

LATE IRON AGE FEATURES AT RESERVE SITE 5, DOWNS BARN, MILTON KEYNES

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with a contribution by

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An archaeological excavation in Milton Keynes revealed a system of linear and curvilinear ditches of Late Iron Age date, one in particular containing substantial quantities of 'Belgic' pottery. Although no evidence for houses was recovered, the ditches appear to represent domestic enclosures. Post-dating some of the ditches was a small structure of carefully-laid limestone slabs, close to two areas of burning and a deposit of burnt animal bone. These features may be evidence for ritual activity. The remains of a structure of 'Belgic bricks' were also present.

Between January and March 1999 the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) carried out an archaeological investigation at Reserve Site 5, on the southern edge of the Downs Barn area of Milton Keynes (NGR: SP 8617 4004) (Fig. 1). Historically the site lay at the southern end of the parish of Willen, in an area known as Lower Downs. Today it is bounded by the 'Redway' footpath and cycle track to the north and the cutting for the Portway (the A509) to the south. The site lies at a height of *c* 100 m OD on the western edge of the valley of the river Ouzel or Lovat, 2 km from the river and *c* 4.5 km south-west of its confluence with the Great Ouse. The soils in the area are slowly permeable calcareous clay belonging to the Evesham 2 association (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983), which overlies natural head deposits. The head has formed in a series of minor stream valleys which run off the boulder-clay plateau to the west (for a fuller geological description of the region see Zeevat *et al.* 1987, 3-5).

Formerly open space adjacent to a recreation ground, redevelopment of the site for housing required a programme of archaeological work, which followed a brief prepared by Mr B. Giggins, Archaeological Officer for Milton Keynes Council. The historical and archaeological background to the site was not well defined: a number of struck flints (Fig. 1 right, nos. 1-2) and ditches containing Roman pottery and oyster shell (no. 3) had been found during construction of the Milton Keynes grid roads immediately west of the site in 1978 (Site MK 210a), but the features were seen only in

roadside cuttings. Further finds of Roman pottery have been made at other times (Fig. 1 right, nos. 4-5), while fieldwalking by the Bedfordshire Historical Search Society turned up a gold stater of Cunobelin in the northern part of the site (Fig. 1 right, no. 6). From further west came handmade Iron Age pottery (no. 7) and a Roman coin (no. 8). The more recent history of the area was agricultural; a field barn erected in 1829 stands immediately to the east (no. 9).

THE EXCAVATIONS

During the initial evaluation of the site, in January 1999, five trial trenches (1 – 5) were opened using a mechanical excavator (Fig. 2). A number of ditches were revealed in the western part of the site (Trench 1), but the remaining trenches were blank. Finds of 'Belgic' pottery from these features suggested that they dated to the first half of the 1st century AD (Late Pre-Roman Iron Age). A second stage of work the following month involved the cutting of four more trenches (6 – 9) and the opening of two small areas (A and B) which extended the excavation around Trench 1. The aims of the second investigation were to define the courses of the previously recorded ditches and examine the adjacent area. As a result, archaeological features were revealed in the centre and west of the site, in Trenches 6, 8 and 9, as well as in Areas A and B. A third stage of works comprised a watching brief to monitor the groundworks associated with construction at the western end of the site (House Plots 1 – 3).

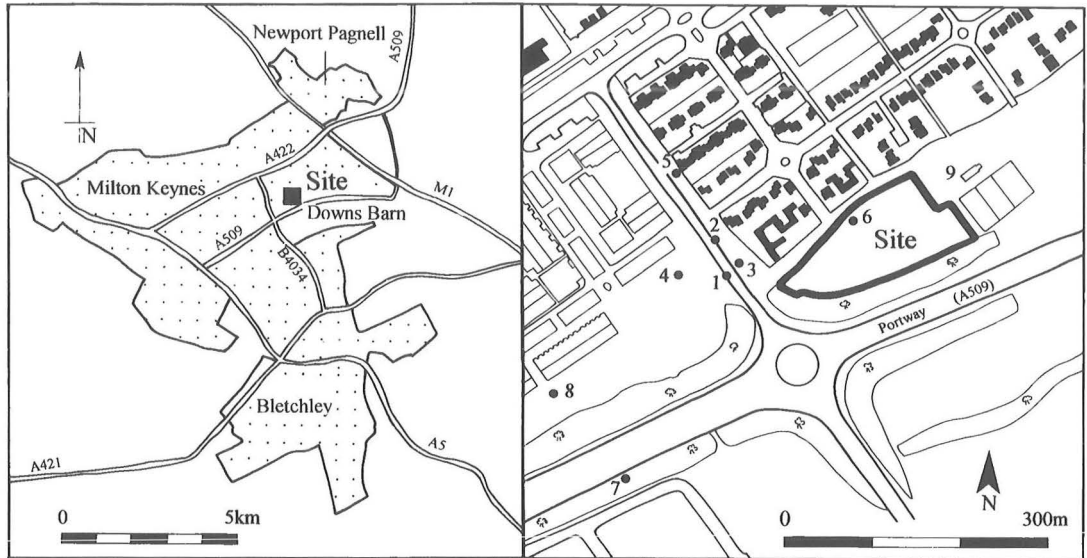


FIGURE 1 Site Location Plan, Downs Barn, Milton Keynes

Some 0.2 – 0.4 m of topsoil sealed the natural clay, except in the eastern part of the site where the topsoil overlay two deposits of silty clay subsoil (L1013 & L1001).

Ditches

Several ditches were present in Trench 1 and Areas A and B, all filled with compacted silty clay deposits (Figs. 3 & 4). F1008 appears to be a major boundary to which smaller features F1006 and F1022 are connected; F1003 (Fig. 2) was spatially separate and remains undated, though its alignment would suggest that it was perhaps contemporary with F1006 or F1060.

F1060 was a curvilinear feature, possibly the remnant of a ditch, measuring up to 0.9 m wide and 0.2 m deep in Trench 1, though in the eastern half of Area A it only survived in short stretches. Where sectioned, it had steeply sloping sides and a flat base, and contained two fills. The upper deposit (L1004) was yellowish with inclusions of chalk and charcoal; the lower (L1005) was black with rather more charcoal, burnt pebbles and small amounts of burnt clay. Beneath L1005 the base and sides of the feature showed discoloration apparently due to burning *in situ*.

F1047 in Trench 6 to the west was not excavated but may be a continuation of F1006/F1022 or

F1060; it measured up to 0.64 m wide and was filled with a dark grey pebbly deposit (L1048).

To the south of F1060, ditch F1006 was up to 0.9 m wide and 0.4 m deep. Its profile varied from gently sloping, with a concave, slightly irregular base, to steep-sided and flat-based. The ditch was filled with a dark brown pebbly deposit (L1007) which contained small quantities of animal bone and pottery. Ditch F1006 was cut by stone structure S1042, cremation pit F1020 at the eastern end of the excavated area, and possibly also by ditch F1022, although in Area B, where F1006 was not sectioned, the relationship between the two was not apparent.

F1022 was a third curvilinear ditch, up to 1.05 m wide and 0.7 m deep, with steep sides and a flat base. For part of its length it ran adjacent to F1006. F1022 had three fills, a dark brown basal deposit (L1025) underlying a yellowish secondary fill (L1024) and a stony dark brown upper fill (L1023). Small amounts of pottery came from L1025 and L1024, while L1023 produced rather more, including several sherds of a medium-sized jar (Fig. 8.10a), and animal bone. F1022 was not sectioned in Area B, but like F1006 it was cut by the stone structure S1042.

F1008 was a broad straight ditch aligned north-east/south-west, running parallel to F1006 in Trench 1 and the eastern part of Area A until the

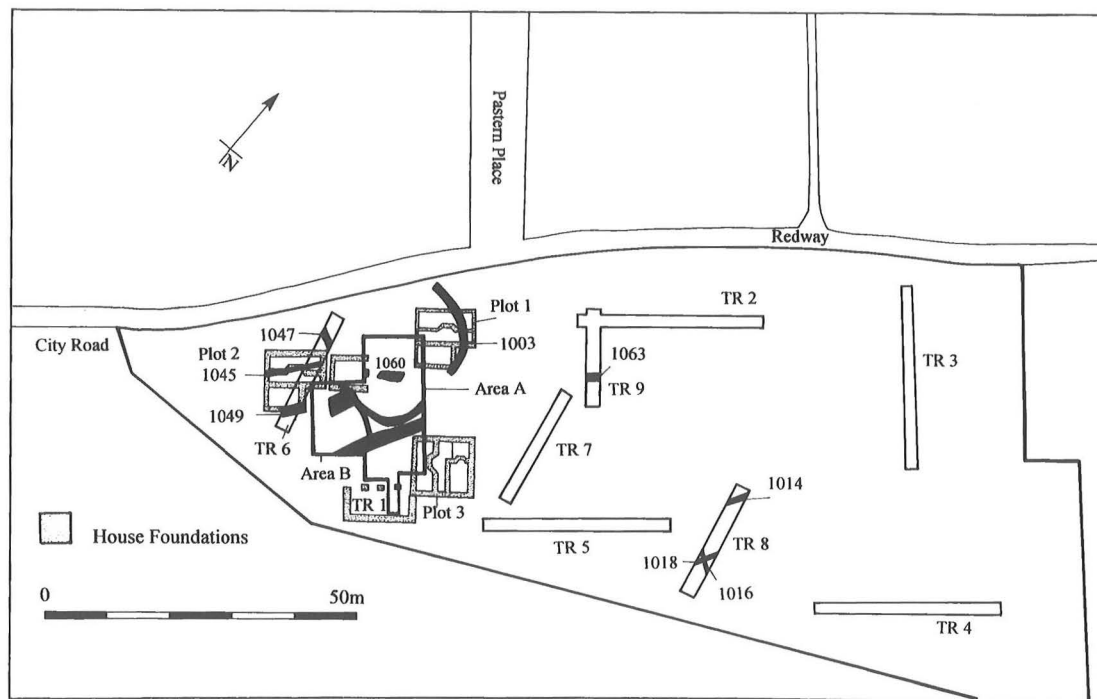


FIGURE 2 Plan of Excavation, Downs Barn, Milton Keynes. Plans of Trial Trenches 1-9 & Excavated Areas A & B

latter feature curved away. It was sectioned at three points. In Trench 1 and the east of Area A it measured up to 1.65 m wide and 0.7 m deep, and was 'V'-shaped in profile. Here the ditch had three or four fills. The primary deposit (L1012) was a brown pebbly fill covering a large number of potsherds which lay on the base of the ditch; most of these belonged to two or three shell-tempered jars and two large grogged bases (Figs. 7.6-7, 8.8). The secondary fill (L1011) was a light yellowish deposit containing fewer finds. In the Trench 1 section this was overlain, on the southern side of the ditch only, by a dark greenish-brown deposit (L1010) with frequent charcoal inclusions which may represent *in situ* burning, because the surrounding undisturbed natural showed signs of scorching. The upper fill (L1009) of the ditch was grey in colour and again contained a significant quantity of pottery, especially in the easternmost section, which included substantial parts of two or more vessels (Fig. 7.1-2). Deposits L1009 and L1011 also produced some animal bone and a few pieces of residual prehistoric flint, including three

squat flakes – one of them notched – and a retouched blade.

The western section of ditch F1008 (width 1.45 m, depth 0.6 m) had a 'U'-shaped profile. Its upper fill (L1009) was the same as to the east, but beneath this was L1026, a softer dark brown deposit which contained some pottery and a little animal bone. F1008 was not sectioned in Area B. Within Area A F1008 cut pit F1027 (Fig. 3, detail) and also cut ditch F1022.

A substantial length of curvilinear ditch (F1003) was revealed during the watching brief, in the area of House Plot 1 to the north-east of Area A. Its fill was a dark grey pebbly deposit (L1051). The profile of the ditch varied: in the southern part of Plot 1 it was 0.35 m deep with moderately sloping sides and a flat base; to the north it measured 0.58 m deep, with steeper sides and a concave base. No finds were recovered from any part of F1003.

A further ditch (F1063) was identified in Trench 9, measuring 0.8 m at its widest point. No finds were made. It may represent the continuation of F1008.

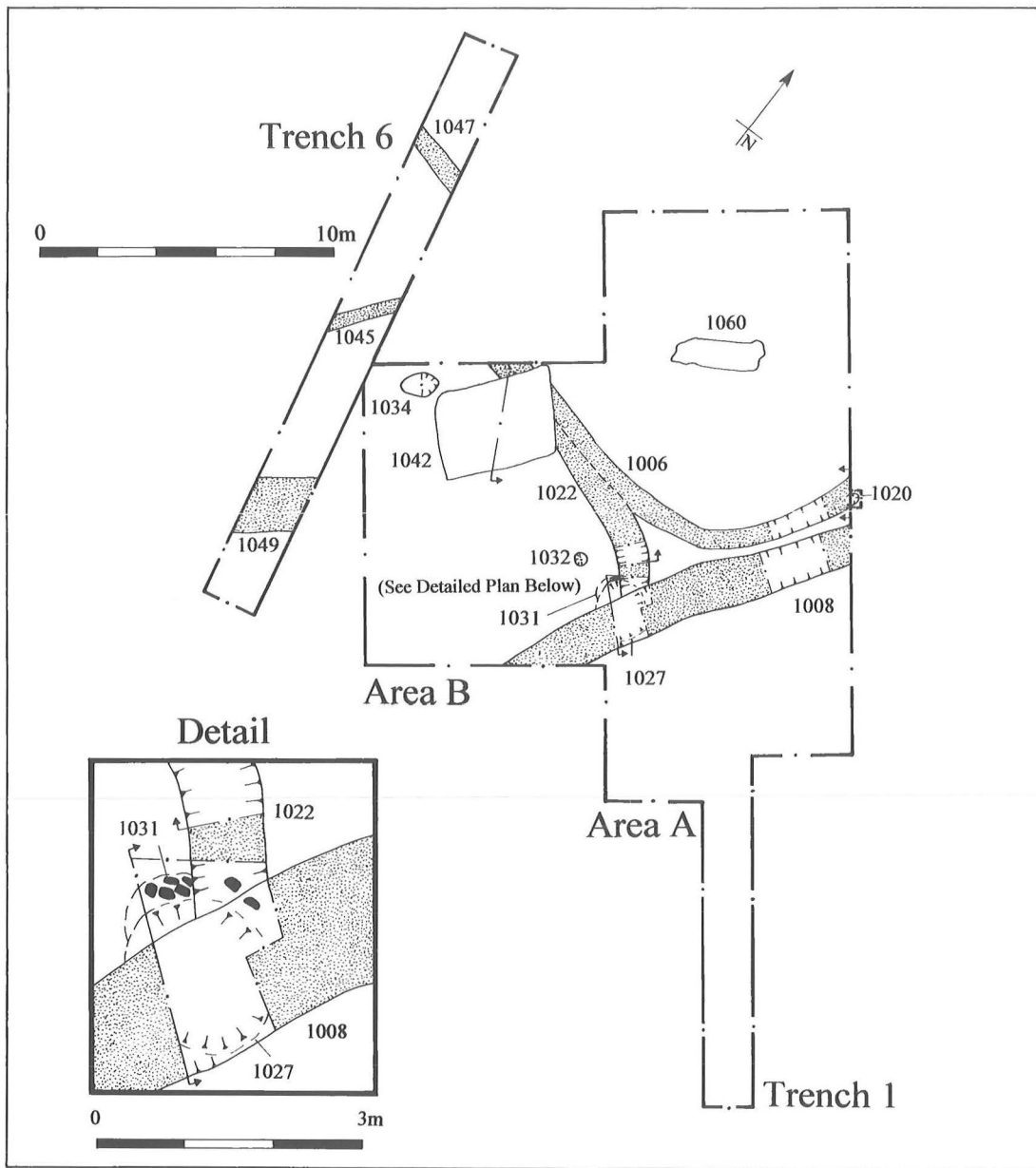


FIGURE 3 Plan of Areas A and B

As well as ditch F1047, two further ditches, aligned north-east/south-west, were revealed in Trench 6 at the western end of the site (Fig. 3). They did not continue into Areas A and B, but were picked up in the adjacent House Plot 2 to the west

during the watching brief. F1045 measured up to 0.7 m wide and 0.35 m deep; it was filled with a pale yellow pebbly silty clay (L1046) and its base and sides showed evidence of *in situ* burning affecting the natural clay. No finds were recovered.

F1049 was a broader ditch up to 1.6 m wide and at least 0.5 m deep (it was not bottomed). Its fill was a mid-grey silty clay (L1050) which contained some pottery and occasional fragments of animal bone.

Some 50 m to the east in Trench 8, where the topsoil and subsoil together were 0.7 m deep, another three ditches were revealed, none of which contained any finds. F1014 was up to 0.55 m wide and just 0.1 m deep, with a flat base and a yellowish brown pebbly silty clay fill (L1015). F1016 was a narrower feature, up to 0.3 m wide and 0.25 m deep, with a 'U'-shaped profile and a less stony fill (L1017). This ditch was cut by F1018, which measured up to 0.6 m wide and 0.4 m deep, with vertical sides and a flat base. Its fill (L1019) was slightly darker than L1015.

Pits

A number of pits were recorded in Areas A and B. F1027 (Fig. 3, detail) was a large subcircular fea-

ture, 1.9 m in diameter and at least 0.9 m deep, cut by ditch F1008. It was not fully excavated because of rising groundwater, but it contained at least three fills of soft silty clay. The upper deposit (L1030) was greyish brown in colour and contained pottery, including some joining sherds (Fig. 8.12-13), along with a little animal bone. It overlay two lighter-coloured deposits, L1029 and L1028; the latter produced more pottery (Fig. 8.11) and occasional fragments of animal bone.

On the northwestern edge of pit F1027 was a group of fragmented 'Belgic bricks' (L1031). These were a coherent group, a single course deep, and formed part of a structure which is not fully understood. Other 'Belgic bricks', almost certainly derived from the structure, were found as residual finds in other features (ditches F1008 and F1022 and pit F1027), suggesting that the structure is one of the earliest elements in this part of the site.

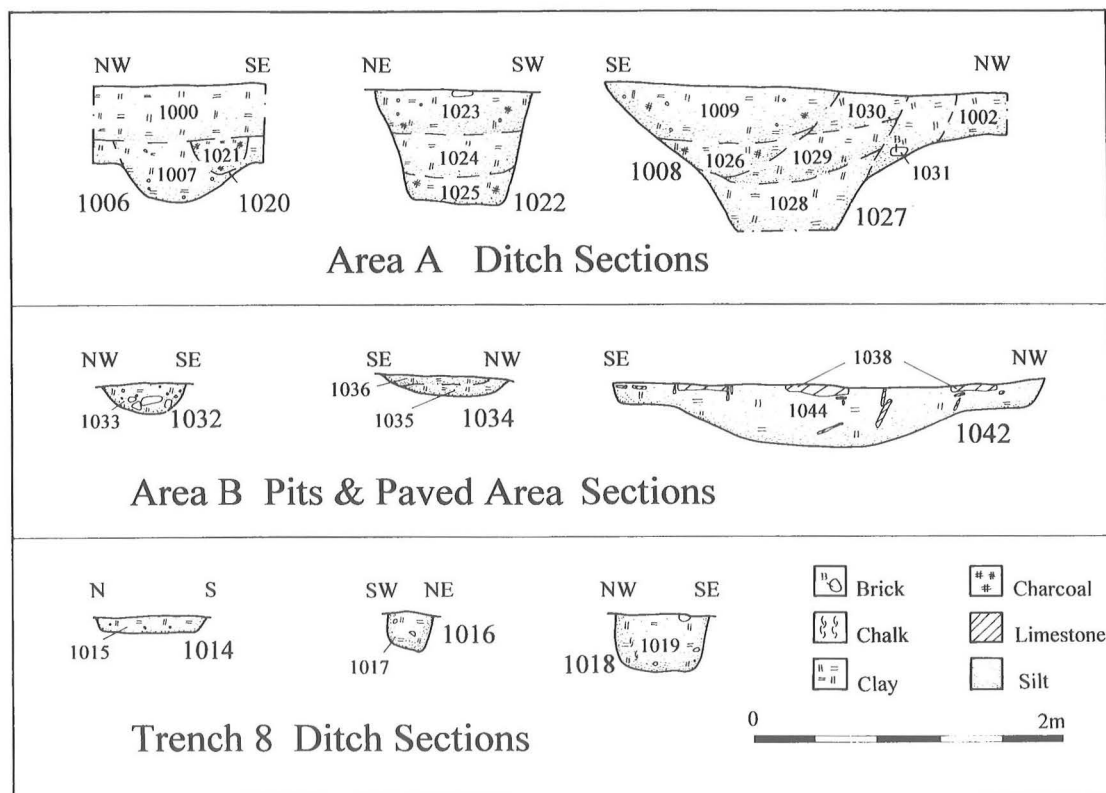


FIGURE 4 Sections of Major Features from Downs Barn, Milton Keynes (For Locations of Areas A & B see Fig. 3 & Trench 8 Fig. 2)

To the west of pit F1027 was a small subcircular pit, F1032 (diameter 0.5 m, depth 0.24 m), with a concave base. It contained a soft, stony, dark greyish-brown fill (L1033) which produced large potsherds, including a substantial part of a jar or beaker (Fig. 8.14). In the north of Area B, pit F1034 was larger (1.05 x 0.8 m) but shallower than F1032 (depth 0.14 m). It had two soft fills, a grey deposit (L1036) which contained some large potsherds and animal bone overlying an orange/brown gravelly layer (L1035) with no finds (Fig. 4, section).

On the eastern edge of Area A was a fourth pit, F1020. It was subcircular (0.55 x 0.4 x 0.2 m deep) with irregular sides, filled with a dark brown to black silty clay containing frequent charcoal (L1021). Up to 50 % of the fill comprised burnt animal bone. No other finds were recovered.

The Laid Stone Feature

In Area B was an unusual feature, S1042 (Figs. 3 – 6), comprising a stone surface (L1038). The slabs

were retained by smaller fragments set vertically around the edges, especially at the corners (L1039). None of the slabs had evidence of wear on their upper surfaces. The slabs were overlain by L1037, a grey/brown soft silty clay which contained a few undiagnostic potsherds and fragments of animal bone. The larger slabs had fractured into smaller pieces where the structure had subsided into earlier ditches F1006 and F1022. Along the north-western edge two areas of slab were much truncated. Only one slab could be interpreted as part of the edging (Fig. 5).

Beneath the slabs was a mottled dark brown deposit (L1044) containing slab fragments but no other finds (Fig. 4, section). Some of the fragments appeared to have been deliberately placed beneath the larger slabs of L1038 to level them, most noticeably along the southern half of the structure. The slabs and their make-up were contained within a rectangular construction pit (F1043) which measured 3.8 m in length, 2.85 m wide and up to 0.35 m deep. Its sides were vertical and the base slightly sloping.

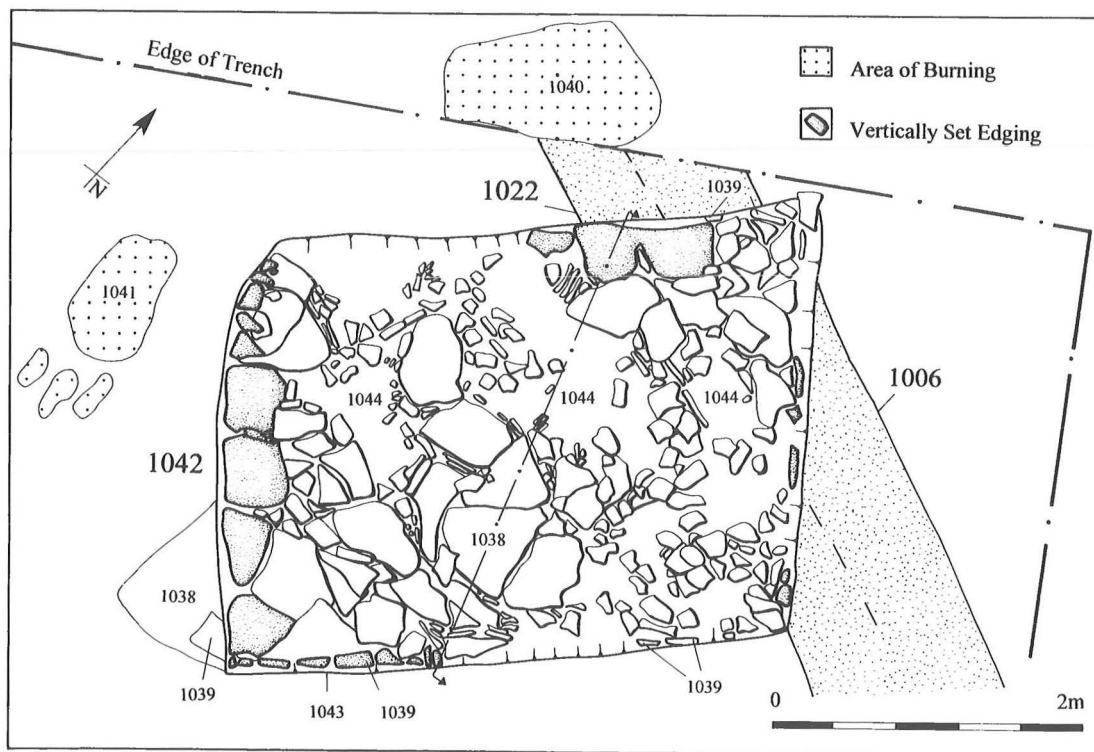


FIGURE 5 Detail Plan of Structure 1042, Downs Barn, Milton Keynes

To the north-west of S1042 was an area of *in situ* burning (1.3 x 0.7 m) which discoloured the natural clay (F1040), while to the west was further burning (F1041) which survived in patches across an area of 1.5 x 0.5 m (Fig. 5).

Phasing of Features

The earliest feature recorded was L1031, the structure of 'Belgic bricks'. It was truncated by the large pit F1027, which predated the smaller enclosure F1022. Its upper fill and the basal fill of later ditch F1008 contained fired clay bricks redeposited from L1031. The limestone slabs S1042 and pit F1020 postdate the smaller enclosures F1022 and F1006, as does F1008. There are a number of undated features including pits F1032 and F1034, ditch F1003 and all of the ditches in Trenches 6 and 8.

Hence at least three phases of activity are evidenced, but the homogeneity of the pottery assemblage from the site suggests they occurred within a relatively short period of time.

POTTERY AND FIRED CLAY

A total of c 580 sherds weighing 6.8 kg was recovered from Downs Barn, all essentially of Late Pre-Roman Iron Age ('Belgic' type). About 50% of

these sherds belong to between three and five individual vessels from ditch F1008 (Fig. 7.1a-b; Fig. 7.7a-c, which belong to two or three similar vessels). Another 119 sherds include diagnostic elements and other joining fragments which indicate a further 12 to 14 pots (Fig. 7.2 – 6; 8.8 – 14). These represent the 'major vessels' described below (Table 1). The remaining 177 sherds include another 18 rims, 7 bases and five decorated bodies, a few of which are also illustrated (Fig. 8.15-19).

Fabrics and Technology

The pottery fabrics from Downs Barn fall into two main types: those tempered with abundant coarse shell (Sh) and those tempered with grog (G). Within the latter type a 'coarse' group (G1) with large inclusions of orange and grey grog can be distinguished from a 'fine' group (G2) with smaller fragments of predominantly grey grog. Minor groups include some sand-tempered sherds (Q) and some with non-shelly calcareous inclusions, probably chalk (C). Full fabric descriptions are contained in the archive report. The majority of the pottery is wheelmade. Exceptions include some of the Sh material (e.g. Fig. 7.7a-b) which appears to be handmade with a wheel-finished rim, and the larger G1 storage vessels.

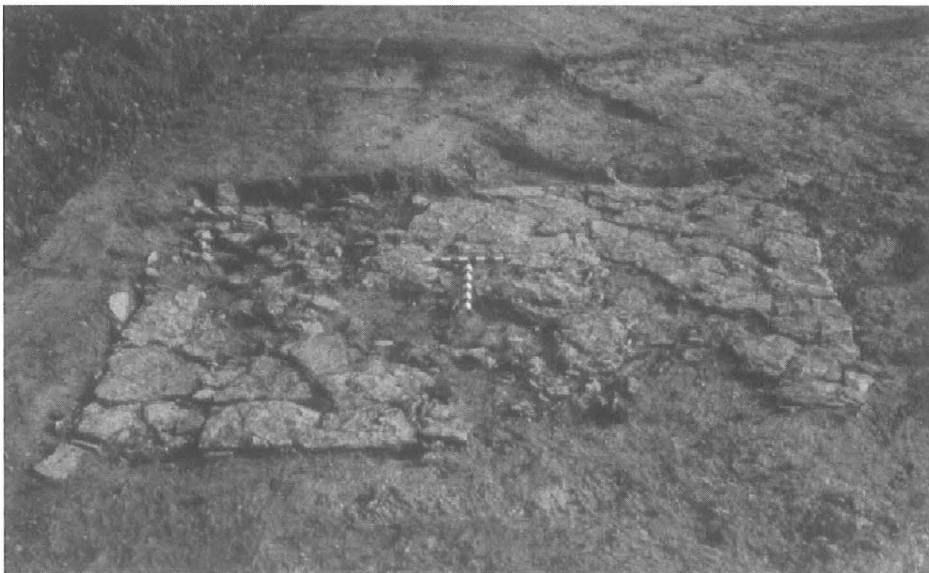


FIGURE 6 Pavement S1042 from the North

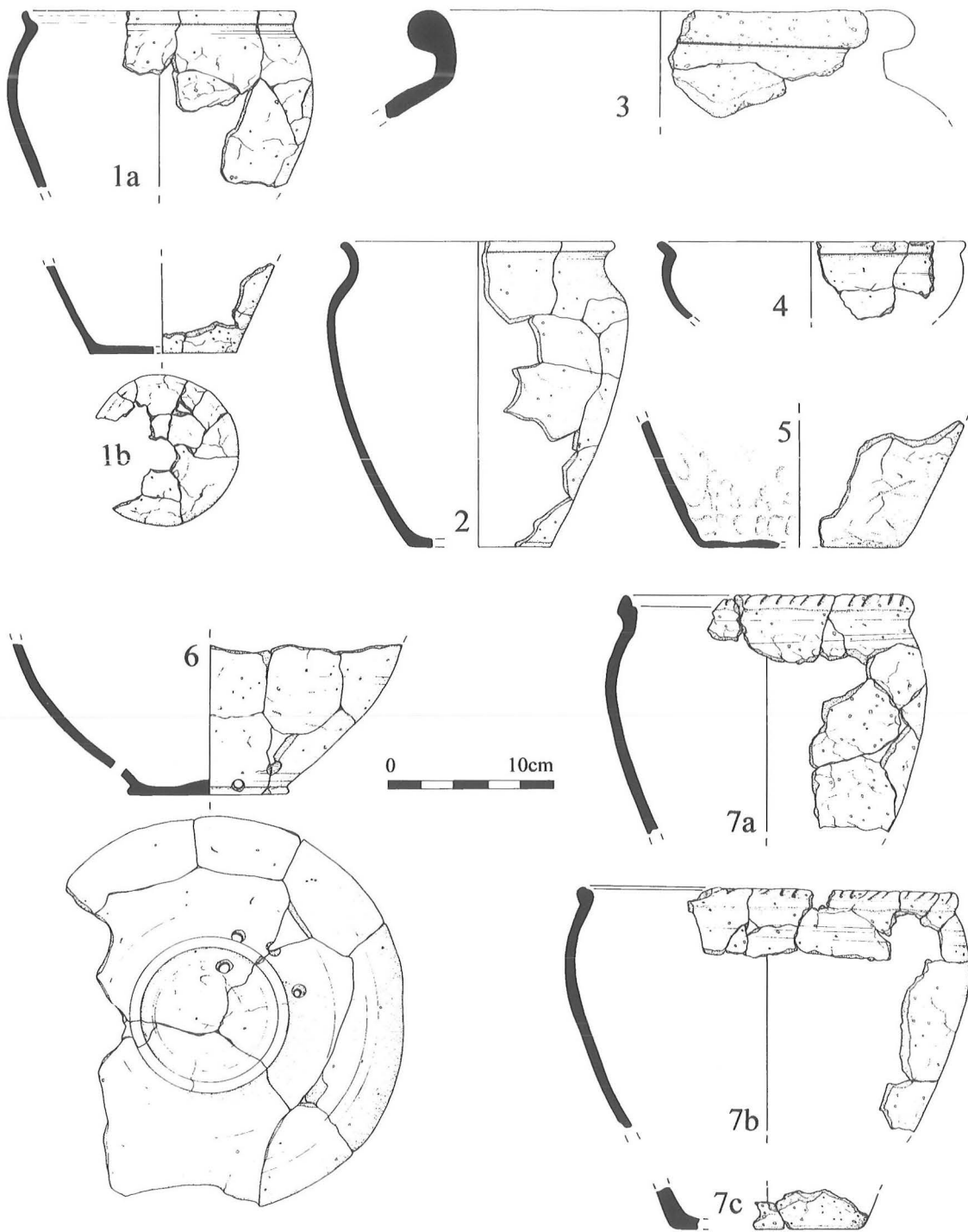


FIGURE 7 Pottery from Down's Barn, Milton Keynes (Nos. 1a-7c): scale 1: 4

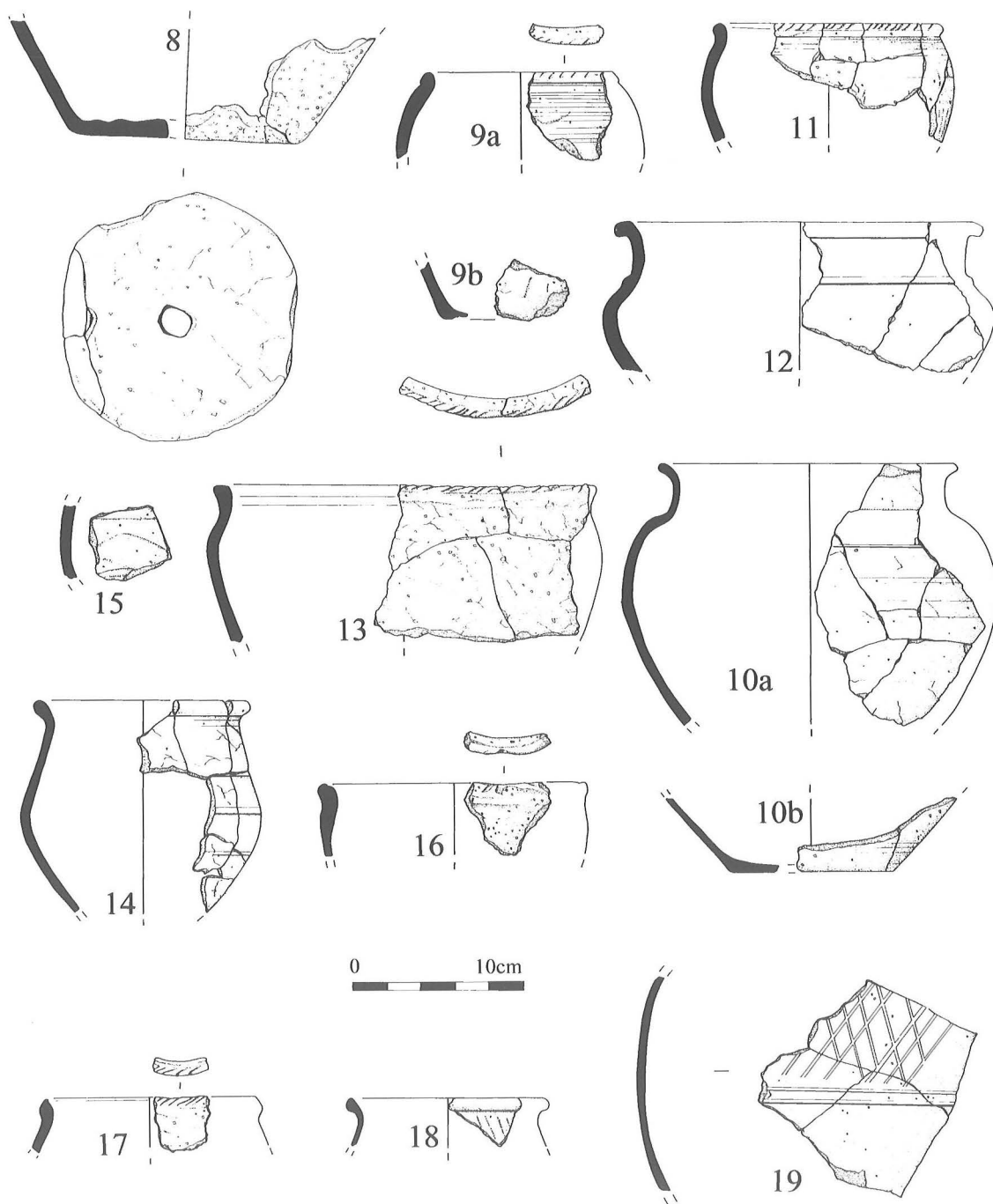


FIGURE 8 Pottery from Down's Barn, Milton Keynes (Nos. 8-19): scale 1: 4

Forms and Decoration

Characteristic forms include globular jars with upright, decorated rims, sometimes with lid-seats (in both Sh and G1 fabrics); and finer necked jars (mainly G2). Forms listed in Table 1 follow Thompson (1982).

Illustrations (Figs. 7 – 8)

- 1a. Globular jar with short upright internally bevelled rim. Exterior unoxidised and smoothed or wiped by the rim, rougher and oxidised or partly oxidised on most of the body and base; interior generally oxidised. A number of sherds show laminar splits or spalling.
- 1b. Flat base, perhaps of same vessel, with central perforation (cf. no. 8; and another example in fabric Sh from F1008; L1011).
2. Necked jar with everted rim and flat base. Brown surfaces and light grey fabric; soapy texture. The sherds are abraded.
3. Storage jar with everted and rounded rim. Orange surfaces; grey fabric.
4. Globular bowl with everted, rounded rim. A low ring-base may belong to the same vessel but does not join. Dark grey or mottled grey and brown surfaces, lightly burnished on the exterior.
5. Base of large vessel. Underside of base considerably more abraded than vessel wall, indicative of use-wear. Finger impressions on interior of wall just above base represent manufacturing traces. Exterior and fabric grey; interior predominantly orange.
6. Complete base with a low pedestal. Mottled mid/dark brown surfaces and grey core. Four holes have been drilled, post-firing, through the base (1) and wall (3).
- 7a. Jar with upright rim and internal concave bevel, probably a lid-seat. Rim exterior decorated with deep diagonal slashes. Exterior surface dark grey at rim with light burnishing, lighter brown on body with shallow vertical scoring or combing; interior generally oxidised. All but one small section of rim is present.
- 7b. Almost identical vessel, except that part of rim exterior is strongly oxidised.
- 7c. A few fragments of a simple, rather steeply angled base in the same fabric were present; this may be from one of the above vessels.
8. Base of large ?handmade vessel with central perforation. Fabric and interior surface grey, exterior mottled grey and orange.
- 9a. Holemouth jar with externally thickened rim. Exterior unoxidised, sooted; interior mottled. Rilling lines visible below the rim.
- 9b. Non-joining base, probably of same vessel.
- 10a. Necked jar with flaring rim (only a small part of the rim is present). Interior oxidised; exterior oxidised by the rim, mottled or unoxidised lower down. Buff fabric with a thin grey core.
- 10b. Three sherds of a low ring-base in a similar fabric may belong to this vessel.
11. Globular jar with short, upright, internally-bevelled rim, decorated with diagonal incised slashes on top. Combed or scored exterior (horizontal and vertical parallel shallow grooves), mottled in colour; oxidised interior.
12. Necked jar with externally-thickened rim. Surfaces unoxidised; light burnishing on exterior.
13. Globular jar with short, upright thickened rim, decorated with diagonal incised slashes on top. Oxidised surfaces, grey core.
14. Necked jar with externally thickened rim. Mottled dark brown/orange surfaces; grey-brown fabric.
15. Body sherd with grooved curvilinear decoration (F1008; L1009; fabric G1).
16. ?Globular jar with short neck; groove round top of rim, perhaps lid seating (F1022; L1023; fabric Sh).
17. Jar with short, upright rim; diagonal incised slashes on top (F1008; L1026; fabric G2).
18. Jar with everted rim and parallel diagonal incised lines on neck (F1027; L1030; fabric G2).
19. Body sherd decorated with horizontal grooves framing pattern burnished lattice band (F1034; L1036; fabric Q).

Affinities and Dating

The pottery appears to be a typical 'Belgic' assemblage of the region, including wheelmade forms and grog-tempered fabrics. It is therefore no earlier than 50 BC, and probably belongs to the 1st century AD. However, the absence of any definite Roman forms or wares would suggest the assemblage predates *c.* AD 50. The globular and lid-seated forms (e.g. Fig. 7.1, 7.7a-b, 8.11) are essentially 'native' while the wide-mouthed jars with strongly everted rims (e.g. Fig. 7.2) are a basic

TABLE 1 Major pottery vessels

Figure No.	Feature	Fill	Fabric	No. of Sherds	Rim d. (mm)	Base d. (mm)	Thickness (mm)	Form
7.1a	1008	1009	G1(C)	141 ¹	150	—	6-7	C5-1
7.1b	1008	1009	G1(C)	141 ¹	—	100	5	—
7.2	1008	1009	G2(Q)	28	150	80	4	B1-2
7.3	1008	1009	Sh	1	280	—	10	C6-1?
7.4	1008	1009	G2	10	170	100	5	—
7.5	1008	1009	G1	1	—	120	6	—
7.6	1008	1012	G2	14	—	100	6	—
7.7a	1008	1012	Sh	143 ²	160	—	5-7	C5-2
7.7b	1008	1012	Sh	143 ²	?210	—	5-9	C5-2
7.7c	1008	1012	Sh	143 ²	—	?120	6-9	—
8.8	1008	1012	G1	9	—	150	9	(wall)
13	(base)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8.9a	1008	1026	Q/C	1	?110	—	6-10	C1-2
8.9b	1008	1026	Q/C	1	—	?	6+	—
8.10a	1022	1023	G1(C)	12	?	—	6	B1-2
8.10b	1022	1023	G1(C)	3	—	100	4-6	—
8.11	1027	1028	Q/C	16	120	—	6-7	C1-2
8.12	1027	1030	G2	7	200	—	6-7	B1-3
8.13	1027	1030	G2(Q)	4	200	—	6-8	C1-2?
8.14	1032	1033	G2	12	120	—	3-8	B1?

¹vessels 1a-b combined ²vessels 7a-c combined

Belgic form, although they do continue after the Roman conquest (Marney 1989). The shelly fabric (Marney's Fabric 1a), including lid-seated jars with 'slashed' rims (cf. Marney 1989, fig. 34:2), is also native in origin. The few mid-1st century AD assemblages described from Milton Keynes range from c 2 % to 35 % shelly wares, and Downs Barn is within that range. The second century, in contrast, would tend to have a higher percentage of shelly wares.

The assemblage also compares with Period 2b at Bancroft Mausoleum Site, which is dated to the early/mid-1st century AD (Marney in Williams and Zeevat 1994). Fig. 7a-b compare with e.g. Fig. 212:38 (handmade in a shelly fabric) and 45 (handmade and wheel-finished, in a grogged fabric), which are most likely pre-conquest forms. On the other hand, the jars with elongated necks and marked shoulders (e.g. Fig. 8.10) look like Romanised forms (cf. Bancroft Fig. 213: 55-6), though in general the Downs Barn assemblage shows less resemblance to Period 3, Phase 1 at Bancroft (post-conquest) than to the earlier 'Belgic' Period 2b.

The sherd with burnished lattice decoration (Fig.

8.19) has a parallel at Bancroft Villa dated AD 120-135 (Fig. 231:111), but could be earlier. The large shell-tempered storage jar with a rolled rim (Fig. 7.3) has no precise parallels at Bancroft but is probably 1st century. The sherd with curvilinear grooves (Fig. 8.15) has some similarities to the Hunsbury-Draughton style, which begins in the Middle Iron Age in this region and runs through the 'Belgic' period.

Downs Barn seems to be a 'low status' assemblage in that many Gallo-Belgic forms, such as cups and platters, are absent. Marney reports that many features common in Hertfordshire (e.g. pedestal bases, grooved jars and butt beakers) were rare in the Milton Keynes area before the conquest. She also suggests that the shell-gritted wares served as cooking pots (hence their association with the lid-seated form, e.g. Fig. 7.7a-b) while grogged forms were tablewares (perhaps our G2) and storage vessels (G1). However, pots of very similar form can occur in both main fabrics (cf. Fig. 7.1a, 7.7a-b).

A number of vessels have evidence for post-firing perforations. They come in two types: those with a single central perforation in the base (Fig.

7.1b, 8.8) and one with a group of holes irregularly in the base and wall (Fig. 7.6). The former may have been made for an organic bung or stopper (cf. Williams and Zeepvat 1994, Fig. 227:6), while the asymmetry of the latter arrangement makes less sense as a strainer and may indicate a ritual 'killing' of the vessel prior to its deposition. The smashing of pots in Late Iron Age mortuary contexts, perhaps as surrogates for deceased individuals, is discussed by Gwilt (1997). 'Killing' by piercing or the deliberate detachment of rim segments has also been noted for Romano-British pottery by Going (in Wickenden 1988, 22-3). The presence at Downs Barn of large parts of vessels, possibly deliberately smashed prior to deposition in the ditches, and the pierced base might suggest that more than simple domestic rubbish is present (cf. Hill 1995).

Fired clay (Fig. 9, 1-3)

A number of lumps of fired clay, usually with sparse coarse non-shelly calcareous inclusions, were found in the fills of F1008, F1022 and F1027. A few pieces contained organic matter. Because of the proximity of these features to possible kiln or oven L1031, it is probable that the fragments derive

from the latter. Few had clear indications of their form, although flat, convex and concave surfaces can be recognised; one large piece from L1026 is certainly part of a brick (Fig. 9). Similar 'Belgic bricks' are recorded at Bancroft (Williams and Zeepvat 1994, 362-3). In addition to these pieces, part of an unusual tile or slab (fabric Sh, unoxidised) with a flange or lip on one side and a flat edge on another came from the topsoil. It does not appear to be rectangular and may represent kiln furniture.

STONE AND FLINT

A sample paving slab from S1042 was identified as a shelly, oolitic limestone of Jurassic age. Other stone collected from ditch F1008 comprised burnt fragments of rounded cobbles of glauconitic, calcareous quartz sandstone (Andrew Pearson, pers. comm.).

Four residual prehistoric struck flints were also recovered from ditch F1008. They include three broad, irregular flakes (two tertiary, one primary) on different types of flint, and a long (72 mm) secondary blade with a small area of retouch. The latter suggests a Neolithic date.

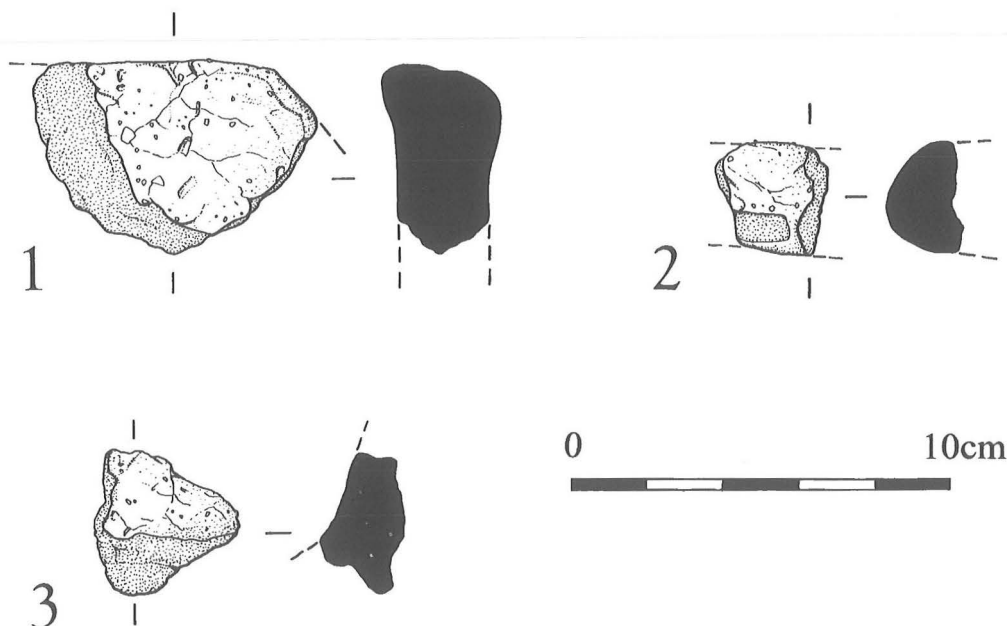


FIGURE 9 Fired Clay Objects from Down's Barn, Milton Keynes: scale 1: 2

ANIMAL BONE by IAN BAXTER

The total weight of animal bone recovered from the site amounts to just under 1.8 kg and includes 128 counted fragments and a large number of weighed but uncounted fragments from a burnt deposit (sample 3) in F1020 (L1021). All the animal bone was collected by hand, with the exception of the sampled burnt deposit. Of the hand-collected bone 111 fragments (or 87%) came from ditches and 17 fragments (13%) from pits or other features. Bone preservation is good to fair.

Horse

Horse remains are frequent in the assemblage, accounting for nearly 12% of fragments identified to species. Five cranial fragments from a single individual were found in ditch F1008 (L1009). From the same context were recovered the upper right M3 of an animal approximately ten years old and a complete phalanx I. A very worn lower M2 from a horse over twenty years old was found in ditch F1022 (L1023).

Cattle

The bones of cattle represent 29% of fragments identified to species and would have represented the main source of meat consumed at the site. All the cattle remains came from adult beasts. A fragmentary mandible from ditch F1008 (L1011), with Mandible Wear Stage (MWS) around 41 (Grant 1982), came from a mature animal.

Pig

Pig remains account for slightly less than 9% of fragments identified to species. However, most of these derive from the burnt deposit in pit F1020 (L1021); the only fragments collected by hand are a mandible fragment and unerupted lower P4 germ from the same individual, found in ditch F1008 (L1009).

Sheep/Goat

Sheep bones represent 50% of fragments identified to species. They include associated teeth from a prime mutton animal approximately two years old (MWS around 37), found in ditch F1008 (L1009), and mandible fragments of a younger individual, with MWS around 21, from the same ditch (L1011).

The Burnt Deposit from Pit F1020

A total of 200g of burnt animal bone was recovered from pit F1020 (L1021). The only fragments that can be identified to species are a distal phalanx I fragment and a distal left humerus fragment belonging to pig. Ten indeterminate large mammal long bone shaft fragments that may derive from cattle, but could equally well be from horse, were also recovered.

Summary and Conclusion

With such a small assemblage little can be said about the husbandry regime at the site. However, sheep seem to have been the most numerous stock animal, in common with most sites of the period, although at other sites in the Milton Keynes area cattle were predominant (Williams *et al.* 1995, 24). However, cattle would still have provided most of the meat consumed at Downs Barn. Horses, probably small ponies, were kept for transport. The burnt deposit in pit F1020 containing pig and cattle or horse bones may have a ritual significance, but this must remain speculative.

TABLE 2 Number of identifiable fragments of bones of each species (NISP)

Taxon		Total
Horse	<i>Equus caballus</i> L	4
Cattle	<i>Bos</i> f. domestic	10
Pig	<i>Sus</i> f. domestic	3
Sheep/Goat	<i>Ovis/Capra</i> f. domestic	17
Large Mammal		33
Medium Mammal		12
Indeterminate		*49
Total		128

*Indeterminate fragments in sample 3 F1020 (1021) not counted

DISCUSSION

The broader picture of Late Iron Age settlement patterns in the Milton Keynes area has been discussed elsewhere (Williams 1993, 213-5). The principal feature of the period is an expansion onto poorer quality land at sites such as Woughton (Zeepvat *et al.* 1987, 90-7). The Downs Barn site may be part of this movement, located as it is on the edge of the boulder clay

plateau between the Ouzel and Loughton Brook. Little trace was found on the site of any earlier activity, apart from four residual struck flint flakes although flints were recovered from the adjacent road cutting (Fig. 1.1-2). Earlier prehistoric settlement in the area seems to have been predominantly riverine.

Late Iron Age occupation at Downs Barn was previously represented by the gold coin of Cunobelin (Fig. 1, 6) and a findspot to the south-west (MK12) from which handmade pottery was recovered (Williams in Croft & Mynard 1993, Fig. 4). A number of excavated sites lie at a distance of 2 – 3 km from Downs Barn, including Hartigans (Williams 1993) and Cotton Valley (Zeepvat *et al.* 1987, 35-6) on the other side of the Ouzel, Woughton to the south, and Bancroft to the west (Williams and Zeepvat 1994).

The ditches in the west of the Downs Barn site appear to represent a series of Late Iron Age enclosures, some of which respect a large boundary feature (F1008). The finds from the road cutting made in 1978 suggest that a subsequent Roman site lies to the west. Although the precise relationship of all the ditches could not be established, the arrangement may be similar to that seen in the mid to late 1st century AD phase at Bancroft, where a linear grouping of small enclosures was attached to one side of a major boundary (Williams and Zeepvat 1994, 73-81). These enclosures, like similar features in the Thames Valley, perhaps contained domestic buildings of a type that has left no archaeological trace. At Cotton Valley a three-sided 'enclosure' was sub-divided by ditches containing Belgic-style pottery of the mid to late 1st century AD but again there was no direct evidence for internal structures. Some of the Late Iron Age/Belgic enclosures at Wavendon Gate did contain roundhouses, though it was hard to demonstrate that they were contemporary. The enclosures there succeed a more haphazard scatter of slightly earlier roundhouses (Williams *et al.* 1995). At Woughton, however, a comparable boundary ditch defined an area of occupation that includes recognisable roundhouses as well as a variety of linear gullies.

The large quantity, high number of joins and domestic nature of the pottery from the fill of F1008 in particular (see above) suggest dumping of fresh settlement refuse, and that an area of

occupation therefore lay nearby. There is also some indication of a symbolic dimension that may link ceramic deposition with subsequent activity around the limestone structure S1042 (see below). Apart from ditches, several pits were recorded. L1031 may be a kiln or oven and F1027 a large storage pit or a well. The lack of metalwork (apart from the previous casual coin find) or other small finds suggests the site was not wealthy.

To the north, ditch F1003 may form a self-contained sub-circular enclosure, perhaps associated with F1022 or F1060 (Fig. 2). Charcoal and evidence of heating associated with the basal fill of F1060 may indicate the burning of organic material within the ditch shortly after it was dug; a domestic interpretation is therefore likely, though no internal features were observed.

The extent and nature of ditches F1045 and F1049 in Trench 6 and Plot 2 are harder to assess as they were traced only for a short distance. The latter feature did not appear in Area B and may therefore terminate just to the east of Trench 6. Similarly, only short stretches of the undated ditches in Trench 8 were observed. As the only features lying to the east of the major boundary ditch F1008 they may not be contemporary with the occupation further west.

Stone structure S1042, which post-dated the ditches, lacks an obvious interpretation. There were no associated postholes or other indication of a superstructure, nor were there any significant finds. One possible interpretation is that it was a threshing floor, though the investment in laying a stone surface hardly seems justified when flat, beaten earth would probably have been more efficient. A more appealing interpretation is that it had a ritual purpose, given the other features in the vicinity. Although the two patches of burning (F1040 and F1041) (Fig. 5) were undated, they both lie within 1 m of the structure and suggest that the pavement was present when the burning occurred. The burnt animal bone in pit F1020, 11 m to the east, could conceivably represent the end point of a ritual involving slaughter (perhaps on the limestone surface) and cooking/cremation adjacent to it. Parallels for the structure are hard to find, although in the 'Belgic' phase at Bancroft a small area of limestone cobbling (uninterpreted) lay on the same alignment as a cremation cemetery while animal remains occurred in some of the

graves (Williams and Zeepvat 1994, 59). These practices may also be linked with the deliberate 'killing' of pots which is suggested for some of the Downs Barn ditch assemblages. Unlike the Roman period, when specific religious locales such as the temple-mausoleum complex at Bancroft emerged, ritual activity in the Late Iron Age was embedded in (and hard to distinguish from) the domestic routines of everyday life.

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