

LATE NEOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGE OCCUPATION AT MIDDLE WALLOP, HAMPSHIRE

By DAVID GILBERT, JOHN MOORE *and* CLARE ROBERTS
with contributions by FRANCES RAYMOND *and* ADRIAN M. CHADWICK

ABSTRACT

Excavation at Middle Wallop revealed a rectangular post-built Late Neolithic structure on a hilltop, along with a post-built roundhouse dated to the Early Bronze Age, and associated pits and other postholes. These buildings, with associated radiocarbon dating for the occupations, are of regional importance.

INTRODUCTION

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological excavation in a broadly square-shaped field 3.34 hectares in extent, on agricultural land at Middle Wallop (NGR SU 2948 3896, Fig. 1). Located within the southern part of the Wallop Defence Systems site, the work was conducted prior to the construction of a new manufacturing building. The underlying geology was the Seaford Chalk formation of Upper Chalk, and the elevation varied between approximately 74m above Ordnance Datum (OD) at the south-western side of the site to 82m OD on the eastern side.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Known archaeology recorded in the county HER in the landscape surrounding the site includes Bronze Age and Iron Age field systems, enclosures and ring ditches, and Roman buildings and features. The villages of Over Wallop, Middle Wallop and Nether Wallop probably originated in the Saxon period, and a number of farms and properties are mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086. The site was still arable land on the 1840 tithe map and apportionment. The airfield at Middle Wallop

was first constructed in 1938, but no features related to the Defence of Britain were identified on the site itself.

THE FIELD WORK

Prior to the excavation an initial evaluation phase was undertaken comprising nine trenches (Fig. 1). Only two produced archaeological features. Trench 2 was situated along the northern boundary of Area 1, and contained remnants of ridge and furrow. Trench 3 was mostly within the subsequent excavation area. All features were found underlying the thin (0.15m thick) topsoil (101), or a thin subsoil of orange-brown clayey silt with chalk and some flint nodules (102) also a maximum of 0.15m thick. All features were cut into the chalk natural (103), and the thin topsoil and hilltop location indicated that there had been considerable plough truncation in the past. The presence of a large number of periglacial ‘stripes’ and solution features may have prevented the identification of less substantial postholes.

RESULTS

Two phases of occupation were identified (Fig. 2). Structure 1 consisted of postholes *circa.* 2.5m apart arranged in double and triple rows (postholes [122], [130], [147], [150], [170], [179], [182], [193], [196] and [3A/05]) (Fig. 3). These postholes were up to 0.45m deep and 0.70m wide, with traces of postpipes and stone packing. The fill of posthole [196] produced a flint blade and burnt flint, along with sherds of Mortlake ware and charred hazelnut shell

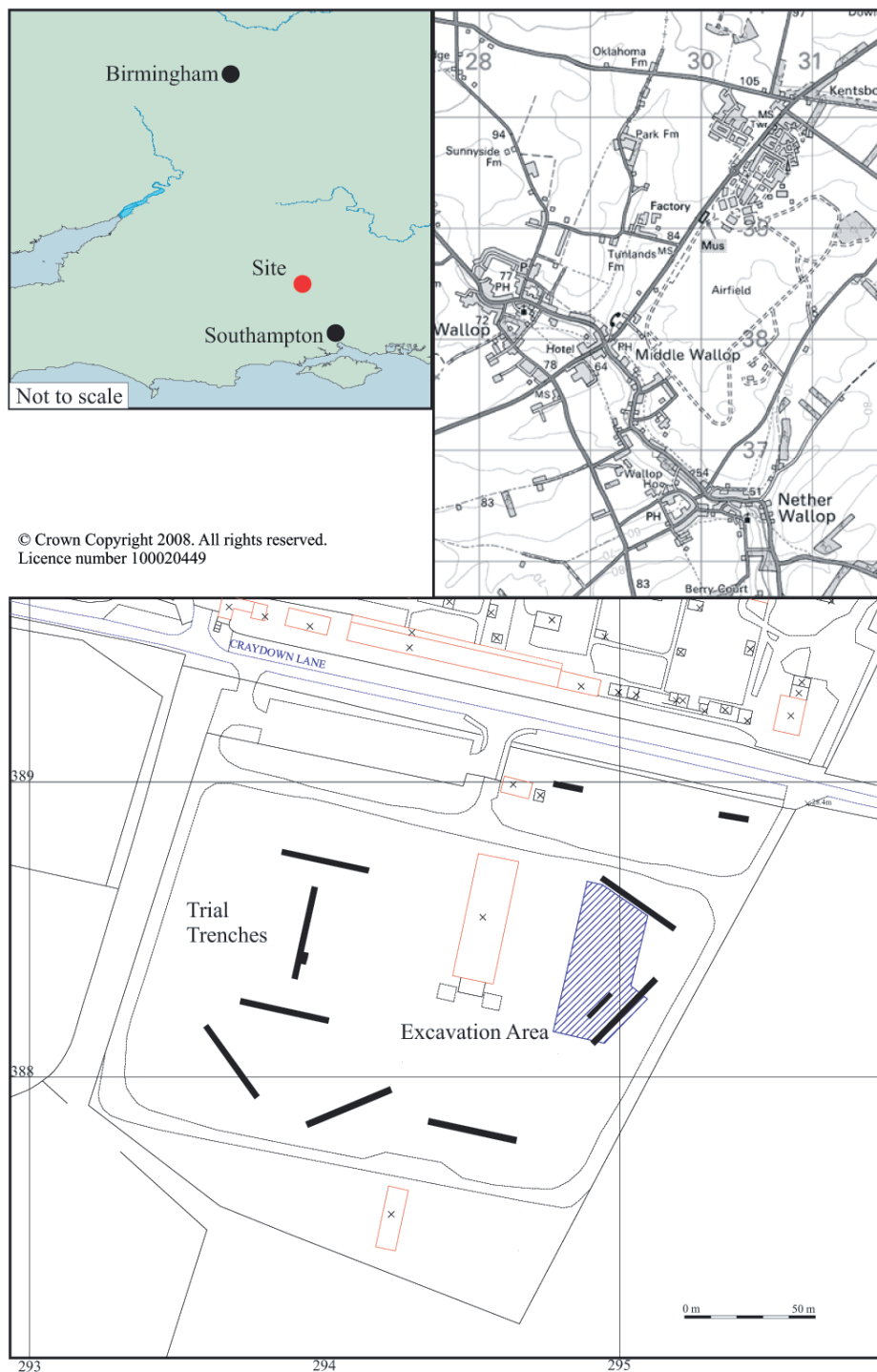


Fig. 1 Site location

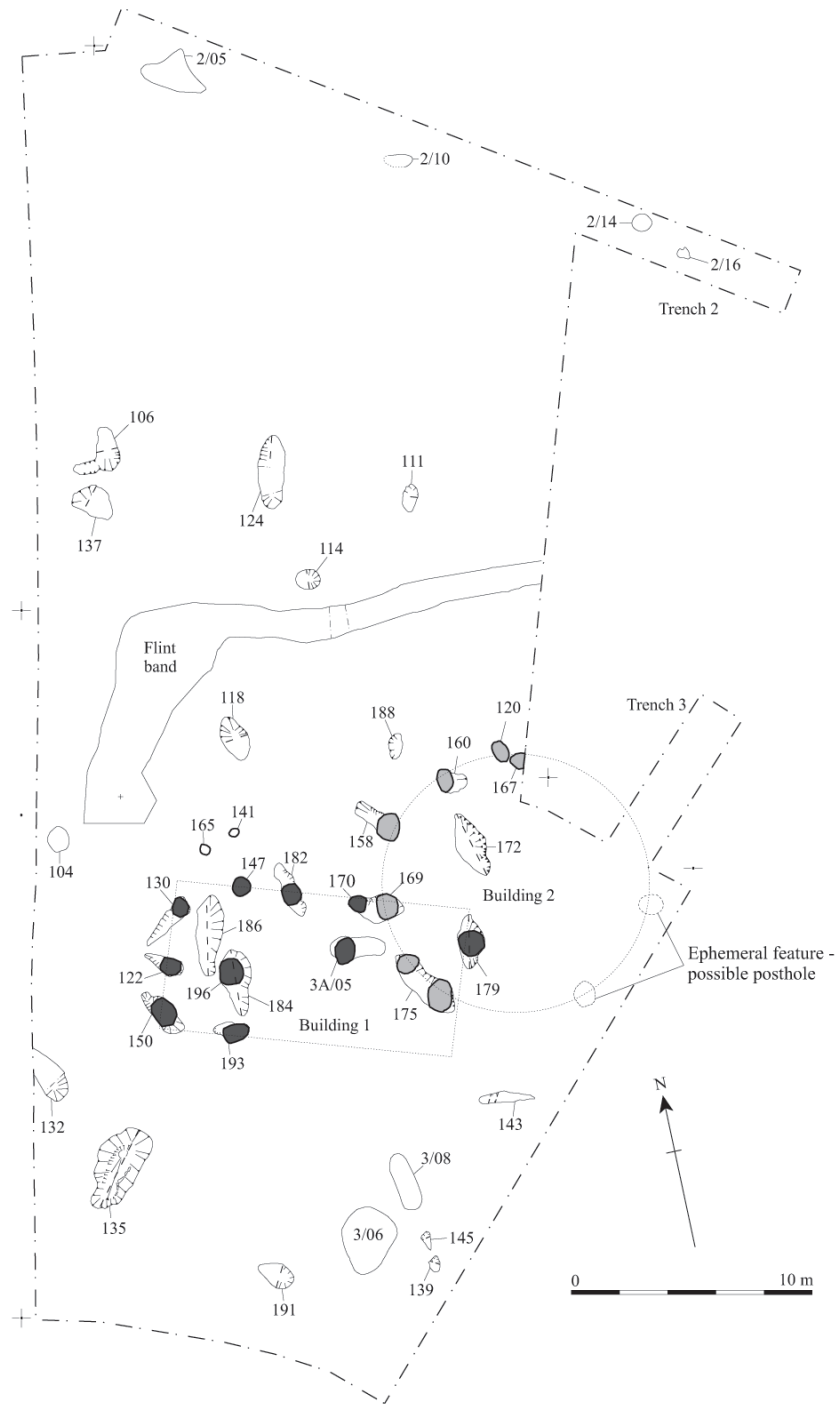


Fig. 2 Site Plan

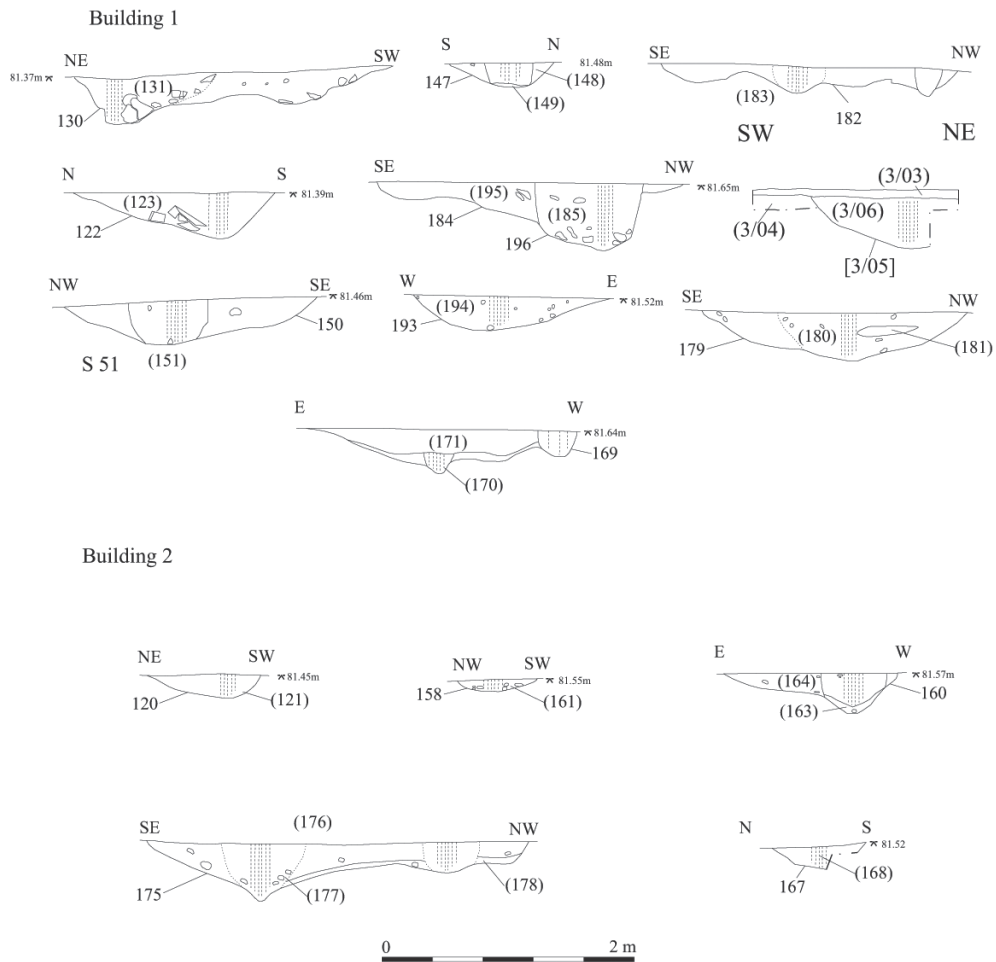


Fig. 3 Sections of building postholes

remains. This posthole cut an earlier feature [184] that may have been natural. Large fragments of a decorated Mortlake bowl were recovered from posthole [147], including rim sherds, along with a piece of thermally-fractured flint that may have been a burnt core. A lens of burnt material within the fill of posthole [179] was sampled for palaeo-environmental analysis (see below). The postholes appeared to form a subrectangular building up to 6.5m wide and 13m long, with smaller postholes [141] and [165] perhaps ancillary to the main structure,

and it is uncertain if [179] was part of the same structure.

Structure 1 produced two radiocarbon dates of 3270–2910 cal. BC and 3330–2910 BC at 95.4% confidence, from hazelnut shells contained within postholes [147] and [196] respectively (SUERC-21041 and 21042). Whether the hazelnut shells were incorporated into the packing around the post or entered the feature following the abandonment of the structure is unknown. Sherds of Mortlake Ware pottery were also recovered from the same two

features, including much of a decorated bowl from [147]. Some small friable fragments of prehistoric pottery were recovered from postholes [150], [122] and [130], but it was too abraded and friable to be assessed.

Structure 2 consisted of a curvilinear group of seven postholes ([120], [158], [160], [167], [169] and double posthole [175]), up to 0.50m wide and 0.40m deep (Fig. 3). The western end of posthole [169] was a possible post setting of Structure 1 [170], the post for Structure 2 cutting through the earlier example. Postholes [120] and [167] may represent a replacement/repair episode, and the teardrop shape of some postholes reflects slight ramps dug in order to help with erection. Two ephemeral features originally discounted by the excavator may indicate the presence of heavily truncated postholes. Together, they formed a possible arc of posts *c.* 11m in diameter, part of a roundhouse with an overall diameter of up to 15m, quite large compared to later examples (Brossler *et al.* 2004; Moore & Jennings 1992). Two sherds of possible Early Bronze Age Food Urn were found in posthole [158], in addition to a flint flake and burnt flint, whilst posthole [160] contained one thermally-fractured piece of flint and one primary flake. The large feature [172] within Structure 2 had a slightly paler chalky area near its centre suggestive of a post setting, whilst its irregular shape may again indicate post replacement.

It is possible that Structure 2 was contemporary with pit [186]. This was a large oval feature that in plan appeared to consist of three inter-cutting pits, though no differences in the fills could be defined during excavation. Burnt clay, possibly daub, was recovered from the fill, along with carbonised hazelnut shells. This produced a radiocarbon date of 2140–1950 cal. BC at 95.4% confidence (SUERC-21043).

The other features in this area included ten pits and five postholes, most filled with similar orange or reddish-brown clayey silt and chalk fragments. Pit [2/14] contained three secondary flint flakes and a small fragment of Middle Neolithic Peterborough-type ware. No finds were recovered from pits [111], [114], [118], [139], [143] and [145]. Pits [3/06] and [3/08] contained one thermally-fractured piece of possible hammerstone and one retouched

flint blade respectively. Feature [188] may have been a double post setting, whilst postholes [104], [132] and [191] contained traces of single post settings. No finds were recovered from these features. Features [106], [124], [135], [137], [2/05] and [2/16] were probable tree throw holes.

DISCUSSION

Despite its apparent Middle Neolithic date, Structure 1 resembles two Early Neolithic buildings excavated in 1966–67 and 2005 at Llandygai near Bangor (Kenney 2008; Lynch & Musson 2001), a structure beneath the long barrow at Gwernwale, Powys (Britnell & Savory 1984); and perhaps Early Neolithic buildings at White Horse Stone and Pilgrim's Way in Kent (Barclay & Chaffey *forthcoming*; Hayden 2008), Lismore Fields in Derbyshire (Garton 1991; Hind 2004) and Field Farm, Burghfield, Berkshire (Butterfield & Lobb 1992, 11–13; Hey *forthcoming*). The triple row of posts in Structure 1 may have been for above ground storage or a raised sleeping area.

Buildings of Middle Neolithic date are extremely rare. At Willington in Derbyshire, postholes and pits associated with Peterborough Ware were found adjacent to a burnt mound (Beamish 2001; Beamish & Ripper 2000), whilst at Ecton in Northamptonshire shallow hollows and hearth debris was associated with Peterborough Ware (Moore & Williams 1975). More recently at Sewerby Cottage Farm, Bridlington in East Yorkshire, Peterborough Ware including Mortlake, Ebbsfleet and Fengate styles was found with the remains of two post-built structures (Fenton-Thomas 2009).

Structure 2 may represent an Early Bronze Age roundhouse, and Food Urn or Food Vessel pottery is generally thought to date to between approximately 2400 and 1450 BC (Gibson 2002; Healy 1995; Needham 1996). Hampshire is outside of its core distribution, however, and it was generally associated with funerary contexts.

Few Early Bronze Age structures have been excavated, although a circular building associated with Beaker ware was identified at Down Farm on Cranborne Chase.

The lithic assemblage was consistent with occupation spanning the Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age, whilst the molluscs and hazelnuts indicated that the most likely habitat in and around the site when occupied in both periods would be mixed woodland abutting or in very close association with grassland and scrub. The disparity in dates between Structures 1 and 2 indicates either a considerable break in occupation, or else that other areas outside of the investigation area were used in the intervening period. If Structures 1 and 2 do represent a Middle Neolithic and an Early Bronze Age building respectively, these would be the first identified examples in Hampshire (Gardiner 2006).

THE NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE POTTERY *by Frances Raymond*

Introduction

A small assemblage of prehistoric pottery (174 sherds, 309gs) largely composed of Middle Neolithic Peterborough Ware was recovered from four features ([147], [1/60], [1/96] and [2/14]), and was quantified and analysed in accordance with the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group (PCRG 1997). The detailed descriptive data is available in the project archive.

Peterborough ware

Approximately 95% of the pottery was Middle Neolithic Peterborough Ware (163 sherds, 296gs), much of this (118 sherds, 229g) derived from fill (148) of posthole [147], and likely to represent remains of a single bowl. The interior is decorated with whipped cord maggots arranged in a herringbone pattern, a motif repeated on the rim with fingernail impressions (Fig. 4, P1). There are a series of deep pits along the centre line of the cavetto neck with a row of crescentic whipped cord maggots below.

The sherds are generally well-preserved but highly fragmented, with one rim sherd featuring an ancient fracture along the line of

a joining coil, and it is not clear whether this reflects the vessel's state at burial or whether it resulted from secondary disturbance. Approximately 29% of the rim is represented by five large sherds 60–90 millimetres across. The remainder are body sherds, none able to be refitted with the rim, although as all are of the same fabric and the better preserved carry motifs which repeat those used on the rim and neck there is a high probability that all sherds are from a single vessel (Fig. 4, P2 and P3). The body sherd motifs are separated by two or three parallel lines of whipped cord (e.g. Fig. 4, P2), and such repetitive and zoned decoration is characteristic of the Mortlake sub-style. The fabric is tempered with coarse flint, limonite and fine to medium-grained quartz sand, the latter probably a natural component of the clay.

The rest of the Peterborough Ware (45 sherds, 67g) was from fill (185) of posthole [196], with the decorative motifs and fabric suggesting it is from the Mortlake or Fengate sub-styles. The sherds are moderately abraded, and the largest all decorated (nine sherds, 38g). The most complete carries three rows of impressions created using the end of a bird or small mammal bone (Fig. 4, P4). The same impressions occur on four other fragments, whilst a single sherd is decorated with two offset fingertip impressions in a crows-foot motif, and three tiny fragments have abraded linear impressions that may be whipped cord (not illustrated). The sherds could be from a single vessel, but this is by no means certain. They are in a fabric very similar to that used for the Mortlake bowl, aside from the incorporation of finer, angular quartz sand and occasional rounded clay pellets. Posthole [196] also contained two heavily abraded split body sherds (3g) in a soft fabric with sparse rounded voids, likely to be leached calcareous inclusions. These were not chronologically diagnostic, and whilst they might be Neolithic, they could also be later, intrusive prehistoric sherds.

The Early Bronze Age and other pottery

Two small body sherds are likely to be derived from one or two Early Bronze Age Food Urn related vessels (8g) from fill (161) of posthole

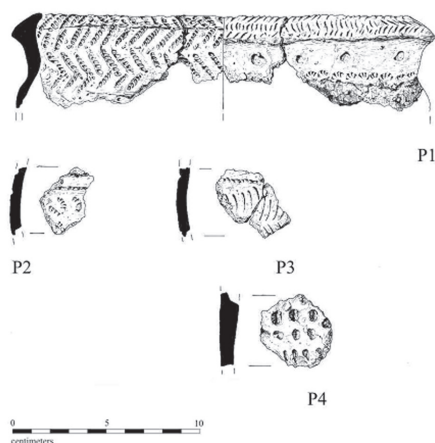


Fig. 4 Prehistoric pottery

[158]. One of the fragments has a wall thickness in excess of 10mm and is decorated with two fine, parallel impressed lines, while the other is thinner walled (7mm) and has three parallel linear impressions that might be twisted cord (not illustrated). Both sherds are from the same soft, grog-tempered fabric, also containing quartz sand and limonite.

The only other prehistoric pottery from the site was seven sherds (2g) from fill (2/15) of pit [2/14] and consisting of tiny flint tempered crumbs, too small to be identifiable.

Discussion

Radiocarbon dates for the Peterborough ceramic series indicate a central range of 3400–2900 BC for the various sub-styles including Mortlake and Fengate ware (Gibson 2002; Gibson & Kinnes 1997). This suggests a considerable gap in the sequence before the deposition of the Food Urn related sherds, with a date range of c. 2400–1450 BC (Healy 1995; Needham 1996).

The elaborate decoration and motifs of the Mortlake bowl is typical of the sub-style, although the way in which they are combined appears to be unique. In the central southern 'Wessex' region, herringbone whipped cord is more frequently on Ebbsfleet vessels, as at West Kennet (Piggott 1962, fig. 11, P1-P4) and

Wilsford cum Lake (Smith 1991, fig. 14, P15), though its use on Mortlake Ware is recorded, as on the interior of a bowl from Handley Hill Barrow 24 (Cleal 1991, fig. 7.11, P124). The herringbone fingernail impressions resemble those on the neck of a Mortlake vessel from a barrow in Micheldever Wood (Fasham 1979, fig. 15, 4), and are reminiscent of the incised decorative motifs repeated on the rim and walls of a small bowl of the same sub-style from West Kennet (Piggott 1962, fig. 11, P6). The pits and their position along the centre of the cavetto neck are a common feature of Mortlake Ware, occurring on two vessels from Micheldever Wood (Fasham 1979, fig. 15, 4–5) and five from Windmill Hill (Smith 1965, 78). By contrast, the rows of whipped cord crescentic maggots are rare, with parallels outside the region at Iver in Buckinghamshire (Smith 1956, fig. 36, 1). In Wessex, similar impressions in twisted cord feature on Mortlake Ware from Windmill Hill (Smith 1965, fig. 33, P268) and Wor Barrow (Cleal 1991, fig. 7.15, P174).

The possible bird or small mammal bone impressions on the Peterborough sherds from [184] (Fig. 4 P4) are common on Mortlake Ware and less so on Fengate vessels. They are arranged in similar rows on two of the Mortlake bowls from West Kennet (Piggott 1962, fig. 11, P9, fig. 12, P17), which also feature several Mortlake and Fengate vessels with rusticated fingertip decoration (*ibid.*, fig. 12, P12, P14–16). More local Hampshire parallels include two of the Peterborough sherds from Down Farm near Andover, ornamented with comparable rows of impressions to the illustrated sherd from [184] (Fig. 4, P4; *cf.* Davies 1981, fig. 2–3, 7).

The use of sandy flint tempered fabrics is typical of Mortlake and Fengate Ware in Wiltshire and north-east Dorset, where one study found those containing flint and sand were used for 21% and 22% of Fengate and Mortlake vessels respectively (Cleal 1995, fig. 16.2). Although this has not been quantified for Hampshire assemblages, similar wares were used for two Mortlake bowls from the Portway in Andover (Smith 1985, 16–17), one Fengate vessel from the nearby site at Kimpton (Ellison & Smith 1981, 151–152, fig. 3, A1), and one of

Table 1

Laboratory No.	Context	Radiocarbon Age (BP)	$\delta^{13}C$ (o/oo)	Calibrated date range (95.4% confidence)	Estimated date range (95.4% confidence)	Sample details	Associated material
SUERC 21041 (GU-17668)	(148) [147]	4400 + 30	-22.8	cal BC 3270-2910	cal BC 3270-3250 (1.3% confidence) or cal BC 3100-2910 (94.1% confidence)	Hazelnut shell	Peterborough Ware
SUERC 21042 (GU-17669)	(185) [196]	4420 + 30	-22.5	cal BC 3330-2910	cal BC 3330-3230 (12.4% confidence) or cal BC 3120-2910 (83% confidence)	Hazelnut shell	Peterborough Ware
SUERC 21043 (GU-17670)	(187) [186]	3665 + 30	-27.0	cal BC 2140-1950	cal BC 2140-1950	Hazelnut shell	Food Urn

the Peterborough sherds from Easton Down near Winchester (Ross 1982, fig. 14, P4). These examples suggest that the Over Wallop vessels were made within a well-established regional tradition, but as is typical of the period the inclusions indicate local production.

RADIOCARBON DATING

Radiocarbon measurements were obtained from three samples – fill (185) of posthole [196] and fill (148) of posthole [147], both from Structure 1; and fill (187) of pit [186]. The work was carried out by Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre. The results are given in Table 1.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Gifford and funded by Wallop Defence Systems. The excavation was carried out to a specification designed by Martin Wilson of Gifford. The fieldwork was undertaken in September 2008 by Clare Roberts; assisted by Milena Grzybowska, Clare Stott, Philip Parker, Ben Sharp and Conan Parsons. Laura Evans conducted the environmental analysis. Illustrations are by Eoin Fitsimons, Roy Entwistle and David Gilbert. Thanks also to Adrian Chadwick for his input and editing this paper.

REFERENCES

- Barclay, A, & Chaffey, G *forthcoming* The MTV generations: remixing the past in pre-history. Commercial research in the Middle Thames Valley, in Chadwick, A M & Gibson, C (eds), *Memory, Myth, and Long-term Landscape Inhabitation*.
- Beamish, M 2001 Excavations at Willington, south Derbyshire. Interim Report, *Derbyshire Archaeol J* **121** 1–18.
- Beamish, M & Ripper, S 2000 Burnt mounds in the East Midlands, *Antiquity* **75** 37–38.
- Brossler, A, Early, R & Allen, C 2004 *Green Park (Reading Business Park). Phase 2 Excavations 1995 – Neolithic and Bronze Age Sites*. Oxford Archaeology Thames Valley Landscapes Monogr **19**.
- Britnell, W J & Savory, H N 1984 *Gwernvale and Pen-y-wylod: Two Neolithic Long Cairns in the Black Mountains of Brecknock*, Cambrian Archaeological Monogr **2**.
- Butterfield, C A & Lobb, S J 1992 Excavations in the Burghfield Area, Berkshire, Wessex Archaeology Report **1**, Salisbury.
- Cleal, R M J 1991 Cranborne Chase – the earlier prehistoric pottery, in Barrett, J Bradley, R & Hall, M (eds), *Papers on the Prehistoric Archaeology of Cranborne Chase*, Oxbow Monogr **11**, 134–200.
- Cleal, R M J 1995, Pottery fabrics in Wessex in the fourth to second millennia BC, in Kinnes, I & Varndell, G (eds), *Unbaked Urns of Rudely Shape Essays on British and Irish Pottery for Ian Longworth*, Oxbow Monogr **55**, 185–194.
- Davies, S M 1981 Excavations at Old Down Farm, Andover, Part II: Prehistoric and Roman, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* **37** 81–163.
- Ellison, A & Smith, I 1981 The Neolithic and Bronze Age Pottery, 151–152, in Dacre, M & Ellison, E A Bronze Age Urn Cemetery at Kimpton, Hampshire, *Proc Prehist Soc* **47** 147–203.
- Fasham, P J 1979 The excavation of a triple barrow in Micheldever Wood, Hampshire, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* **35** 5–40.
- Fenton-Thomas, C 2009 *A Place by the Sea: Excavations at Sewerby Cottage Farm, Bridlington, Yorkshire*, On-Site Archaeology, Monogr **1**, York.
- Gardiner, J 2006 *Resource Assessment: The Neolithic and Bronze Age in Hampshire*, Wessex Archaeology.
- Garton, D 1991 Neolithic settlement in the Peak District: perspective and prospects, in Hodges, R & Smith, K (eds), *Recent Developments in the Archaeology of the Peak District*, Sheffield, 3–21.
- Gibson, A 2002 *Prehistoric Pottery in Britain and Ireland*, Stroud.
- Gibson, A, & Kinnes, I 1997 On the Urns of a dilemma: radiocarbon and the Peterborough problem, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* **16** 65–72.

- Hayden, C 2008 White Horse Stone and the earliest Neolithic in the South East, South East Research Framework resource assessment seminar. http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/heritage/south_east_research_framework/serf_seminar_notes_docs.aspx.
- Healy, F 1995 Pots, pits and peat: ceramics and settlement in East Anglia, in Kinnes, I & Vardell, G (eds), *Unbaked Urns of Rudely Shape: Essays on British and Irish Pottery for Ian Longworth*, Oxbow Monogr, **55**, 173–184.
- Hey, G forthcoming Neolithic Houses, in Hey, G, Garwood, P, Barclay, P A & Bradley, P (eds), *The Thames through Time. The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames: Early Human Occupation to 1500 BC*, Oxford Archaeology (part 2).
- Hind, D 2004 Picking up the trail: people, landscapes and technology in the Peak district of Derbyshire during the fifth and fourth millennia BC, in Chadwick, A M (ed.), *Stories from the Landscape: Archaeologies of Inhabitation*, (BAR Int. Ser. **1238**), 130–176.
- Kenney, J 2008 *Recent excavations at Parc Bryn Cegin, Llandygai, near Bangor, North Wales. Full excavation report*, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report, **764**.
- Lynch, F & Musson, C 2001 A prehistoric and early medieval complex at Llandegai, near Bangor, North Wales, *Archaeol Cambrensis* **150** 17–142.
- Moore, J & Jennings, D 1992 *Reading Business Park: a Bronze Age Landscape*. Oxford Archaeology Thames Valley Landscapes Monogr **1**: the Kennet Valley.
- Moore, W R G & Williams, J H 1975 A Later Neolithic site at Ecton, Northampton, *Northamptonshire Archaeol* **10** 3–30.
- Needham, S 1996 Chronology and Periodisation in the British Bronze Age, *Acta Archaeologica* **67** 121–140.
- PCRG (Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group), 1997 *The Study of Later Prehistoric Pottery: General Policies and Guidelines for Analysis and Publication*, Occasional Papers **1** and **2** (Revised Version).
- Piggott, S 1962 *The West Kennet Long Barrow: Excavations 1955–56*, Ministry of Works Archaeological Reports **4**.
- Ross, J M 1982 Pottery, 32–37, in Fasham, P J The excavation of four ring-ditches in central Hampshire, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* **38** 19–56.
- Smith, I F 1956 *The Decorative Art of Neolithic Ceramics in South-Eastern England and its Relations*, unpubl Ph.D. thesis, University of London.
- Smith, I F 1965 *Windmill Hill and Avebury*, Oxford.
- Smith, I F 1985 Prehistoric pottery, in Cook, A M & Dacre, M W *Excavations at Portway, Andover, 1973–1975*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monogr **4**, 16–17.
- Smith, I F 1991 Round barrows Wilsford cum Lake G51-G54: excavations by Ernest Greenfield in 1958, *Wiltshire Archaeol Natur Hist Mag* **84** 11–31.

Authors: David Gilbert, John Moore, Clare Roberts, John Moore Heritage Services, Hill View, Woodperry Road, Beckley OX3 9UZ

© Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society