

Pinner Village Gardens

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OVER THE LAST few years increasing attention has been paid to some low earthwork features at the southern end of Pinner Village Gardens (TQ 125 888, see Fig. 1), a council-owned recreation ground. They are reminiscent of narrow rig ridge and furrow, a landscape feature generally found on poorly drained soil where ploughing had been undertaken for relatively long periods in the past. This tends to cause the soil to be thrown up in a series of alternate ridges and furrows, running roughly parallel to one another.

The earthworks at Pinner Village Gardens are also similar to another type of landscape feature, which was formed by the laying of underdraining, particularly in the 19th century. Examples have recently been identified at the nearby Pinner Park Farm¹.

At the end of November 1985, the Parks Section of Harrow Borough Council informed the Archaeological Surveys Project, then under way in the Borough, that it intended to level these earthworks to enable the grass growing on them to be cut more efficiently. The levelling was due to begin at the end of the week in which the Surveys Project was informed, and in view of the short notice given, it was decided to undertake a small-scale rescue excavation to try to determine whether these features really did represent ridge and furrow or whether they were later drainage features. Because of the rarity of ridge and furrow so near London, the discovery that these features were ridge and furrow would have been reason for recommending their preservation.

History

Messeder's map of Harrow, dated to 1759, shows the area now occupied by Pinner Village Gardens as covered by land designated as 'common fields and enclosures'². The Enclosure Map of Harrow is more specific, in that it gives the names of these 'common fields'. They are Long, Middle and Down Field, and from their location it would seem that they were the common, or open, fields of the village of Pinner³. The present site of Pinner Village Gardens was

taken up, after enclosure, by field numbers 515, 516 and 517. These enclosures had formerly been part of Middle Field (Fig. 2).

The likelihood of Pinner Village Gardens being part of the Open Field system of Pinner Village has been suggested by Long⁴. The village itself first appears as one of the largest hamlets within the substantial manor of Harrow in 1315-16, although the name itself first appears as a family name, 'de Pinnora' in 1232⁵. The Victoria County History states that Saxon and early medieval occupation is lacking, but recent finds in the garden of 54 Waxwell Gardens may cause this statement to be rethought⁶. Certainly Pinner was a flourishing community by the early 14th century, with a chapel consecrated in 1321 and a weekly market and annual fair being granted in 1336⁷.

Excavation and survey

Before excavation commenced, the area under question was surveyed both to produce a plan of the site (Fig. 3) and to record changes in levels across a specified section of the field (Fig. 4), so that the nature of the earthworks could be more clearly appreciated. Once this had been done, three small trenches were dug at right angles to the furrows, in an attempt to discover whether underdrainage could have been the cause of these features.

Results (see Fig. 5)

As speed was of the essence in this exercise, the trenches excavated were not of the same size. Although all three trenches were 0.5m (20in) wide, their lengths varied. The first trench excavated was therefore the longest, and the third and final trench the shortest.

Trench 1

This trench was 2.33m (7ft 8in) long, approximately across the centre of the furrow. It revealed a fairly uniform layer of silty clay mixed with gravel, for a depth of about 0.4m (16in) below the turf line, overlying natural clay. The silty layer contained residual artefacts of a fragmentary nature including

1. C. K. Currie, *Pinner Park Farm* (forthcoming). Report part of Harrow Archaeological Surveys, deposited with Planning Dept., London Borough of Harrow; apply to James Clifton.
2. Messeder *Map of Harrow, 1759*, Greater London Record Office, GLRO 643/2nd deposit.
3. *Harrow Enclosure Map, 1817*, Local History Section, Harrow Public Library, Civic Centre, Harrow.

4. I. Long, 'Farming in Pinner during the 19th Century' in *A Pinner Miscellany* (1980) 5.
5. *Victoria County History of Middlesex* 5 (1971) 177.
6. C. K. Currie, *Pottery found at 54 Waxwell Gardens* (forthcoming). See fn 1.
7. See fn 5.

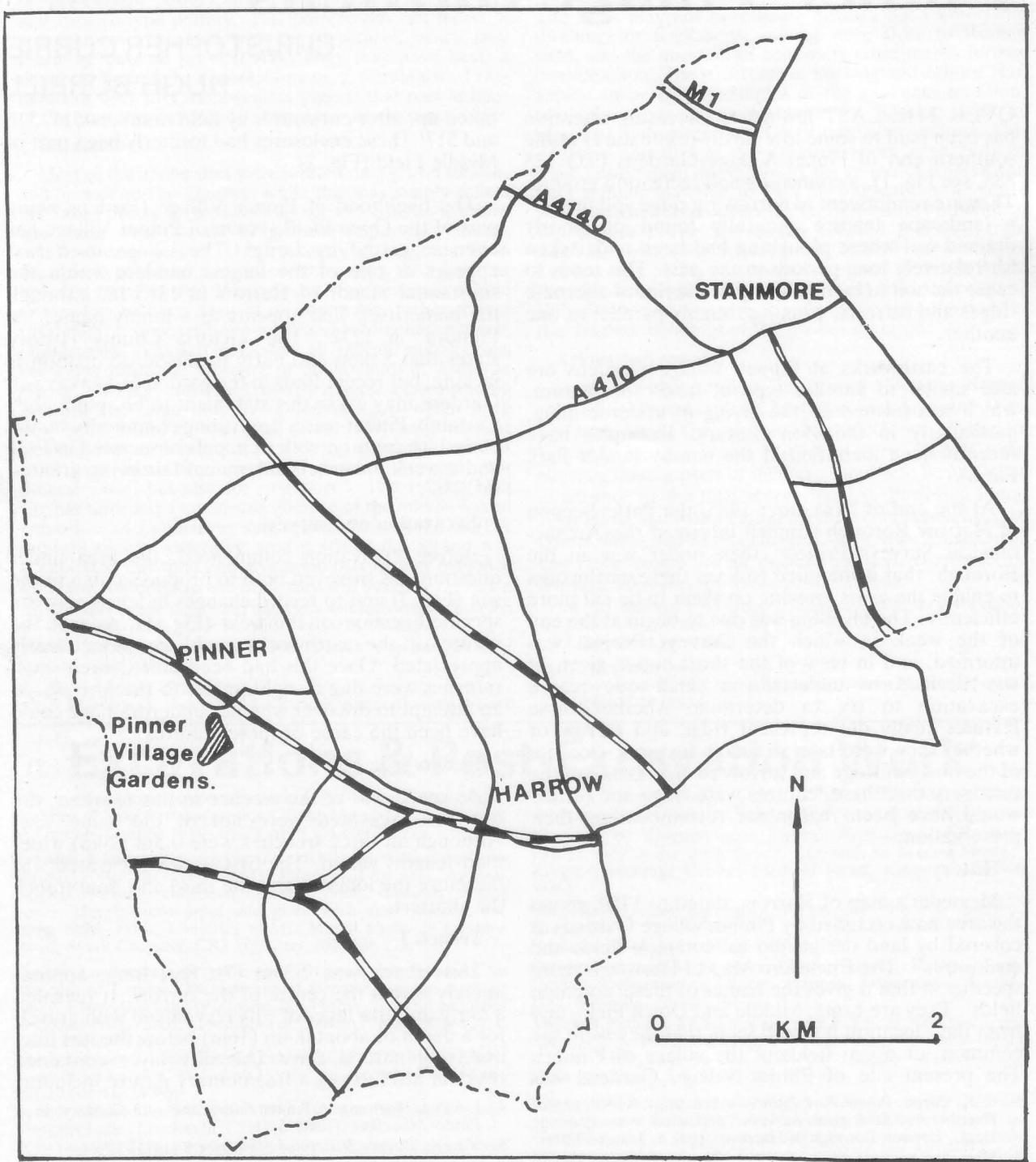


Fig. 1: London Borough of Harrow showing the position of Pinner Village Gardens (TQ 125 888).

FIG. 2

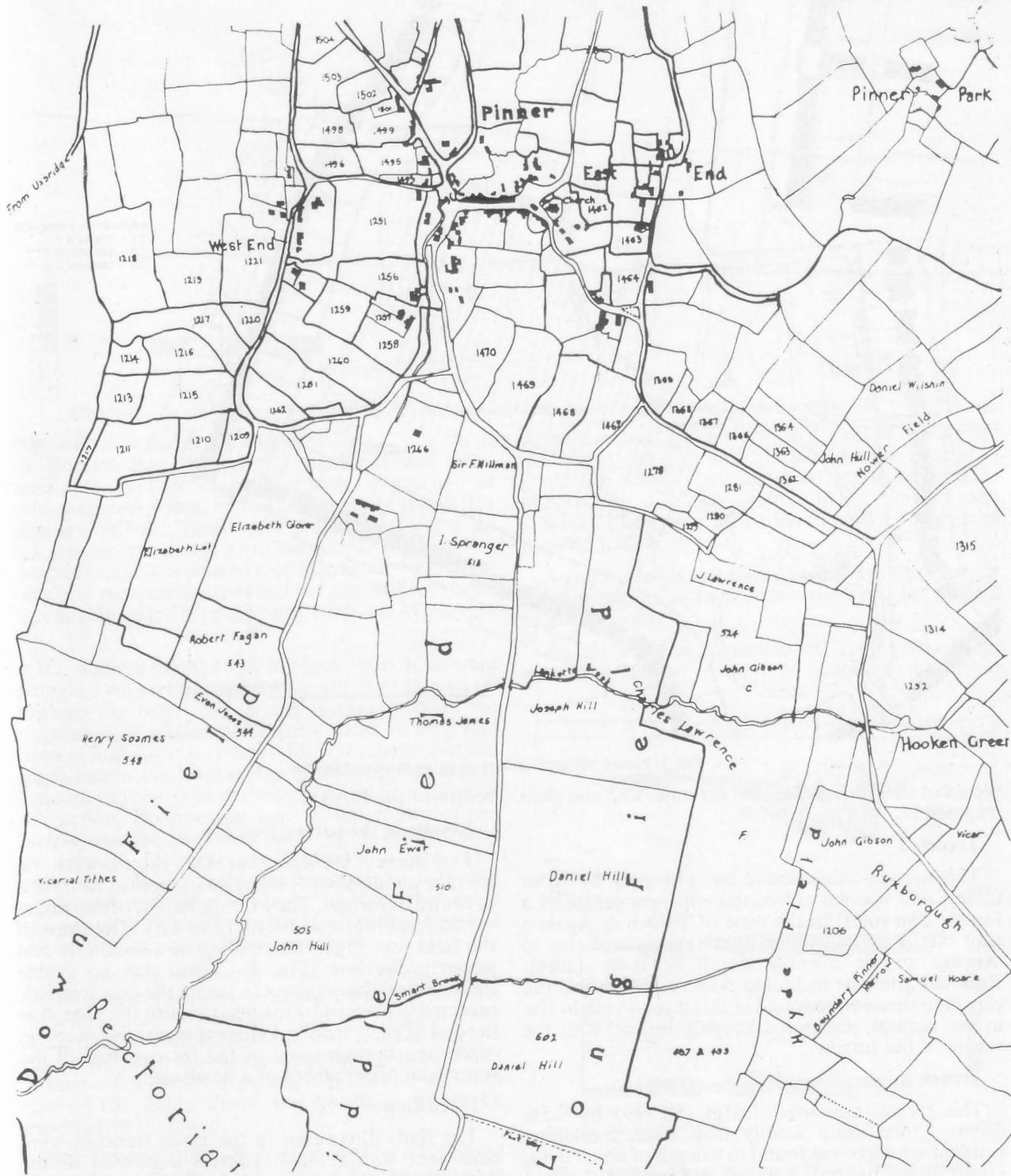


Fig. 2: Open fields of Pinner, taken from an Enclosure map of 1817.

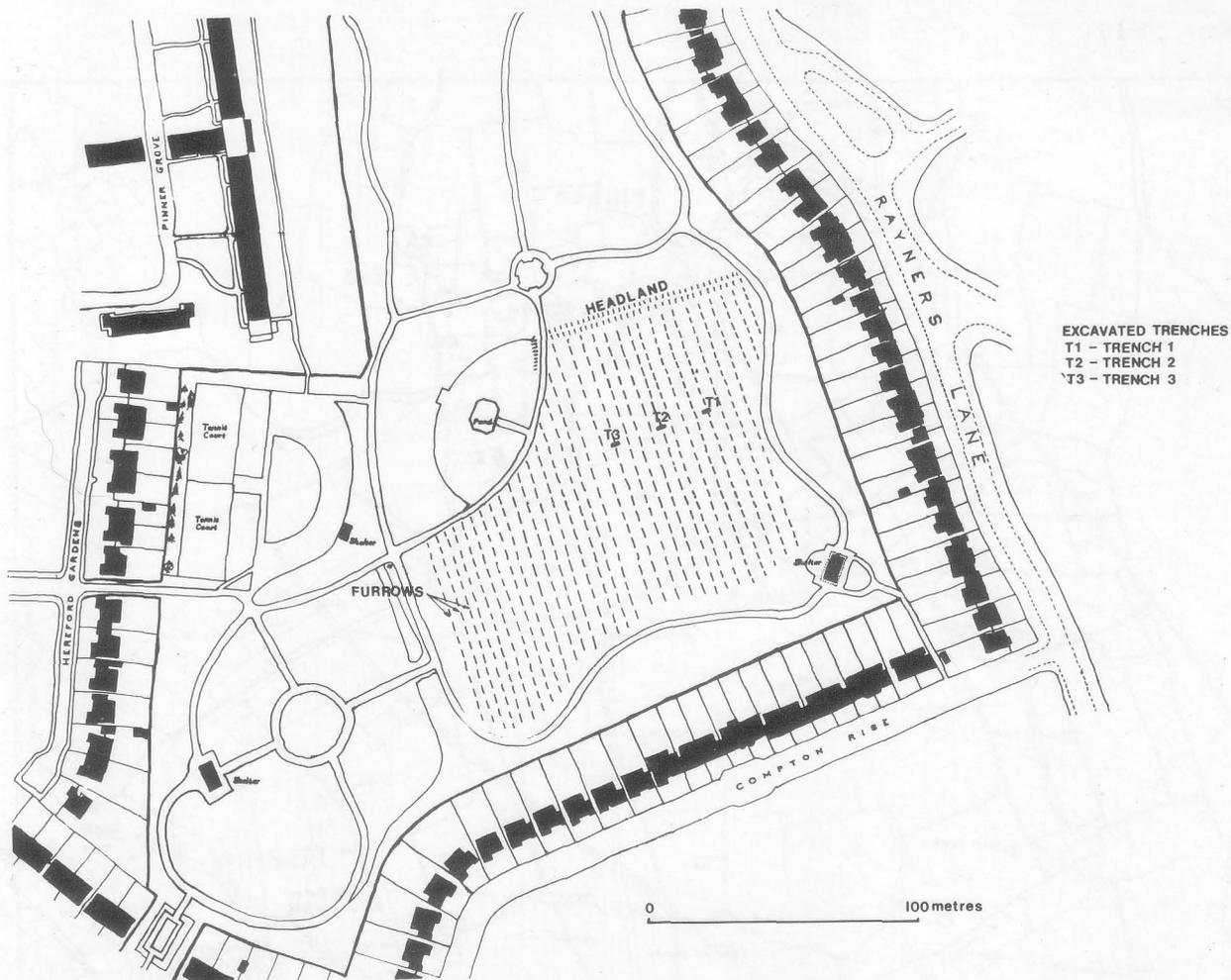


Fig. 3: Pinner Village Gardens, showing ridge and furrow.

pieces of slate, brick and tile, ceramic, slag and glass fragments.

Trench 2

This trench measured 2.2m (7ft 3in) by 0.5m (20in), and was cut across the apparent centre of a furrow 20m (66ft) to the west of Trench 1. Again a silty clay layer was found overlying natural clay to average to an average depth of 0.4m (16in). Residual artefacts including pottery, tile, brick and clay pipe stems were found in this layer. A slight rise in the natural was noted roughly in line with the centre of the furrow.

Trench 3

This trench measured 1.65m (5ft 6in) by 0.5m (20in). Once more a silty clay layer containing residual artefacts was found to a depth of about 0.4m (16in) above natural. As in Trench 2, a slight rise in the level of the natural was noted at about the

centre of the furrow.

Results of the survey (see Fig. 3)

The survey showed that the ridges were on average about 4.5m (14½ft) apart, centre of furrow to centre of furrow. The average height of the ridges varied from 0.11m to 0.21m (4 to 8in). The slope of the field was slight, descending in a southerly and westerly direction (Fig. 4). There was no visible indication of the earthworks taking the characteristic reversed 'S' caused by the need to turn the plough at the end of each 'land'⁸. A ridge that was found to run across the northern end of the furrows has all the superficial appearances of a headland.

Discussion

The finds discovered in the three trenches were consistent with residual scatters deposited during past manurings of arable fields. They varied from a

8. C. S. & C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (3rd edition, 1967).

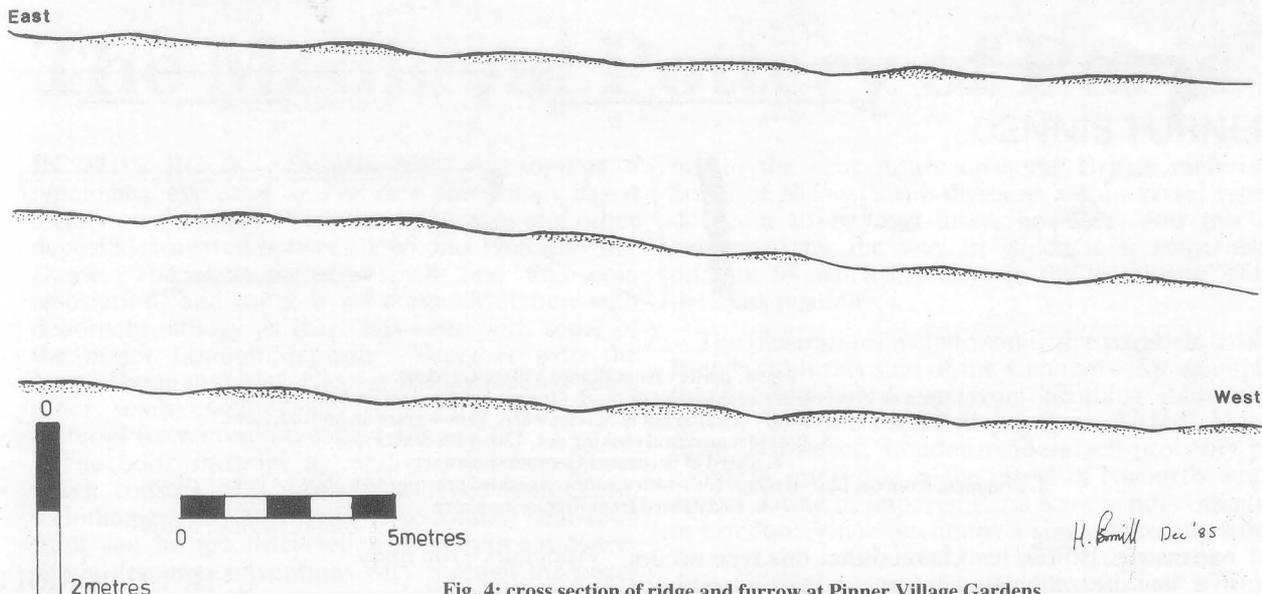


Fig. 4: cross section of ridge and furrow at Pinner Village Gardens.

chipped stone flake, a possible amphora body sherd of Roman date, through to medieval and post-medieval pottery, together with fragments of post-medieval brick and tile (see finds report for details). All the finds were fragmentary, and no discernable groupings were related to depth below ground level. It appeared that the disturbed layer of silty clay between natural and the turf line had been thoroughly mixed through time, probably by ploughing.

It is notable that the way in which open fields were ploughed would have caused the soil to be thrown up towards the ridge, the plough working around the ridge until all of that particularly 'land' or strip had been ploughed. It is conceivable, therefore, that the slight rise in the level of the natural approximately beneath the centre of the furrow could be a result of this action, because the land in the centre of the furrow was the part least likely to be disturbed by the plough. Despite its tentative nature, this argument can be used in conjunction with the artefactual and other evidence to show that ridge and furrow ploughing was a very plausible cause of the earthworks here being examined.

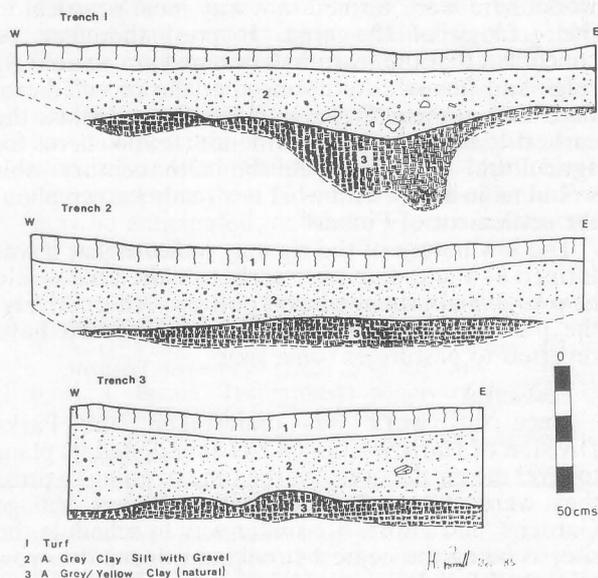
The absence of the reversed 'S' shape of the earthworks can possibly be explained by the fact that they represent only a fraction of the original field. According to both Messeder's map and the Harrow Enclosure Map, this surviving portion is to be found at least a few hundred metres short of the northern end of the field, where the headland would be expected to be found.

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a headland across the end of the earthworks. Close examination

of the Enclosure Map shows that a division between the later fields 515 and 516 would have existed at about this point. The ridge surviving today appears to be too broad to be a simple field boundary, and it seems likely that an earlier boundary had been reused in 1817.

As no evidence was found for field drains, it must be concluded that the earthworks were not formed by this activity.

All the evidence points to the earthworks being ridge and furrow, of the type commonly known as



- 1 Turf
- 2 A Gray Clay Silt with Gravel
- 3 A Gray/Yellow Clay (natural)

Fig. 5: sections of three trenches at Pinner Village Gardens.

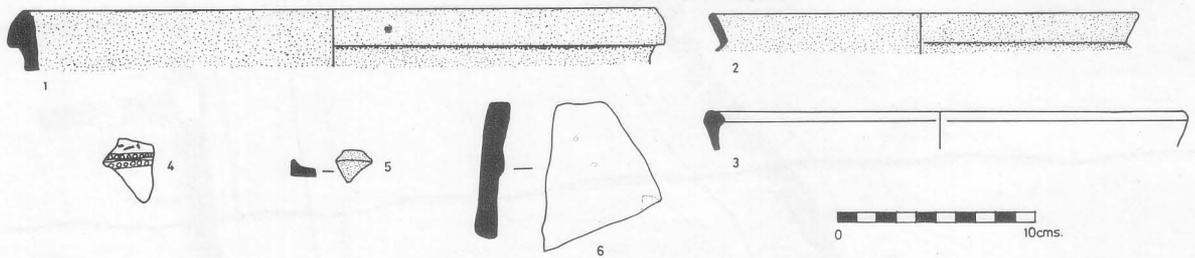


Fig. 6: pottery from Pinner Village Gardens.

1. Rim of 19th century cooking pot or bowl. Orange-brown glaze on both surfaces.
2. Rim of a 19th century cooking pot in Mocha ware. Yellow glaze on both surfaces.
3. Rim of a medieval cooking pot, 13th-14th century.
4. Sherd of decorated German stoneware.
5. Fragment from the base of a jug, 13th-14th century. Speckled green/brown glaze on inner surface.
6. Body sherd from Roman amphora?

(drawn by Hugh Borrill)

narrow rig. Bowen has claimed that this type occurs in a 'demonstrably late context', at least in southern England. He describes it as 'five yards or less in width, it is almost always straight and low'. Such a description exactly matches the earthworks in Pinner Village Gardens. Despite attributing narrow rig to the 18th and 19th centuries, he admits that it has been known at much earlier dates⁹.

Conclusions

The heavy clay of the Pinner Open Fields would have required the furrows to be close together to facilitate good drainage. Having observed the waterlogged conditions of the grass at Pinner Village Gardens in the autumn, I suggest that the earthworks here were formed in a way most practical to the geology of the area. It must therefore be concluded that the features examined are narrow rig ridge and furrow. Accepting that the pre-medieval finds had nothing to do with the Open Fields, the earliest date from the evidence found here for agricultural activity would be 13th century. This would tie in nicely with what is already known about the settlement of Pinner¹⁰.

The low nature of the rig may indicate that it was formed at a late date over earlier fields. This would help to explain the medieval pottery. Alternatively, the part of the field under discussion could have reverted to pasture at some time.

Postscript

Since this work was undertaken, the Parks Division of Harrow Council has abandoned its plans to level the earthworks. At the time of going to press they were still to be seen within Pinner Village Gardens, and efforts are under way to schedule the site, as being the nearest surviving ridge and furrow to central London.

9. H. C. Bowen, *Ancient Fields* (1961).

10. *Op cit* fn 5, 177-83.

Appendix – the finds

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Trench 1

Forty fragments of assorted material included six pieces of slate, six of brick, ten of tile, three of Roman pottery/tile, two of slag, one of coal, one of window glass, three sherds of medieval pottery and five of post-medieval pottery.

Roman tile/pottery

These sherds are characterised by a fine smooth silty fabric with flecks of mica and a few fragments of flint. One sherd is possibly from an amphora (Fig. 6, no. 6).

Medieval pottery

These sherds are characterised by a fine silty fabric with quartz inclusions. Two have traces of glaze (Fig. 6, no. 5), and one is of 15th-16th c date.

Post-medieval pottery

Two sherds of stoneware, one decorated with two lines of raised circles with a possible lion motif above, possibly 18th c (Fig. 6, no. 4); the undecorated sherds is 19th c. One sherd of Mocha ware, 19th c (Fig. 6, no. 2). Two sherds of white lustre ware, 19th c.

Flint

Three pieces of burnt flint.

Trench 2

Twenty one fragments of assorted material consisted of fourteen of tile, one of slag, one of bottle glass, one of brick, one of flint, two sherds of medieval pottery and one post-medieval rim.

Medieval pottery

Two abraded sherds, one of a cooking pot rim in a soft sandy buff/pink fabric, small quartz inclusions, 13th-14th c (Fig. 6, no. 3).

Post-medieval pottery

Rim of a 19th c cooking pot in a fine silty pink/red fabric with glaze on both surfaces (Fig. 6, no. 1). One large flint inclusion.

Flint

One piece of burnt flint.

Trench 3

Ten fragments of assorted material consisted of five of tile, two of flint, one of brick, one of slate and one of 19th c white lustre ware.

Flint

One waste flake.

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