

PREHISTORIC, ROMAN AND LATER ACTIVITY NORTH OF PARK PREWETT, BASINGSTOKE

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ABSTRACT

Excavations at Park Prewett, Basingstoke, were undertaken in advance of a residential development. Three areas were opened, measuring a combined area of 1.6 ha, based on the results of a previous site evaluation. Limited later prehistoric finds suggest background activity of various periods, possibly relating to settlements outside of the excavated area. At the south-west of the site, a series of parallel linear ditches representing a field boundary and trackway dating to the Roman period were discovered. These are part of a wider agricultural landscape known through various excavations around the north of Basingstoke. A medieval field boundary ditch, with associated fence line and potential hedgerow were also identified towards the east of the excavation. A number of features were also uncovered that relate to Park Prewett Hospital, built in the early 20th century.

INTRODUCTION

Excavations were carried out by Oxford Archaeology (OA) on land north of Park Prewett, Basingstoke, Hampshire, in July 2016 in advance of residential development. The site centres on NGR SU 61625423, and is on a north-facing slope between 102m and 120m OD (Fig. 1). The underlying geology was Newhaven Chalk Formation (BGS 2016). The excavations comprised Area A and Area B. In Area A, two areas measuring 9150 m² and 2670 m² were opened, and in Area B one area of 4250 m² was explored (Fig. 2). The location of the excavated areas was determined by the results of a previous evaluation by Archaeology South-East (ASE), comprising 97 trenches (Douglas 2016), in accordance with a brief set by David Hopkins, county archaeologist at

Hampshire County Council. Findings from the evaluation are incorporated into this report. The excavation produced limited evidence for prehistoric activity, ditched boundaries probably of Roman and later date, and further features including some related to the early twentieth-century Park Prewett Hospital.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The area around Basingstoke has produced much evidence of prehistoric activity. Evaluations, fieldwalking and metal-detecting in the immediate vicinity of the site have uncovered numerous prehistoric and Roman features, struck flints and coins (AOC 2007; Coles *et al.* 2011; Currie 1998; Hammond & Ford 2007; Torrance & Ford 1993). Important evidence of Early Iron Age iron smelting, alongside other settlement evidence, has been discovered at Rooksdown Hospital, 500m to the south-west of the site (Butterworth 1994; Butterworth & Hutcheson 1996). The large univallate hillfort at Winklebury lies 1.25 km to the south-south-west, and has been extensively excavated (Smith 1977). Excavations *c.* 1km to the east at Merton Rise and Marnel Park have uncovered Middle Bronze Age and Early Iron Age roundhouses, a Late Bronze Age burnt flint spread, major linear ditches probably dating to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, and multiple Late Iron Age and Roman enclosures (Wright *et al.* 2009). Probable banjo enclosures, linear ditches and trackways are visible as cropmarks near the site (Torrance & Ford 1993, fig. 2; Wright *et al.* 2009, fig. 3), and the western end of the site is bounded by a Roman road running between Silchester to

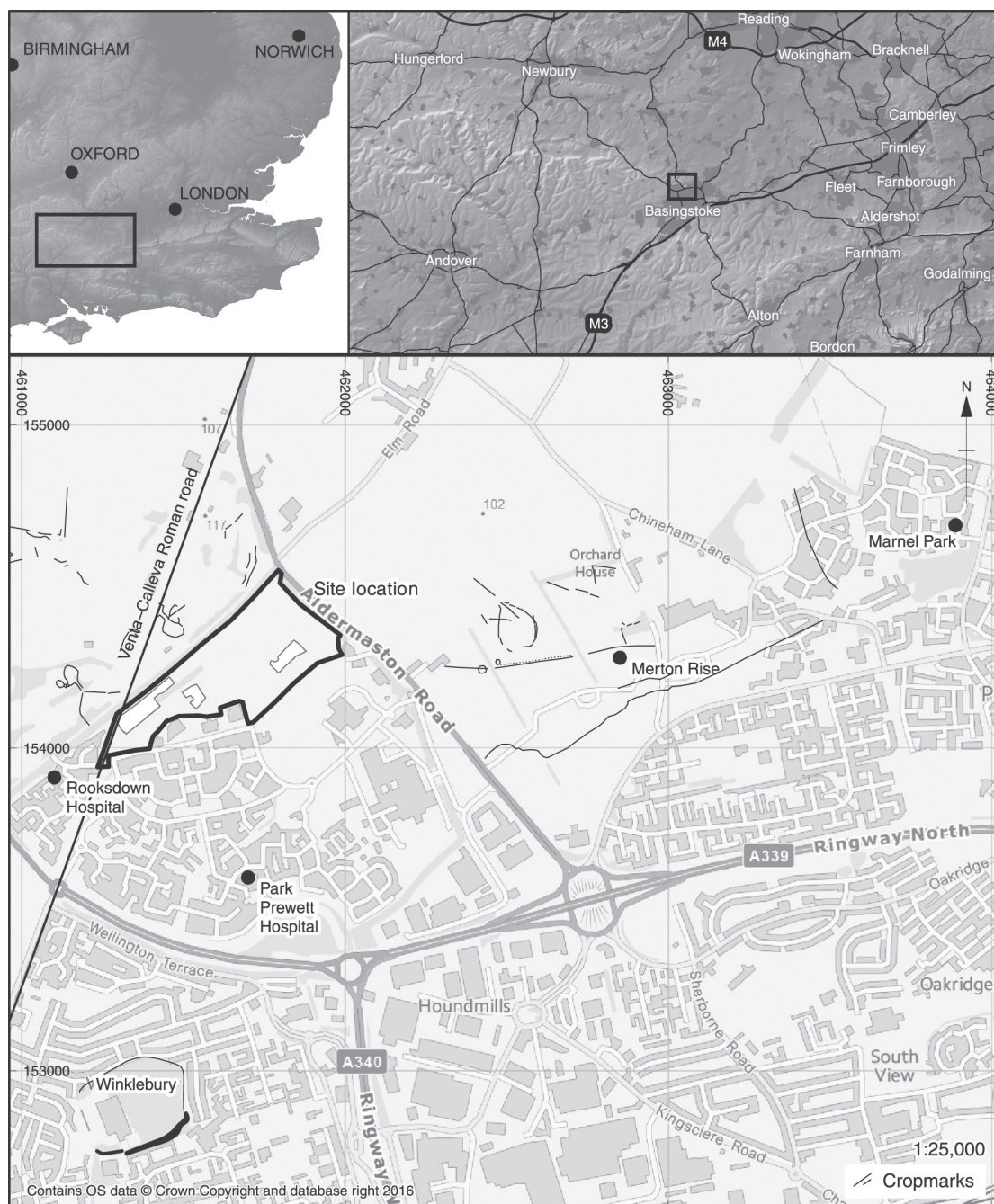


Fig. 1 Site location



Fig. 2 Location of trenches within site. Evaluation trenches mentioned in the text are numbered

the north and Winchester to the south-west. An enclosure dating to the middle Roman period with three corn driers, a well and an unusual assemblage of imported quernstones has been excavated 600 m to the south of the site at Park Prewett Hospital (Coles *et al.* 2011). The Hampshire Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record (AHBR) lists a medieval deer park in this location, and a surface scatter of medieval pottery was found immediately to the south (AHBR 42720, 54126, 35995; Douglas 2016, 3). Nineteenth-century maps show the site sitting within a single L-shaped field within Park Prewett Farm. Park Prewett Mental Hospital was completed immediately to the south of the site during the First World War. It was used as a military hospital during this time and

again throughout the Second World War. The hospital closed in 1996.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Prehistoric activity

Only two prehistoric features were uncovered during the excavations (Fig. 3). Pit 184 in Area A produced 20 sherds of pottery weighing 35 g from a single vessel. The fabric contained burnt flint, possible grog, and quartz sand. Prehistoric pottery assemblages from nearby excavations do not have closely comparable fabrics (e.g. Barclay 2009, table PP2; Smith 1977, 89-92), but a probable middle to later

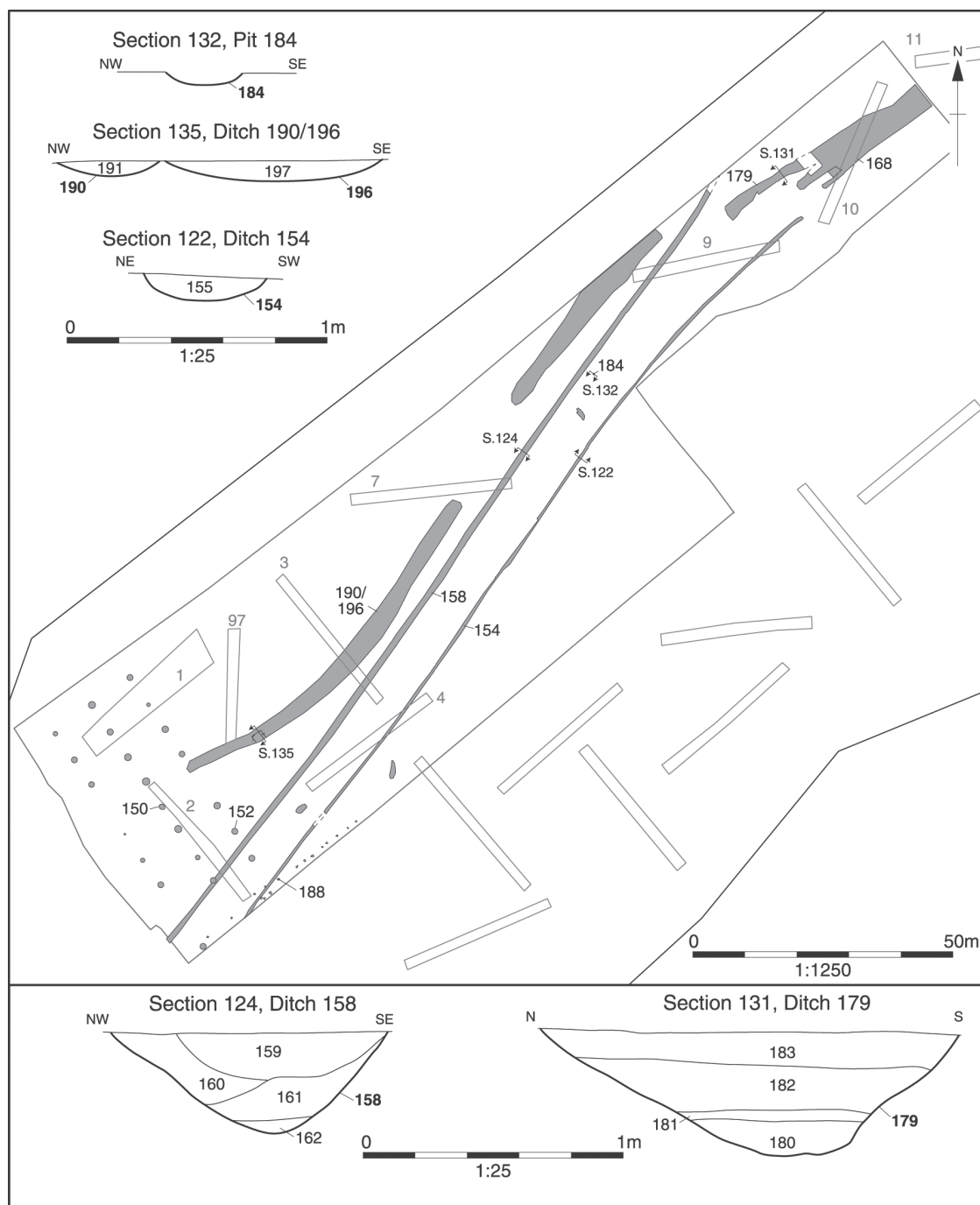


Fig. 3 Plan of Area A, including selected sections

Bronze Age date can be suggested for these sherds. Pit 184 was thought to have been a truncated cremation during excavation, although no bone was discovered in the charcoal-rich fill, comprising charcoal from primarily hazel but also blackthorn and hawthorn species, and possibly alder and cherry. Unurned cremation burials have been discovered 600 m to the south-east (Coles *et al.* 2011, 47; Hall 1992, 5), and unurned and Roman cremations have been found 2.3 km to the east at Marnel Park and Merton Rise, Area D (Wright *et al.* 2009, 26–33).

Evaluation trench 85 at the north-eastern corner of the site exposed a ditch oriented north-west/south-east. Two pottery sherds of probable Middle Iron Age date were found (Doherty 2016). The ditch was not picked up in any other trenches.

All of the ditches within Area A have been phased to the Roman period, although a number of residual prehistoric finds of various dates were recovered from their fills. A single flint flake of probable later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date was found in ditch 179. During the evaluation, trench 7 recovered struck flints comprising primarily unmodified waste flakes indicative of a later Bronze Age date from ditch 158 (Le Hégarat & Munnery 2016, 37). In trench 4, a single sherd of pottery in a flint-tempered fabric, possibly of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date (Doherty 2016), was found in ditch 154.

Roman activity

A number of parallel linear ditches were found in Area A (Fig. 3). These appear to have formed a multi-phased boundary feature and trackway. Ditch 158 was exposed across the entirety of the excavated area, running over some 180m. Neither of the terminals were found, although a hobnail of Roman or later date was discovered in the ditch in evaluation trench 7. Ditch 158 was 1.1m wide and 0.4m deep.

Ditch 154 ran parallel to 158, forming a possible trackway 9m wide. The ditch was exposed over 170m and was 0.45m wide and 0.1m deep. The southern terminal was not uncovered, although ditch 154 had an entrance 7m wide at the northern end of

Area A where it was continued by ditch 168. Several sherds of pottery from a sandy ware vessel of earlier Roman date were found in ditch 168 in evaluation trench 10. This northern ditch appears to have had multiple phases, indicated by the presence of ditches 10/007 and 179=10/005. The stratigraphic relationship between the ditches was not clarified.

Ditches 190/196 also ran broadly parallel to 158, although they were curvilinear rather than straight. The ditches were 73m long and appear to be two phases of the same ditch that in turn replaced or were replaced by ditches 158 and 154. The north-eastern and south-western terminals were exposed, and ditches 190/196 had an entrance 21.7m wide before being continued to the north-east by another ditch. The only find was a fragment of a vertebra split down the middle from a medium-sized mammal in ditch 190. This style of butchery, involving halving the carcass, and the fairly fresh condition of the bone are consistent with a post-medieval date, and it is likely that the bone was intrusive.

The small number of finds associated with these ditches in Area A include those belonging to the later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age and Roman periods. Linear ditches dating to both the Roman period and later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age have been discovered in the immediate vicinity (Coles *et al.* 2011; Torrance & Ford 1993; Wright *et al.* 2009, 17–29, figs 3, 15). While dating is not entirely secure, the presence of similar nearby Roman parallel along with Roman material culture in the ditches suggests that the ditches in Area A belong to this period (Coles *et al.* 2011; Wright *et al.* 2009, figs 16, 20, 21, 22).

Medieval and post-medieval activity

At the far west of the site in Area A, three lines of pits were discovered running in a north-west/south-east direction. Pits 1/004, 1/006 and 1/008 were excavated in evaluation Trench 1; finds include eighteenth or nineteenth-century pottery and ceramic building material, a cast iron object possibly from agricultural machinery, and a sparse scatter of hammerscale

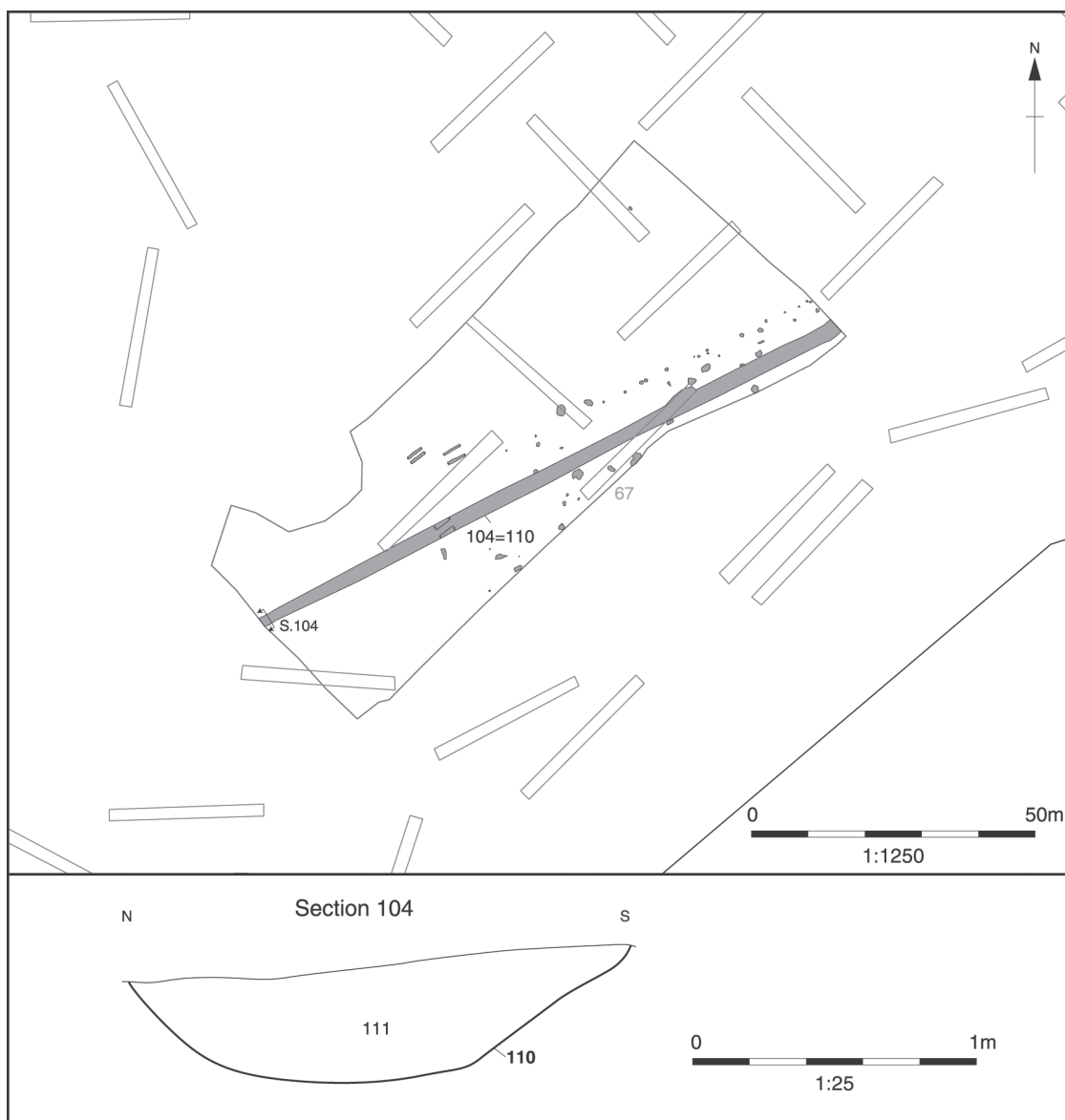


Fig. 4 Plan of Area B, including section of ditch 104=110

(Douglas 2016, 8). Pits 150 and 152 were excavated by OA and did not produce any finds. Lines of trees at the same orientation appear on the 1933 OS map, and it is likely that these were planted in relation to the construction of Park Prewett Mental Hospital. The hammerscale is probably residual, possibly originating from Early Iron Age ironworking

recorded at Rooksdown Hospital (Butterworth & Hutcheson 1996). Quantities were so low that it is unlikely that smithing was occurring close to the trench. A line of postholes was found running perpendicular to the tree pits, and it is probable that these sets of features are related. Posthole 188 contained the remains of a post in-situ; postholes 2/004 and 2/008 produced

pottery dating to the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century.

Linear ditch 104=110 ran across the entirety of Area B (Fig. 4). This ditch probably represents a continuation of the line of a field boundary shown to the south-west on the 1897 six-inch OS map. It is likely that ditch 104=110 was part of the boundary of an earlier rectangular field before it was removed, creating the L-shaped field present in 1897 which incorporated the area north-west and south-east of 104=110. Four sherds of pottery of medieval sandy ware dating to c. 1225–1350 were found in fill 105. Sherds from three or four vessels were found including a jug and cooking pots. A line of postholes and a treethrow hole ran parallel to linear ditch 104=110, 6m to the north. Five were excavated but did not produce any finds. These are likely to be related to the ditch and both appear to be boundary features.

DISCUSSION

Given the size of excavation, the number of features indicated in the evaluation, and the density of prehistoric and Roman archaeology in the immediate locality and wider landscape, surprisingly few archaeological features were uncovered. None of the pre-medieval features can be directly related to activity known in the immediate area though cropmarks or previous excavations. However, the probable Roman ditches are part of a local landscape comprising numerous rectangular enclosures, trackways, evidence of domestic activity such as wells and buildings, as well as burials and the possible specialised processing of grain (Coles *et al.* 2011, 69–70; Wright *et al.* 2009,

35–6). The position immediately adjacent to the road running between the significant settlements of Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*) and Winchester (*Venta Belgarum*) would have impacted on the development of the area. The medieval and post-medieval evidence can be placed within a wider agricultural landscape, and features relating to a change in the use of the site when Park Prewett Hospital was built in the early twentieth century were also discovered.

ARCHIVE

The project archive is currently held at Oxford Archaeology and will be deposited with the Hampshire County Museum Service/Hampshire Cultural Trust, under accession number A2016.63. The full texts of the specialist reports drawn upon here will be found in the archive and on the OA Library (<https://library.thehumanjourney.net/>). These comprise reports on the prehistoric pottery by Paul Booth, on the post-Roman pottery by John Cotter, on the worked flint by Mike Donnelly, on the animal bone by Lee Broderick, and on the charred plant remains by Sheila Boardman.

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