

INVESTIGATIONS AT THE PREHISTORIC SITE AT COLDHARBOUR FARM, AYLESBURY IN 1996

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with contributions by

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Excavations undertaken in advance of housing development on a low-lying area adjacent to the Southcourt Brook, a tributary of the River Thame, produced evidence for five main phases of activity:

Phase 1: A small Neolithic pit, containing pottery, struck flint and an amber bead, was apparently contemporary with a period of tree clearance. Palaeoenvironmental evidence suggests predominantly open conditions, perhaps with a background presence of scrub.

Phases 2 and 3: Abundant evidence for at least two phases of Early Iron Age occupation. In phase 2 hundreds of intercutting pits were dug between an earlier course of the Southcourt Brook and a possible boundary ditch to its west. In phase 3 four possible roundhouses were constructed, together with two small enclosures (perhaps to control stock) within a larger rectilinear enclosure, and an associated droveway. Several four-post structures and short lengths of associated fence-lines and drainage gullies also probably belong to phase 3.

There appears to have been a hiatus between phases 3 and 4, although evidence from other sites in the vicinity indicates sporadic activity along the Southcourt Brook during the first millennium BC.

Phase 4: In the Belgic period there was occupation in the form of a roundhouse and field systems to its north and south.

Phase 5: A single ditch of Early Roman date may represent a slight shift in activity towards the northern end of the site. Alluviation, perhaps commencing during earlier phases, took place during the first millennium AD, but it is not known what influence this may have had upon the abandonment of the site; despite the low-lying position of the site, and evidence indicative of stagnant water in some of the gullies, there was no evidence that flooding was a problem whilst the site was in use. There may have been some form of activity to the northwest of the excavated area during the early/mid Saxon period.

A part of the site was retained undisturbed within the development area.

There are reports on pottery (ME Farley and NJ Smith), flints (D Bonner), the neolithic amber bead (ME Farley), metal and other artefacts (J Parkhouse and A-M Cromarty), vertebrate remains (C Johnstone) and palaeoenvironmental studies (M Robinson). The concluding discussion places the site in its wider context.



Fig. 1: Location of Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury (scale 1:5000)

INTRODUCTION

The site was located at SP 8060 1365, on a low-lying area (74m above OD) known as 'Ditchingham Field', close to the confluence of the Southcourt Brook and the Bear Brook, tributaries of the River Thame, to the southwest of Aylesbury in the parish of Hartwell.

Archaeological investigations in the Aylesbury

area have tended to focus upon the limestone ridges protruding from the surrounding clay vale, which had attracted settlement since prehistoric times. These include multiperiod sites at Bierton (Allen 1982), Walton (Farley 1976, Dalwood *et al* 1989, Bonner and Dalwood forthcoming), and Aylesbury itself (Allen and Dalwood 1983, Farley 1986a and 1986b, Bonner *et al* 1996). The low-lying Coldharbour farm site provided an opportunity to examine a site in a rather different type of location.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT COLDHARBOUR FARM

The first discovery at the Coldharbour Farm site was a scatter of grass-tempered Saxon pottery, found by fieldwalking carried out by the Aylesbury Past Project in 1987. An evaluation was undertaken in 1990, funded by the then landowners (the Ernest Cook Trust), prior to the proposed development of the site. This investigation found a single hearth, dated to the first century AD, in the vicinity of the pottery scatter, but no evidence of Saxon activity. Further to the southeast a high density of Iron Age deposits, including a ditch orientated north-south, was found, sealed by alluvium (Stewart 1990). This work did not satisfactorily demonstrate the full extent of the area of archaeological interest, which extended beyond the evaluation area.

THE 1996 INVESTIGATIONS

Negotiations for access to the site for more detailed investigation were protracted. Outline planning permission had been obtained shortly before the issue of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) which would have enabled a full investigation to be undertaken as a condition of planning consent. The archaeological response, therefore, fell some way short of what was desirable. Nevertheless, it is to the credit of the developers, the Fairford Leys Consortium, that they were able to provide the use of plant, and the former landowners, the Ernest Cook Trust, that they gave a grant towards the excavation. This generosity allowed the County Museum Archaeological Service to respond by putting a small professional team into the field for a four-week period during May and June 1996, which was augmented by volunteers, principally from the County Museum Archaeological Group.

The main objectives of the excavation were to define the limits of the Iron Age site identified by the evaluation, to plan all visible archaeological features, to excavate a selective range of features, and to investigate the palaeo-environmental history of the site.

METHODS

Stripping was conducted in phases, beginning with the excavation of six evaluation trenches ex-

tending out from the area evaluated in 1990, in order to clarify the extent of archaeological deposits. These results determined the area selected for subsequent stripping. One area was to be preserved as an area of open space within the development (see Fig. 4, centred on grid square G15), and no work was undertaken here. Stripping was also undertaken within an area referred to here as the 'riverine corridor', within which a diversion of the Southcourt Brook from its canalised course was proposed.

The resultant excavation site consisted of an irregularly-shaped area, covering about 18,000m², approximately 4.5% of the total development area (c.40Ha) (Figs. 1-4).

Given the manpower available, the size of the area under investigation was not conducive to rigorous archaeological cleaning. For this reason, and due to the heterogenous nature of the basal drift (glacio-fluvial calcareous sands and gravels), less visible features, such as older dehumified deposits, may not have been recognised.

Planning was undertaken almost entirely by use of a total-station theodolite. Horizontal co-ordinates were plotted directly on-site at a scale of 1:100, with occasional plots of more complex features such as roundhouses at 1:20. In order to avoid use of a cumbersome series of co-ordinates, this report refers to feature positions by means of a simple alphanumeric system based on 10m grid squares, as shown on Fig. 4.

The intensity of hand-excavation of individual features across the site was dictated by the rate of stripping by the machines provided by the developer. A higher proportion of features were investigated at the southern end of the site, where the machining had commenced, than at the northern end, some of which was stripped only shortly before conclusion of the investigation. Sampling was only possible for a relatively small number of features. All linear features were sampled, with several sections being cut across major ditches. Most intersections were investigated, particularly where relationships were not clear from initial surface inspection. A reasonable percentage of cut features were investigated near the southern parts of the site (roughly the area bounded by B14, H10, H7 and



Fig. 2: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: General view of site from south. The Southcourt Brook runs along the right hand side.



Fig. 3: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: General view of site from north

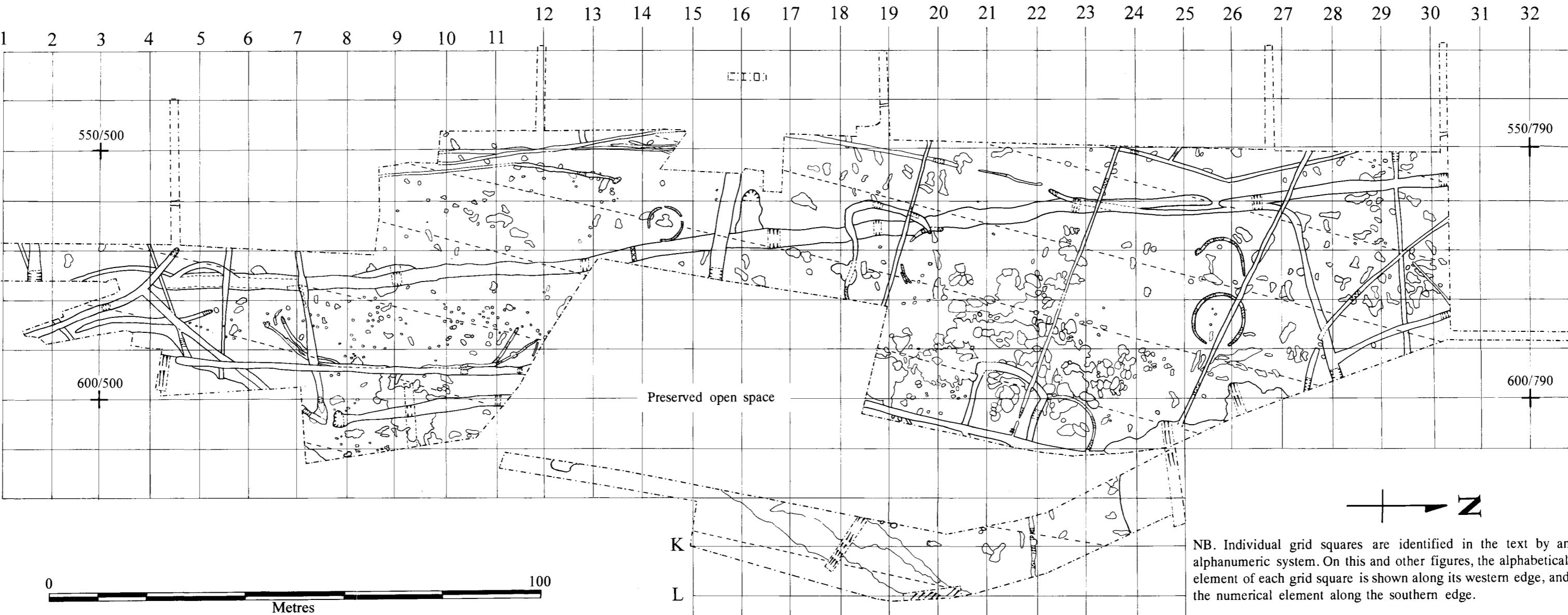


Fig. 4: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Site plan, all excavated features (1:800)

C8), but only a very low percentage of the major pit clusters in the northern half of the site could be examined.

CORRELATION OF 1990 AND 1996 RESULTS

Almost no traces of the 1990 evaluation trenches were discovered during the 1997 programme, indicating that the overburden in 1996 had been taken down at least as far as the horizon reached in 1990, a reflection of the aggressive stripping necessitated by the slender resources available in 1996. It was difficult to determine with any certainty from the 1990 archive the exact position of the 1990 trenches. When the plans of the two investigations were compared, there were few features which could be satisfactorily correlated; the main north-south ditch identified in 1990 was clearly the same feature as the most prominent ditch revealed in 1996 (4150/4151; Fig. 5), but the precise part of it exposed in 1990 could not be confidently delineated.

STRATIGRAPHY

The modern topsoil (0.25–0.40m D) showed no evidence of vertical sorting or grading, suggesting that it had been ploughed in modern times. This accorded with the land-use history of the site, and with the presence of ploughmarks observed during the 1990 evaluation. Faint traces of medieval ridge and furrow are visible on aerial photographs (Stewart 1990, 91).

Beneath the topsoil was an alluvial silty clay, which extended for about fifty metres beyond the west bank of the Southcourt Brook. This was deepest (0.35–0.5m) at the northern and southern ends of the site, and shallower (0.2m) towards the centre. There was evidence for migration of the stream channel before canalisation in its present course; this took place at an unknown date, but prior to enclosure c1777.

The basal sands and gravels, a heterogenous drift deposit, exhibited evidence of post-depositional decalcification of soluble bicarbonates and re-precipitation downslope as a white silty clay.

N.B. Where appropriate, context numbers which refer to

a group of features (for example, a four-post structure) rather than an individual archaeological context are differentiated on the figures by underlining.

SUMMARY OF PERIODS

PHASE 1: Earlier Prehistoric (Late 4th-early 3rd millennium BC). The site was covered by over one hundred ancient tree-throws, one of which contained a flint axe rough-out, indicating that the tree clearance possibly occurred during the Neolithic. A small pit, containing knapped flints and hazelnut shells, probably represented seasonal or intermittent non-settlement activity.

PHASE 2: Early Iron Age. A substantial ditch, broadly parallel with and fifty metres to the west of the former course of the Southcourt Brook was a possible site boundary. Although no structural features could be positively assigned to this period, the volume of domestic refuse within the upper fill of the ditch indicated nearby occupation. Hundreds of intercutting pits of this phase, in two main groups, may indicate a specialist activity.

PHASE 3: Early Iron Age. A rectilinear enclosure, with a possible driveway along its west side, replaced the phase 2 site boundary. Four penannular gullies, perhaps indicating the position of roundhouses, and, later, two small enclosures/ corrals, were located at the north end of the enclosure. At its south end, seven four-post structures, some associated with a north-south fenceline, were sited to the west of a series of 'banana-shaped' drainage gullies. There appears to have been a considerable chronological gap between phases 3 and 4.

PHASE 4: Belgic. A small roundhouse was constructed in the middle of the site, to the south of a substantial east to west ditch. Recut as a minor gully, this ditch influenced the layout of a series of small rectangular fields over the north side of the site.

PHASE 5: Roman and later. A curvilinear ditch, possibly a field boundary or enclosure ditch, was laid out at the north end of the site. A small undated ditch at right-angles to it may be broadly contemporary. Much of the site was

affected by alluviation which is believed to have taken place during the first millennium AD, although the process may have been initiated earlier.

PHASE I – EARLIER PREHISTORIC (late 4th to late 3rd millennia BC) (Fig. 5)

This period was characterised by evidence for possible tree clearance, in the form of over one hundred and fifty ancient tree-throws, one of which contained a Neolithic flint axe rough-out. A Neolithic pit (5037) was also found (Figs. 5 and 6).

Pit 5037 (J19; Fig. 6c), sub-rounded, dish-shaped (0.80m diam x 0.17m D), filled by loamy sand with flint and calcareous grit/ gravel. 1 x probable Early-Middle Neolithic sherd, 15 uncertain (prehistoric) sherds, 85 knapped flints, fired clay, animal bone, hazelnut shell, and a small amber bead.

The entire contents of pit 5037, after wet-sieving, produced eight flint knives and seventy-seven unabraded waste flakes, with later Mesolithic/ Early Neolithic affinities, a date that broadly accorded with the associated handmade pottery, which included a rim sherd of probable Early-Middle Neolithic date. A low average sherd weight (4.4g) probably reflected the fragile nature of prehistoric pottery, rather than indicating that the sherds were residual. The presence of a small amber bead is of interest, particularly in a non-funerary context; this high status item is discussed further below. The fragmented faunal remains (average weight 1.6g) provided little insight into the diet and economy of the people who exploited the area, although fragments of cattle and roe deer bone indicated that domestic and wild resources were exploited. The carbonised material included charcoal and hazelnut shells, the latter suggesting possible early autumnal use of the site.

Tree-throw 2039 (F27; Fig. 6a), elongated, irregular sides and base, undercut on SW side (c.4m L x c.2m W x 0.37m D), filled by loamy clay with flint and calcareous grits/ gravels. Contained a Neolithic flint axe rough-out and knapped flints.

Tree-throw 5043 (J19; Fig. 6b), teardrop-shaped, irregular sides and base, undercut on W side (2.6m L x 0.95m W x 0.35m D), filled by: a possibly slumped basal fill, overlain by a loamy clay with flint and calcareous grits/ gravels. Contained burnt flint.

Other numbered contexts (2091–2094, 4135–4137, 5039, 6269–6277) were also interpreted as tree-throws. In total, over one hundred and fifty nebulous features, unevenly distributed across the site, were interpreted as ancient tree-throws, although it is possible that some were pits.

The tree-throws probably represent a single event of deliberate woodland clearance, rather than a natural event. Bark-ringing may have played its part in land clearance as much as felling with flint axes, although the results of the former activity would have taken many times longer to achieve than the results of the latter. The resultant holes became reservoirs for contemporary material, which included knapped and burnt flint, animal bone, snails and a Neolithic flint axe rough-out, indicating that clearance possibly occurred in the late third/ early second millennium BC.

PHASE 2 – EARLY IRON AGE (Fig. 5)

A substantial boundary ditch (2049/4150), at least 330m long, defined the western limit of an area containing a large number of shallow intercutting pits. These were close to a number of pond areas, possibly watering places for livestock, along the former course of the Southcourt Brook.

BOUNDARY DITCHES 2099 AND 4150/4151 (Figs. 5 and 7)

This feature, orientated approximately N-S, had been dug in two near-contiguous segments: the southern (4150; recut 4151) was 270m long (E4–C25) and the northern (2099) was at least 60m long (C25–C30). There was a two metre wide gap between the two ditch segments.

Ditch 4150/4151 was investigated by six sections, some excavated by machine (4081, 4111/4077, 4150, 4114/4073, 6008 and 6206). These showed a consistent profile and fill sequence, and revealed that a short section of the ditch had been re-dug on at least one occasion (4151). The sections are described below, beginning from the south.

Section 6206 (E9), broad, flat-bottomed (2.85m W x 0.95m D), filled by three layers: primary gritty silts along E side of base; overlain by an oxidised semi-gleyed silty clay with gravel lenses from weathered

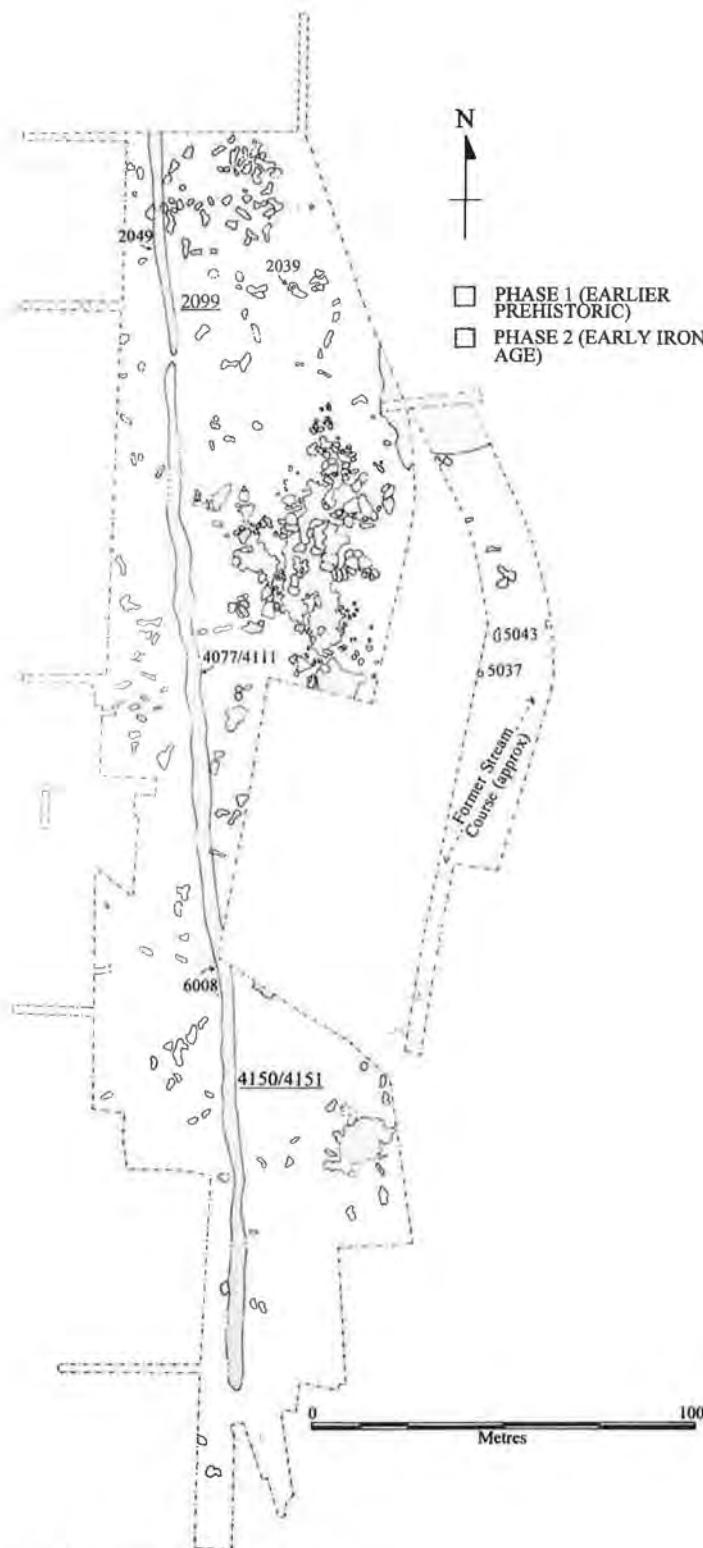


Fig. 5: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Phases 1 and 2

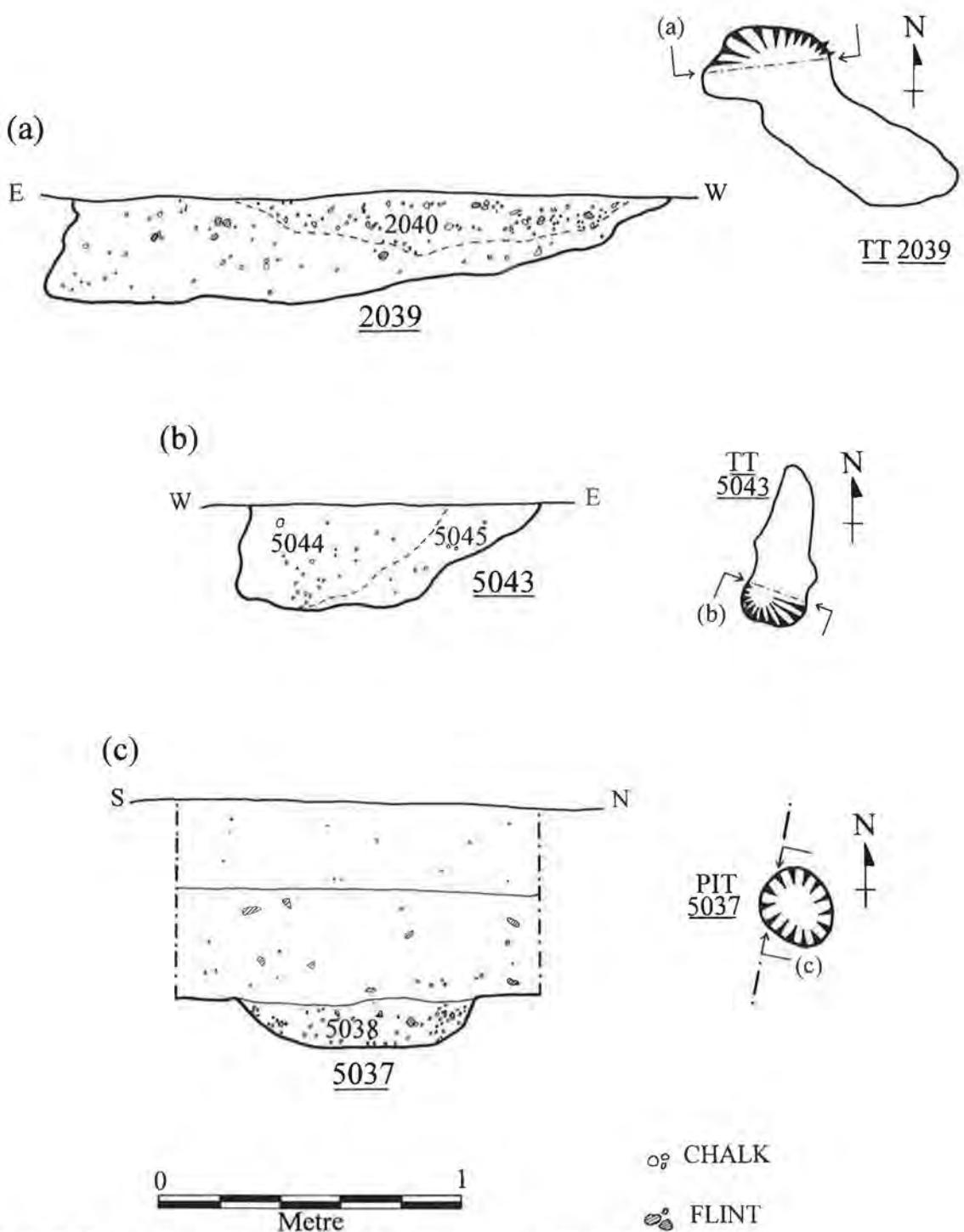


Fig. 6: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Phase 1 sections: features 2039, 5043, 5037

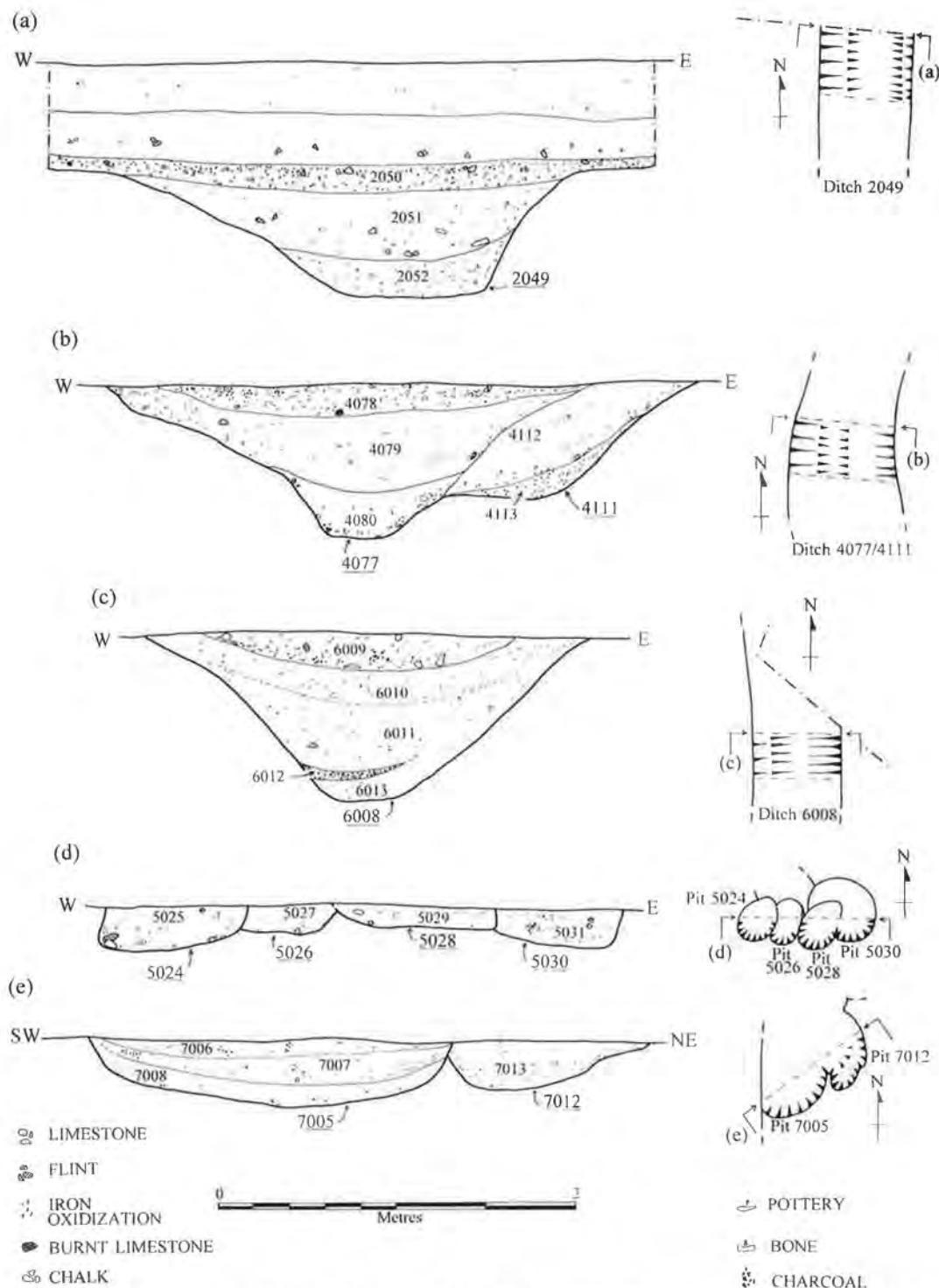


Fig. 7: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Phase 2 sections: Ditches 2049, 4077/4111 and 6008; Pits 5024/5026/5028/5030 and 7005/7012

sides; overlain by a charcoal-rich loamy clay. 9 × undated sherds and animal bone.

Section 6008 (E12), Fig. 7c; broad, 'U'-shaped (2.50m W × 0.95m D), filled by a moderately oxidised, semi-gleyed silty-clay, overlain by a charcoal-rich loamy clay. 36 × EIA sherds, 4 × undated sherds and animal bone.

Section 4114 (D16), broad flat-bottomed, 'U'-shaped (2.3m+ W × 0.75m D), filled by a loamy sand. No finds. This was recut as **4073**; asymmetrical with steep E side (3.2m W × 0.92m D), filled by three layers: primary silty sands/ grits; overlain by a relatively stone-free gritty loamy sand; overlain by a charcoal-rich sandy-clay-loam. 99 × undated sherds, animal bone and daub.

Section 4111 (D18), Fig. 7b; broad flat-bottomed, 'U'-shaped (1.4m+ W × 0.63m D), filled by a gritty silty clay, overlain by a loamy sand. No finds. This was recut as **4077**; broad 'V'-shaped and narrow flat base (2.75m W × 0.87m D), filled by three layers: primary silty sands and grits; overlain by a loamy sand; overlain by a charcoal-rich sandy clay loam. 16 × EIA sherds, 5 × undated sherds, animal bone.

Section 4081 (D22), broad flat-bottomed 'U'-shaped (2.30m W × 0.70m D), filled by four layers: primary sands and calcareous grits; overlain by a stony loamy clay; overlain by a loamy clay; overlain by a charcoal-rich sandy clay loam. 29 × undated sherds, animal bone.

Surface Finds (4126, 4127, 4130, 6259, 6260, 6261) were recovered by limited investigation of finds concentrations along surface of the ditch. 43 × EIA and 103 × undated (probably prehistoric) sherds.

Ditch 2099 was investigated by both machine and hand-dug sections (2045, 2049). These showed a consistent profile and fill sequence, comparable to Ditch 4150. The sections are described below, the southernmost first.

Section 2045 (C26), broad flat-bottomed 'U'-shaped (2.28m W × 0.68m D), filled by four layers: primary clayey sand; overlain by a stony loamy clay; overlain by a stoneless loamy clay; overlain by a sandy clay loam. Contained fragments of human cranium (frontal and parietal bones).

Section 2049 (C30), Fig. 7a; broad flat-bottomed 'U'-shaped (2.50m W × 0.60m D), filled by three layers: primary semi-gleyed silty clay; overlain by a silty clay; overlain by a stony silty clay (which extended as a layer to either side of the ditch). No finds.

The original ditch (4150/2099) was over 330m long, apart from a two-metre wide gap (C25). It continued into the unexcavated area at the northern end of the site, and may have continued for another hundred metres northwards to the Bear Brook, close to its confluence with the Southcourt Brook.

In its earliest form (2049, at the northern end of the site) the ditch appeared to have been flat-bottomed for at least one hundred metres; this had been recut further south (4077) with a more 'V'-shaped profile. The profile of one section (6008) accorded with the *recut* of the ditch, suggesting that the original ditch had not reached this far.

The recut had a loamy upper fill containing large quantities of domestic waste, unlike the earlier ditch, which contained sterile silty and clayey products of natural weathering.

During the 1990 evaluation, investigation along a seventy-five metre long section of the same ditch revealed a series of surface finds clusters, possibly midden dumps, associated with a 'reworked boulder clay', a deliberate backfill of the ditch (Stewart 1990, 94–95). This same pattern was evident during the 1996 excavation, when at least eighteen midden-like dumps were recorded along a one hundred and fifty metre long section of the ditch. The finds broadly correlated with the recut section of the ditch; there was a low density of finds associated with paler fills at the extreme north and south ends of the ditch. The intensity of secondary dumping within the ditch may mean that surface middens were favoured for rubbish disposal over primary burial in pits.

This substantial 330m long ditch may have functioned as a site boundary, enclosing an area of at least 10,500m², on the west side of the former course of the Southcourt Brook.

A further ditch (2082; C29–G29, not shown on Fig. 5) may also belong to this phase. 2082 lay at right angles to the main phase 2 ditch 2099, but the relationship between them could not be ascertained. It was apparently cut by the phase 3 ditch 4148, as well as the phase 5 ditch 2080.

Ditch 2082 (C29–G29), Moderately sloping sides with shallow concave base, 1.00m W × 0.29m D, no finds

PITS

The principal evidence for Phase II activity consisted of about five hundred intercutting pits in two clusters: a large concentration at the north end of the site (centred around G21), and a smaller one near the south end (centred around H9). They had been dug along a band of white calcareous clay. This band may have formed as a result of post-depositional precipitation of calcium ions from groundwater moving downslope (Dr Mark Robinson, *pers. comm.*).

The **northern pit cluster** consisted of at least four or five main groups and numerous minor groups and discrete pits, covering an approximate area of 700m². Twelve pits, approximately a 2–5% sample of the total estimated number in the northern cluster, were excavated. A representative sample of the excavated pits is described below (see also Figs. 7 and 8).

Pit 4033 (G20), oval, flat-bottomed (0.8m L × 0.72m W × 0.12m D), filled with sandy clay loam and occasional limestone lumps. 7 × EIA sherds and fragments of a loomweight.

Pit Group 5024, 5026, 5028, 5030 (H21; Fig. 7d), rounded/oval, with partly undercut sides and flat-sloping bases (0.7m–0.9m W × 0.11–0.25m D). Filled by loamy clay/ clay loam with occasional flint and calcareous grits/gravels and charcoal flecks. 55 × EIA sherds, animal bone, knapped flint and daub. Pits 5024 and 5028 cut Pits 5026 and 5030 respectively.

Pit 5033 (H22), oval, undercut sides, sloping base (2.05m L × 1.55m W × 0.32m D), filled by loamy clay with calcareous grits, overlain by a sandy clay with occasional flint and calcareous grits/ gravels, and charcoal flecks. 16 × EIA sherds, animal bone and burnt flint.

Other pits (4015, 4019, 4021, 4029, 4031, 4036), similar in size, form and fill to those described above. 44 × EIA sherds, animal bone, knapped flint and daub.

The **southern pit cluster** was a single group of pits covering an area of approximately 140m². Four pits, approximately a 3–4% sample of the total estimated number of pits in this group, were excavated and are described below.

Pit 7003 (H9), rounded, bowl-shaped (1.05m W × 0.32m D), filled with stone-free silty clay fill. 21 × EIA sherds; animal bone.

Pit 7005 (H8; Fig. 7e), oval, bowl-shaped (2.05m L × 1.80m W × 0.39m D), filled by a sterile silty clay, overlain by a silty clay with calcareous grits/ gravels, charcoal-rich silty loam. 7 × EIA sherds, animal bone and knapped flint. Cut Pit 7012.

Pit 7012 (H9; Fig. 7e), rounded, bowl-shaped (1.15m W × 0.28m D) filled by silty clay with calcareous grits and charcoal. 3 × EIA sherds, animal bone. Cut by Pit 7005.

Pit 7009 (G8), rounded, bowl-shaped (1.8m L × 1.6m+ × 0.63m D). Filled by four layers: sterile, semi-gleyed silty clay; overlain by a gritty clayey silt; overlain by a gravelly silty clay with charcoal; overlain by a gravelly silty clay with charcoal. 7 × EIA sherds, animal bone.

The excavated pits revealed a consistency of size and form, most being small, shallow, and flat-bottomed (under one metre across), a few being more substantial. Most seem to be of Knight's Form 5 (Knight 1984, 101–2), which are defined as irregular pits with uneven sides, flat or uneven base, and an irregular but generally oval or circular plan. Not surprisingly these make up the largest category of Knight's data-set, and at Coldharbour Farm, as elsewhere, it is impossible to be certain whether the excavated data reflect the original profiles. The primary pit fills tended to be alluvial silts and clays, perhaps the result of overbank spill from the former Southcourt Brook, whilst the secondary fills were anthropogenically reworked soils with a higher charcoal and finds content, suggesting a proximity to occupation. No buildings which might have been associated with such occupation could be assigned to this phase, although it is possible that buildings are preserved beneath the unexcavated area.

The excavated pits form far too small a sample to reach any definitive conclusions about their function. The large number appears to have been beyond the needs of any residents, suggesting that the pits represented a specialist activity serving a wider community. Although their distribution broadly correlated with a band of white clay, this correlation was considered coincidental, since there was no evidence that the clay had been extracted for on-site use, and the characteristics of those pits which were excavated was inconsistent with use as quarry pits. The relatively high water-table (close to the Southcourt Brook) makes it highly unlikely that any could have been used for



Fig. 8: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Pits and enclosures on east side of site, from south.

storage. Their shallowness may represent an attempt to avoid the water-table (cf the Iron Age site at Whitehouse Road, Oxford, where shallowness of pits was interpreted as reflecting a seasonal rise in the water table; Mudd 1993).

Although the pits are assigned to phase 2 on stratigraphic grounds, as some of them were cut by the Phase 3 enclosure ditches, it is possible that some were dug during Phase 3.

FORMER STREAM CHANNELS AND ASSOCIATED PONDS

Former courses of the Southcourt Brook and four associated pond areas were identified a little to the west of the present course of the brook (Fig. 4). Two hearths were also recorded in this area.

Former Channel 5009 (L20), shallow, flat-bottomed (0.60m D), with alluvial silty clay primary deposit and a more loamy upper fill from which six IA sherds were recovered.

Hearth 5012 (L20), on base of channel 5009; burnt clay fragments with charcoal flecks (1.05m W × 0.10m D). No finds.

Ponds 5077, 5079, 5081 and 5084 (centred K18), flat-bottomed, 'U'-shaped profile (3.0–4.0m W × 0.60–0.90m D), with clayey silt and silty (calcareous) clay primary deposits and more loamy upper fills with a detectable charcoal content. The only finds were one definite and one probable Iron Age sherd from 5069.

Former Channel 7039 (I12), form and dimensions not recorded (1.05m+ D), filled by three layers: a sterile silty clay; overlain by an organic-rich silty clay; overlain by possibly reworked fluvio-glacial calcareous gravels: overlain by a silty clay. No finds.

Hearth 7026 (I12; Fig. 9b), overlying possibly reworked fluvio-glacial calcareous gravels (uppermost fill of 7039). Brownish-black loamy clay with numerous heat-reddened flints, burnt clay fragments and charcoal, as well as seven IA sherds, overlain by a calcareous clay with an ash-like residue (2.95m W × 0.14m D).

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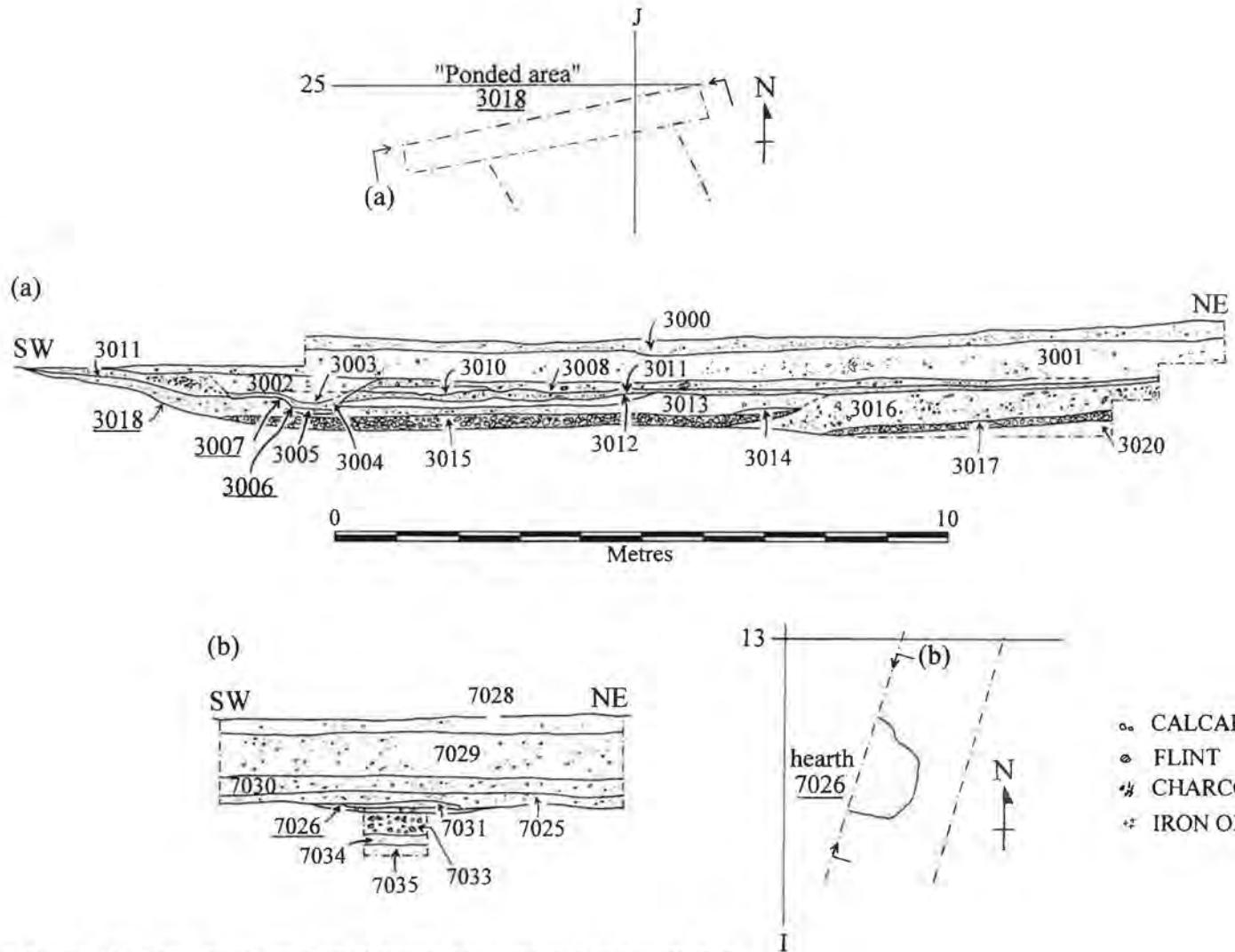


Fig. 9: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Section through pond area 3018 and hearth 7026

Pond 3018 (H/I24; Fig. 9a), irregularly rounded, shallow sides, flat base (26m+ L × 18m+ W × 0.65m D), filled by five layers: calcareous and flint grits/ gravels, and coarse sands in a silty sand matrix, also 1 × IA sherd; overlain by a silty sand; overlain by a clayey sand with moderately frequent calcareous and flint grits/gravels and charcoal; overlain by a gritty alluvial silty clay; overlain by a derived silty clay loam with high anthropogenic component (notably charcoal, also 24 IA sherds). The position of a cut (3006/3007; Fig. 9a) in the upper part of the sequence was coincident with the extrapolated position of the confluence of the phase 4 ditches 2030 and 5000.

A series of former water channels (K19–I11) and associated pond areas (H26, I24, K19 and G4) along the eastern side of the site indicated the positions of at least two major migrations/ meanders (approximately 100m each in length) of the former Southcourt Brook, to the west of its present canalised course. The former channels contained typical alluvial silty clays. A later reworked layer of grits and gravels (possibly derived from the basal fluvial-glacial sands and gravels) within one channel may have represented a major flood episode of the stream, although the layer could be of anthropogenic origin. Traces of two hearths within the channels indicated human activity at times of low water level, presumably during the summer months. The pond areas may have been the result of animals wallowing in wet areas near the former course of the Southcourt Brook. The upper sediments within them may have been re-worked/redeposited.

The area closest to the Southcourt Brook was excavated for the most part by machine and the southern part was susceptible to flooding. Investigations were more cursory than was desirable, and the deposits here were difficult to integrate with the main stratigraphic sequence. Such finds as were recovered suggest that these deposits were being formed and/or reworked, at least in part, during the earlier Iron Age (phases 2 and 3), whilst pond 3018 appeared to be cut by a phase 4 ditch system. The features are therefore included at this point in the site narrative. It must be stressed, however, that this group of features need not be entirely contemporary with each other, and that they may have been in existence for a longer period of time than the combined duration of phases 2 and 3.

PHASE 3: EARLY IRON AGE

This phase was characterised by a large rectilinear enclosure and an associated driveway to the west (Fig. 10). At the north end of the enclosure, two possible sub-phases of activity were identified. The earlier sub-phase contained evidence for penannular drainage gullies associated with four possible roundhouses, whilst the later phase consisted of two small sub-rectilinear enclosures (perhaps cattle corrals). These may have been established whilst the adjacent roundhouses were still in use. At least six four-post structures and a number of associated fence-lines and drainage gullies were constructed at the south end of the Phase 3 enclosure.

THE MAIN ENCLOSURE, DROVEWAY AND ASSOCIATED FIELDS

Three ditches (4148, 4123 and 4024) formed two sides of a broadly rectilinear enclosure against the west side of the projected course of the former brook (Fig. 10). It is possible that the main Phase 2 ditch (2099/4150) was still faintly visible as a shallow silted depression when the enclosure was laid out, as the Phase 3 enclosure seems to have respected the lines of the earlier feature over a short distance (D26 and environs). The new enclosed area was c. 14,000m², comparable in size to the area enclosed during phase 2.

Access into the enclosure from the west was provided by two small gaps thirteen metres apart. The ditch along the north side of the enclosure had been re-cut (ditch section 2041), and the ditch on the west side of the enclosure may also have been re-cut (sections 4024 and 4038).

The enclosure ditches were investigated by seven sections which are described below from north to south:

Ditch 4148 formed the N and NW sides of the Phase 3 enclosure (G28–D27–C22). From the projected course of the former brook (G28), it ran for over 35m in an ENE–WSW direction, before it turned S for 30m along the E side of the Phase 2 ditch, which it then crossed, and terminated with a slight westward turn (C22). This ditch was investigated by five sections, excavated by hand or machine:

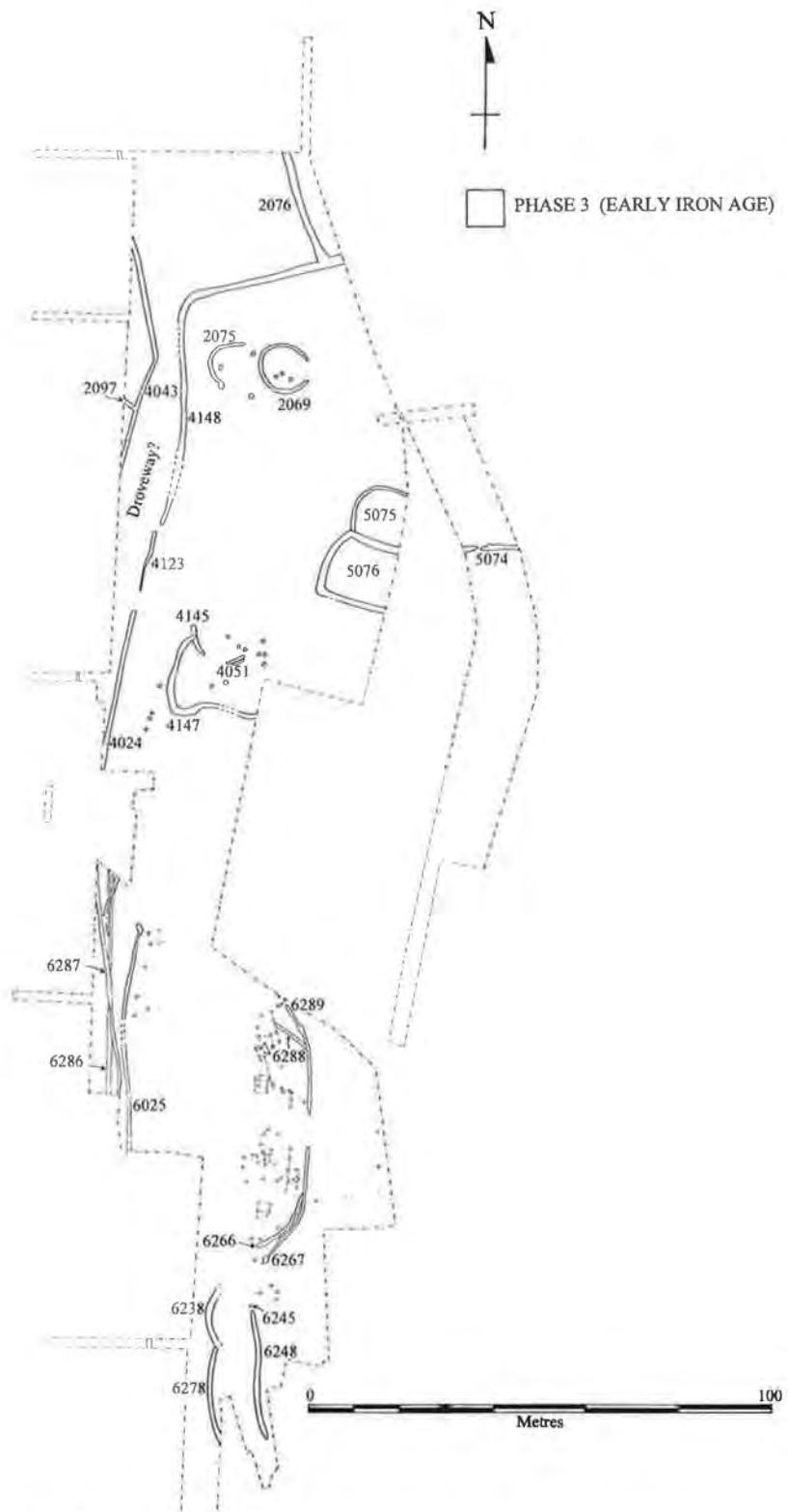


Fig. 10: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Phase 3

Section 2054 (G28), 'V'-shaped with narrow flat base (1.25m+ W × 0.72m D), filled by three layers: sterile oxidised silty clay (0.06m D); overlain by a clayey sand with calcareous and flint grits/ gravels (0.2m D); overlain by an oxidised loamy clay with frequent calcareous and flint grits/ gravels (0.52m D). No finds. Recut as 2041.

Section 2041 (G28), Re-cut, asymmetrical 'U'-shaped (2.5m W × 0.46m D), filled by an alluvial silty clay (0.42m D), overlain by a sandy clay loam to loamy clay with calcareous and flint grits/ gravels, extends as a layer beyond the limits of the feature (0.18m d). No finds.

Section 2043 (C26), 'U'-shaped (1.05m W × 0.37m D), filled by a sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint grits/ gravels. 3 × EIA sherds.

Section 4121 (D22), 'U'-shaped (0.65m W × 0.40m D), filled by sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint grits/ gravels. No finds.

Section 4038 (C22), 'V'-shaped with narrow flat base (0.56m W × 0.34m D), filled by a loamy clay with calcareous grits (0.25m D), overlain by a sandy clay loam with frequent calcareous and flint grits/ gravels (0.09m D). 49 × EIA sherds; animal bones.

Ditch/ Gully 4123 ran for 13m to the WSW of Ditch 4148 and formed the W side of the Phase 3 enclosure (C21). The gully was investigated by one hand-excavated section: 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.40m W × 0.15m D), filled by a loamy clay with calcareous grits and flint gravels. 1 × EIA sherd.

Ditch 6287 formed the S continuation of the W side of the Phase 3 enclosure (C20–D4). The ditch ran WSW of Gully 4123 for 45m and then possibly ESE (as either Gully 6286 or Gully 6287) for over 100m towards the brook. The ditch was investigated by three machine/ hand excavated sections:

Section 4024 (C19), 'V'-shaped with narrow flat base (0.40m W × 0.15m D), filled by a loamy clay with calcareous grits (0.31m D), overlain by a sandy clay loam with frequent calcareous and flint grits/ gravels (0.15m D). 2 × EIA sherds and animal bone.

Section 6287 (C11), 'U'-shaped (0.53–0.65m W × 0.14–15m D), filled by a sandy clay loam to loamy clay with calcareous, flint and limestone gravels. No finds.

Section 6286 (C11), 'U'-shaped (0.50–0.71m W × 0.18–0.32m D), filled by a loamy clay with occasional calcareous grit and flint lumps. 1 × undated sherd; 1 × worked flint.

The enclosure ditch (4148) and a parallel gully (4043) on its west side formed a possible

droveway, orientated NNE-SSW, leading to a small field on the north side of the enclosure. The droveway was at least 80m long, and between five and ten metres wide. Access into the enclosure was provided by two small entrances (four metres and two metres wide) at either end of Gully 4123, approximately midway along the droveway. A gully (2076), parallel with the northern part of Gully 4043, formed the east side of this field. Another gully (2097), joining gully 4043 (the western side of the droveway) approximately at right-angles and close to the western edge of the excavation, indicated that further fields lay to the west.

Gully 4043 (C23), 'U'-shaped (0.55m W × 0.22m D), filled by loamy clay with occasional calcareous grits along base. 2 × EIA and 1 × R-B sherd (?intrusive).

Gully 2097 (C24), 'U'-shaped (0.52m W × 0.16m D), filled by loamy clay. No finds.

Ditch 2076 (F30), shallow, flat-bottomed (1.10m W × 0.19m D) filled by sandy clay with calcareous grits and occasional flint gravels. No finds.

The enclosure ditches contained a small quantity of Early Iron Age pottery, typologically the same as pottery from the Phase 2 features. No other datable artefacts were found.

Within the main enclosure, at its north end, were drainage gullies belonging to four possible roundhouses and two small sub-rectilinear enclosures/ corrals, whilst at the south end there were at least seven four-post structures and a number of associated fence-lines and drainage gullies.

ROUNDHOUSES

Three penannular gullies and a single bow-shaped gully at the northern end of the Phase 3 enclosure are interpreted as the external drainage gullies of roundhouses. Stratigraphically, they post-dated the Phase 2 boundary ditch and associated pits, and pre-dated the Phase 4 field boundary ditches. Two of the penannular gullies pre-dated other Phase 3 features.

PENANNULAR GULLY 2069 (Figs. 11 and 12; F25)

A penannular drainage gully (2069, later recut

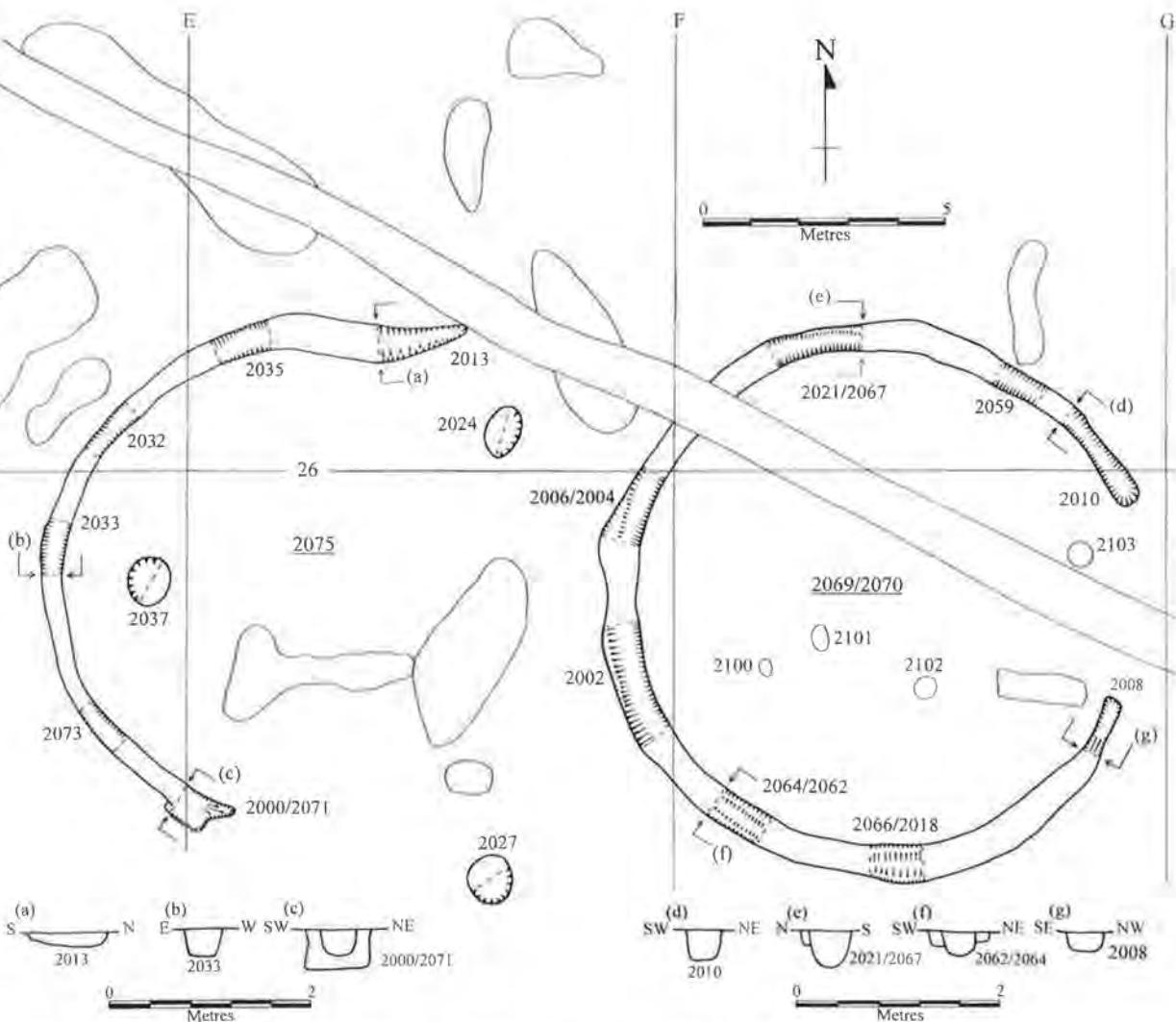


Fig. 11: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Penannular gullies 2069/70 & 2075: plan and sections

(2070)) and a number of postholes indicated the position of a possible roundhouse at the north end of the enclosure.

Gully 2069 (F25), described a near-circle of c. 10m diam, with a 4m wide gap on the E side. It had been recut by a more substantial gully (2070). The earlier gully was investigated by four hand-excavated sections, and its recut by eight sections:

Sections 2006, 2064, 2066, 2067 (E25, F25, F26), shallow, flat-bottomed (0.59m-0.70m W × 0.09m-0.15m D), filled by silty clay with calcareous grits/gravels and occasional flint gravel. 4 × EIA sherds.

Recut Sections 2010, 2059, 2021, 2004, 2002, 2062,

2018, 2008 (E25, F25, F26), deep, flat-bottomed (0.39m-0.60m W × 0.19m-0.36m D), filled by a primary, loamy clay with calcareous grits, overlain by an upper, clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels, and occasional limestone fragments. The primary fill was not present in all sections. 45 × EIA sherds, animal bone and foreign stone. Cut by Phase 4 field boundary ditch 2030.

Postholes 2100-2103 Four circular postholes (0.3m diam) within the area defined by the drainage gully did not appear to form any coherent pattern. They were not excavated.

The flat-bottomed profile of the gully was consistent with that of a foundation, although the absence of any post-settings within it makes it more



Fig. 12: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Penannular gullies 2069/70 and 2075, from east

likely to have been a drain around a circular building. The recutting and enlargement of the original gully along its entire length, apart from the terminals, may indicate longevity of occupation. The four postholes may represent structural elements of a timber building, although the use of other construction methods (eg. turf or cobb walls) which did not penetrate the subsoil should not be ruled out. The dearth of features here may reflect the general difficulty in identifying features over this part of the site.

BOW-SHAPED GULLY 2075 (E26, Figs. 11 and 12)

A curvilinear gully defined an arc to the west side of the roundhouse 2069. Three small pits were identified in the area between the gully and the building, whilst a fourth was cut by the gully. These may have been contemporary with the gully.

Bow-shaped Gully 2075: An approximately semi-circular gully with an out-turned northeast terminal en-

closed an area of just over 50m², a few metres to the west of the roundhouse. The gully was investigated by six hand-excavated sections:

Sections 2013, 2035, 2032, 2033, 2073, 2000 (D25/26, E25/26), steep-sided and flat-bottomed on the S and W sides (0.37–0.38m W × 0.15m–0.23m D) becoming broader and less regular on the N side (0.60–0.80m W × 0.14m–0.25m D). Filled by a (sandy) clay loam with occasional calcareous grits and flint gravels. A primary siltier fill was identified at the SE terminal. 53 × EIA sherds, animal bone, burnt flint, burnt stone and fired clay loomweight frags.

Pit 2024 (E26), oval, steep-sided, flat-bottomed (0.92m L × 0.82m W × 0.15m D), filled by a primary loamy sand, overlain by a loamy clay with calcareous grits, flint gravels, 1.2Kg of limestone slabs (under 0.15m W) and charcoal. 4 × EIA sherds.

Pit 2027 (E25), cylindrical with slight undercut (0.88m Di × 0.27m D), filled by a primary loamy sand, overlain by a loamy clay to sandy clay with occasional calcareous grits/gravels, 0.8Kg limestone fragments, and charcoal. 3 × EIA sherds; animal bone.

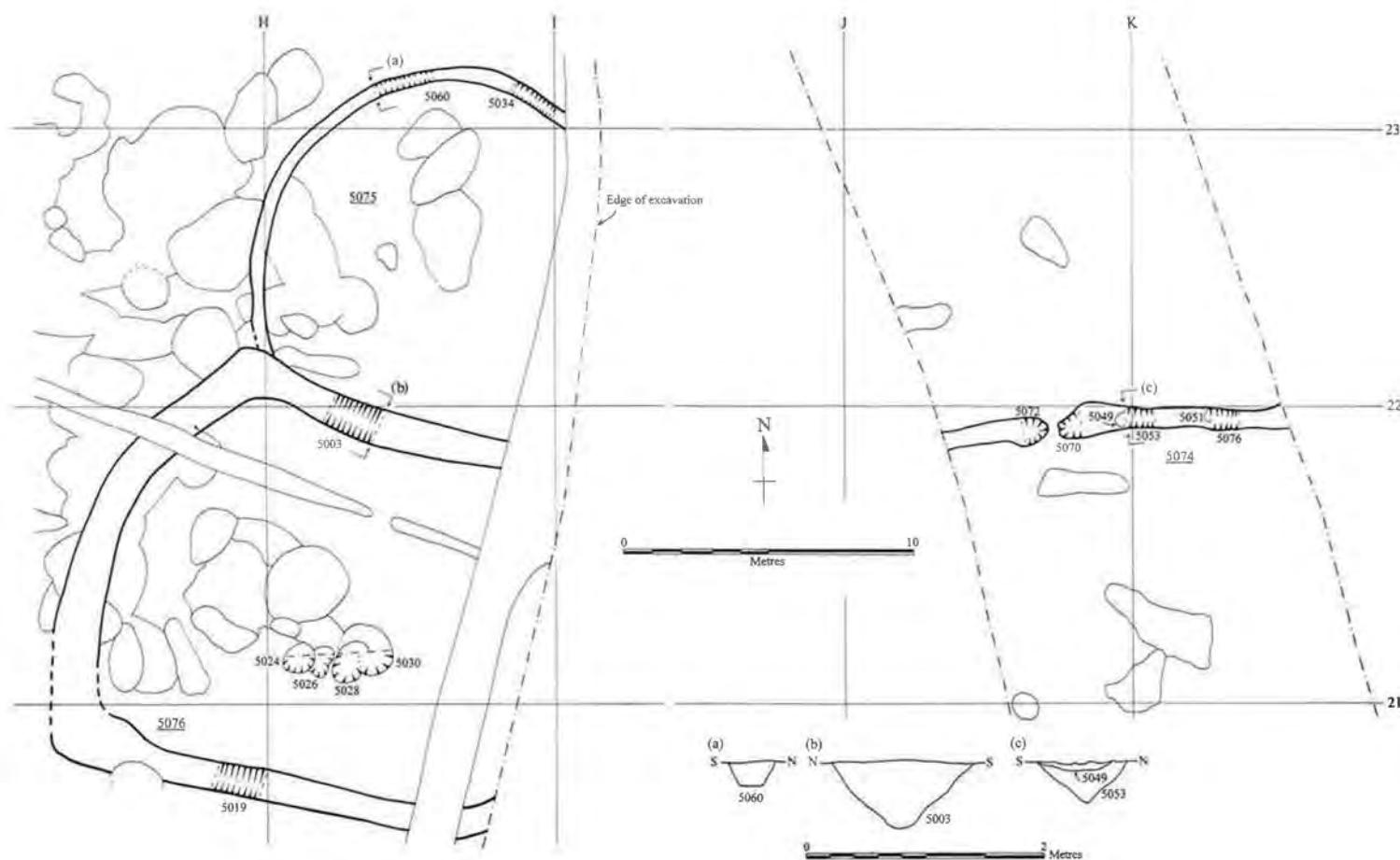


Fig. 13: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Enclosures 5075 and 5076: plan and sections

Pit 2037 (D25), cylindrical (0.80m Di × 0.08m D), filled by a loamy clay with occasional calcareous grits and flint gravels, 0.75Kg limestone fragments, and charcoal. No finds.

Pit 2071 (E25), at the terminal of the gully and cut by it, oblong with undercut south side (1.25m L × 0.65m W × 0.36m D), filled by a clayey fine sand with calcareous grits (backfilled 'natural'), and charcoal. 4 × EIA sherds.

Apart from its outward-turned terminals, the bow-shaped gully had an identical curvature to that of the penannular gully (2069), to the east, and may have provided drainage as an eaves-drip to a similar small building. However, no positive trace of any internal structure was found.

Pits 2024, 2027 and 2037 are possibly contemporary with each other, although their relationship, if any, to the bow-shaped gully is less certain. Large fragments of limestone, possibly packing, suggest that the pits may be the truncated bases of postholes belonging to a structure, although their configuration does not obviously accord with a roundhouse structure.

Associated debris, including fragments of a loomweight, suggested a domestic focus to any internal activity and/or structure, although the finds could have derived from the putative roundhouse to the east represented by gully 2069.

Both the penannular gully 2069 and the bow-shaped gully 2075 were dated to the Early Iron Age by pottery, rather than stratigraphic relationships. They therefore belong to either Phase 2 or 3. It may be significant that the bow-shaped gully and the roundhouse to the east were located close to the "entrance" gap which punctuated the Phase 2 enclosure ditch, and a Phase 2 date for these features cannot be entirely ruled out.

PENANNULAR GULLY 5075 (Fig. 13, H22/23)

Gully 5075 was situated 40m SE of penannular gully 2069, adjacent to 5076, and was represented by an arc c.13m in diameter. It was investigated by two hand-excavated sections:

Sections 5034, 5060 (H23), shallow, flat-bottomed 'U'-shaped (0.38–0.40m W × 0.20–0.23m D), filled by a primary, fine loamy clay and calcareous grits (0.04–

0.10m D), overlain by a sandy clay loam with calcareous grits, flint gravels and occasional charcoal. 10 × EIA sherds, animal bone, shell and a fragment of human cranium on the base of section 5060. Cut by Ditch 5003 (Enclosure 5076; see below).

The gully may have been the eaves-drip gully of a roundhouse, but no trace of any internal structure was found. The estimated internal diameter of the gully, c. 12.5m (123m²), was larger than 2069 and 2075. Access was probably from the south or east, there being no identifiable breaks along the excavated section of the gully.

The fragment of human cranium on the base of the gully (section 5060, above) is of interest, although the recovery of human skeletal material from non-funerary contexts (including the hillfort at Aylesbury; Farley 1986) is not unusual in later prehistory (eg Brück 1995).

The gully was cut by ditch 5076, also thought to be phase 3 (see below).

PENANNULAR GULLY 4051/4145 (Fig. 14, centred E20)

A discontinuous penannular drainage gully indicated the position of a possible roundhouse approximately central within the Phase 3 enclosure. No positive traces of any contemporary internal features were identified.

Gully 4051, 4.5m long, was investigated by two hand-excavated sections:

Sections 4055, 4103 (E19), shallow, flat-bottomed 'U'-shaped (0.38–0.41m W × 0.11–0.15m D), filled by a clay loam with calcareous grits. 13 × EIA sherds, animal bone, knapped flint, and burnt stone.

Gully 4145, 8m long, was investigated by three hand-excavated sections:

Sections 4109, 4141, 4143 (D19/20), shallow, flat-bottomed 'U'-profile (0.39–0.42m W × 0.08–0.10m D), filled by a clay loam with occasional calcareous grits. 4 × EIA sherds, animal bone, and foreign stone. Cut by Ditch 4052 (Phase 3, Enclosure 4147).

This gully, the most vestigial of those investigated, consisted of two short gully sections, separated by a possible entrance (4.5m W). The gully may have been the eaves-drip of a circular building, although no trace of any internal structure was found, in common with most of the other penannular gullies at the site. The estimated inter-

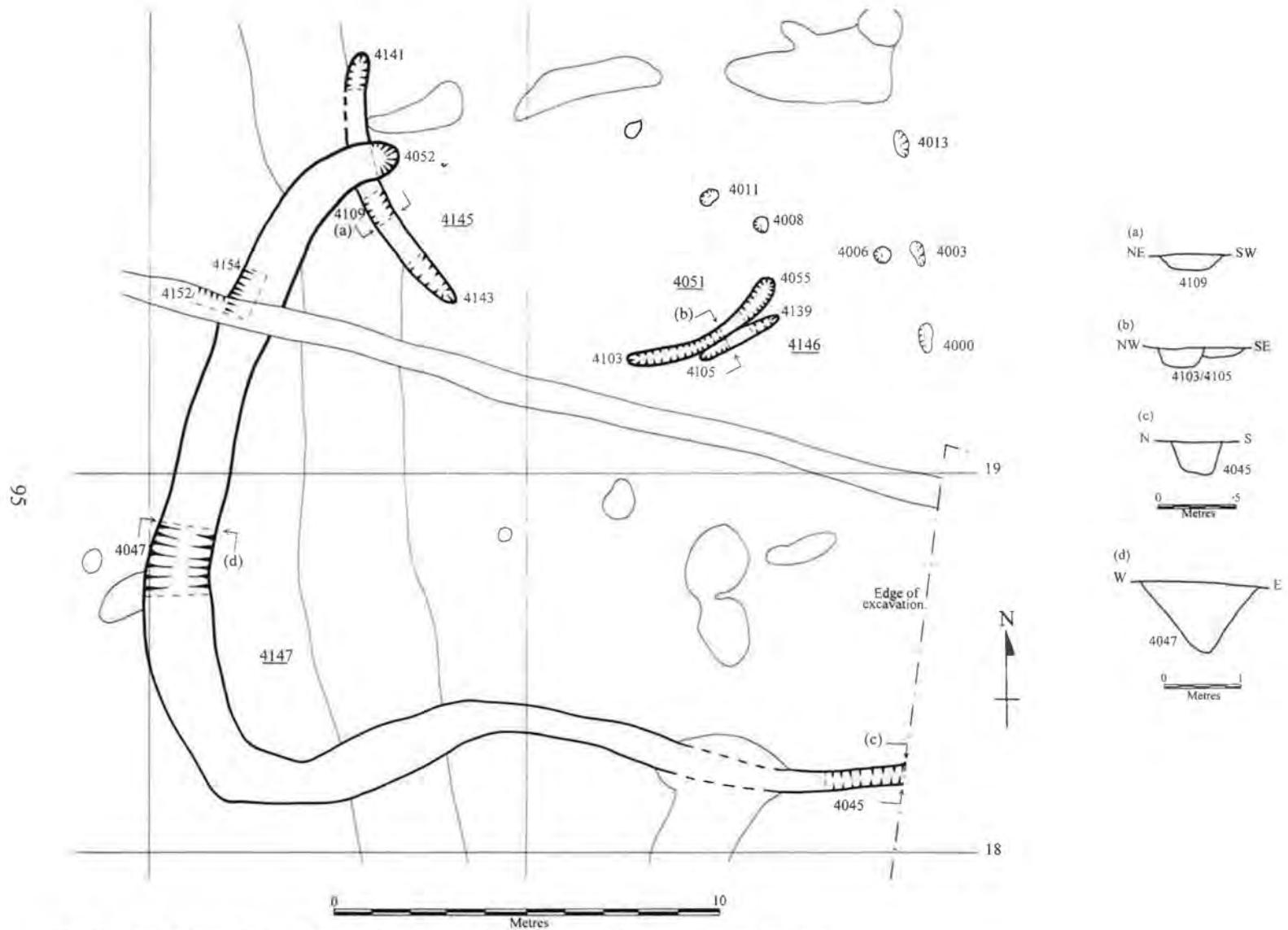


Fig. 14: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Enclosure 4147 and gully 4145/4051: plan and sections

nal diameter of the gully, twelve metres (113m^2), was comparable to that of Penannular Ditch 5075.

THE PENANNULAR GULLIES: DISCUSSION

The penannular, segmented and bow-shaped gullies exhibited a broad uniformity in size, ranging in diameter from c. 10m to 12.5m. The absence of post-settings or palisading within them indicated that they were probably for drainage. Although there was little evidence for buildings or other internal structures, any structural elements need not have penetrated the subsoil. The quantity of domestic refuse dumped within the fills of the drainage gullies seems to imply some form of domestic activity, and they may well have surrounded roundhouses, although the possibility that the gullies were dug to protect features such as hayricks or specialised activity areas cannot be ruled out. It is not known whether the gullies were in use simultaneously or sequentially.

Knight (1984, 118–45) classifies the evidence for circular, oval and polygonal structures according to three groups:

- 1 (a) single rings of timber uprights; (b) as a, with the addition of an outer drainage gully.
- 2 (a) circular/ polygonal construction trenches (for an outer ring of vertical members); (b) as a, with the addition of an outer drainage gully; (c) as b, together with a central post; (d) bedding trenches with an internal ring of post-holes; (e) concentric bedding trenches and an external gully.
- 3 Drainage gullies with no evidence for wall/ roof supports: (a) annular; (b) penannular; (c) opposing crescentic gullies.

It is clear that the features at Coldharbour Farm fall into the third group. Knight notes that Group 3 gullies are generally V- or U-shaped, unsuitable for either timber uprights or horizontal beams, and often contain evidence for natural silting. However, the evidence must be considered in the light of post-abandonment processes such as the silting or erosion of trench sides which may follow the removal of structural elements, which in turn may make it difficult to demonstrate that a gully had a

non-structural purpose. Some methods of construction, including mass-construction of turf or cob, and stake-built structures which may be easily eroded, will leave less obvious archaeological trace. Mass wall construction has been suggested for roundhouses at Mingies Ditch and Deer Park Road, Witney (Allen, Miles and Palmer 1984; Allen and Robinson 1993; Walker 1995): such structures may also have been present at Coldharbour Farm, although there is little in the way of corroborative evidence.

In some cases, gullies of this type may have been intended to drain non-structural features such as haystacks (cf Claydon Pike, where shallow gullies of 3–9m diameter are interpreted as fodder-stacking areas: Allen *et al* 1984, 91, and Farmoor where similar structures are interpreted as animal pens: Lambrick and Robinson 1979); a circular gully does not, therefore, necessarily denote the former presence of a circular building. Semi-circular structures may be more appropriately interpreted as windbreaks or animal pens (Knight 1984, 146–50). It has been suggested in relation to the Upper Thames area that penannular gullies are generally a feature of the Middle Iron Age, whilst the tendency in the Early Iron Age was towards ring-post type structures (Allen, Miles and Palmer 1984). This chronological variation is not necessarily clear cut, however; at Eight Acres Field, Radley, a penannular gully of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age has been recorded (Mudd 1995).

POSSIBLE STOCK ENCLOSURES/ CORRALS

Two ditched enclosures or corrals within the Phase 3 enclosure (5076 and 4147) were stratigraphically later than Phase 3 penannular gullies and pre-dated the Phase 4 field boundary ditches, although the precise chronological relationship with the two adjacent roundhouses is difficult to determine.

ENCLOSURE 5076 (Figs. 10 and 13, centred H21)

This ditched enclosure, adjacent to the southern side of penannular gully 5075, consisted of a semi-enclosed area (about 170m^2) from which a ditch (over 36m long) extended from the northern side at right-angles to the former course of the Southcourt Brook.

On the northern side of the enclosure, the ditch curved inwards following the projected course of a penannular gully believed to be associated with a roundhouse (5075 – described above). The enclosure ditch, however, was stratigraphically later than that of the roundhouse, indicating that the defunct gully may have influenced the shape of the enclosure. It is possible that there may have been some element of contemporaneity between the two features, with the roundhouse going out of use (and its encircling gully becoming filled) first, and this suggestion is supported by the quantity of domestic refuse recovered from the enclosure ditch on the side nearest the roundhouse.

The 'V'-shaped ditch 5074 apparently continues its northern alignment. There was a narrow break in 5074 (perhaps an entrance) 0.5m wide. There were two hearths (5049, 5051) within the upper fill of the ditch to the east side of this gap. The ditch was investigated by six hand-excavated sections:

Sections 5003, 5019 (G20, H21), 'V'-shaped with narrow, flat base (1.18m-1.20m W × 0.58m D), filled by four layers: primary, silty loam to silty sand with frequent calcareous grits (0.04–0.12m D); overlain by a loamy sand with calcareous grits/ gravels (0.10m D); overlain by a sandy clay loam to loamy sand with flint gravels and occasional calcareous grits (0.13–0.25m d); overlain by an upper, sandy clay loam with flint gravels, calcareous grits, charcoal and dumps of domestic refuse, predominantly from the N side of the enclosure ditch. 257 × EIA sherds, animal bone, foreign stone, burnt flint, and an iron knife (in Section 5019).

Sections 5053, 5056, 5070, 5072 (J21, K21), 'V'-shaped with very narrow flat base (0.75–0.80m W × 0.31–0.41m D), filled by a primary, loamy sand with occasional flint gravel (0.07–0.10m D), overlain by an upper, clay loam with calcareous grits/ gravels. No finds.

Hearth 5049 (K21), near-circular, shallow bowl-shaped (0.59m Di × 0.06m D), filled by densely packed burnt flints in a silty charcoal matrix. 7 × EIA sherds, animal bone, c.80 burnt flints, and daub.

Hearth 5051 (K21), near-circular, shallow bowl-shaped (0.36m Di × 0.05m D) occasional burnt flints in a silty charcoal matrix. 40 × EIA sherds, animal bone, c.40 burnt flints.

"HOOK-SHAPED" ENCLOSURE 4147 (Fig. 14, centred E19)

This ditched enclosure, near the western side of the main Phase 3 enclosure, was defined by a ditch (at least 36m long), with an outward-curving west side and an inward-curving south side, which ran broadly at right-angles towards the former course of the Southcourt Brook. Postholes to the east of the northern side of the enclosure ditch may represent the continuation of the enclosure boundary as a fence.

The enclosure ditch was investigated by three hand-excavated sections:

Section 4052 (D19: ditch terminal), 'U'-shaped (0.75m W × 0.46m D); primary fill of clayey coarse sand with calcareous grits, overlain by an upper sandy clay loam with calcareous grits, occasional flint gravels and charcoal. 2 × EIA sherds and animal bone.

Section 4047 (D18), 'V'-shaped with narrow, flat base (1.54m W × 0.89m D), filled by three layers: a primary, silty loam with fine sand and calcareous grits; overlain by a loamy clay with occasional calcareous and flint grits/ gravels; overlain by an upper, sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels. 35 × EIA sherds, animal bone, and foreign stone.

Section 4045 (E18), 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.33m W × 0.20m D), filled by a sandy clay loam with occasional calcareous grits. 6 × EIA sherds and animal bone.

Postholes 4006, 4008, 4011 (E19), cylindrical (0.25–0.35m W × 0.07–0.18m D), filled by a sandy clay loam to loamy sand with occasional calcareous grits. Contained animal bone.

ENCLOSURES 5076 AND 4147: DISCUSSION

The two ditched enclosures 5076 and 4147 appear to have been similar in shape, consisting of an incomplete enclosure with one long ditch leading towards the stream. Their silty primary fills indicated that they probably helped to drain surface water from the areas they enclosed. It is not known whether they enclosed structures, since no definite structural evidence was recorded.

Large quantities of domestic refuse, such as pottery, butchered animal bone and daub from the

ditches of Enclosure 5076 indicated nearby domestic activity. This may relate directly to activities within the enclosure, but since over 95% of it came from the northern ditch only, it is more likely to represent secondary dispersal from the round-house immediately to the north.

The enclosures may have been used for the temporary corralling of livestock. The ditches may have been supplemented by fences which have left no definite trace in the archaeological record, although some of the postholes in the area of E19 (4006, 4008, 4011), and perhaps also postholes 4000, 4003 and 4013 in F19, may represent the edge of enclosure 4147. Irregular ditched areas with sub-circular lengths of ditch are described at Farmoor (eg Lambrick and Robinson, 21, 138–9) and interpreted as possible annexes for working areas, livestock, storage or subsidiary buildings.

The absence of alluvial silty clays, such as might indicate episodes of overbank spill, within the ditches of either enclosure suggests that the margins of the former Southcourt Brook remained relatively dry throughout the Early Iron Age. This seems to be supported by the two hearths within the upper fill of the north ditch of Enclosure 5076, and by the palaeoenvironmental evidence (Dr Robinson's report, below). Their presence indicated continued activity when the enclosure had become defunct but was still visible on the surface.

FOUR-POST STRUCTURES AND ASSOCIATED FEATURES (Figs. 10, 15–18)

Six four-post structures and a possible seventh, representing at least two phases, were identified within the southern end of the Phase 3 enclosure. The area occupied by these structures was drained along its east side by at least two phases of "banana-shaped" gullies. Some of the post-structures were associated with short sections of fence-line.

Structure 6293 (C13, Fig. 15; postholes 6023, 6026, 6188, 6190), square (2.3m × 2.3m) with circular-ovoid, cylindrical postholes (0.34m–0.41m W × 0.26m–0.35m D), filled by silty loam to silty clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels and charcoal. One posthole had a sterile silty primary fill. 2 × EIA sherds, burnt flint and loomweight frags. Associated with Fence-line 6306.

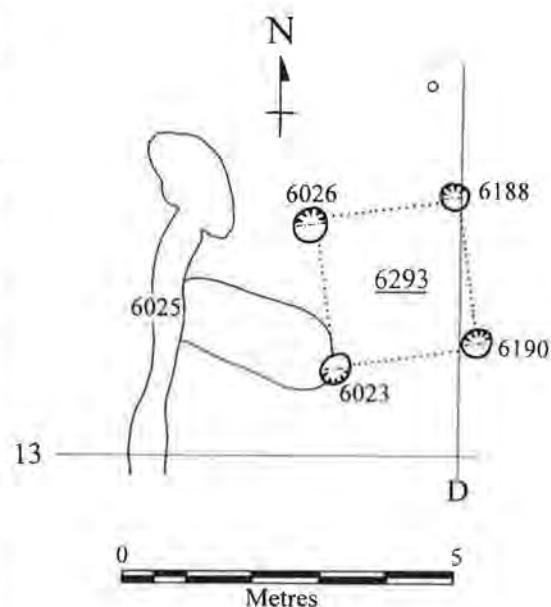


Fig. 15: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Four-post structure 6293

Structure 6294 (F10/11, Fig. 16; postholes 6053, 6063, 6065, 6069), near-square (2.6m × 2.67) with circular, ovoid and sub-rectangular postholes (0.32m–0.52m W × 0.28m–0.32m D), filled by clay loam to loamy clay with occasional calcareous grits. Three postholes had gritty silty clay filled post-pipes (0.20–0.30m W) with limestone fragments. 5 × EIA sherds, animal bone and burnt flint. Associated with fence-line 6304.

Structure 6295 (F10, Fig. 16; postholes 6043, 6049, 6071, 6102), near-square (2.2m × 2.3m) with three circular, cylindrical postholes (0.30–0.40m W × 0.09–0.20m D), and a fourth (6071) 0.18m diam × 0.12m deep, all filled by sandy clay loam with calcareous grits/gravels. Two postholes had gritty sandy clay post-pipes (0.15–0.28m W). 2 × EIA sherds and animal bone.

Structure 6296 (F10, Fig. 16; postholes 6073, 6106, 6115, 6127), near-square (2.0m × 2.2m) with circular postholes (0.23m–0.34m W × 0.12m–0.26m D), filled by gritty clayey sand to sandy clay with calcareous grits. One posthole (6073) had a sandy clay post-pipe with charcoal (0.21m W). 3 × EIA sherds. Possible association with fence-line 6304.

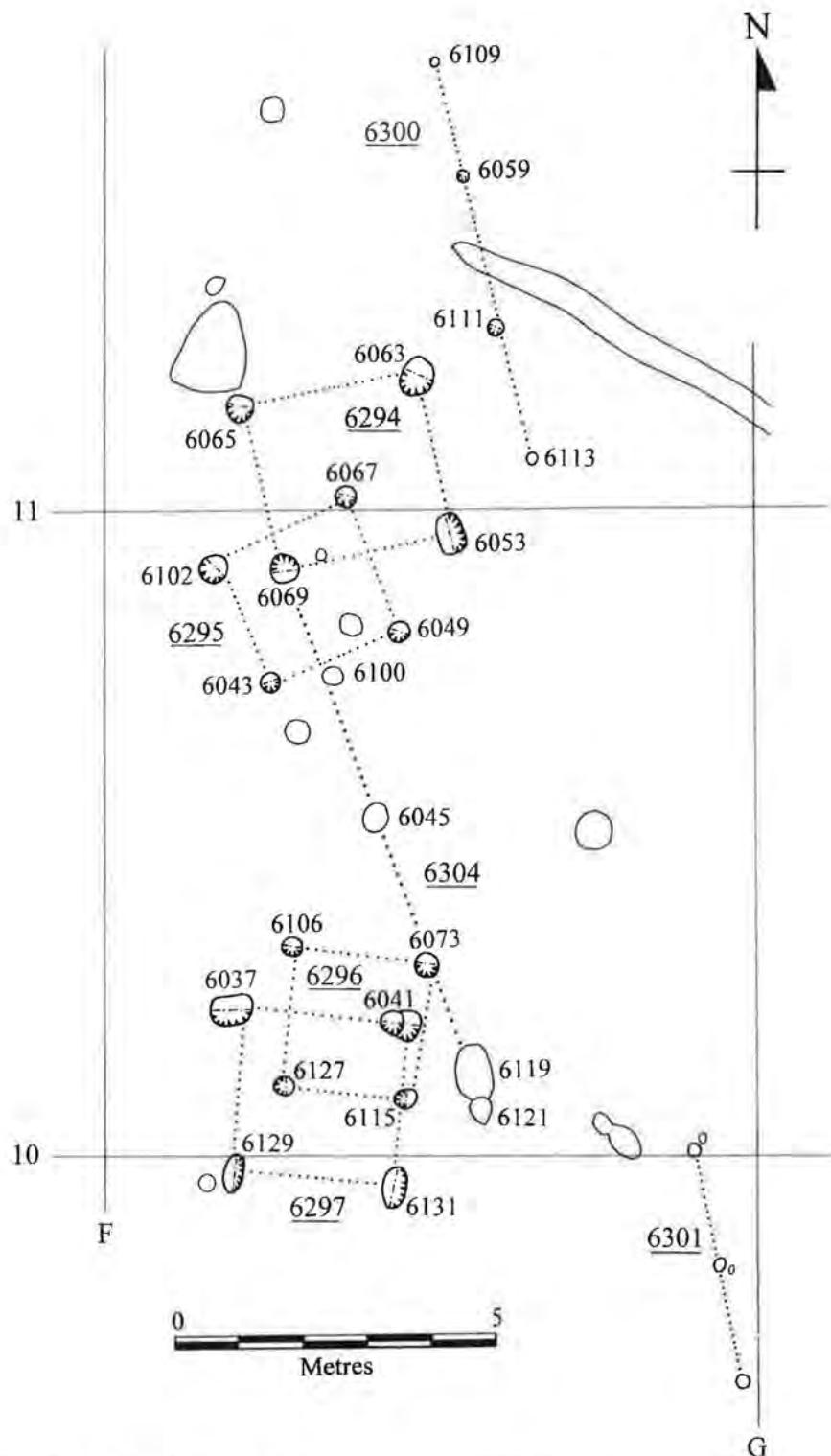
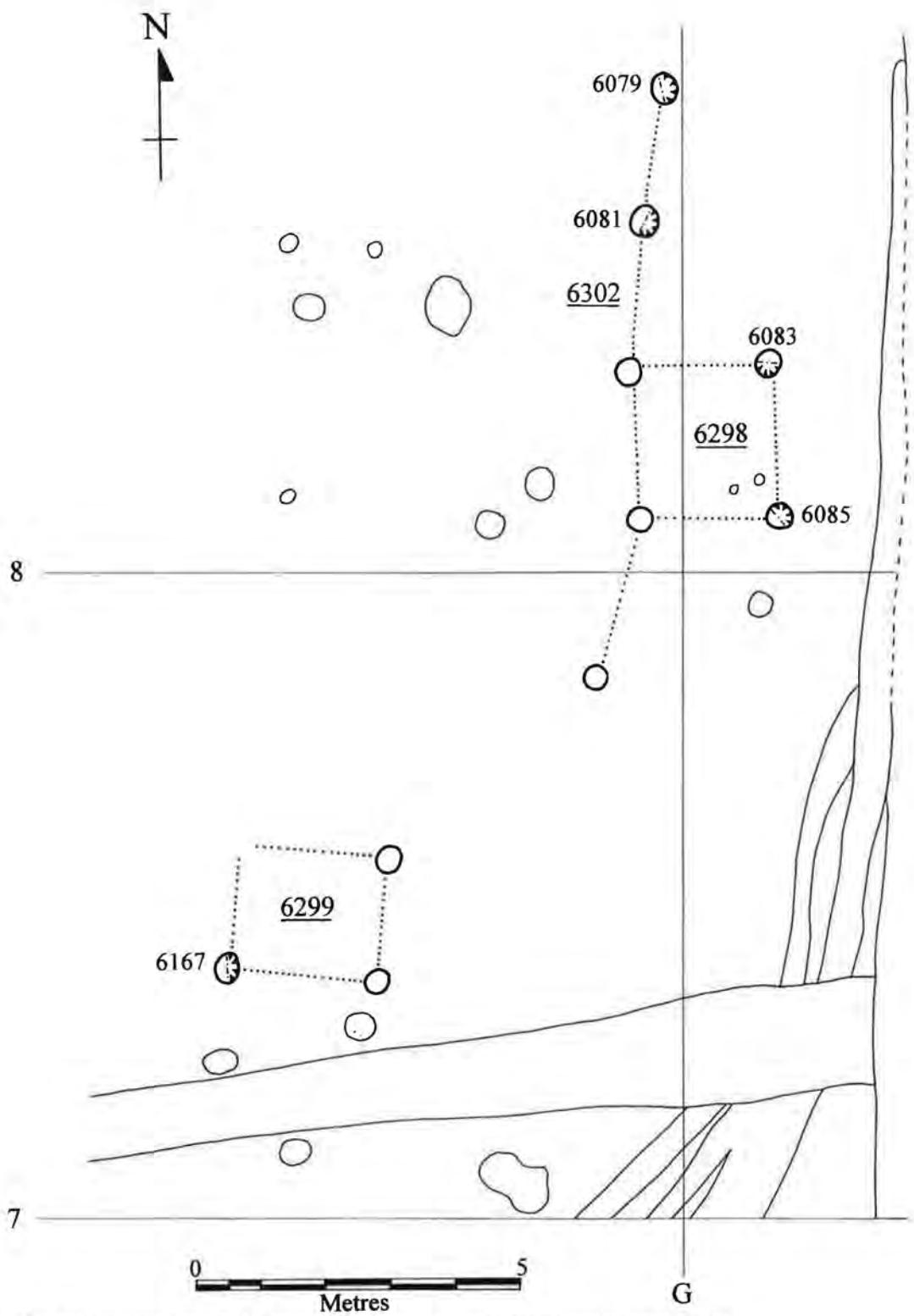


Fig. 16: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Four-post structures 6294–97 and fencelines 6300, 6301 and 6304



Structure 6297 (F10, Fig. 16; postholes 6037, 6041, 6129, 6131), near-square ($2.5m \times 2.55m$) with ovoid and sub-rectangular postholes ($0.49-0.70m L \times 0.38-0.45m W \times 0.10-0.18m D$), filled by sandy clay to loamy clay with flint gravels and charcoal. Two postholes had gritty loamy clay to silty clay post-pipes ($0.22-0.29m W$). $22 \times$ EIA sherds and animal bone.

Structure 6298 (F8-G8, Fig. 17; postholes 6083, 6085 and two un-numbered), rectangular ($2.2m \times 2.4m$) with two cylindrical postholes ($0.22-0.30m W \times 0.30-0.41m D$) filled by humic-rich (silty) clay loam with calcareous grits/gravels, large limestone fragments and charcoal. Two post-holes were not excavated. $1 \times$ EIA sherd, animal bone. Associated with fence-line 6302.

Structure 6299 (F7, Fig. 17; posthole 6167 and two un-numbered); arrangement of three postholes forming three corners of a rectangle ($2.0m \times 2.6m$) with circular bowl-shaped posthole ($0.6m W \times 0.16m D$) filled by loamy sand with calcareous grits and flint gravels. Only one post-hole excavated. No finds. Possible associated with fence-line 6303. This structure is less convincing than the others (6293-6298) described here.

FENCE-LINES:

Fence-line 6300 (F11, Fig. 16; postholes 6109, 6059, 6111, 6113), $6.4m L$, consisting of four circular postholes ($0.20-0.23m W \times 0.06-0.10m D$), spaced $2.0-2.4m$ apart, filled by (sandy) clay loam with occasional calcareous grits. No finds. Parallel with and $1.5m$ from the NE side of Structure 6294.

Fence-line 6301 (F10/11, Fig. 16; postholes all un-numbered), $4.0m L$, consisting of three unexcavated, circular postholes ($0.18-0.24m W$), spaced $1.8-2.0m$ apart. Small stake-holes ($0.10-0.12m W$) adjacent to each of the northern two postholes may represent additional braced support. In exact alignment with, and $10m$ to SE of Fence-line 6300.

Fence-line 6302 (F8/G8, Fig. 17; postholes 6079, 6081, and the two un-numbered postholes forming the W side of four-post structure 6298), $9.4m L$, consisting of five circular and ovoid postholes ($0.40-0.41m W \times 0.18-0.23m D$), spaced $2.0-2.4m$ apart. Filled by clayey loam to loamy clay. One posthole had a clay loam post-pipe ($0.23m W$). $7 \times$ EIA sherds and animal bone. Incorporated W side of Structure 6298 (the other postholes were spaced a similar distance apart) and aligned closely with Fence-line 6301.

Fence-line 6303 (F4/5; postholes all un-numbered), $9.0m L$, consisting of six unexcavated, circular postholes ($0.23-0.25m W$), spaced $0.6-3.8m$ apart.

Aligned broadly with Fence-line 6302, but the gap between the two groups is too great to be certain that they are part of the same feature (not illustrated)

Fence-line 6304 (F10/11; post-holes 6065, 6069, 6100, 6045, 6093, ?6119, 6121 and one un-numbered feature), $13.6m L$, consisting of seven or possibly eight circular and ovoid postholes ($0.25-0.40m W$), spaced $1.8-2.4m$ apart. Incorporated W side of Structure 6294 (postholes 6065 and 6069) and NE corner of Structure 6296 (posthole 6296). Not excavated, other than those incorporated in the four-post structures. Posthole 6119 was larger than the others and did not share their generally regular spacing; although sharing the same alignment its inclusion in this group is uncertain.

Fence-line 6306 (C11 to C13; postholes 6195, 6172, 6193, 6023, 6026), $18.0m L$, consisting of five postholes ($0.20-0.29m W \times 0.06-0.20m D$), spaced $2.4-6.5m$ apart. Filled by sandy clay loam to loamy sand with occasional calcareous grits. One posthole contained a smashed EIA pot base. Two postholes (6023, 6025) form one side of the four-post structure 6293 (Fig. 15). Parallel with gully 6025.

DRAINAGE GULLIES TO EAST OF FOUR-POST STRUCTURES (Fig. 18)

At least two phases of "banana-shaped" gullies (contexts 6288, 6289, 6266, 6267, 6230, 6232) drained the area occupied by the four-post structures.

The earliest two gullies (6266, 6288) formed the ends of a banana-shaped pattern $47m$ long, although it is unknown whether they were originally connected, the relationship having been destroyed by the later gullies and by the phase 4 ditch 6040.

The later gullies (6267, probably the extension of 6232, and 6289) described a similar pattern although the ends did not curve quite as sharply to the west. They were apparently separated by a central $6m$ gap, although the phase 4 ditch 6040 may have destroyed evidence for a connecting length of gully.

Gully 6288: Sections 6003, 6006, 6051, 6214 (F11/12, G10), shallow 'U'-shaped, terminal ($0.31m W \times 0.21m D$) becoming progressively wider and deeper towards S ($0.35m+ W \times 0.40m D$). Filled by sandy to silty clay with occasional calcareous grits, flint gravels and (burnt) limestone fragments ($0.54Kg$).



Fig. 18: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Phase 3 "Banana-shaped" gullies and four-post structures

60 x EIA sherds, animal bone, and foreign stone. Cut by Gully 6289.

Gully 6266: Sections 6148, 6228, 6255 (F6/7, G7), shallow, 'U'-shaped, terminal (0.38m W x 0.22m D) remaining relatively consistent to the N (0.38m+ W x 0.18m D). Filled by sandy clay loam to silty clay loam with occasional calcareous grits, flint gravels and limestone fragments (0.78Kg). 23 x EIA sherds, animal bone, daub frags, burnt flint, and a flint pounder. Cut by Gully 6267.

Gully 6289: Sections 6000, 6031, 6092, 6175 (F11/12, G10), shallow 'U'-shaped, terminal (0.40m W x 0.24m D), becoming progressively wider and deeper and more 'V'-shaped towards S (0.51m W x 0.34m D). Filled by a primary, silty clay, overlain by an upper, sandy to silty clay with occasional calcareous grits and flint gravels. 113 x EIA sherds and animal bone. Cuts Gully 6288.

Gully 6267: Sections 6232, 6251 (F6, G7), shallow, 'U'-shaped terminal (0.65m W x 0.26m D) with similar profile to N (0.35m+ W x 0.16m D). Filled by a primary, gritty loamy sand, overlain by an upper sandy clay loam with calcareous grits and flint gravels. 31 x EIA sherds, animal bone, knapped flint, burnt flint. Cuts Gully 6266.

Gully 6230 (F6), shallow 'U'-shaped profile (0.30m W x 0.09m D), filled with loamy sand with frequent calcareous grits and occasional flint gravels. Animal bone. Relationships difficult to discern; apparently cut by 6266 and cut by 6267.

Gully 6232 (F6), shallow, 'U'-shaped profile (0.30m W x 0.08m D), filled by loamy sand with flint gravels. Contained animal bone. Stratigraphic relationship with other gullies uncertain; probably same as 6267 or (less likely) 6230, but relationship destroyed by phase 4 ditch 6179.

FOUR-POST STRUCTURES, FENCE-LINES AND ASSOCIATED GULLIES: DISCUSSION

The four-post structures formed a distinct group, being distributed in a band, approximately twenty-five to thirty metres to the west of the former Southcourt Brook, with a single outlier (6293) 30m northwest of the main group. The structures were aligned between NNW-SSE and NNE-SSW. They were of near-identical form, their dimensions ranging from 2.0–2.7m, with internal areas of 4.6m²–7.0m², comparable in size to similar Iron Age structures at Pennyland (Williams 1993, 43–44) and Bancroft (Williams and Zeepvat 1994, 39 and 54).

There was no positive evidence that any of the structures had been rebuilt, although the elongated postholes of Structures 6294 and 6297, may indicate that posts had been replaced. In two instances the plans of structures overlapped.

Four-post structures are common on Iron Age sites. Those of small size, such as those at Coldharbour Farm, are generally regarded as indicating an earlier Iron Age date, which would accord with the ceramic dating. The interpretation most usually proposed for such structures is that they were granaries of raised floor-design. This may have been the case at Coldharbour Farm, for the permanently high water-table would have prevented storage of, for example, grain, in pits. However, the granary explanation should be viewed with some caution as ethnographic parallels for a variety of functions abound; one of the present authors has seen shops in villages of the Himalaya supported on four timber posts of identical configuration and plan-size to our Coldharbour Farm examples, whilst at Butser, Hampshire, convincing hen-coops have been constructed on a four-post plan (Reynolds 1978). A classification has been proposed in respect of the numerous rectangular post-built structures at Danebury (Poole 1984) without reaching any firm conclusions as to the relationship between size, plan, post-hole dimensions and function.

Sections of fence-lines, some evidently intimately associated with the four-post structures were identified at the south end of the Phase III enclosure.

The fences varied in length between 4.0–18.0m, the posts generally being regularly spaced at intervals of 1.8–2.4m. Some of the fence-lines (for instance, 6300, 6301, 6302 and possibly 6305) were aligned, suggesting that they were contemporary. The slightly curved alignment of this group reflects the curvature of the gullies some 4m to the east. It was uncertain whether they were ever connected as a single fence, or whether the apparent gaps were genuine; it may be significant that the gap between Fences 6301 and 6302 exactly accorded with a break in the 'banana-shaped' drainage gullies, suggesting access from the east into the area occupied by the possible granaries. The parallel alignment and proximity of Fence 6300

with Fence 6304, which was intimately associated with the four-post structure 6994 and possibly also 6296, suggested that they were all broadly contemporary. If, as suggested above, Fences 6300, 6301 and 6302 were contemporary, then the apparently associated four-post structure 6298 must also have been contemporary.

The fences possibly segregated areas of different activity, eg storage from livestock. The banana-shaped gullies probably helped to drain surface water away from the area occupied by the four-post structures, and may have further served to differentiate functional areas. The two phases of drainage may relate to the different phases of four-post structures and associated fences. Only the later drainage gullies (6289 and 6267) could have functioned at the same time that Fence 6300 was extant.

There are indications, therefore, that the four-post structures, fence-lines and "banana-shaped" gullies form two groups. The following phases are suggested, although this may be an oversimplification of evidence which by its very nature is inimicable to particularly rigorous scrutiny.

Phase	Four-post Structures	Fence-lines	Gullies
"Early"	6295		6266
	6297		6288
"Late"	6244	6300	6289
	6296	6301	6267
	6298	6302	
	6299	?6305	

It is possible that the banana-shaped gullies were broadly contemporary with Gully 6025, which drained the western side of the area. Its parallel alignment with the possible Fence-line 6306, which was directly associated with Structure 6293, suggested that they might all have been broadly contemporary.

OTHER GULLIES AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE SITE

In the southern part of the site, to the west of the outlying four-post structure 6293 and its associ-

ated fence-line 6305, there was a series of gullies which are dated to Phase 3 on the basis of the general similarity of their orientation and profile to other Phase 3 gullies, as well as by the small number of finds (Fig. 10). At least three stratigraphic sub-phases of gully may be distinguished within this group.

Another group of gullies at the extreme southern end of the excavation also appear, on stratigraphic grounds, to belong to Phase 3.

GULLIES WEST OF THE FOUR-POST STRUCTURES (Fig. 10).

Gully 6284 (B13 – C14). 9.1m+ L; only S end within excavated area. Not excavated; profile dimensions not recorded (c0.3m); fill not recorded (thought to be similar to fill of 6225; see below). No finds. Cut by gullies 6225 and 6286.

Gully 6225 (B13 – B14). 13.6m+ L; only S end within excavated area. "U"-shaped rounded profile, 0.35m W × 0.13m D. Filled with loamy clay with moderate calcareous grits towards base. No finds. Cuts gully 6284; relationship with gully 6286 unknown, although the two gullies lie edge-to-edge for the southernmost 5m of 6225.

Gully 6286 (C9 – C14). 43.2m+ L (neither end within excavated area). Two sections excavated, showing variable profile dimensions. Gully section **6182** steep sides curving to meet flat base; 0.70m W × 0.31m D; primary fill loamy clay with frequent calcareous grits, secondary fill loamy clay with occasional calcareous grits and flint gravel, 1 × IA sherd, 1 × flint flake. Gully section **6200**, excavated 7m to S of 6182, shallow, gently sloping sides and flat base; 0.52m W × 0.06m D; filled with silty clay with small sand fraction at base, moderate flint and limestone. No finds. Cuts gully 6284; cut by gully 6287.

Gully 6287 (C9 – B14). 52.3m+ L (neither end within excavated area). Two sections excavated. Gully section **6180** shallow, steep sides and flat base, 0.55m W × 0.15m D; filled with loamy clay with occasional calcareous grit and flint gravel. No finds. Gully section **6197** shallow, sides merging into concave base, 0.60m W × 0.16m D, filled with coarse sandy clay loam with occasional flint gravel and limestone fragments. No finds. Gully 6287 is aligned with an isolated (un-numbered) length of gully of similar width some 40m to the N (B18), which may be part of the same feature. Cuts gully 6286.

Gully 6025 (C8 – C13). 48.2m+ L (only N end within excavated area). Three sections excavated. Gully section 6033 steep sides and flat base, 0.49m W × 0.30m D; filled with sandy clay with occasional small limestone fragments and flint gravel. No finds. Gully section 6014 steep sides and flat base, 0.53m W × 0.29m D; 1^o fill silty clay with occasional limestone grit and flint gravel, 2^o fill clayey sand with frequent limestone grit and occasional flint pebbles; final fill sandy clay with occasional small limestone fragments and flint gravel, with 1 × IA sherd. Gully section 6202 steep sides and slightly concave base 0.40m W × 0.21m D, filled with greyed silty clay with moderate flint gravel and occasional large frags limestone. No finds. Parallel with, and perhaps contemporary with, fence-line 6306 and the associated four-post structure 6294.

It is thought that these gullies probably had a similar relationship to the area of four-post structures and fence-lines as the series of "banana-shaped" gullies to the east; the association appears to be evident particularly in the case of gully 6025. A short un-numbered length of gully recorded in a trial trench to the south (D4) may also be related to this group of gullies.

GULLIES AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE EXCAVATION (Fig. 10)

Gully 6278 (E2–E4) Curvilinear, 20.5m+ L (southern end beyond limit of excavation). Profile and dimensions not recorded, but believed to be similar to the parallel gully 6248. No finds. Cut by gully 6238

Gully 6238 (E4–E5) Curved, c16m long (terminals indistinctly visible against the fills of phase 2 ditch 4150). Steep sides, flat base, 1.20m W × 0.70m D. 1^o fill loamy sand, overlain by sandy loam, darker towards top of profile. 6 × EIA sherds. Cut gully 6278 and phase 2 ditch 4150.

Gully 6248 (F2–F5) Curvilinear, 28m long, "U"-profile 0.59m W × 0.30m D. Fills not recorded. 25 × IA sherds, 1449 frags (8.14 Kg) animal bone.

Pit 6245 (F5) Circular pit, steep sides, shallow base, 0.72m dia × 0.19m D. Two fills, not recorded; 1 × EIA sherd from upper fill. Immediately adjacent to N terminal of gully 6248, with which it is assumed to be associated.

Only cursory examination and recording of these features could be undertaken.

6278 and 6248 were parallel and c9m apart. They may be assigned to phase 3 on stratigraphic grounds, as they cut the phase 2 ditch 4150 and

were in turn cut by several features belonging to phase 4. There also appeared to be a spatial relationship with other phase 3 features, as the parallel ditches 6278 and 6248 seemed to lead towards the southern terminals of the "banana-shaped" gullies described above; they may therefore have formed a driveway leading towards an area defined by gullies to the east (and perhaps also to the west) which was characterised by the presence of the four-post structures.

PHASE 4: BELGIC

The ceramic evidence suggests that there was a hiatus in occupation between phase 3 and 4, perhaps of as much as a few centuries.

Phase 4 was characterised by a change in land organisation over the entire site. A roundhouse (4157) was built and to its north a major E-W boundary ditch (4069) was dug, which later seems to have influenced the layout of a series of small rectangular fields, defined by small gullies draining into a N-S ditch along the west side of the former Southcourt Brook. Several phases of gully were also dug at the southern end of the site, possibly for drainage (Fig. 19).

ROUNDHOUSE 4157 (Figs. 20 and 21)

Three crescent-shaped gullies (4100, 4101, 4102; all D14) formed the penannular (6.4m diam) footprint of a roundhouse, to the south of a major E-W ditch (4069).

Gully 4100 (D14), NE segment (4.5m L) of 4157, was investigated by four hand-excavated sections: Sections 4010, 4063, 4057, 4085, 'U'-shaped with flat base, shallow terminals (0.3m W × 0.14–0.21m D) becoming wider and deeper towards centre (0.4–0.6m W × 0.20–0.26m D). Filled by a primary, clayey sand to loamy sand (0.04–0.05m D) with calcareous grits, extending down outer side of gully, overlain by an upper, sandy clay loam with calcareous grits, flint gravels, few limestone fragments (up to 0.1m W) and charcoal. 57 × IA sherds, animal bone and burnt flint.

Gully 4101, (D14), NW segment (4m L) of 4157, was investigated by two hand-excavated sections: Sections 4094, 4096, 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.3–0.4m W × 0.09m D), filled by a sandy clay loam with occasional calcareous grits. 8 × IA sherds and animal bone.

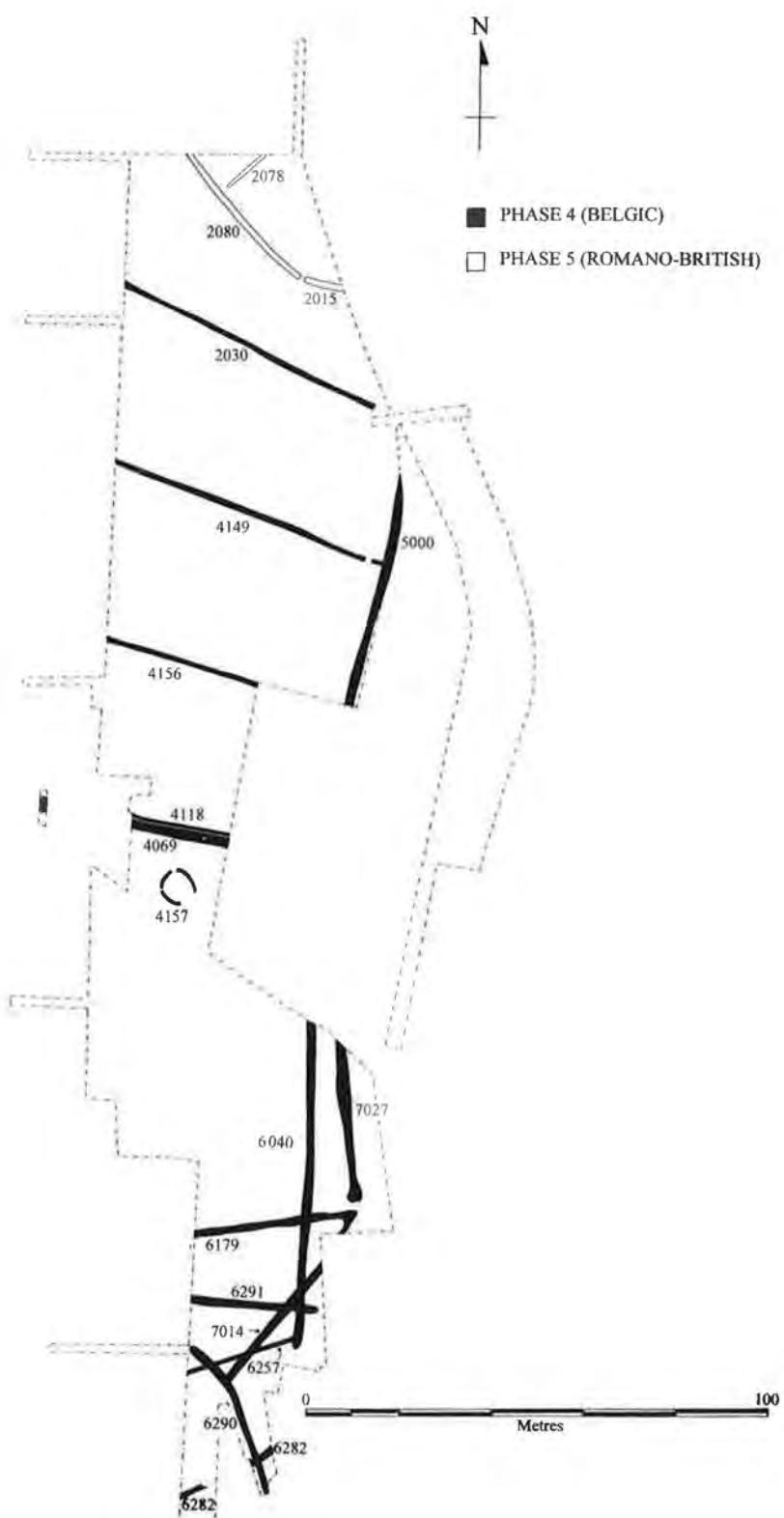


Fig. 19: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Phases 4 and 5

Gully 4102, (D14), SW segment (5.8m L) of 4157, was investigated by four hand-excavated sections. Sections 4091, 4066, 4060, 4088, 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.3–0.4m W × 0.15–0.22m D), filled by a primary, silty clay loam with calcareous grits, overlain by an upper, sandy clay loam with calcareous grits, flint gravels, few limestone/flint fragments (up to 0.1m across) and charcoal. 287 × IA sherds (mostly small fragments from a small number of vessels) and animal bone.

The three formed a penannular trench, similar overall in profile to the gullies of the phase 3

roundhouses, but smaller. Despite containing possible limestone packing and predominantly loamy fills, the sloping bases of the curvilinear gullies suggested that they were probably not construction trenches but drainage gullies for a small circular building no larger than six metres in diameter. Entrance to such a building is probably indicated by the 2.5m wide gap between Gullies 4100 and 4102 on the southeast side, rather than the two smaller 0.6m wide gaps between the gullies on the north and west sides

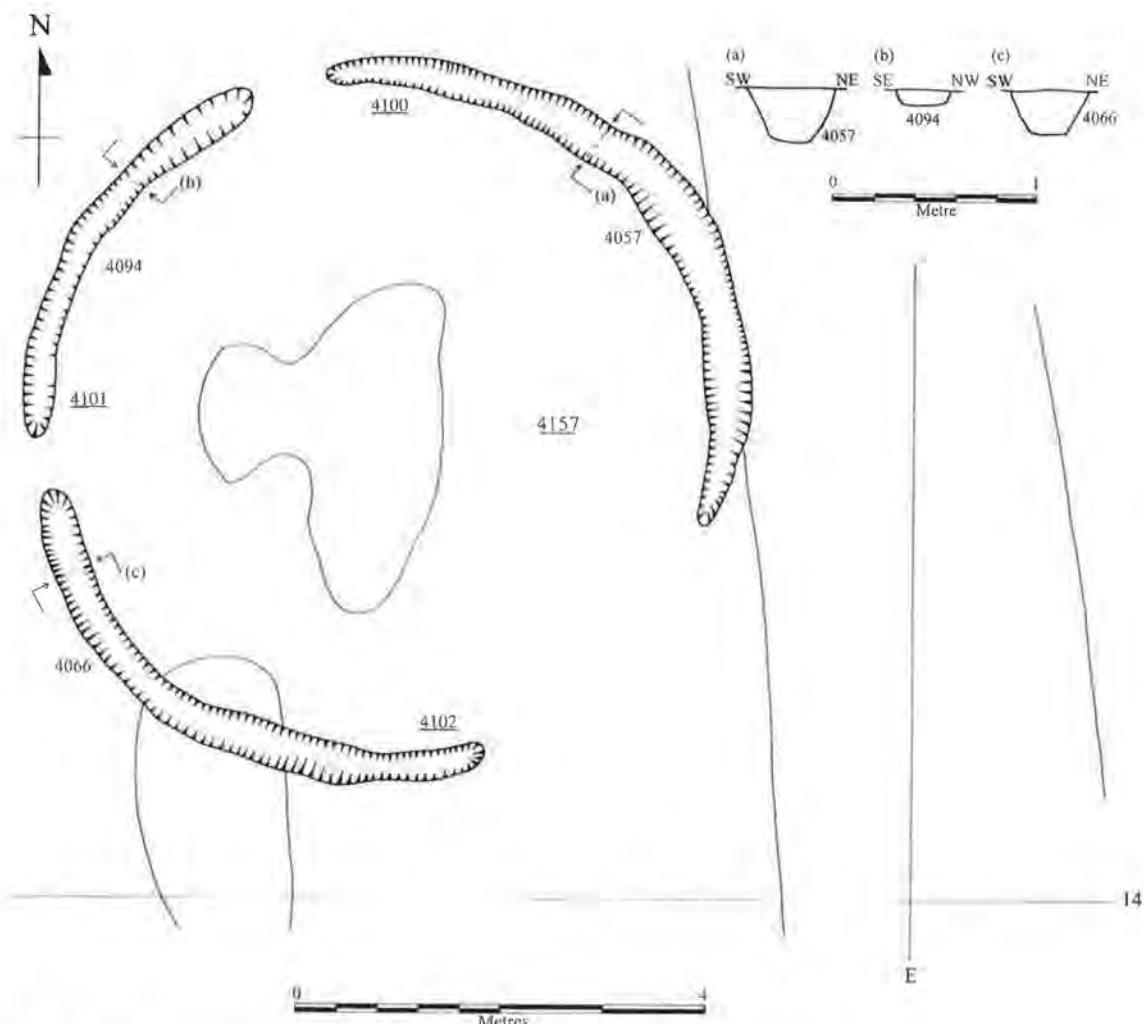


Fig. 20: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Penannular gully 4157: plan and sections



Fig. 21: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Roundhouse gully 4157, from southeast

The majority of finds from the gullies were found towards the south end of Gully 4100 and towards the east end of Gully 4102, closest to the suggested position of the door. This reinforces the hypothesis that the gullies were open features around a building rather than backfilled structural components.

DITCHES (Fig. 19)

A number of ditches were stratigraphically later than the Phase 3 features and, on the basis of their stratigraphic relationships and the pottery within them, all appear to belong to Phase 4. Four sub-phases (4A-4D) have been identified.

In Phase 4A a major E-W ditch (4069) was dug to the north of the roundhouse. This was re-cut in Phase 4B as a minor gully (4118), which together with three parallel gullies (2030, 4149, 4156), drained a series of small fields into a major N-S ditch (5000).

Evidence from the 1990 evaluation indicates that Ditch 5000 continued to the south, and was the same feature as another section of ditch, 7027. If this is the case, then another set of fields, less regular than those to the north, which were drained by Gullies 6179, 6291, 6257 and 6282 into Ditch 7027, were contemporary with those associated with Ditch 5000 to the north. These, therefore, are also assigned to Phase 4B, although it is not entirely certain that they were established at exactly the same time as those in the northern part of the site.

Two connecting ditches (6290, 7014) were dug after the fields went out of use at the south end of the site (Phase 4B). Finally, another major N-S ditch (6040) was dug, parallel to Ditch 7027 (Phase 4D).

PHASE 4A

Ditch 4069, (F15), orientated E-W, 'V'-shaped with

narrow flat base (over 40m L \times 2.31m W \times 1.04m D), filled by five layers: a primary, silty loam with coarse sands, calcareous grits and flint gravels along base (0.21m D); overlain by a sterile loamy clay (0.06m D); overlain by a silty clay with occasional calcareous grits and flint gravels (0.18m D); overlain by dump of fired clay, unburnt yellow clay, limestone fragments and pottery in a sandy clay loam matrix (0.05m D); overlain by an upper, sandy clay loam with frequent calcareous grits, flint gravels and charcoal, mostly deposited from south side. 175 \times IA sherds, animal bone, foreign stone, knapped flint, fragments of a loomweight, an iron blade tip and the broken remnants of a clay oven. Re-cut in Phase 4B as Gully 4118.

This ditch seems to have been a major boundary. It is probably the same feature as an east-west ditch recorded during the 1990 evaluation (vicinity of G14 or G15), making the known length in the region of 65m. It had become partially filled when broken fired clay fragments of an oven, together with limestone, unburnt clay and charcoal-rich deposits, were thrown into the ditch, possibly derived from roundhouse 4157 or some other structure in the unexcavated area.

PHASE 4B (North and central part of site)

Ditch 5000 (H18–I23), orientated NNE-SSW, directly associated with the gullies 2030, 4149, 4146 and 4118. The ditch was recorded for a length of 50m. Believed to be the northern continuation of Ditch 7027, on the basis of the 1990 evaluation, but, as noted earlier, correlation of the 1990 records with the 1996 plans is problematical. One section was excavated (H18): 'V'-shaped with narrow, flat base (1.43m W \times 0.72m D), filled by four layers: a primary, silty clay with calcareous grits/gravels (0.15m D); overlain by a silty clay with occasional calcareous grits (0.23m D); overlain by a loamy sand; overlain by an upper, sandy clay loam with occasional calcareous grits and flint gravels. 4 \times IA sherds, 1 Roman sherd (intrusive in uppermost fill), animal bone and knapped flint.

Gully 2030 (C27–H24: one section excavated in F25); 'U'-shaped with wide flat base (over 65m L \times 0.64m W 0.16m D), filled by sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels. 3 \times IA sherds, animal bone and knapped flint.

Gully 4149 (B23–H21), with short break (1.2m W), at E end near intersection with Ditch 5000 (H21). Investigated by three sections: 4041, 5005, 5007, (C23, H21), 'U'-shaped with wide, narrow base (over 60m

L \times 0.40–0.55m W \times 0.15–0.16m D), becoming narrower towards E end. Filled by sandy loam to sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels. 20 \times IA sherds, animal bone, foreign stone and shell.

Gully 4156 (B19–F18); two sections excavated, 4027, 4152, (both D19): 'U'-shaped with wide base (over 35m L \times 0.61–0.70m W \times 0.19–0.22m D), filled by sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels. 19 \times IA sherds and animal bone.

Gully 4118 (A16–E15), one section excavated (E15): 'U'-shaped with wide base (over 40m L \times 0.54m W \times 0.21m D), filled by a sandy clay loam with calcareous and flint gravels. No finds. Re-cut of Phase 4A Ditch 4069.

PHASE 4B: (South part of site)

Ditch 7027 (G/H11–H7), orientated N-S, possibly contemporary with Ditch 6179 and parallel gullies, orientated E-W, at the S end of the site. Believed to be the southern continuation of Ditch 5000. Two sections excavated (7000 in H7 and the ditch terminal 7019 in H10): open 'V'-shaped with concave base (1.8–2.6m W \times 0.70–82m D), filled by a primary semi-gleyed silty clay with coarse sand and calcareous grits (0.27m D), overlain by an upper silty clay with occasional calcareous grits (0.53m D). Bulbous terminal (2.8m W), 1.5m N of E terminal of Ditch 6179. Spread of gravel between ditches and possible evidence of animal trampling. 10 \times IA sherds, animal bone and burnt flint.

Ditch 6179, (E7–H7) orientated E-W, possibly associated with parallel gullies to S, and Ditch 7027, at right-angles to N. Two sections investigated (6151, 6222); 'U'-shaped (1.12m–1.28m W \times 0.48–0.52m D), filled by three layers: a primary, semi-gleyed silty clay with occasional calcareous grits/gravels (0.10m D); overlain by an oxidised silty clay; overlain by an upper, silty clay with occasional calcareous grits and charcoal flecks. 17 \times IA sherds, animal bone, foreign stone and a copper-alloy brooch.

The allocation of gullies 6291, 6257 and 6282 to Phase 4B is uncertain; the stratigraphic relationships of the various ditches in this area were complex, and the relationship of these three gullies to 7027 and 6179 is inferred but not strictly proven.

Gully 6291 (E5–G5), orientated E-W, 'U'-shaped with flat base (1.05m W \times 0.32m D), filled by silty clay loam with occasional calcareous grits. No finds.

Gully 6257 (D4–G4), orientated E-W, 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.75m W \times 0.30m D), filled by silty clay

loam with occasional calcareous grits. 5 x IA sherds, 10 x animal bone.

Gully 6282 (D1-F1), orientated E-W, 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.85m W x 0.28m D), filled by silty clay loam with occasional calcareous grits. No finds.

Two field systems (a northern and southern) were laid out from Ditches 5000 and 7027, which formed a continuous N-S ditch (over 150m long), parallel with the former Southcourt Brook.

The northern field system consisted of four near-parallel gullies (one of which was dug exactly along the northern edge of Ditch 4069), connected at right-angles with Ditch 5000, to form three approximately rectangular fields (each 30–35m wide). Although it was not possible to be sure that the E-W ditches did not continue to the east of ditch 5000, there was no sign of these features within the area excavated adjacent to the stream. Nevertheless, the course of the four east-west ditches align on a point some 365m east of the site, at NGR SP 8097 1355. This position, in the grounds of Bearbrook County Combined School, does not appear to be of any topographical significance, nor is it a known archaeological site. In each case the angle subtended was just under 5°, and an element of deliberation in the layout of these ditches seems to be quite clear.

Access across one of the field boundary gullies (4149) was provided by a narrow 0.5m wide break, at its east end.

The southern field system consisted of three near-parallel gullies and a more substantial ditch (6179), which terminated at right-angles with the southern terminal of Ditch 7027. There was evidence of puddling at this point, suggested that animals passed through the narrow gap between the two ditches, perhaps to water at the former Southcourt Brook. The idiosyncrasies of alignment observed in respect of the northern group were not repeated here.

PHASE 4C

Ditch 7014 (E3-H7), 45m long, orientated NE-SW, open 'V'-shaped with narrow flat base (0.89m W x 0.54m D), filled by four layers: a primary, sterile clayey silt (0.06m D); overlain by a silty clay with occasional flint gravel (0.23m D); overlain by a silty clay with

occasional calcareous grit/ gravel (0.17m D); overlain by a loamy clay with frequent calcareous and flint grit/ gravel (0.06m D). 1 x Belgic sherd, animal bone, knapped flint and burnt clay. Terminated at SW end at its junction with ditch 6290.

Ditch 6290 (D4-F1), curvilinear, over 36m long (only NW end within excavated area), orientated NW-SE, connected with Ditch 7014, investigated by two sections: Section 6235, (terminal, D4), 'V'-shaped with narrow flat base (0.90m W x 0.55m D), filled by a primary, silty clay with calcareous grits and flint gravels along base (0.11m D), overlain by an upper loamy clay with moderately frequent calcareous grit and flint gravels (0.44m D). Contained animal bone and knapped flint. Section 6241, (F3), 'U'-shaped (1.19m W x 0.61m D), filled by three layers: a primary, silty clay with frequent calcareous grits (0.05m D); overlain by an oxidised silty clay with occasional calcareous grit and flint gravel (0.40 D); overlain by an upper, loamy clay with occasional flint gravel and charcoal flecks (0.14m D). 1 x IA and animal bone.

These two joining ditches are possibly drainage ditches associated with field systems. They cut the southern field boundaries assigned to Phase 4B, and were in turn cut by a N-S ditch (6040) of Phase 4D.

PHASE 4D

Ditch 6040 (G4-G11), length at least 71m (only S end within excavated area), orientated N-S, investigated by two sections: 6018 (G10) and 6218 (G11). 'U'-shaped (1.35–1.45m W x 0.5m D), filled by a primary, silty clay with frequent calcareous grit and occasional organic-rich lenses (0.04m D), overlain by a gleyed sandy clay with very occasional calcareous grit and flint gravel (0.47m D). Contained 12 IA sherds, animal bone and in the upper fill, a copper-alloy coin of Constantine I (AD 330–346).

This ditch drained into a pond area adjacent to the former Southcourt Brook, at the south end of the site. The discovery of a Roman coin on its surface suggested that the ditch may have still been present as a shallow depression into the fourth century AD.

PHASE 5 – (?) ROMAN (Fig. 19)

This phase was characterised by a curvilinear ditch (over 45m long), possibly a field boundary or enclosure ditch, and a small gully at right-angles to it, at the north end of the site.

Ditch 2015 (H27), orientated WNW-ESE, 'U'-shaped with wide flat base (1.06m W x 0.26m D), filled by a primary, loamy clay with frequent calcareous grits (0.06m D), overlain by an upper, silty clay with occasional flint gravel (0.20m D). 3 x R-B greyware sherds, 2 (residual) IA sherds, animal bone and shell. SE of Ditch 2080, from which it was separated by a 1.6m wide gap.

Ditch 2080 (D30-F27), orientated NW-SE, 'U'-shaped with wide flat base (0.80m W x 0.18m D), filled by a sandy clay loam with calcareous grits and flint gravel. 3 x IA sherds. Continued ESE as Ditch 2015.

Gully 2078 (E29-F30), orientated NE-SW, at right angles to ditch 2080; 'U'-shaped with flat base (0.48m W x 0.17m D), filled by a loamy clay with occasional calcareous grits. No finds. Terminated just over 2m to NE of Ditch 2080.

Ditches 2015 and 2080 appear to define a field boundary or enclosure, in the NE corner of the site. The subsidiary feature 2078, which appears to be spatially related, presumably represents a sub-division of this enclosure and the gap separating the 2078 from 2080 a field entrance.

The 1990 evaluation identified a low level of Roman activity, including a small Roman hearth, in this vicinity. These features are tentatively dated as Roman by the presence of three Romano-British greyware sherds.

POST-ROMAN ACTIVITY.

There was no evidence for post-Roman activity. The evidence for the "pond" area indicates that the site, and particularly the part closest to the Southcourt Brook, was subject to alluviation. There is no evidence, however, to indicate that abandonment of the site was the direct consequence of inundation (see the palaeo-environmental report, below).

Forty sherds of early Saxon grass-tempered pottery were found during fieldwalking in 1987, and a further seven during the 1990 evaluation, from an area immediately to the northwest of the 1996 excavation (Stewart 1990). The evaluation, which was intended *inter alia* to investigate the origin of the scatter, failed to reveal any Saxon features, and the most recent work also failed to shed any further light on the nature of any Saxon

activity, which is likely to have been short in duration and restricted in extent.

Subsequent land-use does not appear to have been intensive. There are faint traces of ridge-and-furrow on an aerial photograph taken in 1950. The presence of mollusc shell fragments (*Succina* or *Oxyloma*; *Trichia hispida*), recovered from ploughsoil during the 1990 evaluation, suggests former use as hay meadow. Following drainage improvements in 1975 the field was used for intensive crop rotation.

THE FINDS

THE POTTERY

by Michael Farley and Nicky Smith

The initial Coldharbour Farm investigation in 1990 recovered 230 sherds of pottery (Stewart 1990). The majority came from the surface of the principal north-south ditch located at that time and which has subsequently been re-examined (feature 4150/4151 in this report). The pottery fabrics then recorded were quartz 115 (50%), shell 85 (39%), other 28 (11%), unidentified 16 (6%). There was a marked absence of flint temper, a common fabric at Ivinghoe Beacon, the only site of Late Bronze Age /early Iron Age date in the area with a large assemblage (Waugh 1968). The Coldharbour Farm material was at the time tentatively suggested to be of mid-Iron Age date. The greater volume of ceramic material retrieved during the recent excavation enables this dating to be reviewed and it is now suggested that the assemblage is of earlier Iron Age date.

The sherds were examined macroscopically or with a $\times 10$ lens. Some 2,108 sherds were recovered, only 10 of which were of Roman date, confirming the very slight Roman period activity on the site noted previously; 2 were medieval or later. Of the remaining sherds, 26 were in a grog-tempered fabric which could clearly seen to be of Late Iron Age – early Roman date where diagnostic rims etc survived, whilst the remaining sherds (2070) were earlier prehistoric.

The fabric proportions of the prehistoric assemblage are: quartz/sandy 1566 (74.2%); shell 490 (23.2%); flint 14 (0.6%). It will be noted that

with the larger sample size the relative volume of shelly fabric has diminished and the quartz/sandy fabric has become dominant. The latter may include a small proportion of fine flint-temper not obvious at a macroscopic level, but it consisted principally of a fine rounded-grain quartz, sometimes iron-stained. The shell temper was generally fine and hence probably derives from a fossiliferous clay deposit rather than being an added temper, although a very few pieces had larger inclusions.

No large single-context pottery assemblages were present. It was initially hoped that differences in fabric across the site might assist with the phasing. In practice this proved not to be the case since although a few contexts did contain one fabric only, in such instances only three or four sherds were present. The great majority contained both principal fabrics. It is therefore probable that both fabrics were in use on the site at the same time.

Of considerable interest was a single pit (5037) containing multiple flakes, a flint-grit rim (Fig. 22, no 1) and 12 sherds of both flint and shell temper. The association suggests a Neolithic date and this is confirmed by a better preserved single unstratified flint-grit sherd of undoubtedly Neolithic form (Fig. 22 no 2). This class of material is rare in the area. It is possible that there may be other unidentified material of this date; however, flint-grit, although proportionately insignificant on the site as a whole, continued to be used into the late Bronze Age, as can be seen locally at Walton, and shell is also a significant temper in the Iron Age so distinguishing such material without accompanying vessel forms is difficult.

Lacking radiocarbon dates, significant associations, or good local parallels, the dating bracket for the bulk of the ceramic material has to be determined largely on form. There is as yet no clear view as to whether shell-temper, which it has been argued above is contemporary with the sandy fabrics here, has a defined time range; however, use of the sandy fabric is certainly long lived. The most significant dating criterion for the assemblage as a whole is the presence of shouldered jars with finger tip decoration on top of their everted rims, e.g.

Fig. 22 no 6 and Fig. 26 no 57. The form is seen locally at Ivinghoe Beacon (e.g. Waugh 1968, Fig. 20), an assemblage datable to the late Bronze Age. The Coldharbour Farm material, however, lacks the flint grit common on the latter site.

The pottery forms from Coldharbour Farm compare, in some respects, with those from Walton (Bonner, forthcoming) where a late Bronze Age date is clear. However, the fabrics do not compare and some diagnostic Late Bronze Age forms, such as hook rim jars, are absent from Coldharbour Farm. On balance then, the Coldharbour Farm assemblage appears to be related to the Ivinghoe and Walton material but is probably a little later - perhaps earlier Iron Age in date. This is slightly earlier than was previously suggested on the basis of the initial finds from the site. Although there is no associated metalwork or other finds, it is worth noting that the few identifiable fragments of loomweight are of triangular type (Fig. 27), which although present at Ivinghoe Beacon are commonest in Iron Age contexts.

In the catalogue which follows the material is illustrated by phases. Most can be attributed to the earlier Iron Age (phases 2 and 3) as has been argued above; a large proportion of the unstratified material also probably belongs to this period. Phases 2 and 3 are determined on stratigraphic grounds; there is no immediate difference apparent on ceramic grounds.

The 'Belgic' (phase 4) material is distinguishable on ceramic grounds. Although not a large assemblage there is a notable absence of definite Roman period fabrics suggesting that it may be of pre-conquest date. Local sites including material of this date include Bierton (Allen 1986), Walton Court (Farley *et al.* 1981), and Ellen Road (Parkhouse and Hunn 1997).

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED POTTERY (Figs 22-26)

Virtually all of the illustratable pottery from the site is included. In the description which follows fabric is given first: interior and exterior are abbreviated as int. and ext., and decoration as dec. Where a sherd is obviously burnished this is stated, but in several instances burnishing only remains in

protected areas. It is worth noting that although burnishing is often regarded as significant in terms of the investment of time lavished on a vessel during its making, it arises following even quite cursory smoothing and compaction of the irregularities of a coil-built pot once it has reached a leather-hard state.

The drawings are by Cluny Johnstone.

Phase 1. Earlier Prehistoric

- 1 Flint grit, irregularly reduced, diam. uncertain. From this context came 2 other flint grit sherds and 5 shell tempered, together with 9 fragments of burnt clay and a bead. 5038, *fill of pit 5037*
- 2 Flint gritted, oxidised. Rim with perforations beneath, made after manufacture. Neolithic, for local parallel including perforation see Smith 1954, Fig. 6, 26. *Context 033, unstratified*

Phase 2. Earlier Iron Age

North-South boundary ditch:

- 3 Shelly, part reduced. Irregular rim, probable finger-tip dec. on top. 4078, *upper fill of ditch section 4077*
- 4 Shelly, part reduced. Finger-tip decoration on rim. 4078, *upper fill of ditch section 4077*
- 5 Sandy, reduced, surface burnished. Coil built, finely made splayed base. 4074, *upper fill of ditch section 4073*
- 6 Shelly, oxidised ext. with reduced core. Splayed base. 4074, *upper fill of ditch section 4073*
- 7 Fine sandy, reduced. Splayed base. 4074, *upper fill of ditch section 4073*
- 8 Shelly, reduced, burnished ext. Finger-tip impressions beneath rim, possibly due to squeezing rim during forming. 6010, *secondary fill of ditch 6008*
- 9 Fine sandy, sparse shell, oxidised. Burnished int. and ext. Flat top rim. 6010, *fill of ditch 6008*

Pits:

- 10 Fine sandy, reduced. Diameter slightly uncertain. 4034, *fill of pit 4033*
- 11 Fine sandy, reduced. Burnished ext. and part of int., possibly Belgic. 5046, *lower fill of pit 5032*
- 12 Fine shelly, oxidised int. and reduced ext. Finger-tip dec. on top of rim. 7004, *fill of pit 7003*
- 13 Shelly, oxidised ext. and reduced int. Flat top rim. 7008, *lowest fill of pit 7005*

- 14 Shelly, oxidised. Flat-top rim. 7006, *uppermost fill of pit 7005*

Pond:

- 15 Fine sandy, part reduced. Finger-nail decoration on top of rim. 3011; *an upper layer in "pond" 3018*

Phase 3 Earlier Iron Age

Enclosure ditches:

- 16 Sandy, reduced. 2044, *fill of ditch 2043*
- 17 Fine sandy, reduced. Burnished ext. 4039, *upper fill of 4038*

Penannular gully/ Roundhouse 2069:

- 18 Fine sandy, reduced. 2019, *fill of recut gully 2018*

Enclosures:

- 19 Sandy, reduced, burnished ext. Splayed base. 5035, *upper fill of ditch 5034*
- 20 Fine sandy, oxidised ext., reduced int. Finger-tip decoration on the top of rim. 5035, *fill of ditch 5034*
- 21 Fine sandy, oxidised. Burnished ext. 5023, *lowest fill of ditch 5019*
- 22 Fine sandy, reduced. 4106, *fill of ditch 4105*
- 23 Fine sandy, reduced. 4056, *fill of gully 4055*
- 24 Fine sandy, reduced. 4056, *fill of gully 4055*

Hearth 5051:

- 25 Shelly, oxidised ext. reduced int. Finger-tip dec. on top of rim. Diagonal scoring on the ext. of body. *Hearth 5052/5051*

Four-post structure 6297:

- 26 Shelly, reduced. Flat-topped rim. 6042, *fill of post-hole 6041*

Fence-line structures:

- 27 Shelly, oxidised. Possibly a "T" rim but very abraded. 6082, *upper fill of post-hole 6081 (fence-line 6302)*

- 28 Fine sandy, reduced, burnished surface. Flat-top rim. 6173, *fill of post-hole 6172 (fence-line 6306)*

- 29 Fine sandy with shell inclusions, oxidised. 6143, *fill of post-hole 6142 (fence-line 6305)*

Post Holes:

- 30 Calcareous, oxidised, burnished surface. 6178, *fill of post-hole 6177*

- 31 Shelly, reduced. Burnished int. and ext. 6178, *fill of post-hole 6177*

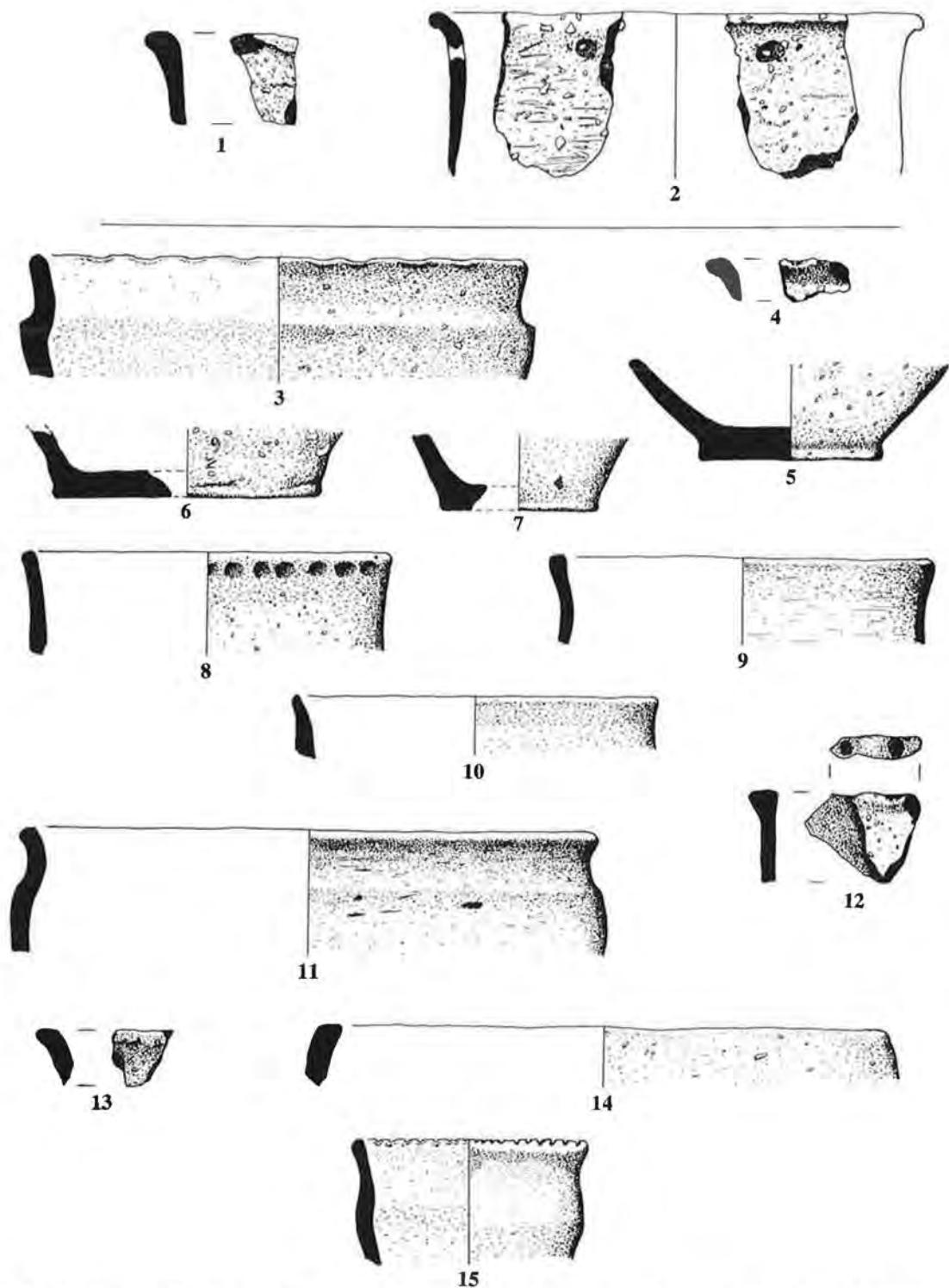


Fig. 22: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. Pottery: Neolithic (Phase 1; nos 1–2) and Iron Age (Phase 2; nos 3–15) (scale 1:3)

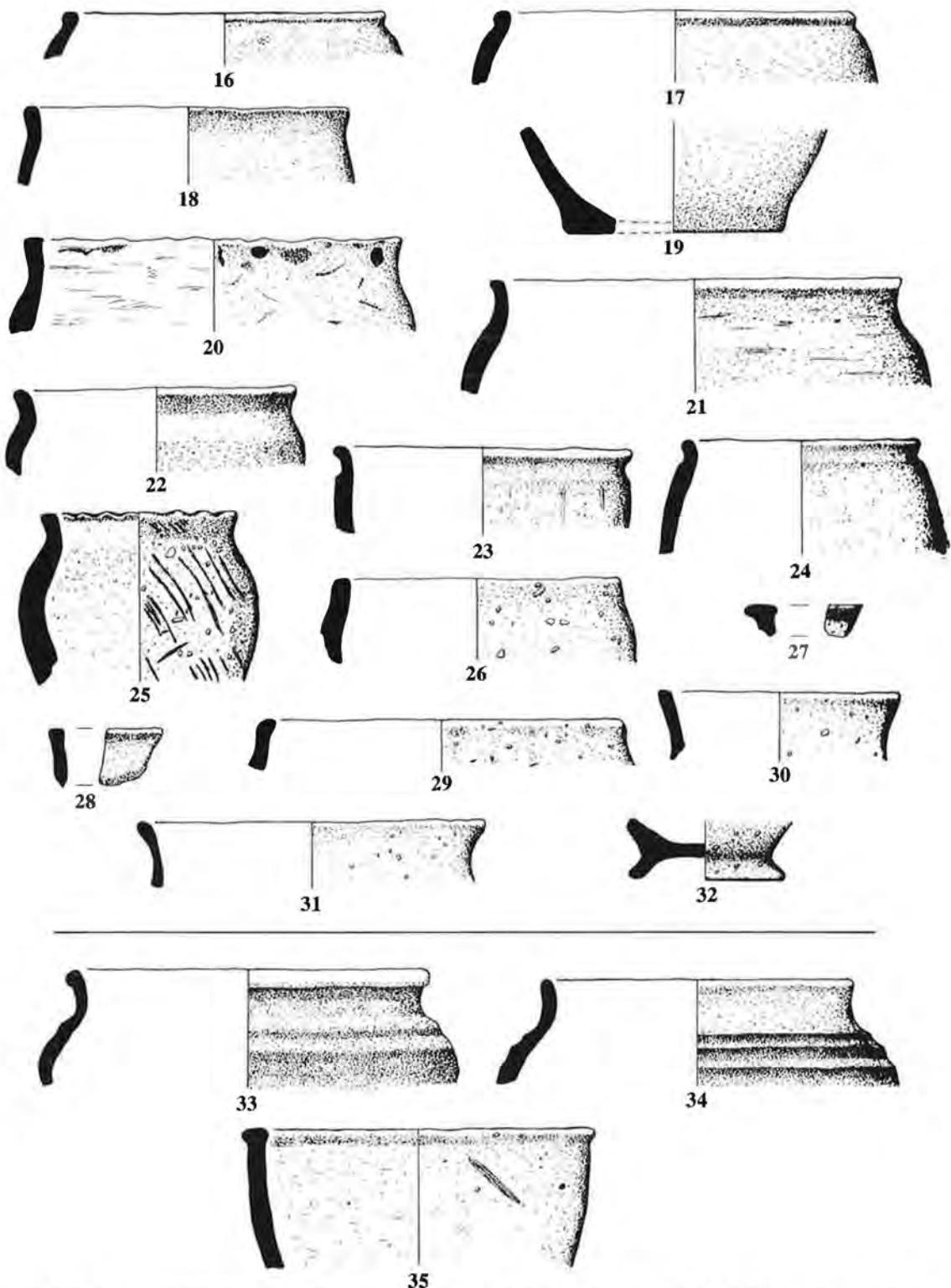


Fig. 23: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. Pottery: Iron Age (Phase 3, nos 16–35; Phase 4 nos 33–35) (scale 1:3)

- 32 Shelly, reduced. Burnished beneath base and ext. Footring base, 6178, *fill of post-hole* 6177
- Phase 4. Late Iron Age / Belgic**
- Round House 4157:
- 33 Fine sandy, grog tempered, reduced. 4058, *upper fill of gully section* 4057 (*gully* 4100)
 - 34 Fine sandy, grog tempered, oxidised. 4058, *upper fill of gully section* 4057 (*gully* 4100)
 - 35 Fine sandy, oxidised. ?residual. 4064, *upper fill of gully section* 4063 (*gully* 4100)
 - 36 Fine sandy, reduced. ?residual. 4064, *upper fill of gully section* 4063 (*gully* 4100)
 - 37 Grog tempered, reduced. Hand-made, large storage jar. 4089, *upper fill of gully section* 4088 (*gully* 4102)
 - 38 Grog tempered, oxidised ext. reduced int. Base. 4089, *upper fill of gully section* 4088 (*gully* 4102)
 - 39 Fine sandy, grog tempered, reduced. Burnished ext. 4089, *upper fill of gully section* 4088 (*gully* 4102)
 - 40 Grog tempered, oxidised ext. Int. of base has spalled off and has been reconstructed on illustration. 4061, *upper fill of gully section* 4060 (*gully* 4102)
- East-west boundary ditch 4069:
- 41 Fine sandy with sparse calcareous inclusions. Oxidised surfaces with reduced core. 4071, *middle fill of ditch* 4069
 - 42 Fine sandy, oxidised ext. reduced int. Horizontal finger-nail decorations on six joining body sherds. 4071, *middle fill of ditch* 4069
 - 43 Grog tempered, reduced. Complete base with central perforation, possibly bored after manufacture. Probably Belgic. 4072, *lowest fill of ditch* 4069
 - 44 Shelly, oxidised. 4072, *lowest fill of ditch* 4069
 - 45 Fine sandy, reduced ext. oxidised int. Burnished ext. 4072, *lowest fill of ditch* 4069
- Other ditches:
- 46 Flint gritted, reduced. Probably residual. 7020, *upper fill of southern ditch terminal* 7019 (*ditch* 7000)
- 48 Fine sandy, reduced. Organic deposit on int.; irregular thumbing beneath the rim on the ext. probably part of rim forming process. *Context* 4131
- 49 Fine sandy, grog tempered. Oxidised ext. reduced core. Expanded foot to base. *Context* 4131
- 50 Fine sandy, oxidised. Perforated base, three holes possibly made post-manufacture. The int. surface is ridged concentrically around the central boss. Possibly a Belgic cheese press. *Context* 039
- 51 Fine sandy, with sparse shell, reduced. ?IA. *Context* 039
- 52 Fine sandy, oxidised. Base. ?IA. *Context* 4131
- 53 Fine sandy, reduced. IA. *Context* 4131
- 54 Fine sandy, oxidised. Burnished int. ?IA. *Context* 4129/4138
- 55 Fine sandy with sparse shell. ?IA. *Context* 4130
- 56 Fine sandy, reduced. Base. *Context* 5068
- 57 Fine sandy, oxidised. Finger-tip dec. on the top of rim. LBA/EIA. *Context* 5068
- 58 Shelly, oxidised. *Context* 4126
- 59 Shelly, oxidised. Deep finger-tip dec. on the top of rim. LBA/EIA. *Context* 6260
- 60 Fine sandy with grit, oxidised. IA. *Context* 4126
- 61 Fine sandy with sparse calcareous inclusions, oxidised. ?IA. *Context* 5069
- 62 Fine sandy. The surface is possibly iron oxide enriched. *Context* 4126
- 63 Calcareous fabric, oxidised. *Context* 4126

OTHER CERAMIC ITEMS

Loomweight (Fig. 27): Two pieces of a triangular loomweight came from Context 2012 (Fig. 27), the lower fill of the southern terminal of the phase 3 bow-shaped gully 2075. Six other contexts produced thick pieces of fired clay with either curved or flat surfaces which may also have been from loomweights as follows: 4034, 4070, 4074, 6027, 6078, 6217.

THE FLINTS

David Bonner

A more detailed report on the flint will be found in the site archive.

Phase 5. Early Roman

No illustratable pottery.

Unstratified

- 47 Fine sandy, reduced. Finger-tip decoration on the top of rim. LBA/EIA *Context* 4131

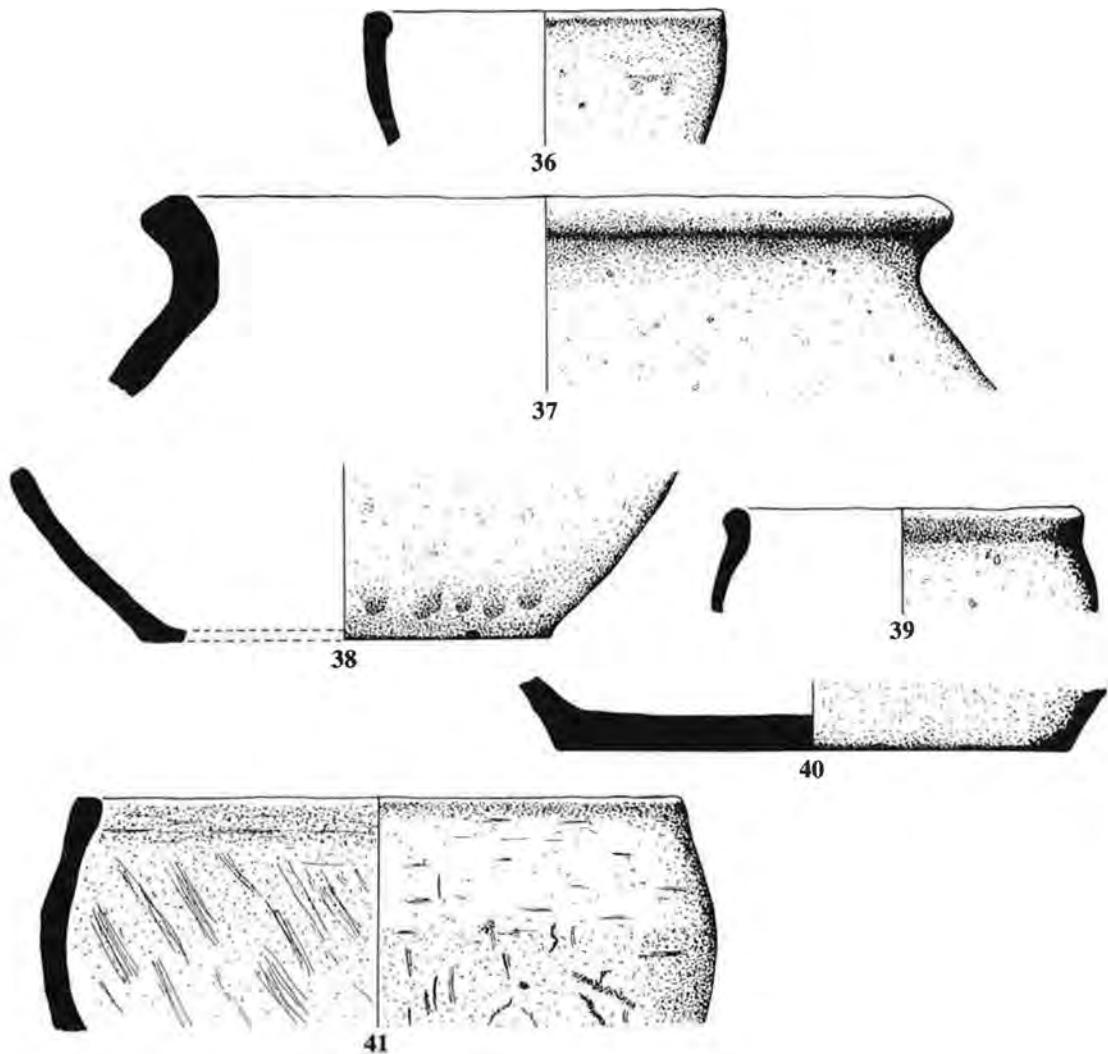


Fig. 24: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. Pottery: Iron Age (Phase 4, nos 36–41) (scale 1:3)

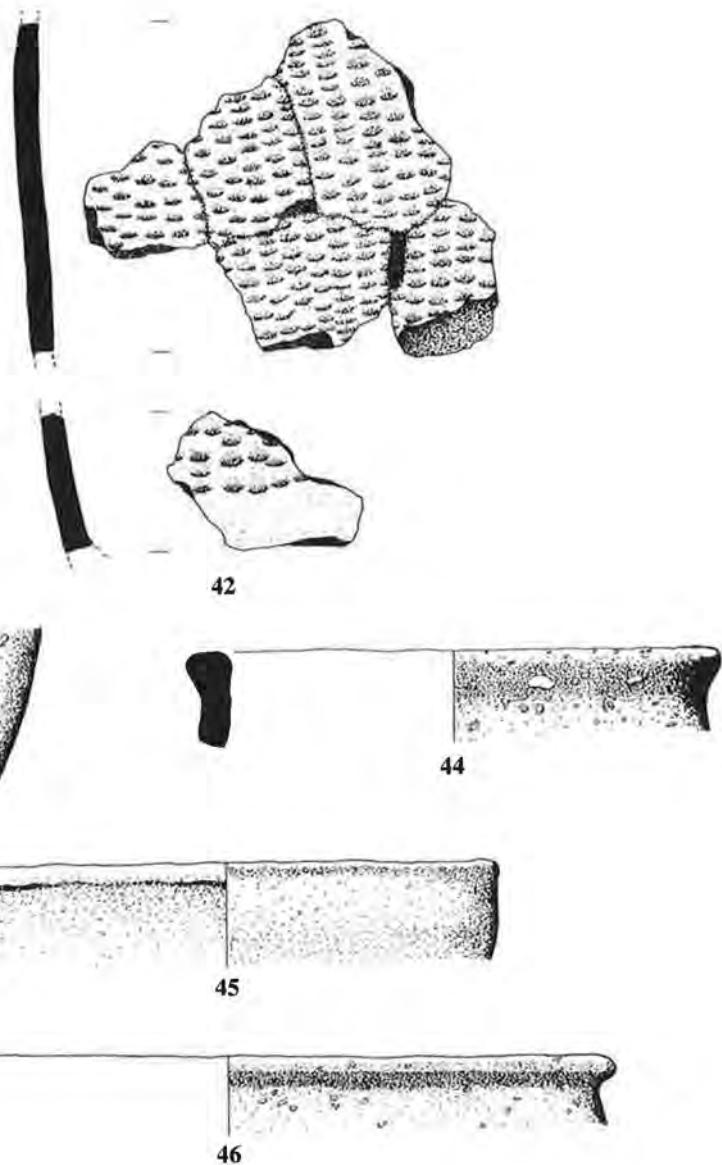


Fig. 25: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. Pottery: Iron Age (Phase 4, nos 42–46) (scale 1:3)

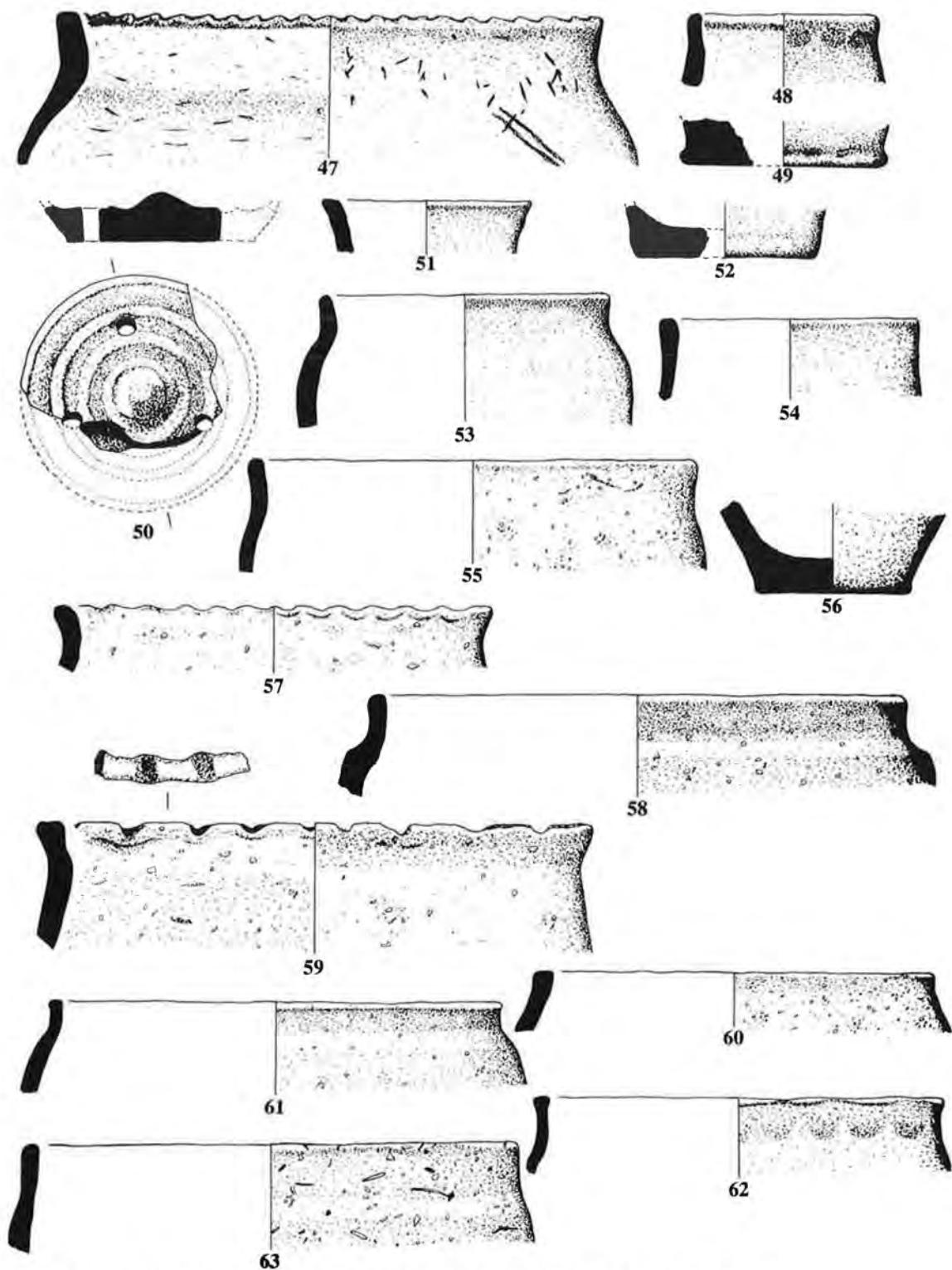


Fig. 26: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury. Pottery: Iron Age (unstratified, nos 47–63) (scale 1:3)

The assemblage consisted of 109 knapped flints (including 5 cores and 11 flaked tools) weighing 815g and 7 pounders weighing 2640g. Over 73% ($n=85$) of the assemblage came from a phase I (neolithic) pit (5037). Gravel-derived flint was

predominant, reflecting the local availability of a range of derived flint deposits. The pounders were made of low-quality cherty and opaque flint types, but the remainder of the assemblage consisted generally of better quality semitranslucent materials.



Fig. 27: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Iron Age loomweight (scale 1:3)

The five cores exhibited both single- and multi-platform characteristics. They had been discarded before being flaked to exhaustion, which is indicative of reasonable availability of resources.

An absence of primary flakes, together with the relatively small numbers of cores, suggests that much procurement and knapping took place off-site.

Breadth:length ratio analysis (Pitts 1978) showed broad correlation with Pitts' later Mesolithic/ early Neolithic data-sets, particularly amongst that part of the assemblage which came from neolithic pit 5037, although a possible later prehistoric component may be present amongst the remainder of the assemblage.

The tools consisted of eight knives (six with ventral ridges characteristic of later mesolithic types), two side/end scrapers and an axe-roughout. The restricted repertoire of tool-types may be linked to the comparatively small sample; however, the types represented are typical of a "domestic" assemblage, and the absence of types such as arrowheads and ground axes, more generally associated with off-site activity, is scarcely surprising.

Axe roughout (Fig. 28): large nodule of dark, semi-translucent flint with green-grey cherty mottles and a pale blue-grey to white patina. $149.2 \times 58.0 \times 28.3 - 34.6$ mm. Apart from a small patch of cortex, the body of the roughout was covered by broad shallow flakes indicative of soft hammer production. There was a single transverse flake at the non-cutting end, which showed possible signs of a break. Probably neolithic. From tree-thrown pit 2039.

A NEOLITHIC AMBER BEAD

Michael Farley

Small bead, amber, diameter c. 2.5 mm, height c. 1.5 mm, cylindrical, central perforation c. 1 mm; V-bored from both sides. Dark brown with milky-white patches and some cavities. Context 5038, fill of early-middle Neolithic pit 5037.

Acknowledgement must first be made to Abigail Richards for noting the presence of this tiny piece whilst sorting a large amount of wet-sieved residues (total 42kg of sieving), derived from the fill of the pit. Thanks are also due to Glynis Edwards and Jacqui Watson of English Heritage's Ancient Monuments Laboratory, for confirming that the piece is of amber.

The bead can best be seen under a microscope. Its small size means that there is little to be gained from illustration. The central perforation, which has been bored from both sides, is too small to take any spun thread likely to have been available in the Neolithic. It could have been strung on a bast fibre but a single fibre would probably have had insufficient strength. Alternatively, it could have been threaded on hair (thanks are due to Jacqui Watson for this suggestion). This might have been directly onto human hair, in which case multiple beads would have been necessary for the effect to be visible as part of a style, but an alternative would have been to use hair from a horse's tail. In the latter case a conventional multiple-bead string could easily have been created. A little experimental archaeology has shown that the Coldharbour Farm bead will accept three strands of horse hair.

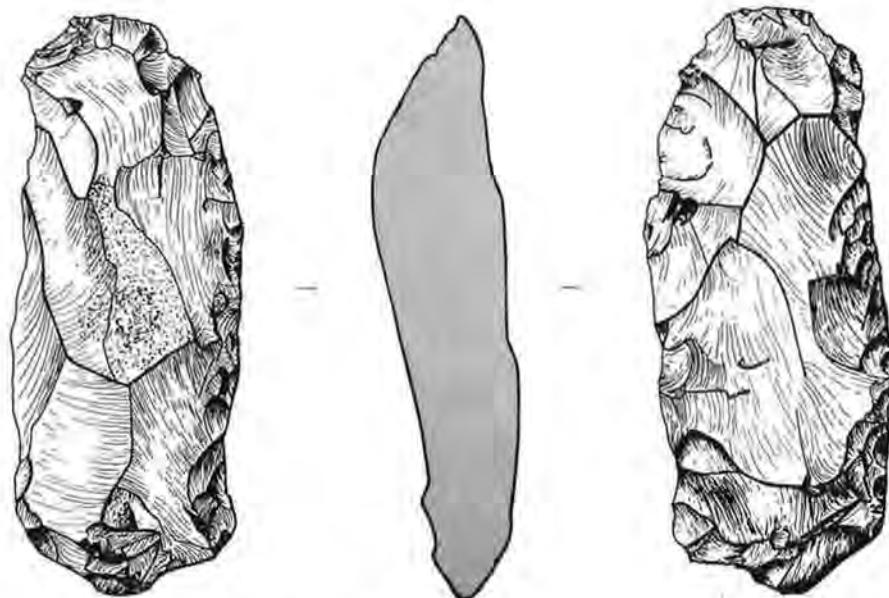


Fig. 28: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Neolithic axe roughout (scale 1:2)

Horse hair has a high tensile strength and is quite suitable for the job. I am grateful to Cluny Johnstone for kindly arranging for a supply of hair.

Neolithic amber is extremely rare in Britain and since the piece is so small the possibility that it could be intrusive within the pit has to be considered. Although this cannot be conclusively ruled out the integrity of the sample in other respects seems sound, and since previously recorded amber finds are readily visible, it is entirely likely that such tiny pieces may have previously escaped detection in the course of conventional archaeological excavation.

Beck and Shennan (1991) have published a comprehensive survey of British amber finds. They note only three discoveries which date to the preceding Mesolithic, two being unformed lumps from cave sites, the other being three irregular beads from Star Carr. Of finds probably or certainly of Neolithic date there are four previously recorded discoveries. Two are from barrows in East Yorkshire, one being a bead, the other an unmodified perforated lump. The third find consists of four irregular beads from Cruden, Aberdeenshire, perhaps from a burial, and the fourth is

another poorly documented find from a barrow in Lanarkshire where three amber beads were associated with six jet beads. During the Beaker/Early Bronze Age period amber beads become far commoner and substantial numbers have been found with Wessex burials.

Of 123 amber items analysed by Beck using infrared spectroscopy, 113 were certainly of Baltic amber which can be picked up from coastal deposits on the east of England and Scotland. Although there are rare occurrences of naturally occurring amber in Britain, for instance within Eocene clay, its use has not been identified in the British archaeological record.

The Coldharbour find is of exceptional interest, a first for the County, the smallest British Neolithic amber bead recorded, and an interesting addition to the Neolithic corpus.

OTHER ARTEFACTS (Fig. 29)

Jonathan Parkhouse with Anne-Marie Cromarty.

- 1 small triangular fragment iron, 42.2 × 26.2 ×

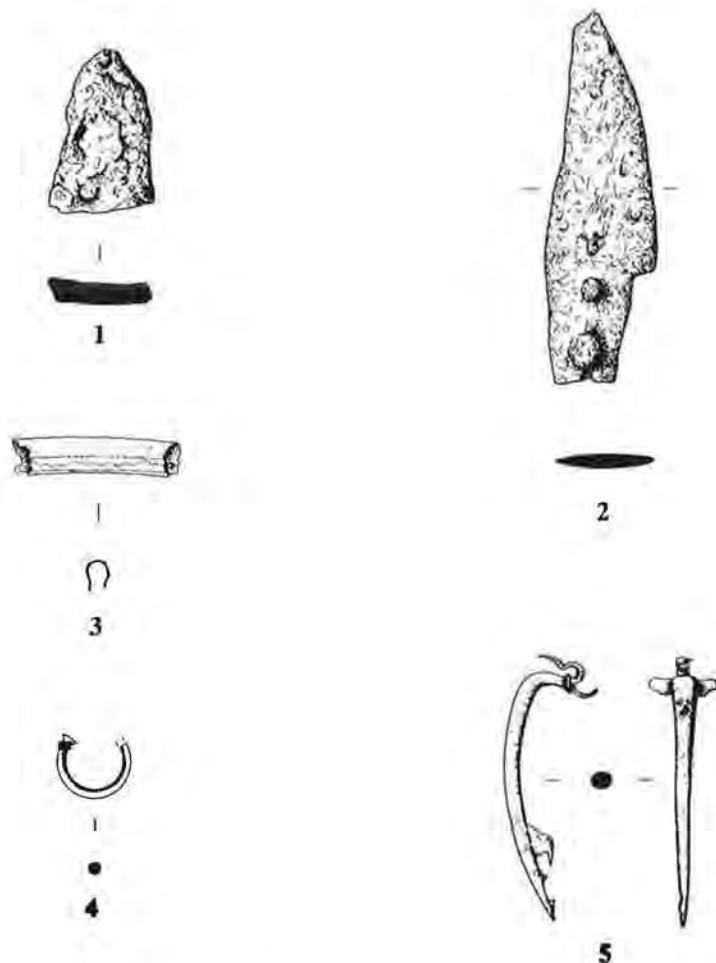


Fig. 29: Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury: Metal artefacts (scale 1:2)

7.4mm, possibly the tip of a blade. SF 106; Context 4070; uppermost fill of phase 4a ditch 4609.

- 2 Iron knife blade, $95.6 \times 29.4 \times 5.4$ mm. Slightly irregular, concave back and convex cutting edge. There are traces of two rivets in the tang, which is deep. The type is similar to Manning (1985) type 11a, p114 and Fig. 28, which is dated to the mid C1 but lacks the rivets on the Coldharbour Farm example. A shorter, squatter example, riveted, is published from Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943, 272 no.8 and

Fig. 88), which is dated to late C1 bc. There is also a parallel from Danebury (Sellwood 1984, no 2.34, pp 349–51 and Fig. 7.10), although the Danebury example, whilst damaged, shows a more accentuated curvature of both blade and back. Context 5020, uppermost fill of section 5019, phase 3 enclosure ditch 5076. The knife was recovered from the top of the feature and its attribution to phase 3 may not, therefore, be entirely secure.

- 3 Curved copper-alloy binding strip, U-shaped cross-section, with faint incised zig-zag deco-

ration within two parallel grooves on each side; broken, with traces of one distinct and a second probable rivet hole or piercing with traces of iron staining, both on the same side. The general form is similar to a first century AD piece from Colchester (Crummy 1983, p.122 no 4111) which is interpreted as a possible shield binding, although this form of binding must have occurred on a wide variety of artefacts. *Context 6268; uppermost fill of phase 2 ditch 4150/4151.*

- 4 Penannular copper alloy ring, 20.7mm ext diam, 2.6mm thick, with one flattened terminal and traces possibly of a second. Probably from a small penannular brooch of Fowler type A (Fowler 1960) *Context 6222; fill of phase 4b ditch 6179.*
- 5 Copper alloy Colchester-type bow brooch, lacking spring and pin. Short plain flattened side-wings and perforated catch-plate. *Context 0001; unstratified (spoilheap).*
- 6 Copper-alloy coin (not illustrated), worn, probably AE 3/4 *Urbs Roma* type, with wolf suckling Romulus and Remus on reverse (Constantinian). cf RIC 187 *Context 6019; fill of phase 4d ditch 6040.*
- 7 Small fragment gritstone (not illustrated), 51.7 x 36.0; 24.7mm thick, worn smooth on one surface; possibly fragment of quern or rubber, but the fragment is too small to be diagnostic. *SF 130; Context 4132; unstratified, from surface of phase 2 pits.*

VERTEBRATE REMAINS

Cluny Johnstone

Most of the vertebrate assemblage was hand-collected, although some bulk sieving (33 samples) was also carried out using 2 mm mesh. A small amount of bone was recovered from the residues of 24 of these samples. Although not large, the bone assemblage was recovered from a wide range of deposits. Full methods and results, including tables and data archive, are provided in the technical report (Johnstone 1997; copy in site archive).

Overall the preservation of the bones was good, although some 'etching' was noted on the bone surface, possibly caused by plant roots. The colour of the bones (usually fawn) was consistent throughout individual contexts. Most showed evidence of fresh breakage. Dog gnawing was also present on bones from most deposits, much of the gnawing affecting the ends of cattle bones (20–50%). Few burnt fragments were recorded (< 5% of the assemblage). Definitive evidence of butchery was sparse.

RESULTS

The hand-collected assemblage totalled 2964 fragments (weighing 20.08 kg) of which 2550 fragments (7.76 kg) were unidentified. The 414 identified fragments weighed 12.32 kg. In addition, 1784 fragments (weighing 463.6 g) were recovered by bulk sieving. Of these, only 68 (174.8 g) were identified. Context 6249 from Phase 3 contained a large quantity of bones (three boxes compared to five from the rest of the site) and is discussed in more detail below.

There were so few bones from deposits dated to Phases I and V that little useful information could be gleaned. The only identifiable bones from Phase I deposits were a single cattle tooth and one fragment of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus* L.) tibia. Phase V deposits contained no identifiable fragments. As phases II to IV were all of Iron Age date, and individually did not contain enough material for a meaningful analysis, these assemblages were combined.

SPECIES REPRESENTATION

Table 1 lists the range of species present and the number of identified fragments recorded from the hand collected material, whilst Table 2 contains the same information for the sieved material. The minimum number of individuals (MNI) for the main domesticates are shown in Table 3.

Cattle were the predominant species present at the site, from both fragment and MNI counts. Since the amount of meat obtained from one cow is obviously considerably greater than from one caprovid or pig, the proportion of the diet they represent is far larger. Caprovids were the second

most abundant group (135 fragments) of which three were definitely goat and 14 definitely sheep. Overall, goat bones made up about 2 % of the total assemblage. In comparison to caprovids, pigs appeared to be of minor importance. The frequency of horse bones (5 %) was quite high for a site of this period. As at other sites of this period, both deer and dogs were present in small numbers and appeared to be of minor importance.

The representation of species at Coldharbour Farm seems to have been slightly unusual for an Iron Age site. At Ashville, (Wilson 1978), Bierton (Jones 1986), and many other sites the most numerous taxon was sheep/goat. Coxhoe (Rackham 1982) and Birdlip (Dobney and Jaques 1990) showed a preponderance of cattle but the assemblages were too small to be meaningful. At Pennyland (Holmes 1993) the assemblage was large enough for the observed high frequency of cattle to be significant. It has been suggested that lower-lying farms near rivers may have kept more cattle (Wilson 1978), and Coldharbour Farm would fit such a picture. If the observed preponderance of cattle is real, it is unusual for the early Iron Age. Noddle (1994) suggests, on present evidence, that goats were much rarer in the Bronze Age than in the Iron Age. Their presence in these early Iron Age deposits at Coldharbour Farm is, therefore, interesting.

CATTLE

The range of skeletal elements present suggests that the cattle remains represented both primary butchery and domestic waste. The numbers of bones that could be aged were small so only tentative conclusions could be drawn about the age structure of the population. The presence of neonatal and juvenile bones and teeth suggests that cattle were being bred on or near the site. It appears that most of the fragments were from older adults, suggesting cattle were kept as multi-purpose beasts. Congenital abnormalities were scarce; three mandibular third molars with reduced third cusps and one with the third cusp entirely absent were recorded (the nearby site at Bierton (Jones 1986) produced two examples of this phenomenon).

Although few measurable cattle bones were recovered (since many epiphyses were considerably

damaged by dog gnawing), a single femur and two metapodials provided withers height estimations of 1.09 m, 1.10 m, 1.08 m. It is widely accepted that Iron Age cattle were small and those from Coldharbour Farm were no exception, falling within the ranges stated by Wilson (1978) and Jones (1986) for cattle at other Iron Age settlements in the area (1.0–1.18 m and 0.98–1.17 m respectively). The distal tibia and astragalus measurements from Coldharbour Farm also fall within the range of those from Birdlip (Dobney and Jaques 1990) and Garton Slack (Noddle 1979), being similar in size to the modern Dexter breed.

Context 6249

Context 6249 contained almost exclusively cattle remains. The skeletal elements present indicate that whole animals were deposited. The disarticulated remains of whole animals of all ages, showing no signs of butchery, is difficult to interpret. It is possible that deposit included the corpses of animals that died whilst calving and those lost early in life, or as a result of disease. The material may well have been deliberately buried or covered over in one action, rather than being gradually buried over a period of time, which would explain why little evidence of dog gnawing was present.

CAPROVIDS

As was the case for cattle, the range of skeletal elements present suggests that the caprovid remains reflect both primary butchery and domestic waste. Although a wide range of ages was present in this small assemblage, few conclusions can be drawn. However, the presence of mostly juvenile and subadult animals suggests that these were animals kept primarily for meat. The few older animals may have been kept as breeding stock or for wool.

Evidence for butchery on caprovid bones was extremely limited: a single scapula and an astragalus with knife marks, and a chopped pelvis, consistent with the removal of meat from bones or cutting joints of meat. There was also a tibia which had been chopped down the shaft at the distal end and smoothed, perhaps in an attempt to make a bone point.

The few distal tibia measurements are similar in size to the smallest modern Shetland and Soay individuals (there was no data available from other Iron Age sites for comparison).

PIGS

It has been assumed that the pig remains are from domestic rather than wild individuals because there was no evidence to suggest otherwise. There were very few pig bones in the assemblage, the norm at other Iron Age sites. The most frequent elements were those usually discarded as waste and included many isolated teeth. This may be a factor of preservation as pigs are generally killed young for meat, and hence the more delicate immature bones are less likely to survive burial or dog gnawing (tooth enamel being more readily preserved). Too few fragments provided age at death data for any useful comments to be made. Two female and two male canines were recorded along with one probable female canine. One of the male canines was large for a domestic pig, but was still considerably smaller than the wild boar comparative specimen.

HORSES

Most skeletal elements were present, although skull fragments were absent. This is most likely a result of preservation factors (most skull fragments being too small to identify to species). All the fragments were from individuals older than one year and none of the bones were porous in appearance, indicating that they were probably from mature individuals. One mandible with incisors provided an age at death of 9–13 years (after Levine 1982). It has been suggested (Harcourt 1979, quoted in Moore-Colyer 1994) that the absence of immature horse bones from Iron Age sites indicates that horse breeding was not practised there, and that horses from wild or semi-managed herds were periodically rounded up, and selected animals caught and trained. The data from Coldharbour Farm perhaps supports this hypothesis, although numbers are too small to be conclusive. However, another explanation may be that the younger, unfused, horse bones may simply not have survived to be recovered. A single horse distal metapodial showed knife marks on the lateral side of the shaft, which may be the result of

skinning rather than butchery. There is, however, no definite evidence of butchery on horse bones at this site.

Six measurable horse bones were recorded, of which three metacarpals provided withers height estimations of 1395.5 mm (14 hands), 1332.6 mm (13.2 hh) and 1378.2 mm (13.3 hh) respectively. Withers heights for the Coldharbour horses were all taller than the mean of 12.1 hh for Iron Age horses and fall towards the upper end of the range (10.2 hh to 14.3 hh, Johnstone 1996). These taller animals are more usually associated with large, high status, hillfort sites (Johnstone 1996). To find taller horses on a small rural settlement site is perhaps unusual, as previous data have suggested that they may have been prized, high status animals (Grant 1991).

The limb proportions of the horses from Coldharbour Farm again fell at the upper end of the range seen at other Iron Age sites (Figure 1). These were therefore animals with robust limbs in proportion to height. They are roughly comparable to some Przewalskii individuals but are slightly more robust in relation to height. The volume of the astragalus correlates well with the weight of the animal and, in conjunction with the height estimates, provides an estimation of build. The volume of the Coldharbour astragalus is 167.1 cm³ corresponding to an approximate weight of 260 kg. Modern ponies of about 12.1 hh are approximately of this weight, but for taller animals, the same weight would indicate a more gracile build. The astragalus could be from a shorter individual than the metacarpals used to estimate height, which is more in keeping with other archaeological data of the period i.e. of small stocky ponies (Johnstone 1996).

DOGS

Six fragments identified as domestic dog and a single canid fragment (probably domestic dog), all from Phase 3, were recovered. No evidence of butchery was recorded. The presence of dogs at the site was also confirmed by the numerous cattle bones showing signs of dog gnawing. Most of the fragments were from medium sized dogs, although one canid tooth was similar in size to fox.

TABLE I.
Total bone fragment counts for the hand collected material.

TAXON	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 2/3	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	1	29	14	173	20		237
Caprine		35	3	67	9		114
<i>Sus. f domestic</i>		13		16	3		32
<i>Equus f. domestic</i>		8	6	6	1		21
<i>Cervus elaphus L.</i>					1		1
<i>Capreolus capreolus L.</i>	1			1			2
<i>Canis f. domestic</i>				6			6
<i>Canis sp.</i>				1			1
Sub total	2	85	23	270	34		414
Large mammal	17	68	25	1171	73		1354
Medium mammal	8	224		520	140	6	898
Unidentifiable	1	38	26	224	9		298
Sub Total	26	330	51	1915	222	6	2550
Total	28	415	74	2185	256	6	2964

DEER

Only two fragments of Cervidae were present from Phases 2 to 4. These were single fragments of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus L.*) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus L.*). The presence of deer remains on the site (albeit so few) suggests that the inhabitants utilised wild as well as domestic resources and that woodland was perhaps present not too far from the site.

SMALL MAMMALS AND AMPHIBIANS

Small mammal and amphibian bones were recovered by wet sieving in small quantities. The most abundant small mammal remains (16 fragments) were those of the water vole (*Arvicola terrestris* (L.)), most being teeth. The presence of water voles is hardly surprising as the site is next to a watercourse, although they have a tendency to burrow and could be intrusive. Other small mammals included: a single *Microtus agrestis* (L.) fragment; one murine fragment; two microtine fragments; and three mouse/vole fragments. Two amphibian fragments were identified as common frog (*Rana temporaria L.*), whilst a further eight fragments were either frog or toad. Again the presence of amphibians is not surprising in view of the proximity of the watercourse.

All the small mammal and amphibian fragments were examined under a binocular microscope and showed no evidence of acid etching or erosion characteristic of digestion. This suggests that they do not reflect a predator accumulation such as the contents of owl pellets. The fragments were from ditch deposits, suggesting they may have been incorporated into the sediments as the result of a 'pit-fall trap' effect. If the ditch contained water then this could also be a 'natural loss' assemblage.

SUMMARY

The vertebrate remains from Coldharbour Farm constituted a fairly typical assemblage for an Iron Age settlement, the only anomalies being the apparent preponderance of cattle over caprovids and the presence of larger horses than typical of the period, of a size more usually associated with higher status sites. Context 6249 provided an interesting deposit of disarticulated cattle remains, perhaps deposited in one act, possibly to dispose of the victims of disease.

THE HUMAN REMAINS

A few fragments of human bone were present.

TABLE 2.
Total bone fragment counts for the bulk sieved material.

TAXON	Phase 2	Phase 2/3	Phase 3	Phase 4	Total
<i>Bos f. domesticus</i>	1		3	1	5
Ovi-caprine	8	1	5	7	21
<i>Sus f. domesticus</i>	3			1	4
<i>Arvicola terrestris</i> (L.)	9		1	6	16
Microtine sp.	2				2
c.f. <i>Microtus agrestis</i> (L.)				1	1
Murine/Microtine				3	3
Murine sp.			1		1
<i>Rana temporaria</i> L.	2				2
Amphibian	8			5	13
Sub total	33	1	10	24	68
Medium mammal	105		2		107
Small mammal	6	3	7	13	29
Frags <10mm	910	14	292	194	1410
Frags >10mm	66	2	54	48	170
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>1087</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>355</i>	<i>255</i>	<i>1716</i>
Total	1120	20	365	279	1784

TABLE 3.
The Minimum Number of Individuals for the main species.

TAXON	MNI
Cattle	7
Sheep/goat	6
Pig	3
Horse	2

Context 2046 (Phase 2) yielded 10 fragments of the right and left frontal and right parietal bones of a single skull. Context 4056 (Phase 3) also provided 10 fragments, in this case, of the right frontal bone of another skull. The small size of the fragments and their small number precludes any further useful comment.

PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Mark Robinson

INTRODUCTION

The Iron Age settlement at Coldharbour Farm was situated on a low-lying area of drift alongside the Southcourt Brook. The drift was very mixed

ranging from boulder clay-like chalky clay through sandy clay with flints and, alongside the Southcourt Brook, water-lain flint gravel.

Samples were taken for molluscan analysis from an early prehistoric tree-throw pit and an Iron Age pond. Samples were floated from archaeological features for charred plant remains, which also served to recover additional mollusc shells.

METHODS AND RESULTS

1 kg of each mollusc sample (Samples 1–7, 9) was sieved down to 0.5 mm, dried and sorted under a binocular microscope. The shells were identified and the minimum number of individuals listed in Table 4. 26 bulk samples were floated onto a 0.5 mm mesh and the dried flots sorted for charred plant remains. Charred seeds were found in 12 of the flots (chaff was entirely absent) and charcoal was present in 16 flots. The results are listed in Tables 5–6. Molluscs were also identified in selected flots. Flotation is not the ideal way to recover shells so the results have been listed in Table 4 giving an indication of relative abundance only.

THE SITE ENVIRONMENTAL SEQUENCE

The molluscs from the tree-throw hole (Sample

9) were woodland species, *Discus rotundatus* being the most abundant. Wet ground snails were entirely absent. The molluscs were presumably reflecting conditions on the site during the mid Holocene prior to clearance.

The molluscs from Context 5037, a Neolithic pit (Sample 210), were again dry ground species. There was still a significant presence of woodland species including *D. rotundatus* and *Vertigo pusilla*, a rare species which has occasionally been found in Neolithic deposits (Evans 1972, 141–2). However, open country species, particularly *Pupilla muscorum* and *Vallonia costata*, predominated. The assemblage would either suggest open conditions with a background presence of scrub or that the site had been fully cleared and the shells of the woodland species had been reworked from earlier deposits.

Although no sealed Iron Age soils survived on the site, Samples 215 and 208 were from archaeological features which had been backfilled with soil rather than left open long enough to develop their own molluscan faunas. The former was from Pit 5030, which belonged to an early stage of the Iron Age settlement, while the latter was from Foundation Trench 4100 of a late Iron Age (Belgic) round house. The molluscs suggested open conditions. *Vallonia pulchella* outnumbered the other species of *Vallonia* in both samples. It tends to favour moister habitats than either *V. costata* or *V. excentrica* and is characteristic of damp grassland. Shells of aquatic molluscs were absent. The features thus appeared to have been backfilled with soil from damp grassland which did not show any evidence that it was experiencing flooding.

Samples 216, 219 and 233 were from short, self-contained lengths of Iron Age gully or ditch. They were from, respectively, Round House Drainage Gully 5075, Round House Drainage Gully 2070 and Enclosure Ditch 5076. In addition to shells of terrestrial molluscs, either or both of *Lymnaea truncatula* and *Anisus leucostoma* were present. They are stagnant water species which readily emerge from water and can withstand the seasonal drying out of their habitat. Shells of species which require more permanent water were absent. These results emphasise the low lying na-

ture of the site, with episodes when even quite shallow gullies held stagnant water, but again there was no evidence of flooding.

The series of samples from the trench through Pond 3018 and the sediments related to it provided a long sequence which spanned the life of the Iron Age settlement. The earliest sample (Sample 1) was from Context 3016, alluvial sediment of the Southcourt Brook, which contained a flowing-water molluscan assemblage, with *Bithynia tentaculata*, *Pisidium amnicum* and many shells of *Valvata piscinalis*. Samples 2 and 3 were from Contexts 3012 and 3011, phase II early Iron Age sediments in the pond. Sample 2 was a water-lain clay containing shells of the stagnant water molluscs *Lymnaea truncatula*, *L. peregra*, *Anisus leucostoma* and *Pisidium* sp., which probably reflected conditions in the pond while it was in use. Sample 3 was a charcoal-rich backfill dump in the pond in which the majority of the shells were from terrestrial species especially *Trichia hispida* or *plebeia*. It is difficult to establish which of them lived in the pond and which were introduced amongst the backfill. Subsequently, probably in Phase III of the early Iron Age, alluvial clay was deposited in the pond by the Southcourt Brook (Sample 4, Context 3010). The flowing water origin of this sediment could be discerned from the occurrence of the mollusc *Bithynia tentaculata* while the numerous shells of *Lymnaea truncatula* and *Anisus leucostoma* were perhaps from the population of the pool of water left in the top of the former pond after each flood episode. It is uncertain whether flood levels were high enough to reach the Iron Age settlement. Shells of flowing water as well as stagnant water molluscs were present in Context 3004, the lower fill of a Phase IV, Belgic, ditch cut through the pond sediments (Sample 7). This suggested that the ditch carried flowing water at least seasonally. Sealing the ditch and pond sediments was Context 3001, a layer over 0.5 m thick of alluvial clay. The shells from it were mostly stagnant water to amphibious species but shells of both flowing water aquatic and terrestrial molluscs were also present (Samples 5 and 6). This alluvial deposit was continuous with the alluvium noted earlier which sealed Iron Age features on part of the site (Robinson 1990). It was possibly Roman or medieval in date.

Sequences of flots were examined from Ditch 4150/4151, successive cuts of the main N-S boundary ditch during Phase II early Iron Age (Samples 220, 232, 331, 221) and from a section through Ditch 4069, the main E-W boundary ditch during Phase IV which drained towards the Southcourt Brook (Samples 226, 225, 224 and 223). The samples all contained high concentrations of shells, particularly the stagnant water to amphibious species *Anisus leucostoma* and the terrestrial species *Trichia hispida* or *plebeia*. The number and range of aquatic molluscs in these ditches was much greater than in the small self-contained enclosure ditches considered earlier (Samples 216, 219, 233). The occurrence of *Planorbis planorbis* in most of the samples suggested that Ditch 4150/4151 and Ditch 4069 held water throughout much if not all of the year. A shell of *Bithynia tentaculata* from Ditch 4150 raises the possibility that there were episodes when the ditch carried stream or flood waters. As for the smaller enclosure gullies these results emphasise the low-lying nature of the site in the Iron Age and imply that the water level in the ditch was only about 1.0 m below the contemporaneous ground surface. The occurrence of the drier ground terrestrial molluscs *Pupilla muscorum* and *Vallonia excentrica* in addition to species of damper terrestrial habitats such as *Vallonia pulchella*, would suggest that the ground surface was sufficiently dry for comfortable occupation over most of the year. One species of particular interest in three of the samples from Ditch 4150/4151 was *Vertigo angustior*. This marshland snail is now very rare in England, being restricted to a few localities in East Anglia (Kerney and Cameron 1979, 266). However, it formerly had a more widespread distribution, and it was found in a late Iron Age soil at the Roman town of Alchester, Oxon (Robinson 1975, 165-6). The snail had perhaps found a suitable habitat on the side of the ditch in company with other marsh species such as *Vertigo antivertigo* and had spread back along the ditch from the stream it drained into.

THE CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

The only charred plant remains from Neolithic Pit 5037 were a fragment of *Corylus avellana* (hazel) nut shell, a piece of *Quercus* sp. (oak) charcoal and a piece of *Prunus* sp. (sloe etc.) charcoal.

Hazel nut shell fragments are very much typical Neolithic food plant remains.

The charred crop and weed remains from the Iron Age settlement (Phases II-IV) were very sparse. Barley, including hulled six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), was present in eight of the samples and hulled wheat, including spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*), was identified from three samples. The only flot with a significant quantity of charred crop processing remains (Sample 218) was from Context 3011, Iron Age Phase II charcoal-rich backfill of Pond 3018. It comprised grain, mostly barley, and seeds of possible arable weeds such as *Fallopia convolvulus* (black bindweed) and *Bromus cf. secalinus* (brome grass).

Small quantities of charcoal, especially *Quercus* sp. (oak) were present in many of the samples. Charcoal of hedgerow species such as Pomoideae (hawthorn, apple etc.) was also found. With the exception of Sample 222, the charcoal had been re-deposited and mixed from the original sites of burning. Sample 222, however, was from Hearth 5049 belonging to Phase III, early Iron Age. It contained much Pomoideae and *Prunus* sp. (sloe etc.) charcoal and a little *Rhamnus catharticus* (purging buckthorn) charcoal.

CONCLUSIONS

The molluscan evidence showed the site to have been wooded during the mid Holocene, at least partly though probably not permanently cleared in the Neolithic and very open during the Iron Age. It also showed the increasing wetness of the site. However, although the Iron Age settlement was low-lying, there was no certain evidence of flooding and alluviation until after it had been abandoned.

The charred plant remains confirmed that the Iron Age settlement used cereals throughout its life but the very low concentration of cereal remains would suggest that cereals were only being processed on a small scale. The settlement was perhaps primarily concerned with the raising of domestic animals. The charcoal probably represented a mixture of hedgerow/scrub shrubs and woodland trees cut for domestic fuel.

TABLE 4:
Mollusca

Minimum Number of Individuals or Abundance

Phase Sample Context	Pond 3018										Ditch 4150 / 4151						Ditch 4069							
	I 9	I 210	II 215	IV 208	III 216	III 219	III 233	I 1	II 2	II 3	III 4	IV 7	V+ 5	V+ 6	II 220	II 232	II 231	II 221	IV 226	IV 225	IV 224	IV 223		
		5038	5031	4058	5035	2019	5004	3016	3012	3011	3010	3004	3001	3001	6207	4112	4079	4078	4072	4071	4070	4070		
GASTROPODA																								
<i>Valvata cristata</i> Müll.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>V. piscinalis</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Bithynia tentaculata</i> (L.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	1	5	-	2	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Bithynia</i> spp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	2	5	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Carychium</i> sp.	4	++	-	-	++	-	-	1	-	4	5	3	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	
<i>Aplexa hypnorum</i> (L.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Lymnaea truncatula</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	7	6	163	4	28	56	++	++	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>L. stagnalis</i> (L.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	12	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>L. palustris</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	4	-	1	16	-	2	++	+	++	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Planorbis planorbis</i> (L.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	1	1	-	-	+	++	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Anisus leucostoma</i> (Mill.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	1	205	272	7	60	+++	+++	+++	-	++	++	++	++	++	
<i>Gyraulus albus</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Armiger crista</i> L.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Succinea</i> or <i>Oxyloma</i> sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	39	3	1	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Cochlicopa</i> sp.	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	12	5	1	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	
<i>Vertigo pusilla</i> Müll.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>V. antivertigo</i> (Drap.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	++	++	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>V. pygmaea</i> (Drap.)	-	++	+	-	++	+	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	++	+	++	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>V. angustior</i> Jeff.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Pupilla muscorum</i> (L.)	-	++	++	-	+	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	++	++	++	++	++	++	-	
<i>Vallonia costata</i> (Müll.)	-	++	+	-	++	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	
<i>V. pulchella</i> (Müll.)	-	-	++	++	-	-	-	4	-	4	1	2	1	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>V. excentrica</i> Sterki	-	++	+	+	++	+	+	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	++	++	+	++	+	+	-	-	-	
<i>Vallonia</i> sp.	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	3	-	19	3	6	2	2	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	
<i>Punctum pygmaeum</i> (Drap.)	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Discus rotundatus</i> (Müll.)	6	++	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Nesovitrea hammonis</i> (Ström)	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	++	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Aegopinella pura</i> (Ald.)	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>A. nitidula</i> (Drap.)	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Oxychilus cellarius</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Zonitoides nitidus</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Limax</i> or <i>Deroceras</i> sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	3	3	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Clausilia bidentata</i> (Ström)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>T. hispida</i> (L.) or <i>plebeia</i> (Drap.)	-	++	++	++	++	++	+	4	-	36	15	8	7	2	++	+	+	+	++	++	++	++	++	
<i>Helicigona lapicida</i> (L.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Cepaea</i> sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Arianta arbustorum</i> or <i>Cepaea</i> sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
BIVALVIA																								
<i>Sphaerium</i> sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Pisidium amnicum</i> (Müll.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Pisidium</i> spp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	2	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	16							145	16	85	452	360	51	152										

TABLE 5:
Charred Plant Remains (excluding charcoal)

	Phase	Number of Items											
		I Neolithic				II Early Iron Age				III Early Iron Age			
	Sample	210	215	218	220	214	216	217	219	228	230	208	226
	Context	5038	5031	3011	6207	5004	5035	2001	2019	6064	4048	4058	4072
	Sample Weight (Kg.)	28	14	27	18.5	11	14	10	11	6	14	12	21.5
CEREAL GRAIN													
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L.	spelt wheat	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>T. dicoccum</i> Shubl. or <i>spelta</i> L.	emmer or spelt wheat	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L.	- lateral grain	six-row barley	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	- hulled grain	hulled barley	-	1	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	barley	-	3	7	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
cereal indet.	-	-	11	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NUT SHELL													
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	hazel	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
WEED SEEDS													
<i>Fallopia convolvulus</i> (L.) Löve	black bindweed	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Gallium aparine</i> (L.)	goosegrass	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Eleocharis</i> S. <i>Palustres</i> sp.	spike-rush	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Carex</i> sp.	sedge	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Bromus</i> cf. <i>secalinus</i> L.	brome	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
weed indet.	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Total number of charred items per kg.		0.04	0.43	1.19	0.05	0.64	0.07	0.10	0.18	0.17	0.14	0.08	0.05

TABLE 6:
Charcoal

Phase	I Neolithic	II Early Iron Age						III Early Iron Age						IV Belgic			
		210	215	218	220	221	229	214	216	217	222	228	230	207	208	223	226
Sample		5038	5031	3011	6207	4078	7006	5004	5035	2001	5050	6064	4048	4068	4058	4070	4072
Context																	
Sample Weight (Kg.)		28	14	27	18.5	12.5	15	11	14	10	8.5	6	14	4	12	13	21.5
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	hazel	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> L.	ash	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
Pomoideae indet.	hawthorn etc	-	+	++	-	-	-	+	-	-	+++	-	+	-	-	+	++
<i>Prunus</i> sp.	sloe etc	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+++	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Rhamnus catharticus</i> L.	pusing buckthorn	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

+ present, ++ some, +++ much

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The resources available for the excavations at Coldharbour Farm, and the consequent small size of the sample of material evidence recovered, have inevitably led to an attenuated level of interpretation. Nevertheless, the results obtained more than justify the investigative strategy adopted.

The principal features of interest at this site are:

- a) the presence of evidence for Neolithic activity
- b) the recovery of an outline environmental sequence for the site and its immediate environs during the first millennium bc
- c) the recovery of the partial plan of an Early Iron Age site, a period which had previously yielded few examples in the County

NEOLITHIC ACTIVITY

There have been comparatively few excavations of Neolithic sites in Buckinghamshire, with the notable exception of the sites recently excavated close to the Thames at Dorney by the Oxford Archaeological Unit; post-excavation analysis of these sites is in progress and only interim reports are available (Allen and Welsh 1988; OAU forthcoming). The predominant site type registered in the County Sites and Monuments Record consists of isolated finds of characteristic artefacts such as axes, or scatters of flint debitage and tools, and very little of this material has been recovered from excavated contexts. In the north of the (historic) County within the urban development of Milton Keynes, later Neolithic sites have been investigated at Stacey Bushes (Green and Sofranoff 1985), Heelands and Secklow (Williams 1981). All three sites consisted of amorphous pits of uncertain function. It is possible that some of these pits, particularly those at Stacey Bushes which produced an apparent association of Grimston-style and Grooved Ware sherds, may be tree-throw pits. The environmental evidence from Stacey Bushes indicated a certain degree of tree clearance, and the position of the other two sites on boulder clay may also indicate penetration of the woodlands away from the main riverine corridors (Williams 1993). Other sites have consisted of iso-

lated pits; such a site is St Johns Hospital, Stone (Carstairs and Lawson 1992), some 3km west of Coldharbour Farm, where a pit containing 55 struck flints and sherds from at least three different vessels, including a bowl with similarities to the Mildenhall series, was discovered during trial trenching in 1992. The Stone assemblage appeared to be early Neolithic in character. It is impossible to be certain whether this apparently isolated feature was part of a larger group, although more recent excavation on the site, near to the pit, did not produce any further evidence for activity of this period.

The other excavated site producing significant Neolithic remains is the Whiteleaf barrow (Childe and Smith 1954). Whilst the funerary nature of that site clearly places it in a different functional category to Coldharbour Farm, the presence of a sherd similar to one from Coldharbour Farm (Fig 22 no 2, above), may suggest a degree of contemporaneity between the two sites.

The Neolithic evidence from Coldharbour Farm consists for the most part of tree-throw holes, and is indicative of one or more episodes of clearance. The axe roughout found within one of the tree-throw pits indicates the type of implement used for clearance. The tree-throw holes will have trapped some of the debris on site at the time. The fact that such debris was found in both of the tree-throws investigated suggests that it may have been present in significant quantities. Finds of Neolithic material in tree-throw holes are not uncommon; in addition to the examples noted above, tree-throw holes containing Neolithic material, often in some quantity, have recently been recorded at the Eton Rowing Lake sites at Dorney (Allen and Welsh 1998). The single pit at Coldharbour Farm, however, points to some form of activity other than clearance, perhaps related to a nearby domestic focus, or perhaps "off-site" activity related to a base further afield. The presence of hazelnut shells within the pit-fill may suggest autumnal deposit-formation, although hazelnut shells are frequently encountered in Neolithic deposits and demonstrate the continued importance of the collection of food plants during the period (Moffett *et al* 1989). Had there been the opportunity for more comprehensive sampling, it seems likely that other features might have been discovered to be Neolithic.

COLDHARBOUR FARM AND ITS ENVIRONS DURING THE FIRST MILLENNIUM BC

The palaeoenvironmental evidence, analysed above by Dr Robinson, enables us to sketch out the broad outline of the immediate environs of Coldharbour Farm during the period of its occupation. The Neolithic period evidently saw episodes of tree-clearance which provided open conditions, perhaps with a background presence of scrub. By the first millennium the mollusc assemblages indicate damp grassland, without any evidence for seasonal flooding, but there would have been stagnant water in some of the gullies and ditches during much or even all of the year, indicating the relatively poor drainage of the low-lying area. There were also sufficient dry species to indicate that the ground was in general sufficiently dry for comfortable occupation over most of the year. By the end of the Iron Age some ditches were carrying flowing water, at least seasonally. Charcoal from hedgerow species may indicate that the ditches were supplemented by hedges, which are generally less readily evident in the archaeological record. The alluvium which covered much of the site in the vicinity of the stream contained mostly stagnant/amphibious mollusc species, with some examples of both terrestrial and flowing water species; it is believed that this alluviation took place during the Roman period or later, but it is impossible to determine whether this was a direct cause of the site's abandonment. Elsewhere, in the Upper Thames valley, site abandonment around the first century BC is not uncommon, but the dislocation is not confined to low-lying sites. Even on a low-lying site such as Whitehouse Road, Oxford, it is by no means clear that flooding followed abandonment immediately (Mudd 1993). Nevertheless, expansion of arable cultivation (particularly winter wheat) and increased clearance within stream catchments must have increased surface water run-off, silt transport and ultimately alluviation, but the course of actual alluviation is unlikely to be uniform.

To this evidence we may also add the results of an evaluation undertaken by the County Museum Archaeological Service in 1997 at Ellen Road, some 500m southeast of the Coldharbour Farm site (Parkhouse and Hunn 1997). The Ellen Road site was situated either side of a former feeder of the Southcourt Brook, in a location broadly comparable to Coldharbour Farm, at SP 809 128. Trial

trenching of a 2.5% sample of the 6.6 ha site revealed the presence over much of the site of a generally dispersed pattern of cut features, mainly pits and ditches. Only minimal dating evidence was recovered, but it is considered that the majority of the features were related to former field boundaries, many of which appeared to date from the first millennium bc. Several phases of activity relating to these boundary features appeared to be represented, beginning in the Late Bronze Age. There was also slight evidence for probable small-scale activity during the Neolithic period. Finds of material later than the first millennium bc were almost entirely unstratified, with virtually no Roman material and none whatsoever from the Saxon periods.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate a close chronological match between the two sites, the Ellen Road evidence is broadly comparable with the sequence at Coldharbour Farm, with a Neolithic presence, albeit poorly characterised, and intermittent activity throughout much of the first millennium bc, but without any particularly distinct spatial concentration. On the basis of this, it is possible to suggest that settlement during this millennium was not tied to any single focal point in the long term, but consisted of a number of shorter episodes which used different areas of the land around the Southcourt Brook and involved several re-organisations of the landscape. In both cases, exploitation during the Romano-British period appears to have been minimal, despite the existence of a site at Walton Court, some 500m southeast of the Ellen Road site (Farley *et al* 1981), and a probable Belgic/Romano-British cemetery, discovered earlier this century (unpublished), a similar distance to its southwest. Although the Walton Court site may have had some form of specialist military or religious function, the presence of quern fragments may indicate the presence at this date of local areas of arable, which would have needed to be enclosed. This first millennium AD lacuna in the evidence would tend to support the hypothesis that flooding and attendant alluviation may have begun to be a problem during the Roman period.

THE IRON AGE SETTLEMENT

There are very few comparable Buckinghamshire sites of the earlier part of the Iron Age. Evidence from two of the hillforts on the Chiltern

escarpment, Ivinghoe Beacon and Boddington Bank, shows that activity probably began at both sites during the Late Bronze Age and continued into the Early Iron Age (Frere and Cotton 1968; Green 1981; Anon 1965; Thorn and Gething 1996). The evidence for Boddington Bank is based on a single excavation of limited extent, and a number of finds from tree-collapses and the like in the interior. Rather more is known of Ivinghoe Beacon, where the excavations of the 1960s demonstrated the existence of settlement on the hill before the construction of the hill-fort defences. Structures included the post-settings of round-houses and four-post arrays, the latter being found in the lee of the ramparts. Little is known of the relationship of either hill-fort to its hinterland, although the evidence from Ivinghoe Beacon suggests an economy focused upon pastoralism.

Turning from the hill-forts, the evidence for other settlement types of the earlier Iron Age is virtually non-existent in Buckinghamshire. There appears to have been some form of Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age activity at Hartigans (Williams 1993), whilst a single feature at Wavendon Gate contained an apparently 'ritual' deposit which included a perforated dog's canine and a complete human mandible as well as a quantity of Early Iron Age sherds (Williams, Hart and Williams 1996); in both instances the sites yielded considerably more features from the Late Iron Age. The only possibly earlier Iron Age structure from Milton Keynes is the Blue Bridge (Bancroft) roundhouse (Williams and Zeepvat 1994); a large and structurally complex building some 18m in diameter, and standing in isolation, which the excavators have suggested may have housed an entire community. Interpretation and dating of the building are not straightforward, but a late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age date is asserted on the basis of pottery and radiocarbon dates.

The only site in the clay vale itself, other than late Iron Age sites, is that at Woodham, near Waddesdon. Here a humic horizon, part of a sequence of alluvial deposits, was investigated during pipeline work in 1976/77 (Farley, Shackley and Cundill 1984); this contained Middle Iron Age sherds, as well as bone fragments. The relatively unabraded nature of the material suggested settlement in the near vicinity, whilst pollen analysis

indicated that the occupation took place in an open landscape. Little more can be usefully said about the Woodham site, which appears to have been a little later than the main phase 2 and 3 activity at Coldharbour Farm.

Given the absence of suitable parallels within the County, we must look further afield for comparanda. It is probably more instructive to consider Coldharbour Farm in the context of the various excavations made elsewhere within the drainage basin of the Thames, particularly those situated on the floodplain and the river terrace gravels. This is an area which has been the focus of much rescue-led research, and for which the available syntheses are able to draw on a relatively large data-set (eg Hingley and Miles 1984, Lambrick 1992). It would be a mistake, however, to treat such an extensive area as being a single undifferentiated entity, for one of its most obvious characteristics is its variability; it is also important to remember that the degree of chronological precision varies and that many of the generalisations which have been drawn from this body of data involve features which belong to the Middle and Late Iron Age. Nevertheless, the extent of archaeological intervention in that region allows some general trends to be adduced, albeit tentatively.

It has been suggested (Hingley and Miles 1984) that there may be a relationship between settlement types and the landscape zones in which they occur. The floodplain can be seen to contain "lowland shielings"; scattered hut and small enclosure sites such as those at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979) perhaps indicative of the movement of small groups (families?) with their animals on to the riverside pasture during the summer months. Other low-lying sites such as Mingies Ditch (Allen and Robinson 1993) and Dorney (Allen and Welsh 1998) represent longer-term settlement. The increasing use of lower-lying sites throughout the Iron Age reflects an increased exploitation of the landscape and a concomitant increase in population. Four-post structures are most obvious on the lower-lying sites where there is reduced potential for pit storage, but they tend to occur singly and to be associated with individual buildings. This is in contrast to the Coldharbour Farm examples, which seem to match more closely the situation in the Middle Thames of the Late Bronze Age, where at

the Reading Business Park site four-post structures were found not only in close proximity to round-houses but also in a cluster away from the houses (Moore and Jennings 1992).

Further from the floodplain, the evidence tends to show a higher degree of settlement permanence. The occurrence of ditched field systems on the first terrace gravels suggests that the ditches enhanced the long-term viability of settlement close to pasture. Even where ditches do not occur, linear clustering of features (such as at Farmoor, Gravelly Guy and Claydon Pike) may indicate that features such as boundaries or trackways once ran alongside them. Storage pits also show evidence of clustering, as they do at Coldharbour Farm Phase 2, possibly indicative of "utility areas", not necessarily specific to any single activity, where crop processing, low-level metalworking, tool repair and the like took place within the working environment of the fieldscape (cf Deer Park Road, Witney; Walker 1995). Relatively open settlements occur here, as well as rectangular and "banjo" enclosures.

Such a general model as that outlined in the previous two paragraphs, however, is probably too simplistic, and the extent of its relevance to Coldharbour Farm may be questionable. What Coldharbour Farm does seem to demonstrate is the development of an open settlement with a mixed economy. In phase 2 this consists of a mass of pits situated near to watering places along the stream and bounded on the other side by a relatively substantial ditch, perhaps representing an initial stage of exploitation. In phase 3 the settlement becomes integrated into a more clearly defined pattern of land division, and there is evidence for a greater range of structures and activities. The penannular gullies probably indicate the presence of round houses, with the animals corralled, when required, close by in small irregular or sub-circular enclosures. To the south, away from the houses and smaller enclosures, four post structures are clustered, perhaps associated with shallow gullies and relatively insubstantial fences; the clustering, as suggested above, seems to mirror the Middle Thames Late Bronze Age rather than the Upper Thames Iron Age. Water levels do not appear to have provided any form of serious constraint, and the ditches and gullies probably ensured that this was so.

Although density of settlement may have been low, the density of features and structures may indicate that occupation was not seasonal. What we do not know is how permanent the settlement here was. The general impression, taking the Ellen Road data into account, is that the Southcourt Brook valley may have been exploited throughout much of the Iron Age, without longevity of occupation on single sites, and perhaps without any great degree of permanence of landscape layout, but the evidence is probably too slender to develop the hypothesis much further. There is evidence that some, at least, of the ditches and gullies were cleaned, but not that they were cleaned many times. The estimation of site and feature longevity by and large lacks empirical evidence and is something of a long-standing archaeological problem. It has been suggested that at the site of Watkins Farm in the Windrush Valley (Allen 1990) the ditches would have been cleaned out at intervals of about ten years; the calculation need not be applicable here, but may indicate that the two main phases (2 and 3) at Coldharbour Farm need not represent more than a couple of decades.

No single cause can be attributed to the abandonment of the Coldharbour Farm area at the end of phase 3. It is probable that the hiatus occurred before the establishment of a hillfort about 1 km to the east at Aylesbury, as the material assemblage from the Aylesbury site was indicative of a Middle Iron Age date (Farley 1986); however, the hiatus at Coldharbour Farm and the establishment of the Aylesbury hillfort, which presumably reflects development or change in the local settlement hierarchy, may have been responses to the same external stimuli.

When the site is occupied again in the Late, Belgic, Iron Age, the new layout indicated a tighter organisation of the landscape, at a time when local social and political organisation may have become more complex and when other changes, such as the appearance in the area of high status burials, were taking place. The imposition of a regular rectilinear fieldscape is paralleled elsewhere, for example at Lake End Road, Dorney (Foreman 1998), although the initiation of the regular Dorney layout, with field boundaries spaced at intervals of approximately 60m, belongs in the earlier part of the Iron Age; the same may be true of some of the other

cropmark sites of the Middle Thames (Carstairs 1986). Again, it is difficult to estimate the length of this episode of occupation, but it need not have been great. Abandonment had certainly occurred by the Romano-British period, apart from low-level activity near the north of the site. The final abandonment need not be due to flooding or alluviation as much as to sociopolitical change.

ARCHIVE

The archive, including finds, has been deposited at Buckinghamshire County Museum, ref CAS 5625; acc no 1996.89.

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