

Chapter 1: Introduction

INTRODUCTION

This volume presents the results of two excavations on the gravel terraces of the Lower Kennet Valley, at Green Park (Phase 3) and Moores Farm, Burghfield, Berkshire. The excavations revealed a sequence of prehistoric activity that complements the results of the two previously published phases of work at Green Park (formerly known as Reading Business Park: Moore and Jennings 1992; Brossler *et al.* 2004). In particular, extensive evidence for later Bronze Age settlement and farming was revealed, which makes a significant contribution to our understanding of this period. The final chapter of the volume synthesises all of the work to date in the Green Park/Moores Farm area, in order to explore the development of this important prehistoric landscape.

SITE LOCATIONS, GEOLOGY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF EXCAVATION

The Green Park Phase 3 excavation area is located in the south-western part of the Green Park development at SU 697696, and is bisected by the

boundary between Burghfield and Shinfield parishes (Fig. 1.1). It lies on the first terrace gravels of the River Kennet, on level ground at 39m OD. The gravel is overlain by poorly drained, non-calcareous clay soils of the Loddon series (Jarvis 1968). Prior to the fieldwork the site was under arable cultivation. The site was excavated by Oxford Archaeology (OA) in advance of commercial development, on behalf of Caversham Project Management Ltd acting for Prudential Property Investment Managers Ltd (later as part of Prupim).

Moores Farm is located 1 km to the south-west of Green Park at SU 691687, within Burghfield parish (Fig. 1.1). It lies on ground sloping gently from north to south at *c* 40m OD. The underlying geology again consists of first terrace river gravels, capped by soils of the Loddon series and a series of red-brown alluvial deposits. Prior to the fieldwork the site was used partly for arable agriculture and partly as pasture. The site was excavated by OA in advance of gravel quarrying, on behalf of Caversham Project Management Ltd and the Caversham Bridge Group.

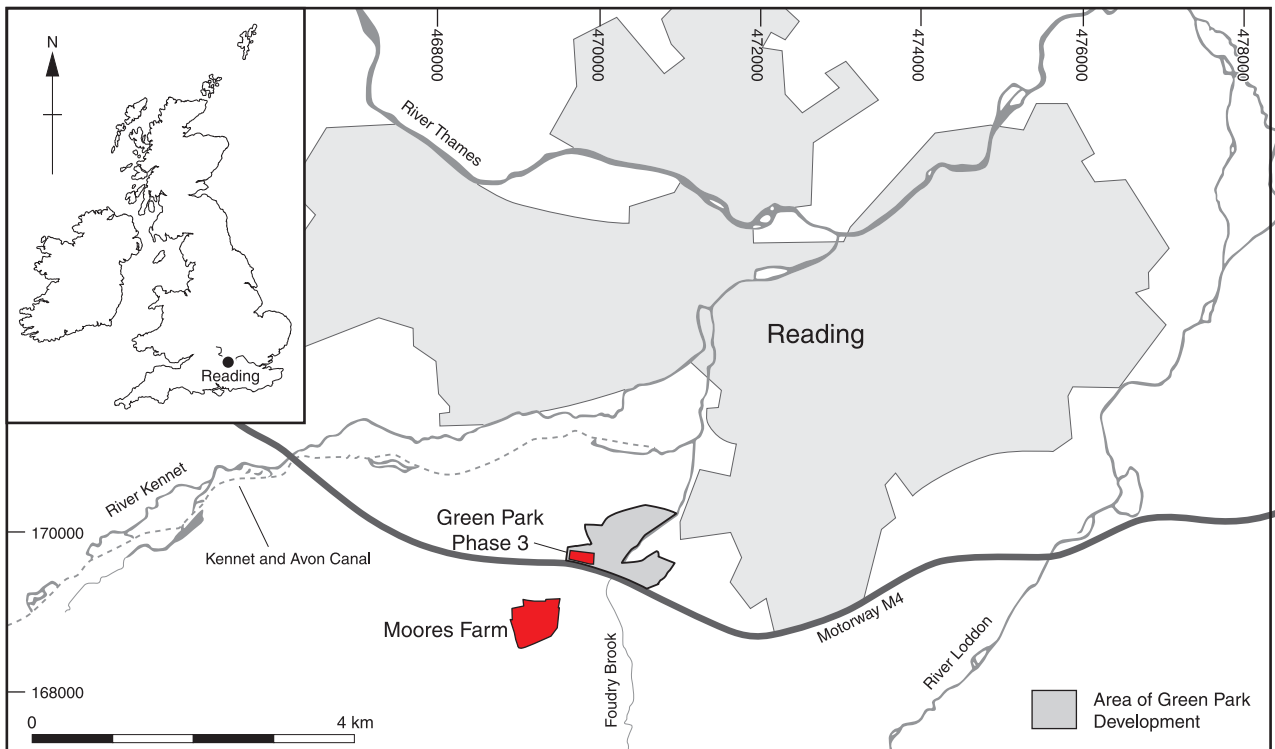


Fig. 1.1 Location of sites, © Crown Copyright 2013, Ordnance Survey 100005569

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The area of the Lower Kennet Valley around Green Park and Moores Farm has seen intensive archaeological investigation over the past two decades. The salient findings of this work are summarised below. For convenience, the first phase of excavation at Green Park – originally published as Reading Business Park (Moore and Jennings 1992) – will be referred to in this volume as Green Park 1, the second phase (Brossler *et al.* 2004) as Green Park 2, and the third phase (this volume) as Green Park 3.

Survey work

The archaeological richness of the area was first revealed in the mid 1970s by a survey of the aerial photographic evidence from the Middle Thames Valley, which showed that cropmark complexes extended across the gravel terraces of the Burghfield area. Green Park 3 lies within one of these cropmark complexes, which incorporates trackways, linear ditch systems and scattered pits (Fig. 1.2; Gates 1975, 32–3, pls 7–8).

Fieldwalking was subsequently carried out in the area by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit in 1983–84 as part of the Lower Kennet Valley Survey. The part of the survey area corresponding with Green Park 3

produced worked flint, prehistoric, Roman and medieval pottery and a Roman coin (Lobb and Rose 1996). Moores Farm was not surveyed.

Previous Green Park investigations

Wessex Archaeology evaluation 1986

In 1986 Wessex Archaeology carried out an evaluation of 1% of the Green Park development area (Fig. 1.3) (TWA 1986). The evaluation comprised a grid of 2m-square test pits, supplemented by longer trenches in areas where archaeological features and high artefact densities were found.

Within the south-western part of the evaluated area, corresponding to Green Park 3, 12 of the 31 excavated test pits contained archaeological features. The only stratified dating evidence was a group of medieval pottery sherds, although unstratified Bronze Age pottery was also recovered. Two of the five larger trenches in this area also produced archaeological remains. One trench revealed a crouched inhumation burial, a complex of intercutting ditches containing Bronze Age pottery, burnt flint and animal bone, and a large waterhole that produced a wooden bowl and two wooden stakes. A second trench revealed three Romano-British ditches.

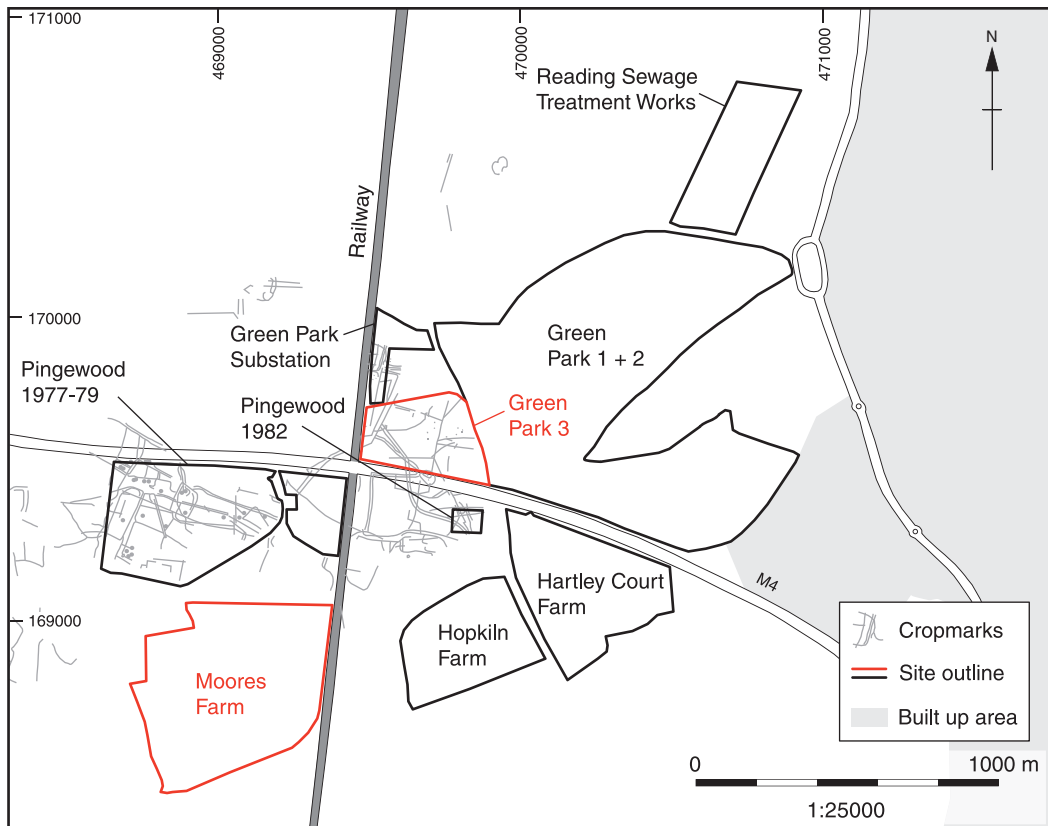


Fig. 1.2 Cropmark evidence (after Gates 1975) and other archaeological investigations in the Green Park/Moores Farm area. Mapping of cropmarks does not extend eastwards of the SU 70 easting. © Crown Copyright 2013, Ordnance Survey 100005569

Elsewhere within the evaluated area, to the west and north-west of Green Park 3, further evidence for later Bronze Age activity was discovered including an occupation layer adjacent to a palaeochannel. An area of Romano-British settlement close to Foudry Brook was also found.

Green Park 1 excavations 1987–88

As a consequence of the discoveries made during the evaluation, additional archaeological work was made a condition of the development. During 1987–88, further evaluation trenching and a series of open area excavations were carried out by OA (Fig. 1.3; Moore and Jennings 1992).

Excavation within Area 5 revealed a late Bronze Age settlement located on an island of gravel. Twenty roundhouses were excavated, together with two-, four-, and six-post structures and a large number of pits. Traces of an associated field system were found nearby in Areas 3 and 6.

In Area 2000 a number of intercutting ditches and pits proved to be mostly of Roman date. These were thought to represent the remains of field systems, enclosures, and other features associated with a nearby settlement.

Part of a late Bronze Age settlement was discovered in Area 3100, bounded to the north by a palaeochannel. Ten roundhouses were excavated, overlying an earlier field system. Other features associated with the settlement included two-, four-, and six-post structures, and a row of six possible flax-retting pits.

Area 4000 contained isolated pits and postholes associated with both late Bronze Age and Roman pottery. In Area 5000 four pit alignments were superseded by boundary ditches of Bronze Age date. Pits and postholes were also scattered across the excavated area. Area 6000 contained ditches and gullies thought to represent a Bronze Age field system.

Neolithic, late Bronze Age and Roman remains were located in Area 7000. A swathe of 118 pits of probable Neolithic date extended from north-west to south-east across the site. Other Neolithic features included postholes and a pit containing a complete cattle skeleton. Late Bronze Age activity in this area was represented by pits, a crouched inhumation burial, two cremation burials and several postholes, together with a U-shaped enclosure. Traces of four Roman enclosures were found in the northern and eastern parts of the site.

Green Park 2 excavations 1995

In 1995 OA carried out further excavation in advance of Phase 2 of the Green Park development (Brossler *et al.* 2004). Two sites with a total area of 2.2ha were investigated: Area 3017, located on a gravel island to the south-west of Area 7000, and Area 3000B, which represented an eastwards extension of Area 3100 (Fig. 1.3).

Area 3017 contained features predominantly dating to the Neolithic period. A segmented ring-ditch produced an assemblage of Neolithic flint-work, and animal bone from the upper ditch fills was radiocarbon dated to the early 3rd millennium cal BC. An unurned cremation burial from one of the upper fills may have been interred later, during the Bronze Age. Nineteen Neolithic pits similar to those excavated in Area 7000 to the north-east were recorded, together with postholes relating to a possible timber building. Other features included three late Bronze Age pits, and medieval ditches and pits associated with a field system.

Area 3000B showed a similar sequence to that recorded in Area 3100 immediately to the south-west, where a late Bronze Age settlement overlay part of an earlier field system. A cremation burial within a middle Bronze Age urn was found in a pit to the west of a large square field. To the south-east, another pit containing a fragmentary middle Bronze Age vessel was found, but there was no evidence of a cremation burial. A middle Bronze Age waterhole was also discovered. The late Bronze Age settlement was represented by a further five roundhouses, several two-, four-, and six-post structures, seven waterholes and a large number of pits. Immediately north-east of the roundhouses, a large burnt mound was uncovered, made up predominantly of burnt flint in a black sandy silt soil. This deposit produced significant amounts of late Bronze Age pottery, and had accumulated along the southern edge of the palaeochannel.

Watching brief work

Watching briefs were maintained on groundworks at various stages of the Green Park development (Fig. 1.4). Those carried out up to 1996 are reported on by Brossler *et al.* (2004). Between 1997 and 2002, watching briefs were carried out in intermittently the southern part of the development area, to the east of Kybe's Lane. In 1997 the watching brief covered two areas (P3 and P4) to the east and west of the palaeochannel covered by the 1996 watching brief. The southern part of the development (Zones 11 to 14) was covered by watching briefs carried out from 1998 to 2000. The watching briefs were carried out piecemeal as development progressed, sometimes covering only very small strips of land. The depth to which the areas were stripped varied, depending upon the impact of the development, but many areas were stripped only to shallow depths (rarely exceeding 0.50m, and sometimes to a depth of just 0.1m) which may have been insufficient to expose some archaeological features. After stripping, most of these areas were levelled with a grader and then covered with dense layers of gravel. Most areas had suffered from modern disturbance to some extent. Zones 11 and 12, which lay adjacent to the M4 had suffered particularly as the result of the removal of trees and shrubs. Not surprisingly, given these factors, the watching briefs

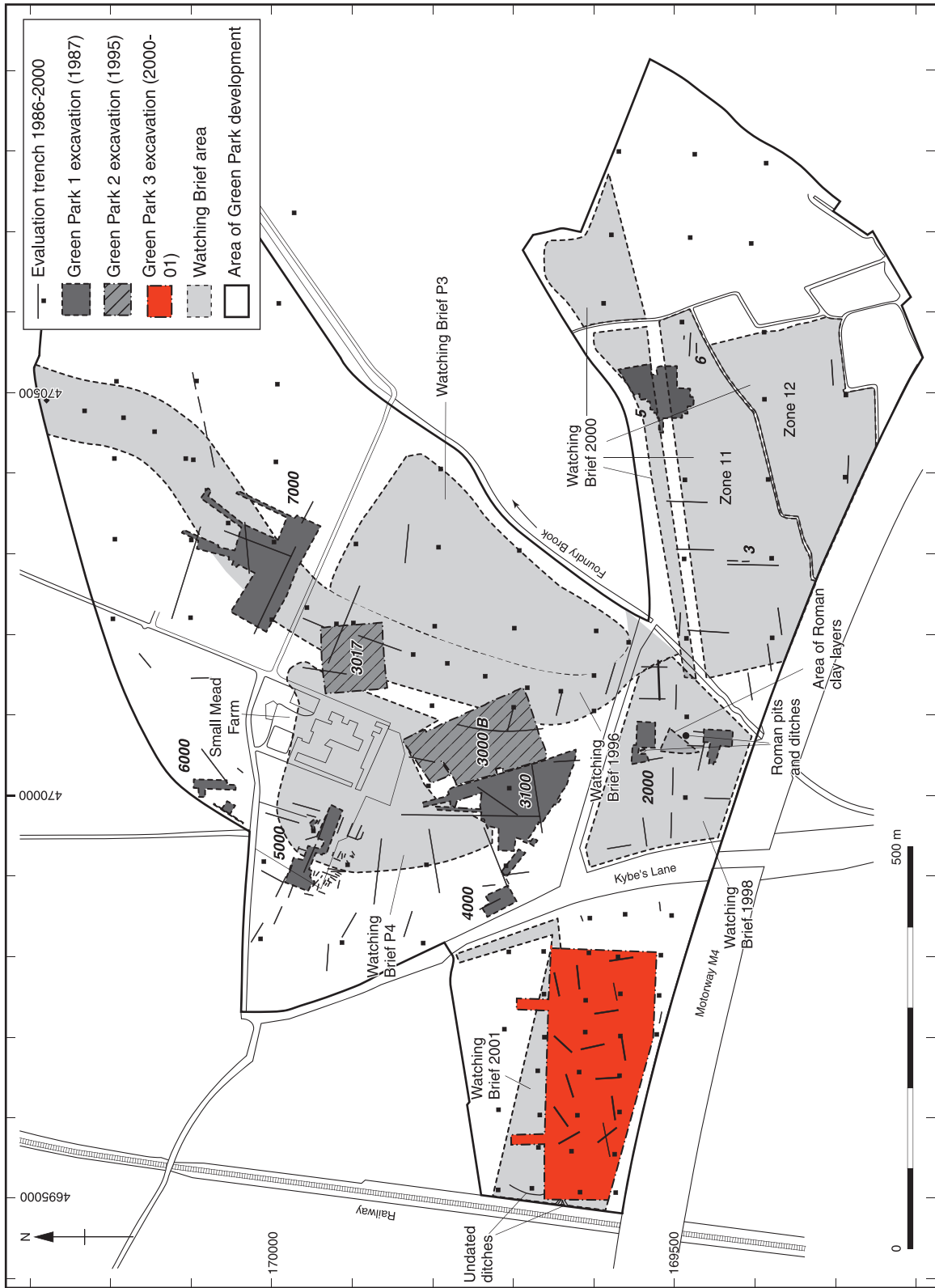


Fig. 1.3 Green Park: areas of archaeological fieldwork, © Crown Copyright 2013, Ordnance Survey 100005569



Fig. 1.4 Green Park: areas of watching brief, © Crown Copyright 2013, Ordnance Survey 100005569

revealed few features of archaeological interest, although modern drains and tree-throw holes were noted in most areas. Evidence for Romano-British activity was, however, found in 1998 in the immediate vicinity of the excavated Roman site at Area 2000 in a zone which was stripped between the two previous excavation areas (Fig. 1.4). Roman pottery and ceramic building material was recovered from two patchy silty clay layers that probably equate to the Roman plough soils identified in the earlier excavations (Moore and Jennings 1992, 62). The lower layer contained pottery dated to the 1st to 2nd centuries AD, while the upper layer was dated to after AD 240. A few sherds of 1st-century pottery were also found in an irregular pit or tree-throw hole that showed no stratigraphic relationship to the plough soils. Further watching brief work immediately to the east uncovered a curvilinear gully and three clusters of intercutting pits, which produced small amounts of pottery dated to the 2nd century or later. The remaining features revealed in the watching briefs consisted of a very small number of undated ditches and pits which contained no finds.

Other archaeological investigations

A number of other archaeological investigations have been carried out in the immediate vicinity of Green Park and Moores Farm (Fig. 1.2). These include work carried out by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit at Pingewood in 1977–82 in advance of gravel quarrying. The first stage of excavation, located 200m to the north-west of Moores Farm, uncovered later Bronze Age occupation, late Iron Age cremation burials and a Roman settlement consisting of a series of enclosures backing onto a trackway (Johnston 1985). A subsequent watching brief immediately to the east revealed further Bronze Age activity and a concentration of medieval occupation close to Pingewood House (Lobb and Mills 1993). A further small-scale excavation carried out 150m to the south of Green Park 3 uncovered a ring ditch presumed to be of prehistoric date and a number of Romano-British ditches (*ibid.*).

More recently, fieldwork has been carried out by OA at several locations in the area (Fig. 1.2). An evaluation at Hartley Court Farm, 200m to the south-east of Green Park 3, has revealed later Bronze Age occupation, a Romano-British settlement producing late 3rd- to 4th-century pottery, and a small medieval settlement dating to the 12th to 14th centuries (OA 1991a; Keevill 1992). Fieldwalking to the west of this site at Hopkilm Farm produced prehistoric worked flint, Roman finds including pottery and a shale vessel fragment, and a sparse scatter of medieval pottery (OA 1991b). Evaluation trenching at the Green Park Substation site, immediately to the north of Green Park 3, uncovered two ditches of probable Bronze Age date, along with two ditches containing late 11th-century pottery that are likely to be associated with a cropmark complex to

the east (OA 2001). Finally, at Reading Sewage Treatment Works, 1km to the north-east of Green Park 3, a watching brief revealed a C-shaped ring ditch which produced no finds but is likely to be of prehistoric date (OA 2002).

FIELDWORK METHODS

Green Park 3

The third phase of OA fieldwork at Green Park comprised evaluation trenching followed by open area excavation in the south-western part of the development area (Fig. 1.3). Thirteen evaluation trenches were excavated in August 2000 (OA 2000), to add to the information gained from the earlier Wessex Archaeology evaluation of the site (see above). A total area of 3ha, divided into two discrete zones either side of a drainage ditch, was then excavated between October 2000 and April 2001. A watching brief was subsequently carried out immediately to the north of the excavation area (Fig. 1.3). This revealed few significant archaeological features; the majority of the relevant area was scheduled to be used for dumping, and topsoil removal was not complete across the whole area. Features were revealed in the north-west corner of this area (Fig. 1.3) but were not dated.

Moores Farm

Evaluation trenching was undertaken at Moores Farm in 1989 (OA 1989). A total of 83 trenches were excavated, representing a 1% sample of the site; where archaeological deposits were encountered the number of trenches was increased to a 2% sample (Fig. 1.5). The results from the evaluation trenches formed the basis for the placement of 16 excavation areas, investigated between October 1998 and July 1999. The largest of these, Area 16, measured 165 x 135m, and corresponded with an area of later Bronze Age activity identified by the evaluation. The other 15 excavation areas were much smaller, ranging from 50 x 40m to 30 x 10m in size. In total, an area of 3ha was uncovered. In addition, a limited watching brief was maintained on groundworks carried in various other parts of the site between July and September 1999. Subsequently, in 2000, three discrete areas in the western part of the site were stripped and subjected to a more rigorous watching brief. Archaeological features within these areas were planned and limited sample excavation carried out.

Excavation procedures

The excavations at both Green Park 3 and Moores Farm followed standard procedures set out by the OA field manual (Wilkinson 1992) and IFA guidelines (IFA 1999). The topsoil was removed mechanically down to the first significant archaeological horizon or to the surface of the underlying natural

silts and gravel, under the supervision of an archaeologist. Subsequently, archaeological features and deposits were excavated by hand. Linear ditches were sample excavated in segments, and discrete features were usually half-sectioned. Some significant discrete features were subjected to 100%

excavation. All archaeological deposits were allocated a unique context number. Finds were recorded by context, with objects of special interest additionally being given a unique small find number (eg SF 10). Environmental sampling targeted features with a high potential for the

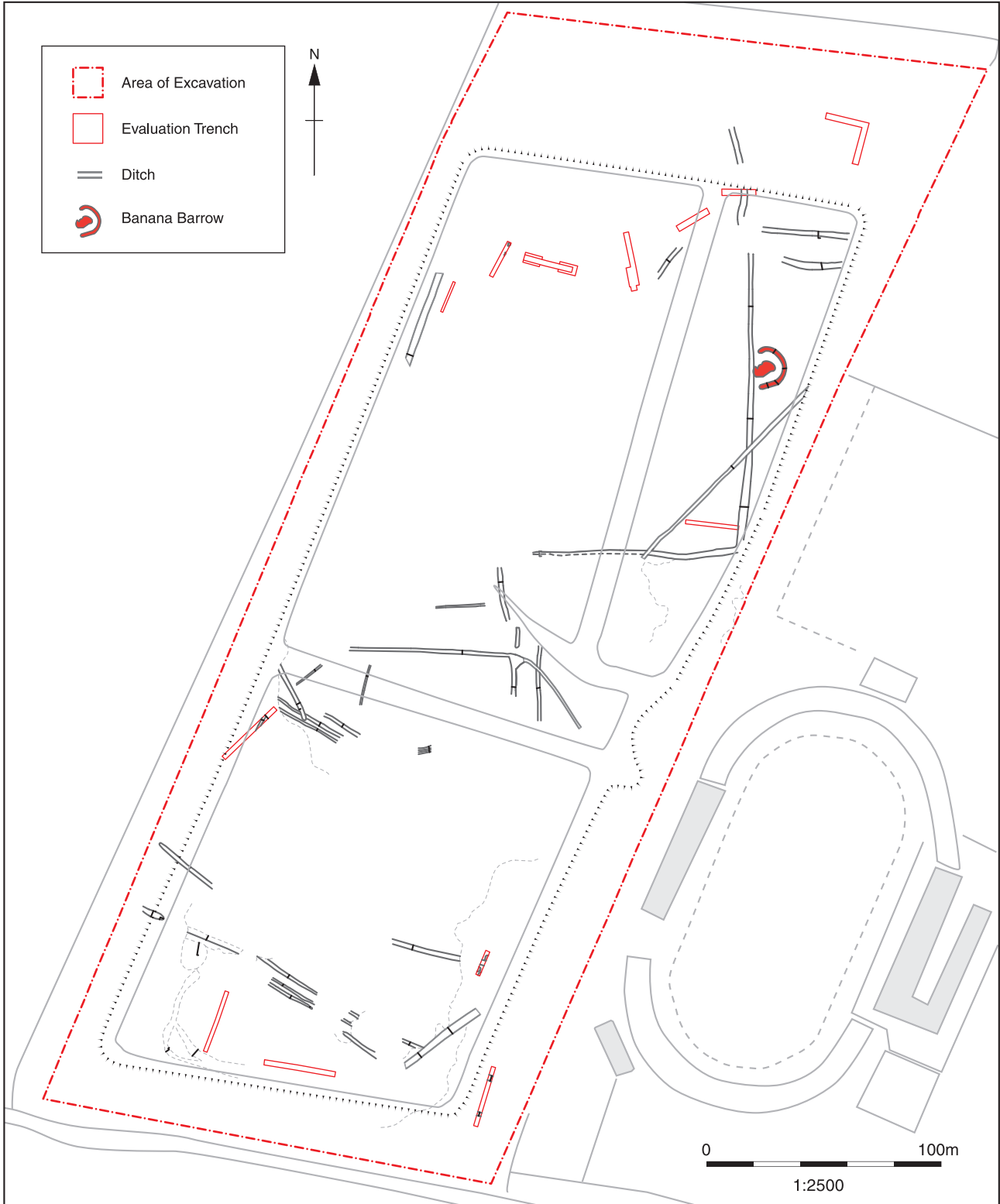


Fig. 1.5 Moores Farm: areas of archaeological fieldwork

recovery of charred remains or waterlogged macroscopic plant remains. Pollen columns were also taken from waterlogged features at both sites.

LAYOUT OF THE VOLUME

The next two chapters of this volume present the stratigraphic sequence, finds and environmental evidence from Green Park 3, with Chapter 2 covering the early prehistoric and Bronze Age

evidence and Chapter 3 the later Iron Age to post-medieval activity. The evidence from Moores Farm is presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, Elaine Morris considers the significance of the assemblages from Green Park and Moores Farm for our understanding of the middle to late Bronze Age ceramic transition in southern Britain. The final chapter discusses the development of prehistoric settlement in the Green Park/Moores Farm area, synthesising the results of all of the fieldwork to date.