

PETTERS SPORTS FIELD, EGHAM, SURREY

PREFACE

This is a report on the results of the two seasons of excavation that took place in a former sports ground, known as Petters Sports Field, on the north-east of Egham town centre. The first season lasted between 21st August 1976 and 14th March 1977 and was followed by a second season between 8th August and 2nd September 1977. The work was funded by the DoE and directed by Martin O'Connell on behalf of the Surrey Archaeological Society. Petters Sports Field was bisected by the M25 South Orbital Motorway in 1975-6 and the rest of the field is now under a long term threat of redevelopment.

Summary

Evidence of multi-period settlement was uncovered and at least six phases were identified, the earliest of which can be dated to the Neolithic period while the latest is as recent as the post-medieval period. The most important phase of activity on the site occurred during the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age and included a large ditch in which a hoard of bronzes, probably belonging to a bronzesmith, had been deliberately deposited. Several hut circles, together with a number of pits, were also identified which could have been contemporary with the burial of the hoard. The Roman period followed after an apparent absence of occupation in the Iron Age. The principal Roman features were a 1st century ditch and palisade trench. Part of a Roman roadside ditch was also excavated and the dateable material obtained suggested that it was already becoming infilled in the 4th century. A medieval ditch was examined as well as several small post-medieval features. Because of the lack of dating and stratigraphic evidence a number of features could not be assigned to any particular phase of occupation.

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 SETTING

The site lies about 500m to the north-east of Egham town centre and about 450m from the river Thames (figs 1 & 2, pl 1). The area is on low lying ground and the underlying geology consists of brickearth and flood plain gravel. The fill and profile of features varied where the natural subsoil changed from gravel to brickearth due to the differential weathering and natural erosion of the two subsoils. The water table fluctuates seasonally in this area and was as high as 14.10m OD in the winter months of 1976/7 after prolonged rainfall.

Although David Barker had discovered evidence of a 12th century building in the north-east corner of Petters Sports Field (see below), excavations in 1976-7 produced no structures that could be definitely

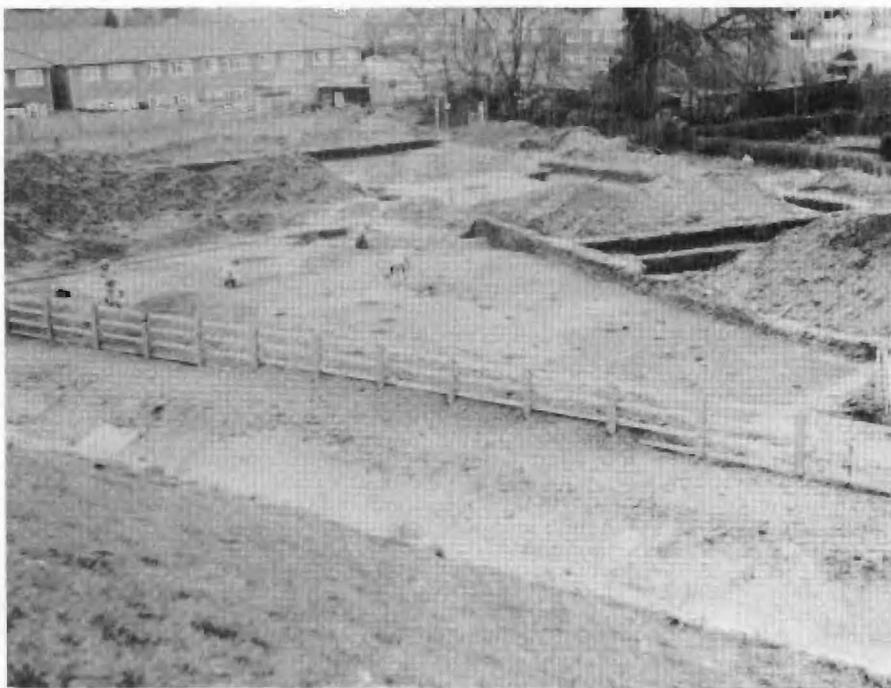


Plate 1 View of the site from M25 motorway

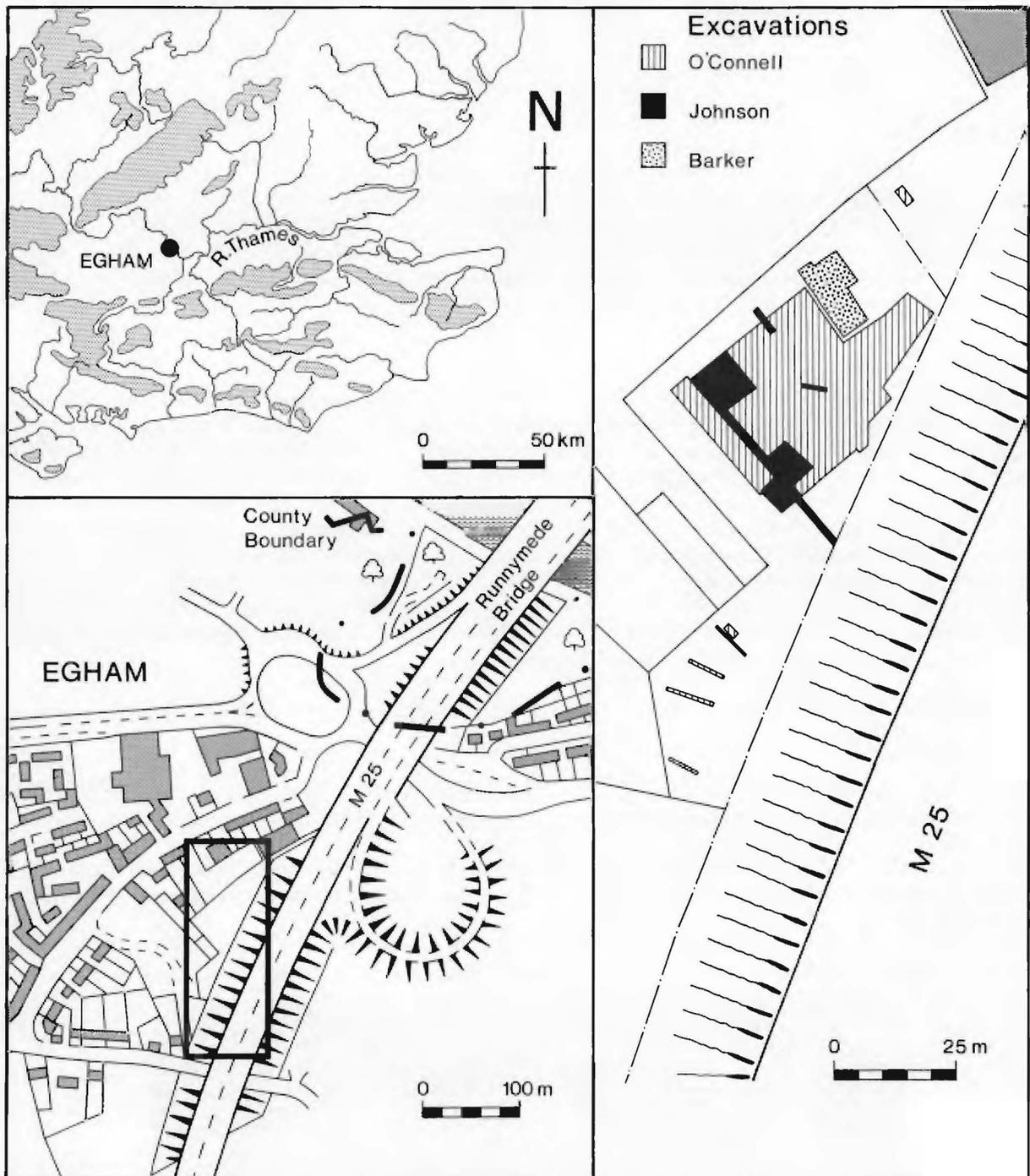


Fig 1 Site Location plan

assigned to the same period but suggested that the greater part of the site would have been arable land for much of the medieval and post-medieval periods and have reverted to pasture land, appearing as part of a large meadow on the Tithe map of Egham, published in 1841 (Surrey Record Office B27/V). The site was used until fairly recently as a sports ground by Petters Limited and was, therefore, still relatively open land before the construction of the M25 motorway. The lower Thames Valley, in which the site lies, is rich in material remains from Prehistoric and Roman periods and the results of fieldwork and research in the area can be found in *Archaeology and the M25* (Johnson 1975) and *The Archaeological Implication of Gravel Extraction in North-West Surrey* (Longley 1976). An assessment of the importance of the Egham area in the late Bronze to Early Iron Age has appeared in a recent article (Longley & Needham 1979) which highlights the significance of the discoveries at Runnymede Bridge and Petters Sports Field for our understanding of this difficult period. A full report on the first season of excavations at Runnymede Bridge, which is only about 400m to the north-east of Petters Sports Field, has also been published recently (Longley 1980) and reports on the 1978 and 1980 seasons are in preparation.

1.2 PREVIOUS WORK ON THE SITE

As part of an archaeological survey of the M25 South Orbital Motorway carried out from 1972–5, Bernard

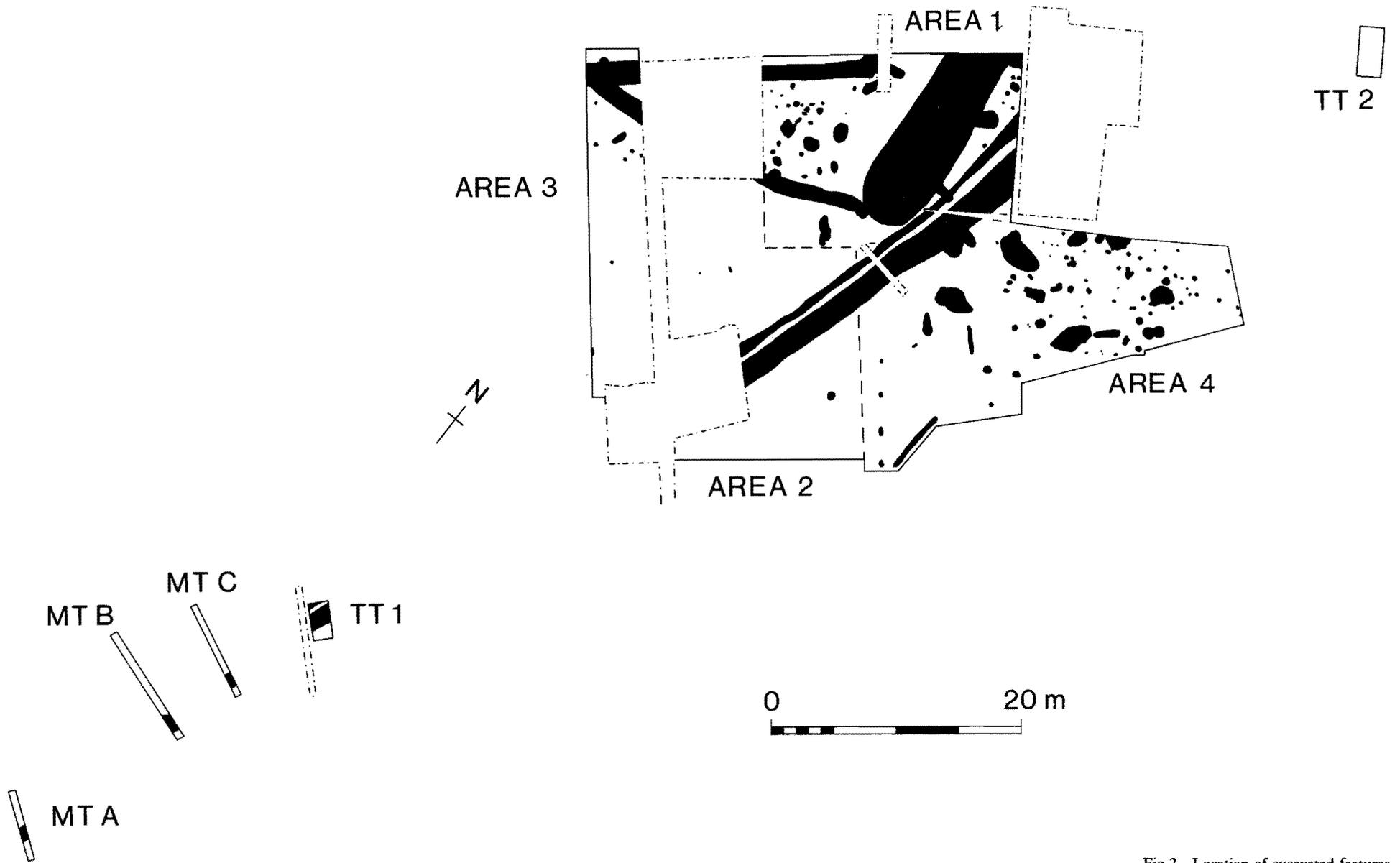


Fig 2 Location of excavated features 3

Johnson opened a series of machine-cut trial trenches across the site after a geophysical survey had failed to detect any buried archaeological material (Johnson 1975, 12–14). A series of smaller areas adjacent to these trial trenches were also examined by Johnson. At the same time, David Barker of the Egham-by-Runnymede Historical Society was responsible for the excavation of a large hand-cut trench in the north-east corner of the field. These excavations together provided evidence of a Roman road and multi-period occupation in this area. The archaeological importance of the site made a more complete examination of the field essential before the entire area was redeveloped.

1.3 EXCAVATION METHOD

The first season of the 1976–7 excavations took place in two stages, the first beginning on 21st August and lasting until 23rd December 1976. Areas 1, 2 and 3 (figs 3, 4 and 5) were stripped of topsoil by machine (JCB digger-loader) but due to lack of manpower, work was at first concentrated on Area 1 and the removal of the ploughsoil that remained by hand. It was soon established that, apart from 3 post-medieval features (F100, 101 and 102), the stratigraphy of any occupation deposits had been removed by agricultural activity and that features only survived where they had been cut deep enough to penetrate the natural subsoil. Accordingly the ploughsoil immediately above the archaeological horizon was removed by machine from Areas 2 and 3. The topsoil (layer 100) varied in depth between 0.30 and 0.40m and the ploughsoil (layer 101/102, 200, 300, 400) between 0.20 and 0.30m. In some cases it was necessary to remove the upper surface of the natural subsoil to a depth of 0.05m as it was not possible to recognise every archaeological feature after an initial clearing of the surface, particularly in dry conditions. In the southern corner of the field a trial trench (TT1) was excavated in order to investigate the stratigraphy of the Roman ditch known to exist in that area and further three trenches (Machine Trenches A, B and C) were cut by machine to establish the line and extent of the same ditch (fig 2). The second stage of the first season lasted between 2nd January and 14th March 1977 and during this period Area 4 (figs 6 and 7) was stripped of topsoil by machine and cleaned down to the natural subsoil by hand. It was hoped to discover further evidence of Late Bronze to Early Iron Age occupation in this part of the field associated with the large prehistoric ditch located in Area 1 the previous year.

The second season, between 8th August and 2nd September 1977, was undertaken in order to complete the excavation of the prehistoric ditch in Area 1, which had only been partially uncovered in the earlier excavation. The area examined was simply an extension of Area 1 but is called Area 1b on the published site

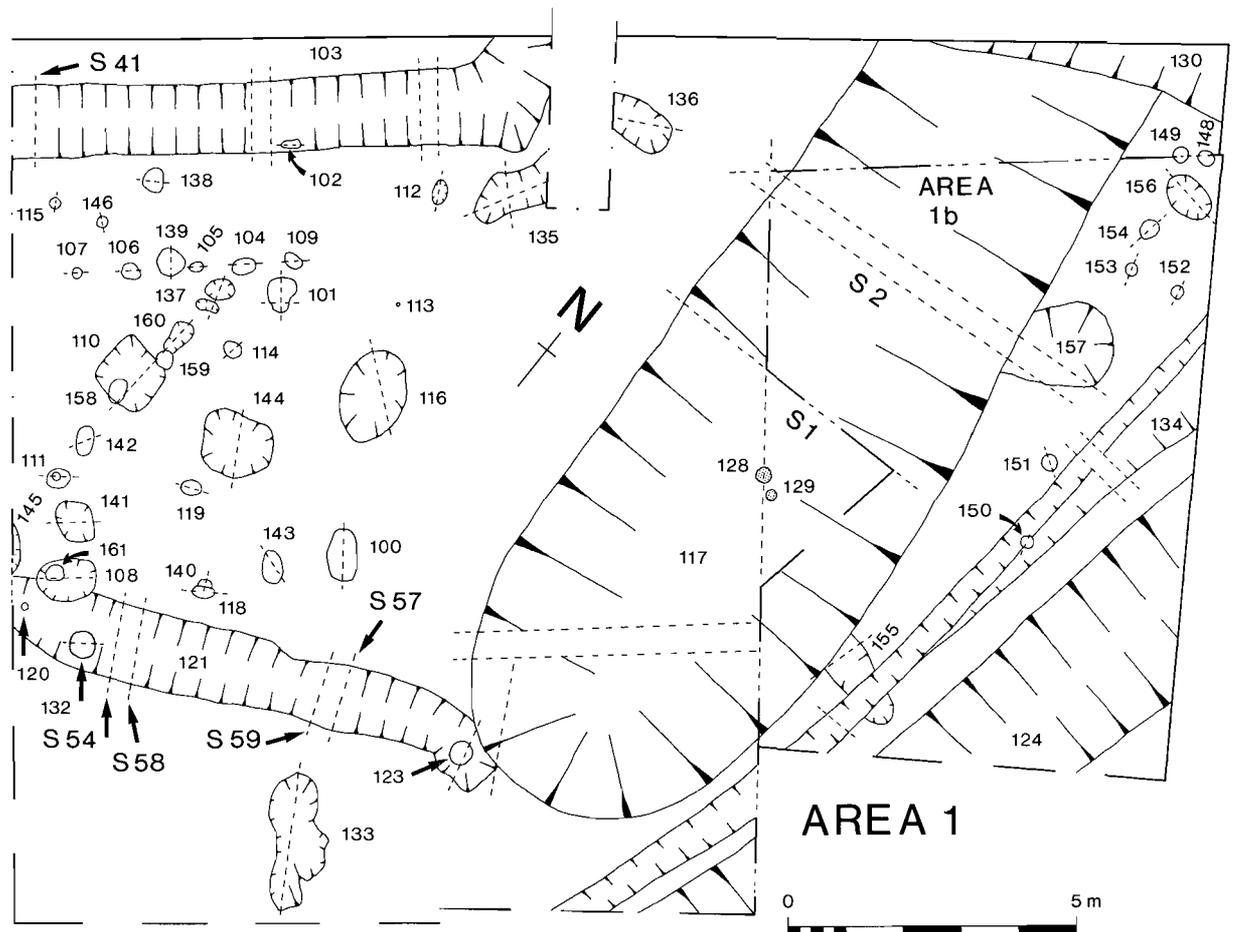


Fig 3 Features in Area 1

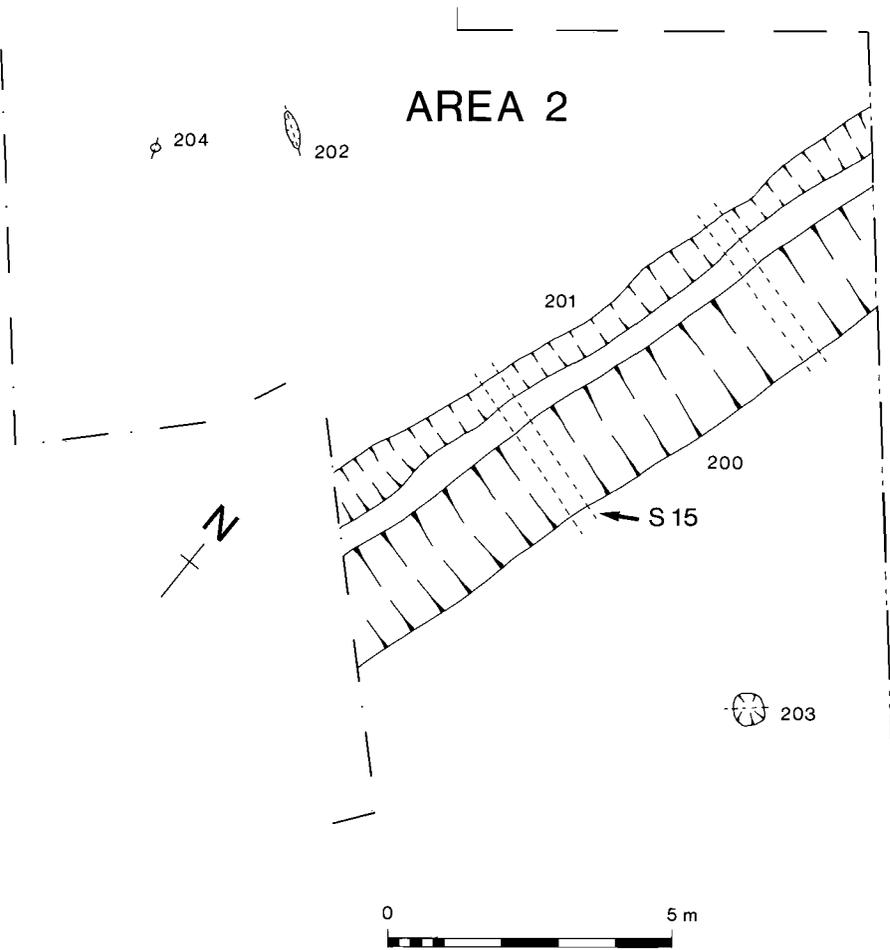


Fig 4 Features in Area 2

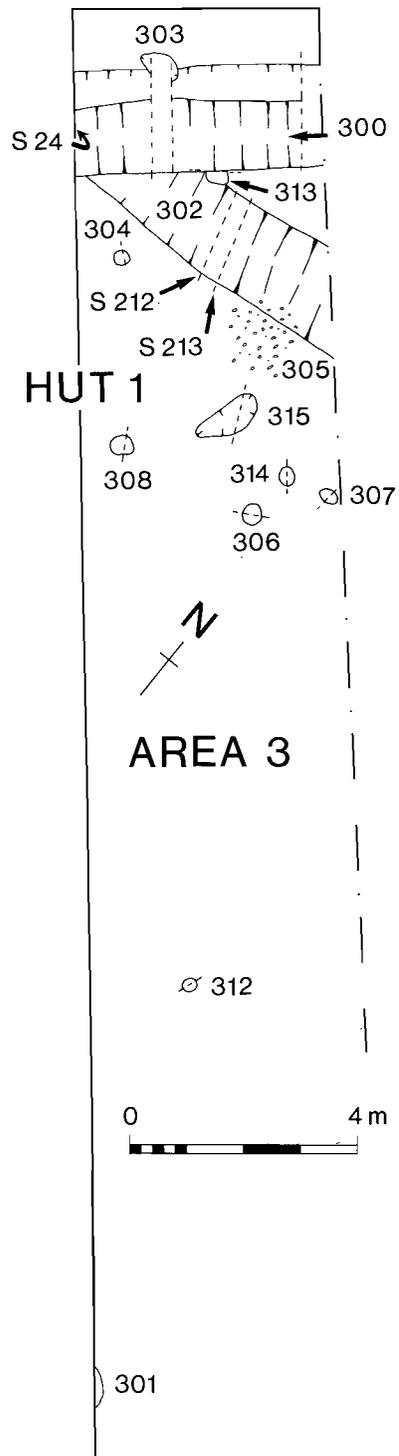


Fig 5 Features in Area 3

plans to avoid confusion (fig 3). A small trial trench (TT2) was also dug by hand in the car park attached to the United Dairies' building to the north-east of the site (fig 2), in order to determine the possible extent of stratified archaeological material in that area. It was discovered that levelling of the site there had removed most of the ploughsoil and the remaining soil had been compressed and badly contaminated with later material. The natural subsoil appeared to be relatively undisturbed but no stratified archaeological material was discovered.

1.4 THE PHASES OF OCCUPATION

The six phases of occupation (figs 8 and 9) identified at the site are listed below. It should be noted, however, that this list is simply an interpretative guide to the excavated material and that, because of the lack of dateable finds and stratigraphy, some features could not be confidently fitted into any phase (see below) while others have been allotted to a particular phase solely on the ground of probability.

Fig 8 Areas 1-4, phases of occupation

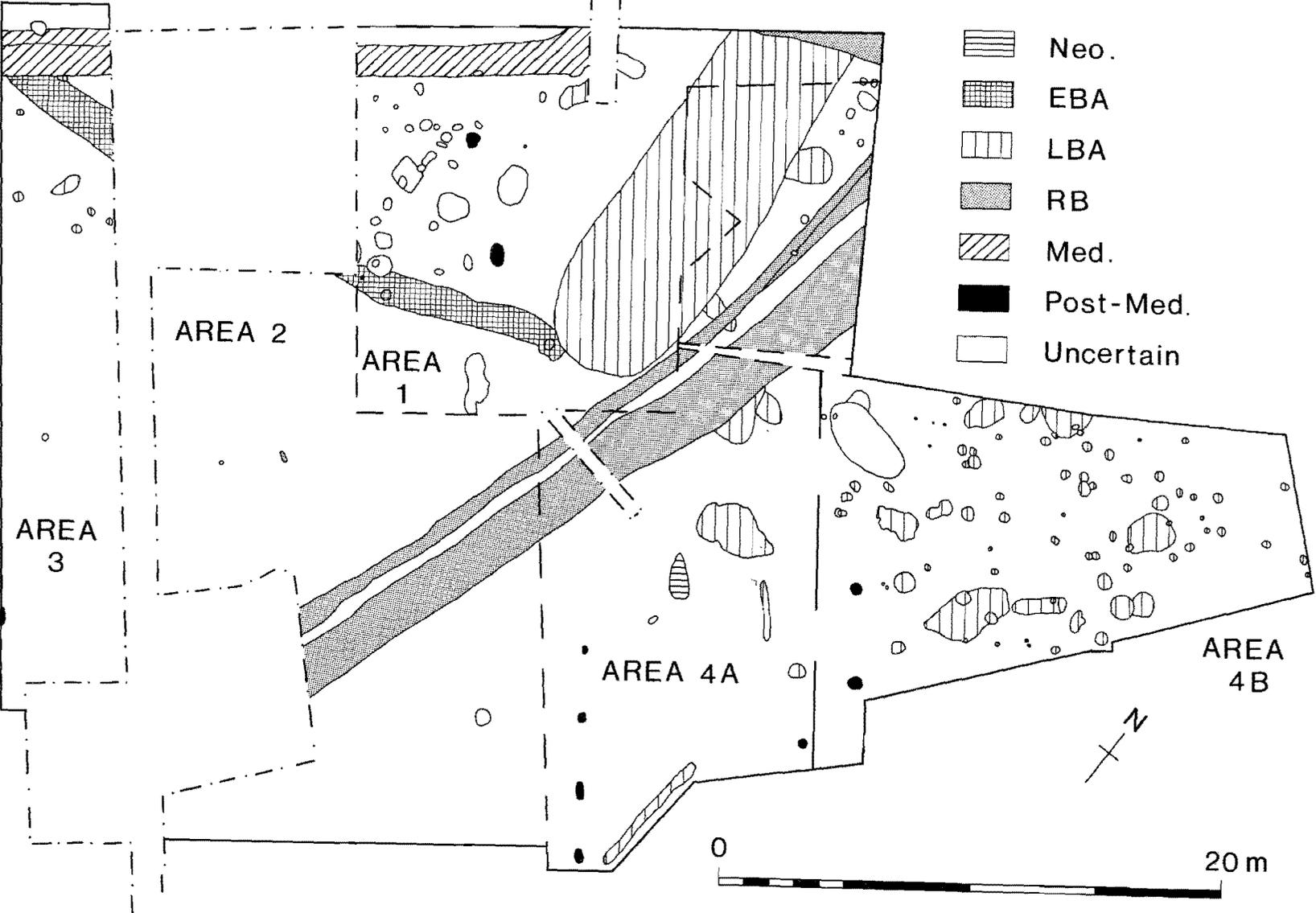


Table 1 Phases of occupation

Phase No	Period	Details and Feature Nos
1	Neolithic	Pit — F 470
2	Early to Middle Bronze Age	Ditch — F121/302
3	Late Bronze to Early Iron Age	
Pre-phase 3a		Pits F155 and 157
a		Excavation and initial silting of Ditch — F117 3–6
b		Site Clearance — F137, 408, 465, 469, 479 and 483, period of occupation: Hut 1?, Hut 2–6; Pits — various (see 6.3.1); metal working in vicinity of Ditch (F107), deposition of bronze hoard — F128 and 129 — in Ditch — F117.2; Infilling of Ditch — F.117.1, 7 and 8
4	Roman	
a		1st Century AD — Ditch — F1/124/200/406 — and Palisade Trench — F134/201/407; Small Pit — F202
b		Roadside Ditch — F130
5	Medieval	Ditch — F102/300
6	Post-Medieval	Various small pits and post holes — (see 6.3)

Features are prefixed with the letter F (eg F121) and layers within features are numbered from .1 onwards, normally in the reverse order of deposition, and follow the feature numbers so that for instance, F121.1. is the ultimate fill of F121.

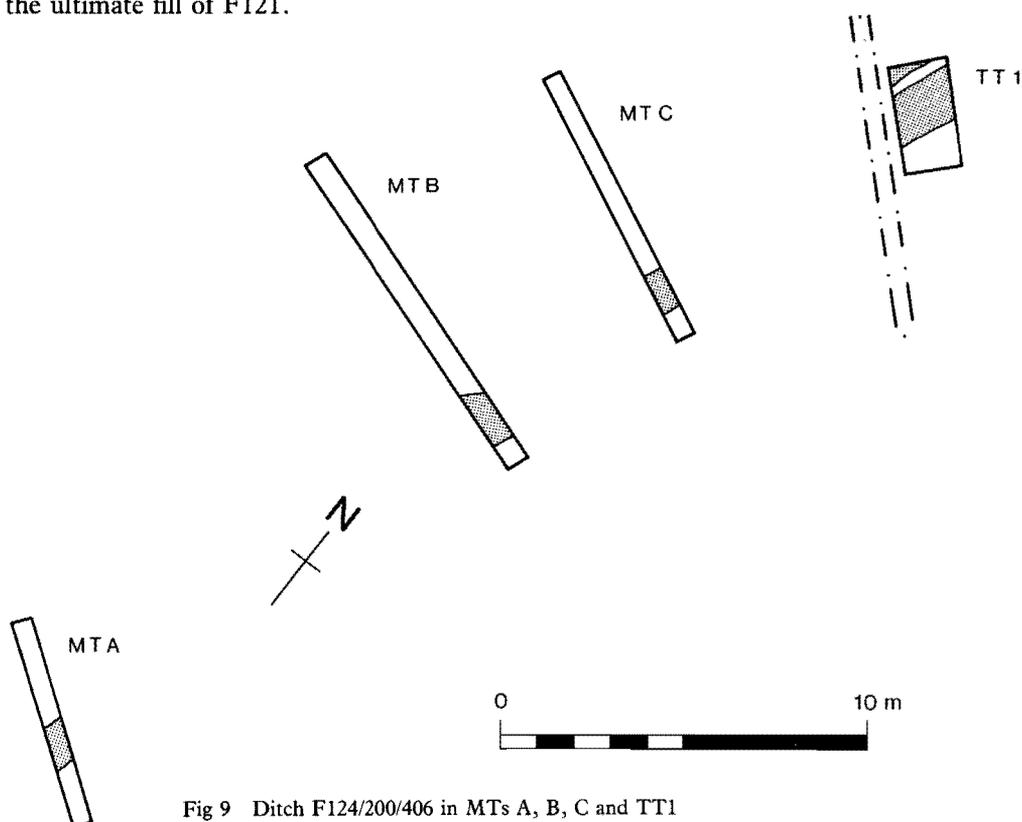


Fig 9 Ditch F124/200/406 in MTs A, B, C and TT1