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EXCAVATIONS

at

THATCHAM NORTHERN DISTRIBUTOR ROAD, BERKSHIRE

SU 499 677

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

NORTHERN DISTRIBUTOR ROAD, THATCHAM, BERKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION REPORT

SU 499 677

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Summary

In the summer of 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit excavated an area of approximately 285 by 18 metres (5130 m²), within the corridor of the proposed Thatcham Northern Distributor road, located to the west of the town of Thatcham. This work was carried out on behalf of Berkshire County Council. A desk-based assessment and field evaluation of the archaeological potential of the route were undertaken in the winter of 1996/1997 by the Babbie Group Ltd. In addition, the Bartlett-Clark Consultancy carried out an archaeogeophysical survey.

The excavation largely confirmed the results of the previous fieldwork. The bulk of the features identified were east-west oriented ditches, containing very few artefacts. Those that contained pottery appeared to have been filled in during, or after, the 2nd century AD. Three large pits were excavated and the depth of two suggested that they might have been wells, also of Roman date. Although it has been suggested that the Roman road from Silchester to Caerleon lay to the north of the modern Bath road, no evidence was recovered to support that assertion.

Acknowledgements

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Location of the archive

The archive is currently held by the Oxford Archaeological Unit. The OAU's standards will be adhered to at all times with regard to project documentation and archivally suitable materials used (see Walker 1990). The archive from the desk-based assessment, field evaluation and archaeogeophysical survey undertaken by the Babbie Group Ltd will be incorporated with the excavation archive to create a single, unified archive. All post-excavation documentation will be filed, ordered and indexed as part of the research archive. This will be submitted to the National Archaeological Record for microficheing. The archive and artefacts will be deposited with the West Berkshire Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Location and geology (Fig. 1)

The probable Roman town of Thatcham lies approximately three kilometres to the east of modern Newbury in the former royal county of Berkshire, now West Berkshire. The land to be impacted upon by the proposed Thatcham Northern Distributor Road is situated on the north-west side of the town, between Turnpike Road and Cold Ash Hill. The excavation was conducted on a south-facing slope of the River Kennet valley, 300 m to the north of Turnpike Road (SU 499 677) rising from 92.6 m OD to 98.3 m OD. At the time of fieldwork, the land-use consisted of improved arable land. The underlying geology consists predominantly of Reading Beds, with a band of Valley gravels found in the approximate centre of the excavation area.

Archaeological background

The most recent excavations in Thatcham, conducted by Wessex Archaeology, at Chamberhouse Farm in 1997 (John Lewis, Project Officer, pers. comm.), and by Thames Valley Archaeological Services at Henwick Field (Ford 1992), revealed Roman deposits which produced many artefacts. At Chamberhouse Farm, on the Kennet floodplain, a number of Romano-British ditches and a substantial waterlogged feature, thought to be a pond, were identified. Early Mesolithic material was also recovered during this excavation.

The Berkshire Sites and Minerals Record catalogues a substantial amount of prehistoric material from the Thatcham area, although much of this was not closely datable. Significant finds include a Mesolithic Maglemosian hammer from Thatcham (SMR 1421) and a Bronze Age macehead from Cold Ash Hill (SMR 1426). An Iron Age coin was found near Henwick Lane, Thatcham (SMR 1410.09) and pottery of the same date was recorded from north of Thatcham Newtown (SMR 1411) and from Benham Hill Gravel Pit (SMR 4019).

Margary (1973, 130-2) records the efforts to locate the Roman road connecting the *civitas* capital of *Calleva* (Silchester) to *Isca* (Caerleon). The road can be traced through Aldermaston Park to Thatcham, crossing the Kennet near the Colthrop paper mill. In the 1920s and 1930s considerable evidence was found for Roman settlement to the north and south of the modern Bath road, west of the medieval town centre (SMR 1410). This evidence consisted of structural remains, including wells, along with coins and pottery assemblages.

It has been argued that a series of linear cropmarks (SMR 1189) located to the east of the French Gardens may represent the line of the Roman road to Caerleon. The road can be traced into Thatcham, but there is little evidence of its existence west of the Colthrop paper mill. Margary argues (1973, 130-2) that it is probable that the road continued to Speen along the course of Shaw Lane, but this is not proven.

King Edgar was granted land in Thatcham in AD 971 and Astill (1978) has used the evidence from the Domesday Book to argue that Thatcham was a late Saxon administrative centre, which became the centre of a royal estate and a Domesday hundred. It may have had a minster church, possibly upon the same site as the parish church, which dates from at least the 13th century. However, there is no material evidence for the Saxon settlement.

Thatcham expanded in the medieval period, with a market in the 12th century and a fair in the 13th century. It has been suggested that a deserted medieval village was centred upon Henwick Manor, although there are no traces of it on the ground, or in aerial photographs. A medieval cornet was found in Thatcham (SMR 1407.00.001).

Post-medieval remains recorded on the SMR include the London-Bath road, with associated milestone (SMR 5052.13) and a lock on the Kennet and Avon canal (SMR 5050.41). There are also cropmarks associated with modern drainage to the south-west of the proposed route of the Northern Distributor Road (SMR 1190).

Background to the excavation (Fig. 2)

A desk-based assessment and field evaluation of the area to be impacted upon by the Northern Distributor road was undertaken by the Babbie Group Ltd, in the winter of 1996/1997, on behalf of Berkshire County Council (Babbie Group 1997). The desk-based assessment involved the consultation of the Berkshire SMR, the Berkshire County Record Office and the Berkshire County Council photographic archive. A site visit was also made to assess the potential for the survival of archaeological features and a photographic record of colour prints was compiled. Examination of cartographic and documentary sources demonstrated that the landscape has changed very little in the early modern period. Only vertical aerial photographs were available for the survey area. No archaeological features were identified and the history of land-use, in the larger fields south of the route, showed recent arable cultivation, with frequent use as improved grassland.

Findspots in the vicinity of the proposed road corridor suggested that there was potential for prehistoric settlement of the valley slopes. It was also thought possible, from the desk-based assessment that the newly-built section of the Northern Distributor Road would cross the projected line of the Roman road connecting Silchester to Caerleon. In addition it was anticipated that evidence for a possible deserted medieval village, centred upon Henwick Manor might be encountered, along with several landscape boundaries and two historic hedgerows at Lower Henwick Farm and the Bowling Green. Findspots in the vicinity suggested the potential for prehistoric settlement on the valley slopes.

An archaeogeophysical survey of the proposed route of the Northern Distributor road was commissioned by the Babbie Group Ltd. Detailed magnetometer surveys, supplemented by magnetic susceptibility measurements of topsoil samples were carried out by the Bartlett-Clark Consultancy in December 1996. The magnetometer survey suggested that the archaeological potential of area 1, closest to Turnpike Lane, was high. The southern extent of area 2, immediately to the north of the three government oil pipelines was low, but there were significant anomalies at the northern extent of this area. Area 3 did not contain any areas of archaeological potential.

An evaluation was conducted by the Babbie Group Ltd from December 1996 to January 1997. Six trenches, each measuring 1.8 m in width and a total of 305 metres in length were excavated, providing a 2.7% sample of the area of the proposed road corridor. The trench locations were influenced by the archaeogeophysical and desk-based surveys and were also intended to provide a random sample along the length of the new-build road, including any blank areas, for which no data was available.

Only trenches 1 and 2, within c.300 m north of Turnpike Lane contained archaeological features, confirming the results of the archaeogeophysical survey. Some of the features appeared to be late Roman land boundaries. It was suggested that

tile recovered from these ditches may have been indicative of Roman occupation in the vicinity. No evidence was found for the Roman road between Silchester and Caerleon. However, a 60 m baulk around the government oil pipelines was not excavated and it was suggested that this may have concealed evidence for the road. No evidence was found for the possible deserted medieval village nor for the linear cropmark associated with a boundary on the 1842 tithe map.

The presence of Romano-British occupation activity (ditches, a pit and several postholes), possibly associated with the Roman road, formed the basis of the recommendation that an archaeological excavation should be conducted upon the area c.300 m north of Turnpike Lane, roughly corresponding to evaluation trenches 1 and 2.

Excavation methodology (Fig. 3)

The surveyor for Babtie Group Ltd, Peter Coffield, marked out the line of the proposed road corridor. The excavation was conducted within the corridor by a 360° mechanical excavator with a 1.2-m wide ditching bucket. Topsoil was removed to reveal subsoil, Reading Beds and gravel, at an average depth of 0.30 m. The topsoil was removed from the site by lorry. The site was cleaned and all archaeological features were excavated by hand. A single context recording system was used, thus each cut, layer and fill was assigned a single number from a continuous sequence. No less than 25% of the length of all ditches encountered was excavated; all pits were half-sectioned and all stratigraphic relationships between features were examined. Each feature or deposit was planned, photographed and its section was drawn.

In the area south of the bridleway and north of the northernmost oil pipeline, the topsoil was removed onto subsoil. The evaluation report recorded the fact that the features identified in this area were cut through the subsoil. After repeated cleaning and weathering indistinct edges were identified, however they were extremely difficult to trace in plan. After consultation with Chris Moore of the Babtie Group Ltd the evaluation trench was emptied in the relevant places and backfilled features were re-excavated. The edges of these ditches were then projected across the site and sondages cut to locate and to take the required 25% sample.

Greg Campbell of the Oxford Archaeological Unit visited the site to advise upon an appropriate environmental sampling policy. Prior to his visit, samples from a dated ditch and a pit were processed. It was agreed with Chris Moore, of the Babtie Group Ltd, that preservation was poor and that only pits should be sampled.

Graham Noble of SERCO Gulf Engineering supervised the measures taken to protect the three government oil pipelines. Boiler plates covered with mounded topsoil were placed over the pipelines and six baulks, each 3 m in width were left to either side of them. The boiler plates were removed as the mechanical excavator moved south across them and the areas between the pipelines were excavated. No deep excavation was undertaken in the vicinity of the pipelines and the areas above the pipelines were used for spoil heaps. Graham Noble returned to the site after the boiler plates had been removed from the baulks left over the pipelines and agreed that they had not been damaged by excavation.

The bridleway, located close to the northernmost extent of the site, was cordoned off with mesh fence after the areas either side of it had been stripped. A banksman was appointed to protect the general public while excavation was in progress in the vicinity of the bridleway.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION (Figs 3 and 4)

In the following description the group numbers, given to the features during the excavation, are followed, where appropriate, by the number assigned to the feature by the Babbie Group Ltd during the evaluation. All cut numbers referred to in the text are group feature numbers, although the illustrated sections include both the feature and individual segment numbers.

Natural features

Solution hole 27 (Babbie 107) was located 20 m south of the bridleway. It was sub-circular in plan and measured *c.* 3 m in width. It was excavated to a depth of 1.8 m without reaching the base. The edges of the feature were very ill defined, as were the individual fills within it. The fills were predominantly silty and the natural was clay, however, the fills appeared to grade into the natural. There was a lens of charcoal, 0.80 m below the topsoil, suggesting that the feature may still have been in use while a partially silted hollow, however, the feature was certainly natural.

Possible prehistoric ditches

Two ditches containing prehistoric material (164, 165) were located in the southernmost 70 m of the excavation area. They were both oriented north-east to south-west. Ditch 164 (Babbie 27) was exposed for a length of approximately 40 m and three sections were excavated through it. It measured between 1.84 m and 2.30 m wide and varied in depth between 0.38 m and 0.60 m. In profile the ditch had a flat base and fairly gently sloping sides. It was filled with light to mid brown sandy silt (96, 129, 134) with up to 20% flint gravel inclusions. Three flint flakes, broadly dated to the later Neolithic/ early Bronze Age, were recovered from fill 96.

Ditch 165 (Babbie 33) was observed for 23 m from the western baulk before becoming obscured in the plough-spread ditch fills north of the section excavated to examine ditches 167 and 169. It was investigated in two sections and measured between 0.6 m and 0.78 m wide with a maximum depth of 0.13 m. It had a concave base and fairly steep sides and it was filled with dark brown silty sand (94, 153) with occasional charcoal and manganese flecks. The ditch yielded two small abraded sherds of Bronze Age or Iron Age pottery.

On balance it appears likely that ditches 164 and 165 were post-medieval in date. Ditch 167 to the south of ditch 165 was on the same alignment as ditches 164 and 165 and it produced prehistoric material. However, ditch 167 also contained 11 fragments of post-medieval tile, illustrating the potential for contamination with residual prehistoric material.

Roman ditches

Ditch 147 (Babbie 4) was located *c.* 33 m north of the southern baulk. It was observed for 12.7 m from the western baulk before disappearing, probably due to ploughing, at the point where a section was excavated to examine the profiles of ditches 166, 147 and 168. It had a maximum width of 0.7 m and depth of 0.08 m with a shallow concave profile. It was filled with dark yellow brown silty sand (148) with occasional charcoal and manganese flecks and up to 10% flint gravel inclusions. Nineteen sherds from a single New Forest Beaker, dated 270-400 AD were found within the ditch (Fig. 5).

Ditch 19 (Babtie 42) was located 37 m south of the southernmost pipeline where it crossed the full width of the excavation area. It measured 1 m in width and between 0.5 m and 0.58 m in depth. It had a 'V-shaped' profile (Fig. 4.2) and contained two fills (20/21, 25/24); the lower fill (21, 24) was mid grey brown sandy silt with up to 30% flint gravel inclusions and the upper fill (20, 25) had the same soil matrix, with up to 10% flint gravel inclusions. Three sherds of pottery dated to the 2nd century AD or later and six sherds of pottery dated to the 3rd century AD or later were found within the ditch in association with eight fragments of Roman tile.

Ditch 143 (Babtie 108, 109, 110) was found 22 m north of the northernmost pipeline. It was oriented east-west and it varied in width from 1 m to 1.3 m and it was between 0.42 m and 0.56 m deep. It had two silty sand fills (48/49, 93/130); the upper fill (48,130) was dark brown and the lower fill (49/83) yellow brown. Fourteen sherds of pottery dated to the 2nd century AD or later and six sherds dated to the late 1st to 2nd century AD were found within the ditch along with twenty fragments of Roman tile.

Ditch 132 (Babtie 121) was found 15 m north of ditch 143 and it was also aligned east-west. It measured 1.3 m in width and 0.60 m in depth. In section it had a 'V-shaped' profile with fairly steep straight sides and a slightly rounded base (Fig. 4.3). The ditch had a maximum of five fills (112/113/114/115, 117/118/119/120/121, 123/124/125/126/127) all mid orange brown silty clay, however the basal fills (115,121,127) and penultimate fills (113,118,124) had 1% flint gravel inclusions. The remaining fills contained up to 70% flint gravel inclusions. A single sherd of pottery dated to the 2nd century AD or later was found within the ditch. The ditch was cut by post-medieval ditch 111.

Ditch 161 was located 5 m south of the southernmost pipeline and survived only as an ephemeral feature. It was visible for 8 m from the western baulk and its eastern terminal was removed by Roman well 46. Against the western baulk it measured 0.8 m in width and 0.20 m in depth and it had a slightly rounded base and shallow, slightly concave sides. At its eastern extent it was spread, probably by ploughing, to a width of 4.8 m and it had been reduced in depth to 0.07 m. It was filled with dark brown silt (64, 82) with a large amount of flint gravel inclusions. The ditch cut tree-throw hole 85, demonstrating that the area was cleared prior to the cutting of the ditch. The ditch is considered to be Roman but the exact date of the ditch could not be determined and it is possible that it is earlier.

Probable Roman wells

Two probable wells were found within 20 m of the southernmost pipeline. Feature 46 was sub-circular in plan, with a diameter of 2.82 m. It was excavated to a depth of 1.8 m and augured to a further 1.2 m, without encountering the bottom. Therefore, it is most likely that the feature was a well. The excavated deposits within the well (44, 45, 53 and 54) were all clay silts with the exception of the basal fill (54) which was a sandy silt. The percentage of gravel inclusions decreased with increasing depth, suggesting that it may have stood open and filled naturally, with increasing weathering of the sides. Nine sherds of pottery dating to the 2nd century AD or later and four fragments of Roman tile were found within the well.

Feature 55 (Babtie 23) was ovoid in plan and measured 3.4 m north-south by 2.83 m east-west. It was excavated to a depth of 1.9 m and augured to a further 1.05 m without encountering the base. It is, therefore, likely that this feature was also a well. The sides of the well had slumped giving it an undercut profile (Fig. 4.1). It was filled

with dark brown silt (56) which contained a lens of charcoal. Six sherds of pottery dated to the 2nd century AD or later were recovered from the feature.

Possible medieval ditch

Ditch 41 was located 27 m north of the northernmost pipeline. Only 2.7 m of the ditch were exposed within the section excavated to examine ditch 143. It measured 0.7 m in width and 0.27 m in depth and it had a rounded base with short, straight, gently sloping sides. It was filled with dark brown silty sand (42) which produced a sherd of late medieval glazed pottery. Ditch 42 cut Roman ditch 143.

Post-medieval ditches

Ditch 168 (Babtie 44) was the southernmost ditch. It extended for 23 m from the western baulk before terminating 3 m short of the eastern baulk. The ditch was an average of 1.5 m in width and 0.26 m in depth, although it widened to 2.6 m and deepened to 0.62 m at the terminal. The base of the ditch was flat, and the sides were straight and steep. The ditch terminal had three fills (136/139/140) two clay layers overlain by a layer of light grey brown silty sand (150) which was the sole fill of the remainder of the ditch. Ditch 168 cut ditch 167, which was post-medieval in date.

Ditch 167 (Babtie 46) was located immediately north of ditch 168. It was visible for 20 m, extending from the eastern baulk before it terminated within the Babtie evaluation trench. It measured 1.56 m in width and 0.37 m in depth. The ditch had a slightly concave base and fairly gently sloping concave sides. It was filled with dark brown silty sand (103) which contained eleven fragments of post-medieval tile along with a sherd of Bronze Age or Iron Age pottery and a late Mesolithic/earlier Neolithic flint blade. Ditch 167 was cut by ditch 168.

Ditch 111 (Babtie 121) was the northernmost ditch. It measured 1.5 m in width and 0.83 m in depth. It had steep straight sides and a narrow flat base (Fig. 4.3). It was filled with mid to light greyish brown silt (105, 107, 109) which produced a sherd of post-medieval pottery.

Undated ditches

Two undated ditches (166, 169) were identified in the southernmost 50 m of the site. The northern terminal of ditch 166 was found 2 m north of the Babtie evaluation trench. The ditch was aligned north-east to south-west but it turned ninety degrees 1 m before the western baulk. It measured 0.7 m in width and 0.13 m in depth and it contained dark brown silty sand (146) with occasional charcoal flecks and up to 15% gravel inclusions.

Ditch 169 clearly terminated within the section excavated to investigate ditches 165 and 167 but was not discernible within the plough-spread ditch fills to the north of the section. It had a maximum width of 0.60 m and depth of 0.30 m with a roughly 'V-shaped' profile. It was filled with light brown sandy silt (156, 158). Ditch 169 appeared to cut possible prehistoric ditch 165.

Three undated ditches (163, 99 and 162) were found north of Babtie evaluation trench 1 and south of the southernmost pipeline. Ditch 163 extended from the eastern baulk and terminated 2.5 m short of the western baulk. It varied in width from 0.30 m to 0.94 m and between 0.09 m and 0.17 m in depth. The ditch had a

concave, although irregular, base and short irregular edges. It was filled with mid brown sandy silt (67, 69, 71) with up to 20% flint gravel inclusions.

Ditch 99 terminated within 3 m of the western baulk. It measured 0.90 m in width and 0.53 m in depth and it had a 'V-shaped' profile. It was filled with reddish brown silty clay (98) with up to 10% flint gravel inclusions.

Ditch 162 extended for 6 m from the eastern baulk. It was irregular in plan, partly because it cut several tree-throw holes, 30, 32 and 39. The ditch measured between 1 m and 1.5 m in width and it varied in depth between 0.13 m and 0.38 m. It had a flat base and short steep sides. It was filled with sandy silt (35, 37, 38).

Two undated ditches (78, 59) and a gully (160) were found within the two discrete areas created by excavation between the pipelines. Ditch 59 measured in excess of 1.6 m in width and, where excavated, it had a maximum depth of 0.38 m. A full profile could not be established because it extended beneath the eastern baulk. The sterile light to mid yellow silty sand fill (60, 62) was different to those of any of the other excavated features, with the exception of gully 160. The gully measured 0.63 m in width and 0.10 m in depth and it had a shallow, gently concave profile. It appeared to feed into ditch 59.

The terminal of possible ditch 78 was located 2 m north of the northern baulk of the southern pipeline. It measured 1.3 m in width and 0.41 m in depth and it had a rounded base and irregular, slightly concave sides. The feature was filled with mid to light brown sandy silt (79). This feature extended beneath the baulk left around the pipeline but was not observed south of it.

Undated pit

Pit 4 was sub-circular in plan; in section it had a flat base and steep, slightly concave sides (Fig. 4.4). There was evidence for slumping of the gravel edges, but it was otherwise filled with a single deposit of light orange brown fine sandy silt (6) with a large amount of flint gravel inclusions. The pit measured 2.4 m in width and 0.95 m in depth. The location of the pit, within 10 m of probable Roman wells 46 and 55, suggests that the pit may also be Roman.

Ploughmarks

The area to the north of the bridleway was cut by a series of modern east-west oriented ploughmarks.

THE FINDS

Prehistoric and Roman pottery

by Paul Booth

The OAU excavation and the evaluation carried out by Babbie altogether produced 41 sherds of pottery of all periods: 7 prehistoric (36 gm), 31 Roman (415 gm), 1 medieval (4 gm) and 2 post-medieval (11 gm), of which only 7 Roman and 1 post-medieval sherd came from the evaluation. The material was scanned fairly rapidly and recorded with regard to broad fabric and type categories using codes established in the Oxford Archaeological Unit Roman pottery recording system. Quantification was by sherd count and weight and a count of vessels based on rim sherds. The pottery was at best in

moderate condition. It was generally slightly to moderately abraded and the average sherd weight was not particularly high.

Prehistoric Pottery

No prehistoric pottery was recovered in the evaluation. The subsequent excavation produced 7 sherds: 3 (11 gm) in flint-tempered fabrics, 1 (2 gm) in a quartzite-tempered fabric and 3 (23 gm) in sand-tempered fabrics. All were undiagnostic body sherds, so any assessment of dating has to rely on criteria of fabric alone. The character of the sand-tempered sherds was consistent with a middle-late Iron Age date. The other fabrics were potentially assignable to a wider date range, though the quartzite-tempered sherd may be of late Bronze Age date and indicate in turn a similar date for the flint-tempered fragments. The latter tradition has a wide chronological range, however, and an Iron Age or even an early Roman date is possible for these sherds on fabric grounds. Two sand-tempered sherds (in contexts 54 and 103) and two flint-tempered sherds (from 94 and 153) were the only sherds from their respective contexts and might therefore indicate a pre-Roman date for these features. This cannot be regarded as certain, however, and the total quantity of this material indicates at best a low level of prehistoric activity on or close to the site.

Roman Pottery

Fabrics

The following fabric/ware groups were represented:

- S30. Central Gaulish samian ware. 1 sherd, 37 gm.
- F53. New Forest colour-coated ware. 1 sherd, 5 gm.
- F54. New Forest (near-stoneware) colour-coated ware. 1 sherd, 35 gm; indented beaker.
- O. Uncertain oxidised fabrics, not certainly Roman. 2 sherds, 4 gm.
- O10. Fine oxidised wares. 2 sherds, 32 gm.
- O11. Fine oxidised fabric. 1 sherd, 16 g; rim of narrow-mouthed jar.
- O30. Fairly fine sand-tempered oxidised ware. 1 sherd, 3 gm.
- O80. Coarse grog-tempered oxidised ware. 1 sherd, 10 gm.
- R. Uncertain reduced wares. 1 sherd, 5 gm.
- R10. Fine reduced wares. 1 sherd, 6 gm.
- R20. Coarse sandy reduced wares. 3 sherds, 13 gm.
- R30. Medium sand-tempered reduced coarse wares. 10 sherds, 117 gm; one rim of straight-sided dish.
- R90. Coarse grog-tempered reduced ware. 2 sherds, 105 gm; rim of large bead-rimmed storage jar.
- B11. Black-burnished ware category 1 (BB1). 4 sherds, 27 gm.

Few fabrics could be assigned with confidence to known sources. F53 and F54 were both attributable to the New Forest. Fabric O11 was consistent with production in the Oxford industry and O10 could have been from the same source, but in neither case is this certain. Fabric O30 has common fine sand-tempering consistent with production in the North Wiltshire industry. This is the most likely source, but another source cannot be precluded. The uncertain sherds recorded simply as fabric O were not certainly of Roman date. The reduced wares are not sufficiently diagnostic to allow attribution to a particular source, the most common fabric grouping, R30, having moderate sand temper

characteristic of many Romanised industries. The fine sherd in fabric R10 could, like the fine oxidised sherds, have been an Oxford product, but this cannot be certain. Possible Alice Holt products were present in fabric groups R30 and R90 (see below). The black-burnished ware sherds were fairly small but were all presumably of the Dorset BB1 industry.

Forms

Only five vessels were represented by rim sherds, few of which indicated particularly diagnostic vessel forms. The rim in fabric O11 was a narrow mouthed jar of Young (1977) form O6, if it is assumed that this was an Oxford product. General jar or jar/bowl forms were indicated by rims in fabric groups R and R30 (2). The form of a large bead-rimmed jar in fabric R90 is found *e.g.* in the Alice Holt industry (Lyne and Jefferies 1979, 29, class 4) but the vessel is not definitely from that source, and the same comment applies to a 'cooking pot type' jar in R30, with slip on the shoulder and rim again reminiscent of Alice Holt. The only other vessel represented by a rim was a New Forest colour-coated indented beaker of Fulford (1975) type 27 (Fig. 5). The samian sherd was probably of form 18/31 or 31 and the black-burnished sherds were apparently all from bowls or dishes.

Chronology

The overall chronological range of the Roman component of the site is difficult to assess. The most obvious diagnostic pieces including the single sherd of samian ware are datable at least to the 2nd century, and the two New Forest vessels present are of late 3rd/4th-century date. The numerically most important reduced coarse wares are, however, not closely datable. Overall, while it is possible that the date of the entire assemblage is indicated by the late Roman material, with some residual pieces, it is most likely that the assemblage ranges from some time in the 2nd century to at least the mid 4th.

Individual context groups were too small to permit of confident dating. The best group in this respect was that in evaluation Trench 2, 104. This is dated after *c.* AD 260-280 by the occurrence of New Forest colour-coated ware (Fulford 1975, 105). The sherd in question is from a closed form, perhaps a flagon or more likely a beaker, with white-painted decoration. A 4th-century date is quite possible both for this sherd and therefore for the group as a whole. The other contents of context group 104 appear consistent with a late 3rd/4th-century date.

Illustrated vessel (Fig. 5)

1. Fabric F54 (New Forest colour-coated ware). A small, upright indented beaker with very slightly flaring rim of Fulford Type 27, closest to 27.7 (Fulford 1975, 50 and 52-3). The type is dated *c.* AD 270-340 (*ibid.*).

Post Roman pottery

by Paul Blinkhorn

Two sherds of post-Roman pottery occurred, in contexts 42 and 105. The former was part of a base of a late medieval (*c.* 15-16th century) Brill/Boarstall vessel (Mellor

1994) with internal green glaze, whilst the latter was part of the convex base of a Border ware (Pearce 1992) vessel, and is generally dateable to the period 1550-1700. Such pottery is common throughout southern England.

Ceramic building material

by Paul Booth

Introduction and quantification

The excavation and evaluation together produced some 36 fragments (3279 gm) of Roman tile and 17 fragments (1356 gm) of post-medieval brick and tile. Roman material came from contexts 5 and 104 of the evaluation and 20, 45, 48, 49, 52, 56, 93, 101 and 103 of the subsequent excavation.

Results

The Roman tile was generally in a fine to moderately sandy oxidised fabric or fabrics. A few pieces were rather darker in colour, but this could indicate either overfiring or burning subsequent to manufacture. A few large pieces were recovered, but there were also several small fragments, not all of which were certainly tile, although this seems likely. Nine pieces from the excavation were identifiable as coming from *tegulae* and a large residual piece in context 5 (Trench 1) of the evaluation, while not absolutely certainly Roman, was most probably part of a *tegula* with the flange knocked off.

Two fragments from context 48 of the excavation were too thick to have been from *tegulae* and were therefore presumably from some kind of 'floor' tile, though insufficient survived to permit identification of the particular type. This would indicate the presence of a building somewhere in the vicinity of the site.

Context 104 in Trench 2 produced a number of fragments in a distinct, very sandy, quite hard fired reduced fabric. The largest piece of this material was over 30 mm thick and cannot have been pottery. It is presumed to have been overfired tile and of Roman date.

The later brick and tile was recovered mainly (in terms of weight) in the evaluation (contexts 5, 19 and unstratified). Only context 103 of the excavation produced probable post-medieval material. Here 11 of the 12 fragments were in a very heavily sand-tempered fabric broadly similar to that noted above in context 102 of the evaluation, a late Roman deposit. In excavation context 103, however, the fragments were from the corner of a fairly characteristic post-medieval tile and are presumed to be of that date.

The flint

by Theresa Durden

Introduction and quantification

A total of 8 pieces of struck flint and 36 pieces/856 gm of burnt unworked flint was recovered from the site. The flint was mottled grey/brown with a thin buff cortex and of reasonably good quality. The burnt flint was very cracked and grey/white in colour. The flint was collected from a number of pits and ditches which are probably of Roman date and so is, therefore, redeposited.

Results

Seven flakes and one retouched blade form the struck component. The flakes were broad and had plain or unprepared butts apart from one flake from context 5 which had a faceted butt. The other flake from this context had an abraded platform edge. Both hard and soft hammers appear to have been used. The blade from context 103 was broken, but had an abraded platform and was retouched along the inverse right hand side. Traces of wear were also apparent along this edge.

Dating is difficult due to the small size of this collection. The flakes may be broadly datable to the later Neolithic/early Bronze Age, although the flake with the abraded platform may be slightly earlier. The blade is likely to be of late Mesolithic/earlier Neolithic date.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

The charred and waterlogged plant remains

by Ruth Pelling

Introduction

A total of 10 samples, taken from pits, a ditch section and a Roman well, were processed for the retrieval of charred plant remains using bulk water separation. Samples of up to 30 litres in volume were taken. Flots were collected onto a 500 µm mesh. The flots were allowed to air dry slowly before being scanned under a binocular microscope at magnification of x 10 to x 25. In addition a series of six auger samples were taken from the upper fill of a well (context 54) for the examination of any waterlogged plant remains. Sub-samples of 200-400 g were processed by hand using a wash-over technique. Flots were collected onto a 500 µm mesh and kept wet while being scanned as above.

Results

A summary of the charred plant remains is displayed below (Table 1). Small quantities of charred seeds and chaff were present in seven samples. Occasional grains of *Triticum* sp. (wheat) and *Hordeum* sp. (barley) were present. One *Hordeum* sp. grain displayed clear evidence of hulling. Occasional weed seeds, including *Chenopodiaceae* and *Vicia/Lathyrus* sp. (vetch/vetchling) were noted. One well sample (sample 21-24, context 44) was more unusual in that it contained the rachis of free-threshing *Triticum* sp. including hexaploid, bread-type wheat. This sample also produced a grain of *Avena* sp. (oats). Occasional modern bread-type wheat rachis and indeterminate culm nodes were also present in sample 21-24, however, which suggests some contamination. A large quantity of *Quercus* sp. (oak) charcoal was present in sample 4, taken from pit 26. Smaller quantities of *Pomoideae* (hawthorn, apple, pear *etc.*) and *Corylus/Alnus* sp. (hazel/alder) charcoal were noted in two further pit samples (27 and 15). No evidence for waterlogged deposits was recovered from any of the samples.

Charred and waterlogged plant remains did not survive well. Occasional charred grains of wheat and barley are to be expected on most archaeological sites. Free-threshing wheat and oats recovered from sample 21-24 are more characteristic of

Saxon and medieval assemblages than Roman and the presence of modern remains suggests contamination. The taxa represented by the charcoal would all have been readily available within the vicinity of the site.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation and subsequent excavation of the area affected by the proposed Thatcham Northern Distributor road suggest that although there may have been prehistoric activity on or near the site, the earliest datable features resulted from low level rural Roman activity, probably from the 2nd century AD onwards.

The evidence for prehistoric activity in the area consisted of seven sherds (36 gm) of pottery broadly dated to the Bronze Age/Iron Age and eight pieces of struck flint broadly dated to the late Mesolithic/early Bronze Age. Ditches 164 and 165 contained only three flint flakes and three sherds of pottery respectively and they may therefore have been prehistoric features, however, there was insufficient material to be certain. The fact that both ditch 167 and pit 46 contained residual prehistoric material illustrates the problem in dating ditches 164 or 165 as prehistoric. The fact that Roman ditch 147 and post-medieval ditches 167 and 168 were all oriented north-east by south-west suggests that there may have been recutting of a long established boundary. However, there is not sufficient evidence on which to base a hypothesis.

The contamination of the soil samples taken from the probable Roman wells with modern and possibly Saxon organic material highlights the problem of residuality and, therefore, the difficulty in obtaining reliable dates. It also means that very little can be determined about the use of the ditches or the conditions in the surrounding landscape.

Three east-west aligned ditches (132, 143, 19) and a ditch aligned north-east - south-west (147) were cut in the Roman period, either for drainage or as boundaries, two wells (46, 55) were sunk and it is possible that pit (4) was dug as a grain store. This activity was concentrated upon the free-draining Valley gravel in the middle of the excavated area. The concentration of tree-throw holes in the vicinity of the wells suggests that there was fairly substantial tree-clearance prior to the use of the site.

Ditch 161 must have been Roman or earlier because it was cut by the Roman well 46. However, a more precise date is impossible to determine. The same is true of ditches 162 and 163 which could not be dated by artefacts or stratigraphy. The fact that all of the features found on the gravels were Roman might suggest that the ditches could be spatially dated to that period but this date is far from secure.

Ditch 59 was anomalous both in terms of its light yellow sandy fill and its north-south orientation. Very little can be said about the feature because it was only partially exposed within the excavated area.

The results of the excavation in advance of the construction of the Northern Distributor road fit very well with the picture of the development of Roman Thatcham established by the excavations of Harris (1937) and added to by the evaluation of Henwick Field (Ford 1992). Harris identified a black layer varying in thickness from an inch to a foot, extending for 1000 feet east to west along the A4, Bath road and measuring 70 feet north to south. He argued that Ermin Street, connecting London and Caerleon, extended through Thatcham largely beneath the modern A4. He further suggested that the Roman town of *Spinæ* previously associated with modern Speen was instead located beneath modern Thatcham.

Ford (1992) did not find any evidence for a Roman road on the line projected by either Harris (1937) or Margary (1973), and no evidence for the road was found

within the corridor of the Northern Distributor road. Harris described a hard surface in Henwick Field, identified with an iron probe, which he believed to be Ermin Street. However, it was not exposed by excavation (Harris 1937). If Ermin Street was constructed on an alignment through Henwick Field and the line of the distributor road, it seems unlikely that it should have been missed both by archaeogeophysical survey and actual excavation, especially considering Margary's description that large sections of the *agger* of Ermin Street still stand 3 feet high (Margary 1973). It appears more likely therefore that Ermin Street continued further west on the line of the modern A4, Bath road, before being realigned to Speen.

Harris excavated at least six stone-lined wells along with the possible stone footings of several buildings and numerous ditches, one at least 6 feet wide and 3 feet deep. He also observed the excavation of a possible flue in the garden of Miss J. Searle (Harris 1937). Most of those features were dated to the 2nd century AD or later and the bulk of them were found within 150 m of the Bath road. Ford identified a similar range of features of similar date. With the exception of Ford's trench 11, the results of his evaluation suggested that the density of features decreased with movement west along the Bath road and with movement north away from the road. The results of the Oxford Archaeological Unit's excavation confirm that impression. On the western outskirts of modern Thatcham there is evidence for low level 2nd-century AD and later Roman activity, peripheral to a likely roadside settlement to the east. The wells are likely to have been used to water livestock and/or crops and it is possible that pit 4 was used as a grain store for the supply of food for domesticated animals. The discovery of tile within the ditch fills suggests that there was at least one substantial stone built, roofed building in fairly close proximity.

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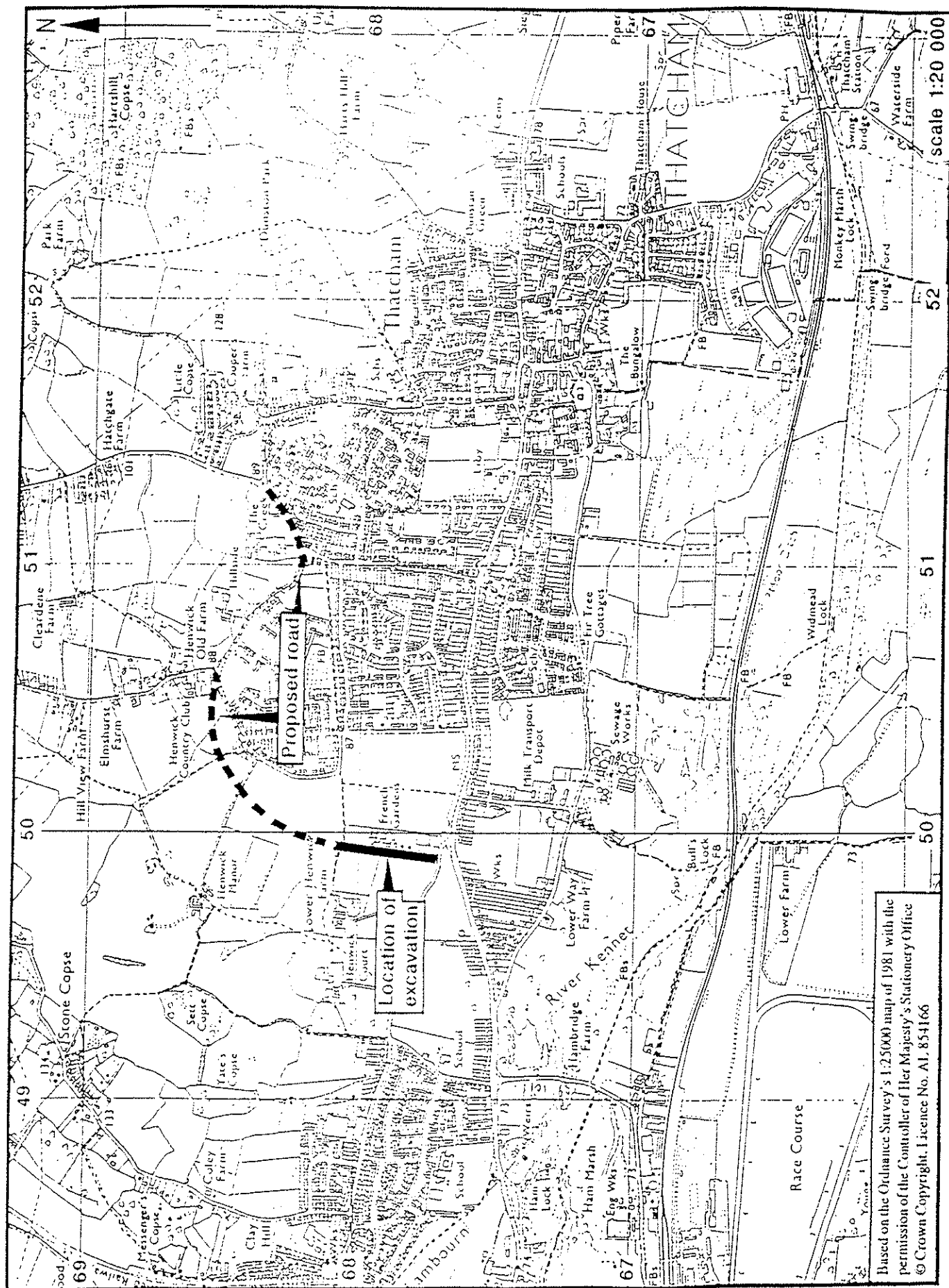
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Table 1: Summary of the charred plant remains

		pit	ditch	well
	Total number of samples	6	1	4
	No. of samples with remains	4	1	2
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat grain	1	-	2
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	free-threshing wheat, rachis internode	-	-	6
<i>Triticum</i> sp. hexaploid	bread-type wheat rachis internode	-	-	1
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	barley, hulled grain	1	-	-
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	barley grain	-	-	-
<i>Avena</i> sp.	oats, grain	-	-	1
<i>Cerealia</i> indet.	grain	1	-	3
Weeds			1	10+
Charcoal				
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak	frequent	-	-
<i>Pomoideae</i>	hawthorn, apple/pear etc.	present	-	-
<i>Corylus/Alnus</i> sp.	hazel/ alder	present	-	-



Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:25000 map of 1981 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office
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Figure 1 Location plan

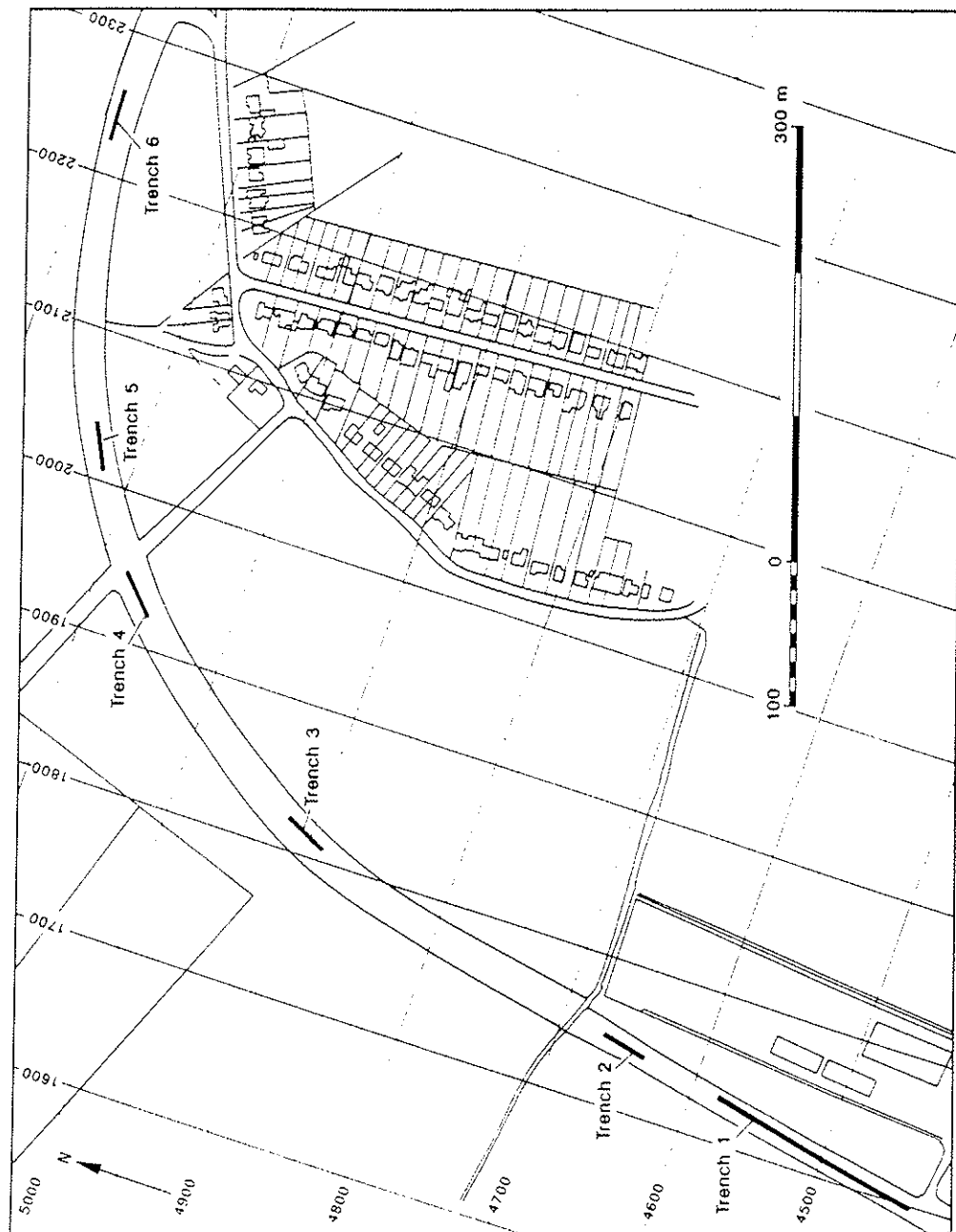


Figure 2 Location of the Babcie evaluation trenches

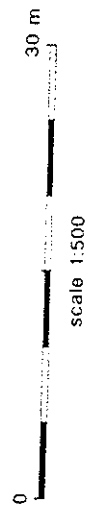
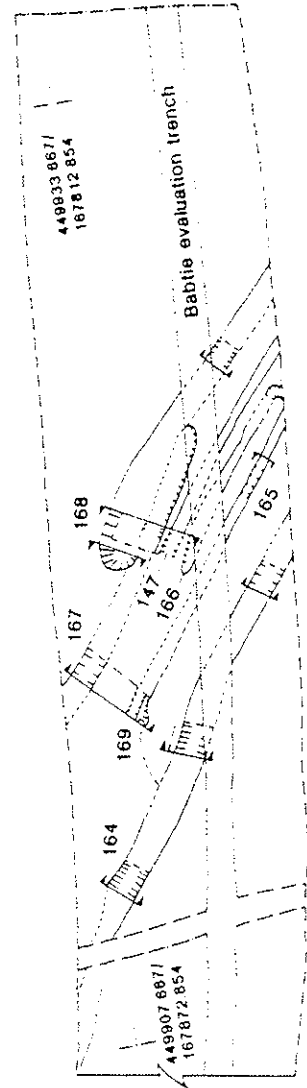
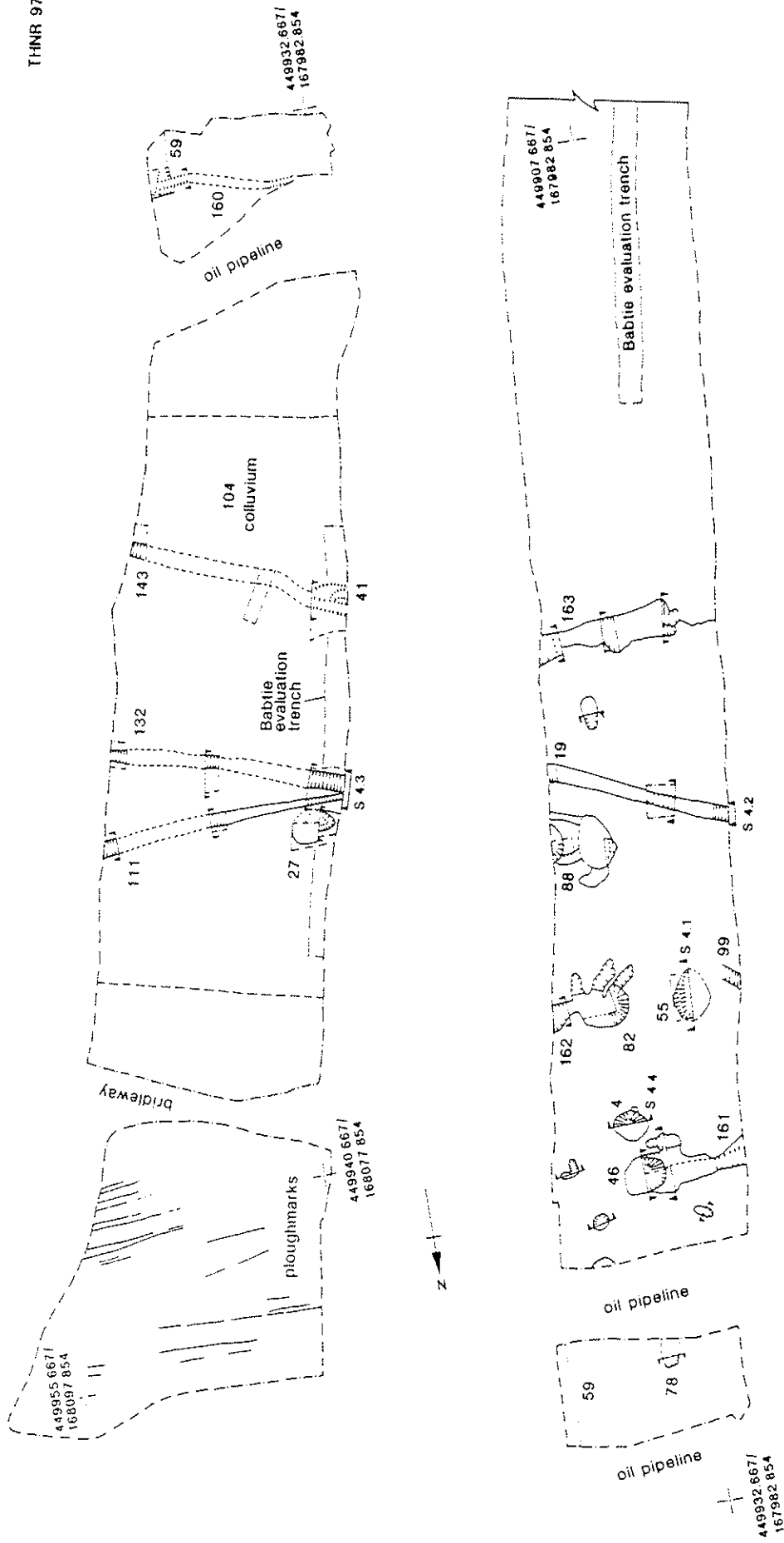


Figure 3 Trench plan

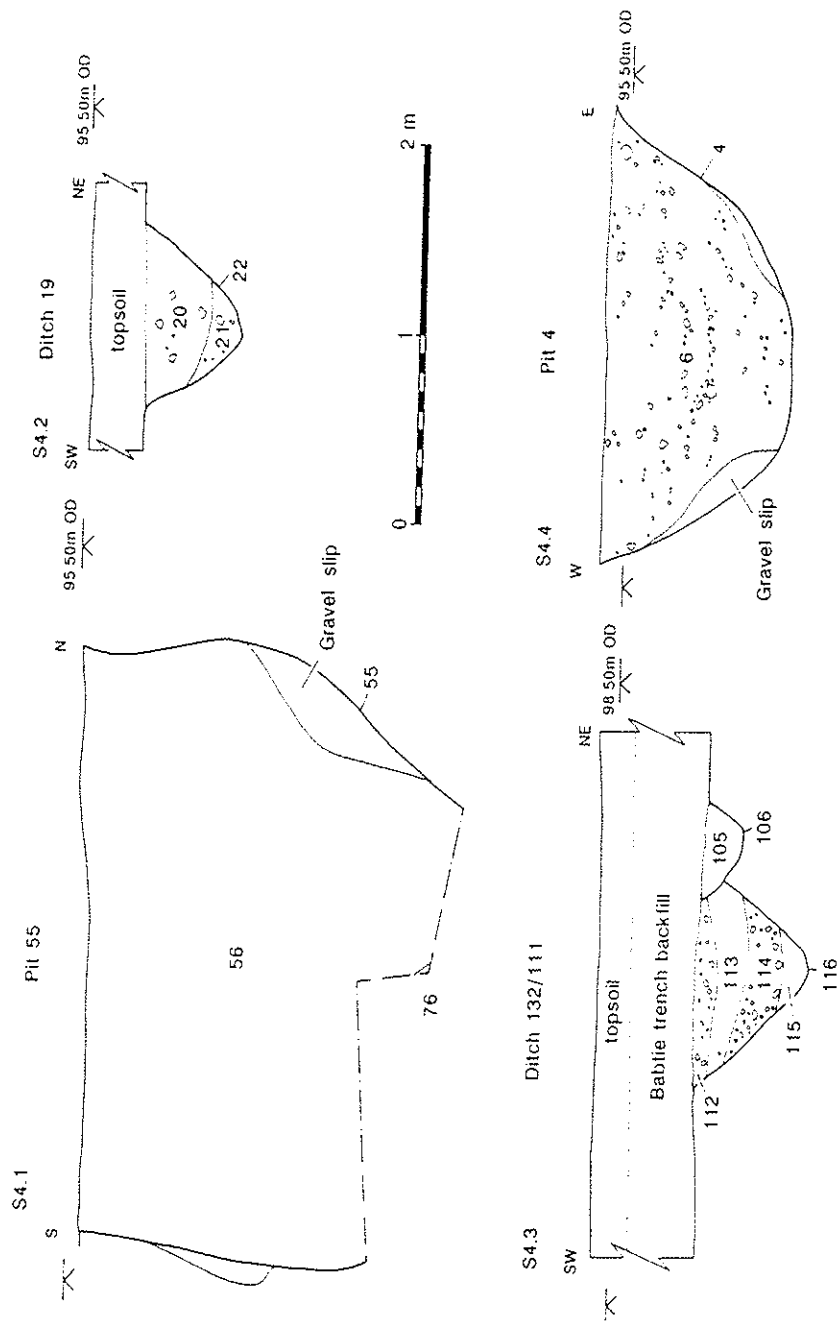


Figure 4 Sections of pits 55 and 4 and of ditches 19, 111, 132

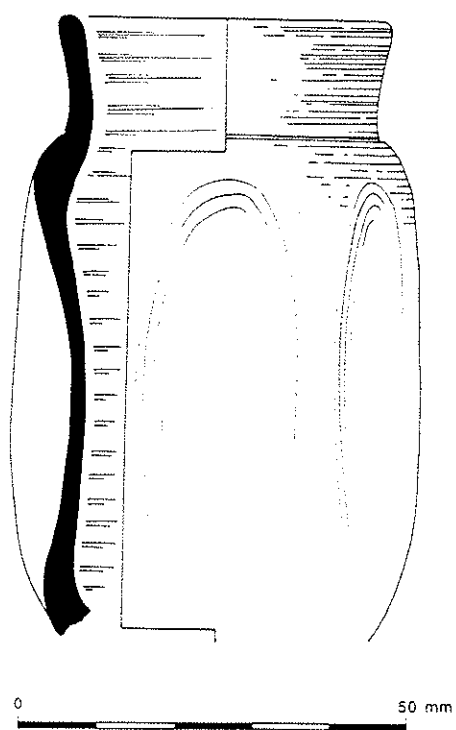


Figure 5 New Forest beaker from ditch 147



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