AN UNUSUAL PIT AND OTHER NEARBY PREHISTORIC FINDS AT WOODNESBOROUGH

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Ploughing revealed a shallowly buried prehistoric pit. Excavation of this allowed two radio-carbon dates to be obtained, indicating that the feature belongs to the Early-Middle Bronze Age period, broadly c.1650-1450 Cal BC. Also of special interest was an earlier, Neolithic stone axe found 24m away. This is apparently unrelated to the pit but represents an important new local discovery. Of the scatter of surface flintwork recovered in the vicinity of the excavated pit, some could be broadly contemporary with the Neolithic axe, but the bulk of this material is later, probably of Bronze Age date and quite possibly contemporary with the pit.

Winter weathering of a ploughed field at Woodnesborough, near Sandwich (**Fig. 1**) revealed a distinct, localised concentration of heavily calcined flint at one point on the surface (**Fig. 2**). With the ready permission of the farmer, the Dover Archaeological Group undertook a small investigative excavation on the site in March 2014. This revealed the outline of a shallow prehistoric pit directly under the plough soil. A walkover survey of the adjacent ground recovered an interesting assemblage of prehistoric flintwork, together with a Neolithic polished stone axe.

The excavated pit (TR 31114 57272) lies on the outskirts of the present village of Woodnesborough, about 620m NE of the parish church, and 25m ENE of the site of medieval Convent Well, also excavated in 2014 (Parfitt and Clarke 2016, fig. 1). The pit lies on a very gentle east-facing slope at an elevation of about 9.40m AOD (Fig. 2). The natural subsoil here is a silty clay belonging to the Thanet Formation. Although now covered over, Convent Well apparently represents the site of an ancient spring feeding the South Poulders Stream which flows eastwards towards the River Stour at Sandwich (Parfitt and Clarke 2016, fig. 1). Such a source of fresh water is likely to have been attractive to prehistoric inhabitants of the region.

The excavated pit

About 0.20m of plough soil was cleared by hand, down to the surface of the natural clay over an area measuring 3.10m (NE-SW) by 2.40m (NW-SE). The undisturbed surface below the plough soil showed regular plough scores. Traces of natural clay brought to the surface at a number of points across the field indicated that the most recent ploughing of the field had been somewhat deeper than usual. Undoubtedly,

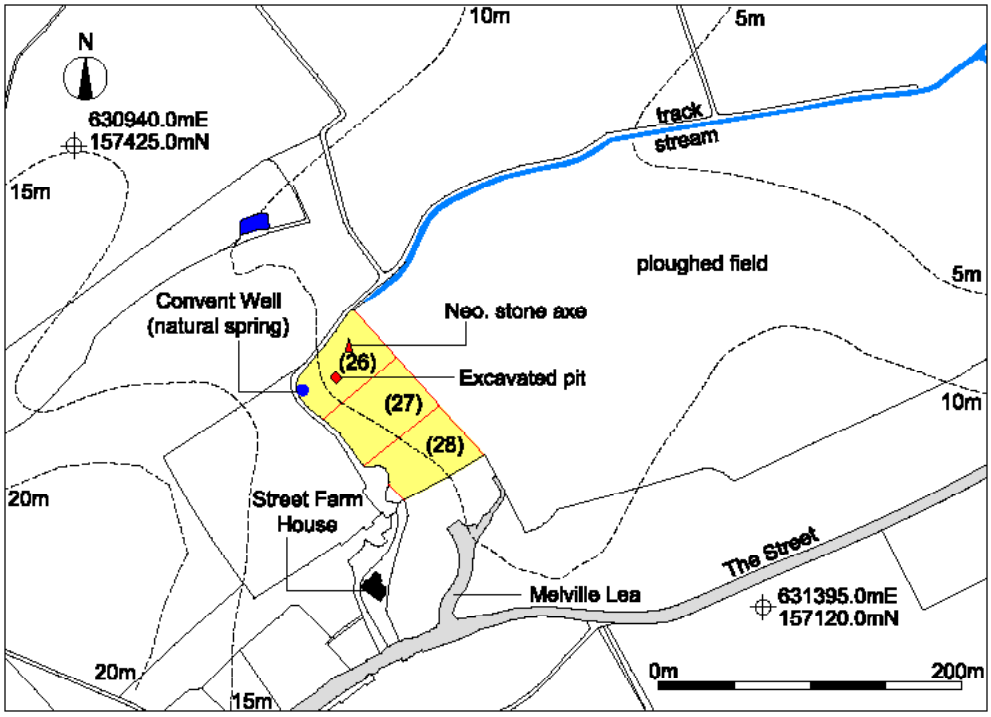

Fig. 1 Plan showing location of the excavated pit and field-walked areas in relation to Convent Well.

Fig. 2 General view looking east towards Sandwich. The surface scatter of burnt flint is visible below 'X'.

this deeper ploughing had led to the truncation of the excavated pit, bringing its upper filling to the surface (Fig. 2). No other surface evidence for any additional truncated features was noted in the vicinity, suggesting that the present pit might have been an isolated one.

The pit as excavated was roughly sub-square in shape and measured about 1.95m (NE-SW) by 1.85m (NW-SE). Clearly truncated by the plough, as surviving, it was 0.20m deep with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. Despite much burnt material being contained within its filling there was no clear evidence for any *in situ* burning or scorching of the sides and base of the pit itself. This implies that the feature did not function as a hearth or fire-pit of any sort and further confirmation of this point appears to be provided by the presence of nine post-holes cut into the base of the pit (**Figs 3-5**). On this evidence, it would seem that the pit had originally contained

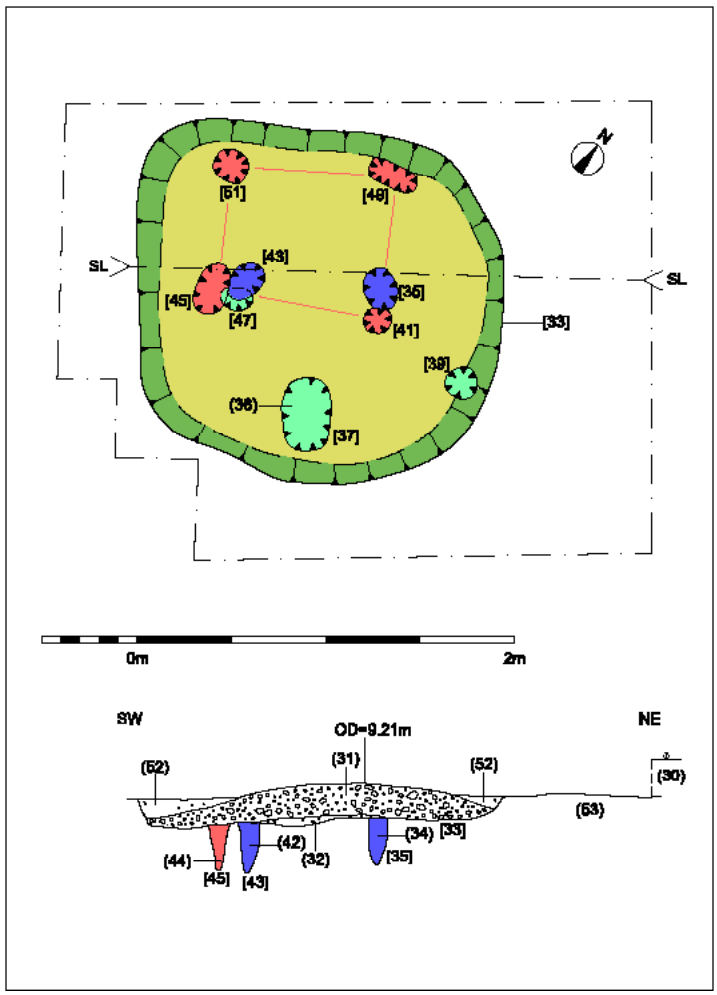

Fig. 3 Plan and section of the excavated pit showing possible post-hole arrangements.

Fig. 4 The excavated pit with central baulk remaining showing filling of burnt flints, looking north-west. Scale, 1 metre.

a series of upright timbers and that the burnt material subsequently filling it was derived from elsewhere.

Post-holes in the base of the pit

A scatter of nine post-holes, mostly between 0.22 and 0.28m deep, were noted cutting the base of the pit (Fig. 3; Fs 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49 and 51; **Table 1**). Although post-holes Fs 37, 39, 49 and 51 did occur around the edge, the overall arrangement of these features is not really consistent with that of a timber wall or lining to the pit (Fig. 5).

Post-hole, F. 49, was probably a double, representing two separate, adjacent posts. Fs 35 and 41, and Fs 43 and 45, also lay side by side, in such a way as to suggest that they constituted successive replacements of a single timber upright. Fs 43 and 45 also cut an earlier post-hole, F. 47 (Fig. 3). None of these features contained any datable finds.

The excavated evidence suggests that perhaps two or three separate phases of post-hole could be represented. Certainly pre-dating Fs 43 and 45, post-hole F. 47 was characterised by a filling of light grey clay, containing only occasional fragments of calcined flint and charcoal. The fillings of Fs 37 and 39 were very similar, standing in marked contrast to the other post-holes, which contained dense

Fig. 5 The pit fully excavated showing arrangement of post-holes in the base, looking south-east. Scale, 1 metre.

TABLE 1. DETAILS OF RECORDED POST-HOLES IN BASE OF EXCAVATED PIT

Feature No.	Shape	Size (m)	Depth (m)	Sides	Base	Fill
35	oval	0.22 x 0.17	0.26	steep-vert.	pointed	Dark grey clay, much charcoal and calcined flint
37	oval	0.37 x 0.26	0.09	steep	flat	Light grey clay, occasional charcoal and calcined flint
39	circ.	dia. 0.16	0.22	steep-vert.	rounded	-ditto-
41	oval	0.16 x 0.14	0.24	steep	pointed	Dark grey clay, much charcoal and calcined flint
43	oval	0.22 x 0.15	0.28	very steep	pointed	-ditto-
45	oval	0.28 x 0.17	0.25	very steep	pointed	-ditto -
47	oval	0.15 x 0.09	0.24	steep	pointed	Light grey clay, occasional charcoal and calcined flint
49	sub-rect.	0.27 x 0.12	0.25	vertical	rounded	Dark grey clay, much charcoal and calcined flint
51	oval	0.19 x 0.15	0.25	vertical	pointed	-ditto-

amounts of charcoal and calcined flint fragments, clearly related to the main filling of the pit and perhaps derived from above as the posts rotted. On this evidence, Fs 37, 39 and 47 may be tentatively put forward as representing a primary group of post-holes, infilled before the others.

The arrangement of the remaining six, potentially later, post-holes appears to be significant. These all occur in the north-western half of the pit and their layout strongly implies that they were arranged to form a small rectangular structure marked by a post at each corner. Moreover, the additional post-holes here suggest that this structure had been rebuilt (Figs 3 and 5). Thus, post-holes Fs 41, 45, 49 and 51 may be grouped together to suggest a closely rectangular structure measuring about 0.90m (NE-SW) by 0.70m (NW-SE) (Fig. 3). Post-hole F. 51 showed no evidence of a successor, but F. 49 fairly certainly represents two inter-cutting, perhaps successive, features and the other post-holes show adjacent replacements. Fs 35 and 43, together with Fs 49 and 51 reused, could be linked to form a second, slightly smaller and less precise rectangular structure, measuring about 0.80 by 0.60m, that replaced the first. A sample of charcoal recovered from the filling of F. 35 gave a radio-carbon result of 3297 ± 32 BP (UBA-25927). See detailed report below.

On the evidence of the apparent post settings, it seems possible that primary post-holes Fs 37, 39 and 47 could represent an earlier grouping, positioned further east on the base of the pit and set on a different axis (Fig. 3). Such an original structure could have been about 0.90m across but the absence of any northern corner post must leave this interpretation in doubt.

Filling of the pit

The primary filling of the pit (Fig. 3, section, Context 32) consisted of a thin layer of dark grey silty clay containing very large quantities of calcined flint and much charcoal, including some sizeable fragments. The layer was up to 0.05m thick and was confined to the central area of the pit's base, sealing infilled post-holes Fs 35, 41, 43 and 47. A sample of the charcoal contained within Context 32 was submitted for radio-carbon dating and gave a result of 3242 ± 33 BP (UBA-25926).

The main filling of the pit (Context 31) was of a similar composition to Context 32, and consisted of a medium grey silty clay containing very large quantities of calcined flint but slightly less charcoal (Fig. 4). The deposit was up to 0.16m thick but it had clearly been partially truncated by the plough. Despite subsequent damage, the upper surface appeared slightly domed, being higher at the centre, implying that this was a dumped heap of material.

Around the edges of the pit, covering the slopes of the central burnt flint heap (Context 31) was a layer of fairly clean olive-grey silty clay containing only occasional small pieces of charcoal and calcined flint (Context 52). This could perhaps mostly represent weathered material derived from the upper sides of the pit. It contained no datable finds.

The combined filling of the pit contained 168kg of calcined flint (not retained). The individual flints ranged in size from 1 to 15cm but the bulk were between 5 and 9cm. A significant proportion retained evidence of the outer surface, confirming that they were locally collected pebbles and cobbles, derived from the underlying

Thanet Formation. Nineteen of the pieces from Context 31 showed evidence of being struck prior to heating. Amongst these were several burnt cores and core fragments and one burnt end-scraper, but most of this material is difficult to closely identify due to the subsequent heat damage.

Surface discoveries

A careful search of the field surface around the excavated pit (Fig. 1) failed to reveal any specific indications for the presence of other buried features but a general scatter of prehistoric struck flint and calcined flint was noted across the area. The struck flints include a range of cores, waste flakes and blades, together with hammer-stones, scrapers and other worked material. Of more special interest was the discovery of a polished Neolithic axe of non-local greenstone (**Fig. 6**). This was found lying on the surface some 24m NNE of the excavated pit. Petrological study suggests a Cornish origin for this find.

THE FINDS

Excavation of the prehistoric pit produced relatively little archaeological material other than calcined flint (none retained). A few pieces of struck flint were recovered from its filling but there was no pottery or animal bone. Rather more lithic material was collected from the surface of the adjacent field and this included the polished stone axe. A brief metal-detector search of the area failed to reveal any significant finds. The material collected currently remains in the possession of the Dover Archaeological Group but will be transferred to Dover Museum in due course.

The Neolithic stone axe *by David Williams*

Just over half a Neolithic miniature polished stone axe-head was recovered from the field north-east of Convent Well (TR 31120 57294), Woodnesborough. It is light greyish-green in colour, of trapezoidal form, and has the butt missing. The sides are slightly convex in profile and flare evenly on both sides towards the cutting edge. The cutting edge when viewed in plan has an even curved profile. When viewed from the side the axe is slightly curved. It is oval-shaped in cross-section. There is no indication that the axe is small because it has been reduced in size through reuse and it appears that it was deliberately made that size (*cf.* Clarke 2011). Length: 43.5mm (max.); Width: 41.7mm (cutting edge) to 26.9mm (surviving butt end); Thickness: 17.1mm (max.); Weight: 51g (Fig. 6).

The axe is worn and displays evidence of use along the oblique cutting edge, which shows signs of chipping, but overall it still retains much of its original polish and it is still possible to see some of the polishing striations which have been left behind on the surface of the axe. On one of the tapered edges the striations are longitudinal, whereas the striations on the blade section are more curved. In order not to further damage this small axe, a macroscopic examination with the aid of a compound microscope (x40) was made rather than a petrological one, involving sampling and thin section analysis. This strongly suggests that the axe has been made from a medium-grained altered or low-grade metamorphosed basic igneous rock, perhaps

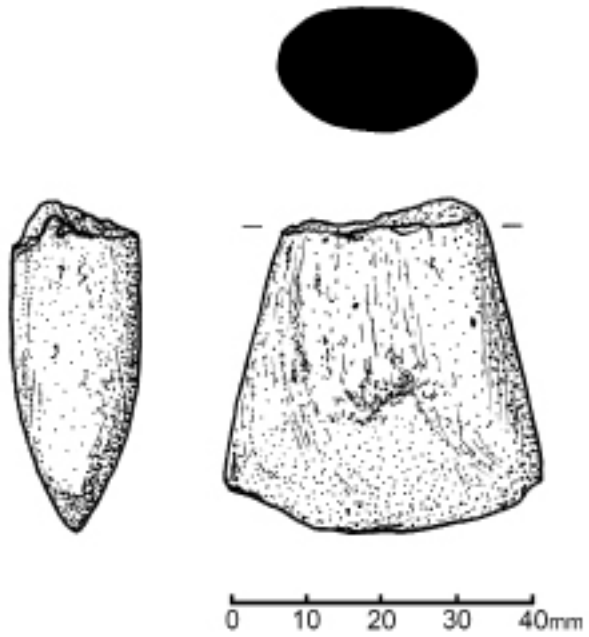

Fig. 6 Neolithic stone axe found on the surface.

originally a gabbro or dolerite. The greenish hue of the axe most probably derives from the presence of minerals such as chlorite, hornblende and epidote.

The stone may be related to the Cornish Groups I-IV of the Implement Petrology classification, though visually it lacks the plentiful dark-coloured grains of pyroxene and fibrous amphibole normally associated with the more common uralitized gabbro of Group I (Keiller *et al*. 1941; McK Clough and Cummins 1979, 127; Cummins, 1983, fig. 6.5). Instead, it probably belongs to the ungrouped Neolithic greenstone implements recovered from the South-East, many of which are thought to come from the South-West region (Woodcock *et al*. 1988, table 11). It is worth pointing out that Cornish axes appear to be the most commonly sourced polished axes found in Kent (Woodcock *et al*. 1988, table 10 and pp. 30-31).

Prehistoric flintwork from the field surface *by Geoff Halliwell*

The field surface around the excavated pit showed a light surface scatter of prehistoric struck flint and calcined flint. Some 6,600m^2 of ground adjacent to the pit were carefully searched and this produced about 270 struck flints (11.72kg) and 355 calcined flints (10kg), together with a few Roman and medieval pot-sherds. The ground examined was subdivided into three smaller search areas (Fig. 1, Areas 26, 27 and 28), each measuring roughly 55 x 40m. The excavated pit lay towards the middle of Area 26, with the natural spring, later to become Convent Well, located at its western corner. Flints were found to be more common in the

TABLE 2. OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF STRUCK FLINT MATERIAL

Context	26		27		28		*Total*	
	No.	(%)	No.	%	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Bashed lumps	7	(5)	4	(6)	2	(3)	13	(5)
Cores, fragments, remnants	26	(20)	9	(13)	9	(13)	44	(16)
Tools, worked, utilised & modified pieces	77	(58)	32	(45)	36	(53)	145	(53)
Waste flakes	19	(14)	25	(36)	21	(31)	65	(24)
Other	4	(3)	-	(-)	-	(-)	4	(2)
Total Struck flint	*133*		*70*		*68*		*271*	
Calcined flint	178		102		75		355	
(kg)	5		3		2		10	

immediate area of the excavated pit, with half the material recovered coming from this general vicinity, together with the Neolithic stone axe (**Table 2**).

All flint material which showed evidence of being deliberately altered by man was collected. The vast majority of the flints were unpatinated and were mainly black in colour, with some brown or grey. Where cortex was present this indicated a Downland flint derivation. Some Bullhead flint was also being used. Although unpatinated, about forty of the flints recovered were stained orange-brown. These included a typical Mesolithic core and axe sharpening flake suggesting that all these stained flints could be from a somewhat earlier period than the majority. Another, uncorticated flake of grey flint with a thick orange/cream coloured patina/staining, 50 x 30 x 10mm and weighing 20.2g, has the appearance of being much earlier than the bulk of the flintwork recovered and may be of Palaeolithic date. Following washing and marking, each flint was allocated to one of five groups, as set out in Table 2.

Cores, 'bashed lumps', remnants and fragments

Attributing lithics to this group is, by its very nature, somewhat a matter of opinion, but all have in common a flint mass showing definite signs of being struck by man, in many cases so often that only an uncorticated lump remains. Cores are the recognisable ('conventional') remnants of a process to produce deliberate flakes or blades for a particular function. Apart from the single Mesolithic blade core referred to above, there are no specific types of core or fragments here which can be attributed to particular periods of prehistory but the presence of the bashed lumps and fragments in a region where flint is plentiful tends to be characteristic of later, Bronze Age flint working (Butler 2005, 181).

Hammerstones

From Area 26 are two hammerstones, one a much battered spherical bullhead flint,

55mm across and weighing 195g, and the other a fragment of a large nodule, 50 x 50mm of crystallised (possibly from heat) Downland flint, again with much battering and weighing 150g.

Worked, utilised or modified pieces

This group, which makes up half of all the collected flints has been subdivided into five sections as shown in **Table 3**.

TABLE 3. SUBDIVISION OF WORKED, UTILISED OR MODIFIED PIECES

Context	Scrapers		Points (piercers, awls)		Rods		Misc. retouch		Others (incl. axe fragment)		*Total*
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
26	10	13	13	17	4	5	38	49	12	16	77
27	5	16	5	16	0	0	17	53	5	16	32
28	6	16	5	14	1	3	22	61	2	6	36
Total	21	15	23	16	5	3	77	53	19	13	145

Scrapers: **Table 4** shows a breakdown of the scraper types and demonstrates the predominance of side- and multiple-faced scrapers over end- and nosed-scrapers. There are no Neolithic horseshoe-shaped types, and the two small thumbnail scrapers are not out of place for the Bronze Age period.

TABLE 4. SCRAPER TYPES

Context	End	Nosed	Side	Multiple-faced	Thumbnail	Total
26	0	0	6	3	1	10
27	1	0	3	0	1	5
28	0	2	1	3	0	6
Total	1	2	10	6	2	21

Points: these implements have been carefully made to produce a strong, sharp point not only intended for initially piercing material but also subsequently enlarging the hole by removing material through an awl or borer action. Most points are straight-forward implements with the point being at the end of a blade and awls or borers having additional working around this point. In the present collection, however, some of the flakes have been worked into points on a lateral edge of the flake, at right-angles to the main axis, and come to hand for using the point as a heavy-duty reamer, other edges of the flake being blunted. Maybe some of the items being worked were of a heavy quality necessitating more robust handling.

Rods: these are robust pieces of flint, finger long, made to a triangular or oval

cross-section, and usually worked on at least two surfaces. The ends are often bruised or smoothed and were probably used for heavy pressure rubbing (hence the smooth end) or as a strike-a-light.

Axe preform or broken axe fragment: a large fragment from Area 26, 80 x 55 x 25mm, weighing 174g, is of triangular cross-section and worked on all faces. It is of black unpatinated flint and would appear to represent either an axe preform or broken axe fragment, although what would be the cutting edge is undamaged.

Miscellaneous retouch: it is immediately apparent that half the flakes in the worked section come under the 'miscellaneous retouch' group, and are defined by the fact that these pieces exhibit some, often minute, deliberate edge modification, and on only part of the flake, but not consistent enough to produce a recognisable tool. This retouch can be on any part of the flake and the lack of standardisation indicates that it is an expedient but nevertheless consistent feature of the assemblage.

Other worked tools: flints are allocated to this group if it is evident that some modification has taken place on a recognisable implement possibly due to damage or change of function. For example, a side scraper can subsequently be retouched sufficiently to form a notched piece, that may be cited as a tool in its own right.

Waste flakes

All the non-modified flint flakes showing signs of having been stuck during the knapping process come into this category, and examination of these can also provide some information about the character of site activity as a whole. For example, the degree of cortication remaining on flakes can give some measure of how much of the original flint nodule has been knapped, and where.

Flakes with a dorsal side completely corticated are termed primary flakes and are the result of the initial working of a core. Secondary flakes have some cortex remaining somewhere on the surface and tertiary flakes are completely uncorticated. **Table 5** shows the distribution of the cortical state of the flakes from each context.

The fact that 90% of the waste flake population fall into categories of secondary and tertiary cortication is a good indication that flint working to produce implements was taking place at this location, as very few of these would be present if the implements recorded were made elsewhere and brought in.

TABLE 5. CORTICAL NATURE OF THE WASTE FLAKE POPULATION

Context	Primary		Secondary		Tertiary		Total
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%	
26	2	11	12	63	5	26	19
27	1	4	18	72	6	24	25
28	3	14	10	48	8	38	21
Total	6	9	40	62	19	29	65

Conclusions and discussion of surface flints

Overall, the small number of prehistoric flints recovered from an area of some 6,600m^2 suggests that either prehistoric activity was quite limited in this area or that this is just part of a diffuse larger site (but see below). It may be that despite the adjacent freshwater spring this site was visited infrequently. That the modern ploughing regime had generally not been deep enough to bring more ancient material to the surface seems unlikely in view of the heavily truncated nature of the excavated pit.

Not only is the surface assemblage quite small, it would also seem to include flints from more than one industry, although the bulk appear to belong to one consistent, unpatinated group. Much of this material can be seen to have been deliberately modified in some way for immediate purposes (Table 2). Taken together with the evidence from the bashed lumps, core fragments etc. and the assessment of the cortical state of the remaining flakes (Table 5), all indications are that flint flake production and modification was taking place at the site, with Area 26, in the vicinity of the excavated pit and natural spring, being the focus of this activity. Interestingly, this is also the area where most of the utilised flints were recovered.

The distribution of the flint tool types (Tables 4 and 5), where the forms of the scrapers are accompanied by expedient retouched pieces are all consistent with a later Bronze Age style of flint usage with small scale activities, probably of a domestic nature, being undertaken. Generalized shaping, trimming or cleaning small material such as working with wood, hides, plants or even scraping bones would be consistent with these tool types. Evidence of heavy-duty activity needing axes, choppers or large scrapers is generally absent.

The bulk of the flintwork recovered would thus appear to be broadly datable to the Bronze Age, but some other pieces are likely to be earlier. One heavily patinated flake could be Palaeolithic and there are two definite Mesolithic types – a conical shaped blade core and an axe sharpening flake. Both these diagnostic pieces have a distinctive orange-brown surface staining and similar staining is seen on about forty other less diagnostic flakes, suggesting that these might also be contemporary. Some of the other struck flints recovered could be associated with the Neolithic stone axe but few diagnostic pieces are identifiable and the axe could be an isolated, casual loss.

In contrast to the situation on the south and west sides of Woodnesborough, where regular field walking has established the presence of a largely unbroken surface scatter of prehistoric flints, the extent and density of such material to the north and east of the village is less certain due to a general lack of fieldwork. Accordingly, it is difficult to gauge whether the amount of flintwork recovered during the present investigation is broadly typical of the region as a whole or reflects a more specific concentration of such material focussed on the spring at Convent Well. A few casual forays undertaken across the ground between the excavated site and Sandwich Bypass, however, have suggested the presence of only a very light surface scatter of prehistoric flints further away from Convent Well.

Note on charcoal samples recovered from pit F. 33 *by Geoff Halliwell*

Context 32, primary filling of pit: larger remnants of the charcoal lumps which remained and could be traced longitudinally over 5-12cm indicated that fairly thin branches, 5-15mm thick and thinner, formed the bulk of the combustible material represented. No traces of previously carved or shaped wood were seen.

Context 34, filling of post-hole, F. 35: smaller but similar carboniferous material was obtained. Initial attempts to separate charcoal from the adhering soil by the usual method of gentle crushing of the dried material and flotation in distilled water were unsuccessful, as the carbon was so intimately incorporated in the hard clay soil.

Radio-carbon dates

Two samples from Contexts 32 and 34 were submitted for radio-carbon dating to the Queen's University, Belfast. These comprised identifiable 'charcoal' fragments, from which any obvious ordinary soil had been removed with forceps but no further treatment applied.

UBA-25926; Primary filling of pit, CWW-14-32
Radiocarbon Age BP: 3242 ± 33.
Calibration data set: intcal 13.14c # Reimer *et al*. 2013

% area enclosed	Cal age ranges	Relative area under probability distribution
68.3 (1 sigma)	Cal BC 1601–1585	0.141
	1542–1540	0.007
	1534–1492	0.568
	1482–1453	0.285
95.4 (2 sigma)	Cal BC 1611–1571	0.183
	1566–1442	0.817

UBA-25927; Filling of post-hole, F. 35, CWW-14-34
Radiocarbon Age BP: 3297 ± 32
Calibration data set: intcal 13.14c # Reimer *et al*. 2013

% area enclosed	Cal age ranges	Relative area under probability distribution
68.3 (1 sigma)	Cal BC 1615–1594	0.260
	1589–1531	0.740
95.4 (2 sigma)	Cal BC 1657–1653	0.004
	1644–1501	0.996

The results obtained would indicate an Early-Middle Bronze Age date for these samples.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The surface lithic assemblage recovered appears to represent more than one industry. Of special interest is the Neolithic stone axe (Fig. 6). Seemingly unrelated to the excavated pit and perhaps an earlier stray find, this represents an important new local discovery, as there are only a few other stone axes known from this part of north-east Kent. Excavations at the major Neolithic and Bronze Age site at Ringlemere, some 1.75km to the west, have yielded fragments from three such stone axes (Parfitt and Needham forthcoming), whilst a single complete specimen comes as an isolated find from the excavations at Richborough Castle, some 3km to the north-east (Cunliffe 1968, plate LII, no. 258). Significantly, all of these local axe finds appear to have origins in Cornwall and the South-West.

Although some of the surface flintwork recovered could be broadly contemporary with the Neolithic stone axe, the general impression gained is that the bulk of this material is later, probably of Bronze Age date, quite possibly contemporary with the excavated pit. Nevertheless, earlier pieces, of Mesolithic date, are also identifiable, implying at least casual prehistoric activity in the general area over a long period of time.

In the absence of any diagnostic pottery in the excavated pit, the two radio-carbon dates obtained effectively provide the only useful dating evidence and indicate that the pit belongs to the Early-Middle Bronze Age period, broadly *c*.1650-1450 Cal BC. There appear to be few close local parallels for the discovery and the feature is presently difficult to fully understand.

Pits containing dense amounts of burnt flint and charcoal have been identified at a number of other locations in this eastern part of Kent, mostly as fairly small, isolated features located high on the chalk Downs, where they have generally been regarded as temporary cooking pits. A few of these have provided radio-carbon dates, which are generally a little earlier than those from Woodnesborough (Parfitt 2006, 235; table 3).

As at Crabble, previously examined in the valley of the River Dour outside Dover (Parfitt 2006), certain aspects of the Woodnesborough discovery are reminiscent of a prehistoric 'burnt mound' site. These sites appear to be connected with a specific activity or industrial process that involved hot stone technology. The Bronze Age dating, the proximity to fresh flowing water and an abundance of burnt material in the form of calcined flint and charcoal are all details typical of these somewhat enigmatic prehistoric monuments (Topping 2011). Most obviously missing at Woodnesborough, however, is the defining feature – an extensive spread or mound of burnt stones. Although a substantial quantity of calcined flint was contained within the excavated pit, with more in the plough soil derived from its truncated upper filling, taken together all this material is surely far too little to represent a levelled burnt mound, well preserved examples of which can be 15m or more across and 1-2m high.

There was no clear evidence that the burnt material present within the pit had been heated *in situ* but it perhaps seems unlikely that this fire debris is completely unrelated (Fig. 4). In its original form, the flat-bottomed open pit, maybe around 0.40m deep, seems to have held a succession of fairly substantial, timber uprights (Fig. 5). These appear to have supported a small rectangular structure, probably

rebuilt at least once. The presence of this internal post-hole structure indicates that the pit cannot be interpreted as being a simple fire-pit or sunken hearth or dug for storage. Indeed, its final use for containing dumped burnt debris may not closely reflect the primary function.

In its original form the pit, with its upright posts, could have constituted part of a larger structure, conceivably the sunken portion of a small building not otherwise revealed within the limited area of the excavation. The general absence of domestic rubbish such as broken pottery and animal bone, however, is perhaps suggestive of a non-domestic function. Possibly, the pit with its internal timber structure, formed just one element of a more extensive industrial/manufacturing facility where heat and water were used in other associated processes nearby. At present, however, it is difficult to be much clearer as to what this site might have been.

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As ever, members of Dover Archaeological Group worked enthusiastically and efficiently throughout, allowing the site to be fully recorded, backfilled and restored over one weekend. To all the individuals involved the writer extends his sincere thanks.

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