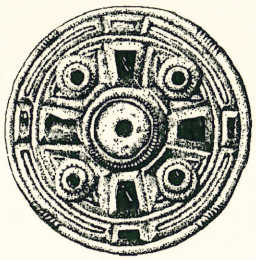

Archaeological Field Unit

Iron Age/Romano-British Settlement at Milton: An Archaeological Rescue Project

Tim Reynolds

1994

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 104

Commissioned By East Waste Ltd.

Iron Age/Romano-British Settlement at Milton: An Archaeological Rescue Project

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Planning permission has been granted for the expansion of waste pits by East Waste Ltd. at Milton (TL 465 625), subject to an archaeological watching brief being carried out. Preliminary visits to the site in April 1994 identified a series of Romano-British ditches rich in pottery, and resulted in the discovery of pond deposits also containing a significant quantity of Romano-British material. These findings prompted a rescue project working from day to day over the period of a week, during which time evidence for the presence of a Roman villa nearby was recovered, together with five phases of Roman activity. This area, recorded as MILEW 94 (I), has now been destroyed.

In June a second stage began on an adjacent pit MILEW 94 (II), with three weeks allowed for archaeological investigations. A complex of late Iron Age and Romano-British features was discovered, which included the remains of three round houses, a mortuary enclosure with four possible cremations, numerous pits, postholes and ditches. This site will be destroyed during September 1994.

Analysis of environmental samples has produced preserved seeds, molluscs, beetles and waterlogged wood. Faunal preservation is also notable with many complete long bones being recovered from ditch fills. Pollen samples were also taken.

Expansion of the waste pits between autumn 1994 and summer 1995 is likely to affect a Roman villa and further parts of the Iron Age settlement. A strategy for recording the threatened archaeology using 'preservation by record' is proposed.

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LIST OF FIGURES

1 INTRODUCTION

The client, East Waste Ltd, approached the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council with a request for archaeological monitoring to be carried out in response to a planning condition for an archaeological watching brief. This was recommended as a result of a fieldwalking of the area in 1991 when a total of 49 sherds from all periods was recovered. No cropmark evidence or other records were found in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).

East Waste Ltd are a recently privatised company with restrictions on cash flow, and the money available to them for borrowing is limited. Despite this the client has been most supportive and has increased the resources available for the present recording work by a factor of ten.

A total of four and a half weeks was spent recording the archaeology prior to its destruction by the development. A complex landscape spanning the late Iron Age and Romano-British periods was identified, samples taken, and plans and sections drawn. No resources were available for post-excavation analysis however. This document is therefore a preliminary report of the rescue recording work.

2 IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The development involves the excavation by East Waste of 10m deep pits, 100m x 150m in area. This will destroy all surviving archaeological remains.

3 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND SOILS

The underlying geology is Jurassic Gault clay with sporadic capping of Pleistocene gravels, silts and marls (Worssam and Taylor 1969). Geomorphologically, this latter unit comprises the third terrace of the River Cam. The site lies on the 10m contour and is generally flat with slight ridges where gravel caps the clay. The soils of the area are a mixture of clayey-silts and silty-clays of the Evesham 3 and Milton Soil Associations (Mackney *et al.* 1983). Over the development site these are particularly well-developed and deep. The land use of the site is presently arable fields together with the existing waste pits (*Figure 1*).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies on intermittent third terrace river gravel deposits of the River Cam which have yielded Palaeolithic artefacts and a mammoth (Cambridge County Council SMR). No strictly dateable context for these finds can be assigned but a late Ipswichian /early Devensian date has been given to the terrace itself.

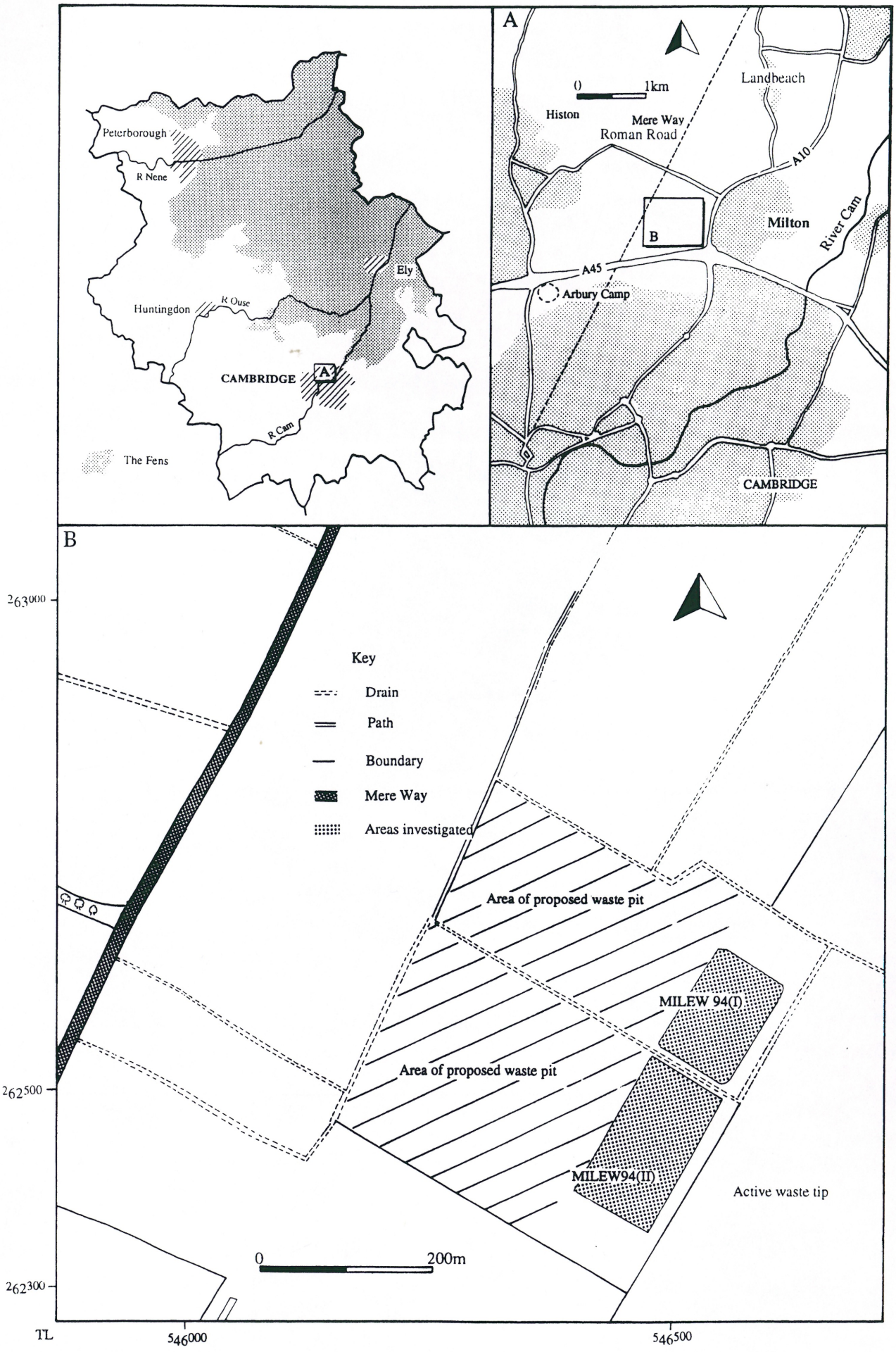

Figure 1 *Location maps*

4.1 The Prehistoric Period

There is little prehistoric evidence in the Milton area: Mesolithic and Neolithic evidence is absent from the vicinity of the development site; while Bronze Age material is present, it is some distance away at Impington, and again nothing is known from the development site itself. The Iron Age archaeology at Arbury Camp (Hughes 1904; Evans 1991a, 1991b) includes a defensive late ring work. On the development site itself, fieldwalking in 1991 recovered a single late Iron Age pottery sherd (Oetgen 1990).

4.2 The Romano-British period

There is some Romano-British evidence for the general area of Milton. A Romano-British farmstead to the north of Arbury Camp is suggested by pottery scatters (Evans 1991a; Hughes 1904). Roman villa buildings are known on the east side of the road at Arbury (Frend 1955) and Kings Hedges (Ette 1991), the latter subject to recent work by Tempus Reparatum. Both of these lie between Cambridge and the development site.

Conversely the area between Milton Road and Histon Road in Cambridge, immediately south of the A14T has been evaluated in recent years by the AFU of Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge Archaeological Unit, with little substantial evidence being recorded (Ette *op. cit.*; Evans *op. cit.*, 1991b; Reynolds 1994). Similarly a watching brief on a pipeline across the north of the development area along Butt Lane failed to identify any archaeology (Ozanne 1991).

In contrast the Romano-British period is well represented at Milton itself, with kilns and farmsteads present on the lower Cam terraces, whilst to the west of the development site Roman Akeman Street runs between the settlements now known as Cambridge and Ely (Margary 1973; Phillips 1970). This road was sectioned in 1991 (Ozanne *op. cit.*) and cremations were found adjacent to it at Kings Hedges on the other side of the A14T (formerly the A45T) (Ette *op. cit.*).

4.3 The Medieval and Post-Medieval Period

Saxon remains are not known from the development area: early settlement at Milton lay closer to the river. Prior to 1912 the development lay mostly in Chesterton parish, and was part of the Chesterton East Field, a component of the three field system of medieval agricultural methods (Wright and Lewis 1989). No settlement is documented for the development site during the medieval period.

In the later post-medieval, in 1802, inclosure of land took place in Milton and in Chesterton in 1840; at the beginning of the nineteenth century Butt Lane, running between Impington and Milton, was built (Wright and Lewis op. cit.).

Pre WW2, much of the development area was given over to market gardening . During WW2 the land to the south of the development area was used as a tank depot. The A14T was built in the mid-1970's as a northern bypass for Cambridge: there are plans for widening the road which will have important implications for archaeology(Kemp 1992).

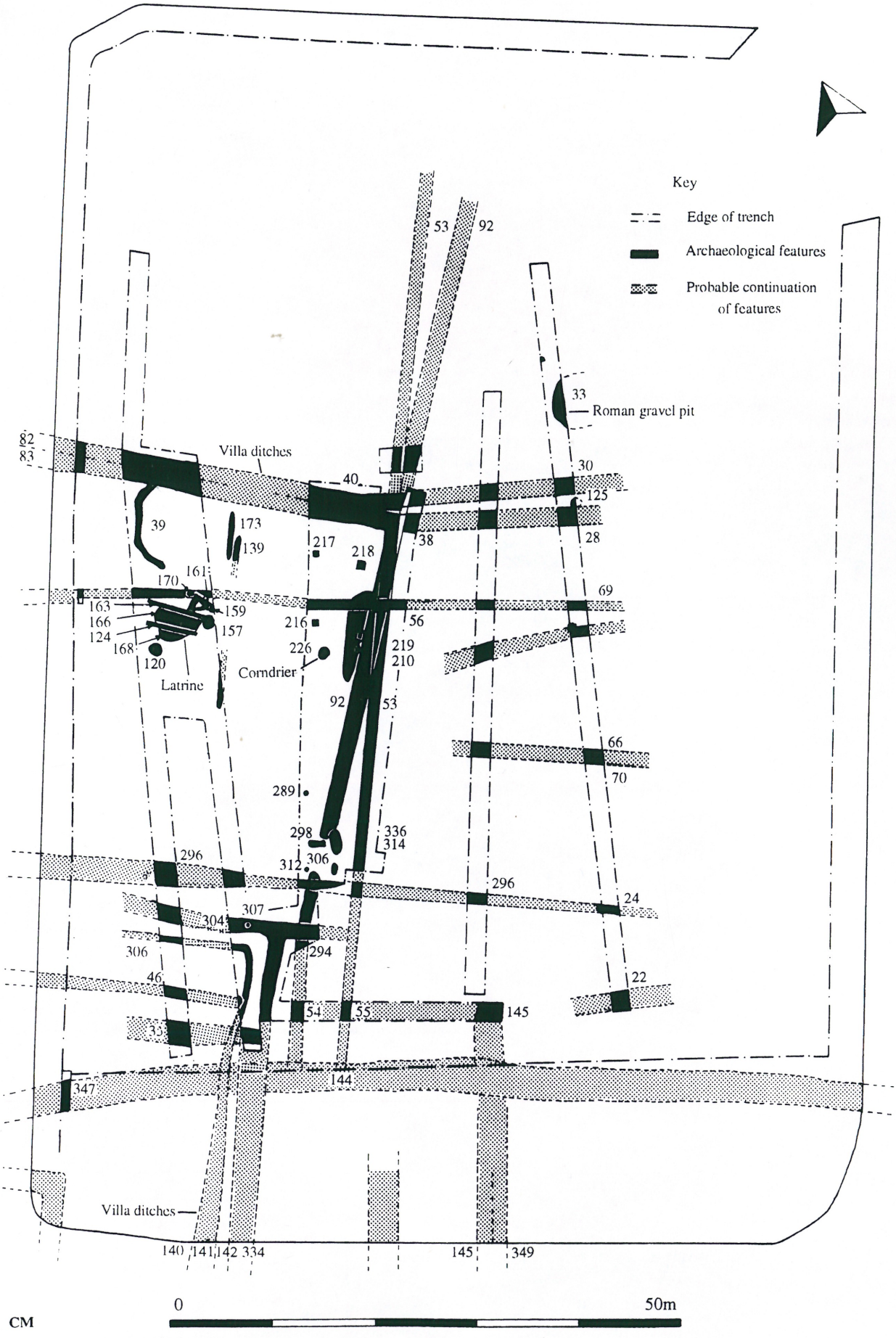

Figure 2 *Plan of trenches and features MILEW (I)*

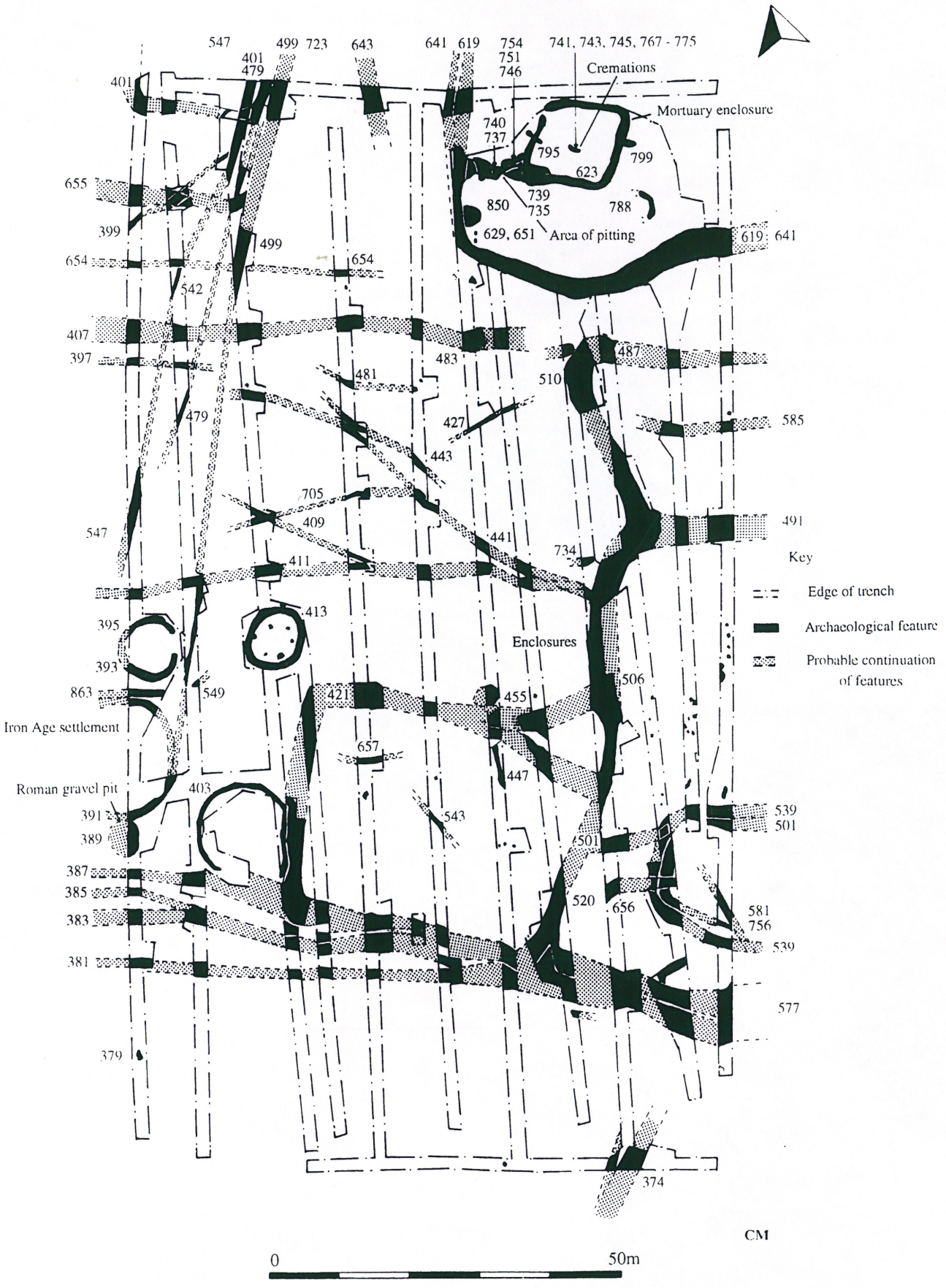

Figure 3 *Plan of trenches and features MILEW (II)*

5 METHODOLOGY

Initially, a watching brief was required and two staff members were assigned to monitor the machine stripping of the topsoil by bulldozer.

The first phase of development in April 1994 comprised the digging of a deep ditch around the area of the first pit (labelled MILEW 94 (I)) to drain it . This was monitored and four Romano-British ditches were identified. The central part of the pit area was topsoil stripped using bulldozers, and monitored by the author together with one other member of staff. During this, a substantial amount of Romano-British material was identified within a pond deposit (*Figure 2*).

As a result of the findings the strategy was changed. A 360 tracked excavator was brought onto site, and trenches 1.6m wide were excavated in the area of features, with a toothless ditching bucket. The areas north, south and east of this were examined for features, although only cursorily, to allow development to proceed.

A total of five days was spent on this pit (MILEW 94 (I)): the sections through the features were hand dug and recorded. All features were planned using an EDM, and environmental samples were taken where appropriate.

The second pit (MILEW 94 (II)) was stripped in May. A grid was laid over this site, a metal detector survey carried out, and machine trenching undertaken to evaluate the area. Machine-dug slots were put through large ditches when these were identified during machining (*Figure 3*).

In area I, seven machine dug trenches were excavated whilst a further 175m length of section was examined as trenches: areas 1 and 9. A sample of *c* 10% of the total was investigated. In area II, trenching by machine was coupled to the opening of an open area and 32% of the proposed pit was sampled.

Priority was given to recording ditch intersections in order to provide phasing for the site, whilst planning was undertaken by EDM.

A sample of strategic areas and features was hand excavated to record sections, recover dating materials and take environmental samples.

The features were planned and sections drawn at 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate: all recording was undertaken using the AFU of Cambridgeshire County Council standard single context recording system, which has been widely applied elsewhere in the County, and has demonstrated success in consistent and relatively rapid recording, which allows comparisons between sites.

6 RESULTS

In summary of our findings, a sequence spanning the late Iron Age to the late Roman-British period has been recovered (Section 7; *Figures 5 to 11*). There is also evidence to suggest there was Mesolithic activity in the area.

Materials recovered include pottery, bone, iron, bronze and lead objects, waterlogged wood, burnt stone, glass, struck flint, and tile.

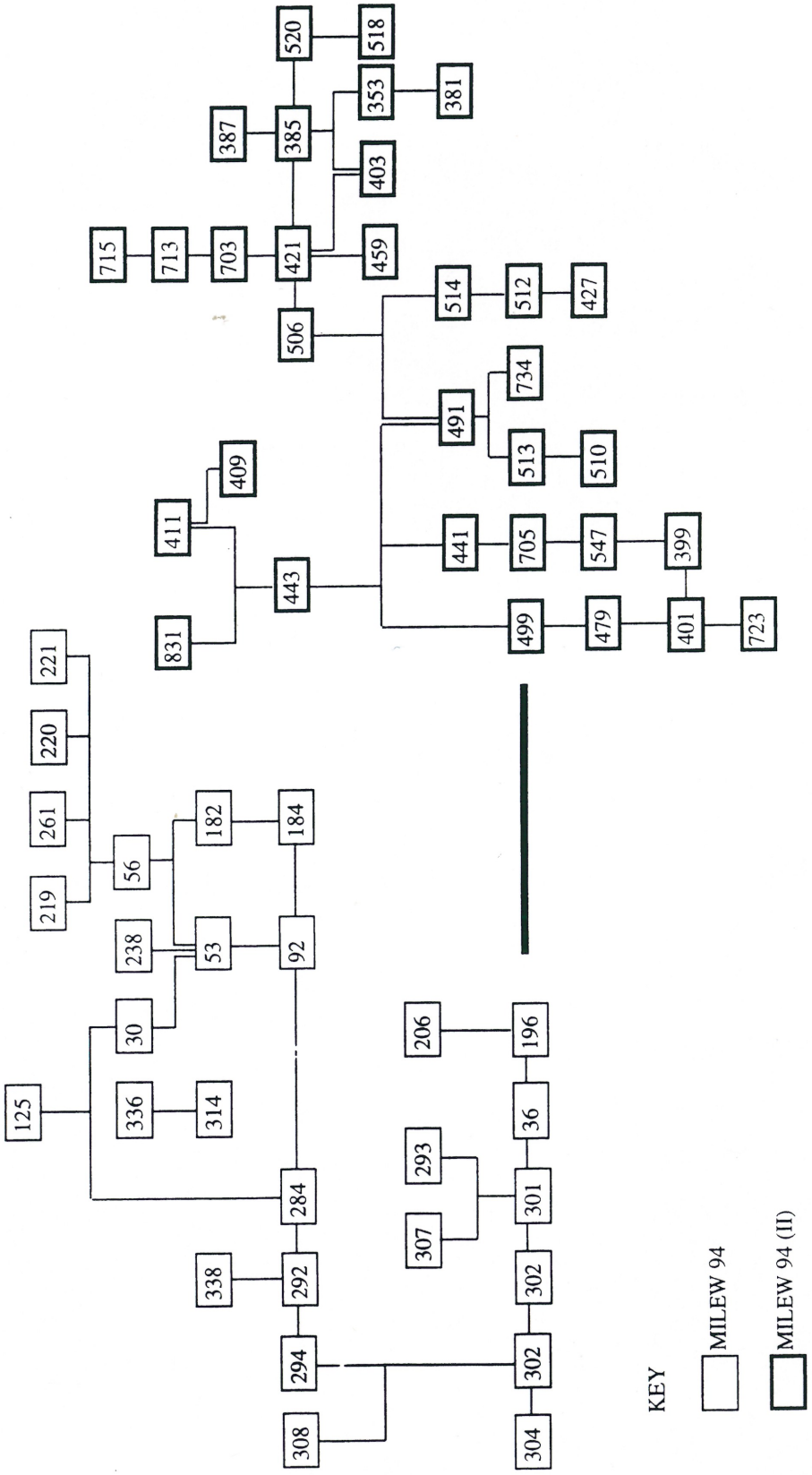

Figure 4 *Site matrix*

The potential for analysis of artefact and environmental evidence is summarised in section 8, below; features identified in area I are shown in *Figure 2*; features identified in area II are shown in *Figure 3*.

Hand excavation of feature intersections has allowed the construction of a basic site matrix (minimally represented in *Figure 4*).

7 INTERPRETATION.

7.1 Introduction

This phasing is a minimal representation of the sequence; other more localised events in the landscape can also be recognised.

In the following sections, numbers **in bold** are cuts, plain numbers are fills or deposits, and / numbers \ are small finds numbers.

7.1.1 Prior to Phase 1 there is evidence for brief activity probably a hunting stand, in area II during the Mesolithic period.

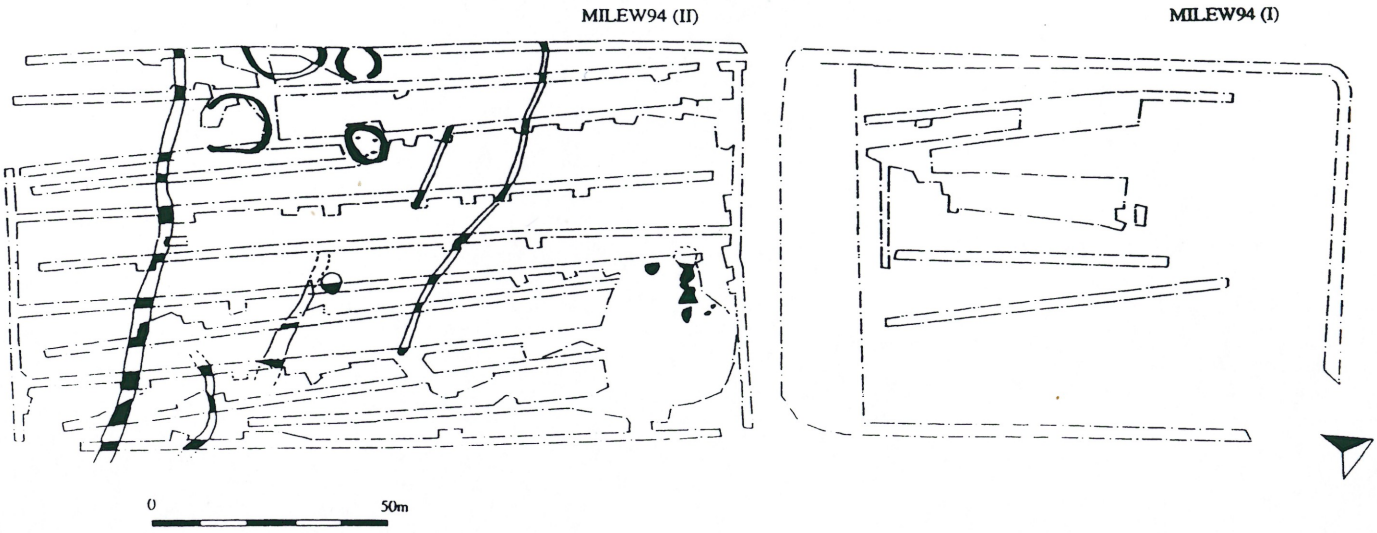

Figure 5 *Plan of phase 1*

7.2 Phase 1 *(Figure 5)*

Initially a late Iron Age settlement was placed on a slight gravel ridge in the area containing evidence of ring-ditches **391**, **395**, **403**, **413** (area II); this was a farming settlement, with associated field boundary ditches **383**, **409**, **443**, **703**.

An area of pits **455**, **746**, **754**, **751**, **807**, (for gravel extraction) was located off the central part of the gravel ridge to the east and north-east of the settlement.

7.3 Phase 2 *(Figure 6)*

The pits were rapidly backfilled and a timber building, **735**, **737**, was constructed on this area. The timber building was then replaced with a similarly constructed and located structure **739**, **740**, together with a further timber structure, **799**, *c*10m to the east of it.

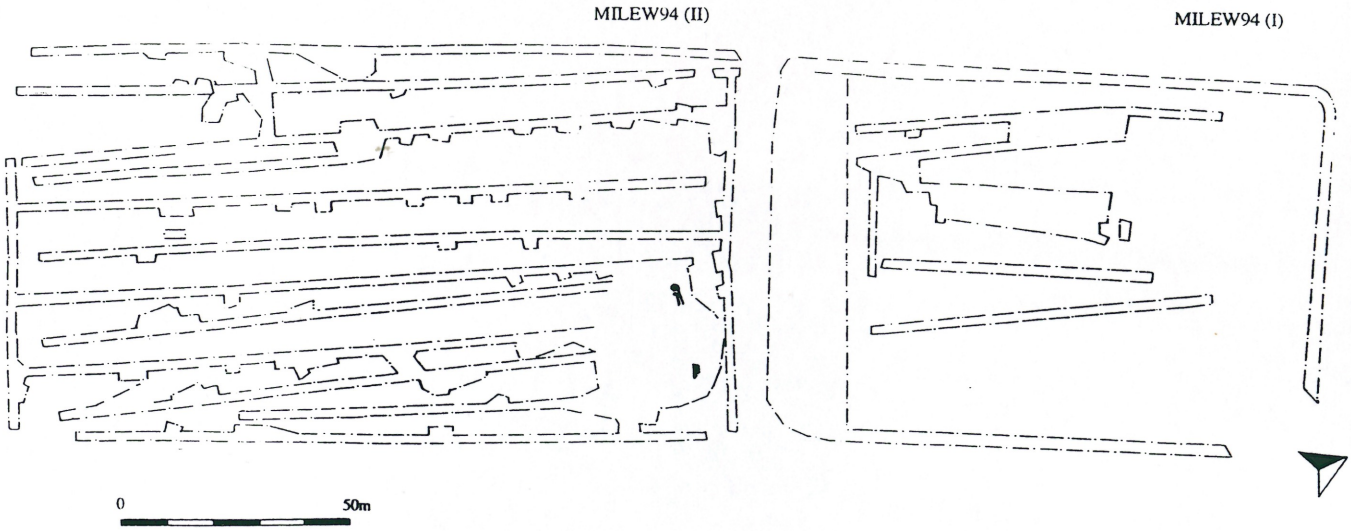

Figure 6 *Plan of phase 2*

7.4 Phase 3 *(Figure 7)*

An enclosure ditch, **641**, was dug around the buildings and a system of at least three other enclosures was also set out, **421**, **491**, **501**, **506**, **510**, **520**. The most westerly of these, **421**, cut through the southernmost ring-ditch, **403**, of the settlement area, suggesting that the latter was disused by this time.

A timber ?mortuary enclosure, **623**, replaced the timber buildings within the most northern enclosure. In the centre of this structure were four possible cremations, **741**, **743**, **745**, **767**, together with three other pottery vessels .

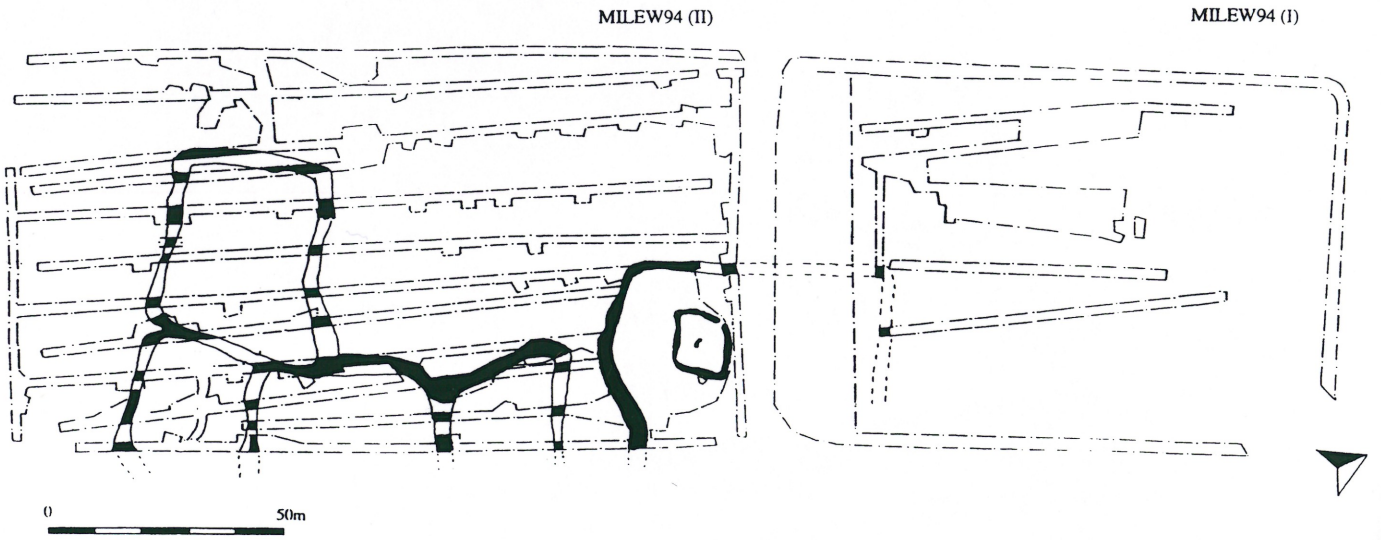

Figure 7 *Plan of phase 3*

Subsequently the Iron Age settlement appears to have been deliberately dismantled, timbers being taken out of their postholes (possibly for reuse), and non-reusable materials being burnt on site. The fills, 392, 394, 412, of the dismantled house ditches contained charcoal and burnt stones.

7.5 Phase 4 *(Figure 8)*

The above dismantling was followed by the digging of a Romano-British pit, **33, 389,** for gravel, possibly for the construction of the villa nearby; a Roman villa estate, **37**, **40**, **54**, **92**, **304**, was laid out to the north of the Iron Age settlement.

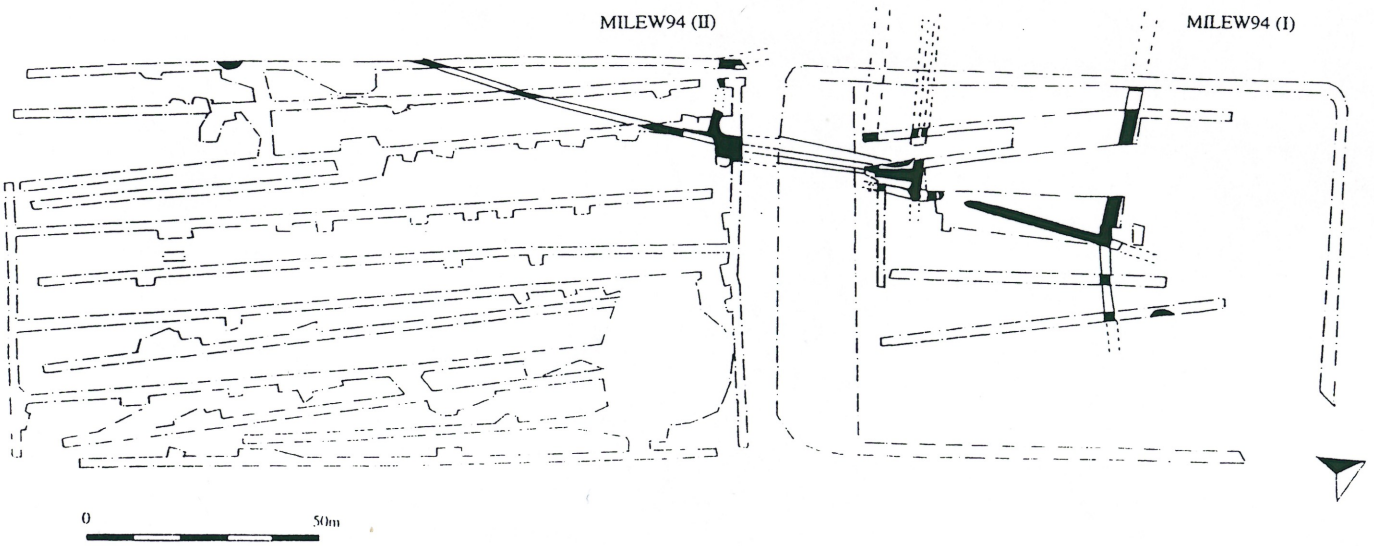

Figure 8 *Plan of phase 4*

7.6 Phase 5 *(Figure 9)*

The estate was realigned with ditches, **40**, **55**, **298**, **300**, **312**, **314**, **336**, being recut on slightly different axes. The area of the Iron Age settlement was ploughed thus removing traces of floors inside the ring-ditches, and reducing the banks and other extant earthworks.

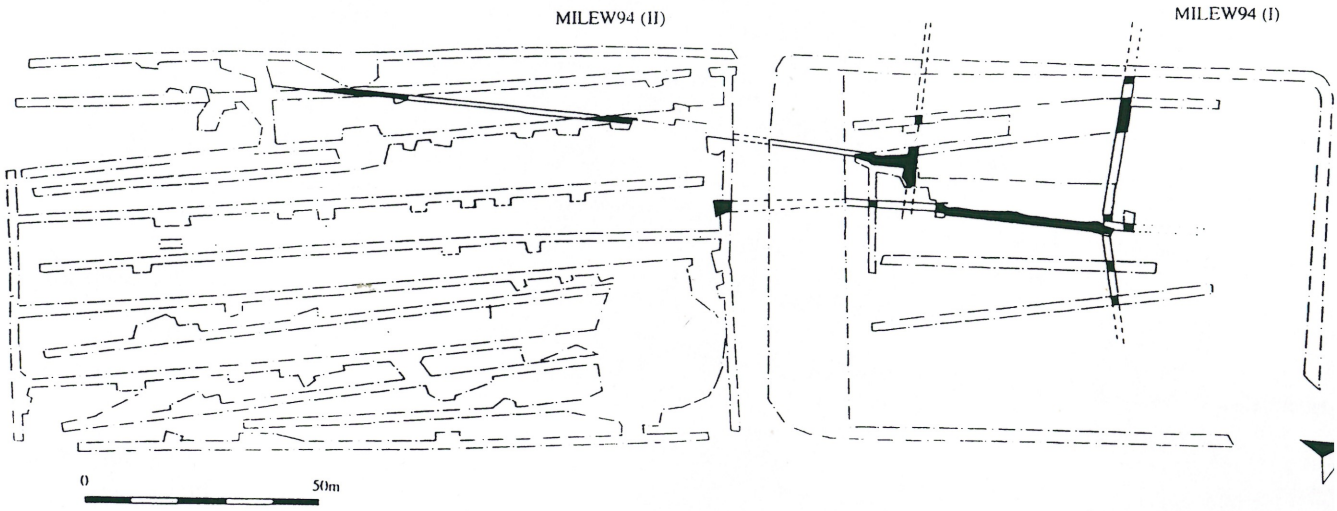

Figure 9 *Plan of phase 5*

7.7 Phase 6 *(Figure 10)*

The villa estate was destroyed; roof tile, box tile and worked stone were deposited in the fills of the estate ditches in the north of the evaluated area. A series of regular ditches, **26**, **34**, **50**, **66**, **69**, **245**, **387**, **407**, **411**, was laid out running perpendicular to the axis of the Roman road, possibly indicative of the reallocation of the villa estate land to local residents.

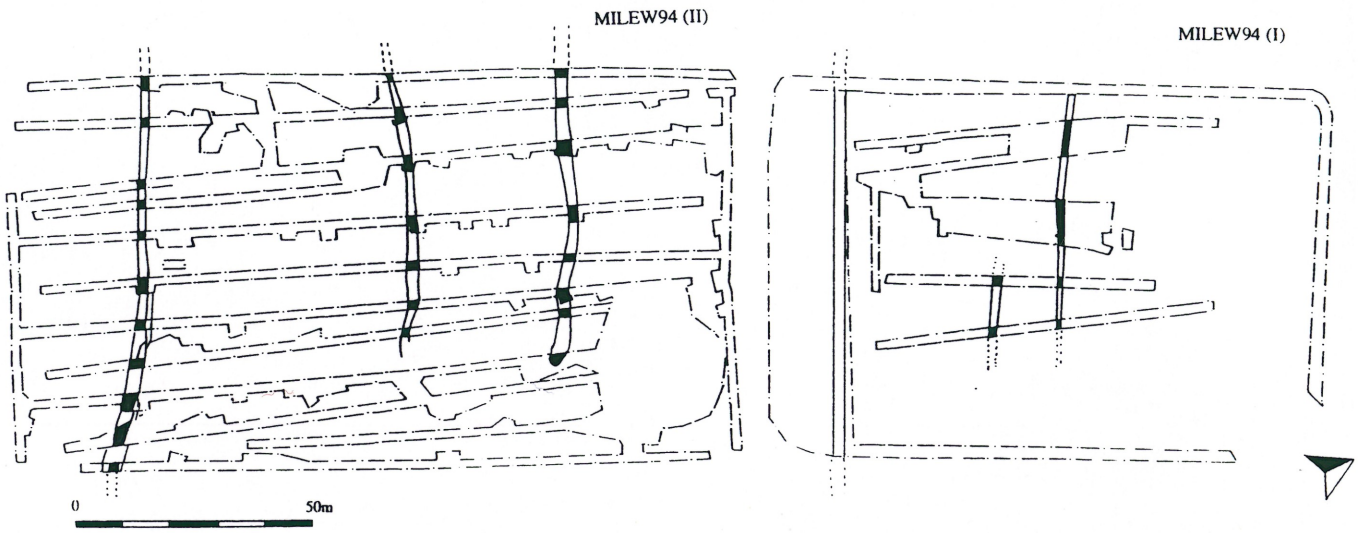

Figure 10 *Plan of phase 6*

7.8 Phase 7 *(Figure 11)*

The ditches in phase 6 also silted up and a pond, **261**, formed at the intersection between one of these silted up ditches and two of the infilled estate ditches.

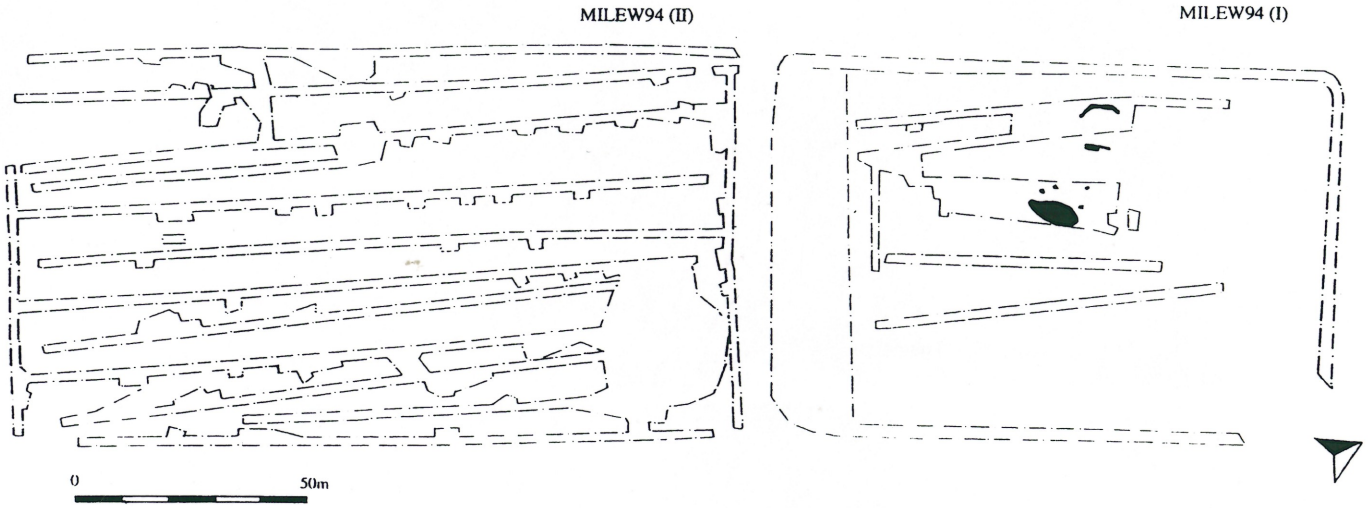

Figure 11 *Plan of phase 7*

A timber barn, **139**, **173**, **216**, **217**, **218**, was built with an oven/corn drier, **221**, outside it; two individual dumps, **219**, **220**, from this feature have been identified in the pond. The barn possibly had two storeys, its front wall has two square cut pits with postholes in their corners. Beyond this line a further square cut pit, **218**, occurs with two cut gullies in it, parallel to each other; these have been interpreted as the setting for a fixed access ladder. A substantial amount of pottery was dumped in the pond.
A ?latrine, constructed as a pit, **166**, enclosed by timber walls, **163**, **124**, was built after a previous pit, **168**, had been filled.

8 ARTEFACTUAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL POTENTIAL FOR ANALYSIS

8.1 Animal Bone

Substantial quantities of faunal remains, including well-preserved whole bones, were recovered from ditches. In addition a sizeable amount of small bone fragments and bones of small animals has been recovered through the environmental sampling of feature fills.

8.2 Flint

Only eleven struck flints were recovered. These comprised a core fragment, a microlith, a burin spall, five bladelet fragments, two flakes and a bladelet. No further analysis of this material would be appropriate at present, however further work is likely to yield additional materials.

8.3 Ceramics

Relatively large amounts of pottery have been collected, washed and sorted but no further analysis undertaken. Only basic identifications have been made for dating purposes. This material requires examination to ascertain its potential for analysis and - as a matter of urgency - to provide more effective spot-dating for features.

A single, fragmentary, ceramic loom weight **/26** has been recovered from a pit.

8.4 Metal Objects

A number of iron objects were recovered as a result of a metal detector survey. These include: some possible horse harness trappings and numerous nails; two iron fibulae both of simple Colchester type, one, **/22** , dated to between AD 20 and 70, the second, **/27** is slightly earlier (Hattatt 1982; 1985); a socketed iron spike/?spear **/3** recovered from a Roman ditch, 303; a quantity of hobnails collected from the pond.

During the excavation various metal artefacts were also recovered. The assemblage comprised: two lead pot-mends **/6, 12** from **216,** and **the surface**; a total of three copper-alloy Roman coins,**/1, 2, 24** , from **40**, 55, and from **the surface**, dating to between the third and late fourth centuries; a bronze ?key fragment **/5** from 295, and part of a gilt-bronze sheet circular brooch **/19** , from **the surface**; a bronze ?bead **/30** was recovered from ditch **421**.

All metal objects have been stabilised and stored in a controlled environment store in the AFU office.

8.5 Glass

A single fragment, **/4**, of the base of a square bottle, datable to the first or second century AD, was recovered from 105.

8.6 Building Materials

Roman roof tile, box tile and fragments of worked stone have been recovered. Only a small amount of daub has been found and no fragments of opus signinum or tesserae have been recorded to date.

8.7 Environmental samples

Flotation yielded carbonised seeds, cereal rachis fragments, beetles, and molluscs. Pollen cores were taken from the main Roman ditch sequence, **40**, but have not yet been processed. A single fragment of waterlogged wood was retrieved from the basal fill of an enclosure ditch, 421. Further environmental samples are being processed and will be sent to P. Murphy of English Heritage for comments on their potential for analysis. The pollen cores will also be sent.

9 RESEARCH POTENTIAL

Research issues have been identified in the English Heritage document Exploring Our Past (1991), the following points derive from these and other, more regional, interests.

The site is of importance since it covers the period in Exploring Our Past (EOP) discussed as 'Briton into Roman', (1991,36). The changes at the Milton site associated with the Romanisation of the rural environment are recorded in the sequence of enclosure, settlement and field patterns.

The significance of the site cannot be over emphasised, providing evidence, as it does, for both continuity and change during the late Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Furthermore, the breaking down of the villa estate into smaller units during the later Romano-British period offers an opportunity for studying the decline of Roman influence. The site's additional potential for environmental analysis, associated with the economies of the late Iron Age rural settlement and Roman villa estate, is also highly significant.

The destruction of the Roman villa at Milton will also provide an opportunity to investigate a previously unknown villa site of a type in Cambridgeshire that has not yet been subject to total excavation; and for early specialist involvement and effective sampling strategies, in order to tackle efficiently those specific questions arising from previous, less systematic, work.

In addition, the proximity of the site to both Arbury Camp and the suburbs of Roman Cambridge, offers an opportunity to examine the role of the site in the broader context of the total landscape.

Furthermore, since the site location is situated in a 'development corridor' of the Romano-British period, lying as it does between the River Cam and the Roman road, the nature of the local economy here is of particular interest, as one would expect specialised services, such as local small industries, to take advantage of this strategic location. There are, for example, kilns in both Milton and Horningsea, and the presence of lodes leading into the Cam, together with the near by location of Car Dyke, suggests that the existence of both extraction and production industries would be needed to justify this construction effort. The products of these local kilns need to be studied to establish sequences and phasing; materials from the site may provide important evidence necessary to accomplish such work.

The location of the site in relation to Iron Age tribal territories may also be of significance in terms of its ability to indicate the competing political spheres of interest between 55/54 BC and AD 43.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS.

10.1 Future Development Plans

The two waste disposal pits already investigated are only part of a series planned for the next year. By early summer 1995 when the present pits are filled, additional pits will be placed to the west of the present site.

To prevent the delays experienced this spring due to bad weather, it is planned to remove the topsoil from the fields adjacent to the present pits in August/September 1994. Planning permission for this work has been given subject to an archaeological planning condition. This planning condition requires a watching brief.

10.2 Suggested Further Work

The planning condition laid down to date can now be seen to be inadequate to deal effectively with the quantity and quality of surviving archaeology at the site. Post-excavation funding is urgently required in order to exploit fully the evidence already recovered from the work .

Monitoring of further topsoil stripping this August/September is necessary. Once the topsoil has been stripped, magnetic susceptibility and geophysical surveys should be conducted, to identify the extent of the Iron Age settlement, to plan the field systems, and most importantly, to identify the exact location of the Roman villa building itself.

Strategic evaluation trenching should be undertaken in autumn 1994 to confirm the findings of the surveys recommended..

This evaluation should also aim to identify the condition of any surviving structural remains, to introduce specialists to the site and its data, and to initiate the planning of a rescue excavation.

The rescue excavation is needed in early summer 1995 to 'preserve by record' the surviving archaeological landscape.

It should be noted that whilst the development is subject to an archaeological planning condition, the developer will not have the resources to fund further works, and support must be sought elsewhere.

In this instance English Heritage funding will be sought to fund both the post-excavation analysis of the existing work and the future rescue excavation needed to 'preserve by record'.

11 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank East Waste for their co-operation and assistance with work on the site and for providing resources for the field work. Mike Tassel, Clive Carr and Rebecca Holiday all visited the site and were unerringly helpful.

I should like to thank the County Archaeologist Alison Taylor, the Assistant County Archaeologist Bob Sydes and the Archaeological Field Unit Senior Project Manager Tim Malim for their helpful comments and support; and Philip Walker of English Heritage for visiting the site at short notice and also providing encouragement.

The following specialists all came out at short notice, for which I am grateful; Dr C. French, Dr R. Luff and P. Murphy.

I would also like to thank the field team who worked extremely effectively and rapidly in some very difficult conditions, Ben Robinson, Stephanie Leith, Carole Fletcher and Malin Holst who all did sterling work with the EDM and produced the base plans, Malin Holst and Chris Montague for work on illustration and Christine Sheard for editing this report.

I wish to thank Chris Montague for the metal detector survey and efforts in post-excavation processing, Duncan Schlee and Helen Finnigan for sample processing and Simon Bray for postponing project tasks to work at Milton at short notice.

Paul Firman, Jane Kenney and John Allen all volunteered to work on site despite the heat and were most useful.

The field team comprised (intermittently):
Simon Bray
Helen Finnigan
Carole Fletcher
Richard Heawood
Sarah Hinds
Malin Holst
Scott Kenney
David Mitchell
Chris Montague
Steve Ouditt
Christine Sheard
Paul Stevens

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