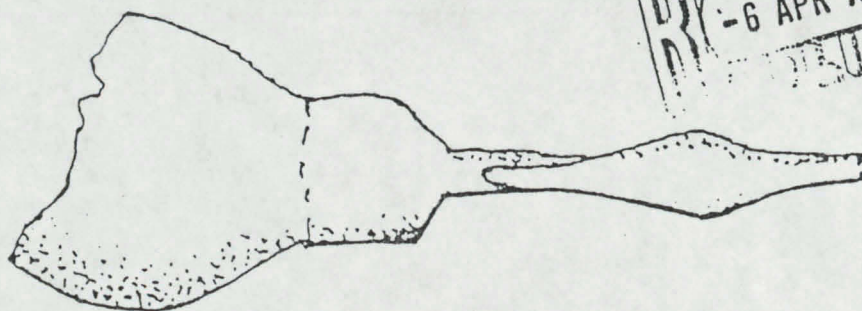


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THE MUSEUM OF
LONDON

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT
72a ARMAGH ROAD
91-93 PARNELL ROAD
E3



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DEPARTMENT OF GREATER LONDON ARCHAEOLOGY
(NORTH LONDON)

KEN PITT

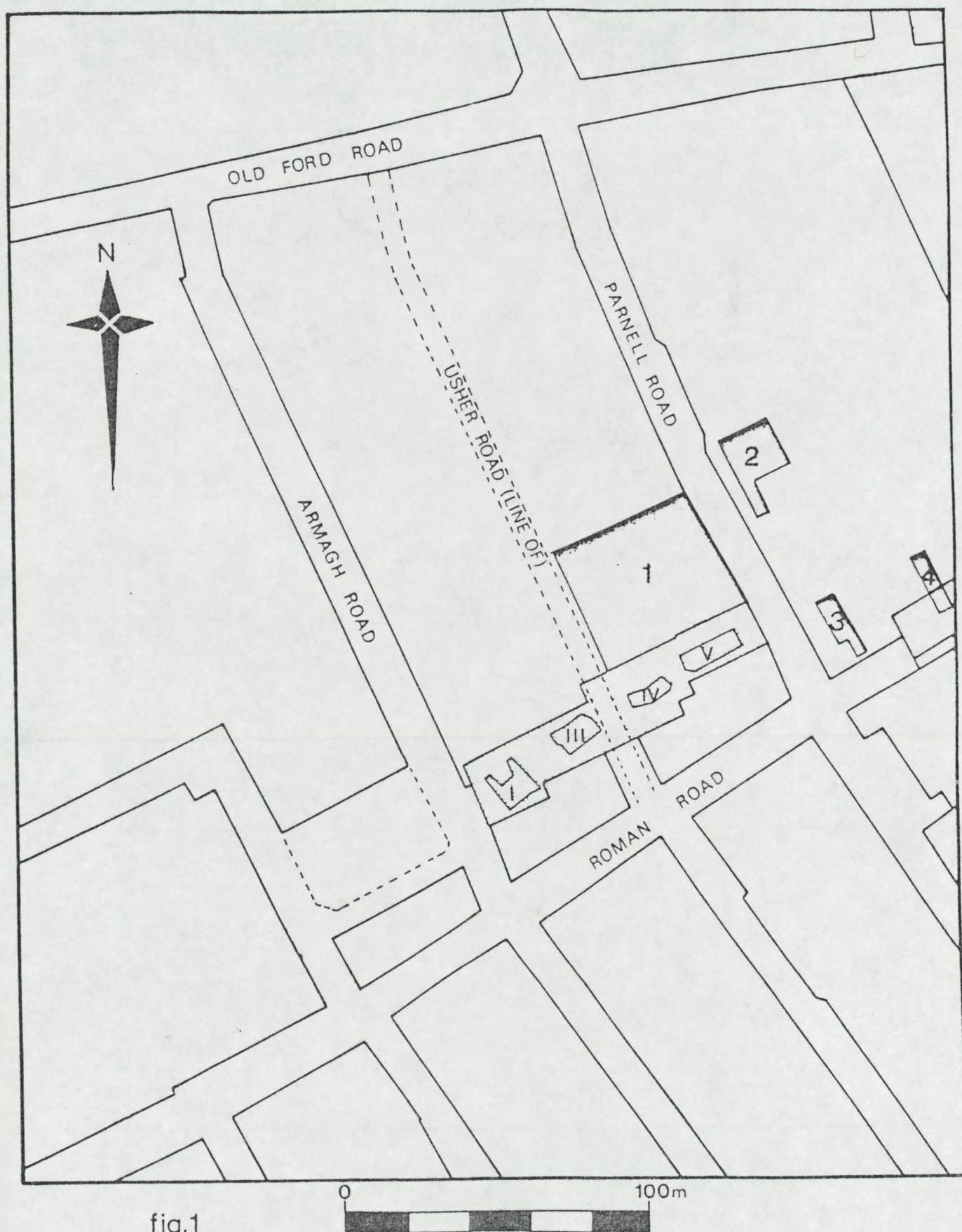


fig.1

LOCATION OF SITE

PREVIOUS EXCAVATIONS BY THE INNER LONDON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

INTRODUCTION

During the period 15th January - 23th March 1990 the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology undertook an excavation at 72a Armagh Road, 67/71 & 69 Usher Road, 91-93 Parnell Road (TQ 3684 8351), prior to redevelopment by Annelisa Homes Ltd. This is a preliminary report of the excavation findings. Post-excavation analysis continues and finds dating evidence is not yet available.

The site was situated just north of Roman Road, in an area where previous excavations had revealed the Roman road from London to Colchester and evidence of a Roman settlement, which appears to be concentrated in the Old Ford area, west of the River Lea. The dating evidence of the finds from these excavations, suggests that the settlement originated in the first century but was particularly active in the late third and fourth centuries. The excavation aimed to recover further evidence of the settlement, and in particular to examine an area of roadside occupation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the vicinity of the Armagh Road site during the 19th century Roman burials were found which were the first suggestion that there may have been Roman occupation in this area. In more recent times there have been four major excavations, to the north-east of the site (see fig.1 No.1) an area was excavated in 1974 [McIsaac *et al* 1972] which produced evidence for Roman field boundaries defined by ditches, the field enclosures were found to vary in size, being smaller to the south, where they were closest to the Roman road. Many Roman pits were also found, but no evidence for structures was located. Roman burials were found in 1971 in an area to the east on Parnell Road (see fig.1 No. 2) [Sheldon 1972], but very little evidence was found for field outlines and it is supposed that this site was away from the habitated areas. Also in 1971 at Appian Road (see fig.1 No.4) [Sheldon 1972] a length of the Roman Road was found; evidence for Roman structures in the form of Roman floor and roof tiles was found but no structural remains. More of the road was found in 1980 [Mills 1984] at the junction of Roman Road and Parnell Road (see fig.1 No. 3), but again no Roman structural remains were found.

The conclusions drawn from the previous excavations, suggested that the Roman settlement straddled the road with buildings 'strung out' alongside it, behind the buildings there would have been a network of yards and fields, their boundaries defined by ditches. Away from the main areas of habitation there would be small family cemetery areas, a pattern is typical of rural Roman roadside settlements which have been described by Finch Smith [1987].

As the settlement appears to have been laid out along the road it can be assumed that the nature of the settlement was in part defined by the type of traffic using the road. It has been suggested that the road was mainly used for the transportation of food from Essex and East Anglia to the Roman City of London Londinium. The large amount of cattle bone with evidence of butchering, and the many coins found, suggests that this settlement may have been primarily a market, with the buying and selling of cattle, as well as slaughtering, for sale in Londinium. The field enclosures would probably have been pasture for cattle prior to trading. As this settlement was only two miles from Londinium it would be ideally placed for such activities.

THE EXCAVATION

The initial phase of excavation consisted of the opening of five trenches by machine, to determine the archaeological potential of the site. These consisted of two north-south trenches (1 and 2), and three east-west trenches (3, 4 and 5), numbering from west to east. After a brief examination it was decided to connect trenches 1 and 2 to form area I, and enlarge trench 3 northwards to form area III, and trenches 4 and 5 thus became areas IV and V respectively, (see fig.1).

Area I

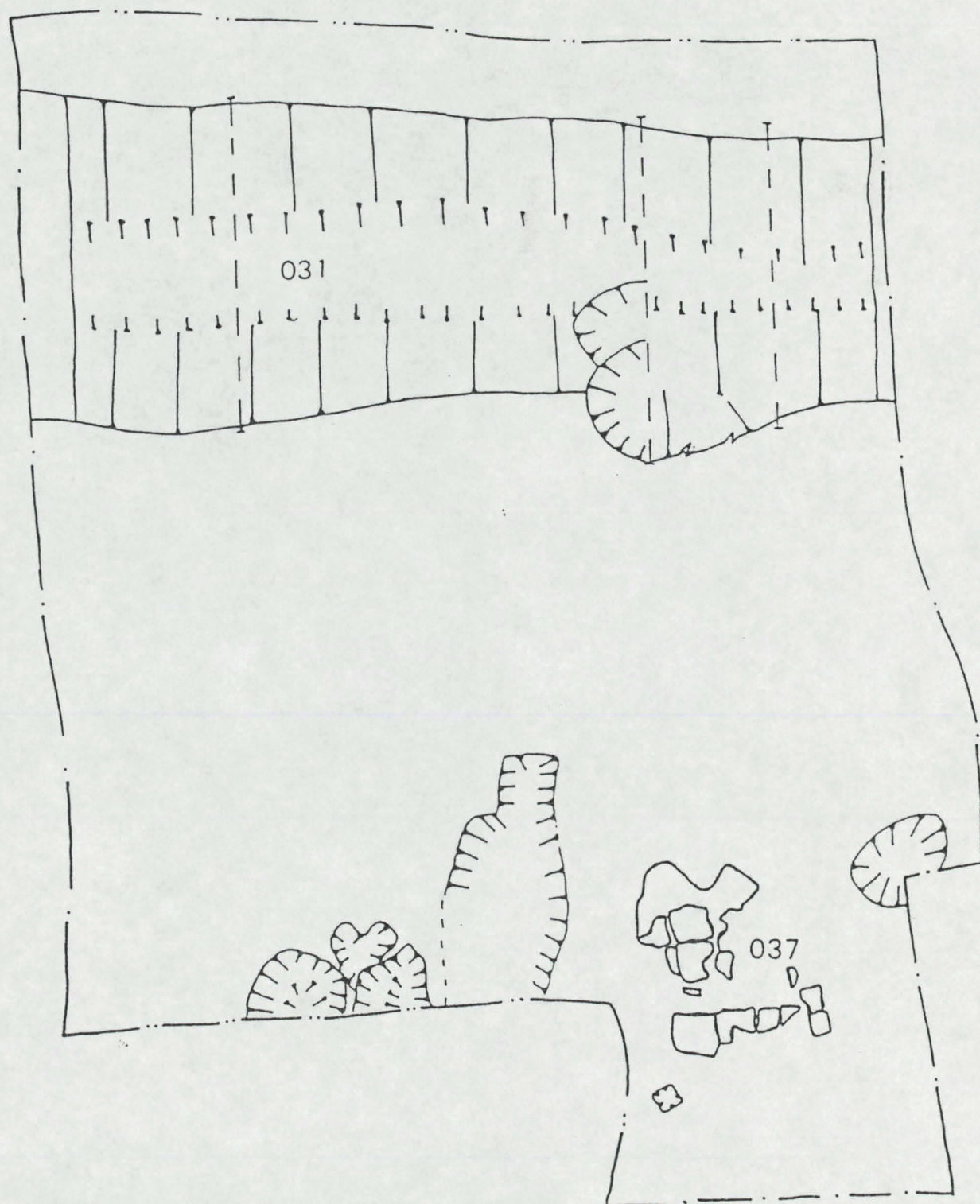
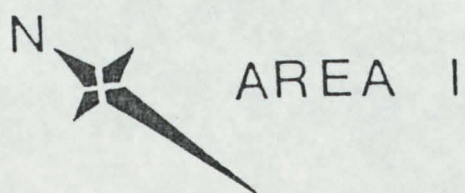
This area measured 9.70m (W-E) by 7.35m (N-S) and was cut to the west by trench 1 and to the east by trench 2. The earliest features in this area were a group of quarry pits (see fig. 2). Due to limitations of excavation these quarry pits were not excavated, but they cut the natural sands and gravels and overlying brickearth of this area, and their fill contained a high proportion of brickearth and very little gravel. This gravel quarrying was presumably for the construction of the Roman road the line of which is conjectured to pass immediately to the south of this area.

Cut into the fills of these quarry pits and also the natural brickearth was a group of twenty stakeholes and two postholes (see fig. 2). The majority formed no discernible pattern, but six of the stakeholes were grouped into pairs forming the arc of a quarter of a circle, possibly a fence line marking a field or property boundary.

Over these features was a layer of disturbed brickearth, 0.05m-0.10m thick. This dumped material may have been deliberately laid to improve the ground for agricultural purposes; this contained evidence of root action, and vertical marks left by Cockchafer larvae. Cockchafers are beetles that lay their eggs in dry, well-drained pasture land. When the larvae hatch they burrow vertically upwards leaving marks in the soil. These indicate that this land may have been pasture at this period.



fig. 2



0 2m

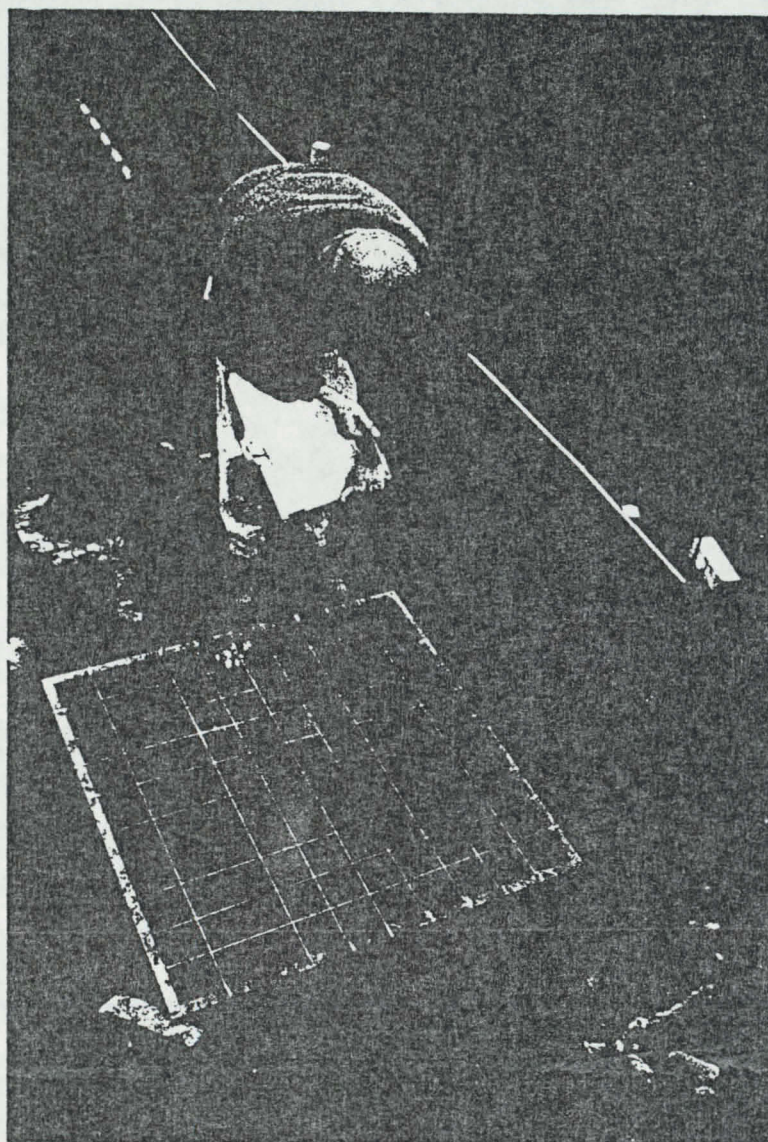
fig.4

Cut into the disturbed brickearth in the east of this area there was a large ditch (075) orientated north-south (see fig. 3), the exact extent of which could not be discerned due to the limits of excavation; but its width was 2.12m and it was 0.75m deep. Ditch (075) from its size and nature appears to have been a property boundary, outlining the extent of a plot of land, but probably also functioned as a drainage ditch. Cutting this layer were also various pits, postholes, and stakeholes (see fig. 3). Due to the limited number of these features no overall interpretation of their purpose could be formed. In the north-west corner of this area was a small patch of roof and floor tile and ragstone (055) (see fig.3), this feature was truncated by trial trench 1 to the west and extended beyond the limits of excavation to the north. The exact purpose of this feature is unknown due to its heavily truncated nature but it is possibly a rough pathway or postpad.

The next series of events consisted of the build-up of a number of layers of 'ploughsoil'. The homogeneous nature of the 'ploughsoil' meant that the individual layers were hard to define. The 'ploughsoil' was therefore removed in two arbitrary spits. Cutting the lower of these was large a ditch (031), (see fig. 4), which followed the same line as the earlier ditch (075), but was slightly offset to the west. It was possibly a deliberate recut also acting as a property boundary ditch indicating continuity of this boundary. Also cutting the 'ploughsoil' was a group of shallow oval and circular pits, two of which cut ditch (031) (see fig. 4). These pits contained a moderate amount of Roman tile and daub, and were probably rubbish disposal pits.

Located in the south-west of this area and abutted by the 'ploughsoil' layer were the remains of a hearth (037), (see fig. 4), constructed of Roman floor and roof tiles. The initial phases of the hearth consisted of badly burnt tiles which had cracked into fine fragments, and burnt clay. These lay on the disturbed brickearth at the base of the 'ploughsoil'. The hearth appears to have been used for some considerable time with the tiles being replaced as they became fragmented, by the heat of the hearth: three rebuilds of this nature were found, which increased the height of the hearth to the level of the surface of the 'ploughsoil'.

Many fragments of Roman roof and floor tile were found in the 'ploughsoil' but no other evidence for structures was found in this area.



THE HEARTH DURING EXCAVATION

Area III

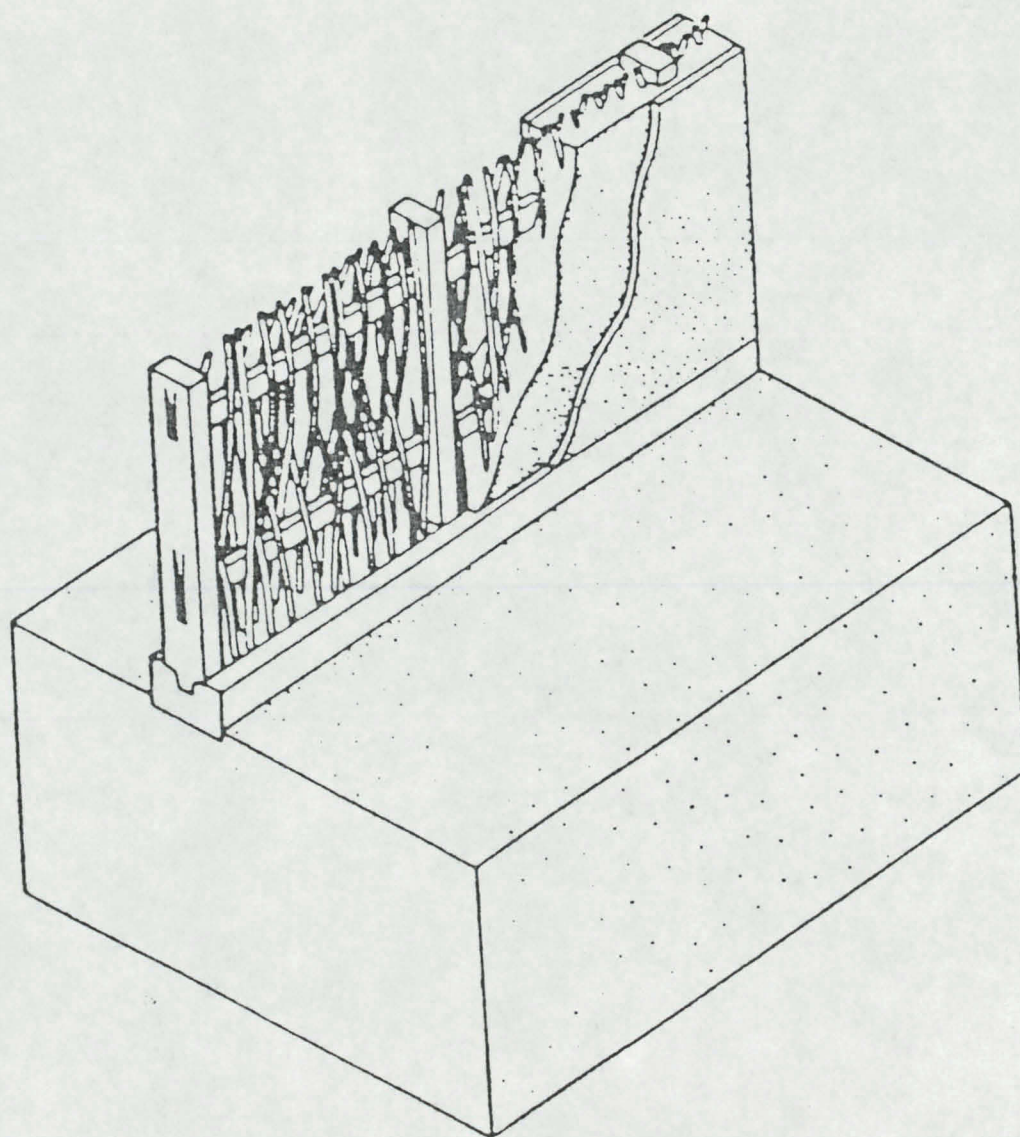
Area III was an east-west trench measuring 11.20m (W-E) by 6.80m (N-S). It was excavated to the level of disturbed brickearth. Cut into the brickearth was a group of postholes and stakeholes, which formed an L-shape (see fig.5). This could have been the remains of a timber structure, at least 4.00m wide and 6.00m long orientated east-west, the purpose of this structure is unknown, but the presence of Cockchafer larvae burrows in the brickearth indicates pasture land. Therefore, this structure could possibly be a livestock enclosure, or possibly a later domestic dwelling. At this level were four shallow pits or depressions all of which were truncated by modern disturbance making their exact function difficult to interpret.

Overlying these features was a build-up of 'ploughsoil' similar to that in area I. The construction cut for a major timber frame wall (101) (see fig. 6) had been dug through the 'ploughsoil'. The wall was orientated north-south at rightangles to the projected line of the Roman road, it measured at least 5.65m long, 0.80m wide, and 0.53m deep. This wall was constructed by cutting a trench into the surrounding ground, and then levelling off the base with clay; over this clay a wooden beam was laid, constructed out of several pieces of timber nailed and butted together. Upright posts would have been set into the surface of the beam, and in between these posts there would have been a framework of wattle (thin branches), with a 'coating' of daub (brickearth/clay) pressed onto the wattle to form a smooth weather proof surface. The remains found were heavily burnt; all that remained of the ground beam was a dark fill containing a large amount of charcoal, lying over it was a heavy concentration of burnt daub with charcoal flecks. This showed that the wall had been burnt and the wattle and daub had collapsed down into the construction cut. Only one length of this structure was found and it appeared to end where it was truncated by a modern narrow drain cut to the south. No return was present suggesting that the structure, opened onto the Roman roadside. A hundred percent sample was taken of the daub, and from the wattle impressions in the daub it is hoped to be able to reconstruct the framework of this wall.

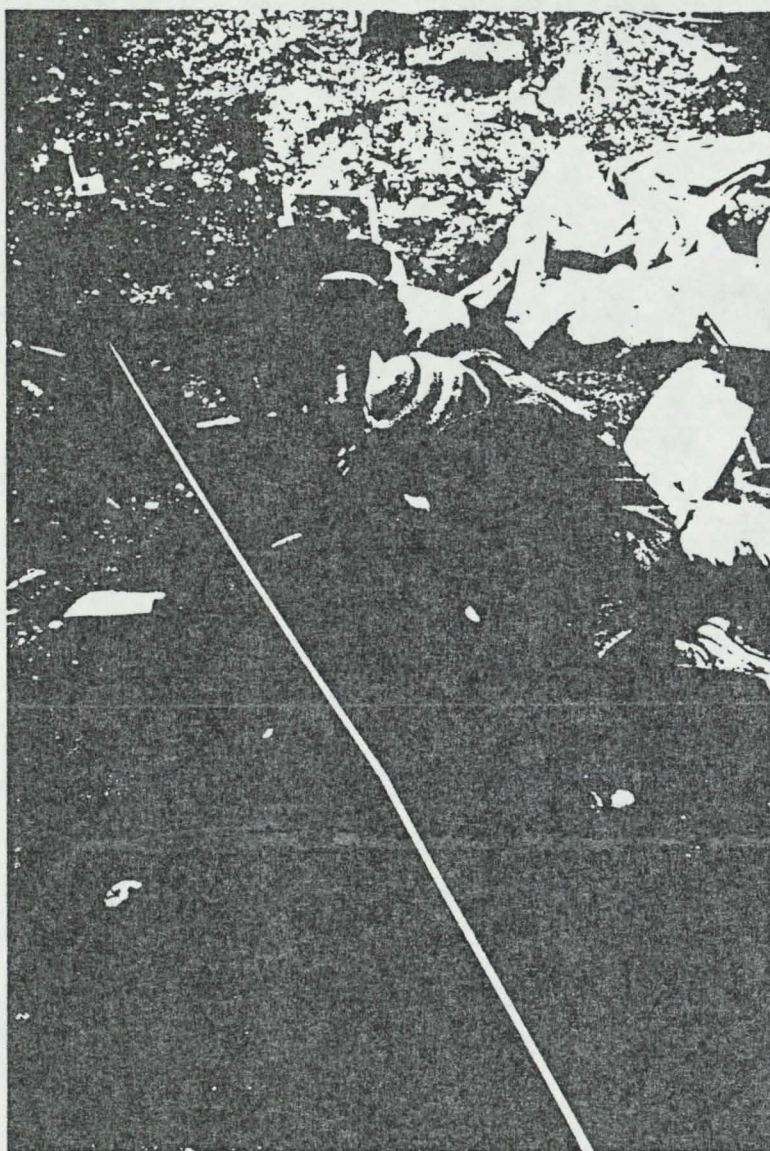
Just to the west of this wall were a group of six small postholes (110) (see fig.6), filled and capped by a layer of building debris, and may have been the impressions left by scaffolding used during the construction of the wall. However as no floor levels survived associated with the wall the postholes might also have been some abutting out-building, or an internal partition.

In the south-west of this area were two west-east linear features, possibly drainage gullies, the southern of the two appeared to demarcate an area in which a large group of

intercutting pits had been dug, (see fig.6). These were filled with daub and charcoal fragments, and may have been for the disposal of debris from the burnt wall. Two similar pits were also found to the east of the wall. A small isolated north-south orientated beamslot and posthole (106) cut the surface of the pits to the west.



RECONSTRUCTION OF A WATTLE AND DAUB WALL



THE WATTLE AND DAUB WALL DURING EXCAVATION

N
AREA III

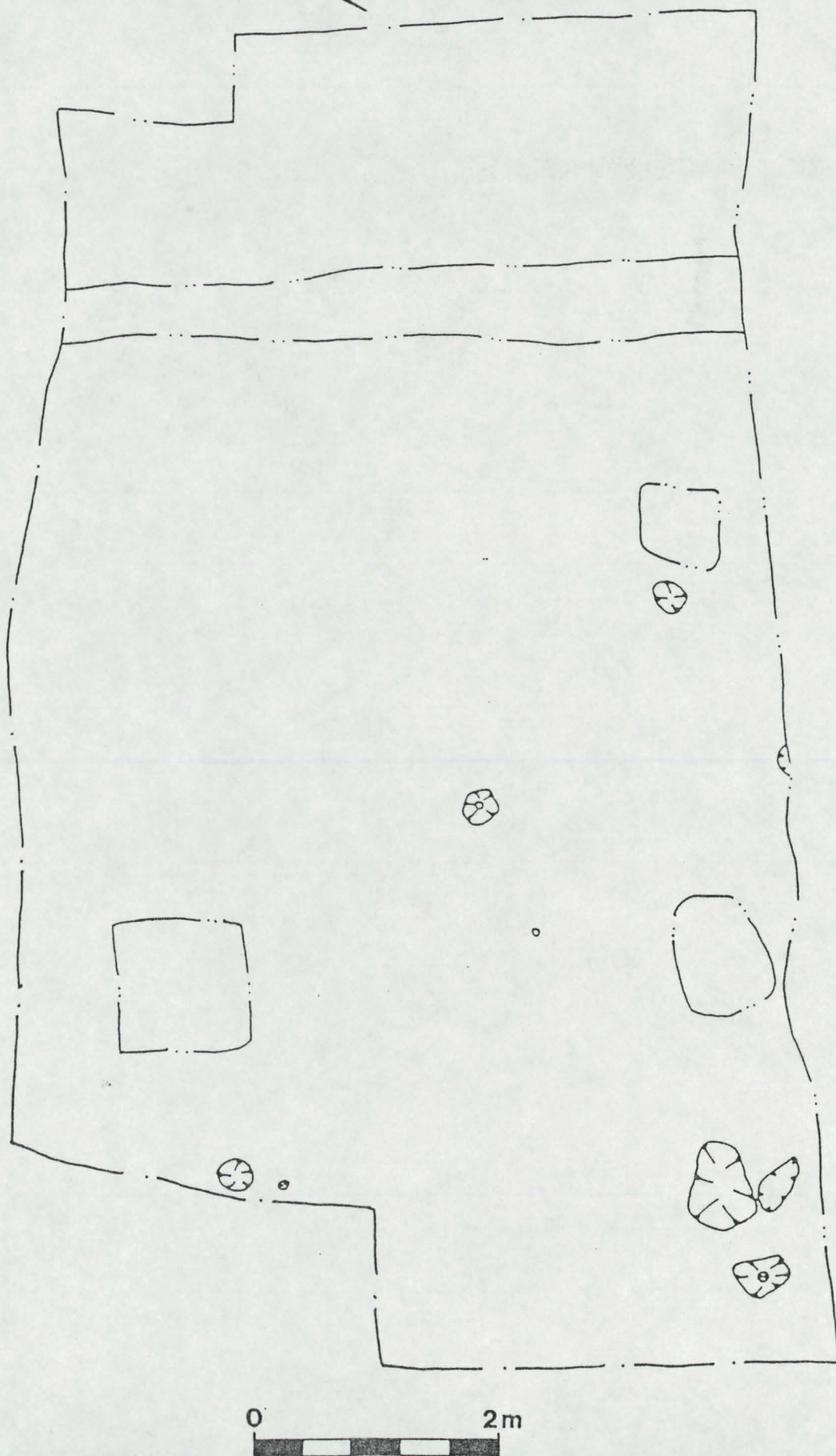
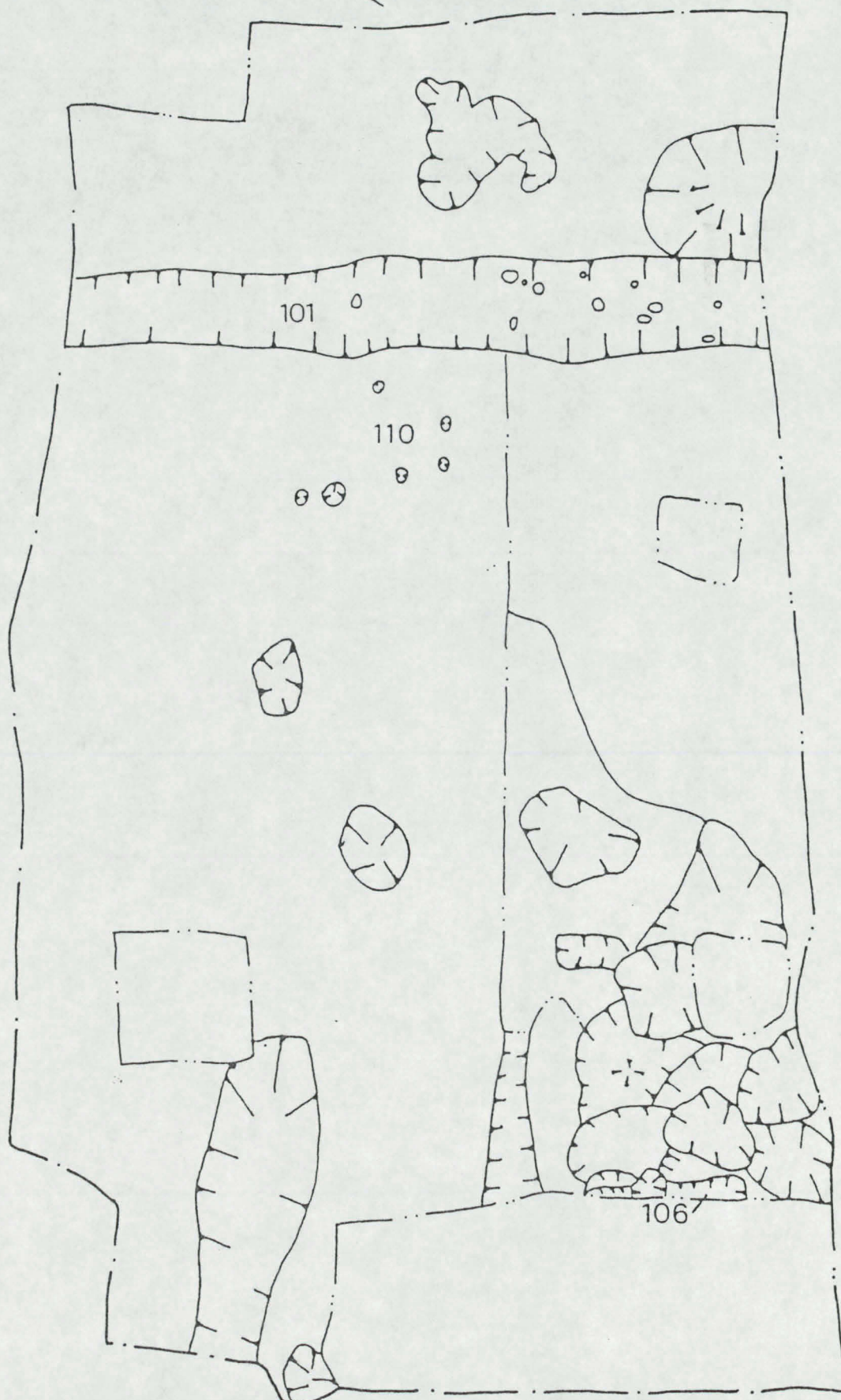


fig. 5

N



AREA III



0

2m



Area IV

Area IV was another east-west trench, again this was excavated to the level of disturbed brickearth. Approximately 20% of this area was lost due to the presence of a modern drain cutting through it, resulting in the truncation of many of the features in this area.

There were five pits, two postholes, and a stakehole cut into the disturbed brickearth layer (see fig.7), all the pits were truncated by the modern drain or later features, making their original shape and purpose difficult to interpret.

Overlying these features there was a layer of 'ploughsoil', cut by two north-south ditches 6.50m apart. (see fig.8). The narrower of the two was located to the west, and was truncated to the north by the modern drain, and it was 0.90m wide, and 0.42m deep. It contained a dark fill which produced many sherds of Roman pottery, two copper alloy coins, and a worked bone pin. Possibly this ditch was a small boundary ditch delineating a property sub-division. The larger ditch was only partially excavated, and its exact extent was not located due to the limits of excavation, but it is possible that it is an extension of a ditch found on the previous excavation north of this area, (McIsaac 1979), (fig.1, No.1). It was 2.20m wide, and 0.75m deep, making it similar in size to the ditches found in area I. Its profile suggested that it may have been recut at some stage but only one fill was found. The dimensions of this ditch suggests it would have been a major property boundary.

Only three other features were found at this level, and all were truncated by modern intrusions making interpretation difficult. To the extreme west and also to the north of this trench was the remains of a thin gravel surface possible rough yard surface. It had been heavily disturbed by later 'ploughing', and truncated from above by machine clearance and its relationship to the two ditches could not be discerned.

AREA IV

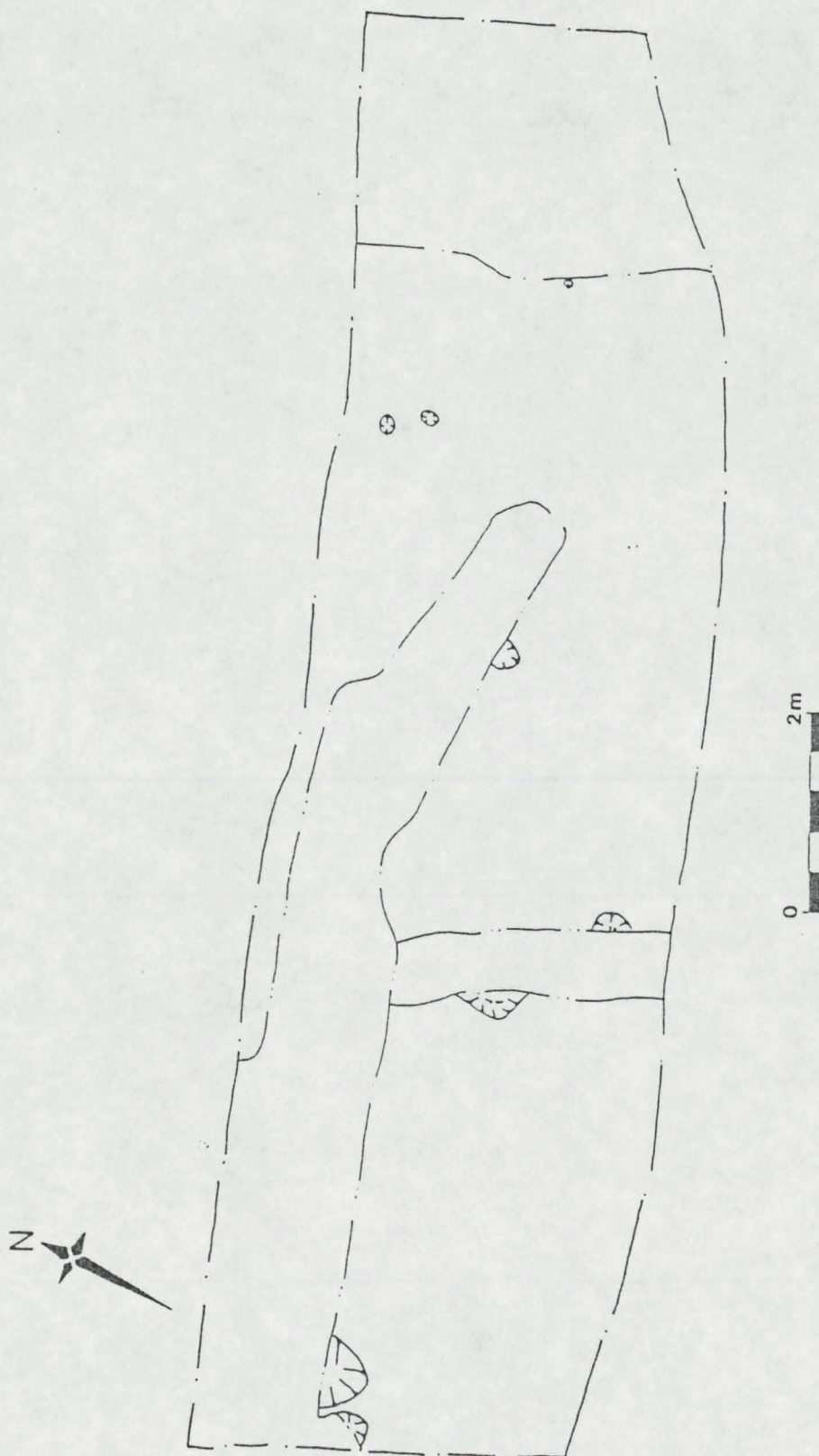


fig.7

AREA IV

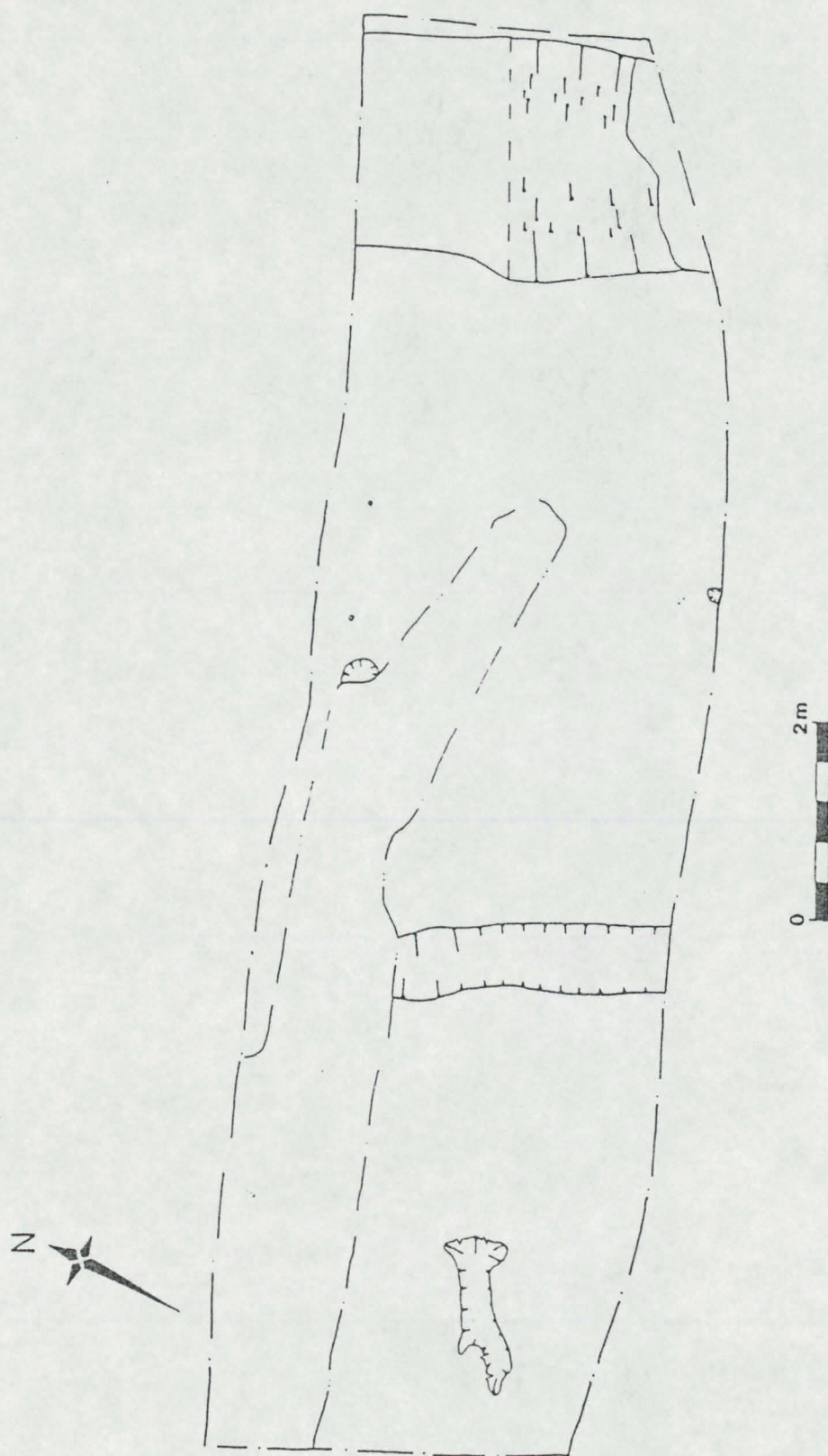


fig.8

Area V (see fig. 9)

Very little excavation was undertaken in this area due to time constraints, however four features were excavated. A vertical sided pit, and a stakehole, both of which were cut by a later shallow north-south linear feature, the exact purpose of which is uncertain. To the north there was another large linear feature, orientated east-west. Both of these linear features may have been ditches truncated from above by the overlying modern building.



AREA V

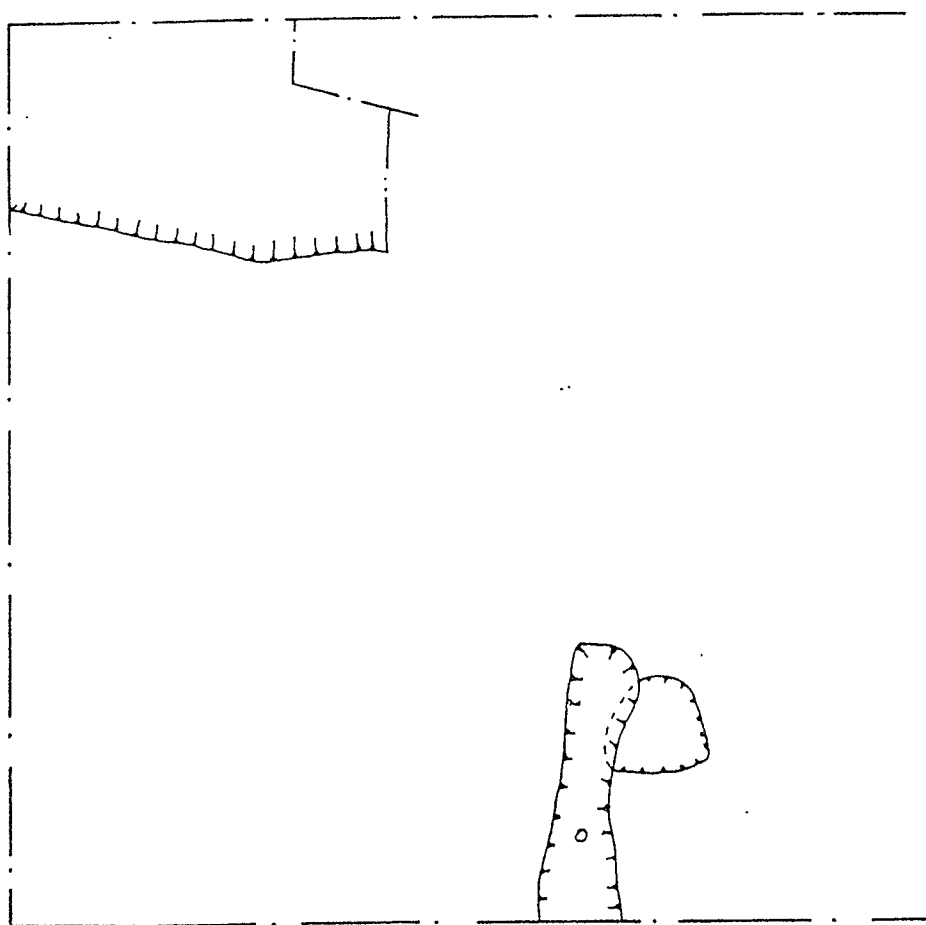


fig.9

CONCLUSIONS

The sequence of Roman activity found on the Armagh Road site can be broken down into four phases:

Phase 1

Gravel quarrying for the construction of the Roman road from London to Colchester, and the backfilling of the pits with brickearth. This must have entailed use of a considerable workforce, and it is thought that the road would have been constructed by the Roman army.

Phase 2

The earliest occupation evidence consisted of postholes and stakeholes cut into the natural brickearth and the quarry pit fills (area I). These probably represent property boundaries and possibly rudimentary structures.

Phase 3

A build up of the ground surface in the form of disturbed brickearth then took place. At this time, the area may have been used for pasture land. Ditches sub-divided this area, and seem to have marked property boundaries which remained in use for a considerable time. The postholes in area III may have been for fencing, or for a structure.

Phase 4

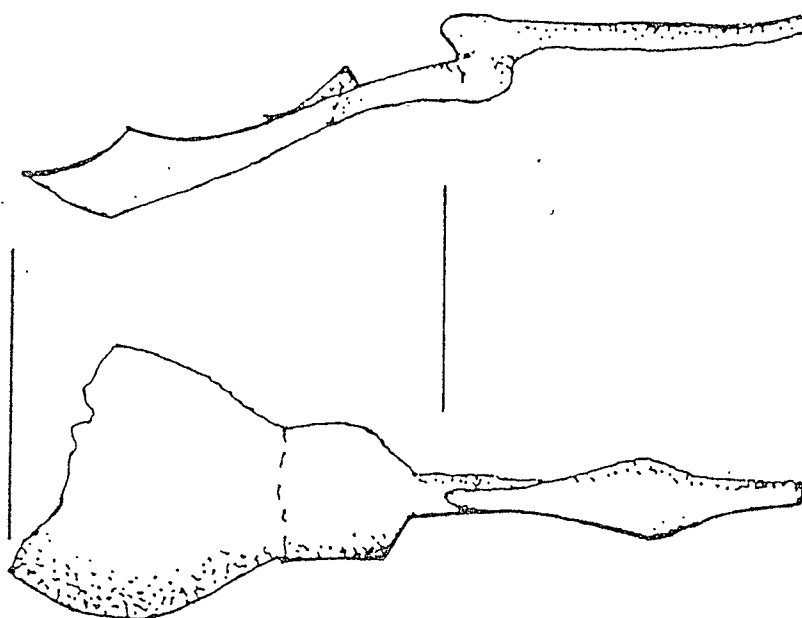
There followed a build up of 'ploughsoil', presumably indicating continuous cultivation, with the continuing use of ditches to define property boundaries (areas I & IV), and some plots were sub-divided by smaller ditches (area IV). A substantial structure was erected using ground beams with wattle and daub walls (area III). This structure was obviously extremely large as its other walls lay beyond the excavation area; any floors relating to the wall were lost due to later cultivation, but there seemed to be no southern wall indicating that it may have been open to the road. It could have been a barn or some form of shelter for road users. The hearth in area I appeared to have remained in constant use throughout this phase, which entailed a number of rebuilds. It was not clearly associated with any structure and might have been in a backyard, and perhaps used for an agricultural activity, possibly the drying of grain. The tight grouping of pits bordered by a gully (area III) indicates specific uses for particular parts of the settlement.

This excavation has significantly added to our knowledge of the Roman settlement at Old Ford. It has examined a part of the settlement layout which had not previously been studied and

indicated what kind of occupation evidence might be found by the roadside. The settlement can be shown to be similar to others in lowland Britain, with a distinct layout of smaller enclosures and buildings close to the road, with large fields behind.

THE FINDS

The preliminary report from the finds suggests the majority are from the third and fourth centuries. The majority of the pot sherds were black burnished wares, though some first and second century pottery was found. Twenty three copper alloy coins were recovered, all have been preliminarily dated to the third and fourth centuries (see appendix 1). Other important finds include two fragments of shale bracelets, a copper alloy spoon, a copper alloy cloak pin, copper alloy clasp, two worked bone pins, and numerous iron objects including a hook, bolt, fork, and many nails.



SCALE 3:2

THE COPPER ALLOY SPOON

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APPENDIX 1

ARMAGH ROAD, E3, 1990 - IDENTIFICATION LIST OF ROMAN COINS

(Wear: A= unworn B= slight wear, C= average wear, D= fairly heavy wear, E= very heavy wear, ?= indicates corrosion renders condition uncertain).

SF	CONT	DATE	IDENTIFICATION	WEAR	REF
65	30	222-235	Plated copy, denarius of Julia Mamaea Rev. VENUS VICTRIX	B?	Copy of RIC (Severus Alexander) 358
47	36	253-9	Gallienus, rev. VIRTUS AVGG	B?	RIC (Joint Reign) 456
10	1	268-70	Claudius II, rev. LAETITIA AVG	B	RIC 181
31	24	268-73	Victorinus of Tetricus I, unc. rev.	?	(Corroded)
24	24	c.270-85	Irregular Gallic Empire, poss. Tetricus I, rev. poss. HILARITAS	B	Copy of RIC 79-81
21	24	C.270-85	Irregular radiate, poss. type of Probus (276-282)	B	?
27	24	c.270-85	Irregular copy, Tetricus I. rev. HILARITAS AVGG	B	Copy of RIC 79
25	24	c.270-85	Irregular copy, Claudius II, rev. CONSECRATIO (Eagle).	D	Copy of RIC 266
17	24	prob.270-300	Irregular coin, v. corroded, rev. may have been filed flat; unclear.	?	?
57	42	287-90	Carausius, rev. PAX AVG	B	RIC 121/122
28	24	287-93	Carausius, rev. PAX AVG	C?	As RIC. 98ff
22	24	321-4	Constantine II	?	As RIC. VII (London) 219

7	1	c.355-65	Irregular copy, Constantius II, rev. prob. Fallen horsemen type.	?	Copy as LRB2. 72
6	1	?c.365-75	illegible; irregular flan. appears as if it may be cast. Remincent of the cast copies of coins of the House of Valentinian seen quite often.		
23	24	c.270-370	Illegible, corroded, Nothing on x-ray.		
13	+	c.270-300	ditto.		

Mike Hammerson
29.5.90