

Chapter I

Introduction

I.1 The background to the 1957–65 excavations

by Margaret Jones

Quarrying had been part of the farming enterprise in field OS 73 since 1930. Known as Roughground, this field gave its name to the farm; Mr B F Poole, who then farmed it, observed that his plough brought stone to the surface. Quarrying took place also in the adjacent field to the south known as Iles' and/or Stratton's pit.

Cropmarks of ancient features around Lechlade had been photographed by Major Allen, but this site was first photographed by D N Riley (Riley 1942, 112–3; Riley 1942, 73 and ff.) (Fig. 2). Several local people had observed sections of pits and ditches exposed in quarry faces, and had rescued finds: notably the late Mrs E D Atkinson, the late Mr and Mrs F C Innocent and A J Baxter. Some finds made their way to the Ashmolean, British, Cirencester, Filkins and Stroud museums, and site visits were made by the staff of Pitt Rivers and Stroud museums.

In 1957 Mr Poole sold the rights for gravel to Amey Aggregates Ltd of Oxford, who began extraction on a large scale. Graders were used for the first time to clear large areas of topsoil. Mr and Mrs Innocent and A J Baxter made further finds in the topsoil dumps, realised the implications and informed the county correspondent of the Ministry of Works, the late Mrs H E O'Neil. Air photographs of the newly stripped gravel and adjacent cropmarks were taken by St. Joseph (Fig. 3), and the writer was asked to hold a watching brief.

Despite dumping and lorry tracks, some soilmarks were still visible in the cemented oolitic gravel. This was aided by the comparatively small-tracked scrapers in use. With the help of local volunteers an early Roman area was sampled (Fig. 34). On the south-east of the fields still under cultivation topsoil removal had exposed large, pitched oolite blocks, and to the east Romano-British tile fragments, including tubuli, had survived.

The prospect of a substantial Romano-British building was held to justify an excavation with labour supplied by a gang of MoW mobile excavators, and it now became feasible to trench likely sites. The plan of the exposed building indicated a corner, or the end of a wing running west (Fig. 37); three trenches into the arable (112, 115, 116) confirmed this. Since this area was still under cultivation

further trenching was restricted to the south-east of the exposed building (Fig. 36).

Another Romano-British building was discovered by lines of trial trenches to the east, but since spoil had to be dumped alongside few trenches could be extended, and thus only a partial plan was obtained (Fig. 37). An excavation of the building under crop was arranged for 1958, but when the writer visited the site a few days before the start of excavation, the 'building' was a pool of water. It had been quarried away.

Amey's management granted permission to excavate the surviving south edge of the building site and agreed to make more land to the west available for investigation, the topsoil stripping to take place under archaeological supervision. This new area — some 200 by 100 m — provided what was, in the 1950s, a novel opportunity to plan on landscape dimensions, albeit imperfectly, the buildings and fields of a Roman villa (Fig. 59). A third building complex was found at the south edge of the quarried area (Fig. 42), which was tackled in 1959. The gravel quarry spoil heap however overlaid the north part of this building, so that only a part of the building was excavated.

By 1950s standards, Roughground Farm had by now received a good share of official funding. The original justification for excavation had been the rescue of Romano-British villa buildings; the landscape element had come about by chance following the unforeseen destruction of the centre of the villa. This explains why the area first extracted east of the Burford road, which contained no apparent cropmarks, was not examined. However, the writer had by now no doubts about the value of landscape rescue, both for itself and as an aid to the incipient study of cropmark interpretation. Quarrying east of the Burford road was due to extend into areas where cropmarks of ditches which lined up with those already investigated were visible, and where the distinct cropmark of a round ditched feature was evident (Frontispiece). Moreover, field walking had indicated a rise in the ground just north of the station, and stone had been picked up there.

It was therefore decided to excavate two further areas of dense cropmarks adjacent to Burford Road (the area between to be abandoned), and to carry out a watching brief on any subsequent stripping. The same strategy was followed: rescue of the entire plan, sampling of linear features particularly for stratigraphic relationships, half-sectioning of discrete features and verification of blank areas.



Figure 2 Aerial view of the villa from the north-west, showing the regular enclosure system north and east of the villa buildings. Riley 1942 (Cambridge Air Photograph No. CD 044, Crown copyright reserved)



Figure 3 Aerial view of the villa and Early Roman occupation from the north-west, taken after stripping in 1957 just before excavation began. (Cambridge Air Photograph No. VQ29, copyright reserved)

The area excavations were carried out in 1961, and a watching brief in 1962. A further season of excavation on the south-east half of the northern cropmark complex was directed by Ernest Greenfield in 1963 during the writer's absence. Recording of the final most easterly areas was less adequately tackled due to increasing involvement in excavations at Mucking, Essex.

I.2 The 1981–82 and 1990 excavations

by Tim Allen

In 1981 Tim Allen returned to the site and began excavations at weekends with the Oxford University Archaeological Society, picking up the continuation of the west wall of

Building III. In 1982 trenches were dug around a modern house adjacent to the track and recovered a small part of Building IV east of Building III and yard surfaces outside Building III (Fig. 36).

During the summer of 1990, when the report on Margaret Jones' excavations had just been completed, it was discovered that the remaining part of the villa, which lay beneath the track to Roughground Farm and the modern house adjacent, was under threat from housing development. Although building had already commenced adjacent to the site it proved possible to carry out a 4-week salvage excavation, directed by Tim Allen for the Oxford Archaeological Unit, which uncovered the south end of Building III, most of Building IV and the enclosure ditches surrounding the villa on the south side.

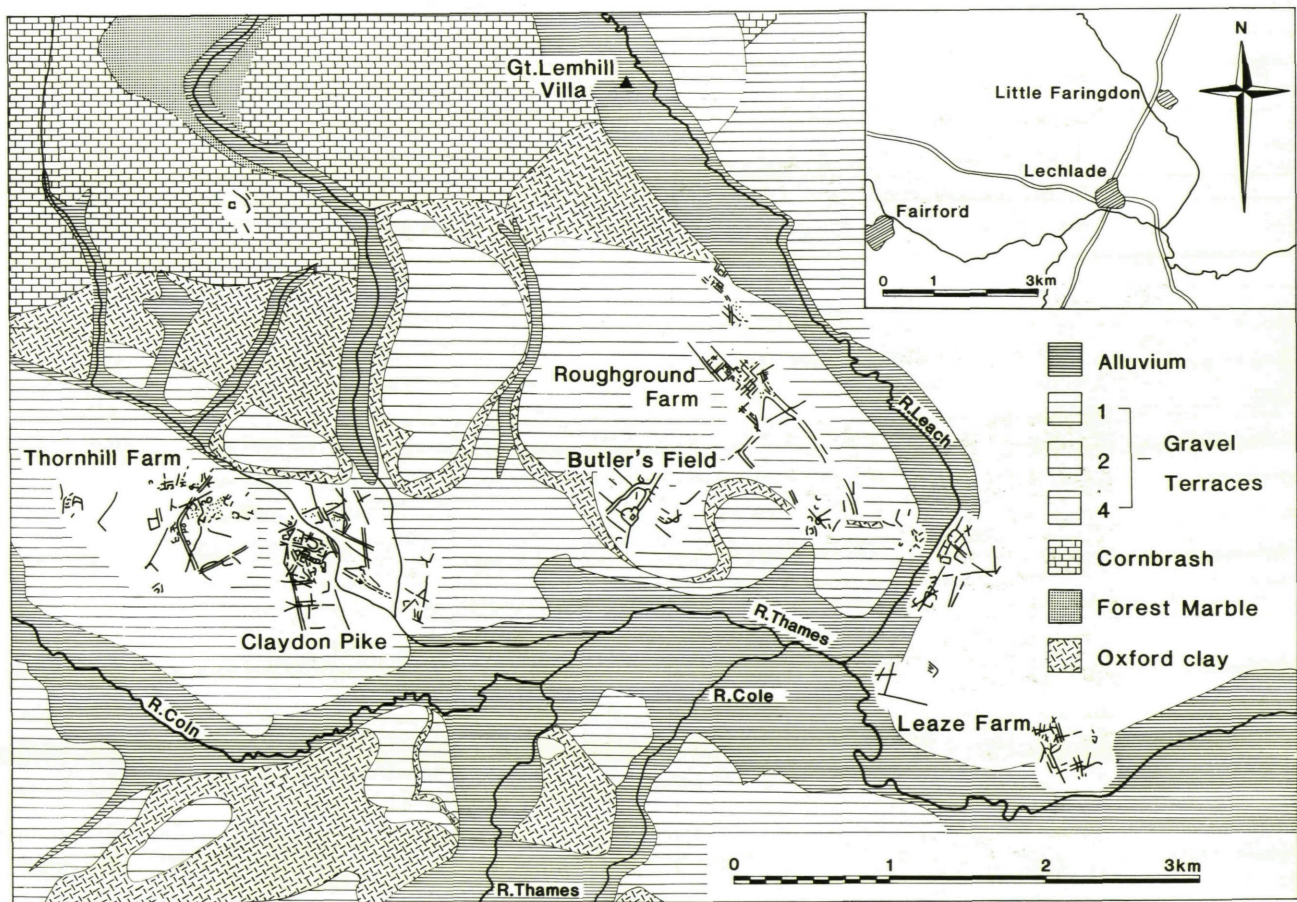


Figure 4 Site location and geology

I.3 Geology and topography

Roughground Farm lies upon an area of well-drained second terrace gravel between the rivers Leach and Thames just north of Lechlade. This area of gravel is adjacent to the confluence of several rivers, the Coln and the Leach running into the Thames from the Cotswolds to the north, the river

Cole from the Corallian Ridge to the south. Upstream of the site the closest of these, the river Leach, cuts through the successive exposures of the Cotswold dip slope: Cornbrash (less than 2 km away), Forest Marble (3–4 km distant) and the Great Oolite, which is visible alongside the river only 4–5 km to the north, but only outcrops extensively

9 km or so away. All these types of rock were used in buildings on the site. South of the Thames the floodplain gives way to a broad expanse of Oxford Clay, upon which are small deposits of sand and gravel which may have been the source for the quartzite pebbles used by the Neolithic inhabitants of the site. The sand and Ragstone deposits of the Corallian Ridge are 8–9 km distant, and beyond these lie the Kimmeridge and Gault clays, which were used to make some of the later prehistoric pottery found around Lechlade. The river Cole rises on the edge of the chalk of the Wessex downland some 15 km away, from which came the chalkland flint used on the site.

The tributary valleys of the Upper Thames provided easy routes of communication between the valley bottom and the higher ground either side, and the rivers were perhaps used for transporting materials downstream. The Lechlade confluence was thus an important meeting point for the products of different geological resources, hence its significance from the Neolithic onwards.

The second terrace gravel upon which the site lies is bounded on the north and north-east by the floodplain of the river Leach only a few hundred metres away, and on the south gives way to the lower-lying first terrace gravels which slope down to the floodplain of the Thames. On the north a band of Oxford Clay separates the gravels from the Cornbrash foothills of the Cotswolds, and on the west the gravel terrace is bounded by a minor tributary, beyond which the second terrace gravel peters out and Oxford Clay reappears. The Oxford Clay is poorly-drained and was probably marginal land for agriculture in the prehistoric and Romano-British periods.

These natural constraints define an area of *c* 5 square kilometres. The alluvial channel of another former tributary divided the western part of the second terrace here from the main portion upon which the site sat (see Fig. 4); this latter area was between 3.5 and 4.0 square kilometres in extent. The settlement lay approximately at the centre of this, and it may represent the area of potential arable available. The first terrace and floodplain to the south is today mostly under grass, and excavations at Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm, Fairford, nearby show that this was also true in the Iron Age and Roman periods (Miles and Palmer pers. comm.). Additional grazing would have been available along the narrow floodplain of the river Leach.

I.4 Excavation methodology

by Margaret Jones

During the period in which Roughground Farm was first investigated (1957–1965), the writer was concerned also with a Roman landscape at Stanton Low, Bucks., (Woodfield & Johnson 1989, 135 & ff). There, a loose sodden gravel in the valley bottom and the absence of air photographs showing cropmarks made area planning impossible. In

contrast the cemented gravel at Roughground Farm made possible the recording of the landscape, with the plan the prime aim, following by the rescue of as many features and their finds as possible. This was not quite in accord with current practice which advocated the selection of 'typical' features for more intensive excavation rather than extensive studies. A survey of gravel archaeology which was then being compiled makes this point (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments 1960).

Even though there was insufficient labour to clear the ground after the scrapers had left, most features were at least partly visible and could be handled individually. The site conditions are well-recorded in W A Baker's near-vertical shot showing one of the cropmark areas as left by the scraper (Fig. 75). An important aspect of landscape archaeology — the mapping of blank areas — was not usually a problem. Another hazard of planning gravel sites — the recognition of periglacial features — was luckily confined to one small area. Field work at Roughground Farm enjoyed two major advantages: the full co-operation of Amey's Aggregates Ltd and the nature of the gravel. Features as shallow as ridge and furrow could be recognised, and this was the first excavation to plan them.

Originally the site was planned with a 50 foot linen tape, ranging poles and six inch nails. A drill developed for the larger areas in which six steel 100 foot tapes were laid out at 10 foot intervals. Features within the 100 by 50 foot rectangle were then plotted systematically within each 10 foot square by offset, using ranging poles. According to circumstances, scales ranged from 1:120 to 1:12. Scaled paper was used. At first features were numbered serially; however in the larger areas numbered and lettered grid squares gave identity (and also location). Planning thereafter continued to be based upon a grid, with points measured in by offset. Because of the difficulty of maintaining fixed points however each new area had a fresh grid origin; field gates, hedge junctions, and railway fencing had to serve as fixed points.

To support the plans a full photographic archive of more than 1,000 negatives was produced. Colour films were available only in the final years. Near-vertical air photographs of the areas stripped in 1961 were taken during excavation by W A Baker, which have as expected proved very helpful in post-excavation analysis. (A full list of the air photographs consulted will be found in the microfiche Ch. 1.3 on Fiche 1#2).

Since most of the labour was (archaeologically) unskilled and there was at best only one assistant, digging strategy also had to be simple. Where stratigraphy was difficult — as in soil filled features — excavation was by levels ('spits'). Plans of the principal finds at each level were drawn. The aim was to record all informative sections, with layers shown with continuous or broken lines.

Storage and transport of finds were major problems. After discussion with the Ashmolean museum staff in

1959 and with Graham Webster, unstratified coarse pottery found up to that date was discarded, fragmented animal bones and the bulk of building materials, unless of intrinsic interest, were not kept. Categories of finds for which specialists could be found to report on them were kept entire: prehistoric pottery, flints, glass, metalwork, coins.

Although the Ancient Monuments Laboratory was then in existence, staff and resources were limited. Samples for identification and environmental evidence were taken rather as an act of faith.

I.5 Post-excavation methodology

by *Tim Allen*

For the post-excavation analysis of the 1957–65 excavations the decision was taken to provide a unique context number for each stratigraphic deposit, in order to facilitate description and to provide a coherent system of cross-referencing between the original paper records, the photographs and the finds. This unique numbering system is that used to refer to contexts in the report. The context record sheets will be found with the original site records in the Archive. The 1981–82 and 1990 excavations were recorded in the field by unique context numbers starting at 1400 and 2000 respectively.

The partial nature of the excavations and the character and the variety of the excavation and recording techniques used have left an incomplete picture of the site. In ordering this for publication a choice had to be made between full description, often involving lengthy discussion of the doubtful validity of particular pieces of evidence, or more summary description, based around whichever interpretative framework best fitted the available data. The second approach has been adopted here, and for reasons both of brevity and clarity much of the information is presented through an interpretative rather than a purely descriptive framework. This is drawn from a fuller description of the stratigraphy, which can be found in the Archive.

I.6 The Archive

The original site notebooks, drawings and photographs from the 1957–65, 1981–2 and 1990 excavations, together with the context numbers and secondary data generated during post-excavation, have been deposited with the finds at the Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street, Oxford. A copy of the paper archive is also held on microfilm by the National Monuments Record.

I.7 Preparation of the report

Some draft reports on the finds and the stratigraphy were prepared in the 1960s. Post-excavation resumed in 1980 at the Oxford Archaeological Unit, and the various specialist

reports and the text sections dealing with the stratigraphy were completed at different times between 1980 and 1986, by which time the report was substantially complete.

Following the 1990 excavation some of the original finds reports were amended to incorporate the new material, but in other cases separate reports were written for this to stand alongside the unmodified existing reports. The original specialist reports were not updated to take account of information published since completion in or before 1986. Except for those aspects of the discussion directly affected by the results of the 1990 excavation, the same is true of the discussion sections in Chapters II, III, VI and VII.

I.8 Organisation of the report

This report is divided between Print and Fiche. The printed part provides a characterisation of the stratigraphy and summaries of the finds, followed by a discussion of the discoveries. Most of the illustrations have been included in the Print section for ease of reference. The Fiche contains detailed plans of the site, a key to which will be found in Fig. 6 in print, and supplementary section drawings of the areas around the villa. The bulk of the Fiche comprises full reports on the finds with supporting Tables and Catalogues.

I.8.a Conventions used in this report

A variety of styles will be found among the illustrations, as different groups of finds have been drawn at different times over the last 30 years.

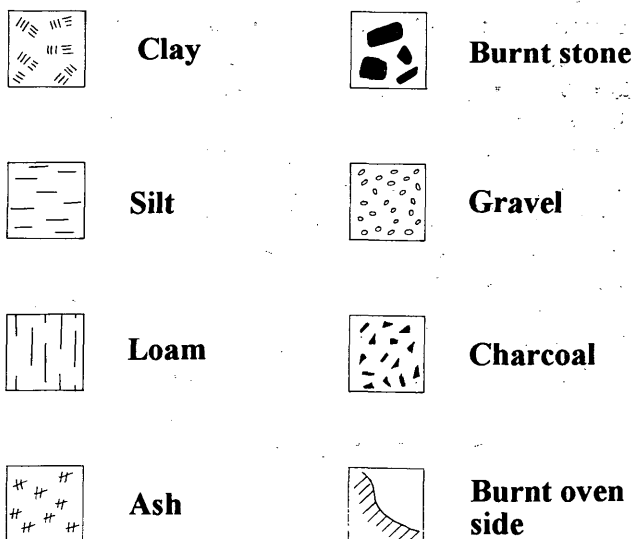


Figure 5 Key to conventions used on section drawings

I.8.a.1 Sections

The standard conventions used for soil descriptions are illustrated in Fig. 5. Where conventions vary they are given in a key on the relevant drawing. No levels were taken during the excavations between 1957 and 1982, but gravel was found at between 78.60 m and 78.65 m OD beneath Building IV in the 1990 excavation. Most of the site was however fairly flat, and the level of undisturbed gravel in adjacent trenches is therefore likely to be very similar.

I.8.a.2 Plans

A simplified version of the actual site plan is used in the reduced figures in print; a detailed plan will be found on Fiche 4, for which Fig. 6 provides a key. Wherever possible hachures are shown in the excavated features, but these were not always drawn and have therefore sometimes been extrapolated from the sections and photographs.

I.8.a.3 Radiocarbon dates

Uncalibrated dates are quoted in the form BP or uncal. BP, calibrated dates are given as cal. BC. Where periods of time

are mentioned, eg the third millenium BC, these are always given in calendar years.

I.9 The Cotswold Water Park series

The publication of this report was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Margaret Jones because of the intrinsic value of the site and because it forms the first stage of a major landscape study of the Lechlade–Fairford area. This study has centred on the excavation of Iron Age and Roman settlements at Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm and of a Bronze Age ring ditch, Early Iron Age features and an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Butler's Field (see Fig. 4). A series of reports about these and other excavations is now in preparation, and the Roughground Farm report is intended as the first volume in this series.

The interpretation of the landscape at Roughground Farm is intimately bound-up with these more recent excavations and, although some of the results from them are mentioned in this report, the details of the evidence will be presented in future volumes in the series.



Figure 6 Overall site plan gridded to show the layout of plans as illustrated on Fiche 4. The numbers refer to individual frames on the microfiche.

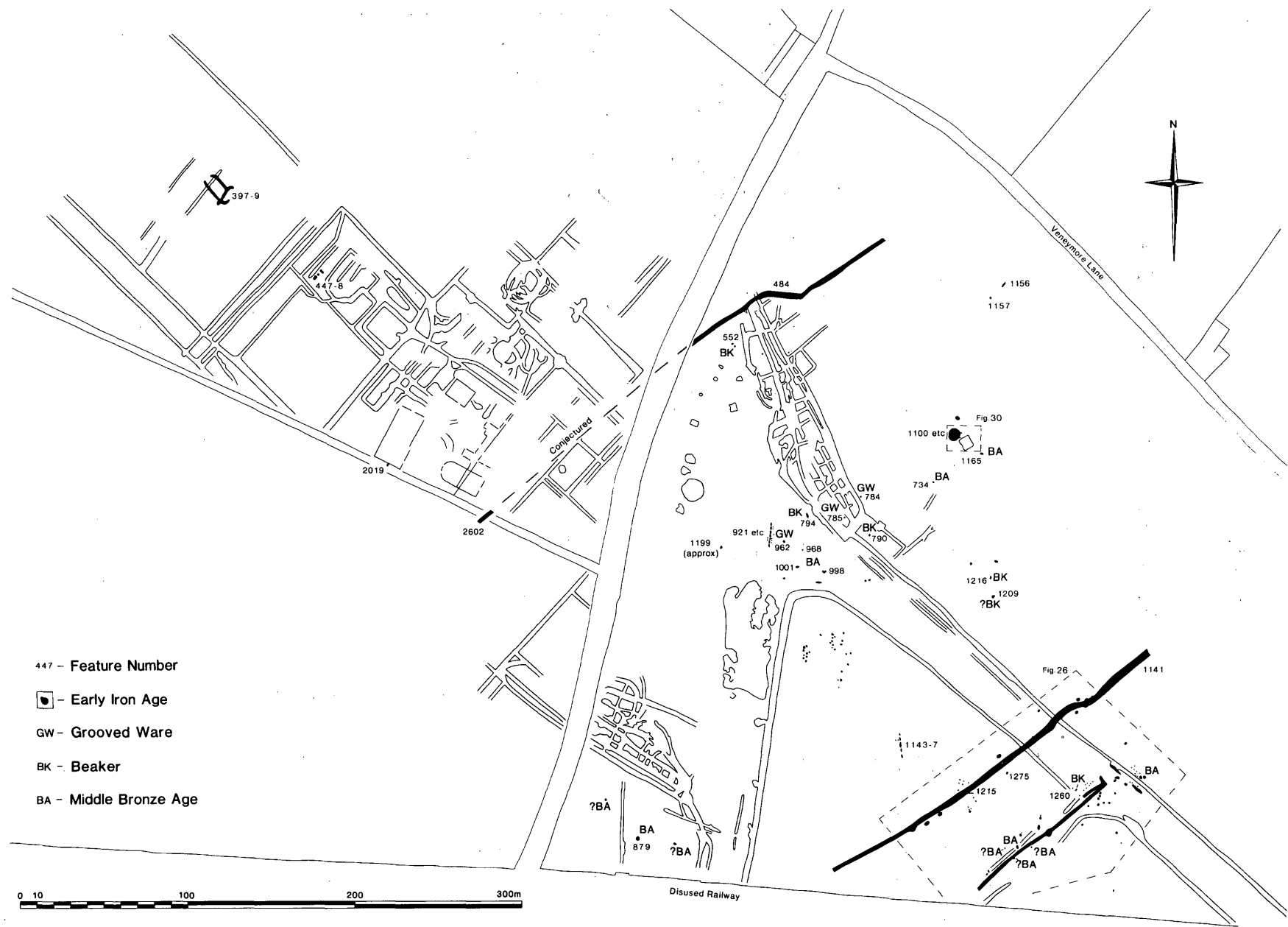


Figure 7 Plan of the distribution of prehistoric features identified by period