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THE CHANCE DISCOVERY OF TWO BEAKER BURIALS AT KEMPSHOTT PARK, BASINGSTOKE

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with contributions by ALISTAIR BARCLAY, KATE BRAYNE *and* J PETER NORTHOVER

ABSTRACT

Two Beaker burials were found by chance at Kempshott Park, Basingstoke. One grave, partially disturbed, contained a crouched male inhumation, aged 45+, with a Wessex/Middle Rhine Beaker near the knees. The second, completely disturbed, contained a probable female, aged 45+, interred with a Wessex/ Middle Rhine Beaker and a bronze awl. Both burials are radiocarbon dated.

BACKGROUND

During October 2000, Winchester Museums Service was contacted by Hampshire Police concerning the discovery of skeletal remains during groundwork on a new housing development at Kempshott Park, Basingstoke. The installation of drainage for a new house was found to have disturbed part of a grave (Grave 1), although its remainder was excavated by hand. In September 2001 further skeletal remains were reported during the excavation of foundation trenches, 100 m NW of Grave 1. Although no in-situ evidence survived, a quantity of human bone, Beaker fragments and a bronze awl were recovered nearby (Grave 2).

Due to the chance nature of the find, securing funding for full post-excavation research has been a slow process. It should therefore be noted that much of this paper was written shortly after the discovery of the second beaker burial and that it has been only briefly updated.

THE SITE

Kempshott Park (NGR SU 603 479) is immediately to the S of Hatch Warren, Basingstoke and occupies a prominent area of former chalk downland at approximately 160 m OD (Fig. 1). The site now comprises an area of residential housing bounded by the M3 to the east and the A30 to the west (the former Roman road leading from Silchester to Winchester). During 1987 a series of Iron Age enclosures (initially identified by aerial photography) and a medieval church were excavated in advance of a large-scale housing development at Hatch Warren (Fasham & Keevill 1995). Prior to the new housing development at Kempshott Park, further Iron Age-Early Roman enclosures were excavated in 1996 (Chapman 1997) and in 1998 (Holms 1999).

THE GRAVES (Fig. 2)

Grave 1

The grave pit was approximately oval in plan and measured 1.45m E-W; the contractors' excavations had removed its northern edge but it measured at least 1.20 m N-S. The sides of the grave were steep, cut 0.65 m into the chalk, and the base was level. The chalky fill of the grave was derived from the cutting of the grave. Inspection of drainage trenches immediately around the grave revealed no further features.

The grave contained a male inhumation, aged 45+, interred in a crouched position (Fig. 3). The digging of a soakaway pit had removed the upper part of the body, although fragments of the skull remained in-situ close to the E end of the grave pit. Placed upright, near the right knee, was a complete Wessex/Middle Rhine Beaker. A radiocarbon date was obtained on human bone, which calibrates to 2210–2020 cal BC (95% SUERC–33330 3715±30 BP).

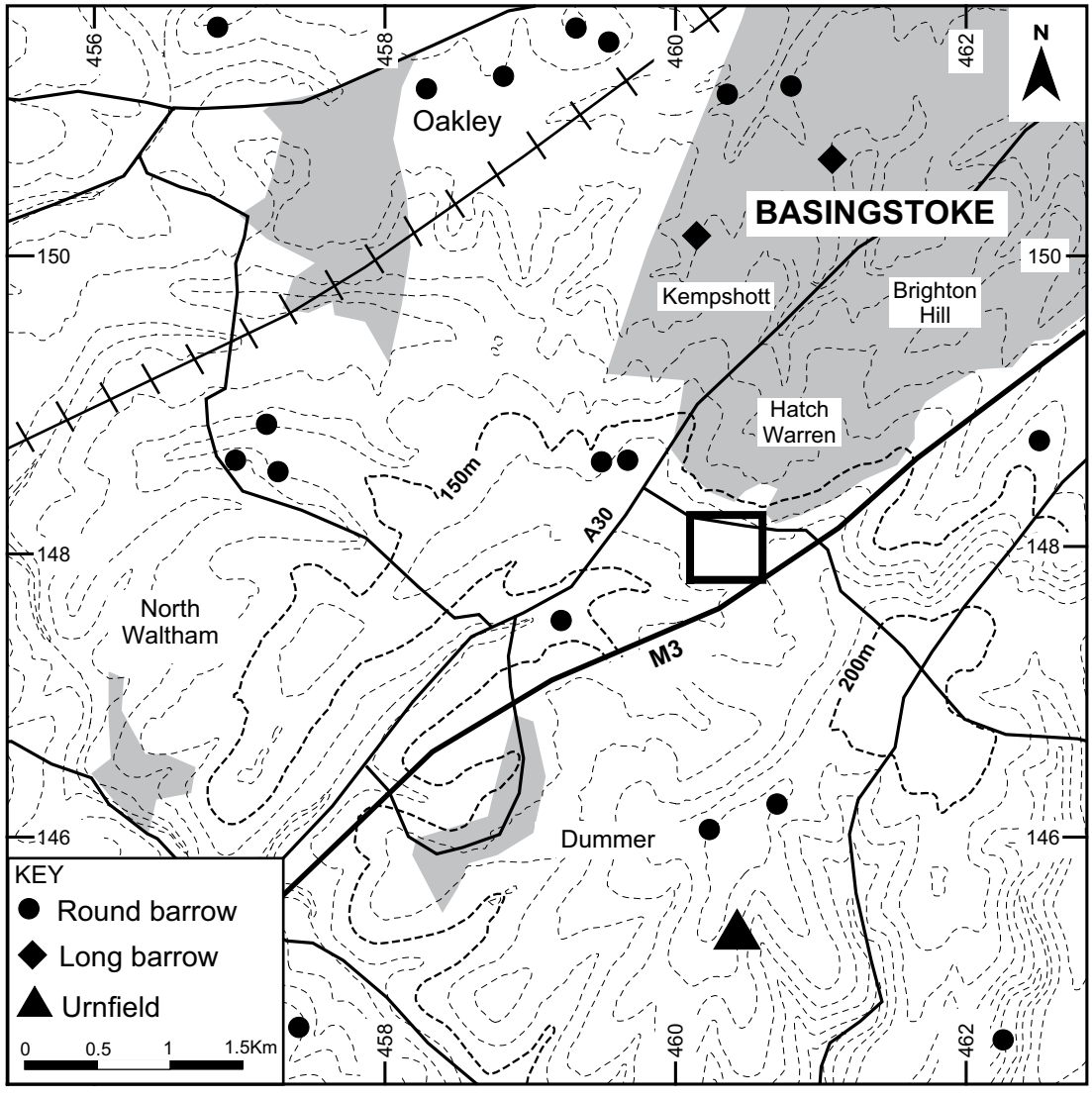

Fig. 1 The site and its setting

Grave 2

A pit, probably a grave, was found close to a spoil heap from which fragments of a female inhumation aged 45+, a Wessex/Middle Rhine Beaker and a copper awl were recovered. A foundation trench had removed the central part of the pit and hand excavation of its remaining chalk rubble fill revealed no finds. The pit was approximately circular in plan with a diameter of about 1.65m and was cut 0.75 m into the chalk. A radiocarbon date was obtained on human bone, which calibrates to 2350–2130 cal BC (95% SUERC–33329 3805±30 BP).

FINDS

Beakers by Alistair Barclay

Fabric and manufacture

Both vessels were typically handmade from a

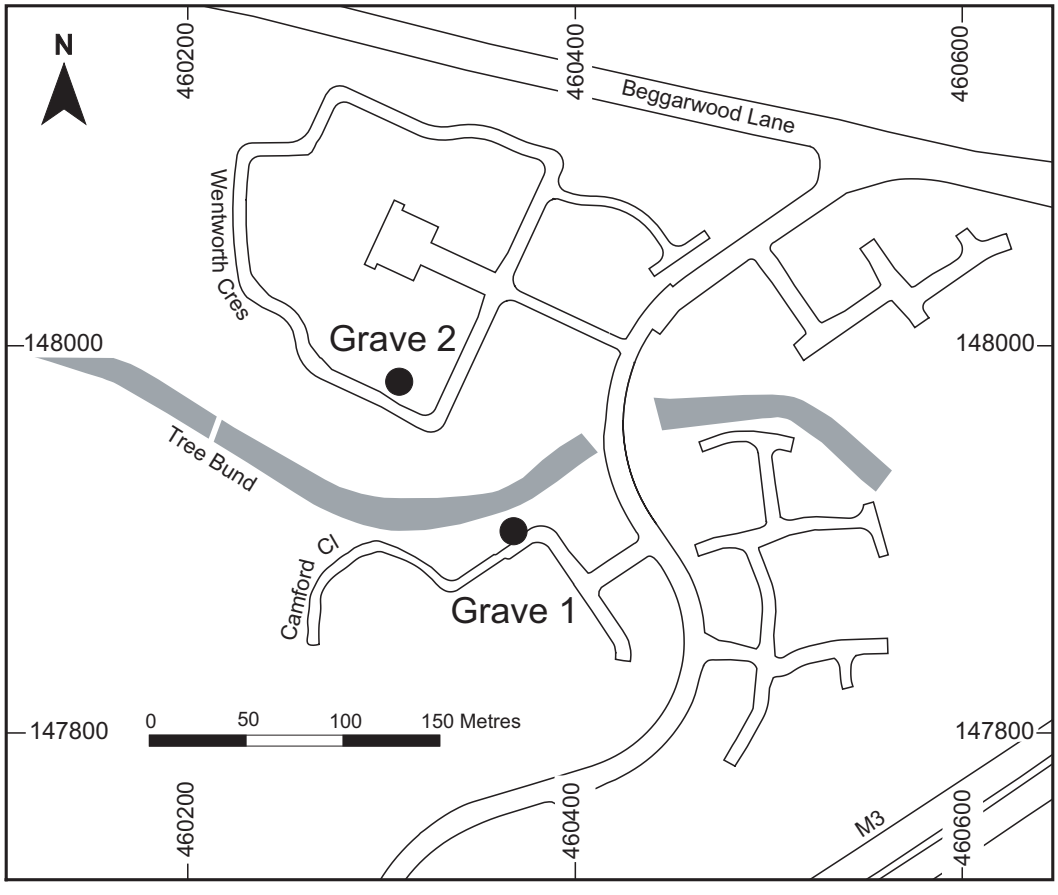

Fig. 2 Location of the graves

fabric that had been deliberately tempered with grog and possibly, although not certainly, with smaller quantities of flint and sand. It is quite a common fabric at this time and is found across much of southern England.

Fabric: relatively soft with inclusions of angular grog (1–3 mm), occasional angular flint and rare quartz.

Form and decoration

Vessel 1 (Fig. 4.1)

The Beaker is 152 mm tall and of slightly sinuous form with approximately equal rim (117 mm) and belly (118 mm) diameters and a flat narrower (76 mm) base. It is decorated with six horizontal bands of impressed comb. The upper band consists of three lines and of the remainder four have five lines, while one has six. These lines were made with a rectangular toothed comb that was at least 42 mm in length, although sometimes the impression can be traced for only 25 mm. In places the execution of these impressions is quite poor, especially near the base. There are places were the decoration has been double 'printed' or re-stamped after the surface had been smudged. The exterior surface has been burnished. No traces of white inlay survive within the comb impressions.

The form and decoration place it within Clarke's (1970) Wessex/Middle Rhine (W/MR) group. There is a close parallel for this Beaker from Brightwell, Berkshire (Clarke 1970 no 168), while numerous less precise parallels

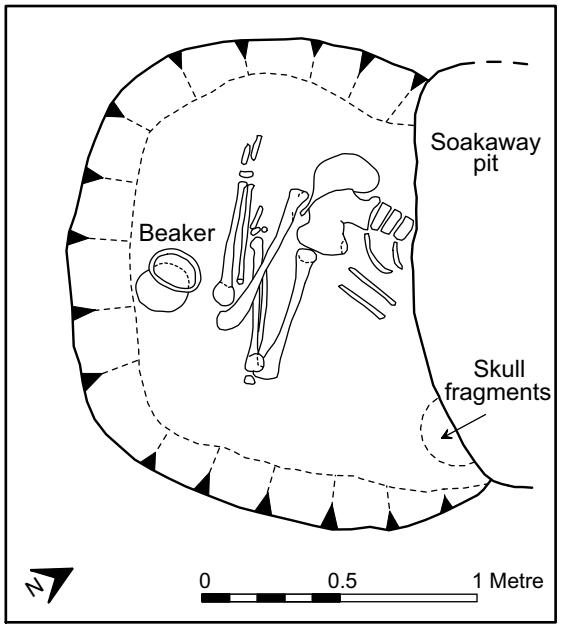

Fig. 3 Plan of Grave 1

are illustrated by Clarke (1970 nos. 146–7, 185, 187, 193, 219 and 222) many of which come from Wessex or the Upper Thames valley.

Vessel 2 (Fig. 4.2)

The height of the Beaker is uncertain but possibly in the region of 163 mm. The profile is sinuous with the vessel belly (131 mm) wider than the mouth (121 mm) with a relatively small base (65 mm). The upper part of the vessel is decorated with all-over comb. The belly of the pot is marked with an undecorated band. Below the belly the pot is decorated with alternating decorated and plain bands. The decorated bands consist of horizontal comb impressions. For the most part the upper decorated band is made up of continuous lines of comb impressions. However, further down the vessel the lines become more broken, while near the base they form clear blocks within horizontal bands. A rectangular toothed comb was used to make the impressions. Possible white inlay survives within some of these impressions. The exterior of the vessel is highly burnished, as is the interior.

The form and decoration place it within

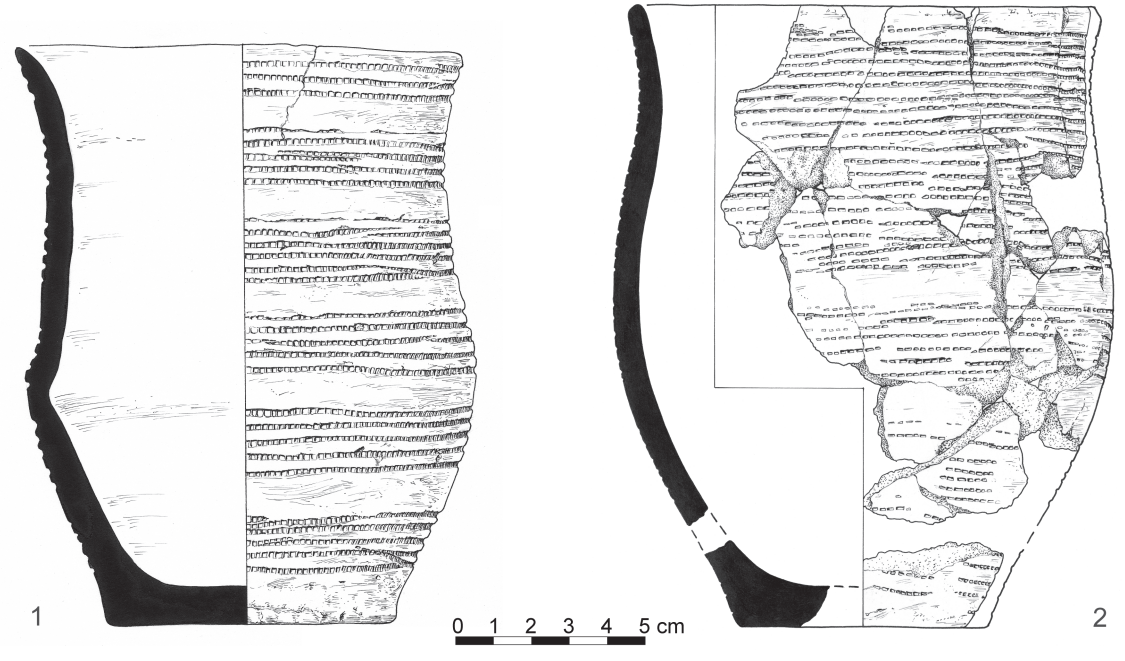

Fig. 4 Beakers. 1, Grave 1; 2, Grave 2. Scale, 1:2

Clarke's Wessex/Middle Rhine (W/MR) group (1970, 296–392), although the decoration on the lower part of the vessel is unusual. Similar decoration is found on a European style Beaker from Cholsey, Oxon (Clarke 1970: 291, no 87).

The two Beakers share a number of similarities: size, fabric, method and style of decoration, which may reflect that the same community made them. The slight differences in shape and decoration may well be an expression of individuality and social identity.

Date and chronology

Wessex/Middle Rhine vessels are generally considered to be one of the earlier styles within the Beaker ceramic tradition (c.2350–2000 cal BC). This style is associated with a series of early radiocarbon dates from contexts that include both graves and pit deposits (Barclay & Lupton 1999, 515–6), although there is also evidence that the style of vessel may have had a long currency (Kinnes et al. 1991, 39). The earlier date (SUERC–33329) is quite consistent with current views that this type of Beaker appeared after about 2300 BC during what Needham has termed the Beaker 'Fission Horizon' (Needham 2005, 205; Barclay & Marshall 2011, 49). This was a time when Beaker burials and practices generally became widespread over much of Britain, and the replacement of copper with bronze. The second date is perhaps later than what is expected for a Beaker of low-bellied, slightly Carinated form, although this may just help confirm the suggestion that some 'early' forms had a long currency (e.g. compare with Needham 2005, fig. 5:8).

Discussion

Wessex/Middle Rhine Beakers have been recovered from a variety of contexts (pits, graves and monuments) indicating a use that was not just restricted to ritual-funerary practices. Similar Beakers have been found in graves, while more elaborately decorated ones are frequently found with 'rich' grave assemblages that include early metalwork (daggers and trinkets) (Clarke 1970, 296; Needham 1999, 186). Style of vessel and the degree of decoration (simple, complex, all-over) has been correlated with patterns of social differentiation based on age and gender (Gibbs 1989; Barclay 1999) and the possible, but uncertain, single association of Vessel 1 (of relatively slender profile and simple decorative scheme, somewhat poor execution) with a male inhumation grave would fit the expected pattern. The second Beaker (Vessel 2) was possibly associated with an awl, which according to Gibbs is more likely to have been associated with a female burial. That such patterns should exist is not surprising, as Beakers were the first vessels to be consistently used and placed within graves.

Catalogue

Vessel 1. Grave 1. LNEBA. Complete W/MR Beaker with slight post-depositional damage to the rim. Decorated with six horizontal bands of impressed comb. Burnished. Grog, flint and sand tempered fabric. Colour: Ext. reddish-brown; core black; int. reddish-brown. Condition good.

Vessel 2. Grave 2. LNEBA. Fragmentary (partially reconstructed) W/MR Beaker. Decorated with horizontal bands of impressed comb. Burnished. Grog, flint and sand tempered fabric. Colour: Ext. reddish-brown; core black; int. reddish-brown. Condition good.

The awl by J Peter Northover

Description (Fig. 5)

The awl (small find 1) is very roughly lozengic in profile and sub-rectangular in section. The dimensions are: length 63.5mm; maximum width 4mm; maximum thickness 2.5mm, with the maximum at about 2/3 length. The awl is not very symmetrical, with the shorter end being slightly bent. Both ends appear to have been a blunt point, the bluntness increased by wear and corrosion; there is no sign that either end had been widened to a chisel-like form. It is possible also that the shorter end has been reworked.

Metallurgical analysis

Methodology

The sample (R2128) was prepared as described elsewhere by the present author (Northover

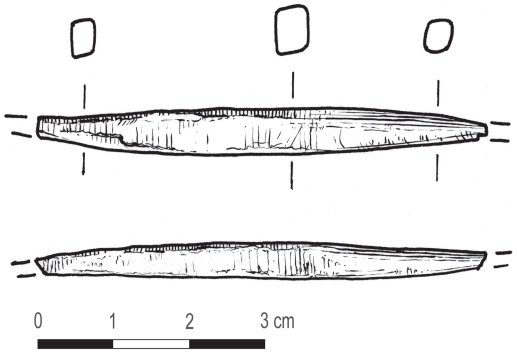

Fig. 5 The awl. Scale 1:1

2005). Five areas, each 30x50µm were analysed on the sample; the individual composition and their means normalised to 100%, are shown in Table 1. All concentrations are in weight %.

The metal

The awl is made from a slightly impure copper; the principal impurities are 0.14% antimony and 0.21% silver. There were also small traces of iron, nickel, arsenic, bismuth, lead and sulphur.

There are two points of make about this composition and the first is that the awl is made of copper. Apart from a series of analyses by Britton and Longworth in the early 1960s, not all of which were published, awls have often evaded analysis. Among those that have been analysed, there are only two others of copper, one from Stockbridge, Hampshire (Longworth 1984, 203, no 638, Pl 209) and the other from Spring Road cemetery, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (Northover 2008); some work still has to be done in the archives to identify precisely which awl of two from Stockbridge it was and what were its exact associations. The Abingdon awl was found in a grave with a female skeleton, and a radiocarbon date of 2460–2200 Cal BC was obtained. The compositions of the other two awls are also presented in Table 1.

The second point is the impurity pattern with antimony and silver as the main impurities, together with a small amount of arsenic. This is at once different from the Stockbridge and Abingdon awls which both have a much more significant nickel impurity and which is believed to represent a continental origin for the metal in those two awls. The impurity pattern of the Kempshott Park awl can be labelled as belonging to group 'A2' in the scheme devised by Northover (1980) to sort Copper and Early Bronze Age analyses in the British Isles. This is connected with an origin in the south-west of Ireland (Northover 2004; O'Brien et al. 2004). The A2 composition probably is the result of extensive recycling with arsenic being lost faster to the vapour or oxide phases than antimony at each re-melting. The dating of the Abingdon awl placed it in a period before bronze was introduced in Britain or Ireland, which latter process took place in the 22nd century BC (Northover 1999). The composition of the Kempshott Park awl is consistent with a similar dating as 'A' copper was in use from the 25th to the 22nd century when, as just mentioned, it was replaced by bronze, in fact quite rapidly.

The use of impure copper will also, of course, affect the functionality of the awl, which could only be used on relatively soft materials without too much wear or damage, textiles and very soft leather or thin slivers of wood, but possibly nothing with much more strength.

Conclusions

The awl excavated at Kempshott Park is made of copper which was most probably ultimately of Irish origin. The composition suggests a date between the 25th and 22nd centuries BC, which is in accordance with the radiocarbon result SUERC–33329 (see Grave 2 above).

THE SKELETAL REMAINS by Kate Brayne

Grave 1

Preservation

The bone was generally in a good state of preservation, although the skull, lower vertebrae, ribs and pelvis were fragmentary. Approximately 50% of the skeleton was recovered, the lower limbs being almost complete, but the right hand side of the body and the right arm were largely absent. None of the long bones were completely intact, so stature could not be estimated.

Table 1 Results of metallurgical analysis

Sample	*Object*	*Part*	*Fe*	*Co*	*Ni*	*Cu*	*Zn*	*As*	*Sb*	*Sn*	*Ag*	*Bi*	*Pb*	*Au*	*S*	*Al*	*Si*	*Mn*
R2128/1	Copper awl	drillings	0.04	0.02	0.05	99.63	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
R2128/2	BAS 01		0.00	0.00	0.04	99.64	0.01	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.16	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
R2128/3	sf 1		0.00	0.00	0.05	99.41	0.00	0.04	0.10	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.06	0.07	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01
R2128/4			0.00	0.00	0.00	99.35	0.00	0.07	0.31	0.03	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
R2128/5			0.01	0.00	0.00	99.40	0.00	0.04	0.18	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
R2128/ Mean	Copper awl, BAS 01 sf 1		0.01	0.00	0.03	99.48	0.00	0.03	0.14	0.01	0.21	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
RLAHA283/a	Copper awl, Stockbridge		0.00		0.10	99.50	<0.10	<0.10	0.19	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.00					
Ox 606	Copper awl, Spring Road Cemetery, Abingdon		0.01	0.00	0.15	99.54	0.00	0.05	0.08	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00			

Sex
This individual was male according to morphological criteria and the vertical diameter of both the femoral and humeral heads.

Age
Age is estimated to be 45+; based on dental attrition, pubic symphyseal appearance and cranial suture fusion. It is quite possible that this individual was 60+, given the profound level of attrition presented by the teeth.

Pathology
Osteoarthritis is present on the left proximal radial-ulnar joint, where the head of the radius articulates with the radial notch on the ulna, just below the elbow. The joint contour of the radial head was altered, so that the epiphysis appeared to have 'slipped' medially, extending distally down the neck. The joint surface was both porous and eburnated. The proximal tip of the bone, where the head would normally be, was also extremely porous. There are Schmorl's nodes, marginal osteophytes, porosity and a breakdown of the joint margins on the fourth and fifth lumbar vertebral bodies.

Dental pathology
There is prolific subgingival calculus on the buccal and lingual aspects of all of the mandibular and maxillary dentition. This was associated with alveolar recession, and evidence of an inflammatory response, which is indicative of periodontal disease. There are hypoplastic defects on the lower first molars and the upper canines and premolars. The prolific calculus present on all the teeth impeded observation of enamel hypoplasia on the remaining dentition.

Grave 2

Preservation
The bone was generally in a very poor state of preservation, and all the recovered bones were fragmentary and displayed periosteal exfoliation. Approximately 30% of the skeleton was recovered. The lower limbs were almost entirely absent, but the skull, vertebrae, ribs, right pelvis and arms were partially recovered.

Sex
This individual was possibly female, although very few anatomical features indicative of sex survived. However, the bones are extremely gracile, which is regarded as a female characteristic.

Age
Age is estimated to be 45+; based on cranial suture fusion, and the degree of degenerative changes presented on the skeleton. It is quite possible that this individual was 60+, based on the apparent lack of bone density (probably associated with osteoporosis).

Pathology
There are degenerative lesions on the left wrist, where the distal radius articulates with the distal ulna and the carpal bones. The joint surfaces display porosity and lysis. The joint contour of the distal radius and ulna are altered. Marginal osteophytes are present. These lesions are suggestive of osteoarthritis. There are marginal osteophytes, lysis, porosity and a breakdown of the joint margins on the upper and lower articular surfaces of the 3rd to 7th cervical vertebral bodies. The severity of the lesions is suggestive of the development of osteoarthritis in these joints. The individual has exceptionally light bones and 'codfish' shaped cervical vertebral bodies and probably suffered from osteoporosis.

Dental pathology
No dentition was recovered, and the maxilla and the anterior mandible are absent. However, on both sides of the surviving posterior mandible, there is evidence for inflammatory lesions on the tooth sockets, in the form of porous bone and deposits of reactive, grey, woven periosteal bone. The first molars have been lost ante-mortem and the alveolar bone remodelled. The right second premolar also appears to have been lost recently ante-mortem. These lesions are indicative of periodontal disease.

DISCUSSION

A number of largely ploughed-out barrows are known around the vicinity of Kempshott Park

(Fig. 1), although none have been closely investigated. There is a long barrow at Down Grange (Scheduled Ancient Monument No: 179) and postulated second nearby at Kempshott (Andrews 1905). The area is particularly rich in Bowl and Saucer Barrows (Scheduled Ancient Monument Nos.: Hants 336–7; Grinsell 1940) that largely occupy prominent positions on ridges overlooking Kempshott. Near Dummer, 20 urns found in 1888 – many containing cremations (Andrews 1906) – is further testimony to the continued use of the area for burial into the later Bronze Age. The two graves, 100m apart, were presumably originally associated with ring-ditches that once formed part of such barrows, although all traces have long been ploughed out. Detailed examination of aerial photograph evidence that was undertaken as part of a desktop study (Fagan & Smith 1995), prior to the recent development of site, similarly found no evidence.

Grave 1, a male interred with a single Beaker, could been seen as a 'poor Beaker Culture grave' (Case 1977, 81), although any evidence for other grave goods may have been removed by the mechanical digger. The tentative identification of the burial in Grave 2, as that of a woman, is further supported by the presence of a bronze awl, a characteristically female association (Ibid.; Gibbs 1989). Case also argues that the addition of further grave-goods may be an indicator of social status. Since male graves tend to be better furnished generally, it is possible Grave 2 was the comparatively 'richer' burial.

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