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The Excavation of a Romano-British
Farmstead at Normanton-le-Heath,
Leicestershire

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The Excavation of a Romano-British Enclosure at
Normanton-le-Heath, Leicestershire

Summary

Between June and September 1991, the Leicestershire Archaeological Unit carried out extensive excavations on the site of a Romano-British settlement at Normanton-le-Heath in north-west Leicestershire. This work was financed by British Coal, Opencast Executive in advance of proposed opencast extraction. There are no aerial photographs showing cropmarks for the site and the decision to excavate was based upon the results of fieldwalking and preliminary trial trenching during a one month evaluation phase in June 1991.

A total area of 3713 square metres was examined, revealing enclosure ditches, droveways, the postholes of a timber building and a possible pottery kiln..

A tentative division of the site into three phases is suggested in this report. Phase 1 is represented by a ditch of 80 metres length which ran across the site from east to west and formed the northern boundary of an adjoining rectangular enclosure measuring 45 x 15 metres. It is likely that these ditches were maintained from at least the early 2nd century AD until the late 2nd early 3rd century AD. Substantial recutting had taken place on several occasions.

The function of these features is unclear but it is possible that the east west ditch formed the southern boundary of a large enclosure occupying the area now covered by woodland. In view of the lack of evidence for occupation in the areas examined, the focus of the early settlement could have been in this area. Deliberate infilling of these ditches appears to have taken place during the late 2nd/early 3rd century AD and a track or droveway crosses the Phase 1 ditches to the east of the excavated area. A structure which respects the track has been taken to post-date the infilling of the Phase 1 ditches. Phase 2 is represented by the track a rectangular structure and kiln. The kiln consisted of a stokepit and an oven with a short flue. Evidence of an oven lining in the form of fired clay fragments was recovered from the fill. There was, however, no evidence of kiln furniture such as firebars or a pedestal. A large quantity of pottery consisting almost entirely sandy oxidised/greyware was found.

These were succeeded by a group of enclosures which were in turn abandoned during the late 3rd/mid 4th century AD. In comparison to the phase 1 enclosures which were recut on several occasions, the phase 3 boundaries appear to have been shortlived with little evidence of substantial recutting.

The high acid content of the soil meant that very little bone survived on the site - when it had it was generally very fragile. Most of the pottery was also in poor condition, and very few metal objects or coins were recovered.

Although it is known that small Romano-British rural settlements were widespread in the area, little work has been carried out on these sites in the past. The excavation at Normanton-le-Heath has, therefore, provided a significant addition to the archaeological knowledge of Leicestershire.

Introduction

In response to a proposal by British Coal to develop an opencast coal-mine in the area, the Leicestershire Archaeological Unit has undertaken the excavation of a Romano-British site at Normanton-le-Heath 23Km (14 miles) north-west of Leicester. All work was financed by British Coal and was carried out from June - October 1991. The excavation was directed by the author and managed by Patrick Clay. The finds and archive are deposited with the Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service (Acc. No. A38.1991).

Situated on a geology of Mercian mudstone (Keuper Marl) overlying keuper sandstone, the site (British Coal Site 2) was discovered as a result of fieldwalking of the area by the Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service Archaeological Survey Team in 1989. A Roman pottery scatter, confined to the north east corner of the field bounded by Jubilee plantation to the north and Normanton Wood to the east, indicated the presence of a potential site. This was confirmed by an evaluation of the area carried out in June 1991.

There are no aerial photographs showing cropmarks in the area of the excavation. However, aerial photographs in the Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record show two enclosures of possible Iron Age/Romano-British date (SK 394142 and SK 392142) to the north of Jubilee plantation, together with a ring ditch (SK 387 141) further to the east - all within a 500 metre radius of the excavated area (Fig 1).

Previous work in the area includes the excavation in 1990, of an Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Normanton-le-Heath (SK 389 118) 1.5Km (1 mile) to the south, with the Romano-British element consisting primarily of a large rectangular enclosure and associated track or driveway - both with probable Iron Age origins (British Coal Site 1 (Thorpe forthcoming)). At Ravenstone (SK 402 117) just over 2Km to the south east of Normanton-le-Heath, excavations carried out in 1981 discovered Roman pottery kilns, enclosure ditches and a timber structure (Lucas 1981).

Objectives

The excavation was undertaken with the following objectives:-

1. To confirm the presence or otherwise of archaeologically significant deposits.
2. To determine the character, extent and state of preservation of any such deposits.
3. Once the above had been achieved: to select a representative area of the site for excavation with a view to obtaining an understanding of its status and development.

Methods

Trial trenching during the evaluation phase, using a JCB 3C with 1.5 metre wide trenching bucket established that the focus of archaeological activity was on the higher ground to the north of the evaluation area. Although there was some limited evidence of archaeological deposits extending eastwards, it was decided that open area excavation would be kept within the limits of original evaluation area where enclosures ditches and a possible furnace or kiln had been located. The kiln was of particular interest given the

proximity of this site to the one at Ravenstone where Roman pottery kilns are known to have operated. With the aid of a dumper truck, the topsoil was stripped from a total area of 3145 square metres. Trial trenches on the slope to the south and at the base of the slope produced little evidence of archaeological activity. Excluding those trial trenches which were later incorporated into the main area of excavation, an area of 568 square metres was examined in 1.5 wide trenches.

The site had sustained considerable damage in the past through ploughing, with the furrows of medieval and post medieval strip fields crossing the site from the north to south at regular intervals. These furrows were on average 2 metres and 0.20 metres deep - leaving less disturbed islands approximately 4.00 M wide in between. Removal of the furrows was carried out where it was thought that they may have overlain particularly significant features. Numerous field drains which post-dated the furrows, and more recent plough marks had also had an adverse effect on the survival of the deposits.

Archaeological features were difficult to detect, partly as a result of the disturbances described above but primarily as a result of the problems of excavating on a dry subsoil in summer. Constant wetting of the site during cleaning was therefore essential, particularly for the recovery of evidence of insubstantial timber structures. Following cleaning, all features were planned at a scale of 1:20 although some linear features were planned by E.D.M. (Electronic Distance Measurer).

With the resources available, total excavation of all deposits would not have been possible and only a small percentage of the linear features could be sampled. It was therefore decided that in order to establish the chronological development of the site ditches, would be excavated at intersections. Ditches were also sampled at points where recutting of the boundary had left earlier phases at the ditch relatively intact.

The excavations are described beginning with Area 1 and the trial trenches, which remain unphased, followed by Area 2 where most activity was located. This area is described in phase order.

Area 1 (Fig 2)

Several features were revealed to the west of the excavation (Fig 2).

F237 a cobble spread ran across Area 1 from north to south partially sealing a ditch F232 - also orientated on a north-south axis. Machine sections were dug through these features against the northern and southern baulks of the excavation. The ditch in the northernmost section was 0.90m deep from the bottom of the topsoil and a maximum 1.65m wide. It has steep sides (steeper on the western side) and a flat base and was filled by a uniform dark reddish brown day overlying a primary fill of purer clay (Fig 3).

The southern section was 0.50m deep and 2.35 metres wide with a steep slope to the east and a gradual slope to the north. The primary fill was reddish brown silty clay - the upper fills (which could have been within a recut) were reddish brown, dark brown and strong brown silty clays and day silts. Context 1056 was a charcoal rich secondary deposit in this section.

The northern section produced large quantities of Derbyshire ware along with mid 3rd/mid 4th century AD Black Burnished ware, greyware and calcite gritted pottery. The southern section contained much Mortaria dated to the mid 3rd

to mid 4th century AD. F231 was a short gully or slot set at a right angle to 232 containing a reddish brown clay from which a large quantity of abraded fired clay fragments were recovered. F234 may have been part of an east-west gully.

F233 was a shallow sub circular pit with steep sides and a concave base measuring 0.60m across and 0.25m in depth. It was filled with dark reddish brown clay containing frequent charcoal flecks and tile fragments.

The Trial Trenches (Fig 1)

Trial trenches 1,2,5 and 7 were incorporated into the main area of excavation while trenches 9,10,11,15,16,17 produced no evidence of archaeological features. In trenches 15,16 and 11 linear features orientated on an east-west axis - F24, F22 and F20 respectively - were cut into the bedrock. These were only partially excavated and depths are unknown. However, the sides were vertically cut and widths of 0.90 metres for F24 and 0.80 metres for F22 suggests that these features may be contemporary. All were filled by similar fills of mixed clay lumps, sandstone fragments, grits and pebbles within a brown sandy clay matrix. It is thought that these were service pipe trenches. F22 cuts the eastern edge of F21 - a quarry visible from the surface - for which no date can be provided. A section through the eastern side of F21 in trench 16 revealed steeply sloping sides cut into natural bedrock. The maximum depth obtained in this section was 1.06 metres but it can be assumed that F21 deepens substantially to the west.

A broad shallow feature F227 was located in Trench 17, having one surviving edge on its western side which indicated a north-south orientation.

A 0.30m thick deposit (context 1033) of dark brown sandy clay filled the feature, sealing a layer of cobbles within a brown/dark brown sandy matrix (Fig 4). These 'cobbles' were loosely distributed in some areas and tightly packed in others.

Finds included Mancetter Mortaria, Derbyshire ware/greyware, Black Burnished ware, reeked bowls similar to those in the F2 assemblage and white ware providing a date range of mid 3rd to mid 4th century AD.

Area 1

Phase 1 (Fig 5)

Five complete sections and two partial sections were excavated from a ditch which crossed the site from east to west with a turn towards the north west halfway along its length. In four of the five sections a primary ditch phase 1(a) (Fig 6 S1) was clearly identifiable. To the east a rectangular enclosure was revealed. All Phase 1 ditches had been re-cut several times, the re-cutts being allocated separate Feature numbers. The earliest Feature number is used on Fig.5.

Phase 1(a) F77, F217, F153

To the west, where it has been subject to recutting on its northern side, (F77 Fig 6) the ditch was 0.7 metres deep with steep sides and a rounded base. The primary fills were brown silty clays interleaved with lenses of light grey silt. One of these lenses was sealed by a thin layer of charcoal (context 455). The upper fill of the ditch was a homogenous brown sandy silt containing occasional flecks of charcoal. With slight variations this was similar in profile and fill to the other sections. The fills can be

interpreted as an initial period during which interspersed with episodes of silting (probably derived from the sort kemper sandstone which had been exposed at various points) were followed by a final silting up process.

At approximately the midway point along the length of the ditch, a depth 1.18 was recorded (F217 Fig 4 S2). From this point the ditch rises to both east and west. Immediately to the west of section 2, the profile and fill of the earliest phase was substantially different from that recorded in other sections - raising the possibility that the equivalent of F217, F77 had been completely removed by a later recut. An alternative explanation, could be that there was originally a break in the ditch at this point which was dispensed with during subsequent recutting. F153 (Fig 6 S3) probably represents the easternmost part of this ditch and shows that recutting had taken place to the south.

Phase 1(b)

F77 was succeeded by F145, a recut along the north edge of the ditch. F145 was in turn almost entirely cut away by F144 (Fig 6 S1). Although the fills of these ditches were almost identical and the cut of F144 was very indistinct, the profile of the section does indicate evidence of recutting. F144 was 1.85 metres wide and 0.56 metres deep and was filled by a brown sandy clay. Recutting is evident in all sections - F154 (Fig 6 S3) strongly resembles F144 - except in section 2.

Phase 1(c)

A much shallower ditch F128 succeeded F144. This ditch was 1.05m wide and 0.37m deep with 45° sides and a rounded base. After an initial silting it was filled with dark yellowish brown silty sand containing a large number of irregular shaped sandstone blocks - together with occasional pottery sherds, in contrast to the absence of finds within the fills of the earlier ditches. F185 to the west represents a continuation of F128. A dark greyish brown clay silt (972) containing evidence of burning was also present within this fill.

To the east, immediately beyond the junction with the enclosure ditch to the south the upper fill (also containing large blocks of sandstone) of what is probably the continuation of F128 extends onto a broad shelf to the south which could perhaps be regarded as a berm. In the second section from the east two ditches comparable in dimensions to F128 were recorded - F211 and F117. Both were evident in the partial section to the west where they appear to terminate. The earlier of the two, F211, contained a primary fill of charcoal with fragments of fired clay. There was no evidence of these ditches in section 3 probably due to destruction by a strip field furrow at this point.

F133 and F60 are thought to be contemporary with F128. F133, a shallow gully extends 6.90m to the north at a right angle to F128 and probably represents a partial recut of F11 which continued northwards, beyond the limits of the excavation. F11, a shallow gully had been completely removed at the junction with F128 and it was not therefore possible to establish a relationship. F133 varied in width from 0.40m to the north to 0.90m where it opened into F128 and increased in depth from 0.10m to 0.40m at the junction with F128. The upper fill - a dark greyish brown clay silt an exceptionally large quantity of pottery relative to the rest of the site, together with frequent large sandstone fragments perhaps indicates contemporaneity with F128. The primary fill was olive brown silt also containing a large quantity of

pottery. The overall assemblage from F133 included black burnished ware, Derbyshire ware, White ware and greyware - occasionally displaying lattice decoration, and can be dated to the late 2nd/early 3rd century AD. There were occasionally distorted vessels within the assemblage which may or may not be significant given the proximity of F2 a possible kiln (see below p 9). In form and fabric however the pottery from F133 was different to that from F2.

F60 - also set a right angle to the main east-west ditch, extended 13.50m southward, its width varying between 0.35 and 0.80m and depth to a flat base. F60 was cut by post hole F47. The relationship between F60 and the main ditch was not conclusively established but if, as thought, F60 belongs to phase 1(c), there is some stratigraphic evidence to support the theory that the structure post dates the phase 1 enclosure ditches.

Pond(?) F64

F64 (Fig 9 S4) was a large depression measuring 16m across from north to south and with a depth of 0.29m to the north gradually tapering away to the south. Post-medieval furrows had truncated the feature to the east and west, The surviving northern edge sloped gradually to a flat base. The primary fill was reddish brown silty clay with occasional pebbles. Finds included Mancetter Mortaria ware and black burnished ware generally of mid 2nd/early 3rd century AD dates, although there were some sherds of possible mid 3rd/mid 4th century date. Above this were mixed sandy silty clays which were in turn sealed by a dark yellowish brown sandy silty clay containing 10% sandstones of varying size to a maximum of 0.28m across.

The Phase 1 rectangular enclosure

The east-west ditch formed the northern boundary of a rectangular ditched enclosure measuring 45 x 15m. The excavated sections produced evidence of multiple recuts, which, due to the uniformity of their fills and the dry ground conditions, were extremely difficult to define with accuracy. The following sub phases represent an attempt to correlate the evidence from the different sections - highlighting any similarities.

Phase 1(d)

A steep sides ditch F70 (Fig 8 S9) could represent the earliest phase of the boundary. This ditch contained dark reddish brown silty clay and had a depth of 0.52m below the bottom of the plough soil. Its upper levels had been cut away by ditch F71. F110 (Fig 8 S7) resembled F70 in having a steep profile and a silty clay fill. Two indentations in the base of F110 - F119 and F124 could be regarded as post holes. Both contained identical fills to the main ditch fill and may have been integral features of the ditch. F119 was 0.45m in diameter and 0.30m deep while F124 was 0.45m in diameter and 0.15m deep. F137 (F8 S7) could represent a continuation of this feature. There was no evidence of a comparable feature on the eastern side of the enclosure ditch.

Phase 1(e)

F71 (Fig 8 S9) and F158 (Fig 8 S6) contained similar reddish brown silt sand clay and are stratigraphically comparable. F71 was a maximum of 0.38m deep and F192 (Fig 7 S1) could represent a north - south return of this ditch on the eastern side of the enclosure.

Phase 1(f)

A broad flat based ditch with vertical sides F151 (Fig 8 S6) had no obvious parallel in the sections to the east but a connection with F67 is a possibility.

Phase 1(f)

F69 (Fig 8 S6), a steep-sided, narrow gully or slot containing sand clay silt with a base 0.40m below the bottom of the topsoil, appeared to continue eastwards. However no comparable feature was found to the west.

Phase 1(i)

F67 had been truncated to the south by a recut. The surviving part had a flat base and side at 45° and was filled by a dark yellowish brown clay sand silt. F230 (Fig 8 Section 5) and F162 (Fig 8 S5) are possible continuations of this ditch. F190 (Fig 7 S1) could be the same feature on the eastern length of the enclosure.

Phase 1(j)

F80, a later recut with a width of 1.20m and depth of 0.33m, had sides sloping at approximately 45° curving to a flat base. The fill was dark yellowish brown sandy silty clay. F229 (Fig 8 S5) and F99 (Fig 8 S6) could be continuations of this feature as could F172 along the eastern side of the enclosure.

Phase 1(k)

F171 (Fig 7 S2) and F169 were located on the eastern side of the enclosure and may be related to F80. However an accurate correlation is not possible.

Two possible post holes F163 and F177 cutting F99 were located to the south-west (Figs 3 and 8 S6 and S7).

Discussion of Phase 1

The fills of the phase 1 ditches indicated primary silting (1a-b), recutting and deliberate backfilling (1c). A few sherds found in the backfills are of late 1st/early 2nd century AD date. However, given the absence of finds from the earliest contexts an earlier origin may be possible.

There was no conclusive evidence of structural elements associated with this phase and it is possible that the main focus of settlement was to the north occupying the area now covered by woodland. The long east-west ditch could, if this is correct, represent the southern boundary of a large enclosure encompassing the settlement with the smaller rectangular enclosure performing a subsidiary function possibly for the keeping of livestock. The precise relationship between the large "enclosure" and the smaller one to the south was not proven but it does appear that at least in the later sub phases the two were in use at the same time and that simultaneous backfilling took place during the late 2nd/early 3rd century AD. During the later sub phases there was, it seems, a break in the ditch at approximately the mid point on the northern side of the rectangular enclosure.

The interpretation of F64 to the east is uncertain. Excavation showed the feature to be broad and shallow with a flat base and it seems possible that the feature was a pond for watering livestock, the clay subsoil having

excellent water retaining qualities. Alternatively the large quantities of sandstone might in this case represent the remains of a wall or revetment carried up above ground level to form a water storage tank.

Phase 2 (Fig 10)

A rectangular or perhaps aisled structure was located to the east of the site cutting Phase 1 ditches. This structure incorporated five large central post holes while smaller post holes, outside the area formed by the large post holes, could well be further components of the structure.

Postpits F34, F47, F54, F32, F30

Five substantial postpits were located each lined with large blocks of sandstone. F34 and F37 had been substantially truncated by gully or ditch F46 while F54 (Fig 12) had been cut by F49. The least disturbed examples were F32 and F30 which were both sub-rectangular in plan with dimensions of 0.80 x 1.00 x 0.83 x 0.47m deep and 0.76 x 0.94 x 0.45m deep respectively. They contained stone linings formed by large sandstones set on edge and the dimensions of the areas within the linings were 0.30 x 0.22 and 0.32 x 0.32m respectively. It was not possible to discern the remains of posts with certainty but F30 (Fig 12) contained a fill of very dark greyish brown silty clay with 35% charcoal flecks and fragments perhaps suggesting a burnt post. This filled most of the void between the sandstones. Otherwise the fills of the post holes were generally reddish brown and dark yellowish brown silty clays consistent with direct backfilling of the postpits around wooden posts.

Post holes F48, F33, F79, F90, F101

These are all less substantial post holes found in the vicinity of those described above.

F48 (Fig 12) and F33, to the south of the main post holes, measured 0.74 x 0.29m and 0.72 x 0.44m in plan respectively and were 0.22m and 0.25m deep. F33 displayed evidence of a postpipe measuring 0.30 x 0.20m and 0.25m deep which consisted of a dark yellowish brown clay silt. The postpipe was set to the east of the post hole within a packing of dark yellowish brown clay containing 30% sandstone fragments. Post holes F79 and F90 (Fig 12) were situated to the west of the main post holes and were subsquare in plan - F90's dimensions being 0.56 x 0.55m in plan and 0.18 deep. F79 appeared to replace an earlier post hole although this was not conclusive. F101 cutting F29 to the north was less well defined.

Hearth F31

A possible hearth or furnace, F31 was found within the area defined by the larger post holes. It was oval in plan - narrowing to the east - with steep sides to the north and south and a more gradual slope on its short sides. It had an upper fill of silty clay containing ash and charcoal sealing a dark yellowish brown silt with frequent charcoal which in turn overlay a sandy clay containing charcoal flecks and ash.

Gullies F88, F89, F112, F235, F195, F182

Six shallow gullies were located leading in a northerly direction away from the structure - and on an east-west orientation parallel with the structure. These may represent gullies either side of a trackway.

F88 (2.87m wide and 0.15m deep) was cut by a modern field drain to the south. F89 which was cut by the same field drain this time on its northern side could be a southward continuation of F88. The rise in the level of the natural between the two could in this case be explained as an undulation of the original surface. F88 appears to seal F60 although evidence for this was not conclusive. F88/F89 was filled by a dark brown sandy clay silt containing occasional rounded sandstone fragments.

A broad linear gully, running parallel with the phase 3 gully F46 had a similar fill to these described above and was probably contemporary. F112 was 1.65 metres wide and 0.16 metres deep and continued eastwards. F195 is located to east of the site (Fig 7) probably represents the northern edge of the same feature.

Pits F96, F35, F55, F58, F93

A group of five shallow pits were concentrated to the south east of the phase 2 structure. These were all extremely shallow - between 50 and 150mm in depth and varied in shape and size. F58 was 1.86m long and 0.40m wide and may represent two or more intercutting pits with identical fills. The phasing of these features is uncertain. However they have been placed in phase 2 on the basis of their cutting the phase 1 enclosure ditch and their possible association with the phase 2 structure, there is no stratigraphic reason why these pits should not be contemporary with phase 3 enclosure ditches.

F35 contained occasional sherds of greyware and Derbyshire ware while F55 contained sherds of greyware.

Pits F131, F193, F224

Three oval pits were found in a group to the east of the building. F131 (Fig 12) an elongated pit measuring 2.00m in length and 1.00m in width with a depth of 0.30m had been cut by F135. It had concave, gradually sloping sides and an irregular base.

F193 was 1.70m long and 1.55m wide with a depth of 0.40m. F193 had dished profile similar to that of F131.

F224 was 1.45m long and 1.05m wide. The pits were all filled by similar material with reddish brown clays under reddish brown or dark brown silty loams - F193 having a clay upper fill. There were no dateable finds - phasing is therefore tentative.

Kiln F2

F2, a furnace or kiln (Fig 11) lay to the north of the site - physically separated from all other contexts. A relatively large quantity of pottery was recovered from this feature but a provisional date range does not allow accurate phasing. However activity within Phase 2 might be suggested for this structure.

F2's long axis was orientated north west - south east. To the east was a large oval stokepit with a straighter side in plan where it leads into a flue and oven. The pit measured 2.00m along its north - south axis and 1.25m along its east - west axis, with a maximum depth of 0.22m. When excavated it proved to have a dished profile along both areas. A modern field drain running from north to south had partially truncated the upper levels of the pit.

A lining of sandstone and hard, baked clay extended into the flue/oven to a distance of 1.00m. Typical stone sizes were 0.30 x 0.30 x 0.12m and 0.25 x 0.15m. These stones were set on edge and had tapering bases which had partially sunk into the natural clay. Only one course of stone survived from what was evidently the flue arch. However, several blocks of stone were recovered from the fills within the flue area possibly indicating a collapsed arch.

The oven/flue extended for a total of 1.65m from the mouth of the stokepit. A marked distinction between the flue and oven did not exist. The western extremity of the feature survived in heavily truncated form only, with post-medieval furrow cutting the edge and modern ploughing causing a general reduction of the features upper levels.

The upper fill (203) of the stokepit was mottled sandy clay containing 10% charcoal. Underlying (203) and also extending into the flue and oven was (211) the primary fill of F2. This fill consisted almost entirely of charcoal - 90% - together with 10% dark grey clay. Above this, the oven/flue area had been filled by clays of varying hue - red, dark red and reddish brown, generally containing frequent charcoal flecks.

Most of the fills produced relatively large quantities of pottery and fired clay fragments. These were particularly evident in 568, the upper fill of the oven area and can be interpreted as the remains of a clay lining of the oven area.

A provisional date of mid 2nd/early mid 4th century AD can be suggested for the pottery which consisted predominately of jars, generally necked with wide mouths, and bowls. Dishes and handled jars were absent from the assemblage. The fabric consisted of a sandy oxidised - greyware containing variable quantities of flint. Most of the pottery was soft and badly worn. Several distorted vessels indicate that the assemblage was produced locally even if F2 is not itself a pottery kiln.

Pit/Post hole F92

A small sub-rectangular pit or post hole F92 (Fig 9 S4) was cut into F64 (Phase 1), measuring 0.40 x 0.35m with a depth of 0.15m and filled with reddish brown clay and silt.

Discussion of Phase 2

Post holes F34, F47, F54, F32 and F30 appear to represent the remains of a rectangular or aisled building orientated on a north west - south east axis. F54, F32 and F30 form a southern row of posts with a furrow between F30 and F32 possibly removing or obscuring a further post hole. F34 and F47 form a parallel row of posts to the north. The same furrow may have destroyed the evidence of an additional post hole between these two. By inferring the existence of the missing posts a symmetrical, rectangular building is suggested. There was however, no evidence of a post to the east of F47. F48 and F33 are less substantial post holes running parallel with F54, F32 and F30 and appear to correspond with F54 and F32 respectively. F79 and F90 are parallel with F34 and F54 but more centrally positioned. These smaller post holes might indicate the existence of lean-to's, or porches projecting from a basic rectangular, timber structure or perhaps an aisled building of the simple timber variety described by Hadman (Hadman 1978).

If this latter interpretation is correct F34, F47, F54, F32 and F30 could therefore represent the internal post of aisled building with a nave less than 6m in width and a length of approximately 9m. F48 and F33 could represent the remains of an outer wall. These post holes were not particularly deep and others could have been lost. Alternatively F48 and F33 could be door posts with the rest of the wall standing on shallow sill beams.

An example from Cherry Hinton in Cambridgeshire (Morris, 1979, 130) appears to be the closest parallel to the Normanton example measuring 10.62 x 7.62 metres with the nave wider than the aisles at a ration of 2:1.

This type of building was extremely adaptable and robust and can be seen as a development from the simple rectangular building with the arrangement of internal and outer posts allowing a wider roof than would otherwise have been possible. The roof might have sloped from apex to eaves or have been raised above the aisles to allow light through a clerestorey (Morris, 1979, 55-56).

The occurrence of both types of building is well attested on Romano-British sites and with a width of just under six metres between the two rows of central post holes the Normanton structure fits into the 3.1 - 6.1 metres size range typical of simple rectangular, timber buildings (Morris, 1979, 66). There was no evidence of outer walls, which may have rested upon shallowly sunken sill beams, or of internal divisions. This is only to be expected given the extent of plough damage and the insubstantial nature of these features. In this respect the Normanton building is typical as timber buildings of this type are rarely found in a sufficiently well preserved state to allow interpretation of their original layout and function (Morris, 1979, 66). However other examples have shown associations with corn driers, querns, iron, bronze or lead waste and hearths indicating that the building type may have fulfilled a variety of functions - as agricultural building, a workshop for metal working, and for domestic occupation (Morris, 1979, 68). F31 - the small charcoal rich pit internal to the main post holes could either be truncated remains of a hearth or furnace indicating either domestic occupation or metal working. Slag from the site indicates the presence of iron smithing.

The simple timber aisled buildings of the Roman period have been well documented in the East Midlands. A concentration in this area and Hampshire, however is probably a reflection of greater archaeological activity, rather than a reflection of actual distribution (Hadman, 1978, 187-194).

The depressions to the north appear to respect structure and a possible track, of which F112 forms a part, is on a similar orientation to the structure. Both the structure and the track post date F60, the north - south gully, and the track post dates the phase 1 enclosures. Although it cannot be stated conclusively that the structure was not present before the phase 1 enclosure system was abandoned, it is tempting to suggest in view of the alignment that the foundation of the building followed a re-organisation of settlement.

The limited range of forms and fabrics, the absence of imported Derbyshire ware and Mortaria, which occurred regularly on other contents, and the presence of several distorted vessels suggests that F2 to the north west of the site was a pottery kiln/

Pottery production is known to have taken place during the Roman period, at Ravenstone 2 [Km to the south east of Normanton - at Ravenstone (Lucas, 1981) where three pottery kilns were excavated in 1981. These were up-draught kilns producing sandy greyware, the best preserved example having a deep, walled and arched flue and a rectangular box pedestal with associated stone

kiln bars. Although no similar kiln furniture was found in F2, F2 does resemble the Ravenstone kilns in plan.

Swan (1984 113-117) describes a single flue/single chamber type of kiln where vessels undergoing firing would be stacked on a layer of broken vessels or stones thus dispensing with the need for a raised floor within the oven chamber to aid draught circulation. This type of arrangement would be conclusive to the production of the soft oxidised - greyware found in F2. At Harrold, Bedfordshire, a kiln resembling F2 in construction - with a short flue and flat base through oven and flue was producing "a serviceable oxidised kitchenware with blotchy buff and grey surfaces". A single chambered/short flue kiln such as this could provide a robust and simple construct alternative to twin chambered up-draught kilns, where a high degree of control over temperature during firing was not required.

Phase 3 (Fig 13)

A distinctly later phase of enclosure was identified. This layout appears to have had a much shorter life than the earlier phase 1 system of enclosures. The ditches were shallow with little evidence of recutting in contrast to that encountered in the phase 1 enclosure ditches. F1 (Figs 9, 13, 14) was orientated north - south and cut across the earlier enclosure ditches and F64. Its width varied between 0.90, and 1.28m and its depth between 0.20m and 0.37m. It had fairly regular steep sides and a flat base. The fill along its length varied, with dark reddish brown silty clay with frequent fragments of silty clay to the north while to the south, where it cuts the Phase 1 east - west ditch (F128), it was filled by a light greyish brown silty sand and large blocks of sandstone. This difference can be explained by the character of the soils through which the feature was cut. Pottery finds included Roman greyware, Derbyshire ware, one sherd of Mortarium dated to the mid 3rd/4th century AD and 2nd century Samian. As mentioned before, F1 fades out to the south, probably as a result of increased plough damage towards the edge of the slope.

Two possible stakeholes, F138 and F139, were recorded in the base of F1, these were 50mm and 30mm deep respectively. There was no physical relationship between F1 and the other phase 3 ditches but it is likely that F1 forms a north - south return of F83. Erosion, similar to that described above has resulted in substantial damage to F83, completely the area west of the length which connects with F13/F29. Only a part of this feature was excavated (Fig 13) at the junction with F13, F29. F83 was 0.18m deep and was filled by a mixed clay - dark reddish grey and yellowish red in hue.

F29, F13 and F53 are component ditches of an enclosure occupying the eastern end of the excavated area. It is unclear whether F46 forms a return of F53 since the junction has been obscured by post-medieval disturbance to the east (context 268). F27 in the north east corner of the excavated area could also be a part of this enclosure but again the relationship was obscured. In fact it is very likely that F27 has been wholly truncated to the south.

To the east of F29 - F184, F136 and F36 form a small enclosure set at a right angle to F29. F135 probably represents an internal division within this enclosure. F49 has been included in phase 3 on the basis of its cutting post hole F32 and because the western terminal aligns with F36.

F29 (Fig 14, S2) varied in depth from 0.37m to 0.50m with the base dropping in level by 0.39m from north to south. The primary fills between segments varied slightly but were generally either reddish brown or strong brown

clay. The upper fills were siltier dark yellowish brown or strong silty usually containing occasional charcoal flecks and small pebbles. The possible remains of an earlier ditch were recorded in the most northerly segment - context 423. The fill was a dark yellowish brown sandy silt.

F13 (Fig 14 S3) varied in depth between 0.32 and 0.44m with a drop in the level of the base to the east of 0.19m, and in width between 0.85m and 0.98m the fills were generally dark yellowish brown, dark brown or reddish brown sandy or silty clays with degraded sandstone in varying proportions. In the easternmost segment however, a secondary fill of dark greyish brown silty clay with a high charcoal content was recorded. F50 on the northern edge of F13 (Fig 13 S1) may represent the remains of an earlier ditch. The ditch widens markedly at this point but no differences in the fills of these features could be discerned in plans.

F53 (Fig 14 S6) forms a return of F43 and is orientated in a north easterly direction before it is obscured by 268. Two sections were excavated through F53 close to the south east corner of the enclosure. It contained a primary fill of dark yellowish brown sandy clay. A secondary fill (344) of sandy silt containing large quantities of charcoal flecks and fragments was recorded sealing a brown silty clay (374) with occasional charcoal flecks. 386 and 580 respectively in the adjacent segment could represent continuations of these layers. F37, a deposit of angular sandstones within F53 could represent a causeway (Fig 14 S5).

The greatest concentration of pottery from the enclosure ditch occurred here including Nene Valley colour coat dated to the 3rd - 4th century AD, white ware, Derbyshire ware, Black Burnished Ware and Mortaria.

Little dating material is available for this area. F167 1.40m wide and 0.28m deep, was filled by an upper fill of brown sandy silt with a primary fill of dark grey sandy clay. There is a discrepancy between this and the segments of F53 in terms of profile and dimensions this may be due, however, to its being close to a junction with F46. The segments to the north revealed ditches which, from the clay content of their fills more closely resembled the phase 1 ditches.

Six sections were placed along the length of F46 (Fig 15 S13). The most westerly of these continued the existence of a terminal. F46 had cut through two of the main postholes of the structure (phase 2). The maximum width of F46 was 1.00 at the eastern extreme the rest varying between 0.60 metres and 0.70 metres in width. Depth varied between 0.30 and 0.40 metres again increasing towards the east. The level of the base fell over this distance from 137.04m to 136.09m O.D. The fills were generally a silty clay varying in hue between segments with dark yellowish brown, and brown all evident.

An earlier ditch was observed towards the centre of F46. It was 0.80 metres wide and 0.35 metres deep and contained a dark yellowish brown sandy silt with occasional rounded pebbles to 50mm. Material from this feature could be dated to the late 3rd to mid 4th century.

Running parallel to F46 and 5m to the south was gully F49 (Fig 15 S12). F49 was 8.80m long and 0.44m wide by 0.15m deep. It had a consistent "U" shaped profile with steep sides and a rounded base. F49 cuts post hole F54 of the phase 2 structure and for this reason it could be contemporary with F46.

No physical evidence is available to link F27 to either phase 1 or phase 3. It seems likely however that F27 could represent a later extension of a smaller enclosure formed by F29, F13, F53, and F46. Only one segment was

excavated from F27 (Fig 15, S14). At this point the gully was 0.95m wide and 0.20m deep with steep sides and a flat base filled by strong brown sandy clay.

Features F36, F121 and F184 can be regarded as components of an enclosure located to the west of F29. F121 terminates to the west which suggests a causeway across the ditch at this point but F184 has been cut by a furrow to the east and the width of this entrance could not be established. F184 either terminates 2.60m to the south or, alternatively, has been truncated by plough action.

The entire length of F36 was excavated in alternate sections. It has steep sides and a flat base with a width of 0.62m and a depth of 0.20m (Fig 15 S11).

F121 was 0.42 - 0.45m wide and 0.11 to 0.5m deep with a similar profile to F36 (Fig 15 S10) while F184 was 0.46m wide and 0.12m deep. A primary fill of clay was recorded in all sections with slight variation in colour from brown to dark reddish brown - the fills of F36 and F121 including reddish brown and yellow clay mottles perhaps suggesting a primary filling from collapses of the ditch sides. The secondary fill of F36 was a dark yellowish brown, loose sandy silt. The remainder of the enclosure had a secondary fill of loose reddish brown silty loam with pottery - occurring with much greater frequency on the western side of the enclosure.

F38, F107, F122, F148, F100 are possible stake holes or post holes found either cut through the fills or in the base of the enclosure ditches described above. F38 - near the junction with F29 was 50mm wide and 0.13m deep and was filled by a dark greyish brown friable sandy loam which was also evident in the fill and the base of F26. F107, an oval posthole measuring 0.24m by 0.14m with depth of 70mm, had steep sides and a flat base but was only recognised where it cut into the base of the ditch. It was filled by a reddish brown silty clay. Another oval post hole F122 (0.22m x 0.20m x 0.25m deep) appeared to cut at least the lower fill of F121. It was filled by a brown silty loam within which context 584 consisting of a very dark brown greyish brown clayey silt may represent a postpipe. F148 could either have been a small pit or posthole, was 0.30 x 0.16m x 0.10m in depth and contained a dark reddish grey silty clay primary fill with a secondary fill of dark reddish brown clay and was sealed by F121. F100 was an oval cut with steep sides and a tapering base with dimensions of 0.19m by 0.10m and a depth of 0.10m which had been cut by F26.

Finds from the enclosure ditches included Mortaria greyware, Derbyshire ware and Black Burnished ware with obtuse lattice decoration typical of the mid 3rd-mid 4th centuries AD.

Discussion of Phase 3

If it is accepted that F46 is a return of F53, a small subsquare enclosure is formed by F46, F53, F13 and F29, which respects the phase 2 trackway but post-dates the phase 2 structure - with F46 cutting postholes F34 and F47.

The northern length of F29, beyond the junction with F36 is on a slightly different orientation to the southern length and could represent a northward extension from the right angle formed by F36 and F29. If this interpretation is correct, the gap between the western terminal of F46 and the corner of F29 and F36 may have originally been an entrance into the subsquare enclosure with, perhaps F49 acting to create a corridor into the enclosure.

F27 may represent an extension to the eastern side of the enclosure to form, with F29 and a possible return not included in the area excavated, an enlarged

enclosure taking in the track and space to the north of the track. F1 and F83 could, conceivably have originated at the same time to form with F29 a large rectangular enclosure surrounding the F184, F136, F36 enclosure.

Discussion

The drawing of firm conclusions about the size, status and development of the site is likely to be misleading given the partial nature of the evidence - with significant deposits almost certainly lying outside the area of excavation. There is no reason to believe that the excavated area is typical of the site as a whole, stratigraphic relationships between features were rare and the site had sustained considerable damage from subsequent ploughing.

However, from the evidence available it would seem reasonable to suggest the east - west phase 1 ditch (Fig 5) represents the southern boundary of an enclosed settlement occupying the area now covered by Jubilee plantation and Normanton Wood. No evidence of occupation was recovered within this enclosure or within the subsidiary enclosure to the south but it is possible that the focus of occupation lay to the north. Large rectangular or sub-rectangular enclosures surrounding the area of domestic occupation (usually in the case of the Midlands and East of England with multiple dwellings) are a common feature of the Iron Age in lowland Britain (Hingley, 1989).

The Phase 1 enclosures were abandoned during the late 2nd/early 3rd century AD and occupation continued on the site until the late 3rd/early 4th century AD. An open phase settlement (Phase 2) may have succeeded phase 1, during which a trackway was laid or developed over the phase 1 ditches respecting or being respected by the rectangular post built structure. Phase 3 sees the foundation of a system of enclosures which represent a change in the division of space compared to the phase 1 enclosures. Probable contemporaneity with F232 the north - south ditch in area 1 suggest an expansion of the settlement to the west and a multiplication of the number of enclosures.

The function of these enclosures and of the phase 2 structure is unclear. There was no conclusive evidence of domestic occupation and the enclosures could conceivably have been components of a complex with the main area of occupation located to the north. However, the limited quantity of finds and the absence of definite structural evidence by no means excludes the possibility of domestic occupation of these enclosures since non villa rural settlements typically produce a poor range of pottery, metalwork and coins (Hingley 1989, 23).

Surveys carried out on the Lincolnshire demonstrate that compounds frequently occur in clusters and indicate a progressive nucleation of settlement between the 1st century AD and the late second/early third century AD (Hingley 1989, 75). A similar process of operation may have been in operation at Normanton-le-Heath with a move away from the large single enclosure towards nucleated settlement in cluster of smaller enclosures.

The example of Wetwant Slang, Humberside may also be relevant. Here three settlements developed on the periphery of an Iron Age/Romano British farm with the central area apparently held in common. According to Hingley (1989; 97-98) the majority of Fenland sites may have developed around common arable land. This girdle pattern of settlement could explain why evidence of occupation appears to be focussed outside the 'main enclosure' during phase 2 and 3.

Industrial activity on the site is evident from the pottery kiln, F2 and other hearths, e.g. F91, F131. Slag from the site suggested iron smithing. The pottery produced on the site is discussed above p 00 and represents a local rural production. Similar material was found at the excavation 1 mile to the south of Iron Age and Roman enclosures (Thorpe forthcoming).

The relationship between these two sites is important in our understanding of the development of settlements and land use in this part of north-west Leicestershire. Initial dating of excavation of site 1 to the south suggests origins in the 1st century BC with occupation possibly continuing into the 2nd century AD, perhaps with an hiatus in the late 1st century A.D. Although earlier origins are possible the settlement on site 2 discussed in this reports dates from the late 2nd - 4th century. This may indicate a shift in settlement focus from the area to the south. Although detailed analysis has yet to be undertaken of the Roman site at Ravenstone (Lucas, 1981) this also appears to have developed during the 2nd - 4th centuries. An extensive settlement is suggested from work in this area with evidence of pottery and tile production.

The excavation of part of this rural Roman settlement in North West Leicestershire, therefore provides a valuable addition to archaeological knowledge of this area. Rural "non villa" farmstead sites have been neglected in comparison to the higher status rural settlements and this helps to redress the balance. The site is most important in contributing to understanding the development of settlement patterns in this area in its relationship to the Iron Age - Roman enclosure systems at Normanton-le-Heath Site 1 2.5Km (1 mile) to the south and with the extensive Roman settlement at Ravenstone a similar distance to the east. The rural pottery production at the two sites in this area is of importance in extending our knowledge of this little understood aspect of Roman industrial activity.

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The Excavation of an Iron Age and Roman Enclosure System at Normanton-le-Heath, Leicestershire

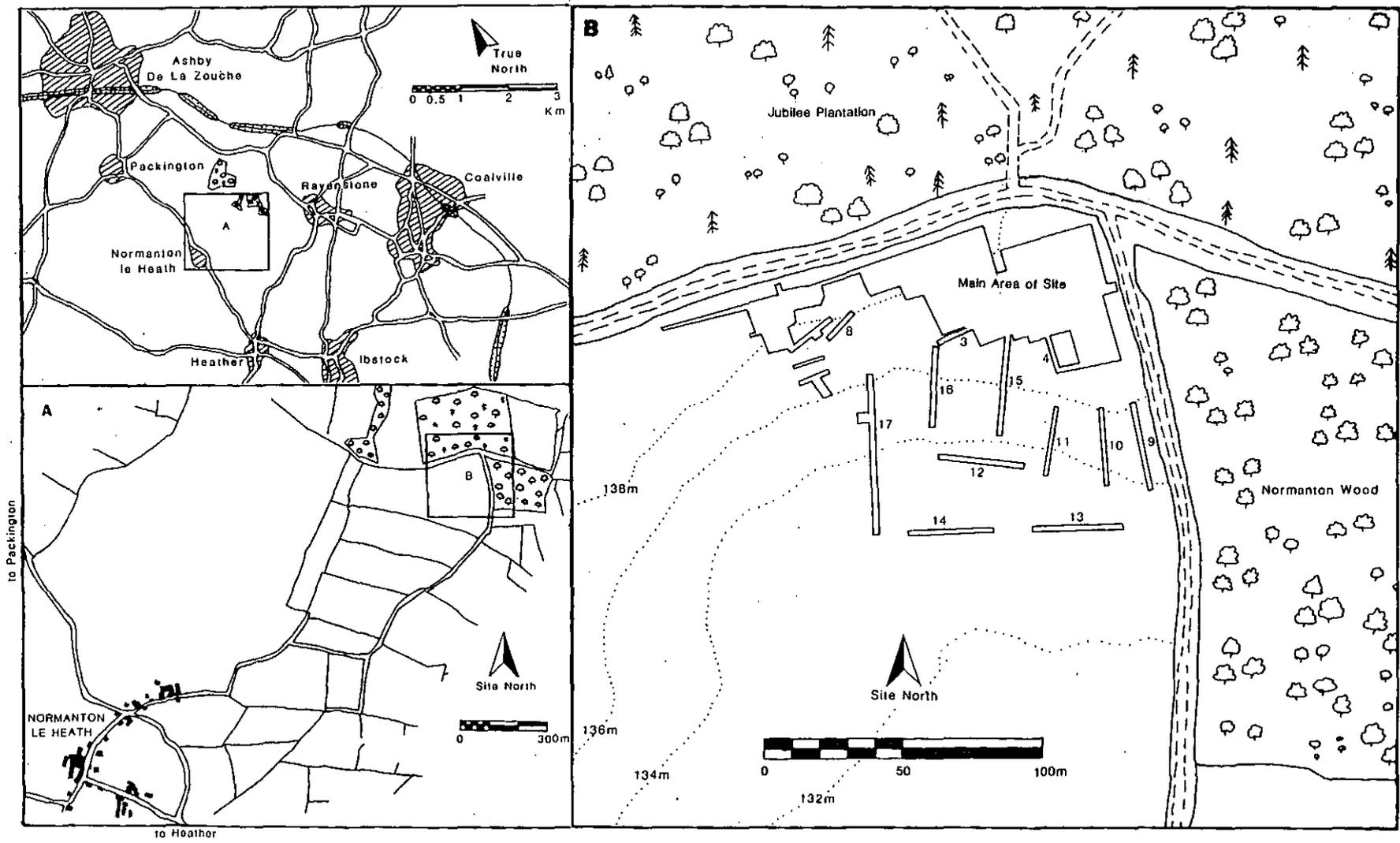


Fig 1 Location Map

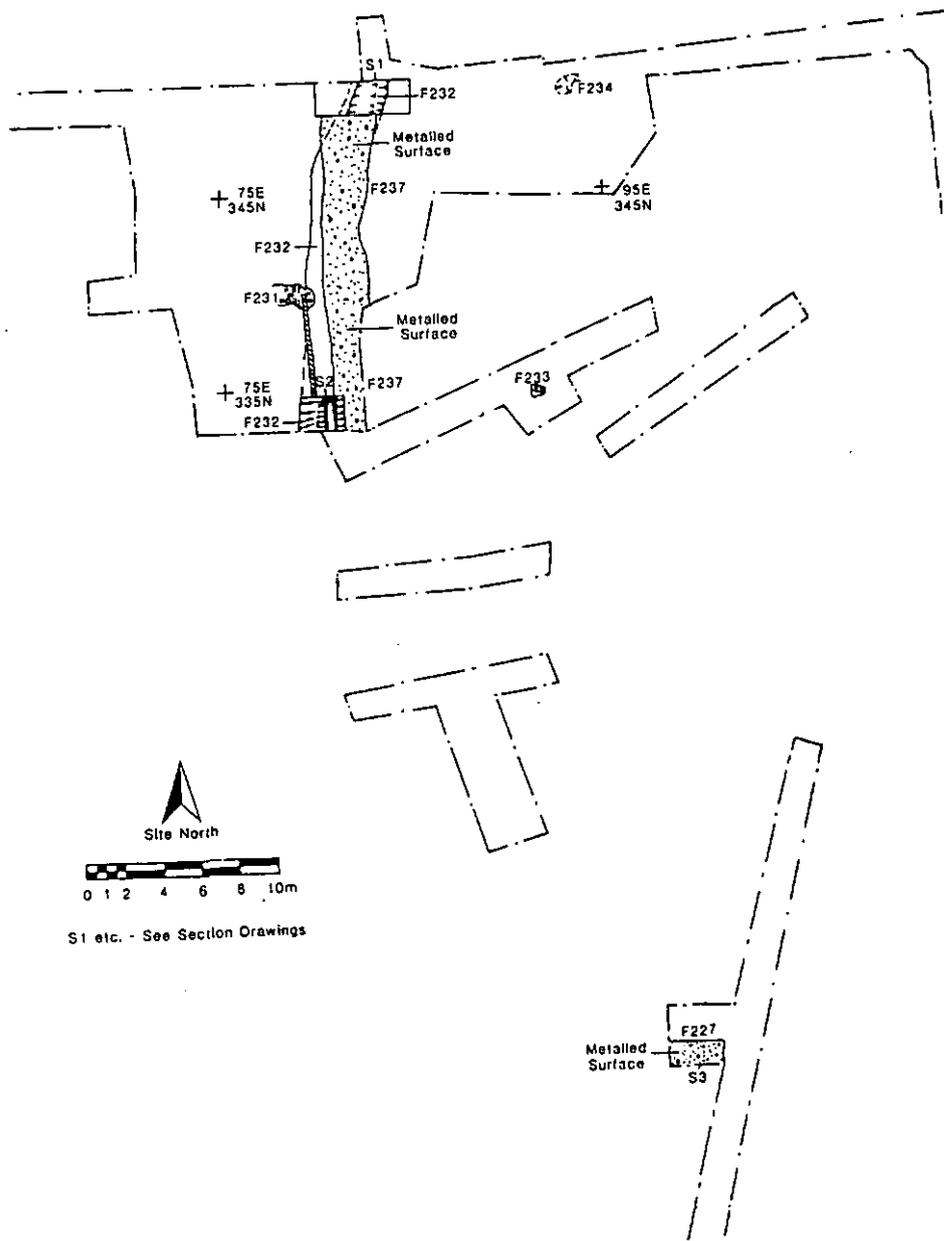


Fig 2

Area 1 Excavated features

KEY TO SECTION DRAWINGS

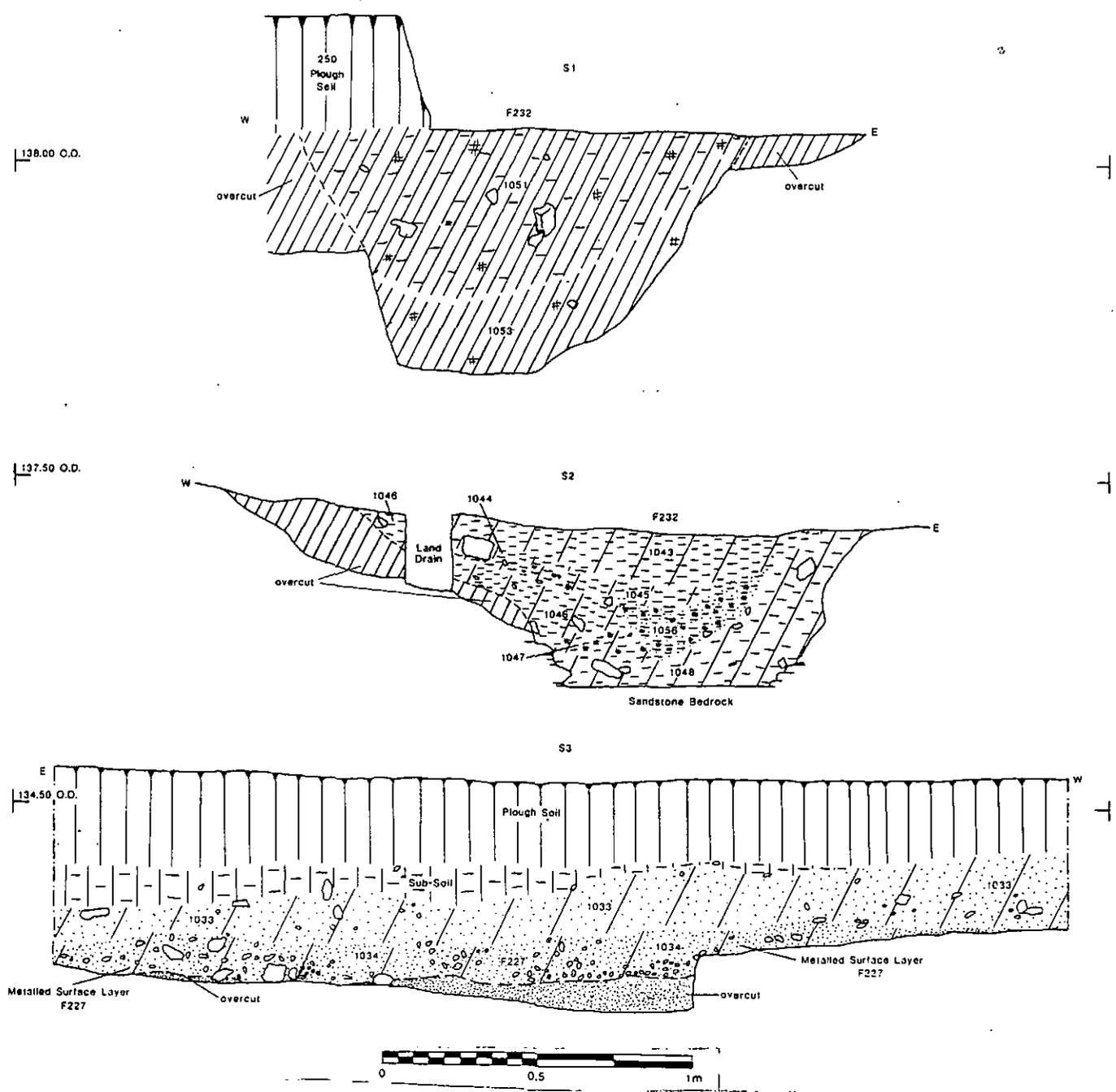
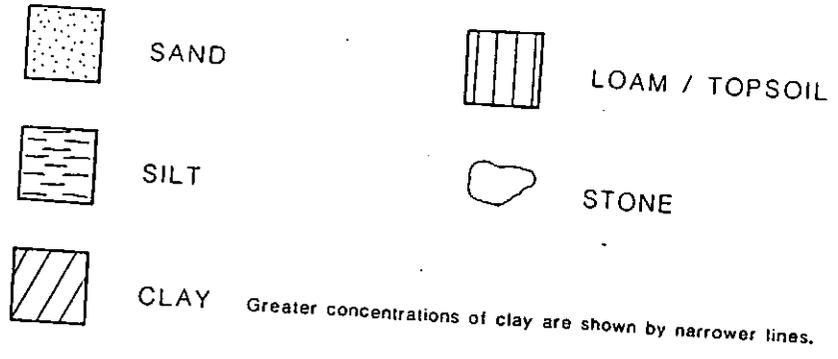


Fig 3 Sections of features in Area 1

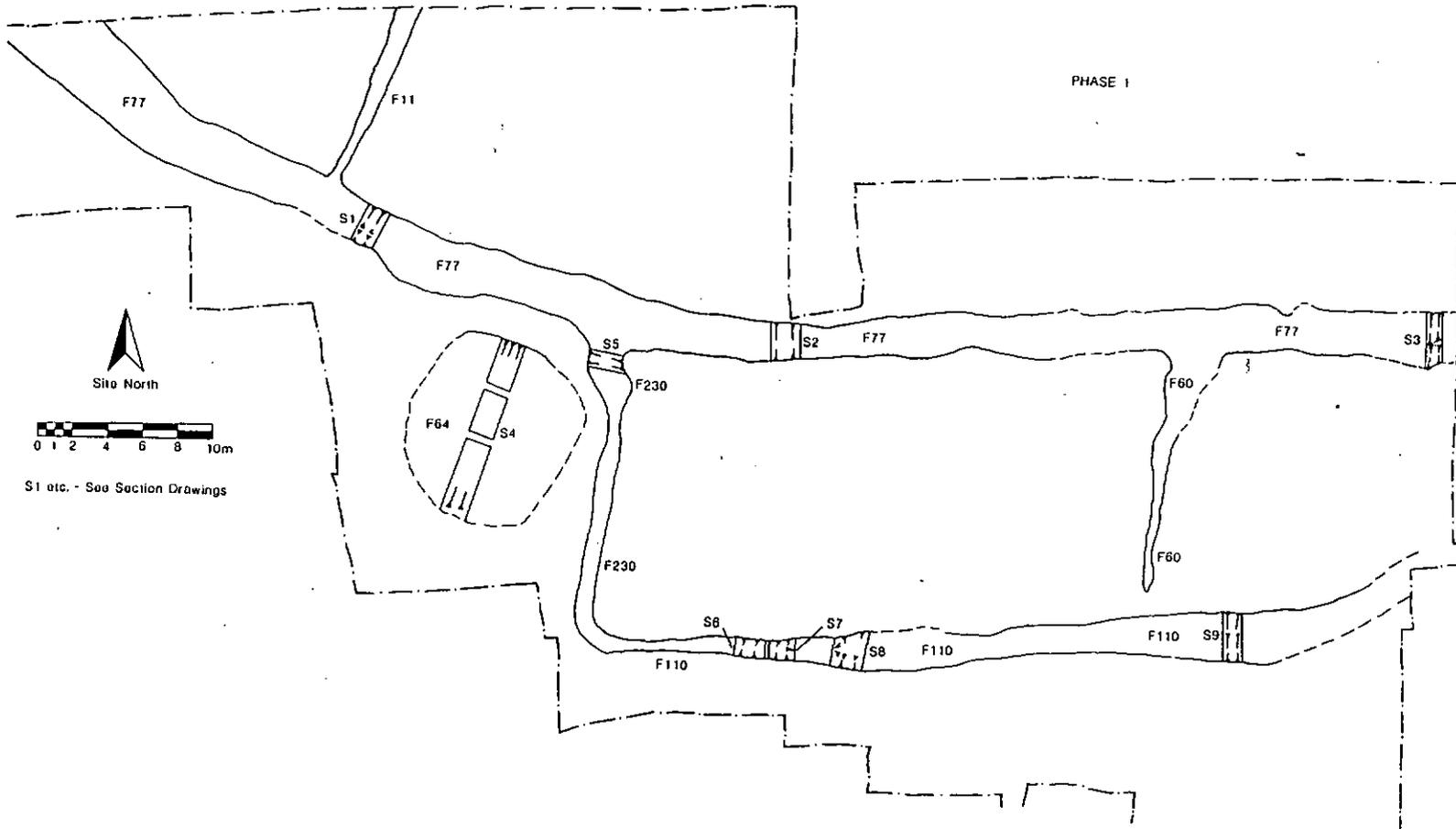


Fig 5 Phase 1

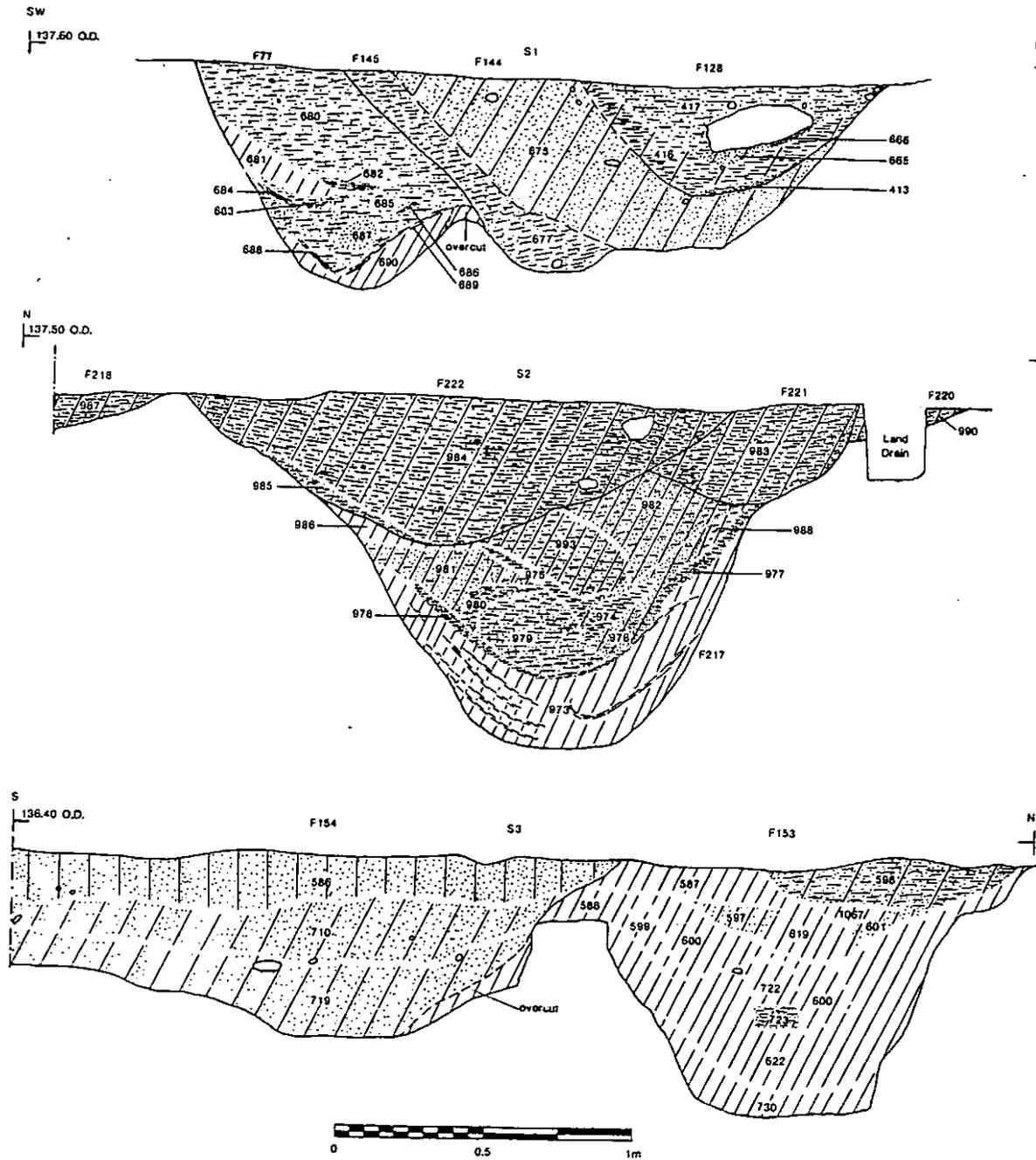


Fig 6 Sections of Phase 1 Enclosure Ditches

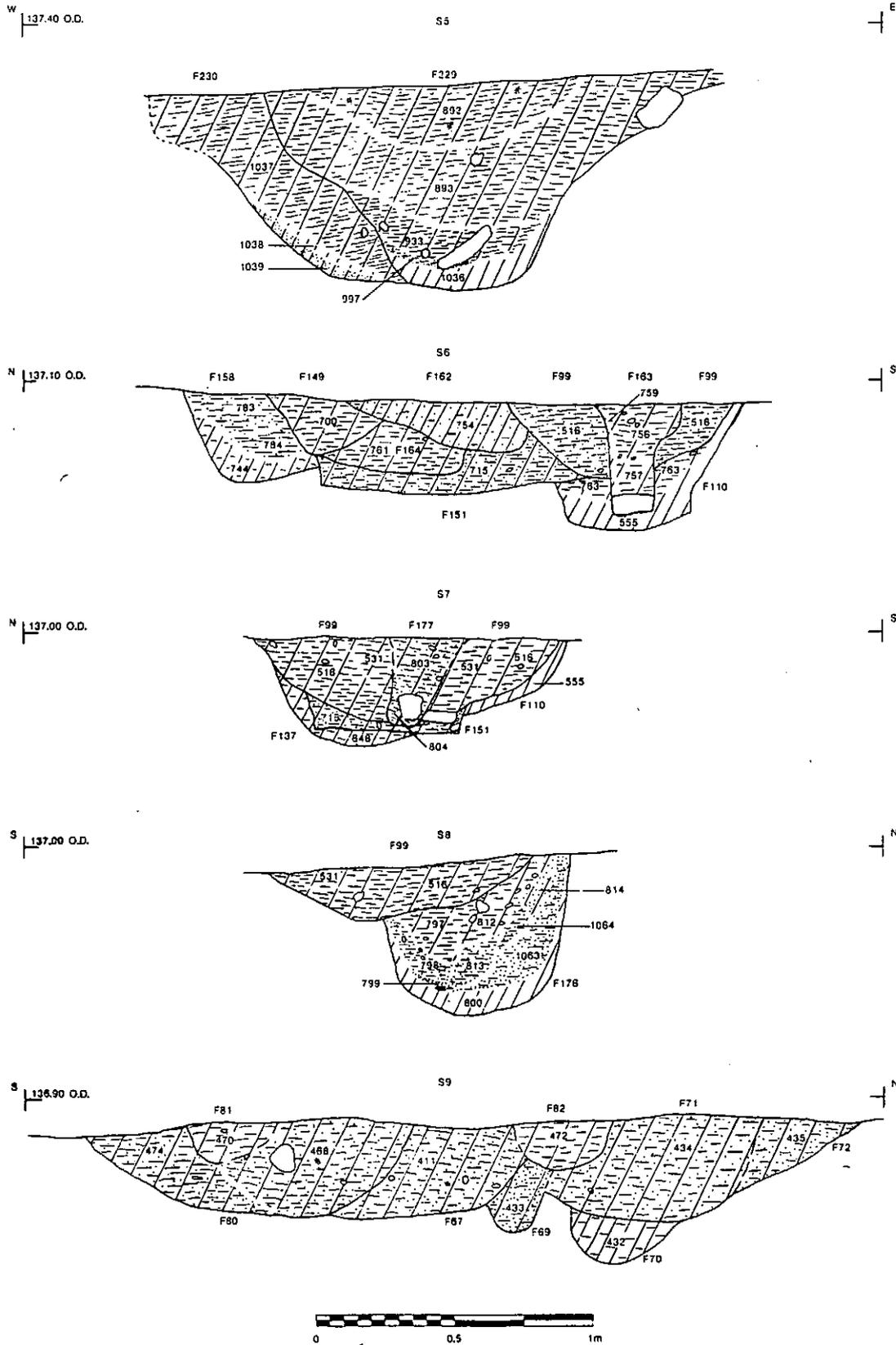


Fig 7 Sections of Phase 1 Rectangular Enclosure Ditches at East End of

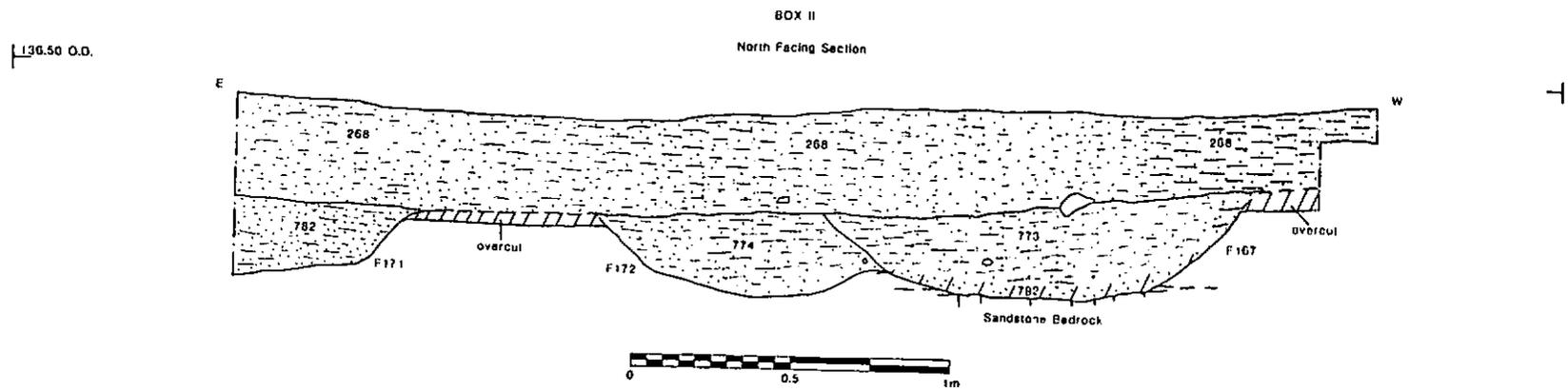
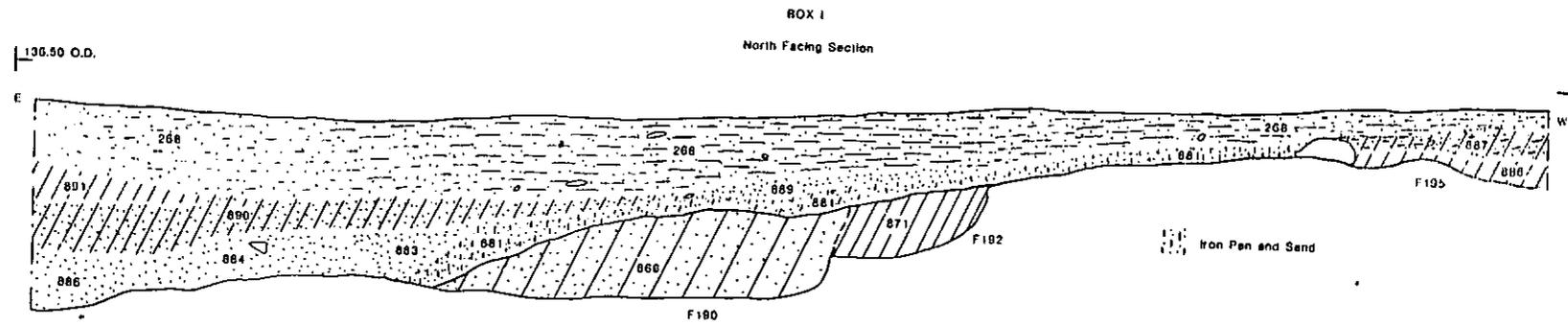


Fig 8 Sections of Rectangular Enclosure Ditches

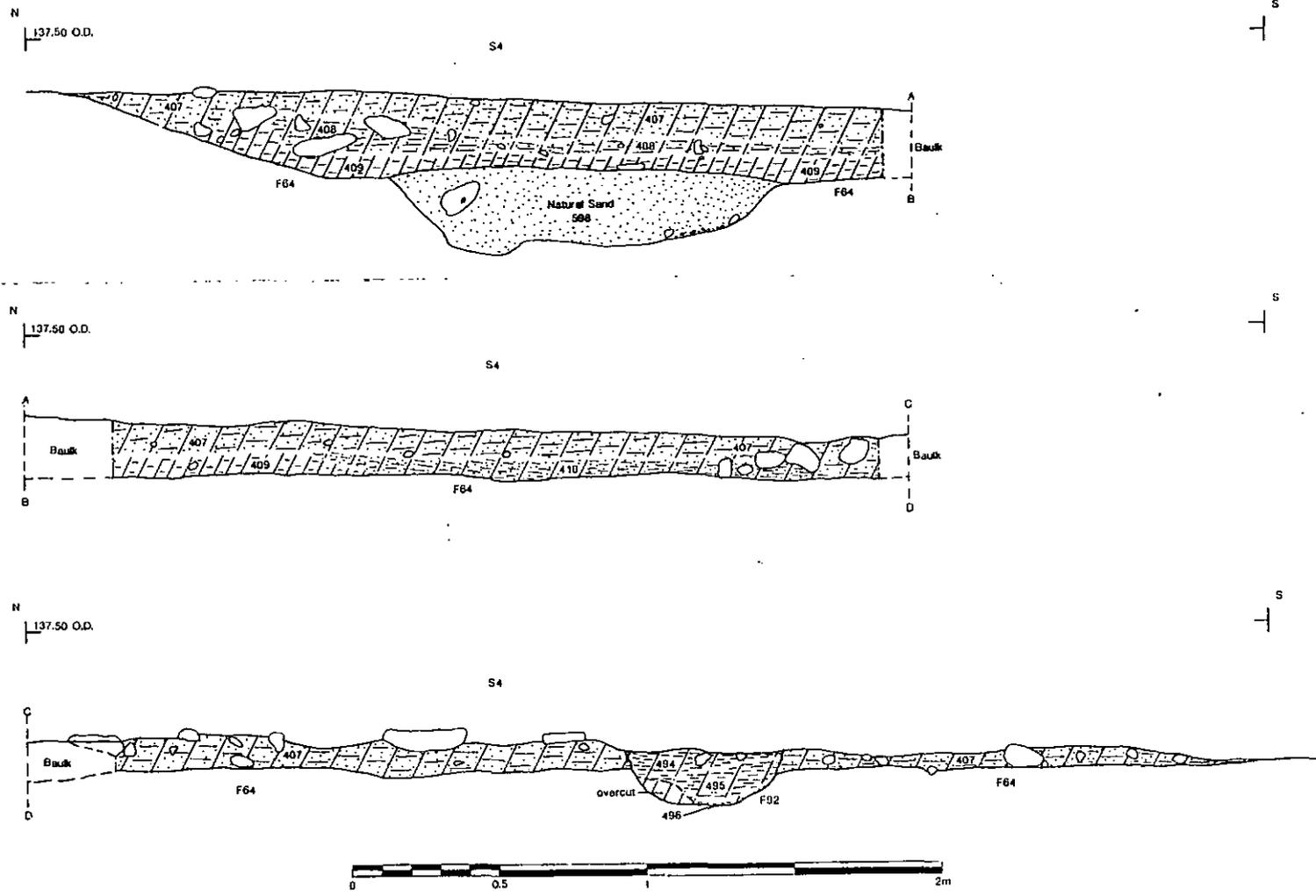


Fig 9 Sections of F64

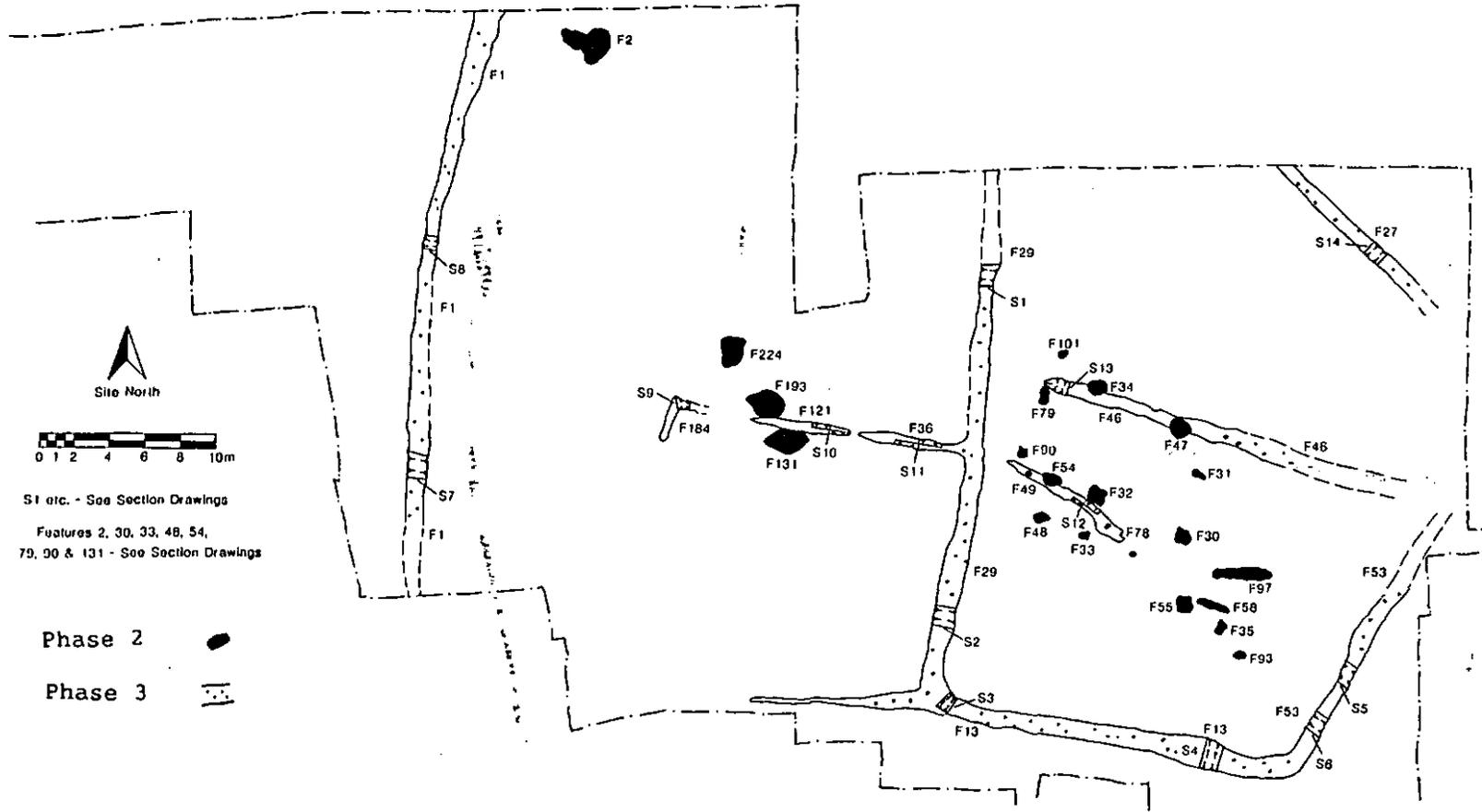


Fig 10 Phases 2 and 3.

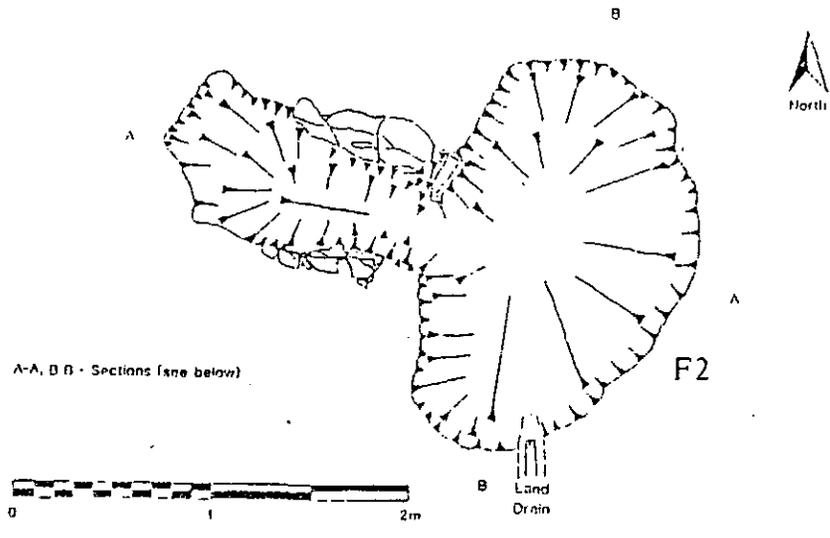


Fig. 11 Plan Of Kiln F2

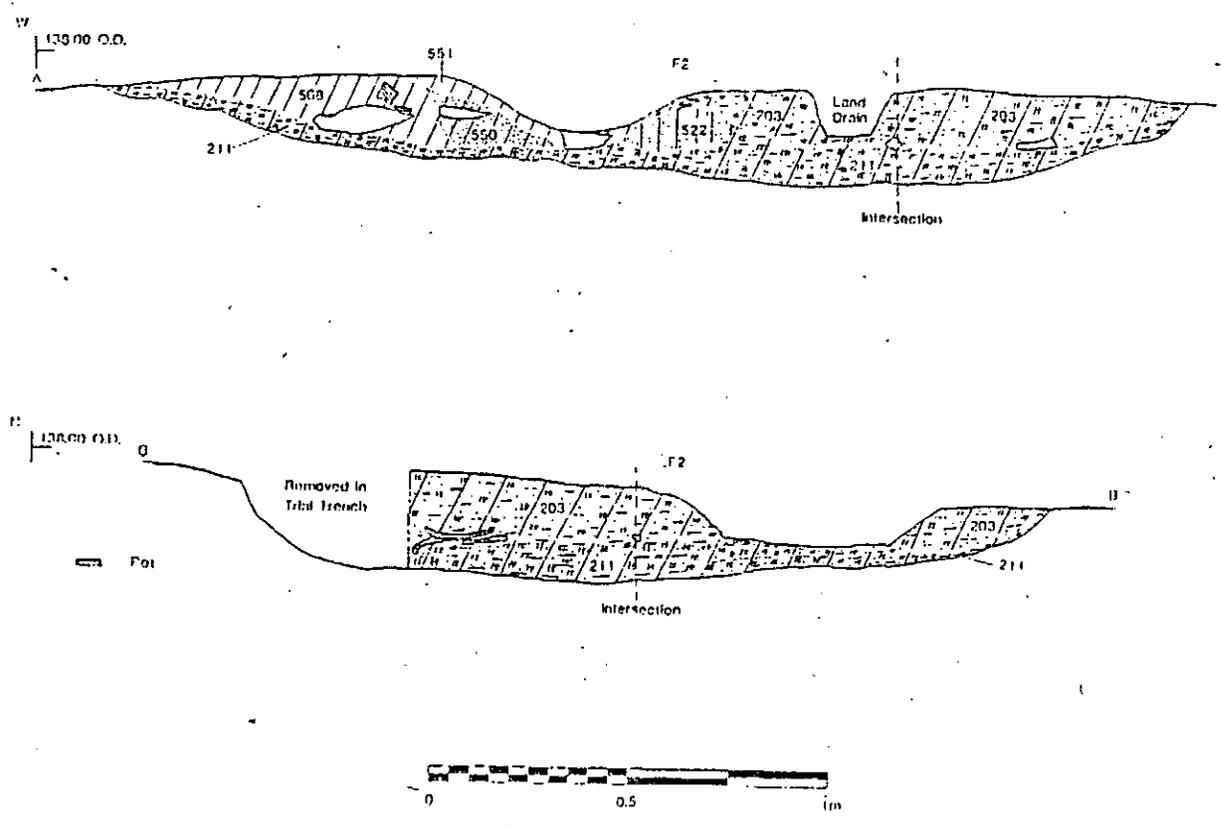


Fig 12 Sections Through F2

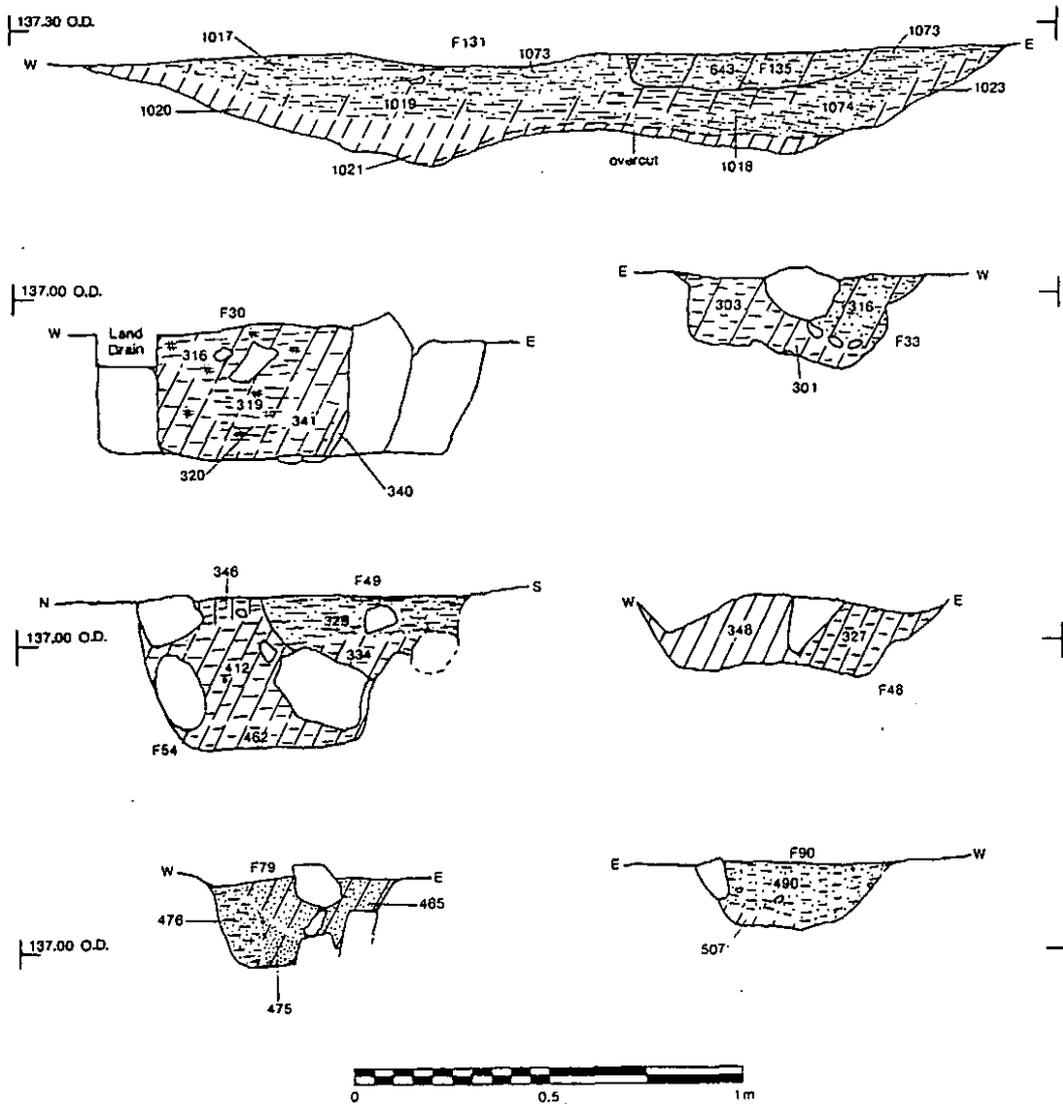


Fig 13 Sections of Phase 2 postholes

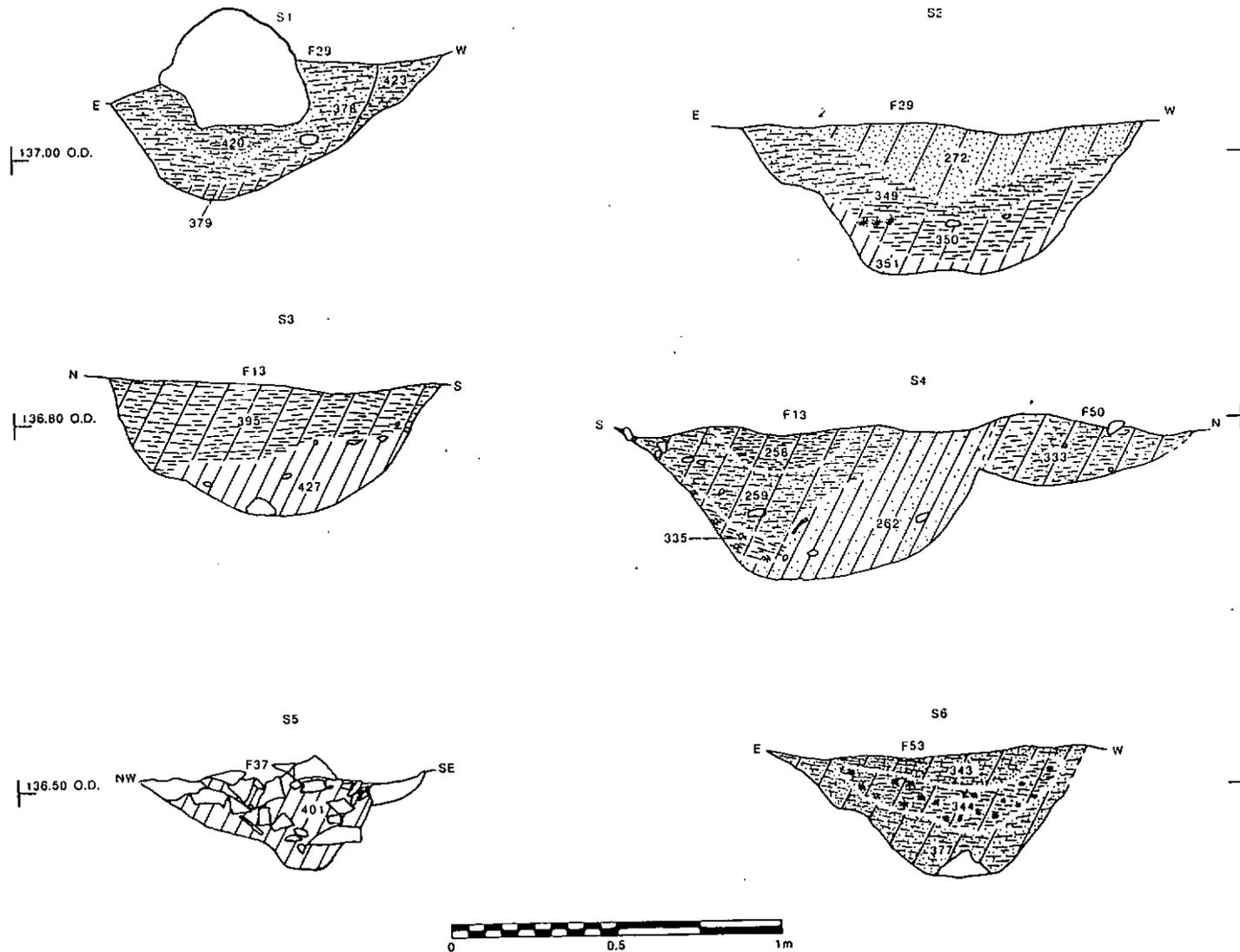


Fig 14 Sections of Phase 3 Features

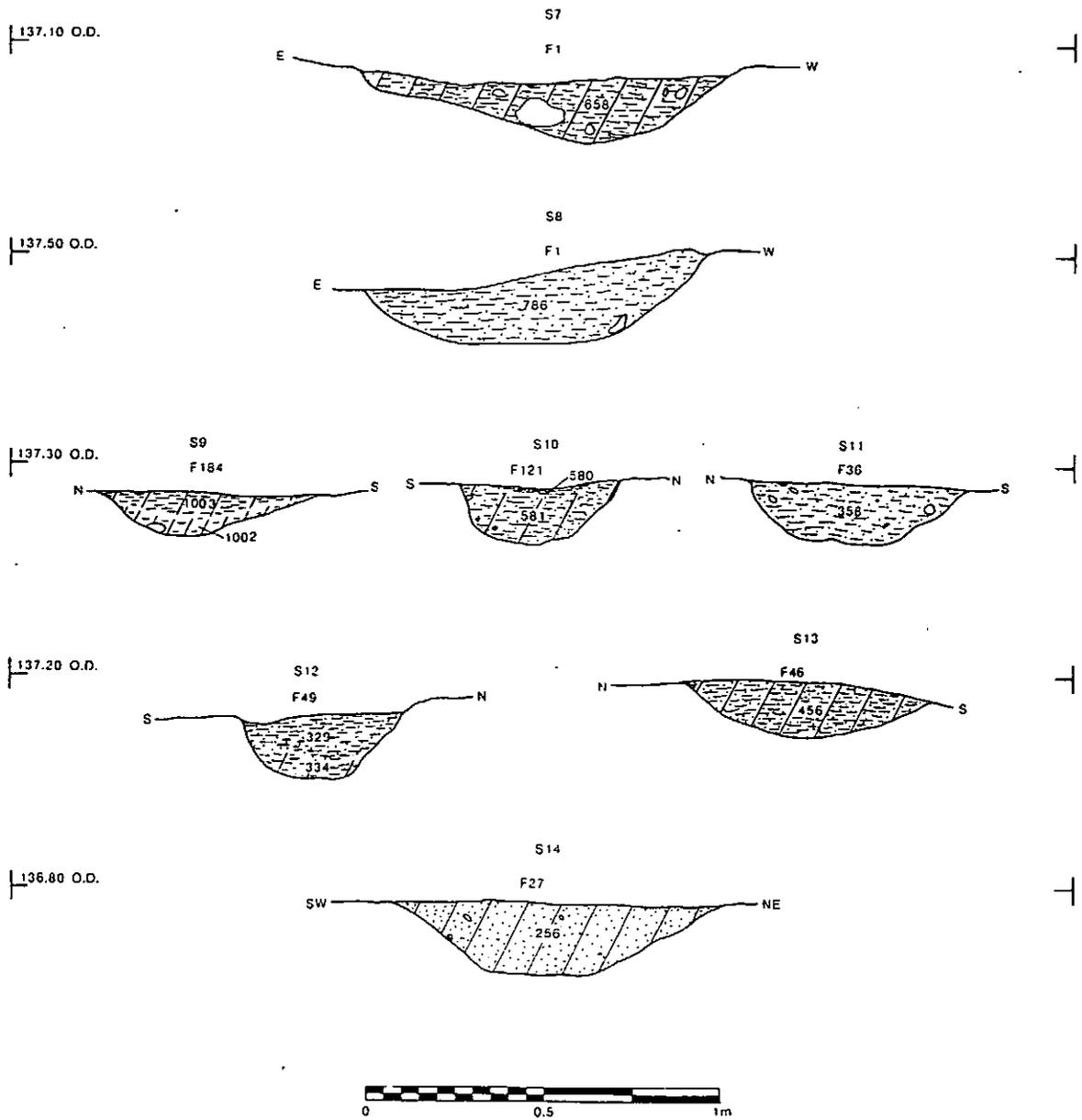


Fig 15 Sections of Phase 3 Features