A Middle Bronze Age enclosure and other prehistoric and early-medieval activity at Nerrols Farm, Cheddon Fitzpaine

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A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE ENCLOSURE AND OTHER PREHISTORIC TO EARLY MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY AT NERROLS FARM, CHEDDON FITZPAINE

ALEX DAVIES, LEO WEBLEY AND JOHN BOOTHROYD

with contributions by Mike Donnelly, Julie Dunne, Richard P Evershed, Toby Gillard, Julia Meen, Cynthia Poole and Ruth Shaffrey, and illustrations by Charles Rousseaux and Lucy Gane

SUMMARY

Excavations by Oxford Archaeology at Nerrols Farm, Cheddon Fitzpaine, uncovered a substantial Middle Bronze Age enclosure. The enclosure had two phases and contained a roundhouse. The associated pottery belongs to the Trevisker-related series primarily found in Somerset, and a sequence of radiocarbon dates taken through the enclosure ditch suggests that it dated to the 14th century cal BC. Seven pits within the roundhouse and elsewhere within the enclosure were found to contain snugly fitting pottery vessels, which may have been used as sunken storage vessels. Lipid analysis on the pottery demonstrates that dairying was an important element of the site economy. Another significant find was a fragment of a clay mould used for casting a bladed implement, possibly a rapier. Other activity at the site included Early Neolithic pits; an Early Bronze Age ring ditch; two Middle Iron Age roundhouses; and a pair of early-medieval pits, one of which produced a radiocarbon date in the 7th-8th century cal AD.

INTRODUCTION

While Somerset is well known for its Middle Bronze Age metalwork, evidence for contemporary settlement was limited until recently. The excavation of a Middle Bronze Age settlement enclosure at Nerrols Farm, Cheddon Fitzpaine, has thus provided welcome evidence for domestic life during this period. Other activity at the site included Early Neolithic pits; an Early Bronze Age ring ditch; two Middle Iron Age roundhouses; and traces of occupation in the 7th-8th century cal AD.

The excavations were carried out by Oxford Archaeology (OA) between May and July 2019, ahead of development. The 1.6ha site comprised agricultural land lying at 27-31m above Ordnance Datum on a gentle south-east facing slope (NGR ST 2415 2680; Fig. 1). A minor tributary of the River Tone known as the Maiden Brook lies c. 100m to the east. The bedrock geology is mapped as Triassic Mercia Mudstone; no superficial deposits are recorded (BGS 2020).

This article summarises the key results of the excavation, including selected specialist reports. The full excavation report, which contains further details of the fieldwork methodology, stratigraphy, finds and environmental evidence, can be downloaded from the OA Library (OA 2020). The archive will be deposited with the South West Heritage Trust under the accession code TTNCM:32/2019.

Previous archaeological work

The present excavation is part of a more extensive development area that has been subject to a c. 19ha geophysical survey (Archaeological Surveys 2010) and trial-trench evaluation (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2010). The geophysical survey revealed a rectilinear enclosure that had previously been observed from cropmark evidence (Somerset HER 26899). The evaluation trenching recovered Bronze Age pottery from the enclosure, and identified a few other undated features in its near vicinity. The present excavation was targeted on this area (Fig. 2). The evaluation also uncovered medieval features c. 300m to the south-east of the enclosure; the subsequent excavation of this medieval settlement in 2016 is reported on elsewhere (AC Archaeology 2018; Rainbird 2021 (this volume)).

Other previous archaeological work in the immediate vicinity has included a series of excavations and watching briefs carried out between 1990 and 2000 some 200m to the west, at a site also known as Nerrols Farm. The most significant discovery was a Romano-British settlement, although Early Neolithic, Early Bronze Age, possible Late Bronze Age, Iron Age and early-medieval activity was also identified

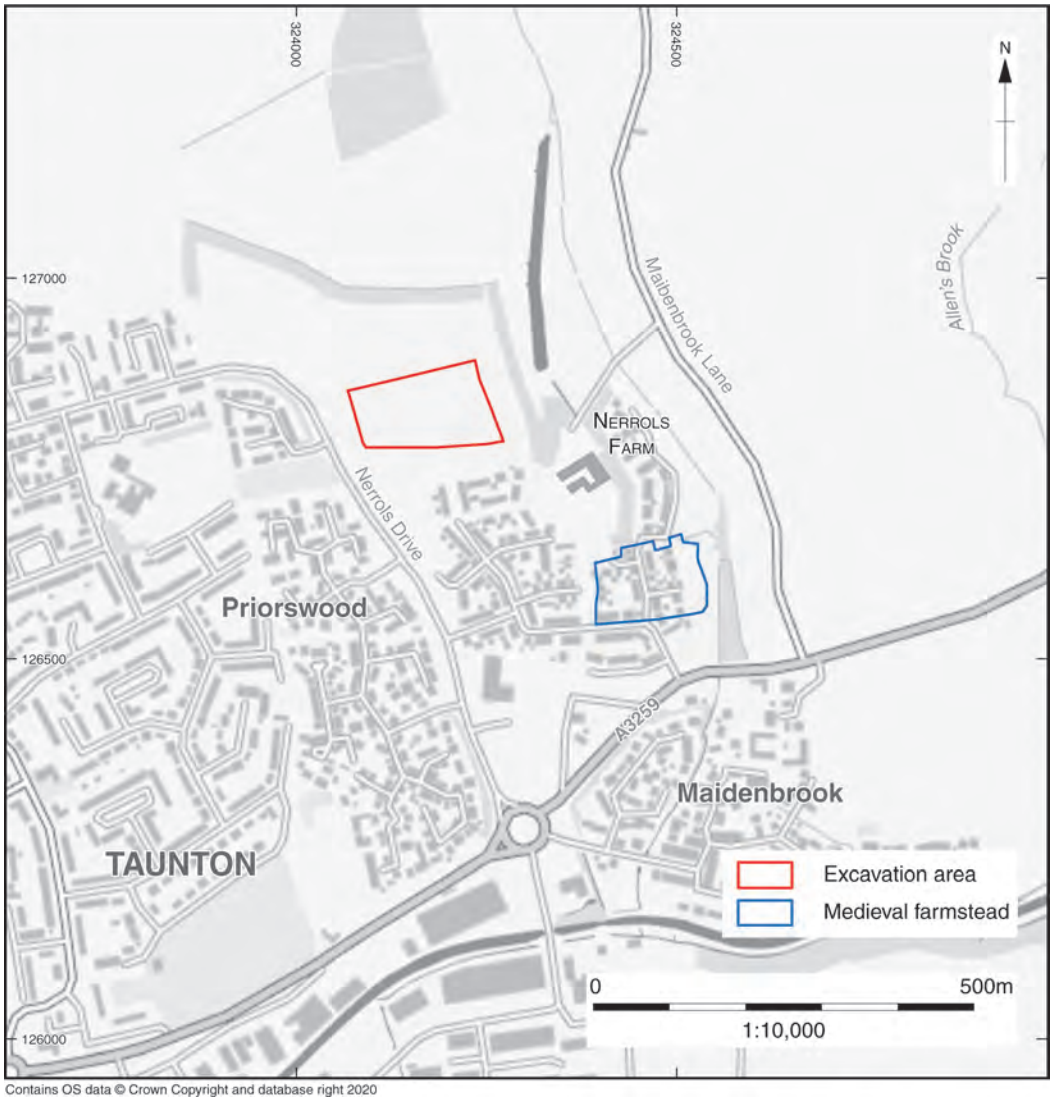

Fig. 1 Site location

(Hawkes 1992; Cox and Samuel 2001). A stray find of a tanged bronze sickle of probable Late Bronze Age date has been recorded from Nerrols Farm, though its precise findspot is unknown (Knight *et al*. 2015, 64 and pl. 30; Knight 2018, vol 2, 465; Knight pers. comm.). Numerous cropmarks of enclosures and other archaeological features are recorded in the surrounding area on the Somerset HER; many of these are likely to be of later prehistoric or Romano-British origin, though precise dating is difficult (Norman 2006).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

Early Neolithic

Seven pits could be confidently dated to the Early Neolithic, arranged in a tight group in the north-western part of the site (1411; Fig. 3). Six of these seven pits were arranged in two parallel lines of three pits, c. 1.5m apart over a distance of c. 2.30m. The seventh pit was in the middle of the lines. The outer six pits were half sectioned, and the inner pit was

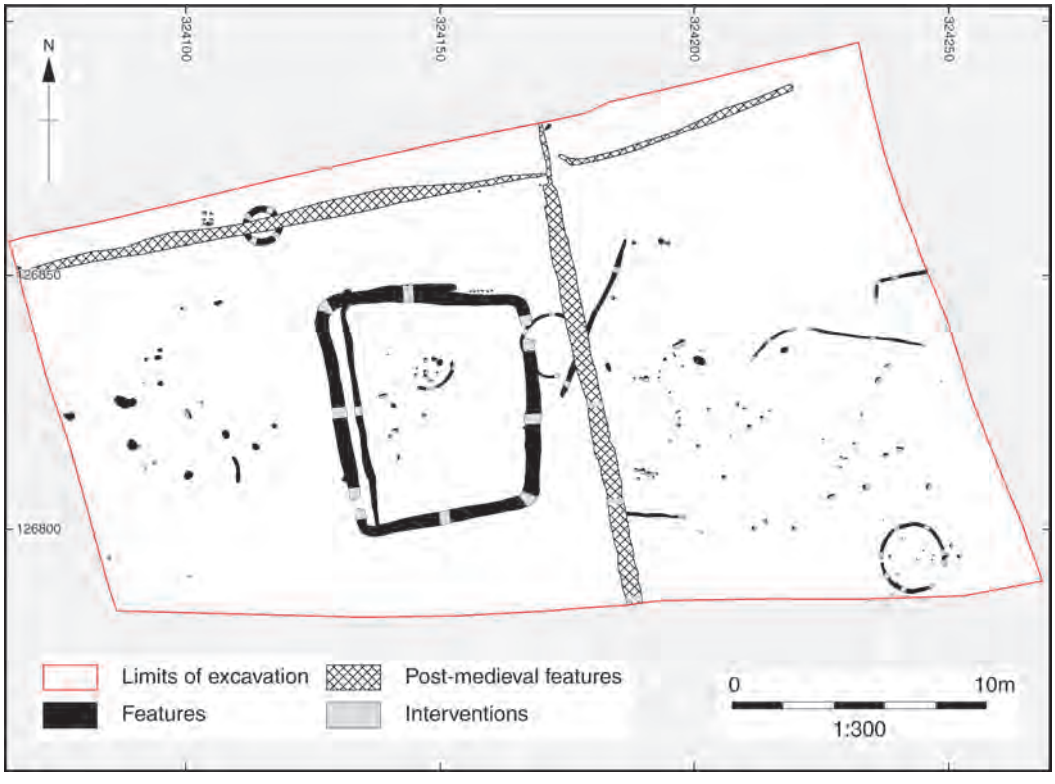

Fig. 2 Archaeological features and interventions

excavated in its entirety. The pits were all broadly circular, measuring 0.42-0.82m diameter and 0.06-0.20m deep, with bowl-shaped profiles. All but one of the pits had single fills, with the deepest pit containing two fills. An environmental sample from pit 1242 produced abundant charred hazelnut shells and alder charcoal. Despite the presence of charcoal, none of the pits had evidence for *in situ* burning. Worked flint and/or chert was found in five of the pits (up to three pieces per pit), and three contained small amounts of Early Neolithic pottery.

Three further pits have been tentatively dated to the Early Neolithic. Pit 1219 was 33m to the south-west of group 1411 (Fig. 3). This measured 0.95m by 0.80m and was 0.28m deep. The pit contained three fills with frequent pieces of burnt stone, burnt unworked flint and charcoal. The middle fill contained a charcoal lens that appeared to represent *in situ* burning. A single highly abraded sherd of Early Neolithic pottery weighing 3g was found in this fill. The other two pits lay in the eastern part of the site (Fig. 4). Pit 1044 measured 1.18m by 0.78m and was 0.41m deep. Its lower fill contained a small, highly abraded sherd of Early Neolithic pottery. Pit 1166 was 0.40m in diameter and 0.06m deep. Its only fill contained two small sherds of Early Neolithic pottery. It was cut by a larger undated pit.

Early Bronze Age

Lying just to the east of the Neolithic pit group, ring ditch 1410 had a diameter of c. 6.7m (Fig. 3). Four 1m slots were excavated, showing that the ditch was 1.02-1.22m wide and 0.25-0.37m deep. Three of the slots contained single fills, interpreted as natural silting. Two fills were observed in slot 1338, the lower of which appeared to have formed from slumping from an internal mound. An environmental sample from the upper fill produced only a single barley grain and a small amount of charcoal, including a piece of Maloideae charcoal that has been radiocarbon dated to 1895-1745 cal BC (SUERC-92054; Table 1). A posthole was found under the north-east slot of the ring ditch, although its relationship to the ring ditch was not established.

A total of five pieces of worked flint were recovered from two fills of the ring ditch, and burnt stone from

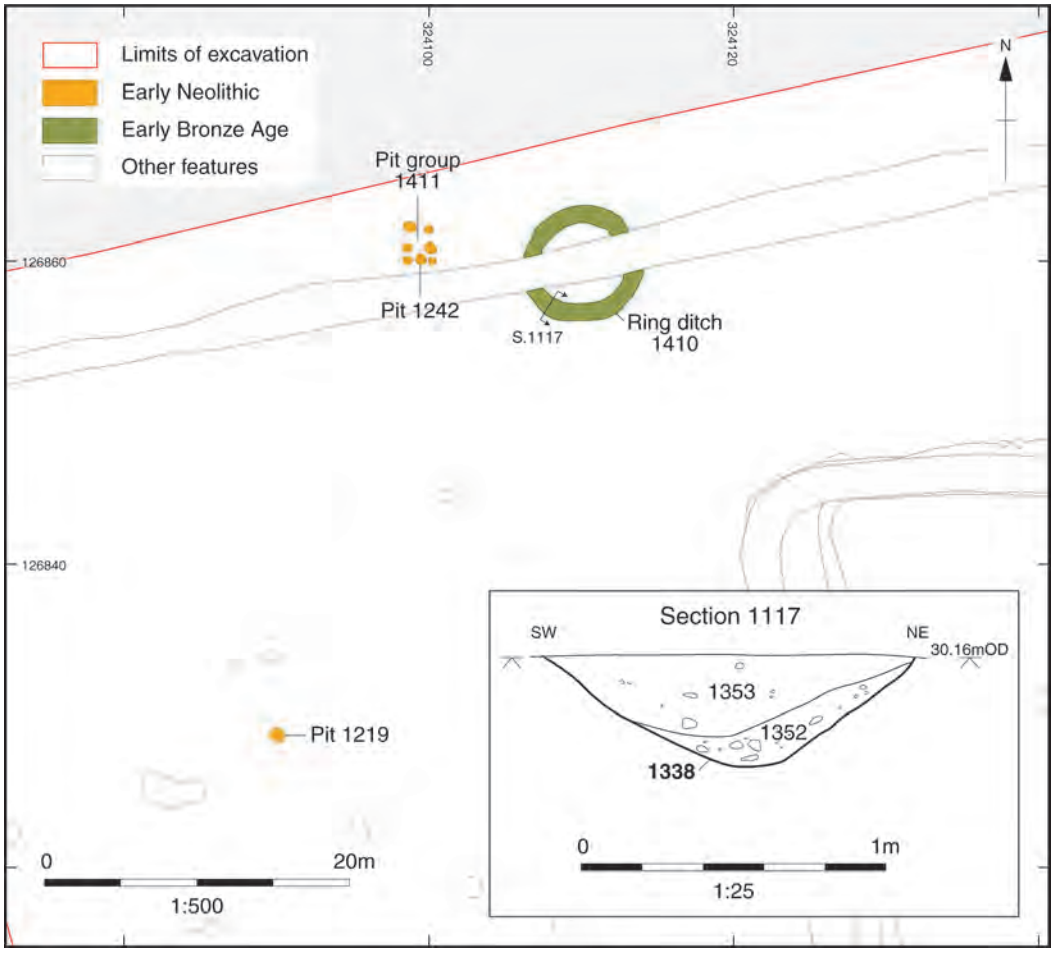

Fig. 3 Early Neolithic and Early Bronze Age features in the western part of the site

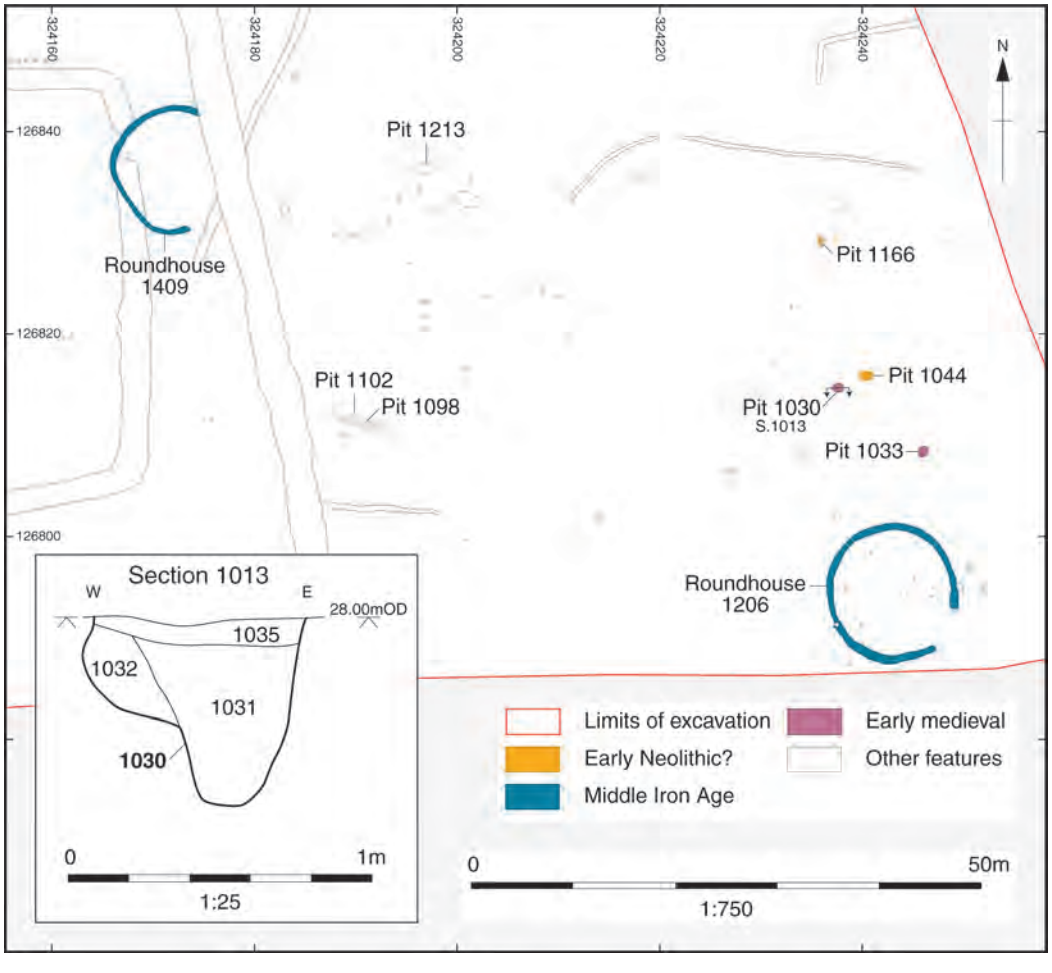

Fig. 4 Early Neolithic, Middle Iron Age and early-medieval features in the eastern part of the site

TABLE 1 RADIOCARBON DATES. THE CALIBRATED AGE RANGES AND BAYESIAN MODEL WERE DETERMINED IN OXCAL V.4.3 (BRONK RAMSEY 2009) USING THE INTCAL13 CURVE.

Lab. no.	**Material**	**Context/ Feature**	**$\Delta^{13}C$ ($^0/_{00}$)**	**Radiocarbon Age BP**	**Calibrated Age 95% confidence**	**Calibrated Age 68% confidence**
SUERC-92053	Charcoal: *Betula*	1034 Pit 1033	-26.7	1285 ± 27	Cal AD 665-770	Cal AD 680-715 (41% confidence) Cal AD 745-765 (27% confidence)
SUERC-92054	Charcoal: Maloideae	1353 Ring ditch 1410 (upper fill)	-27.3	3500 ± 27	1895-1745 cal BC	1880-1865 cal BC (11% confidence) 1850-1775 cal BC (57% confidence)
SUERC-92055	Charred grain: *Triticum* sp.	1071 Enclosure ditch 1414 (middle fill)	-23.6	3078 ± 27	1415-1270 cal BC	1400-1370 cal BC (21% confidence) 1360-1300 cal BC (47% confidence)
SUERC-92056	Charcoal: cf. *Alnus*	1072 Enclosure ditch 1414 (upper fill)	-26.6	3079 ± 27	1415-1270 cal BC	1400-1370 cal BC (21% confidence) 1360-1300 cal BC (47% confidence)
SUERC-92057	Charcoal: *Prunus*	1069 Enclosure ditch 1414 (basal fill)	-24.9	3103 ± 27	1430-1290 cal BC	1415-1380 cal BC (34% confidence) 1345-1290 cal BC (34% confidence)

one. Two tiny sherds of residual Early Neolithic pottery were the only ceramic material recovered. No bone was discovered, though this is unsurprising as no unburnt bone survived anywhere on the site. A post-medieval ditch that cut across the middle of the ring ditch may have removed any central grave.

A probable Late Neolithic and/or Early Bronze Age element has also been identified in the flint assemblage recovered from later features elsewhere on the site.

Middle Bronze Age

Enclosure 1413/1414

The subrectangular enclosure previously identified on aerial photographs and in the evaluation was demonstrated to be of Middle Bronze Age date (Figs 5-6). The enclosure had two phases. The first phase (1413) could only be identified in plan by an L-shaped ditch, measuring 45.5m north-south and 22m east-west. A possible southern side

Fig. 5 Aerial photograph of enclosure 1413/1414, looking south

to the enclosure was seen in one of the sections, being cut by enclosure ditch 1414. The eastern return was not present in any of the sections and may have been entirely truncated by enclosure ditch 1414. A row of six postholes (1415) might represent a westwards continuation of the line of the northern ditch, but it is considered more likely that this post row was associated with the subsequent phase of the enclosure (see below). Enclosure ditch 1413 was c. 1.30m wide and 0.52-0.80m deep, and had two to three fills. Primary fills in two of the three interventions suggest that the ditch was filled from outside of the enclosed area, possibly suggesting an accompanying bank was outside the enclosure. This early enclosure phase produced a single sherd of pottery.

The second phase enclosure (1414) measured 44m by 38.50m. Entrances were present in the north-east and south-west corners, and these were 2-2.50m wide. The enclosure ditch was generally V-shaped, measuring 1.85-3.20m (mean 2.60m) wide and 1.0-1.8m (mean 1.5m) deep. The ditch had four to eight fills. Primary fills did not usually show the direction of slumping, although in three of the ten interventions they suggested accumulation from outside of the enclosure. One of the primary fills at one of the entrances suggests that the material slumped from inside the enclosure. The direction of accumulation was less clear in the middle and upper fills. This might suggest the presence of an external bank eroding to form the primary fills of the ditch, with the remaining fills not as clearly deriving from the possible associated bank. Pottery from the ditch tended to be in better condition further up the fill sequence, and this might suggest deliberate infilling of the enclosure ditch with fresh midden material and/or recently broken pottery. Other than pottery, finds from enclosure ditch 1414 include a fragment of a clay mould, probably for casting a bladed implement such as a rapier, found in the same middle fill of the ditch as a fired clay block of uncertain purpose. Small quantities of structural fired clay were also found from elsewhere in the ditch, including some pieces with wattle impressions, along with probable fragments of hearth or oven lining.

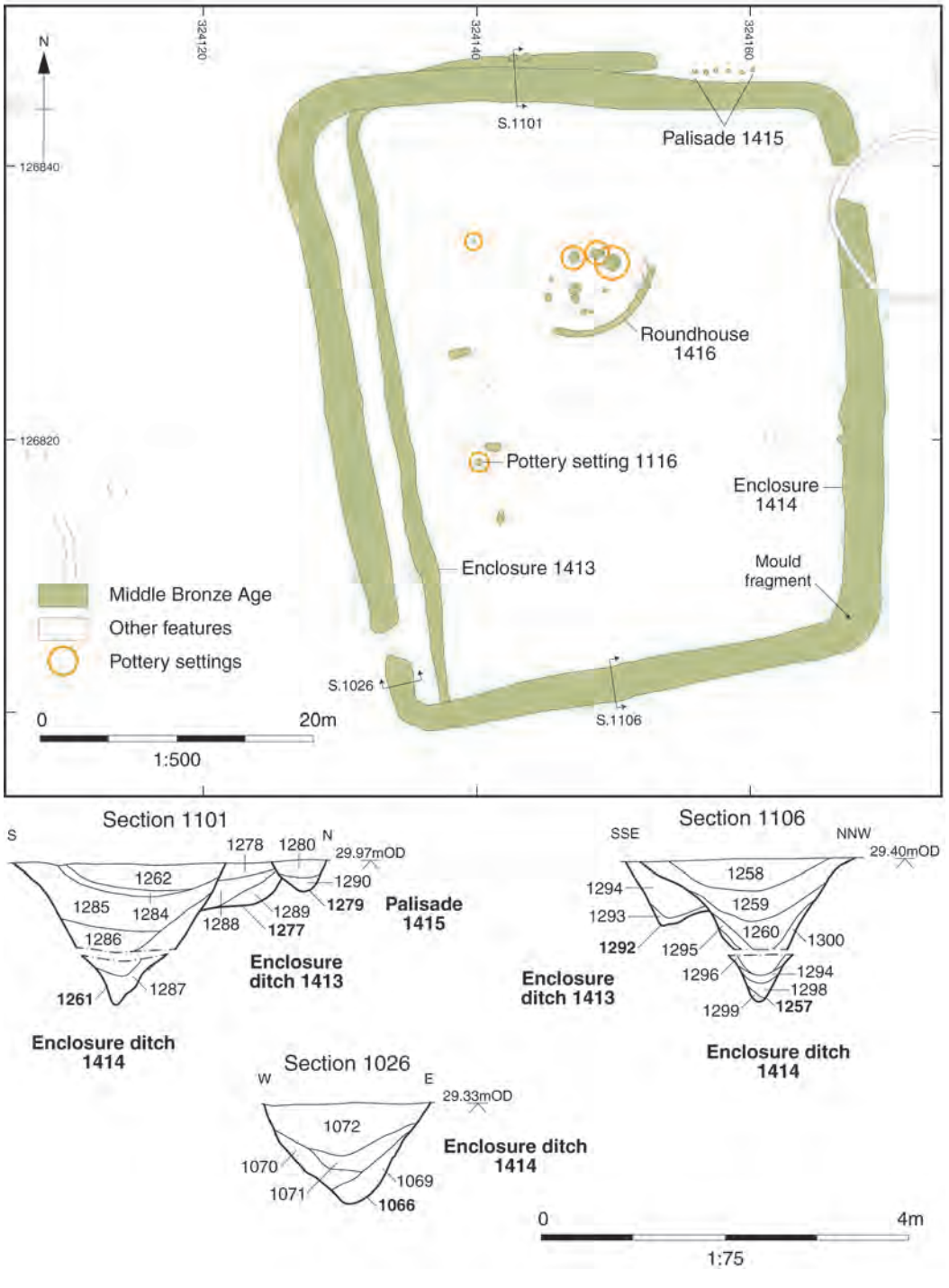

Fig. 6 Middle Bronze Age features

Three radiocarbon dates were taken in a sequence through slot 1066 (Table 1), sampling short-lived charcoal or grain from primary (1069), middle (1071) and upper (1072) ditch fills. Bayesian modelling of these dates suggest that enclosure 1414 started *1655-1295 cal BC (95% probability)* and ended *1410-1040 cal BC (95% probability)*. Due to the limited number of radiocarbon dates in the model, the distribution at 95% probability has long tails of low probability, and the peaks in the posterior density estimates are of more use. These suggest that the enclosure probably started *1445-1320 cal BC (68% probability)*, and ended *1385-1300 cal BC (68% probability)*. The enclosure most likely dates to the 14th century cal BC. The enclosure spanned *0-545 years (95% probability)*, probably *0-155 years (68% probability*). The long tails of low probability are again reflective of a limited number of dates. The median span value is *90 years*.

A possible fence or palisade (1415) formed from six postholes and with a total length of c. 4.5m was found c. 0.70m to the north of the northern ditch. The four postholes that were excavated ranged from 0.32-0.46m in diameter and from 0.14-0.29m deep, and produced no finds. A possible continuation of the fence line was found 12m to the west in the form of a pair of postholes that both cut phase 1 enclosure ditch 1413. The postholes in this pair were slightly larger at 0.46-56m diameter and 0.34-0.36m deep and were again devoid of finds. If these eight postholes did together form a fence line that post-dated the phase 1 enclosure, it is uncertain why this feature was so partial. The relationship between the possible fence and any external bank of the phase 2 enclosure is also uncertain.

Roundhouse 1416

The Middle Bronze Age roundhouse was defined by a C-shaped gully with a projected diameter of c. 9.5m (Fig. 7). The gully was c. 0.45m wide and 0.15m deep. Most of the features within the enclosure were also within the area of the roundhouse. These comprised eleven pits and five postholes, none of which could be clearly assigned a structural function. Five of the pits within the roundhouse contained the bases and/or lower parts of pottery vessels (pottery settings), all fitting snugly within the features.

There were three sets of relationships between the pits in the roundhouse. Pottery settings 1312 and 1333 were intercutting but the relationship was not established. They were both cut by pit 1362. Pits 1381 and 1396 were intercutting without a clear relationship, both cut by pottery setting 1359. Two further pottery settings were intercutting, 1386 cut by 1375 (Fig. 8). The pottery settings in the roundhouse had diameters of 0.30-0.60m (mean 0.48m) and depths of 0.06-0.35m (mean 0.21m). The pits had diameters of 0.45-0.80m (mean 0.59m) and depths of 0.09-0.42m (mean 0.24m).

The pot in setting 1375 was filled with stones, a number of them burnt and cracked from thermal shock. At least one piece of a saddle quern was also in the vessel, made from imported stone probably from Devon or Cornwall. Fragments of fired clay with wattle impressions were also found in the pot, and the vessel was decorated with a fingertipped cross cordon on the inner side of the base (Fig. 8).

Pits outside the roundhouse

Three pits and two further pottery settings (1116 and 1303) were found within the enclosure outside of roundhouse 1416. These pits were more oval than circular, with lengths between 0.86-1.56m, widths 0.46-0.64m, and depths 0.15-0.44m. Pottery setting 1116 was 0.32m diameter and c. 0.18m deep, and the vessel also contained heat-cracked stone and burnt stone fragments of the same lithology as the imported quern. Pottery setting 1303 was 0.26m diameter and 0.08m deep.

Middle Iron Age

A small Middle Iron Age settlement was found in the eastern part of the site, comprising two roundhouses defined by penannular gullies with south-east facing entrances (Fig. 4). It is likely that the gullies were drainage features surrounding the houses, rather than being wall slots. Roundhouse gully 1206 was 13m in diameter, 0.46-0.87m (mean 0.59m) wide and 0.16-0.33m (mean 0.25m) deep. Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered, including a vessel of Glastonbury Ware (South-Western decorated) type. Seven postholes and one small pit lay within the enclosed area, although none contained artefacts and they did not form an obvious structure. Two undated pits cut the roundhouse gully.

Roundhouse gully 1409 was 12m in diameter, 0.71-1.00m (mean 0.87m) wide and 0.14-0.32m (mean 0.26m) deep. It cut the Middle Bronze Age enclosure, and its eastern side had been truncated by a post-medieval ditch. This roundhouse is assumed to be broadly contemporary with roundhouse 1206, although no dating evidence was recovered.

Environmental samples from roundhouses 1206 and 1409 produced no remains other than very sparse amounts of charcoal. A few small, calcined fragments of unidentified animal bone were also recovered from 1409, these representing the only faunal remains surviving at the site. The only other finds from Iron Age contexts were small amounts of structural fired clay, including probable hearth or oven lining.

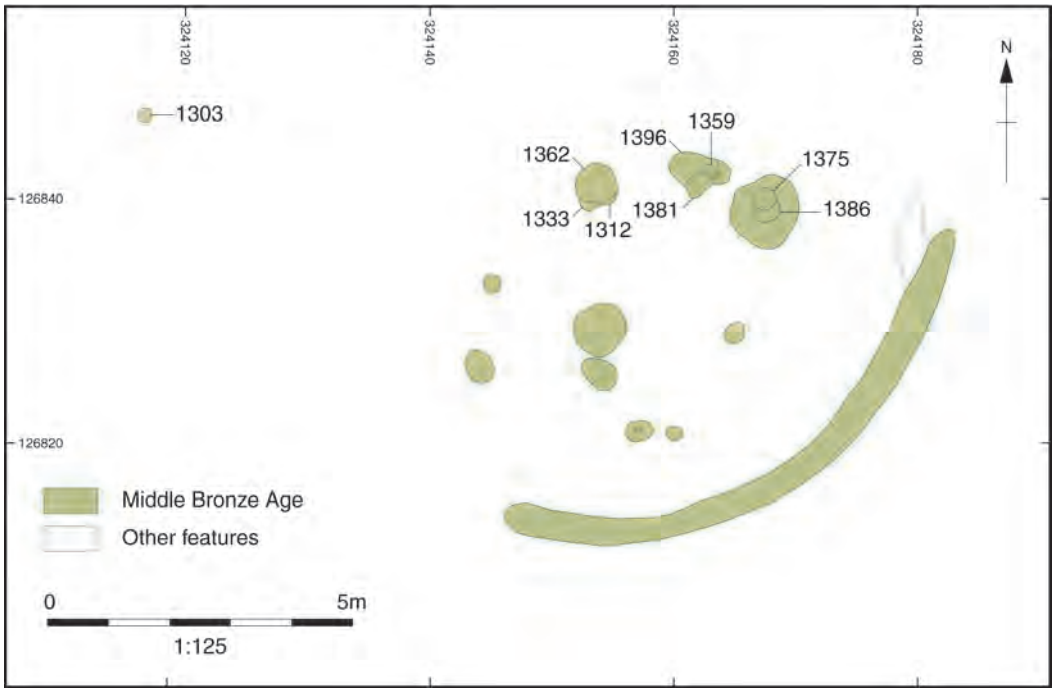

Fig. 7 Roundhouse 1416 and internal features

Fig. 8 Pottery vessel 69 in setting 1375

Early medieval

Two features were dated to the early-medieval period (Fig. 4). Pit/posthole 1030 was 0.74m diameter and 0.63m deep. The main fill (1031) contained a small whittle-tang iron knife, 93mm long, with a thick triangular-sectioned blade – a characteristically early-medieval form (OA 2020, fig. 14). An environmental sample from the same context produced a moderate amount of charcoal, including oak. Pit 1033 lay 10.6m to the south-west and was 1m diameter and 0.52m deep. Fragments of vitrified ceramic lining were found in its only fill, possibly deriving from a hearth. An environmental sample yielded a small quantity of charcoal, including *Betula* charcoal that produced a radiocarbon date of cal AD 665-770 (SUERC-92053; Table 1). The radiocarbon date could be contemporary with the knife. To the west of these features, pit 1098 contained vitrified material similar to that found in pit 1033, along with an iron nail, and could possibly have been of similar date.

Post-medieval

A ditch running across the site on an NNW-SSE alignment (Fig. 2) contained post-medieval finds and corresponds with a field boundary on the 1837 tithe map of Cheddon Fitzpaine. This boundary had been removed by the time of the 1889 Ordnance Survey first edition 25-inch map. A second ditch perpendicular to this was not excavated and does not appear on any historic maps, but its alignment suggests that it was an associated field boundary that had perhaps fallen out of use before 1837.

Undated

Four lengths of ditch in the eastern part of the site produced no finds (Fig. 2). None of these share a similar alignment to the Middle Bronze Age enclosure or the post-medieval field boundaries, leaving their date unclear. Among the other undated features, pit 1102 and possible tree-throw hole 1213 contained a Greensand chert flake and a flint blade respectively, and could perhaps have been prehistoric (Fig. 4).

WORKED FLINT AND CHERT
Mike Donnelly

Introduction

The excavations recovered an assemblage of 131 lithics and eleven small fragments of burnt unworked flint weighing just 5g (Table 2). The lithic material was dominated by flint but there were numerous pieces of

TABLE 2 FLINT ASSEMBLAGE

Category type	Total
Flint	105 (79.55%)
Greensand chert	25 (18.94%)
Portland chert	2 (1.51%)
Flake	69
Blade	13
Bladelet	8
Blade index	23.33% (21/90)
Irregular waste	9
Chip	3
Core tablet	2
Crested blade	1
Core single platform flakes	2
Core multiplatform flakes	1
Core on a flake	1
Core bipolar flakes	2
Core fragment flakes	1
Scraper end+side	3
Scraper thumbnail	1
Scraper other	1
Awl	2
Piercer	1
Heavy borer	1
Microdenticulate	1
Notch	1
Backed knife	1
Other knife	1
Retouched bladelet	1
Retouched flake	1
Retouched other	3
Retouch miscellaneous	1
Total	131
Burnt unworked flint	11/5g
No. burnt (%)	9/131 (6.87%)
No. broken (%)	63/128 (49.22%)
No cores/related debitage	10/128 (7.81%)
No. retouched (%)	19/128 (14.84%)

Greensand chert and small amounts of Portland chert in the assemblage. The lithics were recovered from a wide range of contexts of varying date, including ten pieces from Early Neolithic pit cluster 1411 and five from Early Bronze Age ring ditch 1410. However, the majority of the lithics originated from the Middle Bronze Age enclosure, particularly its north-east corner, and adjacent Iron Age roundhouse 1409. The likelihood is that many of the flints recovered from this area were residual finds occupying a surface spread or buried soil. However, there is also a possibility that many of these pieces relate to lithic use during the Middle Bronze Age.

Raw material and condition

The assemblage utilised various raw materials including flint (79.6%), Greensand chert (19.0%) and Portland chert (1.5%). Both pieces of Portland chert came from Early Neolithic pit group 1411, making up 22% of the total from that group, a figure matched there by Greensand chert. Ring ditch 1410 contained only flint, represented by five pieces. Greensand chert was more common in Middle Bronze Age contexts, especially ditch enclosure 1414 where it made up 31% of the assemblage, but it was rare in Iron Age contexts. This supports the view that many of the lithics from Iron Age contexts are residual.

The lithics were in slightly poor condition with more lightly damaged (47%) than fresh pieces (34%) and significant amounts that were either moderately (18%) or heavily damaged. This suggests a mix of *in situ* contemporary material alongside a residual component that may have spent a considerable period of time in a midden deposit or sub-surface layer.

The assemblage

The assemblage contained a sizeable blade component of 23.3%, indicative of Early Neolithic industries (Ford 1987), but this figure was actually lower for the Early Neolithic groups than for the Middle Bronze Age groups and the background material. However, the figure for the Neolithic element was still high at 16.7% and would be acceptable in Early Neolithic contexts. This also probably confirms that a significant part of the reminder of the assemblage is likely to be residual material of early date, supporting the view that most of the flints from groups 1409 and perhaps 1414 are residual. However, variations in raw material selection such as the increase on a flake-based Greensand chert industry in group 1414 suggest that it is probably contemporary with the use of that enclosure.

There were numerous core forms (7.8%) and even more numerous tool forms (14.8%) in the assemblage. While this might indicate recovery bias, it could also be a feature of an assemblage from an area in which good flint was more intensively exploited due to a lack of readily accessible quality material. This is also supported by the presence of material such as Portland chert and the occasional use of very inferior-quality Greensand chert in some Middle Bronze Age contexts alongside some very high-quality Greensand chert in certain areas, such as a fine and very dark bladelet form from the south-west corner of the site. All the cores related to flake technology, but most were very heavily worked out, including two that had their final phases of use as bipolar anvil-knapped cores that are a classic feature of lithic reduction in areas that lack good sources of flint. Some of the flake cores are quite formal and could easily represent exhausted bladelet cores of Early Neolithic date. Two core tablets were also present, as was a crested bladelet, generally seen as being part of a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic blade reduction strategy. In addition to this, there were no specialist flake cores (other than the bipolar cores) that typify later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age industries. All of this indicates a mix of cores from the Early Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age phases of activity.

Tools were very common with very similar figures for the main flint-rich groups. Early Neolithic and Early Bronze Age groups 1410 and 1411 between them contained 13.3% tools, while Middle Bronze Age group 1414 and Iron Age group 1409 had 14.8% and 15.8% respectively, and the remainder of the assemblage had 15.2%. The Early Neolithic features contained a classic Early Neolithic tool in form of the microdenticulate from pit 1254 (group 1411), while the piercer from Early Bronze Age ring ditch group 1410 was atypical of early industries, being fashioned on a fairly squat flake. All the tool forms from Iron Age gully 1409 looked to be earlier in date, with a retouched bladelet as well as two refitting pieces from a combination side scraper-awl on a quite regular flake that would be very much at home with a Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. However, such finer tools can be found in Middle Bronze Age contexts and perhaps this piece is a genuine example of a slightly higher standard of flint working than is typically accepted as being Middle Bronze Age. Middle Bronze Age enclosure 1414 had the largest group of tools at nine examples, most of which would appear to be typically earlier in date than the feature they belonged to, while others were wholly undiagnostic (such as the simple retouched flakes). This may again represent the issue mentioned above for tools dated to the Middle Bronze Age but, equally, many could belong to an earlier spread of material associated with the Neolithic phase of activity. The early tools comprised a backed knife on a blade, a thumbnail scraper, an atypical miniscule and complex scraper and two side-and-end scrapers, while the potentially contemporary finds comprised an end scraper-denticulate, a heavy borer, a retouched flake and possibly the two side-and-end scrapers. The remainder

of the assemblage's five tools included four that were undiagnostic (an awl, a notch, a miscellaneous fragment and a side-and-end scraper). The final piece was a fine knife on an inner flake from the natural and was a rare find of probable Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date.

Discussion

The lithic material from this site falls into three broad categories: a blade-based element probably contemporary with Early Neolithic pit group 1411; a probable Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age group represented by ring ditch 1410 and some of the tools found as stray finds and in Middle Bronze Age contexts; and a Middle Bronze Age element.

There is clear evidence of early activity as evidenced by many of the tool forms, the blade-core curation pieces (core tablet and crested blade) and the high blade count, and it would appear highly likely that this is contemporary with the Early Neolithic pit cluster and ring ditch. Some material could be earlier in date but there are no unequivocal Mesolithic artefacts in the assemblage. Elsewhere in Somerset, blades are rarely found in Middle Bronze Age contexts, reflected in the very low figure of 2.1% for Brean Down (Saville 1990). These assemblages are all small in scale but are consistently early in character. It is likely that they formed part of a wider spread of artefactual material, most likely a midden deposit, and this would explain many of the residual finds in later features. The early component reflects a wide range of activities such as plant processing, hide working and possibly butchery. In terms of hide working, both scrapers and awls were present, suggesting the production of items such as clothing rather than the simple preparation of hides.

The presence of several tools of probable Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date suggests a degree of continuity in the use of this landscape. This material could simply represent some early elements and some well-made Middle Bronze Age material, but there are numerous pieces that are more typically dated to this phase including one thumbnail scraper and a second possible example, as well as quite fine knives. These pieces suggest a more limited range of activities, probably butchery and hide preparation.

Lithic use during the later periods on site is difficult to fully assess due to issues with potentially residual material and also with our concepts about the quality of later flintwork and our tendency to suggest that any fine flintwork must be residual. That said, it does appear that lithics were frequently utilised here, with a clear shift in material diversity towards encompassing more Greensand chert – often of low quality – whereas the earlier assemblages tended to stray from using flint only where high-quality substitutes were available. The use of low-quality Greensand chert was especially prevalent within enclosure 1414. This shift to Greensand chert may be a very local phenomenon, as in some other parts of the South West the opposite happens, with chert dominating early assemblages but becoming rarer from the Neolithic onwards (Bayer 2020).

PREHISTORIC POTTERY
Alex Davies

Early Neolithic

Some 13 sherds of undecorated Early Neolithic pottery were discovered, weighing 47g, probably belonging to the Plain Bowl tradition. A maximum of eight vessels were recorded from eight contexts. The low mean sherd weight (MSW) of 3.6g suggests the pottery was subjected to a significant degree of attrition prior to deposition, and was perhaps stored in an above-ground midden before reaching subsoil features. Just over half of the pottery is heavily abraded, with the remainder recorded as moderately abraded. The largest and least abraded material was from pit group 1411, including a sherd that weighed 17g. There are single squared (OA 2020, fig. 9.1) and slightly rolled rims. All of the material has poorly sorted angular vein quartz inclusions, usually c. 2mm in size but up to c. 5mm. Wall thickness ranges from 5-9mm.

Middle Bronze Age

The Middle Bronze Age assemblage consisted of 1,632 sherds weighing 21,349g, with an MSW of 13.1g. This MSW quantification is misleading as it derives from the number of sherds finally accounted for after excavation. The lower parts of seven large vessels were found set into pits, and all of these crumbled into many sherds upon excavation. Considering this, the sherd count 'upon discovery' would instead be 352, counting each of these seven pots as a single sherd, giving a drastically different MSW of 60.6g. The rest of this report follows the larger sherd count. Excluding the freshly broken pots set into the ground, some 9% of the assemblage by weight was recorded as freshly broken, 80% moderately abraded, and 11% highly abraded.

A maximum of 74 vessels were found in 48 contexts. No attempt at cross-context joins was made, and it is very likely that the same vessels have been counted multiple times in the total.

Fabric

Five Middle Bronze Age fabrics were defined, three containing grog of different grades and frequency (Gr1-3). These accounted for c. 98% of the assemblage. The

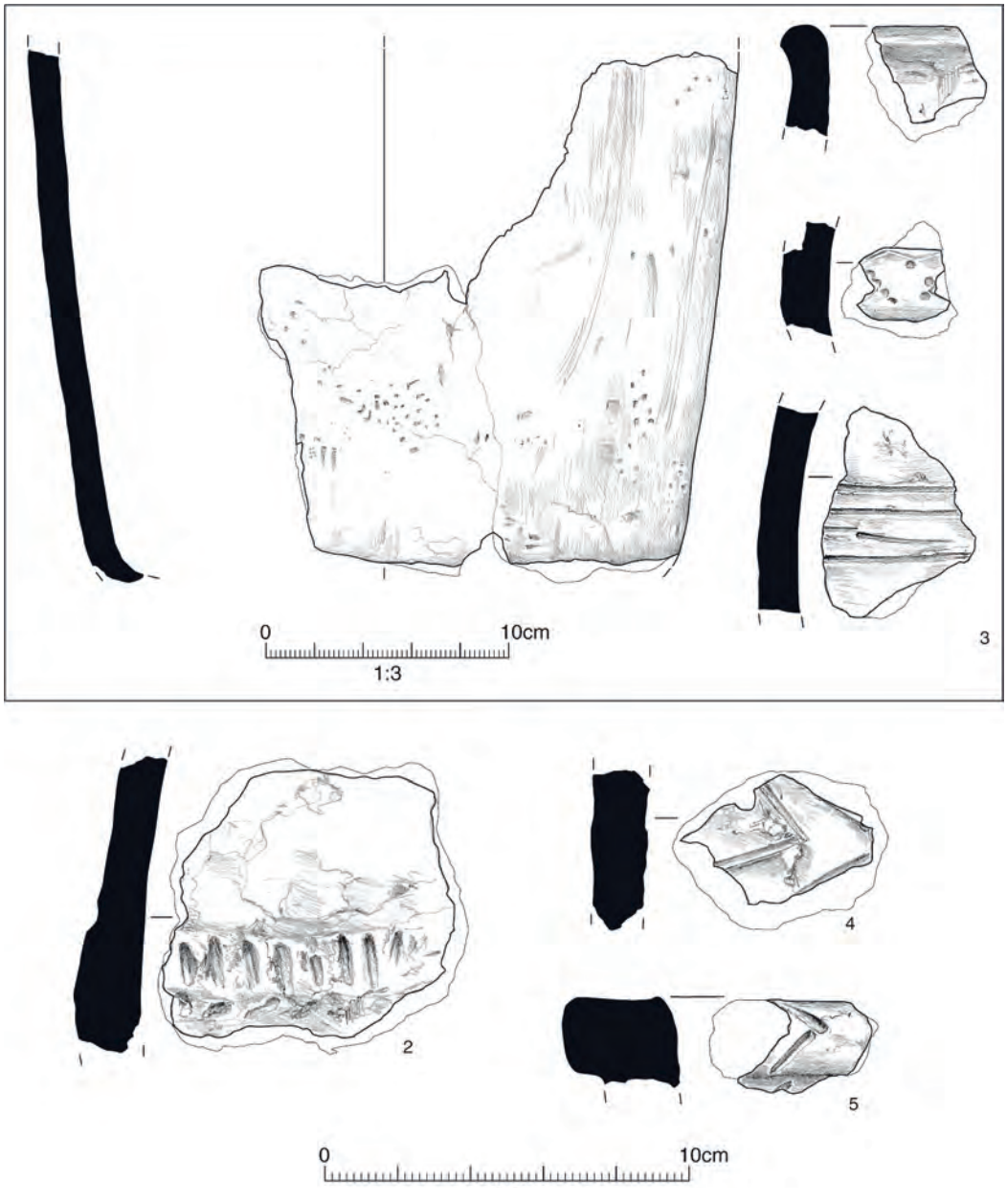

Fig. 9 Middle Bronze Age pottery from pottery settings

minor fabrics consist of vein quartz and grog (Qt2), and an almost inclusion-free fabric containing rare amounts of quartz sand (Qs). These basic fabric descriptions are of little help in sourcing the clay and provenancing the vessels. No inclusions that may have been geologically distinct were visible at x20 magnification level.

Form

Most of the vessels appear to be broadly bucket shaped with straight or near-straight sides. The possible exceptions are five incurving rims, some of which might have belonged to more barrel-shaped vessels. One of

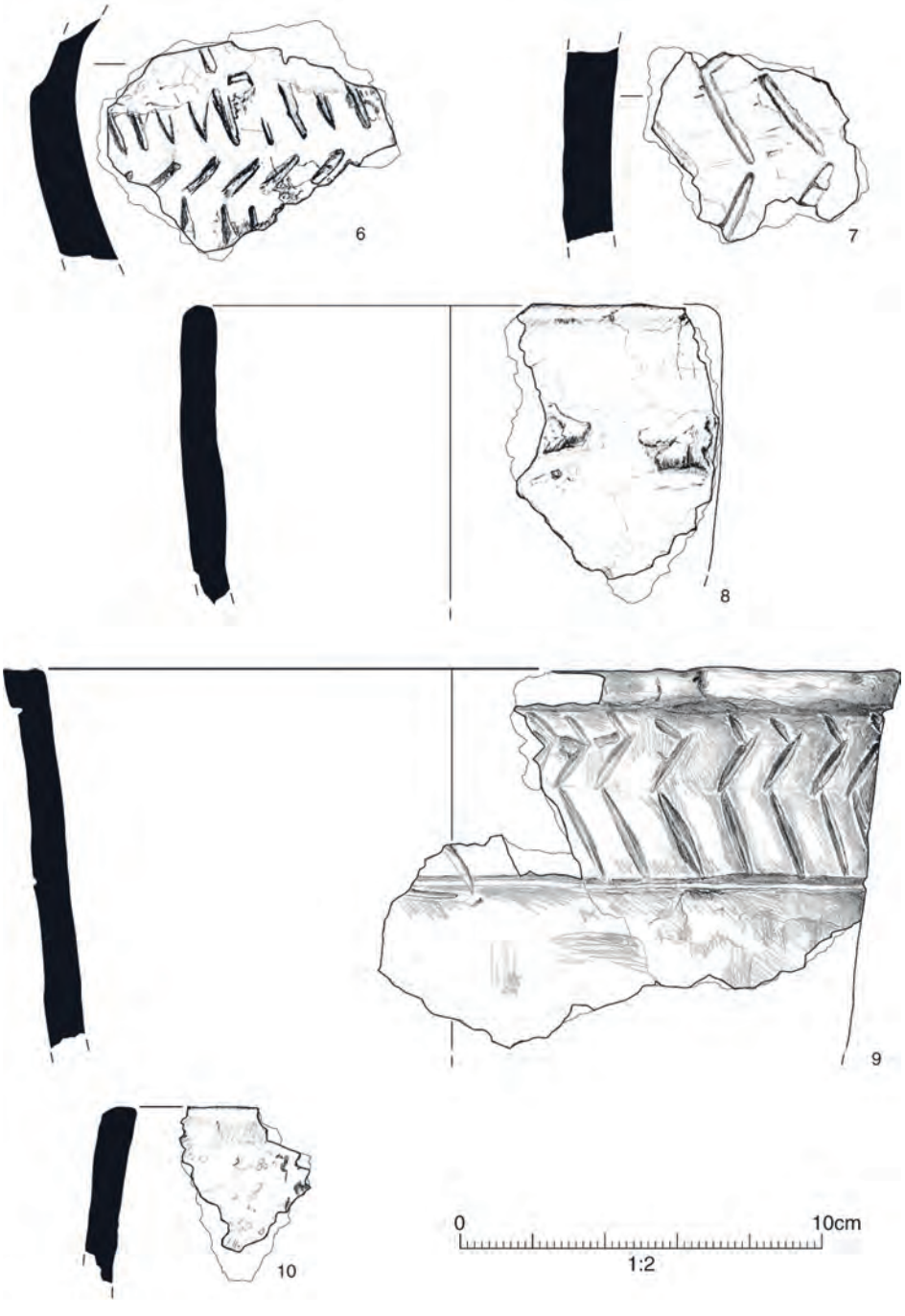

Fig. 10 Middle Bronze Age pottery from pit 1362 (6), and enclosure ditch 1414 (7-10)

these incurving rims belongs to a small pot with two closely set, poorly formed bosses (Fig. 10.8); the vessel is near straight sided. The rims from twelve vessels were discovered: two are simple, five incurving, three everted and two squared. None of the rims have bevels.

Size

No complete profiles were discovered, but the rim diameters of five vessels can be measured with reasonable confidence, and the base diameters of seven. The rims display much greater variation than the bases, with a range between 150-320mm. The bases are all between 220-280mm diameter. These figures are, however, biased as the rims from larger vessels are more difficult to confidently measure from small sherds, making them less likely to be represented. Six of the seven bases are from vessels set into pits, biasing these vessels with a (presumably) shared functional and depositional history. Vessel diameters do not clearly correlate with fabrics, although the sample is small.

Wall thickness is measurable on 58 vessels and ranged between 7-30mm. There is a correlation between the grade of the fabric and wall thickness: the larger the grog inclusions, the thicker the vessel walls tend to be. Fabric Gr1 had a mean wall thickness of 10.3mm, compared to a mean of 13.8mm for Gr2, and 14.7mm for Gr3. There is, however, significant overlap between the fabrics. This may simply represent a functional requirement of smaller inclusions needed for small pots.

Decoration

Eighteen vessels are decorated (24% of all vessels), and virtually all of the motifs are incised chevrons. Where identifiable, all the chevrons were vertical. There are two examples of wall cordons decorated with chevrons (Figs 9.2 and 11.13; there are no undecorated cordons), and one with chevrons on the outer part of the rim (Fig. 9.5). Apart from these, where identifiable the chevrons are located on the wall below the rim.

One vessel has fingertip decoration on an internal base cross cordon (the vessel was also externally decorated with a chevron pattern; v.69; Fig. 8). Two small sherds have stabbed dots, although the pattern these were part of cannot be understood (Fig. 9.3). There are no examples of cord decoration.

Pots set into the ground

The most notable element of the context of the pottery assemblage was seven vessels that were set into the ground, placed snugly within pits. Two pairs of these intercut (vessels 62 and 53; vessels 69 and 74). These pairs were within the roundhouse, as was one other pot set into the ground (vessel 65). The other two vessels (23 and 46) were not clearly associated with any other feature. All of the vessels crumbled into many fragments upon excavation, and none contained cremated bone.

The pots set into the ground are as follows:

- Vessel 23 (ctx 1175, cut 1116). Base of vessel 0.26m in diameter and lower part of wall, surviving to a height of 55mm. Two sherds are chevron decorated. Gr3. 1,788g.
- Vessel 46 (ctx 1301, cut 1303). Base of a vessel 0.20m diameter and lower part of wall, surviving to a height of c. 20mm. All of the sherds appeared to be from the base or junction of the base and wall. Gr2. 623g
- Vessel 53 (ctx 1313, cut 1312). Part of the base of a vessel too fragmentary to measure. Two body sherds, one chevron decorated. Intercutting with pit 1333 (containing vessel 62), and pit 1362. The relationship between 1312 and 1333 was not established, although both were cut by pit 1362. Pit 1312 also contained a sherd from a different vessel. Gr3. 564g.
- Vessel 62 (ctx 1334, cut 1333). About 60% of base and joining wall of vessel. Base 0.24m diameter, c. 70mm of wall surviving. About half of the sherds are from the base, and half the wall. Chevron decoration on external cordon. Intercutting with pit 1312 (containing vessel 53). The relationship between pits 1312 and 1333 was not established, although both cut by pit 1362. Pit also contained sherds from a different vessel. Gr3. 767g.
- Vessel 65 (ctx 1360, cut 1359). Complete lower circuit of vessel, missing its base. Base 0.22m diameter, c.50mm of wall surviving. About 65% of junction between vessel wall and base surviving, demonstrating this was the lower part of the pot placed upright, but without the base. Cuts two other pits, but no pottery retrieved from them. Gr3. 754g.
- Vessel 69 (ctx 1376, cut 1375). Complete base and wall surviving up to c. 0.31m. Base diameter 0.28m. Applied fingertipped cross cordon on base. Three sherds decorated with parallel lines, possibly chevrons. Filled with stones and fired clay. Cut pit 1386, containing vessel 74. Gr1. 8,139g. (Fig. 8)
- Vessel 74 (ctx 1387, cut 1386). Complete base and about half of circumference of wall, surviving up to c.0.25m. Base diameter 0.24m. Other side of wall was truncated by pit 1375. One everted rim sherd. Decorated with four near-parallel lines, possibly leading to large chevrons, and stabbed dots. Cut by pit 1375, containing vessel 69. Gr2. 4,747g. (Fig. 9.3)

Site provenance

Excluding the seven pots set into the ground, 73% of the pottery by weight was found in the main enclosure ditch

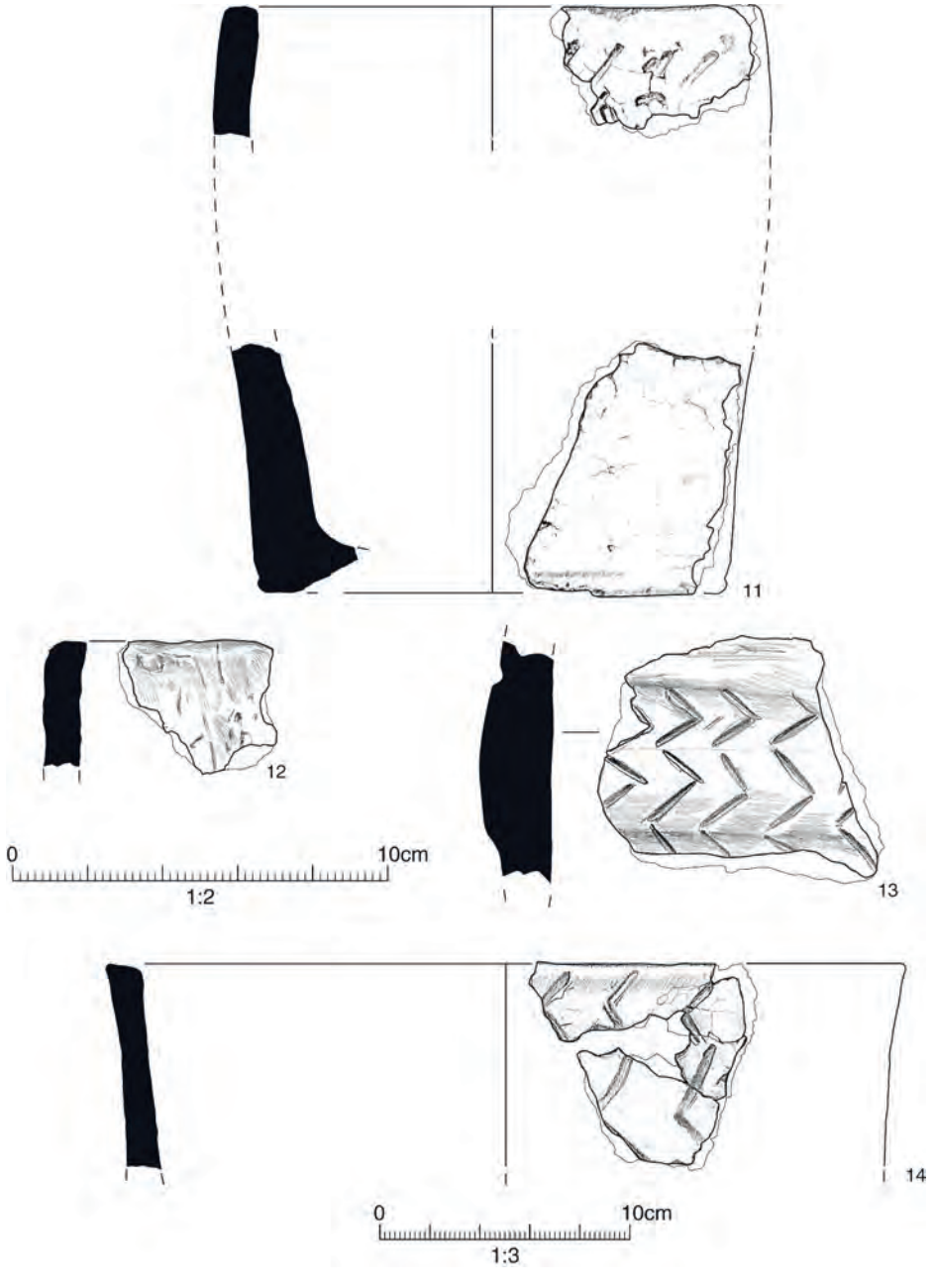

Fig. 11 Middle Bronze Age pottery from enclosure ditch 1414

(1414), 18% in features inside roundhouse 1416, 3% in roundhouse ditch 1416, and just 6% in other features inside the enclosure. No Middle Bronze Age pottery was found outside of the enclosure.

The MSW of the material in features associated with the roundhouse was 7.4g, compared to the 14.3g MSW of the material in the enclosure ditch. More of the vessels from the enclosure ditch were also recorded as freshly broken compared with the roundhouse. The MSW across different levels of the ditch was, however, quite different, and suggests different processes surrounded the filling of the feature during its life.

The fills of the enclosure ditch were spilt into basal, lower, middle and upper levels. Some 46% of the pottery was from the upper fills, 40% from the middle fills, and much less from the lowest fills. This in part reflects the tendency for basal and lower fills to comprise less soil. The MSW increased higher up the ditch fill: MSW was 8.5g from the basal/lower fills, 12.7g from the middle fills, and 20.5g from the upper fills. Furthermore, over twice the percentage of vessels in the basal and lower fills were recorded as highly abraded compared to the material from the middle and upper fills, and nearly a third of the vessels in the upper fills were freshly broken, whereas none were freshly broken in the basal/lower fills. This shows that the pottery in the lower parts of the ditch was subject to more intensive processes of attrition compared to that from the upper parts of the ditch. Why this might have happened is not certain, although presumably the pottery in the lower parts of the ditch was deposited when the settlement was in use, whereas the material from the upper parts of the ditch was deposited at or after abandonment. The presence of larger, fresher sherds in the upper part of the ditch might suggest that the ditch was purposefully backfilled at abandonment, with fresh sherds becoming incorporated from either relatively fresh midden material, or even purposefully buried as part of an abandonment rite. If the upper part of the ditch silted naturally after abandonment, pottery might be expected to be more broken and abraded due to quite long periods on the surface prior to deposition.

Two of the ten interventions made into the enclosure produced about half of the material. These were 1264, the southern terminal belonging to the eastern entrance, and 1322 on the eastern side. The other three terminals each produced between 4-7% of the material from the enclosure. This suggests that terminals were not favoured for the deposition of pottery.

Discussion

The Middle Bronze Age assemblage was generally rather homogeneous, with form and decoration being reasonably consistent, although vessel sizes did vary. The assemblage belongs to the Trevisker-related series centring in Somerset but also found in Devon, Cornwall and South Wales. The main features of the assemblage are the predominance of straight- or near-straight-sided vessels; rims that are essentially plain but can be slightly incurving, everted or squared; the prevalence of incised chevron decoration; and the dominance of grog temper. In these respects, the assemblage significantly diverges from 'true' domestic Trevisker ware centring in Cornwall as it entirely lacks the cord decoration, bevelled rims and clear round-bodied jars that form substantial components of the style (e.g. ApSimon and Greenfield 1972; Woodward and Cane 1991; also Quinnell 2012, 147-8). While many of the vessels could uncomfortably fit in Parker Pearson's (1990; 1995) Trevisker Styles 3 and 4, due largely to the presence of incised decoration, this typology is overall not appropriate for the assemblage, although the scheme is suitable for one vessel (v.10) of Style 6 as it is small, undecorated and displays small bosses. The evidence from Nerrols Farm and other recent excavations shows that Trevisker-related ware was present in Somerset from the 15th/14th centuries cal BC, contradicting previous arguments that it only emerged in the latter stages of the Middle Bronze Age (Woodward 1989; 1990).

One interesting aspect of the assemblage was that one of the vessels set into the ground, vessel 69, had fingertipped cross cordons on the internal side of the base. Basal cross cordons are infrequent features of Trevisker and Deverel-Rimbury pottery with examples from Cornwall (ApSimon and Greenfield 1972, fig. 15.10; Quinnell forthcoming b), Devon (Raymond 2008, 54; 2012, 76), Dorset (Pitt-Rivers 1898, pl. 301.4; Watling and White 1982, fig. 22.13) and Essex (Brown 1999, fig. 64.89). Fingertipped cross cordons are known from Topsham Road (Devon; Raymond 2008, 54) and Ardleigh (Essex; Brown 1999, fig. 64.89). The function of these is uncertain, although the Nerrols Farm example was from a pot set into the ground so it appears unlikely that the cross cordons were designed to strengthen the base of the vessel, at least during its use. Given the context of the vessel, the decorative fingertipping on the internal cross cordons would be more visible than any external decoration, even if this was only seen when the pot was empty.

Middle Iron Age

Some 28 sherds (216g) of Middle Iron Age pottery, probably from two vessels, were found in the penannular gully of roundhouse 1206. This includes sherds probably all from the same Glastonbury style (South-Western) necked jar with a slight foot ring (Fig. 12). The decoration on the jar could only be very partially understood, although a lower band of parallel diagonal lines on the body and another band of parallel vertical lines on the shoulder can be seen. A decorated sherd

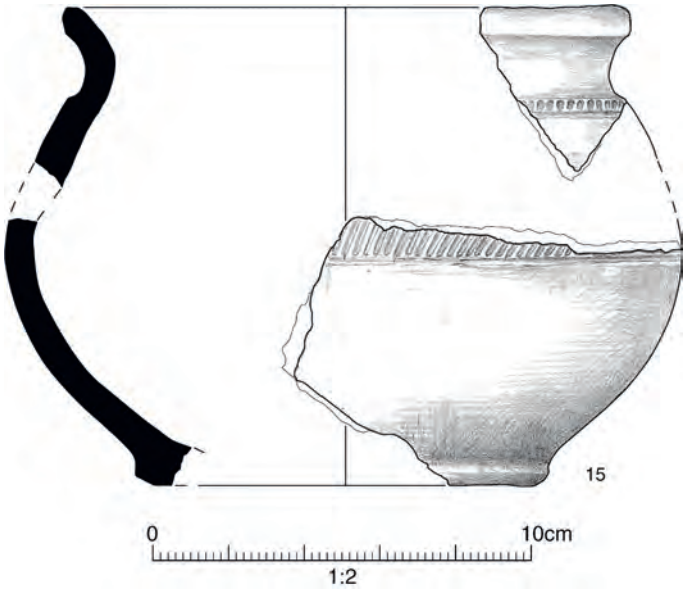

Fig. 12 Middle Iron Age pottery

has straight and probably curvilinear lines. The fabric is predominantly quartz sand and has white crystalline inclusions, probably calcite. This appears to belong to Peacock's (1969) Group 3, where a Mendip limestone source was suggested.

The other vessel was in a vesicular fabric and was abraded. The voids were often rhomboid but sometimes rounded, suggesting that the leached inclusions were calcite and/or limestone.

Catalogue of illustrated pottery (Figs 9-12)

Middle Bronze Age

2 Pottery setting 1333, fill 1334, inside roundhouse. Gr3 (Fig. 9)
3 Pottery setting 1386, fill 1387, inside roundhouse. Gr2 (Fig. 9)
4 Pottery setting 1116, fill 1175, inside roundhouse. Gr3 (Fig. 9)
5 Surface find 1143 next to pottery setting 1116. Gr3 (Fig. 9)
6 Pit 1362, fill 1363, inside roundhouse. Gr3 (Fig. 10)
7 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1264, lower fill 1266. Gr3 (Fig. 10)
8 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1073, lower fill 1074. Gr2 (Fig. 10)
9 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1264, middle fill 1269. Gr2 (Fig. 10)
10 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1264, middle fill 1269. Gr1 (Fig. 10)
11 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1264, middle fill 1268. Gr2 (Fig. 11)
12 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1264, middle fill 1268. Gr1 (Fig. 11)
13 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1257, upper fill 1259. Gr2 (Fig. 11)
14 Enclosure ditch 1414, cut 1257, upper fill 1258. Gr2 (Fig. 11)

Middle Iron Age

15 Roundhouse penannular ditch 1206, cut 1064 fill 1065, and cut 1118 fill 1119. QsCa (Fig. 12)

ORGANIC RESIDUE ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE BRONZE AGE POTTERY

Julie Dunne, Toby Gillard and Richard P Evershed

Analysis was undertaken to determine whether organic residues were preserved in 42 Trevisker-related pottery sherds from 25 vessels. The results are summarised here; further details and supporting data are available in the full excavation report (OA 2020).

A total of 19 sherds from 14 vessels yielded lipid profiles indicative of a degraded animal fat, making a lipid recovery rate of 45%. Sherds from different parts (rim, body, base) of five vessels were analysed. Of these, GC, GC-MS and GC-C-IRMS analyses demonstrated that 14 sherds were from pots used to

process predominantly dairy products, four sherds were from pots used to process ruminant carcass products and one sherd was from a pot used to process non-ruminant products. These results demonstrate the majority of vessels (63%) were used to process dairy products. However, these data are complicated by the results from the five potential vessels where two sherds were analysed. Of these, three were shown to have been used for processing dairy products, but sherds from the other two vessels yielded differing results, for reasons unclear.

Sherds (n=5) from three of the seven vessels (53, 65 and 74) set into the ground all yielded results, with 53 and 74 being used to process or store dairy products. The two sherds from vessel 65 yielded both ruminant dairy and ruminant adipose $\Delta^{13}C$ values suggesting the vessel may have been used to process both types of products (dairy and meat).

Of the other vessels analysed (six sherds from vessels 5, 9, 39, 58 and 70), of the same type as those set into the pits, three yielded ruminant dairy $\Delta^{13}C$ values (vessels 9, 39 and 70) and one ruminant adipose (vessel 5). The remaining vessel (58) yielded two sherds with Δ13C values which suggest the vessel was used to process different commodities, i.e. ruminant and non-ruminant carcass products.

Sherds from vessels that were of different type to those set into the ground (eight sherds from six vessels: 10, 27, 35, 36, 37 and 38) all yielded ruminant dairy profiles, save for vessel 35 which was used to process ruminant adipose products.

Lipid concentrations from sherds from vessels 36 and 37 suggest the placement of a dairy product on the base of the vessel, leading to some very minor capillary action of the product up the vessel wall, but with no actual processing (cooking) occurring in the vessel. The high lipid concentration in the base suggests prolonged use so these vessels may have been used to store dairy products over a long period.

Interestingly, two rim sherds (vessels 10 and 38) yielded high concentrations of lipids from ruminant dairy processing. This suggests, in contrast to vessels 36 and 37, that these vessels were either filled to the rim with butter or may have been used for the boiling of dairy products, where lipids were preferentially absorbed into the rim.

Finally, lipid concentrations from pots set into the ground (vessels 53, 65 and 74), hypothesised to be storage vessels, do appear to contain lower concentrations of lipid than other vessels from the site. This appears to bear out the hypothesis, although it should be noted that this is a small dataset and may be a feature of degradation processes. Analysis of three heat-cracked stones from the fill of one sunken pot did not yield any lipids.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE MOULD

Cynthia Poole

A fragment of fired clay found in the corner of the Middle Bronze Age enclosure ditch (context 1113) comes from the edge of a mould for a bladed implement, probably a rapier or sword (Fig. 13). The date of the enclosure, probably in the 14th century cal BC, suggests that the mould is contemporary with the Taunton metalworking period (Needham *et al*. 1997, 82), making it more likely that it was for a rapier.

Terminology used in describing the mould follows Needham (1980), where more detailed explanation of the technology may be found. The fragment is 18mm thick. It derives from one valve of a bivalve mould assembly and has a well-smoothed and convex exterior surface fired light grey. A patchy light yellowish brown clay veneer over the exterior surface represents remains of the outer wrap and faint linear marks through this on the outer surface might represent a cord binding holding the two mould valves in place. The valve has a narrow, flat contact surface 9mm wide that is slightly bevelled and sloping outwards and fired dark grey the same as the core. From the contact surface, the step to the casting surface is barely perceptible; the casting surface slopes at an angle forming a shallow bevelled surface 8-10mm wide joining to a flat or barely concave central section over 12mm wide. The inner valve surface is fired mid grey. The mould is made in a fine sandy clay containing a high density of fine-medium well-sorted quartz sand, a low density of mica and common fine black inclusions/voids, which may be burnt organic inclusions.

An oblong fired-clay block was found in the same context as the mould. This measures 51mm thick by over 48mm wide and over 70mm long. It has a roughly moulded curving surface, forming two sides of a rod or bar with sub-rectangular cross section with rounded corners and possibly part of a third side, though this area is damaged. This is not a standardized form and probably represents an *ad hoc* piece made to serve a particular purpose on a single occasion. A role in metalworking cannot be demonstrated.

No other fired clay was found in this context, and there is no other debris clearly associated with metalworking from the site. The structural fired clay was found mainly concentrated in the upper fills of one of the terminals of the ditch and arguably is not related to the metalworking but may of be purely domestic origin. However, at this period specialised hearths were probably not necessary for bronze casting and temperatures reached would be insufficient to differentiate them from domestic structures.

Fig. 13 Fired clay mould

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE STONE ARTEFACTS
Ruth Shaffrey

The only item of worked stone is a saddle quern, neatly broken into about two-thirds during antiquity and more recently at the other end (OA 2020, pl. 10). It has been shaped with neat pecking all over and has a flat grinding surface with a rounded base. The grinding surface is worn very smooth and the base and one side of the quern are smoothed with some polish – either a deliberate polish or a result of movement during use. It is made from a coarse granite with small feldspar phenocrysts and black tourmaline (schorl). These rocks outcrop in a number of localities in Cornwall, and the quern has certainly been transported at least 50km from Dartmoor or further (identification by Roger Taylor).

The saddle quern was recovered from the top of the fill of a vessel placed in cut 1375 (ctx 1383) where it was positioned at a slight angle but inverted with the grinding surface facing approximately downwards. Around and under the saddle quern, but still within the vessel, were a number of burnt stones, which show the cracking effects of exposure to rapid heating and cooling. Most of these (38 fragments weighing 3.6kg) are of quartz, mainly white with some red and grey examples. There are also two fragments of burnt unworked stone of the same lithology as the saddle quern. They are rounded and not obviously from the quern, but since the quern has been transported some distance it seems likely that they were originally part of this quern (or another). The fill of a second sunken vessel (cut 1116, ctx 1117) contained 25 fragments (2kg) of burnt stones, including a mixture of heat-cracked quartz and fragments of the same lithology as the saddle quern, but more highly burnt and degraded.

Saddle querns are unusual finds from features of Bronze Age date in Somerset and this quern is particularly striking because it is made of igneous stone imported from the outcrops of Cornwall. A fragment of rubber of micro-granite of similar provenance was recently found in a Bronze Age feature in Yeovil (Cheryl Green pers. comm.), but otherwise there is little evidence for the movement of querns (or the raw materials for querns) from the South-West Peninsula into Somerset at this time.

CHARRED PLANT REMAINS AND CHARCOAL
Julia Meen

Thirty bulk samples were processed for the recovery of charred plant remains and charcoal. Following initial assessment of the flots, two samples underwent further analysis for charred plant remains and five for charcoal. The results of this work are summarised here; the complete data are available in the full excavation report.

The initial assessment showed that macrofossils were generally sparse and charcoal tended to be of small size and in low quantity. Pit 1242, part of Early Neolithic pit group 1411, contains numerous fragments of charred

hazelnut shell: a total of 472 pieces, weighing 2.26g. A partial grain of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) was recovered from fill 1353 of Early Bronze Age ring ditch 1410. A very small number of cereal grains were recovered from the fills of Middle Bronze Age enclosure ditch 1414, including a total of four wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains.

The only quantifiable remains from the Middle Bronze Age were recovered from one of the seven pots set into the ground within enclosure 1414 (cut 1375, ctx 1383). These were generally poorly preserved: fragmented, distorted, and often coated with a mineral precipitate that made close identification difficult. The remains include a small number of grains of both wheat (*Triticum* sp.) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and a little cereal chaff. While the wheat grains themselves were not diagnostic to species, a number of the better-preserved glume bases were identifiable as emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*). This sample also produced a significant quantity of charcoal, which was examined to characterise the range of wood present. This comprised a mix of taxa, with around half of the assemblage blackthorn/cherry, followed by ash, oak and alder, as well as occasional hawthorn-type, hazel, field maple (*Acer campestre*) and probable spindle (cf *Euonymus europaeus*).

A further five samples had sufficient identifiable charcoal to justify further analysis. This included the hazelnut-shell-rich Neolithic pit 1242, in which only alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) could be conclusively identified. Comparison of the charcoal assemblages from three of the fills from Middle Bronze Age enclosure ditch 1414 shows that their composition differs. Lower fill 1074 was dominated by oak (*Quercus* sp.), with the remainder mostly blackthorn/cherry (*Prunus* sp.) and alder. Middle fill 1269, which out of the three fills contained the least charcoal, was more mixed, with blackthorn/cherry, ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and oak the most common. Upper fill 1258 was far richer in charcoal than the other two fills, and was predominately composed of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and hawthorn-type charcoal (Maloideae; a group of closely related taxa which also includes apple and whitebeam).

DISCUSSION

Early Neolithic

Evidence for Early Neolithic occupation consisted of a tight cluster of seven pits arranged over an area of less than 3m. Three further pits scattered across the site could also have belonged to the same period, though not necessarily to the same episode of occupation. The finds assemblage from the pit cluster is limited, including small quantities of lithics and pottery sherds of probable Plain Bowl type, and does not particularly suggest any purposeful deposition. The Plain Bowl tradition is thought to have commenced in southern Britain between 3970 and 3715 cal BC and ended between 3375 and 3095 cal BC (Whittle *et al*. 2011). The presence of flint, Greensand chert and Portland chert shows that a variety of lithic resources were used, with the Portland chert deriving from c. 70km away on the Isle of Portland, or possibly from other smaller deposits in Dorset or Wiltshire (Stewart 2015). Hazelnuts were gathered for food, and alder wood used for fuel.

These features may have formed part of a larger area of Early Neolithic activity. The earlier investigations 200m to the west uncovered a few pits and a linear ditch that contained pottery and lithics of probable earlier Neolithic date (Cox and Samuel 2001). A 9.5m length of the ditch was exposed, which ran on a broadly E-W alignment. Neolithic ditches are generally associated with funerary or ceremonial monuments, though whether that was the case here remains uncertain. Early Neolithic activity, again including a ditch possibly of this date, has also been found in an evaluation at Staplegrove, 2km to the west (Cotswold Archaeology 2016).

Similar small groups of Early Neolithic pits associated with Plain Bowl pottery occur elsewhere in Somerset. At Ham Hill, seven pits were found over c. 7m, although these were arranged in a less orderly fashion than in the pit group at Nerrols Farm (Brittain *et al.* 2014, 12-13, fig. 6). At Milsoms Corner, four pits were found over c. 6m with a fifth c. 8m distant (Tabor and Randall 2017). Stake holes, a hollow and an occupation layer were also found, with all features interpreted as being part of a single or a few near-contemporary domestic occupation events.

Early Bronze Age

The small ring ditch at the northern edge of the site has produced a radiocarbon date of 1895-1745 cal BC, though as this derived from the upper fill it is possible that that the ring ditch was first constructed at an earlier time during the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. Finds were limited to a few lithics and small residual sherds of Early Neolithic pottery. It is not clear whether the ring ditch surrounded a small barrow mound, and while a funerary purpose is likely this cannot be demonstrated. Though no bone was recovered, bone survival across the site was extremely poor, and any central burial within the area enclosed by the ring ditch would have been obliterated by the post-medieval ditch cutting through the centre of the feature.

Little further evidence for Early Bronze Age activity is known from the local area. The previous excavations 200m to the west uncovered a pit containing possible collared urn pottery, and some flintwork from that site may also be of Early Bronze Age date (Cox and Samuel 2001). The nearest other excavated ring ditch is a much larger (19m diameter) example from an evaluation at Staplegrove, 2km to the west, associated with four cremation burials of probable

Early to Middle Bronze Age date (Cotswold Archaeology 2016). Few potential ring ditches can be recognised in the cropmark evidence from the local area, though it should be noted that neither the Nerrols Farm nor the Staplegrove ring ditches were visible in aerial photographs.

Middle Bronze Age

Until recently, Middle Bronze Age settlement was virtually unknown in Somerset, other than the coastal site at Brean Down (Bell 1990) and the poorly understood hilltop enclosure at Norton Fitzwarren (Ellis 1989; Norman 2006). Development-led excavation has dramatically changed this picture in the last few years, with the discovery of numerous settlement enclosure sites. These take various forms, including examples of oval or D-shaped plan, but subrectangular enclosures comparable to that at Nerrols Farm have been found at Rodway (Hart and Mudd 2018) and Aller (Allen *et al.* 2020). More locally, two discrete Middle Bronze Age enclosures have recently been excavated 1.5km to the east of Nerrols Farm at Hartnells Farm, Monkton Heathfield, one of them similar in form and dimensions to the Nerrols Farm enclosure (Andrew Mudd pers. comm.). In addition, there are at least two dozen rectilinear cropmark enclosures recorded in the HER within c. 2.5km of the site, many of which are of comparable size to the Nerrols Farm enclosure (c. 30-57m by c. 18-48m) and could potentially be of similar date (Norman 2006). While a pattern of single, discrete enclosures seems to be the norm across Somerset, a more extensive complex of conjoined settlement enclosures has been excavated 9.5km to the north-east of Nerrols Farm at Bridgwater Gateway (Simmonds 2020). As at Nerrols Farm, radiocarbon dating evidence from many of the excavated Middle Bronze Age enclosure sites in the county focuses around the 14th to 13th centuries cal BC. This suggests a horizon of enclosure construction corresponding to the Taunton metalworking phase, when Somerset saw an upsurge in the deposition of metal objects and hoards.

The emerging evidence for Middle Bronze Age settlement in Somerset will be reviewed in more detail in the forthcoming publication of the Bridgwater Gateway site. Discussion in the present report will focus on the evidence from Nerrols Farm.

Settlement form and development

Middle Bronze Age activity at Nerrols Farm was focused on the enclosure, with no features or finds occurring beyond its limits. There was also no contemporary evidence from the earlier excavations 200m to the west (Cox and Samuel 2001), though two postholes containing Middle Bronze Age pottery were recorded at the medieval farmstead site c. 300m to the south-east (AC Archaeology 2018).

The placing of the enclosure may have been influenced by the presence of the Early Bronze Age monument just to its north. Some other Middle Bronze Age enclosures in Somerset were constructed in locations showing evidence for Early Bronze Age activity, as at Bridgwater Gateway and Rodway (Simmonds 2020; Hart and Mudd 2018). At Aller, the Middle Bronze Age settlement enclosure was placed a short distance from a group of funerary monuments, some of which have produced Early Bronze Age radiocarbon dates (Allen *et al*. 2020).

The first phase of the enclosure survived in plan only on its western and northern sides, though a possible southern side was observed in section. The southern and eastern sides may well have been truncated away by the second phase enclosure ditch, though it is also possible that in its initial form the enclosure ditch was only ever L-shaped. L-shaped Middle Bronze Age enclosures have been identified in many parts of southern Britain (e.g. Lambrick 2009), and it may be that the enclosure circuit of these was completed by a bank or some other form of barrier that has left no archaeological trace. In its second phase the Nerrols Farm enclosure was subrectangular with entrances on its eastern and western sides. Radiocarbon dates suggest that it was in use for a relatively limited period during the 14th century cal BC.

The fill sequences in some of the slots of the second phase enclosure ditch suggest that the early deposits derived from outside of the enclosure. This may tentatively suggest the presence of an external bank, although this is far from certain. An external rather than internal bank would be a rare feature for a later prehistoric enclosure, being more usually associated with Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceremonial monuments. However, there is firmer evidence for an external bank at the much larger Middle Bronze Age hilltop enclosure at Norton Fitzwarren, 4.5km to the west. This led to the tentative interpretation that the site was 'deliberately non-defensive but ?ceremonial' (Ellis 1989, 66). If the bank was positioned outside of the ditch at Nerrols Farm, this would suggest that the enclosure had a similar non-defensive role, and perhaps referenced earlier prehistoric monuments. Analysis of the pottery from the second phase enclosure ditch shows that the sherds from the higher fills tend to be larger and better preserved than those in the lower fills. This might suggest that the ditch was deliberately backfilled at or following the abandonment of the settlement, in part using relatively fresh midden material.

The putative roundhouse within the enclosure comprised a C-shaped gully surrounding an irregular cluster of postholes and pits, some of which contained

pots that had been deliberately set upright into the ground (see below). Middle Bronze Age roundhouses from lowland southern Britain are generally defined by post-rings rather than gullies. However, houses of very similar form – with C-shaped gullies surrounding a cluster of internal features – have been uncovered elsewhere in Somerset at Bridgwater Gateway (Simmonds 2020) and Sutton Bridge, Queen Camel (Wessex Archaeology 2015). This may thus represent a local roundhouse 'type', though the exact constructional form that these buildings took is not clear. Some of the pits within the Nerrols Farm roundhouse intercut, which could suggest that the building was occupied for a significant length of time, but it is also possible that not all of the features ostensibly associated with this structure were actually contemporary with its primary use. Elsewhere in the South-West Peninsula, investigation of Middle Bronze Age roundhouses with stratified deposits has shown that these buildings could have complex histories; artefacts could be deposited or new features dug during abandonment rituals (see below), or when the site of the abandoned building was later reused for a different purpose. For example, at Scarcewater, Cornwall, a ring gully was dug around part of a roundhouse only *after* this building had fallen out of use, as part of a sequence of ritualised acts of closure (Jones 2015).

Economy and diet

Charred plant remains were generally sparse from Middle Bronze Age contexts, suggesting that crop processing was not a major activity at this settlement. Emmer wheat and barley were identified, however, and a fragment of a saddle quern also suggests the consumption of cereals. No animal bones had survived the harsh soil conditions, but indirect evidence for livestock farming was obtained from the residue analysis of the Middle Bronze Age pottery. Residues of dairy fats were present on the majority of the sampled vessels, with residues of ruminant (probably cattle, sheep or goat) and non-ruminant (probably pig) fats also present on some vessels. These results echo those from the coastal Middle Bronze Age settlement at Brean Down, where again more than half of the sampled vessels had dairy fat residues (Bell 1990). Isotopic analysis of cattle and sheep bones from Brean Down and from Redwick and Peterstone on the Gwent levels suggest that livestock was grazed on the coastal saltmarshes, leading Bell to argue for a 'correlation between cattle herding, saltmarsh grazing and a dairying economy in the Bronze Age Severn Estuary' (*ibid*., 263-4). The demonstration that dairying was also a major element of the economy at Nerrols Farm – a site located well away from the coastal saltmarshes – is therefore of interest. We have no evidence to show whether livestock husbandry also provided the inhabitants of Nerrols Farm with wool; there was a notable absence of the cylindrical loomweights that are found at many Middle Bronze Age settlements, as seen in Somerset at Queen Camel (Newton 2018), Bridgwater Gateway (Simmonds 2020) and Aller (Allen *et al*. 2020).

Metalworking

The most notable artefact recovered from the Middle Bronze Age settlement was a fragment of a fired clay mould that had been used for casting a bladed implement, possibly a rapier. The same context also contained a fired clay block that could perhaps have been used as some form of hearth or oven furniture, though the lack of vitrification or visible metal residues means that there is no evidence it was used in the metalworking process.

Somerset is well known for its Middle Bronze Age metalwork, specifically from the Taunton phase (c. 1400-1275 BC). Despite this, the mould fragment from Nerrols Farm represents the first evidence for bronze casting from an excavated Middle Bronze Age site in Somerset; a bronze mould for casting spearheads has occurred as a stray find from East Pennard. Moulds or crucibles have however been recovered from a number of settlements elsewhere in southern Britain. Such remains typically occur as single fragments or small assemblages suggestive of small-scale casting events, though whether these represent the activities of resident part-time craftworkers or the visits of itinerant smiths is uncertain. If the clay mould from Nerrols Farm was indeed for a rapier, it would be slightly unusual, as most known rapier moulds are made of stone (Webley *et al*. 2020).

Pots set into the ground

Another significant feature of the site was the discovery of seven pottery vessels set into the ground. Five of these were within the roundhouse, with two instances where one pot cut another. Only the lower parts of the vessels were discovered. The site has undergone substantial truncation with only those features dug into the natural surviving. It is assumed that complete vessels were originally placed within the pits, possibly standing proud of the ground surface, but middle and upper portions were subsequently destroyed. A rim sherd was only found in one of the vessels and it is not certain that this belonged to the same pot.

While urned cremation burials are a frequent feature of the Middle Bronze Age and often utilised the same types of pots used in the domestic sphere (Ellison 1980), none of the vessels set into the ground at Nerrols Farm contained cremated remains. Pots in such settings without cremated remains are a recurring if not particularly frequent feature of Middle Bronze Age sites of the South-West Peninsula

and more widely in southern Britain. Urned cremation burials are in fact very rare from settlements in the South West (Caswell and Roberts 2018), and in cases where Middle Bronze Age cremation burials and settlement are present on the same sites, the burials tend to precede the settlement activity and are not strictly associated (e.g. Jones and Taylor 2010, 26; Simmonds 2020). It seems unlikely that the pots set into the ground at Nerrols Farm are part of some form of funerary activity, such as a cenotaph burial.

Middle Bronze Age domestic sites in the South West with similar pots set into the ground include Bridgwater Gateway (Simmonds 2020), Crablake Farm (Mudd and Joyce 2014, 34), Tolgarrick Farm (Hughes and Farnell 2016, 12-13), Topsham Road (JMHS 2008, 49; Raymond 2008, 54), Chudleigh (Quinnell forthcoming a) and possibly Aller (Allen *et al*. 2020). The example from Chudleigh is particularly comparable to vessel 69 from Nerrols Farm, as it was filled with stones which had been subject to thermal shock, as well as a possible muller. The pit at Aller containing the base of a pottery vessel also produced a perforated stone object (Allen *et al.* 2020, 50). The Topsham Road vessel also contained a fragment of a quern (JMHS 2008, 49), and like vessel 69 had an internal fingertipped cross cordon on the base. The Tolgarrick Farm pot was also associated with a worked stone object (Hughes and Farnell 2016, 12-13).

If the pots from Nerrols Farm did not have a funerary role, three possible purposes present themselves. Firstly, the presence of heat-cracked stones within one of the pots raises the possibility that they were used for heating water; in other words, the stones were heated in a fire and then used as 'pot boilers'. The practicality of using 'pot boilers' in this way has been questioned, however (Seager Thomas 2010). It should also be stressed that only two pots contained heat-affected stones, and such stones were not abundant from the rest of the site.

The second possibility is that the pots served for storage, perhaps for foodstuffs or water, or for some kind of food processing. It is notable that there are otherwise no obvious storage pits or granary structures at this site. Burying storage pots would serve to make the vessels immovable, but more secure. Coarse Middle Bronze Age pots can be large, cumbersome, and poorly fired with friable fabrics making them unsuited to being regularly moved. Burial of the pots would also have allowed their contents to be kept at a relatively cool temperature in summer, making them useful for storing foodstuffs such as dairy products. One of the pots, vessel 65 in setting 1359, was missing its base, although the junction between the lower wall and the base was present showing that the pot was placed upright in the feature. In this case the incomplete pot may have served more as a pit liner, stabilising both the environment within the pit and the pit walls. A similar pot missing its base is reported from Crablake Farm (Mudd and Joyce 2014, 34, fig. 2.22).

The selection of vessel 69 for use as a buried storage vessel may seem incongruous, as the unusual decoration on its base would have been covered up by whatever was contained in the vessel. This could however have been quite deliberate – in other words, the decoration was intended to usually be hidden, but to be revealed at certain times to certain people.

If the sunken pots were used for storage, then it is notable that there was no consistent difference in the lipid residues from these vessels compared to those that were not buried in the ground. This might suggest that the pots in the ground had a use-life prior to being buried; or that pots could be used for the same storage or food processing function whether sunken or not; or that different activities produced similar lipid signatures. For example, a pot used to store butter might produce a similar lipid signature to one that was used in the production of yoghurt.

The third possible interpretation of the sunken pots is that they were buried as offerings or in some other ritualised gesture. The observation that some of the pots within the roundhouse intercut could suggest that vessels were deposited at different stages of the history of the building. This could mirror practices observed elsewhere in the South-West Peninsula and more widely across southern Britain, in which offerings were made to mark different stages in the life-histories of houses and the people that inhabited them (Brück 1999; Nowakowski 2001; Jones 2015). Under this interpretation, pot 74 could have been deposited to mark the foundation of the household or an early stage of its development, and its location was remembered and selected for the deposition of vessel 69 at a later date, perhaps when the building was abandoned. Vessel 69 may have been selected for this purpose due to its unusual decoration. The subsequent filling of vessel 69 with burnt stones and a fragment of a quern imported from Cornwall could also have formed part of this closure rite. Examples from elsewhere in the South West of pots placed in roundhouses as part of 'ritualised' practices include Tolgarrick Farm, Cornwall. Here a pot appears to have been deposited as part of an abandonment rite as it was placed within a structural posthole of the roundhouse, apparently after the post had been removed. The house was then burnt down (Hughes and Farnell 2016, 12-13, 56). This pot differs from the Nerrols Farm examples as it was not set snugly within the feature, the pot being much smaller than its receptacle.

The question of the purpose of the sunken vessels at Nerrols Farm cannot be conclusively resolved. However, it can be suggested that they are most likely to have had a purpose in food storage and/or processing, with the residue evidence suggesting that this often

involved dairy products. This does not preclude the pots then subsequently becoming involved in ritualised abandonment practices, as may have happened in the case of vessel 69.

Middle Iron Age

Evidence for Middle Iron Age settlement comprised the penannular gullies of two roundhouses and number of possibly associated pits and postholes. Iron Age occupation was also found in the previous excavation 200m to the west, where a further penannular gully was uncovered that was of comparable size to those from the present site (14m diameter) and had an east-facing entrance (Cox and Samuel 2001). This suggests that the settlement was quite extensive, or that it shifted location over time. Similar roundhouses defined by penannular gullies – often with little or no trace of the house structure itself surviving – are also known from Middle and Late Iron Age settlements elsewhere in Somerset, as at Bridgwater Gateway/Huntworth (Powell *et al*. 2008; Simmonds 2020).

The sparse finds assemblage from the present site included a small quantity of pottery, of which one vessel was in the South Western Decorated style, and tiny amounts of fired clay, burnt stone and burnt animal bone. The scant quantities of charred plant remains recovered from the environmental samples provides no indication that crop processing was a major activity. The evidence hardly suggests long-lived or intensive settlement, though it could of course be that occupation debris was mostly deposited in middens or pits lying outside of the excavated area.

Early medieval

Features of early-medieval date comprised two pits, one of which produced a radiocarbon date of cal AD 665-770, while the other contained an iron whittle-tang knife which could fall within that date range. A number of undated pits, postholes and ditches lay nearby and might also belong to the same period, though equally they could have been associated with the adjacent Middle Iron Age settlement. Traces of earlier medieval activity were also slight from the immediately neighbouring investigations, though an earlier radiocarbon date of cal AD 425-645 was obtained from a pit in the excavations 200m to the west (Cox and Samuel 2001, 56), and a later date of cal AD 890-985 comes from a pit containing iron slag from the medieval farmstead site to the south-east (Rainbird 2021 (this volume)). This dating evidence could suggest that the area around Nerrols Farm saw periodic settlement shifts during the course of the early-medieval period.

While the remains from Nerrols Farm are sparse, they are of some interest: early-medieval settlement evidence pre-dating the 10th century is rare in Somerset due to the absence of pottery and scarcity of other datable finds (Webster 2000; 2007). More substantial remains from this period have recently been excavated at Bridgwater Gateway, comprising a ditched enclosure radiocarbon dated to the 6th-7th century cal AD and a group of iron smelting furnaces dated to the 5th-7th century cal AD. Notably, none of these features produced any material culture other than iron slag and charcoal (Simmonds 2020). The discoveries at Nerrols Farm and Bridgwater Gateway underline the need in this region for radiocarbon dating to identify early-medieval sites that may otherwise go unrecognised due to a lack of associated artefacts.

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