CHAPTER 4 PHASE 3 — LATE BRONZE TO EARLY IRON AGE

4.1 PRE-PHASE 3a

4.1.1 Pits (F155 and 157)

Two pits (F155 and 157) had been cut by a large ditch (F117). Due to the irregularities in the shape and profile of both pits, their function is uncertain and they may simply have been the result of an early phase of tree clearance. The fill of both features was fairly homogeneous, suggesting deliberate backfilling. Only F157 produced any artifactual material and that could be residual from an earlier period (see Flint Report 3.2).

4.2 PHASE 3a

4.2.1 Early history of the ditch (F117)

The terminal of a large ditch (max width 5.10m and depth 1.42m), aligned north-south, was discovered in Area 1, cut into gravel and brickearth. The profile varied but in general the ditch had a flattened bottom and sloping sides (figs 15 and 16, pls 2 & 3). No bank was found, but it is noticeable in Sections 1 and 2 that the initial silt layers, F117.5 and 6, are thickest on the west side of the feature, suggesting that the greater proportion of the upcast from the original excavation of the ditch was deposited on that side, possibly in the form of a bank which has since been removed by agricultural activity. If this is correct, the area enclosed by the ditch would presumably have been to the west rather than to the east as was formerly supposed (O'Connell 1977). It was originally thought that Area 4, where occupation in the late Bronze to Early Iron Age had been proved, might have been enclosed by F117 because in earlier excavations in the northern part of the site David Barker had shown that the ditch was beginning to curve around to the north-east of that area. The evidence, however, both material and stratigraphic, indicates that the original use of the ditch is part of an earlier phase of occupation than that represented by the features in Area 4, although still within the Late Bronze Age.

The infilling of the ditch appears to have been a gradual, natural process at first and is represented by a series of silt layers — F117.3–6. There was a paucity of finds in these layers and only F117.3 and 4 produced any dateable material. F117.3–6, and to a lesser extent F117.2, showed evidence of gleying due to the fluctuating water table which almost reached the top of F117.3 during the winter months of 1976/77. As a result of this waterlogging, iron pans had formed through the silt layers confusing the vertical stratigraphy and making the separation of the layers more difficult. It was not possible to estimate the time of the initial rise of the water table or to determine whether the ditch was waterlogged in the Late Bronze Age. The silt samples taken were entirely barren except for some modern intrusive elements.

Plate 2 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ditch terminal F117

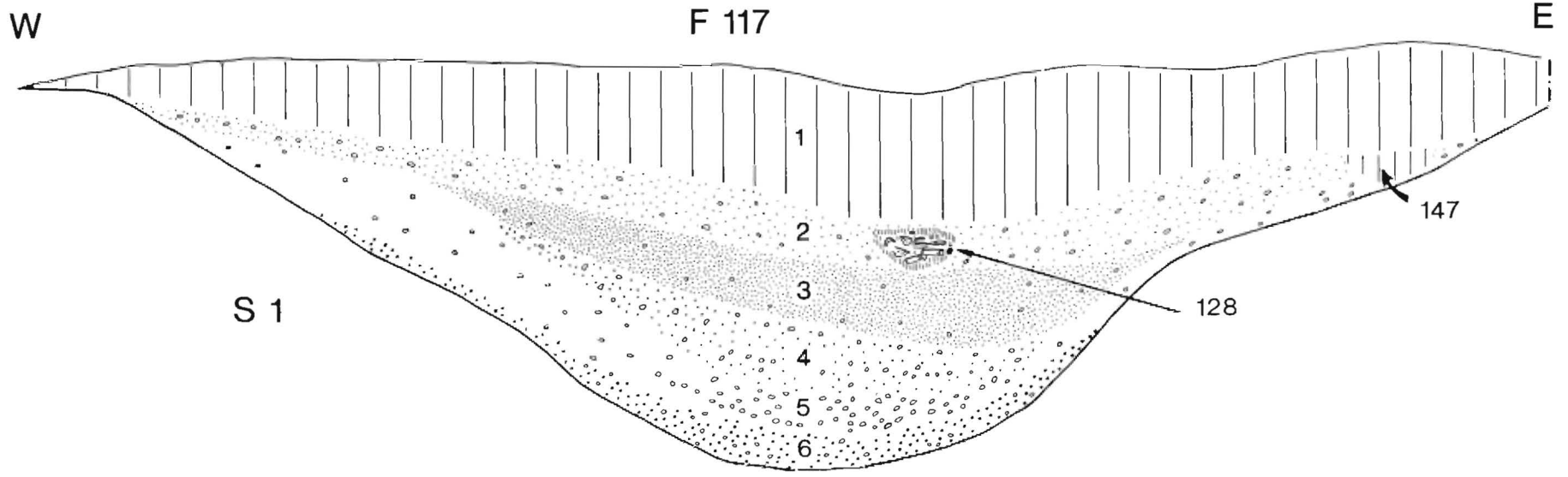

Fig 15 Section 1 of F117, ditch, showing location of Fs 128 (hoard) and 147 (scattered bronzes)

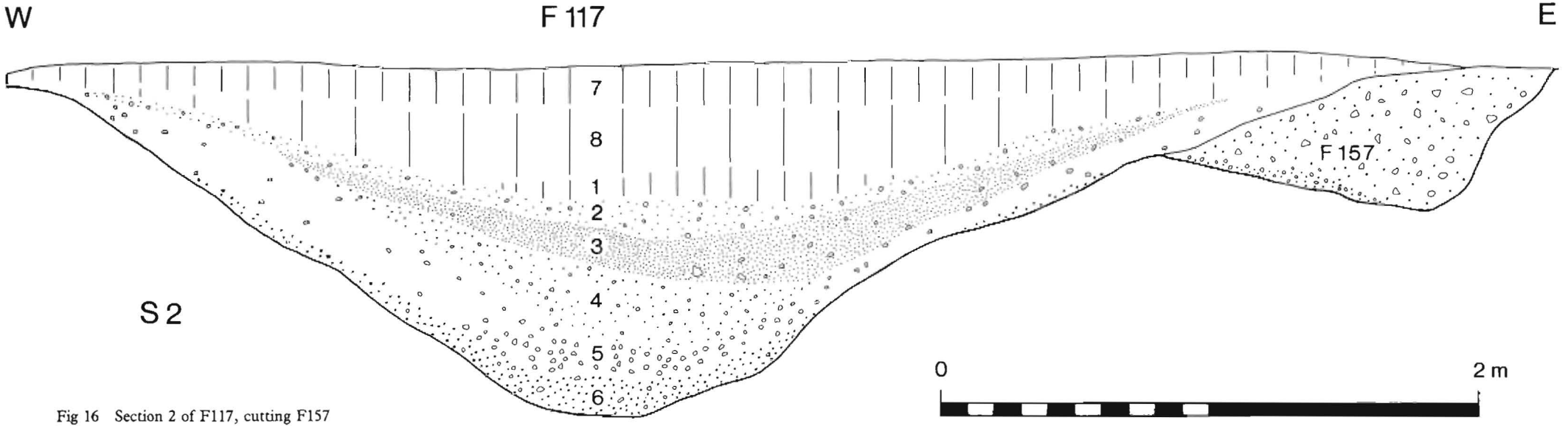

Fig 16 Section 2 of F117, cutting F157

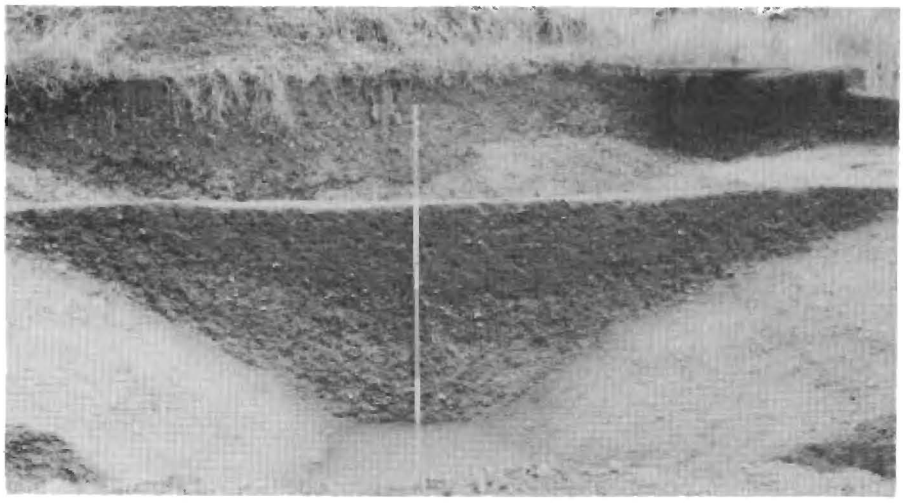

Plate 3 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ditch, section F117

4.3 PHASE 3b

4.3.1 Deposition of the hoard

At some time in the later Bronze Age the ditch, which by that time would have silted up considerably and would only have been a large depression in the ground, was chosen as the site for the deposition of a hoard of bronzes. The hoard (frontispiece & pl 4) consisted of 78 pieces of bronze including a variety of weapons, tools, vessels and ornamental attachments and had been buried in two small features (F128 and 129) that were sealed within F117.2 (fig 15). It was evident in Section 1 that F128 and 129 had been cut into F117.2, but also apparent that a thin deposit of the same layer covered both features. This can be explained if the depositor of the hoard after burying the bronzes, then spread the silt removed in excavating F128 and 129 over the top of the features to conceal the valuable metalwork, but not so thoroughly that it would have been difficult to relocate them. The only alternative to this explanation would be that a thin layer of silt accumulated above the hoard after it had been buried.

It is not clear whether or not the bronzes had been placed in some form of container prior to burial and the analysis of the fill from F128 and 129 has proved disappointing. A black discoloration was noted and sampled on the edge of both features but probably indicated only a purely chemical reaction of the bronze with the surrounding silt (Professor Dimbleby pers comm). Apart from the articles in the hoard eight bronze objects were found scattered towards the butt end of the ditch, (fig 17). With the exception of one item from the very

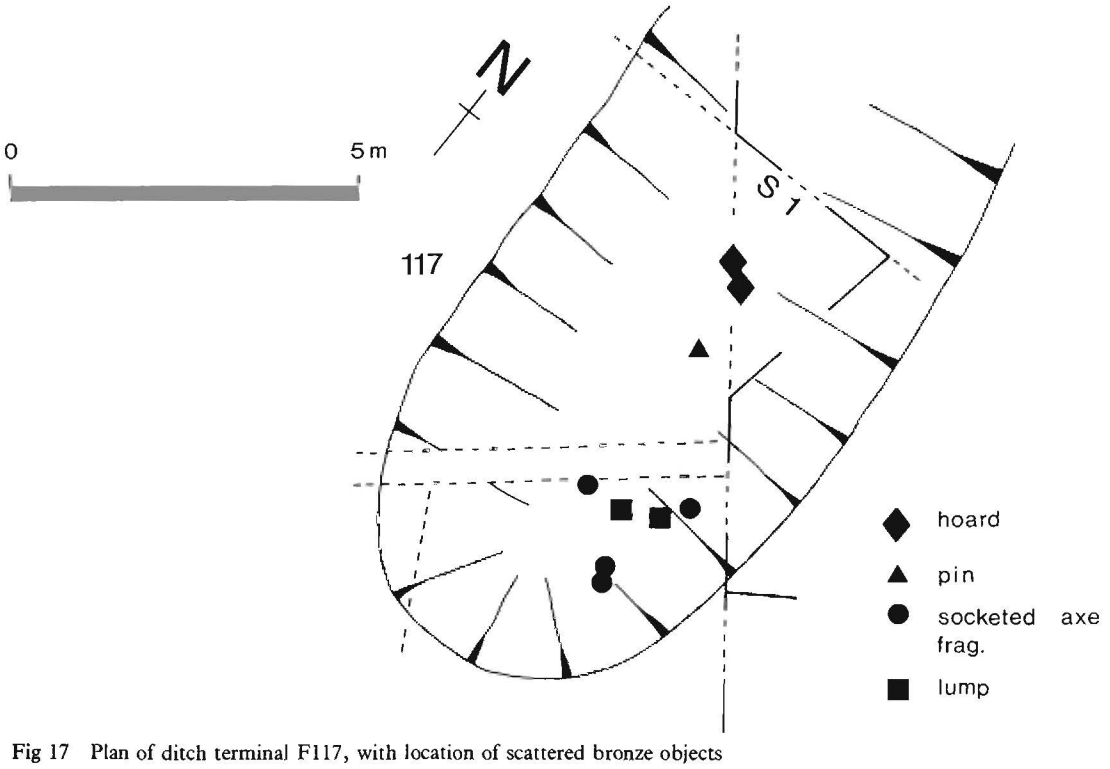

Fig 17 Plan of ditch terminal F117, with location of scattered bronze objects

Plate 4 One half of the late Bronze Age hoard F128, as excavated

bottom of F117.1 the material was found from high within F117.2. The absolute levels at which the objects were discovered became progressively higher the further they were removed from the main body of the hoard, reflecting the gradual rise in the level of F117.2 towards the sides and terminal of the ditch rather than pointing to a chronological distinction. Although it is clear (see 4.7) that these objects could not have formed an original part of the hoard, together they form a coherent group stratigraphically and it is probable that the stray bronzes were discarded with the other occupational debris — pottery, bone and flint — from F117.2 during the same period when the hoard was buried. Metal working was evidently an important activity during this phase while the concentration of material strongly suggests that the workshop would have existed within the vicinity of the ditch (F117), that is on the periphery of the settlement in the later Bronze Age (see 4.13).

4.3.2 Later history of the ditch (F117)

Following the accumulation of F117.2 and the deposition of the hoard the terminal of the ditch was deliberately infilled. This process is represented by F117.1, a layer consisting of brown sticky soil containing charcoal, burnt daub, a concentration of late Bronze Age pottery together with animal bones and flint. That this was one phase of activity is indicated by the soil consistency of that layer and the fact that in many cases joining sherds from the same vessel were found at different levels within F117.1. The density of the refuse and the differential sherd condition — some of the pottery was worn or abraded while other sherds were relatively fresh — suggests that this material originally formed part of a midden or an accumulation of occupational debris within the settlement. The remainder of the ditch fill consisted of two layers, F117.8 and F117.7 (fig 18). Both bore a superficial resemblance to F117.1 but closer examination indicated that they

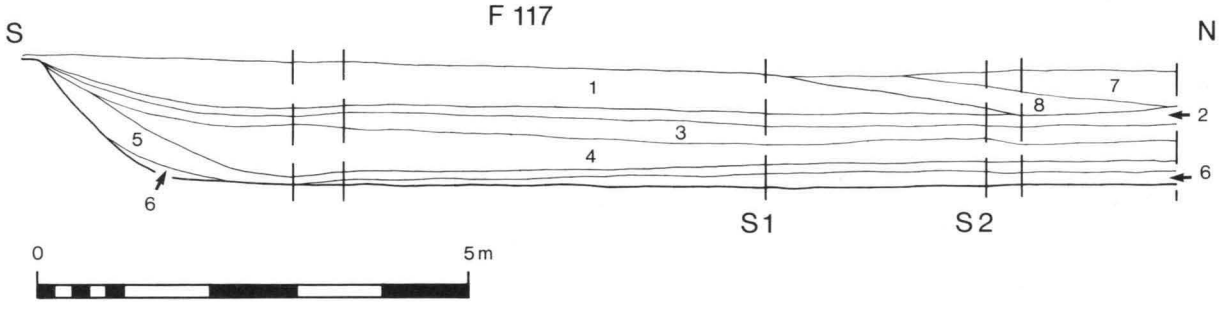

Fig 18 Longitudinal section of F117, showing sequence of layers and positions of Sections 1 and 2

were generally more earthy and gravelly than that layer and contained a much smaller quantity of charcoal and domestic refuse. F117.7, which represents the last phase of infilling produced very few finds and the pot sherds found were small and abraded. Despite the stratigraphical distinction between the layers, the artefactual material from F117.1, and F117.7 appeared to be contemporary suggesting that the interval of time between their deposition was not a long or protracted one.

Part of a small feature (F147) was revealed in Section 1, sealed below F117.1 and cut into F117.2. The fill of F147 was almost identical to F117.1 while the feature itself resembled a small post hole. Unfortunately, before it was possible to examine the feature properly, Section 1 collapsed after excessive rainfall, thus destroying the remains of F147. The catalogue of ditch-fill is on Microfiche 12.

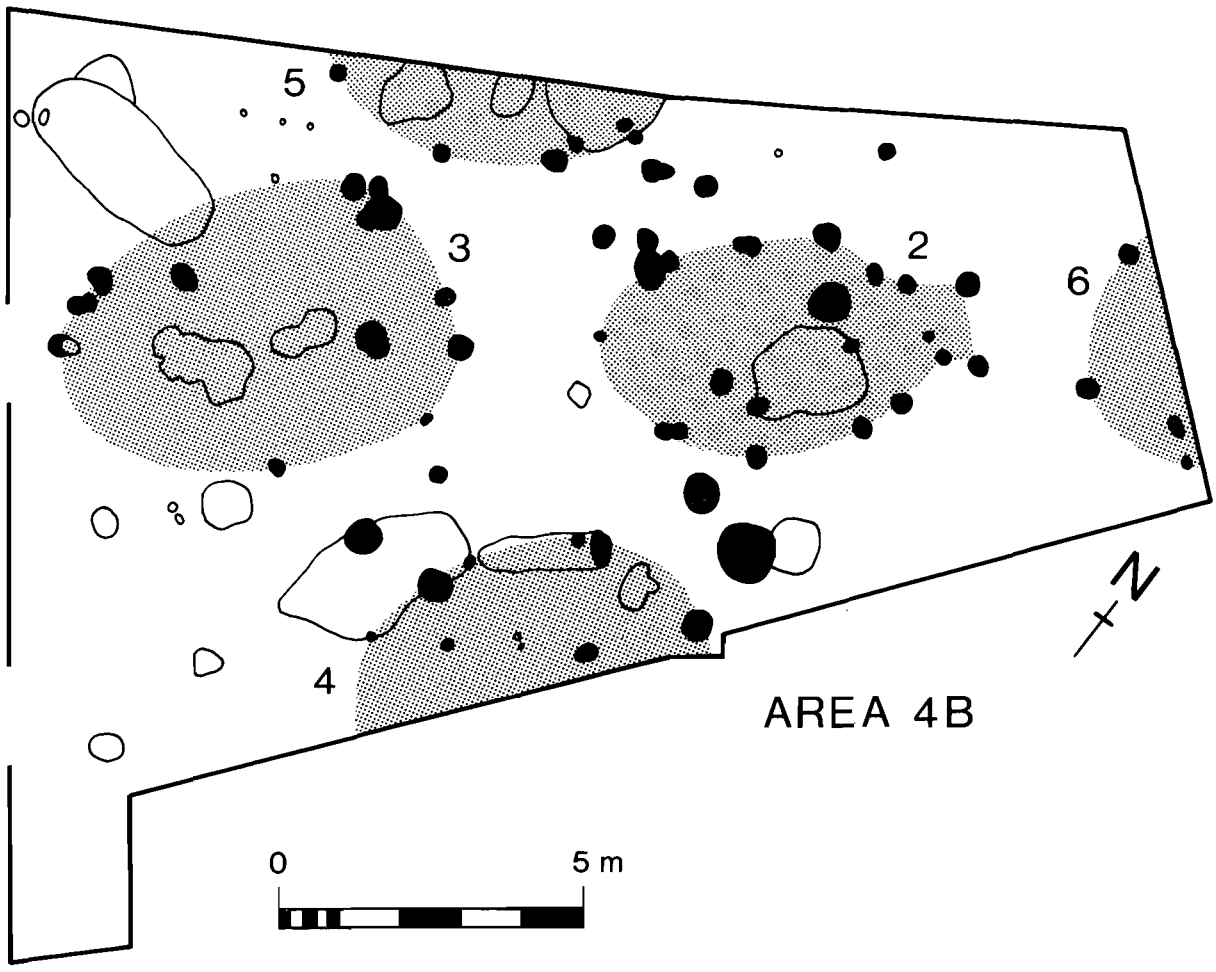

Fig 19 Structural evidence, Huts 2–6

4.4 STRUCTURAL EVIDENCE

The incomplete outline of a possible hut was recovered in Area 3 (Hut 1), (fig 5), the outline of one probable hut (Hut 2) and the partial outline of four other possible huts were found in Area 4 (Huts 3, 4, 5 and 6), (figs 7 & 19). Definite reconstructions are difficult because of the irregularity of the posthole spacing and the lack of standardisation of the posthole depths. A number of isolated or unrelated postholes were also excavated. All the posts appeared to have been withdrawn. The small size and general irregularity of the structures postulated recalls examples from Bronze Age occupation at Eldon's Seat, Dorset (Cunliffe & Phllipson 1968) and Ram's Hill, Berkshire (Bradley & Ellison 1975), together with earlier structures from Itford Hill, Sussex (Burstow & Hollyman 1957).

Hut 1 The partial outline of hut 1 was found superimposed on the Early Bronze Age ditch (F121) and one of the postholes (F313) penetrated the ditch fill. Five postholes were recovered (F307, 306, 308, 304, 313) and one possible internal example (F314). The average diameter of the posts was 0.36m and they varied between 0.30m and 0.40m. The average depth was 0.22m varying between 0.15 and 0.34m. The only find was some burnt daub from the fill of F306. An area of burnt gravel was found at the centre of the post-ring and may indicate the remains of a hearth. The diameter of the post-ring was estimated at between 6 and 7m.

Hut 2 This was the most complete hut excavated, roughly oval in shape measuring 6.5 x 4.0m with a porched entrance. Fifteen postholes, (F436, 438, 429, 437, 433, 454, 489, 505, 430, 441, 435, 445, 439, 440, 452) and one possible (F425) were excavated. The average diameter of the postholes was 0.35m varying between 0.22 and 0.68m. The average depth was 0.25m and the variation between 0.14 and 0.52m. One of the postholes (F430) produced a sherd of pottery of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age type and four of the others (F429, 439, 440 and 454) produced flints. There was evidence for partial rebuilding of the hut; F454 replaced two earlier postholes F487 and 505 while F435 had replaced F437. Five unassociated postholes (F426, 446, 448, 484 and 503) were found inside Hut 2, two of which (F484 and 503) had been cut into an earlier pit (F479). Two external postholes (F427 and 487) may have been associated with the structure as part of an external support.

Hut 3 Only the partial outline of this structure has survived, roughly oval in shape and measuring approximately 7.0 x 5.0m (pl 5). Many of the postholes have been lost, possibly due to later agricultural activity. Eleven posts remained (F463, 467, 468, 500, 414, 411, 457, 415, 456, 412, 418) and one possible

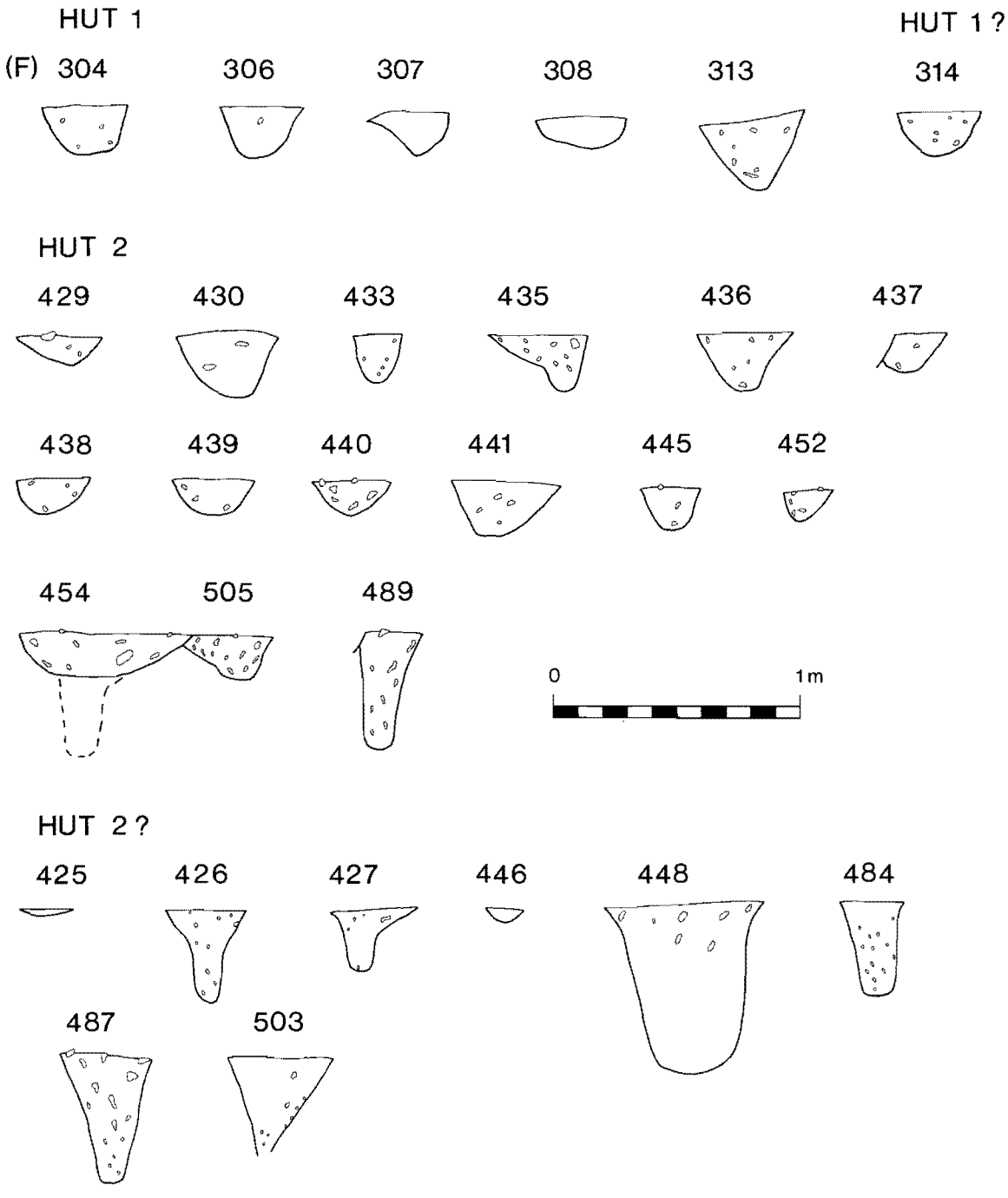

Fig 20 Sections of the postholes belonging to Huts 1 and 2

post (F442). The average diameter of the posts was 0.38m, varying between 0.27 and 0.60m and the average depth was 0.24m varying between 0.13 and 0.53m. There was some evidence of reconstruction during the life of the hut — post F415 replaced two earlier posts, F456 and 457, and post F468 replaced post F500. The pottery found in postholes F411 and 404 was fragmentary but appeared to be of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age type. Two postholes (F460) and 492 and two pits (F459 and 465) were found inside the structure. A large, irregular pit (F496) appears to be a later intrusive feature and may have removed some structural evidence.

Hut 4 Only part of this structure was excavated. Six postholes (F473, 420, 494, 502, 458 and 432) and one possible internal post (F423) were uncovered. The average diameter of the posts was 0.39m varying between 0.16 and 0.56m and the average depth was 0.20m varying between 0.13 and 0.41m. Three of the posts (F420, 473 and 494) were superimposed on a large pit (F493) and two (F458 and 502) had been cut into another feature (F483). Three (F420, 423 and F473) produced pottery of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age type. One associated posthole (F422) was found inside the structure.

Hut 5 Only part of the structure was excavated. Four postholes were recovered (F474, 455, 413, 486) one of which had been cut into an earlier feature (F488). The average diameter of the posts was 0.30m varying between 0.25 and 0.40m, the average depth was 0.30m varying between 0.18 and 0.46m. Two posts (F451 and 504) may have served as internal supports to strengthen the structure. No finds were made.

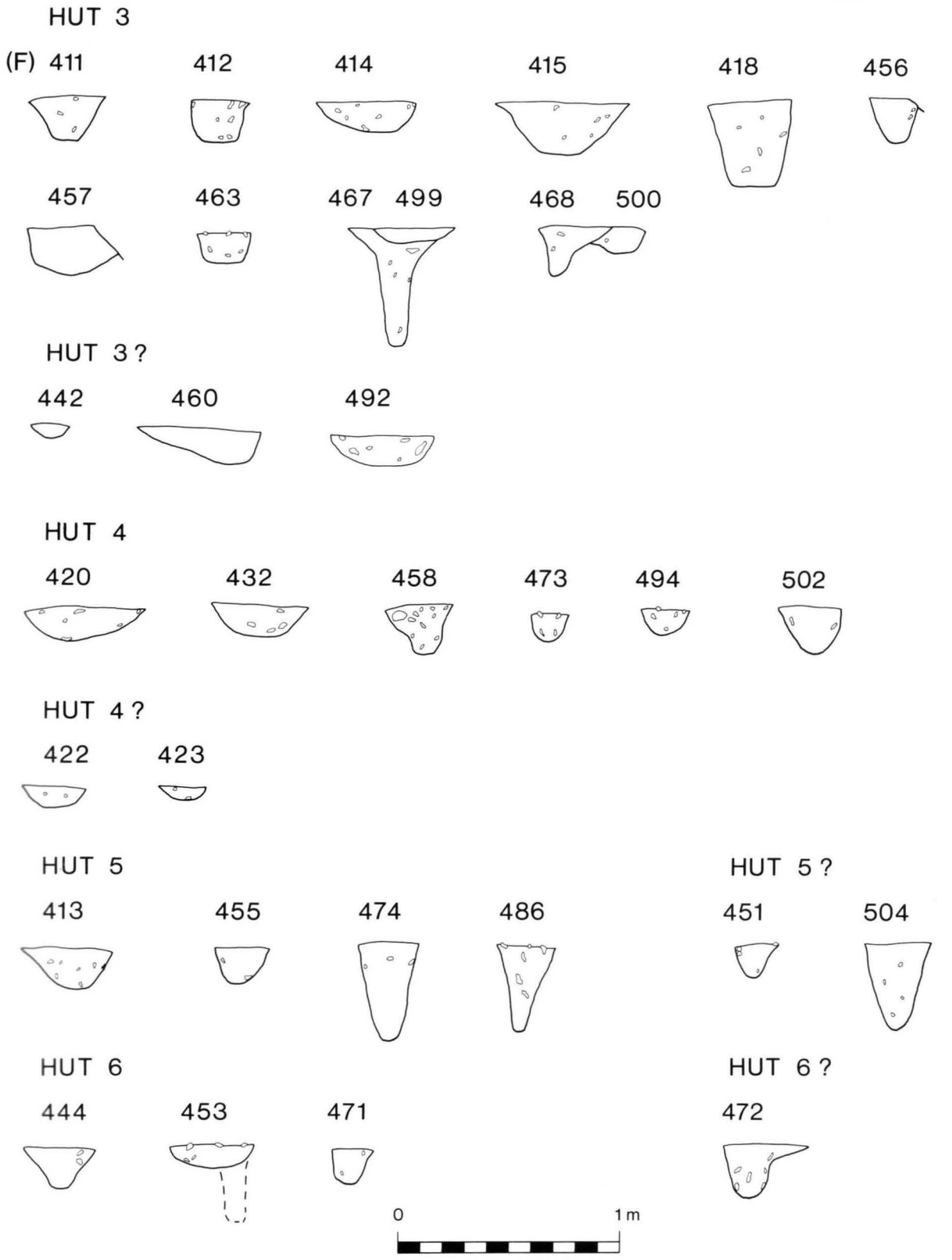

Fig 21 Sections of the postholes belonging to Huts 3–6

Hut 6 This was the most doubtful of the structures suggested because only a very small part of it was excavated. Three postholes were found (F471, F453 and 444). The average diameter was 0.30m varying between 0.19 and 0.38m, the average depth was 0.24m, the variation between 0.16 and 0.36m. One internal post (F472) was discovered which may be associated with the structure. No finds were recovered. The catalogue of postholes is on Microfiche 13–15.

All the postholes considered in the catalogues (4.41 and 4.4.2), apart from some minor variations, contained a fairly uniform fill consisting of dark grey to brown soil with differing quantities of gravel.

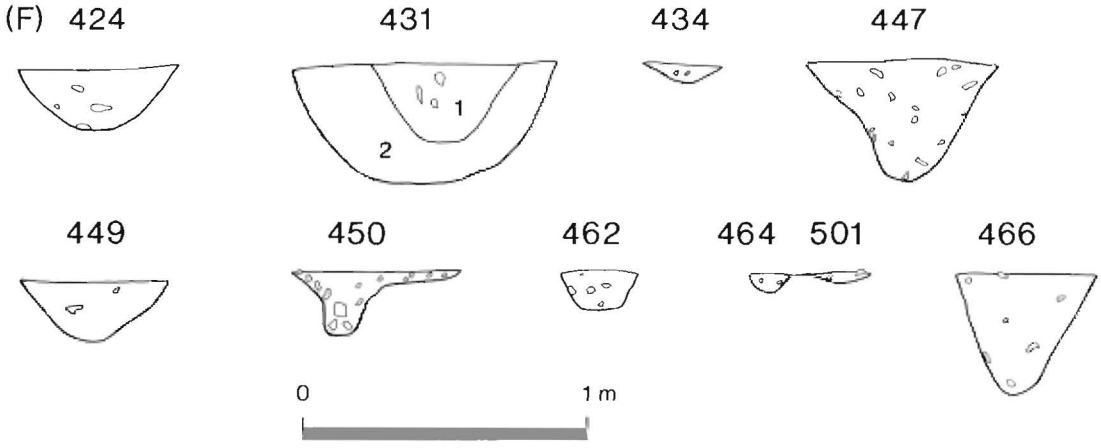

Fig 22 Sections of postholes possibly belonging to occupation in Area 4

Plate 5 Hut 3, postholes

4.5 THE PITS (figs 23 and 24, pls 6 & 7)

Most of the pits produced few finds and were not closely dateable. On stratigraphic grounds, F481 predated F405, F483 and F493 predated Hut 4, and F488 predated Hut 5. The relationship of F155 and 157 to F117 has already been discussed (4.1) as has the relationship between Hut 3 and F496 (4.4).

Only seven pits produced pottery — F135, 400, 405, 408, 409, 419 and 465. The pottery appeared to be of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age type, but the sherds found were generally very small and fragmentary, and only the finds from F400, 405 and 409 could be securely placed in that period.

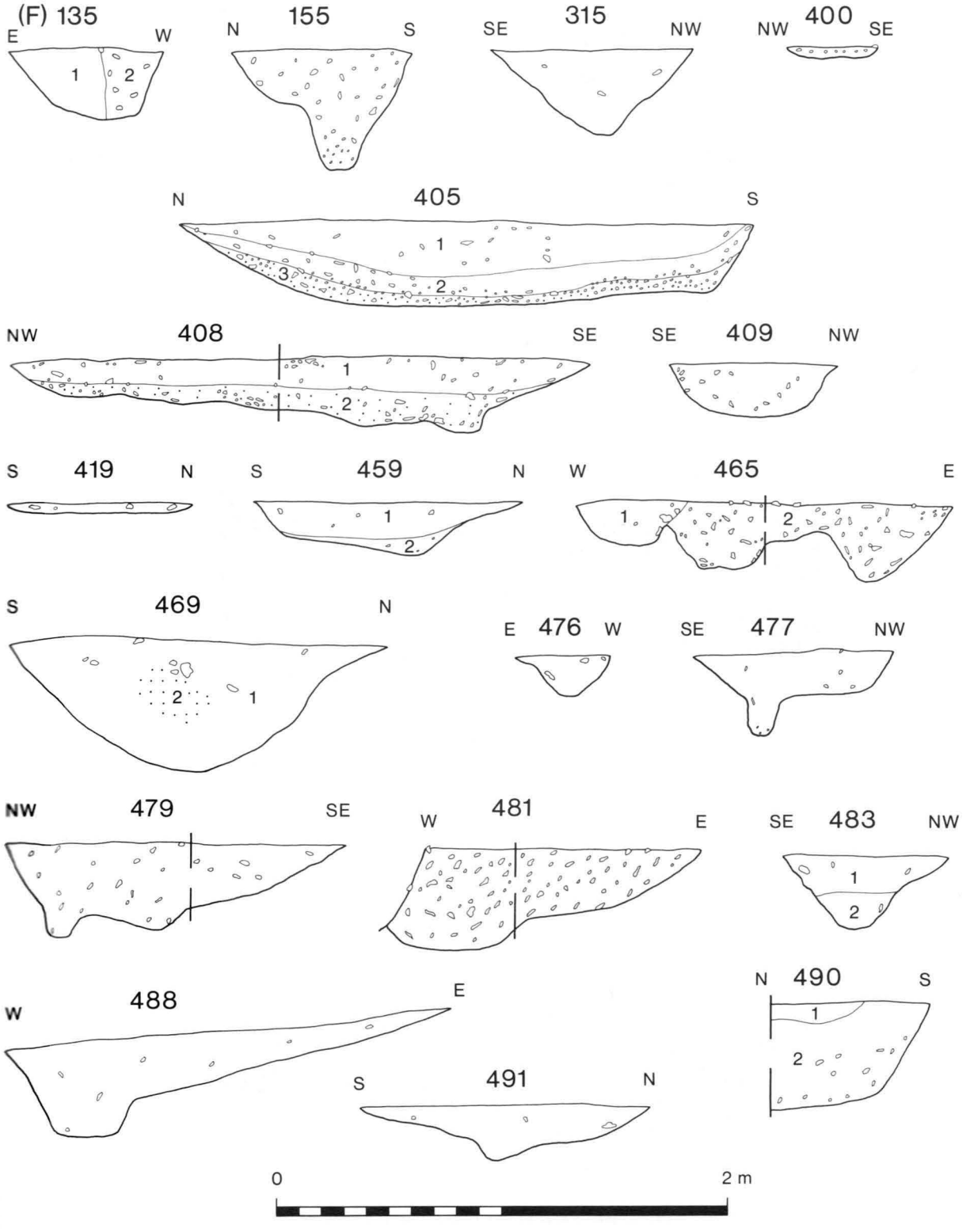

Fig 23 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pits

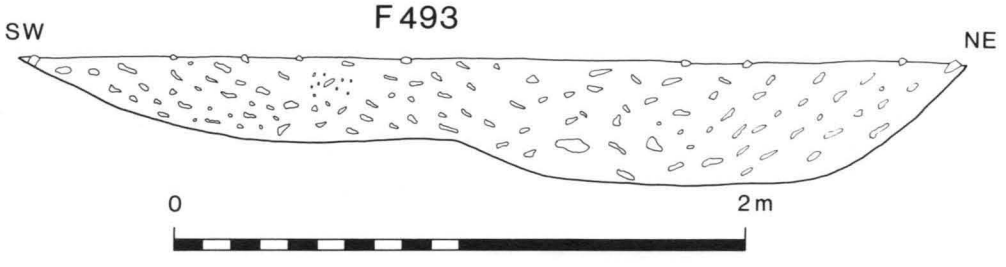

Fig 24 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pit

A number of pits which were very irregular in outline and profile may have been tree holes or clearance hollows — F137, 155, 157, 465, 469, 479 and 483. F465, 479 and 483 had a series of irregular depressions similar to clearance hollows identified at Ram's Hill, Berkshire (Bradley & Ellison 1975, 48–50). F403 had similar irregularities in plan and section but its elongated, narrow shape makes it less plausible as a clearance hollow and its function remains uncertain. A number of root holes were also detected on the site — F112, 303, 152, 153, 464 and 501 — and it is possible that F459 was at least party the result of root action.

The fill of many of the pits was fairly uniform suggesting that they had been backfilled. Seven pits (F135, 408, 459, 465, 469, 485 and 490) however, appeared to have been left open for a short period of time as a layer of silt had accumulated at the bottom of the features. F400 and 419 resembled small irregular

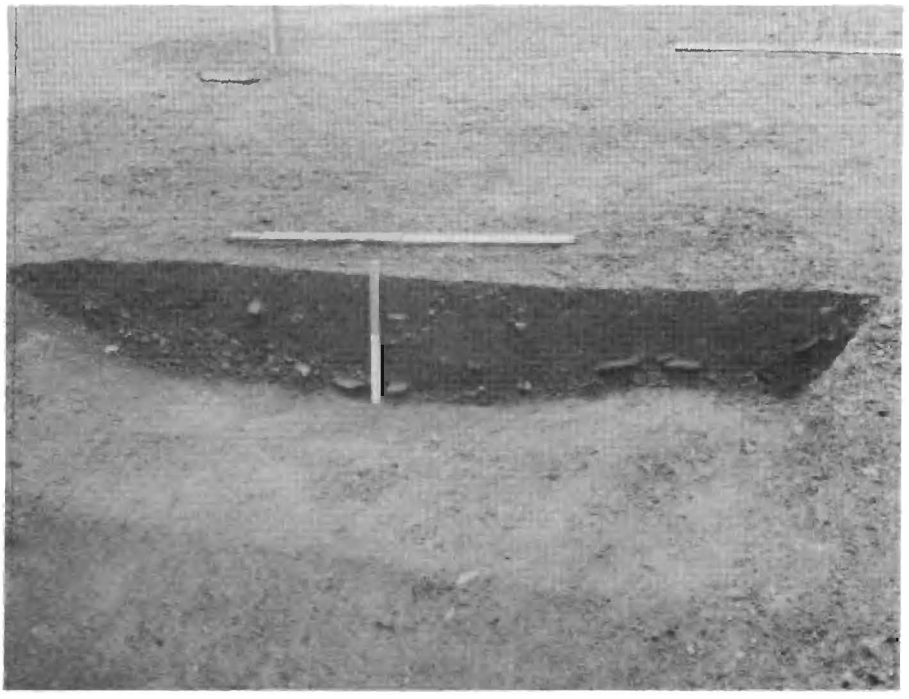

Plate 6 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pit F405

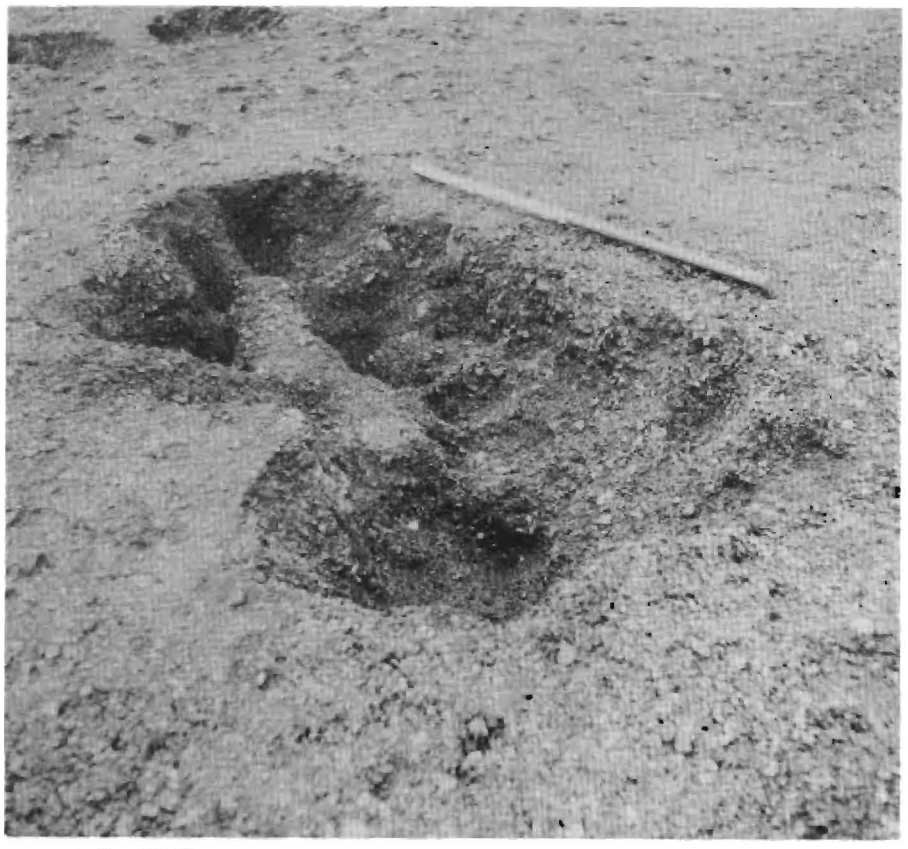

Plate 7 Tree clearance hollow F465

depressions rather than functional pits although their original shape has probably been truncated by later agricultural activity. Burnt gravel was found in F419 and close to F400 but there was insufficient evidence to suggest that either feature had been used as a hearth.

F477, 488, 490, 491 and 493 appeared to be man-made features, but were unlike conventional prehistoric storage pits. There was nothing to indicate that they had served as rubbish pits and they seemed unsuitable for use as working hollows. All contained a similar fill of brown gravelly soil with some large stones, but produced no finds. F315 also contained a similar fill but was more regular in profile and contained some flecks of charcoal.

Only the function of two pits — F405 and 409 — could be proposed with any confidence. The two features had evidently served as rubbish pits and both produced a number of sherds identifiable as Late Bronze/Early Iron Age. F409 was a small circular pit with gently sloping sides filled with dark brown soil together with stones and flecks of charcoal (F409.1). Quantities of domestic refuse including pottery, bone and a lump of bronze were found in the fill. F405 was part of a much larger pit with sloping sides which had been cut by a Roman ditch (F406). The pit had been open for a period of time as a layer of gravelly silt (F405.3), containing pottery and bone had accumulated at the bottom of the feature. The fill was made up of black stony soil with charcoal (F405.2) and black sticky soil with concentrations of charcoal (F405.1). These two layers were very similar and differed only in the quantity of charcoal present. Both contained pottery, bones and flint while several sherds found separately in the two layers were later discovered to form part of the same vessel indicating that F405.1 and 2 were deposited at the same time. F405 also produced most of the scanty organic material preserved on the site.

F476 is included in this discussion because a separate section seemed unnecessary for this particular feature. F476 is a long, shallow irregular gully that was traced at the southern edge of Area 4. Several sherds of late Bronze/Early Iron Age pottery were found in the fill but the function of the feature is uncertain. The catalogue of pits is on Microfiche 17–19.

4.6 SEQUENCE

It has been argued that the construction and initial siting of the ditch (F117) predates the settlement defined in Area 4 (see 4.2.1). The function and date of this feature is not certain but could well be as early as the Late Bronze Age period of occupation at Runnymede Bridge (Needham & Longley 1980, 402). Two pits (F155 and 157) indicate activity on the site prior to the excavation of the ditch. A number of pits in Area 4 (see 4.5) are thought to be the remains of tree hollows and would presumably have belonged to a phase of site clearance predating the structural evidence.

A metal working phase has been defined on the basis of the hoard contents, material from F117.2 and F409 as well as finds made during earlier work on the site (Johnson 1975, 12). The material evidence suggests that this industrial activity was related to the occupational life of the settlement as defined by Huts 2-6 and associated pits. The duration of this settlement phase is difficult to estimate although there is evidence of rebuilding. The lack of material stratigraphy and close dating evidence makes construction of a sequence for the erection of the structures almost impossible although their spacing and layout would have allowed contemporary occupation.

The dismantling of the huts implied by the withdrawal of the posts from their sockets would appear to mark the end of this particular area as a habitation site and the next identifiable phase of occupation does not occur until the Romano-British period. If the removal of the huts was a single process it would suggest that the inhabitants did not simply abandon the site and move to another area but made a deliberate change in the land use by levelling the site. In this context, it would be tempting to view the clearance of the occupational detritus from Area 4 indicated by F117.1 as part of the same operation. The layer comprised over $10m^3$ of soil and domestic refuse and its deposition as a single event (see 4.3.2) signifies a large scale undertaking. The infilling of the ditch would have been a primary consideration if levelling of the whole site had been intended although this would mean that the deposition of F117.8 and F117.7 would have necessarily been related to the operation if the ditch was to have been levelled completely. The absence of any occupational deposits in association with the huts is not helpful in this respect because it is possible that later agricultural activity could have been partly responsible for the dispersal of those deposits. Certainly plough damage appears to have been a significant factor both in the truncation of certain features and the removal of smaller features such as postholes, thus accounting for the incomplete plan of Hut 3.

The relationship of Hut 1 to the phase of settlement in the later Bronze Age is not clear as it lies outside Area 4 in an isolated position at the north-west corner of the site and produced no dateable material. On stratigraphic grounds the structure postdates the Early Bronze Age ditch (F121/302) and in size and shape is similar to the other circular or oblong post-rings examined in Area 4.