

THE EXCAVATION OF A SAXON SETTLEMENT AT RIVERDENE, BASINGSTOKE, HAMPSHIRE, 1995

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ABSTRACT

Excavation in advance of housing development at Riverdene, Basingstoke, Hampshire, revealed an extensive area containing Saxon settlement features, including both post-built and sunken-featured buildings, likely to date to the 7th or 8th centuries AD. Although most of the remains had been severely truncated, the number of buildings and the relatively substantial ceramic assemblage mean that the site forms a considerable addition to hitherto meagre rural settlement evidence for the Anglo-Saxon period in the region. Although more than one phase of building is clearly attested in at least one place, it remains unclear if the site was a large, short-lived settlement or a smaller one lasting for a longer period, involving the internal shifting of buildings. Other than the sunken-featured buildings, few features could be securely dated, but most were probably related to the Saxon occupation. A pair of ditches marking a driveway may belong with the Saxon settlement, or could conceivably be prehistoric. Only one other prehistoric feature (a pit) was encountered, and only one certainly later feature (a medieval pit).

INTRODUCTION

The excavation of a Saxon settlement at Riverdene, Basingstoke, Hampshire, took place from June to September 1995 (Fig. 1; NGR SU 650523). The excavation was carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in accordance with a specification prepared by the County Archaeologist, acting as archaeological adviser to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council planning authority. An evaluation of the area in question had previously been commissioned by the landowners, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, and carried out by the Oxford Archaeo-

logical Unit in December 1993 (OAU 1993). The excavation was followed by a watching brief during construction of the housing development. The archive has been deposited with Hampshire Museums Service with the accession code A.1996.28.

Location

The residential development at Riverdene is situated east of Basingstoke town centre, the total area encompassing approximately 8.5 hectares (Fig. 1). The site occupies a west-east spur of Upper Chalk, which has drift deposits of Clay-with-Flints, overlooking the river Loddon to the north and a tributary of the Loddon to the south, and bounded by a housing estate to the west and the A339 to the east. Just across the A339 was a spring line feeding the rivers. At the time of excavation the area consisted of overgrown pasture with some densely wooded areas. The site sloped fairly steeply down to the north and east from a high point some 90m above Ordnance Datum, and was bisected north-south by an old trackway known as Deadman's Lane.

Archaeological background

The gradual expansion of Basingstoke and subsequent extensive development of the surrounding area have led to the discovery of substantial archaeological remains in the vicinity. The area has been occupied extensively, particularly in the Iron Age and Roman periods, and elevated ground overlooking the valley and within easy reach of the valley's resources appears to have been favoured for settlement.

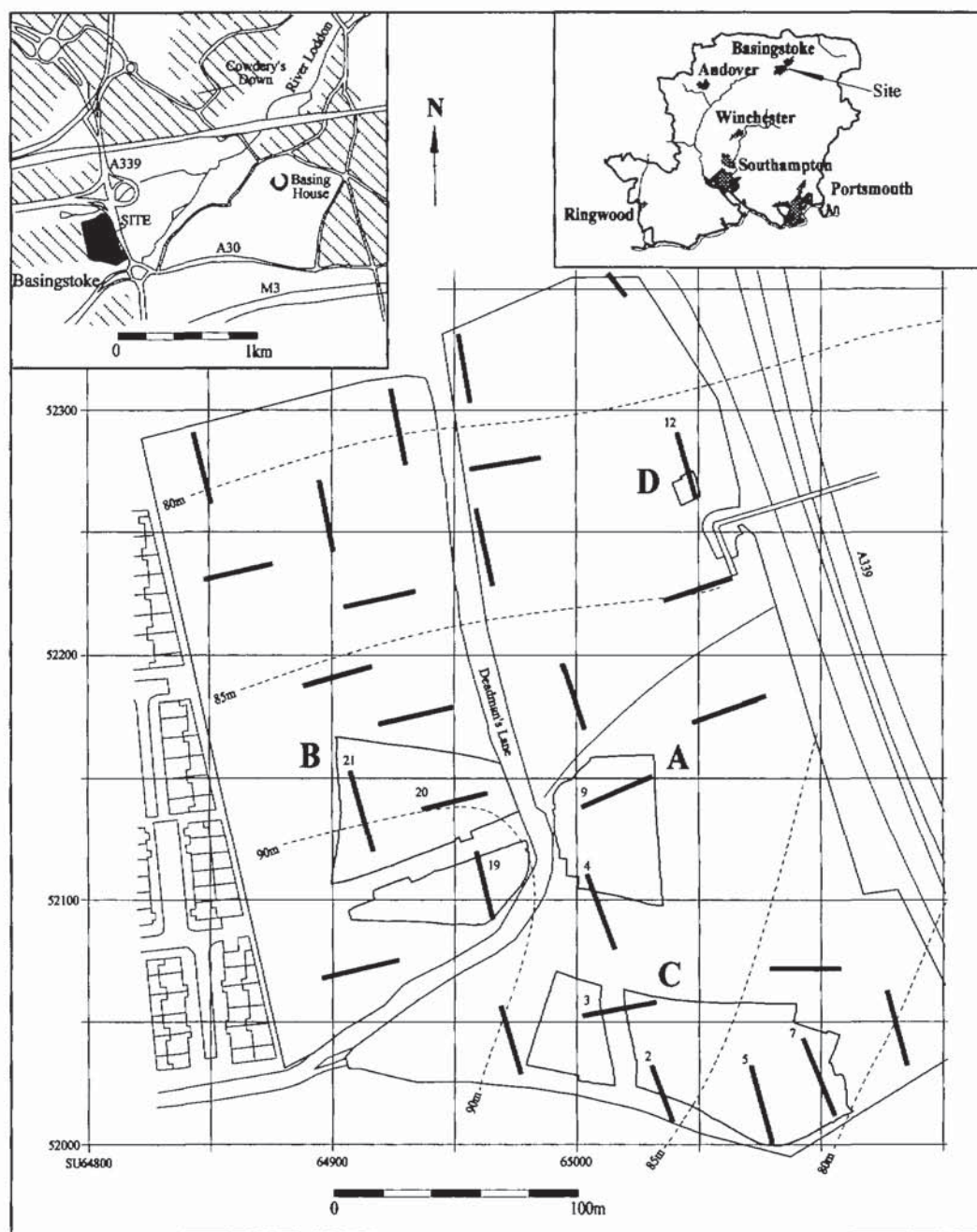


Fig. 1 Location plan of site, showing evaluation trenches and excavated areas (A-D)

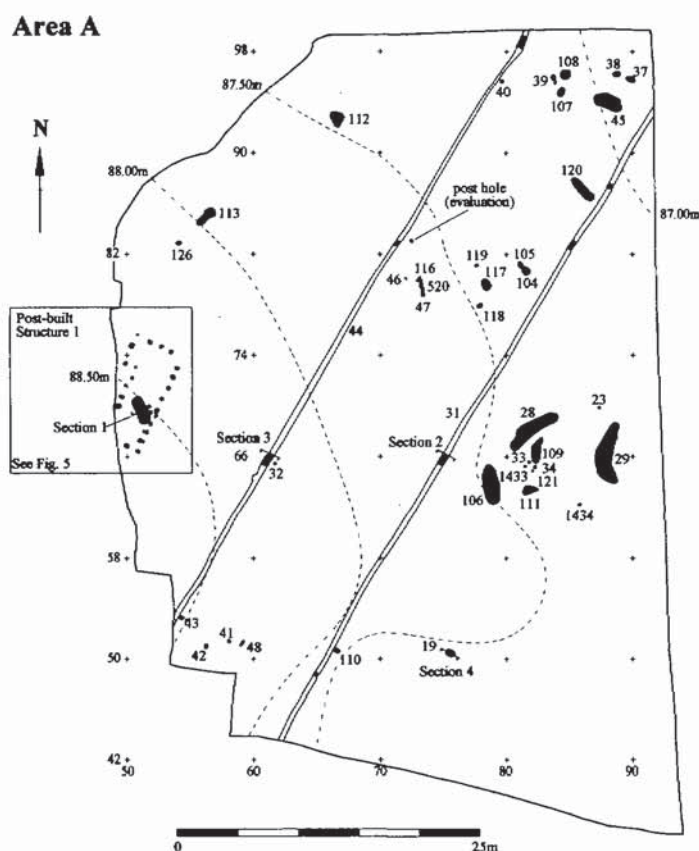


Fig. 2 Plan of Area A

In AD 990, Æthelred granted land at *Embasinga stocæ* to Æthelweard (Sawyer, 1968, no. 874). Domesday records *Basingstoches* as a royal manor (both before and after the Conquest), with a market and mills, while the abbey of Mont St Michel also held land and a church in the same hundred.

An Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation site was excavated at Cowdery's Down just over 1 km to the north-east of Riverdene (Millet and James, 1983). The only other Saxon finds recorded in the near vicinity prior to the excavation were an iron spearhead (SU63335349, SMR ref. SU65SW22) and a rich inhumation burial discovered during building work (SU64305400, SMR SU65SW64), both just over 2 km north-west of Riverdene.

Evidence of Roman occupation in the area was more plentiful but still sporadic.

The evaluation

The evaluation consisted of 29 trenches which, with one exception, revealed a silty loam topsoil (0.20–0.25 m deep) overlying a silty clay subsoil/ploughsoil that varied in depth from 0.05 m to 0.30 m. Beneath the subsoil on the top of the ridge was a reddish clay with large flint nodules, overlying the chalk. However, the northern slope was found to consist of successive waves of hillwash or colluvium, up to 1 m deep at the bottom of the slope.

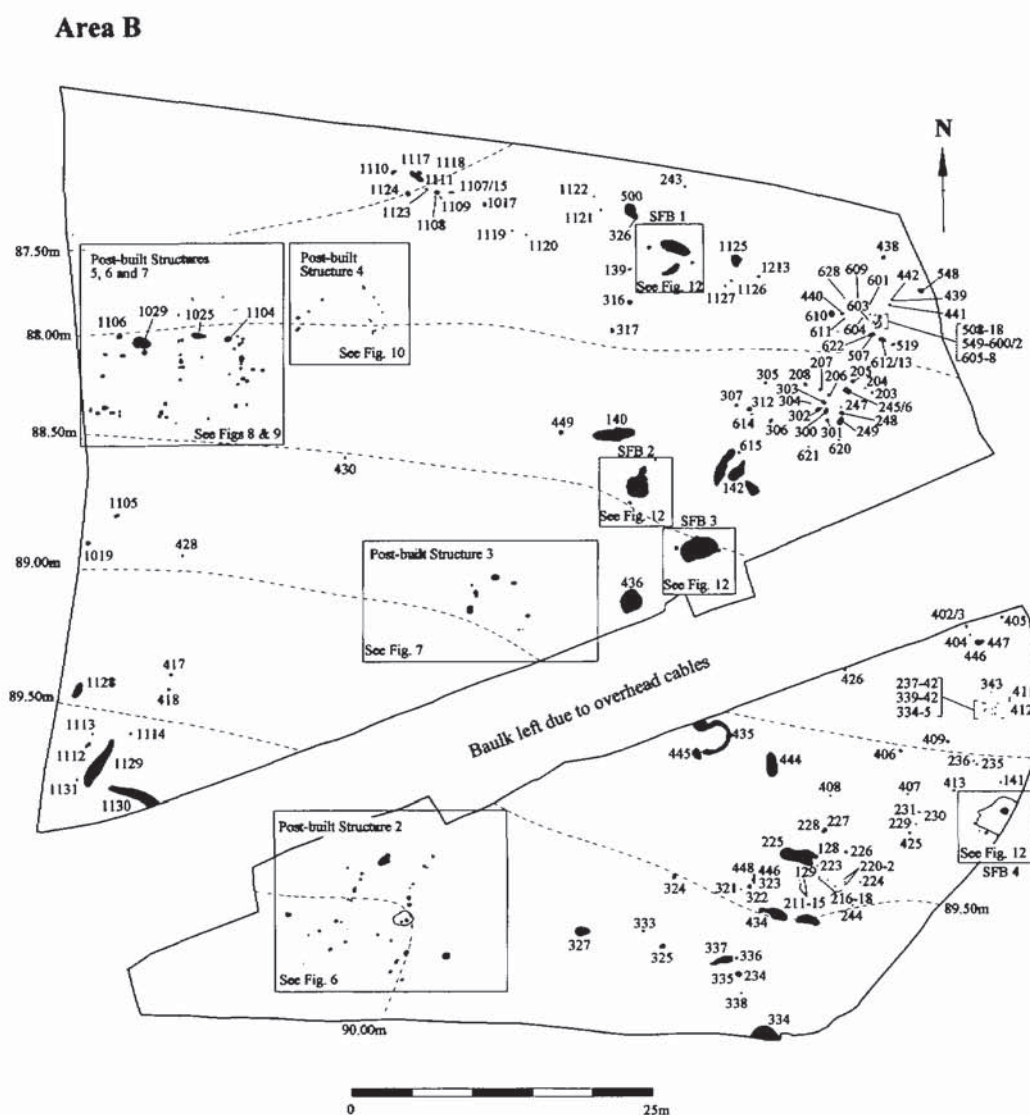


Fig. 3 Plan of Area B

The trenching located evidence of Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Saxon dates, including a probable Bronze Age ditch and two Saxon sunken-featured buildings (SFBs). In view of the development proposal for the site, the County Archaeologist recommended full excavation of these and any other remains as a requirement of the planning process.

THE EXCAVATION

The excavation comprised four areas (A-D), which were stripped of topsoil and subsoil using a 360° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Deadman's Lane, which runs between Areas A and B, was not available for stripping and two additional strips of land in

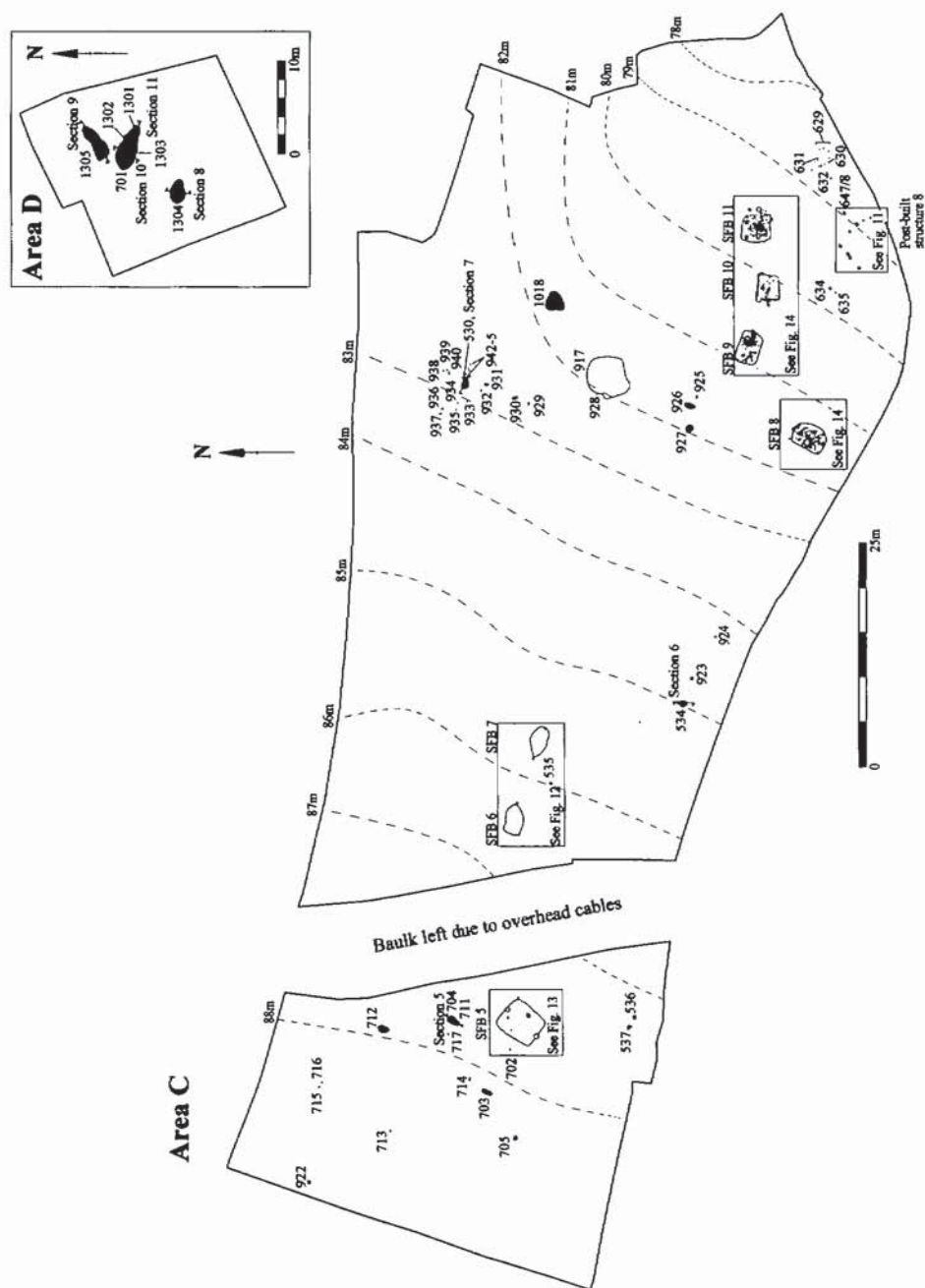


Fig. 4 Plan of Areas C and D

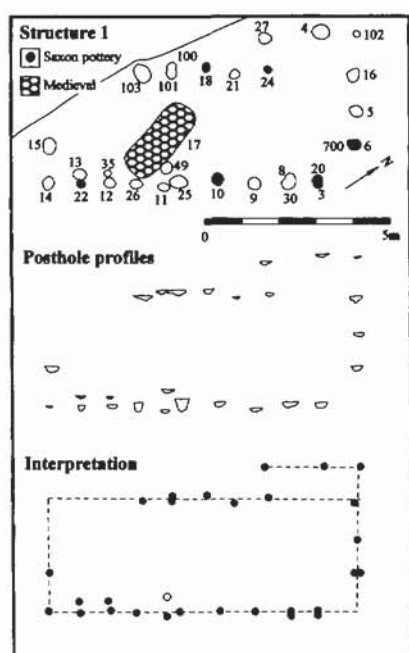


Fig. 5 Post-built structure 1: plan, posthole profiles and possible interpretations

Areas B and C and a small corner of Area A were left untouched due to the presence of overhead power cables. A natural hollow at the southern end of Area A was not stripped, nor was a small area at the eastern edge of Area C, where there was clear evidence of modern disturbance.

A toothless ditching bucket was mainly used to remove topsoil and subsoil, but a toothed bucket had occasionally to be used to remove topsoil due to the particular hardness of the ground. At a later stage a small kubota-type excavator was used to remove part of the baulk beneath the power cables in areas where it was predicted that further archaeological features might be present. Recognizing features was made particularly difficult by the arid conditions prevailing during the very hot, dry summer of 1995. Despite these difficulties approximately 860 features were investigated. Full details are retained in the

archive, and only the significant features are described here.

Several further visits were made to conduct a watching brief at the site during the preparation of the area for development. In general the conditions were not conducive to effective observation. No archaeological features were seen and just a few unstratified flint flakes and fragments of pottery were retrieved.

THE BUILDINGS

Post-Built Structures (Figs 5–11)

Eight possible post-built structures (not including four-posters) were discovered during the excavations at Riverdene. Details of the component postholes of each structure are in the archive. All but two of these were in Area B; only a single post-built structure was found in each of Areas A and C. The clearest of these was post-built Structure 1 in Area A, although part of this was obscured by the baulk. The remaining structures were difficult to discover and to define, which is reflected in the descriptions provided below. Many of the postholes were shallow and ill-defined, and very few contained dating evidence of any sort. It is possible that some postholes had been ploughed away completely, especially in Area B.

There is some evidence of successive phases of construction, particularly in the area of post-built structures 4–7. In this area in particular it is possible to interpret the configuration of postholes in a variety of ways. In each case the most likely interpretation has been given but, given the nature of the evidence, this is by no means a definitive description of the structures represented.

Post-built Structure 1 (Figs 5 and 9) Area A (Orientation: NE–SW)

This rectangular post-built structure lay partly outside the western boundary of Area A (Deadman's Lane). Saxon pottery was recovered from six of the postholes (Fig. 5). The building was 8.3 m long but its width was unclear. There were two rows, of three and six postholes respec-

tively, along its western side. The first (outer) row (4, 27 and 102) would make the building 4.0 m wide, whereas the second row (16, 18, 21, 24, 100/101 and 103) would make it 3.0 m wide. There are several reasons for believing the outer row of posts probably represents the west wall of this building. First, the gap between postholes 16 and 24 is 2.3 m and there was no apparent posthole between them. Second, given the insubstantial nature of the corner posts on the east side, symmetry suggests that the less substantial posthole 102 is the north-west corner post. Also, the outer row would give the building a length: breadth ratio of 2:1 which fits well with the hypothesis that many Saxon buildings were based on a 'double square' (James *et al.* 1984, and see below). Assuming that the outer row of posts was the true west side of the structure, just two corner posts were visible, a third was missing and the fourth was obscured by the lane. The two corner posts were both very shallow; 102 was just 0.04 m deep, and 14 was 0.03 m deep. The rest of the postholes that made up Structure 1 ranged up to 0.35 m deep. The six double postholes appear to have been contemporary rather than replacements.

The spacing between posts ranged from 0.70 m to 1.50 m, with an average spacing of 0.92 m. There may have been an entrance between postholes 10 and 25, halfway along the east wall. The gap between them was 1.05 m and posthole 25 was the deepest in this structure at 0.35 m.

The inner row of posts may belong to a further phase of construction obscured by the lane. However, the post settings of this row do appear to mirror those of the opposing wall. This may be coincidence or it could indicate that this is the true west wall of the structure.

Post-built Structure 2 (Fig. 6) Area B (Orientation: NE-SW)

This collection of post- and stakeholes was discovered in the south-west corner of Area B, south of the central baulk. It appeared to represent a second rectangular post-built structure, although it was by no means as clear as Structure 1 and, unfortunately, no pottery was recovered from any of the constituent

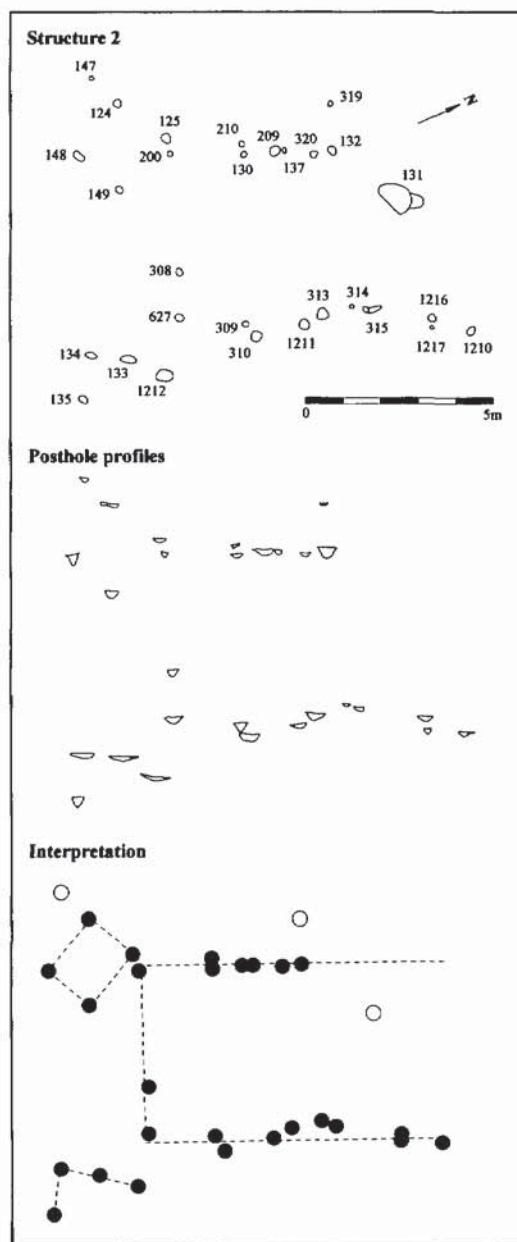


Fig. 6 Post-built structure 2: plan, posthole profiles and possible interpretations

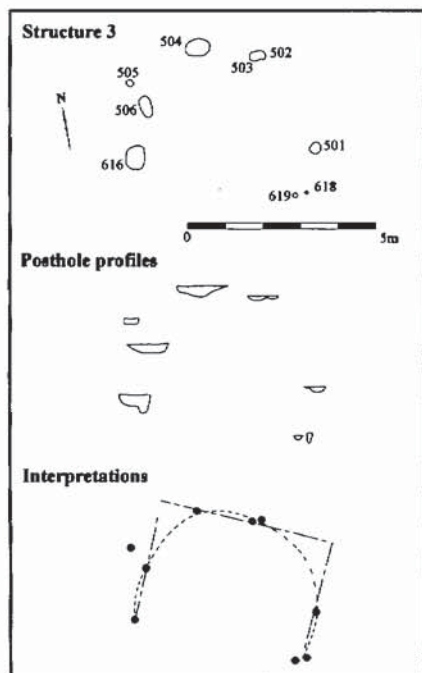


Fig. 7 Post-built structure 3: plan, posthole profiles and possible interpretations

postholes. Two lines of posts were discernible, forming what could be two sides of a rectangle. Ten postholes formed the east side of the structure, and eight more made up the west side. The postholes were less substantial than those in Structure 1. There were several double post-settings, as with Structure 1. However, there was no evidence of posts for the northern side and the evidence for the southern side is unclear; it may have crossed between postholes 125, 200, 308 and 627. It is also possible, however, that the southern side of the building was further south. The groups of postholes adjacent to the corners of the structure could be interpreted in several ways, as either free-standing minor structures or possibly corner-braces.

The rectangular structure appears to have been approximately 4.5 m wide (similar to the postulated width of post-built Structure 1). Assuming

an approximate length:breadth ratio of 2:1, we could expect the building to have extended just beyond posthole 1210 to the north. The spacing between posts ranged from 0.40 m to 2.0 m, with an average distance of 0.93 m. Thus the range is broader than for Structure 1 but the average spacing is virtually the same. There were no obvious entrances, although the doubling of posts either side of the largest gap (between posts 125/200 and 130/210) may suggest a doorway in the south-west corner.

Post-built Structure 3 (Fig. 7) Area B (Orientation: NE-SW)

Just to the north of the central baulk, towards the centre of Area B, was a small group of seven postholes (501-6 and 616) and two stakeholes (618-9). None contained dating evidence.

It is possible to interpret this group of postholes in two ways. Postholes 501-4, 506, 616 and 618/9 could represent a square or rectangular structure with missing corner posts and no south side. A structure of this type would have been approximately 4.50 m wide. Alternatively, the same group of postholes could be interpreted as a semi-circular structure 4.50 m in diameter, perhaps open on the south side.

Post-built Structures 4, 5 and 6 (Fig. 3) Area B

Towards the north-west corner of Area B there was a concentration of postholes which appeared to represent several structures. Many of these postholes were very shallow and it has proved difficult to provide a definitive interpretation of the sequence of buildings in this area. The clearest, Structure 4, stood apart from the group but was incomplete. The remaining posts probably represented two or more buildings; it is perhaps more likely that there were two successive rectangular buildings here (5 and 6) but there is also the possibility of a circular structure (7). Four of the features in this area produced Saxon pottery: 401, 419, 946 and 1020; while posthole 1000 contained a single prehistoric sherd.

Post-built Structure 4 (Fig. 10) Area B (Orientation: approximately NE-SW)

This possible structure consisted of twelve post/stakeholes none of which produced any dating

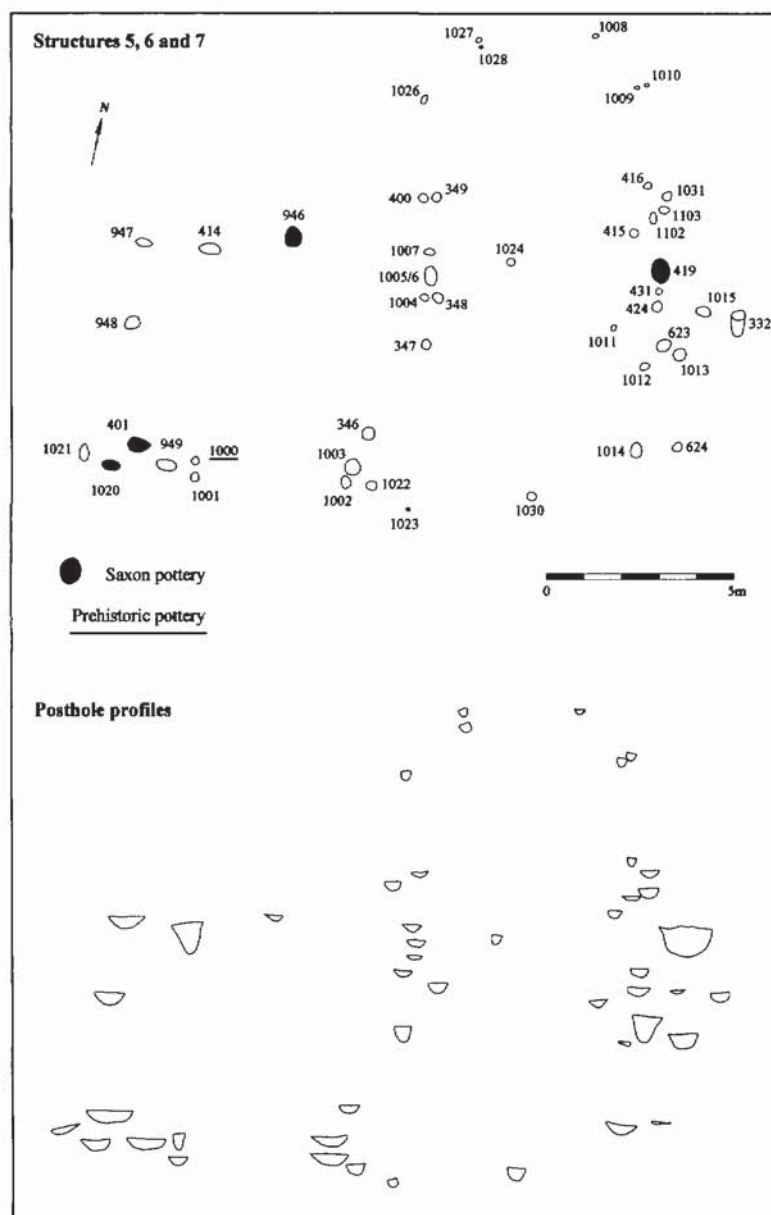


Fig. 8 Post-built structures 5, 6 and 7: plans and posthole profiles



Fig. 9 Area A, post-built structure 1, looking south-west. Scales 2m

evidence. The post- and stakeholes were smaller, in both plan and depth, than the postholes of Structure 1. No corner posts for the proposed structure could be detected but, assuming it was rectangular, this building would have been approximately 4.5 m wide and 6.5 m long.

Post-built Structure 5 (Fig. 9) Area B Orientation: N-S
Two parallel rows of postholes on a north-south axis could represent two sides of a rectangular building. The structure would have been approximately 5 m wide and 9 m long, with missing corner posts on the northern side and several missing posts, including one corner, on the southern side. Both sizes and the spacing between posts varied considerably and there appear to be several gaps. Some were grouped in pairs, and some were located directly opposite one another. Two sherds of Saxon pottery were recovered from posthole 419.

Post-built Structure 6 (Fig. 8) Area B (Orientation: E-W)
This possible structure consisted of 20 postholes, some of which are the same as those used for the interpretation of structure 5 above. Two of these postholes contained Saxon pottery: 401 produced one sherd; and 1020, two sherds. Posthole 1000 contained a single sherd of prehistoric pottery. Again, there were some double postholes.

This rectangular structure would have been approximately 4.5 m wide and between 9 m and 13 m long, depending on where the east end lay. Again, there are some gaps in the sequence of postholes, the west side consisting of just three posts. There are various possibilities for the east end, the most plausible giving a building 11 m long.

Post-built Structure 7 (Fig. 8) Area B
An alternative interpretation can be given for some of the postholes that make up the northern

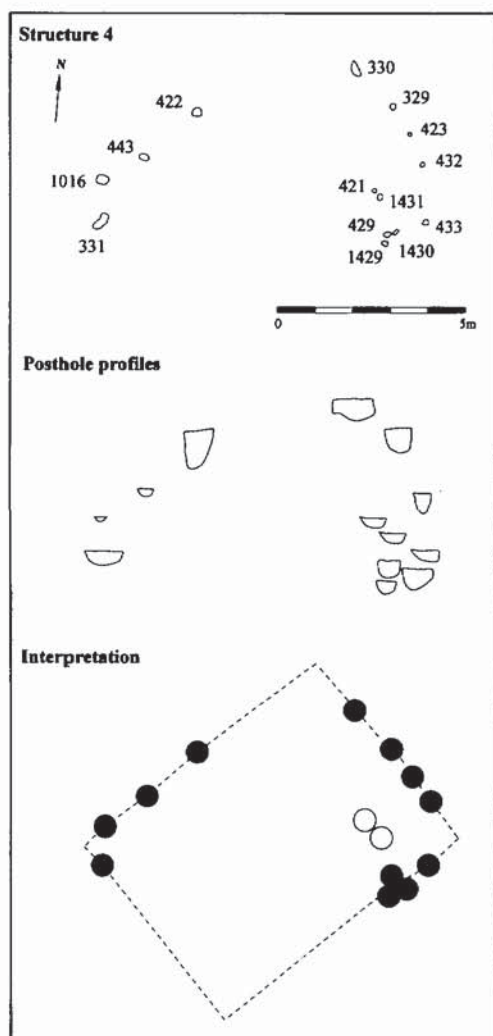


Fig. 10 Post-built structure 4: plan, posthole profiles and possible interpretation

end of structure 5. Structure 7 consists of 11 post/stakeholes which could form a circular structure approximately 5 m in diameter. Three other small postholes just outside this ring may also be related (1031 and 1102-3). No pottery was recovered from any of these features.

Many of the post- or stakeholes were relatively small and shallow, which could indicate a rela-

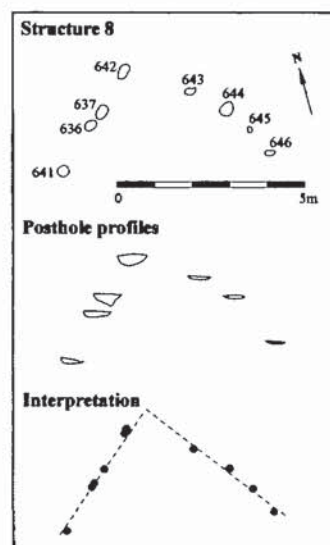


Fig. 11 Post-built structure 8: plan, posthole profiles and possible interpretation

tively insubstantial circular building. Although the results of the evaluation appeared to indicate the presence of prehistoric occupation in this area, very little prehistoric pottery was recovered from the site as a whole and just a single sherd was found in this part of the site during the excavation (in posthole 1000). It more likely that the buildings in this area were rectangular in plan and of Saxon date, although just four of the 62 features in this part of the site produced Saxon pottery, so that the possibility of round (prehistoric) structures certainly cannot be ruled out. Finally, it is just possible that Structure 5 was apsidal, and although this is not a common form for timber buildings in any period on British sites, it finds a possible parallel at Prospect Park, Harmondsworth, 'hall 721' (although this is only ambiguously of early Saxon date: Andrews, 1996a, 23-4 and fig. 20).

Post-built structure 8 (Fig. 11) Area C (Orientation: NW/SE?)

An L-shaped group of eight postholes, close to the south-east baulk in Area C, may represent

another poorly preserved post-built structure. Many of these postholes were rather indistinct but their fills were found to contain charcoal flecks, even though many were very shallow.

Discussion of Post-Built Structures

Among the post-built structures at Riverdene, the only good example was Structure 1 and even this was not complete as part was obscured by Deadman's Lane. There were clearly numerous other post-built structures on the site but, given the nature of the evidence, it is difficult to interpret the groups of postholes with any certainty. This is very different from nearby Cowdery's Down where it was possible for the excavators to discuss in detail the construction of extremely well-preserved building remains (Millett & James 1983; and see Alcock and Walsh, 1994, for an equally detailed reappraisal).

Most of the structures at Riverdene were evidenced by parallel rows of postholes, presumably the sides of rectangular structures, and in most cases it was not obvious where the end walls of the structures were. For this reason it is only possible to calculate with any confidence their widths, which ranged from 3 to 5 m. Structure 1 was 8.3 m long and estimates of the lengths of the other buildings range from 6.5 to 11 m. Both the widths and estimated lengths are well within the dimensions recorded for similar buildings elsewhere (Rahtz 1976; Marshall & Marshall, 1994).

There was no evidence at Riverdene of 'post-' or 'plank-in-trench' construction, as found at Cowdery's Down (Millett & James 1983) and the chalk downland site at Chalton, Hants (Addyman & Leigh 1973; Addyman *et al.*, 1972). The Riverdene buildings were smaller than the post-in-hole examples at Cowdery's Down, which ranged in width from 4.6 to 7.3 m and were between 13.8 and 16 m long (one incomplete example, A2, may have been just 9.8 m long). Similar buildings found at Chalton came in a range of sizes from small and virtually square e.g., 4.40 × 3.75 m (structure B3), through medium, e.g., 8.80 × 4.50 m (structure B2) to large, e.g., 12.10 × 5.55 m (structure A11). The Riverdene buildings also varied in

size but were generally similar to the medium-sized buildings at Chalton. Riverdene Structure 1 was probably 8.3 m × 4.0 m, the largest (Structure 6) may have been c. 4.5 m by 9 or 11 m, and Structure 4 was perhaps smaller at 4.5 × 6.5 m. All of these sizes are well within the typical range for the region and period (Marshall and Marshall, 1994, 389 and *illus.* 15).

The post-in-hole technique appears to be the earlier form of construction (Marshall & Marshall 1991; 1994) generally requiring smaller dimensions, especially widths. Larger, post-in-trench and plank-in-trench buildings developed from the 6th century onwards. The increased strength derived from the latter methods may have allowed the construction of wider buildings (Marshall & Marshall 1991). The evidence suggests that the Riverdene site was occupied in the 7th and 8th centuries, whereas Cowdery's Down and Chalton were probably occupied between the 6th and 7th centuries; this need not invalidate the idea that both the post-in-hole method and smaller ground plans are earlier, since considerable overlap in the dating of the different traditions can be envisaged. The 7th century specifically seems to have been the period of the greatest mixing of styles in this region, smaller buildings continuing to be constructed using individual post-hole settings, larger buildings using trenches, with the transition to foundation trenches complete by the 8th century, by when even the smallest buildings used this method (Marshall and Marshall 1994, 389–90). It is also interesting to note the broad similarity between the buildings at Riverdene, both post-built and sunken, and some of the buildings at the 5th to 6th century site of Bishopstone, Sussex (Bell 1977).

A two-square module for the construction of Saxon buildings has been suggested (James *et al.* 1984) and more recent work has supported this model (Marshall & Marshall 1991). For example, the larger of the post-in-hole buildings at Chalton was probably constructed in this way, as two squares either side of the central doorways (Addyman & Leigh 1973). At Riverdene, Structure 1 may have been based upon a 'double square' with a central doorway on the eastern side between posts 25 and 10, with perhaps posthole 49, just inside the southern jamb, serving

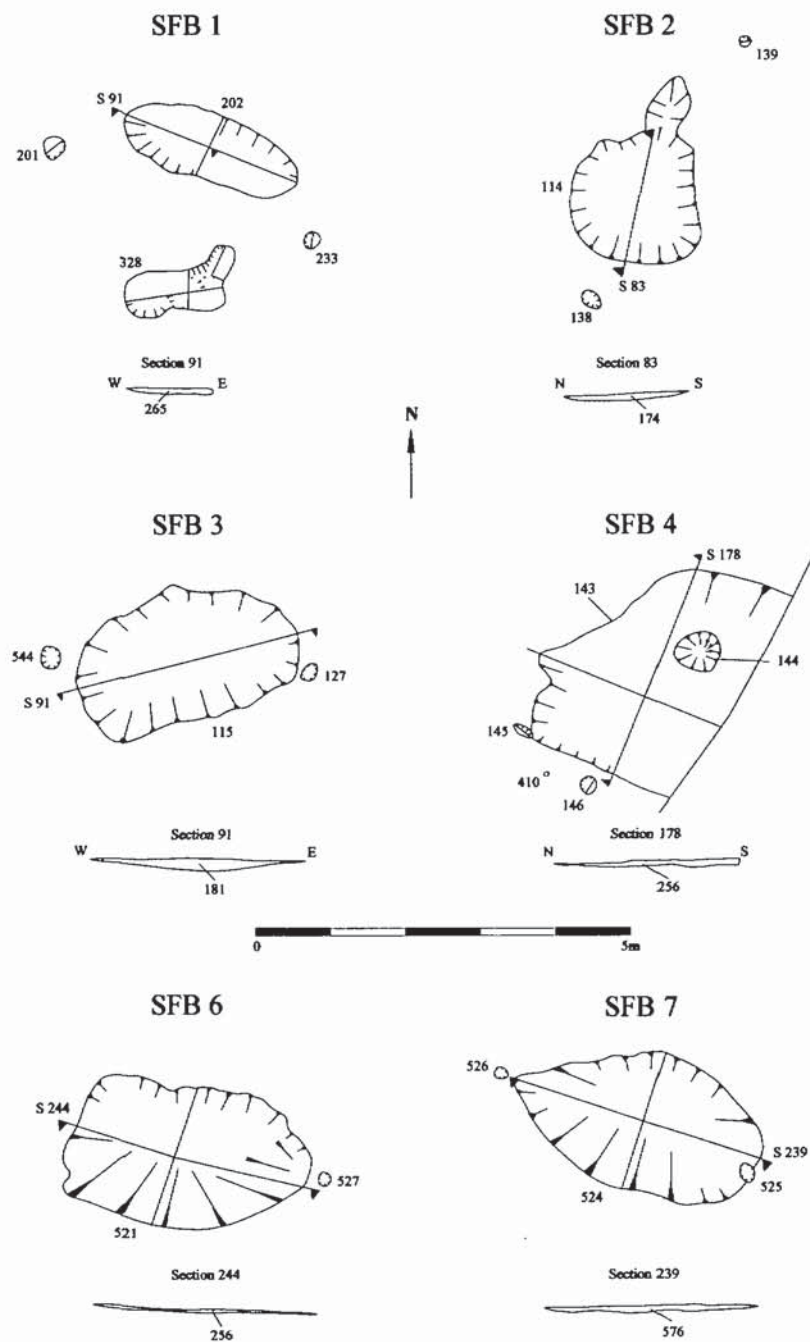


Fig. 12 Plans and sections of SFBs 1-4 and 6-7

to support an internally hung door, as at Chalton. Unfortunately, the evidence for the remaining buildings at Riverdene is really not good enough to test this model. What evidence there is would seem to come close to the 2:1 length:breadth ratio needed, apart from Structure 4 which is nearer 1.4:1.

There is evidence at Riverdene of less substantial or missing corner posts, e.g., Structure 1, an observation made at many other sites, including Chalton, Hants (*ibid.*), West Stow, Suffolk (West 1985), Prospect Park, Harmondsworth (Andrews 1996a), and Brixworth, Northants (Ford 1995). Most of the structures at Riverdene had several double postholes, some positioned very close together, the cuts for others overlapping, but there was no clear evidence that the second post was a replacement or additional support for the first. Double post-holes have also been noted elsewhere, for example, small paired postholes were observed for Bishopstone structures XXXVII and XXXV (Bell 1977, 224). There was no evidence at Riverdene of external raking timbers, such as were discovered at Cowdery's Down (Millett & James 1983), unless perhaps as part of Structure 2; an absence which was also noted for the structures at Mucking, where it was suggested that the shallower holes needed for raking timbers may have been ploughed or scraped away. The same could be said for the structures at Riverdene. However, as Hamerow (1993) pointed out in her discussion of the post-built structures at Mucking, it has been suggested by Dutch scholars that double posts, like those at Mucking and Riverdene, may have performed the same function as raking timbers, viz., to stabilize the wallplate against the outward thrust of the rafters (Huijts 1986).

No evidence of hearths or floors was discovered within the structures at Riverdene, but this is not unusual; hearths are rarely located on these sites (James *et al.* 1984, 193).

In contrast to the sunken-featured buildings (aligned basically E-W, see below) the long axis of four of the post-built structures was orientated directly NNE-SSW and, of the two other structures whose orientations could be ascertained, one appears to have been orientated almost due

N-S and the other almost due E-W. It seems likely that the orientations were determined relative to the direction of the slope of the hill rather than any other factor. If the entrances to these buildings were centrally positioned on the long sides the majority would face east-south-east, assuming the doorways would not face into the prevailing winds. Indeed, the only evidence of a doorway at Riverdene is that in the middle of the ESE-facing side of Structure 1.

Four-Post Structures

Just two possible four-post structures have been identified at Riverdene; others may remain undetected among the apparently random clusters of uninterpreted postholes. Four-posters are usually interpreted as storage racks, although positive evidence for their function is lacking. One group of four postholes was located in the centre of the eastern half of Area A (Fig. 2, postholes 33-4, 121 and 1433). These were all quite insubstantial. There was evidence of post-packing in the form of large flint nodules in posthole 33.

A second possible four-post structure may have been located adjacent to post-built structure 2 in Area B (Fig. 7; 124-5 and 148-9).

Sunken-Featured Buildings (SFBs) (Figs 12-16)

Of the eleven hollows interpreted as sunken-featured buildings (SFB), five are confidently interpreted, although some of their ground plans may not be complete, and six are more doubtful. Table 1 summarizes their orientation, width, length, the distance between gable posts, and dimensions of gable postholes (where appropriate); table 2 summarizes finds from each (including associated postholes). Four were found in Area B, and seven in Area C. There was no detectable stratigraphy within the fills of the SFBs, most of which were quite shallow.

SFB 1 (Fig. 12)

This dubious structure was located towards the northern boundary of Area B (see also SFBs 2-4, 6 and 7). It consisted of a shallow oval feature (202) 0.85 m wide, 2.45 m long and just 0.08 m

deep, the fill of which (265) contained quite a substantial quantity of pottery considering its depth. Just to the south of this was a very ephemeral feature, 328, which appeared as three patches of silty clay, the edges of which were difficult to define. Taken as a whole they were 0.50 m wide, 1.40 m long and 0.10 m deep, and contained no artefacts.

Axially positioned between these features were postholes 201 and 233. Posthole 201 contained a single sherd of Saxon pot. Posthole 233 had a charcoal-rich fill. Both had steep sides and flat bottoms.

Given the spatial configuration of this group of features, it is possible that at least 202, and possibly also 328, were the remains of a sunken feature, with postholes 201 and 233 being the remains of holes to take opposing gable posts. The fill of 328 was not the same as 202 and it contained no pottery. It is possible that 328 was a natural silty patch beneath the sunken feature. The natural slope in this part of the site could have led to differing preservation, with the lower part of the SFB surviving (202) and the upper part disappearing altogether.

SFB 2 (Fig. 12)

Approximately 18 m to the south of SFB 1 was another group of quite similar features (114 and 138–9). This also had a roughly circular central hollow (114), approximately 1.60 m in diameter and just 0.07 m deep, which may have extended towards posthole 139, although this part of the feature was extremely shallow. Positioned at either end of 114 were postholes 138 and 139.

This group of features, together with SFB 3 (see below), was located on the crest of the hill some 25 m from Deadman's Lane. This part of the site may have been subject to a greater degree of truncation and erosion, due presumably to ploughing, than parts of Area C, for example.

SFB 3 (Fig. 12)

This building was situated 5 m to the south-east of SFB 2 and was very similar. The shallow oval hollow (115) was 3.0 m long, 2.0 m wide and 0.13 m deep. Its fill (181), contained a large proportion of charcoal and some burnt clay and pottery.

Either side of this were two postholes, 127 and 544. Posthole 127 had steep sides and a flat base. Its fill (189) contained just two pieces of fired clay and some charcoal. Posthole 544 had steep sides and a rounded bottom. Its fill had a high proportion of charcoal flecks but did not contain any pottery.

SFB 4 (Fig. 12)

This possible SFB was immediately adjacent to, and indeed partially obscured by, the eastern boundary of Area B (Deadman's Lane). It consisted of a large, relatively shallow feature (143) approximately 2.4 m long and 0.19 m deep. Its true width is unknown but the visible extent was just over 2.0 m. The south end of the feature had steep sides and was cut square but the north end was shallower and more rounded.

Associated with this feature were three postholes (144–6) and a stakehole (410).

As with SFBs 1, 2 and 3 described above, it is quite likely, judging by the quantity of Saxon pottery, the fill and size of 143, and the associated

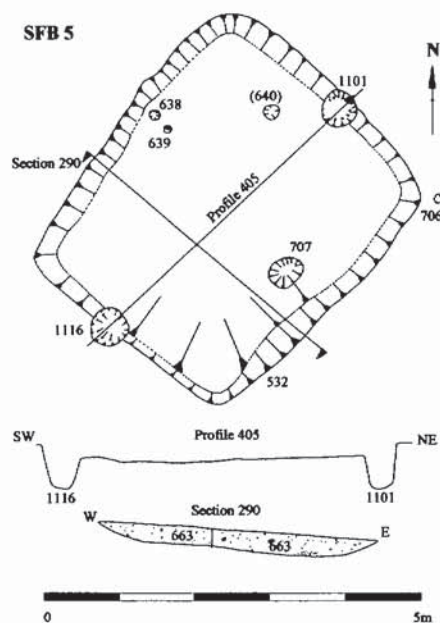


Fig. 13 Plan and section of SFB 5

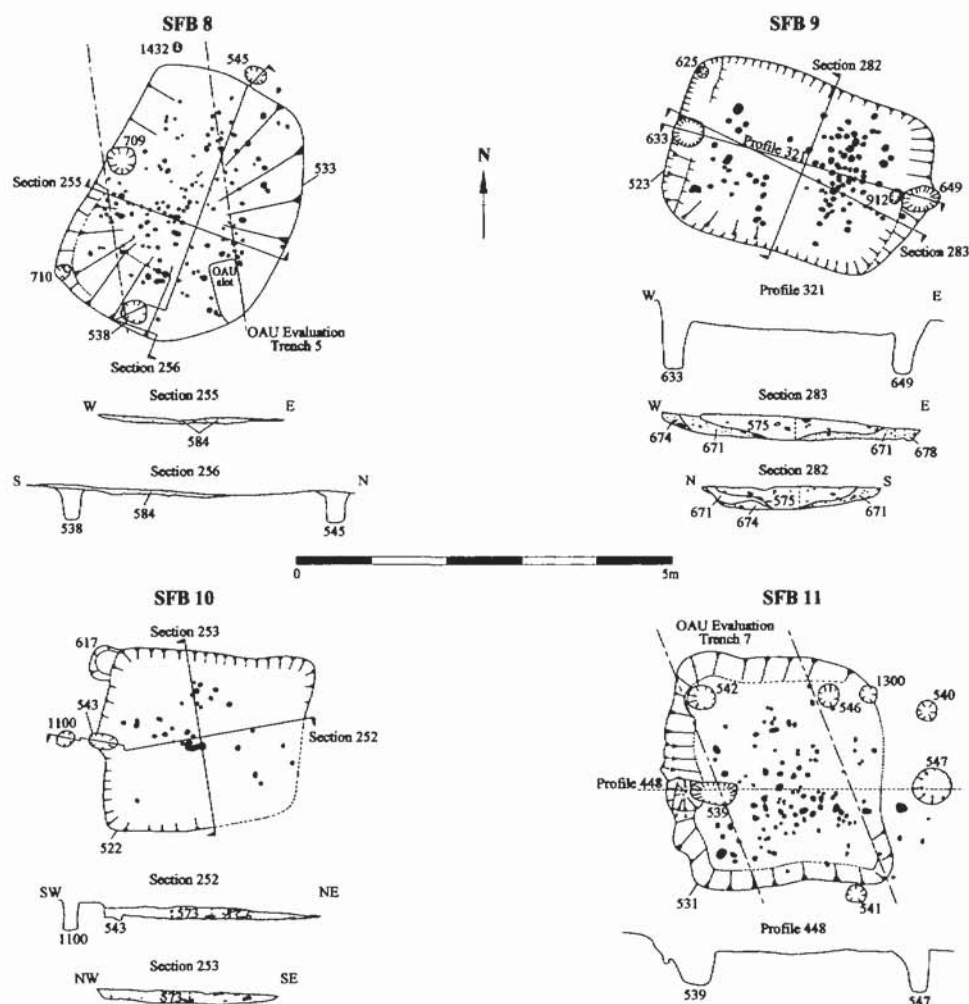


Fig. 14 Plans and sections of SFBs 8-11

postholes, that this feature was also the heavily eroded base of an SFB. Its slightly better preservation is probably due to its location immediately adjacent to Deadman's Lane, which may have protected it from severe plough-damage. The location of posthole 144 towards the centre of the main feature contrasts with the other SFBs at Riverdene. The relationship between this and 143 was not clear during the excavation and it is not

possible to say whether they were contemporary: the posthole may have been unrelated to SFB 4.

SFB 5 (Fig. 13)

The remains of this building were situated close to the central baulk at the west end of Area C. It was the largest SFB discovered at Riverdene at approximately 4.30 m × 3.60 m, and survived to a depth of 0.25 m. The sunken hollow (532) was

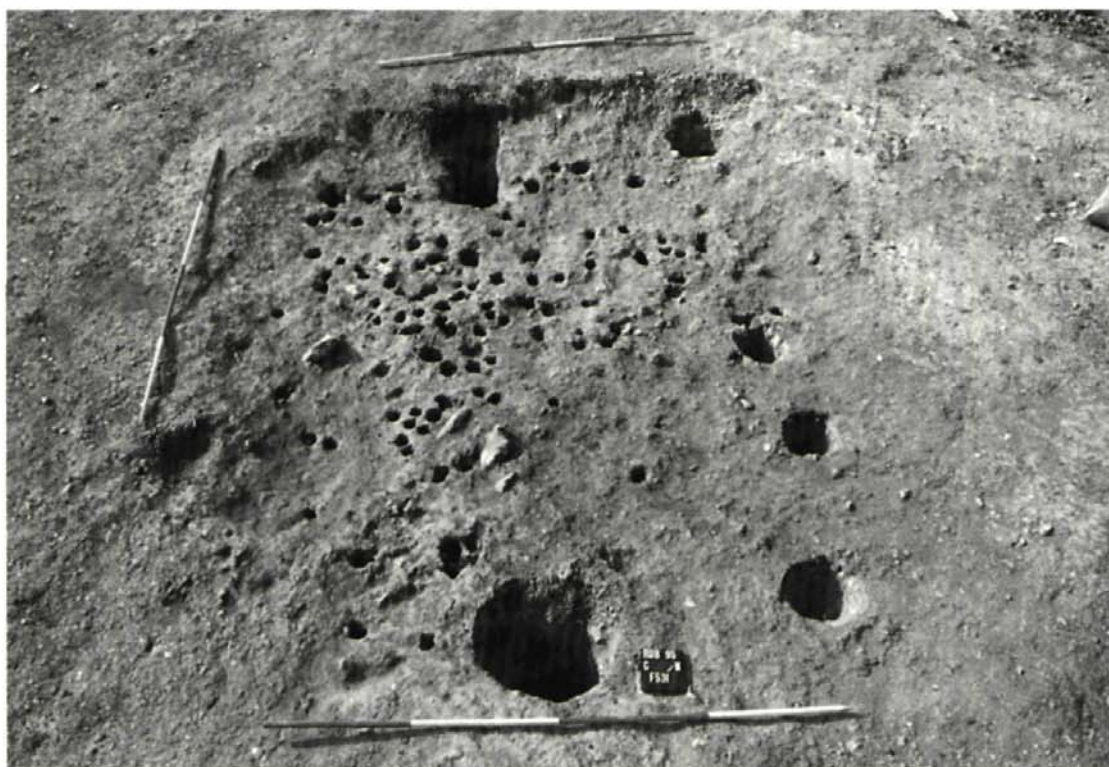


Fig. 15 Area C, SFB 9, looking east. Scales 2m

slightly trapezoid in plan, narrowing to the south-west from 3.75 m to 3.20 m. The main fill (663) was a silty clay with some flint nodules, charcoal pieces and flecks, and some chalk flecks.

The SFB had two deep postholes (1101 and 1116) positioned central to the narrow sides and two stakeholes (638 and 639) were just within the hollow, along the north-west side of the building. Stakehole 638 had been disturbed by an animal burrow. Posthole 707 was almost opposite these, 0.45 m from the eastern side of the SFB, within the main feature. Posthole 640 was clearly cut through 663, the fill of 532, and therefore post-dates the accumulation of this fill.

The building was orientated northeast-to-south-west, like several other buildings at Riverdene

(see Table 1). The SFB had been dug on a slight slope, mainly into a chalk ridge, although some of the base of the feature consisted of Clay-with-Flints. The two deep postholes at the narrow ends presumably held gable posts.

SFBs 6 and 7 (Fig. 12)

Just the other side of the central baulk, roughly 20 m away, were two broad shallow features, 521 and 524, very similar in nature to SFBs 1, 2 and 3. Feature 521 (SFB 6) was 2.20 m × 3.0 m and just 0.04 m deep, whereas 524 (SFB 7) was 1.90 m × 3.40 m and 0.09 m deep. Feature 521 had a single posthole just outside its eastern edge (527). Feature 524 also had a posthole just inside its eastern edge (525) and an opposing one just outside the western edge (526). Posthole 525 was filled with a silty clay with charcoal flecks

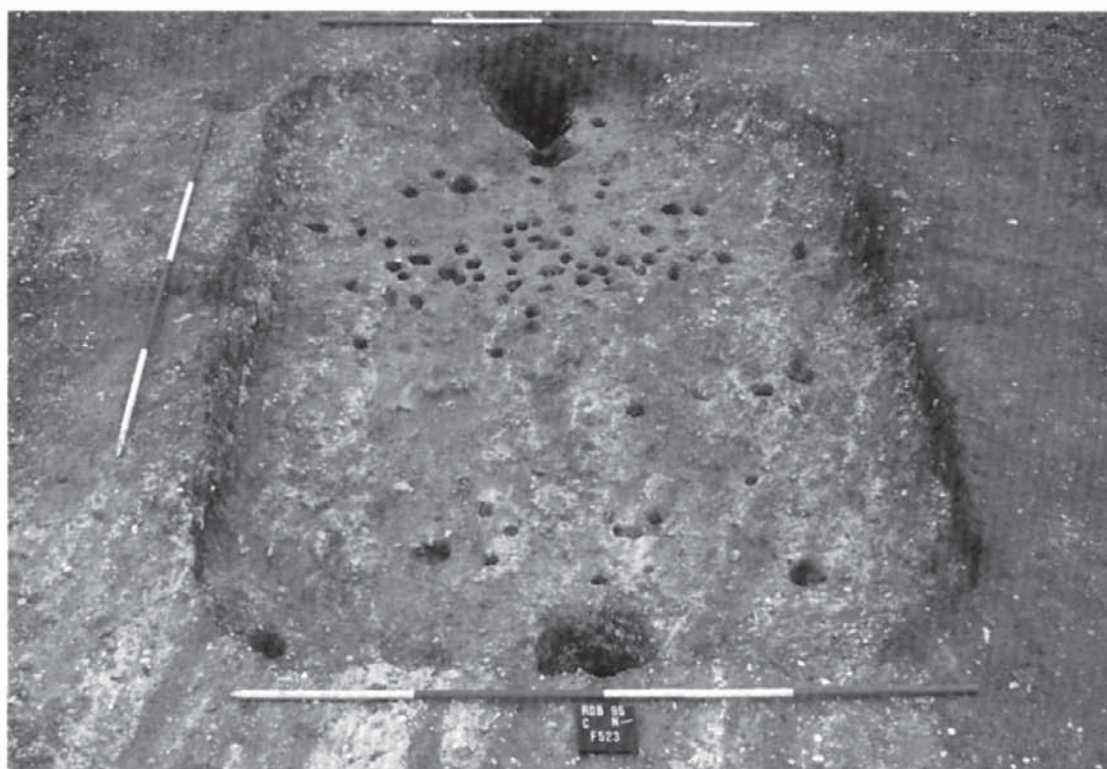


Fig. 16 Area C, SFB 11, looking south-east. Scales 2m

but no artefacts. Posthole 526 was similar in size and fill.

SFB 8 (Fig. 14)

This is the first of a group of four SFBs towards the eastern end of Area C. The main feature (533) was just 0.10 m deep, and had five postholes associated with it. The base of the hollow consisted mostly of clay with some areas of chalk. It had very gently sloping sides to the south-east and north-west but a more steeply sloping side in the south-west quadrant. OAU evaluation Trench 5 crossed this feature from south-east to north-west, and a slot excavated through the fill of the hollow had revealed posthole 1432. A further slot at the south end

was taken deeper than the base of the hollow and may perhaps have removed any stakeholes in this area had they existed.

This sunken-featured building produced a range of artefacts (see Table 2). During the cleaning of the base of the building many possible stakeholes were noticed and subsequently excavated. Some of these may have been of dubious origin but the majority were convincing. A check was made outside this and the other SFBs in this area to ensure that this was not a natural phenomenon occurring over a wider area, but although stakeholes were found in the bottom of all four SFBs in this part of Area C, no similar features were seen outside the SFBs. In all, 151 stakeholes were recorded in the base of SFB 8. These stakeholes did not form any particular

pattern, although they clustered more towards the southern half of the building and there were some blank areas.

SFB 9 (Figs 14 and 15)

Approximately 10 m to the north-east was SFB 9. This was rectangular with slightly rounded corners and was cut into a natural chalk ridge which crosses this part of the site. It had a relatively flat base with steep sides along the northern edge and a more gradual slope on the southern side. There was a slight ledge or platform at the western end and substantial central postholes within the hollow at both short ends (633 and 649). Posthole 633 was cut through the slight platform at this end of the building with almost vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. Posthole 649, at the opposite end of the structure, had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. Adjacent to this was a smaller posthole, 912, which may have given added support to the gable post. Lastly, a small post- or stakehole, 625, was in the north-west corner of the building. It had steep sides and a blunt, tapered base.

The main feature (523) contained a broad range of artefacts (table 2). As in SFB 8, a cluster of stakeholes, 98 in all, was discovered in the base of 523. Most were in the eastern half of the feature although there was a group, including a line of stakeholes, in the western half.

SFB 10 (Fig. 14)

Approximately 3 m further east was SFB 10, which consisted of a slightly irregular, rectangular hollow with rounded corners and a flat base cut into the chalk ridge. Its south-east corner appeared to have been truncated. This SFB had three postholes associated with it: 543; 617; and 1100; together with thirty stakeholes cutting the base of the hollow (522).

There were just 30 stakeholes clustered towards the northern half of this feature, far fewer than in some of the other SFBs in this area.

SFB 11 (Figs 14 and 16)

Approximately 3 m to the north-east was SFB 11. This was truncated on the east side and had seven postholes associated with it. One of the OAU

evaluation trenches (no. 7) crossed the SFB from north-west to south-east and located postholes 541 and 542.

Also located within the base of 531 was a collection of 105 stakeholes, and, although there is no clear pattern to them, the deepest (those above 0.10 m depth) clustered in the south and west sections of the building, with a rough line of deeper stakeholes along the western side.

Discussion of SFBs

Form and Dimensions (Table 1)

The five most definite of these buildings (SFBs 5 and 8–11) were all situated in Area C. Three of the less convincing buildings were discovered on the crest of the hill in Area B (SFBs 1–3), although two similar buildings (SFBs 6 and 7) were also found close to the largest SFB (5) in Area C. Rather than this being the effect solely of differential preservation, it is quite possible that some of these buildings were either less substantial, or differently constructed, in the first place. Several attempts have been made to classify sunken-featured buildings, such as von Guyan's two-, four- and six-post huts (1952, 180) and Ahrens' gable-post and corner-post houses (1966, 207–29). More recently, West grouped sunken-featured buildings at West Stow according to the number of posts: two-post, two-post derivative, four-post, four-post derivative, six-post and six-post derivative (West 1985, 113–14). Whilst the evidence at Riverdene is limited due to the incomplete nature of some of the SFB plans, many appear to fit the two-post or two-post derivative category. The exceptions, SFBs 8 and 11, albeit incomplete, may belong to the six-post derivative group. They clearly had more than one post at the shorter ends and additional postholes on the longer sides.

It has not been possible to obtain the complete dimensions of all the less substantial buildings but, using the measurements between the presumed gable posts, we can see that they are similar in length, at least, to the more substantial examples (see Table 1). The distances between gable posts for the most definite SFBs (5 and 8–11) range

Table 1 Orientation and dimensions of SFBs

<i>SFB No.</i>	<i>Orientation of long axis</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>L/W ratio</i>	<i>Distance between gable posts (centre to centre) (m)</i>	<i>Dimensions of gable post-holes (width × depth m)</i>
SFB 1	ESE-WNW	—	—	—	3.60	W 0.30 × 0.16 and E 0.19 × 0.23
SFB 2	NNE-SSW	—	—	—	4.00	SW 0.20 × 0.18 and NE 0.12 × 0.08
SFB 3	E-W	—	—	—	3.55	W 0.26 × 0.25 and E 0.20 × 0.30
SFB 4	?	—	c. 2.40	—	—	—□
SFB 5	NE-SW	3.60	4.30	1.19	4.20	SW 0.42 × 0.37 and NE 0.42 × 0.66
SFB 6	E-W	2.20	3.00	1.36	—	E 0.23 × 0.16 (only)
SFB 7	ESE-WNW	1.90	3.40	1.79	3.50	W 0.16 × 0.13 and E 0.18 × 0.09
SFB 8	NNE-SSW	2.60	3.60	1.38	3.60	SW 0.30 × 0.45 and NE 0.28 × 0.44
SFB 9	E-W	2.40	3.40	1.41	3.20	W 0.30 × 0.90 and E 0.30 × 0.80
SFB 10	E-W	2.40	2.70	1.13	—	W 0.25 × 0.15/0.42 × 0.66 (only)
SFB 11	E-W	3.00	3.75	1.25	3.00	W 0.60 × 0.28 and E 0.52 × 0.56

from 3.00 m to 4.20 m, whereas the less substantial (1–4 and 6–7) range from 3.50 m to 4.00 m (the average being 3.66 m.). So, the less substantial buildings have a narrower range of sizes, but the difference is insignificant. The main differences between these and the more definite SFBs are in the size of the main hollow and the number and size of associated postholes. If we take, for example, SFBs 3, 6 and 7, the hollows for these range from 3.00 to 3.40 m long and 1.90 to 2.20 m wide. They were also very shallow, at between just 0.04 and 0.13 m deep. In comparison, SFBs 5 and 8 to 11 range from 2.70 to 4.30 m long and from 2.40 to 3.75 m wide. They also survived to a greater depth, at 0.10 to 0.30 m. The postholes that would have

held the gable posts for SFBs 3, 6 and 7 ranged in width from 0.16 to 0.26 m, and in depth from 0.09 to 0.30 m. In contrast, the postholes for the gable posts of SFBs 5 and 8 to 11 were more substantial, ranging in width from 0.25 to 0.60 m and in depth from 0.28 to 0.90 m.

Taken as a whole, then, the sunken-featured buildings can be divided into two, possibly three, categories. Firstly, SFBs 1–4, 6 and 7 have small, shallow, hollows and two opposing postholes (SFB 6 had only one). SFBs 5 and 9 also had two gable posts but these were much more substantial than the first group. SFB 5, the largest at Riverdene, had a slightly trapezoidal hollow with smaller, more dubious, postholes within it. SFB 9 was smaller and had two additional small posts

within the hollow, one of which may have provided additional support for a gable. SFB 10 was similar but postholes were discovered at only one end, the other being truncated. SFBs 8 and 11 may belong to the six-post derivative category. These were situated in the same part of Area C as SFBs 9 and 10, and were very similar in size. All these last four contained large numbers of stakeholes in the base of their hollows, similar to those discovered at Bishopstone, Sussex (Bell 1977), in smaller numbers at Old Down Farm, Andover (Davies 1980), and for example GH192 at Mucking, Essex (Hamerow 1993).

No interior hearths were found in any of the SFBs, nor were there hearths close by which could be interpreted as being within a larger building with a small sunken component.

Orientation

Where orientation can be determined, seven of the sunken-featured buildings were similarly aligned, along an axis between E-W and ESE-WSW, with three others aligned closer to NE-SW (Table 1). A roughly E-W orientation appears to have been preferred generally for both sunken-featured and post-built Saxon structures, and similar orientations have been noted at many other sites, for example Pennylands, Milton Keynes (Williams 1993), Walton, Aylesbury (Dalwood *et al.* 1989) and Abbots Worthy, Hampshire (Fasham & Whinney 1991), while the Marshalls' analysis (1994) suggests that rarely were fewer than 75% of structures in any region/period aligned roughly east-to-west; where exceptions did occur, most were aligned due north-south. There was no clear evidence of entrances for the SFBs at Riverdene but presumably the doorways would not be facing the prevailing winds coming from the west, in which case they may have been on the eastern end or along the southern side. The latter would have provided the maximum amount of sunlight assuming that these buildings had no windows.

Construction and Function

The SFBs were mostly of the two-post type, with a posthole in the centre of each narrow end. These are usually interpreted as having taken supports for

a simple ridge-pole. All of the less well-defined possible SFBs have these posts outside the hollow, whereas for the better examples the postholes are sometimes within the hollow, sometimes partially or completely outside it. Some additional postholes appeared to have been positioned to provide extra support to the gable, perhaps when the main post had been weakened by erosion. Extra posts supporting a door-frame have not been found and doors remain a structural problem.

There was some evidence of ledges, for example in the south-west corner of SFB 8 and at either end of SFB 9 (both examples also had stakeholes in their bases). These ledges have been interpreted as remnant floors protected from wear by restricted access to the sides due to low eaves, as at Walton, Aylesbury (Farley 1976). It has also been suggested that they are the result of cleaning out of the hollow (Rahtz 1979). There was no evidence at Riverdene of suspended wooden floors, as suggested for similar buildings at West Stow (West 1969). West suggested that the sub-floor spaces were perhaps used for storage, or to provide ventilation in order to preserve the life of wooden floors. The evidence of stakeholes in the floors of some of the huts at Riverdene, together perhaps with the evidence of ledges, supports the view that for these buildings at least the floor of the building was the floor of the sunken hollow.

The wide variety of functions applied to SFBs at other sites has been discussed in more detail elsewhere (e.g., Rahtz 1976, 76) with interpretations including spinning huts, weaving sheds, byres, store-houses etc. Unfortunately, there is no evidence at Riverdene to suggest specific functions for the sunken-featured buildings at this site, although the presence of large numbers of stakeholes in the bases of four of the SFBs (8-11) is presumably connected with the activity carried out in those buildings. The sheer numbers of stakeholes involved would seem to suggest that some sort of construction or frame, such as a vertical loom, was being moved or reconstructed frequently.

Artefacts

Not only did the SFBs contain the largest quantities of pottery found on the site, they also

Table 2 Finds from the SFB

SFB	Saxon Pottery (sherd count)	Metallwork	Other	Flora/fauna
1	29			
2	11 + 1 Roman			
3			Fired clay	
4	13 + 1 prehistoric			
5	62	Copper alloy strap frag	Roman tile, spindlewhorl, bone pin,	2× bread wheat, 1× barley, Animal bone
6	5			Animal bone
7	63		Loomweight	Animal bone
8	62	Copper alloy disc	glass bead, bone needle, burnt flint	1× spelt, Animal bone
9	162 + 1 Roman	Copper alloy: Nail cleaner, strip fragment. Iron: leather-clip, knife, 4 nails,	?quern frags, glass bead, glass frag., 45× Roman brick/tile, fired clay	Animal bone
10	210 + 5 Roman	8 iron nails	Bone comb, bone pin, tile ×10, fired clay, burnt flint, slag, glass	Animal bone
11				Animal bone

contained a wide range of other artefacts (Table 2). SFB 9 produced the broadest range of materials. Some of the metal items, such as the nail-cleaner and leather-clip, are crudely made and likely to be of Saxon manufacture. However, the brick and tile assemblage includes Roman pieces evidently robbed from a building presumably not too distant from this site. All of this material is probably post-abandonment rubbish/backfill, rather than relating to the use of the structures, although the precise mechanism whereby Roman material would become mingled with contemporary rubbish remains obscure.

Other Features in Area A (Fig. 2)

Postholes

A further 14 postholes were discovered in Area A. None of these appeared to form structures of any sort, although four may have been related to ditches 31 and 44 (see below).

Pits

Located within the confines of post-built Structure 1 was an oval pit (17) with steep sides, a flat base, and five fills (63 and 152–5; Fig. 18). One sherd of medieval pot, two peg tiles of late- or post-medieval date and two presumably residual

Saxon sherds came from middle fill 153.

Trackway/droeway (Fig. 2)

Two parallel ditches, 31 and 44, approximately 12 m apart, crossed Area A from the south-west to the north-east corner, across the slope. Ditch 31 had previously been located during the evaluation (trench 4, 4/8) when it was found to contain a single prehistoric sherd and three flint flakes. During the excavation four slots were excavated across ditch 31 and three across 44, but no further artefacts were recovered from either, except that some iron ?nail fragments were found on the surface of ditch 44. Both features were narrow (0.40 m) and shallow (0.05–0.15 m), and their orientation apparently respected that of post-built Structure 1, approximately 10 m to the west. They may have delineated a trackway or droeway, perhaps contemporary with this structure, although it remains possible that they should be dated by the prehistoric finds.

Three or four postholes were found flanking the ditches. None produced dating evidence and they were very widely spaced, at from 14 m to 20 m apart. The lines of the ditches were investigated for further postholes but none was found. Given the shallowness of the ditches, these may have been only the deepest of a putative line of fence posts alongside.

Hearth (Fig. 2)

An isolated small hearth, 19, was found in the southern part of the area. Both fills (65 and 66) contained large quantities of charcoal and bottom fill (66) showed signs of burning *in situ*. No dating evidence was recovered.

Tree-clearance?

A group of features (28, 29, 106, 109, 111) towards the eastern edge of Area A proved difficult to interpret, especially given the extremely dry conditions prevailing during the excavation. Feature 28 contained one sherd of Saxon pottery and several struck flints, including a microlith. Feature 29 had six fills and a single sherd of prehistoric pottery came from its top fill. It is likely that these were tree-throw holes, and it is tempting to associate them with clearance in

advance of construction of the droeway, but this can only be speculation.

Other Features in Area B (Fig. 3)

Postholes and stakeholes

There were a further 104 postholes and 65 stakeholes in Area B that have not been attributed to particular post-built structures, most of which also remain undated. Postholes 243 and 1108 contained a single sherd of Saxon pottery each. These features tended to occur in clusters which must represent structures but no convincing plans could be identified.

Pits

The most interesting of the five pits in Area B was 334 (Fig. 4), which was partly obscured by the southern baulk. The visible part of the feature was 1.40 m long and approximately 0.30 m deep, and its main fill produced 40 sherds of Saxon pottery. It is not impossible that this was a further sunken-featured building. Four other pits or scoops in the area contained no finds and cannot be dated.

Other Features in Area C (Fig. 4)

Postholes and stakeholes

Besides the postholes associated with the SFBs and the one possible post-built structure in Area C (Structure 8) there were an additional 36 undated postholes in this area and 19 undated stakeholes. Some of the postholes may have been for fences; for example 929, 930, 931, 938, 939 and 940 formed a line parallel to the 83m contour, and 934, 935 and 941–5 formed a line crossing this in an east-to-west direction.

Pits and hearths

Four small pits were located in Area C. None was particularly substantial. Just one of these, 704, contained Saxon pot (11 sherds); the rest remain undated.

A small pit or hearth (534) contained three distinct fills, the top two of which were very rich in charcoal. This may have been a hearth, although there was no evidence of burning *in situ* as such and the fill of the pit may have derived from elsewhere. Similarly, a circular pit or hearth

with a bowl-shaped profile (530) had two fills, the top one (582) also quite rich in charcoal. Again, there were no clear indications of burning *in situ* and none of the surrounding clay had been reddened by fire. Neither of these features produced dating evidence.

Three further features investigated in this area were probably natural in origin. Feature 917 (a tree-throw hole) contained six sherds of prehistoric pottery.

Features in Area D (Fig. 4)

This small area was located further down the northern slope, adjacent to the A339, and was targeted for excavation as evaluation Trench 12 revealed colluvium to a depth of at least 1.20 m and a small pit at a depth of 0.50 m below the upper colluvial layer. The pit produced five sherds of Neolithic or early Bronze age pottery and 25 worked flints.

During the excavation a larger area, approximately 101 sq. m, was stripped in the region of this trench. This revealed a group of six pits (701 and 1301–5). Pit 701 was that discovered during the evaluation and a further two prehistoric pottery sherds were retrieved from its fill. This feature was cut by pit 1303 which contained a single sherd of Saxon pottery, and was possibly also cut by pits 1301 and 1302 which, in common with pits 1304 and 1305, contained no finds.

The two prehistoric sherds from pit 701 are likely to be *early* prehistoric, although more precise dating is not possible. It is interesting that the only other sherd from this area was the Saxon sherd from pit 1303. This casts some doubt upon the likelihood of all of these features being prehistoric, although the presence of seven sherds and 25 worked flints in the fill of 701 provides a more convincing date for that feature.

THE FINDS

The Pottery by Jane Timby

Introduction

An assemblage of 978 sherds (9.6 kg) of pottery was recovered from the excavation, to which can be

added a further 126 sherds (3.2 kg) from the earlier evaluation (Bown 1993). Although the group included sherds of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval date, the main emphasis, (98%), was on wares dating to the Saxon period. The sherds were of variable condition, with some very well preserved, large, relatively fresh sherds, often with several pieces from single vessels, together with much more abraded material. The largest groups came from the fills of the SFBs, with a scatter of material from other features. The material was sorted into broad fabric types and quantified by weight and count for each excavated context. In the following report the wares are discussed chronologically. Details of the fabrics and forms are in Appendix 1, and a complete catalogue of the pottery is included in the archive.

Prehistoric

Six features produced sherds of prehistoric date: linear feature 29, SFBs 4 (143) and 9 (523), pit 701, treehole 917, and posthole 1000. In total eleven sherds were present, six of which came from 917, all with a calcined flint temper. Unfortunately the sherds were plain bodysherds and thus precise dating is difficult, although a date in the earlier prehistoric period is likely.

Roman

Ten sherds of Roman pottery were found; all except one were within the fills of SFBs. They include three pieces from an early 2nd century samian cup, Dragendorff type 33, together with two other Roman sherds probably from the Alice Holt kilns and at least one from a form belonging to the later 1st century, all from SFB 10 (522, fill 573). There were also two sherds of a grey sandy ware from SFB 2 (114) and a perforated grog-tempered sherd from SFB 9 (523). The sherds are indicative of an early Roman settlement in the vicinity and are presumably redeposited, although by what mechanism cannot be determined. Items such as the samian cup could have been specifically collected, or if still complete, it may have been used in the Saxon period.

Saxon

Saxon sherds made up the greater part of the assemblage, some 954 sherds. Although a variety

of fabrics is present (Appendix 1), most of the sherds are in a sandy ware with varying amounts of added organic material. The commonest forms are simple everted rim cooking pots/jars, although at least one small cup/lamp (SFB 10, 522) (Fig. 17.10) and one ?dish are present. Most of the sherds are plain but there were five decorated pieces, one perforated lug and one fragment from either a spout or a small cup. The decorated sherds include two pieces with hollow pressed-out bosses encircled with a series of three or four lightly incised curvilinear lines in the *hängende Bogen* style (SFB 7, 524 and SFB 11, 531; Fig. 17.11, 13), one sherd with just two lines (SFB 10, 522), and two joining pieces with incised lines and irregular-shaped impressions (SFB 6, 521) (Fig. 17.4). The pierced lug came from SFB 10 (522) (Fig. 17.5). In addition, a single fragment of an annular loomweight was present in SFB 7 (524).

Most of the pottery, and all of the large groups, came from the SFBs (Table 3), which together account for 93% by count, 82% by weight. One of the largest groups came from SFB 9 (523) including examples of all the fabrics identified, which suggests their broad contemporaneity. Rectangular post-built Structure 1 in Area A yielded eleven sherds from seven of the postholes, mostly in very fragmentary condition apart from posthole 15 which contained four larger sherds. Pit 17, contained within the structure, is probably a medieval feature as it contained tile and a sherd of medieval pottery.

Most of the wares were probably locally made, each household producing its own requirements from materials to hand, hence the minor variations in fabric between vessels. One exception may be a possible imported sherd from SFB 11 (531), a basesherd from a closed wheelmade vessel with concentric cutting marks on the underside. The fabric is a very hard mid-grey ware with ill-sorted rounded quartz and a sparse to moderate frequency of fine black inclusions visible at $\times 20$. The ware does not resemble the local Roman products and may be a continental import.

The tradition of organic-tempering is a particularly long-lived one, spanning the 6th to 9th/10th centuries in some areas. Sandy wares can be equally long-lived. The single radiocar-

bon date from SFB 9 (523) would suggest that the assemblage from this structure, which produced one of the largest groups of pottery, was deposited in the 7th or 8th century. Such a date would somewhat contradict Myres' conclusions (1977) with regard to the dating of the bossed style of urn, which is traditionally regarded as a typical 5th- to 6th-century development. The decorated pieces from Riverdene are too fragmentary to determine whether the bosses were set on the shoulder or lower, on the mid carination of the vessel, although the latter seems most likely. It is also, unfortunately, not possible to appreciate the overall decorative scheme of the vessels, which seem to occur as single sherds. Vessels employing this *hängende Bogen* style, particularly in association with bosses, are generally dated to the 5th–6th century in Britain, having earlier antecedents in East Holstein and Mecklenburg (Myres 1977, 57). Urns with hollow bosses have been found at Alton (Evison 1988, fig. 39, C4; fig. 40, C12) dated broadly to the later 5th–6th century but otherwise are a relatively rare phenomenon in this part of the country, the better known examples coming from East Anglia and the East Midlands. There are two obvious possible explanations here: either these particular vessels (or sherds) were curated items; or the tradition itself is longer-lived than hitherto thought.

The nearby Saxon settlement at Cowdery's Down, Basingstoke (Millett & James 1983), dated to the 6th/7th centuries, produced remarkably little well-preserved pottery, 146 sherds, with no decorated diagnostic types. The emphasis was again on organic tempered wares, presumed to be of local manufacture (Brisbane 1983). To the north, Abingdon has produced a vessel with a pierced lug similar to that from Riverdene (Myres 1977, fig. 76, 2034). Myres (*ibid.*, 10) considers that most of the British examples of lugged domestic pottery belong to the 6th century or later. Recent excavations at Benson (Pine and Ford, forthcoming) have located another Saxon settlement, comprising three SFBs. Here again, organic-tempered wares followed by sandy wares dominated the assemblage (Timby, forthcoming). At least one bossed vessel was present.

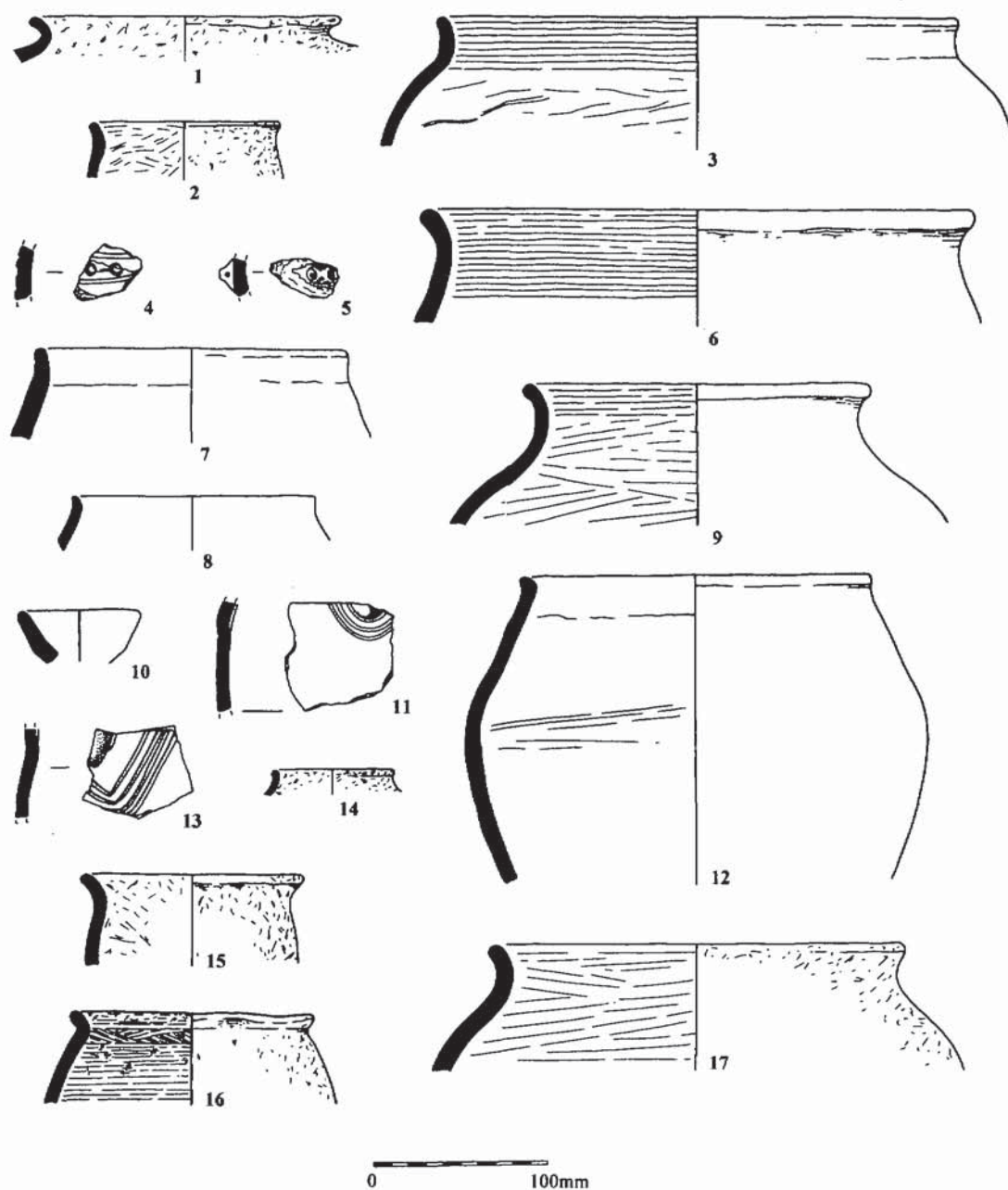


Fig. 17 Pottery; Scale 1:4

1. Everted rim cooking pot. Dark grey with a brown interior. Fabric SO. Posthole 243 (362)
2. Small bowl/cooking pot. Dark brown in colour with a coarse organic temper, fabric SO. Smoothed exterior and interior rim. SFB 3, 115 (181)

3. Large wide-mouthed cooking pot, black with a grey-brown interior. Fabric SO. Smoothed exterior and interior rim surfaces. SFB 3, 115 (181)
4. Two joining bodysherds decorated with two diverging incised lines and irregular oval impressions. Black with a brown interior, fabric O1. SFB 6, 521 (574)
5. Small bodysherd with a small horizontally perforated lug. Black in colour, fabric SO. SFB 10, 522 (573)
6. Large wide-mouthed cooking pot, dark brown in colour, fabric SL. Smoothed exterior and interior rim. SFB 10, 522 (573)
7. Cooking pot with a vertical rim, mid to light brown, fabric S3. Smoothed interior surface. SFB 9, 523 (575)
8. Cooking pot, mid orange-brown in colour, fabric S3. SFB 9, 523 (575/671/674)
9. Large everted rim cooking pot, light brown exterior with a reduced interior. Smooth matt exterior, burnished interior. Fabric SO. SFB 9, 523 (671)
10. Small cup or lamp. Slight trace of burning. Fabric S3. SFB 9, 523 (671)
11. Decorated bodysherd with a hollow boss encircled by three incised lines. Brown exterior, dark grey interior/core, fabric SO. SFB 7, 524 (576)
12. Large slackly biconical cooking pot. Dark brown exterior, reduced interior. Smoothed exterior, well smoothed on the lower interior half. Fabric SO. SFB 7, 524 (576)
13. Bodysherd showing part of an ?elongate hollow boss surrounded by four parallel curvilinear lines. Mid grey in colour, fabric S1. SFB 11, 531 (588)
14. Small jar/ narrow-mouthed bowl. Brown exterior with a reduced interior. Fabric SO. SFB 5 532 (663)
15. Small cooking pot, dark brown surfaces with black core. Fabric SO. SFB 5 532 (663).
16. Cooking pot, dark brown in colour with black reduced interior. Smoothed exterior and internal burnish. The interior of the rim angle has knife trimming marks. Fabric SO. SFB 8 533 (584)
17. Large everted rim cooking pot, orange-brown exterior with a reduced interior. Fabric SO. Pit 704 (756)

Radiocarbon dating here suggests a slightly earlier date for the assemblage, in the first half of the 7th century.

A different emphasis of material can be seen at two Saxon sites investigated in the Thames Valley towards London, at Prospect Park (Laidlaw and Mephram 1996) and Hurst Park, East Molesey (Laidlaw 1996). At Prospect Park, provisionally dated to the early Saxon period (5th–6th century) organic-tempered wares, although present, formed only a relatively minor component of a particularly diverse group of largely non-local wares (Laidlaw and Mephram 1996, 35). At Hurst Park, provisionally dated to the 6th–7th century, sandy wares were still dominant with only a small proportion of vegetable-tempered sherds (Laidlaw 1996, 88). Here again there was some apparent conflict in the dating of the vessels typologically following Myres' (1977) scheme (Laidlaw 1996, 90).

In conclusion therefore, the assemblage at Riverdene would seem to be broadly dated to the 7th–8th centuries, perhaps slightly later than Cowdery's Down. The general homogeneity of the Riverdene fabrics would suggest the assemblage derives from one period of occupation. The presence of some possible archaic elements in the assemblage suggests that either some items may have been deliberately kept, perhaps

because they had some ancestral value, or that a chronological review is required of the certain typological styles. The composition of the wares would appear to be broadly similar to the 7th century settlement at Benson but shows some distinct differences to the earlier Saxon settlements in the London area. These are presumed at present to be chronological rather than cultural or regional differences.

Many of the sherds were concentrated in the sunken-featured buildings, with mainly only single sherds associated with other contexts. The mechanism by which the material was deposited in the buildings is unclear; presumably it represents midden material accumulated in abandoned structures, whose depth preserved the sherds. This could account for the contrast in recovered pottery between Riverdene and the Cowdery's Down settlement. At the latter, mainly comprising post-built structures, the inhabitants possibly disposed of rubbish in surface middens, which over time have become more dispersed and the constituents more degraded.

Medieval and later

A single sherd of Medieval ware, Newbury fabric B (12th–13th century) was recovered from pit 17 and a post-Medieval sherd from posthole 129.

Table 3 Occurrence of pottery fabrics from the SFBs

FABRIC	SFB 1		SFB 2		SFB 3		SFB 4		SFB 5		SFB 6		SFB 7		SFB 8		SFB 9		SFB 10		SFB 11		SFB/Pt	
	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.
SO	29	59	11	24	21	245	10	24	62	234	4	28	61	1229	46	294	303	3479	188	1649	10	106	33	220
O1	-	-	-	-	20	55	2	12	-	-	3	12	-	-	6	52	15	394	-	-	1	10	1	3
O2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	54	1	23	1	6	1	16	-	-
S1	-	-	-	-	1	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	16	1	9	-	-	1	30	-	-
S2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	1	4	2	7	2	13	10	91	19	67	2	14	4	6
S3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	22	-	-	-	-	-	-
S4	-	-	-	-	2	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	55	-	-	-	-	-	-
SL	-	-	-	-	3	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	3	147	2	96	-	-	-	-
?Import	-	-	-	-	2	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	10	-	-	-
Roman	-	-	1	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	135	5	27	-	-	-	-
Prehistoric	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	29	59	12	29	49	350	14	45	62	234	8	44	63	1236	60	433	338	4358	215	1845	16	186	38	229

Brick and Tile by Jane Timby

A small quantity of fired clay and brick and tile fragments were recovered, largely concentrated in SFB 1, SFB 9, SFB 5 and posthole 448. In total, 228 pieces of fired clay were recorded, a few of which had one flat surface which suggests they may have been lining material. Most, some 150 pieces (1680 g or 66%), came from SFB 9 (523). A smaller concentration of 51 pieces (22%) came from SFB 10. The brick/tile pieces, some 68 fragments, similarly showed a marked concentration in these two features. SFB 9 produced 45 pieces (3.4 kg), all Roman in date, including fragments of combed box flue, and *pilae*/flat tile. Further Roman tile was recovered from SFB 10 (10 fragments, 819 g), SFB 5 (four pieces) and posthole 128 (four pieces). The Roman pieces were all fairly fragmentary but suggest re-use of tile plundered from a fairly well-appointed Roman building equipped with a heating system.

Two peg tiles of late Medieval/post-Medieval date were recovered from pit 17.

Clay Spindle Whorl (Fig. 18.1)

Approximately half a clay spindlewhorl was recovered from SFB 5. It is approximately 45 mm long, 20 mm wide and up to 17 mm thick.

Struck Flint by Theresa Durden

A total of 935 pieces of struck flint was recovered during the course of the excavations at Riverdene. Most (760) of these were incorporated in the fills of cut features, 28 were finds on the stripped surface and are located relative to the site grid, and a further 147 were unstratified finds recovered during the removal of the subsoil on Area B.

Geology and flint source

The site is situated on a spur of the Upper Chalk, which is overlain by drift deposits of Clay-with-Flints. Flint nodules of reasonably good quality would have been easily obtainable from these drift deposits and it is noticeable that prehistoric settlement from the later Neolithic onwards

Table 4 Basic composition of flint collection

Flakes	731	78.18%
Blades (including possible blades)	86	9.20%
Cores	25	2.67%
Retouched implements	53	5.67%
Spalls	40	4.28%
<i>Total</i>	935	

Table 5 Flint core types

Retouched flakes	17
Scrapers	16
Hollow scrapers	2
Awls	11
Crude fabricator?	1
Discoidal knife (roughout)	1
Handaxe	1
Serrated flakes	2
Microoliths	2
<i>Total</i>	53

tended to favour areas of Clay-with-Flints on the chalklands of southern England (Gardiner 1984; 1990). The flint collected during the excavations was mostly mottled grey and dark grey in colour, with variable amounts of patination. Occasional translucent brown pieces of flint were also recovered.

Spatial analysis

Virtually no spatial patterning of flintwork over the site can be identified and very few surface finds were collected, in contrast to the considerable amounts present in the top- and subsoil. The SFBs in Area C contained considerable quantities of flint, as did trechole 917 nearby, which also contained a sherd of prehistoric pottery. Feature 701 in Area D, a possibly pre-

historic pit (dated by associated pottery) contained a number of undiagnostic flakes. In Area A, the possible treeholes 28 and 29 also contained notable quantities of flint, including a microlith. The postholes forming post-built structure 1 also contained flint, mostly single flakes, and SFB 11 in Area B contained a number of flakes. It is thus apparent that most of the flint is residual and not directly related to the features in which it was found.

Technological analysis (Tables 4 & 5)

Flakes make up the vast majority of the collection at 731 pieces (78.18%), including broken examples. Blades have a much lower representation at 5.44% (9.2% if possible blades and fragments are included). As the collection does not appear to be a discrete assemblage and quite a high percentage of flakes (38.58%) and blades (54.9%, or 69.77% including possible blades) are broken, metrical analysis will provide little useful information and has, therefore, not been undertaken. Retouched implements make up only 5.67% of the collection. Cores are also poorly represented at only 2.67% of the collection. Owing to the small number of cores, their recorded weights have not been compared.

Discussion

The low percentage of blades and the presence of only two narrow flake/blade cores in the collection suggests that it is of mixed date, with a small Mesolithic component. Ford (1987, 79, table 2) has proposed that an assemblage containing this percentage of blade material could be indicative of a later Neolithic date; conversely, 9.3% of all flakes possessed blade scars on their dorsal surface, which, according to Ford's model, could indicate a Mesolithic/earlier Neolithic date.

As the collection appears not to be a single, discrete assemblage, however, it would be prudent to assume the varying proportions of material reflect a palimpsest of different periods of activity. Two microliths (one fragmentary) were recovered, which, together with the blades, suggest at least a low level of activity in the Mesolithic period. It is also notable that a higher percentage of blades (47.67%) than flakes (22.7%)

were patinated, possibly indicating material of different periods (cf. Martin & Hall 1980, 7 and 12; Hall 1985, 33). The large percentage of flakes and dominance of flake cores would indicate flint working more typical of the later Neolithic and Bronze Age, that is, less systematic knapping represented by irregular cores and flakes and low levels of platform preparation.

Of the retouched artefacts, only two are clearly datable. The handaxe is of Palaeolithic date and the discoidal knife throughout is typical of the later Neolithic; both were stray unstratified finds from Area B.

In summary, the flint collected from Riverdene represents prehistoric activity on the site spanning the Mesolithic to Bronze Age. Unfortunately, few diagnostic pieces were recovered so it is not possible to refine the dating of various phases of activity further. It was not possible to pick out discrete assemblages within the overall collection and it is likely that any spatial patterning has been disturbed by the Saxon (and later) activity on the site.

Burnt Flint

Burnt flint was recovered from fifteen features in all areas of the site (seven features in Area A, three features in Area B, four in Area C, and one in Area D). Pit/hearth 705 in Area C produced 63 pieces weighing 1236 g in total. This was the only feature to contain more than 6 pieces of burnt flint. All the burnt flint has been weighed, recorded and discarded. A complete record can be found with the site archive.

The Faunal Remains by Sheila Hamilton-Dyer

The animal bone was recovered almost entirely from the sunken-featured buildings in Area C. Just four fragments were recovered from Area A; two from pit 17 (Medieval), one from posthole 15 (Saxon) and one from ?treehole 29.

Much of the bone is fragmented and moderately eroded; few fragments are over 10 mm in length and measurements and butchery marks are negligible. The poor condition of the bone is reflected in the level of identification, of 702 fragments only 181 (26%) could be identified to species. Many

Table 6 Animal Bone: species distribution summary

<i>Date</i>	<i>Feature</i>	<i>Horse</i>	<i>Cattle</i>	<i>Sheep /goat</i>	<i>Pig</i>	<i>Cattle size</i>	<i>Sheep size</i>	<i>Mammal</i>	<i>Red deer</i>	<i>Dog</i>	<i>Roe</i>	<i>Bird</i>	<i>Total</i>
Saxon	15	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
	SFB 5 (532)	2	2	6	5	11	3	13	–	–	–	–	42
	SFB 6 (521)	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
	SFB 7 (524)	–	–	2	3	1	3	10	–	–	–	–	19
	SFB 8 (533)	–	–	1	8	8	22	41	1	–	–	–	81
	SFB 9 (523)	–	30	20	34	72	81	92	1	1	1	1	333
	SFB 10 (522)	1	14	9	23	24	40	74	2	–	–	–	187
	SFB 11 (531)	–	2	2	3	4	2	1	–	–	–	–	14
	539	–	–	–	1	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	3
	543	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
	547	–	–	–	–	1	2	–	–	–	–	–	3
	707	–	–	–	–	–	2	1	–	–	–	–	3
	709	–	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
	913	–	–	–	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	2
	919	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	1
	921	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	1
	1101	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
	1234	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
	1235	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	1
	3019	–	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	2
	<i>Total</i>	4	49	41	79	123	163	232	4	1	1	2	699
	<i>Per cent</i>	0.6	7	5.9	11.3	17.6	23.3	33.2	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.3	–
Medieval	17	–	1	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
Natural?	29	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	1

were classed as cattle-sized or sheep/pig-sized only, with a further group not identified even to this level.

The taxa identified are horse, cattle, sheep, red deer, roe, dog, fowl and probable goose. The distribution summary is given in Table 6. The totals include six items of worked bone (see below).

The majority of the identified material is of the common domestic ungulates cattle, sheep and pig. A high proportion of the cattle bone is of jaws and teeth. This may be due in part to the poor condition of the bone assemblage as the jaws and teeth may be more resistant to destruction and are also more easily recognized than limb bones when in a highly fragmented state. The poor condition of the bones is unlikely to be wholly a problem of post-depositional preservation as several bones of neonatal piglets are present. This may indicate that the bone material has been trampled. In addition to the piglet bones, pig toes and peripheral metapodia are also present, indicating a good recovery rate. Most of the pig bone is of immature animals but at least two jaws are of mature females. The sheep/goat bones (probably all sheep) are all fused where this information survives. A complete metacarpus from SFB 5 (532) gives an estimated withers height of 0.543 m, well within the range of Saxon material but also within the range for the Medieval period in southern England. The presence of dog is indicated by several gnawed bones as well as the single bone recovered. The few deer fragments are mainly of antler, including a sawn tine and a spindle whorl. Horse is represented by three teeth and a peripheral metapodial. The domestic fowl bone, the dog humerus and the roe antler were all recovered from context 575 in SFB 9 (523).

The proportion of pig at this site is high at 44% of the identified fragments. This is in contrast to Abbots Worthy (Coy 1991) which had little pig in the SFBs, but is similar to the middle Saxon assemblage at Meonstoke (Bourdillon and Hamilton-Dyer *nd.*) which also had evidence for piglet in the SFB. At both sites there seems little exploitation of wild resources for meat. It was noted at Abbots Worthy that fragmentation was higher in the SFBs than in pits, with correspondingly lower identifiability.

It is unfortunate that very little bone was recovered from Saxon contexts at nearby Cowdery's Down (Millet & James 1983) so comparison with this site is not possible. There are few bone assemblages from rural sites of Saxon date and this assemblage, although too small for detailed analysis, adds to this body of data, particularly with regard to sunken-featured buildings.

Worked bone

The bone needle from SFB 8 is a typical modified pig fibula and is perforated through the broad end. The spindlewhorl from the same feature is lathe-turned from the burr of a red deer antler. There are two substantial 'pins' of large mammal shaft, one from SFB 11 and another almost complete from a posthole in SFB 5. This has tapered ends and they are both probably pin-beaters for textiles. A comb tooth was recovered from context 573 in SFB 10 and a hollow 'pin' from a posthole in SFB 10 was probably made from a goose fibula. Apart from the last item, these are all common finds in southern England throughout the Saxon period.

Metalwork by David Richards (Table 7)

A small metalwork assemblage of 28 pieces was recovered from the excavation. These are mainly of iron but include four objects of copper-alloy, one of lead, and six small pieces of slag. The iron is dominated by nails or nail-fragments, but also present are a leather-clip and a small knife (Fig. 18.7 and 18.8), the latter of which could be either Roman or Saxon. From the same feature (SFB 9) comes a bronze nail-cleaner (from a toilet-set?) (Fig. 18.9) and a small copper alloy fragment, perhaps of a round brooch. Both leather-clip and nail-cleaner are Roman forms, but these are crudely made, almost 'home-made', as if copying a partly-lost art (M. Henig, *pers. comm.*). The plain alloy disc from SFB 8 is less definitive, but could be appliqué decoration from a shield or a belt.

The complete or recognizable nails nearly all come from one feature (SFB 10) and, with one

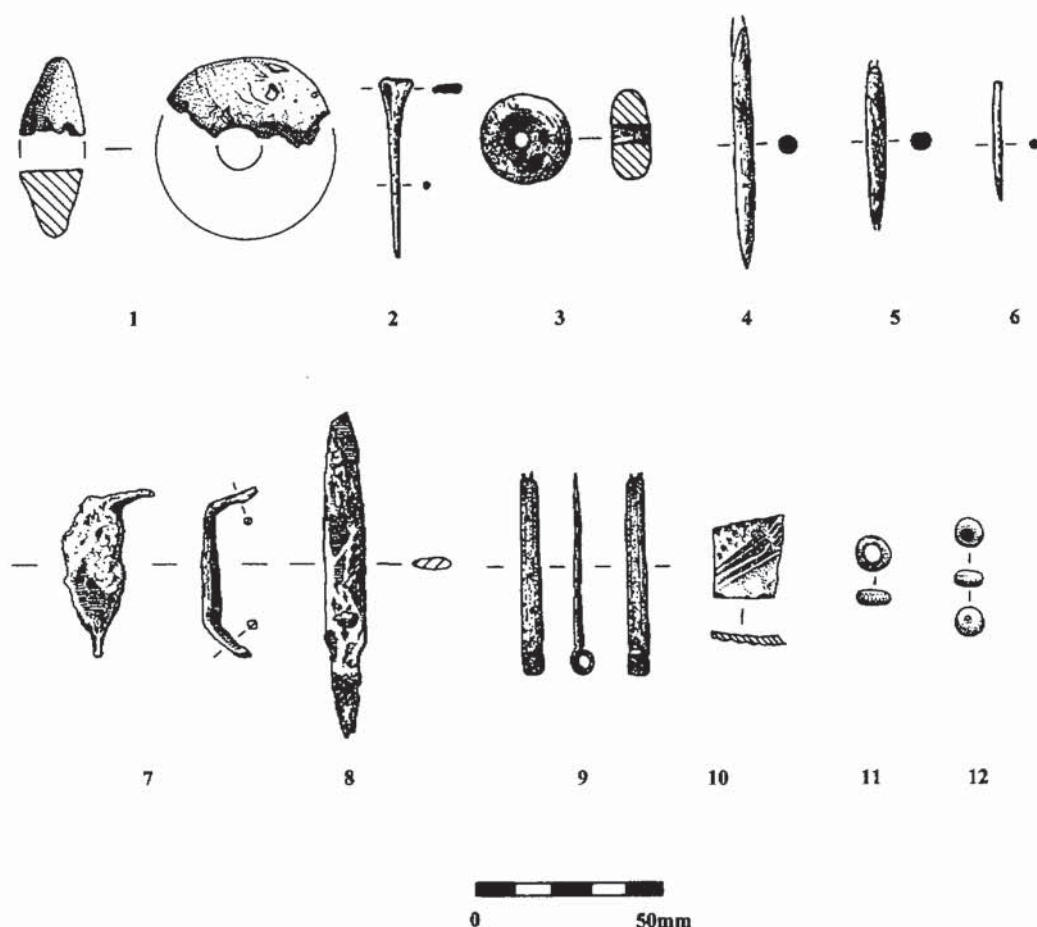


Fig. 18 Small finds

1. Clay spindle whorl from SFB 5; 2. Bone needle from SFB 8; 3. Red deer antler spindle whorl from SFB 8; 4. Bone pin from SFB 11; 5. Bone pin from posthole 707 in SFB 5; 6. Comb tooth from posthole 543 in SFB 10; 7. Leather-clip from SFB 9; 8. Small knife from SFB 9; 9. Bronze nail-cleaner from SFB 9; 10. Fragment of Roman glass bowl showing moulded pattern of parallel lines and dimpling, from SFB 10; 11. Dark blue glass bead from SFB 8 (Roman or Saxon); 12. Lemon-yellow glass bead from SFB 9 (possibly Saxon)

exception, all are Manning Type 1b. However, this is a very long-lived form, not necessarily restricted to the Roman period. The exception is a horseshoe nail which is probably intrusive (no. 15 below).

The lead weight(?) is undatable, but most Romano-British lead weights have iron suspension hooks.

Slag

There is a total of 400 g of slag from three contexts. The smaller pieces (numbers 27 and 28 above) are fuel-ash slag. The major specimen (no. 26) weighs 325 g, or 80% of the total, and is a dense vesiculate material, the interior black with crystalline inclusions. The exterior has some

Table 7 Metalwork

No.	Area	Feature/Fill	Description
<i>Copper alloy objects:</i>			
1	C	SFB 8 533 (584)	Disc. Length 35 mm. An irregular fragment with part of an original curved edge surviving. The original circumference was probably about 60-70 mm.
2	C	SFB 9 523 (575)	Nail-cleaner. Length 57 mm. A tapering strip rolled into a loop at one end and with a V-cut at the other. The back is decorated with two incised lines.
3	C	SFB 9 523 (-)	Strip. Length 19 mm. A narrow curved or angular piece, broken at one or possibly both ends. Use unclear, it might be a piece of an annular or penannular brooch.
4	A	Posthole 8 (54)	Small lump of Ae dross. Length <8 mm. (Metal detector find from posthole of post-built structure 1)
<i>Iron objects:</i>			
5	C	SFB 9 523 (575)	Leather-clip. Length 40 mm. Ovoid body, straight on one side, curved on the other. Rather too large for footwear (many of these enigmatic objects are associated with the remains of boots or sandals). This may be from some form of harness. One spine is intact, the other damaged.
6	C	SFB 9 523 (575)	Knife. Length 90 mm. A very small straight-edged blade with flat tang on the mid-line. Both blade-tip and tang are fore-shortened. (Type 10, Manning 1985, pl. 54, Q31, Q32, – both of these are unstratified and unfortunately small knives like this with mid-line tangs are not unusual in Saxon burials.)
7	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Nail stem. Length 55 mm. Headless and broken tip.
8	C	SFB 9 523 (575)	Object(?). Length c. 60 mm, thick, irregular tapering piece of iron (Fe), broken at each end.
9	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Nail. Length c. 95 mm. Once intact, head now detached.
10	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Nail. Slightly larger than no. 9. Head and stem.
11	C	SFB 9 523 (-)	Nail. Length 56 mm. A complete but headless stem.
12	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Nail. Same size as no. 10. Head and stem.
13	C	SFB 5 532 (663)	Strap fragment. Length 25 mm. Narrow and untapered, with rivet.
14	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Stem fragment.
15	C	SFB 11 531 (588)	Nail. Length c. 35 mm (complete). Rectangular stem, flaring out to a damaged head. A horseshoe nail.
16	C	SFB 9 523 (-)	Nail. Length c. 45 mm. Almost complete, tip missing.
17	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Stem fragment.

Table 7 (cont.)

No.	Area	Feature/Fill	Description
18	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Nail. Head and stem fragment.
19	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Stem fragment.
20	C	SFB 9 523 (671)	Nail. Length 85 mm. Complete – this is more likely a Type 1B with damaged head, than the rarer Type 3 (T-head) (Manning, 1985, pl. 63).
21	C	SFB 9 523 (671)	Nail. Small head and stem.
22	A	Ditch 44 (surface)	Fragments. (? Nail stem fragments.)
23	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Tiny iron (Fe) fragment. Perhaps a broken stem tip.
24	B	Posthole 329 (480)	Tiny fragments of iron from posthole of post-built structure 4.
			<i>Lead object:</i>
25	C	Unstratified	Lead weight. Diameter <i>c.</i> 60 mm. A moulded shallow hemisphere. The flat top bears some circumferal marks – ?applied before solidification. There may have been a suspension loop, but not of iron (Fe). (Metal detector find.)
			<i>Slag:</i>
26	C	SFB 10 522 (573)	Three pieces, weight 325 g. Black dense slag from a furnace bottom.
27	A	Posthole 49 (95)	Two pieces, weight 39 g. Fuel-ash slag. From posthole within post-built structure 1.
28	A	Posthole 700 (698)	One piece, weight 36 g. Denser and slightly vesicular once molten. From posthole of post-built structure 1.

impressions of wood (fuel?) and some smooth areas. Although not tap-slag, this is a relatively high-temperature material from a furnace, rather than a hearth.

Stone by David Williams

Several samples of stone were collected and analysed; all were from SFB 9 (523) in Area C. These include a slab (530 g) and several irregular fragments (367 g) from a ?quernstone in a dark grey medium-grained sandstone containing quartz and micaceous grits. This seems quite likely to be Pennant Sandstone, originating from the area around Clevedon in Avon. Also found were small fragments of Mayen lava from the

Eifel Hills region of Germany (61 g), a substance also usually associated with quernstones.

Glass by V I Evison

Four pieces of glass were found during the excavation. Two pieces of Roman glass came from SFB 10: a light blue-green small ring handle formed from a thick trail, with part of the neck and shoulder of the vessel still attached (maximum length 33 mm, thickness 2–13 mm); and a light green-blue fragment of a ?bowl with vertical wall and complex moulded pattern including parallel lines and dimpling, glossy, with small bubbles (Fig. 18.10) (max. length 29 mm, thickness 1–2 mm). SFB 9 (523, 575) contained a featureless

light green vessel fragment, with a few small bubbles (max. length 10 mm, thickness 1 mm) which is too small to be diagnosable. Lastly, an unstratified piece of light blue-green vessel glass with a deteriorated and iridescent surface, of medieval or later date, came from Area B (max. length 41 mm, thickness 3 mm).

Glass Beads by Matthew Gleave

Two glass beads were found during the excavations, both from within sunken-featured buildings: a complete small annular bead of translucent dark blue glass with a slightly weathered and pitted surface came from SFB 8 (diameter 9 mm, height 4.5 mm, perforation diameter 4 mm) (Fig. 18.11); also a complete small globular bead of opaque lemon-yellow glass, with a surface pitted and scratched in numerous places, came from SFB 9 (diameter 8 mm, height 5 mm, perforation diameter 1–2 mm) (Fig. 18.12).

Small annular beads in blue glass are found from the Iron Age through the Roman and probably into the Saxon periods. Beads of this form have no special characteristics to enable closer dating. Opaque yellow beads also date from both the Roman and Saxon periods. Roman examples are typically better made than the later Saxon pieces, which tend to be less regular and more lemon-yellow in colour (Guido, 1978, 16). It is perhaps more likely, therefore, that the yellow bead is Saxon in origin.

Environmental Evidence

Samples were taken from 114 features (13% of the total), with the aim of examining them for environmental evidence. Samples from 31 of these (3.6% of all features, 27% of sampled features) were selected to be wet-sieved through a fine mesh to determine the quality of the samples before further processing. A total of 353 litres of soil was processed, from a variety of feature types including postholes, pits, linear features and all the potential SFBs.

An assessment of the environmental potential of these samples was provided by John Letts. Approximately 15% of the features sampled contained charred seeds, but in all cases there was insufficient material to justify any significant

interpretation. The cereal grain in all of the samples was also very poorly preserved. The sample from SFB 8, 533 (584) contained a single grain of spelt *Triticum spelta*. The sample from SFB 5, 532 (663) contained two grains of bread wheat (*T. aestivum*) and a single grain of hulled barley *Hordeum vulgare*.

These very poor results meant that no work on the remaining samples was considered worthwhile, and they have since been dry-sieved for artefacts and disposed of.

Radiocarbon Dating by Janet Ambers

A single radiocarbon date for the site, measured on collagen extracted from a number of large animal bone fragments from SFB 9 (hollow 523, fill 575), was produced at the British Museum Radiocarbon Laboratory by liquid scintillation count of benzene (using the methods described in Ambers and Bowman 1998). This gave a result of 1310 ± 70 BP (quoted in the form recommended by Stuiver & Polach (1977) in uncalibrated years BP and corrected for a measured isotopic variation of $\delta^{13}C = -23.8\text{‰}$, within the expected range for such variation).

When calibrated using v 2.18 of OxCal (Bronk Ramsey 1995), and the INTCAL 98 calibration curve (Stuiver *et al.* 1998), this result gives a calendar age range of 650 to 780 cal AD at 68% confidence or 610 to 890 cal AD at 95% confidence.

DISCUSSION

Mesolithic by Steve Ford

Observations made several decades ago (Clark 1933) and reiterated more recently (Clarke 1976) noted that most Mesolithic occupation was to be found in riparian locations. Recent surveys of the Loddon Valley, which rises near Riverdene, have emphasized Mesolithic occupation on the valley floor (Ford 1997; Weaver & Bellamy 1995). The number of struck flints of certain Mesolithic date from Riverdene is not large and may only reflect a low level of casual loss from settlement located in the valley. However, they may also belong to a

wider downland component of the Mesolithic settlement pattern in southern England as recent work has drawn attention to the association of later Mesolithic occupation with outcrops of Clay-with-Flints (Barrett *et al.* 1991; Care 1979; Gardiner 1984).

Prehistoric

It had been anticipated, following the results of the evaluation, that the excavation would produce evidence of Bronze Age activity. In the event, little evidence of Bronze Age activity was recovered. The excavations produced just 11 sherds of prehistoric pottery from a total collection of 978 sherds. Six of these came from treehole 917 in Area C, two were recovered from pit 701 in Area D (to add to five from the same feature in the evaluation), and single sherds came from three other features. All of these sherds have a calcined flint temper and, although difficult to date, are likely to belong to the earlier prehistoric period. The evaluation had produced nine flint-tempered sherds: one of these was the only ceramic find from ditch 31 in Area A (trench 4 4/8=9/8); three were recovered from colluvial deposits, one of which was associated with five Iron Age sherds. Therefore, apart from pit 701 in Area D, there were no securely dated prehistoric features on the site.

Care was taken when analysing the configuration of postholes to be aware of the possibility of both circular and rectangular post-built structures. However, there were just two areas where it was possible to reconstruct a circular building and in both cases the same postholes can be interpreted as rectangular post-built structures with missing corner posts (post-built structures 3 and 7).

The presence of prehistoric pottery and struck flints on the site points to some prehistoric activity in the area but the nature, extent, and duration of this activity remain unknown. The parallel ditches (31 and 44) could possibly be interpreted as part of a small *cursus* but cannot be dated with any certainty and are just as likely to be Saxon.

The Saxon Settlement

Although many individual features remain undated, the occupation at Riverdene is primar-

ily of middle Saxon date. The few residual Roman pot sherds and tile fragments do not amount to evidence for a direct Roman precursor. Rural Saxon settlements are rarely found in this area and the excavations here have added substantially to our knowledge. The date of the organic-tempered pottery is still open to debate and on traditional typology, the pottery assemblage might have been assigned to the 5th or 6th centuries, but the radiocarbon date from SFB 9 provides a deposition date in the 7th or 8th century. There is no suggestion that SFB 9 was considerably later than the rest of the site. The settlement here is, therefore, probably later than that at Cowdery's Down, just over 1 km away, which was occupied in the 6th and 7th centuries.

The value of the radiocarbon determination from a bone in SFB 9 cannot be overstressed, absolute dates being comparatively rare from rural Saxon settlements. Only one sample from Riverdene has been dated, but where similar sites have yielded more than one date, they have often turned out to evince surprisingly wide ranges, or even totally separate phases of occupation, not otherwise suggested by the evidence. Examples of this phenomenon can be cited from Collingbourne Ducis, Wilts, (Pine, 2001), Facombe Netherton (Hants; CBA 2002) and Yarnnton Worton (Oxon; Hey, forthcoming; cf. Archaeometry, 35 (1993), 65; Hey, 1991). As most sites presently can only be dated by pottery or metal finds, and the pottery chronology is rarely closely resolvable, while metalwork is rare except in graves, it is possible that this phenomenon may be more widespread than it appears (Blair, 2001). A parallel case may be cited from recent excavations at Benson (Oxon) (Pine and Ford, forthcoming) where the archaeology suggests a 6th–7th century date, but textual evidence clearly has the site (or, at worst, a nearby site) still occupied in the late 8th century (Holmes 1999).

It is likely that the complete extent of settlement at Riverdene was not revealed, as many of the features found were close to the margins of the excavation and sites of this type have been known to spread over large areas. It is not possible to say whether the pattern of settlement

revealed at Riverdene relates to a small settlement that has shifted over time or a larger settlement occupied for a relatively short period, or even separate periods. Evidence of settlement shift within a single site has been discovered elsewhere, most notably at Mucking, Essex (Hamerow 1993) but other sites appear to represent small, nucleated, single phase settlements (e.g., Hurst Park, East Molesey; Andrews 1996b). Timby (above) has suggested that the general homogeneity of pottery fabrics at Riverdene points to a single period of occupation. The majority of the pottery, however, came from the backfills of the sunken-featured buildings (93%), particularly from the well-preserved ones found in Area C and, although this may indicate a single phase of *pottery deposition* in this area, it is not necessarily conclusive evidence of a single phase of *occupation* for the whole site. In any case, as examples cited above show, in the face of fluid settlement shift such as attested during Saxon times, even where apparently identical features seem to be grouped as if part of a contemporary layout, the dating evidence available is rarely sufficient to prove they were of a single phase, and in at least some instances, demonstrates unexpected breaks in the sequence. If confirmed elsewhere, (and it appears to have occurred at Yarnton Worton, for example; Hey, forthcoming.) this observation may serve to shrink the scale of occupation at even small sites still further, increasing the impression of fluidity within a relatively unbounded landscape.

There is some indication of successive buildings in the group of postholes at the western side of Area B (post-built Structures 5, 6 and 7), but even here it is difficult to discern individual structures, and the impression would be that they followed one another relatively quickly, rather than after a substantial break in occupation. There may have been another phase to post-built Structure 1 (Area A) but that building's full extent was obscured by Deadman's Lane. The multitude of stakeholes in the bases of SFBs 8–11 can be taken to indicate activities being performed repeatedly in these buildings, but there is no indication of whether this occurred over weeks, months or decades.

The excavation produced a total of 954 sherds of Saxon pottery which, compared to nearby Cowdery's Down which only produced 146 sherds, is a considerable assemblage. This difference may be accounted for by the different natures of the deposits encountered on the two sites. The material in the SFBs at Riverdene is presumably midden material accumulated or dumped after the buildings had been abandoned, whereas at Cowdery's Down, the buildings consisted mainly of post-built structures without such convenient hollows for dumping, and it is likely that rubbish there would have been disposed of in surface middens and so would have become more dispersed and eroded over time.

The excavations revealed seven possible rectangular post-built structures and perhaps as many as eleven sunken-featured buildings over an area of 1.19 hectares. The post-built and sunken-featured buildings have been discussed in detail above but, in general terms, the SFBs appear to cluster in groups, particularly SFBs 8 to 11 which were also adjacent to post-built Structure 8. On the whole the post-built structures were more dispersed across the excavated areas. Post-built Structure 1 in Area A was the best preserved on the site and while there were reasonable examples in Area B, there was scant evidence of this type of building in Area C. Conversely, there were several well-preserved SFBs in Area C, a few reasonable candidates in Area B, but none in Area A. We might assume that features in Area B, which is on the brow of the hill, have been much truncated, presumably by ploughing (there was evidence of ploughstripes cutting the natural in Areas A and B) and erosion. The well preserved post-built structure in Area A (1) and the partially concealed possible SFB (4) in Area B were both adjacent to Deadman's Lane and had presumably been afforded some protection by this fact. Area C was on the more gentle southern slope of the hill where there was evidence of colluvial build-up (hillwash). Given the good preservation of the SFBs in this area there is no reason why post-built structures would not also have been found had any been present. However,

Saxon settlements of this type are typically very dispersed and it is not impossible that any post-built structures lie beyond the boundaries of the excavated area. Also, there can be little doubt that the extremely dry conditions under which this excavation was carried out will have affected recognition, particularly of small features such as postholes. Nevertheless, the implication may be that SFBs and post-built structures were functionally different, and that the site was organized into distinct land-use zones. Even the few structures revealed constitute a valuable addition to meagre settlement evidence for this period. Although the database of Anglo-Saxon buildings used by Marshall and Marshall (1991 and 1994), for example, included forty-seven 7th-century buildings for their southern region, this contrasts sharply with just one for the 5th century, only eight for the 6th century (mostly from Cowdery's Down) and seven for the 8th-9th centuries.

A more detailed comparison between the buildings at this site and those at nearby Cowdery's Down has been set out above (pp 74 and 76). The most obvious difference between the two sites is that Riverdene had a higher proportion of SFBs to post-built structures (seven rectangular post-built structures and eleven SFBs if we are convinced by SFBs 2-4, 6 and 7), whereas Cowdery's Down had just one SFB to nine post-built structures (Millett & James 1983). The significance of this is not clear. It has been suggested that sunken-featured buildings were not primarily for occupation, but were used for craft, storage, or small-scale industrial activities, and it is often assumed that post-built structures provided the occupation space. The evidence from Riverdene has provided little to add to this discussion. The artefacts from the SFBs relate to post-abandonment rubbish deposition and provide no direct evidence of their use(s), while the post-built structures contained no evidence of function. The numerous stakeholes in the floors of some of the SFBs no doubt relate to their functions but their exact purpose remains unknown. Comparison of the dimensions would certainly suggest the SFBs

were intended to be ancillary to the larger post-built structures. It is also notable that the SFBs showed more variety in their length:breadth ratios (ranging from 1.19:1 to 1.79:1, see Table 1). If a two-square module dominated domestic architecture of the 5th and 6th centuries (as seems increasingly convincingly demonstrated), it did not extend to the SFBs here, again suggesting different roles for the two building forms.

It is not known whether the two parallel ditches, perhaps marking a droveway crossing Area A, were contemporary with the Saxon settlement. Just one sherd of prehistoric pottery and three flint flakes came from a slot across one of the ditches during the evaluation, but the alignment of the ditches respects that of post-built Structure 1. Although there were some linear rows of postholes at Riverdene, which could represent fence lines, there is not enough evidence to reconstruct individual farmsteads, as at Chalton (Addyman & Leigh 1973; Addyman *et al.* 1972). It is possible that, had a larger area been available, a clustered pattern might have been visible, each cluster consisting of a central core of two or three post-built structures and a peripheral group of several SFBs. However, the pattern actually revealed only hints at such an arrangement. Given the different balance between the types of buildings found in Areas B and C, the double ditches (whose projected line would have divided these two areas) may have marked a significant boundary within the settlement.

Discussion of the economy of the site is necessarily limited by the poor results of the analysis of environmental samples and the limited range of faunal evidence. As with the other artefacts on the site, the animal bone was recovered almost entirely from the SFBs in Area C. The poor condition of the bone has limited the identification of species but there does not seem to have been any particular species bias as a result of taphonomic factors. It seems possible to take at face value, then, the observations that the proportion of pig bone recovered is high compared to other Saxon assemblages and that there is little evidence for the exploitation of wild animal resources for

meat. The cereal grains retrieved from the environmental sampling were all poorly preserved and consist of a single grain of spelt wheat, two grains of bread wheat and a single grain of hulled barley. The first of these was replaced by the bread wheat during the Saxon period and the last, introduced to Britain in the Neolithic period, is ubiquitous on sites of all subsequent periods. The lack of carbonized plant remains may be due to the fact that crop processing was being carried out elsewhere. The pottery was all probably of local, domestic-based, manufacture. The few artefacts other than pottery provide little information to add to this picture: quernstone fragments indicate long-distance trade, but this is almost always the case for these items, and it is not certain they need have been imported in the Saxon period,

as many of the finds (tile, metalwork) seem to have been redeposited Roman material.

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APPENDIX 1: Description of Saxon pottery fabrics and forms

The sherds were examined under a $\times 20$ binocular microscope.

Fabric S0: A dense sandy ware, dark brown or black in colour and containing variable quantities of organic matter. The paste shows a moderate to common frequency of well-sorted sub-angular to rounded quartz sand, sparse quartz sandstone and blackened voids from fairly coarse organic material. Handmade vessels, mainly closed forms. Several of the vessels show a well-burnished interior surface presumably to reduce porosity for liquid contents. The exteriors appear smoothed but were not so highly burnished. One vessel had a carbonised internal residue. Featured sherds include a perforated lug, a possible part of a spout and sherd from a bossed decorated urn (Fig. 17.11). This was the commonest fabric in the assemblage accounting for 84%, both by count and weight.

Fabric S1: Coarse quartz sand tempered ware. A black or dark brown ware with a moderate to

common frequency of well-sorted quartz sand, less than 1 mm in size. The grains appear dark in colour and are accompanied by sparse grains of iron. Represented by just six sherds one of which was from a hollow bossed decorated urn from SFB 11 (531).

Fabric S2: Thinner black sandy ware with no visible organic matter. The paste contains a moderate to common frequency of fine quartz sand, the grains having slight facets producing a sparkling effect. Plain handmade closed forms, cooking pots. One sherd from pit/SFB 334 had an carbonised internal residue. The thinner walls of the vessels led to a greater fragmentation of the sherds which showed an average weight of just 4.5 g. The ware accounted for 5% by count, 2% by weight.

Fabric S3: A finer, orange-brown sandy micaceous clay with sparse organic matter. The grey core shows a common frequency of well-sorted, fine sub-angular to rounded quartz sand, individual grains just visible macroscopi-

cally. An uncommon ware represented by just two sherds, one probably from a lamp, the other from a closed form.

Fabric S4: A mid brown ware with a grey core. The paste contains a moderate to common frequency of well-sorted, sub-angular to rounded quartz sand, accompanied by rare grains of quartz sandstone.

Fabric O1: A hard, dark brown to black ware with a laminar fracture. The very fine paste contains dense organic matter and occasional orange-brown iron grains. The third commonest fabric in the assemblage of this ware accounted for 5% by count, 6% by weight. One sherd from SFB 6 (521) came from a decorated urn.

Fabric O2: A finer, sandy, micaceous clay as S3 but with organic matter. Represented by just seven sherds, all unfeatured.

Fabric SL: A dense sandy, black or dark brown ware with sparse rounded to sub-angular white calcareous inclusions (chalk/limestone), 1 mm and less in size. The sand appears relatively well sorted with a common frequency of well rounded grains. Handmade cooking pots. Not a common fabric this ware accounted for 2% by weight (3% by weight).

Unidentified greyware: Possible imported ware. A very hard mid grey fabric with a sparse scatter of ill-sorted rounded quartz, the larger grains up to 3 mm across, and a evenly distributed scatter of fine black inclusions. Single basesherd from a wheelmade vessel with concentric cutting marks on the underside of the base.

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