

A BRONZE AGE CREMATION CEMETERY AT OLIVER'S BATTERY, NEAR WINCHESTER, AND SOME RELATED FINDS

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with a contribution by PAULINE SHEPPARD

ABSTRACT

A number of Bronze Age cremation burials from the south-western edge of Winchester have remained largely unreported since their discovery over thirty years ago. These provide evidence which is important for the interpretation of the settlement history of the area. A number of the pottery containers in which the cremations were deposited are also interesting in their own right in terms of ceramic typology.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1940s and 1950s a number of Bronze Age cremation urns came to light in the area immediately to the south-west of Winchester (Fig 1). Although there have been brief reports on some of these by, for example, Cottrill (1952), Hawkes (1969, 16-17 and Fig 3) and Ellison (1981, table 13), they have remained largely unpublished until now. All the discoveries were made during construction work of various kinds and most of the vessels were salvaged only after they had been damaged. Information concerning the archaeological context of all these cremations is therefore minimal. The following report is based on notes held in the history files and accessions registers of the Winchester Museums Service, who also hold the finds.

Three sites are covered by this report, Compton Way, Oliver's Battery (WMS catalogue number 85), Bushfield Camp, Compton (WMS catalogue number 10) and Minden Way, Stanmore (WMS catalogue number 2236).

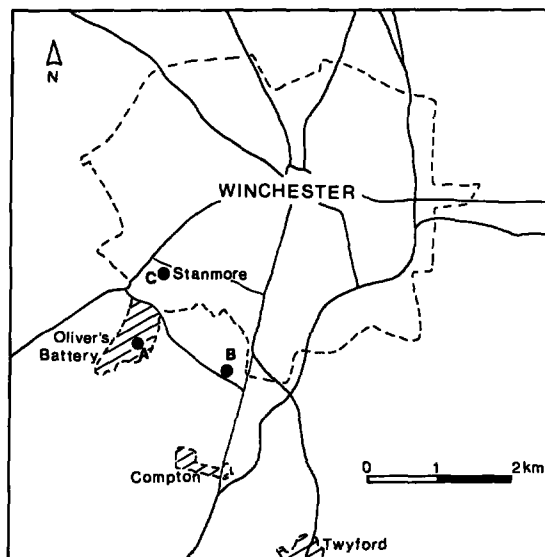


Fig 1. Location plan.

SITE A. COMPTON WAY, OLIVER'S BATTERY

The circumstances of the find

Between March 1956 and March 1959 the remains of eleven or twelve Bronze Age cremation burials were recovered from the southern end of the Oliver's Battery housing estate, 3km south-west of Winchester. They were all found within an area approximately 20m square, centred on SU 4586 2744. The site is about

110m above OD, the underlying geology being Upper Chalk.

For Saturday 10th March 1956 the Curator's diary records the following entry: "Bale-mark, natural flints and sherds of prehistoric pottery, found at Oliver's Battery, Winchester, left for identification". The sherds were found in a trench which was being dug for the foundations of a house, later called 'Lisholt', at the southern end of the west side of Compton Way, at its junction with South View Road. They were identified as coming from an urn of the Middle Bronze Age (burial 1).

On the 27th January 1957 a sewerage trench, dug to connect the same house to a septic tank, revealed more pottery. During the following week six cremation burials, five of them contained in urns, were recovered by Mr

F V Lyall for Winchester City Museums (burials 2-7). An eighth burial was discovered on the 31st August 1957, by a workman digging a foundation trench for a house on the property adjoining 'Lisholt' to the north, and more pottery was uncovered in the north-east part of the garden of 'Lisholt' on the 23rd February 1959, when three urns and a fragment of a fourth were found lying in an irregular hollow in the chalk (burials 9-12. See Fig 2). All these finds are now held by Winchester Museums Service under catalogue numbers 85.00.2 to 85.00.12 and 85.00.14.

A detailed description of all the burials is contained in appendix A (microfiche), and summarised in Table 1. All the cremations were apparently deposited in shallow pits cut to a depth of between 10 and 20cm below the

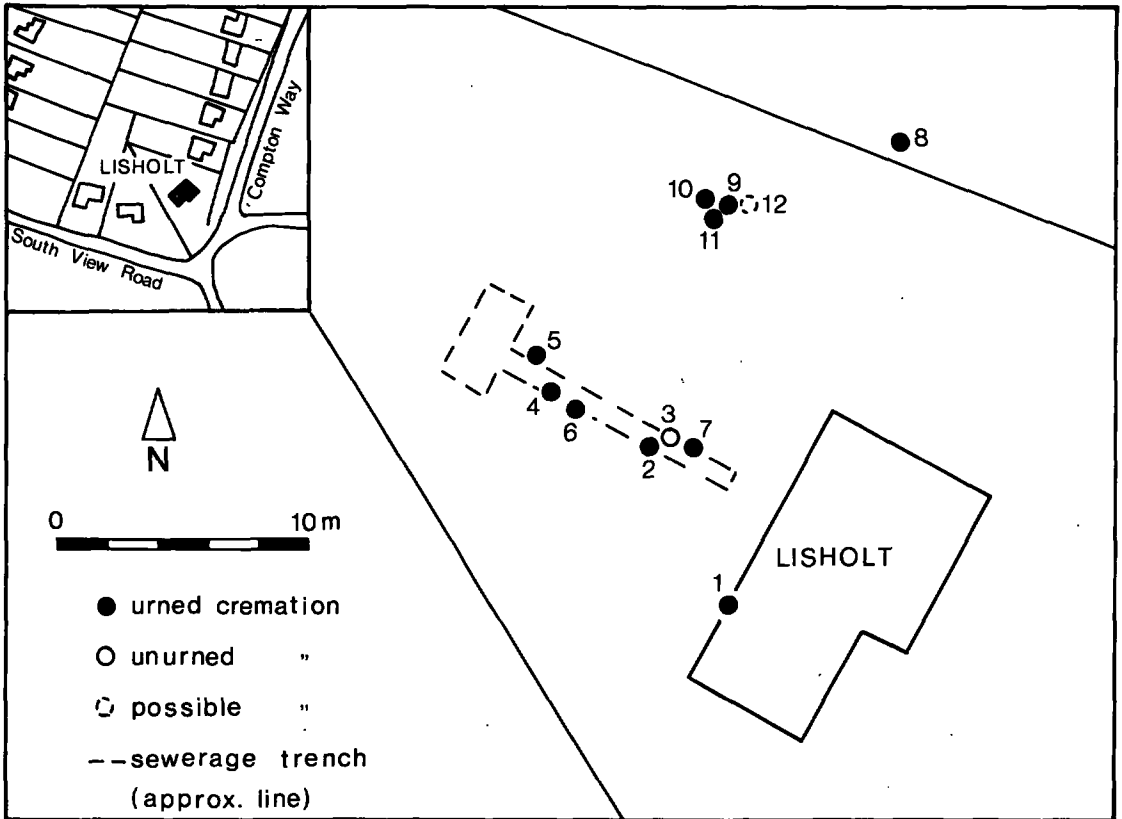


Fig 2. Location of the cremation burials from Compton Way.

Table 1. *The cremation burials from Compton Way*

Burial	Urned	Type (Ellison 1981)	Unurned	Inverted	Horizontal	Unknown	Burnt Bone Present	WMS Acc. No.
1	x	?				x	x	85.00.2
2	x	5 Bucket?			x		x Adult	85.00.4
3			x				x	
4	x	3b Bucket		x			x	85.00.5
5	x	2a Barrel			x			85.00.6
6	x	Barrel of S L type		x			x	85.00.7
7	x	3a Bucket		x			x	85.00.8
8	x	1a Glob.		x			x	85.00.9
9	x	1b Glob.?		x			x Adult	85.00.10
							? Female	
10	x	1b Glob.?		x			x Infant	85.00.12
11	x	1b Glob.?		x			x Adult	85.00.11
							? Female	
12	?	5 Bucket?				x	x Adult	85.00.14

present surface of the chalk subsoil. Most, if not all of them, had been truncated by ploughing. It is uncertain when the area was last under the plough. On the Tithe Map of 1846 it is called 'Far Down', and is marked as open downland on an estate map of 1852. Although enclosed at some time prior to the Ordnance Survey map of 1874, the area was under pasture in the years immediately preceding the construction of the housing estate (the late Mrs M Waldron, pers comm). It is therefore uncertain whether the urns were damaged by ploughing in antiquity or at some time in the early part of this century.

Further damage to the pottery had been caused by compression and root penetration, and it can be assumed that post-excavation degradation has taken place through drying and abrasion in its boxes.

The pottery (Figs 3 & 4)

All the vessels from this site fall within the Deverel-Rimbury tradition, although a number of types are present. There are no classic Wessex type globular urns from the site such as were found at Winnall (Hawkes 1969). The large decorated urn from burial 8 discussed by Hawkes (1969, 16-17) has the shallow tooled decoration one would expect on a globular urn of Ellison's type 1a (Ellison 1981, 173-4), but the horizontally perforated

lugs are not. In general morphology the vessel resembles urn 4, a secondary interment from a barrow near Portesham, Dorset (Thompson & Ashbee 1957, 129), and is similar also to vessel D16 from Kimpton (Ellison 1981, fig. 14) except that the lugs are set above the belly of the pot.

The urns from burials 4 and 7 are standard bucket urns, with fingernail-impressed decoration around the rim and a second band of similar decoration lower down on the body. Dr Ellison (pers comm) has also tentatively identified the vessel from burial 2 and the rim sherd from burial 12 as possibly of her type 5, another kind of bucket urn. The small amount of pottery from burial 1 may also be from a bucket urn.

Barrel urns are represented by burials 5 and 6, although both are very fragmentary. The latter with evidence of both horizontal and vertical finger-impressed cordons is similar to that from Knighton Hill (Rahtz 1970, Fig 7.1) and is probably a classic barrel urn of South Lodge type.

The urns from burials 9, 10 and 11 Dr Ellison has identified as belonging to her class 1b globular urns (1981, table 13 and pers comm), although only that from burial 10 closely resembles others of that type. The urn from burial 11 has a far more pronounced biconical profile with a groove and four small lugs around the point of carination. It is also decorated

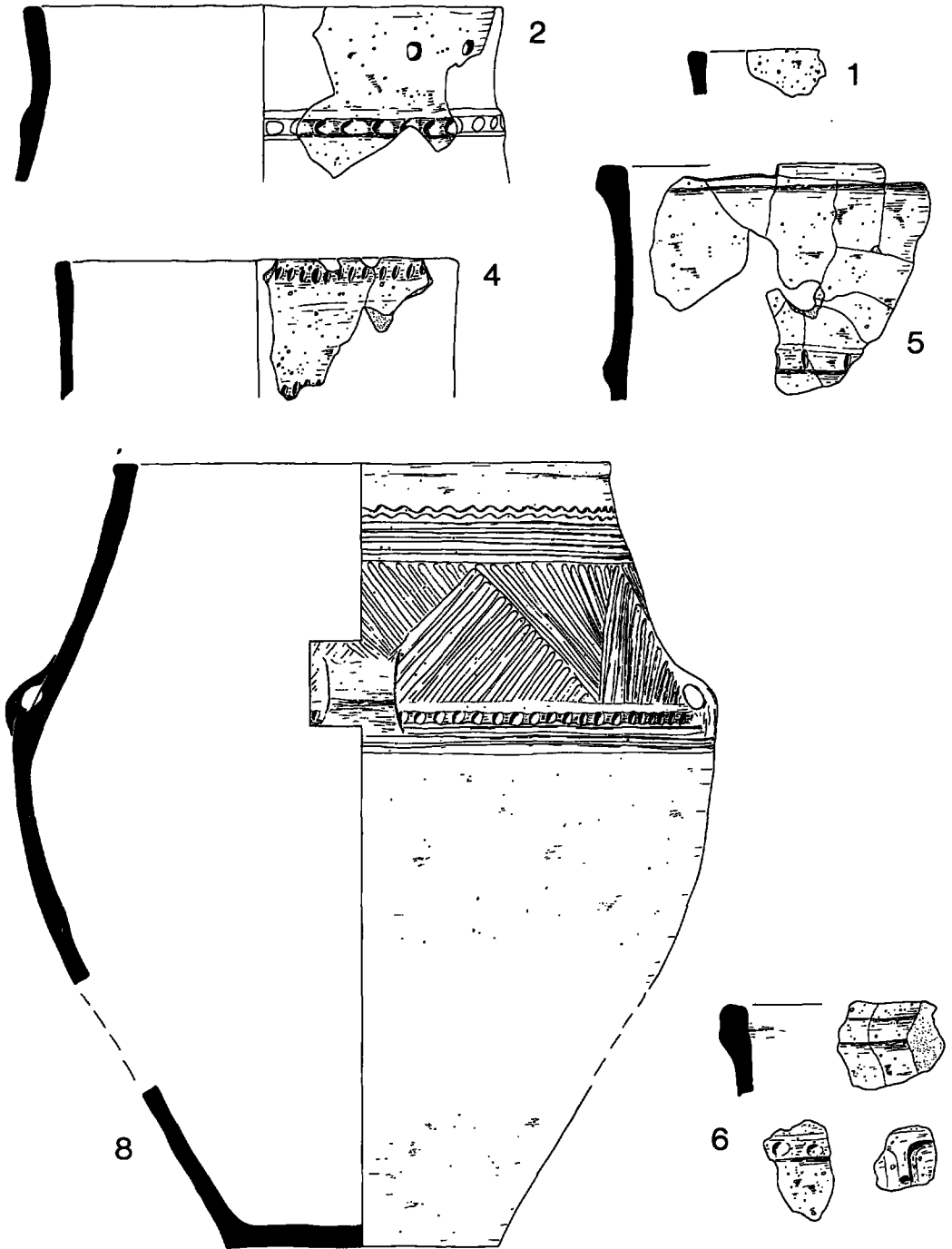


Fig 3. The pottery from burials 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8, Compton Way. (Scale 1:4)

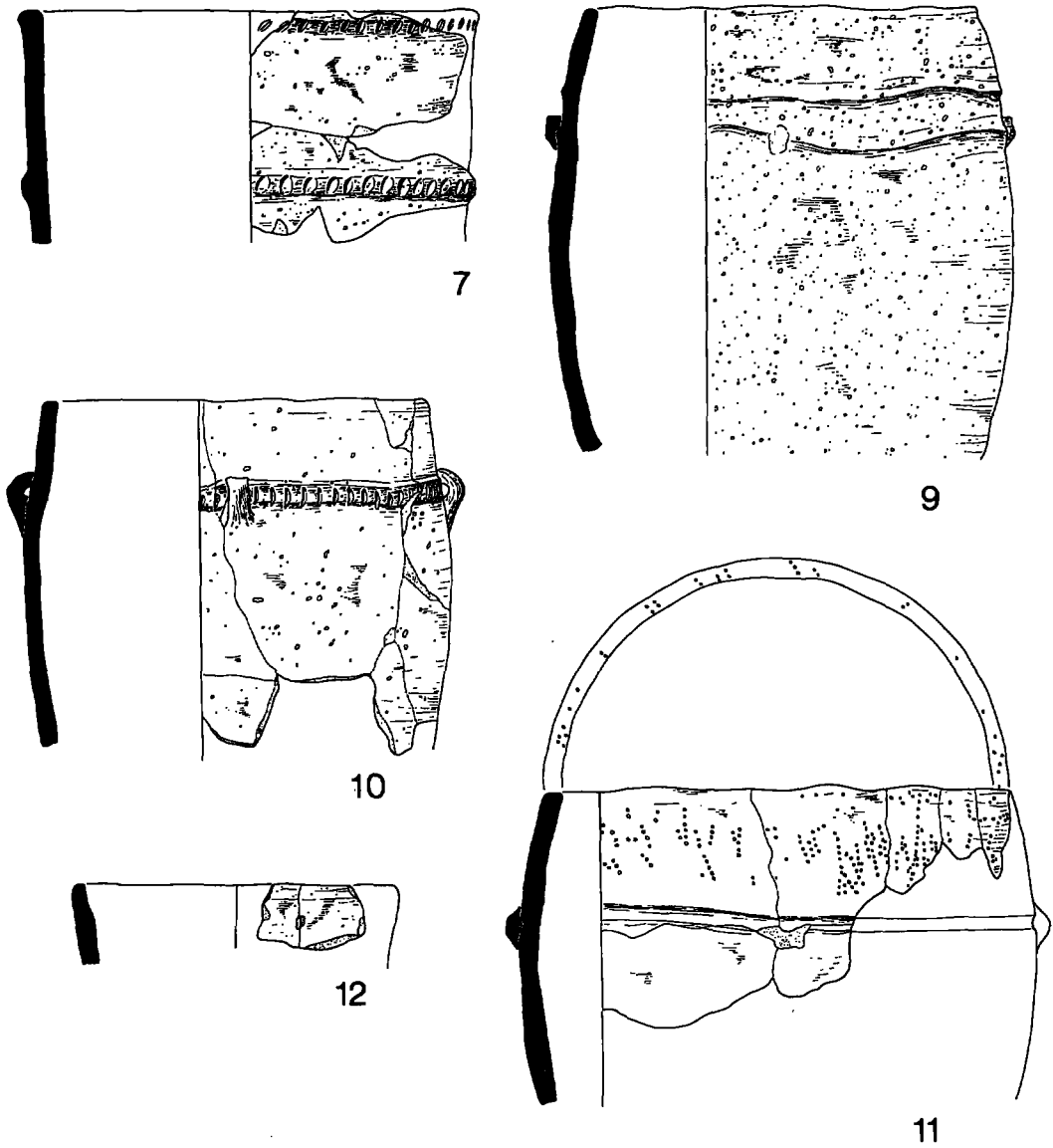


Fig 4. The pottery from burials 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12, Compton Way. (Scale 1:4)

above the groove and on the top of its flat rim with tooth-comb impressions, a method of decoration not otherwise found on globular urns, but known from biconical urns of the later Early Bronze Age, for example Cherhill G1, Wiltshire (Annable & Simpson, 1964, no. 538). Looking away from Wessex it is also possible that these three vessels may owe something of their morphology to Ellison's Lower Thames Valley and Sussex types (1981; 1978).

Burial 12 was accompanied by only a few sherds of pottery, and whether the rest of this vessel had been removed by ploughing or whether it was just a token deposit of sherds with an otherwise unurned cremation cannot now be ascertained. Neither is it altogether clear from the records whether burial 12 was a separate cremation or part of burial 9, but in the absence of decisive evidence it has been retained as a separate burial in Table 1.

The fabric of the vessels is fairly uniform, all of them being tempered with calcined and crushed flint, the only differences being in the size and frequency of the inclusions and the hardness and density of the matrix. The fabric of the barrel urns is distinguishable by the presence of voids caused by the leaching out of some kind of calcareous material, and that of the urn from burial 8 by its hardness, compaction and fewer interstices.

The diversity of pottery from Compton Way makes it difficult to compare with other known groups and therefore to suggest a date. There is, of course, no reason to assume that, although found in close proximity, the burials are all of one phase of deposition. It is possible that burials 1-7 and possibly 8, and burials 9-12 represent two distinct phases of activity. If the vessels in the latter group are related to the type 1b globular urns and/or the Lower Thames Valley types then these may be the later of the two (Ellison 1981, 194-5).

The human remains by Pauline Sheppard

A full report on the human remains from this site is included in Appendix B (microfiche), and a summary of possible age and sex determinations given in Table 1.

SITE B. BUSHFIELD CAMP, COMPTON

The circumstances of the find

In March 1950 the remains of two cremation urns were exposed in the north scarp of a terrace which was being made into the hillside during the construction of a tennis court at SU 4703 2707. They had been placed upright and together in a small cavity cut into the chalk, the top of which was 10in (25.4cm) below the present ground surface.

The more fully preserved vessel had its base 18in (45.7cm), and the top of what remained 6in (15.2cm) below the surface. Of the other, to the west of it, only the base and a little of the wall survived. About half the circumference of the latter had been removed before Mr F Cottrill, the then Curator, visited the site. There was no trace of the rim of either vessel, these presumably having been truncated by ploughing. Both the vessels are said to have been filled with a mixture of soil, burnt flints and ash.

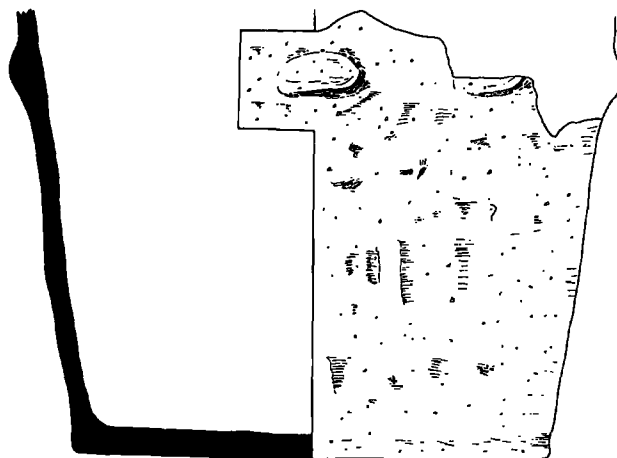
The pottery (Fig 5)

The pottery from this site is in a very fragmentary condition. It was, however, possible to reconstruct the more complete vessel as in Fig 5. It would appear to be a bucket-shaped urn with imperforate lugs which, if they are evenly spaced, should number eight in all. The fabric of both vessels was coarsely tempered with calcined flint.

SITE C. MINDEN WAY, STANMORE, WINCHESTER

The circumstances of the find

At about the beginning of November 1945 a single urn was discovered in the area of SU 4615 2847, presumably during the building of this part of the Stanmore housing estate. The accessions register states that it was approximately 2ft 6in (76.2cm) below the surface, but does not indicate whether this depth refers to



1



2

Fig 5. The pottery from Bushfield Camp urn 1 (1) and Minden Way (2). (Scale 1:4)

the top or the bottom of the urn. Neither is any indication of its orientation given. It was smashed at the time of discovery although there were some pre-existing breaks, and was filled with dark ash and fragments of bone.

The pottery (Fig 5)

The vessel is a bucket urn with finger-impressed decoration around the rim and on a cordon below the rim. The fabric is tempered with crushed calcined flint.

THE DATING OF THE BURIALS

The dating of the burials is based entirely on the pottery containers for the cremations, which in form and decoration all belong within the Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition. In recent years the accepted chronological span for Deverel-Rimbury has been considerably extended by radio-carbon dating (Barrett 1976; Barrett & Bradley 1980; Barrett *et al* 1981). Leaving aside the impossibly late date of 71 bc \pm 50 from Simon's Ground, Dorset (White 1982), the main series of dates falls between 489 bc \pm 55, also from Simon's Ground and 1380 bc \pm 90 from Wilsford Shaft, Wiltshire, with an outlier of 1740 bc \pm 90 from Worgret Barrow, Arnc, Dorset. More recent dates from Handley Barrow 24, South Lodge Camp, Barrow Pleck and Down Farm with only one exception fall within the eighth to tenth centuries bc (Barrett *et al* 1981).

Thus the range of radio-carbon dates, together with ceramic and metalwork associations, reveals the Deverel-Rimbury tradition as beginning towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, contemporary with the later Wessex barrows, and continuing through the Middle Bronze Age, with some of the later dates from Simon's Ground approaching the Bronze Age/Iron Age interface. Indeed Cunliffe (1974, 29) has recognised an 'Ultimate Deverel-Rimbury Culture', exemplified by the pottery from Eldon's Seat, Dorset (Cunliffe & Phillipson 1968; see also Barrett 1980 for a more recent discussion of later Bronze Age pottery).

In the absence of radio-carbon dates or associated metalwork the urns are impossible to date within this broad range, with the possible exception noted above that burials 9-12 from Oliver's Battery may date from towards the end of the sequence.

DISCUSSION

Although it is unlikely that all the cremations from the Compton Way cemetery have been located (Fig 2), the site can probably be regarded as a small to medium-sized one of its type. Ellison (1980) has shown that of all multiple cremation cemeteries of this period 78% contain less than 40 individual burials, and 52% less than 12. In the larger cemeteries also, the total pattern can usually be broken down into discrete clusters of between 10 and 30 burials. Since, in cases where such information is available, it appears that these cemeteries contain an unbiased sample of all age groups and both sexes, with no real indication of relative rank, it is, as Bradley says, "... tempting to regard these as the burials of family groups or other small settlement units". This view he reinforces by contrasting the prominent individual barrows of a social elite with the small 'private' world of ordinary settlements, the small 'family' clusters of burials reflecting the structure of the rural workforce (Bradley 1981, 102).

The analysis of human remains from Itford Hill (Ratcliffe-Densham in Holden 1972) suggests a high infant mortality rate. That being the case a cluster of a dozen or so cremations may represent the burials of no more than a couple of generations.

This brings us to the question of the other cremation burials in the immediate vicinity, and whether they should be regarded as deriving from dispersed small settlement groups, perhaps broadly contemporary with the Compton Way people, or whether they represent drifting of the same settlement unit over a period of several generations, or indeed whether they are the result of a single static settlement using dispersed burial grounds.

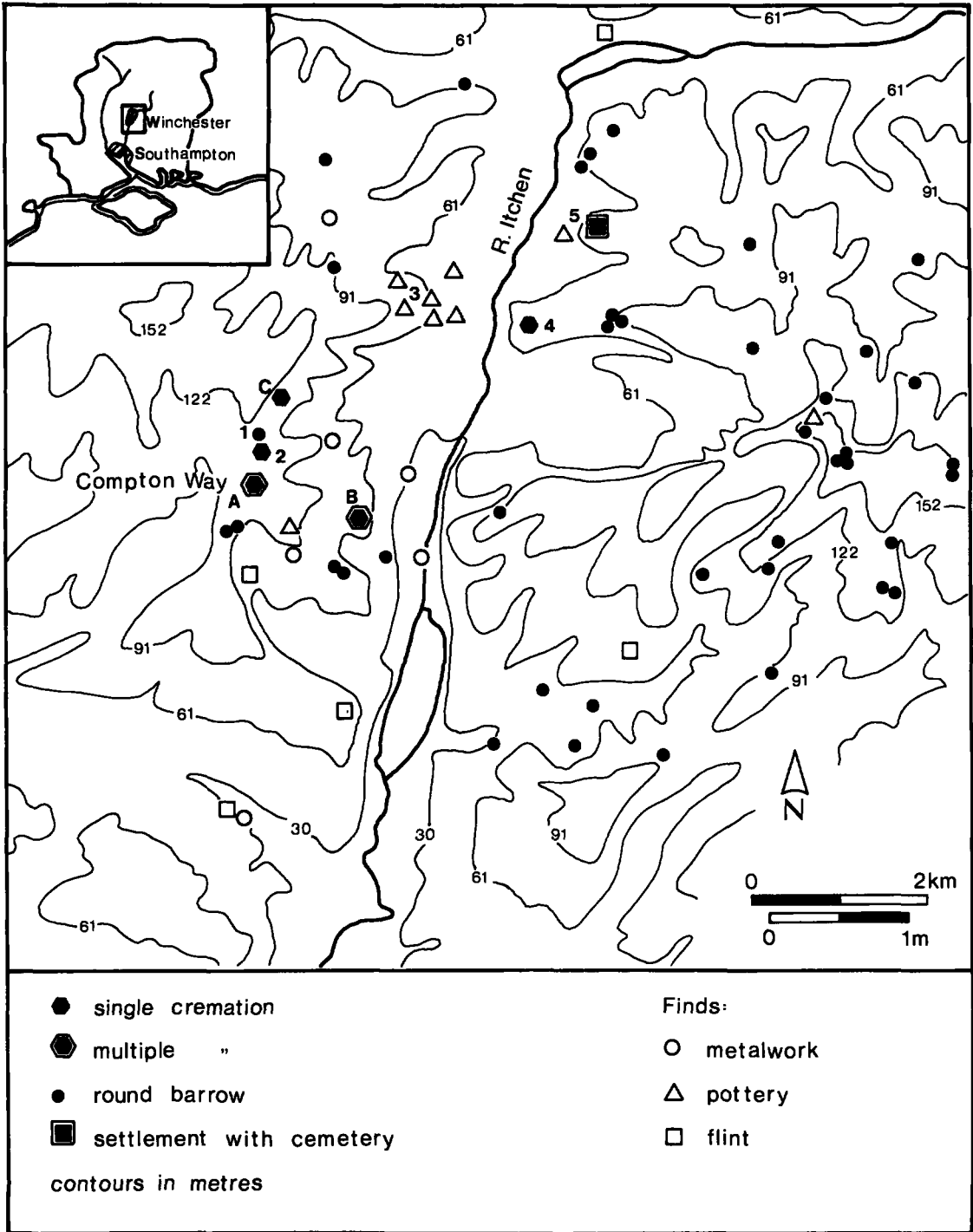


Fig 6. Finds of the later Bronze Age from the Winchester area, and the distribution of round barrows.

Without more precise dating and direct evidence of the settlements themselves these questions must remain unanswered.

In addition to the three sites described in this report there is also the possibility that the barrow (Fig 6, no. 1) which lies only 520m north of the Compton Way cemetery may itself have contained a number of urned cremation burials (Andrew 1932; 1934) similar to those, for example, at Latch Farm (Piggott 1938), Colebury and Landford (Preston & Hawkes 1933) and Fairway Caravan Park, Bournemouth (Hedges *et al* 1975). The pottery is described in the report as being "... of the Early Iron Age and of Halstatt quality". Up to the time of writing it has proved impossible to locate either the records of the excavation or the finds, ruling out the possibility of a re-examination.

There is one other urned cremation from Oliver's Battery, although in this case the vessel has a grogged fabric which may well be from an Early Bronze Age collared urn. The records make it unclear as to whether the discovery was made in a garden in Oliver's Battery Crescent or Oliver's Battery Road (Fig 6, no. 2). In either case it was still close to the barrow mentioned above, and may be significant. Indeed if this is a collared urn, then taken with the globular, barrel and bucket urns from burials 1-8, and the possibly later type 1b globulars from burials 9-11, it may well be that we are seeing evidence of several centuries of occupation in the area.

What has emerged in recent years is that there are more or less consistent spatial relationships between cremation cemeteries and their associated settlements (Bradley 1981), and it would not be unreasonable to expect to find a contemporary settlement within a radius

of 500m or so of the Compton Way cemetery. There are certainly extensive areas of celtic fields in the vicinity which might be related to such a settlement.

The full significance of these several groups of cremations cannot be appreciated by looking at them in isolation. An examination of the sources reveals a body of evidence that has been steadily accumulating, and which increasingly suggests the importance of the Winchester area in the Bronze Age. Finds of pottery dating to the later Bronze Age from the western edge of the city (Biddle 1966, 310; Matthews forthcoming; Ms R Ball pers. comm.) suggest a possible focus of settlement in this area (Fig 6, no. 3). East of the River Itchen there is a bucket urn from St Giles Hill (Fig 6, no. 4; Clay 1927, 323) and the settlement and cemeteries at Winnall and Easton Down (Fig 6, no. 5 Hawkes 1969; Fasham 1985; Fasham & Whinney 1985). There is, after all, every reason why the topographical factors which must have influenced the siting of the late Iron Age and Roman settlements, and also the possible Beaker settlement (Matthews forthcoming), should have provided a concentration of settlement here in the later Bronze Age.

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