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The Lands of Ancient Lothian

Interpreting the Archaeology of the A1

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Chapter 4

Everything in its place: Excavations at Eweford West, Overhails, Pencraig Wood and Eweford Cottages (3300–1700 BC)

GAVING MacGREGOR and ELAND STUART

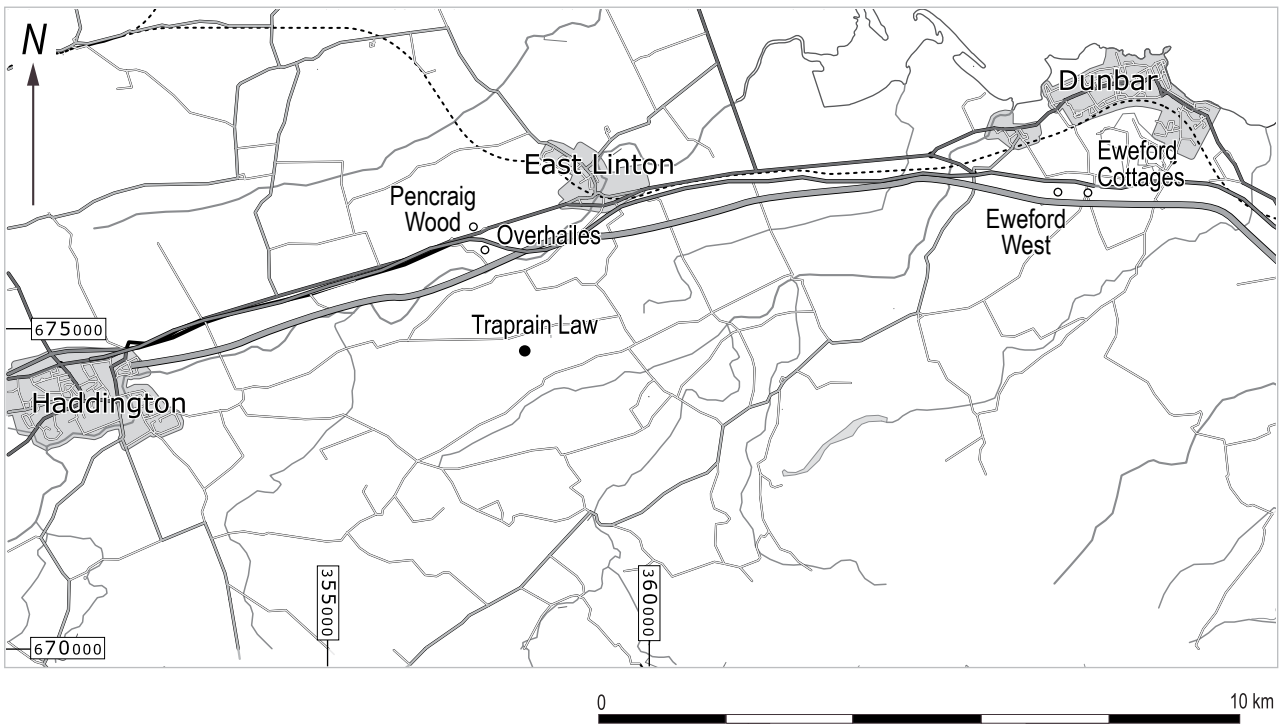
Introduction

Several of the excavated sites had archaeological remains dating from the late fourth millennium to the end of the second millennium BC, all of them associated in some way with the deliberate deposition of artefacts. In this chapter, we examine the changing nature of deposition during this period and the various contexts in which it took place. These practices varied considerably, from evidence at Overhailes for the deposition of exotic artefacts, perhaps related to a stake-defined structure, to the deposition of artefacts at the ceremonial site of Eweford West. While most of the evidence considered in this chapter is from Overhailes and Eweford West, other instances of similar practice are explored from Pencraig Wood and Eweford Cottages (Figure 4.1).

The making of place at Overhailes

The activities at Overhailes took place on a small shelf on the long, south-facing slope that runs down from the summit of Pencraig Hill to the River Tyne (Figure 4.1). Bedrock, which rose up through the subsoil, bracketed the shelf at the north and south edges of the trench (Figure 4.2). The biggest outcrop was downslope, where a great hump covered with plough scars jutted out of the subsoil. This bedrock lurked below a thin layer of ploughsoil and could well have been exposed in prehistory as an outcrop. Ploughing may have removed the upper fills of features as well as anything that originally stood above ground, such as midden heaps.

Radiocarbon dates, spatial relationships and associated artefacts date the activity on the terrace to several different



4.1 Map showing the locations of Overhailes, Eweford West and Pencraig Wood.

phases. Starting with the earlier material, the basic sequence is as follows: a single date of 7600–7525 BC from an ambiguous feature attests to the passage of Mesolithic feet (see Chapter 2); between 3340 and 2900 BC, several large pits were dug and then filled in, and stake-holes that respected these pits might have formed a contemporary building and yard; and finally, between 2340 BC and 1740 BC, a stone box was created and a setting or building of five timber uprights was constructed.

In the first phase of activity on the shelf (3340–2900 BC), people undertook most archaeologically visible tasks in the north-eastern part of the site. They drove in numerous stakes to create a structure of some sort, possibly a building with an adjacent yard. Inside the yard they dug two large pits.

A possible building and a yard

The stake-holes on the site plan may have traced the outline of a light, sub-circular or horseshoe-shaped building (Structure A) measuring about 6m in diameter, with a sub-circular yard to the south (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Palaeobotanical evidence suggests that the building could have been made of oak standards (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

It is possible that more stake-holes defined a yard or enclosure that abutted the building to the south. While some stake-holes were barren (157, 197, 185), most contained a mixture of wood species (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive) that suggests they may have supported wicker hurdling, which was subsequently burnt down. One stake-hole (250) contained hazel, blackthorn and oak; another (172) contained alder, birch and heather, and two contained single species, hazel in one (154) and heather in another (178). All other stake-holes in the area either contained oak with small quantities of hazel or were barren. The large gaps between the stake-holes would suggest that they supported a very light screen, but plough truncation could have resulted in differential preservation.

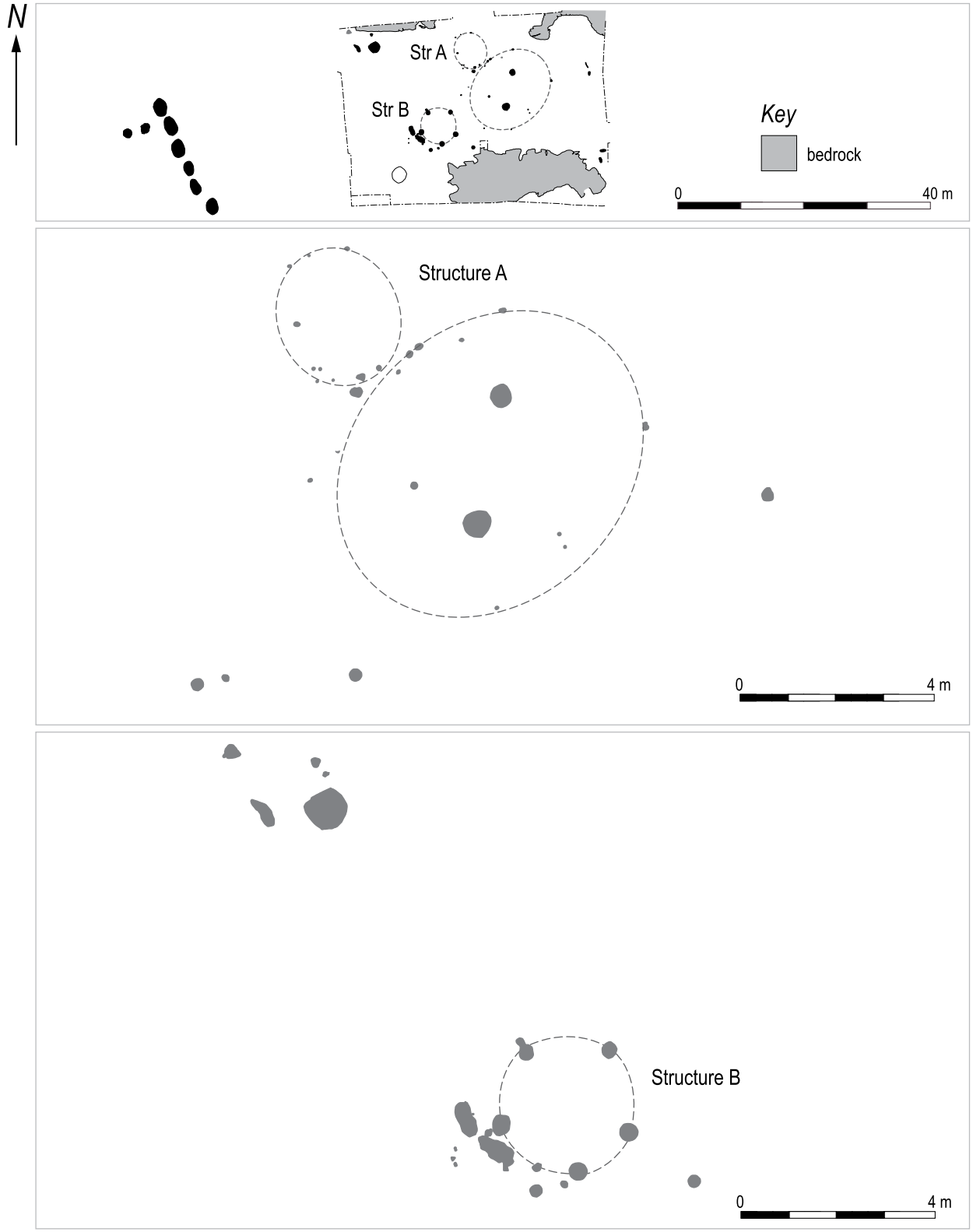
Inside the possible yard

Inside the possible yard, the early residents at Overhailes dug two pits, (050) and (247) (Figure 4.4). They threw several handfuls of flint, a few other stone tools, pottery and some burnt animal bones into each hole.

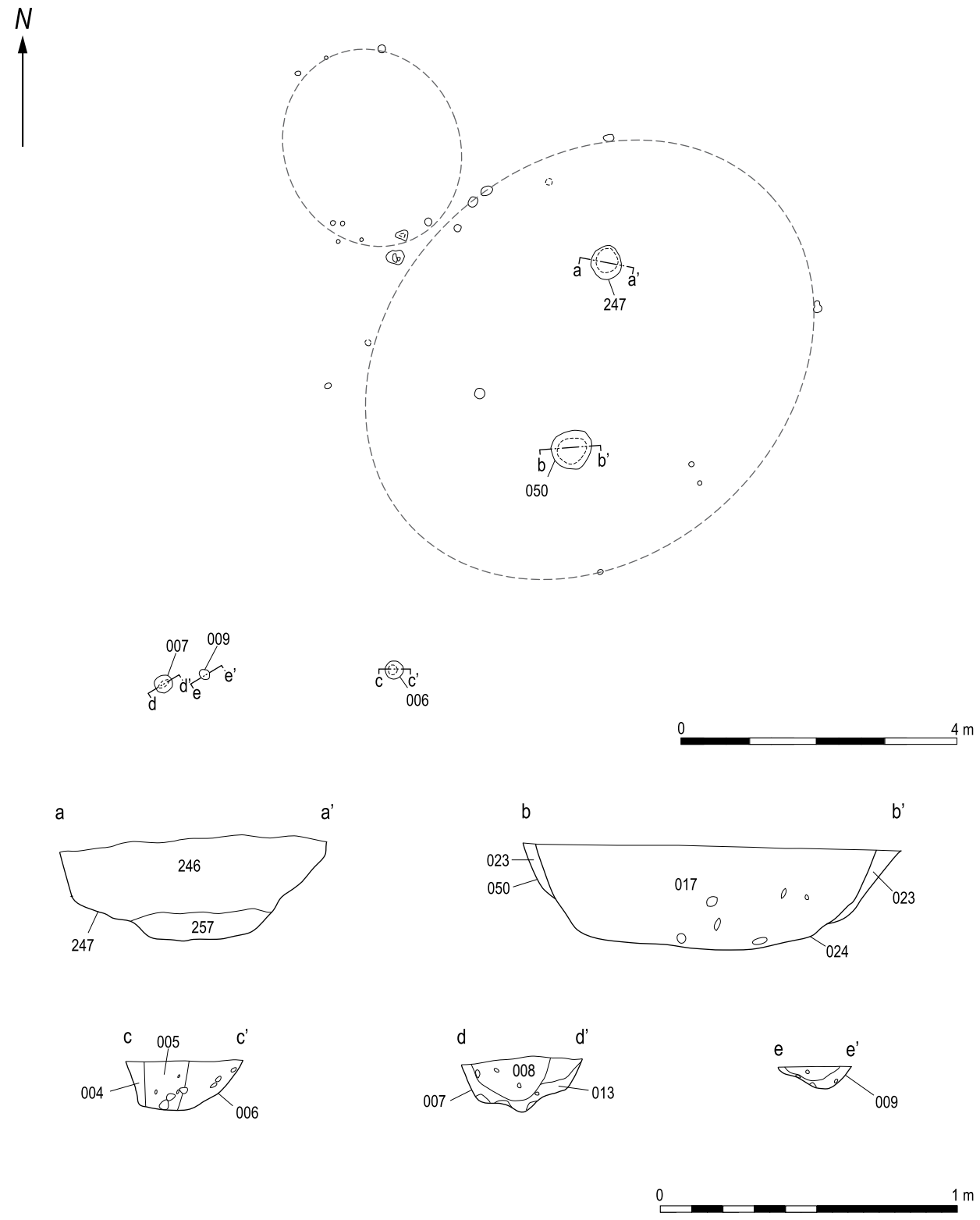
They filled in the northern pit (247) in two stages (246 and 257), soon after it was dug (no deposits were blown in or fell in while it lay open). First, they put in a small deposit, only 0.08m deep, rich in burnt plant remains and containing a pottery sherd and an unretouched flint flake and a fragment of end scraper (Figure 4.5: SF 23). On top of this, they put in more material rich in the burnt remains of hazel, oak and willow (246), as well as a little burnt animal bone, over 30 pieces of worked flint and pottery sherds from 12 different Fengate Ware vessels (Vessels 1–12; Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Only a small proportion of each vessel was present, suggesting they had been broken elsewhere and drawn together for deposition (see Chapter 12 and Archive). One pot (Figure 4.6: V 1), a large collared vessel with splaying walls and impressed decoration, had clearly been used for cooking or boiling, as evident from burnt encrustations on its outer and inner surfaces; after breaking it may have a lain in a hearth, causing its interior to scorch bright red. Fragments of another large collared vessel with incised decoration (Figure 4.6: V 2), a large thick-walled and flat-based vessel (Figure 4.6: V 3), two large, thick-walled, coarse vessels (V 4 and V 5), three large, thin-walled, fine-textured pots (V 5, 6 and 7), medium and large, tub-shaped vessels with incised decoration (Figure 4.6: V 10 and 11) and a small, thin-walled, incised-decorated vessel (Figure 4.6: V 12). Of these other pots, five also have indications that they were used on a hearth (V 2, 3, 4, 10 and 11).

4.2 The site at Overhailes during excavation.

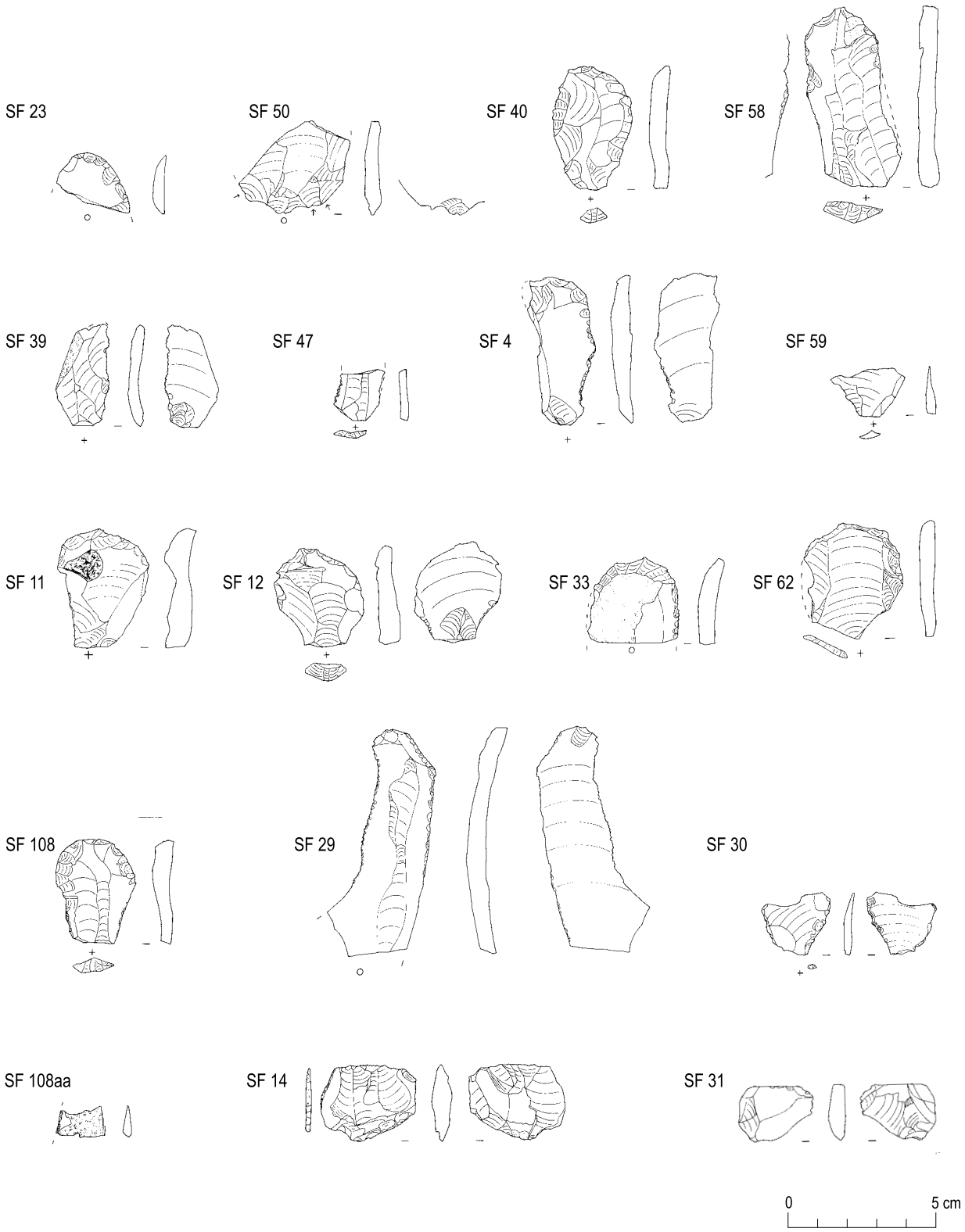
As well as flint chips (13) and unretouched flakes (9), the upper fill (246) contained a retouched piece (SF 50), two end scrapers (SFs 40, 58), two flakes with serrated edges (SFs 39, 47), a scraper/serrated combination tool



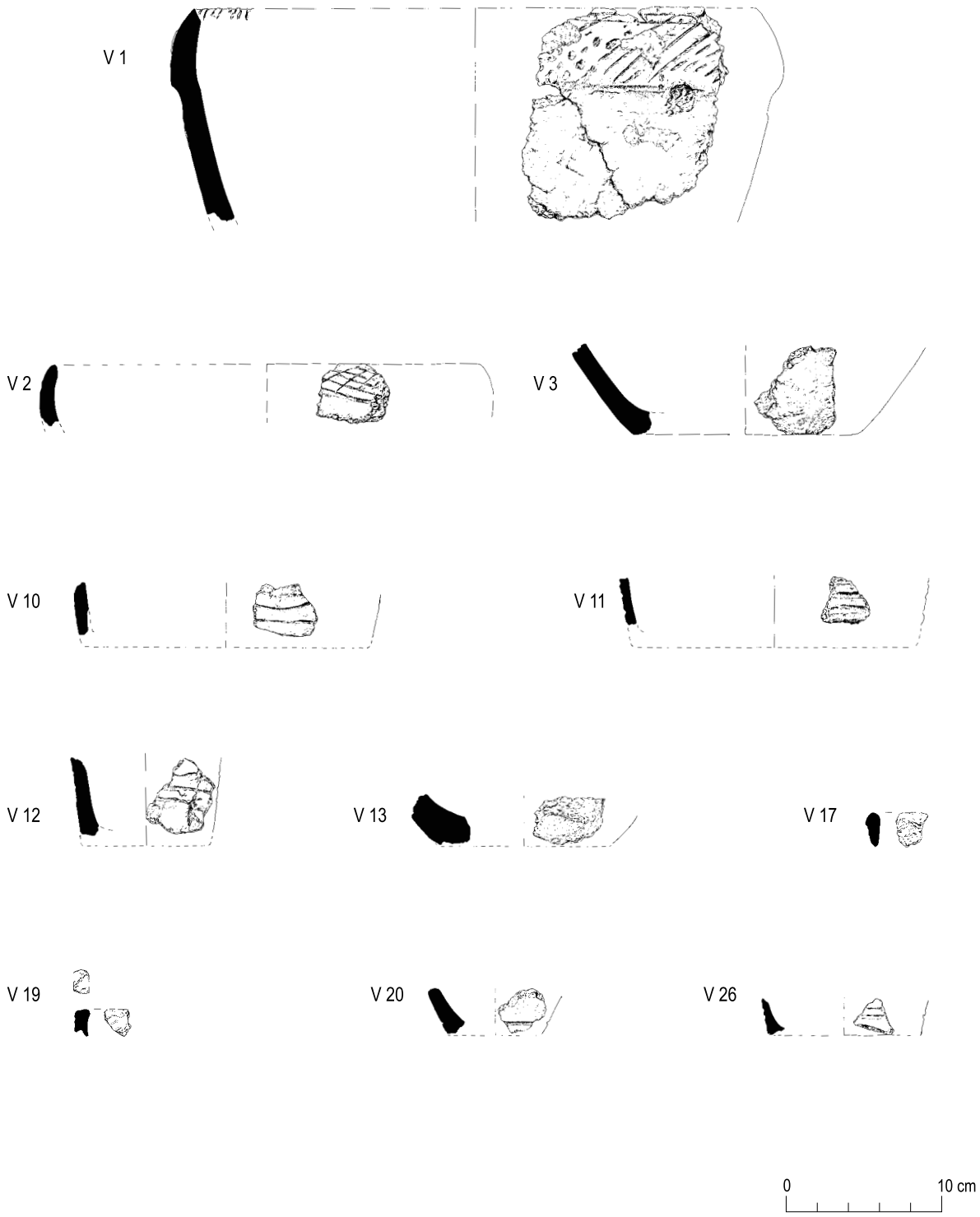
4.3 Plans of the main features at Overhailes.



4.4 Plan of Structure A and sections through pits 247, 050, 009, 007, 006.



4.5 Flint and chert stone tools from Overhailes.

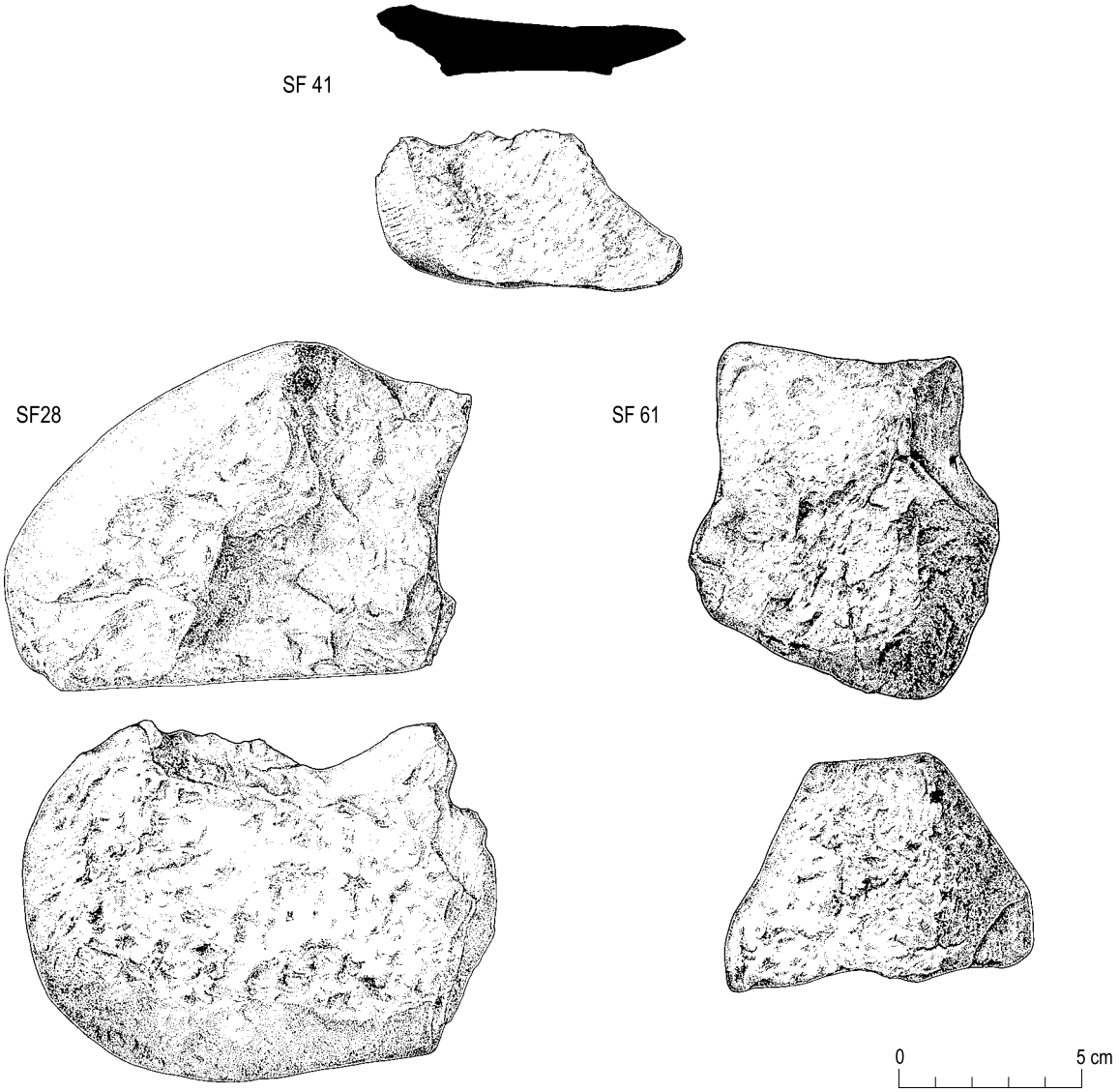


4.6 Pottery vessels from Overhailes.

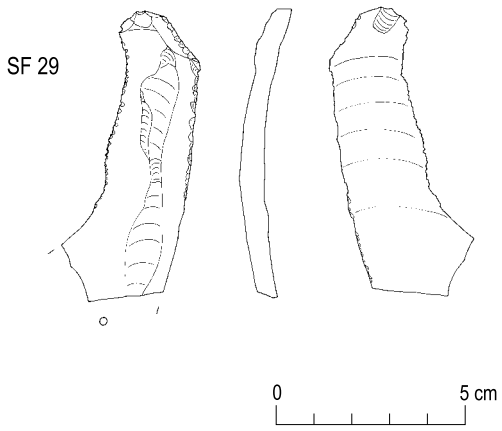
(SF 4) and a flake from a polished flint axe (SF 59) (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive) (Figure 4.5). The polished surface of the axe had been the platform. The tool-maker might have used a broken axe for a core because the flake had other scars on its dorsal surface that ran in the same direction. Coarse stone tools had also been deposited in the pit, including a large, struck-stone flake (SF 41) (Figure 4.7) and a fragment from a cobble (SF 46) (Stuart, see Chapter 12 and Archive) (not illustrated).

The upper fill (246) produced radiocarbon dates from hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal and hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana*) of 3340–2920 BC (SUERC-7504) and 3320–2910 BC (SUERC-7505). Small fragments of animal bones were present and identified by analysis as mammal in origin (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

The southern pit (050, fill 023) differed most from the northern one in that, soon after it had been backfilled, it was re-dug and filled in again. This sequence of activity removed most of the initial fill, a fine, yellow-brown silt (023). What remained contained a little charcoal and a single flint chip (SF 102). The second fill (017) was darker and contained more burnt plant remains, including hazelnut shell, hazel, apple, blackthorn and oak charcoal (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). There



4.7 Heavy stone tools from Overhailes.



4.8 A serrated edge tool from Overhailes.

were also small fragments of animal bone, which analysis identified as mammal in origin (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Samples of hazel (*Corylus*) and apple type (*Maloideae*) charcoal produced radiocarbon dates of 3340–3010 BC (SUERC-7509) and 3270–2900 BC (SUERC-7510), very similar calibrated ranges to those from the northern pit.

Those who filled in the pit for the second time also added a few handfuls of flint and pottery sherds as they worked. The pottery sherds are from ten different vessels: a large coarse, thick-walled vessel (Figure 4.6: V 13), four large, thin-walled and fine-textured vessels (V 14, 15, 16 and 18), a medium-sized vessel (Figure 4.6: V 17), a small, coarse-textured vessel (Figure 4.6: V 19), a thin-walled, fine-textured, flat-based pot with trunco-conic profile and incised decoration (Figure 4.6: V 20) and two other fine-textured vessels (V 21 and 22) (see Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Only a small proportion of each vessel was deposited, sherds from several of which indicate that they may have been used for cooking or burnt after breakage. Among the flints were five scrapers (SFs 11, 12, 33, 62, 108), one flake with a serrated edge (SF 29), two retouched pieces (SFs 30, 108AA), a core (SF 14) and a core fragment (SF 31) (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive) (Stuart, see Chapter 12 and Archive) (Figure 4.5). Coarse stone tools, an anvil (SF 28) and a possible pounder (SF 61), were also deposited in the pit (Figure 4.7).

The stone tool assemblage from both pits embodies an interesting contrast (see text box 4.1). The evidence suggests that someone knapped stone at the site and deposited a small, bipolar anvil core and a core fragment in the southern pit (050), along with the anvil on which it may have been struck. The core was a broken, retouched flake (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The implements, on the other hand, were flaked from sophisticated platform cores that were not put in the pit. Either the cores were never brought to the site, or they were kept in circulation. The nature of the raw material suggests that the tools came from at least as far away as Yorkshire and possibly further still. They were probably brought as finished pieces, or at least blanks, since nothing in the knapping debris indicated that large nodules were worked at Overhailes (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Similarly, the pottery assemblage includes a form of large, collared vessel that has never previously been recognised in Scotland. This form, part of a Fengate ware tradition, has a distribution much further to the south (Sherdian, see Chapter 12 and Archive). These observations imply that the people using the shelf at Overhailes had social contacts over a wide geographical range.

Other activity

Perhaps at around the same time that they dug and filled in the two large pits, those occupying the shelf also dug a line of three smaller pits to the south-west of the yard (Figure 4.4). In one small pit (007), the diggers pressed a few stones into its base, then put in a deposit with a small amount of charcoal (013). They covered this with two other deposits (008 and 012); both contained charcoal and one (008) contained tiny fragments of burnt bone and sherds of pottery. The charcoal was of burnt hazel, blackthorn, heather and oak (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive), while the animal remains were mammalian but too small to identify (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Radiocarbon dates were obtained from samples of blackthorn type (*Prunus spinosa*) charcoal and hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal of 3330–2920 BC (SUERC-7511) and 3340–2930 BC (SUERC-7512).

Although no radiocarbon dates came from the other two pits, their relative positions and the artefacts they contained suggest that they could be contemporary. About one metre to the east, another small pit (009) was dug and filled with a deposit containing what may be burnt food remains, including some hazelnut shell and mammal bone (010). Most of the bone was unidentifiable, but one was a heavily calcined bone from the foot of a pig, an adult or immature adult (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The pit was filled up with an ashy deposit of burnt alder and hazel, with more food remains among it, again including hazelnut shell (011) (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

About 5m further to the east was a third small pit (006) that probably held a post: an inner fill of dark-brown silty sand (005) against its steep western edge was interpreted as a post-pipe, and oak charcoal from this may have been the remains of a post. Sherds of pottery from four different

4.1

Stone tools from the Overhailes pits

The two pits in the yard outside Structure 1 contained particularly interesting sets of flint tools. One of the pits (050) held five scrapers and a serrated-edge flake, while the other (247) held two scrapers, two serrated-edge flakes and a tool which combines both scraping and serrated edges (see Figure 4.8).

Scrapers are flakes of stone; the flakes have been retouched, usually at the distal end, to form convex scraping edges. They were used, as the name implies, for scraping, with the tool held in such a way that the ventral surface of the retouched edge is in contact with the material being scraped. Micro-wear analysis and experimentation has shown that scrapers are multi-purpose tools which can be used for working various raw materials, including wood and bone, but that they are especially suitable for preparing animal skins.

Serrated-edge tools are flakes on which part of the edge has been given closely spaced indentations using the edge of another piece of flint, creating serrated edges that look like the teeth of a fine saw (Figure 4.8). This provides a robust working edge, but its function is still disputed. For a long time it was thought that serrated-edge tools were components – hafted singly or in combinations – of sickle-like harvesting tools. However, microwear studies have shown that serrated pieces have often been used in a whittling fashion rather than in a saw-like motion. Some connection with the working of plant material (including wood) seems likely, in any case, because so many serrated-edge tools have a distinctive edge gloss, thought to relate to continued contact with plant silica. The largest serrated-edge flake from Overhailes has a small patch of gloss on the back of the denticulations (saw-teeth).

While scrapers are a ubiquitous tool type, occurring in archaeological assemblages from the Palaeolithic period to the Bronze Age, serrated-edge flakes are less common. They have been reported in contexts in Britain ranging from the Mesolithic period to the early Bronze Age, but seem to have had a particular currency during the early to middle Neolithic. Since both scrapers and serrated-edge flakes are basic tool-types with fairly standard characteristics, they rarely occur in chronologically diagnostic forms (that is, they are difficult, if not impossible, to closely date in isolation). So their presence together in the pits at Overhailes, dated to the second half of the fourth millennium BC, helps to establish a chronological horizon for these tools in eastern Scotland.

All of the implements from these pits appear to have been used before they were discarded, though they do not seem to have been used so heavily that they were no longer functional. They are also of relatively large size – larger than most blanks obtainable from local pebble sources – and so they could have been reworked into other tools rather than left in the pit. So their presence in these pit fills is somewhat enigmatic, since one might expect them to have remained in circulation rather than been abandoned. Given the ritualised nature of social and technological activity during the Neolithic, however, there could be many reasons why people chose to abandon or conceal them rather than to continue using them.

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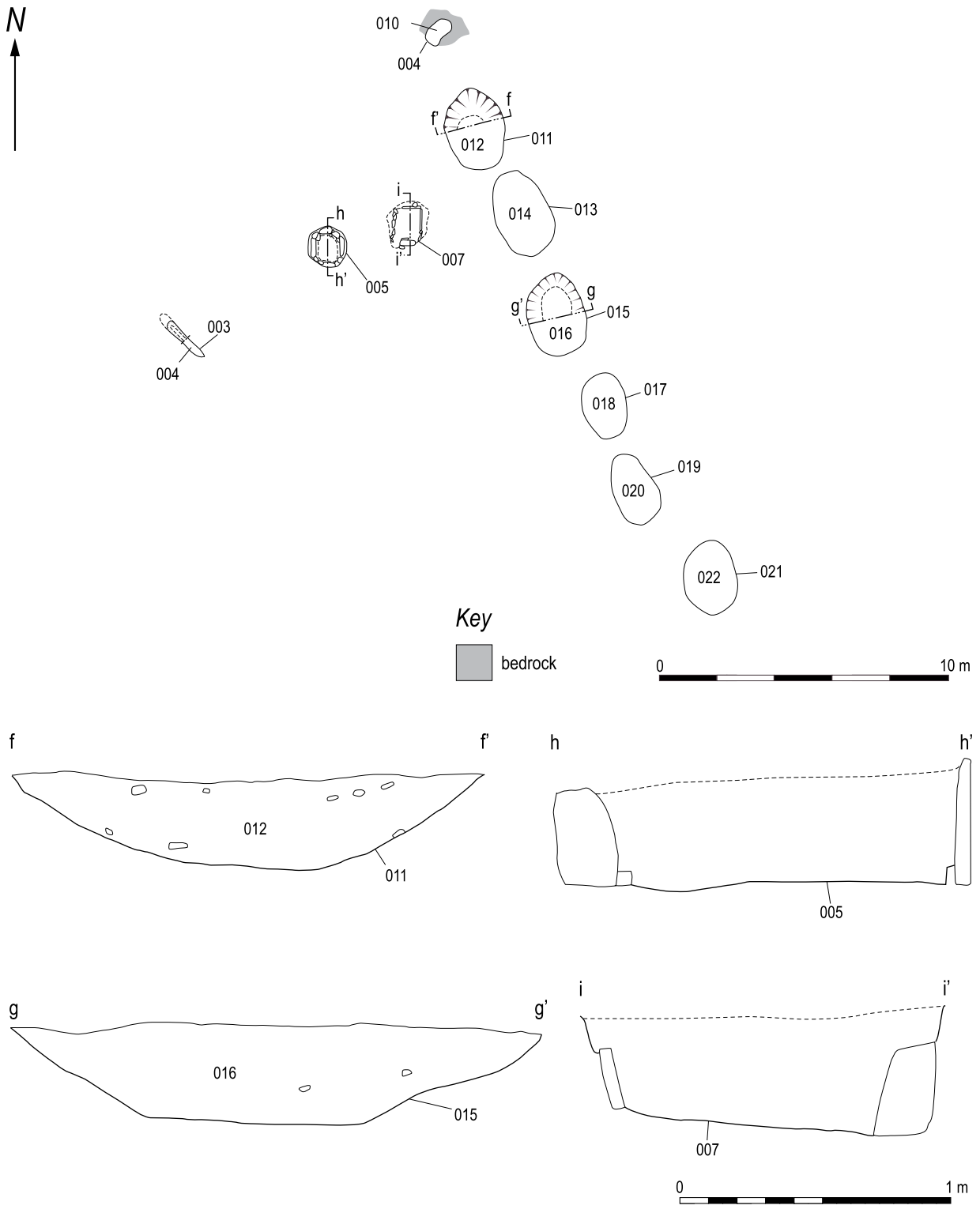
vessels (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive; V 23–26) had been placed in the pit: from two large vessels (pots 23 and 24), a small vessel (V 25) and a small, thin-walled, fine ware pot with incised decoration (Figure 4.6: V 26). These sherds were found in the outer fill (004), lying against the post-pipe, and they may have been tucked in deliberately, along with charcoal, burnt animal bone and burnt hazelnut shell, perhaps from a hearth. The charcoal consisted of oak, alder, birch, hazel, and apple charcoal (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).



4.9 The pit alignment in plan and section.

Long after the pits had been backfilled and the stake-built structure (A) and enclosure had burnt down, another phase of activity was initiated by a new generation. Around the end of the third millennium BC, an alignment of pits was created along with three large, stone-lined pits and a structure or circle of large timber posts (Figure 4.3). The chronology of much of this activity is not clear, but it is possible that the features are broadly contemporary.

An alignment of pits

About 15m to the west of the long-vanished building and yard, a new generation came to the site and dug a line of eight pits that ran down the slope, from north to south (Figure 4.9). All the pits except one were oval in plan, up to 2.8m in length and 0.4m in depth. The exception was the northernmost pit, which had been cut into the outcropping bedrock on the hillside and was only 1m long. This general consistency in form may suggest that the pits were created to hold upright timbers.

4.10 The stone-lined pit (241) during excavation.

No dating evidence was recovered from these features. However, it is possible, by analogy with other pit alignments identified in the wider region (see Chapter 3), that they date to the third millennium BC.

Stone-lined pits and linear features

Close to the pit alignment, three sub-circular pits and a linear feature were dug. Their spatial relationships suggest that they were contemporary (Figure 4.9).

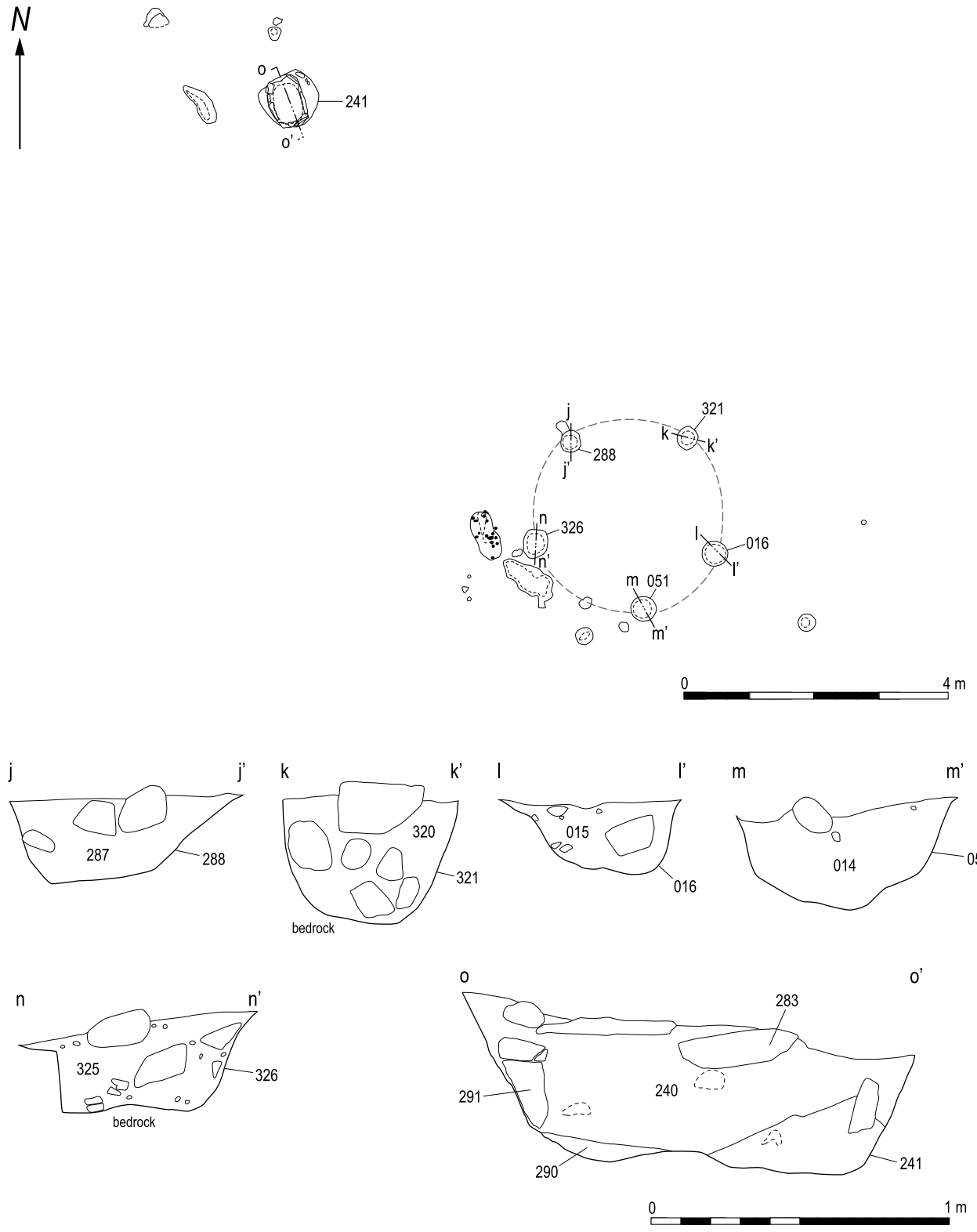
To the west of the pit alignment were two stone-lined boxes or cists (005 and 007), sitting along a line perpendicular to that of the alignment (Figure 4.9). Although subsequent ploughing may have damaged the pits, dragging stones out of them, whoever created them appears to have set upright, flat slabs against the edges, with packing stones to hold them in place. The fills of both stone boxes were silts (TSM-006 and TSM-008), which may suggest they had been left open to the elements. Fragments of unidentifiable burnt bone were observed in the fill (TSM-006) of the westernmost pit. Large pieces of rubble in the eastern pit (TSM-005) may suggest that it originally had a capstone that had broken, and some of the pieces of which had fallen in.

To the east of the pit alignment, this later generation dug another pit (241) down to the bedrock (Figures 4.10 and 4.11). They set slabs (291) hard against the edges, setting some in compact sandy silt (290/289) that might have been earthen luting, and set packing stones around the lining. This pit was filled with a light, friable deposit of dark, sandy silt (240) that is likely to have been the result of natural silting. On the fill were set several large slabs (283) that formed a capstone; subsequent ploughing may have dragged it slightly off-centre. Samples of hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal and oat (*Avena sp*) from the silty fill (240) gave radiocarbon dates of 2350–2040 BC (SUERC-7513) and 1150–1280 AD (SUERC-7514) respectively. The Medieval date is most likely to derive from intrusive material, but the late second millennium BC may at best represent a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the feature.

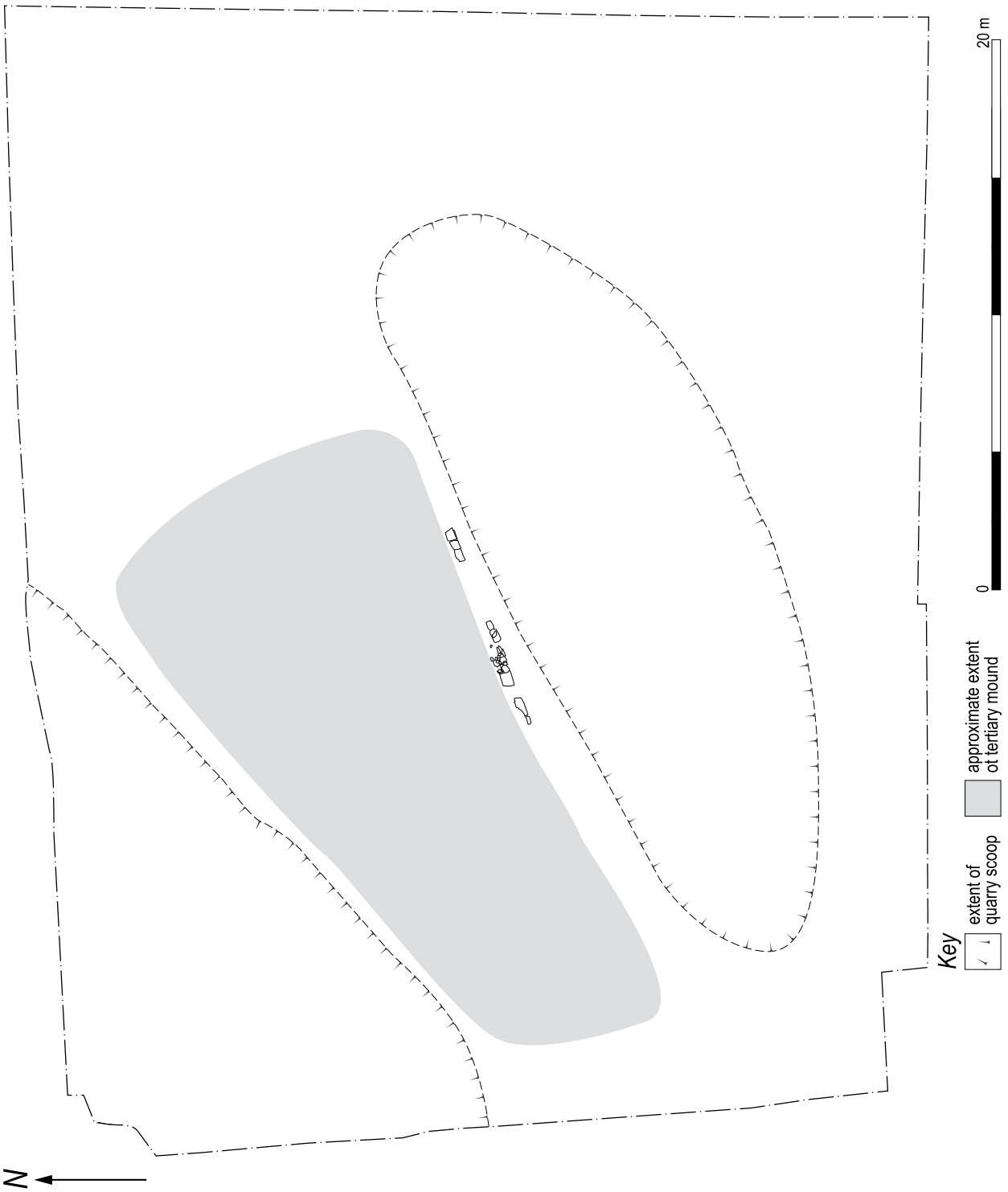
Of several other pits in the vicinity, one (003) may be contemporary. This linear pit (003), up to 2.2m in length and 0.4m wide with a charcoal-rich fill (004), appears to have been positioned in relation to stone-lined pits (005) and (007).

A timber circle or structure

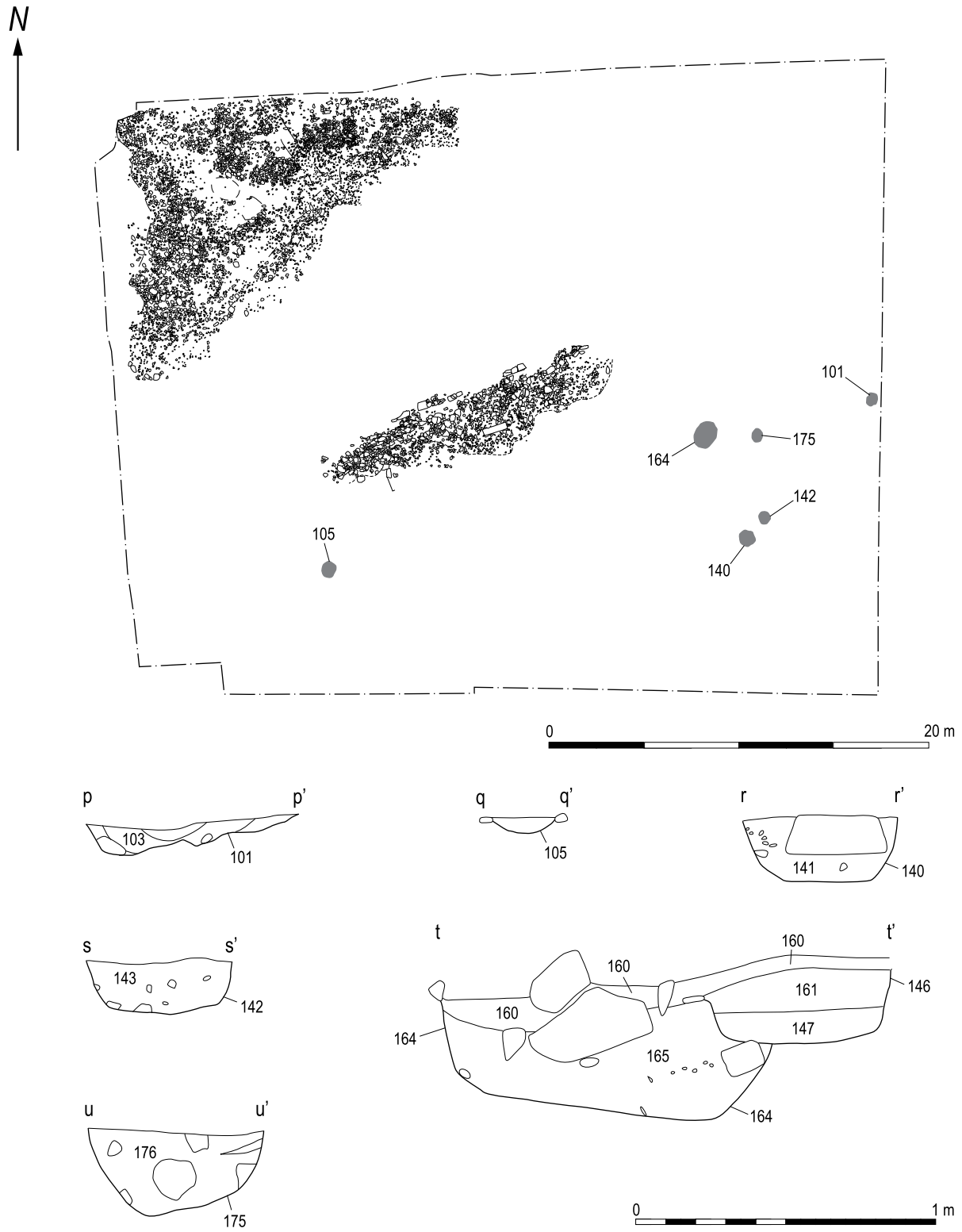
About 15m south-east of the stone-lined pit (241), these later occupants of Overhailes created a ring of five posts, set in post-holes (016, 051, 288, 321 and 326) (Figure 4.11). The largest post-hole was just over 1m across, but the rest were about 0.7m wide, and all reached down onto the surface of the bedrock. The occupants erected substantial oak timbers in them; three (051), (288) and (326) contained post-pipes, and the similarities in form



4.11 Plans of Structure B and the stone-lined pit (241), with sections through the features.



4.12 Plan showing the approximate extent of the third mound at Eweford West, flanked by quarry scoops.



4.13 Plan of the pits and cairn material, with sections through the pits.

and packing between all five indicate a common function. They also packed the posts with cobbles and larger stones, and they dug two further single post-holes (319 and 322) outside the ring on the south.

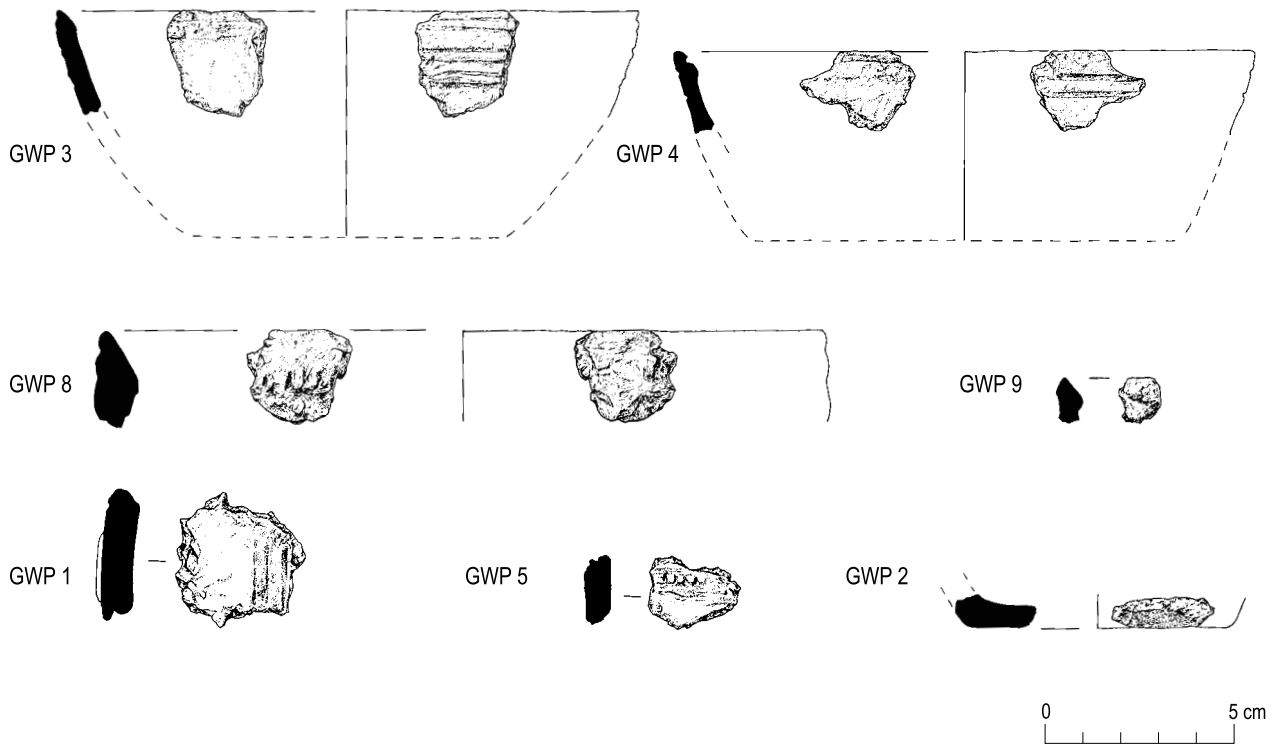
When the posts were in place, the builders backfilled the holes with burnt wood and (in three of them) burnt plant food remains. Palaeobotanical analysis shows one contained indeterminate cereal (287), while two (015 and 325) contained cereals and burnt seeds of radish, pea, hazelnut shell and tuber fragments (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Radiocarbon dates of 2340–2040 BC (SUERC-7520) and 1930–1740 BC (SUERC-7521) were obtained from samples of hazel (*Corlyus*) charcoal and blackthorn type (*Prunus spinosa*) charcoal in one post-hole (288). In one post-hole (051), small featureless sherds from two pots (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive; V 27 and 28), were also deposited. This may have been a small timber circle, marking off an area about 5m in diameter; alternatively, the posts may have supported the roof of a small, circular building.

The return to place at Eweford West

At Eweford West (Figure 4.1), by the end of the fourth millennium BC, previous generations had constructed a long, trapezoidal mound of earth and stone, retained by lengths of drystone walling and a timber façade (see Chapter 2). The mound had been built after several hundred years of activity that included building and burning wooden and stone structures that held human remains, digging pits and smashing pottery.

It would appear that for several hundred years, perhaps during the first half of the third millennium BC, the old mound was no longer such a focus of activity, or at least none that left archaeologically visible traces. We cannot be sure whether the monument was completely ignored or abandoned during this period, or whether its importance simply decreased. Inevitably, the wooden façade rotted and the stone cap tumbled down. Much of the subsequent activity at Eweford West focused on the southern and northern margins of the mound, on its flanks and in hollows that may have been used as quarry pits for mound material from the fourth millennium BC onward (see Figure 4.12).

The first archaeologically visible activity from this phase was a small, isolated pit, dug and filled (101) in the early second millennium BC. This pit lay to the east of the mound, beyond the southern hollow (Figure 4.13). Broken artefacts and burnt plant remains were placed



4.14 Grooved Ware vessels from Eweford West.

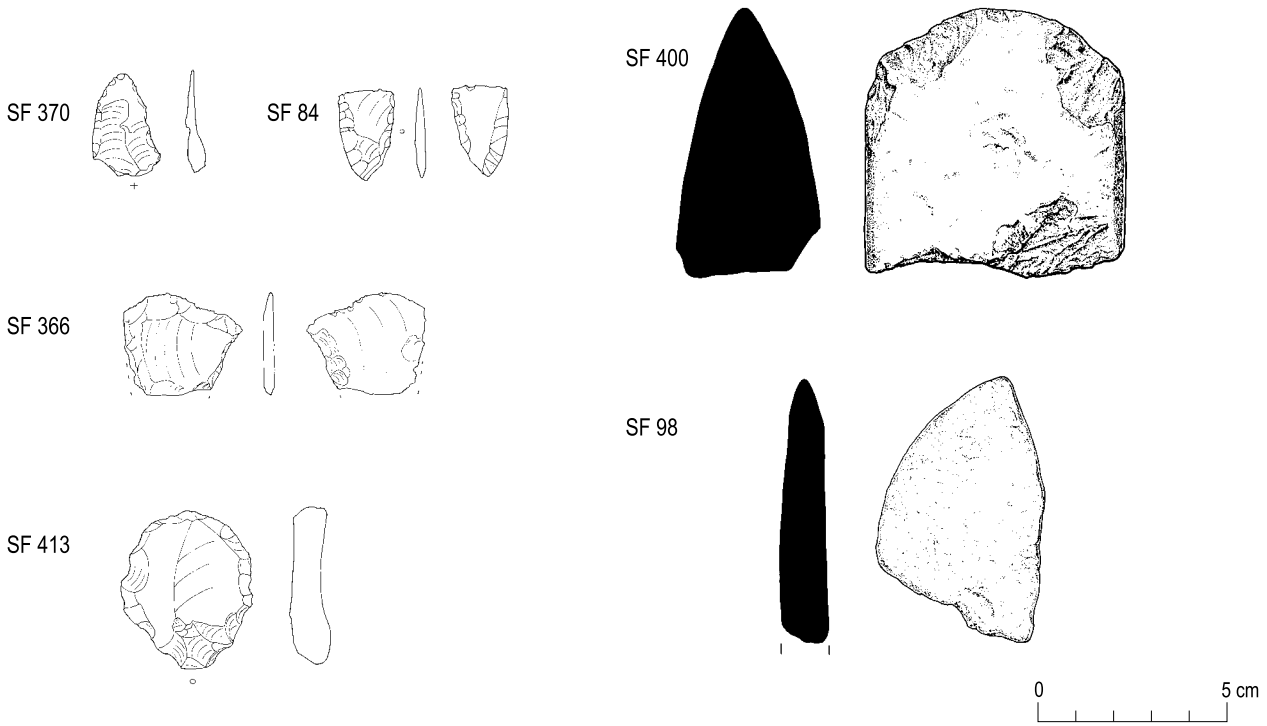
in it. Part of a grey flint arrowhead (SF 493) (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive) was put in the pit, along with two chips of grey flint, a grey-blue chert flake and two sherds of pottery (SF 492, 494) from two possible Grooved Ware vessels (GWP 1 and 2, Figure 4.14; Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive) that had been smashed elsewhere. These artefacts were mixed with hazel and oak charcoal, fragments of hazelnut shell and two carbonised grains of six-row barley (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A radiocarbon date of 3020–2700 BC (SUERC-5294) was obtained from hazelnut shell.

Filling the hollows

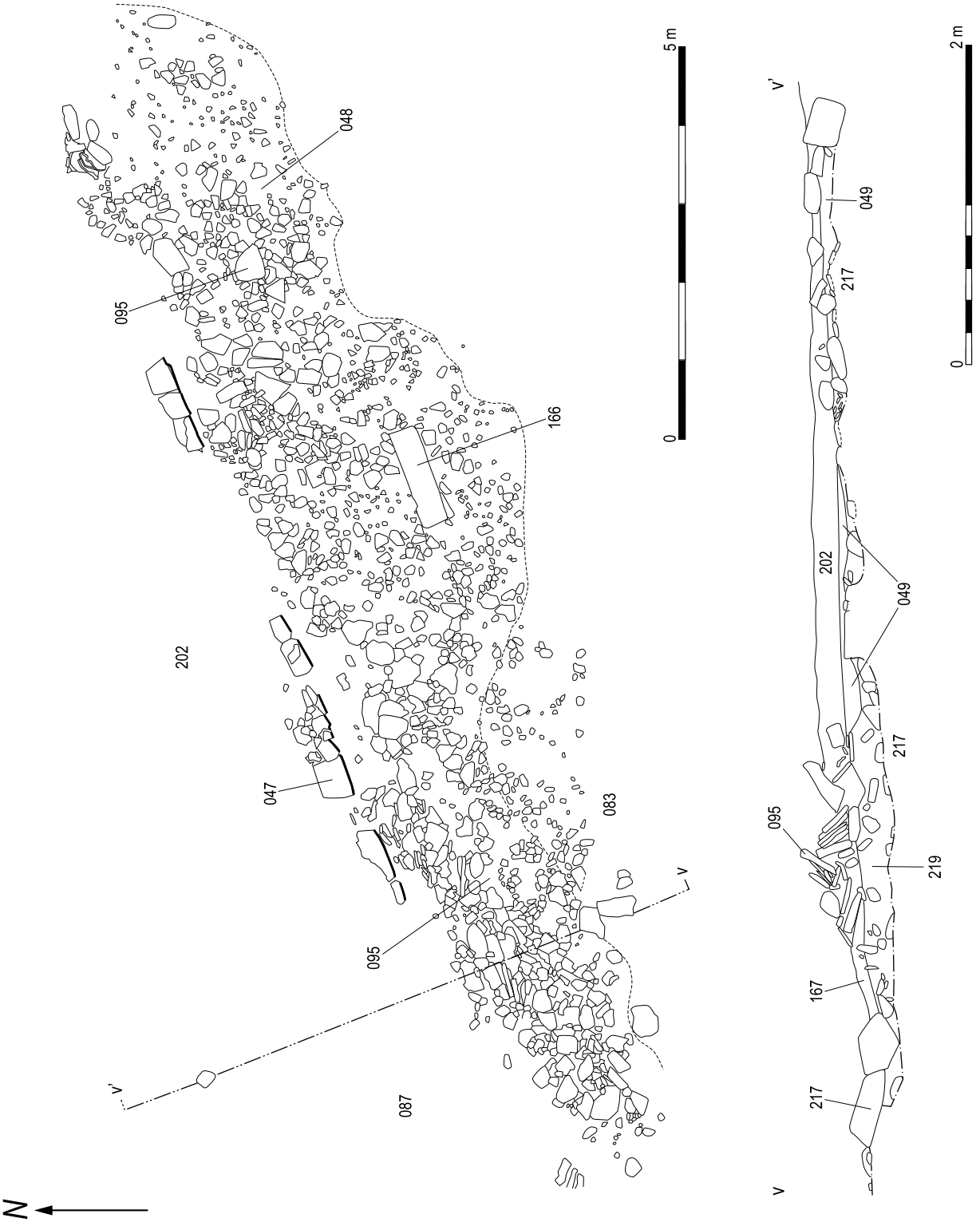
Perhaps about the same time, the southern hollow began to act as a focus for other activities, which left artefacts in a layer of sand and silts (104/109/167) that formed in the hollow's base and on the flank of the old mound. People brought fragments of pottery vessels to the site, as represented by a number of sherds (SFs 334, 344, 345, 349, 355, 358, 359, 362, 363, 367, 371, 374, 382, 383). These sherds came from a variety of up to seven Grooved Ware vessels (GWP 3–9, Figure 4.14; Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The pots were predominantly thin-walled, fine-textured vessels, two of which were small bowls with splaying sides (GWP 3 and 4) and two of which may have been larger and tub-shaped (GWP 8 and 9). Only a tiny proportion of each pot was present, and the sherds were generally worn. Together, this suggests that they were trampled in the course of other activity in the hollows.

Some of this activity involved the use of human remains. A small pit (105) had been cut into layer (104), and among the contents (106) of that pit was a small quantity (0.2g) of burnt human bone and oak charcoal. Specialist analysis of the bone suggests that it derives from both an adult and a neonate (see Duffy, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A small quantity of burnt human bone (1.2g) was also found within layer 104.

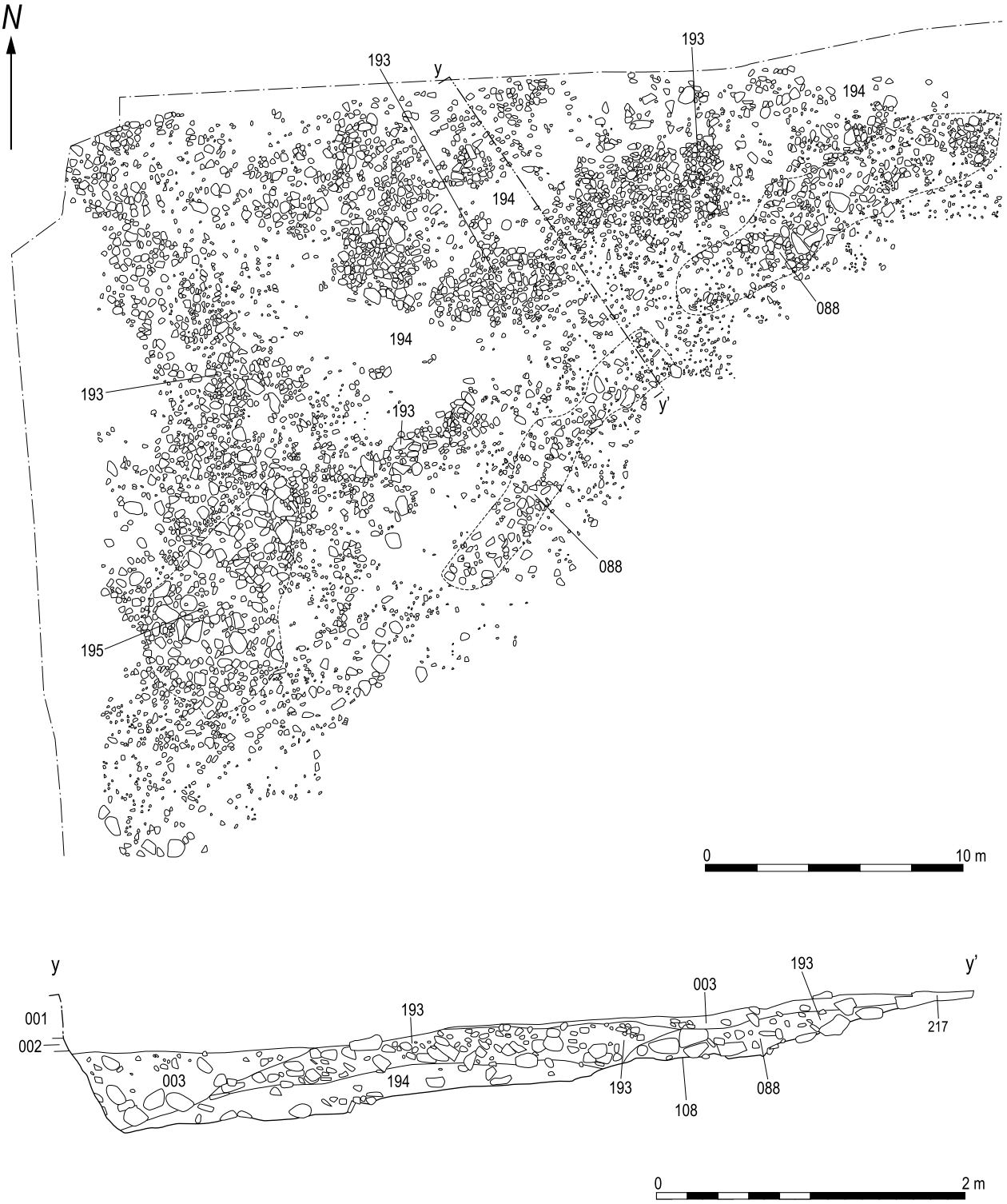
People also dropped pieces of quartz in the area (in layer 104), particularly towards the west end of the southern hollow. Although many of these pieces were unworked flakes, some – including a core (SF 333) – had been worked (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Again, it is difficult to be certain which of these artefacts relates directly to this phase of activity, since a microlith (Sample cat no 44) and perhaps other stone tools might have been residual (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.3). However, two of the tools from the area (from 167) almost certainly relate to this phase of activity: a retouched piece produced from



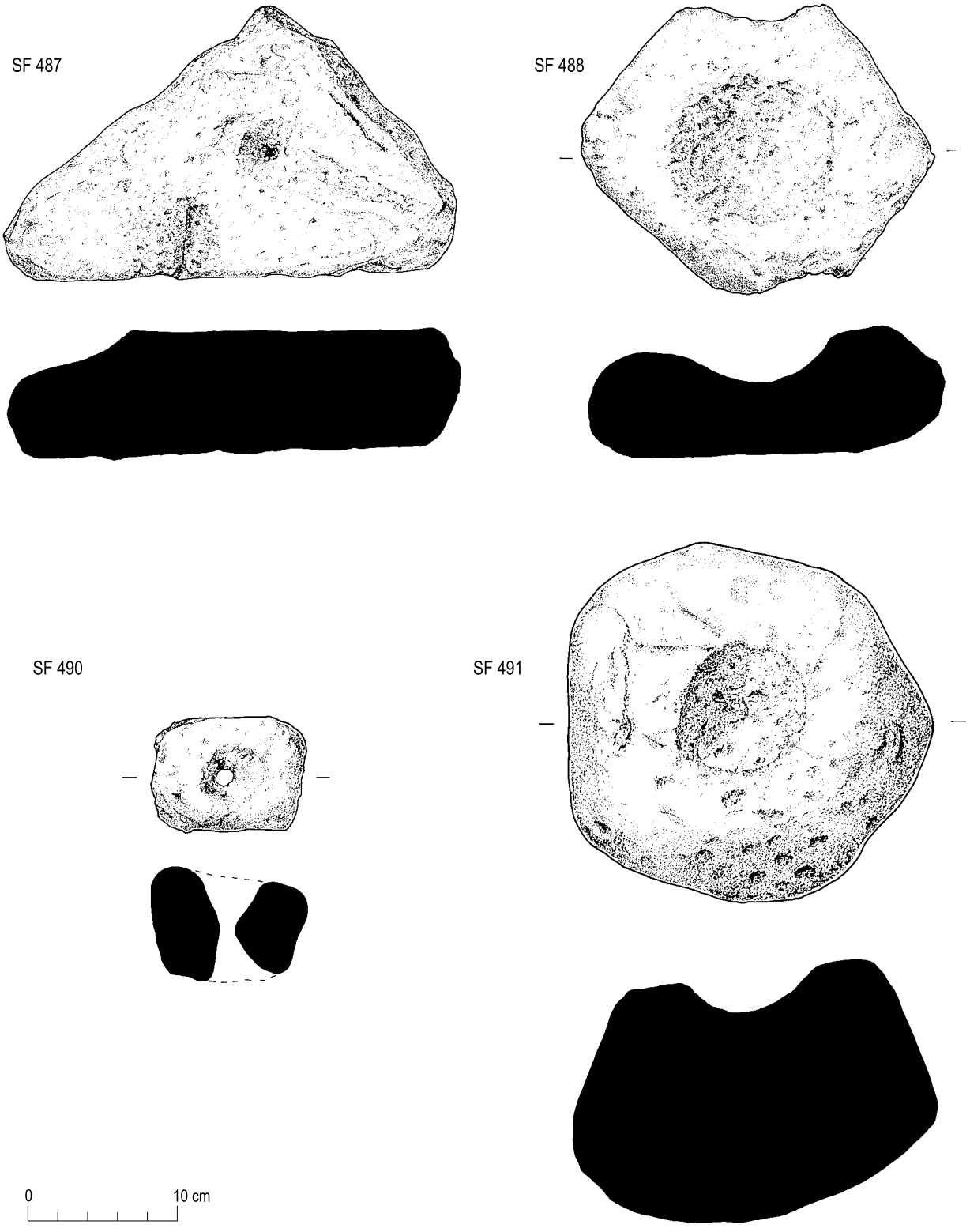
4.15 Stone tools from Eweford West.



4.16 The collapsed walling on the southern side of the mound.



4.17 Later arcs of stonework on the mound.



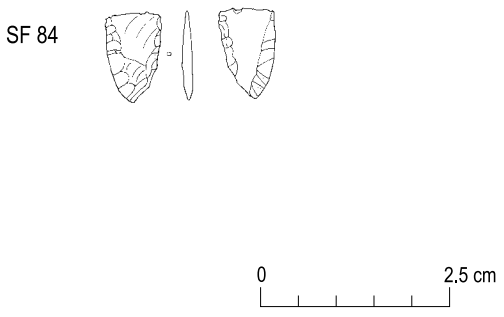
4.18 Cup-marked stones from Eweford West.

a broken, polished, flint axehead (SF 370, Figure 4.15) and an incomplete grey flint chisel arrowhead (SF 366) (Figure 4.15). A large horse shoe scraper (SF 413, Figure 4.15) may also have been brought at this time. One coarse stone tool from the area (from 167) may also relate to this phase. This was a fragment of an elongated pebble (SF 367) that had first been used as a hammer stone and then as a whetstone (McLaren, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

After these artefacts were scattered to the south of the old mound, piles of sandstone slabs (095) were set on the flank of the mound itself; they later pitched down its slope (212) and partially sealed the artefact-rich deposits in the hollow and on the flank of the mound (Figure 4.16). Although these slabs were jumbled and broken, they still retained some of their original order. This order evoked the remains of a wall that had collapsed in a single, decisive event, and the slabs were interpreted as the remains of the wall that had retained the mound's southern side (see Chapter 2). It is unclear whether the collapse of this wall was the result of deliberate destruction or structural failure, caused by the pressure of the earth behind it.

Shortly afterward, the mound may have been deliberately scalped to re-use the deposits and stone of the upper cairn. A layer of cairn material (083) was spread to form an arc extending over *c.* 7m by 35m, sealing one of the artefact-rich deposits (104). The stones were mixed with considerable quantities of sediment, suggesting that this deposit might have been a mixture of the capping cairn material and the earthen mound below. Equally, it is possible that this stoney layer (083) originally had a more coherent form, but that it had become mixed or levelled with subsequent use, as was evident in deposits to the north-west of the old mound (see below): this mixing is evident through the presence of a sherd of Grooved Ware (083) (GWP 3, Figure 4.14; Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Certain artefacts may have been deliberately deposited in the stoney layer (083) at this time, including part of a flat, ovoid whetstone (not illustrated; SF 403) and two broken stone axe heads (McLaren, see Chapter 12 and Archive). One, a sandstone axe head, was heat-reddened and sooty, so the people active at Eweford West at this time may have broken and burned the axe head before depositing it (Figure 4.15; SF 400). These people also broke another polished stone axe in half before leaving it among the stones Figure 4.15; SF 98). The cutting edge showed signs of damage, so the axe had been used elsewhere before being brought to the monument. The sandstone axe could have been made from local stone, but the stone axe is probably from Langdale in Cumbria (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

At around this time, the monument builders created two new arcs of cairn along the north-western flank of the old mound, and these arcs also extended into the quarry pit below. They consisted of several distinct banks of stone (Figure 4.17). One ran along the upper edge of the old mound (088), extending as two lengths (7m by 1.4m and 6m by 1.2m wide and up to 0.35m deep) that rested on a notable cut (108), perhaps where a length of drystone walling equivalent to the southern wall (047) had been robbed (108). Another bank of stone (195) ran further down the slope (6.3m by 3m and up to 0.30m deep). The builders incorporated cup-marked stones into the cairn, two in the upper bank (088) (SFs 600, 601; not illustrated) and five in the lower one (195) (SFs 487–491; see Figure 4.18 (489 not illustrated)). One of them (SF 490) was perforated (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The absence of cup-marked stones elsewhere on the monument suggests that they were being placed here in an intentional, meaningful way. The area between the banks (088 and 195) was strewn with stone (193). This stone (193) might have derived from more coherent deposits of stone, which had originally formed more substantial banks or cairns that were later spread by erosion and ploughing. At its northernmost extent, this spread of cairn material lay at a depth of 0.90m and was sealed by colluvium (003).



4.19 The chisel arrowhead.

Activity beyond the hollows

After the mound was scalped, it seems that other artefacts were put or dropped on its surface. The late Neolithic chisel arrowhead of grey flint mentioned above (SF 84; see text box 4.2 and Figure 4.19) was incorporated into what was left of the mound after scalping (090). Although some of the 27 pieces of worked stone from this layer (090) pre-date the fourth millennium BC (see Chapter 2), others – predominantly grey chert and flint flakes – might have been deposited at the same time as the arrowhead (Savillle, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Elsewhere in the vicinity of the old mound, 200m to the east, someone dug a small pit (028, not illustrated)

4.2

Chisel arrowheads

Chisel arrowheads, which have a broad cutting edge rather than a point, are typically associated with later Neolithic contexts in Britain. They were made using a distinctive method, starting with a broad flake, one lateral edge of which was left unretouched as the cutting edge while the other edges were trimmed to form the base or tang for hafting (see Figure 4.19). Arrowheads of this type were presumably designed to cut wide, profusely bleeding wounds. There has been much speculation over the type of game they were used to target, with some authorities suggesting large birds such as geese.

Surprisingly, however, there is little evidence for the use of bows and arrows for hunting or sport during the Neolithic period. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence for their use in earlier and middle Neolithic times as a weapon of war – for example, from finds of leaf-shaped arrowheads embedded in human bones found in chambered tombs – although there is no evidence that chisel arrowheads were used in this way in Britain. It is, therefore, possible that their introduction marked a swing towards hunting or sport, accompanying other cultural changes in the late Neolithic.

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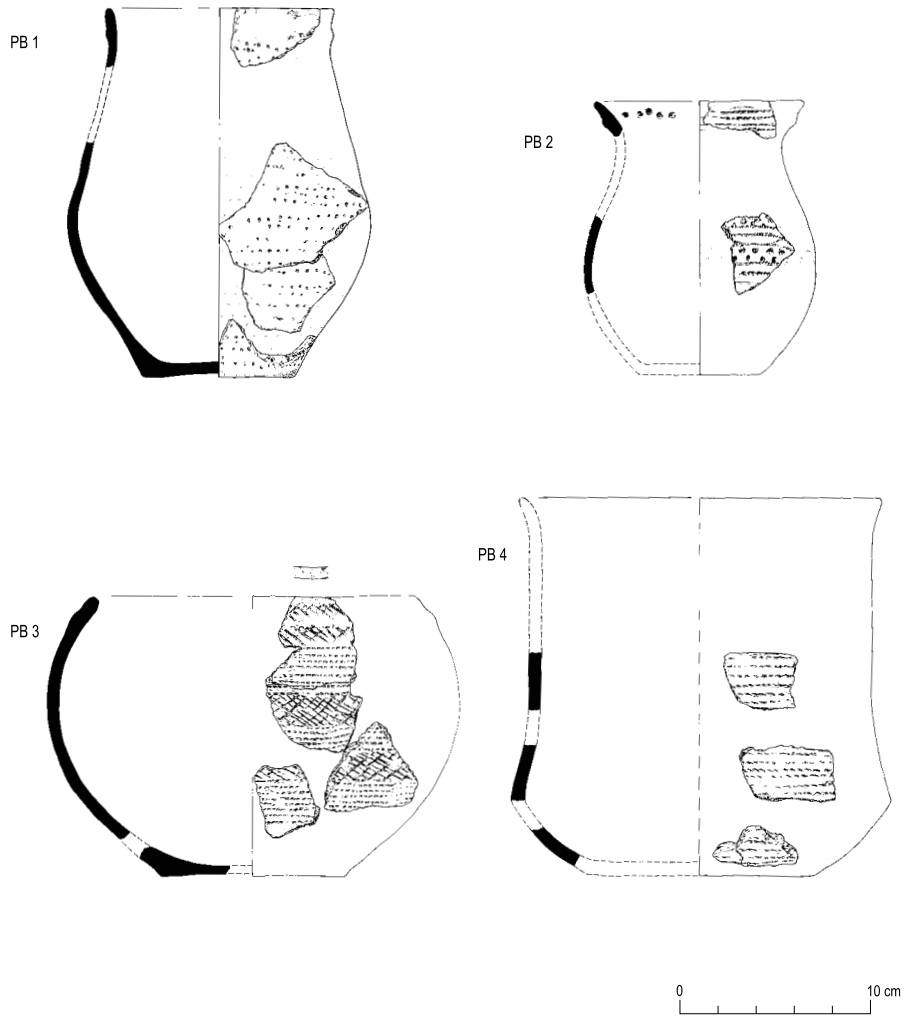
and put fragments from four different Beakers and some charcoal into it, including apple type (*Maloideae*), oak (*Quercus*), hazel (*Corylus*), willow (*Salix*) and cherry type (*Prunoideae*) charcoal (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Mixed in with this were burnt hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) fragments, burnt rowan seeds (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and a few burnt cereal grains, some of which were identifiable as barley. A radiocarbon date of 2310–2030 BC (SUERC-5299) was obtained from carbonised cereal grains (*Hordeum vulgare*).

The Beakers from which the sherds came were of different forms (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). One pot had been decorated with impressions from a round-toothed comb (BP 1, Figure 4.20; less than one-quarter of the pot is present), another with impressions from a rectangular-toothed comb (BP 2, Figure 4.20; less than one-tenth is present). A third was a globular bowl, decorated in zones with impressions made with a comb and with incised lines (BP 3, Figure 2.40; less than one-fifth is present). A fourth had been a large vessel decorated all over with comb impressions (BP 4, Figure 4.20; less than one-fifth is present). All the sherds were unabraded, so they had not been lying around for long before they were put into the pits. Whoever put them there might have smashed the vessels deliberately with the intention of depositing parts of them.

Two other pits (142 and 140) were dug closer to the old mound, just beyond the south-eastern hollow (Figure 4.13). One (143) contained oak and hazel charcoal, carbonised hazelnut shell and approximately 2000 cereal grains (including naked and hulled barley, bread wheat and emmer wheat) (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A radiocarbon date of 2280–2030 BC (SUERC-5296) was obtained from one cereal grain (*Triticum dicoccum*). A chert flake, two flint chips and a burnt flint fragment accompanied the grain, shell and charcoal.

The neighbouring pit (140) contained similar material (Figure 4.13). Its ashy lower fill contained two chert flakes and a flint flake, as well as oak and hazel charcoal, carbonised hazelnut shell and approximately 1000 cereal grains (including naked and hulled barley, bread wheat and emmer wheat) (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A radiocarbon date of 2200–1940 BC (SUERC-5295)) was obtained from a cereal grain (*Hordeum vulgare var vulgare*). In this pit (unlike its neighbour), they set three large stones in the upper fill, sealing the contents.

At around the same time, a sub-rectangular pit (164) was dug into the flank of the old mound, cutting through the layer of mixed cairn material (083) (Figure 4.13). This pit was filled with about 25,000 burnt cereal grains, mainly barley, with twice as much of the naked variety as hulled, and a small quantity of emmer wheat (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Along with the cereal grains, the pit held charcoal, predominantly oak and hazel with smaller quantities of cherry and alder; a chert core, two flint chips and a burnt fragment of a bifacially worked point (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive), and



4.20 Beaker pots 1–4.

two sherds from two different Beakers (BP 8 and BP 9) (SFs 120 and 326) (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A radiocarbon date of 2140–1910 BC (SUERC-5316) was obtained from a sample of cereal grain (*Hordeum vulgare var vulgare*).

Another pit (175) was dug close by and filled with a similar deposit, consisting of four sherds of Beaker pottery (BP 10) (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive) and about 9000 grains of burnt cereal (Figure 4.13). It consisted mostly of naked barley, with some emmer and bread wheat (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

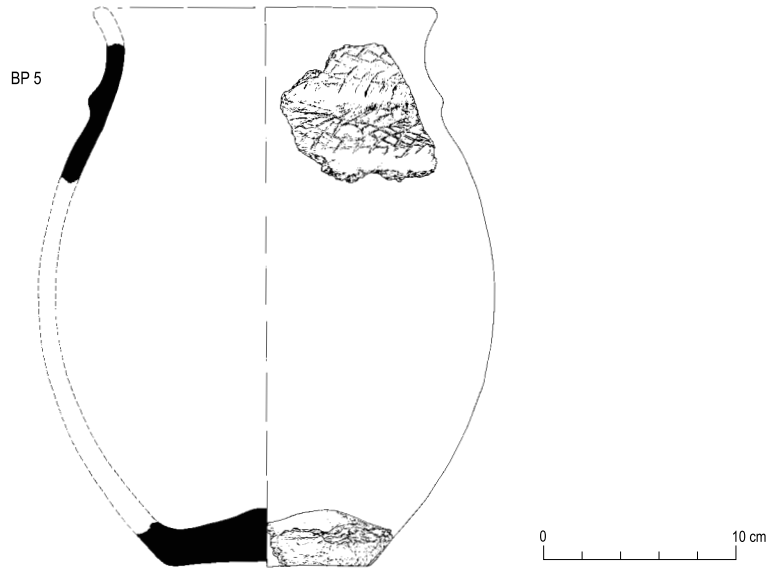
Part of another Beaker vessel (BP 5, Figure 4.21) was discovered in a pit which had been dug during the second millennium BC, to hold a cremation deposit (see Chapter 5).

Sowing seeds: The deposition of carbonised cereal at Eweford West

As well as filling pits with burnt cereal and Beaker sherds, there is evidence to suggest that people deposited cereal grains across a wider area, with varying consequences for the archaeological record.

Large numbers of burnt cereal grains came to be incorporated in the fills of later pits, which also contained human bone (see Chapter 5). Radiocarbon dating has shown that these cereal grains derived from the time when the pits described above were being filled with grain (see table 4.1).

The sheer number of burnt cereal grains found in the later deposits, either scraped up with the ashes of pyres or backfilled into pits, shows that huge quantities of



4.21 Beaker pot 5.

grain were strewn across site around the end of the third millennium BC. Analysis has identified approximately 56,000 cereal grains from pit fills and bulk samples of deposits which probably relate to this phase of activity (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). People probably scattered hundreds of thousands of cereal grains, and their distribution shows that this was only across the south-eastern flank of the mound. There was no evidence for the *in situ* burning of the grain, and it is possible that the cereal was charred elsewhere.

What might have been the final act of deposition during this phase was also the simplest. Someone placed a bronze halberd (SF 146; see text box 9.2) between the layers of stone that formed the cairn (083). The position selected suggests that this was a potent act: the halberd was placed at the north-eastern end of the stoney arc, in front of the collapsed mound. The weapon had already seen use. Analysis has shown surface evidence that the blade had been polished and/or sharpened, while damage around the surviving rivet hole indicates that it was probably used or modified before it was left in the cairn (Cowie, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

The Wider Landscape: Acts of deposition at Eweford Cottages and Pencraig Wood

There is some evidence for other activity around this time in the environs of Overhailes and Eweford West. At Eweford Cottages (Figure 4.1) in the mid third millennium BC, a pit (024) was dug and filled with three deposits (012, 017 and 018) containing over 429 pieces of struck stone, mainly debris from knapping. Most of the pieces were of grey flint; 15 were burnt, and a few others were of chert and quartz. Among this assemblage were two fragments of microliths from an earlier phase of activity at the site. Analysis of the assemblage has identified a high proportion of micro-debitage, debris created during knapping, while the absence of cores shows that these were kept rather than discarded (Pannett, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The pit also contained abundant charcoal, including alder, apple, hazel, willow, oak and elm, and fragments of burnt hazelnut shell (Ramsay and Miller, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A sample of apple (*Maloideae*) charcoal produced a radiocarbon date of 2890–2630 BC (SUERC-8179).

Several hundred years later, a few hundred metres to the north of the excavated Eweford sites, a body was buried in a stone short cist that incorporated a cup-marked stone (NMRS NT67NE 65; NT 6663 7771). The inhumation was excavated in the 1970s (Nisbet 1973), and a radiocarbon date was obtained from the bone (proximal half left ulna) as part of the A1 post-excavation work. The bone produced a date of 2140–1890 BC (SUERC-5318). The human bone was analysed by Kathleen McSweeney (2005) on behalf of the National Museums of Scotland, who identified the individual as a male, probably in his early thirties.

Between the time when the pit at Eweford Cottages was filled with knapping waste, and the body of a man was buried in a stone cist to the north, other pits were dug at Pencraig Wood, about 10km to the west (Figure 4.1). Someone dug a pit (027) and put two deposits

Table 4.1 Radiocarbon dates from cereal-filled pits at Eweford West.

Code	*Sample (2 sigma)*	*Context*	*Calibrated date*
SUERC-5316	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var vulgare*	165 Pit	2140–1910 BC
SUERC-5284	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var nudum*	107 Collapse of structural elements of S mortuary structure	2140–1890 BC
SUERC-5318	Human Bone Proximal ½ left ulna	Inhumation	2140–1890 BC
SUERC-5295	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var vulgare*	141 Pit beyond hollow	2200–1940 BC
SUERC-5317	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var vulgare*	176 Pit	2200–1940 BC
SUERC-5308	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var nudum*	147 Cremation pit	2200–1950 BC
SUERC-5314	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare*	156 Cremation pit	2200–1960 BC
SUERC-5315	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var nudum*	170 Cremation pit	2200–1970 BC
SUERC-5309	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare sl*	148 Cremation pit	2280–1970 BC
SUERC-5310	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var nudum*	151 Cremation pit	2280–1980 BC
SUERC-5296	Cereal – *Triticum dicoccum*	143 Pit beyond hollow	2280–2030 BC
SUERC-5306	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare var nudum*	119 Cremation pit	2290–1980 BC
SUERC-5299	Cereal – *Hordeum vulgare*	028 Pit beyond hollow	2310–2030 BC

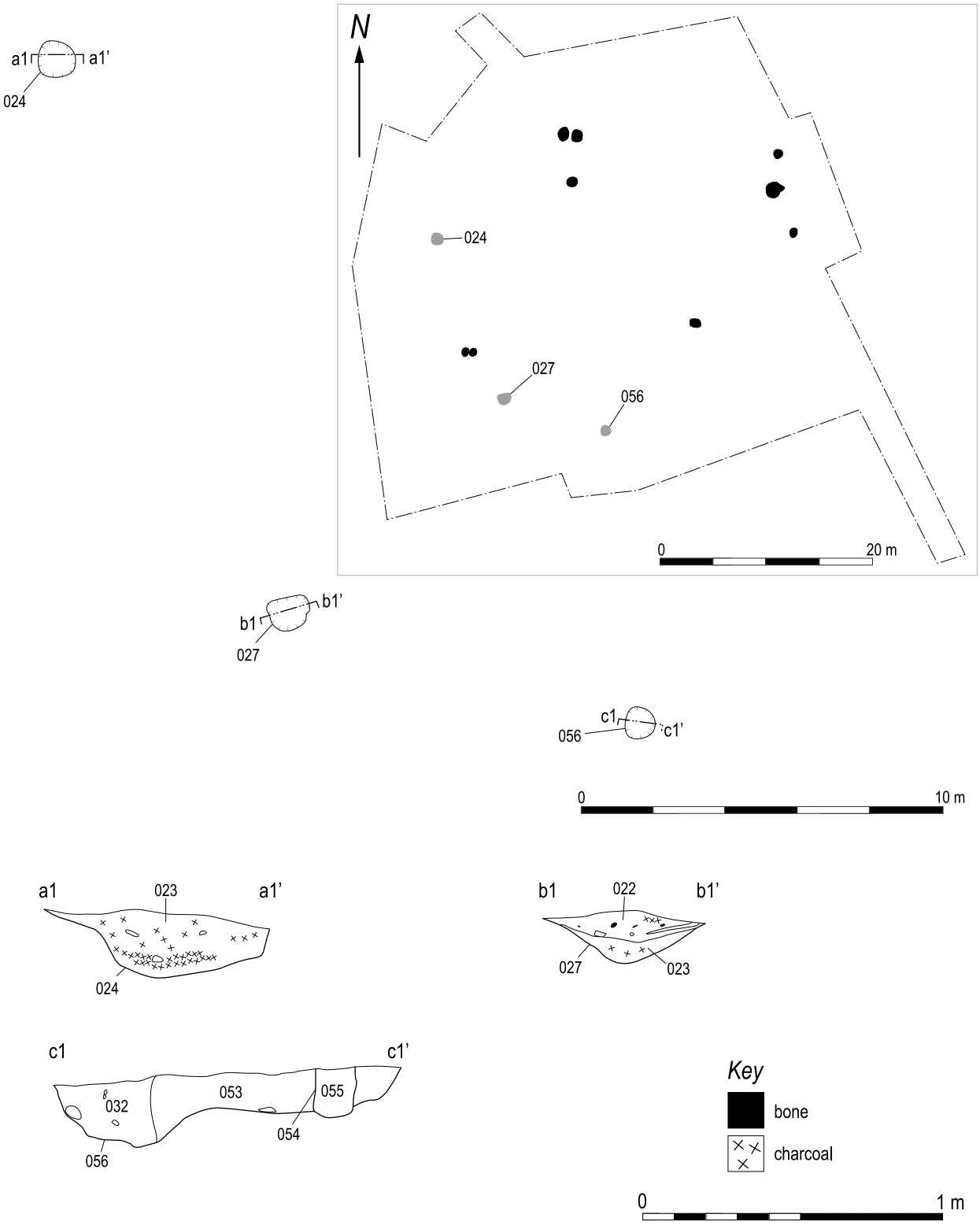
in it (Figure 4.22). The lower fill (025) contained small fragments of burnt hazelnut shell and oak charcoal (Ramsay and Miller, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Samples of hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana*) produced dates of 2480–2230 BC (SUERC-6890) and 2460–2200 BC (SUERC-6891). The upper fill (022) contained oak charcoal and four sherds of pottery. The pottery may have been derived from a coarse, round-based vessel (Figure 4.23: V 2), and encrusted residues on the sherds show that the vessel had been used for cooking. Several of the sherds also show signs of abrasion and heat damage, so they may have lain in a hearth for some time (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). With them were two conjoining pieces of daub (SF 13 and 14, Figure 4.23) – clay that had been squeezed onto wattle, which left corrugated impressions on its surface (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Both fills also contained burnt human bone (127g), which represents at least one adult (Marquez-Grant, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

At the base of the pit was a stake-hole (039), which contained oak charcoal. The presence of oak charcoal in the upper two fills of the pit, as the only carbonised wood present (Ramsay and Miller, see Chapter 12 and Archive), may suggest an oak stake extended through the feature and that it was subsequently burnt down.

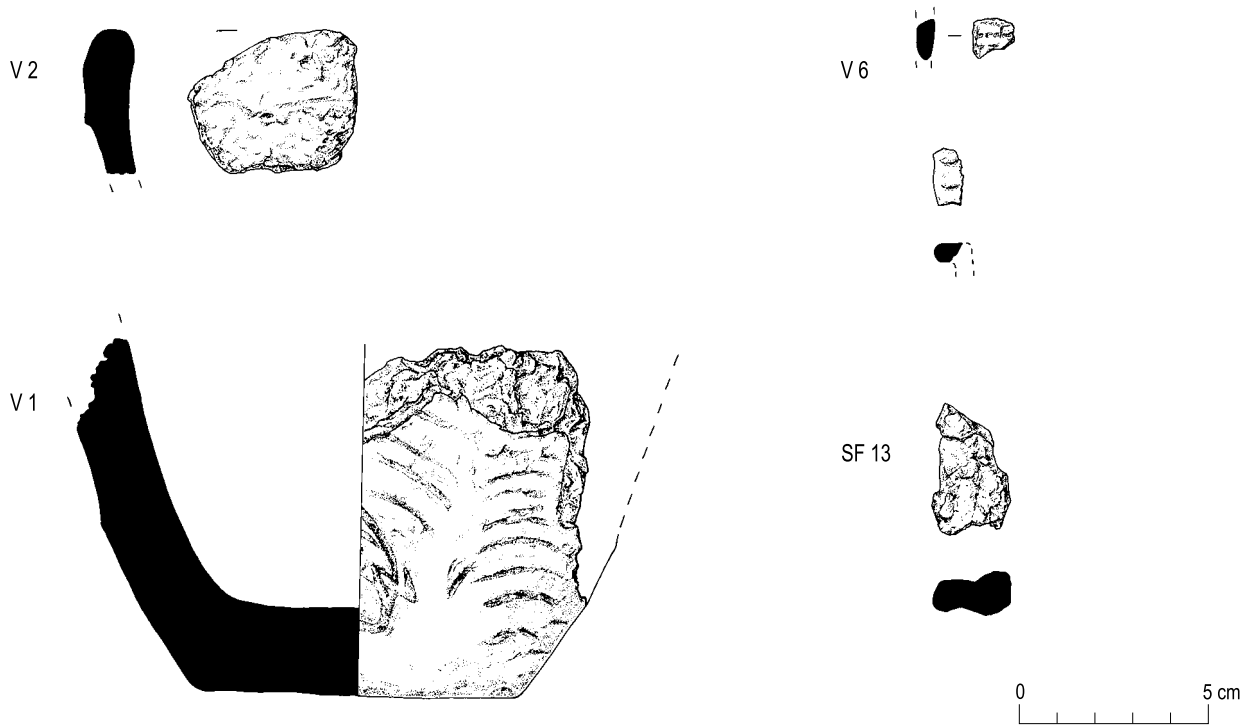
It is possible that two other pits (024) and (056) at Pencraig Wood were broadly contemporary with this event (Figure 4.22). One of them (024) was filled with a deposit (023) containing burnt hazelnut shell and a diverse assemblage of charcoal (alder, birch, hazel, apple family, oak, rose family and willow), perhaps raked out from a hearth (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Also mixed in were fragments (14 g) of burnt human bone (Marquez-Grant, see Chapter 12 and Archive), representing the partial remains of one adult. Along with the bone and charcoal were five sherds of pottery from three separate vessels (V 4–6) (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). One vessel had a flat rim with radial finger nail impressions, its body decorated with horizontal lines impressed with a comb (Figure 4.23, V 4). In another small pit (056), people put the broken remains of a coarse, flat-based pottery vessel (Figure 4.23, V 1), decorated with loose rows of arc-shaped impressions, probably made by rocking a curved tool back and forth across the surface. The pottery from these two pits may be late Neolithic Impressed Ware (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Discussion

There are fundamental differences in what happened at each of the places we discuss in this chapter, in terms of the scale and nature of activities. At Eweford West, an ancient mound saw sustained episodes of deposition and modification. At Overhailes, another place saw two or three episodes of more understated building and modest transformation, with a considerable hiatus between them. At Pencraig Wood, another place saw a brief period of pit digging and deposition, and at Eweford Cottages, we glimpse knapping and burning events, reflected in a single pit.



4.22 The third-millennium BC features at Pencraig Wood in plan and section.



4.23 Pottery from Pencraig Wood.

But look again and similarities between them emerge. At all of the sites, people dug pits and buried objects of apparent significance in them: pottery, stone tools and huge quantities of burnt cereal, along with burnt wood, animal remains and, in some cases, human bone. Did these acts have anything in common? How can we make sense of practices that appear similar but that took place in very different social arenas? We consider further what people did at each place, how they used material culture and how these different social arenas may have related to one another.

To appreciate the significance of these practices, we should consider the texture of the lives of which they were part. In the late fourth and the third millennia BC, communities would have gathered or produced most of their food, medicine and materials for garments, tools and buildings from their immediate environment. They had, therefore, an intimate relationship with the land and its varying flora, fauna and geology. They could trace the origin of what they ate, wore and used. They probably built their own homes. They knew who tended, killed and prepared any animals they ate, who sewed every stitch on their backs, and who made most of the items they used. They knew what each component was made from, where it was found and how it was made. Their buildings were probably small, dark and flimsy, and they may have spent much of their time outside (see Figure 4.24). They probably made most of their land journeys on foot (for discussion of the introduction of the domestic horse, see Levine 1993; Anthony 1995). This self-sufficiency and close relationship with their environment generated deep practical knowledge. People met all their needs with materials available around them, and they knew the technologies that enabled them to meet those needs and pursue their shared projects. With these points in mind, let us reassess how the superficially similar practices actually differed from site to site. While at each site broken objects were deposited, they were deployed in distinctly different ways.

The uses of objects

East Lothian communities were using and depositing material culture in specific, deliberate ways at certain places during the late fourth and the third millennia BC. At Pencraig Wood, they combined pottery, human remains and plant remains in pits. At Overhailes, they filled pits and post-holes with plant remains and animal bones, and put carefully assembled collections of well-travelled

objects in two large pits. At Eweford West, there were periods during the third millennium BC when people were depositing broken arrowheads, smashed axes and Beaker pottery in pits, and spreading burnt cereals across the remains of the older mound. At Eweford Cottages, people knapped flint, chert and quartz and put the waste into a pit, along with the burnt remains of plants.

At Overhailes, it may be that a light structure that left minimal traces was erected to frame certain activities, including the deposition of flint tools and pottery in two pits. If we compare and contrast the pieces that were put in the pits (see table 4.2) a number of observations can be made. First, despite differences in the numbers of artefacts, each pit contained broadly the same range of materials. The predominant formal tool types were scrapers and serrated blades; both were accompanied by sherds from pottery vessels and broken coarse stone tools. Pit 050 held more scrapers and pit 247 more serrated edge tools, but both kinds of tool appeared in both pits, suggesting they were each constituents of the contemporary toolbox.

The life histories of these different objects may be relevant to their meanings. The coarse stone tools and pottery had been broken and burnt at the end of their life spans, but the flint tools were still usable for practical purposes. In light of this, their deposition may have represented an act of sacrifice rather than rubbish disposal. Such a sacrifice would have been even more potent because of the size of the pieces, which means they could have been reworked, and the flint's quality, which suggests that it had been imported (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Alternatively, perhaps people considered it inappropriate to use the pieces again in any other place or context because they had been polluted through previous contacts or ritual use (see Douglas 1966; Huntington and Metcalf 1991).

In light of these observations, we can compare the practices at Pencraig Wood, where fragments of pottery and burnt plant remains – superficially the detritus of daily life – were put in three pits. One of the pots may have been used for cooking and this, along with plant remains reminiscent of hearth waste, could evoke a domestic scene. Yet in two cases, small amounts of human bone accompanied this apparent detritus. Was this simply a case of human bone having been disposed as rubbish? The small amount of human remains deposited hints at some other intention; the remains of these individuals had been fragmented and separated, suggesting categories

4.24 Reconstruction of Structure A at Overhailes.

Table 4.2 Comparison of artefacts between pits 050 and 247

Pit 050	*Pit 247*
5 scrapers	2 scrapers
1 serrated edge tool	3 serrated edge tool
1 core and 1 core fragment	1 flake from polished tool
1 burnt anvil stone	1 fragment of cobble stone
	1 burnt possible stone pounder
Sherds from 10 vessels	Sherds from 12 Fengate vessels

of practice more complex than simple burial or rubbish disposal.

At Eweford West, there were traces of other kinds of practice. For example, the sherds from four smashed Beaker pots, deposited with wood charcoal, carbonised cereal grains and rowan seeds (028) (potentially rich with symbolism (Hayman 2003, 1; Tebbs 1994)), could be construed as domestic waste. However, the fact that only small proportions of broken pots were deposited suggests that the fragmentation and dispersal of artefacts was integral to the meaning of these practices. Other deposits at Eweford West demonstrate that its visitors were not solely concerned with depositing pottery. During the third millennium BC, people scattered struck quartz and deposited a small quantity of burnt bone at the site. Others came during the late third millennium BC and spread large quantities of burnt cereals and broken artefacts across the mound. The burning and spreading of cereal grains are highly potent acts, involving the sacrifice of food and, because of their potential for sowing, some loss of the following year's harvest.

The evidence suggests that people were combining pieces of material culture, including broken ones (artefactual and human), and sacrificing objects (functional artefacts and edible foodstuffs) in ways that transcend our categories of understanding. These intentional acts may be better understood by considering their wider context.

Every place is a stage

The practices in evidence at the above sites differ in many respects, but most fundamentally in the nature of the places where they were carried out. They also differ in how they would have been understood in a wider network of associations, networks which extended both spatially and temporally, through social connections and social memory.

At Overhailes, a possible yard enclosed two pits in which useful artefacts were sacrificed. We might, therefore, suggest that the yard was built to screen or frame activities that culminated in the deposits in the pits. The light nature of the possible early structures at Overhailes could also suggest that the inhabitants were there for no more than a few days or weeks. They may have built rudimentary structures to shelter them from wind and weather during their stay, and perhaps their activities here ended when they filled up the two pits. Alternatively, the buildings were intended to last longer, perhaps sheltering occasional residents over a few seasons. Perhaps the putative yard was used to pen animals while their owners negotiated an exchange, which was sealed with a meal and formal acts of depositions.

However we assess the structures' function or length of use, it is difficult to see the entire building process, including gathering and cutting the timber, taking a small group of people more than a day. By contrast, the effort (physical or social) involved in procuring the artefacts to deposit in the pits was considerable. The stone tools travelled at least 250km to get to the site, and the Fengate Ware pottery (or its concept) might have come along the same route (see Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive; Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Whether these artefacts arrived through exchange from hand to hand or at the end of one person's long journey, they must have been recognised as deriving from elsewhere. The community that built at Overhailes may have associated them with faraway places and other, distant communities; each object may have come with a story about its origins and how it was acquired. Making contacts, arranging to acquire the pieces and taking possession of them all took time. The travelling might have involved some danger – the perils of the sea, threats posed by bears, wolves or who knows what from the long forgotten Neolithic bestiary, or the cunning devices of human enemies. Perhaps the deposition of the objects tied the community's social memory of this place – overlooking Traprain Law and the Lammermuir Hills beyond – more tightly to it than did slight and short-lived structures.

Another group came to the same spot about a thousand years later, to erect more substantial posts that formed a small building or a timber circle. It may be that the effort of digging the pits onto bedrock, erecting the timbers and filling the holes was as important here as the building's intended use. The burnt plant and animal remains buried in the post-holes were perhaps foundation deposits. Once standing, the posts may have framed other activities on the natural shelf or marked an important place in the landscape.

Those approaching Pencraig Wood may have passed or observed the timber setting at Overhailes. The deposits that people left at Pencraig Wood during the late third millennium BC were in close proximity to an earlier

ceremonial site, Pencraig Hill (see Chapter 2). These acts marked a new place of importance, perhaps with reference to the earlier site, that subsequently became a locus for depositing larger quantities of human remains during the second millennium BC (see Chapter 5).

The acts that people carried out at Eweford West during this phase were framed by the remains of earlier generations; they used the ancient mound as the focus for their activities, and this phase of activity ultimately saw its decline and fall. It is not clear whether those using the monument simply did not bother to maintain it or whether they deliberately pulled the drystone walls down. The eventual exposure of the upper mound, the collapse of the wall and the spreading of the cairn are more evocative of deliberate destruction. Whatever the cause of the collapse, it must have been viewed as an exceptionally significant event in the life of the monument, with ramifications far beyond the site itself.

However, the rearranged lengths of cairn to the north-west of the earlier mound, which incorporated cup marked stones, indicate that this was not simply a phase of destruction. In creating these stony arcs, the builders were actively reconstructing the earlier monument, returning to a place of long-held significance to rework the meanings associated with it. Their activities during this period at Eweford West evoked the place's earlier meanings in partly destroying it, and wove them together with new ones.

The reworking of the monument's fabric was accompanied by other practices that resulted in the sacrifice of edible foodstuffs and potentially re-usable artefacts. As at Overhailes, well-travelled artefacts were also deposited at Eweford West: the broken Langdale axe from 200km to the south and the bronze halberd, almost certainly from further afield, perhaps from Aberdeenshire 170km to the north (Needham 2004). These objects may have had greater significance due to the distances they had travelled, and they certainly could have been reworked or recycled instead of being deposited at the site. The chronological relationships between phases of reworking the monument's fabric and acts of deposition are not entirely clear, but together they constituted the continual return to and reinvention of a place associated with previous generations.

We have focused on the activities that took place in the immediate vicinity of the mound at Eweford West, but this was not the only locus of activity in this part of the contemporary landscape. The pit (028) that lay between the mound and the pit alignments at Eweford East (see Chapter 3) shows that other depositional acts took place beyond the mound. This reminds us that significant places did not exist in isolation, but formed a network of places that extended across the landscape. What people did at these places may have been remembered and referred to in other contexts, acting as nodes of memory to anchor the daily rhythms of life.

The acts of deposition at Eweford West, Overhailes and Pencraig Wood were not isolated; they made sense with reference to other acts at other places, and their meanings arose from the social, temporal and spatial relationships that formed their context.

Everything in its place

While it would be easy to characterise the deposits at Eweford West, Overhailes and Pencraig Wood as rubbish disposal, their composition suggests different categories of behaviour. In this respect, precisely what took place at each site is unclear, and our poor understanding of the routine matters of third millennium BC life complicates its interpretation. What if the social structures and codes of behaviour that shaped people's lives demanded that they dispose of work-a-day rubbish in a formal way (see Hill 1995a, 3–4; Needham 1996, 19–25)? How can we distinguish this kind of rubbish, which might consist of pottery, stone tools and burnt plant remains, from that created during ritual proceedings? From a modern perspective, the materials that we mix or separate and when we do one or the other shed little light on the structures that inform our social behaviour. Past social structures (very different from ours today) generated patterns of deposits that we interpret according to our own ways of thinking, so that we end up with this dualism between ritual and domestic life and deposits (Bradley 2005). This distinction might be entirely particular to our own, rather secular way of doing things.

The purposes for which structures were erected at Overhailes are not immediately clear. In the earliest phase, some light structures might have framed or screened activities that culminated in the burial of well-travelled artefacts in two pits. In the later phase, timbers were erected perhaps to form a small structure, perhaps as a timber circle. The interpretation of these can be problematic if we consider past societies having had clearly demarcated, separate domestic and ritual spheres of activity. We may deliberate whether or not, in each case, these were dwellings or formalised arenas for ceremonial activity. However, in some respects, how we categorise these remains is unimportant. What matters more is that the structures at Overhailes provided an arena for the use and deposition of material culture. The occupants understood the origins, the meanings and the patina from past journeys that accompanied the stone tools and the pottery.

At Eweford West during the first half of the third millennium BC, communities came intermittently to a place that was loaded with (oral) historical or mythical associations and deposited fragments of objects in pits.

Again we face an interpretative dilemma: were these remains collected in the domestic sphere, perhaps from the hearth around which households ate and slept, or were they instead drawn together for the first time at a place previously given over to the dead?

That question is difficult to answer, but again what is important is that people were using material culture in specific ways, through occasional interventions at Eweford West. The temporal rhythms of these acts were entirely different from the daily routines. At the end of the third millennium BC, a number of objects were destroyed or sacrificed before being disposed of or buried at the site. These artefacts and plant remains may have derived from other social arenas, but in the contemporary historical conditions communities deemed it necessary or appropriate to bring them together at this time and place.

Thus, we can interpret the material culture at Pencraig Wood, Overhailes and Eweford West as both 'domestic' (infused with meanings from other social arenas, part of daily life) and 'ceremonial' (intentionally drawn together for acts of sacrifice) and deployed in formal practices, which were intended to achieve specific social outcomes. This material culture was drawn from a network of places. Each piece was tinged with perceptions about its origins; each possessed a geographical genealogy. Place and time became entangled with these objects. In Chapter 9 we consider how these objects were used and understood in other social arenas and why they were combined in these ways.