

## EXCAVATION OF SAXON STRUCTURES AND BRONZE AGE FEATURES AT BENTLEY GREEN FARM, BENTLEY, HAMPSHIRE, 1994

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with contributions by TESS DURDEN, JOHN LETTS, CHRIS SALTER and JANE TIMBY

### ABSTRACT

*An evaluation was carried out in January 1994 in advance of gravel extraction as a part of the construction of the Bentley by-pass. This located two areas of archaeological interest. One of these areas which contained a probable Middle Bronze Age slab 'burial', was located in an area to be occupied by a topsoil bund and was not, therefore, threatened by quarrying. The other area contained a series of very shallow postholes, undated except for the presence of a few struck flints. It was thought that this was a prehistoric occupation site. The latter area was subsequently excavated and revealed three rectangular structures probably of Saxon date. A single Middle Bronze Age pit was also revealed. A watching brief of adjacent areas carried out by Southampton City Archaeology Unit revealed a few outlying features.*

### *Topography and geology*

The site lies on a terrace of the river Wey (north branch) at a height of 94 m above OD. The site lies on level ground approximately 0.5 km south of the main valley side cutting the chalk downland, but overlooking the broad gorge that the river now occupies. To the south the ground drops away moderately steeply to the floodplain of the river. The ground dips away in the very south-west corner of the evaluated area, which might reflect an old bluff on the edge of the terrace, or more likely, the site of an old gravel pit.

For the northern two-thirds of the evaluated area, the gravel terrace is capped by a largely stone-free red/brown clay loam (brickearth) 1 m thick in places. To the south, including the area subject to detailed investigation, the bed-rock is progressively more gravelly with a brown clay loam infilling the interstices at the very top of the gravel.

### INTRODUCTION

This report documents the archaeological evaluation, excavation and watching brief carried out in advance of the proposed borrow pit as a part of the construction of the Bentley by-pass in north east Hampshire (Fig. 1) (NGR SU 780 434). The project was commissioned by Alfred McAlpine Construction Limited, and carried out to a specification agreed with the Hampshire County Archaeology section. Fieldwork took place during January and April 1994 and the site code is BGF94. The finds have been deposited with Hampshire Museum Service (Acc. no. A1994:30).

### *Archaeological background*

The archaeological potential of the proposal area had been highlighted by the County Archaeologist. A number of Roman sites and finds are known for the general area, with Roman pottery recorded from Crocks Farm cottages just to the north of the site and a possible villa visible from the air some 500 m to the east (Fig. 1). Metal detector users are reported to have recovered a Roman brooch from the southern part of the proposal area here, but details are sketchy. Prehistoric finds and sites are also recorded, such as a possible Neolithic or Early Bronze Age monument

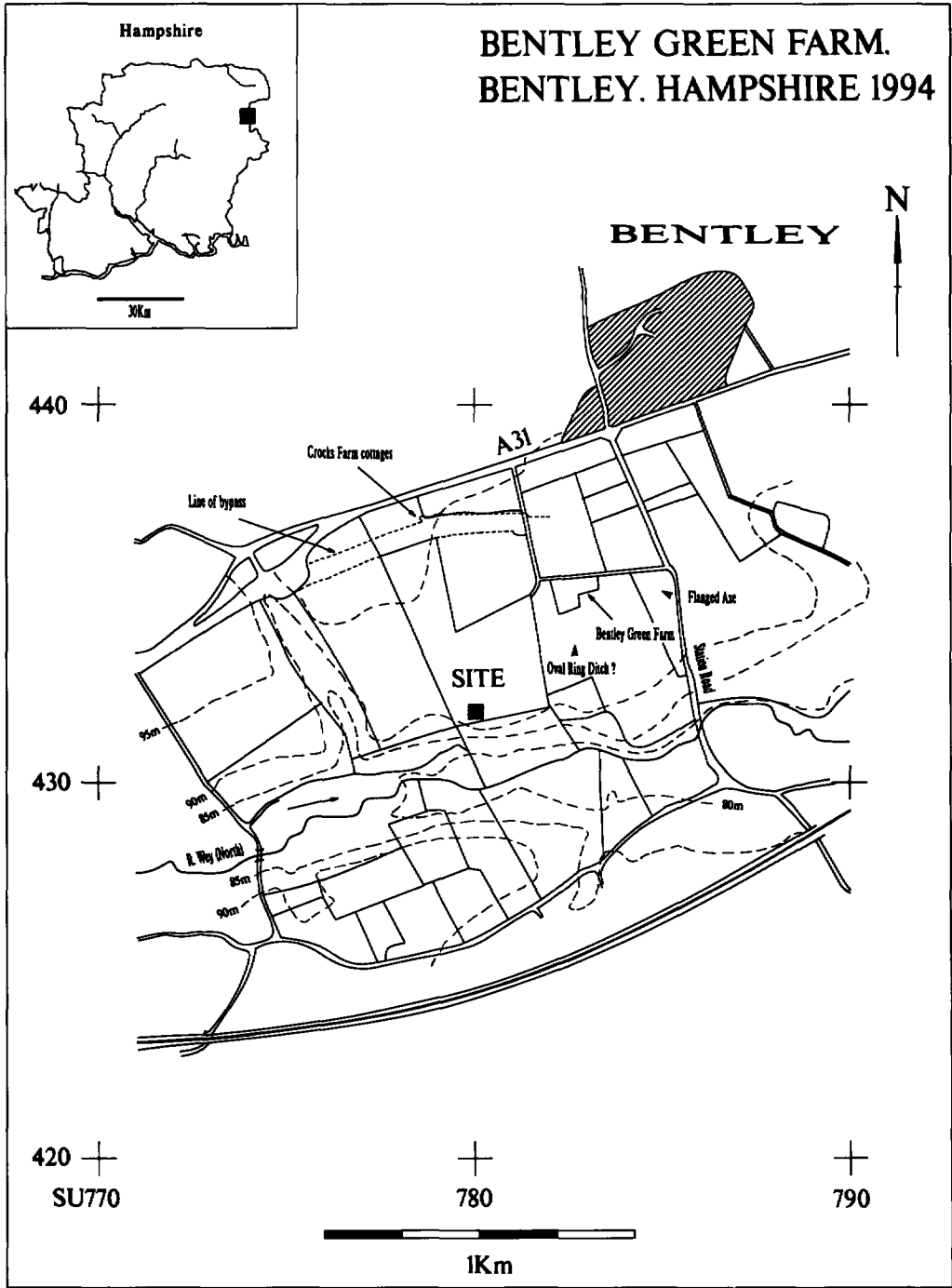


Fig 1. Location of site.

visible from the air south of Bentley Green Farm and the recovery of an Early Bronze Age bronze flat axe from east of the farm.

## THE EVALUATION

As a consequence of this information, the County Archaeologist requested an evaluation, as detailed in Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16, 1990). The evaluation comprised two elements; a desk-based study involving the examination of pre-recorded information contained within the County Sites and Monuments Record, and aerial photographs in various collections; and machine trenching. The results of this evaluation are detailed in the evaluation report (Ford 1994) and only a summary is presented here.

Forty-six trenches were excavated, 1.9 m wide and varying in length from 12.5 m to 50 m. Two areas of archaeological interest were located, both close to the southern boundary of the site: A series of post holes were found in three trenches, which at the time were thought to be of prehistoric date. This area was the subject of the main excavation. Trench 23 located the bases and side walls of at least three fragmentary (Middle) Bronze Age vessels and two ceramic slabs (one of which may be a large urn wall sherd) occupying a shallow pit (F3). A few other fragmentary sherds occurred nearby pressed into the clay loam subsoil. This area was eventually excluded from the extractive portion of the site and was not further excavated. The deposit in F3 consisted of a large ceramic slab at the bottom with some base sherds around the margins and other base and wall sherds above. None of this pottery was associated with cremated bone, charcoal or burnt flint. However, it has been reported for other sites, such as the Bronze Age urn cemetery at Kimpton, Hampshire, that symbolic 'burials' with slabs of broken pottery can occur without cremated bone (Dacre & Ellison 1981, 159). This kind of activity may be represented here.

## THE EXCAVATION

The excavation comprised the topsoil stripping of an area of approximately 2400 sq m. Eighty-nine

subsoil features were identified in addition to a small ditch, presumably a field boundary of post-medieval date. These features mainly comprised postholes, with two pits and a burnt flint patch (Fig. 3). Hand cleaning took place only in the areas containing groups of features. Approximately 95% of the features were initially sampled for charred plant remains. A subsample of these was floated and sieved for these remains (see below) and all samples were dry sieved using a 5 mm mesh for small artefact recovery.

Three elements are represented in the spatial arrangement of these features: Three clusters of postholes in rectangular or sub-rectangular arrangement; isolated pits; isolated postholes.

### *Pits*

Pit F102 was the best dated feature on the site and was the only one clearly of Middle Bronze Age date. It was an elongated oval in plan 2.7 m × 0.8 m by 0.3 m deep and contained many large pieces of Deverel-Rimbury pottery in clumps, indicating primary deposition of material. No carbonised plant remains were recovered from samples of this feature.

Pit F100 was circular, 1.2 m across but only 0.15 m deep. It contained many large pieces of mature wood charcoal, including oak, some burnt flint and a single sherd of Early Saxon pottery along with a fragment of probable Roman tile. The base of the pit was not fire-reddened.

### *Burnt flint patch*

Context C203 consisted of a patch of burnt flint with some charcoal in a slight fire-reddened basin, 0.6 m across.

### *Postholes*

The majority of the post holes fall within one of three clusters with rectilinear settings and which are clearly the remains of post-built structures.

### *Structure 1 (Fig. 4)*

This structure, which was the largest, produced the clearest ground plan for a rectangular building. It measured 11 m × 5.5 m with a length:width proportion of 2:1 and was aligned north-south. The structure comprised lines of postholes on all four sides but with a conspicuous absence of postholes on three corners. A large gap in the post

# BENTLEY GREEN FARM. BENTLEY. HAMPSHIRE 1994

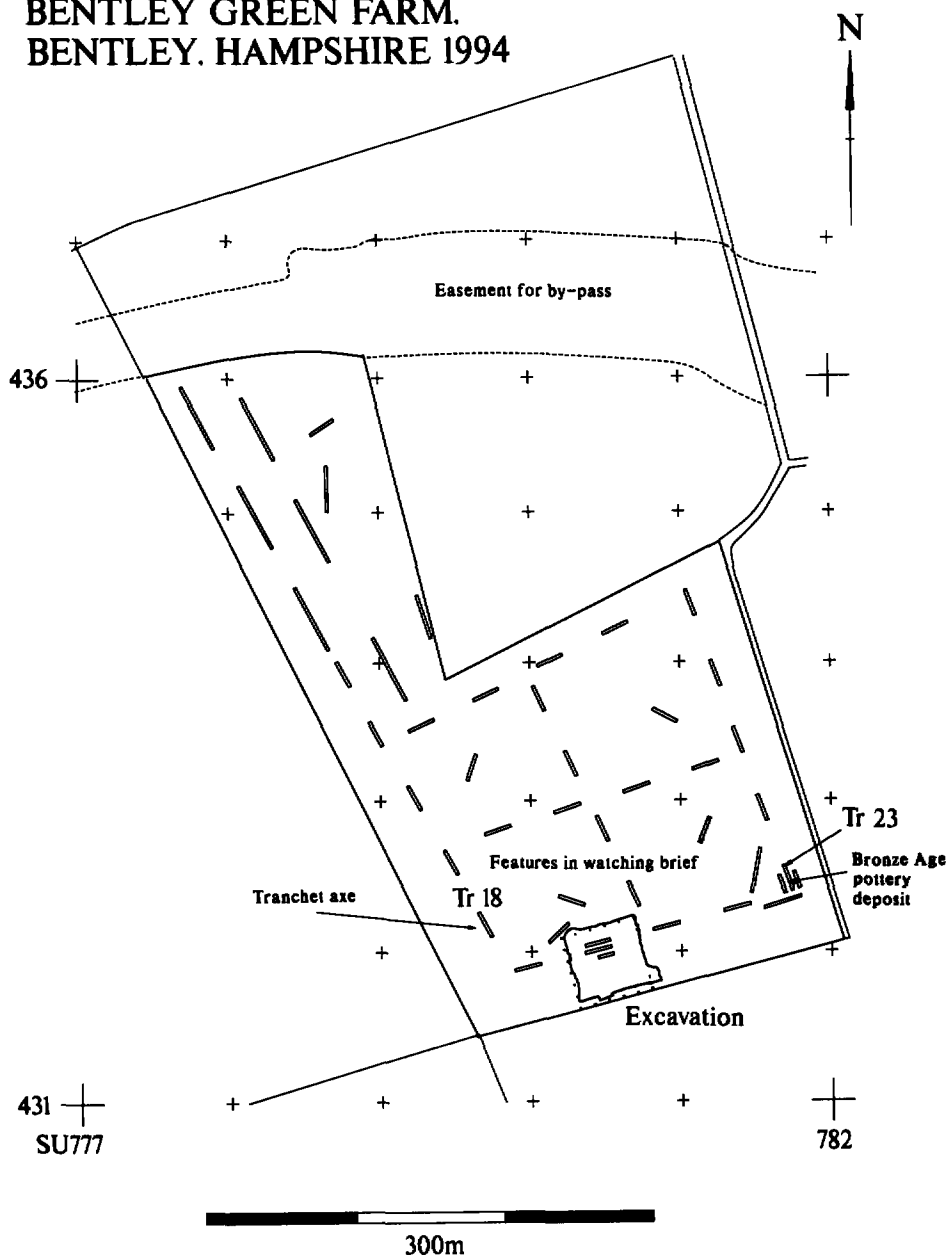


Fig 2. Location of evaluation trenches and excavated area.

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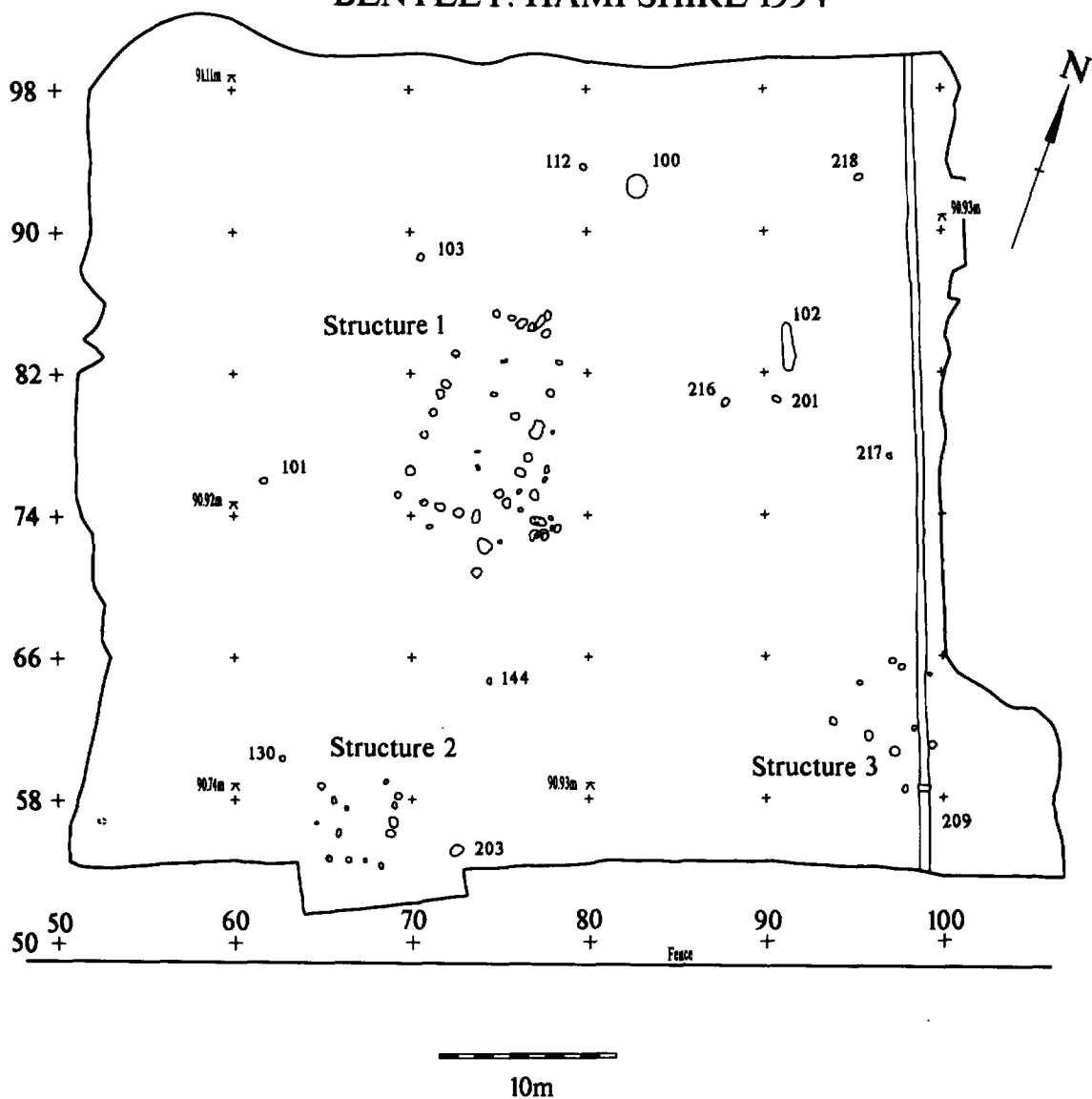


Fig 3. Plan of all excavated features (see Fig 4 for detail of structures 1-3).

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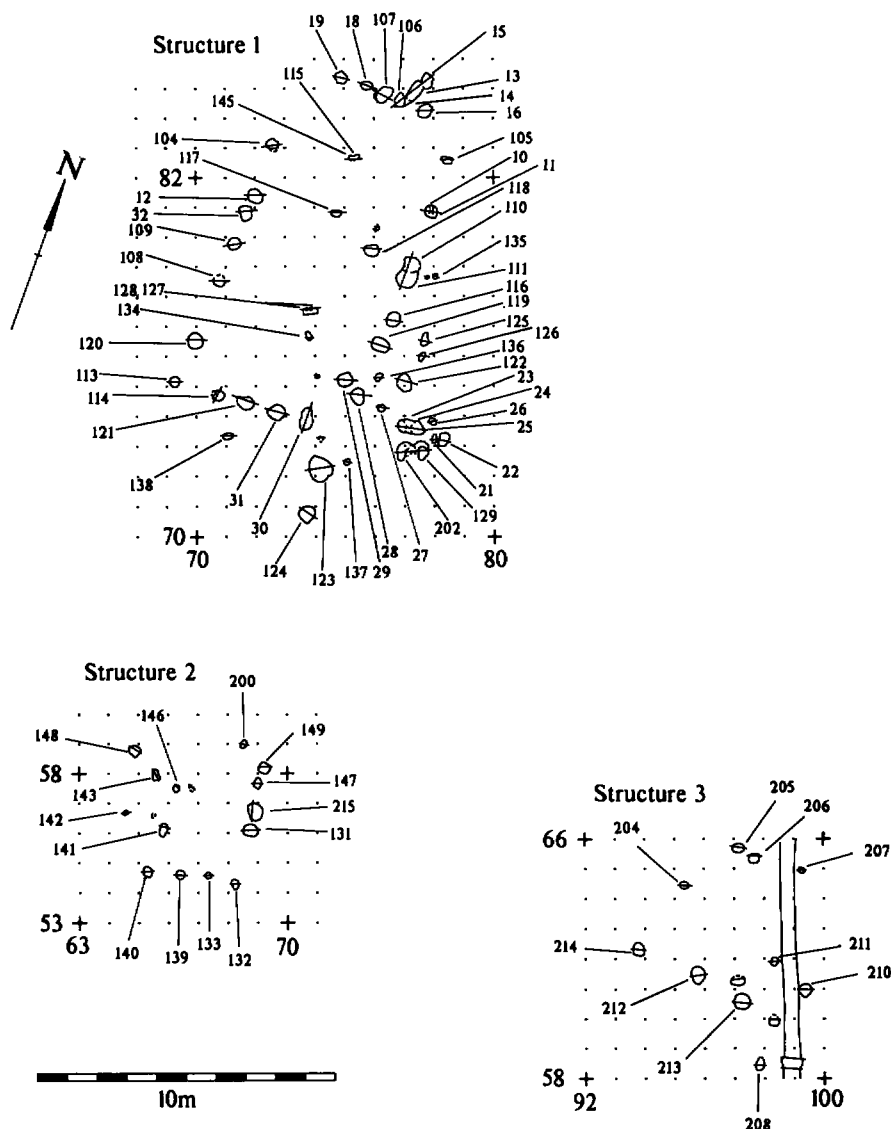


Fig 4 Detailed plan of structures 1-3.

setting occurs in the north west corner which may represent an entrance, although for buildings of Saxon date these are usually expected in the side walls (Rahtz 1976). A series of six small post/stake holes at four locations are approximately aligned down the long axis of the building. No hearths

were observed. The post holes are arranged broadly symmetrically along the west and east sides, but with one additional post on the north side and a missing post opposite F105 on the west side.

The post holes are of variable profile and size (Fig. 5). F119 with a depth of 0.28 m and diameter

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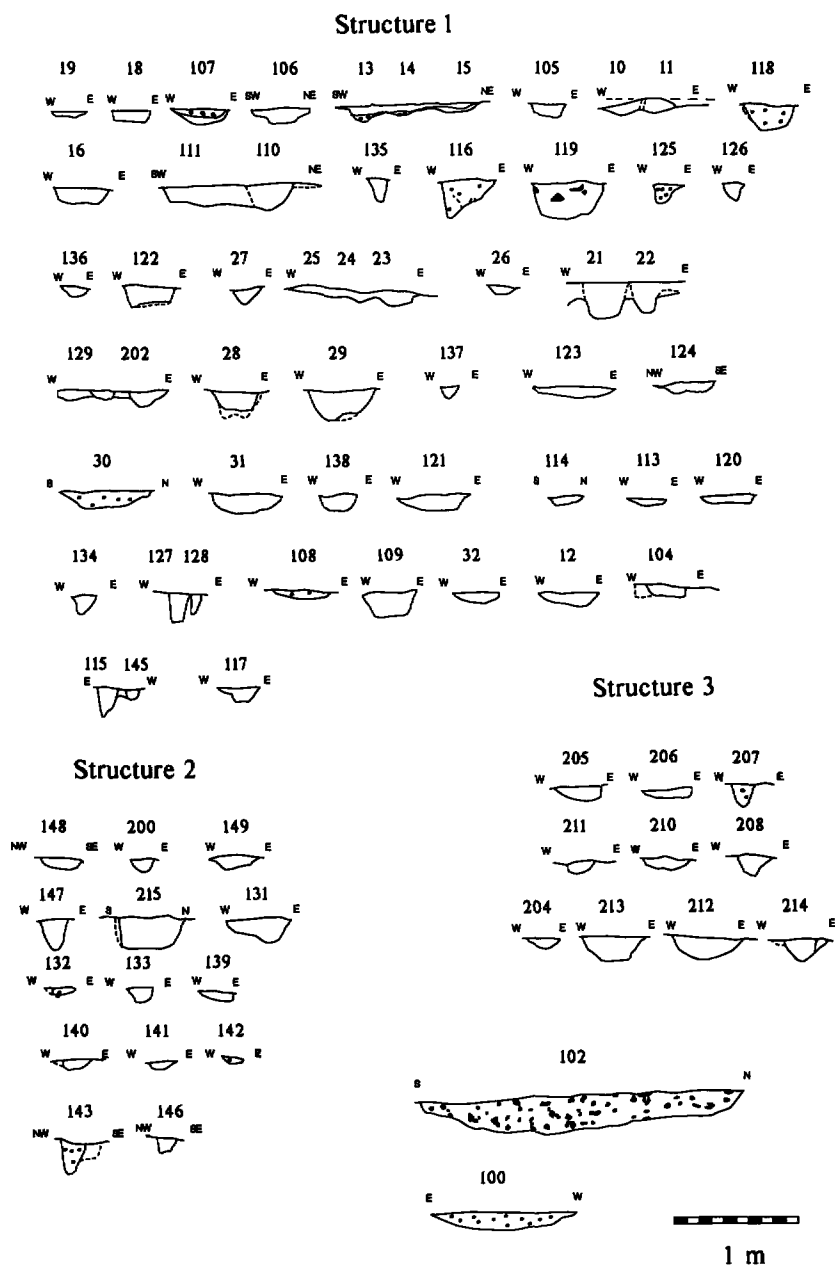


Fig 5. Sections of postholes forming structures 1-3, and pits F100 and F102.

of 0.56 m is one of the largest, with others being broader but shallower (eg. F123). No post-pipes could be recognised in any of the post holes. Some of the post holes are extremely shallow which may suggest that they have been selectively truncated, for example by medieval ridge and furrow. However, extremely shallow depths have been reported on other sites (Rahtz 1976, 81) and their shallowness could also reflect the construction technique. The Butzer experimental farm has shown that once a post-built structure is partially upstanding using earth-fast posts, other posts do not require this treatment as the weight of the building effectively holds it in place. (Reynolds 1979, 100 and pers. comm.). There is very limited evidence for replacement of posts (F10 replaced by F11?) or external supports (F13/14/15).

The lack of corner posts is a recurrent observation on several sites such as Bishopstone, Sussex or West Stow, Suffolk and it has been suggested that this indicates the presence of gable ends (Bell 1977; West 1987). The internal line of posts, if they are a part of the main structure, is unusual but a similar configuration has been recorded at Chalton, Hampshire (Welch 1992, fig. 3).

Dating of the structure is very tentative with few finds recovered. The only two pottery sherds recovered from F117 and F137 were, in fact, prehistoric. However, a large Roman tegula fragment was recovered from F119 and iron slag was recovered from several features integral with the main rectangular structure (F16, F18, F106, F121).

The rectangular pattern of structure 1 is confused on the south-eastern side by the presence of additional post holes. Some of these may be additional supports (F125, F126, F122) for structure 1, or they may represent a contemporary porch, out-building, or an earlier or later building. Similar patterns were observed at West Stow (West 1987) whereas at Bishopstone more regular settings of eight posts were compared with granaries on sites on the Continent (Bell 1977; Zimmerman 1974).

Structure 1, with dimensions of 11 m × 5.5 m, is somewhat larger than many other examples of Early/Middle Saxon buildings but is not of the same order of magnitude as large (high status?) structures such as Cowdery's Down B/C15 (19 m × 9 m) (Millet & James 1983).

### *Structure 2*

This comprised a small number of features. The postholes were of variable size and spacing but were otherwise similar to those forming structure 1. No post holes retained post pipes. Two lines of posts (four in each) lie approximately at right angles to form the south and east side (F132, F133, F139, F140 and F131, F215, F147, F149), with the west side represented by only two posts (F141, F146) and just one (F200) for the northern side. If this interpretation is correct then it would produce a rectangular structure, 4.6 m long × 2.9 m wide aligned north-south. This would be of similar dimensions to several smaller structures found on other sites such as Bishopstone XXXIII – 5 m × 3 m (Bell 1977). There are three outlying features (F142, F143 and 148) nearby. Possible entrances for the structure could lie at the north-west corner, where the shape of the structure is conjectured, or at the south-east corner, where there is a wide gap between F131 and 132. No hearths were found.

The only dating evidence for the structure is provided by a fragment of prehistoric pottery from F132, a fragment of tile from F215 and a lump of iron ore from F131.

### *Structure 3*

This is the least convincing structure present on the site. A line of three posts (F213, F212, F214) form the southern side with two, possibly three post holes (F205, F206 and F207?) forming the north side. The west and east sides are only represented by single posts each (F204 and F211). Features F210 and F208 are outliers. If this interpretation is valid, the structure has the dimensions of 4.3 m × 3.9 m. A date for the structure is provided by a small fragment of Roman pottery from F213. Nearby feature F210 produced a fragment of prehistoric pottery.

## THE FINDS

### *The Pottery by Jane Timby*

#### *Introduction*

The excavation produced a small assemblage of approximately 150 sherds of prehistoric pottery accompanied by a small quantity of fired clay (Table 1). In addition two pieces of Roman tile, a



Table 1 Catalogue of pottery and fired clay

*Prehistoric*

F16 (73)	1 fragment of fired clay.
F30 (68)	1 bodysherd, fabric P1b.
F102 (152)	1 fragment of fired clay, possibly from a mould. 3=1 rim from a straight-sided vessel with moderately thin walls, fabric P2. (Fig. 6; 8). 8 bodysherds, one larger sherd showing vertical smoothing, fabric P1a. 3 bodysherds, fabric P1b.
F102 (152), 91.5E 82.1N	2=1 flat basesherd with flint gritting on the underside, fabric P1a. (Fig. 6; 1).
F102 (152), 91.5E 82.2N	44 plain bodysherds and 1 basesherd, fabric P1b. 1 rim plain straight-sided vessel, fabric P1b. (Fig. 6; 2) 1 bodysherd from a thick-walled urn decorated with an applied vertically notched cordon, fabric P1b. (Fig. 6; 3)
F102 (152), 91.5E 82.4N	7 bodysherds very friable, fabric P1a.
F102 (152), 91.5E 83.5N	11 bodysherds, fabric P1a. 27 bodysherds and 1 basesherd, fabric P1b. 1 bodysherd from a thick-walled urn with an applied cordon, fabric P1b. (Fig. 6; 6). 1 bodysherd with possible impressed decoration. Surface fairly abraded, fabric P1b. (Fig. 6; 4). Rim and bodysherd possibly from the same vessel. Thin-walled vessel with a fine burnished surface and decorated with lightly burnished diagonal lines, fabric P4. (Fig. 6; 5).
F102 (152), 91.5E 84.0N	6 bodysherds, fabric P1b.
F102 (152), 91.5E 84.5N	3=1 sherd, 2=1 sherd, 2=1 bodysherd, 1 basesherd and a few crumbs, fabric P1b.
F102 (152), 91.5E 84.6N	6 plain bodysherds fabric P1b, 1 bodysherd with a slight carination, fabric P1b. (Fig. 6; 7). 1 bodysherd or abraded rim from a straight-sided vessel, fabric P1b.
F104 (154)	2 fragments of fired clay.
F107 (157)	1 fragment of fired clay.
F108 (158)	1 fragment of fired clay.
F109 (159)	5 fragments of fired clay.

F110 (160)	3 fragments of fired clay.
F114 (163)	2 fragments of fired clay.
F116 (165)	5 fragments of fired clay.
F117 (166)	1 bodysherd, fairly worn, possibly Beaker, fabric P5.
F120 (169)	1 fragment of fired clay.
F132 (193)	1 crumb, fabric P1b.
F137 (198)	2=1 small bodysherd with impressed linear lines, possibly from a Beaker. Orange-red exterior, black core and interior, fabric P5. (Fig. 6; 9).
F138 (199)	1 fragment of fired clay.
F206 (254)	1 fragment of fired clay.
F210 (259)	1 fragment pottery, fabric P1b.
F215 (265)	2 crumbs, fabric P1b.
	1 small fragment sparse flint tempered ware with rounded quartz grains; 1 fragment of tile.
60.0E 52.0N	1 bodysherd, fabric P1b.
61.0E 72.0N	1 fragment of fired clay.
70.0E 53.5N	1 bodysherd, coarse fabric P2.
76.5E 81.0N	1 fragment of fired clay.
77.0E 81.0N	1 bodysherd with traces of lightly impressed decoration. Possibly Beaker, fabric P5. (Fig. 6; 10).
79.0E 75.0N	1 bodysherd, fabric P3.
80.0E 70.5N	1 fragment of fired clay.
80.0E 74.0N	1 bodysherd, fabric P3.
81.0E 78.5N	1 fragment of fired clay or abraded pot, grey soapy fabric containing grog and sparse flint.
86.0E 74.5N	1 fragment of fired clay.
86.0E 77.0N	1 fragment of fired clay.
86.0E 77.5N	1 fragment of fired clay.

*Evaluation trench 23 (by Steve Ford)*

- F3 Ceramic slab, sub-trapezoidal 208 × 175 × 24 mm thick. Fragmentary but 3/4 complete. Fabric 1b but flint grits up to 9 mm protruding on one side only.
- Ceramic slab/wall sherd from large vessel, rectangular 85 × 80 × 10 mm thick. Fragmentary but 3/4 complete. Fabric 1b but grits up to 6 mm protruding on one side only.

- 6 base sherds from at least three vessels, fabric 1b but grits up to 6 mm; two sherds with crushed flint on one surface only.
- 5 body sherds from at least three vessels, one fabric 1b, four fabric 1b but with grits up to 6 mm.
- 2 body sherds, fabric 1b but with grits up to 6 mm, slipped.
- c. 50 fragments, fabric 1b but with grits up to 6 mm.

#### *Roman*

- F100 (150) Fragment of abraded tile, probably a tegula with a sanded base. ?Roman.
- F119 (168) 1 large fragment of a tegula. Roman.
- F213 (263) 2=1 small sherd of micaceous grey sandy ware. ?Roman.

#### *Saxon*

- F100 (150) 1 bodysherd, black organic tempered ware.

possible Roman potsherd, and a single Early Saxon sherd were recovered. The prehistoric material was in relatively good condition with several large sherds, despite the very friable character of many fabrics present. The sherds were examined macroscopically and divided into five fabrics based on the main tempering agents present. A brief catalogue is provided below.

#### *Prehistoric*

##### *Fabric P1*

A reddish-brown ware generally with a dark grey to black core and interior surface. The matrix contains fragments of white, angular, calcined flint, mainly 1mm or less in size but occasionally larger. The amount of flint present varied slightly and the sherds correspondingly split into P1a, for the less densely tempered, and P1b where slightly coarser flint fragments occurred in a moderate to common frequency. The sherds showed a hackley fracture and were very friable in nature. The fabric accounted for 92% of the recorded sherds by count and included most of the featured sherds. Of particular note are basesherds from a slightly globular-bodied urn (Fig. 6; 1), two wall sherds with applied cordons from cordoned, probably straight-sided urns (Fig. 6; 3,6), a bodysherd with a slight carination (Fig. 6; 7), a plain rim from a straight-sided vessel (Fig. 6; 2) and a bodysherd with traces of impressed or stabbed decoration (Fig. 6; 4).

##### *Fabric P2*

A dark blackish-brown ware in a finely micaceous clay. The matrix contains a sparse scatter of angular flint up to 1-2 mm across, and sparse voids from decayed organic matter. Featured sherds include a rim from a plain straight-sided vessel (Fig. 6; 8).

##### *Fabric P3*

A matt reddish-orange ware with a grey core and interior surface. The fabric has a fine sandy texture and contains a very sparse scatter of fine mica, rounded quartz grains and angular flint. There were no featured sherds in this fabric.

##### *Fabric P4*

Dark blackish-brown moderately compact fabric with smooth burnished surfaces. The matrix contains a common frequency of fine white calcined flint temper, 1 mm and less in size. Only two sherds in this fabric were recovered, probably from the same vessel. Both were decorated with lightly impressed burnished line decoration.

##### *Fabric P5*

A fine textured ware with a smooth, slightly soapy feel. Orange exterior surfaces and outer core with a black inner core and interior. The matrix contains fine quartz sand and fine grog fragments. Sherds in this ware were small in size but at least two showed traces of impressed, or incised decoration (Fig. 6; 9,10).

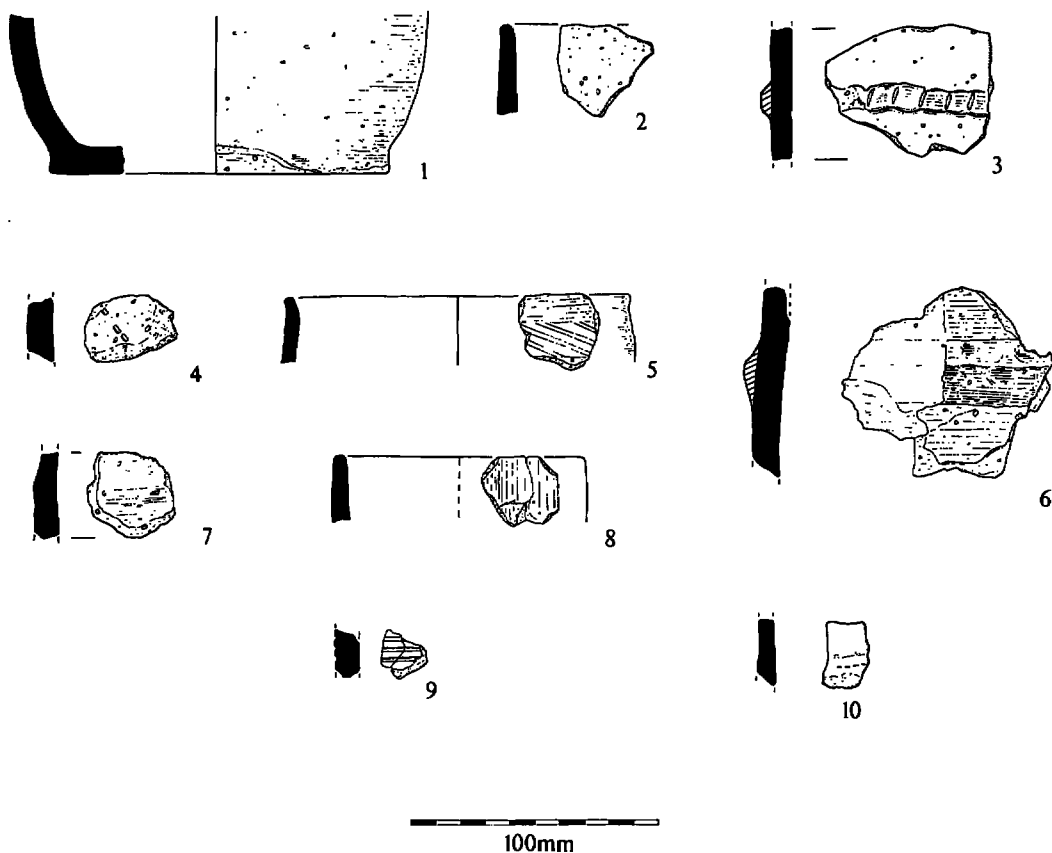


Fig 6. Pottery: 1-8 Middle Bronze Age from F102 (152); 9, Beaker? F137 (198); 10, Beaker? 77E/81N.

#### *Fired clay*

Several small fragments of poorly fired sandy clay were recovered. Most pieces were fairly abraded and showed no form. One exception was a small fragment from F102 (152) which could conceivably be part of a metal-working mould.

#### *Dating*

The pottery from Bentley Green would fit into the Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition of the Middle Bronze Age. Vessels present typical of this period include the cordon decorated sherds, probably from bucket urns, (Fig. 6; 3,6), the base sherd (Fig. 6; 1) probably from a globular urn and the plain rims perhaps from thinner-walled barrel urns (Fig. 6; 2,8). Most of this material appears to derive from a single main context F102 (152). Also pre-

sent from the same deposit is the finer decorated bowl (Fig. 6; 5), which could perhaps traditionally be seen as a later Bronze Age type. However, comparable assemblages containing straight-sided cordoned urns accompanied by finer decorated ware, dated to the Middle Bronze Age period, can be found from Down Farm Enclosure, and Handley Barrow 24, both in Cranbourne Chase (Barrett 1991). Radiocarbon dates for the former site suggest a date in the 9th century BC.

Also present in the assemblage but not directly associated with the above material are the two sherds in fabric P5, which may be surviving fragments of earlier Bronze Age Beaker material. The fragments are however, extremely small and it is not impossible that they are contemporary with the main bulk of the assemblage.

*Other ceramic finds*

Also present in the ceramic assemblage was a large fragment of Roman tile (tegula) from F119. A small abraded fragment, probably also from a Roman tile came from F100. Two very small joining fragments of a micaceous grey sandy ware from F213 may also tentatively be assigned a Roman date.

Feature F100 also produced a single, relatively well-preserved sherd from a Saxon organic tempered, globular cooking pot. This had a black, finely micaceous, smooth fabric heavily tempered with coarse organic matter.

*Struck Flint* by Tess Durden

Fifty-seven pieces of struck flint were recovered from the excavated area, comprising six flakes including a core rejuvenation flake, a core and a scraper from the Middle Bronze Age pit (F102), and thirty-nine flakes, two blades, two cores, four spalls, one scraper and six retouched pieces from elsewhere on the site. Of these, nine flakes, a blade, two spalls and four retouched flakes were residual finds in features of a later date. Few pieces are chronologically distinctive apart from the two blades which, along with the tranchet axe found from a nearby evaluation trench, probably belong to the Mesolithic period. The remaining material could easily be contemporary with the Middle Bronze Age activity on the site.

*Carbonised Plant Remains* by John Letts

Thirty seven flotation samples were submitted for analysis (Table 2). Most of the samples contained comminuted charcoal, but only six contained poorly-preserved cereal fragments and eight contained weed seeds (primarily of wild legumes). The seed-like items from F213 are fungal fruiting bodies (sclerotia) of little archaeological significance. The sample from F133 contained what is probably a grain of rye (*Secale cereale*), a staple of the Saxon diet. The single Middle Bronze Age pit sample (F102) contained no identifiable remains. Pit F100 contained charcoal from mature tree species including Oak (*Quercus* sp.).

The impoverished information recovered is only useful in demonstrating the limited potential

of charred plant remains to be expected from Saxon structural features.

*Iron Slag* by Chris Salter

The material presented consisted of seven slag fragments that could be definitely associated with iron smelting, and one fragment of a different type of slag which is more likely to have been the result of iron working (smithing). There was also present some fragments of 'box' type ironstone of a high quality, probably from Tertiary, Lower Greensand, or Wealden strata, and some coarse sandstone with a high iron content probably from the same geological formation, which had been roasted. Also, there was a sample of clay fired under reducing conditions typical of the type of material used to build an iron-smelting furnace. Table 3 provides a fuller description of the material.

The condition of the slag would indicate that it has not been transported any distance by soil movements, i.e. the slag distribution is unlikely to be due to material having been accidentally incorporated in manure which was subsequently spread onto arable fields. The distribution of material is also not typical of a slag dump. Thus it is likely that this is a random slag patch relatively close to an iron smelting site (probably within a few hundred metres). The form of the slag is typical of Late Iron Age and Roman material, but unfortunately, as there was not sufficient found to define the nature of the tapping process, there is the possibility of a later date of origin.

*Bone* by Steve Ford

Three fragments of bone from F107, F28, and F218, including sheep teeth, were the only faunal remains recovered. Presumably this lack of finds is a combination of an acidic subsoil and the paucity of artefacts in general on Saxon sites.

## DISCUSSION

The excavation has revealed finds and deposits of various dates. Beaker pottery of Early Bronze Age date, struck flints, pottery and a pit containing

Table 2 Details of deposits sampled for charred plant remains

<i>Feature/context</i>	<i>Volume (L)</i>	<i>Charcoal</i>	<i>Other</i>
F2 (65)	3	x	—
F10 (50)	4	—	—
F13 (52)	1.5	—	—
F15 (54)	0.7	—	—
F16 (73)	15	x	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (1).
F19 (64)	3	—	—
F21 (55)	7	—	Modern weed seeds.
F22 (56)	3	—	Modern weed seeds.
F28 (69)	14	—	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (1), cereal indeterminate (1).
F31 (67)	10	x	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (1).
F100 (150)	10	xxx	—
F102 (152)	6	—	—
F107 (157)	8	x	Cereal indeterminate (1).
F109 (159)	10	x	Small oat grain ( <i>Avena</i> sp.) (1).
F110 (160)	12	x	—
F111 (161)	16	x	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (1), <i>Avena</i> sp. (1).
F116 (165)	4	x	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (4).
F118 (167)	5	x	—
F119 (168)	16	x	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (2).
F123 (172)	6	—	—
F125 (174)	4	x	<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp. (2), cereal indeterminate (1).
F131 (178)	7	—	—
F133 (179)	5	x	Cereal indeterminate (1), cf. rye grain.
F135 (196)	4	—	<i>Bromus/Avena</i> sp. (1).
F143 (184)	8	x	—
F146 (186)	1	x	—
F147 (187)	8	x	—
F148 (188)	1	—	—
F149 (189)	2	x	—
F205 (253)	6	x	—
F210 (259)	4	x	—
F211 (260)	4	x	—
F212 (261)	8	x	—
F213 (263)	8	x	Cereal indeterminate (2), modern seeds, fungi.
F215 (265)	12	x	Modern weed seeds.
F218 (269)	16	x	—

*Table 3* Details of Iron slag, ore and clay lining/mould

- 1) F16 (73) 4.1 gm Tap slag – thin run  
A single thin slag flow. Although material of this morphology can form during iron-working or smelting, in this case it would seem to be the product of smelting. Minimal abrasion or corrosion.
- 2) F16 (73) 8.0 gm Tap slag – thin run  
A single thin slag flow. Although material of this morphology can form during iron-working or smelting, in this case it would seem to be the product of smelting. Minimal abrasion or corrosion.
- 3) F13 (52) 95.4 gm Tap slag – moderate flow (15–30 mm thick)  
Two fragments of tap-slag-like flows. The slag was ‘tapped’ over an irregular surface of fuel and small chert particles (rather similar to those in the clay of sample 11). The lower surface has retained a very glassy appearance whereas the upper surface has the typical appearance of ‘Roman’ iron smelting tap-slugs, and carries small particles of partially reduced ore.
- 4) F121 (170) 7.4 gm Dense slag-inter-fuel slag flow
- 5) F131 (178) 6.8 gm Natural iron ore  
Apparently high quality ‘box-ironstone’. Possibly Tertiary or naturally enriched Greensand.
- 6) F106 (156) 6.6 gm Tap slag – thin run  
As for 1) and 2) above.
- 7) F106 (156) 5.9 gm Dense slag – fragment unclassified  
A thin shell of slag probably originally resting on part of the furnace lining or tapping floor as there is trapped sandy soil and small chert particles.
- 8) F18 (63) 5.5 gm Natural rock/ore  
A fragment of medium to coarse sandstone with a moderate iron content which has been heated. Probably a fragment of roasted ore.
- 9) F29 (70) 10.3 gm Dense slag – unclassified  
A non-diagnostic fragment of abraded and weathered iron slag.
- 10) F16 (73) 39.9 gm Metal – iron alloy  
Other than its higher than expected density, this sample looked rather similar to sample 8. However, the high density and the fact that it is magnetic indicates that it is probably an irregular fragment of metallic iron (corroded?). As there is a lot of adhering charcoal, and, possibly, hammerscale indicates that this sample was a fragment of waste lost during smelting or smithing.
- 11) F126 (175) 8.3 gm Fired clay – high reducing fired  
Four fragments of clay, possibly tempered with angular crushed chert, which had been fired under reducing conditions. Material of this type is often used to form part of the structure of metal-working furnaces, and occasionally as moulds for casting metal-alloys.

Deverel-Rimbury pottery attest to Middle Bronze Age activity, but apart from the pit no other subsoil features could be confidently assigned to these times. In addition to these finds, the evaluation located other prehistoric struck flints, a tranchet axe of Mesolithic date (Fig. 2) and a probable symbolic burial deposit consisting of pottery and a ceramic slab of Middle Bronze Age date.

It is possible that the Middle Bronze Age pit (F102) represents an occupation site located within the excavated area, for which no other traces have

survived or can be distinguished from deposits of a later date. A more likely scenario is that the feature is an outlying example of an occupation deposit whose focus is located nearby, but beyond the excavation area. Similar outlying features are a common occurrence on Middle and Late Bronze Age sites such as at Grange Road, Gosport (Hall & Ford 1995).

Finds of Roman date are the next most well represented period on the site, but are few in number, small and abraded. It is thought that these are residual finds in deposits of Saxon date.

Deposits of Roman date in southern England are usually prodigious in their numbers of finds and are frequently represented by ditches and deep pits in addition to post-built structures.

The nature of the site, mainly comprising post-built rectangular structures paucity of artefacts, and limited chronological evidence for a Roman or later date for several features, would suggest that it is most likely that the majority of features present, especially structures 1-3 and pit F100, are of Saxon date. It must be highlighted that the only find of Saxon date was a sherd of organic tempered pottery from pit F100. Radiocarbon dating was considered as an option to date these structures, but unfortunately virtually no bone was recovered, and the only feature producing charcoal in quantity was F100, which contained the Saxon sherd. If the latter feature was to be dated by radiocarbon, as it is not directly associated with the structural deposits, it would move the argument no further forward.

It seems likely that a significant proportion of the site has been examined. The area to the south beyond the site boundary has not been investigated but the areas to the north, east and west, subject to evaluation and watching brief, revealed just a few outlying features. If the excavated area includes the majority of the site then it seems likely that it represents an unenclosed settlement consisting of at least three structures, a number of other post holes and a pit. However, in contrast to other sites in the region (see below), a common category of Saxon feature – the sunken floor structure (*grubenhäus*) – is absent from the site. Rahtz (1976, 73) has suggested that such structures are less common on sites of Mid- and Late Saxon date but as a chronological indicator here, this is extremely tentative.

The Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record contains many entries of Early/ Middle Saxon date but relatively few refer to substantial excavations of settlement sites with which to provide a corpus of comparative detail. For the locality of the Bentley Green Farm few sites or finds are known (Cooper in Evison 1988, fig. 10). The situation is little better in neighbouring Surrey but a sunken floored structure of 6th Century date was recorded at Farnham (Poulson 1987, fig. 8.1; Oakley *et al.* 1939).

Many of the best known sites in the area are high chalk downland sites, such as Old Down Farm, Chalton and Cowdrey's Down, Hampshire and North Marden and Bishopstone, Sussex (Davies 1979; Welch 1992; Millett & James 1983; Down & Welch 1991; Bell 1977). It has been suggested that for Southern England early settlement favoured the light upland soils as well as the gravel soils of major rivers such as the Thames. Only from Middle Saxon times were heavier soils used and settlement shifts to the valleys (Cunliffe 1972; Arnold & Wardle 1981). Although the clay loam at Bentley Green Farm is hardly light, the site's location broadly fits in with this generalised pattern. The extent to which this pattern reflects economic or social realignments, especially on a local basis will require information from more sites than hitherto available. The poor botanical, faunal and artefactual evidence from Bentley Green Farm does not allow for further useful discussion of these interesting topics for our site even at a general level.

The site is best interpreted as a small farmstead, and judging by the relatively low density of subsoil features and lack of replacement structures, was of short duration. The form of the settlement adds more variation to the limited number of extensively excavated Hampshire Saxon sites. At Old Down Farm, the Saxon structures identified were all sunken floored buildings (Davies 1979). At Abbots Worthy, structural evidence again comprised sunken floored buildings but with the addition of a sub-rectangular enclosure and rare pits (Fasham & Whinney 1991). At Chalton, some of the building characteristics are comparable with Bentley but the size/duration of the site is much greater (Welch 1992). Cowdrey's Down is also of greater size and duration, and its large, elaborate halls appear to mark a site of higher status than usual (Millett & James 1983). The paucity of artefacts, though, is a recurrent feature.

Finally, one theme of interest to earlier researchers was the location of Early Saxon burials on or close to parish boundaries suggesting an early origin for the latter (Bonney 1976). For what it is worth, the site here lies within 200 m of the parish margins, but here the boundary follows the river and the site location with respect to this is coincidental.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the assistance provided by Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd who financed the project and provided earthmoving equipment, members of the Farnham and District Metal Detecting Club, Rosemary

Braithwaite and Susan Smith of Hampshire County Archaeology section, and Rachel Bellamy, John Pressly, Andy Smith, Leigh Torrance and Steve Weaver who assisted in various stages during the fieldwork and preparation of this report.

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