

PREHISTORIC REMAINS AT WORTHY DOWN CAMP, WINCHESTER

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with contributions by PAUL BOOTH *and* DAVID MULLIN

ABSTRACT

Oxford Archaeology carried out a watching brief, including a small area excavation, at Bray House, Worthy Down Camp, near Winchester (NGR SU 482 358) on behalf of MoD Defence Estates. Natural chalk, former topsoil and ground levelling deposits were revealed in service trenches and the excavations for a new water tank. On the north side of Bray House, a small group of archaeological features was exposed. These comprised two pits, four postholes, and a tree-throw. Several of the features contained pottery of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date. A notable number of flints were recovered. The flints represent knapping debitage and, given their technological traits and association with the pottery, date to the late Bronze Age and possibly the early Iron Age. Small amounts of animal bone, hammerscale and plant remains were also recovered. Overall, this small site represents an area of settlement activity, possibly part of a small farmstead.

LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORK

In June and August 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an extended watching brief, including a small-area excavation, at Bray House, Worthy Down Camp, near Winchester (Fig. 1) on behalf of MOD Defence Estates prior to the construction of new buildings and the insertion of a gas pipe and water tank. The work was carried out as specified in a written scheme of investigation prepared by OA (OA 2008) and in consultation with Tracy Matthews, Historic Environment Officer of Winchester City Council Museums Service. Bray House is located at Worthy Down Camp

which is situated south of the village of South Wonston, about 4.5 km to the north of Winchester and east of the A34 (NGR SU 482 358). The camp lies on the south-east side of the former Winchester racecourse, which was converted for use as an airfield between the first and second world wars. The site lies in gently undulating terrain, comprising grass and hard standing, at c 90 m OD. The underlying geology is cretaceous chalk.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Water tank trench (Fig. 2)

The trench for the new water tank was excavated by contractors to the south of Bray House. The trench measured 12 m by 3 m and was 0.8 m deep. It revealed natural chalk overlain by a former topsoil of reddish-brown silty clay with chalk flecks, in turn covered by a 0.25 m thick layer of modern rubble mixed with a recently laid geo-textile membrane. A further mixed rubble and shallow topsoil covered with weeds overlay this. No finds were recovered from this area.

Gas pipe trench (Fig. 2)

A new gas main extended along Riley Road to the south of Bray House and around the building itself. The trench was between 1.1 m and 1.2 m in depth. No archaeological features were observed within the trench. Chalk natural was overlain by a 0.3 m layer of topsoil and turf around Bray House. To the south of the building, the topsoil sealed

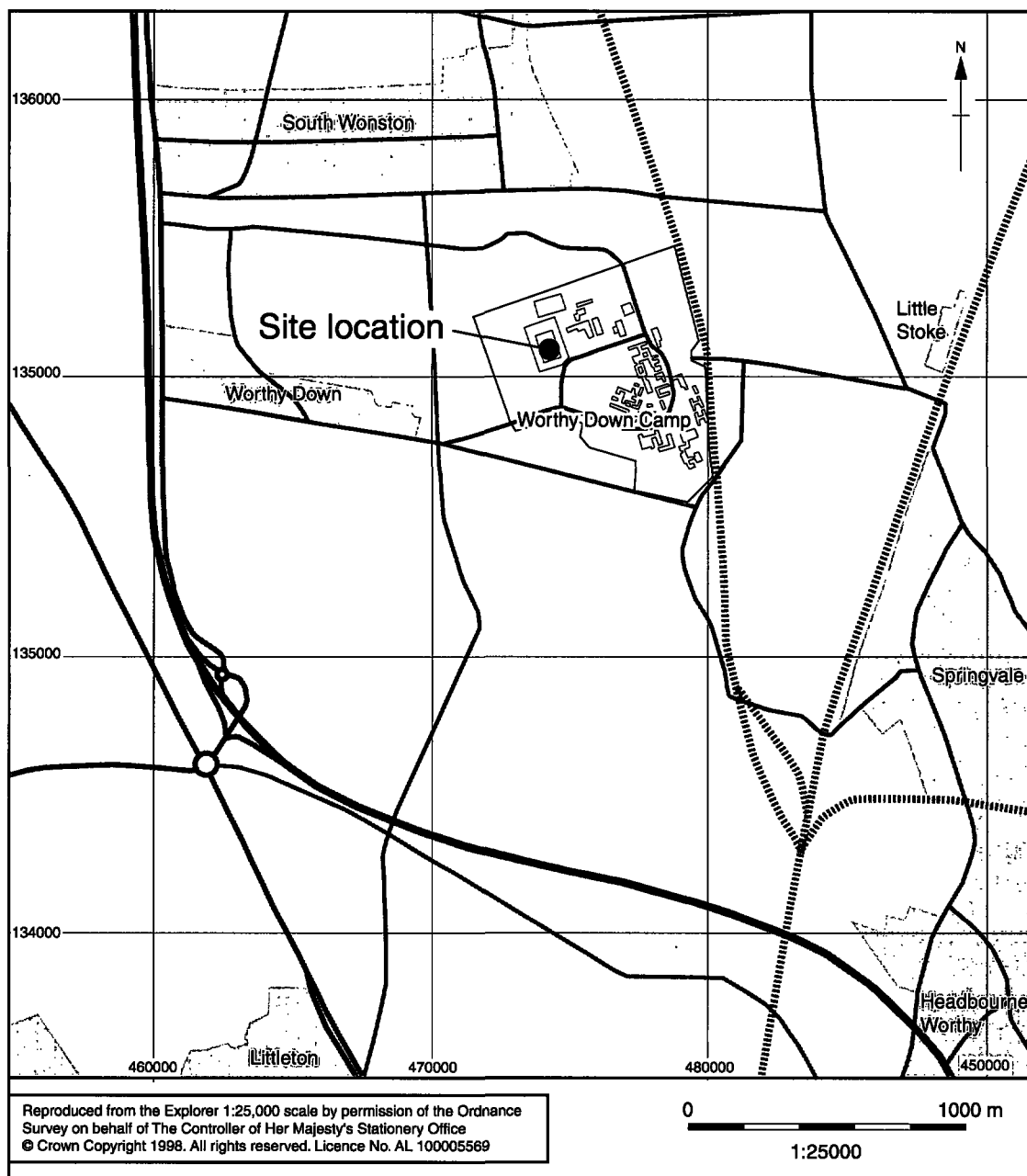


Fig. 1 Site location

re-deposited chalk and modern rubble to depths of 0.8 m.

Area of new buildings: Late Bronze Age–early Iron Age features (Fig. 3)

The topsoil and overburden were stripped by machine to the natural chalk, exposing an area of approximately 30 m by 14 m. This was linked to a smaller zone measuring 15 m by 17 m. A number of features were recorded. Pit 113 was oval in plan, measuring 1 m by 0.75 m across and 0.4 m deep. The single fill consisted of a friable dark brown silty clay with flint and charcoal flecks. No finds were recovered. An irregularly-shaped feature (110) was 0.8 m in length and 0.6 m wide with concave sides. It was 0.3 m deep and filled with a dark brown clay silt that contained worked-flint fragments and charcoal flecks together with burnt stones. The feature may have been the remains of a shallow pit or, given its shape, a tree-throw hole. A possible posthole (112), which was c 0.3 m in diameter and 0.16 m deep, was seen at the south end of 110. The relationship between the two features was uncertain as 112 was filled with similar material to 110. A group of three small features that could have formed part of a structure was recorded within the small trench linking the two building footprints. The feature (108) nearest the east baulk was circular, measuring 0.46 m in diameter and 0.36 m deep. It had a flat base and vertical sides and was interpreted as a posthole. The fill consisted of a reddish-brown clay silt with frequent chalk and flint fragments. Three large flint packing stones occupied the centre of the feature. The fill contained pottery of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age date, animal bone, worked flint and burnt stone. A second posthole (103), 1 m south-west of 108, was circular in plan, 0.45 m in diameter and 0.46 m deep. It had a flat base and near-vertical sides. The basal fill (104) was a light grey-brown silt with fragments of chalk and contained worked flint and burnt stone. It was overlain by a dark reddish-brown clay silt deposit containing more chalk and flint fragments. A third posthole (106) was located immediately west of 103. This feature

was circular with a diameter of 0.32 m and was 0.12 m in depth. It had a flat base and vertical sides and was filled by a dark red-brown clay silt. Pottery of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age date and burnt stone were recovered. An oval-shaped pit (101) south of the group of postholes had a flat base with shallow flared edges. It was 2.6 m in length and 2 m wide, but only 0.18 m in depth. The pit was filled with a reddish-brown clay silt containing a relatively large quantity of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery, worked flint and burnt stone.

ARTEFACTUAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

Pottery by Paul Booth

Some 207 sherds (1083 g) of prehistoric pottery were recovered from four features (101, 103, 106 and 108). The majority of the material (194 sherds, 988 g) came from the shallow fill of pit 101; this total includes 28 fragments (87 g) from the sieved residue of a soil sample taken from the feature. The pottery is highly fragmented and many of the sherds are abraded, but all the material appears to be of late Bronze Age–early Iron Age date, with the majority assigned to the late Bronze Age. Fabrics were recorded using codes to identify the principal inclusion types in order of importance (A sand, F flint, P clay pellets, N no inclusions visible, Z organic voids). These were qualified with a numeric indicator of the degree of coarseness of the fabric on a scale of 1 (very fine) to 5 (very coarse). The dominance of flint tempering is clear from Table 1. The flint was almost invariably calcined and deliberately prepared for addition to the clay matrix. The distinction between FA and AF fabrics is supported by the fact that many sherds of the former group also contained both voids, where organic material had burnt out of the clay, and clay pellet inclusions. These elements were not regularly noted in the AF fabrics. This suggests that the clay used for the latter was more carefully prepared, whereas for the makers of vessels in FA fabrics the addition of flint may have been the only important activity.

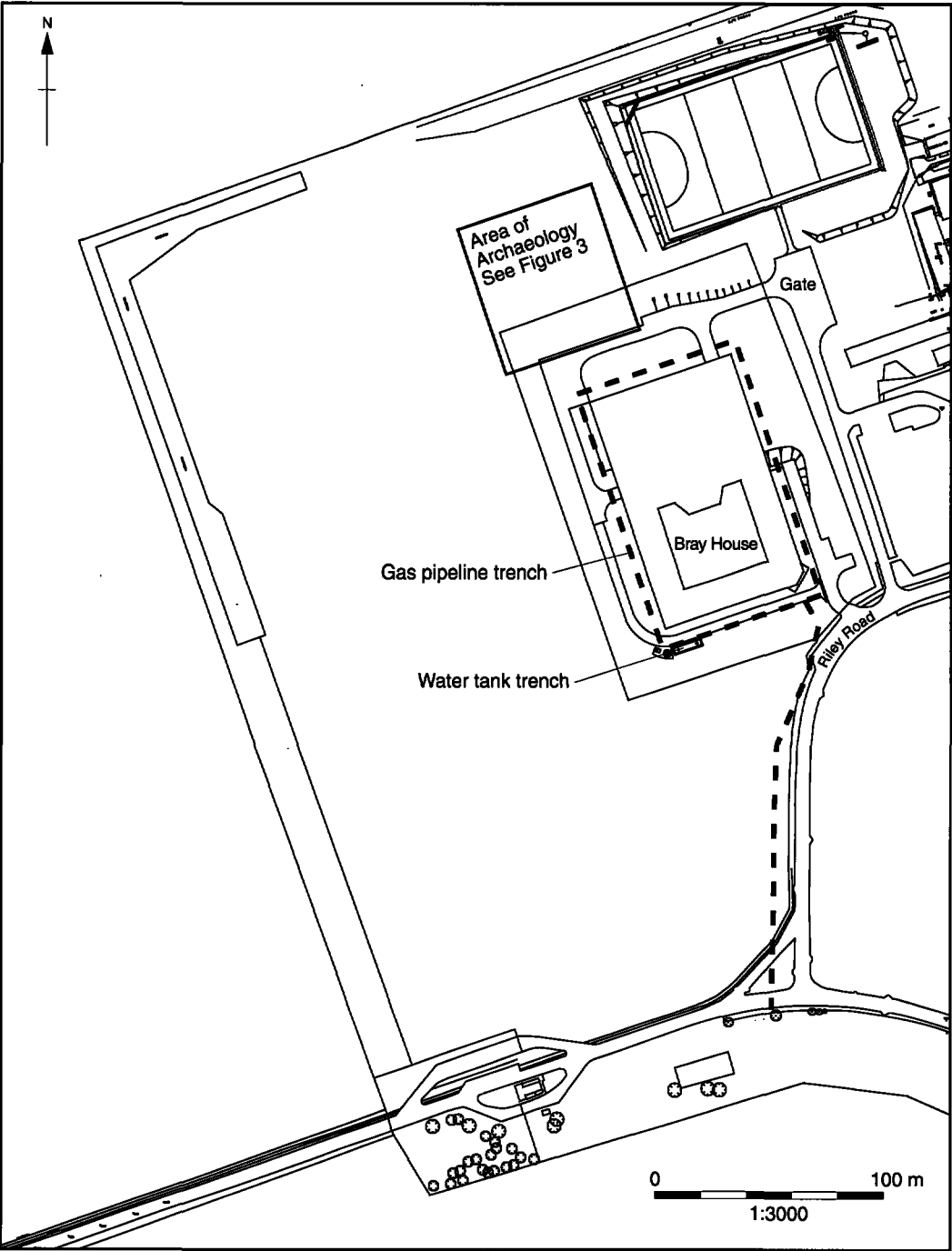


Fig. 2 Area of investigation

Table 1 Summary of pottery

<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Sherds</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>	<i>Features</i>
AP3	3	21	1 simple rim
AF	4	5	
AF2	1	2	
AF3/4	45	169	1 simple rim
FA	6	5	
FA(P)3	1	5	Carinated body sherd
FA4	146	873	5 rim sherds, 9 base sherds
FN4	1	3	

In general, the quartz sand inclusions appeared to be better sorted than the flint ones, which were often quite variable in size and sparse to moderate in frequency. A total of seven rim sherds was recorded. Two of these from pit 101 are likely (although not certain) to have been from the same vessel, so it is probable that six vessels were represented by rims. Identification of vessel forms was impossible. Most of the rims were very simple, with rounded or slightly tapering ends, either outslipping or slightly incurved, although it was not always possible to be certain about the angle of particular sherds. One inslipping rim was very slightly expanded, with a flat top. Overall, three vessels were thought to have incurving rims suggestive of simple, slightly barrel-shaped forms, while the other three had outslipping rims. These could have been from equally simple forms, but two of the rims (three sherds) were quite thin and even-sided, and it is quite likely that they were from shouldered or angular vessel forms. The only certain example of a well-defined shoulder carination was in the fine fabric FA3, but up to ten sherds in fabric FA4 may have been from very slack shoulders of forms which would most likely have had everted rims of the type just described. One of these shoulder sherds, in fabric FA4, may have borne a fingertip impression, but if so this was only lightly impressed. Two other sherds in fabric FA4 had slight traces of linear decoration,

in one case an incised line and in the other one or (just possibly) two lightly impressed lines at right angles to each other. One other sherd of fabric FA4 may have been burnished on both internal and external surfaces. The only other technological characteristic identified was the presence of extra flint temper on the underside of base sherds. This was noted on a total of four small sherds, all in fabric FA4. The pottery is consistent in general character with that from a number of larger assemblages examined in the Winchester area, particularly important amongst which is the material from the adjacent sites of Winnall Down and Easton Lane (Hawkes 1985; 1989). The later prehistoric pottery from these sites is dominated by flint-tempered fabrics, a broad tradition that extended from the Neolithic (Ellison 1989, 87) at least into the middle Iron Age (e.g. Hawkes 1985, 62; 1987, 27). The general characteristics of the Winnall Down and Easton Lane assemblages support a late Bronze Age-early Iron Age date for the present material.

Flint by David Mullin

A total of 150 lithic items was recovered from the excavations. Most of these came from the fill of pit 101. In addition, 135 un-worked burnt flint pieces weighing 5.67 kg was recovered, mostly from the same context. The

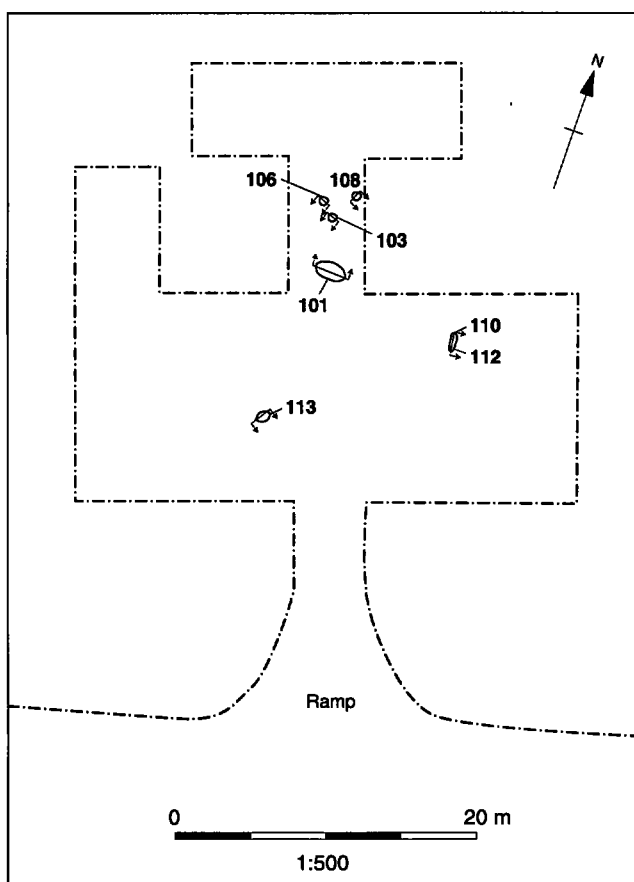


Fig. 3 Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age features

raw materials exploited at the site were predominantly locally-occurring chalk flint, which had varying degrees of cortication. Much of the material was in relatively fresh condition, suggesting that it had suffered minimal disturbance. No formal implements were identified in the assemblage, which comprised waste from the knapping process. This waste showed evidence for the use of hard hammers and the presence of large, irregular waste; the predominance of secondary/tertiary flakes and indications of poor knapping skill suggest a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age date (Young & Humphrey 1999). A total of 133 flints was recovered from pit 101. These were predomi-

nantly waste flakes, comprising six primary flakes, 53 secondary flakes, 34 tertiary flakes and 22 chips. Cores and core-maintenance pieces were poorly represented, a total of ten core-related pieces being recovered from 101. The largest amount of burnt flint was also recovered from 102 with small amounts from the fills of 103, 106 and 108. The lithic material comprises a relatively small group but is important due to its context and association with the dated pottery. The material forms one of an emerging number of well-stratified later prehistoric assemblages, for example from phases 4 and 5 of the barrow site at Micheldever Wood, Hampshire (Fasham & Ross 1978),

which have demonstrated continued flint knapping into the Iron Age period.

Other finds

Nine animal bones were recovered from the excavations. Both juvenile and adult cattle bones were found, suggesting that cattle rearing took place in the vicinity. Sheep or goat bone fragments from adult skeletons were also present. A small quantity of hammer-scale was recovered from pit 101, giving slight indications of metal-working at the site. The pit also contained a small quantity of charred plant remains. These included a mixture of poorly preserved cereal grain, weed seeds and a small quantity of cereal chaff. A few minute fragments of hazel nutshell were also noted. The flot contained abundant modern roots and insect remains, which implies that this deposit was near to or within topsoil-level and subject to bioturbation.

DISCUSSION

The small group of features uncovered at Bray House represents activity of a late Bronze Age date, with the suggestion of this activity extending into the early Iron Age, on the basis of some of the pottery. The quantity of pottery and worked flint recovered from pit 101, and the presence of well-defined postholes, suggests that a settlement existed nearby.

The group of three postholes is difficult to interpret, but could represent an individual structure, perhaps a cooking tripod or hide-drying rack. Alternatively, it formed part of a larger structure whose full dimensions lay

outside the investigation area. The abraded nature of the pottery and the fact that all the flints were either waste from knapping or burnt suggest that the material was redeposited from areas of disposal, probably middens, which similarly points to a nearby domestic focus.

It is possible that these features were associated with an undated ditch, possibly a boundary feature, that was located to the south-east of this site during an investigation by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2005). The site lies in an area of intensive Bronze Age and Iron Age burial and settlement activity along the higher ground to the north and north-west of the upper Itchen Valley, including an early/middle Iron Age enclosure *c* 1.3 km to the west (King 1986), and the well-known later Iron Age settlement excavated in the 1920s, 500m to the west (Dunning *et al* 1929).

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