



Late Bronze Age settlement

An intensive series of archaeological investigations, culminating in large scale excavations, was carried out before the construction of Great Western Park - to ensure that all of the archaeological evidence in the area was recorded and preserved. This is one of eight information boards which summarise the results of these investigations.

THE BRONZE AGE

The Bronze Age - the period stretching from the first appearance of metal in Britain around 4500 years ago - to the introduction of Iron over 1000 years later - was a period of profound change.

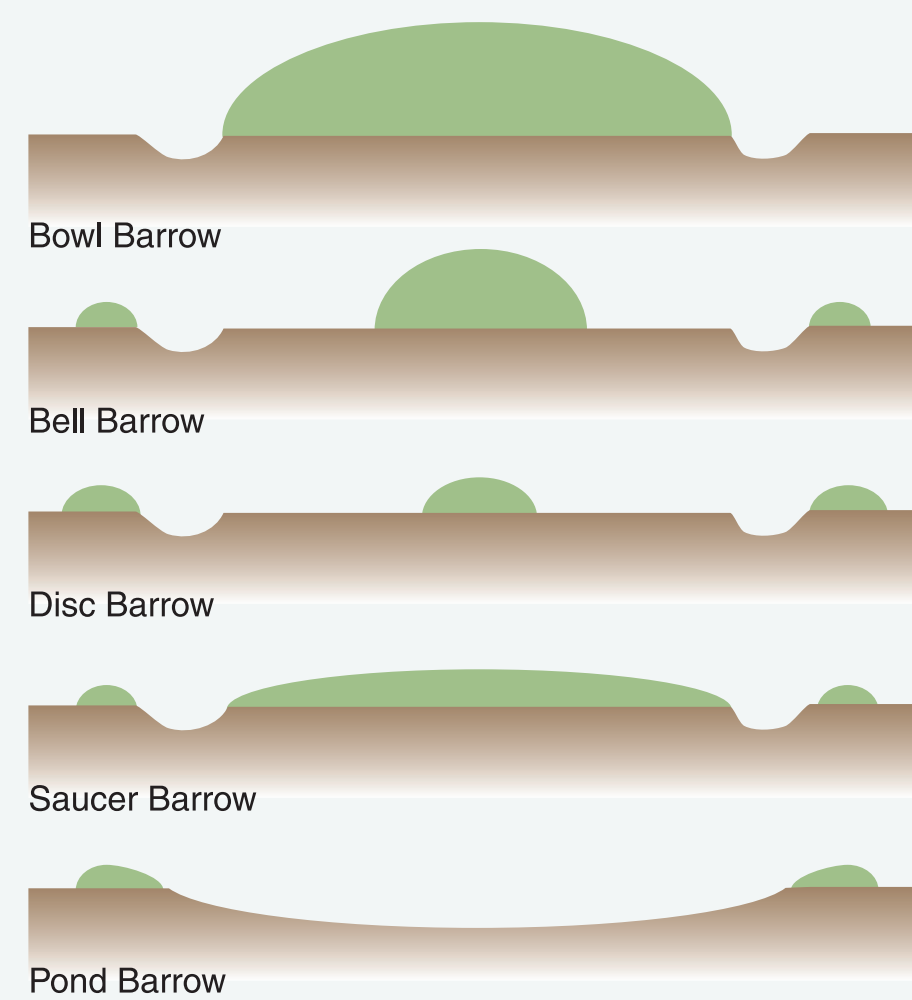
Its beginning is know largely from round barrows - large burial mounds often covering burials with rich grave goods. Evidence for settlements from this period is very limited. By the end of the Bronze Age, however, the few burials that are known were placed in small, shallow, unmarked pits without any grave goods. In contrast, settlements consisting of large timber roundhouses are well known, and much of the countryside had been cleared of woodland and divided up into fields. A ritual landscape of the dead was transformed into a rural landscape of the living.

An inverted barrow: an enigmatic monument from the early Bronze Age

Rounds barrows are well know in the Thames Valley - a few occur in the area around Great Western Park, and one poorly preserved example was excavated on the site. The excavations also, however, revealed a much more unusual form of monument known as a pond barrow.

Round barrows typically include a central round mound surrounded by a ditch. A pond barrow, in contrast, consists of the opposite: a circular hollow, sometimes surrounded by a bank. At Great Western Park the hollow had been roughly paved with stones. No burials were found at Great Western Park (although they do occur at other pond barrows). The hollow was, however, associated with a few very finely worked flint arrowheads, including one - a leaf-shaped arrowhead - which must have been over a thousand years old before it was placed in the pond barrow.

The exceptional arrowheads left in the pond barrow suggest that it had a special significance, and was perhaps an area where rituals were carried out. The significance of those rituals is now lost to us. It has long been noted, however, that pond barrows seem to be inverted barrows. Perhaps, then, if barrows were dedicated to rituals for the dead, pond barrows were for rituals for the living.



Type of round barrows



Barbed and tanged arrowheads recovered from the pond barrow

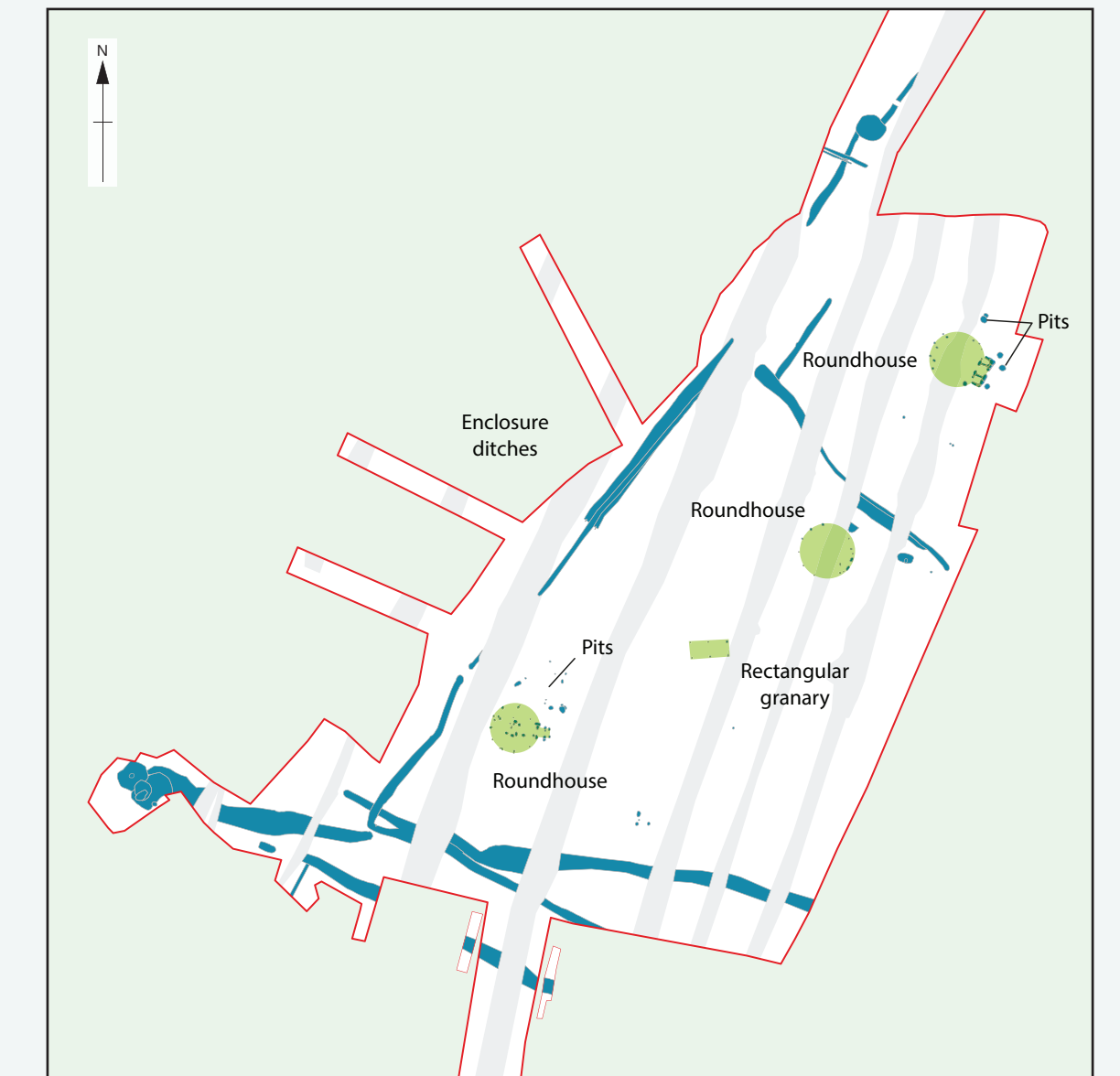


leaf shaped arrowheads recovered from the pond barrow

Didcot's first houses: settlement in the Bronze Age

Nearly 1000 years after the pond barrow had been abandoned, a small settlement developed in the same area. It consisted of just three large timber roundhouses and a smaller rectangular building, perhaps a granary, set within enclosures defined by ditches.

These buildings are the earliest evidence so far found for houses in Didcot. They began a tradition of living in timber roundhouses which lasted for another 1000 years, through the Iron Age and into the Roman period.



Plan of the late Bronze Age settlement

Fragments of discarded material preserved in the postholes, pits and ditches of this settlement show that the occupants were farmers, growing wheat and barley, and raising cows and sheep - the same species that their forefathers who introduced farming to the area also raised (see Board 1).

Although the roundhouses may have been occupied year round, the changes in ways of life in the Bronze Age did not lead to the formation of stable villages. As at other sites in the Thames Valley, the houses are widely spaced, and at Great Western Park they seem to have been occupied for quite short periods, perhaps as little as 30 years or one generation. One possibility is that new houses were built, in new locations, for each generation, perhaps when marriages occurred or when children were born.

The settlement could represent the households of a single founding family and of the families of two of their children. And when the next generation moved away, the settlement dissolved. Over time, this would lead to a dispersed scatter of roundhouses with no fixed centres of settlement - just as we find at Great Western Park and other sites in the Thames Valley.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

ROMAN
CONQUEST OF
BRITAIN

ANGLO-SAXON
OCCUPATION

NORMAN
CONQUEST

MEDIEVAL
PERIOD

INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION

4000BC

2500BC

900BC

43AD

450AD

1066AD

1800AD



Reconstruction of a ritual at the pond barrow