

Fig. 1: site location.

A multi-period site in Ilford, Essex

Dave Lawrence
Nick Truckle
Mark Beasley

Introduction

EXCAVATIONS BY the Newham Museum Service on the Buttsbury Estate, Ilford, (TQ 447 853) between 1992 and 1994 have revealed a previously unknown multi-period site. Evidence of activity includes material from the mesolithic, Bronze Age and Roman periods. Features relating to the location of the known post-medieval manor that occupied the site were also recorded. The excavations were conducted in three phases in advance of redevelopment of the Buttsbury Road housing estate, the works being funded by London and Quadrant Housing Association.

The Buttsbury Estate (Fig. 1) lies between Ilford and Barking on Loxford Water, close to Loxford Bridge. The Loxford was tidal up to this point until it was canalised during the 1970s. The site is within 800m of the Barking Archaeological Priority Zone and some 300m to the east of the Iron Age hillfort at Uphall Camp, a major regional site in

that period, where extensive remains include features of similar date to those at Buttsbury¹. A succession of large manors, each known as Loxford Hall, is known to have existed on or near the site from the 14th century. The earliest of these houses is known to have been the property of the Abbess of Barking; the abbess being licensed in 1319 to fell trees in Hainault Forest to rebuild the great house at Loxford after a fire. The manor reverted to a Thomas Powle in 1557, and was then owned by a succession of farmers until the land was sold for housing development in the 19th century². The current Loxford Hall, thought to be on or near the site of the original house, dates to the 19th century.

Geology

The geological sequence on site consisted mainly of Taplow Terrace gravels³, overlain in part by layers of clay and silt probably deposited by past flooding of the Loxford Water⁴. The river, now canalised, runs to the south-east of the site. The

1. P. Greenwood 'Uphall Camp, Ilford, Essex: an Iron Age fortification' *London Archaeol* 6, no 4 (1989) 94-101.
2. W. R. Powell *A History of the County of Essex* V (1966) 206-8.
3. As Indicated on the British Geological Survey, Sheet 257, *Romford. Solid and Drift Deposits* (1976).

4. This remains undated but a model of alluviation in the lower Thames region has been developed in R. J. Devoy 'Post-glacial Environmental Change and Man in the Thames Estuary: a Synopsis' in F. H. Thompson (ed) *Archaeology and Coastal Change* Society of Antiquaries of London Occasional Papers, New Series No. 1 (1980) 134-7.

fact that some features were found cut into these probable river deposits, the area of which is distinctly poor in features generally, indicates that the river silted up to a considerable extent during or after the sequence of prehistoric exploitation, the river bed subsequently having shifted away from the site. Such a sequence of migration is common in the Thames tributaries of this region and is a normal aspect to the evolution of low-lying rivers⁵.

The excavations

The work was conducted in three phases. The first phase consisted of an evaluation of the site, designed to assess the impact of development on any archaeological remains which might have survived the construction of the 1970s estate. Further trenches were located in a playing field to the east of the estate which was also scheduled for development. This was followed by rescue excavation on the building footprints in the area of the playing field. Phase II consisted of further assessment work on an extension to the development and Phase III comprised additional rescue excavations in this area. In all, thirteen trenches of

various sizes were excavated over the three year duration of the project (see Fig. 2).

Each phase of trenching was preceded by a resistivity survey of the affected area of the playing field and of the few open grassed areas within the estate itself. Within the estate the areas surveyed produced results consistent with considerable dumping, and the only recognisable features were service runs. To the west of the playing field, it appeared that the ground surface had also been raised by dumping and this had the effect of masking any archaeological features. In the east, however, the results showed several large linear features, including a large rectangular enclosure and two large apparently circular features (see Fig. 3); these were investigated by partial excavation.

Prehistoric exploitation of the site

Throughout the site, the features recorded were generally post-holes, pits and ditches, all filled with brown sandy silty clays and containing very few finds. The fills generally derive from the weathering of the cut sides although a small number of features had vertical edges and therefore appear to have been intentionally backfilled. Few finds were

5. Braiding and avulsion are related to both pitch and degree of mineral bearing of a river, D. Briggs and P. Smithson *Fundamentals of Physical Geography* (1985) 348-351. This has also been demonstrated experimentally in the Drainage Evolution Research Facility at Colorado State University.

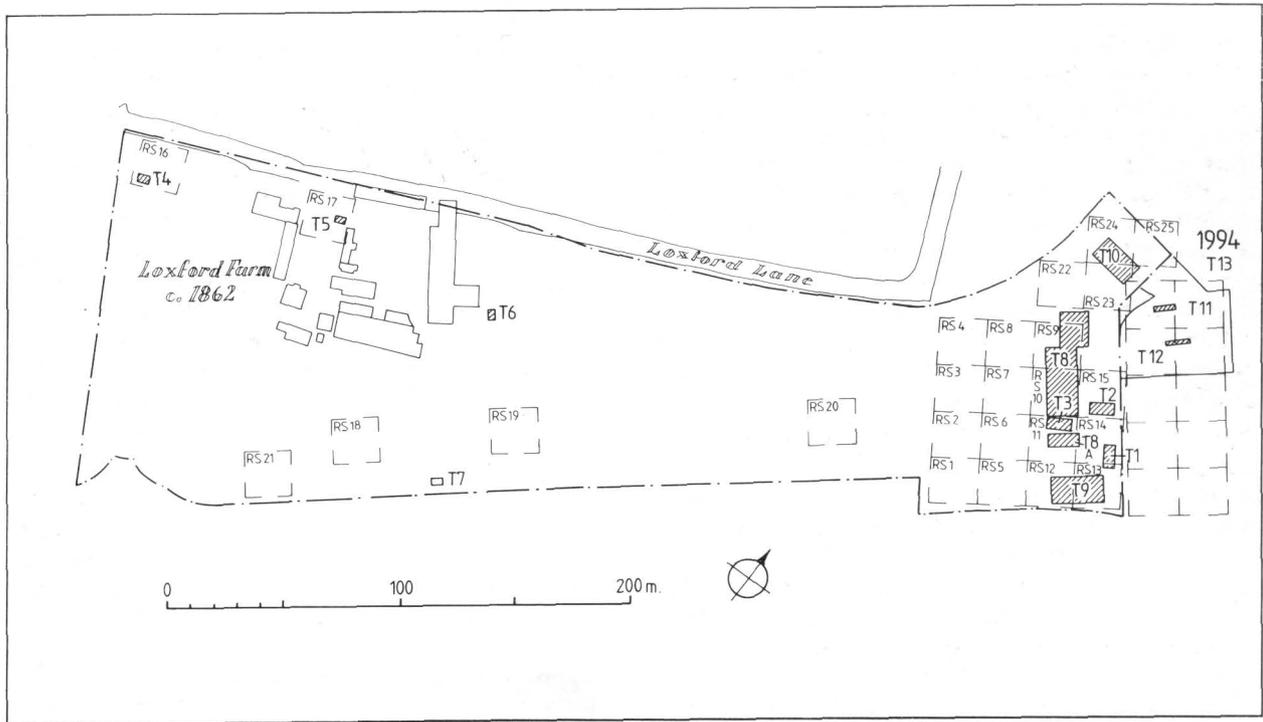


Fig. 2: trench location

recovered throughout the site, making it difficult to identify the use of many features.

A curvilinear ditch terminus [658] in Trench 10 contained middle Bronze Age pottery, and to the south in Trench 8 a large spread of (burnt) reddish soil with charcoal [407] may be of similar date. In Trench 13, a pit [1056] produced a late neolithic/Bronze Age worked flint and a collection of indeterminate daub, and a gully [1169] produced a vessel of neolithic or Bronze Age date. Unfortunately these features had few stratigraphic and no obvious spatial relationships with any others that were recorded, though this may merely have been due to the limited area of excavation in each case.

Other cut features describe two generally rectilinear patterns identified in the resistivity survey. One, aligned north-south identified in Trenches 13, 8 and possibly 10, is discussed here (see Fig. 4); the other was at 45 degrees to this, in Trenches 1 and 8, and has been interpreted as Roman. Small quantities of pottery and worked flint, possibly residual (e.g. from the manuring of fields with domestic

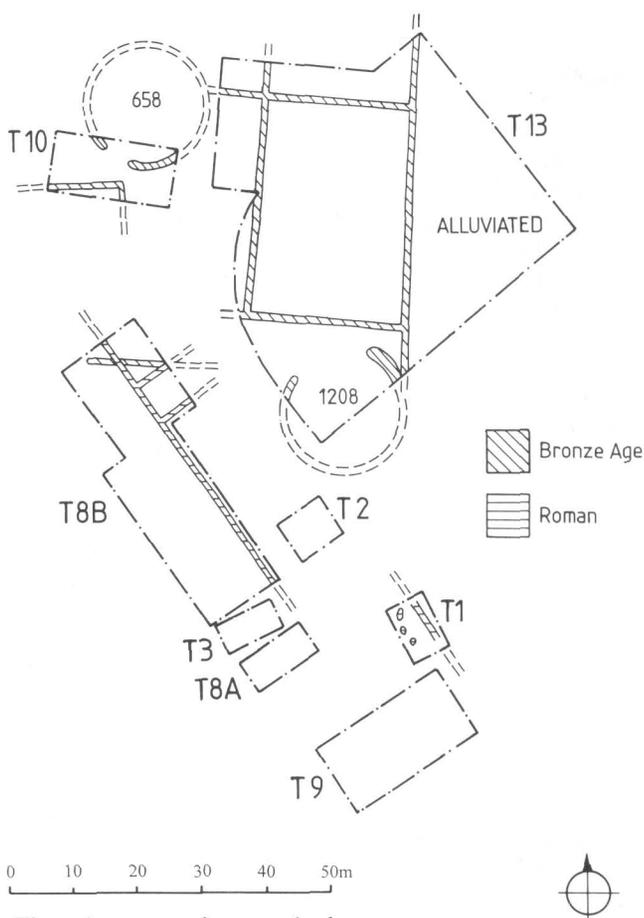


Fig. 4: interpretative trench plan

waste), were recovered from some of these features, notably 1002 and 1020, implying *termini post quem* of middle Bronze Age date. That some of these features were post-holes is certain morphologically, but many were oval pits roughly 2m x 1m and less than 0.5m deep, probably not structural themselves but respecting a structure such as a fence⁶. These may be evidence of low intensity, *ad hoc* clay quarrying⁷ but no diagnostic usage was found. It has long been recognised that field boundaries “were generally rectangular in shape”⁸ and survey by aerial photography seems to show their distribution to be closely related to river valleys such as this⁹.

Two curvilinear ditches, [1208] and the aforementioned [658], each estimated at 20m diameter, were recorded and have been identified with ring ditches

6. J. Pollard ‘Iron Age riverside pit alignments at St Ives, Cambridgeshire’ *Proc Prehist Soc* 62 (1996) 93-115.
7. H. S. Green ‘The Excavation of a Late Neolithic Settlement at Stacey Bushes, Milton Keynes, and its Significance’ in C. Burgess & R. Miket (eds) *Settlement and Economy in the Third and Second Millennia BC* BAR Brit Ser 33 (1976).
8. P. J. Fowler *The Farming of Prehistoric Britain* (1983) 107.
9. D. R. Wilson ‘Pit Alignments: Distribution and Function’ in H. C. Bowen and P. J. Fowler (eds) *Early Land Allotment* BAR Brit Ser 48 (1978) 3.

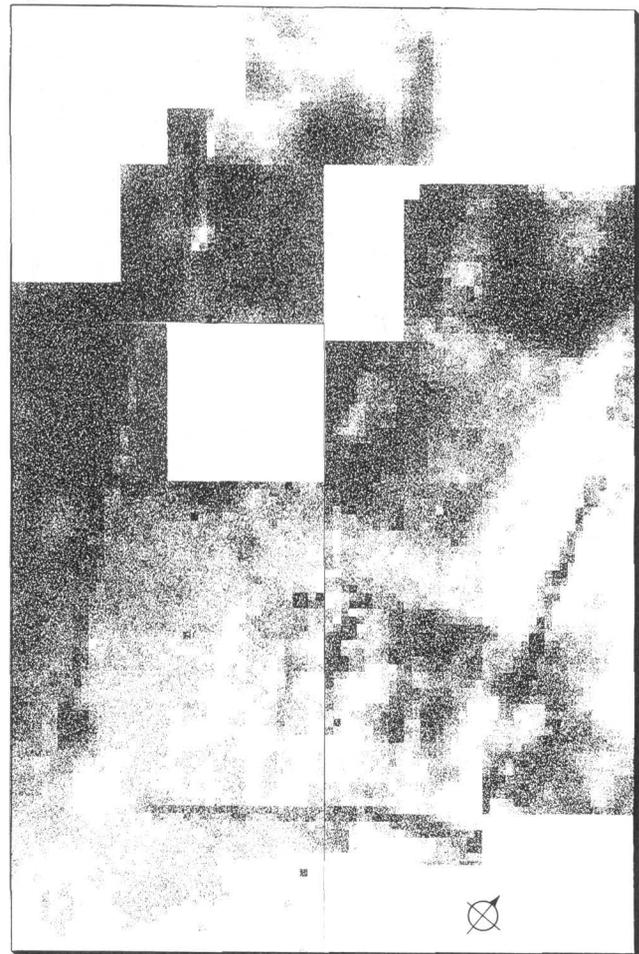


Fig. 3: results of geophysical survey

observed in the geophysical survey. Both were approximately 1m deep and 2m across as excavated. Unfortunately, as both features existed largely beyond the limit of excavation, it was not possible to properly investigate their function, although each was found with a terminus that might imply an entrance. No internal features were identified within the small area available for excavation. Their relatively large size may indicate stock enclosures as proposed by Bradley⁹ although it has been more widely believed that such monuments represent denuded barrows^{11, 12} and Childe even suggested the possibility of ‘emplacements for tents’¹³.

To the west of the site, in Trench 8, a fence line running east-west was recorded, consisting of twenty-two post-holes. Their rectangular shape suggests that this structure consisted of a series of driven upright wooden planks forming a palisade. This ran roughly parallel to the rectilinear pattern of pits but appears to end abruptly at its western extreme, suggestive of an interrupted enclosure. It may therefore simply be a different build-type¹⁴ within a single enclosure pattern, indeed possibly a single farm.

Evidence of domestic activity for the period is limited to a patch of burning and four fire pits or hearths to the east of the site in Trenches 9 and 13. They consist of amorphous pits of c. 1.5m diameter containing numerous layers of ash concentrated in the middle of the pit and evidence of high temperature burning through the sand of the edges. There are no apparent structures associated with them and no evidence of either smelting debris or pot wasters was found, implying a domestic, rather than industrial use, although the ritual use of similar features has been proposed¹⁵.

The lines of features suggest an agricultural landscape rather than permanent settlement activity. The absence of any long-lived occupation within

the excavated areas is attested by the paucity of finds recovered. Although several flint tools were recovered, ranging in date from the mesolithic to the Bronze Age, a lack of debitage suggests the absence of tool production *in situ*. The burnt features may then indicate temporary occupation of the site, reflecting a model of seasonal animal-driving, to a crossing point of the Loxford.

Roman

Apart from some unstratified sherds of 1st-century pottery, firm evidence of Roman activity was only found to the south of the site in Trench 1, in the form of a linear ditch [4] aligned north-west/south-east. From the bottom of the excavated section of the ditch, a broken but virtually complete locally-produced Roman jar was recovered (see Fig. 5). This appears to date to the later 2nd-3rd century AD. The fill also included burnt flint and a waste flake, possibly prehistoric in date. The ditch, which had been re-cut, appears to form part of one side of a rectilinear enclosure, as revealed by the resistivity survey, and may have been part of a larger pattern recognised in Trench 8 (see Fig. 4), with which it was aligned. Extensive early Roman settlement¹⁶ has been revealed at Uphall Camp and can be related to the Buttsbury evidence. The function of the enclosure is uncertain but the lack of domestic rubbish in the ditch fill appears to preclude any military or civilian settlement activity, and it would therefore appear that this feature is the result of land division for agricultural purposes^{17, 18}.

10. R. Bradley ‘Stock Raising and the Origins of the Hill Fort on the South Downs’ *Antiq J* 51 (1) (1971) 8-29.
11. I. Kinnes *Round Barrows and Ring-ditches in the British Neolithic* British Museum Occasional Papers 7 (1979). Also Fowler *op cit* fn. 8, 83.
12. These can be incorporated within field systems. R. Bradley ‘Prehistoric Field Systems in Britain and North-west Europe’ *World Archaeol* 9 no. 3 (1978) 265-280.
13. V. G. Childe *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (1942) 158.
14. D. R. Wilson *op cit* fn. 9, 5.
15. S. Ford ‘An Early Bronze Age Pit Circle from Charnham Lane, Hungerford, Berkshire’ *Proc Prehist Soc* 57 (2) (1991) 00-00.
16. P. Greenwood *op cit* fn. 1, 99-100.

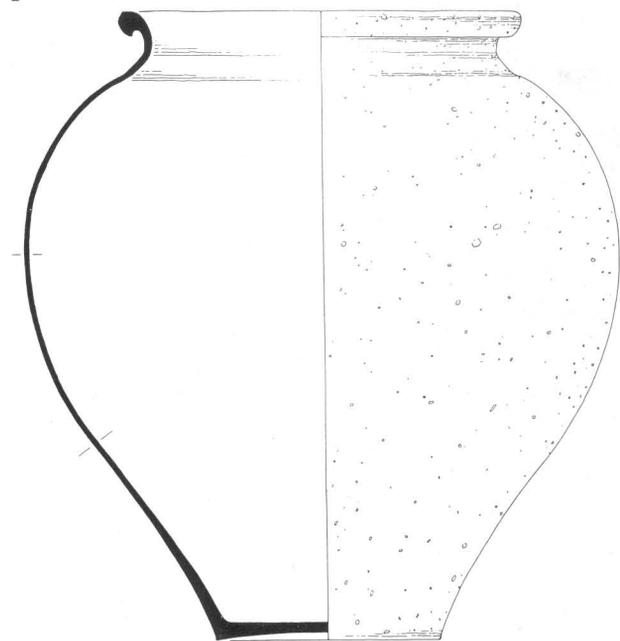


Fig. 5: Roman pot from IG LH 92

0 5 10cm

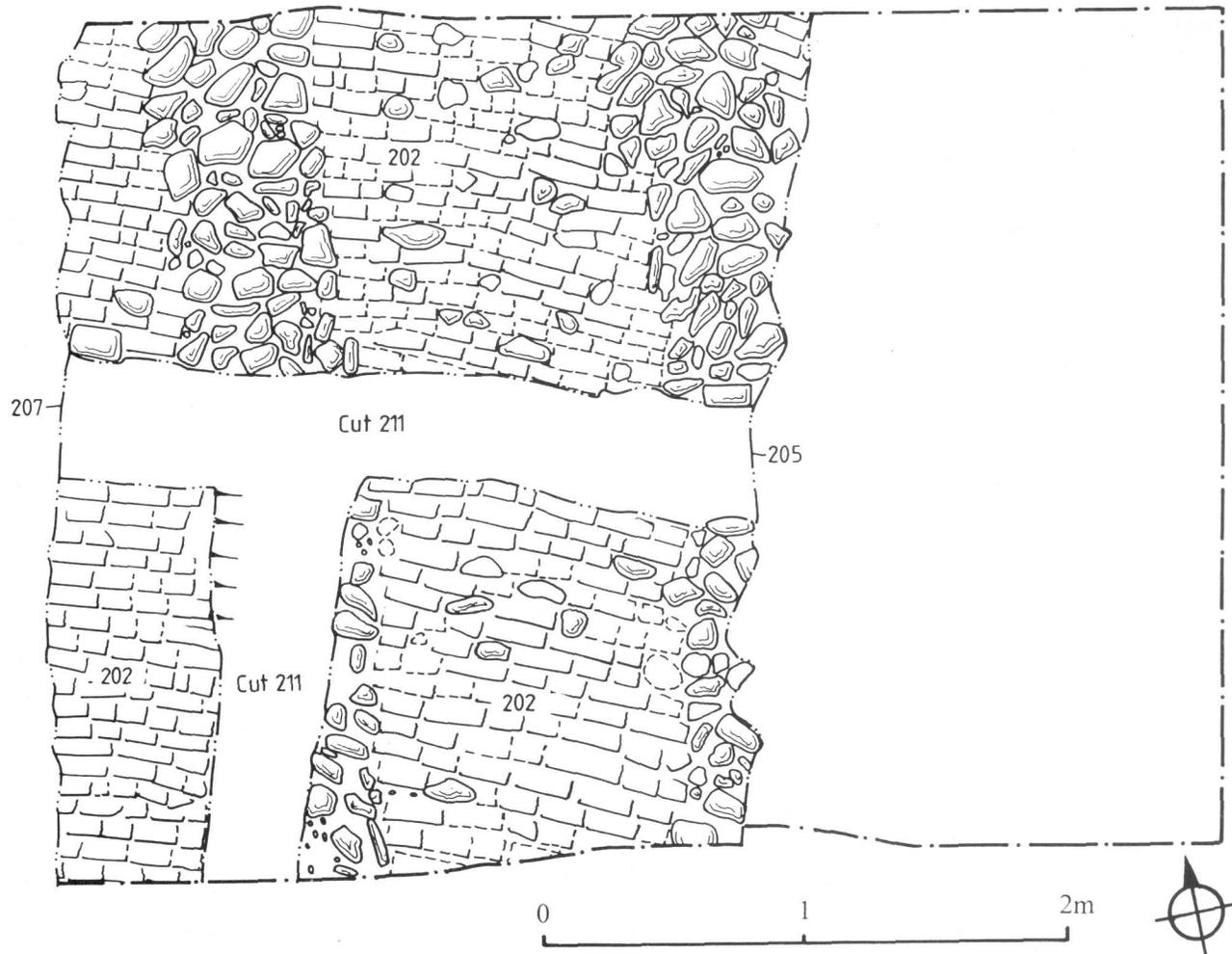


Fig. 6: trench 5 plan of the post-medieval brick and cobble surface

This phase of site use echoes that of the Bronze Age, but it appears that the earlier pattern of fields had been long out of use, resulting in replacement at such a different alignment. Again, part of the rectilinear pattern consists of pits and again we have no evidence for their use. While it is likely that small quantities of clay were required occasionally and the proximity of Loxford Water would make this a good area for brick or tile works, these features cannot be seen as a significant clay quarry, and no other signs of industry have so far been observed.

Post-medieval

Post-medieval activity appears to have been centred on the area now occupied by the 1970s housing estate, the construction of which has destroyed all

archaeological deposits within the estate itself. However, trenches along the road frontage of Loxford Lane did produce evidence of activity, including two linear ditches, a 19th-century wall and a brick road. The road surface (Fig. 6) consisted of a surface of predominantly stock bricks, laid on edge, and inset with cobble tracks, presumably for cart-wheels. The surface showed signs of extensive wear, and of repairs. This feature lay close to the location of Loxford Farm, shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of c 1862, and it is probable that it was part of the farm courtyard.

On the playing fields to the east of the site a series of post-medieval plough soils were recorded, cut by an extensive system of 19th-century mole drains. The site appears to have been heavily ploughed up

17. Compare with K. Parfitt 'Observations on the Hull Place, Sholden Foul Sewerage Scheme' *Kent Archaeol Rev* 109 (1992) 00-00, in which field boundaries close to a villa building produced significant quantities of ceramics.

18. Bowden et al found varying quantities of pottery in a series of lynchets. M. Bowden, S. Ford and G. Mees 'The Date of the Ancient Fields on the Berkshire Downs' *Berks Archaeol J* 74 (1993) 109-133.

to the 19th century, resulting in the destruction of any sub-surface features.

Conclusion

The proximity of the site to Uphall Camp and Loxford Water is of obvious significance. It seems probable that there was a crossing of the river at this point, making the area of strategic importance in regard to both trading and military considerations.

While no intensive domestic settlement has been identified, the large number of pits and post-holes recorded does point to activity during both the middle Bronze Age and the Roman period¹⁹. It is likely that the inhabitants of the multi-period settlement at Uphall would have made some use of this adjacent, rather marginal land, despite its vulnerability to flooding. Minimal evidence of activity was found on site relating to the later Bronze Age or Iron Age periods. It is possible too, that the change in alignment of the field systems is due to their being based on different courses of the Loxford²⁰.

The site appears to have been under cultivation for much of its recorded history, a result of the rich river silts deposited by the Loxford. Such cultiva-

19. There is a remarkable similarity between this site and recently published work by Lobb and Mills, which describes a series of pits, post-holes, ditches, 'shallow scoops' and a ring ditch, cut into gravels and of similar date, with similar finds densities to those discussed here. S. J. Lobb and J. M. Mills

tion with its associated ploughing has obviously had a destructive impact on the ephemeral prehistoric archaeology of the area. It does, however appear that agricultural exploitation of the site started during the Bronze Age, beginning a cycle of land use that existed until the urbanisation of the area in the 19th century.

Future work depends on the further acquisition by developers of the land to the east of the site. At present this lies fallow and undisturbed but may bear the potential to test the animal stockade hypothesis through excavation and techniques such as phosphate analysis. Further work on the estate area itself is unlikely.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank London and Quadrant Housing, in particular Sally Buckley and Levitt Bernstein Associates, particularly Gary Tidmarsh. Thanks also to Mr. N. Richardson of Redbridge Land Management, Keith May of Laings, Dr. Pamela Greenwood for the finds report and Graham Reed for the illustrations. Special thanks are due to Dr. Frank Meddens who directed the project, and to the numerous members of the field staff of NMS who worked on the excavations.

'Observations and Excavations in the Pingewood Area - Bronze Age, Romano-British and Medieval Features' *Berkshire Archaeol J* 74 (1993) 85-93.

20. Bradley (*op cit* fn. 12) illustrates such patterns.

Excavations and post-excavation work

City of London. Museum of London Archaeology Service, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (0171-410 2200).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

Greater London (except north-east and south-east London), by Museum of London Archaeology Service. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to MOLAS, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (0171-410 2200).

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites in the borough. For further information contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, London SE18 1JT (0181-855 3240).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays,

7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, SW6 (0171-731 4498).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston (0181-546 5386).

North-east London, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Newham Museum Service, Archaeology and Local History Centre, 31 Stock Street, E13 0BX (0181-472 4785).

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Old Library Headquarters, 25 West Street, Dorking, RH4 1DE (01306-886 466).

Individual membership of the Council for British Archaeology includes 10 issues of British Archaeological News, as well as the supplement CBA Briefing, which gives details of conferences, extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The subscription of £18 p.a. includes postage, and should be sent to C.B.A., Bowes Morrell House, 111 Walmgate, York, YO1 2UA (01904 671417).