area 4

Area 4 lay at the south-eastern end of Gravel Island G, largely within Inlet Z. The earlier palaeochannel (Inlet Z) had been identified from aerial photographs of the south-eastern part of the site, and the palaeochannel and surrounding area were evaluated in 1995. Since evaluation in Area 6 had established the presence of a hollow running west to east which contained what were interpreted as Mesolithic struck flints, and as Inlet Z was believed to represent the same channel, Area 4 was laid out to run east-west across Inlet Z and extend into the former Thames channel (Palaeochannel V). The presence of a gas main prevented Areas 4 and 6 from being linked to provide a full cross-section of the palaeochannel at this point, but the eastern edge of Channel V was excavated in Area 6.

Area 4 was stripped by machine of topsoil and underlying recent ploughsoil down to the first clear archaeological horizon. In order to establish whether significant archaeological horizons lay at slightly greater depth, a number of 2m squares were excavated down to the underlying alluvial deposits. None of these produced finds in any quantity, so no further hand-excavation was undertaken. A series of trenches was, however, dug by machine under close archaeological supervision along the southern edge of the excavation to investigate and record the palaeochannel sequence in section. Subsequently, half of the width of the site was machined to greater depth to investigate the palaeochannel sequence further. Due to the depth of the channel and the height of the water table, it was not possible to bottom the channel except at the very western end of the trench, although a machine-dug sondage was excavated at the eastern end.

A long sequence of phases of Inlet Z was seen, beginning in the late Glacial period, but very few finds were recovered. A small number of sherds dating from the early Bronze Age to the Roman

period, as well as a barbed and tanged arrowhead and other probably early Bronze Age flints, were recovered from the later phases of Inlet Z.

Area 6

Area 6 lay on the gravel terrace (Site I) at the south-eastern end of the Rowing Course. This area was identified as of archaeological significance from aerial photographs and was listed in Carstairs' survey of the area for Buckinghamshire County Council (Carstairs 1986, 165-6 Site I), who plotted five circles, and noted struck flint, burnt flint and probably Iron Age pottery when walking over the site. Reexamination of the aerial photographs also identified a wide east-west cropmark, thought to represent an infilled channel.

Evaluation trenches established that the channel formed a hollow, the top of which contained much struck flint, some animal bone and a little pottery, and that small features interpreted as postholes and gullies lay to both the south and the north of the hollow. Further evaluation trenches were later dug to evaluate the area occupied by the Return Lane of the Rowing Course and to refine understanding of the area threatened by the Rowing Course. Trenches along the Return Lane (105-107; Fig. 1.3) showed that the gravel terrace dipped towards the river, but contained no archaeological features. Trenches 114 and 116 (Fig. 5.2) defined the limits of the hollow more clearly, and Trenches 110 and 113 confirmed that it split and faded out south of Boveney.

A programme of fieldwalking was set up in partnership with Reading University. The field containing the cropmark ring ditches was walked in 20m squares after it had been ploughed.

Before the excavation areas were stripped, a programme of test-pitting and sieving was undertaken north of the ring ditches to further quantify the extent and density of struck flint in the plough-soils over the gravel. A 5m grid was laid out and a 1m square test-pit dug at every intersection, providing a 4% sample of the topsoil. The soil was sieved through 10mm and 4mm sieves, and the residues were sorted for struck flint.

Although the two southern ring ditches lay mainly between the Rowing Lake and the Return Lane, the Return Lane impinged upon the south-western cropmark ring ditch. Because of this, and the impact of haul routes, roads and cycle routes, it was decided to excavate all of the ring ditches. In accordance with the mitigation strategy, two rectangular areas were stripped in 1996 incorporating all of the ring ditches, a 100m length of the hollow, and the eastern edge of the Thames palaeochannel.

The site was cut by a late Pleistocene palaeochannel which had been choked with gravel and sand by the early Neolithic, and survived only as a shallow hollow. This channel probably formed part of Inlet Z which was examined in Areas 4 and 15. The infilled glacial channel was cut by a more recent, north-south aligned channel (Channel V)

which ran along the western side of Site 6. Within this more recent channel, a complex sequence of deposits and cuts was found, reflecting deposition within, and erosion of, the channel.

The only evidence of Mesolithic activity in Area 6 consisted of residual flint.

The most significant discoveries in Area 6 were a number of deposits containing large quantities of early Neolithic finds, interpreted as midden deposits, which, as in Area 10, were preserved within the hollow left where the glacial palaeochannel had been. The finds from these midden deposits were, however, better preserved than those in Area 10, and include much larger quantities of early Neolithic flint and pottery (including Carinated and Plain Bowl pottery with only a small quantity of Decorated Bowl). This material appears to have been deposited as a series of dumps over a period of several centuries. A small quantity of later pottery – middle Neolithic (mostly Ebbsfleet Ware but also some Mortlake and Fengate Ware), late Neolithic, Beaker and early Bronze Age – was also recovered. Other finds include fired clay, querns, rubbers, a probable axe-polishing stone and a shafthole adze. Animal bones were also present, and consist mostly of cattle bones, but include also sheep/goat, pig, deer and a badger bone. Analysis of the cattle bones suggests that most were from domestic animals, although aurochs is also represented. A fragment of a shale bead was also recovered from the layer sealing the midden.

A number of radiocarbon dates were obtained from these midden deposits. Bayesian modelling of these dates suggests that deposition was probably carried out over a period from 70 to 460 years long, beginning between 3920 and 3690 cal BC and ending between 3520 and 3320 cal BC.

Deposits similar to those forming the middens were also found in a number of tree-throw holes and probably contemporaneous pits.

Early Neolithic finds were also recovered from outside the hollow, notably from two ring ditches, one of which might have been early Neolithic in date, and from an undated inhumation grave (which might have been early Neolithic or have been contemporary with the adjacent late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ring ditch).

Evidence for activity in the middle Neolithic was much less extensive, but included two inhumations – of an adult and of a child – which have been dated to 3370-2930 cal BC and 3330-2900 cal BC, as well as two tree-throw holes and an irregular oval deposit containing burnt flint, charcoal, middle Neolithic pottery, worked flint and animal bone.

Activity in Area 6 in the late Neolithic was represented by only a small number of stray sherds and flint artefacts. Parts of a human skeleton were, however, retrieved by the Rowing Lake contractor from the palaeochannel to the west of Area 6. The skeleton has been dated to 2890-2570 cal BC.

Four ring ditches were found in Area 6. The south-eastern ring ditch probably dates from the

middle Bronze Age and is described in Volume 2. The south-western ring ditch surrounded a large pit containing Beaker pottery, and although the secondary fills contained middle Bronze Age pottery, the ring ditch is attributed to the Beaker period. The evidence for the date of the remaining two is unclear. One was circular and may, on stratigraphic grounds, date from the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, although most of the pottery from the ditches was early Neolithic. The other ring ditch was penannular and less regular in plan. Its ditch contained very few finds, although again most of the pot recovered was early Neolithic, and it is possible that the structure dates from that period.

A small quantity of early Bronze Age pottery, including sherds from one or more Collared Urns, was recovered from the site.

The Jubilee River: the south-eastern sites

Agar's Plough

The Agar's Plough site lies on the gravel terrace at the south-eastern end of the Jubilee River. No earlier prehistoric features were identified on this site. The only indications of earlier prehistoric activity were provided by very small quantities of residual Neolithic and possibly Mesolithic worked flint.

Roundmoor Ditch

The Roundmoor Ditch site was situated at 21m OD on the floodplain just south of Cippenham sewage works, and was bordered to the south and west by the Roundmoor Ditch stream. Evaluation had identified three potential prehistoric sites and the presence of palaeochannels. The area was thus selected for further excavation in 1996. The site had been disturbed and truncated by landscaping associated with the construction of the sewerage works in the 19th century.

The site was crossed by two palaeochannels. Little information was retrieved from the earlier, clay filled channel, but plant macrofossils were retrieved from a tree-throw hole within the peat fill of the later channel. Disturbed scatters of worked flint, with dates ranging from the Mesolithic to the early Bronze Age, were discovered adjacent to the palaeochannel. A number of tree-throw holes were found. Most of these could not be dated, but two might date from the early Neolithic on the basis of the worked flint and very small quantity of pottery they contained.

The Jubilee River: the central sites

Lake End Road East

The Lake End Road East site lay at 22m OD on the Floodplain Terrace to the north of the Rowing Course, immediately east of the B 3026 or Lake End

Road, south of the M4 motorway. At the time of excavation the area was under pasture, but had been heavily cultivated in the past. The field had been deep-ploughed to depths of between 450mm and 600mm in recent years and was subject to significant plough damage.

The only indications of activity in the prehistoric period were provided by residual early Neolithic sherds and Neolithic worked flint.

Lake End Road West

The Lake End Road West site lay on the Floodplain Terrace to the north of the Rowing Course immediately east of the B3026. The excavation consisted of a single area (c 40m x 70m) of relatively flat ground. In order to investigate depositional practices (such as structured deposition and placed deposits), pits were half sectioned and excavated in 0.01m spits. Individual finds were each given a unique small find number and their position and depth recorded. Early Neolithic activity on the site was represented by midden deposits preserved within a depression in the top of a silted Pleistocene channel. The finds in this deposit include predominantly Plain Bowl pottery (although a few decorated sherds were also present), worked flint and burnt unworked flint. A pit or tree-throw hole which contained further Plain Bowl pottery cut the midden deposits. A second tree-throw hole which contained worked flint may have dated from the same period.

Activity in the middle Neolithic was evidenced by ten pits (some isolated but most in two groups) which contained large quantities of Peterborough Ware, largely consisting of Mortlake Ware but including also some Fengate Ware. The pits also contained worked flint, cremated bone, animal bone, burnt stone, charcoal, charred plant remains and ash.

Lot's Hole

The Lot's Hole site lay at 23m OD on the Floodplain Terrace just south of the M4 (directly over the motorway from Marsh Lane East Site 2). The land was arable and had been extensively ploughed. A palaeochannel crossed the site. The ground sloped down to the palaeochannel to the west and very gradually to the south.

The only earlier prehistoric feature found on the site was an early Neolithic pit which contained pottery, worked flint and charred plant remains, including grain and hazel nutshells. Residual Plain Bowl pottery was recovered from later features.

Lot's Hole Gravel Storage Area

The Lot's Hole Gravel Storage area lay adjacent to the Lot's Hole site on the Floodplain Terrace. A single early Neolithic sherd from a subsoil context was the only evidence from this site for earlier prehistoric activity.

Marsh Lane East Site 2

Marsh Lane East Site 2 lay at 23m OD in an area of the gravel terrace that was cut by a palaeochannel which continued across Marsh Lane East Site 1, evaluation trenches near Lot's Hole and the Lake End Road West site. The development and filling of this Channel was examined in a small slot, but the only evidence for its chronology was late Bronze Age pottery in colluvial deposits which had formed in the top of the channel when the channel was already inactive. The M4 motorway lies directly south of the site, and to the north and east the land consisted of arable fields. The site was situated on the top of a low gravel hill.

The only clearly dated Neolithic feature was a pit containing Plain Bowl pottery and worked flint. It is possible that an oval ring ditch also dated from the Neolithic, but there were no artefacts associated with the first phase of the monument and its date is unclear. Some of the tree-throw holes on the site may also have been Neolithic but, again, clear dating evidence was lacking.

The oval ring ditch was recut after it had almost completely filled. Early Bronze Age and residual early Neolithic pottery and worked flint were recovered from the fills of this second cut.

A second ring ditch, circular in plan, was also found. At the centre of this ring ditch, a small pit containing a cremation burial of an adult in a Collared Urn was found. The pit also contained a layer of oak charcoal below the urn, and a dump of oak charcoal next to the urn. The ring ditch itself contained early Neolithic and late Bronze Age pottery, as well as worked flint and a dump of animal bone.

Marsh Lane East Site 1

Marsh Lane East Site 1 lay at 22m OD on the Floodplain Terrace with Marsh Lane to the west, the M4 motorway to the south, and a thin stretch of woodland to the east. The site was within an arable field in an area of the terrace which was cut by the palaeochannel which also cut across Marsh Lane East Site 2 and Lot's Hole, following roughly the course of the modern Cress Brook. A number of tree-throw holes were identified on the southern edge of this channel, one of which contained a small quantity of early Neolithic pottery and a large assemblage of worked flint.

Activity in the middle Neolithic was evidenced by three pits (two forming a pair and one isolated) which contained Mortlake and Fengate Ware, worked flint and charred plant remains.

A further pit and a shallow circular hollow which contained worked flint and animal bone may have dated from the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age.

Marsh Lane West

The Marsh Lane West site was located at 23m OD on

the Floodplain Terrace, to the east of Marsh Lane and north of the M4 motorway, on arable land at the northern end of the central group of sites along the Jubilee River. The excavation comprised an area of 120m by 90m.

A small quantity of early Neolithic pottery, worked flint and charcoal was recovered from two tree-throw holes.

The Jubilee River: the northern sites

Amerden Lane East

The Amerden Lane East site lay towards the northern end of the Jubilee River on the Floodplain Terrace.

The only evidence of earlier prehistoric activity was provided by residual finds consisting of a Beaker sherd in a natural hollow and Neolithic or early Bronze Age flint in a late Bronze Age ditch.

Amerden Lane West

The Amerden Lane West site lay near the northern end of the Jubilee River at 23m OD on the Floodplain Terrace, west of Amerden Lane and south of the railway line between Maidenhead and Slough. The site was relatively flat and had been laid to pasture. Landscaping of the whole area may have occurred when a large railway embankment to the north and an ornamental stream to the west were constructed.

A palaeochannel which, by the Mesolithic, survived only as a hollow, ran across the site. Within this hollow finds spanning the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age had accumulated. Although much of the flint in this hollow probably dates to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, and appeared to occur in *in situ* scatters, the presence of early Neolithic and late Bronze Age finds in the same deposits indicates that the flint was residual or had suffered significant disturbance.

Taplow Mill Site 1

Taplow Mill Site 1 lay near the northern end of the Jubilee River at 23m OD on the floodplain near to the base of the Taplow Terrace. The site contained evidence of former arable cultivation in the form of ridge and furrow.

The only earlier prehistoric activity on the site was evidenced by four small middle Neolithic pits, in two pairs, containing Fengate Ware, flint (including chisel arrowheads), animal bone, antler, charred cereal grain and hazel nutshells.

Taplow Mill Site 2

Taplow Mill Site 2 was located at the northern end of the Jubilee River at 24m OD in a pasture field at the bottom of the break of slope between the Taplow and the floodplain terraces. The site was relatively

flat but the Taplow terrace sloped steeply up to the north-east.

A glacial palaeochannel ran across the site. A complex series of colluvial deposits lay over this palaeochannel, reflecting a varied depositional history.

A number of tree-throw holes were found cutting these layers, one of which, on the basis of the flint it contained may date from the early Neolithic. The flint in others suggests a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date.

Only two features were regular enough to be interpreted as pits. One did not contain any finds, but the other contained a large group of flint suggesting a middle or late Neolithic date and a single grain of charred cereal.

Within the colluvial sequence two flint scatters, consisting predominantly of late Neolithic/early

Bronze Age flint, were found. An 8m length of gully also contained flint which may date from the same period.

Widbrook Common

Widbrook Common was the only site which lay on the western (or southern) side of the Thames. It was located further north than all of the other sites, between Maidenhead and Cookham. It lay on a band of alluvial deposits which extends westwards from the Thames, and which is bordered to the north and south by gravels.

A single sherd of Peterborough Ware, recovered during the stripping of the site, and residual Neolithic and early Bronze Age flint were the only indications of earlier prehistoric activity.