# INVESTIGATIONS AT WARREN WOOD, LITTLE MARLOW, 2010–2011

# JOHN LAKER AND MEMBERS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN MARLOW (AIM)

From February 2010 to November 2011 AIM conducted intrusive investigations within two enclosures at Warren Wood, in order to locate artefacts and building remains that might date the site. As a result of these investigations, much of the site was dated to the medieval period. In addition, Neolithic and Bronze/Iron Age artefacts were also unearthed, indicating a hitherto unsuspected phase of activity on the site.

# Introduction

In 2005 and 2006, AIM conducted part of its ROMADAM (Recording of Marlow and District's Ancient Monuments) Project at Warren Wood, within which an earthwork, consisting of inner and outer enclosures, is present. These enclosures were thought to date from the medieval period (AD500–1500). Previously two of the enclosures had been researched and surveyed, but no decisive dating evidence had been found. It was also hoped that the date and location of any original structures, their usage and associated activities, and the dates of any later phases could be established.

AIM also intended to give opportunities to as many members and visitors as possible to explore the areas of archaeology they were interested in. Training was given in all aspects of excavation and fieldwork, to expand people's knowledge.

## SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

Warren Wood lies within the parish of Little Marlow, off Winchbottom Lane, at NGR SU 8715 8972 (Fig 1). The earthwork is visible from the public footpath behind the AIM information board. The enclosures are on private land and permission must be obtained from the landowners, A & R Mash, in order to visit them.

Situated on the chalk hills of the Chilterns, c.100m above sea level, the inner enclosure of the earthwork (Fig. 2) is c.50m in diameter and the outer enclosure measures c.75m in diameter. The earthwork (Fig. 3) is constructed on a plateau of glacial sand and gravel, which overlies the chalk bedrock. There is a good sprinkling of trees on the

site. Beech, sessile oak, ash and holly predominate, along with a liberal covering of brambles, ferns and bluebells.

# HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The oldest maps available show 'The Warren' as a wooded area. Unfortunately, the Domesday survey does not tell us whether or not the area was a wood in 1086, although Little Marlow was assessed for 50 pigs, which suggests the area must have had some woodlands. In addition, the 'Close Rolls' of 1233, which state '18 does were gifted to the Earl of Cornwall for his park at Marlow', may refer to the Warren Wood area.

Following the Inclosure map of 1821, the next instance of either Warren Wood, or the adjacent Bloom Wood, being named on a map is on Bryant's 1825 map, which identifies 'Broom Wood', but has no mention of Warren Wood. The significance of Broom Wood, rather than Bloom Wood, is that 'bloom' might indicate the presence of past iron working. However, the name Broom Wood is unlikely to have the same connotations. Broom Wood is also shown on Lipscomb's 1847 map. Warren Wood is first mentioned on the 1870 OS map and Bloom Wood, rather than Broom Wood, first appears on the 1883 OS map. In more recent times Warren Wood is present on the 1993 Ordnance Survey (OS) Pathfinder Map.

Investigations by David Wilson, a member of Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society and Roger Carter had previously taken place on the site in 1975, and by Arthur Boarder, an amateur archaeologist and Marlow man, in 1978.

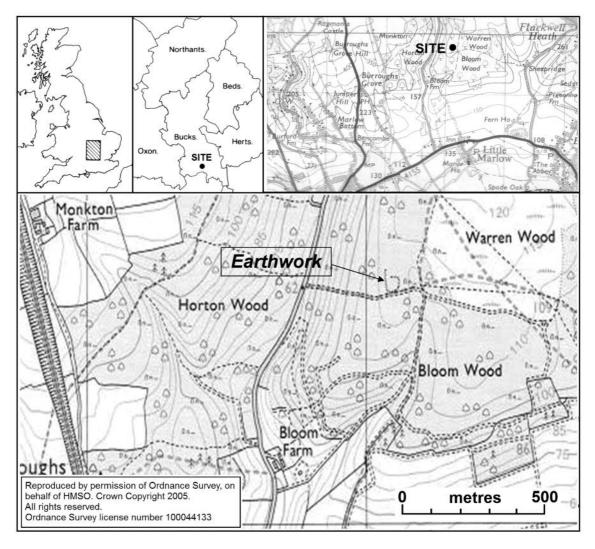


FIGURE 1 Warren Wood enclosure, location and topography

Mr Wilson is reported to have found the rim of a pot of very coarse greyware in the bank, a lump of grey clay and some red tiles. He thought that the pottery sherd might have been 13<sup>th</sup> century in date. In 1975 Mr Boarder made notes of a visit by Mr Carter in July of that year. These recorded the discovery of 'two flint and mortar masses – walls', as well as, 'a base and a body sherd of sandy grey unglazed pottery' and 'pieces of peg tile'. The tiles were probably made locally, or at Lane End, or Penn, both in Bucks.

In 1978 Mr Boarder wrote his own report,

including a more detailed sketch of the inner enclosure on which a small section of 'flint wall' is shown running north — south, adjacent to its northern side, none of which is apparent today. He collected pieces of tile and pottery which he thought were medieval. He believed the pottery was similar to that found at Fillington Wood, a medieval earthwork, and at other local sites. Although AIM made efforts to locate both sets of Warren Wood pottery sherds, neither has been located so far, although Mr Boarder had taken a photograph of the sherds that he had found.



FIGURE 2 Warren Wood, bank of inner enclosure

A comprehensive work entitled *Earthwork Enclosures in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns* (Pike 1995) lists seven earthwork enclosures, along with three more possible sites. In summary, Pike says:

In short, these enclosures can perhaps be interpreted as the centres of small woodland settlements, with the principal dwelling and outbuildings situated within the smaller enclosure, where there is one. The larger "bailey enclosure" would have, perhaps, afforded protection to a small domestic herd from wild animals, such as deer and wild boar, which were prevalent in Buckinghamshire in the medieval period. It would doubtless be the deer and boar, which were the principal animals that were hunted. Fieldwork in some of the enclosures has produced small quantities of medieval pottery so, despite the lack of documentary evidence, a date in the medieval period for these structures may be suggested.

Similar local sites have been recorded at Sadler's Wood, Lewknor (Chambers 1973) and Stoken-church (Easterbrook 1977). Outside the Chilterns area, sites exist at Sarratt (Marginia Wick) in Hert-

fordshire, in the New Forest, south of Gaze Hill, in Hampshire (a possible swine pound) and at Chobham Common on the Bagshot Sands in Surrey. Pigs may have been kept at Chobham, as their staple food was the mast of fallen beech and oak.

The maximum dimensions of the inner and outer enclosures at Warren Wood taken together are 96m north to south and 74m east to west. When Warren Wood is compared with other similar sites in Bucks, it appears to be of roughly average size.

## METHODOLOGY

A proposal to excavate by hand eight one-metresquare test pits, four in the inner enclosure, and four in the outer enclosure for comparison purposes, was submitted to the County Council's Senior Archaeologist, who supported it.

The test pits were surveyed into the site plan using a total station. The intention was to excavate down to the natural geology, recording each context in order. All excavated materials were to be sieved. Each significant event was to be recorded using a drawing frame, along with still and video photography. If foundations, or walls, were located they

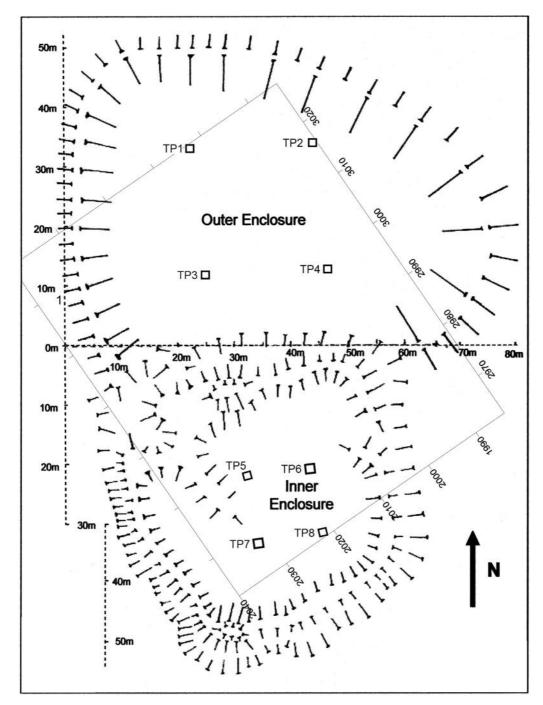


FIGURE 3 Warren Wood earthwork survey and test-pit locations

were to be cleaned up and recorded, leaving them undisturbed as excavations took place around them. Each test pit was to be recorded individually, in plan view, and its section recorded with its contexts.

Investigations commenced in February 2010 and continued until they were completed in November 2011. Ian Cook of Oxford Archaeology agreed to oversee AIM's work, to ensure it was carried out to the highest possible standards.

The base line, used for the ROMADAM Project, was employed again. Utilising the base line, a scale drawing was used to measure accurately the four 1 metre square test pits in the inner enclosure, using 50 metre tapes and an optical square. Four 1 metre square test pits were then laid out in the outer enclosure. Following professional advice, it was decided to move the test pits in the outer enclosure 1 metre east and 1.7 metres north so that the southeastern square was away from a tree and the northeastern square was located outside a boggy area.

Test pit locations within the outer (Pits 1-4) and inner enclosures (Pits 5-8) were surveyed onto the site map (Fig. 3). The pit locations were marked out on the ground. Excavation was carried out by hand, until undisturbed natural geology was reached. Sieving of all excavated contexts was undertaken to recover any finds missed during excavation. Small find locations were plotted on the detailed plan prepared for each pit. The total station was deployed to survey all the test pits, so that the graphics could be overlaid onto the site maps. This operation was undertaken as a training event to give members an insight into archaeological surveying.

# RESULTS

## The Outer Enclosure

### Test-Pit 1

Two contexts were encountered in Pit 1. The topsoil (Context 1) was mid-brown loam with a few stones, 7cm deep. It contained a sherd of medieval pottery, a worked flint and a shotgun cartridge case. It sealed Context 2, which comprised light brown sandy soil 8cm thick with few inclusions and no finds, below which natural geology was encountered.

## Test-Pit 2

In Test pit 2 the uppermost layer (Context 1) consisted of compacted grey clayey material, 4cm thick, containing one worked flint and two pot boilers. This overlay Context 2, an orangey/brown sandy soil with large stone inclusions, 9cm thick, overlying undisturbed natural geology. One sherd of Iron Age pottery and one pot boiler were found in Context 2.

#### Test-Pit 3

Test Pit 3 was located on ground sloping from west to east, resulting in varied context depths. Three contexts were investigated. The uppermost, Context 1, comprised dark brown loam varying from 11cm depth on the west side of the pit to 6cm at the eastern edge. It contained single sherds of medieval pottery and tile, a worked flint and three pot boilers. Beneath this layer was gravelly sandy soil 4.5–3.0cm in depth (Context 2) with small pebbles, five worked flints and two pot boilers. The lowest layer (Context 3), lighter brown sandy soil, was about 3cm in depth, overlying natural geology. It contained a single pot boiler and a possible worked piece of stone.

#### Test-Pit 4

Test Pit 4 also encountered three contexts. The uppermost (Context 1) was dark brown loam 5cm deep, containing a single sherd of Iron Age pottery, two worked flints and a pot boiler. Beneath it was light brown sandy clay (Context 2), 4cm deep, containing a roof tile fragment, three worked flints and a pot boiler. The lowest layer (Context 3) comprised dark brown silty clay, 5cm deep, overlying natural. Two tile fragments, an Iron Age sherd, three worked flints and a pot boiler were recovered from it.

## The Inner Enclosure

## Test Pit 5

Test pit 5 encountered three contexts. Darkish brown topsoil (Context 1), 10cm deep, contained abundant tile fragments and two worked flints. It overlay light brown sandy/silty clay (Context 2), also 10cm deep, and also containing abundant roof tile fragments. The lowest layer, Context 3, contained fewer but larger tile fragments, a late medieval pottery sherd, and some worked flint and pot boilers.

#### Test Pit 6

In Test pit 6, Context 1 comprised darkish brown topsoil, 16cm deep. It contained 466 tile fragments, 27 sherds of early medieval pottery, and three fragments of glazed tile, as well as residual worked flint and pot boilers. The underlying Context 2 was a lighter brown sandy/silty layer, 14cm thick, also containing significant amounts of tile and early medieval pottery sherds. This context partly overlay a flinty 'ridge' and was excavated either side of this feature to the underlying layer (Context 3), a dark brown clayey/silty soil, 10cm deep, containing a large quantity of late Bronze Age pottery.

Although natural geology had now been reached over most of the trench, in the south-west corner a quadrant of darker material containing small pieces of chalk remained (Context 4). Following advice from the County Archaeologist, the test pit was extended to the west and south, to permit examination of this deposit, which contained burnt stone, Iron Age pottery sherds and large quantities of chalk fragments. Context 4 was 58cm wide and about 24cm in height): it appeared to have been sealed beneath Context 2 and cut through Context 3 into the natural (Figs 4 & 5): it is hoped that

future investigations will throw more light on this anomaly.

## Test Pit 7

Test pit 7 revealed a similar sequence of contexts to Test pit 6, and was similarly extended to examine the ridge of flints present. Topsoil (Context 1) was 10cm deep, and contained a large amount of roof tile fragments, and five sherds of medieval pottery. Context 2 was a lighter brown sandy/silty layer, 9cm deep, also containing significant amounts of tile and medieval pottery sherds, along with residual worked flint and pot boilers. Context 3 was yellow/brown sandy clay, 26cm deep, with a similar range of finds, as well as two animal bones, thought to be from sheep or goat.

#### Test Pit 8

Three contexts were encountered in Test pit 8. Context 1 was dark brown topsoil, 16cm deep, containing roof tile, medieval pottery fragments, and residual worked flint and pot boilers. Context 2 was lighter brown sandy soil 14cm deep, with roof tile and medieval pottery sherds, and context 3 was yellow/brown sandy clay 17cm deep, again

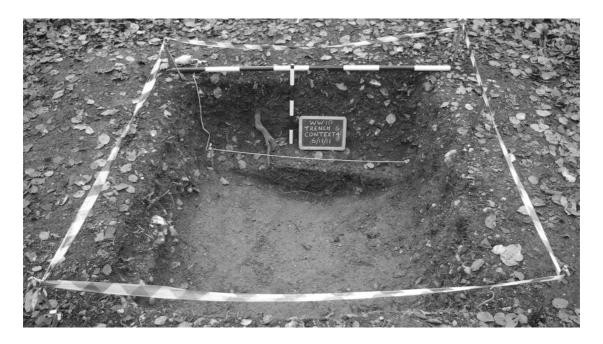


FIGURE 4 Test pit 6 after excavation of context 4

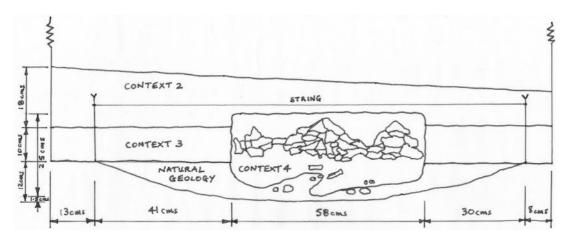


FIGURE 5 Test pit 6, sketch section drawing

TABLE 1 Pottery occurrence by number and weight (grammes) of sherds per context by fabric type

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$\overline{Tr}$	Cntxt	F1		F2		F3		F4		MS3		MS9		TLMS3		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	1											1	36			13thC
2	2			1	9											IA
3	1									1	7					M11thC
4	1			1	5											IA
4	3			1	2											IA
5	3													1	4	M14thC
6	1	2	28					2	36	16	95					M11thC
6	2	13	264	1	19	2	8			5	25					M11thC
6	3	70	2060	2	16											LBA
6	4	5	71			2	9									IA
7	1									5	24					M11thC
7	2									27	171					M11thC
7	3									103	1071					M11thC
8	1									11	50					M11thC
8	2									17	200					M11thC
8	3									3	19					M11thC
	Total	90	2423	6	51	4	17	2	36	188	1662	1	36	1	4	

containing tile and medieval pottery.

Finds from the investigations were recorded on spread-sheets, showing the numbers and weights of the artefacts found in each test pit, context by context, in the inner and outer enclosures. These are retained in the project archive.

THE POTTERY by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage consisted of 292 sherds with a total weight of 4.229kg (Table 1). It comprised a mixture of Iron Age and medieval fabrics, indicating that there were two entirely

separate phases of activity at the site, one in the Early Iron Age ( $c.9^{th} - 5^{th}$  century BC), and the other in the early  $12^{th}$  – early  $13^{th}$  century.

#### Prehistoric:

The following fabric types were noted:

- F1: Sand and Flint. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, most 0.2mm or less. Sparse angular white flint up to 1mm, some carbonized organic material. 94 sherds, 2423g.
- F2: Coarse flint. Moderate to dense angular white flint up to 2mm. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, most 0.2mm or less, some carbonized organic material. 6 sherds, 51g.
- F3: Fine flint. Rare to sparse sub-angular flint up to 0.5mm, sparse to moderate sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, most 0.2mm or less, some carbonized organic material. Thin-walled, burnished vessels. 4 sherds, 17σ
- F4: Shell. Sparse shell fragments up to 5mm, sparse subrounded quartz up to 0.5mm. Most of the calcareous inclusions had dissolved. 2 sherds, 36g.

The range of fabric types is typical of the Iron Age pottery of the region, and can be paralleled at

a number of sites, such as George Street, Aylesbury (Allen & Dalwood 1983) and Oxford Road, Stone (Last 2001). Test pit 6 produced all but three sherds of the Iron Age pottery from the site. Most of it consisted of plain bodysherds from different vessels, but all but two sherds from Test pit 6, context 3, were from a single vessel. The pot in question is a large jar (rim diameter = 300mm, 20% complete) which was partially reconstructed (Fig. 6), and had a finger-tipped rim and two rows of fingertip impressions on the outer body between the rim and shoulder. It is in reasonably good condition, although all the sherds are slightly abraded. However, the fabric is very soft, so the attrition seems most likely to be due to bioturbation rather than redeposition via human activity. A large area of the lower body was also reconstructed, and it seems very likely that more of the vessel is stratified beyond the limits of the trench. The rim-form and decoration is very typical of the pottery of the Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age period in the south of England (Knight 2002), and suggests a date of the  $9^{th} - 5^{th}$  century BC for the assemblage.

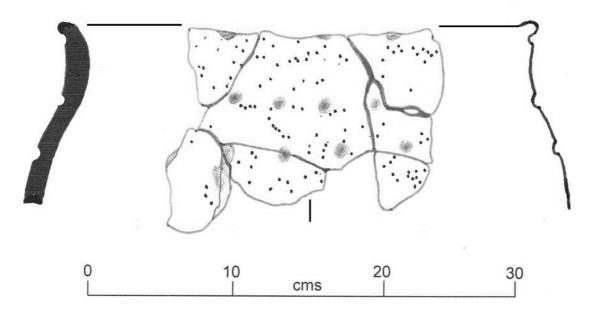


FIGURE 6 Reconstruction of late Bronze Age/late Iron Age pot from Test pit 6, context 3 (scale as shown)

#### Medieval:

The medieval assemblage was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard & Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat *et al* 1994), as follows:

MS3: Medieval Grey Sandy Wares. Mid 11<sup>th</sup> – late 14<sup>th</sup> century. 188 sherds, 1662g.

MS9: Brill/Boarstall Ware. 1200–?1600. 1 sherd, 36g. TLMS3: Late Medieval Reduced Ware. Mid 14<sup>th</sup> – early 16<sup>th</sup> century. 1 sherd, 4g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The bulk of the medieval pottery occurred in Test pits 6, 7 and 8 (Fig. 7).

Most of the pottery comprised unglazed, sand-tempered wares, which can all be regarded as part of the fabric MS3, Medieval Grey Sandy Ware tradition of Buckinghamshire. It would also appear that it is mainly of fairly local manufacture, as the fabric is very similar to that of medieval wares from kiln-sites at Great Missenden (Ashworth 1983; Blinkhorn in press) and Denham (McCarthy & Brooks, 1988 293). A few sherds were noted with vertical or diagonal incised decoration on the outer bodies. This is typical of the so-called 'M40

Ware' tradition (Hinton 1973). Such pottery was manufactured at the Denham kiln, and also at Camley Gardens, Maidenhead (Pike 1965). The Denham scored sherds are dated to the early 12<sup>th</sup> century in London (Vince 1985, 37), although the kiln itself produced an archaeomagnetic date for its final firing of AD1250 +/-20 (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 293). The Camley Gardens wares usually have noticeable flint in the fabric, which the sherds from this site lack, so Denham seems the most likely source of the scored wares, and it is entirely possible that some of the plain sandy wares also come from that source. All the rimsherds in MS3 were from jars, and there were no obvious jug sherds anywhere amongst the assemblage. This is a trait more typical of the earlier part of the medieval period, as jugs are much more common in the later part of that era.

The largest group, from Test pit 7 Context 3, is in good condition and the sherd size is fairly large. A number of vessels in the group are represented by more than one sherd, and the group appears to be the result of primary deposition, suggesting that there was medieval occupation in the immediate vicinity of the trench.

The only pottery which can be definitely dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century is the fragment of Brill/Boarstall ware from Test pit 1 Context 1. Such wares are



FIGURE 7 Medieval pottery sherd from Test pit 8, context 1

usually very common on sites of the 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century in Buckinghamshire. For example, this was the case at George Street, Aylesbury (Yeoman 1983), and suggests that activity at Warren Wood did not extend much beyond the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, glazed London Wares, which are known from sites in High Wycombe (e.g. Thompson 2009) from the mid-late 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and Surrey Whitewares, which are common at places such as Maidenhead from the second quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards (e.g. Whittingham 2002, 89) are also absent, which reinforces this suggestion. The single sherd of TLMS3, dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, seems likely to be a stray find.

It would appear therefore that the medieval activity at this site extended from the early 12<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and may have started in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (Table 1).

## OTHER ARTEFACTS

#### Flint

Many suspected worked flints were unearthed by trainee excavators on the site for later identification. Of the 114 sent for identification, only 44 proved to be struck flints. Roughly twice as many worked flints were found in the outer enclosure as in the inner enclosure. Although a number of the flints should now be discarded as natural, there are still a considerable number of flakes showing evidence of flint working. They all appear to be from a late Neolithic or Bronze Age tradition, although the very small number of blades would point towards more of a Bronze Age date.

Significant numbers of large pieces of flint were found in clusters in all the test pits in the inner enclosure. The flints were mixed up with roof tile and pottery sherds and may have formed parts of structures, as the evidence pointed to a tumble of building and domestic materials. Very few flints were excavated from the outer enclosure test pits.

#### **Burnt Stone**

Large quantities of burnt stone and flint (the latter possibly 'pot boilers') present on the site suggest that fire was in repeated regular use in the vicinity (Fig. 8). It is possible that the group of large burnt pebbles in Test pit 6, context 4 represent a hearth base.



FIGURE 8 Possible pot boilers from Test pit 6, context 4

#### Iron

Ten iron artefacts were found, all in the inner enclosure. One piece was identified as slag. The remaining heavily corroded articles were forwarded to the Conservation Department at Oxfordshire County Council's Museum Resource Centre, who x-rayed them. The artefacts were identified as mostly pins and nails, along with a metal strip and a possible key.

#### Tile

Excavations within the inner enclosure recovered the vast majority (40kg) of the roof tile from the excavations. Nearly half of that (18kg) was recovered from Test Pit 6. Only 4 pieces of tile were found in the outer enclosure.

There is only one tile fabric present, although some of it is much harder, with a pink colour: this has been accidentally overfired. There are also some pieces with apparent glaze on: this is again accidental overfiring, where salts from the clay have vitrified. There is an unusually high number of failed pegholes, where the hole has not been pushed all the way through. One tile fragment from Test pit 8 is curved, but is more likely to be a manufacturing fault than a ridge tile.

All the tile could be dated to the late medieval to early post-medieval period. Owing to the lack of change in manufacturing methods over this period, it is hard to be more precise. The large amount of tile recovered suggests a substantial tile roofed building in the immediate vicinity. Since almost all of the pottery from the site pre-dates the tile, it is possible that a non-domestic tiled building, such as a barn, was a later phase of use of the site.

Although not archaeologically significant, two interesting fragments were noted. One fragment, from Test pit 6 Context 1, has a leaf fossil on the underside. A sherd from Test pit 6 Context 2 has a distinct thumb print.

## **Bone**

Four animal bones were unearthed from Test pit 7: the one complete bone is thought to be from a sheep, or goat. All the bone artefacts were found within the inner enclosure.

#### **Miscellaneous Artefacts**

The vast majority of chalk pieces were found in close proximity to the late Iron Age pottery sherds (Test pit 6, inner enclosure). The collection of burnt

stones (nearly 3 kg) was found in the same area. No chalk or burnt stones were found in the outer enclosure.

Twenty pieces of charcoal and wood (27g) were recovered, all from the inner enclosure.

#### DISCUSSION

Based on the available historic evidence, and comparison with other similar enclosures in Buckinghamshire and surrounding counties, the enclosure at Warren Wood is evidently medieval in origin. The outer enclosure would have provided some security for livestock, while the inner enclosure would have surrounded a house and maybe a range of outbuildings.

Most unexpectedly, late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery was found within the inner enclosure. Along with the presence of chalk pieces and a quantity of burnt stones from the same context, this would indicate that the site had been in use for many years prior to the medieval period. Worked flint flakes and pot boilers, probably late Neolithic, or early Bronze Age, were also recovered from the inner enclosure test pits. The outer enclosure also produced evidence of prehistoric activity, of a similar date range.

Most of the medieval pottery sherds dated from the mid-eleventh century onwards, while the roof tile fragments were dated from the thirteenth century onwards. Although this suggests a possible conflict as regards dating, it should be remembered that hand-made roof tile is ubiquitous, and not as easy to date as precisely as pottery. On balance, it would appear that the second stage of occupation of the site — and presumably construction of the enclosure — can be dated to the eleventh or twelfth century.

It can be argued that the quantity of large flints and substantial quantities of roof tile indicate a building, or buildings, of a relatively high status. Both the roof tiles and the large flints would almost certainly have been imported into the area. The mixture of large flint pieces, roof tile and pottery sherds indicate that any building or buildings were demolished at some time, rather than just falling into disrepair. Test pit 7 contained the largest concentration of medieval pottery sherds from the excavation, in addition to the only animal bones, which may indicate the proximity of a kitchen/cooking area. In contrast, evidence for

medieval activity within the outer enclosure is sparse.

Although accurate dating of the site has still not been achieved, it appears that the site was occupied from c. AD1050–1400, but probably not much later

#### **Archive & Future Work**

Some significant pieces of roof tile (those with peg holes, or markings), along with all the pottery sherds and other genuine artefacts have been forwarded to Bucks Museum Resource Centre. The majority of roof tile pieces have been redeposited in the test pits from whence they came. The archives and records of the investigation have also been forwarded to Bucks Museum Resource Centre.

There are plans to undertake more investigations at Warren Wood during 2012 and beyond. AIM's website may be consulted for details (www.archaeologyinmarlow.org.uk).

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