

Slade End Farm and Winterbrook

Prehistoric Landscapes around Wallingford, South Oxfordshire

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Front cover: Slade End Farm: Hollow-domed or 'beaded' bracelet from posthole 7178

Back cover: Slade End Farm: Log ladder in waterhole 2035

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Contents

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	xi
Digital Appendices	xv
Summary.....	xvii
Acknowledgements	xix

Chapter 1: Introduction

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT.....	1
SITE LOCATIONS, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY	1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	6
The archaeological landscape around Wallingford	6
Previous archaeological work at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	9
FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY.....	9
POST-EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY	12
Flint by Mike Donnelly	14
Prehistoric pottery by Alex Davies	14
Roman and post-Roman pottery.....	16
Fired clay and ceramic building material by Cynthia Poole	16
Human remains by Mandy Kingdom and Lauren McIntyre	16
Animal bone by Adrienne Powell	17
Charred plant remains and charcoal by Julia Meen	18
Waterlogged plant remains by Julia Meen	19
Pollen by Mairead Rutherford.....	19
Insects by Enid Allison	19
ARCHIVE.....	20

Chapter 2: Mesolithic, Neolithic and early Bronze Age

SLADE END FARM.....	21
Earliest/early Neolithic.....	21
Middle Neolithic	31
Late Neolithic	32
Beaker period	35
Other Neolithic or early Bronze Age features.....	35
WINTERBROOK	36
Middle Neolithic	36
Beaker period	37
FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE.....	37
Flint by Mike Donnelly	37
Pottery by Alex Davies	58
Organic residue analysis of early Neolithic pottery by Isabel L Wiltshire and Lucy J E Cramp	75
Fired clay by Cynthia Poole	75

Stone by Ruth Shaffrey	76
Worked bone by Leigh Allen	76
Human remains by Mandy Kingdom, Lauren McIntyre and Sharon Clough	77
Animal bone by Adrienne Powell	78
Charred plant remains and charcoal by Julia Meen	79
DISCUSSION	84
Burials and monuments	84
Pits, deposition and settlement	85
Subsistence and seasonality	91
The wider landscape	92
 Chapter 3: Middle Bronze Age	
SLADE END FARM	97
Trackways	97
Boundaries and enclosures	102
Identifying settlements	105
Pits	107
Waterholes	108
Cremation burials	110
WINTERBROOK	112
Waterhole	113
The main enclosure	114
Subdivisions within the enclosure	114
Inhumation burials	117
FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE	119
Flint by Mike Donnelly	119
Pottery by Alex Davies	120
Fired clay by Cynthia Poole	124
Metalwork by Anni Byard	124
Stone by Ruth Shaffrey	124
Worked bone by Leigh Allen	125
Log ladder by Steven J Allen	125
Human remains by Mandy Kingdom and Lauren McIntyre	127
DNA analysis of human remains by Tom Booth, Jesse McCabe, Marina Silva, Alexandre Gilardet, Monica Kelly, Mia Williams, Pooja Swali and Pontus Skoglund	135
Animal bone by Adrienne Powell, with a contribution on fish bone by Rebecca Nicholson	136
Charred plant remains and charcoal by Julia Meen	139
Waterlogged plant remains by Julia Meen	143
Pollen by Mairead Rutherford	145
Insects by Enid Allison	146
DISCUSSION	147
Chronology and development of the middle Bronze Age enclosure systems	147
The use and significance of the enclosure systems	148
Marking place and time: deposition in the enclosure system ditches	149
Funerary practices	149
The wider landscape	150
The late Bronze Age hiatus	153

Chapter 4: Iron Age

SLADE END FARM.	155
Earliest Iron Age	155
Early Iron Age	155
Middle Iron Age	169
Other Iron Age features	186
WINTERBROOK	187
Early Iron Age	188
Middle Iron Age	194
Middle to late Iron Age	197
Other Iron Age features	198
FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE.	199
Flint <i>by Mike Donnelly</i>	199
Pottery <i>by Alex Davies</i>	200
Organic residue analysis of early Iron Age pottery <i>by Steven Kolakowski</i>	227
Fired clay <i>by Cynthia Poole</i>	230
Metalwork <i>by Anni Byard</i>	232
Metalworking debris and other vitrified materials	235
Stone <i>by Ruth Shaffrey</i>	238
Worked bone <i>by Leigh Allen</i>	238
Human remains <i>by Mandy Kingdom and Lauren McIntyre</i>	239
Animal bone <i>by Adrienne Powell</i>	242
Charred plant remains and charcoal <i>by Julia Meen</i>	250
Waterlogged plant remains <i>by Julia Meen</i>	255
Pollen <i>by Mairead Rutherford</i>	258
Insects <i>by Enid Allison</i>	259
DISCUSSION	260
Settlement visibility from the earliest to middle Iron Age	260
Settlement layout	261
Roundhouses	262
Pits	264
Funerary practices	266
Bracelet	266
Agrarian economy	266
Land use	268
The wider political landscape	273
Late Iron Age depopulation?	273

Chapter 5: Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods

SLADE END FARM.	275
Roman period	275
Early to middle Anglo-Saxon period	275
Medieval and post-medieval periods	275
WINTERBROOK	275
Late Iron Age or Roman period	275
Roman period	278
Early to middle Anglo-Saxon period	278

Late Anglo-Saxon to medieval period.....	279
Post-medieval period	280
FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE.....	280
Roman pottery	280
Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery	281
Fired clay <i>by Cynthia Poole</i>	283
Ceramic building material <i>by Cynthia Poole</i>	283
Roman coin <i>by Paul Booth and Anni Byard</i>	284
Late Anglo-Saxon to medieval metalwork <i>by Anni Byard</i>	284
Metalworking debris and other vitrified materials	286
Stone <i>by Ruth Shaffrey</i>	286
Human remains <i>by Mandy Kingdom and Lauren McIntyre</i>	286
Animal bone <i>by Adrienne Powell</i>	286
Marine shell	288
Charred plant remains and charcoal <i>by Julia Meen</i>	288
DISCUSSION.....	291
Roman period.....	291
Early to middle Anglo-Saxon period.....	291
Late Anglo-Saxon to medieval period.....	292
Bibliography	295
Index	313

List of Figures

Chapter 1

1.1	Site locations	2
1.2	LIDAR visualisation of topography	3
1.3	Geology	4
1.4	Cropmarks and geophysics	5
1.5	Selected previous archaeological evaluations and excavations in the vicinity of the sites, as listed in Table 1.1. Not shown are investigations of late Anglo-Saxon and later sites within the historic core of Wallingford, and minor evaluations and watching briefs producing few or no finds	8
1.6	Slade End Farm: plan of all features and location of evaluation trenches	10
1.7	Slade End Farm: drone orthomosaic showing site stripping in progress in the southern part of the site; north to left of image	11
1.8	Slade End Farm: excavation in progress	12
1.9	Winterbrook: plan of all features and location of evaluation trenches	13
1.10	Winterbrook: aerial view of site, facing north-west	14
1.11	Winterbrook: view westwards from the site	15

Chapter 2

2.1	Slade End Farm: Neolithic and Beaker period overview	22-3
2.2	Slade End Farm: Neolithic features, western area	24-5
2.3	Slade End Farm: Neolithic features, southern area	26
2.4	Slade End Farm: Neolithic and Beaker period features, eastern area	27
2.5	Slade End Farm: Neolithic and Beaker period features, northern area	28-9
2.6	Slade End Farm: early Neolithic pit group B. Scales: 1m	31
2.7	Slade End Farm: sections of Neolithic features	32
2.8	Slade End Farm: earliest Neolithic pit 3799 showing pottery and flint spread. Scale: 0.3m	32
2.9	Slade End Farm: earliest/early Neolithic pit 1039	32
2.10	Slade End Farm: early Neolithic pit 1167. Scale: 0.3m	33
2.11	Slade End Farm: burial 6182. Scale: 0.3m	33
2.12	Slade End Farm: segmented ring ditch 1693, facing north-west. Scales: 1m	33
2.13	Winterbrook: Neolithic and Beaker period features	36
2.14	Flint from early Neolithic pit 1365 at Slade End Farm	41
2.15	Flint from middle Neolithic ring ditch 1693 at Slade End Farm	43
2.16	Flint from late Neolithic pit 3154 at Slade End Farm	45
2.17	Flint from late Neolithic pit 7079 at Slade End Farm	46
2.18	Mesolithic flint from Winterbrook	47
2.19	Blade-flake pyramids for early Neolithic pits at Slade End Farm and Great Western Park, Didcot	52
2.20	Changes in prehistoric pottery fabrics through time, by vessel count, at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	59
2.21	Earliest and early Neolithic pottery from Slade End Farm	61
2.22	Mean sherd weight (g) of individual vessels across time, from pit assemblages from Winterbrook (middle Neolithic) and Slade End Farm (other periods)	62
2.23	Abrasion level by percentage of vessels from contemporary pits	62
2.24	Fabric grade of Carinated Bowl and Plain Bowl pottery from Slade End Farm, by number of vessels	63
2.25	Firing colour of Carinated Bowl and Plain Bowl pottery from Slade End Farm	64
2.26	Middle Neolithic pottery from Winterbrook	65
2.27	Late Neolithic pottery from Slade End Farm	67
2.28	Late Neolithic vessel with bone temper from pit 10022, Slade End Farm	69
2.29	Overall percentage of pottery (by weight) in lower, middle and upper fills of pits with more than one fill	72

2.30	Scatter graph comparing sherds and weight (g) across time, from contemporary pit assemblages. Each point is a vessel. The less fragmented vessels fall in the upper and left part of the graph; the more fragmented examples are to the bottom and right	73
2.31	Scatter graph comparing sherds and weight (g) across time, replicating Fig. 2.30, showing detail of the less well-represented vessels	73
2.32	Early Neolithic hammerstones from Slade End Farm	76
2.33	Early Neolithic bone pin from Slade End Farm	76
2.34	Early and middle Neolithic landscape around Wallingford	94
2.35	Late Neolithic, Beaker period and early Bronze Age landscape around Wallingford	95

Chapter 3

3.1	Slade End Farm: middle Bronze Age overview	98
3.2	Slade End Farm: middle Bronze Age features, southern area	99
3.3	Slade End Farm: Settlement A, cattle burial 1648 and trackway ditches	103
3.4	Slade End Farm: middle Bronze Age features, northern area	104
3.5	Slade End Farm: distribution of pottery, charcoal and heat-affected stone	106
3.6	Frequency of pottery from 'settlement' ditches, other ditches and pits at Slade End Farm, compared to the ditches from Winterbrook	107
3.7	Slade End Farm: sections of middle Bronze Age features	108
3.8	Slade End Farm: waterhole 2035 after excavation of upper section, facing east. Scales: 1m	109
3.9	Slade End Farm: log ladder in waterhole 2035	109
3.10	Slade End Farm: waterhole 2232. Scale: 1m	110
3.11	Slade End Farm: cremation burial 2572. Scale: 0.3m	111
3.12	Slade End Farm: cremation burial 1744. Scale: 0.3m	111
3.13	Winterbrook: middle Bronze Age overview	112
3.14	Winterbrook: section of waterhole 1992	113
3.15	Winterbrook: middle Bronze Age features, phase 1	114
3.16	Winterbrook: middle Bronze Age features, phase 2	115
3.17	Winterbrook: distribution of pottery	116
3.18	Winterbrook: inhumation burials	118
3.19	Pottery from Slade End Farm (nos 1–7) and Winterbrook (nos 8–9)	122
3.20	Pottery wall thickness by fabric from Slade End Farm	122
3.21	Bronze blade from Winterbrook	124
3.22	Stone spindle whorl roughout from Slade End Farm	125
3.23	Log ladder from Slade End Farm	126
3.24	Relative proportions of cereal grain, chaff and weed seeds from middle Bronze Age features at Slade End Farm (SEF) and Winterbrook. Grain count does not include fragmentary grain; chaff count refers to wheat glume bases (one spikelet fork = 2) and barley rachis nodes	143
3.25	Relative proportions of quantified seeds from waterhole 2035 at Slade End Farm, by habitat preference (<i>Juncus</i> seeds excluded from count)	145
3.26	Later Bronze Age landscape around Wallingford	151
3.27	Provisional interpretation of later Bronze Age field system at New Barn Farm, Cholsey, based on evaluation and geophysical survey data	153

Chapter 4

4.1	Slade End Farm: Iron Age overview	156
4.2	Slade End Farm: earliest Iron Age eastern settlement	157
4.3	Slade End Farm: sections of earliest, early and middle Iron Age features	158
4.4	Slade End Farm: early Iron Age overview	160
4.5	Slade End Farm: pit alignment 7596, facing south-east, showing skeleton 2716	161
4.6	Slade End Farm: pit alignment 7596, pit 2037, facing north. Scale: 1m	161
4.7	Slade End Farm: pit alignment 7596, pit 2326, facing north. Scale: 1m	161
4.8	Slade End Farm: pit alignment 7596, pit 2715, showing skeleton 2716, facing north-east. Scale: 1m	162
4.9	Slade End Farm: early Iron Age eastern settlement	163
4.10	Slade End Farm: pit group 7631	167
4.11	Slade End Farm: early Iron Age western settlement	168
4.12	Slade End Farm: early Iron Age northern settlement	170
4.13	Slade End Farm: middle Iron Age overview	171
4.14	Slade End Farm: middle Iron Age eastern settlement, Phases MIA I, MIA II, MIA and IA	172

List of Figures

4.15	Slade End Farm: middle Iron Age enclosures 7587 and 7591	173
4.16	Slade End Farm: middle Iron Age eastern settlement, Phase MIA III	174
4.17	Slade End Farm: middle Iron Age western settlement, Phases MIA I, MIA II and MIA	175
4.18	Slade End Farm: middle Iron Age western settlement, Phase MIA III	176
4.19	Slade End Farm: sections of middle Iron Age and Iron Age features	178
4.20	Slade End Farm: roundhouse 7585, looking west. Scales: 1m	181
4.21	Slade End Farm: posthole belonging to four-post structure 3210, showing possible <i>in situ</i> burning. Scale: 0.3m	182
4.22	Slade End Farm: waterhole 3565, facing north-west. Scales: 1m	183
4.23	Slade End Farm: waterhole 7686, facing south-west	183
4.24	Slade End Farm: pit 3838, facing west. Scale: 1m	183
4.25	Slade End Farm: waterhole 2189, facing south-east. Scales: 1m	186
4.26	Winterbrook: Iron Age overview	187
4.27	Winterbrook: early Iron Age features	189
4.28	Winterbrook: roundhouses 2540 and 2572	190
4.29	Winterbrook: roundhouses 1888, 2512, 2540, 2571 and 2573	192
4.30	Winterbrook: roundhouses 703 and 704	193
4.31	Winterbrook: pit 230, facing south. Scale: 0.5m	194
4.32	Winterbrook: middle Iron Age features	195
4.33	Winterbrook: roundhouse 2505, facing east. Scales: 1m and 2m	196
4.34	Winterbrook: burial 1864, north to top	197
4.35	Winterbrook: features dated broadly to the Iron Age	198
4.36	Distribution of early Iron Age pottery, charcoal and burnt stone at Slade End Farm	201
4.37	Distribution of middle Iron Age pottery, charcoal and burnt stone at Slade End Farm	202
4.38	Pottery fabrics by major inclusion at Slade End Farm	203
4.39	Pottery fabrics by major inclusion in the three early Iron Age settlements at Slade End Farm	203
4.40	Pottery fabrics by major inclusion in the middle Iron Age stratigraphic units at Slade End Farm	204
4.41	Pottery fabrics by major inclusion at Winterbrook	205
4.42	Pottery fabrics by major inclusion in the early and middle Iron Age stratigraphic units at Winterbrook	205
4.43	Early and middle Iron Age rim diameters at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	210
4.44	Early Iron Age rim diameters by vessel type at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	211
4.45	Middle Iron Age rim diameters by vessel type at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	211
4.46	Pottery from earliest and early Iron Age and MIA I contexts at Slade End Farm	213
4.47	Pottery from early Iron Age contexts at Winterbrook	214
4.48	Pottery from middle Iron Age contexts at Slade End Farm	215
4.49	Pottery from middle Iron Age contexts at Slade End Farm	216
4.50	Pottery from middle Iron Age contexts at Winterbrook	217
4.51	Typological scheme for Iron Age pottery from the southern Upper Thames Valley	218-9
4.52	Bayesian model of radiocarbon dates from closed pottery groups, assuming periods are sequential	224
4.53	Detail of the model in Fig. 4.52, showing only boundaries	225
4.54	Detail of model of radiocarbon dates from closed pottery groups showing EIA 2 and MIA boundaries, assuming no relationship between the periods.	226
4.55	Distribution of residue concentrations at each site	228
4.56	Comparison of residue concentrations between different vessel types	230
4.57	Metalwork from Slade End Farm	233
4.58	Crucibles from Slade End Farm	237
4.59	Stone object from Slade End Farm	238
4.60	Worked bone objects from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook.	239
4.61	Relative proportions of grain, chaff and weed seeds from Iron Age features at Slade End Farm	252
4.62	Relative proportions of grain, chaff and weed seeds from Iron Age features at Winterbrook. Grain counts do not include fragments; chaff includes wheat glume bases (spikelet fork = 2) and barley rachis	252
4.63	Weight of pottery per cubic metre of excavated soil from terminal and non-terminal slots of penannular roundhouse ditches at Slade End Farm (SEF) and Winterbrook (W)	263
4.64	Iron Age landscape around Wallingford	269
4.65	Iron Age enclosures at Winterbrook and 'Newnham Murren'. Note that Bradford's Brook would not have been present in the Iron Age	270
4.66	Early Iron Age pit alignment at Slade End Farm	272

Chapter 5

5.1	Slade End Farm: Roman features	276
5.2	Slade End Farm: Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval features	277
5.3	Winterbrook: Roman and early to middle Anglo-Saxon features	278
5.4	Winterbrook: late Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval features	279
5.5	Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery from Winterbrook.	283
5.6	Medieval ironwork from Winterbrook.	285

List of Tables

Chapter 1

1.1	Gazetteer of the selected previous archaeological excavations in the vicinity of the sites shown on Figure 1.5. Not listed are investigations of late Anglo-Saxon and later sites within the historic core of Wallingford, and minor evaluations and watching briefs producing few or no finds	7
1.2	Periods of prehistory referred to in this volume. * = period with little or no representation at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	15

Chapter 2

2.1	Neolithic and Beaker period radiocarbon dates from Slade End Farm. The dates were calibrated using Oxcal v.4.4.2 and IntCal20 (Reimer <i>et al.</i> 2020), and have been rounded out to five years	21
2.2	Earliest and early Neolithic pits at Slade End Farm. Phase: Est Neo = earliest Neolithic; E Neo = early Neolithic. Ex.: amount of pit excavated. CPR = charred plant remains. Pottery: CB = Carinated Bowl; PB = Plain Bowl; DB = Decorated Bowl; B = Bowl. Flint: number of struck pieces excluding sieved chips. Charcoal and CPR: Y = Context sheet records as charcoal rich; A–D = abundance and identifiability of charcoal and CPR, where A = excellent, D = poor	30-1
2.3	Late Neolithic to early Bronze Age pits at Slade End Farm. Phase: L Neo = late Neolithic; EBA = early Bronze Age. Pottery: GW = Grooved Ware (uncertain substyle); DW = Durrington Walls; WL = Woodlands; ?Gr = undiagnostic grog-tempered pottery; BK = Beaker; B = early Neolithic Bowl (residual). Other abbreviations as Table 2.2	34-5
2.4	Middle Neolithic and Beaker period pits at Winterbrook. Phase: M Neo = middle Neolithic. Pottery: PW = Peterborough Ware (uncertain substyle); FG = Fengate; ML = Mortlake; BK = Beaker. Other abbreviations as Table 2.2.	37
2.5	Worked flint assemblage from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. * = excludes sieved chips.	38
2.6	Flint assemblage from early Neolithic pit group B, Slade End Farm	42
2.7	Blank forms by phase, earliest Neolithic to middle Neolithic	49
2.8	Blank forms by phase, late Neolithic to Iron Age.	49
2.9	Selected characteristics of phased flint assemblages from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	49
2.10	Blank type from key assemblages from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook, Mesolithic to middle Neolithic	51
2.11	Blank type from key assemblages from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook, late Neolithic to Iron Age	51
2.12	Blank dimensions by phase from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. All dimensions are in mm.	53
2.13	Flaking pattern by phase from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	53
2.14	Neolithic and Beaker period pottery from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	59
2.15	Early Neolithic Carinated and Plain Bowl pottery from Slade End Farm by fabric.	63
2.16	Early Neolithic Carinated and Plain Bowl pottery from Slade End Farm by fabric group.	63
2.17	Middle Neolithic Peterborough Ware pottery from Winterbrook by fabric.	65
2.18	Decoration technique and position on middle Neolithic pottery from Winterbrook.	65
2.19	Late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery fabrics from Slade End Farm	66
2.20	Late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery from Slade End Farm showing associations between features and forms. Each row is a pit, the numbers in brackets are the numbers of vessels in each pit. A vessel can be counted multiple times	68
2.21	Animal bone from Neolithic and Beaker period contexts at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	78
2.22	Charred plant remains from early Neolithic pit 6172 at Slade End Farm. Hazelnut fragments given both as number of fragments and total fragment weight. F = fragment	80
2.23	Charred plant remains from early Neolithic pits in pit group B at Slade End Farm	80

2.24	Charred plant remains from pit group C and other early Neolithic pits at Slade End Farm.	81
2.25	Charred plant remains from late Neolithic and Beaker period pits at Slade End Farm	82
2.26	Charcoal identifications from Neolithic and Beaker period pits at Slade End Farm. h = heartwood, r = roundwood	82-3
2.27	Charred plant remains from middle Neolithic and Beaker period pits at Winterbrook	83
2.28	Charcoal identifications from Neolithic and early Bronze Age pits at Winterbrook. h = heartwood, r = roundwood.	84
Chapter 3		
3.1	Middle Bronze Age ditches at Slade End Farm. Mean dimensions in italics.	100-1
3.2	Middle Bronze Age radiocarbon dates from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. The dates were calibrated using Oxcal v.4.4.2 and IntCal20 (Reimer <i>et al.</i> 2020), and have been rounded out to five years	102-3
3.3	Possible settlement enclosures at Slade End Farm. The calculation of pottery weight per m ³ of excavated soil assumes that the ditches took the form of half an elliptic cylinder (approximately 45° with rounded sides), with the formula: volume = (pi x radius x depth x length)/2	105
3.4	Certain and possible cremation burials at Slade End Farm	110
3.5	Middle Bronze Age ditches at Winterbrook. * = main enclosure ditches.	113
3.6	Middle Bronze Age pottery fabrics from Slade End Farm	121
3.7	Middle Bronze Age pottery fabrics from Winterbrook	123
3.8	Summary of osteological findings for middle Bronze Age cremation deposits from Slade End Farm.	128-9
3.9	Summary of osteological findings for middle Bronze Age inhumation burials from Winterbrook.	130-1
3.10	Animal bone from middle Bronze Age contexts at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook; excludes cattle skeleton from pit 1648 at Slade End Farm	136
3.11	Charred plant remains from middle Bronze Age contexts at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook.	138-41
3.12	Wood charcoal identifications from middle Bronze Age pits and ditches at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. h = heartwood, r = roundwood	142
3.13	Wood charcoal identifications from middle Bronze Age cremation burials at Slade End Farm. h = heartwood.	142
3.14	Waterlogged plant remains from middle Bronze Age waterhole 2035 at Slade End Farm	144
3.15	Proportions of selected groups of terrestrial beetles (Coleoptera) from middle Bronze Age waterhole 2035 at Slade End Farm	146
Chapter 4		
4.1	Iron Age radiocarbon dates from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. The dates were calibrated using Oxcal v.4.4.2 and IntCal20 (Reimer <i>et al.</i> 2020), and have been rounded out to five years	159
4.2	Roundhouses defined by penannular ditches at Slade End Farm. Mean dimensions in italics	164-5
4.3	Four- and six-post structures at Slade End Farm.	166
4.4	Post-built roundhouses at Slade End Farm.	169
4.5	Enclosure ditches at Slade End Farm. Mean dimensions in italics	177
4.6	Enclosure ditches at Winterbrook.	188
4.7	Post-built roundhouses at Winterbrook	191
4.8	Roundhouses defined by penannular ditches at Winterbrook. Pottery is only from penannular ditches	193
4.9	Four-post structures at Winterbrook	194
4.10	Iron Age pottery from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	200
4.11	Earliest and early Iron Age pottery fabrics at Slade End Farm	203
4.12	Middle Iron Age and broadly Iron Age pottery fabrics at Slade End Farm.	204
4.13	Early Iron Age pottery fabrics at Winterbrook	205
4.14	Middle Iron Age and broadly Iron Age pottery fabrics at Winterbrook.	206
4.15	Correlations between forms and fabrics at Slade End Farm. % is by percentage of forms in each period. The earliest and early Iron Age have been treated as one period	206
4.16	Correlations between forms and fabrics at Winterbrook. % is by percentage of forms in each period	207

List of Tables

4.17	Form associations at Slade End Farm. Shown by area of site, feature, and stratigraphic phase (MIA). Forms are repeated between these categories. * indicates features that have radiocarbon dates	208
4.18	Form associations at Winterbrook by stratigraphic sequence. Pit 613 is the only feature to contain multiple forms that has not been assigned a stratigraphic subphase. * indicates features that have radiocarbon dates	209
4.19	Pottery form type codes	220
4.20	Forms from pottery groups in the Didcot-Wallingford area. Groups are closed, except those in italics	222-3
4.21	Total lipid yield and average concentrations from Slade End Farm, Winterbrook and Sutton Courtenay Lane	228
4.22	List of sherds with their inferred previous contents and total concentration of organic residues. For vessel form codes see Table 4.19	229
4.23	Metalwork from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook	232
4.24	Animal bone from Iron Age contexts at Slade End Farm	243
4.25	Relative abundance of the main domestic mammals (%) at Slade End Farm	243
4.26	Animal bone from Iron Age contexts at Winterbrook	246
4.27	Relative abundance of the main domestic mammals (%) at Winterbrook	246
4.28	Charred plant remains from Iron Age features at Slade End Farm	250-1
4.29	Charred plant remains from Iron Age features at Winterbrook	253-4
4.30	Wood charcoal identifications from Iron Age features at Winterbrook. h = heartwood, r = roundwood	254
4.31	Waterlogged plant remains from Iron Age waterholes at Slade End Farm	256-7
4.32	Proportions of selected groups of terrestrial beetles (Coleoptera) from Iron Age waterholes at Slade End Farm	259
Chapter 5		
5.1	Roman pottery from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. NRFRC codes in brackets	281
5.2	Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery from Winterbrook	282
5.3	Metalwork from late Anglo-Saxon and medieval contexts at Winterbrook	284
5.4	Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval animal bone from Winterbrook	287
5.5	Anglo-Saxon and medieval charred plant remains from Winterbrook	289-90
5.6	Relative proportions of wood charcoal identified from Anglo-Saxon and medieval contexts at Winterbrook	290

Digital Appendices

(<https://knowledge.oxfordarchaeology.com/7072>)

Appendix 1 Additional flint data from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook

- 1.1 Slade End Farm: flint assemblage by context type
- 1.2 Slade End Farm: flint by condition and cortication
- 1.3 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit groups A and B
- 1.4 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit groups C and D
- 1.5 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit groups E and F
- 1.6 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit groups G and H
- 1.7 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit group I
- 1.8 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit group J
- 1.9 Slade End Farm: assemblages from pit group K
- 1.10 Slade End Farm: assemblages from other key contexts in the southern and western parts of the site
- 1.11 Slade End Farm: assemblages from other key contexts in the eastern part of the site
- 1.12 Slade End Farm: assemblages from other key contexts in the northern part of the site
- 1.13 Winterbrook: flint assemblage by context type
- 1.14 Winterbrook: flint by condition and cortication
- 1.15 Winterbrook: key pit assemblages

Appendix 2 Organic residue analysis of early Neolithic pottery from Slade End Farm

Appendix 3 Catalogue of worked stone from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook

Appendix 4 Metalworking debris and other vitrified materials from Slade End Farm

Appendix 5 Additional human remains data from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook

- 5.1 Slade End Farm, middle Bronze Age cremation burials: bone weight calculations for the unsorted 4–2mm fractions
- 5.2 Winterbrook, middle Bronze Age inhumation burials: prevalence of non-metric cranial and post-cranial traits
- 5.3 Winterbrook: summary of osteological findings for cremation deposit 672

Appendix 6 Preliminary report on the DNA from middle Bronze Age and Iron Age burials at Winterbrook

Appendix 7 Additional animal bone data from Slade End Farm and Winterbrook

- 7.1 Slade End Farm, middle Bronze Age: Anatomical representation of main domestic mammals
- 7.2 Slade End Farm, middle Bronze Age: Measurements on cattle ABG
- 7.3 Slade End Farm, Iron Age: Taphonomic modifications
- 7.4 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Species frequency (% NISP) by feature type
- 7.5 Slade End Farm, early Iron Age: Element representation (MNE) in the main domestic mammals
- 7.6 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Element representation (MNE) in the main domestic mammals
- 7.7 Slade End Farm, Iron Age: Distribution of butchery marks by taxon
- 7.8 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Cattle epiphyseal fusion
- 7.9 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Sheep/goat epiphyseal fusion
- 7.10 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Pig epiphyseal fusion
- 7.11 Slade End Farm, Iron Age: Toothwear data
- 7.12 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Equid cheek tooth crown heights
- 7.13 Slade End Farm, middle Iron Age: Dog measurements
- 7.14 Winterbrook, Iron Age: Taphonomic modifications
- 7.15 Winterbrook, Iron Age: Species frequency (% NISP) by feature type
- 7.16 Winterbrook, early Iron Age: Element representation (MNE) in the main domestic mammals

- 7.17 Winterbrook, middle Iron Age: Element representation (MNE) in the main domestic mammals
- 7.18 Winterbrook, Iron Age: Equid cheek tooth crown heights
- 7.19 Winterbrook, Iron Age: Distribution of butchery marks by taxon
- 7.20 Winterbrook, early Iron Age: Sheep/goat epiphyseal fusion
- 7.21 Winterbrook, middle Iron Age: Sheep/goat epiphyseal fusion
- 7.22 Winterbrook, middle Iron Age: Cattle epiphyseal fusion
- 7.23 Winterbrook, Iron Age: Toothwear data

Appendix 8 Assessment of charred plant remains from Slade End Farm

Appendix 9 Assessment of charred plant remains from Winterbrook

Appendix 10 Pollen data from middle Bronze Age and Iron Age waterholes at Slade End Farm

Appendix 11 Insects and other invertebrates recovered from middle Bronze Age and Iron Age waterholes at Slade End Farm

Appendix 12 Additional sections from Winterbrook

Summary

This volume reports on two excavations carried out on the fringes of the town of Wallingford, at Slade End Farm and Winterbrook. The two sites lay 1.25km apart on the first gravel terrace of the Thames, and produced similar sequences of prehistoric archaeology, including Neolithic pits, middle Bronze Age enclosure systems and Iron Age settlement. Medieval occupation was also present at Winterbrook. Between them, the two sites shed significant new light on the prehistory of the south Oxfordshire Thames Valley.

Though small-scale Mesolithic activity is evinced at both sites by residual worked flint, the earliest settlement features dated to the early Neolithic and were restricted to Slade End Farm. The 24 pits phased to this period were scattered widely across the site and were mostly found in pairs. The pits variously contained pottery in the Carinated Bowl, Plain Bowl and Decorated Bowl traditions, and a large assemblage of worked flint was also recovered, one pit containing an exceptional group of over 5700 pieces. Detailed analysis of the pits indicates that they typically contained material that derived from surface middens. A programme of lipid analysis on the early Neolithic pottery suggests that dairying was an important element of the economy. A pair of early Neolithic inhumation burials was also found at the edge of the site, one accompanied by a bone pin.

Occupation in the subsequent stages of the Neolithic seems to have been lesser in scale. Activity during the middle Neolithic was represented at Winterbrook by a few pits and ditches and at Slade End Farm by a segmented ring ditch. Late Neolithic occupation was restricted to Slade End Farm, in the form of pits containing Grooved Ware pottery. A single pit at each site produced Beaker pottery, and at Slade End Farm a hollow surrounded by a ring of nine pits has been radiocarbon dated to the same period.

After an apparent hiatus in activity during the early Bronze Age, landscape organisation dramatically changed in the middle Bronze Age, when ditched field systems or enclosure complexes were laid out at both sites. At Slade End Farm an extensive landscape of trackways, fields and enclosures was uncovered, which was fairly irregular in layout, in contrast to the coaxial field systems found at some other contemporary sites. A waterhole containing a log ladder was also found. Environmental remains from the waterhole suggest that the immediate area was characterised by open grassland, though the pollen evidence also indicates arable farming in the vicinity. As with many other middle Bronze Age field systems in the region, no

direct evidence for settlement in the form of buildings was found, though concentrations of pottery and other finds suggest that some of the smaller enclosures may have been foci for domestic activity. The enclosure complex was not only used for farming and settlement, however. A cattle burial had been interred in a pit that cut one of the trackway ditches, and seven cremation burials were present. Two of these were *bustum*-type (*in situ*) cremation burials, while the remaining five consisted of smaller deposits of cremated bone placed around the edge of a rectangular enclosure that otherwise produced few finds. At Winterbrook, a single subrectangular enclosure with internal subdivisions extended across most of the excavated area. Only a low density of finds was recovered, suggesting that the enclosure was not a major focus for settlement. Associations with funerary ritual were more evident, as seven inhumation burials were found within or adjacent to the enclosure ditches. Another notable find from the enclosure was a fragment of a bronze weapon.

Following a further hiatus in activity in the late Bronze Age, both sites were reoccupied for settlement during the Iron Age. At Slade End Farm, settlement began on a small scale during the earliest Iron Age (800–600 BC) and extended across much of the southern part of the site during the early and middle Iron Age. The early Iron Age settlement consisted of roundhouses, four-post structures and pits and was bounded to the south by a double pit alignment, which seems to have separated the occupied area from the lower, wetter ground to the south. One of the pits from this alignment contained an inhumation burial. During the middle Iron Age, settlement shifted slightly in location and now lay within a complex of ditched boundaries and enclosures. Roundhouses and four-post structures continued to be present, and several waterholes were dug. One of the roundhouses was associated with evidence for iron working and copper alloy working. The most notable find from the site was a complete copper alloy bracelet, found in a posthole. At Winterbrook, the settlement dated to the early and middle Iron Age, and in both phases incorporated enclosures, roundhouses, four-post structures and pits. The settlements at both sites seem to have been abandoned by the late Iron Age, with no clear evidence for activity in that period other than an inhumation burial at Winterbrook that has been radiocarbon dated to between the mid-2nd century BC and the early 1st century AD.

Both sites appear to have remained peripheral during the Roman period, though at Slade End

Farm field boundary ditches were dug at the southern edge of the site. Evidence for activity during the early to middle Anglo-Saxon period was even sparser, with just a single pit at Slade End Farm and a small assemblage of pottery at Winterbrook. There is then no trace of anything other than agricultural land use at Slade End Farm from the medieval period onwards. At Winterbrook, by contrast, part of a settlement dating to the 11th to

12th centuries was uncovered, represented by a series of rectilinear enclosure ditches and pits. Notable finds included a spearhead and several other iron objects. The remains are likely to correspond to the settlement at Winterbrook mentioned in medieval documents, and they provide the first good archaeological evidence for a rural community in the immediate hinterland of the town of Wallingford.

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