

**CONSERVATION &
ARCHAEOLOGY SECTION**
COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT



ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT MASKELL'S QUARRY,
HARLINGTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction.
- 2 Background
- 3 Methodology.
- 4 Results of the fieldwork 1991/1992.
- 5 Discussion.
- 6 Recommendations.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In the summer of 1991 the remains of a human cremation found on a spoilheap, and a second found in situ, within Maskell's quarry at Harlington, Bedfordshire led to a rescue excavation lasting 3 days. During the excavation a further five cremations were found below topsoil close to the first discoveries. The possibility of further burials being damaged or disturbed as well as the probable survival of other archaeological remains, were key factors in formulating a three week long assessment excavation in April 1992. This report sets out the findings of the excavations, places them within the wider context of the ancient landscape of Harlington, and puts forward a proposal for further recording in advance of quarrying.

2 BACKGROUND

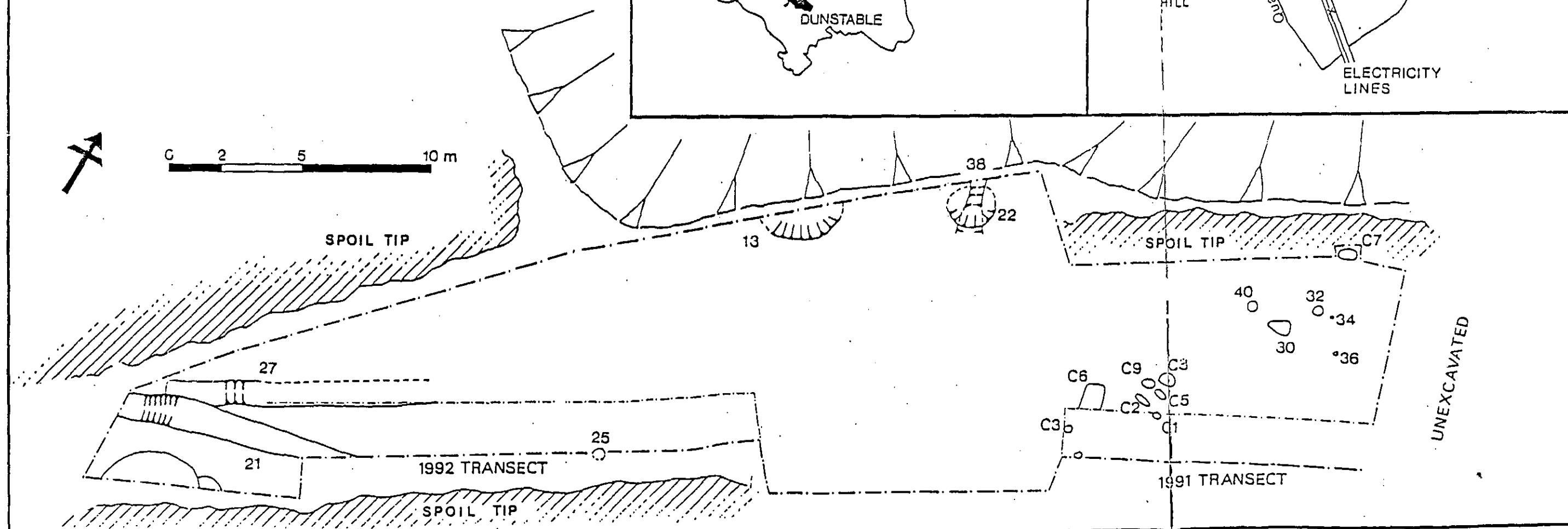
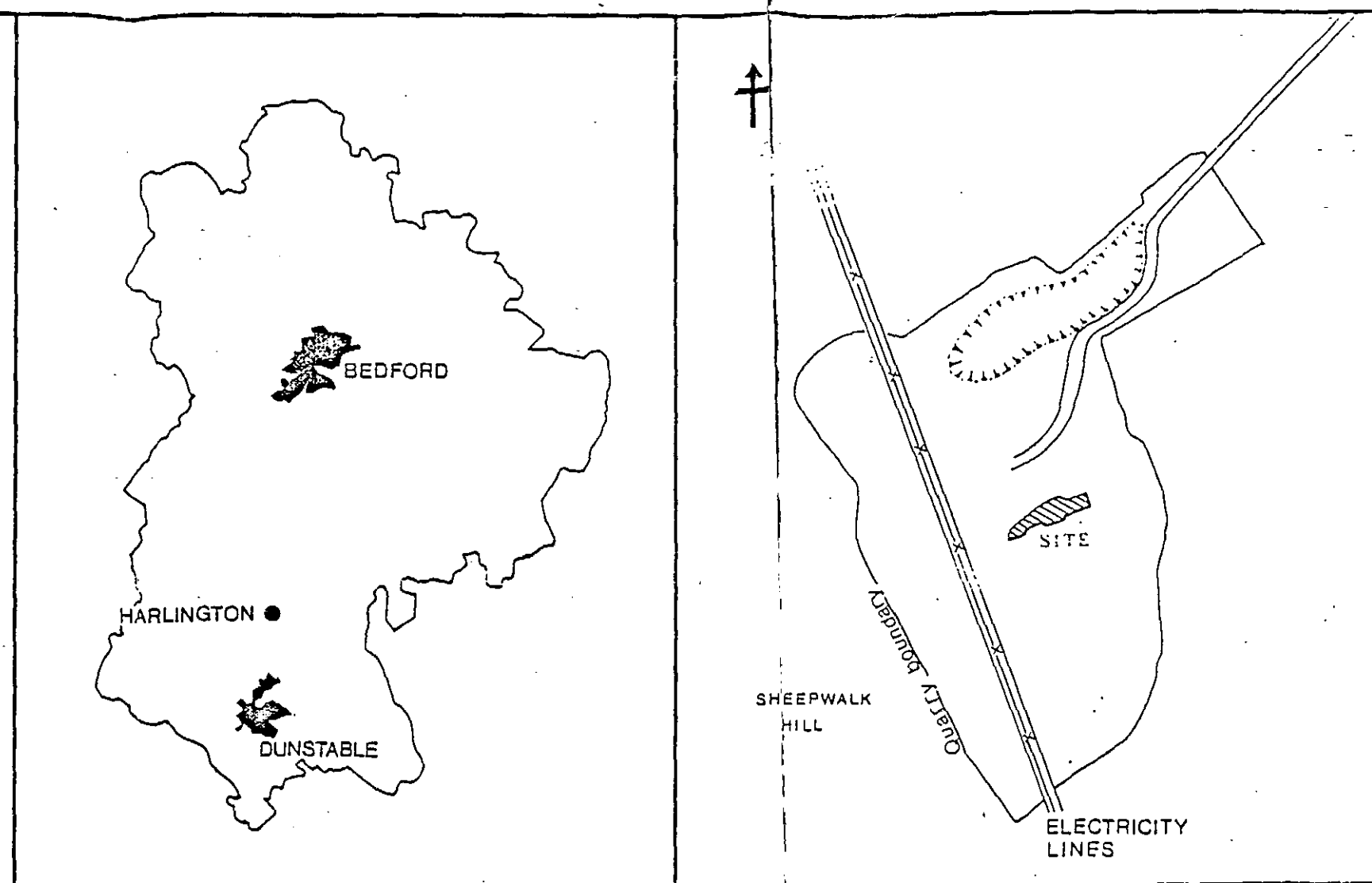
- 2.1** Maskell's Quarry is located west of the village of Harlington, between the Great Northern railway line and the eastern slopes of Sheepwalk Hill. The site occupies a sand hill above the gravel terrace east of the Flit Valley between the higher areas of decalcified boulder clays at Harlington and Sheepwalk Hill.
- 2.2** Survey of the Bedfordshire County Council's Sites' Monuments and Building Record (SMBR) shows that the area has produced archaeological material from the 19th century onwards. These finds include Anglo Saxon burials and cremations with associated grave goods found above the 'concrete' floor of a substantial Roman building on Sheepwalk Hill, and a Roman kiln site at Foxborough Hill or Fox Burrow, situated approximately where Toddington Service Station is now. Some finds went to the museums at Luton and St Albans, but others have been lost over the last 150 years.
- 2.3** Since April 1990, Stephen Castle (British Museum & local archaeologist) and other interested local people from Harlington have been collecting material from the spoilheaps and watching the progress of quarrying. They have found artefacts ranging from the Mesolithic through to the medieval period, (12th to 14th) centuries. It was through the interest of this local group that the first cremations were discovered.
- 2.4** Assessment and rescue excavations were proposed by Bedfordshire County Council in agreement with J Murphy & Sons Limited and with the co-operation of Mr G H Maskell, the quarry operator. The County Council is grateful for their help in this matter.
- 2.5** An exhumation licence was issued to the Bedfordshire Archaeology Service by the Home Office and exploratory work was undertaken at the County Council's expense to clear the cremations that were visible on the surface and at risk in 1991; five cremations were found.
- 2.6** In April 1992 an evaluation commissioned by J Murphy & Sons Ltd was carried out by Bedfordshire County Council's Archaeology Service. This was primarily to locate the extent of the cemetery, record and excavate any visible cremations under the conditions set down by the Home Office Licence for the Removal of Human Remains, and to record the extent and quality of surviving archaeological features possibly associated with a larger settlement.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 This report sets out the results of the two phases of assessment and evaluation of the archaeological remains at Harlington carried out in 1991 and 1992.
- 3.2 Two transects totalling 60m in length and 2m in width were excavated, and archaeological features excavated and recorded. A further area of 40m x 10m was cleaned of a colluvial or hill-wash deposit to clarify the extent of archaeological survival (Fig 1).
- 3.3 The transects were stripped using a 360° Hymac mechanical excavator with a ditching blade. This was then followed by hand cleaning and recording of all visible features. To gauge the extent of the cremations, the 1991 transect was extended as far north as the spoil heap. In 1992 a second transect, on the same alignment as the previous year, was excavated further westwards to the top of the slope after the removal of a spoil heap. In addition in 1992, the area to the north alongside the 1991 transect was stripped of remaining spoil to reveal a thick deposit of colluvial soils which masked underlying features. The transects were located on the national grid using the 1:2500 series OS map.
- 3.4 The quality of preservation across the site was generally good with features surviving below the colluvial deposits. The cremation vessels were broken either due to plough damage or quarry plant.
- 3.5 Each cremation pit was half sectioned vertically and drawn at 1:5. The remaining half was excavated and the horizontal aspect drawn at 1:5 and 1:10. The soil content from every cremation pit was kept and wet sieved for bone, pottery and any other finds. Where 40% or more of each cremation vessel was recovered, half of the contents were excavated out in 2 cms spits. The vertical section left was drawn and the distribution of cremated bone, pottery fragments, charcoal and stones were plotted. The remaining half was then excavated. Individual bones are identified and measured to compare total weight found with total weight expected from a complete individual.

HARLINGTON QUARRY

1991 - 1992



4 RESULTS OF FIELDWORK 1991/1992.

4.1 Two periods of occupation were discovered during the assessment. The following descriptions are divided into cremations, other Roman features and later, Anglo-Saxon, aspects. For the purposes of this report, where a number has been pre-fixed by "F" this indicates feature such as a ditch or post hole. Where a number has been pre-fixed by "L", this indicates a general layer such as topsoil. The letter "C" denotes a cremation.

4.2 The Roman cemetery.

All the cremations found were cut into the sandy silt subsoil, and had been sealed by a layer of colluvial soils brought onto the site by ploughing. This horizon had been badly disturbed during the testing of quarry machinery, and when moving spoil heaps.

Cremation 1 This was found at the northern edge of the transect, 3m from the western end. It consisted of the remains of a fragmented pottery vessel containing cremated bone fragments within a shallow pit (F3).

Cremation 2 Situated 1m west of C1, this consisted of the base of a pottery vessel with some fragments of cremated bone scattered around it in a shallow hollow.

Cremation 3 This was found at the west end of the transect and consisted of a fragmentary pottery vessel with a few cremated bone fragments.

Cremation 4 This cremation had a dense area of cremated bone around three fragmented pottery vessels in a shallow pit, it was found 0.5m north of C2.

Cremation 5 This consisted of a few sherds of pottery with some fragments of cremated bone scattered around; it was found 0.5m east of C4 and C2 within pit (F11).

Cremation 6 This was found along the north side of the 1991 transect, 0.25m from the west end, and 1.2m west of C2. The cremation pit was rectangular in shape and approximately 0.8m across. It contained four

pottery vessels with a dense heap of cremated bone alongside them to the west. A copper alloy brooch was also found with this group.

Cremation 7 This cremation was found close to the northern edge of the excavation, 8m north east of C8. It consisted of three pottery vessels containing cremated bone within the layer of colluvium.

Cremation 8 The pit containing C8 was 0.7m x 0.5m in diameter and located 0.75m north of C5. It contained two pottery vessels both with cremated bone inside.

4.3 Roman structural remains.

4.3.1 At the western end of the site, near the top of the slope, two ditches were found branching towards the north east and the south east. The later ditch (F21) truncated ditch (F27) and contained large quantities of broken cooking pots, animal bones, charcoal and large blocks of fired clay. The fired clay probably came from an oven. To the south of the ditches and extending under the spoilheap were further remains of refuse pits. All the features were cut into the subsoil and sealed by colluvium.

4.3.2 The earlier ditch, (F27) had gently sloping sides down to a concave base, and measured between 0.9m to 1m wide and 0.21m deep. It ran for approximately 24m on a north east/south west alignment with the terminal to the west. It was filled with a mid orange brown clay sand, few stones and charcoal flecks. The later ditch, (F21), lay to the south of (F27) and ran from north west to south east. It measured between 1m-1.2m wide, 0.42m deep and ran for at least 6m. Its full extent was masked by quarry spoilheaps at both ends. The ditch had steep sloping sides and a narrow concave base, it was filled with a red grey brown sandy silt below, a mid grey brown clay silt. The latter contained large quantities of charcoal, animal bone, flint, broken cooking pots and large blocks of fired clay.

4.3.3 To the south of ditch (F21), lay several possible pits which remained unexcavated. These extended beneath the spoilheap and seem to indicate that archaeological features continue to the south. These may contain cremations.

4.3.4 A further ditch (F38) lay between the ditches to the west and the cremation cemetery. This ran north south and had been truncated by the quarry to the north of the site. It measured between 0.5-0.9m across with a depth of 0.45m

and ran for at least 1.7m to the south. It had steep sloping sides with a narrow bottom and was filled with a grey brown sandy silt.

4.3.5 Along the south edge of the 1992 transect, 6m from the east end was located a post hole, (F25). This measured 0.35m in diameter 0.14m deep, with steep sides and a concave base. It was filled with, an orange brown sandy loam.

4.3.6 The remaining postholes lay towards the east end of the site with (F40), lying 4m to the north east of C44. F40 was circular in plan, with curving sides and a concave base. It measured 0.45m across, 0.21m deep and was filled with (L41), an orange brown sand. Post hole (F30) lay 0.75m to the east of (F40) and was oval in plan, measuring 0.75 x 0.48m across and 0.25m deep. It had sloping sides and concave base and was filled with (L31), a mid brown clay sand. Post hole (F32) lay 1m to the north east of (F40) and was circular in plan with steep sloping sides and a concave base. It measured 0.26m across, 0.13m deep and was filled with (L33), a mid grey brown sandy clay.

4.3.7 Close by were two stake holes; stakehole (F34) was located 0.4m east of post hole (F32) with stake hole (F36) 1.4m to the south. They were filled with grey sandy clay.

4.4 The Anglo-Saxon period

4.4.1 The evidence for activity in the Saxon period came from two pits damaged by quarry activity. They probably belong to the same period.

4.4.2 Pit (F22) was directly over ditch (F38) and was roughly circular in plan. It measured 1.6m across, 0.28m deep and was filled with (L23), a mid brown sandy silt. East of this, 3.8m away, lay pit (F13). This was also probably roughly circular in plan and measured 2.8m across, and between 0.05-0.25m deep. Against the west side had been placed a pottery vessel with a knife blade and whetstone against the opposite side. The fill, (L14), consisted of a mid grey brown sandy silt containing charcoal flecks and a coin, probably Roman. Both pits cut through the colluvium (L15).

4.5 Artefact remains.

4.5.1 For the purposes of this assessment report, the artefacts have been quantified only. It will be more cost effective to combine analysis of the whole assemblage if there should be more work.

4.5.2 The total finds assemblage:

- Ceramic finds including pottery, cremation urns, accessory vessels, tile and fired clay 29,028g.
- The human bone which includes unsorted samples totals 4,334g.
- Animal bone totals 2,351g, flint 185g and nails 47.
- Small finds 7
- Soil samples 22.

4.6 Summary.

4.6.1 A total of eight Roman cremations were located in situ, with one other discovered on the eastern quarry spoilheap before the start of the fieldwork. Each cremation had between two and four pottery vessels associated with it.

4.6.2 Evidence of possible Roman structures was found in the form of post holes and stakeholes with ditches containing domestic rubbish. Further pits were located south of the ditches.

4.6.3 Later Saxon pits were found close to the north edge of the site and are dated from associated finds.

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1** The archaeological remains at Maskell's Quarry are part of an extensive relict landscape in which evidence of settlement from the late Iron Age onwards survives.
- 5.2** In the Iron Age the Greensand Ridge afforded well placed vantage points for the siting of hilltop fortifications such as those at Sandy, Sharpenhoe and Houghton Regis. By the 1st century AD and the Roman conquest, extensive woodland clearance had probably taken place and settlements were spreading from the lighter soils of the river valleys to some of the heavier clay soils. In the Roman period these settlements, usually villages, often had small scale industries such as metal working and pottery kilns associated with them. They often included small cemeteries.
- 5.3** Evidence of other settlements, such as villas, has been found on the south face of Sheepwalk Hill, at Chalton, Sundon and Flitton, and indicates the variety of settlement in the region in the Roman period.
- 5.4** There is evidence of small scale industry, such as pottery and bronze working on the site of Toddington service station, once a Tumulus called Fox Burrow or Foxborough, and at Fancott and Ruxox further north.
- 5.5** Markets were established by Rome in the surrounding small towns such as Dunstable, identified through a reference in the Antonine Itinerary, to a place called Durocobrivis, midway between Verulamium (St. Albans) and Magiovinium (Bow Brickhill).
- 5.6** The evidence found at Harlington suggests that the cremation cemetery and the few structural features were probably part of a larger cemetery which was once close to an Iron Age settlement which survived into the Roman period. The evidence for the settlement has been destroyed by quarrying from 1960 onwards, but sufficient pottery has been recovered by Stephen Castle from old quarry spoil heaps to suggest a once sizeable village.
- 5.7** The importance of the Roman cemetery is that it not only contains human remains which require scientific excavation, but that such cemeteries are rare. The archaeological value lies in that the burials are accompanied by Samian vessels, a high quality imported Roman pottery often associated with early Iron Age settlements of high status. The number of pots accompanying the burials represent offerings of food to help the deceased on their journey through the

underworld. The pots, often a platter, bowl and dish may reflect the normal place setting at a 1st century table, transmitted to the grave. It is likely that more cremations may be found to the east and south of the 1992 excavation with further evidence for settlement

- 5.8 Of equal importance is the possibility of further Saxon remains. Evidence of Saxon settlement in the county in the immediately post Roman period is rare and limited to burials and occasional finds of pottery or jewellery such as brooches and necklaces. The finds at the Quarry site are additional evidence for the slow process of Saxon settlement in Bedfordshire in the 5th to 7th centuries.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 On archaeological grounds there are two alternatives for dealing with the remains at Harlington.

- **Preservation of the archaeological deposits including the human remains in situ.**

This course of action has several disadvantages. It sterilises an area of minerals and restricts access to some areas of the quarry.

- **Complete archaeological excavation under the conditions of the Home Office Licence**

This course of action enables all minerals to be extracted and effectively clears the present quarry area of archaeology.

6.2 In assessing these two alternatives several factors are important.

- The damaged state of the human burials so far recovered.
- The exposed position of the site on a tongue of land between two deep areas of excavation which has left the area vulnerable to further erosion and inevitable loss of archaeological deposits and information
- The practical difficulties of quarrying around this area.

The normal presumption that wherever possible archaeological remains should be preserved in situ has been eroded in the case of Harlington. The vulnerability of the remains, their already damaged condition and the limited area remaining lead us to recommend full archaeological clearance. This will enable quarrying to go ahead in the normal way.

7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CLEARANCE

7.1 This is normally carried out in two stages: **1 Fieldwork, 2 Analysis & Publication**

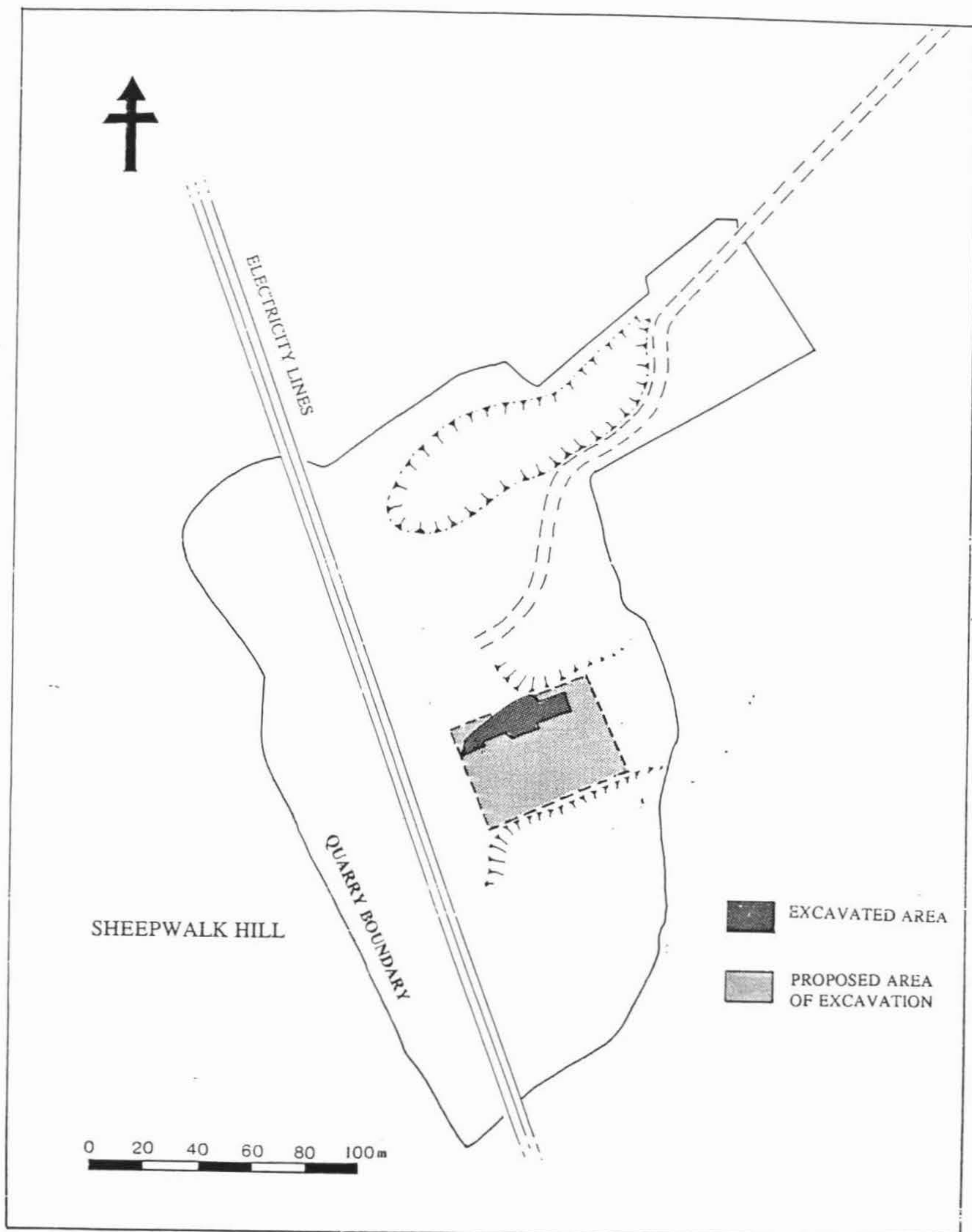
7.2 Fieldwork

The area of excavation comprises 40m x 40m in the SE area of the quarry. As parts of the site remain masked by spoilheaps to the south and north west, the area of proposed excavation will first be cleared of spoilheaps and the disturbed soil horizon below machined away to avoid unnecessary manual work. All archaeological features will then be excavated and recorded according to standard Bedfordshire Archaeology Service practice in order to be able to feed into the County wide database, and in ease of accessioning to Luton Museum.

The summary of costs which follows is based on maximum estimates derived from operating costs alone. The Bedfordshire Archaeology Service operates on a cost recovery basis; if costs are less than expected then this is reflected in the charges.

It is estimated that the work would take 25 working days (5 weeks) and the work could start almost immediately

Summary of Costs.	£
Senior Archaeological field officer	2650
Assistant Field Officer	2150
Finds Assistant	1950
Site Technicians	5210
Ceramics Officer	460
Finds Officer	650
Transport	900
Office accommodation/ equipment costs	350
Site recording materials & conservation	1525
Overheads & admin	1900
Total	17745



Outline plan showing area of proposed archaeological clearance.

7.3 Analysis & Publication

7.3.1 The second stage of archaeological work is post excavation analysis.

This is work which leads to publication of the results, storage and display in local museums, and the wider dissemination of the results to the general public. It is the Archaeology Service's standard practice to use material from current excavations for educational work at Schools, Colleges and to adult groups.

7.3.2 Recently a document outlining best practice produced by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (The Management of archaeological Projects) has highlighted the difficulties of estimating costs of post excavation work before excavation. Therefore we propose that Stage 2 is assessed and costed once the results of the excavation are known. Generally, however, such costs are usually 50% of the costs of excavation

7.3.4 The final report would take the form established by the Archaeology Service over the past 20 years.

Structural elements, artefacts, human remains and evidence of environmental change are processed into a clear and comprehensive report highlighting the type, nature and date of the site. This will also include discussion of such factors relevant to a cemetery as population, and ritual.

7.3.5 The means to achieve this must be as follows: the site recording would be undertaken using systems compatible with other excavations in the County and which allow easy and clear comparisons to be made across the region. All relevant excavated information would be added and compared to the County wide databases for ceramics and small finds. Environmental evidence would be added to the growing body of evidence for the Fauna and Floral development of the Bedfordshire landscape. Evidence gleaned from human remains is similarly examined not only for pathology but in comparison with other cemeteries in the region. Such comparative information provides the regional context which gives Harlington its wider importance as part of the Roman Empire.

7.3.6 The additional value of locally based systems is that they not only provide the means to process efficiently information from excavations but that the final deposition of the archive with local museums can be achieved in a way that makes the results of excavation easily accessible for public viewing and further research.

7.3.6 The practical processes of post excavation analysis are specified in more detail in the *Archaeology Service's Procedures Manual*, currently undergoing revision.