The Excavation of a Ring-ditch at Lower Farm, Greenham, Berkshire

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THE EXCAVATION OF A RING-DITCH AT LOWER FARM, GREENHAM, BERKSHIRE.

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In the preparation of this report the finds work was coordinated by Elaine Morris, Finds Officer for the Trust for Wessex Archaeology; the environmental processing was undertaken by Sarah Wyles and coordinated by Mike Allen, Environmental Officer, for the Trust for Wessex Archaeology. The illustrations were undertaken by Serena Garrett and John Vallender.

INTRODUCTION.

Lower Farm lies in the Lower Kennet Valley in the Parish of Greenham, two kilometres south-east of Newbury. The ring-ditch, centred on SU 4945 6616, was first identified from aerial photographs taken in 1963 and 1964 (RCHM SF2150 frames 1055 and 1057) together with other cropmarks to the west of Lower Farm (Fig. 1).

In 1986 planning permission was sought by Newbury Sand and Gravel Company Ltd. for the extraction of sand and gravel from an area of 47.2 hectares to the south-west and south-east of Lower Farm which included the site of the ring-ditch and other cropmarks to the east of Newbury racecourse. After consultation with Berkshire County Council and in view of the archaeological implications of this proposal, Newbury Sand and Gravel Company Ltd., commissioned the Trust for Wessex Archaeology to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the proposed extraction area in January 1987. The aims of the evaluation were defined by the County Archaeological Officer for Berkshire and included the confirmation of the presence or absence of stratified deposits in the area of the ring-ditch. The evaluation of this feature was undertaken by two machined trenches with hand-dug extensions (Fig. 2). The two excavated segments (Fig. 2, 1 and 6) demonstrated the survival of the ring-ditch as a subsoil feature, 21 metres in diameter internally, with considerable variation in profile and depth but with no apparent external or internal associated features, mound or original ground surfaces surviving. Thirty-four sherds of pottery, probably representing one vessel of Early-Middle Bronze Age date, were recovered

from the fills of the ring-ditch on its eastern side (Farwell and Lobb, 1987).

In view of the results of this work, Berkshire County Council requested that Wimpey Hobbs, the new owners of the sand and gravel deposits at Lower Farm, undertake certain archaeological investigations prior to commencing its extraction operations. Consequently in 1987 Wimpey Hobbs commissioned the Trust for Wessex Archaeology to undertake the full excavation of the ring-ditch prior to sand and gravel extraction. This fieldwork was undertaken in August 1989 and the results, including the evaluation trench, are reported on here.

THE SITE AND THE CROPMARKS.

The ring-ditch lies between the buildings of Lower Farm and Newbury racecourse (Fig. 1), on the south side of the river valley. It occupies a low terrace approximately five metres above the floor of the floodplain (71m O.D.) which is approximately 1.5 kilometres wide at this point, its widest for 10 kilometres in either direction. To the north the valley sides rise gently to the chalk downs and, to the south, up to Greenham Common.

The ring-ditch is located on the junction between a narrow outcrop of Reading Beds (variegated red, blue, grey and yellow clays, sands and loams) and Valley and River Gravels.

The site and other land to the west of Lower Farm are presently under permanent pasture. The soils consist of moderately permeable loams and because of high groundwater, are invariable under permanent or improved grass (Jarvis et al, 1979, 104) although the area is not liable to flooding (information from Berkshire County Council).

A series of cropmarks is recorded on aerial photographs to the west of Lower Farm and within the racecourse (information from Berkshire County Council, Sites and Monuments Record). The photographs show the ring-ditch as a slightly ovate, incomplete circle with a short section apparently absent to the south of a modern drainage ditch and field boundary (Fig. 1). No internal features are visible. Two linear cropmarks occur to the east and south; aligned north to south and south-east to north-west respectively. All three cropmarks are well-defined.

Other cropmarks occur to the south and west of Lower Farm and within Newbury Racecourse (Fig. 1). These consist of a series of linear features generally aligned parallel or at right-angles to the valley contours. An apparent ditched trackway occurs to the north of the ring-ditch and continues westward into the area of the racecourse, where there are also a number of sharply-defined, rectangular cropmarks.

The majority of these linear cropmarks can be identified as post-medieval field boundaries or ditches indicated on the 1880 1st Edition 6" Ordnance Survey Map (Berkshire County Record Office). This includes the double-ditched feature to the north of the ring-ditch which is indicated as part trackway and part drain. A post-medieval date for some of these cropmark

features was partly confirmed as a result of evaluation work in 1987 although this also suggested that some elements may be Romano-British in date (Farwell and Lobb, 1987). The sharply-defined rectangular cropmarks in the racecourse correspond to the alignment of railway sidings that occupied the entire area west of Lower Farm, including the racecourse during the Second World War (information courtesy of Newbury Racecourse plc).

METHODOLOGY AND NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE.

Topsoil and subsoil stripping was undertaken by a 360° mechanical excavator and Volvo dump truck. Because of the exceptionally dry weather prior to excavation and the 'baked' nature of the topsoil, a 3' toothed bucket was used. Stripping began in the south-west trench and was taken down until ditch fills were reached. All further excavation was undertaken by hand.

A total of 1,054m^2 was stripped, including approximately 70% by area of the ring-ditch. The remaining southern portion of the ring-ditch in the adjacent field had been substantially disturbed by the present field drain (Fig. 1) and remained unstripped. Four baulks were left across the ring-ditch to provide complete east-west and north-south profiles (Fig. 2 and 4).

All deposits were planned, excavated and recorded using the standard Trust for Wessex Archaeology machine-based recording system, with context sub-divisions on a five metre grid for widespread layers and clearance. All artefacts were three-dimensionally recorded, except for struck flint which was recorded in two dimensions only.

Seven two metre-wide radial transects were excavated within the machined trenches to reveal the earliest deposits. Together with the two segments excavated in the evaluation, this opened up 24.2% of the total ditch circuit, and 414m^2 of the pre-monument surface (Fig. 2).

Soil sampling was undertaken on a subjective basis to answer specific questions: bulk artefact samples from otherwise undated contexts for wet sieving, bulk environmental samples for carbonised plant remains from the ring-ditch and phosphate samples from two putative graves and their backgrounds.

The stratigraphic sequence was broadly as follows: a shallow turfline sealed a 0.20m thick yellow-brown silt loam subsoil which in turn lay directly on natural gravel with an abrupt and clear boundary. An intermediary subsoil layer of dark brown silty gravel, 8047, extended over the southern areas of the excavation (Fig. 2) and observations of adjacent mineral test pits showed it to be restricted to the vicinity of the ring-ditch. It sealed the fills of the ring-ditch and a number of other internal and external features and was in turn cut by a series of other features including modern drains. Consequently, the ring-ditch was not initially apparent after topsoil stripping and was identified only after this subsoil deposit had been removed by hand from the seven radial transects (Fig. 2). The natural gravels of the site contained irregular pockets and bands of silts and clays. Consequently, the fills and profiles of features invariably reflected the nature of the localised geology and the profiles and fills of the ring-ditch, for example, were highly variable as a result.

Material recovered from the excavation consists of pottery of early/middle and late bronze age, Romano-British, medieval and post-medieval dates. With the exception of a small collection of struck flint, probably of mesolithic date, no material could be assigned a date outside these periods.

Four broad episodes or periods of activity can be defined from the stratigraphy and material remains which are described in detail in the following site report.

1. Features and deposits pre-dating the construction of the ring-ditch.
2. The construction and infilling of the ring-ditch.
3. Layer 8047.
4. Later features and deposits.

THE ARCHIVE.

The archive consists of individual context records with accompanying photographs and drawings. An abbreviated record was entered onto a Delilah database (Central Excavation Unit 1987) to which stratigraphic references and artefact records were added. The full stratigraphic references are not used in this report, details are available in archive. The ring-ditch excavation was allocated a Trust for Wessex Archaeology site code (W321) and project code (32692). The finds, field record and archive from the excavation will be deposited in Newbury Museum, alongside the material from the evaluation work (W169) and watching brief work (W297) at Lower Farm.

SITE DESCRIPTION

1. Features and deposits pre-dating the construction of the ring-ditch.

A total of 414m² of pre-monument surface was exposed, in which 44 features (not illustrated) were identified and recorded to pre-excavation level. All but one were in the western half of the excavation, outside the ring-ditch. Six were examined in section. These features were typified by 8056 (not illustrated) in the south-west trench; an amorphous cut of irregular plan and profile tapering to a narrow funnel-shaped base, 1.0m wide, 4.5m long and 0.47m at its deepest point. It was filled with a very hard, compact, yellow-brown silt loam containing occasional small flint pebbles. It became less yellow towards the top of the profile but without any clear horizons.

Of the features examined, only one, 8027 (not illustrated) situated just outside the western edge of the ring-ditch in the south-west trench, contained finds. One piece of burnt flint (21g) was recovered from its lower fill and two flint flakes were recovered from its upper fill. This latter fill was darker in colour than other contexts of this group, contained sparse charcoal flecks and occupied a slight hollow in the top of the lower fill.

These features were assumed to be either solution features or natural variations in the geology. The presence of charcoal and worked flints in the upper fill of 8027 precludes a natural origin for the fill itself but

not for the feature in which it settled. All features in the south-west trench were sealed by layer 8047, a probable medieval deposit (see below).

A deposit of consistently-sized flint nodules (Fig. 2, 8198) was identified within the ring-ditch in the northern and western trenches. The nodules were all approximately 0.1m long and were delimited by a clear boundary concentric with the ring-ditch approximately five to six metres from its centre. Similar-sized flint nodules were present in the central area of the ring-ditch exposed in the north-east trench but less densely concentrated and without a clear and convincing boundary. No such concentrations were observed in the south-east trench. No finds were recovered from these flints and, although a central cairn is a possible interpretation, it is equally probable that they were a periglacial feature.

There was no evidence of a buried soil or a protected natural surface.

The flint assemblage for the whole site contained a small 'background' of worn and/or plough-damaged mesolithic material from the clearance layer and from layer 8047. These pieces are residual in these contexts and on the site as a whole (Healey this report) and cannot be taken as evidence of mesolithic activity on the site.

2. The construction and infilling of the ring-ditch.

The ring-ditch, 21.9m and 26.8m in diameter internally and externally, was not visible as a complete circular feature during excavation; its plan and profile were observed only in the eight sections examined during the excavation and evaluation (Fig. 2).

The profiles and patterns of silting displayed by each of these segments (Fig. 2, numbers 8031, 1, 8129, 8196, 8325, 8351, 6, and 8212) varied considerably and was determined by the nature of the natural gravel. A sample of ditch profiles is presented on Figure 3 which gives some idea of the variation within the monument between the shouldered, tapering, 'U'-shaped profile of segment 8325 (Fig. 3, 2) and the stepped, flat-bottomed and steep-sided profile of 8031 (Fig. 3, 1).

The primary fills also varied in nature from a single deposit of cemented, light greyish-brown gravel in the base of segment 8325 (Fig. 3, 2) to two separate deposits of orange-brown clayey sand and compact, light brownish-grey gravel in segment 8031 (Fig. 3, 1). Although none of these particular layers contained finds, primary fills in other segments did. A minute fragment of burnt flint and a small collection of flakes and blades were recovered from the less well-defined primary fills of ditch segments 6, 1, 8212 and 8129 (Fig. 2) with two very small sherds (2g) of possible Biconical Urn from the primary fill of segment 1 excavated during the evaluation.

The secondary fills showed similar variation, from the single deposit of cemented, light brown, silty gravel of segment 8325 (Fig. 3, 2) to the three

variously coloured separate layers of silt loam in segment 8031 (Fig. 3, 1). A thin band of fine charcoal flecks was observed in the central fill of segment 8031 (Fig. 3, 1). A similar band of fine charcoal or possibly manganese staining was also observed in the more gravelly secondary fills of ditch segment 8212 (Fig. 3, 3). Samples of these charcoal layers were not taken and no charcoal was recovered from manual excavation.

Finds recovered from the secondary fills consisted of a small quantity of burnt flint, moderate amounts of worked flint, including a scraper (Fig. 7, 4) and 615g of prehistoric pottery, including 34 sherds/594g of grog-tempered Collared Urn including Fig. 8, 2-4. The fills also contained one sherd/2g of Romano-British pottery which is probably intrusive.

Gravel-free tertiary horizons of hard, greyish-brown silt loam were identified with certainty only in segments 8325 (Fig. 3, 2) and 6 (not illustrated). These two deposits contained a small quantity of burnt flint, 20 pieces of worked flint and four sherds/16g of an Early/Middle Bronze Age accessory vessel fabric including the illustrated sherd (Fig. 8, 1).

The Central Feature.

One feature (Fig. 2, 8192) was identified at the centre of the ring-ditch, sealed beneath layer 8047, which also sealed the upper fills of the ring-ditch. This amorphous feature, with a maximum dimension of 0.9m, was filled with a clean silt loam over a cemented gravel (Fig. 3, 4). No finds were recovered and a soil sample from the feature, processed through a nest of

sieves, contained no human bone, cremated or otherwise.

Undated Ditches.

Two linear features ran tangentially to the ring-ditch and were sealed beneath layer 8047. Both were examined in two 2m wide sections. Both remain essentially unphased.

Ditch 8054, in the south-west trench (Fig. 2), corresponded exactly with one of the linear cropmarks shown on the aerial photographs (Fig. 1). It was filled with three distinct layers (Fig. 5, 6): a cemented, dark brown, silty gravel beneath a layer of hard, brown, silt loam in turn sealed by a layer of almost stone-free, compact, light brown, silt loam that contained one flint flake. The alignment of this ditch, parallel to a modern field drain (Fig. 2, 8133) and to cropmarks visible on aerial photographs to the north and east of the excavation, suggests it is of post-medieval or recent date, although stratigraphically a medieval or earlier date is suggested.

Ditch 8188, situated in the north-west trench (Fig. 2), was less well-defined, and not visible as a cropmark on aerial photographs. In plan it appeared as an irregular linear spread of stone-free silt loam, containing four sherds (43g) of medieval pottery, sealed below layer 8047. The rest of the profile (Fig. 5, 5) was filled entirely with poorly sorted fine gravels which contained two flint flakes. The definition of the edges of these layers against each other and the adjacent natural gravel was poor.

3. Layer 8047.

The upper fills of the ring-ditch were sealed by layer 8047, a compact, dark yellowish-brown, silty gravel that extended across most of the stripped area (Fig. 2).

It had a clear boundary to the north, but its limits to south, west and east lay outside the stripped area. Observations of minerals test pits positioned outside the stripped area indicated that it did not extend more than 20m away from the ring-ditch. Its thickness varied only over the excavated ring-ditch segments where it filled the slight subsidence hollows in the top of the feature. Elsewhere it displayed a remarkably uniform 0.1m thickness that tapered slightly towards its northern edge (Fig. 4).

Layer 8047 contained 532g of burnt flint, 58 pieces of worked flint including the illustrated example (Fig. 7, 2) and 24 sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing 276g, all but one sherd of which was probably from a single Biconical Urn including the illustrated sherds (Fig. 8, 5-6). These sherds were recovered from segment 8212 (Fig. 3, 3; 8214) adjacent to segment 6 (Fig. 2) where most of the prehistoric pottery had been recovered during the evaluation. Layer 8047 also contained two sherds/28g of medieval pottery, and, although this small quantity could be intrusive, a medieval rather than bronze age date is suggested by the layer's stratigraphic position.

4. Later features and deposits.

Figure 2 shows the 38 features that cut layer 8047 which were excavated and recorded. A further 38 possible features were planned but not excavated and are not illustrated here.

The majority of the excavated features were small amorphous hollows typified by feature 8124. This feature was oblong in plan, 0.46m long, 0.30m wide and 0.08m deep with a flat-based, irregular, broad 'U'-shaped profile. It was filled with a compact, dark yellowish-brown silt loam and contained no finds. Most of the features remain undated by artefacts, although a medieval or later date is suggested by their relationship with the medieval layer 8047. Nineteen sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from 8137 and eleven iron hobnails were recovered from 8064. These features are all definitely anthropogenic and although no definite interpretative conclusions have been reached, they remain indicators of later, possibly medieval, activity on the site.

A small number of larger features, pit 8040, scoops 8058 and 8182, ditch 8348 and group 8269, were distinguished from this pattern.

Pit 8040 was situated in the south-west trench outside the ring-ditch (Fig. 2). In plan and in profile (Fig. 6, 7) it resembled a grave and was excavated as such. The feature was 1.8m long, sub-rectangular with vertical sides and a flat base although the deeper portion of the base remains unexplained. No trace of human bone was recovered through hand excavation or wet-sieving and flotation of the pit fills, while phosphate analysis

also proved inconclusive. The lower fill contained one small (1g) undiagnostic sherd of Romano-British pottery.

Scoops 8058 and 8182 were separated by the east-west baulk and the evaluation trench. Both had similar broad U-profiles with numerous overlapping hollows in their bases (Fig. 6, 8 and 9). In plan the features were slightly curved, concentric with the ring-ditch, two metres inside its inner edge. Both also contained similar fills: two layers of silt loam containing small quantities of burnt and worked flint, sealed by a layer of soft, dark brown charcoal-flecked silt loam. This upper layer contained small quantities of burnt and worked flint and, in 8068, one sherd (3g) of early/Middle Bronze Age pottery. It is possible that the two features are part of a single curvilinear hollow, concentric with the ring-ditch. However, this may be coincidental as the latter was sealed by layer 8047 through which the former features were cut.

Ditch 8348, in the north-east trench, consisted of a broad, shallow, irregular feature, probably representing the repeated re-cutting of a single alignment. This was further suggested by the two separate shallow ditches, 8338 and 8340 (Fig. 6, 11 and 12) that represent the continuation of the feature to the north. The continuation of the ditch to the south was not clearly defined, although two amorphous scoops, 8256 and 8252, in the south-east trench, may represent the truncated ditch.

Group 8269 consisted of 17 small, irregular hollows in a cluster of approximately 6m diameter within the ring-ditch in the south-east trench. These features were typified by scoops 8218, 8224, 8226 and 8228 (Fig. 6,

14-17). Their profiles were well-defined and filled with single layers of soft, orangey-brown silt loam. A small quantity of burnt flint and two pieces of worked flint were recovered from these features.

The Subsoil, Topsoil and Modern Features.

All features and deposits with the exception of modern field drains and the evaluation trenches were sealed by a uniform layer of hard, brownish-yellow, gravelly, silt loam subsoil (Fig. 4, 8001). Its thickness increased downslope from 0.1m to 0.3m becoming greater to the north and west. This layer, removed by machine and examined in section only, was a heavily reworked alluvial deposit (M. Allen pers. comm.). The topsoil (Fig. 4, 8000) consisted of a friable, yellowish-brown gravelly silt loam with little variation in thickness between 0.2m and 0.25m, and covered the whole site and was examined in section only. A gravel-filled field drain 8133 (Fig. 2; Fig. 6, 13) passed two metres to the south-west of the centre of the ring-ditch and had also been recorded in the evaluation trench. A second parallel linear feature (Fig. 2, 8322) also cut the subsoil and topsoil. The profile, alignment and silt loam fill (Fig. 6, 10) suggest it might have been an open drain.

THE FINDS.

THE WORKED FLINT.

by Frances Healy

Introduction.

The composition and incidence of the struck flint are summarised in Table 1.

Raw Material.

The flint ranges in colour from near-black to mottled light grey, sometimes with a brown or orange tinge. Cortex is generally thin, and rolled or battered to varying extents. Thermal fractures are frequent. Such material can be readily matched in the gravels of the site, which include large, rolled nodules. About a quarter of the characterisable pieces, generally those of sounder flint, have thicker cortex which, while not fresh, is less abraded than that of most of the collection. This probably represents the selection of some of the least rolled material from the gravels, which contain occasional nodules which are only lightly abraded and retain a few mm of cortex. It may possibly reflect the collection of weathered flint from the surface of the chalk, some 2km to the north-west,

The Ring-Ditch.

The condition of both the small collection from the primary fill and the larger ones from the secondary and tertiary fills ranges from fresh to glossed and edge-damaged. There is some incipient cortication. The material can be divided into two components. The first, concentrated among the more worn pieces, consists of regular blades, often with deliberately abraded platform edges. The second, concentrated among the fresher pieces, is characterised by broad flakes, often thick-butted, showing little sign of platform preparation, and with frequent hinge fractures. It also includes two coarse, steep scrapers, one of which is illustrated (Fig. 7, 4). The less rolled flint described above occurs only in this second component.

Other Contexts.

Material from other contexts is rarely fresh and often plough-damaged. In other respects, however, it comprises the same two elements as that from the ring-ditch, each with additional forms. Blades include five small examples less than 10mm broad; there is also a microlith (Fig. 7, 1), a scraper made on a blade-like flake (Fig. 7, 2) and a truncated blade (Fig. 7, 3). The flake component includes cores (Table 2), generally irregular and hard-hammer-flaked, which were absent from the ring-ditch, and two further coarse scrapers. Less rolled flint remains confined to this second group of material.

Burnt Flint.

Burnt flint was concentrated, like struck flint, in the secondary fills of the ring-ditch (Table 4). Most of it was recovered from the eastern part of the ditch during the evaluation.

Discussion.

A Mesolithic presence is evidenced by the single microlith (Fig. 7,1), and probably by the long scraper and truncated blade (Fig. 7,2 and 3) and the blade component of the collection. All phases of the period are particularly well represented in the Kennet valley (Richards 1978, 29, fig. 17). This material pre-dates the ring-ditch by millennia and would have become accidentally incorporated in its fills and mound.

The technology of the sometimes fresher flake component corresponds to that of Bronze Age flint industries, summarised by Ford, Bradley, Hawkes and Fisher. (1984). Steep, coarse scrapers like that shown in Fig. 7, 4 and three others from the site can be matched in Bronze Age assemblages such as the post-barrow industries of R4, Micheldever Wood, Hampshire (Fasham and Ross 1978, 590). This component is likely to be broadly contemporary with the construction of the barrow. The original excavation of the ditch would have brought a supply of relatively fresh flint to the surface from among which nodules suitable for knapping could have been selected. Some of the debris of this activity could eventually have been disposed of into the ditch or have silted back into it.

Catalogue of Illustrated Struck Flint (Fig. 7).

1. Microlith (obliquely blunted point). Mottled orange-grey flint. Fairly fresh. 8201; clearance.

2. Scraper on blade-like flake. Mottled grey flint with thin, abraded cortex, probably from local gravels. Plough-damaged, slightly glossed. 8334; part of layer 8047.

3. Truncated blade. Mottled grey flint. Plough-damaged, slightly glossed. Worked at proximal end of blank. 8313; clearance.

4. Scraper. Dark grey flint with lighter mottling. Fresh. Worked at proximal end of blank, part of dorsal face formed by thermal fracture. 2; secondary fill of ring-ditch.

Table I : Composition and Incidence of Struck Flint

1 = Misc. debitage 2 = cores 3 = core rejuvenation flakes
4 = chips 5 = flakes 6 = blades 7 = retouched

Phase	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Totals	Burnt	Broken
Natural features	0	0	0	0	13	2	0	2	0	12
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%		0.0%	50.0%
Primary fill of Ring-ditch	0	0	0	0	14	2	1	17	1	7
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	82.4%	11.8%	5.9%		5.9%	41.2%
Secondary fill of Ring-ditch	0	0	1	1	76	15	1	94	1	34
	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%	80.9%	16.0%	1.1%		1.1%	36.2%
Tertiary fill of Ring-ditch	3	0	0	0	14	2	1	20	0	5
	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	70.0%	10.0%	5.0%		0.0%	25.0%
Other ditches	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	7	1	1
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%		14.3%	14.3%
Layer 8047	2	1	1	0	44	8	2	58	0	19
	3.4%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	75.9%	13.8%	3.4%		0.0%	32.8%
Medieval features	2	4	2	0	51	12	0	71	3	29
	2.8%	5.6%	2.8%	0.0%	71.8%	16.9%	0.0%		4.2%	40.8%
Subsoil	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	7	0	2
	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%	0.0%	0.0%		0.0%	28.6%
Topsoil, modern and clearance	2	5	1	0	50	14	3	75	1	39
	2.7%	6.7%	1.3%	0.0%	66.7%	18.6%	4.0%		1.3%	52.0%
Totals	11	10	5	1	263	53	8	351	7	137
	3.1%	2.8%	1.4%	0.3%	75.0%	15.1%	2.3%		2.0%	39.3%

Table 2: Cores

1 = Multiplatform flake core
2 = Keeled, non-discoidal flake core
3 = Unclassifiable/fragmentary core

Phase	1	2	3	Totals
Layer 8047	1	0	0	1
Medieval	1	1	2	4
Post-Med and clearance	0	1	4	5
Totals	2	2	6	10

Mean weight of complete cores 105 g

Table 3: Retouched Forms

1 = Microlith
2 = Scrapers
3 = Serrated piece
4 = Truncated blade

Phase	1	2	3	4	Totals
Primary fill of ring-ditch	0	0	1	0	1
Secondary fill of ring-ditch	0	1	0	0	1
Tertiary fill of ring-ditch	0	1	0	0	1
Layer 8047	0	2	0	0	2
Clearance	1	1	0	1	3
Totals	1	5	1	1	8

Table 4: Burnt Flint

Phase	Number	Weight (g)
Natural features	1	21
Primary fill of ring-ditch	28	356
Secondary fill of	159	2162
Tertiary fill of	1	5
Other ditches	17	592
Layer 8047	50	532
Later features	56	399
Post-medieval and clearance	111	946
Totals	423	5013

THE POTTERY.

by Rosamund M. J. Cleal

A total of 161 sherds was recovered, comprising 85 prehistoric, 11 Romano-British, and 60 medieval. One post-medieval sherd was also recovered, and four sherds were not datable (see Table 5 for pottery from all contexts).

Methodology.

The pottery was analysed using the standard Trust for Wessex Archaeology procedure. Fabrics were established with the aid of a binocular microscope of X 20 magnification, and assigned codes based on the main visible inclusion type. Fabric code numbers indicate date, as outlined in the Fabric Catalogue. Although the majority of sherds were featureless body sherds, sufficient featured sherds were present to establish the likely affinities of most fabrics. Similarity to fabrics of known date enabled even those fabrics lacking diagnostic sherds to be dated, in very broad terms, with some confidence. Only in the case of fabric Q800 is a date range not suggested.

The pottery is treated primarily by ceramic period, and secondarily by context and phase.

Prehistoric pottery.

Eighty-five sherds are certainly or probably prehistoric, and most are assignable to two vessels of the Early to Middle Bronze Age; a small later Bronze Age element may also be present.

Fabric.

The prehistoric pottery is divided almost equally between fabrics with grog as the dominant inclusion type (fabrics G1 and G2) and those with flint (fabrics F1 - F5) (Tables 6 and 7). Fabrics G1, G2, and F1 are exclusively Early or Middle Bronze Age, on the basis of diagnostic sherds, while F2-F5, in which there is no diagnostic material, may be tentatively assigned to the later Bronze Age, on the basis of similarity with post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery in the Kennet Valley and Thames Valley (pers. comm. L. Mepham and S. Lobb).

Collared Urn (Fig. 8, 2 - 4).

Of the thirty-four sherds of the vessel represented by Fig. 8, 2-4 all but seven are plain featureless body sherds. Six slack shoulder sherds are present, one of which carries a horseshoe impression in twisted cord, which almost certainly lies above, rather than below, the shoulder, on the basis of comparison with other Collared Urns. Use of twisted cord horseshoe impressions on the shoulder is a diagnostic trait of Longworth's South-Eastern Style of the Secondary Series (Longworth 1984, 35), and occurs on 41 vessels of that Style (Longworth *op cit*, fig. 34). It is a common motif

in Wessex: 13 of the 33 vessels illustrated by Longworth as having this motif are in Dorset or Wiltshire. The nearest occurrence of a vessel with this motif to Lower Farm is at Farncombe Down, Lambourn, 20km to the north-west, where a body sherd showing a slack shoulder similar to that of P3 was recovered from the central turf stack of a barrow (Rahtz 1962, Longworth 1984, Catalogue number 55). There, the Collared Urn sherds are small but unweathered, retaining fresh surfaces, and include one sherd with carbonised ?food residue on the interior; Smith suggests that these sherds constitute a domestic assemblage contemporary with the construction of the barrow (Smith 1962).

Possible Biconical Urn (Fig 8,5 and 6).

The 23 sherds belonging to the vessel represented by Fig. 8,5 and 6 almost certainly belong to a single Biconical Urn. Only a very small proportion of the profile of this vessel survives, with no carinated sherds present, but the angle of the rim appears clear, and such an inturned upper body could only belong to either a vessel with a markedly convex body, such as a Barrel Urn, or to one with an angled profile. Neither the fabric nor the rim type suggest that the vessel is a Barrel Urn, and although it is not impossible that a barrel-shaped vessel is represented, a Barrel Urn <u>sensu stricto</u> must be excluded on the basis of the absence of cordons and a heavy rim (see Ellison 1981 for definition of Barrel urns).

Biconical Urns are not common in Berkshire, Tomalin noting only urns from Lambourn, Streatley, Burghfield and Caversham (Tomalin 1983). None of these bears a close resemblance to Fig. 8,5 and 6 from Lower Farm. The

Biconical Urn from Burghfield, only 15km to the north-east, has a rounded, only slightly inturned rim, and a horse-shoe handle (Lobb 1983-5, fig 3, no 5), and is not therefore comparable to the Lower Farm vessel. Apart from this, the rim of one of the Biconical Urns from Radley (formerly Berkshire, now Oxfordshire; illustrated by Case et al. 1964-5, fig. 27, no. 4) has the same peculiarity of the rim as Fig. 8, 5 and 6, although this vessel also possesses a horseshoe cordon.

Possible accessory vessel (Fig. 8, 1).

The vessel Fig. 8, 1, from the tertiary fill of the ring-ditch, although represented only by small sherds, may also be assigned to the Early or Middle Bronze Age. Although it is not possible to estimate size, the relatively thin body wall and the smallness of the lug both suggest a vessel on a small scale. Small 'accessory vessels' are a feature of both Early and Middle Bronze Age ceramic assemblages, and occur in a variety of forms (eg Annable and Simpson 1964, 547-552, Ellison 1981, fig. 14, nos D2, D7, D9, D10, D11, D13). As the fabric of Fig 8, 1 is similar to that of Fig. 8, 2 - 4 (ie is grog-tempered) it may be of similar date.

Context.

The sherds of Collared Urn (Fig. 8, 2-4) were all recovered from low in the the secondary fills of the ring-ditch (segment 6), while the possible Biconical Urn (Fig. 8, 5 and 6) was found in layer 8047, in the top of segment 8212 of the ring-ditch. The Biconical Urn is assumed to be residual

in layer 8047, which is suggested as medieval in date, although the vessel may have derived from deposits associated with the use of the ring-ditch.

The four small sherds of the Early/Middle bronze Age accessory vessel (Fig. 8, 1) were recovered from the tertiary fill of the ring-ditch in segment 8325.

Later prehistoric pottery.

Only one featured sherd in fabric F5, a small, thick, base, only 70mm in diameter (not illustrated), may be later Bronze Age. The base is approximately 18mm thick, and the body wall rises from it at an angle of about 45°, suggesting a markedly convex lower body. Some shallow grooves on the exterior may be deliberate, but no motif can be distinguished, and the grooves may be the result of wear or damage. It may be tentatively suggested that the base belongs to a vessel similar to number 26 from Aldermaston Wharf, Berkshire (Bradley et al. 1980, fig. 13: no. 26). A small number of body sherds in flint tempered fabrics may also be of similar date (see Table 7).

Context.

The majority of this material is from the tertiary fills of segment 6 of the ring-ditch (see Table 7, fabrics F2-F5). The base sherd in fabric F5 is from layer 8047, which also incorporates medieval sherds.

Romano-British pottery.

Only eleven sherds, weighing 24g, and all in sandy fabrics, can be identified (Table 1). None is from known sources.

Context.

With the exception of a single small sherd in the secondary fills and 2 sherds/4g from the tertiary fills of the ring-ditch, which may be intrusive, all the Romano-British pottery is residual in later contexts, and consists of small worn sherds.

Medieval pottery.

Sixty sherds, weighing 383g, are medieval. As the mean sherd weight (6.4g) indicates, the sherds are generally small and no vessels can be reconstructed.

Fabric.

Fabrics F400, C400 and C401 at least appear to be paralleled at Newbury in fabric group A, which comprises fabrics with sand and flint, but also includes those with sand, flint, and sparse limestone (chalk) inclusions. Newbury Group B fabrics, which comprise fabrics with sand, flint and limestone (chalk) inclusions, generally contain higher frequencies of

calcareous inclusions (Vince forthcoming). Fabric Q400 may belong to Newbury fabric group C, on the grounds of its abundant quartz sand temper.

Petrological analysis suggests a source for fabric group A in the Savernake Forest, although this is to the west of the main distribution of the fabric type, which is mainly confined to the Kennet Valley; it does not occur at Reading or sites further east (Vince forthcoming).

Form.

Only eleven featured medieval sherds are present in the assemblage. Four are sherds showing sharp shoulder angles, but with little of the rest of the body wall surviving, and seven are rims (illustrated only in archive). Only one rim is decorated, having shallow oval (?finger) impressions around the rim top, and none are markedly thickened or expanded. Simple jars/cooking pots in the flint-tempered group A fabrics are characterisitic of Phase 1a at Cheap Street Newbury (Hawkes in prep.). There Hawkes suggests a date range for Period 1 (subdivided into Phases a-d) of 12th to mid-14th centuries, but comments that it is impossible to provide a convincing chronology for this period.

Although the evidence is slight, both at Lower Farm, where the amount and nature of the medieval pottery make identification difficult, and in nearby Newbury, where the chronology appears to be uncertain, it at least seems clear that the small number of sherds from the excavation are related to forms and fabrics known in Newbury. The parallels there suggest that the Lower Farm vessels may belong within Phase 1a, and therefore at the earlier

rather than the later end of the date range suggested by Hawkes for Period 1 at Cheap Street.

Context.

A small number of sherds, including one of the rims, are in features probably of medieval date (see Table 5).

Illustrated Pottery Catalogue (Fig. 8).

1 Body sherd of a vessel with a small applied oval lug. There may also be one pair of plastic fingernail impressions, but the impressions are unclear, and very near the broken and disintegrating edge of the sherd. Fabric G2. Colour: exterior buff; core black; interior grey-brown. Context 8326, tertiary fill of ring-ditch, Object No. 18048

2-4 Three sherds representing thirty-four sherds, including 50% of the base, of a large vessel with slack shoulder, carrying twisted cord horseshoe impressions. These are likely to be widely spaced, as only one of the six shoulder sherds present is decorated. The twisted cord impressions exhibit an S-twist, inicating that the cord used was Z-twisted. Fabric G1. Colour: exterior buff, brown, pale brown; core black; interior pale grey-brown, pale brown. Contexts 8, 12, 13 (see Table 5), secondary fill of ring-ditch, Object No. 21

5-6 Two sherds representing twenty-three sherds, including two rim sherds, of a vessel with an inturned rim and a diameter at the lip of not less than 240mm. A linear depression runs around the rim top, which may be the result of the addition of an extra strip of clay around the exterior, without final smoothing having taken place - the junction between the vessel wall and the extra clay remaining as a slight depression. Shallow ?fingertip impressions around the exterior of the rim may have been left during this procedure.

Fabric F1. Colour: exterior dark brown to black, core and interior black.

Contexts 8213, 8214 (see Table 5), part of layer 8047.

Table 5: All Pottery by period, phase and context

Context (with cut numbers in square brackets)	prehistoric	R-B	medieval	post-med.	indeterminate
ring-ditch primary fills					
049 [001]	2/2g	-	-	-	-
ring-ditch secondary fills					
002 [001]	-	1/2g	-	-	-
007 [006]	1/5g	-	-	-	-
008 [006]	2/9g	-	-	-	-
012 [006]	1/11g	-	-	-	-
013 [006]	35/590g 2-4	-	-	-	-
ring-ditch tertiary fills					
8326 [8325]	4/16g 1	-	-	-	-
006	4/28g	2/4g	-	-	3/6g
undated ditches					
8189 [8188]	-	-	4/43g (2)	-	-
layer 8047					
8191 [8190]	1/39g	-	2/28g (1)	-	-
8213 [8212]	5/54g	-	-	-	-
8214 [8212]	18/183g (2)5-6	-	-	-	-
later features					
8069 [8068]	1/3g	-	-	-	-
8042 [8040]	-	1/1g (1)	-	-	-
8127 [8137]	-	1/2g	19/101g (1)	-	-
later fills of prehistoric features					
8122 [8129]	11/12g (1)	3/3g	2/18g	-	1/3g
subsoil					
8178	-	-	1/7g (1)	-	-
topsoil					
003	-	-	1/8g	-	-

Table 5: cont.

	prehistoric	R-B	medieval	post-med.	indeterminate
post-medieval drains					
8128 [8133]	-	-	1/15g	-	-
8323 [8322]	-	-	1/7g	-	-
clearance					
8103	-	-	3/14g (1)	-	-
8106	-	-	1/16g	-	-
8110	-	-	3/31g	-	-
8112	-	-	5/6g	-	-
8118	-	-	4/10g	-	-
8121	-	-	8/51g (1)	-	-
8303	-	-	1/1g	-	-
8306	-	-	1/1g	-	-
8307	-	3/12g	-	-	-
8309	-	-	-	1/4g	-
8314	-	-	1/1g	-	-
8315	-	-	1/12g	-	-
8316	-	-	1/13g	-	-

Entries are shown as follows; sherd count / weight
(rim count)* / illustration

*also included in sherd count

Table 6: All pottery by main inclusion type.

	Calcareous	Flint	Grog	Quartz
Prehistoric	-	42/323g *49%/34%*	43/629g *51%/66%*	-
Romano-British	-	-	-	11/24g
Medieval	11/72g *18%/19%*	37/228g *62%/59%*	-	12/83g *20%/22%*
Post-medieval Earthenware 1/4g				
Indeterminate	-	-	-	4/9g

Table 7: Fabrics of prehistoric pottery by phase and context

Context	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	G1	G2
ring-ditch primary fills							
049	2/2g	-	-	-	-	-	-
ring-ditch secondary fills							
007	-	1/5g	-	-	-	-	-
008	-	-	-	-	-	1/6g	1/3g
012	-	-	-	-	-	1/11g	-
013	-	-	-	-	-	32/577g 2-4	3/13g
ring-ditch tertiary fills							
8326	-	-	-	-	-	-	4/16g 1
006	-	1/10g	1/5g	2/13g	-	-	-
layer 8047							
8213	5/54g	-	-	-	-	-	-
8214	18/183g (2) 5-6	-	-	-	-	-	-
8191	-	-	-	-	1/39g (base)	-	-
later features							
8069	-	-	-	-	-	-	1/3g
later fills of prehistoric features							
8122	-	-	-	11/12g (2)	-	-	-

Entries are shown as follows; sherd count / weight
(rim count)* / illustration

*also included in sherd count

Fabric catalogue

Key

Terms used consistently in the description are;

hard - not scratched, or only just scratched, with the fingernail
soft - scratched easily with the fingernail

rare - (2% (all % are % of total surface area)
sparse - 3% - 7%
moderate - 10% - 15%
common - 20% - 25%
very common - 30%
abundant - 40%

fine (of sand grains, mica etc) - not seen easily with the naked eye
coarse - seen easily with the naked eye

The numbering of the fabrics reflects their date, and the codes lie within the following ranges;

1 - 99 - prehistoric
100-399 - Romano-British
400-599 - medieval
600-799 - post-medieval
800+ - uncertain

Calcareous fabrics

C400 Hard fabric with sparse to moderate irregular voids (<3mm), moderate fine to coarse sand, and sparse fine mica. The voids are sub-rounded, with some very small (<0,5mm) round voids, and seem most likely to represent a leached out calcareous inclusion, probably chalk or limestone. Unoxidised throughout.

C401 As for C400, with the addition of sparse flint (<2mm).

Established fabrics

E600 post-medieval red earthenware

Flint-tempered fabrics

F1 Soft, slightly laminated and friable fabric, with moderate flint (<5mm, most <2mm). Unoxidised throughout.
?Biconical Urn

F2 Hard fabric (may just be scratched with the fingernail), with sparse flint (<1mm), sparse to moderate fine to coarse sand, rare to sparse fine mica, and rare iron oxides (<1mm).
Probably pre-Roman; possibly Late Bronze Age (no diagnostic sherds). Partially oxidised to unoxidised exterior surfaces, unoxidised core and interior surfaces.

F3 Soft fabric with sparse to moderate flint (<1mm), sparse coarse sand, and moderate iron oxides (<0,5mm). Oxidised exterior surfaces, unoxidised core and interior surfaces.
Probably later prehistoric (no diagnostic sherds)

F4 Hard fabric (just scratched with the fingernail) with moderate flint (<3mm, most <1mm), rare to sparse fine sand, and rare to sparse iron oxides (<3mm). Unoxidised throughout.
Probably later prehistoric (no diagnostic sherds)

F5 Hard fabric (just scratched with the fingernail) with moderate flint (<4mm), sparse fine to coarse sand, and rare iron oxides (<1mm). Oxidised surfaces, core obscured.
Possibly Late Bronze Age.

F400 Hard fabric with sparse to moderate flint (<5mm, most <2mm) and common to abundant coarse sand. Unoxidised throughout.

Grog-tempered fabrics

G1 Soft friable fabric with common to very common grog (<10mm, most <4mm), rare to sparse fine to coarse sand, rare fine mica, and rare flint (<1mm). Partially oxidised to oxidised surfaces, unoxidised core.
Collared Urn

G2 Soft friable fabric with sparse grog and rare to sparse fine sand. The grog is extremely difficult to distinguish from the matrix. Oxidised surfaces, unoxidised core.
Bronze Age accessory/miniature vessel.

Sandy fabrics

Q100 Hard fabric (may just be scratched with the fingernail) with rare to sparse fine sand and rare flint (<1mm). Unoxidised throughout.

Q101 Soft fabric with moderate fine to coarse sand. Unoxidised throughout.

Q102 Hard fabric with common coarse sand, sparse to moderate grog (<3mm, most <1mm), sparse voids (<3mm, most <1mm) and rare flint (<4mm). The voids may represent grog fragments which have disintegrated, as some of the surviving fragments are friable and powdery. Unoxidised or partially oxidised throughout.

Q103 Soft fabric with moderate fine sand and rare flint (<2mm, most <1mm). Unoxidised throughout.

Q104 Hard fabric with moderate fine sand, sparse fine mica, and sparse fine unidentified dark mineral grains. Unoxidised throughout.
Greyware

Q105 Soft fabric with sparse fine sand, sparse fine mica, and sparse fine unidentified dark minerals. Oxidised throughout.

Q400 Hard sandy fabric, with common to very common coarse sand. Generally unoxidised.

Q800 Soft fabric with sparse fine sand, sparse iron oxides (<1mm) and rare flint (<1mm). Partially oxidised surfaces, unoxidised core.

THE OTHER FINDS.

by Michael J. Heaton

The quantities of all other materials recovered are shown on Table 8. Quantities were small and with the exception of iron, stone and burnt stone occurred only in modern contexts.

Iron objects.

Nineteen objects of iron were recovered and recorded as objects. They comprised eleven hobnail fragments from pit 8064, a nut and bolt from the backfilled evaluation trench, one amorphous lump from clearance and six nail fragments, three from the topsoil, one from the backfilled evaluation trench and one from the tertiary fill of undated ditch 8188. All were heavily encrusted and as they were all recovered from medieval, post-medieval or undated contexts, they have not been X-rayed and no analysis has been attempted. Details of these objects are presented in the archive.

Stone.

A wide variety of stone types occur naturally in the gravels of the Kennet Valley, so all fragments unless indisputably bearing evidence of the hand of mankind, were assumed to be natural and, after counting and weighing, were discarded on site. Burnt stone was treated in the same manner. Stone and burnt stone occurred only in the secondary and tertiary fills of the ring-ditch (Table 8) and in modern contexts.

Table 8. Other finds.

Phase	animal bone	burnt stone	cbm*	fired clay	glass	slag	stone	iron
The Ring-ditch								
secondary fills	-	2/10	-	4/32	-	-	4/1295	-
tertiary fills	-	-	-	-	-	-	1/34	-
Undated ditches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Medieval								
feature fills	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
Subsoil	-	1/126	1/45	-	1/2	-	-	-
Topsoil	6/10	-	-	-	1/8	2/52	3/56	2
Recent disturbance								
backfilled trenches	-	-	6/53	-	1/14	6/26	-	2
clearance layer	23/66	-	4/47	-	-	6/110	6/454	3

amounts are given as count/weight, all weights to nearest gramme or as count only.
* cbm = ceramic building material

ENVIRONMENTAL.

THE PLANT MACROFOSSILS.

by Pat Hinton.

Method.

Nineteen samples were processed using the Trust's standard flotation procedure. Flots were retained on a 500ŋ mesh sieve and residues on a 1mm mesh sieve. These were graded into 5.6mm, 2mm and 1mm fractions for ease of sorting. The residues were sorted by Wessex Archaeology and the extracted material and flot identified by the writer.

Results.

The samples from the Bronze Age ring-ditch contain very few seeds, of which all but three are cereal grains. These are mostly in poor condition, being distorted and with very little surface remaining. Identification in most cases was made on over all outline only.

The one grain of Emmer wheat (Triticum dicoccum) in context 8030, the tertiary fill of undated ditch 8054, is incomplete but the identification is suggested by its narrowness and by the flattened ventral surface. Of the two other wheat grains, from the primary fill of the ring-ditch, only

one is in fairly good condition but even so identification is uncertain. It lacks the characteristics of grains of Emmer or Spelt wheats which usually retain something of the form imposed by their tightly-enclosed glumes, and yet does not have features sufficient to identify it as a free-threshing bread wheat (Triticum aestivum s.l.). In the absence of any parts of the ear or chaff it is impossible to be sure of the specific identification of a single grain of wheat.

The identification of the barley grain from the secondary fill of the ring-ditch was straightforward, but the oats cannot be more closely identified. As with the wheats, parts of the chaff are necessary for identification and the base of the floret is needed to distinguish between cultivated and wild species.

The seeds of knotgrass and vetch represent common grassland or arable weeds.

The identification of the Sloe is not certain. It consists of a fragment of a fruit stone of Rosaceae species. The external surface is damaged, but its outline and size strongly suggest Sloe - a common shrub of light woodland, hedge and scrub.

Summary.

With small numbers of seeds it is difficult to compare the different phases of the ring-ditch, except to note that there is no evidence of agricultural

activity in the pre-ditch phase, that wheat occurs only in the ring-ditches primary fill (although in the tertiary fill of other, undated, ditches), barley is only present in the secondary fill of the ring-ditch and oats, the most numerous grains, throughout.

Samples from the Medieval contexts also contain few seeds and, as in the Bronze Age samples, oats appear most frequently.

Table 9: Charred seeds from ring-ditch

		Ring-ditch						
	pre-RD	P.fill		S.fill			T.fill	Central pit
context	8264	8046	8072	8045	8038	8195	8025	8193
Triticum sp. Indet. wheat	-	1+f	1	-	-	-	-	-
Hordeum vulgare Hulled barley	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Avena sp. Oats	-	2+2f	2f	4	-	1	2f	1f
Cerealia indet. Indet. cereals	-	1	-	6f	-	2	1	2f
Vicia cf tetrasperma Four-seeded vetch	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
cf Prunus spinosa Sloe	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
cf Polygonum aviculare agg. (Knotgrass)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

f=fragment,

Table 10: Charred seeds from other contexts.

context	undated ditch 8054		layer 8047	features cutting 8047			
	8030	8046	8213	8069	8070	8073	8347
Triticum dicoccum Emmer wheat	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Avena sp. Oats	1+2f	1+3f	1	1	2	1	-
Cerealia indet. Indet. cereals	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Vicia tetrasperma Four-seeded vetch	-	10f	-	-	-	-	1
Veronica hederifolia Ivy-leaved speedwell	-	-	-	-	1	-	-

f=fragment

THE PHOSPHATE ANALYSIS.

by Sarah Wyles.

Sixteen samples, three columns of three from putative grave 8040 and seven as background controls from elsewhere on site, were taken for phosphate analysis.

Method.

Air-dried samples were finely ground and 1ml of each had 5mls of 5N hydrochloric acid added to it. This solution was boiled for 30 minutes and 15ml of stannous chloride was added to 0.2ml of each sample solution. 9.65ml od ammonium molybdate working solution was then added to each sample. After 10 minutes the phosphorous pentoxide content of each sample was calculated using a Lovibond 2000 comparator and comparator disc 3/7.

Results.

All 16 samples gave the same result with a ppmP measurement of 100 (parts per million of phosphorous). The fills of the putative grave 8040, therefore, showed no phosphate enhancement.

DISCUSSION.

The ring-ditch at Lower Farm is one of many to have been identified on the gravels of the Lower Kennet Valley (Gates 1975,; Lobb and Rose forthcoming). Single, isolated ring-ditches, similar to Lower Farm, have been identified elsewhere (for example Gates 1975, Map 1) although both scattered groups (ibid Map 8) and linear groups (ibid Map 7) also occur. Several of the ring-ditches recorded by Gates had previously, or were subsequently to be destroyed, primarily by gravel extraction operations, and the Lower Farm ring-ditch is an addition to a series of excavations and observations of such features in the Kennet Valley.

Form.

The diameter of the ring-ditch falls within the range of other such features in the Kennet Valley. Its diameter, 21.9m internally, can be compared to that of Ring-Ditch B, 21.6m internal diameter, at Burghfield (Lobb 1983-85, 11) and lies between the 55m diameter of the Late Neolithic ring-ditch at Beenham (Anon 1963-4, 99) and the smaller Bronze Age ring-ditches at Heron's House, Burghfield, 11m internal diameter (Bradley and Richards 1980, 1) and Ring-Ditch 604, 13.5m internal diameter, at Field Farm, Burghfield (Farwell and Lobb forthcoming).

There was no evidence for an internal mound or an external bank. None of the ditch sections displayed any preferential tip, and there was no indication of a protected natural surface or buried soil within the monument. The total upcast of approximately 68.1m^3 (estimated from average

original profile and medial circumference) could only have produced a 20m diameter mound 0.65m high, or a 10m diameter mound, 2.6m high with a 20° slope. Gravel is unsuitable for this purpose, being generally unstable, and, unlike chalk, can rarely hold a slope of more than 30°. Layer 8047, a post-Bronze Age deposit, may possibly represent a 'spread' mound layer but may alternatively be a localised, reworked colluvial deposit. An area of scorched grass over the ring-ditch and recorded on aerial photographs may represent the extent of a colluvial fan that equates to layer 8047.

Evidence of internal mounds or external banks from other ring-ditches in the Kennet Valley is equivocal. Possible mounds occurred at Ring-Ditches 417 and 418 at Field Farm (Farwell and Lobb forthcoming) and Ring-Ditch C at Heron's House (Bradley and Richards 1980,5); external banks may have occurred at Ring-Ditch A at Burghfield (Lobb 1983-85,15) and Ring-Ditch 604 at Field Farm (Farwell and Lobb forthcoming).

Function.

No evidence was recovered from the ring-ditch of any burials. The central feature contained no burial or associated material. The fragments of two vessels, probably representing a Collared Urn and Biconical Urn, could have contained cremations. The remnants of both vessels were recovered from locations that would be compatible with their erosion into the ditch from positions either on the ground surface or in a mound within the ring-ditch. Alternatively un-urned cremations are known from the interiors of ring-ditches elsewhere in the Kennet Valley, for example ring-ditches 418 and 604 at Field Farm (Farwell and Lobb forthcoming) and Ring-Ditch B at

Heron's House (Bradley and Richards 1980, 1). However, no evidence for cremations was recovered from the ring-ditch fills, although human bone, cremated or otherwise, may not have survived the former acidity of the soil. A comparable absence of human bone was recorded at the two ring-ditches at Burghfield, where, similarly, possible cremation vessels were recovered from the ditch fills (Lobb 1983-85, 15).

Despite the lack of positive evidence for burials, the ring-ditch most likely represents a burial feature. Other comparable ring-ditches in the Kennet Valley at Heron's House (Bradley and Richards 1980), Burghfield (Lobb 1983-85), Pingewood (Lobb and Mills forthcoming) and Field Farm (Farwell and Lobb forthcoming) have also been interpreted as burial features, and, in the absence of other evidence, this seems a likely interpretation here. Otherwise the original form of the Lower Farm ring-ditch must remain unclear.

Date.

The Collared Urn sherds in the secondary fills of the ring-ditch appear to secure an Early or Middle Bronze Age date for the infill and probably also therefore the construction of the ring-ditch, given the initial rapid filling of a gravel-cut feature. An Early Bronze Age date is comparable to that suggested for many of the Kennet Valley ring-ditches (for example those at Burghfield - Bradley and Richards 1980, 6; Lobb 1983-85, 15) and the Lower Farm ring-ditch can be seen as a component of $\bar{a}$ phase of monument construction in the Kennet valley at this time (Lobb, 1983-85, 15). The small quantities of undiagnostic Late Bronze Age pottery from the tertiary fills

of the ditch suggest the monument was still visible as an earthwork at this time, although there is no evidence for re-use or recutting of the ring-ditch. Later Bronze Age settlement and activity is well-represented in the Kennet Valley, for example at Aldermaston Wharf, 11 kilometres to the east (Bradley et al. 1980, 219) and fully discussed in that report.

The presence of a charcoal layer within the secondary fills of the Lower Farm ring-ditch can be paralleled in other ring-ditches elsewhere in the Kennet Valley (Bradley and Richards 1980, 6). Although it was not possible to identify this layer as specifically representing a clearance deposit and although the pottery in the upper fills is only tentatively assigned a Late Bronze Age date, superficially the implied sequence is one that has been recognised elsewhere in the Kennet and Middle Thames Valleys (Barrett and Bradley 1980, 255).

Associations

The ring-ditch is sited on a low terrace close to the boundary between the gravels of the Kennet Valley and the clays of the valley sides. As such, it is positioned on the margins of the floodplain. A similar location has been recognised for other ring-ditches in the Thames and Kennet Valleys (Barrett and Bradley 1980, 249). The gravel areas immediately to the north are not presently liable to seasonal flooding, and are likely to have been cultivated in antiquity. The small quantity of cereal grain recovered from the ring-ditch fills suggests at least a low level of arable cultivation in the vicinity after the construction and during the initial infilling of the monument.

The location of any contemporary Early or Middle Bronze Age settlement associated with the ring-ditch was not apparent from the excavation. The majority of the cropmarks adjacent to the ring-ditch have been shown from documentary sources and evaluation excavation to be primarily post-medieval or possibly Romano-British in date and no other positive evidence for Bronze Age settlement was recovered from the vicinity in 1987 (Farwell and Lobb 1987). However, a settlement location below the ring-ditch on the floodplain, but away from the most poorly-drained soils closest to the River Kennet might be suggested from available evidence elsewhere in the Kennet Valley (Bradley et al. 1980, 286; Lobb forthcoming). Alternatively, settlement may occur adjacent to the ring-ditch at the junction between the two geologies (gravels and Reading Beds) as has recently been shown at Dunston Park, Thatcham, where evidence of possible later Bronze Age settlement was recorded in a comparable topographic and geological location (Barnes 1990).

Later History of the ring-ditch.

While the ditches of the monument were probably infilled by the Late Bronze Age, any surviving mound or external bank would have been removed by Romano-British and medieval activity represented by the material of this date recovered from features within and external to the ring-ditch. The small quantity of abraded, residual Romano-British pottery may be associated with the apparent ditched field system of this date to the north of the ring-ditch identified during the evaluation (Farwell and Lobb 1987) and the ring-ditch may have been flattened during this period. This work

also identified a possible settlement 1.5 kilometres to the east (SU 508658).

The moderate quantities of small and abraded, possibly 12th- to 14th-century, material is noteworthy in view of the distance of contemporary settlement from the excavation, but is nevertheless presumably a result of manuring activities.

Alternatively, the complete blanketing of the Lower Farm site and Newbury Racecourse with railway sidings and storage areas during the Second World War has left remarkably little trace within the excavation. By 1949, when racing had returned to Newbury Racecourse after an eight year absence, 22 miles of railway sidings, thousands of sleepers and 200,000 cubic yards of hard core and ballast had been removed from this area west of Lower Farm (information courtesy of Newbury Racecourse plc). Many of the amorphous, shallow hollows representing later features on the site and the small quantities of post-medieval material, however, may be associated with this activity.

The opportunity to supplement the information gathered from the ring-ditch excavation, and possibly to identify any contemporary Bronze Age settlement associated with the monument, has been provided by Wimpey Hobbs, who are continuing to fund a watching brief during extraction works at the site. This will provide an excellent opportunity to examine an extensive area adjacent to the ring-ditch that will hopefully elucidate the environmental, social and economic landscape in which this Bronze Age monument was set. The watching brief is continuing at present and is expected to last for

several years. Ultimately it is hoped that on completion of this work, a supplementary report will be prepared summarising the results of the archaeological evalution and watching brief works for the remaining areas at Lower Farm.

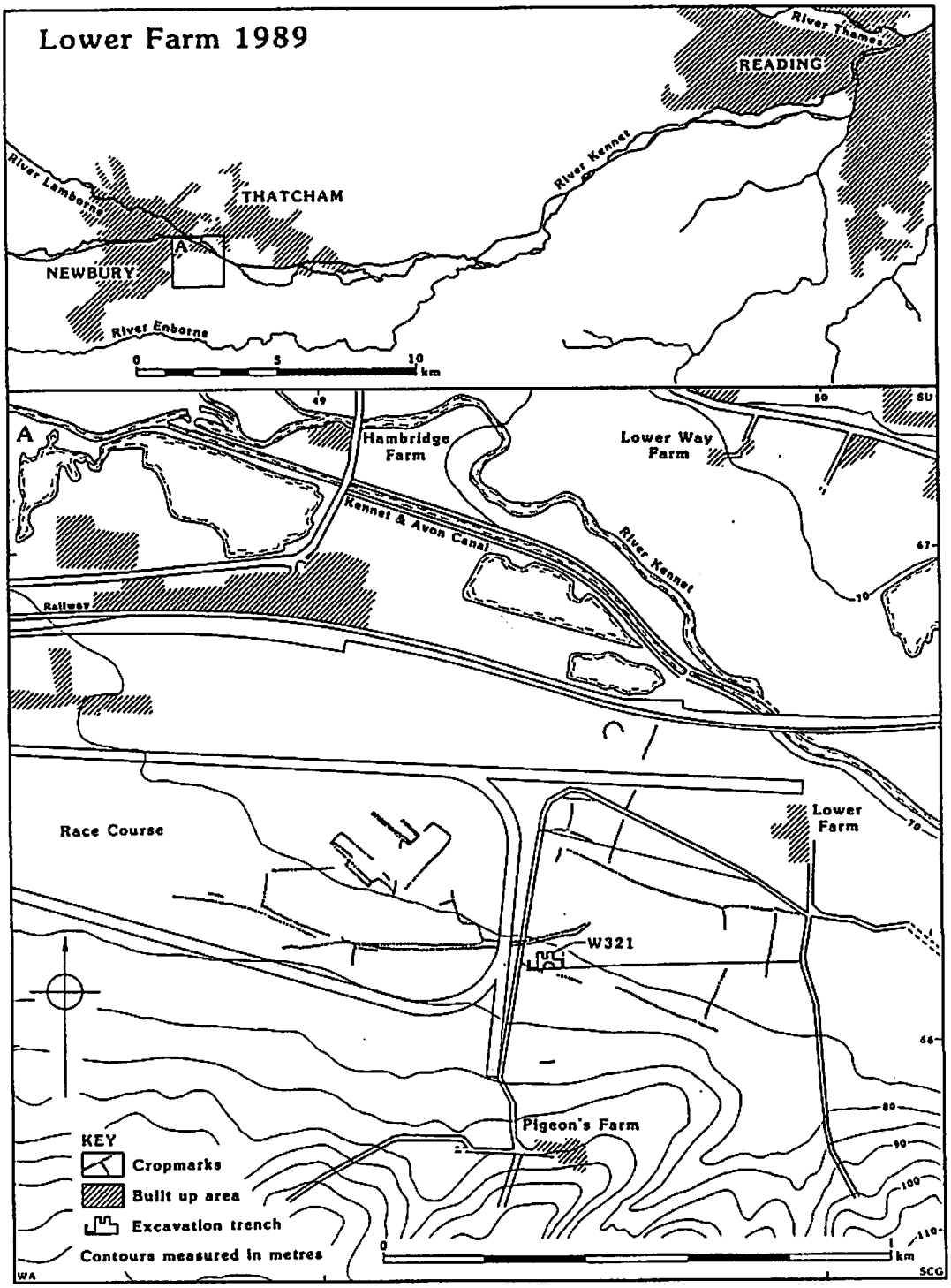

Fig 1: Site location.

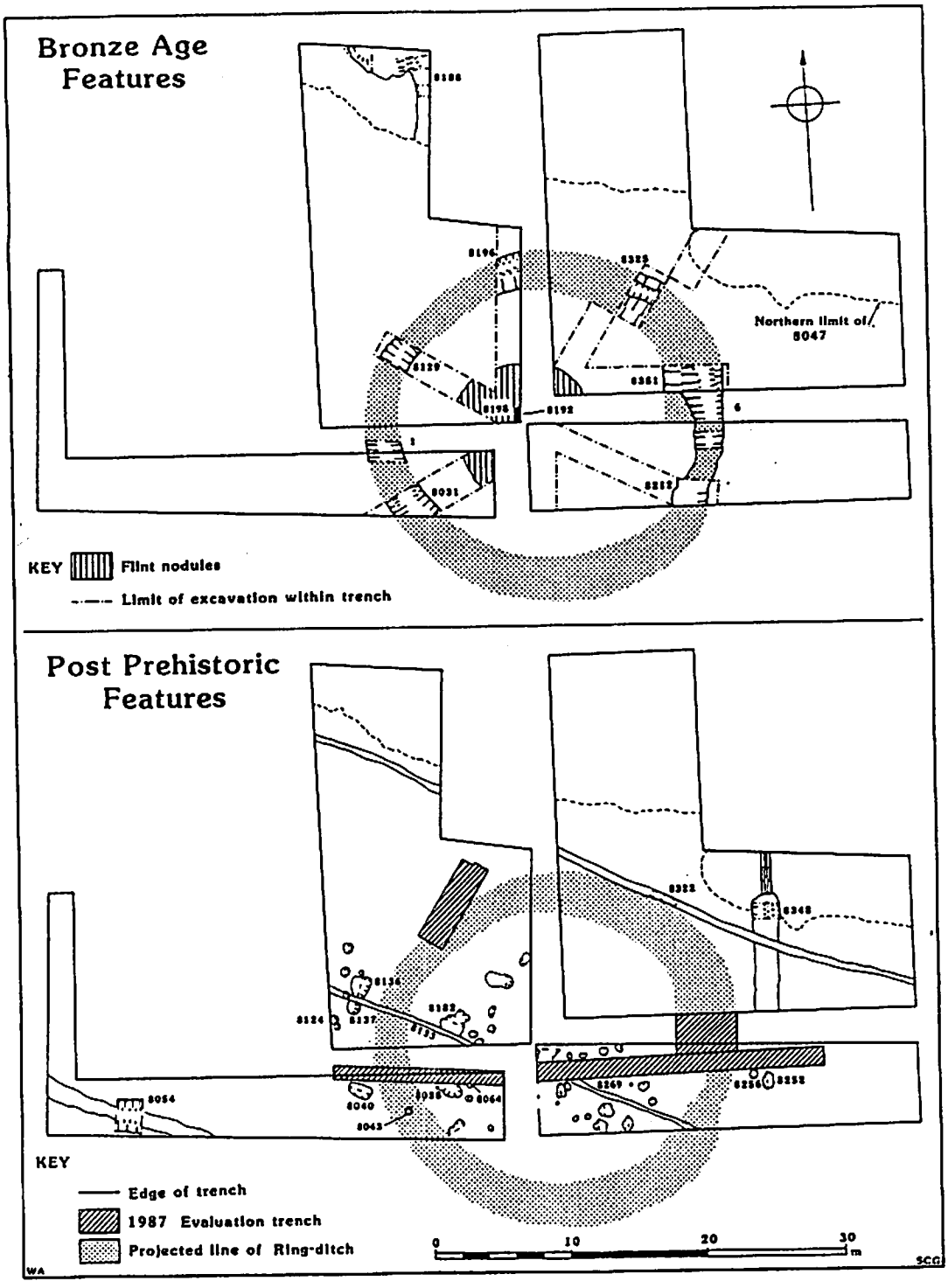

Fig 2: Plan of Excavated features.

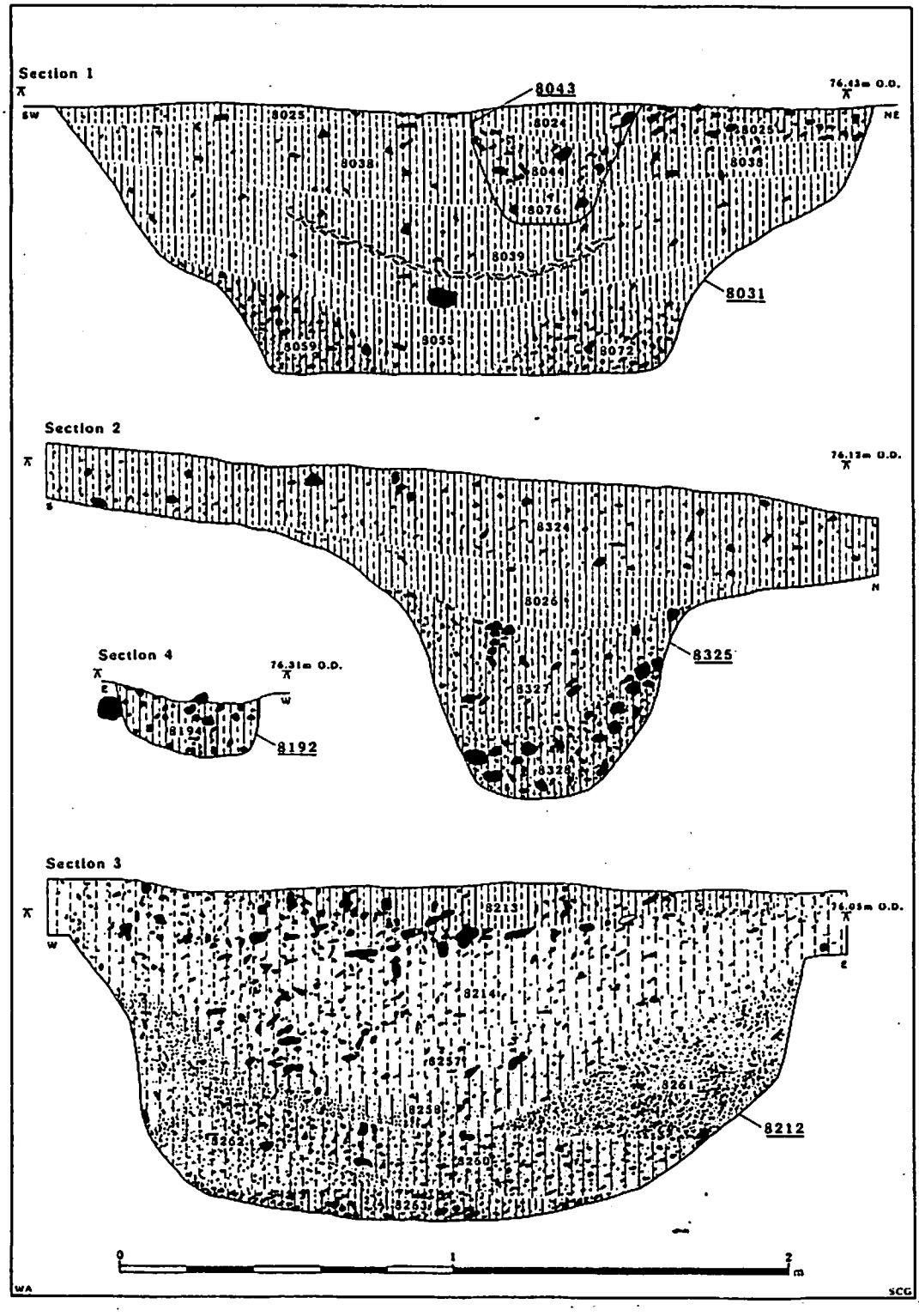

Fig 3: Sections of the ring-ditch and the central feature.

For key see Figure 5.

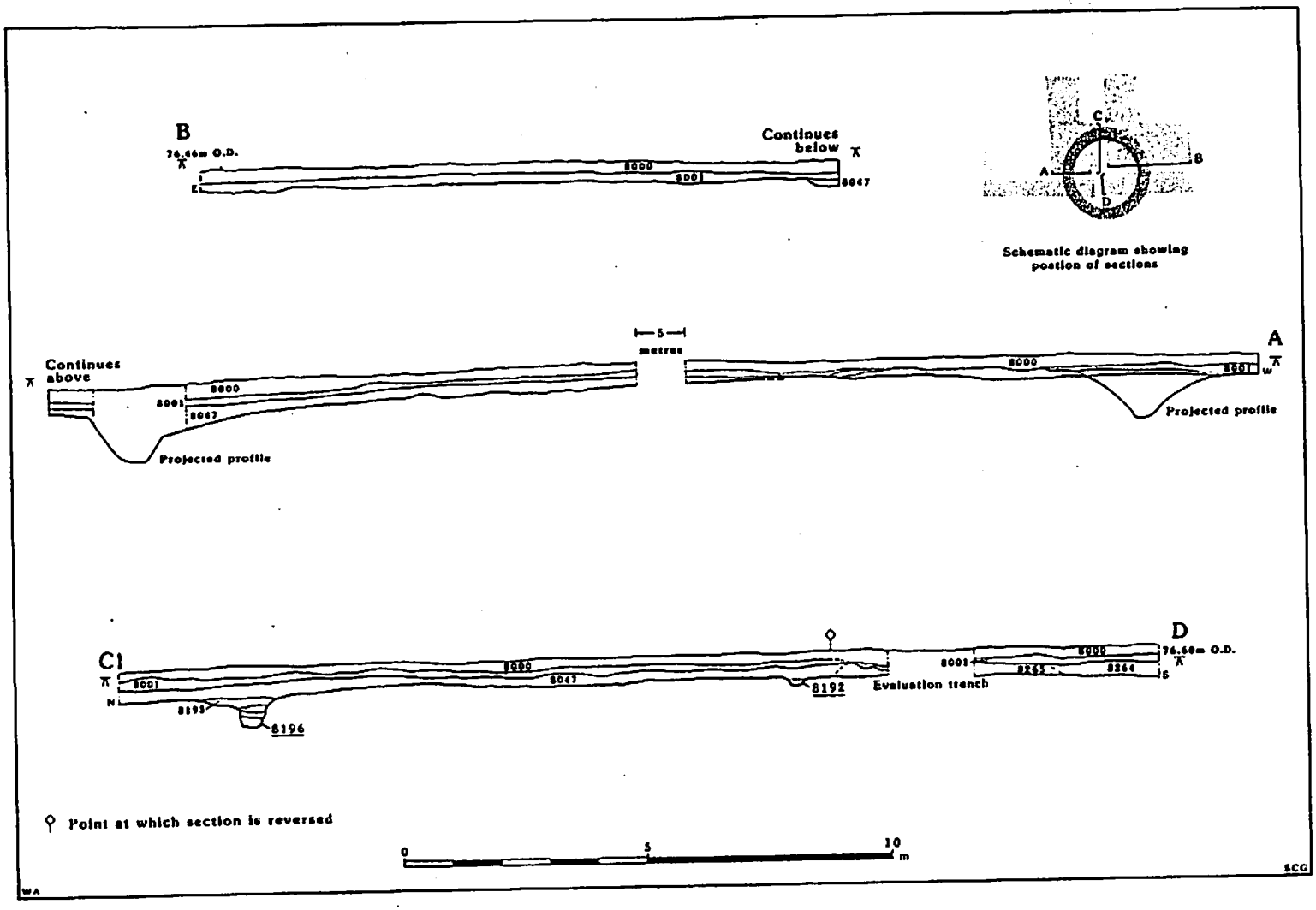

Fig 4: Ring-ditch profiles.

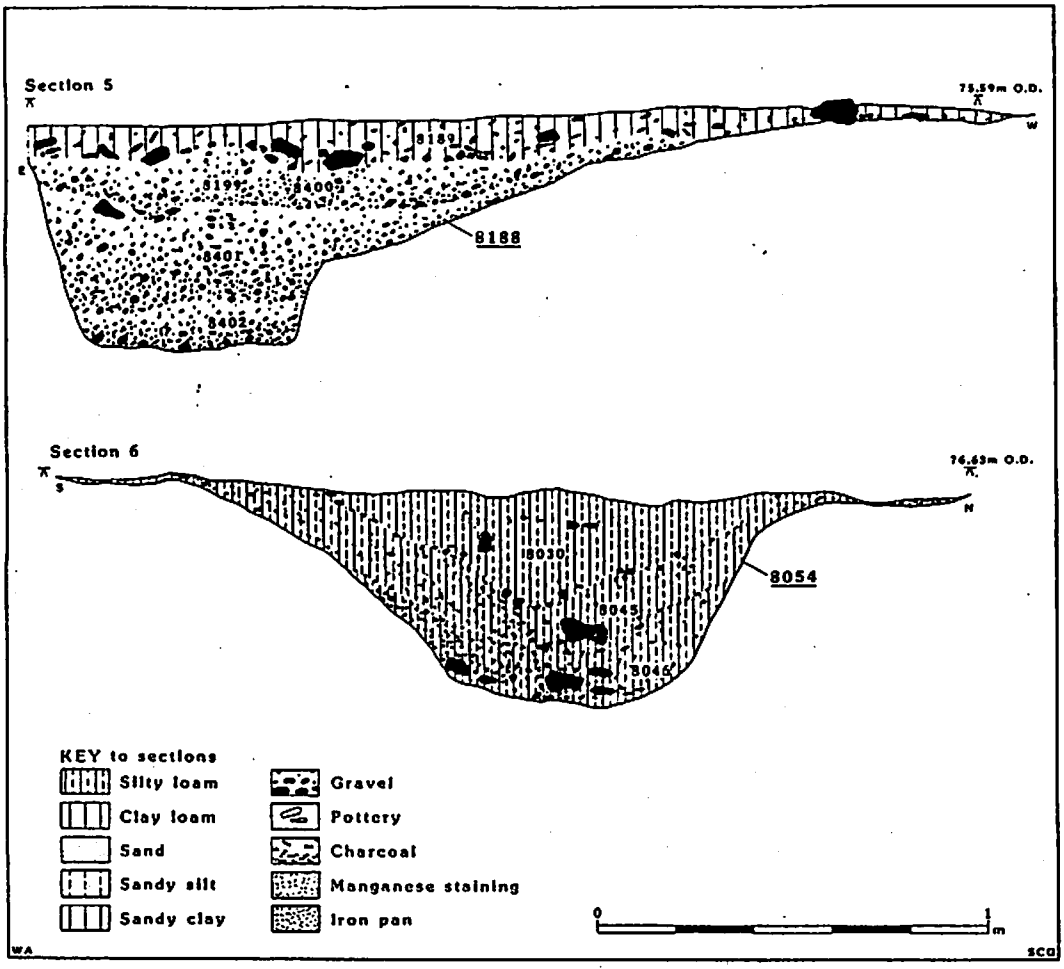

Fig 5: Sections of undated ditches.

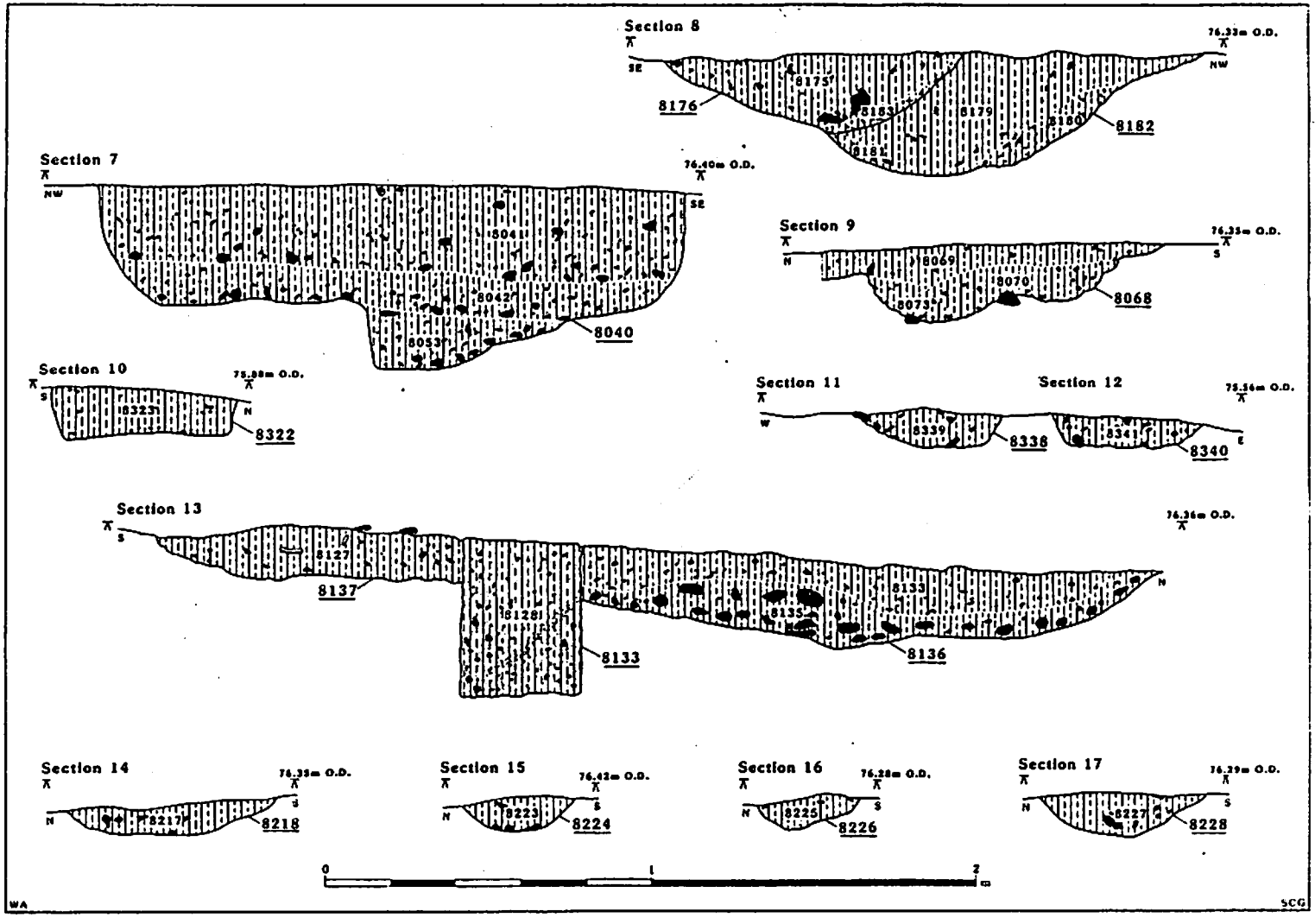

Fig 6: Sections of later features.

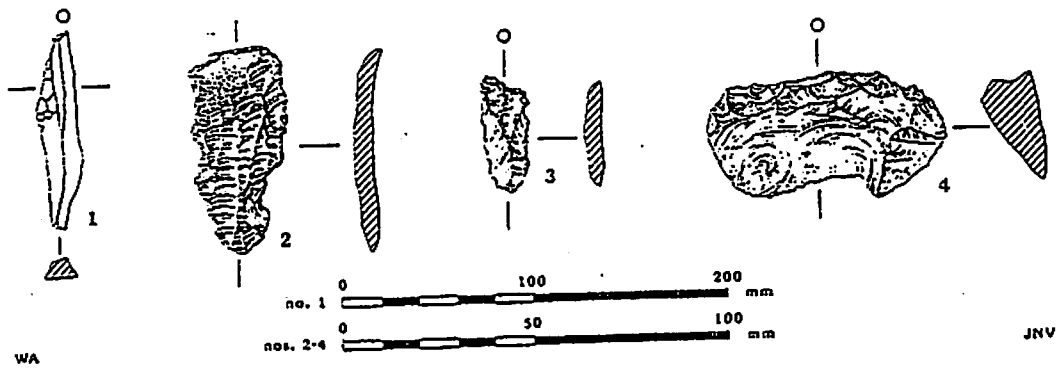

Fig 7: Struck flint: no. 1 1:1, remainder 1:2. Particulars in catalogue.

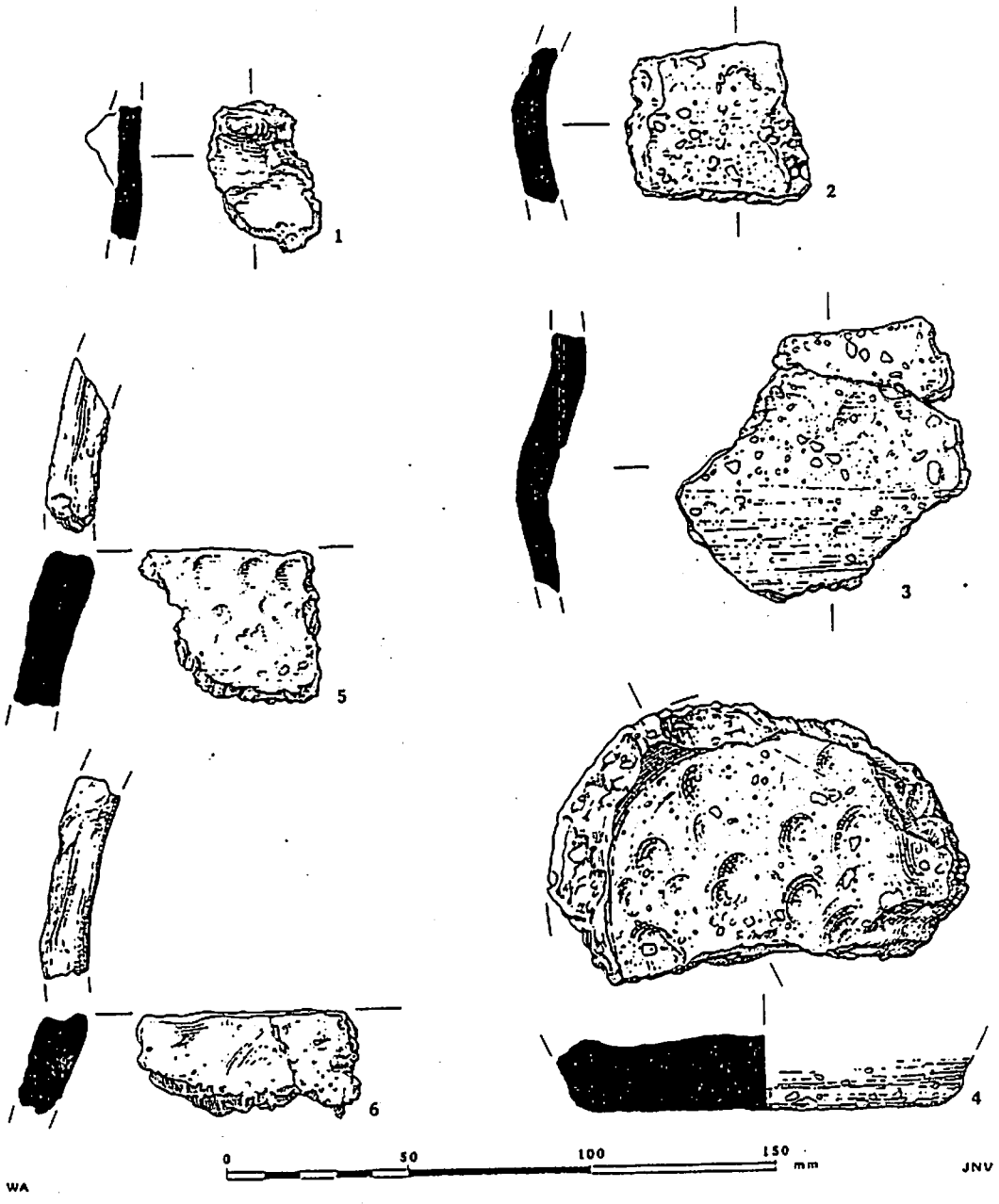

Fig 8: The Prehistoric pottery.

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