

# A Multiple Round-Barrow at Barnack

by Peter Donaldson

Aerial photography has shown an extensive complex of cropmarks along the valley of the River Welland in the parish of Barnack. In 1974 the investigation of the double ring ditch (fig. 8, A) was carried out in advance of gravel extraction. No previous excavations had been made in this area, except for salvage work in 1971, during actual quarrying operations, to rescue two Bronze-Age burials possibly from the ring ditch (fig. 8, B) (Pryor (1974)). Land which contained the greater part of the feature became available in November 1974 and excavations then commenced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Burghley Estate and with the helpful co-operation of the farmer, Mr R. W. G. Burbridge, and of the Nene Barge and Lighter Co. Ltd. In January 1976, when the adjacent strip of land was cleared of crops, the excavation of the remaining part was completed.

The site was funerary, consisting of three distinct phases of round-barrow construction, each sited approximately concentrically within its predecessor. The first was a Disc barrow with a small inner ditch and a Beaker shaft burial, the second a Bowl barrow, and the third a revetted mound. A total of seventeen burials was found, four of which had grave goods. The primary inhumation (P) contained a very fine Beaker group, which is reviewed below. An overall plan of the site is shown in fig. 8.

The first phase, a Disc barrow, consisted of an outer ditch (Ditch 1 in fig. 8), 40 metres in diameter and 1.3 metres deep, with an outer bank. In the centre was a small ditch (Ditch 3), 11.5 metres in diameter and 0.6 metres deep. The latter did not show up on the aerial photograph. Near the centre was a grave-pit, 2.5 metres long by 1.75 metres wide by 1.8 metres deep, in which was found a male skeleton lying in a flexed position. At the feet was a Beaker and at one side a bone or ivory pendant, a bronze dagger and a stone wristguard with associated gold caps. The wristguard had been ritually broken.

The second phase was a Bowl barrow with a ditch (Ditch 2), 24 metres in diameter and 1.4 metres deep, dug concentrically between the two earlier ditches. The probable secondary burial was a complete cremation deposited in a pit cut into one side of the top of the shaft grave of phase 1.

The third phase consisted of a double circle of stakes which had been driven into the inside edge of the partially silted-up ditch of the Bowl barrow to form a revetment for a mound. These stake circles were not quite concentric with the earlier ditch. The material for this mound could have been derived from a series of quarry pits dug on the periphery of the outer ditch of the Disc barrow of phase 1. The probable tertiary burial was cut into the pit of the secondary burial.

In addition to the three burials mentioned above, there were fourteen others. Four of these were of infants. One at the bottom of the inner ditch was accompanied by a small plain Beaker and could have been contemporary with the primary burial. Another was accompanied by an undecorated miniature Food Vessel, whilst the remaining two had no grave goods. Two adult inhumations were each in a crouched position inside coffins, both identically oriented. One grave contained the skeletons of two people interred at the same time, one a male in an extended position and the other, possibly female, in a flexed position. The latter lay beside the lower part of the extended male skeleton with her head by his feet. A bone point, two flint scrapers and a flake were found beside the flexed skeleton at the bottom of the grave filling.

Of the remaining six burials, three were in a flexed, and three in a crouched position, none with grave goods. All the burials were situated within the area of the revetted mound, some cutting earlier graves or the inner ditch. There was considerable variation in the orientations and positions of the bodies, but they can be broadly categorised as: (a) crouched, (b) flexed, (c) within a coffin. It is not possible to assign stratigraphically any satellite burials to particular phases, as ploughing has removed most of the mound.

## Bibliography

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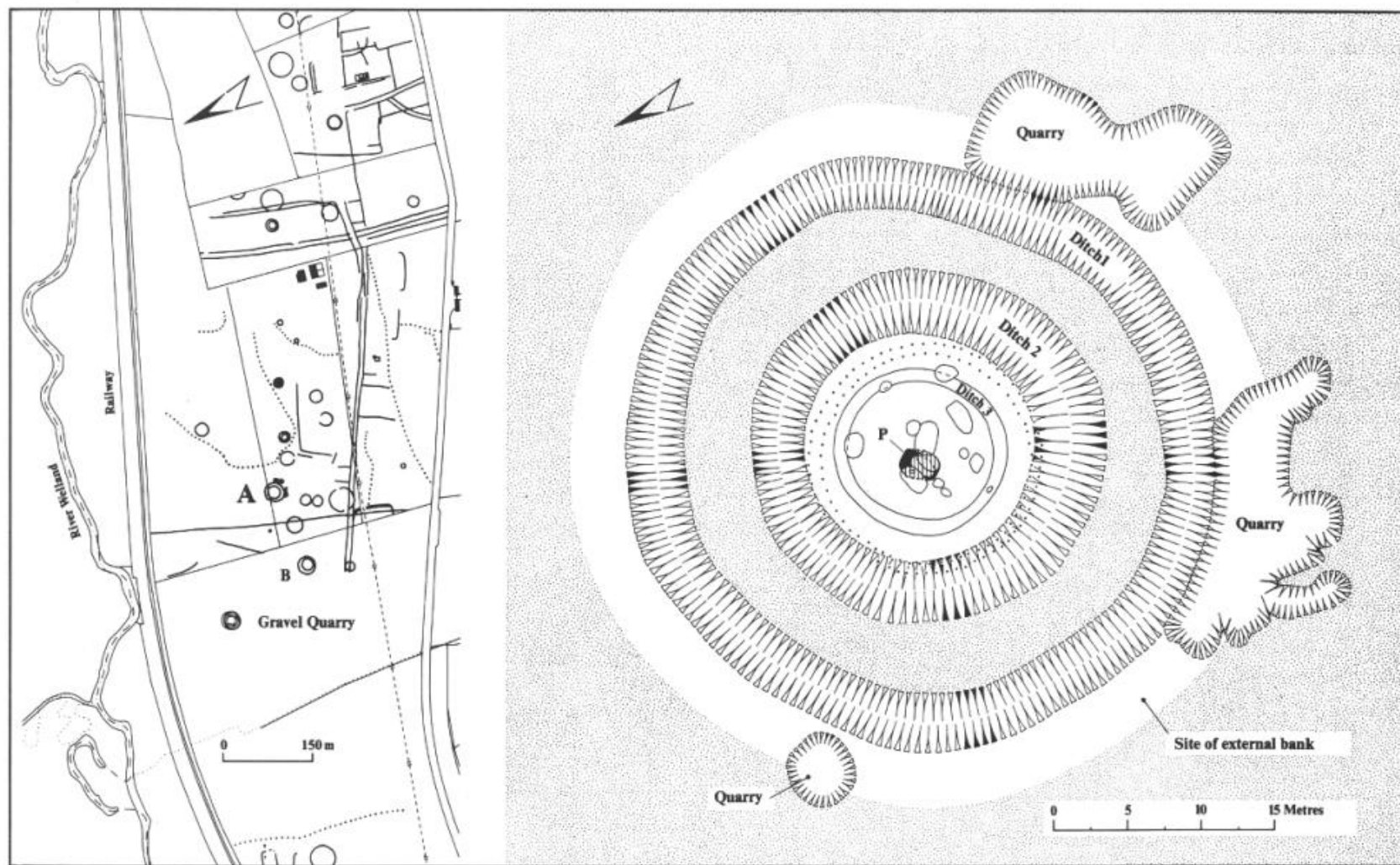


Fig 8 Barnack: location of the barrow (A) with other crop-marks and plan of excavated barrow

# The Barnack Grave-Group

by Ian Kinnes

The Beaker grave-group from Barnack is among the most important discoveries of its kind in this century. By the generosity of the Trustees of the Burghley Estate Trust it now forms part of the national collections in the British Museum.

The objects accompanied the flexed skeleton of an adult male in a large primary grave beneath the multi-period barrow described above. The burial circumstances can be briefly described. Some form of wooden structure was located at the base of the grave. The Beaker stood by the feet and the dagger beside the skeleton in the expected fashion. The pendant and wristguard were not in position, but had been deposited beneath the body. The wristguard had been broken, the major part lying face-down, the smaller above and face-up.

The Beaker (fig. 9) is of exceptional size, having a height of some 24cm. The fabric is hard and well-fired with a smooth red-brown surface. Decoration consists of zones of regular toothcomb stamping. The profile and decorative style ally the Beaker to Clarke's Wessex-Middle Rhine series, or steps 2/3 in the Lanting and van der Waals scheme (Clarke (1970); Lanting, van der Waals (1972)).

The wristguard (fig. 11) is of exceptional interest. In form it is a broad slightly-waisted rectangle with bevelled edges, and almost flat in section. The fine-grained stone is as yet unidentified, but has been finished by careful grinding. At either end are 9 conical perforations, arranged in zig-zag pattern. Each is well-made on the upper face and occupied by fitted hemispherical caps of sheet gold. The original method of attachment is not clear. There is no trace of metal rivets and the caps would surely have prevented thonging or stitching. Gold-capped copper rivets are known on the wristguard from Driffield (Mortimer (1905)), but the present example is so far unique in Europe. The number of perforations is unusually high, but the overall form can be linked to Bohemian wristguards of Sangmeister type C.

The dagger (fig. 10) can be assigned to an early local development of the West European tanged series. The pointed tang cannot be readily matched elsewhere, but the form is otherwise not exceptional. Although



Fig 9 Barnack: the beaker



Fig 10 Barnack: the dagger and pendant

presumably of copper, its fragility has rendered detailed analysis impracticable.

The pendant (fig. 10) is again unique in this context. Broadly comparable side-looped forms are known associated with Food Vessels in Britain (see Driffild C38 in Mortimer (1905)). The expanded terminals and perhaps the transverse incisions might indicate some affinity with the Central European pendant series recently interpreted as composite-bow models (Piggott (1971)). The material awaits analysis, but seems to be bone or perhaps sperm-whale or walrus ivory. Surface coloration is comparable with that of a patinated bronze, but the reason for this is again still unknown.

Apart from its aesthetic qualities, which reinforce the sense of personal display evident in contemporary grave assemblages, the group invokes the international character of Beaker cultures in a most striking fashion. Although at present there is no reason to doubt that each piece is an insular product, the Rhenish and Bohemian background must be emphasised as a formative component. The typological details would suggest a conventional date around 1800-1700 B.C.

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- Clarke (1970) D. L. Clarke, *Beaker Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1970.
- Lanting, J. N. Lanting, J. D. van der Waals, 'British Beakers as seen from the Continent', *Helinium* 12, 1972, 20-46.
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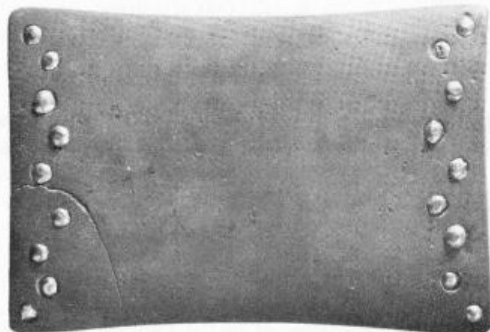


Fig 11 Barnack: the wristguard

Mortimer (1905)

J. R. Mortimer, *Forty Years' Researches in the British and Saxon Burial Mounds of East Yorkshire*, 1905.

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# Barnack 1978-9

by Donald Mackreth and Francis O'Neill

Since the excavation of a barrow by Mr Peter Donaldson in a gravel pit at Barnack in 1974 (*Durobrivae* 4, 1976, 14-17; *Antiquaries Journal* LVII, 1977, 197-231) a watch has been kept on gravel extraction and, with the kind permission of the Nene Barge and Lighter Company, two further seasons of work have taken place. Although the two parts differ in character, a pit-alignment and track tie them together and provide some synchronism for elements which themselves yielded little dating evidence.

The penannular ditch (fig. 14A) was excavated by Mr Arnold Pryor after the site had been stripped by the gravel company. The site's surface as a result was much lower than the base of the plough-soil, and only the bottoms of the ditch and the pits in the alignment survived. There was evidence for post-holes in the south part of the enclosed area and some must have been lost in the grading.

The penannular ditch (shown as the next ring south-east of the barrow in fig. 8 in *Durobrivae* 4) has parallels in other parts of the Welland Valley, but its association with other archaeological features lent it an especial interest here. By examining the relationships it was hoped that comparative dates would emerge. The pit-alignment and the track-ditch were seen to cut into the penannular ditch, but only halfway across its width. From the stripped site and aerial photographs taken by Professor St Joseph, it was clear that the pit-alignment had diverged slightly from its course to take the ditch into account. At first it seemed that the ditch was earlier and may have been a surviving earthwork which had been respected.

On excavation the ditch sections showed a central vertical cleavage, the material thrown back being different on either side. In the ditch bottom traces of post-holes were found, suggesting that a standing wooden structure had been based in the ditch. The post-holes in the enclosure seem to be concentrated near the entrance, implying that this area had received special attention. However, the probable destruction of post-holes elsewhere in the enclosure almost certainly gives a false picture. Evidence for the structure in the ditch was clear in the southern part of the circuit, but became weaker towards the north. The progressive erosion of the site to the north may have created an artificial impression; but it is certain that the track and a pit inside the ring only cut up to the line of the probable structure. As it seems that the ditch was back-filled immediately after the insertion of this, there should have been no earthworks for the

alignment to follow and therefore both structure and pits should be contemporary.

There was unfortunately no dating evidence from the penannular ditch, its post-holes and the pit inside. Thus the dating depends upon that of the pit-alignment, normally thought of as an Iron-Age feature. Within the graded area little of the pits survived, and finds were scarce.

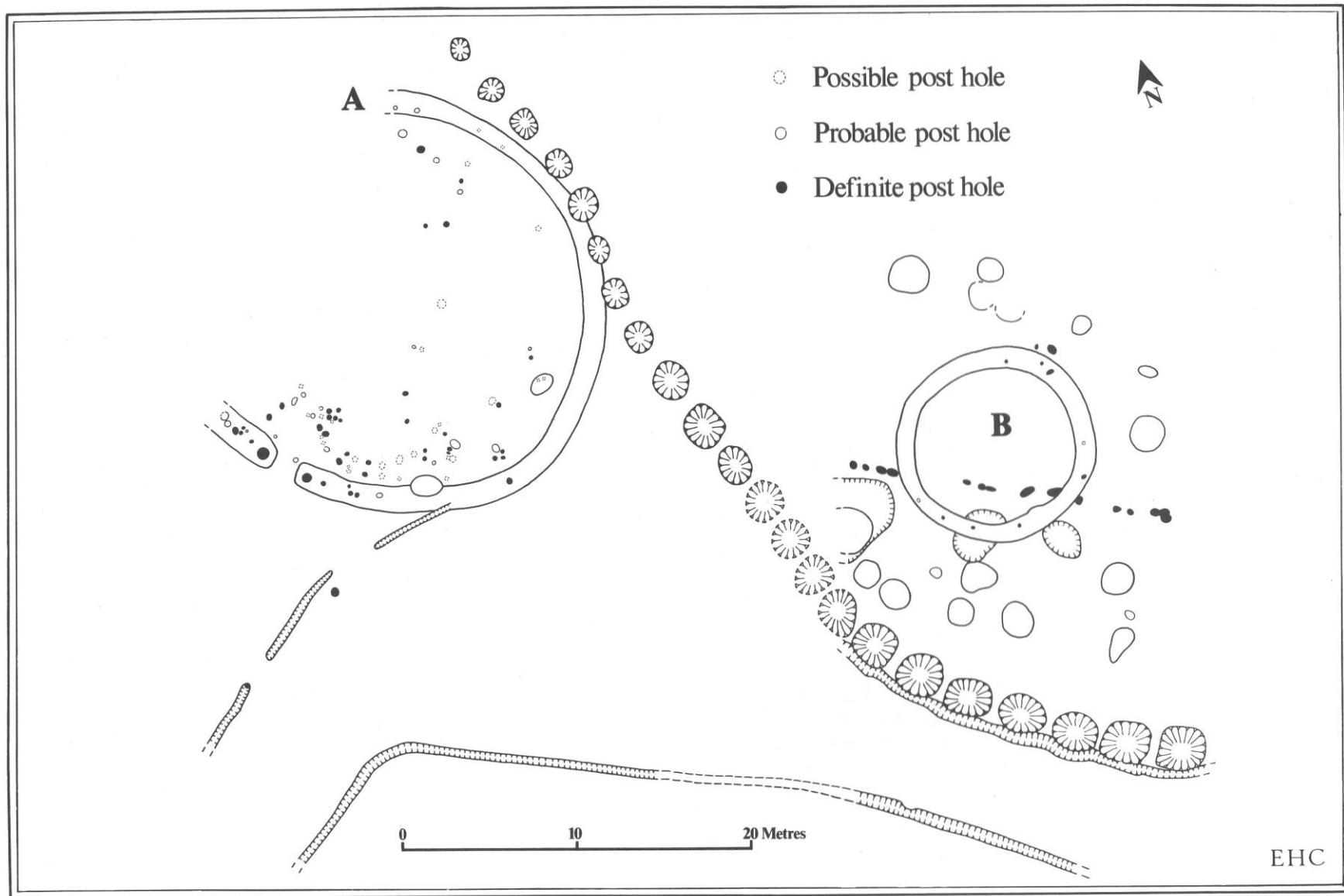
Because of the damage done to the first site and the nature of the features showing on the aerial photographs, the second site, excavated under the direction of Francis O'Neill, was machine-stripped only to the top of the 'B' horizon. On cleaning and planning it became evident that the aerial photographs had, unusually, revealed virtually all that was to be seen. The main features are the ring (B), the line of pits around it, and, outside these, the sinuous course of the already-examined pit-alignment. In addition there was the trackway only partially examined in the earlier work.

The latest feature of the plan is the trackway, the northern ditch of which cut the filling of the pits in the alignment. The track itself produced no dating evidence. On the other hand, the pits contained abundant finds, mainly bone and pottery, confined to the uppermost filling, which was a topsoil developing above that resting on the angle of rest of the eroded pits. The digging of the pits probably took place some time, perhaps centuries, before pottery was at hand to be included in the filling. There was no direct dating evidence from the lower parts of the pits.

The pottery recovered appears to be Iron-Age, an opinion supported by Mr Dennis Jackson who kindly examined it. There are no scored wares and none of it shows any Belgic influence. It should be, at the latest, middle Iron-Age (before c.300 B.C.), and it may be that the latest date at which the pits were dug was either early in the Iron Age or even in the late Bronze Age.

On excavation most of the pits proved to have been originally rectangular. Those nearest the penannular ditch seem to have been more oval in shape and smaller in size. The pits were too close set for there to have been mounds between, but a band of slipped gravel which occurred in all but one of the pits excavated seems to show that there had been a bank on the north side.

Although the track cut the topsoil in the pits, their hollows were probably still visible and it is likely that the pottery found arrived after the track itself was cut. It should be noted that the track runs along the edges of the pits and does not link any possibly surviving depressions.



*Fig 14 Plan of the excavations at Barnack 1978-9*



The pit-alignment's relationship with other features found in the second season raises an interesting point. At first sight the ring is about the same diameter and width as the innermost one found on the barrow site in 1974, but, whereas that ring had been back-filled almost immediately after having been dug, this one silted up gradually. In the top of both rings was a sand deposit which, given the different basic geology of the site, may well represent the remains of a carefully-built mound. Along the bottom of the present ring was found a series of nine stake-holes forming an incomplete circle. No burial was found in the ring or on any part of the site. The pits around the ditch formed a rough ring and each had been dug to a different depth and size. Where enough survived, it was clear that no pit had been left open to weather and, apart from a small wedge of loose gravel round the sides, each had been back-filled with selected soil. The report of Mr R Macphail, the soil scientist, states unequivocally that the pits were back-filled immediately after initial digging.

There is evidently a basic problem in the interpretation of the site. While it looks as though there was a sequence (albeit interrupted) in activities which could be paralleled at the barrow site dug by Peter Donaldson (the ring and surrounding pits might conform with his stages 1 and possibly 3), excavation showed this to be incorrect. The 1974 barrow had been protected by a modern hedgerow which ran across it. The present ring was located on what seems to have been a levee of an early channel of the Welland and was thus at a higher level than most of the field. Much of the monument therefore had probably been ploughed out and any burial placed on the original ground surface or in a shallow pit could have been destroyed.

The course of the pit-alignment needs explanation. When it approached the penannular ditch, it cut into it and appeared to pass some form of standing feature; yet it curved well away from the ring with its pits. There is no outer ditch of normal type to suggest that there had been a barrow mound, yet it is possible that there had been a scraped-up mound made up of a sand core and a topsoil overburden round which the alignment ran. This might explain the apparently selected filling of the inner pits, if they had been dug through such a mound. The absence of any of the gravel dug out beneath the original topsoil suggests an unusual degree of selectivity.

From the ring itself came a flint, possibly struck as a scraper, but without any secondary working. Another find was a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead somewhat crudely but efficiently made from a single flake. Neither of these may have been used. There was one other flint flake and a scrap of pottery too small to be useful.

The ring had been preceded by three hollows which ran in a line across the site, gradually diminishing in depth towards the east so that it is possible that a fourth hollow had been ploughed out. It is tempting to associate these with a line of post-holes close by and seemingly running parallel with them. Most of the post-holes were very shallow and others could have been eroded by ploughing. No function suggests itself for either the posts or hollows.

In summary, there was activity on the site before a ring was cut, which itself seems to have been the focus for a series of pits around its perimeter. In default of any other information, all that can be said is that the ring, and probably its pits, had some ritual significance, perhaps associated with a primary burial now lost. There may have been a scraped-up mound over the whole, round which a pit-alignment later wound its way. Next to the possible mound a penannular ditch was cut to receive a wooden structure of some kind and the pit-alignment would appear to be contemporary with this. The track along the south side of both sites was probably later, but it may be argued that enough survived of other features to act as markers for its location. The absence of ordinary refuse in the lower parts of the pits in the alignment, the pit inside the penannular ditch, the complete ring and its pits suggests strongly that there had been no domestic activity here. However, it may be unwise to conclude from this that the penannular ditch was also ritual in purpose.