



Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society
41 Long Street, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 1NS

Archaeology Field Group

Vale of Pewsey: field walking



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Authors	L. Amadio MSc and B. Clarke MSc

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Summary

Field walking was undertaken on both the north and south sides of the Vale of Pewsey on an alignment with Marden Henge, this equated to just over 3km. Flint finds included an Early Neolithic flint arrowhead. Prehistoric pottery as well as pottery from all the historic periods was recovered from both north and south sides of the Vale, however, the percentages of pottery from each period varied greatly, the northern aspect having Romano-British pottery as the largest part of the assemblage.

Vale of Pewsey: Field Walking

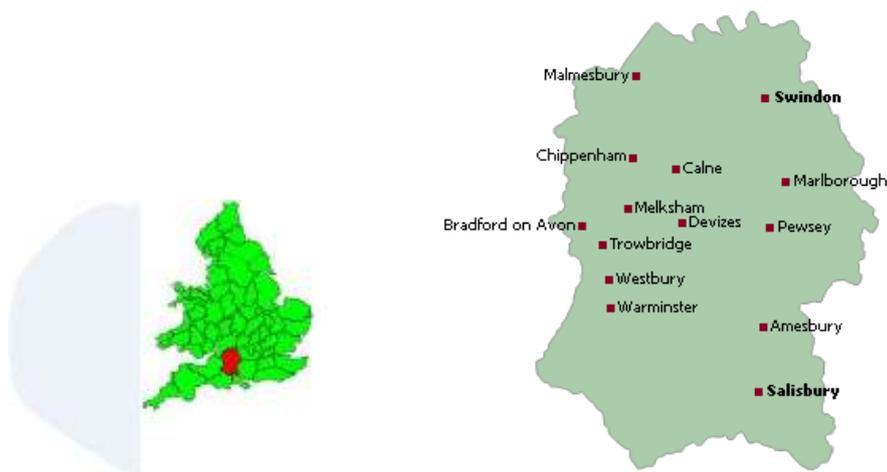
Background

Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Society's (WANHS) Archaeological Field Group (AFG) was asked to field walk a north - south transect across the Vale of Pewsey, centred on Marden Henge. This area has been neglected in the past but it lies between the World Heritage Sites of Avebury and Stonehenge and is potentially of great importance. The area is currently the subject of archaeological investigation, in 2010 Jim Leary of English Heritage excavated at Marden Henge, and in 2011 English Heritage's National Mapping Programme team completed a survey of the Vale mapping features seen on aerial photographs. The area of interest covers three parishes, Stanton St Bernard in the North of the Vale, Beechingstoke at the centre and Marden to the south. Field walking was carried out in the parishes of Stanton St Bernard and Marden.

Location

Pewsey Vale is situated in the centre of Wiltshire, bounded to the north by the Marlborough Downs and to the south by Salisbury Plain. The Vale runs roughly east to west, from Burbage to Devizes.

Fig. 1 Location map, Vale of Pewsey lies between Devizes and Pewsey



Geology and Land Use

The Vale was formed when an anticline in the chalk cracked; water erosion widened the crack, dissolving the chalk to reveal the underlying greensand (Geddes 2003). The chalk escarpments rise to 290m, whilst the centre of the Vale is at 110m above sea level. The western part of the Vale was very marshy until it was drained during the nineteenth century. The centre of the Vale is mainly pasture, while the land below the scarps is arable.

Archaeological Background

Previous Field Work

1911, Maud Cunnington excavation at Knap Hill.

1923, Maud and Ben Cunnington excavation at All Cannings Cross.

1969, Geoff Wainwright excavation at Marden Henge.

1980s Black Patch at Pewsey excavated but not published.

1983-4 Potterne Cemetery excavated by Wessex Archaeology.

1990 Golden Ball Hill excavated by Cardiff University, not published.

1996 Chisenbury Midden excavated by RCHME.

1998 Tom McCulloch PhD thesis on Lithic scatters.

2009 Paul Tubb PhD thesis, The Bronze Age – Iron Age transition in the Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire. (Tubb 2009).

Palaeolithic

Evidence of Palaeolithic activity has been found on Milk Hill and north of Oxenmere, in the form of flint tools. Both of these find sites are in the parish of Stanton St Bernard.

No Palaeolithic evidence has been found in Marden parish.

Mesolithic

Mesolithic activity has also been identified on Milk Hill with the find of further flint tools.

A microlith and notched blade were found at Marden Henge, but no evidence of Mesolithic activity has been found in Marden parish

Early Neolithic

Pewsey Vale has a number of monuments dating to this period - close to Stanton St Bernard there are causewayed enclosures at Rybury, Knaphill and Crofton, and long barrows at Adam's Grave, Giant's Grave and Hatfield Barrow. Other finds include flint tools north-north-west of Oxenmere, two cores with 10 flakes (Stanton St Bernard) and flint tools on Milk Hill (unlocated).

No evidence of Neolithic activity has been found in Marden Parish

Late Neolithic

At the centre of the Vale is Marden Henge (SU 092583).

Bronze Age

Confirmed Round Barrows are found on Harestone Down, North of Milk Hill (2 joined bowl barrows), Urchfont Hill, Tan Hill, Knaphill, Draycott Hill and a ploughed out barrow South East of Hill Barn (2). There are also a number of undated ring ditches and barrows identified on aerial photographs at Milk Hill (2), North of Milk Hill (2), north-west of New Town Farm (2) and Thorn Hill. Other finds include pottery on Milk Hill and two palstaves (unlocated in Stanton St Bernard).

Within Marden parish there is an unenclosed Bronze Age settlement (Larkhill ranges) with associated pottery, and an enclosure on Marden Down. Pottery, flint tools, and a whetstone have been found within the henge.

Late Bronze Age Early Iron Age

There are a number of Black Earth sites associated with All Cannings pottery adjacent to routeways, as at East Chisenbury, there could be as many as 53.

Early Iron Age pot sherds have been found near Marden Henge.

Iron Age

Martinsell Hillfort is situated on the north eastern scarp and Casterley Camp on the south eastern. A probable Iron Age settlement has been revealed east of All Cannings Cross Farm. Other finds include pottery fragments on Milk Hill, a bronze brooch found north of Stanton St Bernard and a harness fitting found north of the Wansdyke.

Romano-British

Pottery has been found on Milk Hill and Stanton St Bernard.

A number of artefacts dating to this period have been recovered from Marden village and also at Stoke Farm.

Anglo-Saxon

Earthworks relating to a Saxon settlement are visible on aerial photographs at Stanton St Bernard.

Both Marden and Beechingstoke villages have Anglo-Saxon origins.

Undated

There are a number of field systems, ditches, tracks and enclosures in the area which are undated.

Field Walking

A defined area is systematically covered by walkers, a time limit is imposed. The walkers collect artefacts made or modified by man and sometimes ecofacts which may be the result of human activity - 'finds'.

Finds may include

- Pottery
- CBM
- Worked/struck Flint
- Slag, clinker
- Glass
- Metal objects
- Shell
- Dressed stone

Bone, teeth and shell cannot be dated, unless Radio Carbon Dating is used. The presence of bone and teeth could be the result of a natural event, an animal dying or have been transported to the site by predators.

Locations

Season I 2009

A strip of ploughed land 1.5km x 200m wide was walked immediately to the north of Stanton St Bernard from the Alton Barnes to Devizes Road at SU090627 to SU092643. A further 250m strip of pasture on the escarpment to SU094645 was walked and here molehills, rabbit burrows and scrapes were examined.

Fig. 2 Location of the 2009 season field walking



Season II 2010

The area walked was immediately to the north of Stanton St Bernard and south of the Devizes to Alton Barnes road, centred on SU095625.

Fig. 3 Location of the 2010 field walking



Season III 2011

The area walked was a transect approximately 1km east of Chirton and almost immediately south of Marden Village, centred on SU083567.

Fig. 4 2011 field walking, looking north to Marden village



Fig. 5 2011 field walking, looking south to Salisbury Plain



In total an area of just over 3 km x 200m was field walked in the three seasons and this equates to slightly less than 40% of a 200m north south transect across the Vale.

Methodology

The initial grids (immediately north of the road) were 20m x 20m and these were walked intensively in two directions collecting all artefacts visible on the surface, but it became apparent that it would be more efficient to follow the Maddie Farm model by walking transects 50m long and 20 m apart (Gafney, 1989). Each line was walked for a timed period of 10 minutes, observing and collecting artefacts 1m either side of the line.

Methodology: Finds Processing and Recording

Each line was assigned a collection bag labelled with the site code and the line reference letter(s) and number. Later, the contents of the field walking bags were recorded on a 'Field Walking Recording Sheet'.

Worked/struck flint and Prehistoric pottery, were removed and re-bagged in separate bags labelled as the original, with the addition of find type and period on the bottom line (i.e. Iron Age pottery).

Pottery was sorted by type, counted, weighed and recorded.

The Results

Fig. 6 Pewsey Vale North Prehistoric finds

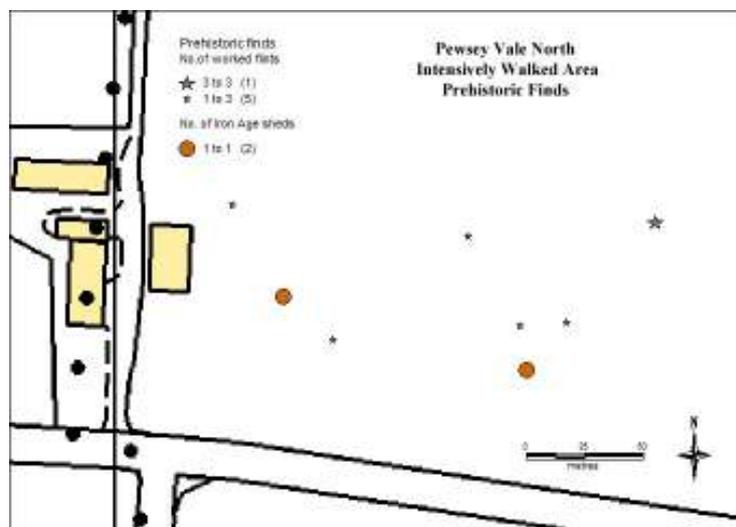
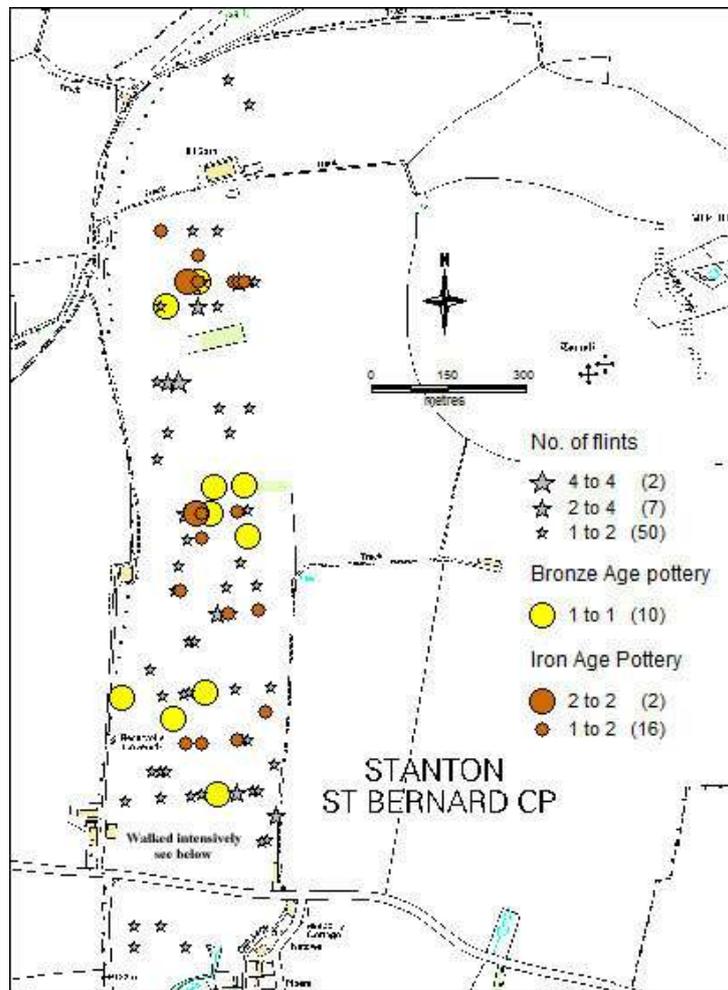


Fig. 7 Pewsey Vale North Distribution of Romano-British finds

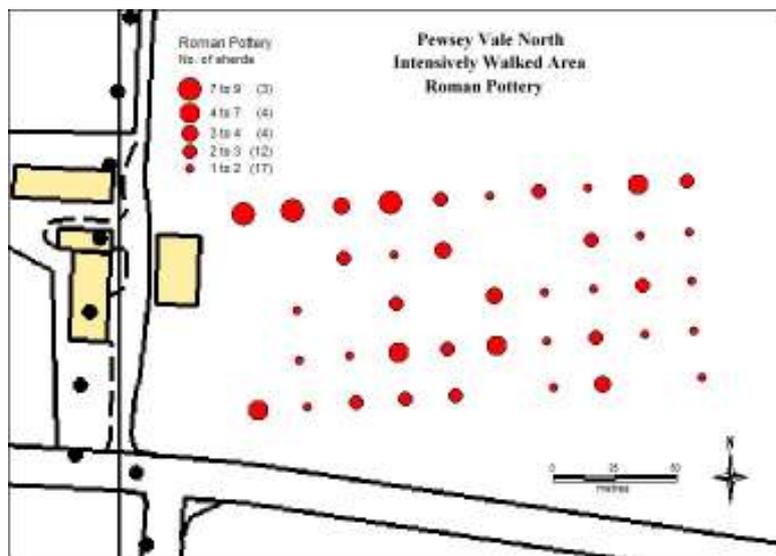
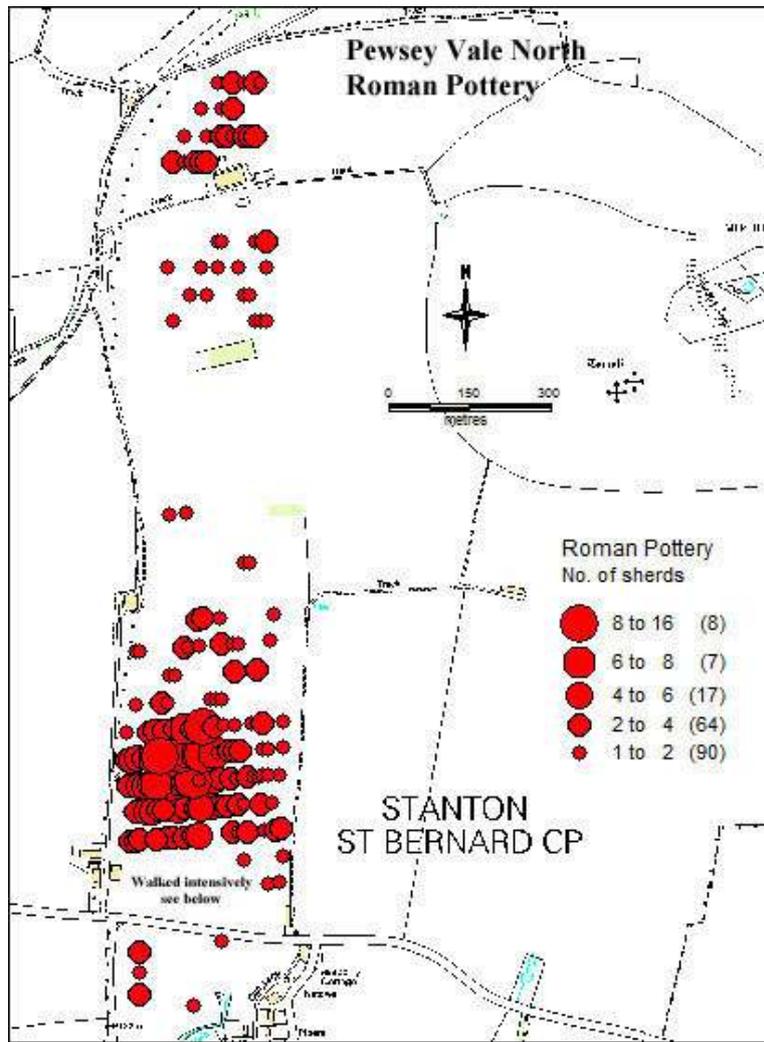


Fig. 8 Pewsey Vale North Distribution of Medieval finds

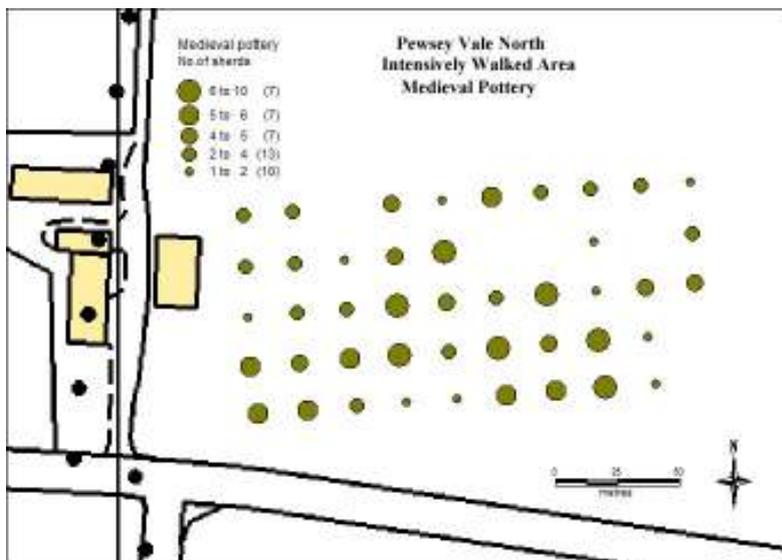
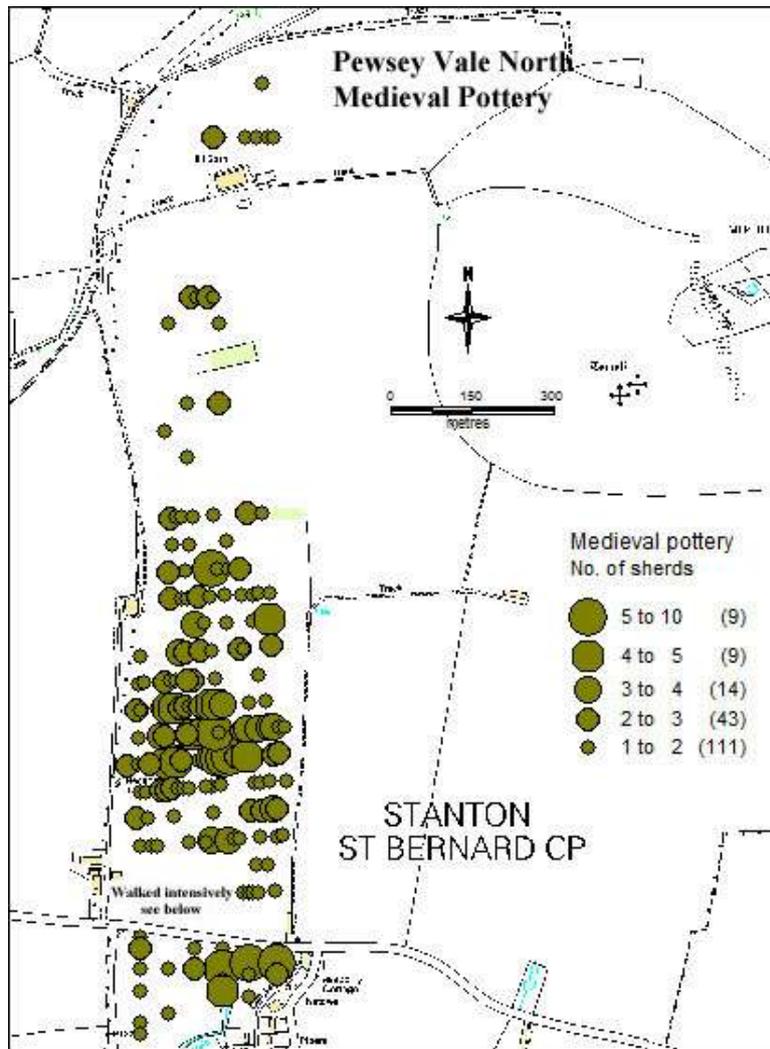


Figure 9. Pewsey Vale North Distribution of Post-medieval Finds

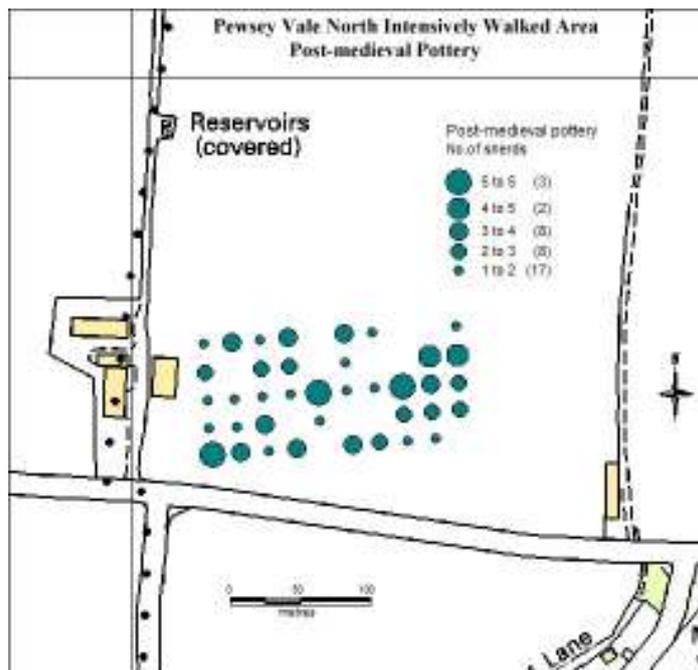
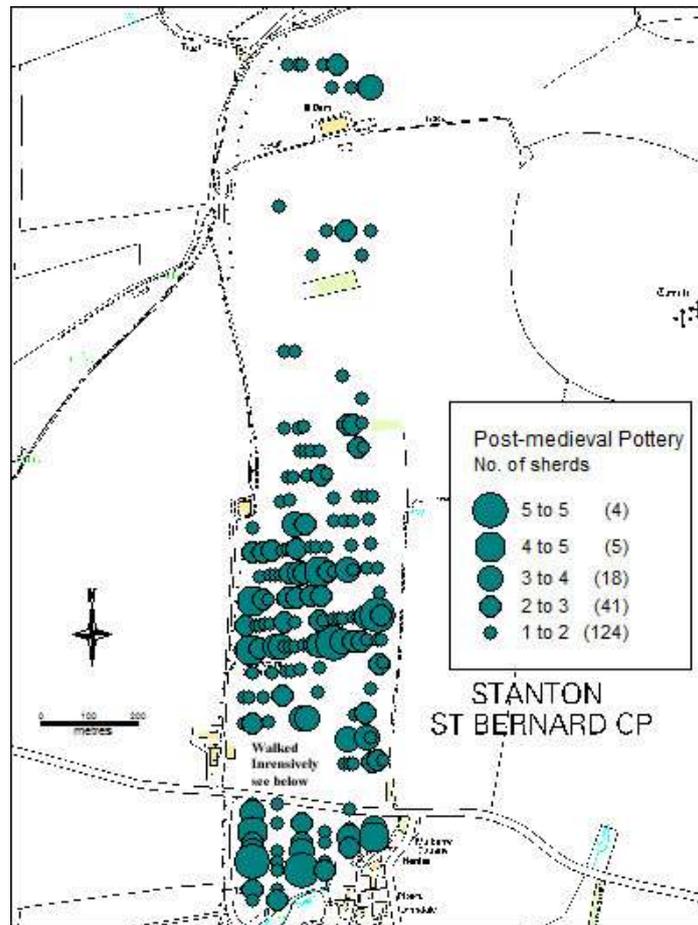


Figure 10. Pewsey Vale South Distribution of Prehistoric Finds

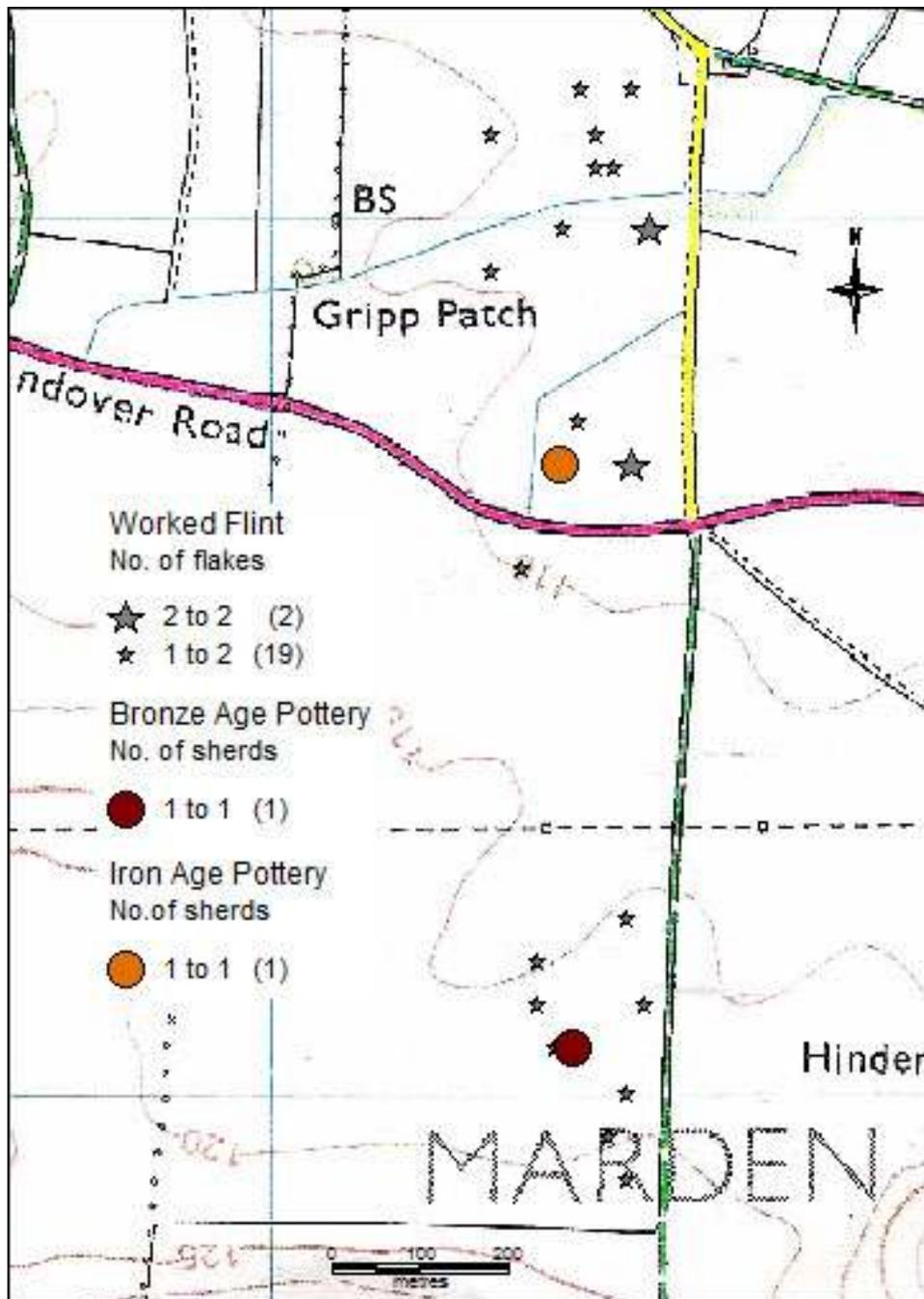


Figure 11. Pewsey Vale South Distribution of Romano-British Finds

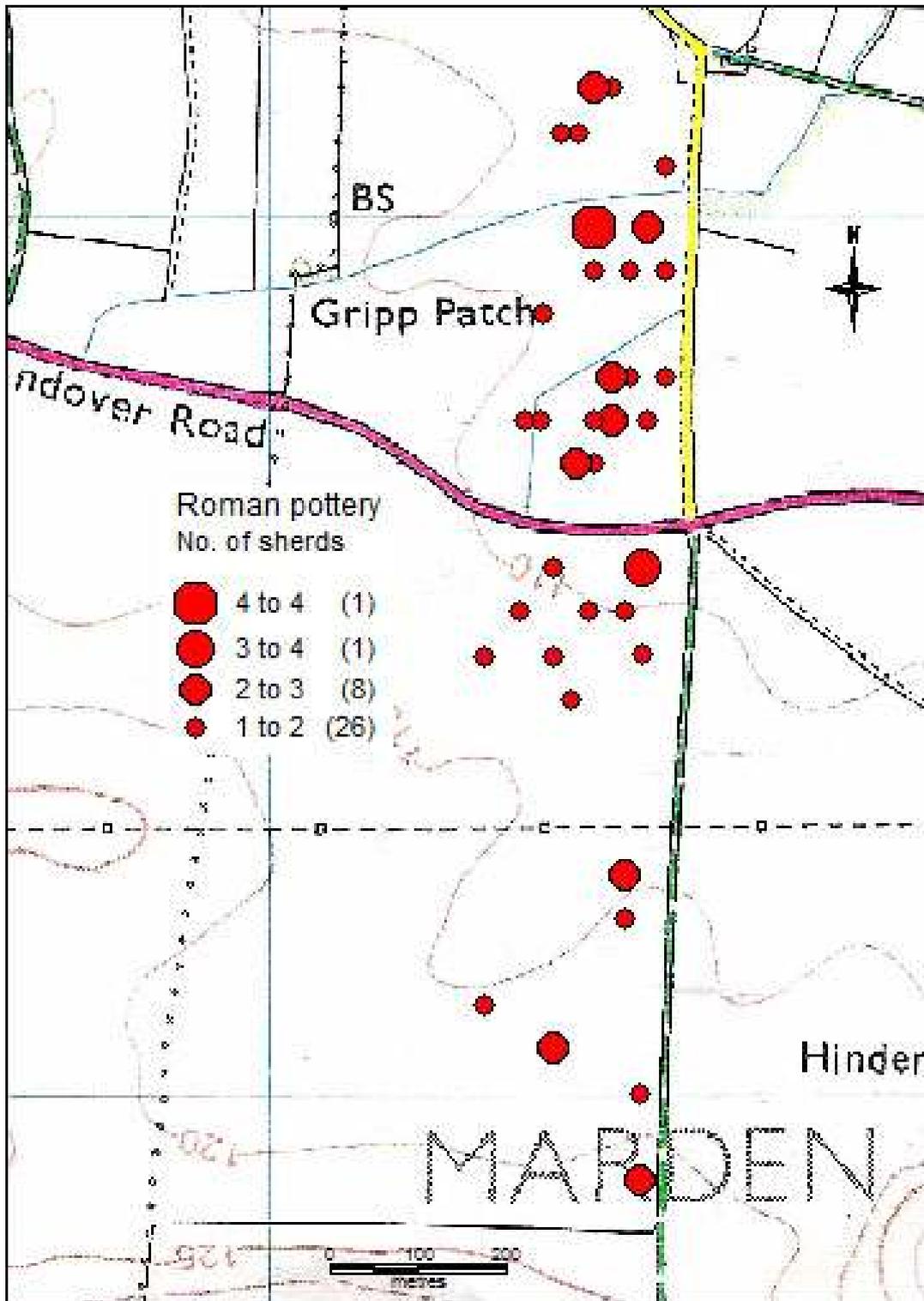


Figure 12. Pewsey Vale South Distribution of Medieval Finds

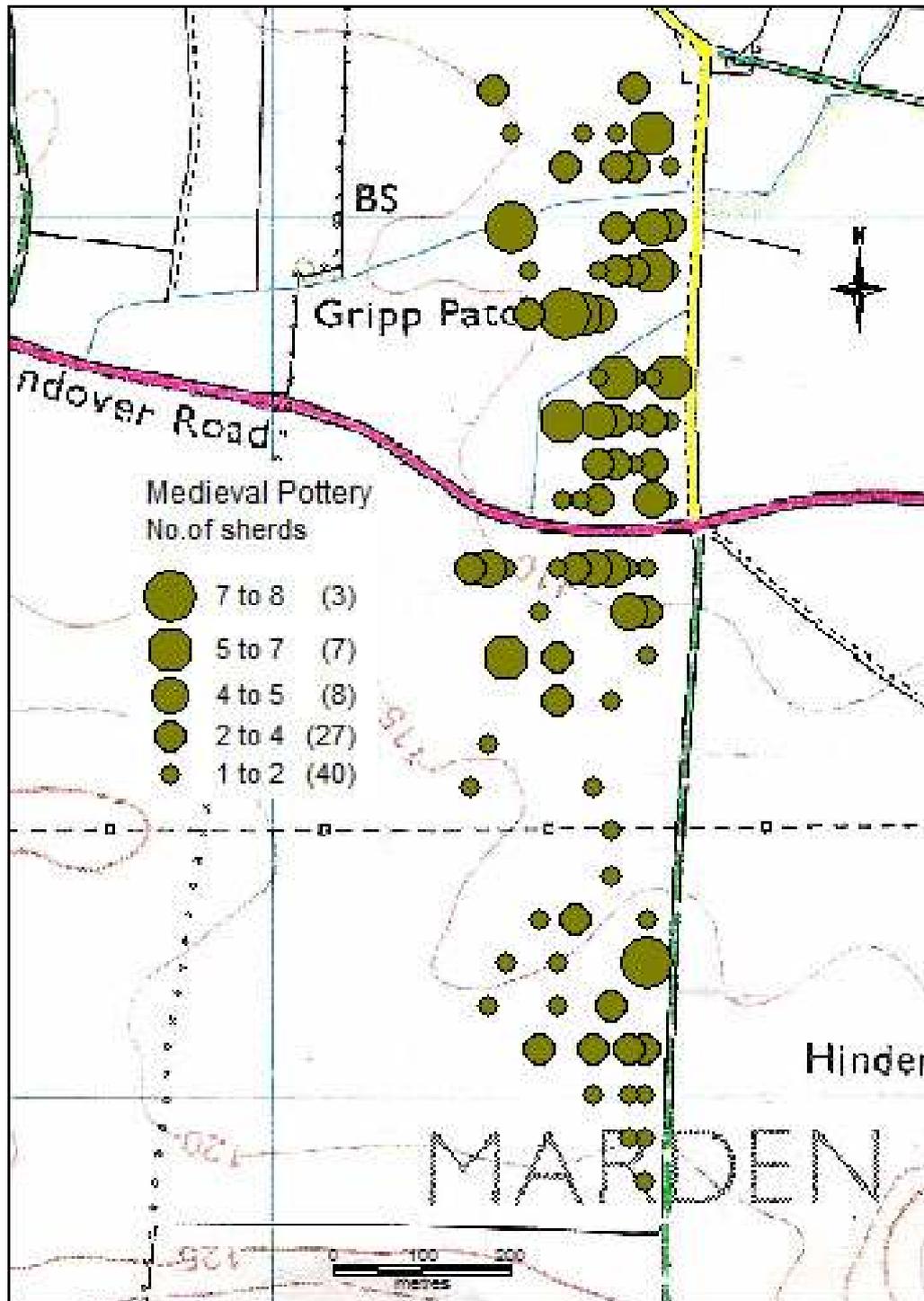
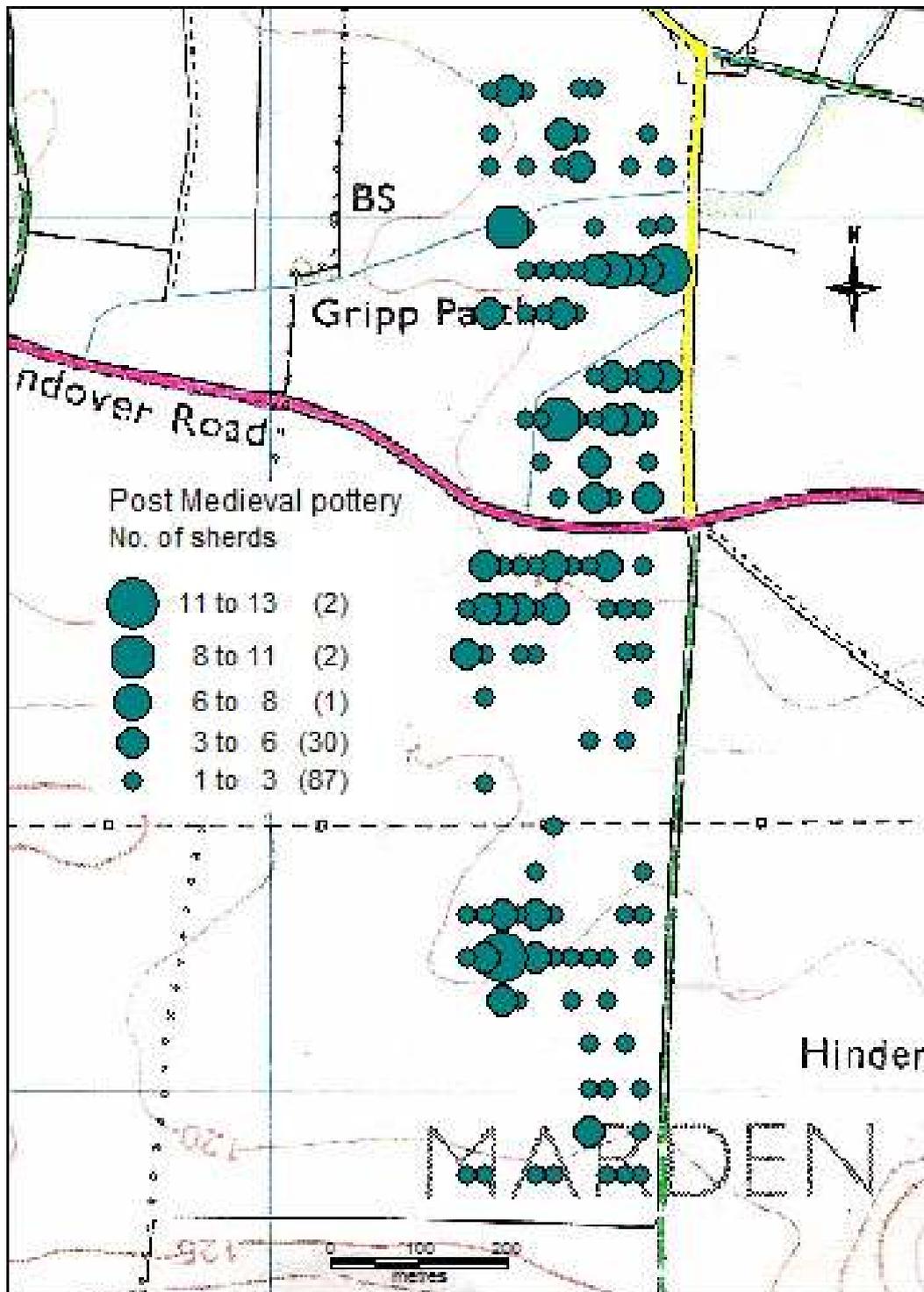


Figure 13. Pewsey Vale South Distribution of Post-medieval Finds.



The Finds

Pottery

Fig. 14 Table of pottery finds by period

Period	Total number of sherds	Percentage
Prehistoric	32	2%
Romano-British	507	29%
Medieval	590	34%
Post Medieval	531	30%
Modern	90	5 %
Totals	1760	

There is a difference in the percentages in the north and south assemblages.

Fig. 15 Table of pottery finds by period, Northern aspect of the Vale of Pewsey

Period	Total number of sherds	Percentage
Prehistoric	32	2.5%
Roman-British	465	39%
Medieval	400	33%
Post Medieval	263	22%
Modern	41	3.5%
Totals	1199	

Fig. 16 Table of pottery finds by period, Southern aspect of the Vale

Period	Total number of sherds	Percentage
Prehistoric	2	0.5%
Romano-British	42	6.5%
Medieval	190	34%
Post Medieval	268	49%
Modern	49	9%
Totals	551	

Fig. 17 Pottery types (count and percentage)

Period and type	Northern count	Northern %	Southern count	Southern %
R-B				
Black burnish.	15	3.2%	1	2.3%
Grey ware	84	18%	5	11.9%
Oxford	67	14.4%	12	28.5%
Samian	7	1.5%		
Savernake	110	23.6%	1	2.3%
Short St	8	1.3%		
Severn Val	113	24.3%	22	52%
Other	61	13.1%	1	2.3%
Medieval				
Kennett Val	8	2%		
Langley Burr	1	0.2%	3	1.5%
Laverstock	27	6.75%	10	5.2%
Minety	300	75%	138	72.3%
Verwood	2	0.5%	9	4.7%
Other	62	15%	30	15.7%
Post Medieval				
Ashton Keynes	77	29%	75	30%
Bromham	96	36.5%	103	38%
Crockerton	4	1.5%		
Donyatt	2	0.7%	3	1%
English Stone	12	4.5%	13	5%
German Stone	7	2.5%	10	4%
Laverstock	5	2%	3	1%
Nash Hill	1	0.4%		
Staffordshire	1	0.4%	9	3%
Verwood	7	2.5%		
Other	51	19%	52	18%

Thirty four sherds were tentatively assigned to the prehistoric period, the majority of these (32) were collected from the north of the Vale. Eight different fabric types were identified, although all contained inclusions of flint suggesting the pottery was produced locally. Fifteen sherds had only flint inclusions, 7 had inclusions of both flint and organic material, which created spherical voids; flint and a quartz temper accounted for 4 pieces; 3 sherds had a flint and ferrous oxide temper; 2 had flint, stone and ferrous oxide; 1 sherd had a temper consisting of flint and stone; a further sherd was tempered with flint, quartz, stone and organic material, and the final sherd had a temper of flint, quartz, grog and organic material. The Assemblage was abraded and consisted entirely of body sherds, it was impossible to identify vessel types.

A couple of northern grids (P18 and Q18) produced 7 very interesting pieces, all globular and up to 45x27x24mm. The exterior on some pieces shows evidence of burning, the temper has very different components to all the other sherds, the inclusions consist of bone or shell and chalk, this may be the remains of pottery production, however, as all the pottery sherds have flint temper this is unlikely, the core does not have the colour one would expect to see on a hearth base (the pieces are dark grey and black with very little red).

Roman Pottery represents the largest percentage of the northern assemblage, whilst in the southern part of the Vale Post Medieval pottery formed the largest percentage. Post Medieval would be expected to be the largest percentage of pottery, because of a larger population and perhaps more easily procured pottery. It is interesting that the Romano-British assemblage forms the larger proportion of the northern assemblage with the Post Medieval being less than the Medieval. The Northern part of the Vale is south facing and therefore much better arable land, in addition the land below the escarpment in the north is much higher, the area field walked in the south, either side of the A342 Andover Road is lower and wetter. The assemblages reflect agricultural practices, the southern area remaining pasture until the medieval period, becoming more intensively farmed during the Post Medieval when the land was drained. Small modern pottery assemblages indicate a change in fertilisation practices.

The majority of Romano-British pottery assemblage is lower status coarse wares, represented by both local (Savernake pottery) and regional wares (Severn Valley and

Grey ware). High status wares included both Samian and Oxford Colour Coated. The pottery indicates settlement from 1st to 4th century with little or no difference in the status of the site throughout the period. The pottery found is most likely to be the result of manuring.

A sherd of Severn Valley ware appeared to have been made into a gaming token.

Fig. 18 Oxford colour coated ware



Fig. 19 Sherd of Severn Valley ware made into a gaming token



No Anglo-Saxon pottery was found, this is not unusual, pottery of this period was poorly made and does not survive well, also it would appear that pottery was not a common commodity, especially in the Early Anglo-Saxon period.

The Medieval pottery, as with the Roman, consists of local wares (mainly Minety pottery) with a few higher status wares (Laverstock and Verwood). Again the presence of this assemblage is the result of manuring.

Fig. 20 Verwood pottery handle



The Post Medieval collection also consists of mostly lower status local wares (Ashton Keynes and Bromham pottery), with a few higher status wares (Donyatt and Staffordshire), and is also likely to be the result of manuring.

Lithics

A total of 109 struck flint tools were found, of these 101 were chalk flint and the remaining 8 were greensand chert; both resources are available locally. The assemblage comprised, 2 type C cores, 7 scrapers of which 2 were notched; 3 blades, 1 denticulate, 2 awls, 1 Early Neolithic arrowhead and the remaining 93 flints were flakes. The assemblage ranges in date from the Early Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age. A number of the flints have been damaged, presumably by the plough. Two stone hammers were also found, these are made from chert.

Fig. 21 Early Neolithic leaf shaped arrow head



Fig. 22 Flint blade



Fig. 23 Side and end scraper



Fig. 24 Second side and end scraper



Ceramic Building Material (CBM)

CBM was found in a majority of grids, this was mostly undiagnostic small abraded pieces. There was no scatter indicative of the site of a building. There were some obvious Romano-British pieces, a high status Nash Hill roof tile, and a couple of pieces of daub.

Fig. 25 Nash Hill roof tile



Dressed Stone

Twenty two pieces of dressed stone were recovered, several of Oolitic building material, some Pennant, and part of a sharpening stone.

Metal

Of the 102 pieces of metal recovered, the majority consisted of ferrous nails and pieces of farming equipment. There were 2 copper alloy objects, an extremely worn coin, probably a halfpenny, and a military button.

Discussion

The different assemblages in the northern area either side of the Devizes to Pewsey road reflect different land management practices. The Prehistoric pottery and flint, and Romano-British pottery being largely found north of the road on higher south facing ground, the land in the south being too wet and marshy to use. During the Medieval and certainly the Post-Medieval periods the marshy land would have been drained and brought into use as arable rather than pasture. The finds are probably the result of manuring practices.

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