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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT TEMPLE HILL SCHOOL, ST. EDMUNDS ROAD, DARTFORD, KENT

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FIGURES

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT TEMPLE HILL SCHOOL, ST. EDMUNDS ROAD, DARTFORD, KENT

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INTRODUCTION

Circumstances of fieldwork, site location, natural geology and topography

Archaeology South-East (hereafter ASE; UCL Institute of Archaeology) was commissioned by Kier Group Developments to undertake a programme of archaeological work in advance of a northerly extension to the eastern block of Temple Hill School, St. Edmunds Road, Dartford, Kent (NGR TQ 55159 74985; Figure 1; hereafter 'the site'). This program comprised an archaeological and geoarchaeological evaluation (July 2017), a strip, map and sample (SMS) excavation comprising c. 300m² with additional geoarchaeological work (October 2017) and an archaeological watching brief covering the remainder of the site (November 2017–February 2018). The fieldwork commissioned by Kier Group Developments followed earlier site investigations by ASE in 2015 (see below).

Figure 1: Site location plan

The site was located within Temple Hill Community Primary and Nursery School within the northern suburbs of Dartford. Temple Hill extends from the west of the A282 (Dartford Crossing) in the east to Dartford town centre in the west. It takes its name from Temples Manor, known as the manor of Dartford Temples, once a holding of the order of Knights Templar. Temple Hill rises to c.30m AOD and overlooks the River Thames approximately 2km to the north. The area was farmland until the expansion of Dartford in the mid-20th century and the school was opened in 1953. The site comprised an irregular parcel of former playing field between St. Edmunds Road to the north and Littlebrook Manor Way to the south. The underlying geology of the site comprises chalk overlain by sands of the Thanet Formation. Superficial geological deposits at the site comprise the Boyn Hill Gravel Member and sands and gravels of the Thames Valley Formation (BGS 2023). The existing ground was

fairly level and found to be from 31.10m AOD in the eastern part of site to 31.41m AOD in the western part.

Archaeological and historical background

Previous investigations on the site

A previous two trench archaeological and geoarchaeological evaluation carried out by ASE on the site during August 2015 (ASE 2015) confirmed the presence of the Boyn Hill Gravels. The Boyn Hill Gravels extend intermittently across the Lower Thames Basin and are thought to have been deposited immediately following the Anglian Glaciation (Bridgland, 2006). They are known to hold significant remains of human habitation during the Hoxnian interglacial, around 390 to 420 thousand years ago (Ashton 2016). Most notably, at nearby Swanscombe where Boyn Hill deposits contained primary context lithic artefacts, biological material such as molluscs and mammalian remains, as well has the hominin (*Homo heildelbergensis*) remains of the Swanscombe Skull (Ovey 1964).

During the 2015 archaeological and geoarchaeological evaluation a shallow pit in Trench 1 yielded three probable AD 2nd century Roman potsherds and small quantities of industrial material, probably iron slag. Similar material was also encountered in a shallow linear feature in the same trench (ASE 2015). Subsequently, ASE carried out an archaeological and geoarchaeological watching brief between August and October 2015. A single, shallow possible pit feature was encountered, yielding two tiny sherds of probable Roman pottery. Residual worked flints including a palaeolithic piece were also recovered (ASE 2016).

The site evaluation carried out during July 2017 consisted of archaeological investigation comprising four trenches in tandem with geoarchaeological test pitting. The trenches revealed evidence of features of Late Bronze/ Early Iron Age (Trench 4), Late Iron Age/early Roman (Trench 2) and possible early medieval (Trench 3) date (ASE 2017). Four geoarchaeological test pits were excavated within the evaluation trenches, revealing a varying sequence of deposits across the site. The main interest was the Boyn Hill Gravel sequence, and worked flints were recovered from some of the units of this sequence, although these were generally abraded and demonstrated significant post-depositional wear (ibid.). The ‘strip map and sample’ excavation and watching brief followed on from this. The findings of the 2017–2018 archaeological works are the main focus of this article.

Archaeological activity in the vicinity

Archaeological excavations at the adjacent St. Edmund's Church (c. 200m west of the current site) were carried out by the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust in 2001 and 2002, and then subsequently by Archaeological Solutions during 2002 and 2003 (O'Brian 2013). They revealed evidence of Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age settlement, potentially associated with a postulated hillfort at East Hill to the south (Willson 2002), a possible Roman hilltop shrine and part of an early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery (O'Brian 2013).

The vicinity of the site is rich in records of Roman remains and during the period, the slopes of East Hill and Temple Hill appear to have formed one or more burial grounds, with graves ranging from cremations to stone sarcophagi and gypsum-filled coffins (O'Brian 2013). Roman artefacts were found during works on the school buildings themselves in 1955 (HER No. TQ 57 SE 18); and some Roman burials have been found to the south (HER No. TQ 57 SE 19). During the construction of the school, a number of Roman refuse pits were discovered that yielded AD 1st century pottery (HER No. TQ 57 SE 18). Excavations immediately east of the site were undertaken by Canterbury Archaeological Trust during 1991, and potential Late Iron Age/early Roman settlement activity was recorded (Canterbury Archaeological Trust 1991; 1992).

RESULTS

Summary

A mechanical excavator using a large flat bladed, toothless ditching bucket carried out machine stripping of overburden soils. The machine excavation was taken down to the top of the archaeological level or to the top of 'natural' subsoil where no archaeological deposits were found at a higher level. The stratigraphic sequence generally consisted of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology, with some variations in certain parts of the site. The overburden deposits measured between c.0.40m and 0.60m in depth., The natural geology across site consisted of mid to light orange-brown coarse sand and gravel, with moderate angular flint inclusions. All archaeological features were cut into the natural and sealed by subsoil.

In the south-western corner of site, the demolition of a pre-existing swimming pool had resulted in truncation of the natural horizon and had likely impacted on the survival of archaeological features in this location. Further modern truncation by isolated modern services was noted across the site. The site excavations comprised a strip map and sample area in the

east, one large geoarchaeological test pit, trenches and drainage trenches, and test pits in the locations of foundation pads (Figure 1).

Residual prehistoric material and Bronze Age activity (c.2300–800 BC; Period 1)

A small assemblage of prehistoric worked flint was recovered from the site during the excavations, totalling 41 pieces weighing 738g. These were found to have been re-deposited in later contexts, largely displaying moderate-to-heavy edge damage. One core tool was recovered, the remainder of the worked flint consisted of debitage. No diagnostic pieces were found; therefore, it was only possible to assign a very broad date to the assemblage, between the Middle Neolithic to Late Bronze/Early Iron Age. In addition to the worked flint, a residual Early Bronze Age sherd was recovered from fill [45] of Period 3 pit [60].

Further small amounts of Bronze Age pottery were recovered from archaeological features during the site investigations. Ditch terminus [1090] yielded a flint-tempered potsherd from the primary fill [1091]. The repeated fingernail impressions suggested that it belonged to the Beaker tradition (c.2500–1750 BC), although this identification is uncertain as flint-tempered pottery is also found to be common in later periods.

Figure 2: Period 1 Bronze Age activity

Two pit features [1121] and [1123] at the far northern end of the site both produced plain post-Deverel-Rimby pottery of Late Bronze Age date (c.1150–800 BC). Pit [1121] also produced small quantities of animal bone. Late Bronze Age pottery was also recovered from pit [70] in the south-eastern part of site.

Late Bronze/ Early Iron Age (c.1150–400 BC; Period 2)

It should be noted that the Period 2 pottery may comprise a chronologically mixed assemblage, as it could only be broadly ascribed to c.1000–400 BC. Therefore, it may not necessarily sit chronologically between Periods 1 and 3. Some 30 features excavated on site were broadly phased to this period, consisting exclusively of pits and postholes and providing evidence of settlement activity during this time. A fence line or palisade was suggested by several posthole-like features containing the same mid greyish-brown sandy fill, apparently running on a northeast-southwest alignment in the east of the site (Figure 3). Seven unabraded potsherds were recovered from the fill of posthole [4/009] dated to c.1150–800 BC, although an Early Iron Age date could not be excluded (ASE 2017).

Figure 3: Period 2 Late Bronze/ Early Iron Age activity

A cluster of three pits [031], [033] and [035] measuring 0.42–0.75m long x 0.40–0.60m wide x 0.38–0.45m deep, yielded a total of 18 sherds of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age pottery weighing 263g. Three intercutting pits were found towards the eastern limit of the excavation, one of which [19] contained a single Period 2 potsherd (the others did not yield any dating evidence). Pits [82], [109] and [1169] likewise contained just single Period 2 sherds.

A solitary possible posthole [27], measuring just 0.14m deep, yielded four potsherds including a partial rim of potentially Early Iron Age form, and it is thought that the sherds recovered from this feature were more likely to lay later within the Period 2 date range.

Pits [1115] and [1118] were not fully visible in plan due to the limits of excavation. They measured 0.54m and 0.81m deep respectively with [1118] cutting [1115]. A total of 10 unabraded Period 2 potsherds were recovered from these two pits, as well as a tiny intrusive Late Iron Age/early Roman sherd from pit [1115]. These two features were thought to have potentially functioned as storage pits, and environmental samples taken from the basal fills of each confirmed the presence of 20–50 poorly preserved indeterminate crop seeds.

Another potential palisade/fence line comprising of four postholes on an east-west alignment was excavated at the western end of the site. These postholes were extremely shallow, suggesting truncation or erosion may have occurred in this part of the site. No dating evidence was recovered from these features; however, they were found amongst a cluster of Period 2 features so have been provisionally phased to Period 2 on that basis and on the feature's similarity to the fence line in the east.

A substantial pit [1041] was found just to the north of the western fence line. It was not fully visible in plan measuring 2.64m wide x 0.62m deep. A total of 16 Period 2 bodysherds were recovered from the fills of the pit. Five postholes were found on the edge of and cut into [1041]. Just one if these produced a Period 2 potsherd. Though it is not certain that the postholes were related to the pit's function, it is possible they were related to a superstructure over the pit. Several other shallow pits were phased to this period based on small amounts of pottery.

Earliest/Early Iron Age (c.800–300 BC; Period 3)

Features that produced Period 3 dating evidence were uncommon being limited to three intercutting pits and one further pit to the north excavated during the evaluation phase. Intercutting pits [39], [42] and [60] were found to be interesting in terms of the finds they

contained. Pit [39], the earliest in the sequence, yielded earliest/ Early Iron Age potsherds, as well as a Bronze Age pyramidal loom weight and a perforated clay plate fragment. It was cut by pit [42], from which 19 Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age sherds and another perforated clay fragment were recovered. Pit [42] was in turn cut by pit [60], in which were found two further pyramidal loom weights and Late Bronze/ Early Iron Age potsherds. So apparently the latest datable material came from the earliest pit stratigraphically. This suggests a potential mixing of finds during recutting, later disturbance or perhaps a more deliberate redeposition of earlier material in later contexts. A sheep distal metacarpal recovered from fill [44] of pit [60] refitted to a proximal sheep metacarpal found in fill [41] of pit [39], which pointed to redeposition of earlier material in a later context (ASE 2019). Pit [4/019], excavated during the 2017 evaluation, was found to contain Early Iron Age pottery dated to c.800-400 BC.

Figure 4: Period 3 earliest/Early Iron Age activity

Late Iron Age/Roman (c.AD 10-410; Period 4)

Most of the Period 4 pottery recovered from site dates to within the AD 1st century, suggesting Late Iron Age/early Roman activity was predominant. The most notable features recorded during the site excavations consisted of a substantial pit-like feature [51] and its associated intercutting features (Figures 5 and 6). Feature [51] measured 4.73m long x 3.47m wide x 0.26m deep. Pottery, animal bone and fire-cracked flint (FCF) were recovered from the feature's single fill. The pottery consisted of four early Roman sherds dated c.AD 50–80, along with a single abraded late Roman sherd (c.AD 270–410) and an early medieval sherd belonging to the 5th to 6th centuries. This later material was considered to be intrusive in this context. The function of this feature is something of a mystery. The relatively small amount of finds in relation to the size of the pit would preclude its use as a refuse dump. Feature [51] was found to cut two small pits [53] and [96], and the only find came from the latter feature, a single sherd of early Roman pot (c.AD 50–80). Four other features were found cut into [51], three small shallow pits and an odd, short, shallow 'linear' feature [94] which could have been an elongated pit or structural feature. Finds were again sparse, with just a piece of ceramic building material (CBM) recovered from fill [95] of feature [94] considered to be Roman or later in date. Some thought was given to this feature being the remains of an Anglo-Saxon sunken-feature building (SFB) associated with settlement related to the nearby early medieval cemetery, however, the limited amount of contemporary pottery compared to the relatively fresh Roman material and

the lack of gable postholes that are generally typical of this feature type led to a Period 4 origin for the feature being thought to be the more likely.

Figure 5: Photograph of feature [51] and its associated features; looking south-west

Figure 6: Period 4 Late Iron Age/Roman activity

A small pit [29] located east of [51] was found to contain a single undiagnostic Roman potsherd that could not be any more closely dated. Two sherds of mixed date were recovered from pit [68], just to the north of [51]; a Roman potsherd dated c.AD 120–300 and a Period 2 sherd (c.1000–400 BC). It was not clear whether the former was intrusive or the latter residual. The close proximity of [68] to feature [51] might suggest that a Period 4 date may be the more likely, although this remains speculative.

Six linear features of Roman date were recorded during the site excavations that together suggest elements of a Roman field system extending beyond the site. Three of these, north-south oriented ditches G4, G5 and [1011] were parallel and intercutting, suggesting general maintenance and/ or re-use of the features. The pottery recovered from the ditches was all of similar early Roman date, falling between c.AD 10–80/100. The vast majority of the recovered pottery came from G4 which yielded 52 sherds dated c.AD 50–80 and a further 18 sherds dating c.AD 40–80/100. Three sherds were recovered from ditch [1011], and just one from G5, all of which were fell within a c.AD 10–80 date range.

Ditch G7 was oriented east-west, terminating at the east and continuing beyond the western limit of excavation. It was truncated by a modern soakaway and associated drainage. In all, 51 potsherds were recovered from G7, and the dating was mixed; 25 sherds were dated c.AD 50–80, 25 more were dated c.AD 100–200, and a single rimsherd was dated c.AD 150–250. The single fill of G7 was a homogenous deliberate backfilling event, which could account for the mixed dating with earlier materials being deliberately deposited in a later feature. Hammerscale was noted in an environmental sample of the fill, suggestive of low-level smithing activity in the area.

Ditch G6 was oriented north-south, and exhibited a potential recut [1207], which ran on the same alignment but was of demonstrably different profile and fill. No finds were recovered from the original G6 ditch, but 14 sherds dating between c.AD 40–80/100 were recovered from the fills of [1207].

Ditch G8 was located at the north end of site, oriented broadly east-west and terminating at the western end. The ditch continued eastwards beyond the limit of excavation. Two bodysherds were recovered and used to date the ditch to c.AD 10–80. Pit [1126] was located east of G8, also continuing past the northern excavation limit. It was substantial in plan, measuring 3.30m in width, but was only 0.40m deep. Stone, animal bone and FCF was recovered from the basal fill, with a single potsherd dated c.AD 10–80 and a well-preserved Roman tegula piece found in the uppermost deposits.

A further 17 pit/posthole features distributed across site yielded Period 4 dating material. These pits were of varying size measuring between 0.20–2.52m long x 0.21–0.94m wide x 0.10–0.70m deep. Of these pits, 12 produced sherds of a similar date range, between c.AD 10–100. One pit contained a sherd dated c.AD 50–200, and four pits yielded undiagnostic Roman sherds. All apart from one of these pits contained a single fill.

Early medieval (c.AD 410–600; Period 5)

Just two features were phased to Period 5. Six fresh AD 5th to 6th century sherds were recovered from pit [3/005], and a single sherd of the same date was found in pit [13]. An intrusive early medieval sherd also dating to the 5th–6th centuries was found in the fill of Period 3 feature [51] (see above). These features and finds indicate that there was at least some low-level Period 5 activity on the site.

Figure 7: Period 5 early medieval activity

Undated

A number of features recorded during the excavations could not be assigned to a period of activity. It could be tentatively suggested that undated features G3, [094] and [104] comprised wall trenches for a building or gullies forming an enclosure, although this was not by any means clear or conclusive (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Undated features

SPECIALIST SUMMARY REPORTS

The Prehistoric Pottery by Anna Doherty

Introduction

A moderate-sized assemblage of prehistoric pottery was recovered during the excavation, totalling 460 sherds, weighing 9.20 kg. The majority of this total is of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date, including one large group of probable transitional earliest/Early Iron Age date.

Methodology

The pottery was recorded and reported on following guidance in the *standard for pottery studies in archaeology* (PCRG et al. 2016). The pottery was examined using a x20 binocular microscope and quantified by sherd count, weight, estimated vessel number (ENV) on pro forma records and in an Excel spreadsheet. The prehistoric pottery was recorded using site-specific fabric codes, formulated in accordance with the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 2010, Table 1). Two residual Early Bronze Age sherds and a small assemblage of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery were reported on in the post-excavation assessment (ASE 2019).

Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age

Most of the prehistoric features produced small and poorly-dated assemblages so the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery from Periods 1 to 3 has been presented together. The only significant group, comprising over half of the later prehistoric assemblage, came from a single Period 3 pit [42] of probable earliest/Early Iron Age date on which the following text focuses.

Fabrics

Overall, the assemblage is dominated by non-sandy flint-tempered wares, of which fabrics containing moderately coarse inclusions (FLIN2, FLIN3 and FLIN7) make up just over 60% (quantified by sherd count), while similar but coarser fabric variants (FLIN5, FLIN6 and FLIN8) and non-sandy flint-tempered fine wares (FLIN1 and FLIN4) each make up *c*. 15% (Table 1). The proportion of these fabrics is not dissimilar across the three stratigraphic periods; however, possible chronological variation was noted across a range of minor fabric types. In particular, sandier flint-tempered wares are absent from the tiny Period 1 assemblage, which

may argue in favour of a (Late Bronze Age) plain ware PDR attribution. By contrast fine and moderately coarse flint-tempered wares (FLQU1, FLQU2, FLQU3 and FLQU4) occur in similar frequencies in Periods 2 and 3, together making up around 10% of sherds. Perhaps significantly, clear examples of flint-and-shell fabrics were absent in both Periods 1 and 2 (although the latter included two sherds in a possibly related fabric with some voids which were difficult to characterise conclusively as deriving from shell (FLIN6). Fabric FLIN6 was a fairly common element in the single large group assigned to Period 3 (making up 13% of sherds), while a few sherds in a more certainly defined flint-and-shell ware (FLSH1) were noted for the first time. A single example of a purely sandy fabric was also noted in Period 3 (QUAR1).

Table 1: Fabric definitions and quantification of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery

Fabric	**Definition**	**Sherds**	**Weight (g)**	**ENV**
FLIN1	Common/abundant flint; mostly <0.5mm, very occasionally up to 1.5mm. A silty matrix with rare larger quartz up to 0.5mm	13	423	9
FLIN2	Moderate/common flint of 0.2-2.5mm. A silty matrix with rare larger quartz up to 0.5mm	69	1172	52
FLIN3	Common/abundant flint of 0.2-2.5mm. A silty matrix with rare larger quartz up to 0.5mm	61	947	41
FLIN4	Moderate, moderately-sorted flint of 0.5-1mm in a silty matrix	27	220	23
FLIN5	Common, moderately-sorted flint most of 0.5-3mm, very rarely to 7mm in a slightly silty matrix	3	204	2
FLIN6	Common, moderately-sorted flint most of 0.5-3mm, very rarely to 7mm, with sparse voids of 2-4mm in a slightly silty matrix. Possibly related to FLSH1 but less clear that the voids are from leached shell	20	647	6
FLIN7	Moderate to common flint of 0.2-3.5mm in a silty matrix	34	472	21
FLIN8	Moderate to common flint of 0.2-5mm in a silty matrix	11	70	2

Fabric	Definition	Sherds	Weight (g)	ENV
FLQU1	Moderate, moderately-sorted flint of 0.5-1mm in a matrix with moderate quartz of 0.1-0.5mm or very rarely to 0.8mm	10	50	10
FLQU2	Common, ill-sorted flint of 0.2-4mm in a matrix with moderate quartz of 0.1-0.5mm or very rarely to 0.8mm	8	199	6
FLQU3	Sparse/moderate flint of 0.2-3mm in a matrix with moderate quartz of 0.1-0.5mm or very rarely to 0.8mm	7	98	6
FLQU4	Sparse flint of 0.2-2mm in a matrix with moderate quartz of 0.1-0.5mm or very rarely to 0.8mm	1	25	1
FLQU5	Moderate to common flint of 0.2-5mm in a silty matrix with moderate quartz of 0.1-0.5mm or very rarely to 0.8mm	1	20	1
FLSH1	Common, moderately-sorted flint most of 0.5-3mm, rarely to 7mm and moderate elliptical voids of 2-4mm in a silty matrix	4	149	3
QUAR 1	Moderate to common quartz of 0.1-0.5mm; very rare flint of <1mm may occur	1	5	1
Total		270	4701	184

Forms, decoration and chronology

The pottery from Periods 1 and 2 largely comprises undiagnostic body sherds, although the former produced two partial rims, apparently from broadly bipartite bowl or jar/bowl forms, one associated with incised horizontal line decoration on the shoulder (not illustrated). Taken together with the, admittedly slight, fabric evidence, these forms may suggest the Period 1 assemblage belongs to the Late Bronze Age plain ware phase of the PDR tradition and the decoration is perhaps more likely to be of developed plain ware type (c.1000–800 BC). It occurred commonly in Highstead Period 2, for example (Couldrey 2007, 118).

A fairly substantial and diagnostic earliest/Early Iron Age assemblage of 136 sherds weighing 2.94kg, amounting to about half of the total prehistoric assemblage, was found in fills [40] and [41] of pit [39], assigned to Period 3. Examples of these are illustrated in Figure

9. Although one jar form (P6) has a poorly defined rounded shoulder which could sit comfortably in a plain ware PDR assemblage, the group is overwhelmingly characterised by jars with very elongated rims, in many cases with hollow necks but fairly upright rim profiles (e.g. P2, P3 and P7), but also including more strongly flaring rims (e.g. P1). These are often very distinctly flattened along the rim top (e.g. P1, P3, P7 and P8). A bowl profile (P4) has a weakly tripartite profile with a short, slightly flaring everted rim. The group is largely undecorated, but two notable forms of decoration are present: an impressed cordon, likely positioned at the join of the shoulder and neck of a jar form (P5) and a row of finger-pinching below the rim of a slightly flaring rim jar (P8).

Figure 9: The illustrated prehistoric pottery

The presence of some flint-with shell fabrics may be chronologically significant, although there is some conflicting evidence from local sites about the dating of these wares. Flint-with-shell fabrics are, for example, apparently quite common in both later Bronze Age and earliest Iron Age assemblages excavated to the east, around the Gravesend area (e.g. Couldrey and Mullin 2012, table 2.9, 70; Brown and Couldrey 2012 223) but they were absent from a more local assemblage dated *c*. 800–500 BC at Dartford Football Club (Brown 2011, 255). The lack of shelly fabrics had there been noted in relation to shell-rich assemblages from sites in the north-western segment of the High Speed 1 project. It was suggested that this might reflect either differing chronology or the slightly greater distance between Dartford and sources of shell-bearing clays (ibid., 258). Certainly, assemblages of 'Early/Middle Iron Age' date like those from Northumberland Botton and Tollgate (Bryan and Morris 2006; Jones 2006) are much more dominated by shelly wares, suggesting that the current assemblage is probably earlier and could suggest an 'earliest' rather than 'Early' Iron Age attribution.

On the other hand, the preponderance of very tall upright or flaring rim profiles is perhaps more in keeping with the Early Iron Age proper. Although jars with similarly tall neck profiles are a feature in the assemblage dated c.800–500 BC from Dartford Football Club, rim profiles appear less flattened and more rounded (Brown 2011, fig. 13.1). Admittedly the group from pit [39] is lacking clear examples of classic Early Iron Age tripartite or strongly carinated fine ware bowl forms, with only one somewhat weakly carinated example (P4); however, two partial rims with thin-walled flaring profiles in fine ware fabric FLIN4 may be of this type (not illustrated).

Finally, the assemblage appears considerably less decorated, particularly in terms of finger impressions on rims and shoulders, than some of the well-sealed Early Iron Age groups from the A2 Pepperhill to Cobham scheme (e.g. Brown and Couldrey 2012, figs. 3.46–3.48) or the 'Early/Middle Iron Age' assemblages from Northumberland Bottom or Tollgate (Bryan and Morris 2006; Jones 2006). The only decorative elements present are applied finger impressed cordons or rows of finger-pinching which were recorded in both Periods 2 and 3 at Highstead (e.g. Couldrey 2007, fig.77, 226, fig 83, 296). The assemblage also notably lacks surface rustication, which becomes very prevalent in Thanet by the Early/Middle Iron Age transition (ibid., table 9, 166); however, its occurrence in north-west Kent is more sporadic and its absence in a moderate-sized assemblage may therefore be of limited significance (Brown and Couldrey 2012, 198; Morris 2006, 65).

In summary then, the group appears somewhat earlier than classic 'Early' or 'Early/Middle Iron Age' assemblages from sites of the 5th to 3rd century BC from north-west Kent such as Northumberland Bottom, Tollgate and the A2 Pepper Hill to Cobham Scheme, particularly on the basis of the frequency of decoration and of shelly fabrics. Some fabric and form elements, however, seem potentially a little later than the earliest Iron Age assemblage from Dartford Football Club, suggesting that the group may be estimated to date around the transition from earliest to Early Iron Age (perhaps around the 7th to 6th centuries BC).

Deposition

The group contains a few fragmented vessel profiles that could be described as partially complete, occurring with many sherds of more broken and mixed character. It has been noted that special deposits of pottery on Early or Early/Middle Iron Age sites in the High Speed 1 project often comprised a fairly common range of vessel types and sizes, although their deposition suggests that they related to special events (Morris 2006, 117). However, at Dartford Football Club, partially complete vessels appeared to be deposited separately from midden waste suggesting different forms of deposition to those in pit [39] at Temple Hill School (Brown 2011, 256).

Although the pottery may represent midden waste, it is notable that this feature, and an intercutting pit [60], contained several complete or near complete pyramidal clay weights and fragments of clay plates, together with a relatively large and diverse animal bone assemblage. Interestingly, a high proportion of both the pottery (16 % of sherds) and the animal bone (62%) in this feature appeared burnt, but the clay weights were more complete and unburnt, suggesting that they derive from a different source. Although all of material may suggest

patterns of structured deposition, there is an apparent discrepancy in the dating of the clay objects and the pottery. Pyramidal weight forms are considered unlikely to post-date the Late Bronze Age and, while the clay plates might extend into the earliest Iron Age (Champion 2014, 286), the pottery seems substantially later, perhaps arguing in favour of the interpretation that the clay objects all derive from Period 3 intercutting pit [42].

Catalogue (Figure 9)

P1 Jar with long flaring rim and flattened rim top. Fabric FLSH1, fill [040]
P2 Round shouldered jar with slightly hollow neck and long, upright rim. Fabric FLQU2, fill [40]
P3 Jar with slightly hollow neck, long upright rim with flattened rim top. Fabric FLIN2, fill [40]
P4 Bowl with weak tripartite profile, slightly carinated shoulder and short, slightly flaring rim. Fabric FLIN2, fill [40]
P5 Shoulder of jar with applied finger impressed cordon. Fabric FLIN6, fill [40]
P6 Jar with round shoulder and continuous long upright neck. Fabric FLIN2, fill [41]
P7 Jar with Jar with long flaring rim and flattened rim top. Fabric FLQU3, fill [41]
P8 Jar with flaring rim and horizontal finger impressed cordon. Fabric FLIN4, fill [41]

The Ceramic Object Registered Finds by Stephen Patton

The ceramic object registered finds consist of two large and complete pyramidal loom weights (RF<1>, RF<2>), conjoining fragments of a partially complete pyramidal loom weight (RF<3>; Figure 10) and two fragments of perforated plates (RF<4>, RF<5>; Figure 11). Current dating evidence indicates that both of these artefact types date to the Late Bronze Age.

Figure 10: The loom weights

Figure 11: The perforated plates

Whilst cylindrical loom weights are relatively common finds from Middle and Late Bronze Age sites in the south-east, the pyramidal form appeared during the Late Bronze Age and became a second type used rather than a replacement. The Temple Hill School weights measure 123–141.5mm in height and 100–110mm width and depth at the bases. The perforations are horizontal through the top parts of the faces and measure 15–24mm in diameter. All three weights have wear marks at the top of the perforations indicating suspension and providing evidence for the interpretation as being used on looms. Only the clay fabric of

the incomplete example (RF<3>) can be established, and it is made from a fine silty clay with moderately frequent fine to medium quartz and moderately frequent fine to very coarse chalk up to 4mm. A similar pyramidal weight was previously uncovered at Dartford Football Club, Princes Road in Dartford (Poole 2011, 264–265, fig. 13.3,1–3).

Perforated plates are now a common find confined largely to the middle and lower Thames Valley (Champion 2014, 285, fig 2), and which are often found in association with Late Bronze Age plain Post Deverel-Rimbury pottery (ibid., 286). In fact, the clay fabrics of these plate fragments is very similar to that of Late Bronze Age pottery from the region, with the tempering consisting of common calcinated medium to very coarse flint up to 3mm. Plate fragment RF<4> has a rounded edge and straight side, it measures up to 19mm in thickness and retains part of a perforation. No perforations survive on plate fragment RF<5>, however the similarity of fabric and form to RF <4> strongly suggests this too would have been a perforated plate. It measures up to 16.70mm thick, has a rounded edge and a slight concave indentation running into the broken edge which is also diagnostic of perforated plates. The function of perforated plates has been much debated, with hypotheses ranging from oven furniture to salt-working equipment. The predominant current theory is that of oven parts, specifically for baking bread (Champion 2014).

Almost immediately adjacent to Temple Hill School, the site of St Edmunds Church produced fragmentary remains of pyramidal loom weights and perforated plates potentially dating to the same Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age period (Crummy 2015). The Temple Hill School loom weights potentially fit within the St Edmund's Church Group 3 category based on weight. However, they are difficult to compare in terms of clay fabrics but the chalk inclusions in RF <3> may indicate a link to St Edmund's Church clay Fabric C.

The perforated clay plates from St Edmund's Church are referred to as perforated slabs and interpreted as being kiln furniture (ibid.). Whilst Crummy identifies the source of most of the slab fragments as a kiln, the option of this structure being an oven is not ruled out. It is believed that Bronze Age pottery was fired in open fires or pits, with there being no certain evidence for firings within clay structures (Gibson 2002, 44–45). It is perhaps more likely that the examples from both Temple Hill School and St Edmund's Church are plates that were used in ovens. Nonetheless, the contexts from which the Temple Hill School examples were found do not add weight to either side of this debate, and their possible use in early rudimentary clay superstructure kilns cannot be dismissed. Perforated plates have also been previously recovered nearby at Princes Road in Dartford (Poole 2011, 265, 264, fig. 13,.3:4).

Catalogue (Figures 10 and 11)

RF<1> Pyramidal Loom weight, 2009g, pit [39] fill [41]
RF<2> Pyramidal Loom weight, 2405g, pit [42] recut [60] fill [44]
RF<3> Pyramidal Loom weight, 1272g, pit [42] recut [60] fill [44]
RF<4> perforated clay plate fragment, 28g, pit [39] fill [41]
RF<5> Perforated clay plate fragment, 66g, pit [39] recut [42] fill [43]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Periods 1 and 2

Period 1 activity on site was scarce and seemed mainly confined to the Late Bronze Age, but some important finds were recovered that demonstrate potential settlement activity during this time. In terms of features, there was nothing beyond a few pits [70], [1121] and [1123] which yielded sherds dated c.1150–800 BC, and some residual earlier Bronze Age sherds were recovered from later features. Animal bone totalling 15 fragments was recovered during excavation and environmental sampling of fill [1122] of pit [1121]. One of these was found to be calcined and two others exhibited scorching (ASE 2019) indicating that food was prepared on site with waste subsequently discarded into the pit. A sheep/goat ulna was also recovered from the pit fill, suggesting the consumption of domesticated animals on site.

Two complete pyramidal loom weights and conjoining fragments of another pyramidal loom weight dating to the Late Bronze Age were recovered from Period 3 contexts. Bronze Age textile production in Britain is an area that has not been especially well-studied, and knowledge remains lacking (Haughton at al. 2021, 173). Bronze Age woollen production, for example, is much better understood elsewhere in Europe and the Near East (ibid.). The presence of sheep bone on site does not of course necessarily point to wool production, with sheep being kept for meat, their skins used for clothing and manure used for fertilizer. As is usually the case (ibid., 182), the loom weights recovered from site were not found in their primary context but recovered from intercutting pits [39] and [60]. Pit [039] contained Period 3 pottery in both of its fills in addition to a loom weight and also a fragment of a perforated clay plate (see further discussion below). Production of textiles was becoming significant from the Middle Bronze Age onwards and woollen goods are known to have been used in England by the end of the Bronze Age (ibid., 176–8). It is, however, important to note that not all regions in Britain were doing so and items of clothing for example may have highlighted differences

between social groups; wool production would have been much more laborious than, for example, meat production (ibid., 182–183).

Although there was little Bronze Age activity encountered on the Temple Hill School site, evidence from both fieldwork and aerial photographs has shown that there is a group of ring ditches in the general vicinity (Pre-Construct Archaeology 2009), suggesting there was reasonably substantial Bronze Age activity in the Dartford area. Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age activity at East Hill and the St Edmund's Church site have been interpreted as being related to a defended settlement and grain storage site, perhaps an early hillfort (Willson 2002, 47–48; O'Brian 2013). Certainly, the activity at the Temple Hill School presented here appears to be an extension of this occupation and also revealed further evidence of possible grain storage pits. The location overlooking the Thames and defending Darent Creek may also be conducive to the siting of a hillfort and further investigations in the vicinity should attempt to locate any additional evidence of a defensive circuit associated with these remains.

The two fragments of the so-called perforated clay plates are perhaps the most significant artefacts recovered from the site. There has been much debate regarding the purpose and function of these objects since the 19th century, although they are most recently thought to be related to use in ovens (although this is not a new idea); no example of an oven with such perforated plates found in a 'well preserved structural condition' has yet been found, and so the way in which these objects actually functioned is not known (Champion 2014, 290). These perforated plates are often found in association with burning. Excavations by Oxford Archaeology at Dartford Football Club recovered three fragments of perforated clay plates found in association with remnants of an oven superstructure, burnt bone, carbonised grain and a quernstone (Poole 2011, 265). The dating of these clay plates is thought most securely to be the very Late Bronze Age and very early on into the Iron Age (Champion 2014, 286). The examples from Temple Hill School were recovered from Period 3 pits [39] and [42]. The upper fill of [39] from which one of the plates was recovered also contained residual Late Bronze/ Early Iron Age pottery that could well have been contemporary with the clay plates. The pottery had either been burnt or over-fired (ASE 2019). As burnt flint, animal bone and fragmentary charcoal were also found in this context it may relate to the deposition of cooking waste.

Period 3

Features containing Period 3 dating evidence were limited to three intercutting pits [39], [42] and [60], as well as a pit excavated in evaluation Trench 4. The mixed finds from the intercutting features suggested reworking of earlier deposits, either through Period 3 activity,

some later disturbance, or perhaps a more deliberate redeposition of earlier Bronze Age material during the earliest/Early Iron Age.

No Middle Iron Age material was recovered from the site. One of the existing problems is the suggestion from the evidence that parts of Kent such as the north where Dartford is situated, were not significantly colonised prior to the Late Iron Age (Booth 2017, 59). For example, areas excavated during the HS1 project largely showed a disconnect between the Middle and the Late Iron Age, with only a few exceptions showing significant Middle Iron Age activity (Booth 2011, 259). This contrasts with evidence from east Kent, where archaeological excavations carried out on the East Kent Access route have shown that a larger proportion of Late Iron Age and early Roman settlements had origins in the Middle Iron Age or earlier (Booth 2017, 59). The evidence may well be skewed partly by the distribution of developer-funded archaeology in the county, or it may point to settlement patterns with previously sparse areas of settlement becoming increasingly inhabited into the later Iron Age due to factors such as growing populations.

Period 4

It was reported in volume 70 of *Archaeologia Cantiana* that AD 1st century pottery was recovered during the construction of an extension to the western side of 'Temple Hill County Primary School' as the site was called then (Tester 1956, 253). The pottery, along with some animal bone, was collected by a schoolteacher from what were later realised to have been refuse pits. Further building work along the north side of Littlebrook Manor Way revealed more 1st century pottery, this time associated with cremation burials as pieces of burnt bone were recovered along with the pottery by the builders (ibid., 253–254). Unfortunately, the precise location of these features and finds does not appear to be known, but they were all clearly very close to the evaluations, watching brief and strip, map and sample investigations carried out by ASE. No burials were found during these excavations, but a number of Roman features comprising pits/postholes and ditches were recorded.

In 1980 at 17 Trevithick Drive, around 300m west of the ASE site, human remains were discovered in the back garden, and it was subsequently determined these were the remains of three adults (Dartford District Archaeological Group 1986, 13). Initially the date of the burials was unclear, but in 1983 a further two graves were found in the same garden, buried with two vessels subsequently dated to the late 1st century AD (ibid.). Although no burial evidence was found during the ASE excavations, the slopes of Temple Hill appear to have been well settled and to have also included one or more burial grounds during the Roman period. A possible Late

Iron Age/early Roman shrine accompanied by 'votive pits' has also been uncovered at nearby St Edmund's Church pointing to some ritual significance to the local landscape (O'Brian 2013). In contrast, the evidence from Temple Hill School appears to relate to settlement edge activity and the presence of field systems suggesting agricultural land use. Activity in the vicinity of the site would have been encouraged as it is known to have been positioned close to Watling Street (Margary 1967, route 1), which along with the nearby Thames would have given the local community access to major transport routes during the Roman period.

Evidence of a Late Iron Age site continuing into the Roman period was found at Farnol Road (Canterbury Archaeological Trust 1991; 1992) adjacent to the Temple Hill School site. It is likely that the Period 4 activity found at Temple Hill School represents a continuation of the Farnol Road activity. It was thought that the density of features at Farnol Road pointed to a long-lived occupation of the area, although pottery dating suggested it was mainly confined to the AD 1st century (Canterbury Archaeological Trust 1992) The majority of Period 4 pottery from Temple Hill School was Late Iron Age/early Roman in origin, however, a group of 25 sherds recovered from ditch G7 were dated to the second century. A single sherd dated c.AD 50–200 was recovered from the fill of pit [1171], and another potsherd dated c.AD 270–410 was recovered from the large pit feature [51]. This points to the first century as the most intensive period of occupation, with subsequent low-level activity potentially extending beyond the third century.

A site excavated by SWAT Archaeology roughly 400m south-west of the Temple Hill School site revealed evidence of several Roman features, including 10 pits and two linear features (SWAT Archaeology 2016). Two periods of occupation were identified, c.AD 50–125 or later, and c.AD 175–250 (ibid.). One of the linear features was an enclosure ditch in use from the Early Iron Age. This may represent continuity of land use into the early Roman period, or (perhaps more likely) re-use of a previously infilled earlier feature.

The function of the large, shallow feature [51] at Temple Hill School is unclear. Large features of unknown use were also found at Farnol Road, although these were far greater in depth than [51], being between 0.50–2.00m. One of these features, like [51], had other later features cut into it and one of these contained Late Iron Age/early Roman pottery (ibid.).

A timber post-built structure was encountered during excavations carried out by Archaeological Solutions at St. Edmund's Church, in very close proximity to the west of the Temple Hill School site. Small amounts of abraded Late Iron Age and Roman pottery, animal bone and FCF were recovered, and c.10m east of the building Roman pottery, plaster and metal objects including fragments of knives, rings, awls, an axe and horse paraphernalia were

recovered from two pits (O'Brian 2013). It was suggested that these depositions were votive offerings, although such interpretations can be controversial (ibid.). The building was situated on a hilltop, and though it did not conform to a typical plan of a Romano-British shrine and may have been an agricultural building, the possibility should not be discounted. As mentioned above, a Roman cemetery was known to have been situated on the slopes of Temple Hill below, with which this building may have been associated (ibid.). Whether this building was a shrine or of agricultural origin, it, along with the nearby cemetery, could certainly have been utilised by those living and working on the land now occupied by the school as pottery dating suggests that all three elements are roughly contemporary.

The remnants of a possible Roman field system discovered at Temple Hill School imply the existence of a Roman farmstead. It is likely that this field system had its origins in the Late Iron Age judging by the pottery dating, rather than being the result of any significant alterations to the landscape that occurred through Roman influence. Landscape continuity from the Late Iron Age into the early Roman period has been seen to be the case throughout Britain. The nearest confirmed Roman villas are later in date and around a couple of kilometres away as the crow flies (Dartford Roman villa occupied 2nd–3rd centuries and Wilmington Roman villa dated to the late 3rd century; Boreham and Baker 1993, 26). Although possible masonry foundations and tile debris found during works in the 1940s hint at more substantial Roman settlement remains at Temple Hill (O'Brian 2013), there is currently too little evidence to suggest whether the activity at Temple Hill School was related to a farmstead, villa estate or a roadside settlement.

Period 5

Only scant evidence was found for early medieval (AD 5th to 6th century) activity on the site, despite the presence of the nearby Anglo-Saxon cemetery (O'Brian 2013). The limited evidence comprised just two pits and an intrusive pot sherd recovered from an earlier pit context. Other early medieval material has been recovered from the area, and it is thought likely that Watling Street continued to be in use through the medieval period (Canterbury Archaeological Trust 1992).

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Fig 1


N
The Site
Rochester
Maidstone
Canterbury
Ashford
Dover
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Folkestone
554791
175287
Henderson Drive
Littlebrook Manor Way
Temple Hill
St Vincents Avenue
591193
149813
0
250m
592620
149813
555692
174985
555092
174896
0
20m
555184
174896

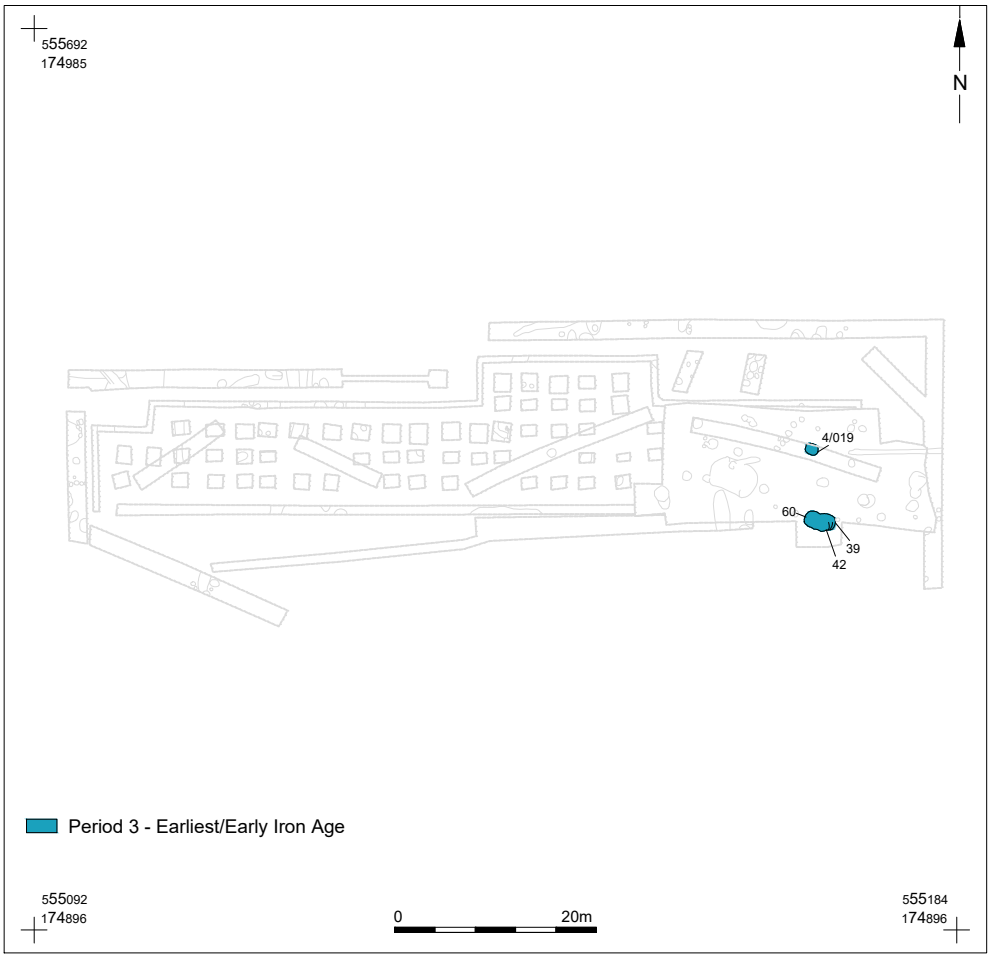
Fig. 2


555692
174985
N
1090
1121
1123
70
Period 1 - Bronze Age
555092
174896
0
20m
555184
174896

Fig 3


555692
174985
N
1118
1115
1169
1041
1053
1057
1063
Fence Line
Fence Line
33
31
35
4/009
82
109
19
27
Period 2 - Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age
555092
174896
0
20m
555184
174896

Fig 4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174985
N
4/019
60
39
42
Period 3 - Earliest/Early Iron Age
555092
174896
0
20m
555184
174896

Fig 5

Fig 6


555692
174985
N
G8
1126
G7
G5
G4
1011
1240
1207
G6
68
53
94
51
96
29
Period 4 - Late Iron Age/Roman
Period 4 - Conjecture Line
555092
174896
0
20m
555184
174896

Fig 7


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3/004
13
Period 5 - Early Medieval
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174896
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20m
555184
174896

Fig 8

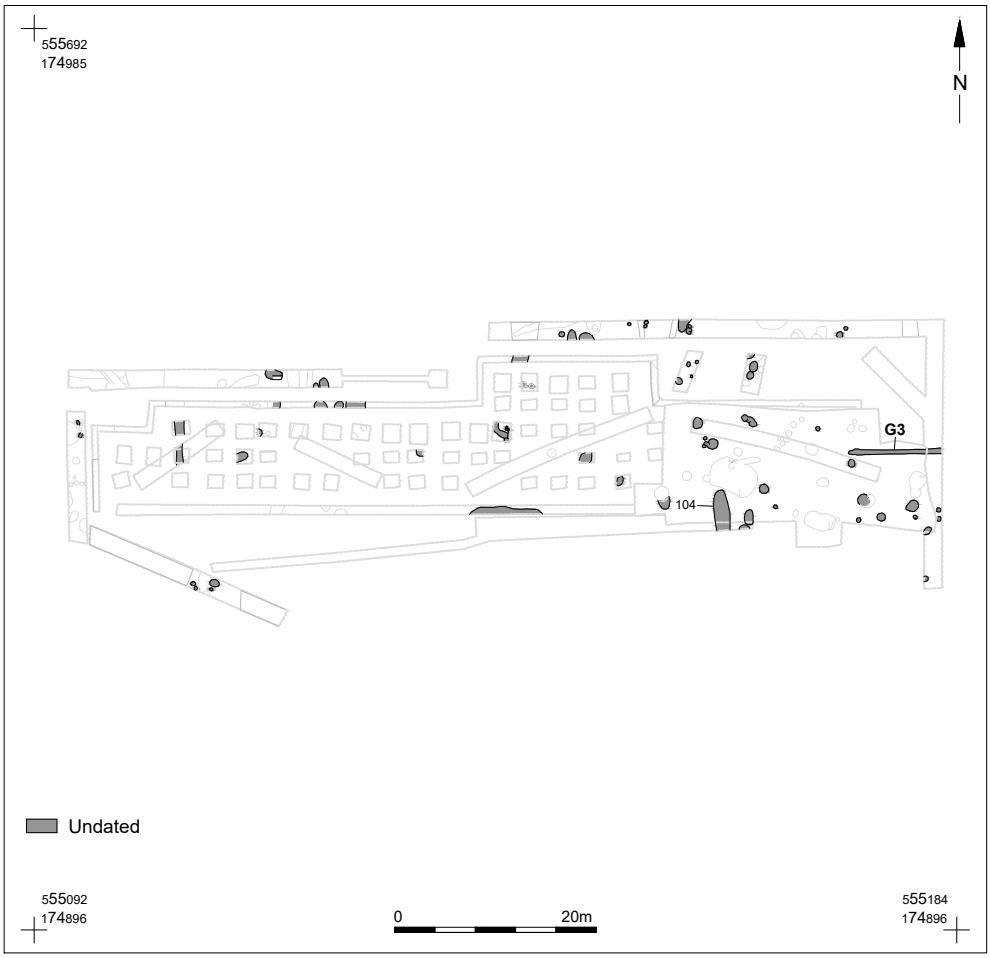
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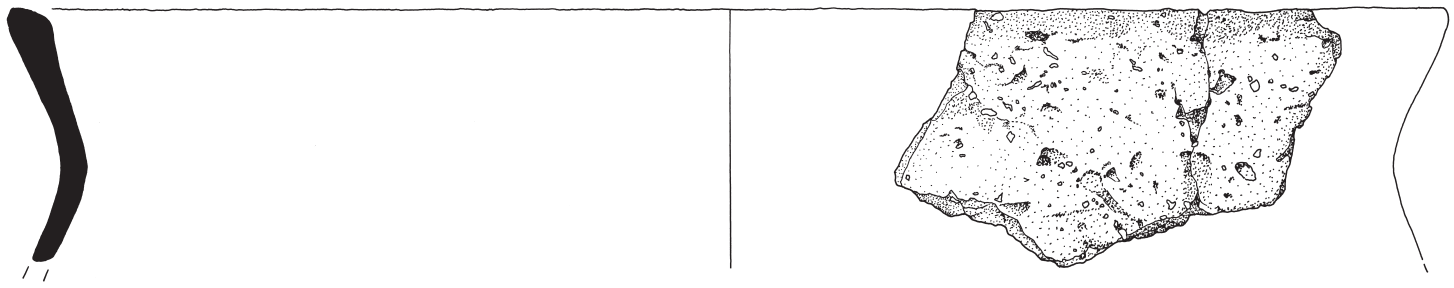
Fig 9



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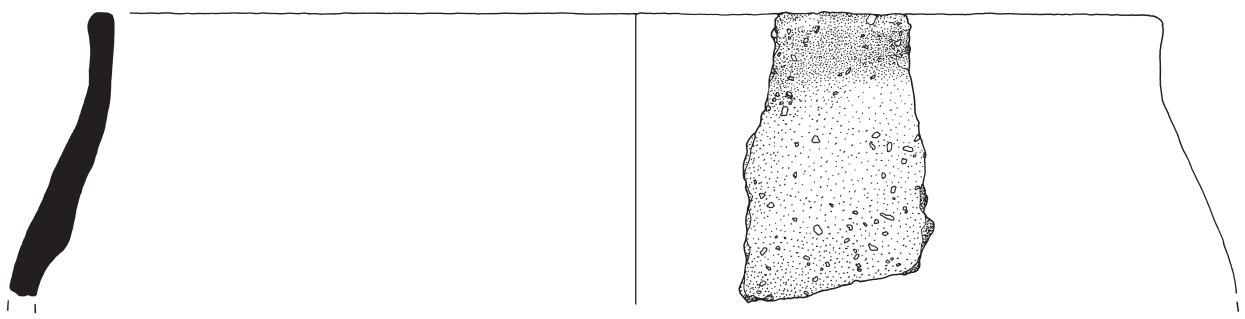

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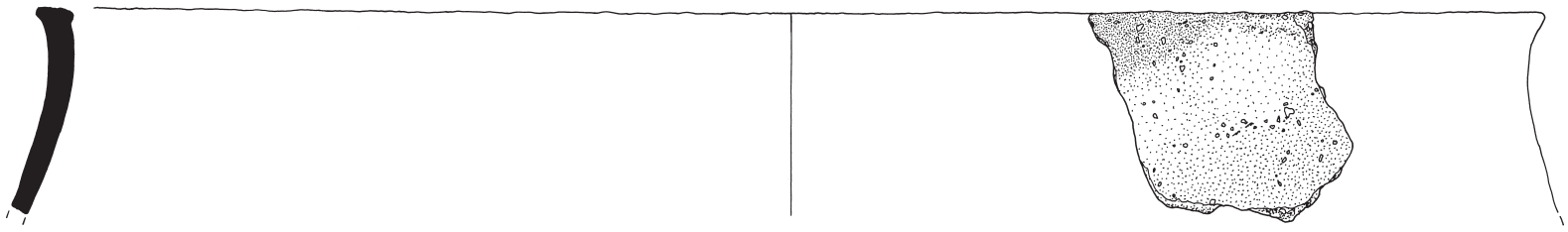

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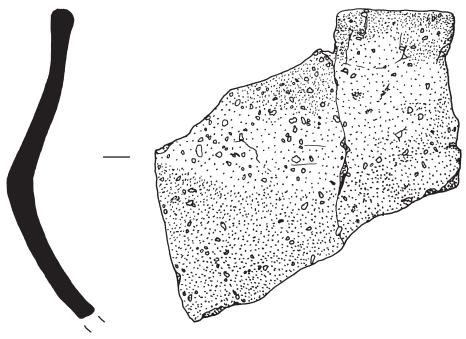

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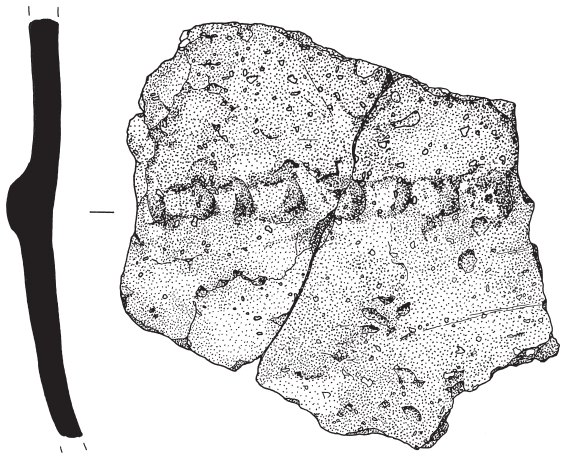

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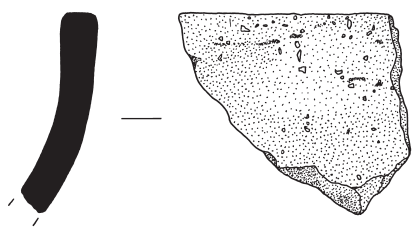

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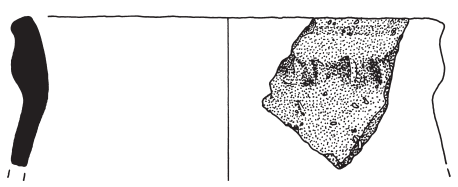

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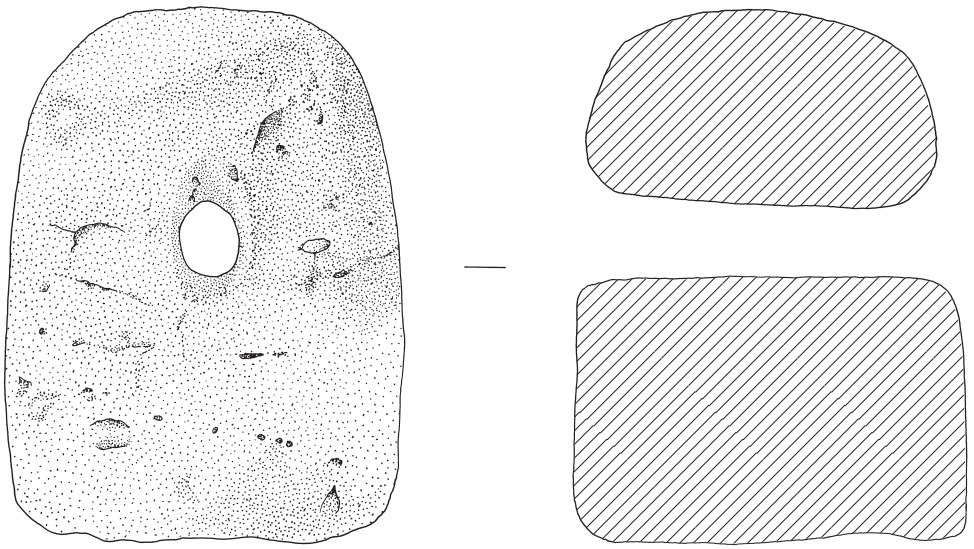
Fig 10



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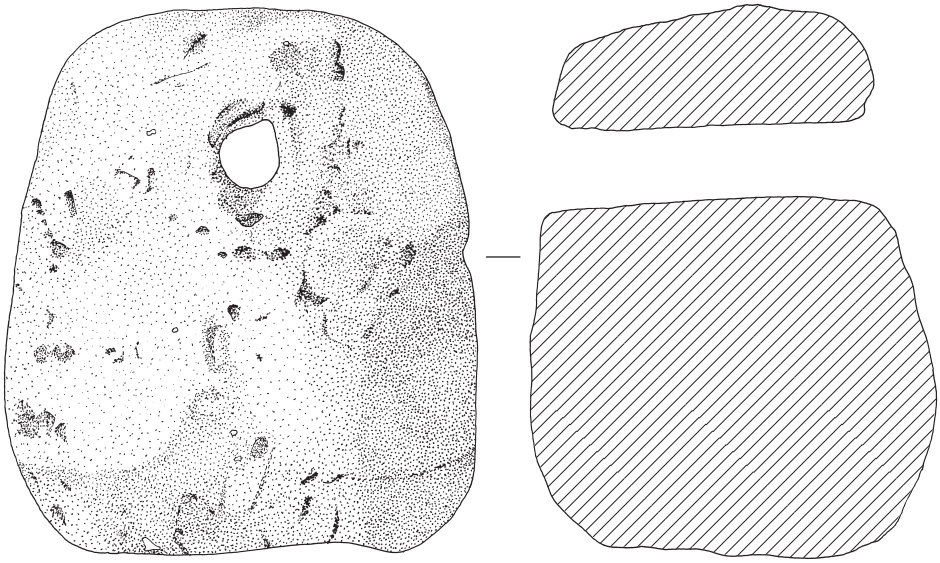

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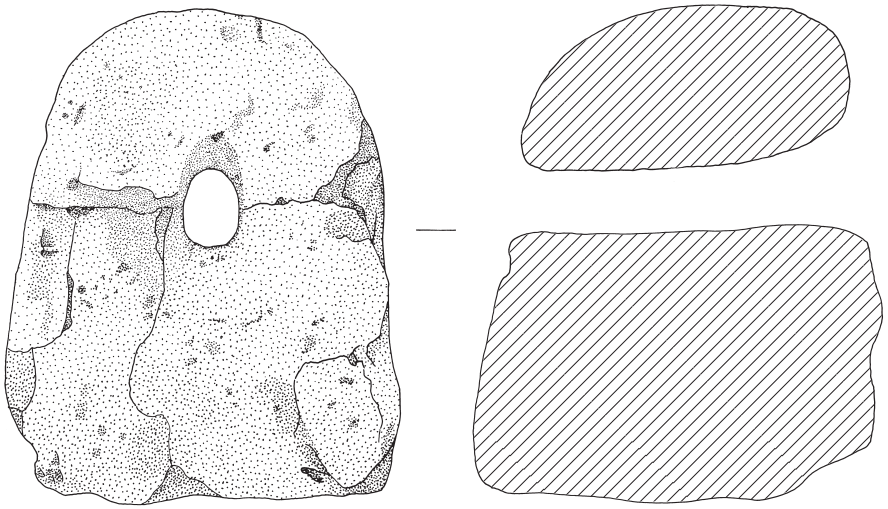

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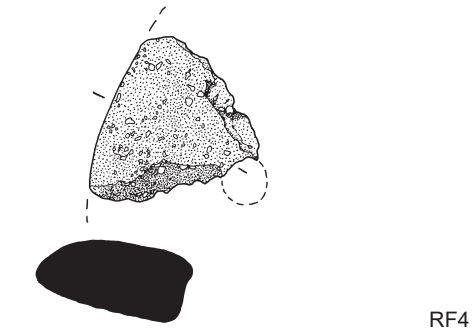
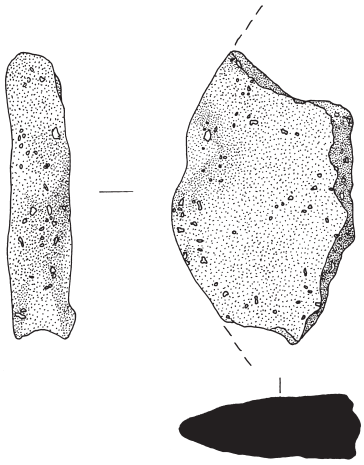


RF4



RF5

0 5cm