
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume XCIX
for 2010

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Proceedings XCVIII, 2009: Price £12.50 for members, £14.50 for non-members

- John Pickles, Peter Gathercole, and Alison Taylor: *Mary Desborough Cra'ster, 1928–2008*
Leo Webley and Jonathan Hiller: *A fen island in the Neolithic and Bronze Age: excavations at North Fen, Sutton, Cambridgeshire*
Aileen Connor: *A fen island burial: excavation of an Early Bronze Age round barrow at North Fen, Sutton*
Hella Eckardt with Amanda Clarke, Sophie Hay, Stephen Macaulay, Pat Ryan, David Thornley and Jane Timby: *The Bartlow Hills in context*
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Scott Kenney: *A reappraisal of the evidence for the 'northern arm' of the Fleam Dyke at Fen Ditton*
Laura Piper and Andrew Norton: *An excavation at Station Quarry, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire*
Duncan Mackay: *Excavations at Scotland Road/Union Lane, Chesterton*
Aileen Connor: *A curious object from Firs Farm, Caxton*
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Chris Jakes: *Recent Accessions to the Cambridgeshire Collection*

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Cambridge Antiquarian Society**

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**Volume XCIX
for 2010**

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Cambridge Antiquarian Society

Report for the Year 2009

Membership: there are now 382 members, 49 Affiliated Societies and 67 subscribing institutions.

Meetings: There were 4 Council meetings and 9 Ordinary meetings, at which the following lectures were given:

Gabriel Moshenska	<i>The School Air Raid Shelter: History, Archaeology and Memory</i>
Prof. Stephen Oakley	<i>How Latin Texts Survived from Antiquity to the Age of Printing</i> (In association with the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies)
Richard Buckley	<i>A Tale of Two Towns: recent discoveries from Roman and Medieval Leicester</i>
Prof. Ronald Hutton	<i>The History of Prehistory: Megaliths and the Modern Imagination</i>
Dr Catherine Hills	<i>Skeletons in the Garden – Romans and Anglo Saxons at Newnham College</i>
Ben Robinson	<i>Revealing Peterborough – New Explorations in an Ancient Cathedral City</i>
Dr Stephen Alford	<i>Finding Nicholas Berden: the career of an Elizabethan spy</i>
Prof. Simon Keynes	<i>John Mitchell Kemble (1807–57): Apostle, Revolutionary, and Anglo-Saxonist</i>
Richard Mortimer & Alex Pickstone	<i>Further Excavations at the War Ditches, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge</i> (In association with the Prehistoric Society)

In addition the following two conferences were held:

21st November 2009 *Recent archaeological work in Cambridgeshire*

17th April 2010 *Past Relations: different approaches to the dead over time*

Excursions: The Programme for 2010 consisted of the following visits:

Chatham Historic Dockyard, Saturday 15 May:

One of the country's foremost naval dockyards for 300 years, Chatham has been in the care of the Historic Dockyard Trust since 1985. As well as three historic vessels – HMS Gannet (1878), HMS Cavalier (1944) and HM Submarine Ocelot (1962) – it has a spectacular Victorian Ropery and a galaxy of other permanent and temporary exhibitions and displays, including 'The Wooden Walls' (a recreation of the dockyard in 1758) and the RNLI Lifeboat Collection. It also has the largest single concentration of listed buildings (military, civil and religious) in the UK.

Cherry Hinton, Saturday 26 June.

A morning was spent exploring the historical and archaeological landscape of Cherry Hinton Hall and its surroundings, under the guidance of Ms Michelle Bullivant. Outwardly Victorian, the park nonetheless has many features that bear witness to former land uses and industrial activity. Also investigated was the Lime Kiln Hill area and the newly-open to the public East Pit.

Spalding, Lincolnshire, Wednesday 14 July.

The highlight of this excursion was a visit to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, founded in 1710 and one of the oldest learned societies in the country. The Society has the UK's second oldest museum collection, containing many rare items of both local and national interest, and a fine library.

The medieval riverside at Ely, Wednesday 15 September.

The riverside was a centre of activity in the Middle Ages attracting trades dependent on the river, and those requiring water such as brewing. The area was developed after the diversion of the river to its present course, probably in the twelfth century, thereby incorporating Ely into the fenland river network.

This walk, led by Mrs Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl, explored the area between the river and Broad Street, bounded by Waterside to the north, looking at sites of former watercourses, hithes, and buildings. The tour also included two medieval houses in Broad Street.

Moggerhanger Park, Bedfordshire, Wednesday 6 October.

Relatively little-known, perhaps due to its long period of use as a local authority TB sanatorium and then orthopaedic hospital (from 1919 to 1987), Moggerhanger was designed by Sir John Soane for Sir Godfrey Thornton, a director of the Bank of England, and built between 1790 and 1816. Listed Grade 1, it is regarded as perhaps the best complete surviving example of Soane's work, and epitomises many of his architectural ideas. The grounds were laid out by Humphry Repton. Now in the care of a Trust, which stepped in to avert the threatened demolition of the house and construction of a housing estate on the site, this excursion enabled members to see the current state of an ongoing and ambitious programme of restoration.

Cambridge Antiquarian Society Accounts for the Year Ended 31/12/2009

Registered Charity 299211 • Founded 1840

PAYMENTS		2008	2009
	Lectures: Publishing Programme	332.53	310.00
	Expenses	255.44	401.07
	Vol XCVI Delivery	1418.33	
	Proceedings Vol XCVII Publication	6399.28	
	Proceedings Vol XCVII Delivery	911.14	(b)
	Proceedings Vol XCVIII Publication		7692.41
	Proceedings Vol XCVIII Delivery		1083.29
	Conduit	1050.36 (a)	1005.00 (a)
	Conference: March	944.69 (a)	898.35 (b, c)
	: November	437.67 (a)	300.00
	Excursions	2147.09 (a)	285.03 (b)
	Mailings: Delivery Charges	504.65	156.56 (b, c)
	Subscriptions (CBA, Rescue, CRSoc)	102.00	104.00
	Haddon Library: Conservation	100.00	100.00
	Office Expenses, Web Site, Misc	376.17	347.75
	Emolument: Registrar	250.00	250.00
	Publicity		532.65
	Insurance	221.60	241.05
	From capital: new web site	894.83 (b)	1121.25 (h)
	Small Grants Scheme	500.00	100.00
	Sub-Total	16895.78	14928.41
	Purchase of Investments	6000.00	
	Total Payments	22895.78	14928.41
RECEIPTS		2008	2009
	Subscriptions: Members & Societies	7110.00	6908.50
	Tax Reclaimed	720.71	779.65
	C.U. Archaeology Dept.	800.00	800.00
	Proceedings Vol XCVI: Grants	2369.00	
	VolXCVII: Grants	3370.00	
	VolXCVIII: Grants		2090.00
	Conduit	486.96	162.60
	Conference: March	1197.10	1813.00
	: November	386.00	505.00
	Excursions	1924.25	312.00
	Sales of Publications	173.48	135.90
	Royalties, Misc	416.00	208.05
	Investment Income (gross)	997.59	1174.05
	Interest: NSB (gross)	812.02	67.41
	Total Receipts	20763.11	14956.16
	less Payments (excluding Investment of capital adjusted below)	22895.78	14928.41
	Cash Surplus/Deficit (-)	-2132.67	27.75 (d)
	Fixed Interest Treasury Stock:		
	Capital investment	6000.00	
	less excess cost on purchase/re-investment over maturity values	-997.06	-571.32
	Surplus/Deficit (-) Income over Expenditure	2870.27	-543.57
STATEMENT OF ASSETS			
	Cash Funds: Current A/C	2611.26	2571.60
	: Deposit A/C	23265.03	23332.44 (e)
	Treasury Stock at maturity values	18363.84	17792.52
		44240.13	43696.56 (g)
	Accumulated Fund		
	At beginning of year	41369.86	44240.13
	Surplus/Deficit (-) Income over Expenditure for the Year	2870.27	-543.57
	At end of year	44240.13	43696.56
	Planned Future Expenditure		9840.00 (f)

Notes

The presentation of the accounts conforms to guidance provided by the Charity Commission. Comment on some of the entries is given in the following notes:

- a. The cost of mailing details to members has been attributed to the event.
- b. A credit of £894.83 with Mailing Distributor arose in 2008 and was used in 2009.
- c. Adding the attributable postage credit makes the 2009 figures comparable to earlier years.
- d. This figure is influenced by a credit with the mailing distributor (b) and the exceptional expenditure on redesigning the Web site (h); excluding these amounts the surplus from the normal activities of the Society in the year 2009 is £254.17.
- e. In 2005 the Council reviewed the policy for the reserves held by the Society and concluded that the cash funds less liabilities (f) should be maintained in the range £10,000 to £20,000; on 31 December 2009 the reserves were £16,064
- f. Planned expenditure; PCAS Vol XCIX £8000, Ladd's Bequest (g) £840, Small Grants £500 and a grant of £500 to Cambridgeshire Archives towards the cost of purchasing the Fen Drainage Papers; total £9,840.
- g. Includes Ladd's bequest earmarked for events associated with Huntingdon; with interest the sum is now £840.
- h. Exceptional expenditure on the design of a new Web site.

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Early Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman pit deposits at Bluntisham, Cambridgeshire

Adrian Burrow and Andrew Mudd

with contributions by Phillip Armitage, Andy Chapman, Sharon Clough, Andy Fawcett, Rowena Gale, Jonny Geber, Pam Grinter and Tora Hylton

Excavation in advance of a housing development found features of early Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman date. A pit containing rusticated Beaker pottery, disarticulated human bone, animal bone, including aurochs, as well as hazelnut shells and some carbonised mistletoe stem, has been radiocarbon dated to the late third millennium BC. A crouched inhumation of a man, buried in an oval pit and accompanied by a bone toggle, has been radiocarbon dated to the middle Iron Age, probably the second century BC. It may have lain within a small sub-circular enclosure. Most of the other activity dated to the late Iron Age/early Roman period, with ditches and pits suggesting the existence of a farmstead lying mainly beyond the excavated area. Of particular interest was a deep pit, dated to the later first or earlier second centuries AD, containing burials of a goose and a dog.

Introduction

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Diocese of Ely to undertake an archaeological excavation on land to the rear of 6 Rectory Road, Bluntisham, Cambridgeshire, ahead of development for housing (NGR TL 3690 7455, Fig 1). A condition requiring a scheme of archaeological works had been placed upon the planning consent by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA) to ensure an appropriate record was made of any archaeological deposits before their destruction (Thomas 2005), and the work was undertaken in accordance with an approved Project Design prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology.

This report is a summary, prepared by Andy

Chapman, of the full archive report by Adrian Burrow and Andrew Mudd (2008) submitted to CAPCA and also available digitally on the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) website library of Unpublished Fieldwork Reports (grey literature) (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit>).

The site is situated in the lower Great Ouse valley, to the east of Huntingdon and St Ives and west of Ely. The village lies 1.0km north-west of the river, on river terrace sands and gravels. The site is in the southern part of the village to the north of Rectory Road (Fig 1). At the time of excavation it was open land covering an area of about 0.7ha, bounded by existing housing and gardens, with public access on the northern side.

An trial trench evaluation was undertaken in 2004 by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (Hatton 2004). This revealed late Iron Age–early Roman ditches, pits and postholes, and a crouched human burial, which was not excavated at the time. The site was interpreted as being part of a small rural settlement. There was considerable post-medieval disturbance on the eastern side of the site.

Topsoil and subsoil were removed from a triangular area of 0.25ha using a large mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m-wide toothless ditching bucket, operating under archaeological direction (Fig. 2). A 3.0m-wide buffer was left around a tree in the centre of the site, which was to be preserved. Overburden was stripped to reveal the natural, there being no significant archaeological remains above this level.

The archaeological deposits fall into four distinct groups by period and character, as summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of site chronology.

Period (date)	Nature of activity
Early Bronze Age (late third millennium)	Isolated pit containing Rusticated Beaker pottery, human bone, animal bone (including aurochs), hazelnut shells and mistletoe wood.
Middle Iron Age (second century BC)	Inhumation of older man in oval pit, accompanied by bone toggle. Possibly within a small sub-circular enclosure.
Late Iron Age-early Roman (first - second centuries AD)	Probable ditched enclosure with internal divisions and scattered pits and postholes. Abandonment of enclosure and replacement with new, slighter boundary ditches.
Post-medieval	Quarry pits

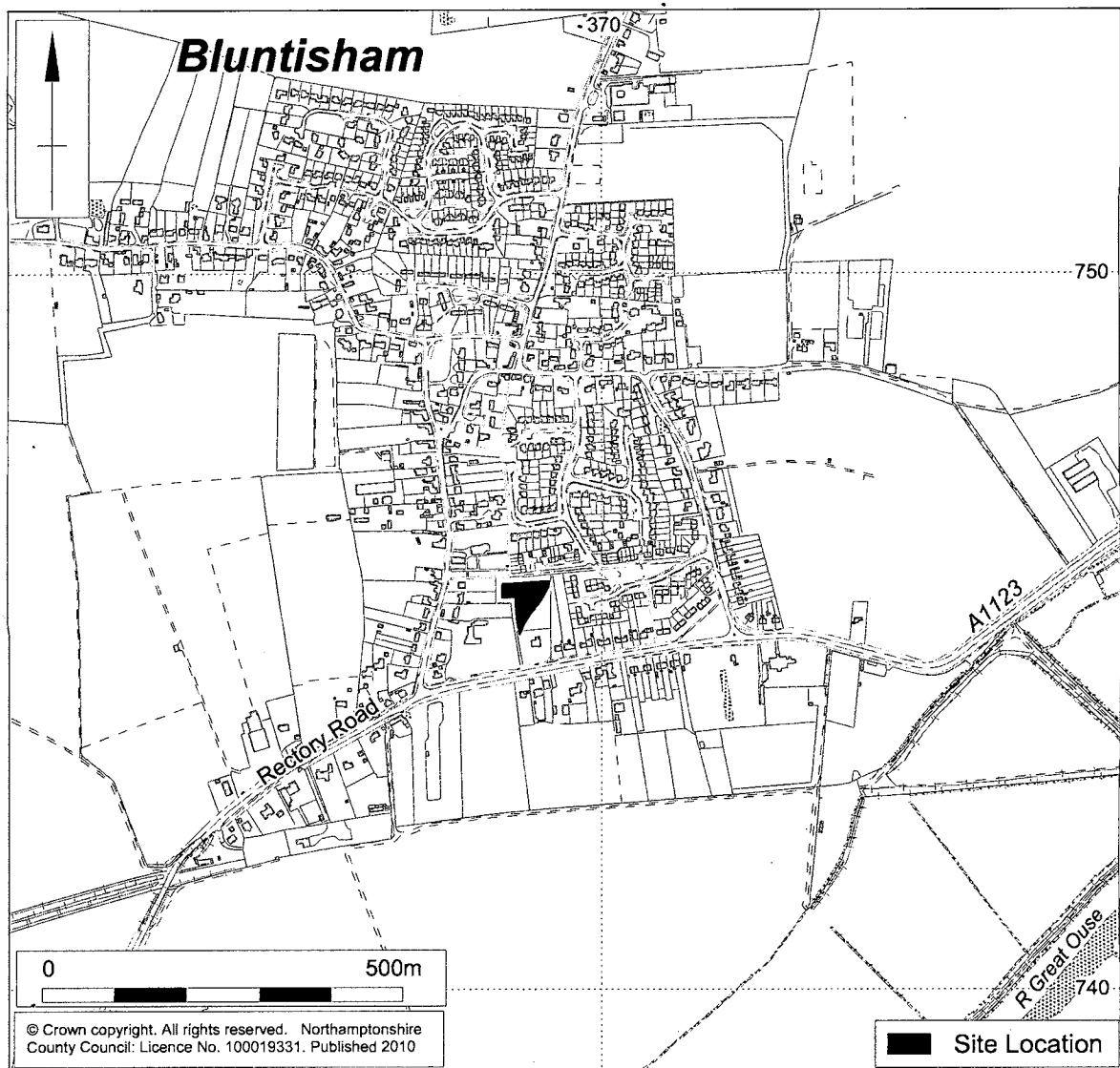


Figure 1. Site location.

The Early Bronze Age pit

The pit

A large oval pit, 216, was 3.0m long, 2.0m wide and 0.6m deep, with a shallow, bowl-shaped profile (Figs 2 and 3). The silty fills were all dark in colour, and the primary fill (228) contained a range of materials. Seven struck flints included two burnt pieces and some crude flakes and irregular fragments, along with a utilised and possibly lightly retouched blade fragment. There is no suggestion of any special selection in this group.

A small collection of animal bone, examined by Phillip Armitage, comprised cattle (*Bos*) and sheep (*Ovis*), including a radius of an aurochs (*Bos primigenius*). Identification is based on its large size (Proximal width, 92mm), which is comparable to identified aurochs from Durrington Walls, Wiltshire (Proximal width, c. 101mm) and falls outside the range docu-

mented for domestic cattle from comparative prehistoric sites, such as Durrington Walls and Runymede Bridge, Surrey (Proximal width, 54–82mm) (Harcourt 1971; Done 1980). Wild cattle became extinct in Britain during the Bronze Age and are generally uncommon in archaeological contexts at any time.

A cattle rib had superficial cut marks, as did a length of burnt long bone shaft. The sheep elements comprise fragments of three teeth, at least one from a young animal, and a calcaneum with the epiphysis unfused, also from a young animal. The primary fill also contained a human tooth, a worn upper left first permanent molar, probably from a mature adult. There are also four very irregular pieces of fired clay similar in colour to the Beaker pottery, suggesting a common origin for the clay.

A soil sample from the primary fill, examined by Pam Grinter, produced a considerable number of hazelnut (*Corylus avellana* L) shell fragments, as well as the whole kernel of one nut. On the basis of

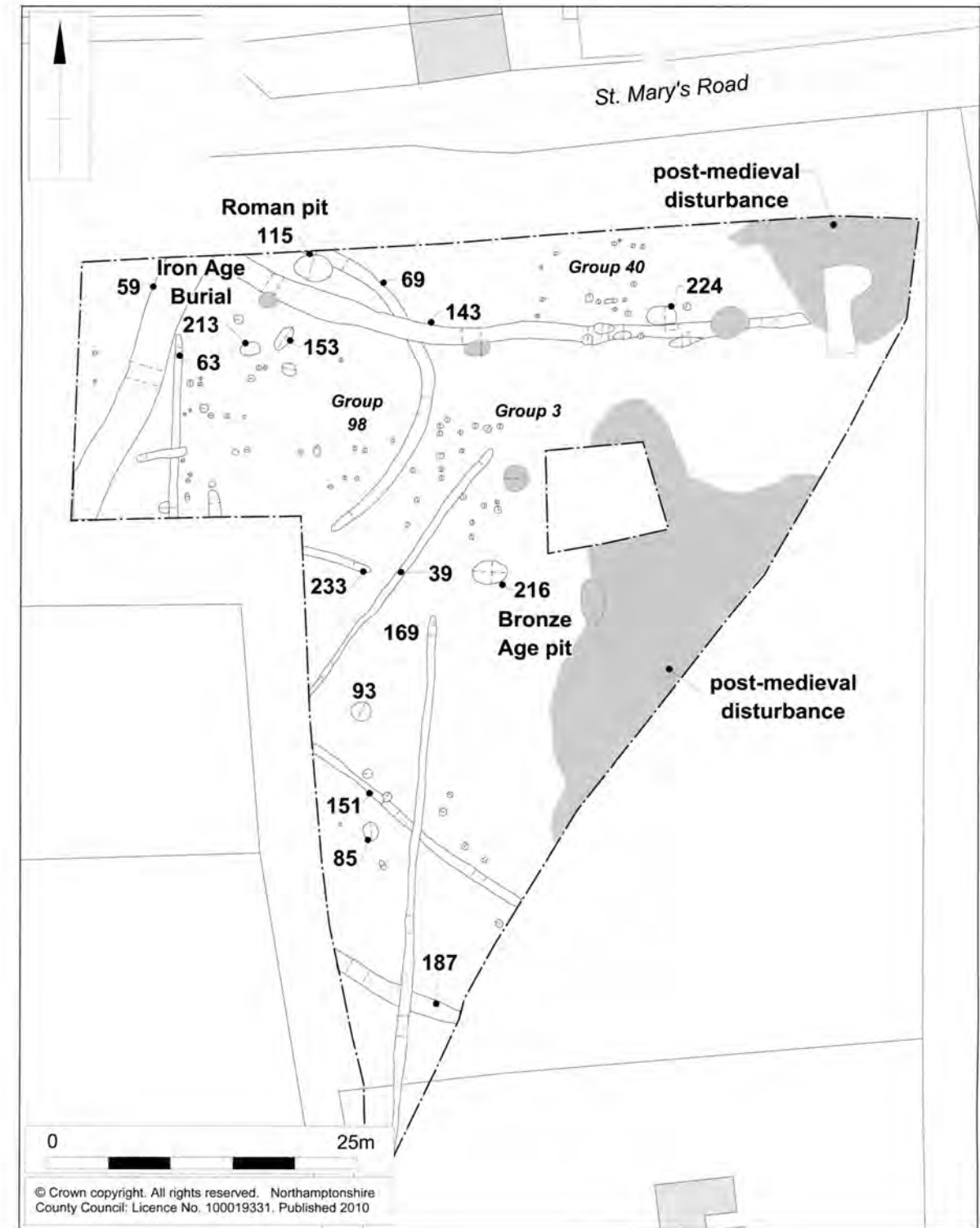


Figure 2. General site plan.

experiments conducted by Wendy Carruthers (pers. comm.), which indicate that 100 native hazelnuts could reduce to 42g of charred nut fragments, the 5g of fragments from Bluntisham may represent between 8 and 12 nuts. A radiocarbon measurement on

a charred hazelnut shell has yielded a date in the late third millennium BC (2290–2030 cal BC, 95% confidence, 3750±35 BP, SUERC-11482/GU-14438).

The soil sample also contained two grains of a free-threshing wheat (*Triticum aestivum* type) and two

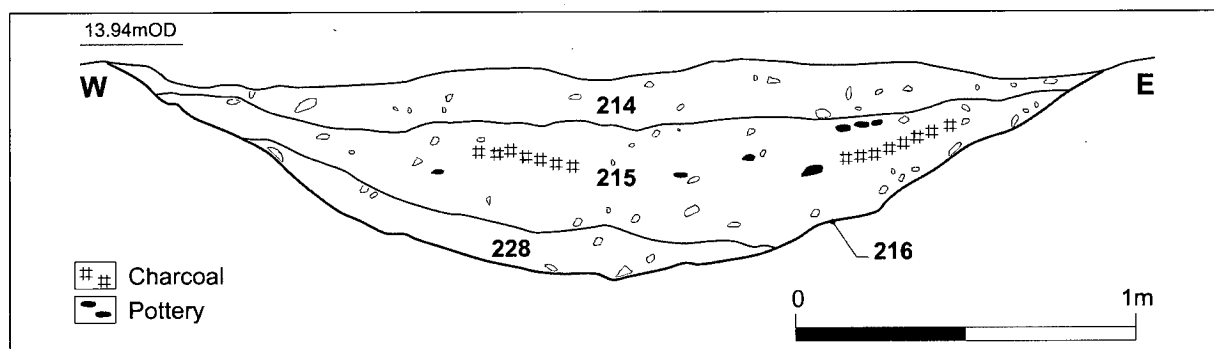


Figure 3. Early Bronze Age pit 216, section.

of barley (*Hordeum* sp.), but as free-threshing wheat replaced glume wheat towards the end of the prehistoric period in Britain, this material is likely to be contamination from later activity.

The secondary fill (215) contained most of the pottery, which has been examined by Andy Chapman. There are 93 sherds, largely from a single rusticated Beaker (Fig. 4. 1 and Fig. 5). This was hand-built in a fabric, 8–12mm thick, containing sparse small inclusions of quartz, up to 1mm diameter. Although the extreme fragmentation is largely due to crushing, some edges are oblique, indicating that it had broken partly along the joints between coils. It is poorly fired and quite soft and friable, with a brown core and oxidised, orange to orange-brown surfaces. The rim sherds indicate a vessel diameter of around 200mm. The outer surface is rough and uneven due to the profuse decoration with deep fingertip impressions and adjacent raised bosses of displaced clay. It is difficult to define the full decorative scheme, but the larger sherds indicate that there are multiple regular lines of deep fingertip impressions with single shallow, oblique fingernail impressions between.

A single thinner sherd, 5mm thick, in a harder fabric, light brown throughout, is decorated in the same style, but with much shallower fingertip and fingernail impressions (Fig. 4.2).

Fingertip and fingernail rusticated vessels are typical of those found in later Beaker assemblages in East Anglia and around the Fen edge. The vessel from Bluntisham is broadly paralleled by numerous examples from immediately east of the River Great Ouse, as catalogued by Bamford (1982). More recent work has recovered further examples, often in association with classic Beakers. These examples include classic and rusticated beakers from a group of pits at Fenstanton, only 8km to the south-west of Bluntisham on the opposite bank of the Great Ouse (Gibson 2005), which have also been radiocarbon dated to the end of the third millennium (Chapman *et al* 2005, 14).

In the same area as the pottery, there were concentrations of well-preserved charcoal, examined by Rowena Gale. They weigh a total of 90g and include fragments up to 10mm in radial cross-section, although most were considerably narrower. The bulk of the charcoal consisted of oak (*Quercus* sp.), round-

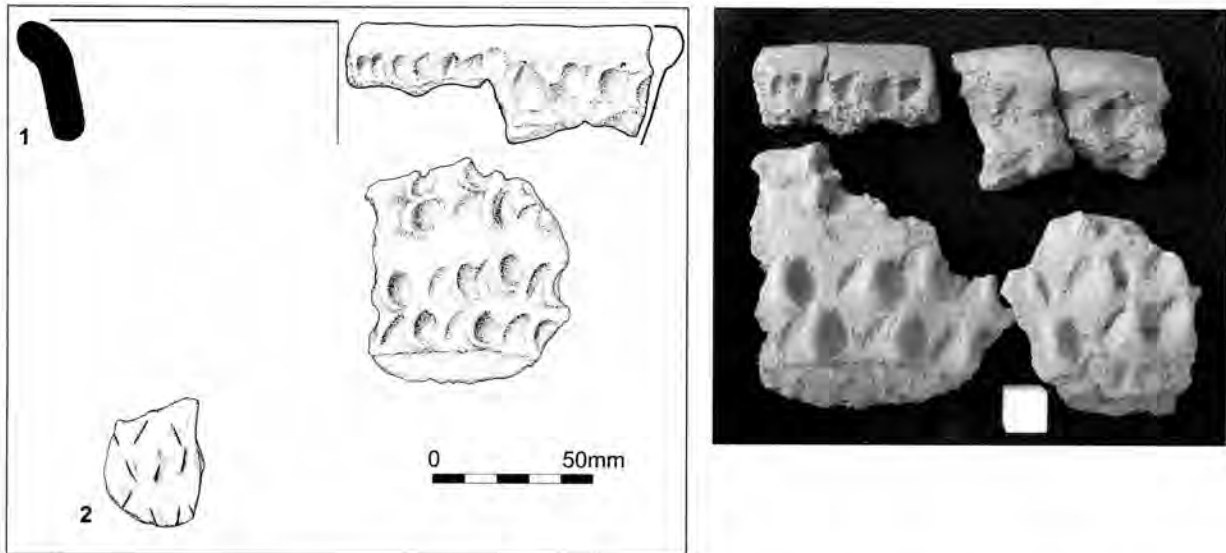
wood and sapwood, and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), mostly sapwood. This material indicated origins from fairly slow-grown trees. Additional species included hazel (*Corylus avellana*), the hawthorn/Sorbus group (Pomoideae), elm (*Ulmus* sp.) and mistletoe (*Viscum album*). The latter occurred as fragments of narrow stem with radial measurements of 5mm. Most of these species are likely to have been common in local woodland but mistletoe is unusual in archaeological contexts. Mistletoe is parasitic on deciduous trees and its presence here may be entirely incidental, perhaps having been attached to some larger woodland tree. However, mistletoe has also had economic uses in the past, as a fodder plant (Troels-Smith 1960) and as a source of bird-lime (Mabey 1996), and in some ancient cultures, such as the Druidic religion, mistletoe was regarded as sacred and important for ceremonial use (Mosley 1910; Piggott 1968).

The upper fill (214) contained a sheep tibia and 18 fragments of human bone, examined by Sharon Clough. The human bone is fragmentary but in a fair condition, with some flaking of the cortical bone surface, and comprising lower leg, foot, hand and ribs of a single individual Epiphyseal fusion indicates an adult of over 18 years of age, and while the individual was of gracile build there was insufficient bone present to establish sex.

Discussion

This early Bronze Age pit appears to have been isolated, with no association with further pits or other contemporary activity, and there is no evidence of a ring-ditch or barrow nearby. The site does not seem to have become a focus for later ritual or burial and therefore contrasts, for example, with the Beaker burials at Camp Ground, Colne Fen, some 3.5km to the north, where a group of early Bronze Age inhumations became the site of a later 'semi ring ditch' (Regan *et al* 2004), unless the Iron Age inhumation is to be seen as an associated later event.

Individual or small groups of early Bronze Age pits, normally considered to be in a domestic context, are not uncommon in the region, although the material from the Bluntisham pit appears to be unusual in its nature and diversity (Garrow 2006). It would seem to include both selected items (the human bone, the



Above left, **Figure 4.** Beaker pottery from pit 216: 1, vessel with deep fingernail and deep fingertip impressions; 2, sherd with shallow fingertip and fingernail impressions.
 Above right, **Figure 5.** Beaker sherds from pit 216, showing rows of alternating deep fingertip and fingernail impressions (Scale 10 mm).

aurochs bone and the Beaker pottery) and random elements (mixed wood charcoal, charred hazelnut shell, a few flints and a little animal bone). The mistletoe might have been a fortuitous inclusion with the other fuel debris, or it might be seen as part of the selected items.

Beaker pits in East Anglia rarely contain animal bone and the pottery tends to be weathered and fragmented, suggesting a random input from adjacent occupation (Garrow 2006, 129–130). However, the pottery from this pit was not weathered. At Fenstanton, 8km to the south-east of Bluntisham, a group of small pits represented a standard pattern to the deposition of ceramics of the late fourth through to the early second millennia BC. These pits typically contained small groups of sherds from single vessels although in one instance there was also a substantial part of a single Beaker. These instances suggest the deliberate deposition of material already in a sherd state (Gibson 2005, 11). It has been argued that this represents the burial of token pieces of domestic material in earth rituals that may have been designed to ensure the fecundity of the earth and her resources (Gibson 2000), and a similar interpretation could be applied to the single pit at Bluntisham.

While the presence of a few sheep and cow bones could suggest an incidental accumulation from nearby occupation, the aurochs radius is more likely to have been selected as such finds are uncommon in prehistoric animal bone assemblages, and the aurochs is thought to have become extinct in Britain during the Bronze Age (Cotton *et al* 2006).

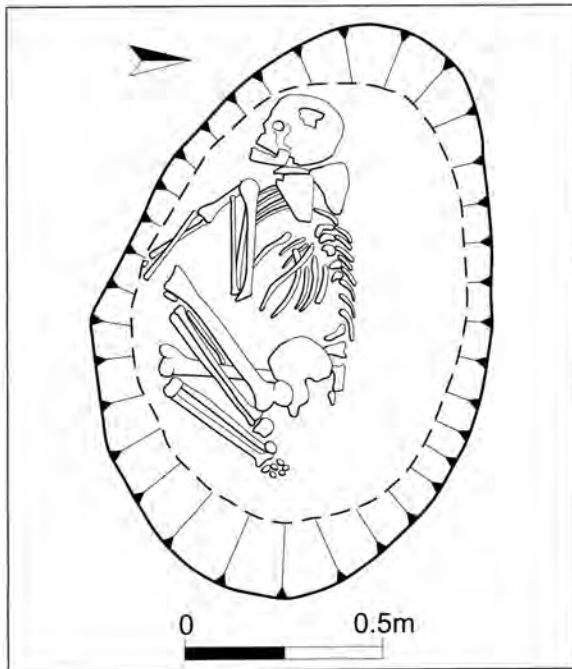
An Iron Age Inhumation

The burial

An oval pit or grave, 213, on the north-western side of the excavated area, was 1.50m long by 1.00m wide and 0.38m deep. Lying on the base of the pit was a crouched inhumation of a man, aged in his late 40s (Figs. 6 and 7, Plate 1). The body was lying on its right side, face down with the head against the pit wall and facing to the south. It was tightly contracted and it seems likely that the legs had been bound in place. The left arm was flexed, with the hand just below the chin but the right arm was extended, suggesting that the arms had not been bound to the chest. A bone toggle (Fig. 8) lay among the ribs, and two fragments of perforated cattle rib were also recovered. The pit fill contained a single sherd of Iron Age pottery and no other finds, but a rib has been radiocarbon dated to the middle Iron Age, most probably the second century BC (210–50 cal BC, 94% confidence, 2125+/-20 BP, GrN-30305).

The skeleton, which is in good condition, was examined by Jonny Geber. It is of a male, aged 45–49 years at the time of death, and stature is estimated to 1.66–1.68m (5 feet 5 inches to 5 feet 6 inches). There are well-developed squatting facets and stress on the mid to lower spine, perhaps also associated with squatting, is indicated by the presence of vertebral osteophytosis and Schmorl's nodes. There is a healed hairline fracture on a rib fragment, with no evidence for secondary infection.

Well-healed plaques of new bone lined parts of the right maxillary sinus, indicating that the individual had suffered from chronic sinusitis some time before death, probably associated with chronic upper



Above left, Figure 6. Iron Age inhumation, 211.

Above right, Figure 7. Iron Age inhumation, 211, (scale 0.5m).

respiratory infection, as suggested by considerable reactive periostitis on the pleural surface of a number of the right ribs. Such lesions were believed to be indicative of tuberculosis, but more recent studies (eg Roberts *et al* 1998) suggest a much wider aetiology, including pneumonia, metastatic carcinoma, treponemal disease and bronchiectasis.

The lower front teeth displayed very marked lines of enamel hypoplasia, which is usually associated with malnutrition and acute infection during the first seven years of life, but has also been attributed to genetic factors (Hillson 1986, 129–130). Multiple bands on the teeth of this individual indicate that he had suffered two independent episodes of physical stress: the first around the age of two years and the second around the age of four years.

A plain bone toggle, examined by Tora Hylton, is manufactured from a hollow section of a sheep/goat metapodium. It lay among the ribs, and had presumably been used to fasten clothing. It is 40mm long and 12–14mm in diameter (Fig. 8). The central perforation is 3mm in diameter and slightly conical on each face, which suggests that it had been cut, or at least finished, using a pointed implement rather than by drilling through from one side only. The surfaces of the toggle display signs of considerable polish as a result of wear. It is within the upper size range of examples recovered from Danebury (Sellwood 1984, 378).

Two bone fragments from lengths of rib bones from a large animal, such as a cow, were also recovered from among the human skeletal remains. The larger piece, 70mm long by up to 38mm wide, and originally rectangular has a small circular perforation at either end. The smaller piece, 50mm long by 35 mm wide,

has no surviving original edges and a single perforation. Both pieces have highly polished surfaces and, where unbroken, polished edges as well. A similar object from Danebury, Hampshire (Sellwood 1984, fig. 7.39 no. 3.2.10) also has polished surfaces and was described as a possible modelling tool or burnisher.

A curvilinear ditch, 69, in the northern part of the site pre-dated the late Iron Age enclosure system (Fig. 2). The ditch was 1.10m wide and 0.50m deep, with a V-shaped profile and a narrow rounded base, it terminated to the south-east in a shallow butt-end. It may have formed part of a sub-circular enclosure at least 25m in diameter, and pottery from the ditch indicates an early to middle Iron Age date. The enclosure was therefore at least broadly contemporary with the inhumation in pit 213, which lay within but not central to the enclosed area.

Discussion

A crouched body posture was the standard praxis in Bronze Age and Iron Age burials, and persisted as a minority rite throughout the Roman period (Philpott

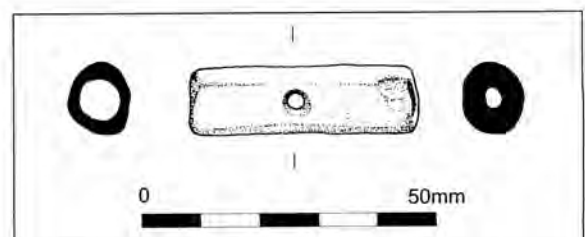


Figure 8. Bone toggle found with inhumation 211.

1991, 71). While inhumation appears to have been a minority rite in the Iron Age, aspects of this burial are typical of practices found more widely, including its isolation and the tightly crouched body posture. The deposition of such burials within former storage pits is widely attested, and there are a number of examples from Cat's Water, Fengate, near Peterborough (Pryor 1984, burials 2, 3 & 4, figs. 92–94), all also male. In this instance the pit may have been a purposely excavated grave but, like many pit burials, the inhumation only occupied part of the available space, being set towards the southern side of the pit with the head leaning against the pit wall.

The tightly crouched position of the legs suggests that they were bound, but the extended right arm suggests that the torso was not fully bound. Burial 2 at Cat's Water was probably bound, and perhaps also Burial 1 at that site (Pryor 1984, fig. 91). At Prickwillow Road, Ely, two crouched inhumations (a young man and an older woman) were found within or on the margins of an Iron Age settlement (Atkins and Mudd 2003). At Colne Fen there were two or three crouched inhumations of either Bronze Age or Iron Age date (Dodwell 2004, 34). The possibility that the Bluntisham burial had been interred within an enclosure would suggest that, like other examples, it lay within the limits of the contemporary settlement, but perhaps towards the margins.

The Late Iron Age/Early Roman Settlement

The settlement

The late Iron Age/early Roman occupation was marked by two substantial ditches. A slightly curving ditch, 143, ran west to east and at right-angles to a broad linear ditch, 59 (Fig. 2). The pottery assemblage, examined by Andy Fawcett, comprises 236 sherds, weighing 3.44kg, of Iron Age and Roman pottery, with a rim estimated vessel equivalent (EVE) of 1.84. The vast majority of the pottery is typical of the later Iron Age, but most features contained few sherds with little diagnostic data and are therefore considered poorly dated.

Ditch 143 was 1.75m wide by 0.55m deep, although to the east it became very shallow, averaging 0.15m deep. It may have formed either an internal subdivision within a larger enclosure, or part of an external ditch system. This ditch was the only context with a useful pottery assemblage, containing some 115 sherds dated to the late Iron Age. The fabrics are wholly compatible with those encountered at Prickwillow Road, Ely (Jackson 2003, 25) and from the Ely/Haddenham area (Fawcett 2006). They are principally composed of shell, grog and ill-sorted sand, the latter often with varying amounts of grog. The form assemblage from this feature is restricted to everted rim jars most of which are too small to be identified beyond their general class. Nonetheless, three clear forms are noted: an everted rim necked jar, a long necked version and a small shouldered jar with an

everted rim. It is the last two forms that provide the pre-conquest date from Thompson's *corpus* (1982), although a slight 'incursion' into the very early Roman period cannot be ruled out.

Large amounts of animal bone, examined by Phillip Armitage, were recovered from ditch 143. This largely comprised cattle, sheep and pig in descending order of frequency, but also included a left dentary from a pike. The extraordinary large size of this dentary indicates that it derived from a very large fish probably of great age when caught for eating. The anterior height of the dentary measures 11.2mm in comparison to 4.4mm for a modern specimen with a total length of 457mm (Morales and Rosenlund 1979). According to Newdick (1979) adult pike range in size from 400mm to 1000mm and live to a considerable age (twenty years is not uncommon). The Bluntisham pike probably was at least 1000mm in length (if not greater than this) as evidenced by comparison with the dentary from the modern specimen. Very large pike have also been recorded from two other prehistoric sites in Britain: at Runnymede (contexts dated to the Middle Neolithic and to the Late Bronze Age) and at Haddenham (Iron Age) (Serjeantson *et al* 1994).

The sieved material from other contemporary features revealed other freshwater fish bones – roach, perch and eel, suggesting a little recorded aspect to the diet of the native population in Late Iron Age and early Roman Britain.

Ditch 59 was 3.0m wide and 0.85m deep, with a broad, fairly steep profile and a flat base. It may have formed the perimeter of a sub-rectangular enclosure, but with such a short length lying within the excavated area this cannot be established with certainty. The primary fill appeared to have accumulated from the western edge, perhaps suggesting the presence of a bank on this side. There was a shallow, flat-based recut through the upper fill, which followed the line of the earlier ditch, indicating a major episode of reinstatement.

Further minor ditch and gully systems, all quite shallow at 0.20–0.30m deep, lay to the south, also either parallel with or at right angles to ditch 59. Ditches 39 and 151, set at right-angles, were very similar in profile and fill, and may have formed an L-shaped system. Ditch 187 ran parallel to ditch 151 and 10m to the south. This ditch also contained late Iron Age pottery. Ditch 233, which butt-ended 2m from ditch 39, contained Gallo-Belgic pottery (first century AD).

Two ditches, 63 and 169, ran on parallel north-south alignments, which were slightly oblique to the late Iron Age ditches, and ditch 169 cut two late Iron Age ditches. Ditch 63 was 0.74m wide by 0.30m deep while ditch 169 was only 0.20m deep. Both ditches produced pottery of late Iron Age/early Roman date. This suggests that in the later first century AD at least part of the late Iron Age boundary system was abandoned and replaced by a new system of ditches on a different alignment. The western ditch, 63, terminated next to ditch 59, perhaps suggesting that this major boundary or enclosure ditch had been retained.

Scattered oval and circular pits are assumed to

be of contemporary date, although only a few produced datable pottery. In the northern part of the site, oval pit 153 contained Iron Age pottery. Three pits at the southern end of the site, including pit 85, had similar steep-sided and flat bottomed profiles and similar dark grey silty clay fills. There were several clusters of postholes across the northern part of the site. Fifteen postholes (Group 40) formed a square structure roughly 7m across. The plan form, and a nail with tapered rectangular-sectioned shank and T-shaped head nail from one of the postholes, suggests a Roman date, but the evidence is too meagre to be conclusive. A rectangular arrangement of four postholes (Group 98) formed a small structure 2.5m long and 1.0m wide, perhaps a rack for hanging or drying cloth or skins. To the east there was a large irregular cluster of postholes (Group 3), which included a line of five postholes running north-south, possibly forming a fence-line.

Early Roman pit with goose burial

On the northern edge of the site there was a large, sub-circular pit, 115, 2.4m wide and 1.9m deep with steep, well-formed edges and a curved base (Figs. 9 and 10). This pit holds the best verification of an early Roman presence on the site. The pit fills contained small amounts of Iron Age and early Roman pottery, but the only diagnostic element is a small reed-rimmed bowl.

On top of the primary silting there was an articulated goose skeleton (Fig. 11), presumably deliberately deposited. Above this there was a complex sequence of fills, including redeposited gravel, 113 and 114, which was probably a result of rapid backfilling. Within the dumped gravel there was a jumbled partial dog skeleton. Both the goose and the dog have been examined by Phillip Armitage.

Virtually all the major parts of the articulated skeleton of a mature goose are present apart from the cervical vertebrae and extremities of the feet (Fig. 9). There is some post-depositional damage to the skull, mandibles, and the sternum (all anciently broken) and part of the pelvis is eroded/leached, possibly from contact with groundwater during burial. There is no evidence of butchery/de-fleshing/cooking or consumption and it would appear the entire goose had been disposed of uneaten in the pit. Such complete/semi-complete goose skeletons are rare archaeological finds in any period. There is a reference to "several partial goose skeletons" from a late 10th-century pit in Lincoln (O'Connor 1982, 41) and a nearly complete skeleton of goose/grey-lag from an early 14th-century rubbish dump at Alkmaar, The Netherlands (Clason 1972, 101).

As discussed by O'Connor (1982, 42) the modern domestic goose is larger and more heavily built than the modern wild grey-lag but these differences may not be so apparent in early archaeological specimens. It is therefore not possible to say with any degree of certainty whether the Bluntisham goose was a domestic locally-reared bird or a wild grey-lag hunted in surrounding marshes.

Of particular interest in the Bluntisham specimen is the evidence of animal gnawing on proximal and distal ends of conjoining (articulated) bones: distal radius/ulna and proximal humerus; distal femur and proximal tibiotarsus; distal tibiotarsus and proximal tarsometatarsus. The epiphyseal ends of these bone elements exhibit tooth (cusp) puncture marks and small areas of surface destruction, with the most severe destruction of bone structure seen in the distal articular (condylar) ends of the two tarsometatarsi. This type and pattern of damage is observed in bones chewed/gnawed/crunched by cats (see O'Connor 2000, 49 and Moran and O'Connor 1992) but could also be attributed to polecat (Somerville pers. comm.).

The skull and the virtually complete skeleton of a dog was also recovered from pit 115, but, unlike the goose, the bones were not articulated but were jumbled up, as if parts of a semi-decomposed carcass had been deposited in the pit. No cause of death could be established from the skeletal remains but it is noteworthy that two of the cervical vertebrae exhibit chopping marks suggesting repeated blows to the left side of the neck. Whatever the sharp implement used (axe, chopper or large knife) the blows apparently had not been delivered with sufficient force to cause decapitation.

The dog was a fully-grown adult at time of death, as indicated by the full dentition and the fusion in all epiphyses of the long bones. The surface markings on the skull indicate the animal was male, and this identification is confirmed by the presence of an os penis.

Based on the length measurements in the limb bones, the shoulder height in the Bluntisham dog is estimated to have been 608mm (method of Harcourt 1974) and therefore taller than the Iron Age dogs from Gussage All Saints, Dorset, documented by Harcourt (1974) (360 to 580mm) but comparable to the tallest dog (shoulder height 605mm) at Ashville Trading Estate, Oxfordshire, recorded by Wilson (1978).

In terms of head shape, the Bluntisham animal would have conformed to what Harcourt (1974) classified as a "plain dog"; characterised by an unmodified cranium with fairly broad zygomatic arches (cephalic index 45.5), and with a snout of moderate length (snout index 51.3). The Bluntisham dog, however, had a relatively narrow muzzle (snout width index 37.6) unlike the fairly broad form seen in most other Iron Age dogs. There is a prominent sagittal crest and parietal ridge, which are cranial features found in modern terriers.

From the generally poor condition of its teeth, the Bluntisham dog apparently had a rough diet. There is a considerable degree of wear in the lower and upper carnassials/molar teeth and ante-mortem loss of lower premolar cheek teeth with healed over (bone filled) alveoli. The point of the left canine is broken off and the remaining stump is much worn down/rounded. Further evidence of the unfortunate life history of the Bluntisham dog is provided by the presence of a healed traumatic injury to the right side of the skull just above and behind the eye socket – there is an impacted elliptical (22.2 x 12.1mm) area of the

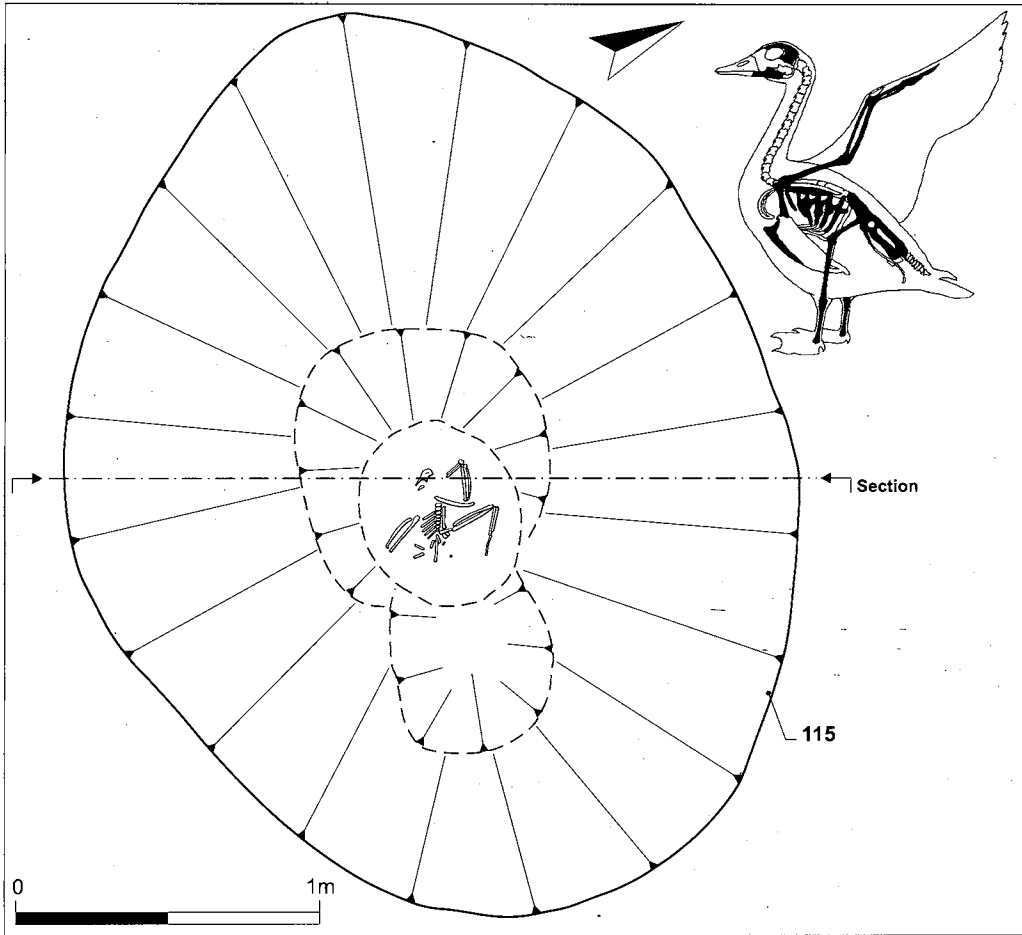


Figure 9. Roman pit 215, plan of goose burial and diagram of bones present.

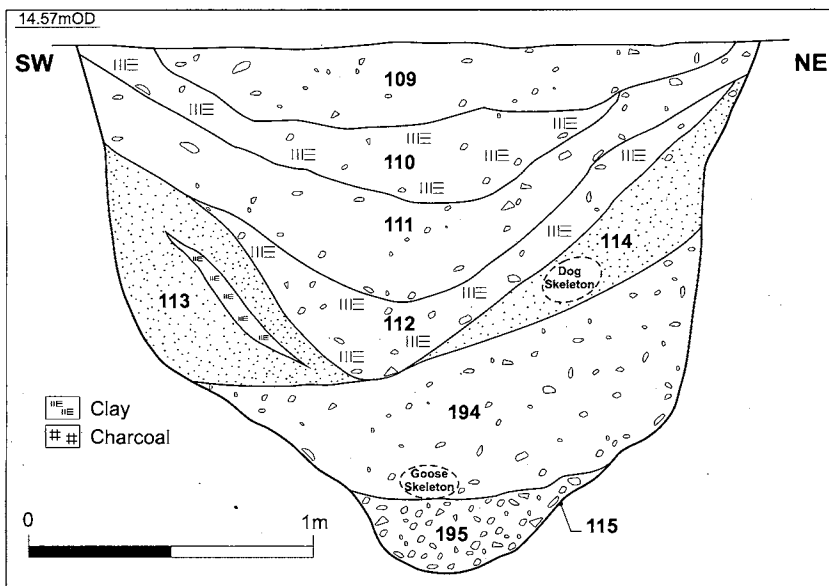


Figure 10. Section of Roman pit 215.



Figure 11. The Roman goose skeleton in Pit 215, with wings raised (scale 10 mm intervals).

frontal bone located just posterior to the zygomatic process and immediately below the temporal line. Owing to the thickness/robustness of the bone in the affected cranial region, this injury apparently did not penetrate through to the brain cavity. In time the external wound healed over but the impact injury left in its wake a shallow crater-like depression in the skull.

Similar traumatic lesions have been recorded in early Neolithic to Roman dogs from other archaeological sites, which have been interpreted as caused by humans striking at the head of dogs "to stave off aggressive behaviour on the part of the animals or for other reasons of control or rebuke" (see Baker and Brothwell 1980, 93–94). There is perhaps an alternative explanation, which may be advanced if the Bluntisham dog had been a working dog deployed in herding livestock. Whilst the dog was assisting its owner in moving cattle, one of the cows could have become sufficiently agitated to kick out at the head of the dog in a defensive or aggressive action, causing the observed lesion.

Discussion

Nature of the settlement

Little can be said about the nature of the late Iron Age/early Roman settlement due to the limited area available and the generally mundane nature of the excavated material. The pottery is generally within the late Iron Age tradition and there is also some early

Roman pottery, so it appears that the occupation lasted into later first century AD, if not beyond. The site is likely to have been part of a farming settlement. The charred plant remains included cereal grains, but these were poorly preserved. The animal bones showed the usual range of domestic animals for this period, although there were also fish bones, which are unusual before the Roman period (Serjeantson *et al* 1994).

Goose and dog burials

The discovery of a goose and a dog burial within the same pit is an interesting addition to the corpus of animal burials recorded from the early Roman period in Britain. While the burial of a complete goose may be the first recorded instance of this practice in Roman Britain, there are several examples of buried bird remains from both Iron Age and Roman sites, and stray goose bones are even more common, having been recovered from in excess of 30 sites across Roman Britain (Parker 1988, table 1).

Dog burials are relatively common in both periods. As with many animal burials, particularly where the skeletons occur as individuals in an apparently mundane context, it is problematic deciding whether these particular burials followed a natural or accidental death, or whether the animals were participants in some kind of ritual activity. It is perhaps pertinent to add that the goose and the dog were from different contexts within the pit – the goose being a

primary deposit while the dog was found within the later fills – but it is probable that the pit was filled-in relatively rapidly, so it is possible that both burials took place within a short space of time. There is no particular indication as to the purpose of the pit, but it is of the form demonstrated elsewhere to have been suitable for grain storage, and that may have been its original function.

The much discussed examples of animal burials and other 'special deposits' from Danebury hillfort in Hampshire show that, in the Iron Age, the deposition of animal carcasses and parts of animal carcasses in pits, rather than being a result the disposal of rubbish or butchery waste, can be considered part of common ritual practices on settlements (Cunliffe 1984, Hill 1996, Green 1992). At Danebury, a small but significant quantity of bird bones was also recovered. These were overwhelmingly (74%) bones of raven, several being represented by the burials of complete skeletons (Cunliffe 1984, tables 83–86; Serjeantson 1991, 479–81). This may represent a deliberate selection of birds that did not form part of the diet of the settlement's inhabitants. It was considered likely that the birds were buried as 'special deposits', a hypothesis supported by the statistical association between bird bones and special deposits of animals (Cunliffe op. cit. 540). Ravens have also been found in Romano-British pits or wells, one curious example being at the Romano-Celtic temple at Jordan Hill, near Weymouth, Dorset, where 16 ravens' skeletons were found between pairs of tiles within a dry well (quoted in Green 1992, 126). While the significance of ravens in Celtic mythology is widely attested, there is little to suggest what significance geese might have had. Miranda Green notes that in Celtic iconography they were commonly associated with war, and there are continental examples of geese as companions to warriors and warrior-gods (Green 1992, 214). It is unclear whether this has relevance to Roman Britain.

Dog burials are found on Iron Age and Roman sites with varying frequency. There is no doubt that they occur more frequently than other domestic animals, but this may be more to do with the fact that they seldom occur as food debris, rather than their being singled out for special or ritual treatment, although there are also many specific examples of special treatment and unusual associations. A recent review by Kate Smith (2006) has drawn together much of the evidence. One of the more remarkable collections of burials is the deposition of over 100 complete dogs in the area of a *mansio* in Godmanchester, Huntingdonshire. Many were buried in pairs, and one pit contained over 20 individuals. It is considered likely that the burials were foundation offerings, and this may have been the common motive for a number of dog burials elsewhere (Smith 2006, 21–22; Woodward and Woodward 2004). The early deposits from one of the central *insulae* in Dorchester, Dorset, contained several pits containing large numbers of dogs, including decapitated animals. Numerous dogs, including one buried in an upright position, have come from pits in *Insula IX* at Silchester (Smith 2006, 17–19). The subterranean sec-

ond-century shrine at Ridgeon's Gardens, Cambridge included the burials of three dogs laid out in a circular formation, with iron chains radiating from their necks, around a central pottery vessel (Alexander and Pullinger 1999). Other ritual deposits in the shrine included the skeleton of a complete horse, a bull and a sheep, as well as numerous vessels. The association of a dog and a bird is found among one of the number of animal burials lining a first-century road at the Roman temple complex at Springhead, Kent (Smith 2006, 30).

The reasons why dogs were chosen for ritual attention is not straightforward and there are a number of possible associations, including a role as symbolic guardians. Burials in grain storage pits may relate to offerings of gratitude for the safekeeping of grain (Green 1992, 103), although in the Roman period the remains of dogs are frequently found in association with shafts and wells and there may be an association with water and chthonic deities (*ibid.*, 197–8). There is also a strong Romano-Celtic association with healing. The temple and curative establishment at Lydney, Gloucestershire, dedicated to the god Nodens, yielded a large number of representations of dogs including a bronze statuette of a deer-hound. Miranda Green has suggested that hunting and healing may have been conceptually linked with the notion of death and regeneration.

The fact that the dog buried in the pit at Bluntisham showed evidence of maltreatment during its life has been remarked upon, but pathologies resulting from physical abuse have been commonly noted on Iron Age and Roman dog skeletons, and the situation cannot be considered unusual (Smith 2006, 15). Indeed, Kate Smith's assessment of the dog burials from *Insula IX* Silchester concludes that the most striking feature of the dog remains is the number of severe pathologies on the skeletons, to an extent which suggests that the dogs were victims of gratuitous violence (*ibid.*, 18).

Although the circumstances of the burials of the goose and dog at Bluntisham remain obscure, their deposition can be seen to fall within a category of 'special deposits', commonly recorded on a range of later prehistoric and Roman sites, which appear to be an expression of Celtic-based rituals concerned with offerings and sacrifice.

Regional settlement

The settlement at Bluntisham lies within a region where Iron Age and Roman settlements are common if little understood (Fig. 12). Most information comes from the gravel areas on the fen skirtland to the east and south, from cropmarks, finds made casually or unsystematically (in gravel quarries in particular), and from modern excavations. There is less information from the higher ground where the records relate mostly to occasional finds.

There are reported findings of Iron Age pottery in Bluntisham, about 300m north-east of the present site, and third to fourth-century Roman coins from a similar area. These finds encompass a wide range of date and there is no reason to suspect a link with

the present site. There are also Iron Age and Roman potsherds recorded further north near Colne.

Clear evidence of settlement is relatively rare on the high ground, although recent excavations ahead of housing development at Parkhall Road, Somersham, have revealed early to middle Iron Age remains that are clearly part of a much wider settlement (Roberts 2002). It is to be suspected that more sites of this nature await discovery. Roman finds have also come from this area.

From Causeway Meadow, within a kilometre east of Bluntisham, stray finds include a small bronze statue of Jupiter, which as led to the suggestion of a later Roman religious site here. There is also possible evidence of a Roman period shrine at Crane's Fen Terrace, south of the Ouse, following the recovery during an evaluation of a perforated human skull and an ulna, together with a sheep burial (Evans and

Webley 2003).

There have been extensive investigations on the fen edge to the east. Both Iron Age and Roman settlements have been mapped from aerial photographs and excavated ahead of mineral extraction at the Camp Ground, Colne Fen complex (Regan *et al* 2004) and the Rhee Lakeside settlements (Regan 2003; Appleby *et al* 2007), and a Roman settlement was excavated earlier at Fenland Edge, Earith (White 1967). A large Roman settlement was partly examined at Fen Drove, Earith (Green 1955), while finds from Earith itself suggest that a Roman settlement of some sort underlies the present town.

A little over 1km south-west of Bluntisham, extensive cropmarks and remains recovered from the Barleycroft Farm area include the possible evidence of a Roman villa. Similar dense complexes of cropmarks and surface finds from the fen skirtland north

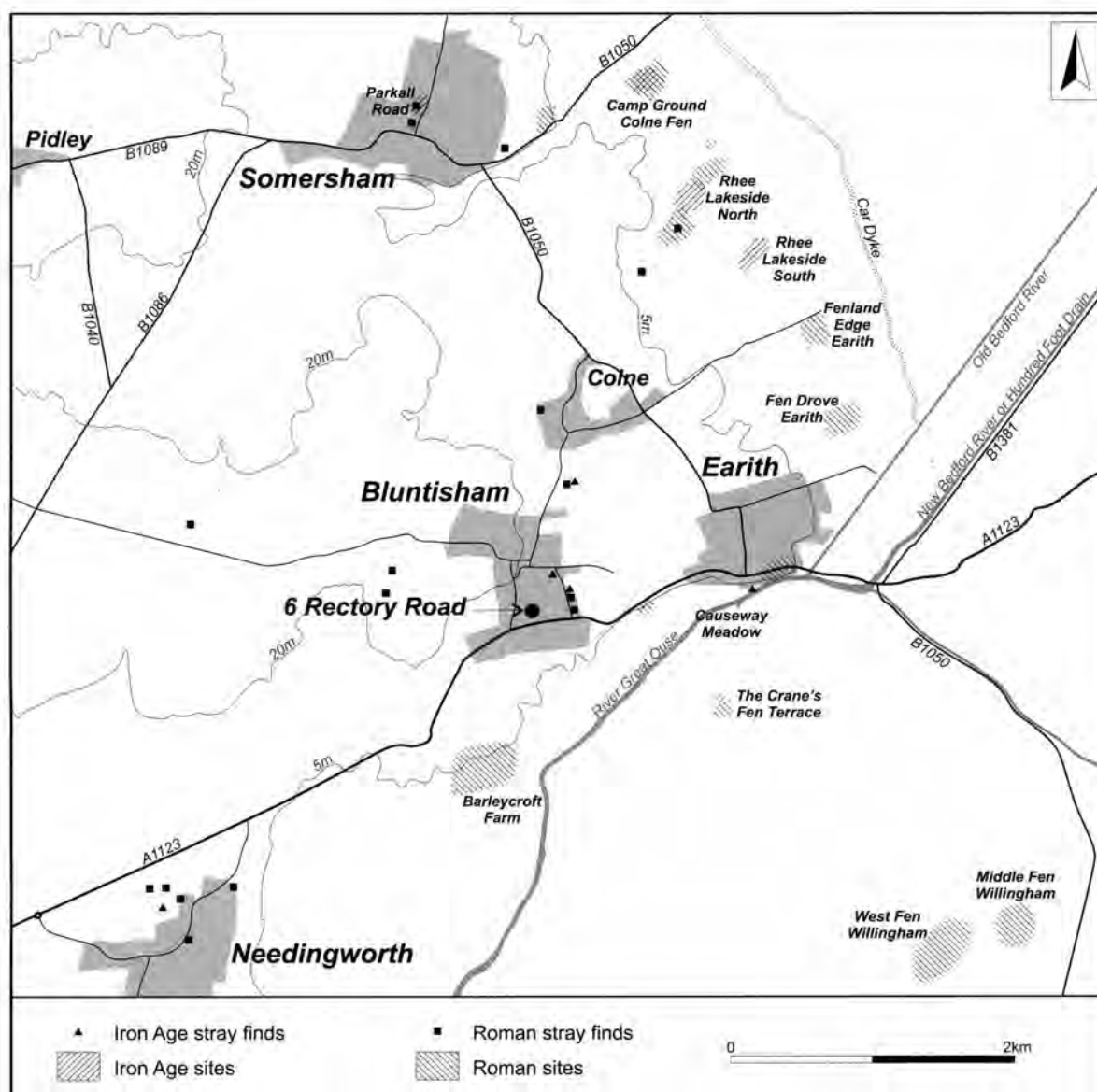


Figure 12. Iron Age and Roman sites in the Bluntisham area.

of Willingham suggest a villa at West Fen, and there also enclosures and droveways at Middle Fen.

The present site contributes to the developing picture of prehistoric and Roman settlement in the fen hinterland, although this small intervention is ill-equipped to contribute to an understanding of the detail and trajectory of settlement and landscape development. There is considerable research interest in assessing the degree of continuity from the Iron Age to Roman periods, and examining the influence of the Roman military and administrative system upon the indigenous population, particularly in a region where historical records indicate a marked degree of friction at the time of the conquest and there is continued archaeological debate about the status of the fenland in Roman times.

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The specialist reports, which are available in full in archive and within the digital copy of the report deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), were prepared by the following: worked flint, Andrew Mudd; Bronze Age pottery, Andy Chapman; Iron Age and Roman pottery, Andy Fawcett; Bone toggle, Tora Hylton; human bone, Sharon Clough and Jonny Geber; animal bone, Philip Armitage, who would like to thank Polydora Baker, Research Dept. English Heritage (Fort Cumberland) for providing the goose template; charcoal, Rowena Gale and charred plant remains, Pam Grinter. Any errors in summarising their work are the responsibility of the editor.

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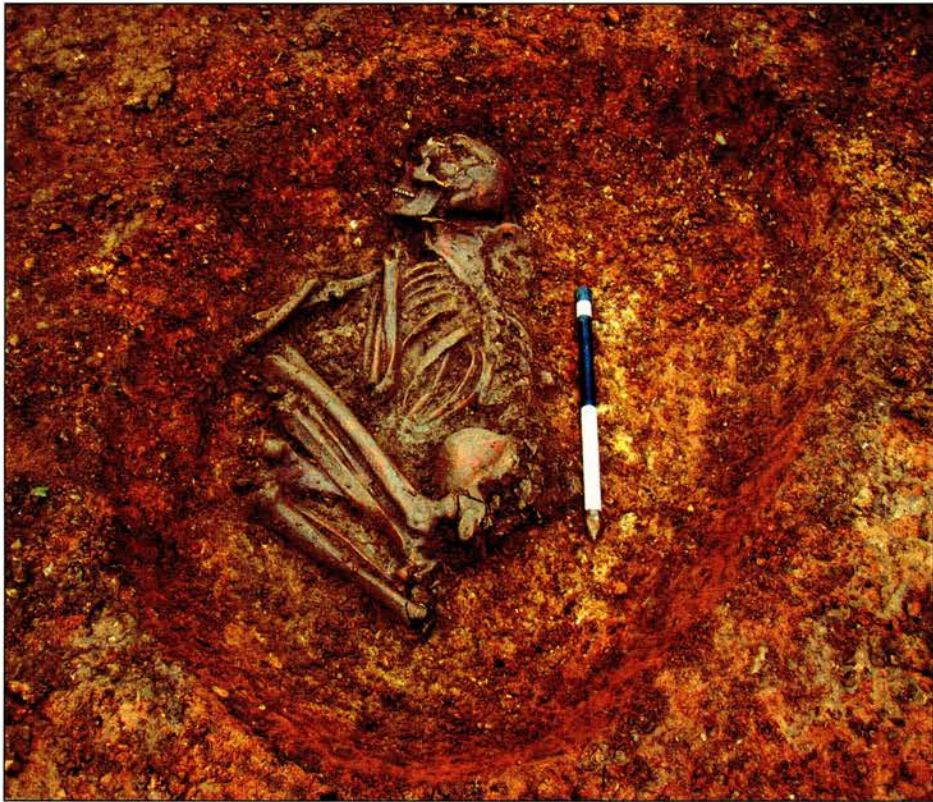


Plate 1. Iron Age inhumation, Bluntisham.

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