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Archaeological Field Unit

Iron Age and Roman Settlement Remains near Tort Hill, Sawtry

K Welsh

103

1994

Cambridgeshire County Council

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SUMMARY

During November and December 1993, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological assessment of land along the A1 trunk road, which follows the line of Roman Ermine Street, just to the north of Sawtry. The work was carried out on behalf of the Transportation Department of Cambridgeshire County Council.

On the west side of the A1 (centred on TL 1720 8460), a small ditched enclosure and various pits and ditches were revealed, probably representing a farmstead. Pottery from some of these features indicate that settlement initially occurred in the period immediately before the Roman invasion of Britain in the first century AD, and possibly continued well into the Roman period.

To the east of the A1 (centred on TL 1720 8485), a large number of pits, ditches, and other features were recorded. These produced a large quantity of, mainly, second to fourth century, Roman pottery, as well as iron objects, coins, and other domestic refuse. These deposits probably represent a peripheral area of a Roman roadside settlement, where activities such as rubbish disposal, and perhaps small scale industrial processing, took place.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 BACKGROUND	1
3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	3
4 METHODS AND CONSTRAINTS	3
5 RESULTS	3
6 DISCUSSION	12
CONCLUSIONS	15
BIBLIOGRAPHY	16
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	16
 LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 Location map and site plan of trench locations	2
Figure 2 Plan of features in Trench A	4
Figure 3 Section across Cut 38	5
Figure 4 Section across Cut 67	5
Figure 5 Section showing deposits in Trench B	6
Figure 6 Trench D: plan of features	7
Figure 7 Section across features in Trench D	8
Figure 8 Trench 6: plan of features	9
Figure 9 Trench 7: plan of features	11
Figure 10 a) Devolved Gallo-Belgic platter (probably local, coarse reduced ware) from Ditch 69 b) Imitation Samian Drag f27 (fine reduced ware) from Layer 4 c) Plain-rimmed bag-shaped beaker (Nene Valley colour coat) from Layer 4 d) Stamped imitation Samian Drag. f30 (Nene Valley greyware from Ditch 38	13
Figure 11 a) Central Gaulish Terra Sigillata platter with a post-firing graffito from Layer 4 b) Large ?beaker with orange colour coat (Nene Valley colour coat) with post-firing beaker with orange colour coat (Nene Valley colour coat) with a post-firing graffito on exterior base, from Ditch 67	14
 APPENDIX	
A The Pottery from Sawtry	17

1 INTRODUCTION

From 15th November to 3rd December 1993, a team from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an assessment of land on either side of the A1 trunk road at Sawtry, Cambridgeshire (*Figure 1*). The work was commissioned by the Transportation Department of the County Council in advance of the A1 widening scheme. Two 'desk-top' surveys of the A1 corridor carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit (Evans and Shotliff 1990, Pelling and Leith 1992), have identified the area as having high archaeological potential.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The assessment area (from TL 1730 8430 to TL 1710 8500) lies immediately to the north of the village of Sawtry, with a high point of about 16m OD at Tort Hill. The land slopes down, fairly steeply at first, to the north and east, the northern part of the area being relatively flat. The site lies on Boulder Clay, close to the Fen edge to the east.

3 BACKGROUND

The village of Sawtry lies on the route of Roman Ermine Street, and is rich in archaeological remains of that period. During the realignment of the A1 in 1939, a Romano-British settlement was partially excavated at Tort Hill (Garrod 1940; 1947). Pottery from the site indicates that it was occupied from the second to the fourth century. Various other chance finds may have been associated with this settlement. A number of Roman urns, for example, found during the eighteenth century, may represent a cremation cemetery (TL 17/82). Indications of a second area of settlement, further to the north, were found during a field-walking survey undertaken by Sawtry Archaeological Society. A significant quantity of Roman material, including pottery sherds, roof tile, and 25 coins, were collected from a field (centred on TL 173/848) immediately to the east of the present A1. An anecdotal report that two Barnack stone coffins were also found in the area, during road widening in the 1960s, proved unfounded. In fact, two such coffins were found, but further north at Water Newton.

Earthworks at Tort Hill (Scheduled Ancient Monument, SAM 172) which consist of an embanked rectangular platform, 100m square containing a circular feature 30m across, were once thought to be a Roman signal station overlooking Ermine Street. Excavations in 1965 (Edwardson et al, 1966), however, indicated that the platform was not in use before the thirteenth century, and it was re-interpreted as a Civil War gun battery. The circular feature may be part of this emplacement, although it has also been suggested that it is the site of a medieval mill.

Adjacent to the platform, further earthworks (also part of SAM 172) mark the site of the Shrunken Medieval Village (SMV) of Sawtry. They include a rectangular moated site, a number of banks, ditches, house platforms, and hollows, as well as ridge and furrow. Further areas of ridge and furrow, surviving as earthworks, can also be seen immediately to the south, and also on the far side of the A1. It is clear from an aerial photograph, taken in 1945, that, until recently, the area of ridge and furrow was much more extensive.

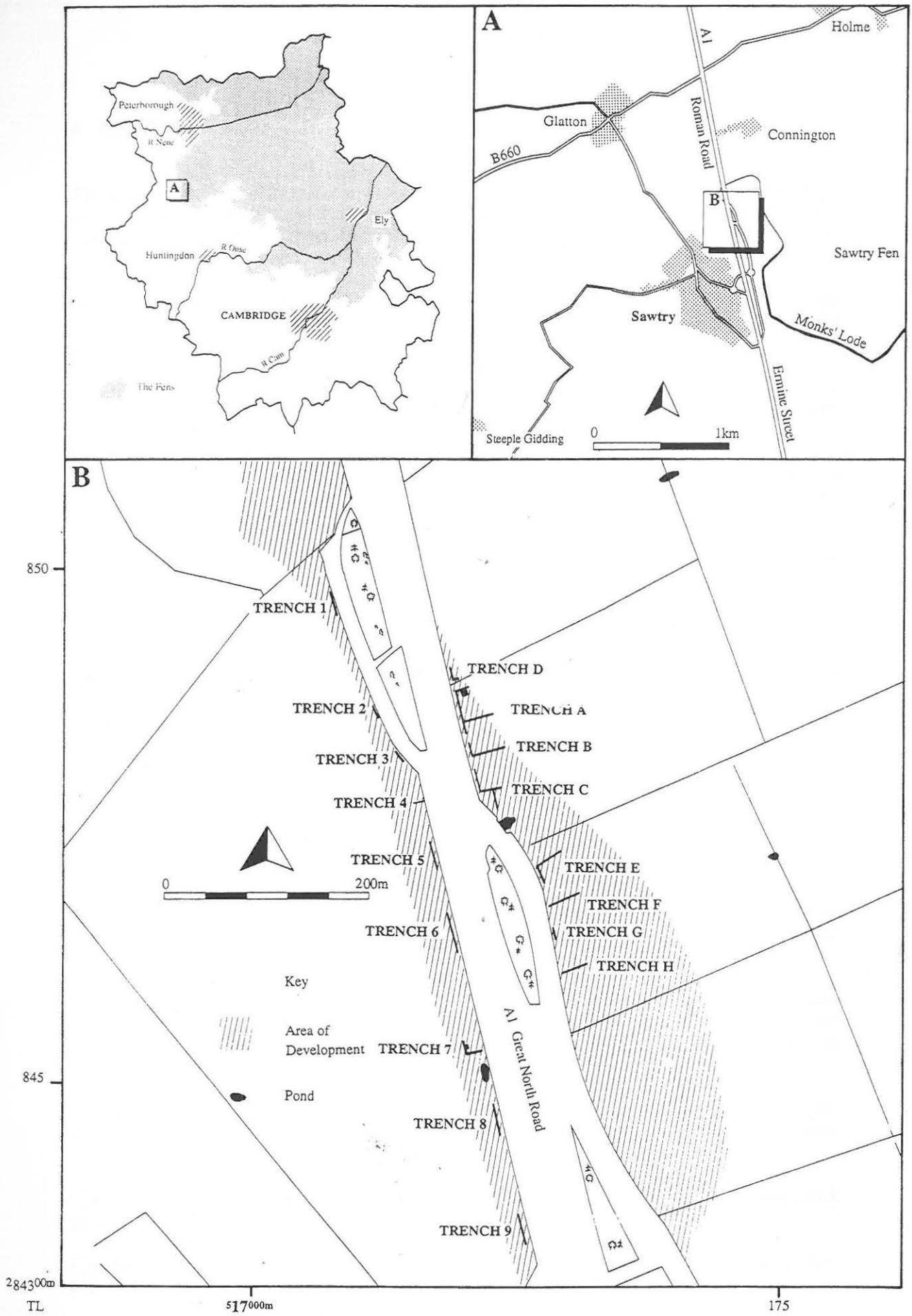


Figure 1 Location map and site plan of trench locations

4 METHODS AND CONSTRAINTS

The area from Tort Hill north to Connington Bridge was identified as an area of high archaeological potential, largely because of the Romano-British settlement at Tort Hill and the Roman finds scatter further to the north. On the western side, a relatively narrow strip of land will be required, since much of the extra road width will be accommodated within the present verges and central reservation. On the eastern side, a new roundabout and slip roads will involve a much greater intake of land. It was therefore decided that a series of trial trenches should be opened on either side of the A1 (see *Figure 1*).

On the western side, nine trenches, totalling 420 square metres, were opened using a mechanical excavator with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket. On the eastern side, seven trenches were opened with a total area of 590 square metres.

Once opened, the trenches were cleaned, photographed, and planned, so that any archaeological features could be selectively excavated and recorded using the standard techniques of the Archaeological Field Unit.

Weather and ground conditions made excavation extremely arduous. This was especially so on the eastern side where heavy clay and daily freezing and thawing of the ground surface made the trenches unworkable at times. On both sides of the road, extensive agricultural 'sub-soiling', to improve drainage of the top soil, caused waterlogging within the trenches. These problems were exacerbated by the low angle of the sun, which rendered feature recognition extremely difficult. As a result, detailed description of individual features was very often impossible, making their interpretation difficult.

5 RESULTS

The Eastern Side

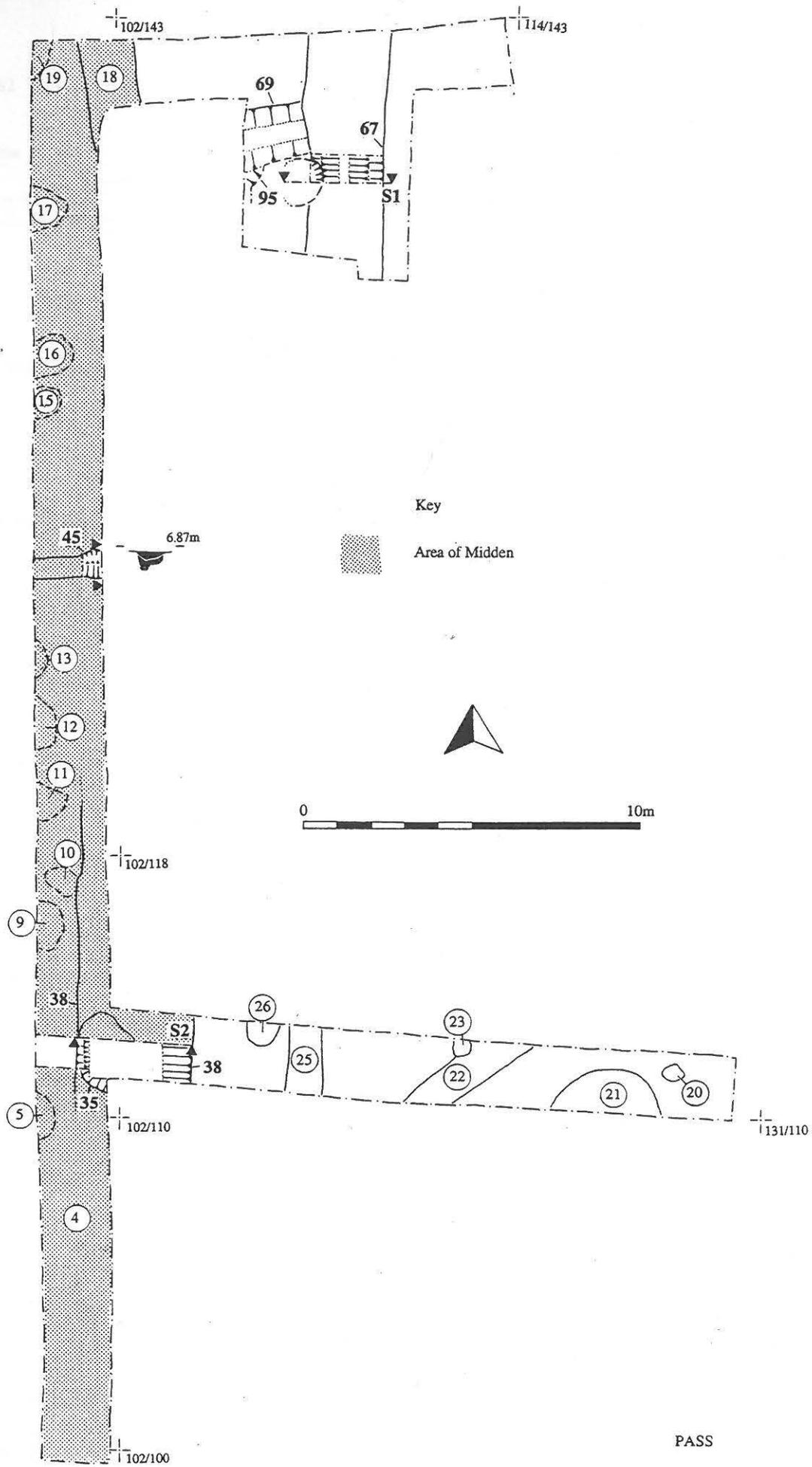
Trench A (*Figure 2*) This trench contained a high density of features, many of which could not be properly defined due to waterlogged and frozen conditions. For this reason, it was necessary to abandon parts of the trench after machining and, therefore, many features were not investigated.

Layer 4, more than 40m by 1.6m, and up to 0.25m thick, was a dark greyish brown, silty clay which contained large quantities of pottery, charcoal fragments, some bone and oyster shell, and limestone fragments. The pottery dated from the later first-early fourth centuries.

Cut 38, (*Figure 3*) 2m wide, 0.35m deep, and at least 10m long, orientated north-south, contained two fills, 7 and 34, both dark greyish brown, silty clays. Both contained later first-early third century pottery, as well as animal bone and oyster shell.

Cuts 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 19 were not excavated but contained similar dark greyish brown, silty clay fills.

Cut 35, 1.20m by 0.90m, and 0.18m deep, contained a dark greyish brown, silty clay, Fill 8, with abraded pottery dated to the later third century or later.



PASS

Figure 2 Plan of features in Trench A

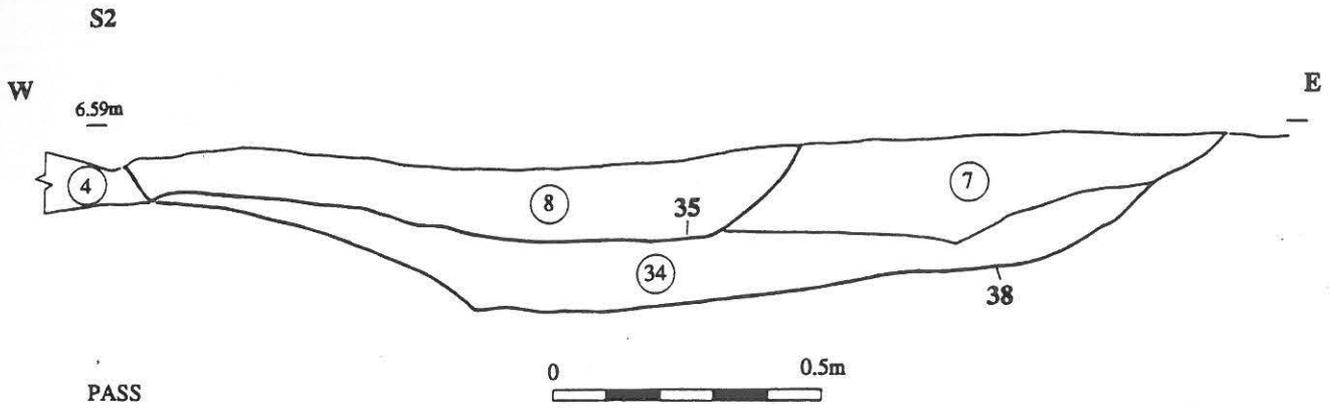


Figure 3 Section across Cut 38

Cut 67, 2.1m wide, 0.9m deep, at least 7m long, and orientated north-south, contained three fills (*Figure 4*). The upper fill, 30, was a dark, greyish brown, sandy clay silt, 0.1m thick. It overlay Fill 29, a mottled, yellowish brown, sandy clay silt, up to 0.45m thick. The primary fill, 72, was a greyish brown, sandy silty clay. All of the fills contained pottery fragments, including several large base fragments from the primary fill. The upper fill contained material datable to the fourth century. Some animal bone was also present.

Cut 69, 1.8m wide, and 0.7m deep, more than 2.0m long, and orientated north-east to south-west, contained two fills. The upper fill, 68, was a brown, silty clay and contained occasional small fragments of pottery. The lower fill, 93, was a yellowish brown, slightly sandy silty clay, very similar to the natural clay, but containing occasional small pot sherds. The south-eastern edge of Ditch 69 was very unclear and appeared to be cut into another feature, Cut 95, the shape and extent of which was not clear.

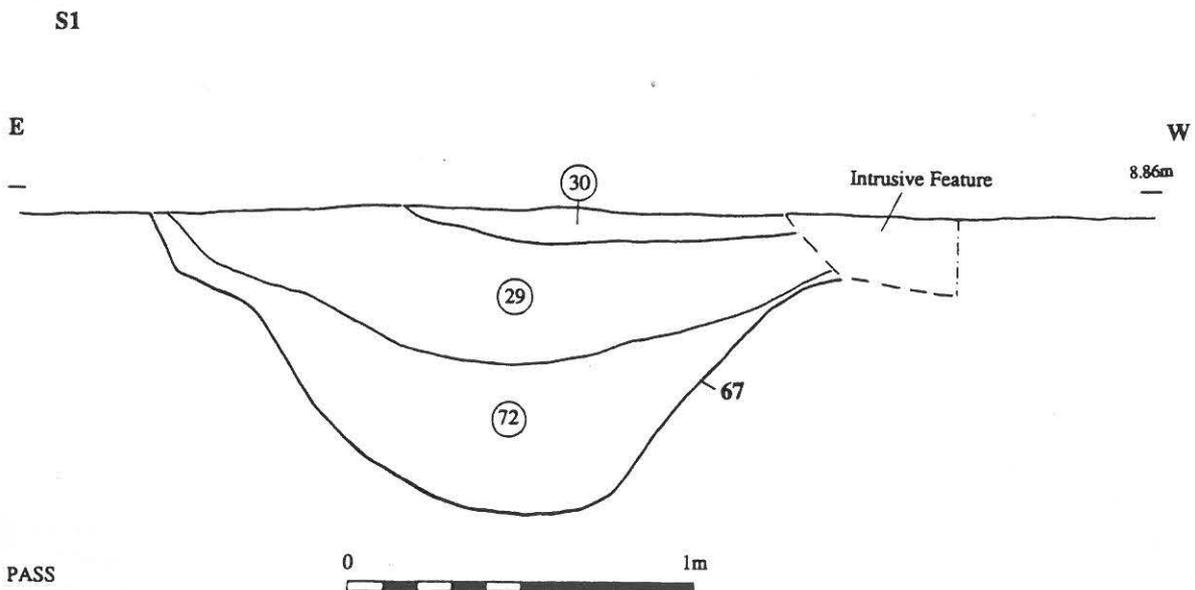


Figure 4 Section across Cut 67

Cuts 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 were not excavated but contained yellowish brown, silty clay fills.

Trench B Waterlogged and frozen conditions prevented detailed recording but it was clear that many features were present, often made evident by the presence of Roman pottery on the freshly machined surface. In the western part of the trench, a dark silty layer, similar to Layer 4 in Trench A, was recorded. A test-pit, 1.5m square, was excavated in order to determine the depth of deposits (*Figure 5*). A series of layers or fills, 78, 79, 81, and 82, were excavated down to natural clay at a depth of 0.65m below the base of the ploughsoil. All of the layers contained numbers of pottery sherds, including those of fine colour-coated wares. As in Trench A, features in the eastern part of the trench were generally much lighter in colour, but ground conditions prevented excavation.

Trench C The density of features in this trench was much lower than in Trenches A and B, and the dark layer was not present. Once again, waterlogged and frozen conditions prevented extensive excavation.

Cut 85, 0.85m wide, 0.40m wide, orientated east-west, contained Fill 84, a greyish brown, sandy silty clay with pottery dated to the third-fourth centuries. It also contained animal bone and occasional iron nails.

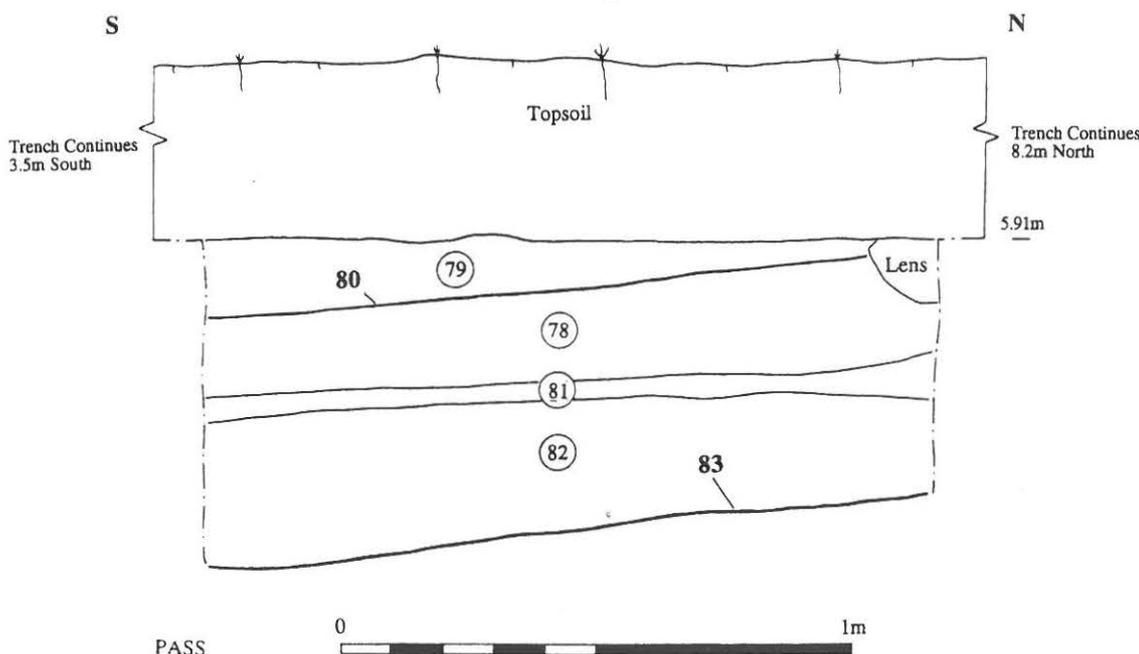


Figure 5 Section showing deposits in Trench B

Layer 48, 0.15m deep, was a greyish brown, sandy silty clay and contained pottery dated to the second-fourth centuries. It also contained animal bone

Trench D (*Figures 6 and 7*) The southern half of this trench contained a high density of features:

Cut 61, an east to west running ditch, 2.0m wide, 0.7m deep, and at least 6.5m long, contained two fills. The upper one, 43, was a dark brownish grey, silty clay with frequent pottery fragments, as well as occasional iron nails, and tile and limestone fragments. The lower fill, 60, was a greenish grey, silty clay containing occasional pottery and tile fragments. The pottery dated to the third to fourth centuries;

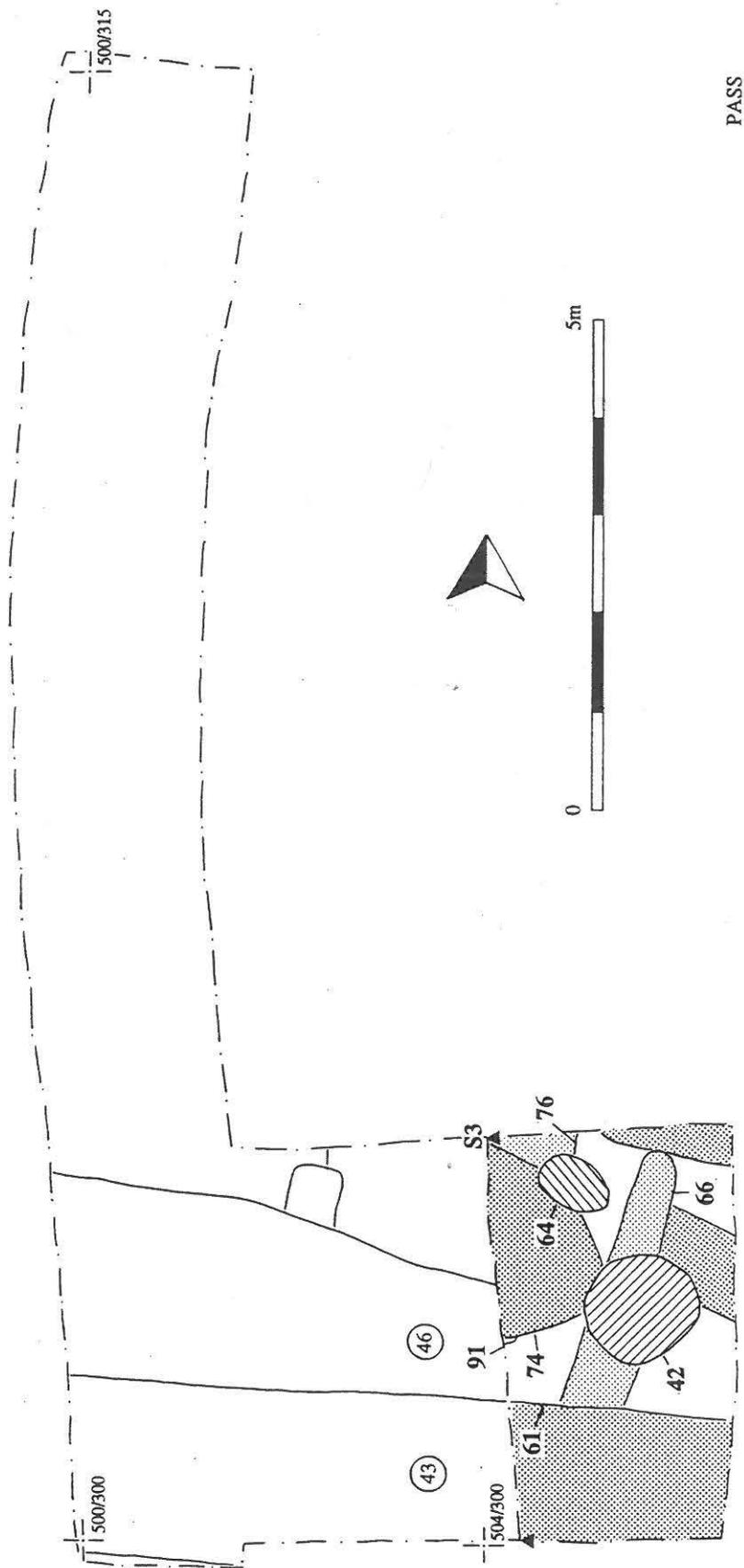


Figure 6 Trench D: plan of features (features are shaded for clarity only: similar shading does not imply a similar date)

Pit 42, 1.38m long, 1.05m wide, and 0.2m deep, contained a greenish brown, silty clay with occasional pottery fragments dated to the second century or later;

Layer 46, up to 0.27m thick, a dark, greenish grey, silty clay, contained frequent pottery fragments, occasional bone, oyster shell, tile fragments, limestone blocks (one of them worked), and glass fragments. It also contained a copper alloy coin of Claudius II Gothicus (268-270). The latest pottery dates from post c AD 250;

Cut 64, 0.70m by 0.44, and 0.09m deep, contained Fill 63, a dark brownish grey, silty clay with abraded pottery dating from the first to second centuries;

Cut 66, 0.65m wide, 0.13m deep, and more than 2.7m long, was orientated north-east to south-west, and was butt-ended to the north-east. It contained Fill 65, a mid greyish brown, silty clay with abraded pottery dating to the first to second centuries;

Cut 74, at least 2.0m by 1.1m, and 0.19m deep, contained Fill 73, a yellowish brown, silty clay. It contained pottery dating to the second to third centuries;

Cut 76, at least 1.0m by 0.9m, and 0.5m deep, contained Fill 75, a dark brownish grey, silty clay with abraded pottery dating to the first century;

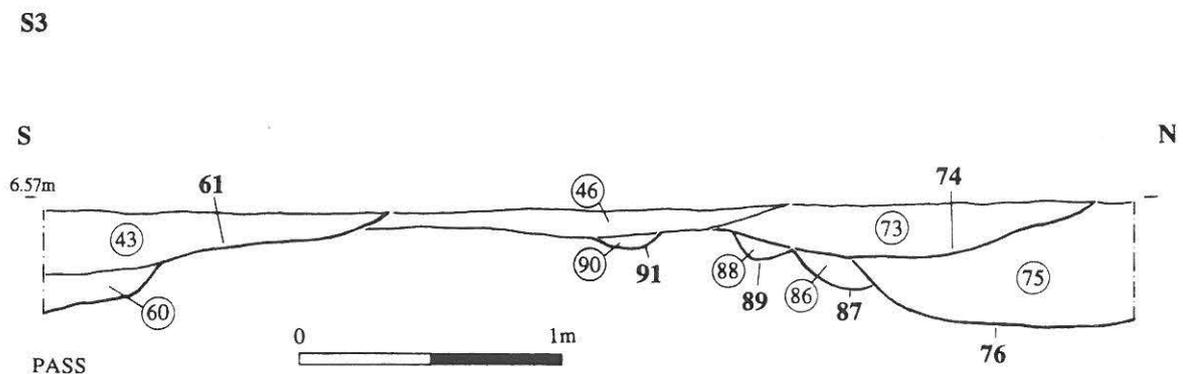


Figure 7 Section across features in Trench D

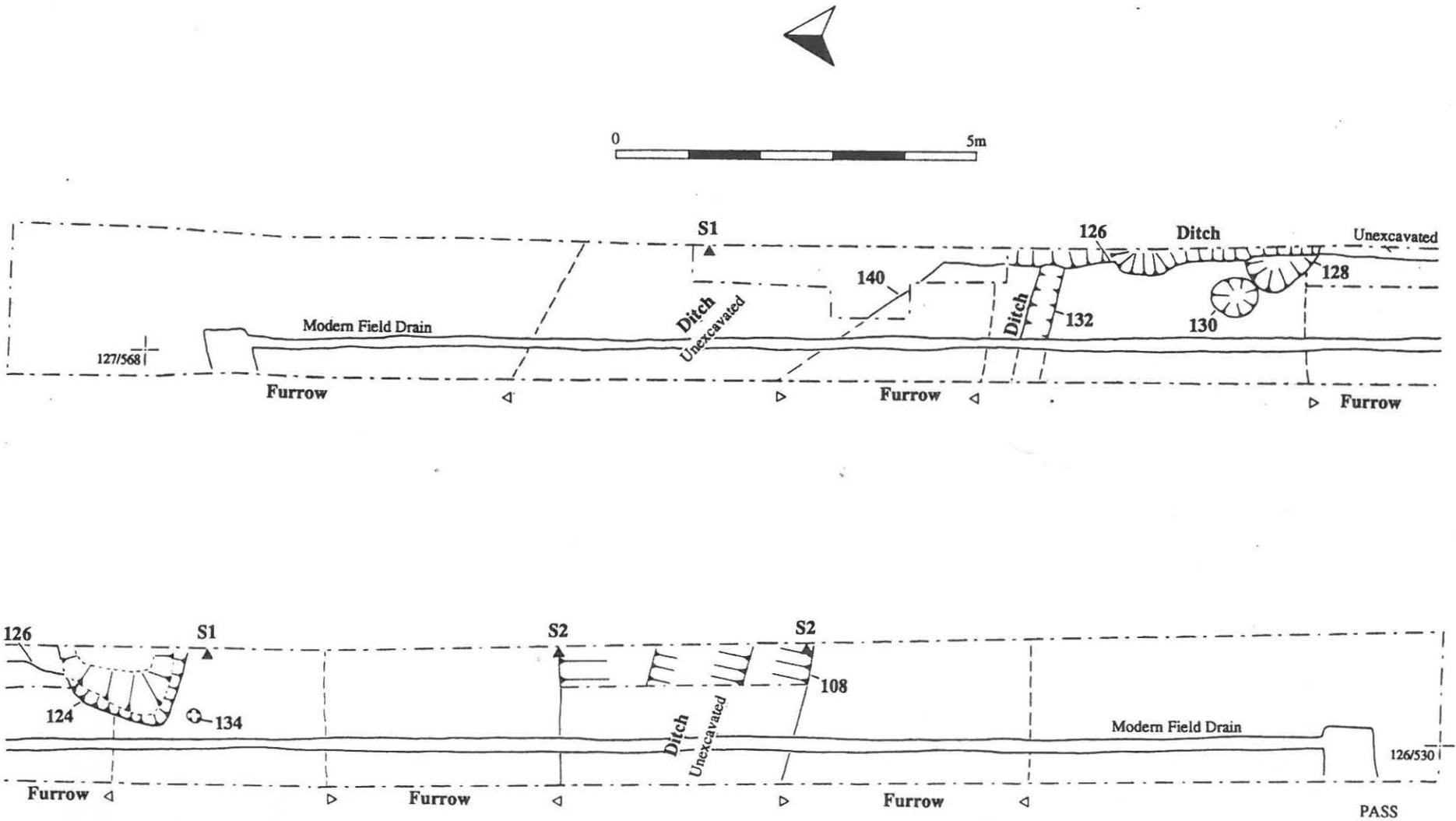
Cut 87, 0.33m by 0.2m, and 0.2m deep, contained Fill 86, a yellowish brown, silty clay with pottery dating from the first to second centuries;

Cut 89, 0.22m by 0.19m, and 0.1m deep, contained Fill 88, a yellowish brown, silty clay;

Cut 91, 0.2m by 0.2m, and 0.1m, contained Fill 90, a yellowish brown, silty clay.

Trenches E, F, and G A linear cut, containing modern glass and plastic, ran parallel to the western field boundary. It was interpreted as a pipe trench. No other archaeological features were observed.

Figure 8 Trench 6: plan of features



The Western Side

Trenches 1 to 5 No archaeological features were observed. A linear feature in Trench 1 contained a plastic pen top and modern milk bottles. No utility trenches (gas, water, and so forth) were expected in this area, but it may be associated with the widening of the A1 in the 1960s.

Trench 6 (Figure 8) Large, ill-defined, parallel, linear features, running east-west, were observed throughout this trench. They were 3.5 to 4m wide, up to 0.4m deep, and about 7m from the centre-line of one to the next. A fragment of medieval or Post-medieval peg-tile was recovered from one of them. Beneath these linear features were several pits and ditches:

Cut 108, an east-west ditch, was 3.6m wide, and 1m deep. It contained four fills, 114, 115, 116, and 117. Fill 114 was an orange brown, silty clay. Fill 115 was a mottled orange brown and grey, silty clay. Fill 116 was a mottled orange brown and grey, sandy silty clay. Fill 117 was a greyish brown, silty sandy clay. It had been re-cut twice, Cuts **118** and **119**. The first re-cut, **119**, contained three fills, 107, 112, 113. Fill 107 was a greyish brown, sandy silty clay and contained occasional abraded pottery fragments dating to the second century. Fill 112 was a dark greyish brown, sandy silty clay. The second re-cut, **118**, contained a single fill, 111, a greyish brown, sandy clay silt;

Cut 124, a sub-rectangular pit or ditch terminal, extended beyond the edge of excavation, but was at least 1.8m by 1m, and 0.75m deep. It contained two fills: Fill 102 was a dark, greyish brown, silty clay containing occasional abraded pottery fragments dating to the first-second centuries; the lower fill, 120, was a mottled brown, silty clay containing abraded sherds of late pre-Roman Iron Age, or early Roman, pottery;

Cut 126, a north-south ditch, ran along the eastern edge of the trench so that only its western edge was exposed. It contained Fill 125, a greyish brown silty clay with abraded first century AD pottery sherds and bone fragments;

Cut 140, running north-west to south-east, may have been contemporary with Ditch 126 although the relationship was unclear. Although only partially excavated, Ditch 140 contained at least three fills, 136, 141, and 142, all brown silty clays. The lowest fill, 142, contained first to second century pottery sherds;

Cut 134, a post-hole, 0.2m in diameter, and 0.15m deep, contained Fill 97, a greyish brown, sandy silty clay with very small fragments of pottery or burnt clay;

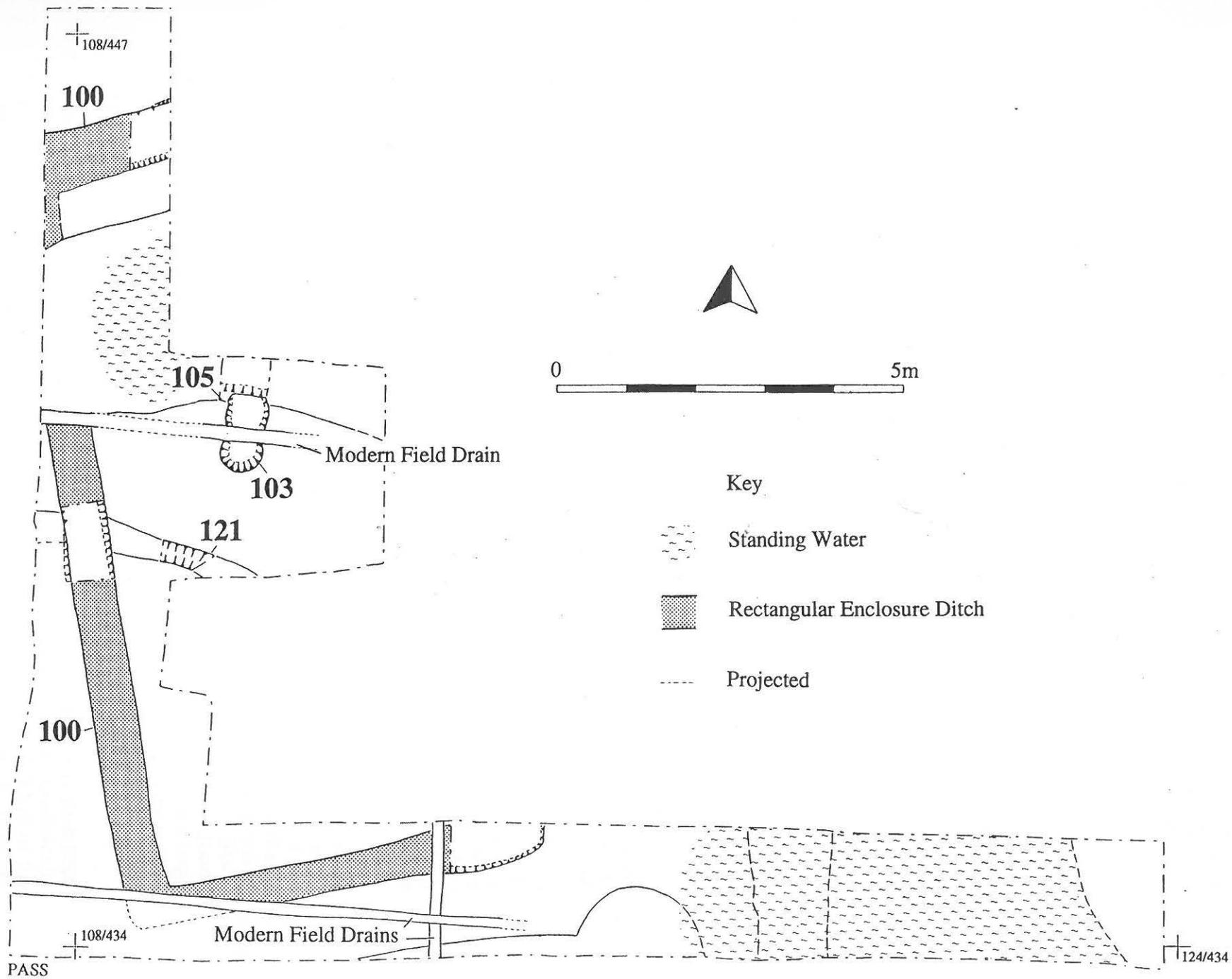
Pit 128, truncated by Ditch 126, was at least 1m by 0.5m, and 0.3m deep. It contained a greyish brown, sandy silty clay, Fill 127, with occasional abraded pottery dating from the first century AD, and occasional animal bone fragments;

Pit 130, a sub-circular cut, 0.6m by 0.5m, and 0.1m deep, contained Fill 129, virtually identical to Fill 127. It contained abraded pottery fragments dating to the first century AD, and possibly late pre-Roman Iron Age;

Cut 132, an east-west running cut, may have been contemporary with Ditch 126. It was 0.3m wide and 0.15m deep, and contained Fill 131, a greyish-brown silty clay.

Trench 7 (Figure 9) The eastern part of this trench was permanently waterlogged and could not be excavated. There were, however, darker patches visible against the natural silty clay when the trench was first opened.

Figure 9 Trench 7: plan of features



A rectilinear enclosure, 11m by 6m, was formed by a ditch, Cut 100, up to 0.8m wide and 0.28m deep. It was filled with dark greyish brown, silty clay, Fill 99 (also numbered 101 and 123), and contained occasional small sherds of pottery perhaps dating to the late pre-Roman Iron Age. The outer edge of the ditch was undercut, the inner edge vertical. Part of the western edge was truncated by Cut 105, filled with greyish brown silty clay, Fill 106

Cut 103, also truncated by Cut 105, contained dark greyish brown, silty clay, Fill 104, with fragments of clay tobacco pipe and brick.

Cut 121, a small ditch or gully, was up to 0.4m across and 0.2m deep. It contained a dark greyish brown, silty clay. No pottery was retrieved, but it was stratigraphically earlier than Enclosure Ditch 100.

Trenches 8 and 9 No archaeological features were visible in these trenches.

6 DISCUSSION

The East Side In spite of the problems encountered in excavating waterlogged and frozen trenches, it is clear that a site of some importance is represented by the features in Trenches A to D. The increase in feature density towards the west, accompanied by a marked increase in the quantity of pottery and other artefacts within features, strongly suggests that the focus of the site lay slightly further to the west.

While no structural remains were encountered, quantities of building material, including tile and limestone fragments, may indicate that a building, or buildings, existed close by. Layer 4, in Trench A, may be a midden layer, gradually deposited over many years and, consequently, containing pottery from a wide date-range. This impression is reinforced by the presence of features cut from different levels within Layer 4. Cut 38 appears to form the eastern limit of the midden although possibly partly overlain by it. Cut 61, orientated east to west, and Cut 67, orientated north-south, may have been boundary ditches forming the limits of a settlement plot, although they are not necessarily contemporary with each other. Most of the other features investigated in Trenches A to D are consistent with this being a peripheral area of the settlement, used for rubbish disposal, and possibly for other secondary activities, although it is not possible to be more specific at this stage.

The pottery dates from the first to fourth centuries AD, the majority being consistent with dates in the second and third centuries (Going, Appendix A). The assemblage, which includes coarsewares and some finer wares (*Figure 10*), is characteristic of the area and was probably manufactured in the Nene Valley potteries and, perhaps, Bedfordshire. There was virtually no material from further afield except a few sherds of Gaulish Samian (in common with almost all Roman sites) and a single sherd of Black Burnished Ware (BB1) from Dorset. Two sherds with fragmentary graffiti were found (*Figure 11*). One, on a Samian bowl from layer 4, read NA(...). The second, on a large ? beaker from the Nene Valley, is potentially more interesting. Although at first read as IE(...), it may well be part of a swastika, a symbol commonly found on mosaics but rarely as a graffito.

The function of roadside settlements is not clearly understood but some may have been based primarily on agricultural activities or pottery production. Other, small-scale, activities, such as metal, bone and leather working, were also practised. Most of the settlements took the form of narrow, ribbon developments along the roads, with the depth of the settlement plots from the roadside being fairly consistent at around 40m (Smith, 1987). If the large ditch, Cut 67, is the back boundary ditch of the plot then the Roman road might be expected to lie under the western carriageway of the modern A1.

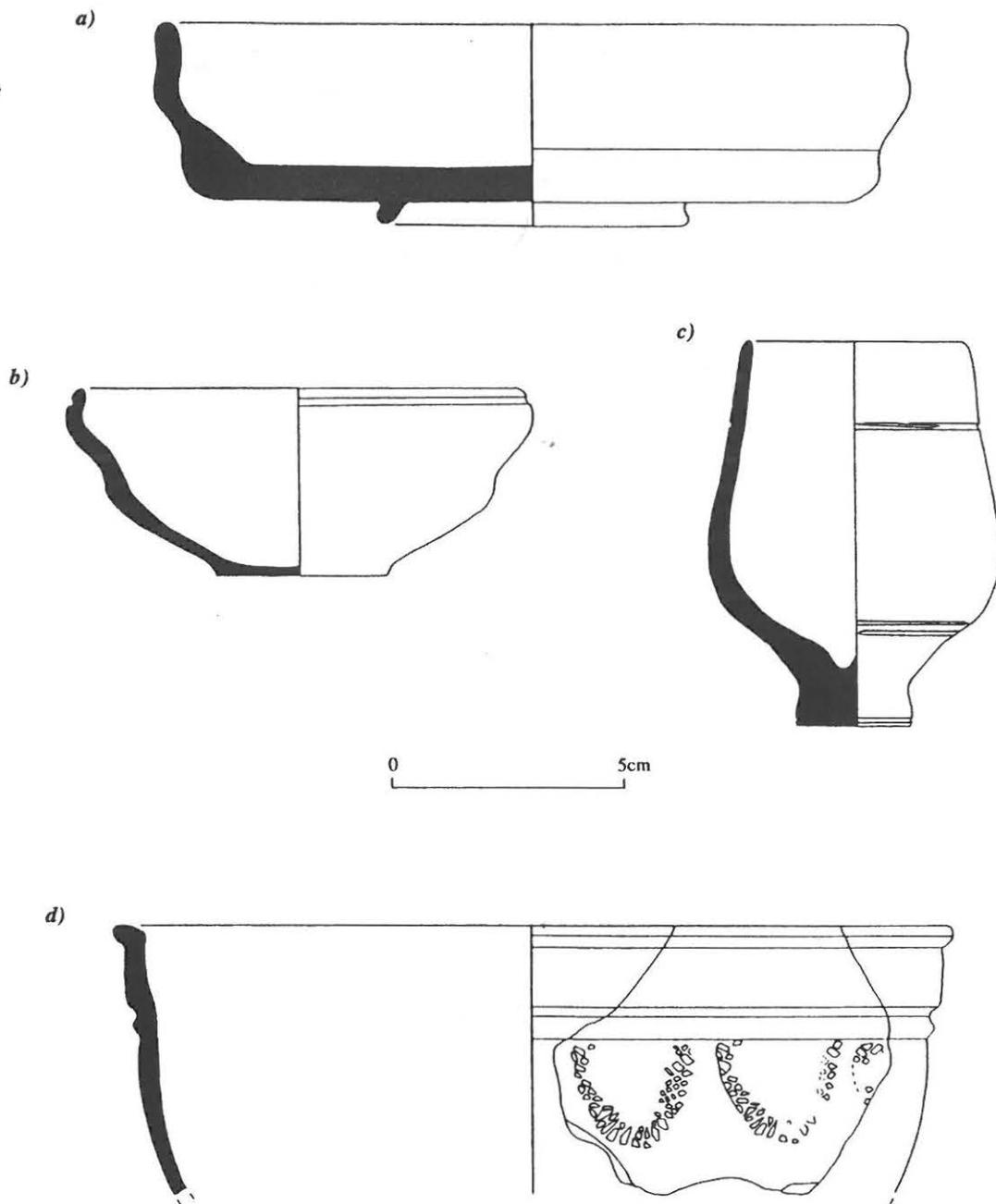


Figure 10 a) Devolved Gallo-Belgic platter (probably local, coarse reduced ware) from Ditch 69 b) Imitation Samian Drag. f27 (fine reduced ware), probably originally burnished overall, now abraded, from Layer 4 c) Plain-rimmed bag-shaped beaker (Nene Valley colour coat), from Layer 4 d) Stamped imitation Samian, Drag. f30 (R+) (Nene Valley greyware), from Ditch 38

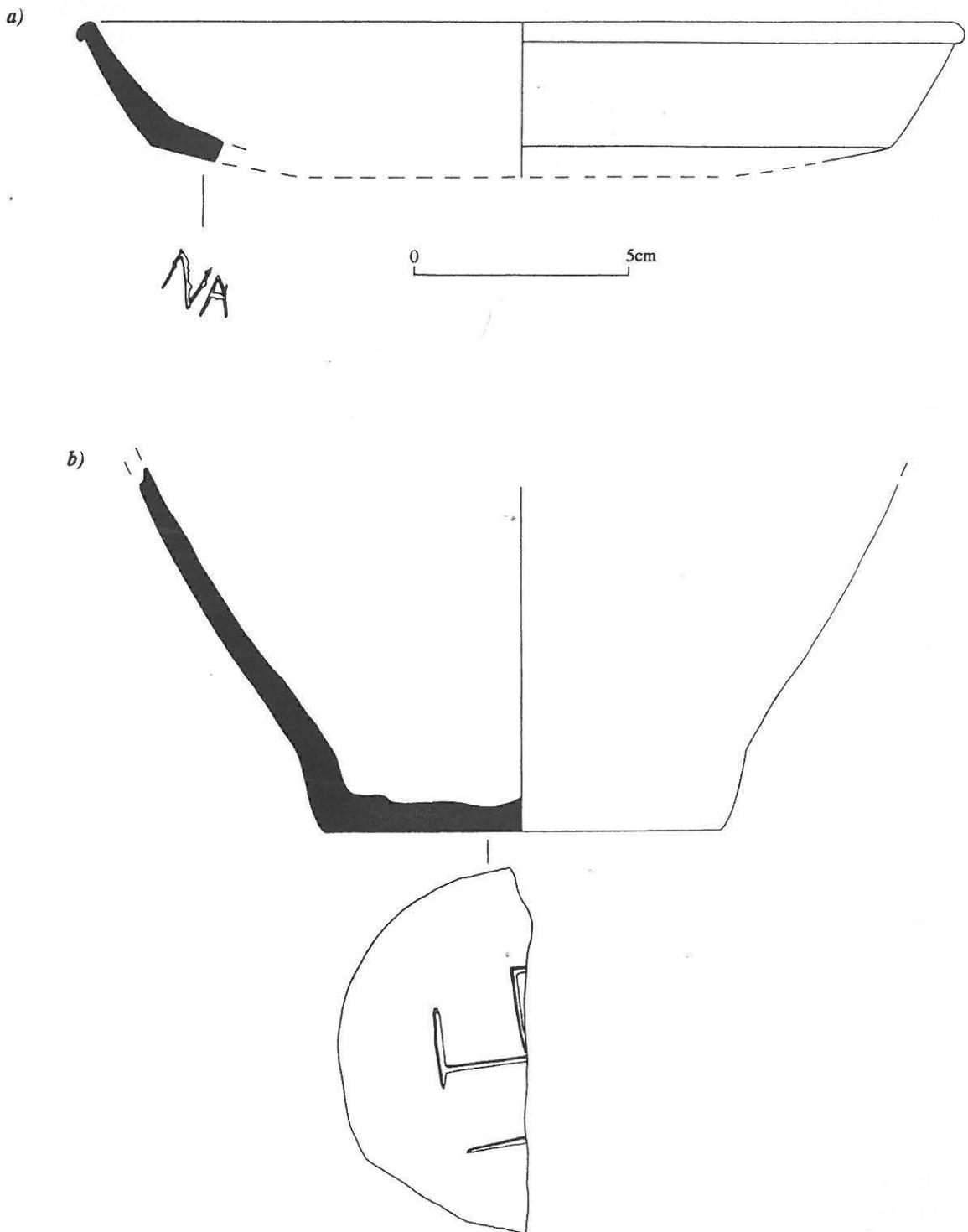


Figure 11 a) Central Gaulish Terra Sigillata platter with a post-firing graffito reading NA (...), from Layer 4 b) Large ?beaker with orange colour coat (Nene Valley colour coat) with a post-firing graffito on exterior base, perhaps reading 'IE' or part of a swastika, from Ditch 67

It should also be borne in mind that burials are often associated with individual settlement plots, frequently aligned with the rear or side boundaries. They have been found both within and outside plots, sometimes associated with a second enclosure immediately behind the first. Although they are more commonly found in slightly later, fourth century, contexts (Smith 1987), there is a strong possibility that one or more burials would be found in more extensive excavations.

Interestingly, the site seems to be contemporary with the small settlement just 600m to the south at Tort Hill (Garrood, 1947). This may suggest that, while being located on Ermine Street was clearly important, other factors were also in play. It perhaps indicates that both settlements were primarily concerned with agriculture, and may have been part of a larger estate with its focus elsewhere.

The West Side The earliest features, including the rectilinear enclosure ditch **100**, Pit **124**, possibly post hole **134**, and Pit **130**, contained coarseware pottery probably dating to the period immediately before the Roman conquest. Although the density of features is lower than that encountered on the east side of the road, it seems probable that a very late Iron Age settlement existed here. The small rectilinear enclosure in Trench 7 was probably a temporary stock enclosure, the undercut, outer edge of its ditch suggesting that it was enclosed with an inwardly-inclined fence. It is more difficult to interpret the detailed function of many of the features in Trench 6 since only a small part of them could be seen and they are clearly not all of one phase. It is likely, however, that they are part of a reasonably long-lived settlement, probably a farmstead.

That the settlement continued into the Roman period may be indicated by the presence of some second century pottery in Ditches **119** (a re-cut of Ditch **108**) and **140**, although this later material may be derived from activities associated with the settlement seen on the east side of the road. The relationship between the two settlement areas (for example, whether one was the precursor of the other) is unknown and, unfortunately, construction of the modern road has probably destroyed any such evidence. It should be noted that what appears to be an immediately pre-Roman settlement lies on the line of Ermine Street, perhaps suggesting that, at least in this area, the road followed the line of a prehistoric route way.

The parallel linear features encountered in Trench 6, obscuring the late Iron Age and early Roman features, are certainly the remains of medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow which, according to the farmer, was only levelled during the 1950s. Its survival under permanent pasture until that date may reflect the importance of the A1 corridor as a drove way in the later medieval and Post-medieval periods, and the consequent need for grazing land.

CONCLUSIONS

The two sites discovered here are of considerable interest. On the west side of the road, a late pre-Roman Iron Age settlement shows evidence of spanning the Roman conquest and perhaps continuing well into the Roman period. The settlement evidence on the east side of the road, while apparently forming a discreet concentration, may be part of a more extensive, linear, settlement pattern which included the Tort Hill site (Garrood 1940; 1947).

More extensive excavation would certainly help to elucidate the form and function of both settlement areas, particularly if areas of the present roadside verges could be investigated. While it is unlikely that any substantial buildings would be encountered in the areas available for excavation, evidence for activities such as metal-working and leather-working may very well exist in the form of waste material in rubbish pits. There

could also be the remains of temporary structures associated with such activities. The possibility of the presence of burials, particularly on the east side of the road, must also be taken into account. If the form of this settlement follows that found at other Roman roadside sites (Smith 1987), then they could well be situated within the proposed intake of land.

On the east side of the road, the perceived reduction in feature density to the north, south, and east of Trenches A to D, combined with the results from field-walking, suggest that the area of Roman settlement is relatively limited, extending along the A1 for about 200m. Any further excavation would therefore be best concentrated in the area covered by Trenches A to D (centred on TL 1720 8485), and should take in the full width of the proposed land intake.

On the west side of the road, further excavation (centred on TL 1720 8460) should be directed towards elucidating the nature of the rectilinear enclosure and any associated features, whether internal or external to it. In addition, further trenching is necessary in the area of Trench 6 so that the extent and nature of the late Iron Age/early Roman features can be more fully determined.

Finally, since very few Roman roadside settlements have been extensively excavated, any additional information obtained here could have regional significance, both in terms of the type of activities taking place in the settlement itself, and with respect to the role of such settlements in the wider Romano-British economy.

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APPENDIX A

The Pottery from Sawtry

C J Going

Introduction

The site assemblage has been examined with the primary aim of providing the excavators with dates for the features examined. The main body of the report comprises a listing, trench by trench, of the significant features, with a brief discussion of their probable date together with a record of the chronologically significant fabrics and forms found within them. As a tailpiece to the report there is a brief discussion of the site assemblage as a whole, and a catalogue of the illustrated vessels.

Fabrics and forms are described using the following designations (for expanded descriptions of fabrics and form terms see Going 1987). Details of other codes are to be found in the report archive.

A brief note on context catalogue entries: where a fabric code is given and no details are set against them, no chronologically diagnostic material was noted.

Fabrics

BB1	Black Burnished 1.
CGTS	Central Gaulish <i>Terra Sigillata</i> .
COAR	Coarse reduced wares, probably all local.
COX	Coarse oxidised ware.
FRED	Fine reduced ware.
NVCC	Nene valley colour coat.
NVGw	Nene valley grey wares.
NVMt	Nene valley Mortarium fabric.
ShT	Shell-tempered ware.
WhW	Miscellaneous white wares.

Forms

FRD	Flange-rimmed dish.
NDJ	Necked jar.
PRD	Plain rimmed dish.
VO	Open form (platter, bowl etc.).
VC	Closed form, for example a jar.

Trench A

Roadside ditch 67:

Lower fill 72

ShT No chronologically diagnostic material

NVGW No chronologically diagnostic material

NVCC Large ?beaker with orange colour coat with post-firing *graffito* on exterior base, perhaps reading 'IE'. No expansion possible.

Middle fill 29

NVCC ?Beaker base (B-)

NVGw

ShT Jar fragment (s)

WhW Closed form fragments

StJ Fragments (S-)

Top fill (30)

NVCC FRD (R-)

ShT NDJ (R-)

Ceramic evidence suggests that the ditch infilling began not before the later third century. The presence in the upper fill 30 of material datable to the fourth century suggests accumulation, or infilling, after this date.

Ditch/Pit 69

Lower fill 93

COAR Devolved Gallo-Belgic platter form (OK)

Upper fill 68

COAR

WhW Closed form, possibly a flagon

Lack of Nene Valley greywares or colour-coated forms, unlikely after the mid-second century, and the devolved 'Gallo-Belgic' platter suggests a Flavian to early second century date for this feature.

Ditch 38

Lower fill 34: <1kg, fairly fresh

ShT Ledge-rimmed jars (x2)

NVGW Stamped imitation Samian Drag f30 (R+)

COAR Misc.

Upper fill 7

FGry Plain rimmed dish (OK) 1 2 sh misc. closed forms, probably jars

WhW Sherds from closed forms

Mostly backfilled with later first to early second century material. However, the latest pottery is datable to the later second to early third centuries, suggesting the feature was backfilled by the mid third century.

Cut 45: <0.5kg

Lowest fill 44 No pottery

Lower fill 39

CGT/s CG Drag f31 Antonine (burnt)

NVGW Folded beaker fragment (S+). Later Antonine to third century

ShT Jar body sherds. first century+

NVCC Castor box lid sherds

Upper fill 37

ShT Jar sherd. Abraded

This feature produced only a small quantity of pottery, probably datable down to the later third century.

Pit 35

Fill 8: <0.5kg, abraded

NVCC Misc.

NVGW Scraps

ShT Misc. closed form sherds

Rather battered collection of material, probably a redeposited accumulation datable to the later third century or after.

Midden 4

The pottery from this stratigraphic level (or levels) may represent an accumulation of material spanning the later first century AD (e.g. ledge-rimmed jars in shell-tempered fabric) to the later third and fourth centuries AD (e.g. NVCC: flange rimmed dishes). There was, however, little material datable to the post mid fourth century. Intrinsically interesting material from this level includes a plain-rimmed bag-

shaped beaker and a CGTS platter (f 31) with a post-firing *graffito* reading NA[. No expansion of this is possible.

Ditch 62

Lower fill 47

ShT Bowl jar (R+). Probably Neronian-Flavian or slightly later.

COAR Misc.. open closed forms, scraps

COX Misc. closed forms, sherds only

Upper fill 36

ShT Lugged rimmed jar (R-). Probably later first century

COAR Misc. closed forms, sherds only

A small quantity of material, mostly of later first to early to mid second century date. However, a sherd of Nene Valley colour coat in characteristically later Roman thick white ware from 36 suggests that most of the pottery is re deposited and that the feature was backfilled after the mid fourth century.

Trench B

Pit 83

Lowest fill 82: Abraded

COAR Scraps

ShT Jar (S-)

Burnt layer 81: 3 sh

ShT Jar with rilling on shoulder

Upper fill 77

NVGW Folded beaker (s+)

ShT Jar rim (R+)

NVCC Jar rim (fourth century); beaker sherds with rouletted dec., third to fourth century; Ped beaker frag

(B-), possibly fourth century

Top fill 78

NVCC (grey), scale dec. folded beaker, beaker with thin piped dec. (later third to fourth century)

ShT Misc. sherds

The pottery in the fill of this feature suggests backfilling sometime in the later third or early fourth century AD.

Cut 80

Fill 79

NVCC Scale-dec folded beaker (possibly same vessel as in 78). Folded beaker (S+)

ShT Misc. scraps

COAR PRD (OK), probably post second century

NVMT Rim of locally manufactured mortarium, probably post c AD 240

A *terminus post quem* for this feature is provided by Pit 83 which contained material to the end of the third century or slightly after. The pottery from 80 is consistent with this date, but cannot give a very tight date bracket.

Unstratified

Among the unstratified sherds noted were the rim of a Nene Valley white ware mortarium, the second noted, a nozzle of a closed form in a white ware, and two Samian sherds, a base of an f 37, central Gaulish, Antonine; and a f 79 R, later Antonine, probably C6.

Trench C

Ditch 85

Fill 84: < 0.5kg: Abraded

NVCC Scraps
WhW Closed form (S-)
COAR Scraps
ShT Scraps

Accumulation, second to fourth century, suggesting backfill with wholly redeposited material in later Roman period.

Layer 85

Fill 48: < 0.5kg: Abraded

NVCC Thick white ware, x2 sherds
COAR Necked jar (R-)
ShT Misc. (s-)

Seals Ditch 85 therefore potentially later Roman. The pottery is mostly residual but includes some potentially fourth century pieces (NVCC).

Cleaning

Miscellaneous second to fourth century material.

Trench D

Ditch 61

Lower fill 60 (material erroneously labelled 61): < 0.5kg

NVCC Pedestal beaker (s-), abraded ?bag shaped beaker base, with orange slip (b+); Bowl with white painted arcade motif on exterior, a common later third-fourth century type (R+).

Upper fill 43: < 2kg: Abraded

NVCC Castor box lid, ped beaker, sherds from funnel necked beakers with white piped decoration (s+); Bowl, imitation f 38 (R+); also ShT and NVGw fabric present.

Date: probably fourth century. Cuts Layer 46, which contained material to after c AD 250.

Pit 42

Fill 41: < 0.5kg: Abraded

Misc. buff, ShT: COAR, all abraded scraps, no diagnostic sherds.

Date: second century or later.

Pit 64. Cuts 73

Fill 63: < 0.5kg: Abraded

ShT Large body sherds, probably a jar
COAR Featureless sherds

Probably first to second century date.

Pit 66

Fill 65: 7sh: abraded

Date, probably first to second century, but all material likely to be residual. Predates Pit 42.

Feature 74

Fill 73

NVCC Sherds inc. castor box lid (S+)
WhW Flagon (s-)
ShT Jar (s-)

Suggested date, probably second to third century AD.

Feature 76

Fill 75

FRED Imitation f 27, probably originally burnished overall but now uncertain finish
ShT Fragments of closed forms, also unusual strap ?handle from an unknown form

Suggested date: first century, though possibly all residual. The strap handle in shell-tempered fabric may be post-Roman.

Scoop 87

COAR NDJ, first to second century

This feature predates Feature 76 and is possibly first century.

Layer 46 (cuts 74, pre 61)

NVCC Imitation Drag f 38; FRD (R-)
ShT Closed forms, probably jars (RS-)

Layer post dates ?second to third century Feature 74, and contains material to pos. c AD 250 suggesting a later third century *terminus post quem*.

Cleaning produced some pottery of which the only significant find was a BB1 flanged rimmed dish (R+), of post mid third or fourth century date.

Trenches E-H were aceramic.

Trench 7

Slot[100]

Fills 99, 101, 123: < 0.5kg: abraded

COAR Scraps

Date: All very small scraps, nothing diagnostic. Probable date, however, is LPRIA.

Slot 121: Aceramic

Post Roman (post Medieval) material came from contexts 103, 105.

Trench 6

Ditch 108

Fill of recut 119 107 < 0.5kg: Abraded.
Fabrics include ShT, NVCC and COAR.

Date: second century or later.

Machining of 108 produced a small quantity of first century to second century material.

Pit 124

Fills 98, 102: < 0.5kg: abraded

Mostly first to second century scraps, including a Samian chip, SG, Flavian from 98.

Lowest fill 120: < 0.5kg: abraded

Small quantity of ?LPRIA to early Roman material including burnt fired clay.

Ditch 126 (pre Ditch 124)

Lowest fill 125: < 0.5kg: abraded

CoarRom NDJ (R-); misc.
Fired clay

Probably first century.

Pit 128 (pre Ditch 126): 2 sh: abraded

Both coarse reduced ware (COAR).

Probably first century AD.

Post-hole 134

Fill 97: < 0.5kg: abraded

All soft fired clay chips. Pre or Roman.

Pit 130

Fill 129: < 0.5kg: Abraded

COAR Soft-fired fabric, Cordoned jar (S+)

Probably LPRIA early Roman.

Ditch 140

Lowest fill 142

First to second century AD scraps

Middle fill 141: 3 sh

COAR Including second century jar rim (R-); cordoned jar (s+)
NvGw VC base sherd

Probably second century or later.

Upper fill 136: VSQ: Abraded

ShT; NVGw

Probably second century.

Fill 138: Fc x1 scrap

Undatable

Trench 6 machining, pit

Two bodysherds (COAR and ShT), both probably first century AD.

Discussion

The Sawtry Romano-British pottery assemblage is entirely characteristic of its region and period. In terms of fabrics and forms there is little worthy of note: the bulk of the pottery comprised reduced coarsewares, but there were some finer 'table wares'. Both kinds of pottery are likely to have originated in the nearby Nene Valley potteries and perhaps (in the case of the shell-tempered wares) from

Bedfordshire. Pottery from more distant sources was vanishingly rare: there were a few sherds of Gaulish Samian (in contexts 4, 39, 98, for example), ubiquitous in nearly all Roman sites, but no amphorae or other imports were noted. More distant British material was represented by a single sherd of BB1, from Dorset (Trench D, clearing). Of some interest were the two fragmentary graffiti (from contexts 4 and 72). It is rare to find two in an assemblage of this size. One, 4, was on a Samian bowl, a fabric which features disproportionately in graffiti tables. There were few pieces of intrinsic merit, though the strap handle in a shell-tempered fabric from 75 is unusual. It may be post-Roman.

Considered overall, the emphasis is earlier rather than later Roman. The material from west of the road is substantially earlier, belonging perhaps to the immediate pre-conquest period if not slightly earlier, while the remainder, from Trenches A to D, is generally consistent with dates in the second and third centuries AD. Only a few contexts produced material datable to the fourth century, and none produced material very late in that century. The coin list made available matches this spread.

Going, C. J. 1987: *The Mansio and Other Sites in the South Eastern sector of Caesaromagus: The Roman Pottery*, *CBA Res. Rep 62*.