

# INVESTIGATION OF LATER PREHISTORIC AND ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT AT HUNTWORTH, 2006

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## SUMMARY

Excavation in 2006 on land at Huntworth, south of Bridgwater, revealed evidence of a Middle/Late Iron Age open settlement, comprising a number of roundhouses and pits, situated on the edge of the River Parrett floodplain, in an area with little previous evidence of this date. The area of settlement was subsequently bounded by a substantial ditch of Late Iron Age/Romano-British date, and then overlain in the Roman period by a series of lesser ditches defining an array of sub-rectangular fields, the small assemblage of Romano-British finds from them indicating settlement activity in the area. Medieval and later field boundaries were also recorded.

## INTRODUCTION

Between May and September 2006, an archaeological excavation was undertaken on land at Huntworth, between Bridgwater and North Petherton village, Somerset, in advance of its development as the Regional Rural Business Centre. The excavation (Wessex Archaeology 2007) was the final stage of a programme of archaeological works that had included geophysical survey (Stratascan 2006) and evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2006).

The development site, covering some 21ha (centred on NGR 330 134), comprised a rectangular block of hedged agricultural fields under pasture bounded to the west by the A38 Taunton Road, to the south by Park Lane, to the east by the M5 and to the north by a slip road for Junction 24 of the M5; it

is bisected by Huntworth Lane (Fig. 1). The ground is generally flat, falling slightly from 30m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) in the south to 22m aOD in the north.

The underlying geology is Mercian Mudstone (British Geological Survey 1984), with soils of the Newnham Association comprising well-drained reddish coarse and fine loamy soils over gravel, with some similar soils affected by groundwater (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983). The site lies *c.* 1.5km south-west of the River Parrett, on the edge of the floodplain.

Little evidence of prehistoric activity is recorded in the area (Gathercole 2003), although the Somerset Historic Environment Record (SHER) records two possible enclosures (SHER 11264), suggested by soil marks visible in aerial photographs, lying within the northern part of the site, the eastern of which is bisected by the M5; neither has been subjected to archaeological investigation. Further possible enclosures are recorded west of the site. A 2nd and 3rd-century AD Romano-British occupation site was recorded *c.* 1km south at Parker's Field, North Petherton (Barnie 1973), but little is known of its extent or character.

## THE EXCAVATION

Seven areas (Areas 1–7) (Fig. 1) were targeted for archaeological 'strip, map and record' excavation based on the results of the evaluation, including three adjacent areas (Areas 5–7) in the northern part of the site, although part of this area could not be

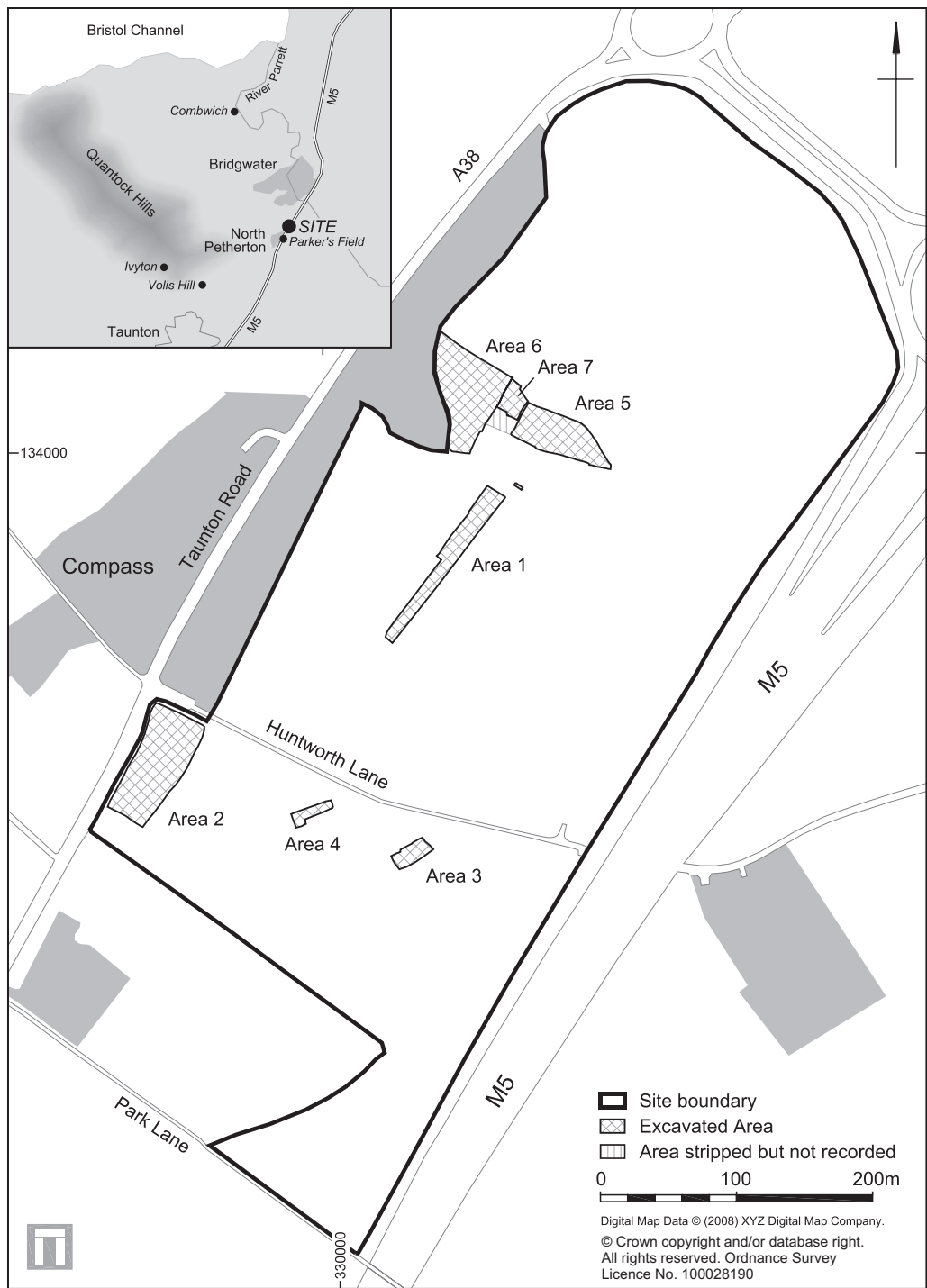


Fig. 1 Site location and excavation areas

investigated due to the presence of overhead electrical cables. Most of the archaeological features of Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval date, which are the subject of this report, were recorded in Areas 5–7 (Fig. 2). Other features are undated but of probable post-medieval or modern date.

### Middle–Late Iron Age

Part of a Middle–Late Iron Age settlement was recorded in Areas 6 and 7, comprising at least two (possibly four) roundhouses identified by lengths of curved gully, a four-post structure and a possible small enclosure or pen.

At the west of Area 6, and extending beyond the edge of the excavation, a heavily truncated gully (7337), averaging 0.3m wide and just 0.03m deep, formed the eastern arc of a circle with a projected internal diameter of 10.7m, its single fill producing five sherds (90g) of Iron Age pottery. A small shallow feature (7411) on its outer edge contained 11 sherds (37g) from a Late Iron Age cordoned jar, but the stratigraphical relationship between them could not be established. Although a square arrangement of four postholes straddling the gully at the south-east, the usual location for an entrance, could indicate the roundhouse's porch structure, it was slightly misaligned on the gully and probably represents a separate four-post structure of a different phase (7442, below); there was no break in the gully at that point. A sub-rectangular hearth (7332), just north of centre within the roundhouse, measured 0.7m by 1.1m and comprised a 0.1m deep cut with moderately steep sides and a flat base. Although the base displayed slight effects of burning, there was a relatively small amount of charcoal in its single fill, which also contained fragments of heavily abraded and undated pottery and one fragment of unidentified animal bone.

A second roundhouse was represented some 24m to the east by gully 7334 which formed the northern arc of a circle 11m in diameter. Although more substantial than gully 7337, averaging 0.5m wide and 0.13m deep, it was not recorded to the south of Romano-British ditch 7445 (below) with which it intersected, suggesting a heavier level of truncation in the area bounded by the ditch. There was no break in the surviving length of gully, but a south-south-east facing entrance could have been located on the line of and south of the ditch. The gully's single fill produced 29 sherds (172g) of Iron Age pottery, a chronologically undiagnostic flint core and a

possibly utilised pebble. There were no internal features. Diverging eastwards from gully 7334 on its north-eastern side was a further length of similar curved gully (7394) (not recorded in Area 7), which may represent a modification to the roundhouse, increasing its diameter to 11.9m. It produced (in addition to four pieces – 102g – of burnt sandstone) 12 sherds (27g) of intrusive medieval pottery that almost certainly derived from a medieval ditch (7446, below) that cut the gully.

A third possible roundhouse, in Area 7, was indicated by an arc of gully (7537) forming less than a quarter of a circle (on its north-east quadrant) *c.* 12m in diameter. It had a clear terminal at its southern end indicating the likely position of an east-south-east facing entrance. Its single fill contained abraded fragments of fired clay, and produced 40 sherds (283g) of Iron Age pottery, probably from just two vessels, one a 'baggy' convex vessel with short upright rim in a heavily organic-tempered fabric, the other in a rock-tempered fabric with prominent ?shale inclusions.

A very truncated 5m length of possible gully (7338), 0.5m wide and 0.05m deep, may have formed part of the western arc of a circle, *c.* 6.5m in diameter. However, its stratigraphic relationship with Late Iron Age/Romano-British ditch 7509 at its north was not established, and although potentially part of a roundhouse gully, it may have had some other function. It contained abraded fragments of fired clay but no datable finds.

Three lengths of gully (7470, 7443 and 7444) appear to combine to form a small enclosed area, or pen, between roundhouses 7334 and 7337, and may be associated with this focus of settlement activity. Gully 7470, which averaged 0.6m wide and 0.07m deep, ran for *c.* 12m from a spread of silt (7522) in a shallow natural depression at the south-south-west, to either a terminal curving slightly to the north-east or to a point where it had been completely truncated. After a 2m wide gap, gully 7444 (0.7m wide and 0.1m deep) continued this line, then curved sharply round to the south where it was cut by Romano-British ditch 7445. At the north-west, a 3.4m length of more substantial gully (7443), 0.9m wide and 0.24m deep, flanking gully 7444 on its outer side, almost closed the gap between it and gully 7470. None of these gullies produced any finds. A further short length of curved gully (7532) inside the 'pen', cut at its south end by ditch 7445, contained a number of Romano-British and clearly intrusive medieval sherds, and could possibly date to this period.

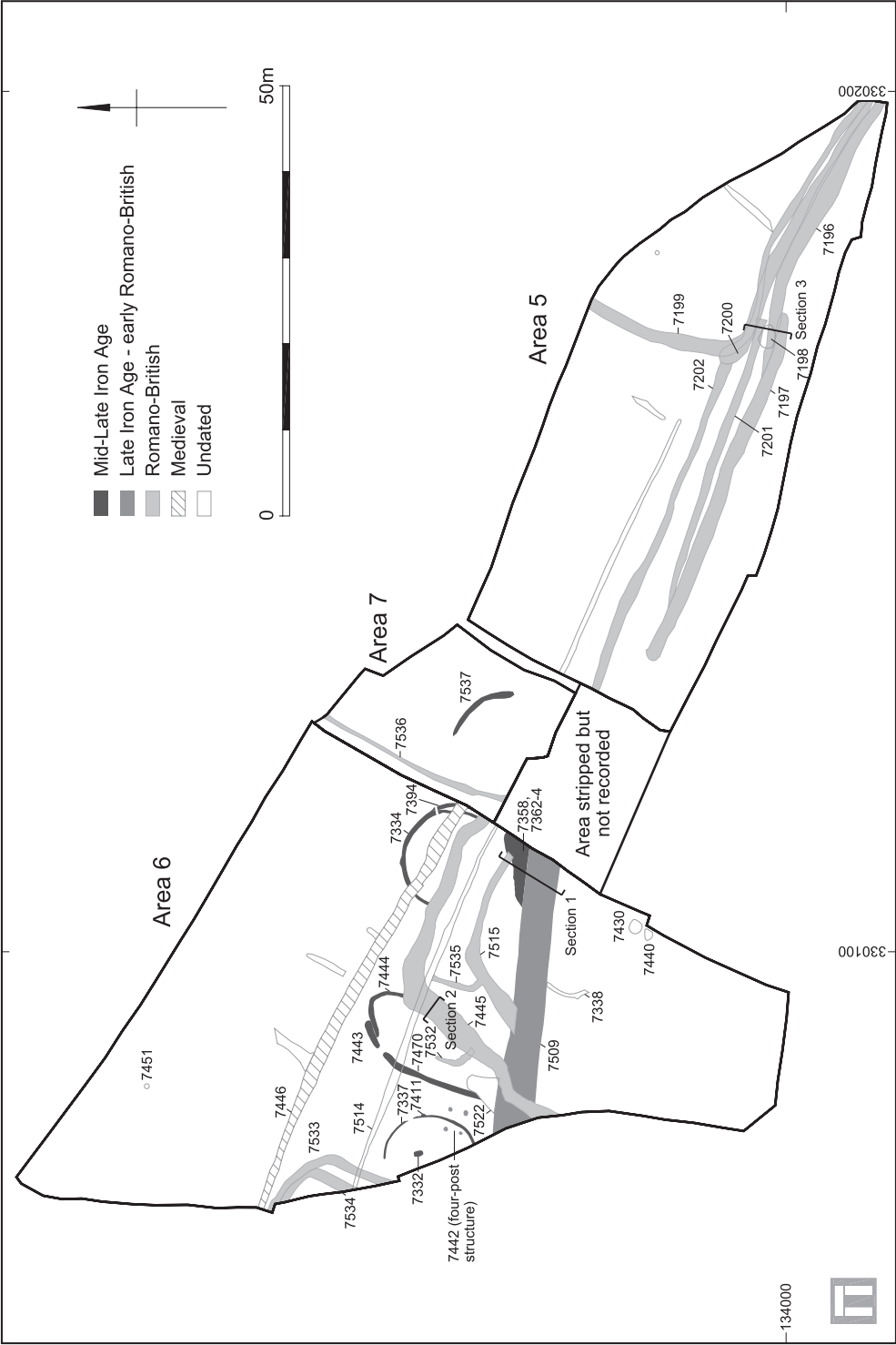


Fig. 2 Phase plan of Areas 5-7

A number of intercutting features (7358 and 7362–4), probably pits, were recorded on the eastern edge of Area 6, all predating Late Iron Age/Romano-British ditch 7509. They were recorded only in section in a slot cut through the ditch and what appeared to be a spread of soil on its northern side, but which proved to comprise the pits' upper fills. The pits varied considerably in their lower fill sequences and contents (Fig. 3, section 1). The earliest (7364), was at least 0.65m deep, but was heavily truncated by feature 7363 and only the base of a charcoal-rich fill survived. Feature 7363 contained seven fills indicating a sequence of natural silting, two of the lower fills producing four sherds (39g) of Iron Age pottery, four pieces of burnt sandstone, abraded fragments of fired clay and seven fragments of unidentified animal bone. Feature 7362, which was 1m deep, was filled to near the top with a single fill which contained part of a fired clay triangular loomweight. Feature 7358, also 1m deep, produced a single Iron Age sherd (5g) and a piece of slag (27g) from its basal fill, above which were five layers, all but the middle of which, consisting largely of redeposited natural clay, were the result of natural silting.

Outside the focus of settlement activity, near the north-west corner of Area 6, an isolated shallow pit (7451), 0.5m in diameter, contained burnt stone and charcoal, but displayed no evidence of in situ burning. Towards the south-east of Area 6 were two shallow, sub-circular scoops (7430 and 7440), 1.3m and 0.9m in diameter respectively, and c. 0.1m deep, both also containing dumps of burnt material, that in the former producing four small pieces of fired clay and an abraded fragment of ceramic building material.

### **Late Iron Age–early Romano-British**

A series of ditches were recorded across Areas 5, 6 and 7, with predominantly east-south-east–west–north-west orientations, and although different phases of construction are clearly evident, assigning them secure dates is problematic. However, the earliest ditch which appears to have been also the most substantial (7509), ran east–west across Area 6 but was not recorded in Areas 7 or 5 indicating that it either terminated, or turned to the south, in the unrecorded area. It was 3.5–4.5m wide and up to 1m deep with steep, slightly concave sides and a broad flat base (Fig. 3, section 1). Its lowest fill produced five Late Iron Age/Romano-British sherds

(43g) and a single Romano-British sherd (14g) with further Iron Age and Romano-British pottery recovered from the overlying layers. Apart from undated scoops 7430 and 7440 and undated gully 7338, all the possible settlement features described above lay to its north, and only the gully and intercutting pits 7358 and 7362–4 were cut by it, suggesting that the ditch may have defined a southern boundary to the former (or possibly still contemporary) settlement area.

The four-post structure (7442) straddling roundhouse gully 7337 measured 1.8m by 2.4m. Its postholes averaged 0.5m in diameter and 0.2m deep. One posthole (7436) contained three sherds (19g) of Late Iron Age/Romano-British pottery, perhaps indicating that this structure postdated the destruction/demolition of the roundhouse. It may be significant that the orientation of its long axis is close to that of ditch 7509.

### **Romano-British**

The scale and orientation of ditch 7509 contrast with the sequence of the other pre-medieval ditches (below), which in Area 6 all cut through or impinged on the Iron Age roundhouses, and which therefore postdate the main period of settlement activity. Many contained only small quantities of datable material (Iron Age, Late Iron Age and Romano-British pottery) and while those that can be shown to be stratigraphically late (7445 and 7197) clearly date to the Romano-British period, the beginning of the sequence is not so easy to date. However, given the change in alignment they all display, it is likely that they all postdate ditch 7509 and are at least of early Romano-British date, even though three of those in Area 5 (7196, 7199 and 7200) contained only Iron Age pottery, albeit just four sherds between them.

When viewed as a group this sequence of ditches appears to represent the reworking of a system of sub-rectangular fields or enclosures, possibly incorporating a trackway. At the west, ditches 7533 and 7534 appear to form the remodelled north-eastern corner of a possible sub-rectangular field/enclosure lying mostly outside the excavation area. The earlier ditch (7534), which was c. 1m wide and 0.5m deep, was cut on its outer edge by the shallower (1m by 0.25m) ditch 7533. Between them they produced 23 sherds (132g) of Romano-British pottery, and, from 7534, a piece of burnt limestone.

Some 20m to the east-south-east, another pair of ditches (7445 and 7515), this time 3.3–4.8m apart,



appear to form the north-western corner of another field/enclosure. Although the outer (northern) ditch (7445) clearly extended into Area 7, it was not recorded during that stage of the excavation. It is possible, however, that both ditches are related to, and possibly continuations of, the ditches further east in Area 5 (below). Together they appear to represent a double boundary, or a reworked boundary, or a track or drove-way, the traffic along which could possibly account for the truncation of the southern half of roundhouse gully 7334.

Ditch 7445 was 2–3.5m wide and up to 1.2m deep with moderate to steep convex sides and a narrow base (Fig. 3, section 2). It cut roundhouse gully 7334, 'pen' gully 7444 and the fully silted Late Iron Age/Romano-British ditch 7509. Romano-British pottery was recovered from all but its primary fill, along with residual Iron Age pottery. It also contained a piece of ceramic building material (possibly Romano-British), a piece of slag and fragments of burnt sandstone. The substantial quantity of medieval pottery (140 sherds, 1044g) recovered from this ditch came exclusively from the uppermost of its (up to five) fills. A further six medieval sherds, along with four Romano-British sherds, came from the short curved gully (7532) (which lay within the small Iron Age 'pen', above), the southern end of which was cut by the ditch.

In contrast, the southern (inner) ditch (7515) was 0.8–1m wide and no more than 0.15m deep with a rounded concave profile. Its single fill produced one Late Iron Age sherd and two fragments of intrusive medieval pottery. At the west it was recorded up to but not beyond Late Iron Age/Romano-British ditch 7509 and its stratigraphic relationship with 7509 was not established due to its shallow depth; its relationship with the intercutting pits at the east was similarly unclear. A short gully (7535), 0.8m wide but only 0.05m deep, running north from the ditch, had a comparable position to that of gully 7532 in relation to ditch 7445 (above); it contained three sherds of Romano-British pottery.

The line of ditch 7515 appears to continue in Area 5 as ditch 7202, one of the series of largely parallel ditches running east-south-east–west-north-west (7196–7198 and 7199–7202). Some of these ditches overlapped providing a stratigraphical sequence, although towards the east it was not easy to distinguish them in plan and the correlation of their excavated sections should be treated with some caution. All the ditches, which were generally 1–2m wide and 0.4–0.7m deep, appeared to have silted up naturally (Fig. 3, section 3). Two ditches

(7196 and 7201) were cut by an undated pit (7198) close to the point where many of the ditches converged.

One ditch (7200), which ran from the east, ended near the centre of Area 5 at a rounded terminal that curved to the north-west. It was subsequently recut by ditch 7199, which turned at a near right-angle to the north-north-east continuing past the earlier terminal towards the northern edge of the site. Matching its alignment, in Area 7, was ditch 7536, which produced 33 sherds (294g) of Romano-British pottery along with fragments of abraded fired clay and a piece of burnt flint. The most southerly of these ditches (7197), which ran for 43m between two terminals, was possibly the latest stratigraphically, cutting both ditches 7196 and 7201 and containing exclusively Romano-British pottery (18 sherds, 109g). It is possible that, with ditch 7202, 3.5m to its north, it defined a trackway, perhaps related to that suggested between ditches 7445 and 7515 in Area 6.

### Medieval

The only clearly medieval feature was ditch 7446, aligned west-north-west–east-south-east and therefore following closely the field boundary orientation established in the Roman period. Although it crossed the full extent of Area 6, it was not recorded in Area 5. The ditch, which bowed out slightly to the north, widened from *c.* 0.8m at the west to 1.7m at the east, and was up to 0.4m deep, having up to two fills and producing a quantity of locally made coarseware pottery of 11th–13th century date. Rye and free-threshing wheat grain and several seeds of broad bean were recovered from the ditch, together with a larger quantity of twig wood charcoal, which could possibly have resulted from clearing scrub from a hedgerow or the removal of a hedgerow. This ditch probably served as a field boundary and may be associated with a number of truncated gullies which ran northwards perpendicularly from it. A slight, undated ditch (7514) to its south which continued east in Area 5, and a number of other linear features are also probably of medieval or later date.

A large proportion of the medieval pottery assemblage derived from the upper tertiary fill of ditch 7445. The sediment description of a monolith sample taken through this ditch suggests this tertiary fill represents the ploughing in of material some time after disuse of the ditch, and therefore it is likely that this medieval pottery may relate to domestic waste dumped in fields during manuring.

# FINDS

Lorraine Mephram

## Pottery

The small pottery assemblage contained material of Middle/Late Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval date (Table 1), although dating has been hampered by the recurrence of certain inclusion types in several periods, the scarcity of diagnostic sherds, and the generally poor condition of the assemblage. Mean sherd weight overall is 6.1g, and a significant proportion of sherds have suffered high degrees of abrasion on surfaces and broken edges, either through post-depositional movement or through aggressive soil conditions, or a combination of the two.

### Iron Age

Four broad fabric groups were defined: sandy, rock-tempered, organic-tempered and calcareous, although there are obvious overlaps between these, rock inclusions also occurring in some sandy and organic-tempered wares. 'Rock-tempered' in this instance includes sherds with obvious igneous inclusions, as well as those containing sandstone, or prominent fragments of laminar, micaceous rock, possibly shale or a related stone type.

Diagnostic sherds are confined to four rim sherds and a decorated body sherd. The rim sherds are from

convex or rounded jar/bowl forms, with short upright/everted or slightly beaded rims. One has horizontal tooled lines below the rim. One body sherd carries incised diagonal lines from the ?shoulder of the vessel. Forms and decoration would fit within the regional Middle to Late Iron Age ceramic sequence; there are no obvious examples of South-Western decorated style vessels, although some of the fabrics could be accommodated within Peacock's 'Glastonbury ware' fabric groups (1969). Parallels can be made with the Iron Age assemblages from, for example, Norton Fitzwarren (Woodward 1989), Meare (Rouillard 1987) and Dibble's Farm, Christon (Morris 1988).

### Late Iron Age/Romano-British

No definite Late Iron Age forms were noted, although it is possible that some of the 'Middle Iron Age' wares date slightly later in the sequence. A few sherds in sandy wares have been more broadly dated as Late Iron Age/Romano-British (1st century AD); these include a countersunk handle from ditch 7509, and a cordoned jar from feature 7411.

More obviously 'Romanised' wares include coarse greywares, oxidised and grog-tempered wares (which probably include the products of more than one source, although all likely to be relatively local), and a few identifiable sherds of south-east Dorset Black Burnished ware. There is nothing to indicate a more closely refined date range within the Roman period.

TABLE 1: POTTERY ASSEMBLAGE BY WARE TYPE

Period	Ware type	No. sherds	Weight (g)
<i>Iron Age</i>	Sandy	15	130
	Rock-tempered ware	65	431
	Organic tempered ware	25	294
	Calcareous ware	2	15
	<i>sub-total</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>870</i>
<i>Late Iron Age/ Romano-British</i>	Greyware	101	529
	Black Burnished ware	6	49
	Oxidised ware	3	7
	Coarse sandy ware	28	117
	Grog-tempered ware	2	67
	<i>sub-total</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>769</i>
<i>Medieval</i>	Sandy ware	10	61
	Flint-/chert-tempered ware	20	73
	Rock-tempered ware	144	1014
	Calcareous ware	11	21
	<i>sub-total</i>	<i>185</i>	<i>1169</i>
<i>Undated</i>	Rock-tempered ware	1	1
	Grog-tempered ware	1	1
	Calcareous ware	34	45
	<i>sub-total</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>47</i>
	Overall total	468	2855

### Medieval

All of the medieval wares are coarsewares. Most contain rock inclusions (largely igneous but also including some ?shale fragments); there are smaller quantities of sandy and flint- or chert-tempered wares, while a small group of heavily leached sherds from gully 7394 probably originally contained calcareous inclusions. All are likely to be at least relatively locally produced. These wares appear to be used predominantly for jar forms, although one bowl rim was recognised. The coarser wares are likely to have a date range of 11th/12th century, with the sandy wares perhaps slightly later 12th/13th century. A large part of the medieval assemblage (124 sherds) comprised intrusive material in Romano-British ditch 7445, all but three of these sherds coming from its uppermost fill.

### Other finds

Two pieces of ceramic building material were recovered, one possibly Romano-British (ditch 7445), the other undiagnostic (undated scoop 7430). The 32 pieces of fired clay (426g) are likely to be of structural origin, from hearth/pit linings or upstanding structures. One fragment from a triangular loomweight – a characteristic Iron Age form – was identified (possible pit 7362).

No obviously worked pieces of stone were recovered, although one fragment (885g) with worn surfaces, from medieval ditch 7446, might have derived from a saddle quern. A number of pieces of sandstone, and one of limestone, had been burnt.

The worked flint comprises one core and five flakes, none of which are chronologically distinctive within the prehistoric period. Other finds comprised two pieces of slag (31g), a small iron tack or hobnail, and a small quantity of animal bone in very poor and fragmentary condition.

## ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Chris J. Stevens

During the excavations 31 environmental samples were taken from features of Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval date (Table 2). The samples were processed using standard flotation techniques and the flots were assessed in detail using a stereo-binocular microscope. The identifications and the nomenclature used below follows that of Stace (1997).

### Iron Age

Cereal remains were generally sparse within the Iron Age features and only that from the gully of roundhouse 7337 (section 7413, fill 7414) produced any significant numbers of cereal remains. This had a single grain of probable spelt (*Triticum spelta*) and several unidentified glume bases of general hulled wheats (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*). A few other cereal grains were also recovered, but were too poorly preserved for identification. There were also few identifiable weed seeds, including single seeds of vetch (*Vicia/Lathyrus* sp.), Polygonaceae, and black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*).

A single sample from the Late Iron Age/Romano-British ditch 7509 (section 7357, fill 7374) contained two rachises of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and two glume bases. A further sample from possible Iron Age scoop (7440) contained several glume bases and a single spikelet fork of emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*).

The presence of hulled wheats, including both emmer and spelt, is widely recorded from sites in this area of south-west England, for example, Ham Hill (Ede 1990; 1999; Leivers *et al.* 2006) and Meare Lake Village (Helbaek 1952), although generally spelt is dominant at many Iron Age sites in the region, notably Glastonbury (Housley 1987), Poundbury (Monk 1987) and Cannards Grave, Shepton Mallet (Hinton 2002).

Modern roots were very high in the samples and charred material is poorly preserved close to or within the active soil horizon. As such the poor numbers of cereal remains may be more reflective of the shallow nature of the deposits rather than a genuine absence perhaps related to short-lived or relatively low-intensity occupation.

### Romano-British

Thirteen samples were taken from Romano-British ditch fills. Only one of these contained any cereal remains comprising a few glumes of spelt wheat and an unidentified cereal grain. Spelt wheat is well documented from Romano-British sites in the general region, for example, Ilchester to the east (Stevens 1999). However, the almost total absence of such material is consistent with these features being field ditches rather than related to occupation and it is hence more probable that these remains are reworked from Iron Age deposits.



## Medieval

Medieval ditch 7446 was much richer in charred cereal remains, yielding large numbers of grains of rye (*Secale cereale*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), with some of free-threshing wheat (*Triticum aestivum/turgidum* type), as well as several seeds of broad-bean (*Vicia faba*) that were noticeably larger than the normal Iron Age or 'celtic' bean (*Vicia faba* subsp. *minor*), and a single fragment of hazelnut shell. Such remains are similar to medieval assemblages from Bridport, Dorset, where rye, barley and free-threshing wheat are all well represented, along with broad bean (Stevens 2000). One sample from ditch 7446 also contained high amounts of charcoal, dominated by twig wood, possibly representing the clearance of a hedge or overgrown wood shrub adjacent to or within the ditch.

## DISCUSSION

Establishing a detailed chronology for the site was hampered by the small quantity of datable artefacts, although the possibility that there may have been a degree of continuity of activity from the Late Iron Age (perhaps earlier) into the early Roman period makes it a significant addition to our understanding of this broad period, in this part of Somerset. That understanding has been largely based, until recently, either on excavations at hillforts or in the rather atypical contexts of the 'lake villages' at Glastonbury and Meare (Fitzpatrick 2008), although a combination of extensive surveys (eg Miles and Miles 1969; Tabor 2004; Riley 2006; Southern Quantocks Archaeological Survey) and recent development work has revealed a considerable density and variety of Iron Age settlements on both higher and lower lying ground.

Evidence of Iron Age agricultural settlement in the wider area is concentrated in the Quantock and Polden Hills. The site at Huntworth, however, is situated on low-lying land below the Quantocks' eastern foothills, on the edge of the former marshland of the Somerset Levels. It lies close to the floodplain of the River Parrett, and was probably liable to flooding. It occupies part of the landscape that has previously provided little evidence of either late prehistoric or Romano-British occupation, although aerial photographs reveal a number of enclosures close to the site, some possibly of Iron Age date.

In the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age the Somerset Levels saw the onset of wetter conditions, but there

may have been a reduction of flooding by the Middle Iron Age (Straker *et al.* 2008), enabling the expansion of open settlement and farming onto areas of lower lying ground such as that occupied by the site, possibly initially on a seasonal basis. The small 'pen' sited within the centre of the Iron Age settlement may reflect the role of animal husbandry, although the sparse cereal remains and the lack of animal bone (through its poor survival) hinders further discussion of both Iron Age to Romano-British economy and agriculture.

The site may be contrasted with some of the Iron Age settlement enclosures investigated as part of the Southern Quantocks Archaeological Survey, such as at Ivyton Farm (Roffey *et al.* 2005) and Volis Hill (Thorpe 2003), although a comparison may be made with a small 5th–3rd century BC open settlement at Cannards Grave, Shepton Mallet, comprising four roundhouses within an open grassland environment (Birbeck 2002).

Whether or not there was a hiatus in activity between the Iron Age and Romano-British phases of activity, the relatively substantial nature of the earliest ditch (7509) may point to some reorganisation or formalisation of land boundaries in the early Romano-British period, and the recutting of later field ditches suggests a more permanent economic exploitation of the low-lying ground. However, whether these field systems played a role in arable, pastoral or mixed farming could not be determined.

In the Romano-British period, the site lay within an area of predominantly rural settlement little affected by the process of urbanisation (Gathercole 2003). The nearest Roman town was at Ilchester (*Lindinis*) some 25km to the south-east, linked by a Roman road on the north side of the Parrett valley to the settlement, and probable port on the river, at Combwich (Pike and Langdon 1981). The site, therefore, lies outside these two foci of Romanised settlement and so may be characterised by a continuation of essentially native settlement and agricultural patterns (Hunt and Sellman 1973).

The low levels of plant remains from the ditches are consistent with their being field ditches, rather than defining settlement enclosures, and a clear focus of settlement has yet to be identified in the area, although some form of Romano-British activity has been recorded c. 1km to the south, at Parker's Field, North Petherton (Barnie 1973), comprising a ditch, a sandstone slab and some stakeholes, and producing 2nd and 3rd-century pottery and a coin. It is possible that the associated settlement was some distance

from the site, perhaps on the higher ground to the west, situated so as to exploit different zones within the landscape for different forms of agriculture.

### The archive

The project archive will be deposited with Somerset County Museum, Taunton, under the accession code TTN CM:11/2008. It is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology under the reference numbers 62360 for the archaeological field evaluation and 62361 for the archaeological mitigation works.

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