Archaeological Field Unit

Prehistoric, Roman and Later Activity at the East of England Showground, Orton Waterville, Peterborough: An Archaeological Excavation

Samuel Whitehead

January 2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 702

Commissioned by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd.

Prehistoric, Roman and later activity at the East of England Showground, Orton Waterville, Peterborough: An Archaeological Excavation

(TL 142 960)

Samuel Whitehead

2004

Editors: Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu
Illustrator: Emily Oakes

With contributions by Jerry Evans, Rachel Fosberry and Stephen Macaulay

Report No. 702

Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 5762014
Fax (01223) 880946

arch.field.unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
http://edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu

SUMMARY

Between 13th April and 2nd May 2003 an archaeological excavation was carried out on one third of a hectare of land at the East of England Showground adjacent to the Oundle Road, near Alwalton, Peterborough (TL 142 960). The most recent use for the land has been as an overflow car park and a venue for car boot sales. The archaeological work was carried out by staff of the Cambridge County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) and commissioned by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd in advance of the construction of houses and associated access roads and services.

The earliest evidence of human activity was represented by a single undiagnostic and residual Bronze Age flint flake. Prehistoric activity was also indicated by pottery deposited in a large pit and a curving irregular Iron Age ditch which crossed the site: the latter contained Middle to Late Iron Age shell tempered pottery, charred prehistoric wheat varieties and the remnants of a possible cremation.

The Romans appeared to have used the existing Iron Age boundary in creating new boundaries/field systems. The two Roman ditches excavated contained varied assemblages of standard Roman kitchenwares and tablewares as well as storage vessels and roof tile. Such finds may indicate the presence of a substantial building in the vicinity, presumably a farmstead.

Later activity was also based around agriculture, represented by post-medieval field drains in both stone and ceramic pipe as well as plough furrows. More recent plough scars were also visible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Prehistoric, Roman and Later Activity at the East of England Showground, Orton Waterville, Peterborough

(TL 142 960)

1 INTRODUCTION

Between 13th April and 2nd May 2003 an archaeological excavation was undertaken by staff of the Cambridge County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) on one third of a hectare of land at the East of England Showground (Fig. 1). The site lies adjacent to the Oundle Road on the eastern edge of Awalton, which is in the parish of Orton Waterville within the city of Peterborough (TL 142 960).

Before excavation the site was under well kept grass as the land was being used as an overflow car park for the Showground and a venue for car boot sales.

The site was archaeologically evaluated by AFU in 1999 (Wall and Hatton 1999) in connection with a planning application by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd. involving the construction of houses and associated access roads and services. On the basis of the presence of a possible Bronze Age ring ditch located during the extensive evaluation of the site and surrounding land in 1999 further excavation was deemed necessary in this part of the development area.

The work was carried out in accordance with a specification for Archaeological Excavation issued by Cambridge County Council Archaeological Field Unit (Roberts 2003) and agreed by Peterborough City Council Archaeological Services.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

To the south-east of the village of Alwalton, 6 miles to the south-west of Peterborough, the site lies in the north-eastern corner of the East of England Showground and is bordered to the north by the A605.

This land is on the interface of third terrace sands and gravel of the River Nene and Oxford Clay (BGS 1984) and lies at 17m OD.

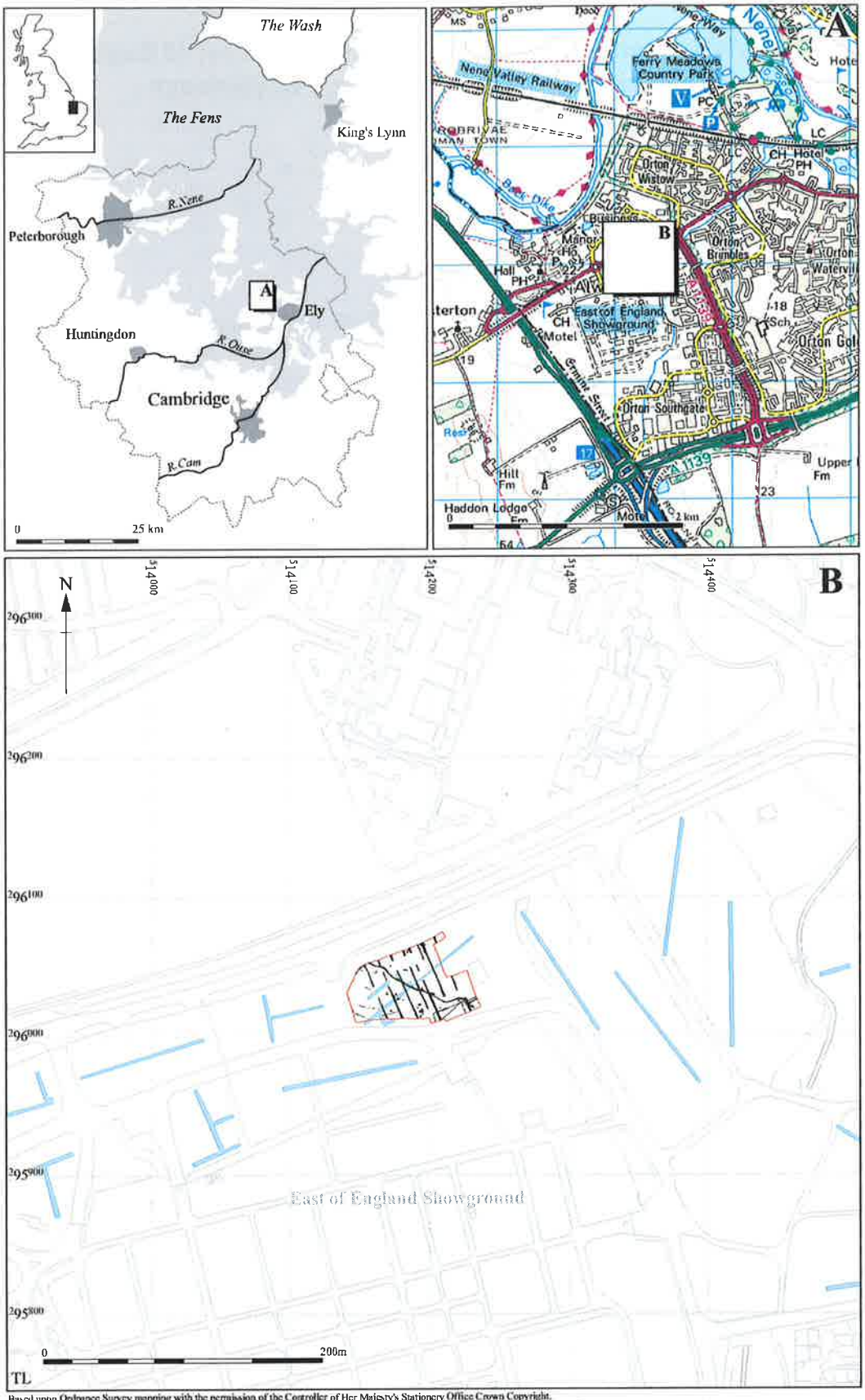

Figure 1 *Location of Excavated Area (red) and Archaeology (black) with 1999 Evaluation trenches (blue).*

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A detailed account of the rich archaeological potential and historical background of Alwalton and the environs of the development area is presented in the evaluation report (Wall and Hatton 1999) and summarised below. The site and its environs are covered by both the Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Records (PCCSMR and CCCSMR respectively).

3.1 Prehistoric

There are no known sites or finds of Palaeolithic or Mesolithic date in the vicinity of the site, although unstratified Neolithic flint has been recorded from this area. The prehistoric period is characterised by Bronze Age barrows and ring-ditches and a scheduled barrow cemetery lies 100m to the east (PCCSMR 1436, SAM 193). There are also records of three ring ditches to the south of the site (PCCSMR 9174, 9186 and 50346).

3.2 Roman

The Roman town of *Durobrivae* on the Roman road of Ermine Street (now predominantly the A1) lies 2km to the north-west of the site. The site is bordered to the north by the Ailsworth to King's Cliffe Roman road (Margary 1967) along the course of which frequent isolated Roman finds have been recorded.

In Alwalton itself the remains of a Roman building (PCCSMR 00912) and burials (CCCSMR 05714) have been recorded. A 1st century pottery kiln, along with metalled yards and up to six extended inhumations of probable Roman date were recorded during construction work at Lynch Wood, 200m to the north of the site (PCCSMR 10091).

3.3 Recent Archaeological Work in the Vicinity

Recent work in and around Alwalton has included an evaluation of land 300m to the north-west of the present site, carried out by the AFU in December 1998 (Roberts 1999), which uncovered evidence of Roman and Middle Saxon occupation. A subsequent excavation of this site during the summer of 1999 by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust uncovered further Anglo-Saxon occupation and a Middle Saxon cemetery.

An evaluation on land to the west of the development area conducted in January 1998 (Bray 1998) revealed no archaeological activity other than evidence of ridge and furrow.

A recent excavation by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit during the spring of 2002 (Mackay 2002) focused on land just 200m to the north-west of this excavation revealed evidence of agrarian land use from the Iron Age through to the 3rd century AD.

3.4 Historical and Documentary Evidence

The derivation of the name Alwalton is unclear but it can be traced back to the 10th century when recorded as *Aethelwoldington*, changing to *Alwoltune* in the 11th century, *Alewaltone* in the 12th to 14th centuries and finally becoming Alwalton in the 17th century (Pugh 1967). By 1086 the manor had two mills increasing to three by 1125. By the end of the 12th century there was a stone church which was re-built during the 15th century.

The parish was enclosed in 1805 under a private Act of Parliament and an enclosure map of 1809 shows the area divided into separate fields. The first OS 1-inch map, published in 1824 but surveyed in 1808-1817, shows the area of the site as open land without fences, hedges or buildings.

4 METHODOLOGY

A total area of 3450 square metres was stripped of topsoil and subsoil using a mechanical excavator with a 1.80m toothless ditching bucket. The natural gravels and clays were found between 0.40m and 0.80m below the original ground surface.

The area stripped was planned by hand at a scale of 1:50. All features revealed were hand excavated utilising the AFU's standard single context recording system. Environmental samples were taken from organic deposits. Colour print, colour slide and monochrome photographs were taken of excavated features, sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 and all spoil and a majority of the subsoil and topsoil were scanned by a metal detectorist.

The area targeted for excavation was located around evaluation trench 6 (Wall and Hatton 1999) where a possible ring ditch was discovered: of the 18 hectares of land evaluated at the Showground this was the only area where archaeology was discovered.

The original area of the excavation was extended south-eastwards upon the discovery of the Roman ditches. This area of the site was flooded as it was below the water table and a pump was used to help drainage, a sump was also dug (slot **17=72**). Despite the aid of the pump it was only possible to examine the relationship between the Iron Age and Roman ditches in section.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 2)

5.1 Natural Features

Twenty-seven features appeared to be natural in origin, fifteen were excavated (**17**, **25**, **36**, **43**, **55**, **61**, **67**, **70**, **74**, **76**, **78**, **80**, **82**, **84** and **113**). The majority of these took the form of pits created by fallen trees that subsequently filled naturally. Two of these (**36** and **67**) contained pottery and other finds which may have been accidentally or deliberately introduced (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3 below).

5.2 Phase 1: Prehistoric

An extensive ditch ran over a distance of 95m across the site from the north-west to the south-east, with a distinct variation in its course to the south-east. Its fills yielded pottery dating from the Middle to Late Iron Age and a burnt deposit (68; see below) which contained bone and prehistoric seeds, possibly the remnants of a cremation. In addition, a few fragments of prehistoric pottery came from two pits or tree throws (see below and Section 5.3).

5.2.1 Boundary Ditch

Ditch **95** was excavated in seven segments distributed evenly along its course (**34**, **15**, **19**, **27**, **97**, **110** and **72**). The depth of the ditch varied considerably along its length relative to the varying topography of the site. From levels taken along its base it is evident that the ditch maintained a constant and gentle slope from the north-west of the site to the south-east. Siltier fills occurred down slope to the south-east and more gravelly fills to the north-west where the ground is higher. It would therefore seem likely that the ditch functioned as a drainage channel as well as acting as a boundary. The seven segments across the ditch are described individually below, with the northernmost first.

Segment **34** provided the deepest of the ditch sections, the ditch here was 1.10m wide and 0.80m deep. The depth is presumably due to the thick gravels in this region of the site preventing erosion of the ditch sides by later ploughing. The sides of the ditch were steep and met a narrow rounded base. The ditch contained four fills at this point. The primary deposit (33) consisted of a 0.20m thick layer of pale yellowish brown slightly silty clay which contained occasional sub-rounded flint pebbles and gravels and evenly covered the base of the ditch. This fill contained no finds.

Fill 32 was a 0.20m thick deposit of brownish mid yellow clay silt with a slight sand component and frequent sub-rounded and sub-angular flint gravels and pebbles. The deposit had slumped down the eastern side of the ditch, indicating the slippage of the natural gravels through which this steep-sided ditch was cut. The fact that the slumping came from the east side may indicate the presence of a bank on this side, although it was noted during excavation

that the natural gravels were more loosely bonded on the eastern side of the ditch while those on the west contained more clay.

Fill 31 consisted of a 0.25m thick deposit of yellowish mid-brown sandy silt with a small clay component. This was distinctly different from all other fills in this segment as it contained no gravels. The fill contained four sherds of pottery dating from the Middle to Late Iron Age.

The upper fill (30) was 0.30m thick and consisted of brownish yellow slightly clayey sand with moderate sub-angular and sub-rounded flint gravels and pebbles. This fill contained no finds and, being so similar to the subsoil/ploughsoil (11), it presumably represents the stage at which the ditch went out of use.

Ditch segment **15** was 0.75m wide and was 0.28m deep, with straight, slightly convex sides and a wide flat base. Its fill (14) was a light yellowish-grey clay silt with moderate amounts of rounded sandstone and sub-angular flint pebbles. The fill contained a small quantity of animal bone and a worked flint which may attributable to the Bronze Age.

Ditch segment **19** took the form of a longitudinal half-section of the ditch from which a width of 1.20m could be extrapolated. Its shallow depth of 0.20m indicates truncation by subsequent agricultural activity. Its fill (18) consisted of a compact light orange-brown clayey silt with occasional flint gravels. The fill was partially truncated by a shallow plough furrow (**21**) which may have introduced a piece of heavily abraded oolitic coarseware pottery of Late Saxon or Saxo-Norman date.

Ditch segment **27** exposed a ditch width of at least 0.60m. Its full extent was unknown due to partial truncation by a 18th- to 19th-century field drain. Here the ditch was 0.30m deep and had slightly concave sides with a flattish wide base. Its fill (26) was a yellowish-brown and grey clayey silt containing moderate rounded flint gravels and pebbles. This particular section of the ditch was excavated to investigate the relationship between ditch **95** and pit **25**, although this relationship proved to have been obscured by the field drain. Pit **25**, however, appears to have been a natural feature hollow, probably the result of a fallen tree.

Ditch segment **97** was 1.00m wide, 0.20m deep, had shallow concave sides and a flat base. Its fill (96) was a yellowish-grey soft clayey sand with occasional flint gravels. Environmental samples were taken, although the flotation procedure revealed only modern rootlets and undiagnostic charcoal flecks.

Ditch segment **110** was approximately 1.60m wide and 0.50m deep. Its sides were shallow and its base rounded. The lower fill (106) consisted of a light grey clayey-silt with moderate rounded flint gravels and pebbles, a maximum of 0.20m thick. The upper fill (105) was a dark brown organic silt with a

maximum depth of 0.40m. It contained occasional rounded flint gravel and pebbles.

Ditch segment **72** was 3.00m wide, at least 0.40m deep and had very shallow sides that became steeper after two thirds of their depth to form a steep sided narrow cut of 0.80m. The base of the ditch was not reached due to severe flooding that not even a pump could fully alleviate. It appears likely that the feature extended down at least another 0.20m. Lower fill 87 was a light grey clayey-silt with moderate rounded flint gravels and pebbles. It covered the shallow upper sides of the ditch and the eastern side of the steeper part. Upper fill 71 was at least 0.40m deep, consisting of dark brown silt with occasional rounded flint gravels and pebbles. It had a very organic almost peaty character.

Burnt deposit 68 was within the upper fill of ditch **95,** 4.50m to the east of segment **97,** and was circular in plan, approximately 0.30m in diameter and 0.10m deep. The deposit appears to have been burnt *in situ*, with fire reddened clay - presumably burnt ditch fill - charcoal fragments and burnt and unburnt bone fragments. The deposit was 100% sampled and flotation samples revealed two seeds of prehistoric wheat (Emmer or Spelt) along with some wetland sedge and rush seeds indicating that burning may have taken place *in situ* and that the area has always been prone to flooding (Appendix 3). No evidence of a cut or any pottery was recovered to indicate that this represented a cremation event, although the presence of burnt bone within the sample may suggest this possibility.

5.2.2 Pit/Tree Throw

Pit **67**, which may have been a tree throw, was near the southern baulk in the central part of the site and was sub-circular in shape with a long axis of 3.20m a width of 2.20m and a depth of 1.00m. It was steep-sided with a flat base and contained five fills, at least some of which were entirely natural in origin.

The basal fill (66) was a 0.30m thick deposit of reddish-brown and grey clay with occasional rounded flint pebbles. This was barely distinguishable from the natural Oxford Clays but it contained small woody fragments and fragments of animal bone. The subsequent fill (65) was a 0.15m thick deposit of dark grey silty clay with occasional rounded gravels and pebbles, flint nodules and rounded glacial boulders. Environmental samples revealed several modern seeds including elder and bramble, indicating nothing other than contamination of the sample.

Fill 64 was a 0.20m thick deposit of grey clayey silt and sand with some orange mottling which contained frequent flint gravels and pebbles along with a severely degraded and fragmented horse skull (257g) and four degraded pottery sherds of an indeterminable prehistoric date. Environmental samples revealed the presence of charcoal flecks and horse teeth, although the horse teeth were not burnt.

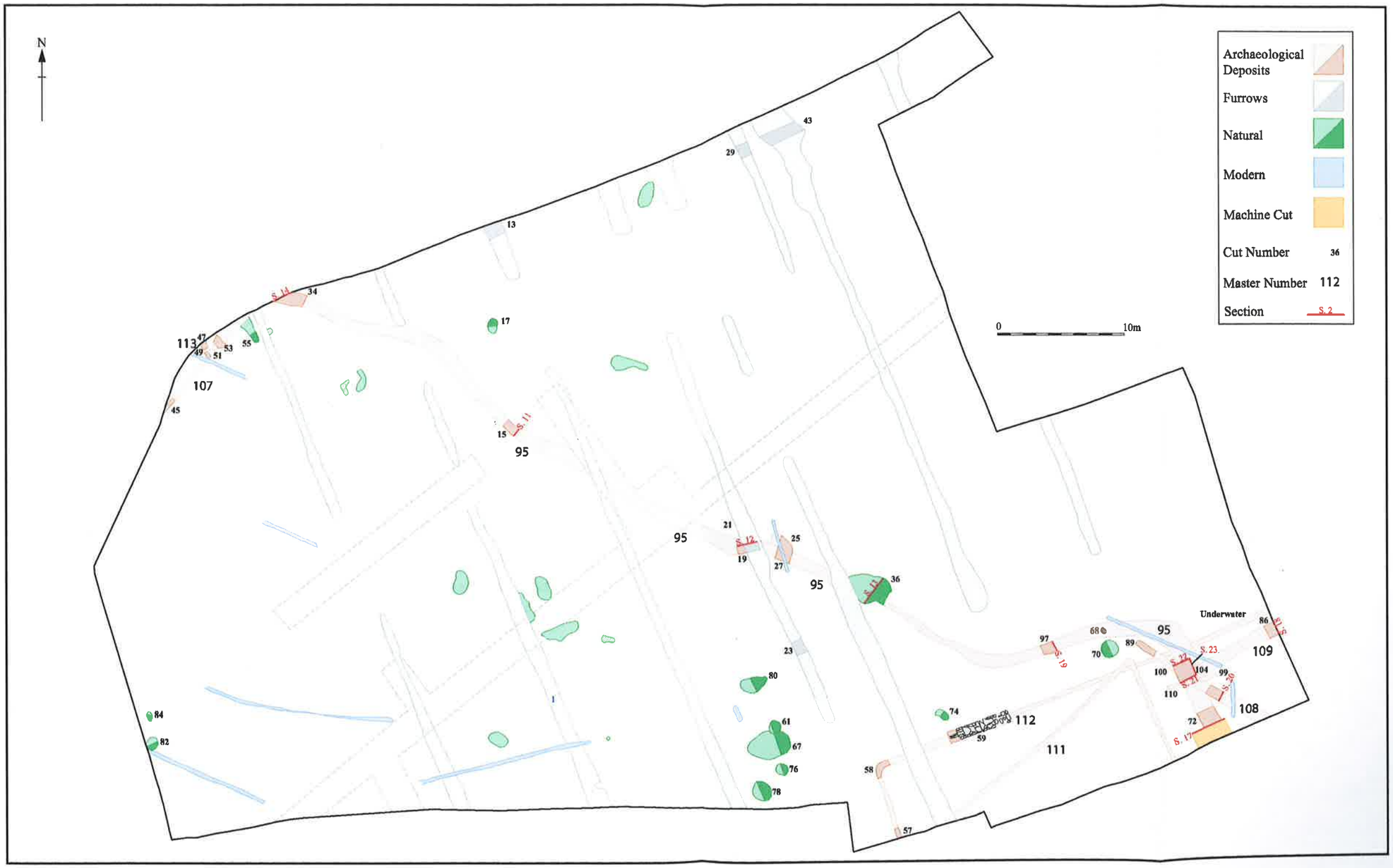

Figure 2 *Site Plan*

Fill 63 was a 0.20m thick deposit of light grey clayey silt with occasional sub-rounded flint gravels and pebbles, from which one piece of animal bone was recovered. The upper fill (62) consited of mixed dark brown and grey clayey silt with occasional sub-rounded flint gravels and pebbles. This fill was compact and 0.20m thick.

5.3 Phase 2: Roman

Two Roman ditches were found in the extreme south-eastern corner of the site (**108** and **109**): their discovery resulted in an extension of the excavation area. A few other features contained residual Roman pottery.

5.3.1 Ditches

Both ditches **108** and **109** terminated close to each other and the Iron Age ditch (**95**) which they both cut. Ditch **109** ran eastwards from a rounded terminal for approximately 8m before reaching the eastern limit of excavation. It was stratigraphically earlier than ditch **108** which cut its terminal end, although the pottery recorded from both features suggests that the two were broadly contemporary.

Ditch **109** was sectioned twice (segments **104** and **86**). Segment **104** investigated the western terminus of the ditch. As this area was subject to severe flooding (being under the water table) it could only be investigated as part of a box section. At this point the ditch base was rising towards its terminus and was 0.30m deep and 0.60m wide. This part of the ditch contained two fills (103 and 102). Lower fill 103 was a 0.25m deep deposit of grey clayey silt with a small sand component and occasional rounded gravels and pebbles. It contained 2nd- to 3rd-century Roman pottery.

Fill 102 was a 0.05m thick layer of moderately firm grey clayey silt and sand containing frequent sherds of pottery (146 sherds, 2202g), small rounded pebbles, fine gritty gravels and occasional sandstone pieces measuring 50-100mm. The pottery from fill 102 was so dense that initially it appeared to be in a pit cut into the ditch, but it is more likely a layer in the upper part of the ditch. Some of the pottery is slightly water worn although the majority is not heavily abraded and provides a good assemblage of standard rural domestic pottery dating from the mid 2nd century. Animal bone (268g), oyster shell and roof tiles were also found in this context. Pottery fabrics included greywares, Nene Valley greywares, Hadrianic/Antonine central Gaulish Samian, Nene Valley colour coated wares and Nene Valley mortaria. The pottery was largely undecorated.

Slot **86** was against the eastern baulk of the excavation area and revealed the full width and depth of the ditch, which was 0.45m deep and 1.15m wide with a narrow rounded base. The basal fill (90) was a 0.35m deep deposit of grey clayey silt with some sand containing frequent rounded gravels and pebbles and occasional large pieces of sandstone measuring 50-100mm. Dense

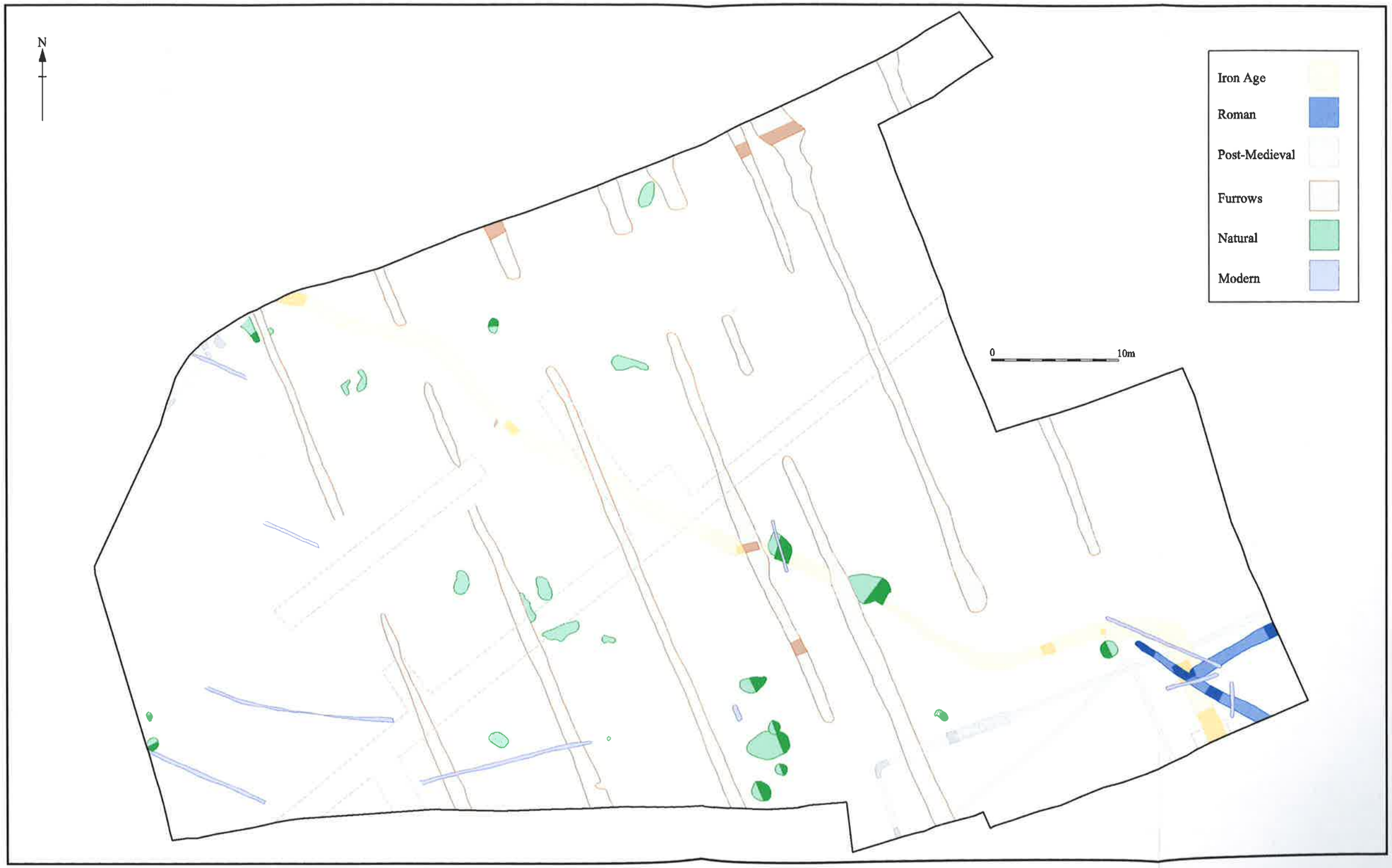

***Figure 3** Phase Plan*

accumulations of pottery were recovered from this fill (31 sherds, 252g) representing the same domestic functions and fabric types as that recovered from fill 102. Undated fill 85 consisted of a light brownish-grey silty clay with occasional rounded gravels and pebbles. This upper fill did not completely seal the lower fill along the northern side of the ditch, being more extensive to the south where it was 0.20m thick.

Ditch **108** extended 13m from the southern baulk in a north-easterly direction before terminating. It was investigated in three places (**89**, **100** and **99**). All sections contained a single fill (88, 101 and 98 respectively).

Segment **89** examined the terminal end of the ditch which was narrower than the main body of the ditch at 0.40m and was steep-sided. The depth of the ditch at this point was 0.25m. Fill 88 consisted of a greyish pale-brown silty clay with moderate quantities of flint pebbles. A fairly large quantity of Roman pottery was recovered (64 sherds, 553g), the assemblage being very similar to that from the earlier ditch and consisting of kitchen wares, table wares and storage wares. The pottery fabrics included Roman greywares and shelly wares, undecorated Nene Valley colour coat and Nene Valley mortaria. Animal bone and Roman roof tile were also recovered from this fill.

Segment **100** consisted of a box section. In the south and north facing sections the ditch clearly cut into both Iron Age ditch **95** and Roman ditch **109**. Within both sections the profile of the cut was similar being 0.70m wide and 0.40m deep with steep sides and a narrow rounded base. Fill 101 consisted of a firm greyish pale-brown silty clay. The top of this 0.40m thick deposit was densely packed with broken pottery (71 sherds, 1289g) and again this consisted of standard rural kitchen and table wares and large storage jars, largely grey wares and Roman shelly wares dating from the mid 2nd century onwards. A small quantity of animal bone and oyster shell was also recovered from this fill.

Segment **99** was the southernmost section placed across ditch **108** and revealed a very similar profile to that encountered in segment **100.** The width of the ditch at this point was again 0.70m and the depth was 0.30m. Fill 98 was a grey silty clay containing frequent sub-rounded gravels and occasional rounded pebbles. Animal bone and pottery identical to that from fill 101 was recovered from this fill including Nene Valley mortaria.

5.3.2 Pit/Tree Throw

Pit **36** was located on the course of the Iron Age ditch (**95;** between segments **27** and **97**). Its long axis was orientated north-west to south-east and it measured 3.30m. The feature was 2.35m wide and 0.80m deep. The south-eastern third of the pit was excavated showing steep sides that were undercut towards the base, indicating an origin as a tree throw. The base itself was gently rounded rising slightly towards the south-west.

The feature contained six fills. The primary fills (40 and 41) of light grey clayey silt probably were the same fill, although they were partially obscured by the high water table. These fills were 0.10m thick. Subsequent fills (37 and 38) were 0.20m thick and indicate slumping. They consisted of light brown clayey silt with some orange mottling, containing occasional sub-rounded flint gravels. A later fill (39), 0.30m deep, comprised a light blue-grey clay, with occasional sub-rounded flint gravels. The uppermost fill (35) was 0.40m deep and consisted of a light brown clayey silt with occasional sub-rounded flint gravels and pebbles. This fill also contained two sherds of degraded shell tempered Iron Age pottery, one sherd of heavily abraded 2nd-century Samian pottery and a small quantity of animal bone and antler.

5.4 Phase 3: Post-Medieval and Modern

This phase of activity is represented by two stone drains (**112** and **111**) and the remains of eight plough furrows. Stone drain **112** was overlain by the second drain (**111**) which in turn had been damaged by one of the series of north-to-south plough furrows.

5.4.1 Field Drains

Drain **112** ran north/north-west from the eastern part of the southern baulk (segment **57**) of the site for 6m before turning at right angles (segment **58**) and continuing for a further 30m to the eastern limit of excavation. The drainage channel consisted of a narrow cut 0.30m wide and 0.30m deep with vertical sides that were cut through natural clays. The cut was then lined with thin slabs of a commonly occurring local limestone placed vertically or edge on, above which a scant roof of horizontal slabs of the same stone was placed, bonded with clay.

The most interesting aspect of this drain was a large culvert construction 6m along its eastern stretch (segment **59**). At this point the construction widened to 1.00m and the sides of the cut were supported by large slabs to create a central channel for water to accumulate rather than narrow fissures through which it could seep, as was the case elsewhere along its length. The culvert was 5m long and was soundly roofed by two to three layers of slabs up to 0.50m and approximately 0.60m thick, creating a box-like structure. The drain was still in good working order at the time of excavation, filling soon after any rainfall.

Drain **111** ran north-east from the eastern part of the southern baulk for 20m, passing over the top of the earlier drain briefly before turning approximately 110° to head south/south-east for 9m towards the southern baulk. This drain had a much simpler construction than its predecessor, consisting of a V-shaped cut 0.20m-0.30m wide at the base lined with local limestone slabs placed end on and leaning into each other to form an A-shaped channel 0.20m deep.

Figure 4 *Stone lined drain*

Contained within this erratic construction were occasional pieces of broken brick dating from the 18th or 19th century.

Numerous other ceramic field drains presumably dating from a similar period crossed the site largely from east-to-west or from north-west to south-east.

5.4.2 Plough Furrows

The remains of eight furrows ran straight and parallel in a north/north-westerly to south/south-easterly direction, reflecting the natural slope of the site. They were evenly spaced 10m intervals apart from one additional furrow which may represent a boundary between furlongs or the remnant of an earlier field system. Another additional furrow may be represented by feature **113**.

Each of the five slots placed across the furrows had the same wide, flat-bottomed shallow-sided profile. Other than the residual Roman pottery found in furrows **13** and **23** and some undiagnostic non-ferrous slags in combination with one piece of iron tap slag in furrow **13,** the only dating evidence came from a single sherd of Bone China in furrow **29**. This dates from the late 18th or early 19th century.

Later farming practices were also in evidence. East-to-west ploughing along the contour of the slope was revealed by numerous plough marks most clearly seen cutting ditch **95** and the earlier furrows.

5.5 Undated features

Two features, other than those considered to be natural in origin, remain undated. These were both linear features and lay at the extreme north-west of the site.

Feature **107** ran from north-east to south-west across the north-western corner of the site for approximately 10m. Three slots were dug across it (**45**, **51** and **53**) and demonstrated that it was 0.40m wide and 0.20m deep with steep, slightly concave sides and a flattish base. Its fill (recorded as 44, 50 and 52 respectively) consisted of a light yellowish brown clayey silt with occasional sub-rounded gravels and pebbles of mainly flint, which contained a few pieces of animal bone.

The second feature (**113**) ran southwards 1.50m from the north-western edge of excavation in the vicinity of feature **107**. It was excavated in two places (**47** and **49**). The feature was 0.40m wide and 0.05m deep, with slightly concave, gentle sides and a flat base. Its fill (46=48) was a light yellowish brown clayey silt with some sand and occasional sub-rounded gravels.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Prehistoric

The site produced very limited evidence for Bronze Age activity in the form of a residual undiagnostic struck flint flake. This flint (from ditch **95**) has been dated to the Bronze Age or earlier based upon the extent of platform preparation. Despite the relatively un-abraded condition of the flake it is deemed to be residual since no other evidence of flint working was associated. There is, however, documented Bronze Activity in the vicinity (see Section 3.1 above).

A few pieces of both undiagnostic prehistoric and Iron Age pottery were also recovered. A large feature (**67**) contained pottery of an indeterminable prehistoric date and a fragmented horse skull. Its morphology indicates that this may have been a hollow created by a fallen tree.

A boundary ditch (**95**) dating to the Middle to Late Iron Age may represent a land/field boundary which also functioned as a drain. It appears likely that this feature represents the same boundary as that discovered to the north-west

of this site by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit in 2002 (Mackay 2002). This boundary evidently formed a important landscape feature and was still respected several centuries later in the Roman period.

6.2 Roman

Roman remains were confined to the extreme south-east of the site and consisted of two ditches (**108**) and (**109**). Ditch **108** may have been a re-cut of the earlier ditch, 95, broadly following its alignment and straightening out the sharp curve evident in the south-eastern part of the excavated area. Ditch **109** had a similar northern and western extent as **108**. These ditches were been broadly contemporary and perhaps related to two land enclosures using the earlier Iron Age ditch.

Both ditches contained relatively large assemblages of domestic pottery types dating from the late 2nd century through to at least the late 3rd century. This material had been dumped in the ditches along with other domestic refuse including building materials and food waste. The character of the assemblage (Appendix 2) is indicative of a rural farmstead, presumably in the immediate vicinity of the site.

A probable tree throw (**36**) contained both Iron Age and Roman pottery, indicating that the feature originated in the Roman period or later.

6.3 Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

There was no evidence for either Anglo-Saxon or medieval activity on the site. A single sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery came from the fill of the Iron Age ditch (**95**) where it had been introduced by later ploughing. This highly abraded sherd of oolitic coarseware probably originated in Northamptonshire in the Late Saxon or Saxo-Norman period.

6.4 Post-Medieval and Modern

This period was represented by further agricultural activity consisting of plough furrows and field drains. Field drain **111** appears to date to the 18th or 19th century on the basis of the brick fragments incorporated in its construction. It lay above drain **112**, although the difference in date does not appear to have been significant. Similar drains incorporating such culvert-like arrangements have been recorded during excavations in Glinton just to the north of Peterborough where the more solid construction of this particular drain's side walls and roof was interpreted as a field entrance (Kemp 2003).

The other field drains present on the Showground site used ceramic pipes and largely date from the 19th century. While the dating of the plough furrows has already been discussed it is quite possible that they represent evidence for Victorian steam ploughing. The furrows are rather close together at 10m

compared to an average of 15m spacing produced by steam ploughs (Hall 1982), but good examples of ridge and furrow produced by steam ploughing have been recorded nearby at King's Cliffe. The furrows present on this site are also very straight and parallel rather than the slightly curved furrows typically resulting from medieval ploughing and they respect the modern enclosure boundaries. If indeed the furrows were the result of steam ploughing then a mid-19th century date would apply.

Evidence for more recent ploughing takes the form of east-to-west plough scars that were recorded cutting features in the north of the site where the ground was more compact.

7 CONCLUSIONS

From the excavation carried out in the north-west part of the East of England Showground it can be suggested that a succession of land divisions and probable associated farming activity began in the Iron Age and continued well into the Roman period. Thereafter there was no evidence for activity until the post-medieval period during which the land again had an agricultural focus.

The probable ring ditch discovered during the evaluation phase (Wall and Hatton 1999) proved to be the extensive Iron Age boundary ditch (**95**), highlighting the difficulties of accurate interpretation encountered when working in narrow trial trenches.

An interesting assemblage of Roman tablewares and kitchenwares along with other household refuse hint at nearby occupation presumably to the south or east of the development site.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd. who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts, Simon Pickstone and Les Bognar helped with excavation. The report was edited by Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu. Illustrations were by Emily Oakes.

Steve Critchley carried out the metal detecting survey while Taleyna Fletcher helped to lay out the site grid. Sarah Percival examined the prehistoric pottery, Jerry Evans commented on the Roman pottery and Stephen Macaulay assessed the Roman pottery while Paul Spoerry dated the Saxon and post-medieval pottery. Stephen Kemp commented on the worked flint and offered advice on field drains.

9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bray, S., 1998, *Land Off Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough: An Archaeological Evaluation*, AFU Report No. B19

Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (CCCSMR)

Hall, D., 1982, *Medieval Fields* (Shire)

Kemp, S., 2003 *Romano-British Enclosures and Crop Processing: A15 Werrington to Glinton Bypass Archaeological Excavation 1996,* AFU Report No. 128

Mackay, D., 2002, *An Archaeological Investigation on Land Adjacent To Oundle Road, Peterborough Business Park,* Cambridge Archaeological Unit, University of Cambridge Report No. 504

Margary, I.D., 1967, *Roman Roads in Britain* (London)

Peterborough County Council Sites and Monuments Record (PCCSMR)

Pugh, R.G., (ed.), 1967, *The Victoria County History of Huntingdonshire*, Vol. II, 133-136

Roberts, J., 1999, *Multi-period Features on Land at Minerva Business Park, Alwalton*, AFU Report No. 155

Roberts, J., 2003, *Specification for Archaeological Excavation: East of England Showground, Orton Waterville, Peterborough*, unpublished AFU document

Wall, W., and Hatton, A., 1999, *A Ring-Ditch at the East of England Showground, Orton Waterville, Peterborough: An Archaeological Evaluation,* Cambridge County Council Report No. 166

Maps Consulted

OS 1 inch first edition, Sheet 44 Oakham, reprint, pub. 1970, David and Charles (original pub. 1824)

British Geological Survey (BGS), 1984, 1:50000, Sheet 172, Ramsey, Solid and Drift Edition

1809 Enclosure Map

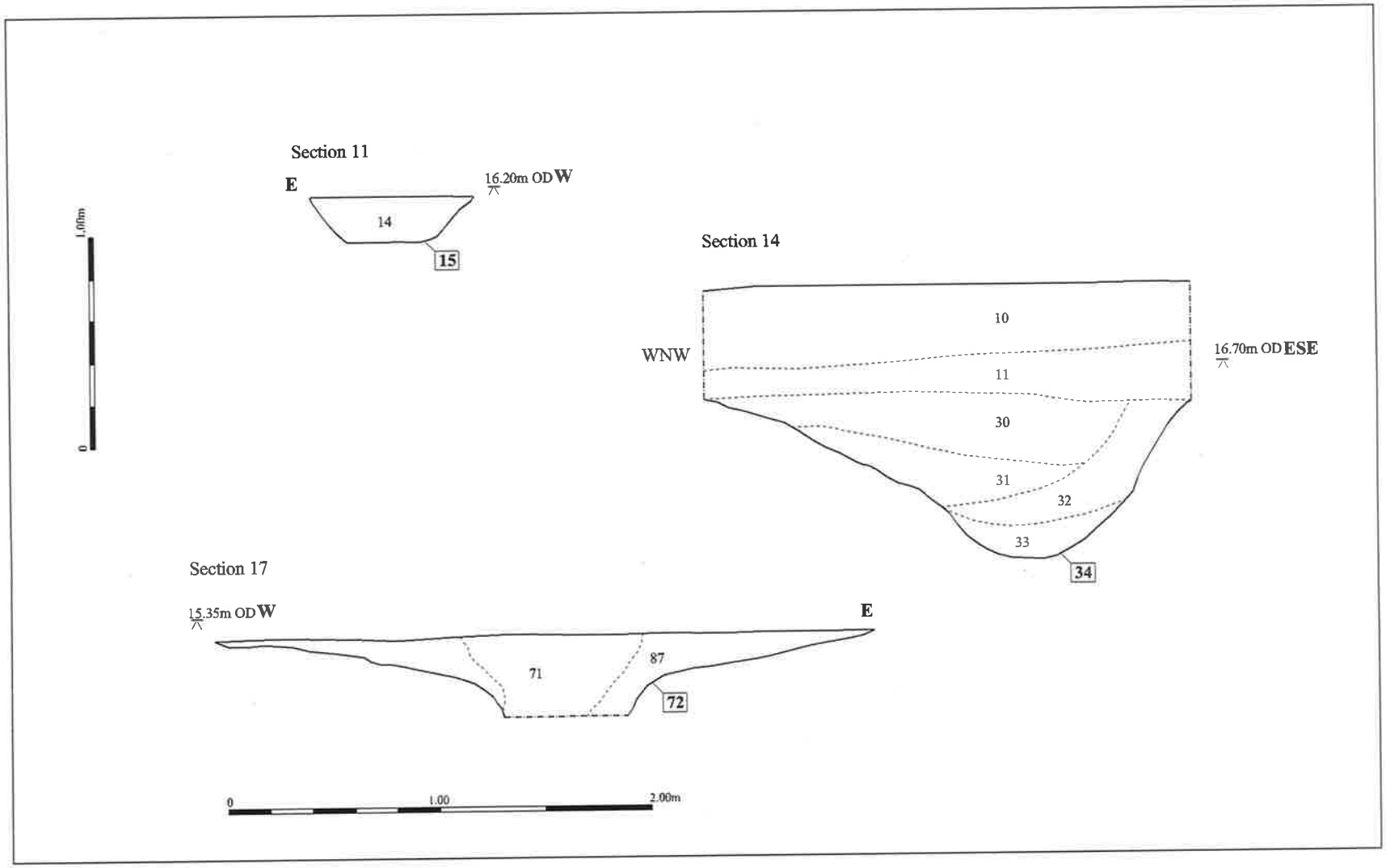

Figure 5 *Sections 11-17*

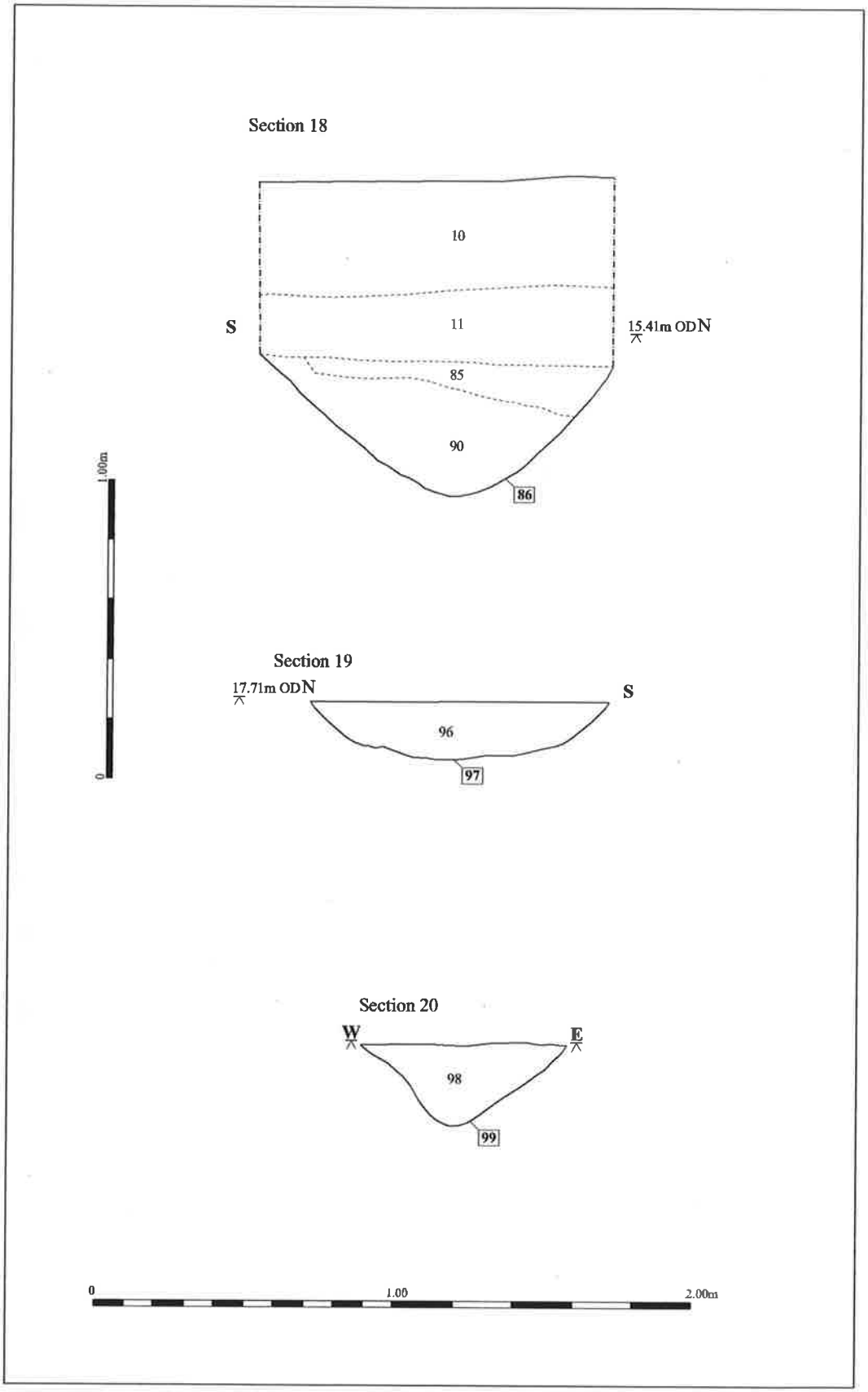

Figure 6 *Sections 18-20*

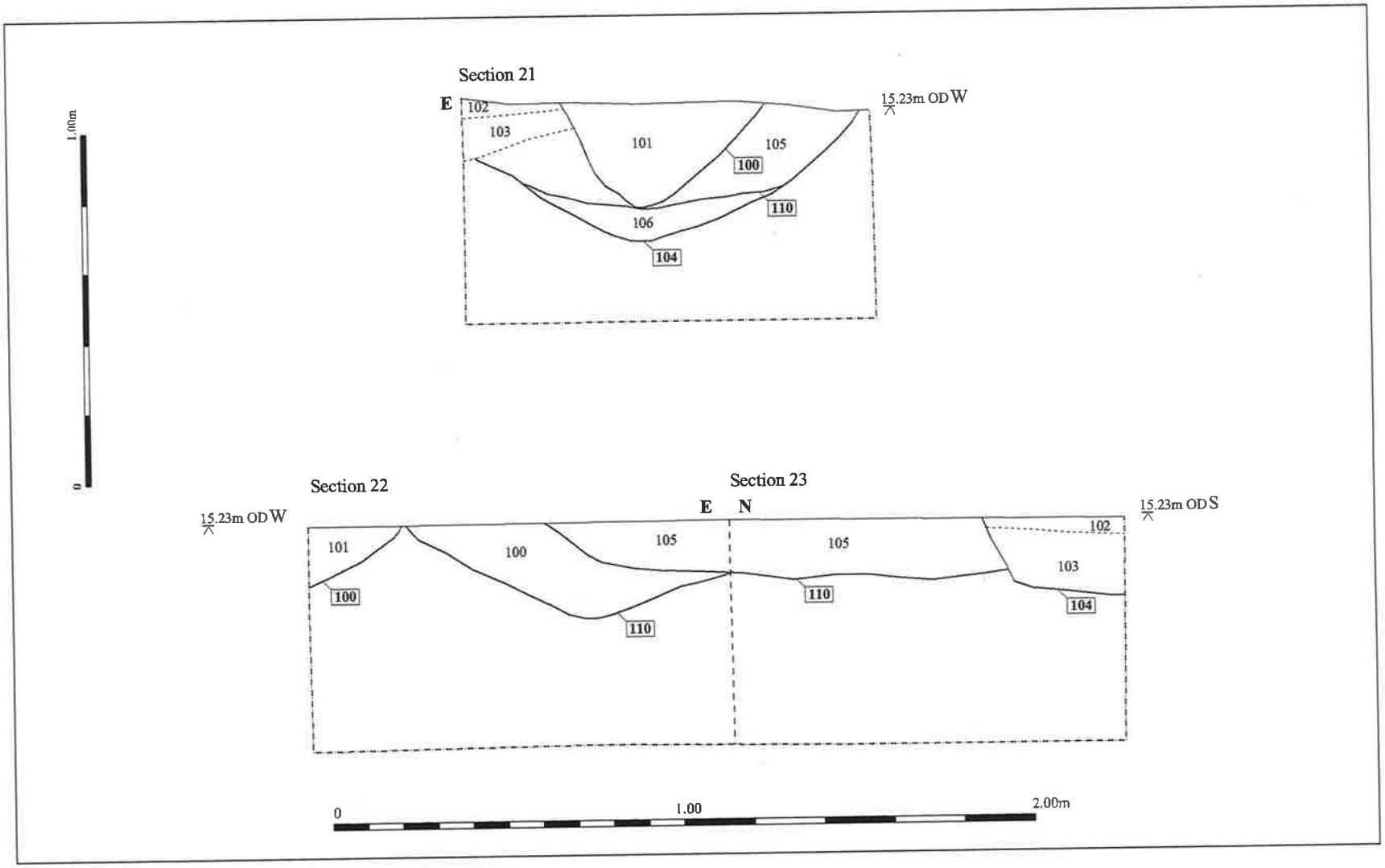

***Figure** 7 Sections 21-23*

Appendix 1: Finds Summary

Material	Weight (g)
Animal bone	844
Brick or tile	1119
Fired clay	103
Flint	23
Organics	3
Pottery	4617
Shell	18
Slag	298
Stone	1644
Worked stone	101

Context	Animal bone	Brick or tile	Fired clay	Flint	Organic	Pottery	Shell	Slag	Stone	Worked stone	Weight (g)
3				21							21
12						5		298			303
14	8								249		257
18						6					6
20						4					4
22						34					34
24									359		359
28						4					4
33				2		51					53
35	98					15					113
37		236							548		784
50	5										5
63	72										72
64	257					7					264
66	7				3						10
68	5										5
69	38										38
88	8	217				553			201	101	1080
90						252					252
98	64					195			93		352
101	14					1289	3		30		1336
102	268	666	103			2202	15		164		3418
Total	**844**	**1119**	**103**	**23**	**3**	**4617**	**18**	**298**	**1644**	**101**	**8770**

Appendix 2: Pottery

Context	No. Sherds	Weight (g)
12	1	5
18	0	6
20	1	4
22	3	34
28	1	4
33	4	51
35	4	15
64	4	7
88	64	553
90	31	252
98	3	195
101	71	1289
102	146	2202
Total	**333**	**4617**

Prehistoric pottery identification

by Sarah Percival

Context 33 Shell tempered mid-late Iron Age

Context 35 Shell tempered Iron Age
Samian 2nd century Roman

Context 64 Indeterminate prehistoric

Appendix 3: Environmental Samples
Rachel Fosberry

1 INTRODUCTION

Five bulk samples taken from an Iron Age ditch (95) and a large pit or tree throw (67) were submitted for assessment. The samples were subjected to bucket flotation, the flot being retained in a 0.5mm mesh and the residue retained in a 1.0mm sieve. The flots were air dried and viewed under a binocular microscope at x14 magnification.

2 RESULTS

Pit 67

Samples 2 and 3 were taken from the same pit. Sample 2, (fill 65; flot volume 20ml) contained several species of modern seeds including elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and bramble (*Rubus* sp). A few charcoal fragments were recovered. Sample 3 (fill 64; flot volume 5ml) contained a few flecks of charcoal. Several horse teeth were recovered from the residue.

Ditch 95

Sample 1 (fill 56; flot volume 82ml) largely consisted of modern rootlets with abundant charcoal fragments of up to 1cm. Two charred *Chenopodium* sp. seeds were present. The sample was taken from the main ditch that passed through the site at the northern edge of the excavation. The substantial amount of charcoal is indicative of burning but the lack of other material makes interpretation impossible.

Sample 4 (fill 68; flot volume 55ml) was taken from a circular area of dark material in the upper part of the main ditch in a flooded area. Bone fragments and burnt wood were visible on excavation. The flot contained two charred grains of prehistoric wheat (Emmer or Spelt), one bramble seed (*Rubus* sp), single seeds of knotgrass (*Polygonum* sp.), buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp), two seeds of vetch/pea, two sedge seeds (*Carex* sp), and a single seed of Club rush (*Scirpus lacustris*). All the seeds were preserved by charring. Wood charcoal was also present. The residue contained a few fragments of burnt bone.

This sample was probably from a cremation that had incorporated a few grassland seeds. The presence of the wetland sedge and rush seeds suggest that the burning took place *in situ* in an area of the site that may have always been prone to flooding.

Sample 5 (fill 96; flot volume 25ml) was taken from a lower fill of the main ditch. The flot was comprised of modern rootlets with a few undiagnostic flecks of charcoal.

3 CONCLUSION

All the samples taken from the Iron Age ditch contained some scant evidence of burning. The only significant sample was sample 4 (68), which contained a very low density of prehistoric seeds.

It is not considered that full analysis would add significantly to this interpretation and no further work is recommended.

REGISTERED • ORGANISATION •
IFA

Cambridgeshire County Council
Education, Libraries and Heritage

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