

Chapter 6: area 2000

by David Jennings

In 1987 12 assessment trenches were laid out across Area 2000. Three of these initial trenches (2004, 2005, 2008) were then expanded to form two open area excavations, in which a more accurate evaluation could be made of the character of the archaeological remains encountered. These excavations revealed 49 ditches, 70 pits, 62 postholes and 18 gullies of Roman date, ranging from the 1st through to the 4th century.

Several curvilinear ditches in Trench 2008, dated to the 1st century, formed enclosures which were probably related to a settlement site. This must have been relatively small, as it was not detected in any of the other assessment trenches and it would have been constrained by the Foudry Brook to the E. However, the principal areas of occupation were not uncovered and it is assumed that the excavations encountered only the edge of the settlement and/or its associated enclosures.

Other features of 2nd- to 4th-century date formed the elements of enclosures and linear boundaries interpreted as field systems and peripheral activities associated with a Roman site known to exist c 300 m to the W, in Area A (Fig. 2).

DATING

Only limited vertical stratigraphic relationships could be established and the lack of coherent spatial patterning for the majority of features did not permit the date of many contexts to be determined by horizontal stratigraphy. Certain features were, however, capable of being dated more closely by the pottery found on the site. The recovery of considerable quantities of late Bronze Age pottery, a saddle quern fragment and the fragments of six pyramidal clay weights from the area suggests that the Roman activity disturbed late Bronze Age deposits. These may have been simply the vestiges of a prehistoric ploughsoil, an old ground surface or more substantial remains of occupation.

This late Bronze Age pottery was concentrated in Trenches 2004 and 2005 and in particular a large amount was recovered from the complex of pits in Trench 2005 (see below). However, these sherds must be considered as residual, since they were frequently found in association with Roman pottery or in contexts demonstrated to be stratigraphically later than those of Roman date. The contexts (2046, 2110, 2115 and 2245) which contained only late Bronze Age pottery (Fig. 39) and could not be related to any other features should probably also be considered to be Roman in date. These features contained only one or two sherds of pottery, which could easily be residual, and their fills were indistinguishable from adjacent Roman contexts.

Those features which contained no dating evidence are also considered as being of probable Roman date, given the general predominance of Roman activity demonstrated in the area.

In view of the unremarkable nature of the deposits uncovered, the discussion below has been confined to general remarks, with only contexts of unusual interest receiving specific attention.

DITCHES (Figs. 38–40)

The ditches had an average depth of 0.41 m and a width of 1.06 m. The fills of these features varied; in Trench 2004 they tended to consist of grey-brown silty clays, while in Trench 2008 they were most frequently composed of a mixed grey to orange/brown sandy clay loam. This distinction between the fills in the two trenches may be the result of the differing exposure of these areas to periodic flooding.

In Trench 2008 (Fig. 38) two ditches, 2212 and 2277, probably formed part of a circular enclosure which continued under the eastern baulk of the trench. Ditch 2212 was securely dated by pottery to the 1st century AD. The spatial relationship between 2212 and 2277 leads one to suggest that ditch 2277 is also of 1st-century date, with an entrance 1.6 m wide demarcated by the two ditch terminals. The series of ditches 2234, 2255 and 2263 should also be considered in association with this enclosure. They formed a set of inter-cutting, curvilinear ditches which dated to the 1st century AD and seem to be maintaining the same boundary.

The presence of these curvilinear features leads one to suggest that Trench 2008 was either located on the periphery of a set of 1st-century enclosures, probably associated with a settlement site, or possibly that the excavations had actually located a focus of occupation but that the area opened up was too small to reveal any significant spatial patterning. The quantities and character of the 1st-century AD pottery recovered would tend to suggest that there was some form of settlement in the area (see below), and in this context one should also consider the two bronze coins of Vespasian/Titus (AD 69–81) and the glass medallion from a glass vessel of 1st- or 2nd-century date found in Trench 2008 (see Chapter 7: Roman finds).

The enclosure demarcated by ditches 2212 and 2277 presumably went out of use when it was cut by ditch 2205,

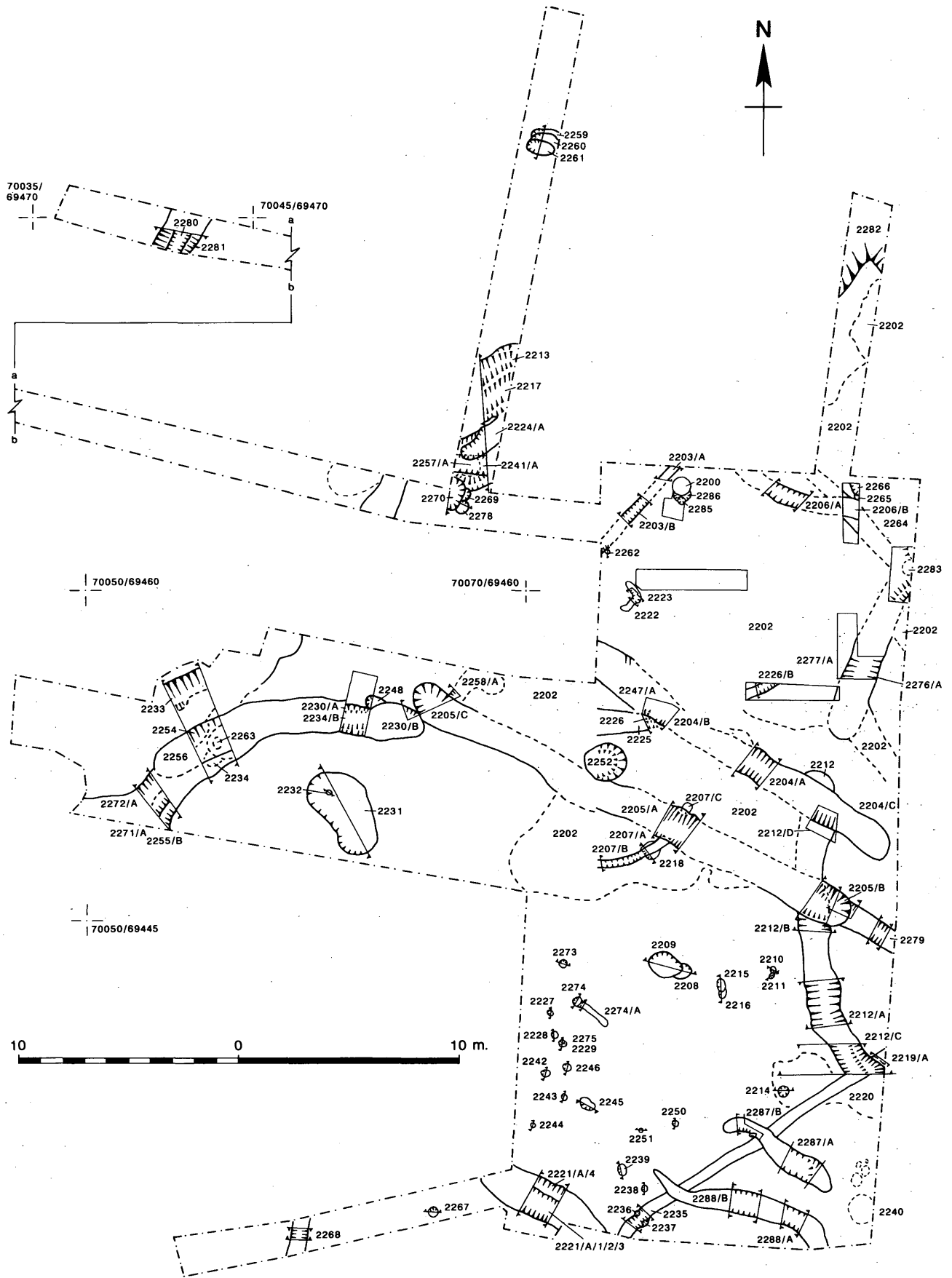


Figure 38 Trench 2008: plan

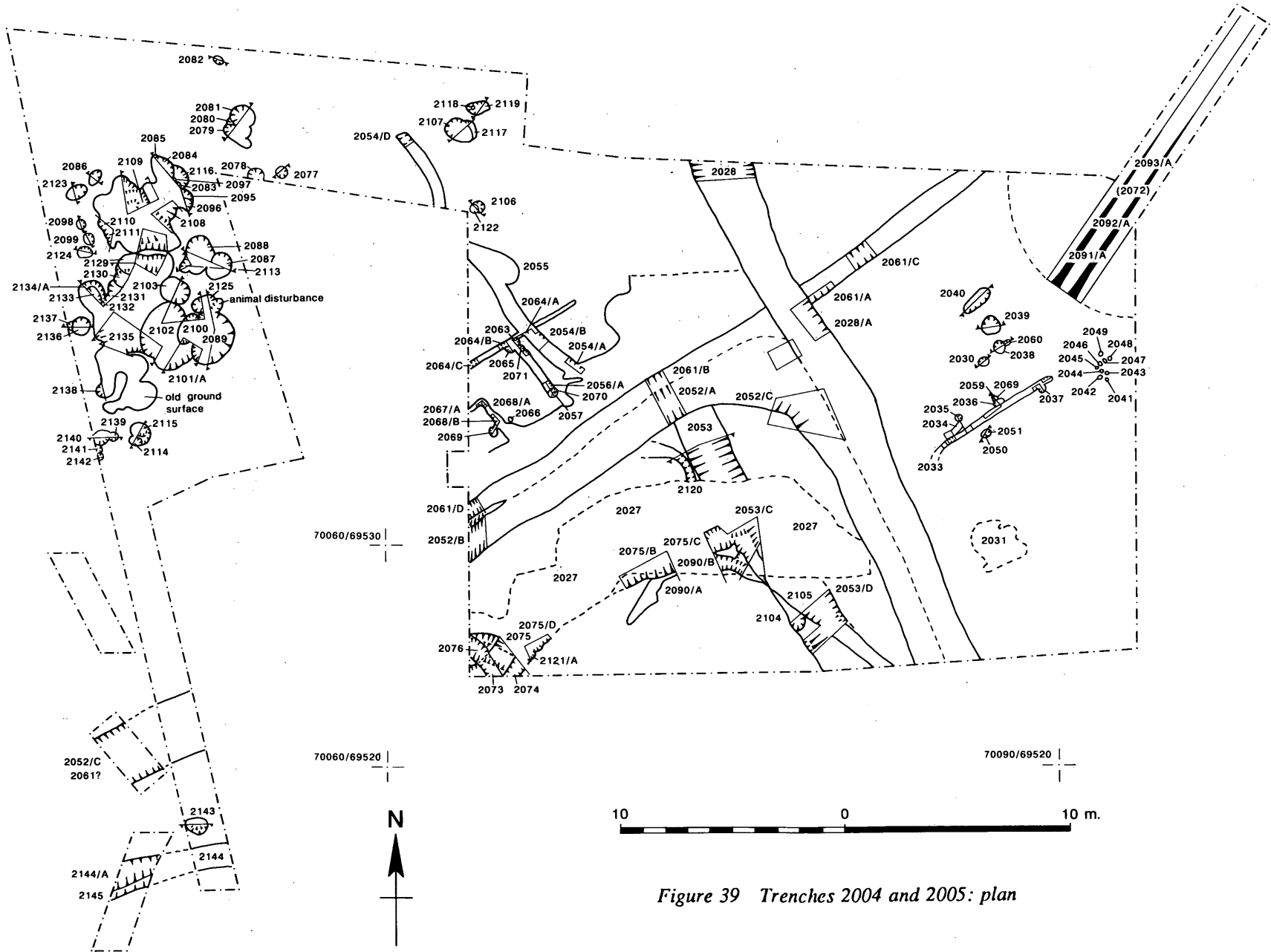


Figure 39 Trenches 2004 and 2005: plan

orientated on a WNW-ESE axis, which had been filled by the 2nd century. However, another 1st century boundary, defined by contexts 2234, 2255 and 2263, seems to have been maintained through to the 3rd or 4th century with the cutting of ditch 2230 on the same alignment.

Equally, the 2nd-century ditch 2205, aligned WNW-ESE, appears to be replaced in the 3rd century by a parallel ditch, 2204, 2.8 m to the N, which was of similar dimensions and terminated at approximately the same eastern co-ordinate. Thus although it is difficult to recover a coherent picture of the type of field system in Trench 2008 after the 1st century, several boundaries appear to have persisted over a considerable period of time.

By contrast, in Trenches 2004 and 2005 (Figs. 39 and 40) a more coherent image of the field system is available. The principal axes of these linear boundaries were SW-NE and SE-NW and both this general alignment and the physical location of the boundaries seem to have been maintained over a long period.

The initial ditch in these trenches was 2061, which crossed them on a NE-SW orientation. This was cut in the 2nd century on its southern side by ditch 2052, which followed on the same alignment until grid reference 70077/69537, after which it turned at 90° to continue in a southerly direction to run NW-SE, forming the corner of an enclosure.

Ditch 2052 seems in turn to have been superseded by a bank and ditch (2027 and 2028) which was aligned across Trench 2004 on a NW-SE axis, the ditch cutting ditch 2052 on its eastern side. The bank (2027) was composed of a sandy clay loam and was associated with ditch 2028 (Fig. 40). It had been constructed on the western side of the ditch and sealed ditches 2052, 2053 and 2120. This feature was dated to the 2nd century and had been spread by later ploughing over the top of several other contexts. A considerable amount of the bank was excavated by hand in order to reveal the underlying contexts.

The finds from the ditches in Area 2000 were generally unremarkable, consisting principally of Roman pottery. However, in the primary fill of ditch 2282, consisting of a mid-grey clay silt, preserved timbers were found. The ditch was aligned SW-NE and dated to the 3rd century. The timbers consisted of four short timber planks, which appeared to be uprights carrying a longitudinal side plank. These timbers were possibly jointed at one end to another post, which may also have been an upright. They were laying flat in the ditch fill. Other timbers were also found in association with these which it is more difficult to interpret. Several joints appeared to be cut into the planks and one joint on a plank had been pegged. It is most likely that the timbers are the remains of a fence-like structure deposited in the ditch, rather than being any form of ditch lining.

PITS (Figs. 38 and 39)

Seventy pits were recorded across the two excavation areas, 39 of them in a dense concentration in Trench 2005. They

had an average depth of 0.23 m and a median depth of 0.58 m. The shallowness of these features may be, as with the ditches, a function of the height of the water table.

The 39 pits concentrated in Trench 2005 were generally shallow, with gentle sides (45°), flat bottoms and only one or two discernible fills. The fills tended to be clay loams and contained only 5–10% gravel, the pits rarely being dug into the natural gravel. These fills were very similar to the surrounding subsoil and were probably derived from this material. The pottery dating suggests that these pits may have been dug from the 1st through to the 3rd century. However, this broad date range seems excessive and given the substantial quantities of residual pottery noted as a characteristic of the site (see Chapter 7), it seems probable that the two potentially 1st-century pits contained only residual sherds. It is more likely that the pits belong to the 2nd to 3rd centuries.

The other 31 pits distributed across the site were not significantly clustered and range in date from the 1st through to the 4th century AD. One pit in the northern part of Trench 2008 produced a glass 'Medusa'-type medallion from a glass vessel, dated to the 1st or 2nd century. Several pits were considerably deeper than those in the pit complex in Trench 2005, penetrating into the natural gravel (eg 2252 = 1.1 m, 2263 = 1.12 m), but the majority were similar in dimensions and fills to those described above.

GULLIES (Figs. 38 and 39)

Eighteen gullies were recorded during the excavations, with an average depth of 0.18 m and an average width of 0.54 m. They did not form any coherent pattern, nor did they seem to be particularly closely associated with the ditches found in the trenches. The gullies in Trench 2004 (Fig. 39; 2033, 2054, 2056, 2064, 2067 and 2068) were generally aligned with the major axes of the ditches. In Trench 2008 (Fig. 38) the gullies had a variety of alignments. One gully in this trench, 2203/2258, was possibly functionally associated with the ditch 2205, forming the western side of an enclosure. Both of these features were dated to the 2nd century.

POSTHOLES (Figs. 38 and 39)

Sixty-two postholes were found in the two trenches. They had an average depth of 0.18 m and an average breadth of 0.31 m. As with the gullies, no significant patterning was apparent. They were not uniformly distributed but tended to be concentrated in well-defined areas. Clusters occurred in the southern half of Trench 2008 and in the NE corner of Trench 2004. The dating evidence available for the complex of postholes in the southern half of Trench 2008 suggests that they are of 2nd-century date. In this context it is possible to interpret the ditch 2205 to the N, which was orientated WNW-ESE, as forming some kind of boundary to the activities which created these features, an important qualification to this argument being that the northern part of the trench was largely covered by a late Roman plough-

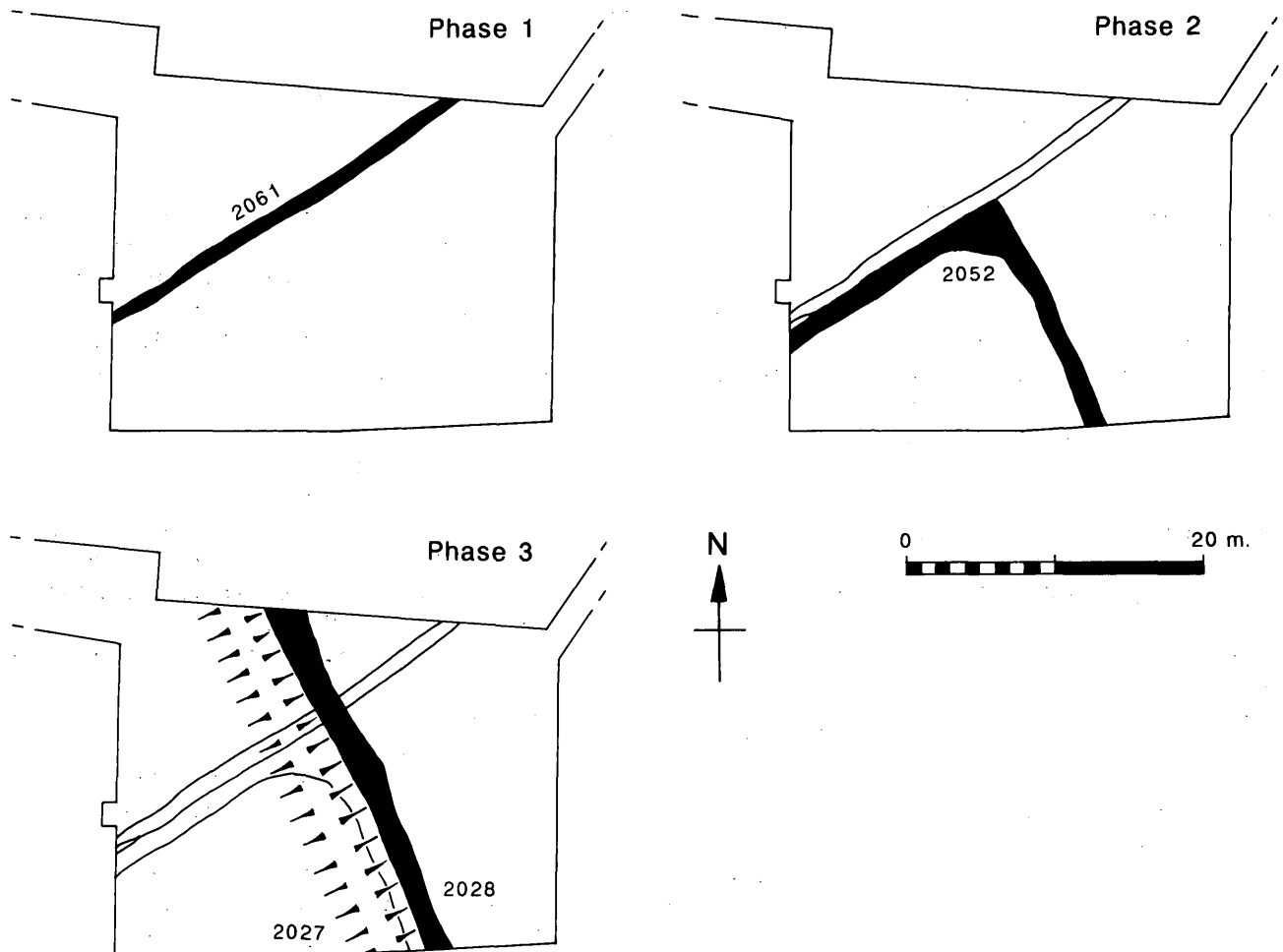


Figure 40 Area 2004: phase plan

soil. The few small areas where ploughsoil was removed produced no evidence of postholes, and such an interpretation must therefore remain speculative. The postholes which were found formed no significant pattern.

The cluster of postholes in the NW part of Trench 2004 contained no dating evidence except one probably residual sherd of late Bronze Age pottery in 2046. They may have been related to the gully 2033 and the pits in the vicinity (2039 and 2038) but no meaningful distribution can be established.

OLD PLOUGHSOILS/GROUND SURFACES

Several limited areas of old ground surface were located during the excavations. In Trench 2004 a small area of an old ground surface 2031 was recorded in the SW corner of the excavation, measuring approximately 2.5 x 2.0 m. It contained pottery which dated it to the 2nd century AD.

In Trench 2008 patches of preserved ground surface were recorded in the SE corner of the area. Layer 2220 consisted of

a sandy clay loam, its extent being approximately 4.0 x 1.5 m, with a maximum depth of 0.14 m. This had been cut by the 1st-century enclosure and it contained Roman pottery. To the S of 2220 other more limited patches of an old ground surface occurred (2240). These consisted of a sandy clay loam, containing flecks of charcoal and 5–10% gravel, and overlay a natural loess deposit. Again Roman pottery was recovered from these contexts.

The northern half of Trench 2008 was covered by an old ploughsoil 2202, which overlay most of the features in this area. It consisted of a clay loam with 30% gravel and varied in depth between 0.10 m to the N and 0.18 m to the S. It contained 26% by sherd number of the total assemblage of pottery from area 2000, ranging in date from the 1st through to the later 3rd or early 4th century (see Chapter 7: Roman pottery). It also contained two 3rd- to 4th-century *minimi* and a bronze *as* of Vespasian/Titus (AD 69–81), in addition to an early type of crossbow brooch of late 3rd- to 4th-century date. Either a late or post-Roman date therefore seems most likely for this context.