

Hatch Farm, Winnersh

Excavations of Iron Age and Roman Archaeology at Hatch Farm

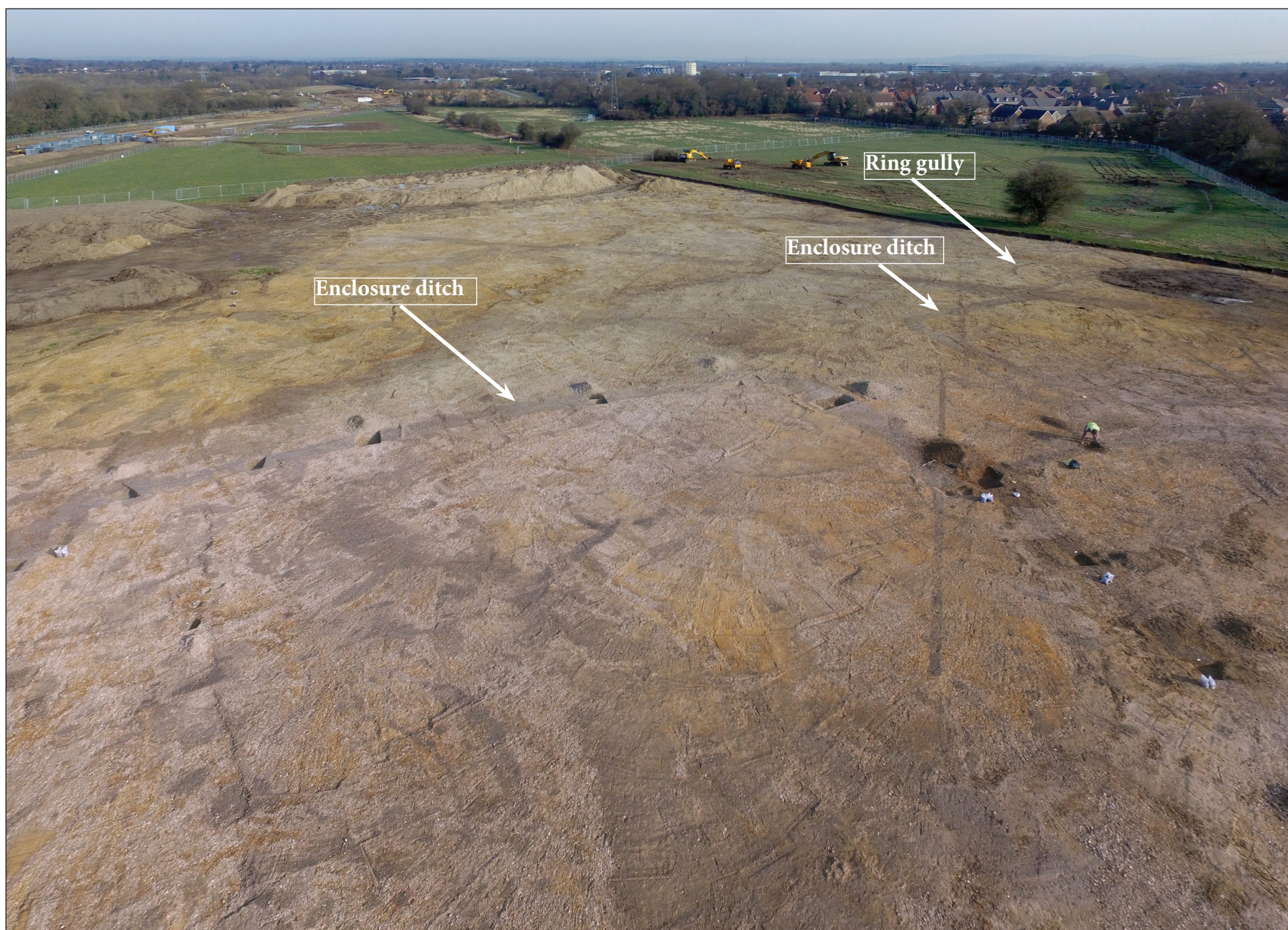
Background

An ongoing archaeological excavation is currently taking place at Hatch Farm, Winnersh in advance of a residential and school development on the site. The work is being carried out by a team of archaeologists from Thames Valley Archaeological Services, commissioned by Armour Heritage Ltd on behalf of Bovis Homes and Persimmon Homes. Berkshire Archaeology, who advise Wokingham Borough about archaeology in the planning process, identified this site as having archaeological potential. Two previous episodes of trial trenching on the site identified several areas of high archaeological potential highlighting the need for further investigation which has resulted in the excavations now underway. Sixteen separate areas, totalling c. 4ha have been proposed for excavation, with a little over 50% being completed so far.

Methods in archaeology

Most archaeology in a rural setting, as here, lies just below the topsoil with cut features dug directly into the natural geology. When archaeological features are encountered slots are dug in order to examine a section of the infill and establish what they are and whether they represents single or multiple events of use. The slots are used to retrieve artefacts such as pottery for dating and the recovery of samples to examine environmental evidence such as from seeds and cereal grains preserved by charring. Organic remains (eg charcoal or bone) also allow for radiocarbon dating. When linear features such as ditches or gullies are encountered a number of slots are dug. The features are then hand drawn, photographed and a written record created for each excavated slot. The dating of archaeological features and ultimately the site, primarily comes from pottery evidence, however, when this is not available relative dating can be used (ie 'earlier than' or 'later than').

A number of the features at Hatch Farm can be relatively dated as some visibly overlie earlier features. Where the relationship is unclear between two features a slot is dug over both to attempt to establish the correct sequence, which can usually be seen by different colours or textures in the soil.



Aerial view of site

The Excavation

The excavation commenced with the removal of the top and subsoil by mechanical excavator to reveal the archaeological features cut into the natural geology (sand, gravel and clay). To date the stripping of the main area has revealed archaeological features comprising ditches, gullies, pits and postholes. Early indications from pottery evidence and relative dating place the site within the Iron Age and Early Roman periods. The main features on the site are a series of rectangular ditched enclosures and circular ring gullies.

Enclosures can be interpreted in a number of ways such as: areas to hold livestock; areas to exclude livestock; areas to define burial or ceremonial sites.

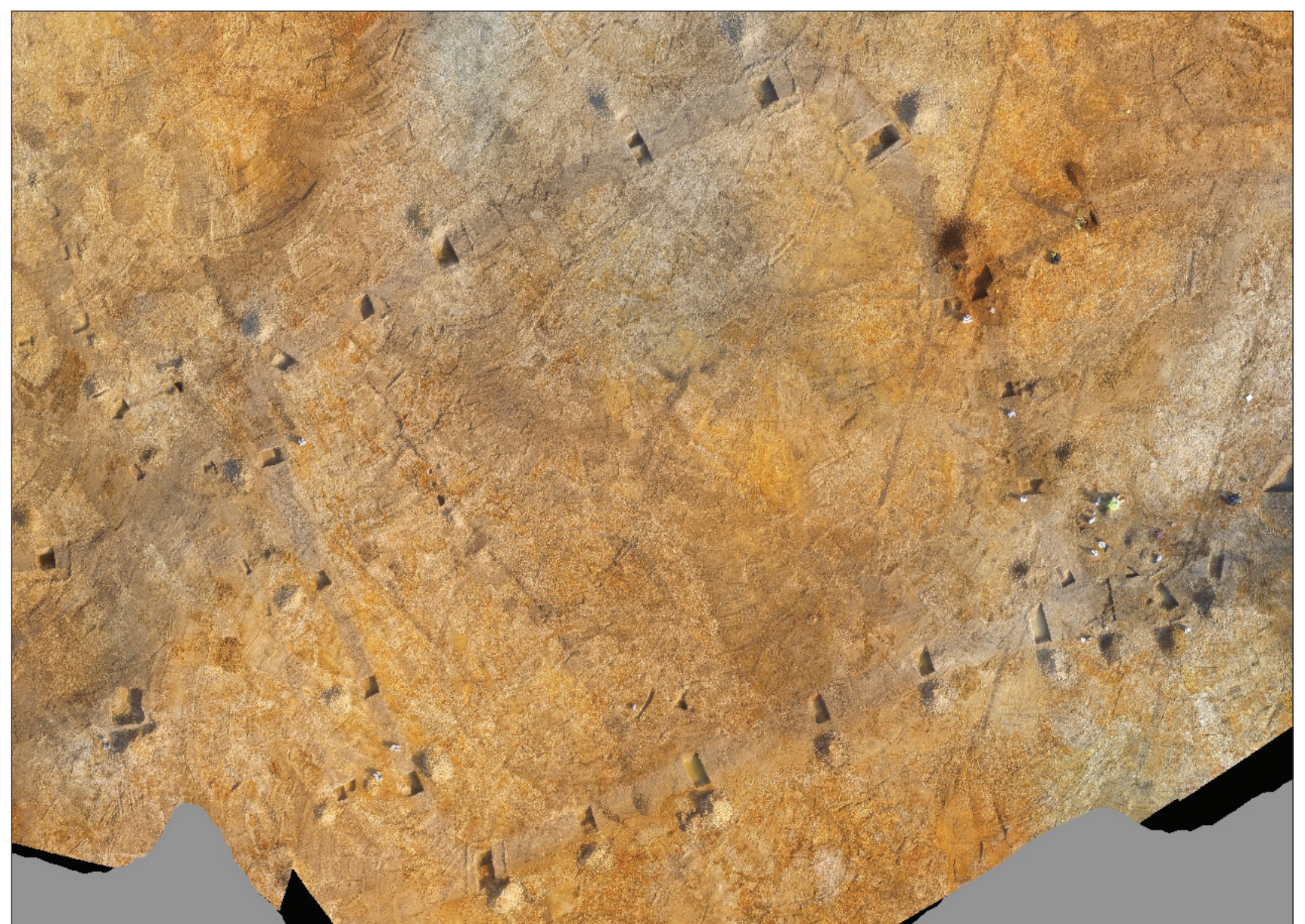


Ring gully under excavation

As well as the enclosures, a number of ring gullies were also exposed. The ring gullies have been interpreted as roundhouses, with the gully either defining a small enclosure with a house inside, or possibly the foundations of the walls of the house. There is a small possibility that they are not Iron Age roundhouses at all but are levelled round barrows (burial mounds) of Bronze Age date.

Several of the ring gullies either cut each other or are cut by other ditches showing that several periods of replacement and reorganisation of the site have taken place.

A number of other linear features (ditches and gullies) have been found across the site. Some of these are land drains clearly of modern (Victorian) date, but the others are likely to be field boundaries representing an organised landscape of Iron Age and Roman date.



Vertical aerial view of one of the enclosures on the site

The finds

The majority of artefacts recorded so far consist of pottery. Very little animal bone has survived due to acidic soil conditions.



Example of pottery found at the site