An early Bronze Age mortuary enclosure, Middle Bronze Age enclosed settlement and Late Roman trackway at Aller Court Farm, Somerset

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AN EARLY BRONZE AGE MORTUARY ENCLOSURE, MIDDLE BRONZE AGE ENCLOSED SETTLEMENT AND LATE ROMAN TRACKWAY AT ALLER COURT FARM, ALLER, SOMERSET

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016 Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by British Solar Renewables to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation at Aller Court Farm, Somerset, on the site of a proposed solar farm development. Two rectilinear enclosures identified by a geophysical survey were excavated. A large trapezoidal enclosure with evidence for internal features was located c. 200m north-west of a smaller, square enclosure containing three cremation burials. Radiocarbon analysis of human bone samples from the three cremations provided consistent results and confirmed their combined date range as c. 1960-1760 cal BC, placing the burials within the Early Bronze Age. Pottery in the ditches of both enclosures dated from the end of the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age. A late Roman trackway defined by two parallel ditches cut through the centre of the trapezoidal enclosure.

Location

The site lies in a c. 27ha field centred at ST 38926 29344. The field is located c. 700m west of Aller village and c. 4km north-west of Langport in Somerset (Fig. 1). Prior to development, the field was under arable cultivation and was surrounded by open countryside.

The site is situated in the Somerset Levels and Moors (National Character Area (NCA) 142) on relatively flat, low-lying land at c. 5-10m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). It lies at the north-western end of a raised 'island' surrounded by peat and clay deposits. This island consists of river terrace sand and gravel overlying the Mercian Mudstone bedrock (BGS 2017), and has its highest point to the south-east of the site near Aller Court Farm. Approximately 1.2km to the east, just beyond Aller village and east of the A372, the land rises sharply to 90-105m aOD, forming a block of high ground overlooking the island. This change in the local topography marks the boundary between the Somerset Levels and the Mid-Somerset Hills (NCA 143). Much of the land around the western and northern sides of the site is today cut by modern irrigation channels. The River Parrett lies 1.7km to the south and just over 1km to the west, and from here flows north-westwards for about 30km through the Somerset Levels and into the Severn Estuary.

Archaeological background

Recent archaeological work in the local area has been concentrated c. 750m to the south-west of the site around Aller Court Farm and St Andrew's Church. Aerial photographs taken in the 1970s highlighted numerous cropmarks that have long been thought to represent the deserted medieval village at Aller (HER 53488), located south of the centre of the modern settlement. In 2012, Somerset County Council (SCC) began a program of archaeological investigation in the area. Magnetometry survey in conjunction with small-scale excavations and a programme of radiocarbon dating have revealed at least three Early to Middle Bronze Age ring ditches, a Middle to Late Bronze Age rectilinear enclosure, a series of large Iron Age pits, a late Iron Age ditch, a Romano-British enclosure, and evidence of early-medieval activity including a corndryer that was in use in the 6th and 7th centuries AD (Brunning 2013; 2015, 39-42; pers. comm.). This work has provided evidence of a wide range of multiperiod activity and a broader landscape context for the results of the excavation that forms the basis of this article.

As well as the features described above, the SCC magnetometry survey highlighted two rectilinear anomalies and one circular anomaly located outside the main area of investigation, in the north-western part of the Aller 'island' (Fig. 2). Somerset HER records the circular

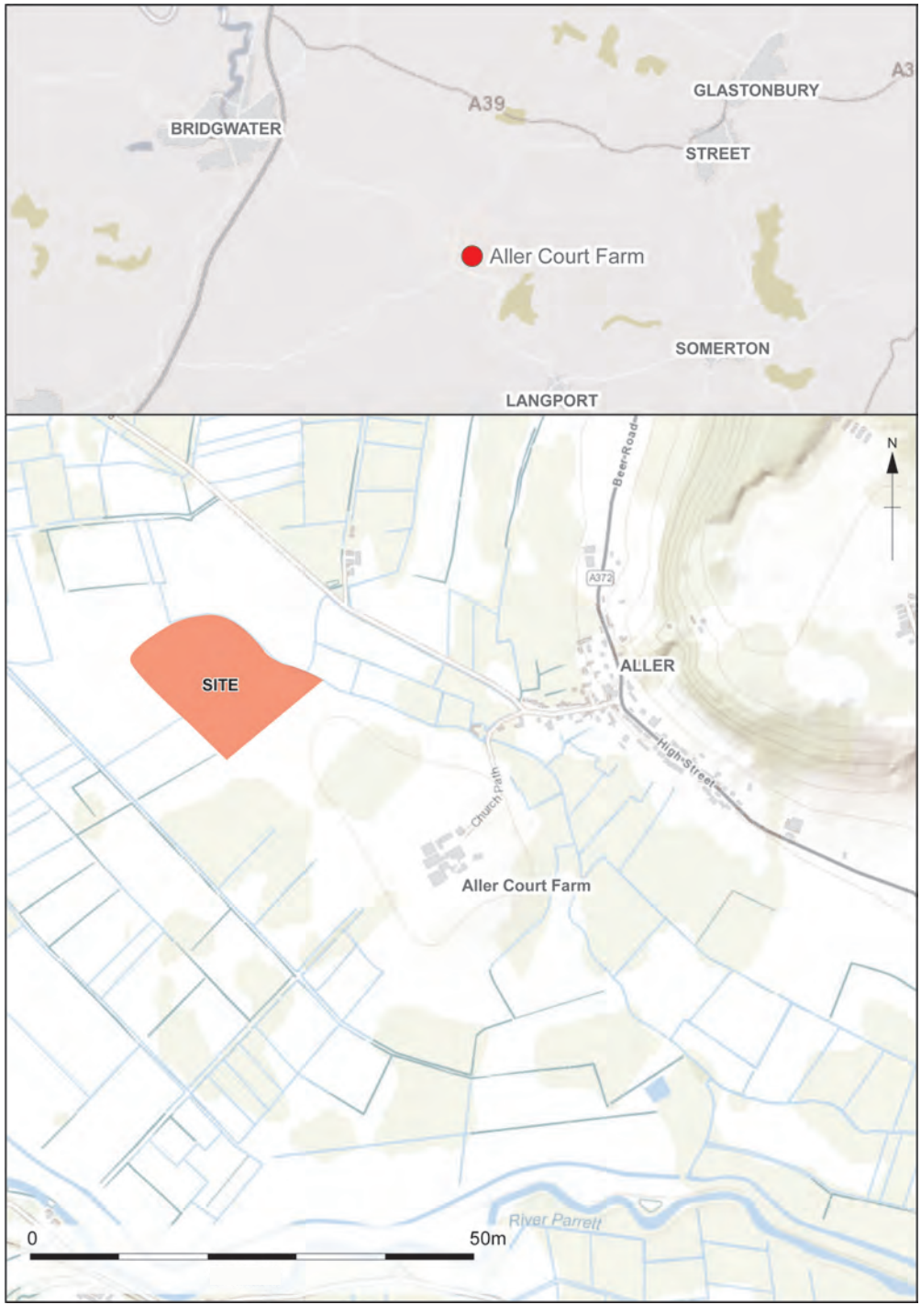

Fig. 1 Site location

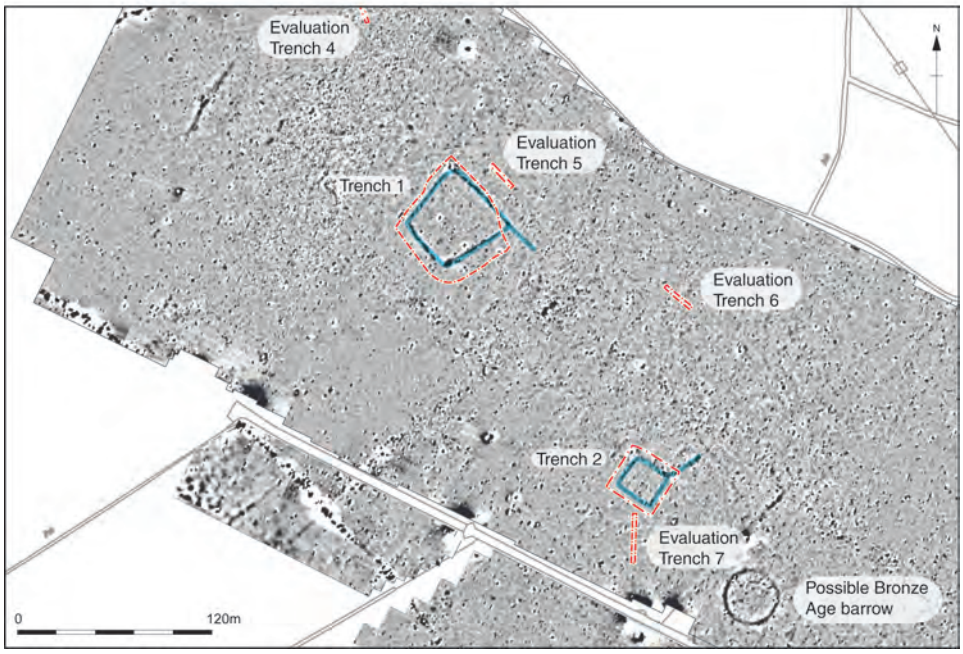

Fig. 2 Trench locations and magnetometry survey plot (courtesy of GSB Prospection)

feature (HER 55326) and the nearest rectilinear anomaly (HER 55855) as cropmarks. The larger rectilinear feature, to the west of the other two, is slightly fainter but can be seen on aerial photographs with a long linear feature cutting through it from north to south. The HER also records finds of flintwork (HER 55012) and a Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age axe hammer (HER 53493) in the vicinity.

An application for the construction of a solar farm in the field containing the two rectilinear anomalies made them subject to planning conditions, and it is the excavation of these features that is the focus of this article. The circular feature just to the south-east appears to be the ring ditch of a barrow, but since it was not under threat from development it remains preserved *in situ*.

Methodology

Two areas were excavated over the two rectilinear features revealed by the geophysical survey. Trench 1 focussed on the enclosure in the north-western part of the site and covered an area of 3,360m^2. Trench 2 focussed on the smaller enclosure to the south-east and covered 1,045m^2. The topsoil and subsoil layers were stripped by mechanical digger to the first significant archaeological horizon and the resulting spoil was scanned for artefactual remains, though no metal-detector was used. The archaeological features were sampled by hand excavation. A minimum of 10% of all linear features including ditch terminals and intersections was excavated, while 50% of all discrete features, such as pits and postholes, was excavated. The cremation deposits were fully excavated and environmental samples taken as per the methods detailed in the human bone report (see *Human remains* below).

In addition to the two main excavation areas, four evaluation trenches were excavated to target other geophysical anomalies in the field. Only one of these encountered an archaeological feature; Trench 6 revealed a short length of an undated gully, c. 100m north of Trench 2. The evaluation trenches are not discussed any further in this report.

The excavation archive will be deposited with Somerset County Museum under the accession code TTNCM114/2016.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Early Bronze Age

In Trench 2, c. 150m south-east of Trench 1, a single phase of activity was represented by a square enclosure containing three cremation burials (Fig. 3). The enclosure was laid out with its corners pointing approximately

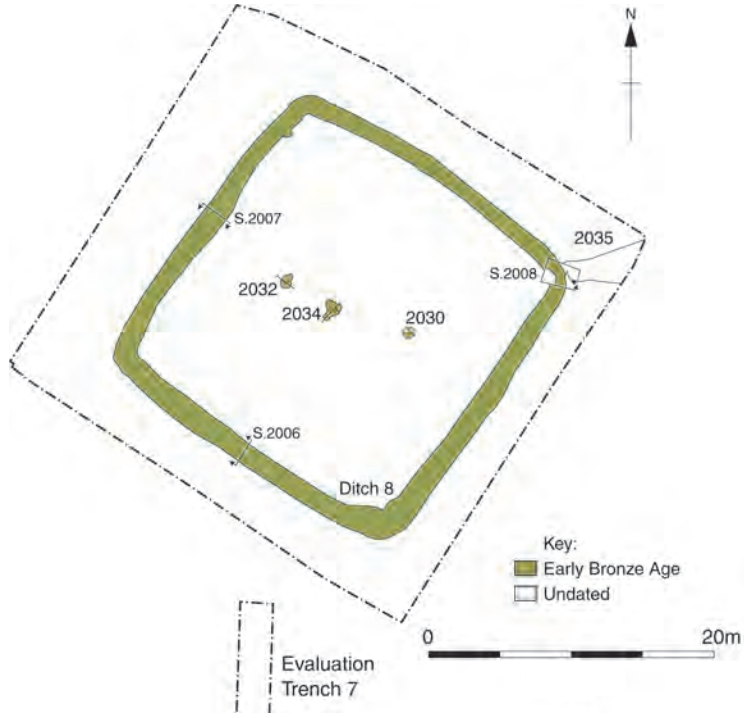

Fig. 3 Trench 2 plan

north, south, east and west. Within the enclosure, the three unurned cremation burials (2030, 2032 and 2034) appear to have been placed in a line nearly 10m across and aligned roughly NW-SE through its centre. The cremations all produced burnt human bones, samples of which were submitted for radiocarbon analysis. Details of these results are presented below, but, broadly speaking, they provide a date range for the burials of between the middle of the 20th century BC and the first half of the 18th century BC. It is possible that the upper parts of the burials and the enclosure ditch were slightly truncated, though this does not appear to have significantly impacted the remains. No other features were found within the enclosure.

The cremation group

Cremation 2034 formed the central burial of the group. It was placed in a circular pit (2033) that measured 0.4m in diameter and 0.2m deep (Fig. 4, Section 2011). It had a narrowed, concave base and its sides were more steeply cut than the pits of 2030 and 2032. A large quantity of burnt bone (1,328.1g) and charcoal was recovered from pit 2033, but no other finds [were found]. The cremated material was mixed with a deposit of dark-red silty clay. No evidence of burning was noted in or around the feature. Pit 2033 was cut into the eastern side of a larger, irregular-shaped feature (2040). This had a shallow, undulating base that varied in depth between 0.15m and 0.3m, and it covered an area approximately 1.0m by 1.5m. It is possible that it represents the remains of a tree-throw hole.

Cremation 2032 was the north-western member of the group, placed about 4m from cremation 2034. It was deposited in a shallow, sub-oval pit (2031) measuring 0.2m deep and 1.1m by 0.8m across (Fig. 4, Section 2010). The cremation deposit was placed above a lower fill of firm, dark-red clay (2042). No finds were recovered from this fill. Cremation 2032 consisted of a 0.1m-thick deposit of burnt bone (1,090.4g) and charcoal, which was placed within the centre of the pit and gradually became mixed with the underlying red clay. No finds were recovered from the cremation deposit, and no evidence for burning was noted in or around pit 2031.

Cremation 2030 was interred c. 5m south-east of cremation 2034, though, as mentioned, it was positioned slightly off-line from the other two. The cremation was placed in a shallow pit (2029), 0.7-0.8m wide and 0.15m deep. The pit contained a single grey-brown sandy clay deposit with some stones and quantities of charcoal and burnt bone (814.1g). No finds were recovered from the pit and no evidence for burning was noted in or around the feature.

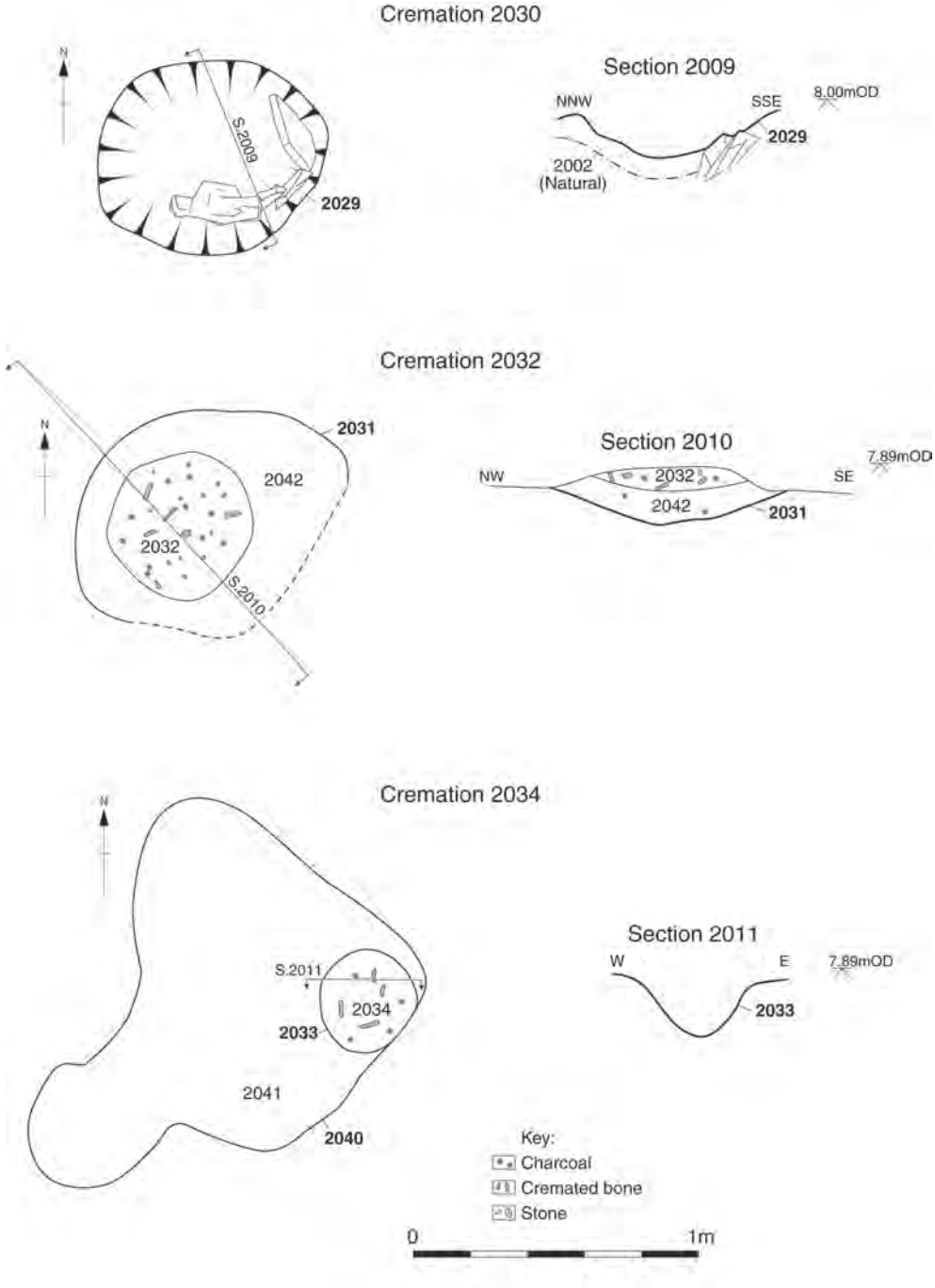

Fig. 4 Trench 2 cremations

The enclosure ditch

The enclosure ditch (8) was approximately 22m long on each side and enclosed an area of c. 0.05ha. The ditch was excavated in sections at each corner and mid-way along each side. Ditch 8 appears to have formed a continuous boundary and there is no obvious evidence of an entrance.

The dimensions of ditch 8 were relatively consistent. The feature ranged in width from 1.1m across at the eastern corner (Fig. 5, Section 2008), to 1.6m at the western corner and along its north-west side. It was shallowest along the north-west side, where it was 0.5m deep, and deepest at 0.9m along the south-west side (Fig. 5, Sections 2006 and 2007). For most of its length, ditch 8 had a broadly V-shaped profile, though this varied in places. An accumulation of large stones in the natural geology was encountered on the south-west side, many of which remained in the sides of the ditch in this area. These may have influenced the cutting of the narrowed base in this part of the feature. The ditch deviated from its V-shaped profile at the eastern corner, where it had a flat base and steep sloping sides. The reason for this is unclear, though it may be due to differences in the surrounding soil. Most of the ditch was cut into the surrounding mudstone bedrock, but around the eastern corner it cut through a layer of friable clay silt that contained quantities of charcoal. The feature (2035) was not fully excavated, though its shape in plan appeared to be quite irregular and its fill was at least as deep as the ditch.

Three fills were identified in most of the excavated sections of ditch 8 and were fairly consistent throughout the feature. A thin band of light-yellow silty sand tended to form a primary deposit, followed by two upper fills of brown clay silt which differed only slightly in shade and texture. In some instances, the difference between the upper two fills could not be discerned. The character of the fills suggests that the ditch silted up naturally. The existence of a bank is not indicated from the position of the fills as there is little evidence for slumping on either side of the ditch, other than in the northern corner where the primary fills began to accumulate first on the south side.

Very few finds were recovered from the ditch. A handful of prehistoric pottery sherds were found in two sections along the northern side of the enclosure. Three prehistoric stuck flints were recovered, two from the southern corner and one from the eastern corner. Animal bones were conspicuous by their absence, though soil conditions were not conducive for the preservation of organic materials (see *Animal bones* below).

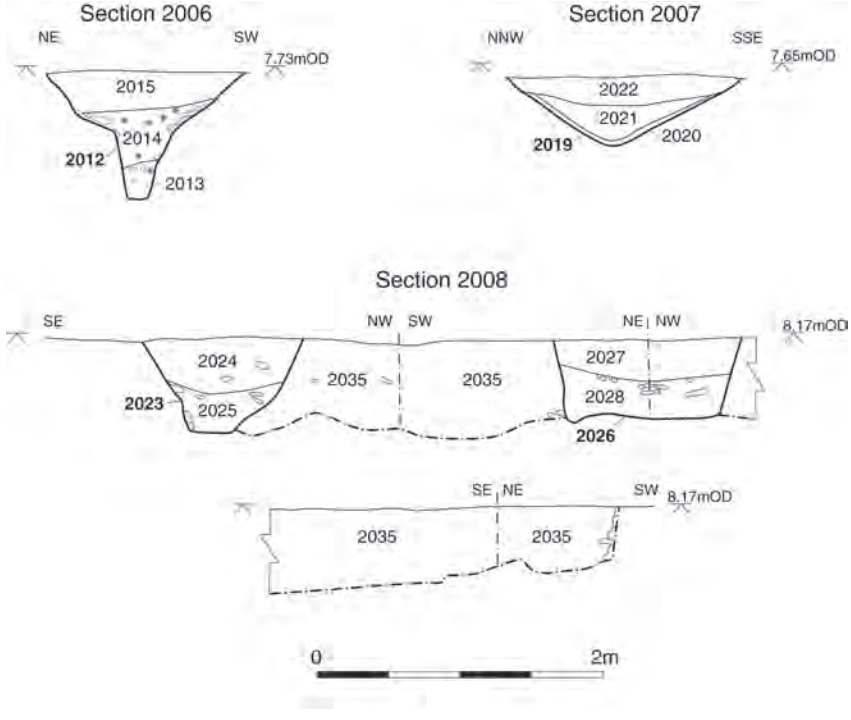

Fig. 5 Trench 2 ditch sections

Middle Bronze Age

In Trench 1, a sub-square or trapezoidal enclosure was established possibly towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, but was certainly occupied in the Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 6). Most of the pottery assemblage from this enclosure is described as earlier Bronze Age in date. However, the presence of Trevisker-related pottery (a type rare outside of Cornwall) strongly suggests that the enclosure post-dated the mortuary enclosure (see *Prehistoric pottery* below).

At least two phases of recutting were observed on the south-western side, and there is some evidence that the enclosure was constructed along a pre-existing field boundary along its north-eastern side. The enclosure contained several pits and postholes, some of which probably related to structural features. Most of these have been grouped to aid discussion below, though it should be noted that the groupings do not necessarily represent individual structures. The entrance to the enclosure was located at the southern corner, and a pit containing a cattle burial was situated in the entrance area.

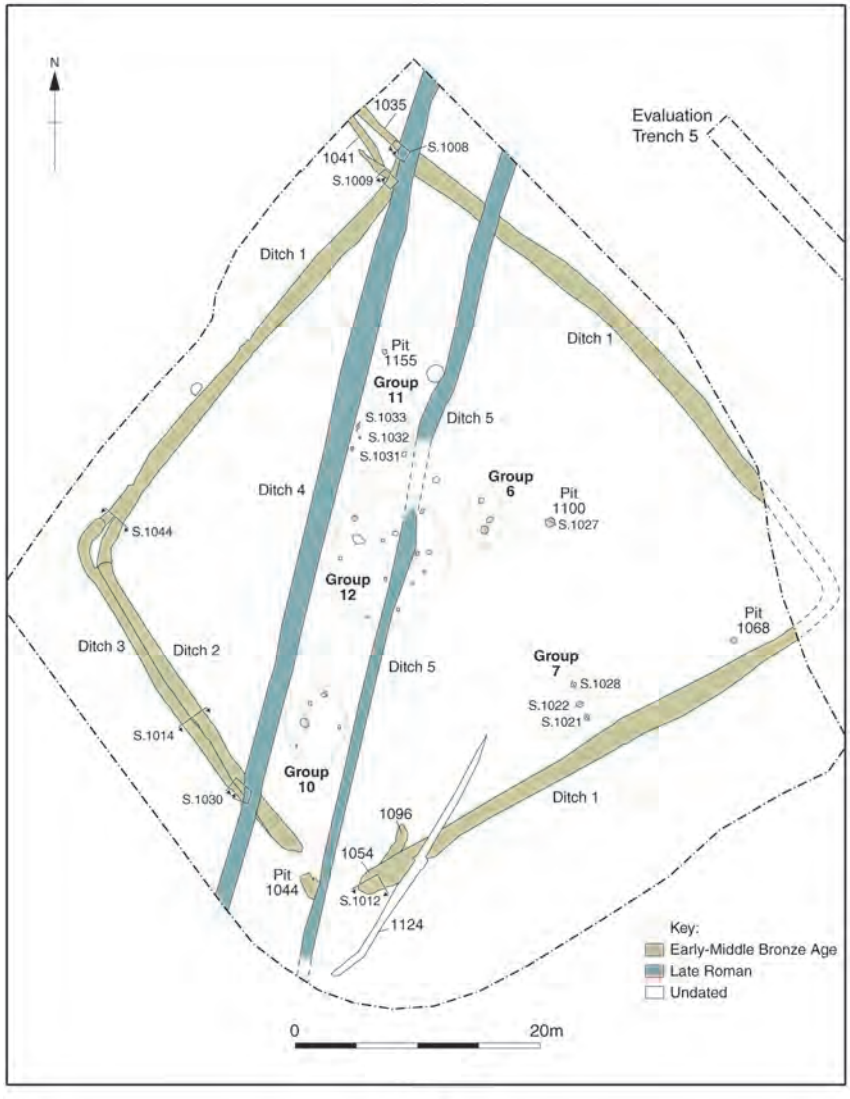

Fig. 6 Trench 1 plan

Pre-enclosure features

Two small ditches, possibly part of the same feature, appeared to have been cut by the enclosure ditch close to the south entrance. Around 3m from the eastern terminal, enclosure ditch 1 cut through ditch 1096, which protruded from its northern side. Ditch 1096 had an irregular alignment, curving slightly from north-east to north, and it contained two clay silt fills, similar to those found in the enclosure ditch. The lower fill (1098) contained a small rim sherd in a quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered fabric (see *Prehistoric pottery* below for full definitions of fabric types). It is possible that ditch 1096 was related to another ditch which protruded from the terminal end of ditch 1, though this feature was not excavated.

Two parallel ditches, 1041 and 1035, extended north-west from the northern corner of the enclosure. Ditch 1041 was cut by ditch 1, while ditch 1035 was cut by Roman trackway ditch 4 (Fig. 7, Sections 1008 and 1009). Presumably, ditch 1035 was also cut by ditch 1, though this could not be demonstrated. The bases of ditches 1041 and 1035 were undulating, while their sides were irregular and unlike those in the main enclosure ditches. Both features contained yellow silty-sand fills, which appear to have naturally accumulated, with a few stones and no datable finds.

Trapezoidal enclosure (ditches 1, 2 and 3)

The enclosure in Trench 1 contained an area of c. 0.2ha, though it was notably longer along its north-east side than along its south-west side, which gave it a slightly trapezoidal shape. Topsoil and subsoil stripping exposed most of the enclosure, except the eastern corner which lay outside the excavation trench. The geophysical survey suggests that the ditch along the north-eastern side of the enclosure continued for a short distance beyond the eastern corner (Fig. 2). A total of 16 sections were excavated along the full length of the enclosure ditches. Much of the feature appears to have been a single construction (ditch 1), though there is evidence of later recuts on the south-western side (ditch 2 and ditch 3).

Ditch 1 was exposed for c. 41m along the south-east side of the enclosure. It led from the south-west terminal (1054), which formed part of the southern entranceway, to the edge of the excavation trench before it reached the eastern corner. Terminal 1054 was half-sectioned and was over 1m deep, though its base was not reached during excavation (Fig. 7, Section 1012). The ditch terminal contained three fills, the lowest of which (1057) was a light-brown/red clay silt with numerous burnt stones and several sherds from a large Early-Middle Bronze Age jar in G1 fabric. The middle fill (1056) contained several finds, including several fragments of a Trevisker-style urn, a worked flint flake and a perforated fired-clay object. The upper two fills both consisted of lighter grey-brown clay silt with charcoal inclusions.

Although the terminal of ditch 1 was not sectioned across its full width, it was notably wide, measuring c. 3.4m across. This may be a consequence of it cutting the earlier features described above. Ditch 1 had a V-shaped profile measuring 1.7-1.9m across and 0.8-0.9m deep along the south-east side of the enclosure, though it was more steeply cut at the north-eastern end. Its central section contained two fills (1025 and 1026) that were similar to the brown/red clay silt found in the terminal. The lower fill (1026) produced a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age retouched flake, and both fills contained fragments of quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered pottery. In the eastern section, however, the ditch contained five clay silt fills that were concentrated along its south-eastern side. Silting from this side of the ditch suggests that there may have been a bank external to the enclosure. It is notable that three postholes (Group 7) and pit 1068 were located close to the north-west side of ditch 1, making it less likely that an internal bank existed on this side.

The turn of ditch 1 at the eastern corner of the enclosure was located beyond the edge of the excavation trench. The north-east side was exposed for about 40m. It was V-shaped in profile and measured 1.4-1.6m wide and 0.7-0.8m deep, though it was shallower near the northern corner (c. 0.5m deep). Ditch 1 was cut by Roman trackway ditch 5, c. 9m from its northern corner.

At the northern corner of the enclosure, ditch 1 was cut by Roman trackway ditch 4. It is uncertain whether the undated ditch 1035 was cut by ditch 1, since both were truncated by ditch 4, though this seems likely given that undated ditch 1041 was cut by ditch 1 close by on the north-western side of the enclosure (Fig. 7, Section 1009).

Ditch 1 was c. 44m long on the north-west side of the enclosure, ranging in depth from 0.5m to 0.7m and in width from 0.6m to 1.0m. In the central part, it had a distinct V-shaped profile with a narrow but flat base. Here, it contained four fills, the lowest of which was a thin layer of gritty, yellow sand, overlain by a firm and distinctly orange-red clay, followed by a dark red clay which was concentrated on the south-east side of the ditch, suggesting that it had accumulated from the inside of the enclosure.

At the western corner of the enclosure ditch 1 was cut by the terminal of ditch 2, which appears to have followed the alignment of its predecessor along the south-west side of the enclosure, in effect completely replacing ditch 1 on this side. Ditch 2 was exposed for almost 30m between its north-west and south-east

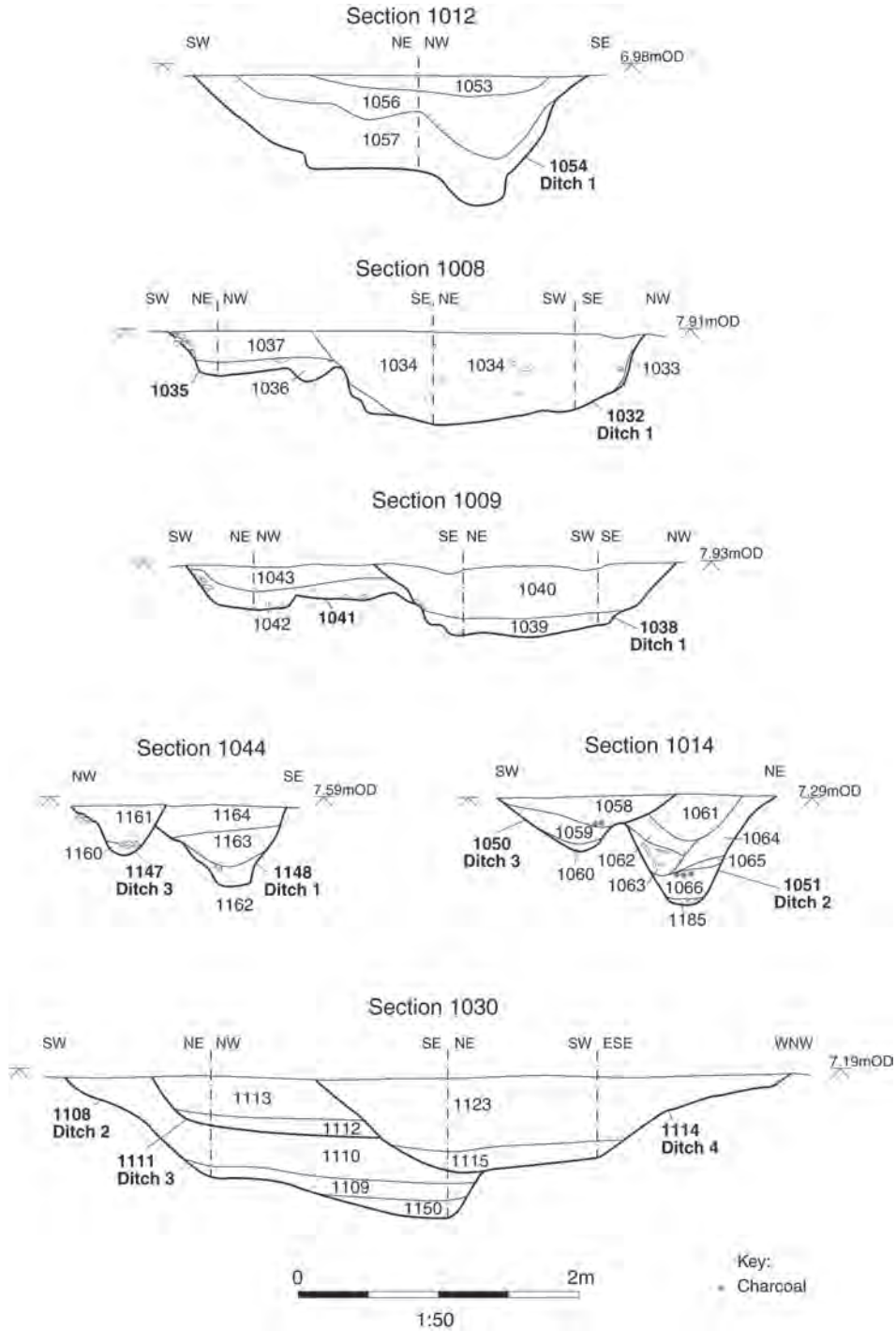

Fig. 7 Trench 1 ditch sections

terminals. It had a V-shaped profile with a concave base, similar to ditch 1, and was 0.9-1.2m wide with an average depth of c. 0.9m. A section through ditch 2 about halfway along the south-west side of the enclosure showed that it contained multiple deposits (Fig. 7, Section 1014). The first three fills (1185, 1066 and 1065) formed a sequence of brown sandy-silts at the base of the ditch. Above these was a thick layer of orange silty clay that had accumulated on the ditch's north-east side (1064). The next two fills consisted of greyish clay silt, the first of which formed on the south-west side of the ditch (1063 and 1062), while the final fill consisted of a red-brown clay silt (1061).

Ditch 3 was a later addition to the enclosure. Initially, it cut ditch 1 on the north-west side of the enclosure, close to the western corner (Fig. 7, Section 1044). The ditch may have been recut at least once before extending to the corner of the enclosure, where it formed a sharper right-angle than that made by ditches 1 and 2, making a distinct modification to this part of the enclosure. Ditch 3 was also notably different in size compared with ditches 1 and 2, measuring 0.7m wide and 0.35m deep at the western corner, and 0.35-0.45m deep along the south-west side of the enclosure

Ditch 3 cut the upper edge of ditch 2 on its south-west side about half-way along its length (Fig. 7, Section 1014). About 7m to the south of this section, both ditches 2 and 3 were truncated by the south-west end of Roman trackway ditch 4 (cut 114) (Fig. 7, Section 1030).

The ditch terminal at the south-east end of the south-west side of the enclosure was formed by a single cut. It is uncertain whether this was part of ditch 2 or ditch 3, though its shallow depth of 0.5m deep perhaps suggests that it was the later feature. The terminal contained a very thin basal layer and an upper fill (1106) of grey-brown clay silt with a perforated fired clay block and two pottery sherds in a quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered fabric, one of which was from a large Middle Bronze Age urn with fingernail impressions. If this terminal did represent the end of ditch 3, it suggests that the size of the entranceway may have originally been wider.

Internal features

Several clusters of postholes and pits were excavated within the trapezoidal enclosure. Most of these probably represent structures, though no evidence for buildings can be recognised in their arrangement. All the postholes have been grouped to aid discussion below (Fig. 6), and their locations are illustrated in Figure 8. A couple of seemingly isolated pits were also identified. The shallow depths of some of these features, particularly in the centre of the enclosure, suggests that some had been truncated by later activity, perhaps becoming impacted by the route of the late Roman trackway.

Feature group 6 consisted of three pits (1073, 1075 and 1077) located just east of the centre of the enclosure. Each pit was roughly circular in plan and measured c. 0.6m across. They had shallow, concave bases with depths ranging between 0.15m and 0.20m, and each was filled with reddish-brown clay silt. Pit 1073 contained five sherds from a thick-walled, quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered vessel, plus a small fragment of Severn Valley ware. The Roman sherd is likely to be intrusive, perhaps associated with activity around the trackway, and it was noted that pit 1073 had also been partially truncated by machining. Pits 1075 and 1077 did not contain any pottery.

Feature group 7 was located close to the middle of the south-eastern enclosure ditch. Here, a row of three postholes (1079, 1082 and 1101) was positioned perpendicular to ditch 1. These features were similar in size and profile, ranging in width between 0.4m and 0.5m, reaching depths of 0.3-0.4m (Fig. 9, Sections 1021, 1022 and 1028). Each contained fills of reddish-brown silty clay, and the base of each posthole was notably deeper on one side, creating a circular 'depression'. These probably indicated the positions of posts, and it was notable that the fills varied in colour within each feature. Charcoal fragments were recovered from all three postholes, while 1079 also contained a single sherd of quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered pottery.

Feature group 10 consisted of six circular features, four of which were probably postholes, located in the southern quarter of the enclosure. The features varied in size, ranging between 0.2m and 0.8m wide and 0.15m and 0.3m deep. The largest, 1166, had gently sloping sides that gave it a different profile compared with the other features in this group. Patches of pink/reddened ground in and around the feature suggest that the area had been exposed to fire. The brown clay silt fills also contained ashes, some burnt animal bones, and pottery sherds from a thick-walled, grog-tempered vessel and a sand-and-white-quartzite vessel. Postholes 1173, 1175 and 1177 were almost identical, with U-shaped profiles, widths of c. 0.4m and depths of c. 0.15m. Each contained clay silt fills with charcoal. Posthole 1173 was cut by 1175 on its western side. Posthole 1182 was slightly isolated from the group and differed in size. It was 0.2m wide and 0.3m deep with steep sides. It also had a deeper cut within its base, similar to the postholes in group 7, possibly indicating the position of a post. It contained a single brown clay silt fill with charcoal inclusions.

Feature group 11 consisted of four circular features located just north of the centre of the enclosure. Three of the features (1116, 1118 and 1120) were probably postholes. Each had steep sides and a flat base, and ranged between 0.2m and 0.3m wide and 0.1m and 0.2m deep (Fig. 9, Sections 1031, 1032 and 1033). All three

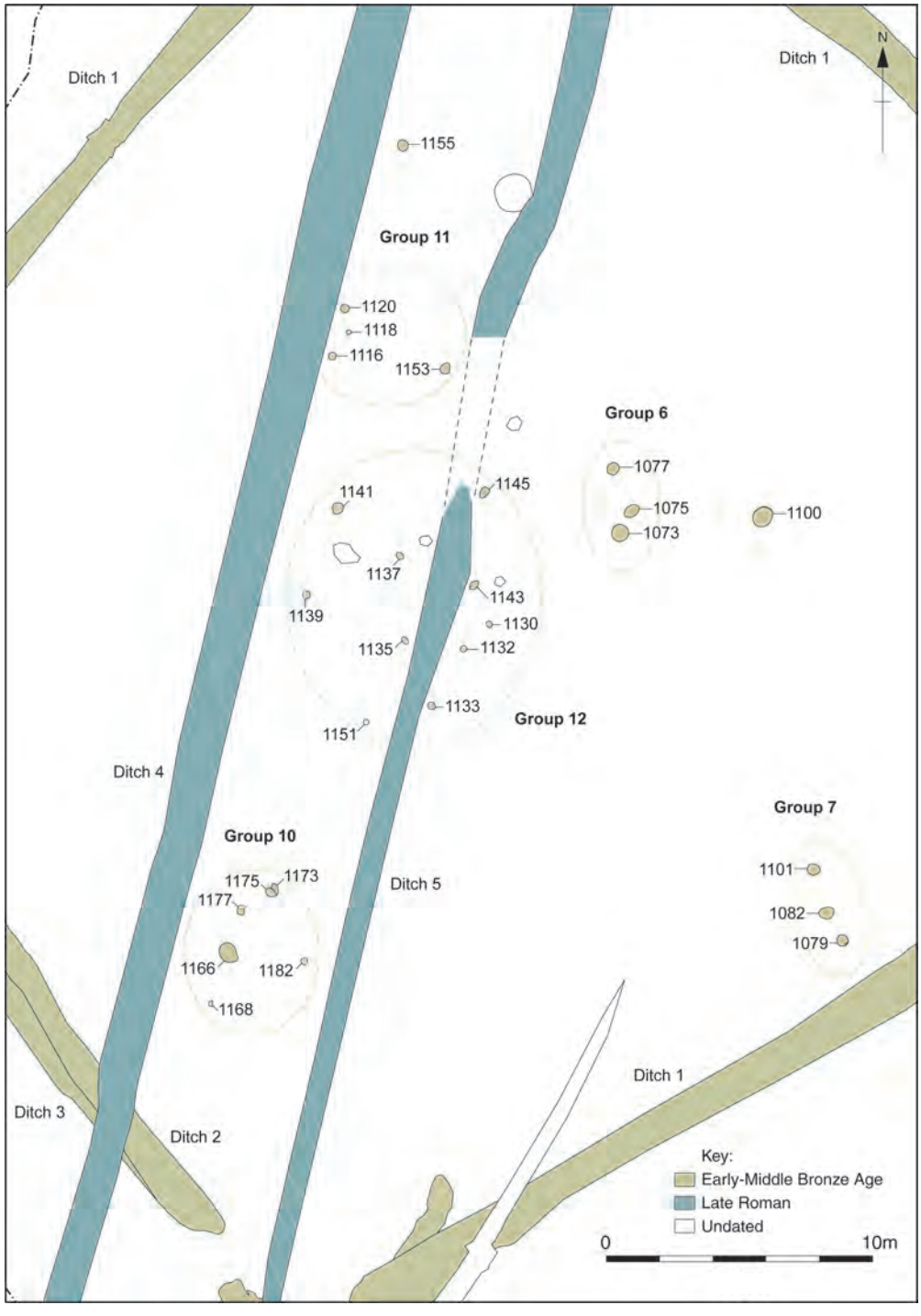

Fig. 8 Trench 1 pit and posthole plan

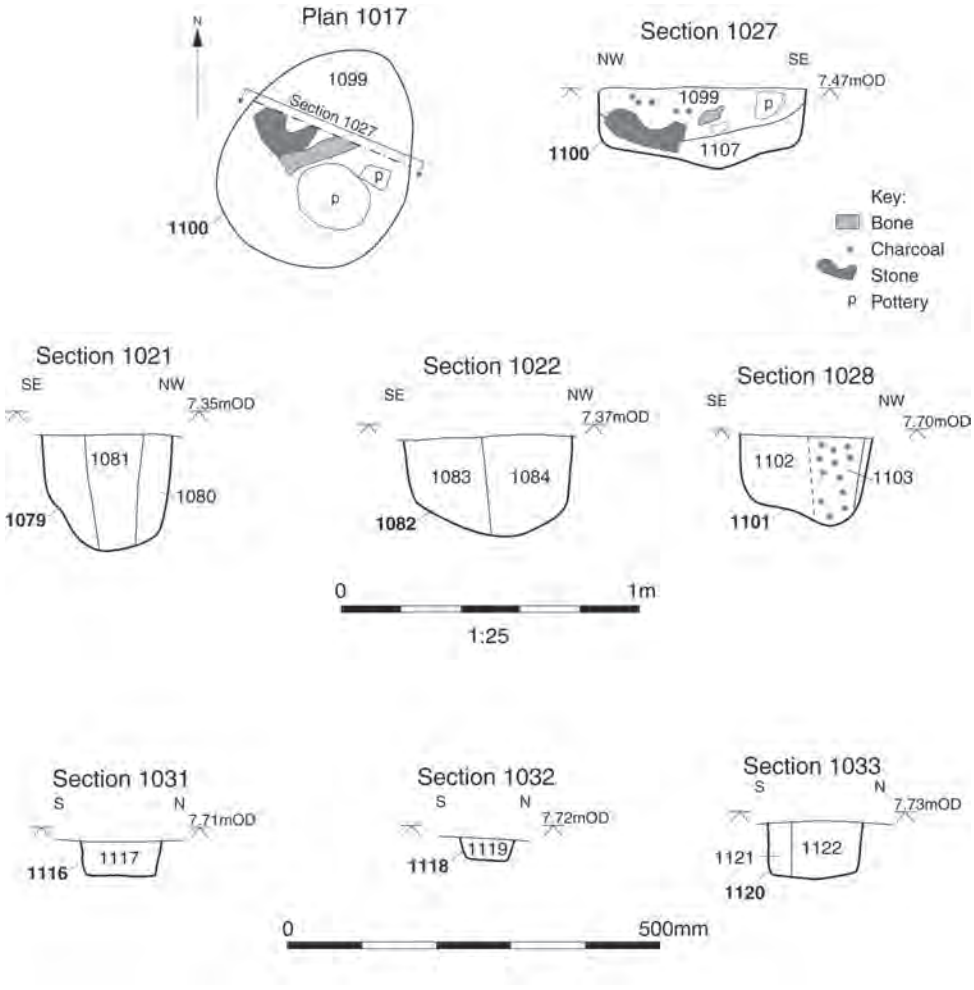

Fig. 9 Trench 1 pit and posthole sections

postholes contained dark-brown clay silt deposits with relatively dense concentrations of charcoal. Fragments of quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered vessels were recovered from postholes 1116 and 1120. Feature 1153, located a couple of metres east of the three postholes, was 0.4m wide and 0.1m deep, with sloping sides and an irregular base. It contained brown silty clay with much charcoal.

Feature group 12 consisted of ten features located in the centre of the enclosure. These were notably shallow, with depths ranging between 0.05m and 0.15m. They may have been affected by later truncation, which appears to have been particularly prominent in this area and was possibly caused by the route of the late Roman trackway. Despite this, some variation in the profiles of the features was observed. Postholes 1130, 1141, 1143 and 1145 had sloping sides with shallow bases and were relatively wide, measuring c. 0.4m across. Each of these postholes contained sterile clay silt fills. Postholes 1133 and 1151 had steep sides and flat bases, similar in profile to the postholes in group 11. Their fills included concentrations of charcoal and they were located together at the southernmost end of the group. Postholes 1132, 1135, 1137 and 1139 had relatively steep sides with concave bases. They ranged between 0.2m and 0.3m in width and contained brown silty clay fills, though 1135 and 1137 also included concentrations of charcoal.

Pit 1044 was located c. 2m from the western enclosure terminal, close to the southern end of the trench. It had an irregular ovoid shape, measuring 1.8m

by 1.5m in plan, and was relatively shallow at 0.35m deep. The pit contained a complete cattle skeleton within fill 1048. The animal was laid on its right-hand-side with its legs tucked into its body. Analysis of the teeth suggests that the animal was fairly old when it died, probably over eight years. Fill 1048 contained two grog-tempered sherds, a thick jar rim, and a body sherd from a possible Trevisker vessel. The pit appears to have respected the ditch terminal, though it was also cut on its south-east side by Roman trackway ditch 5.

Pit 1100 was located a few metres east of group 6. It was sub-circular in shape, with steep sides and a flattish base, though it was notably lower in the centre (Fig. 9, Plan 1017). The pit contained two fills: the lower fill (1107) was a firm, grey/brown silty clay, while the upper fill (1099) comprised a more friable, dark grey silt (Fig. 9, Section 1027). The feature contained several finds that may have been placed as a 'structured' deposit. These included a perforated stone object, animal bones and a pottery vessel base. The perforated stone may have been a weight of some type, or perhaps a pivot-stone for a door or gatepost. The animal bones were all from cattle and included a mandible and bones from the lower left forelimb. In total, 41 sherds of pottery from at least two Middle Bronze Age vessels were recovered from the upper fill, consisting of a large flat-based jar and a smaller jar, both in a quartz-sand-and-grog-tempered fabric. Two patches of pink material within the upper fill suggest that heated remains were also deposited in the feature.

Pit 1068 was located close to south-eastern enclosure ditch 1, a few metres from the eastern corner. It was sub-circular in plan, measuring 0.4m by 0.5m wide, and had steeply sloping sides with a flat base. The feature contained a friable, grey silt with occasional charcoal inclusions, but no other finds. Its function is uncertain.

Pit 1155 had vertical sides and a slightly concave base. It was 0.4m wide and 0.13m deep, and contained a single grey/brown clay silt fill with frequent charcoal inclusions.

Late Roman period (c. AD 250-410)

A trackway measuring 6-7m wide cut across the centre of the site in Trench 1. It was defined by two parallel ditches—ditches 4 and 5—which cut the trapezoidal enclosure at its northern corner and across the southern entranceway. Both ditches could be clearly seen on the surface after the initial stripping of the site.

Ditch 4 was excavated in two sections along its southern half where it measured 1.3-1.5m wide and 0.65-0.7m deep. Cut 1114 truncated ditches 2 and 3 of the trapezoidal enclosure on its south-western side (see above). Here, a primary fill of light brown silty-sand formed a thin band of material, 0.15m thick, across the base of the ditch. This contained a single rim sherd from a New Forest indented beaker dated to the late 3rd/4th century AD, which suggests that the ditch was beginning to silt up towards the end of the Roman period. A single sherd of Early-Middle Bronze Age grog-tempered pottery was found near the surface of the upper fill (1123) of the feature, a thick deposit of firm, light red-brown clay silt, and was no doubt residual in this context. The north end of ditch 4 appears to cut through the north corner of the trapezoidal enclosure (Fig. 7, Section 1008).

Ditch 5 ran parallel with ditch 4 along its whole length. It was sectioned in three places, and was found to be narrower and shallower at its southern end where it was 0.65m wide and 0.23m deep, compared to 1.4m wide and 0.45m deep its northern end. Each section contained two fills of clay silt with few finds or other inclusions, suggesting that it silted up naturally. There was no evidence of recuts. At its southern end, ditch 5 passed through the entranceway that led into the trapezoidal enclosure, cutting pit 1044. From here, the line of ditch 5 could be followed northward to the centre of the enclosure, where there was an apparent break for about 5m. This section was not excavated. It is possible that there was a gap in the ditch at this point or that its line could not be seen due to a lack of contrast between the ditch fill and the surrounding natural. The upper fill of the ditch may have been affected by truncation from later activity in this area. Ditch 5 was excavated about 5m north of where its line was picked up again. Here, it cut through a shallow sub-circular feature, probably a tree-throw hole. At its northern end, ditch 5 cut the Bronze Age enclosure ditch along its north-east side.

Undated features

Gully or ditch 1124, c. 23m in length, cut obliquely across the line of ditch 1 at its southern end. An excavated section on the south side of ditch 1 showed that this gully or ditch was clearly a later feature. No datable material was recovered from its fill, but it could relate to the late Roman activity at the site.

ARTEFACTUAL REMAINS

Worked flint
Tom Lawrence

Ten worked flints were recovered and recorded using OA's standard system of broad artefact/debitage type, general condition, hammer type and presence/degree of platform preparation/abrasion. Dating of the flints was attempted where possible.

Most of the struck flint derived from the ditches of the trapezoidal and mortuary enclosures, except for one blade recovered from posthole 1130 (Fig. 10.1) within the trapezoidal enclosure. A summary of the assemblage is presented in Table 1.

The trapezoidal enclosure ditch contained a side-and-end scraper (1014; Fig. 10.2), a retouched flake (1026; Fig. 10.3), and a burnt, notched flake (1059; Fig. 10.4). Three pieces of debitage were found in contexts 1010, 1056 and 1058. These are all fairly squat fragments with regular flaking patterns. The flint found in posthole 1130, near the centre of the trapezoidal enclosure, was a lightly burnt blade that was different in character to the squat flakes in the rest of the assemblage (Fig. 10.1).

In Trench 2, the mortuary enclosure ditch produced a utilized flake and two pieces of debitage. Both debitage pieces were squat flakes: one in a very cherty, orange-brown material with a rolled cortex, while the other was black speckled flint derived from a gravel source.

Much of the assemblage is likely to be Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in date due to the squat nature of the flakes and the high number of faceted and dihedral platforms, while the debitage is too regular for it to be any later. The scarring patterns are indicative of single or multiplatform flake cores. The blade from posthole 1130 possibly dates to the Late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic, though this is tentative.

The high ratio of retouched to non-retouched pieces

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF WORKED FLINTS

Context	**Type**	**Sub-type**	**Description**	**Date**
1010	Flake	Distal trimming	Squat flake in fresh condition	
1014	Side-and-end scraper	Inner flake	A well-made scraper with semi-abrupt retouch	Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age
1026	Retouched flake	Side trimming	A proximal fragment of fresh flake with *ad hoc* retouch	Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age
1056	Flake	Side trimming	A squat flake with a faceted platform in fresh condition	
1058	Flake	Inner	A squat fresh flake in fresh condition	
1059	Notch	Distal trimming	A heavily burnt flake with a crude notch on the left lateral	Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age
1129	Blade	Inner	A lightly burnt blade with possible utilization on both lateral edges	Late Mesolithic/ Early Neolithic
2007	Flake (x 2)	Side trimming	Two squat flakes with hard hammer percussion—one flint derives from cherty sources and the other from gravel sources	
2028	Flake	Side trimming	A squat flake with possible mutilation on the right lateral	

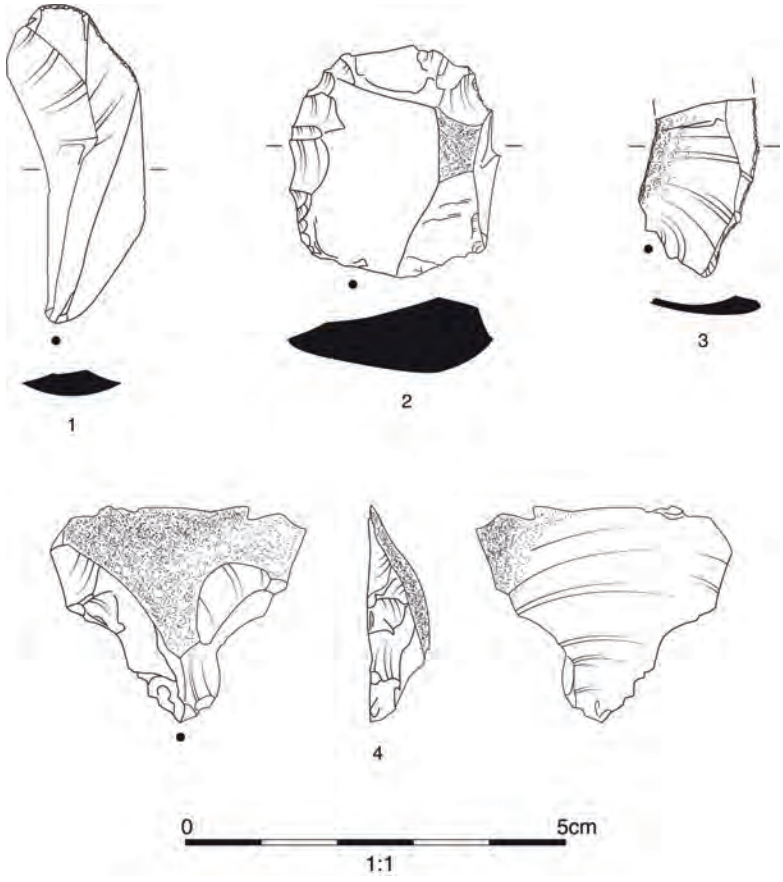

Fig. 10 Worked flints

(30%) likely represents recovery bias rather than specific structural deposition within the enclosure ditches. Nonetheless, the assemblage is in fresh condition and is unlikely to have moved far before deposition.

Prehistoric pottery
Lisa Brown

A small collection of 197 sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing 1,805g was recovered. Due to the small size and generally fragmentary and abraded condition of the assemblage, it was not possible to fully characterise all the material. However, the dominant component can be placed in the Trevisker-related tradition.

Trevisker-ware pottery first emerged in Cornwall during the Early Bronze Age, when it was used mainly in funerary contexts. During the Middle Bronze Age, Trevisker-related pottery spread more widely across south-west England and south-east Wales, being found in both settlements and burials (Nowakowski 2012; Quinnell 2018). Trevisker-related assemblages from Middle Bronze Age settlements in Somerset such as Brean Down (Woodward 1990), Rodway (Quinnell 2018), Bridgwater Gateway (Brown forthcoming) and Nerrols Farm, Cheddon Fitzpaine (Davies forthcoming) have affinities with the Aller assemblage, especially in the preponderance of grog-tempered fabrics.

Methods

The pottery was recorded and quantified in accordance with the methodology recommended by the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 2010). All sherds were inspected macroscopically and microscopically at x20 magnification, and dated with consideration of the combined diagnostic features of fabric, form and decoration.

Condition

The condition of the group is poor overall, with a few notable exceptions. The average sherd weight (ASW) of the total collection is 9g. A low ASW for the ditch and posthole material is typical of prehistoric settlement sites. The much higher figure of 19g for the pit groups suggests different life histories and depositional processes involved when considering how the pottery ended up in these features. There may have been some selection of pottery fragments for deliberate deposition in pits, particularly pit 1100 where the pottery was associated with other distinctive material (see e.g. Nowakowski 2001).

Provenance

Most of the prehistoric pottery—115 sherds (738g), representing 58% of the total assemblage by sherd count and 41% by weight—was recovered in small quantities from the fills of ditch segments belonging to enclosure ditch 1 (1007, 1008, 1013, 1023, 1024, 1027, 1032, 1054, 1179), and its recuts, ditch 2 (1051, 1104, 1072) and ditch 3 (1050). Ditch 1096 produced a single 7g sherd, and Roman trackway ditch 4 (1115) yielded a single, residual 6g sherd.

Another 53 sherds (1,008g) came from four pits, and is all consistent with a Middle Bronze Age date. Pit 1044 produced two sherds (58g), including a fragment of a short out-turned rim of a large vessel in fabric G1 and an 11g sherd in G2 with traces of twisted cord resembling a Trevisker-related jar from ditch 1 (Fig. 11.1). This pit contained a complete cattle skeleton. Pit 1073 produced two basal sherds belonging to a large jar or urn and pit 1166 four body sherds (62g) from a thick-walled vessel. Pit 1100 yielded 42 sherds (823g) including a fragmented complete base, which may have been a structured deposit. Some 17 sherds (34g) were found in the fills of four postholes (1079, 1115, 1116 and 1120), again consistent with a Middle Bronze Age date.

The square enclosure ditch 8 (2009, 2036) produced ten sherds weighing only 12g, some of these so comminuted that even the fabric type was unclear; this material is too small and fragmentary to establish affinities with any particular ceramic tradition.

Fabrics

Five distinct fabrics within two broad groups were distinguished by the presence of principal inclusions:

G Predominantly grog inclusions

G1 soapy, slightly micaceous clay matrix with fine - medium grade quartz sand and sparse - moderate grog pieces generally < 2mm. May additionally incorporate sparse rock inclusions, and red and black ferrous lumps and pellets. Rare calcareous flecks of fossil limestone (bryozoa observed in some sherds). Most grog is pale buff, but orange and dark grey are also visible in most sherds.

G2 Slightly micaceous soapy clay matrix similar to G1, but incorporating rarer dark grog and red ferrous inclusions.

G3 Sandy micaceous clay containing sparse pale grog, angular calcite, subangular quartzite <3mm, and rare inclusions of other unidentified rock.

Q Predominantly quartz sand

Q1 Micaceous clay with fine quartz sand, calcite and sparse quartzite pieces <2mm, sparse pale grog, red and black ferrous inclusions

Q2 Micaceous clay incorporating medium grade sand with sparse white quartzite pieces up to 3mm

TABLE 2 PREHISTORIC POTTERY QUANTIFICATION BY FABRIC TYPE

Fabric	NOSH	Weight (g)	ASW (g)
Predominantly grog			
G1	140	1293	9
G2	18	71	4
G3	13	119	9
Total	171	1654	
Predominantly sand			
Q1	5	44	9
Q2	21	107	5
Total	197	1805	9

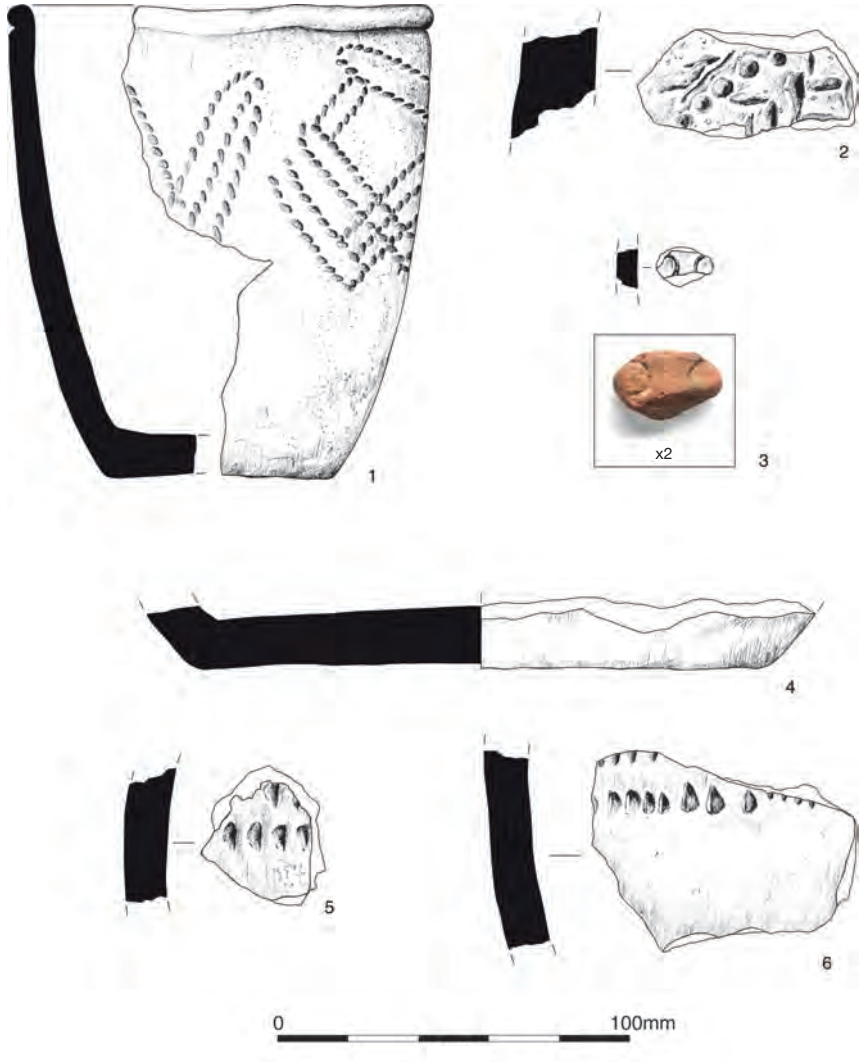

Fig. 11 Prehistoric pottery

The pottery was not subjected to petrological analysis, and some sherds are too small and weathered even to determine fabric constituents. However, the clearly dominant ware group incorporates grog, sometimes in combination with other inclusions, including ferrous particles, rare quartzite and calcareous (limestone) fragments, and rare occurrences of other unsourced rock.

Most of the grog-tempered wares could have been produced locally, and the calcite and fossil limestone inclusions reflect the limestone-dominated geology of the local region. The grog inclusions in the sherds belonging to the larger vessels (most of which are in fabric G1) are typically pale grey or buff coloured, and stand out on the surface of the (generally) reddish oxidised sherds. An overfired or refired sherd from ditch 1179 is a similar pale colour to these grog inclusions, which could suggest that in the firing of the vessels the grog is effectively refired. The homogeneity of the fabrics in which the larger, thick-walled vessels were produced may indicate the work of a single workshop or potter, but vessel numbers are too few to pursue this possibility. Red or dark-grey grog inclusions are less common, but occur alongside the pale grog in some sherds, generally the smaller, finer vessels.

Grog-tempered sherds from an earlier investigation at Aller were tentatively dated to the Early to Middle Bronze Age (Mepham 2013), but the fragments were not sufficiently distinctive to determine the tradition. Grog-tempered fabrics are found in Early to Middle Bronze Age assemblages in Somerset and Devon, occurring, for example, at Wick Lane, Norton Fitzwarren (McSloy 2013, 5-7), although the description of the fabric of two Collared Urns highlights darker grog than the pale inclusions typical of the Aller fabrics.

The origin of the clays containing other inclusions amongst the grog is less certain. Bronze Age grog-tempered wares (fabric group 2) from Brean Down incorporate inclusions of limestone, quartz and other rock, more closely resembling the Aller fabrics. Thin section analysis of some sherds of pottery from Brean Down by David Williams showed inclusions of plagioclase feldspar, chert and sandstone in addition to quartz and limestone (Woodward 1990, 122), and the Aller fabrics may include similar constituents. A partial Trevisker-type vessel from with twisted cord decoration (Fig. 11.1) from ditch 1 (1050/1051) is in fabric G3, which contains calcite, quartzite and unidentified rock inclusions alongside pale grog. No gabbroic inclusions are apparent at 20x magnification, so the fabric of this vessel cannot confidently be classified as belonging to the range of 'gabbroic admixture' fabrics commonly observed in Trevisker-ware assemblages (H. Quinnell pers. comm. and 1987; Parker Pearson 1990, 19). There is thus no evidence that the Trevisker-related vessels from Aller are Cornish imports.

Forms and decoration

Few sherds diagnostic of vessel form were present in this assemblage, but all classifiable forms are consistent with a Middle Bronze Age date. Most distinctive of all is the Trevisker-related vessel (Fig. 11.1) in fabric G3, represented by conjoining sherds from ditch 1 (1050/1051). The vessel is incomplete, but the full profile of this small, straight-sided jar survives, bearing a decorative scheme of diagonal intersecting lines of twisted cord impressions. This vessel has been inspected by Henrietta Quinnell, who believes it to be a Somerset variant produced somewhere local to the site (pers. comm.). A body sherd in fabric G1 (thus a separate vessel) with the same decoration was recovered from a separate segment (1179) of ditch 1, and twisted cord decoration on an 11g sherd in fabric G2 from pit 1044 represents a third probable Trevisker-related vessel. Trevisker-related vessels with cord-impressed decoration have been recovered from Middle Bronze Age settlements in Somerset including Brean Down (Woodward 1990, 126-45), Rodway (Quinnell 2018, fig. 2.7) and Bridgwater Gateway (Brown forthcoming).

A thick-walled sherd in fabric Q2 from ditch 1 (1054) may belong to a Food Vessel or Collared Urn, but the deep-stabbed impressions that form a crude herringbone pattern (Fig. 11.2) resemble decoration on some examples of Trevisker-related pottery from Brean Down (Woodward 1990, fig. 89, no. 22; fig. 90, no. 34), Rodway (Quinnell 2018, figs 2.7-2.8) and Nerrols Farm (Davies forthcoming), and are likely to also belong to that tradition. A 1g body sherd in fabric Q1 decorated with impressed open circles of the type seen on earlier Bronze Age pottery (Food Vessels and Collared Urns) came from ditch 2009 (2010) (Fig. 11.3), and another five sherds in Q1 include a fragment of a flat base from segment 1032 of ditch 1.

Less distinctive of stylistic tradition are the everted rim of a thick-walled jar in fabric G1 from pit 1044 (1123) and complete bases of large jars recovered from pit 1100 (1099) (Fig. 11.4). These may have been selected and retained for structured deposition. Body sherds of two large jars in fabric G1 from ditch 1 (1024) and its recut, ditch 2 (1104), are decorated with horizontal rows of fingernail impressions (Fig. 11.5-6), a decorative motif that was widespread from the earlier Bronze Age. It is a feature of the later Early Bronze Age biconical urn series, but also seen on Trevisker-related pottery (Woodward 1990, fig. 92, nos 53 and 54). Because of the fragmentary nature of the Aller examples it was not possible to attribute them to either tradition. The wall thickness of most of the body sherds from the four pits indicate that they belonged to similar jars.

Indeterminate forms include a flat-topped rim sherd (3g) in fabric G2 from ditch 1 (1032), and a small dish or bowl (5g) in the same fabric with a moulded or grooved rim top from ditch 8 (2036).

Little can be said of the highly abraded sherds from the four postholes, all in fabric G1, except that the fabric corresponds to that of the Bronze Age pottery from other contexts, suggesting that they are broadly contemporary.

Roman and later pottery
Paul Booth

Five sherds of Roman pottery weighing 48g were recovered from the excavation. Trench 1 produced a tiny fragment (1g) of possible Severn Valley ware from the fill of pit 1073, and the rim (12g) of a New Forest indented beaker (Fulford 1975, type 27.13) in a fine reduced colour-coated fabric from the lower fill of trackway ditch 4 (context 1115; Fig. 7, Section 1030). Two black-burnished ware sherds, one each in south-east Dorset and 'South-west' fabric (9g and 15g respectively), came from subsoil 1001. A further sherd of South-west BB1 (11g) came from the upper fill of the enclosure ditch (2027) in Trench 2.

Miscellaneous scraps of post-medieval pottery, mostly from topsoil and subsoil contexts, came from Trench 1 (nine sherds, 56g) and Trench 2 (two sherds, 9g).

Fired clay
Cynthia Poole

A small quantity of fired clay amounting to 24 fragments (550g) was recovered from Bronze Age ditches and pits. Three diagnostic objects were identified, while the remainder of the fired clay consisted of small fragments either with a single moulded surface or amorphous in shape. All the unidentified fragments were less than 30mm long.

The three diagnostic fragments were perforated blocks dating to the Middle-Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age. All these fragments were recovered from fills of the trapezoidal enclosure ditch. Two fragments from contexts 1056 (Fig. 12.1) and 1106 (Fig. 12.2) have cylindrical drum forms with smooth, evenly moulded, plano-convex sides curving slightly to a flat end. The flat end is pierced in both examples by a cylindrical perforation, 11mm and 18mm in diameter respectively. They measure c. 100mm and 130mm in diameter and have heights greater than 52mm and 82mm respectively. The latter height is probably not far short of its original size, which is estimated to be c. 90mm. The flat-ended form is usually dated to the Late Bronze Age and contrasts with Early-Middle Bronze Age forms which tend to have more convex ends, though the distinction is not necessarily clear, especially where ends are poorly preserved as is the case with the Aller Court examples.

One object of the second variety, found in context 1015, appears to be part of an oblong or pyramidal block of Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age type (Fig. 12.3). Only the flat top which curves to the four sides survives, together with a perforation 17mm in diameter set 25mm from the end. The top end measures 77mm wide by c. 58mm thick.

All the identified and unidentified fragments were made of a fine, smooth silty clay containing moderate-high densities of quartz sand and occasional small grits of flint or sandstone. They were generally fired to a yellow/red-brown and one was blackened over most of the surviving side. Heavy burning on one side was observed on similar objects from Tinney's Lane, Sherborne, Dorset, where it has been suggested these were used as furniture in the firing of pottery (Best and Woodward 2012, 231).

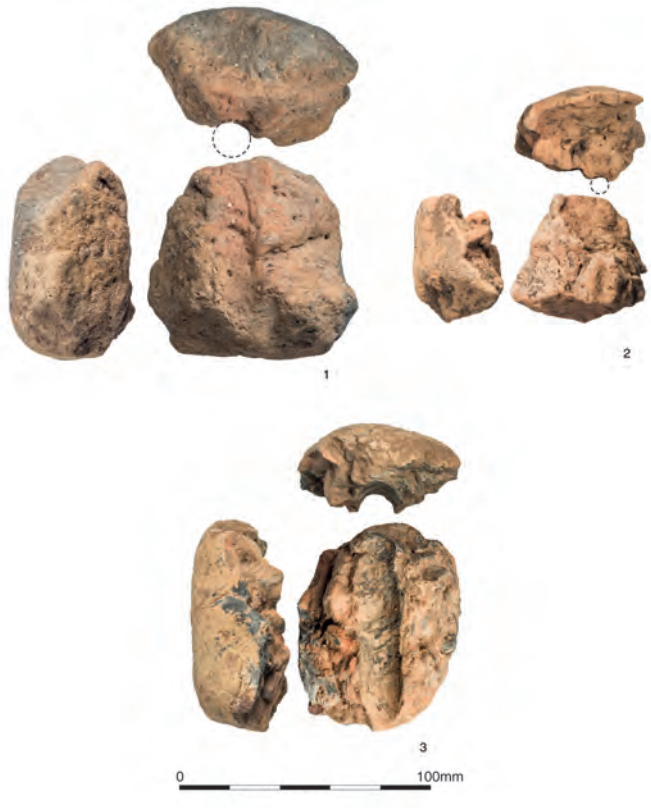

Fig. 12 Fired clay

Discussion

Previous interpretations tend to see these objects as loom-weights for a warp-weighted loom, largely because of the perforations. However, evidence of wear from suspension has never been convincingly demonstrated. The rough alignment of a group of Middle Bronze Age objects in a roundhouse at Black Patch, East Sussex, was interpreted as the position of a loom, though this is also inconclusive (Drewett 1982, fig. 10). In contrast, the association of cylindrical, cuboid and pyramidal perforated blocks with ovens, hearths or pottery production is evident at a number of Late Bronze Age sites. Excavations at Willington, Derbyshire, exposed examples of pyramidal blocks around the perimeter of a hearth, though the interpretation as hearth furniture was not explicit here (Elsdon 1979). At Badwell Ash, Suffolk, five pyramidal blocks were found in the base of a kiln or oven, each being heavily burnt on one side (Winbolt 1935). The function of these perforated blocks has been discussed in some detail in relation to the Middle Bronze Age assemblages from Bestwall Quarry (Ladle and Woodward 2009, 296-9) and Late Bronze Age material from Tinney's Lane, Sherborne (Best and Woodward 2012, 231-4), where detailed analysis of the unusually large assemblages suggested that they had been used in the process of firing pottery. Evidence of pottery production is rarely present on most later Bronze Age sites and their sparse distribution on most sites may be the result of more general use of perforated blocks as domestic oven or hearth furniture (e.g. Poole forthcoming), rather than as specialised items for pottery production.

Worked stone
Ruth Shaffrey

One large stone was recovered from the base of fill 1099 where it met with fill 1107 in pit 1100 (Fig. 13). This stone is approximately square in shape with a large, slightly offset, circular perforation. Its surface is naturally smooth all over and no distinct wear is apparent within the perforation. The stone was possibly used as a pivot/socket stone for a door or gatepost, although such stones are typically hollowed rather than perforated. Alternatively, the stone may have functioned as a large weight, though the only known comparable stones are Iron Age in date (Shaffrey 2017, table 11.1).

Fig. 13 Worked stone

Other small finds
Paul Booth

Very small quantities of miscellaneous materials were recovered. A single fragment of clay pipe stem, a modern nail, two small fragments of modern glass and two fragments of post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM) all came from a single deposit (numbered 1026, though this must be an error since this context is certainly a primary fill in the south-east side of enclosure ditch 1 in Trench 1). Fourteen fragments (242g) of CBM (including the two fragments mentioned above), mostly from topsoil contexts, were all post-medieval/modern in date.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Human remains
Lauren McIntyre

Three discrete cremation burial deposits (2030, 2032 and 2034) were found within the mortuary enclosure in Trench 2, in shallow pits with depths of up to 0.25m. It was observed during the excavation that the features had been affected by ploughing. All three cremations have been radiocarbon dated to between the mid-20th century BC and the first half of the 18th century BC (see *Radiocarbon dating* below).

Methodology

All contexts containing cremated bone were subject to whole-earth recovery, then processed by flotation and wet sieving which sorted them into >10mm, 10-4mm, 4-2mm and 2-0.5mm fractions. Floated residues were retained in a 250µ mesh. Once dried, the extraneous material (e.g. stones) from the >10mm and 10-4mm fractions was separated from the cremated bone and discarded. All cremated bone was examined in accordance with national guidelines (Brickley and McKinley (eds) 2004; McKinley 2004).

For the 4-2mm fractions, a 20g sample was sorted. An estimation of the total bone weight was calculated for the entire fraction, based on the proportion of cremated bone present in the 20g sample. The estimated weights are included in the total weights presented below.

The smallest fraction sizes (2-0.5mm) were not sorted but were rapidly scanned for identifiable skeletal remains and artefacts. Estimations of the proportions of bone present within the 2-0.5mm fractions were made and recorded in the archive. These are presented below, but were not included in the total bone weights.

Analysis of each cremation deposit involved recording its colour, weight and maximum fragment size. These observations can provide information on factors such as the efficacy of cremation (i.e. how well burnt the body was), relative quantity of fuel used, attained temperature within the pyre, length of time over which the cremation took place, degree of bone oxidation, and how well collected the burnt remains were from the pyre site (McKinley 2004, 10-11). Evidence for the presence of pyre goods was also recorded where necessary. The weight and presence/absence of charcoal fuel waste was also recorded in order to explore deposit type, i.e. whether the deposit represented a formal burial or pyre debris.

Each deposit was examined for identifiable bone elements and the minimum number of individuals (MNI) was estimated. The MNI was determined based on the presence/absence of repeated skeletal elements and on the comparative size of bones, e.g. 'adult' versus 'juvenile' size (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994). Where possible, estimation of age and sex was attempted following published methods (Phenice 1969; Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994; Scheuer and Black 2000), although it was not possible to assign an age at death beyond adult (>18 years) for any of the remains. Fragments were examined for evidence of normal morphological variation, or non-metric traits (Berry and Berry 1967; Finnegan 1978). Any pathological lesions were recorded and diagnoses were explored with reference to standard texts (e.g. Aufderheide and Rodríguez-Martín 1998; Ortner 2003).

Results

A summary of the osteological data is presented in Table 3, including weight of material, bone colour, age, sex and evidence of non-metric traits and pathology.

TABLE 3 OSTEOLOGICAL SUMMARY (F?? = POSSIBLE FEMALE; U = UNKNOWN)

Cut	Deposit	Total weight	Colour	Age	Sex	Non-metrics/ pathology/ other comments
2029	2030	814.1g	White 85%, Grey 5%, Blue 5%, Black 5%	Adult >18 years	F??	Cribra orbitalia.
2031	2032	1090.4g	White 90%, Grey 5%, Black 5%	Adult >18 years	U	Bilateral supra-orbital foramen and accessory supra-orbital foramen
2033	2034	1328.1g	White 80%, Grey 10%, Blue 5%, Black 5%	Adult >18 years	F??	Accessory supra-orbital foramen left orbit

Bone weight

Cremation 2030 weighed 814.1g, which falls within the 600-900g weight range cited by McKinley (2013, 154) for cremations that have been recovered archaeologically (Table 4). Cremations 2032 and 2034 both fall within the weight range of 1000-2400g, the quantity of bone typically produced by a single adult during modern cremations (McKinley 2000, 269). The extent to which these features were truncated is unclear, but the high bone weights (particularly in deposits 2032 and 2034) suggest that truncation did not impact upon the features to any great extent. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that some types of Bronze Age cremation deposits frequently include bone weights above 900g (McKinley 2013, 163). Thus, most of the original deposit is likely to be represented in all three cases. Nonetheless, a small quantity of bone could have been lost through later truncation of the deposits, while some fragments may not have been collected from the pyre site.

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF BONE WEIGHTS BY SKELETAL ELEMENT (NB. * INDICATES WEIGHTS THAT INCLUDE ESTIMATED WEIGHTS FROM THE 4-2MM FRACTIONS)

Element	**Cremation 2030**		**Cremation 2032**		**Cremation 2034**	
	weight/g	**%**	**weight/g**	**%**	**weight/g**	**%**
Skull	177.9	21.85	251	23.02	302.1	22.75
Axial	39.2	4.82	70.9	6.5	124.5	9.37
Upper limb	29.6	3.64	35.1	3.22	37.6	2.83
Lower limb	54.7	6.72	111.9	10.26	163.7	12.33
Unid. long bone	161.8	19.87	230	21.09	201.1	15.14
Unid. hand/foot	8.6	1.06	6.4	0.59	10	0.75
Unid. joint surface	14.4g	1.77	33.4	3.06	53.3	4.01
Unid. other	327.91*	40.27	351.7*	32.25	435.81*	32.81
total	814.11*	100	1090.4*	100	1328.11*	100

Fragmentation

Fragment size ranged from 54.7mm to 73.3mm, which relate to fragments of femoral shaft from cremations 2034 and 2032 respectively (Table 5). In cremations 2032 and 2034 the greatest proportion of bone derived from the >10mm fraction, but relatively sizable quantities of bone also came from the 10-4mm fractions; this is unsurprising considering the large weights of both these deposits. The largest proportion of bone in 2030 came from the 10-4mm fraction, although a quarter of the total bone weight did come from the >10mm fraction (206.9g, 25.4%).

High frequencies of cremated bone were also present in the 2-0.5mm residues (Table 6), although the total bone weights could not be estimated here. These have the potential to contribute significantly to the total bone weight.

TABLE 5 SUMMARY OF FRAGMENTATION (NB. * INDICATE WEIGHTS THAT INCLUDE ESTIMATED WEIGHTS FROM THE 4-2MM FRACTIONS)

Cremation	**Total weight**	**>10mm**	**10-4mm**	**4-2mm**	**Max. frag. size**
2030	814.11g*	206.9g	450.3g	156.91g*	56.4mm, radius shaft fragment
2032	1090.4g*	489.3g	458.8g	142.3g*	73.3mm, femoral shaft fragment
2034	1328.11g*	603.3g	565.7g	159.11g*	54.7g, femoral shaft fragment

TABLE 6 2-0.5MM FRACTION PROPORTIONAL BONE CONTENT

Cremation	Total 2-0.5mm fraction weight/g	% cremated bone (based on visual assessment)
2030	789.3	25
2032	321.1	75
2034	3221	70

Skeletal representation

Of the identified fragments, bones from the skull were the most frequent observed in all three burials, comprising 21.9% of the total bone weight from 2030, 23.0% from 2032, and 22.8% from 2034 (Table 4). In this author's experience, high proportions of skull fragments are often noted during the analysis of cremations, most likely owing to the skull vault being more easily identified than other bones, even within the smaller fractions. Bone fragments from the axial skeleton and upper and lower limbs were also identified in smaller proportions in all three cremations.

Most of the bone fragments from the three deposits were not identified to a specific anatomical region. Small proportions of unidentified bone were from the hands or feet, but the majority was either from the upper or lower limbs, or could not be identified. Proportions of unidentified bone ranged from 32.8% (2034) to 40.3% (2030). The highest proportion of unidentified bone was observed in cremation 2030, as this had the greatest level of fragmentation of the three burials. Unidentified bone mostly derived from the 4-2mm fraction. This is unsurprising given that these fractions were extremely large (only a 20g sample of each was sorted, see *Methodology* above) (Table 7). No identifiable human fragments were found in the sorted 20g samples, although small proportions of animal bone in the 4-2mm fraction from cremation 2030 were separated out and analysed separately (see *Animal bones* below).

TABLE 7 4-2MM FRACTION SUMMARY

Cremation	Material	Total 4-2mm fraction weight/g	Weight from sorted 20g sample/g	Proportional bone content of 20g sample/%	Estimated bone weight for total 4-2mm fraction/g
2030	Human bone	482.8	6.5	32.5	156.91
	Animal bone		0.2	1.0	4.83
2032	Human bone	174.6	16.3	81.5	142.3
	Charcoal		0.1	0.5	0.87
2034	Human bone	224.1	14.2	71.0	159.1
	Charcoal		0.1	0.5	1.12g

Efficiency of cremation

At least 80% of the bone fragments in all three cremation deposits were white in colour (Table 3). This indicates an efficient cremation process with most of the bones being subjected to temperatures over 600ºC (McKinley 2006, 84). Therefore, most of the corpse was placed on the pyre where the heat was concentrated and the oxygen supply was maintained (McKinley 2013, 158). The remainder of the bone in these deposits was coloured grey/blue and black. The small quantity of grey/blue and black fragments may relate to parts of the body that rested towards the edges of the pyre, where temperature fluctuation is greatest and full oxidation of the bone not always possible (McKinley 2013, 158). It was noted that occasional fragments from deposits 2030 and 2034 were white on the outside of the bone, but grey or black on the inside. This may occur where anatomical regions have thicker layers of muscle and fat, which may protect the interior of the bone from becoming fully oxidised (McKinley 1989, 65).

Demography

Each cremation contained the remains of at least one person and assuming that the remains of one individual was not deposited in more than one cremation, which seems unlikely, thus at least three people were represented overall. Osteological indicators of age were very limited.

The size and morphology of the identified bone fragments in all three contexts were in keeping with those of adults, aged over 18 years (Scheuer and Black 2000).

Sex determination was assessed on cranial traits observable in deposits 2030 (one right orbital margin) and 2034 (one right orbital margin, and the nuchal crest), while one pelvic trait (the sciatic notch) was also observable in 2034. In both deposits, the traits were indicative of females, though these estimations are very tentative (Table 3). In unburnt adult skeletons, the accuracy rate for assessing sex on the morphology of the pelvis is 90-95%, and 80% when using the skull (Krogman and Işcan 1986). When applying these criteria to burnt material, bone shrinkage and warping due to dehydration can influence the size and morphology of sexually dimorphic traits.

Non-metric traits

Non-metric traits were present in cremations 2032 and 2034 (Table 3). Bilateral supra-orbital and accessory supra-orbital foramina were observed on fragments from 2032, and an accessory supra-orbital foramen was present on a fragment of the left orbital margin from cremation 2034. These foramina are located on the frontal bone, superior to the supra-orbital margin, and allow the supra-orbital vessels and nerve to pass through the skull (Berry and Berry 1967, 367-9). The presence of both foramina is likely to be a genetic trait (Veldman 2013, 75).

Pathology

Very little evidence for pathology was observed. Cribra orbitalia was present on one fragment of orbit from cremation 2030 (Table 3). The lesions were consistent with Stuart-Macadam's (1991, 145) Type 2. Cribra orbitalia is a metabolic disease identified by increased porosity on the roofs of the orbits (Stuart-Macadam 1991). It has been linked to several conditions, including iron deficiency anaemia and vitamin deficiency (Stuart-Macadam 1991; Ortner 2003, 102-6; Steckel *et al.* 2006, 13). More recent research has suggested Vitamin B deficiency as a possible cause (Walker *et al.* 2009). When observed macroscopically, cribra orbitalia is best considered just as a general indicator of health stress (Steckel *et al.* 2006).

Pyre goods and debris

Cremation deposits occasionally include fragmentary objects that have been burnt on the pyre and become included in the burial. Several fragments of unidentified burnt animal bone were found amongst the cremated human remains from deposits 2030 and 2034. Only small fragments of animal bone were present in the deposits, perhaps suggesting that burnt animal remains were selectively excluded here (see *Animal bones* below). The only pyre debris observed were small quantities of charcoal in all three deposits (see *Charcoal* below). As with the animal bones, the small quantity suggests that an attempt was made to deliberately exclude charcoal from the buried deposits.

Discussion

In Somerset, a chronological trend from collective burial in the Neolithic towards single (either inhumation or cremation) burial in the Early Bronze Age has been identified, and has been linked to the appearance of round cairns and barrows during this period (Pollard and Healey 2007, 101). Cremation as a funerary practice increased in popularity over the course of the Early Bronze Age and is considered as the prevailing funerary rite by the second millennium BC (Owoc 2001, 194; Pollard and Healy 2007; Alexander and Adam 2012, 15). Early Bronze Age cremation burials in Somerset were often urned, as found at Wick Lane, Norton Fitzwarren (Alexander and Adam 2012), and The Hatcheries, West Monkton (Hughes *et al.* 2015). Vessels used to contain cremated bone commonly included beakers, urns or re-used food vessels (Owoc 2001, 200). However, it is uncertain whether the use of funerary urns was typical practice since many potentially unurned examples rarely provide a secure date, usually due to the lack of the urn and/or radiocarbon dating. Possible examples include unurned burials discovered at Charlcombe 2a (Williams 1950) and Chew Park (Rahtz and Greenfield 1977).

Despite the observation of a general trend towards single burial in the Early Bronze Age, it has been argued that burial traditions across south-west England are likely to have been complex with more diverse funerary practices being undertaken, perhaps related to regional variation (Owoc 2001, 200; Alexander and Adam 2012, 15). At Aller Court Farm, the lack of pyre debris recovered from all three cremations suggests that they were primary burials rather than other types of funerary deposit, such as cenotaph burials. The cremation burials here were unurned and deposited in pits inside a square enclosure. Although unurned cremations are known from the region, their arrangement within an enclosure of this type is not known locally during the Early Bronze Age, and this raises questions about the significance of the burial rite at this site.

Radiocarbon dating

Martyn Allen

Three bone samples, one each from cremations 2030, 2032 and 2034, were submitted to SUERC for high-precision radiocarbon dating by Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS), using the methods described

TABLE 8 RADIOCARBON RESULTS FROM CREMATIONS 2030, 2032 AND 2034

Lab. no.	Context	Material	δ13C (‰)	Radiocarbon age (BP)	Calibrated date (at 94.5%)
SUERC-73985 (GU44363)	2030	cremated human bone (femur)	-22.1	3540 ± 28	1951-1771 BC
SUERC-73989 (GU44364)	2032	cremated human bone (?radius)	-23.7	3530 ± 30	1943-1763 BC
SUERC-73984 (GU44362)	2034	cremated human bone (humerus)	-21.8	3539 ± 30	1953-1767 BC

in Dunbar *et al*. (2016). The three samples produced closely matching results, ranging between the mid-20th century cal BC and the first half of the 18th century cal BC (Table 8). These place the date of the burials within Period 3 (2050-1700 BC) of the Early Bronze Age (Pollard and Healy 2007, 77). While these three dates are generally consistent with each other, it is worth highlighting that radiocarbon dates obtained from cremated human bone can be offset by the age of the fuel used in the cremation pyre, of what is often called the 'old wood effect' (Snoeck *et al*. 2014; 2015).

Animal bones
Martyn Allen

A total of 250 animal bone fragments, mostly in a poor condition, were recovered from the site. Much of the material derived from the ditch of the trapezoidal enclosure, while a small amount came from pits. A small assemblage of burnt bones were recovered from two of the cremation burials in Trench 2.

Overall, cattle were the most common species identified, though this is partly due to the high level of fragmentation which biased against the survival and recovery of bones from smaller animals. The most notable aspect of the assemblage was a cattle skeleton found close to the entrance of the trapezoidal enclosure in Trench 1.

Methods

The animal bones were analysed using OA's skeletal reference collection to identify specimens to taxon and element. Where possible, elements were sided and recorded by zone following the criteria of Serjeantson (1996). Evidence for epiphyseal fusion was recorded and age ranges were estimated using the criteria of Silver (1969). Cattle tooth wear stages were recorded using the criteria of Grant (1982), and estimated ages were made using Jones and Sadler's (2012) data. Evidence of burning, butchery and carnivore gnawing was recorded, though the latter two were absent.

Results

Most of the assemblage derived from Trench 1 and predominantly from trapezoidal enclosure ditch 1 and its recut ditches 2 and 3 (Table 9). A few bones were found in two pits (1100 and 1166) located within the enclosure. One fragment was recovered from one of the Roman trackway ditches and another came from the unphased ditch/gully feature (1124). In Trench 2, no animal bones were recovered from mortuary enclosure ditch 8, though a small quantity of burnt material was found in two cremations (2030 and 2034).

Animal bones from the trapezoidal enclosure (Trench 1)

Cattle were the most common taxon in the assemblage, represented by 25 specimens. Forty-two specimens were of large mammal long bone shaft fragments, vertebrae and ribs, and given the absence of horse bones at the site, most of these also likely derive from cattle. It is important to note that the cattle skeleton found in pit 1044 has been quantified as one specimen, rather than the number of bones found (see below for details).

Despite the small number of cattle bones found, a wide range of elements were identified, including fragments of skull, teeth, mandible, scapula, humerus, radius, ulna, pelvis, femur, tibia, metatarsal, and phalanges. Most of the long bones were skeletally mature. A distal metatarsal and a proximal ulna were the only unfused specimens, deriving from animals aged less than two/two-and-a-half years and three-and-a-half/four years respectively. A wider age range is indicated by two dental specimens. A fourth deciduous premolar from ditch cut 1024 had only just come into wear (Stage C), indicating that it belonged to an animal aged around one month old when it died (cf. Jones and Sadler 2012). A mandible from ditch cut 1008 was heavily fragmented, though the full molar row was present. The teeth were in a relatively advanced stage of wear (LM1=g; LM2=h; LM3=h) and probably derived from an animal over seven years old (ibid.).

None of the cattle remains included any signs of butchery or carnivore gnawing, though this is probably due

TABLE 9 NUMBER OF IDENTIFIED SPECIMENS BY PHASE AND FEATURE TYPE
(*ONE COMPLETE CATTLE SKELETON COUNTED AS A SINGLE SPECIMEN)

Period	**Early Bronze Age**		**Early-Middle Bronze Age**						**Late Roman**	**Undated**	**Total**
Feature type	**cremation**		**enclosure ditch**			**pit**			**ditch**	**ditch**	
Feature no.	**2030**	**2034**	**ditch 1**	**ditch 2**	**ditch 3**	**1044**	**1100**	**1166**	**ditch 5**	**1124**	
cattle			18	1	1	1*	4		1		26
sheep/goat		1			1			1		1	4
dog			1								1
vole sp.					1						1
galliform sp.					1						1
medium mammal		5		2							7
large mammal	13		31		3		4	4			55
unidentified	42	25	1		4		2	6			80
Total	55	31	51	3	11	1	10	11	1	1	175

to poor preservation of the bone. A large mammal vertebra from ditch cut 1007 was blackened around one edge indicating that it had been burnt, perhaps during cooking.

Only two specimens of sheep/goat were identified. These included a lower molar from ditch 3 and a calcined tibia fragment from pit 1066. Dog was represented by a single, fused, distal metapodial fragment from ditch cut 1179.

Sieved samples produced mostly unidentifiable specimens. However, the humeri of a small galliform and a vole were recovered from ditch 3. The galliform humerus included much of its distal end, and though it was poorly preserved it compared well with modern grouse and partridge bones.

The cattle burial

Excavation of pit 1044 revealed the remains of a mostly complete cattle skeleton. Unfortunately, the poor preservation conditions meant that the bones were friable and several broke up when lifted. Most parts of the skeleton have been identified and these are detailed in Table 10. Elements of the right side of the body were recovered in better condition than the left, perhaps due to the way the carcass was laid in the pit; only right-sided parts of the humerus, ulna, pelvis, femur, patella and tibia were identified. The skull was very heavily fragmented. There was no evidence for horncores, though these may

TABLE 10 DETAILS OF THE CATTLE SKELETON IN PIT 1044

Element	**Side**	**Epiphyseal fusion**	**Description**
skull			heavily fragmented
mandible	R only		LM2 tws = j; LM3 tws = h
loose teeth			two left lower molars (LM2 tws = j; LM3 tws = j); LM3 missing third cusp
vertebra			four fragmented specimens
humerus	R only	fused distal	
radius	L and R	fused proximal and distal	
ulna	R only		
metacarpal	L and R	fused proximal and distal	
pelvis	R only		
femur	R only	fused proximal and distal	proximal and distal ends present, but bone very fragmented
patella	R only		
tibia	R only	fused proximal and distal	
calcaneus	L and R	distal	
astragalus	L and R		
naviculo-cuboid	L and R		
metatarsal	L only	fused proximal and distal	
1st phalanx		fused proximal	three complete specimens
2nd phalanx		fused proximal	three specimens (two complete)

('TWS'=TOOTH WEAR SCORE, AFTER GRANT 1982)

not have survived. Only the right mandible was identified, though lower molars from the left mandible indicate that it was present. No scapulae fragments were identified.

Epiphyseal fusion had occurred on all the long bones where the epiphyses had preserved, indicating that the animal was skeletally mature when it died. The distal radius, distal femur and the proximal tibia fuse around 3.5-4.0 years of age in cattle (Silver 1969, 285-6). Analysis of tooth wear patterns on the lower second and third molars show that each was at a relatively advanced stage. Third molars at tooth wear stages h and j indicate that the animal was over seven years, and potentially several years older than that (cf. Jones and Sadler 2012, 18). No evidence of butchery, burning or carnivore gnawing was observed on any of the remains.

Animal bones from the cremation burials

No animal bones were recovered from the enclosure ditch in Trench 2. This may have been due to exceptionally poor preservation conditions. However, the fact that most sections of the trapezoidal enclosure ditch produced at least small amounts of bone perhaps suggests that the mortuary enclosure ditch was either deliberately kept clean, or was not open long enough for deposits of animal bone to accumulate.

Animal bones were recovered from sieved samples taken from two cremation deposits (2030 and 2034) in the centre of the enclosure. Cremation burial 2030 produced 56 small fragments of animal bone, together weighing 19.2g. All the specimens were partially calcined, exhibiting white, black and/or grey discolouration, and thus had probably been cremated along with the human remains. About nine fragments were from a long bone. The thickness and shape of the cortical bone suggests that it may have been from a cattle metatarsal, though this is a tentative identification. Two very small fragments appear to be tooth enamel. Cremation 2034 produced 31 fragments of animal bone weighing 6.1g. Thirty specimens were partially calcined, exhibiting white and/or grey discolouration. Two specimens were possibly rib fragments, though the species could not be identified. A small tooth fragment almost certainly derived from a sheep or a goat.

Summary

The small size of the assemblage and the poor preservation conditions make it difficult to glean much information about husbandry practices at the site. Cattle may have been important to the economy and social life of the settlement, as indicated by the burial of a comparatively old animal around the entrance to the site. The age of this animal does not give any indication of the general pattern of livestock slaughter, since it was clearly singled out to be killed and buried in a specific fashion. Cattle, and livestock in general, may have been kept as a source of wealth as much as being important for meat and dairying.

Remains of sheep and possibly cattle were identified alongside human bone from the cremation deposits. These likely represent carcass parts added to the pyre as grave goods, and the use of domestic animals in this context perhaps suggests something about the close social connection between the inhabitants of the site and their animals.

The recovery of a bone belonging to a grouse or a partridge from sieved samples, suggests that local wildfowl may have provided occasional additions to the diet.

Marine molluscs

Paul Booth

Two cockles and a limpet were recovered from contexts 1034, 1171 and 1036 respectively. Contexts 1034 and 1171 were both fills of Roman trackway ditch 4, while 1036 was the lower fills of the undated linear feature 1035. There is nothing to suggest that the shells were not contemporary within the deposits in which they were found.

Environmental samples

Sharon Cook and Rebecca Nicholson

Forty-three samples were taken from the excavation, of which eleven were selected for processing and reporting, based on their stratigraphic integrity. Samples 1, 2 and 3 were taken from the cremation deposits within the mortuary enclosure ditch in Trench 2 (ditch 8) and sample 6 was taken from fill 2016 of the mortuary enclosure ditch itself. Samples 8, 9, 10 and 18 were taken from pit fills of feature group 6 within the trapezoidal enclosure ditch in Trench 1. Sample 33 was taken from the primary fill of ditch 3 (1112), and sample 37 was taken from the upper fill of the same ditch (1058). Sample 38 was taken from pit 1166 of group 10, also within the main enclosure.

Methods

The bulk soil samples were processed using a Siraf-style tank, with flots and residues collected on meshes of 250µm and 500µm respectively. The whole of each flot was sorted for quantifiable plant remains including cereal grains and chaff, weed seeds, fruit seeds and nutshell fragments. The charred plant remains were examined using a low-power binocular microscope at x10-x40 magnifications, and remains were compared with modern seed reference material and identification manuals (Jacomet 2006; Cappers *et al.* 2006).

Whole cereal grains, seeds and complete chaff elements (glume bases etc.) were counted individually. It was unclear if a small quantity of seeds were of modern date owing to colouration and poor condition (suffixed with # in Table 11). Nomenclature of plant taxa follows Stace (2010).

TABLE 11 SUMMARY OF CHARRED PLANT REMAINS BY CONTEXT (*DENOTES NUMBER OF FRAGMENTS; # INDICATES THAT SAMPLE IS PROBABLY MODERN)

Sample no.		**1**	**2**	**3**	**6**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**18**	**33**	**37**	**38**
Context		2030	2032	2034	2016	1074	1076	1078	1107	1112	1058	1167
Cut		2029	2031	2033	2011	1073	1075	1077	1100	1111	1050	1166
Feature type		Crem.	Crem.	Crem.	Ditch	Pit	Pit	Pit	Pit	Ditch	Ditch	Pit
Dates		EBA	EBA	EBA	EBA	E/MBA	E/MBA	E/MBA	E/MBA	E/MBA	E/MBA	E/MBA
Volume (L)		26	20	18	15	40	26	20	24	22	30	40
Flot volume (ml)		50	125	10	<5	50	50	25	25	20	15	50
Cereal grain												
Cerealia	indet. cereal		1*							4*		2*
Cereal chaff												
Triticum dicoccum/spelta	emmer/spelt glume base								2*		2*	
Legumes, fruits & nuts												
cf. Pisum sativum	pea			1								
Corylus avellana	hazelnut shell					3*	2*				2*	
Wild species												
Polygonaceae undiff.	knotweed family						1*					
Montiaceae undiff.	blinks family		1*	3*								
Galium sp.	bedstraws											1*
Veronica hederifolia	ivy-leaved speedwell					1#	2#	1#	1#			1#
Plantago cf. *lanceolata*	ribwort plantain		8									
Carex sp. (trigonous)	sedge, 3-faced						1					
Arrhenatherum elatius	onion couch grass tubers	5	33									
Arrhenatherum elatius	onion couch grass roots		11*									
Other												
Indet.	seed/fruit		1*									1*

Results

Most samples produced very little charred material (Table 11). All the flots, except those from the cremation samples, largely consisted of modern roots and other plant material. Modern, intrusive snails (*Cecilioides acicula*) were present in all the flots, which indicates the likelihood of other modern material, such as small seeds, being present in the sediments due to bioturbation.

The cremation group

Samples 1 and 2 produced a high proportion of charred remains, with very little modern material. More charcoal was found in these samples compared with others from the site. Both samples contained onion couch grass tubers (*Arrhenatherum elatius* var. *bulbosum*). This is a native grass taxon which is commonly found in arable and pastoral fields, and can be used as livestock fodder. While its presence in relatively large quantities may indicate the importance of local pastoral farming, the plant is commonly found in Bronze Age cremation burials in north-west Europe, and its deliberate selection for ritual practices cannot be ruled out (Roehrs *et al.* 2012). Robinson has suggested that these grasses may have been used as tinder for the funeral pyre, with the bulbs surviving the burning process due to their increased humidity (Robinson 1988). In contrast, Stevens (2008) has hypothesised that the presence of onion couch may be the result of turves being added to the pyre as a fire barrier, while the tubers remain in the topsoil.

Sample 2 contained two fragmented wild plant seeds and a single fragment from the interior of an unidentifiable cereal grain, which is likely to be an accidental inclusion. Several seeds from ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) were also present. As with the onion couch grass, ribwort is a native plant commonly considered an indicator of pastoral grazing (Hjelle *et al*. 2006).

Several valves of Sphaeriidae (tiny freshwater clams) were also present in the flots from samples 1 and 2, though these are unlikely to be contemporary with the cremations.

Sample 3 contained very little charred material with a small number of charcoal fragments present, together with fragmented wild plant seeds and a single legume that is likely to be a cultivated pea (*Pisum sativum*).

Mortuary enclosure ditch 8

Sample 6 was almost entirely devoid of charred remains, consisting mostly of modern roots and small terrestrial molluscs.

Pit group 6

All the flots in this group consisted mostly of modern roots with very little charred material present. Several small and abraded fragments of hazelnut shell were present in samples 8 and 9. Two small wheat (*Triticum* sp.) glume base fragments in sample 18 may suggest small-scale arable processing at the site, though they may be residual considering the mixed nature of the remains. The few wild plant seeds, including examples of ivy-leaved speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*), are likely to be modern.

Trapezoidal enclosure ditch 3

Very little charred material was present in these samples, much of which fragmented and in a poor condition. Four small fragments of wheat grain from sample 33 and two small fragments of glume base from sample 37 were in such poor condition that further identification beyond *Triticum* sp. was impossible. Two fragments of hazelnut shell within sample 37 were also small and abraded.

Pit group 10

Sample 38 mostly consisted of modern roots. The charred material was small and extremely fragmented.

Discussion

Except for samples 1 and 2 from the cremation burials, there was very little charred material within most of the samples. The general lack of cereal grains and other arable waste material from the site may be an indication that cereal-processing did not take place on or close to the site. What material has been observed is small, highly fragmented and possibly windblown, or resulting from material brought in from elsewhere.

The cremation samples contained relatively little charred material, suggesting that much of the pyre debris was not collected (see *Human remains* above). The great majority of the charred material is charcoal, almost entirely of oak (see *Charcoal* below). Onion couch grass tubers are found fairly frequently in association with Bronze Age cremations and seem likely to have originated in turf burnt as fuel or in topsoil as a fire barrier. It is possible that onion couch was exploited as a wild food resource (Clapham 1988). Other edible tubers including pignut have been found in Bronze Age cremations elsewhere (Moffett 1991), and onion couch grass tubers were recovered from within cremation urns at Irthlingborough (Robinson, cited in Clapham 1988). The single large legume, possibly pea, in sample 3 from cremation 2033 may also be a burnt food item.

Charcoal
Julia Meen

The environmental samples from the three cremation burials (2030, 2032 and 2034) in the mortuary enclosure contained charcoal of sufficient size and quantity to merit further investigation. Analysis of these samples aimed to identify the range of taxa present to investigate fuel selection preferences and identify any pyre furniture or artefacts burnt alongside the cremation pyre.

A representative selection of charcoal fragments from each sample was examined, initially on the transverse section at up to x40 magnification using a stereomicroscope, and then, when required, on the radial and tangential sections at up to x400 magnification using a Brunel Metallurgical SP-400BD microscope. Identifications were made using the key in Schweingruber (1990) and the taxa nomenclature follows Stace (2010).

The material from cremation 2030 was mostly very fragmentary, with few items greater than 4mm in size (Table 12). All examined charcoal fragments were identified as oak (*Quercus* sp.). The charcoal from cremation 2032 was also composed solely of oak, with many items having a vitrified appearance (Table 13). Cremation 2034 contained very little charcoal of a size that enabled identification. However, this sample was again found to be dominated by oak, although a few alder (*Alnus* sp.) fragments were also present. Oak would have been an ideal wood to use in a cremation pyre, as it burns consistently and at a high temperature.

TABLE 12 SUMMARY OF CHARCOAL WEIGHTS
(NB. * = ESTIMATED WEIGHTS)

Cremation	Fraction	Weight/g
2030	10-4mm	0.2g
2032	10-4mm	4.1g
	4-2mm	0.87g*
2034	10-4mm	0.1g
	4-2mm	1.12g*

SITE DISCUSSION

The Early Bronze Age mortuary enclosure

The radiocarbon dating of the three cremation burials found within the square mortuary enclosure is remarkably consistent. There is little variation between the earliest calibrated dates, which range from 1960 BC to 1950 cal BC, while the latest dates range between 1770 BC and 1760 cal BC. The uniformity of the dating evidence strongly suggests that all three burials were deposited within a relatively short time span, possibly within a single generation. The way in which the burial deposits were arranged, placed roughly in a line north-west-south-east across the centre of the enclosure, also suggests that it was a purpose-built monument. Unfortunately, the pottery evidence from the fills of ditch 8 is weak, represented by no more than ten small, abraded fragments that could date anywhere

TABLE 13 SUMMARY OF CHARCOAL RECOVERED FROM THE CREMATIONS IN TRENCH 2
(QUANTITIES EQUAL THE NUMBER OF FRAGMENTS IDENTIFIED; H = HEARTWOOD)

	Sample no.	**1**	**2**	**3**
	Context no.	**2030**	**2032**	**2034**
	Feature no.	**2029**	**2031**	**2033**
	Feature type	**cremation**	**cremation**	**cremation**
Quercus sp.	oak	25	24 (h)	17
cf. *Quercus* sp.	cf. oak		1	
Alnus sp.	alder			2
cf. *Alnus* sp.	cf. alder			1
	total	25	25	20

within the Early-Middle Bronze Age. In the absence of radiocarbon dates from this feature, it is possible that the burials were placed first and the enclosure ditch dug sometime after. This seems unlikely given the way the burials align through the centre of the enclosure, unless they were clearly marked out by features that have not left any archaeological trace. The central cremation burial was cut into a larger, irregular feature that may have been a tree-throw hole and thus could have been the original focus of the burial site.

No evidence of an entrance into the enclosure was found. While the ditch was only excavated in short sections at each corner and mid-way along each side, the top fill was seen to continue uninterrupted along its full circuit. Equally, there was no evidence that the ditch had been recut, which might otherwise raise the possibility that an entrance had been later moved or removed. The ditch would have restricted access to the burial area, perhaps marking out the space within as sacred and was not meant to be entered. The fact that there is no evidence of recuts in the ditch indicates that it was not continually maintained, and the character of the fills suggests that it may have silted up after a relatively short time. There is little evidence of material such as pottery and animal bones being dumped in the enclosure ditch, and although it was left to silt up naturally it was probably kept clear of debris.

Analysis of the cremated human bones suggests that each burial contained an individual adult, and based on the morphology of the cranial and pelvic bones from cremations 2030 and 2034 these two were probably the remains of women. Most of the material was fully calcined (white in colour) and comparison of the level of burning on the human remains at Aller Court with Early Bronze Age cremated remains at Wick Lane, Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset, suggests similarities in pyre technology at both sites (Jacklin 2013, 9).

Other than the burials, there is little evidence for the cremation rite. A general lack of finds from the enclosure is notable as it suggests that activities such as feasting did not take place at the burial site, either occurring elsewhere or not at all. There are also no signs of a pyre. While the excavation was restricted to the area of the mortuary enclosure, the magnetometry survey was conducted over a relatively wide area and did not reveal any locations with significant burning. This suggests that the cremation process occurred some distance away, though it is quite possible that any pyre sites would leave only ephemeral traces and could in most cases have been truncated (Fülöp 2018). It was also notable that every effort was made to separate the human bone from the charcoal and other pyre debris after firing. Grave goods were restricted to a few cremated animal bones that were found mixed with the human remains. These may have been food offerings placed on the pyre that later became confused with the bones of the deceased. If the pyre site was located some distance from the mortuary enclosure, considerable care was taken over transporting the human remains to the burial ground, and since the cremations were unurned it seems likely that they would have been carried in an organic container.

The most notable aspect of the mortuary enclosure is that there are almost no known, directly comparable sites from the period. Radiocarbon analysis of the burials places the use of the mortuary enclosure within Period 3 (2050-1700 BC) of the Early Bronze Age, a time characterised by a diversity in pottery traditions in urned cremations in the south-west of England, interspersed by rich inhumation burials (Pollard and Healy 2007, 44). The broad trend of burial practice during this period across the region is generally seen as a shift from inhumation, especially with beakers, to urned cremation (ibid., 101).

Examples of later Neolithic burials are not common, but there appears to be an increase in the use of burial architecture into the Early Bronze Age, i.e. the widespread appearance of round barrows and cairns, with burial traditions that focus on individual people. It is noteworthy, however, that the known distribution of round barrows, cairns and ring ditches occurs in clusters in south-west England, with large numbers found across Cornwall and Dorset, and notable concentrations on the uplands of Dartmoor, Exmoor and the Cotswolds, no doubt reflecting the importance of topographic setting in these areas (ibid. 98, fig. 4.2). The nearest clusters of burial monuments to the Aller Court site occur on the Quantock Hills to the west and the Mendips to the north-east. The area around Aller Court Farm is very sparsely populated by these types of sites, and the Somerset Levels do not appear to have an abundance of burial monuments generally. While this may be due to poorer visibility in the low-lying landscape, it may also signify differences in the way that the landscape was used and perceived for burial practice. However, as highlighted above (see Archaeological background), ring ditches presumed to represent round barrows are known in the vicinity of Aller Court Farm. One large example is located within c. 60m of the mortuary enclosure, one is located c. 390m to the south-east, while two small examples are positioned c. 450m ESE, close to the highest point of the 'island'. The range of burial sites perhaps suggests that the mortuary enclosure was merely one part of an Early Bronze Age ritual landscape consisting of different types of burial monuments. The landscape context was almost certainly fundamental to the positioning of these features, and it is worth pointing out that all of them were located on the raised 'island'

described in the introduction (See Location). The surrounding area is very low-lying and now covered by clay and peat deposits, though it is uncertain how this landscape would have looked during the Bronze Age.

Owoc (2001, 194) has observed the growing preference for cremation in this period and highlights evidence for this new type of burial being deliberately located close to pre-existing barrows and other burial monuments, in what she describes as a 'funerary topography', where community and family histories were interwoven with the ancestral landscape. It is worth highlighting that the ring ditch located c. 390m to the south-east has been radiocarbon dated to 2011-1775 cal BC, perhaps slightly earlier or broadly contemporary with the Aller Court cremation burials, while one of the small ring-ditches c. 450m to the ESE has been dated to 1632-1492 cal BC, and thus was significantly later (Brunning pers. comm.). It seems clear that, on the one hand, the mortuary enclosure, with its arrangement of three, aligned, cremation burials, is a rare example of this type of monument in the region (and nationally), and on the other hand, it was constructed within a ritual landscape in which it was situated amongst barrow burials, both spatially and chronologically.

The Middle Bronze Age trapezoidal enclosure

It is difficult to be certain about the date of establishment of the trapezoidal enclosure but it is here argued that it post-dated the mortuary enclosure. Dating of the settlement enclosure is reliant on the analysis of a comparatively small pottery assemblage and other finds recovered from the fills of the enclosure ditch and internal features. The only pottery recovered from a feature that predates the digging of the enclosure ditch is a single abraded sherd from ditch 1096, which was later cut by the eastern terminal. This fragment, like much of the pottery from the site, was ascribed a broad Early-Middle Bronze Age date range and alone cannot provide a *terminus post quem* for ditch 1 of the trapezoidal enclosure. Nonetheless, the most distinctive ceramic found at the site is the Trevisker ware, or at least a regional Trevisker variant (H. Quinnell pers. comm.). This pottery type originated in the Early Bronze Age, and by the end of that period became one of the first styles to develop a tripartite pattern of vessel size since the earlier Neolithic (Woodward 2008, 82). Trevisker ware continued to be an important regional ceramic type in the Middle Bronze Age, with a common distribution in Cornwall due to the source of gabbroic clay for which it is famed, found on the Lizard (Parker Pearson 1990, 6-7, 14-16). It was during this period that it spread more widely and several examples of Trevisker ware have been found outside Cornwall, though these are often thought to have derived from different production sources, imitating Cornish styles of form and decoration, and this is likely to be the case for the Aller Court examples.

There is some evidence that the trapezoidal enclosure was built on a pre-existing field boundary along its north-eastern side, and which was perhaps previously associated with the mortuary enclosure. Two comparatively narrow linear features (1035 and 1041) extend north-west from the northern corner of the enclosure. Ditch 1035 was cut by ditch 1 on the same alignment, though it is uncertain how far ditch 1035 continued to the south-east. Ditches 1035 and 1041 did not produce any finds, so it is impossible to date the features. The eastern corner of the trapezoidal enclosure was not excavated, but the magnetometry survey clearly shows a positive linear anomaly continuing from the corner in a south-eastern direction. Although far from conclusive, it is possible that this was the line of a field boundary onto which the enclosure was later added, with ditch 1 being a later recut along this side. A precedent for this type of site development can be found at Sigwells, Somerset, where a later Bronze Age rectilinear enclosure was attached to the southern side of an Early Bronze Age linear feature (Tabor 2008, 61-9). The enclosure was built to contain a posthole structure associated with metalworking. If the pre-existing field system was more broadly contemporary with the Early Bronze Age mortuary enclosure, and helped to define the layout of the Middle Bronze Age trapezoidal enclosure, it is possible that the burial monument also had some influence in the later establishment of the settlement. It has recently been suggested that there is a low correlation between the location of Middle Bronze Age settlements and contemporary cremation burial sites (Caswell and Roberts 2018, 344-5), arguing against previous assertions that the two were often linked (e.g. Darvill 1996, 116-17; Bradley 1981; 2007, 185). However, there has been very little work that examines the siting of Middle Bronze Age settlements in reference to earlier monuments, and Aller Court Farm perhaps provides one such example.

The form of the settlement enclosure, while unusual, is not without contemporary parallels from Somerset, including recently excavated Middle Bronze Age examples at Rodway (Quinnell 2018) and Nerrols Farm (Davies *et al*. forthcoming). The enclosure ditch contained numerous postholes and several pits within an area measuring approximately 0.2ha. The postholes tended to cluster in groups and although none could be clearly resolved into individual buildings, some almost certainly formed structures of some kind. The irregular arrangement of many of the postholes may reflect patterns of demolition and rebuilding, rather than each being contemporary. The

presence of a building is also suggested by the find of a large perforated stone that may have been used as socket stone for a door (Fig. 13). The stone was later deposited in pit 1100 with a group of articulated animal bones and a partially complete pot; the feature perhaps represents a 'closing deposit' associated with the demolition of a structure (cf. Pollard 2001; Thomas 2002).

No evidence for metalworking was found at the site and there was little evidence for the processing and consumption of cereals, which perhaps suggests that the economy of the site was based upon pastoral farming. The Middle Bronze Age site at Nerrols Farm provides a possible parallel as the excavation here produced only a minimal quantity of charred cereal remains, while lipid analysis of pottery residues suggested an emphasis on dairying (Davies *et al*. forthcoming). At Aller Court Farm, the identification of onion couch grass in the environmental samples is often taken to indicate local pasture, though this was discovered in the cremation deposits and may have been representative of turves used in the pyre. Nonetheless, the location of the site near the boundary of the Somerset Levels and Moors and the Mid Somerset Hills may have been significant, as the site would have had access to low-lying pasture and adjacent higher ground. Environmental evidence from the Somerset Levels suggests that the landscape may have been fairly wooded around the end of the second millennium BC and the beginning of the first millennium, with oak, elm and hazel flourishing (Wilkinson and Straker 2007, 71), and this would have provided suitable land for grazing cattle.

The zooarchaeological assemblage is dominated by cattle bones, though the remains are poorly preserved which biases against the less robust bones of smaller livestock. Within the entranceway to the enclosure, pit 1044 contained a complete cattle skeleton. Although the pit shared no stratigraphic relationship with other Bronze Age features, it was cut by Roman trackway ditch 5 and it contained the rim of a large urn and a body sherd of a possible Trevisker vessel. This suggests that the feature was broadly contemporary with the enclosure, though whether the construction of the entrance deliberately respected the pit, or the pit was dug within the existing entrance, is uncertain. The pit was positioned a short distance from the entrance terminal on the western side of the enclosure and seemed to be aligned with it. The placement of animal carcasses or carcass parts in ditch terminals appears to have been a reasonably common practice through much of later prehistory, and may have been related to ritual practices (Thomas 2002, 74-7). Two Middle Bronze Age cattle burials were discovered during excavations at Field Farm, Shepton Mallett, possibly associated with a contemporary field system (Leach 2009, 23). Both were estimated to be mature females, one being more elderly than the other, with the older individual showing signs of having suffered from tuberculosis, which is thought to be more prevalent in dairy cattle (Higbee 2009, 59). Another Middle Bronze Age cattle burial was found cut into a droveway ditch at Slade End Farm, near Wallingford in Oxfordshire (OA 2019, 9, 61). It is possible that the cattle burial in the entrance of the Aller Court Farm enclosure may have been a deliberate act to mark or commemorate it in some way (cf. Brück 1999), and likely highlights the close social relationships between the inhabitants and their livestock.

The late Roman trackway

Roman activity at the site is confined to a trackway that cut across the centre of the trapezoidal enclosure. The trackway was about 7-8 metres across and was delineated by large parallel ditches flanking each side (ditches 4 and 5). On the eastern side of the trackway, the line of ditch 5 disappeared around the middle of the excavation trench. It is possible that the top fill of the ditch here was indistinguishable from the surrounding natural, or that there was an entrance giving access to and from the adjacent land. Although the trackway is not visible on the geophysical survey plot, aerial photographs (HER 55012) show it continuing on the same alignment for around 120m to the NNE to meet a modern rhyne (Oxleazedrove Rhyne East).

The date of the trackway rests upon a single sherd of late-3rd- to 4th-century New Forest ware recovered from the lower fill of ditch 5. The pottery does not date the construction of the ditch, but it indicates that it was in use during the late Roman period when the ditches began to silt up. A striking aspect of the trackway is the way that it cuts through features associated with the Bronze Age trapezoidal enclosure, suggesting that no remnant of the settlement had survived when the track was in use. A date in the late Roman period therefore seems reasonable.

Ditched trackways are well attested during the Roman period in Somerset and are usually found in association with field systems and local settlements (Allen *et al.* 2016). Notable examples have been excavated at Banwell Moor (Rippon 2000), Compton Durville, South Petherton (Brett and Mudd 2013), and Lyde Road, Yeovil (Clelland 2011). Little work has been carried out on the significance of these features in this region, though a survey of Roman tracks in the Upper Thames Valley has shown that the late 1st/early 2nd century witnessed an increase in the establishment and use of ditch-cut trackways, possibly associated with an increase in the demarcation of land (Booth 2011). This type of trackway may have been important during this period for transporting livestock, particularly cattle, to and from the seasonal pastures of the Somerset Levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The excavations at Aller Court Farm have revealed evidence for Early Bronze Age mortuary practices, Middle Bronze Age settlement, and a late Roman trackway. The mortuary enclosure is of particular significance as it is, as far as the authors are aware, the only one of its type dating to the Early Bronze Age. The deliberate arrangement of three unurned cremations within a square ditched enclosure is an anomaly for a period when round barrows and cairns are considered to be the norm. It is possible that this type of cemetery has not been recognised by archaeologists before now, though this seems unlikely. The dating of the monument, however, shows that it was established in a landscape where round barrows were being built both before and after the mortuary enclosure. This suggests that burial traditions were not only regionally varied, but were increasingly diverse in certain areas.

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