05.15

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT HENSCOTT, BRADFORD, DEVON

by

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Exeter Archaeology

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Contents

List of illustrations.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of the archaeological recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) during the groundworks for new farm buildings at Henscott, Bradford, Devon (SS 4187 0868 - site centred). Henscott itself lies 9km north-east of Holsworthy and 22km north-west of Okehampton. The work was commissioned by Mike Goff (Mike Goff Agricultural Planning, Design and Project Management) on behalf of the W.J. and J.M. Elliot. This work was required as a condition on the granting of the planning application (Application no. 1/0505/2004). A Brief for this work was provided by Devon County Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken between June and September 2004.

1.1 **The site** (Figs 1-2; Pl. 1)

Henscott lies at a height of a little over 140m AOD on the gentle south facing slopes of a hill set between the rivers Torridge and Walden. The site commands an extensive outlook to the south with open views as far as Dartmoor. The area monitored by the watching brief, some 1.4ha, is situated to the north and north east of the existing farmhouse and ancillary buildings (SS 4192 0873) and was under pasture. A hedgebank divided the site into two fields.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

SS40NW|15 PRN 11692

A settlement at Henscott was mentioned in Domesday (Thorn and Thorn, 1985, 3,12) and represented the home of the Henscott family from the early 13th-century. The current farmhouse is thought to be of mid 19th-century construction. A putative Iron Age, D-shaped enclosure, lies some 0.7km to the east of Henscott within Castle Wood, overlooking the Torridge valley. No previous archaeological works have been undertaken in this area.

SS40NW|16 PRN 11693

3. AIMS

The principal aim of the watching brief was to investigate and record any archaeological deposits exposed during the groundworks for the development.

4. METHOD

Topsoil stripping was undertaken under archaeological supervision. A hedgebank was also removed during this work. All exposed archaeological features were investigated and cleaned by hand, and recorded to standard EA specifications.

Ground level in the area to the north of the farm, including the new access to the development, had been reduced prior to the establishment of an archaeological watching brief on the works.

5. RESULTS

The removal of the hedgebank (511) and depths of up to 0.40m of topsoil across the site revealed two area of pits and post-holes (A and B), as well as an isolated pit, two pit features exposed in section by the terracing to the north of Henscott and the remains of three ditches representing an earlier field system.

PRN 71404

5.1 **Terraced area to the north of the outbuildings** (Figs 2 and 5. Pls 2-4)

An area of approximately 2,000m^2 had been terraced into the hillslope to the north of Henscott *prior* to the establishment of an archaeological watching brief on the groundworks.

Examination of the edges of the terrace cut identified two archaeological features, described below.

Pits 501 and 509 (Fig. 5: section 2. Pl. 3-4)
Two pits (501, 509) were exposed in the south facing section of the terrace cut. These lay close to the hedgebank that forms the boundary on the northern side of the development. Both features were cut into the clay subsoil and were sealed by modern plough soil.

Pit 509 was 0.75m wide and cut into the subsoil to a depth of 0.5m. Excavation of the fill (510) exposed the northern edge of the pit 0.18m in from the edge of the terrace cut. No finds were recovered from this feature.

Pit 501 was 0.9m wide and 0.6m deep. The primary fill (504) extended almost to the rim of the pit, as did the secondary fill (513). The remainder of the pit was filled with a reddish brown clay silt (502), with inclusions of abundant charcoal and fired clay fragments. No finds were recovered from this feature. Excavation of the fill of this pit (Pl. 4) revealed its northern side to be cut by the ditch (507) associated with the hedgebank that formed the northern boundary of the site. No finds were recovered from either of its fills (506, 508).

Interpretation
Pit 509 probably represents a modern feature; its position corresponding to the site of an agricultural shed known to have stood on the site in recent decades.

Although pit 501 also lies in the area of the known modern agricultural building, the fills are distinctly different form those in 509. That it is cut by the construction of the hedge ditch shows it predates the current field system and may therefore be of medieval or earlier origin. The shape of the primary and secondary fills (504, 503) suggests they formed around a post or stone, now lost, within the pit itself.

5.2 **Area A** (Figs 2 and 3)

Pit 543 (Figs 3 and 6: section 15 and Fig. 7: section 28. Pl. 6) PRN 71406
The most significant feature exposed in this area consisted of a sub-rectangular pit feature with an east-west length of 2.4m and a maximum width at the eastern end of 0.95m was exposed by topsoil stripping. Excavation of its single, uniform, fill (544) revealed the shallow remains of a pit showing considerable evidence of burning at the eastern end. Almost 60% of the undisturbed clay base of this feature had been heavily discoloured and baked by heat. At the eastern end a distinct bowl shape had been deliberately formed. The flat base of this bowl possessed a maximum depth of 0.28m. An almost centrally placed lip divided this bowl from a shallower western end with a depth of only 0.14m. In plan the feature was very slightly waisted at the position of the dividing lip.

Interpretation
Pit 543 undoubtedly represents the remains of some form of oven, kiln or furnace, although no material evidence of the actual function survives. The western end of the pit is thought to represent a stoking pit, allowing easy access to administer fuel to the fire chamber to the east. The remains of the fire-box end of the pit suggest that it may originally have been circular in form, although no other detail can be deduced. A few carbonised grain fragments were recovered from the fill of this pit, but in too little a quantity to suggest a grain drying activities. The grain may suggest a proximity to settlement activity however. Charcoal

derived from hazel (*Corylus avellana*) recovered from the fill (544) of this pit has been radiocarbon dated by the University of Waikato, New Zealand, to 390-550AD at 95.4% probability (Appendix 1).

PRN 71407

Pits 560, 562, 564 (Figs 3 and 7: sections 26, 27 and 29, Fig. 8: section 30)
Three pits were exposed *c.* 7m to the north of pit 543.

Pit 560 was irregular both in plan and section, with a maximum length of 2.25m and width of almost 0.3m. Both the depth and profile of the feature varied considerably, the depth being 0.6m at the eastern end, with the potential profile of a posthole, while only 0.3m to the west, and bowl-shaped. The edges of the feature were also irregular and, probably, disturbed by burrowing animal activity.

Disturbance was also evident in pits 562 and 564. Pit 562 possessed an irregular elongated shape in plan, similar to 560 but smaller, measuring only 0.75m by 0.5m. It had a maximum depth of 0.13m.

Feature 564 was oval in plan measuring 0.7m by 0.5m and cut into the subsoil to a depth of 0.38m. This pit was exposed in section during machine removal of the ploughsoil.

A single, small, sherd of Middle Bronze Age Trevisker Ware pottery was recovered from fill 561 of feature 560. Otherwise, the very similar mid-yellowish brown gritty clay silt fills of these features produced only small amounts of charcoal

Interpretation
This collection of features each possessed signs of root or animal disturbance and, with the possible exception of feature 564, the true dimensions are uncertain. Feature 564 has the appearance of a small pit. The other two features (560, 562) may represent further pits, or some form of interrupted post-trench. A Middle Bronze Age date is suggested by the small sherd of pottery recovered from feature 560, although this was particularly abraded, and could be residual in a later feature, possibly this feature represents an animal burrow.

Features to the south-east of Pit 543 (Figs 3 and 7: sections 17–22 and 24–25. Pl. 5)
A collection of shallow, and partially disturbed, features were exposed 10m to the south-east of pit 543 and consisted of:

A single posthole (554) 0.4m in diameter and depth of only 0.07m; its fill (555), a greyish brown clay silt fill (555) contained occasional charcoal flecks.

A collection of post or stake holes, immediately to the west of 554. These features were exposed as two distinct groups, each consisting of three interconnecting postholes (546, 550, 551) and (548, 552, 553). Their fills, 547 and 549 respectively, were uniform - consisting of yellowish brown clay silt - and indicates their contemporaneity. The largest of the features (548) was 0.5m in diameter and less than 0.1m deep. None of the features were cut deeper than 0.15m into the subsoil. The base of posthole 546 produced the base of a Middle Bronze Age Trevisker Ware pot.

The very shallow and disturbed remains of three further postholes (556, 558, 578) lay *c.* 4m to the south-west of the two groups of the post-holes described above. None survived to a depth of more than 0.8m. No artefacts were recovered from the fills (559, 557 - the latter

infilled both 556 and 558) of these features, although occasional small charcoal flecks were recorded within their fills.

Interpretation
These vestigial remains provide little opportunity for interpretation, although the pottery base found in posthole 546 provides a Middle Bronze Age date at least for these features. A shared purpose for the sized stake and postholes is possible, although any indication of that purpose could not be determined.

5.3 **Area B** (Figs 2 and 4)

Pit 516 (Figs 4 and 5: section 4. Pl. 7) PRN 71407
This feature was a sub-rectangular pit measuring 1.1m north-south and 1.3m east-west and cut *c.* 0.6m into the subsoil. The pit contained two fills; the upper (517) was a dark brown humic clay silt, while the lower (522) was a yellowish grey silty clay. In the north-east corner of this feature were two small post- or stake holes (518, 520). Post-hole 518 was 0.22m in diameter and 0.1m deep, and appeared to have been cut by pit 516. Post-hole 520 was 0.20m in diameter and cut *c.* 0.1m into the base of pit 516. It was demonstrated stratigraphically that the post that formed this feature was present within pit 516 as it became filled with 522. The void left by the rotted post was filled by 521. Two sherds of Middle Bronze Age Trevisker Ware pottery were recovered from each of the fills of this feature (517, 522).

Pit 523 (Figs 4 and 6: section 5)
Located adjacent and to the south of pit 516 was an irregular pit features (523). This pit was 0.15m deep and measured 0.6m long east-west and 0.25m wide north-south. In addition to frequent charcoal inclusions, fill 524 of feature 523 also contained fired clay fragments.

Other pits and post-holes (527, 529, 531, 535, 537, 567, 572) Figs 4 and 5: section 4, Fig. 6: sections 6-9, and Fig. 8: sections 34-37)
A total of eleven other features were exposed in close proximity to pit 516. The farthest consisting of a post-hole (570), located 7m to the north-east and was 0.24m in diameter as well as in depth and contained a friable mid yellowish-brown clay silt fill (571). Of the remainder of these features eight of them represented stake- or postholes (527, 530, 531, 535, 537, 568, 570, 572) lay close to pit 516. There was no stratigraphic relationship between any of these features and each measured between 0.2m and 0.24m in diameter, with depths of between 0.12m and 0.2m. All the clay silt fills of these features produced charcoal, being particularly abundant within the fill (528) of posthole 527.

Feature 533 was an oval pit between 0.5m - 0.75m in diameter, 0.14m deep and located *c.* 5m to the east of pit 516. Its fill (534) consisted of yellowish brown clay silt with occasional inclusions of charcoal fragments.

A similar material (575) filled another irregular pit situated immediately to the west of ditch 525, *c.* 2.2m from pit 516. This elongated feature, with a maximum length of 1.5m, possessed an uneven depth of up to 0.3m.

No finds, other than those from pit 516 were recovered from this area.

Interpretation
The function of pit 516 remains unknown and while its fills, 517 and 522, contained an abundance of charcoal, no industrial waste was included. A small amount of carbonised grain fragments was present, but not in quantities that would suggest a function associated with grain drying/storage, although the presence of this grain does suggest proximity to settlement activity. The profile of the pit is of interest. The undercutting of the edges of the pit suggests either that the pit was left open for some time and the edges have weathered and partially collapsed into the pit or they have been created by wear during the features use. The absence of a clean clay primary fill, the result of weathering or wear, suggests that the pit was cleaned prior to infilling. Indication that a post (520) had been set within the fill of the pit may suggest a marker, and it is also possible that the post-hole (518) cut by the pit may also have marked the site, prior to excavation.

While the presence of the numerous small post- or stakeholes in this area, roughly aligned in two rows, suggests some structure was present, it is impossible interpret its function or whether they were contemporaneous with pit 516.

5.4 **Pit 566** (Fig. 8. Pl. 8)
An almost circular pit (566) was exposed 15m to the south-west of Area A and 20m north-west of Area B. Measuring a little over 1m in diameter, the pit was cut into the subsoil to a maximum depth of 0.12m. The remains of a possible stone lining survived around the edge of the pit. The fill of the pit (567) consisted almost entirely of charcoal fragments and contained fire-discoloured stone. There was a small area of *in situ* heat discolouration on the northern edge of the pit.

Interpretation
The small area of *in situ* scorching within this pit demonstrates that burning took place within this feature. It was not possible to determine what function this burning fulfilled; whether it represented industrial activity, a simple bonfire pit or the *in situ* burning of a post. The stones within this feature could represent either a stone lining or packing stones for a post. No artefacts were recovered from this feature.

PRN 71408

5.5 **Medieval field system** (Fig. 2 and 4, Fig. 5: section 3, Fig. 6: sections 10-14, Fig. 9)
The exposure of three, truncated, parallel ditches (525, 539 and 541) on the same alignment as the, now removed, hedgebank (511) that once divided the site suggest the presence of an earlier field system. These ditches were aligned on a north-north-west to south-south-east alignment spaced at distances of between 20m and 25m. The easternmost ditch (541) extended some 50m northward from the southern boundary of the site. This feature was 0.8m wide and cut 0.1m into the subsoil. Ditch 539 measured less than 0.45m at its widest point, with a depth of only 0.06m. This ditch only survived as a 20m length extending northward into site from the south. On the west of the site ditch 525 survived for a distance of 15m and was 1m wide and cut into the subsoil to a depth of 0.1m.

The north-south aligned hedgebank that originally divided the site consisted of a stony earthen bank a little over 1.5m in height and between 2.3m-2.6m wide, derived from material from the excavation of the ditch (512) to the east. No buried soil survived beneath the bank material and no structural stone elements were present. During the removal of the bank it was observed that the surface of the underlying subsoil beneath the bank (511) lay 0.25m *above* the level of the subsoil exposed in the fields either side of the bank (Fig. 5: section 3).

The ditch (512) to the east of the bank measured between 1.3m and 1.5m in width and was 0.4m deep, no datable material or artefacts were recovered from its fill (513).

Three potsherds recovered from the hedgebank have been dated to between the 13th- and late 15th-centuries AD.

Interpretation
The presence of these parallel ditches demonstrates the existence of an earlier field system of which only hedgebank 511 survived. The freshly broken, unabraded, 13th-15th-century potsherds recovered from within hedgebank 511 suggest a medieval date for their establishment. The up-stand of subsoil beneath the line of hedgebank 511 shows that the site has, on its southern part been truncated by agricultural activity by 0.25m. The survival of these ditches *only* on the southern part of the site suggests that the level of truncation increases northward. The surviving ditches were spaced at 20-25m intervals; with the exception of the western two ditches (539 and 541) which lay 45m apart - suggesting that a ditch between these two had been ploughed out. The southern extent of this field system - disregarding the, probable modern, straight east-west boundary that forms the southern boundary of the development - is likely to be the curving southern boundary, some 184m to the south of the northern boundary of the site (Fig. 9), and would make each field just under one acre in area; 4 rods by 40 rods or 20m by 200m.

5.6 **The finds** (Appendix 2)
The prehistoric pottery recovered from this site consisted of six sherds of Middle Bronze Age Trevisker Ware pottery with a gabbroic fabric. The clay from which this pottery was manufactured was derived from the area around the Lizard Peninsula, Cornwall. However, one of the constituents of the temper is tourmaline, a mineral found in association with granite. This suggests that the pots were manufactured outside the Lizard Peninsula and in proximity to granite geology - Bodmin Moor or Dartmoor - and indicates the existence of a prehistoric trade in raw material away from the clay source and to a production site on or near to granite geology.

Seven shreds of medieval pottery were recovered during this project, three of which were from the earthen bank 511 the remainder represented stray finds from the topsoil. Other unstratified finds included a single sherd of post-medieval pottery as well as six struck flint flakes and a fragment of undiagnostic slag.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The presence of Bronze Age features is not surprising, given the proximity of the putative Iron Age, D-shaped enclosure that lies some 700m to the east. However, the presence of late Roman activity (AD 390-550), in the form of a hearth feature 543, was unexpected. No artefactual evidence for Roman period occupation of the site was recovered during these works and none has been recorded in the vicinity. The recovery of pottery dating to the Middle Bronze Age recovered from three features and as a surface find indicates activity in this period (1600-1000BC) and as such predates the possible Iron Age enclosure to the east. Alternatively, the exposed remains may represent an extension of activity associated with the enclosure, itself of an earlier date than previously considered.

These excavations have demonstrated that those archaeological deposits that survived across the site had been heavily truncated by agricultural activity. On the south side of the site, the

subsoil had been truncated by 0.25m, as shown by the comparative level of the subsoil beneath and adjacent to hedgebank 511. Ditches 525, 539, and 541 that represent the medieval field system do not extend to the northern boundary of the site, indicative of an increase in the depth of agricultural disturbance northward across the site. On the southern part of the site all archaeological features have been truncated by at least 0.25m and by at least this amount across the middle and more northerly parts of the site. The archaeological deposits exposed by these groundworks must therefore be regarded only as a limited picture of what may have been intensive use of the area. The post- or stakeholes in the proximity of pit 516 are thought to represent an example of this selective preservation, with only the deepest of what may originally have been numerous examples surviving. The remains of possibly more than one structure are now too fragmentary to provide any meaningful picture of their form. The small amount of charred grain recovered from the fills of features does suggest proximity to settlement activity. However, the absence of other surface finds or artefacts may suggest that any such activity was not either intensive or long lived, or have been largely destroyed by later agricultural activity. A small amount of flint work was recovered during the fieldwork.

The presence of gabbroic pottery indicates a widespread trade in gabbroic clays in the Middle Bronze Age. This clay can be obtained on the Lizard Peninsula, Cornwall, and appears here to have been mixed with temper derived from a source on or near a granitic geological area - Bodmin Moor or Dartmoor - and could have been made locally.

Pottery recovered from the body of hedgebank 511 suggests a medieval origin for this boundary. It is likely that along with the other exposed ditches (525, 539 and 541) these features represent part of a, now lost, medieval field system adjacent to the settlement at Henscott. Four sherds of medieval pottery were recovered as surface finds during the watching brief, three dating from the early 13th- to the late 15th-century, the fourth from the 14th- or 15th-century. This recovery is only to be expected in close proximity to a known medieval settlement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was commissioned by M. Goff (Mike Goff Agricultural Planning, Design and Project Management) on behalf of the W.J. and J.M. Elliot. Devon County Council (DCC) Archaeology Service provided a brief for the work. The project was administered by Mike Goff and S.J. Reed (EA). The charcoal sample for radiocarbon dating was identified by R. Gale. The fieldwork was undertaken by the author assisted by S. Blackmore and N. Goodwin. The illustrations were prepared by S. Blackmore (EA).

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APPENDIX 1: The radiocarbon dates *by* The Radiocarbon Laboratory, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Lab. No.	EA Sample No.	Context no:	Sample material	Radiocarbon age (yrs BP)	Calibrated radiocarbon date (2σ – 95.4% probability)
Wk-16277	5144313	514, fill of pit 543	*Corylus avellana* - hazel charcoal	1594±35	AD 390–550

Table 1 The radiocarbon date

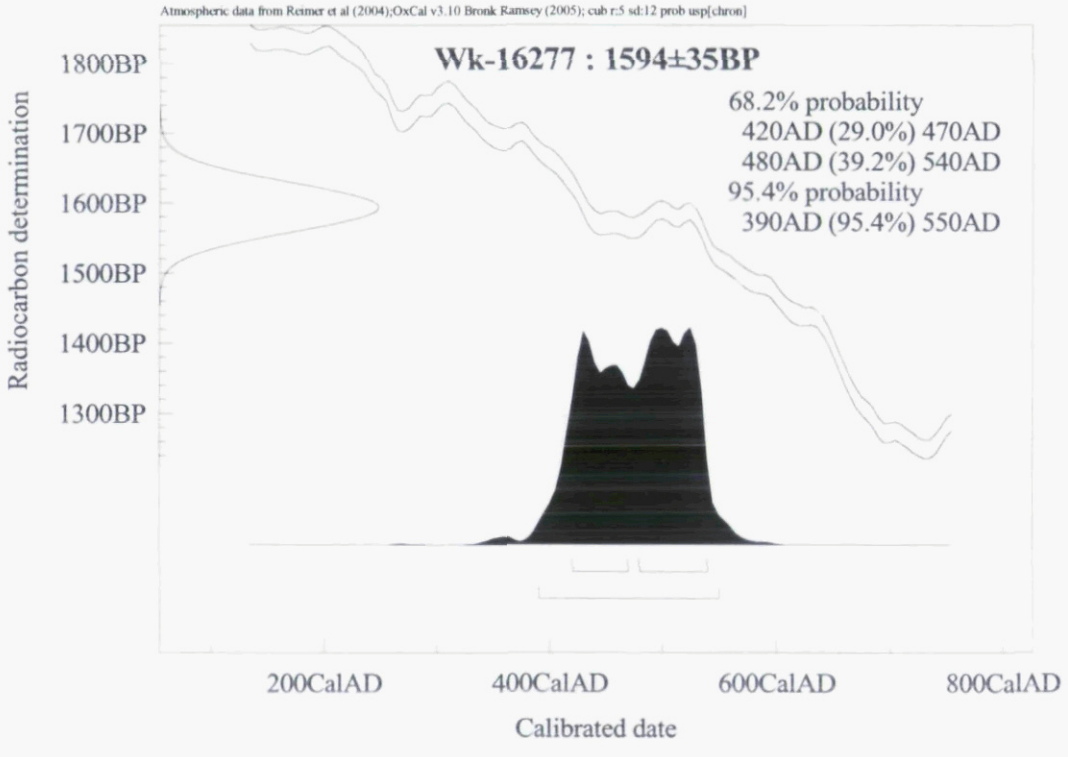


Table 2 Radiocarbon probability diagram.

Appendix 2 The finds list *by* G. Langman

All weights given are in grams (to the nearest 2 grams). SF denotes small finds number and qty denotes quantity. The following site code was used to mark artefacts: DHBH 04.

Context Dating

context	*date/period*
511	1200-late 15th century
517	prehistoric (middle bronze age)
522	prehistoric (middle bronze age)
547	prehistoric (middle bronze age)
561	prehistoric (middle bronze age)

Lithics

context	*qty*	*comments*
unstrat	1	flint: ?scraper.
unstrat (SF 400)	6	flint: struck waste flakes.
unstrat area 1	1	flint: struck flake.

Pottery & Dating Evidence

Abbreviations Listing

bd	body
bs	base
bwl	bowl
cal	calcareous
cp	cooking pot
cw	coarseware
dec	decorated
E	early
ext	external
fb	fabric
gtw	gravel-tempered ware
int	internal
L	late
MBA	Middle Bronze Age
Med	medieval
ND	North Devon
pln	plain
PM	post-medieval
Pre	prehistoric
sh	sherd
soot	sooted
typ	type
ug	unglazed
wln	wavy line

Prehistoric

context	*contents/dating evidence*	*sherds*	*vessels*
517	Pre (MBA) total sherds: 2 total vessels: 1 Gabbro cw (MBA, Trevisker w, bd sh dec with incised lines, Gabbro admixture)	2	1
522	Pre (MBA) total sherds: 2 total vessels: 1 Gabbro cw (MBA, pln body sh, Gabbro admixture)	2	1
547	Pre (MBA) total sherds: 3 total vessels: 1 Gabbro cw (MBA, Trevisker w, bs sh with int cordon cross over , Gabbro admixture)	3	1
561	Pre (MBA) total sherds: 1 total vessels: 1 Gabbro cw (MBA, small scrap, Gabbro admixture)	1	1
unstrat	Pre total sherds: 2 total vessels: 1 Pre pot (MBA, pln body sh, granitic fb) lithics: Pre	2	1
unstrat area 1	Pre lithic: Pre		

Medieval/Post-Medieval

context	*contents/dating evidence*	*sherds*	*vessels*
511	1200-L15C total sherds: 3 total vessels: 3 ND Med cw (1200-L15C, 1 dec cp bd sh, ext soot surface with incised wln, 1 bd sh ext soot surface)	3	3
unstrat	Med total sherds: 4 total vessels: 4 ND Med cw (1200-L15C, 1 bd sh, 1 bs angle)	3	3
	ND Med cal cw (14C/15C, ug ?jug bd sh)	1	1
unstrat	PM total sherds: 1 total vessels: 1 ND gtw (1500-E19C, typ 3B bwl rim)	1	1

Statistics
total number of sherds: 18
minimum number of vessels: 13

Slag

context	*qty*	*weight*	*comments*
unstrat	1	48	undiagnostic fragment.

Small Finds

SF	*context*	*qty*	*material*	*comments*
400	unstrat	6	flint	struck waste flakes.

Fig. 1 Location of site. Reproduced from the 1:50000 Landranger™ map 190 by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 2002. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100016685.

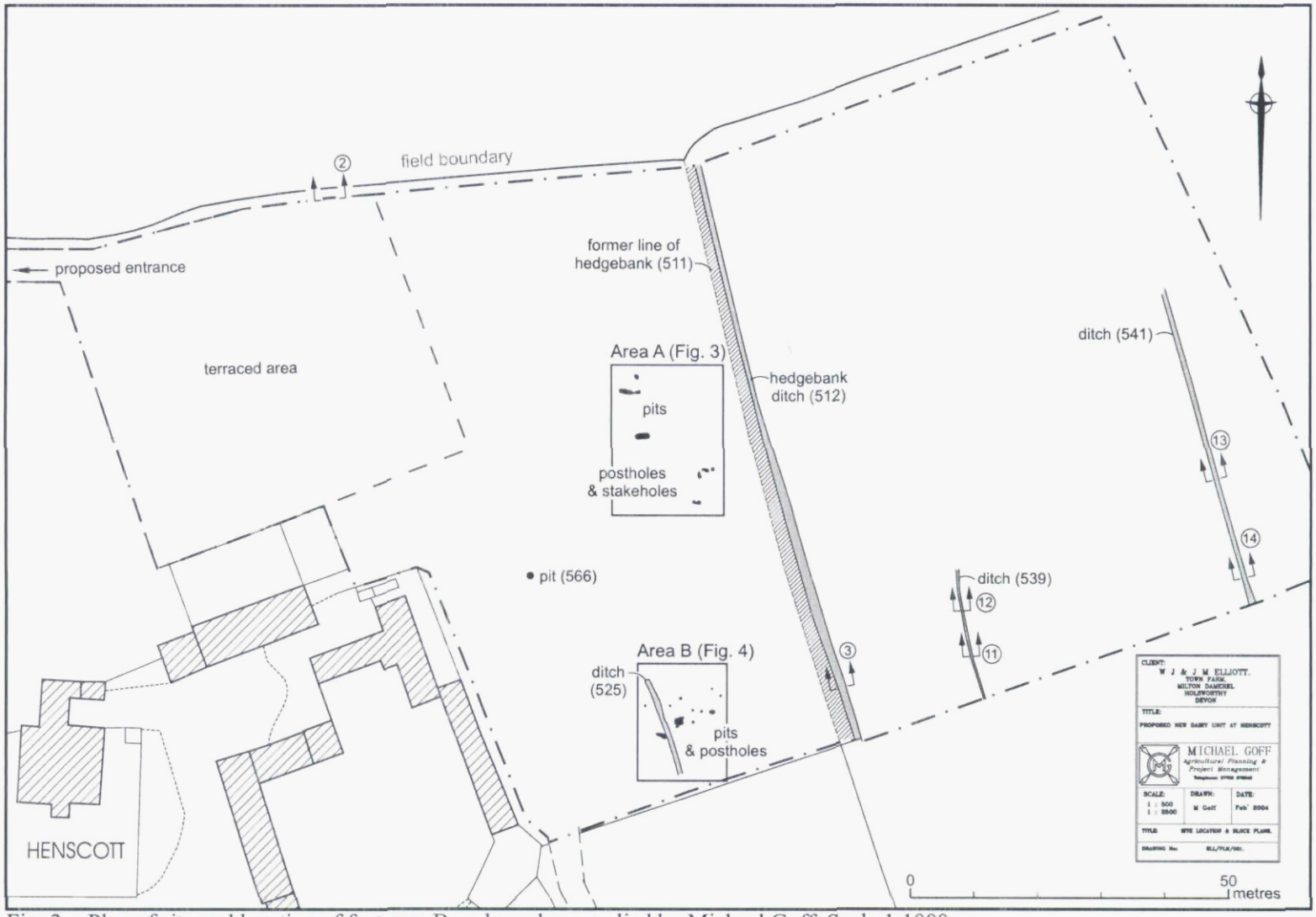


Fig. 2 Plan of site and location of features. Based on plan supplied by Michael Goff. Scale 1:1000.

Fig. 3 Area A: plan. Scales 1:125 and 1:100.

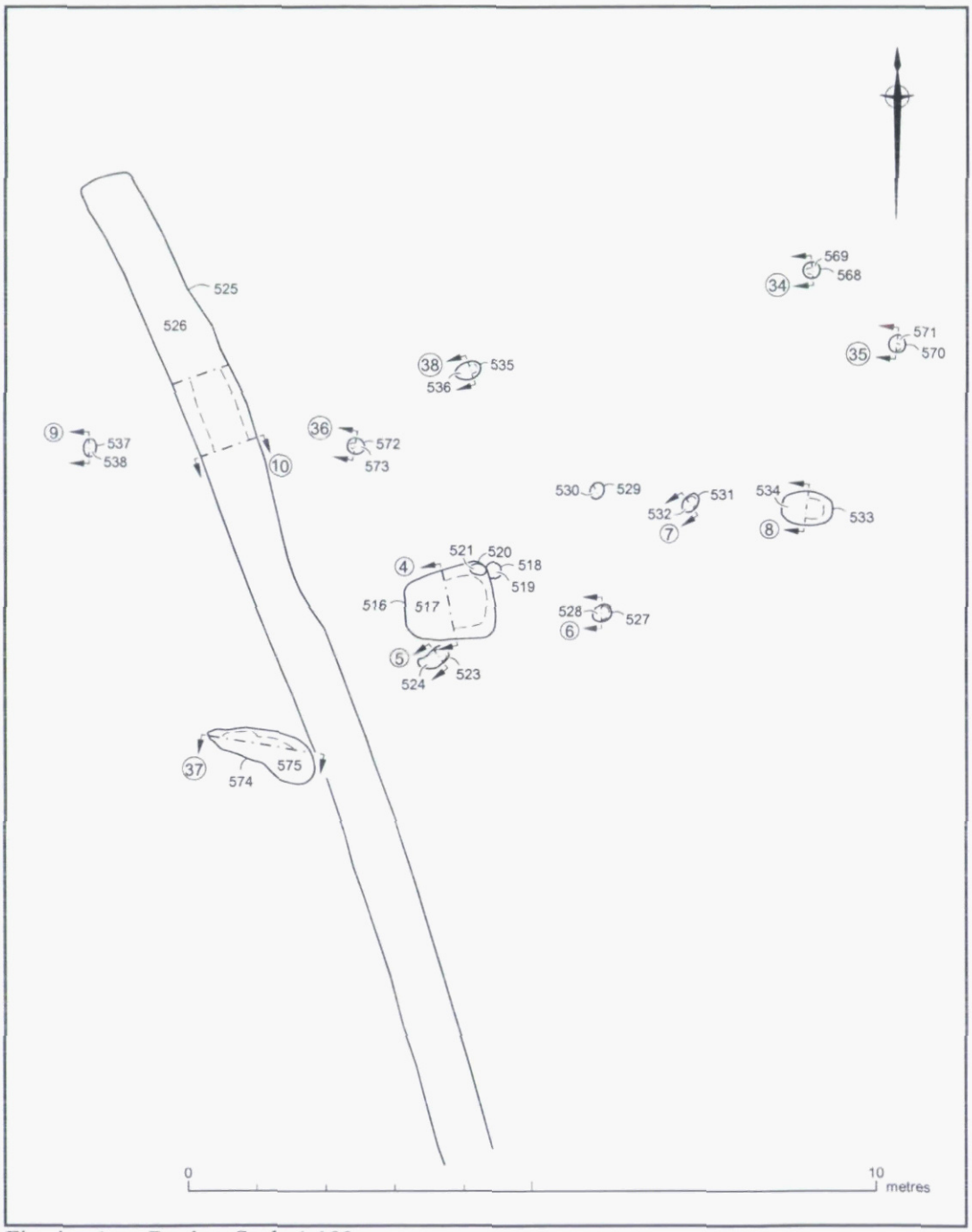


Fig. 4 Area B: plan. Scale 1:100.

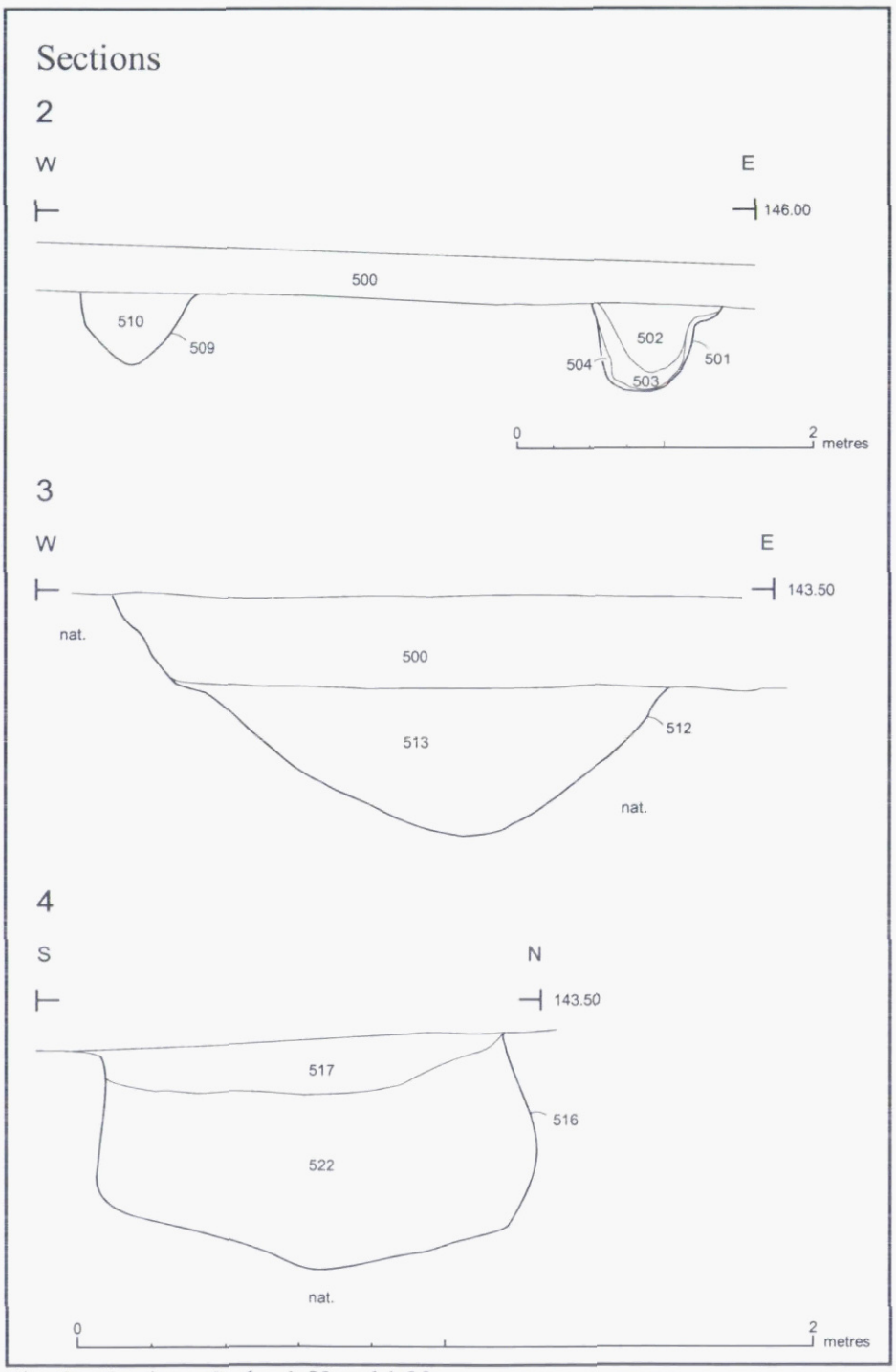


Fig. 5 Sections. Scales 1:50 and 1:20.

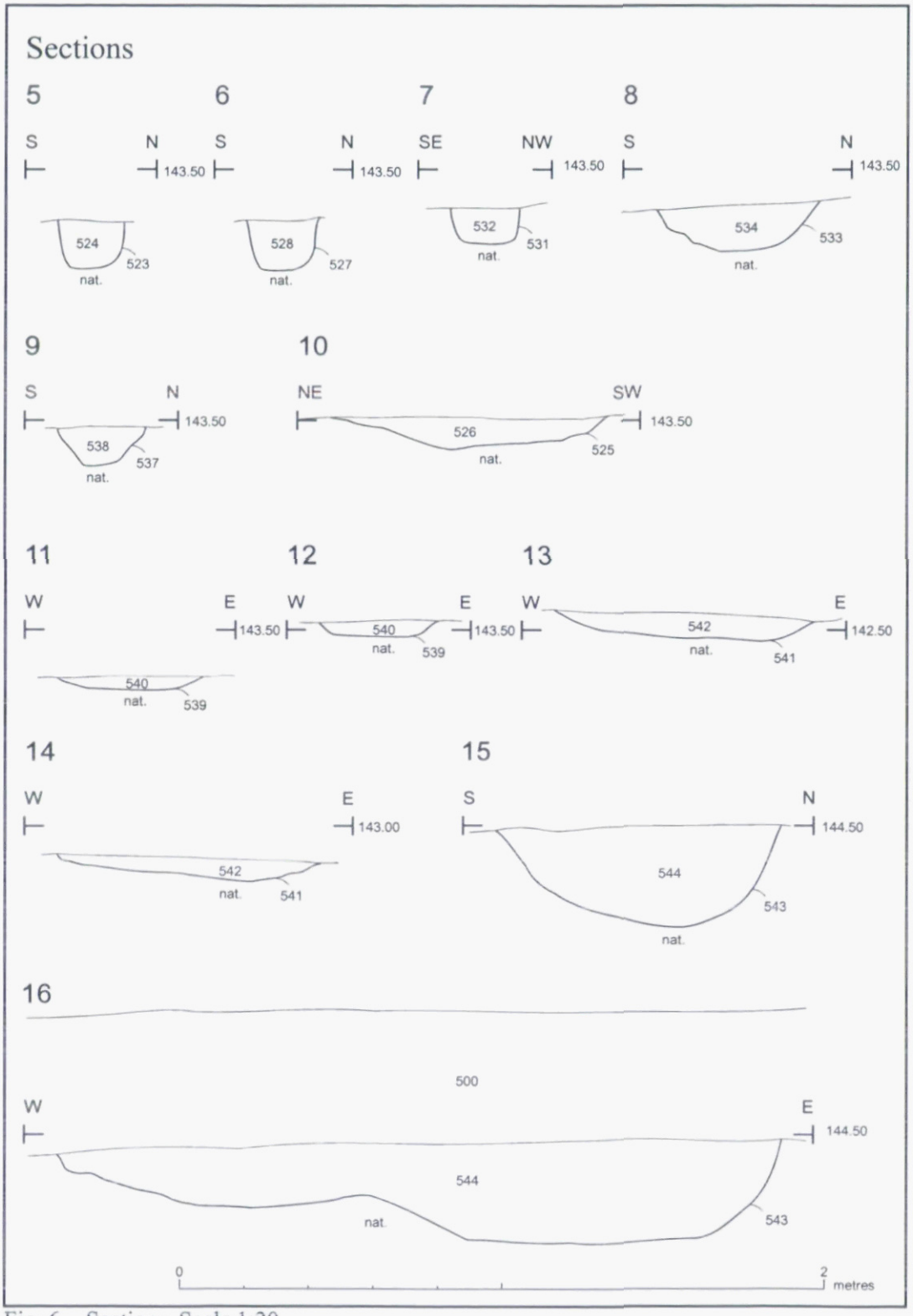


Fig. 6 Sections. Scale 1:20.

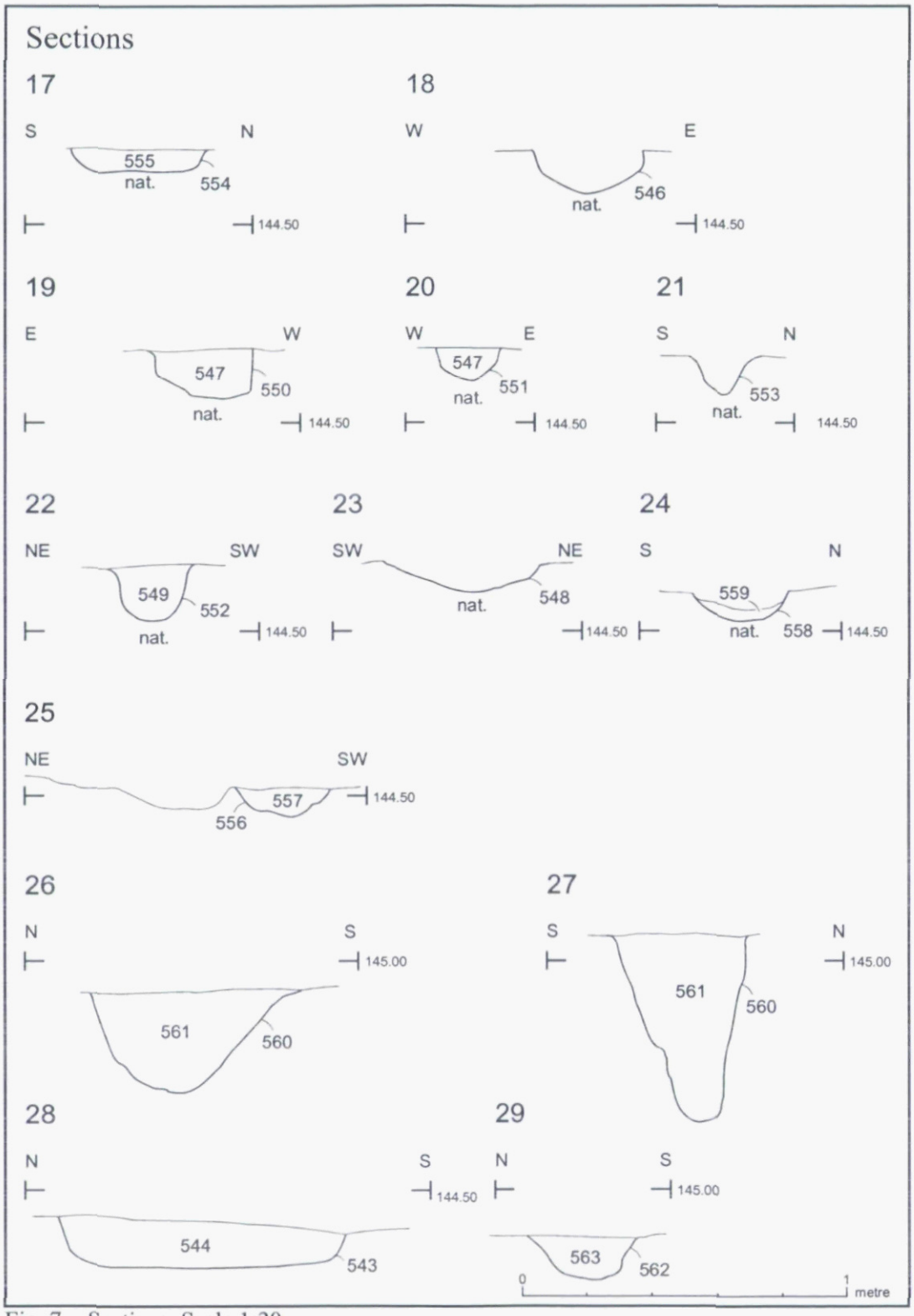


Fig. 7 Sections. Scale 1:20.

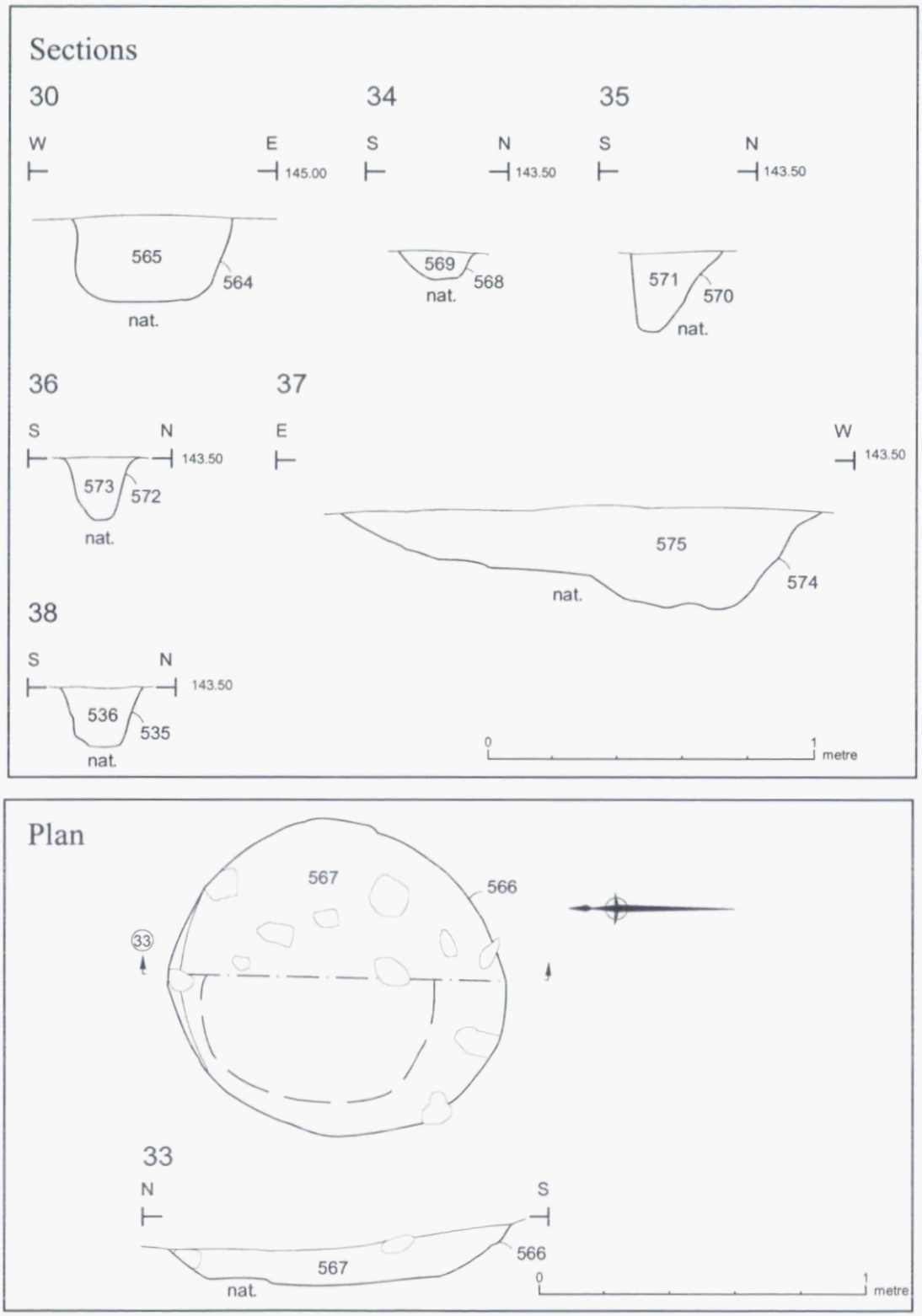
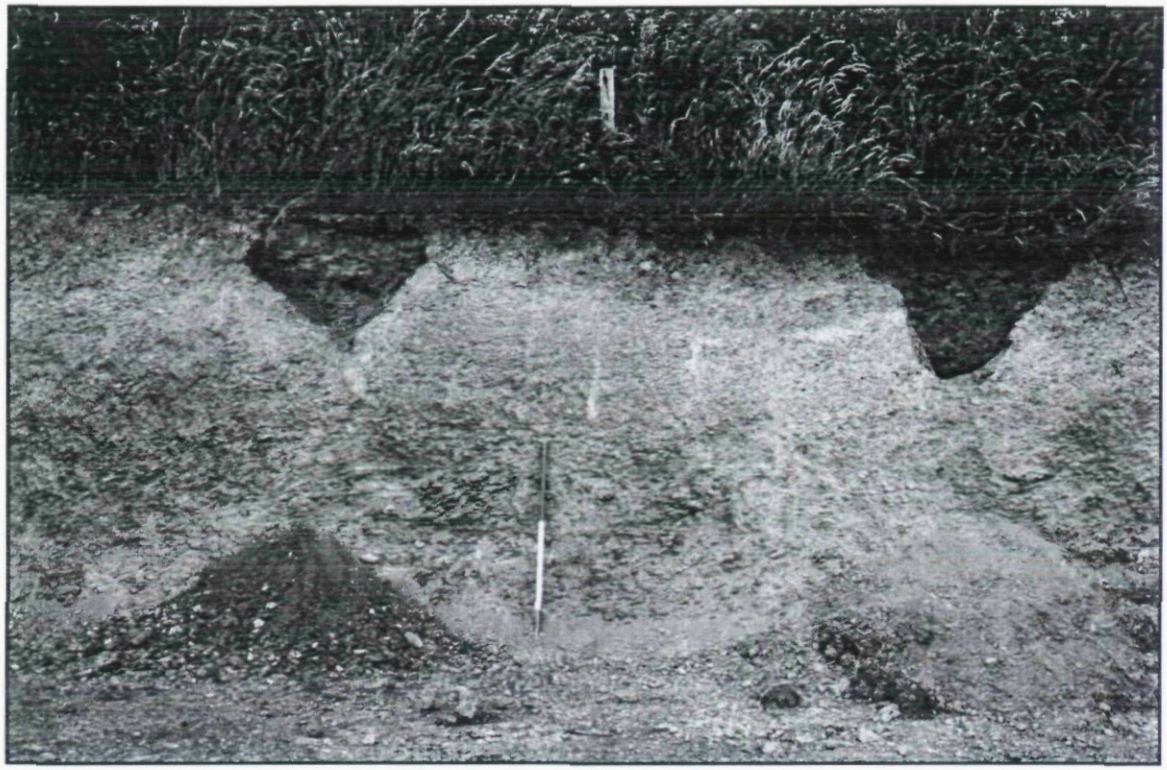


Fig. 8 Sections and plan and section of pit 566. Scale 1:20.

Fig. 9 Projected layout of medieval field system. Based on plan supplied by Michael Goff. Scale 1:2000.

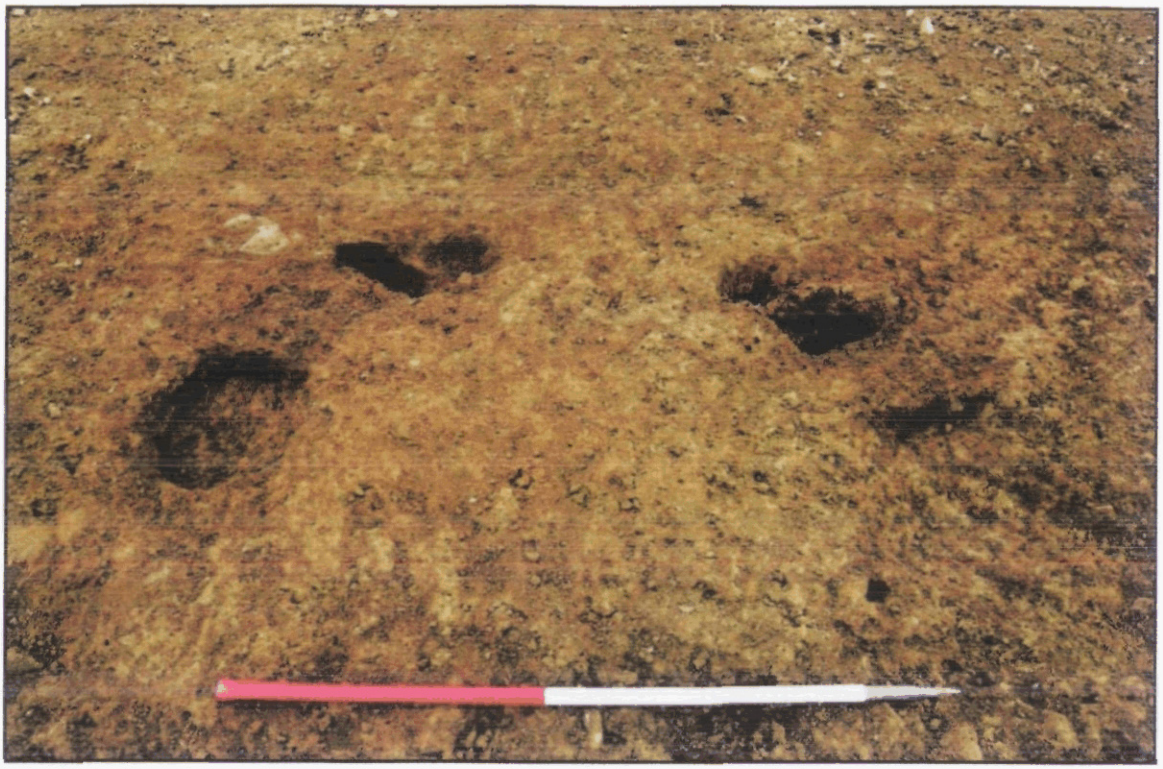
Pl. 1 View across site during topsoil stripping. Looking east.

Pl. 2 Terraced area to north of Henscott. Looking north.

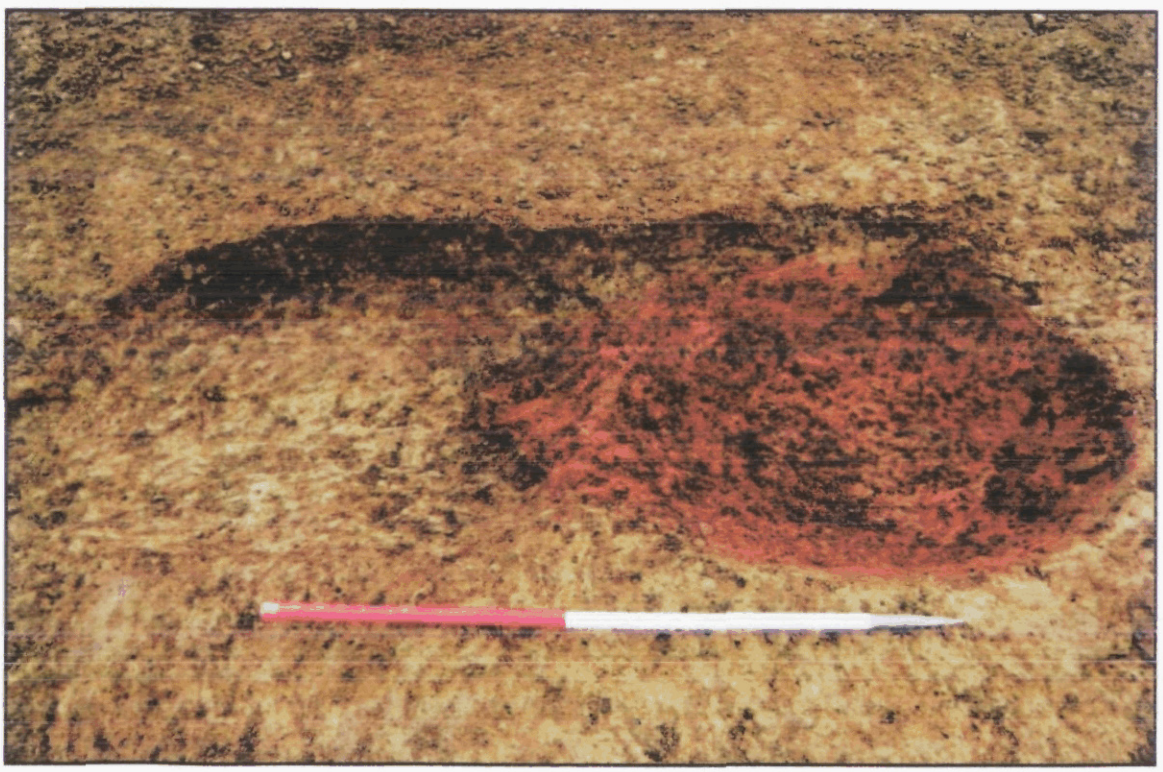


Pl. 3 Pits 509 and 501 exposed in the northern edge of the terraced area. Scale 1m.

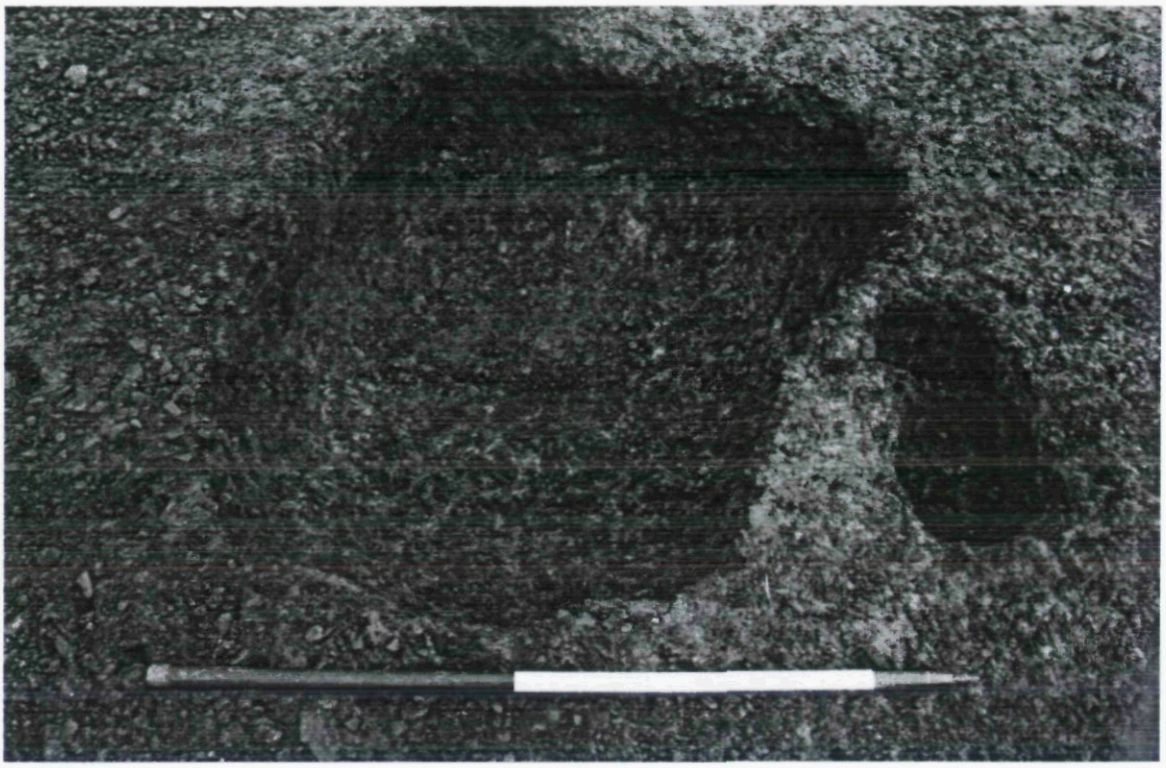
Pl. 4 Pit 501 fully excavated to reveal hedge ditch cutting its northern side. Looking north. Scale 1m.



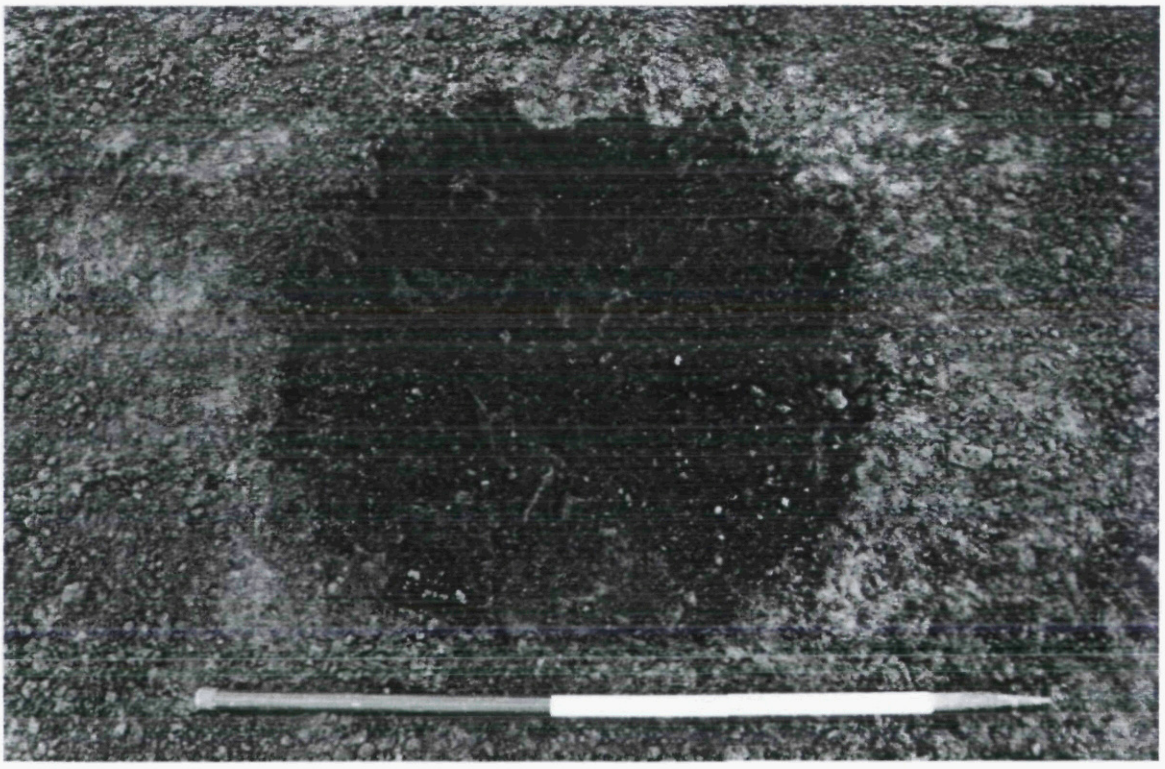
Pl. 5 Area A: post holes 546, 547, 551- on left and 548, 552,553, 554-on right. Looking north. Scale 1m.



Pl. 6 Area B: Roman industrial feature 543. Note heat discolouration on right of feature. Looking north. Scale 1m.



Pl. 7 Area B: pits 516 and 524. Looking east. Scale 1m.



Pl. 8 Charcoal filled pit 543. Looking north Scale 1m.