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MID SUSSEX: Hassocks

An Interim Report

on the

Survey and subsequent Excavations

at

Talbot Field, Hassocks

by the

Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

November 1998

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Introduction

Since the discovery of the Roman cemetery at Hassocks (Fig. 1) during quarrying activity in the earlier part of this century (Lyne 1994), it has been suspected that there was an associated settlement nearby, although the exact location of a settlement has remained elusive. The Roman road, the Greensand Way, runs along the southern edge of Talbot Field (Margary 1935). Many other Roman finds and suggestions of settlement activity have been found around Talbot Field (Garrett 1980). In addition, a recent watching brief carried out by South Eastern Archaeological Services at Crossways Barn, located evidence for Roman settlement (Wood 1993).

MSFAT carried out resistivity surveys adjacent to Crossways Barn in March 1994, and at Talbot Field (TQ294157), in March 1995. Both surveys produced anomalies which may be archaeological features. The Talbot Field survey produced anomalies along the southern edge of the field which may include ditches, an enclosure and the footings of buildings fronting the Roman Greensand way (Fig. 2)

In May 1998, the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team were asked by Clayton Parish Council, to carry out a watching brief during the erection of a basketball post at Talbot Field, Hassocks (Butler 1998) and although no Roman remains were discovered, further permission was obtained to excavate some trenches along the southern edge of Talbot Field to investigate some of the anomalies suggested by the resistivity survey.

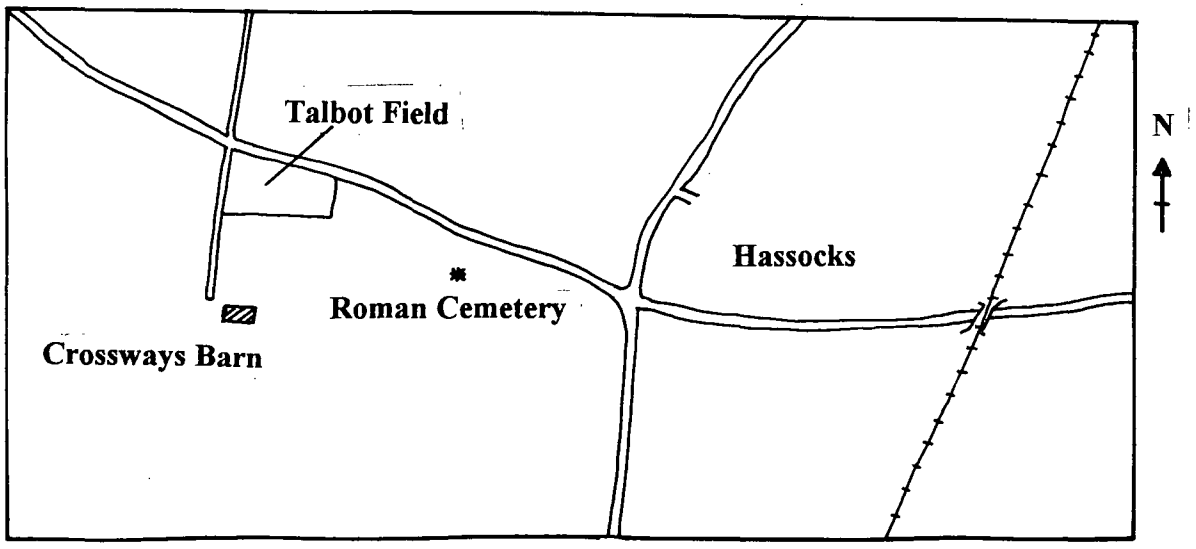


Fig. 1

Site : talbot Comp. : a	Resistivity Survey	Scale	1:738
Shade Plot (Compress)	Size x 1	Block	Off
Brightness 0 Contrast 1	Grey Levels 17 Palette Positive	Black High White Low	

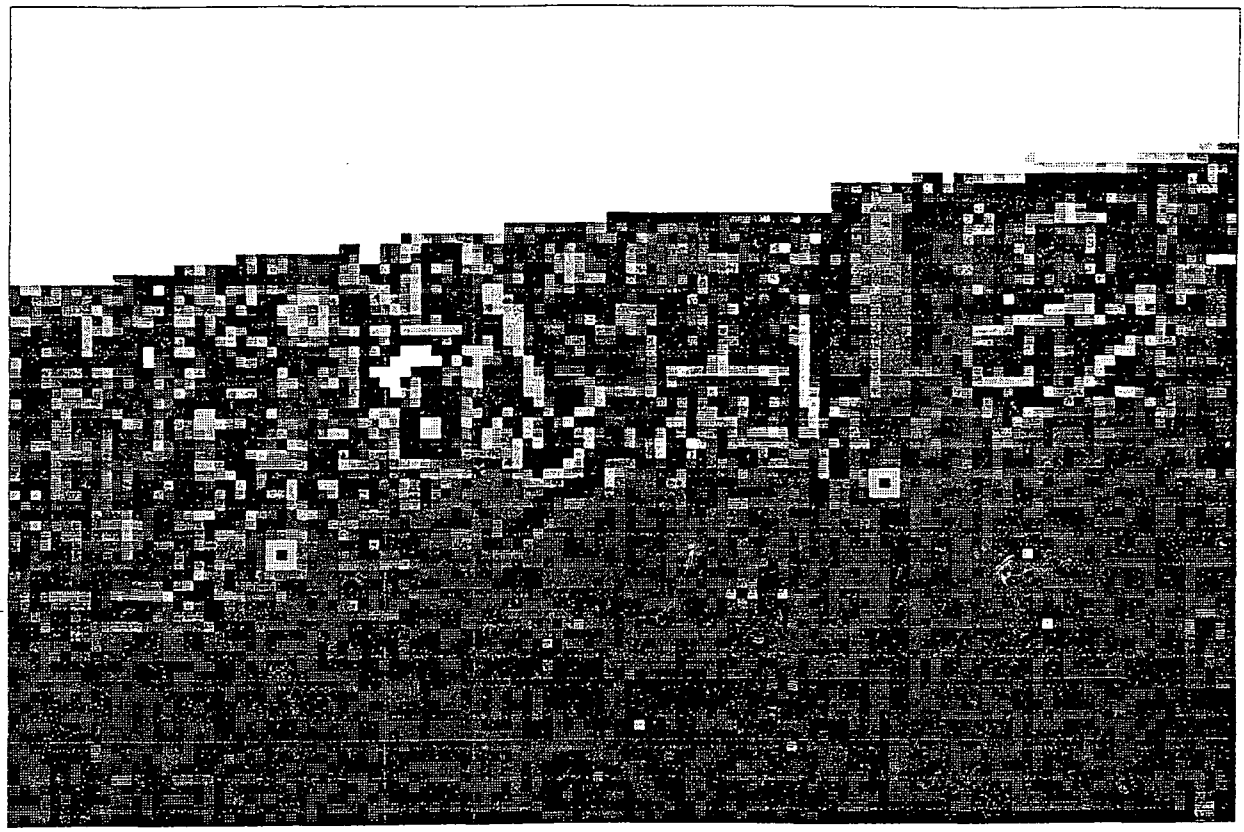


Fig 2a

Site : talbot Mesh : a	Resistivity Survey	Scale 1:738
Shade Plot (Relief)	Size x 1	Block Off
Scaling Factor 1 Sun Dir. (°) 270 Sun Elev. (°) 20	Grey Levels 17 Palette Positive	

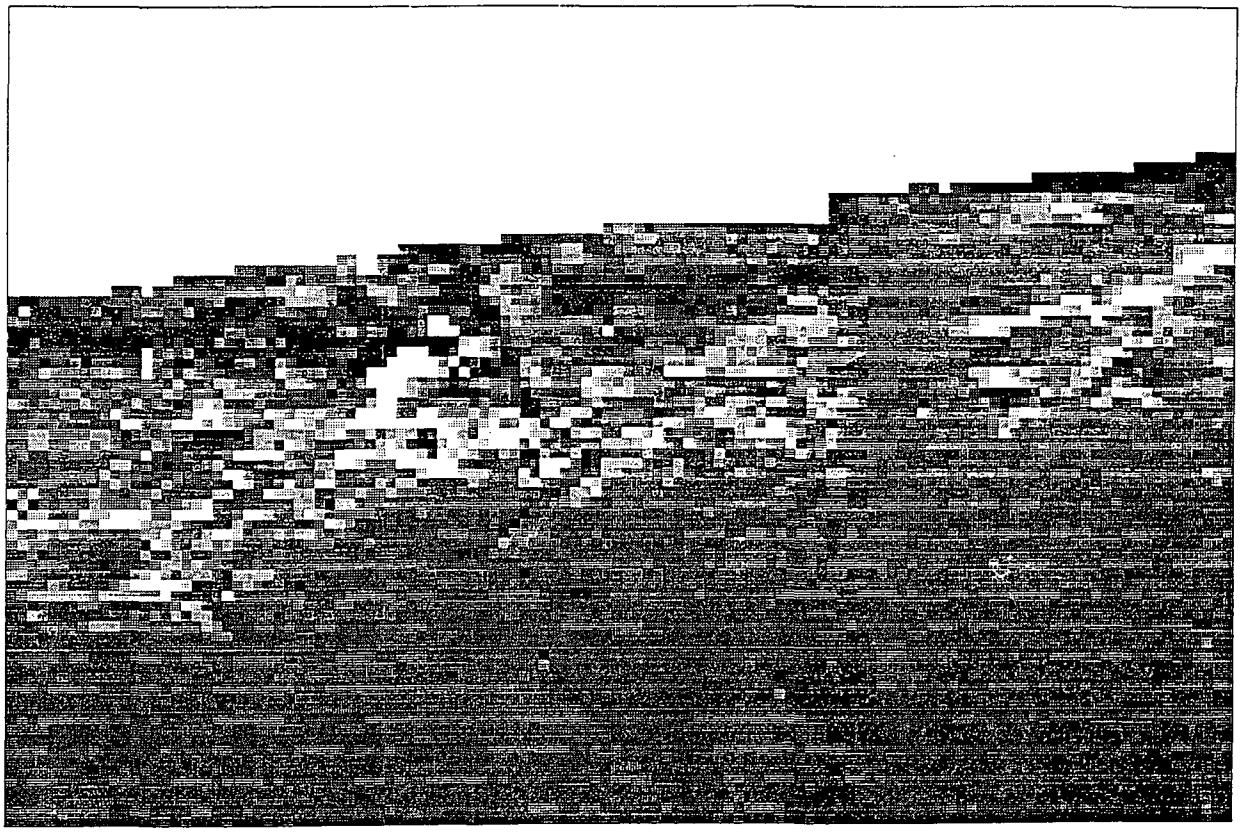


Fig 2b

N

0 20m

The Excavations

Over two weekends in September and October 1998, MSFAT excavated three trenches along the southern edge of Talbot Field (Fig. 3). The trenches were excavated by hand, and on completion the soil and turves were carefully reinstated.

Trench 1

This trench was 1 x 3 metres in size and orientated north-south (Fig. 4). Some Roman pottery sherds were located in the topsoil, but below this was a sandy soil layer which contained numerous sherds of pottery and other finds. As the pottery appeared un-abraded, this layer may possibly represent an occupation layer. In the south end of the trench was a shallow feature containing a darker sandy soil with many pieces of un-abraded Roman pottery. A series of small stakeholes cut into these layers, and are probably from the last war when Talbot Field was used as allotments. Below the Roman features some pieces of Mesolithic flintwork were recovered from the sandy layer immediately above the subsoil. A linear feature of sandstone pieces lying on the subsoil is probably natural.

Trench 2

This trench was 1 by 3 metres, orientated east-west (Fig. 4). It was designed to test a possible ditch anomaly shown on the resistivity survey. Below the topsoil was a thin layer containing pieces of flint and sandstone, and below this a number of features were found. Firstly, a ditch running south-east to north-west on the line suggested by the resistivity survey was sectioned. The ditch was 1.4 metres wide and 0.5 metres deep with steep sides. It appeared to have a single fill with few finds, all of Roman date, in it. To the west of the ditch, and in the corner of the trench, was a deep pit 0.63 metres deep. This pit had a main fill which contained numerous pieces of Roman pottery. Towards the bottom of the pit was a thin layer of yellow sand, and below this some large pieces of Roman pottery lying in the bottom of the pit. Unfortunately due to time constraints, we were unable to extend the trench and therefore do not know the extent of this feature. Two shallow features were located on the east side of the ditch. Context 35 is later than the ditch, and probably of post Roman date. Context 46 contained Roman pottery, and may be a small pit. A further feature (Context 51) to the west of the ditch was identified, but we did not have sufficient time to section it.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was excavated at the south west end of Talbot Field to investigate a positive anomaly shown by the resistivity survey. The trench was 1 by 2 metres in size (Fig. 4). It was noted that the topsoil here produced fewer sherds of Roman pottery. Below the topsoil was a linear feature (40) running east-west, comprising flint and sandstone nodules, and may be the footings of a wall. Some Roman pottery and pieces of Roman tile are also mixed in with this feature. Another, but slightly indistinct, linear feature (41), running north-south may be another wall footing. The soil on either side of the main wall (40) contained pottery sherds and, after removing the loose material, appeared to be a fairly compact floor.

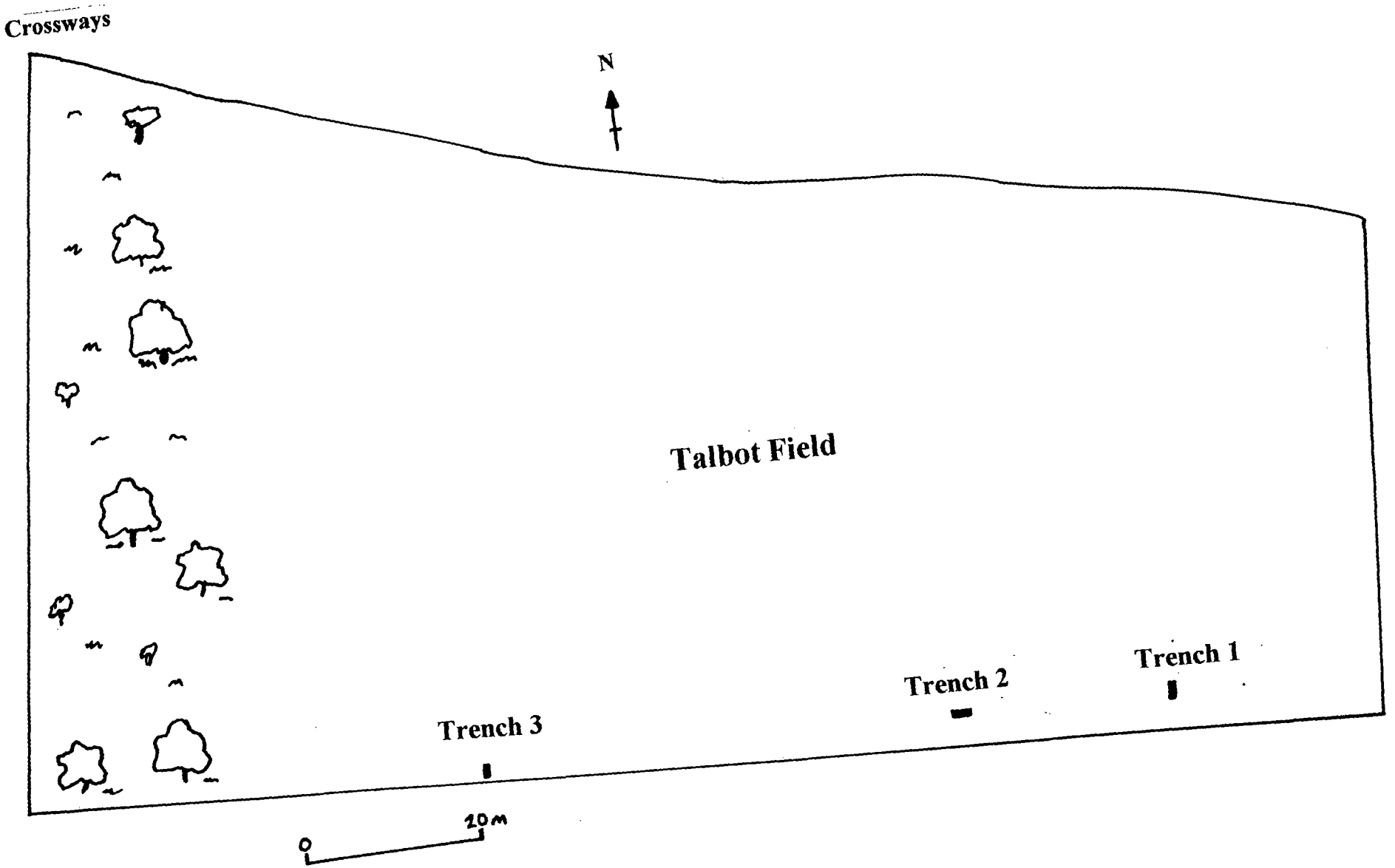
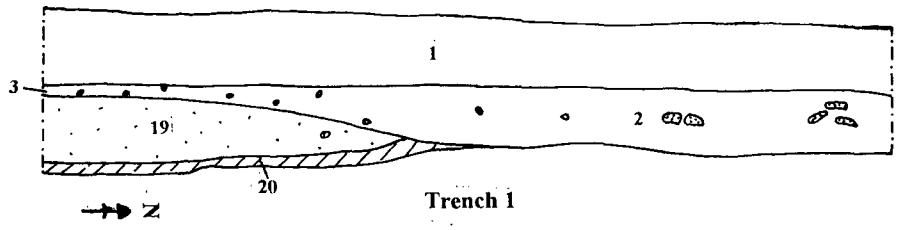
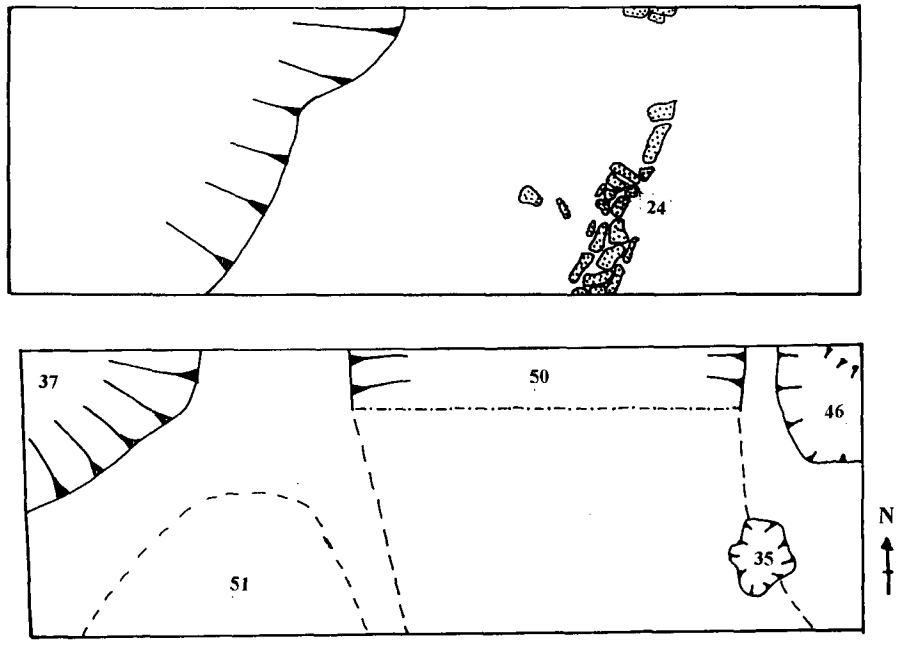


Fig 3.

Talbot Field, Hassocks



Trench 1



Trench 2

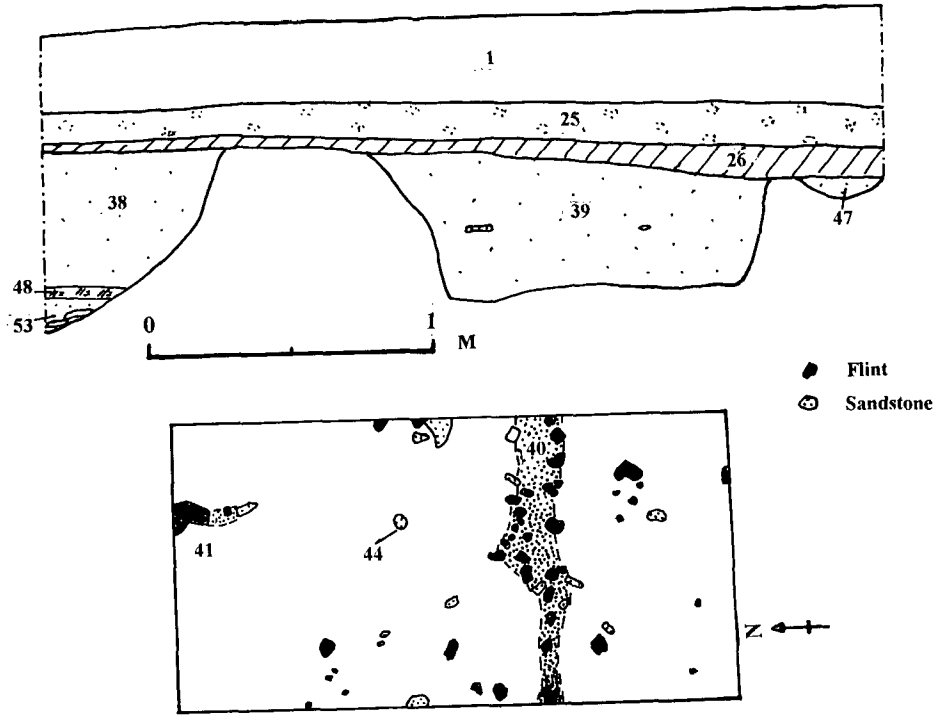


Fig. 4.

Trench 3

The Finds

Pottery

Large quantities of Roman pottery were recovered during the excavations, and will be analysed by Malcolm Lyne. As well as orange and grey sandy wares, sherds of East Sussex Ware, and Samian were noted. Cooking pots, dishes, beakers and flagons were amongst the vessel types recovered. Quantities of Roman tile were also recovered.

Flintwork

Pieces of prehistoric flintwork were recovered during the excavation, including Mesolithic blades.

Conclusions.

Despite earlier fears that even if the Roman settlement at Hassocks was below Talbot Field, the allotment gardening activity would have destroyed it, it does appear that significant Roman remains do exist. The resistivity survey does suggest that along the frontage of the Greensand Way there may be numerous buildings and associated features, and these trial excavation do confirm that this could be the case. Only the opening up of a larger area for excavation will determine exactly what these remains do represent, and whether we have in fact located the Roman settlement at Hassocks.

Acknowledgements.

We would like to thank Mrs Judy King, the Clerk, and Jack Slaughter, Chairman, of Clayton Parish Council for allowing us to carry out these excavations, and for their interest throughout the work. Lawrence Gaston, Bruce Milton, Michael Fairbrother, Claire Goodey and others helped with the excavation work. David Combes processed the resistivity results and produced the results for us.

Chris Butler MIFA

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