

## A SUMMARY REPORT ON A SMALL MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CREMATION CEMETERY AT LOVEDEAN, HAMPSHIRE

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### ABSTRACT

*Two isolated Bronze Age cremation pits were found at Lovedean, Hampshire, each of which contained a barrel or bucket urn considered to belong to the Deverel-Rimbury tradition of the Middle Bronze Age. Each contained cremated bone, albeit in small quantities. A single adult was identified from one urn while the material from the other was too small to allow any diagnosis of age or sex. Of two similar pits, one contained a Middle Bronze Age urn but no human remains, and the second produced no finds. During the watching brief, a single feature containing Middle to Late Bronze Age, Late Prehistoric and Romano-British pottery was revealed on the higher ground at the northern end of the site.*

### INTRODUCTION

An archaeological strip, map and sample excavation was undertaken in April 2014 by Cotswold Archaeology at the Lovedean electricity substation, followed in July 2014 by a watching brief. The work was carried out at the request of Jacobs UK Ltd, on behalf of National Grid. The site lies in agricultural land to the north-west of the village of Lovedean, to the west of the existing substation (NGR SU 67571 13509) (Fig. 1). The land falls gradually from approximately c. 90m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the north to 80m AOD in the south. Superficial Head deposits over the solid Tarrant Chalk Member (BGS 1974) were overlain by silty soil and clay with flint and chalk (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

The full report including specialist reports and data, and additional illustrations for this project (CA 2014) can be found on the

Cotswold Archaeology website: <http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/>.

The archive will be deposited with Winchester Museums Service (Accession Number: WINCM: AY547).

### SUMMARY RESULTS (Figs 2–3)

Bronze Age features were found in two areas of the site; they were not on the whole closely grouped, though all were located upon the lower slopes of the site and all had been badly truncated through ploughing.

Cremation pit 1003 was broadly circular in plan and comprised a shallow U-shaped profile, with steep sides, and a flat base. Partial urn 1006 (RA2), was inverted centrally within the pit. The fill of the urn contained 279g of cremated human remains and a further 7.8g was recovered from around the vessel. The bone was found to be adult and from a single individual. Due to the low weight and high fragmentation of the cremated bone it was not possible to observe any sexually dimorphic features, nor any pathology. The urn also contained 33 pieces (89g) of burnt flint and a flint flake (< 1g).

Cremation pit 1007 was broadly oval in plan and comprised a shallow U-shaped profile, with gradually sloping sides, and a flat base. Partial urn 1011 (RA3) was positioned inverted within the pit and contained >0.1g of cremated bone, the small fragment size of which again prevented diagnosis of age or sex.

Pit 2003 was located immediately north-east of a trough-shaped pit 2A and south of pit 2008. It was broadly oval in plan and comprised a shallow U-shaped profile, with gradually sloping sides, and a flat base. Partial



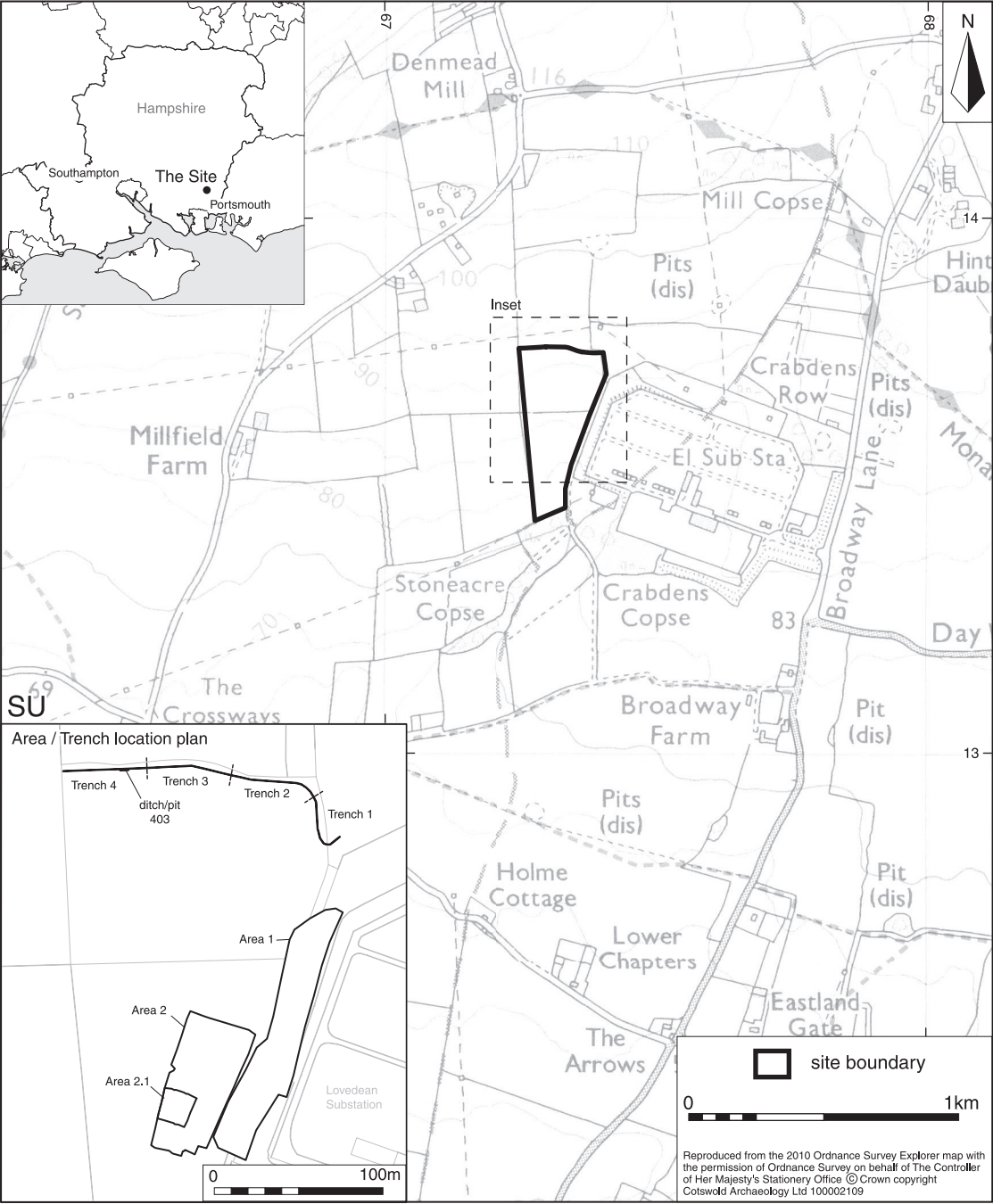


Fig. 1 Site location

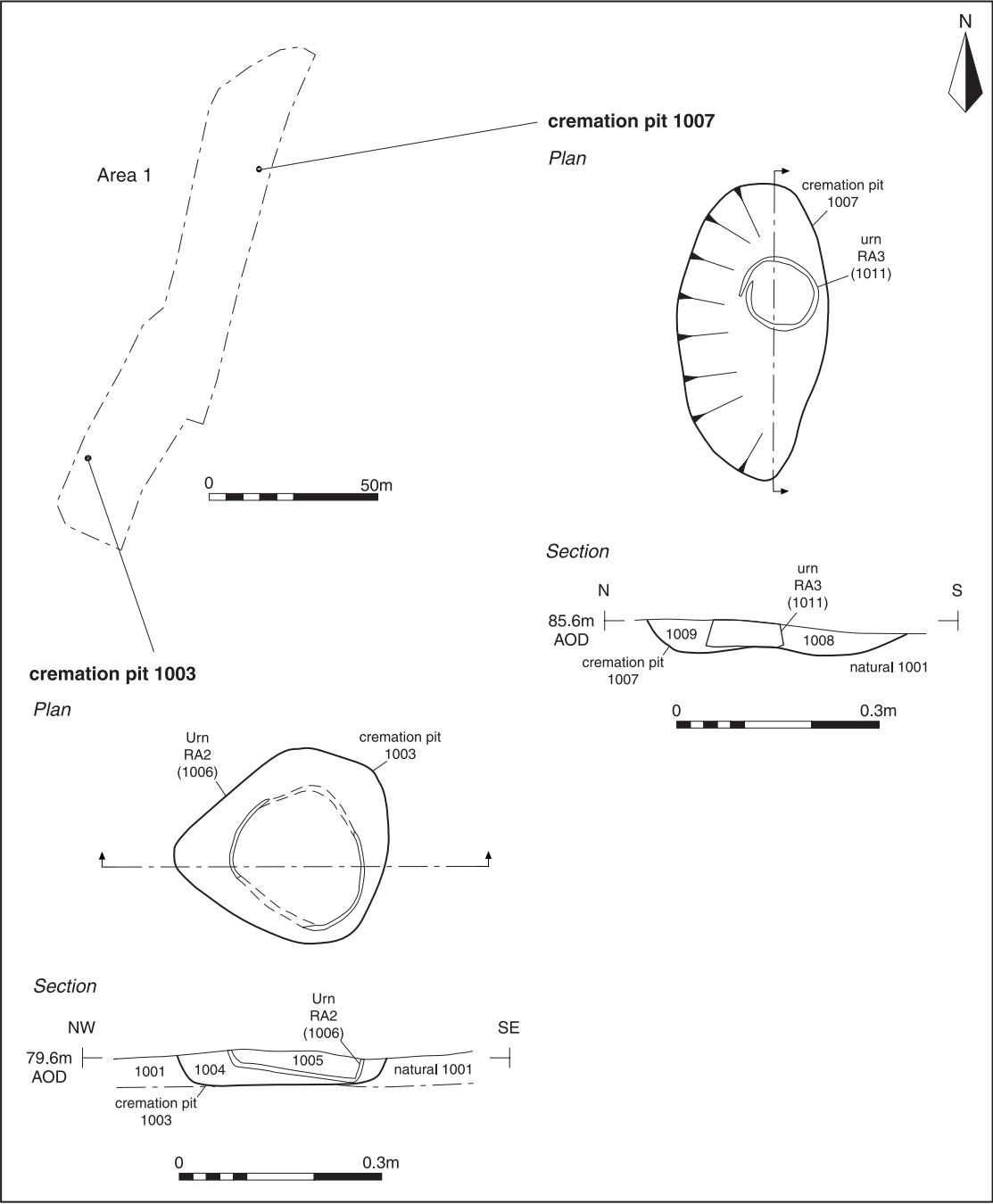


Fig. 2 Area 1



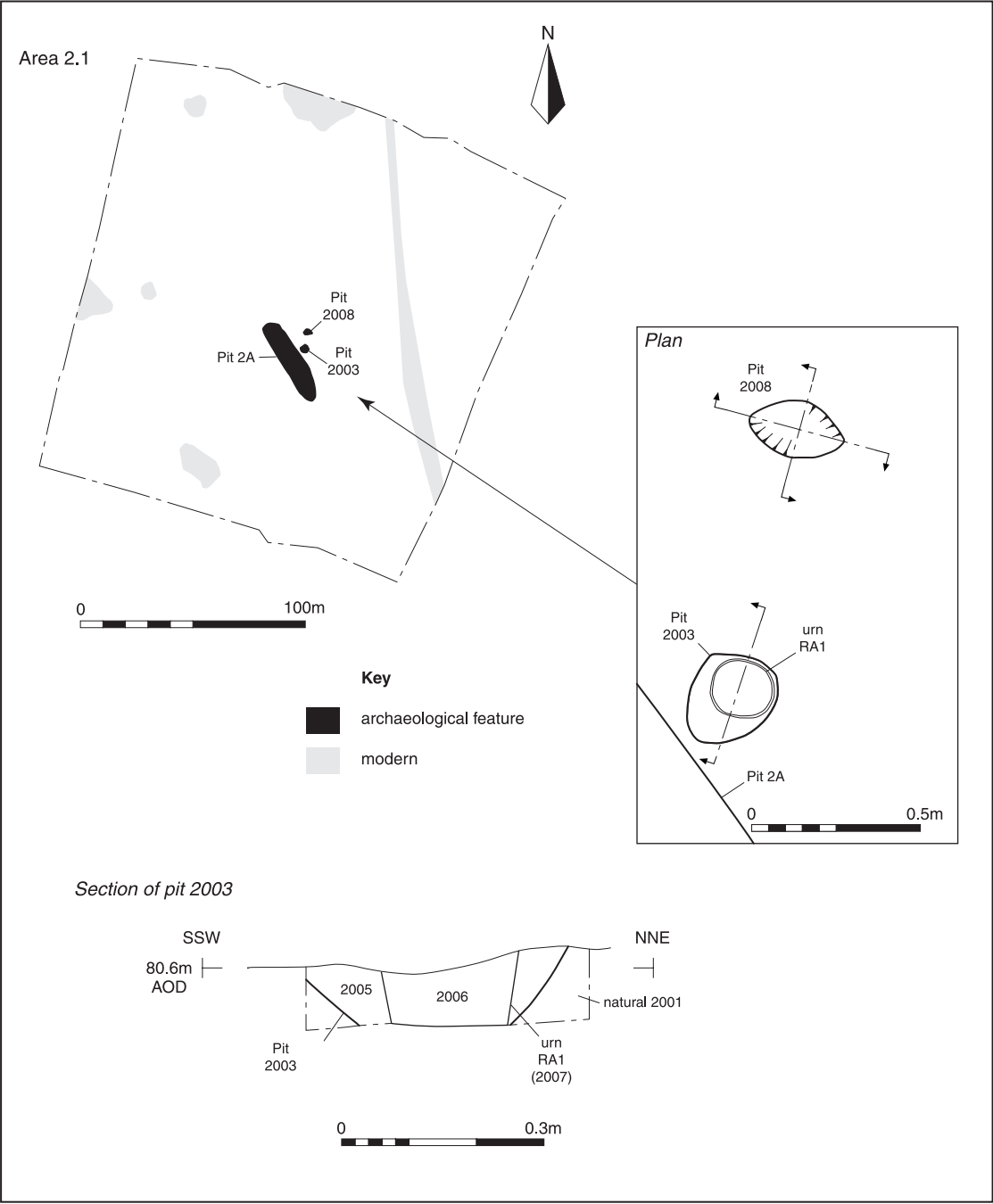


Fig. 3 Area 2.1



urn 2007 (RA1) was positioned upright within the pit. In this case however, sherds from two different globular/baggy, necked vessels with simple rims (P4 and P5), were also discovered within the fill, as was an unfeatured sherd in a different fabric. No cremated bone was recovered. However, the lower fill of the urn contained a moderate assemblage of charcoal dominated by oak, (*Quercus*), with four fragments of hawthorn/rowan/crab apple (*Crataegus monogyna/Sorbus/Malus sylvestris*) also present. There were sufficient quantities of charcoal to suggest it originated from pyre debris. Two flint flakes (21g) were recovered from the pit fill surrounding the urn.

Pit 2008 was broadly oval in plan and comprised a shallow U-shaped profile, with gradually sloping sides and filled with a single deposit that contained smears of charcoal and was interpreted on site as a cremation-related deposit; however it contained neither pottery nor human bone.

Trough-shaped pit 2A was linear in plan and orientated north-west/south-east, and had a gradual to steep sided profile. Two prehistoric flint flakes were recovered from upper fill 2018.

A feature (403) interpreted as a ditch or possibly part of a large pit, observed in a narrow trench during the watching brief, was 4.2m in width/diameter with a gradually sloping profile. The feature contained three fills, the uppermost of which contained three sherds of Middle to Late Bronze Age pottery and a further three bodysherds dateable to the Late Prehistoric period (spanning the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age). It also contained Romano-British pottery, two fragments of Roman tegula and a fragment of fired clay.

## THE FINDS

Initially 143 sherds (6.7kg) of prehistoric pottery were recovered from features excluding ditch 403, the large majority of which form three heavily truncated urns RA1–3. These are of flint-tempered fabrics which are soft, resulting in high levels of fragmentation, although surface preservation is moderately good. An additional 648 sherds of pottery, weighing a total of 82g, were recovered from

bulk soil sampling of cremation pit fills. All are in a flint-tempered fabric but the vast majority were tiny scraps which cannot be attributed to a particular vessel. A catalogue is provided in the full report.

All of these vessels are considered to belong to the Deverel-Rimbury tradition of the Middle Bronze Age, dating in the range *c.* 1700/1500 to 1150 cal. BC (Needham 1996, 132–5). The use of flint-tempering, although a long-lived tradition locally, would seem typical for Middle Bronze Age groups from across the county and beyond (Millet & Sacha-Hall 1992; King 1982, 18; Seager Thomas 2008, 34). The vessel forms consist of bucket or barrel ‘urns’ (RA1–3), with the stray vessel sherds associated with cremation pit 2003 probably of the globular/baggy vessels which can occur in Middle Bronze Age groups in the region (Seager Thomas 2008, 30). None of the vessels exhibit the finger-impressed or applied decoration commonly characteristic of the Deverel-Rimbury style. It is entirely possible however that decoration, which is commonly limited to the ‘shoulder’ portion of the vessel, has in all instances been lost to truncation.

Five sherds of prehistoric and 15 sherds of later pottery were recovered from the probable ditch 403. This included three sherds of Middle to Late Bronze Age date (*c.* 1500–700 BC) in a flint-tempered fabric and of a sherd thickness (*c.* 14mm) comparable with that of the cremation urns and their associated sherds. Three more sherds cannot be dated more closely than the Late Prehistoric period (Late Bronze Age or Iron Age). Regional imports were represented by a single rimsherd in Dorset Black-burnished ware from a Type 1 everted rim jar, which dates to the 1st to 2nd centuries AD (Seager Smith & Davies 1993, 230–1) and a bodysherd of New Forest Colour-coated ware dating to the late 3rd to 4th centuries AD (Fulford 1975, 39–40). Pottery types broadly dateable to the Romano-British period, and likely to be of local manufacture, include: sandy greyware sherds, and unfeatured bodysherds in a dark grey-firing, sand-tempered fabric.

A small assemblage of worked flint (weighing 4.698kg) was recovered mainly from top and subsoil deposits including 186 worked lithics

comprising: 2 blades, 1 bladelet, 29 chips, 8 cores, 1 chopper core, 1 core fragment, 114 flakes, 4 pieces of shatter and 26 tools. Overall, the character of the assemblage is clearly Bronze Age. The cores have mostly been unsystematically worked; and the tools are mainly quite crudely made, displaying irregular, careless retouch. A small number of items (the blades and bladelet) represent earlier periods, i.e. the Mesolithic and/or the Early Neolithic. In addition, 667 fragments of burnt, unworked flint weighing 2.083kg were recorded. Fifty-five of the worked flints and 627 fragments of burnt flint were recovered from bulk soil sampling of 15 deposits.

## CONCLUSIONS

Residual worked flint from the site suggests that there was some early prehistoric activity (Mesolithic and/or Early Neolithic) in the general locality, as has been previously indicated by fieldwalking some 1.5km to the northwest of the site.

The excavation provided evidence for dispersed Middle Bronze Age funerary activity. The level of preservation was generally poor due to truncation of the site by later ploughing. There were no carbonised plant macrofossils recovered and only limited charcoal could be identified. The remains included at least one adult individual, with evidence to suggest a well-tended funerary pyre. The small volume of cremated bone and incomplete recovery of bone elements are both consistent with the previously documented ability in the Bronze Age to cremate the dead efficiently, and with the suggestion that the rest of the cremated material might have been scattered or otherwise distributed elsewhere. Similar examples of small cemeteries or isolated cremation graves have been found regionally, including at Weston Colley, Winchester where two shallow, mortuary-related features (one a probable unurned cremation burial) were

associated with Deverel-Rimbury sherds and pyre debris (Gibson & Knight 2007, 4–6).

During the watching brief, a ditch or pit was recorded with later prehistoric and Romano-British pottery identified from within the primary fill, and further domestic material recovered from the upper fill including Romano-British ceramic building material roof-tile fragments. Three sherds of (presumably residual) Middle Bronze Age pottery were also recovered from the upper fill.

The excavations provided definite evidence for Middle Bronze Age (15th to 12th centuries BC) funerary activity within the present site and limited finds of Later Prehistoric and Romano-British periods. This is significant in so far as a Middle Bronze Age settlement might be expected to have been located relatively close by. The limited finds of the later periods also indicate the likely presence of nearby settlements. The (presumably Later Prehistoric or Romano-British) archaeological feature recorded in the watching brief is on high ground looking south across the site, and cropmark evidence has indicated the presence of a ring ditch and linear and curvilinear features suggestive of enclosures and field systems of unknown date within 1.5km to the north.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork was undertaken by Matt Nichol assisted by Sam Wilson and by Jeremy Clutterbuck (who also undertook the watching brief). The environmental remains were analysed and reported upon by Sarah Cobain, the human remains by Sharon Clough, the urns by E.R. McSloy and other ceramics and lithics by Jacky Sommerville. The fieldwork was managed for CA by Damian De Rosa, and the post-excavation programme by Karen Walker. Tracy Matthews monitored the archaeological work on behalf of the Historic Environment Team, Winchester City Council.

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