

## PREHISTORIC AND SAXON REMAINS AT THE FORMER PRYSMIAN FACTORY SITE, DEW LANE, EASTLEIGH, HAMPSHIRE

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In December 2012 and January 2013 Wessex Archaeology (WA) undertook an excavation on behalf of Bellway Homes (Wessex) in advance of development for housing on land to the south of Dew Lane, Eastleigh, Hampshire (Fig. 1). The site lay at the western fringes of Eastleigh *c.* 500 m from its historic centre, centred on NGR SU 446190, on flat ground at *c.* 15m above Ordnance Datum. The excavation comprised two areas: Areas 1 and 2 measuring *c.* 0.30ha and 0.25ha respectively which were targeted upon the results of two phases of evaluation comprising a total of 19 trenches (WA 2012a and b).

The excavation was able to provide valuable information regarding the existence of prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon remains in this heavily built up area of Eastleigh some distance from the historic centre of the town.

The site lay on flat, low-lying ground a little over 1km west of the River Itchen, just beyond the floodplain of the river on free-draining gravel and silt deposits which would have provided ideal opportunities for arable farming. A water course (Monk's Brook) runs only 350m to the west, and the abundance of available water sources and transport routes would have made the area attractive during the prehistoric period. There is however nothing to suggest a focus for settlement during the prehistoric period. Indeed, place-name evidence suggests that the area was wooded in the Saxon period, and this may well have been the case earlier.

The earliest evidence for any human activity on the site consisted of a single platform bladelet core of later Mesolithic date, recovered from an Iron Age trackway ditch. No other evidence of early prehistoric activity was recovered, but the core indicates that the area was visited by mobile bands of hunter-gatherers.

Most of the archaeological features comprised the remains of a probable Iron Age field system and associated trackway. Within the field system was a post-built enclosure. A number of other post-holes were revealed, and though undated they are thought to be Iron Age in date. The Iron Age features were eventually abandoned and naturally infilled.

The field system consisted of three parallel north-east to south-west aligned linear ditches (3114, 3115 and 3116) in Areas 1 and 2. A contemporary trackway formed by two parallel ditches (3118 and 3119) perpendicular to the field system was revealed in Area 2. The trackway continued out of the excavated area, one side of it being revealed in the evaluation in Trench 9 (Fig. 1). Coarse flint-tempered pottery of Late Iron Age (100 BC–AD 43) date was found in the field and trackway ditches.

At the junction of the field system and trackway was a post-built enclosure comprising 25 post-holes forming an arc *c.* 18m long. There was no strong evidence of truncation on the north-western side which could have removed all traces of a continuing arc, and a complete circular enclosure would have sat on the very edges of the adjacent ditches, an arrangement which seems unlikely. Each post-hole was situated *c.* 0.75m from its neighbour, and it was clear one (3083) had been replaced (by 3085), suggesting rebuilding. The profile of, and deposits within the post-holes indicated each was formed by having a post driven into the ground: there was no evidence of post packing. This method of construction, the size of the arc and a lack of an inner ring of posts or central post argue against the structure being a domestic building, and suggest that an enclosure for stock is the best interpretation.



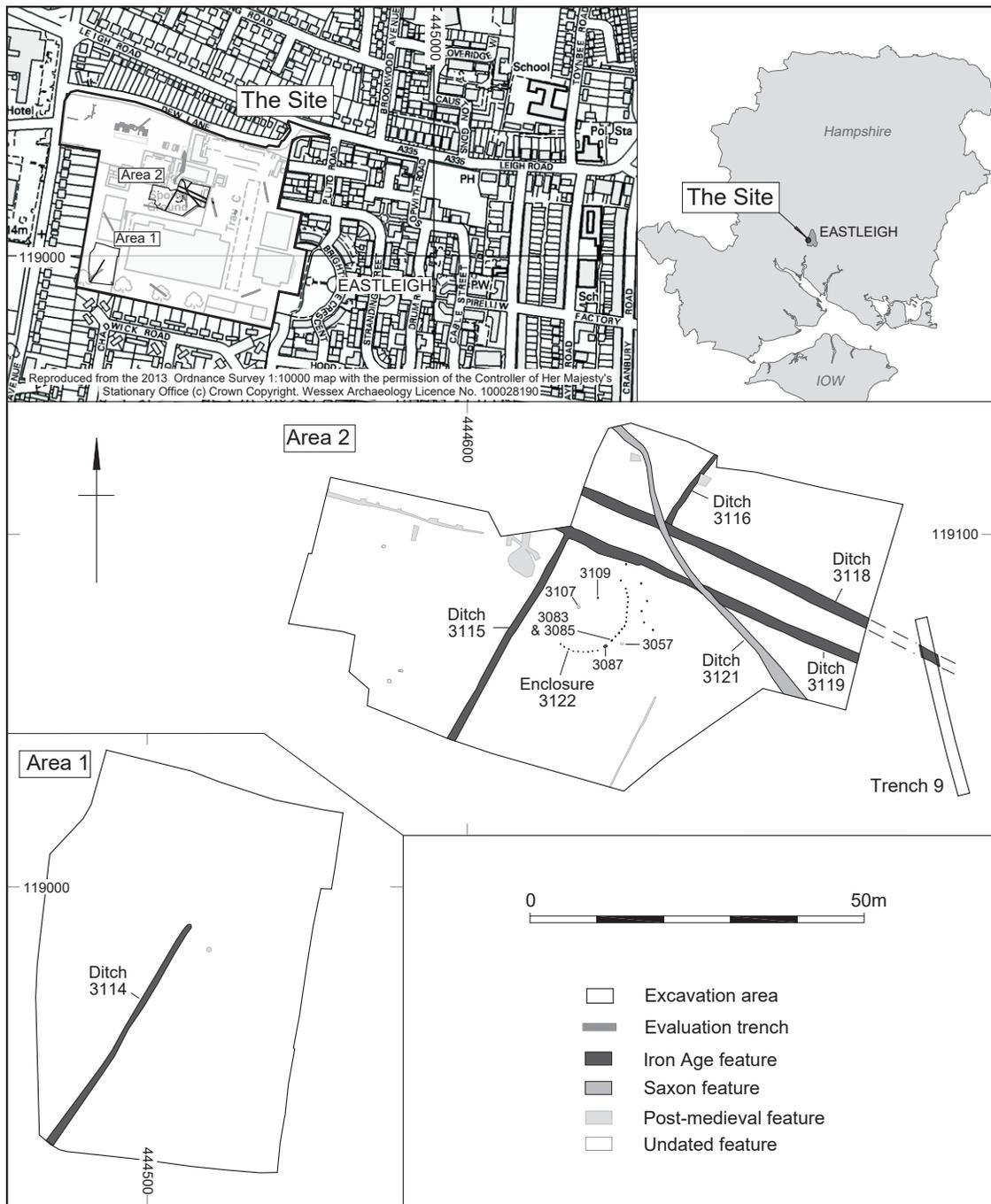


Fig. 1 Site location, showing archaeological features



Two features were located within the centre of the enclosure: post-hole 3109 was similar in size and form to those forming the enclosure while 3107 was a shallow scoop pit. A further six post-holes of a similar size and form to those of the enclosure were located to the east with a further four to the west: neither formed a discernible pattern. Although undated, these may be of Iron Age date.

No cereal remains were recovered from environmental samples, suggesting that the fields were for pasture rather than arable farming. Large numbers of charred sloe stones (*Prunus spinosa*) were found in trackway ditch 3118. In several cases the stones had been gnawed by rodents, but there was no roundwood charcoal or thorns that might suggest the burning of scrub or hedge material. Rather, it is possible that the stones had been collected for food and the discarded stones had been gnawed prior to becoming charred.

The evidence makes it clear that the site lay on the periphery of an Iron Age settlement, with excellent access to water sources, transport routes and free draining ground for agriculture, with just the remnants of field boundaries and an associated trackway for the movement of animals between fields for grazing present within the excavated area.

Evidence of the pre-Saxon inhabitation of Eastleigh and the immediately surrounding area is very scarce, making this site of particular importance. Although direct local parallels are not known, similar (if slightly older) sites occur elsewhere in this part of Hampshire, for instance around Nursling at Adanac Park (Leivers & Gibson 2011), Church Lane (Rees 1993), Dairy Lane (Adam *et al.* 1997), Franconia Drive (Beamish & Hearne 1994), and Nursling Gravel Quarry (Rees 1993); to the north at Weston Down Cottages (Gibson & Knight 2007) and east of the Itchen at Dowd's Farm (Clelland 2012).

A Saxon ditch (3121) was dug across the infilled Iron Age ditches, aligned roughly north-north-west to south south-east. A rim and body sherd from a single vessel of organic-tempered Early to Middle Saxon ware of

the 5th–8th century were recovered from the ditch fills. A further nine sherds of Late Iron Age flint-tempered pottery were recovered at the point where ditch 3121 cut ditch 3119. It is therefore probable these sherds derived from the infill of the Iron Age trackway ditch, redeposited in the later Saxon feature.

The first reference to Eastleigh is from 932 AD when the village of 'East Lea'; a 'clearing in the woodland' is recorded (Mills 1991, 122). The identification of ditch 3121 with Early–Middle Saxon pottery dating from the 5th–8th century suggests an earlier rural settlement similar to those found in elsewhere in the mid–upper Itchen, probably of Middle Saxon date, for example at Abbots Worthy (Fasham & Whinney 1991) and Abbots Barton (Powell 2015). The function of ditch 3121 is unclear; however a landscape division/field boundary is the most likely interpretation. A single post-hole (3057) contained a number of pieces of burnt flint, and a fragment of ceramic clay pipe of 18th or 19th century date.

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Finds analysis was undertaken by Lorraine Mepham and Matt Leivers, and environmental analysis by Dr Chris J. Stevens. The illustration was drawn by Elizabeth James. The archive is currently stored at the offices of Wessex Archaeology at Old Sarum, Salisbury (project codes 78931 and 78932) pending deposition with Hampshire Museum Service under accession number A2013.54.

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