

# A Newly Discovered Ring Ditch and Two Late Bronze Age Pits on East Ilsley All Weather Gallop, near Churn, Berkshire, 1994

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## SUMMARY

*A watching brief during construction of an all-weather gallop revealed three features of Late Bronze-Age date, notably a previously unidentified ring ditch. Associated finds included pottery mostly of the Late Bronze Age, with a few sherds of the Early and Middle Bronze Age and of the Early Iron Age.*

## INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was commissioned by Mr. Simon Sherwood as a planning condition for the construction of an all-weather gallop. This took place according to a scheme approved by Mr. P. Fasham of Babcote Public Service Division, who advised the Local Planning Authority on archaeological matters. The fieldwork took place during September 1994. The site code is EIGWB94 and the finds have been deposited with Newbury Museum.

The watching brief entailed the observation of the construction of an all-weather gallop located adjacent to an existing gallop on Compton and Several Down (centred on SU 507829). This involved examination of the gallop after the removal of the topsoil to a depth of about 0.4 m. In the north-west area the natural chalk was truncated to a depth of about 0.6 m. The overall length of the gallop was 1.075 km. and it was 3 m. wide (Fig. 1).

Three archaeological features were observed (F3, F7 and F9). These comprised two pits and a ring ditch.

Feature F3 was a moderately sized round pit, containing three fills (50, 51, 52) (Fig. 2). It was 0.9 m. in diameter and 0.45 m. deep, with all fills producing a quantity of finds (bone, pottery, spindle whorl, burnt flint, struck flint and daub). Fill 51 contained daub and evidence of burning. Samples of the fills were taken to recover any carbonised botanical remains. The feature was fully dug. The pottery recovered was of Late Bronze-Age date (see below).

Feature F7 was an irregular scoop containing one fill (53) which produced several large sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery. It was 0.75 m. in diameter and 0.12 m. deep. The feature was half-sectioned only.

Feature F9 was a moderately-sized ring ditch visible as a slight earthwork and grass mark in the adjacent gallop. The all weather gallop crossed the north-east side of the monument.

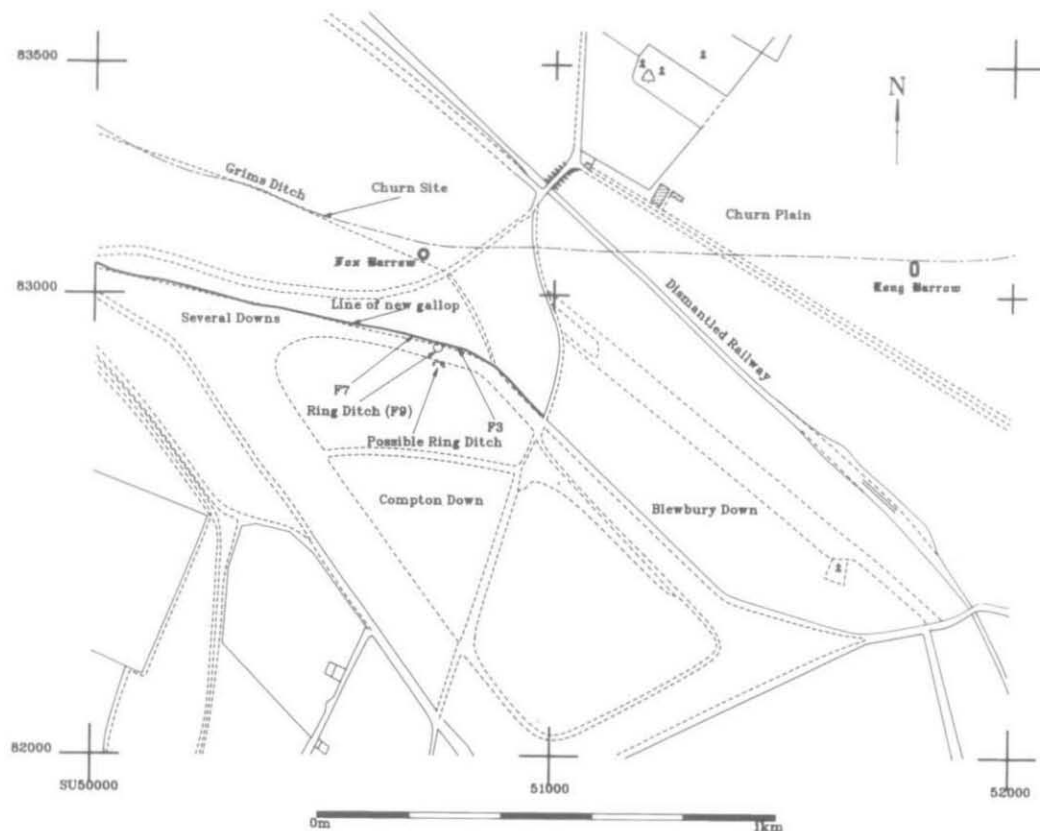


Fig. 1. Location and nearby sites.

The ring ditch itself was slightly oval in plan with an overall diameter of between 17.50 m. and 18.70 m. Any mound that had been originally present had been thoroughly levelled.

A 0.5 m. wide slot dug across the ditch showed that it was 3 m. wide and 1.1 m. deep with a flat base. It contained seven fills (54–60). All the fills except the upper most one (54) were absent of finds. Fill 54 produced sherds of Early and Late Bronze Age pottery, struck flint and animal bone.

#### THE FLINT by TESS DURDEN

Struck and burnt flint was recovered from two of the features investigated. Pit F3 contained both burnt and unburnt material, whilst F9, the ring ditch, yielded two unburnt flakes and a core.

Flintwork from pit F3 consisted of a total of 26 struck flakes, 13 of which had been burnt. None bore any form of retouch. A core fragment from which narrow and broad flakes had been removed was also recovered from this context. Many of the flakes are thick and irregular, this type of removal being more consistent with the more degenerate technology of the later Bronze Age.

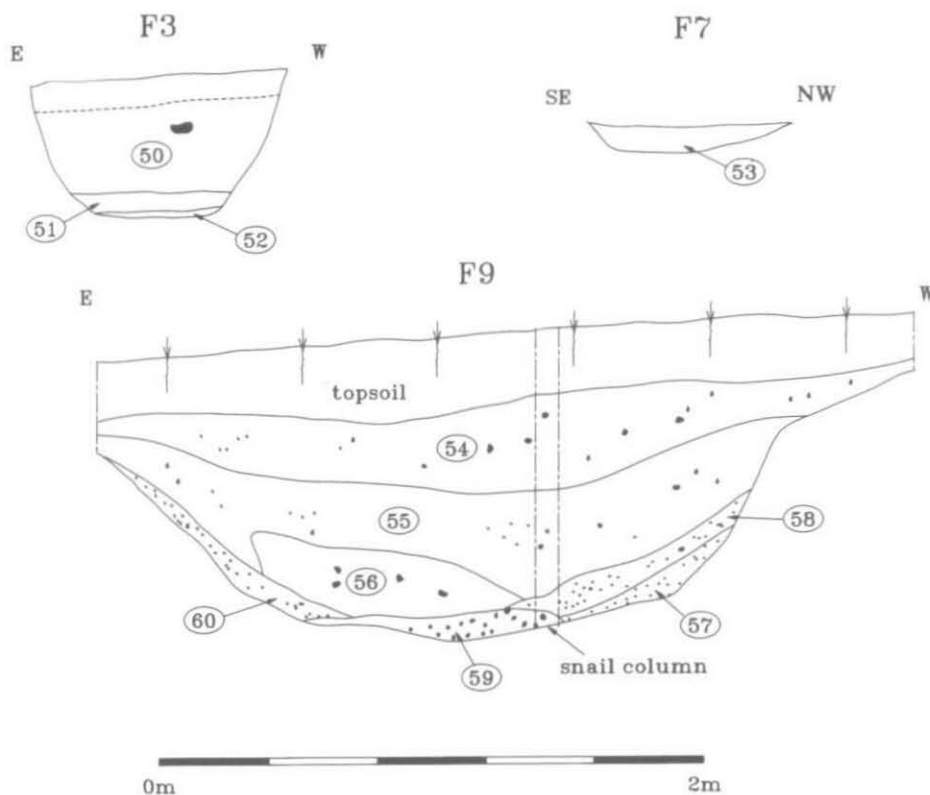


Fig. 2. Sections.

14 burnt pieces of flint with no recognisable working were also recovered from the pit.<sup>1</sup> Pottery and bone were also recovered from the pit, so this feature may either be a rubbish pit or represent some sort of ritual deposit. The core recovered from the ring ditch F9 is irregular with several broad flakes removed. The majority of these flake scars terminate in hinge fractures, indicating that flaking was not carried out with any particular skill or precision. Again, this type of evidence is consistent with later Bronze Age flint technology. The two flakes from this feature could also be of the same broad date.

#### THE POTTERY by ALISTAIR J. BARCLAY

A total of 142 sherds (1.13 kg.) of Prehistoric pottery was recovered from the excavations. The assemblage is mostly of Late Bronze Age date, but also includes a few sherds of Early Bronze Age and Early Iron Age date. The assemblage contains very few featured sherds and is largely characterised by its predominantly flint-tempered fabrics.

<sup>1</sup> S. Ford, R. Bradley, J. Hawkes and P. Fisher, 'Flint working in the metal age', *Oxford Jnl. Arch.* 3 (1984), 157-73.

### Methodology

Table 1 summarizes the assemblage by sherd count and weight. Eight fabrics have been defined through the analysis of inclusion size and type. These have been given an alpha-numeric code where the letter denotes the principal inclusion (A = sand, F = flint, G = grog, S = shell) and the number refers to inclusion size (1 = <1 mm., 2 = 1–3 mm., 3 = >3 mm.). Fabric descriptions are given in Table 2.

### Fabrics

Five fabrics contain flint temper (F1–3, FA3 and FG2) and are considered to be Late Bronze Age in date. The grog tempered fabric (G3) is more likely to be Early Bronze Age in date, whilst the shell-tempered fabrics (S3 and SA3) could be Early Iron Age. Approximately 98% of the assemblage is manufactured from flint-tempered fabrics and this can be taken as an indicator for a Late Bronze-Age date for most of the assemblage. This percentage is slightly higher than the figure of 90% recorded for an assemblage of similar date from Churn.<sup>2</sup>

### Decoration and surface treatment

The assemblage contains only two decorated sherds. The shoulder sherd P9 in a flint fabric (F3), from context F7, is decorated with a row of indeterminate impressions (Fig. 3.9). This sherd is from a decorated coarseware jar of Late Bronze-Age date. The surface find P10 has a possible geometric motif formed by parallel shallow grooves (Fig. 3.10) and is probably from a Globular Urn of Middle Bronze-Age date.<sup>3</sup> Several sherds had smoothed surfaces, although very few had been burnished and a number of sherds from coarse ware jars have finger wiping surfaces.

### Forms

The assemblage contains very few featured sherds. Six undecorated rims were recorded of which four (P1–4) derive from bipartite vessels (Fig. 3.1–4). The rim forms can be paralleled in the many Late Bronze Age assemblages recorded from the Thames Valley. Rims P5–6 are probably from simple straight walled vessels of bucket or of hooked-rimmed form. P7 represents most of a fineware jar, again of typical bipartite form.

### Catalogue

#### Pit F3

P1. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Everted rim, shoulder and seven body sherds from a coarseware jar (102 gm). Vertical finger wiping. Fabric F3. Colour: ext: buff; core: buff; int: buff. Condition average.<sup>4</sup>

P2. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Squared rim (15 gm). Fabric F3. Colour: ext: dark grey; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Condition average.<sup>5</sup>

P3. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Squared rim (8 gm). Fabric F3. Colour: ext: dark grey; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Condition average (see P2 above).

<sup>2</sup> S. Ford, 'Fieldwork and excavation on the Berkshire Grims Ditch', *Oxoniensia*, xlvii (1982), 13–36.

<sup>3</sup> B. Calkin, 'The Bournemouth area in the Middle and Late Bronze Age with the Deverel-Rimbury problem reconsidered', *Archaeol. J.* 119 (1962), 24 and fig. 10.

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Barrett, 'Types, affinities, chronology and significance', in *Rams Hills: a Bronze Age defended enclosure and its landscape*, ed. R. Bradley and A. Ellison (British Archaeological Reports 19), fig 3.5:22.

<sup>5</sup> M. Hall, 'The Prehistoric pottery', in J. Moore and D. Jennings, *Reading Business Park: a Bronze Age Landscape (Thames Valley landscapes: the Kennet Valley)*, Vol. 1 (Oxford Archaeological Unit), fig. 84.

P4. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Squared rim (1 gm) from a fineware cup or small jar. Fabric F1. Colour: ext: greyish brown; core: grey; int: buff. Condition average (see P2 above).

P5. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Upright rim, internally rolled (17 gm). Very hard, brittle fabric probably refired. Fabric F3. Colour: ext: greyish brown; core: dark grey; int: grey. Condition average.<sup>6</sup>

P6. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Hooked rim (3 gm). Fabric FG2. Colour: ext: reddish brown; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Condition average.<sup>7</sup>

P7. F3 (50). Late Bronze Age. Thirteen sherds from a plain fineware jar (332 gm). Burnished surface. Fabric F3. Colour: ext: light brown; core: light brown; int: light brown. Condition average.<sup>8</sup>

P8. Ring ditch F9 (54). Base sherd which has broken along a ring join (10 gm). Fabric. Colour: ext: reddish brown; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Condition average.

P9. Scoop F7 (53). Shoulder (11 gm) with impressed decoration. Fabric FA3. Colour: ext: greyish brown; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Condition worn.<sup>9</sup>

P10. Surface find. Middle Bronze Age. Decorated sherd with shallow grooving (8 gm) probably from a Globular Urn. Fabric F2. Colour: ext: greyish brown; core: dark grey; int: dark grey. Condition average.<sup>10</sup>

P11. Spindlewhorl.

### Pottery discussion

The small assemblage from features F3, 7 and 9 is predominantly of Late Bronze-Age date and is characterised by undecorated bipartite vessels which are manufactured from a range of flint-tempered fabrics. The group of pottery from pit F3 has affinities with the Plain Ware assemblages of the Late Bronze Age which were current during the 11–8th centuries cal BC.<sup>11</sup> The pottery from scoop F7 is more mixed and includes one decorated sherd and therefore could postdate the group from F3. The upper layer of ring ditch F9 contained a mixed group of sherds ranging in date from Early Bronze Age through to Early Iron Age. Some of this material is no doubt redeposited. The grog-tempered Early Bronze Age sherds and the decorated sherd (P10) could however derive from funerary deposits of earlier Prehistoric date associated with the ring ditch.

The Late Bronze Age assemblage includes sherds from both fine and coarse ware vessels and is similar in overall character to the domestic assemblages recorded from the earliest phases of the Ram's Hill enclosure and the Wallingford riverside settlement and from sites in the Kennet Valley.<sup>12</sup>

### FIRED CLAY by ALISTAIR J. BARCLAY (Fig. 3.11)

F3 (50) Spindlewhorl. (Complete) 18 gm. Biconical profile with a concave face. Oxidised reddish brown. Fabric angular calcined flint. Maximum dia. 35 mm. Thickness 15 mm.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett op. cit. note 4, fig. 3.5:18.

<sup>7</sup> Barrett op. cit. note 4, fig. 3.5:6–9.

<sup>8</sup> J.C. Barrett, 'The pottery of the later Bronze Age in lowland Britain', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 46 (1980), 297–320, fig. 5.5.

<sup>9</sup> Barrett op. cit. note 4, fig. 3.6:4.

<sup>10</sup> C.M. Piggott, 'Five Late Bronze Age enclosures in north Wiltshire', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 8 (1942), 48–61, fig. 5.1–3.

<sup>11</sup> Barrett, op. cit. note 8; S. Needham, 'The structure of settlement and ritual in the late Bronze Age of south-east Britain', in *L'habitat et L'occupation du sol à l'âge du bronze en Europe. Actes du colloque international de Lons-le-Saunier*, ed. C. Mordant and A. Richard (Documents Préhistoriques 4, 1992), 49–69, fig. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Barrett op. cit. note 4; Hall and Bradley, op. cit. note 5; J. Barrett in R. Thomas, M. Robinson, J. Barrett and R. Wilson, 'A LBA riverside settlement at Wallingford, Oxon.', *Archaeol. J.* 143 (1986), 174–200; R. Bradley, S. Lobb, J. Richards and M. Robinson, 'Two Late Bronze Age settlements on the Kennet gravels: excavations at Aldermaston Wharf and Knight's Farm, Burghfield, Berkshire', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 46 (1980), 217–96.

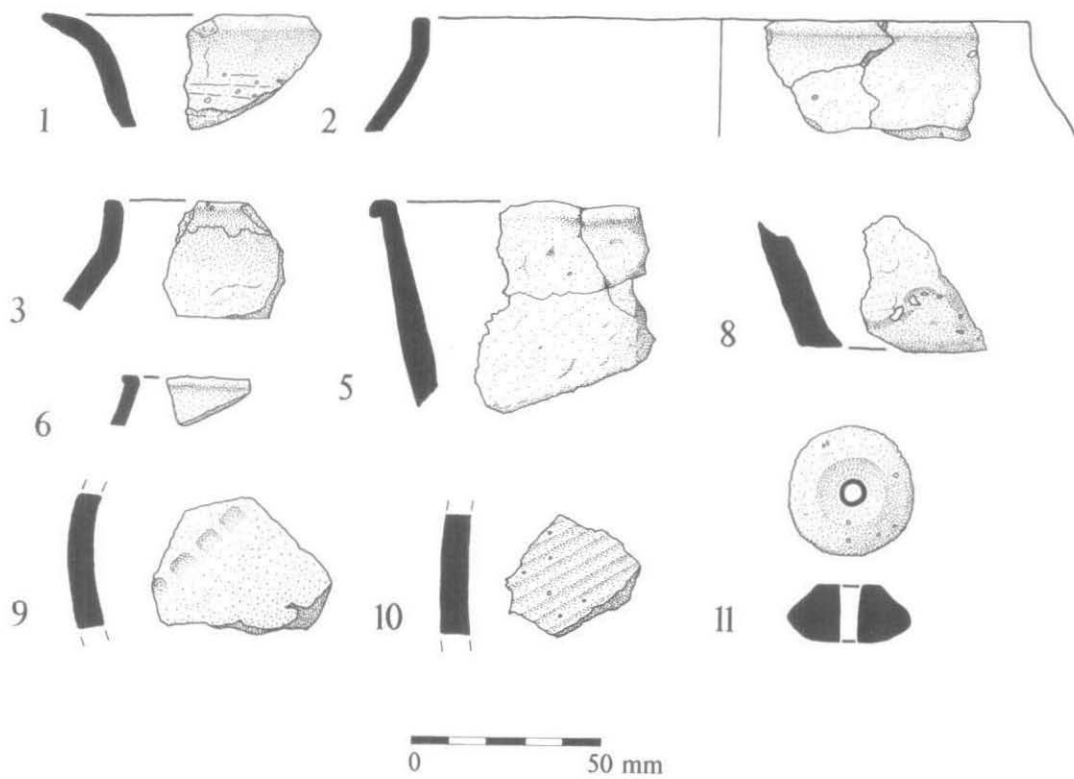


Fig. 3. The Pottery.

TABLE 1. A SUMMARY OF POTTERY NUMBER AND WEIGHT BY FEATURE

<i>Fabrics</i>	<i>F7 (53)</i>	<i>F3 (50)</i>	<i>F9 (54)</i>	<i>Surface</i>	<i>Total finds</i>
F1		7, 11gm		7, 11gm	
F2	3, 20gm	3, 4gm	1, 3gm	1, 8gm	8, 35gm
F3	7, 90gm	103, 886gm	3, 18gm	2, 14gm	109, 929gm
FA3	1, 11gm	1, 5gm	3, 38gm		2, 16gm
FG2		1, 3gm		1, 3gm	
G3			3, 13gm		3, 13gm
S3		1, 4gm		1, 4gm	
SA3			2, 6gm		2, 6gm
TOTAL	11, 121	116, 913	12, 78	3, 22	142, 1134gm

TABLE 2. FABRIC DESCRIPTIONS

F1	Hard fabric with common (10%) fine (<1 mm) angular calcined flint
F2	Hard fabric with common (10%) fine to medium (1-3 mm) angular calcined flint
F3	Hard fabric with common (10%) medium to coarse (3< mm) angular calcined flint
FA3	Hard fabric with sparse (7%) medium to coarse (3< mm) angular calcined flint and sparse (7%) coarse quartz sand
FG2	Hard fabric with sparse (7%) calcined flint (1-3 mm) and rare (<5%) sub-angular grog
G3	Soft fabric with common (10%) sub-angular grog
S3	Hard fabric with sparse (7%) shell platelets
SA3	Hard fabric with sparse (7%) shell platelets (1-4 mm) and common coarse sand (<1 mm)

The biconical form is a characteristic Late Bronze Age type.<sup>13</sup> Spindlewhorls provide direct evidence for textile production and are a common find on Late Bronze Age settlements.

#### CHARRED PLANT REMAINS by JOHN LETTS

The flots from two samples were examined from pit F3. That from context 51 (10L) only produced charcoal fragments. That from context (50) produced 2 certain and 2 possible grains of hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), 2 grains of wheat (*Triticum sp.*), 2 grains of emmer or spelt wheat (*T. dicocum/spelta*) and 8 indeterminate cereal fragments in addition to much charcoal.

#### ANIMAL BONE by SHEILA HAMILTON-DYER

The bone from pit F3 had a mixture of preservation conditions with a minimum of 25 individual bones. Cow, sheep/goat and deer antler was present. One fragment of the antler had been worked as had four other bones. A sheep metatarsus had been split axially by burin grooves and is likely to be an early stage in the production of a type of pin common on Bronze Age sites.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> D. Longley, 'Excavation on the site of a Late Bronze Age settlement', *Surrey Archaeol. Soc. Research*, vol. 6 (1980), 31; Thomas et. al. op. cit. note 12, fig. 5.7-10.

<sup>14</sup> A.J. Legge, 'The animal remains from six sites at Down Farm, Woodcutts', in J. Barrett, R. Bradley and M. Hall (eds.), *Papers on the PreHistoric Archaeology of Cranbourne Chase* (Oxbow monograph 11, 1991), 54-100.

## DISCUSSION

The general vicinity of these findings has already been identified as an area of Bronze-Age activity with Fox Barrow, Berkshire Grims Ditch and the Late Bronze-Age site of Churn lying c. 100 m. to the north-west.<sup>15</sup> The two pits show that Late Bronze-Age activity could be widespread in the area.

Discovery of the ring ditch was unexpected as aerial photographic coverage of the Berkshire Downs is good and the bedrock conducive to site discovery.<sup>16</sup> It is only with the benefit of the field information that a vague circular mark in the gallop can be identified with this monument. Another vague soilmark just to the south could be the site of another ring ditch.

Also of note is the presence of a possible sherd of Middle Bronze-Age globular urn, as pottery and finds of this date are rare on the Berkshire Downs.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> S. Ford, *op. cit.* note 2.

<sup>16</sup> J. Richards, *The Archaeology of the Berkshire Downs* (Berkshire Archaeological Committee no. 3, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> S. Ford, 'The nature and development of Prehistoric settlement and land use in the Middle Thames region (8000-500 bc) with special reference to the evidence from lithic artefacts' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Reading University, 1991), fig. 6.12.