

IRON AGE/ROMAN PASTORAL FIELD SYSTEM ON LAND AT BUCKINGHAM ROAD, STEEPLE CLAYDON

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A pastoral field system/settlement was probably established at the end of the middle Iron Age. Two possible stock enclosures and drainage ditches were dated to the late Iron Age. This settlement developed during the late Iron Age/early Roman transition to encompass a boundary ditch as well as a further possible enclosure and drainage ditches. One early Roman Aylesford-Swarling type cremation was found deposited in the boundary ditch. In the middle to late Roman period the earlier stock enclosures were modified and further ditches were established possibly to ease the drainage. In addition several large pits were located in the southern area of the site. The settlement was in use until the mid-3rd century AD.

INTRODUCTION

Background

MOLA was commissioned by Crest Nicholson Chiltern to carry out a strip map and record archaeological excavation on c.1.6ha of arable land to the east of Steeple Claydon, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 70450 27142). Excavations focused on the west of the proposed development area (Fig 1), to determine the nature and extent of the Roman settlement activity identified in the previous geophysical survey (Fisher 2015) and subsequent trial trench evaluation (Finn 2015).

The excavation was situated on the north-eastern edge of Steeple Claydon, bounded to the west by Buckingham Road and to the south by modern residential buildings (Fig 2). Open fields lie to the north and east. The site encompassed the southern portion of two rectangular fields bounded by hedges. The village of Steeple Claydon is situated on top of a hill overlooking Claydon Brook to the north. The site itself occupied a gentle, south-west-facing slope at an elevation of c.85m-95m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

Geology

by Steve Critchley

The site is underlain by beds belonging to the Mid Jurassic Oxford Clay (Peterborough Member) overlain by Pleistocene Glacial Tills. These tills had been affected by periglacial action with some ice wedging seen now picked out by pale brown silty sand infills. The topsoil was dark grey-brown silty clay across the area and ranged from 0.15m and 0.30m thick. Beneath was a mid grey-brown silty clay subsoil which was 0.02m-0.25m thick. The overall depth of the archaeological horizon ranged from 0.20m at its shallowest to 0.50m at its deepest.

A palaeochannel [155] was found by the excavations orientated north-south across the site near to the eastern excavation boundary. It contained layers of slightly gravelly silty sandy clays (Figs 3 & 4). From fill (150) of the palaeochannel a single undated flint flake was recovered, as well as a wind-blown deposit of charred wheat and unidentifiable grain kernels. Close to the southern boundary an extensive layer of silty sandy gravels was exposed. This probably derived from colluvium/hill wash from the nearby beds of glacial gravels, which lay just to the south of the site.

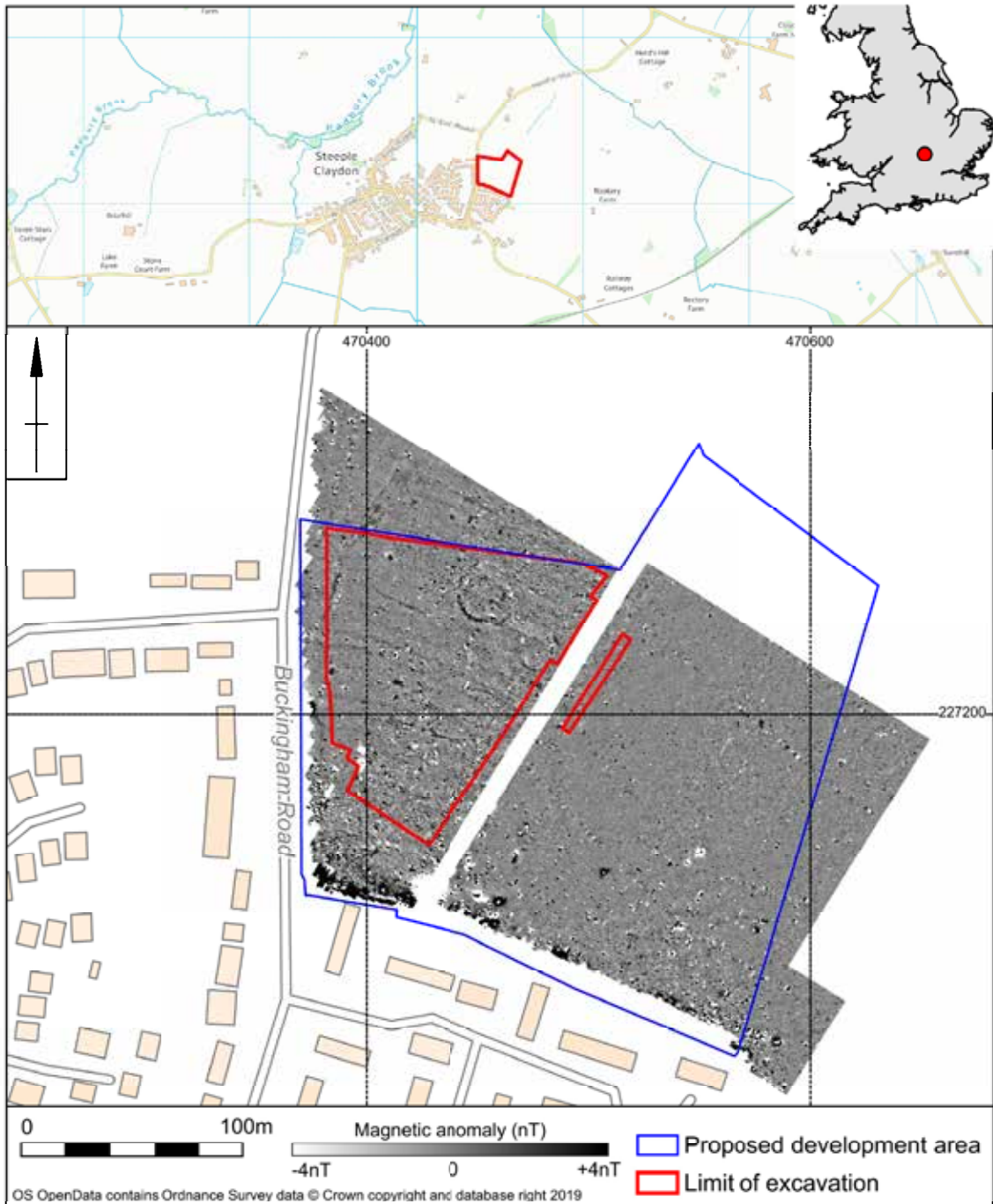


FIGURE 1 Site location, geophysical survey and excavation area (scale 1:3000)



FIGURE 2 Excavation area, looking west

Acknowledgements

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The archive for the archaeological excavation is held by Buckinghamshire Museums under the code AYBCM: 2018.85.

Historical and Archaeological Background

The development area and its surroundings have been subject to previous archaeological investigation comprising geophysical survey (Fisher 2015: Figs 1 & 4) and trial trenching (Finn 2015: Fig 4). Both phases of evaluation recorded a concentration of activity which was dated to the Roman period during the trial trenching. The features comprised enclosures, ditches and pits and were principally located in the western field of the evaluation area.

Prior to the evaluation, the Buckinghamshire County Council Historic Environment Record (BCCHER) did not contain any records of archaeological evidence dated prior to the early medieval period (5th century AD) within the 500m search radius. There is a single record for an undated inhumation found during sewer works at Manor Farm (MBC2145/ EBC10319), located just beyond the 500m search radius to the south-east of the site.



FIGURE 3 Section through the palaeochannel [155], looking south-west

In the wider area at Steeple Claydon, the only evidence of Roman activity were two rim sherds of Roman pottery recovered just to the south of the village in allotments (Farley 1975), and some 3rd-century AD coins that were reportedly recovered in the 17th century (Downs 1904).

THE EXCAVATION RESULTS

Scope of Mitigation Works and the Summary of the Site Chronology

The strip, map and record investigation (SMR) comprised most of the western extent of the development area as well as a 50m x 3.60m trench to the east (Trench 11; Fig 5). Archaeological features were found across the main excavation area, but not in Trench 11 (Fig 4). The settlement was phased by pottery and stratification into four time periods of activity and/or occupation, although the vast majority of activity related to the late Iron Age and to the early to middle Roman phases (Table 1).

Agricultural activity took place in the post-Roman timeframe.

Middle Iron Age activity

Activity on the site likely commenced during the end of the middle Iron Age, although no features of this date were identified. The only evidence of middle Iron Age activity comprised the recovery of a small quantity of pottery residual in later features and represented by jars/bowls with slack-shouldered or ovoid bodies, and short, sometimes beaded rims.

Late Iron Age

In the late Iron Age a sub-oval enclosure E1 was established, located against the eastern limit of excavation (Fig. 5). Another possible stock enclosure E2 was identified further south, in addition to two ditches D1 and D2. This activity was focused at the base of the slope, adjacent to the western edge of the palaeochannel.

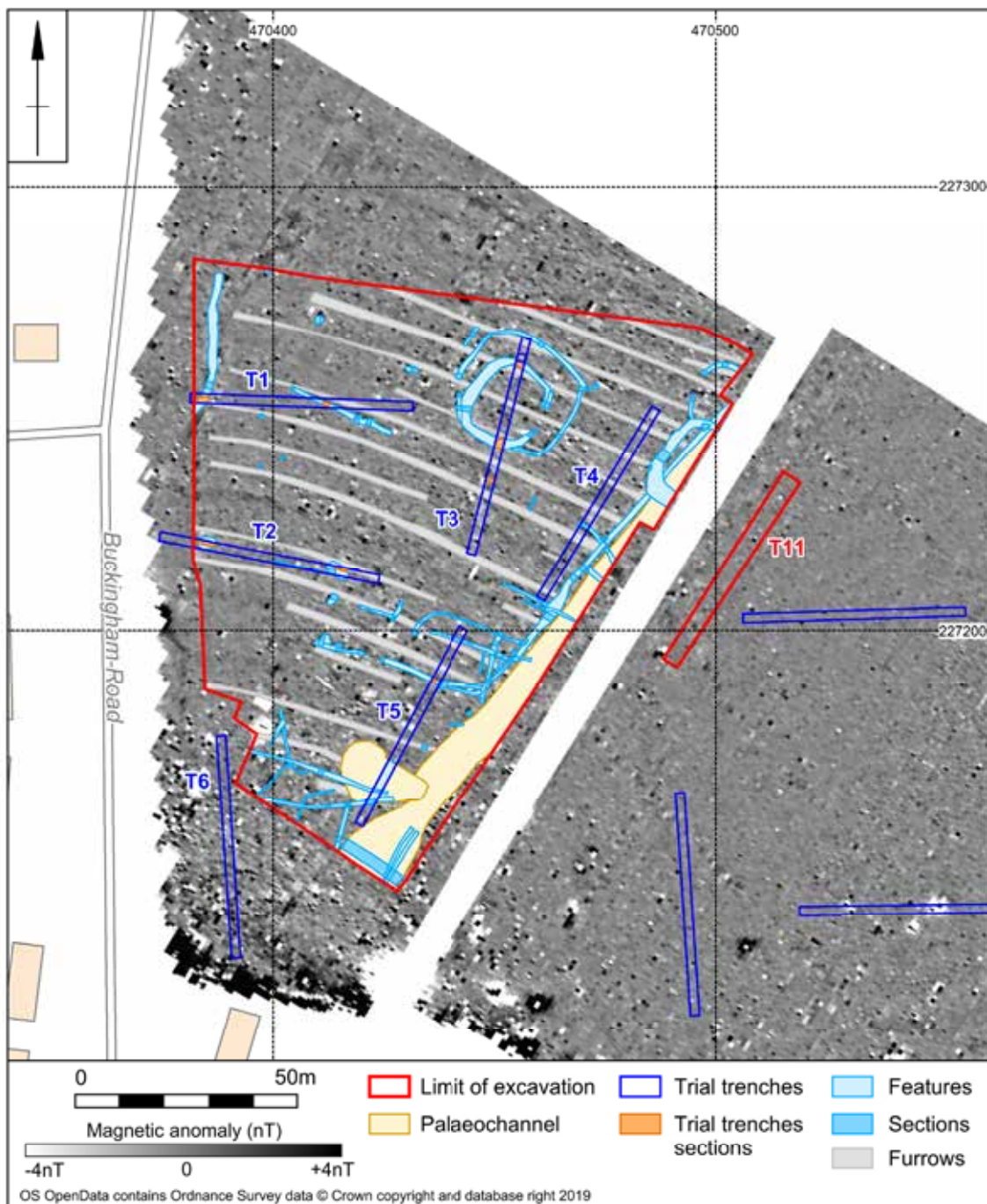


FIGURE 4 Strip map and sample area with trial trenches and geophysical survey results (scale 1:1500)

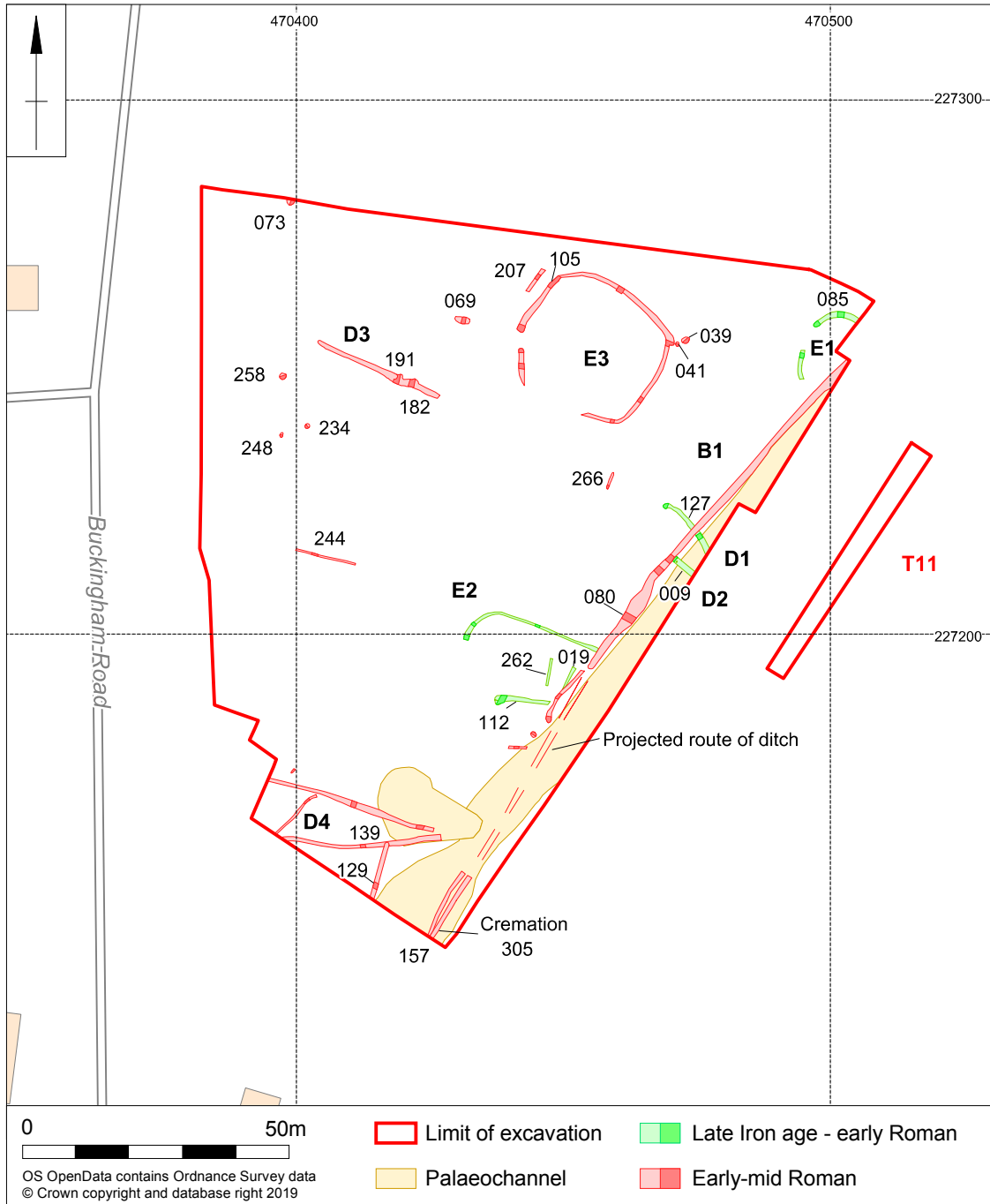


FIGURE 5 late Iron Age to mid-Roman features (scale 1:1250)

TABLE 1 Summary of site chronology

<i>Time period</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Key features</i>
Middle Iron Age	5th century BC to 1st century BC	Residual pottery
Late Iron Age	1st century BC–1st century AD	Enclosures (E1, E2) and ditches (D1, D2)
Early to middle Roman	1st-2nd century AD	Eastern boundary ditch established (B1), enclosure (E3); ditches (D3, D4) and discrete features
Middle to late Roman	2nd to mid-3rd century AD	Western boundary established (B2), additional enclosures (E4, E5, E6) ditches (D5, D6) and discrete features
Post-Roman	Medieval to modern	Furrows and field drainage

Enclosures (E1 and E2)

Enclosure E1 was presumed oval and defined by a curvilinear ditch that lay partly beyond the eastern edge of excavation. It had a diameter of c.14m with a c.5.0m wide entrance on the north-western side. The enclosure ditch [085] was defined by gently sloping sides and a flat base, measuring between 0.53m to 1.10m wide and up to 0.18m deep. The fill of mid orange-grey sandy clay reflected the natural substrate, and was likely the product of episodic silting.

Enclosure E2 also lay on the eastern edge of the site to the south of E1 and ditches D1/D2. It was partly truncated by later enclosure E6. It was broadly sub-rectangular in form, with a length of c.28m east to west and a width of 14m north to south with a south-west facing entrance. The surviving elements of the enclosure comprised two linear ditches, both of which were aligned north-east to south-west with an average width of 0.38m and depth of 0.30m. They contained a single firm mid brown clay fill. The ditch on the north side of the enclosure curved to face south at its northern end, terminating to form the north side of a possible entranceway. The other side was formed by the western terminus [112] of the southern ditch, which contained 17 sherds of pottery (0.3kg) dating from the 1st century BC to 1st century AD.

Within the enclosure were two short 5.0m long undated ditches oriented north-south and positioned 4.0m apart, [019] and [262]. They had a maximum width of 0.45m and were up to 0.18m deep.

Ditches (D1 and D2)

The only other features associated with this early period of activity were two roughly parallel ditches D1 and D2 with respective 5.0m and 12m lengths, lying within the excavation area (Fig 5). Both were aligned north-west to south-east and were 0.98m wide and 0.24m deep, with single mid grey-brown clay silt fills. In D1 a total of 15 sherds of late Iron Age to early Roman period pottery was recovered, as well as a complete ceramic spindle whorl from terminal [127], whereas the single excavation section [009] through D2 produced no artefacts.

Early-mid Roman

In the early-mid Roman period activity increased and key features were established, including a boundary ditch B1 along the eastern edge of the site and the main stock enclosure E3 to the north of the area (Fig 5). Additional ditches (D3) formed a remnant of a field system in the north area and ditches (D4) were possibly drainage features in the south part of the site.

Boundary Ditch (B1)

The main boundary ditch B1 was orientated north-east to south-west, parallel to the palaeo-channel, and extended beyond the southern limit of excavation. The ditch [080] had a total length of 110m and at the widest point it measured 1.80m wide and 0.48m deep with a dark grey homogenous fill. The ditch had a U-shaped profile with eroded upper edges and a flat base. It contained mid-late 1st century AD pottery, including the handle of a

flagon. Ditch D1, from the previous phase, was cut by boundary ditch B1.

Most significantly, the boundary ditch at the very southern corner of the excavation area contained the remains of a cremation burial in a cinerary urn, possibly following the Aylesford-Swarling type tradition. The cremation urn was found buried in the upper ditch fill (305) in association with an ancillary vessel, which may have contained a votive offering. Based on analysis of the urn, the cremation was likely deposited in the later 1st century AD (see below).

Cremation Urn and Ancillary Vessel

by Adam Sutton

The cremation-burial produced sherds from two vessels of early Roman dates (Fig 6). The cinerary urn (vessel 1) comprised 12 sherds, (0.514kg) and has the complete profile of a carinated bowl, with a rim diameter of 130mm. Rather than being in the typical grog-tempered fabric, it is a white ware fabric with iron oxide pellets. Also unusual is the red painted decoration, used to make a zig-zag or chevron motif around the neck of the bowl. Given the combination of fabric and form, vessel 1 is likely to date to the mid-to-late 1st century AD.

The ancillary vessel (vessel 2) is less substantially complete than vessel 1, comprising 9 sherds, (0.115kg) and lacking any rim sherds, but preserving sufficient of the base and body to allow determination of form. The shape is that of an ovoid beaker, probably of 'poppyhead' type. Such a vessel would date to the Flavian period onwards, probably not outlasting the mid-2nd century. It has applied/barbotine dots on the exterior, these forming the shapes of lozenges.

In combination, these two vessels make a date in the later 1st century AD likely for the deposition of the cremation.

Cremated Bone

by Chris Chinnock

A total of 483g of burnt human bone was recorded from within the cinerary urn. Although fragmentary, the burnt bone was relatively well preserved: in particular, a number of complete vertebrae were present as well as parts of the pelvic girdle. The deposit of burnt bone comprised the cremated remains of a single individual and total amount

of cremated bone suggests that, on the basis of total weight alone, only a relatively small quantity of bone was collected from the pyre site for final deposition. The excavation of the cremation deposit by spit demonstrated a general increase in the percentage of identifiable fragments towards the base of the urn; suggesting that the larger recognisable fragments, such as the larger skull fragments were collected and deposited together and placed in the urn first, followed by the smaller fragments.

The morphological characteristics of the bone fragments indicated that the remains are those of an individual adult. No indicators of sex were present in the assemblage, but a small fragment of the pelvis may suggest an age range of 26 to 45 years old. Evidence of pathology was found with marginal osteophytes noted on the vertebrae fragments. In addition, there was intervertebral disc disease and a possible avulsion injury to the posterior apophyseal ring on the superior part of a thoracic vertebral body. Avulsion injuries such as this are associated with disc prolapse.

Enclosure (E3)

A large sub-square enclosure E3 was located in the northern area of the site (Fig 5). The north-west to south-east axis measured 25m and the north-east to south-west axis measured 21m. The ditch [105] had a width of between 0.55m to 1.08m wide and a maximum depth of 0.30m, with sloping sides and a flat base. The compact dark grey brown clay ditch fills contained 27 sherds of pottery (0.472kg) dated from the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD, some of which were parts of storage jars. A narrow c.3.0m entrance lay on the west side of the enclosure and the southern side of the enclosure was cut away by the later enclosure E4.

Field System

Several ephemeral ditches D3 (182/191, 207, 244 & 266) were probably the remnants of a field system associated with the enclosures in the northern part of the site over an area of c.60m by 60m (Fig 5). The ditches were between 0.30m to 0.60m wide and 0.05m to 0.26m deep. All produced pottery dating from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, with the exception of [244], which contained 12 pottery sherds dating to the 1st to 2nd century. Within D3 there were also two small fragments of undiagnostic ferrous slag weighing 30g.

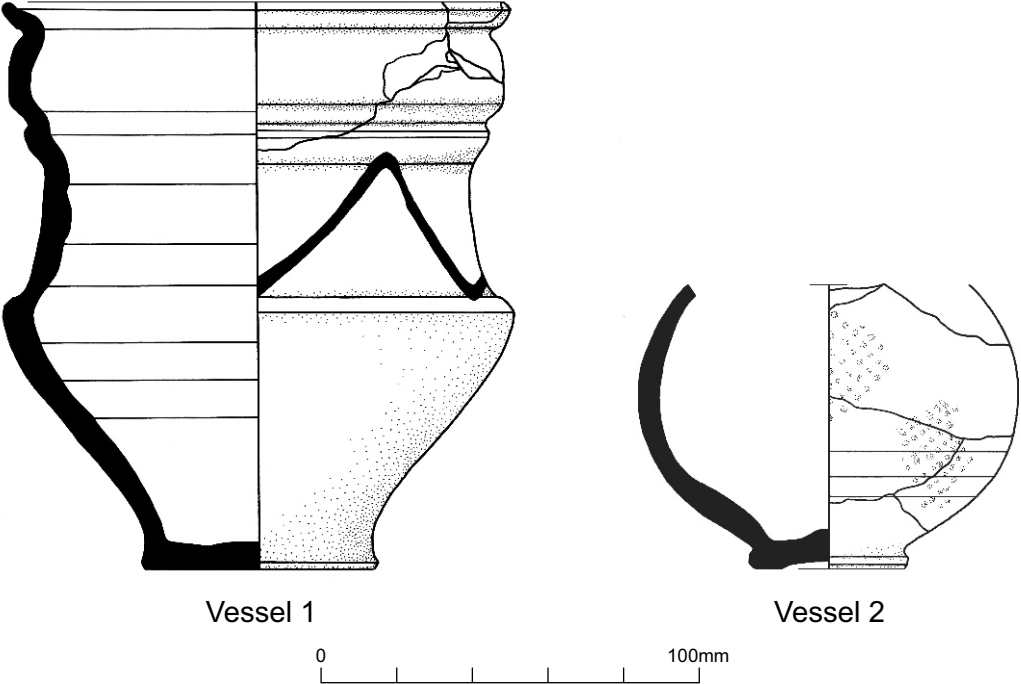


FIGURE 6 Cremation urn and ancillary vessel (scale 1:2)

Pits

Seven pits [39, 41, 69, 73, 234, 248 and 258] were found over an area of c.70m by 40m in the northern part of the site (Fig 5). This included a cluster of three pits [234, 248 and 258], with two adjacent undated pits [39 and 41]. They varied in size from 0.52m to 1.35m in diameter and 0.13m to 0.60m deep. Pits [234] and [258] only produced a small quantity of 1st century BC to the 1st century AD pottery, but [258] also included a copper alloy pin 9.5mm in length, with a knob head decorated with oblique grooves; this style of pin was thought to be common to the eastern region. Pit [69] produced 113 pottery sherds (0.781kg) also dating from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD and pit [073] contained 22 sherds of pottery (0.284kg) dating from the 1st to 2nd century AD.

Ditches (D4)

A series of four ditches (D4) located at the bottom of the hill at the south end of the site were all located close to the palaeochannel and associated flooding area (Fig 5). They were all similar in form, measuring between 0.65m to 0.80m wide and 0.11m to 0.19m deep. The fills were all derived from natural silting. Ditch [139] contained 57 sherds of pottery (0.234kg) dated to the 1st to 2nd century AD. Ditch [129] was examined by one excavation slot and contained a dump of pottery comprising 187 sherds (2.603kg), the second largest assemblage on site, dating from the 1st to 2nd centuries AD. This feature also contained a fragment of sheet lead with a scalloped edge, which may originally have been decorative edging to a box covering or bowl; similar examples have been dated to the 3rd to mid-4th century AD.

Sutton notes the pottery assemblage in ditch [129] as a key ceramic group comprising mainly late Iron Age type grog-tempered wares with a subsidiary component of sandy wares. Significant finds are a sherd of samian and eight sherds of mica-dusted ware: a moderately uncommon ceramic type on low-status rural sites. The range of vessels is also typical of the period: necked jars dominate, with channel-rim jars being a secondary component and there are no import copies. The group is characteristic of the Steeple Claydon assemblage as a whole in this earlier phase.

Middle-late Roman (Fig 7)

The activity in the mid-late Roman period consisted

primarily of modification of two enclosures (E4 and E6) from the earlier phases and the establishment of new enclosure E5. An additional boundary ditch B2 was established to the north-west of the area. Supplementary drainage ditches were positioned to the south and east of the site and a number of large pits were also found.

Boundary ditch (B2)

A large ditch B2 aligned north-south and 31.5m long was located close to the north-western corner of the excavation area. The ditch terminated at the northern end whilst the south end of the ditch turned gently to the south-west and continued beyond the excavation limit. The ditch had a primary cut [161] measuring 2.08m wide and 0.50m deep and a recut [306] that measured 1.40m wide and 0.20m deep.

Enclosure (E4)

E4 was a smaller sub-square ditched enclosure that measured 16m north-east to south-west by 12m internally, with a c.6.0m wide south-east facing entranceway (Fig 8). E4 replaced the earlier enclosure E3, truncating a length of its southern side. The ditch was 0.65m wide and had a maximum depth of 0.35m.

Close to the southern entrance terminal was pit/posthole [143]. It measured 0.50m wide and 0.17m deep, with one dark grey brown clay fill which contained two sherds of residual Iron Age and early Roman pottery. It possibly represents a gatepost for the entrance way. Adjacent to the northernmost terminal [059] of E4 was an oval pit [061], 4.0m in length and 0.85m wide, with a depth of 0.43m.

Enclosure (E5)

To the east of E4, lying on the east edge of the excavation, was the western side of enclosure E5, the east side lying beyond the excavation edge (Fig 7). The enclosure was 16m in length and its ditch [077] measured 2.10m wide and 0.75m deep, and had an asymmetrical V-shaped profile, which comprised a narrow, rounded base and steep sloping sides (Fig 8).

Enclosure (E6)

In the southern part of the excavation area, a series of linear ditches formed part of a possible rectangular enclosure (E6), which may have been a replacement or modification of E2. It was nearly 40m in length and 10m wide (Fig 7).

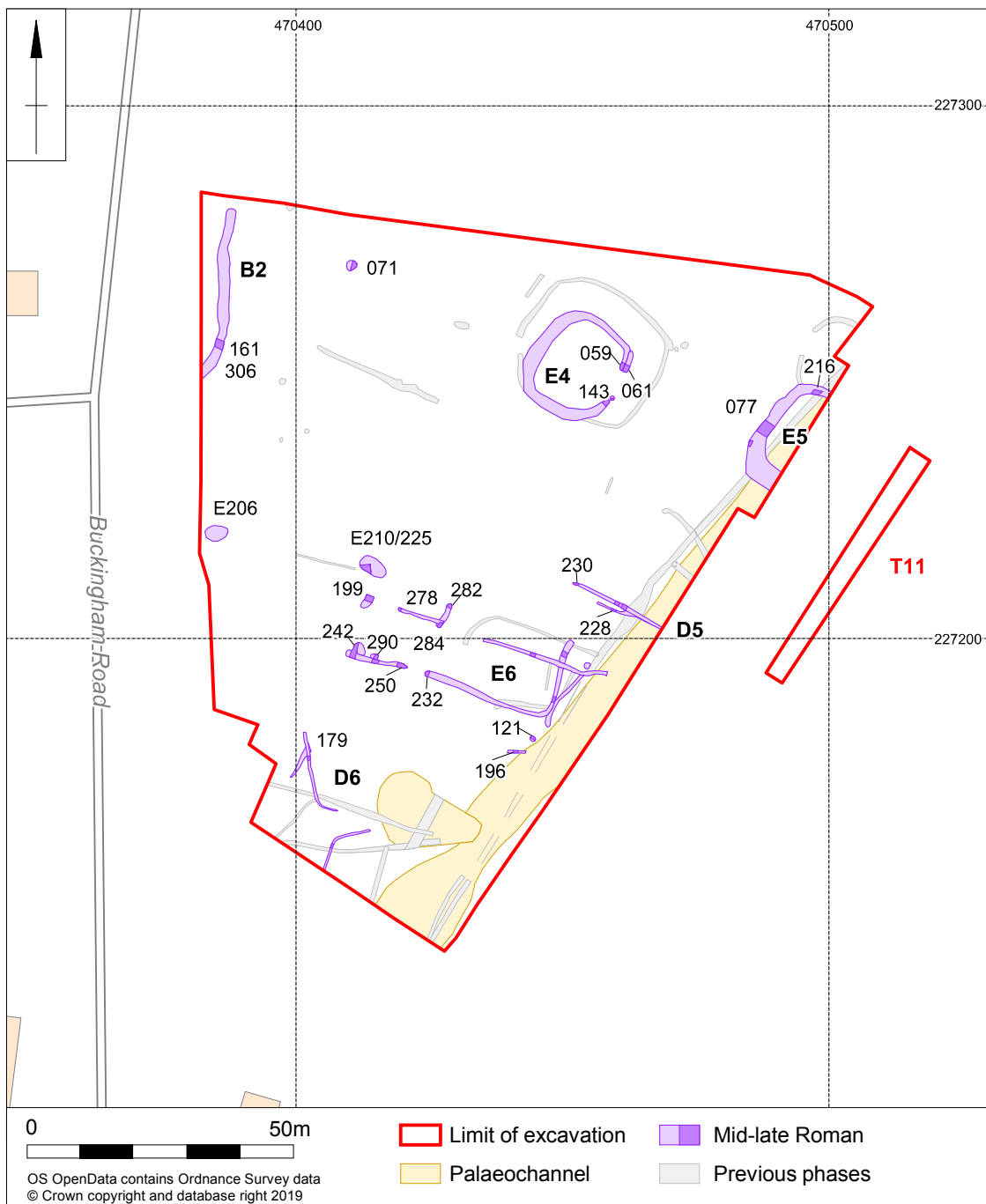


FIGURE 7 Middle to late Roman features (scale 1:1250)



FIGURE 8 Section of enclosure ditch E5, looking south-west

It comprised two north-west to south-east aligned ditches, 10m apart, with a north-east to south-west ditch connecting the two at the eastern end, respecting both the earlier boundary ditch B1 and the palaeochannel. The west end appeared to be open ended as well as centrally placed entrances on both north and south sides, between 3.0m to 7.0m wide. The entranceway on the northern side may have been augmented by ditch [282], for example, cut the east end of ditch [284] and continued north for more than 5.0m at right angles to enclosure E6. It is uncertain whether there had been other features such as hedges which blocked off the western side of the enclosure, but if there had been they have left no impression archaeologically. The profiles of the individual ditches [232, 250 and 284] varied between U-shaped and V-shaped and were up to 1.09m wide and 0.34m deep. The north-western ditch [284] was re-cut by ditch [278], suggesting the enclosure may have been long-lived. It is possible large post-pad or pit [199], 1.50m in diameter and 0.30m deep, was an extension of the northern side of E6.

Associated features within E6 included two

sub-circular pits [242] and [290], located to the north-west of the short segment of southern enclosure ditch [250]. The larger of the two had a diameter of 1.65m and a depth of 0.60m: both contained late 2nd to 4th century pottery.

Ditches (D5 and D6)

Ditches D5 and D6 were in the same location as ditches D1, D2 and D4 and may have been constructed to channel water away from the southern and eastern edges of the site (Fig 7). The ditches varied from 0.30m to 1.20m wide and from 0.06m and 0.41m deep. Pottery was recovered and dated the ditches to the late 2nd to 4th century. Other artefacts comprised a nail and also a broken scythe used for harvesting cereals and/or cutting hay were retrieved from ditch [179].

Waste Pits [E206] and [225]/[E210]

A large pit [E206], identified during the trial trench investigation of this area, was located near the western limit of excavation. The pit was oval in plan, 3.0m in length, 4.20m wide and 72m deep, with gently sloping sides and a broad flat base. The primary fill (E205) 0.18m deep overlaid by a fill of

light grey-orange mottled sandy clay (E204) which had a depth of 0.54m.

The pit contained the largest pottery assemblage from the site, comprising 154 sherds and weighing 4.5kg. All came from context (E204), except for two sherds weighing 3g. Most of the assemblage comprised pink, cream-yellow and brown grog-tempered wares followed by grey wares and shell-gritted ware dated between the 1st to 2nd centuries. The less common, but more interesting pottery products came from other regions, including continental imports, represented by part of the base from a flat-bottomed cup from Lezoux in Central Gaulish. A stamp **[R?OM]ANIM** on the base of the vessel probably dates it to the Antonine period (c.AD 140–70). One sherd of white to pinkish white sand-tempered mortarium had traces of two badly worn linear stamps next to the spout, dating the vessel to the later 1st to 2nd century AD. Two sherds of Lower Nene Valley colour coated beaker probably date the deposit to the 3rd century AD (Perrin 2015).

This pit also contained several tile fragments, including tegula, residual quern fragments and 94 fragments of animal bone, which included cattle and horse (Finn 2015).

The latest dated feature on the site was pit [E210/225], located near the centre of the excavation area (Fig 7). This large oval-shaped pit measured 6.0m long, was 3.8m wide and 0.60m deep. It had an eroded concave base with gradual sloping edges. The original purpose of the pit could have been a watering hole for livestock, later used as a waste pit, with the final depositions perhaps representing the abandonment of an associated settlement.

Pit [225] contained a large quantity of pottery, the majority of which came from the upper fills. This was probably derived from deliberate dumping of material rather than as a result of gradual silting. The pottery dated to the mid-3rd century AD.

The assemblage from the first fill (220) totalled 240 sherds (2.60kg), in addition to the evaluation assemblage of 224 sherds (2.067kg). Substantial parts of numerous vessels were represented, in particular fine white and oxidised wares including table wares such as beakers and two flat-rimmed samian bowls. It is possible that the deposit derived from a particular depositional event, as it included a higher than usual proportion of fine tableware,

suggesting that this may have been an event of relative significance. The finds assemblage of this pit also comprised fired clay, which may have come from the lip of an oven or kiln opening. There were also small fragments of Roman brick and tile. The animal bone assemblage included a large number of cattle fragments, as well as six bone fragments from a single dog. This suggests that when the pit was finally infilled it was used as a waste pit for domestic, farming and small-scale industrial debris.

Other isolated features from this period included pit [071]. This was located 22m east of B2 and was sub-oval in plan with a U-shaped profile, 1.67m in diameter and 0.48m deep. It had a compact dark grey clay silt fill and contained 20 sherds of late Roman pottery (0.655kg) and two cattle bone fragments, suggesting this was possibly a waste pit.

Medieval to Post-medieval

There was no evidence of any activity between the Roman period and the establishment of the medieval field system.

Remnants of the medieval open-field system were defined by at least 20 furrows aligned east to west in the main excavation area. They were spaced 6.0m apart and on average were 1.50m wide and between 0.03m and 0.15m deep. Three post-medieval metal fragments, including a dress fastener and three residual Roman metal objects, a coin, stud and repair patch, were recovered from the furrows.

Iron Age and Roman Pottery

by Adam Sutton

A total of 1, 224 sherds of pottery weighing 13, 446g and equating to 11.15 EVEs was recovered from the excavation phase. The evaluation produced an additional 476 sherds weighing 7.7kg with an estimated EVE of nearly 5.8 (Perrin 2015). The pottery ranged in date from the middle Iron Age to the 3rd century AD. Overall, the assemblage compares well with that recovered from the evaluation works at the site (Perrin 2015), being broadly similar in terms of fabrics and forms represented, and the date ranges of pottery represented in each assemblage (Table 2). The current assemblage is, however, significantly larger, and includes evidence for Iron Age activity, which was not evident in the evaluation

TABLE 2 Iron Age and Roman pottery fabrics

		<i>NRFRC</i>	<i>Description</i>
Iron Age			
		SAC	Handmade Iron Age sandy ware, coarse
		SAF	Handmade Iron Age sandy ware, fine
		SAM	Handmade Iron Age sandy ware, medium
		SHF	Handmade Iron Age shelly ware, fine
		SHM	Handmade Iron Age shelly ware, medium
LIA/Roman			
1	ROB SH		Shelly wares, or vesicular wares with elongated voids from leached shell inclusions
2	PNK GT		Soft pink grog-tempered ware
3			Misc. sandy greywares
4a	OXF WH		Oxfordshire white ware
6	LNV CC		Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware
9			Black-fired coarse sandy wares
12			Lower Nene Valley greyware
14			Sandy greywares: light core, darker blue-grey surfaces. ?Northants
18			Misc. white wares
19-29			Misc. oxidised wares
20			Samian wares
34			Dull brown mica-dusted ware. Unprovenanced
43			Sandy white/buff ware, blackened exterior surfaces
45			Grog-and-shell
46	SOB GT		Grog-tempered wares, incl. "Belgic" fabrics
47			LIA/early Roman sandy ware

NRFRC= National Roman Fabric Reference Collection

works. The pottery reported below derived only from the excavation phase.

The fabric numbers relate to the type series recorded for Milton Keynes (Marney 1989), while the Iron Age fabrics are recorded based upon principal inclusion type(s) and degree of coarseness (Table 2). The middle Iron Age pottery in this (and neighbouring areas) is found exclusively in the Iron Age fabrics. The middle Iron Age forms are represented by simple jars/bowls with slack-shouldered or ovoid bodies and short, sometimes beaded, rims.

Fabrics and Sources

Table 3 presents the overall proportions of the

different fabrics represented. Grog-tempered wares are the most common, accounting for between roughly one-third and one-half of the assemblage. Later Roman fabrics were also dominated by grog-tempered wares in the usual local tradition, in this case being pink grog-tempered ware. Pink grog-tempered ware is a well-known local ceramic class: a kiln is known to have been producing it a few miles to the north of Steeple Claydon at Stowe, Buckinghamshire (Taylor 2004).

Products from distant (regional distribution/continental import) sources occupy only a small proportion of the wares found. The 36 sherds of Lower Nene Valley greyware (fabric 12) are the

TABLE 3 Quantification of pottery fabrics

	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Wt.(g)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>EVE</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Iron Age</i>						
SAC	14	1.1%	100	0.7%	–	–
SAF	19	1.6%	158	1.2%	0.08	0.8%
SAM	5	0.4%	31	0.2%	0.07	0.7%
SHF	5	0.4%	10	0.1%	–	–
SHM	4	0.3%	17	0.1%	0.06	0.6%
<i>LIA/Roman</i>						
1	129	10.5%	1248	9.3%	0.67	6.6%
2	114	9.3%	1673	12.4%	0.82	8.1%
3	30	2.5%	398	3.0%	1.71	16.8%
4a	1	0.1%	20	0.1%	–	–
6	6	0.5%	44	0.3%	–	–
9	53	4.3%	640	4.8%	0.76	7.5%
12	36	2.9%	306	2.3%	0.14	1.4%
14	2	0.2%	11	0.1%	–	–
18	100	8.2%	865	6.4%	0.37	3.6%
19-29	32	2.6%	242	1.8%	0.4	3.9%
20	9	0.7%	248	1.8%	0.3	3.0%
34	8	0.7%	71	0.5%	–	–
43	2	0.2%	10	0.1%	–	–
45	12	1.0%	206	1.5%	–	–
46	559	45.7%	6048	45.0%	3.67	36.2%
47	84	6.9%	1100	8.2%	1.1	10.8%
Total	1224	–	13446	–	10.15	–

most significant products known to have moved more than a few miles from their source, and these are accompanied by the six sherds of Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware (fabric 6) also identified. One sherd of Oxfordshire white ware mortarium was also found, this being the only product from this industry that was recognised. Nine sherds of samian derived from sources in southern and central Gaul (La Graufesenque and, probably, Lezoux, respectively). The latter was the likely source (based on fabric) of at least two Drag.18/31 bowls from (220) and (279), while a high foot-ring base, possibly from a cup or small

dish, derived from an indeterminate source. These were the only continental imports identified, and together amount to 3% or less of the assemblage.

Forms

Table 4 presents the amounts and proportions of the different vessel categories identified. The assemblage is clearly jar-dominated and can be characterised as deriving from a low-status rural settlement. There was a proportion of tablewares, beakers and flasks. Two measurable beaker rims were found: that of an indented necked type in fabric 18 from (220), and a cavetto rim in fabric

TABLE 4 Quantification of pottery forms

Type	EVE	%
Jar	6.47	61.4%
Storage jar	0.51	4.8%
Jar total	6.98	66.3%
Bowl	0.92	8.7%
Bowl/Lid	0.17	1.6%
Dish	0.05	0.5%
Bowl/Dish total	1.14	10.8%
Beaker	1.41	13.4%
Flagon	+	–
Flagon?	+	–
Flask	1	9.5%
Mortarium?	+	–
Total	10.53	–

19-29 from (243). However, context (220), the upper fill of pit [225], contained at least two and possibly three white/oxidised ware beakers of middle Roman dates, alongside other contemporary wares including numerous other vessels that could be described as tablewares.

DISCUSSION

Middle/late Iron Age and Roman Occupation

The site at Buckingham Road, Steeple Claydon is the first Iron Age to Roman activity examined in Steeple Claydon or its immediate vicinity. The Vale of Aylesbury and the claylands of Buckinghamshire have been identified as previously underrepresented research areas. Therefore the results of the excavation have enabled key research questions to be addressed. As has been noted in the region as a whole, there was no clear boundary between the Iron Age and Roman activity. In the course of this excavation only a few features were securely identified as solely late Iron Age in date, but the height of activity on site was clearly 1st century BC to 1st century AD, the late Iron Age to early Roman transition. This is indicative of activity across the region during this period, as there was a rapid expansion into land that had previously lain dormant being utilised for arable and pastoral farming and forming a wider, open agricultural landscape.

Evidence for earlier activity in the area was limited to a few sherds of middle Iron Age pottery (presumably at the end of this period) and the earliest cut features on site dated to the late Iron Age. This corroborates the settlement pattern noted at local sites such as Tring Hill, one of the sites along the Aston Clinton bypass (RPS 2005) c.24km to the south-west, and Bierton (Allen 1986), c.18km to the south-west, the sites lying either side of Aylesbury. In the region there is evidence that the population increased during the later Iron Age, which prompted the establishment of many new market settlements. Roads were constructed or formalised to provide links between them, such as the nearby Akeman Street, which was less than 5km to the south of the site (the present A41). This road would have linked Watling Street to the Fosse Way (Copeland 2009). There also appears to have been an associated re-organisation of the countryside with more land turned over to arable and pastoral farming, with low-status farmsteads managing the areas to produce food and goods for local larger high-status settlements (RPS 2005; Masefield 2008).

Even though there is only evidence of enclosures and the fragmentary remains of a possible field system on this site, it is not unrealistic to assume that this pastoral farming landscape had an associated settlement. The lack of structural evidence within the excavation areas is perhaps due to later truncation through ploughing, as presumed at Boughton, Milton Keynes (Petchev 1978) and Aston Clinton Road, Aylesbury (Orzechowski 2018). The moderate quantity of artefacts and ecofacts found strongly suggests there had been domestic occupation here. The numbers of animal bones, especially from cattle, suggest animal husbandry was an important part of the local agricultural economy. The finding of a scythe alludes to the harvesting of crops, and the windblown charred cereal grains recovered from the palaeochannel are indicative of food storage and/or processing in close proximity to the site. The settlement may have continued beyond the excavation area to the north towards the top of the slope and possibly also to the west under the existing 20th-century housing estate. A small number of Roman tile and brick pieces were recovered from the site, including from the mid-3rd-century rubbish pit [225], and comprised *tegula* and *imbrex* roof tile, bricks and floor tiles. Although their origin is unclear, they potentially came from

the settlement or may have been brought in from elsewhere and used as hardcore within the excavation site.

Mid-late 1st Century Cremation

Domestic occupation can also be inferred from the discovery of a cremation which was located at the very southern limit of the excavation and within the early Roman boundary ditch. The cremation urn and the ancillary vessel have been dated to the mid-late 1st century AD. Cremations located within former ditches include an early Roman urned cremation 382 dated c.AD69–117 from Broughton Manor Farm, Milton Keynes (Atkins *et al* 2014, fig 4.1 168). It is possible this activity was a closure deposit marking the end of the ditch.

The Steeple Claydon cremation burial may be viewed as a ‘boundary burial’, a common phenomenon in Roman Britain, and the most likely explanation is that in the early period the space around boundary ditches often had very little practical use and thus was utilised for deposition of the dead, away from occupational activity (Cleary 2001). Nearby there are examples of cremations located adjacent to a ditch, such as at Aston Clinton, where a mixture of inhumations and cremations were noted in close proximity to an early-mid Roman field boundary ditch (Simmonds & Walker 2013).

The Steeple Claydon cremation urn had an accompanying ancillary vessel and can be seen to have been of the Aylesford-Swarling type cremation tradition. Cremations of this age and type have been found in Bourton Grounds, Thornborough, c.8.5km to the north-east of Steeple Claydon (Johnson 1975). Here, a total of seven cremations were excavated, all of which were associated with ceramic vessels and in two cases possible wooden boxes/chests. Although very little can be said of the Steeple Claydon adult individual, there was evidence of injury to the spine that probably occurred in their youth as a result of physical activity and also evidence of age-related spinal disease.

Enclosures and Farming

This pastoral farm site also follows the regional trend for the establishment of new settlements in the late Iron Age. The Steeple Claydon site went out of use in the mid-3rd century AD, while other examples lasted longer; generally these settlements were abandoned in the 4th-5th centuries AD (Smith

et al 2016). The reason for the abandonment of the site is unclear, but may have been due to environmental factors, although this may be too simplistic an explanation. It is worth noting that nationally, agricultural production intensified in the 3rd-4th centuries AD, which made small farmsteads less economically viable and the focus shifted to larger settlements and villa estates (Holbrook 2008).

The Steeple Claydon site was unenclosed. This is not unusual for small farmsteads: for example, a similar-sized contemporary settlement at Old Stratford, near Milton Keynes, was also unenclosed (Morris 2019). It is unlikely that the settlement at Steeple Claydon was used for more than subsistence farming, although it may have traded any surplus produce at the local larger settlements of Alchester or Fleet Marston. Fleet Marston is 13km from Steeple Claydon and was possibly the nearest market accessible to it in the Roman period. It was within a day’s journey, based on the estimation that one could walk 10km there and 10km back in a day, and travel further distances in a day by horse, with pack animals or in a cart (Burnham & Wachter 1990, 44).

It seems likely, therefore that the field system and sub-rectangular enclosures were presumably for stock and this type of feature was recorded in all phases. The reason Steeple Claydon would have been used predominantly for pastoral rather than arable farming was because it was situated on the claylands of the Vale of Aylesbury, where drainage was clearly a concern. It was not easy to make crops thrive in the clay soils and it seems generally that other sites within Buckinghamshire have shown a propensity to pastoral farming (Fulford 2014).

It is notable that the field system, enclosures and the presumed associated occupation may have been established in this location to utilise the former watercourse. The main boundary ditch (B1) also respects the line of the palaeochannel. It is uncertain if this whole area was wet, especially during winter. Nearby settlements where water features affected areas within settlements include those at Aston Clinton Road (RPS 2005; Masefield 2008) and Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury (Parkhouse & Bonner 1997). The latter site provided a direct parallel to Buckingham Road, as it was also bounded by a palaeochannel. Although the palaeochannel at Steeple Claydon was clearly no longer an active water course in the late Iron Age period when the boundary was formalised, it can

be proposed that another watercourse was active to the east of the site, probably in the location of the present field boundary, as there is evidence for numerous ditches cut to drain excess water to the east and south-east of the excavation area. It was also common that pastoral farming field systems were positioned next to watercourses to provide the use of water meadows for grazing, as well as easy access to water for both the animals and the people who inhabited these landscapes, as demonstrated by the excavation at Stablebridge Road, Aston Clinton (Morris 2017). At College Road, Aston Clinton, frequent ponds were dug throughout the life 'of the settlement' (Simmonds 2020).

It is likely that the majority of the ditches on site were used for water management and to control the flooding of fields used as pasture. Unsurprisingly, the features indicate that this was mostly a problem at the base of the slope, in the southern part of the excavation area. This was clearly an issue pre-dating archaeological activity, as the palaeochannel located on the eastern edge of the area became wider towards the base of the hill, in an area most likely associated with flooding: The early Roman drainage ditches had been cut through both, indicating the longevity of the waterlogged nature of this area.

The analysis of the animal bone recovered from the site, both from the trial trench evaluation and this excavation, indicated that cattle were the dominant species. The second largest group of animal remains was sheep/goat and horse equally at 11% and pigs were rare at 5%, though it should be noted that the preservation of all bone found on site was poor and thus smaller species may be underrepresented. Unfortunately the poor preservation also means that little can be stated regarding the age or sex of the animals, and thus little insight can be gleaned into the processing of the animals. However, the fact that only one of the bone fragments recovered from the site displayed evidence of butchery implies the animals were not slaughtered on site: indeed, butchery tended to be a specialist practice based within urban settlements in the Roman period (Maltby 2010). This animal bone assemblage reflects the pattern found in Buckinghamshire, the Solent-Thames region and the national trend as a whole (Fulford 2014 & Maltby 2016). It shows a pastoral landscape focused on rearing cattle that were exploited for their secondary products of milk and traction

until they were young adults (4-8 years old) when they were butchered. The age at slaughter has been confirmed through assemblages such as from Alchester (Maltby 2001). The horses were likely used for the transportation of goods and people, as analysis demonstrated that several had developed osteoarthritis, again fitting the national trend of horses being worked until they died of natural causes (Maltby 2016).

The cultivated grains within environmental sample taken from the palaeochannel suggest that there had been attempts to grow crops on the nearby land, and a few quern fragments recovered also suggest some arable farming had occurred. But the local people appeared to change their regime to livestock and pastoral farming, adapting quickly to the strategy which could best thrive in this wet clay environment.

Settlement Status

This site did not lie on or very close to any major Roman routes and the nearest market was some distance away, meaning access to markets was not easy or timely. Although the number of other finds from the site is small, the range represented is of interest, pointing to some of the activities which may have also taken place such as craft work and cloth making, with the recovery of a ceramic spindle whorl used in the production of thread manufacture and textiles. Metal working is also suggested from the recovery of a small quantity of ferrous slag. The interpretation of the fired clay recovered indicated the presence of a probable hearth or oven, and possibly a forge on or close to the site. The retrieval of a few iron nails, fragments of copper alloy and lead sheets, although commonly found on sites such as this, implies construction and maintenance were being undertaken, but not at a large or even moderate scale. In addition there are items for personal adornment and domestic use, with the finds of a decorated copper alloy pin and stud, as well as an iron knife. One interesting find was the lead sheet fragment with one side having a scalloped/beaded edge that may originally have been decorative edging to a box covering (Evans 2000, 421) or part of a container/bowl similar in form to that recovered from Bozeat Quarry, Northamptonshire (Hylton 2018, fig 3.4).

Only a single late 3rd-century Roman coin was found on the site in a medieval furrow, despite the

site being metal detected. The recovery of this single unstratified radiate (AD260/270–94) does indicate that the wealth of the settlement was below average, but it also suggests that the settlement probably went out of use before the late 3rd century AD.

It is worth noting that 97% of the pottery came from local or regional kilns (or was unsourced but presumably local). These are predominantly associated with small-scale producers such as those based at Caldecotte, Milton Keynes and Stowe, located only 16km north of Steeple Claydon (Marney 1989; Taylor 2004). Only 3% of the overall assemblage was imported to Britain, this consisting entirely of samian (based on EVE). Therefore from the late Iron Age through to the later Roman period this pastoral farm was securely part of the local landscape and presumably traded their goods for domestic necessities.

There was some wealth within the site, as shown by the middle to late Roman pottery from pit [225], but this was not representative of the other late Roman pottery found on the site. This pottery consisted of fine table wares, mainly beakers but also flat-rimmed bowls. The identifiable animal bone in the same context consisted of cattle and fragments from a dog, the only evidence of this animal found on the site. The significance of the deposition of these items, which were atypical in comparison to the rest of the site assemblages, indicates that this may have been the final deposition made, and perhaps represented the abandonment of this site, a practice which has also been noted at the Aston Clinton Road settlement in Aylesbury (Orzechowski 2018). The same can be seen in the possible closure deposit cremation [305], the cremation urn being a fineware vessel (see above). Overall, the lack of certain pottery fabrics such as Oxfordshire white ware and ‘utilitarian’ Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware forms is strongly suggestive of the ending of occupation at the site prior to the 4th century AD.

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