

A BRONZE AGE CREMATION CEMETERY AND ROMANO-BRITISH ENCLOSURE AT GLEBELANDS, BROUGHTON, MILTON KEYNES

STEVEN TEAGUE, LEO WEBLEY AND CARL CHAMPNESS

with contributions by Martyn Allen, Kate Brady, Alex Davies,
Mike Donnelly, Mark Gibson, Julia Meen and Ian Scott

Excavations at Glebelands, Broughton, Milton Keynes revealed a Bronze Age cemetery comprising eight pits containing deposits of cremated bone. A variety of burial practices were evident. One burial was contained within an urn of early to middle Bronze Age type, while another appears to be a form of in-situ or 'bustum' cremation burial. Two further burials each contained remains from at least three individuals – two adults and a child – suggestive of family groups. One of these individuals returned a radiocarbon date in the early part of the middle Bronze Age. During the Roman period, a small open-ended rectangular enclosure was constructed. Pottery from its ditches suggests that it was in use between c AD 170–250. The enclosure may have been associated with a settlement previously investigated at Magna Park to the south.

INTRODUCTION

Excavations carried out by Oxford Archaeology in advance of development at Glebelands, Broughton, uncovered a Bronze Age cremation cemetery and Romano-British enclosure (NGR SP 917 392: Fig. 1). The site lay on arable land at c 65m OD on the northern flank of the valley of the Broughton Brook, a tributary of the river Ouzel. The geology of the area is mapped as 1st (Felmersham) Terrace and 2nd (Stoke Goldington) Terrace sand and gravel deposits of the river Great Ouse. The underlying solid geology comprises the Stewartby Member of the Oxford Clay formation. The site historically lay in Salford parish in Bedfordshire, but now forms part of Broughton and Milton Keynes parish within the Borough of Milton Keynes.

The wider area around the site has seen a significant amount of archaeological investigation. Field boundaries and a pit alignment of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age date were revealed during excavations at Brooklands Area 10, 300m to the west of the site (Atkins *et al* 2014, 25–50). Further to the west and north-west, extensive areas of Iron Age and Romano-British settlements and field systems have been excavated at Brooklands and Broughton Manor Farm (*ibid*, 51–127). Excavations

south of the Broughton Brook at Magna Park revealed a small square enclosure of late Iron Age date, located 1.0km to the south-west of the site (Chapman & Chapman 2017). This was abandoned by c AD 70 and a second area of settlement developed by the 1st century AD, located 200m south-east of the site. The settlement was arranged around a driveway and consisted of a series of enclosures and at least two roundhouses. It was abandoned by the end of the 3rd century AD (*ibid*).

Archaeological investigations in the 9ha development area containing the Glebelands site began with a magnetometer survey. This identified a ditched rectangular enclosure in the southern part of the area, along with extensive traces of ridge and furrow agriculture (Walford 2017). A subsequent trial-trench evaluation recovered Roman finds from ditches and pits associated with the rectangular enclosure. Features encountered elsewhere in the development area were limited to a few undated ditches (MOLA 2017).

A 0.38ha area was selected for excavation, targeted on the rectangular enclosure (Fig. 2). The fieldwork was undertaken between September and November 2018. This report summarises the key results of the excavation. Full details of the stratigraphy, finds and environmental evidence are presented in a longer

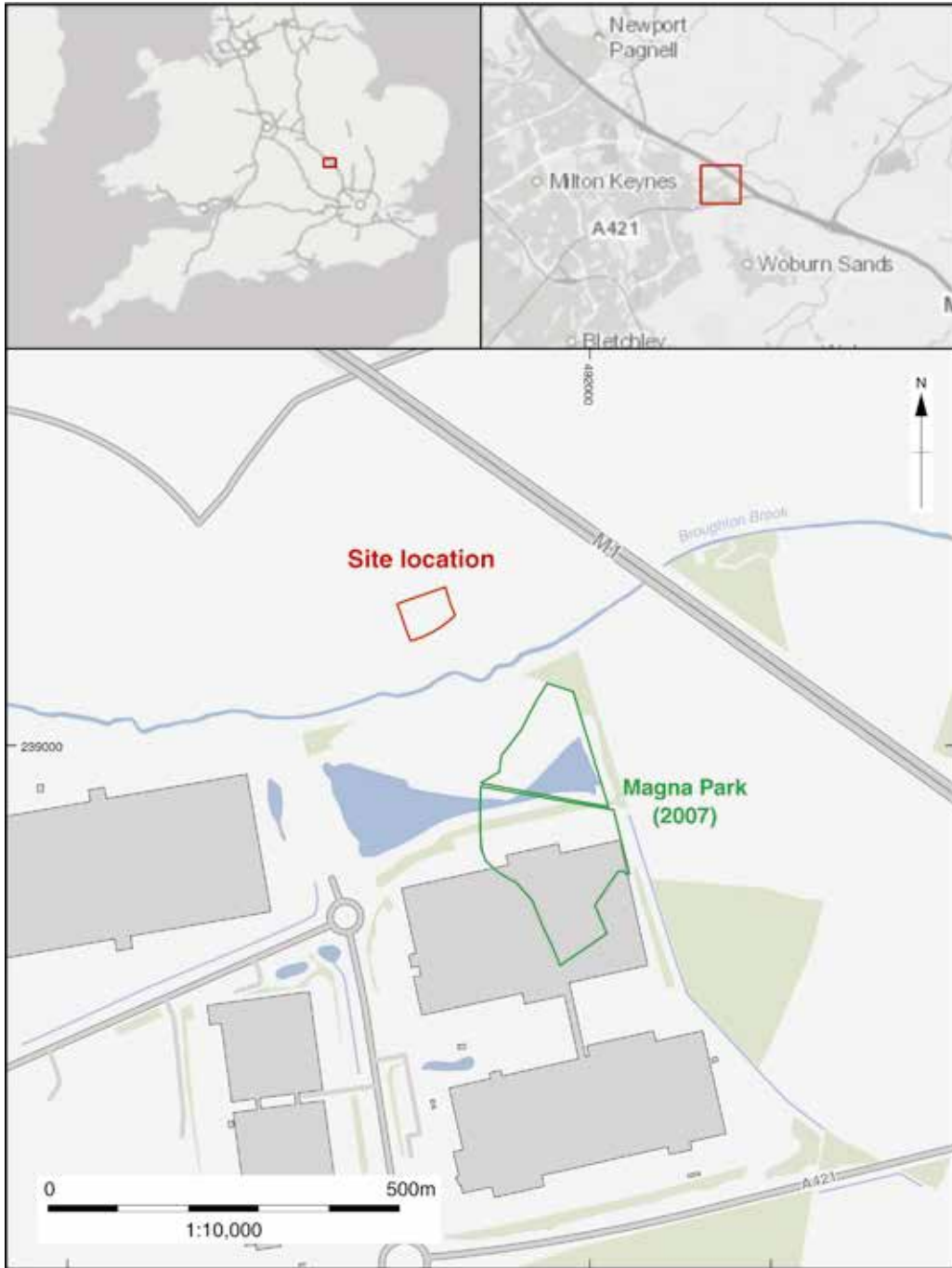


FIGURE 1 Site location

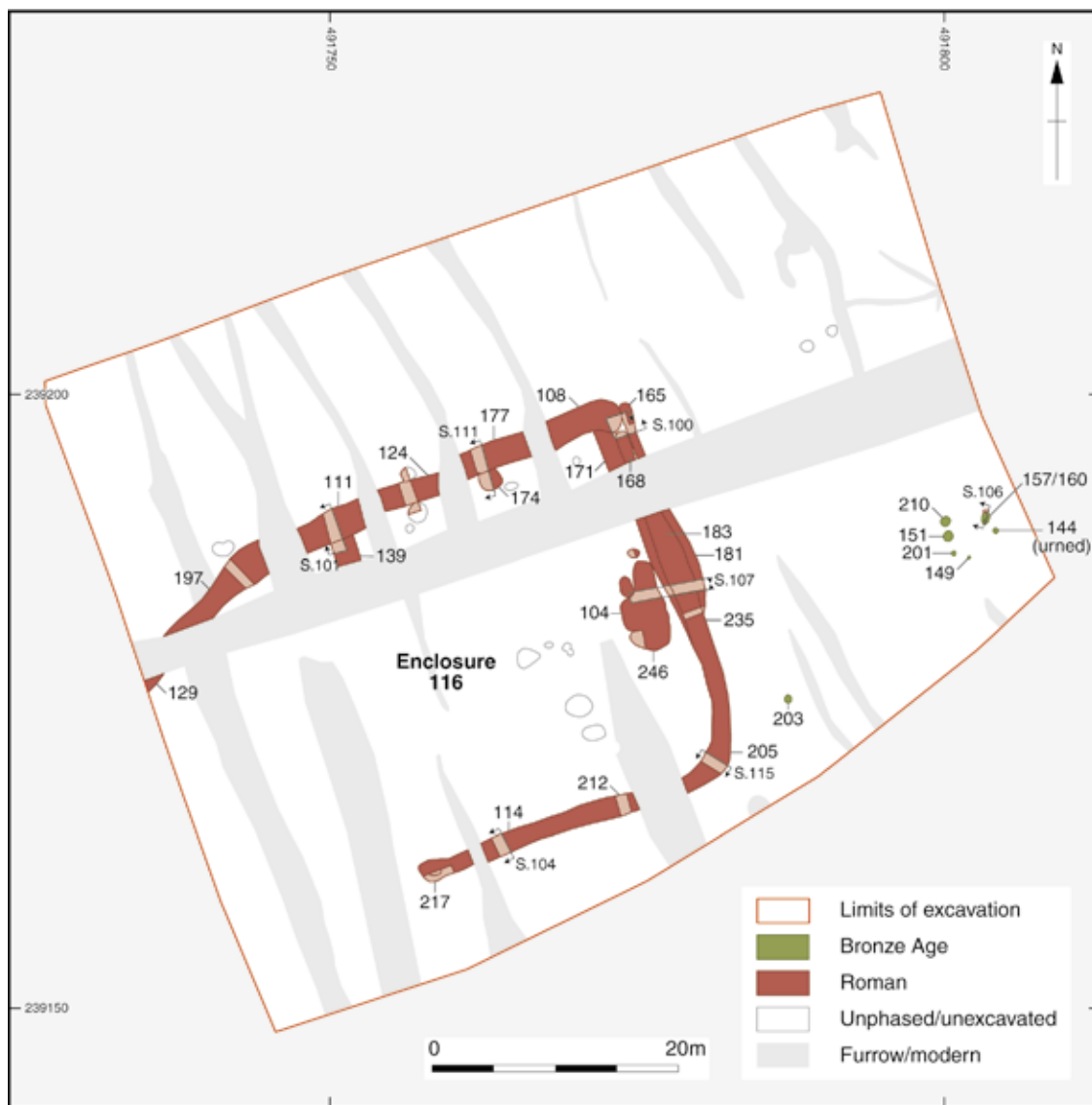


FIGURE 2 Plan of features

report available online via OA Library (<https://library.oxfordarchaeology.com/5528/>).

EARLY PREHISTORIC ACTIVITY

Evidence for early prehistoric activity was limited to 34 residual pieces of worked flint, including a few pieces of Mesolithic or Neolithic date.

BRONZE AGE CREMATION CEMETERY

The Bronze Age cremation cemetery was an unexpected discovery of the excavations. The cemetery was confined to the south-eastern part of the excavation area, and consisted of a cluster of seven pits containing deposits of cremated bone, with an eighth (203) located 18m to the south-west

TABLE 1 Summary of features containing cremated bone.

<i>Feature no.</i>	<i>Diameter (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Weight of bone (g)</i>	<i>Bone identification</i>	<i>Charcoal identification</i>	<i>Notes</i>
144	0.42	0.20	12.2	?Adult	Ash	Urned burial
149	0.22	0.06	1.9	Human or animal	–	
151	0.84	0.24	2326.2*	?adult x 2 (of which one poss. female); juvenile <2 years	Oak, ash	Two flint flakes
157	0.98 x 0.76	0.28	0.5	Human or animal	Oak	Cut by 160
160	0.36	0.10	2.3	Human or animal	–	Cut 157
201	0.38	0.10	48.9*	?Adult	Ash	Possible <i>in situ</i> cremation
203	0.66	0.17	13.1*	?Adult	Maloideae, oak, hazel, ivy	
210	0.82	0.10	4979.0*	?adult x 2 (of which one poss male); juvenile <16.5 years	Oak, ash	Radio-carbon date 1520–1420 cal BC

* = includes estimated weights from the 4-2mm fractions

(Table 1). Pit 160 was cut into the top of pit 157. It is likely that this was a ‘flat’ cemetery, as there was no evidence for any barrow mound, ring ditch or enclosure, either from the excavation or the magnetometer survey. The pits had been significantly affected by plough truncation, surviving to only 0.06–0.28m deep, and it is possible that further pits had been completely removed. It is also possible that the cemetery continued to the south, beyond the limits of the development area. All of the pits underwent whole-earth recovery and wet sieving.

Despite the small number of burials uncovered, a variety of funerary practices were evident. Only one of the burials (144) had been interred within an urn. The vessel was severely truncated, with only the lower 140mm surviving. This lower part of the vessel was bucket-shaped, and the base was 200mm in diameter. The fabric had voids from leached inclusions, probably from calcareous material, and was oxidised orange-brown with a

grey core. The vessel should be early or middle Bronze Age in date. It contained 10.8g of cremated bone, possibly from an adult, and a further 1.4g of bone was found in the pit fill around the urn.

The remaining features within the cemetery were simple pits with dark, silty clay fills containing varying amounts of charcoal and cremated bone. Burial pit 201 stood out from the rest in that the sides of the pit were heavily scorched to a red colour (Fig. 3). This trait has been noted in a number other early and middle Bronze Age cremation burials in southern Britain (Dodwell 2012; Caswell & Roberts 2018). Experimental work has indicated that such features probably represent a form of *in-situ* (or ‘bustum’) burial, with the cremation pyre constructed above the pit, and the cremated remains then allowed to fall into the pit (Dodwell 2012). The baking and reddening of the pit sides produced by the burning pyre may have been a deliberately sought effect, as it resembles a ceramic urn.



FIGURE 3 Cremation burial pit 201, facing south-east. Scale 0.3m

TABLE 2 Radiocarbon date

<i>Lab. ID</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Feature</i>	<i>Material</i>	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (0/00)	<i>Radiocarbon age (BP)</i>	<i>Calibrated date (95.4% confidence)</i>
SUERC-85593	211	Cremation burial 210	Cremated human bone	-24.4	3203 ± 24	1520–1420 cal BC

Burial pits 151 and 210 contained relatively large amounts of bone, in each case representing at least three individuals. Pit 210 contained remains from two probable adults and a child aged less than 16.5 years. A fragment of cremated bone submitted for radiocarbon dating (SUERC-85593) returned a date of 1520–1420 cal BC at 95.4% confidence, or 1500–1450 cal BC at 68.2% confidence (Table 2). Pit 151 contained remains from two probable adults and a child aged less than two years. Two flint flakes

were also recovered from this burial, but may be incidental inclusions; at least one of the flakes is of a type predating the Bronze Age. Bronze Age burials containing the cremated remains of three or more individuals are rare (Caswell & Roberts 2018), and to find two in a single small cemetery is noteworthy. Given the probable presence of two adults and a child in each case, it is tempting to suggest that these represent ‘family’ burials.

Other pits contained much smaller quantities

of bone, as little as 0.5g in one case, and for the very smallest bone deposits it was not possible to positively identify the remains as human. These deposits clearly only represent a small proportion of the remains of any one individual. Investigations in modern crematoria have found that the bone weight of cremated adult individuals ranges between 1000–2400g (McKinley 2000, 269), whilst archaeologically recovered cremations have an expected weight range of 600–900g (McKinley 2013, 154). Truncation of the burial pits may well have been a factor in the low recovery of bone from some of these features, but this is unlikely to be a complete explanation, as there was no direct relationship between pit depth and bone quantities (Table 1). It may be that those pits containing only small amounts of bone represent ‘token’ deposits of pyre debris, collected and interred as a symbolic gesture (Caswell & Roberts 2018).

Analysis of charcoal from the sieved flots from six of the pits provides further evidence for variation in funerary rites. In five cases the pyre fuel wood was ash and/or oak, but pit 203 contained a more varied assemblage including oak, hazel, ivy and Maloideae (e.g. hawthorn, whitebeam or apple). The presence of ivy is unusual (cf. O’Donnell 2016). It is possible that this had simply been attached to the other wood when it was collected, but it is also possible that it had been deliberately selected and placed on the pyre due to its symbolic associations. The leaves of ivy stay green year round, and evergreen plants have been consistently associated with death and immortality since at least the Roman period. Box in particular has been recovered from both inhumations and urned cremations of Romano-British date (Lodwick 2017) and has also been found in medieval burials (e.g. Hall *et al* 2000), while yew trees are common in churchyards to this day. Records from medieval Europe discuss the placing of ivy in graves as a symbol of Christian life after death (Jonsson 2007, 49). It is possible that ivy had similar associations for the Bronze Age community at Glebelands.

The radiocarbon date from cremation pit 210 falls in the earlier part of the middle Bronze Age, or just possibly the very end of the early Bronze Age. This concurs with the broad early to middle Bronze Age date ascribed to the urn from burial 144, and the characteristics of ‘*in-situ*’ cremation burial 201, which parallels examples elsewhere dated to the early and middle Bronze Age. While

none of the other burials can be dated, it is likely that the cemetery as a whole belonged to the end of the early Bronze Age or, more likely, the middle Bronze Age. Similar small, flat cremation cemeteries dating to the middle Bronze Age have been found across much of southern Britain (Caswell & Roberts 2018), as at Loughton, Milton Keynes, 8km to the west, where two urned and nine unurned burials were uncovered (Pine 2003).

Some middle Bronze Age cremation cemeteries are located on the fringes of settlements, as at Dorney in south Buckinghamshire (Allen & Moore 1992, 26), though many others have no clear spatial association with occupation sites (Caswell & Roberts 2018). At Glebelands there is no evidence for substantial settlement in the immediate vicinity of the cemetery, although there are scattered traces of middle Bronze Age activity. The Brooklands investigations uncovered a pit containing pottery broadly dated to the middle to late Bronze Age 300m to the west of the site, and a waterhole radiocarbon dated to 1420–1260 cal BC 1km to the north-west of the site (Atkins *et al* 2014, 28–9). An isolated middle Bronze Age pit containing two complete loomweights and fragments of further eight was found 450m to the south of the site at Magna Park Site 2 (Chapman 2012); this has the appearance of a deliberate deposit rather than the casual disposal of settlement waste. A fragment of a middle Bronze Age copper-alloy dagger was recovered as a residual find from Magna Park Site 1, 1km to the south-west of the site (Chapman & Chapman 2017).

ROMANO-BRITISH ENCLOSURE

The excavation confirmed the presence of the rectangular enclosure (116) that was first identified by the magnetometer survey. The enclosure was open-ended on its western side, measuring *c* 42m long and 27.7m wide internally, and enclosing an area of *c* 0.10ha. The southern and eastern sides of the enclosure were formed by a continuous ditch. The northern ditch terminated immediately before it met the eastern ditch, though the gap of *c* 0.20m between the two seems too narrow for an entrance at this point. The western end of the northern ditch appears to have turned inwards towards the south, though its terminus lay beyond the limit of excavation. The ditch was up to 2.87m wide and 0.87m deep, with a generally V-shaped profile. It contained

a sequence of silty fills, which became progressively darker higher up the profile. Pottery evidence suggests that the filling of the ditch dates to c AD 170–250. Later pottery, of 4th-century date, was only present in one fill within the upper part of the ditch on the north side of the enclosure.

The eastern side of the enclosure cut a pair of parallel, shallower ditches (244 and 245), which followed the same alignment. It is possible that these earlier ditches marked the eastern side of an earlier phase of the enclosure that had largely been removed elsewhere by a later recut. Finds from these earlier ditches could only be dated broadly to the Roman period. Three shallow pits or hollows (139, 174 and 246) located along the inner edge of the enclosure also appear to have been cut by the main phase of the enclosure ditch. Features 174 and 246 contained pottery dated to the late 2nd century, while pit 139 contained only a single undiagnostic sherd of Roman pottery. The interior of the enclosure was otherwise devoid of features that could be dated to the Roman period.

Finds from the enclosure were modest in quantity and range. The pottery assemblage of 426 sherds (3865g) was in a fragmentary state, suggesting that it may have undergone multiple episodes of redeposition. It was dominated by jars and bowls in generic sandy wares and South Midlands shell-tempered ware. Non-local pottery included a single Verulamium region mortarium, a few sherds from the Nene Valley industry, and sherds of Central Gaulish samian. There were just two pieces of tile, including a tegula fragment; both were in the shelly fabric commonly found in the Milton Keynes area (Zeepvat 1987). Iron finds comprised three nails, four hobnails and a possible bucket or barrel binding. A copper-alloy pin was found in the enclosure ditch during the evaluation (MOLA 2017). A small quantity of animal bone was recovered (204 fragments); cattle was the most common species represented, with sheep/goat, horse, dog and bird bone also present, along with a piece of roe deer antler and an oyster shell. Assessment of bulk samples from the enclosure ditch and hollow 246 showed that charred plant remains were limited to sparse, poorly preserved cereal grains and charcoal, indicating that the enclosure was not used for crop processing on any scale.

The paucity of internal features and the limited range of finds suggests that the enclosure was not a focus of settlement, but rather had a subsidiary

role, perhaps being used for livestock. It may well have been associated with the settlement complex excavated 200m to the south-east on the other side of the Broughton Brook at Magna Park Site 2, which comprised a droveway with flanking enclosures (Chapman & Chapman 2017; Fig. 4). This settlement developed from the early 2nd century AD with a wide droveway leading to possible stock enclosures with an adjacent enclosure that contained at least two roundhouses. During the 3rd century the drove developed into a narrow trackway, aligned on the Glebelands enclosure. However, the excavations and the earlier evaluation at Glebelands revealed no evidence for such a track, suggesting that it did not extend as far north as the site. An earlier geophysical survey undertaken as part of the Magna Park development (Butler 2006) shows that this track extended up to the Broughton Brook, suggesting that the stream was extant during the Roman period on much the same course.

The evidence from Glebelands adds to a picture of dense Romano-British settlement and agriculture in the valley of the Broughton Brook. Aside from Magna Park, other broadly contemporary sites in the immediate local area include a late Iron Age to late Roman settlement at Broughton Manor Farm, 1.5km to the west (Atkins *et al* 2014); a late Roman settlement identified in an evaluation at Broughton Barn Quarry, 1.5km to the north-west (Chapman 2009); a field system dated to AD 140–200 at Old Covert, 1.25km to the north (Petchey 1978); and Roman trackways at Whitsundoles Farm, 1km to the north-east (Luke & Phillips 2002).

LATER AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY

The Romano-British enclosure was cut by a series of furrows on a NNW-SSE alignment. A linear feature crossing the site on an ENE-WSW alignment corresponds with a modern field boundary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Simon Mortimer, CgMs Heritage (now RPS), for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Nick Crank who monitored the work on behalf of Milton Keynes Council for his advice and guidance.

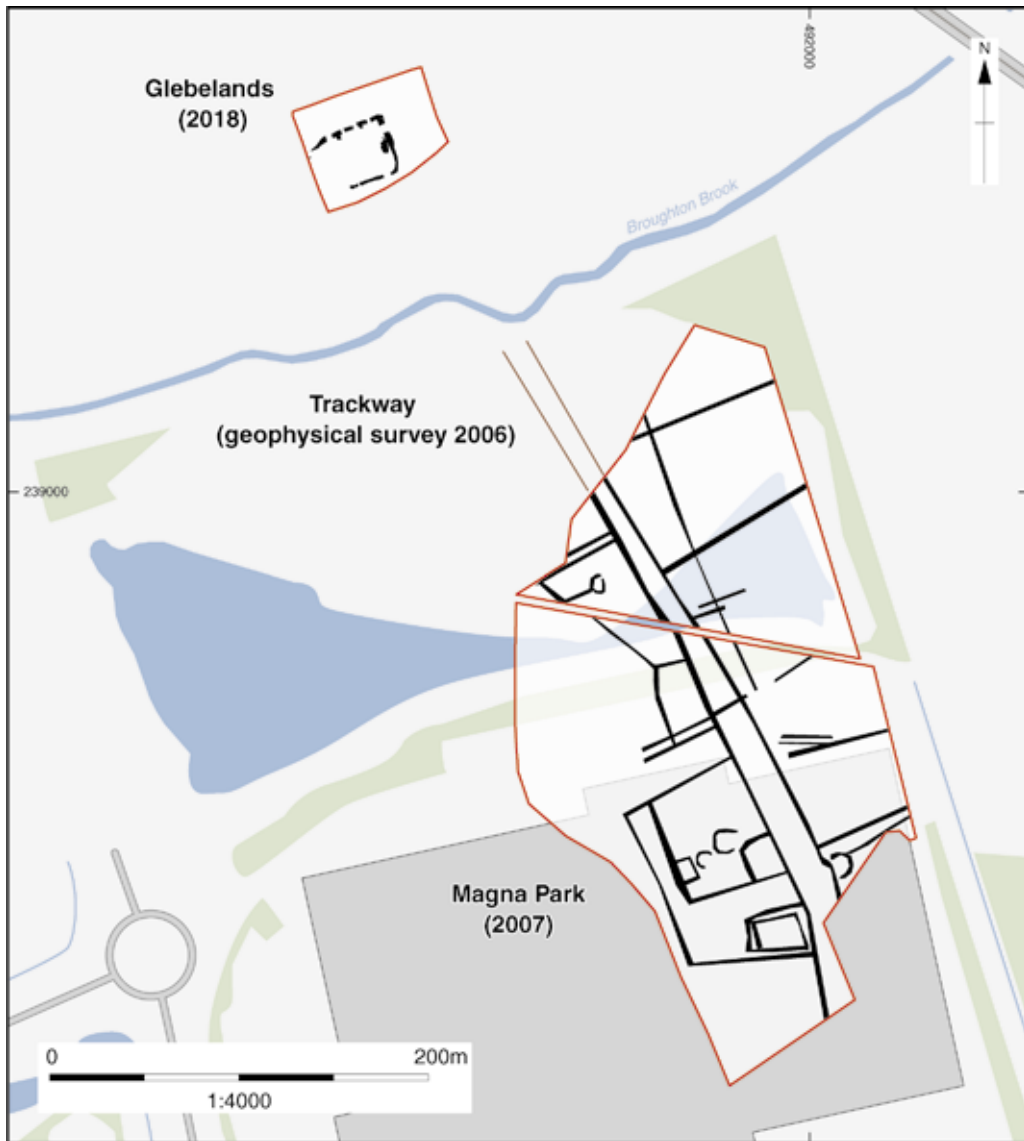


FIGURE 4 Roman enclosures at Glebelands and Magna Park

The fieldwork was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Carl Champness, and directed by Gary Evans and Lee Sparks, who were supported by Adam Rapiejko, Caroline Souday, Jacob Spriggs and Emma Powell. Survey and digitizing were carried out by Diana Chard. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen and Geraldine Crann, processed the environ-

mental remains under the management of Rebecca Nicholson, and prepared the archive under the management of Nicky Scott.

This report incorporates summaries of specialist reports produced by Martyn Allen (animal bone), Kate Brady (Roman pottery), Alex Davies (prehistoric pottery), Mike Donnelly (flint), Mark Gibson (human bone), Julia Meen (charred plant remains and charcoal) and Ian Scott (metalwork).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen T & Moore J 1992, Dorney, Boveney Court, *South Midlands Archaeol* **22**, 26
- Atkins R, Popescu E, Rees G & Stansbie D 2014, *Broughton, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire: The Evolution of a South Midlands Landscape*, Oxford Archaeol Monog **22** (Oxford)
- Butler A 2006, *A Geophysical Survey at Nova MK1, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire*, Northamptonshire Archaeol Rep **06/45**
- Caswell E & Roberts B W 2018, Reassessing community cemeteries: Cremation burials in Britain during the middle Bronze Age (c 1600–1150 cal BC), *Proc Prehist Soc* **84**, 329–57
- Chapman A 2009, Bronze Age burial and late Iron Age and Roman settlement at Broughton Barn Quarry, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, *Recs Bucks* **49**, 9–41
- Chapman A 2012, A group of Bronze Age decorated loomweights from Magna Park, Milton Keynes, *Recs Bucks* **52**, 25–32
- Chapman P & Chapman A 2017, A late Iron Age enclosure and a Roman droveway and enclosures at Magna Park, Milton Keynes, *Recs Bucks* **57**, 1–53
- Dodwell N 2012, Early Bronze Age busta in Cambridgeshire? On-site experiments to investigate the effects of fires and pyres on pits, in PD Mitchell & J Buckberry (eds), *Proc. Twelfth Annual Conference, British Assoc for Biological Anthropology & Osteoarchaeology*. Brit Archaeol Repts, Int. Series **2380**, 141–9
- Hall A, Carrott J, Jaques D, Johnstone C, Kenward H, Large F & Usai R 2000, *Technical report: Studies on Biological Remains and Sediments from Medieval Deposits at the Magistrates' Courts site, Kingston-upon-Hull (site codes HMC94 and MCH99)*, Environmental Archaeol Unit Rep **2000/25**
- Jonsson K 2007, Burial rods and charcoal graves: New light on old burial practices, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* **3**, 43–73
- Lodwick L 2017, Evergreen plants in Roman Britain and beyond: Movement, meaning and materiality, *Britannia* **48**, 135–73
- Luke M & Phillips M 2002, Salford, Whitsundoles Farm, *South Midlands Archaeol* **32**, 3–4
- McKinley J I 2000, Cremation burials, in B Barber & D Bowsher, *The Eastern Cemetery of Roman London. Excavations 1983–1990*, MoLAS Monog **4**, 264–77
- McKinley J I 2013. Cremation: Excavation and analysis, in S Tarlow & L Nilsson Stutz (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial*, 147–72 (Oxford)
- MOLA 2017, *Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation: Glebelands Site 410, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire August 2017*, MOLA Rep **17/110**
- O'Donnell L 2016, The power of the pyre – A holistic study of cremation focusing on charcoal remains, *J Archaeol Science* **65**, 161–71
- Petchey M 1978, A Roman field system at Broughton, Buckinghamshire, *Recs Bucks* **20**, 637–45
- Pine J 2003, Medieval settlement, late Saxon features and a Bronze-Age cremation cemetery at Loughton, Milton Keynes, *Recs Bucks* **43**, 77–126
- Walford J 2017, *Archaeological Geophysical Survey of Site 410 of the Glebe Land Development Site, Wavendon, Milton Keynes July 2017*, MOLA Northampton unpublished report
- Zeevat R J 1987, Tiles, in D Mynard (ed.) *Roman Milton Keynes*, Buckinghamshire Archaeol Soc Monog **1**, 118–25 (Aylesbury)