

A Bronze Age round barrow and Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Upthorne Road, Stanton, Suffolk

MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, on behalf of Abbey Homes, to undertake archaeological work in advance of a new development on land between Upthorpe Road and Hepworth Road, Stanton, as a condition of the planning application (SE/10/1410). As trial trench evaluation had located three inhumation burials, then undated, and a ditch of Bronze Age date, the Suffolk planning archaeologist requested more extensive excavation.

In November 2013, an area measuring 80m by 50m was opened along the southern edge of the field beside Upthorpe Road. The ditch was seen to be circular in plan, 30m in diameter, encircling a former burial mound, levelled by later ploughing, and the initial three burials were found to be just part of a much larger cemetery.

The ring ditch was up to 5.0m wide and 1.3m deep, and sherds of Bronze age pottery were recovered from the upper fills. No central burial or other contemporary burials had survived, but the size and the location, on higher ground, are typical of many Bronze Age round barrows.



The Bronze Age ring ditch, looking west

The burial mound was still standing 2500 years later, when it was chosen to be the focal point for a cemetery in the early Anglo-Saxon period. A total of over 70 burials were excavated and recorded during the archaeological works, and there is evidence of two distinct burial traditions

About 30 burials had been interred in graves either cut into the fills of the ditch surrounding the barrow or close by, positioned following the curve of the ditch. These individuals had been buried with grave goods: the men with knives, spears and wooden shields, of which the iron blades, spear heads and shield bosses survived, the women with copper alloy brooches and small collections of beads. One individual also had an iron hammer axe. Mineralised wood and fabric impressions survived on some of these objects, and the brooches date these burials to around the 5th-7th century AD.



Two Anglo-Saxon burials in the Bronze Age ring ditch, one with an iron spear head and a circular shield boss behind his head

Over time the burial customs changed. The later burials, perhaps dating to the late 7th or early 8th century, clustered on the southern and eastern side of the barrow. They were not accompanied by grave goods, apart from the occasional iron knife, and the graves were aligned east to west, with the head to the west. The alignment and the lack of grave goods is the in fashion of Christian burials. One notable individual in this group was in a deep grave pit with six surrounding postholes, suggesting that he lay under a timber mausoleum.



Burial in a deep grave with surrounding postholes of possible timber mausoleum

As part of the post excavation analysis, the skeletons will be examined by an osteologist to assess age, sex and height, and to record any signs of trauma or disease. The many finds will also be analysed and conserved. A detailed report on the results will be published in a local archaeological journal.