

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title Beals Southern Bypass.	Details Interim Fieldwork Rev.
Road Number	Date
Contractor Beals Arch. Service	
County Beals	
OS Reference	
Single sided ✓ Double sided A3 0 Colour 0	

✓ A421

**BEDFORD SOUTHERN BYPASS**

Interim Fieldwork Review

94/34

## **BEDFORD SOUTHERN BYPASS**

### **Interim fieldwork review**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** The full potential and value of the archaeological recording programme cannot be known until the assessment has been completed on artefacts, ecofacts and structural evidence on all eight principal sites. However, immediate post-fieldwork assessment of the results of the project overall confirms its predicted major contribution to the understanding of the archaeology of Bedfordshire, and its ranking within the national scene. The general approach, that of wholesale stripping and then sampling within the exposed areas of archaeology, has been amply justified, with the caveat that possibly up to 80% of finds can be lost in topsoil stripping. A test pit sampling strategy in between evaluation and stripping for full recording is an issue which needs to be addressed for future sites. For the results achieved, it has proved to be a highly cost effective and fruitful methodology, with a type of result that would not have been possible had the work been done on a smaller or more piecemeal scale.

**1.2** As a result of the pre contract recording work on the Bedford Southern Bypass, archaeologists will have far greater insight into the development of the landscape and changes in landscape and land-use/exploitation from the neolithic through to the Saxo Norman and medieval periods.

**1.3** The extent, nature and purpose of the prehistoric ritual area centring on Octagon Farm (most of which, but not all, is now legally protected) will need to be at least partially reconsidered. As a result, some interesting interpretative implications with regard to continuity of settlement, or long-lived respect for/acknowledgement of earlier people's ritual sites (see Village Farm) can be postulated. There is evidence for neolithic tree clearance, prehistoric ring ditches and henge monument, Romano British settlement, farming activities, ritual deposition in pits and ditches, inhumations, pottery production and metal working. The change from Briton to Roman will be one of the important issues to be examined. The elusive Dark Ages have made a significant appearance, yet to be fully quantified. Anglo Saxon buildings take the form of sunken floored buildings and post built structures - possibly aisled halls denoting considerable status. The medieval period was represented by boundary ditches, a cobbled road, pits and postholes yet to be interpreted, with occupation at Village Farm continuing until the 16th century.

**1.4** The pre-construction archaeological recording work on the Bypass has taken approximately nine months to complete, but has been successfully achieved prior to the letting of the main contract, and without itself generating any major problems. It is clear that the careful provision of various categories of contingency sum within the contract has proven to be the correct approach given the nature of the project, its programming in the worst of the winter, and the lack of evidence for apparently blank areas. Had the agreement been restricted to the Scole model, serious difficulties would have arisen. With the Bedford contract, sufficient allowance (and safeguards for the Department) had been made to enable a flexible and prompt response within the overall budget.

**1.5** The benefits to the project in exploiting the flexibility of a local unit were very apparent throughout the duration of pre-construction recording. This was particularly the case when dealing with ancillary works when rapid response was needed, and in the juggling and merging of staffing on projects, including

short notice borrowing of BCCAS staff from other projects when necessary. Communication with regard to the handling of ancillary works with regard to archaeology need to be improved, though the effects of failures were mitigated by the ability of BCCAS to respond quickly. A secure local base has also proved to be essential, given the persistent illicit metal detecting and petty vandalism on sites; most finds processing was withdrawn to St Mary's. BCCAS will be looking to secure overflow accommodation as a direct result of the enormous quantity of finds and records generated. The presence of security measures on site was a marked deterrent to several known predators and, while it is difficult to furnish absolute proof, must have saved the sites from regular pillaging and concomitant damage. The contingency insurance claim will be largely untouched as a direct result.

1.6 The project was dogged by exceptionally poor weather during the winter months, resulting in the temporary abandonment of Peartree Farm, and triggering a proportion of the contingency sums agreed for that eventuality. Nearly £10,000 was voluntarily ploughed back into the project by BCCAS from identified efficiency savings on other sites, notably Manor Farm, Bunyan's Farm and the scheduled area at Octagon Farm.

1.7 The so called "blank areas" did contain archaeology as suspected, including a henge monument at Bumpy Lane. The aerial photographic evidence gave little indication in some instances, of the density and quality of the underlying archaeology. Eastcotts proved to be exceptionally extensive, rich and varied, despite all surface indications to the contrary.

## **2 FUTURE WORK**

### **2.1 Assessment**

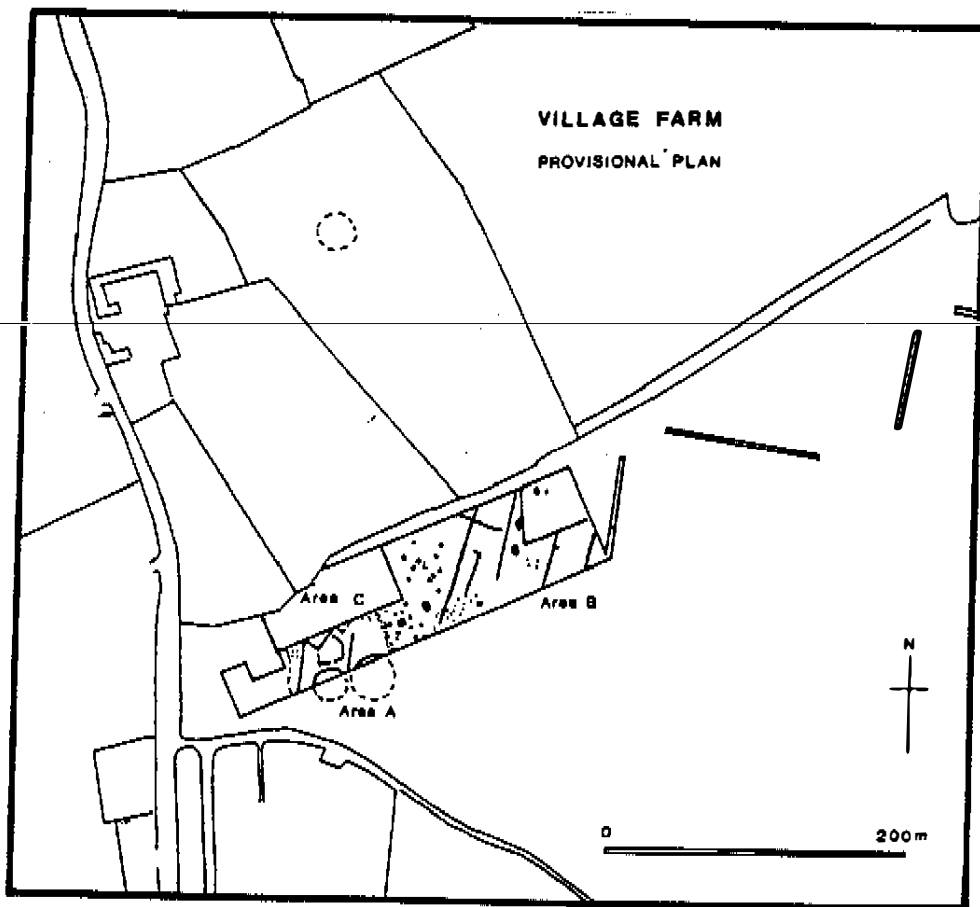
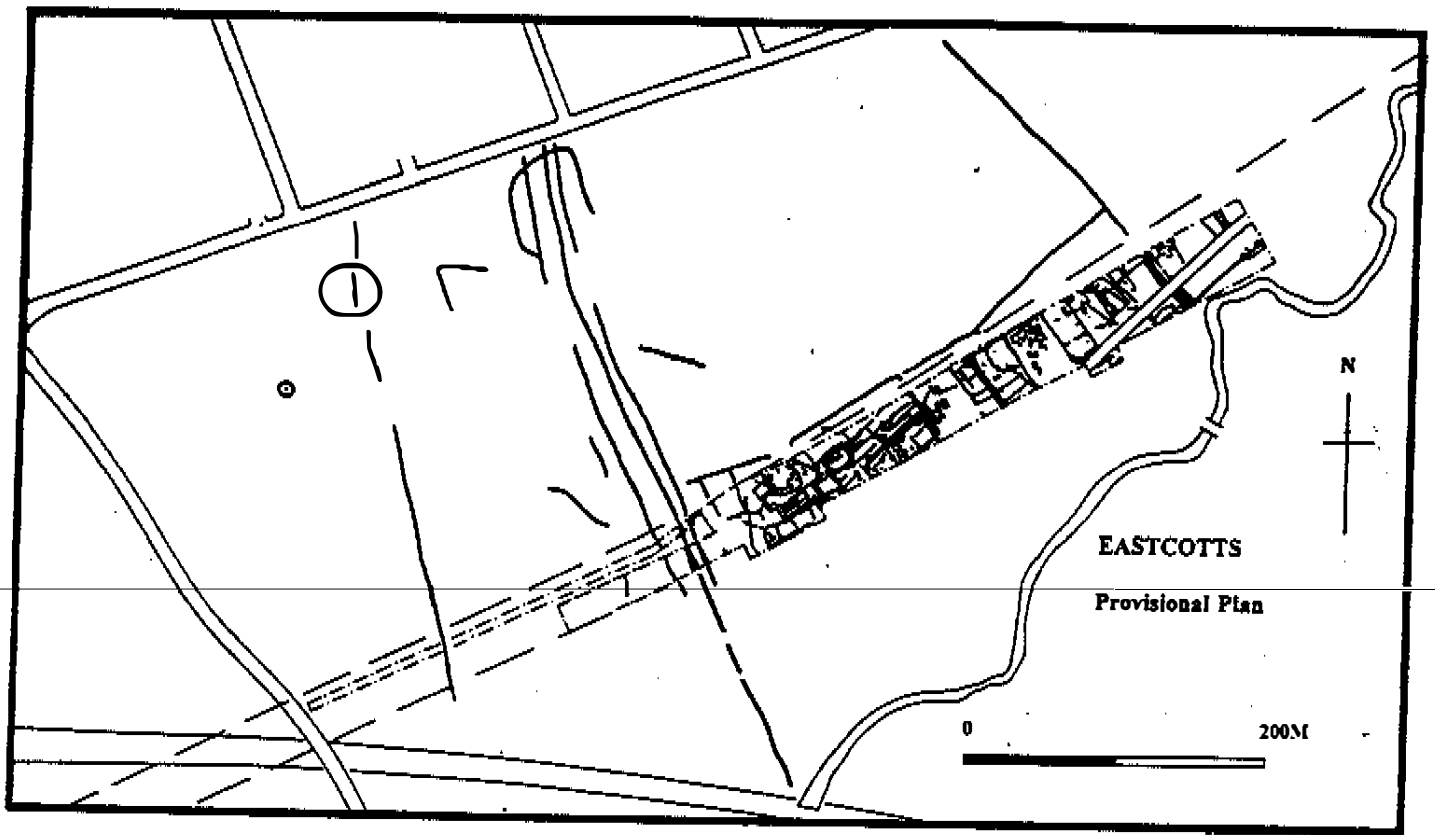
2.1.1 A provisional assessment programme is attached. BCCAS is currently undertaking a review of assessment needs in the light of the actual archaeological discoveries made. The review will take into account the changes in scale of results for individual projects, both increase and decrease. Any financial implications for the extra fieldwork undertaken or lack of results in others are not yet clear. If the changes cannot be accommodated within the original budget, consultation will take place with RPS Clouston.

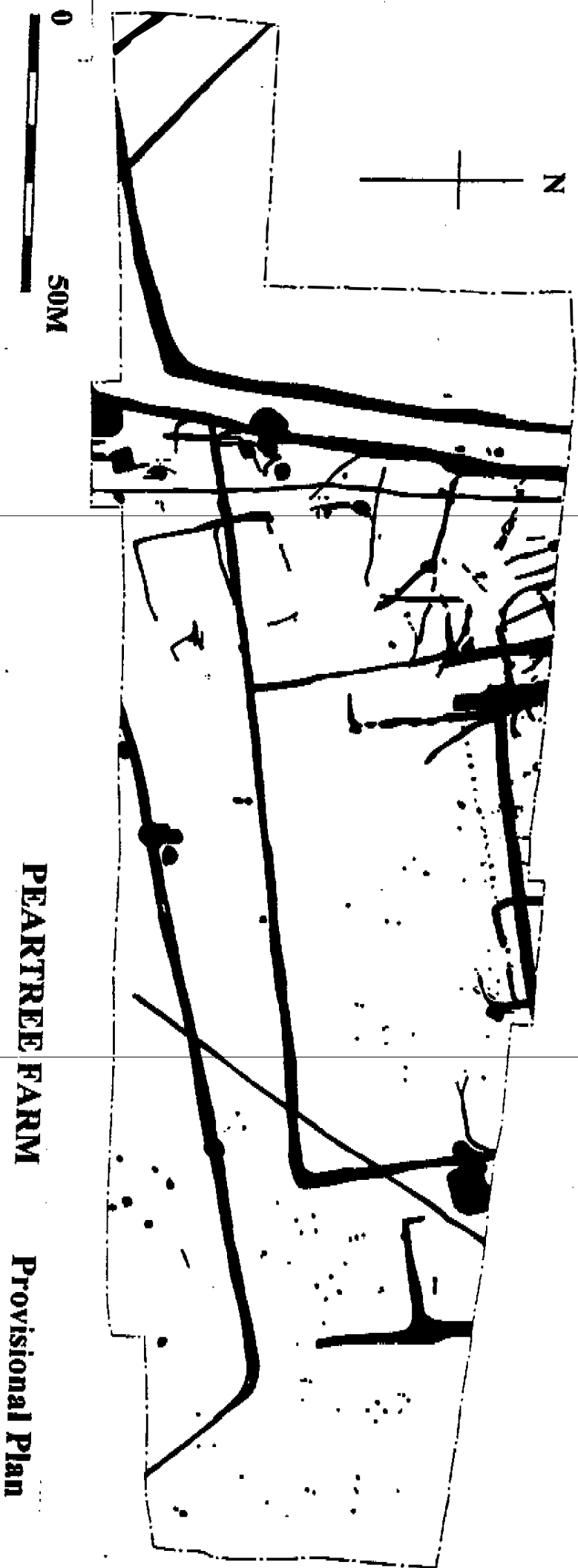
2.1.2 The assessment phase will be the responsibility of the Bedford Southern Bypass Project Officer N Shepherd under the general guidance of M Dawson, Senior Archaeological Field Officer. Supervisory staff for relevant sites are expected to have a major input into the initial assessment work. The draft document includes a number of review points at key stages, which also act as target dates to monitor progress. Progress reports will be given at these points to the Director, Evelyn Baker, and to the Department's Archaeological Consultant Dr Freke of RPS Clouston. Time is left at the back end of the programme for any possible slippage, and for negotiation with RPS Clouston, and with English Heritage at this key decision stage. The assessment is expected to be complete, and decisions taken with regard to the scope of any future full analysis, by the end of this financial year, 31 March 1995. However, it seems certain, even at this stage, that the results will merit analysis and publication, and the finds archive contains many items of museum display quality which will be of important public benefit in due course.

## **2.2 Construction Period Recording**

**2.2.1** Given our revised upward perception of the density and nature of the archaeology in the Ouse Valley, the absolute necessity to ensure an effective watching brief provision during the earthmoving period to ensure essential rapid response, and minimise delays, has been underlined.

**2.2.2** N Shepherd will be managing both this and the assessment phase as Project Officer. It will be essential to have a competent archaeologist on the ground and available to the Resident Engineer at all times. One way forward would be to explore the possibility of recruiting a Resident Archaeologist with the relevant experience in the near future. The outstanding problem then to be resolved is how a stand-by team for rapid response could be maintained.





**PEARTREE FARM**      **Provisional Plan**

### 3 THE SITE REPORTS

#### 3.1 Peartree Farm:

Open-Area (2.27ha).

2 weeks excavation, 2036 contexts.

Excavation has confirmed the assessment of the cropmarks as representing the site of a small Romano-British farmstead. Infield and outfield enclosures were identified and excavated along with part of the settlement focus, the latter continuing to the north beyond the limits of excavation. Earlier phases of activity were represented by prehistoric tree-clearance hollows and an Iron Age landscape boundary, with a possible final phase of activity during the Saxon period (this is very tenuous at present, and could be late Romano British or sub-Romano British).

The site layout remained relatively faithful to that already elucidated from aerial photographs, except for unexpected structural activity within the outfields area. The settlement focus, although identified, has no certain structures thus far identified. Perhaps some of the most interesting aspects of the site will lie in the distribution of ecofacts and artefacts across the site and in particular between infield and outfield areas. The animal bone assemblage and carbonised seed were exceptionally good, and will make a major contribution to our understanding of the local environment and farming practices. Evidence for crop processing may have been recovered (the enigmatic paved feature associated with organic remains), and a good group of fairly complete vessels comprising mixed coarse and fine wares may indicate ritual deposition. This phenomenon can be compared with other Ouse Valley sites of the period.

Although essentially a single period site (Romano British, first to fourth centuries) there are clearly a number of phases of boundary re-alignment and re-use. This means we are still working within an environment of deposit reworking/redeposition with the concomitant problems of residuality and intrusion. The pottery assemblage appears fairly homogenous throughout, with coarse wares difficult to date beyond very broad margins. It remains to be proven whether Peartree Farm continues to be a "single phase" site with little contamination of deposits.

#### 3.2 Octagon farm:

Trenched

4 weeks excavation, 500 contexts.

The project was largely a mitigation exercise involving the minimum ground disturbance necessary for engineering purposes in the vicinity of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments. As such it was a success in as much as none of the major monuments were affected, although a phase of Iron Age settlement post-dating the major monuments was discovered. Elements of the field system visible on air photos and investigated during trial work were identified and excavated, along with scattered evidence for settlement: these were dated to the Iron Age, a useful piece of information for the distribution of activity zones for that period. Beyond that, the sequence and pattern of post-glacial alluviation noted on other Ouse valley sites was recorded and confirmed, and a large number of (?prehistoric) tree-clearance hollows were investigated. Finally, the overlying pattern of medieval furrows was recorded. It is imperative that a close watch is kept on this area during construction.

An outstanding issue to be addressed in the assessment report and Project Design for analysis concerns the full integration of the results of all fieldwork, since the evaluation explored far more of these important monuments. This prehistoric ritual area is of the greatest importance, and it is necessary to get as full an understanding as possible of even the slightest evidence.

### **3.3 Eastcotts:**

Open area (2.8ha)

16 weeks excavation, 3200 contexts.

A number of definite prehistoric features were added to those identified during evaluation. However, no more inhumations were recorded beyond the neolithic burial recorded by Dawson. The major triple boundary ditches, thought to be of possible neolithic date, are probably no older than the Iron Age, with at least one of them remaining open in the Romano British period. They may well have formed a system of land division into which the later Romano British settlement was slotted. The Romano British settlement itself consisted of a series of conjoined rectilinear enclosures ranged east west across the site, reminiscent of a deserted medieval village and similar in form to that excavated by Dawson at Warren Villas near Sandy. Their northern boundaries were a little distance beyond the limits of excavation. Although it is difficult to be certain because of the pattern of alluviation, aerial photographs suggest that the settlement may run down to the Elstow Brook (features of Romano British date recorded in excavations at Harrowden appear to confirm this).

Within the enclosures concentrations of pits and possible structural elements suggest three or more settlement foci. Although these may not be contemporary, and there was a large amount of boundary redefinition and reorganisation over time. A picture emerges of single farmsteads, within a loosely nucleated hamlet or village. Evidence for pottery production, metalworking and crop production/processing was recovered. The kiln was particularly significant in that it may be possible to chart the distribution of its products on other Bypass sites of the period, and it was subjected to archaeomagnetic dating. A useful and unexpected addition to the assemblage was the discovery of waterlogged material. A feature of the site was the high level of organic preservation within the lower fills of pits, and Carbon14 samples were taken from a wooden hurdle which will give further crucial independent dating. Tucked behind a hurdle was a unique discovery, a pair of elaborately constructed leather shoes, which will make a superb display item. One interesting observation, especially in the light of the Peartree "ritual deposit", was the continued deposition over time of complete vessels into re-cuts of a major boundary. A number of scattered and isolated inhumations of Romano British date were also recorded.

### **3.4 Harrowden:**

Trenched

5 weeks excavation, 450 contexts

Primarily initiated to investigate the origins and later form of the medieval village, Harrowden was noteworthy for the identification of largely Romano British material to the north on both sides of the A600. This presumably represented a continuation of the Eastcotts settlement, or separate elements within that same landscape. To the south, where one would have expected it given the form of the earthworks, medieval material was encountered. A dissected bank, probably a headland, marked the northern boundary of the

settlement, with ridge and furrow observed beyond it. To the south of the bank, a network of rectilinear enclosures was recorded, presumably marking the position of crofts or internal divisions within them. Post-hole alignments were seen, but not enough was visible to postulate the site of buildings. On the western side of the A600 a part of the medieval village appears to have been turned over to cultivation and then subsequently sealed by a substantial cobbled trackway. The trackway was very well made, reminiscent of the high quality road excavated running through the middle of medieval Stratton near Biggleswade. A highly provisional overall date for the medieval material covers the period from the 11th to 15th centuries; no recognisably earlier material was recovered, and there was no confirmation of the Saxon origins of the settlement.

### **3.5 Bunyans Farm:**

Trenched

2 weeks excavation, 124 contexts.

Scattered evidence of tree-throw holes, presumably evidence of prehistoric tree clearance, were recorded. A possible Bronze Age hearth was excavated, giving the tantalising prospect of surviving settlement evidence nearby. Ditches of Romano British date were associated with the crop-mark complex to the north, although some of the features predicted from aerial photographs did not materialise when the area was stripped to find them.

### **3.6 Manor farm:**

Trenched

2 weeks excavation, 247 contexts.

Prehistoric tree clearance hollows were found as above, but there was also scattered evidence for settlement from the Iron Age, Romano British, middle Saxon and into the medieval period. Although relatively slight, this and the Bunyan's Farm evidence, will help to flesh out the pattern of settlement shift and change. Savings were channelled into more fruitful projects.

### **3.7 Village farm:**

Open-area (1.75ha)

11 weeks excavation, 2000+ contexts

This settlement proved to be more extensive and far more dense and complex than expected, and further resources needed to be made available. Both the expected ring-ditches were identified as lying partly within the line of the road corridor rather than without it. The first was approximately 15m in diameter, the second 35m. Both had been heavily truncated with no surviving evidence for a mound/bank or any internal features; the second ring had been heavily disturbed by root action and burrowing. Within their primary fills no direct dating evidence was recovered other than waste flakes, confirming a prehistoric date for construction.

The upper fills of the ring ditches, by contrast, contained large amounts of bone and pot of Iron Age date. This material was clearly accumulating at the same as a pit/post alignment was constructed across the site. It is likely that little direct settlement evidence of Iron Age date exists to the west, beyond the ring-ditch

fills and the pit alignment. An area to explore is the possibility that both relate to a continued ritual use of the site, focused on the still visible ring-ditches.

In the same area as the pit alignment, and rather confusingly tangled up with it, was significant settlement evidence of early Anglo Saxon date comprising at least two sunken floored buildings and a number of post built structures. These may potentially be described as aisled halls, and will be a significant contribution to the nation's relatively small stock of status buildings of this date.

The great mass of features of this date were isolated pits and post-holes, although an as yet undated ditch system to the north west may prove to be contemporary and thus provide a boundary to the settlement.

Running across the entire site is a system of medieval ditches, probably marking strip fields. The system became more complex to the east where isolated pits and post holes belonging to the Saxo-Norman period through to the 15th or 16th centuries were encountered.

In summary a prehistoric ritual focus probably continued to be respected into the Iron Age. Habitative settlement just to the east, implying the ring-ditches may have been still visible, was established in the early Saxon period, with a possible hiatus and re-establishment of occupation/activity in the Saxo-Norman period, and continuing into the 15th or 16th centuries. Should this interpretation hold good, it clearly has implications for the rest of the project sites, and holds out the possibility of forming possible predictive models for locating the elusive Dark Ages, alongside other indicators such as territorial/parish boundaries.

### **3.8 Bumpy Lane:**

Open-area (1.1ha)

4 weeks excavation, 500 contexts

Two separate areas were excavated. In Area 1 the position of the ring-ditch and its classification as a henge type monument were confirmed. A causewayed entrance was visible to the SW and the ditch had clearly been re-cut; no internal features were seen and no direct dating evidence was recovered. Surrounding the ditch, which was 75m diameter, were a number of isolated features, some containing pottery of neolithic type; in one case a large collection of struck flakes was located, suggesting tool making on site. Although suggestive of a near perfect circle in that southern part of the ring exposed, a geophysical survey to the north clearly shows the monument to be more irregular, possibly elliptical in form. The ring was cut on its eastern edge by an undated ditch, part of a more extensive rectilinear system. This ditch was in turn cut by a pit alignment of Iron Age date, which may have continued across the silted up ditch of the ring. Other features of possible Iron Age date were also recorded.

Within Area 2 to the east, only isolated, mainly undated features, were recovered, although the large neolithic pit identified within the trial trenches was further investigated. At the far eastern edge of Area 2 ditches of Romano British date appear to mark the westernmost extent of activity recorded at Eastcotts and Harrowden.

#### **4 Continuity of Project Expertise**

**4.1** It will be essential to integrate any further discoveries made at this construction stage with the substantive results of the pre-construction project. This type of integration will also be essential for ancillary work on borrow pits, compounds, additional landscaping, the Norse Road Link and so on, being regarded as **part and parcel of the Bedford Southern Bypass (Ouse Valley) Project**. While this is the sensible approach, there is still uncertainty in our minds as to the status of the Bedford Bypass project in the eyes of the Department.

**4.2** To count Norse Road as a separate project, and thereby put the remainder of the project within its locus out to Competitive Tender would hold no real advantages for the Department. It must be appreciated that BCCAS considers that it is a cost effective organisation, and would expect to win such a tender on quality and price, judging by previous experience. Possible fragmentation of the Bedford Bypass project makes extremely bad academic and practical sense. It would almost certainly involve expensive reworking of essential databases and archives in order to make them acceptable to the recipient museum, and the situation could be compounded by loss of information/ quality/partial or misleading understanding of previous Bypass results by previously uninvolved units.

**4.3** Proper integration can only be achieved by project continuity by BCCAS as the preferred provider, contributing (for no extra cost) its accumulated wealth of knowledge on other Ouse Valley sites, and its day to day running of the databases. The Department's interests must be safeguarded by RPS Clouston and English Heritage as appropriate, ensuring that the proposals are adequate and well budgeted.

EMB/NS 30 June 1994