

LATE BRONZE AGE ACTIVITY AT HATCHWOOD FARM, ODIHAM

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013–14, an archaeological evaluation followed by three small areas of strip-map-and-record excavation found evidence of Late Bronze Age activity, as well as of medieval/post-medieval field systems, at Hatchwood Farm, Farnham Road, Odiham (Wessex Archaeology 2013; 2014) (Fig. 1). The archaeological works were undertaken as a condition of planning permission being granted by Hart District Council for the development of a 7.5 hectare site for housing and a public park.

The site lies on a slight north-east-facing slope, at 80–85m OD, south of the River White-water; the underlying geology is London Clay (British Geological Survey). The Hampshire Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record lists a number Late Bronze Age findspots and sites in the area, including the find of a bronze socketed axe in Odiham, and a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age enclosure containing a possible round-house, approximately 1.2km south-west of the site.

The excavation areas (1–3), totalling 800m² centred on NGR 474730 151450, were focused on four of the 21 evaluation trenches, with the most significant finds being made in Area 1 which occupied a slight plateau at the south-west edge of the site.

RESULTS

Area 1 was focused on trenches 8 and 11 (Fig. 1). In trench 8 the evaluation had revealed a subcircular pit (804), 1m wide and 0.3m deep, the single fill of which contained, near the top, approximately half of a Late Bronze Age pottery vessel (Figs 2 & 3). The shouldered bowl, which

has a simple very slightly everted rim 140mm in diameter and an omphalos base, is in a coarse flint-tempered fabric typical of the plainware tradition of the post-Deverel-Rimbury ceramic style, with a probable date range around the turn of the 1st millennium BC. The sherds are abraded, and some have been burnt, but a thin slurry is visible in places, covering the coarse inclusions and providing a smooth external surface. Comparable vessels are not common locally: a slightly later (earliest Iron Age) example from Marnel Park, Basingstoke has a slightly more angular shoulder and more markedly everted rim, but is otherwise similar (Wright *et al.* 2009, fig. 10.11).

The pit also contained a small quantity of burnt flint and a piece of burnt animal bone, while an environmental sample produced charred remains of hulled wheat – emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*) – with both grains and glume bases present. Some of the glumes bases were identifiable as spelt (*Triticum spelta*), this relatively early date adding to our knowledge of Late Bronze Age agriculture in the region. A few seeds of probable arable weeds – cleavers *Galium aparine*, black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*) and clover (*Trifolium* sp.) – were also recovered, and such plant remains are generally indicative of crop-processing within a domestic context. There was also a fragment of charred hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) shell.

During the subsequent excavation around the pit sherds of similar, flint-tempered pottery were recovered from an array of nearby post-holes and a small hollow (5004). These included a 5m-long line of five post-holes, four (5038, 5040, 5042 5044) containing pottery (and three containing burnt flint), aligned south-west–north-east to the immediate south



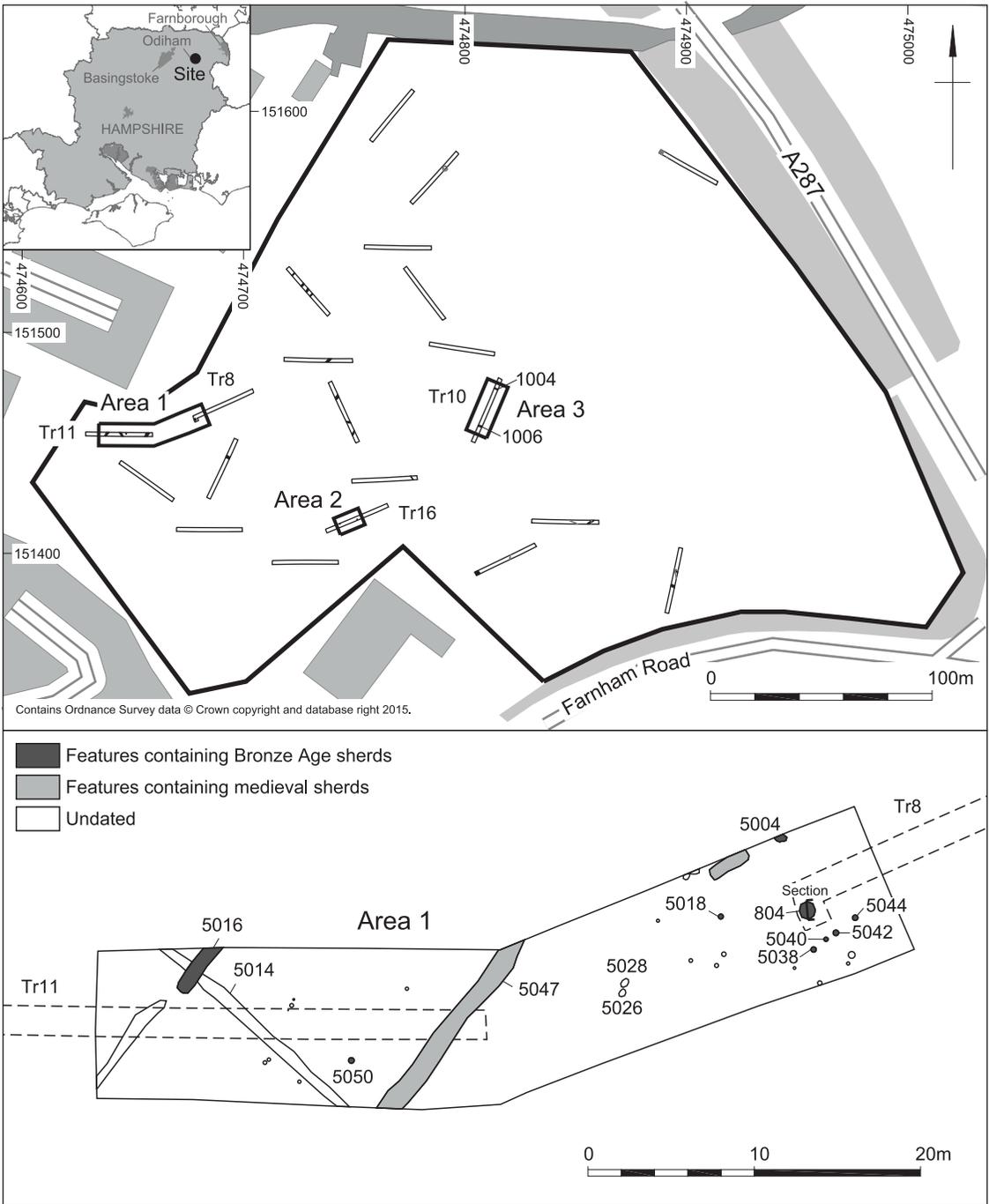


Fig. 1 Location of the site, showing features in Area 1



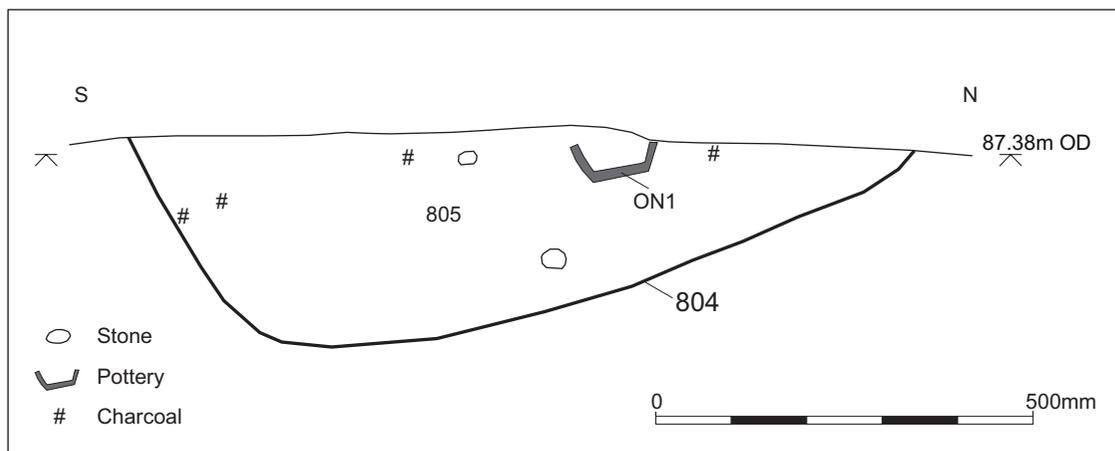


Fig. 2 East-facing section of pit 804

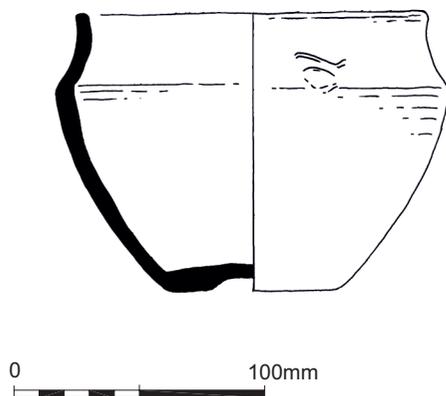


Fig. 3 Late Bronze Age vessel from pit 804

of the pit, and a possibly parallel line of three post-holes less than 2m to their south. The post-holes were generally 0.2–0.3m in diameter with single fills containing fine charcoal flecking. A further loose and apparently random cluster of post-holes lay to the west of the pit, the nearest of which (5018) also contained pottery. Not all of these latter features need have been contemporary, however; a pair of adjacent oval post-holes (5026, 5028), over 0.5m wide but less than 0.1m deep, to the west of the group both contained fragments of ceramic building material (CBM), and are probably of later date.

Similar flint-tempered sherds were recovered

(along with burnt flint) from a post-hole (5050) in the western part of Area 1 (in the vicinity of trench 11); the other post-holes in this area, however, were all undated. A further fragment of pottery was recovered a ditch (5016) in the same area. However, this was one of a parallel pair of ditches, 13m apart and aligned north-east–south-west, the other of which (5047) contained pieces of medieval roof tile, and it is possible these two ditches, and a third (5014) at right-angles to them, are of medieval/post-medieval date.

Area 2, 80m south-east of Area 1, was focused on trench 16 in which two possible post-holes had been recorded; both of them were shallow and undated, but contained fragments of charcoal. However, no further features were recorded in this area during the excavation.

Area 3, 120m east of Area 1, was opened around trench 10 in which two parallel ditches (1004 and 1006) were recorded 18m apart and aligned WNW–ESE. Ditch 1004 contained a single fill, but ditch 1006 also contained a dump of burnt flint and wood charcoal, possibly indicating a prehistoric date. When subsequently re-examined during the excavation ditch 1006 was 0.9m wide and 0.3m deep, with a single fill, in which was the un-rotted base of a timber post. Four post-holes flanked the ditch in the same areas, two to the north and two to the south, one of these also containing un-rotted wood. These post-holes, one

of which contained a piece of medieval roof-tile, are considered likely to be relatively modern in date, and the ditches, therefore, of probable medieval/post-medieval origin, as in Area 1.

DISCUSSION

The nature of the Late Bronze Age activity revealed in Area 1 is unclear, given the limited extent of the excavation, as is the relationship between the pit and the post-holes, and their respective functions. However, the features' association with pottery, burnt flint, burnt animal bone, charcoal, charred hazelnut shell and crop-processing waste would be consistent with domestic activity within a mixed agricultural economy. The possibility that the pottery vessel had been deliberately placed in the pit, although not on its base, could reflect some aspect of domestic ritual.

Later Bronze Age sites in the region have produced varying evidence for agriculture; Easton Lane, Winchester (Carruthers 1989), for example, produced a very few charred remains of cereals, while small amounts of hulled wheat were recovered at Marnel Park, Basingstoke (Pelling 2009) and Frithend (Stevens 2012). Slightly richer Bronze Age deposits are known from sites in Berkshire, such as Reading Business Park (Campbell 2004) and Aldermaston Wharf (Arthur with Paradine 1980).

Ditches and/or gullies were recorded in ten of the 27 evaluation trenches, and some of them, such as those in trenches 10 and 11,

appear to form parallel field boundaries within rectilinear field systems. It is possible that most, if not all, these ditches are of medieval/post-medieval date, with the single fragment of flint-tempered pottery from ditch 5016 being residual. There is a chance, however, that some of them could be of late prehistoric date; field systems of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date were recorded at Groom's Farm, Frithend (Cooke & Powell 2012; 2014), approximately 12km to the south of Odiham, where the deliberate burial of pottery vessels in pits was also a feature from the Middle Bronze Age through to the Early Iron Age.

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