

## Evidence for Middle Iron Age settlement activity at Charterhouse, Godalming

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with contributions by  
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*Archaeological excavations at the site known as The Fletcherites, on the campus of Charterhouse School, Godalming, took place in September and October 2014. The site is in an area that is likely to have been attractive for prehistoric activity; situated on a high promontory overlooking the river Wey and its tributaries c 330m to the south. Evidence for Middle Iron Age activity was attested by the presence of two circular pits initially utilised for storage and reused for the deposition of hearth waste. Later features include a linear gully and a crushed tile and brick path, which are evidence of post-medieval garden activity. A dog burial recorded on site remains undated but is assumed to be a post-medieval or modern feature.*

### Introduction

Archaeological investigations were carried out in advance of the proposed redevelopment of The Fletcherites boarding house by AOC Archaeology Group on the campus of Charterhouse School, Godalming (SU 95894 45306) in September and October 2014. The site is situated in the north-west section of Charterhouse School, located on the south side of Duke's Drive (fig 1). The initial archaeological evaluation excavated two trenches measuring 9 x 1.8m, followed by a strip, map and record excavation undertaken in the northern half of the new-build footprint. The site archive will be curated by Charterhouse School under the site code FLC14.

### Geology and topography

The site lies on a high promontory, located c 1.1km to the north-west of the river Wey. A topographical survey illustrates that it is relatively flat at a height of c 101m OD (Brotherton & Partners 2014). The natural solid underlying geology of the area is composed of sandstone bedrock deposits. Most of the site is underlain by Bargate Sandstone, though the natural bedrock underlying the north-eastern corner is the Sandgate Formation of sandstone and mudstone. The soil is an orange/yellow sand with patches of clay sand or gravel sand, identified as part of the Sandstone and Mudstone series of the Sandgate Formation.

### Archaeological and historical background

The Charterhouse area has produced multiple finds of prehistoric date. A number of worked flint implements found during an evaluation and excavation in the eastern area of the school grounds may date to any point between the Mesolithic and Iron Age (fig 1, D; Hall 1999). More securely dated Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork from the site and its wider environs (Surrey Historic Environment Record (HER) 1645, 1807, 2748–50, 1645, 1649, 3303) indicates that the natural resources of the area were exploited by hunter-gatherers and early farmers. There are similar, albeit fewer, finds dating to the Bronze Age, including quernstone fragments that suggest settlement activity (HER 1671); however, it is not until the Iron Age that any evidence of physical settlement is attested. A pit containing 1st century BC–early 1st century AD handmade pottery of the Late Iron Age was discovered during excavations in the south-east corner of the school grounds (fig 1, C; Harrison 1961).

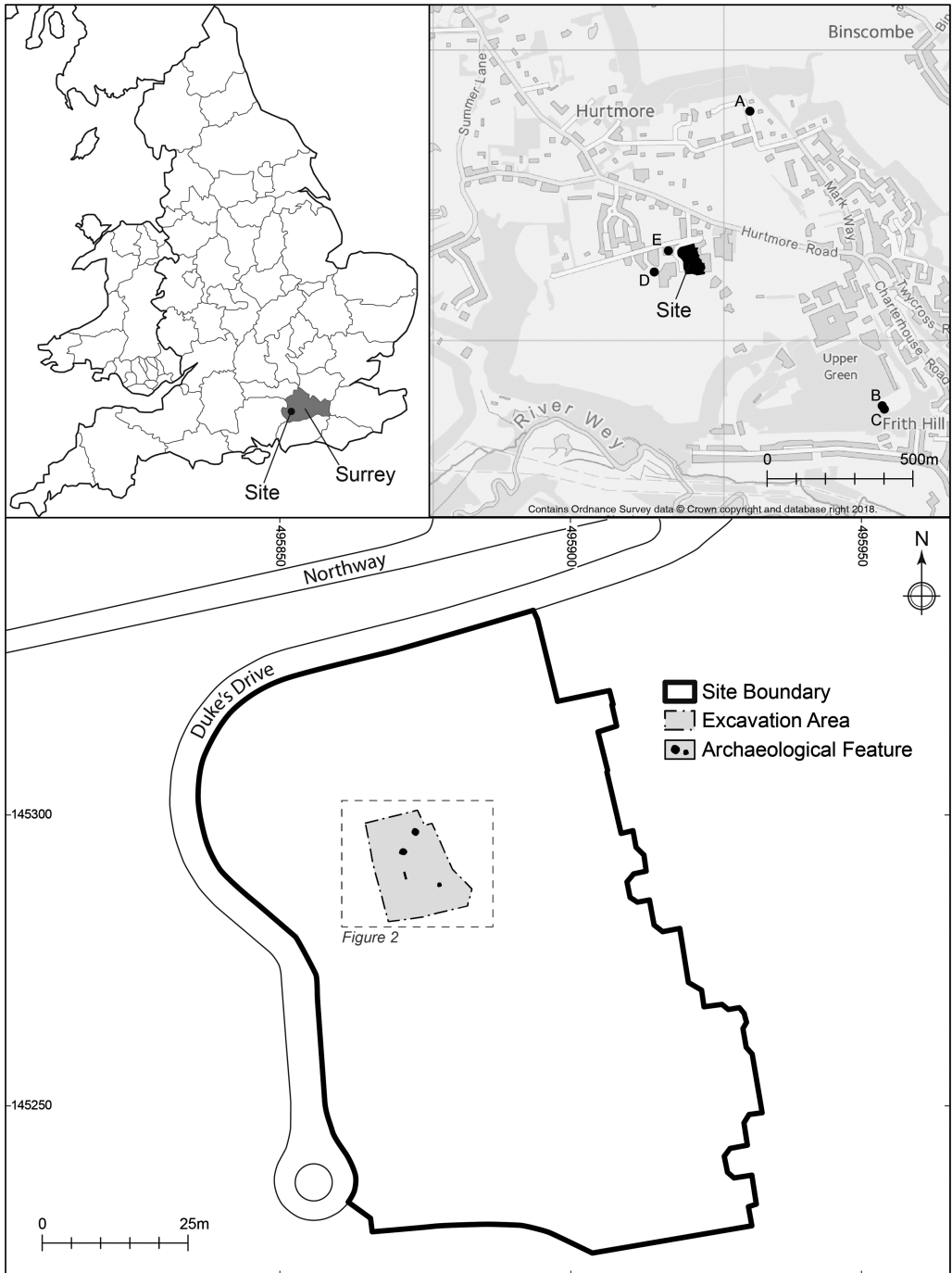


Fig 1 Charterhouse, Godalming. Site location.

In contrast to the scarcity of evidence for settlement during the later prehistoric period, Charterhouse and the wider area has an abundance for the Roman period. The earliest discovery at Charterhouse was of five 1st century cremation urns (fig 1, B; Holmes 1949), indicating the presence of a settlement nearby. Evidence for this was forthcoming with the identification of a 1st century ditch during an investigation in the south-east corner of Charterhouse grounds, in which the Late Iron Age activity described above was also attested (Harrison 1961), although it was unclear whether the settlement was continuous. Subsequently, a short-lived 1st century rural settlement, possibly a small farmstead, was evidenced by pits, ditches and postholes, and finds of metalwork, animal bone and quernstone during an evaluation and excavation undertaken in the eastern grounds of Charterhouse School (fig 1, D; Hall 1999). The recovery of 1st–3rd century AD Roman pottery from the Charterhouse School playing fields and gardens of Northbrook House (fig 1, E; Hall 1999, 151) suggests that there may be later activity yet to be discovered within the site or its immediate environs.

Evidence for activity during the Roman period within the wider vicinity of Charterhouse includes a large rural settlement of 1st–3rd century date, possibly a villa estate, located to the north-east at Binscombe (Smith 1977). Near to this, in Seventeen Acre Field, there have been finds of 1st and 2nd century pottery and a 2nd century coin of Hadrian (fig 1, A; Smith 1977, 25). To the south-west of the site, at the Queens Sport Centre development, two pits and two ditches associated with middle to late 1st century Romano-British pottery have also been taken to be indicative of a nearby settlement (SCAU 1997). A rural settlement, potentially a villa, may also be indicated in Shackleford on the opposite side of the river Wey (*c* 1 km south of Charterhouse School), where large quantities of brick, tiles and 4th century pottery were recovered from plough-soil (Scott 1993, 178).

Before the discovery of the Late Iron Age settlement at Charterhouse by Harrison in 1961, this extensive rural Roman settlement pattern was traditionally viewed as resulting solely from the proximity of the area to the new capital of *Londinium*, for which it would have produced food (Holmes 1949). The limited evidence found by Harrison becomes, in his own words, ‘of an importance out of proportion to its size’ (1961, 27). The same is true of the discovery discussed here, which provides further, even earlier, evidence for settlement at Charterhouse.

## Archaeological results

An irregular sub-rectangular area measuring 223m<sup>2</sup> was mechanically stripped of topsoil to a depth of *c* 100.62m OD. Following the recording of a feature lying above subsoil deposit (102), the area was further machine-stripped in successive level spits to the archaeological horizon identified during the evaluation, a height of *c* 100.38m OD. The area was then hand-cleaned and all potential features investigated. Methodologically, all features were half sectioned with the pits subsequently being fully excavated with environmental samples taken from appropriate deposits.

The excavation identified two principal features of archaeological interest. These were both well-defined sub-circular pits [104] and [111] (fig 2), which were cut into the natural horizon and associated with a substantial quantity of Middle Iron Age (*c* 400–100/50 BC) pottery. The remaining features comprised an undated dog burial and two post-medieval linear features thought to represent later garden activity.

Pit [104] was roughly circular, measured 1.25 x 1.35 across x 0.52m deep and had gradually sloping sides and a flat base. Three distinctive fills recorded as (103), (105) and (106) were identified, the lowest of which was fill (106), an orange/brown sand likely to be a natural wash accumulated while the pit was left open. The second fill (105), which overlaid (106), was a dark brown/black sand with charcoal fragments that contained 118 sherds (eleven ENV, 1.44kg) of Middle Iron Age pottery including three diagnostic vessels (fig 3, 1–3) and a single residual piece of worked flint. The pottery is discussed in further detail (see Doherty, below).

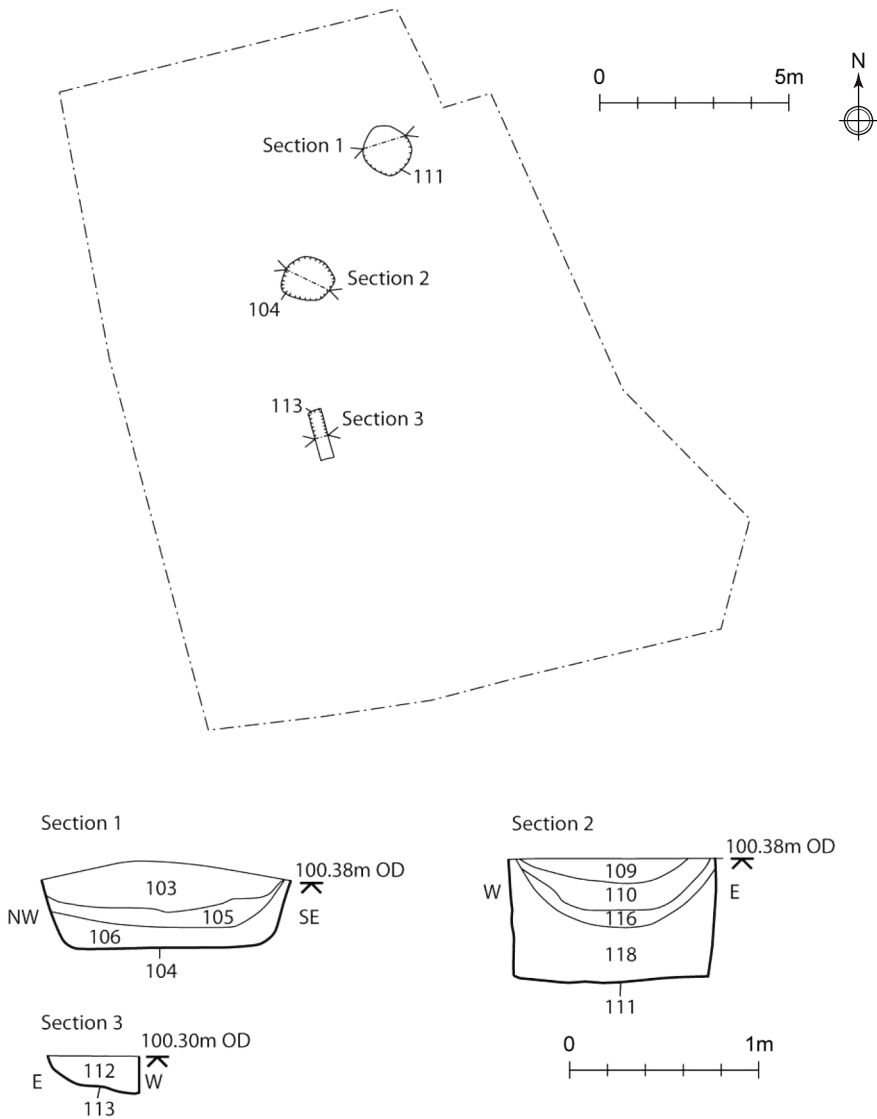


Fig 2 Charterhouse, Godalming. Plan and sections of the archaeological features.

Environmental samples taken from fill (105) also yielded a moderate assemblage of charred macrobotanical remains and give an insight into the Middle Iron Age landscape and possible agricultural practices of the time as detailed in the report below by Mooney.

The final and uppermost fill (103) within pit [104] was a mid-brown sand with occasional natural stones and a small number of sherds of flint-tempered (FLIN1, FLIN2) Middle Iron Age pottery (six sherds, six ENV, 54g). The fill is very similar to the overlying subsoil (102) and may represent the disuse of the pit.

A second pit [111] was located 2.70m to the north-east of pit [104] and was roughly circular, measuring 1.30 x 1.35m across x 0.66m deep with near-vertical sides and a flat base. The lowest fill within the pit was (118), a grey/brown silty sand that may represent a natural accumulation while the pit was kept open. A second fill (116) was a 0.10m-thick layer of yellow sand that contained eight sherds (five ENV, 150g) of grog-tempered pottery (GROG1)

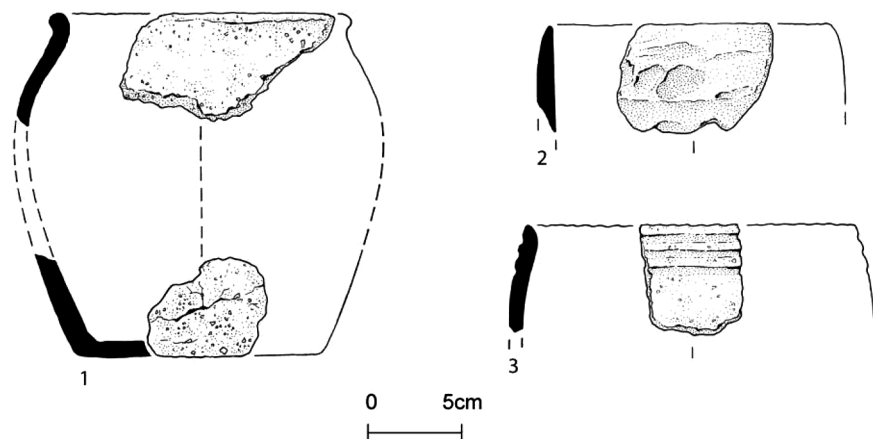


Fig 3 Charterhouse, Godalming. Prehistoric pottery vessels from Pit [104]; Bead rim jar, fabric FLIN1 (1); ovoid jar with spalls on the upper exterior surface, fabric QUAR1 (2); Saucepan with beaded rim formed by three wide tooled horizontal grooves, fabric FLIN2 (3).

usually indicative of a later Middle Iron Age date of deposition, though this is far from certain. A layer of sub-angular, heat-affected stones of small-to-moderate size (115) were placed onto or shallowly cut into the edge of the pit [111], possibly representing material used within a hearth or as pot boilers. The layer deposited directly above the stones (114) was reddened and was also very hard suggesting that the sand had hardened as a consequence of being heated (fig 4). Both the stones and the overlying deposit measured 1.16 x 1.18 x 0.09m thick (fig 2). Above (114) a mottled black and red sandy silt (110) with occasional charcoal inclusions and small natural stones contained a small assemblage of eleven sherds (four ENV, 64g) of Middle Iron Age pottery (CALC1, GROG1, FLG1). This deposit was similar in character to (105) in pit [104] and may also be indicative of the dumping of domestic waste possibly from a nearby hearth. Capping the pit was (109) a mid-brown/yellow sand, which may represent the disuse of the pit and the accumulation of subsoil.

In addition to the pits, the remains of a dog burial [108] were also identified during the excavation. No dating evidence was recovered from the burial, but given that the remains were located some distance from the pits and that the surrounding fill differed to that observed within the pits it is highly probable that the burial is of later date – probably post-medieval or modern. Two further features also attested later activity on the site: a 1.40m-long north-south linear feature [113] (fig 2), thought to relate to garden activity, and a 0.13m-thick layer of crushed chalk with inclusions of tile and brick fragments (101), interpreted as the remains of a path. The second feature lay above the subsoil.

## Specialist reports

THE PREHISTORIC POTTERY, by Anna Doherty

Pits [104] and [111] produced large fresh fragments of pottery, the former containing more than 100 sherds, including quite substantial portions of three different vessels, belonging to the Middle Iron Age (*c* 400–100/50 BC). Although the pottery was fragmented it seems possible that it represents a structured pattern of deposition – a phenomenon which is fairly typical in Middle Iron Age storage pits.

The pottery was examined using a x20 binocular microscope and quantified by sherd count, weight and Estimated Number of Vessels (ENV) on a pro-forma record sheet and in an Excel spreadsheet. Fabrics were defined according to a site-specific type-series in accordance with the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group (PCRG 2010).





Fig 4 Charterhouse, Godalming. View of pit [111] showing the heat-affected layer of stones (115) and overlying hearth deposit (114).

Site-specific fabric definitions

- CALC1 Common rounded orangish/brown calcareous sedimentary rock fragments of 0.5–2mm, often slightly leached out, leaving voids on surfaces
- FLGL1 Moderate, moderately-sorted quartz of 0.1–0.4mm; rare/sparse glauconite in a similar size range; rare/sparse flint of 0.5–1.5mm
- FLIN1 Common well-sorted flint inclusions (mostly of 0.5–1.5mm with rare examples up to 2.5mm)

- FLIN2 Moderate well-sorted flint inclusions of 0.5–1.5mm; surfaces are often well burnished
- GROG1 Rare/sparse argillaceous inclusions (probably added grog) and red iron-rich inclusions both of 1–2mm set in a dense otherwise inclusionless matrix
- QUAR1 Common well-sorted quartz of 0.1–0.2mm; may contain rare large linear organic inclusions of up to 10mm in length

*Overview of fabrics and forms*

Since most of the assemblage is made up of fragmented sherds from a relatively small number of vessels it is difficult to be certain that the range of fabrics present is representative; however, the majority are in well-sorted flint-tempered wares (FLIN1 and FLIN2). Most other fabrics are represented by only a few individual vessels (table 1). These include a quartz-rich ware

containing rare organic material (QUAR1), a fabric with leached calcareous sedimentary rock inclusions probably originating from a north Wealden source (Seager Thomas 2010, 21) and another sparsely flint-tempered ware with some glauconite inclusions, suggesting an origin to the north on Greensand/Gault geology. Although the presence of the latter two fabrics indicate that the raw materials used in the pottery came from differing sources, these are all relatively local so it is uncertain whether these represent actual trade or exchange of vessels or simply a wide procurement strategy by potters based in the immediate vicinity.

Of particular interest is a fabric type with a dense mostly inclusionless matrix and rare/sparse iron-rich inclusions and some rare probable added grog-temper (GROG1). Grog-tempering is generally associated with Late Iron Age assemblages although this fabric is clearly very distinct from the frequently grog-tempered wares that typify assemblages of the 1st century AD. The presence of probable grog-temper could indicate a later Middle Iron Age date of deposition although this is far from certain. There is increasing evidence that grog may have occurred occasionally throughout the Middle Iron Age, particularly in southern Kent (Morris 2006, 68–70).

Table 1 Quantification of fabrics in pits [104] and [111]

Fabric	Sherds	Weight (g)	ENV
Pit [104]	<b>124</b>	<b>1496</b>	<b>17</b>
CALC1	7	30	1
FLIN1	61	1072	6
FLIN2	46	211	6
GROG1	4	51	3
QUAR1	6	132	1
Pit [111]	<b>19</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>9</b>
CALC1	1	2	1
FLGL1	6	14	1
GROG1	12	198	7
Pit totals	<b>143</b>	<b>1710</b>	<b>26</b>

Three diagnostic vessels were recorded in (105), the secondary fill of pit [104]. The most complete of these is a handmade jar with a closed, beaded profile that can be paralleled by a large number of vessels at Hawk's Hill, Leatherhead (Cunliffe 1965; Rayner in prep) (fig 3, 1). Although the 56 sherds probably represent somewhere in the region of half the vessel, these appear to be fragmented elements from different parts of the profile, rather than, for example, a truncated base. Large rim sherds from another plain ovoid form display 'spalls' on the upper exterior surface, possibly indicating that the vessel was made in the immediate vicinity (fig 3, 2). These are characteristic of manufacturing faults that occur when insufficient drying time has been allowed, causing water to expand rapidly and detach discs of clay from the surfaces (Tite 1999, 188). The third diagnostic vessel is a Saucepan form that appears to be undecorated except for three wide parallel tooled horizontal lines below the rim, which create a slightly beaded profile (fig 3, 3). This vessel has close parallels at the hillfort at Hascombe (Seager Thomas 2010, fig 1, 4; fig 3, 30; plate 2, 4) and in the Late Iron Age pottery assemblage from Tongham Nurseries in the Blackwater valley to the north-west of Charterhouse (Poulton 2004, Fig 4.7b, 50). Saucepans with beaded rims tend to be found in later Middle Iron Age assemblages although it should be noted that at least some decorated sherds would be expected to be found in these two pit groups if they were

deposited in the 2nd to 1st centuries BC, so precise dating within the Middle Iron Age remains ambiguous.

#### *Possible evidence for structured deposition of pottery*

The deposition of inherently special objects or materials such as weapons, iron tools, associated animal bone groups and human bone is a well-attested pattern in Middle Iron Age storage pits, which has been linked to the annual agricultural cycle and to beliefs and rituals involving the propitiation of chthonic deities (Cunliffe 1992). This is most notably the case on Chalk geologies, particularly in Wessex, although similar deposits have also been noted more locally at sites such as Hawk's Hill (Hastings 1965; Stevenson in prep). Ritual deposition of this type is also known on other geologies and may be the case at this site. Typically, such storage pits may also contain fragmented and more everyday objects such as pottery and disarticulated animal bone. It has been argued that these may also exhibit some evidence of selection and curation; certainly, the current assemblage appears to consist of large fresh sherds from a few vessels rather than more general waste that had been subjected to repeated reworking. One idea is that domestic midden waste had some symbolic value, serving as a metaphor for fertility and decomposition/death both in agriculture and in human populations (Parker-Pearson 1996, 125–7; Fitzpatrick 1997, 79).

#### *Catalogue of illustrated pottery*

- |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Bead rim jar, fabric FLIN1, context (105), fig 3, 1.   | 3 | Saucepan with beaded rim formed by three wide tooled horizontal grooves, fabric FLIN2, context (105), fig 3, 3. |
| 2 | Plain profile, ovoid jar with spalls on the upper exterior surface, fabric QUAR1, context (105), fig 3, 2. |   |   |

#### ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS, by Dawn Elise Mooney

The assemblage of botanical remains from the site comprised material from three contexts containing Middle Iron Age pottery: secondary fill (105) of pit [104], and secondary and basal fills (110) and (116) respectively of pit [111]. The assemblage comprised charred wood fragments and charred and uncharred seeds. Charred and uncharred seeds were examined under a stereozoom microscope at x7–45 magnifications. Identifications of macrobotanical remains have been made through comparison with published reference atlases (Cappers *et al* 2006; Jacomet 2006; NIAB 2004), and nomenclature used follows Stace (1997).

In pit [111] charred macrobotanical remains other than wood charcoal were rare, comprising only a single charred cereal (*Cerealia* indet.) caryopsis in a poor state of preservation. Uncharred elder (*Sambucus nigra*) seeds from both contexts (110) and (116) are likely to represent intrusive modern material. Small assemblages of charcoal recovered from both fills were generally poorly preserved, showing evidence of abrasion and of sediment infiltration and concretion linked to fluctuations in groundwater level. Oak (*Quercus* sp.) wood was identified in both fills, while pit fill (110) also contained cherry/blackthorn (*Prunus* sp.) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*) wood. Fill (116) also contained fragments of roundwood of the Leguminosae group, which are likely to represent the remains of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) or broom (*Cytisus scoparius*).

Fill (105) of pit [104] contained a significant amount of uncharred modern plant material, including seed and root fragments. However, a moderate assemblage of charred macrobotanical remains was also present. Cereal caryopses identified included spelt/emmer wheat (*Triticum spelta/dicoccum*) and barley (*Hordeum* sp.), while wild grasses including oat/brome (*Avena/Bromus*) and fescue (*Festuca* sp.) were also recorded. Other wild taxa noted included common knotgrass (*Polygonum aviculare*), black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*), dock (*Rumex* sp.), goosefoot (*Chenopodium* sp.), chickweed (*Stellaria media*) and sedge (*Carex* sp.). A



small assemblage of charcoal, poorly preserved as above, was also present, comprising fragments of oak and alder (*Alnus* sp.), as well as wood of the Maloideae family, which includes hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), rowan, service and whitebeam (*Sorbus* spp.), apple (*Malus* sp.) and pear (*Pyrus* sp.).

The charred seeds are likely to derive from material that has been accidentally included in domestic fires, with the charcoal remains present representing the wood chosen as fuel. The assemblage of cereal grains suggests that both wheat and barley were consumed at or near the site. The absence of cereal chaff may indicate that this assemblage represents fully-processed grain, and that crop processing took place elsewhere. However, this absence may also result from a preservation bias. The wild taxa present are indicative of an open grassland or arable landscape and are likely to have grown in the area around the site.

The larger seeds such as oat/brome and fescue may have been accidentally included in assemblages of processed grain owing to their similar size to cereal caryopses, while smaller seeds may have entered domestic fires accidentally with material used as kindling.

Charcoal from the site indicates that wood for use as fuel is likely to have been procured from mixed deciduous woodland and woodland margin/hedgerow environments, although the presence of Leguminosae roundwood in pit [111] may indicate the exploitation of scrub or heath environments for firewood acquisition. All the woods identified are known to burn efficiently (Taylor 1981) and are likely to have been selected specifically for use as fuel.

## Discussion

It seems most likely that these two sub-circular pits, [104] and [111], were originally used as storage pits for grain or similar foodstuff, suggesting that settlement activity was located in the vicinity of the investigation site. The pits are close together and were deliberately backfilled with debris from hearths/domestic activity together with domestic pottery and a Mesolithic flint blade fragment. That the Mesolithic flint was deliberately buried together with material from a hearth and several pottery vessels in pit [104] is a slight possibility, but it is far more probable that the object is residual.

The assemblage of 143 sherds of pottery found associated with both pits dates the earliest activity at this site as Middle Iron Age. This pottery represents wares relatively local to the area, although some of the raw materials used come from difference sources. This may represent trade or an exchange of vessels, but more probably and simply a wide procurement of material by the potters based in the immediate vicinity of the site.

The environmental samples produced an assemblage of charred seeds that had been preserved accidentally in the remains of a domestic fire. The identification of cereal grains in the charred seeds suggests that both spelt/emmer wheat (*Triticum spelta/dicoccum*) and barley (*Hordeum* sp.) were consumed at or in the vicinity and the absence of cereal chaff may indicate that this assemblage represents fully-processed grain being stored at the site. The wild taxa present in the charred seeds are indicative of an open grassland or arable landscape, and are likely to have grown in the immediate area. The wood species in the charcoal from oak and alder (*Alnus* sp.), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), rowan, service and whitebeam (*Sorbus* spp.), apple (*Malus* sp.) and pear (*Pyrus* sp.) are likely to have come from the surrounding landscape.

In summary the site, lying on a natural high promontory to the north of the river Wey, has proved to be an attractive location for prehistoric settlement activity. The evidence for Middle Iron Age settlement such as a farmstead is strongly suggested by the physical evidence of the two storage pits, probably used for grain, and the more substantial ceramic evidence from eleven vessels, which are characteristic of Middle Iron Age pottery found locally.

Poulton (2004) has suggested that Iron Age agriculture within some areas of Surrey respected Bronze Age field systems. As the Iron Age developed, however, new settlement foci were established, some of which were sited on flood plains, areas that offered a wider range of resources (*ibid.*, 52). Middle Iron Age agricultural practices are likely to have involved ancient systems of seasonal grazing, exploited by people inhabiting these more permanent

settlements in the river valleys (*ibid*, 54). Increasing social stratification was expressed architecturally as settlements, enclosures with complex buildings and hillforts, and by the deliberate deposition of metalwork (*ibid*, 53).

The Wey valley has been associated with some of the more important Iron Age sites such as the Brooklands iron smelting and smithing site, farmstead sites within enclosures at Brooklands and Wey Manor Farm and a substantial hillfort at St George's Hill. A pattern of Middle–Late Iron Age settlement in the Blackwater valley to the north-west of Charterhouse shows that at both the Tongham Nurseries site and at Runfold Farm, Farnham Quarry, similar types of settlements have been found that encompass twenty or more roundhouses set within ditched enclosures containing pits and other features within a setting of more extensive field systems (Poulton 2004, 58–9). Could it be that the storage pits backfilled with a large assemblage of Middle Iron Age pottery at Charterhouse belong to a similar period of settlement within an enclosure site on the hillside above the river Wey? Middle to later Iron Age people may have been attracted by the higher ground, so avoiding the low-lying river valleys, which may have been liable to flooding as indicated by the alluvial build-up found in geotechnical test pits (Brotherton & Partners 2014). The rich alluvial deposits within the Wey valley were likely to have been an attractive area for associated agricultural activity as witnessed by the environmental evidence for the farming and harvesting of wheat and barley within an area of open grassland or arable landscape that may also have supported seasonal grazing. The evidence for the exploitation of good agricultural land within close proximity may also be the foundation for suggesting there is a continuity of occupation into the Roman period at Charterhouse, conforming with the general settlement pattern of Roman-British farms, identified as relatively common in the area to the south of the Hog's Back and to the north-east of Charterhouse (Clark & Nichols 1960; Smith 1977).

Although the stratigraphic evidence for Middle–Late Iron Age activity at Charterhouse is slight it would appear to be within an area that has continually attracted occupation owing to a combination of factors: the river Wey for water, the river valley for agricultural land and the higher drier ground for occupation and seasonal grazing within an open grassland site. The emerging picture at Charterhouse from chance finds ranging from Neolithic to Mesolithic artefacts, Bronze Age quernstones, Iron Age occupation witnessed by pottery in storage pits that contain evidence for the farming of barley and wheat and later Roman finds is beginning to suggest that this is an area with a rich potential for future research into the transition of Late Iron Age to Roman occupation in Surrey.

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