

# MULTI-PERIOD ARCHAEOLOGY AT WELLOW LANE PEASEDOWN ST JOHN: EXCAVATIONS 2004–5

MICHAEL ROWE AND MARY ALEXANDER

*with contributions by Rowena Gale, Teresa Gilmore,  
E.R. McSloy, Elizabeth Pearson and Sylvia Warman*

## **Summary**

Excavations in 2004–5 at Wellow Lane, Peasedown St John revealed two burials of human bone dated to the Middle Bronze Age. A deep ditch of uncertain function and part of a possible field system suggested activity in the Middle Iron Age. Part of an enclosure of late Roman date was also identified. Extending beyond the northern limit of the excavated area was a ‘D’-shaped enclosure with internal postholes. Radiocarbon dated charred plant remains recovered from the ditch fill indicated that the enclosure was in use in the Middle Saxon period. Undated postholes within the enclosure implied small non-domestic structures. A cluster of features dating to the 11th to 13th centuries suggested further activity on the site in this period.

The excavation also demonstrated a southerly continuation of the burial ground identified by evaluation trenches located to the north-east of the excavated area. These burials could not be reliably dated but postdate the Iron Age field system and may be related to the Late Saxon and early medieval evidence for settlement at Eckweek to the north. Residual Mesolithic flints were also recovered from an excavated feature.

a 11ha business park at Wellow Lane, Peasedown St John was granted by Bath and North East Somerset Council in 2002. As a requirement of this permission a programme of archaeological work was carried out by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) to fulfil the terms of a Section 106 agreement. The site lies just beyond the south-east limit of the village of Peasedown St John, c. 9km south-west of Bath, centred on NGR ST 7120 5705 (Fig. 1). It is of roughly triangular shape and is bounded by the A367 Peasedown by-pass to the north-west, Wellow Lane to the south, and Eckweek Lane to the east. Prior to the start of development the site was subdivided into three fields by mature hedgerows. All three fields were most recently used as grazing land.

The site lies in the upper reaches of a shallow dry valley, on land sloping down gently to the south-east from c. 145m to 136m OD. Beyond the site the land descends more steeply to the Wellow Brook, a tributary of the River Avon, at around 60m OD. To the north-west is the modern village of Peasedown St John, lying on a broad plateau. The underlying geology is mapped as Jurassic Limestone of the inferior oolite group (BGS 2000) part of an oolitic ridge to the east of the Mendips.

## **Archaeological background**

The site lies in an area rich in prehistoric and Roman activity. Residual finds of Bronze Age pottery and

## **INTRODUCTION**

Outline planning permission for the development of

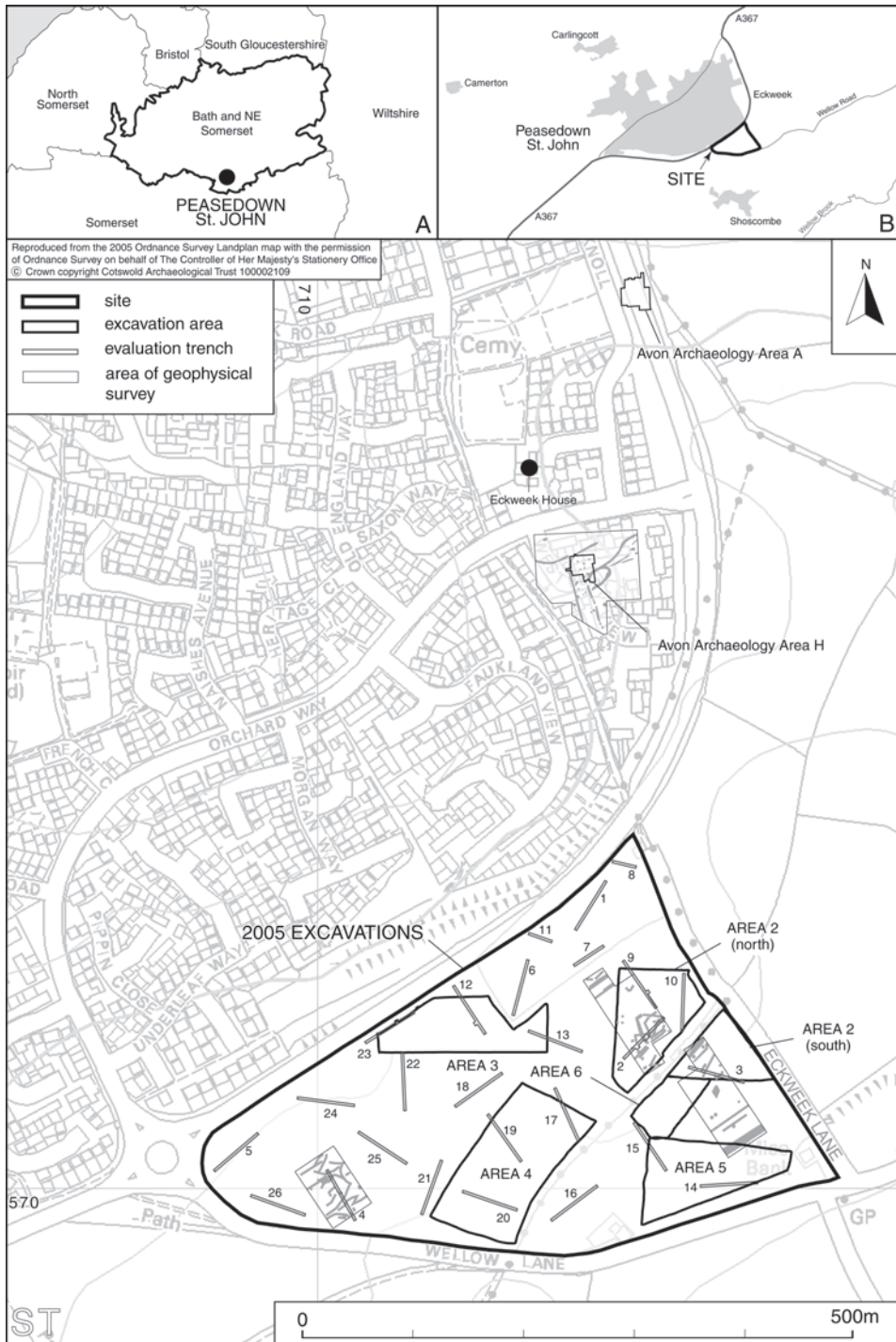


Fig. 1 Site location plan

flint arrowheads were found at the excavations at Eckweek House approximately 500m to the north (Fig. 1, Area H). Possible occupation evidence and a substantial ditch dating to the Iron Age were also revealed and a geophysical survey suggested an arrangement of ditches funnelling south towards Eckweek Lane (A. Young, pers. comm.). Approximately 450m to the south-west of the site a further defensive 'V'-shaped ditch was identified containing a human skeleton, Iron Age pottery and fragments of a copper-working crucible (Wedlake 1958). Iron Age settlement and burials were recorded at Camerton 2.5km to the west of the site, superseded by a small Roman roadside settlement on the Fosse Way (Wedlake 1958, 37–41; Burnham and Wachter 1990, 292–6).

The excavations to the north-east and south of Eckweek House also revealed Late Saxon and medieval settlement. In total, eight houses were identified spanning the 10th–15th century (Fig. 1, Areas A and H). The settlement is recorded in Domesday Book as *Ecewiche*; the excavations are unpublished, but a short summary is contained in Aston 1994, 235. Undated earthworks around 200m to the south of the site may also represent remnants of medieval settlement recorded in an aerial photograph of 1946 (RAF sortie no. 3G/TUD/UK/15/25).

In the light of the archaeological remains in the vicinity, when plans were first developed for the construction of a business park at Wellow Lane, it was necessary to assess the archaeological potential of the site itself. Following an initial desk-based archaeological assessment (CAT 2000a), a geophysical survey of the site identified features representing possible pits and a large ditch (Stratascan 2000). This was followed by the excavation of 26 evaluation trenches, which identified 16 roughly east–west aligned grave-shaped cuts in trench 1, which formed part of a cemetery of unknown date in the north-east corner of the site. The graves were not fully excavated, although part of an extended inhumation was revealed and human bone was also observed in two other grave fills. Some inconclusive evidence for undated settlement activity was recorded in a number of trenches dispersed across the site, and an isolated deep ditch or earthwork of probable Iron Age date was identified in trench 2, to the south of the inhumation cemetery (CAT 2000b).

### Excavation methodology

Given the potential demonstrated in the evaluation an agreement attached to the planning consent

required strip and record excavation in five areas (Area 2 (north), Area 2 (south), Areas 3–5), selected on the results from previous work. Area 6 was subsequently stripped in order to fully investigate features revealed within Area 5, (Figs 2–6). These areas were stripped by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision, down to the level at which archaeological features were revealed. Features were then cleaned and excavated by hand. All discreet features were 50% excavated, linear features were 25% excavated and 50% of tree-throw pits were sample excavated. It proved possible to preserve the inhumation cemetery identified in the evaluation and no further work occurred here.

### RESULTS

Extensive ground truncation throughout the excavated area was apparent from the poor preservation of most archaeological remains, including burials, and from the shallowness of overlying soils which ranged from 0.1–0.2m in depth. The archaeological features identified were generally widely spaced with very little stratigraphy and the dateable finds were few. Consequently many of the features remain undated or can only be dated in broad terms. The burials are dated solely on the basis of radiocarbon dates derived from associated charred plant material, as the bone preservation was of insufficient quality. Where features are only broadly dated they have been assigned to the latest possible phase to which they could belong. Six periods of activity were recorded on the site, ranging from the Middle Bronze Age to the 13th century AD. Radiocarbon dates presented in the text are calibrated at 95.4% confidence. Details are contained in Table 1.

In addition four flint blades or bladelets of Mesolithic date were recovered from within the fill of tree throw pit 4048 (Fig. 3). As Mid–late Iron Age pottery was also retrieved from the same fill, the flints are residual in their context although indicative of Mesolithic activity in the vicinity.

#### Period 1: Middle Bronze Age (c. 15th century BC)

Two pits in Area 3 contained human bone, Burial H was a very shallow oval pit 1.27m long, 0.59m wide, and only 0.02m deep (containing a single human bone) and Burial G was a shallow sub-circular pit, 1.04m long, 0.81m wide and 0.12m deep (containing

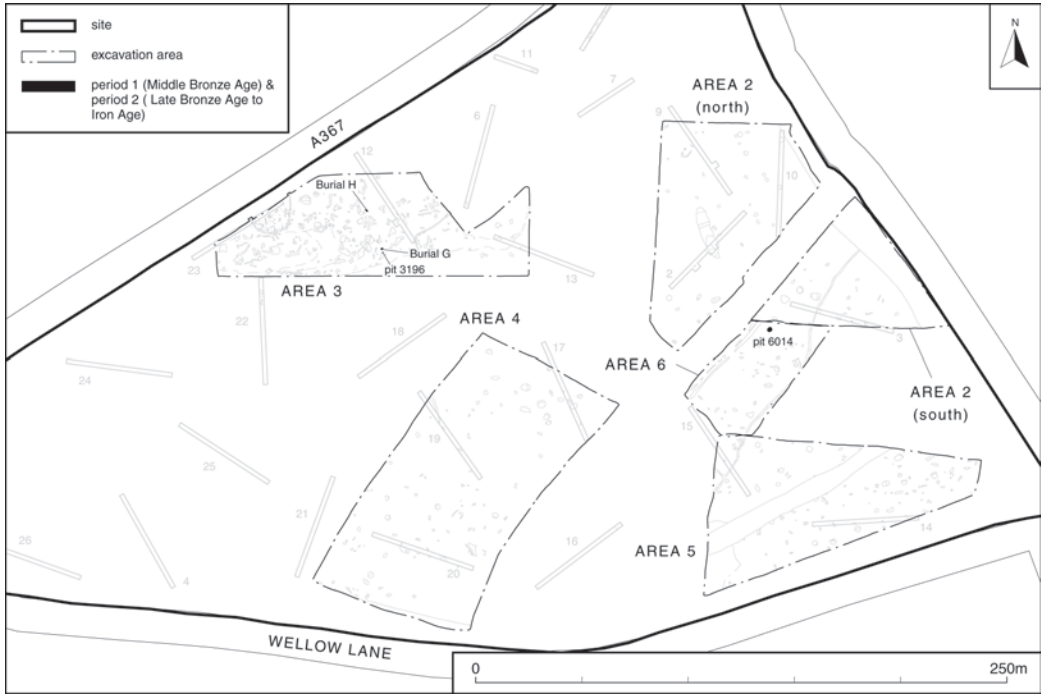


Fig. 2 Periods 1 and 2

a truncated crouched inhumation) (Fig. 2). Charred plant remains from Burial G provided radiocarbon dates of 1510–1390 cal BC (Wk-18621) and 1640–1450 cal BC (Wk-18622). Burial H is assigned to this period because it appears to be the truncated remains of a similar pit burial and lay in the proximity of Burial G.

Pit 3196, contained a small amount of cremated bone and may be the remains of a cremation burial; associated charred plant material produced a calibrated radiocarbon date of 1610–1420 cal BC (Wk-18625). This pit lay in close proximity to Burial G and together with the two inhumations suggest that this part of the site was used for burial around the 15th century BC.

### Period 2: Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (c. 11th to 5th century BC)

A single isolated circular pit, 6014, c. 2m in diameter in Area 6 is the only feature allocated to this phase (Fig. 2). Pottery sherds recovered from this feature are characteristically different from that identified

elsewhere on site and appear to predate the Later Iron Age.

### Period 3: Later Iron Age (c. 4th century BC to c. AD 43)

Ditch A crossed Area 2 (south) and Areas 5 and 6 (Fig. 3). Two recuts of the ditch were recorded in areas of softer geology. Elsewhere recutting was not visible, but may have followed the original cut through the bedrock. The ditch had been recut at least twice, although this was only visible where it crossed areas of softer geology. Here changes to the original ditch profile could be observed, as the softer fill would have been easier to extract than cutting through the bedrock. The ditch was orientated north-east/south-west with a silty fill. Iron Age pottery was recovered from the latest fills. A branch of this ditch running north was recorded at its south-western extent.

In Area 2 (north) a wide, steep-sided ditch (Ditch C) 25m long, 5m wide and c. 1.7m deep was excavated (Figs 3 and 4). A number of pottery fragments and pieces of animal bone were recovered

TABLE 1: RADIOCARBON DATES

Lab no	Type	Contxt/ Period	Feature	Material used	Radio-carbon Age (BP)	Calibrated date range (at 95.4% confidence)
Wk-18241	AMS	2078/4	Burial L	human left humerus	unsuccessful	
Wk-18242	AMS	3266/1	Burial H	human right femur	unsuccessful	
Wk-18243	Radio metric	5080/4	Burial B	human right femur	unsuccessful	
Wk-18621	AMS	3006/1	Burial G	Fraxinius charcoal	3175+/-33	1510BC-1390BC cal
Wk-18622	AMS	3008/1	Burial G	Prunus charcoal	3280+/-32	1640BC-1450BC cal
Wk-18623	AMS	3068/5	Ditch D	Pomoideae charcoal	1273+/-32	660AD-860AD cal
Wk-18624	AMS	3089/5	Ditch D	Corylus charcoal	1284+/-34	650AD-810AD cal
Wk-18625	AMS	3200/1	Pit 3196	Fraxinius charcoal	3226+/-37	1610BC-1420BC cal
Wk-18626	AMS	5071	Burial C	Prunus charcoal	2468+/-35	770BC-410BC cal
Wk-18627	AMS	5081	Burial B	Charcoal	3196+/-31	1520BC-1410BC cal

from the excavated sections, including broadly Middle Iron Age pottery (*c.* 400–100 BC) from the primary ditch fill. The ditch cut through solid bedrock and the lower fills (accounting for at least two thirds of the total fill) comprised a mass of limestone fragments, presumably the same material that had been excavated originally from the ditch.

These fills incorporated further sherds of Iron Age pottery and a fragment of saddle quern that had been reused as a point sharpener. This suggests that the ditch was abandoned and its bank levelled after only a short period, before any significant degree of natural silting accumulated at the base of the ditch. The fill was consistent throughout the four sections

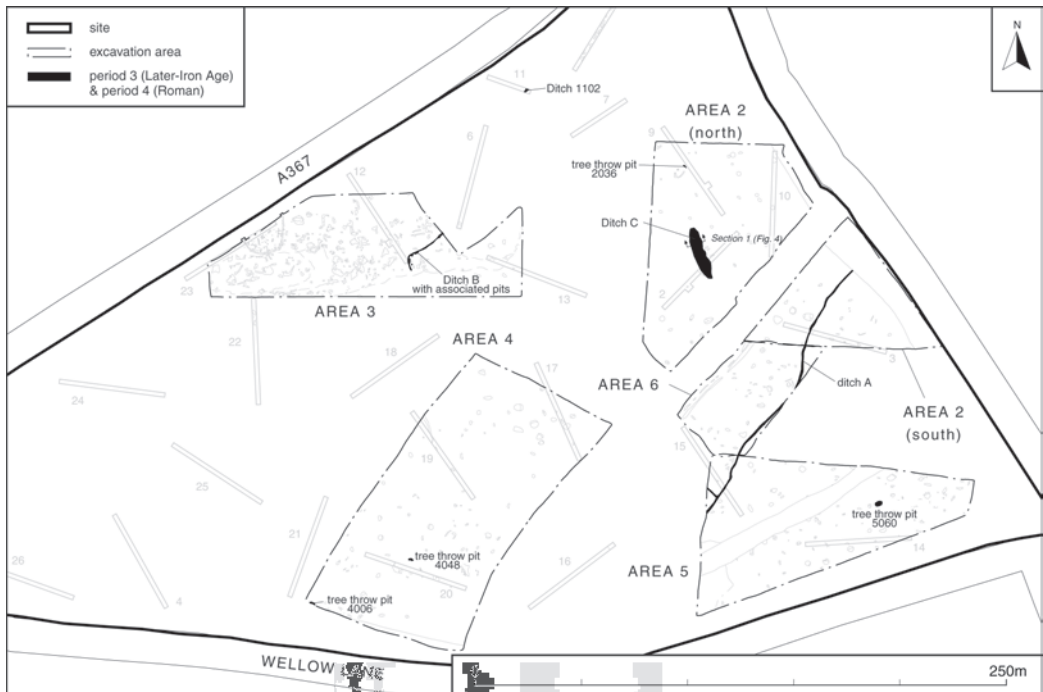


Fig. 3 Periods 3 and 4



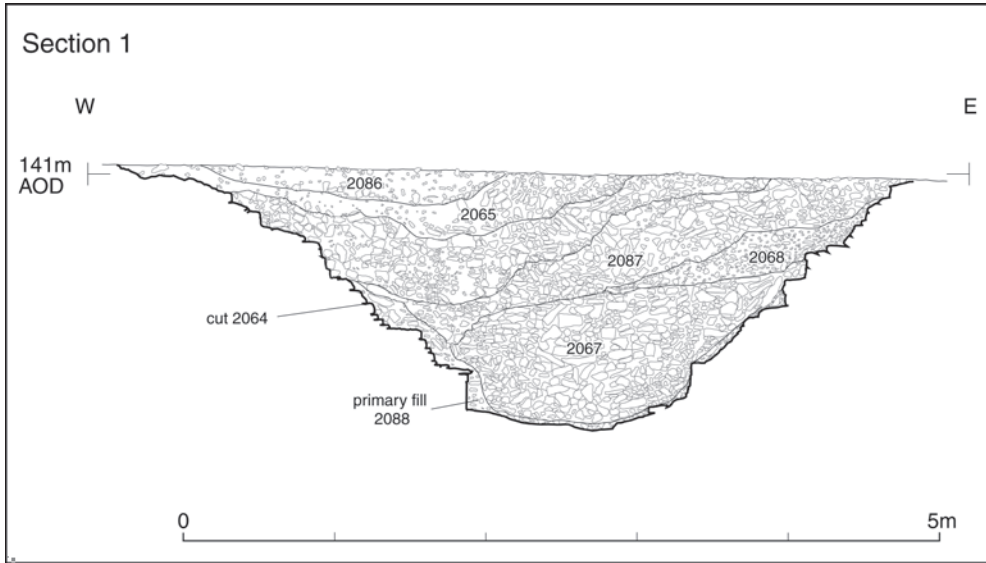


Fig. 4 Area 2, Ditch C

dug through the ditch. Tip lines within the fill indicate that the excavated stone had been banked to the east. The function of the bank and ditch is unclear given that no other elements of a defensive circuit were found in the excavations.

Four of the numerous tree-throw pits (2036, 4006, 4048 and 5060) found across the site produced material of broadly Middle Iron Age date, with one sherd from pit 2036 possibly later in date. Pits 4006 and 4048, and a number of the undated tree-throw pits, showed evidence of *in situ* burning, with reddening of the natural clay and the presence of heat-fractured stone and may represent an episode of clearance at this time.

#### Period 4: Late Roman (c. 3rd to 4th century AD)

A shallow 'L'-shaped ditch (Ditch B) extended beyond the eastern limit of Area 3 and was flanked on one side by a series of seven, irregularly spaced oval pits (Fig. 3). Ditch B and one of these pits produced pottery of broadly late Roman date. The other pits are also attributed to this period because of their close proximity to Ditch B and similarity in form to the pit with pottery. The ditch suggests an enclosure with an entrance to the south-west. The corresponding side of this feature may not have penetrated the solid bedrock to the south and was

subsequently truncated. The flanking pits may represent fence posts, with the intervals between the posts being filled with horizontal timbers. A short section of a ditch excavated in evaluation trench 11 (Ditch 1102) from which a sherd of Roman pottery was recovered, may be evidence of another Roman boundary ditch.

#### Period 5: Middle Saxon (c. AD 650 to 850)

An enclosure, defined by Ditch D, lay partly within Area 3 (Figs 5 and 7). The curved southern part of the circuit enclosed an area c. 18m in diameter, although the eastern side of the enclosure appeared to be straight rather than returning the curve to form a circle, suggesting a 'D'-shaped, or round-ended rectangular plan for the entire circuit. The enclosure ditch varied in depth between 0.15m and 0.5m, with a width of 0.5m to 0.65m. Late Roman pottery, lumps of fired clay, fragments of Pennant sandstone roof tile and a fragment of rotary quern were recovered from the homogeneous fill and there was no evidence for erosion from an internal bank. Charred plant remains recovered from two samples taken from the ditch fill produced calibrated radiocarbon dates of 650–810 cal AD (Wk-18624) and 660–860 cal AD (Wk-18623) which indicate a Middle Saxon date (Table 1).

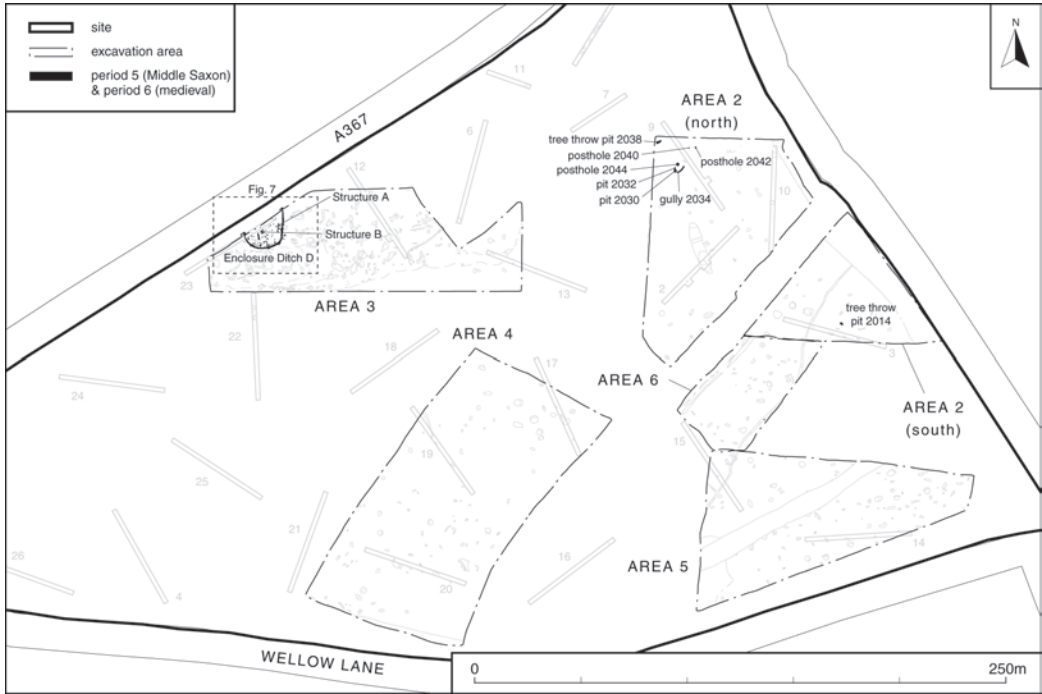


Fig. 5 Periods 5 and 6

Within the enclosure, numerous stake or postholes were recorded. However the proximity of some postholes to the ditch suggests they are not contemporary with it. Some postholes formed distinct linear and rectilinear shapes, and may represent post-built structures (Fig. 7). Two such structures have been identified (Structures A and B). Structure A consists of an 'H'-shaped arrangement of postholes measuring 2m by 4m, although with one side longer than the other. Structure B consists of a solid square of stake or postholes covering an area 1.5m by 1.5m. Only undiagnostic flint flakes and fired clay were recovered from the postholes of the two structures; they are discussed here because they lay within the enclosure ditch, but could equally be assigned as 'undated'.

The enclosure ditch and associated internal features remain enigmatic. The size of the area enclosed by Ditch D is too big to accommodate a single roofed structure, especially in the absence of major postholes. As such it is interpreted as a small enclosure, used for horticulture, crop processing and storage, or similar subsistence purposes. Although no evidence lies within the site, the enclosure may

have also contained a dwelling to the north, outside the excavated area. Structures A and B are too small to have been houses and are best interpreted as agricultural structures for storage or other functions. There is no evidence for an internal bank, but the proximity of Structure A and other postholes to the ditch, which is clearly truncated, raises the possibility that some, if not all of the internal features are either earlier or later than the enclosure.

#### Period 6: Medieval (c. 11th to 13th centuries AD)

A cluster of shallow cut features at the north end of Area 2 (north) produced pottery of 11th to 13th-century date (Fig. 5). These consisted of two pits, one large the other small (2030 and 2032 respectively), with a short length of gully (2034) and possible shallow postholes (2040 and 2042). Collectively they indicate some minor activity at this location, although not enough was found to identify a specific structure. Pottery from this period was also recovered from two tree throw pits (2014 and 2038).

**Undated: (Late Roman or early medieval features)**

Nine extended, east–west aligned inhumations (Burials A–F and J–L) cannot be accurately dated due to the absence of any definitive dating evidence, although a late Roman to medieval date is considered the most probable on general grounds. Similarly a small number of unremarkable cut features which produced no dating evidence, or had no clear association with any other datable feature, are also discussed here (Fig. 6).

Burials A–F contained six extended inhumations arranged in two rows of three. These were located just to the north of Ditch A in Area 5. The two southernmost burials (C and F) overlapped with, and were cut into, the backfill of Ditch A. The state of bone preservation for all of these burials was generally very poor; bone from Burial E was too fragmentary for analysis and samples of bone from Burials B and H contained insufficient collagen for radiocarbon dates. Instead charred plant material from Burials B and C was submitted, but this provided conflicting evidence. The material from Burial B produced a Middle Bronze Age date (1520–1410 cal BC Wk-18627) and a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date was derived from material from Burial C (770–410 cal BC, Wk-18626). This would suggest two adjacent extended inhumations, on the same alignment, interred at least 600 years apart. The close spatial relationship, and similar alignments of the graves of this group is more representative of a cemetery in use for a relatively short period of time, to which the radiocarbon results appear anomalous. Furthermore, not only was a single small sherd of Roman pottery recovered from the fill of Burial C, but it had clearly been cut through the backfill of Late-Iron Age Ditch A. Although Burial B did not cut through the ditch at the level at which both features were preserved, it was located immediately adjacent to the ditch and may have cut through it at a higher level. As such the radiocarbon dates are not only at odds with each other but also inconsistent with the other dating evidence. It is possible that the charred material could be residual, perhaps originating from earlier features, destroyed by the ditch, graves, or later truncation. It is also possible that the single Roman sherd may be either intrusive or residual; as such the dating evidence for this group remains unresolved. A date postdating the infilling of Ditch A, and no later than the medieval period remains most probable.

Burials J–L comprised three extended inhumations, arranged in a single row adjacent to

Ditch C. The inhumations were in very poor condition due to the shallow depth of their graves, and human bone from Burials J and K disintegrated completely on excavation. Radiocarbon dating was attempted for the best preserved of this group, Burial L, however this was unsuccessful and these graves remain undated, although their common orientation, arrangement and proximity to Burials A–F may suggest that they share a similar date. Burials A–F and J–L also share the same characteristics of alignment and arrangement in rows as the 16 grave cuts identified in evaluation trench 1. It is therefore possible that all three groups of burials are broadly contemporary and represent burial within distinct, but separate, areas.

**THE ARTEFACTS****Worked flint** *by E.R. McSloy*

A total of 41 pieces of worked flint (156g) and one piece of unworked burnt flint was recovered from 24 contexts. A small number of Mesolithic pieces are identifiable, with the remainder undiagnostic or broadly dateable to the Late Neolithic or Bronze Age periods.

A significant proportion of the worked flint (19 pieces) was unstratified, recovered from subsoil layers. Of the remainder, most can be considered residual, evidenced both by the poor condition of most material and by the occurrence of some pieces with Iron Age or later ceramics. The condition of the unstratified material is markedly worse, with a high incidence of breakage, edge damage and in some instances severe rolling. The majority of pieces, regardless of provenance, are patinated, this varying in severity from light mottling to an overall white discolouration. Incidence of fire cracking is fairly high with eight pieces recorded showing heat damage to varying degrees. Raw material consists of dark or mid-grey coloured flint of generally good quality. Cortex, where present is mainly thick and chalky, suggesting retrieval of raw material from primary (chalk or chalk soil) sources. The occurrence of fully cortical flakes would suggest that some primary reduction, presumably of transported raw material, was undertaken locally.

Pieces with secondary working are rare in the assemblage and intrinsically dateable pieces entirely absent. A single extended-end scraper was recovered from Iron Age Ditch C and the blade-like flake from Iron Age Ditch A exhibits an apparently denticulated



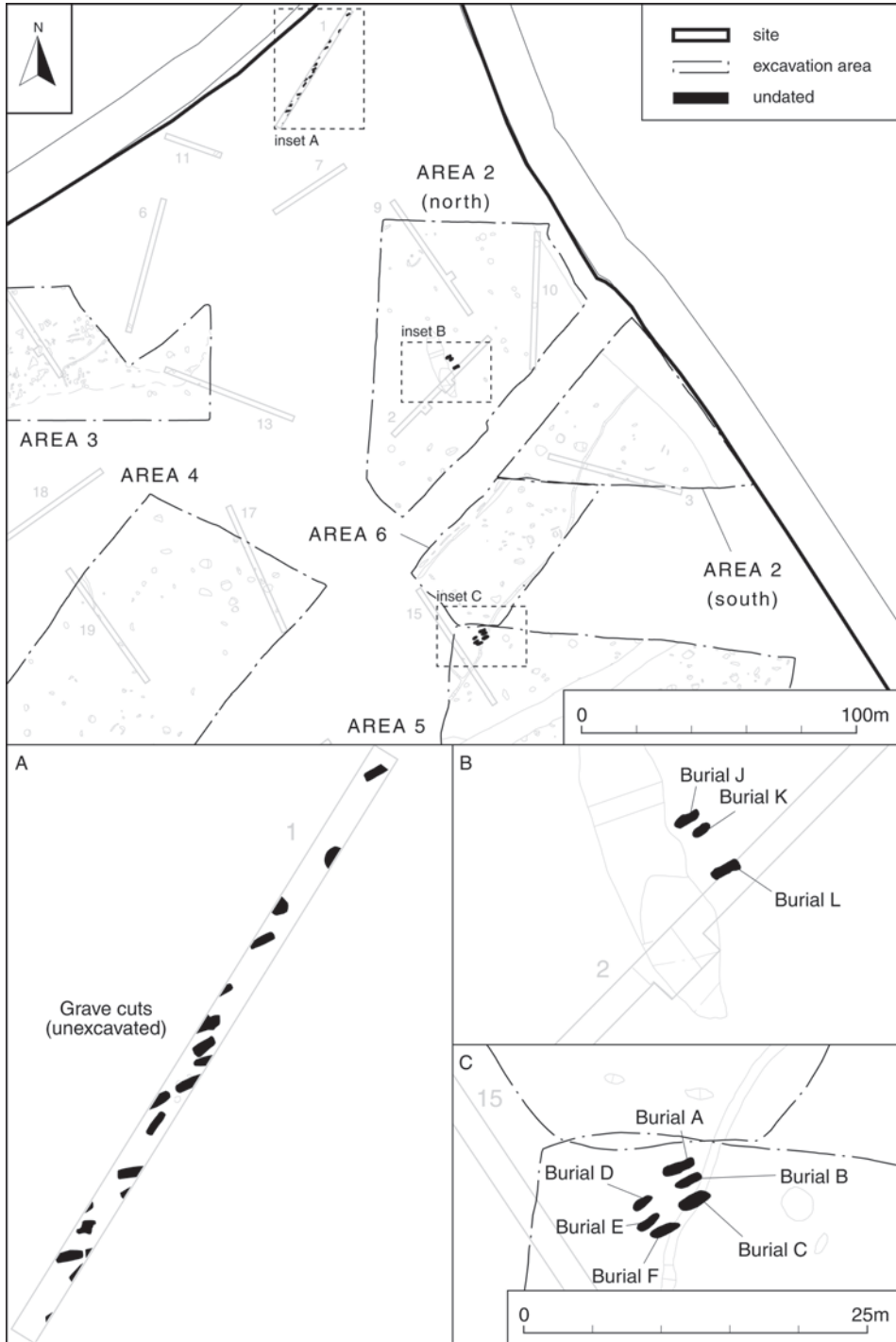


Fig. 6 Undated

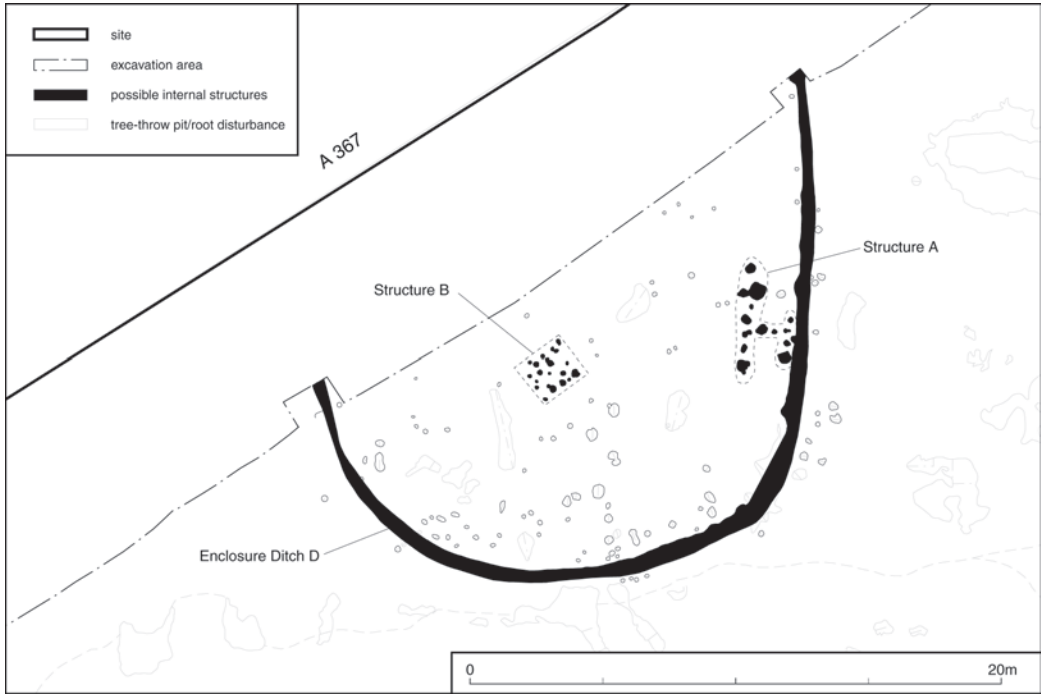


Fig. 7 Details of Structures A and B

edge. A further three flakes with areas of retouch, including a possible notched flake, were recovered. The presence of blade and bladelets in the assemblage is most likely indicative of a Mesolithic component. A group of four blades or blade-like removals from tree-throw pit 4048 is notable, although seemingly redeposited. The bulk of the remainder of removals tend to be of broad and squat proportions, predominantly with a thick butt and clear point of percussion indicative of hard hammer striking. As such it is likely that most material relates to the Late Neolithic or Bronze Age periods.

### The pottery by E.R. McSloy

#### Later prehistoric

A small assemblage of 61 sherds (286g), representing a minimum of 30 vessels, was recovered. Condition was generally poor, with sherds small and fragmentary. A significant proportion of the recovered pottery, 19 sherds, derived from the fills of pit 2062. The remaining sherds derived singly or in small groups from Ditch A and discrete, pit-like

features including probable tree-throw pits from across the site.

Pottery fabrics were identified macroscopically or with the use of a (x4) hand lens. Quantification was by sherd count and weight for each fabric type by context. Six fabrics were defined according to inclusion type, abundance and size/sorting (PCRG 1997). The fabrics conform to three fabric groups based on the dominant inclusion classes: limestone, fossil shell and grog (below). The calcareous fabric groups reflect the underlying local limestone geology which is characterised as 'oolitic rubbly, flaggy' of the inferior oolite group of the Jurassic era (BGS 2000). The presumption is that all material was made locally. The use of grog is common in the earlier prehistoric period and in the later Iron Age/Early Roman period as typified by the East Wiltshire Savernake industry. A single sherd recovered from the fill of tree-throw pit 2036 is featureless, but in terms of hardness and colouring compares closest with later material.

#### Fossil shell

SH1: (11 sherds from minimum of 7 vessels, weighing 80g). Sparse quantity of moderately sorted

fossil shell, between 2–5mm. Irregular fracture with soapy surface feel. Buff or brown exterior surface and margin with black interior and margin.

SH2: (1 sherd, weighing 9g). Common quantity of well-sorted fine fossil shell, between 0.5–1mm with sparser rounded or sub-rounded oolitic limestone inclusions 0.3–0.5mm. Finely irregular fracture with soapy surface feel. Brown exterior surface with dark grey core and interior.

SH3: (10 sherds from minimum of 4 vessels, weighing 14g). Vesicular fabric – common plate-like and rounded voids assumed to represent leached shell and other calcareous inclusions. Finely irregular fracture with soapy surface feel. Grey throughout or with brown exterior surface.

#### Limestone

LI1: (22 sherds from minimum of 11 vessels, weighing 90g). Common quantity of moderately-sorted, rounded or sub-rounded oolitic limestone, most 0.5–1mm with common or sparse fossil shell inclusions 0.5–3mm. Finely irregular fracture with sandy surface feel. Brown exterior surface with dark grey core and interior.

LI2: (16 sherds from minimum of 6 vessels, weighing 60g). Common quantity of moderately-sorted coarse, rounded or sub-rounded oolitic limestone, most 1–2mm with sparse fossil shell inclusions 0.5–3mm. Irregular fracture with sandy surface feel. Brown exterior surface with dark grey core and interior.

#### Grog

GR: (1 sherd weighing 33g) Common quantity of well-sorted, self-coloured and sub-rounded grog, 1–2mm. Irregular fracture with soapy feel. Brown exterior surface with dark grey core and interior.

#### Discussion

The fragmentary nature of the pottery meant that it was rarely possible to discern form. Sherds from a single vessel from Ditch C were identifiable as a jar of barrel-shaped or ovoid profile with a slightly thickened or bead-like rim. Other form elements are restricted to a (plain) base sherd, also from Ditch C. All recovered material appears to be handmade. No clear instances of decoration were recorded, however a sherd from Ditch C exhibits very light vertical scratches. It is unclear whether this represents ‘dragging’ of inclusions resulting from surface wiping or decoration comparable to Middle Iron Age scored ware pottery common in eastern England. Use as cooking pots was recorded on two vessels,

including the jar described above, in the form of exterior sooting.

Little substantive can be said regarding this small group. The few occurring form elements, all of which come from one feature, are most characteristic of the Middle Iron Age (c. 400–100 BC). Calcareous-based fabrics are a feature of the Iron Age over a wide area, extending northwards into the Gloucestershire Cotswolds. Comparable fabrics and forms occur from Blaise Castle (Rahtz and Brown 1959), Henbury, Bristol (Evans *et al.* 2006) and Budbury hillfort, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire (Wainwright 1970). There is no strong evidence for importation of non-local wares. A possible exception, a grog-tempered sherd, may be somewhat later, and probably dates to the 1st century AD.

#### Roman

The Roman pottery amounted to 17 sherds (36g) representing a minimum of nine vessels. Condition is generally poor, with most sherds small and loss of surfaces common. The majority of sherds derive from the area of Ditch B, with a small sherd from the fill of Grave C. A restricted range of fabrics and forms was recorded. Most common (15 sherds weighing 32 grams) are fine and micaceous reduced fabrics GW MIC/BS MIC. Similar micaceous fabrics occur from Late Roman phases at Bath (Green and Young 1985, 148) and it is likely that these, together with a single sherd of coarser greyware type (GW), represent relatively local products. A single necked jar with curving rim is recorded in fabric GW MIC and a small bead-rim jar or beaker in fabric GW QZ. Neither is chronologically diagnostic. The sole non-local type present is south-east Dorset Black-Burnished ware, present as a single sherd from Ditch B. Firm conclusions regarding the closer dating of the Roman pottery are difficult. The similarity of micaceous reduced fabrics to later Roman types encountered at Bath may be significant. Similarly the occurrence of Black-Burnished ware, a type most abundant locally in the 3rd and 4th centuries, may also suggest activity extending into the later Roman period.

#### Medieval

The medieval pottery amounted to 18 sherds (149g) representing a minimum of 15 vessels. A group of seven sherds from pit 2030 included moderately large and unabraded sherds. Excepting this group, the condition of most was poor with abrasion high and

some loss of calcareous inclusions. The majority of material (15 sherds weighing 115 grams) occurs in a micaceous fabric comparing to material known from Bath and Bristol ('Bath A' type: Vince 1979; Vince 1983) and probably produced locally. The remainder consists of sherds in oolitic limestone-tempered fabric probably from the Cotswold region and a coarse gritty fabric from an unknown source. No glazed fabrics are present and a broad date between the 11th and 13th centuries is based on the cooking-pot vessel forms. Forms are restricted to jars/cooking-pots with simple everted rims. Evidence for use as cooking vessels occurs on two sherds with exterior sooting from pit 2030.

## BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

### **Radiocarbon dating** by *Sylvia Warman*

Ten samples were submitted for radiocarbon (AMS and radiometric) dating. The samples were processed at the University of Waikato Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory (2006). Material was selected from undated inhumation and cremation burials and from enclosure Ditch D which yielded only abraded Roman pottery. The results are presented in Table 1 as conventional radiocarbon ages (Stuiver and Polach 1977). Simple calibrations of the results have been calculated using the calibration curve of Stuiver *et al.* (1998) and the computer program OXCal 3.10 Bronk Ramsey (2005). Date ranges cited in the text are those at 95.4% confidence level unless otherwise specified. Ranges are derived from the probability method (Stuiver and Reimer 1993).

The three human bone samples from Burials B, H and L proved to contain insufficient collagen for a date to be obtained. Consequently a further seven samples of charcoal (identified by R. Gale), were submitted from Burials B, C and G, a possible cremation in pit 3196 and two deposits from enclosure Ditch D. Radiocarbon dates were successfully obtained from all seven charcoal samples. The samples from Burials B and C, belonging to the same group of extended burials, supplied a Bronze Age date for Burial B and a Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age date for Burial C, which was at odds with their form, layout and stratigraphic relationship to earlier features. Moreover a sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from the grave of Burial C. The results would suggest that the charcoal derived from both grave fills was

residual, which is consistent with the small size and fragmentation of the charcoal samples. The samples from two contexts from enclosure Ditch D obtained a Middle Saxon date, indicating that the Roman pottery within the ditch fills was residual.

### **Human bone** by *Teresa Gilmore*

Twelve burials (eleven inhumations and one possible cremation) were recovered from the excavations (Table 2). The inhumations consisted of two pit burials (one containing a single bone) and nine extended individuals. The pit burials dated to the Middle Bronze Age and the remaining inhumations were undated, but considered to be late Roman to medieval. The cremation burial consisted of an unurned deposition of a small amount of cremated human bone. All features had been heavily truncated.

The grave cuts were carefully excavated, any surviving bone collected by hand, and the remaining grave fill sampled for small bones and bone fragments. The cremation burial was quarter-sectioned and sieved using a 1mm mesh. For details of the methodology adopted see Gilmore 2008.

### *The inhumations*

All individuals were very poorly preserved and highly fragmented. Due to adverse taphonomic conditions, including mildly acidic soil, root action, water action through the soil and truncation of the burial, the cortex was highly degraded, removing any surface signs of pathology. Burials A and C were the best preserved with more than 25% of their skeletal material present. Less than 25% of the expected skeletal material had survived in Burials B, L, D, G and H. Burials E, F, J and K were the least well-preserved with no skeletal material surviving to reach the analysis stage (Table 2).

All skeletons analysed were adults; sex could only be determined in three individuals. Burial A was an adult male, Burial B an unsexable adult and Burial C an old middle-aged adult (36–45 yrs) who was probably male. Burial D and G were young middle-aged unsexable adults (26–35 yrs), the latter of whom was buried in a disarticulated manner in a pit. Burial H was an adult individual with only fragments of the right femur remaining. Burial L was an old middle-aged adult male (36–45 yrs).

The very poor preservation of the eleven inhumations meant that the only pathology that could

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF ANALYSED SKELETAL MATERIAL  
(NO MATERIAL PRESENT FOR ANALYSIS FROM E, F, J AND K)

Burial	Period	Orientation	Position	Preservation/ Completeness	Age/Sex	Dentition
A	undated	E–W	extended	v. poor/30%	adult/?M	0/32
B	undated	E–W	extended	v. poor/20%	adult/?	0/32
C	undated	E–W	extended	v. poor/25%	36–45/?M	19/32
D	undated	E–W	–	v. poor/10%	26–35/?	1/32
G	1	–	disarticulated	v. poor/10%	26–35/?	4/32
H	1	–	–	v. poor/5%	adult/?	0/32
L	undated	E–W	extended	poor	36–45/M	29/32

be determined from macroscopic analysis of the skeletal material was dental in nature. Dentition only survived from four individuals, Burials C, D, G and L. A total of 19 teeth was present from Burial C, one from Burial D, four from Burial G and 29 from Burial L, though none remained in the jaw. All teeth displayed some degree of dental wear, however erosion of the tooth surfaces had obscured any dental enamel defects and destroyed any surviving calculus. Burial L displayed severe dental wear predominately on the molars and premolars, most likely indicating an age of at least 36–45 years and potentially consumption of a coarse diet.

#### *The cremation burial*

A small amount of cremated human bone was recovered from the fills of pit 3196. The total weight was 7.8g from four quadrants of the sampled fill. Further details are available in the archive. The only identifiable fragments included an incisor root and medial tibia fragment and represented an adult individual. The majority of cremated bone present was white or light grey in colour, suggesting a high temperature and degree of efficiency during the cremation process. The amount present was far too small to represent a complete adult individual (McKinley 1993) and is most likely residual.

#### **Animal bone** by Sylvia Warman

Following preliminary assessment no further analysis was recommended. This report therefore summarises the results of the assessment. Further details can be found in the archive. The animal bone assemblage was rapidly scanned and recorded. The species

identified were cattle, sheep/goat, pig and roe deer. The hand collected animal bone totalled 176 bones made up of 257 fragments which weighed 714g. Of these only 43 were identifiable to species. The sieved material totalled 114 fragments from 100 bones weighing 9.62 grams. Of these four bones were identifiable to species.

Most of the animal bone is from deposits dated to Period 5 (Middle Saxon) although Period 1 (Middle Bronze Age), Period 3 (Mid-Late Iron Age) and Period 6 (medieval) deposits also produced animal bone. The material is in a very poor state of preservation being noticeably weathered, not so much by exposure on the ground surface but due to the percolation of water through the deposits which contained the bone. This makes identification of butchery marks and pathology impossible for most specimens. The best-preserved bone comes from Period 3 deposit 2081 from Ditch C in Area 2 which comprises a partial skeleton of a young roe deer. The deer bones are in much better condition than the rest of the assemblage. The sieved material was generally in very poor condition and very fragmented thus few specimens could be identified to species. The range of species is dominated by domestic stock but the presence of a substantial part of a roe deer is of note. The assemblage is too small for any conclusions relating to the use of wild taxa to be drawn.

#### **The charred plant remains** by Elizabeth Pearson

Samples were taken from deposits considered to be of high potential for the recovery of environmental remains. A total of 24 bulk samples of 10 to 30 litre size were analysed, 20 of which were processed by flotation. The flots were collected on a 250µ sieve



and the residue retained on a 5mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds. Seed remains were also sorted from four samples which had been wet-sieved through a 1mm mesh to retrieve human bone. The residues were fully sorted, and the remaining residue retained. The flots were scanned using a low power MEIJI stereo light microscope and plant remains identified using modern reference collections and a seed identification manual (Beijerinck 1947). Nomenclature for the plant remains follows Clapham *et al.* (1989).

Uncharred seeds recovered from many of the samples are assumed to be modern and intrusive, as there was no evidence on site of long-term waterlogging or anoxic (oxygen reduced) conditions. These included seeds of plants generally found on arable or disturbed ground, such as orache (*Atriplex* sp), fool's parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*), thistle (*Cirsium* sp) and redshank (*Polygonum persicaria*).

Charcoal was generally sparse in the flots and finely fragmented and therefore not suitable for identification. Details of the larger fragments are contained in the archive. Environmental remains thought to be contemporary with the features excavated were sparse in all samples. Only unidentifiable charred material (possible cereal grain fragments) was recovered from Burial G (Period 1), while 14 samples were assessed from enclosure Ditch D (Period 5; Middle Saxon). Charred cereal grains included wheat (*Triticum* sp), hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and unidentifiable cereal grains. Spelt-type wheat grains (*Triticum spelta* type) and poorly preserved grains of free-threshing wheat (*Triticum* sp free-threshing) were present. Grains of free-threshing wheat are found in low numbers throughout the prehistoric to Roman period, and became the dominant wheat in cultivation in the Middle Saxon period over much of the British Isles. Earthworm eggs in a sample from Ditch D suggest some reworking of deposits. Seeds of fat hen (*Chenopodium album*), a weed of cultivated and waste ground, were also present. The plant remains indicate that arable farming was being carried out in the Middle Saxon period, but they are insufficient to assess the importance of this to the agriculture economy. Only occasional charred plant remains, including wheat (*Triticum* sp) or unidentifiable cereal grains or weed seeds were recorded from the fills of the late Roman or medieval Burials B, C and D.

## DISCUSSION

Excavation on the southern 'shoulder' of the Peasedown plateau has provided evidence of intermittent human activity from the Mesolithic to the medieval period. Although this evidence suffers from severe truncation of the overlying soils, and that which survives is mostly indicative of low intensity activity, there remains sufficient evidence to reconstruct the changing patterns of land-use and combined with other archaeological work, broader land-use across the Peasedown plateau.

The earliest in situ remains identified at Wellow Lane date to the Middle Bronze Age. The fragmentary remains of two inhumations and a single, probably disturbed cremation record the presence of funerary activity during this period. The shallow and disturbed nature of these features may indicate that this activity may originally have been more extensive, with only very partial survival up to the present time. The presence or otherwise of any overlying monument or surrounding ditch may only be speculated. It may be noted that excavations in 1950 to determine if there had been a surrounding ditch associated with an extant barrow near Camerton, 2.5km to the north-west of Wellow Lane, produced negative results (Wedlake 1958). As such the absence of a ditch at Wellow Lane need not necessarily imply the absence of an overlying monument, whilst extensive truncation to the deposits across the site may also have obliterated all traces of it. Recent excavations in South-West England, particularly Dorset, also suggest that flat cemeteries from this period are more common than was previously assumed (Fitzpatrick 2008, 124). The Middle Bronze Age period (c.1500–1000BC) also sees a greater frequency of cremation burials and the pattern of cremation burials (urned and unurned) made to the south and east of earlier Bronze Age barrows has been noted at sites in Dorset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire (*ibid.*). The function of a large pit, dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age remains unclear although it may be interpreted as an indication of a continued human presence in the vicinity at this time.

Tree-throw pits containing Iron Age pottery suggest a phase of woodland clearance, although there is little surviving evidence for the use to which the land was then put. Other than the shallow meandering Ditch A, the deep 'defensive' Ditch C in Area 2 represents the only other excavated evidence for activity from this period within the

confines of the site. The depth and width of the ditch, if not its length has close affinities with the excavated sections of the Iron Age ditches at Eckweek, 500m to the north, where less truncated conditions prevailed, but a comparable width of 5.5m and a depth of 2.1m was recorded. Geophysical survey at Eckweek indicated a series of curvilinear ditches and associated postholes demarcating an entranceway associated with a settlement (Young nd). The pottery suggests a c. 5th century BC date, (Morris nd), slightly earlier than Ditch C here.

Ditch C appears to be isolated, despite investigation of the surrounding area, and its function is difficult to interpret. The excavated evidence suggests rapid backfilling of the feature, which may represent an abandoned venture to enclose a small settlement within a substantial enclosure ditch. Alternatively it may have been part of a land boundary, other stretches being marked by hedges, woods or insubstantial fences which have left no trace. Evidence for Iron Age activity in Somerset beyond the well-known hillforts or lake settlements is patchy, but the extensive survey undertaken around South Cadbury has recorded a wide variety and density of settlement, for which the hillfort may have provided a nucleus (Tabor 2004).

Shortly after the Roman invasion of AD 43 the Fosse Way was laid out. This passed 0.75km north-west of Wellow Lane, and a roadside settlement developed at Camerton, but the site itself has Late Iron Age origins. Agricultural activity at Wellow Lane may have continued from the Iron Age throughout the Roman period, although dating is confined to the 3rd to 4th century AD, coinciding with the most prosperous period at Camerton. Ditch B and the flanking pits are best interpreted as some form of rural enclosure or stockade. The paucity of Roman pottery recovered from the site would suggest that this activity was low-level and at some distance from any associated domestic activity.

The enclosure defined by Ditch D, partially revealed on the north edge of Area 3, was presumed to be Roman at the time of excavation on the evidence of abraded Roman pottery within the perimeter ditch. Revised dating based on the radiocarbon results sets this feature in the Middle Saxon period (mid 7th to mid 8th century AD). Boundary features such as this enclosure appear in Anglo-Saxon rural settlements from the 6th century onwards (Reynolds 2003, 104), and the importance of boundaries and their maintenance in rural settlement is enshrined in 7th and 8th-century laws.

This is part of a wider picture of the regulation of space, at a time when there is also archaeological evidence for the enclosure of high-status sites and the refurbishment and reoccupation of hillforts (*ibid.*, 102). Rural enclosures continue to feature throughout the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, and both rectilinear and curvilinear forms have been recognised within a wide range of sizes. The excavated evidence at Wellow Lane indicates a 'D'-shaped plan and its diameter of c.18m suggests that it enclosed a single small farmstead (cf. Hamerow 2002). Alternatively it may have been a component of a larger settlement extending to the north. It is notable that contemporary examples of excavated enclosures of this size are commonly found as part of a larger complex, such as the post-built ovoid enclosure at the 6th-century site at Thirlings, Northumberland (one of two enclosures; the other rectangular) that measured 24m x 19m and enclosed a free-standing rectangular building (Hinchliffe 1986, 251–3; Reynolds 2003, 107–8, fig. 3). Enclosures of similar dimensions (c. 13 x 20m) have been recorded at Poundbury, Dorset, but lying within a larger enclosure (Sparey-Green 1987, 89, fig. 52; Reynolds 2003, 110). The tentative 6th-century date for these features suggests British antecedents. On a larger scale is the 7th to 9th-century settlement at Abbots Worthy, Hampshire where a 'D'-shaped enclosure c. 40m x 50m was recorded enclosing SFBs (Fasham and Whinney 1991; Reynolds 2003, 110). The complex is interpreted as a lower status farmstead. For lower status settlements, the process of enclosure may have been driven by practical obligation. The presence of small post-built structures within the enclosure at Wellow Lane may represent granaries or other ancillary buildings that would require enclosure as a protection from animal stock.

The evidence from Wellow Lane fits with the wider picture of Saxon rural settlement in the Somerset region (Aston 1988, 71), which is characterised by dispersed settlement, building techniques that often leave insubstantial remains, and a largely aceramic material culture. The identification of this type of site is heavily reliant on chance discovery on multi-period sites and the fortuitous results of radiocarbon dating. A pertinent example is the 'D'-shaped enclosure, at Hayes Farm, Clyst Honiton, Devon, which overlay an earlier Roman-British enclosure. Two sherds of abraded Roman pottery were found within the excavated section of the ditch, but the radiocarbon date of 390–630 cal AD indicates that

they were residual (Simpson *et al.* 1989). Given the wide date range for rural enclosures that has been recognised, with little in the way of a diagnostic morphology (Griffith 1996; Reynolds 2003), examples such as Clyst Honiton and Wellow Lane demonstrate that post-Roman enclosures that do not benefit from a programme of scientific dating may frequently be assigned to an earlier date, either on the basis of residual finds or their location amongst more extensive or diagnostic features from an earlier period.

Building remains associated with abundant 9th to 10th-century pottery found beneath the later medieval structures during excavation at Eckweek reflects at a local level the pattern of settlement shift and nucleation related to the fragmentation of early Anglo-Saxon estates (Young *nd*; Costen 1988, 34). The features of 11th to 13th-century date at Wellow Lane, most probably reflect peripheral activity associated with the main settlement at Eckweek.

The grouping of Burials A–F and J–L, and the graves identified in the evaluation imply the surviving examples of an extensive and possibly densely populated cemetery. The shallow depth of the surviving burials suggests that subsequent truncation of the overlying soils has been sufficiently severe to remove traces of other burials that may have existed in the extensive areas between the burial groups. Alternatively the burials may be a representation of scattered, but self-contained, groups of burials.

The date, character and significance of these burials all remain open to question. A late Roman to early medieval date range is implied from the stratigraphic relationship of Burial C with Ditch A and the low level of ceramic inclusions within the burial fill (a single abraded sherd of Roman pottery). Both the east–west alignment of the inhumations and the lack of grave-goods have been recorded amongst ‘pagan’ burials and are an unreliable indication of Christian beliefs. Moreover a burial ground without a church is not sufficient grounds to denote burial predating the Saxon conversion. Churchyard burial does not become the ‘norm’ until the 10th century (Webster 2008, 182) when the possession of a churchyard enhances the status of a church in Church Law and payment can be exacted for burial (Zadora-Rio 2003, 13), although lay burial in minster cemeteries became increasingly common from the 8th century onwards (Blair 2005, 236–8). In the meantime burial also continued in unsanctified ground (*ad sanctus*), sometimes at a distance from

contemporary settlement (Blair 1994; Hadley 2001; Reynolds 2002); the cemetery at Peasedown may be an example of an early medieval lay cemetery reusing an ancient site (Blair 2005, 244), assuming that earlier activity on the site was visible and/or retained some significance. It has been suggested that burial in or adjacent to monuments invested with ancestral and spiritual power helps to maintain ideologies and social order and would be particularly important at times of territorial unrest. This burial practice may have been undertaken both by a pre-existing tribal power as well as a new élite wishing to establish dominance (Lucy 2000). This has been discussed in relation to a need to legitimise or reaffirm territorial ownership by burial in or close to visible monuments that are perceived as sacred or ancestral sites. The practice has been assigned to burial sites of all periods, but has been recognised with frequency in the period in which Anglo-Saxon political dominance was achieved (Williams 1997; Webster and Brunning 2004). The presence of a Bronze Age barrow, as speculated above, would have supplied a suitable focus, for which a preference has been noted in Anglo-Saxon reuse of earlier funerary monuments (Williams 1997, 14).

The location of the domestic activity dating from the 11th to 13th century found between the area of graves identified in the evaluation and Burials J, K and L, may indicate a *terminus ante quem* for the burial ground, although continental examples of domestic activity taking place within consecrated burial grounds in this period can be cited (Zadora-Rio 2003, 15). The burial ground could have served the early settlement at Eckweek, but equally could be somewhat earlier in date and belong to the late or post-Roman milieu.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation and this publication were generously funded by Anglo Holt Construction Limited. We are grateful to Bob Sydes, Charlotte Matthews and Richard Sermon from Bath and North East Somerset Council for their assistance. The excavation was managed by Mary Alexander and directed by Michael Rowe with the assistance of Leslie Cross, Derek Evans, Emily King, Andy Phelps and Jon Webster. The post-excavation was managed by Annette Hancocks and Mary Alexander. The text was edited by Mary Alexander and Neil Holbrook. Thanks to Professor Mick Aston for comments on

an earlier draft and Andy Young of Avon Archaeology for supplying information concerning the excavations at Eckweek. The project archives and finds are deposited with Roman Bath Museum, Bath under accession number BATRM 2004.52.

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