

AN IRON AGE FARMSTEAD AT SOMBORNE PARK FARM, LITTLE SOMBORNE

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ABSTRACT

Significant archaeological discoveries were made during an archaeological watching brief at Somborne Park Farm. The site lay in an extensive landscape of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British field systems and enclosures that demonstrate complex patterns of settlement and land use across much of this area. Activity on the site spanned the prehistoric period; a tree throw feature contained an assemblage of Neolithic worked flint and a series of Iron Age quarry pits were also revealed. The most significant result was the discovery of a previously unrecorded 'D' shaped enclosure, that functioned as a small Iron Age farmstead populated by families growing and processing cereals, rearing stock and undertaking small scale metal-working.

Its position in the landscape and relationship with other similar enclosures in the area fills a gap in the known distribution of similar sites in the area. Its discovery makes it possible to speculate on the position of other similar enclosures in the area particularly along the east valley side of the River Test.

LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

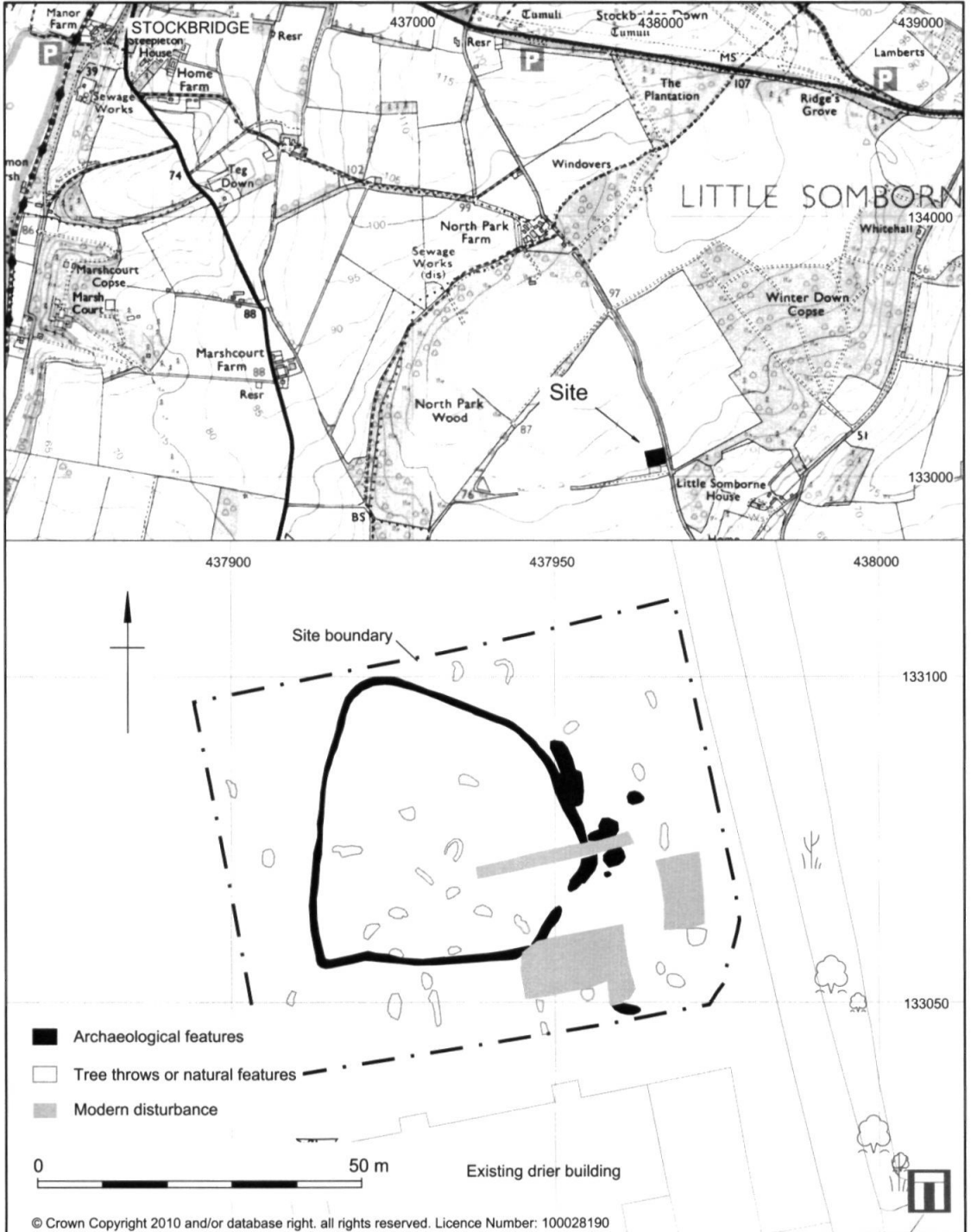
The work at Somborne Park Farm was required as a condition for planning consent to construct a new grain store. The site (Fig. 1) lay on the north-western edge of Little Somborne village (NGR 437940 133055) and covered *c* 0.5ha on south facing arable land at *c* 75 metres above Ordnance Datum (m aOD). The ground rises to 95 m aOD in the north but falls to 45 m aOD to the Somborne, a tributary of the River Test, which flows south

in its valley approximately 3 km to the west. The site coincides with the head of a slight spur, defined by a shallow coombe to the west. The underlying solid geology is Upper Chalk with many flint nodules (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 299).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies in the south-east corner of a block of Chalk Downs covering 450 sq km that were surveyed as part of the Danebury Environs Project (Palmer 1984). An extensive archive of aerial photographs exists for this area; the crop-marks, when plotted, demonstrate a network of enclosures and field systems principally of the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, but frequently with Bronze Age origins. The density of crop marks varied across the project area; in places, as around Danebury Hill and along the north-east facing slopes of the Wallop Brook, they were particularly well represented and it was possible to reconstruct the distribution of individual enclosures each with its associated field system (Cunliffe 1983).

Similar patterns could be identified in parts of the south-east corner of the Danebury Environs Project area, which included Little Somborne. The most extensive field system lay to the north-west of Woolbury Hill, an Iron Age hill fort, with other fields, some still defined by upstanding lynchets, on unploughed pasture on the south east slopes of the hill. Field systems, of varying extent, were also detected on other south facing slopes, especially on a ridge approximately 1 km south



of Little Somborne, in a tributary valley of the Somborne. This area was bisected by the Southern Feeder Gas Pipeline (Neal 1980; Catherall *et al* 1984) which crossed a number of Iron Age and Romano-British enclosures, field systems and open settlement sites immediately south of the Somborne valley and provided opportunities to undertake rescue excavation in advance of pipeline construction. An enclosure at Little Somborne (NGR 4390 1329; Fig. 4) contained two round houses, a number of four-post granary structures and grain storage/rubbish pits. Pottery indicated that settlement extended from the 5th to 2nd century BC, but principally to the later part of that period.

Excavations have also taken place subsequently within selected enclosures around Danebury Hill and at Woolbury Hill. These have provided additional chronological data for settlement development across the area, but also shown that sites were not always contemporary and enjoyed fluctuating periods of growth and decline. Excavations at Woolbury Hill (Cunliffe and Poole 2000b) demonstrated Late Neolithic activity with Early Bronze Age barrows and a Late Bronze Age linear ditch and associated field system that culminated in the construction of the hill fort in the mid-1st millennium BC. Evidence of occupation throughout the Early and Middle Iron Age was slight and possibly sporadic but intensified with the construction of a Late Iron Age enclosure that may have remained occupied into and throughout the Romano-British period.

The accumulated results of the Danebury Environs Survey and previous excavations have provided a relatively detailed picture of the distribution, if not chronological development, of settlement patterns, sufficient to make it possible to speculate on the possible location of other sites in the area. Despite this extensive archive no field systems or enclosures were known from the south facing slopes of the Somborne valley.

AIMS AND METHODS

The watching brief was undertaken to sample and record any archaeological features that might be exposed as the topsoil and subsoil were removed and before ground work to construct a new grain store. Artefacts would help to determine the approximate date, economy and status of the site and help place it within existing known settlement patterns across the broader local landscape.

The discovery of an unexpected well preserved Iron Age enclosure was considered to be of sufficient interest to necessitate more extensive examination than was included in the watching brief but not to require detailed excavation. The method of working was therefore amended to allow deposits, principally the enclosure ditch, to be excavated systematically in segments by machine. Employing constant archaeological supervision and a toothless grading bucket, artefact recovery and distribution was maximised and sections of the ditch could be cleaned and recorded.

RESULTS

The site was covered by approximately 0.20–0.30 m of dark brown silty clay topsoil. This overlay a similar thickness of red brown Clay-with-Flints that was present across the entire site and which obscured the visibility of any archaeological features. The subsoil was therefore removed with the topsoil, truncating the upper parts of any archaeological features in the process to expose them clearly in the Chalk.

The natural Chalk surface contained large numbers of flint nodules and was crossed by a series of continuous, irregular, sub-parallel periglacial stripes which ran north to south down the slope. These features were filled with small, broken chalk rubble in a creamy paste matrix or by pockets of Clay-with-Flints. A small number of these features were sectioned to

Fig. 1 (*opposite*) Site location plan

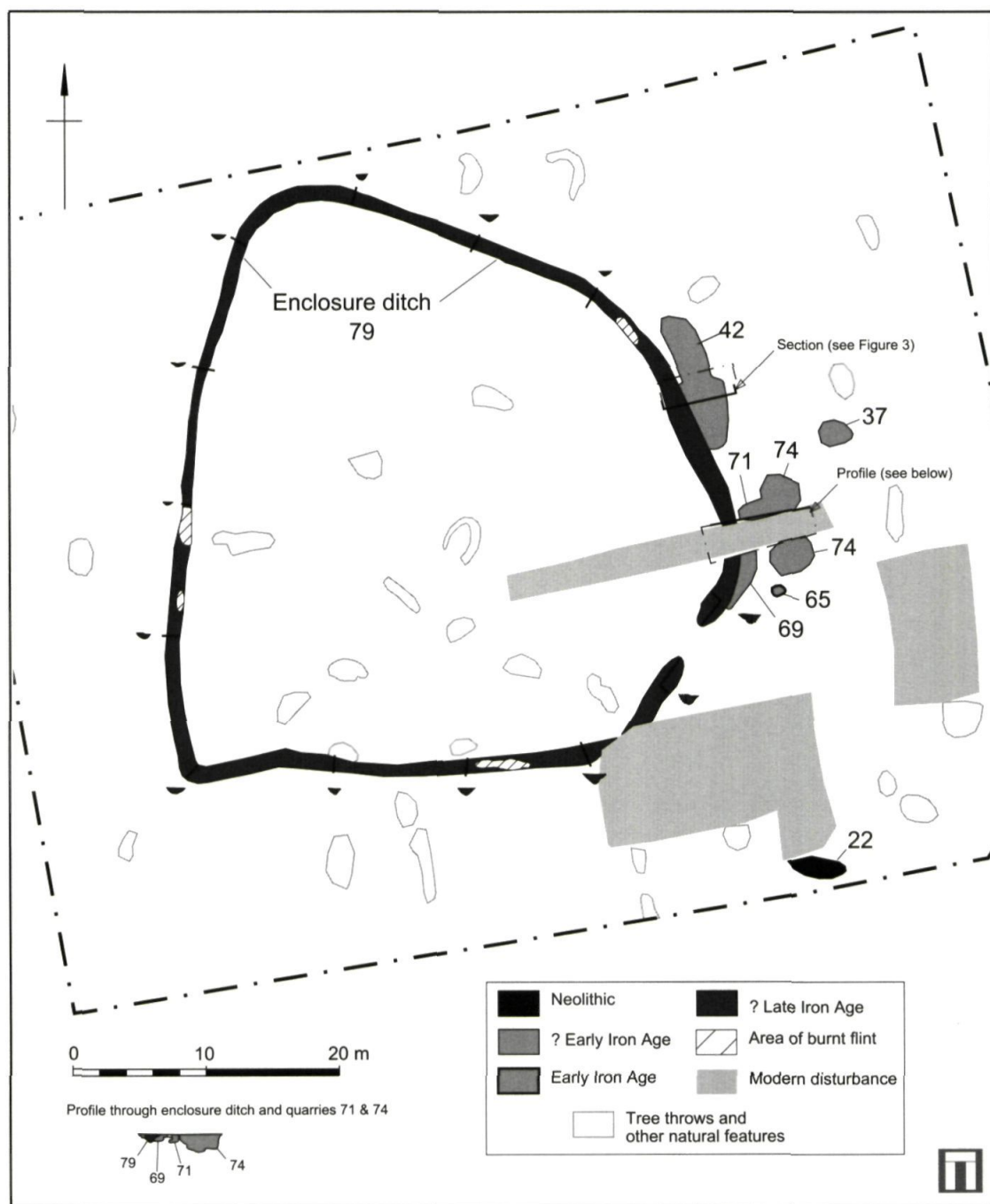


Fig. 2 Phased plan of all features showing profiles across enclosure ditch 79

record their form and stratigraphy, to evaluate the presence/absence of artefacts and confirm their natural formation.

Tree throw/Feature 22

The excavation also revealed a number of crescentic features that were often perpendicular to the natural striping of the chalk and were thought more likely to result from tree throws than from periglacial activity. These features included an elongated oval area of red-brown clay, approximately 4 m long and 1 m wide on the southern edge of the stripped area aligned approximately E–W across the site (Fig. 2).

The excavated section indicated that the feature measured approximately 2 m across and 0.6 m deep with sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with chalk rubble, especially at the south edge, that alternated with bands of silty clay that had weathered in from the south. The basal deposit was darker, with charcoal flecks that may have silted in from a former old ground surface. The northern part of the section comprised mid to dark brown silty clay mixed with flint nodules, which was considered to represent the silted 'ghost' of the root bole of a fallen tree.

A cluster of flint knapping debris approximately 0.50 m across was found in the upper chalky silts on the southern side of the hollow. The flint was concentrated against the probable root bole and thinned to the south. The condition of the flint and presence of chips indicates that the material was all of one period.

The absence of any associated features or of contemporary activity suggests that this is an isolated occurrence, possibly representing the activity of a single person or small group moving through the landscape. Activity of this type, utilizing tree throw features, has been observed in a growing number of instances in Britain where it is frequently dated to the Early Neolithic period (4,000–3,000 BC). There is nothing to indicate a similar date for this material although it is nevertheless an important indicator of early activity on this part of the Chalk Downs.

Quarry features

Two large elongated undated features [42 and 74] (Fig. 2), thought to be quarries, were found towards the eastern extent of the stripped area. They were associated with two pits, one of which contained large sherds from an Early Iron Age jar. The two large features were located adjacent to and outside the ditch of the Iron Age enclosure, which cut through them.

Quarry 42

This measured approximately 11 m N-S, 4.5 m E-W and 1 m deep. The section (Fig. 3) exposed in a machine cut slot showed that the eastern edge was undercut, possibly to destabilise the chalk and make it easier to remove. The base was irregular, with deeper circular depressions. Chalk rubble tips (44 and 45) could be traced to the surface and confirmed that this was one feature that had probably been backfilled deliberately, possibly in the course of quarrying. The eastern end was filled with decalcified dark brown silty clay, which was darker towards the base (46), possibly indicating that this had stabilised and later silted up naturally. Deeper hollows in the base of the feature contained a large number of unworked flint nodules, presumably taken from the chalk and thrown behind the advancing quarry face. Cattle bones, which may represent 'placed' deposits (Hill 1995) were also found in the base of the depression; no other artefacts were recovered from this machined section, although an additional bovine jaw bone was found when the filling of the northern part of the quarry was removed.

At the west end of the quarry the tips of back fill were cut by a broad feature [50], which was itself cut by the Late Iron Age enclosure ditch [79]. Feature 50, possibly a pit, was only seen in the section of the machine cut slot. It measured approximately 1.5 m wide at the surface and 0.60 m deep with sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with dark brown silty clay (48, 49), which included tip lines containing charcoal and areas of red clay, some apparently fired, to the west (49) but which were less distinct on

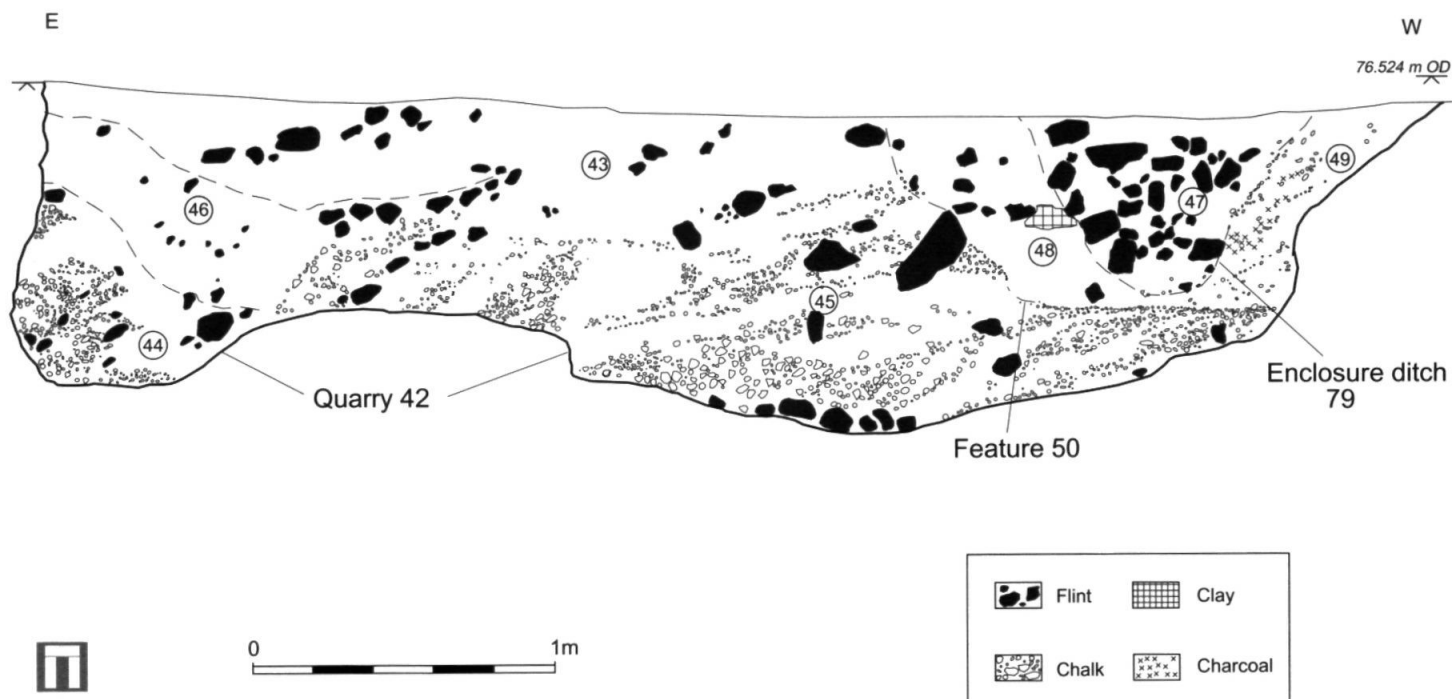


Fig. 3 Section through enclosure ditch 79, feature 50 and quarry 42

the east (48). Red clay was also incorporated into the filling of the subsequent enclosure ditch [79]. The clay, which was not apparently local to the site, with the associated charcoal may best be regarded as having been derived from some form of domestic oven or industrial furnace.

Quarry 74

An irregular complex of pits and quarries was present approximately 5 m south of quarry 42 (Fig. 2). It was impossible to define the extent of individual features on the surface or to establish their stratigraphic relationships apart from the fact that they were all later than the Iron Age enclosure ditch. A backfilled machine-cut slot, of unknown function or origin, which ran through this group of features was re-excavated to provide a section that could be recorded.

The largest feature [74] comprised a quarry hollow, approximately 3.5 m across and up to 1.3 m deep with steep vertical and undercut sides and an irregular base. It was filled with a series of roughly horizontal chalk rubble beds alternating with mid-brown silty clay layers. These deposits showed no respect for the profile of the feature nor did they demonstrate any reduction in particle size from the base upwards, which suggested that this feature was also backfilled deliberately. Cattle, sheep and goat bones, possibly 'placed', were also found at the base. The edge of a second pit/quarry [71] was recorded immediately to the west while a third feature [69] was cut by the main enclosure ditch. This last feature measured approximately 1.80 m across and 0.55 m deep and may equate with feature 50 to the north. It was filled with orange-brown silty clay.

Pit 37

This sub-rectangular/oval pit (Fig. 2) lay to the east of the quarries and measured approximately 2 m across and approximately 1 m deep. The sides were steep, irregular and sometimes undercut while the base was flat. A cattle bone lay on the base, which was covered by 0.30 m

of dark brown silty clay containing bands of heavily weathered chalk rubble. Sub-angular flint nodules, up to 0.15 m across, in the base of the central weathering cone suggest that the feature had silted naturally. The principal fill comprised heavily decalcified, strong dark brown, slightly silty clay which was also capped by large flint nodules, up to 0.25 m across. Charcoal flecks were present in the upper deposit and a sherd of Early Iron Age pottery, similar to material from Pit 65, was found on the surface of the feature, which was otherwise undated.

Pit 65

A sub-circular pit, 1.12 m long, 0.95 m wide and 0.30 m deep, with steep sloping sides and a flat base was located approximately 2 m south of quarry 74 (Fig. 2). It was filled with dark grey-brown silty clay and included flint nodules that were mixed with large sherds of unweathered, hand made Iron Age pottery with finger-tipped decoration.

Enclosure 79

A 'D' shaped enclosure defined by a ditch 138 m long that enclosed an area of 0.14 ha formed the principal feature at the site (Figs 2 and 3). Three hand dug sections were excavated through the ditch terminals and a corner of the enclosure to record ditch profiles and deposits and to recover any artefacts. The remainder of the ditch was emptied systematically by machine in segments, each 10 m long, to maximise the quantity of material obtained from the ditch, to assist with artefact distributions that might reflect human activity in differing parts of the site and to record additional sections.

The enclosure was defined by three gently curving sides; however on the south side the ditch kinked noticeably before turning at a near right angle in the south-west corner. A flattened in-turned entrance approximately 3 m wide lay in the south-east corner, where the ditch was approximately 1.80 m wide and 0.70 m deep with steep sloping sides and a narrow flat base.

Table 1 All finds by context (number/weight in grammes)

<i>Context</i>	<i>Feature</i>	<i>Animal Bone</i>	<i>Burnt Flint</i>	<i>Fired Clay</i>	<i>Worked Flint</i>	<i>Pot</i>	<i>Stone</i>	<i>Other Finds</i>
004	Enclosure	7/241	9/1114			2/44		
005	Enclosure	23/101	4/403					
007	Enclosure	27/168	12/1219			2/15	1/503	
008	Enclosure	5/47						
011	Enclosure	3/18	4/370			2/47		
013	Enclosure	6/31						
014	Enclosure	15/102		1/26		29/177	1/769	30g slag
015	Pit 37					8/25		
029	Tree throw				339/6542			
039	Pit 37		1/85					
041	Pit 37	4/43			5/694			
045	Quarry 42	13/53						
047	Enclosure	6/18	1/224	12/250	1/8	2/13	1/257	1 iron
051	Enclosure	20/207						
052	Enclosure	37/467		6/98		7/105	1/130	
053	Enclosure	47/631		3/54	1/67	10/250		
054	Enclosure	74/760	1/8			4/53		
055	Enclosure	65/437				4/58		
056	Enclosure					2/9		
057	Enclosure	1/3				7/80		
058	Enclosure	1/4						
059	Enclosure	1/3				6/44	1/177	
060	Enclosure					5/28		
061	Enclosure	30/355			2/98	11/72	2/480	
062	Enclosure	11/155		1/16	1/4		1/211	
063	Enclosure	9/537			2/46	1/22	1/376	5 human bone
064	Enclosure	10/56		1/10	1/5	5/98		
066	Pit 65					162/2363		
068	Enclosure		2/26		2/47			
072	Pit 71	2/73						
075	Quarry 74	14/62	3/260		4/27			
076	Quarry 42	2/217						
TOTAL		433/4789	37/3709	24/454	359/7542	269/3503	9/2903	

This part of the enclosure was constructed to a higher standard than elsewhere, possibly, with its accompanying bank, to provide an impressive approach to the site from the valley below. No traces of a bank survived anywhere around the site. Away from the entrance the ditch narrowed and became shallower, measuring approximately 1 m wide and 0.20 m deep immediately opposite the entrance in the north-west. The sides were more gently sloping with a broad rounded base.

The ditch fills were similar in all sections; heavily decalcified silty clay flecked with chalk at the base with large flint nodules and increased presence of domestic refuse in the upper fills. Intermittent dumps of burnt flint, a feature noted during recent excavations at the Iron Age enclosure on Winnall Down II (Davis 2007), were also present in the upper fills. Flint nodules were sufficiently common in the upper fills of the ditch to suggest that they may have resulted from deliberate backfilling of the ditch or as a result of field clearance activities.

No internal features, post-holes, traces of structures or artefacts were found to demonstrate the organisation, layout or activity areas inside the enclosure.

FINDS

The watching brief produced a small finds assemblage in which worked flint, pottery and animal bone were represented in moderate quantities, other material types being restricted in both range and quantity. The assemblage reflects prehistoric activity on the site dating from the Neolithic through to the Late Iron Age although there is a possibility that some of the ceramics may span the period of the Roman conquest. All finds were quantified by material type and context, and the results presented in Table 1. This shows that 49% of the assemblage by number was recovered from the enclosure ditch, of which most was concentrated along the south side. The remainder of the finds assemblage was largely composed of flint from tree throw 22 and Early Iron Age pottery from pit 65.

Flint

The material from tree throw 22 comprised waste core preparation debris from the working of large nodules that appear in the Clay-with-Flints capping and may have weathered from the root boles of blown trees. The flint is mottled, black and grey in colour, and apart from minor thermal flaws is apparently of good flaking quality. Two flake cores, produced by hard hammer percussion, represent failed or abandoned pieces. The large numbers of flakes suggest that successfully prepared cores were taken away from the production site.

No comprehensive refitting was attempted but two *Siret* fractures (accidental breakages), two blades and two flakes, the latter in a distinctive speckled flint, could be conjoined, confirming the fact that this was a single assemblage. However the fact that no large sequences could be refitted and the relatively small number of chips, all derived from blank production, suggests that the assemblage represents dumped waste from flaking close by.

Worked flints, similar in condition to those from the tree throw, were found elsewhere on the site. This material included a flake from a segment of the enclosure ditch, in a slightly rolled condition, that is almost certainly from core tool thinning.

No datable artefacts were found in the tree throw feature; however their use as suitable receptacles for discarded waste is more in keeping with Neolithic activity than of Bronze Age date. The discovery of an isolated core tool thinning flake, in a more weathered condition than the main assemblage, might be linked to the apparent association of Clay-with-Flints with axe production in the Neolithic period (Gardiner 1984).

Pottery

The pottery sherds are in a restricted range of fabric types – flint-tempered, grog-tempered and sandy. They appear to fall into two chronological groups.

The earliest material comprises sherds from pit 65; these are all in soft, sandy fabrics and may

represent a single vessel, of which the rim and shoulder survives. This is from a large, coarseware jar with upright rim and finger-impressed shoulder, datable on typological grounds to the Early Iron Age (700–400 BC). These sherds are in relatively unabraded condition and could represent a single, deliberate deposit of one vessel. Sherds from the surface of pit 37 are in a very similar fabric and are tentatively dated to the same period.

The remaining sherds are in a mixture of sandy, flint-tempered and grog-tempered fabrics. The sandy fabrics are generally slightly harder than those from pit 65. Vessel forms include bead rim jars/bowls (contexts 54, 59, 61), a carinated bowl (context 14), and a pedestal base (context 64). Several sandy sherds carry shallow tooled decoration. While the possibility exists that some of these sherds could be post-conquest (later 1st century AD), no wheelthrown, 'Romanised' wares were recovered, and this group is most likely to be of Late Iron Age date (1st century BC to mid 1st century AD).

Animal bone

The assemblage from Little Somborne Park consists of 217 hand collected mammal bone fragments, of which 52% could be identified to species. As the identified assemblage is quite small, it is probably not representative in terms of husbandry strategy or population characteristics (Hambleton 1999, 40).

The overall condition of the bone ranges from fair to poor. Only one bone showed traces of canid gnawing and three bones showed butchery marks. The root etched surfaces of most of the bones probably obscures gnawing and butchery marks. None of the bones were burnt.

The identified remains consist of cattle (n=71), horse (18), sheep/goat (18), pig (5) and dog (1). Of these only 23 could be aged; however the teeth and bone fragments clearly indicate both younger and older animals.

Of note is a sheep/goat mandible from the northern terminus of the ditch with signs of inflammation around the premolar roots.

Human bone

Five degraded fragments of adult human femur were found redeposited in the north side of the enclosure ditch.

Fired clay

The fragments of fired clay from context 47 of the enclosure ditch (Fig. 3) appear to represent a small, crudely made, rectangular block, perhaps an item of portable kiln furniture. These fragments are in a fine, poorly wedged clay matrix with no visible inclusions and with a slightly soapy feel. Fragments from other contexts are in similar fabrics, and exhibit flat or curved surfaces; these may also derive from objects, perhaps of a similar nature to that from 47, or from oven plates. Possible parallels are not uncommon on other Iron Age sites in Hampshire. A similar rectangular block was found at Micheldever Wood, interpreted as kiln or hearth furniture (Fasham 1987, fig. 34, 4) and oven plates, with both flat and curved surfaces, are known from Danebury (Poole 1984, fig. 4.76–78) and Winnall Down (Bates and Winham, 1985, fig. 69).

Stone

All of the nine fragments of stone recovered are greensand, and all but one can be definitively identified as quern fragments – the ninth is almost certainly also a quern fragment, but retains no signs of working. Two fragments, both from the enclosure ditch, are identifiable as upper stones from rotary querns; it is likely that all other fragments also derive from rotary querns.

DISCUSSION

The most notable feature of the archaeological record in this part of Hampshire is an extensive network of settlement and land use that developed through the Late Bronze and Iron Age periods. It typifies a pattern that can be traced across much of the Chalk Downs of

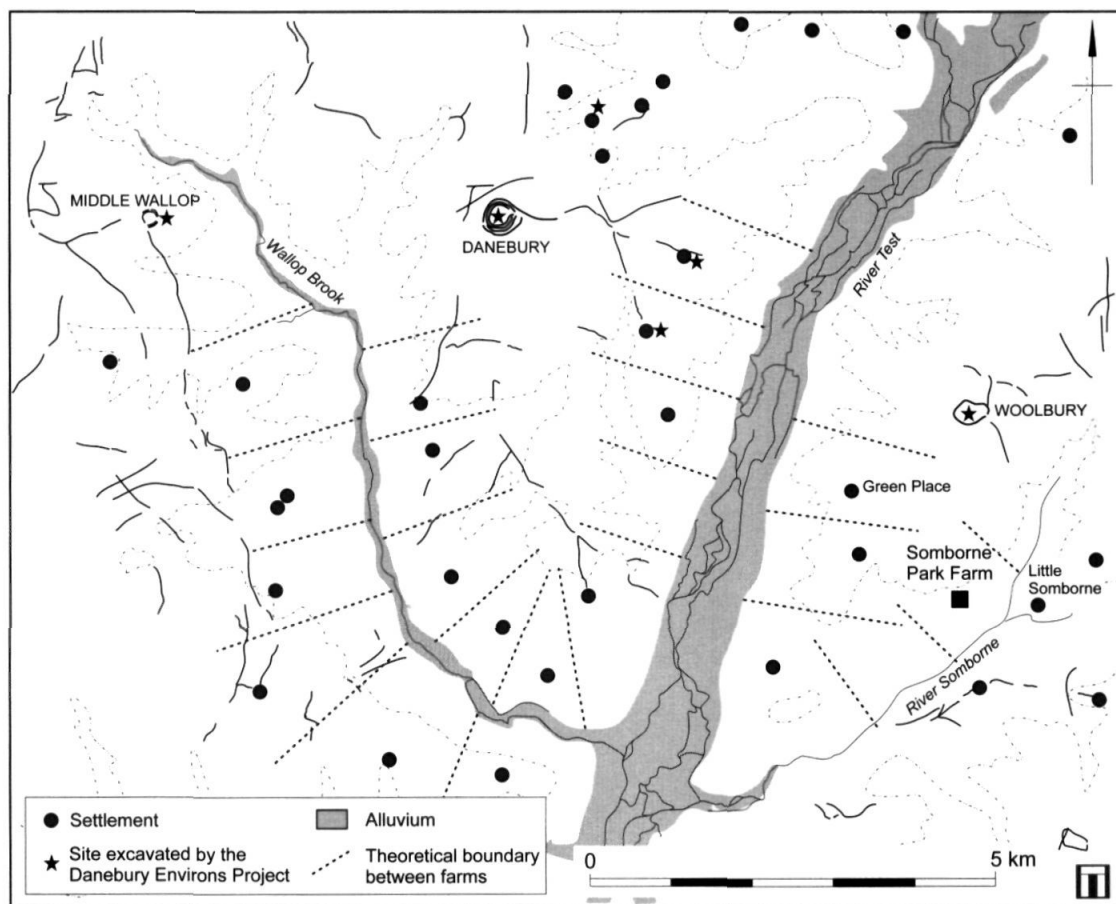


Fig. 4 Somborne Park Farm added to the distribution of Iron Age settlements as reconstructed by Cunliffe (1983)

Southern England and which evolved from much earlier, often less well preserved, activity. Neolithic communities constructed long barrow mounds, of which Palmer (1984) listed fifteen within the Danebury Environs; none were located to the east of the River Test. Additional diagnostic material has been recorded from surface collections and fortuitous discoveries during excavations, including a mixed assemblage from Woolbury Camp, 2.5 km north of Somborne Park Farm. The material was principally assigned to the Late Mesolithic (Brooks, 2000) but also thought likely to contain artefacts of a later date

Gardiner (1984) demonstrated that areas capped by Clay-with-Flints provided an important source of raw material for axe production during the Neolithic. The core preparation waste and core tool thinning flake from Somborne Park Farm underline the value of these superficial deposits, characterised by large nodules of good quality flint, as places of valuable raw material.

Despite this the density of material recovered, especially from the surface, remains extremely thin. Systematic surface collection (Wessex Archaeology 2008) preceded the construction of a pipeline that terminated only 7 km north-

Table 2 Enclosures as plotted by Palmer (1984)

<i>Site</i>	<i>NGR</i>	<i>Drainage</i>	<i>OD height</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Other</i>
Enclosure						
Woodlease Copse	293319	Test	105	0.23	Rectilinear	In complex
Whiteshoot Plantation	295330	Wallop Brook (s)	70	<0.25	D shaped	
Waterloo Farm (south)	296341	Wallop Brook (s)	65–70	0.76	Rectilinear	In complex
Waterloo Farm (north)	297342	Wallop Brook (s)	65–70	0.84	Rectilinear	In complex
Bustards Corner	291356	Wallop Brook (s)	80	0.27	D shaped	In complex
Nine Mile Water Farm	302343	Wallop Brook (s)	70	c.1.00	D shaped	
Broughton East	323326	Wallop Brook (n)	55	1.12	D shaped	In complex
Houghton Drayton	329320	Wallop Brook (n) /Test	55	0.28	D shaped	In complex double ditch
Green Place	367343	Test (e)	95–100	0.18	Rectilinear	In complex
Somborne Park Farm	379330	Somborne	75	0.14	D shaped	
Lower Chalk Hill	382319	Somborne	80	<0.25	Rectilinear	In complex, unenclosed settlement
Little Somborne	389329	Somborne	80	1.25	Curvilinear	Excavated
Unenclosed settlement						
Darfield	314348	Wallop Brook (n)	75			In complex
The Buildings	317332	Wallop Brook (n)	65			In complex
Everley Farm	334330	Test	70			In complex
Hoopers Bottom	357321	Test	60			In complex
North Park	367336	Test/Somborne	95			In complex
Rookley House	393332	Somborne	85			

east of Little Somborne at Crawley Down. The route crossed areas of Clay-with-Flints but produced relatively low levels of flint assemblages from any period.

Healy (1983) argued that surface collections often only reflect the distribution of Late Neolithic and Bronze Age activity, with Early Neolithic activity frequently preserved in subsoil features, including pits and more frequently tree throw hollows. These features are often revealed, as at Somborne Park Farm, as unexpected discoveries on excavations. Exploitation of tree throw features has been observed elsewhere, including Cambridgeshire (Evans *et al.* 1999) and Kent (Harding *in press* table 5). The flint assemblage from Somborne Park Farm lacks diagnostic tools and remains undated; however aspects of the technology, the exploitation of Clay-with-Flints as a source of raw material and use of a tree throw hollow as a repository for knapping waste suggests that it more likely to be of Neolithic date. The absence of any traces of settlement or related flint tools reinforces the idea that this episode represents only small scale industrial activity, typical of that likely to have been repeated many times in the area.

Evidence of Bronze Age activity in this part of Hampshire is also slight. Palmer (1984) recognised a bipartite division of monuments with round barrows from the Early Bronze Age and extensive Wessex linear ditch systems that developed in the Middle/Late Bronze Age.

The most significant result of the watching brief at Somborne Park Farm has been the discovery of the Iron Age enclosure which has filled a gap in the distribution of Iron Age settlement in the south-east corner of the Danebury Environs Survey area. The unexpected discovery of this site has also reinforced the fact that, despite the extensive archive of aerial photographs from the area and the detail with which they can be read, sites, possibly masked by the underlying Clay-with-Flints, can remain undetected on aerial photographs. The excavation has produced a small finds assemblage that records domestic and economic activity and provided a broad chronological framework for the site.

Apart from extensive study centred on Danebury hill fort and its environs (Cunliffe 2000; Cunliffe and Poole 2000a; 2000b) there have been very few opportunities to establish an associated chronology using results from excavation. Work has been restricted principally to the results from Danebury and the Southern Feeder Gas Pipeline (Neal 1980; Catherall *et al.* 1984). These excavations have demonstrated that enclosures and settlements were not always contemporaneous but developed throughout the Iron Age. The principal use of the site at Somborne Park Farm is marked by activity that has been dated to separate phases in the Early and Late Iron Age. Excavations at Woolbury hill fort also found evidence for Early Iron Age occupation and re-use in the Late Iron Age (Cunliffe and Poole 2000b), a pattern that was observed elsewhere in the wider Danebury Project.

At Somborne Park Farm the Early Iron Age was represented by an isolated pit containing sherds of a large, coarseware jar. Additional sherds, in a very similar fabric and probably of the same date, were found on the machine excavated surface of an adjacent pit. Both pits lay close to a pair of elongated quarries, neither of which contained datable material, only animal bones that may have represented 'placed deposits' (Hill 1995). Both quarries had been completely backfilled before the construction of the enclosure ditch.

Quarry hollows are a recurring feature of Iron Age sites in Hampshire. Fasham (1985) described complex sets of similar features from Winnall Down that inter-cut and had been re-cut from the Early and Middle Iron Age. The pottery from Little Somborne Farm confirms an Early Iron Age presence on the site that may also have included the quarry scoop features. This activity may have been intermittent or centred on settlement nearby before the construction of the enclosure; however it is apparent that the development of this enclosure occurred on a site that was possibly already known to the local inhabitants. It is also conceivable that just as there are no traces of structures or artefacts within the enclosure that any additional traces of earlier open settlement have been similarly removed.

The principal feature of the archaeology at Little Somborne Farm was the construction of the enclosure. The location of the site, its size and design fit well with other enclosures plotted from aerial photographs. It is likely that the industrial and economic activities were also similar to other sites in the area and their relationships to local hill forts at Danebury and Woolbury. Table 2 shows details of eleven enclosures plotted by Palmer (1984), their height aOD, drainage, area and shape; most lie within complexes that probably reflect multi-period activity. The table also shows a number of unenclosed settlement sites in the immediate area.

Palmer (1984) noted seven 'D' shaped or rectilinear enclosures that averaged 0.6 ha, located along the Wallop Brook at approximately 800–1,000 m intervals. All are associated with complex 'celtic' field and linear ditch systems. Most lie at about 70 m OD, approximately 70 m below the crest of the Hampshire chalk plateau. He also recorded similar closely spaced enclosed and unenclosed settlements of comparable location, spacing, area and form in the Somborne valley and another at Green Place that overlooks the River Test. The newly recognised 'D' shaped enclosure at Somborne Park Farm fills a gap in the distribution of these settlements on this side of the valley. Nevertheless it maintains the spatial patterning, lying as it does approximately 1 km from enclosures at North Park, Little Somborne and Lower Chalk Hill. It is likely that this enclosure, located on a favourable south facing valley side, also lay within an area of 'celtic' fields, although none are currently visible on aerial photographs.

Cunliffe (1983, fig. 65) illustrated that these small farmsteads appeared to be associated with parcels of land that extended back from a local watercourse, which often lay within 500–1,000 m, to the higher parts of the Chalk. However he stressed that the results of the Danebury Environs Project (Cunliffe, 2000) had demonstrated that it was erroneous to assume that they were all contemporary. This settlement pattern appears to extend across other parts of the Hampshire Downs; enclosures, some associated with Roman buildings, have been plotted and are shown on the Hampshire Sites

and Monuments Record along the north side of the River Itchen valley at or slightly above the 90m a OD contour. They lie approximately 1 km apart and are also of a similar distance from the river.

The south facing entrance of the Somborne Park Farm enclosure overlooks the Somborne valley and is the most demonstrative part of the enclosure; the ditch and, by inference, the bank were more substantial. This reflects the situation at Winnall Down (Fasham 1985), where the ditch of the 'D' shaped, Phase 3, Early Iron Age enclosure of 0.4 ha was twice the size at the entrance than elsewhere in the circuit. The rest of the Somborne Park Farm enclosure ditch is relatively insubstantial but functional; however it is likely that much of the upper part has been reduced by ploughing or was truncated by the removal of the subsoil.

The centre of the enclosure produced no features or artefacts to demonstrate the distribution and density of structures or activity areas. Similar problems of spatial patterns have been encountered elsewhere in the region. This may be attributed to the use of machine stripping, to former ploughing or the ephemeral nature of the foundations. Buildings at Danebury Hill fort (Cunliffe 1983) were predominantly constructed using woven wattle panels, possibly supporting clay built walls. It is more than likely, in any case, that post- or stake-holes were cut into the Clay-with-Flints but did not penetrate the natural Chalk. Locally, at Woolbury Hill (Cunliffe and Poole 2000b) which is capped by Clay-with-Flints, an excavation area of 1,500 sq m, inside the defences of the hill fort, produced only six pits and no post-holes. More detailed results hinting at the probable internal layout of the enclosure at Somborne Park Farm were obtained from the easement of the Southern Feeder Gas Pipeline which crossed an enclosure covering 1.25 ha at Little Somborne (Neal 1980). This enclosure lay 1 km east of Somborne Park Farm and contained two round houses, a number of four-post granary structures and grain storage/rubbish pits. One of the round

houses was a substantial structure constructed on a post-built frame, while the other was of similar construction to those at Danebury. Pottery indicated that settlement extended from the 5th to 2nd century BC, but principally to the later period.

The density of artefacts from Somborne Park Farm leaves little doubt that the enclosure was occupied. The assemblage reflects a small Iron Age farmstead within an enclosure, populated by families growing and processing cereals using imported Greensand quern stones, rearing stock and undertaking small scale metal-working. The artefact assemblage was located primarily in the upper part of the ditch. A similar distribution was observed at both Winnall Down I (Fasham 1985) and II (Davis 2007) which suggested at the former that the ditch had been backfilled deliberately when the site was abandoned. This event appears to have taken place at Somborne Park Farm sometime between the 1st century BC and the mid-1st century AD. The date for its construction is far less certain. No pottery was found in the primary ditch fill which makes it possible that the enclosure could be much older and that the ditch was cleaned out at regular intervals. Conversely the enclosure may be of Late Iron Age date and contemporary with a Late Iron Age enclosure that was laid out on Woolbury Hill (Cunliffe and Poole 2000b) following a phase of abandonment. Sites with evidence for Late Iron Age reoccupation were noted elsewhere in the Danebury Environs, although at Woolbury Hill, unlike at Somborne Park Farm, occupation continued throughout the Romano-British period.

CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief at Somborne Park Farm was a relatively small undertaking; however, the unexpected results have produced evidence of a story that begins with early exploitation of flint by probable Neolithic communities. However the most significant contribution made by the work has been the discovery of a previously unrecorded Iron Age enclosure

with a small, but informative, artefact assemblage. The addition of this enclosure to what is already an impressive distribution of other settlement sites in the Iron Age landscape may make it possible to speculate on the position of other similar enclosures in the area particularly along the east valley side of the River Test.

THE ARCHIVE

The paper archive and all artefacts are currently held at Wessex Archaeology's headquarters at Portway House where they are given temporary storage under the project code 67790. It is intended that the archive will be deposited with the Hampshire County Council Museum Service for permanent storage.

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