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The Lands of Ancient Lothian

Interpreting the Archaeology of the A1

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Chapter 5

The uses of bones and beads: Excavations at Eweford West and Pencraig Wood (2000–1120 BC)

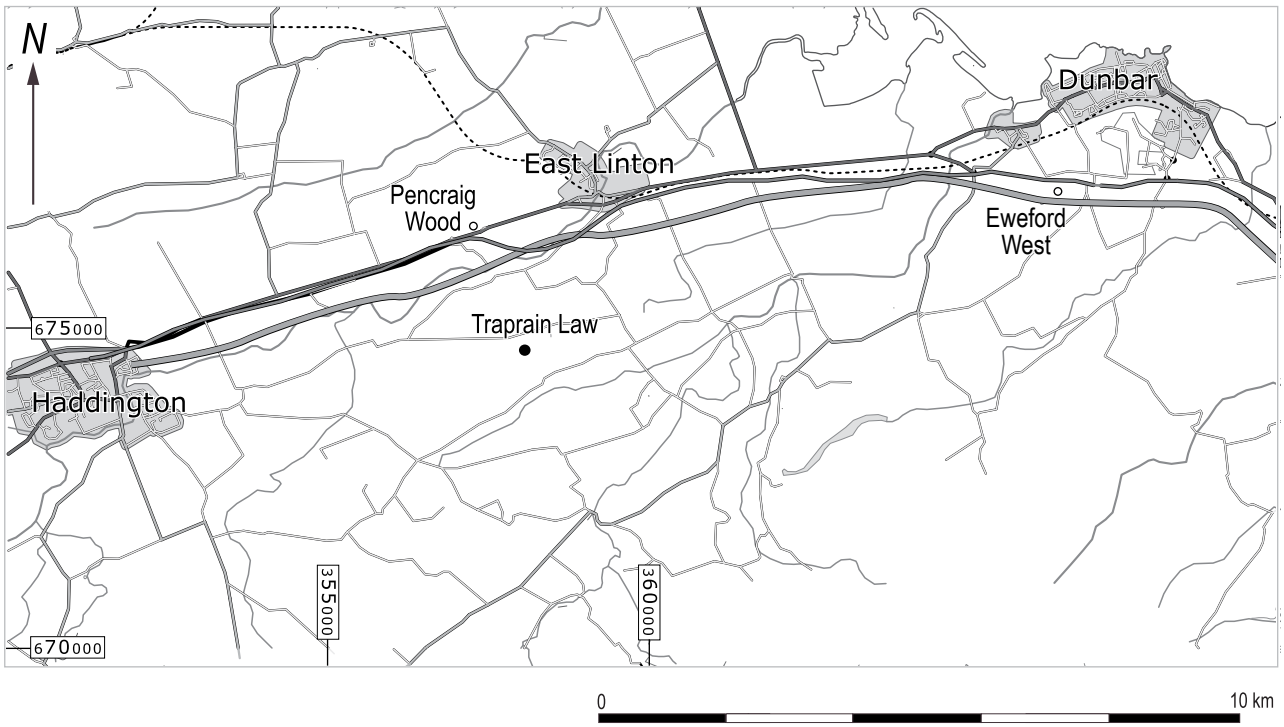
GAVIN MacGREGOR and ELAND STUART

Introduction

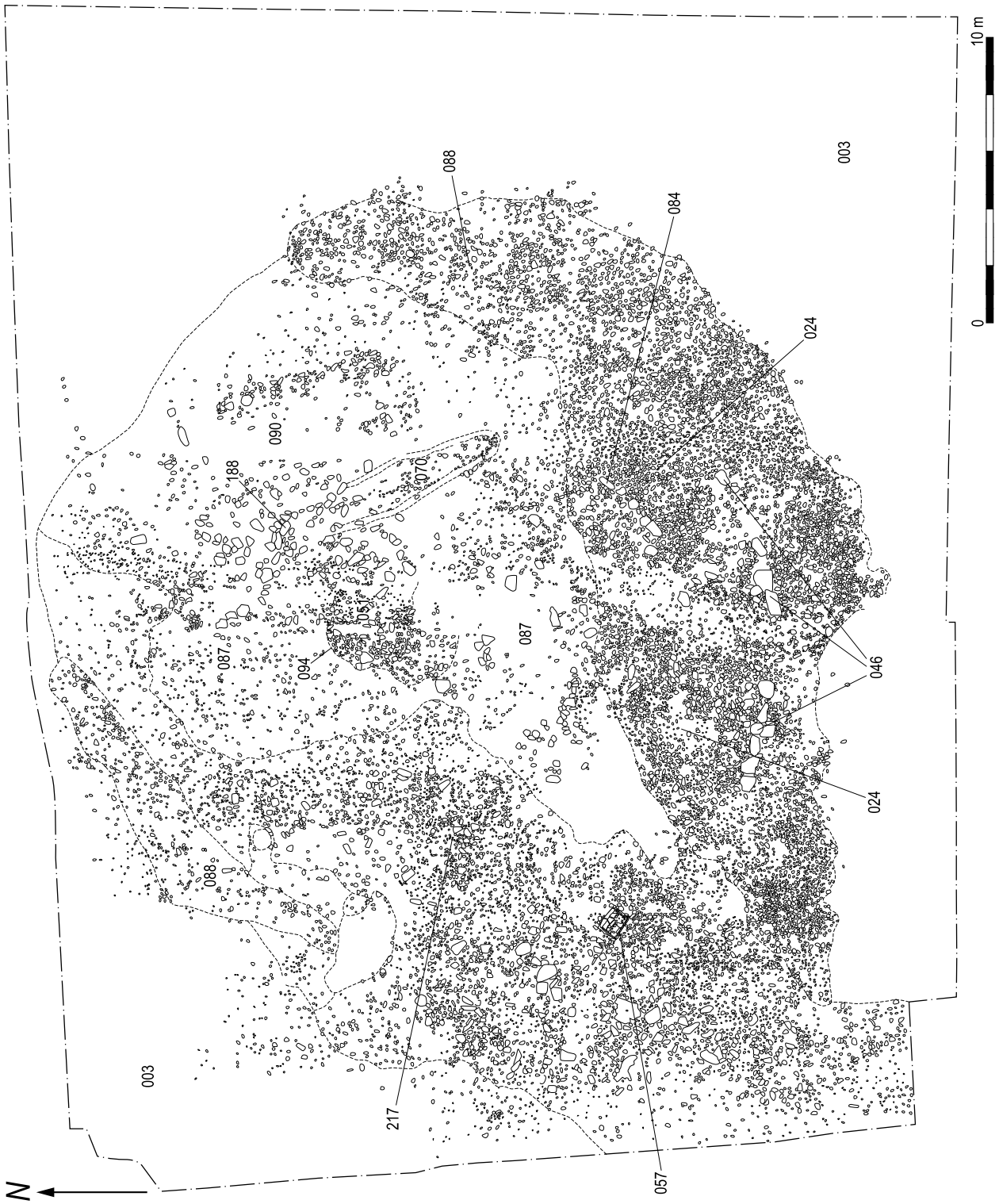
Two sites along the A1, Eweford West and Pencraig Wood (Figure 5.1), related to the treatment of the dead between about 4000 and 3000 years ago (2000–1120 BC, or 160–120 generations past), and both had previously been the focus of ceremonial activities involving the dead (see Chapters 2 and 4). In the second millennium BC, at both sites, pits were dug to hold the fragmentary burnt bones of the dead, and sometimes artefacts were also placed in them. Archaeologists usually consider such combinations of human remains and 'grave goods' as burials, comparable to how we bury our dead today. When applied to these sites, such a view may oversimplify the different reasons behind the choices people made in the past. This chapter will examine the variations in what took place at both sites and consider what those acts of deposition meant.

Eweford West (2000–1120 BC)

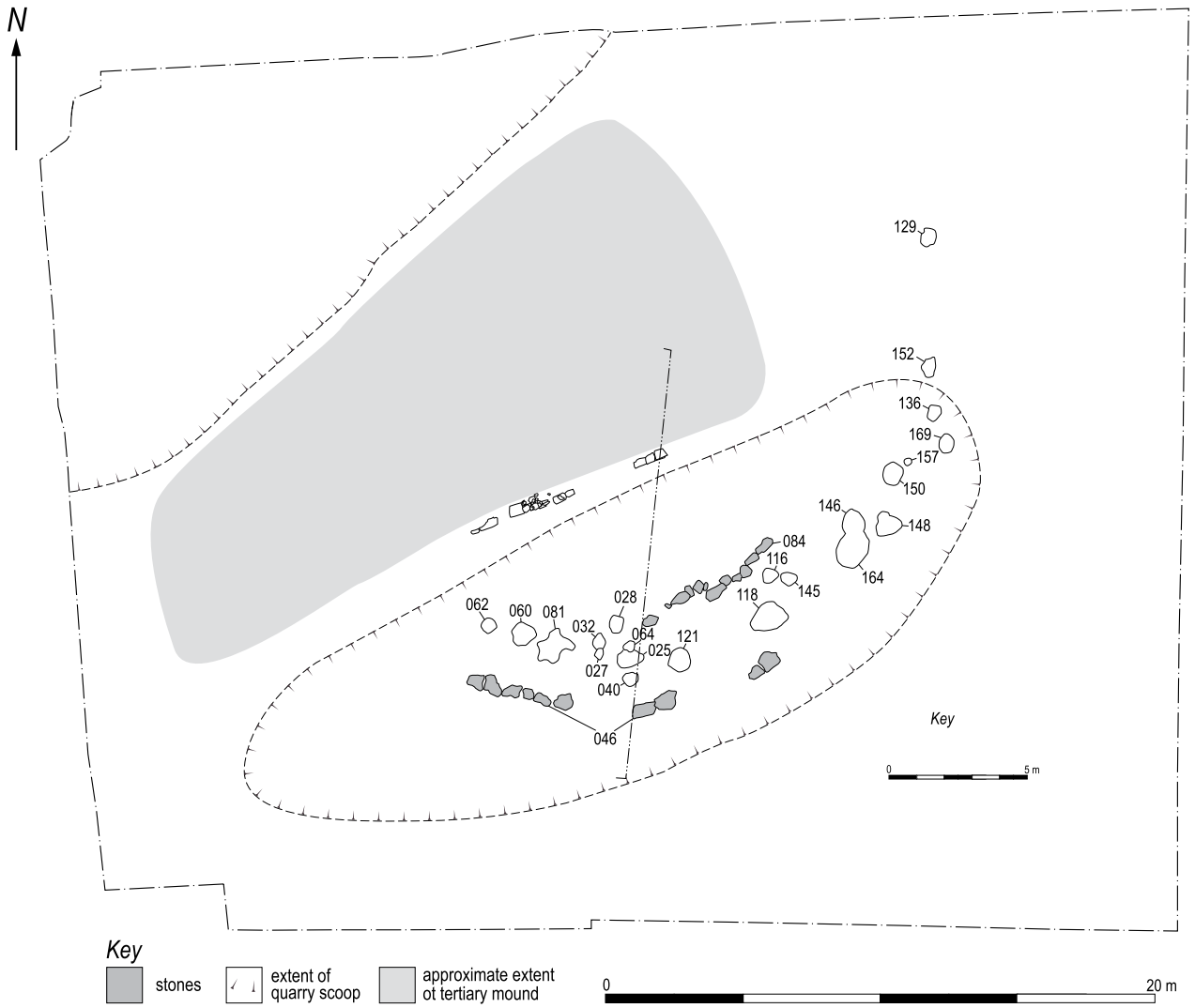
The excavation team at Eweford West identified the results of events that took place between 2000 and 1120 BC (Figure 5.2), after an earlier period of ceremonial activity (see Figure 5.3). The excavated features and deposits lay in front of a low mound created during the fourth millennium BC, which had probably been capped with a cairn retained by a timber façade and drystone revetments, with quarry scoops or hollows to the north-west and south-east (see



5.1 Map showing the locations of Eweford West and Pencraig Wood.



5.2 Plan showing the latest phase of the ceremonial site at Eweford West.



5.3 Plan showing positions of the earlier, Neolithic features in relation to the later cremations.

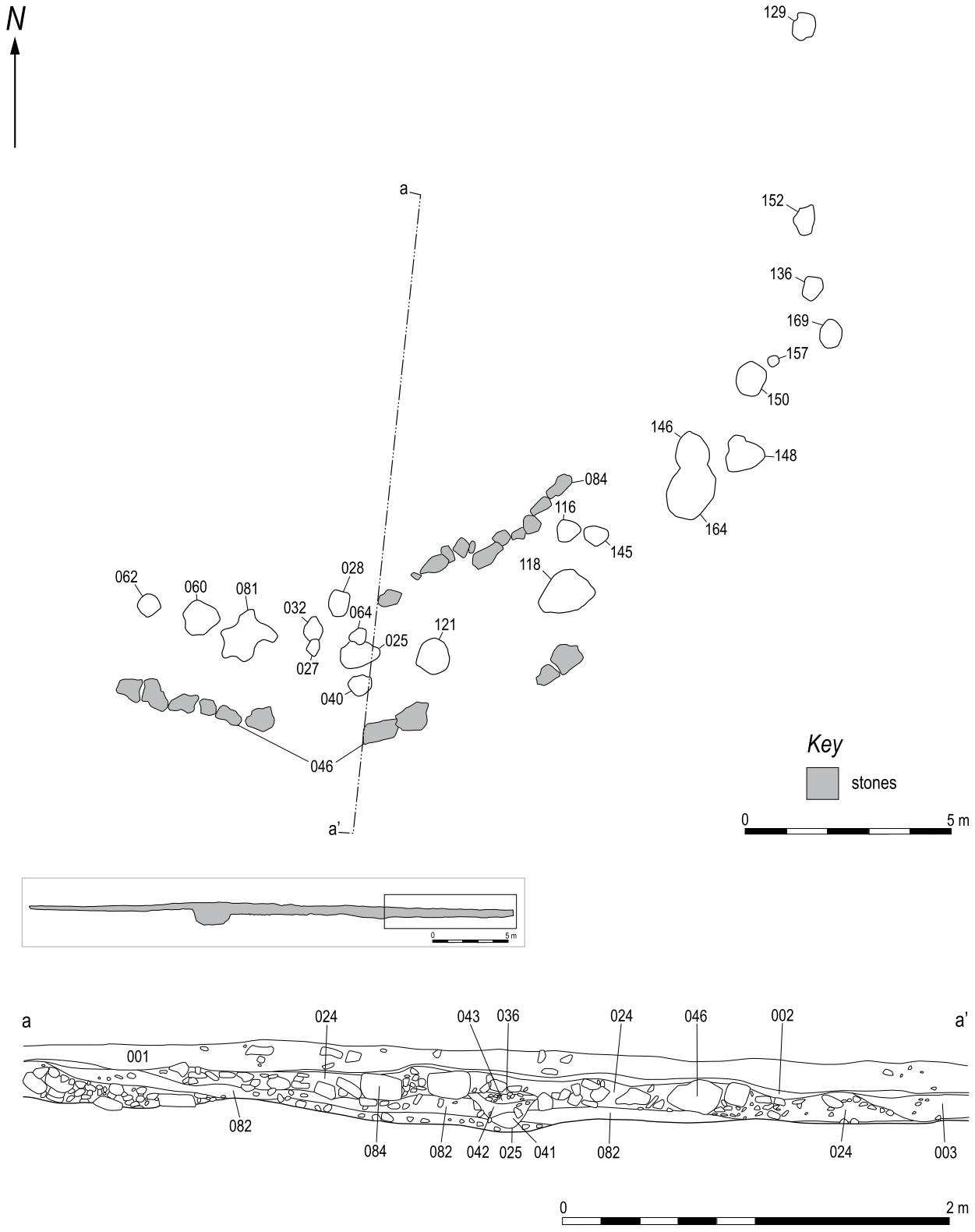
Chapter 2). During the third millennium BC, a further phase of activity filled the hollows with artefact-rich deposits and the cairn's collapsed capping (see Chapter 4). During the second millennium BC, reported in this chapter, human remains were left in discrete deposits around the mound, sealed in places with a low cairn that was probably retained by short stone rows (Figure 5.4).

People began coming to Eweford West in the second millennium BC, returning over several generations to dig into the ground, ultimately creating 21 pits or hollows in an arc that extended for about 23m (see Figure 5.5). In all except one pit, they placed burnt bone and also (in eight cases) artefacts. The radiocarbon dates show that most of these acts of deposition happened between 1900 and 1500 BC, with occasional deposition between 1500 and 1100 BC (for example, pits 146 and 157) (see table 5.1). Individual radiocarbon dates are cited in this chapter where they are derived from samples of human bone and can confidently be related to an act of deposition. In the descriptions of these acts that follow, references to botanical remains and human remains are based upon specialist analyses of samples from the site (Miller and Ramsay for botanical remains; Duffy for human remains; see Chapter 12 and Archive).

The surfaces and pyre

This phase of activity at Eweford began on two contemporary ground surfaces, one covering the surface of

5.4 Detailed plan of the cairn and retaining stones.



5.5 Plan of the arc of pits, with a section showing the pits and retaining stones.

the earlier low mound (090) and the other (082) lying in a hollow to the south of the mound. Most activity took place in the hollow, where the ground surface (082) extended over an area of about 25m east/west by 15m north/south. This surface may already have built up, through the erosion of the mound deposits to the north, as a layer into which charcoal and burnt bone had been trampled. It may have been covered with vegetation for most of the year, only disturbed intermittently by the digging of pits into it. Communities returned here over several centuries, perhaps only once a generation.

At one point, they brought oak timbers and built a cremation pyre, upon which the body of at least one adult was burnt. A distinct concentration of charcoal and burnt bone (590g) in the existing ground surface (082), associated with reddening of the sediments through *in situ* burning (036), indicated the pyre's location (see section drawing, Figure 5.5). Studies of pyre technology suggest that it may have burned intensely for a few hours, then smouldered before cooling a day later (McKinley 1997, 134). It may have been just after the pyre cooled that its builders raked though the charcoal and scorched earth to

5.1

Animals at the earlier prehistoric A1 sites

Animal bones were recovered from two of the early prehistoric sites on the A1, Overhailes and Eweford West. While the animal remains from both sites were fragmentary, they provide evidence both of animal husbandry and funerary practices in East Lothian in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages.

The animals kept during this period were domesticated cattle and sheep or goats; remains of both were found at Eweford West (see table 5.1). At later Neolithic Overhailes, there was also evidence of pigs, in the form of a very small burnt phalange (toe-bone) fragment. We do not know whether this bone came from a domesticated pig or from its wild ancestor, the wild boar (Sus scrofa). The wild pig was part of the native fauna of Scotland at this time, and was almost certainly hunted for its meat.

Table 5.1 Species found at early prehistoric sites along the A1

Eweford West	*Overhailes*
cattle	pig
sheep/goat	indeterminate mammal
large ungulate	–
small ungulate	–
ungulate	–
indeterminate mammal	–
bird	–
fish (probably)	–
amphibian	–

At Eweford, there is some evidence that joints of mutton and beef played a part in funerary rites in the Bronze Age. Burnt sheep/goat bones were found in some of the cremation burials. These animal bones may represent food offerings, perhaps intended as sustenance for the dead personís journey to the afterlife, or they may be the remains of ritual meals eaten by the mourners. Although their exact significance cannot be known, the bones seem to provide evidence of ritual activities carried out upon the death of members of the Bronze Age community and during disposal of their mortal remains.

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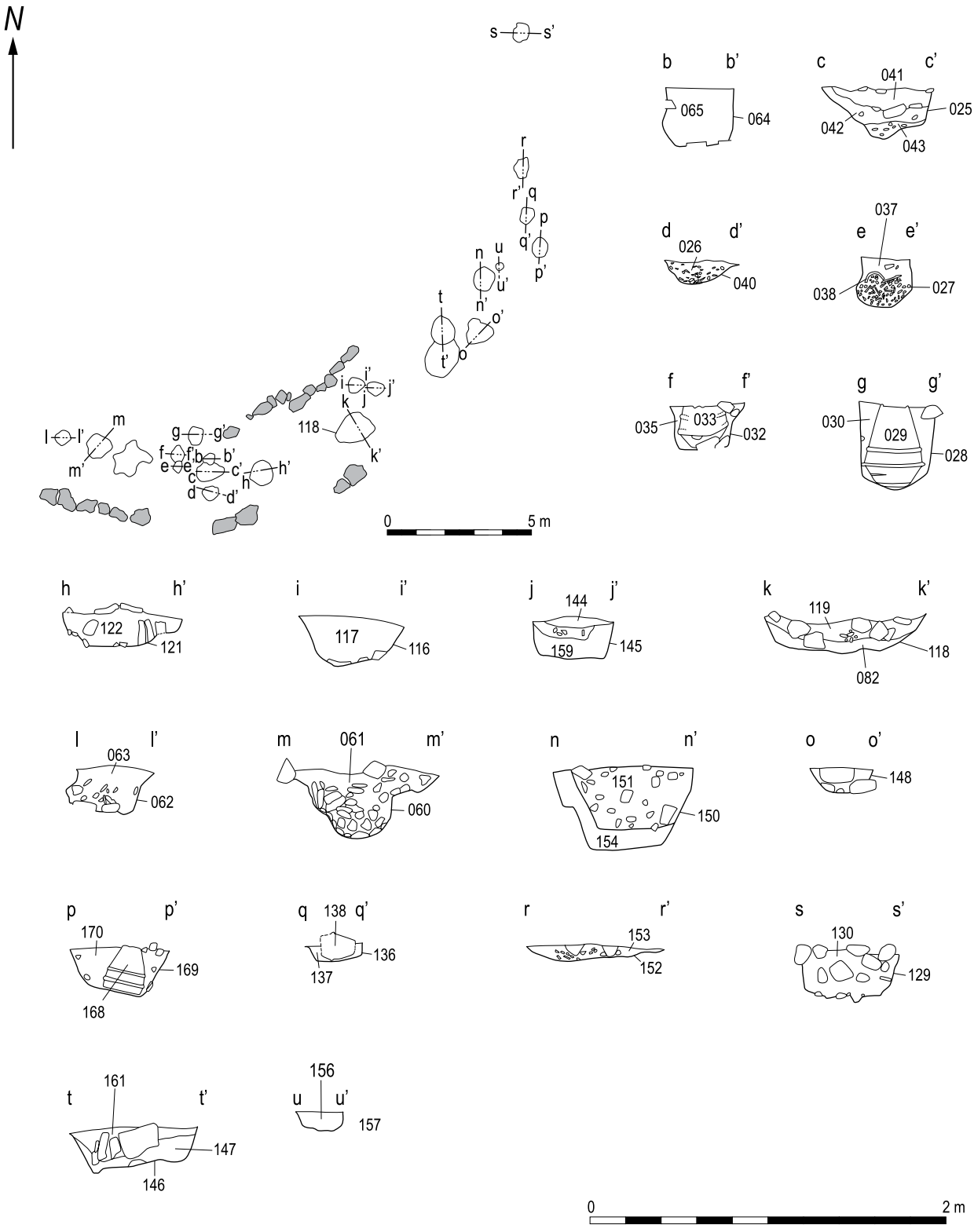
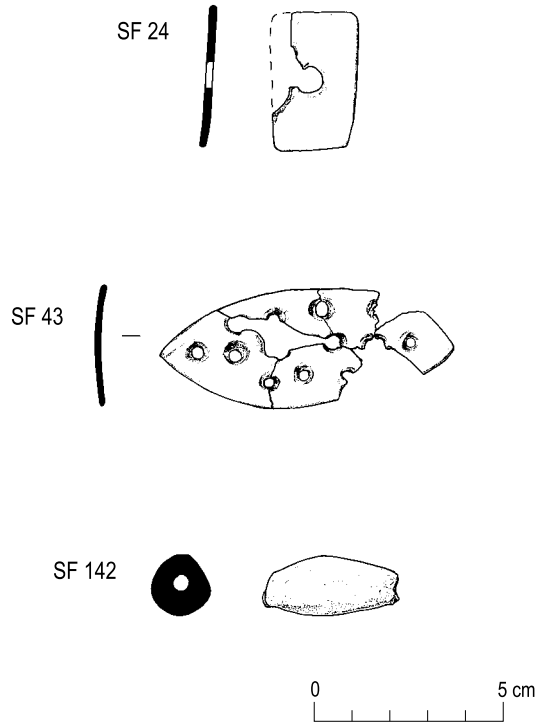


5.6 Sections through the cremation pits.



5.7 The bone bead and toggles.

find the fragments of bone, or it may have been some time later. Analysis of the bone from various pits has shown that sometimes this bone was left exposed for weeks, its surface weathering, before it was collected. In some cases, the bone had been washed, revealing shades of white, grey and yellow, but in others it remained mixed with pyre material, the pale bone mingling with the blacks, reds and browns of scorched earth and burnt oak.

During this period, people also dumped or scattered some burnt human bone mixed with charcoal, including charcoal and burnt hazelnut shell, on top of the mound (090). A radiocarbon date of 1940–1730 BC (SUERC-5288) was obtained from the bone. Analysis has shown that the bone represents a small proportion (90g) of at least one adult. The scatter confirms that this surface was exposed during the early second millennium BC.

The peopling of pits

Each of the pits and its contents was the result of certain choices. While each act essentially involved depositing burnt human bone and sometimes also artefacts in pits, the differences between these acts help to illuminate what they meant to those that carried them out. The condition of the human remains allows us to infer the events that led to this point. Several general points about these deposits are important to remember when we come to interpret their meaning.

All except one of the pits contained burnt human bone, in many cases from more than one individual, and sometimes also burnt animal bone (see text box 5.1). Analysis of the human bone (Duffy, see Chapter 12 and Archive) has produced information on the minimum numbers of individuals represented, age and sex where possible, and traces of disease or trauma where evident. The bone was burnt on a funeral pyre constructed of wood. Palaeo-botanical analysis (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive) has shown that most of the charcoal from the pits, which probably derived from the wood used to build the pyres, was oak. However, there were also significant amounts of hazel charcoal, along with smaller amounts of alder, birch, apple family, blackthorn type, cherry, rose family and willow. This combination of charcoal types shows that a variety of wood types was used, perhaps according to what was readily available; however, some wood types may have been used for more symbolic reasons, according to how the different species of trees were perceived (Hayman 2003; Bloch 2005).

After the pyre had cooled down, the community collected the burnt remains of the cremated bodies. Analysis has shown that the quantity of bone in the pits did not usually equal the amount that would result from the cremation of a body, so in most cases only parts of individuals were present (Duffy, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The proportions represented were highly variable, with no apparent patterns of selection of particular body parts.

The radiocarbon dates from charcoal and human bone in the pit fills show that human remains were being deposited mainly between 1890 and 1520 BC, over perhaps nine generations. While it is not clear which deposit was placed in the ground first during this phase of activity at Eweford, a combination of stratigraphic observations and radiocarbon dates suggests that the earliest activity created the features between the stone settings (084) and (046) and allows the construction of an approximate chronology of deposition. In broad terms, those using the monument first dug the pits to the south-west which cut into the trampled ground surface (082), but as later generations returned they tended to create pits further to the north-east. In many cases, the pits were cut through the ground surface (082), into or through the remains of the collapsed capping (083) of the earlier mound (see Chapter 2) and also into earlier layers below (104, 109) (see Chapter 4). As they worked, the pit diggers may have encountered fragments of earlier artefacts and observed that the soil through which they dug was different from that they encountered

5.2

Bone and antler toggles of the Bronze Age

Two perforated Bronze Age toggles, produced from thin splinters of bone or antler, were found during the excavation of Eweford West cairn (see Figure 5.7). Both of them were burnt, probably having gone through the pyre, attached to the garments or shrouds of the deceased.

The first is an incomplete, flat, perforated, lozenge-shaped bone toggle (SF 42 and 43). Seven less ornate examples of similarly shaped toggles are known in Scotland. The Eweford toggle appears to be unique, in that it has the remains of thirteen perforations. The holes are laid out in three rows, two following the upper and lower edges of the toggle and a third row running along the middle. The ornate detail suggests that this was a decorative ornament, as well as a functional piece used to fasten cloth or leather. One piece came from the cairn material itself (024), where it was associated with cremated human remains, and another four fragments came from a cremation deposit made up of the remains of four people (081).

The discovery of fragments of one toggle in two different contexts is significant, because it raises questions about our conventional ideas of formal burial deposits. Were some cremated remains kept from the pyre, to be scattered on top of the cairn after it was built, perhaps as a closing rite? Was some pyre debris swept up and scattered on the cairn after the burial itself?

The second piece (SF 24) consists of two conjoining fragments of a small, incomplete, sub-rectangular plate of bone or antler with a central, circular perforation. This was found among the cremated remains of a man, a woman and an infant (064). Like the first toggle, its white, brittle condition shows that it had passed through fire, perhaps attached to a garment that covered one of the bodies. Although no exact parallels are known, three similar flat toggles with single perforations are known from throughout Scotland.

Perforated flat bone or antler toggles fall into four broad types based on shape: lozenge-shaped, sub-rectangular, oval and circular; however, some examples fall outside these categories. Looking at the group as a whole, these artefacts have a fairly wide distribution throughout Scotland. Lozenge-shaped bone toggles are found almost exclusively with a type of cinerary urn known as Cordoned Urns, as are sub-rectangular flat toggles. The majority of Bronze Age bone toggles have been found in association with cremation burials, but this is a biased picture, based on preservation conditions. Bone toggles are likely to have been common throughout this period.

Six cremation deposits associated with perforated, flat bone toggles have been radiocarbon dated and have revealed a tight sequence of dates that place their use to between 1880 and 1510 BC.

DAWN McLAREN

when digging at other places. Hence, they may have been aware that they were disturbing or digging through the remains of earlier generations.

The results of the analysis of the contents of each pit are given below. Figure 5.5 shows the pits in plan and in section (in relation to the retaining stones and pyre material), while Figure 5.6 shows the sections through the pits.

Cremation deposit (064): someone collected the burnt remains (2220g) of an adult man, an adult woman and an infant and put them in this pit. Perhaps these three had shared the pyre. One of them may have been wrapped in a shroud held together by a carefully shaped, perforated bone toggle (SF 24; see Figure 5.7 and text box 5.2). The fragments of bone varied in colour from yellow to white to grey to black, which suggests that those who witnessed

the cremation stoked the pyre (Duffy, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Cremation deposit (043) 1880–1620 BC (SUERC-5324): this pit (025) was dug into the remains of previous generations (see Chapter 3), and it involved a more complex sequence of events. The diggers set this pit next to the first one (064), so close that they clipped its edge.

In its base, they deposited (043) some remains (350g) of an adult who had suffered from periodontal disease (alveolar resorbtion) and spinal joint disease, as evidenced by Schmorl's nodes. Shortly afterward, they put in another deposit (042) of human bone (236g), including the remains of two adults. Then they placed the head of a stone battle-axe (SF 145; see text box 5.3 and Figures 5.8 and 5.9) on top of the burnt bones, and set a fire in the pit which scorched the deposits (042) and perhaps also the battle-axe. Finally, they laid another deposit (041), consisting of the burnt remains of an adult (196g) and a burnt fragment of goat/sheep bone, over the battle-axe.

Then a pyre (036), described above, was built over the pit (025), sealing it (Figure 5.5).

Cremation deposit (026), 1880–1620 BC (SUERC-5325): again digging into the remains of previous generations, someone scooped out this pit (040) and put less than

5.3

Battle axeheads

Battle axeheads are regarded as prestige weapons of the early Bronze Age: mounted on short wooden hafts, they would have made excellent weapons, but an important purpose (if not their main purpose) would have been to show off the status of their owners. They would have required skill and much patience to manufacture; two to three days' intensive work would have been needed to peck, grind and drill one into shape (Fenton 1984, 230), and this would have contributed to their prestige value.

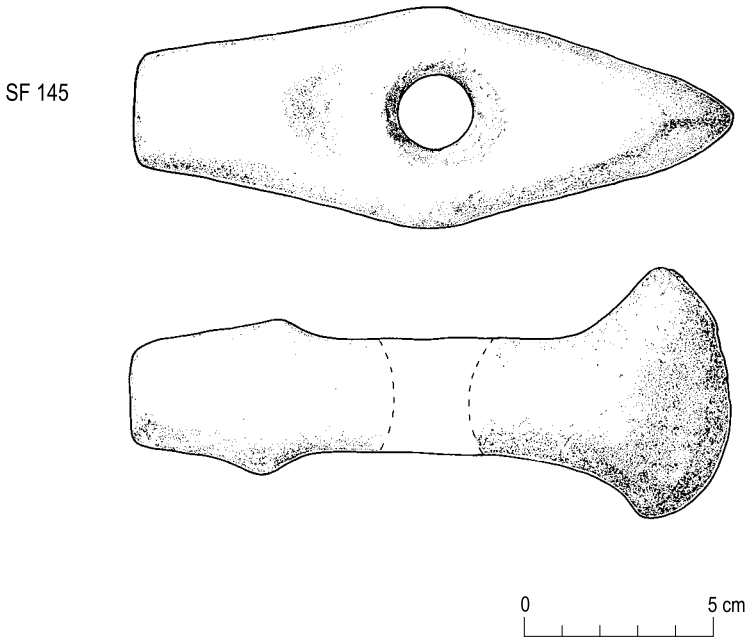
The idea of using this type of artefact was adopted from the Continent, where it had been a characteristic grave good in single burials of the Corded Ware and early Beaker traditions of northern Europe (Case 2004), towards the end of the late third millennium BC.

The earliest British examples of battle axeheads are associated with Beakers and probably date to around 2100 BC. The form of the Eweford battle axehead suggests it dates to *c.* 1900–1700 BC, so it falls within Roe's (1966) 'Intermediate' category. Interestingly, a slenderer, decorated version of this same basic type of battle axehead was found not far from Eweford at Longniddry around AD 1800; like the Eweford specimen, it is described as being of diorite (*ibid*, no 387; Anon 1894, 239–42, fig 5).

Recent radiocarbon dating of cremated human bones associated with several Scottish battle axeheads as part of the NMS Dating Cremated Bones Project (Sheridan in press a; b), and also by Vicky Cummings as part of her Cairnderry project, has confirmed the basic correctness of Roe's overall developmental scheme, and suggests that ëIntermediateí battle axeheads and 'Developed' examples date to *c.* 1850/1800–1600 BC. The date of 1880–1620 BC from the cremated bone that accompanied the Eweford specimen is well in accord with the dating of the kind of urns found in its vicinity (cf Sheridan 2003).

As for whether battle axeheads were an exclusively or mainly male possession (as seems to be the case with early Bronze Age daggers), there are too few well-sexed associated burials for one to be sure, and it is unfortunate that the remains associated with the Eweford West axehead could not be sexed. To judge from the nature of the damage and its overall appearance (Figure 5.8) – the surface weathering is not what one would have expected from normal weathering through groundwater leaching – it seems quite likely that this axehead had accompanied the deceased through the funeral pyre, and that it was slightly damaged by burning.

ALISON SHERIDAN



5.8 The battle axehead from Eweford West.

half the remains (549g) of an adult woman and an infant inside. He or she may have collected the bone from the adjacent pyre (036).

Cremation deposit (039), 1750–1520 BC (SUERC-5319): someone made a small collared urn, incising its collar with chevrons framed between horizontal lines made from two lengths of cord pressed together into the damp clay (see text box 5.4 and Figure 5.10). The partial remains (2485g) of two adults, one of whom was a man, an adolescent and an infant were put in the pot (Figure 5.11: Urn 3). This pit (027) was dug through the remains of earlier generations and also through the blackened remains of the pyre (036), which had burned some time before. The urn was set in the pit.

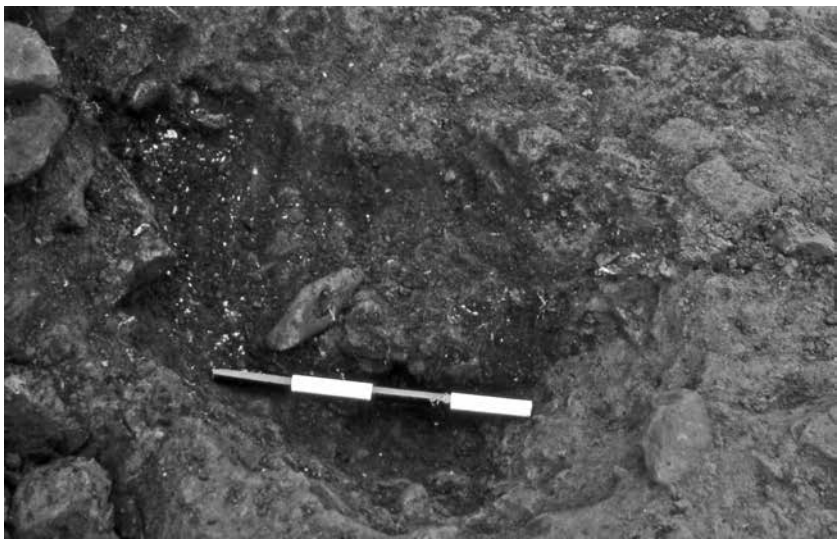
Whether the four people whose bones lay in the pit were cremated separately or on a large pyre together is unclear, but they may have been cremated along with a sheep/goat and a small ungulate, the bones of which accompanied them in the urn. A single unburnt, barrel-shaped bead (SF 142), made from bone (see Figure 5.7), was added to the urn's contents. The bead may have belonged to one of those buried, perhaps originally part of a necklace, or may have been an offering from the people who disturbed the earlier remains.

A few years later, the urn was disturbed. Whoever broke it placed the sherds carefully on top of the bones it had once held. One sherd, overlooked, later became incorporated in the cairn (024) material that later sealed the pit.

Deposit (136): after digging this pit into the remains left by previous generations, someone set a small, empty, bipartite urn on its side and covered it. The potter had decorated the urn's upper body with sloping lines, framed with horizontal lines at the top and bottom, using a z-twisted cord (Figure 5.11: Urn 5; text box 5.4). Sherds missing from its mouth show that the urn had been partially broken before it entered the pit. A sherd from vessel three had been placed within this deposit.

Cremation deposit (034), 1880–1630 BC (SUERC-5355): people returned to the site to dig another pit (032), grubbing up the stones of the earlier cairn as they did (Figures 5.4 and 5.5). They chose a spot close to the pit that contained the collared urn (027), perhaps recalling its presence and who it contained, and as they dug the new pit they disturbed it, smashing the pot.

They set the partial remains (52g) of one adult in the base of the pit, and then set an undecorated cordoned urn



5.9 The axehead *in situ* in the pit.

5.4

The types and uses of cinerary urns

The cinerary urns found in the cairn at Eweford West – of Collared, Cordoned and other associated types – are typical of the styles of urn that were used in Scotland between around 1900 and 1500 BC. They were used to contain the cremated remains of the deceased. Most of those at Eweford West were found upside down; the contents had almost certainly been kept in place by an organic cover, tied over the potsí mouths. These large urns were probably made specially for the burials; their collars and cordons served partly to fix the organic covers and also to make them easier to carry to the cairn. Usually only one person's remains are found in an urn, but sometimes they contain the remains of two or more people. This raises the question of whether those people died at the same time, or whether the bones of one or more were kept aside until someone else in particular died, such as a family member. The urns vary in size, and the reasons for this are also unclear.

In Scotland, the practice of placing cremated remains in cinerary urns was adopted around 2100 BC – a time when cremation was becoming a popular rite elsewhere in Britain and Ireland as well. Thanks to the National Museums of Scotland programme of radiocarbon dating cremated Bronze Age bone, we can now demonstrate that the earliest urns were the so-called Vase Urns (or Enlarged Food Vessel Urns), which resemble larger versions of the vase-shaped Food Vessels that normally accompanied unburnt corpses in cist graves. The Collared Urn – characterised by its heavy, overhanging neck – was adopted from England, probably during the twentieth century BC. The Cordoned Urn was a regional adaptation of the Collared Urn shape, which was being manufactured from the mid nineteenth century until around 1500 BC. Some Cordoned Urns are so similar to some Collared Urns that it is impossible to make firm stylistic distinctions between them. More simply shaped Bucket Urns started to be used perhaps as early as 1700 BC, and continued in use into the first millennium BC. Cinerary urns were not always used in burials of cremated remains: organic containers, such as leather pouches, seem to have been used in some cases.

Grave goods tend to be rare in Bronze Age graves with cremated remains, and at Eweford West the only artefact found in an urn was a single unburnt bone bead. Other deposits of cremated bone from the same cemetery were put into pits without urns but alongside objects that had probably gone through the funeral pyre, including a burnt battle axehead and two burnt bone toggles (which had probably held together a burial garment).

ALISON SHERIDAN

(Figure 5.11: Urn 4; text box 5.4) upside down over them. The urn held the remains (1679g) of two adults under the age of 20, a man and a woman, along with those of an adolescent and an infant. One of them had suffered from spinal joint disease and a compression fracture of the lumber vertebra, perhaps after falling from a height or taking a heavy blow to the base of the back.

Cremation deposit (031), 1880–1680 BC (SUERC-5304): this time, people collected the burnt remains (1738g) of two individuals, one of whom was an adult woman, who had suffered from periodontal disease, bone growth (mandibular tori) and spinal joint disease, as evidenced by Schmorl's nodes. In the pit (028) they put the burnt fragments into a large collared urn, (Figure 5.12: Urn 1; text box 5.4). The potter had taken a z-twist cord and pressed it into the urn's collar, creating three horizontal lines bordering a row of chevrons. Mixed with the bone were burnt fragments of hazelnut shell and 22 burnt rowan fruit stones.

Cremation deposit (122) 1890–1680 BC (SUERC-5326): after an adult woman was cremated, the remains of the pyre may have been left for several weeks, as the bones

5.10 Two of the urns being excavated.

were slightly weathered. Some of the burnt bones (484g) were gathered up and placed in this pit (121).

Cremation deposit (117), 1890–1690 BC (SUERC-5348): after digging this pit (116), someone put a few handfuls of bone (238g) from two cremated bodies in it. One had been an adult under 20, the other an adolescent.

Cremation deposit (144), 1860–1530 BC (SUERC-5328): in this pit (145), someone placed the remains (1233g) of two adults, one of them a man. At least one of them had suffered from periodontal disease and spinal joint disease, and also a trauma to the lower arm and the chest (periostitis of median tibial frag and anterior of two ribs).

On top of the heap of bone, they set a bronze, tanged knife-dagger (SF 308) with its blade pointing to the north-east (see Figure 5.13). The dagger may have been hafted at the time. Analysis of its blade edges and point show that it had certainly been damaged through use (Cowie, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

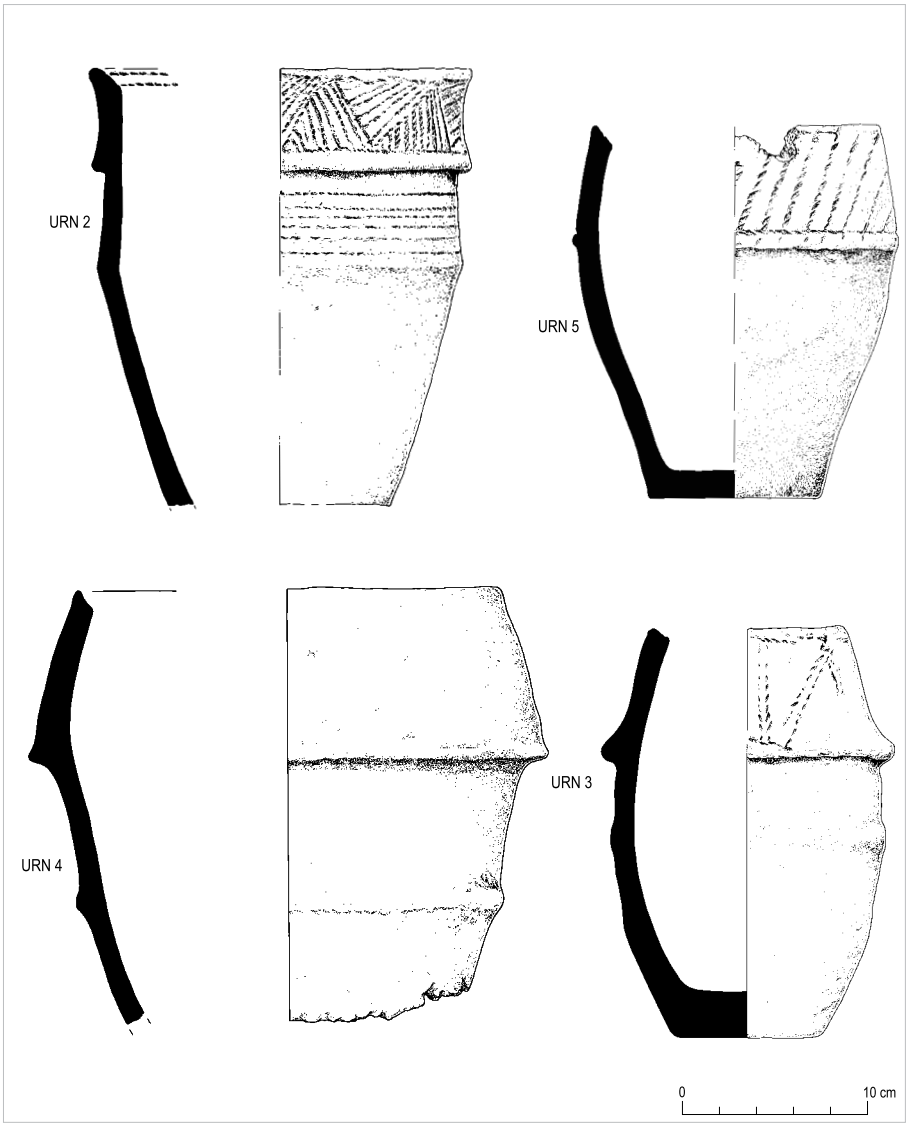
Cremation deposit (119), 1740–1520 BC (SUERC-5327): members of the community dug another pit (118) through the remains of previous generations and placed the partial remains (487g) of a cremated body in it. The person had been a woman aged over 40; she had suffered spinal joint disease, perhaps as a result of a trauma to her upper back when she was younger, which left a compression fracture on the lumbar vertebra.

Stone to hold and bind

At some point during the first part of the second millennium BC, several large boulders (046/084) were pulled into position to form two broadly concentric arcs to the north and south of the pits. Closer examination shows that they were set as a number of short rows on slightly different orientations, which suggests that the arcs were created piece-by-piece over several distinct phases (see Figures 5.4 and 5.14).

Eventually, a stone cairn (024) was created, up to 0.4m in depth (Figure 5.5), that sealed much of the ground surface (082) and many of the cremation-filled pits and hollows (025, 027, 028, 032, 121, 118, 116, 145) that had been dug into it between 2000 and 1500 BC. The cairn seems to have been built over several phases, and ultimately it extended over an area of 20m by 10m. It did not seal other pits to the east (146, 150, 157, 169, 136, 152, 129). Several features (060, 062 and 081) were created in the cairn (024) by pulling stones out to create hollows for deposition.

Burnt human bone and artefacts were heavily scattered throughout the cairn material (024). In some cases, the



5.11 Urns 2–5.

bone deposits appeared distinct and deliberate (071), as if people had pulled stones out of the cairn and placed handfuls of cremated remains in the hollows (073) left by the stones, and dated to 1880–1610 BC (SUERC-5300). For the most part, however, the distribution of the bone gave the impression of having been scattered by hand, like seeds across a field of stones.

The artefacts in the cairn derived predominantly from earlier phases of activity at the site (see Chapters 2 and 4), but it is not clear whether they had been collected to scatter among the stones or whether they had washed in with deposits eroded from the mound to the north. Their consistent distribution throughout the cairn would suggest that they were deliberately incorporated. Perhaps when people dug pits into the remains of earlier generations to hold the cremated remains of their kin, they discovered broken pieces of pottery and pieces of struck flint: recognisable to them as fragments of drinking vessels and broken tools, but strangely different from the ones they now used daily.

Cremation deposit (062): someone created a small hollow by pulling stones out of the cairn (024), and in it placed the partial remains (403g) of three people: one was an adult, while the other two were young children less then five years old. The cremated remains were then covered with stone, consumed within the cairn. The

surface condition of the bones suggests that they had weathered after cremation, perhaps having been left exposed on the extinguished pyre for several weeks.

Cremation deposit (061), 1880–1530 BC (SUERC-5349): members of the community dug another small hollow (060) by pulling stones out of the cairn (024). In it they put the partial remains (2666g) of two adults, a man and a woman, and covered them with stones.

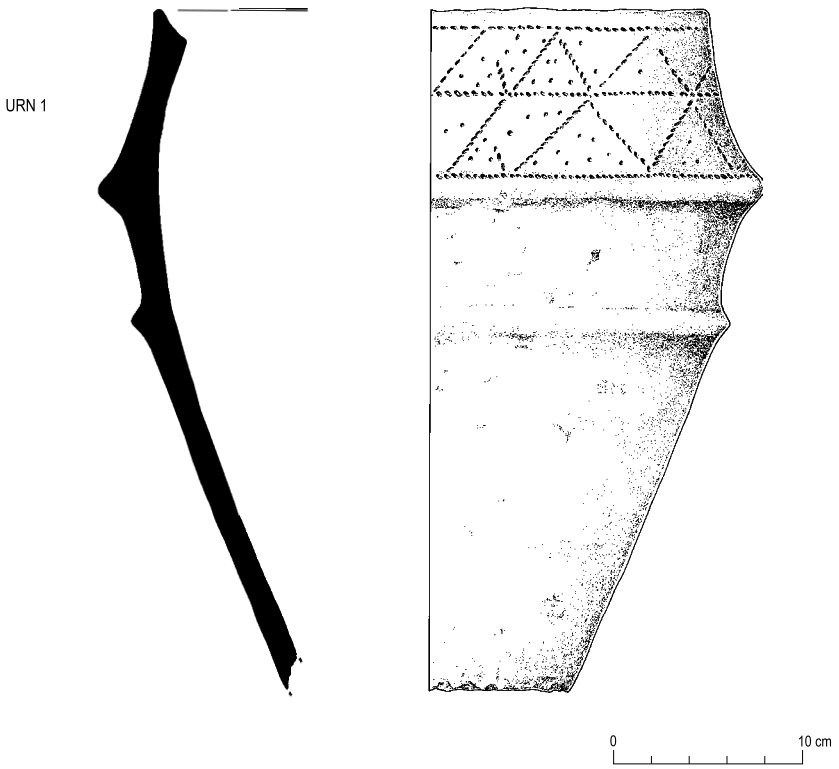
The predominantly grey-black colour of the bones shows that they were incompletely combusted. The pyre may have burnt under stormy skies, its flames quenched by a downpour. The condition of the bones also suggests they were left exposed to the elements for several weeks before being deposited in the hollow.

Cremation deposit (082), 1750–1520 BC (SUERC-5354): people again pulled stones out of the cairn (024) to create a hollow (081). This time they placed the partial remains (3599g) of four individuals in it, three adult men and an adolescent, then hid the remains beneath stone. At least one of them had had spinal joint disease, as shown by bony growths (osteophytes), and iron deficiency anaemia (cribra orbitalia), as is evidenced by changes to the skull's surface. One skull fragment bore a small, linear score; he had received a cut on the head at or around the time of death from a sharp implement, perhaps a bronze or flint knife. Whether this indicates a violent death or the defleshing of the body is not clear.

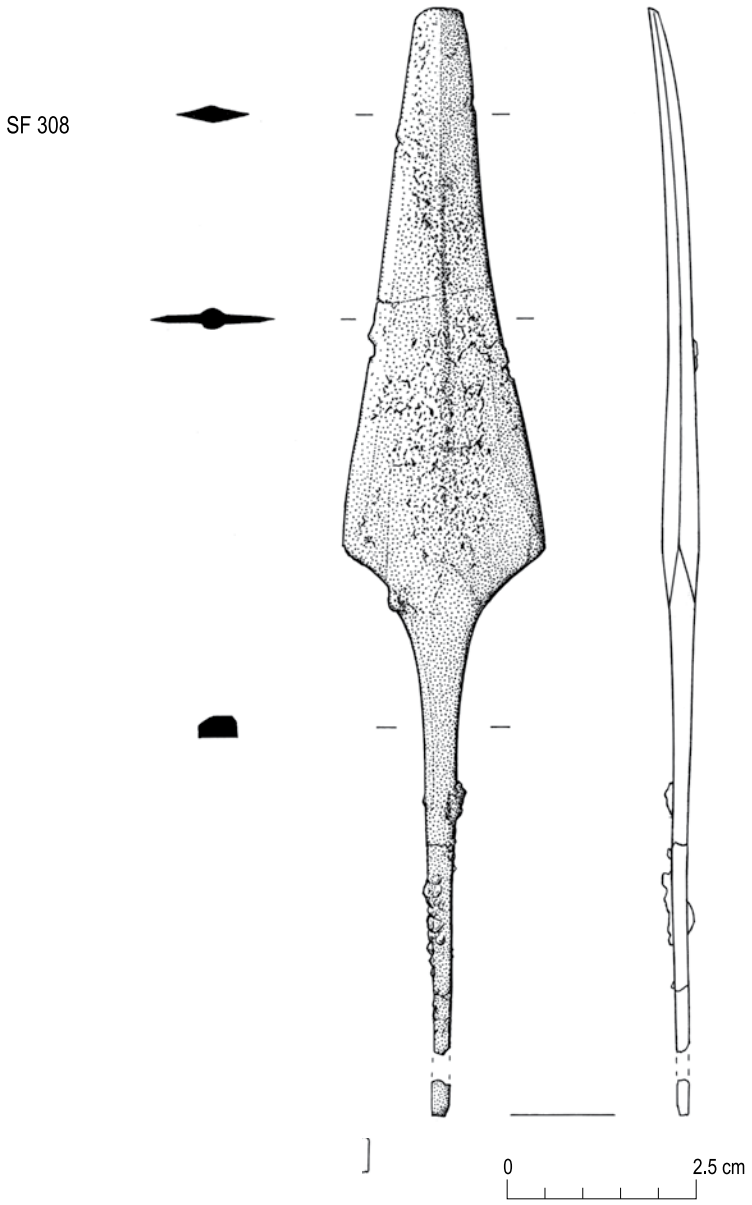
A burnt bone toggle (SF 42–3) lay among the cremated remains (see Figure 5.7 and text box 5.2). It was a finely finished piece, lozenge-shaped, which originally had 14 perforations in three rows. It may have come from a shroud fastened around one of the corpses. Its burnt condition shows that it passed through the pyre with the body. Six burnt bird cherry stones may have also been placed deliberately in the hollow, or on the pyre as an offering.

The cremated remains of these people were again left outside to weather before being placed in the hollow.

Cremation deposit (154) 1890–1680 BC (SUERC-5330): moving away from the cairn, the area which had been favoured for several generations, someone dug a pit (150) further to the east and in it placed the burnt bones (806g) of an adult who had suffered from periodontal disease, as evident by alveolar resorbtion. Several



5.12 Urn 1.



5.13 The bronze tanged knife-dagger.

generations later, as others were placing bones in a small pit (157) nearby, they scattered burnt animal bone across the surface of the earlier pit (150) and it became mixed with its original contents. Specialist analysis has identified that fragments of sheep/goat tibia from both pits (150) and (157) conjoin (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The mouth of the earlier pit was scorched orange, perhaps from a fire or contact with hot rocks.

Cremation deposit (148): when people dug this pit, they found the broken remains of a small Beaker urn (BP 5; see Figure 4.21 in Chapter 4) and pottery sherds from several other vessels, which previous generations had disturbed. They placed (149) the partial remains (512g) of two adults, one of them a male, in the pit. One of the adults had suffered from periodontal disease, as evidenced by alveolar resorbtion. They placed part of a copper alloy awl among the bones (SF 98; not illustrated), along with the broken urn and the other sherds (see also Chapter 3).

Cremation deposit (168), 1880–1620 BC (SUERC-5356): the pit (169) was dug to hold a medium-sized collared urn (Figure 5.11: Urn 2; text box 5.4). The potter had decorated the vessel's rim bevel, collar and neck with a z-twisted cord, and the collar with a continuous chevron pattern between horizontal lines.

Before the urn was set upside down in the pit, it was filled with the remains (1426g) of an adult woman. She had suffered from periodontal disease, as evident by alveolar resorbtion, and changes to the skull surface show iron deficiency anaemia (*cribra orbitalia*) in her lifetime.

Cremation deposit (153), 1880–1630 BC (SUERC-5532): someone placed the partial, weathered remains (728g) of an adult in the base of this pit (152).

Cremation deposit (131), 1690–1520 BC (SUERC-5350): a community returned to the place where, for the past 30 generations, people had placed the remains of their kin in the ground. The bones they carried were incompletely combusted, as attested by their predominantly grey-black colour. Perhaps rain had quenched the pyre.

They dug a small pit (129) and in its base they placed the remains (778g) of an adult man. They heated stones, possibly taken from the nearby cairn, and put these on top of the bone, sealing them with heat and stone and scorching the mouth of the pit orange.

Cremation deposit (147), 1430–1210 BC (SUERC-5329): someone returned to place the partial remains of a man (670g) in another pit (146). His bones had been burnt on a pyre, but unlike all the others they show no signs of having warped. This suggests that the corpse was not fleshed when it was cremated; it may have been left exposed for the flesh to rot (excarnated), or it may have

5.14 The retaining stones at Eweford West.

been more actively defleshed. A slightly burnt flint scraper (SF 312, Figure 5.15), which may have been on the pyre, was placed amongst the bone. Again, hot stones were set on top of bone, scorching the mouth of the pit.

Cremation deposit (156) 1380–1120 BC (SUERC-5334): for the last time, people collected some of the remains (1063g) of an adolescent and a child (aged 4–10) from a pyre and brought them to Eweford. The remains were mixed with burnt sheep bone, some of which scattered across the surface of an earlier deposit (150). The pit (157) they dug at this point was the smallest yet.

Pencraig Wood (1500–1250 BC)

At Pencraig Wood (Figure 5.1), the team excavated features created between 1500 and 1260 BC at a place that had seen activity several hundred years before (see Chapter 4).

In the early second millennium BC, someone or several people came back to the spot and dug a pair of pits (Figure 5.16). They lined one of the pits (012) with stones and placed the partial burnt remains (320g) of at least two people, an adult and an infant, in the pit. Mixed with the burnt bone were traces of burnt hazelnut shell, hawthorn seed and cleaver seed (011), perhaps also set alight on the pyre. A radiocarbon date of 1500–1310 BC (SUERC-6889) was obtained from hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal, while cremated human long bone produced a radiocarbon date of 1440–1260 BC (SUERC-7160). Next to this pit they dug another (014), which they also lined with stone. It contained some oak charcoal, but no bone.

Another intimately associated pair of pits may relate to this time, as their character indicates a similar practice. In one pit (026) lay the remains (666g) of two individuals, an adult and a child, along with oak charcoal. Its companion pit (048) was dug close by and contained alder, hazel and oak charcoal. It is possible, however, that these features relate to an earlier phase of deposition during the third millennium BC (see Chapter 4).

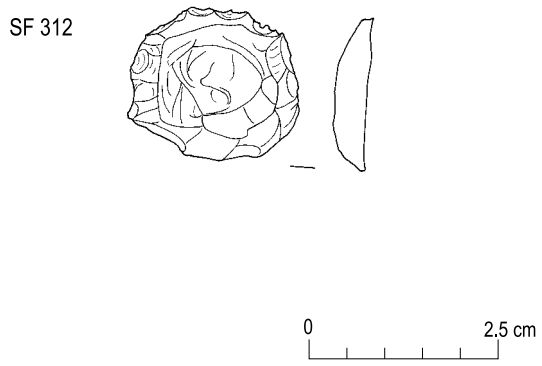
People came to this spot to dig other pits during the early second millennium BC. About 19m to the north of the stone-lined pits (012 and 014) was another pit (035) that held an oak post; the pit contained a post-pipe rich in oak charcoal (034) (Figure 5.16). This pit (035) was backfilled with a deposit (019) containing hazelnut shell, oak, blackthorn and hazel charcoal. A sample of hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal produced a radiocarbon date of 1460–1290 BC (SUERC-6892).

The excavated features evoke a short period during which people were leaving small quantities of human remains at Pencraig Wood. It is possible that the timber upright in pit (035) marked the location, forming a focus for rites relating to these acts of deposition.

Discussion

About 4000 years ago at Eweford West, a community commenced a tradition which continued at the same place, albeit perhaps intermittently, for about 30 generations (600 years). Superficially, it appears that these subsequent visitors to the site maintained the basic tradition of depositing burnt human remains in pits around an earlier mound. However, closer scrutiny of the excavated evidence shows that their acts of deposition expressed four variations on this tradition. Attribution of these variations to discrete phases must remain tentative, as it is difficult to establish the chronological sequence at the site with confidence. Spatial differences in the record do show that different variations were favoured in different parts of the cemetery.

The first tradition involved the digging of pits into the remains of earlier generations at the southern side of an earlier monument. As well as placing human remains in these pits, people frequently put artefacts into them. Most of the pits that may relate to this phase were dug to the south of the mound, but two others containing urns (169 and 136) were created further to the east. In one case (136), the act of deposition was distinctly different: an urn was placed on its side in a pit, with no burnt bone. It is



5.15 The burnt flint scraper.

also during this phase that we have the only evidence for cremation having taken place on the site; in subsequent phases, the pyres were built further away, somewhere beyond the excavation trench.

In a distinctly different, second tradition, later generations covered these earliest pits with stones. The fact that they deliberately incorporated artefacts and fragments of the dead into the cairn material suggests that they imbued this act of capping or sealing with further potent meanings. This tradition appears to have lasted for some time. The large stones which retained the cairn material had been pulled into place in several distinct rows and, although we cannot be certain of the timespan, these seem to represent different events. Indeed, it is not clear whether each row was built as a single event or whether it grew intermittently, before changing circumstances required a new row. We could perhaps even imagine people adding a new stone to a row each time they left a new deposit.

In a third development in tradition, still later generations began to pull out stones to create hollows in the cairn and to put burnt human bone in them. In contrast to the earlier deposits, which now lay beneath the cairn, these were not accompanied by deliberately placed artefacts. One artefact, the bone toggle from pit (081), was probably burnt with the body during the mortuary rites, so its presence is incidental. It does, however, show that bodies were sometimes wrapped in shrouds for cremation after the cairn was built, as well as before it.

The pits along the eastern edge of the arc suggest another distinct development in tradition. Like the deposits described above, they were not capped by a substantial layer of cairn material; indeed, people seem to have moved away from the cairn to create them.

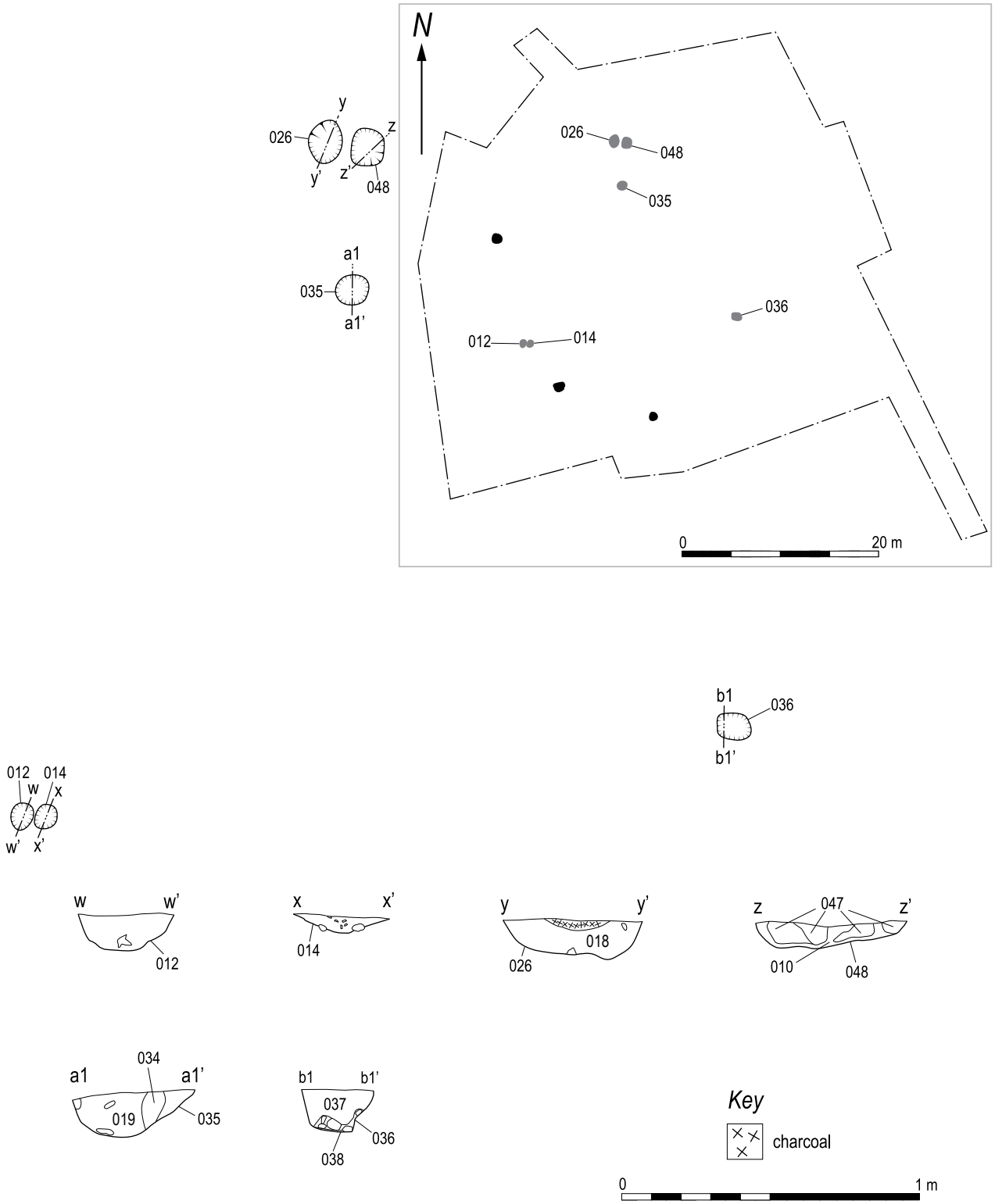
In a fourth variation on the traditions practised at Eweford, people set fires or hot stones at the mouths of three pits (146, 129, 150), scorching them. The radiocarbon dates (1890–1680 BC (150), 1690–1520 BC (129) and 1430–1210 BC (146)) show that this was done intermittently over a long period, and at the same time as other variations were being practised. This highlights how, at different times, in different sets of circumstances, particular practices were considered more appropriate than others. Digging pits and placing cremated remains in the eastern part of the site sometimes involved the use of fire, but need not always have.

We have already noted the bipartite urn (Urn 5), which lay on its side in the eastern part of the pit distribution (136). The fact that it was incomplete, with sherds missing from its mouth, reveals another aspect of its biography. Whether the damage took place through use of the vessel is not clear. The same area contained the broken remains of Beaker vessels associated with cremated human remains. We can suggest, therefore, that another variation in practice emerged in the eastern area of the site, in how people treated the remains of previous generations when they discovered them in the course of digging new pits.

These variations in practice between the different areas are striking. The eastern part seems to have been favoured in the latest phase, its use dying out with one last act of deposition during the second millennia BC (see, however, Chapter 4). The size of this pit (157) (1390–1210 BC) suggests a lack of conviction about its creation; perhaps those who created it felt uncomfortable about digging there, or hesitant about following the old traditions.

The acts of deposition at Pencraig Wood took place about the same time that people at Eweford were avoiding the cairn, during the second half of the second millennium BC. At Pencraig Wood, the two pairs of pits (012/014 and 026/048) seem to indicate that people here were practising other variations in the same general tradition. Here, they placed small quantities of burnt human bone in one of each pair, and hearth waste (perhaps along with other organic remains which decayed away) in the other. It is particularly striking that both deposits of human bone contained the remains of an adult and a child or infant. The material they placed in the companion pits might have been tokens from the funeral pyres or from hearths used in the funerary rites. These acts of deposition may have been carried out near a timber upright that marked the hillside as a significant place.

At Pencraig Wood and Eweford, communities were choosing how and where to create pits and deposits according to what they believed was appropriate at the time. The fact that the deposits contained mainly human



5.16 The features at Pencraig Wood in plan and section.

remains, in common with other excavated cremation 'cemeteries', tends to colour how we view their meanings; they are traditionally thought of as burials (for example, Watkins 1982; Cressey and Sheridan 2003). We as archaeologists tend to see these burials as the ultimate goal of a technological process, one that involved using a pyre to convert the dead to cremated bone. We may consider how the body was treated in terms of mortuary ritual and funerary ritual, but ultimately, in the dominant view, these acts are considered as leading to burial in the sense that we understand it today.

However, certain aspects of human practice at Eweford and Pencraig Wood differ distinctively from modern burial practice. Clearly, only a small proportion of the people who lived during this period were treated in this way after death (Ashmore 2001, 3). Those selected for the pyre were not buried as individuals; instead, the living transformed their bodies through (in some cases) excarnation or defleshing, burning them on the pyre, selecting some of the burnt bone and careful depositing it in pits or vessels prepared for the purpose. These acts of transformation broke up the bodies of individuals and mixed them with fragments of others. The fact that the cremation deposits only ever contained parts of individuals suggests that communities were using their remains in deliberate, particular ways, some of which involved depositing them at places such as Pencraig Wood and Eweford. What happened to the rest of these individuals' remains will always remain unclear, especially if we consider these acts of deposition in isolation.

Detailed examination of the acts carried out at Pencraig Wood and Eweford has shown how long they continued within the same general tradition and also how much they varied. There must have been many variations in each case before death, in the identities and biographies of the individuals. Some may have been ill for long periods, others dying suddenly in tragic or inauspicious circumstances. Bodies may have been excarnated or defleshed, but infrequently. They may have been combined on the pyre or cremated individually. In some cases, artefacts, fruit and animals (or at least joints of meat) were also placed on the pyre, while in other cases objects were added to collections of bone after cremation. Sometimes cremated remains were left to weather, while others were gathered rapidly and put in pits. The numbers, age and sex of individuals represented in the deposits varied widely, as did the ways they were combined; the proportions of each individual's bones also varied. In short, it is clear that people were not following a strict set of rules in the ways they treated their dead. They were making complex choices about what to do and how to proceed.

If their acts were not simply burial, what did they mean, and what lay behind the choices they made? We can only answer these questions by placing their choices and acts in a wider context, which includes a consideration of how communities engaged in the different social arenas (such as the house, the field, the forest) in which they lived at the time (see Chapter 9). This context should also include the cosmological landscape, made up of beliefs and memories of places and events, which existed through story and ritual and which must have framed these acts of deposition. Only then may we begin to understand the uses of bones and beads.