

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF A LATE IRON AGE/  
EARLY ROMAN SITE AT LAND OFF HERMITAGE LANE, MAIDSTONE**

**FINAL REPORT**

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**By Hayley Nicholls**

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Hayley Nicholls

With contributions by Gemma Ayton, Trista Clifford, Anna Doherty, Dr Paola Ponce, Lucy Sibun and Mariangela Vitolo

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Correspondence: Andrew Margetts, ASE Units 1 & 2, 2 Chapel Place, Portslade, East Sussex, BN41 1DR; a.margetts@ucl.ac.uk

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*Archaeological investigations on agricultural land off Hermitage Lane, Maidstone, Kent revealed evidence of Late Iron Age/Early Roman activity, comprising a small possible settlement enclosure within a largely open landscape, with an associated rectangular 4-post structure, an unurned cremation burial, along with evidence for woodland clearance and limited crop production.*

*The absence of any Roman fabrics within the pottery assemblage indicates that it is unlikely that the settlement continued in use after c. AD 50. Following this, a change in the use of landscape was evident, with the creation of a regular field system, whilst settlement activity appeared to shift further away. This was followed by a second field system on a slightly altered alignment, similar to that of the present day landscape.*

Fig. 1 Site location, location of evaluation trenches and subsequent excavation area.

## INTRODUCTION

Archaeology South-East (UCL Institute of Archaeology) was commissioned by Bovis Homes to carry out a series of archaeological investigations in advance of residential development of a 9.6ha plot of land to the west of Hermitage Lane, Maidstone, Kent (NGR TQ 731556). The site overlooks the River Medway, and is situated on the Lower Greensand ridge, an area sometimes referred to as the 'Chartland' due to its abundance of stone; predominantly varieties of sandstone. The shortest distance to the river lies to the south, just 1.5km away as the crow flies, whilst the chalk uplands of the North Downs lie 3km to the north. The site occupies a gentle north-east facing slope, with heights of between 86.1m and 87.2m AOD recorded to the south-west, falling to 82.3m and 83.7m AOD in the north-east corner. The British Geological Survey (BGS 2018), records the underlying geology of the east of the site as Hythe Formation – Sandstone and Limestone bedrock. The western part of the site is located over Sandgate Formation – Sandstone, Siltstone and Mudstone bedrock.

Following a desk-based assessment (CgMs 2013), an archaeological evaluation was undertaken in June 2015 (ASE 2015). This investigation identified a concentration of ditches and a pit containing material of possible Middle Iron Age to Early Roman date within the south-west corner of the site. These findings led to a further phase of work being required, with a targeted excavation undertaken between June and July 2015, to clarify the character, extent and date of these features (Figs. 1 and 2). The results of the investigation were summarised in a post-excavation assessment report shortly after the completion of all fieldwork (Rouard 2016).

Fig. 2 Photograph of excavation area looking south-west

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located within a rich archaeological landscape, close to the confluence of two major rivers, the Medway and Len, providing access both inland, and to the Thames estuary and continental Europe. This strategic location dominated the areas development throughout history. Whilst Palaeolithic evidence is limited to stray finds, both Mesolithic and Neolithic settlement sites, and Neolithic funerary monuments are known in the area, including a very rare example of an Early Neolithic timber building at White Horse Stone (Booth *et al.* 2011, 53-63). Only limited evidence for early prehistoric activity has, however, been identified in the immediate vicinity of the site, with the evidence representing residual finds rather than *in situ* deposits. Two late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic struck flints and five undated flints were recovered adjacent to the site in 2011 during an archaeological evaluation connected to the Aylesford Reservoir (HER Refs: TQ 75 NW375, TQ 7309 5579), whilst residual Neolithic pottery was recovered during evaluation works east of Hermitage lane in 1999 (Arch Cant 2002, 358).

Multiple Bronze Age sites are also known within 5km of the site, including an Early–Middle Bronze Age post-built structure with associated pits and a ditch at Pilgrim’s Way, along with elements of a small farmstead near Boughton Monchelsea, and ditch systems and pits near West Malling (Booth *et al.* 2011; Ferguson 2007; ASE 2005). Funerary sites comprising burials, both cremation and cist type, have been recorded near White Horse Stone and Aylesford (Booth *et al.* 2011; HER ref: TQ 75 NW 55). In the immediate vicinity, small quantities of residual Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age pottery were recovered during archaeological works to the east of Hermitage Lane at Maidstone Hospital (Stevens 2014).

Both settlement and funerary evidence continues into the Iron Age, with cremations recorded at The Old Hermitage, just 500m north of the site, whilst a further cemetery is recorded 3.8km north of the



site near Aylesford (Rouard 2016; HER ref: TQ 75 NW 21). Settlement in the form of a small farmstead is suggested to the east of Hermitage Lane by the presence of pits and ditches, and further afield, traces of Iron Age settlement have been identified to the west of the Neolithic funerary site at Little Kit's Coty House (Hey 1989; HER ref: TQ 76 SW 97). During archaeological works in advance of construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, both settlement and funerary sites of Iron Age date were excavated close to White Horse Stone and Pilgrim's Way, roughly 5km north-east of the site (Booth *et al.* 2011).

The vast majority of the later Iron Age sites within the region demonstrate continuity into the Roman period, with the retention of earlier field systems and farmsteads a common occurrence (Booth *et al.* 2011). Similarly, a small Romano British cemetery has been recorded, clustered near the earlier Iron Age funerary activity north of The Old Hermitage (HER Ref: TQ 75 NW15; TQ 7346 5600). Multiple villa sites are known in the vicinity, one near Snodland to the north-east, and a second minor villa is known overlying an Iron Age enclosure near East Malling, 2km to the west (HER ref: TQ 75 NW 6). These form two of twenty known villa sites within the Medway valley, making it one of the densest concentrations of villas in England (Dawkes 2015).

No proximate sites or finds of Anglo-Saxon or early medieval date are recorded in the immediate vicinity (Rouard 2016). During the late medieval period, the study site lay in an area of relatively remote agricultural land. North of the site lay a chapel dedicated to St Lawrence which is believed to have had a cell for a hermit (a hermitage). There are records of priests being presented to the chapel from 1330 to 1462 but none thereafter. The chapel appears to have been suppressed in 1545–47 (HER Ref: TQ 75 NW12; TQ 7312 5613). From the eighteenth century onwards, the Tithe maps show the site as being part of Barming Common, then as an orchard with parts of it wooded and others being arable land.

## CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

Detailed analysis of the sequence of deposits at Hermitage Lane has led to four phases of activity being recognised, of which two can be confidently assigned to periods (Late Iron Age/Early Roman and post-medieval). The remaining two intermediate phases cannot be securely dated. The finds assemblage recovered from both phases was similar to that of the first, of Late Iron Age/ Early Roman date but the very limited number of sherds of pottery recovered and their size indicates they may be residual. Excavations in all parts of the site revealed a variable superficial head deposit ranging from an orangey-grey to a mid-red colour, and consisting of areas of almost pure clay, to areas of sandy-clay. Although there was little visible disturbance to the site, many archaeological features were very shallow,

suggesting that the site had been subject to a significant degree of horizontal truncation. This was caused from a combination of early nineteenth century and modern ploughing and from wind and hillside erosion. Furthermore, the use of the site as an orchard from prior to 1870 up to the 1960s (as illustrated by historic maps) is likely to have caused a considerable degree of damage to archaeological deposits.

A total of 15 residual flint artefacts were recovered. No chronologically diagnostic implements were present, but based on technological and morphological grounds some pieces suggest activity focussing on the early prehistoric period (Mesolithic or Early Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age).

### **Period 1, phase 1: Late Iron Age/Early Roman (early-mid first century AD)**

This initial phase of visible human activity was also the most concentrated period of occupation of the site, with the vast majority of pottery sherds recovered from deposits of this date. The activity is characterised by a roughly sub-rectangular enclosure, a possible structure, a cremation, multiple pits with *in situ* burning and clusters of sterile irregular pits, interpreted as the result of possible woodland clearance (Fig. 3). Whilst definitive evidence for settlement in the form of domestic structures is lacking, the concentration of activity and the finds assemblage suggests settlement in the near vicinity.

Fig. 3 Period 1, Phase 1 plan; Late Iron Age/ Early Roman

#### *Open Area 1 (OA1)*

Whilst evidence from the wider area indicates early landscape division dating from the Bronze Age (Booth *et al.* 2011, 209), the evidence from this excavation suggests a largely open landscape persisted west of Hermitage Lane into the first century AD. However, the wood charcoals recovered from the site do illustrate landscape modification in the form of woodland clearance with taxa commonly from deciduous woodland, woodland margins, hedgerows and scrub identified. The charred plant macrofossils further support an image of the landscape as partially cleared by the first century as suggested by the recovery of wild grass seeds, whilst evidence of small-scale crop production is present in the form of charred caryopses of wheat, emmer/spelt and barley.

Pit group G16 is notable in that all pits contained evidence for *in situ* burning, and all were clustered in close proximity to Waterway 1 (W1). Whilst one pit was located east of the waterway, three lay to the west, whilst a further two partially cut W1, indicating that at least some of the activity these pits represent continued after the waterway silted up. This could suggest that whilst the

waterway may have played a role in the initial siting of these pits, it was not critical for their purpose. A very limited finds assemblage was recovered across the features, including only tiny fragments of pottery from environmental residues, along with fire-cracked flint, and flecks of burnt clay. The limited finds assemblage is inconclusive in clarifying the use of these pits, although the residues certainly rule out metalworking as the limited magnetic material could have derived from any high temperature process. The regularity of the pits indicates they are unlikely to be incidental features associated with landscape clearance (Figs. 4 and 5).

Fig. 4 Photograph of pit [1023] G16 looking north

Fig. 5 Photograph of pit [1084] G16 looking south

Two clusters of pits, G13 and G19 comprised predominantly sterile, slightly irregular features and have been interpreted as the remains of rooted out trees. Whilst the features were finds poor, the relationship of pit group G19 to Enclosure 1 suggested they were contemporary. It is possible that these features represent intentional woodland clearance for agricultural purposes, but could equally have related to sourcing fuel for the purpose of pits G16.

A single cremation was identified roughly equidistant between Enclosure 1 and Structure 1, interred within a small pit [1154], in close proximity to W1 (Fig. 6). The remains appear to represent a single, adult individual. The small quantity of bone recovered from the pit suggests that it could represent re-deposited pyre debris and the quantity of charcoal associated with it would support this theory. Just three sherds of pottery of early-mid first century date were recovered from the upper fill of the pit whilst recovered charcoal was predominantly oak.

Fig. 6 Photograph of Late Iron Age/ Early Roman cremation burial [1154]

### *Enclosure 1 (ENC1)*

An enclosure (ENC1), was located within OA1, situated just below the highest point of the natural ridge, on ground gently sloping to the north-east. The enclosure was bounded to the south and east by a single ditch, G11, whilst a possible slightly sinuous narrow waterway, W1 appeared to delineate the westernmost edge. The northern boundary was not visible within the excavated area but those boundaries that were formed some of the most substantial features identified across the site. Considering the degree of horizontal truncation, the enclosure ditches must have originally formed a

fairly substantial barrier. The visible extent of the enclosures boundaries suggests a slightly irregular sub-rectangular form, with a length greater than 33m, and a width of roughly 28m. A finds assemblage including pottery, burnt bone, residual struck flint, amorphous fired clay and four conjoining fragments that make up a briquetage pedestal base were recovered from across the enclosure ditches.

No features were identified internal to the enclosure, potentially indicating a non-domestic function. Given the degree of truncation across the site, however, it is entirely possible that evidence of structures and further associated features had been lost. Indeed, over half of the pottery assemblage, some 542 sherds, were recovered from the enclosure ditch most likely indicating that this was located close to an area of settlement activity and that the pottery had been deliberately deposited as refuse.

An enclosure at Brisley Farm, OA17, was similar both in plan and in its dimensions to Enclosure 1. Whilst the Brisley example was slightly earlier in date, of the Middle/ Late Iron Age, it was noted that there were issues with closely dating the assemblage and it may have been of a slightly earlier or later date (Stevenson, 2013, 50-51). At Brisley, a settlement function was the most obvious, even though (in similarity to the Hermitage Lane example) there were no internal structural features. It was suggested that this may indicate sporadic or seasonal reoccupation of the area and this may also have been the case at Hermitage Lane.

### *Structure 1 (S1)*

Structure 1 was situated externally to Enclosure 1, at a distance of 70m to the south, separated from the enclosure by W1. The possible structure had dimensions of 5.4m x 2.3m and was formed of four postholes arranged in a rectangular form, most likely supporting posts at the four corners (Fig. 7). A very limited finds assemblage was recovered across the structure including just four sherds of pottery considered to be of early-mid first century date. Residues from environmental samples included small quantities of magnetic fines, but all could have derived from any number of high temperature processes including domestic hearths. Given the date and rectangular form of the structure, along with the very limited finds assemblage recovered, it is considered unlikely to have had a domestic function. Rectangular domestic structures of AD first century date are rare, with circular forms far more common (Smith 2014, Smith *et al.* 2016). An agricultural function is the more likely.

Fig. 7 Photograph of Structure 1

A substantial, roughly sub-rectangular pit [1020], measuring 1.8m x 1.4m was located externally and immediately south-east of Structure 1 and was most likely associated with it (Fig. 8). The pit was notable for containing evidence of *in situ* burning and a layer of burnt material including cremated animal bone, unidentifiable cremated bone, burnt clay and charcoal. A strap junction, possibly from a horse harness was discovered in the pits primary fill, potentially deposited intentionally at the base of the feature (Fig. 13). The animal bone was analysed to see if it was possible to identify the taxa and element, unfortunately, the bone was too small and fragmented to provide any definite identification. The possibility remains that the structure may have been some kind of animal pen given the deposition of the strap union within the associated pit, or may have been linked with ritualistic activity, however, the limited finds retrieval limits the certainty of these interpretations.

Fig. 8 Photograph of pit [1020]

## **Period 1, Phase 2**

### *Field System 1 (FS1)*

Following the demise of the Late Iron Age/ Early Roman settlement (no later than AD 50), the use of the landscape to the west of Hermitage Lane changed. A regular arrangement of fields was laid out, notably on a similar alignment to that of the now silted waterway W1, suggesting that markers of the preceding boundary such as a bank or tree-line may have remained visible into Phase 1.2 (Fig. 9). No features could be conclusively associated with the field boundaries, suggesting a decreasing intensity of activity, with the landscape most likely primarily utilised for agriculture, with settlement activity moving further afield. The very limited finds recovered were generally similar to those of Phase 1.1 date, suggesting a proximity in date between the two periods of activity, an interpretation possibly supported by the entire lack of medieval material within the finds assemblage. However, the very limited quantity of pottery recovered across Phase 1.2 (14 sherds), and indeed Phase 1.3 (18 sherds), combined with the small sherd size (none weighing more than 3g), highlights a distinct possibility that the material is residual.

One deposit within field boundary ditch G5, appeared to contain a handmade necked jar, a form more in keeping with Middle Iron Age. Furthermore, the vessel appeared to have been deposited more directly, and was less fragmentary than the majority of the Period 1 finds assemblage. However, it is considered that given the small first century finds assemblage recovered from perpendicular ditch G3, combined with the remainder of the finds assemblage from the site, that this most likely

represented a buried vessel disturbed by the later ditch, rather than an indicator that the field system was of a pre first century AD date.

Fig. 9 Period 1, Phase 2 plan

### **Period 1, Phase 3**

#### *Field System 2 (FS2)*

The Period 1, phase 3 activity was characterised by a second stage of ditch cutting, creating a new field system on a marginally different alignment to that seen in Period 1, phase 2, and similar to that of the present day landscape. Here the boundaries were orientated roughly north-west to south-east (Fig. 10). In Similarity to Period 1, phase 2, no features other than field boundaries could be conclusively dated to this phase, suggesting a continuing use of the landscape for agriculture, with settlement activity remaining further afield. The very limited finds recovered were generally similar to those of the preceding phases, suggesting a proximity in date between all three. However, as noted above, the very limited quantity of pottery recovered across Phase 1.3, combined with the small sherd size highlights a distinct possibility that the material is residual, deriving from Phase 1.1 deposits.

Two ditches (G7 and G8), may indicate maintenance and reuse of this phase of field system. These ditches lay in close proximity and parallel to one another, just 5m apart. Whilst it is possible the ditches formed a trackway or droveway, providing access through the field system, the location of ditch G4, closing the north end of the corridor, combined with the lack of gaps in either ditch for gateways made this interpretation less likely. Alternatively, this may have formed a double ditched boundary with a central bank or hedge.

Fig. 10 Period 1, Phase 3 plan

### **Period 2, Phase 1: Post-medieval**

Little activity of post-medieval date was identifiable within the site area. Just a single ditch G10, was notable, overlying part of Period 1, phase 3 ditch (G4) on the same alignment (Fig. 11). This may indicate some continuity in the layout of the landscape from the Late Iron Age/ Early Roman period to the nineteenth century, although as noted above there are issues with this assertion. A finds assemblage including a copper bullet casing, some iron slag, a post-medieval CBM fragment as well as

a small group of post-medieval pottery sherds was recovered from the ditch, conclusively dating the feature. Furthermore, the boundary is evident on historic mapping from 1860 and only appears to have fallen out of use between the 1970s and 1980s. Several modern tree-throws, probably reminiscent of the earlier orchard, also documented on historic maps, were also identified.

Fig. 11 Period 2 plan; post-medieval

## **The Late Iron Age/Early Roman Pottery** by Anna Doherty

### Introduction and methodology

The Late Iron Age/early Roman assemblage from the site amounts to 542 sherds, weighing 3722g, (302 ENV; 1.76 EVE). The pottery was examined using a x 20 binocular microscope. It was quantified by sherd count, weight, Estimated Vessel Number (ENV) and Estimated Vessel Equivalent (EVE) on *pro forma* records and in an Excel spreadsheet. Fabrics have been defined according to a site-specific fabric type-series in accordance with the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 2010); where possible, suggested concordances to Canterbury Archaeological Trust fabrics codes are also provided (Macpherson Grant et al 1995). Forms were recorded with reference to Thompson's (1982) typology of Late Iron Age/early Roman 'Belgic' pottery in south-east England.

### Site specific fabric definitions

FLIN1 Sparse/moderate, moderately-sorted flint of 0.5-2.5mm in a dense matrix which appears quartz free at x 20 magnification

GLAU1 Common well-sorted glauconite of c.0.4mm and rare large quartz grains up to 1mm

GROG1 Common moderately-sorted grog of 0.5-2mm. Some of the grog-like inclusions can appear leached on surfaces and probably represent calcareous clay or other fine sedimentary inclusions.

GROG2 As GROG1 but with no leached inclusions

QUAR1 Common well-sorted fine quartz 0.1-0.2 with rare larger grains of up to 1mm; rare fine black iron rich inclusions also occur

QUAR2 Sparse/moderate coarse quartz of 0.4-0.6mm; very rare fine grog or leached grog-like inclusions may occur

QUGG1 Moderate coarse quartz of 0.4-0.6mm, rare/sparse glauconite of 0.3-0.4mm and rare/sparse grog of 0.5-1mm

QUGL1 Moderate coarse quartz of 0.4-0.6mm with rare/sparse glauconite of 0.3-0.4mm

SHEL1 Sparse/moderate plate like voids of 1-3mm, indicating the presence of leached shell

Residual earlier pottery

In addition to the material quantified in this report, two small bodysherds, considered residual in pit [1092] (G19; OA2), were associated with a flint-tempered fabric with sparse very ill-sorted inclusions of 1-5mm and a low-fired dense matrix. Fabrics of this type are fairly characteristic of Early Neolithic assemblages though, in the absence of diagnostic features, the sherds cannot be dated with certainty.

Period 1 Late Iron Age/Early Roman

Although period 1 was divided into three stratigraphic phases, the vast majority of the pottery was assigned to period 1.1. There was no strong ceramic evidence that the tiny undiagnostic assemblages from periods 1.2 and 1.3 were of later character and so no attempt has been made to discuss the assemblage separately by phase.

### *Fabrics*

The assemblage can be broken down into six main ware groupings. Fabrics with common grog-tempering (GROG1; GROG2) make up over a third of the assemblage (Table 1); a small minority of these fabrics contain some leached calcareous/argillaceous inclusions (GROG1). Just over a quarter of the total is made up by non-grog-tempered glauconitic wares; of these, sandy wares with fairly sparse glauconite (QUGL1) are more common than very densely glauconitic fabrics (GLAU1). Sparsely grog-tempered wares, also containing quartz and glauconite (QUGG1) constitute a further quarter of the



assemblage. The remainder is made up by non-glaucanitic quartz-rich fabrics (QUAR1, QUAR2), with a few sherds each in flint-tempered and shelly wares (FLIN1; SHEL1).

Fabric	CAT fabric code*	Sherds	Sherds %	Weight (g)	Weight %	ENV	ENV %
Grog-tempered							
GROG1	B2.1	15	2.8%	147	3.9%	9	3.0%
GROG2	B2.1	179	33.0%	1056	28.4%	117	38.7%
Glaucanitic							
GLAU1	B9.1	52	9.6%	373	10.0%	30	9.9%
QUGL1	B9.1	100	18.5%	643	17.3%	54	17.9%
Quartz-rich, glaucanitic, grog-tempered							
QUGG1	B9.4	144	26.6%	997	26.8%	72	23.8%
Quartz-rich							
QUAR1	B8	30	5.5%	411	11.0%	7	2.3%
QUAR2	B9	9	1.7%	31	0.8%	6	2.0%
Flint-tempered							
FLIN1	-	6	1.1%	39	1.0%	4	1.3%
Shelly							
SHEL1	B6	7	1.3%	25	0.7%	3	1.0%
Total		542	100.0%	3722	100.0%	302	100.0%

Table 1: Quantification of Late Iron Age/early Roman pottery fabrics. \*suggested concordance to Canterbury Archaeological Trust codes (Macpherson-Grant *et al* 1995)

### *Forms and decoration*

The assemblage is almost entirely made up by jars and there is a distinct emphasis on handmade forms, lacking well-developed necks or shoulder cordons (Table 2). These are bead-rim, simple everted rim and plain rim forms analogous to Thompson's (1982) types C1 (e.g. Fig. 12, P1-2), C2 (e.g. Fig. 12, P7-8) and C3 (e.g. Fig. 12, P3-5). Necked jars are a much rarer element of the assemblage, with just two examples represented, both of which appear to be wheel-thrown. One of these has quite a poorly-defined, short neck and slight horizontal grooves on the neck and shoulder (Fig. 12, P6) while the other is a wide mouth form with a better defined neck and pronounced shoulder cordons, similar to Thompson's B3-1 (Fig. 12, P9). Several other shoulder sherds with cordons were also noted. Only a few partial rims or other feature sherds from other form types are present (not illustrated). These include several simple bead/everted rim storage jars, part of a base from a Thompson type A pedestal jar and a lid with a slightly corrugated profile.

Decoration is generally rare, occurring on less than 5% of all estimated vessels. Mostly this is combing/furrowing on the body of the hand-made jar forms (e.g. Fig. 12, P1, P4-5). There was one example of distinctive fine comb-stabbing on a bodysherd (not illustrated) which can be paralleled at Snarkhurst Wood (Lyne 2006a, fig 1, no 3).

Form	Thompson (1982) code	ENV	%ENV	EVE	%EVE
Jars: unassigned		2	6.9%	0.09	5.1%
Jar: pedestal					
	A	1	3.4%		
Jars: necked with cordons/rippled shoulders					
	B2-1	1	3.4%	0.11	6.3%
	B3-1	1	3.4%	0.06	3.4%
Jar: bead rim					
	C1	5	17.2%	0.17	9.7%
	C1/C2	1	3.4%	0.05	2.8%
	C1-2	1	3.4%	0.07	4.0%
	C1-4	1	3.4%	0.15	8.5%
Jar: simple short everted rim					
	C2	3	10.3%	0.05	2.8%
	C2-1	1	3.4%	0.25	14.2%
	C2-2	1	3.4%	0.11	6.3%
Jar: plain rim					
	C3	7	24.1%	0.5	28.4%
Jar: storage jar					
	C6-1	3	10.3%	0.07	4.0%
Lid					
	L	1	3.4%	0.08	4.5%
Total		29	100.0%	1.76	100.0%

Table 2: Quantification of Late Iron Age/early Roman pottery forms

## Discussion

### *Stratigraphic context*

Over half of the assemblage was recovered from the fills of ditch G11, forming enclosure ENC1, likely indicating that this was located close to an area of settlement activity and that the pottery had been deliberately deposited as refuse. The rest of the pottery was fairly thinly dispersed across other features, with just one other moderate-sized group from pit [1177] (G21). In general the assemblage

is fairly fragmented with a low average sherd weight, probably indicating material that had been circulating in middens prior to finally being deposited. Just one vessel appears to have been deposited more directly: a fairly substantial portion of a necked jar (Fig. 12, P7), found in ditch [72/004] (G5, FS1) without any other accompanying finds.

#### *Dating and regional parallels*

Elsewhere in the Maidstone area, it has been noted that there is a shift in fabric choices over the course of the later Iron Age; glauconitic fabrics being more dominant in earlier groups. For example, in a small Middle/Late Iron Age assemblage from Hockers Lane (dated c.150-1BC), glauconitic wares made up just over half of the assemblage, with much of the remainder made up by flint-tempered wares; here, grog-tempered fabrics represented just 6% of sherds (Lyne 2006b, table 3). This is quite dissimilar to the fabric composition at Hermitage Lane, where grog-tempered fabrics far out-number wholly glauconitic ones and flint-tempered wares are extremely uncommon.

This may be explained partly in chronological terms – it is likely that the Hermitage Lane assemblage is significantly later than the earliest material from Hockers Lane; however flint-tempered wares also remained common well into the mid First century AD at Snarkhurst Wood (Lyne 2006a, 11), which is only c.7km to the east of Maidstone. In addition, glauconitic wares appeared more common in Conquest period groups at Snarkhurst Wood and in another assemblage from a local site located to the east, at Thurnham (Lyne 2006c). This disparity emphasises the importance of the Medway as barrier between different zones of procurement for raw materials being used by potters and for the distribution of their finished vessels.

Overall, the fabric composition at Hermitage Lane is much more similar to that in the assemblage from the route of the West Malling to Leybourne bypass, located c. 5km to the west, and spanning the First century BC to mid First century AD (Jones 2009, 18-19). There however, it was still noted that more heavily grog-dominated groups appeared to be later than those containing higher proportions of glauconite (ibid, 29). The Hermitage Lane pottery appears to be similar to the later material from West Malling to Leybourne sites and probably therefore belongs predominantly to the early-mid First century AD. The absence of any Roman fabrics and the lack of any table wares like butt-beakers, flagons and platters, even in local tempered fabrics, makes it seem unlikely that activity at Hermitage Lane post-dates c. AD50.

Looking at forms and decoration, there are strong parallels with all of the published assemblages from the sites in the Maidstone area. Hand-made jars of Thompson's class C are common at Snarkhurst Wood, Hockers Lane, Thurnham and the West Malling–Leybourne sites. It can be noted

that most of these assemblages tend to include a slightly greater diversity of jars forms than the current assemblage, including jars with well-defined necks and cordons (e.g. Lyne 2006a, 12, 14, 15, 16, 24; Jones 2009, fig 1.12, no 4, fig 1.13, no 6-9, 13); however, this may only reflect the relatively small size of the current assemblage.

## Illustration Catalogue

### Ditch G11, Enclosure ENC1

P1 Hand-made bead to slightly everted rim jar with combing on exterior (GROG2, Thompson C1-2, fills [1200] & [1201], cut [1199])

P2 Hand-made bead rim jar with internally thickened rim (QUGG1, Thompson C1-4, fill [1201], cut [1199])

P3 Possibly wheel-finished plain profile jar with internally thickened rim and regular horizontal grooves on shoulder (GROG2, Thompson C3, fill [1172], cut [1171])

P4 Hand-made, plain rim jar with slightly incurving profile and defined zone of horizontal combing below rim (QUGG1, Thompson C3, fill [1184], cut [1183])

P5 Hand-made, plain rim jar with slightly incurving profile and combing on exterior (GLAU1, Thompson C3, fill [1200], cut [1199])

P6 Possibly wheel-thrown jar with short poorly-defined neck and slight shoulder ripples/grooves (QUAR1, related to Thompson B2-1, fill [1206], cut [1205])

### Other features

P7 Hand-made bead/everted rim jar with slight internally thickened rim (QUAR1; Thompson C2-1, fill [72/005], ditch [72/004], G5, FS1)

P8 Hand-made sinuous everted rim jar with possible trace of external combing (QUGG1, ?related to Thompson C2-2, fill [1022], pit [1020], G2, OA1)

P9 Wheel-thrown, wide-mouth jar with multiple shoulder cordons (QUGG1, Thompson B3-1, fill [1178], pit [1177], G21, OA1)

Fig. 12 Illustrations of Late Iron Age/ Early Roman pottery

### **Burnt Bone** by Dr Paola Ponce, Gemma Ayton and Lucy Sibun

A small quantity of burnt bone was recovered from a series of nine Late Iron Age and Early Roman pit fills ([1022], [1025], [1026], [1027], [1033], [1042], [1156], [1190], and [1200]). The assemblages included both animal and human bone as well as a quantity of unidentified material.

#### *Results*

Unfortunately, positively identified human remains were only recovered from Roman phase 2 pit [1154], the primary fill of which ([1154]) produced a total of 81.3 grams of bone; 23.0 grams from hand collection and a further 58.3 grams from the environmental sample. This quantity of bone represents approximately 5% of the average complete adult cremation, based on data from modern crematoria (McKinley 1993). Fragments of skull and lower limb are identifiable in the assemblage with skull fragments forming the majority of both the largest fraction (<8mm) and the hand collected material. The largest individual fragment is from the skull and measures a maximum of measures 29mm.

The relative size of the fragments suggests an adult individual but unfortunately, neither age nor sex can be estimated more accurately. There is no indication that more than one individual is represented and no evidence for pathology was noted. The consistent off-white colour of the bone fragments suggests that they result from an efficient cremation process.

#### *Discussion*

The identified remains from pit [1154], (fill [1156]) appear to represent a single, adult individual. The small quantity of bone recovered from the pit suggests that it could represent re-deposited pyre debris and the quantity of charcoal associated with it would support this theory. Certainly, as the primary fill of a pit, post-depositional processes are less likely to have had an adverse effect on the quantity of remains recovered.

It is unfortunate that the archaeological evidence regarding the funerary practices carried out at the site is limited, mostly due to the degree of fragmentation and preservation of the burnt material recovered. Although [1154] was the only pit to contain positively identified human bone, other similar pits also produced charcoal and burnt bone and it is therefore possible that they are all related to the funerary process.

The limited information available for this site makes inter-site comparisons difficult but the Roman cemetery at Pepper Hill, one of the largest of this date in Kent, provides some useful comparative data (Boston and Witkin 2006, McKinley 2006). The presence of burnt bone in re-deposited pyre debris was also noted also at Pepper Hill and although this was mostly from the backfills of un-urned cremation burials, it was also recorded as lone deposits in other features (Biddulph 2006; 11, McKinley 2006; 34). Such occurrences may simply represent the clearing up process or perhaps closure of the burial process (McKinley 2006:34). Burnt animal bone is also a common feature in cremation related deposits and was recorded in number of features at Pepper Hill, where it is interpreted as probable food offerings to the deceased (Biddulph 2006; 11).

### **The strap union** by Trista Clifford

The basal fill of pit [1020], fill [1027] (G2 ST1) produced a late Iron Age – early Roman copper alloy strap junction, of Taylor and Brailsford Type I (*ibid.* 1985, 247; Fig. 13). The junction is formed from two co-joining solid roundels that form a figure of eight. The roundels are domed on the obverse with a flat reverse and flanked at either side by a narrowed vertical strap bar, sub-circular in section, set between transversely set disc shaped terminals. Each terminal is decorated with a circumferential moulded line, bifurcated at both ends to produce a V-shape. This example is unusually solid; Type I strap unions often exhibit perforated roundels or concave reverses. It is most closely paralleled by examples from Bury Hill camp and Maiden Castle in Hampshire, although both of these lack the transverse terminals. More recently, an example from Chartham recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (Reference KENT-FFBCB0) also shares similarities.

Strap unions are, as the name suggests, objects used to join two straps. They are particularly associated with horse equipment, and are often found in chariot burials, although may also have been used to fasten clothing (*ibid.* 271). They have a largely south-eastern distribution from Wessex to the Humber estuary in the north of England.

Fig. 13 Illustration of Late Iron Age/ Early Roman strap union

## **The Wood Charcoal** by Mariangela Vitolo

### *Introduction and methodology*

Five contexts were selected for charcoal analysis. The chosen samples originated from pit features, including a possible cooking and a cremation pit, within Open Area 1 and dated to Period 1.1. The following samples and contexts were the subject of analysis:

- <6> [1022], pit [1020]
- <7> [1025], cooking pit [1023]
- <10> [1033], pit [1030]
- <11> [1042], pit [1040]
- <14> [1156], cremation pit [1154]

Charcoal analysis was carried out with the aim of answering research questions regarding fuel selection strategies and local vegetation environment in the Late Iron Age/ Early Roman phase. In addition, evidence for possible woodland management techniques was looked at, although this type of information is not always reliably inferred from carbonised wood assemblages. Finally, a more specific revised research aim was to better understand the use and significance of the pit features the samples were extracted from and if different fuel selection strategies were in use for specific purposes (*e.g.* cooking pits vs cremations).

For the purpose of full analysis, one hundred charcoal fragments were extracted at random from each examined sample and fractured by hand along three planes (transverse, radial and tangential) according to standardised procedures (Gale & Cutler 2000, Hather 2000). Specimens were viewed under a stereozoom microscope for initial grouping, and an incident light microscope at magnifications up to 400x to facilitate identification of the woody taxa present. Taxonomic identifications were assigned by comparing suites of anatomical characteristics visible with those documented in reference atlases (Hather 2000, Schoch *et al.* 2004, Schweingruber 1990). Genera, family or group names have been given where anatomical differences between taxa are not significant enough to permit more detailed identification. Notes have also been made on, presence of round wood, knot wood, and state of preservation. Taxonomic identifications of charcoal are recorded in Table 3, and nomenclature used follows Stace (1997). Latin names are given below and, with the exception of the Maloideae group, are subsequently referred to by their English common names.

## Results

### Summary of woody taxa present

Recorded anatomical characters are consistent with those of the following taxa:

Fagaceae	<i>Quercus</i> sp. (oak)
Betulaceae	<i>Corylus avellana</i> L. hazel. A small number of fragments could not be identified further than <i>Corylus avellana</i> / <i>Alnus</i> sp. hazel/alder, due to poor preservation
Rosaceae:	Prunoideae subfamily <i>Prunus</i> sp., cherry/blackthorn;  <i>Prunus spinosa/domestica</i> , blackthorn/plum  Maloideae subfamily, including <i>Sorbus</i> sp. (rowan, whitebeam, service), <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> (hawthorn), <i>Malus</i> sp. (apple) and <i>Pyrus</i> sp. (pear). These taxa cannot always be distinguished on the basis of their wood anatomy.
Aceraceae	<i>Acer campestre</i> L. field maple
Oleaceae	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> L. ash

### Preservation

The charcoal assemblage was generally well preserved and the vast majority of the fragments were identifiable. In pit [1023] however, 11% of charcoal fragments were unidentifiable due to vitrification. This happens when the wood anatomy fuses; displaying a glossy appearance and it is pre-depositional. It has long been linked to the use of high temperatures, although recent experimental work has shown that high temperatures alone are not enough to cause charcoal to become vitrified (McParland *et al* 2010). A secure cause is not yet known, but it is likely that other factors (e.g. prolonged burning, presence of resin on the wood or external material falling on it prior or during burning) might contribute with high temperatures to give charcoal a glassy appearance. Vitrification



was also noted on a number of fragments from pit [1154], although in this case it did not hinder identification. In the latter feature, vitrification could have been caused by fat leaking from the bone, as well as from high temperature and prolonged burning.

In addition to vitrification, distortions of the wood anatomy and radial cracks were noted on several fragments. On the other hand, post-depositional sediment encrustations were not noted; perhaps indicating that the water table level was relatively stable in the examined period.

## *Discussion*

### *Fuel selection*

The charcoal assemblage from Hermitage Lane, Maidstone, is limited to a restricted range of taxa. This suggests that a strict fuel selection was in use at the site. The limited range of woody taxa could also suggest that the wood derived from a small number of charring events or *in situ* burning, as otherwise a more mixed assemblage would have been expected.

All of the taxa present make excellent fuel and are likely to have been selected for this particular purpose. Oak, which dominates most of the assemblage, is also great for timber and its predominance in all contexts could indicate a lack of pressure on woodland resources as oak wood is generally preferred for construction purposes when its availability is low. Ash and hazel are also excellent burning woods. Field maple works less well as fuel (Taylor 1981), but it might have been readily available on nearby calcareous soils. The range of taxa was pretty similar in all contexts and no major differences were noted between pits destined to different uses. For example, cremation pit [1154] was equally dominated by oak, which is a common choice for this feature type. Other taxa appearing in smaller quantities in this context are likely to have been used for tinder. These include cherry/blackthorn and Maloideae. Some taxa within the last group are known to produce a pleasant smell when burning and this could have been the reason behind their choice in this particular context. A smaller amount of Maloideae fragments were also found in two pits containing unidentified burnt bone. If these bones were human, then both pits would contain material deriving from cremations and it would indicate a link between feature type and wood taxa. However, these woody taxa were not identifiable beyond sub-family level and it is unknown whether wood from the same trees were used. Oak was also the fuel of choice in the majority of contemporary cremations at sites along the High Speed One (Booth *et al* 2011), despite a small number being dominated by ash, gorse/broom or containing a mixture of taxa. Oak and ash are the most common choices for cremations also outside of Kent, because their sturdiness makes them ideal for the pyre structure (*e.g.* Challinor 2007).

The frequent use of round wood indicates the exploitation of small branches or twigs for fuel. Such fragments could have originated from coppices and most of the taxa represented in the assemblage do feature often in woodlands that are managed with coppices. However, the stems were not complete and the assemblage was not large enough to investigate the use of woodland management strategies.

#### *Vegetation environment*

Archaeological charcoal assemblages rarely reflect the range of flora that was available in the local landscape, as the reasons behind fuel choices can be varied and complex. Particularly in an assemblage where the range of taxa is so limited, due to a strict fuel selection, we can expect a minor part of the local vegetation environment to be represented. The identified taxa grow in deciduous woodland, woodland margins, hedgerows and scrub. The absence of taxa of riverine or aquatic environments at a site at the confluence of two rivers further indicates a fuel selection against trees whose wood would not have burnt well, as such taxa are likely to have grown in the local environment.

	<b>Sample Number</b>	6	7	10	11	14
	<b>Context</b>	1022	1025	1033	1042	1156
	<b>Parent Context</b>	1020	1023	1030	1040	1154
	<b>Context / deposit type</b>	pit	pit	pit	pit	pit
	<b>Comment</b>		vitrification common	radial cracks common	maple and hazel mostly rw fragments. Some distortion noted	mostly rw fragments, vitrification common
Taxonomic Identifications	English Name					
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak	56	76	100	32	66
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	ash	3				
Maloideae group	hawthorn, whitebeam, rowan, apple, pear	8 (3 rw)	3 (1 rw)			29
<i>Acer campestre</i>	field maple	6	5		23	
cf <i>Acer campestre</i>	Field maple		1			
Prunoideae <i>Prunus</i> sp.	Cherry/blackthorn					3
<i>Prunus</i> cf. <i>avium</i>	wild cherry					
<i>Prunus</i> cf. <i>spinosa/domestica</i>	sloe/damson/bullace					2
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	hazel	19 (6 rw)			45	
cf <i>Corylus avellana</i>	hazel		1			
<i>Corylus/Alnus</i>	hazel/alder	2				
indet. Distorted		6	11			
indet. Root?			3			

**Table 3:** Charcoal identifications from Hermitage Lane. Key: cf = compares with, rw = round wood, indet.= indeterminate

## Charred Plant Remains By Mariangela Vitolo

Eighteen bulk soil samples were taken from Period 1 features including pits, ditches and postholes in order to recover ecofacts and small artefacts. The entire flots (or 100 ml subsamples for the largest ones) were scanned under a stereozoom microscope at 7-45x magnifications and their contents recorded. Identifications of macrobotanical remains have been made through comparison with published reference atlases (Cappers et al. 2006, Jacomet 2006, NIAB 2004), and nomenclature used follows Stace (1997). This paragraph presents a summary of the results of the post-excavation assessment of the environmental samples. Residue and flot quantifications are available in the site's archive.

Charred macrobotanical remains were generally scarce and represented a background signature. Most of the samples produced charcoal rich flots, although contamination with uncharred/modern material was noted. Charred crop remains were sporadic, including both seeds and chaff. Namely, caryopses of wheat (*Triticum* sp.), including emmer/spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*) and barley (*Hordeum* sp.) were recorded. Cereal chaff included around ten glume bases of emmer/spelt, spelt (*Triticum spelta*) and one of possible emmer (*Triticum cf dicoccum*) from ditch [1189]. These findings gave a more reliable indication of the possible wheat species present. Grass caryopses were the most common type of wild seeds, including a possible oat (*Avena* sp.). Oats cannot be identified as belonging to a wild or cultivated species on the basis of the caryopses. Other wild taxa included stitchworts (*Stellaria* sp.), goosefoots/oraches (*Chenopodium/Atriplex* sp.) and possible pale persicaria (*Persicaria cf lapathifolia*). The heavy residues yielded remnants of nuts and fruits, such as hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell fragments and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) fruit stones.

The charred plant remains from Hermitage Lane do not contribute significant information on diet and agrarian economy at the site. The presence of barley and glume wheats, including definite spelt and perhaps emmer, is consistent with what is currently known of agrarian farming in modern day Kent in the examined period. In this area, the use of emmer wheat is for example known to have continued well into the Late Iron Age and Roman period, much longer than anywhere else (Campbell 2017).

## DISCUSSION

### Period 1, phase 1

Whilst the area around Maidstone is rich in archaeological sites, with prehistoric settlement of both Neolithic and Bronze Age date known (Booth *et al.* 2011; Ferguson 2007; ASE 2005), the site west of Hermitage Lane yielded only limited evidence for a human presence in the vicinity at this time. Similarly, evidence of early landscape enclosure of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date is recorded to the east of Hermitage Lane (HER Ref: TQ 75 NW 141; TQ 7328 5610), but no such evidence was recovered within this site. However, regional trends suggest it is not unusual for Late Iron Age/Early Roman sites to have little correlation to earlier settlements, with a noticeable discontinuity generally seen between Early/Mid Iron Age sites and those of later date, potentially explaining the lack of earlier features (Paul Booth *et al.* 2011, 259).

The evidence attached with the initial occupation of the site is limited, however, potential enclosure of settlement activity, within a largely open landscape is the most likely interpretation. The environmental evidence indicates a partly wooded landscape, with evidence for both pastoral and arable farming. This is generally in keeping with evidence from contemporaneous rural settlements within the region (Paul Booth *et al.* 2011, 252). Furthermore, the proximity of the possible settlement identified during this project, to the known settlement east of Hermitage Lane (HER Ref: TQ 75 NW 141; TQ 7328 5610) further supports the idea of increasing settlement density and expansion in this period (Booth *et al.* 2011, 254).

Isolated burials are not unknown in the vicinity, with a Romano-British cremation recorded less than 1km away to the north-east of the site, at Maidstone Hospital Renal Unit (HER Ref: TQ 75 NW 350). A burial of similar date is recorded to the east of the former Chapel of St Lawrence (TQ 75 NW 15). Whilst the example west of Hermitage Lane is of a slightly earlier date, its location in relation to the settlement enclosure could suggest it is aligned with Roman rural burial practices. Backland graves in farmstead contexts are fairly common occurrences in southern England in the Romano British period, making up 21% of total burials, usually located on outer settlement boundaries, trackways and field systems. Whilst inhumation is more common, making up 62% on known burials, cremation is certainly not unusual. As such, the example at Hermitage Lane, whilst of Late Iron Age/Early Roman date is in keeping with other roughly contemporary rural burial practices (Smith 2013).

### **Period 1, phases 2 and 3**

The intensity of activity within the site area becomes noticeably less following Period 1.1, with the creation of a regular field-scape. This is somewhat divergent to the general trend in the local and regional rural settlement pattern, with the majority of Late Iron Age/Earliest Roman settlement sites demonstrating continuity into the latter half of the first and early second centuries. However, it should be noted that a rigid characterisation of rural Late Iron Age/Early Roman settlements in this area of Kent is yet to be undertaken (Booth *et al.* 2011, 264). As such, it is possible that the short duration and abandonment of the settlement west of Hermitage Lane is not unusual. Furthermore, without a more synthesised understanding of the wider landscape it is currently not viable to hypothesise as to why this occurred.

The evidence from this site, when combined with that from the east of Hermitage Lane, (Stevens 2014), does, however, further suggest that the Wealden Greensand belt, within which the site is situated, was also a well organised, widely-settled landscape by the first century, with large areas given over to agriculture, similarly to the better understood areas of the North Downs a short distance to the east, and both the northern and southern coastal regions of Kent (Booth *et al.* 2011, 254). This would also be in keeping with the Low Weald in the first century, which is increasingly considered a well-utilised area, characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern with large tracts given over to agriculture (Margetts 2018).

### **Period 2, phase 1**

Little activity of post-medieval date was identifiable within the site area. Just a single ditch may indicate some continuity in the layout of the landscape from the Late Iron Age/Early Roman period to the nineteenth century.

Evidence from the Low Weald has shown that in some areas Roman rural land use and field patterns have contributed to the historic character of medieval, later medieval and modern fields (Rippon *et al.* 2015, 165-6, Margetts, 2018). This could be the case at Hermitage Lane, indicating a similar trend on the Greensand geology, with Late Iron Age/ Early Roman field systems influencing the layout of the post-medieval landscape. However, without further investigation in the vicinity, the issues with securely dating both intermediate Phases 1.2 and 1.3 severely limits the degree to which this site can currently aid in the understanding of this particular area of research.

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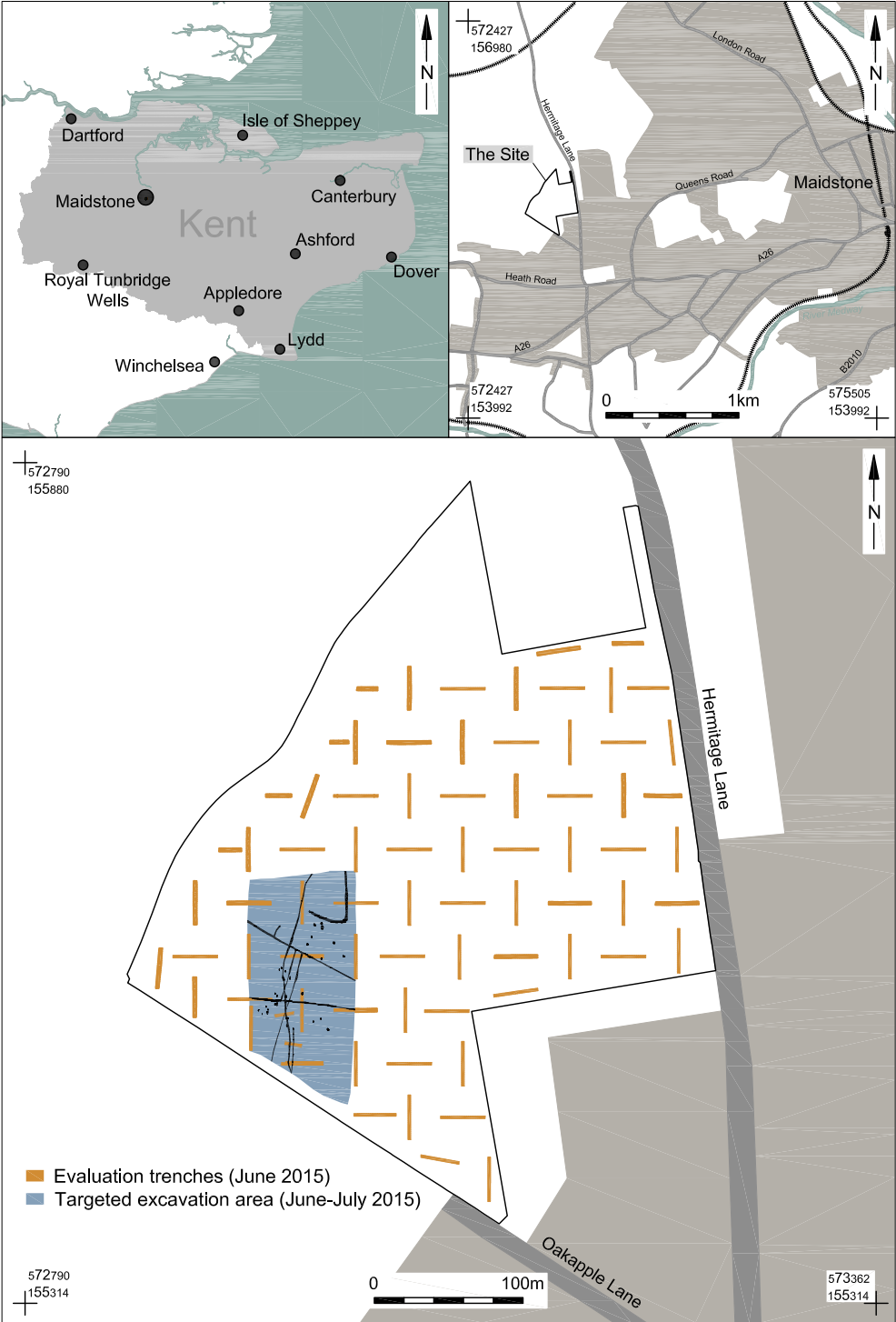
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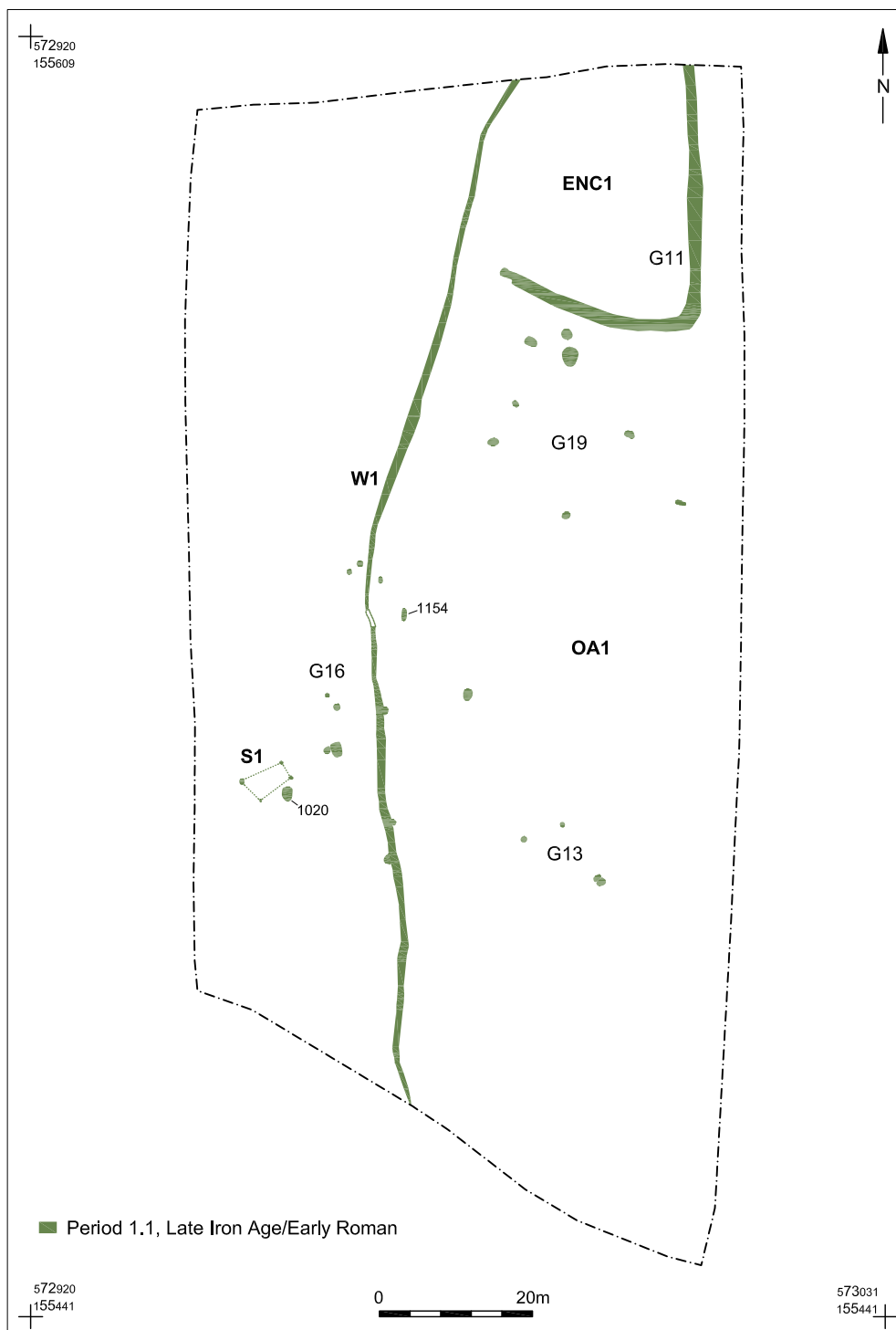
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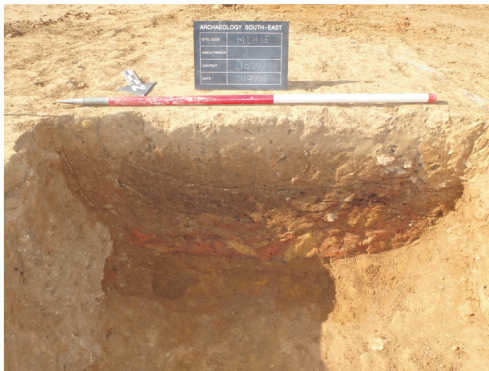












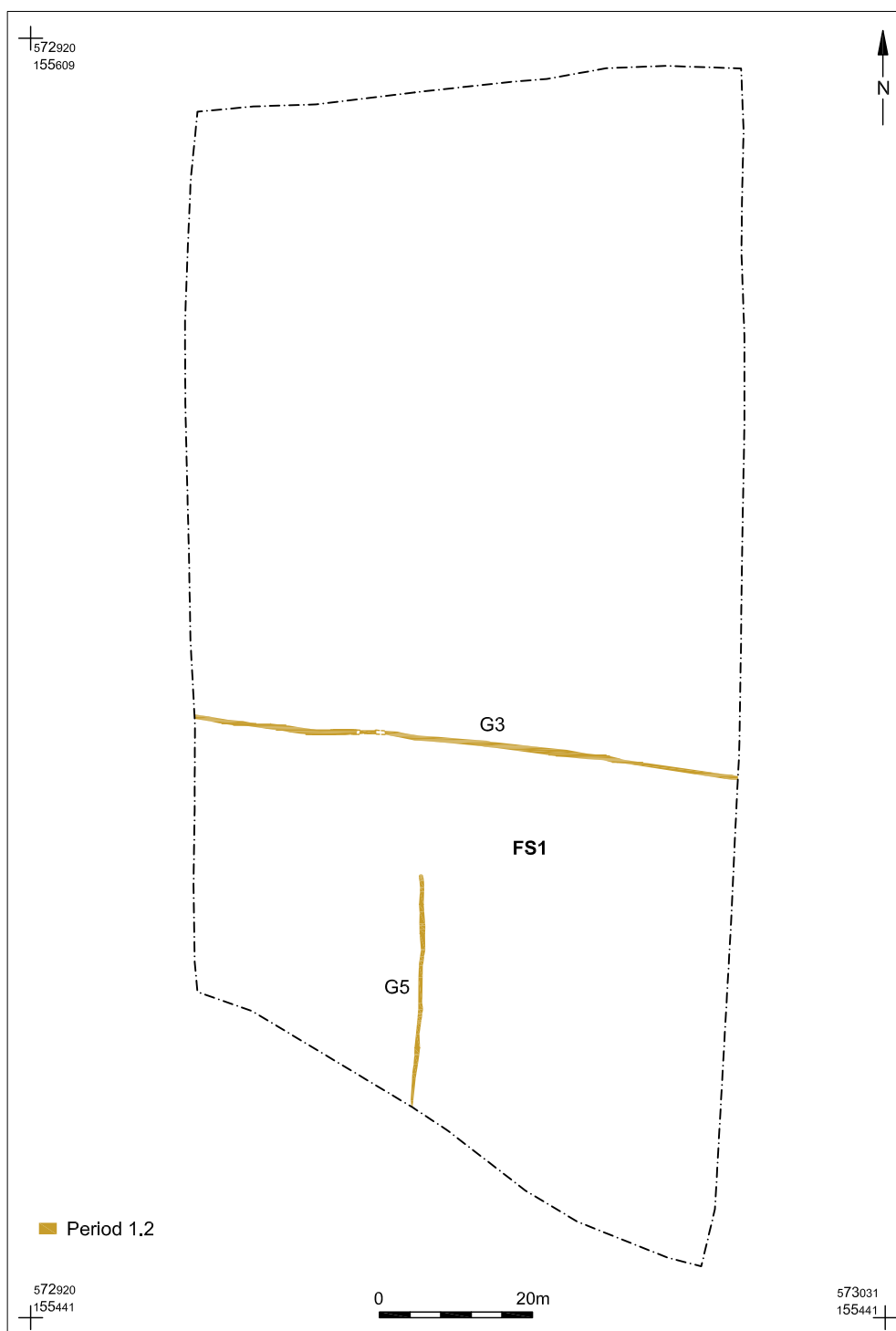
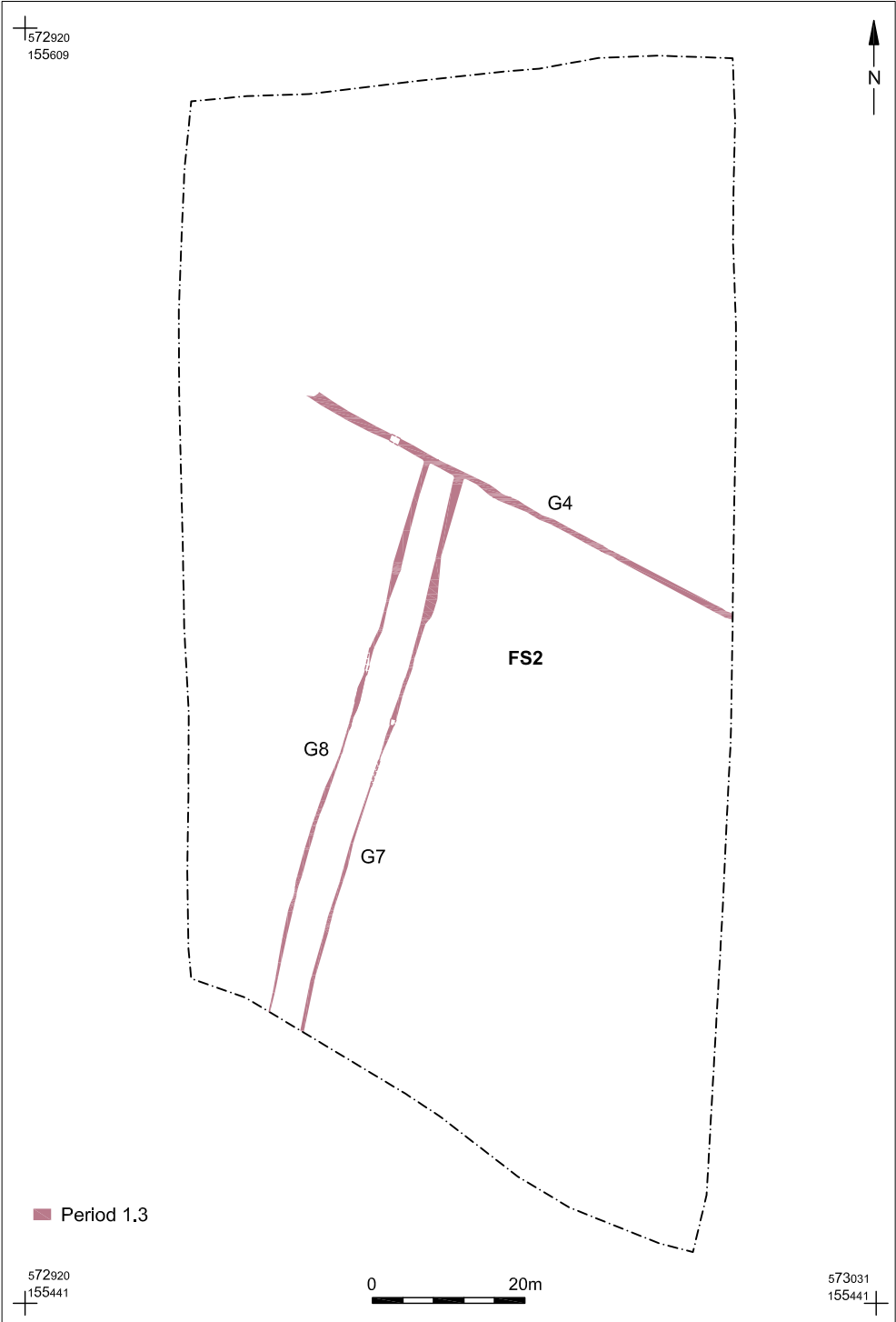
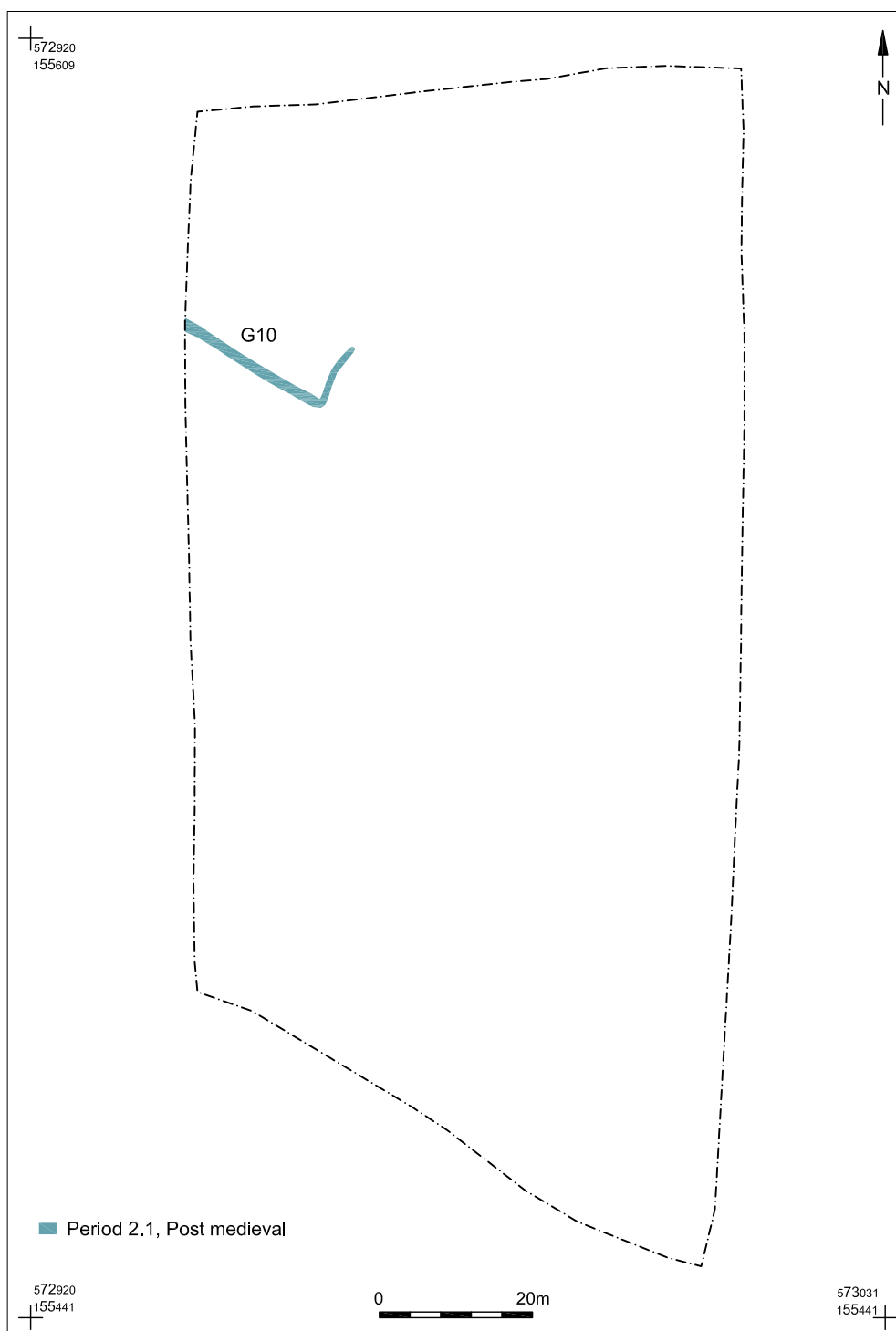
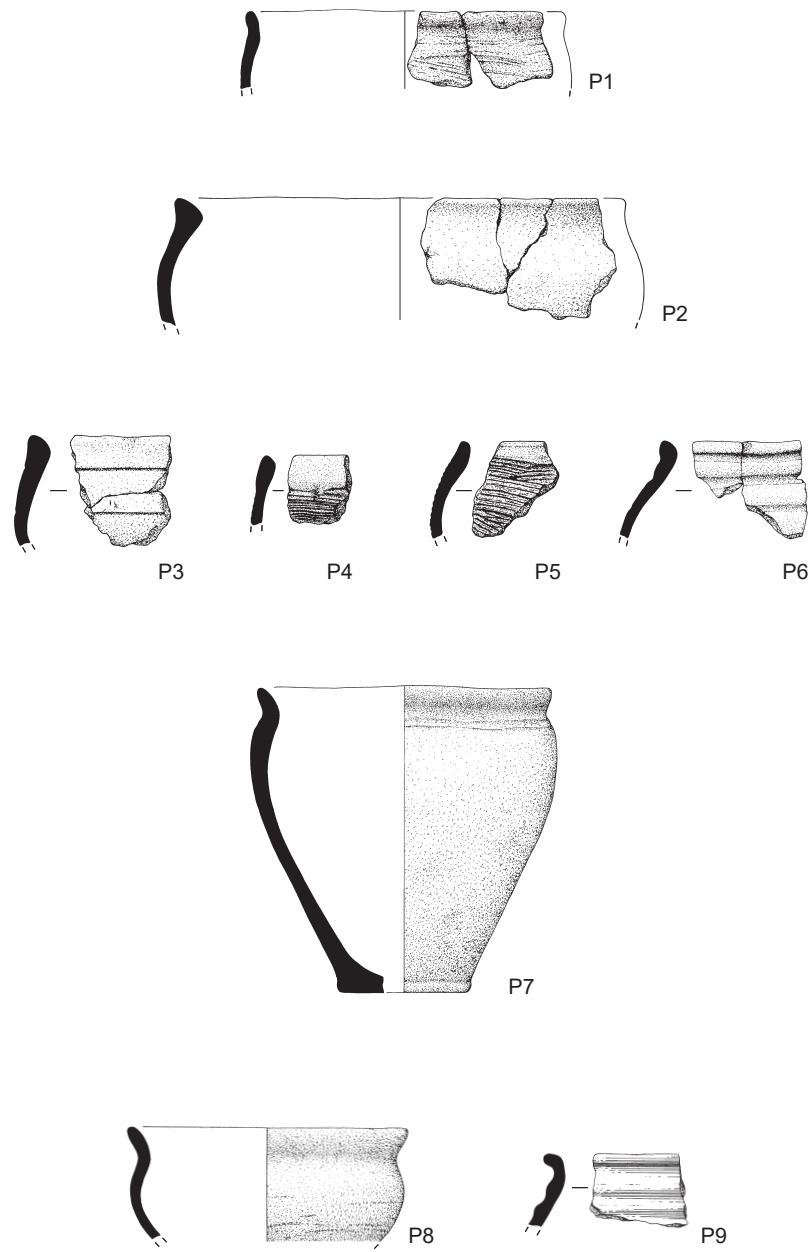


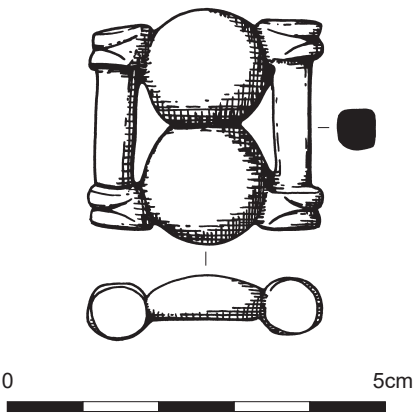
Fig.10







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**Sussex Office**

Units 1 & 2  
2 Chapel Place  
Portslade  
East Sussex BN41 1DR  
tel: +44(0)1273 426830  
email: [ase@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ase@ucl.ac.uk)  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology-south-east](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology-south-east)

**Essex Office**

27 Eastways  
Witham  
Essex  
CM8 3YQ  
tel: +44(0)1376 331470  
email: [ase@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ase@ucl.ac.uk)  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology-south-east](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology-south-east)

**London Office**

Centre for Applied Archaeology  
UCL Institute of Archaeology  
31-34 Gordon Square  
London WC1H 0PY  
tel: +44(0)20 7679 4778  
email: [ase@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ase@ucl.ac.uk)  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/centre-applied-archaeology](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/centre-applied-archaeology)

