THE
OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

WOODEATON TEMPLE HILL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
MARCH 1991

(Islip parish)

WOODEATON TEMPLE HILL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Introduction

An archaeological assessment was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Mr Bill Hall of Littlemore, Oxford, in advance of proposed development on 5500 sq m of land on Temple Hill, which lies just north of the village of Woodeaton, Oxfordshire. The site, located at approximately SP 537124, lies on the upper south-facing slope of the hill, between 89 m and 94 m OD, and within 100 m of the site of a well-known Roman temple (Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 107). The development site itself is not within the scheduled area (see Fig. 1).

Previous work

A surface collection survey, undertaken by the Jeff Wallis (reported in 'Woodeaton Surface Finds Survey' by G Lambrick, 1990), indicated a 'dense concentration' of Romano-British and Iron Age pottery in this specific area. A magnetometer survey, conducted by Prof E T Hall in 1990, indicated minor subsurface anomalies which could not be interpreted unequivocally, but did not suggest any major archaeological features. However, the results were substantially affected by a pipe-line crossing the site, masking out more subtle archaeological anomalies.

Method

Eight trenches were excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator with a 1.6 m wide toothless bucket. Each was about 20 m long, and they were laid out in relation to the grid already established for the magnetometer survey. The area stripped represents a 4.65% sample of the assessment area.

Originally, four trenches were excavated in the northern 55 x 60 m demarcated area. Following the discovery of archaeological features in Trenches A, B, and D, further trenches (E - H) were excavated so as to define the extent of dense occupation south of Trench B, and to define the overall extent of light occupation to the south and west of the initial assessment area.

The trenches were cleaned by hand. A proportion, (88%), were hand-excavated to determine whether they were archaeological, and, if so, their nature and date.

Results

GENERAL

The modern ploughsoil was everywhere 25-40 cm deep, consisting

of a humic dark grey or greyish brown clay loam. Over most of the site, with the important exceptions of Trench B, and the southern end of Trench G, it directly overlay the natural Cornbrash bedrock, into which features were seen to be cut. The extent of plough-damage to archaeological deposits here cannot be estimated, but it is probable that features have been truncated, and that shallow features, together with any stratigraphy, will have been removed completely. In Trenches B and G, however, this type of stratigraphy did survive, and clearly, in places, the site is well-preserved.

Most of the identified features were small pits, post-holes, and gullies, concentrated towards the northern end of the assessment area (particularly in Trench B, and to a lesser degree in Trenches A and E).

An inventory of all archaeological features, by Trench/Feature No., is given in Annex 1. (The fourth column gives the colour of the dominant or upper soil fill of the feature).

TRENCH B

Under the modern ploughsoil was encountered a dark grey charcoal-rich friable clay loam, extending the length of the trench (Fig. 3, layer 2). In depth it varied between 20 cm (W end) and 10 cm (E end). It contained numerous fragments of burnt limestone and burnt daub, and a large quantity (1.5 kg) of Iron Age pottery. There were a few sherds of Roman pottery, but no post-Roman finds came from this layer. 13 post-holes and 6 pits were located. Many were seen to cut the dark layer, and others were sealed by it, but the stratigraphic relationship of many features could not be determined due to the similarity of their fills to this layer. It should be noted that the dark layer was not completely excavated, and it is likely to have concealed still other features.

Whether this layer is purely connected with domestic activities, or was the result of the destruction of a building by fire, is a question which cannot be resolved. In favour of the latter interpretation, it can be noted that most of the features in Trenches A and D, and a number in Trench E, had dark charcoal-rich fills, suggesting widespread rather than localised burning. It must be said, however, that there is no evidence of deep scorching. The underlying layer was a shallow (5-10 cm), greyish brown clay loam with few finds, and was interpreted as an Early Iron Age soil horizon.

TRENCHES A, E AND D

These trenches were similar in that they contained small groups of post-holes with similar dark soil fills. Trench E also contained what is probably a large pit (E/7, not excavated). These features probably relate to subsidiary structures associated with the occupation revealed in Trench B.

TRENCHES F, G AND H

Occasional features in these trenches indicate a light occupation. Beneath the modern ploughsoil in the southern 5 m of Trench G was encountered a light reddish brown colluvial subsoil, which followed the slope of the hill to a maximum depth of 0.2 m. This contained Iron Age and Roman pottery, and appeared to seal a narrow V-shaped gully (G/4) running into a small, flat-based pit (G/5) containing an Iron Age potsherd. Another narrow, V-shaped gully was found towards the northern end of the trench.

At the northern end of Trench H, a small, flat-based pit or ditch terminal was without finds, but might be associated with this occupation.

The finds

The overwhelming proportion of the pottery can be dated to the Early Iron Age (650 - 300 BC), with some of it probably slightly later. The pottery was in good condition and little abraded. While the assemblage does not suggest anything more than ordinary domestic activity, and there were were no finds of exotic materials, the scale of the work is too limited to provide a clear indication of the site's status in this respect. A fair quantity of daub is additional evidence of buildings or oven structures.

A few Roman potsherds came from the soil layers in Trenches B and G, but there was nothing to indicate that any of the features on this site are of this date. Knapped flint was sparse and did not suggest significant earlier prehistoric occupation here.

Conclusion

The assessment has shown dense Early Iron Age occupation at the northern end of the assessment area, which diminishes downslope in a southerly/south-westerly direction, but is present in all the trenches except Trench C. Trench B was exceptional, both in the density of features and material which it yielded, and in the survival of a charcoal-rich layer beneath the modern plough-soil, which appeared to have been little disturbed by later activity.

The area investigated is thus relatively well-preserved, but not uniformly so. The lack of disturbance by Middle Iron Age or later activity is a characteristic fairly unusual for Early Iron Age sites in the Thames Valley. Although there is an indication that less significant remains occur towards the south of the assessment area, the limit of occupation has not been reliably defined within the scope of this study. The results generally verify the pattern already discerned from the surface collection survey.

ANNEX 1: INVENTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES

Tr/Feature	Type	Shape	Fill	Width	Depth	Finds
A/2	post-hole	round	dk gr/br	0.38	0.20	pot bone
A/3	post-hole	round	dk grey	0.34	0.25	bone nail
A/4	post-hole	round	dk gr/br	0.36	0.12	pot
A/5	post-hole	round	lt brown	0.33	0.17	pot
A/6	pit	oval	dk grey	0.64	0.36	pot bone
A/7	post-hole	oval	dk gr/br	0.25	0.46	pot bone
B/5	pit	round	dk grey	0.60	0.25+	spindle-whorl
B/6	pit	round	dk grey	0.80	0.50+	pot bone
B/7	pit	round	dk grey	0.35	0.18	
B/8	post-hole	round	dk grey	0.20	0.12	
B/9	post-hole	round	dk grey	0.20	0.18	
B/10	post-hole	round	dk grey	0.20	0.12	
B/11	pit	round	grey/br	0.30	0.05	
B/12	post-hole	round	grey/br	0.16	0.15	
B/13	post-hole	round	dk grey	0.50	0.48	pot
B/14	post-hole	round	dk gr/br	0.24	0.11	pot
B/15	post-hole	round	dk grey	0.28	0.11	
B/16	pit	round	dk gr/br	0.32	0.34	pot
B/17	post-hole	round	lt brown	0.20	0.32	bone
B/18	post-hole	round?	grey/br	0.25	0.22	pot bone
B/19	pit	?	dk gr/br	0.60	0.22	
B/20	post-hole	round?	lt brown	0.20	0.25	pot
B/21	post-hole	oval	dk gr/br	0.27	0.32	pot bone
B/22	post-hole?	oval	dk grey	0.23	0.07	
B/23	post-hole?	round	dk gr/br	0.24	0.04	
D/1	post-hole	round	dk gr/br	0.33	0.10	pot bone
D/2	post-hole	round	dk gr/br	0.40	0.10	
D/3	post-hole	oval	dk gr/br	0.25	0.10	
E/1	post-hole	round	grey/br	0.30	0.10	
E/2	post-hole	oval	grey/br	0.25	0.14	pot
E/3	post-hole	oval	dk gr/br	0.25	0.26	pot
E/5	post-hole?	?	dk gr/br	0.45	?	
E/6	post-hole?	?	grey/br	0.35	?	daub
E/7	pit	oval?	dk gr/br	2.05	?	pot bone daub
E/8	post-hole?	round	grey/br	0.45	?	
E/9	post-hole?	round	grey/br	0.35	?	
E/10	post-hole?	round	grey/br	0.30	0.12	
F/2	post-hole	oval	grey/br	0.25	0.35	bone pot
G/3	gully	linear	lt gr/br	0.20	0.10	
G/4	gully	linear	lt brown	0.25	0.15	
G/5	pit	round	lt brown	0.50	0.18	pot
H/2	pit/ditch	?	lt brown	1.00	0.26	

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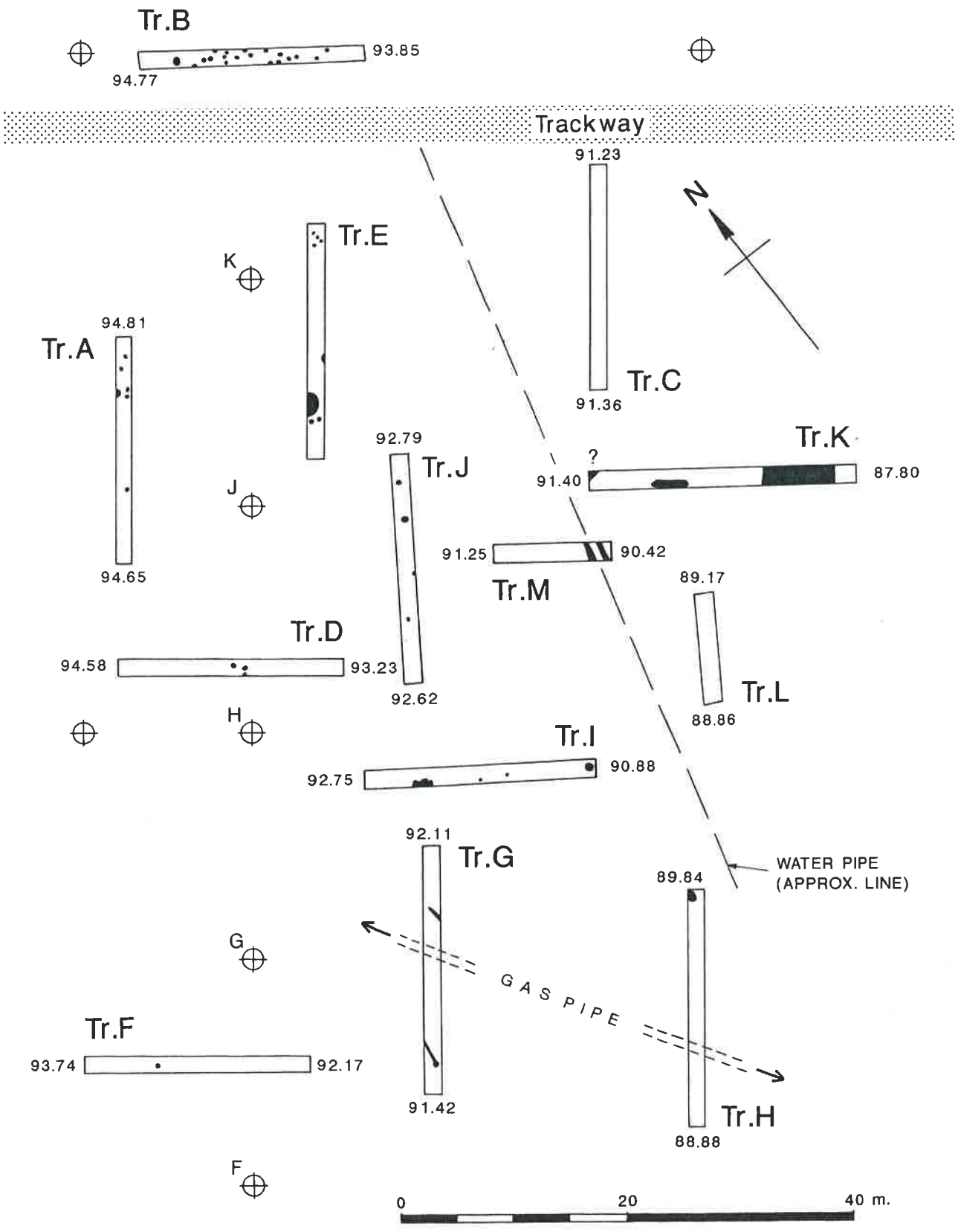


fig 1

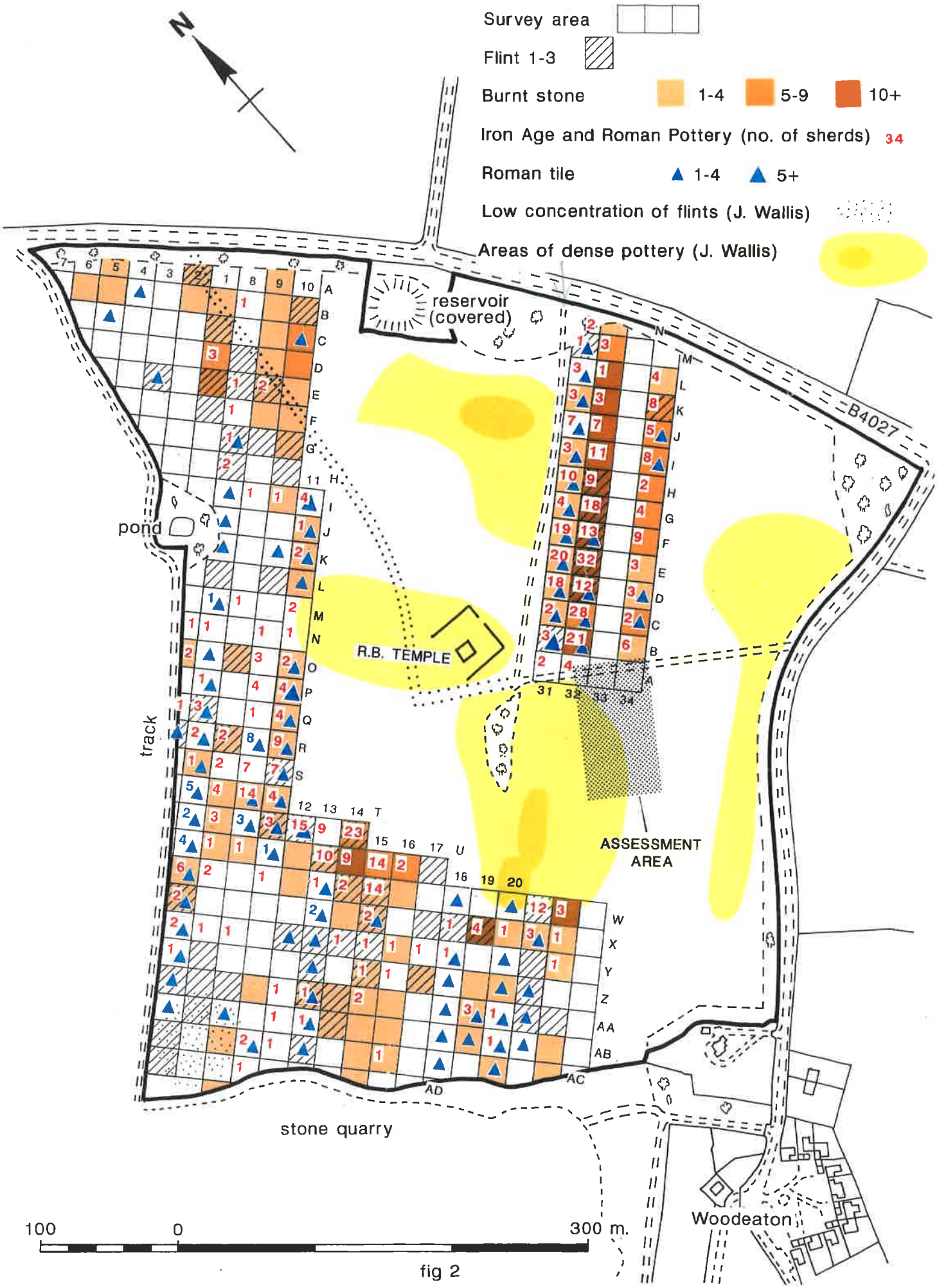
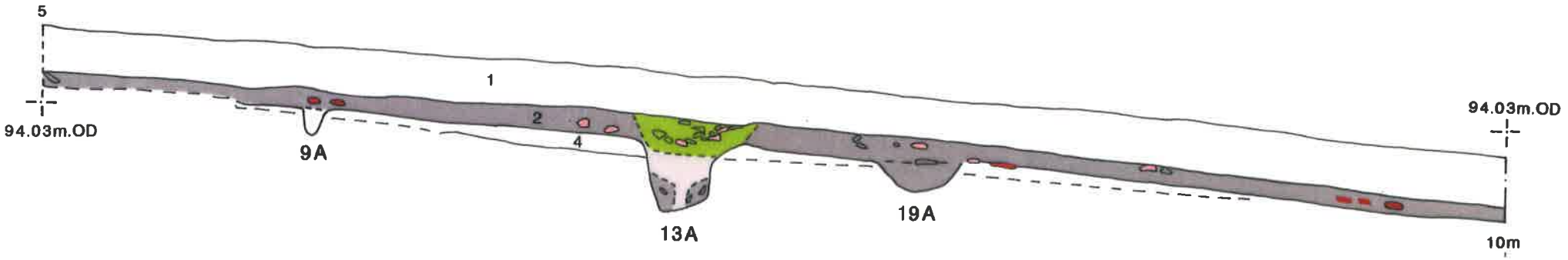

N
Survey area
Flint 1-3
Burnt stone
1-4
5-9
10+
Iron Age and Roman Pottery (no. of sherds)
34
Roman tile
1-4
5+
Low concentration of flints (J. Wallis)
Areas of dense pottery (J. Wallis)
reservoir (covered)
B4027
pond
R.B. TEMPLE
track
ASSESSMENT AREA
stone quarry
Woodeaton
100
0
300 m.

fig 2

WOODEATON TEMPLE HILL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Trench B
North East trench edge section



Burnt limestone

Burnt daub

fig 3

APPENDIX TO THE ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR TEMPLE HILL WOODEATON

Introduction

Five further trenches were dug by mechanical excavator to supplement those of the original assessment. Three (I - K) were 20 m long, and two (L and M) were 10 m long. They were 1.6 m wide. They were excavated down to the natural Cornbrash, which was hand-cleaned and brushed to reveal any features. The trenches were laid out in relation to the grid used for the previous assessment.

Results

Trenches I and J contained post-holes and pits similar to those encountered in Trenches A, E and D in the initial assessment. These features yielded some Early Iron Age pottery, slag (of an as yet unidentified character) and bone, but finds were relatively sparse.

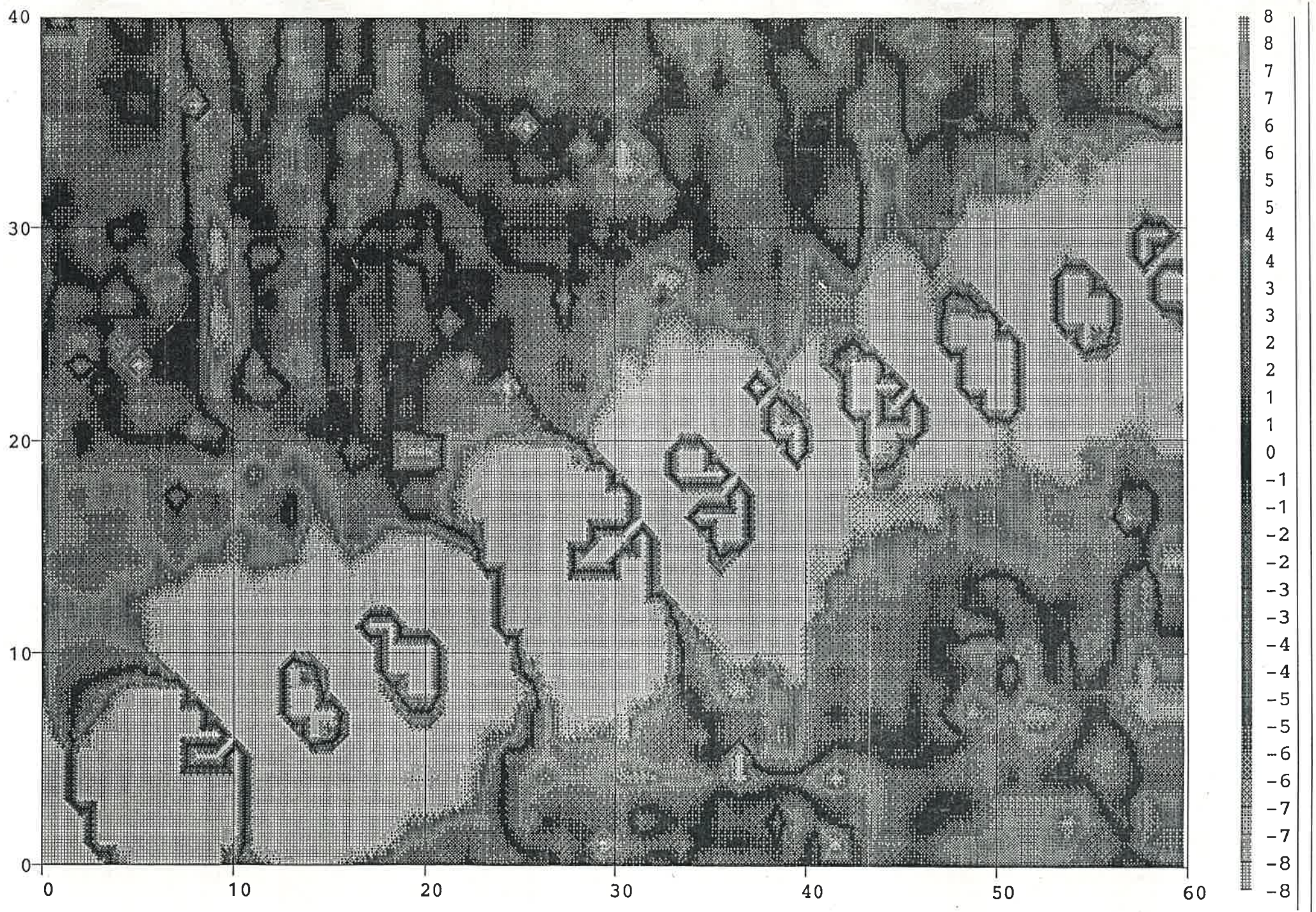
At the SE end of Trench K was encountered a large north-south aligned ditch, which contained a few sherds of Early Iron Age pottery. It was excavated to a depth of 0.2 m, but not bottomed.

In Trench M, a ditch running northeast-southwest was cut by the modern water-pipe trench. No finds came from this trench, nor from Trench L.

These additional trenches indicate that the Early Iron Age occupation continued further towards the SE part of the site than the initial assessment suggested. While there is a reduction in the density of small features towards the SE, the presence of ditches in Trenches K and M indicate that the limit of occupation here has not been reached.

Table of archaeological features

Tr/feature	Type	Shape	Fill	Width	Depth	Finds
I/3	pit?	irreg.	red/br	2.4	0.2	-
I/4	post-hole	round	lt gr/br	0.27	-	-
I/5	post-hole	round	lt gr/br	0.3	-	-
I/6	pit	round	lt gr/br	0.8	0.13	slag
J/3	post-hole	round	lt gr/br	0.4	-	-
J/4	post-hole	round	lt gr/br	0.2	-	-
J/5	post-hole	round	gr/br	0.55	0.29	pot,bone
J/6	post-hole	round	gr/br	0.45	0.22	daub
K/3	gully?	linear	red/br	0.4	0.15	-
K/4	ditch	linear	gr/br	5.0	0.2 +	pot
M/3	ditch	linear	lt gr/br	1.4	-	-


40
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