

Chapter 5: Areas 4000, 5000 and 6000

by John Moore

AREA 4000 (Fig. 32)

Two areas (total 1200 sq.m) were opened up to the W of the late Bronze Age settlement area 3100. Trial trenching had indicated the possibility of low density archaeological activity. This was confirmed by the presence of two definite and two possible postholes, three pits and six scoops. All the archaeological features occurred in the western and larger of the two areas excavated, which was mainly a higher area of loess-like material overlying the gravel.

No patterning is apparent in the features and they do not belong to a single period. While four features contained late Bronze Age flintwork (4010, 4011, 4021, 4024), pit 4016 contained a small sherd of Roman pottery.

Three of the postholes had diameters between 0.16–0.25 m and were between 50–150 mm deep and the possible posthole 4013 was 0.47 m in diameter and 70 mm deep with an irregular profile. Two of the pits, 4009 and 4018, were nearly circular, with mean diameters of 0.95 and 1.37 m respectively and depths of 140 mm, while pit 4021, which survived only partially, had a diameter of 0.72 m and depth of 120 mm. Two of the scoops were nearly circular, with mean diameters of 1.18 m (4005) and 1.05 m (4006), and the diameters of four more oval scoops varied from 0.63 x 0.95 m to 0.99 x 1.12 m, with depths between 40 and 150 mm.

Ten tree throw holes were recognised, four of them in the smaller or easternmost of the two areas examined. The density of trees was thus higher on the slight slope down from the higher ground. Two of these features were partially excavated, and one produced a flint flake. It is not certain whether this indicates prehistoric clearance or is a redeposited find that had entered the filling of the tree throw hole.

The recent ditch in the extreme NW corner was undated by excavation, but a field boundary in this position is shown on the Tithe Map.

During the initial assessment a cremation was found in Trench 3012, some 225 m N of excavation Area 4000. The cremated bone was contained in a pit 500 mm in diameter and 260 mm deep. This cremation pit 3049 cut an old ploughsoil and was sealed by alluvium (Chapter 8: the cremations). No dating evidence was found with this feature, but it may be associated with the Roman activity W of Kybe's Lane.

AREA 5000 (Fig. 33)

The assessment trenches pinpointed a slightly higher area of loess-like subsoil overlying the gravel. Several pits and

two ditches were identified, and in conjunction with the quantities of burnt flint and flintwork recovered from the overburden these were thought to indicate that a Bronze Age settlement area had been located. A transect covering a total of 2000 sq. m was opened up to reveal field systems. Subsequently, smaller trenches were machine-excavated to attempt to trace the extent and direction of several field boundaries. Three types of boundaries were found: pit alignments, segmented ditches and continuous ditches. From the four diagnostic sherds and the flintwork the dating of this subsite appears to be the same as that of Area 3100.

Pit alignments (Fig. 33)

Four pit alignments were identified in this area. A pit alignment consisting of at least 16 features from 5054 in the SE to 5055 in the NW was located in the western part of the site on a NW-SE orientation (Fig. 33, alignment 1). The alignment was not straight and had been redefined at least once. Several pits intercut or were side by side. The alignment is presumed to continue further westwards beyond the post-medieval ditch 5032. The pit alignment does not continue eastwards beyond the NNE-SSW segmented ditch boundary (5091, 5096, 5112, 5072, 5114, 5094, 5087). Several small pits just W of the segmented ditch boundary were roughly in alignment and seemed to form a second, NE-SW line at right-angles to the first, NW-SE one (Fig. 33, alignment 2), and these two pit alignments may indicate that this point formed the SE corner of a field. Eleven metres to the W is a probable third alignment approximately parallel to the first one, which evidently continued to the NW (Fig. 33, alignment 3). The parallel alignment may be the W side of a field or a subdivision of a field.

The shallowness of the pits, as little as 40–50 mm in several cases, suggests that some of the pits on these alignments may not have survived. This, coupled with the redefinition of the alignments by at least one later phase of pit digging, makes it impossible to estimate the original spacing of these pits. The similarity between the fill and the subsoil made the identification of some of the features in Area 5000 extremely difficult, and some features may have not been recognised, while some features which have been interpreted as being of man-made origin may in fact have been natural disturbances or local discolourations (eg 5099 in the eastern NE-SW alignment, alignment 2).

Within the first, NW-SE alignment the pits varied in size from 1.00 x 0.90 m (5054, the extreme easternmost pit,

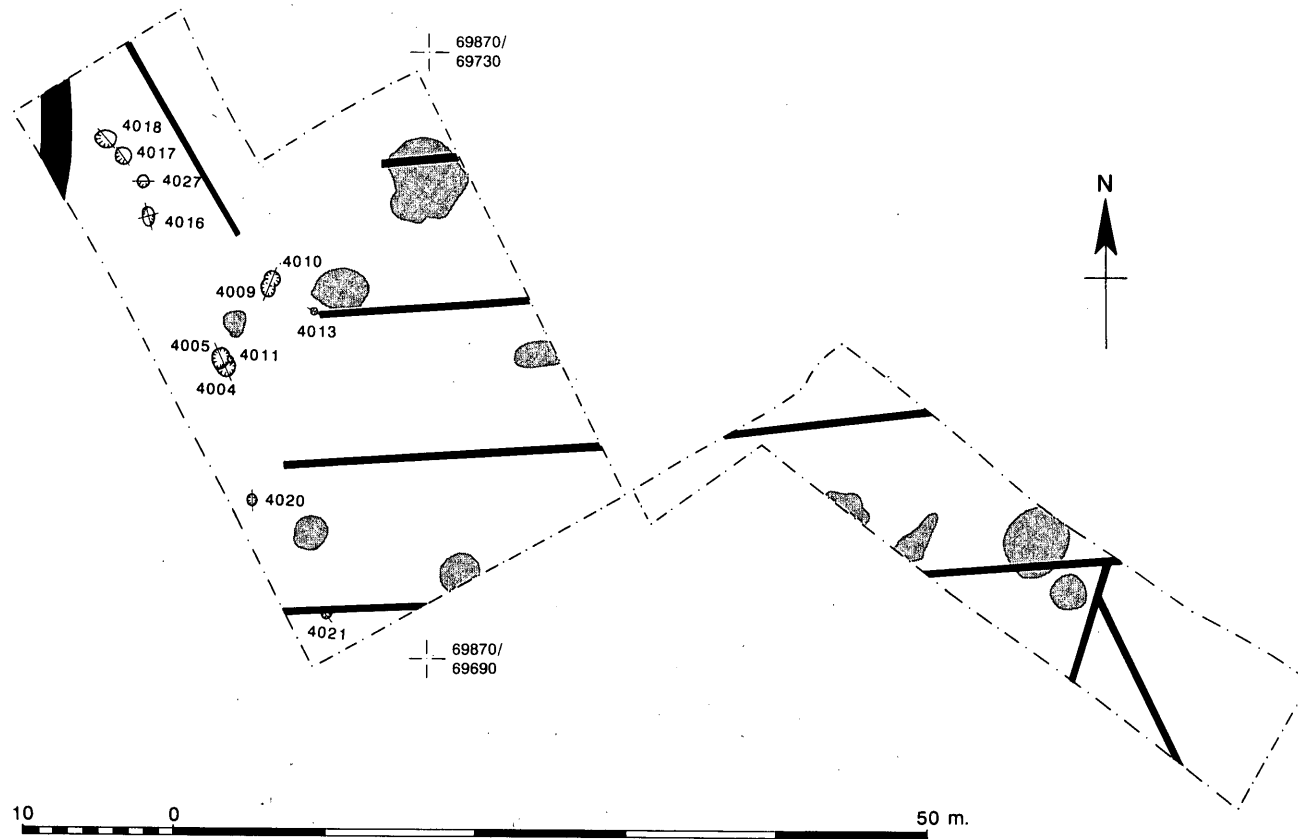


Figure 32 Area 4000: plan

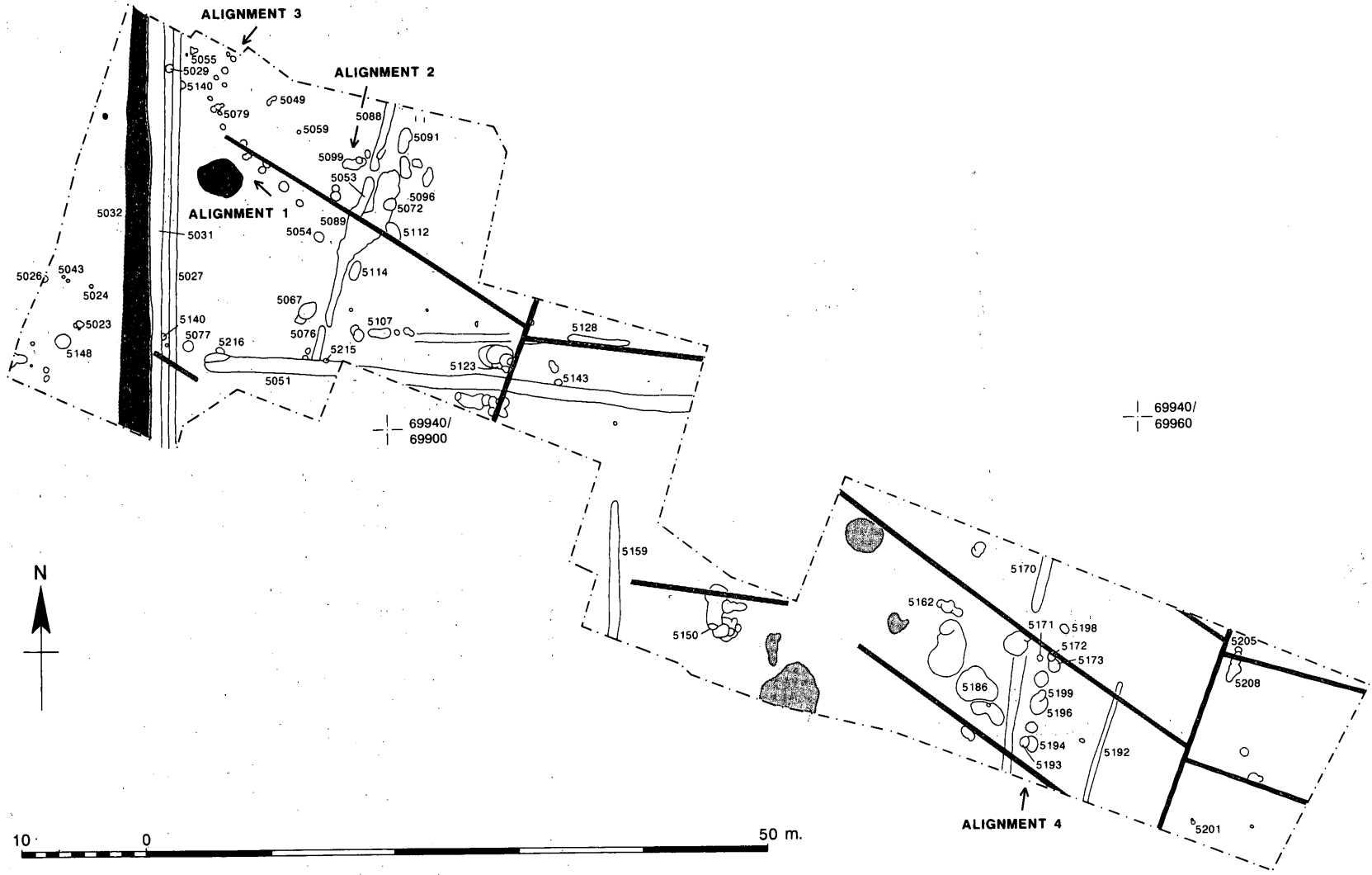


Figure 33 Area 5000: plan

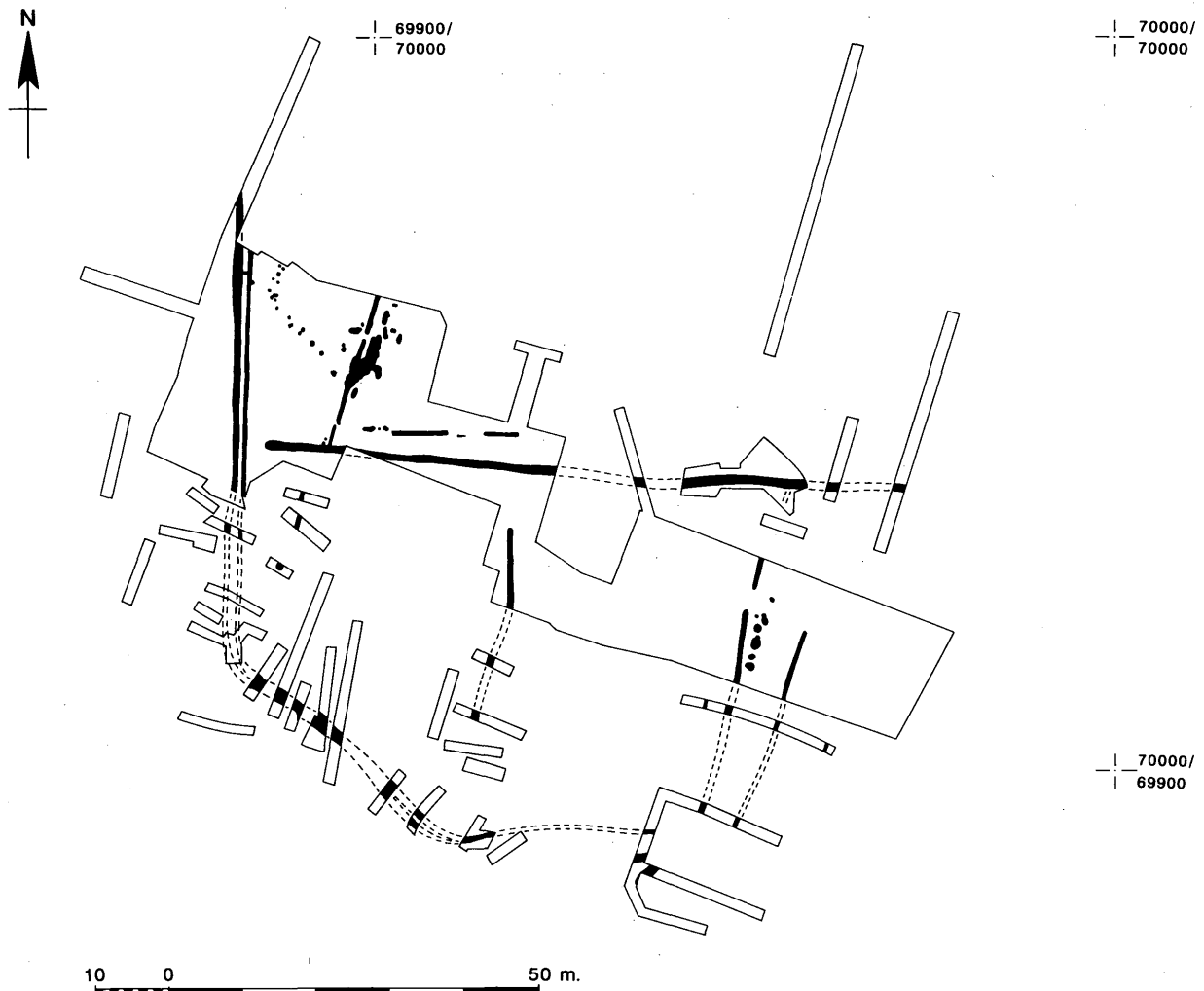


Figure 34 Area 5012: plan

Fig. 35) to 0.24 m (5079, Fig. 35) in diameter, with depths between 50 and 220 mm. On average, the dimensions of the pits were 0.53 x 0.49 m, with a surviving depth of 95 mm. The pits had slightly rounded bases and most had side slopes of 30–45°. The western pit 5029 (Fig. 35) was atypical in having a flat bottom and 80° sides.

The possible eastern or second NE/SW pit alignment consisted of nine features, one of which is dubious (5099). Sizes ranged from 0.90 x 0.38 m to 0.20 x 0.16 m, with depths between 40–100 mm (excluding 5099 which was 1.10 x 0.82 x 0.11 m). On average the pits were 0.61 x 0.45 and survived to a depth of 70 mm.

The western NE/SW alignment (alignment 3; the pits are not numbered on the plan) had five pits lying within the excavation area. Sizes varied from 0.36 to 0.20 m in diameter and from 50 to 190 mm in depth. The average pit would be 0.32 x 0.27 x .095 m. The bases of these features were more rounded, again with sides mainly of 30–45°.

In the eastern part of the area excavated a fourth alignment of ten pits was identified (Fig. 33, 5193–5198,

alignment 4). The orientation was more exactly NNE/SSW than the two alignments to the W, with a difference of c 10°. The alignment did not continue all the way across the trench but extended for 10.5 m. Again, this alignment appears to have been redefined at least once. An indication of spacing is given by the three sets of intercutting pits (5172/5173 (Fig. 35) 5199/5196, 5193/5194). The 'primary' pits had a spacing of 3.25 m (with pit 5198 lying 3.20 m to the N). The distance between the recut pits was 3.20 and 3.70 m. The other three pits are not assigned to any particular phase of the alignment.

The nature of the pits in alignment 4 was significantly different from those of the other three alignments. The size varied from 0.45 m in diameter (5171) to 1.20–1.40 m in diameter (5196, Fig. 35). Depths varied from 50 to 180 mm. The average pit size was diameter 0.98 x 0.31 m and depth 105 mm. The depths are comparable with two of the other alignments but the diameters are c 70% greater than the NW-SE and eastern NE-SW alignments (alignments 1 and 2) and 200% greater than alignment 3.

Segmented ditches (Fig. 33)

The remains of one boundary defined by segmented or interrupted ditch lengths were located within the excavation area (5091, 5096, 5112, 5072, 5114, 5094, 5087). Other examples found within the Business Park excavations occur in Area 3100, where a segmented boundary was stratigraphically earlier than continuous ditched boundaries (Chapter 4, Fig. 18), and possibly in Area 6000 (Fig. 37), where the ditch appears to be a continuation of the Area 5000 ditch systems.

Up to six alignments of ditch lengths were recognisable, but unfortunately the features were very shallow, having suffered from the effects of ploughing and subsoiling. Total excavation of this boundary was not carried out and only general comments can be made about the form of most of the lengths.

Seven individual small lengths (5091, 5096, 5112, 5072, 5114, 5094, 5087) were identified, mainly within the eastern alignments. These lengths varied from 0.65 m to 2.35 m with an average of 1.51 m. The widths of six of these segments lay between 0.70 and 0.80 m with one length, 5112, having a width of 1.20 m. The surviving depths of the features were between 50 and 170 mm with the exception of 5087 (Fig. 35), which lay in the western alignment and was 320 mm in depth. The impression gained from the western alignment (5088, 5053, 5089, 5076, 5212) was that the segments were longer but without complete excavation this cannot be proved. All segments had a rounded base and sides were between 20 to 45°. Segment terminals were rounded with gently sloping sides. Machine trenching indicated that the alignment continued for at least 14 m to the S.

Continuous ditches and gullies (Figs. 33 and 36)

What appears to be a major N/S boundary was found in the westernmost part of the excavation area. Three continuous lengths of ditch or gully (5027, 5031, 5051) of the Bronze Age were cut on the W side by a recent post-medieval ditch 5032 dug parallel to them. For another example of a post-medieval ditch following the line of a Bronze Age ditch see Area 3100. The difference in orientation from the segmented ditches is c 17°.

Gully 5027 was a continuous length some 0.52 to 0.80 m wide and mostly 220–250 mm deep. The profile was generally regular with 45° sides and a well rounded base. The exception was the southern part of 5027/A where the gully was only 150 mm deep with an almost flat bottom. The primary silting in section A had entered from the western side, suggesting that there had been a bank on this side, although this could not be confirmed in other sections as the difference in filling sequences could not be identified.

Gully 5031, c 0.70 m W of gully 5027, appeared from the plan view at the N end to have been recut, although the excavated sections did not provide this information; in each case only a single fill type was recognisable (Fig. 36). At the southern end, the gully was 0.75–0.90 m wide whereas

section A was 1.20 m. This increase in width is explained as the beginning of the divergence of the primary cut and the recut. The depth varied from 290–340 mm. The sides were regular, 40–60° (steeper in the southern part) and the base was rounded.

Machine trenching located two gullies 5.0 m to the S of the excavation area. Further S it was found that the post-medieval ditch veered eastwards across the line of the Bronze Age features before coming to an end. Just S of the point at which the post-medieval ditch turned eastwards traces were found of two gullies. These were presumed to be Bronze Age features and were traced for c 60 m. They changed direction immediately S of the change in course of the post-medieval ditch, and ran south-eastwards for c 30 m before turning eastwards. Unfortunately it was not possible to relate these gullies to the other N-S gullies.

At right-angles to the continuous N-S boundary described above was another recut ditch, 5051. The eastern terminal stopped 2.25 m short of the N-S gully 5027 and the eastern end was not located after the ditch had been traced for 87 m. The western terminal had been cut by a small linear feature 5217 (not numbered on plan) ending at the same point as the ditch; it is conceivable that the terminal silted up more quickly than the rest of the ditch and that the linear feature was created to redefine the end. 5217 survived to a depth of only 100 mm as opposed to 180 mm for the ditch. One section across the ditch 5051/A indicated a recut with a possible shallow primary cut for the ditch on the N side (Fig. 35). The profile of section B again hints at this possibility. Section A is atypical in that the main ditch (possible recut) is V-shaped with sides of 40–50°. Elsewhere the ditch is flat-bottomed or slightly rounded with sides of 30–40° (Fig. 35). The ditch width excluding possible recuts and clearly atypical erosion was between 0.80–0.96 m, with depths varying from 130 to 300 mm. The ditch cut a small pit 5143 and was cut by posthole 5215, and the linear feature 5217 was also cut by posthole 5216.

Some doubt must remain about the dating of this feature. The only artefacts recovered from the ditch are dated to the Bronze Age and the form was similar to the N-S Bronze Age ditches, but a field boundary is shown on the Tithe Map in this position and the ditch may have been post-medieval. While it is possible that the boundary marked on the Tithe Map took the form of some other barrier, such as a hedge, which coincided with the line of an earlier boundary ditch, it seems unlikely. There are two cases within the Business Park excavations where post-medieval boundaries follow what must have been earthworks of the Bronze Age period, but they both involve the digging of a new ditch. It is possible that this area was sufficiently well drained for only N-S ditches to be needed.

Approximately 2.5 to 3.5 m N of the ditch just described was a small incomplete gully (5128, 5105, 5106). This gradually converged on ditch 5051 towards the W and was traceable for only c 21 m. It appeared to have an E terminal in line with the N-S ditch 5159 and faded out

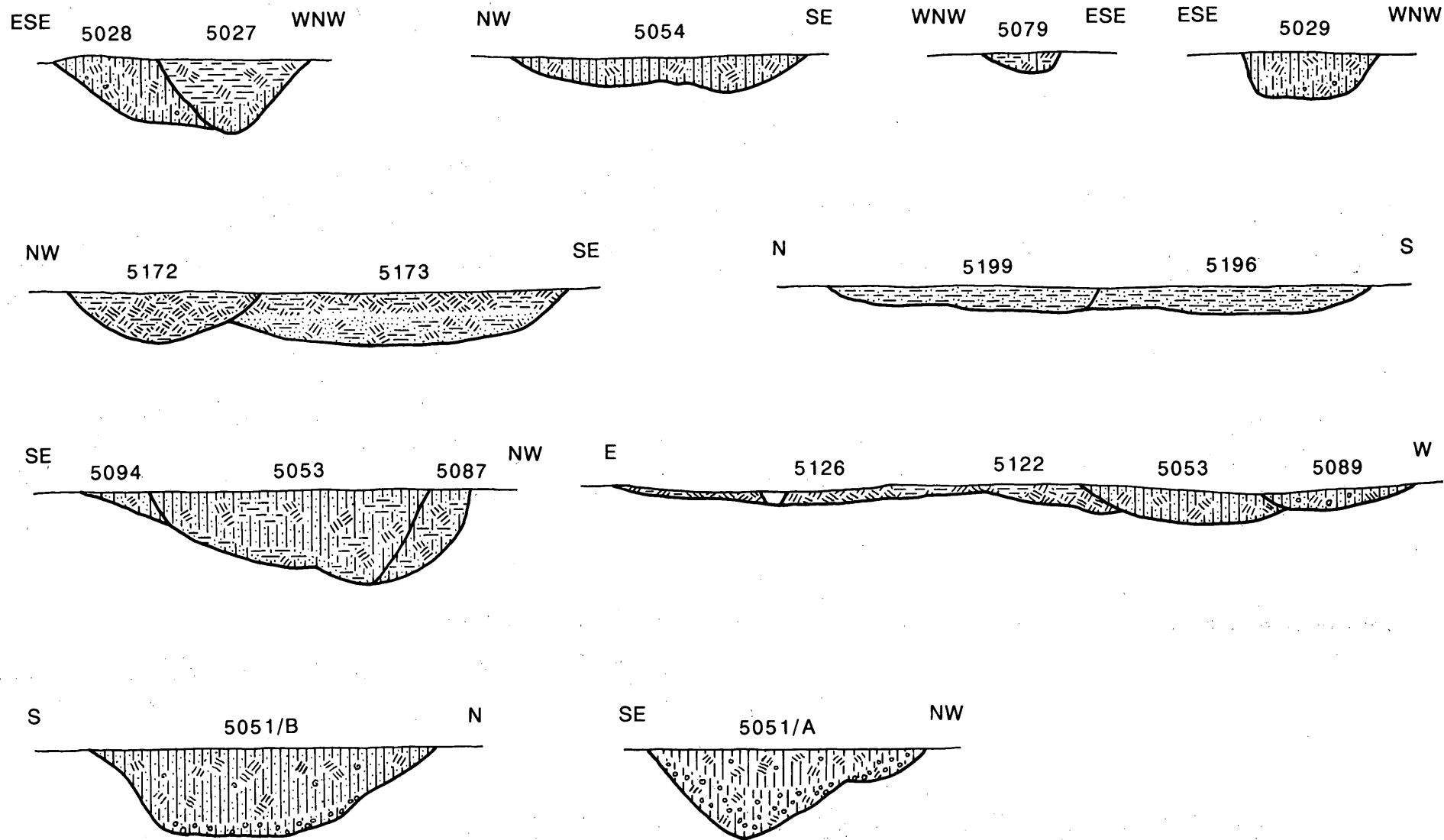
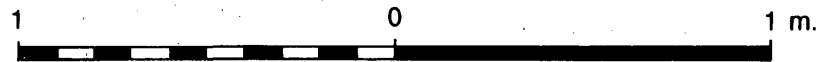
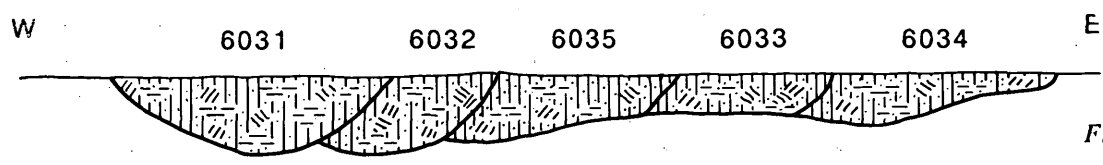
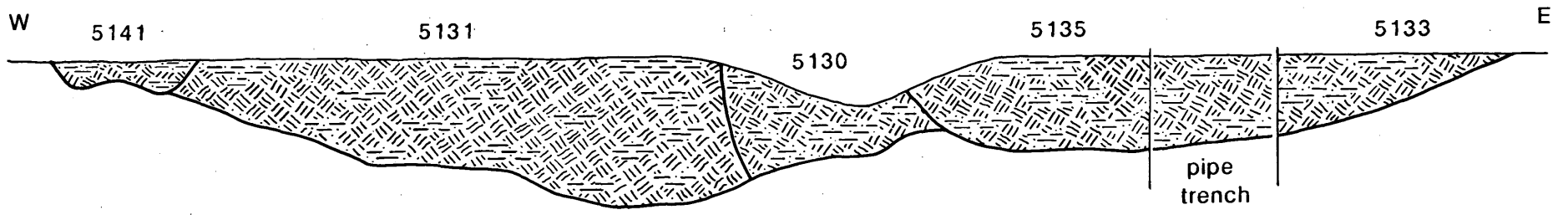
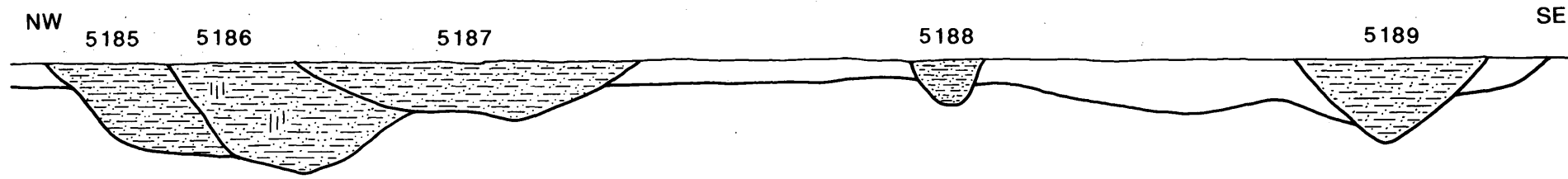
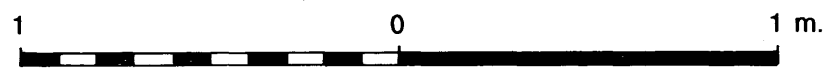
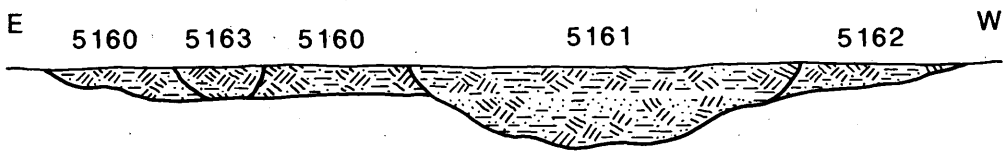
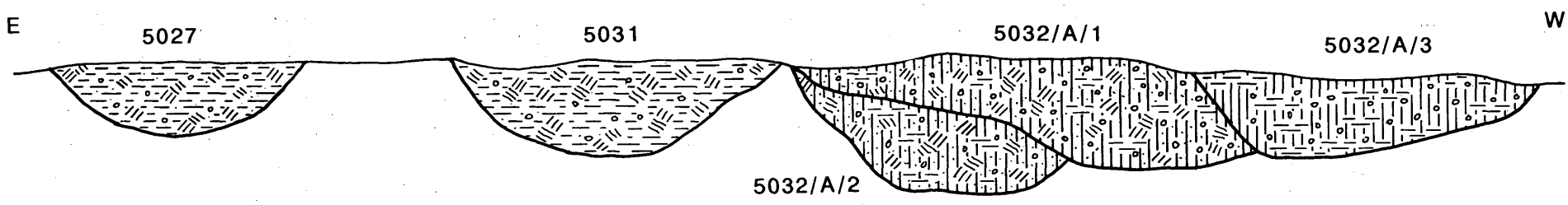


Figure 35 Areas 5000/6000 pit sections 5027-29, 5051, 5053-54, 5079, 5087, 5089, 5094, 5122, 5126, 5172-73, 5196, 5199



Areas 4000, 5000 and 6000



Reading Business Park: a Bronze Age landscape

Figure 36 Areas 5000/6000 pit sections 5027, 5031-32, 5130-31, 5133, 5135, 5141, 5160-63, 5185-89, 6031-35

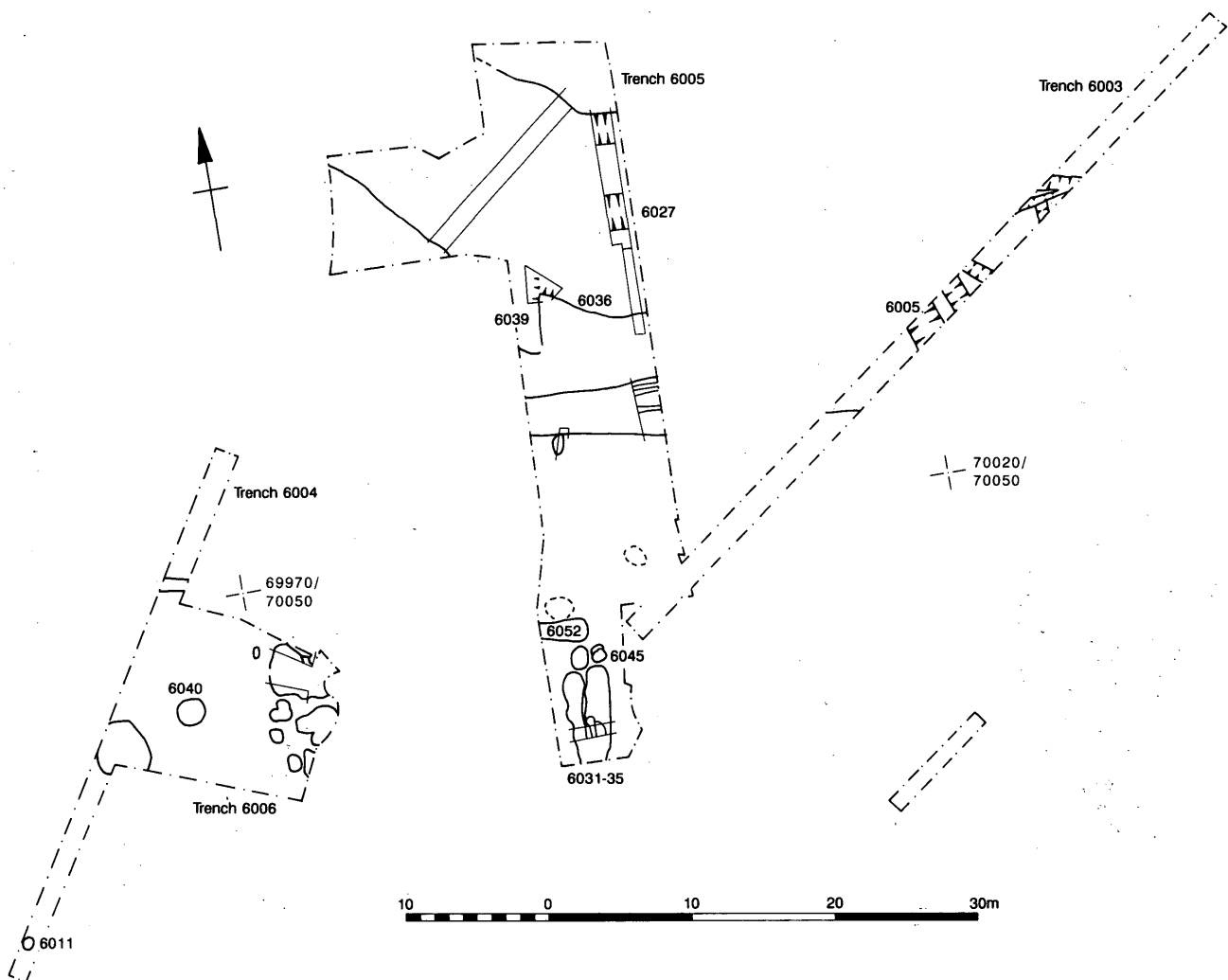


Figure 37 Area 6000: plan

towards the W. It was 120–140 mm deep and 0.35–0.48 m wide and had a well rounded profile. The features 5107 and 5109 may well be parts of this feature.

Further continuous ditches on a N-S orientation were located S of the main E-W ditch. Ditch 5159 stopped 7.0 m short of the E-W ditch and was traced over a distance of 26 m, although it was not entirely straight. This ditch was about 0.75 m wide and 100–120 mm deep with a slightly rounded bottom and sides of 20–30°. About 32 m to the E was ditch 5170, which had been damaged by ploughing. The gap seen in Figure 33 is the result of modern destruction and was not an opening through a field boundary. The southern part survived as a very shallow (40 mm deep) feature some 0.50 m wide. The northern part was irregular with a depth of 60–140 mm and a width of 0.80 m. This ditch was seen to have a relationship with the E-W boundary ditch (Fig. 34) but its shallowness prevented the sequence from being determined. 5070 was not seen on the N side of 5051. Another N-S ditch 5192 was located 6.5 m to the E. It was narrower than the other ditches, only 0.46–0.52 m wide, and was c 100 mm deep with a 45° W side

and 30° E side. Again the northern part had not survived the effects of ploughing.

The small machine-cut trench immediately S of the eastern excavation area located two more possible N-S gullies. These were not traced elsewhere. Further traces of this field systems were found in the excavation in Area 6000 where ditch terminals appear to align with the easternmost N-S ditch in Area 5000.

Sequence of field boundaries (Fig. 33)

It is presumed that the pit alignments predate the segmented ditches. The NW-SE pit alignment 1 was cut by the extreme western N-S continuous boundaries where ditch 5027 cut pit 5028 (Fig. 35). If the eastern N-S pit alignment is a genuine one the absence of pits cutting the segmented ditches 5088 suggests that the segmented ditches have cut through the pit alignment.

The segmented ditch alignment was earlier than the continuous ditch 5051 where 5212 and 5214 (the possible remains of a segment) were cut away. The three phases (at least) of ditch forming a major N-S boundary to the W

indicate a relaid or redefined field system. This is supported by the possible recut seen in ditch 5051 and the smaller length of E-W gully 5128. The possibility of the two E-W ditches (5051, 5128) being contemporary or paired ditches, as at Mount Farm, Berinsfield (Lambrick pers. comm.), and Rough Ground Farm, Lechlade (Allen forthcoming), has been considered. The fact that what appears to be the E terminal of 5128 is opposite the line of N-S ditch 5159 suggests that these two ditches were contemporary, particularly in view of the fact that the northern end of 5159 changes direction to align on the E end of 5128. The absence of a break in 5051 at this point indicates that this ditch belonged to a different phase. As the E-W ditches were therefore probably not paired and there is no sign of a pairing between the N-S ditches on the W (5031, 5027) it seems probable that the eastern two N-S (5170, 5192) ditches in the main excavation area belonged to different phases.

Other features (Fig. 33)

Pits and postholes of the prehistoric period were scattered across the excavation area. As there was no dating evidence to suggest otherwise they are presumed to be contemporary with the field systems. The features are discussed in groups relating to individual fields or apparent subdivisions.

E of the eastern pit alignment 4 was a random scatter of pits and postholes. Posthole 5201 cutting 5211 was the only feature on this site to contain charcoal flecks. The pit group 5205, 5206, 5208 suggests that there was some continuity of use and that these features do not result from single events. On the other side of this pit alignment were pit complexes with pits of up to 2.5 m in diameter. The smallest pit, 5162, was c 0.45 m in diameter (Fig. 36). The larger pits generally survived to a depth of 120–150 mm with pit 5186 the deepest at 360 mm (Fig. 36). The smaller pits were generally 90–100 mm deep, although pit 5150 was 400 mm deep. One set of intercutting pits lay across the line of the continuous field boundary 5170, but unfortunately the ditch did not survive at this point and their relationship cannot be established.

Another pit complex was found on either side of the southern E-W continuous ditch 5051 towards the segmented ditches. The pits were mostly of the order of 0.70–1.00 m in diameter. The apparently larger pits (5131, 5135) which appear in Figure 36 were thought to comprise more than one pit, but similarity of fill and depths prevented the identification of individual pits. Also in this area were several scattered small pits, 5102–5104, 5125, 5143 and 5147, of which 5143 predated the continuous ditch 5051 and postholes 5110, 5119, 5120, 5123, 5144–5146 and 5215; 5123 cut a pit of the pit complex and 5215 cut the ditch 5051.

Within the area roughly demarcated by the three possible pit alignments on the W there were occasional postholes (eg 5059, 5065; for reasons of space not all these numbers could be included on the plan) and two small pits

(5049, 5062); three more postholes (5030, 5035, 5036) were found to the W of this area and N of the NW-SE pit alignment. The area between the NW-SE pit alignment and the continuous ditch 5051 was blank except for the three pits 5067, 5068, 5075 adjacent to the segmented ditch alignment. S of this blank area was a collection of postholes (5023–5, 5038–40, 5042, 5043, 5078) and small pits (5026, 5041, 5052, 5077, 5140, 5148). Pit 5140 was cut by the N-S continuous gully 5031. The possibility of pits 5024–6, 5043, 5140, 5078 and 5077 being part of another pit alignment was considered, but the extent exposed was not enough for this to be established; the ditches in the area cut through part of this possible alignment and it would not have been parallel to the other NW-SE alignment.

The hollows in the top of the loess-like subsoil contained a pale grey and yellow silty material up to 100 mm thick which was cut by several prehistoric features. Over the rest of the area this material had been ploughed into the modern ploughsoil. Examination of this old soil did not reveal traces of prehistoric ploughing. This may be attributable to the fact that modern ploughing left only the base of this soil layer intact; if it was an ancient ploughsoil it would have been well mixed at the bottom.

AREA 6000 (Fig. 37)

The sample excavation areas in area 6000, while confirming the presence of more Bronze Age occupation, were unsatisfactory because they did not define the nature of this occupation. The presence of ditches suggests more field systems, perhaps comparable with those in Area 5000. The pits may also be confined to a corner of a field or adjacent to field boundaries as in Area 5000.

Bronze Age

The gullies 6031–35 (Figs. 36 and 37) in the southern end of Trench 6005 appear to have been on a line with the continuous ditches in the E part of Area 5000. Not enough was uncovered in Trench 6005 to ascertain whether these gullies were continuous or segmented. The apparent butt ends of 6032, 6033, 6035 could be segment ends or recuts of a continuous ditch that had not been dug as far as the ends of 6031 and 6034. A 2.0 m wide entrance was found between the N ends of 6031 and 6034 and an E-W ditch 6052. This ditch was also located in Trench 6004 25 m to the W. Ditch 6039 (cutting 6036) was on the same alignment as gullies 6031–35 and may have been related; it seemed to be turning eastwards to become ditch 6027. Two flints were recovered from the fill. These ditches were undated, but their character and alignment strongly suggest a Bronze Age date. Ditch 6005 in Trench 6003 was dated to this period by pottery, and a substantial quantity of burnt flint was found in the upper fill. It is presumed that this ditch turned westwards to be part of the intercutting ditches in Trench 6005.

Several pits and scoops both discrete and recut were found in the southern part of Trench 6005 and in Trench

6006. Their diameters varied from 0.65 m to 1.85 m with depths from 0.12 m to 0.52 m. They were similar to those in Area 5000 and relate to the Bronze Age field system. Limited sampling of the pits was carried out and only two sherds were recovered. One sherd of Bronze Age date came from pit 6045 along with a piece of post-medieval tile. One small sherd of Roman date was found in pit 6040. All the shallow features in this area had been disturbed by ploughing and subsoiling. The finds from these pits should not be relied on for dating purposes, particularly as such small amounts of material are involved.

A small pit 6011 1.10 m in diameter and 0.25 m in depth was found at the extreme southern end of assessment Trench 6004. It contained a flint flake. The overburden of Trench 6004

produced a number of flints and there were three flints in Trench 6003.

Post-medieval

The majority of the ditches in Area 6000 were undated. The intercutting ditches orientated NW-SE in the northern part of Trench 6005 were also located in Trench 6003 to the SE. Most of them were undated but the type of fill indicated that they were post-medieval. These recut ditches may link up with the major post-medieval boundary 7117 encountered in Trench 7000 some 150 m to the E (see Chapter 2: Post-medieval activity). Two more ditches considered to be of this period, both orientated E-W, were found 75 m to the E in assessment Trench 7006 (Fig. 8).