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LAND TO THE REAR OF AGRICULTURAL HOUSE,  
SANDHURST LANE, GLOUCESTER

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

MARCH TO NOVEMBER 1989

**4/89 LAND TO THE REAR OF AGRICULTURAL HOUSE, SANDHURST  
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Phil Greatorex

**INTRODUCTION**

*This report has been prepared entirely from the written site archive, interim reports and specialist finds reports with the author having no previous knowledge of the site. At the time of writing the photographic archive was unfortunately not available for inspection. The finds have been reported on by specialists for inclusion in the KINGSHOLM II volume (forthcoming) so only a brief summary of those used for dating purposes is given here. Any discrepancies or differences in interpretation between this report and earlier progress reports are entirely the responsibility of the current author.*

**SUMMARY**

An archaeological investigation of a 0.47 hectare area of rough pasture between Tewkesbury road and Sandhurst lane, to the rear of Agricultural House, was conducted by Gloucester excavations unit (Gloucester Archaeology) between March and November 1989. The earliest occupation of the site is dated to the late Iron age and is characterised by a metallised area and a large stone lined feature which may have had some ritual significance. The area was divided by a number of enclosure ditches in the early Roman period before reverting back to a single open space (possibly a market place). This phase is succeeded by two distinct clusters of possible rubbish pits before the land is given over to successive episodes of agricultural use from the 2nd century to the present. The western frontage of the site was extensively quarried (c.25% of the total area) for gravel in the 19th century.

**SITE LOCATION**

The site investigated lies between Tewkesbury Road and Sandhurst Lane at National Grid Reference SO 8345 1983 and covers an area of approximately 0.47 hectares. It is situated approximately 1km north of Gloucester city centre and 100m north of the Kingsholm Roman fort(ress) defences.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND / PREVIOUS WORK**

Extensive watching brief investigations and subsequent limited excavation to the east of Tewkesbury road in 1983 revealed evidence of a late Roman cemetery on the site of the Coppice corner development (sites 9/83 and 9/83W) but a dearth of other Roman features.

Evaluation of a building plot on the corner of Sandhurst road, to the south, in 1985 (site 24/85) defined the northern boundary of the Kingsholm Roman fort(ress) by locating the ditch and rampart.

Metal detecting finds from the vicinity suggest a focus of Iron age activity with considerable numbers of coins and brooches being found.

## **METHOD OF STUDY**

An initial survey using resistivity and magnetometry techniques, commissioned from Geophysical Surveys of Bradford, suggested the western end of the site (approximately 25% of the total area) had been heavily disturbed, presumably during 19th century gravel extraction, so no further investigation was carried out in this area. The centre of the site and particularly the eastern end did, however, produce readings consistent with archaeological features. These included possible ditch alignments, which were sampled at the southern and western boundaries, by limited excavation, during March 1989. With these results to hand it was agreed that a larger (c.500m<sup>2</sup>) area should also be investigated.

The March sampling excavations took the form of two 3m x 30m trenches, one aligned approximately north-south and the other east-west, roughly parallel with the existing site boundaries but at an angle of c.30° to the known alignment of the Kingsholm fort and similar alignments suggested by the geophysical survey.

Further excavation from September to December 1989 took the form of two c.12m x 20m trenches as extensions northward and westward from the previous sample areas.

All trenches were initially machine cleared of topsoil and then hand excavated to the natural ground surface.

The excavations were carried out under the direction of M. Atkin and supervised by M. Sims (March) and M. Walters (September to December).

## RESULTS

The combined excavation results from all trenches have been separated into four chronological phases as follows:

1. Late Iron age
2. Early Roman
3. Later Roman
4. Post Roman

**N.B.** These fairly broad distinctions reflect the difficulty in determining the stratigraphic relationships between what are essentially isolated features and should be taken only as a general guideline to the actual periods represented.

### LATE IRON AGE:

The northern part of area 1 is covered by an extensive metalled area (103) bedded directly onto the pre-cleared natural ground surface. Although its exact function is unclear its compacted nature, the quantity of pottery fragments and the number of brooches pressed into the surface suggests that it was frequently used by a large number of people and may indicate the presence of a meeting area or market place. The surface, and its basic function, appears to continue in use throughout this and the early Roman period until the land is finally given over to later Roman agriculture.

Cut into the surface is a large (c.4m diameter) construction pit (113) for a c.1.6m diameter stone lined feature (138, 145)(see discussion - below). The backfill of the stone lined feature contained an Iron age brooch along with sherds of early Severn valley ware indicating an early Roman *backfilling* date and it is on this basis alone that its *construction* is attributed to the late Iron age. Also included in the backfilling was an unspecified number of baked clay *lozenges* or *mountains* that may point to a ritual activity. These objects however do not appear to have survived for detailed examination so their significance must be treated with caution.

### EARLY ROMAN

On its southern edge the metalled surface is delimited by a c.1m deep boundary ditch (117) running east-west which is presumed to be contemporary with the (approximately) north-south ditch (313) in area 2. Both of these ditches have been recut more substantially on similar alignments

(119 and 311/332 respectively), though still seem to be broadly contemporary with the continued use of the surface, indicating a fairly prolonged and probably identical land usage.

Both of the enclosure ditches, assuming they are contemporary, are backfilled in this same period with a relatively homogenous loamy fill, suggesting a deliberate change in land usage, or allocation, rather than a gradual decay of the enclosure system.

Two distinct clusters of intercutting pits (115, 147 and 134 in area 1 and 316, 318, 335 and 337 in area 2) are assumed to be contemporary due to their size and depth characteristics and, if so, post-date the backfilling of the ditches (the pits in area 1 cut the backfill). Again the function is uncertain - they seem too small for serious gravel extraction and yet the volume of finds is too low, as a percentage of the backfill, if they are to be referred to as true rubbish pits.

The new format of land usage, following the backfilling of the pits, is characterised by two narrow north-south gullies (126 and 152), with east-west branches (122 and 130), cut along the eastern edge of area 1. The function of these gullies is also uncertain but the size and shape of the component parts are reminiscent of timber sill beam slots seen in the early Kingsholm fort(ress) to the south. It is possible then that this may represent the footprint of a number of livestock pens (there are none of the floor surfaces that would be expected in a permanently occupied building) and that a form of market was still in existence in this period.

## **LATER ROMAN**

Following the demise of the enclosure system and the backfilling of the pits the entire area is covered by a uniformly thick accumulation of soils which are assumed to be agricultural in origin.

## **POST ROMAN**

The pattern of agricultural land usage is repeated throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods.

No further significant activity seems to have taken place in the area until the western frontage of the site was extensively quarried for gravel in the 19th century.

## **FINDS SUMMARY**

A total of 146 small finds numbers (some, in the case of nails, are multiple entries) were assigned to the material recovered from the excavation and these can be broken down into the following categories:

### *COPPER ALLOY (71 objects):*

This includes 10 coins comprising five asses of the first or second century, four of which can be dated before AD 73, four bronzes of the late third and fourth centuries and a single western silver unit (Allen Dobunnic C: Mack 378a) datable to the early part of the range 20 BC - AD 10.

Also included are 9 brooches represented by two Colchesters, two Colchester derivatives, two La Tène and three others (information incomplete).

The remaining is largely the expected range of strips, fragments and unidentified objects common to a site of this date and nature.

### *IRON (40 assigned numbers):*

Represented by twenty seven multiple entries for nails and metalworking debris (slag etc.) and including four blades, three unspecified tools and two ox goads, reinforcing the later agricultural nature of the site.

### *OTHERS (29 objects):*

The majority of these are undatable or are too small and abraded to date accurately. They include a single lead token, a lead disk, a lead weight and musket ball, two fragments of quernstone, eighteen glass fragments, a single fragment of worked bone and a flint scraper.

## **THE POTTERY**

The excavations produced a substantial quantity of pottery ranging in date from the Iron age/early Roman period through to recent. In total some 106.4kg (4003 sherds) were processed. Ninety-seven percent of this, by weight, was pre or early Roman in date, the remaining 3% being largely Post-medieval. Later Roman wares of 3rd-4th century date and Medieval wares were only represented by a small number of sherds from the topsoil and other post Roman layers.

The repertoire of forms and fabrics replicates that already documented from other sites in the immediate vicinity of the Kingsholm fort(ress) - handmade wares belonging to the later Iron age native tradition along with early wheelmade native wares dominating the assemblage throughout. Of particular note is only the second recorded presence of Droitwich briquetage from the Kingsholm area. Other unusual vessels worthy of specific mention are at least two jars derived from the Durotrigian industry, - a forerunner of the better known Dorset black burnished ware (BB1); a Gallic amphora, Gauloise type 5, the first to be recognised from Kingsholm/Gloucester and a sherd from a terra rubra platter, also a rare find from this particular area.

## POTTERY SUMMARY

<u>Type Fabric No.</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>EVEs</u>
<u>NATIVE</u>			
2A	22	631	16
2C	20	678	16
4A	10	36	14
6	413	20636	341
18	75	1082	124
31	1	14	-
33	367	3478	427
215	3	32	10
216	767	15855	799
<u>SVW</u>			
11B	18	416	27
11D	663	9461	1066
11F	81	1052	103
11?	26	241	75
17	488	12148	380
23	68	2358	36
<u>ROMAN</u>			
<u>(KINGSHOLM)</u>			
24	84	1595	242
36	44	551	83
9S	2	480	17
39	30	311	39
213	3	28	-
<u>GLOUCESTER</u>			
<u>KILN WARES</u>			
7	1	9	-
11A	131	1505	70

Continued overleaf.....

Pottery summary continued.....

<u>Type Fabric No.</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>EVEs</u>
25	3	50	-
<u>IMPORTS</u>			
8B	76	651	138
9C	1	7	-
10A	85	16377	12
10B	106	5292	100
10D	12	513	-
10E	1	155	-
10F	1	39	-
10G	27	2800	37
10H	2	62	-
10M	1	71	-
10N	3	880	-
10-	22	845	-
211	4	13	-
203	1	5	-
<u>OTHER</u>			
4	95	1442	177
5	2	47	8
9F	1	92	-
9-	1	359	18
12A	4	50	20
13	1	7	-
19	8	74	10
22	1	9	5
200	1	5	-
201	3	15	-
231	1	6	6
00	38	906	146
<u>TOTALS:</u>			
<u>Iron age/Roman</u>	<b>3818</b>	<b>103380</b>	<b>4562</b>
<u>Medieval</u>	<b>6</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>12</b>
<u>Post-medieval</u>	<b>179</b>	<b>2934</b>	<b>169</b>

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although the features revealed on this site are relatively few and a permanent on-site occupation cannot be demonstrated the dating of the activities taking



The post pit theory is of course based on the assumption that the construction and packing pits are contemporary, not just coincidental, and while they are assumed to be contemporary for the purpose of this report the latter cannot be entirely ruled out.

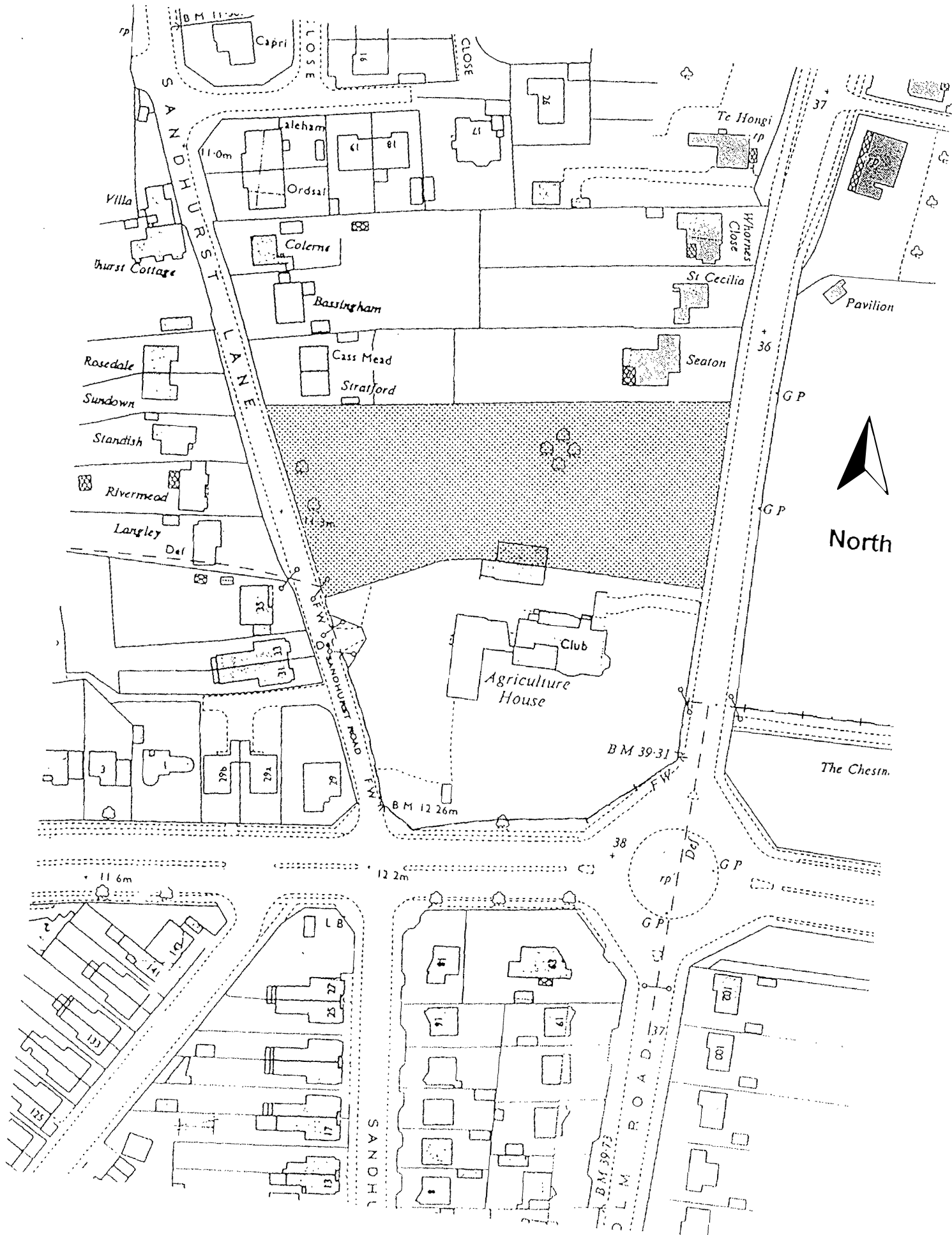
## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It can be clearly demonstrated that this is a site of primary significance in the understanding of the transitional period between Iron age settlement and Roman occupation in the Gloucester area and extra emphasis must be added to this due to the fact that it now appears to be the only undeveloped site of this nature.

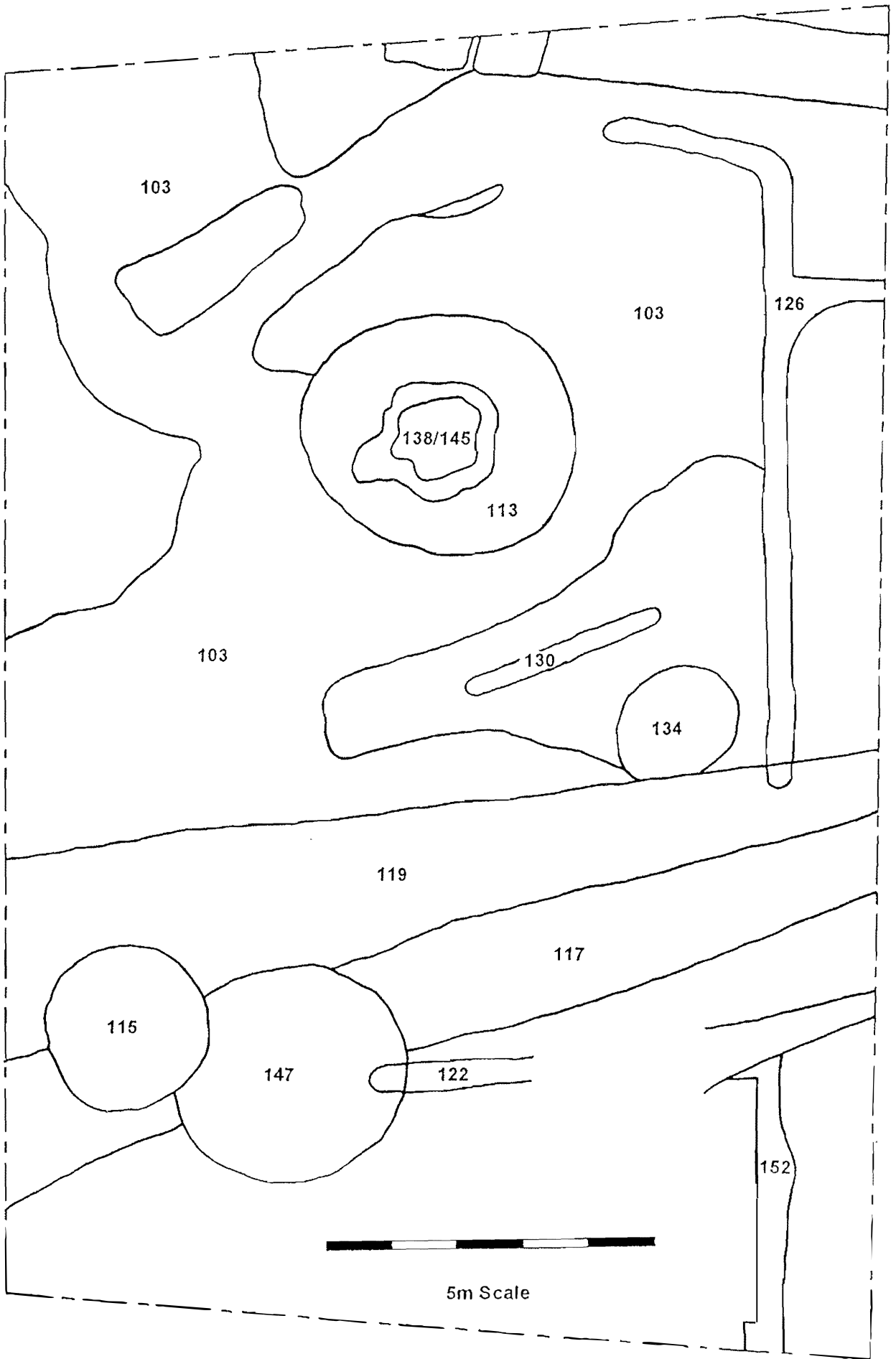
It is therefore recommended that all possible efforts are made to record new discoveries during any development works, the minimum being a closely controlled watching brief, paying particular attention to the eastern (Tewkesbury road) frontage of the area where the focus of activity can be shown to lie.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

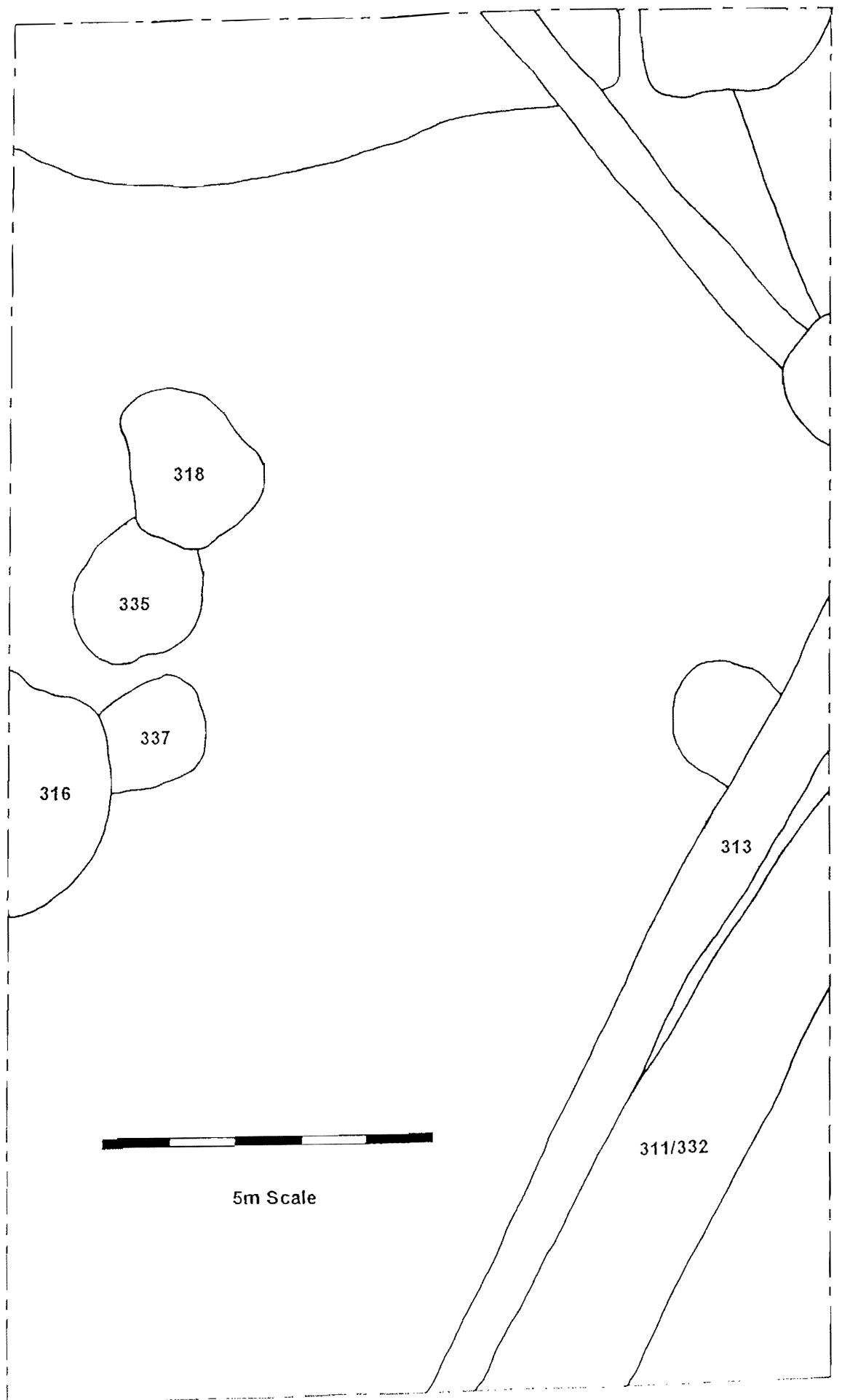
This report has been based on previous work by Malcolm Atkin, Hilary Cool, John A. Davies, Patrick Garrod, Wayne Laughlin, Don Mackreth, Rob Nicholl, Mike Sims, Jan Summerfield, Dr. Jane Timby and Mark Walters, in the form of written reports and personal comment.



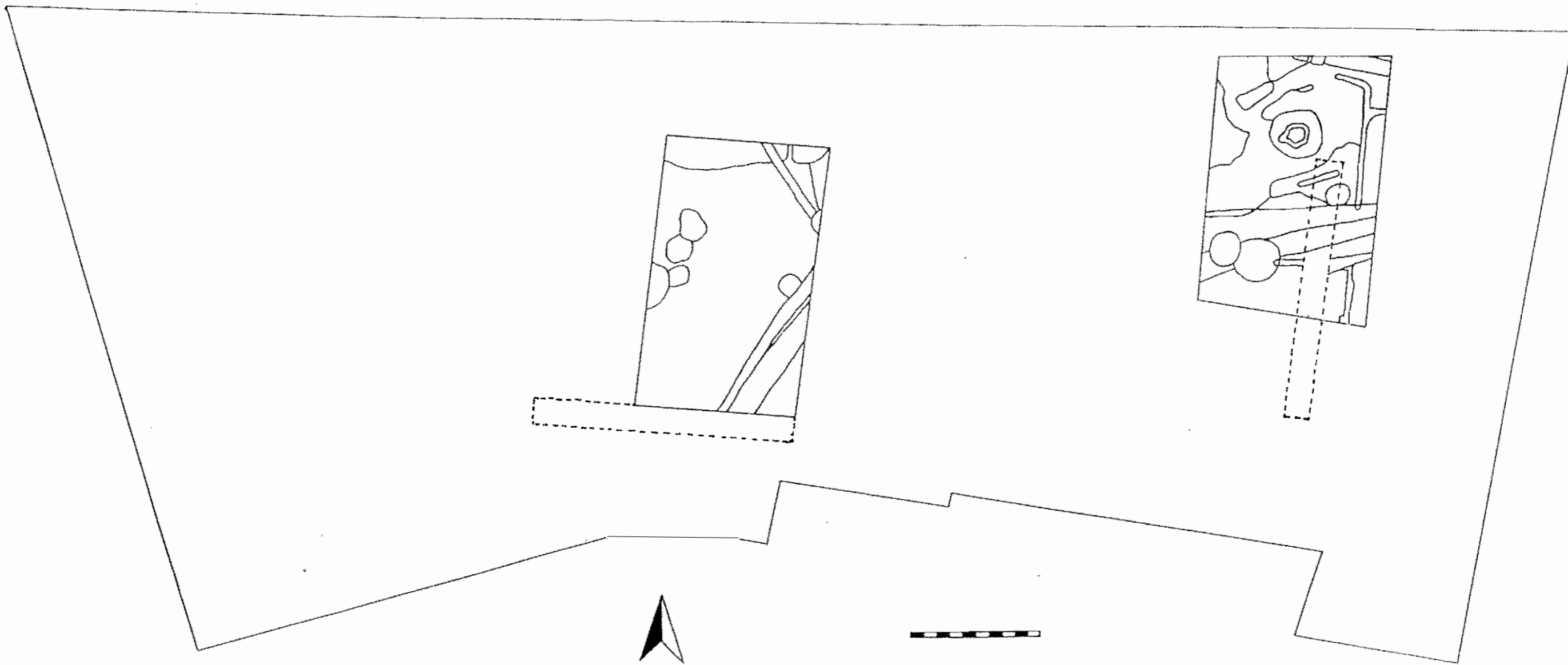
4/89 SANDHURST LANE - SITE LOCATION



4/89 SANDHURST LANE - AREA 1 - MAJOR FEATURES



4/89 SANDHURST LANE - AREA 2 - MAJOR FEATURES



North



10m Scale