

NOTES

EVIDENCE OF PRE-HISTORIC AND ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT FOUND DURING GRAVEL EXTRACTION NEAR HUCKLESBROOK, IN THE AVON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE

Summary

Archaeological observations in advance of gravel extraction in a pit at Hucklesbrook, near Ringwood, found traces of a ring-ditch, probably the remains of a ploughed-out Bronze Age barrow. There was also evidence for other activity, probably prehistoric, in the vicinity of the barrow. In addition, the site of an early Saxon *grubenhaus* was found, indicating the probable position of a fifth or sixth century Saxon settlement.

Introduction

The archaeological site was found when Tarmac Roadstone (Southern) Ltd began gravel extraction in a new pit on the eastern side of the Avon valley, about four miles north of Ringwood. Archaeological traces were first recognised by the machine driver, Mr George Waterman, who informed the works' manager Mr Chris Hughes. Mr Hughes then notified the Hampshire County Archaeologist, Mr Mike Hughes. Hampshire County Council provided funds towards the recording and evaluation of the site, and Tarmac Roadstone extended their full co-operation to enable the necessary archaeological work to be done. Thanks are due to both the machine drivers working on the site, Mr Waterman, and Mr Peter Allen. The archaeological work was carried out by the Trust for Wessex Archaeology in late June 1983.

Site location (SU 153108)

The site was on a level gravel terrace on the eastern side of the river Avon, c 10m above the level of the present flood plain. It lay 300m from the river, and just to the north of the Hucklesbrook, a small tributary of the Avon

(Fig 1). Archaeological work was confined to an area of 6000m², being the surviving central part of the first area to be opened up for gravel extraction. Over the next few years, the gravel pit is to be expanded over a much larger area to the north.

The archaeological evidence

The removal of up to 1m of topsoil from the area to be quarried revealed the outlines of many features which had been dug into the gravel. All the visible features were planned (Fig 1), and those which were partly excavated are described below.

Feature A was a ring-ditch with an internal diameter of c 10m. Though a short length of it had been destroyed before it could be planned, it had been observed as an unbroken ring, with no evidence of a causeway. The ditch was c 1m wide at the top, and two sections were dug across it, both showing a profile with steep sides and flat base, c 0.50m deep. Along the bottom was loose gravel which probably represented the primary weathering of the sides of the ditch. This was covered by a band of fine red-brown clayey-loam, most likely showing the profile of the ditch once it had become stable. The top of the feature was filled with a mixture of gravel and loam, in which several fragments of worked flint were found. Inside the ring-ditch, though off-centre, a single small pit was found, *Feature B*. This feature was c 0.30m deep, with uneven sides, and was filled with red-brown clayey-loam and gravel. To the north of the ring ditch was a shallow linear hollow, *Feature C*, c 1m wide, with a maximum depth of c 0.25m. It was filled with red-brown sandy-loam, with many patches of

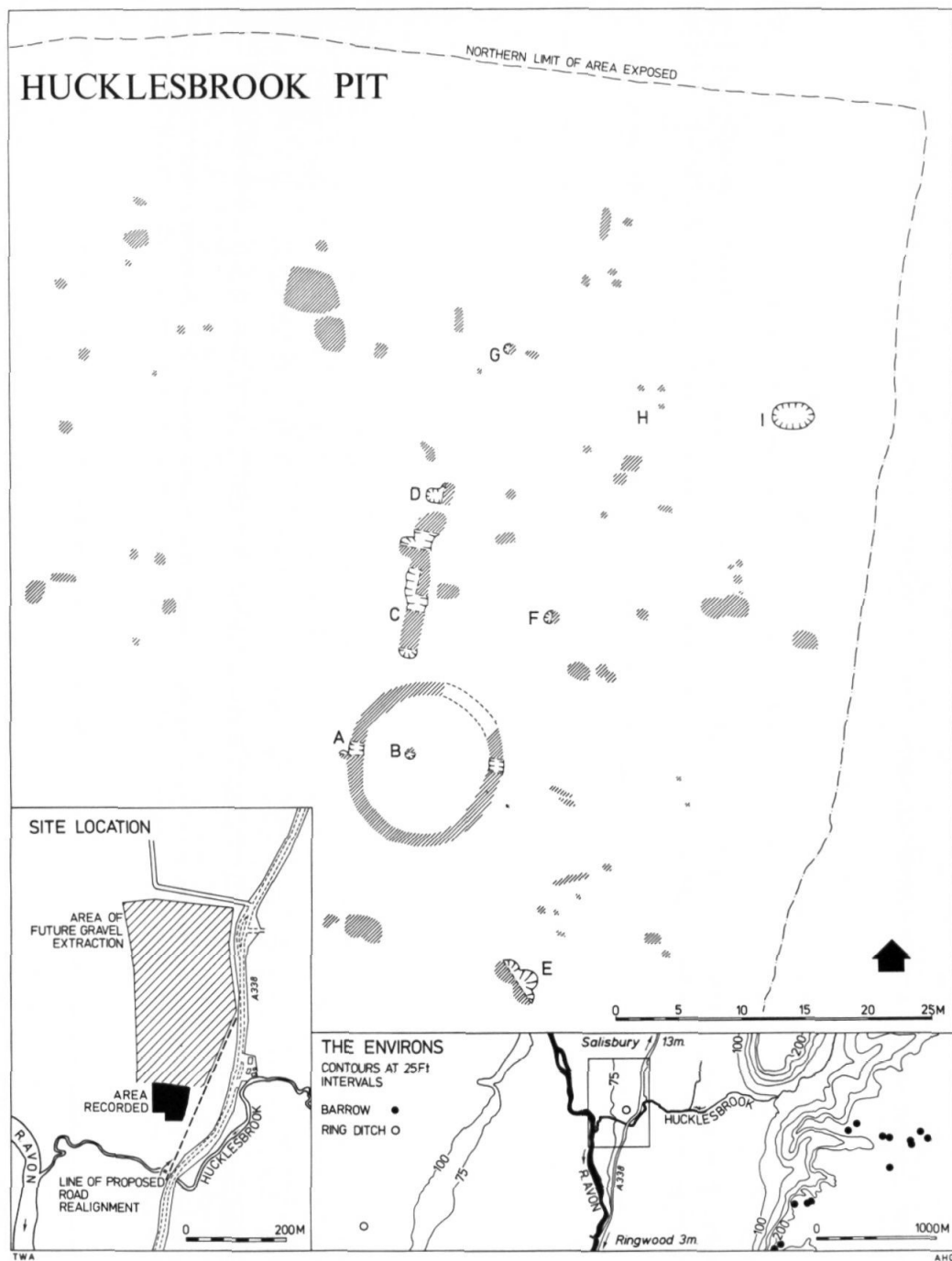


Fig 1. Hucklesbrook. Site location and positions of investigated features.

gravel.

With one exception (*Feature I*), all the other features exposed on the site appeared to be pits, or groups of pits, of various sizes, invariably filled with red-brown loam. Four of these were excavated: *Feature D*, a steep-sided pit c 0.60m deep; *Feature E*, an irregular round pit c 0.70m deep (the section did not suggest inter-cut pits, but rather a single irregularly-shaped hole); *Feature F*, a shallow rounded hole c 0.15m deep, the fill of which contained many fragments of burnt flint; *Feature G*, c 0.30m deep, with vertical sides. Its fill contained charcoal flecks, a fragment of burnt flint, and a single flint flake.

Several possible post-holes all 0.50m across or less, were also found; *Feature H* was a group of three post-holes or small pits, one of which contained a flint flake.

Feature I differed from all the other features on the site in that it was filled with rather dark, grey-brown clayey-loam, containing a high proportion of charcoal flecks, as well as pottery sherds, which could be dated to the Anglo-Saxon period, probably the fifth or sixth century AD. The feature was a sub-rectangular hollow c 2m wide, and c 3m long, with a maximum depth of 0.15m. Several fragments of burnt clay were found in the fill, together with a small piece of lightly burnt sarsen, possibly from a saddle quern, presumably residual in this context.

One other feature must be mentioned; *Feature J* was noted during quarrying by the machine driver Mr Peter Allen, who recovered part of a group of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age pottery from it. It was a pit c 1m across, and c 0.50m deep, due north of the ring-ditch, close to the northern edge of the area recorded. The fill was red-brown loam, interleaved very distinctly with bands of charcoal.

Conclusions

The evidence suggests at least two periods of activity, prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon. The prehistoric period is represented by the ring-ditch, which probably marks the position of a ploughed-out Bronze Age barrow, and it is likely that, with the exception of *Feature I*, all the features recorded belonged to a prehistoric

phase, dateable on the basis of pottery from *Feature J*, to the later Bronze Age or early Iron Age. The purpose of most of the features is unclear however, and they need not represent a permanent or long-term settlement on the site, but only occasional activity in the area of the barrow.

Despite the limitations of the archaeological evidence, the site adds to the map of Bronze Age settlement in the Avon valley. Surviving barrows tend to be clustered along the top of the scarp on the eastern side of the valley, above the two hundred foot contour, and in the now forested area of relatively high ground on the western side of the valley. Bronze Age traces in the bottom of the valley have been limited to finds of flints, pottery or metal work, and the features recorded at Hucklesbrook show the potential of sites along the valley bottom for expanding knowledge of land-usage and settlement in the Avon valley during the Bronze Age.

The evidence for the Anglo-Saxon period comprised a single feature close to the eastern side of the area examined. *Feature I*, a shallow, sub-rectangular hollow in the gravel, was possibly the ploughed-out remains of a sunken-floored hut, or *grubenhaus*, though no associated post- or stake-holes were found. No other Anglo-Saxon features were found, so if the feature was part of a larger settlement, as would seem likely, that probably lay to the south-east of the site, closer to the Hucklesbrook. Anglo-Saxon pottery has in fact been found in the area between the main road and the stream, close to Huckles Bridge. The pottery from the feature is of a type current in the fifth or sixth centuries AD (see below) and any settlement at Hucklesbrook could therefore be one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlements in this part of the Avon valley. The proposed re-alignment of the main road to the north of Huckles Bridge (Fig 1) will cut across the area most likely to contain the remains of any such settlement.

The Pottery from Features I and J, by Sue Davies

Feature I

Two of the three fabrics defined are commonly

found on early Saxon sites, of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Fabric 1 is a variant of the classic 'grass-tempered' type, parallels for which are not uncommon; Portway, Andover (Cook forthcoming); Old Down Farm, Andover (Davies 1980); Abbots Worthy, near Winchester (Fasham forthcoming). Fabric 2 is also a standard type, paralleled for example at the cemetery of Charlton Plantation (Davies forthcoming). Fabric 3 (one sherd) appears most likely to be residual Iron Age, but could also be of early Saxon date.

The one decorated sherd (fabric 2) has four

impressed dots, probably in a pattern delineated by an incised line, perhaps infilling a triangle. Such decoration is common in the early Saxon period. No vessel forms were identified.

Feature J.

Twenty two sherds of pottery, in four fabrics were collected by the machine driver, Mr Allen, from *Feature J*. One only is probably Saxon (fabric 1), whilst the rest (predominantly flint-tempered) are probably of later Bronze Age date (fabrics 3, 4 and 5). Three plain rims, belonging to the latter period, possibly from small bowl forms were found.

REFERENCES

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THE DATE OF THE PILGRIMS' HALL, WINCHESTER

The date of the Pilgrims' Hall, Winchester, has been the subject of discussion for many years. The history of previous research into the building was summarised by one of us in a recent study (Crook 1982, 85-6), where a construction date at the very beginning of the fourteenth century was proposed on typological grounds. While the paper was going to press the possibilities of other methods of dating were investigated. Radiocarbon methods would be of little value because the uncertainty in the result would cover almost a century. But dendrochronology seemed to provide a more promising line

of enquiry. The problem was to find samples other than cores (apt to be of little value) which would give results and involve minimal damage.

During investigation of the building it had been noticed that two adjacent pairs of scissor-braces above Truss II had been truncated during seventeenth-century alterations, leaving mere stumps. In 1982 four samples (Nos i-iv) were thus available for analysis, and a further one (v) was cut from a rafter, similarly redundant, above the truss at the south end of the complex (Truss VI). On the basis of these