McDONALD INSTITUTE MONOGRAPHS

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Mark Knight and Matt Brudenell

CAU Must Farm/Flag Fen Basin *Depth & Time* Series — Volume I

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By Mark Knight and Matt Brudenell

With contributions by
Grahame Appleby, Manuel Arroyo-Kalin, Rachel Ballantyne, Michael Bamforth, Lawrence Billington, Steve Boreham, Natasha Dodwell, Roger Doonan, Charles French, Kevin Hayward, Peter Hommel, Donald Horne, Mark Noel, Peter Northover, Tracey Pierre, Vida Rajkovača, Iona Robinson Zeki, Rob Scaife, Maisie Taylor, Sean Taylor, Simon Timberlake, Anne de Vareilles and Penelope Walton Rogers

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Contents

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Figures

Tables

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Charly French, Paul Middleton, Francis Pryor, Rob Scaife and Maisie Taylor were frequent visitors, bringing experience and encouragement in equal measure. Their generosity of ideas contributed greatly to the understandings presented here — all excavations should be afforded such wise counsel. In similar vein, conversations with Jo Brück, Christopher Evans, Kasia Gdaniec, David Gibson, David Hall, JD Hill, Gavin Lucas, Lesley McFadyen, Richard Mortimer, Stuart Needham, Roderick Regan and Ben Robinson kept us on our interpretive toes. That we had found a site worth explicating was made apparent by the number of requests to publish its plan (Richard Bradley, Mike Parker Pearson and David Yates) or to analyse its artefactual or environmental assemblages. Material gleaned from King's Dyke and Bradley Fen furnished parts of more than one PhD (Matthew Brudenell and Rob Law) along with several MPhil and undergraduate dissertations (Grahame Appleby, Manuel Arroyo-Kalin, Emma Beadsmoore, Tracey Pierre and Sean Taylor). We are grateful to those who expressed an interest and helped put our work into a much wider context.

An opportunity to think and read was extended to Mark Knight by the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. During time as Field Archaeologist in Residence in 2011 he was allowed to combine a bit of *field* with a bit of *theory*. This volume, or at least a large chunk of its theoretical input and product, represents an outcome of that time well appreciated and hopefully well spent. The main body of this text was completed in 2013, and was revised following comment in 2015 and 2018.

Finds were processed by Norma Challands, Jason Hawkes, Leonie Hicks, Gwladys Monteil and Sharon Webb. The graphics in this volume were produced by Andrew Hall with the assistance of Marcus Abbot, Michael Court, Vicki Herring, Donald Horne, Iain Forbes and Jane Matthews. Chloe Watson drew the log ladder and mallet. Studio photography was undertaken by Dave Webb, while onsite photography was undertaken by members of the excavation team. The text was edited by Iona Robinson Zeki, who tackled style in tandem with content, her interventions being astute as well as necessary.

Special thanks are extended to Mark Edmonds and Francis Healy for reading (so thoroughly) and commenting (so cogently) on this monograph. In line with a major theme of this book, we gained from their depth. We also accept that we still have a great deal to learn about radiocarbon dating, especially if we

want to employ it as a sensitive instrument. The monograph was proofread and indexed by Vicki Harley.

The monograph describes the core prehistoric archaeology of King's Dyke and Bradley Fen and is an expression of many peoples hard work in the field as well as in the library, lab and office. The excavation teams were as follows:

King's Dyke 1998: Marc Berger, Craig Cessford, Duncan Garrow, Cassian Hall & Mark Knight.

King's Dyke 1999: Marcus Abbott, Joe Abrams, Mary Alexander, Nicholas Armour, Rachel Ballantyne, Emma Beadsmoore, Andy Clarke, Anwen Cooper, Bob Davis, Duncan Garrow, Andrew Hall, Dave Hall, Jon Hall, Candy Hatherley, Mark Knight, Lesley McFadyen, Richard Mortimer, Ricky Patten, Martin Redding & Beccy Scott.

Bradley Fen 2001: Marcus Abbott, Rachel Ballantyne, Emma Beadsmoore, David Beresford-Jones, David Brown, Matthew Brudenell, Simon Burney, Craig Cessford, Norma Challands, Philip Church, Andy Clarke, Jason Clarke, Chantal Conneller, Bob Davis, Paul Donohue, Natasha Dodwell, Andy Fergerson, Duncan Garrow, Susanne Hakenbeck, Andrew Hall, Candy Hatherley, Teresa Hawtin, Charlie Kitchin, Mark Knight, Mary Leighton, Jane Matthews, Lesley McFadyen, Mary Nugent, Ricky Patten, Richard Purves, Martin Redding, Neil Redfern, Christina Robinson, Beccy Scott, Mark Spalding, Fraser Sturt, Richard Turnbull, Roland Wessling, Steven Williams & Felicity Woor.

Bradley Fen 2004: Ben Bishop, Emma Beadsmoore, Grahame Appleby, Matthew Collins, Donald Horne, Mark Knight, Iain Morley, Martin Oakes, Laura Preston, Tim Vickers, Ellen Simmons, Chris Swaysland & Steven Williams.

Being in the field at King's Dyke and Bradley Fen was a process of sustaining a close engagement with context and circumstance. Much of the time we did this surrounded by the roar, exhausts and dust of heavy plant as it uncovered the ground in front of us or removed the ground behind us. The process was fairly rapid and there was a sense of things being done at a pace. Throughout, however, we tried to stay contextual and we achieved this largely by talking through our individual features, putting into words *cuts*, *fills*, *layers* and *finds*. Friday afternoons (invariably after chips) frequently involved walking around the site discussing each other's postholes, pits, ditches and deposits. In this manner, we were able articulate and correlate different features and begin to recompose sites and landscapes. These grounded conversations occurred at the top of the contour, at King's Dyke, and continued all the way to the bottom of the contour, at Bradley Fen. As we moved down, the depth and complexity of sediment increased and our postholes, pits, ditches and deposits became progressively better preserved. In these sunken spaces, upcast banks and mounds endured. Buried soil, silt and peat horizons intervened between things. All of these details amplified our comprehension or, what we called at the time, our 'confidence in context' – in this we came to be immersed.

Summary

The King's Dyke (1995–1999) and Bradley Fen (2000–2004) excavations occurred within the brick pits of the Fenland town of Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. The investigations straddled the south-eastern contours of the Flag Fen Basin, a small peat-filled embayment located between the East-Midland city of Peterborough and the western limits of the 'island' of Whittlesey. Renowned principally for its Bronze Age and Iron Age discoveries at sites such as Fengate and Flag Fen, the Flag Fen Basin also marked the point where the prehistoric River Nene debouched into the greater Fenland Basin.

In keeping with the earlier findings, the core archaeology of King's Dyke and Bradley Fen was also Bronze Age and Iron Age. A henge, two round barrows, an early fieldsystem, bronze metalwork deposition and patterns of sustained settlement along with metalworking evidence helped produce a plan similar in its configuration to that first revealed at Fengate. In addition, unambiguous evidence of earlier second millennium BC settlement was identified together with large watering holes and the first burnt stone mounds to be found along Fenland's western edge.

The early fieldsystem, defined by linear ditches and banks, was constructed within a landscape preconfigured with monuments and burnt mounds. Genuine settlement structures included three of Early Bronze Age date, one Late Bronze Age, ten Early Iron Age and three Middle Iron Age. Despite the existence of Middle Bronze Age wells, bone dumps and domestic pottery assemblages no contemporary structures were recognised. Later Bronze Age metalwork, including single spears and a weapon hoard, was deposited in indirect association with the earlier land divisions and consistently within ground that was becoming increasingly wet. By the early Middle Iron Age, much of the fieldsystem had been subsumed beneath peat whilst, above the peat, settlement features transgressed its still visible boundaries.

Combined, the King's Dyke and Bradley Fen excavations established a near continuous transect across the Flag Fen Basin's south-eastern gradient – the former exposing its very top, the latter its top, middle and base. The different elevations yielded different archaeologies and in doing so revealed a subtle correspondence between altitude and age. The summit of the gradient contained Roman as well as prehistoric features, whereas the mid-point contained nothing later than the early Middle Iron Age, and the base, nothing later than the very beginnings of the Middle Bronze Age. At the same time, there was a palpable relationship between altitude and preservation. A shallow plough soil was all that protected the most elevated parts. The very base of the gradient however, retained a buried soil as well as silt and peat horizons contemporary with prehistoric occupation and which preserved surfaces, banks and mounds that were not present higher up. The same deposits also facilitated the preservation of organic remains such as wooden barriers, log ladders and a fragment of a logboat.

The large-scale exposure of the base of the Flag Fen Basin at Bradley Fen uncovered a sub-peat or pre-basin landscape. A landscape composed of dryland settlement features related to an earlier terrestrial topography associated with the now buried floodplain of the adjacent River Nene. Above all, the revelation of sub-fen occupation helped position the Flag Fen Basin in time as well as space. It showed that the increasingly wet conditions which led to its formation as a small fen embayment transpired at the end of the Early Bronze Age. In the same way, the new found situation dissolved any sense of an all-enduring and all-defining fen-edge and instead fostered a more fluid understanding of the contemporary environmental circumstances. In this particular landscape setting wetland sediment *displaced* settlement as much as it *defined* it – the process was dynamic and ongoing.

…simultaneity is mere appearance, surface, spectacle. Go deeper. Do not be afraid to disturb this surface, to set its limpidity in motion. (Lefebvre & Régulier 2004, 80)

Chapter 7

Discussion

The final chapter has a four-fold structure: *Review*, *Synthesis*, *Implications* and *Futures*. The first section *reviews* what has been achieved and how it has been accomplished. The second *synthesizes* the assembled results in relation to each other and the local context, whilst expanding the discussion to consider patterns of occupation through time. Under the heading *implications*, the third section moves from the local to the regional and incorporates aspects of Fenland, East Anglia/East Midlands and Southern Britain into the same narrative. The final section looks to the *future* with an emphasis on the adjacent Must Farm investigations and the promise of practising a *vertical* archaeology in an outwardly *horizontal* landscape.

The opening *Review* section also draws together different representations of the site which illustrate the correlation between gradient and forms of tenure. Throughout, the idea is to replicate the displacement of occupation and its vertical tendency over time and to examine settlement's oscillating relationship with the advancing saturation of the landscape.

Review – *a palimpsest pulled apart*

As stated at the beginning of the volume, it would have been possible to follow precedent and (re)present the investigations in a single all-encompassing view. Instead, we have chosen to accentuate process over palimpsest and, as a result, we arrived at a series of intricate views. To achieve this, full use was made of landscape attributes unique to our situation and, as such, we can state with real confidence the outcome is contextually valid. From beginning to end, we opted to draw attention to the project's vertical dimension, its built-in temporal inclination, even if this was achieved in combination with its correspondingly impressive horizontal detail. In this sense, both axes were considered equally – the historical and the geographical.

Instead of maintaining the spatial ascendancy that has come to characterize much of Fenland prehistory, we have chosen a different path, one which actively embraces its depth and complexity. The approach or methodology emulates the sediment, in that its overriding trajectory is also *from the bottom-up*, and as such can be described as being resolutely non-superficial in its attitude. For the most part, past characterizations of prehistoric Fenland have been constructed *from the top-down* and this has been done through the investigation of sites exposed, at least partially, at the present surface. By definition a top-down approach assumes at least two basic certitudes: a consistent degree of transparency together with a fairly curbed or limited distribution. Without both of these things being true, a top-down perspective will only ever produce a reduced or truncated version of past occupations. The switch in attitude presented here is subtle and we are not talking about exploring huge depths. It is simply about following Waller's wise counsel not to take the 'side by side' relationship of *site* and *sediment* at face value, but to countenance the distinct possibility that one might carry on beneath the other (Waller 1994, 3).

In due course, we produced four separate 'evidence' chapters. From these, it is now possible to present the prehistory of King's Dyke and Bradley Fen as a sequence of four individual views or broad chronological windows (Fig. 7.1): **1**) Early Bronze Age, **2**) Middle Bronze Age, **3**) Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age and **4**) Middle Iron Age. Each view maps a successive occupation or landscape component that has been intentionally pulled-apart or disaggregated. Each plan view is accompanied by a cross-sectional diagram elucidating the landscape's vertical axis and its aforementioned correspondence to the predominantly upward mobility of settlement (Fig. 7.2). In both circumstances, plan and section, traces of the previous occupation have been retained as a way of demonstrating flux, but also as a means of articulating

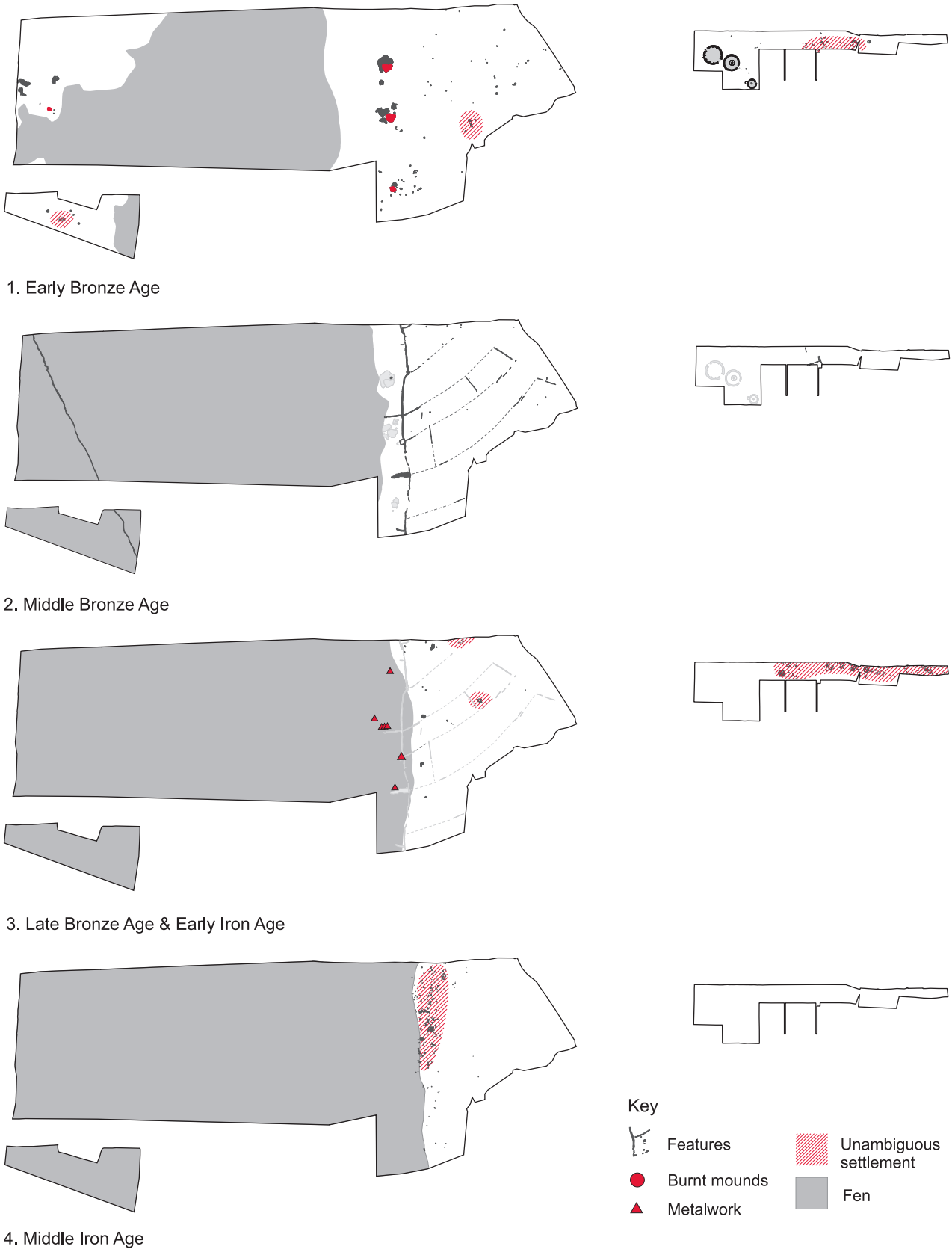
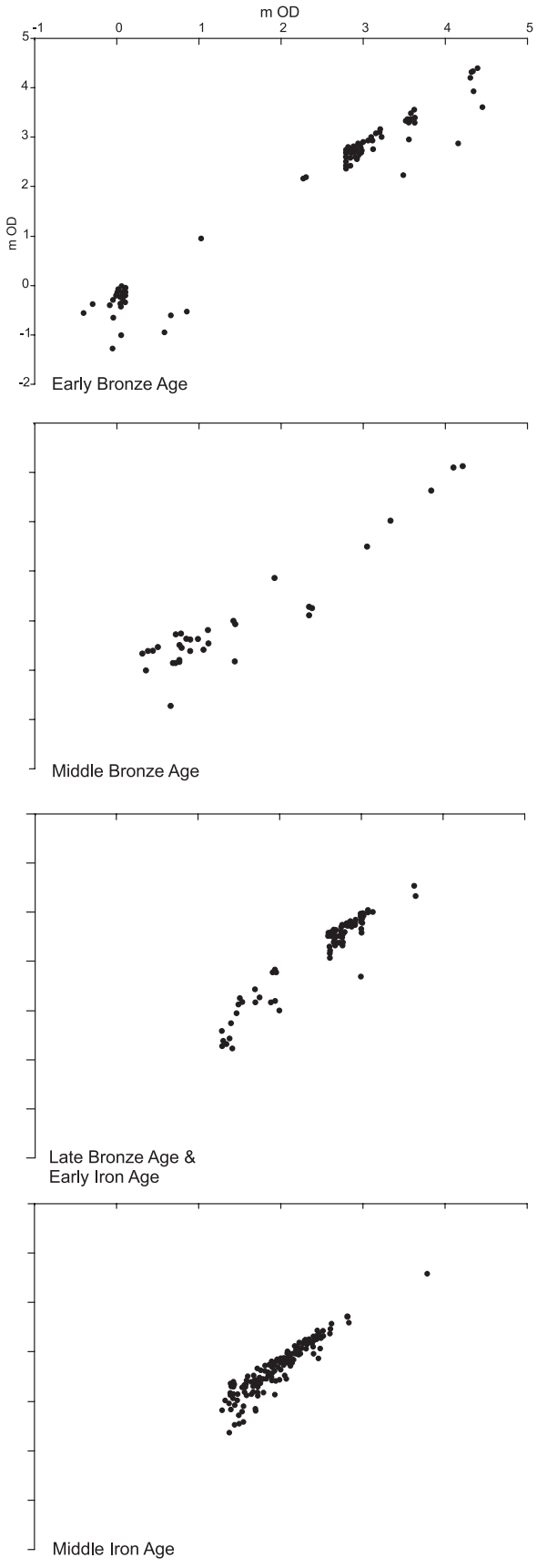


Figure 7.1. *Four landscape views.*



significant junctures in the landscape grain. These junctures took on various forms and included wholesale transformations as well as delicate adjustments in how this particular tract of ground came to be inhabited. In the same vein, the saturation levels and associated environmental differences between views could be dramatic or just barely tangible, depending on 'where you are' in time. The advantage of presenting the site in sequence is the ability to illustrate movement or mobility. In four simple plans, we are able to visualize different types of landscape 'use' or tenure (i.e. the changing conditions under which land was held or occupied), including shifts between *extensive* and *intensive* forms of residency.

'Sequent occupance' (Whittlesey 1929, 164)

Colonization of the landscape succession presented here began in a comparatively open but not unstructured manner (Fig. 7.1 **1**). Individual settlement foci populated the ground between a group of elevated monuments and a string of marginal watering hollows, metalled surfaces and burnt stone mounds. Settlement comprised three independent structures, one situated low down and Beaker associated and two high up and Collared Urn associated. 'Refuse' from settlement was deposited amongst the monuments, whilst cremations equivalent to those interred in and around the same monuments were also interred in close vicinity to the burnt mounds. The up–down or high–low arrangement of different architectures, especially the spatially and functionally divergent relationship between the monuments and burnt mounds, displayed a level of landscape organization which was later formalized through the construction of the co-axial fieldsystem (Fig. 7.1 **2**).

Despite the increasing saturation and consequent accretion of peat that interceded between parts of the earlier 'open' (**1**) and subsequent 'enclosed' (**2**) landscapes, the latter assimilated major constituents of the former. The fieldsystem's elaborate geometry dovetailed closely with the established orientations of the monuments and burnt mounds. Indeed, the join was so explicit that other less obvious projections could also be deduced from its 'composite' geometry including the probable pre-existence of parallel field strips. In the making of the fieldsystem, it seems the landscape's prevailing operational grain was formally entrenched (**2**). Crucially, there was no radical disjuncture and, if anything, the relationship between 'open' and 'enclosed' was remarkably seamless.

Figure 7.2. *Four cross-sectional diagrams.*

The currency of entrenchment outlasted the main operation of the monuments and the burnt mounds. The overlap was relatively short and coincided with the submergence of the burnt mounds and the loss of the lower parts of the fieldsystem to the encroaching peat. Saturation was no respecter of boundaries, whatever form they took, although its encroachment was momentarily arrested by the deliberate augmentation of the main north–south boundary, which for a short time became the principal wet/dry divide. Land on the dry-side stayed enclosed and witnessed minimal activity beyond small waterholes or wells and dumps of butchered cattle bone. Initially, at least, land on the immediate wet-side was also accessible and here further small wells were dug.

The spread of overlying peat ensured that the relationship between the fieldsystem and the subsequent deposition of large quantities of metalwork was also given an added dimension (**2**). Around the margins of the Flag Fen Basin, conditions conducive for peat growth happened post-system but pre-metalwork. This distinction is critical in that it demonstrated a significant dividing line or gulf between the two processes: in these circumstances fields are basically *terrestrial* and metalwork deposition is fundamentally *aquatic*. As a consequence our second landscape view depicts disjuncture as well congruity and, whereas previously the monuments/burnt mounds and fieldsystem narrative portrayed a kind of landscape progression, it now introduces a kind of landscape rift. This is not to say that fields and metalwork were wholly unrelated but to state that the relationship was never as straightforward as sometimes suggested (e.g. Yates 2007, 91). For us, the juncture between fieldsystems and metalwork was always awkward and one which betrayed the collision of opposing landscape perspectives – fieldsystems projecting backwards and metalwork deposition projecting forwards in time. To some the issue is purely chronological, but in reality it is always contextual and the juncture of fields and metal was also pivotal to the landscape's development.

The third view, (Fig. 7.1 **3**), could at first be mistaken for the second (**2**), in that it too shows peat overspreading parallel fields. Components of the opening landscape (**1**) have all but faded, even though the materiality of the remaining field boundaries ensures that something of its original 'grain' survived. What actually distinguished this new view from its antecedents, however, was the impression that tenure and the dynamic environment were becoming ever more synchronized. If in previous views the dynamic environment supplanted occupation, here the two processes began to converge. Between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, we see the first real manifestation of a 'fen-edge' with which settlement could intersect or meet. At first the convergence was subtle. So, for instance, the orientation of Late Bronze Age settlement was structured by the surviving field boundaries and by the advancing peat and, a bit like the metalwork, it too was wedged between the *old* and the *new*. Come the Early Iron Age, however, any influence the fieldsystem had in terms of landscape configuration was negligible and, in the areas where occupation actually met the advancing fen-edge, its relationship was now unmistakably perpendicular. The core of Early Iron Age settlement resided upslope and was removed from the fen-edge; only waterholes occupied the low-lying margins during this period. Its settlement pattern was different primarily because of its magnitude and its imprint. Unlike the preceding Late Bronze Age occupation, which comprised a single 'one-off' diminutive dwelling, Early Iron Age occupation consisted of multiple paired structures built over a sequence of some duration. For the first time within our frame of reference, residency was intensive and reiterative (**3**).

By the Middle Iron Age, the synchronization of tenure and environment was complete. Our final view illustrates this in the coming together of settlement and sediment (Fig. 7.1 **4**). Prior to this, the two processes (settlement and sedimentation) had been out of sync and with the exception of the opening scene (**1**), in which waterholes and burnt mounds were located intentionally on the limits of fen sedimentation where the water-table was most accessible, the earlier landscape trajectories revealed sediment 'pursuing' settlement (**2** & **3**). The coincidence of concerted occupation and the edge of peat was historically and geographically determined, prior to the Middle Iron Age the interrelationship was different and manifold. If the apposite question for this landscape is '*When* fen-edge?', the accurate answer is: Middle Iron Age.

The four views cover approximately 2000 years – from the beginning of the Early Bronze Age to the end of the Middle Iron Age. It would have been possible to fragment the same landscape into six or ten views depending which junctures we chose to articulate. Our points of articulation included seamless progressions, awkward jarrings, as well as out-and-out impositions. Amidst these flows and discontinuities, four landscapes were made. Integral to this sequence was the dynamic environment and, in particular, its inherent ability to interpose horizontally and vertically. Consequently, within our frame of reference, it has been possible to describe a series of significant moments in time.

The quartet of chosen images depicts the disposition of occupation over time. When seen all together there is an overriding impression of movement, a

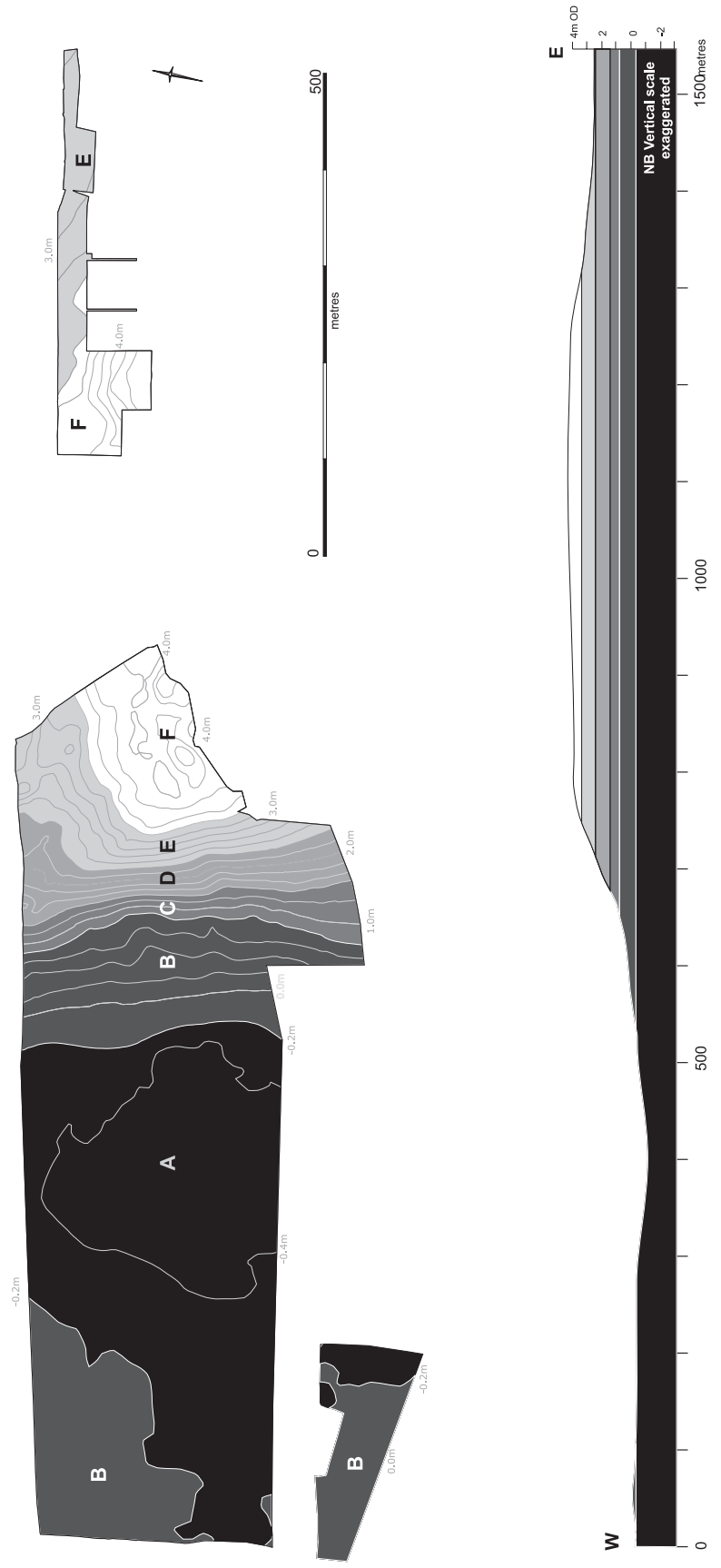


Figure 7.3. *Plan and diagrammatical section of Landscape Zones.*

kind of see-sawing back and forth or up and down. What is absent from the succession is any sense of rigidity or static continuity. The pattern is one of oscillation rather than simple upward development and the interrelationship between occupation and the environmentally defined gradient is shown to be complex and to involve different forms of engagement over time. Instead of portraying settlement ceaselessly climbing-up the edge, our representations also depict a type of dynamic descent – things advancing down towards or even out to meet Fenland's increasing saturation. As well as *movement*, the earlier views also describe a protracted *grain* or a kind of 'continuity', where certain features endure across more than one image. In these representations, however, it is the persistence of practice that is being depicted as opposed to something motionless, such as a fixed point.

Landscape zones

Another way of portraying the complexity of the interrelationship between occupation and the environmentally determined gradient is to interpret our block of landscape zonally. By dividing-up King's Dyke and Bradley Fen into six contour-defined *Zones* the two projects can be consolidated into the same gradational scale. This zoning makes it much easier both to visualize authentic landscape connections between the two investigations and, at the same time, to understand why certain associations were absent. Accordingly, we can reproduce the different zonal divisions in plan and in diagrammatical section (Fig. 7.3) and, in effect, both configurations replicate the horizontal/vertical relationships between key landscape features. Together, these representations allow us to define what we might describe as intermediate zones or strips of landscape caught between consecutive occupations. For instance, Zone C survives in practice as an 'uncontaminated' band of Middle Bronze Age fieldsystem – it being too high and dry for Early Bronze Age metalling, waterholes and burnt mounds (Zone B) but too low and wet for later Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement (Zones D & E).

The basis of the zonal system is the understanding that Bradley Fen's gradient or declivity was proportionate with the development of the surrounding landscape. It is for this reason that the patterns of occupation revealed here can be used to calibrate patterns of occupation exposed at adjacent sites. Appropriately, the next section moves outwards as it attempts to synthesize the results from Bradley Fen and King's Dyke in relation to each other and the immediate context. As before, four separate landscape views are presented to illustrate the correspondence between gradient and tenure, only on this occasion the view has been expanded to incorporate the lower reaches of the River Nene, the Bradley Fen Embayment and the Flag Fen Basin. By moving between these spaces we can assimilate other 'landscapes' under the same dynamic calibration.

Synthesis – *mobility long and short*

If the term fen-edge cropped-up late in the narrative of King's Dyke and Bradley Fen, then the term Flag Fen Basin has a similar billing in the narrative of the broader landscape. Within the wider sequence, it is the lower reaches of the River Nene which featured first and foremost, followed closely by the diminutive Bradley Fen Embayment (Fig. 7.4 **1** & **2**). As an entity, the Flag Fen Basin 'frames' the final two quarters of this particular landscape's history (Fig. 7.4 **3** & **4**). In the course of animating the development of this terrain, the predominant process was the transformation of a river valley into a fen basin. Even though the river endured as a vital feature, it became increasingly suspended within the accumulation of silts and peat which described the Bradley Fen Embayment and, in due course, the Flag Fen Basin. As these geographical features became more prominent the river became increasingly dislocated from land.

The spaces outlined here are neither arbitrary nor definitive. Instead, they constitute a *fitting scale* to apprehend the key components of a prehistoric landscape in all its various forms. They are appropriate to different spatial-temporal extensities and ideally operate in 'some kind of alignment with the scale at which the relevant prehistoric people inhabited their landscape' (Fleming 2012, 70). In reality, the switch from river to basin represents a subtle change in scale as well as geography and, although the river is present throughout (in all its different guises), it is the basin that becomes progressively more integral to patterns of occupation.

Because the landscape sequence articulated at King's Dyke and Bradley Fen was commensurate with the river to basin progression – both sharing the same spatial-temporal gradient – the task of integration was fairly straightforward. The topography which defined the former sequence also defined the latter and, owing to the manifest correspondence between age and altitude, its contours joined together points occupying equal time as well as equal height. In this way, we are able to situate key sites, such as Fengate (Gazetteer 4), Tanholt Farm (5), Tower Works (6), Briggs Farm (13), Pode Hole (17), Flag Fen (19 & 20) and Must Farm (23), into the equivalent frame of reference as King's Dyke and Bradley Fen. Key features such as monuments, waterholes, fieldsystems, metalwork deposition and settlement excavated elsewhere in the vicinity can thus

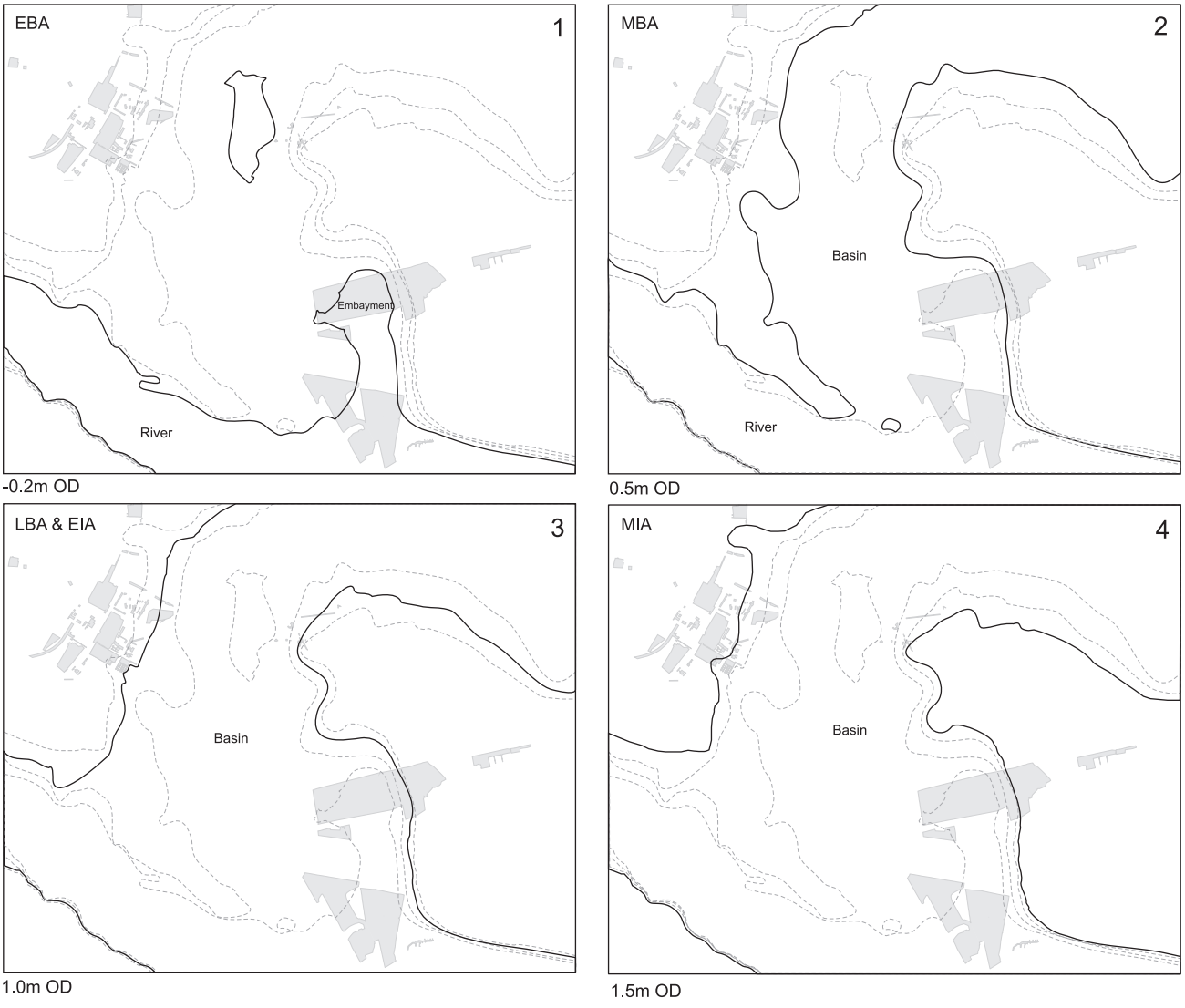


Figure 7.4. *Four wider landscape views.*

be incorporated into the selfsame context. Such an approach makes possible the identification of authentic patterns of occupation and helps to demonstrate why certain features were absent from certain investigations.

The impact of approaching the prehistory of the Flag Fen Basin like this is fundamental in that it remodels our comprehension of its environmental history and cultural geography. In fact, the impact is so fundamental that it suspends the actuality of the Flag Fen Basin altogether and, in its stead, constructs a silted-up river valley beside a largely dryland plain of Early Bronze Age date.

Nene Valley geometries – river and embayment

For those acquainted with the prehistory of the Flag Fen Basin, the opening view will come as something of a revelation. The lack of a defining edge or, at the very least, the introduction of a totally different geographical determinant (i.e. the river) makes this landscape look startlingly unfamiliar (Fig. 7.4 **1**). This quality is amplified by the magnitude of pre-peat or pre-basin activity, but perhaps most of all, by the apparent evaporation of the Fengate shoreline. In this view, the definition of prehistoric occupation has been altered to such an extent that the Fengate investigations no longer describe its distribution (*pace* Pryor). Instead, Fengate has been left stranded, quite literally beached high and dry, by the deeper explorations of Bradley Fen and, more recently, Must Farm (23), Horsey Hill (14) and King's Delph (21).

We can begin to characterize the early landscape by matching 'like-for-like' features between

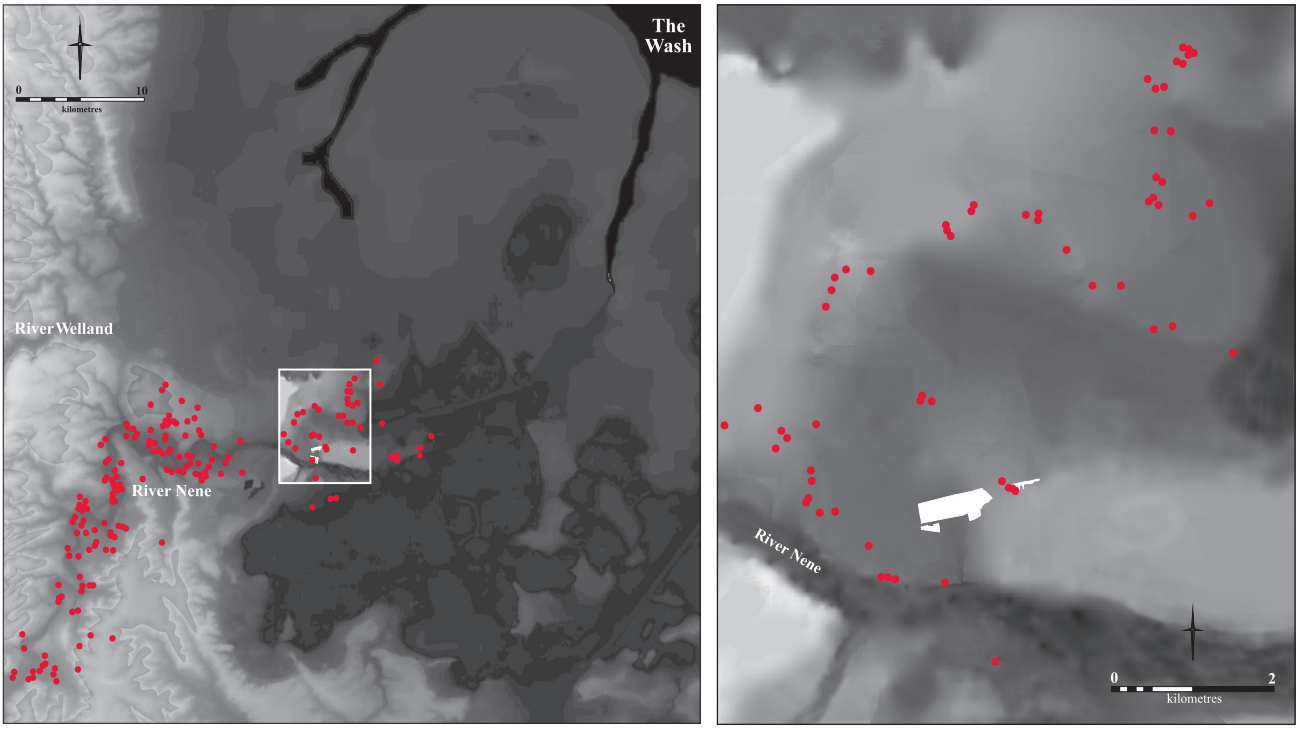
those found at depth and those found higher-up the gradient or edge. By doing things this way we can be more or less assured of contemporaneity. The effect of this approach is dramatic in that it liberates a whole suite of monuments and settlement features from the confines of the fen-edge and by doing so changes how we comprehend the early components of sites such as Fengate, Edgerley Drain Road, Northey Landfall, Briggs Farm and Pode Hole. For example, the deep sub-fen distribution of later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments transforms how we interpret equivalent monuments situated at Storey's Bar Road (Pryor 1978), the Co-op Site (Pryor 2001, 47–50) and Third Drove (Cuttler 1998). These monuments can now be shown to have a distribution separate from that of the Fengate fieldsystem.

At the scale of the 'Flag Fen Basin', there are currently 39 known barrow/ring-ditch monuments. The distribution includes the Fengate group, incorporating Abbott's early twentieth century findings (Pryor 2001; Evans & Appleby 2008, 171–92; Evans 2009b), the Northey group (Britchfield 2010), three barrows at Eye partially excavated by E.T. Leeds in 1910–15 (Hall 1987), the Thorney group (ibid.) and the newly discovered King's Dyke, Must Farm and King's Delph monuments. The 39 monuments are distributed across the basin topography with a near-even split of examples located above and below the 1m contour (Fig. 7.5). They incorporate a mix of monument types (hengi-form, oval barrows, round barrows, causewayed ring-ditches etc.) with an assortment of chronologies (later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age) and ceramic associations (Peterborough Ware, Beaker, Collared Urn and Deverel-Rimbury). All of the monuments are circular or sub-circular in plan and depending on their topographical situation and relation to the deeper sediments, survive as barrow mounds and/or ring-ditches.

Rather than analysing their distribution by monument type (for which the evidence is scarce and often extremely subjective), it is more appropriate in this context to divide the series by configurations of negative (ring-ditch) and positive (barrow) forms. These can be set against contour data for the locality, revealing a striking inter-relationship between peat cover, preservation, form and elevation/altitude (Fig. 7.5). Two key observations can be made. Firstly, the distribution suggests a direct correspondence between ring-ditches and areas of shallow cover and between barrows and areas of deep cover; the former monuments surviving as *denuded* crop marks, the latter as *emergent* earthworks/soil marks. The distinction is marked and demonstrates that *depth* has a significant impact on the current morphology and preservation of the monuments. So clear is this patterning that we can observe an abrupt cut-off between obvious ring-ditch and barrow forms around the 1.5m OD contour. Effectively all the monuments *recently* recorded above this height are, or were, visible as ring-ditches, whilst all those below this elevation were barrows (the difference in form being an attribute of preservation not design).

Issues of preservation aside, the second key observation is that the plot in Figure 7.5 reveals an almost unbroken distribution of monuments across the available contour range in the modern day Flag Fen Basin. Presently, in fact, it would appear that it is only visibility – masking by the peat, coupled with the rarity of large-scale 'deep-fen' excavations – which has prevented us from plotting further monuments below -1m OD. There are no indications that this 'chain' of barrows has reached its 'natural' landscape-end. The importance of this patterning is yet to be acknowledged. Taken together, there are now 18 sub-1m monuments in this landscape, demonstrating a significant below-fen distribution that has major interpretive implications for Fenland prehistory. First and foremost, they make obvious that the previously published fen-edge distribution of Early Bronze Age barrows and ring-ditches (Hall & Coles 1994) is ostensively an artefact of visibility. The increasing recognition of a large number of monuments *within* a high obscuration area demonstrates, categorically, that there are many more monuments hidden beneath the surface of the Fens.

Above all, it is no longer appropriate to describe the distribution of monuments as *fen-edge* and, just like the distribution of barrows/ring-ditches, we too need to locate ourselves below the fen and focus our attention instead, on the underlying geography. By doing so, it soon becomes apparent that the monuments of the Flag Fen Basin form part of a much wider Nene Valley distribution (Deegan 2007b) extending far into Northamptonshire. In short, by acknowledging these broader patterns, we are required to switch our emphasis from fen-edge to river valley. This change not only alters our overall perspective on the earlier prehistoric landscape *per se*, but transforms the context for understanding the principal King's Dyke monument, *the henge*, allowing it to be viewed for the first time as one of several examples in the Nene Valley (such as Thornhaugh and Kings Sutton (Deegan 2007b)). In fact, the upper, middle and lower Nene Valley provides a new context for an entire host of features previously understood in relationship to the fen. By bringing this wider landscape corridor into focus, we can fill in a series of apparent gaps in the local monument repertoire. *Types* are 'absent' only when the Basin



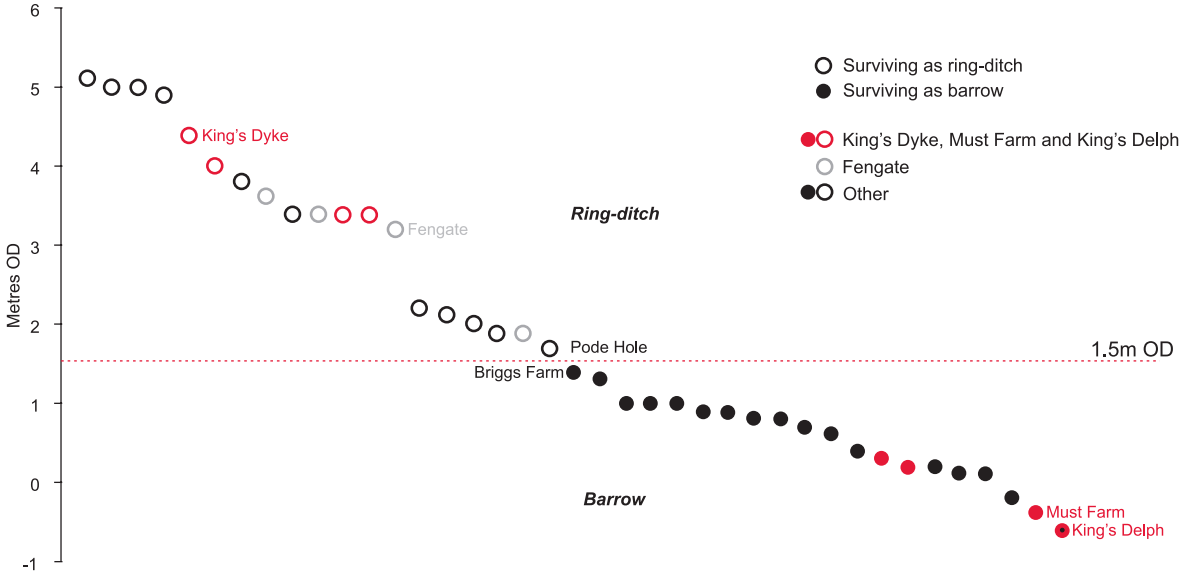


Figure 7.5. *Nene Valley monument distribution (after Harding & Healy 2007, Fig. 5.15), Flag Fen Basin monument distribution and diagram illustrating the relationship between monument form ('negative' ring-ditch or 'positive' barrow) and depth/altitude within the Flag Fen Basin.*

is understood as a closed and inherently significant landscape entity, but not if their distribution is seen from the perspective of the Nene Valley as a whole. We need not only look upstream when trying to come to terms with the river valley patterning, but must take into account what lies within the 'lost' stretch of the lower Nene, buried beneath Peterborough's rural parishes (RCHME 1969). Equally, the King's Delph barrows, including the impressive Suet Hills group and the various barrows and ring-ditched cropmarks further afield at Coates, Eldenell and Eastrea (Hall 1987) can be accommodated into the same configuration.

By making these connections, the geography of monuments is transformed from being essentially introspective, and basin oriented, to outward-looking and valley aligned. The switch is subtle but has major implications in terms of how we understand the scale of these features and the scale of movement and mobility. Indeed, we can extrapolate further and argue that the Early Bronze Age community resided at a scale beyond that of the monuments and was defined by its relationship to the river and *not* to the fen or the Flag Fen Basin (which were yet to emerge as significant landscape entities). As such, it was the Nene Valley corridor that formed the wider community catchment in the late third and early second millennium BC, providing an orientation for monument construction.

As spatial concentrations of temporally discordant activities, barrows can represent a peculiar kind of social construction. The very durability of these features rested in the kinds of emotionally heightened activity that made them and the brief, irregular bursts at which such activity occurred. The focus of these particular spaces was not so much about commemorating the dead (past) but about remembering that these were places where the dead could be buried (future). The overriding impression is of communities scattering burial sites up and down the valley and, at the same time, utilizing and manipulating similar sites previously produced by others. Under these circumstances it was death that represented the principal point of convergence rather than prearranged sites. By the same token, supposed 'isolated' burials (inhumations or cremations) can be incorporated into this scheme as components of the same adaptable pattern of movement.

Harding and Healy suggested 'the use span of a barrow must have varied with the history and needs of the group that built and used it' and that particularly long sequences must have involved 'detailed knowledge communicated over several generations' (2007, 224). Under these kinds of interpretive conditions, continuity prevails, space and time are predetermined and the *living* (present) become tied inextricably to the *dead* (past). Effectively, all Early Bronze Age people are prescribed the same preordained trajectory, save for subtle alterations in the manner which they are treated when they die (interred, cremated etc.). As a consequence process becomes essentially eternal. The evidence, however, including that provided by the King's Dyke complex, implies something much more unpredictable and, therefore, a great deal more open-ended. The configurations contradict any sense of barrows being individual family plots, or of ever accommodating discrete genealogies, but instead suggest protracted lineages strung-out over distributed burial sites (see also Brück 2000, 285). The dead, it seems, 'occupied' the same geographical reach as the living and at a scale equivalent to the community not individuals or families. In the same vein, persistence (as in customary practice) occurred *across*, rather than *within* particular burial places. Yes, the genealogical past was being referenced, both consciously and unconsciously, but this was accomplished by creating and maintaining connections between multiple sites, including places situated far apart.

By extricating the living from the 'immediate' dead in this manner, it also becomes possible to unshackle individual groups of people from specific monuments and therefore specific pieces of land. Under these circumstances tenure takes on a different perspective altogether and becomes more flexible and expansive (Barrett 1994, 143–45). So expansive, in fact, that it extends way beyond our immediate frame of reference. Versatile and wide-ranging forms of tenure do not preclude static settlement structures or, for that matter, other kinds of focused construction. The key features which made up the Early Bronze Age terrain constituted a variety of types of spatial-temporal configurations, each with its own 'composition' of extensity and duration. The burnt mounds, for example, had a restricted extent in that they were confined to the damp margins, whilst the various practices which instigated or perpetuated the building of round barrows had a far greater reach when it came to a choice of location. Both features represented composite edifices but the rhythm of their assembly was manifestly different, burnt mounds being a product of specified *routine*, barrows, a product of an indeterminate sequence of *momentous* events. In amongst these routine and momentous constructions, settlement prevailed and its architecture had a different cadence altogether. Settlement might have been a routine practice but its incidence within our window was far more sporadic and short term. Everything about the character and frequency of dwellings points towards simple one-off occupancies (Brück's 'residentially mobile households' (1999b, 69)), especially when set against the more durable, composite architectures of burnt mounds or barrows.

There are different reasons why communities might favour a system of tenure which is particularly versatile and wide-ranging – one of which is a form of mobile pastoralism. Regionally at least, there is plenty of evidence to support a predominantly cattle-led economy for the later Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age or for that matter, the later Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Pollen and soil analyses collectively describe a landscape where grassland replaced woodland, whilst key features include large waterholes,

trampled surfaces and swathes of hoofprints made by large ungulates. The pastoralist's relationship to land might have been different from the arable farmer's or mixed agriculturalist's but it was no less contingent, especially in terms of access to pasture to graze or sources of water for herds and people (Chatty 1996, 3). At Bradley Fen and at Must Farm, cattle tracks and metalled surfaces made apparent lines of movement, whilst settlement structures, burnt stone mounds and waterholes emerged as points or places where valley life converged for purposes other than the burying of the dead. The river-defined orientation of these features was equivalent to that of the monuments and, but for methodological issues of preservation and accessibility, we can envisage analogous features occurring in similar floodplain settings both up and down the same valley.

In addition, the identification of ephemeral 'brushwood' boundaries of comparable date to the monuments at sites such as Must Farm and Northey Landfall (see also Elliott Site (Evans & Beadsmoore 2009, 77)) clearly shows a hitherto imperceptible facet of the late third and early second millennium riverine landscape. If nothing else, the presence of flimsy wooden fence-lines parcelling-up land in a similar fashion to the later, more substantial or earthfast ditch and bank boundaries, problematizes labelling these landscapes as *open* or *enclosed*. The very possibility of a much earlier but far less tangible framework or delicately bounded *grain* has major ramifications in terms of how we interpret the introduction of formalized land division. As postulated in the previous section, the configuration of monuments and burnt mounds had a strong bearing on the layout of the fieldsystem and there is no reason to believe that the same was not true prior to its architecturally visible formalization. The last thing we want to do, however, is suggest that the barrows and burnt mounds represented fixed points around which land was subsequently organized or appropriated. Quite the reverse, this delicately bounded *grain* was integral to the arrangement of the monuments and mounds. Its 'pattern' may have been made clearer by the enhanced tangibility of these particular constructions but it was not created by them – these things (grain and features) emerged in tandem. This line of interpretation argues against understanding monuments as 'symbolic capital' and therefore largely *of the past* (Cooper & Edmonds 2007, 76) and instead understands these edifices as constructions *in progress* and therefore open to continued investment. The difference is subtle, but nevertheless important, as it also suggests that if there was any 'capital' to be gained out of continuing a relationship between land and these features it was of the direct kind, as opposed to something symbolic or explicitly referential. The important point here is the contiguity of barrows, burnt mounds and the delicately bounded grain – they were *of* the same patterns of mobility.

When brought together the different strands of evidence begin to catch a place of action which extended up and down the river and across the contour; the relationship between features, it seems, was as protracted as the movement between them. The first vestiges of land allotment materialized in the spaces separating round barrows and burnt mounds whilst settlement frequented similar ground. Swathes of metalled surfaces and hoofprints showed where herds had congregated around giant waterholes or had passed over saturated ground. Extended territories built around a predominantly pastoralist economy befits the manifestations presented here.

Striated spaces – embayment and formative basin

For Pryor, the Fengate fieldsystem managed a contracted block of space for an extensive block of time. The system was purposefully coincident with the edge of the fen where it was used to control the movement of stock and regulate access to summer grazing (Pryor 2001). On top of this, core parts of the same system were interpreted as being suitable for communal gatherings (Pryor 1998b). As far as Yates is concerned, the Fengate fieldsystem remains the archetype, both in its organization of space and time and its almost machine-like capacity to generate economic surplus (Yates 2007, 87). In *Fengate Revisited*, Evans (2009c) has the fieldsystem managing the same strip of ground but for a slightly shorter period of time. Its fen-edge relationship is maintained although the system's function is a little less prescriptive. In this model, cattle usurp sheep and Pryor's drafting races are construed as compelling evidence of hedgebanks. In all three cases, the Fengate system has been idealized, at the interpretive expense of other fieldsystems situated in the vicinity (Fig. 4.44).

The 'stranding' of Fengate therefore has considerable implications for how we now comprehend its fieldsystem and land division in this location. To begin with, the supposed perpendicular relationship between Fengate's fields and prevailing environment no longer holds true. In its stead we are left with a partial, infield view of mid second millennium land division, the system's true extent being masked by the very sediment that was previously thought to define it. We would even argue that the apparent perpendicularity was circumstantial because to the north and south of Pryor's main investigations, at Edgerley Drain Road and Tower Works respectively, the juxtaposition between fields and the prevalent environment was more obviously at odds (Evans et al. 2009).

By eradicating Fengate's prescriptive environmental frame, the possibility that the fieldsystem continued eastwards, incorporating a tongue of land which unites Fengate with the Bradley Fen and Must Farm sub-fen landscapes, is introduced. Decisively, these spaces were unified by the bank and ditch boundary identified at Bradley Fen and subsequently at Must Farm, which shared identical contextual circumstances to the truncated 'Neolithic' ditch found at the Power Station excavations (Pryor 2001, 72). Pryor suggested that this 'Neolithic' ditch was important because it was 'roughly aligned on what was later to become a significant part' of the Fengate system. To us it seems almost certain that the ditch represents a straightforward continuation of the fieldsystem and is, in fact, part of the same promontory-edge boundary as that excavated at Bradley Fen and Must Farm. If so, our ditch and bank boundary represents an extension of Fengate – the system's most easterly edge. The consequences of this interpretation are very significant for it binds Fengate and Bradley Fen together in the same contextual framework when previously the 'opposing' systems had been understood as being very different (Evans 2009b, 49).

Both Yates and Evans have commented on the inconsistency of layout amongst the basin edge fieldsystems (Yates 2007, 89–93) and even within Fengate itself (Evans 2009c, 241–42). Overall, it would seem consistency only occurred in blocks and that the broader pattern was generally one of variability – open-up a big enough space and the configuration of a particular fieldsystem is liable to change. Just within the bounds of the Tanholt Farm investigations, it is possible to pick out at least two different systems (Patten 2004), whilst the neighbouring Briggs Farm and Pode Hole configurations appear dissimilar again (Daniel 2009; Pickstone & Mortimer 2011). On current form, there would look to be as many types of fieldsystems as there are sites, to such an extent that the term 'system' no longer seems entirely appropriate. This is not to confuse layout with alignment but to recognize the sheer variability of field shape and size. In this particular landscape, the defining characteristic has tended to be the presence or apparent absence of droveways, although the decisive indicators used for recognizing such features have been about as consistent as the pattern of fields. One site's droveway is another site's strip-field.

Following earlier ideas about the articulation of less tangible landscape configurations or an earlier operational grain, it could even be argued that fieldsystem *organization* and fieldsystem *morphology* were in fact two separate things; the former related to prevailing patterns of tenure, the latter to brand new forms of boundary making. In melding the two together, we finish up with a series of *different* configurations defined by *similar* kinds of division. If both organization and morphology were newly developed surely we should have found more uniform configurations as well as equivalent kinds of division. Previous interpretations of land division have tended to compound patterns of tenure with new forms of boundary making in order to convey a sense of out-and-out landscape transformation or at the very least a sense of new ways in which land was held or occupied. Conversely, the same interpretations also put an emphasis on shared alignments with earlier features to convey a sense of deeper landscape rootedness. Although not strictly contradictory, surely fieldsystems were either original (as in transforming) or derivative (as in continuing) not both.

As we have demonstrated, conditions conducive to peat formation were coincident with the instigation of the fieldsystem but its relationship was far more subtle than previously described. At Bradley Fen the lowest parts of the system cut the first peat, whereas the higher parts were subsequently subsumed by peat. It was subtleties of contour, rather than changes in environment, which came to be defined.

The Flag Fen Basin

Within our deepened landscape frame, the reach of monuments was greater than the reach of fieldsystems and, even if higher up the contour the spatial relationship appeared broadly mutual, lower down, the distribution of the two architectures diverged considerably. On this landscape gradient, divergent distributions can be read as testimony to divergent histories and, sequentially, formalized fieldsystems succeeded configurations of monuments (Fig. 7.6). In turn, concerted metalwork deposition followed fields and, in the same way the distribution of fields diverged from the distribution of monuments, the distribution of metalwork diverged from that of fields. Instead of occurring at the very edge of the fieldsystems, metalwork was deposited at the point where the increasingly saturated environment overlapped existing fields. This relationship was crucial in that it established a vertical rift between the institution of ditch and bank boundaries and the disposal of large numbers of bronze weapons and tools.

The same vertical rift was present at the Power Station investigations with peat again interposing between boundaries and bronzes. The construction of the Flag Fen post-alignment after the onset of peat growth magnified this rift (as indeed, did its thirteenth century BC erection date). It is important to remember that the very preservation of the timber uprights

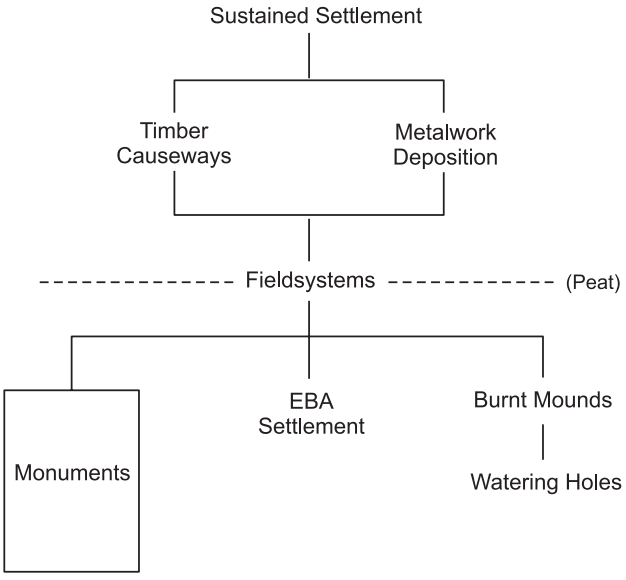


Figure 7.6. *'Vertical rift' in Flag Fen Basin occupation.*

was conditional on the post-alignment's prolonged waterlogged circumstances. In point of fact, the very reason for its existence was the rising saturation and the necessity for people and things to be lifted above the wet. Other, more imaginative, interpretations have been made for the Flag Fen post-alignments and, in particular, its interrelationship with large quantities of metalwork. However, our detailed contextual setting shows that the path of the uprights mimics the route of a former land bridge and the deposition of large quantities metalwork was not exclusive to the alignments. If anything, it seems that the posts shared the equivalent contextual setting as the metalwork and the convergence of the two things was brought about first and foremost by mutual circumstances (i.e. a watery environment). The deposition of later Bronze Age metalwork at Bradley Fen was comparable to that at the Power Station except that it did not have the post-alignment as an additional point of focus. This might also explain the absence of later metalwork from Bradley Fen as the post-alignment persisted as a depositional focus after the fen-edge had shifted further inland.

In many respects, it is the recent discoveries in the Flag Fen Basin which are also forcing us to rethink our perspective on patterns of settlement in the Late Bronze Age. Whilst these are turning some conventional models on their head, at the same time they offer us better ways to understand the 'light' traces of contemporary occupation on the dryland terraces – including those at Bradley Fen. In coming to terms with these new discoveries, we may have to concede that some things in this context are a little less unique than was once supposed, especially with respect to the Flag Fen platform. Indeed, the picture being refashioned is not one of a specialized cult centre in the heart of the Basin, but a thriving wetland community. Still, there remains the danger that wetland settlement 'specialization' will be heralded as the new unique feature of this landscape. This may be true to a certain extent, but if we focus too much on this point, we might lose sight of the way in which patterns of settlement are starting to mirror those associated with other major river valleys, such as the Thames. Here, in the Late Bronze Age, there is the real sense that settlement maintained its relationship to the river corridor *at any cost*, resulting in a high density of sites, and a pronounced settlement/social hierarchy (ringworks and other 'aggrandized' enclosures (Yates 2007, 18)).

The reasons for these developments are clearly complex, but access to the river as the means by which bronzes (as well as other commodities) and their exchange networks were channelled was potentially a major draw for communities. Indeed, direct access to these networks and the control of watercourses are often cited as two of the principal reasons why occupation began to take hold at this time on eyots or islands in the Thames, including sites such as Runnymede Bridge (Needham 1991) or Wallingford (Cromarty et al. 2006). These sites appear to be unlikely choices for settlement, but judging by the wealth of finds, were the context for intense periods of activity. The same might be argued for the wetland sites/settlements in the Flag Fen Basin. The only difference here was that occupation required the colonization of a wetland environment in order to maintain proximity to the watercourses of the River Nene (Bradley 1998, 204). The pattern was essentially the same, reflecting an identical set of concerns surrounding access to routes of communication/exchange networks and, most importantly, access to bronze and the spaces where some of that metalwork would ultimately come to be deposited. After all, this is a region extremely rich in later Bronze Age metalwork, just like the lower Thames valley.

How far these patterns extend to other major river valleys in the region remains to be seen. It is interesting to note that recent excavations at the Over Narrows along the lower Ouse have also uncovered Late Bronze Age settlement and extensive midden deposits on narrow sand ridges between palaeochannels (Evans 2013) – further evidence of the draw of these watercourse locations. Equally significant, the main *floruit* of activity on all these sites ended at, or just after, the close of the Late Bronze Age. In the settlement record of the dryland terraces of the Flag Fen Basin, this coincided with what now appears to be a sudden surge in the

visibility of Early Iron Age occupation (see below). In other words, the Bronze Age–Iron Age transition seems to mark a major *re*-colonization of the dry basin edges.

The causes of this require further investigation, though it is hard to imagine that the collapse of the 'bronze standard' and the cessation of major pan-European exchange networks of bronze were not pivotal in these developments (Needham 2007). With traditional value systems undermined, the benefits of remaining in these wet locations were perhaps now out-stripped by the disadvantages, leading to a wetland settlement exodus and a return to the higher terraces once home to just fields and herder's huts. This model is strikingly different to the conventional story of landscape development in Flag Fen Basin, but does seem to fit the evidence well, if not better than the mainstream narrative. For one, it offers an explanation for the paucity of settlement remains on the basin fringes and a context for understanding the massive investment in water-fast structures in this period. Secondly, it enables us to see these patterns as resonating with those identified elsewhere in southern Britain, meaning that we do not have to frame this region as a unique 'cult centre'. Finally, it softens the kind of deterministic role we often ascribe to the environment in the Flag Fen Basin and shows that communities were quite prepared to, and were capable of, settling in these wetland spaces. Though the rising water-table had effects on the landscape, in the late second and early first millennium BC this did not necessarily *force* people out of the basin interior. Rather the decision to stay or leave seems to have been determined by other concerns shared more widely throughout southern Britain at this time.

Implications – *vertical prehistory*

The implications of practicing an archaeology that sees past the horizontal are many, especially within the context of the Fens but also when considering landscapes elsewhere. By placing emphasis on the vertical, the inclination to suppress difference and contingency is circumvented and, as a result, prehistory reacquires its great depth, its profundity. The objective is to avoid churning out excessively conflatory accounts of the Bronze Age (what we might call a second millennium BC *blend*) or similarly 'flat' explanations of the Iron Age. Fortunately, when exposed to its full vertical extent, prehistory in Fenland presents itself in explicit articulation and there is no reason to believe that the relationships it enunciates were unique to this landscape. As a theoretical insight, however, *vertical prehistory* works best when applied to areas blessed with a similarly dynamic gradient.

For example, the presence of patently terrestrial Early Bronze Age occupation at, or just above 0m OD reshapes Fenland's prehistoric topography (Fig. 7.7). Large tracts of land that were previously regarded as sub-fen or intermittently wet are revealed as dryland,

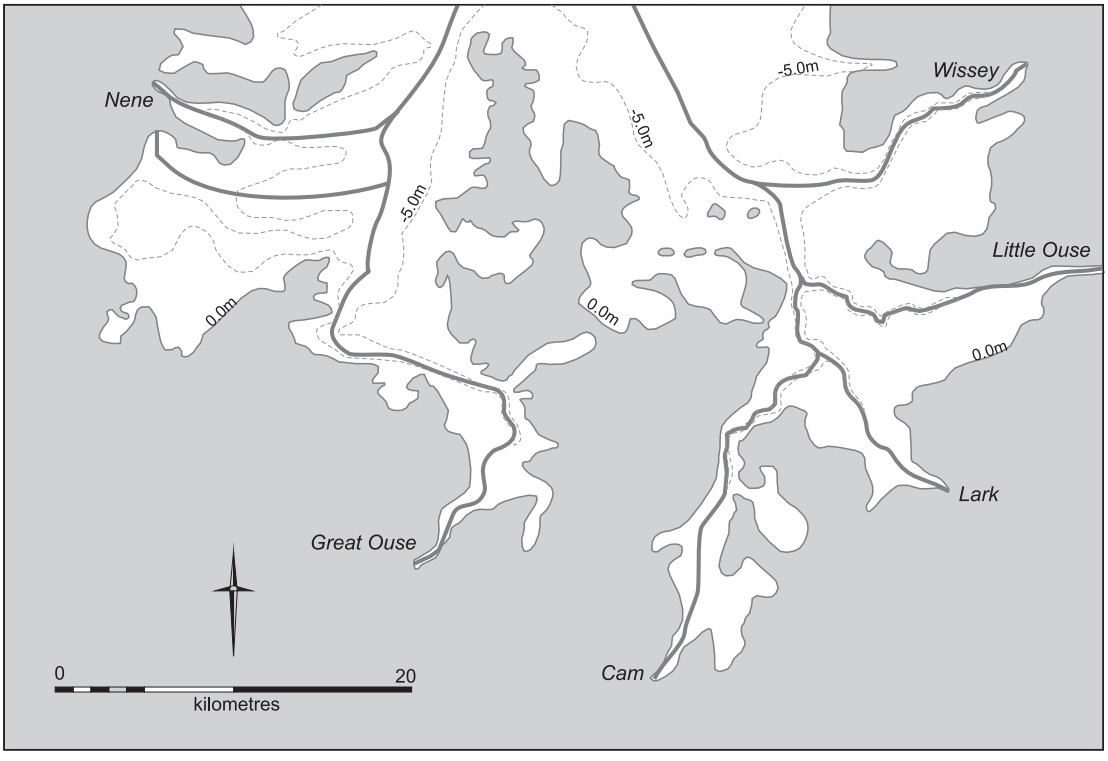


Figure 7.7. *Fenland's prehistoric topography transformed.*

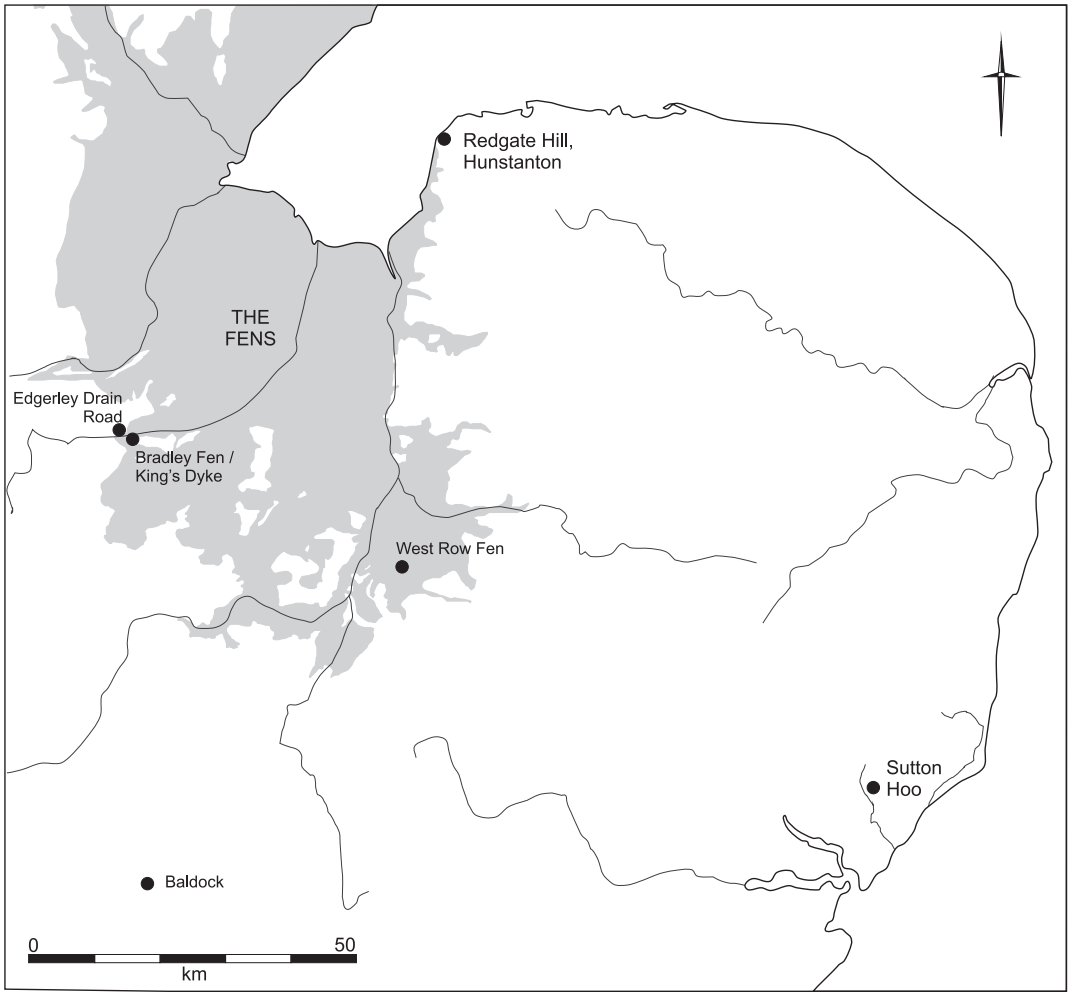
available for sustained settlement in this period. Just as our investigations demonstrated a river valley or pre-fen embayment context for much of the earlier archaeology of the 'Flag Fen Basin', we can envisage a similar dynamic for the rest of the peat fen. By highlighting the equivalent contour, the southern half of Fenland becomes less a peat-filled basin and more a network of major river valleys (Nene, Great Ouse, Cam, Lark, Little Ouse and the Wissey), whose floodplains became overspread with fen-related sediments. At once, the 'islands' of March, Chatteris and Ely, previously understood as fen-locked, are joined into a single landmass, attached to the 'mainland' and forming an undulating central spine dividing its western and eastern rivers. It is in this landscape that we can situate the emerging barrow fields of the lower reaches of the Nene (Must Farm, King's Delph and Suet Hills (Hall 1987, 57) and of the Great Ouse (Needingworth, Over (Evans et al. 2016), Haddenham (Evans & Hodder 2006b) and Block Fen (Hall 1992, 89)) along with the 'pot-boiler' sites or burnt (flint) mounds of the Wissey Embayment (Silvester 1991, 85–87, fig. 49) and the burnt (stone) mounds of the Nene and Great Ouse. The distribution of contemporary settlement at sites such as West Row Fen (Martin & Murphy 1988), Over Narrows (Evans et al. 2016), King's Dyke, Bradley Fen and Must Farm completes the picture and reiterates the Early Bronze Age *triumvirate* of barrows, burnt mounds and settlement (Fig. 7.8).

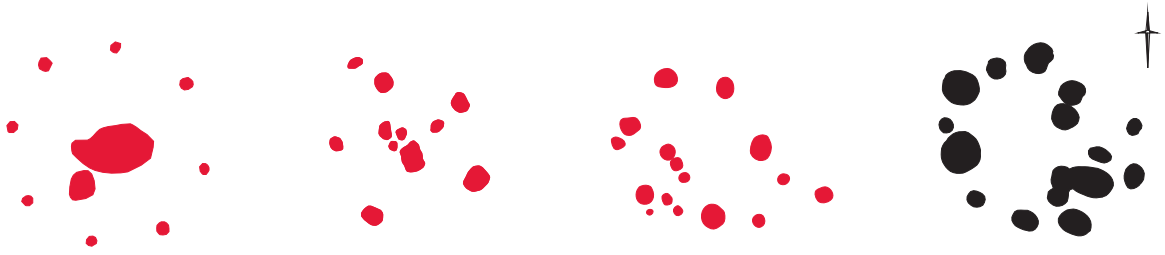
Certainly, the model described here represents a simplified reconstruction of early second millennium BC topography, especially as Fenland's different river valleys and embayments had their own sedimentary histories. However, we feel that the model succeeds in principle in that it envisages a more historically contingent topography than the retrospectively informed, top-down view which pervades many reconstructions of the prehistoric fen. Primarily, its value lies in its potential to reconcile some of the 'apparent gaps or troughs' in the settlement record which prevail to the east and west of Fenland (Healy 1996, 180).

With the new found western pattern of relatively deeply buried burnt mounds and Early Bronze Age settlement it would appear that many of the assumed inconsistencies between the opposing sides of the Fens are in fact related to issues of visibility or extreme post-depositional processes; the western margins being generally covered and protected, the eastern margins, close to the surface and exposed. The extraordinarily erosive land-use patterns of the south-eastern fen-edge have been well documented and shown to have had a drastic impact on later deposits (Healy 1996, 177). With an estimated loss of centuries of settlement over the past four or five decades the same sites have continued to yield earlier and earlier material as the current land surface keeps being denuded (Silvester 1991, 136). The shallowness of cover at locales such as the Wissey Embayment means that what survives of its Bronze Age archaeology resides very close to, or at, the present surface, whereas the depth of cover in the Flag Fen Basin is such that deep excavation is essential in order to fully elucidate its Bronze Age archaeology. As outlined above, until the excavations at Bradley Fen ventured at scale beneath the 1m OD contour, there was no indication of the presence of burnt mounds and our understanding of Early Bronze Age settlement patterns was at best limited. To uncover archaeology equivalent to that exposed along the south-eastern fen, it was necessary to explore further down the edge than had been attempted before.

From earlier accounts you would be forgiven for thinking Bronze Age Fenland was polarized geographically with the western edge being made up predominantly of formalized fieldsystems and the eastern edge of early settlement spreads and burnt mounds. The distinction was remarkable, except that, it is now evident that the marked distinction was temporal. Vertically separate 'horizons' on the Basin's spatial-temporal gradient were being investigated and, more significantly, being compared. In reality, the features that typified the east were located below the features that typified the west.

Publications describing the artefact assemblages retrieved from the eastern fen-edge consistently called attention to the apparent disparity between its *dry* Early Bronze Age ceramic component and its *wet*, but spatially adjacent, later Bronze Age metalwork component (Hall & Coles 1994, 87; Healy 1996). In these circumstances, the dry/wet divide was understood as being especially problematic because the metalwork was devoid of an obvious terrestrial settlement context (Healy 1996, 181). This disparity is resolved when it is understood that accelerated drainage, intensified farming practices and peat wastage have progressively reduced the south-eastern fen-edge to the extent that very little survives of post-Early Bronze Age occupation (Fig. 7.9). Whilst others have taken the juxtaposition of early and late at face value and related the distribution of metalwork directly with that of burnt mounds (Yates & Bradley 2010, 413; Malim et al. 2010), in reality, the pattern demonstrates just how much of the later landscape has actually been lost. In terms of our understanding of the fen-edge gradient and its ability to act as an extremely effective spatial-temporal scale, however, the survival of later Bronze Age metalwork along the eastern margins illustrates just how alike the eastern and western edges once were. It also implies that, prior to erosion, the dry eastern margins once



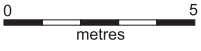


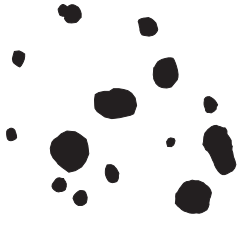
Bradley Fen (Str.1)

Bradley Fen (Str.2)

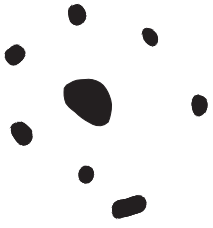
King's Dyke (Str.3)

Edgerley Drain Road

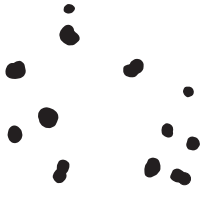




Sutton Hoo



Redgate Hill



West Row Fen

Baldock

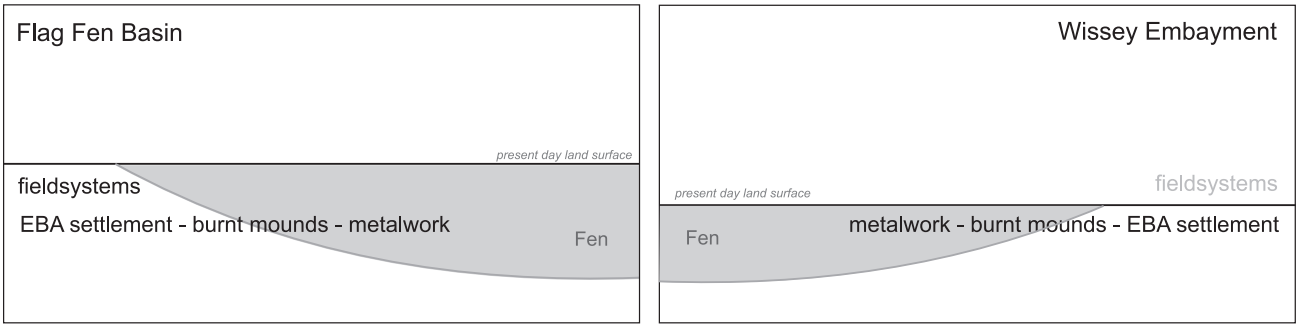


Figure 7.9. *Models of the survival of archaeology on the western (Flag Fen Basin) and eastern (Wissey Embayment) fen-edge.*

contained traces of other later second millennium BC features including Middle Bronze Age fieldsystems and later Bronze Age settlement.

The vexed question of finding a terrestrial context or home for the later Bronze Age metalwork found along the wet margins of the eastern fens brings us right back to where we began. If truth be told, later Bronze Age metalwork has persistently been coupled with much earlier landscape features regardless of the fact that the bulk of the objects were deposited into overspreading sediments. In Fenland, the context of metalwork was not the same as the context of burnt mounds; there exists an appreciable vertical gulf between the two entities in spite of their horizontal proximity. The same can also be said of metalwork and fieldsystems (even if the vertical divide is less evident) and, however tempting it is to equate burnt mounds and fieldsystems with the influx of metalwork, this landscape's enduring stratigraphy advocates a much less collapsed trajectory. Within this terrain, sediment repeatedly interposes and in doing so cautions us against the invention of composite landscapes. Despite the persuasive arguments which interpret fieldsystems as the economic 'motor' behind the profusion of metalwork that occurred in the later second millennium BC, there remains a stratigraphic rift between the two. To truly demonstrate the context of metalwork, we need to extricate it from these erstwhile spaces and resituate it in relationship to features and sediments that were genuinely coeval with its employment and its deposition. The same can be said for all things – context is paramount.

Figure 7.8 *(opposite). Distribution map and ground plans of Early Bronze Age structures in East Anglia; incorporating the Bradley Fen and King's Dyke examples alongside Edgerley Drain Road, Peterborough (Structure 1 – Beadsmoore & Evans 2009, 137, fig. 4.16); Sutton Hoo, Suffolk (Roundhouse S26 – Hummler 2005, 417, fig. 179); Redgate Hill, Hunstanton, Norfolk (Structure J – Patten 2002a, 4, fig. 4); West Row Fen, Suffolk (House – Martin & Murphy 1988, 354, fig. 1); and Baldock Bypass, Hertfordshire (Roundhouse L130 – Phillips 2009, 26, fig. 3.4).*

Futures

In the production of this volume we have reaffirmed the spatial-temporal veracity of Fenland when it comes to articulating later prehistoric landscapes. Our aim from the very outset was to reassert the Basin's overlooked *vertical* dimension as a means of counterbalancing the *spatial turn* which had come to dominate interpretations of the patterns in its prehistoric occupation. The choice of approach was in many ways contingent on the circumstances we found ourselves in (i.e. an extremely deep brick pit) although, even then, it took a while to fully appreciate the possibilities of excavating a buried landscape completely. Coming to comprehend that throughout prehistory the fen-edge was always temporary altered our perspective dramatically. Before, we had been working under the impression that the fen-edge was primarily a geographical feature, whereas in reality, its capacity to define landscapes was historical too. In digging a site at the edge of a concave-shaped basin, with an exaggeratedly time-transgressive environment, we managed to bring to light a 'ramp' or gradient which had a historical-geographical range entirely commensurate with later prehistory. By simply exploring the gradient up and down, and side to side, it was possible to articulate the actual spatial-temporal extent of different occupations. The only limitation was the scale of the gradient within the investigation area. In the case of King's Dyke and Bradley Fen, we were able to reveal the relative *reach* of features such as fieldsystems, metalwork and concerted settlement. But this was only part of the story, as it was obvious

Figure 7.10. *Bradley Fen: first exposure of the 'wet' boundary bank and ditch.*

that features such as barrows, metalled surfaces, burnt mounds and waterholes had a much greater range or distribution than the spatial-temporal scale of our excavation aperture. In our downward pursuit of the extensity of things, we had run out of space and time. The most important thing, however, was that we were aware of the fact; that despite its horizontal immensity, the scope of the opening we had imposed upon the landscape was still restricted vertically.

Since then, the neighbouring Must Farm and King's Delph investigations have started to address the problem of a delimited verticality by proceeding much further down the Fenland gradient. In doing so, these investigations have been able to describe the spatial-temporal reach of barrows, burnt mounds and waterholes. At the same time other feature-types have increased in intensity (metalled surfaces) or cropped up for the first time (Grooved Ware pits). The progression down the 'ramp' continues to produce material equivalent to that found on the surface along Fenland's eastern margins. At these contours, the landscape looks less and less like Fengate and more and more like the Wissey Embayment in character, whilst the age-altitude correspondence bears a remarkable resemblance to the sequence first established at Peacock's Farm (Clark et al. 1935; Smith et al. 1989). At Must Farm, the Flandrian deposit sequence of lower peat, fen clay, upper peat and upper silt overlies an old land surface situated at close to -3m OD. Large and small silted-up river channels and roddons inter-cut different stages in the Flandrian sequence and, in doing so, reveal a whole new component to the prehistoric archaeology of the Flag Fen Basin. For the first time, substantial, unambiguous later Bronze Age occupation has been traced out into the basin sediments via the watercourses and this has conclusively changed the parameters by which we define the settlement of prehistoric Fenland.

Within the extensive area of Forterra's Whittlesey Brick Pits the progression up and down the Fenland gradient has continued to make different components

of prehistoric occupation visibly distinct. As one kind of settlement disappears beneath part of the Flandrian sequence another occurs higher up. As a consequence, it has become possible to discern pattern in a way not normally perceivable in more conventional circumstances: in this place the chronological resolution is much sharper than usual. The volume presented here represents the first in a series, all written under the banner of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit's Must Farm/Flag Fen Basin '*Depth & Time*' Series. It is intended that future volumes will sustain the vertical theme established here, taking it to a whole new level as our investigations progress further into the deep. If this volume originated at the surface, the final volume should culminate at the very base of the Basin (the Must Farm 'dryland'). Appropriately, the next volumes in the series will present a prehistoric archaeology positioned somewhere in-between, describing occupations detached from dryland and temporally suspended in Fenland's accruing sediments (the Must Farm palaeochannel and the Must Farm platform).

Time emplaced

'Moreover, the transformational potential inherent in the awareness of 'time emplaced' renders the ancestral past not as a frozen, timeless, mythical domain, but as historical and dynamic'. (Toren 1995, 164)

Right from the very beginning, when we first started machining Bradley Fen, the intention was to do more than identify a series of sites. The Watching Brief methodology or Strip, Map and Record programme designed for the project placed us in-between the stripping of the overburden and the removal of the mineral and, as a result, archaeology became intrinsic to the extraction process. The scale of the investigation was equivalent to the scale of the quarrying and the limit of excavation corresponded to a line drawn by the mineral extractors and local planning authority and as such was archaeologically arbitrary. As archaeologists we stopped where the developers stopped. The upshot of this approach was the exposure of large empty areas or blank zones in-between features. There were times when nothing was found and we drew up base plans with nothing to show. We were prepared to 'watch' these blank spaces in the understanding that these pieces of empty ground represented the opposite of gaps in the record or places where nothing happened. Instead, the spaces in-between features were construed as valid interludes in the intensity, or rather extensity, of occupation and thus integral to the way in which the constituent parts of that occupation were interrelated or arranged.

At the time, we described what we were doing as the *archaeology of the spaces in-between things*, but we could have also called it the *topology of dwelling*, the spaces between features being less quantitative (geometric) and more qualitative (topologic) with the focus being less on measurement or distance and more on connections and relations (see Shields 2013, 103). At the very least, it prevented prolonged 'emptiness', or blank zones, from being interpreted as limits or edges of 'sites' but instead as authentic manifestations of breaks or pauses in settlement. The natural consequence of approaching things this way was a reluctance to stop excavating, irrespective of how 'empty' the landscape seemed. Whereas before we might have stopped at the recognized fen-edge, we now carried on regardless and, in doing so, began the process of trying to trace things to their actual maximum spatial-temporal reach. The methodology and attitude which drove this landscape approach represents the theoretical insight that now drives the Must Farm investigations. By consciously accentuating the temporal or vertical aspect of the Flag Fen Basin, it is hoped that we have also helped to reanimate the spatial or horizontal aspect of this most remarkable landscape.

Addendum

A scientific date for the Bradley Fen logboat and its stratigraphical/palynological implications

Following the completion of the publication text, the re-used logboat fragment from waterhole **F.1064** was radiocarbon wiggle-matched and shown to be later Iron Age in date and not Bronze Age, as suggested in Chapter 5 of this volume (*Settlement in the Post-fieldsystem Landscape 1100–400 cal* BC). The radiocarbon dates established that the final ring of the fragment's tree-ring sequence was formed in *305–270 cal* BC (*95% probability*) and, with the absence of a heartwood/sapwood boundary, this date now provides a Middle Iron Age *terminus post quem* for the felling of the tree, and accordingly, the construction of the logboat (Tyers et al. 2017).

A 'new' date for the logboat has significant chronological implications for waterhole F.1064 and for the context of the pollen sequence obtained from its sediments. On the basis of a small collection of Middle Iron Age potsherds located in its uppermost fills, F.1064 was originally interpreted as Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age in origin. As a result, the pollen assemblage from F.1064 was analysed as being characteristic of the earlier first millennium cal BC environment.

The Middle Iron Age *terminus post quem* provided by the dating of the logboat fragment located at the base of the pollen sequence means that the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age attribution of F.1064 was misplaced. In light of this, the waterhole, together with Boreham's pollen summary describing a post-clearance pastoral landscape of meadows and grassland with some arable activity and a little wet woodland, should now be regarded as components of the later first millennium cal BC landscape, as described in Chapter 6 (*The Arrival of Fen-edge Settlement 400–100 cal* BC).

Tyers, I., P. Marshall, C. Bronk Ramsey & E. Dunbar, 2017. Radiocarbon wiggle-matching of the Bradley Fen logboat (F.1064). (Unpublished report for Cambridge Archaeological Unit.) Cambridge Archaeological Unit.

Pattern and Process

The King's Dyke and Bradley Fen excavations occurred within the brick pits of the Fenland town of Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. The investigations straddled the south-eastern contours of the Flag Fen Basin, a small peat-filled embayment located between the East-Midland city of Peterborough and the western limits of Whittlesey 'island'. Renowned principally for its Bronze Age discoveries at sites such as Fengate and Flag Fen, the Flag Fen Basin also marked the point where the prehistoric River Nene debouched into the greater Fenland Basin.

A henge, two round barrows, an early fieldsystem, metalwork deposition and patterns of sustained settlement along with metalworking evidence helped produce a plan similar in its configuration to that revealed at Fengate. In addition, unambiguous evidence of earlier second millennium BC settlement was identified together with large watering holes and the first burnt stone mounds to be found along Fenland's western edge.

Genuine settlement structures included three of Early Bronze Age date, one Late Bronze Age, ten Early Iron Age and three Middle Iron Age. Later Bronze Age metalwork, including single spears and a weapon hoard, was deposited in indirect association with the earlier land divisions and consistently within ground that was becoming increasingly wet.

The large-scale exposure of the base of the Flag Fen Basin at Bradley Fen revealed a sub-peat or pre-basin landscape related to the buried floodplain of an early River Nene. Above all, the revelation of sub-fen occupation helped position the Flag Fen Basin in time as well as space.

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