

## THE EXCAVATION OF FOUR RING-DITCHES IN CENTRAL HAMPSHIRE

(MARC3 Sites R17, Feature 1972; R7; R30 and R363)

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### SUMMARY

This report describes the excavation of four ring-ditches threatened with destruction by the proposed construction of the extension of the M3 motorway. All four sites occurred on the Middle Chalk of Central Hampshire and lay above the 66 m (216 ft) contour. They displayed considerable variations in form, date and probable function. R17 Feature 1972 was an interrupted ring-ditch of Neolithic date, R7 contained a central cremation of 'Wessex' type, six inhumations, an uncertain number of other cremations and had been disturbed in the Early Iron Age. R30 was a small ring-ditch, and R363 was a larger one; neither produced conclusively diagnostic indicators of date or function. A microfiche section is included.

### INTRODUCTION

Ring-ditches—Case's 'more or less circular or oval enclosure-ditches indicated by depressions

in the ground or by marks in crops and soils' (Hamlin and Case 1963, 36)—have been extensively studied and excavated, particularly in the valleys of the major rivers of Britain, where they are often, but not always, the remains of ploughed out round barrows (RCHM 1960). As Smith (1972) implies, little attention has been paid to ring-ditches in the uplands above the river valleys. One of the policies pursued by the M3 Archaeological Rescue Committee has been the investigation of upland ring-ditches, and thus Sites R7, R30 and R363 were excavated in order to shed light on some of the problems of ring-ditches. R17 Feature 1972 was discovered during excavation of a large settlement complex (Fasham 1978 and in prep.).

The four sites with all their associated finds will be described and discussed separately.

### 1. THE WINNALL DOWN RING-DITCH (Site R17, feature 1972)

This monument lay just within the eastern boundary of the City of Winchester, on the south-facing slope of Winnall Down, overlooking a dry valley, at a height of 67 m above sea level (Nat. Grid Ref. SU 498303).

The monument (Figs. 2 and 3) was the earliest element on a site which was occupied mainly during the Iron Age (Fasham 1978 and in prep.). It consisted of a circular series of eight connected scoops, with an external diameter of 16.5 m, which may originally have had three entrances. The largest break, up to 8 m, was on the east, while to the south the gap was no more than 5.5 m. A third gap of 2.25 m may have existed on the west before being closed by a gully

some 70 cm wide and up to 29 cm deep. The small gap of 15 cm to the north-east cannot be regarded as an entrance.

The eight irregular scoops, some with signs of recutting, varied from 2.8 m to 7.5 m long, 0.9 m to 1.8 m wide and 23 cm to 70 cm deep (depth from surface of chalk after machine clearance of the topsoil). At the base of many of the scoops a deposit of cemented chalk silt occurred. The processes and the conditions which formed this material are not clear. Above this layer were the more normal primary and secondary silts of chalk sites. A stable soil horizon occurred irregularly in the upper fill. It was not possible to determine from the fills on which side the bank,

if any, had stood.

The monument was badly damaged by the

pits, post-holes and ditches of the later periods of occupation. There were discrete features both

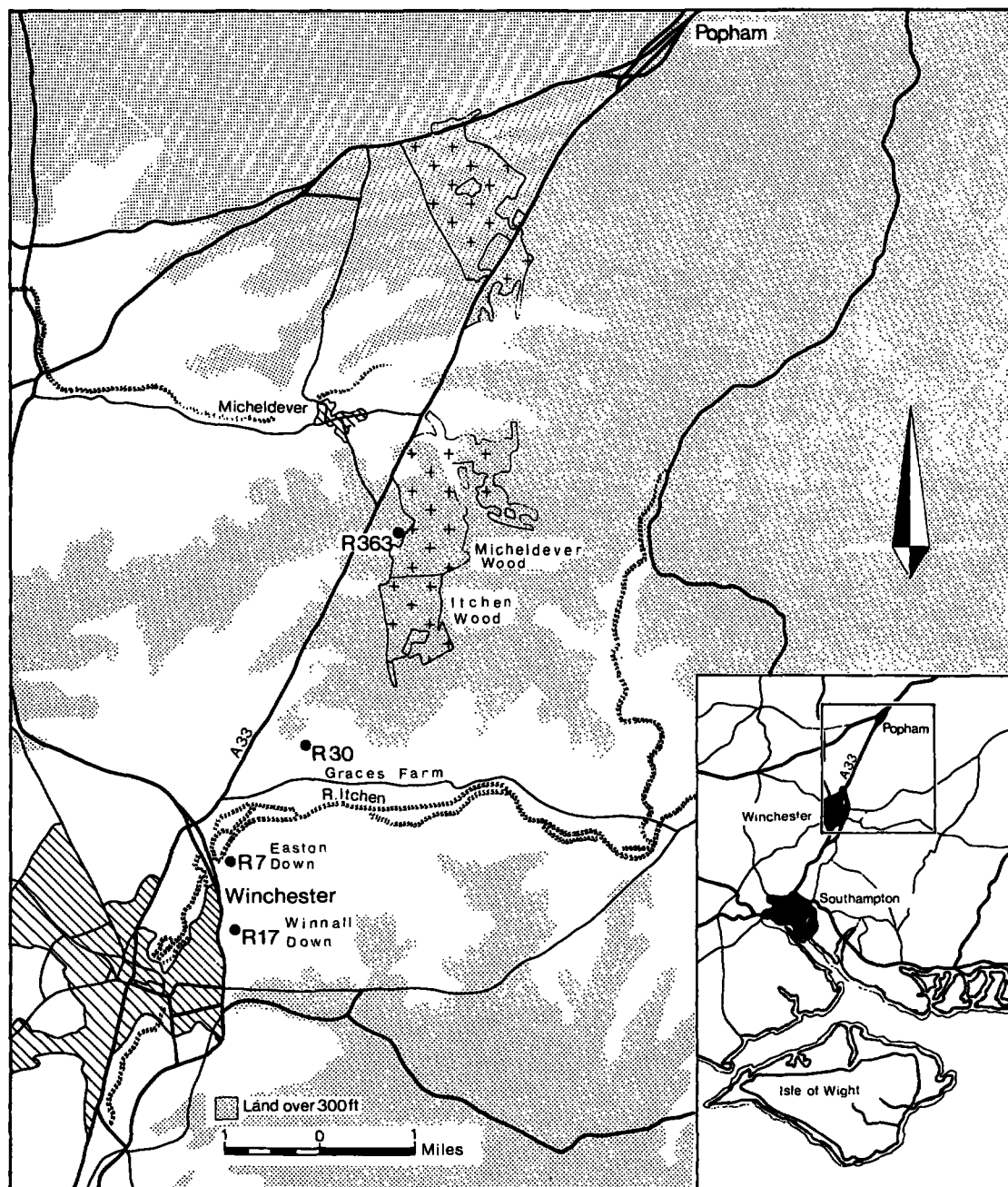


Fig. 1 Location map of the four excavated ring-ditches described in the report.

within the monument (shown on Fig. 2) and outside it (not shown on Fig. 2), but the absence of finds makes it impossible to associate definitely any of the features with the ring-ditch, although on the basic similarity of the fill, Feature 4205 may have been associated.

### Dating

There were four red deer antlers in the basal filling of the scoops (Fig. 4); three were submitted for radiocarbon determinations to Harwell via the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, with the following results:

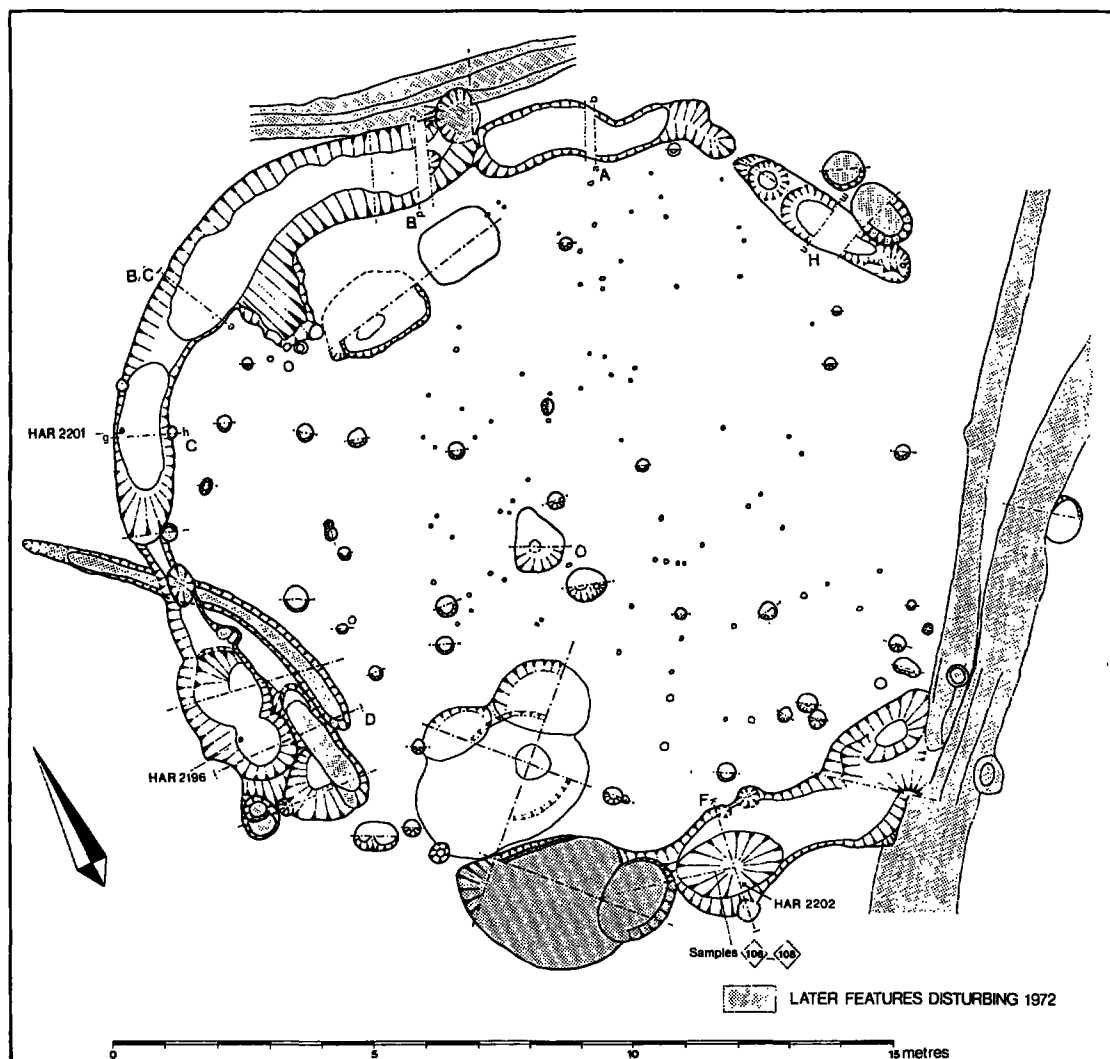


Fig. 2. Winnall Down. Plan of the ring-ditch showing the location of one of the columns of samples analysed for snails and the radiocarbon samples. Features cutting the ring-ditch are stippled.

R17, 1146, HAR-2196:  $4800 \pm 80$ BP; R17, 1379, HAR-2202:  $4680 \pm 90$ BP and R17, 1211, HAR-2201:  $4650 \pm 110$ BP.

There were 33 sherds of Earlier Neolithic pottery well stratified in the ditch, some Iron Age, Romano-British and Medieval pottery

occurred in the upper filling. The date of construction and period of use of this monument lie just within Smith's (1974) Earlier Neolithic.

### Findings

Detailed reports are on microfiche, further details are in the archive.

**Pottery** (Dr I. F. Smith, microfiche): The few diagnostic sherds of Neolithic pottery included parts of at least one shouldered bowl (Fig. 5). This pottery is compatible with the radiocarbon dates.

**Flint artifacts** (microfiche): Four cores and 28 flakes were found, but no tools. The flakes were generally

longer and thinner (Fig. 26) than locally found Bronze Age flakes (Fasham and Ross 1978).

**Animal bones** (J. P. Coy, microfiche): The significant animal bones were antlers from red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and a cervical vertebra and a femur of a dog.

**Land mollusca** (C. Mason, microfiche): There were inadequate numbers of snails for interpretation of the Neolithic environment. Analysis indicates that after the abandonment of the monument and prior to the Iron Age the environment was open, possibly the site lay in a ploughed field, or at the junction of two areas of different land use.

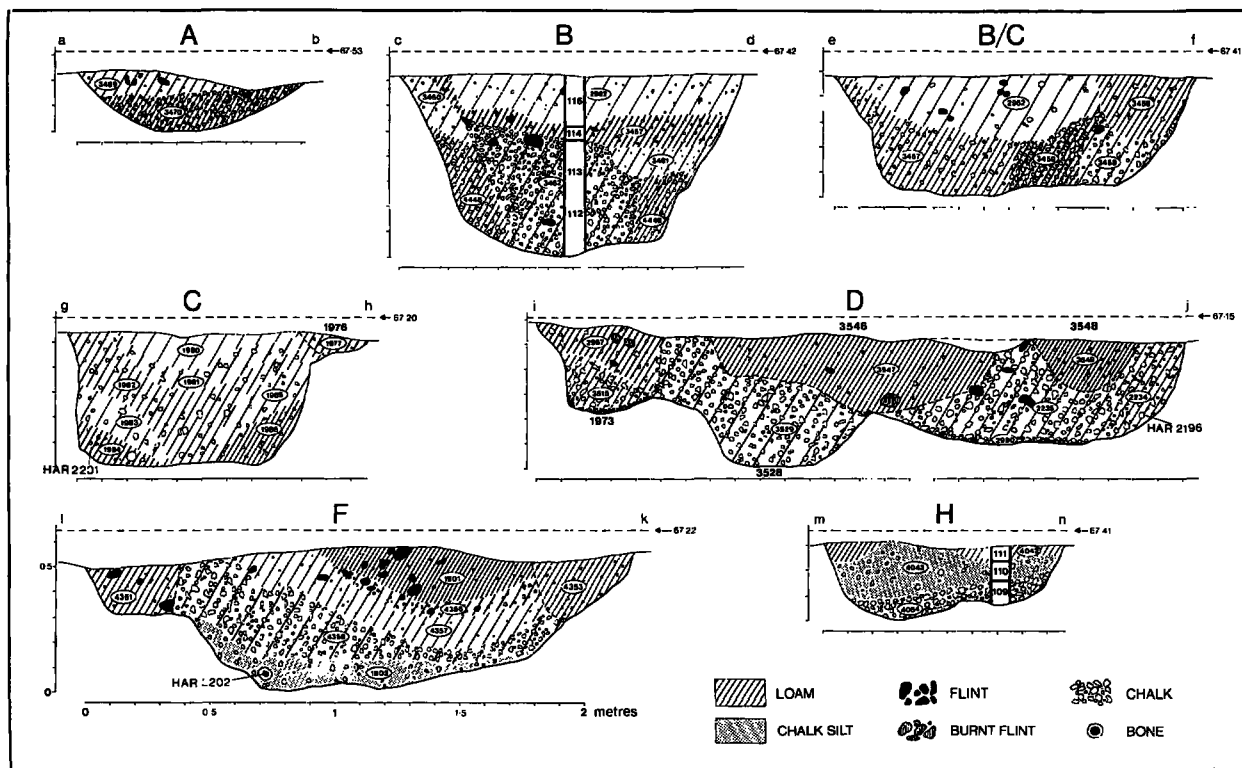


Fig. 3. Winnall Down. Sections of the ring-ditch showing location of radiocarbon dates and of samples analysed for snails.

### DISCUSSION

Feature 1972 on Winnall Down is the first site in Hampshire, not a long barrow, pit or house, to be reliably dated to the Neolithic, although a possible late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age

ritual site has been recorded on Burntwood Farm, Itchen Valley (Fasham 1980). The absence of associated features, both internal and external, means that functional interpretation is largely speculative. The monument is half a millennium too early to be a henge, and in any case

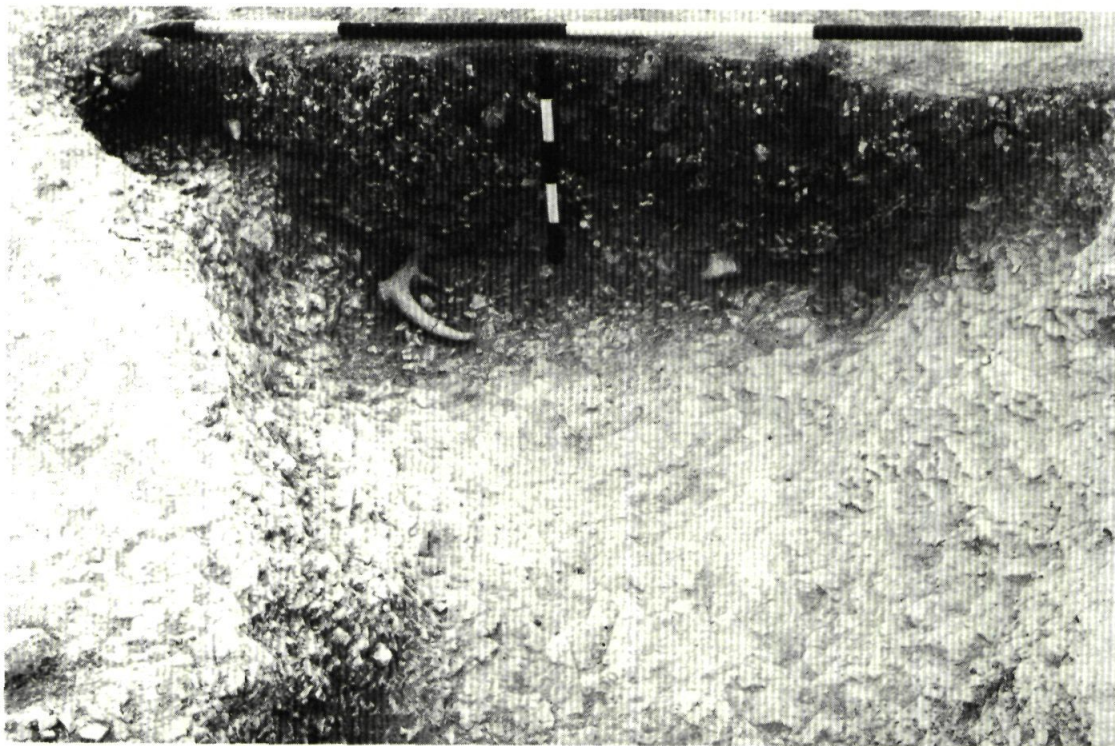


Fig. 4. Winnall Down. Antler in bottom of Neolithic ditch. This antler produced a radiocarbon date of  $4690 \pm 90$ BP (HAR-2202). Scale: 2 m and 20 cm. Photo: P. J. Fasham.

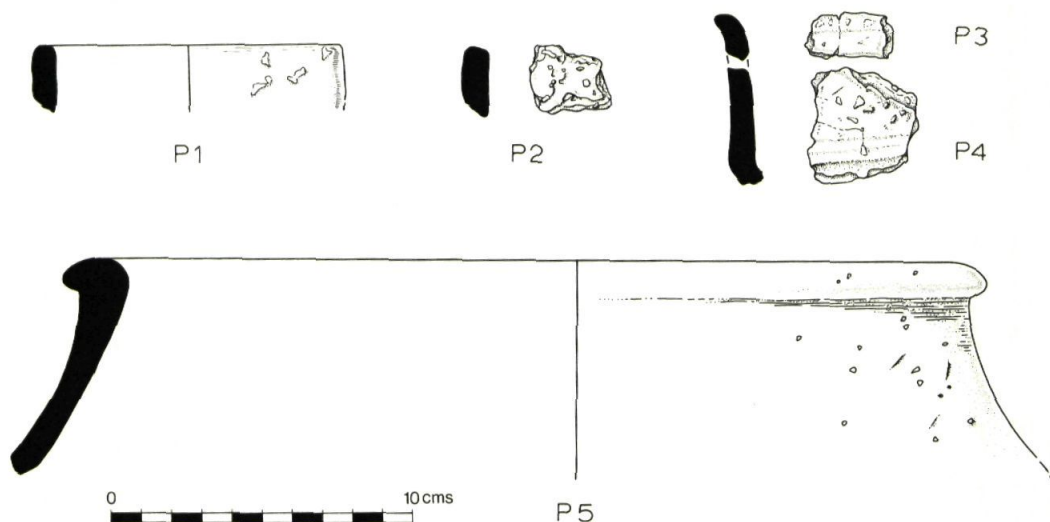


Fig. 5. Winnall Down. Pottery from the ring-ditch. Neolithic: P1-P4; probable Iron Age: P5 Scale:  $\frac{1}{4}$ .

the stratigraphy of the ditch-fill is inadequate to determine whether the bank, if any, was inside or outside the ditch. Kinnes (1976) suggested that sites of this nature could have domestic, ritual or mortuary uses. The paucity of finds seems to suggest that a mortuary or ritual purpose for the site is more reasonable than a domestic use. Conversely, for a ritual or mortuary function other types of finds, particularly fragments of disarticulated skeletons, might have been expected in the fill of the ditch.

The monument lies on chalk overlooking a river valley, unlike other loosely comparable sites, such as Aldwinckle (Jackson 1976), Burford (Oswald 1969) and one of the sites at Dorchester-on-Thames (Atkinson *et al.* 1951) which are situated on the valley gravels.

#### *Acknowledgements*

The excavation of the site, by kind permission of Mr R. Clarke, was supervised mainly by Misses A. A. Borrow and J. V. Nunn.

## 2. THE EASTON DOWN RING-DITCH

(Site R7)

Two kilometres north-east of Winchester the river Itchen changes direction from east-west to north-south. The Easton Down ring-ditch (SU 495313) was situated on the inside, south-east, of this bend at a height of 67 m above sea level dominating the Itchen valley north of Winchester (Fig. 1). The circular soil mark was clearly visible both on aerial photographs (Fig. 6) and from ground level. Immediately north was a distinct linear mark, and other possible features lay to the east. There was a 1:11 slope from north-east to south-west across the site.

The thin topsoil was removed mechanically by a Hymac and a J.C.B. Sufficient area was stripped to examine the linear mark to the north, and trenches were cut to the east to investigate the possible features in that area. There were none. All features visible after the topsoil had been stripped were excavated by hand. Only a limited time was available in the autumn of 1974, and with the heavy rainfall between the harvest and autumn ploughing the excavation of the ditch itself was restricted to a minimum. Eight 1 m wide trenches, numbered 1–8, were excavated at regular intervals around the ditch, two were joined so that a total of 16 m length, 17%, of the ditch was excavated.

Three principal periods of activity were distinguished:

- Period 1.* Features earlier than the ring-ditch,
- Period 2.* Ring-ditch and associated features,
- Period 3.* Features later than the ring-ditch.

### 1. FEATURES EARLIER THAN THE RING-DITCH

Four features (Fig. 27) were cut by the ring-ditch. Features 11, 12 and 59 were circular or oval pits with steeply sloping sides and measured between 30 and 50 cm deep and from 0.5 to 1.3 m across. F 12 contained six fragments of animal bone, including two of sheep/goat, F 13 was a rectangular pit 90 by 50 cm and only 15 cm deep.

Two other features might also be earlier than the ring-ditch: for F 3, the clean fill and absence of finds suggest that it was not associated with the Iron Age activity, while F 33 may be dated by the sherd of Late Neolithic Mortlake ware (Fig. 14, 1) from it.

Single sherds of Neolithic pottery were also found in Feature 24, a later burial, and a modern post-hole, 65.

*Features 4, 5 and 6*, circular pits with steep or vertical sides, lay to the north of the ring-ditch. There was no stratigraphic relationship between them or the ditch, although they were cut by the early Iron Age linear depression. They were similar in shape and filling, their diameters ranged from 0.75 m to 1.25 m and depths from 33 cm to 53 cm. Feature 5 contained an early Bell Beaker (Fig. 14, 5), a fragment of baked clay (possibly a loom weight), 24 sheep-size bone fragments, a tibia from a young ox and two flint flakes, but the few other sherds of pottery from features 4 and 6 resemble the Iron Age ware. There were two flint flakes in feature 4 also. The animal bone from features 4 and 6 included



Fig. 6. Easton Down, aerial photograph of the ring ditch before excavation, also showing Iron Age feature 2 above it, and traces of 'Celtic' fields. The Winchester by-pass (A33) is in the bottom left hand corner.

cattle and fragments of both cattle- and sheep-size bone. The common toad, *Bufo bufo*, was represented by a single tibio-fibula in feature 6. There was a terminal phalange of an infant in feature 4. Although only feature 5 is of Beaker date the similarity of the three pits suggests contemporaneity.

## 2. THE RING DITCH AND ASSOCIATED FEATURES

The flat bottomed ring-ditch (Fig. 7, feature 1) had originally almost vertical sides, although the upper parts of these had weathered back considerably (sections, Fig. 9). Its internal diameter was 27.5 m, its external 32.5 m, its basal width



ranged from 1.29 to 1.44 m, but its surface width was more variable, from 2.95 to 4.22 m. It was from 1.12–1.38 m deep from the surface of the chalk. The lower 0.7 m was filled by loose rubbly chalk, evidently a rapid primary fill, the few finds from which included two plain body sherds, a decorated sherd probably of Late Neolithic Peterborough ware and a few fragments of cattle and sheep/goat bone.

The ditch volume as excavated was about 159 m<sup>3</sup>, and allowing for weathering and the existence of a Bronze Age topsoil, something of the order of 360 tonnes of chalk must have been excavated to form the ditch.

Ash and charcoal from a 15 cm thick deposit on the top of the primary fill in Trench 8 were submitted via the Ancient Monuments Laboratory to Harwell, giving a radiocarbon date of 3070±120 BP (HAR-1040). A second and anomalous radiocarbon date, 32,460±1100 BP (HAR-1039) came from burnt material higher in the ditch in Trench 4.

*The central cremation burial* (Human bones by Justine Bayley)

Feature 86 (Fig. 10), a subrectangular pit 1.75 by 1.05 m by 20 cm deep, with steeply sloping sides and a fairly flat bottom, big enough to take

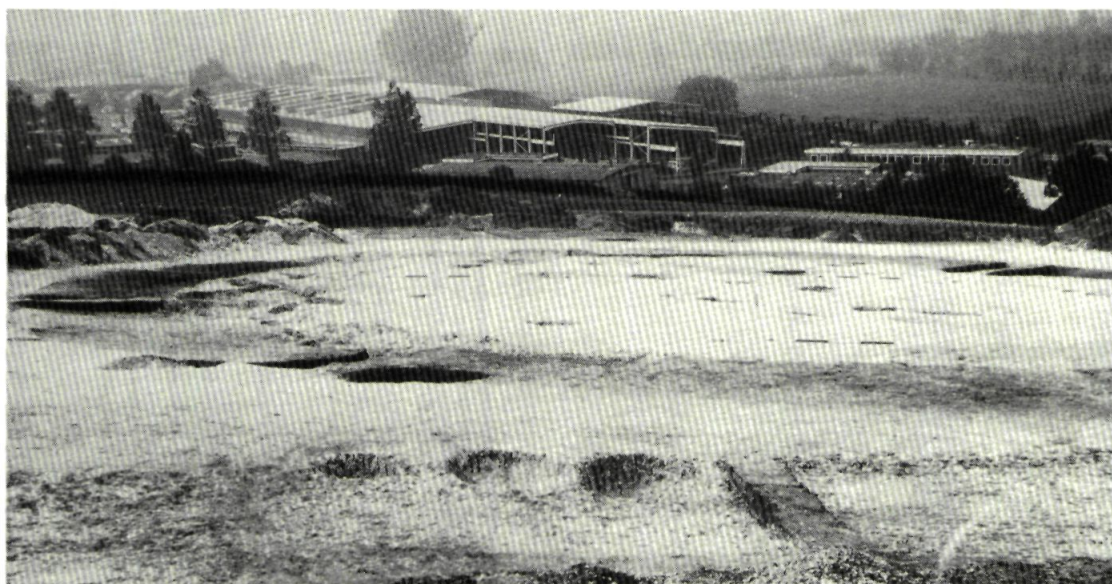


Fig. 8. Easton Down. General view of the site from the north-east. Feature 2 can be seen in the foreground cutting pits 4, 5 and 6. The Iron Age features are clearly visible inside the ring-ditch. Scale: 2 m. Photo: P. J. Fasham.

an inhumed corpse, lay almost at the centre of the ring-ditch. On the bottom of it were a bronze knife-dagger (Fig. 12) and a pile of cremated bones, the remains of a mature adult. Elsewhere in the fill of the pit were two fragments of bronze rod and three amber beads (Fig. 12). There were 672 gm of human bone in small fragments, the largest being only a few centimetres long.

#### *Other cremations*

Four small oval/circular pits, Nos. 36, 37, 38

and 39, 3.5 m south-west of the central cremation, were filled with dark-brown loam (Fig. 10). Pit 37, 20 cm deep, was the only one to exceed 10 cm depth; a carbonized tuber of the onion couch, *A. tuberosum* (Gilib) Schultz, was recovered from its fill. They contained the following quantities of burnt bone:

No. 36—9 gm of probably human bone;

No. 37—360 gm of human bone, mainly long bone fragments, but also skull, extremities and ribs;

No. 38—6 gm of tiny fragments of animal or human bone;

No. 39—31 gm of mainly long bones, probably human.

The only positively identified human bone came from the deeper pit, No. 37.

Burnt human skull and long bone fragments

were recovered from the early Iron Age scoops, features 92 and 102. Six other early Iron Age pits, Nos. 19, 48, 85, 89, 109 and 114, produced possible burnt human bone or small, burnt, indeterminate bone fragments, i.e. human or animal. The amounts were small, weighing from 1 to 46 gm. Other fragments of burnt bone

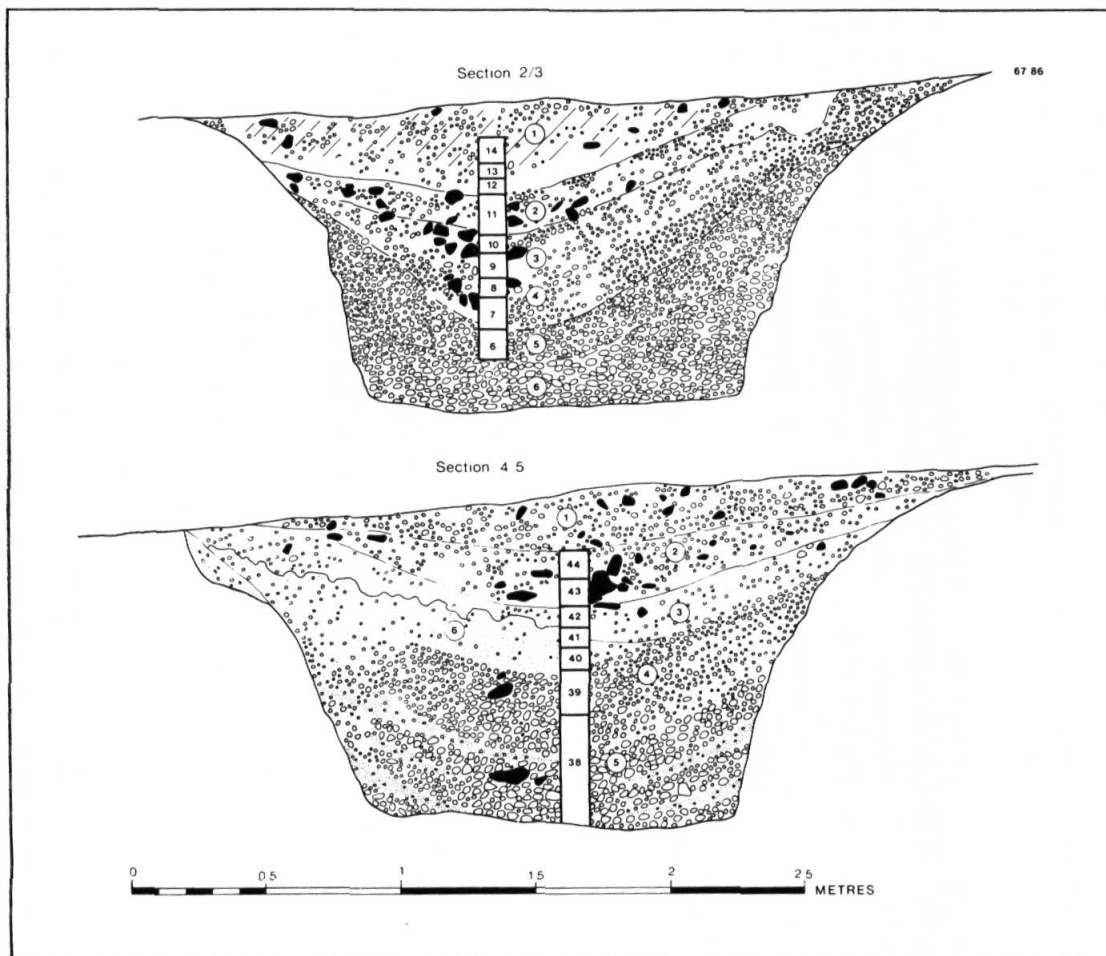


Fig. 9. Easton Down. Sections of the ring-ditch showing the location of snail samples.

occurred in layers 1 and 3 in Trench 1 of the ring-ditch, in features 4 and 54 and in modern post-holes, features 65 and 68.

#### *The inhumations (Fig. 11)*

*Feature 24* was a flat-bottomed, oval grave with vertical sides, 1.15 m by 0.75 m and 25 cm deep. The skeleton lay on its back, legs drawn up and to the right, so that ploughing had dispersed the

patella and smashed the distal end of the femur and the proximal end of the tibia in both legs. The left arm lay across the chest and the right hand on the right pelvis. About half the upper body was buried beneath a deposit of flints, which extended from the pelvis to the right shoulder. The bones were those of a female aged 25–35. The skeleton was submitted to Harwell and produced a radiocarbon determination of  $3130 \pm 70$ BP (HAR-1023). A small Neolithic sherd, already mentioned, was the only artifact. *Feature 26*, a flat-bottomed, vertical-sided grave

of irregular outline, measured 0.9 m by 0.7 m and 45 cm deep. It was so small that the skeleton had been tightly crouched; the knees almost touched the forehead, the head pushed to the right. The right arm lay across the abdomen and the left between the legs. Flint nodules covered the whole of the body except the skull. The remains were those of a juvenile, possibly female, aged 14–17. The bones were submitted to Harwell and produced a radiocarbon determination of  $3160 \pm 70$ BP (HAR-3344). There were no other finds.

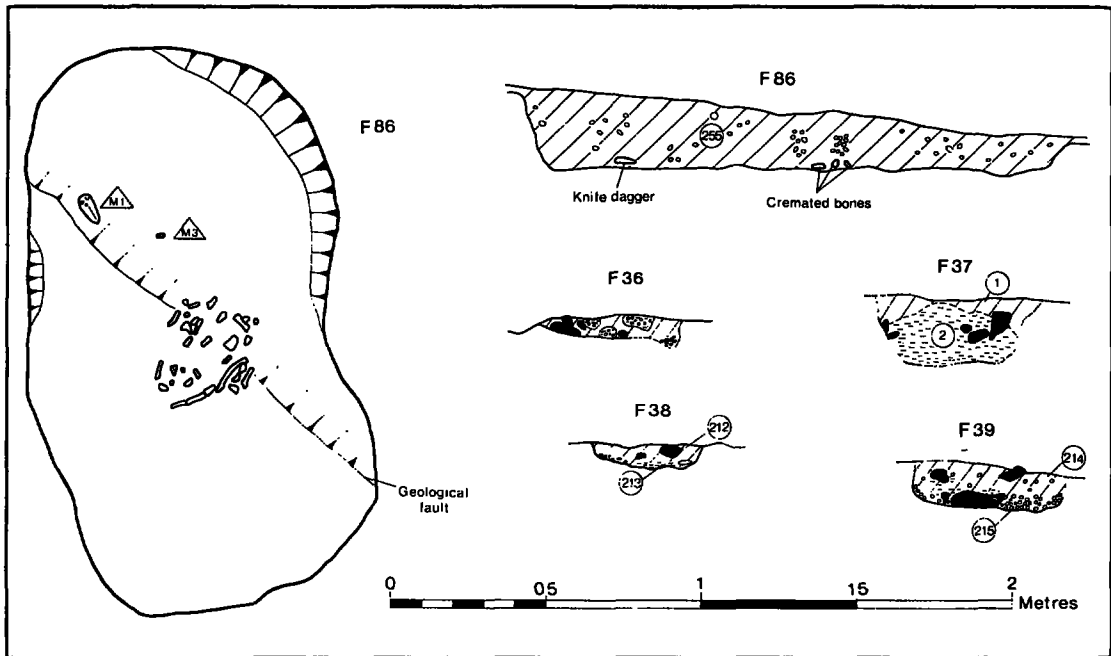


Fig. 10. Easton Down. Plan and section of the central cremation, feature 86. Sections of the four possible cremations, features 36, 37, 38, 39.

*Feature 27* was an oval grave with a flat bottom and vertical sides, 1.15 m by 0.75 m and 40 cm deep. The skeleton was crouched with head and knees to the right. The left hand was on the right upper arm, and the right arm crossed the left, so that the hand lay on the right chest. There was no deposit of flints in the upper fill. The well-preserved bones were from a female aged 17–25. There were no other finds.

*Feature 43*, an oval flat-bottomed grave with

vertical sides, measured 1.35 m by 0.9 m and 40 cm deep. The flexed skeleton was on its right side with its right upper arm lying under the shoulders, so that the right upper arm lay between the humerus and the radius and ulna of the bent left arm. At least 120 medium/large-sized flint nodules sealed the entire grave. The bones were of a female aged 17–25. A radiocarbon determination of  $3080 \pm 80$ BP (HAR-3417) was provided by Harwell. There were no other

finds.

*Features 30 and 95*—two inhumations which were discovered on the surface of the chalk. If they had originally been buried in a chalk-cut grave there was no longer any evidence for it. They had been badly damaged by ploughing, indeed, the lower half of 95 was missing (Fig. 11). Feature 30 was the remains of a young adult, probably female and probably aged 20–30. Feature 95 was the remains of a 25–35 year old, possibly a male.

### 3. FEATURES LATER THAN THE RING-DITCH

#### *Early Iron Age*

The early Iron Age features fell into two groups: a long, shallow depression, and irregular pits and scoops associated with rubbish deposits in the upper fill of the ditch.

*The linear depression, Feature 2* (Figs. 7, 8 & 27). This feature, running east-west on the north of the ring-ditch, was 39 m long, up to 4.25 m wide and 26 cm deep. The sides and ends sloped gently into the chalk. Within the fill of brown loam with chalk lumps was a considerable volume of domestic refuse: 770 sherds of pottery weighing over 5 kg, over 3 kg of animal bone, two loomweight fragments and a spindle whorl. The feature sealed a shallow scoop, feature 117, 15 cm deep and 0.7 m diameter, as well as the Beaker pit 5 and the probably associated pits 4 and 6.

*Irregular pits and scoops.* These features occurred mainly on the east side of the site in an arc just inside the ring-ditch. The adjacent upper fill of the ditch contained much material associated with the scoops. Others were on the south-west side of the site. Typical sections of some of these 64 features are shown in Fig. 28.

In order to determine function the morphology of the features was studied, but this line of enquiry proved fruitless because of the irregularity of the features and the erosion of the chalk. Manual analysis of different attributes relating to fill and contents again was of little value. Eventually 25 of the features were selected on the basis of their attributes and archaeological importance for analysis by non-metric multi-

dimensional scaling (Kruskal 1964 a and b). However, the imprecise nature of the available data meant that little significant ordering emerged (Denham archive). The considerable amount of pottery, animal bone and baked clay objects, including fragments of loomweights and spindle whorls, suggests that these features were contemporary both one with another and with feature 2. The pottery suggests a date in the late Bronze Age—early Iron Age.

Flotation of samples from the upper layer of the ditch in Trench 3, from features 2 and 84, the latter a scoop, produced an indeterminate species of barley and vetch, which may relate to Iron Age agricultural activities in the adjacent area (Murphy archive).

#### *Other features later than the ring-ditch*

Features 21, 44 and 45 were modern rubbish pits. The group of post-holes to the south of the site were also modern. Residual material was found in many of these features.

#### *Finds—from the central cremation (Fig. 12)*

M1. Bronze knife-dagger (by A. M. ApSimon). The knife-dagger has present dimensions of about 90 mm length, 39 mm width and maximum thickness 3 mm. Edges corroded and some metal lost from tip. Essentially triangular with convex curved point. Midrib broad, triangular, 18 mm wide at hilt, slightly convex in section, curves in a little towards the point. Edge of midrib shows concave with slight groove probably sharpened by tooling. Midrib thins at butt end which is slightly lobed in outline. Two rivets 7–8 mm long made from squarish section bronze rod 3.5 mm thick, ends expanded by hammering to circular shape. Position of hilt marked by line of differential corrosion about 15 mm from butt end. Hilt probably curved gently without the semicircular indentation common on daggers.

It is similar to a considerable number found in graves in southern central England, belonging mainly to the later part of the Early Bronze Age, but probably continuing into the early Middle Bronze Age. Such knives may occur with large bronze daggers but are commonly found in cremation graves, sometimes with Collared Urns, sometimes without pottery. Knives of this kind were probably worn by women as well as men.

Milliprobe analysis detected copper and tin in the blade, but one of the rivets had a small amount of lead

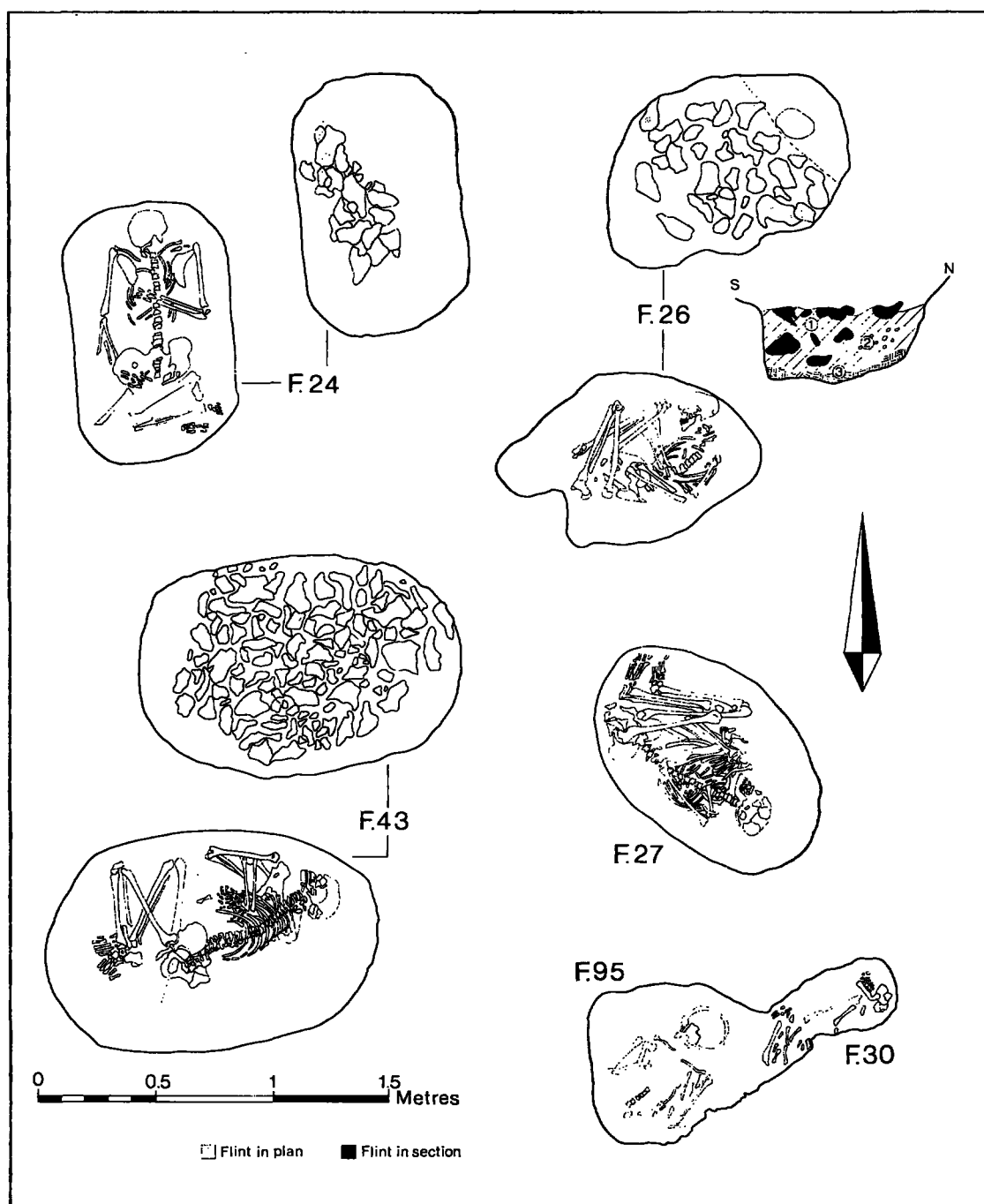


Fig. 11. Easton Down. The inhumation burials.

also present (Bayley archive).

M2. Spiral-twisted bronze rod, 19.8 mm long tapering from 1.9 mm to 1.3 mm in thickness.

M3. Spiral-twisted bronze rod, 11.25 cm long, 1.1 mm thick and apparently of square section.

Dr S. J. Shennan reports that the amber beads have a fairly thick weathering crust, and their condition is fairly typical of others from such contexts.

S1. Amber bead, wt 0.15 gm, diameter 6.75 mm, thickness 4.65 mm, diameter of perforation 1.4 mm.

S2. Amber bead, wt 0.14 gm, diameter 7.1 mm, thickness 4.5 mm, diameter of perforation 1.4 mm.

S3. Amber bead, wt 0.08 gm, diameter 5.8 mm, thickness 3.95 mm, diameter of perforation 1.4 mm.

#### Other Finds—Metal (Fig. 13)

M4. Fragment of square-sectioned moulded bronze rod, 12.8 mm by 1.9 mm in section. Feature 2.

M5. Two-looped bronze fastener, 130 mm long, 1 mm thick. Possibly modern. Feature 2.

— Slag, a piece of the type normally associated with iron-working. It is not clear whether this fairly dense lump was from a smelting or smithing process. Ring-ditch, feature 1, trench 3, layer 1.

#### Pottery (by J. M. Ross, microfiche)

The pottery was analysed by fabric and form and almost thirty fabrics were identified. The fabric descriptions relate to all four ring-ditches. Flint gritted locally produced fabrics dominated the assemblage.

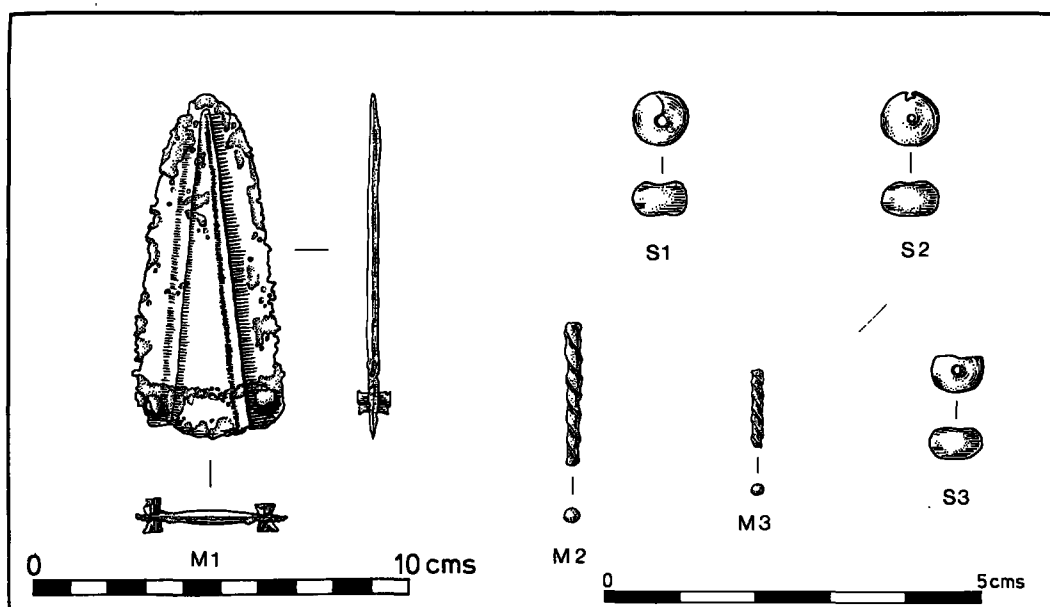


Fig. 12. Easton Down. Finds from the central cremation. Bronze M1–M3; amber S1–S3. Scales: M1— $\frac{1}{2}$ ; the rest— $\frac{1}{4}$ .

Late Neolithic, Beaker and later Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery was collected.

*Neolithic and Bronze Age* (Fig. 14). The Neolithic pottery adds to the small assemblage from sites in central Hampshire (Fasham 1979; 1980). Little can be said of the two possible Bronze Age sherds from the ring-ditch. The Bell Beaker (P5) should belong to Clark's early group typified by coarse wares with non-plastic fingernail and fingertip decoration (Clark 1970) which unlike the decorated fine ware Beakers, are rarely put in graves. A date earlier than about

3600 BP is likely for such a Beaker which should be substantially older than the primary cremation.

*Late Bronze Age—Early Iron Age* (Figs. 14–16). The bulk of the assemblage is similar to the Kimmeridge-Caburn and West Harling–Staple Howe groups (Cunliffe 1978, 36). The scarcity of furrowed bowls is significant when the assemblage is compared to Winklesbury (Smith 1977) where there were at least six examples. Furrowed bowls and haematite-coated cordoned bowls of the later All Cannings Cross–Meon Hill group have been found 900 m away on

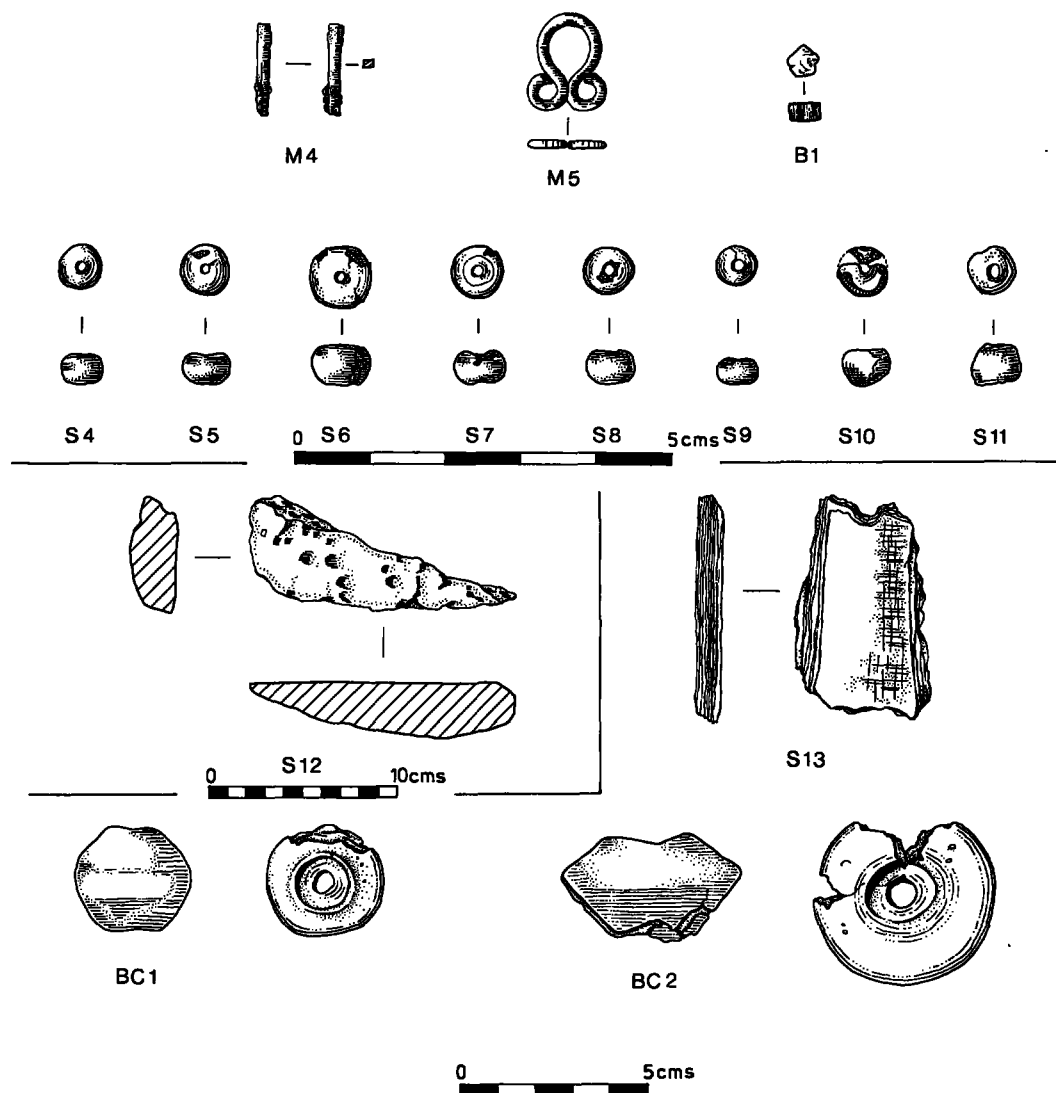


Fig. 13. Easton Down. Finds of bronze, bone (?), stone and baked clay. Bronze M4-M5; ?bone B1; amber S4-S10; chalk S11; greensand S12; slate S13; baked clay BC1-BC2. Scales: all  $\frac{1}{2}$ , except S12- $\frac{1}{4}$ , S13 and BC1-BC2- $\frac{1}{4}$ .

Winnall Down (Fasham in prep.) and the former type in Winchester (Cunliffe 1964, 55). Although right on the eastern edge of the distribution of cordoned haematite bowls their absence from an assemblage of 2,500 sherds is probably a significant reflection of chronology rather than site function. If it is accepted that the absence of the later All Cannings Cross-Meon Hill material is chronological then the obvious

inference for the Easton Down pottery is that it is earlier. Radiocarbon dates for haematite-coated vessels have been obtained from Winnall Down; they are  $2540 \pm 90$ BP (HAR-2251) from immediately below a deposit containing haematite sherds and sealing a tripartite jar, and  $2560 \pm 80$ BP (HAR-2653) for a deposit sealing haematite sherds. Thus a date in the seventh or eighth centuries BC for Easton Down

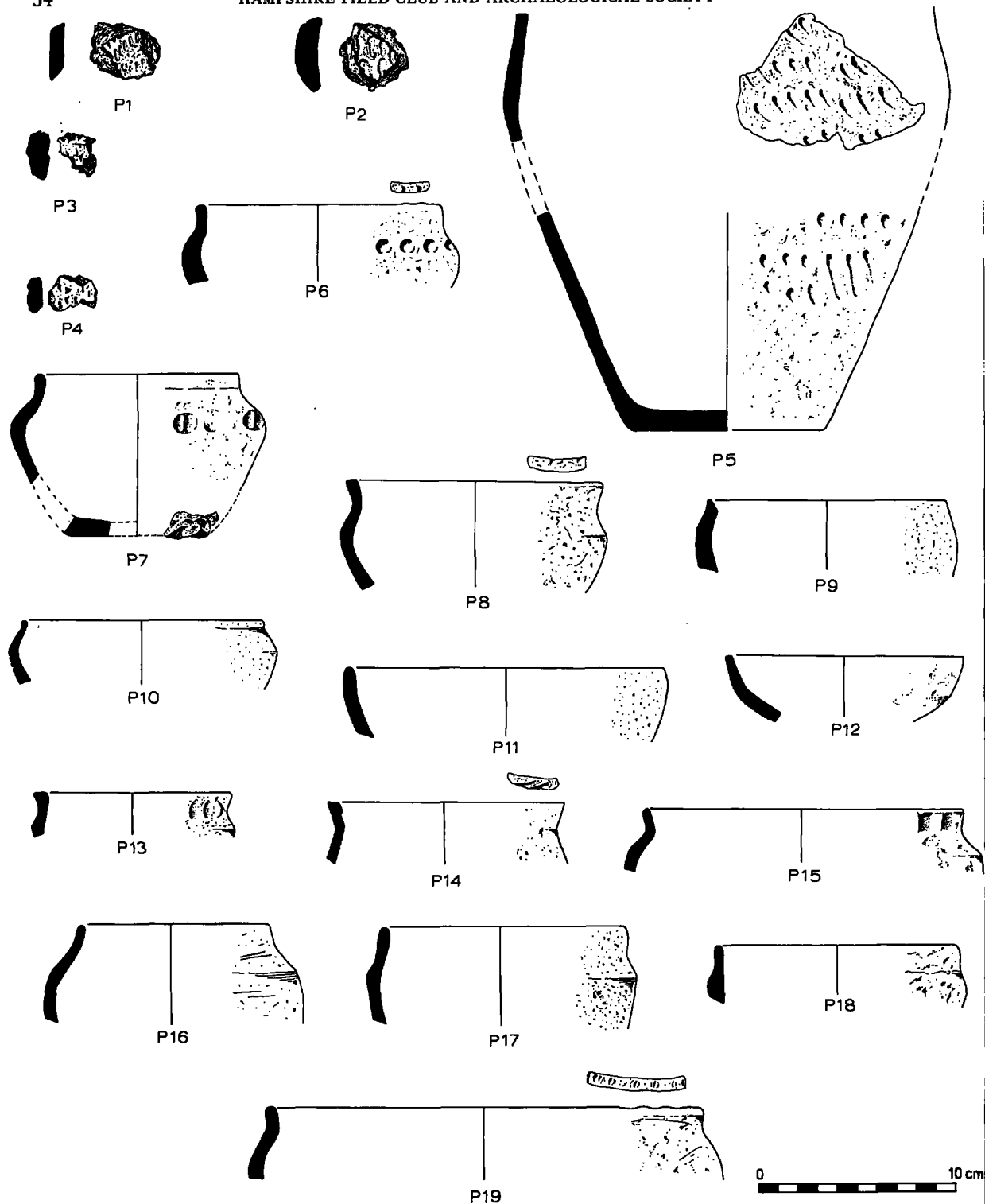


Fig. 14. Easton Down. Pottery. Neolithic: P1-P4; Beaker: P5; late Bronze Age-early Iron Age: P6-P19.  
Scale:  $\frac{1}{4}$ .

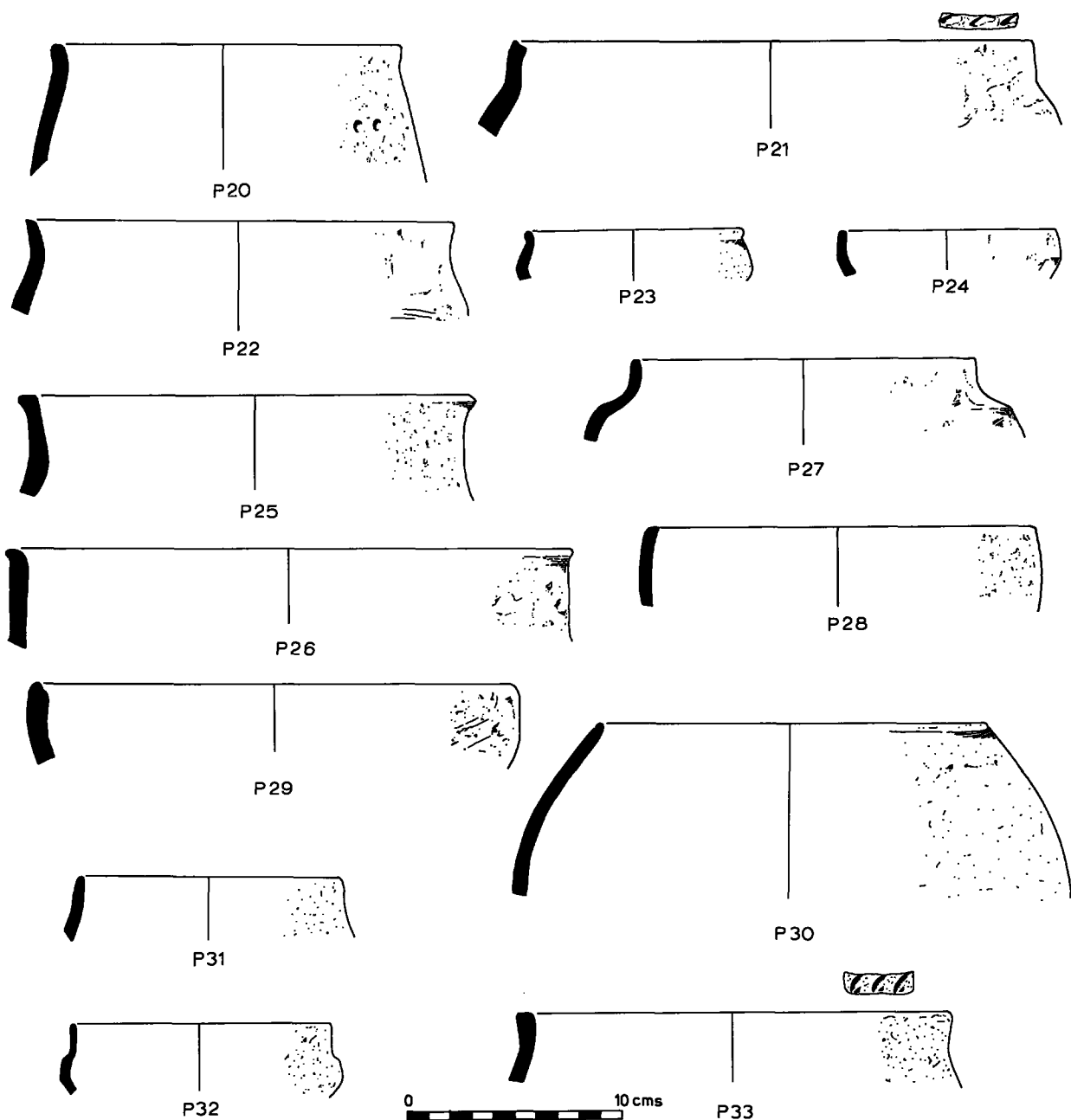


Fig. 15. Easton Down. Late Bronze Age-early Iron Age pottery. Scale:  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

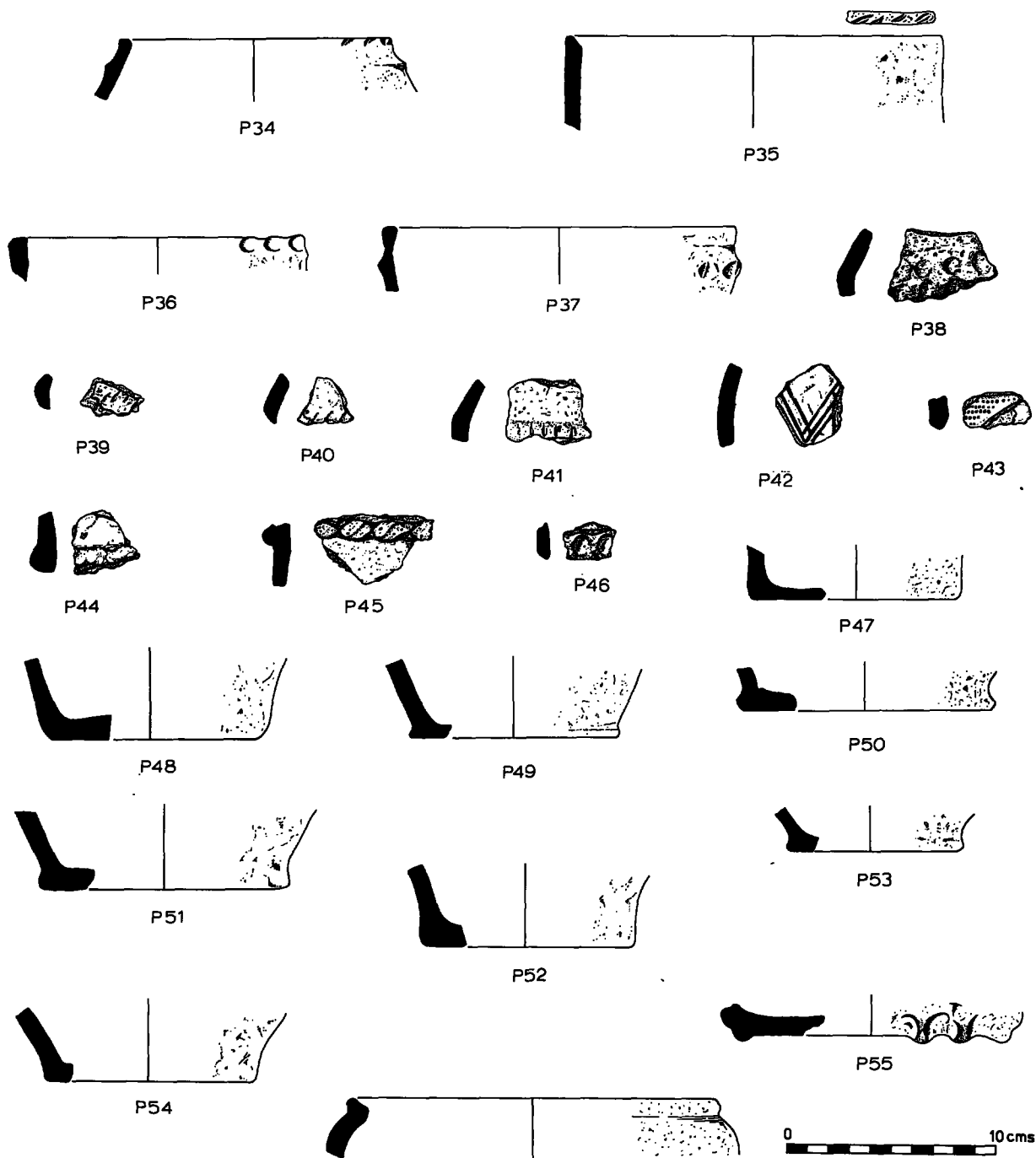


Fig. 16. Easton Down. Pottery. Late Bronze Age-early Iron Age: P34-P55. Late Iron Age: P56. Scale:  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

would be acceptable on local evidence. The finger-impressed cordons could be examples of 'the re-emergence of plastic ornamentation on early Iron Age coarse wares' (Barrett 1976, 295) and not the end of Cunliffe's Ultimate Deverel-Rimbury (Cunliffe 1978, 32).

The closest affinities of the Easton Down pottery are with the early material from Winklebury (Smith 1977), Balksbury (Wainwright 1969) and with the Phase 1A pottery from Ructstall's Hill, (Oliver and Applin 1979). In Surrey most of the elements of the assemblage are represented in pottery from the early land surface at Brooklands which Close-Brooks (1977, 37-40) dated to the sixth century BC. Barrett (1978, 278) has suggested that Brooklands and other assemblages probably date from the eighth to sixth centuries BC. This is not the place to review Barrett's arguments for the dating of these assemblages but the correlation between the local evidence, outlined above and the external evidence, supports a date for the Easton Down pottery in the eighth or seventh centuries BC. However there are at least two of Barrett's post-Deverel Rimbury types present, including P29, which might suggest a date in the ninth century.

*Roman and post-Roman.* The few diagnostic sherds of Roman pottery and the fragment of burnished bead rim bowl indicate minimal later activity and intrusion on the site.

*Amber* (by S. J. Shennan, microfiche) (Fig. 13).

As well as the amber beads in the central grave, F 86, there were six amber beads and two fragments from a seventh in Feature 2. It is almost certain that these were Bronze Age beads and that their occurrence in this feature was due to disturbance in the Iron Age.

*Flint* (microfiche, Fig. 29)

There were 556 pieces of worked flint. Analysis of the later Bronze Age-early Iron Age flakes (ie. the assemblage stratigraphically later than HAR-1040) showed that the flakes tended to be broader and larger than those from Neolithic or earlier Bronze Age assemblages but with a greater variation in shape (cf. Fasham and Ross 1978).

*Other Stone Objects* (microfiche) included a chalk bead from feature 2 (Fig. 13 S11) and 12 pieces of green-sand one of which was from a saddle quern (Fig. 13, S12).

Baked clay objects (microfiche) included two spindle whorls (Fig. 13) BC1 and BC2) and four possible fragments of loomweights.

*Human Bones* (J. Bayley, microfiche)

It was not possible to assess age or sex of the

remains in the central cremation, F86. The six inhumations were all under 35 years of age: F24 was a female aged 25-35; F26, possibly female, was aged 14-17; F27 was a 1.66 m tall female aged 17-25; F43 was a 1.63 m tall female aged 17-25; F30 was probably a female aged 20-30; and F95 was possibly male aged 25-35.

*Animal Bones* (J. P. Coy, microfiche)

There were few diagnostic animal bones in the Bronze Age ring-ditch and associated features.

The majority of the early Iron Age bones were from the top of the ring-ditch and feature 2. There were concentrations of cattle bones in parts of the top of the ring-ditch. Although there was a fairly wide variation in size it was within the usual range for Wessex Iron Age cattle. There were no diagnostic goat bones and it is assumed that the ovicaprid bones were of sheep, although such bones were scarce in these deposits. The pig bones were small and it is suggested that they were from domestic animals. There were four frog bones, *Rana* sp.

*Land Snails* (by Carol Mason, microfiche)

The majority of species in feature 33 were open-country types, of which *Vallonia excentrica* and *Helicella itala* were the most abundant. An open dry grassland is perhaps suggested, possibly kept short by grazing. The large population of *Pomatias elegans* in this sample is misleading, since the majority of the shells were battered apices and should be seen as a relic of a former population. The dominant species in feature 13 were *Pupilla muscorum*, *Vallonia costata* and *Helicella itala*. This was, and is, a typical combination of species found in a grassland habitat where there was some open ground bare of vegetation. Feature 12 was close geographically to feature 13, but exhibited a fauna more closely allied to that found in the lower levels of the ring-ditch. *Carychium tridentatum* and *Vallonia costata* dominated the fauna, suggesting damp, shaded conditions as in zone 1 of 2/3 and zone 2 of 4/5.

*The ring-ditch* (Figs. 30, 31). Three faunal zones were evident in both section 2/3 and 4/5. They differ only in detail.

Zone 1, section 4/5, sample 38, layer 5: This sample contained only 57 snails, taken from the 40 cm deep layer 5, which consisted of chalk rubble with little humic content. A hostile environment for molluscs existed during the formation of this layer. Zone 1, section 2/3, and zone 2, section 4/5 had very similar faunas. A high percentage of shade-loving species characterised these zones, up to 68% in 2/3 and half of the assemblage in 4/5. *Vitrea contracta* formed 23% of the fauna in zone 2 of 4/5. *Carychium tridentatum* was

well-represented in both sections (30% in 2/3, 24% in 4/5), indicating a relatively undisturbed habitat with moist, shaded refuges. Another characteristic of both zones was the occurrence of *Vallonia costata* at 10% to 20% in 2/3 and 17% to 29% in 4/5. This species is usually associated with open, dry habitats and would seem to be environmentally irreconcilable with the occurrence of *Carychium*. As has been pointed out by Evans (1972, 337) *V. costata* is particularly favoured by the moist conditions prevailing in ditch habitats and may also form a significant element of the fauna of open woodland. It is more tolerant of shaded conditions than its congener *V. excentrica* which was present in very small numbers.

The mixed fauna found in zone 1 of 2/3 and zone 2 of 4/5 could be indicative of open woodland. Alternatively, because the samples were taken from a ditch, where a micro-environment tends to be created, the area could have been mostly open ground, with a stable soil surface, continuous mixed vegetation and undisturbed by grazing or cultivation.

Zone 2, section 2/3, and zone 3, section 4/5: A decrease in the abundance of shade-loving species characterised these zones, in 2/3 to 12% (sample 11) and in 4/5 to 5% (sample 44). Open-country species increased to 74% in 2/3 (sample 11) and to 79% in 4/5 (sample 44). *Vallonia costata* was the first of the open-country species to increase, its ability to colonise the previous habitat giving it an advantage, initially, over the other open-country species. By the top of the zones thriving colonies had been established, particularly of *Pupilla muscorum* which increased steadily to 40% in 2/3 (sample 11) and to 30% in 4/5 (sample 44). The resulting faunas were typical of an adjustment period to open, dry grassland.

Zone 3, section 2/3. Shade-loving species were further reduced to 2.5% of the fauna at the top of this zone (sample 14) and open-country species had established themselves at 81% of the assemblage. *Pupilla muscorum* was the most abundant at 40% with *Vallonia excentrica* and *V. costata* forming 11% and 19% respectively. This high abundance of *P. muscorum* suggests a measure of instability in the soil surface and some ground bare of vegetation. *V. excentrica* did not reach the degree of abundance it is capable of, perhaps because of its preference for a stable soil. This fauna is typical of that found on the dry, broken sward of chalk downlands.

*The burials.* Interpretation of the faunas from these features is not possible in any meaningful way, because of the lack of information about the stratigraphy of the barrow mound, due to its total destruction by ploughing. The plough had removed all surface features and evidence of how the samples

here were deposited. The origin of the soils in the burials is therefore unknown, and any interpretation would be speculative.

*Iron Age features.* The two features analysed (55 and 112) had similar faunas. Shade-loving species were negligible or absent, and open-country faunas dominated the assemblages. *Pupilla muscorum* was the most abundant species in both samples and, with other open-country species, indicated dry grassland. A high abundance of *Helicella itala* in feature 112 may be suggestive of arable, but the lack of comparative data makes this speculative, and short grassland should also be considered.

*Conclusions.* It is difficult to provide a sequence of environmental events for site R7, because of the lack of comparative data from all but the ditch. It is, however, possible to suggest a tentative series of environmental changes.

1. Neolithic—open, dry grassland, possibly grazed.
2. Bronze Age—some regeneration of lush vegetation, especially in the micro-environment of the ditch, in the possible wider context of open woodland.
3. Bronze Age—clearance of the woodland or lush vegetation to give a typical chalk downland appearance of short grassland.
4. Iron Age—continuing grassland with the possibility of arable.

## DISCUSSION

*Neolithic and Beaker.* The Late Neolithic material provides a further example of the difficulty of locating Neolithic occupation sites. All known Neolithic sites in Hampshire are either funerary or ritual (Schadla-Hall and Fasham 1981), although small sherds of Neolithic pottery are found from time to time in excavation (Fasham 1979; 1980). Snail evidence suggesting open dry grassland contrasts with that of broadly contemporary data from Burntwood Farm indicative of limited clearance followed by woodland regeneration (Mason 1980). The Bell Beaker was not associated with any distinctive artifacts. Its manufacture in local materials is to be expected of a component of a local domestic assemblage (Burgess and Shennan 1976, 321).

*The ring-ditch.* The distribution of the Iron Age pits and scoops in an arc inside the ditch suggests that the monument may have been originally a bell barrow.

The knife-dagger and amber beads from the central, presumably primary, cremation, are normal artifacts in a Bronze Age cremation in Wessex, even though Easton Down is at the eastern edge of the distribution of rich Wessex burials. Traditionally such an assemblage would be dated to the end of the early Bronze Age or the beginning of the middle Bronze Age, the presence of the spiral twisted rod fragments perhaps favouring the latter. A date of around 1500–1400 BC would seem acceptable.

The four closely-grouped possible cremations, Nos. 36–39, are perhaps best regarded as broadly contemporary with the central cremation. It seems unlikely that four such closely-spaced cremations would, or could, be inserted through a mound, although the mound at Risby was removed and replaced for funerary purposes (Vatcher and Vatcher 1976). Secondary burials would have been inserted into the body of the mound. The other occurrences of burnt human or unidentifiable burnt bone in the early Iron Age pits suggest that either a pyre area or other cremations were disturbed by the pit-digging.

The six inhumations can be regarded as secondary on two counts. Features 30 and 95 were on the surface of the chalk and not in chalk-cut graves and must have been inserted through the mound, while the similarity between the radio-carbon date from 70 cm up the ditch and the dates from three of the inhumations shows that the ditch was partly filled when the burials were made.

Four of the inhumations are females, one possibly male and one indeterminate. Three of the females were less than 25 years old when buried. The inhumation burials may represent two separate phases. Features 30 and 95 were on the surface of the chalk, while burials 24, 26, 27 and 43 were in chalk-cut graves. Burials 24, 26 and 43 had deposits of large flint nodules in the upper fills. The secondary inhumation of a female aged 20–25 years at Warren Farm, had a cairn piled over it (Green 1974). There was also a deposit of flints over the deeper and earlier burial at Earls Farm Down, Amesbury G71 (Christie 1967).

Although the central cremation cannot be

dated in absolute terms, nor indeed can any similar associated groups, it seems that the barrow of Easton Down was used as a burial place from the late Early Bronze Age to some time during the Middle Bronze Age, c.1600–1300 BC, but possibly for a considerably shorter span of time. The burial ritual changed from cremation to inhumation, but this must, for the moment, be regarded as a localised phenomenon. Early Bronze Age communities had mixed inhumation/cremation cemeteries, such as Earls Farm Down, Amesbury G71, Pin Farm, Gazely (Petersen 1973). There seems to be no reason why mixed burial sites should not have been used at the time of the Easton Down inhumations. During the Early Bronze Age barrows were frequently used as cemeteries rather than as single burial monuments for persons of special status (Petersen 1972). Some barrows seem to have had a fairly short life as a cemetery, as at West Overton 6b where the excavators believed that the sequence of twelve burials 'need not have occupied more than a few years, at most a generation' (Smith and Simpson 1966, 133), but others were used over several centuries, as at Amesbury G71, or Risby (Vatcher and Vatcher 1976). Easton Down is clearly a later example of a round barrow being used as a cemetery over a period of time. The lack of absolute dates for the central cremation and for features 30 and 95 makes it impossible to suggest for how long the barrow was used, but a maximum of 300 years does not seem unreasonable. The number and nature of the burials may reflect the status of the community using the barrow; there was only one burial with grave goods, that of a ?male in the central cremation. At least four of the inhumations were of females, and only one was possibly a male. The destruction of the mound and the loss of secondary burials (if any) in the body of the mound make interpretation of burial and social custom impossible in this case.

The snail evidence suggests that the barrow might have been constructed in open woodland, which gradually gave way to open grassland by the end of the Bronze Age.

#### *Iron Age*

Both long and round barrows are affected by

later, often Roman, activities (RCHM 1976) and yield finds of pottery and occasionally coin hoards (Corcoran 1970). The activity was often related to agriculture, as at Tallington (Simpson 1976) or on site V on Snail Down, Wiltshire (Thomas and Thomas 1956). It is unusual for barrows to be mutilated, with all the attendant implications of lost reverence, in the Bronze Age or early Iron Age, although the oval barrow in nearby Micheldever Wood was robbed for its flints in the Middle Bronze Age (Fasham 1979). At Easton Down the disturbance was substantial and happened before the ditch was fully silted and probably while the mound was still extant. The physical remains of the disturbance are the pits and scoops on the east side of the barrow, the material on the ditch adjacent and the linear scoop, feature 2. This ran straight down the slope, contained a considerable volume of domestic refuse and appeared to have deliberate, if slight, terminals. Its purpose remains uncer-

tain. The pits and scoops are similar to Iron Age 'working hollows' (Bersu 1940), but are perhaps more reminiscent of quarries. There was a considerable amount of domestic refuse from the pits. The Iron Age features, whatever their original purpose, were finally used as rubbish receptacles, and the rubbish must have originated from a nearby, and as yet, undiscovered settlement. The reasons for suggesting an eighth-seventh century date for these features have been outlined above.

#### *Acknowledgements*

The excavation was by kind permission of Mr D. Hewetson-Brown and was assisted by Eric Klingelhöffer, Robert Shirley, Chris Butler and George Smith. The finds and the archive have been deposited with the Hampshire County Museum Service (Accession Number A 1978 21).

### 3. THE GRACES FARM RING-DITCH, ITCHEN VALLEY, (R 30)

This crop mark on the Upper Chalk, in the parish of Itchen Valley (NGR SU 508335), was discovered by aerial survey. It lay 1,100 m north of the river Itchen at a height of 80 m (262 ft) above sea level on the south-facing slope of the north side of the valley. The ring-ditch was not on a false crest and was not visible at ground level. Its existence as a continuous ditch was confirmed by a fluxgate gradiometer survey by Mr A. J. Clark of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. It lay among traces of 'Celtic' fields, which are associated with a large prehistoric and Roman settlement whose southern extent is 100 m north of the site. Seven hundred metres and 1,100 m north-east of the ring-ditch are the excavated sites of Burntwood and Bridget's Farms, Itchen Valley Parish, MARC3 Sites R5 and R6 (Fasham 1980).

The ring-ditch and a negative lynchet to the south were excavated. The field has long been arable, the plough scoring the chalk. The topsoil was therefore removed by a caterpillar tractor, CAT 951, and the features exposed in the chalk excavated by hand.

#### THE RING-DITCH (Fig. 17)

The small, continuous ditch had an average external diameter of 9.3 m and an internal one of 5.5 m. The top width of the ditch varied from 1.84 m to 2.35 m, base width from 1.02 m to 1.75 m, and it was 30–44 cm deep. The volume as excavated was 11.1 m<sup>3</sup>, about 22.5 tons of chalk. It was impossible to determine what had happened to the spoil from the ditch, so it is not clear whether it was used to form a mound, or as an internal/external bank, or just dispersed. The ditch had been recut, along the centre, for its entire length. The recut was filled with numerous pieces of worked and unworked flint (Fig. 17).

*Post- and Stake-holes.* Within the ring-ditch were two small post-holes, both excavated, and eight stake-holes, not excavated. A shallow post-hole was discovered cutting into the fill of the ditch, and a further post-hole lay outside to the south. There were no finds from the post-holes.

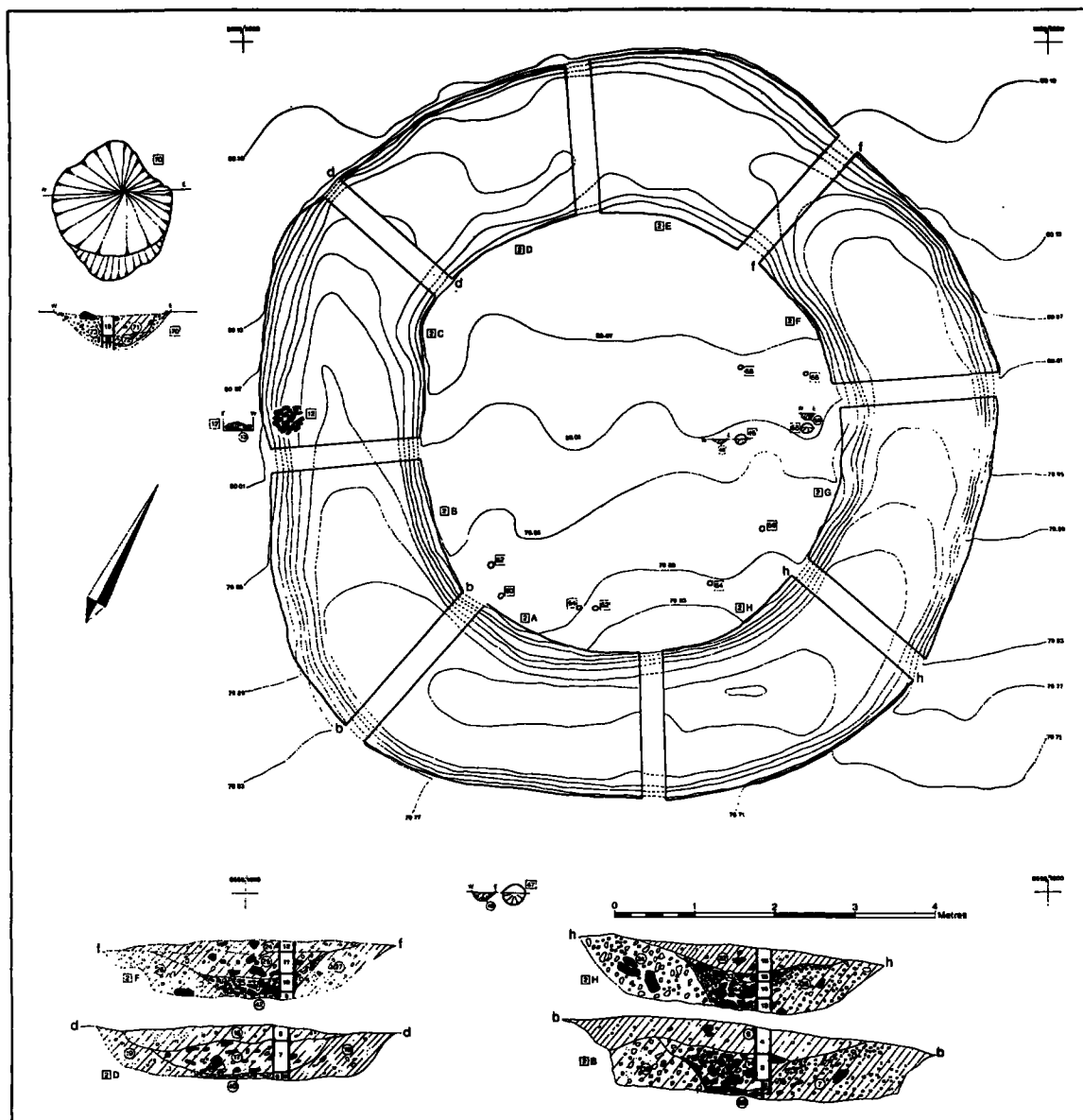


Fig. 17. Graces Farm. Plan and sections of the ring-ditch, and other features.

*Feature 70*, was an irregularly-shaped sub-circular pit with an uneven bottom, filled with loam and small chalk rubble, function and date unknown.

#### *The Negative Lynchet* (Fig. 18)

Five metres south of the ring-ditch, running north-east-south-west, was a lynchet with a negative element recognisable. It was visible as a soil mark on aerial photographs, but not as an earthwork at ground level. A trench 2.45 m wide

was excavated across it. The lynchet scarp was 2.1 m long and fell 40 cm. On the levelled chalk at the foot of the scarp were five broad shallow depressions from 14 to 30 cm wide and 2 to 6 cm deep running along the line of the lynchet and up to 2.5 m from the foot of the scarp. They were presumably man-made and associated with the agricultural activity that created the lynchet, but were not the typical asymmetrical marks made

by the plough. There were two asymmetrical ploughmarks, features 79 and 82, running along the lynchet axis. They were 12 cm wide at the top; feature 79 was 3 cm deep and feature 82 6 cm deep. There was no evidence for cross-ploughing, or for a fence, hedgerow, or wall marking the edge of the field. There were no finds.

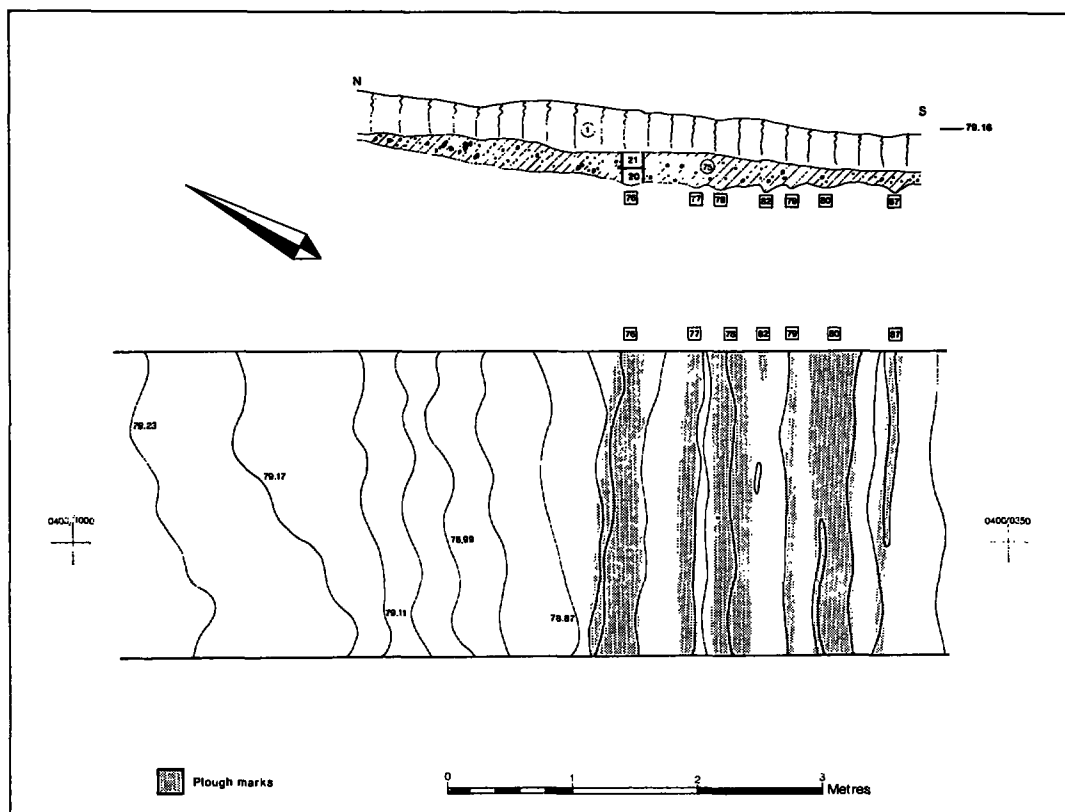


Fig. 18. Graces Farm. Plan and section of the negative lynchet.

### Dating

A single sherd of flint-gritted pottery (MARC3 Fabric 2), discovered in a primary silt of the ditch, is reminiscent of Bucket Urn types found locally (Fasham 1979). The worked flint from the recut would not be out of place in a Middle Bronze Age context. This evidence is insufficient to provide definite dating for the

ring-ditch, but it may have been dug in the Middle Bronze Age.

The lynchet is an element of a 'Celtic' field system, part of which was excavated on Burntwood Farm (MARC3 Site R6) (Fasham 1980), where it was assumed to be Late Bronze Age or Iron Age in date.

## FINDS

Fuller reports on the pottery by J. M. Ross, on the animal bones by J. P. Coy, on the land molluscs by C. Mason and by the author on flint are on microfiche.

Of the 28 sherds of pottery only a base sherd, possibly from a bucket urn type of vessel was recovered from the pre-recut levels. Other pottery would not be out of place anywhere from the mid-late Bronze Age to the early Iron Age. Roman pottery was also recovered.

There were 231 flakes with a similar breadth: length ratio to those from the Micheldever Wood barrow (Fasham and Ross 1978) except that there were more broader flakes. There were 9 cores and no tools.

There were two badly eroded animal bones.

The snails suggest a general environment of open grassland but it is possible that there was shade in the form of a hedge, scrub or even woodland near the south-east of the site.

## DISCUSSION

This small annular ring-ditch was not a

barrow. There was no evidence for burials or traces of human bone. The profile and dimensions of the ditch are not typical of barrows. The ditch was recut and the recut filled with large flint nodules. The site probably was of Bronze Age date and the absence of domestic rubbish suggests an unknown, 'ritual' function. It was of some importance to the community it served as is evidenced by the recut. It was situated 400 m south of a group of three (possibly four) ring-ditches whose diameters were at least twice as large and which probably formed a small barrow cemetery.

### *Acknowledgements*

The excavation, by kind permission of the farmer, Mr H. Gray, was done principally by Miss A. A. Borrow, Mr P. J. Bates and Mr P. S. Mills, assisted by Miss J. V. Nunn and Mr E. A. Elias. The finds and the archive have been deposited with the Hampshire County Museum Service (Accession Number A 1978 18).

## 4. THE MICHELDEVER WOOD RING-DITCH

(R 363)

### *Topography*

MARC3 Site R363 is the only one of these four ring-ditches which lay on a north-facing slope. It was discovered by examining aerial photographs taken by R. T. Schadla-Hall. It lay half in arable and half in Micheldever Wood at SU 52673715 on Upper Chalk with patches of superficial Clay-with-flints. Solution activity had taken place, and perhaps still is occurring, in the area, and the eastern portion of the ditch had been dug through a solution hole. The barrow was 109 m (357 ft) above sea level on a north-facing slope of 4.6% (1:21) in a false-crested position and was immediately north of another ring-ditch and 100 m south-west of a large and badly damaged barrow (Grinsell 1940).

The Upper Chalk in Micheldever Wood is overlain by superficial deposits of Clay-with-Flints of varying depth. Throughout the wood are a number of depressions of varying sizes which are probably best regarded as solution

holes or dolines, features which have been recently discussed, particularly with regard to the Dorset Chalklands, by Sperling *et al.* (1977). This solution hole was presumably filled and no longer particularly active when the ring-ditch was constructed. It was at least 15 m across. The archaeological investigation of the ring-ditch necessitated the partial excavation of the upper 1 m of part of the solution hole which led to the exposure of the top of the north side and part of the fill. In Fig. 19 the Clay-with-flints starts at about line A-A, and all traces of chalk disappear at B. This general slope was reflected by the stepped or terraced slopes of the north side. At the top of each step was a deposit of small flints. Layers 51, 356 and 357 formed the fill of the hole, Fig. 20. The soil descriptions of these layers are:

Layer 51 Yellowish-red (5YR 5/6); silty clay; very slightly stony, small flints; medium sub-angular blocky; firm; dry.

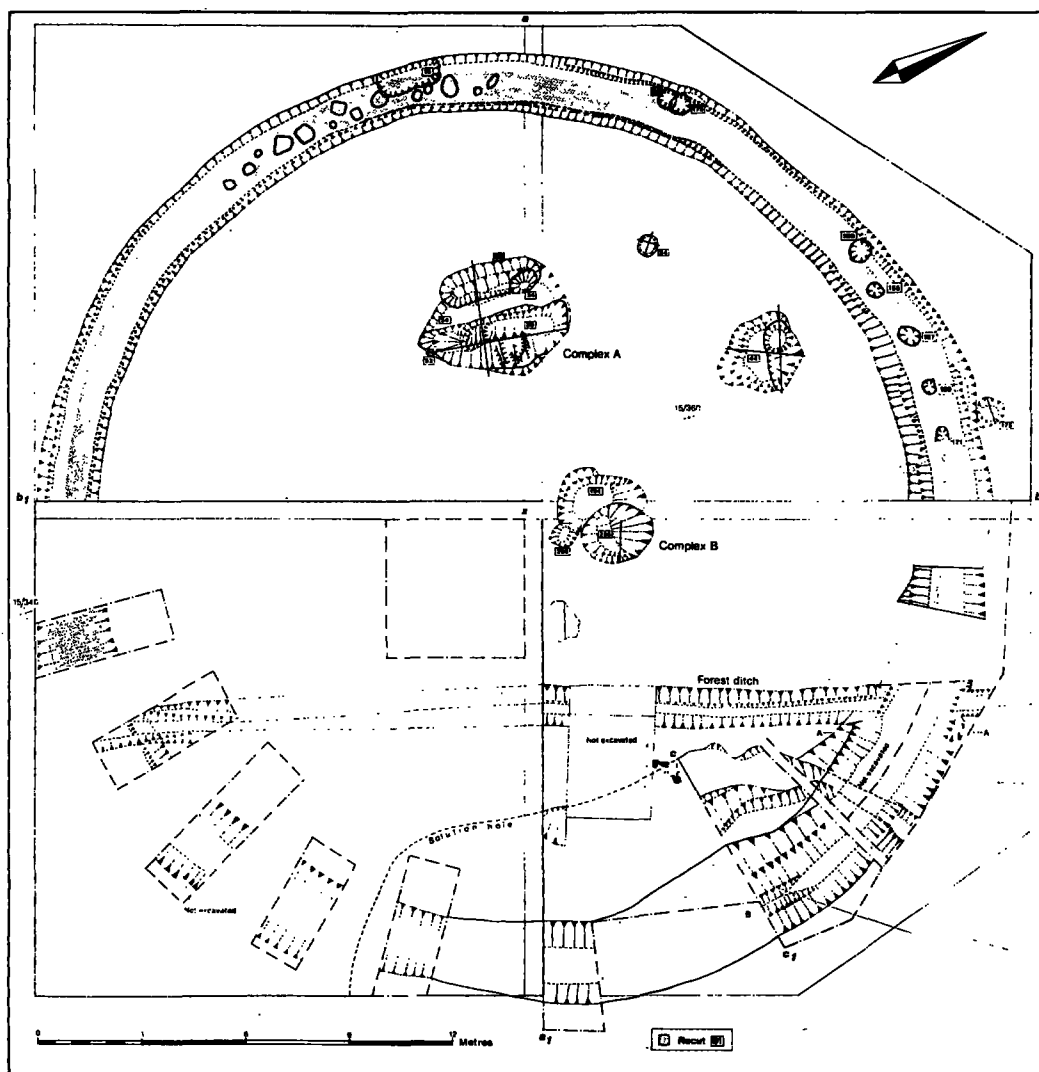


Fig. 19. Micheldever Wood. Plan of the ring-ditch, as excavated, and associated features.

Layer 356 Yellowish-red (5YR 5/6); silty clay; very slightly stony with small flints; coarse sub-angular blocky; firm; dry.

Layer 357 Yellowish-red (5YR 5/6); silty clay; very slightly stony, small flints; medium sub-rounded blocky; less friable; dry.

#### *Method of Excavation*

Lying half in arable and half in woodland, yet

outside the known 18th century woodland boundary, the site had the potential to provide data for two different periods of ploughing and possibly for preservation under woodland (Fasham 1980). The site was not visible on the ground as either a soil mark or an earthwork. It was located in the arable by a fluxgate gradiometer scan by Mr C. W. Butler of the RCHM, but the presence of a collapsed wire mesh fence in the wood prevented a geophysical scan there.

The plough soil in the south-west quadrant was removed mechanically by a CAT DC9, and features cut into the chalk were excavated by hand. In the north-west quadrant the ploughsoil was removed by hand in 2 spits of about 10 cm depth each, and all finds were recorded three-dimensionally. These two quadrants were excavated in January to March 1978 by people employed under the Job Creation Scheme of the Manpower Services Commission. Work was started on the north-east quadrant, but this

could not be completed before the end of the Job Creation Scheme. In August 1978 a fortnight's excavation saw the completion of the north-east quadrant and the confirmation, by a series of five small trenches taken down to the top of the ditch, of the completeness of the circle of the ditch. An area 16 m<sup>2</sup> at the centre of the south-east quadrant was excavated. In both the eastern quadrants all finds were recorded three-dimensionally.

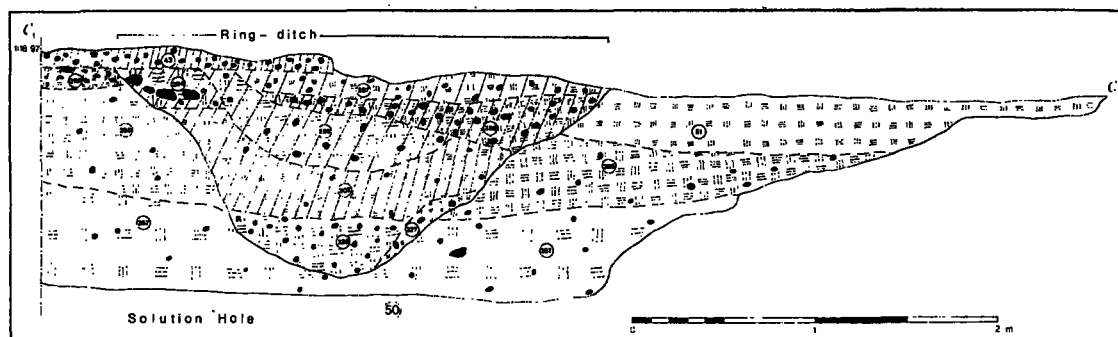


Fig. 20. Micheldever Wood. Section across the ditch and through the upper fill of the solution hole.

## PHASES

There were two principal phases of activity represented on the site:

1. Activity associated with the construction of the ditch.
2. Post-ring-ditch activities relating to both forestry and ploughing.

### *Phase 1. The ring-ditch (Fig. 19)*

The circular ring-ditch, internal diameter 23 m–23.5 m and external 27.5 m, had almost vertical sides and a flat bottom. The ditch measurements were: top width 1.35 m to 2.95 m, bottom width 0.94 m to 1.26 m and depth 0.64 m to 1.26 m. The approximate total volume of the ditch was 106 m<sup>3</sup>, representing a weight, in chalk, of about 216 tons.

The ditch fill was varied; in the field there were successive layers of chalk silt, and in the wood, in the area of the solution hole, the fill changed to a silty-clay (Figs. 20, 21 and 35). It

was impossible to deduce from the fill whether there had been a bank, internal or external, or a mound. A series of oval post-holes or scoops 12 cm–16 cm deep, had been dug into the lower fill of the ditch in the north-west quadrant. Their stratigraphic sequence, from the earliest was 173, 190, 93 and then, all contemporary, 165, 167, 169 and 171 (Sections in Fig. 36). Although no post-holes were identified elsewhere in the ditch, fourteen small, sub-circular and sub-rectangular platforms on the chalk base of the ditch were recorded in the south-west quadrant.

Feature 15 was a rectangular pit, 1.8 m by 0.6 m and 35 cm deep, which had been excavated after the post-holes.

The final phase of activity in the ditch was a re-cut, up to 40 cm deep and 1.5 m wide, on the inside edge. This re-cut, feature 91, was clearly visible in the chalk-filled western half of the site, but not apparent in the clay fills of the eastern segment.

There were 96 pieces of flint in the ditch,

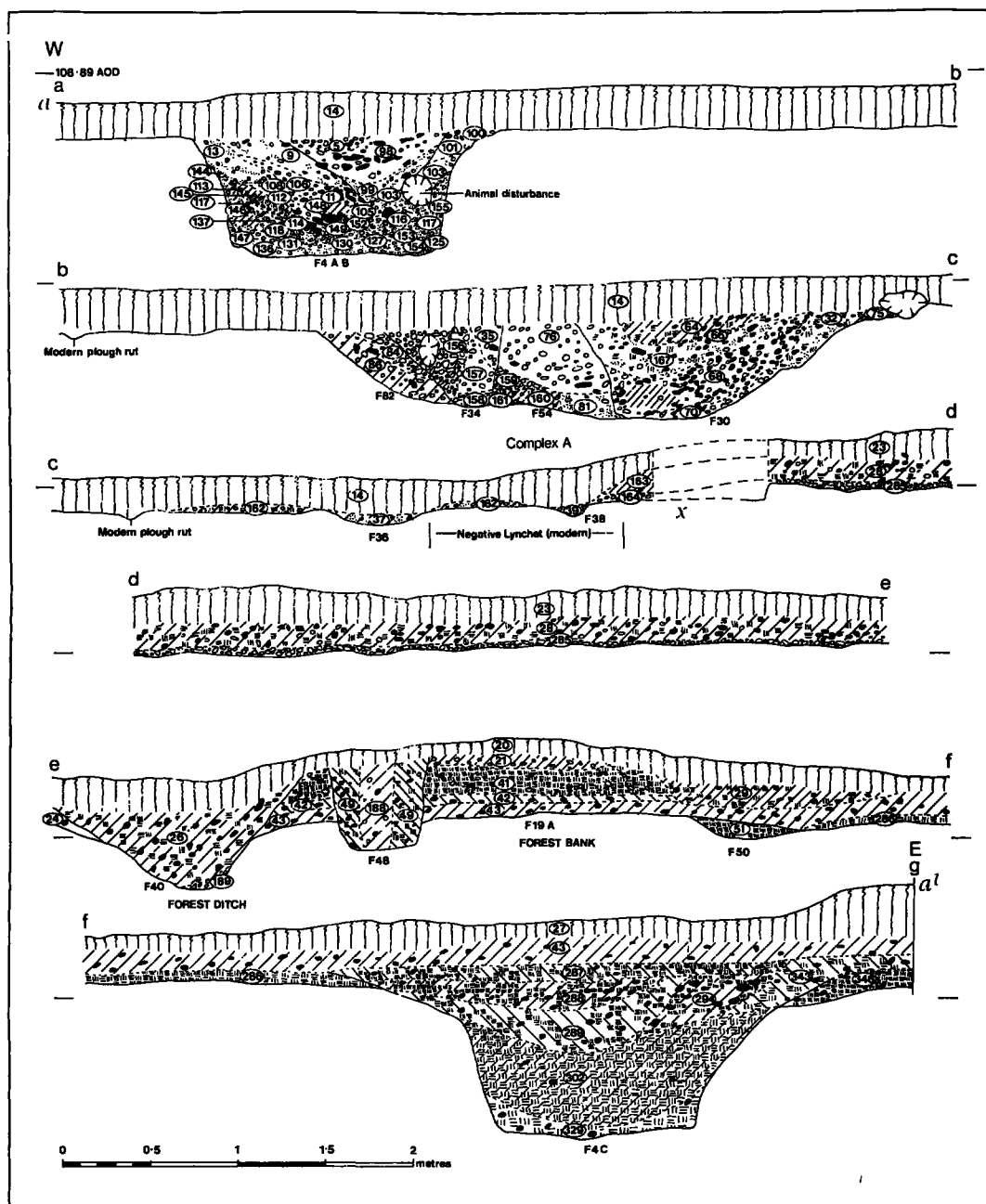


Fig. 21. Micheldever Wood, main east-west section across the site. The section has been drawn in reverse east of X.

including 60 flakes, 7 cores and fragments, and 5 possible implements, mostly concentrated in the north-east segment of the ditch. Only 15 sherds of pottery were discovered, all, except one Roman sherd from the upper fill, were either flint- or grog-tempered. There were also a few fragments of animal bone. A grog-tempered sherd and one flake came from the re-cut, feature 91.

#### *Features Inside the Ring-ditch*

There were four such features (Fig. 36). F 24 was a shallow, 10 cm deep, irregular, sub-circular scoop of 58 cm diameter, filled with a brown-red clay loam. F 44 was also an irregularly-shaped scoop, 16 cm deep, 2.25 m wide and 2.5 m long. Above the weathered natural of the primary silt it was filled with red-brown clay.

Complex A consisted of features F 54, F 30 and F 82. F 54 was a large, irregular, oval pit with steep sides and flat bottom, 45 cm deep, about 3.4 m wide and 4.45 m long (Fig. 30). It had been cut by F. 30 on the east and F. 82 on the west. The east side of F. 30 had four, almost parallel, grooves running down the side. Two post-holes, features 34 and 52, cut the later fills.

Complex B was similar to Complex A, and consisted of features F 194, 296 and 298 (Fig. 35). F 194 was a large, irregular pit, 2.55 m by 1.75 m and 53 cm deep, was cut by F 296, a large oval pit, 2.1 m by 1.7 m and 37 cm deep, and by F 298, a smaller, circular feature, 25 cm deep and 70 cm diameter.

The only find from these features was a flake in F 30 of Complex A.

#### *Phase 2. Post Ring-ditch Features (Fig. 37)*

The most impressive of the subsequent features were 19 and 40, a forest boundary bank and ditch. The bank appeared as an earthwork 3 m wide, but proved on excavation to be 2.4 m wide at the base. About 40 cm high, it comprised a major layer of reddish clay, 41, overlying a deposit of light yellowish-brown soil containing a few small flints, 42, which was derived from natural. The uppermost layer, 21, contained numerous chalk lumps, except where the bank crossed the clay-filled ring-ditch. Layer 21, at

least, was derived from the forest ditch. 5 flakes, 8 burnt flints and 1 sherd had been incorporated into the bank.

The U-shaped ditch, with its gently-sloping sides and rounded bottom, was about 50 cm deep. It was between 1.15 m and 1.55 m wide at the top and 23 cm to 35 cm at the bottom. In the ditch were 2 flakes, 4 burnt flints, 1 core, a piece of tile, one of brick, a pot sherd and an animal bone.

Parallel to and west of features 19 and 40 was a slighter earthwork, which delimited the edge of the wood when the excavation took place. This bank-shaped earthwork was about 1.5 m wide and about 10 cm high. On the east was a slight depression, and to the west it was lynched into the arable field. The feature was not of deliberate construction, but was evolving because of the interaction of woodland and arable farming. It is possible that the space between this modern boundary and features 19 and 40 had been used as a track.

#### FINDS

Fuller reports by I. Clifford and C. Matthews on the pottery, J. P. Coy on the animal bones and the author on flint, are on microfiche. None of the metal objects were stratified. There was a small assemblage of Bronze Age pottery in the ditch; this pottery was frequently grog-tempered. Iron Age, Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery was also discovered. Amongst the 334 pieces of recorded flint were two scrapers and a knife (Fig. 38). The animal bones were badly eroded and are listed on microfiche. There were no snails in the fifty samples analysed.

#### DISCUSSION

Several factors suggest the site was a barrow: its proximity to a large but grossly damaged barrow to the north-east (Grinsell 1940) and to a ring-ditch immediately to the south indicate the former existence of a barrow cemetery, the diameter and the profile of the ditch are similar to excavated barrows, and it lacks domestic or occupation debris. There is, however, no sepulchral evidence and the artifactual data only

tenuously suggests a Bronze Age date. Internal feature complexes B and A could have been primary and secondary burials, subsequently robbed, but the absence of bone fragments or artifacts—except one flake—requires such complete robbing as to be unlikely. The two complexes, and the other internal features, cannot be directly associated on archaeological

grounds with the ditch itself.

The northern half of the site was completely excavated by hand, except for a short length of the ditch in the north-east quadrant. The flint distribution showed a clear concentration to the east of, i.e. inside, the forest bank. The flints came from just inside the ring-ditch and from the fill; the activity thus represented appears to have

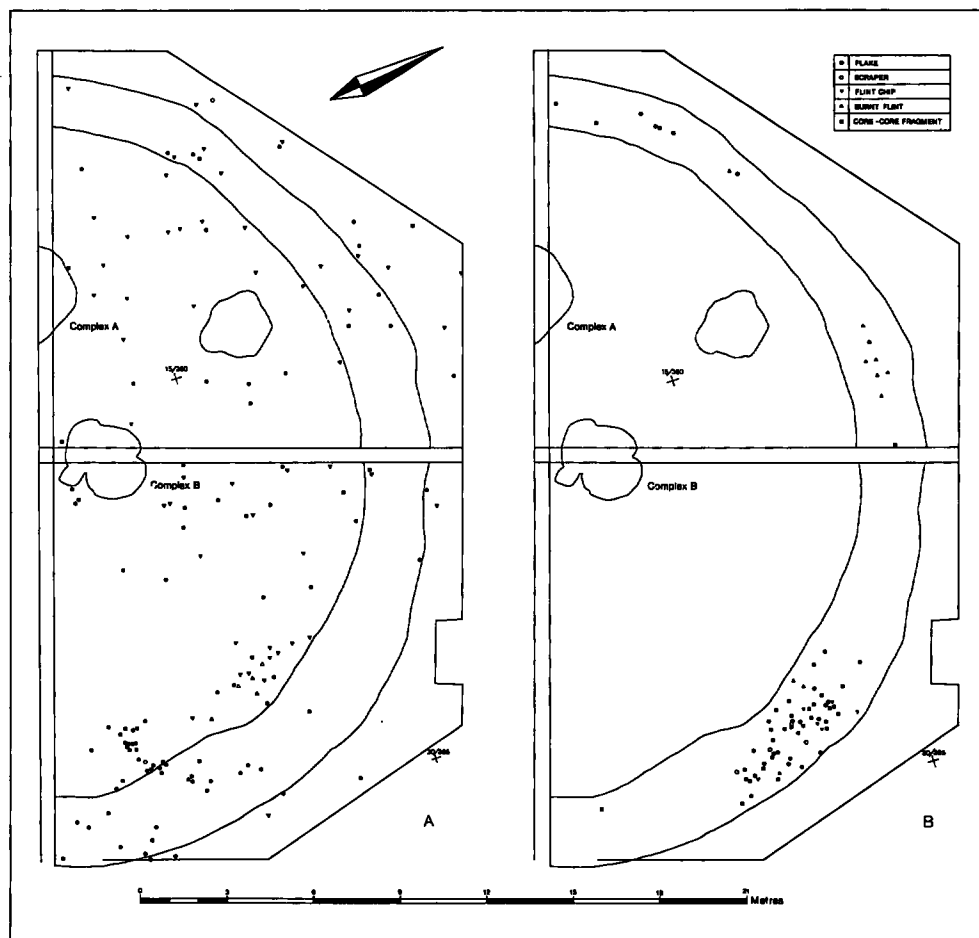


Fig. 22. Micheldever Wood. The distribution of struck flakes on the northern half of the site: A—Artifacts in the plough soil; B—in the ditch. The west part of the site has been heavily ploughed; the east has not been ploughed since at least 1730.

been either contemporary with the construction of the ditch or just a little later (Winham archive).

#### Ploughing (Fig. 22)

To consider plough damage the site can be divided into three areas:

*Area 1*—east of features 19 and 40, Forest boundary bank and ditch identifiable as the boundary of Michel-

dever Wood in Brown's 1730 survey and in a valuation of 1799 (original documents kindly loaned by Lord Northbrook). This area cannot have been ploughed since 1730 and may not have been ploughed for several centuries before then. The top of natural was 108.97 m, although the precise definition of natural was uncertain as it was the uppermost fill of the solution hole. Under feature 19 natural was recorded between 108.97 m and 109.04 m.

*Area 2*, between feature 40 and the modern edge of the wood, was covered by a few birches and by coppiced hazel. This strip of woodland is a result of encroachment some time after the wood boundary was established. It was presumably ploughed for longer than Area 1. The top of natural was between 108.85 m and 108.95 m.

*Area 3* was the western half of the site in the area of modern arable. Top of natural was between 108.59 at the west and 108.62 at the east. Thus there was a slight slope from east to west. Occasional ploughmarks could be seen in the chalk and slight traces across the top of Complex A.

There is no obvious significance to the differing levels of natural in Areas 1 and 2. The greater height under 19 suggests a general drop in the surface of natural since it was erected, but the solution hole undoubtedly complicates the data. Although there is a gap of 35 cm in the recorded section, Fig. 21, at the interface of Areas 2 and 3, the surface of the chalk was properly recorded and shows a step of 8 cm which probably represents a real drop in the surface of the chalk of some 3–4 cm. A negative lynchet effect was visible in the topsoil at the edge of the field and in the chalk 0.77 m to 1.37 m into the field, implying that the step, and possibly the ploughmarks in the chalk, had been created prior to the lynchet which must be of very recent origin. Modern ploughmarks were visible down to the A/C horizon, 16 cm deep, and extended a further 10 cm into the A/C soil, a mixture of topsoil and chalk lumps.

The site had possibly been ploughed since Roman or indeed later Iron Age periods, although it must be noted that the ploughing of barrows on downland in the Iron Age or Romano-British periods is unusual (Bowen 1961). The effect of that early ploughing was to level any upstanding earthworks the site may have had. The complicated effect of the more recent ploughing in Area 3 was to reduce the level of the chalk by 3–4 cm.

The distribution of flint artifacts in the north half of the site was examined to see what effect topsoil movement created (this section by R. P. Winham). In Area 3 there were 22 flints in the topsoil and 11 in the ditch; in Areas 1 and 2 combined there were 71 in the topsoil and 51 in the ditch, totalling 155. Surface flints and those in the ditch were plotted (Fig. 22) and, although the total is small, a distinct concentration was discernable in the north-east quadrant. The site sloped to the north, but there was no concentration or even scatter on the downhill side of the slope. Inside the ring-ditch the flints may be related to the movement of flints from the south end of the site or of surface flints left on the site, or of flints that may have been incorporated into an earthwork, if such ever existed. This distribution does not reflect sub-surface features, except possibly on the west edge of the site. The density of flints between the different areas was calculated: Area 1–1 per 1.6 m<sup>2</sup>; Area 2–1 per 5.6 m<sup>2</sup>; Area 3, east half, 1 per 5.6 m<sup>2</sup>; Area 3, west half, 1 per 7.3 m<sup>2</sup>. This suggests that flints have been more dispersed where there has been more ploughing, although the concentration in Area 1 probably greatly biases the data-base.

#### *Acknowledgements*

Excavation took place by kind permission of Sutton Manor Estate and the Forestry Commission and was facilitated by the efforts of Misses J. and S. Nunn, J. Davies, and Messrs P. J. Bates, E. Elias and J. Lockett. The finds and archive have been deposited with the Hampshire County Museum Service.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

The four ring-ditches in this report show a wide variation in date, form and presumably function (Fig. 23). The major problems with ring-ditches relate to date, form and function. The available data are limited. Atkinson implies a total of 15,000 round barrows in England and Wales (Atkinson 1972). It has been suggested that there are at least 20,000 round barrows and ring-ditches and, at best, less than 10% have

been excavated to an 'acceptable standard' (Kinnes 1979). Estimates of ring-ditches by county are rare—151 in eastern and central Gloucestershire (Smith 1972), 232 in the chalk upland of West Berkshire (Richards 1978) and about 100 on the gravel terraces of Berkshire (data from Gates 1975). In an area of about 220 km<sup>2</sup> in central Hampshire there are 48 barrows and 75 ring-ditches of which 28 can be

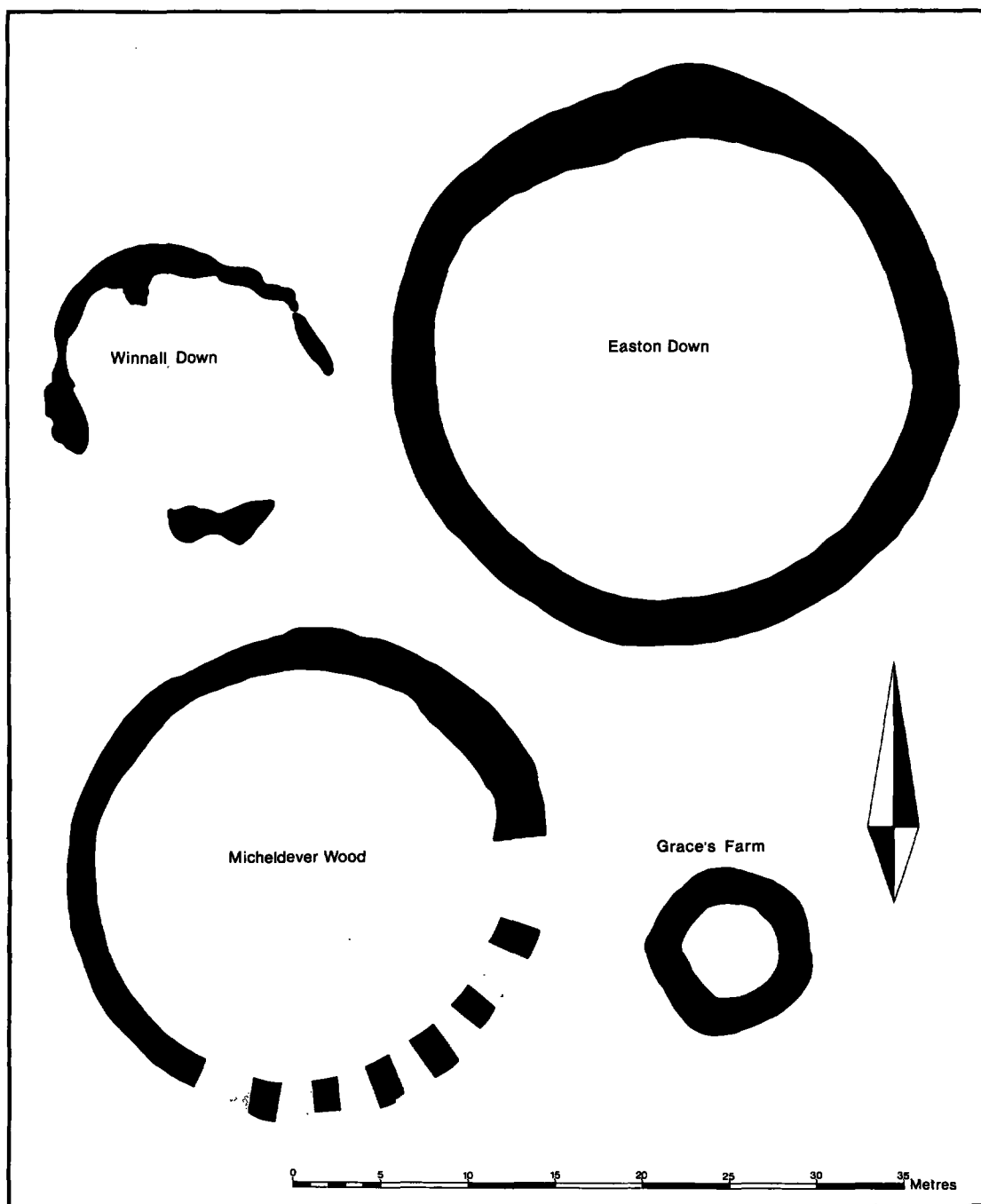


Fig. 23. Hampshire ring-ditches. Comparative plan of four ring-ditches.

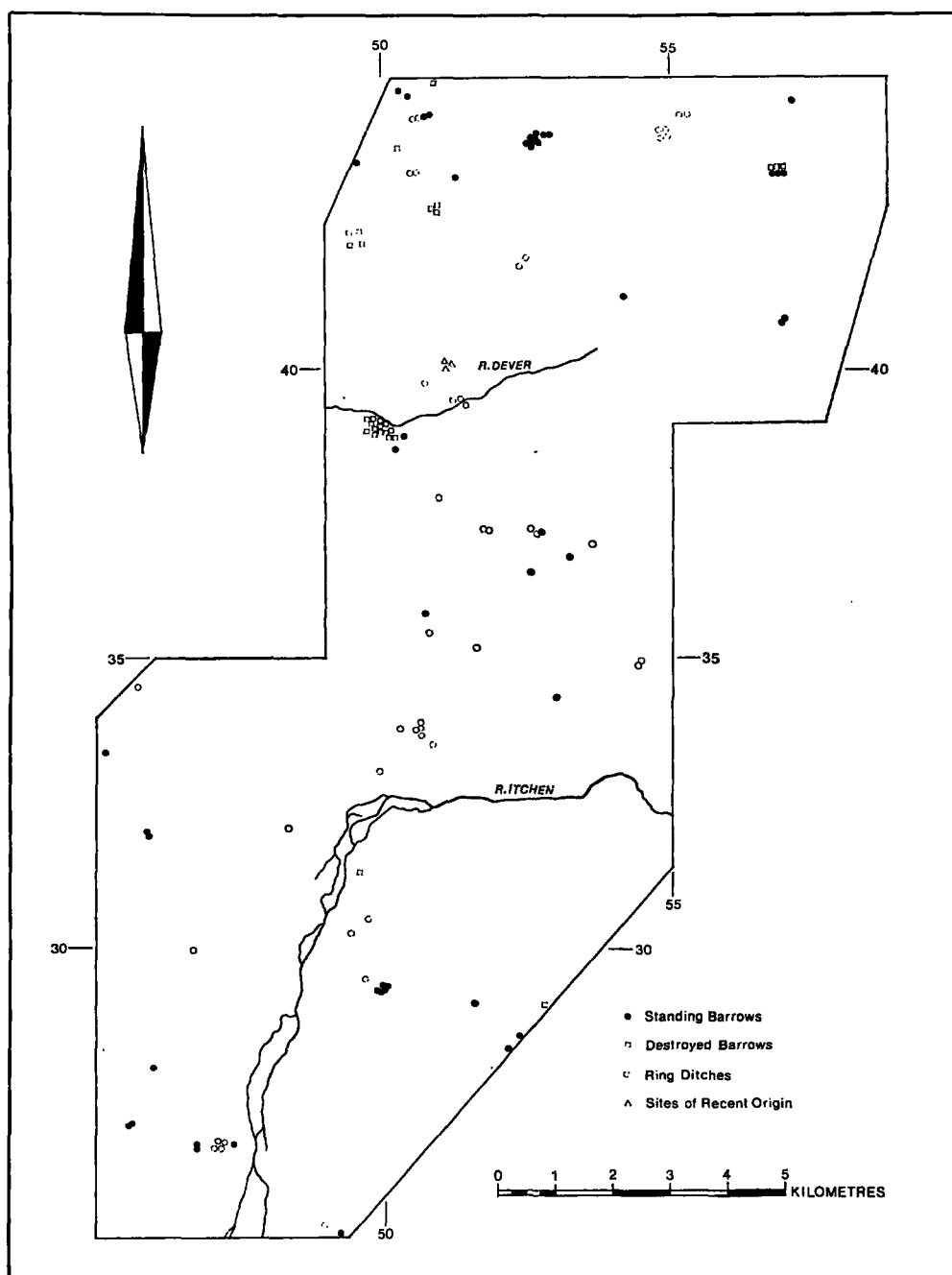


Fig. 24. The distribution of barrows, ploughed-out or destroyed barrows and ring-ditches in central Hampshire (after Maynard 1978).

shown to have been barrows (Fig. 24). The majority of ring ditches excavated have been on river gravels (RCHM 1960), perhaps in the case of the Upper Thames valley because the gravel quarries were near Oxford (Hamlin and Case 1963, Case *et al.*, 1965). In Berkshire about 8 ring-ditches have been examined (Gates 1975; Richards pers. comm.). Ring-ditches in the Ouse Valley have been well studied (Green

1974, Field 1974, Woodward 1978). Away from the river valleys however very little excavation of ring-ditches has taken place. The starting point for considering ring-ditches on the chalk uplands is not very secure.

The problem of the date of ring-ditches is clearly demonstrated by the range of dates from Winnall Down (early Neolithic), Easton Down (Middle Bronze Age) and Grace's Farm and

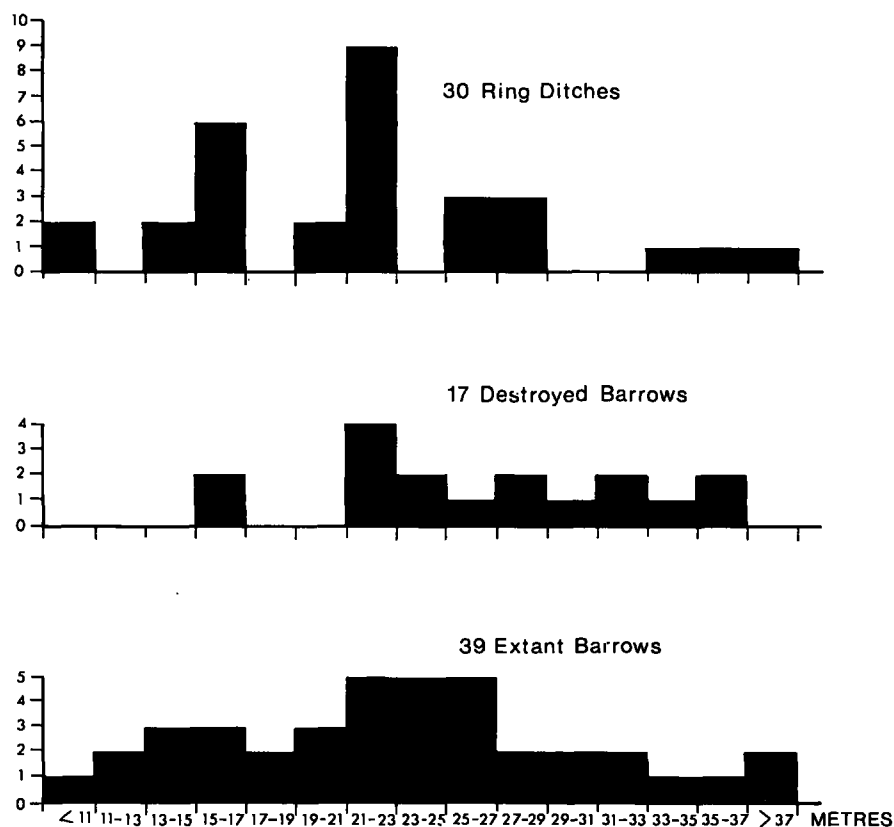


Fig. 25. Histograms of the diameters of the majority of barrows, ploughed-out barrows and ring-ditches shown on Fig. 24. Diameters measured from ditches.

Micheldever Wood (both uncertain). Only two of the five ring-ditches that Matthews excavated in the Chilterns can be dated (Matthews 1976) and of the Berkshire examples four contained late Neolithic/early Bronze Age pottery in the fill of the ditch (Anon 1964, 99, 100, Rutland and

Greenaway 1970) one contained Deverel-Rimbury material (Richards pers. comm.) and the remainder cannot be dated. The longevity of the ring-ditch form has been apparent since Atkinson's work at Dorchester (Atkinson *et al.* 1951) and the early origins of the tradition have

been confirmed by a series of sites excavated in the 1970's such as Garton Slack (Brewster 1975) and Aldwinckle (Jackson 1976). The evidence for Neolithic funerary practices associated with circular monuments is summarised by Kinnes (Kinnes 1979). It seems likely that the last vestige of the use of ring-ditches is to be found in the Roman period (Smith 1972, 165).

They show considerable variation in diameter (Fig. 25) and ditch profile; compare Micheldever Wood and Easton Down with Grace's Farm or Winnall Down.

The function of the ring-ditch is still 'generally enigmatic' (Hamlin and Case 1963). A single ring-ditch can have not only quite a long period of use but a series of different functions (Pryor 1978). They can be tree rings, rings from circular haystacks and even circular pillow mounds as at Steeple Langford Cowdown (Crawford and Keiller 1928, pl. XXVII). Smith (1972) has pointed out that about 60% of the sites Case reviewed in the Thames Valley (Hamlin and Case 1963) could not be positively classed as barrows. In Berkshire only one of the eight excavated ring-ditches can be positively classified as a barrow (Richards *teste*). On the Chilterns three of the five ring-ditches Matthews excavated were destroyed barrows (Matthews 1976). Maynard (1978) suggests that there is no statistical difference between the diameters and altitude of barrows and ring-ditches in central Hampshire. In east Dorset there are 285 barrows and 71 ring-ditches which have been regarded as ploughed-out barrows (RCHM 1975). In north Dorset 130 barrows have been recorded and nearly 75% have been damaged or flattened by ploughing and many would thus manifest themselves as ring-ditches (RCHM 1972). It is clear that somewhere between 20% and 60% of the excavated ring-ditches on chalk were barrows. The absence of convincing evidence for other functions or dates indicates that many more may have been barrows.

Obviously the ring-ditch phenomenon was complex and during the middle Neolithic fulfilled a range of domestic, ritual and mortuary functions (Kinnes 1976). There is no real reason why the later ring-ditches should not have fulfilled a similar range of functions. There does not

seem to be sufficient debris from ring-ditches to indicate a domestic use; Micheldever Wood is a good example of this. The annular examples on the chalk would seem to preclude a function relating to livestock control (unless a plank bridge was used) and transhumance (Hamlin and Case 1963). A ritual or cenotaphal function may have been in operation in some examples, especially Micheldever Wood where the site is within 100 m of a large extant barrow or as manifest by the earthwork site V at Snail Down (Thomas and Thomas 1955).

The small site on Grace's Farm is completely enigmatic. It was open for a considerable time, the ditch was re-cut and struck flakes thrown in.

The upland chalk or limestone ring-ditch is little understood. It has a long and varied history but until more sites are excavated it must be prudent to consider that while many are related to Bronze Age burial practices, the remainder served a variety of functions, perhaps of ritual rather than domestic or funereal purposes.

#### *Acknowledgements*

Thanks to the relevant landowners have been expressed at the end of each site report. Such a report is essentially collaborative and the supervisors and specialists have been acknowledged in the body of the report. Post excavation analysis has been done by Varian Denham, Jane Ross, Peter Bates and Peter Winham. David Lloyd of Hampshire County Council developed the computer programmes. Lorna Jones was responsible for the drawings except for Fig. 20 drawn by Sheila Cresswell, Figs. 30, 31 and 34 by Carol Mason and Figs. 21 and 35 by Jo Gingell. Sally Fasham was largely responsible for producing a final typescript.

The M3 Archaeological Rescue Committee, especially the successive Chairmen, Martin Biddle and Collin Bowen (Royal Commission of Historic Monuments) and the Department of the Environment's representatives, Dr G. J. Wainwright and Dr C. J. Young, provided constructive advice and comments during and after excavation.

The project has been financed by the Department of the Environment. The Manpower Services Commission provided financial support for part of the excavation of site R363.

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Winnall Down. Neolithic pottery; flint artifacts (Fig. 26); animal bones. Easton Down. Figs. 27, 28 (sections of features); pottery (Table 1); amber; flint artifacts (Fig. 29); human bones (Table 2); animal bones (Table 3); land snails (Figs. 30, 31). Grace's

Farm. Pottery (Fig. 32, Table 4); flint artifacts (Fig. 33); animal bones; land snails (Fig. 34). Micheldever Wood. Figs. 35, 36 (Sections), 37 (Plan of later features); pottery (Table 5); flint artifacts (Fig. 38); animal bones.

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