

A SUMMARY REPORT ON A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CREMATION CEMETERY AT LOCKS HEATH, HAMPSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

Excavations were undertaken at land off Peters Road, Locks Heath, Fareham to investigate the extent of a Middle Bronze Age urned cremation cemetery, of which four burials had been identified in 2009. Despite heavy truncation of the site, at least 15 pits containing urns were recorded. Additional cremation urns, or fragments thereof, were also recovered. All of the cremation urns appear to date to the Middle Bronze Age, c. 1700/1500 to 1150 cal. BC and are attributable to the Deverel–Rimbury style, which commonly characterises pottery of this period across southern England. A single glass bead was the only identified grave good. The amount of cremated bone recovered from seven deposits, was very small and the weights of bone were very low when compared to the average for the time. Soil samples produced no carbonised plant macrofossils and charcoal, where present, was poorly preserved.

INTRODUCTION

An archaeological strip, map and sample excavation was undertaken at land off Peters Road, Locks Heath, Fareham in April to May of 2014 by Cotswold Archaeology (National Grid Reference SU 5022 0715, Fig. 1). The excavation, part of a programme of mitigation works, was carried out at the request of Martin Grant Homes in accordance with a requirement for excavation of part of a larger development area, issued by Hannah Fluck, Senior Archaeologist for Hampshire County Council (HCC), the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), Fareham Borough Council. The site had been the subject of three phases of evaluation (in 2009, 2013 and 2014). The excavation was approximately 700m² in size

and was undertaken to investigate the extent of a cremation cemetery, of which four burials had been identified but not excavated in 2009.

The site slopes slightly, lying at 28.8m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) in the north and 23.8m (aOD) in the south. The underlying bedrock geology of the area is mapped as Earnley Sand Formation of the Palaeogene Period, overlain by superficial clay and silt River Terrace Deposits of the Quaternary Period (BGS 2014). Natural geological deposits comprising clayey sand and sandy silts were exposed during the earlier evaluations (CA 2009, 2013).

The full report including specialist reports and data, and additional illustrations for this project (CA 2016) can be found on the Cotswold Archaeology website: <http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/>. The archive will be deposited with Hampshire Museums Service (Accession Number: A2014.31).

SUMMARY RESULTS (Fig 2)

The four cremation graves originally identified in 2009 (CA 2009) were re-exposed and excavated (re-numbered as 4006, 4013, 4020 and 4022). A further 11 pits were identified as cremation pits or graves as they contained ‘complete’ or partial urns, and an unstratified cremation urn, P20, was also recorded. The cremation burial pits were cut into natural geology and were generally sub-circular or sub-oval in shape, and very little larger or deeper than the urns they contained. The pits (4006, 4013, 4116, 4020, 4022, 4046, 4052, 4061, 4063, 4068, 4122, 4079, 4090, 4095, and 4112) were generally 0.5–0.6m in extent and 0.15–0.3m deep, with steep or

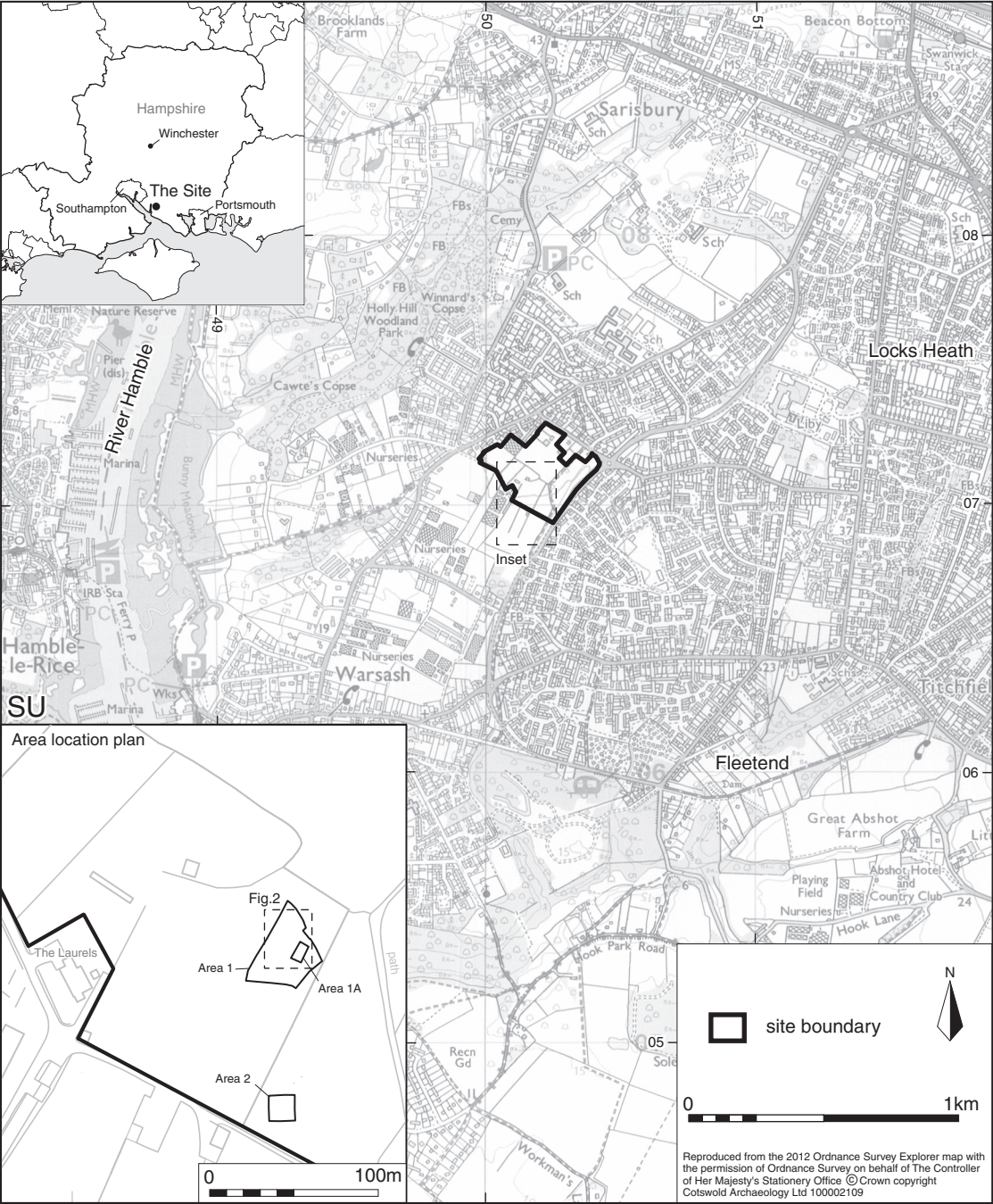


Fig. 1 Site location

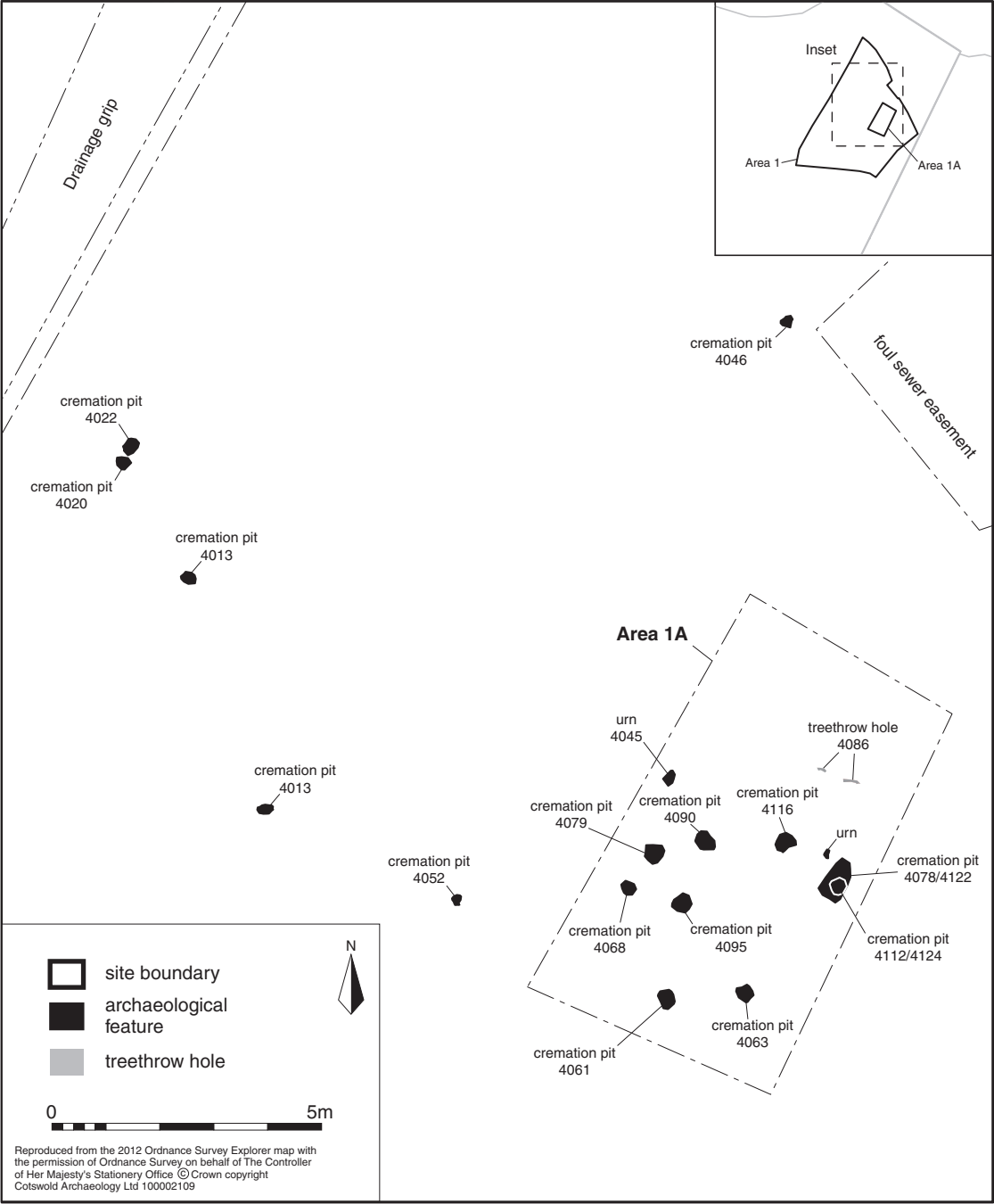


Fig. 2 The archaeological features

near-vertical sides and flat bases. The backfill deposits were generally very subsoil-like and comprised the only fills of the individual pits aside from the burial urns. They were characterised by a mid to dark yellowish or greyish brown silty clay or clayey silt with very rare sub-angular/angular flint (<30mm) and moderate charcoal flecks. Possible cremated bone was rarely visually discernible in any of the backfill deposits during excavation. There was a single example of a cremation pit (4122) having been cut through an earlier cremation burial (pit 4112). Pit 4112 appears to have contained at least parts of more than one vessel. In most cases the burials had been adversely effected by tree root disturbance, and by the relatively recent removal of trees/scrub from the area, as well as from modern features.

Human bone was recovered from within the urn or the surrounding material, from pits 4013 (P5), 4052 (P4), 4068 (P8), 4090 (P6), 4095 (P11), 4061 (P12), and 4063 (P13). The remnants of the seven cremation burials varied in weight from <0.1g–74.8g, very low weights when compared to the average for the time, and with high fragmentation levels. Only one deposit, 74.8g from pit 4090, P6, had any bone which was identifiable (the long bone and cranial bone). The fragments of bone from pit 4013 (P5) were smaller and thinner than the other deposits and it is tentatively suggested that these may be subadult remains. Evidence from the bone fragments suggests that a temperature of over 650°C was maintained for enough time to turn all the bones white, which demonstrates a well-tended pyre with good technology. The urn fills were excavated in spits and the lower spit for each urn had the greater weight of bone which suggests that the cremated bone was affected by taphonomic factors.

No grave goods were recovered by hand during the excavations. However, subsequently, a single greenish blue glass bead of D-sectioned annular form (8mm in diameter and 4mm in width) was recorded following processing of soil sample associated with vessel P10 from cremation pit 4079.

Flotation of the soil samples produced very little ecofactual material. No carbonised plant

macrofossils were present and charcoal, where present, was poorly preserved. Identifiable charcoal was recorded predominantly as oak with moderate amounts of alder/hazel.

THE URNS

A group of up to 21 cremation urns in varying degrees of completeness was recorded (see catalogue below). Most vessels were heavily truncated, with some vessels represented only by base or rim portions. Four vessels (P10, P18–19 and 21) were very fragmentary and may represent disturbed burials. Of the remainder, two (P11 and P14) were deposited upright so that only the base proportion survived and twelve vessels (P1–9; P12–13 and P16) were inverted, preserving the rim and some instances (P1–2 and P7) the greater part of the body. All of the group appears to date to the Middle Bronze Age, *c.* 1700/1500 to 1150 cal. BC (Needham 1996, 132–5) and is largely attributable to the Deverel–Rimbury style, which commonly characterises pottery of this period across southern England. Vessel P1 and possibly P3 exhibit traits more typical of the Wessex Biconical Urn tradition and are suggestive of dating early in the given range, at the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age.

The level of truncation makes definition of vessel profile difficult. Vessel P1 is of slightly biconical form and its profile, together with the complex decorative motifs accord best with the Wessex Biconical Urn tradition. Nos. P2–P3 are straight-sided or slightly convex and fall within the bucket urn class, although the vertical applied strips seen with P3 are again more typical of Wessex Biconical Urns. Only vessel P8 is convincingly of the barrel urn class. Rim forms are simple, typically flattened or as with P7, slightly expanded. Vessel diameters fall in the range 190–340mm, with the majority falling within the 240–280mm range. Vessel P3 is unusual in its distinctly oval circumference. This is thought unlikely to be intentional, and more likely has resulted from distortion prior to firing.

As is common for ceramics of this period the pottery fabrics are coarse and soft which

has resulted in poor surface preservation and fragmentation. Following micro-excavation the urns underwent conservation, including selective cleaning/consolidation. The majority of vessels occur in coarser flint-tempered fabrics (F1/F2), with smaller numbers of vessels in grogged (G1) or vesicular types (V1/V2). The latter probably representing a fabric originally containing calcareous inclusions which for type V2 was almost certainly fossil shell. The (three) vessels in the grogged and vesicular fabrics were very fragmentary, making stylistic comparisons with the main flint-gritted group difficult. A hint that fabric V2 might be part of a later tradition is the association of vessel P10 with a blue glass bead, an object unlikely to date before the Late Bronze Age. The use of flint-tempering, although a long-lived tradition locally, is typical for Middle Bronze Age groups from Hampshire and into West Sussex (Seager Thomas 2008, 34). Where sufficiently well preserved surfaces are evenly smoothed (rather than finger-smoothed). Ten vessels featured decoration, all fully consistent with the Deverel-Rimbury style. For the most part this consists of simple arrangements of applied plain or finger-ornamented cordons, impressed fingertip/fingernail ornament and imperforate lugs (see catalogue and Figs 3 & 4; nos. 1–8). Vessel P1 exhibits the most elaborate scheme, combining a row of fingernail ornament and lugs, and repeated fingernail-impressed chevrons above. The pre-firing perforations seen with vessel P7 is an uncommon feature although paralleled in some East Sussex groups including Itford Hill (Ellison 1972). It is unclear whether this is fully decorative or may relate to the vessel's function, securing a lid or skin cover. A second vessel (P6) featured a single (post-firing perforation of the kind moderately commonly seen with pottery of this period and presumed to facilitate suspension or a repair using a leather thong or similar.

The Locks Heath urn group is among the largest of Middle Bronze Age date excavated from the county in recent decades. The comparable larger groups, as here, relate to 'flat' (urnfield) type groups or secondary use of barrows. Most are to the west or northwest of

the county and the overall distribution may differ little from Preston and Hawkes 1933 (fig. 12) survey, which showed the main concentrations west of the Itchen. More recent surveys show a good number of Middle Bronze Age pottery findspots in the coastal zone of East Sussex (Ellison 1980a, 35, fig. 10; Seager Thomas 2008) and the Locks Heath example fits as a western extension of this loose coastal grouping.

The size of the group and its relatively discrete (spatially) character suggests use by a single community, perhaps over a relatively short period of time. Globular urns or other 'finewares' are absent and the preference for larger, thick-walled vessels in coarser flint-tempered fabrics – Woodward's 'heavy-duty'/'everyday' classes (Woodward 1995), suggests that the vessels were drawn from a community's utilitarian assemblage. Vessel P12 has preserved possible evidence for use in the form of internal carbonised residue, however poor surface preservation may mean that other such evidence may have been lost.

In common with the larger cemetery groups from the region (Dacre & Ellison 1981; King 1989; Raymond 2001), the Locks Heath assemblage demonstrates some degree of stylistic variability, with no two among the better-preserved vessels with exactly matching decorative scheme. Vessel selection might have reflected a symbolic significance relating to 'self' or status; the differences may however merely reflect the degree of variability usual within pottery assemblages of the period. The absence of 'domestic' groups from the area for comparison makes this unclear.

Comparisons across the group (decoration, vessel size and fabric) reveal no convincing spatial patterning. Cremation pits 4020 and 4022 may be notable as an outlying pair, and the contiguousness and matching depth of vessels P1 and P2 suggests close contemporaneity and possibly a familial connection.

Evidence for grave goods was very limited: fragmentary glass bead no. 1 (Fig. 4) from P10 is of a type unlikely to date before the Late Bronze Age. Its association with pottery in a fabric (V2) not typical of the main Middle Bronze Age group, raises the possibility of some later activity. That P10 was

part of the main cluster of burials supports Middle Bronze Age dating and the possibility that the bead is a later intrusion within a truncated deposit should also be considered. The findings at Locks Heath are then similar to other Middle Bronze Age cremation cemeteries in that, there is little evidence for social differentiation amongst the burials with the small pits and limited or no grave goods. The cemetery is within expected size variations as studies have shown that 78% of multiple cremation cemeteries of this period contain less than 40 individual burials and 52% less than 12 (Ellison 1980b, cited in King 1989). Such cemeteries may have represented small family groups.

The cemetery is locally significant and as it is one of a number of such cemeteries that have been previously recorded in the area, adds to the body of available data about local funerary activities in the Middle Bronze Age. Urns were recorded as a result of early 20th century excavations by Mr J. C. Mogridge, Warden of Winchester Museum, in at least three gravel extraction pits around the village of Fleetend to the south of the site (Parkes 1945, 190–1). Given the level of funerary activity in the area, it seems likely that a Middle Bronze Age settlement should be expected to have been located relatively close by.

Pottery catalogue (Fig. 3)

- P1** Upper portion (approx. 50%) of biconical vessel, although the angle of carination is slight. Simple, flattened rim. Decoration to upper zone: row of fingernail (fn) impressions with imperforate lugs (1 survives) and fn impressed chevrons above. Fabric F1. Weight 2918g. Diam. 340mm; sherd thickness 11–13mm. Cremation pit 4020. (Ra. 50)
- P2** Upper portion (approx. 70%) of bucket-shaped vessel. Simple, flattened rim. Imperforate lugs c. 20mm below rim (2 survive). Fabric F1. Weight 1248g. Diam. 190mm; sherd thickness 8–9mm. Cremation pit 4022. (Ra. 51)
- P3** Upper portion (approx. 20%) of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Rim circumference is distorted to oval. Simple, flattened rim. Plain applied horizontal cordon with vertical strip sub-divisions at long and short axis. Fabric F1. Weight 4405g. Diam. 280–380mm; sherd thickness 11–12mm. Cremation pit 4006. (Ra. 52)
- P4** Fragmented upper portion (approx. 20%). Includes detached (simple, rounded) rim sherds and upper body sherds with applied/finger-impressed horizontal cordon. Fabric F1. Weight 526g. Diam. 280mm; sherd thickness 8–9mm. Cremation pit 4052. (Ra. 55)
- P5** Upper portion (approx. 20%) of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Simple, flattened rim. Row of fingertip impressions below rim with imperforate lugs between. Fabric F1. Weight 772g. Diam. c. 280mm; sherd thickness 12mm. Cremation pit 4013. (Ra. 53)
- P6** Upper portion (approx. 20%) of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Flattened rim with deep fingertip impressions. At least one post-firing perforation below rim. Fabric F2. Weight 2575g. Diam. c. 240mm; sherd thickness 9–10mm. Cremation pit 4090. (Ra. 58)
- P7** Upper portion (approx. 60%) of bucket-shaped vessel. Flattened rim with slight outward expansion. Continuous row of round pre-firing perforations below rim and applied, finger-impressed horizontal cordon below. Fabric F1. Weight 2918g. Diam. 280mm; sherd thickness 9–10mm. Cremation pit 4122. (Ra. 65)
- P8** Upper portion (approx. 20%) of barrel-shaped vessel. Simple flattened rim. Plain applied, horizontal cordon at shoulder level. Fabric F1. Weight 1551g. Diam. 280mm; sherd thickness 9–10mm. Cremation pit 4068. (Ra. 56)
- P9** *Not illustrated.* Upper portion (approx. 15%) of ?barrel-shaped vessel. Simple rounded rim. Undecorated. Fabric F1. Weight 206g. Diam. 220mm; sherd thickness 6mm. Cremation pit 4046. (Ra. 54)
- P10** *Not illustrated.* Bodysherds only. Fabric V2. Weight 398g. Sherd thickness 10–11mm. Cremation pit 4079. (Ra. 57)
- P11** *Not illustrated.* Base portion only. Fabric F1. Weight 1760g. Sherd thickness 16–18mm. Cremation pit 4095. (Ra. 59)
- P12** *Not illustrated.* Upper portion (approx. 20%) of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Simple flattened rim. Fabric G1. Internal carbonised residue. Weight 431g. Sherd thickness 15mm. Cremation pit 4061. (Ra. 60)
- P13** *Not illustrated.* Upper portion (approx. 20%) of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Simple flattened/bevelled rim. Undecorated. Fabric V1. Weight 2873g. Diam. 220mm; sherd thickness 10–12mm. Cremation pit 4063. (Ra. 61)
- P14** *Not illustrated.* Base portion (approx. 20%) of

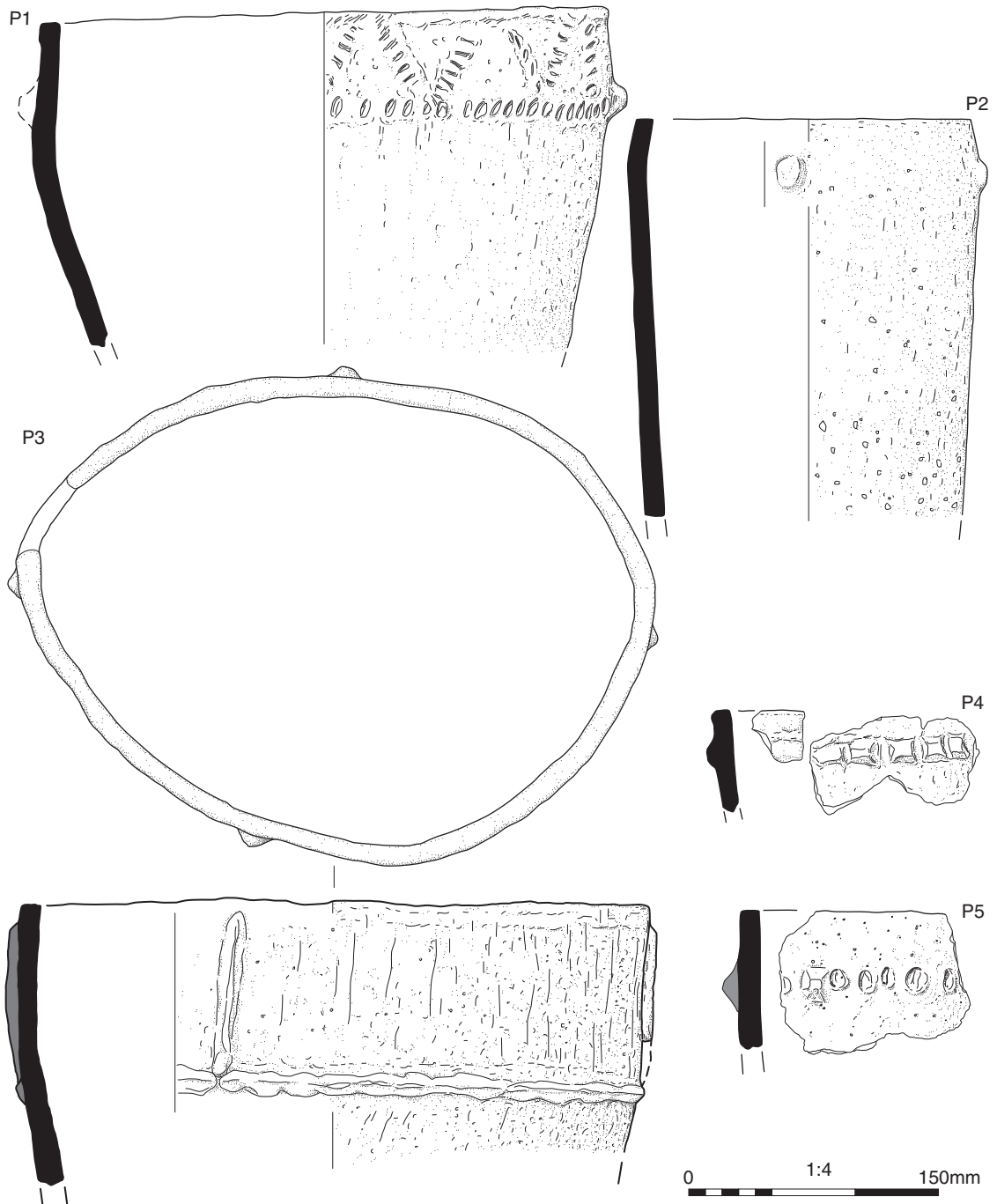


Fig. 3 Pottery P1-P5

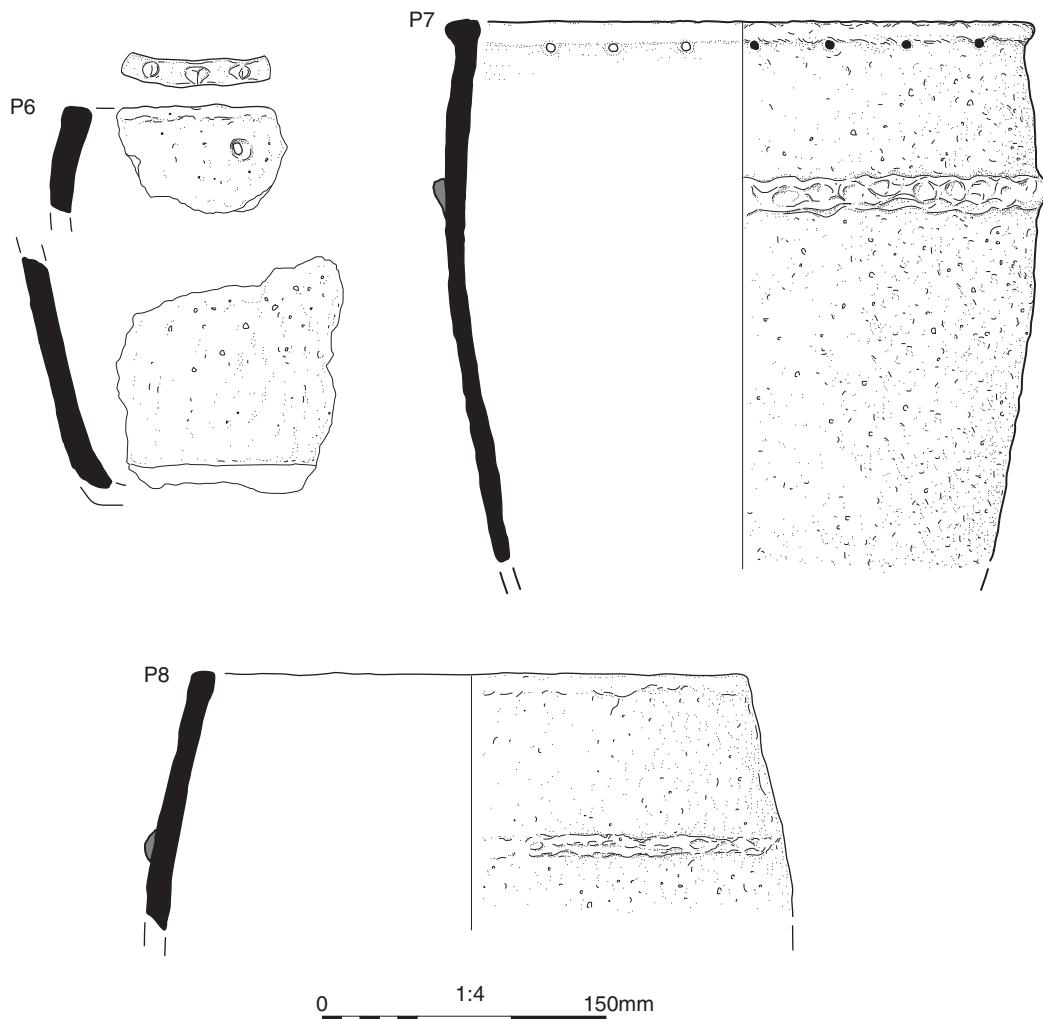


Fig. 3 (cont.) Pottery P6-P8

?bucket-shaped vessel. Undecorated. Fabric F1. Weight 3103g. Diam. 220mm; sherd thickness 15–16mm. Cremation pit 4116. (Ra. 62)

P15 *Not illustrated.* Bodysherds. One sherd with applied horizontal cordon. Fabric F1. Weight 259g. Sherd thickness 16–18mm. Cremation pit 4112. (Ra. 63)

P16 *Not illustrated.* Upper portion (approx. 20%) of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Simple flattened rim. Fabric F1. Weight 793g. Sherd thickness 9–10mm. Cremation pit 4112. (Ra. 64)

P17 *Not illustrated.* Base portion (approx. 20%).

Fabric F1. Weight 1409g. Sherd thickness 10–11mm. Cremation pit 4112. (Ra. 70)

P18 *Not illustrated.* Bodysherds. Fabric F1. Weight 271g. Sherd thickness 11–12mm. Tree throw 4086. (Ra. 67)

P19 *Not illustrated.* Bodysherds. One sherd with applied/finger-impressed horizontal cordon. Fabric F2. Weight 381g. Sherd thickness 10mm. Unstratified. (Ra. 68)

P20 *Not illustrated.* Bodysherds (flakes). Fabric F2. Weight 19g. Unstratified. (Ra. 69)

P21 *Not illustrated.* Upper portion (approx. 15%)

of ?bucket-shaped vessel. Simple rounded rim. Fabric F1. Weight 325g. Sherd thickness 10–11mm. Tree throw 4086. (Ra. 66)

Ra. = Registered artefact numbers (issued at time of excavation)

Summary fabric descriptions

- F1 Sparse or common medium/coarse flint (inclusions 1–3mm)
- F2 Abundant medium/coarse flint/quartzite (inclusions 1.5–3mm)
- G1 Common coarse grog (1.5–3mm); sparse medium flint (1–2mm); sparse quartz/quartzite (0.3–0.5mm)
- V1 Common rounded/sub-rounded voids (leached calcareous inclusions: 1–2mm); sparse flint (1–2mm)
- V2 Common plate-like voids (leached fossil shell: 2–3mm)

Other finds associated with urns

Glass bead (Fig. 4)

- 1 A single pitted blue glass bead was recorded following processing of soil sample <167> which was associated with Urn P10 (fill 4134). The bead is of D-sectioned annular form. It measures 8mm in diameter and 4mm in width. Beads of this type may date as early as the Late Bronze Age, but are more typically Iron Age (pers. comm. A Sheridan).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological investigations were commissioned and funded by Taylor Wimpey plc. The fieldwork was led by Chris Ellis, and the fieldwork and the post-excavation were managed for CA by Damian da Rosa and



Fig. 4 Glass bead associated with vessel P10 from cremation pit 4079

Karen Walker respectively. Specialist reporting was provided by Sarah Cobain (charcoal), E.R. McSloy (finds) and Sharon Clough (cremated remains). Illustrations were by Leo Heatley and Aleksandra Osinska. Cleaning and conservation of the urns was undertaken by Phil Parkes of Cardiff University. Hannah Fluck and David Hopkins of Hampshire County Council are both thanked for their input into the project. Torben Bjarke Ballin (University of Bradford) and Alison Sheridan (National Museums of Scotland) are also thanked for their assistance.

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