

A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENT SITE AT WESTBURY, WEST MEON, HAMPSHIRE

By ELIZABETH LEWIS and GEORGE WALKER
with contributions by RICHARD BRADLEY
and ANNE GRANT

INTRODUCTION

THE settlement described here lies in the midst of a scatter of sites of different periods covering the chalk hillsides above the river Meon where it flows through Westbury (Nat. Grid Ref. SU 657243). All these have been discovered in the last six years by walking the fields in a circumscribed area around Westbury, and by observing soil disturbances. Early medieval pottery from the site of St. Nicholas' Chapel at Westbury has been reported by Moorhouse (1973) and further finds (1973-4) in the grounds of Westbury School point to the existence of a deserted medieval village here. Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement are all attested by pottery finds; Fig. 1, and the list at the end of this paper indicates some of these sites. The only site so far examined in any detail is that of a Bronze Age settlement in the back garden of Westbury Cottage. (Fig. 1, site 2). The first evidence for this appeared in 1971 with George Walker's discovery of the base of a large vessel (in Pit 5), which prompted further archaeological examination of the fruit garden in which it was found, until all attempts at horticulture were abandoned and an area of 85 square metres had been stripped to the natural chalk. The ground here slopes gradually southwards towards the river, and the lane alongside the cottage has bitten deeply into the chalk, curtailing the site to the west. A thick layer of brown loam, containing scattered chalk flecks, overlay an occupation

layer, which had thus been protected from the plough and uncontaminated samples could be taken. Elsewhere in the garden digging and ploughing had disturbed the soil down to the surface of the bedrock, and prehistoric, Roman and medieval material was mixed together.

DESCRIPTION

In the excavated area (Fig. 2), a shallow terraced platform was revealed, cut 15 cm into the chalk at a point where it began to slope westward, making a level and sheltered floor, defined by an uneven circular arrangement of small hollows. With the exception of F13 they were not more than 5 cm deep by 35 cm wide, and they were roughly cut and filled with greyish silty soil. However, there was a marked concentration of domestic refuse, including charcoal, bone and potsherds in the area described by the cutting, which suggests some form of shelter. The position of every sherd was noted, and the majority lay within the terraced area, in the north-east corner of the excavated area. In the centre of the floor there were three deeper holes, F6, Pit 3 and F13. F6 was packed with quern fragments and flint stones, and in the centre was a posthole 23 cm deep below the level of the chalk. F3 was filled with charcoal and burnt flint derived from a nearby hearth, and at its northern end was a well-cut posthole 24 cm deep, packed with flint. F12 was 25 cm deep, filled with chalk rubble with no

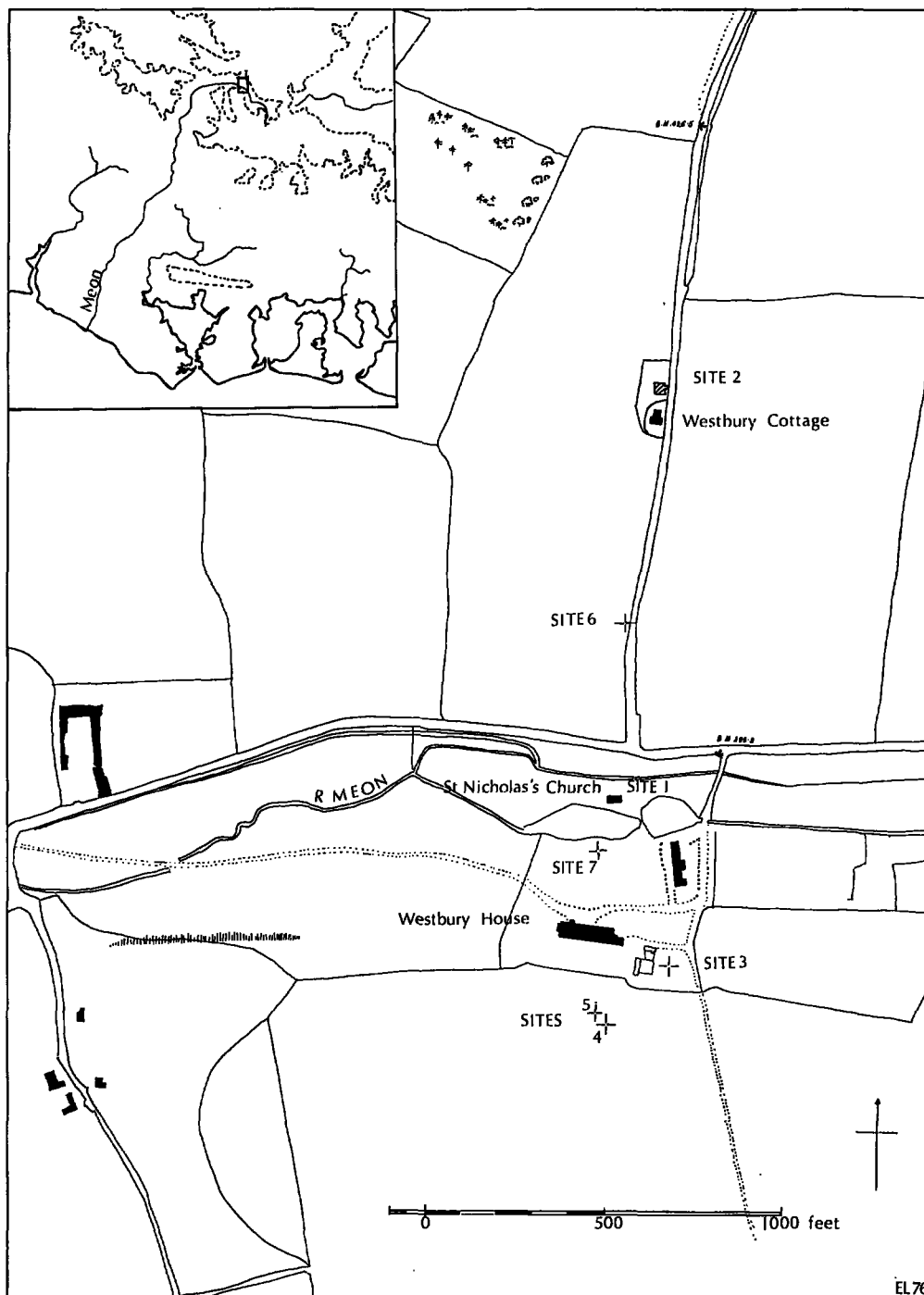


Fig. 1. Sites in the Westbury area. Map based on the 1892 edition of the Ordnance Survey, by courtesy of the Hampshire Record Office. Note: Sites 8 and 9 lie about 750 ft. (230m) north of the limit of the map.

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packing material. The surface of the chalk in this area had been worn. To the west, within the floor area, was a shallow hollow (F14) filled with loose chalk and containing white patinated flints, some with worked edges, others being rough waste flakes. This seems to have been a flint working area.

Outside the floor area were the following pits:

Pit 9: 98 cm in diameter, 50 cm deep. This pit had been open for some time and had been filled gradually. On the bottom were large worked flints and animal bones in a black ashy layer. Above this was a layer of

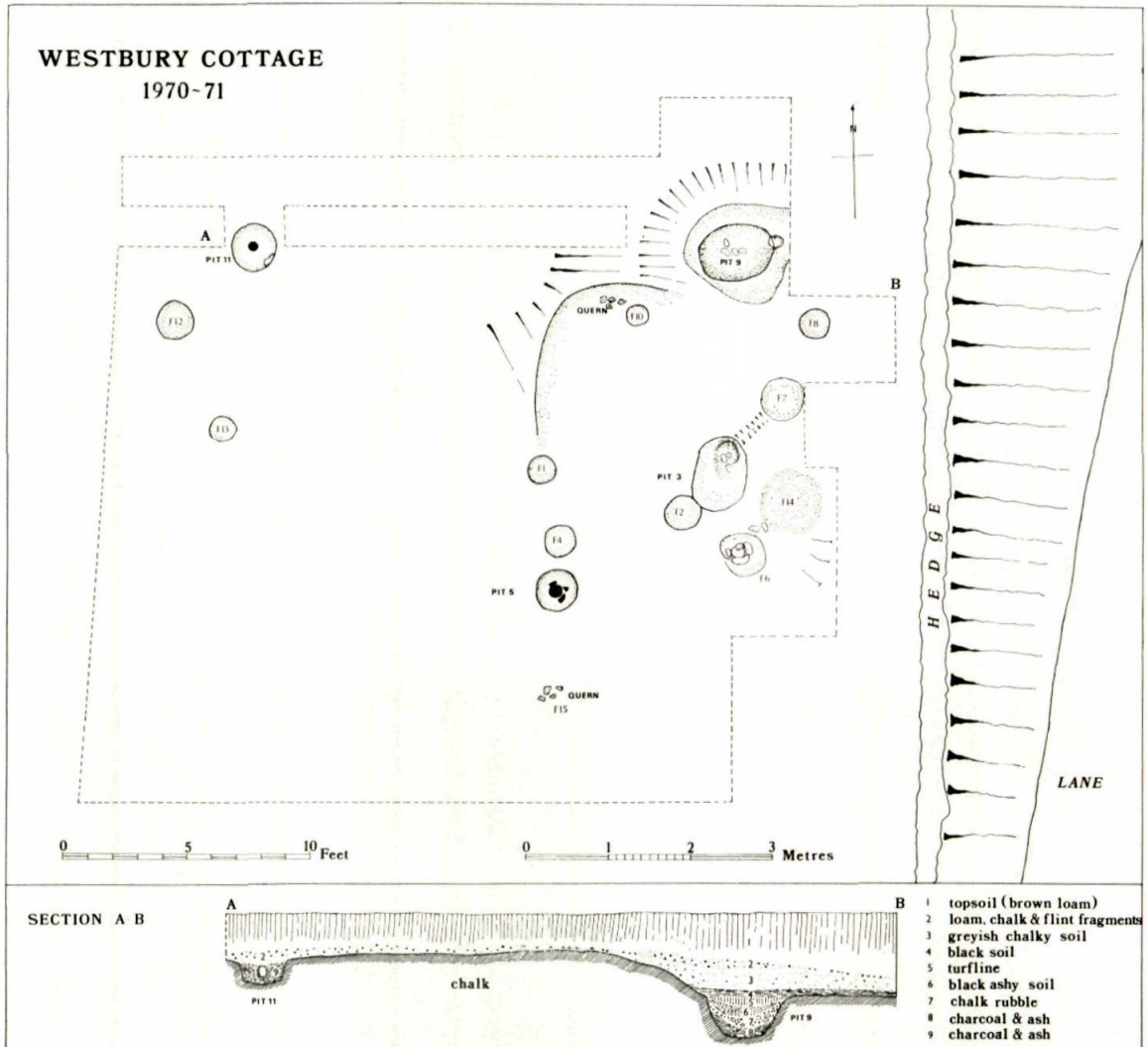


Fig. 2. Bronze Age settlement, plan of excavated area.

chalk rubble, on top of which lay more hearth debris. A turf line had formed above this and the thick black layer (layer 4) overlying this is the same as that covering the floor area. This pit therefore predates the floor, though the sherd and arrowhead found in the lower fill are not incompatible in date with the material excavated from the rest of the site.

Pit 11: 53 cm in diameter, 30 cm deep, very carefully cut with straight sides. The fill was even, stone-free ash, and pot No. 4 (Fig. 3) was found, almost undamaged, standing upright inside it, on top of 5 cm of ashy fill. The pot was filled with black ash and was blackened inside and out subsequent to firing.

Pit 5: 50 cm in diameter, 15 cm deep, filled with brown loam and earth. The base of a bucket urn (Fig. 3, 13) lay on the bottom. The lower part of the sides of the vessel had caved in, and very little remained of the rim and upper parts.

Pit 3: a shallow, scooped pit, deepening to 22 cm in the centre. The fill was black with quantities of burnt flint and pot boilers.

Discussion of features

The original function of these pits is suggested by their form; for example pit 11 has the character of a small storage pit and the bottom of pit 9 had a smooth, soapy appearance, an effect perhaps produced by the storage of water. They were all subsequently abandoned and used as ash pits and rubbish pits, to clear hearth debris from the floor. The near-complete pot in Pit 11 may have been deposited as a parting gesture by the occupants on abandoning the site. Mrs Hawkes noted the same occurrence at Winnall (Hawkes 1969). The presence of these storage and rubbish pits, the incidence of pottery, quern stones and hearth refuse strongly suggest that this was the site of a hut. Although the cutting for the lane to the east of the site had destroyed the eastern part of the hut, it is still possible to make a suggestion about

the structure of the building following Musson's (1970) reinterpretation of the evidence for Bronze Age buildings excavated at Itford Hill and Amberley Mount. These had floors set on a terraced platform, just as at Westbury, and lack outer postholes. Musson suggested that the roof was supported by a ring of stout posts set centrally in the floor, with a low outer wall constructed on top of the scarp. He pointed out that the most worn area of the floor would be where the roof was highest, in the centre of the post ring, and this was observed at Westbury. At Westbury, the theory fits very well, if we take the post hole in Pit 3 and the hole immediately to the north of it as part of the inner post ring supporting the roof. This would give a floor diameter of between four and five metres (12–15 feet) somewhat smaller than the average excavated examples (6 metres) but comparable to the smaller of the two houses excavated in 1968 at Clanfield, Hampshire (Chalton site 78) which is 4.2 m across (Cunliffe 1970). The shallow post holes which follow the line of the scarp at Westbury also need an explanation; they are very meagre in comparison with sites such as Itford Hill, Sussex (Burstow and Holleyman 1957) or Shearplace Hill, Dorset (Rahtz and ApSimon 1962) but compare with the houses at Trevisker, St Eval, Cornwall (ApSimon and Greenfield 1972). It seems possible that these post holes held stakes perhaps interspaced and supported by turf or large chalk blocks lacing the outer wall.

FINDS

Middle Bronze Age pottery (Fig. 3)

The total quantity of pottery recovered, excluding pot No. 4 which was not weighed, was 8,625 gm. Sherds making up the handle (Fig. 3 no. 3) were found separately in pits F11 and F5 and the rest comprised fragments scattered over the floor to the east of the site. All rims, bases and handles are illustrated here. It was possible to distinguish broadly four main fabric types.

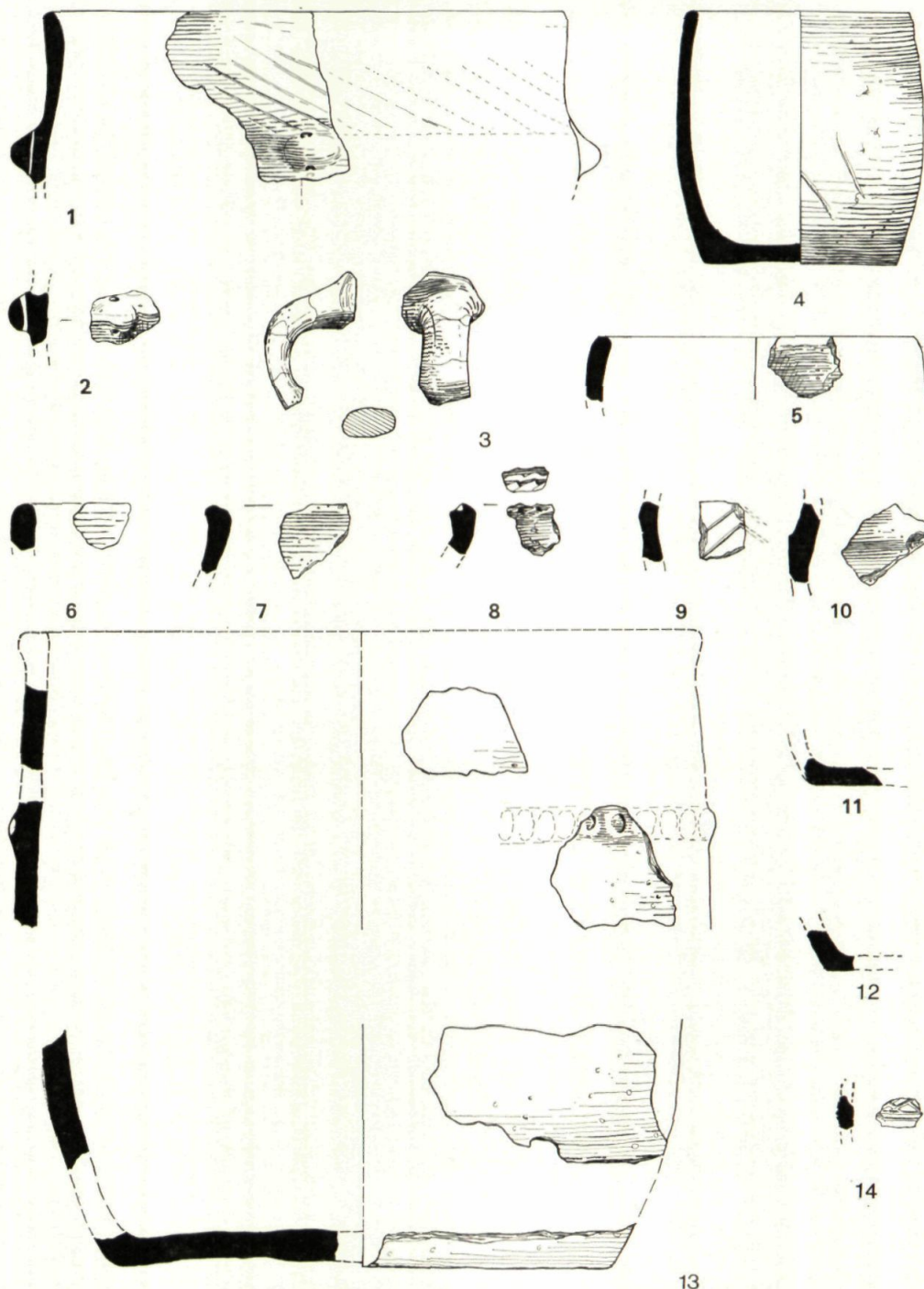


Fig. 3. Westbury, West Meon, Bronze Age Pottery. Scale $\frac{1}{3}$.

Fabric A: a soft buff-coloured fabric, black inside with large grits of flint. The ware is generally thick, up to 12 mm.

Fabric B: a hard smooth fabric very evenly fired to a red colour. The surface is smooth and burnished, and the tempering is of small fine white grits of flint or quartz. The sherds are all thin walled (up to 8 mm).

Fabric C: a hard smooth fabric similar to B, but the colour is black or buff, the flints fewer and larger.

Fabric D: a thick buff fabric with many large flint grits generally harder and thicker than A.

In addition there are three pieces of a soft buff ware similar to A with red specks in addition to the flint filler. These appear to be a burnt clay tempering.

Unless given other specific provenance, all sherds are from the floor area.

1. Rim sherd of fabric B from F6. This is a fragment of globular urn approximating to Calkin's type 1 (Calkin 1964). It had lugs on the shoulder (probably four in number). In a strong side light it is possible to make out faint tooling around the neck forming diagonal striations, with a wavy line round the rim. This may be part of the chevron pattern common to this type.

2. Lug of fabric B, from F3. This comes from a globular urn like no. 1, and indeed probably comes from the same vessel.

3. Large detached handle in fabric B. Made up of three sherds found scattered across the site and in F5 and F11.

4. Small complete pot in ware A, from Pit 11. The inside was burnt black with traces of burnt organic material adhering to the sides. The ware is rather soft with a few medium grits. In form it resembles a 'saucepan pot' of the Iron Age but the ware and temper are less consistent. There are parallels to this pot in Middle Bronze Age contexts, for example the accessory vessels found at the urnfield at Latch Farm, Christchurch (Calkin 1964). Like these it is made of a soft ware and shows signs of reburning. Isolated rims

and bases from many Middle Bronze Age sites could well be from pots of this type, as for example at Shearplace Hill (Rahtz and ApSimon 1962) where nos 38, 44 and 69 in Figs. 18, 21 are closely comparable. However, it must be stated that the context of this pot is equivocal and it is quite possible that Pit 11 is an intrusive later feature. There are other unstratified sherds of possible Iron Age date derived from the area around the site.

5 and 6. From Pit 9, from F6. Both are rim sherds in a ware similar to fabric A, but coarser. The forms are comparable to no 4.

7. Rim sherd in fabric C from pit 9.

8. Rim sherd in fabric C, burnished surface with an impressed pattern along the outside of the rim made with a stick or bone trimmed to a square shape at its tip.

9. Body sherd in fabric C from the chalk surface. It has parallel impressed striations.

10. Fragment of raised shoulder, in fabric C with a smooth finish. From a barrel or bucket urn, closely comparable with a pot illustrated in Fig. 4, No. 5 in the Clanfield report (Cunliffe 1970).

11-12. Two base fragments in fabric D.

13. Base and some body fragments in fabric D, 8-15 mm thick. Colour buff and orange, the interior burnt black. The flint tempering is composed of grits 2-5 mm in diameter. These sherds are from an urn with curving sides and an applied girth cordon impressed with finger tip decoration. None of the rim survives. The form, and cordon and coarse fabric put this vessel into the rather broadly defined 'bucket urn' class commonly found on occupation and burial sites of the Middle Bronze Age.

14. Very small fragment of decorated sherd in a thin-walled red fabric like fabric B. It has a lattice design executed in impressed comb marks, in a zone above two impressed lines round the girth. Fragment of a bell beaker, rather abraded.

Discussion

We may take the single beaker sherd (no. 14) as residual of earlier occupation on the

site. The rest of the pottery is of Middle Bronze Age date. The presence together of such contrasting vessels in both form and fabric as the type 1 globular urn (no. 1) and the bucket urn (no. 13) is quite characteristic of the Deverel-Rimbury culture as defined by Calkin for Wessex. Both fine and coarse wares are found in association in cemeteries and settlements over a very wide area, and the discovery of the Westbury site provides further supportive evidence for Mrs Hawkes' comments on the distribution of these wares (Hawkes 1969). The globular urns from Winnall and Thorney Down are so far the closest parallels for those at Westbury.

A notable feature in this otherwise classic assembly is the appearance of handles in the same fabric as the globular urns. These are round in section, unlike the flattish lugs that are found on type I globulars such as the Compton urn (Hawkes 1969) and the unpublished urn from Crate field, Hayling Island in Portsmouth City Museum. Handles are found in Sussex in Middle Bronze Age contexts at Ilford Hill (Burstow and Holleyman 1957) and Plumpton Plain site A (Holleyman and Curwen 1935).

The sherds from Plumpton Plain site A (class A4) make up a globose vessel with a diameter of 17 cm, the handles being positioned at the maximum diameter of the pot, well below the rim. The vessel is decorated below the handles with an impressed pattern. The handles are D-shaped in outline and rounded or ovoid in section and are very close in form to the Westbury example. Handled vessels are a normal constituent of the Sussex assemblage, but they are not unknown in Wessex, and a detached handle was found in the Bronze Age enclosure at Ogbourne West by Mrs Piggott (Piggott 1942) who pointed out the affinities of the Wessex Deverel-Rimbury Culture with the Sussex Bronze Age.

At Westbury, therefore, the pottery is remarkable for the association of forms regarded as characteristic of two widely separated areas.

Objects of stone, flint and bone

Querns: Several joining quern fragments were found lying on the chalk floor, besides many small fragments found in pits. One example is illustrated in Fig. 4 (marked F15 on the plan, it was lying on the surface of the chalk). All fragments are of Sussex ironstone, which is very coarse and liable to crumble. A reasonably hard surface is achieved by the action of grinding, although this material cannot have been durable (being brittle) nor convenient.

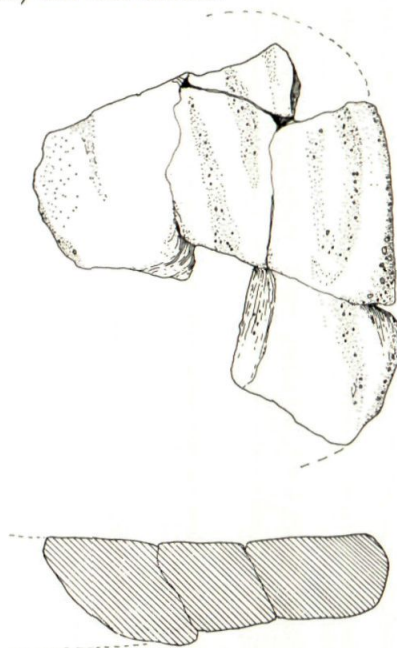


Fig. 4. Westbury, West Meon. Bronze Age quern. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

Whetstones: Fig. 5 no. 7 is of micaceous sandstone with striations on two surfaces made by an edged tool. Another fragment of pink sandstone was probably also part of a whetstone. A whetstone showing similar use to no. 7 was found at Shearplace Hill (Rahtz and ApSimon 1962). A hollowed beach pebble in Pit 9 appears to have been used for polishing or grinding.

The Flints: (Fig. 5) The flint artifacts and waste flakes have a well patinated greyish

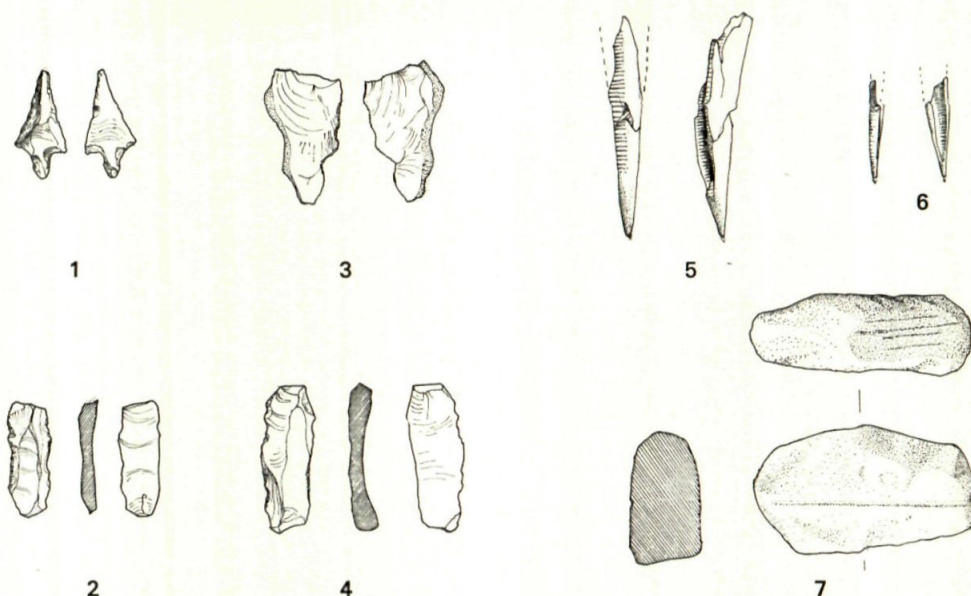


Fig. 5. Westbury, West Meon, flint and bone objects. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

white surface. Only two retain their original black colour. The illustrated flints come from Pit 9 or from layer 4, in the immediate area of Pit 9. A small group, none of which are illustrated, are waste flakes from the chalk-filled feature at F14. Richard Bradley offers the following description and comments.

1. Tanged arrowhead, tip slightly broken. Formed by steep marginal retouch on the dorsal surface with some shallow inverse retouch on the tang. From Pit. 9.

2. Long narrow flake of surface flint with eroded cortex. Slight marginal retouch on both edges, confined to the dorsal surface. The tip shows slight signs of abrasion. From Pit 9.

3. Irregular chunky flake with slight marginal retouch on the bulbous surface. From layer 4.

4. Long narrow flake with signs of slight marginal retouch on both edges. Edge working is confined to the dorsal surface and the tip is apparently unworn. From Layer 4.

Not illustrated: One irregular fragment from which a series of abrupt hinged flakes have been removed. This piece shows no sign of regular core preparation.

Five broad and apparently unused flakes, three retaining large areas of cortex and probably based upon surface nodules. Several unworked flakes from F15.

Comments

Although flint continued to be used throughout the later Bronze Age, material of this date has four distinctive characteristics. Like late Neolithic flintwork, the flakes are usually quite short and broad. By the Middle Bronze Age, cores are notably clumsy and irregular, often showing signs of repeated mis-hits. This decline in technical competence accompanies the more widespread adoption of metal tools and few implements were made in flint after the Early Bronze Age. Later industries normally made use of surface nodules.

The arrowhead (no. 1) represents a late development of a form first appearing with Beaker pottery almost a millenium earlier. It conforms to the orthodox typological scheme into which tanged arrowheads can occur over a longer period than the barbed and tanged form. The two long narrow flakes

(nos. 3, 4) are a little unusual and could just possibly be residual Neolithic items. On the other hand, work by Peter Woodward and the writer on a sequence of flint groups at Roxton, Bedfordshire, show a slight and unexpected change from broader to narrower flakes between the Early and Middle Bronze Ages and this may be another example of this trend.

Bone: (Fig. 5, nos. 5 and 6). Two bone artefacts were found, both awls or points. No. 5 is the sharpened end of sheep's radius, no. 6 is a section of very thin bone, carefully polished.

ANIMAL BONE by Dr. Anne Grant.

The animal bones from Westbury were generally in very small fragments and in very poor condition. Their surfaces were badly eroded and they were whitish in colour, presumably because they were found on chalk. Because of their condition, identification was often very difficult or even impossible. The bones identified are listed below.

Fragments – scattered over chalk:

- Sheep* Ulna – fragment
 - Upper molar
 - Immature scapula – fragment
 - Axis – fragment.
- Bird Humerus – distal end
 - Coracoid – shaft.
- Horse Incisor.
- Miscellaneous bone chips, mainly of sheep size, but some of ox or horse size.
- * sheep and/or goat.

Layer 4 – occupation layer above chalk floor:

- Sheep Metapodial – shaft
 - Rib – fragment.
- Horse Incisor – fragment.
- Ox Incisor.
- Miscellaneous bone chips, mainly sheep size.
- One edge of a large rib fragment (ox or horse size) had been chopped or sawn.

From Pit 9:

- Ox Upper molar
 - Lower molars – 2
 - Atlas – fragment
 - Humerus – Distal epiphysis, fragment
 - Mandible – fragment including mental foramen
 - Mandible – fragment including 3rd molar, with very uneven wear.
 - The third cusp was worn right down to the roots and the wear on the second cusp sloped steeply to the roots of the third cusp. The first cusp still had 22 mm of unworn enamel.
- Pig Humerus – Distal end shaft
 - Lumbar vertebra – body unfused, and one transverse process and the side of the body chopped off.
- Sheep Metapodial, immature – shaft
 - Rib – fragment.
- Miscellaneous bone chips, mainly ox.

Summary

The animals represented are sheep, ox, pig, horse and bird. In the pit group, ox bones were most numerous, while in the other locations, sheep bones were most numerous. Because of the condition of the bones, no measurements were possible, but the sheep bones seemed small and slender. However no meaningful conclusions can be based on such a small and fragmented collection. Bones from both mature and immature animals were found.

On two bones, evidence of butchery was seen. It may be worth noting that both these bones were in very much better condition than most of the other bones, although this may be only a coincidence.

CONCLUSIONS

There is some evidence for the occupation of the site in the early Bronze Age, for certainly the beaker sherd and possibly the tanged

arrowhead appear to be survivals. Pit 9 is itself an earlier feature, but the sherds in its fill are of a coarse fabric comparable with the bucket urn fabric deposited elsewhere during the main occupation of the site; it is therefore not much earlier, and provides only an indication that the site was in use for more than a temporary shelter.

The features indicate that a circular house stood upon the site, the ground being prepared beforehand by levelling. It is comparable to one of the two hut sites at Chalton which may have been occupied by a small isolated family unit. The pottery dates the occupation to the second millenium BC.

LIST OF SITES NEAR WESTBURY, 1969-76

<i>Map Location</i>	<i>Local Code No.</i>	<i>O.S. Grid Ref.</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Site 1	WBP 6	SU 657239	St. Nicholas' Chapel. Excavated 1960. Pottery of the eleventh-twelfth century. (Moorhouse 1973).
Site 2	WBC 1-5	SU 657243	Westbury Cottage Garden. Excavation of Bronze Age site. Scattered finds of Iron Age, Roman and medieval date.
Site 3	1 WBP	SU 657238	Finds from excavation of swimming pool, Westbury House, Roman and medieval pottery.
Site 4	2 WBP	SU 656238	Finds from excavation of roots of felled chestnut tree in Westbury Park, 1974. Quantities of early medieval pottery, including eleventh century Portchester ware, some post medieval pottery. Pit containing Iron Age pottery with handles.
Site 5	3 WBP	SU 656238	Finds from excavation of roots of felled lime tree, 1974, Neolithic flint axe, medieval pottery of the twelfth century, thirteenth century and also sixteenth century.
Site 6	1 WM	SU 657241	Finds from eroded bank of lane (Parish Boundary) 1969, early medieval pottery, sherd of Saxon chaff-tempered ware.
Site 7	5 WBP	SU 657239	Finds from root of box tree near river, much eleventh-twelfth century pottery, and post medieval pottery.
Site 8	5 WMA	SU 656248	Pit excavated in January 1976, contained quantities of Romano-British pottery of the second-third century AD and fragments of glazed first century pottery and other fine wares. Much scattered Iron Age and Romano-British pottery found over the field.

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<i>Map Location</i>	<i>Local Code No.</i>	<i>O.S. Grid Ref.</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Site 9	5 WMB	SU 657249	Pit excavated in 1975, 1m30 deep, contained iron slag and waste, together with decorated saucepan pots of the Iron Age. Second-first century BC.

Sites 2, 6, 8 and 9 are in West Meon parish and the other sites are in East Meon parish.

Correlation of published references with Winchester City Museum Catalogue

The finds and documentation from this site are deposited in Winchester City Museum. The museum catalogue number for both features and finds is 1455. The District Survey number for this site is 0182.

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Authors: Elizabeth Lewis, City Museum, Winchester.
George Walker, Westbury Cottage, West Meon, Hants.