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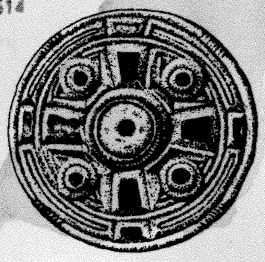

Archaeological Field Unit

Early Bronze Age and Later Iron Age Activity on Land at the New School Site, Hinchingbrooke Park Road, Hinchingbrooke, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Evaluation

Mark Hinman and Spencer Cooper

January 2001

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 188

Commissioned by M Hucklesby, Property Procurement Division, Cambs. County Council

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Summary

Between the 11/12/2000 and the 13/12/2000 Mark Hinman and Spencer Cooper of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook evaluation by means of trial trenching on land adjacent to Hinchingbrooke Park Road, Hinchingbrooke. The work was commissioned by Mr M Hucklesby on behalf of the Property Procurement Division, CCC, in advance of the proposed development of the subject site for a new school.

Evaluation has demonstrated the presence of significant archaeological remains including a group of pits, one of which contained the poorly preserved remains of a horse's skull placed on a collection of cobbles before being carefully covered by a layer of pottery. The structure and nature of these placed deposits is reminsicent of late Neolithic / early Bronze Age remains revealed adjacent to the subject site during the Bob's Wood excavation during 2000AD. The date range for the materials from the current evaluation indicates deposition during the early Bronze Age, adding further significant evidence for the continuing tradition of symbolic placement of artefacts on the site, first encountered during the 1997 excavations immediately to the west of the subject site. The presence of 'Beaker' pottery in association with the horse cranium is a highly significant discovery of regional and potentially national importance. Additional remains consisted of a series of ditches tentatively attributed to the middle-late Iron Age (c 300 BC-50 AD) although no artefactual material was recovered to support this interpretation. Most of the ditches encountered represent field boundaries or drainage ditches.

One of the most striking observations of the evaluation was the lack of features or artefacts dateable to the Romano British period in contrast to the high densities of finds and features found on adjacent areas of the Bob's Wood site (Hinman, 1997, Hinman 2000)

Evidence of two distinct phases of ridge and furrow cultivation were also recorded.

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An Evaluation

TL 223 722

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 11/12/2000 and the 13/12/2000 Mark Hinman and Spencer Cooper of the Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) undertook evaluation by means of trial trenching on 1.4ha of land adjacent to Hinchingbrooke Park Road, Hinchingbrooke. The work was commissioned by Mr M Hucklesby on behalf of the Property Procurement Division, CCC, in advance of the proposed development of the subject site for a new school.

Seven trenches (21 – 27) totalling 370.20m in length x 2.10m wide (5.6% sample) were excavated within the bounds of the New School development.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is situated to the south west of Huntingdon and lies on high ground north of Alconbury Brook within the Ouse Valley. The site lies on the north facing slope of a naturally formed hill which would have afforded clear views down the river valleys to the east and west prior to the construction of the modern road network. The land slopes downwards from 35m OD adjacent to the crest of the hill in the south east corner of the site to 29m OD in the north east corner of the site.

The site is located on Boulder Clay and overlooks the alluviated terrace gravels of the Great Ouse valley in the Brampton area.

An examination of the site within the wider topographical framework of the local area is desirable. The hill upon which the Bob's Wood site is situated appears as a solitary, upstanding, geological feature at the juncture of three broad valleys (Fig 2). The importance of these valleys is evidenced by the range of prehistoric and later sites in the vicinity (see 4 archaeological and historical background). The rivers and later roadways including Ermine Street and the A14 serve to emphasise the strategic location of the site at this ancient transport intersection.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aerial Photographic Assessment

Aerial photographic assessment has not been carried out. Previous experience of these techniques on this area (Palmer, 1997) has proven that the heavy clay soils do not provide ideal circumstances for producing cropmark data.

3.2 Sites and Monuments Record

In order to provide a context for the evaluation a desk based assessment of currently accessible sources relating to archaeological sites and finds spots within a 5km radius of the subject site was undertaken.

The known archaeological resource was investigated through Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), Huntingdon Records Office and information, including maps and past publications held at the AFU's headquarters in Fulbourn.

3.3 Trial Trenching

Seven trenches (21 – 27) totalling 370.20m in length x 2.10m wide (5.6% sample) were excavated within the bounds of the New School development. An additional trench, numbered 28 was also opened. Trench 28, 51m in length had been cut at the start of the evaluation but was mistakenly located immediately to the west of the development area. This trench contained no archaeological features but was recorded and surveyed nonetheless. All trenches were opened using a 360° tracked excavator with a 2.10m wide toothless ditching bucket.

The trenches were numbered from 21 to 28 to avoid confusion with earlier evaluation on the Bob's Wood site during 2000AD (trenches 1-20, Hinman, 2000.)

The positioning of the trenches was designed to provide a uniform level of cover across the area.

Relative artefact densities across the area were examined through controlled scanning of the spoil heaps generated through trenching and included a metal detector survey.

Excavation of all surviving deposits and features was conducted to characterise the nature and extent of the surviving archaeological remains. Photographs were taken and plan and section drawings made where appropriate.

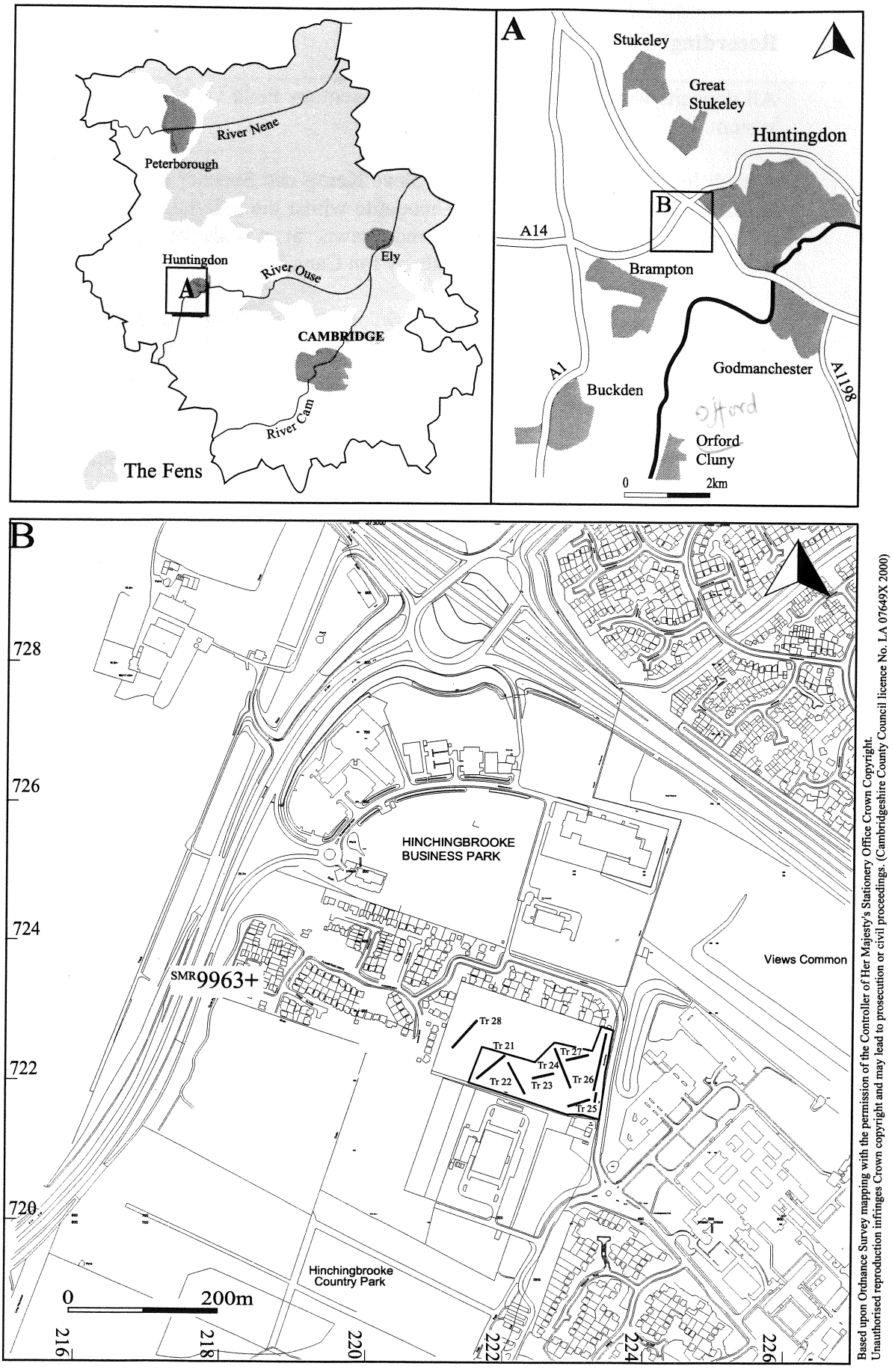

Figure 1 *Location of evaluation trenches within the development area. (For detail see Figure 4)*

3.4 Recording

All deposits were recorded using the Archaeology Field Unit's single context system.

Trench locations were surveyed by Steve Kemp and Spencer Cooper using a Ziess Rec Elta 15 Total Station Theodolite whilst the individual trench plans showing feature locations were hand drawn, at a scale of 1:50 prior to incorporation with the surveying data by Jon Cane.

In line with previous phases of work on the Hinchingbrooke site extant registers were utilised for all context, environmental, plan / section registers *et al* in order to avoid duplication of unique key numbers within the bounds of the archaeological site as distinct from the development area.

All site records and artefacts are held currently at the AFU headquarters at Fulbourn and stored under the site code STU HIN 00.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 General Background

The area is one of high archaeological potential for a range of archaeological periods.

4.2 Prehistoric

The major river systems within Cambridgeshire have been the focus for much of the prehistoric activity within the county. The results of aerial photographic studies and excavations have shown the Ouse Valley to be particularly rich. Palaeolithic remains have been found within the terrace gravels of the river system. Mesolithic and Neolithic finds appear to be sparse in comparison to the later Neolithic and Bronze Age. To the west of the subject site lies the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age ceremonial complex of Brampton (SAM 121).

The major prehistoric monuments in the vicinity of the site are shown in relation to the local topography in Figure 2.

Neolithic

Included on this plan are the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age remains (SAM 121), to the west of the site in Brampton. Neolithic monuments within this complex include henges, a cursus and a long mortuary enclosure.

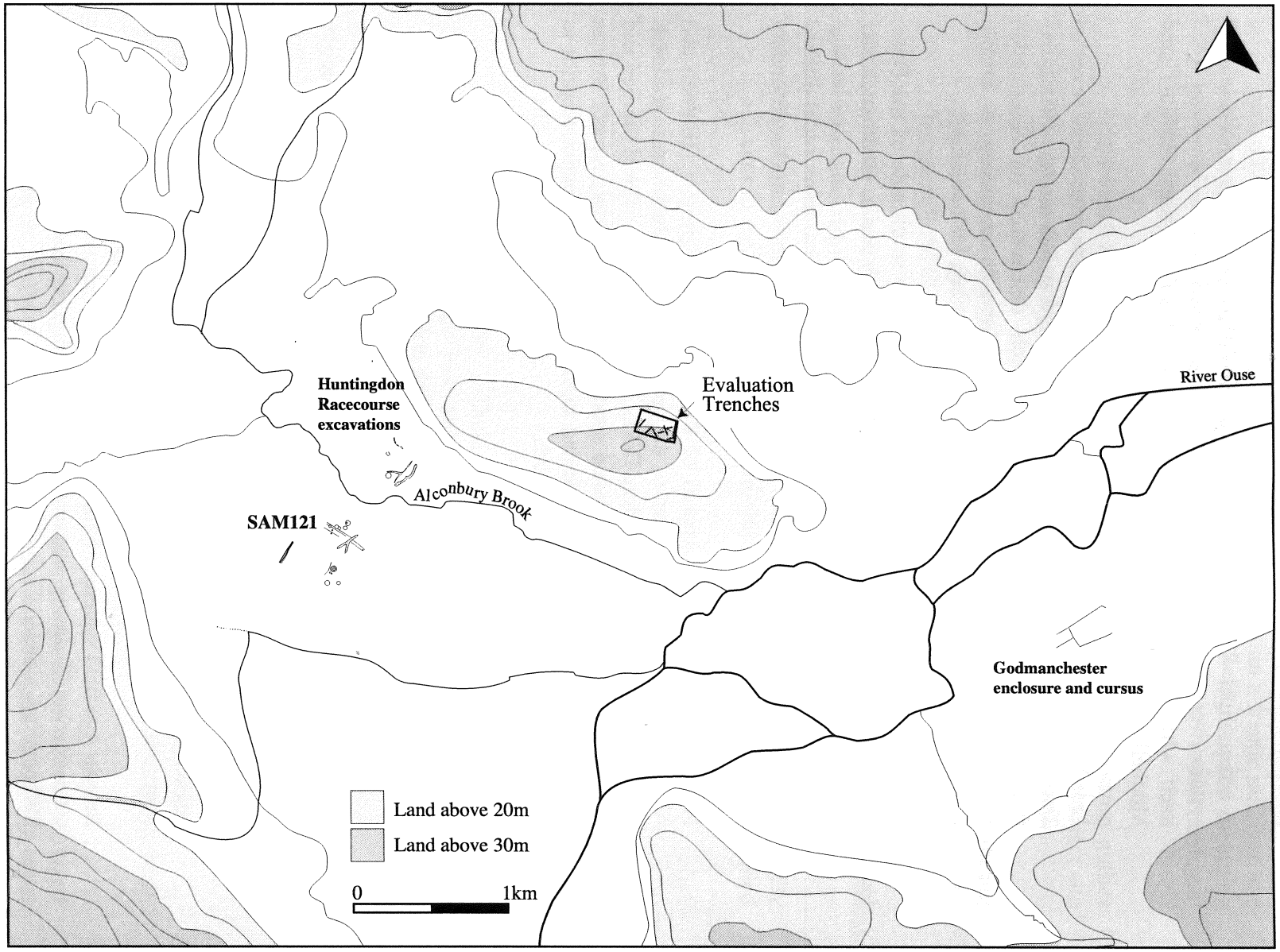

Figure 2 *Local topography and nationally important sites.*

These monuments are considered to form a ceremonial complex (Malim, forthcoming). A Neolithic Mortuary enclosure at the end of a cursus, forming part of this complex was investigated in 1990-1991 (Malim 1990).

A series of parallel ditches interpreted as Neolithic territorial markers or field systems were found during an archaeological excavation on Thrapston Road itself which is situated 2km south-west of the subject site. (MalimT and Mitchell, D;1992).

Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age field systems and an enclosure were revealed 2km to the west of the subject site at Huntingdon Racecourse (Macaulay forthcoming) in 1993. The enclosure ditch discovered on Huntingdon Racecourse contained a series of placed deposits including a broken quernstone and sherds of Neolithic pottery. (Macaulay, forthcoming).

Another ceremonial complex was discovered on the south side of the Ouse, 3km to the south – east of the subject site at Rectory Farm, Godmanchester (McAvoy, forthcoming). This site was investigated by English Heritage during 1989-91 and revealed evidence for a large a-typical trapezoidal ditched enclosure with standing timber posts within. A cursus, some secondary enclosures and a number of ring ditches were also found.

Partial excavation within Area B of the Bob's Wood project (Hinman and Abrams, 2000) 150m south west of the proposed development area, produced a range of lithic artefacts including flakes, tools and an arrowhead (barbed and tanged). A pit containing structured deposits of late Neolithic / early Bronze Age ceramics, lithics, animal bone and stone was also half sectioned prior to the premature cessation of that project.

Bronze Age

The area surrounding the site is similarly rich in Bronze Age remains.

A Bronze Age triple ring ditch (SMR no. 02117) was uncovered during excavations immediately east of Thrapston Rd in 1966 before the construction of the Miller Way housing estate (White, 1969).

A small pit containing fragments of Bronze Age Beaker pottery including fragments of charcoal and burnt bone was uncovered during an archaeological assessment on the area south of Thrapston Road (SMR 11176) during September 1993 (Welsh,K; 1993).

Bronze Age field systems and a Bronze Age round barrow (burial monument) were uncovered during excavations at Huntingdon Racecourse (Macaulay forthcoming), situated 2km west of the site.

Recent evaluation results have highlighted a presence during the Bronze Age which, perhaps significantly includes a series of pits, one of which contained a series of placed or structured deposits (see Results, Trench 26).

Iron Age

A number of Iron Age sites have been identified within a 5 mile radius of the subject site. Iron Age finds have been found within Huntingdon including Scored ware pottery dating from the middle to late Iron Age, most recently at Watersmeet, Huntingdon (Cooper and Spoerry, 1999).

A rectilinear enclosure containing two circular huts with eavesdrop gullies was discovered as part of SAM 121, just 1.5km south-west of the subject site in question, during an excavation by White in 1966 (White, D.A;1969).

A roundhouse and associated ditched field systems were uncovered during excavations on the western half of White's site to the south west corner of Thrapston Road in 1992 (Malim, T and Mitchell, D;1992).

A series of Iron Age farmsteads have been located at intervals along the gravel terrace in Godmanchester, 3km from the subject site (Green;1977).

Significant Iron Age remains were uncovered from the area immediately adjacent to the current site (Hinman 1997) the findings of which are detailed below.

4.3 Romano-British

The proximity of Godmanchester which is only 3km to the south-east of the development site is significant since this town was a major focus for settlement during this time.

Inskip Ladds (1932, 1937), Dickinson (various unpub. manus.) and Greene (1977) have all in the past attempted to locate the line of Ermine Street between Godmanchester and the northern edge of Huntingdon. For the purposes of this study it is assumed that Ermine Street lies close by and probably to the east.

A Roman villa, with ornamental pond was investigated (Green, M; unpublished) in the 1970's, 1980's and between 1990-92 (McAvoy) at Rectory Farm, Godmanchester, 3km to the south-east of the present site. A cremation cemetery was found associated with this villa.

A Roman farm was discovered in Brampton in 1991 (Malim,T, unpublished), as part of A14 salvage excavations.

A number of Roman coins and miscellaneous metalwork have been recovered adjacent to the southern boundary of the subject site in recent years. The coins are predominantly of third to fourth century origin although a number of late first and early second century issues are also known.

4.4 Saxon

The borough of Huntingdon to the west of the site is thought to have originated during the Anglo-Saxon period. It is recorded in the Anglo–Saxon chronicle for 656AD as 'Huntedune – porte'

No activity from the period has yet been identified within the immediate area of the subject site.

4.5 Medieval / Post-Medieval

There are a number of sites of note in the vicinity which include a Medieval Bridge, recorded to the south-east of Hinchingbrooke House (SMR no.2589). The SMR map shows a Medieval church and churchyard (SMR no. 2655) to the north- west of the site and the SMR documents one piece of Medieval pottery discovered on the subject site itself (SMR no. 9963).

The subject site is located within the boundaries of the former estate of Hinchingbrooke House, previously the site of the Benedictine nunnery of St James. The origins of the nunnery at Hinchingbrooke are unclear. It was claimed at the time of the Dissolution that the nunnery had been founded by William the Conqueror. However in the 16th century Leland (in Page,W.G, Proby, S.I and Ladds, S.I; 1932) claimed that the house was in fact founded by the Benedictine nuns of Eltisley who moved here in the early 13th century. The situation is complicated, although for the purposes of this study it is sufficient to note that the earliest surviving structural elements are dateable to c 1100AD (Dickinson) and the first record of a building on the site comes in 1228 (Haigh 1988).

Between the suppression of the nunnery in 1538 and 1627 the House was largely rebuilt and extended by the Cromwell family. Following a serious fire in 1830 the house was restored and rebuilt by Blore, with further restoration undertaken in 1894 and the 1960's (*op cit.*).

In the post-medieval period the proposed land sale area was used for arable farming. The remnants of ridge and furrow field systems were identified during archaeological works in 1997, 2000 and again during the recent evaluation. Furthermore, up-standing remnants of the ridge and furrow have recently been noted as surviving within the bounds of Bob's Wood, which forms the western boundary of the current site and is a part of the Country Park (Hinman and Bullivant, *pers. comm.*).

4.6 The Hinchingbrooke Archaeological Site

A total of 36 separate trenches of varying length have previously been excavated over an area of roughly 17ha during previous phases of evaluation by the AFU at the Hinchingbrooke site. The current development area is

bounded to the north, south and east by previous evaluation and excavation areas. A consideration of this past work is required in order to place the results of the current evaluation within the broader context of the Hinchingbrooke archaeological site.

The first phase of evaluation, which took place between 21/01/97 and 31/01/97 involved the cutting of 16 trenches, total length 900m, identified a marked concentration of features datable to the late Iron Age adjacent to the northern limit of the current development area.

As a result of this evaluation the AFU were commissioned to undertake the simultaneous excavation of two open areas (Area 1; 40m x 120m, and Area 2; *c* 30m x 20m, adjacent to the current development area (see below).

The 1997 Excavation

Previous excavation within the bounds of the archaeological site focused on two areas of remains identified as a result of evaluation.

Excavation within Area 1 revealed the north-eastern limit of a middle Iron Age settlement. The presence of currency bars would seem to suggest a settlement displaying a relatively high degree of wealth and status. That these and other objects had been deliberately placed at the same point on the northern settlement boundary is taken as indicative of symbolic ceremonial activity resulting from the beliefs and superstitions of the MIA inhabitants.

Area 1 (TL 219 / 723)

The earliest evidence of human activity took the form of a pit alignment running from east to west and presumably extending to the west beyond the limit of the excavation. This alignment appeared to delineate an area to the south (at present unexcavated), upslope, towards the crest of the hill. The date at which this alignment was established remains unknown at present but it may well be associated with an as yet unidentified Bronze Age or early Iron Age component to the site. The symbolic placement of the upper fore limb of a Boar on the northern edge of the base of the largest of these pits appears to reinforce the importance of this boundary. At present it is unclear whether this pit alignment is defining the settlement boundary or performing some other role.

A shallow linear ditch 30m to the north (again undatable) which mirrored the pit alignment may have been contemporary or may represent evidence for another, possibly earlier, phase of boundary definition.

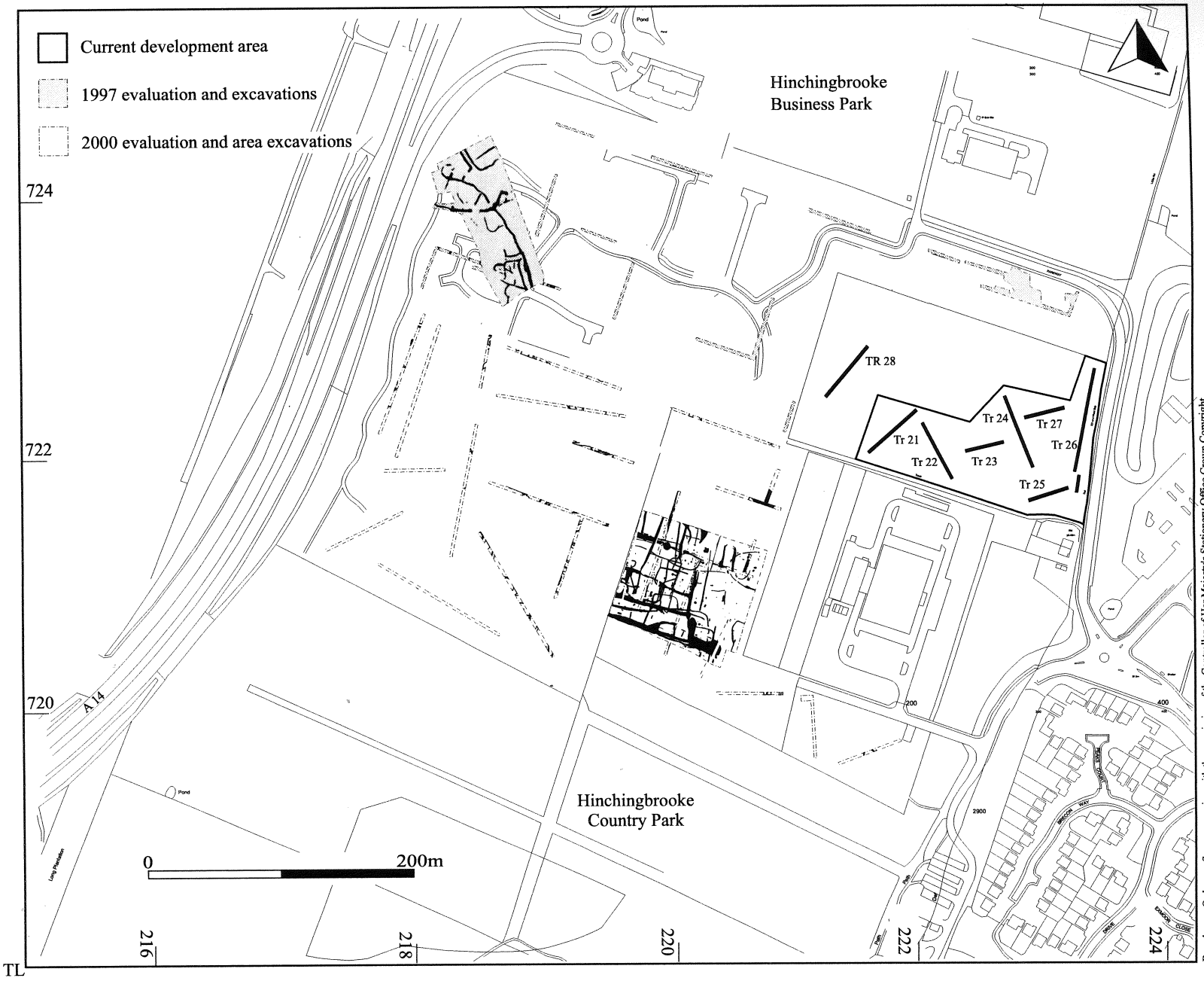

Figure 3 *Plan showing 1997 evaluation/excavation areas, 2000 evaluation/excavation areas and current evaluation trenches*

The pit alignment was truncated along its inner (southern) limit by a *c* 20m long ditch (dateable to the MIA) with a defensive 'ankle breaking' profile. A placed deposit of a ritually? defaced quern base was revealed against the northern edge of this ditch at it's western terminal end.

The final phase of boundary definition maintained the alignment of the previous phases. It took the form of a shallow unbroken ditch and truncated both of the earlier phases. Two currency bars were found placed against the northern edge of this ditch lying parallel to each other with the socketed ends pointing to the east.

The placement of symbolic deposits in the same location throughout all three phases of boundary definition was likely to have been influenced by the local topography although further work is required to illustrate this point.

The southern and eastern limits of this settlement core have been identified as present within the area of the forthcoming excavations.

Certain additional ditches which were undatable due to a lack of artefactual evidence were located towards the southern limit of the site. The north south alignment of the largest of these ditches was mirrored by the alignment of later ditches to the north that were securely datable to the MIA. The paucity of domestic debris within certain of these ditches could be seen to imply a peripheral position to the settlement core during a particular phase in the development of the site. The considerable quantity and diversity of the ceramic and faunal assemblages within adjacent features is an initial indication that more than one phase of activity was represented within the excavation area and may well be seen as evidence for a shift in the settlement core over time.

Area 2 (TL 223 / 723)

Enclosure ditches associated with a separate late Iron Age settlement were also revealed at the eastern limit of the previous land sale area, within 30m of the northern limit of the current development.

Due to the limited area available for excavation there is little that can be said about the nature of the settlement revealed in this area. The large quantities of pottery and other domestic debris were clearly indicative of habitation in the immediate vicinity. The types of pottery recovered were also of significant interest as they form a uniform late Iron Age assemblage of pre conquest date, a period highlighted as a research priority by ceramic specialists (J D Hill pers comm.).

The second phase of evaluation took place between the 27/3/2000 and the 20/4/2000 and involved the cutting of a total of 20 separate trenches of total length 1750.5m covering an area of roughly 8.5ha to the south and east of the current development area. This evaluation, which took place in spring 2000,

identified marked concentrations of settlement related features datable to the late Iron Age and Roman period.

The Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) was subsequently contracted by property management services (CCC) to conduct the archaeological excavation of c 8.5 hectares of land adjacent to Bobs Wood, Hinchingbrooke in advance of the sale of this land for development.

Limited excavation was undertaken by the AFU between 12 July 2000 and 4 August 2000 within Area B of the Bob's Wood project (TL 219 / 721). Main features identified to date included a late Neolithic / early Bronze Age pit, C1st AD pottery kiln, three inhumations (human burials), a metalworking area / smithy with *in-situ* crucible, structural remains including an aisled barn and possible villa wall foundations, post alignments / fence lines, enclosure ditches, processing areas, hearths / ovens, cistern and rubbish pits.

Work on the Bob's Wood project was halted prematurely, without notice during August 2000.

5 RESULTS

Evaluation has demonstrated the presence of significant archaeological remains including possible Neolithic flintwork (*c* 4000-2000 BC), and a series of pits one of which contained 'Beaker' style pottery (early second millenium BC) and ditches from the middle-late Iron Age (*c* 300 BC-50 AD). Evidence of two distinct phases of ridge and furrow cultivation of the later Medieval - Post-Medieval periods (1350-1550 AD / 1550+) was also recorded.

Interestingly no artefactual material or features dateable to the Romano-British period (*c* 50-410 AD) were observed despite the known proximity (Denham and Hinman 1997, Hinman 2000) of remains from the period.

The depth of overburden across the development area varied between 0.5m and 0.80m. It is clear that from the shallowness of surviving features that these archaeological remains have been truncated, presumably by medieval and post medieval ploughing.

The results of the recent evaluation will be examined by trench and period. A full context list and trench plans are provided within Appendices II and III for reference.

General

The most notable observation from the evaluation was the low density of features and the relative absence of finds from excavated features. The

absence of Roman artefacts from excavated features and the ploughsoil in comparison to the large densities of finds and features found on the adjacent site is startling. Furthermore, no material or features relating to the late pre Roman Iron Age were revealed despite the presence of known and significant remains from the period c 30 from the northern boundary of the current development area (Hinman, 1997, Area 2).

The evaluation revealed that most of the development area has been subjected to ridge and furrow cultivation in the post medieval period, as remnants of furrows were identified in trenches 23, 25 and 27. A number of undated ditches were identified in trenches 24, and 22, of particular interest was the entrance type arrangement in the southern part of Trench 24. These ditches are thought to relate to the mid-late Iron Age period of use for the site.

A group of pits was identified in the northern end of Trench 26. One pit produced a small quantity of hand made pottery dateable to the early Bronze Age, lithics and a horse cranium.

The topography of the site may be an important factor in understanding the distribution and function of features. The site slopes away considerably to the north, the southern limit of the site is 34m OD while the northern limit lies at 29m OD. It may be significant that the group of pits are located at that base of the slope.

Trench 21

2201, 2204, 2206, 2208

Trench 21 was 50m long and 0.45m deep and located on a north-east south-west alignment. In the southern part of the trench a possible terminal of a ditch or pit **2201** and an irregular shaped pit **2204** were revealed. No artefacts were recovered from these features which makes phasing problematic.

Pit **2204** contained several fills one of which (See 2203, Appendix II) produced evidence of burning. The form of pit **2204** is reminiscent of a number of features with similarly burnt fills observed or excavated within Area B of the Bob's Wood project. It is possible that this may have been some kind of oven or industrial feature. Environmental data from soil sample 140 was inconclusive (See Appendix II).

A post hole **2206** and a pit **2208** were present in the centre of the trench, both of these features produced no artefacts. Post hole **2206** and pit **2208** contained heavily leached fills perhaps suggesting that they were prehistoric in origin although the absence of dating evidence is problematic.

Further excavation around features in Trench 21 is required in order to establish date and function of features.

2201 was 0.80m wide and 0.17 deep and contained a single fill 2200, a mid brown clay with small pebbles. No artefacts were recovered from this context.

Pit **2204** was curvilinear in plan with irregular under cut sides. It was 0.8m wide and 0.47m deep. The lower fill 2203 composed of a darkish grey clay with large pebbles. The upper fill 2202 consisted of a mid brown clay with occasional pebbles.

Post hole **2206** was 0.26m wide and 0.05m deep and contained a single fill.2205. Fill 2205 was mid dark brown sandy silt with occasional flint and pebbles.

Pit **2208** was 0.50 m wide and 0.15m deep and contained a single fill 2207. Fill 2207 was an orange mid brown clay

Trench 22

2210, 2215

Trench 22 was 50.2m long, 0.51m deep and located on north west south east axis. A large ditch **2215** and a furrow **2210** were the only features revealed in this trench.

Ditch **2215** was 0.82m deep and was the most substantial ditch revealed in the evaluation. The ditch was on a WNW-ESE alignment and cannot be traced in the adjacent trenches 21 and 22. The fact that it was not present indicates that the ditch either terminates or changes alignment. This ditch contained five fills which produced a small assembalge of Bronze Age material.

Further excavation of the area around ditch **2215** is required in order to define alignment, extent, function and related activity.

Furrow **2210** located in the south eastern part of the trench and is associated with furrows **2217, 2221, 2223 2225, 2259** and **2227** within Trench 23.

Furrow **2210** ran on a north east-south west alignment and was 0.95m wide and 0.09m deep.

Ditch **2215** was concave with a sloping base and ran on a WNW-SWS alignment. It measured 2.10m wide and 0.82m deep and contained five fills: 2211, 2212, 2213, 2214 and 2244. Fill 2211 consisted of a yellowish brown sandy silty clay with occasional gravel. Fill 2112, a mid pale grey brown sandy silt with occasional gravel. Fill 2213 was pale brownish grey sandy clay with occasional gravel. Fill 2214 was a mid pale orange brown sandy clay with a moderate amount of gravel. Fill 2244 consisted of a orange brown sandy clay with gravel

Trench 23

2219,2221,2223,2225 and 2227

Trench 23 was 30m long and 0.45 m deep and aligned WSW-ESE. Two intercutting features, **2219** and **2221** were identified in the western end of the trench. Furrow **2219** was 0.70m wide and 0.40m deep and cut ditch **2221** boundary. The earlier ditch within this sequence **2221** may be a field boundary. No dateable finds were recovered from **2219** or **2221**.

The alignment of **2219** may be projected to the north and appears to correspond with the position of furrow **2239** within Trench 24. A number of

similarly aligned, broad, shallow linear features were present within trenches 24 (**2233**, **2235**) and 25 (**2256**, **2258**). Combined these features probably represent surviving evidence of a post medieval ridge and furrow field system. An additional phase of ridge and furrow was present within Trench 23, comprising **2217**, **2223**, **2225**, **2259** and **2227**.

2219 was concave with a flatish base and ran on a NE-SW alignment. It was 0.70m wideand 0.40m deep. This ditch contained a single fill 2218 a mid pale orange grey brown sandy silt clay with occasional gravel

2221 was concave with a flatish base and ran on an ENE-WSW alignment. It was 0.83m wide and 0.36m deep. It contained a single fill 2200 which was comprised of a mid pale orange brown sandy silty clay with occasional gravel.

Furrow **2217** was 0.45m wide and 0.07m. Furrow **2223** was 0.45m wide and 0.07m. Furrow **2225** was 0.50m wide and 0.06 m deep. Furrow **2227** was 0.50m wide and 0.06m deep. Furrow **2259** was 0.56m wide and was unexcavated.

Trench 24

2229, 2231, 2235, 2237, 2239

Trench 24 was 60m long and 0.44m deep and ran on a north west-south east alignment. Two ditches (**2229** and **2231**) were identified in the south eastern end of the trench. Ditches **2229** and **2231** are on the same alignment. A break of roughly 1m between the two ditches may indicate some kind of entrance, however due to heavy truncation the break may be attributable to variable depth within a previously contiguous field boundary. No artefacts were recovered from these two ditches. Furrow **2233** truncates **2231.**

Furrows **2233**, **2235** and **2239** all ran on a roughly north–south alignment and produced no finds.

Ditch **2229** was concave and ran on a north west-south east alignment. It measured 0.35m wide and 0.06m deep contained a single fill 2228. Fill 2228 was a light brown sand with small pebbles.

Ditch **2231** was concave with a rounded base and ran on a north west south east alignment. It was 0.50m wide and 0.07m deep and contained a single fill a light brown sand with small pebbles.

Furrow **2233** was 1.28m wide and 0.12m deep and contained a single fill 2238. Fill 2238 was a greyish brown silty clay with occasional stones.

Furrow **2235** was 1.60m wide and 0.23m deep and contained a single fill 2234. Fill 2234 was a light mid brown clay with a moderate amount of flint pebbles.

Ditch **2237** was 0.20m wide and 0.15m deep and contained a single fill 2236. Fill 2236 was a dark brown silty clay with occasional stones.

Furrow **2239** was 1.28m wide and 0.12m deep and contained a single fill 2238. Fill 2238 was a greyish brown silty clay with occasional stones.

Trench 25

2241 and **2243.**

Trench 25 was 60m long and 0.44m deep and ran on a north west-south east alignment. Trench 25 was 60m long and 0.44m deep and ran on a north west-south east alignment. Furrows **2241** and **2243** were revealed in this trench. The change in alignment of the furrows relating to the field system between Trench 25 and Trench 23 is attributable to the topographic shift fron hill crest to slope.

Furrow **2241** was 0.85m wide and 0.22m deep. Furrow **2243** was 0.70m and 0.14m deep.

Trench 26

Trench 26 was a 100m long and 0.50m deep and located on a north south alignment. The trench was split into two sections because the overburden in the southern part of the trench contained material associated with construction of the modern road

A group of three pits **2246 2250** and **2252** provided direct evidence for prehistoric activity in the northern part of the trench. Pit **2250** produced a small quantity of hand made pottery, animal bone and occasional lithics. Pit **2252** produced a single poorly preserved fragment of animal bone and **2246** did not produce any artefactual evidence. Similarity of feature fill, size and shape suggests that these features were probably broadly contemporary.

Pit **2250** contained a series of apparently structured deposits consisting of a collection of flint cobbles with a horse skull placed on top. The skull in turn appeared to have been overlain with a layer of pottery. Unfortunately both the skull and the pottery were both extremely poorly preserved and only a few teeth from the horse and several small fragments of pottery survived excavation. The flintwork consisted of several abraded flakes the condition of which suggested that they were residual, possibly curated. Environmental sample 141, taken from fill 2248, contained fragments of charcoal, much of which was heavily vitrified and one fragment of a cereal grain (see Appendix II).

The location of pits **2250, 2252, 2246** at the base of the slope may be significant.

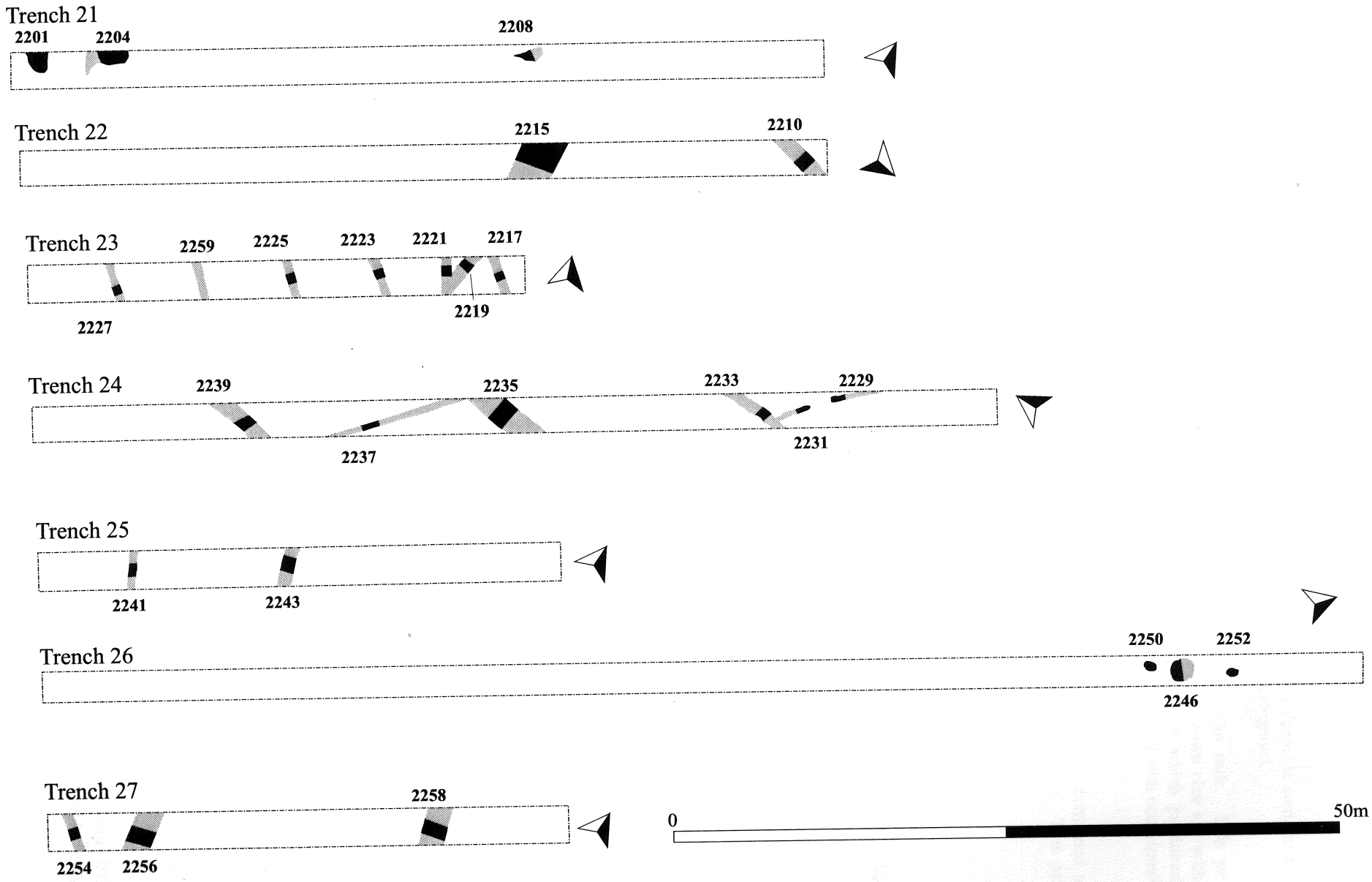

Figure 4 *Trench plans showing archaeological features (excavated sections in black)*

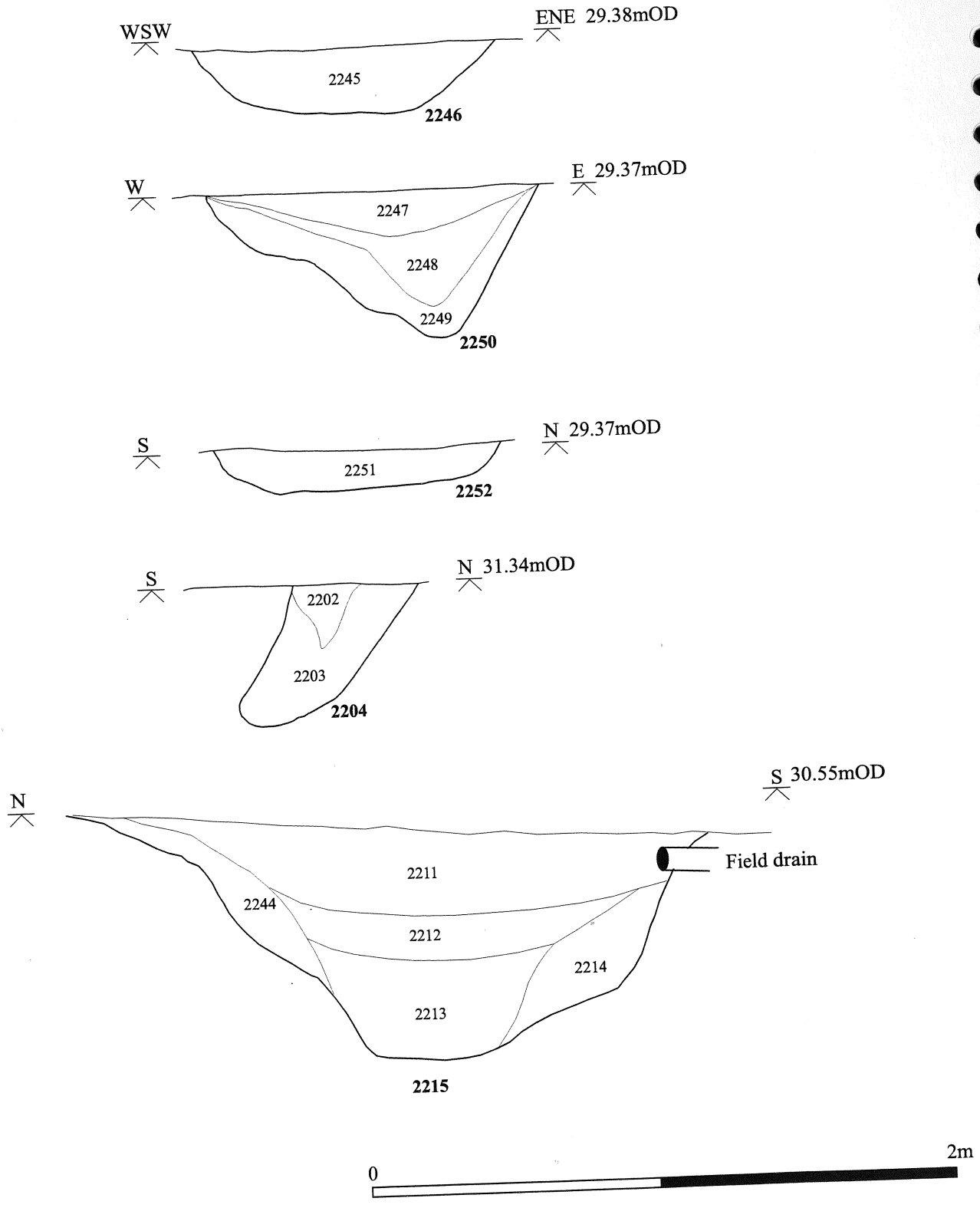

Figure 5 *Significant sections (furrows not illustrated)*

Pit **2246** was oval with concave sides and was 0.75m wide and 0.23m deep. It contained a single fill a light greyish brown sandy clay silt with a moderate amount of gravel.

Pit **2250** was sub circular and concave and was 0.51m deep and 1.10m wide. This pit contained three fills 2247,2248 and 2249. Fill 2247 was a light grey brown clay silt with occasional gravel. Fill 2248 was a mid brownish grey sandy clay silt which produced prehistoric pottery and lithics. Fill 2249 was a mid light brown sandy clay silt with occasional flint and gravel.

Pit **2252** was oval with concave sides and was 0.65m wide and 0.15m deep. It contained a single fill 2251 which was of composed of a light greyish brown sandy clay silt. This pit produced no artefacts.

Trench 27

2254,2256 and 2258.

Trench 27 was 30m long and 0.40m deep and was located on NE-SW alignment. Three furrows **2254, 2256 and 2258** were revealed in this trench

Furrow **2254** was 0.60m wide and 0.18m deep.

Furrow **2256** was 1.65m and 0.15m deep.

Furrow **2258** was 0.70m wide and 0.17m deep

Trench 28

Trench 28 was 51m long and 0.45m deep and was located on a NE-SW location. This trench was located immediately adjacent to the north western limit of the development area. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

5.1 Neolithic /Bronze Age (Trench 26)

Pit 2250 contained a small quantity of lithic material.

The uppermost fill 2211 of ditch **2215** contained several fragments of a hand made, grog tempered vessel of probable Bronze Age Age origin (S Percival pers. comm). Ditch 2215 represents a potentially significant addidition to the limited number of features dateable to the period.

5.2 Iron Age (Trenches 21,22,23 and 26.)

The ditches revealed within trenches 22, 23 and 24 probably represent Iron Age field boundary ditches or drainage ditches associated with the known middle-late Iron Age activity to the south, west and north of the subject site.

A possible terminal of a ditch or pit **2201** and an irregular shaped pit **2204** were revealed at the southern end of Trench 21. No artefacts were recovered which makes phasing problematic although an Iron Age or earlier date is likely for these features.

5.3 Roman

Considering the density of Roman activity encountered in adjacent sites it is surprising that no Roman features or artefacts were observed in the evaluation.

5.4 Medieval / Post Medieval (Trenches 22, 23, 24, 25 and 27.)

Traces of two distinct phases of ridge and furrow cultivation were identified. The two phases were distinguishable by alignment, breadth of furrow and spacing. No stratigraphic or artefactual information was recovered to indicate a relative chronology for the two phases of field systems. One phase was characterised by a series of relatively narrow furrows aligned north – south on the crest of the hill, changing to north, north west / south, south east on the hill slope. These furrows were spaced at 4.5m intervals (14.85 feet). The second phase was characterised by a series of relatively broad furrows aligned north east / south west, spaced at 8.5m intervals (28 feet).

6 DISCUSSION

The location of the site is particularly interesting when considered topographically. As we have already seen (4.2) the surrounding area is particulary rich in Neolithic and Bronze Age remains including a number of the region's most notable ceremonial monuments and centres of ritual activity.

The recent evaluation has identified what appears to be a group of pits within the northernmost extent of the development area provisionally dateable to the early Bronze Age. Pits **2246, 2250** and **2252** were similar in terms of size and fill type to a series of features excavated within Area 1 of the 1997 excavations. These pits, all of which, with one notable exception, were devoid of any artefactual material were aligned roughly north south and had subsequently been truncated by a later Iron Age ditch and have been interpreted as the first formalised phase of boundary definition within that part of the site.

The largest of the three pits, **2250**, contained a series of structured deposits consisting of a collection of flint cobbles with a horse skull placed on top. The skull in turn appeared to have been overlain with a layer of pottery. This layering of different materials is reminiscent of the nature of deposition within the large sub-rectangular pit **1014**, within Area B of the Bob's Wood project. Surviving fragments of ceramics from **2250** preserve traces of comb impressed decoration characteristic of 'beaker' style pottery. The co-incidence of equid

remains and beaker pottery are still extremely rare in Britain. Currently the earliest known examples are from New Grange in Ireland and have been carbon dated to *c* 1900BC. Within the Anglia Region the only example from the period of which we are aware at the time of writing came from Grimes Graves in Norfolk and has been dated to c 1740 +/- 210 BC (Clutton-Brock, J. & Burleigh, R. highlighted by Ian Baxter / Stuart Needham, *pers comms*). It is highly likely that pit **2250** was originally excavated around the time that the horse is thought to have been re introduced into Britain and carbon / accelerator dating should be a requirement for this feature and any similar features encountered during any forthcoming excavation. Careful excavation of the remaining 50% of this feature is essential in order that we maximise the recovery of the full artefactual assemblage that had been selected for deposition within this pit.

Environmental preservation across the New School Site was poor and may be attributed to localised soil conditions on the side of the hill (See Appendix II). Preservation within Area B of the Bob's Wood project to the south of the subject site was markedly better.

Localised soil conditions may well be the reason for the extremely poor preservation of the few artefactual remains recovered. Both pottery and bone had degraded to such a degree that only small fragments of both materials (c 10mm x 10mm) survived. The ceramics recovered contained no diagnostic sherds, however, the material from both ditch **2215** and pit **2250** was handmade and contained grog tempering, and was distinct from fabric types recovered from previous work within the immediate area.

As a dominant feature of the local landscape the hill upon which the subject site now sits may well have held some special significance for the peoples of early prehistory.

From the earliest physical incarnation of the northern boundary of this settlement (in the form of a line of pits aligned east - west, Area 1, 1997), the placement of tokens within this boundary suggests that it enshrined a symbolic meaning alongside any more pragmatic functional purpose.

Three phases of this boundary were excavated. In each instance placed deposits were positioned on the outer, (away from settlement core) edge of this boundary at a point on the hillside that would appear to have allowed an optimum field of vision to the north, west and east. Furthermore this boundary appeared to be positioned along the mid point of the slope between the hilltop and the valley bottom. Interestingly the symbolic nature of this median line could be said to have been reinforced through the choice of the deposits selected for placement. In each case these deposits, although quite different in terms of size and composition may be said to share common characteristics. The upper fore limb of the boar was incomplete, having been a cut of meat, the quern stone appeared to have been half finished, i.e. a flat grinding surface had been prepared, before an iron object, possibly a chisel, was driven into the prepared face and broken off. Both of these objects may

hold a degree of symbolism concerning the transformation of components of the natural world by humankind. In both cases this transformation is only partial. It is the make-up of the currency bars, selected as the third set of placed deposits which seem to emphasise the theme of transformation. At the time of deposition the material from which these bars were formed, iron, had only reached the mid point in the process of transformation from naturally occurring iron ore to tool or weapon. The work of the smith was still required to complete this process. I would suggest that, within the minds of the inhabitants, the positioning of these objects and their partial transformation from a natural state, through human action reflected the symbolic perception of that boundary and the profound change in consciousness and behaviour required when moving from the centre of human control within the settlement core, out into the peripheral zone, and further to the natural world beyond.

Clearly these ideas can be treated as little more than speculation on the basis of the physical evidence with which we construct archaeological interpretations of past events. However I do feel that it is important to bear in mind the important role of symbolism in influencing action even though, then as now, it may be totally entwined within the practical framework of everyday life.

One possible explanation for the paucity of features dateable to the late Iron Age and the surprising absence of Romano-British artefactual materials may be that the area currently under investigation had held some special significance to the earlier prehistoric peoples of the area, a significance that continued to be respected during the later Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Support for this idea may be gained by the presence of those pits dateable to the early Bronze Age within Trench 26.

Other more pragmatic explanations may include the possibility that this part of the hillside was unattractive for settlement, perhaps due to poor drainage or a relatively exposed location. Evaluation identified a similar absence of artefactual materials combined with a lack of any surviving archaeological features within the south western corner of the Bob's Wood site (Hinman, 2000). Here the void in the archaeological record was attributed to poor drainage and soil conditions where the underlying boulder clay lay directly below the subsoil.

Evidence from previous work suggests that this hillside provided the location for settlement from at least as early as the middle Iron Age through to the end of the Romano-British period.

Settlement related activity dateable to the late pre Roman Iron Age has been identified immediately to the north of the current development area (Area 2, Hinman 1997).

Settlement related activity from the Roman period occurs immediately to the south east of the New School site. The recovery of tesserae, painted plaster

and fragments of box flue tile point to presence of a villa within the immediate vicinity.

Further excavation presents us with the opportunity to significantly add to our understanding of the site particularly during the Bronze Age. We must seek to define the archaeological nature of land use within the development area and seek to address the contrast in feature and artefact densities indicated through evaluation with past results which indicate the presence of significant settlement related activity immediately to the north south and west of the subject site.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Synthesis of information gained as a result of this evaluation and the forthcoming excavations with existing data will present us with the opportunity to make significant advances in our current understanding and interpretation of the development of the local landscape, particularly during the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods. An explanation of the apparent absence of Romano-British artefacts and features should be sought during the excavation phase of this project. It may be the case that the paucity of Roman and to a lesser degree Iron Age activity reflects the fact that we are on the edge of the settlement in the Iron Age and Roman period.

Future work on the subject site should seek to address the problems associated with low artefact densities when attempting to attribute surviving features to specific phases within the broader context of the archaeological site as opposed to the development area. These problems will be exacerbated by the nature of the heavy clay soils within the development area which prohibit bulk sieving and the relatively poor preservation of both artefactual and environmental remains.

A change in County Council policy has resulted in the aggressive promotion of competitive tendering for this and all future stages of work on both the New School Site and the archaeological site identified by the author within the Bob's Wood scheme as a whole. As a matter of some urgency, serious consideration must be given to the means by which the results of the forthcoming excavation will be integrated with previous work and all other future work. This is particularly important if further works are awarded to different archaeological organisations as these works will continue to have resource implications for, and draw on the expertise of, key AFU project members. The current status of the archive and integrated excavation and post excavation programme from all past phases of work undertaken by the AFU for the County Council is uncertain. The Post Excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design produced following excavation in 1997 were based upon the clear understanding that the Bob's Wood archaeological site, including the area of the current development, would be excavated by the AFU prior to full scale post excavation assessment and analysis. These

considerations were reflected within the structure of the detailed specification produced for the Bob's Wood project (Hinman 2000) which originally encompassed work within the New School development area. Briefs for archaeological investigation within the bounds of the subject site should seek to address the current uncertainty surrounding the future strategy for both archiving and publication for what is undoubtedly an interesting and important archaeological site.

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APPENDIX I

Context List

Trench/ Area	Context No	Fill of	Filled by	Context type	Date
21	2200	2201-	-	Ditch fill	-
21	2201		2200-	Ditch cut	-
21	2202	2204	-	Pit fill	-
21	2203	2204	-	Pit Fill	-
21	2204`	-	2202 and 22035	Pit cut	-
21	2205	2206	-	Post hole fill	-
21	2206	-	2205	Post hole cut	-
21	2207	2208	-	Pit fill	-
21	2208	-	2207	Post hole cut	-
22	2209	2210	-	Furrow fill	-
22	2210	-	2209	Furrow cut	-
22	2211	2215	-	Ditch fill	-
22	2212	2215-		Ditch fill	-
22	2213	2215	-	Ditch fill	-
22	2214	2215-		Ditch fill cut	-
22	2215		2211,2212,2213, 2214, 2244-	Post hole fill	-
23	2216	2217-		Furrow fill	-
23	2217		2216-	Furrow cut	
23	2218	2219-		Ditch fill	-
23	2219		2218	Ditch cut	-
23	2220	2221		Ditch fill	-
23	2221		2220-	Ditch cut	-
23	2222	-2223		Furrow fill	-
23	2223		2222-	Furrow cut	-
23	2224	2225-		Furrow fill	-
23	2225		2224-	Furrow cut	-
23	2226	2227-		Furrow fill	-
23	2227		2226	Furrow cut	-
24	2228	2229-		Ditch fill	-
24	2229	-	-2228	Ditch cut	-
24	2230	2231	-	Ditch fill	-
24	2231	-	2230	Ditch cut	-
24	2232	2232	-	Ditch fill	-
24	2233		-2233	Ditch cut	-
24	2234	-2235		Furrow fill	-
24	2235		2234-	Furrow cut	-
24	2236	2237-		Ditch fill	-

Trench/ Area	Context No	Fill of	Filled by	Context type	Date
24	2237		-2236	Ditch cut	
24	2238	-2239		Ditch fill	
24	2239		-2238	Ditch cut	
25	2240	2241	-	Furrow fill	
25	2241	-	2242	Furrow cut	
25	2242	2243	-	Furrow fill	-
25	2243		-2242	Furrow fill	-
22	2244	-2215		Ditch fill	-
26	2245	2245	-	Pit fill	-
26	2246	-	2245	Pit cut	-
26	2247	2250	-	Pit fill	-
26	2248	-2250		Pit fill	-
26	2249	2250	-	Pit fill	-
26	2250	-	2247,2249	Pit ~~fill~~ cut	-
26	2251	2252	-	Pit fill	-
26	2252	-	2251	Pit fill	-
27	2253	2254	-	Pit cut	-
27	2254	-	2253	Furrow cut	-
27	2255	2256	-	Furrow fill	-
27	2256	-	2255	Furrow cut	-
27	2257	2258	-	Furrow fill	-
27	2258	-	2257	Furrow cut	-
25	2259		-	Furrow	-

APPENDIX II

Archaeobotanical Remains from New School Site, Hinchingbrooke.

Rachel Ballantyne

Two samples of ten litres were flotation sieved, and the flots (>300μm) submitted for scanning. Negligible charred plant remains have been recovered from each context.

Fill 2203 of pit **2204** includes evidence of burning, with small fragments of charcoal and some small burnt flint fragments. Other material includes numerous intrusive roots, and modern grass components. One juvenile shell of the land snail *Trichia hispida* may also be intrusive.

Summary of results

Sample number	<140>	<141>
Context	Fill 2203	Fill 2248
Feature type	Irregular pit 2204	Circular pit 2250
Volume/ litres	10	10
Indeterminate cereal grain		1
Small charcoal (<2mm)	+++	+++
Medium charcoal (2-4mm)	+	-
Large charcoal (<4mm)		
- of which vitrified charcoal	-	++
Intrusive roots	+++	+++
Intrusive vegetative plant material	+	+
Uncharred *Urtica* sp. seed (nettle)		1
Lemna sp. seed (duckweed)		1
Uncharred Poaceae seed (grass)	1	1
Uncharred modern *Triticum* sp. (wheat) chaff	1	
Small pot sherd		-
Small bone fragments	-	+
Juvenile *Trichia hispida* (land snail)	1	
Ceciliodes acicula *(modern burrowing snail)*		1
Vallonia exentrica/pulchella *(land snail)*		1

KEY: '-' 1 or 2 items, '+' <10 items, '++' 10 to 50 items, '+++' >50 items.

Fill 2248 of pit **2250** also contains small charcoal, much of which is vitrified. One heavily pitted fragment of cereal grain represents the only other charred plant remains. This context again includes numerous intrusive roots, and other recent vegetative plant material and seeds. The burrowing snail *Ceciliodes acicula* is clearly intrusive, the one case of *Vallonia exentrica/pulchella* may also be so.

It would appear that conditions on site have not been conducive to the preservation of charred plant remains. This may be a reflection of the nature of the site itself, with fairly ephemeral human activity. The high level of charcoal fragmentation, however, suggests that physical destruction of charred remains has been considerable. Vitrified charcoal also indicates intense burning conditions in the case of fill 2248, which could have lead to the loss of less robust plant material during charring itself.

If the two contexts are representative of the late Neolithic/Bronze Age archaeology on site, then a carefully targeted sampling strategy relating to specific research questions should be adopted during further excavation.

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