It is something of a paradox that we have to go to an Anglo-Saxon cemetery excavation in order to understand the character of Neolithic settlement, but, as the title of this monograph makes plain, this is precisely why prehistorians should take an interest in the excavations at Spong Hill.

Although there has been considerable progress in the analysis of lithic scatters, excavation has perforce been limited. Small samples have been investigated, usually as part of a larger project concerned with surface survey. Where anything more ambitious is attempted, structures are enigmatic or absent, and subsoil features of any kind are rare. This hardly makes these sites an attractive target for expensive excavation.

One way of resolving the problem is to take advantage of large-scale excavation on sites of other periods. We have long been faced with the frustrating fact that many of the Neolithic and Bronze Age features that elude us in our own work come to light in excavations of sites of other periods. Usually this means that they receive scant attention in the final report. In this case, however, the earlier prehistoric material has been well served, and Dr Healy's monograph puts on record a variety of excavated features and their contents. This is a surprising fact, given the scale of the excavation, and the possibilities that this raised of relating the contents of these subsoil features to the artefacts found in the ploughsoil. It is here that this study breaks new ground, and we must be grateful to the excavator and the publishers for allowing this evidence to be discussed at length.

This report makes two very important observations. The first is that what seems to be a continuous scatter of occupation material very probably results from numerous unrelated episodes of domestic activity. To some extent this is shown by radiocarbon dating, but the main evidence is provided by detailed analysis of the pottery and flintwork. Secondly, Dr Healy is able to define important contrasts between the ways in which Earlier and Later Neolithic artefacts were deposited at Spong Hill. At one level this emphasises the contrasting character of activity in these two periods, but at another it has the most serious consequences for our understanding of surface assemblages. The Earlier Neolithic material was mainly in subsoil features, so that little would be revealed by the plough; the later artefacts were often discarded on the ground surface, and for that reason they dominate the surface finds. Dr Healy's careful analysis of both patterns makes this a particularly important contribution to Neolithic studies.

As we would expect, the documentation of this evidence is impeccable. The text is lucid and clear and the drawings are altogether excellent. This report is easy to use and it deserves a wide readership. Above all, it shows how the specialist analyses that are so often relegated to obscure corners of an excavation report may sometimes be its most rewarding feature.

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