

IRON AGE AND ROMAN ACTIVITY AT RECTORY ROAD, OAKLEY, HAMPSHIRE

By ANDREW NORTON and ALAN MARSHALL

with contributions by LISA BROWN, HUGO LAMDIN-WHYMARK, CYNTHIA POOLE, RACHEL SCALES,
RUTH SHAFFREY, WENDY SMITH and LENA STRID

ABSTRACT

An excavation in 2007 by Oxford Archaeology at 5a Rectory Road, Oakley, Hampshire, revealed a finds-rich middle Iron Age pit, a late Iron Age hollow, and six parallel early Roman ditches, which possibly demarcated the edge of a settlement to the south.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2007 Oxford Archaeology carried out an excavation at 5a Rectory Road, Oakley, near Basingstoke, Hampshire (NGR SU 57305015) (Fig. 1), on behalf of Scott Wilson Ltd, in advance of housing development. This followed an earlier evaluation on the site, which had revealed a middle Iron Age pit, two postholes and post-medieval remains (AOC Archaeology 2007). The excavation area measured 0.05 ha and lies at *c* 120 m OD. The underlying geology is Upper Chalk overlain by clay with flints. This report presents a summary of the results; more details can be found in the excavation archive.

Archaeological background

The archaeological background of the site has been the subject of a separate desk-based study (Scott Wilson 2006). Little archaeological work has been carried out in the immediate area, although a broken Mesolithic blade and 46 sherds of Roman pottery were recovered during a watching brief at the Old Farmhouse on Hill Road, *c* 100 m south-east of the site. A settlement is first referred to at East Oakley in 1236 as 'Eatacle', meaning east of Oak Wood. This was

a nucleated settlement located around a village green and pond at the junction of three roads (Oakley Lane, Hill Road and Rectory Road). The earliest map of the site available is the tithe map for Church Oakley Parish, dated to *c* 1841. This shows that the excavation area lay within an arable field called 'Crimble Piece', with cottages and a shop lying just to the south.

Excavation methodology

The topsoil/hardcore overburden and subsoil were removed under archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Excavation ceased at the top of the natural clay. The excavation area was cleaned by hand and all revealed features were investigated. A watching brief was also carried out on three soakaway trenches within the south-western part of the site (Fig. 2).

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Although a small quantity of residual flintwork indicates activity on the site during the middle to late Bronze Age (see below), the excavated features dated to the middle Iron Age, late Iron Age and early Roman period (Fig. 2).

Phase 1: middle Iron Age (250–100 BC)

A circular pit (5) was revealed in the southern part of the site (Figs 2 and 3), measuring 1.75 m in diameter and 0.4 m deep. It had vertical sides and a flat base that was overlain by a 0.01 m thick layer of charcoal (16). The pit had been backfilled with a brown silt clay (6) that contained 91 sherds

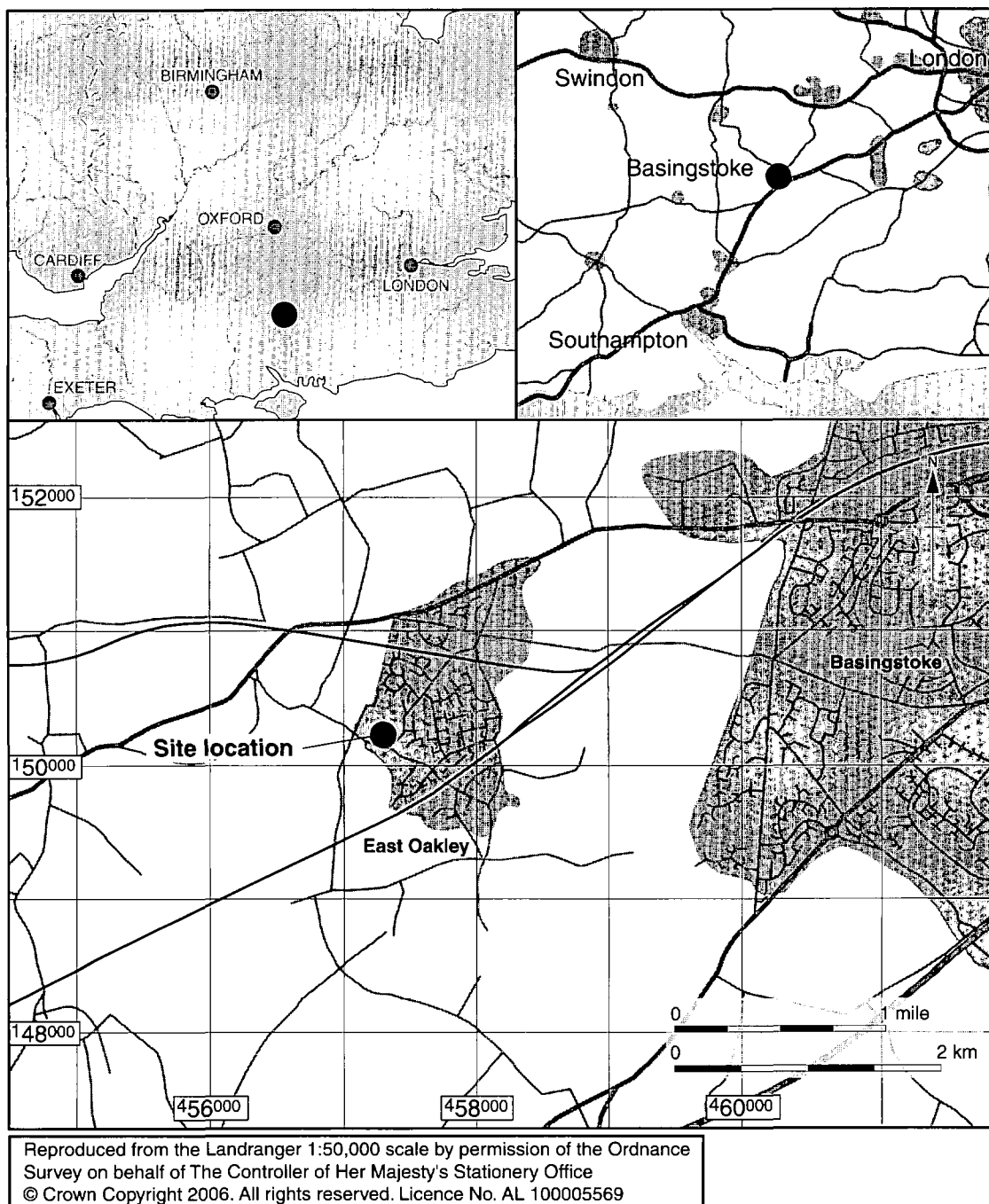


Fig. 1 Site location

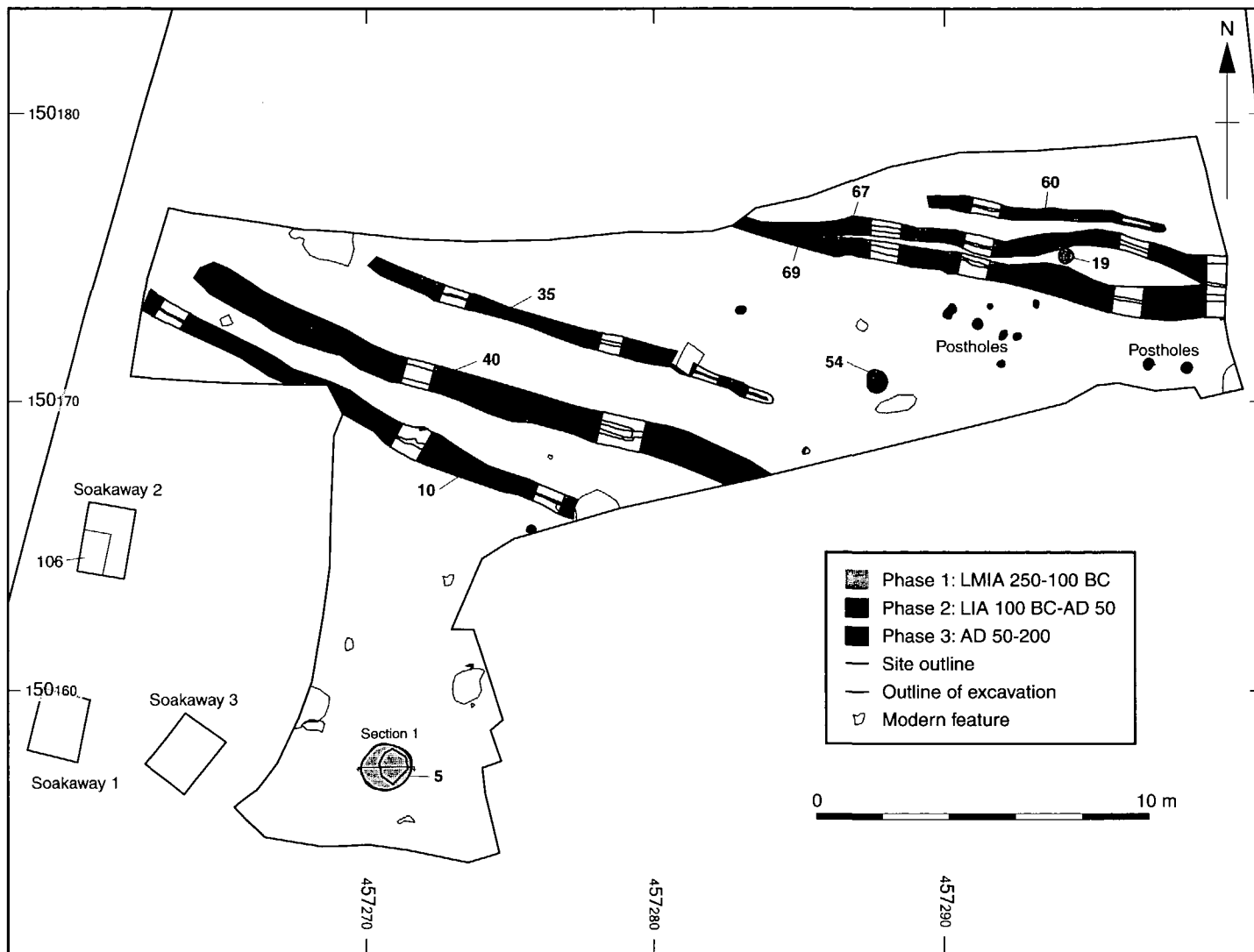


Fig. 2 Site plan

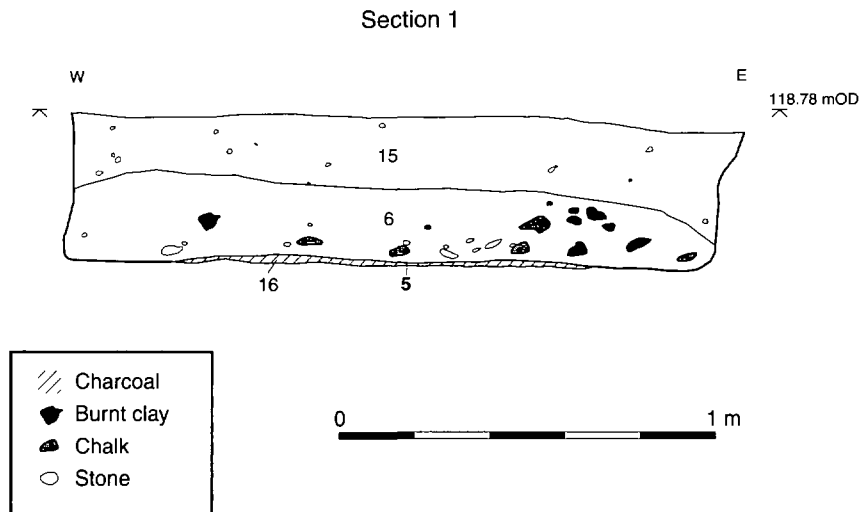


Fig. 3 Section of middle Iron Age pit 5

of later middle Iron Age pottery and fragments of at least 11 fired clay loomweights or oven bricks. The clay bricks and the pottery, which was very unabraded, may have been deliberately placed in the pit. Fill 6 was overlain by a dump of orange clay silt (15) that contained no finds. It is likely that this was also a deliberate deposit: a sterile soil sealing the 'offerings' below.

Phase 2: late Iron Age (100 BC–AD 50)

A hollow (19) in the north of the site was filled with dark silty clay, similar in character to the overlying soil horizon (see below). It contained 22 sherds of late Iron Age pottery. The feature may have been the base of a shallow pit, or possibly a natural depression filled by the overlying subsoil.

Phase 3: early Roman (AD 50–200)

In the northern part of the site a WNW–ESE aligned ditch (69) was revealed, measuring 1 m wide and up to 0.2 m deep (Figs 2 and 3). The lower fill (56) was a grey-brown silty clay that contained 32 sherds of late Iron Age and early Roman pottery, including five sherds of 2nd-century Central Gaulish samian ware. It is possible that the samian in fact derives from the base of the overlying fill

(59), which also contained 2nd-century pottery. Ditch 69 was cut by a parallel ditch (67) of similar dimensions and fill, which contained 195 sherds of late Iron Age and early Roman pottery and a rotary quern fragment.

Parallel to ditches 69 and 67 were four ditches measuring between 0.5 m and 1.0 m in width, and up to 0.3 m deep (10, 35, 40 and 60). They were filled with grey-brown silty clays that contained early Roman pottery. Ditches 35 and 60 terminated in the eastern part of the site, but evidence for their western extents had been lost to ploughing. The western end of ditch 40 also appeared to have been truncated by later ploughing.

An oval pit (54) was located to the east of ditch 35, measuring *c* 0.5 m in diameter and 0.35 m deep. It was filled by a grey-brown silty clay that contained 21 sherds of early Roman pottery.

Twelve postholes, forming a roughly WNW–ESE aligned row, were observed to the north-east of the pit. The postholes measured approximately 0.4 m wide and 0.3 m deep, and were filled with brown silty clays. No finds were recovered during the excavation, although a sherd of pottery tentatively dated as early Iron Age was recovered from a posthole excavated during the evaluation (AOC Archaeology 2007). The proximity of the postholes to the early Roman ditches and pit suggests that they

Table 1 Pottery fabric description and quantification

<i>Fabric group</i>	<i>Fabric description</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>
F1	Sandy clay with coarse, ill-assorted flint 0.5–4 mm (Danebury B4)	328	6636
F2	Fine smooth clay with well-sorted calcined flint <2 mm (Danebury B1)	5	55
G1	Coarse grog-tempered ware, grey grog	16	413
G2	Fine sandy ware with sparse brown grog and rare flint <2 mm	35	540
G3	Fine, smooth, soapy grog-tempered ware, black surfaces	3	27
QU1	Wiltshire glauconitic sandy ware (Danebury D15)	3	24
QU2	Other handmade glauconitic sandy ware	5	31
B11 (DOR BB1)	Dorset black-burnished ware	10	166
F51 (OXFRS)	Oxfordshire red-slipped ware	1	12
R90 reduced coarse	Very coarse grade quartz sand	1	48
R20 sandy grey ware	Romano-British greywares	255	3493
Q20 sandy oxidised	Medium to coarse grade sandy orange ware	20	267
O20 sandy oxidised	Finely sanded, smooth orange ware	23	107
W20 sandy white	Fine to medium sandy white ware	3	9
Misc. slipped ware	Roughcast (clay pellets), glossy black slip	1	2
S30 Central Gaulish	Samian ware	23	24

are probably contemporary, and formed a fence line associated with one of the ditches.

This was overlain by a second soil horizon that contained two sherds of Roman pottery, one of which was late Roman in date.

Later agricultural activity

The ditches were overlain by a dark silty clay soil horizon (48), from which 23 sherds of early Roman pottery were recovered. The soil was *c* 0.4 m thick and was probably a cultivation soil; the pottery may have been residual. The soil was very similar to that filling hollow 19 (see above).

THE FINDS

Flint by Hugo Lamdin-Whymark

A total of 35 struck flints and 165 pieces (1.6 kg) of burnt unworked flint was recovered from the exca-

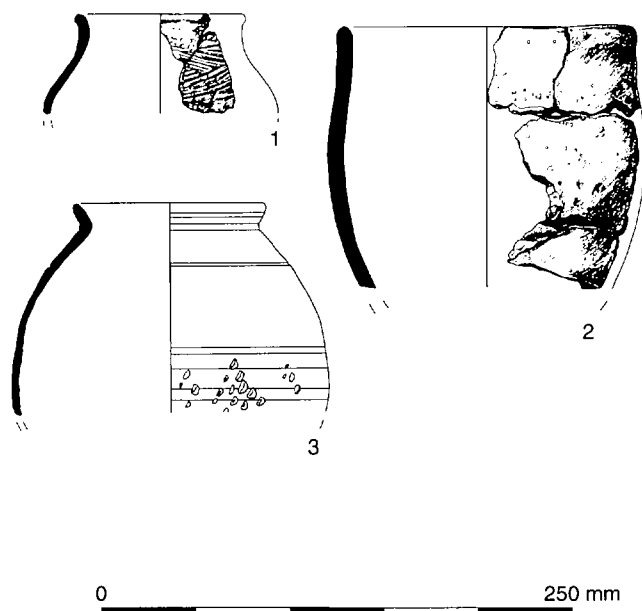


Fig. 4 Pottery

ventions. The worked assemblage consists of twenty flakes, eleven chips from sieved residues, three pieces of irregular waste and one edge-retouched flake. The flakes are relatively thick, of squat proportions, and appear to have been struck using a hard hammer percussor, such as a stone, without platform-edge preparation. The edge-retouched flake has a small area of abrupt retouch along the proximal right hand edge on the ventral surface. The flake morphology and reduction techniques reflect an unspecialised flake industry typical of the middle to late Bronze Age (Pitts & Jacobi 1979; Ford 1987). The majority of the flint assemblage exhibited edge-damage, suggesting it was exposed for a considerable period before deposition, or has been subsequently reworked from its original place of deposition.

Pottery by Lisa Brown

A total of 730 sherds (11,535 g) of pottery was recovered (Table 1). Most of the pottery is of late Iron Age/early Roman (*c* 100 BC-AD 50) and early Roman date (*c* AD 43-180), but the assemblage from pit 5 is likely to be somewhat earlier,

dating to a late phase of the middle Iron Age (*c* 250-100 BC). A single late Roman sherd was recovered from buried soil 3.

Fabrics

Fifteen fabric groups were identified, of which four (F1, F2, QU1 and QU2) are later pre-historic types. The two flint-tempered wares are paralleled at Danebury and other Iron Age sites in the vicinity, where they are represented on a prolific scale within the middle Iron Age pottery assemblages. Fabric QU1 has also been recovered in large quantities from Danebury but a Wiltshire source has been identified for this distinctive glauconitic ware (Brown 1991).

A number of fabrics are products of recognised Roman and Romano-British production sites, including Dorset black-burnished wares (B11), Central Gaulish samian wares (S30) and a single sherd of Oxfordshire red-slipped ware (F51). A small fragment of a roughcast vessel with glossy black slip from ditch 69 is of uncertain origin. A very coarse sandy sherd (R90) may be a south-western (Devon) product.

Iron Age forms

The middle and late Iron Age forms are common types in the Hampshire region, all represented within the Danebury and Environs assemblages (Brown 1991). The Danebury equivalent form code is presented here prefixed by DA. Flint-tempered vessels include S-profile jars (DA JD3), barrel-shaped jars (DA JC2), high-shouldered rounded jars with bead rims (DA JC3), hemispherical bowls with bead rims (DA BC3), and the rim of a very large storage jar with out-curving rim (DA JD5). Basal sherds belonging to very large jars recovered from hollow 19 and ditches 67 and 69 probably belonged to similar vessels. A large rim, a relatively uncommon form in this fabric at Danebury, is probably of late 1st century BC date. A bead rim bowl in glauconitic sandy ware QU1 was also present, the only diagnostic sherd in this fabric.

On the basis of the ceramic evidence, pit 5 appears to date to the later part of the middle Iron Age (Danebury ceramic phase 7; Brown 1991). The pit produced 91 sherds (1432 g) representing a large portion of only two vessels, an S-profile jar (Fig. 4.1) and a barrel-shaped jar (Fig. 4.2). The sherds are in a fresh condition and were clearly deliberately placed in the pit.

Roman forms

The majority of Roman forms date to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. A number of romanised versions of the late Iron Age bead rim jars and bowls were identified in grog-tempered and sandy greyware. These were associated with necked and necked cordoned jars, one with a carinated shoulder, in a range of sandy reduced wares, less commonly in grog-tempered wares. Two examples of black-burnished ware flat-rimmed bowls, one with acute angular lattice decoration, date to the 2nd century. No other forms in this fabric were present.

Four body sherds in sandy orange ware (Q20) with imitation rouletted decoration in the form of vertical striations are probably local copies of butt beakers, dating to before c AD 80. A globular jar with crude barbotine dot decoration (Fig. 4.3) was recovered in small fragments from ditch 35. A fragment weighing only 2 g appears to belong to a beaker with clay pellet roughcast decoration

and glossy black slip, probably a British imitation of a 2nd-century continental form. Twenty small, abraded fragments of Central Gaulish samian ware, including the rims of two Drag 18/31 bowls, were recovered from the fills of ditches 10 and 69. A small sandy oxidised sherd with traces of a white slip is perhaps a flagon fragment.

Catalogue of illustrated pottery

Fig. 4.1 Large S-profile jar with outcurving, slightly internally bevelled rim, perhaps a lid seating. Fabric F1, fired to uniform dark grey. Burnished. Shallow-tooled decoration consisting of a band of horizontal lines above nested chevrons and dots. Pit 5, context 6 and 3/007.

Fig. 4.2 Barrel-shaped jar with plain rim. Fabric F1, fired to uniform dark grey. Streaky burnish. Pit 5, context 6 and 3/007.

Fig. 4.3 Fine globular jar with sharply out-turned rim. Fabric O20. Faint groove at shoulder and crudely applied thin cream-coloured barbotine dots. Ditch 35, context 33/37.

Loomweights or oven bricks by Cynthia Poole

A total of 55 fragments (7254 g) of triangular, perforated, fired clay bricks were recovered from middle Iron Age pit 5. The majority of the bricks are made in a fabric equivalent to fabric J at Danebury, Hampshire, whilst one is made in a chalk-tempered fabric similar to fabric C at Danebury (Poole 1984). All contained coarse inclusions of flint/chert or chalk up to 30 mm in size. The clays are probably derived from local deposits.

A minimum of 11 bricks have been identified. In most cases the only surviving complete dimension was thickness, which ranged from 60–85 mm. Only one complete side length of c 150 mm survived and one height (corner apex to opposite side) of 144 mm. Corners were pieced by lateral perforations c 12–15 mm in diameter. The bricks made in fabric J were all of a similar size and larger than the single example in fabric C.

These objects have traditionally been interpreted as loomweights, though firm evidence for such a function has yet to be demonstrated.

At Danebury an association of triangular bricks and fired clay from ovens was noted, and it was suggested the triangular bricks may be some type of oven furniture (Poole 1995).

Quern by Ruth Shaffrey

A single rotary quern fragment of a slightly glauconitic Greensand was recovered from a 2nd-century ditch fill (ditch 67).

Animal bone by Lena Strid

A small assemblage of 61 fragments of animal bone (191 g) was recovered. Fragments identifiable to species consisted of a sheep/goat metatarsal from the middle Iron Age pit, and cattle bone and a horse tooth from early Roman contexts.

Charred plant remains by Rachel Scales and Wendy Smith

Seven bulk soil samples were collected for charred plant remains, from the middle Iron Age pit and early Roman ditches. The samples were processed using water flotation and the resulting flot was sieved to 250 µm. A portion of each flot was rapidly scanned for charred plant remains at ×15 magnification. In general, the charred plant remains were limited. The samples were all quite similar, containing small quantities of glume wheat grains, chaff and small weed seeds (eg. *Galium* spp., *Chenopodium* spp., *Chenopodium* spp./*Atriplex* spp. and *Rumex* spp.). The preservation of the cereal grain and chaff was particularly poor, but the presence of spelt (*Triticum spelta* L.) grain and glume bases was noted in three of the early Roman samples. Charcoal was present in all seven samples, but was typically very small in size (<2 mm²) and frequently poorly preserved.

DISCUSSION

The middle Iron Age pit contained a rich assemblage of finds, including 91 sherds of pottery, largely from two vessels, and fragments of at least 11 loomweights or oven bricks. The finds appeared to have been deliberately deposited

and were sealed by a sterile layer of soil. 'Special' deposits placed at pit bases during the Iron Age may have formed spiritual or religious offerings, to bless and support everyday activities, or to propitiate the gods when things went wrong; the deposits may have been laid as part of a private act or on behalf of the whole community (Lambrick & Allen 2004, 488–9).

The six ditches represent the redefinition of a boundary during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. The ditches may have defined a boundary between a settlement to the south and east, and a field system to the north. The finds-rich fills of the ditches and pits suggest that an associated settlement, possibly a farmstead, lay very close by. The settlement might have extended to the Old Farmhouse on Hill Road, c 100 m to the south-east, where Roman pottery was recovered during a watching brief (Scott Wilson 2006).

Enclosed settlements occupied from the later Iron Age through into the Roman period are common in the Basingstoke area, examples including Brighton Hill South (Coe & Newman 1992; Fasham & Keevill 1995), Danebury Road (Howell & Durden 2005) and Viabes Two (Gibson 2004). Slightly further afield, the site at Suddern Farm, Middle Wallop, is similar to Oakley in that the early Roman enclosure ditches also appeared to be fence-lined (Cunliffe & Poole 2000, 202). The cultivation soils overlying the features suggest that the site had an agricultural function in the late Roman period, following the possible abandonment of the settlement.

The site lies close to the medieval centre of East Oakley, and the lack of evidence for medieval activity is thus surprising. The site is shown to lie within a field on the tithe map of c 1841, and it is likely that this was also true in the medieval period. The lack of medieval finds within the cultivation soils indicates that the field may have been used for pasture at this time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Helen Clough of Scott Wilson Ltd, and B J Champion who commissioned and funded the project, for their co-operation throughout the work. Stephen

Appleby monitored the work on behalf of Hampshire County Council. The report was edited in draft by Paul Booth and the drawings were produced by Markus Dylewski.

Location of the archive

The finds and archive will be deposited with Hampshire County Museum Service under the accession code A2007.3.

REFERENCES

- AOC Archaeology, 2007 *5a Rectory Road, Oakley, Hampshire: An Archaeological Evaluation*, unpublished client report.
- Brown, L 1991 Iron Age pottery, in Cunliffe, B & Poole, C (eds), *Danebury: An Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire, Volume 5. The Excavations 1979–1988: The Finds*, (CBA Res Rep 73), London, 277–318.
- Coe, D & Newman, R 1992 Excavations of an early Iron Age building and Romano-British enclosure at Brighton Hill South, Hampshire, *Proc Hampshire Field Club Archaeol Soc* 48 13–23.
- Cunliffe, B & Poole, C 2000 *The Danebury Environs Programme: the Prehistory of a Wessex Landscape, Volume 2 – Part 2. Suddern Farm, Middle Wallop, Hants, 1991 and 1996*, (English Heritage and Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monogr 49), Oxford.
- Fasham, P J & Keevill, G 1995 *Brighton Hill South (Hatch Warren): an Iron Age Farmstead and Deserted Medieval Village in Hampshire*, (Wessex Archaeol Rep 7), Salisbury.
- Ford, S 1987 Chronological and functional aspects of flint assemblages, in Brown, A G & Edmonds, M R (eds), *Lithic Analysis and Later British Prehistory: Some Problems and Approaches*, (BAR Brit Ser 162), Oxford, 67–81.
- Gibson, C 2004 The Iron Age and Roman site of Viabes Two (Jays Close), Basingstoke, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* 59 1–30.
- Howell, L & Durden, T 2005 Further excavation of an Iron Age enclosure at Danebury Road, Hatch Warren, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1995, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* 60 39–63.
- Lambrick, G & Allen, T 2004 *Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire, The Development of a Prehistoric and Romano-British Community*, (Thames Valley Landscapes Monogr 21), Oxford.
- Pitts, M W & Jacobi, R M 1979 Some aspects of change in flaked stone industries of the Mesolithic and Neolithic in southern Britain, *J Archaeol Sci* 6 163–77.
- Poole, C 1984 The structural use of daub, clay and timber, in Cunliffe, B *Danebury: an Iron Age hillfort in Hampshire, Volume 1. The excavations 1969–1978: the site*, (CBA Res Rep 52), London, 110–23.
- Poole, C 1995 Loomweights versus oven bricks, in Cunliffe, B *Danebury: an Iron Age hillfort in Hampshire, Volume 6*, (CBA Res Rep 102), London, 285–6.
- Scott Wilson Ltd 2006 *5a Rectory Road, Oakley, Hampshire, Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*, unpublished client report.

Authors: Andrew Norton and Alan Marshall, Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 OES

© Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society