

Green Park (Reading Business Park)

Phase 2 Excavations 1995 Neolithic and Bronze Age Sites

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Summary

In 1995 a second phase of excavations was undertaken by Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) at Reading Business Park in advance of development. Two areas, 3017 and 3000B, were investigated covering about 2.2 ha. Evidence of occupation in the Neolithic, Bronze Age and medieval periods was found.

In Area 3017 Neolithic features were uncovered, including an unusual segmented ring ditch, and a number of pits and postholes. The ring ditch was radiocarbon dated to the middle to late Neolithic, and an interesting flint assemblage from all features on the site was dated mainly to the later Neolithic. Numerous tree-throw holes also contained later Neolithic flint. Only two pits contained Neolithic pottery, one with Peterborough Ware and one with a Grooved Ware rim.

In the earlier phase of Area 3000B Deverel Rimbury pottery was deposited in pits, in one case with two cremations. Dating of associated charcoal gave a middle to late Bronze Age date, identical to the date from another pit containing late Bronze Age pottery. A field system, composed of rectangular boundary ditches, was laid out in the area prior to the establishment of a late Bronze Age settlement.

The late Bronze Age occupation area included five roundhouses, and a number of post-built structures. Waterholes, pits and postholes were also found, many of which contained late Bronze Age pottery. Some medieval activity was also present in this area.

The pottery assemblage of Area 3000B is unusual as it shows continuity from the Deverel Rimbury pottery types of the middle Bronze Age to the plainwares of the later Bronze Age. Little decorated pottery was found in Area 3000B, in contrast to the adjacent Area 3100 previously excavated, suggesting the settlement had shifted over time. Other artefacts found include a shale bracelet, worked wood, with one piece possibly from a cheese press, and a worked piece of human skull. Interesting comparisons are made between the flintworking, economic activities and environment of the Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers at this location. In the later Bronze Age numerous deposits of burnt flint were made in the north-east of Area 3000B, and these grew into a substantial and unusually large elongated burnt mound. The origin of the deposits is discussed together with the management of the landscape in the later Bronze Age.

Résumé

En 1995, une seconde phase de fouilles furent entreprises par l'Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) à Reading Business Park, en avance de la mise en exploitation. Deux zones, 3017 et 3000B, firent l'objet des recherches, couvrant un espace d'environ 2,2ha. Des preuves d'occupation du Néolithique à l'âge du Bronze et de la période médiévale furent découvertes.

Dans la zone 3017, des faits archéologiques du Néolithique furent mis au jour, y compris un *Ring ditch* segmenté inhabituel ainsi qu'un certain nombre de fosses et trous de poteaux. Le *ring ditch* fut daté par radiocarbone entre le milieu et la fin du Néolithique, tandis qu'un assemblage intéressant de silex taillés provenant des autres faits du site ont procuré une datation essentiellement du Néolithique tardif. De nombreux trous d'arrachement d'arbres contenaient également des silex de la fin du néolithique. Seulement deux fosses ont révélé de la poterie néolithique, l'une contenant le type *Peterborough* et l'autre avec un bord de type *Grooved Ware*.

Au cours de la phase la plus ancienne identifiée sur la zone 3000B, de la poterie de type *Deverel Rimbury* fut placée dans des fosses, dans un des cas accompagné de deux incinérations. La datation de charbon de bois associé a fourni une date du milieu

à la fin de l'âge du Bronze, identique à la datation d'une autre fosse contenant de la poterie de la fin de l'âge du Bronze. Un système agraire, formé de fossés d'enceinte rectangulaire, fut établi dans cette zone antérieurement à la formation d'un site d'habitation de l'âge du Bronze tardif. La zone d'occupation de la fin de l'âge du Bronze comprenait 5 maisons circulaires et un certain nombre de structures sur poteaux. Des points d'eau, fosses et poteaux furent également découverts, nombre d'entre eux contenaient de la poterie de l'âge du Bronze tardif.

Des activités liées à l'époque médiévale étaient également présentes dans cette zone.

L'assemblage de poterie de la zone 3000B est inhabituel étant donné qu'il montre une continuité depuis les poteries de type *Deverel Rimbury* du milieu de l'âge du Bronze jusqu'aux productions uniformes de l'âge du Bronze tardif. Peu de poterie décorée fut mise au jour dans la zone 3000B, en comparaison à la zone adjacente 3100, fouillée antérieurement, ce qui suggère un déplacement du site d'habitation au cours du temps.

Les autres objets découverts comprennent un bracelet d'argile schisteuse, du bois taillé, notamment une pièce provenant peut-être d'un pressoir à fromage et un fragment travaillé de crâne humain.

Des comparaisons intéressantes se posent en ce lieu entre le travail du silex, les activités économiques et l'environnement des fermiers du néolithique et de l'âge du Bronze.

Au cours de l'âge du Bronze tardif de nombreux dépôts de silex brûlés furent placés au nord-est de

l'aire 3000B. Ces derniers se développèrent en un *burnt mound* (tertre de pierres brûlées) substantiel, de taille inhabituellement large et de forme allongée. L'origine de ces dépôts fait l'objet d'une discussion en même temps que l'exploitation du paysage vers la fin de l'âge du Bronze.

Zusammenfassung

1995 führte die Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) im Reading Business Park vor Beginn der Erschließungsarbeiten eine zweite Grabungsphase durch. Untersucht wurden zwei Areale, 3017 und 3000B, die eine Fläche von etwa 2,2 Hektar umfassen. Dabei wurden neolithische, bronzezeitliche und mittelalterliche Siedlungshinweise gefunden.

In Areal 3017 kamen neolithische Spuren zum Vorschein, unter anderem ein ungewöhnlich segmentierter Kreisgraben sowie mehrere Gruben und Pfostenlöcher. Der Kreisgraben konnte mithilfe von Radiokarbonmessungen auf das mittlere bis späte Neolithikum datiert werden, eine interessante Feuersteinsammlung von allen Fundstätten des Areals stammte vornehmlich aus dem späten Neolithikum. Auch zahlreiche durch Baumwurf verursachte Löcher enthielten spätneolithischen Feuerstein. Nur zwei Gruben zeigten neolithische Keramik, eine davon »Peterborough Ware«, die andere einen »Grooved Ware«-Rand.

In der Frühzeit von Areal 3000B wurde »Deverel Rimbury«-Keramik in Gruben eingelagert, in einem Fall zusammen mit zwei Brandbestattungen. Die Datierung von zugehörigen Holzkohleresten verwies auf die mittlere bis späte Bronzezeit. Dies stimmte mit dem Datum einer anderen Grube überein, die Keramik aus der späten Bronzezeit enthielt. Schon vor der spätbronzezeitlichen Besiedlung wurde in dem Gebiet ein Flursystem mit rechteckigen Begrenzungsgräben angelegt. Das Siedlungsareal aus der späten Bronzezeit zeigte fünf Rundhütten

und mehrere Pfostenbauten. Darüber hinaus wurden Wasserlöcher, Gruben und Pfostenlöcher gefunden, viele mit spätbronzezeitlicher Keramik. Dieses Areal enthielt außerdem Hinweise auf mittelalterliche Aktivitäten.

Die Keramiksammlung aus Areal 3000B ist ungewöhnlich, da sie auf eine Kontinuität von der Keramik des »Deverel Rimbury«-Typs aus der mittleren Bronzezeit bis zur einfachen Keramik der späten Bronzezeit hinweist. Im Gegensatz zum angrenzenden Areal 3100, das schon vorher ausgegraben worden war, fand sich in Areal 3000B kaum verzierte Keramik, was darauf schließen lässt, dass sich die Besiedlung mit der Zeit verlagerte. Zu den sonstigen Funden zählten ein Schieferarmband, bearbeitete Holzteile, darunter eines, das möglicherweise von einer Käsepresse stammte, und ein menschliches Schädelfragment, das Bearbeitungsspuren aufwies. Es werden interessante Vergleiche zwischen der Flintbearbeitung, den wirtschaftlichen Aktivitäten und der Umwelt der neolithischen und bronzezeitlichen Bauern, die diesen Ort besiedelten, angestellt.

In der späten Bronzezeit wurden zahlreiche Feuersteine mit Brandspuren im Nordosten von Areal 3000B abgelagert, die schließlich einen ungewöhnlich großen, lang gestreckten Brandhaufen bildeten. Der Ursprung dieser Ablagerungen wird in Zusammenhang mit der Landnutzung in der späten Bronzezeit diskutiert.

Acknowledgements

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director was Rob Early, and the site supervisor was Richard Brown. Thanks are due to all the specialists who contributed their reports, and to those who provided additional information, particularly Philippa Bradley and Elaine Morris, and to Oxford Archaeology North staff Joanne Cook and Erika Guttmann for assistance. Adam Brossler initially wrote the report assisted by Angela Boyle, and it was completed and edited by Carol Allen. Mike Middleton and Luke Adams compiled the illustrations.

Location of the project archive

The archive of the Reading Business Park excavations will be deposited with Reading Museum, Berkshire under accession code 1996.193.

A copy of the archive will also be deposited with the National Monuments Record Centre, Swindon.

Chapter 1: Introduction

by Adam Brossler

Location

The site of Reading Business Park is being developed over an area of approximately 80 ha just to the south-west of Reading at Small Mead Farm (Fig. 1.1). The site lies 3.5 km from the centre of Reading and just to the north of the M4 (SU 470170). The River Kennet runs approximately 1 km to the north and a tributary, Foudry Brook, flows from north-east to south-west through the area.

Background to the excavations

This is an area of high archaeological potential and has been the subject of a number of archaeological investigations. All these, summarised below, confirmed the presence of extensive archaeological remains (Moore and Jennings 1992, 2–3).

A field walking programme, undertaken in 1983 and 1984 as part of the Kennet Valley Survey, funded by English Heritage, produced finds from a number of locations in the development area. Following this in 1985, the Trust for Wessex

Archaeology (TWA) carried out an archaeological evaluation based on excavation of a series of test-holes and mechanically excavated trenches (see Fig. 1.2).

First phase of excavations 1987–8

Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out further evaluation and subsequently excavated Areas 5 and 2000 in 1987. Flooding temporarily halted excavations in Area 3100 in 1987, and excavations in Areas 4000, 5000 and 6000 were completed (Fig. 1.2). Excavations of Area 3100 were finished in August 1988, and the results of all these excavations were then published (Moore and Jennings 1992). The work carried out by OAU in 1987 and 1988 was the first full phase of investigations prior to development of the Reading Business Park and in this report are referred to as the RBP1 excavations. The first stage of work was funded by Bucknall Brothers (Holdings) Limited and Sheraton Securities International plc.

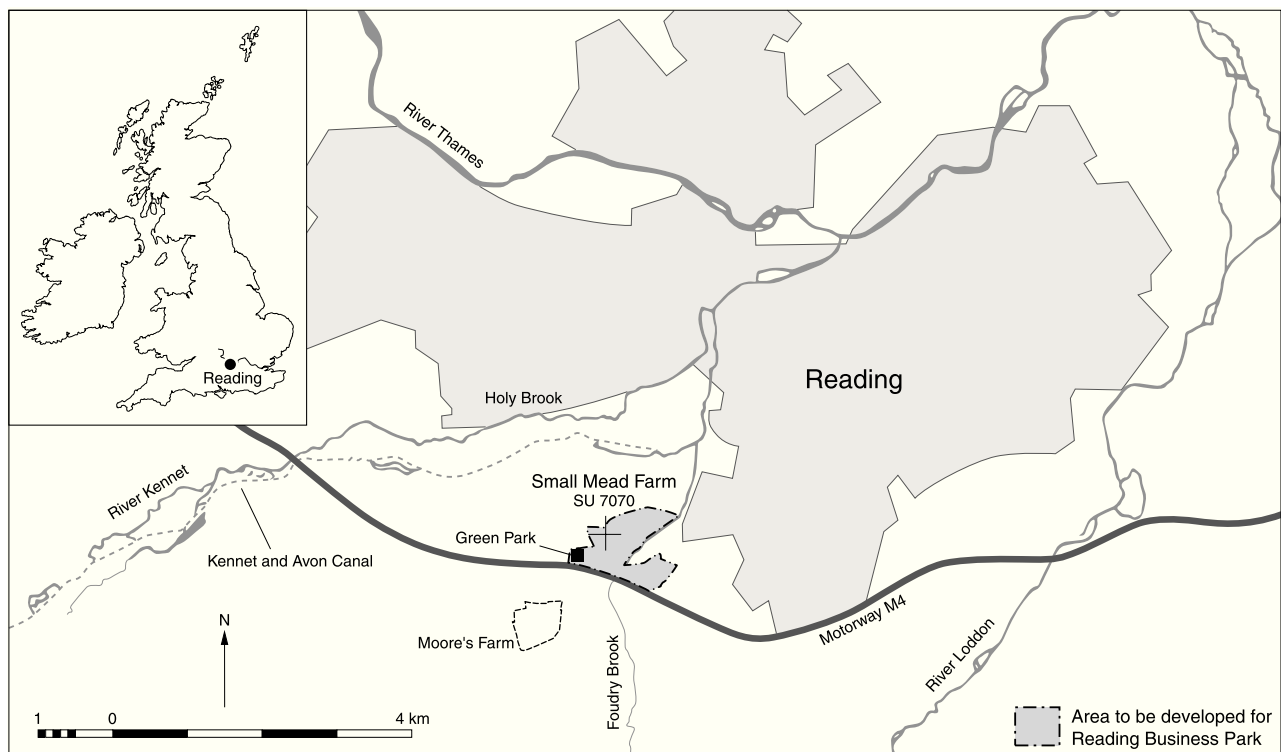


Figure 1.1 Location of Reading Business Park development

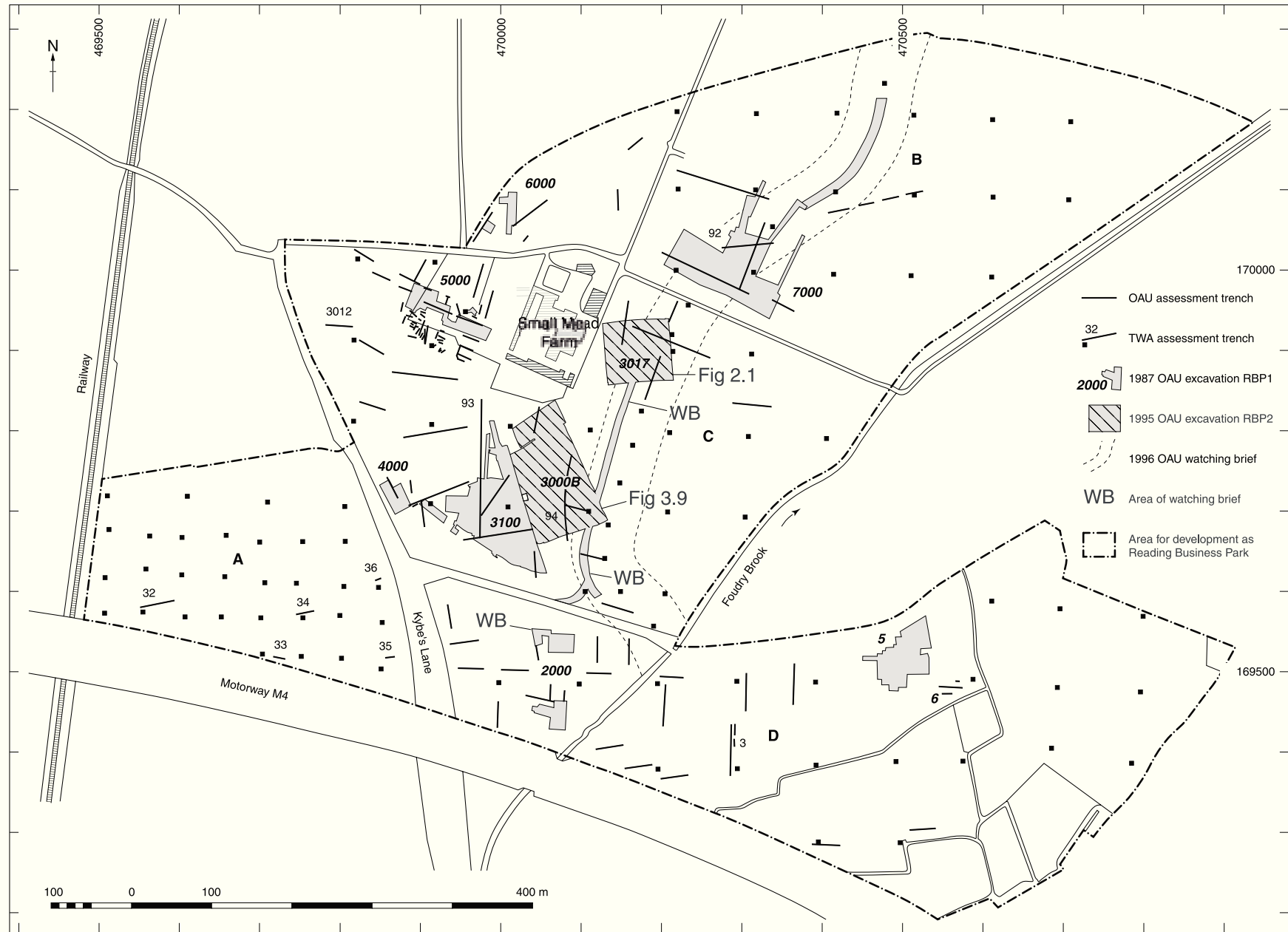


Figure 1.2 Plan of Business Park showing the areas investigated

Second phase of excavations 1995

The second phase of the excavations at Reading Business Park took place in 1995 when Areas 3017 and 3000B were investigated (Fig. 1.2). The results of these excavations (RBP2) are the subject of this report, and this volume also presents the results of the watching brief undertaken in 1996. Area 3017 lay on an island of gravel just to the south-west of Area 7000 and Area 3000B was an eastwards continuation of Area 3100 excavated in the first stage, where extensive archaeological remains were found (*ibid.*). Prudential Portfolio Managers funded this phase of the excavations.

Structure of this report

This chapter summarises the results of the Phase 1 excavations, and subsequent chapters report the results of the 1995 excavations, commencing with the Neolithic activity in Area 3017 in Chapter 2. A small amount of Bronze Age and medieval remains were also apparent in this area. The main location of intensive late Bronze Age occupation was found in Area 3000B, which is presented in Chapter 3. The artefactual evidence forms Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 presents results of the environmental analysis. Discussion of the features and artefacts for each period is covered in Chapter 6. Reference is made throughout the report to the earlier excavations on this site and to other nearby sites of similar date, in order to compare and interpret the current material. This is particularly relevant to the important assemblage of late Bronze Age pottery found in both the RBP1 and RBP2 stages of excavations.

No attempt is made in this report to present an overview of the current state of knowledge in this locality during the prehistoric periods, particularly of the late Bronze Age. Excavations at Green Park in the west of the Reading Business Park development area continued between October 2000 and May 2001, and excavation has also taken place in advance of a planning application for gravel extraction, at Moore's Farm, Burghfield, to the south of Reading Business Park in the summer of 1999 (see Fig. 1.1). At both locations late Bronze Age features were found and the results of all these investigations will be considered together in a later volume.

Summary of first phase of excavations

The first phase of excavations, carried out by OAU between 1987 and 1988, examined seven Areas, 5, 2000, 3100, 4000, 5000, 6000 and 7000. The two sites of particular relevance to the 1995 excavations were Area 3100, adjacent to Area 3000B, and Area 7000, which was located to the north of Area 3017. Substantial evidence of prehistoric activity was found, particularly of Neolithic and late Bronze Age date.

Area 3100

Excavations identified five phases of field boundary ditches considered to be of Bronze Age date, and aerial photographs indicate that these rectilinear ditches run across the entire development area (Moore and Jennings 1992, 1). Extensive late Bronze Age settlement was also identified, and a palaeo-channel lay to the north of the occupied area. The archaeological features uncovered comprised 928 postholes, 95 pits and an undated inhumation, and these were seen to form 10 roundhouses, 1 oval structure, 23 6-post and 4-post structures, and 38 2-post structures. The 95 pits were divided into two typologies, scoops and basin-shaped profiles, and it was suggested that the basin-shaped pits were primarily used for grain storage and were reused as rubbish pits. The function of the scoop-profiled pits was unclear. An east-west aligned row of pits, south of the main settlement, was interpreted as an area for flax retting and this was supported by the environmental evidence (*ibid.*, 39–42).

Area 7000

Features of Neolithic, late Bronze Age and Roman date were revealed. A total of 118 pits, one of which held a cattle burial, and 34 postholes of Neolithic date were identified. Flints found dated the Neolithic activity and it was thought that the material had a possible date in the 3rd millennium BC (Bradley and Brown 1992, 89–90). The Neolithic pits, the main features identified during the excavation, formed a broad band orientated approximately north-west to south-east. It is possible therefore that this represented an area of special activity employing the flint assemblage (Moore and Jennings 1992, 6–13).

Areas 5, 2000, 4000, 5000 and 6000

Excavations of Area 5 revealed late Bronze Age activity, including a settlement of 20 circular structures, several 6-post and 4-post structures, and at least 33 2-post structures. Trial trenching around the area indicated that the settlement was associated with a Bronze Age field system (*ibid.*, 14). In Area 2000 a total of 49 ditches, 70 pits, 62 postholes and 18 gullies ranging in date from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD were uncovered (*ibid.*, 58).

Within Area 4000, to the west of Area 3100, two definite and two possible postholes, three pits and six scoops were found. Four features contained late Bronze Age worked flint, and a pit contained one sherd of Roman pottery (*ibid.*, 48). Three different types of field boundary were revealed in Area 5000, pit alignments, segmented ditches and continuous ditches. A number of pits and postholes were scattered across the excavation area. No dating evidence was recovered from any of these features but it was assumed that they were

contemporary with the prehistoric field boundaries (ibid., 55–6)

Within Area 6000 the excavated ditches were undated but it was suggested that these were Bronze Age. A small number of pits and scoops were found in the area, and these may have been of the same date. A number of intercutting ditches, thought to represent part of a post-medieval boundary, were found in Area 7000 (ibid., 56–7).

Excavation methodology

The RBP2 site was excavated in accordance with the agreed scheme for the development area (Moore and Miles 1988). The Areas 3000B and 3017 were machine-stripped to the first archaeological horizon or, in its absence, to the natural subsoil. The areas were cleaned and the features were hand excavated with OAU's single context recording scheme being used (Wilkinson 1992). A sampling strategy was designed based on the information from the results of the phase one excavations (Moore and Jennings 1992, 2 and 4). It was intended that approximately 50% of all pits and postholes should be sectioned, with the features chosen on the basis of spatial distribution, character and potential relationships with other features, particularly structures. In the event on Area 3017, 100% of features, with the exception of tree-throw holes were excavated. Ditches were sectioned at points where they shared a relationship with other features, and also along their lengths to establish their character. The burnt mound was divided into three areas and the two opposing quadrants of each area were fully

excavated. The two quadrants of the burnt mound were environmentally sampled using a metre square grid, with alternate squares being 100% sampled.

The general environmental strategy was to target features that were likely to produce good material. Pits represented the main priority, while postholes were only sampled if they were part of a structure or contained artefactual material. Separate samples of 10 litres were taken from waterlogged deposits, and monoliths were taken from the palaeochannel and waterlogged pits.

A watching brief was maintained throughout the project in order to identify and sample archaeological deposits identified outside of the excavation areas.

Geology

The site is located on the valley gravel (Geological Survey Map, sheet 268) and Area 3000B was located on the first gravel terrace and Area 3017 on the second terrace. The gravel is overlain by poorly drained gley soils developed in light grey, non-calcareous clayey alluvium derived from London clay (Jarvis 1968, 67–9). At present the site is fairly level at 38 m OD and slopes gently from east to west. Slight variations in the underlying gravel have been covered by alluvium and disturbed by intensive modern ploughing and the construction of a Victorian sewage works. Further details on the soils, sediments and hydrology were provided in the first stage of the excavations (Moore and Jennings 1992, 4–5).