1.10 Pits

List of pits

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Descriptions of the pits

F683 E630603 Pit used as ?cold store

Depth: 0.99 m  Base length: 2.6 m, width: 1.0 m
Volume: 3.55 cu m  Top length: 3.04 m, width: 1.54 m

Rectangular; uneroded; even flat sides and floor, well finished, but no toolmarks. A recessed ledge 0.1–0.14 m deep and 0.15 m wide ran along the north-east side. This recessed edge may have supported a timber cover that could have been lifted to provide access to the pit. A likely use for this type of pit within a building would be as a cold store for food.

1° (6) A wedge-shaped layer at either end infilled the basal angles; it consisted of light greyish brown silty soil containing much chalk grit and a moderate density of sub-angular/rounded chalk fragments up to 40 mm.

2°–3° (5) This very thick deposit infilled more than two-thirds of the pit. It consisted of light yellowish grey, well compacted, chalky silt containing a high density of sub-angular/rounded chalk up to 50 mm and grit, plus occasional small broken flints and numerous thin discontinuous diffuse lenses of ash throughout.

3° (4) In the hollow at the top at the north end was a layer of compact grey ash containing chalk grit and occasional small flints, limestone fragments and oyster shell.

T (3a) A thin lens at the interface of layers 3 and 4 consisted of small clay tile fragments 5–15 mm.

(3) Over this was a deposit of flint nodules 60–250 mm and broken limestone slates 80–210 mm lying flat in a matrix of brown clay-silt soil.

(2) On the south side was a tip of subrounded chalk lumps up to 30 mm concentrated into slight bands or patches set in light brown silt.

(1) Across the top of the pit was a general layer of brown clayey silt containing broken limestone roof slates, clay tile fragments and building debris.
F708 E957411 Pit – ?grain storage

Depth: 0.8 m  Base diameter: 0.85 m  Top diameter: 1.2 m
Erosion cone: 1.05 m

Cylindrical; uneroded; walls rough finish, no toolmarks.

Fill cycle: 2

B/1°  (4) Orange brown clayey silt containing a moderate density of subangular chalk up to 40 mm, plus occasional small flints and charcoal, formed a deliberate tip on the pit base.

(4a) Probably placed at the interface of layers 4 and 3 were four angular flint nodules up to 200 mm long placed end to end against the pit wall in the south-east quadrant. These appeared to be a deliberately placed structured deposit.

2°  (3) = (406) Infilling over half the pit was a deliberate dump of dark grey fine powdery ash containing rare chalk grit and small chalk fragments, burnt shattered flints 40–60 mm, charcoal fragments up to 30 mm and pot sherds. A lens of chalk fragments occurred along its base and a thin brown clay lens in the centre of the dump.

3°  (2) Confined to the central hollow in the top of layer 3 was a small lens of tight packed angular chalk up to 50 mm in a matrix of fine chalk powder. This deliberately dumped deposit may have formed a surface sealing the top of the pit, which has subsequently subsided slightly into the pit.

(1) Filling the top of the pit was a sticky light yellowish brown clayey soil containing a low density of small chalk and rare angular flints. This was probably a natural soil accumulated over the pit top.

F723 E991393 Pit – ?grain storage

Depth: 0.9 m  Base diameter: 1.25 m  Top diameter: 1.45 m

?Barrel/subrectangular; eroded/?recut; walls rough finish, no toolmarks.

Fill cycle: 2c

1°  (4) Filling the southern basal angle was a deliberate tip of compact brown clay with a low density of small rounded chalk, merging into layer 5 at the toe of the tip.

2°  (5) Tipped in from the north side was a compact pale brown silty clay mixed with a high density of small chalk with occasional blocks up to 80 mm.

(3) Layer 5 merged in the centre with a tip from the south of small angular chalk fragments and grit in a matrix of pale grey clayey soil.

3°  (2) Across the top of the pit was a dump of angular chalk blocks 10–70 mm plus rare small flints set in a matrix of pale yellowish brown clayey silt. This may have deliberately sealed the pit surface and subsequently subsided.

T  (1) In the top hollow was a layer of dark grey fine ash and charcoal powder in a clayey soil matrix with chalk grit. This was the only occupation debris in the pit.
F735  E832646    Well

Length: top – 2.25 m  Width: top – 2.0 m  Depth: >1.85 m
Length at 1.85 m deep – 1.8 m  Width at 1.85 m deep –

Form: This pit appeared circular on the surface, but with depth it became apparent that this was a sharply rectangular-cut feature with straight vertical sides roughly finished, cut into chalk below 0.7 m. It was uneroded, but possibly worn around the top. Only one half was excavated to a depth of 1.85 m, stopping at the top of layer 5. The form suggested this feature was a well rather than a pit and it was therefore considered impractical to excavate further. (Wells in the area traditionally reached at least 200 ft.)

Fill:  (5) This was the lowest layer exposed, but only at its surface. It was loose packed chalk rubble up to 40–60 mm with rare angular flints c.80 mm in a matrix of pale yellowish brown clayey silt. As the walls of the feature did not appear to be eroded, this is most likely a deliberate dump of freshly quarried chalk.

(4)/(5) Animal bones noted at the interface of layers 4 and 5 may have been some sort of special deposit. Analysis of the bone may provide further information on this.

(4) A thick near horizontal dump of dark brown clayey soil was virtually stone-free except for very rare chalk grit and small flints. It contained charcoal fragments scattered throughout and a thin discontinuous lens of ash towards the base of the layer.

(3) Above this was a substantial layer of burnt debris in which four individual lenses could be discerned. A thin lens of charcoal fragments defined the base. The bulk of the layer was fine dark grey ash containing daub fragments, charcoal, burnt flint grit and bone, some burnt. This was subdivided by a tip of brown clay.

(2) A thick dump of brown sticky clay soil containing a moderate density of subangular chalk up to 55 mm, occasional flints, frequent charcoal and artefacts filled most of the remainder of the feature.

(1) The top was sealed by a surface formed of compact rammed subangular chalk up to 60 mm in a matrix of fine chalk and a small quantity of light brown clayey soil. This formed a hard surface for the floor of the aisled hall and appears to overlap the edge of the wall footing F650, that has been set deep into the fill of F735 here.

F764   Tr 3    K827547    Pit (rectangular)

Length: 1.60 x 1.07 m  Base: 0.84 x 0.56 m  Depth: 0.87  Volume: 0.81 cu m

Subrectangular pit with flat base and vertical sides, which splay out slightly at the top, probably indicative of slight erosion of the upper lip. Grave? Isolated.

1°  (3) [Eroded weathered chalk rubble] Angular chalk blocks c.30 mm in light brown silty soil with chalk grit. N24

2°  (2) [Special deposit] of adult human body: the skeleton lay front downwards with the torso and thighs aligned along the long axis of the pit with the right arm folded across in front of the chest and the left arm tightly bent so both hands were under the chest (?tied). The upper back and neck bent to the left so the head faced into the north-east corner of the pit with the head pulled back so the skull was sitting upright looking at the pit wall. The knees were tightly bent and the lower legs crossed and were inclined so the left foot lay on the south side of the pit and the right foot on the north at a higher level than the rest of the
skeleton. The pit was about 1.2 m long at this point and clearly too short for an adult body. The body is not a normal Roman inhumation and bears comparison with Iron Age type deposits. R32

(2a) [Deliberate tip] Light brown silty soil containing moderate–high density of small chalk c.10–20 mm and grit very evenly distributed throughout the layer. This layer was 0.3 m thick, fairly level and only just covered the skeleton. In excavation it was not differentiated from 2b. D14

(2) [Special deposit of infant]: Resting on the surface of layer 2a (at a depth of 0.52 m) was a second human deposit of fragments of neonatal cranium (possibly two individuals). They had been placed in the centre of the pit above the pelvis of the adult. R33(2)

[Special deposit of animal mandible] At a slightly higher level (50 mm) and just to the north of the skull fragments an animal mandible had been placed lying flat. R39

3° (2) [Special deposit of metalwork] SF2313: Fe object with mineralized wood, 2343; Fe object, 2367; Fe sheet, 2388; Fe fragments, 2409; 3 Fe nails, 2503–2507; 2 Fe staples; 1 Fe joinery dog; 2 Fe objects. A large quantity of Fe metal work, mainly attachments, may have represented a deliberately placed object, possibly something made in timber and broken up. R47

(2b) [Deliberate tip] Light brown silty soil containing a high density of chalk grit and moderate density of larger lumps 10–50 mm, generally fairly rounded. Some chalk appeared to form diffuse lenses or tip lines. Also occasional flints up to 70 mm, lumps of daub and flecks of charcoal. D15

(1) Greyish brown silty soil containing moderate density of subangular chalk 5–20 mm and rare angular flints c.15 mm. [Wedge-shaped tip infilling top on west side.] D01

SF2314–2319: 5 Fe fittings (?staples), 1 Fe sheet with rivet, SF2408, 5 Fe nails. F772

F772 Tr 3 K832446 Pit (oval + gully)

Length: 2.25, 2.10 m Width: 1.68, 1.40, 1.98 m Depth: 0.40 m Volume: 1.11 cu m

Oval, basin-shaped pit with steep sides and flattish, slightly dished base. The base was very smooth and worn. On the east forming an integral part of the feature was a shallow curving gully c.1.5 m long with U-shaped profile 0.36 m wide. The terminal was rounded and slightly bulbous widening to 0.48 m. Here the gully was only 50 mm deep but its base gradually sloped down to 90 mm close to the pit, then quite steeply to 150 mm beside the pit edge. Discontinuous burning around the upper edges most likely resulted from the collapsed burning roof, rather than being indicative of its primary function. The pit was empty when the roof of building 4 collapsed. ?Milling. Within building 4; cut L453, ?F810.

Fill cycle: 2c

(3) Large fragments of broken, limestone roof slates 250–300 mm, extremely burnt lying horizontally in a fine dark grey matrix of ash and charcoal with a little chalk and flint grit. [Collapsed burning roof.] D67

(2) Large broken fragments of burnt limestone roof slates 80–250 mm lying horizontally in a matrix of brown clayey soil with much chalk and flint grit. Also occasional burnt grey blocks of sandstone or limestone. Some of the slabs looked almost deliberately stacked, but this was probably the effect of the slates falling in blocks (possibly still nailed to timbers), so their overlapping positions were preserved. [Collapsed burning roof.] D67
Flint nodules 80–180 mm, sandstone/limestone masonry (burnt) 80–120 mm and few limestone roof slates 80–200 mm (mostly protruding through from (2) at pit edges) were set in a matrix of degraded light yellowish white mortar. [Wall debris – collapsed or demolished after fire.] D17

F785  Tr 4  L088636  Pit (figure-of-eight)

Length: 1.64 m  Width: 1.30, 0.80 m  Base width: 0.5, 0.7 m  Depth: 0.76, 0.8, 0.82 m  Volume: 0.94 cu m

Subrectangular pit apparently cut by digging two circular pits joined by demolishing the natural between or dug as three separate conjoining cuts. The base was cut to four separate levels, three of them rounded in form. The pit walls were vertical or slightly barrel-shaped in profile with slight undercutting in places. The pit was cut through clay at the top, chalk marl below and soliflucted chalk towards the base.

Fill cycle: 2c  Isolated

1°  (1a) Filling the lower third of the pit was a compact very clayey brown soil containing a moderate density of chalk grit and rare rounded lumps up to 20 mm. [Mainly deliberate tip, but probably with some eroded clay.] D01

(2) Small lenses of natural eroded or slumped from the edges of the pit. On the north side this was a wedge of pale yellowish brown chalky clay marl with fine lenses of soil, whilst on the south solid brown clay had slumped in at the top and a small lens of chalk grit had eroded lower down. [Natural erosion.] N24, N29

2°–3°  (1b) Filling the upper two-thirds of the pit was a solid compact layer of brown clayey soil containing a moderate density of chalk grit and small subrounded chalk 10–30 mm very evenly distributed. Also scattered through the fill were occasional angular broken flints c.75 mm, shattered burnt flints 30–50 mm and nodules 130 mm. Flecks of charcoal occurred consistently throughout in low density. [Deliberate dump.] D01

F787  Tr 4  L176656  Pit (rectangular)

Length: 2.02 x 1.70 m  Base: 0.90 x 0.70 m  Erosion cone: 1.6 x 2.13 m  Depth: 0.90 m  Volume: 2.81 cu m

Rectangular pit with straight steep, near vertical sides, curving in to flat slightly undulating base. There was a shallow shelf along the upper edge of the pit on the west side measuring up to 0.4 m wide at the south thinning to 0.1 m at the north-west corner of the pit. Any similar feature on the east side was obliterated by overcutting. The pit was partly filled to a depth of 0.2–0.5 m when the roof of the building collapsed. ?Cold store. Isolated; within building 3.

Fill cycle: 1b

1°  (2) Well compacted light brown clayey marl, brown clay and soil mixed with large quantities of chalk grit and small subrounded chalk lumps 10–50 mm plus occasional broken worn flints c.30–50 mm. A few fragments of clay tile were embedded in the top of the layer at the interface with (1b). [Deliberate tip most probably, unless this is material eroding off the
adjacent walls of the building after it fell into disuse.] D04

2°–3° (1b) Large pieces of limestone roof slate ranging from complete c.350 x 280 mm down to 130 mm, though most were c.200–250 mm. Their thickness was 15–25 mm. The slates were lying at an angle against the side of the pit or flat in the centre. Also present were a few fragments of clay tile c.100 mm and the occasional flint nodules c.110 mm. These were all loosely packed in crumbly brown clayey soil mixed with chalk grit and small subangular chalk 10–30 mm and containing occasional charcoal flecks. [Collapsed roof debris and natural silting.] N30

(1a) Limestone roofing slates formed c.80% of the layer. Many were complete or nearly so and were generally inclined following the underlying layer or the pit sides, many overlapping as they would have done on the roof. Interspersed with these were large shaped flint nodules 100–250 mm long, which were particularly concentrated at the north end of the pit and may have derived from the north wall F804 of building 3. Also a few pieces of clay tile and blocks of concrete. The matrix surrounding these was a grey crumbly soil with small chalk fragments and grit, small flints and pieces of fired clay. [Collapse of building.] N30

F793 Tr 4 L180740 Pit (cylindrical)
Length: 1.86 m  Width: 1.60 m  Base width: 1.60, 1.30 m
Erosion cone: 2.06 x 1.7 m  Depth: 2.45 m  Volume: 5.47 cu m
Slightly oval in plan, but basically cylindrical with straight vertical sides, flat base and sharp basal angles. There is possibly some slight collapse/erosion from part of the walls on the north side. The walls were roughly finished with no signs of any tool marks. Possibly best interpreted as a ritual shaft though its depth does lie within the range known for Iron Age storage pits from Danebury. Isolated.

Fill cycle: 2d

B° (16) [Special deposits] placed on base of pit against south wall included a daub triangular oven brick (R44) against the wall, a large block of quern (R45) beside it on the west and a pounding stone beside it on the inside to the north. To the west of the quern was a scatter of large sherds of pottery (R51). R44, R45, R51

(16) [Deliberate tip] of light brown clayey silt soil mixed with chalky marl and containing a moderate–high density of chalk blocks up to 50 mm. It forms a level even layer on the pit base. D03

(15)/(16) [Special deposits] placed at the interface of the two layers or possibly within 16, included fragments of daub (?R44) peripherally on south-west and to the north-west of these a large number of pot sherds (R51) plus a long bone (R71). Against the west wall was a bone spindle whorl (R59) set on edge with the perforation pointing to the pit centre. Against the north-west wall was another group of broken pot (R51), together with pieces of burnt chalk, snail shells and rodent bones. Against the north wall was a bone with a cut end. In a central position slightly to the west were some long bones, possibly originally articulated (R71/R36) and to east of these a group of potsherds (R51). R44?, R51x3, R59, R71/R36

1° (15a) Small wedge of angular chalk shatter, blocks up to 70 mm in small chalk and grit. [Natural collapse from pit side.] N23

(15) [Deliberate tips] of chalk rubble, chalk marl and clay, probably freshly dug, mixed with a little charcoal and ash; well compacted with clear tip lines. D15

(14a) Wedge of angular chalk shatter slumped in from north side consisting of blocks up to 100 mm in coarse chalk grit. [Natural erosion.] N23
(14) [Deliberate tips] of loose chalk blocks up to 70 mm in small rounded chalk and grit with a dark brown silty soil matrix, rare small flints and charcoal fragments. Fragments from an animal skull were placed against the east wall. D03, R38

(13)/(14) At the interface of the two layers was a scatter of large flint nodules 150–250 mm, burnt chalk blocks and scattered large potsherds including a base sherd against the south-west side. [Deliberate deposit.] D10 R50

(13) [Deliberate tip] of dark brown clayey soil containing a moderate density of small chalk, frequent burnt chalk blocks and scattered snail shells. D14

(10) [Deliberate tip] of brown clay containing a low density of small chalk up to 15 mm mixed with some lighter brown chalk marl. D08

(10a) [Special deposit] of a broken pierced whetstone placed 0.26 m from the north wall lying inclined at the same angle as the fill at the top of layer 10. R58

(9) Eroded chalk rubble forming loosely packed wedge against north wall becoming more compacted towards pit centre. Animal long bone placed parallel and close to north wall at top of layer. N23 R71

2° (12) [Deliberate tip] of dark brown soil containing a high density of charcoal and ash and sparse small chalk sloping down north side. D13

(12a) [Special deposit] of horse mandible and rib against lower edge of mandible placed slightly off-centre to east and lying flat aligned N–S. R39

(11) Dark brown silty soil mixed with very high density of grey ash, frequent charcoal fragments, rare flint, small chalk and grit. An animal long bone was placed in the pit centre aligned N–S. D11 R71

(11a) [Special deposit] of animal jaw bone and scapula placed against south wall of pit and packed around with flints. R39 R72 R53

(8) [Deliberate tip] of dark brown/grey silty soil with high density of ash, frequent charcoal, scattered fired clay, infrequent chalk grit and rare flints. Special deposits: animal skull fragment against south-west wall and long bone below it; mandible fragment centre east; split long bone aligned E–W in intermediate position in east sector; cut bone with flint nodule alongside it against south wall. D11, R38, R71, Q71, Q53

(7a) [Special deposit] of blocks of daub and pottery against south wall towards base of layer. R52, R51

(7) Dark brown–grey silty soil with very high density of ash, frequent charcoal, much burnt flint c.30 mm; infrequent chalk and flint up to 50 mm. D11

(7b) [Special deposits] in pit centre at top of (7) of small articulated animal, a cut long bone and piece of daub; off-centre to the east was a flattened area covered with much pottery. R35, R71, Q44, R60/51

3° (6) [Deliberate deposit] of horizontal layer of subangular chalk blocks up to 60 mm well compacted in grey soil. D03

(5) [Deliberate deposit] of grey brown soil containing infrequent chalk grit 5–10 mm and rare flint 30 mm. D01

(4) [Deliberate deposit/laid surface] of compact rounded chalk 10–40 mm in light brown marly soil with occasional angular flints 40–160 mm. S/D03

(3) Brownish grey soil containing a low density of chalk, mostly grit; a few flints to north side. [Natural silting in pit top as surface(4) subsided.] N28

(2) Angular chalk blocks 50–100 mm packed in smaller chalk and grit with a little grey silt filtered between the stones. [Deliberate surface/levelling.] S/D03

(1) Grey-brown soil containing a low density of small chalk 10–30 mm and grit, rare small flints, flecks of fired clay and patch of ash on the south side. [Natural silting?] N28
F818  Tr 4  L300734  Pit (rectangular)

Length: 2.04 x 1.80  Base: 1.30, 0.92, 0.78, 1.66

Subrectangular cut with slightly bowed sides, near vertical–steeply sloping joining at sharp angle to flat, rough base; the corners were rounded. The upper edge was cut through clay, the sides through chalk marl and the lower sides and base into chalk. ?Cold store. Within building 3; cut F825, F820

Fill cycle 2c

1°–3°  (2) [Deliberate dump possibly derived from degraded cob] filling lower third of pit composed of chalk grit, small subangular chalk 10–40 mm mixed with pale brown chalky marl containing individual blocks of brown clay. It contained occasional angular flints c.30 mm and rare charcoal. A more yellowish clay lens occurred on the base. Fragments from a CuA sheet artefact with rivets present in this layer. D04

(1) Thick mixed layer of yellowish brown clay and chalky marl containing chalk grit and small chalk lumps and frequent flint nodules 15–20 mm, occasional limestone roof slates c.100 mm, rare fragments of greensand (one slightly burnt) and occasional fragments of charcoal. The layer gradually became more clayey to the base. Occupation debris included clay tile c.80 mm, pottery, bone, Fe nails and several fragments from the same CuA sheet artefact with rivets (as in 2). [Deliberate infill of pit with material mainly derived from building debris.] D04

F826  Tr 4  L030790  Pit (cylindrical)

Length: 1.80 m  Width: 1.40 m  Base diam: 1.30 m  Depth: 2.10 m  Volume: 4.09 cu m

Cylindrical pit, of which half was exposed and excavated in trench 4. Later quarrying had occurred around the upper edge of the pit and layers 1 and 2 probably relate to this later activity, possibly also layer 3. The pit was cylindrical with straight near vertical sides, sharply angled to flat base. There is some hint of undercutting of a slightly barrel-shaped profile in places. The splayed profile in the upper half could result from the quarrying, erosion or a combination of the two. Possibly should be regarded as a ritual shaft rather than a storage pit; however it does fall within the upper limit for cylindrical pits as well as within the maximum depths recorded for pits in general at Danebury. The quarries F784, F821 were probably extended out from the top of the partly filled pit.

Fill cycle: 2d

B°  (12) On the pit base was a thick level layer of dark grey ash with charcoal fragments. Within in this layer close 10–20 mm above the pit base was a scatter of animal bone, including several long bones, some potsherds, broken flint nodules, some burnt and pebbles (R54). D11 R54

1°  (11) Mixed layer of light brown clay and small subangular chalk mostly 10–20 mm. Within the layer was a distinct horizontal lens of larger stones – flints 30–40 mm and chalk blocks 40–100 mm joined by a trail of small pieces c.20 mm. At about this level an inverted sheep skull (R38) had been placed in an intermediate position in the south-east sector. Two rodent skeletons were noted against the east–south-east wall, but need not be regarded as
special deposits. However they may have been attracted to the pit by organic deposits. D14 R38 R53

(10a) At the base of layer 10 on the east side was a diffuse lens of chalk rubble 20–70 mm in a clayey matrix, which was probably material eroded from the pit sides. N23

(10) Mixed layer of subangular chalk 10–80 mm mixed with reddish brown clay containing frequent chalk grit; rare flint nodules up to 200 mm. [Deliberate tip.] D20

2° (9) Brown clayey soil containing a high density of chalk grit up to 10 mm and lesser quantity of large chalk plus a few flints 20–60 mm forming diffuse tip lines. [Deliberate tip.] D18

(8) Chalk rubble, mostly small c.10–30 mm mixed with light brown chalk marl, but with scattered larger blocks 50–80 mm, some tending to form lenses [deliberate tips interspersed with chalk shatter]. D15

(7) Series of tips of grey–dark grey ash and charcoal, and interspersed a tip of chalk rubble mostly subrounded fragments 10–20 mm with larger blocks up to 50 mm mostly rolled to the pit centre. A lens of red clay mixed with small chalk and flint occurred at the top of the layer. [Deliberate tips.] D11 D03

(6)/(7) [Special deposits] resting in/on top of layer 7. The main deposit was an articulated horse leg (R36) the foot placed roughly in the pit centre with a flint against it on the south and the rest of the leg slightly flexed stretching out towards the south-west. Three large broken flint nodules lay to the south (R53). The flint by the foot rested on a mandible (R39). A bronze object occurred to the north-west of the leg. R36 R39 R53

(6) Tip of reddish brown clay mixed with low density of small subangular chalk up to 40 mm; occurred around south-west side of pit. D08

(5) Light brown clayey soil mixed with lumps of chalk marl and frequent chalk mostly grit and small pieces c.15 mm; occasional angular flints 30–120 mm. D04

(4) [Deliberate tip] from west of fine light grey ash becoming darker to pit centre where more charcoal was concentrated; some small flints and chalk within it. D11

3° (3) Thick layer of reddish brown clay soil containing a low density of chalk mostly grit with a scatter of subangular chalk lumps 20–30 mm and flints c.40 mm (D01). Chalky lens across surface of layer (D16).

(2) Brown clay soil containing low density of subangular chalk, mostly grit, but with larger chalk up to 60 mm concentrated in lenses or tips. Scattered subangular flints 20–60 mm through out. D01

(1) Greyish brown silty clay soil containing low–moderate density of subangular chalk up to 30 mm and flints 15–50 mm, a few burnt. D01