

Bronze Age barrow and Anglo-Saxon cemetery: Archaeological excavations on land adjacent to Upthorpe Road, Stanton, Suffolk

November 2013 – March 2014

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Project background

Archaeological investigation ahead of residential development was undertaken on land adjacent to Upthorpe Road, Stanton between November 2013 and March 2014 by MOLA. The scope of these works was set out in a brief prepared by Suffolk County Council (Tipper 2011) and a WSI (NA 2011) and was undertaken in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012, now MHCLG 2019).

Prior evaluation of the development area had uncovered evidence for a Bronze Age ditch and a small number of undated burials (Brown and Yates 2011). Subsequent excavation revealed a significant archaeological site far in excess of what was expected. Over the course of the five month long excavation, the remains of a prehistoric round barrow and a cemetery containing the remains of 67 inhumations with associated grave goods were carefully investigated.

Subsequent post-excavation analysis has sought to place the discovery in its regional context and to expand what we know about the prehistoric remains for the area as well as the early origins of Stanton. This text documents the discovery of the site and the results of the detailed analysis of the archaeological features, skeletal assemblage and other artefacts.

Location and topography

The site was located on the east side of Stanton, Suffolk, between c38-45m above Ordnance Datum on a gentle west facing slope. It is bounded by Upthorpe Road to the south, residential properties to the west and arable fields to the north and east.

Geology

by Steve Critchley

The bedrock is Cretaceous chalk, which in this area comprises a mixture of three or four lithological units. There are no actual mapped areas of glacial till (Lowestoft Till) on the site, but this does occur a mile or two to the east. The sand and gravels are again not mapped as occurring on site, but they do outcrop in the eastern part of the site.

These are fluvial gravels belonging to the Kesgrave Catchment Subgroup and are dated to the early to mid-Pleistocene, deposited as Terrace Gravels by the pre-glacial river Thames. These were formally called the Kesgrave Sands and Gravels prior to a major overhaul of terminology for rock units by the British Geological Survey (BGS) over recent years.

Observations made during the trial trench evaluation identified the 1m or so of periglacial deposits formed during the Devensian Glaciation and its associated Arctic Tundra climate. The result is a locally very complex series of mixed sands and fine to coarse gravels, clays and chalky clays reworked by ground ice over a long period of time and added to by windblown fine sands and silts. There were no observable ice wedge casts and little in the way of periglacial features except the machined off tops of involution features. This would not be surprising with chalk bedrock as this is susceptible to solution on mass particularly by the aggressive groundwaters in the periglacial active layer and by later rainwater penetration.

The substrate at Stanton was seen to be highly variable due to a combination of periglacial activity and the close proximity of Terrace gravels of early to mid-Pleistocene age as well the localised development of lower permeability clay rich putty chalk.

Historical and archaeological background

An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken by CgMs Heritage (Smith 2010) which established that no known archaeological remains were recorded within the development area, although activity was recorded from the immediate locale around the development area. The results of the desk-based assessment are discussed below. The wider context for the Bronze Age and early medieval period has been explored in Chapter 8.

Prehistoric

Aerial photography has identified a possible ring ditch (SNT004) 500m north of the development area. Iron Age pottery has been found within Stanton. During excavation of cottage foundation trenches pottery sherds were found at Duke Street (SNT005) to the west of the development site. Pottery was also recovered from Potters Lane (SNT022) to the south.



Scale 1:25,000

Figure 1.1. Site location

Roman

A housing development in the 1960s located and destroyed a large Roman mosaic (SNT044) 100m west of the development. Metal detecting finds from the vicinity include a coin and figurine found near High Wood (SNT041). Pottery sherds have also been found at Potters Lane (SNT022), south of the development.

Early medieval

Evidence for early medieval funerary activity was considered from a wider area in an attempt to fully contextualise the cemetery at Stanton. What follows is a summary of the most relevant nearby discoveries. Much of the evidence for Anglo-Saxon burial sites within the wider environs of Stanton come from accidental discoveries through mining or other digging activities. The sites discussed are shown on Fig 8.4.

In the 18th century two Anglo-Saxon cremation urns were found near Botesdale, c8km east-north-east of Stanton (BOT004). Near Ixworth Thorpe, c5.5km west of Stanton, two long brooches were found in conjunction with pottery from cinerary urns (IXT007).

In the 1840s near the village of Bardwell, c2km west of Stanton, iron weapons and shield bosses were recovered in an area where it had previously been noted that a ‘good many skeletons have been discovered in the last 40 years’.

To the west, near Ixworth, a burial found in 1868 contained a pair of *in situ* cruciform brooches on the shoulders of a skeleton. Further discoveries were made in this area in 1871 when an iron sword, spearhead, knife, and three shield bosses were recovered. More recently metal detecting of this area has produced finds including the foot of a cruciform brooch, a fragment of a gilded square-headed brooch, a sword, and a gilded bronze human

figurine possibly dated to the 8th century AD (IXW005). More recently, at the same site, three Anglo-Saxon graves dated to the 5th-6th centuries were discovered during trial trench evaluation of land at Riverside Paddocks, Stow Road Ixworth. The site lay 75m north of the Black Bourn River. The full extent and density of the cemetery was not determined. The skeletal remains were left in-situ and the grave goods were recovered but not fully analysed (Thompson 2001).

Gravel extraction near Badwell Ash (c5km to the south-east of Stanton) in 1922 uncovered 30-40 skeletons, some with associated shield bosses, spear heads, and knives and a single 5th-century urned cremation was also found (BAA008).

A possible Anglo-Saxon burial was excavated on a ridge between Calke Wood and Walnut Tree Farm, c5.5km east of Stanton, in 1936 by Basil Brown (RKN012). An inhumation burial was found with a knife and an iron object.

Other funerary evidence in the form of artefact discoveries highly indicative of Anglo-Saxon burial have been found at a number of locations in the area. The Ixworth Cross is a good example of this and is discussed further below. A scatter of finds at Barnham, c11.6km north-west of Stanton, (BAR034) comprised a wrist clasp fragment, a small square headed brooch and a gold thrymsa. Metal detecting near Hinderclay recovered a group of objects of including brooches, wrist clasp, buckles, strap ends, and a girdle hanger (HNY017).

At a site known as Crows Field, in Ixworth Thorpe, a Frankish type carinated sheet-bronze bowl was found and a group of finds including an iron spear, sword and shield boss indicated the location of an associated Anglo-Saxon burial (IXT002). The same site also contained burials dated to the Roman period.

Medieval

A coin of Athelstan of East Anglia was found 1km west of the development site and represents the only indication of Anglo-Saxon activity.

Two historic churches are extant in Stanton. The former Church of St John the Baptist, which dates to the 13th century, stands on the northern edge of Stanton, now largely a roofless shell (Grade II* Listed, NHLE: 1031224). In the centre of the settlement is the 14th-century Church of All Saints (Grade II*, NHLE: 1376971). Outside of the development area fieldwalking surveys have identified scatters of medieval pottery to the south (SNT023). To the north-west pottery and coins have been also been found (SNT005).

The Grade II* Listed Upthorpe Windmill (NHLE: 1376972) is located c150m east of the site. The mill was thought to have been constructed in 1751 and moved to its present site in 1820, but the English Heritage List Description suggests it is dated 1807 and was restored in c1939 (HE 2020).

Previous archaeological work

A desk-based assessment of the site has been undertaken and it was also subject to a programme of trial trench evaluation in early 2011 (Brown and Yates 2011). A total of 21 trenches were excavated across the development area. The evaluation identified a ditch of possible late Bronze Age date. Human remains of two individuals were interred within the upper fill. A further undated burial was also discovered in Trench 17 (1705). The burial had been placed in an oval grave cut and laid in a crouched position.

All features identified by the evaluation were confined to the south-western corner of the development.

BRONZE AGE BARROW AND ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY

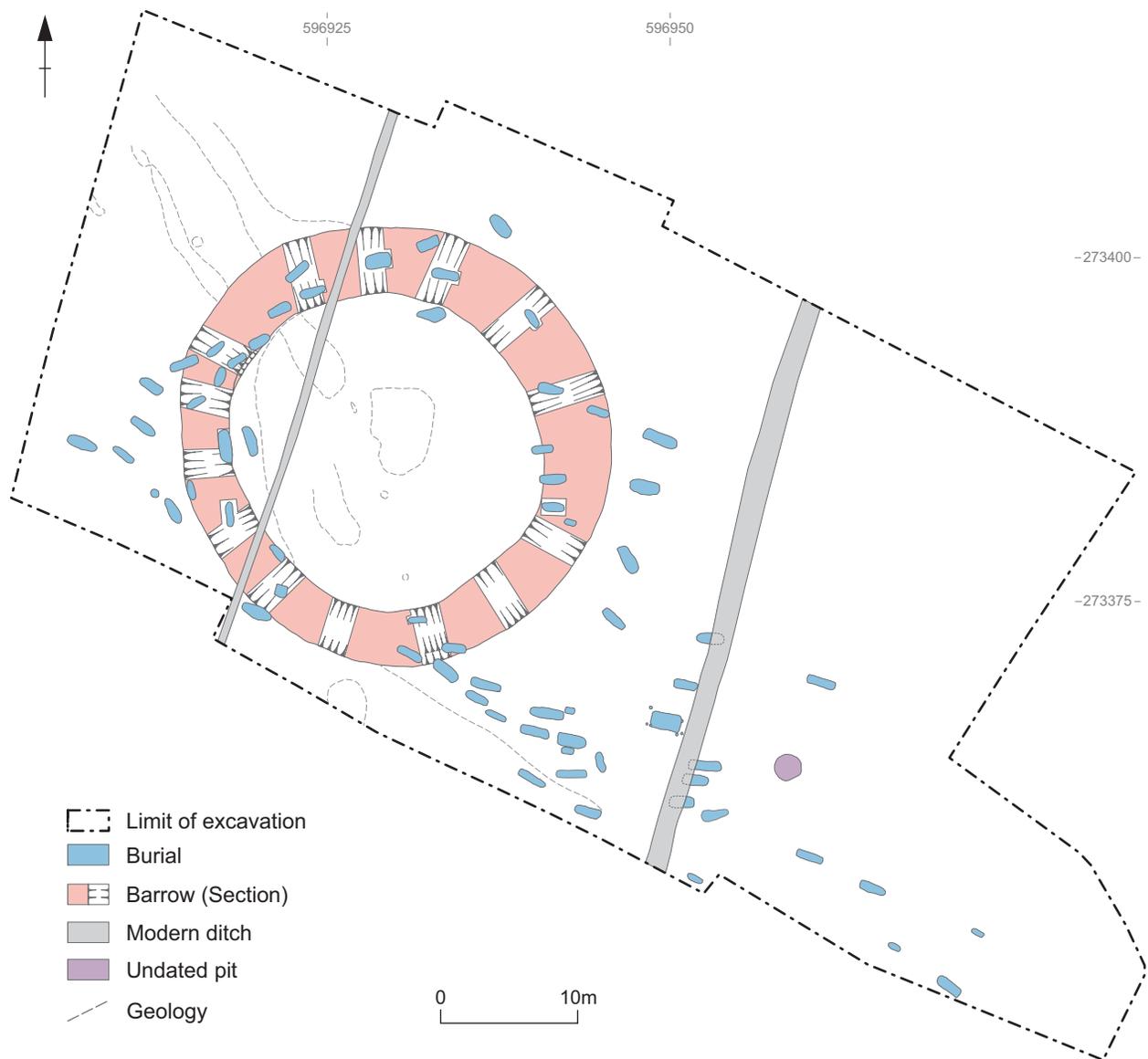


Figure 1.2. All features plan