

## ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SOMERTON FARM TO KNIGHT'S CROSS GAS PIPELINE

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### **Introduction**

Monitoring of construction work for a gas pipeline from Somerton Farm to Knight's Cross, during the spring and summer of 2000, led to the identification of twenty-six areas of archaeological interest. These included a former streambed containing worked timber, probably of Bronze Age date; pits and ditches from the Roman period; remnants of medieval ridge-and-furrow, and post-medieval drainage features. Concentrations of fire-cracked stone associated with scatters of worked flint were also recorded.

This paper gives a brief summary of the results. A full report (*Somerton Farm to Knight's Cross 300mm High Pressure Gas Pipeline, Archaeological Trial Trenching and Watching Brief 2000*, Network Archaeology Ltd Report no. 162, September 2005) is available in the Isle of Wight County Archaeological Service Sites and Monuments Record.

### **Results**

#### **Whippingham (SZ 5091 9363), possible Bronze Age timber.**

A large linear feature seen in the side of the pipe-trench was probably an old stream channel. It contained a number of waterlogged oak timbers, the largest of which, an 85cm-long section of boxed heartwood, showed tool-marks consistent with it having been cut with a bronze socketed axe. This feature, and a small charcoal-filled pit nearby, also contained fragments of fire-cracked flints and a number of pieces of worked flint.

#### **Padmore Farm (SZ 5162 9318), Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval finds.**

Finds from this site spanned a wide range of periods, and included worked flint and Roman and medieval pottery. Trial trenching, carried out before construction work on the pipeline, revealed a number of ill-defined linear features and pits, one of which contained a flint scraper, probably of Neolithic date (fig 2.11). A group of inter-cutting features seen in the pipe-trench produced rim-sherds of Durotrigian black burnished ware (fig 3.1) and of Vectis-ware (figs 3.2, 3.3) as well as a discoidal flint scraper (fig 2.10). Unstratified finds included a sherd of early to middle Bronze Age pottery, a Neolithic flint blade (fig 2.6) and a retouched flake (fig 2.5).

#### **Bridlesford Lodge (SZ 5317 9009), Roman features.**

This site had a small pit with heat-reddened sides, several small pits with charcoal fills and an isolated posthole. One of the pits contained the crushed remains of an almost complete brown Vectis-ware jar (fig 3.5) and substantial remains of a second jar in black Vectis-ware (fig 3.6). The rim forms of these vessels are not closely dateable, but are probably within the range AD 70 to 150. Other features produced further Vectis-ware rim-sherds (figs 3.4, 3.7).

### **Evidence of Prehistoric Tree Clearance**

In addition to three sites above, seven areas with small irregular features believed to be the remains of tree clearance, were identified. These pits were generally in areas with concentrations of fire-cracked flint and smaller quantities of worked flint. Unstratified finds from one of these areas near Somerton Farm (SZ 4960 9424) included an abraded flint core (fig 2.9) and a sherd of pottery of a fabric typical of Beaker period vessels from the Wessex region.

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Another area associated with an old stream channel near Whippingham Church, (SZ 5111 9341) had a Neolithic core (fig 2.1) among other unstratified flint finds. Later ditches, cut through tree clearance pits at a site near Alverstone Farm (SZ 5212 9287), produced medieval pottery along with a Neolithic flint blade (fig 2.4). Unstratified finds here included a discoidal scraper (fig 2.12), a side or end scraper (fig 2.2) and a retouched flake or rough-out (fig 2.3). A small exhausted blade core (fig 2.8) came from a field adjacent to Palmers Lodge (SZ 5272 9196). The three other identified areas of tree clearance pits were centred at SZ 4997 9387, SZ 5051 9373 and SZ 5312 9023.

### **Flint Scatters**

Pieces of fire-cracked flints were common throughout the pipeline route, but seemed to be especially clustered around streams or beds of former streams draining into the Medina River or into Palmer's Brook. These flints are not readily dateable, but appear to be typical of the material that makes up burnt mounds. Burnt mounds are not fully understood: they may be the detritus from cooking processes using pot-boilers, or from sauna-style bathing for personal hygiene or as part of a ritual ceremony. Dating of these features elsewhere in the country indicates that they were in use for a long period, but were particularly common in the Bronze Age.

The concentrations of fire-cracked stones seemed to coincide with scatters of worked flint, reinforcing the view that this material is of prehistoric origin. As an example, a small assemblage of surface finds from one of these areas (SZ 5194 9298) included a scraper of Neolithic or Bronze Age date (fig 2.7).

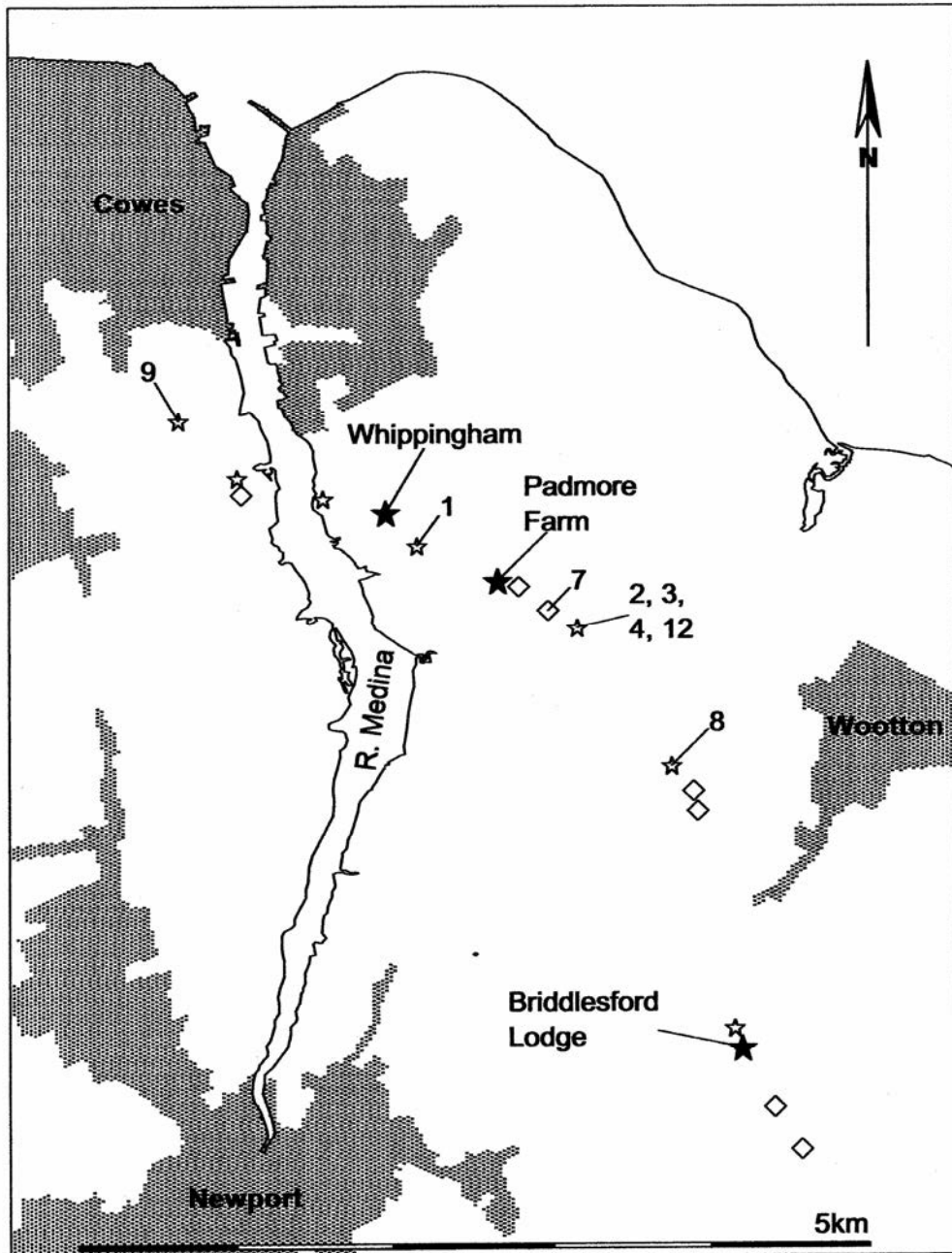
### **Medieval, Post-Medieval and Modern Features**

The watching brief also recorded a former area of ridge-and-furrow cultivation near Calving Close Copse (SZ 4988 9400), former trackways (SZ 4939 9441, SZ 4944 9435, SZ 5244 9222, SZ 5308 9040), a nineteenth century rubbish dump (SZ 5308 9042) and brick culvert (SZ 5091 9364).

### **Conclusions**

The investigations carried out as part of the pipeline construction programme have highlighted the archaeological potential of the area either side of the Medina River. Prehistoric activity, including that resulting in the formation of burnt mounds, seems to have occurred near to the streams draining the high ground on either side of the valley. The evidence associating spreads of fire-cracked flint with tree clearance features, together with the worked timber from the site at Whippingham, suggests that agricultural land was expanding into forested areas during the Bronze Age.

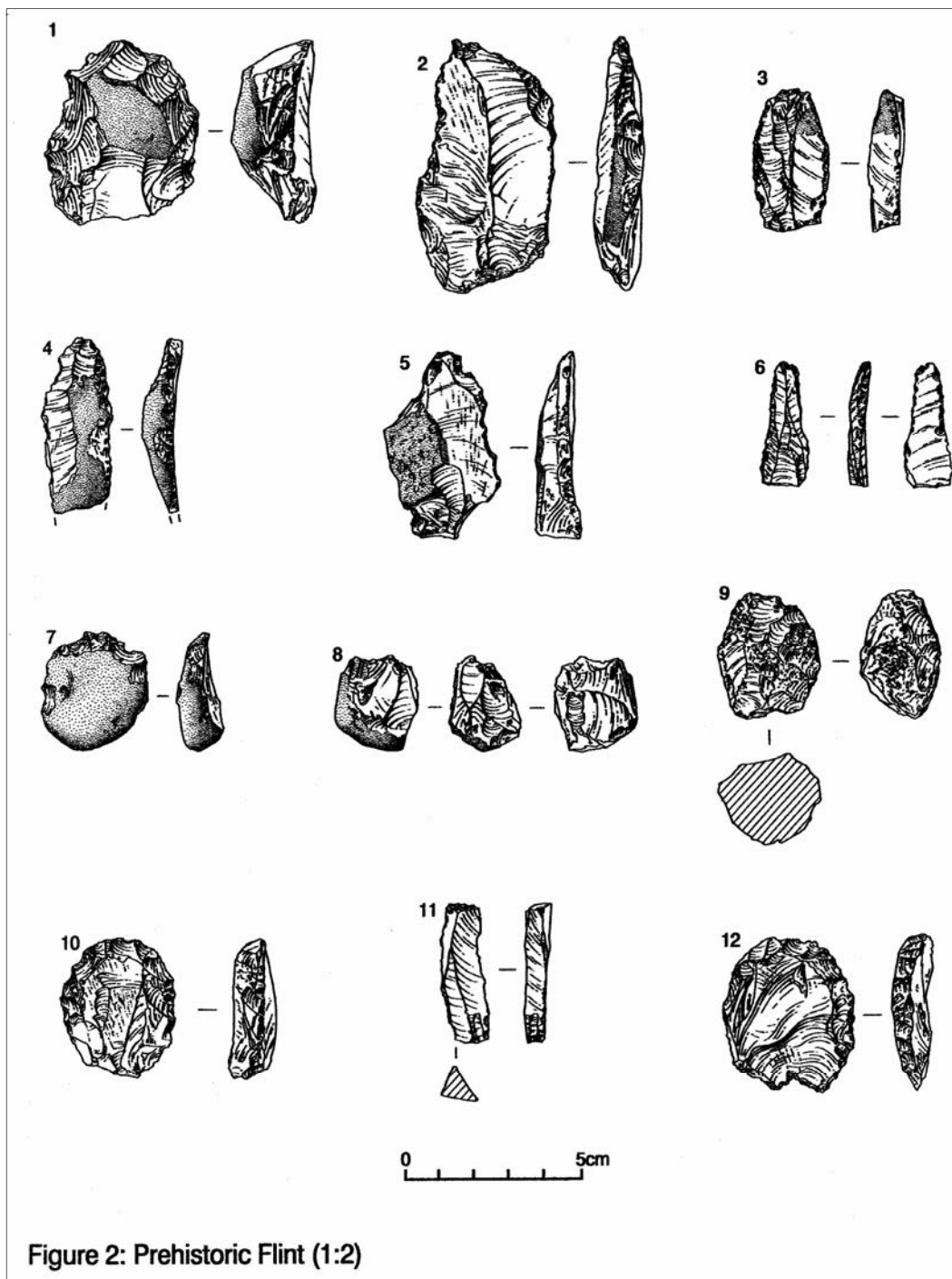
The two small, previously unknown sites at Padmore Farm and Briddlesford Lodge will add to the understanding of the development of the area during the Roman period, while the medieval and later finds provide evidence of its subsequent evolution as a rural, agricultural landscape.



**Figure 1: Location of sites**

- ☆ Areas of tree clearance features and flint finds
- ◇ Scatters of struck flint and fire-cracked flint

Numbers refer to flint finds illustrated in Figure 2



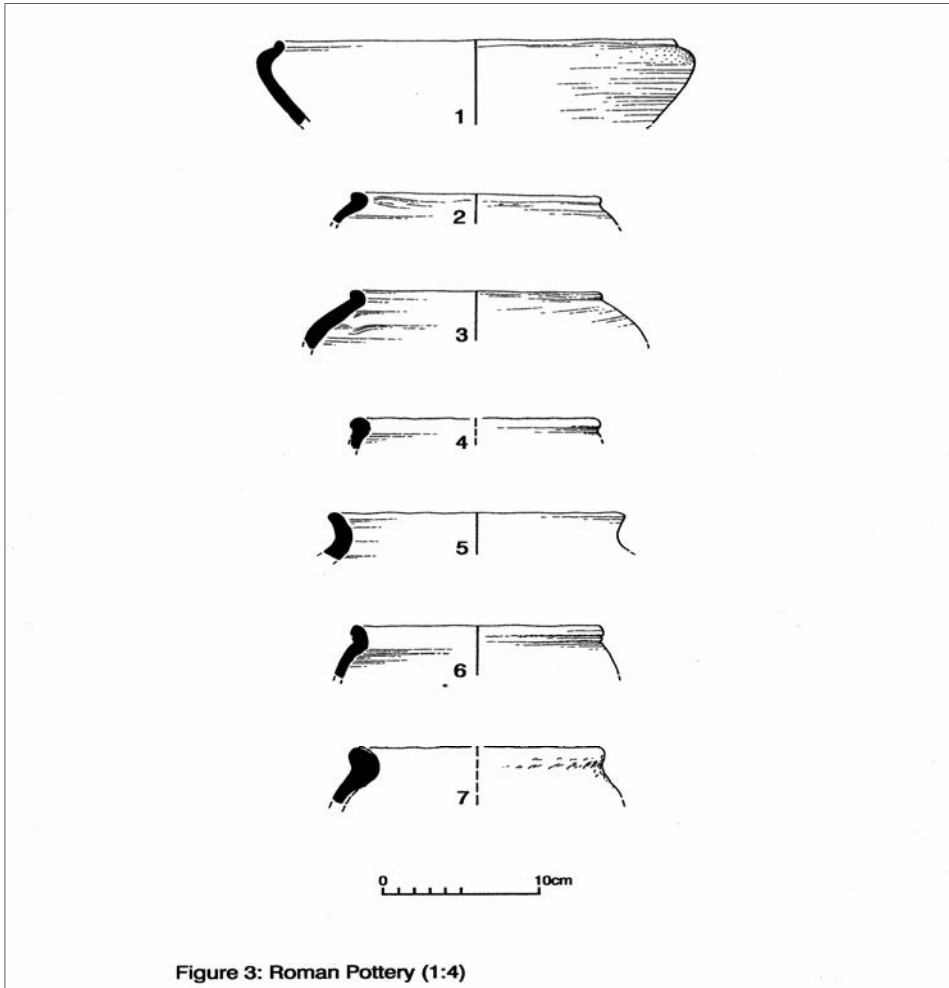


Figure 3: Roman Pottery (1-4)

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