

PAUC



Archaeological Field Unit

Bob's Wood, the Story So Far
An Introduction to the Hinchingsbrooke Excavations

Mark Hinman

February 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Commissioned by *Twigden Homes*

Summary

The forthcoming season of excavation on land adjacent to Bob's Wood in Hinchingsbrooke is the latest stage in a series of investigations of a highly significant archaeological site with which we have been undertaking since 1997. The current development area covers roughly 8.5ha and archaeological remains have been identified across much of this area. As a result Twigden Homes have commissioned us to undertake large scale excavations in advance of the development of this site for housing. The forthcoming development heralds the return of a resident population to this location for the first time in over 1500 years. Previous work on the site has indicated the presence of settlement related activity spanning the middle Iron Age through to at least the 4th century AD. Our impression at present is of a wholesale relocation of the settlement core southwards from the mid – late Iron Age. It would seem that the core of the settlement drifts further south and east from the late Iron Age into the Romano – British period. Given the apparently key strategic location of this hilltop the drift may reflect a conscious desire to be seen to be physically dominating the local landscape overlooking Ermine Street. Artefacts recovered from previous stages of work on the site suggest relatively high status settlement throughout the history of occupation. The presence of a villa within the immediate vicinity of the site during the Roman period is highly likely.

Date of Site:	c 2000BC	Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age
	c 300BC-100BC	Middle Iron Age
	100BC-50BC	Late Iron Age
	50BC-43AD	Late Pre Roman Iron Age
	43AD-410AD	Roman British Period
	410AD+?	Roman British / Saxon transition

INTRODUCTION

The forthcoming season of excavation on land adjacent to Bob's Wood in Hinchbrook is the latest stage in a series of investigations of a highly significant archaeological site with which we have been undertaking since 1997. The current development area covers roughly 8.5ha and archaeological remains have been identified across much of this area. As a result Twigden Homes have commissioned us to undertake large scale excavations in advance of the development of this site for housing. This document represents a brief summary of our past findings. An understanding of the site as a whole will require us to consider the evidence revealed by the ongoing excavations this summer in the light of previous discoveries both on the site and within the surrounding area.

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.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

General Background

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

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.

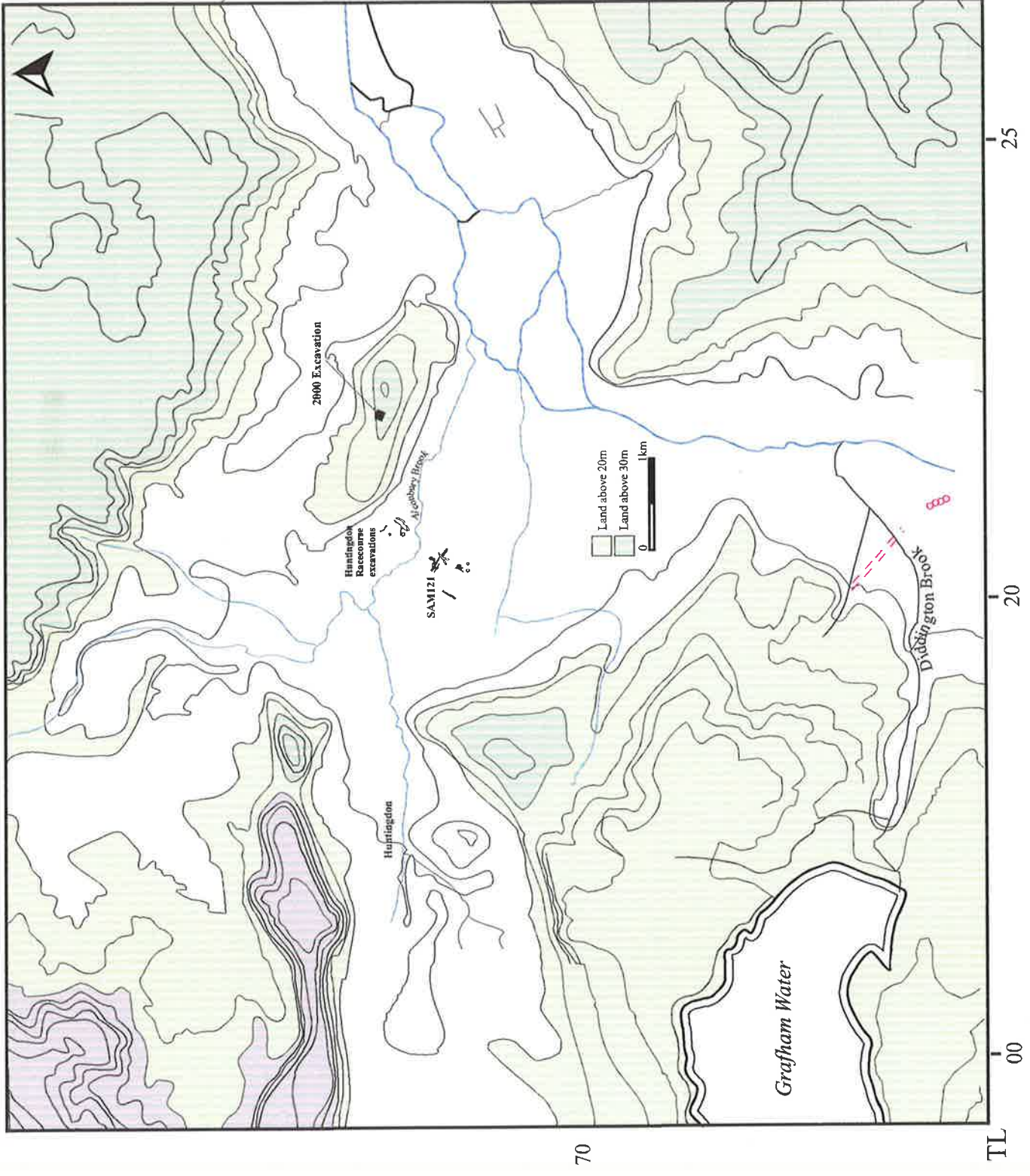
These monuments are considered to form a ceremonial complex (Malim, forthcoming). A Neolithic Mortuary enclosure at the end of a cursus, forming part of this complex was investigated in 1990-1991 (Malim 1990).

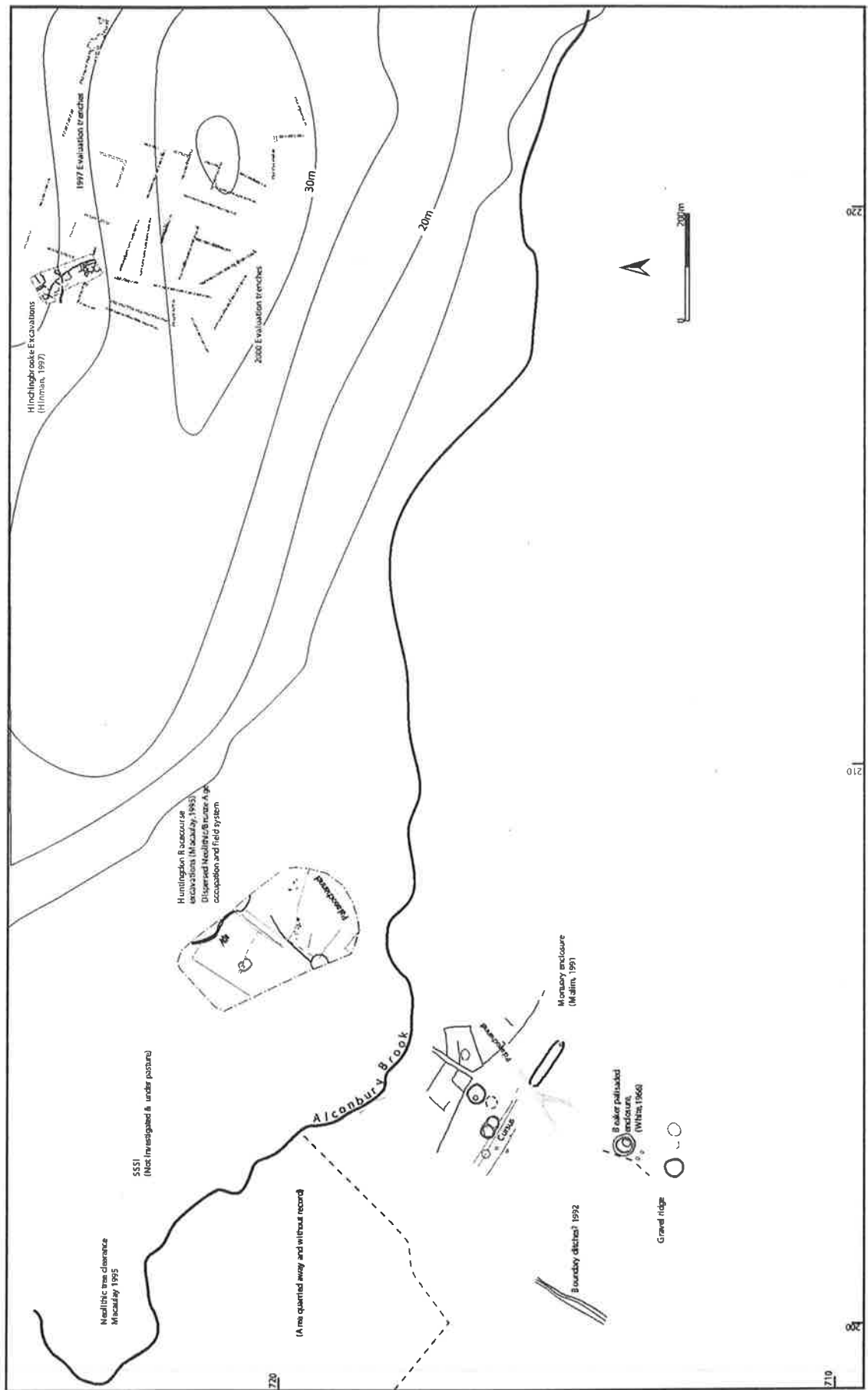
A series of parallel ditches interpreted as Neolithic territorial markers or field systems were found during an archaeological excavation on Thrapston Road itself which is situated 2km south-west of the subject site. (Malim and Mitchell, D;1992).

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 atypical 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.

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.

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.

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 Hinchbrooke 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 Hinchbrooke House, previously the site of the Benedictine nunnery of St James. The origins of the nunnery at Hinchbrooke 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.*).

The Hinchingsbrooke 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 Hinchingsbrooke site. A consideration of this past work is required in order to place the results of the current project within the broader context of the Hinchingsbrooke archaeological site.

The first phase of evaluation, which took place in January 1997 and 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, to the north and east of 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.

Significant Artefacts recovered included two currency bars (2 x sword type), a ritually defaced quern base, the ritually placed upper fore - limb of a (wild?) boar, a complete rotary quern top and base, knife fragments, iron working waste, loom weight fragments and large quantities of domestic pottery and animal bone.

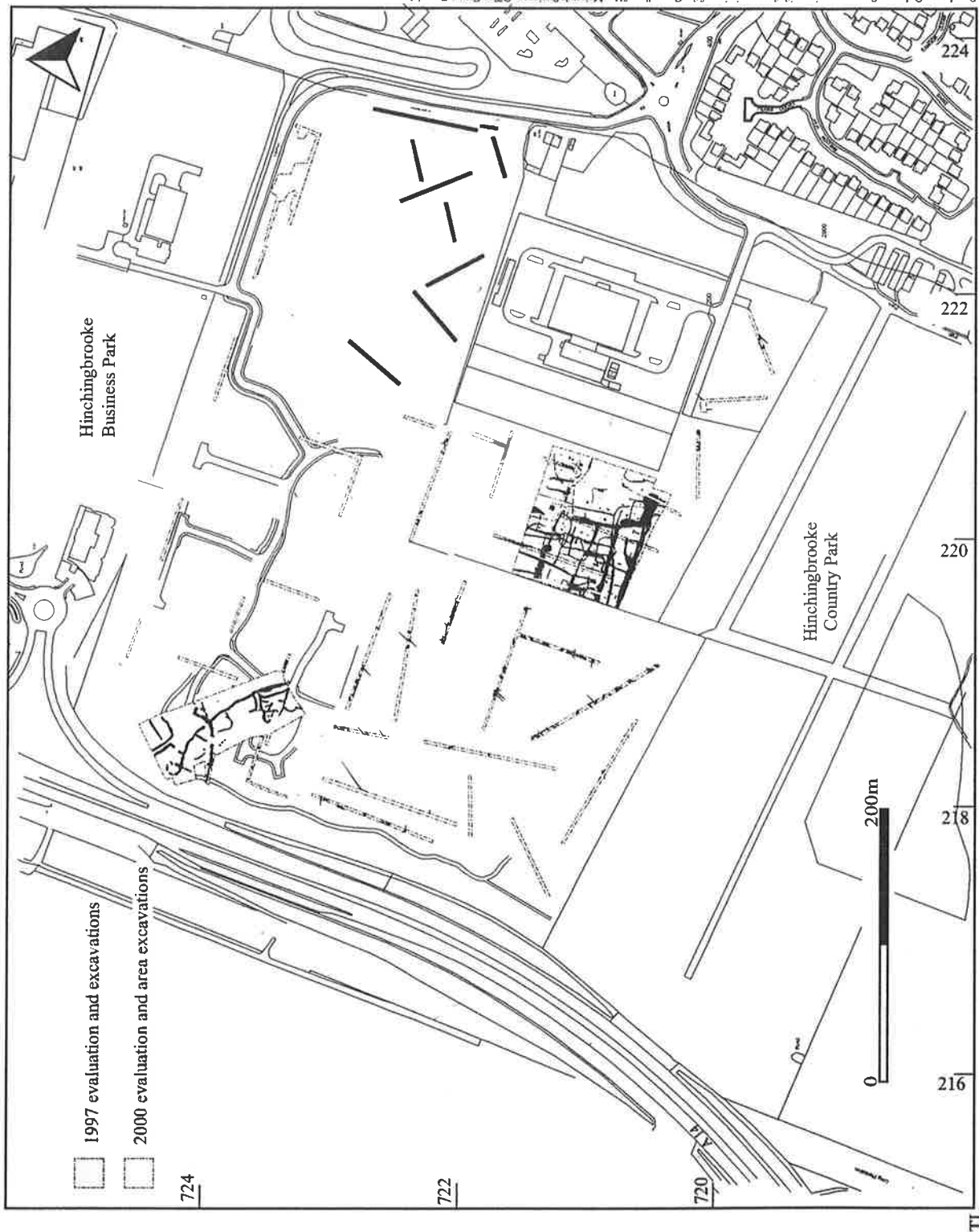


Figure 2 Plan showing 1997 evaluation/excavation areas, 2000 evaluation/excavation areas and current evaluation trenches

Currency bars
and other placed
objects

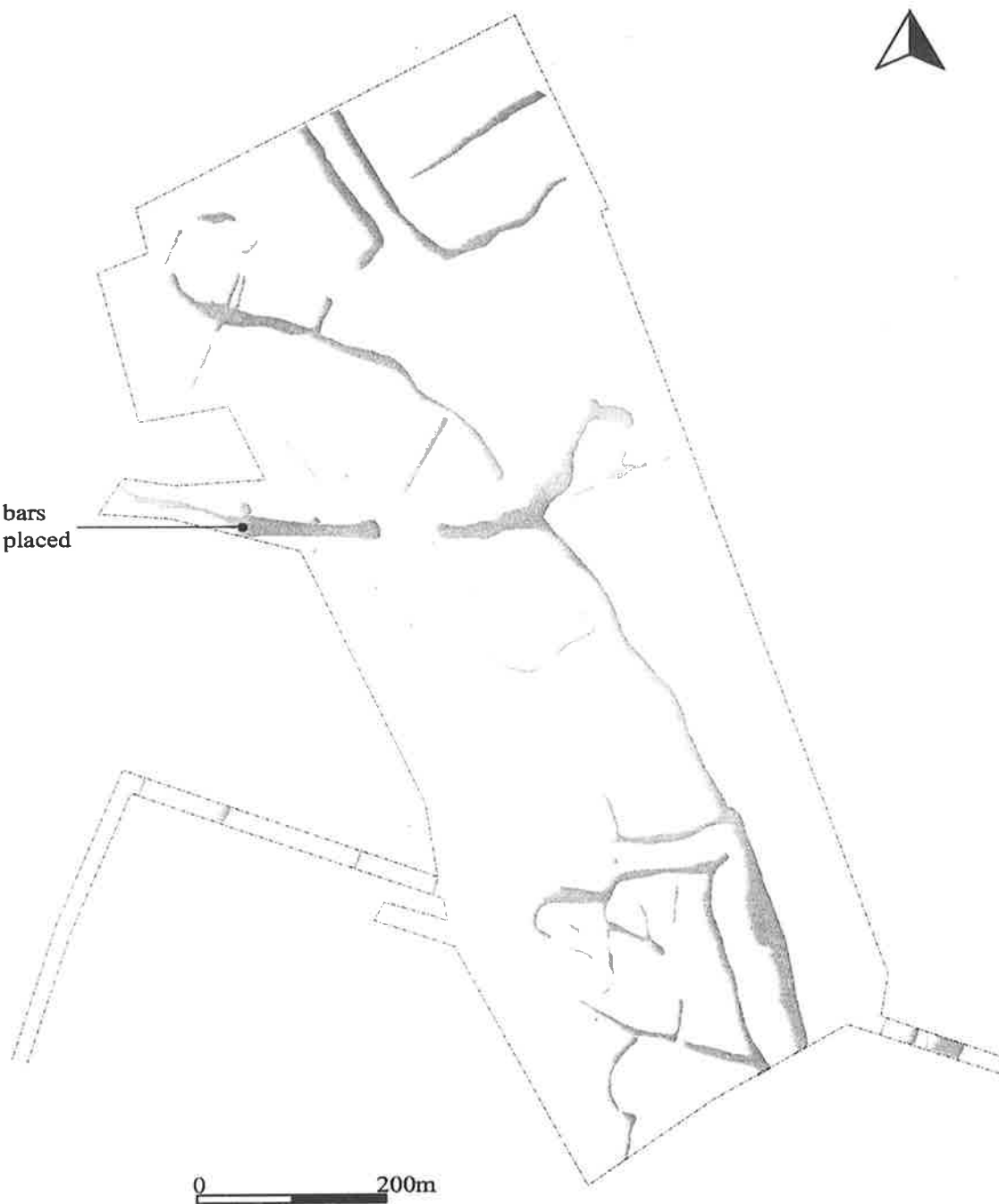


Figure 5 Plan showing 1997 evaluation/excavation areas and current evaluation trenches

Area 1 (TL 219 / 723)

Defining Boundaries

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.

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 its 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.

Symbolic Placement

My impression then as now is that the range of actions, the choice of place and the objects selected were intended to convey a sense of change.

The repeated placement of objects in the same location rather than the same place references the passage of time and hints at a very localised tradition associated with this spot. The main theme in this instance could be seen as an illustration of or identification of the point of transformation between the natural world beyond the settlement boundary and the humanly modified world represented by the interior of the boundary.

I believe we have a number of examples of actions and instances of placement / selective deposition which when viewed within the context of the local topography, space and / or in relation to the wider landscape can be related to quite specific themes or ideas. The best examples seem to encapsulate a range of associated themes examining change, transformation and *liminality*.

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.).

2000 AD

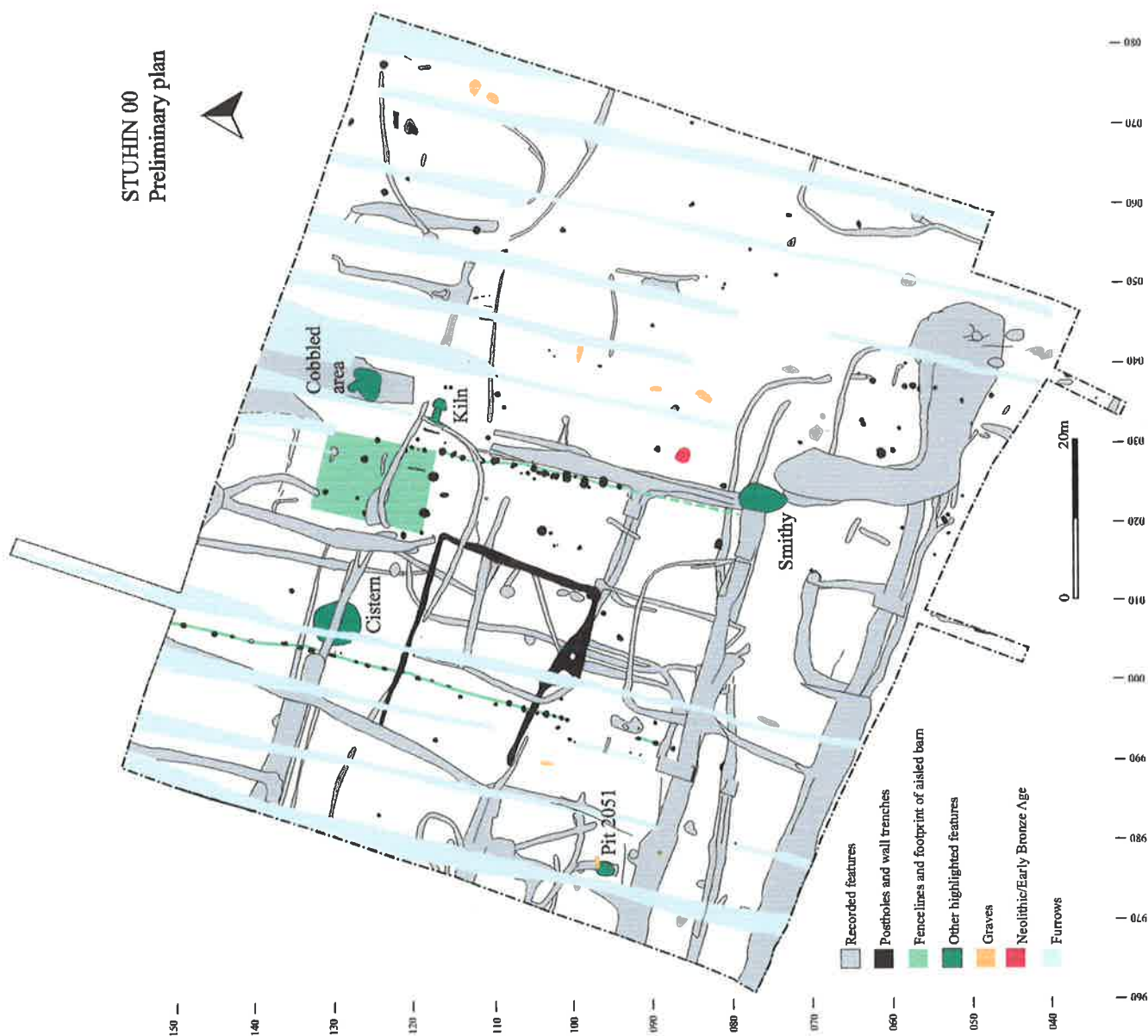
Area 3 (TL 219 / 721)

The second phase of evaluation involved the cutting of a total of 20 separate trenches of total length 1750.5m covering an area of roughly 8.5ha which comprises 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.

Excavation (Areas A-E)

Due to the size of the development area we have sub divided the site into five parts of roughly equal size, Areas A-E.

STUHN 00
Preliminary plan



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.

Significant artefacts recovered included a flint arrowhead (barbed and tanged), late Neolithic / early Bronze Age structured deposits of ceramics, lithics, animal bone and stone. Roman artefacts included high status Claudian / Neronian pottery (C1st AD) including imported Dressel 20 Amphora (Spanish) and rare central Gaulish glazed ware, in addition to painted plaster, metalworking slag, stamped samian ware, over 70 metal objects. Environmental sampling has already produced evidence for the consumption of fresh seafood, peas, wheat and barley, large assemblages of domestic pottery, tile and animal bone of C1st through 4th/5th? AD date.

Late Neolithic / early Bronze Age

The earliest evidence of human activity takes the form of sub rectangular pit **2078** length 1.98m, width 1.72m, and depth 1.10m (BP245). This steep sided feature contained five distinct fills; containing clearly structured episodes of artefactual deposition of large rounded cobbles, a layer of pottery, lithics including flint tools, bones, and evidence of burning.

Preliminary examination of the flint and pottery assemblage indicate a late Neolithic / early Bronze Age date. Considerable evidence continues to accumulate which indicates that pits of this period are not dug to permit the disposal, of what we today may consider as rubbish, in a strictly functional sense. It would seem that the constituent parts of the artefactual assemblages deposited, or sometimes placed within these pits, held a great deal of significance to those engaged in the processes of selection and deposition. We should perhaps view each individual pit as a type of 'timecapsule'. Such features should be excavated in their entirety to allow inter and intra site comparison. At the present time pit **2078** remains only half excavated.

A number of unexcavated features similar in terms of shape / fill to **2078** (possibly of similar date) are marked on Preliminary plan 1.

Middle Iron Age

No remains from the period have yet been identified within Area B in line with the evaluation results. It is possible however that certain of the curvilinear ditches currently exposed may represent elements of field systems of the period. Fragmentary evidence for these systems were identified during the 1997 excavations (Area 1) and their presence was one of the key factors in suggesting the gradual shift in the settlement core.

Late Iron Age

Although the nature of activity within area B during the period is unclear at present, occupation has moved close to the hilltop by the end of the Iron Age. Features dateable to the late pre Roman Iron Age (LPRIA), including a probable drain packed with pottery of the period and a pit. Further pits and at least one human burial may also date to the end of the period but are discussed below due to lack of excavation / dating evidence at the present time.

The Romano - British Period

Area B contains highly significant remains, indicative of high status occupation spanning the whole period of Roman occupation from the conquest through to the fourth and very probably the fifth century AD. Evidence relating to the transition from late Iron Age settlement to the establishment of a Romano-British villa, the development and eventual decline of the site are all present. Although excavation to date has been minimal it is possible to place certain key features into broad phases on the basis of artefactual and stratigraphic data, illustrating the importance and variety of these remains.

The first century AD

Pottery Production

A Romano British kiln, first identified during evaluation, was found on the site (BP248, preliminary plan 5), consisting of firing chamber **1523** and stoking pit **1066**. Although partially truncated by ditch **1519** a considerable range and quantity of pottery was recovered during excavation, in particular from fill **1065** within **1066**. Many of the vessels recovered (including a cheese press) displayed characteristics of vessel failure during firing such as signs of spalling, whilst some were clearly misshapen.

Significantly **1523** also produced large amounts of structural material from the kiln including parts of the perforated clay floor of the firing chamber and the pedestal base used to support the floor. Such information is invaluable, enabling the accurate reconstruction of this feature.

Waste Disposal

An area of pitting was recorded in the south west of Area B. The latest (stratigraphically) feature in the sequence was pit **2051**, sub circular in plan, 2.50m length, 1.70m width, and 1.10m depth. Although not yet fully excavated a considerable amount of artefactual and environmental materials have already been recovered from this pit consisting of a wide range of kitchenwares including a large jar used for boiling water, tablewares including flagons, bowls and drinking vessels, animal bones, oyster shells and the carbonised remains of Roman peas as well as human remains (see below).

Certain specific luxury goods recovered from pit **2051** serve to reinforce the presence of wealth and high status occupation on the site during the first century AD.

Particularly significant discoveries included a *dressel 20* amphora made in Spain and used to contain olive oil. Such amphorae remain relatively rare in East Anglia. Some sherds of an imported lead glazed drinking vessel were also recovered. This type of vessel is thought to have been produced in central Gaul and is extremely rare in this country but tends to be found in contexts dateable to the conquest and immediate post conquest periods, AD 43-70. Interestingly the level of technology required to produce this type of vessel was not re-acquired in Britain for over 1000 years.

The presence of scallop shells shows us that seafood made up part of the diet, another luxury item requiring direct trading links with the coast.

Such finds back up discoveries in other parts of the site, which tell us of the high status of this Romano British settlement.

Although the contents of pit **2051** clearly indicate waste disposal was the primary function of this feature, however both the conspicuous consumption illustrated by the contents of the pit and its location are both unusual. Rubbish pits were generally absent across Area B, although the immediate area surrounding **2051** witnesses repeated episodes of pitting, as yet unexcavated.

It may also be significant that the cutting of this pit disturbed - or rather cut in half! - a grave **2159** containing the remains of a human adult. Much of the lower half of this skeleton was recovered from the infilling sequence of the rubbish pit.

An intriguing sequence exists then for this part of the site; it is an area used for pitting over a long period and yet this sequence is broken by a burial after which the pitting activity resumes. It seems strange to have chosen this location for a burial when there were so many other locations in which it would have remained undisturbed.

Further excavation may reveal evidence of late pre Roman Iron Age pitting giving a continuity of use to the area although any purely functional interpretation of this activity should be qualified. The location of a shrine or temple within the immediate vicinity of this pit group is not unlikely.

Human Remains

Several inhumations were identified on the site (additional plans 181c, 203a, 245a, and preliminary plan 6). Three human skeletons were excavated as they had been exposed by machining and further remains are now expected both within Area B and across the rest of the site. All of the excavated burials remain undated at present although **2159** is almost certainly dateable to the first century AD.

2159 was a Romano British burial discussed above in relation to pit **2051**. The remains are those of a mature woman. The vertebrae display evidence of Schmorl's nodes, a characteristic sign of disc degeneration which today are present in most people over 40 years of age (*C Sampedro pers com.*).

Pit 2051 truncated burial 2159, cutting through this skeleton above the pelvis, removing the lower half of the body, parts of which had subsequently casually re interred within the lower fills of 2051. The body had been buried in the supine position with the head placed to the east within an east-west aligned grave cut.

The grave 2169 was 1.30m long x 0.70m wide and only 0.08m deep containing the remains of a small adult, inhumed in the supine position, aligned north south with the head to the north. This very shallow grave had been heavily truncated by ploughing. A small amount of pottery, tesserae and a piece of worked flint were found with this burial although all could have been introduced through the later action of the plough and hence a reliable date for the burial remains uncertain.

2166 was a very unusual burial within a very small shallow grave cut, 1.10m x 0.50m x depth 0.16m. The skeleton of a very small adult male over 20 years of age (*C Sampedro pers com.*) was buried in a kneeling position, facing north, the upper body crouched forwards with the forehead cradled in the right arm. Worked flint was found in association with this burial although dating of the skeleton is uncertain. Similarities between the position of this inhumation and probable execution victims found at Sutton Hoo were noted. This may have significance but further work on this is needed before a definitive date can be given.

There are several other likely graves on the site, which have been highlighted on preliminary plan 6. These shared similarities in morphology, dimensions and fill colour and type, to the excavated inhumations. It should be pointed out that all three inhumations discussed above were contained in very shallow graves therefore if the site were re buried and machined again damage to these fragile remains would be very likely.

The Second to Third centuries AD

The predominant archaeological remains present within Area B are a series of linear ditches aligned roughly north-south or east-west. These ditches represent the remains of enclosures and boundaries which were once intended for the control of livestock and to define areas of human habitation, whilst ensuring good drainage of the heavy clay soils of the area. Certain of these ditch lines were defined at least as early as the late Iron Age and were identified within the proposed excavation Area C during evaluation. These ditch lines appear to have been maintained and gradually extended eastwards into and throughout the Romano-British period. The infilling of these ditch lines contain a wealth of highly significant artefactual and environmental information. The recovery, through excavation of sufficient samples of these materials is essential for the reconstruction of the changing patterns of consumption, production and hence the economy of this important site.

The majority of features across the site have been placed into the second - third century time frame although this phasing should be viewed as extremely

tentative as it is based more on expectations supported by previous experience, rather than 'hard' data.

Buildings

Villa

Structural remains include elements of what appears to have been a substantial building, possibly a villa located west of the center of Area B. Excavation is required to examine and define the extent of this potential structure. During the excavation it was noted that a number of the smaller rectilinear features, initially assumed to be ditches contained frequent inclusions of limestone fragments, and in one instance, painted wall plaster.

2106 (BP225, 226 and preliminary plan 7), was a slot through an extensive rectilinear feature which ran north south before returning through a right-angled corner to the west. It was 1.11m wide and 0.31m deep. This may represent a possible robber cut, presumably excavated in antiquity in order to recover building materials from a roman wall footing. The northeastern corner of this ditch had significant amounts of limestone fragments, material typical of robber trench backfill.

2110, which may be an associated robbed out wall cut. It had near vertical sides with a depth of 0.64m and a width of 0.73m.

Also of significance were pieces of painted wall plaster and tesserae found during the evaluation again in an associated ditch in slot 1094. Such finds are indicative of a high status building.

Further excavation is needed to in order to establish whether the above features are associated and together form elements of the robbed out remains of a high status Roman building.

Aisled Barn

Adjacent to the extreme north west of the eastern alignment is a series of postholes which have a very distinctively structural arrangement (BP 248 249, preliminary plan 12). None of the postholes in this arrangement have been excavated, however in plan it has the characteristic layout of an 'aisled barn'. These buildings appear to have been used for a wide variety of agricultural purposes including grain storage and as accommodation for livestock.

Although no excavation of this building or associated features has yet taken place it can be suggested that in this instance livestock were kept in this barn. This interpretation is based on the assumption that the following features within the immediate vicinity are contemporary.

Cistern

A cistern, (BP227 228, and preliminary plan 16) was identified in the northwestern part of area B this was not excavated. This storage feature, circular in plan, diameter c 6m would have been cut into the underlying

boulder clay to provide a source of readily accessible water on top of the hill. Similar features were identified by the author (Hinman, 2003) during excavations of a Romano-British farmstead near Haddon during 1999. At Haddon aisled barns were also present in close proximity to cisterns and phosphate analysis indicates the likelihood that livestock were kept within these barns.

Fencelines

Two north-south post alignments dated as Roman exist on the site. Very clearly shown on the base plans. They are shown on preliminary plan 4 labelled as the eastern alignment and the western alignment.

Several of the postholes in the alignment have been numbered although not excavated (see BP248). Surface finds from these postholes were recovered during initial recording of the site. These give a Romano-British date to the alignments. Ditch 1444, which also produced roman pottery sherds, can give us a *terminus ante quem* for the eastern alignment, as one of these postholes cut this ditch. (For further information on these postholes see sheet 1441 for a useful diagram and the descriptions on sheets 1433, 1437, 1440, 1444, 1432, 1436.)

No postholes in the western alignment have so far been excavated, and therefore phasing is impossible without further investigation. However, the similar form, appearance and north south alignment that the western and eastern alignments share would suggest that they also share a similar phase of use. There is evidence of replacement, of some of the posts in the fence line, as certain postholes appear to have been recut.

These alignments must be considered as some of the most fragile elements of the site, as despite the fact that they stretch over a very large area of the site they are also likely to be very shallow. Having already suffered from plough damage and having been machined once. It is unlikely that they would survive reburial and re-machining.

The aisled barn appears to have been constructed on the same alignment as the two fencelines. The eastern wall of this barn would probably have been coincident with the eastern fence line, extending this boundary to the north. The position of the cistern within these boundaries may be taken as tentative evidence for the maintenance of livestock or possibly horses within a fenced enclosure or paddock.

Additional structural remains

A cobbled surface, possibly a floor foundation or building platform was identified near the northern limit of Area B, (BP 249, and preliminary plan 15). This feature was unexcavated but did produce surface finds.

As with the post alignments this feature is unlikely to survive reburial and a second machine excavation.

More postholes indicative of structural activity but lacking cohesion in plan were located within the south eastern corner of the site (BP 244 and preliminary plan 14). Excavation of these features is needed in order to phase them and to establish whether they are contemporary and therefore likely to be part of the same structure.

Domestic Activity or Agricultural Processing?

Several features with burnt linings and or fills were identified on the site. These features represent the remains of domestic hearths or perhaps some form of agricultural processing, for example malting ovens.

2143 is a slot through a short burnt feature with a black fill **2144** (BP 289, preliminary plan 9). The length of this feature is 1.0m, width 0.29m and depth 0.15m. It was steep sided and similar in terms of shape and size with two other burnt features on the site

2147 (BP 289, preliminary plan 9) is also a short burnt feature 1.55m in length, 0.33m width, and 0.33m depth. This also had a black fill.

2120 is a slot through a burnt feature/oven (BP 270 and preliminary plan 11). This was similar in form to **2143** and **2147**. It is 1.45m long and 0.49m wide with a depth of 0.17m. Fill **2119** had a black or burnt appearance, and produced burnt daub, as well as pottery and bone. It was associated with a circular feature, which also contained burnt material (daub) which made it distinct from **2143** and **2147**. Further excavation of this feature is required to establish whether or not this is an oven or kiln.

Enclosures

Several enclosure ditches occurred on the site, one of the more striking occurred in the north eastern part of our area. Slot **1400** (BP 290, 288 287, and preliminary plan 8) was put through this during the evaluation, this had a width of 0.55m and a depth of 0.25 m. And two metal nails were found during its excavation. However, what can be appreciated now and could not during the evaluation is that this is part of a large curvilinear ditch, which curves from where slot **1400** was put to the southwest and then to the southeast forming a large U-shaped enclosure.

In the far west of the site is another enclosure ditch far smaller in size but equally striking in its morphology is the enclosure through which slot **2155** was put (BP 183, 204, and preliminary plan 2). This ditch forms a corral/enclosure shape. With a narrow entrance in the west, c. 0.50m. A medieval furrow truncates part of this tight circular ditch. The excavated section showed it to have near vertical sides and a depth of 0.31m and a width of 0.34m. This slot contained two distinct fills, which produced pottery, which give a preliminary date of Romano British.

This feature may have served as an animal enclosure. And therefore is further evidence of an extensive Romano British farmstead and settlement in the immediate vicinity. An un-excavated pit is contained within this enclosure. Excavation may provide further evidence of the enclosure's function, and confirm whether the pit has anything but a co-incidental relationship with 2155.

Metalworking

A highly significant discovery was the identification of an *in situ* metalworking area (BP244, and preliminary plan 14) located at the southern end of the eastern fenceline thought to be associated with the aisled barn. This produced surface finds of burnt roman pottery as well as slag and a considerable number of nails. A red area of burnt fill suggests that the processes taking place here involved very high temperatures, which would support an industrial function for the feature. Most importantly, and of considerable interest to metalworking specialists, the remains of an *in situ* crucible were visible within the burnt area. The visible fragments of this ceramic vessel were highly vesiculated, indicating that it had been subjected to temperatures in excess of 1000° C. Although unexcavated it would appear that we have located the remains of a Romano-British smithy. It is tempting to associate the smithy with the aisled barn and adjacent enclosure / paddock but this is well beyond the limits of the information currently available to us.

The Fourth to Fifth Centuries AD

In terms of research potential perhaps the greatest significance should be attached to the identification of remains dateable to the latest phases of Romano-British occupation, present within Area B, through the fourth century and potentially into the earliest decades of the fifth century AD.

Sherds of Oxfordshire pottery of a type only produced during the fourth century AD were recovered from an enclosure ditch within the south eastern corner of the site during evaluation and again during the initial stages of excavation. Significantly this ditch line was subsequently truncated by a large 'I' shaped ditch of uncertain purpose.

This large ditch, over 5m wide is stratigraphically the latest feature within Area B. To date only one slot 2027 has been cut (BP 243, preliminary plan 10) through the ditch. This slot was 5m wide and 1.35m deep, and produced a samian ware base, bearing the stamped legend of the master potter originally responsible for the production of the vessel. Interestingly this base sherd appears to have been deliberately and neatly 'trimmed' and clearly displays the potters mark. Although samian ware is a highly dateable type of pottery in this case the date of manufacture appears at odds with the stratigraphic date of the ditch from which it has been recovered. This ditch has not been identified definitively as a post Roman feature, however this piece of samian may support this idea. Although clearly of Roman origin stamped samian bases and other decorated sherds of this highly distinctive glossy red pottery are

known to have been collected or 'curated' (along with other Roman artefacts such as coins) by the earliest Saxon immigrants to Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

On a site, which has otherwise produced nothing from the post roman period, it is obviously necessary to excavate several more slots through the feature as well as the two terminal ends not only in an attempt to date this feature but also to determine it's function.

The New School Site (TL 223 / 722)

A further stage of evaluation was undertaken on land to the east and immediately adjacent to the Bob's Wood site by Mark Hinman and Spencer Cooper in December 2000. The 'New School' evaluation identified 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. Those 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.

Horse Skull and Beaker Pottery

The largest of the three pits from the evaluation, **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. Surviving fragments of ceramics from **2250** preserved 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 (Glutton-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.

Environmental preservation across the New School Site was poor and may be attributed to localised soil conditions on the side of the hill. 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.

The results of the New School Site were interesting in that the area evaluated was not covered by anything like the density and diversity of remains encountered either in 1997 or on the Bob's Wood site. 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.

DISCUSSION

It is clear that we are dealing with a significant site. Previous work on the site has led us to expect that the forthcoming project will provide important information on at least a local and regional level for several archaeological periods.

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

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.

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.

At present it is unknown whether occupation of this hillside was continuous from the Iron Age through to the end of the Roman period. What is clear

however is that the core of the settlement has shifted over the centuries which means that the site has very high potential for the study of themes associated with the development of settlement types and transition between the Iron Age and Roman and possibly Roman to Saxon periods.

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 within the current development area. The recovery of tesserae, painted plaster and fragments of box flue tile point to presence of a villa within the immediate vicinity.

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.

Further excavation now presents us with the opportunity to significantly add to our understanding of the site particularly. 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 within the subject site.

Synthesis of information gained as a result of 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 Iron Age and Romano-British periods.

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and Heritage

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946