Prehistoric pits and Roman enclosures on the A419 Blunsdon Bypass, Blunsdon St Andrew: excavations 2006-7

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Introduction

Between September 2006 and February 2007 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out a programme of archaeological investigation along the route of the A419 Blunsdon Bypass, Blunsdon St Andrew, Wiltshire (between NGR SU 136 912 and SU 152 894; Figure 1). The work was undertaken on behalf of Alfred McAlpine plc working for the Highways Agency.

The bypass route comprises a corridor of land, approximately 3.3km in length, to the north of Swindon, on the south-western side of the former A419. The south-eastern end of the scheme lies at approximately 140m AOD, whilst the northern part extends down the slope of Blunsdon Hill. The underlying geology of the higher, southern part of the bypass route is mapped as Corallian Rag and clay, whilst the northern part of the corridor below the ridge of Blunsdon Hill lies on Oxford Clay (BGS 1974). At the time of the fieldwork, land use along the bypass route varied from arable and pasture fields to areas of woodland, as well as several small plots occupied by extant buildings.

Archaeological background

Following an initial desk study, areas of the proposed bypass were examined by geophysical survey (Stratascan 2002; 2003), evaluation trenching (CA 2003), and fieldwalking (CA 2004).

The geophysical survey identified potential archaeological features, which were subsequently examined by evaluation trenches. The evaluation identified three features containing worked flint of Late Neolithic or Bronze Age date towards the northern end of the scheme near Upper Widhill Farm at Site A (Figure 2). Subsequent fieldwalking in the vicinity of these features recovered further worked flint, which dated from the Mesolithic to Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. Additional evidence for prehistoric activity in the area comes from residual worked flint found at Abbeymeads (McSloy et al. 2009) to the west of the bypass corridor and residual Bronze Age pottery from excavations at Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1982), just to the south of the A419 at the south-east end of the bypass route.
Fig. 1 Location plan. Scale 1:50,000
Fig. 2 Location of bypass route and Sites A and B. Scale 1:20,000
The archaeological evaluation also identified a single feature of possible Iron Age date in Area B to the east of Abbeymeads. This feature was initially thought to be an outlying field boundary associated with an Iron Age enclosure recorded at Groundwell West (Walker et al. 2001) (Figure 2). Pits, probably associated with the Groundwell West settlement, were also found in the Abbeymeads excavations (McSloy et al. 2009), and another Iron Age enclosure was investigated at Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1982).

The line of the Roman road known as Ermin Street is followed partly by the former route of the A419 and, to the south-east of the road scheme, by a minor road. A medieval hollow-way excavated during improvement works to the A419 at the Commonhead Junction, 5km to the south-east of Blunsdon, appears to have preserved the alignment of the Roman road (Hart and Alexander 2009). Within the environs of the Blunsdon Bypass route, Roman finds have come from an area adjacent to the line of the Roman road at the south-eastern end of the scheme (Jeffrey 1987; WANHM 1982). Abraded Roman pottery was also recovered from the upper levels of ditches of the Iron Age site at Groundwell West, and a gully of Roman date was excavated at Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1982). At Groundwell Ridge, approximately 1km to the west of the Blunsdon Bypass, the remains of a substantial Romano-British villa have been excavated (Brickstock et al. 2006). Two isolated Anglo-Saxon burials were examined at Abbeymeads, but no evidence for contemporary activity was found (McSloy et al. 2009).

Fieldwork methodology

On the basis of the evaluation results, two areas of the proposed bypass corridor were selected for investigation in advance of construction. Site A was located where prehistoric features had been identified to the south-east of Upper Widhill Farm, and Area B encompassed the area of the road corridor closest to the excavated sites at Abbeymeads and Groundwell West. These areas were stripped of topsoil and subsoil by a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket, at all times under archaeological supervision. Site A covered an area of approximately 1.8ha. The area of dense Roman features found in Area B, referred to as Site B, covered an area of approximately 0.4ha. The remainder of the bypass route was mechanically stripped of topsoil and monitored by an archaeological watching brief as part of the construction programme.

All archaeological deposits were hand excavated. An average of 50% of all discrete features such as postholes and pits was excavated and an average of 10% of all linear features (ditches, gullies) was sampled in a series of sondages. All features were then fully recorded.

An assessment of the results of the archaeological investigations (CA 2008) was followed by further analysis reported in this paper. The results of the analysis of an environmental sample taken from Site A are discussed within the text. The samples taken from Site B were poor, and apart from a small quantity of charcoal did not supply any environmental information.

Excavation results

Archaeological features were revealed within Site A, Area B and Site B during the archaeologically-controlled strip, and a post-medieval ditch was identified during the watching brief within a ‘processing area’ to the south of Upper Widhill Farm.

The archaeological features are discussed within three broad chronological periods: prehistoric (sub-divided into Period 1a: Mesolithic to Middle Bronze Age; and Period 1b: Earlier/Middle to Late Iron Age), Roman (Period 2: mid 1st to 2nd century AD) and medieval (Period 3: 12th/13th century AD). These periods include a number of features that contained no dating evidence but could be associated spatially or by their form with dated features. A number of undated features are also discussed. Post-medieval features, including furrows, were investigated but are not reported here.

Period 1a: Mesolithic to Middle Bronze Age

Site A contained a number of small pits and possible postholes; some clusters of features were perceived, but with no obvious structural arrangements (Figure 3). Many of these features were undated, but five pits and a posthole just to the north of the centre of Site A contained Middle Bronze Age dating evidence. The most notable of these features was an oval pit 1029, 0.75m in diameter and 0.35m deep (Figure 6), which contained a concentration of charcoal and evidence of in situ scorching, as well as some carbonised...
Prehistoric and Roman enclosures on the A419 Blunsdon Bypass

Fig. 3 Site A. Scale 1:1,000
Fig. 4 Area B. Scale 1:1,250
hazelnut fragments, pottery of probable Middle Bronze Age date and 15 pieces of worked flint. The majority of the flint is contemporary with the date of the pottery but the assemblage included a flake of probable Mesolithic date, which would be residual within the group. A sample from fill 1043 yielded a reasonable assemblage of charcoal, including Quercus (oak) and Alnus/Corylus (alder/hazel). This sample also produced a moderate amount of Corylus avellana (hazel) nutshell. A crescent-shaped pit 1505 identified to the north-east of pit 1029 filled with bands of scorched clay may be associated with the same activity as pit 1029. Its fill yielded six flint flakes and a core fragment of probable Bronze Age date. Pits 1508 and 1510 contained flint flakes of probable Bronze Age date, and further to the north, pit 1004 contained pottery dated to the Middle Bronze Age as well as two worked flint fragments. The fill of adjacent pit 1006 yielded six flint flakes. The fill of this feature was also notable for containing 40 fragments of red deer antler and a red deer tooth.

Pits 1012 and 1016 lying even further to the north, and pit 1031 lying to the south-east of pit 1029 are of similar dimensions and may also belong to this period, as well as the undated posthole 1026 adjacent to 1031, and posthole 1014. Pit 1031 also contained a thin band of in situ scorching and a deposit of charcoal.

Period 1b: Earlier/Middle to Late Iron Age
Two postholes (1039 and 1041) at the southern side of Site A (Figure 3) contained several sherd of Earlier/Middle Iron Age pottery within their backfills; 1041 also contained a fragment of horse bone. A further six postholes may be associated with these features, but were undated. The postholes form no obvious structures, although postholes 1051, 1053 and 1055 are equally spaced in a line, which could denote the location of a fence. An isolated pit 1024 on the west side of Site A contained two sherds of Iron Age pottery and two horse teeth above a thin deposit of charcoal.

There are hints of prehistoric activity in Area B (Figure 4). Here, a single residual sherd of Bronze Age pottery was found within post-medieval pit 2006 and another from pit 2012, one of three intercutting quarry pits, initially interpreted as an Iron Age ditch in the evaluation. Two Roman pottery sherds were recovered from the upper fill of pit 2010, and it is possible that the Iron Age sherd from the evaluation trench was also residual. An isolated oval pit (2026) measuring 2.1m in length and 0.95m wide contained 14 fragments of red deer within its fill. Red deer was commonly hunted throughout the prehistoric period, and its presence here may be indicative of a prehistoric date for this feature.

A low level of prehistoric activity is implied on Site B (Figure 5), where three flint flakes were found in an otherwise undated pit 5122, and a small quantity of residual flint was found in features with later dating evidence. Given the location of pit 5122, amongst a cluster of later pits, these flints may also be residual inclusions. Some 33 sherds of Late Iron Age pottery occurred residually in Roman features on Site B, although no features pre-dating the Roman period were identified, with the possible exception of undated pit 5194, truncated by Early Roman ditch B.

Period 2: Roman (Mid 1st to 2nd century AD)
Romano-British features were located exclusively at Site B where several ditches, pits, postholes and gullies were found (Figure 5). Activity was bounded to the south by two large east/west-aligned parallel ditches and to the north by three parallel ditches on the same east/west alignment. All features ascribed to this period (apart from ditch T) were between these ditches. Roman pottery retrieved from the features dates to the mid 1st to early 2nd century AD, suggesting the majority of the excavated features were broadly contemporary. Iron Age pottery was found in some ditch and pit fills, although some of this assemblage may represent the continuation of an Iron Age tradition of manufacture.

Ditches A and B may represent different phases of establishment of a land boundary, or possibly the alignment of a trackway between 3–5m wide. Ditch A had a maximum width of 2.4m and survived up to 0.45m deep; ditch B was up to 3.6m wide and 0.7m deep. Both ditches had gently sloping sides and an almost flat base (Figure 6). The main fills of each ditch suggested gradual silting up, with a final episode of deliberate back-fill. Both contained small quantities of flint and animal bone, and there was a single piece of slag from ditch B.

Ditches E and F described one corner of a probable enclosure or paddock, with ditch H possibly representing the northern side of this feature. In this case the enclosure was approximately 25m north/south and in excess of 36m east/west. The return at the eastern end of ditch H may indicate an entrance into the enclosure. No finds were recovered from ditch F; however ditch E contained a small amount of animal bone and flint, as well as
Fig. 5 Site B. Scale 1:1,000
a significant quantity of mid to later 1st-century AD pottery, with a few sherds of residual Iron Age pottery. Ditch H contained 42 sherds of mid 1st to early 2nd-century AD pottery, as well as residual Iron Age sherds.

Ditches C, D, J, K and S may represent supplemental drainage or modification to the enclosure. Ditch 5026 may be part of this activity also. All the ditches were of a similar width and 0.2m–0.4m deep. In general the ditch profiles were rounded or concave. Ditch C was notable for a deep eastern terminus, extending to a depth of 0.5m where a number of large limestone blocks had been deposited, possibly intended to facilitate drainage. The eastern terminus of ditch D had been modified, although for an unknown purpose. Ditches D and J each contained a single piece of burnt stone each and an iron hobnail was recovered from the eastern terminus of ditch C.

Although truncated by modern service trenches, the alignment of ditches L, M and U would suggest that these are broadly contemporary with the ditches within the main area of activity, and suggest another small enclosure towards the east. They also both contained pottery dated to the mid 1st to early 2nd centuries AD, as well as a small quantity of animal bone. The alignments of ditch T and the short linear feature R did not correspond with the other Roman linear features and it may be that the small amount of Roman pottery found in each of these features was residual.

The sinuous ditch (gully G) which survived to a maximum depth of 0.3m, cut across ditch F at its southern end and would appear to be a modification of the enclosure. In contrast to the majority of the ditches, which were filled by light-coloured clay derived from the natural substrate, it was filled by very dark grey clay. Gully G contained significant quantities of cultural material, including 73 animal bone fragments and 128 sherds of Roman pottery. The faunal remains predominately comprise sheep/goat, but also include examples of pig, cattle and horse. A number of pits in the vicinity of gully G may have been contemporary with it, as pit 5150 also cut into the top of ditch E. The upper fill of this pit and of pit 5135 were also dark grey and contained sherds of Roman pottery and bone. To the west of gully G, the fill of pit 5148 contained burnt limestone fragments, but no other finds. The presence of these pits in this location, including the large pit 5172 on the edge of the excavated area, would suggest these pits were not contemporary with the use of this corner of the enclosure as an entrance.

A group of pits lay within the south-east corner of the enclosure, and may post-date its use, as pit 5099 cut ditch E. All were roughly circular or oval in shape, except 5106 which was of elongated oval form. Maximum dimensions varied from 0.6m to 2.5m,
with the largest and deepest pit, 5124, surviving to a depth of 0.35m. In contrast to the group of pits in the north-east corner of the enclosure, this group as a whole produced only occasional sherds of Roman pottery.

Three pits to the south of ditch D contained fills rich in animal bone and Roman pottery, pit 5063 producing over 13,000 fragments of sheep/goat bones, including several partially complete individuals. This may indicate the disposal of part of a flock due to disease. Adjacent pit 5065 also contained only sheep/goat bone fragments and may have been used for the same purpose.

A trend towards slightly later dated pottery (but dating no later than the early 3rd century) was noted in the group of pits that lay beyond the eastern end of ditch C. The deepest pit 5041, cut into the top of ditch B, survived up to 0.45m in depth and contained a large assemblage of cattle, horse, sheep/goat and pig bones and 126 sherds of Roman pottery. The adjacent pit 5023 was also rich in pottery of this date.

**Period 3: Medieval (12th/13th century AD)**

Medieval activity at Site A was represented by a single oval pit 1048 (Figure 3) 2.72m long, 1.6m wide and 0.45m deep. It contained a single fill from which two sherds of Minety ware pottery were recovered dating to the 12th/13th century. A single sherd of medieval pottery was also retrieved from tree-throw pit 1020.

**Undated**

Three postholes 5037, 5028 and 5035 on Site B are parallel to the line of the A419 and may form part of a modern fenceline. None of these features contained any dating evidence, although 5028 cut into the top of ditch B. At Site A (Figure 3) a series of tree-throw pits may be associated with ground clearance relating to the prehistoric or medieval activity recorded on the site, but this cannot be proven.

**Finds by E.R. McSloy**

**Worked flint**

A small group of 43 pieces of worked or burnt flint (252g) was recovered from excavation and evaluation. An additional 19 pieces were found during fieldwalking undertaken in 2004. The assemblage consists largely of unutilised removals (flakes and chips) and core fragments. The chief significance of the group is that 30 pieces from features in Site A is stratified material, and is representative of earlier prehistoric activity in the area. Some material, including 15 pieces from the fills of pit 1029, was retrieved in association with pottery of probable Middle Bronze Age date.

Excepting the surface collected group and unstratified material, the condition of the worked flint is typically good. The material from Site A exhibits characteristics of uniform pale grey patination consistent with burial within calcareous soils. Worked flint found at Site B was largely unpatinated, probably reflecting the different geology noted in this area. Where the underlying colour of the raw material is exposed by edge damage or breakage, this is dark grey. The cortex, where surviving, tends to be chalky and un worn, and suggests good quality raw material from a primary (chalk) source.

Included among the Site A pit groups were small removals (chips) and cortical flakes apparently from the same core or nodule. The material present and its typically sharp condition suggests that a proportion at least is stratified. The small quantity of worked flint from Site B largely occurred residually in Roman deposits, and included a broken blade, possibly a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic piece, and seven flakes of unknown date.

Pieces with secondary working (re-touch) are restricted to a broken end/side scraper from Site A (pit 1029) and a small, discoidal ‘button’ scraper recovered from fieldwalking. Only the button scraper is suggestive of dating, this comparing to tool forms commonly seen among Beaker and Early Bronze Age assemblages. Two other pieces from pit 1029 (a blade fragment and a large flake) exhibit damage to edges consistent with utilisation as cutting implements.

Some limited evidence for Mesolithic or possibly Early Neolithic activity is suggested by blades and a fragment from a bladelet core from the topsoil at Site A. A flake from Site A pit 1029 appears to be a ‘core tablet’ (a tranchet-struck rejuvenation flake from a single or opposed platform core of Mesolithic type). It features blade/bladelet scars, with evidence for platform preparation (abrasion).

The (potentially) stratified pit groups from Site A (including material from evaluation features 1505 and 1508) exhibit some observable technological characteristics, which support dating suggested by the associated (Bronze Age) ceramics. The flake removals typically exhibit squat proportions and show characteristics of hard-hammer-percussion without evidence for platform preparation. Five
flakes from pit 1029 and 1006 feature hinge fractures which may reflect the often ‘uncontrolled’ character of some metal-age flintworking.

Pottery

Pottery amounting to 876 sherds (9274g) was recovered from 70 deposits. Small quantities of Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery were recovered primarily from Site A. The larger part of the assemblage derives from Site B and dates to the earlier Roman period.

The majority of pottery was hand-recovered during the course of evaluation and excavation with small quantities of Roman material (61 sherds; 219g) retrieved from the processing of soil samples. The pottery was recorded according to nationally accepted standards (PCRG 1997; SGRP 1994). Quantification for both period groups was according to sherd count and weight for each fabric by context. Vessel form was recorded for all featured sherds (typically rims and bases) and a measure of rim percentage to provide estimated vessel equivalent (Rim EVEs).

The condition of the assemblage was variable. The prehistoric component typically occurred as small bodysherds and is reflected in a low mean sherd weight of 3g. Mean sherd weight is also moderately low for the Roman assemblage (11.3g). Surface survival and preservation of calcareous inclusions varied across the two sites; however it appeared that the clay soils prevalent in Site B resulted in markedly poorer preservation.

Prehistoric Pottery

Middle Bronze Age

Pottery of earlier prehistoric type amounted to 20 sherds (60g). All of it was recovered from pit-like features in Site A, other than two residual sherds from Area B (Table 1). All the material consisted of small, sometimes abraded bodysherds and dating is largely on the basis of characteristics of fabric and firing (below).

Sherds in grog-tempered fabrics from pit 1029 (two) and pit 1004 (one) feature narrow applied (vertical) strips. A Middle Bronze Age date is considered probable, with the use of applied strips consistent with southern British Deverel-Rimbury styles. A sherd in a flint-tempered fabric from pit 1029 would be consistent with either a Neolithic or Middle Bronze Age date, although in this case the absence of decoration favours the later period.

Table 1: Prehistoric pottery summary by area. Quantification as sherd count and weight(g)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Fabric</th>
<th>Ct.</th>
<th>Wt. Ct.</th>
<th>Wt.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>BA FT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>IA LI</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IA SH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IA Q</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IA RS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>115</td>
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</table>

Fabrics

BA GR: Coarse grogged. Orange-brown or buff surfaces with dark grey core. Soft, with irregular fracture and soapy feel. Common sub-rounded dark grey grog (2–3mm); may include sparse white limestone (0.5–1mm). Sherd thickness range 8–10mm.

BA FT: Coarse flint. Orange-brown throughout. Soft, with irregular fracture and rough feel. Common angular flint (2–4mm) which can protrude through surfaces; common quartz sand. Sherd thickness range 9–10mm.

Late Prehistoric

A total of 51 (152g) sherds of probable Iron Age pottery was recovered. Material of probable earlier Iron Age date was recovered from two postholes (1039 and 1041) within Site A. The fabrics compare to material of Earlier/Middle Iron Age type known from neighbouring sites at Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1982, 54–63) and Groundwell West (Timby 2001, 19–24). One vessel from posthole 1039 is notable in exhibiting an iron-rich red slip. The use of red slips is commonly recorded in the central-southern region among pottery finewares of earlier Iron Age date and is also present at Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1982, 54).

The remaining material, comprising quantities of handmade pottery in (leached) shell or limestone-tempered fabrics, was recovered from Site B (Table 1). The majority of pottery of this type is likely to be residual, although there is good evidence for the continuation in the region of hand-made types including Malvernian limestone-tempered wares into the middle decades of the 1st century AD (Timby and Harrison 2004). Few forms were recorded, although the globular and barrel-shaped jars are consistent with a Middle to Late Iron Age date, plausibly extending into the 1st century AD.

IA SH: Coarse fossil shell. Dark grey-brown throughout. Soft with irregular/laminated fracture and smooth
feel. Where not leached, inclusions consist of common coarse shell 2–3 mm and sparse sub-angular limestone (2–3 mm). Sherd thickness range 8–9 mm.

IA LI: Limestone tempered. Dark grey or grey-brown throughout. Soft with irregular fracture and smooth feel. Inclusions are leached, leaving sub-angular voids, 1–3 mm. Forms: neck-less, globular jar with bead-rim (1 vessel/0.05 EVEs); neck-less barrel-shaped jar (1 vessel/0.04 EVEs).

IA Q: Fine sandy. Dark grey throughout or with red-brown surfaces. Hard with sandy feel and fine break. Common quartz sand. Sherd thickness range 5–6 mm.


**Roman Pottery**

A total of 805 sherds of pottery weighing 9062 g and amounting to 6.29 EVEs was recovered (Table 2). Where possible the fabric codes reflect those used for the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998).

**Fabrics**

*Local probably local*

GROG1: *Wheel-thrown grog-tempered ware.* Typically dark grey throughout or with red-brown margin. Medium coarse grey or dark grey grog (1–2 mm). Soapy feel. Forms: necked jar/bowl (2 vessels/0.13 EVEs); neck-less jar with bead rim (1 vessel/0.10 EVEs); platter (1 vessel).

GROGQ: *Wheel-thrown grog with quartz.* Red-brown surfaces with dark grey core. Medium coarse grey or dark grey grog (1–2 mm) and common quartz sand. Sandy feel. Forms: necked jar with out-curved rim and internal groove (1 vessel/0.30 EVEs).

SAV GT: *Savernake ware.* Typically coarse fabric with abundant grey grog and occasional flint (Tomber and Dore 1998, 191). Typically pale grey with darker surfaces but variable. Forms: large necked jar with out-curved/evverted rim (2 vessels/0.24 EVEs); medium necked jar with out-curved rim (1 vessel/0.08 EVEs); neck-less jar with bead/short-evverted rim (2 vessels/0.11 EVEs).

SAV GTF: *Savernake ware fine variant.* This is a finer variant, characterised by smaller grog inclusions and absence of flint. Typically grey throughout.

Forms: necked jar with out-curved rim (3 vessels/0.31 EVEs).

LOC GW: *Local (North Wilts) greyware.* Grey throughout or with darker-firing surfaces. Common quartz sand. Sandy feel. Forms: medium-mouth necked jar with out-curved rim (11 vessels/1.37 EVEs); narrow-mouth jar with out-curved rim (1 vessel/0.04 EVEs); neck-less jar with evverted rim (2 vessels/0.28 EVEs); dish/bowl with flat-rim (1 vessel/0.04 EVEs); Carinated bowl (Late La Tène type) (1 vessel/0.25 EVEs).

LOC GWf: *Local (North Wilts) greyware*, finer variant. Grey throughout. May sometimes have grey slip/wash. Common fine quartz sand. Smooth feel. Forms: beaker with bead rim (1 vessel/0.11 EVEs); Carinated jar with evverted rim (1 vessel/0.11 EVEs).

LOC BS: *Local (North Wilts) black sandy.* Probably equivalent to Cirencester fabric 5 (Rigby 1989). Dark grey/black through or with grey core. Common fine quartz sand. Sandy feel. Forms: carinated bowl (2 vessels); neck-less jar with bead/short-evverted rim (3 vessels/0.25 EVEs); medium

### Table 2: Roman pottery summary by fabric. Quantification shown as sherd count:weight(g):rim EVEs total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fabric</th>
<th>Ditch C</th>
<th>Ditch E</th>
<th>Gully G</th>
<th>Pit 5023</th>
<th>Pit 5041</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GROG1</td>
<td>7/23/-</td>
<td>16/70/0.06</td>
<td>26/294/0.10</td>
<td>22/118/0.07</td>
<td>71/505/0.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROGQ</td>
<td>3/76/-</td>
<td>1/4/-</td>
<td>6/96/-</td>
<td>3/58/0.30</td>
<td>7/138/0.30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAV GT</td>
<td>12/417/-</td>
<td>74/1574/0.18</td>
<td>29/412/-</td>
<td>1/4/-</td>
<td>6/96/-</td>
<td>100/1329/0.43</td>
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<td>SAV GTf</td>
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<td>25/366/0.12</td>
<td>1/4/-</td>
<td>4/43/-</td>
<td>24/370/0.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOC GW</td>
<td>9/60/0.25</td>
<td>3/38/-</td>
<td>26/529/1.12</td>
<td>5/40/0.08</td>
<td>72/701/0.30</td>
<td>87/607/0.39</td>
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<td>LOC GWf</td>
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<td>2/12/-</td>
<td>3/16/0.10</td>
<td>36/43/-</td>
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<td>44/248/0.54</td>
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<td>1/2/-</td>
<td>6/25/-</td>
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<td>7/32/0.08</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>LOCWH</td>
<td>2/26/0.13</td>
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<td>2/26/0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC RS</td>
<td>6/182/-</td>
<td>1/6/-</td>
<td>1/16/-</td>
<td>3/16/-</td>
<td>11/220/-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB FT</td>
<td>3/92/0.07</td>
<td>24/319/0.22</td>
<td>2/68/0.28</td>
<td>14/66/0.08</td>
<td>43/545/0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVW OX</td>
<td>1/10/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1/10/-</td>
<td>1/10/-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAB TR 3</td>
<td>1/10/0.12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1/10/0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEZ SA2</td>
<td>2/62/-</td>
<td>2/62/-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGF SA</td>
<td>2/10/-</td>
<td>2/10/-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>42/651/0.42</td>
<td>107/1961/0.24</td>
<td>147/1927/2.20</td>
<td>45/473/0.52</td>
<td>126/1007/0.67</td>
<td>338/3063/2.24</td>
<td>805/9062/6.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EVE = estimated vessel equivalent
mouth necked jar with out-curved rim (5 vessels/0.32 EVEs); narrow-mouth jar with out-curved rim (1 vessel/0.18 EVEs); lid (1 vessel/0.10 EVEs).

**LOC OX:** Local (North Wilts) oxidised type. Orange throughout. Common fine quartz sand. Smooth feel.

*Forms:* bowl, hemispherical with flat, reeded rim (1 vessel/0.16 EVEs); medium-mouth necked jar with out-curved rim (2 vessels/0.25 EVEs); tankard (1 vessel/0.13 EVEs).

**LOC OX:** Local (North Wilts) oxidised type (flagon fabric).

Pale orange or buff throughout. Sparse fine quartz sand and may be micaceous. Smooth feel.

*Forms:* flagon (handle) (1 vessel).

**LOC WH:** Local (North Wilts) whiteware. White throughout. Common quartz sand. Sandy feel.

*Forms:* beaker/small jar with everted rim (1 vessel/0.08 EVEs).

**RB FT:** Flint-tempered. Dark grey throughout. Common angular calcined flint (1–3mm); sparse quartz sand. Sandy/harsh feel.

**LOC RS:** Local (North Wilts) red-slipped fabric. Buff surfaces with dark grey core. Abundant quartz sand with sparse fine black grog and red-brown iron oxide. Good red-brown surface slip.

*Forms:* globular beaker with everted rim (1 vessel/0.13 EVEs).

**Regional**

**DOR BB:** Dorset Black-Burnished ware. (Tomber and Dore 1998, 127).

*Forms:* everted-rim jars (4 vessels/0.48 EVEs); flat-rim dish (2 vessels/0.15 EVEs).

**SVW OX:** Severn Valley ware with organic (charcoal) inclusions. (Bryant and Evans 2004, 247–50).

*Forms:* tankard (1 vessel).

**Continental**

**GAB TR 3:** Terra Rubra (Tomber and Dore 1998, 24), also described by Rigby (1989, 126).

*Forms:* Cam 112a ovoid beaker (1 vessel/0.12 EVEs).

**LGF SA:** South Gaulish (La Graufesenque) samian. (Tomber and Dore 1998, 28).

**LEZ SA 2:** Central Gaulish (Lezoux) samian. (Tomber and Dore 1998, 32).

*Forms:* Drag 18/31r dish (1 vessel).

**Fabric source**

Local or unsourced (probably local) types account for the bulk of the assemblage (94% by sherd count), primarily a mix of grogged wares and sandy reduced types. The grogged material includes fabrics (SAV GT/SAV GTI) associated with the kilns known from the Savernake Forest/Oare region, approximately 20km distant to the south (Swan 1975, 35–61; Tomber and Dore 1998, 191). The typically softer and black-firing fabric GROG1 is reminiscent of ‘Belgic’-style material noted from the area of Cirencester and Bagendon, 15–20km to the north-west, and Horcott, 7km to the north (Timby and Harrison 2004, 57). It is likely that material in this tradition was made at a number of locations in the wider area. Similarly the exact origin of the reduced and oxidised-firing coarsewares is not known, although fabrics and forms correspond with material deriving from the West Swindon Whitehall Farm-Purton complex of kilns (Anderson 1979). Similarly fineware fabrics including red-slipped type LOC RS probably originate locally, with forms corresponding with vessels from Wanborough (Walters et al. 1973, fig. 3, no. 9).

Regional (non-local) wares occur in modest quantities as Severn Valley ware and Dorset Black-Burnished ware (Table 2). The latter type is largely restricted to later contexts including pits 5023 and 5041. Continental wares are similarly rare, these occurring mainly as Gaulish samian present for the most part as unstratified material. The presence of a *Terra Rubra* sherd (Figure 7, no. 1) is notable, and adds to the small number of rural sites in, or peripheral to, the Cotswolds where pre-Flavian imports occur (Holbrook 2008, 314–5). Gallo-Belgic material is known from Wanborough (Seager-Smith 2001, 242) and it is possible that this important Early Roman site, 6km to the south, represents the source for this and other 1st-century finewares.

**Chronology**

The overall composition of the assemblage (Table 3) is a good indicator of its early character, the sizeable grogged/Savernake-type component probably dating largely to the second half of the 1st century or early decades of the 2nd (Rigby 1982, 153–4). A proportion of the assemblage, including wheel-thrown grog-tempered types (fabrics GROG1; GROGq) may date to the early to mid 1st century AD. A further indicator of activity of pre-Flavian date is the *Terra Rubra* vessel from gully G, which is unlikely to date after AD 65 (pers comm. V. Rigby). The reduced coarsewares which make up the bulk of the remainder of the assemblage belong to a long-lived tradition, with evidence for example from Wanborough for pre-Flavian or early Flavian origins in some instances (Seager-Smith 2001, 243–4). Some forms (Figure 7, no. 4) show clear affinities with ‘Belgic’ material and suggest a date in the mid/late 1st century AD. Similarly, carinated jar forms (Figure 7, no. 5) find parallels among later 1st to earlier 2nd-century material from Wanborough (ibid., fig. 87, no. 206; fig. 89, nos. 234–5).

Dorset Black-Burnished wares, which occur
in small quantities (5.3% by count), are among the latest material represented. Forms in this ware type comprise primarily jars, each with acute-angled lattice and one instance (pit 5041, fill 5043) with scored wavy decoration to the rim. The forms represented very probably date to the period c. AD 120–200/220.

**Site sequence**

The use of the pottery in refining the internal chronology of the site was hindered by the general absence of large context groups. Broad contemporaneity can be supposed for most context groups, with the majority pre-dating c. AD 150. The pottery was unevenly distributed across the site with gully G, ditches C and E and pits 5023 and 5041 producing the bulk of material (Table 2). However, within these larger assemblages some chronological variation can be perceived. The forms from ditch C, mostly necked or neck-less jars and a carinated bowl (Figure 7, no. 4) are typical of the mid to late 1st century AD. The limited presence of fully Romanised sandy reduced wares and a sherd of Severn Valley ware (charcoal-tempered variant) are factors encouraging a similar dating for ditch E. The bulk of the assemblage from gully G is consistent with a mid/later 1st to early 2nd-century AD date, with over half (81 sherds or 55.1%) comprising grogged types. Specific indicators are the *Terra Rubra* vessel, for which a pre-Flavian date is certain, and likely Flavian or early 2nd-century vessel forms (Figure 7, nos. 5–6).

Pottery groups from pits 5023 and 5041 contain markedly larger quantities of Dorset Black-Burnished compared to material previously described and this probably reflects later dating. The forms in these fabrics consist of everted rim-jars with acute-angled lattice, implying dating before c. AD 220/30 (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 96). A vessel with burnished wavy line to its rim from pit 5041, probably dates before the late 2nd century (*ibid.*, 95).

**Discussion**

The Roman assemblage is of interest locally, extending the sequence of habitation after the predominantly Early and Middle Iron Age sites at Groundwell West (Walker *et al.* 2001) and Groundwell Farm (Gingell 1982). The assemblage is compositionally similar to Roman material from the final fills of the Iron Age enclosures at Groundwell Farm (*ibid.*.) and it might be suggested that activity shifted from Groundwell Farm to Site B at about the time of the Roman conquest or the preceding decades. The Roman activity at Site B was relatively short-lived and may have been abandoned in favour of the villa at Groundwell Ridge (Brickstock *et al.* 2006).

The small size of the assemblage means that little can be inferred with regard to economic status. The *Terra Rubra* sherd aside, there are no overt indications of higher status and the virtual
absence of amphorae, flagons or decorated samian suggests that pottery was employed overwhelmingly for cooking and storage. The assemblage is heavily dominated by jars (79.2% of EVEs total) with other classes restricted to beakers/tankards (9.7% EVEs total); bowls/dishes (9.5% EVEs total) and lids (1.6% EVEs total).

Catalogue of illustrated items (Figure 7)
1 Site B, Period 2, gully G fill 5164: Fabric GAB TR 3. Ovoid beaker (Cam 112a)
4 Site B, Period 2, ditch C fill 5088. Fabric LOC GW. Carinated bowl.

Environmental Evidence

Animal Bone, by Sylvia Warman

Animal bone was recovered from Sites A and B during hand excavation and the processing of environmental samples. The assemblage from Site B is the larger and better-preserved, all identifiable bones being fully recorded by element, species, size, sex, weight, parts present, fusion, tooth wear, pathology, burning, butchery and weathering. Whole long bones were measured to enable the calculation of withers heights following Kiesewalter (cited in von den Driesch and Boessneck 1974). Both the hand-collected and sieved assemblages are tabulated by species and body-part (Table 3). The assemblage from Site A and from pit 2026 in Area B was assessed, but was too fragmented to facilitate detailed analysis. Further details of the assessment and analysis data are available in the site archive.

Period 1: Prehistoric, and undated
Red deer and horse bones were recovered from pits within Site A, and red deer bone was found in pit 2026 within Area B. The primary fill of pit 1006 (Period 1a) contained 40 fragments of red deer antlers and a single tooth of a red deer. Pit 1024 (Period 1b) contained a fragmented horse molar, exhibiting advanced weathering, posthole 1041 (Period 1b) produced a horse metacarpal (cannon bone), with a lateral length of 208mm, equivalent to the height of a medium-sized modern pony of 13 hands or 1.3m. Undated pit 2026 from Area B produced 14 fragments of red deer antler in very poor condition and which had been subject to weathering.

Period 2: Roman (Mid 1st to 2nd century AD)
Fragments of horse, cattle, sheep/goat and pig bone were present in a variety of features from Site B. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Part</th>
<th>Horse (hand collected)</th>
<th>Horse (sieved)</th>
<th>Cattle (hand collected)</th>
<th>Cattle (sieved)</th>
<th>Sheep/Goat (hand collected)</th>
<th>Sheep/Goat (sieved)</th>
<th>Pig (hand collected)</th>
<th>Pig (sieved)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose teeth</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlas/axis</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Carpal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NISP totals</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total weight (g.)</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNI</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9+(2)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>% by NISP</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% by weight in grams</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NISP = count of number of identified specimens
MNI = minimum number of individuals
*Figures in brackets denote partially articulated specimens
identified assemblage comprises 53 hand-collected fragments from 43 bones, weighing 565g, and from the processed samples 225 fragments from 219 bones, weighing 564g. Fragmentation is high and no measurements could be taken from the specimens. The MNI (minimum number of individuals) counts are: three horses, three pigs, three cows and sixteen sheep/goat. A wide range of body parts can be fitted together which suggests that seven individuals of sheep/goat were partially articulated skeletons. The horse, cattle and pig remains are all from adult individuals; sheep/goat include a few juvenile specimens but most are from animals which would have been adult or sub-adult (of adult size but not skeletal maturity). The only taxon for which a wide range of body parts is present is sheep/goat. The predominance of teeth and fragments of mandible within the assemblage is probably a result of disproportionate survival of these more robust skeletal elements. A greater range of bones is present in the sieved material than the hand-excavated groups suggesting that smaller bones were missed during hand-excavation of the clayey soils. Butchery was noted on five specimens in the form of bones which had been chopped right through. A total of 11% of the identified specimens shows weathering, the small percentage suggesting damage resulting from exposure of bones on the ground surface prior to burial is minimal. Post-depositional damage is more considerable. The tenacity of the clay and wet conditions during excavation may have contributed to modern breakage frequently observed in the long bones. Two specimens display signs of having been gnawed by dogs.

The assemblage is dominated by sheep/goat, due in part to the presence of several partially articulated skeletons. Discounting the partially articulated skeletons the total for sheep/goat is three times as numerous as horse, cattle, or pig (Table 3). Pit 5063 produced the largest group of animal bones from the site: 210 identified bones from a total fragment count in excess of 13,000 recovered both by hand-collection and from a sieved sample. The identified material comprises purely sheep/goat, with a mixture of adult, sub-adult and juvenile individuals. Visible colour changes from burning at a low temperature (Lyman 1994) were noted in twelve specimens. A smaller assemblage derived from pit 5065 is also composed entirely of sheep/goat bones. The bones are mostly from the forelimb (upper and lower), as well as some lower hind limb bones and a maxillary tooth. Two specimens, possibly from the same individual and comprising right and left distal humeri, have additional bone formation on the lateral surface adjacent to the trochlea (which forms the hinge joint with the ulna). This could be the early stages of a condition which farmers refer to as 'penning elbow' (Dobney et al. 2007).

The large assemblages from pit 5041 and gully G comprise a wider range of species, with sheep/goat, cattle, horse and pig all represented. The final infilling of gully G produced exclusively sheep/goat bones comprising a tibia, radius, distal metatarsal and a fragment of mandible. The radius shows signs of gnawing by dogs. A horse metacarpal from ditch L is an example of a splint bone, the residual second metacarpal, attached by means of additional bone growth to the central (third) metacarpal. This type of trauma occurs when the joint is knocked or grazed. Smaller quantities of animal bone were recovered from ditches defining the boundary trackway, the enclosure, and drainage modifications to the enclosure.

Discussion

The red deer antler assemblage and single tooth from pit 1006 on Site A are consistent with hunting or scavenging, and that from the undated pit 2026 on Area B may be further evidence of the same activity.

The early Roman features on Site B produced a small range of domestic stock dominated by partial sheep/goat skeletons from pits 5063 and 5065. The animal bone from features that had been deliberately back-filled is more numerous, and in a better state of preservation. Deposits 5064 and 5066 represent at least two sheep/goat skeletons. The wide range of body parts suggests that these deposits are the result of the disposal of complete or at least partially articulated skeletons. The reason for the discard of several sheep of prime age is unknown, although infectious disease is a possibility. Alternatively these groups could represent ‘closure’ deposits; a form of ritual behaviour associated with the abandonment of an area previously occupied or used (Fulford, 2001). No butchery or gnawing is apparent. A small proportion of the material had been burnt to a low to moderate temperature.

The incidence of pathology in the assemblage is low, but where present suggests corralling of both sheep and horse. The low level of weathering and gnawing by dogs hint that animal bone was generally buried rapidly. The gnawing marks indicate that dogs were present on site even though this species is not within the assemblage. In this respect, the animal bone assemblage is similar to that of the mid-late
Roman villa at Groundwell Ridge where low levels of gnawing were also noted (Worley in prep).

It is interesting to note that the domestic assemblage from Site B appears more typical of an Iron Age than a Roman site (Dobney 2001), with a high ratio of sheep/goat to cattle and pigs. The lack of wild species at Site B suggests little input into the diet from hunting.

**Charred Plant Remains and Charcoal, by Dana Challinor**

Three bulk samples produced charcoal and charred plant remains, comprising flots from fractions 1mm and 0.5mm, and material sorted from the residues. Sample <1>, from Site A, from the fill of pit 1029 (1043) is dated to the Early to Middle Bronze Age (Period 1), and samples <2> and <3> from Site B derive from Roman (Period 2) pits 5041 and 5063. Three bags of hand-collected charcoal from Area A were also recovered. The flots and charcoal from the residues were scanned under a binocular microscope at up to x45 magnification. Charcoal caught on the 2mm sieve was identified and quantified; fragments were randomly extracted, fractured if necessary and examined in transverse section. The flots were also scanned for the presence of any other charred remains and an estimate of abundance made.

**Results**

All of the flots were dominated by roots and sediment, with concretions in context 1043 (pit 1029) linked to the soil conditions. The charred material in the samples from Site B comprised a single degraded fragment of a probable cereal grain or large grass seed and some small fragments of poorly preserved charcoal. *Quercus* (oak) and *Alnus/Corylus* (alder/hazel) were identified. Context 1043 from Site A produced a moderate amount of *Corylus avellana* (hazel) nutshell and an assemblage of charcoal, including *Quercus* (oak), *Alnus/Corylus* (alder/hazel) and another diffuse porous taxon which was not identified. The fragments were generally small in size. A couple of weed seeds were also noted. The hand-collected charcoal generally was well preserved, with the exception of a fragment of charcoal from pit 1020 which was too friable to identify. The species identified were *Quercus* (oak) and *Alnus/Corylus* (alder/hazel).

Oak and alder/hazel charcoal in the samples suggests the use of locally available species for fuel. The hazelnut shell fragments are likely to be food processing waste. Large quantities of hazelnut shells are often recovered from prehistoric pits, indicating the gathering of wild food resources.

**Discussion**

by Mark Brett and Mary Alexander

The construction of the Blunsdon Bypass has provided the opportunity to investigate a corridor of land to the west of the A419 and the route of the Roman road. Evidence for prehistoric occupation examined at Site A supports the evidence from residual finds at previously excavated sites in the area for the utilisation of the high ground in the early prehistoric period. It is apparent from recent investigations of the sites at Groundwell Farm, Groundwell West and Groundwell Ridge that the region of Blunsdon St Andrew was widely settled in the Iron Age and Roman period. The evidence from Site B provides a significant contribution to the emerging pattern of land-use and settlement shift around the time of the construction of the Roman road.

**Period 1: Prehistoric (Mesolithic to Iron Age)**

The incidence of Mesolithic or possibly Early Neolithic flint found residually at Site A can be seen within the wider picture of worked flint distribution noted from fieldwalking to the south of Site A and within Groundwell West and its environs, where distribution patterns indicate a higher incidence of prehistoric activity on the Corallian Ragstone (Walker 2001, 30). The earliest archaeological features identified along the route of the Blunsdon Bypass comprised pits and postholes dating to the Middle Bronze Age at Site A. The primary clay fill of pit 1029 had been partially scorched by the deposition of a later charcoal-rich deposit, presumably representing the collected residue from a hearth. The charcoal fragments identified as oak and alder/hazel indicate a locally available source of fuel. The secondary fill contained a significant amount of cultural material, including worked flints, Middle Bronze Age pottery and a quantity of carbonised hazel nutshell; the latter represents a commonly utilised supply of food in the prehistoric period. The bands of scorched clay within the fills of the adjacent feature 1505 associated with Bronze Age flints, and the scorched edge of undated pit 1031 to the south.
suggest further evidence of domestic activity. Given that evidence for domestic activity suggested by cultural remains is often found unaccompanied by structural evidence in this period, occupation on Site A in the Middle Bronze Age cannot be ruled out. The assemblage of red deer antler in pit 1006 associated with worked flint broadly characteristic of this period may indicate either seasonal hunting, or the collection of shed antlers for tool-making. Red deer was an important raw material in this period as well as a minor source of food. Evidence for red deer antler-working, as well as limb bones indicating consumption, was found at the Middle Bronze Age site at Latton Lands, 7km to the north of Site A (Hamilton 2004). The evidence from Site A may suggest repeated seasonal occupation, in contrast to the evidence for more permanent settlement emerging in this period on the lower lying lands of the Upper Thames Valley to the north (Lambrick 2007, 92–8).

Although a number of postholes were present within the general scatter of features, these largely appear to represent single posts. Exceptions to this patterning may be represented by two pairs, and a line of three equidistant postholes in the southern part of Site A. The depths to which the recorded postholes survived suggests that it is unlikely that any further features were originally present and have been lost to later truncation. Iron Age pottery was recovered from a pair of postholes, 1039 and 1041, which possibly represent a two-post structure. The isolated pit 1024 on the north-west site of Site A and these postholes suggest small-scale activity on the periphery of settlement in the Iron Age period.

Residual Iron Age pottery was also revealed from Roman features on Site B. The single undated pit 5194 truncated by Ditch B is the sole feature that might pre-date the Roman phase, but no features contained exclusively Iron Age artefacts. However it is of some interest that the animal bone is more typical of an Iron Age than Roman assemblage in the relative proportions of the species represented, and it is possible that some of the ditches disturbed Iron Age features which lay beyond the limits of the excavated area, introducing a greater proportion of sheep bone into the assemblage.

Period 2: Roman (Mid 1st to 2nd century AD)

The pottery evidence from Site B indicates that activity here was relatively short-lived, commencing in the latter part of the 1st century AD and extending only into the early decades of the 2nd century. The stratigraphy largely reflects this, with little evidence for intercutting of features or re-cutting of ditches (although some relationships indicate a degree of reorganisation).

Ditches A and B demarcate the southern boundary of the site, either as a trackway, or as a boundary which was re-established over time. It is possible that these features represent the earliest activity as they are respected by the remaining features. Ditches A and B, and those of the enclosure, silted up naturally in contrast to ditches C and D, gully G and a number of the pits which were deliberately backfilled with culturally rich fills. Stratigraphically, these elements would appear to represent a modification which blocked the entrance to the enclosure. The backfills of these features may be evidence for a symbolic ‘closure’ of the site, and a link to pre-Roman rituals of structured deposition (Fulford 2001, 200).

The general east-west/north-south co-axial alignment of ditches at Site B does not correspond with the projected north-west/south-east course of Ermin Street (Figure 5). However this is not uncommon and can be seen at other Roman roadside settlement sites on the line of Ermin Street, such Field's Farm (Mudd et al., 1999) and Duntisbourne Leer north of Cirencester (ibid; 115), and Field Barn, Latton (ibid.; 129). Cropmark evidence suggests all three settlement enclosures are on a different alignment to the road and the connecting trackways curve round to meet the road at an approximate right angle. At these sites, and at the settlement site at Hucclecote near Gloucester (Thomas et al. 2003, 26), evidence for pre-Conquest origins is linked to their different alignments, and the trackways are added, or adapted, following the construction of the Roman road. The evidence at Blunsdon Bypass Site B is less substantive, although residual Iron Age pottery and a possible Iron Age element to the animal bone assemblage could be taken as an indication of the presence of Iron Age features close to the excavated area.

Taken as a whole, the evidence from Site B would appear to indicate small paddocks or fields, and the quantity of finds indicates nearby occupation. The finds suggest a low-status settlement, more than likely a small farmstead, concerned in part with the keeping of sheep and cattle. Poor soil conditions at Site B have adversely affected the survival of environmental remains, but an absence of quern fragments could indicate a predominantly pastoral economy (Moore 2006, 119). The absence of any ceramic building material within the artefactual
assemblage indicates that any structures at Site B were not roofed in tile.

A site of similar status to that at Site B was discovered at South Marston, approximately 3km to the east, where a relatively poor farmstead was occupied between the 1st century BC and the 3rd or 4th century AD (MoLAS 2005; Evans and Alexander 2008). The absence of any significant Late Iron Age activity at both sites contrasts with the settlements in the Upper Thames Valley and may reflect a more dispersed pattern of settlement on the higher ground (Booth et al. 2007, 33). The activity at Site B is broadly contemporary with the earliest excavated phase at the Groundwell Ridge villa complex and it is possible that the abandonment of Site B is linked to the incorporation of land into the villa estate, or part of the shifting pattern of a small-scale farming venture exploiting the lower quality clay soils beyond the limits of the Groundwell Ridge field systems.

The excavations along the route of the Blunsdon Bypass add to the growing corpus of evidence of the general intensification of settlement and agricultural activity during the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods in the Upper Thames Valley and adjacent areas (Holbrook 2006; Lambrick 1992; Moore 2006).

Acknowledgements

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