AN IRON AGE ENCLOSURE AT RAVENSTONE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

DENNIS C. MYNARD

SUMMARY

A Sub-Rectangular enclosure discovered by an air photograph was threatened with destruction by gravel quarrying in 1966. The results of a rescue excavation showed that the enclosure was in use for a short period of time during the late second or early first century B.C. The nature of the use was not determined. Finds were mainly of pottery, but include animal bones and some ironwork.

Acknowledgments

The writer is grateful to the owners of the site, the Society of Merchant Venturers, for permission to dig and to the Gravel Company, Messrs. G. F. X. Hartigan Ltd. and also to the tenant farmer Mr. B. Howkins for their co-operation and interest. For help on the site he is particularly indebted to Richard Griffiths, Stephen Moorhouse, Ken Field and Dr. N. Swallow. The plans and sections were re-drawn by John Small. Other assistance during and after the excavation which should be acknowledged was given by Mrs. J. Dickens and D. N. Hall.

As the excavation took place in 1966 all measurements taken were in feet and inches. All scales used for record photographs were also Imperial. It has been decided not to convert the measurements given in the text to Metric, as the scale on the photographic Plates VI-VIII cannot be altered.

INTRODUCTION

The enclosure was situated at SP 848490 in the parish of Ravenstone in the Upper Ouse valley. It occupied a position on a gentle rise of gravel beside a stream which runs down to the Ouse from the higher ground to the north.

Recent fieldwork¹ has shown that the upper reaches of the Ouse were well settled during the Iron Age (Fig. 1) and that the settlement of the area began in the Neolithic period.³ The geology of the Ouse Valley in this area created an ideal situation for early settlement. Where the water course had eroded the glacial boulder clay the underlying Great Oolite limestone was exposed forming the sides of the valley, the bed of which was covered with subsequent deposits of gravel and limestone fragments. The soil in the valley was therefore light and well drained due to its gravel and limestone content. Scoured and enriched by annual floods it would support only light growth, and thus be clear



Fig. 1. The site (inset) in its Modern and Iron Age Context, land over 250 ft. shaded.

for early settlement which would be most likely on the fertile deposits just above the flood plain.

The enclosure was discovered by an air photograph (Plate V) taken by Dr. J. K. S. St Joseph³ which showed a small almost square enclosure—aligned approximately north to south—crossed by a ditch running diagonally from the southwest corner to the centre of the north side. Dark patches inside the enclosure indicated the possible existence of pits and other features.

To the north was an isolated circle. Other photographs⁴ of the fields to the south of the enclosure showed a Pit Alignment forming two sides of a square, and another possible enclosure. Air Ministry photographs of the area taken in 1947⁵ show other enclosures and Ring Ditches about a quarter of a mile to the east. About the same distance to the west in Stoke Goldington parish ditches were noticed in the face of an old gravel pit. On excavation these

ditches produced Iron Age and Belgic type pottery."

These finds suggest that far from being an isolated occupation site the enclosure represents just one phase in a sequence of occupation of this immediate area during the late Iron Age and early Romano-British period.

When in 1966 it was discovered that the enclosure was to be destroyed by gravel quarrying an excavation was arranged. Work was carried out by the writer for ten days in September on behalf of the Buckinghamshire County Museum. This was done with the aid of a grant from the Ministry of Public



Fig. 2. Inset from Fig. 1 showing location of Excavation Grid.

Buildings and Works. Volunteer helpers left after a few days because of the unusual amount of rain and the dampness of their camping accommodation. Most of the work was done with the assistance of Mr Richard Griffiths of Bletchley, but during the last two days of the excavation a trenching machine was provided free of charge by a local contractor⁷ whose generosity enabled us to do more than would have been otherwise possible.

THE MAGNETOMETER SURVEY (Fig. 2)

In order to locate the enclosure, an area 500 ft. by 250 ft.—aligned north to south—was marked out on the field surface in a grid of 50 ft. squares which were numbered 1-10 south to north, and lettered A-E west to east. Part of this grid was surveyed with a magnetometer by the Oxford Research Laboratory for Archaeology. This work soon established the exact position of the enclosure ditches. Two days were spent on this survey and apart from the Enclosure Ditch (Ditch I), and the ditch running diagonally across the enclosure (Ditch II), several internal features were located.

The enclosure was found to occupy squares 3, 4, 5 and 6, B, C and D, of the excavation grid. In plan it was shown to be rectangular, not almost square as suggested by the air photograph (Plate V).

Ditch I showed up as a double row of weak normal readings shadowed on the north side by reverse readings. Here and there along its line were occasional stronger readings suggesting a variation in the ditch-fill. The north and south sides gave good readings but those for the east and west sides were intermittent, and the exact line of the ditch not clear.

Ditch II was traced by a similar double row of weak normal readings along most of its course through the enclosure, apart from the last thirty feet or so at the northern end, where no readings were obtained at all.

Scattered high readings inside the enclosure were considered to be indicative of features, but on excavation several were found to be due to the existence of iron objects in the top soil. The following table shows the result obtained from examination of these readings.

Cutting	Grid Square	Magnetometer Reading	Excavation Result
No.			
6	B4	25 Gamma at low height	Pit 3. The hearth.
7	D4	70 Gamma at low height	Pit 1. The Storage Pit
8	D4	80 Gamma at low height	Iron Nail and Twisted pin. Fig. 5, 3.
-	B5	30 Gamma at low height	Iron Knife blade. Fig. 5, 2.

THE EXCAVATION

Ideally it would have been better to follow up the magnetometer survey of the enclosure with the complete removal of all the top soil from the area; however there was no money available for this operation. Another problem was that the tenant farmer was still grazing animals in the field and that the gravel company did not intend to remove the top soil for some months. In view of these circumstances we were limited to trial trenches and to the opening up of small areas over the ditch intersections and features.

There were four main objectives:

- 1. To date the enclosure ditch (Ditch I)
- 2. To date the ditch running diagonally across the enclosure (Ditch II)
- 3. To examine the internal features.
- 4. To locate the Ring Ditch to the north of the enclosure and ascertain its date and purpose.

A total of fifteen cuttings were excavated, some square or rectangular and

others merely trial trenches (Fig. 3). The top soil was on average one foot thick. On its removal the underlying gravel surface was exposed and the ditches and features could be clearly seen. There was much disturbance of the gravel due to the burrowing action of rabbits,⁸ which made interpretation of possible features somewhat difficult.



Fig. 3. Part of Excavation Grid showing Cuttings excavated and results of the Magnetometer Survey.

The Enclosure Ditch (Ditch I)

This was located by cuttings 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, and 15. The enclosure was found to be sub-rectangular in shape, approximately 150 ft. by 250 ft. in area, the longest axis running north to south. The north-west corner of the ditch was

not exposed, but those on the south side were gently rounded, whilst that on the north-east was cut off. It was considered that this suggested an entrance at the north-east corner. It was not possible to confirm this by excavation, although later when the area was quarried away and the top soil removed it might have been possible to check this. By this time the writer was excavating in the Isle of Wight and there was no one available to watch the site.

On average the ditch was 6 ft. 10 ins. wide and 3 ft. 7 ins. deep. In section it was like a broad "V" with a rounded bottom. At the south-east corner (Cutting 5) it was wider and deeper. It was also wider and deeper at the north-east corner (Cutting 15) where it had been recut (Fig. 4).

The fill throughout all the sections was fairly consistent, the primary silt was loose dirty gravel, generally one foot in thickness; above this the main fill was a mixture of gravel and brown sandy soil which was less stony towards the top. Large pebbles approximately 6 to 8 ins. in diameter, possibly from the hut floors or hearths, were occasionally found towards the bottom of the main fill as was most of the pottery recovered from the ditch. The various cuttings produced the following results:

Cutting 1. (Plate VI)

20 ft. by 10 ft. on the north side of the enclosure; here the ditch was 6 ft. 3 ins. wide and 2 ft. 11 ins. deep.

Cutting 3. (Fig. 4 Plan and Section)

20 ft. by 16 ft. over the intersection of Ditches I and II on the north side of the enclosure. Ditch I was 5 ft. 9 ins. wide and 3 ft. deep. The centre of the point of intersection was located and half the fill of each ditch removed in order to work out their relationship. It was found that Ditch I was cut through the fill of Ditch II and was clearly of later construction.

Cutting 4 (Plate VIIa)

30 ft. by 26 ft. over the interesection of Ditches I and II at the south-west corner of the enclosure. On the south side Ditch I was 6 ft. 3 ins. wide and 4 ft. deep. A section through the two ditches on the north side of the intersection did not show their relationship at all; they appeared as one large ditch 14 ft. 6 ins. wide and 5 ft. deep, the fill of which was almost pure gravel. As the results from Cutting 3 showed that Ditch II was earlier than Ditch I, and as there was little time available it was decided to proceed no further at this intersection for the stratigraphy was not very clear.

Cutting 5 (Fig. 4)

A 20 ft. square over the south-west corner of the enclosure. On the east side the ditch was 10 ft. 9 ins. wide and 5 ft. 1 in. deep. Possibly the large size of the ditch at this corner was due to recutting but this was not clear from the section.

Cutting 9

16 ft. by 3 ft. across the ditch on the east side of the enclosure. Here the ditch was 6 ft. 3 ins wide and 3 ft. 8 ins. deep. The fill was different from that recorded



Fig. 4. Plan of Cutting 3 and Sections of the Ditches and Pits.

in most of the other sections in that there was a 5 ins. layer of sand between the Main fill and the Primary silt.

Cutting 10 (Fig. 4)

To the north of cutting 9. This trial trench 25 ft. by 3 ft. located the ditch, which was running in a north-westerly direction; it was 7 ft. 4 ins. wide and 3 ft. 8 ins. deep.

Cutting 13

As there was not time to open an area over the north-west corner this small trench 15 ft. by 3 ft. was dug to establish the position of Ditch I. The ditch at this point had not shown up well on the magnetometer survey and on excavation this was found to be due to the fact that the fill of the ditch was mainly clean gravel. The ditch was 6 ft. 9 ins. wide and only 2 ft. 8 ins. deep.

Cutting 15 (Fig. 4)

As the north-east corner had not been located by Cuttings 11 and 14 a trial trench 30 ft. by 3 ft. was cut. This located the ditch, which was 8 ft. 9 ins. wide and 3 ft. 2 ins. deep. It had been recut and was originally 6 ft. wide and 4 ft. deep.

Dating

The various sections of the ditch produced sherds of hand made Iron Age pottery dateable to the late second or first century B.C. (Fig. 5, F 10, M 15 and C 18). At the south-west corner of the enclosure (Cutting 4) sherds of a wheelturned vessel (Fig. 5, 1) of mid first-century A.D. date were found in the top soil over the fill of the ditch.

The date suggested for the pottery from Ditch I and therefore for the period of use for the enclosure would be sufficient to allow a span of a hundred years or so for the silting up of Ditch I after the enclosure had gone out of use, and before the mid first-century A.D. sherds were lost in the top soil over the ditch.

Ditch II

This was located in cuttings 2, 3, and 4. In section it was of similar shape to Ditch I and the fill was also very much the same. The average size was 7 ft. 9 ins. wide and 3 ft. 10 ins. deep.

Details of the Three Cuttings:

Cutting 2 (Fig. 4 and Plate VIIb)

An area 25 ft. by 10 ft. was opened up some 25 ft. to the south of the north side of the enclosure. Ditch I ran diagonally across this cutting and was 8 ft. 9 ins. wide and 3 ft. 10 ins. deep.

Cutting 3 (Fig. 4)

This was over the intersection of Ditches I and II on the north side of the enclosure. Here Ditch II was 8 ft. 9 ins. wide and 4 ft. 9 ins. deep; the fill was of dirty gravel and was cut by Ditch I.

Cutting 4 (Plate VIIa)

Over the south-west corner of the enclosure and the intersection of Ditches I and II. Here the ditch could be seen running to the south-west away from the enclosure. It was only 6 ft. wide and 3 ft. 8 ins. deep; the fill was of gravelly soil.

Dating

The ditch is earlier than Ditch II (see above) but as no finds were recovered from its fill the date is unknown. Nor indeed is its purpose; it appears to be an isolated linear ditch that may have marked out a boundary of some sort.

The Internal Features

A Storage Pit (P.1), a Shallow Pit (P.2), a Hearth Pit (P.3), a Post-Hole (F.1) and part of a hollowed out area (F.2) were the only internal features found. P.1 and P.3 were located by the magnetometer survey and the remainder were found by excavation. When the gravel company stripped all the topsoil from the site prior to gravel extraction no other features were noticed, although the writer was able to observe most of this operation.

Pits

P.1 (Fig. 4 and Plate VIIIa)

This was located by the magnetometer. An area 15 ft. by 12 ft. (Cutting 7) was excavated and as soon as the top soil was removed the top of the pit was exposed and was approximately 6 ft. in diameter. The fill was sectioned and comprised seven layers. These were lettered A to G from the bottom upwards as follows. The lowest (A), dark-brown sandy soil, above which was (B), black sandy soil which contained a large pebble. Over this to one side of the pit was (C), a deposit of light-brown sandy soil containing an Iron Brooch and much domestic refuse in the form of potsherds and fragments of bone. The layers above this were mainly of dirty gravel; they account for almost half of the fill and appear to be the result of deliberate infilling, as the sides of the pit, which were vertical and well preserved, could not have stood for very long when the pit was open. No evidence was noticed of any wickerwork lining of the sides or of any grain in the bottom, but the size suggests that it may have been a storage pit.

P.2 (Fig. 4)

Located by the excavation of Cutting 15, part of the cutting was enlarged to form a 6 ft. square over the pit, which was roughly 4 ft. 6 ins. in diameter. The fill was sectioned and then completely removed; it was of dirty gravelly soil and large pebbles. In section the pit was shaped like a shallow pan 1 ft. 2 ins. deep with almost vertical sides and a flat bottom.

P.3 (Fig. 4 and Plate VIIIb)

Located by the magnetometer survey, a 10 ft. square was opened over it. On excavation it was seen to be a hearth almost 4 ft. in diameter. In section it was much like P.2. The fill was of burnt stones, fragments of burnt clay and gravel. A few sherds were found between the pebbles on the hearth.

Other features

Fig. 1. The Post Hole

Found in Cutting 1 only 3 ft. to the south of Ditch I. It was 8 ins. in diameter and 10 ins. deep. The fill was of brown sandy soil with a few stones towards the top.

F.2. The Hollow

Also in Cutting 1 to the south of F.1. It consisted of an excavated area possibly 8 ft. in diameter and 1 ft. deep. Only part was excavated; the fill was of brown gravelly soil and pebbles. The suggested interpretation is that this feature is a hollow working area or a sunken hut.

Dating

The three pits all produced sherds showing that they were contemporary with the enclosure. Presumably the Post-Hole and Hollow area are also contemporary, however this cannot be confirmed and apart from the fact that they were in the enclosure there is no other evidence to confirm any connection.

The Ring Ditch

A trial trench (Cutting 12) was commenced some 70 ft. north of the enclosure and excavated for a total length of 60 yds. to the north. It ran through grid squares 8, 9, and 10B, the magnetometer survey of the latter two squares suggested some form of disturbance of the gravel but on excavation nothing was found. Later when the gravel was extracted from the area a close watch was kept in the hope that the ring ditch might be located but nothing apart from a rubbish pit was found. This pit was of Iron Age date and earlier in date than the enclosure (see Appendix 1).

Cutting 8

The magnetometer survey indicated the existence of metalwork and a 4 ft. square was excavated which produced the Iron Pin (Fig. 5, 3) and a nail associated with 8 sherds (Fig. 5, F4 and M16) on the gravel surface. The cutting was extended to 8 ft. \times 4 ft. but no other features or finds were made.

CONCLUSIONS

The amount of excavation was limited by the lack of time and money available to a short period of only thirteen days. In view of this it was only possible to date the enclosure and examine the few features located by the magnetometer survey and the trial trenches. The results do not allow us to make any firm decision as to the use of the enclosure or to say with any degree of certainty that it contained the sites of any huts.

It is most likely that it was an enclosure in which a family or group of people lived and into which they could bring their animals. The air photograph (Plate 1) suggests that huts existed on the west side; several faint circles there could represent hut drip-gullies. The higher magnetometer readings in that area also suggest that there were some features, but there was not time to confirm this. The small number of internal features and the absence of any large amounts of domestic rubbish suggests that the enclosure was not used for any great length of time or by many people.

The large pit P.1 could not have had a very long life, its vertical sides cut into the loose gravel would not have stayed in position very long; after excavation they became eroded and fell in within five weeks. Perhaps when it was in use the sides were supported by a wickerwork lining, but the excavation revealed no evidence to confirm this or any other form of support. It is possible that the pit was used for the storage of grain but again no evidence was found to support this theory.

The date suggested by the pottery is late second to first century B.C., the present lack of knowledge of the pottery of this period in this Upper Ouse area makes more precise dating impossible.

THE FINDS

Pottery from the top soil over the fill of Ditch I

Fig. 5, 1. Sherds from a Belgic-type bowl of mid first-century A.D. date, in a fine sand-tempered brown ware with burnished 'soapy' external surface.

Pottery from the Enclosure (Fig. 5)

Of a total of 157 sherds found, 111 were from the Storage Pit (P1), 19 from the Enclosure Ditch (Ditch I), 9 from the Hearth Pit (P3), 10 from Pit 2 and 8 from the gravel surface in Cutting 8.

The pottery is tempered with shell, limestone and quartz, and for the purpose of this report has been classified visually into the following three wares, each division based upon the amount of tempering material visible in the fabric.

I Fine

Smooth texture, sparsely tempered with fine grits rarely larger than 1 mm. across. Generally completely reduced to a dark grey colour and the surfaces normally burnished. Most often used for the manufacture of cooking pots the walls of which are rarely thicker than 8 mm.

II Medium

Similar to above but coarser, grits still sparse but larger—on average only 3 mm. across. Generally completely reduced to dark grey as above and used for cooking pots. Not always burnished.

III Coarse

Rough texture with plentiful grits up to 5 mm. across and occasionally larger. Often the surfaces are roughly smoothed with a stick or bone. This type is used mainly for the larger vessels. The surfaces are generally buff to brown in colour being partly due to the size of the vessels, which would not have been completely covered in ash after firing in a "Bonfire" or "Clamp" type of kiln, the exposed parts becoming oxidised.

The most common type was III of which 88 sherds were found; there were

47 of type II and 22 of type I.

The following table shows the number of sherds of each ware type from each cutting. The sherds from the Ditch Sections were recovered from the main fill above the primary silt.

Provenance	I	Ware Types II	ш
Cutting 8, Gravel Surface	5	1	2
Cutting 3, Ditch I	4	2	3
Cutting 5, "	1		
Cutting 9, "		1	1
Cutting 10, "	1	6	1
Cutting 15, Pit 2	3		7
Cutting 7, Pit 1	33	13	65
Cutting 1, Feature 2			9
Total Number of Sherds	47	22	88

Examples of these wares were submitted to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory of the Ministry of Public Building and Works for thin section analysis and the following results obtained.

Ancient Monuments		
Lab. Ref. No.	Туре	Tempering Material
70060	I	Limestone, Grog and Quartz
70059	II	Shell (recent) temper, Quartz
70058	III	Shell (recent) temper, Quartz
70057	III	Limestone temper, fragments contain shell, Ouartz.

When the wares were submitted for analysis the question asked was "is the tempering material shell only, or shell and limestone?" I am grateful to Mr. L. Beik for discussing the results of the analysis with Dr. Peacock⁹ who said that it was impossible to be specific and suggested that the tempering material could all be the same.

It would seem likely that the native potters used whatever clay they found readily available, and that if it did not contain enough tempering in its natural state they added either limestone, shell, quartz or pounded pottery (grog).

One cannot therefore be too precise in the classification of these wares. Sorting into types as for the purpose of this report by differences of appearance and surface harshness depends to a great extent on the person doing the sorting. However the system has its value in that it breaks the bulk of the material down into smaller groups for study.



PLATE V. Air photograph of the Enclosure from the south (Copyright Dr. J. K. S. St. Joseph.)



PLATE VI (a). The North side of the Enclosure ditch, Cutting 1, looking north.



PLATE VI (b). Section through the Enclosure ditch, Cutting 1, looking west.



PLATE VII (a). The South West corner of the Enclosure showing Ditches I and II, Cutting 4, looking north.



PLATE VII (b). Ditch II, Cutting 2, looking north.



PLATE VIII (a). The Storage Pit (P. 1) partly excavated, Cutting 7.



PLATE VIII (b). The Hearth Pit (P.3), Cutting 6.

Catalogue and Discussion of the Pottery

The following reports used for comparative purposes are referred to in the text by site name.

Hardingstone	P. J. Woods, <i>Excavations at Hardingstone</i> , Northants 1967-8, published 1969 by the Northamptonshire County
	Council.
Irchester	D. N. Hall and N. Nickerson, "Excavations at Irchester"
	1962-3. Archaeological Journal CXXIV (1967), pp. 65-99.
Stoke Goldington	D. C. Mynard, "Excavations at Stoke Goldington", News-
and the second second second	letter of the Wolverton and District Archaeological Society
	10, (1966), pp. 32-47.

The types of vessels found were large and small cooking pots and large storage jars. The rims are of two main types, rounded or flat-topped. The pottery descriptions have been arranged by ware type and the following abbreviations used. F. for Fine, M. for Medium, C. for coarse and D. for rim diameter which is always given in centimetres.

Fine Tempered Pottery

Small Cooking Pots

- F 2. Grey throughout with smooth burnished surface externally, D. 12.10 cm. Round-topped rim with gentle shoulder profile. From Pit I, layer B. cf. Hardingstone Fig. 22, 112.
- F 3. Grey with brown-black burnished surfaces, D. 13 cm. From Pit I, layer F. cf. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 27.
- F 4. Rim of very small pot D. 7.5 cm., grey with brown-black burnished surfaces. From gravel surface in Cutting 8.
- F 5. Inturned pointed-top rim, D. 15.4 cm., dark grey throughout with burnished surfaces. From Pit I, layer B. cf. Hardingstone Fig. 23, 142 and 143.

Large Cooking Pots

- F 6. Round-topped rim D. 20.4 cm., from large Situlate vessel, dark grey but not burnished. From Pit I, layer F.
- F 7. Flat-topped rim with pot with well marked shoulder, D. 15.5 cm. Grey with buff patches and light burnished externally, decoration of incised lines. From Pit I, layer C. cf. Hardingstone Fig. 8, 2 and Irchester Fig. 1, 20. The decoration is found at Hardingstone Fig. 24, 148-151.
- F 8. Flat-topped rim from vessel with slight shoulder, D. 20.4 cm., grey and burnished. From Pit I, layer B.

cf. Hardingstone Fig. 8, 4. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 27 and 39.

- F 9. Rim with slight external bead, D. 23.4 cm., grey-brown with light burnishing. From Pit I, layer C.
- F 10. Base sherd, D. 15.4 cm., grey with burnished external surface. From Enclosure Ditch. cf. Hardingstone Fig. 9, 24. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 44.

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Medium Tempered Pottery

Small Cooking Pots

M 11. Round-topped rim D. 12.5 cm. with slight shoulder, grey with brown eroded surface. From Pit I layer F.

cf. Hardingstone Fig. 9, 10. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 41.

M 12. Similar rim D. 13 cm., grey with dark brown burnished surfaces. From Pit I layer B. cf. Hardingstone Fig. 9, 10 and Fig. 22, 112. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 37.

Large Cooking Pots

M 13. Flat-topped rim D. 18 cm. with decoration of finger-nail impressions around top edge, slight shoulder, grey but not burnished. From Pit I, layer C.

cf. Hardingstone Fig. 8, 1 for the decoration and Fig. 22, 113 for the form.

Bases

M 14. D. 18 cm., rounded angle with slight external projection; grey with buff patches externally.

cf. Hardingstone Fig. 9, 29.

- M 15. D. 10.5 cm., from vessel with rounded profile, dark grey with burnished surfaces. From Enclosure Ditch.
- M 16. D. 13 cm., dark grey with rough finish. From gravel surface in Cutting 8.

cf. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 44.

M 17. D. 15.5 cm., dark grey. From Pit I, layer D. cf. Hardingstone Fig. 9, 28.

Coarse Tempered Pottery

- C 18. Small cooking pot with flat-topped rim D. 12.10 cm., dark grey throughout. From Enclosure Ditch.
- C 19. Rim of large cooking pot D. 25.5 cm., flat-topped with decoration of finger-tip impressions around the top edge. Dark grey with buff-brown surfaces. From Pit I, layer F.

cf. Stoke Goldington Fig. 3, 32 for similar decoration.

- C 20. Rim of large storage jar D. circa 45 cm., grey with buff-brown surfaces, roughly smoothed internally and externally. From Pit I, layer B.
- C 21. Base of large storage jar, diameter 20.8 cm., grey with buff surfaces.

Discussion

This pottery has much in common with late Iron Age material from the Upper Ouse and Nene Valleys.

The only relevant material yet published from North Bucks. is a group from the fill of a ditch found in a gravel pit at Stoke Goldington,¹⁰ about a quarter of a mile south-west of the enclosure. Its close proximity suggests that it is perhaps part of the same occupation complex. The Stoke Goldington group was considered to have a date towards the end of the Iron Age prior to the introduction of the wheel-turned Belgic forms which were found in the main fill of a nearby ditch—the primary silt of which contained handmade Iron Age pottery. Comparing the Stoke Goldington material with this from Ravenstone one can only come to the conclusion that there is very little difference in fabric or form between them. There is a slightly larger proportion of finger-tip decoration on the Stoke Goldington pottery. The small cooking pot rims are similar and the very small rim F4 may come from a pot with a base like Stoke Goldington 43. There was only one large vessel from Stoke Goldington, No 42, which is much like F8. The absence of more sherds from larger pots at Stoke Goldington is interesting but may only be a result of the small amount of material found.

Some seven miles north west of Ravenstone, at Hardingstone, Northants, two sites produced similar material. Group I from the Primary School site is loosely dated from the mid first-century B.C. to the mid first-century A.D. but closer dating is given to Group III from the second recutting of a ditch which formed part of a series of Iron Age enclosures near the Primary School; this latter group is dated to the first half of the first century A.D.

Parallels are to be found in both groups, in as much as the forms are similar. It has not however been possible to examine the fabric of the Hardingstone material. All of the parallels for the larger vessels come from Group I, which tends to suggest that our pottery is more akin to the earlier material from Hardingstone. Finger-tip decoration was found on only two pots at Hardingstone and finger-nail impressions on one only. The decoration of incised lines (on F.7) was fairly common there, and was found on several of the Group III sherds.

A group of pottery from the primary silt of an enclosure ditch at Irchester, Northants, twelve miles north-east of Ravenstone is also useful for dating purposes. The pottery, part of a series dating from the second century B.C. to the first half of the first century B.C., belongs to the end of that period. Its coming from the primary silt of the enclosure ditch dates its construction. The main fill of the ditch contained wheel-turned Belgic-type sherds. The enclosure was not considered to have a very long life and therefore the handmade sherds from the primary silt are either just pre-Belgic or residual. The group has much in common with this Ravenstone material, many of the forms are similar and there is the same scarcity of decorated sherds; only two examples of finger-tip decoration were found and none of finger-nail decoration.

Dating

The evidence from the excavation is that Ditch I was filled in before the wheel-turned sherds of mid first-century A.D. date were deposited in the top soil over the south-west corner of the enclosure. Whether the filling of the ditch was a deliberate action or a slow natural process is unknown, therefore the precise amount of time by which the handmade sherds predate the wheel-turned ones is uncertain.

The Irchester pottery dates from the first half of the first century B.C. If the Ravenstone material is contemporary with this then there would be a suitable period of time, almost a hundred years, for Ditch I to silt up naturally. On the other hand, there are reasonable parallels with the material from Hardingstone which is dated to the first half of the first century A.D. Even if the pottery were as late as this there would be ample time for Ditch I to have been filled by hand.

Objects of Iron (Fig. 5, 2-3)

1. Iron Brooch

A brooch of La Tene II type was found in Pit I, layer C, this was passed to Professor E. M. Jope for comment and no report has yet been received. The brooch, which was passed to Professor Jope without knowledge of the excavator, had not been drawn, therefore no illustration is as yet available.

Nos. 2-4 were located as a result of the magnetometer survey, see page 402 above.

2. Knife Blade

From the gravel surface at base of top soil. Length 10.8 cm., possibly of medieval or later date. Square B5.

3. Part of twisted iron object

From gravel surface at base of top soil. The remaining part is an iron rod 6 mm. square in section and 6.3 cm. long. One end is twisted and the remaining part tapers to a flattened end. It resembles a modern drill bit, but may be of Iron Age date—perhaps part of a flesh-hook. Examples have been found at Bledlow, Bucks., where continental examples are quoted. Square D4, Cutting 8.

4. An iron nail

Possibly modern. Not illustrated. Square D4, Cutting 8.

Object of Bone (Fig. 5, 5)

5. Fragment of bone sharpened to a point, length 8.3 cm. From Pit I, layer D.

Baked Clay

Two fragments were found in Pit I, layer B, both were small and nondescript.

Numerous fragments were recovered from the Hearth, Pit 3. They came mainly from around and underneath the stones (Fig. 4). Several had stick marks suggesting that they were perhaps daub from a hut wall.

Charcoal

Two fragments were found in Pit 1, layer B and five came from the Hearth Pit 3.

Slag

Six pieces of an unusual type of slag were found, five from the Enclosure Ditch and one from Pit 1, layer B. Two samples were sent for identification to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. Mr L. Biek kindly gave the following report. "Both specimens are similar. They are non-magnetic and very light, both in weight and colour, being largely cream with some light-to-dark pockets. From their general appearance in fractured section, which shows a highly vessicular glassy structure, there seems little doubt that they are the type of material which was fully analysed and described in the course of work on the Chew Valley Lake finds as vegetable ash slag. Such material is formed at hot oxidising spots in fires involving organic material such as wood and woody plants in contact with clay or sand. The plant material is ashed and fluxes the siliceous substrate into a glass which bubbles as water vapour and carbon dioxide escapes. As the viscosity of the cooling glass increases, the last bubbles are ultimately trapped and the glass sets in a spongy form. There need be no direct connection with iron smelting, and there is no evidence for the presence of iron, but such material would require for its formation the kind of temperature reached in an iron smelting furnace, pottery kiln etc. or a very fierce conflagration."

Animal Bones

These were mainly fragmentary and were submitted to Miss Louise Millard who prepared the following report for which I am grateful.

The bones come from cuttings across the Enclosure Ditch and from three levels in Pit 1. Because of the small quantity of bones from the site and their fragmentary condition it has not been possible to make any determination of age or size of animal nor is it practicable to express the numbers of bones as percentages. For the same reason the various levels have been treated together. The unidentifiable fragments have been divided into two groups, those of horse/cow size and those of sheep/pig size. The caprine remains have been described as 'sheep' since with the available material it has not been possible to distinguish between sheep and goat. Most of the sheep bones come from Pit 1, layer B, including 12 incomplete ribs apparently from the same animal. There are 3 incomplete lower jaws with deciduous premolars indicating an age of under 2 years. 9 of the horse and cow bones come from the cuttings across the Enclosure Ditch and so do most of the horse/cow size fragments. The only identifiable pig bone, an upper jaw fragment with 1 premolar and 2 molars in wear, came from Pit 1, layer B. The single canid canine also came from this level. There are no deer or bird bones from the site.

	TABLE		
	A	в	
Sheep	17	4	
Cow	6	1	
Horse	4	<u> </u>	
Pig	1	-	
Canid		1	
	28	6	Total 34
	410		

TADE

Horse/cow size fragments 24
Pig/sheep size fragments 37
A. Complete and identifiable incomplete and fragmentary bones.
B. Loose teeth and jaws.

APPENDIX 1

POTTERY FROM A PIT NORTH OF THE ENCLOSURE

During 1967 gravel was extracted from the area to the north of the enclosure and although a fairly close watch was kept no trace was seen of the circle which had appeared on the air photograph (Plate V). The only other feature to be found was a small rubbish pit which contained pottery earlier in date than that from the enclosure.



Fig. 6. Pottery from the Pit north of the Enclosure, scale $\frac{1}{4}$, and plan and section of the Pit, scale shown.

The pit (Fig. 6) was oval in plan, 3 ft. 5 ins. by 3 ft. 7 ins. It was much like P.2 and P.3 in section with almost vertical sides and rounded corners at the bottom, which was almost flat. The fill was of brown sandy soil which was darker towards the top, where it contained the pottery described below and a few fragments of bone.

The Pottery (Fig. 6, 1-8)

Compared with that from the enclosure this pottery was not as well made; less attention was paid to the finish of the vessels. The internal surfaces are generally rough and lumpy and the external surfaces were rarely burnished.

The temper appears to be the same although it has been largly eroded out of the surfaces, possibly as a result of local soil conditions in the pit. However it was possible to sort it into the same three types as the pottery from the enclosure. The results being Fine 9 sherds, Medium 12 sherds and Coarse 30 sherds.

Catalogue.

- 1. Rim of large Cooking pot, D. 23.1 cm., dark grey throughout, burnished externally.
- 2. Similar rim, D. 22.8 cm., similar ware and colour to 1 but with decoration of incised lines around the rim, slightly burnished externally. The burnishing on the above pots was effected with a stick or bone when the pot was in a leather-hard state prior to firing. In the case of 2 the burnishing was carried out after the incised decoration. It was noticeable that the burnishing had partly wiped out some of the decoration.
- 3. Similar but smaller rim, D. 17.6 cm., ware as 1 but not burnished.
- 4. Rim of Cooking pot, D. 15.4 cm., dark grey sandy with coarse grits.
- 5. Inturned rim with rough external bead, D. 20.6 cm., ware as 4.
- 6. Sherds from the shoulder of a bowl, D. 15.5, fine ware with smooth soapy surface externally and lumpy surface internally.
- Sherds from the shoulder of a small Cooking pot, D. 10.3 cm., in similar ware to 6.
- 8. Base sherds, D. 15.3 cm., fabric as 6.

Apart from the rounded profile of the shoulders of 6 and 7 there is no similarity in form to the pottery from the enclosure. The closest parallels for this group are to be found in pottery from Pitstone, Bucks.¹¹

There are no close parallels at Pitstone for 1, 2 and 3 but in general they are rims of large vessels like Pitstone 39. The incised decoration on 2 has affinities with similar decoration at Pitstone where the decoration is of wavy lines and is more sophisticated than the simple lines found here. The rim form of 3 is like Pitstone 39. The unusual rim of 4, which is flattened on top creating a small bead both internally and externally, is like Pitstone 20 and 27. 5 is also paralleled by Pitstone 77, which has the same inward slope from the shoulder.

The date is difficult to ascertain from such a small group of pottery. It has been shown to several Iron Age specialists who have all made non-committal suggestions as to the date. It would seem, like that from Pitstone, to fall into the period defined by Professor Hawkes as Iron Age II,¹² the date of which is circa 350–150 B.C. and most probably belongs to the latter part of that period.

APPENDIX 2

OTHER FEATURES FOUND AFTER THE EXCAVATION

The area to the south of the enclosure was closely watched by Mr. Richard Griffiths when the gravel company removed the top soil. He recorded several pits, a Ring Ditch and some fragmentary ditches (Fig. 2). The Ring Ditch was 36 ft. in diameter, the ditch was 5 ft. wide and 2 ft. deep, the fill was of brown sandy gravel with finer sand towards the bottom. Inside the circle were four pits:

- 2 ft. 10 ins. diameter, 10 ins. deep; the fill was of sandy soil with silty sand at bottom.
- 4 ft. 6 ins. diameter, 2 ft. deep; the fill was of three layers silty sand at the bottom with gravel above and on top sandy soil.
- Oval, 2 ft. 10 ins. by 3 ft. 6 ins. and 2 ft. 4 ins. deep; the fill was of soft brown sandy soil.

 Oval, 3 ft. by 4 ft. 2 ins. and 3 ft. deep; the fill was of brown sandy soil with some charcoal fragments towards the bottom.

Pits 3 and 4 produced a few very small and fragmentary sherds that may have been Iron Age in date.

To the south east of the Ring ditch were two parallel ditches :

30 ft. long, 2 ft. wide and 6 ins. deep; fill of sandy soil.

2. 50 ft. long, 2 ft. wide and 8 ins. deep; fill as 1.

Close to the south end of 1 was a large pit almost 9 ft. in diameter and 8 ins. deep; the fill was of sandy soil with gravel at the bottom. None of these features found by Mr. Griffiths are closely dateable. The Ring Ditch may have been associated with the Beaker Burial found in 1969 (see note 2) which was to its south west.

¹ By members of the Wolverton and District Archaeological Society.

² In 1969 a Crouched Burial with a Long-Necked Beaker was found in a bank of gravel that had not been quarried away. The exact spot to the south of the enclosure is marked on Fig. 1. The beaker will be published in due course after a specialist report has been obtained.

³ "A matter of time", London, HMSO (1960), p. 53. We are grateful to Dr St. Joseph for permission to publish Plate 1.

⁴ Cambridge collection VC 69-72.

⁵ Air Ministry Nos. AP 4097 and 4098.

⁶ D. C. Mynard, "Excavations at Stoke Goldington", Newsletter of the Wolverton and District Archaeological Society, 10 (1966), pp. 32-47.

7 By Messrs. H. G. and S. W. Clarke and Son of Weston Underwood.

⁸ The farmer of the land said that before he ploughed it for the first time it was infested by rabbits.

⁹ Of the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton.

¹⁰ Further material has been obtained from this ditch and will be published by the excavator K. Field and D. C. Mynard.

¹¹ Helen Waugh, "Pottery from Pitstone Hill", Records of Buckinghamshire, XVIII, part 3 (1968), 235-249.

¹³ C. F. C. Hawkes, "The A.B.C. of the British Iron Age" in *Problems of the Iron Age in Southern Britain*, Institute of Archaeology Occasional Paper No. 11 (1958).

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