Chapter 2: Area 7000

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NEOLITHIC ACTIVITY (Figs. 3 and 8)

The flint recovered demonstrated that there had been a significant amount of Neolithic activity in the area. A substantial quantity of Neolithic flintwork was found in the topsoil and a concentration was recovered from the pits located in a broad band orientated approximately NW-SE across the site. It is considered most likely that all of the pits to the W of the later Roman enclosure ditch 7254 (Fig. 8) should be considered to be of Neolithic date, while those to the E of this feature are thought to be late Bronze Age (see below). This conclusion is arrived at after a consideration of the spatial patterning of the pits and the quantities of diagnostic artefacts found within these features.

Sixty-nine out of the 118 pits considered to be of Neolithic date contained at least one piece of flint, while 13 others contained ten or more flints (7006, 7009, 7035, 7057, 7063, 7066, 7106, 7128, 7159, 7182, 7191, 7204, 7205) and four of these contexts (7128=81, 7106=51, 7191=38, 7204=74) contained significant flint assemblages. A total of 556 Neolithic flakes and tools were found in these contexts in contrast with the 39 sherds of late Bronze Age pottery.

This small quantity of late Bronze Age pottery is probably best interpreted as intrusive, being introduced into the features by the extensive subsoiling which had occurred across the site. This had caused substantial damage to the archaeological deposits, the profile of the subsoiler shoe and chisel blade being visible in the sections of several contexts, and elsewhere it had created 'tails' in the tops of features as it displaced material in the direction in which it was being drawn. This subsoiling may also have displaced flints from the topsoil into some of the features, but this explanation cannot be used to explain convincingly the quantities of flint recovered from all of the contexts in this area. Many of the flints found in these pits were relatively fresh and had not suffered the excessive damage which would be expected from weathering, trampling and agricultural processes if they had been in the topsoil for a long period (A Brown, pers. comm.).

Other pits in the area to the W of ditch 7254 contained no dating material, but given the predominance of Neolithic material it seems most likely that these should also be interpreted as being of this date.

The pits varied in profile between shallow-sided and rounded to flat-bottomed scoops and steeper sided bowl-shaped profiles. The fills tended to consist of silty clay loams, which in the great majority of cases contained little or no gravel and no charcoal. A considerable amount of charcoal was found in only five pits (Fig. 3, 7106, 7128, 7208, 7159, 7204), with a lighter density of charcoal flecks being recorded in another two pits (7205 and 7206). The fills were predominantly of a dark grey/orange-brown colour and a large number of the pits contained only one or two distinguishable fills. The pits were preserved to a depth of between 0.1 – 0.3 m and penetrated through the loess subsoil into the gravel in only a very few instances; 43% were intercutting.

It was not possible to establish how long the pits were open. No evidence of primary silting was recorded, but the character of the loess and the fills makes it unlikely that it would have been possible to distinguish a discrete layer of primary silting. Because the fills were at least partially derived from the loess material, it is probable that after an open pit had been exposed to even a limited amount of weathering, any clean layer of primary silting would rapidly have become intermixed with the pit fills.

Pit 7057 contained a complete cattle skeleton of a juvenile/sub-adult (Chapter 8: Vertebrate remains, cattle burial; see also Fig. 56). The feature was 1.8 m long, 1.5 m wide and 0.39 m deep and had two fills, the top one consisting of a dark red-brown/deep orange-brown clay loam and the bottom layer being a darkish grey/red-brown slightly silty clay loam. The cattle skeleton was deposited in the bottom layer at the base of the feature. It lay on its left side, with its head to the SE and its back slightly flexed. The skull lay on top of the right side of the body and the skeleton displayed no signs of either butchery or disease. Finds from this context consisted of 23 flints and two small pottery sherds. The flints formed a consistent Neolithic assemblage and it seems reasonable to consider the two sherds of pottery as intrusive, given the presence of a subsoiling mark through the eastern part of the context.

Thirty-four postholes were also recorded within the area of these pits, of which only five contained any flintwork (7014, 7036, 7040, 7041, and 7155), including a core from 7040. The fills were similar to those of the pits, consisting of grey or orange/red brown silty clay loams which contained no gravel or charcoal. The postholes had an average diameter of 0.32 m and an average depth of 0.08 m. They tended to have shallow bowl-shaped profiles with flat bottoms.

In area II four pairs of postholes can be identified (7036 + 7050, 7046 + 7047, 7048 + 7049, 7040 + 7044), the posts within each pair being 1.0 m apart. They conform to the general characteristics outlined above, and only two of these eight posts contained any flint. No other artefacts were recovered from these contexts. Another possible pair

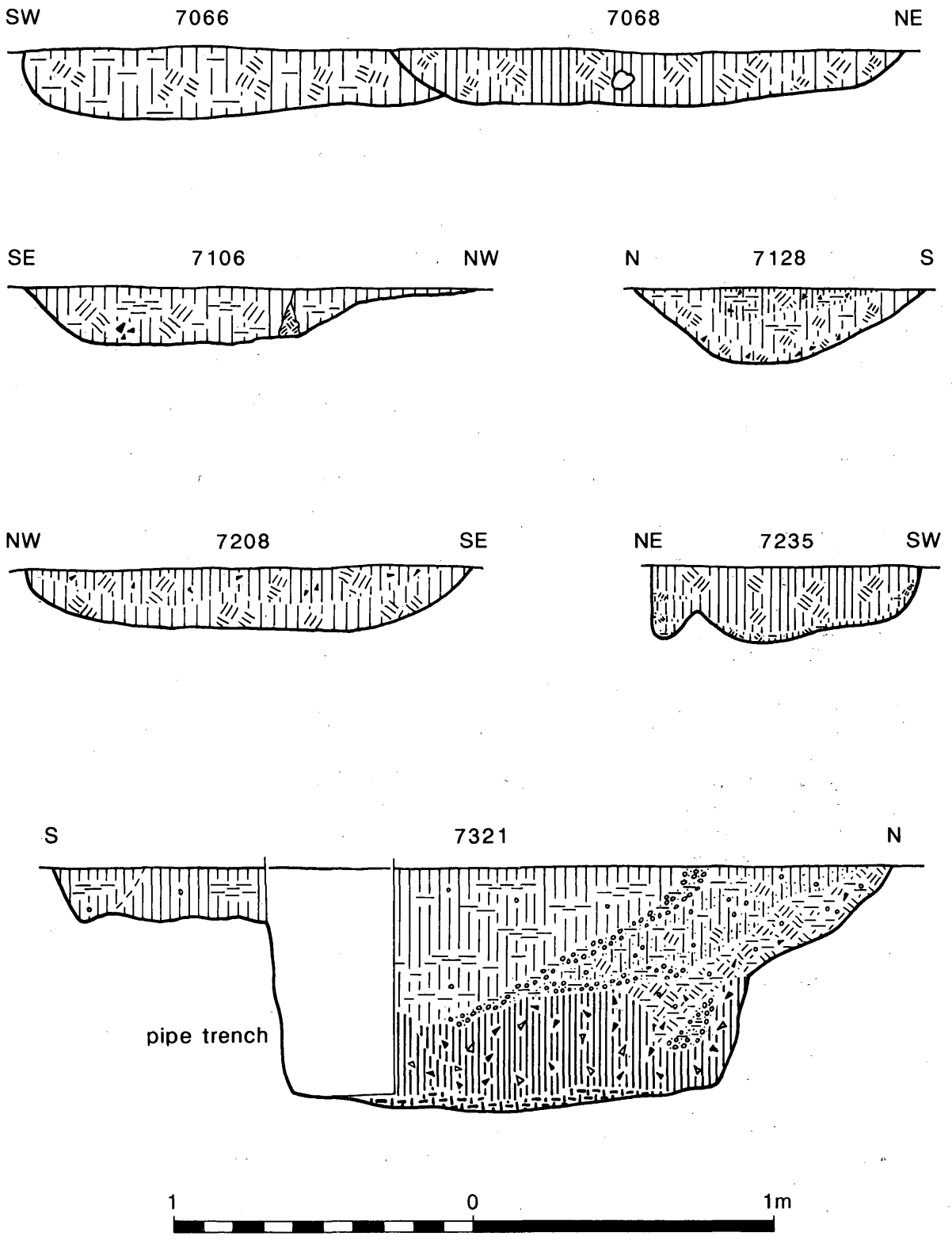

Figure 3 Area 7000 pit sections

of postholes within this area consists of 7041 and 7062, but in this instance the distance between the posts is 2.0 m.

In area I one pair of postholes (7156 + 7157) 1.0 m apart was detected to the S of the pits 7149 and 7150, but none of the other postholes had any significant spatial patterning. Three postholes (7140, 7141 and 7146) occur within the blank zone circumscribed by the pits, but their distribution, fills and profiles provide no evidence of their function.

To the E of Area II and W of ditch 7254 seven postholes were located. Two of these, 7014 and 7020, formed a pair of postholes 1.0 m apart but the others formed no discernible pattern.

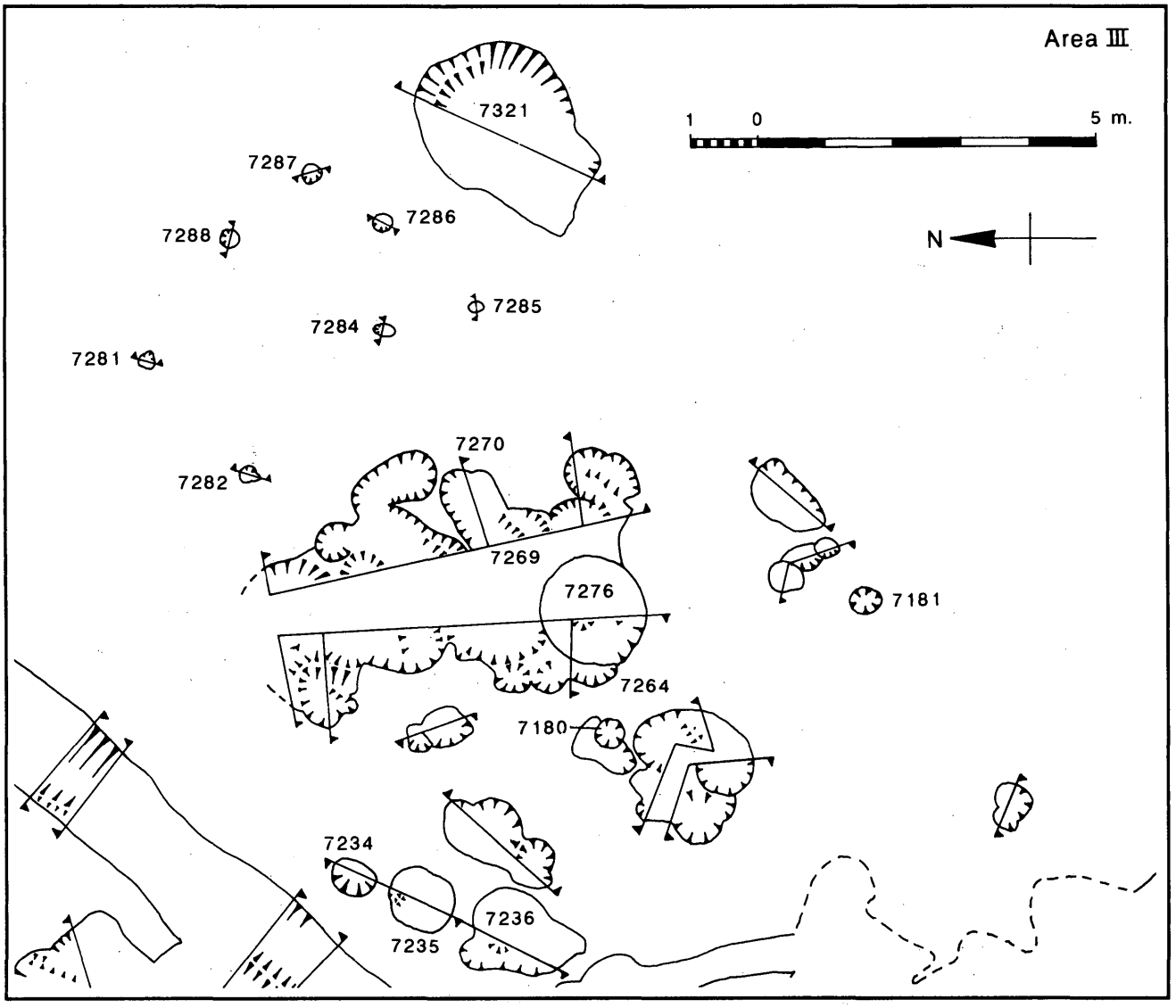

Figure 4 Area III

DATING

In the absence of pottery the flint provides the only means of dating this activity. The assemblage presents certain problems in that it seems to contain elements of both early and late Neolithic flint industries (see Chapter 7: Flint artefacts). However, certain factors favour the suggestion that the flints should be seen as forming a single transitional assemblage, possibly dating to the mid 3rd millennium BC. First there is the spatially restricted nature of the activity, not only within Area 7000 but within the area of the Reading Business Park as a whole. It is also necessary to consider the potential longevity of certain forms of artefact and the effects that production for functionally specialised requirements may have on the character of an assemblage. This last point may be particularly relevant in relation to this site, which does not seem to represent 'normal' domestic occupation but seems rather to be resource-specific (see Chapter 9: Discussion and Chapter 7: Worked flint Neolithic).

LATE BRONZE AGE ACTIVITY

Area III (Figs. 4 and 8)

This area was defined by the presence of datable material in sufficient quantity to allow a late Bronze Age date to be assigned with reasonable confidence; it contained 36 pits, nine postholes and two cremation pits. The series of ditches within this area belongs to the Roman period and is therefore not considered in this section. A total of 237 late Bronze Age pottery sherds (149 from pit 7321) and 33 Neolithic flints were recovered from these contexts. The flints are most probably residual, given their occurrence singly or in twos or threes within features, the problems created by subsoiling (discussed above) and the contrast between the quantities of pottery and flint.

Pits (Figs. 3 and 4)

Two types of pits can be defined by their profiles, the first consisting of shallow-sided scoops with flat to rounded

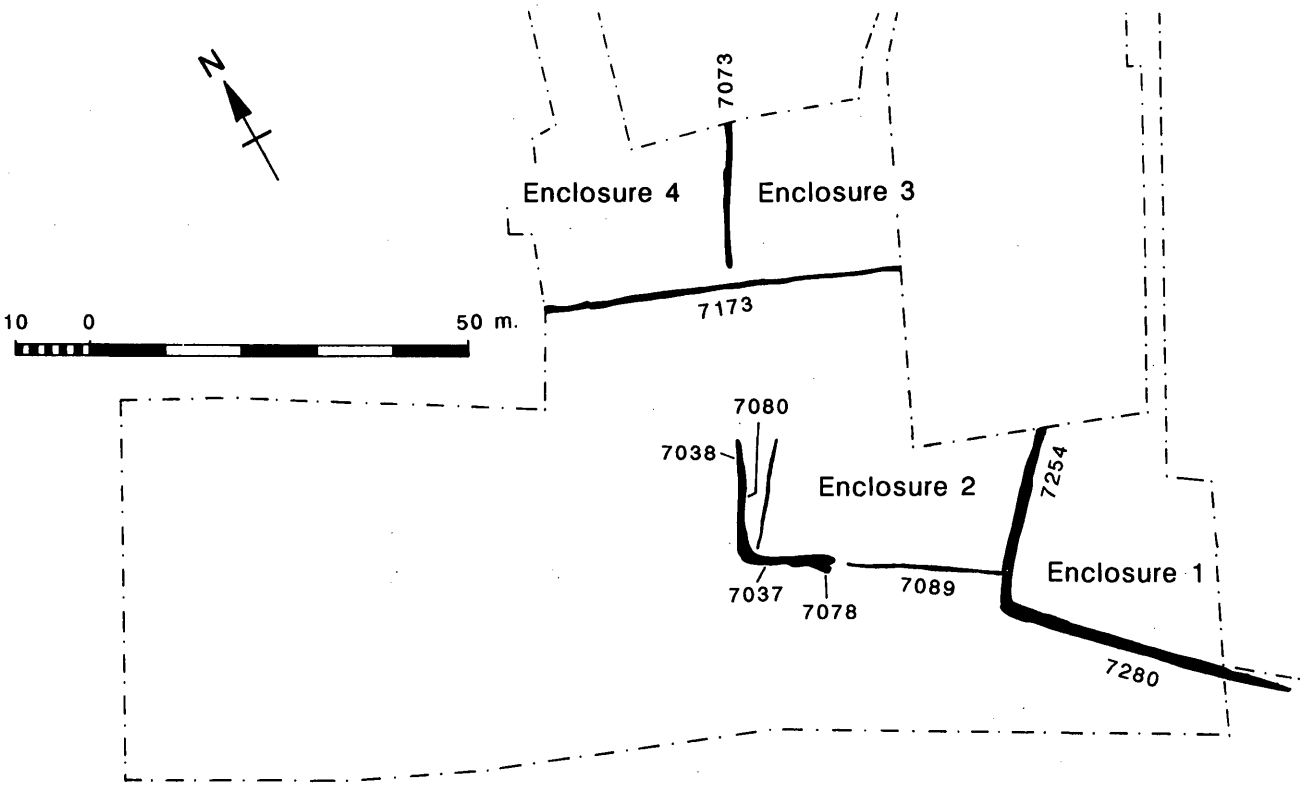

Figure 5 Area 7000: Roman enclosures

bottoms and an average depth of 0.15 m, the second with steeper sides (45° or more), a basin-shaped profile and an average depth of 0.26 m. The overall average diameter of both types of pit was 0.94 m, there being no significant difference in this parameter. Six pits fall into the category of scoops, 22 can be considered as basin-shaped pits, and four pits cannot be assigned to either category. Those not assigned to a category have either been badly disturbed by later features or were so shallow that it is impossible to establish their exact shape.

The angle of the sides of the features may originally have been steeper, their exposure to the environment resulting in erosion of the sides, and in particular some of the scoops may initially have had a more basin-shaped profile. During the excavations prolonged rainfall frequently resulted in the accumulation of approximately 30 mm of fresh silt in the bottom of small features.

In the majority of instances these pits contained one homogeneous fill, which consisted of mid-dark grey/orange-brown (silty) clay loams containing little to no gravel, and 24% (9 out of 38) contained charcoal inclusions in contrast with 6% (5 out of 82) of the Neolithic pits. Evidence of primary silting was recorded in only two pits (7234 and 7235, Fig. 3), but the similarity of the fills to the loess subsoil into which the pits were dug meant that discrete layers of silting were difficult to distinguish. This similarity also makes it difficult to distinguish between the deliberate backfilling of a pit, using material from the excavation of another pit, and the natural silting of a feature. Intentional backfilling can be established in four features: pits 7235 and 7236 contained a second layer of whitish/grey silty clay loam, possibly scorched material from a hearth area, and the fills of two other pits (7269 and 7270) were also considered to be slightly scorched.

Pit 7321 had also been backfilled, after a period of initial silting, with layers being tipped in from the northern side; these consisted of a layer of possible hearth/occupation debris, comprising burnt clay, with frequent charcoal flecks, burnt flint, pottery and animal bone, several thin layers of gravel, and layers of red/brown silty loams with charcoal flecks and 2–5% gravel (Fig. 3). In the other pits it is not possible, given the problems outlined above, to be definite about the filling sequence.

The majority of pits did not penetrate to the gravel, conditioning factors possibly being the level of the water table and the difficulty of excavating the gravel in contrast to the loess subsoil. In addition 81% of the pits were intercutting, indicating that the pits themselves and their location in relation to other activities were the significant factors, rather than the material into which they were dug. Pit 7321 was exceptional in the quantity of pottery it contained, its comparatively large dimensions, which meant that it cut into the gravel (2.9 m x 2.4 m and 0.85 m), and the positive evidence for backfilling.

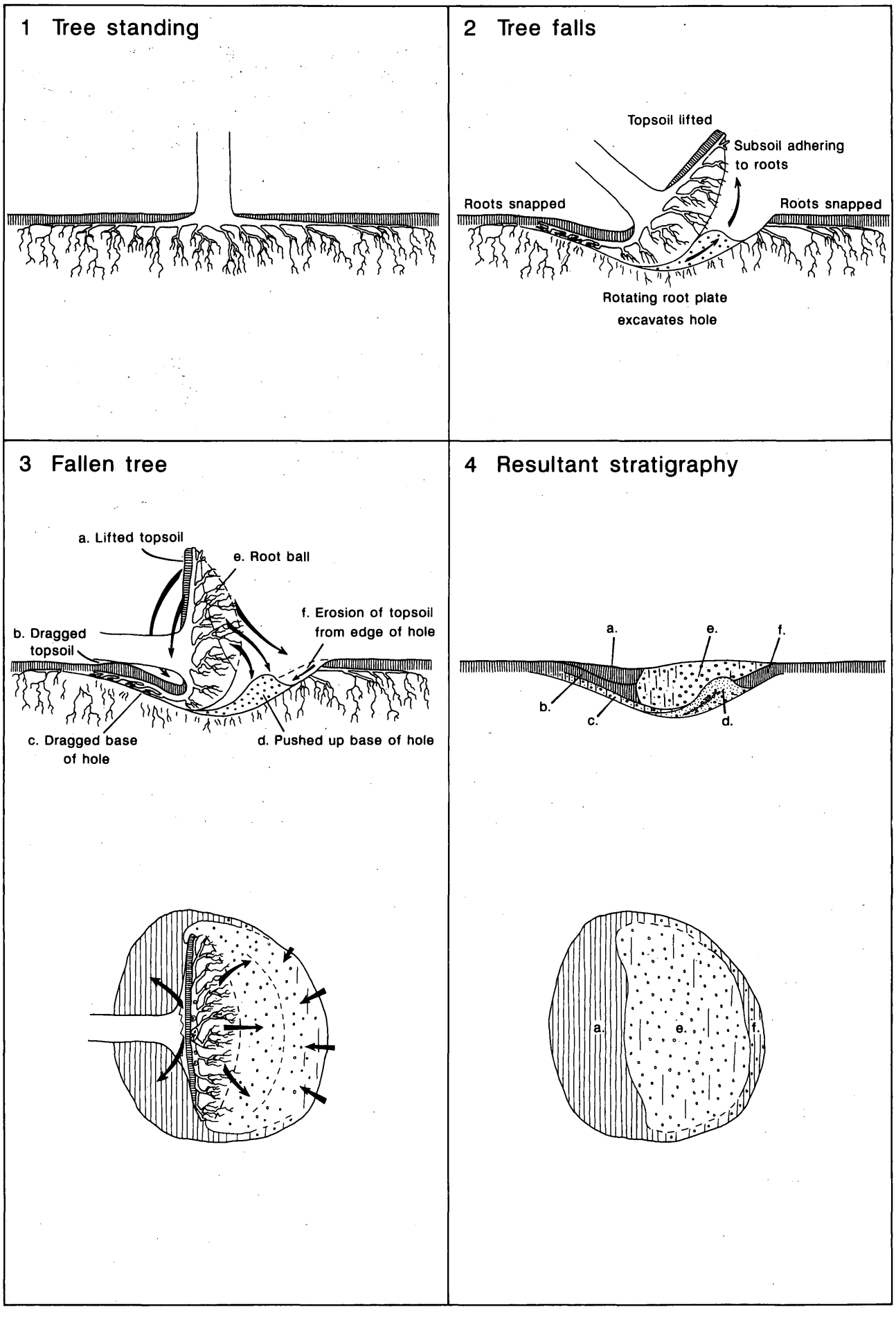

Figure 6 The creation of a tree throw hole

Figure 7 Area 7000: note zone of tree throw holes on edge of silt island and prehistoric enclosure in background

Postholes (Fig. 4)
Ten postholes were recorded in the area. They had similar dimensions, with an average depth of 0.08 m and an average diameter of 0.22 m. Their fills consisted of clay loams whose colours varied from orange-browns to dark grey/blacks. Two of the postholes (7281 and 7276) contained frequent charcoal inclusions and the fill of one of these (7281) had been scorched. No post pipes were detected in of any of these features. The seven postholes clustered in the NE corner of Area III (7281, 7282, 7284, 7285, 7286, 7287 and 7288) appear not to have been structurally related. They had no coherent spatial patterning and the fill of each feature was different. The three other postholes in Area III also appear to have been individual posts which cannot be convincingly associated with any other features.

Human burials (Fig. 4)
An inhumation and two cremations were recovered from this area (see Chapter 8: Human remains). A crouched burial of an adult female was found in pit 7264 at the southern end of the central pit complex. It lay on its left side with its head to the NW. The back, legs and left arm had been flexed, with the left hand being placed under the neck. The state of preservation was extremely poor and the hips and lower vertebrae had been damaged by subsoiling.

The exact shape of the pit was difficult to establish as it had been cut into the fills of pits 7311 and 7290, but it was 0.8 m long on its NW-SE axis (the orientation in which the body was aligned), 0.65 m wide and 0.12 m deep. It contained one fill which consisted of a mid-grey/orange-brown silty clay loam, from which two sherds of late Bronze Age pottery were recovered.

A cremation (7181) was found in the southern part of Area III. It had been placed into a hole measuring 0.28 x 0.3 m and 0.14 m deep, with 45° sides. Burnt human bone was found in both layers of the fill, the top one consisting of black clay loam, the second of mid-brown/mid-grey clay loam. No dating evidence was found in this feature.

The second cremation (7180), 4.0 m to the N of cremation 7181, had been placed in a hole cut into the fill of pit 7185. It had a diameter of 0.36 m, a depth of 0.07 m and 30° sides. Burnt bone was again found in both layers of the fill, which were of the same description as those in cremation 7181. Two small sherds of late Bronze Age pottery were recovered from this feature.

A late Bronze Age enclosure (Figs. 7 and 8)
In the northern half of Area 7000 a large U-shaped enclosure formed by three ditches was uncovered. It was 88 m long NE-SW and 44 m wide at its northern end, decreasing to 32 m at its southern end.

Its eastern boundary was initially demarcated by a segmented ditch (7075 and 7077) with two causeways; the southern causeway was approximately 2.0 m wide, while the northern one had a width of 1.0 m. The southern end of

this ditch (7075) was 1.6 m wide and 0.58 m deep. Its bottom was rounded, and its sides had an initial angle of 19° which increased to 45° from a depth of 0.16 m. The ditch contained four fills, the result of natural silting, which consisted of grey clays and clay loams. An initial layer of primary silting, represented by sand and gravel with 20% pale yellow silty clay, had probably eroded into the ditch from the top of the sides, creating the observed alteration in the angle of the sides. At the southern causeway, the ditch terminals had been recut repeatedly (Fig. 8), resulting either in the closure of the causeway by the digging of a pit represented by layers 8–11 or possibly its relocation further to the N. It was not possible to establish the contemporaneity of the layers 8–11 and the recuts (12–14 and 15–16) to the N. The other causeway, 16 m to the N, had not been closed. The northern terminus of this eastern boundary ditch was located at the end of an extension of the main open area excavation.

The southern boundary of the enclosure was represented by ditch 7076, which was approximately 1.8 m wide and 0.5 m deep. The ditch had a round bottom and 45° sides. The ditch fills were similar to those from ditch 7075 and 7077 with a layer of primary silting consisting of sand and gravel with 10% silty loam in the bottom of the feature. The eastern terminus of the ditch was separated from the southern end of the boundary ditch 7075 by a band of gravel 0.6 m wide. At its western end the ditch cut into one of the recuts of ditch 7135. As a stratigraphically later element of the enclosure than parts of the western boundary ditch defined by ditch 7135, it is possible that the southern end of the 'enclosure' was at one point open, only the western and eastern ditches being in existence. Alternatively, ditch 7076 could be a recut of an earlier, shallower feature which has been completely removed.

The western boundary ditch 7135 was approximately 1.6 m wide and 0.45 m deep. Its fills were similar to those of the other enclosure ditches and appear to be the result of natural silting. The W side of the ditch was at an angle of 45°, that of the E side was 20° and the bottom of the ditch was rounded.

The southern end of the ditch cut the ditch 7136 orientated E-W, and had been re-excavated at least twice (Fig. 8). These phases of the ditch predated the southern boundary ditch 7076, and since they extend beyond the enclosure defined by ditch 7076 they indicate that there may have been a different arrangement of the southern end of the ditch system.

The relationship between the gully 7318 and the northern end of the western boundary ditch could not be established, but the gully was cut by ditch 7320, orientated NNW-SSE, which was only exposed for a short length. No northern boundary ditch was found in the extensions of the main area of excavation which defined the limits of the western and eastern ditches, nor in a slit trench placed across the middle of the alignment of any potential enclosure ditch.

The dating of this enclosure was established by the quantity of late Bronze Age pottery recovered from the ditch fills, the only other significant find being a fragment of a saddle quern (7345) recovered from ditch 7076.

Area 3017

Approximately 100 m to the S of Area 7000 the assessment trenches 3015, 3016 and 3017 located another area of late Bronze Age activity on a gravel ridge capped with the loess-like material. Two ditches were detected in trench 3015, while two pits, two gullies, a ditch and a well/pond were uncovered in trench 3017.

The gravel island fell away to the N and the assessment trench (3018) placed in this area revealed no archaeological features. The character of this activity will be more comprehensively understood when this area is excavated prior to Phase Two of the Business Park development. However, at present the evidence does suggest that this area is another, probably quite restricted, focus of late Bronze Age occupation, and if this is the case any relationship between this and the late Bronze Age activity in Area 7000 needs to be taken into consideration.

ROMAN ACTIVITY (Fig. 5)

In the Roman period several ditches (7073, 7173, 7037, 7038, 7078, 7086, 7089, 7254, 7280) formed a series of paddocks and enclosures in the northern and eastern parts of the site. They were laid out on common axes (NE-SW and NW-SE) forming a coherent pattern of at least four enclosures. These boundary ditches were not substantial, varying in depth between 0.12–0.52 m (average = 0.3 m) and in width between 0.38–1.42 m (average = 0.85 m). They had a dark grey/red brown clay loam fill with 15–20% gravel. Dating material from these features was extremely scarce, consisting of the occasional abraded sherd of Roman pottery, which does not allow any closer dating to be established. Features 7073, 7280, 7086 and 7089 contained no dating material and they have been ascribed to this period on the basis of spatial patterning and similarities in dimensions and fill. Elements of the boundaries in enclosures 1 and 2 (Fig. 5) had been recut; in particular the western side and south-eastern corner of enclosure 2, represented by 7038, 7080, 7037 and 7078, and the western and southern sides of enclosure 1, consisting of 7273, 7279, 7280 and 7254, indicating the active maintenance of these features.

One pit, 7162, contained a single sherd of Roman pottery. However, the sherd was recovered from the top layer of the feature, and a subsoiling mark was recorded as going through this pit. As a result the sherd cannot be considered to provide a secure date and it is not possible to ascribe this pit to the Roman period, especially as the pit also contained three pieces of flint.

POST-MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY (Fig. 8)

A large ditch, 7117 (1.0 m wide and 0.7 m deep), was uncovered orientated approximately NW-SE in the southern half of the trench. A contemporary ditch formed a

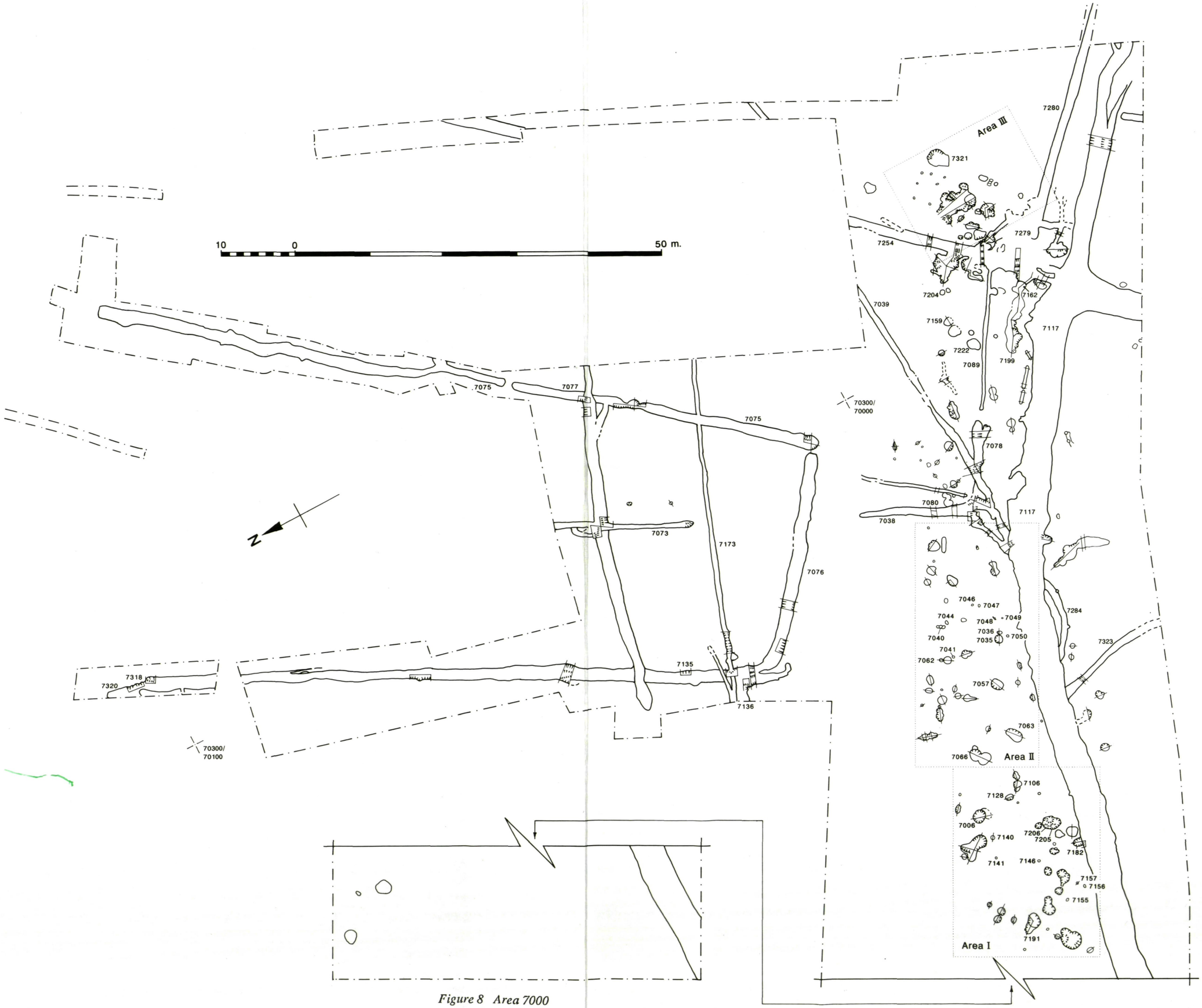

Figure 8 Area 7000

right-angle with 7117 near the eastern side of the trench and extended southwards beyond the limits of the excavation. These ditches demarcated the boundaries shown on the Shinfield Tithe Map (D/D1 110/1) drawn up in 1842 between two fields to the S (one called Orchard Pightle, the other unnamed) and Small Mead Common to the N. At the latest, these ditches went out of use with the construction of Small Mead Road to the S of the trench and the reorganization of the field system which this necessitated.

UNDATED ACTIVITY (Fig. 8)

Ditch 7039 was orientated on a E-W axis, unlike the features of late Bronze Age, Roman and post-medieval date, and was preserved only to a shallow depth. It cut the ditch 7078 which formed part of a Roman enclosure and was itself cut to the S by the post-medieval boundary ditch 7117. It is possible, given this feature's orientation, that it can be seen to continue to the S of ditch 7117 in the form of the semicircular gully 7084 (mislabelled 7284 in Fig. 8), which was also cut by the post-medieval boundary ditch. Neither of these features can be closely dated. The ditch 7323 to the W of the gully 7084 may also be related to ditch 7039, as it is orientated N-S. This is also cut by 7117, but it cannot be dated more closely.

TREE THROW HOLES (Figs. 6 and 7)

The most diagnostic element of these features is a 'sausage-shaped' patch of soil which forms where topsoil is lifted with the falling of the tree. The hollow created by the uprooting of the root ball can often be detected as an area of disturbed subsoil behind the 'sausage' and around this central area there is occasionally an incomplete ring of soil. At least 72 tree throw holes were recorded in the area, and in 32 instances it was possible to establish which way the trees had fallen from observations of the various elements of these features. There appears to be no particular direction from which the trees fell, approximately equal numbers being recorded for each of the cardinal compass points. 64% of these tree throw holes contained scorched material, and in 35% of these cases the scorching was restricted on the surface to the 'sausage-shaped' element of the hole. In these latter instances it is likely that this scorching represents the burning of the base of the fallen trunk, as a method of separating it from the root plate. At Drayton cursus (Lambrick and Moore, forthcoming), evidence of burning was often encountered within the fill of the holes but it was not detectable on the surface. In this case, therefore, where only six of the tree holes were excavated, the evidence for burning may not only have been more extensive within the features, but also may have existed only below the surface of the holes.

Four tree holes had been cut by the late Bronze Age enclosure, providing a *terminus ante quem* for these features, while three pits (7277, 7297 and 7298) which it is not possible to date had been cut by a tree hole (7249). The only dating material recovered from the six excavated tree holes consisted of ten flints from context 7249 and one sherd of late Bronze Age pottery from context 7296. Obviously these may all have been redeposited and cannot be taken to provide any indication of dating.

It is difficult to establish whether these features are indicative of intentional land clearance or were naturally fallen trees, which given the extensive evidence for burning must then have been removed and utilised.