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FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

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**Excavations at Stoke Lane, Wincanton
Somerset, 1990: Interim Statement**

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By
E.G.Hughes

with contributions by
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by
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the preliminary results of a salvage excavation carried out in advance of the construction of the Wincanton-Zeals A303 improvement at Stoke Lane, Wincanton (NGR ST730 290; Fig. 1). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit under the overall supervision of Somerset County Council between the 11th and the 21st of December 1990.

2.0 THE SITE

The excavation site lay to the east of Wincanton above an east facing slope leading down towards a tributary of the River Cale. The archaeological potential of the area was first indicated during fieldwalking by the South East Somerset Archaeological Society. Numerous prehistoric worked flints and fragments of Romano-British pottery were collected, although subsequent trial trenches by the society proved negative.

The results of the fieldwalking prompted an examination of the area by CRAAGS prior to the construction of the Wincanton by-pass in 1975 (Ellison and Pearson 1981, 191-196). The majority of the artifacts recovered by SESAS came from a dense scatter, approximately 100m across, to the south of the then threatened area. Two trenches (Fig. 1, Trench V and Trench VI) were situated within this area and both produced evidence of Romano-British occupation. Four trenches were excavated within the area threatened by the by-pass. Apart from some evidence for an attempt at iron smelting, the results of these excavations were largely negative, suggesting that the potential settlement was of limited extent within the by-pass corridor.

No prehistoric contexts were identified although a large number of flint and chert

implements and a small quantity of Iron Age sherds were recovered. These were all found in residual contexts.

The current road scheme poses a more serious threat to the potential Romano-British settlement. The line of the new road crosses the area of the main artifact scatter shown in the 1981 Wincanton by-pass report (Fig. 1).

A series of evaluation trenches on the line of the proposed road were excavated by Somerset County Council in November 1990 (McCrone 1990). Two features, a gully and a shallow pit, were recorded and fragments of pottery were recovered together with a quantity of burnt clay. This would tend to confirm the previous evidence for occupation.

3.0 THE EXCAVATION

3.1 Objectives

- i) to confirm the existence of the suggested Romano-British settlement and to attempt to determine its nature, date, economy and function.
- ii) to set the potential settlement within its regional context, particularly in the light of recent research at Shepton Mallet and Ilchester.
- iii) to attempt to clarify the nature of the prehistoric activity in the area, suggested by the material recovered during the Wincanton by-pass project and earlier fieldwalking.

3.2 Method

An area approximately 45 x 10m was investigated within the proposed road corridor (Fig. 1). The location of the trench was designed to coincide with the area of the main artifact scatter shown in the 1981 by-pass report. By the

time the excavation commenced, work was already underway on the construction of the new road and an access trackway for construction machinery had severely reduced the area originally intended for investigation. It was hoped to investigate a strip to the north of this trackway but this was abandoned due to the inability of the construction contractors to make a machine available. It was also intended to centre the area of the excavation on the position of the features recorded during the evaluation. Unfortunately, much of this area had already become heavily disturbed as a result of the road construction and so it was necessary to locate the trench further to the northeast.

The ploughsoil and its associated layers (1000, 1001 and 1002) within the area investigated had already been removed by the construction machinery. In many areas the underlying natural clay and limestone, up to 0.6m below the surface, had become exposed. The surface of this clay and associated deposits were cleaned to facilitate the definition of archaeological features and contexts. These were fully excavated or sectioned and recorded using standard unit pro-forma record cards.

3.3 Results (Fig. 2)

Numerous features were observed cutting the clay within the southwestern third of the trench. The homogeneous nature of the silty clays filling these features made it very difficult to determine the order in which they were cut. However, a tentative sequence is given below. Most of the features contained small quantities of abraded Roman pottery. Fewer features were identified within the northeastern two thirds of the site, although a shortage of time, the non-availability of a machine and deteriorating weather conditions affected the progress of the cleaning operation.

The earliest features in the southwestern part of the site appeared to be a series of shallow linear cuts (F3, F8 and F13). The southernmost of these gullies (F8) was a fairly straight feature with a regular U-shaped profile 0.25m wide and 0.4m deep. The gullies to the north (F3) and to the west (F13) were more irregular both in plan and profile, with maximum widths of 0.55m and

0.5m respectively. Neither were more than 0.3m deep. It is possible that the western gully (F13) represented a continuation of the southernmost feature (F8) (However, several sherds of possible prehistoric pottery recovered from the fill of F8, suggest that this gully might be somewhat earlier). The only suggestion of structural elements associated with these features were two possible post impressions (F20 and F23) alongside the eastern edge of the northern gully (F3). It is possible that the gullies represent bedding trenches for a timber fence, perhaps belonging to a stock enclosure.

The southernmost ends of the southern and northern gullies were truncated by a group of fairly large intercutting pits close to the southeastern limit of the excavation (F10, F11 and F21). All were filled with a similar compact, dark yellow-brown silty clay (1017, 1024, 1009 and 1028). Several fragments of heavily burnt limestone were recorded within some of the pit fills. One of these pits (F10) was sub-rectangular with steep, regular sides and a flattish bottom. It measured 1.6m by 1.3m in plan and was 0.8m deep. The remaining pits were not as fully excavated but appeared to be less regular in plan and profile. Two of the pits (F10 and F11) were cut into the top of the limestone bedrock. A similar pit to the west (F7), isolated from the main group, was half sectioned. This measured 1.4m across and 0.6m deep and contained a similar compact silty clay fill (1010 and 1026) with a layer of burnt stone (1025). Again, this pit clearly cut the southernmost gully (F8/F13). An irregular feature to the west, which may have been the truncated remains of another pit (F9), also appeared to cut this gully.

The main group of pits (F10 etc.) appeared to be cut by a linear feature orientated northeast-southwest (F1). The precise nature of the relationship between these features was uncertain due to the similarity in their silty clay fills. Three sections were excavated through the linear feature, which had a maximum width of 1.7m and depth of 1.0m. A possible cleaning slot along the bottom of the feature (0.3m wide and 0.4m deep) suggested that it may have been used for drainage.

Several smaller features were also recorded within the southwestern end of the trench. The possible drainage gully (F1) was cut by two small features (F2 and F4) which, along with a shallow scoop filled with burnt stone (F6), may have been heavily truncated pits

Fewer features were identified in the northeastern end of the trench. The most significant was a short "ditch-like" cut (F19) 6.3m long, 1.4m wide and 1.4m deep. Only the southwestern end was fully excavated. This had a "U"-shaped profile and contained a compact yellow-brown silty clay fill with traces of iron staining (1034). An apparent recut (F18) had a "V"-shaped profile and was filled by a slightly darker silty clay fill (1033). The fill contained numerous small fragments of very coarse, thick-walled prehistoric pottery together with several flint flakes and small tools. Associated with the southwest end of this feature was an area of compact small stones and sandy clay (1020).

Overlying all of these features was a spread of dark yellow-brown silty clay and sand (1002) containing numerous fragments of extremely abraded Roman pottery. In many cases this had slumped into the underlying features but was nowhere more than 0.15m thick. This layer was in turn overlain by a build up of a slightly lighter silty clay up to 0.2m thick (1001). The uppermost

deposit comprised 0.2 to 0.3m of ploughsoil (1000).

The most recent activity was represented by two machine trenches 2.5m long and 0.8m wide which are thought to be the result of preliminary works associated with the present road construction. Another area of disturbance was recorded close to the northwestern limit of the excavation and appeared to correspond to the location of one of the trenches (Trench VI) excavated by CRAAGS in 1975.

4.0 THE FINDS

The Pottery (Preliminary assessment)
by Nicola Trafford

Apart from a single sherd of Nene Valley ware, all of the pottery identified was coarseware – either late prehistoric or Romano-British. Following a preliminary examination, the Romano-British coarseware was divided into six identifiable fabric types: Savernake, black-burnished, Severn, coarse sandy grey ware, fine sandy grey ware, and sandy oxidised ware. The pottery from Stoke Lane was poor in quality, much of it being heavily abraded and fragmentary. A fuller analysis will be attempted following the completion of the archaeological work associated with the road construction.

Wincanton Romano-British Pottery					
Context	Forms	Type	No Sherds	Min No Vessels	Comment
1002		Savernake	1	1	
1002		Severn	4	2	Heavily abraded
1002	Jars	Black-burnished	20	3	Heavily abraded
1002	Jar/bowl	Coarse sandy	12	1	
1002	Jar/bowl/flagon	Fine Sandy	37	4	Very small pieces
1002		Sandy oxidised	3	2	Heavily abraded
1003 F1		Coarse Sandy	1	1	
1003 F1		Severn	1	1	
1003 F1		Black-burnished	1	1	
1004 F3		Prehistoric	4	1	
1004 F3		Coarse Sandy	1	1	
1004 F3	Bowl	Black-burnished	10	2	
1004 F3		Fine Sandy	5	2	

(continued over)

Wincanton Romano-British Pottery (cont.)

Context	Forms	Type	No Sherds	Min No Vessels	Comment
1007 F6		Fine Sandy	2	1	
1008	Jar	Black-burnished	1	1	
1009 F21		Savernake	2	1	
1009 F21		Prehistoric	3	1	
1009 F21		Black-burnished	10	1	
1009 F21		Coarse Sandy	2	1	
1009 F21		Fine Sandy	8	2	
1011 F8		Black-burnished	1	1	
1011 F8		Fine Sandy	2	1	Badly abraded
1011 F8		Prehistoric	21	1	
1012		Severn	1	1	Abraded
1014		Nene Valley	1	1	
1014		Fine Sandy	1	1	
1015 F1		Prehistoric	1	1	
1016 F2		Black-burnished	1	1	Heavily abraded
1016 F2		Fine Sandy	1	1	
1017 F1		Savernake	2	1	
1017 F1	Bowl	Black-burnished	2	1	Badly abraded
1017 F1		Fine Sandy	5	1	Several crumbs
1017 F1		Coarse Sandy	3	1	
1018		Severn	2	1	Abraded
1018		Fine Sandy	1	1	Small pieces
1021 F14		Black-burnished	2	1	
1021 F14		Prehistoric	2	1	Heavily abraded
1021 F14		Fine Sandy	1	1	Heavily abraded
1023 F9		Coarse Sandy	2	1	
1023 F9		Fine Sandy	1	1	
1024 F24		Fine Sandy	2	1	
1024 F24		Black-burnished	1	1	
1024 F24		Coarse Sandy	1	1	
1026 F7		Prehistoric	5	1	
1026 F7		Fine Sandy	4	1	Badly abraded
1026 F7		Black-burnished	3	1	Heavily abraded
1028 F15		Fine Sandy	1	1	
1032 F17		Fine Sandy	1	1	Heavily abraded
1033 F18		Prehistoric	79	1	

The grey wares formed the largest Romano-British fabric group. Two types were distinguishable, a coarser and a finer sandy ware. They formed 57.5% of the Romano-British assemblage, with the fine sandy ware comprising 44% and the coarser ware 13.5%. Although their

exact origins are unknown they were probably manufactured locally. Because of the heavy abrasion it is possible that some black-burnished ware was included with the grey wares. Dating was not possible.

Black-burnished ware comprised 32% of the Romano-British assemblage. It was generally too abraded and fragmentary to be closely dated, although two identifiable jar rims could be mid-second century. The Wareham—region of Dorset is the likely origin of this ware (Williams 1977).

The Savernake pottery, which was being produced in the Savernake forest area of Wiltshire from the mid-first to second century A.D. (Swan 1975), may be of a similar date.

Severn Valley ware was first manufactured in the mid-first century A.D. and continued to be produced into the fourth century. However, firm dating of the sherds from Stoke Lane was not possible due to their poor condition. The nearest known kiln producing this fabric type is Shepton Mallet, although there were many centres of production round the Severn Valley area proper which could have supplied Stoke Lane (P.V. Webster 1976).

Two crucible fragments were also identified, one of which had traces of a copper alloy deposit. These might indicate non-ferrous metal working on the site. Numerous fragments of burnt orange-grey fired clay were recovered from several of the pits. They possibly represent debris from hearths.

All the sherds identified as late prehistoric were coarse-tempered, undecorated body fragments and are probably of Iron Age date.

The Flintwork

by Lynne Bevan

A total of 11 struck flakes and one identifiable tool were recovered.

- 1002 – 4 flakes; 2 light grey and 2 burnt
- 1003 (F) – 1 yellow-grey struck flake
- 1004 (F1) – 1 light grey flake
- 1017 (F) – 2 flakes; 1 light grey and 1 patinated
- 1033 (F18) – 3 dark grey flakes; 1 patinated
1 light grey, bifacially-worked tool.
Possibly a Neolithic type scraper
abandoned before completion.

5.0 DISCUSSION

A preliminary assessment of the finds together with the apparent relationships observed during the excavation suggests the following sequence.

Period 1 – Iron Age: represented by the short ditch (F19), its recut (F18) and the associated compact surface (1021). Unfortunately, the isolated nature of this feature makes it impossible to determine the context or nature of any further Iron Age occupation evidence. It is hoped that subsequent monitoring of the road construction works in the area to the north and west may provide further evidence for this phase of activity. The prehistoric material recovered from the linear gully (F8) suggests that this might also date to this period of activity. Several sherds of similar prehistoric pottery fabrics were recovered from Romano-British features. The presence of flintwork, including a possible Neolithic tool, suggests the presence of earlier prehistoric activity in the area.

Period 2 – Romano-British (A): represented by the narrow linear gullies (F3, and F13 and possibly F24 and F8). It is proposed that these represent the shallow trenches for light fences forming part of an enclosure, possibly for controlling livestock.

Period 3 – Romano-British (B): The gullies appear to have been cut by a number of steep-sided pits (including F7, F10, F11 and F21). Within the backfill of several of these pits were numerous heavily burnt limestone and clay fragments suggesting the presence of industrial activity in the vicinity. This may be related to the small-scale iron smelting suggested during the investigation by CRAAGS in 1975 (Ellison and Pearson 1981, 193)

Period 4 – Romano-British (C): represented by the linear drainage gully (F1), presumably designed to carry surface water away from the area of occupation downslope to the southeast. No definite structural features were identified for this or any other period of the sites' existence. It is unfortunate that it was not possible to investigate further the area of the gully recorded within the evaluation trench to the southwest of the excavation. The substantial quantity of pottery from within this gully suggests that the centre of the occupation may have been in this vicinity.

Period 5 – Late Roman–Post Roman: Development of buried ploughsoil (1002) containing numerous fragments of abraded Roman pottery.

Period 6 – Medieval: Build up of silty clay (1001) behind a possible field lynchet suggested by the sharp break in slope in the field to the southeast

Period 7 – Recent: Ploughsoil (1000) and recent disturbance caused by previous excavations and machine trenches prior to road construction.

An archive assessment and post excavation research design will be prepared following the completion of all on-site archaeological work associated with the new road. In the meantime the site archive and finds will be retained by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was directed by Gwilym Hughes with the assistance of Charlie and Nancy Holinrake, Dick Broomhead, Dave Etheridge, Martin Lightfoot, Karen Walford and Nicola Trafford. The project was monitored by Peter Leach who also edited this report. The illustrations were drawn by the author and the report was produced by Liz Hooper. Many thanks to Richard Carter (Site Engineer, MRM Partners) and Peter McCrone (Assistant Archaeologist, Somerset County Council Planning Department) for their assistance.

Gwilym Hughes

January 1991

7.0 REFERENCES

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WINCANTON STOKE LANE 1990

Location of Excavation

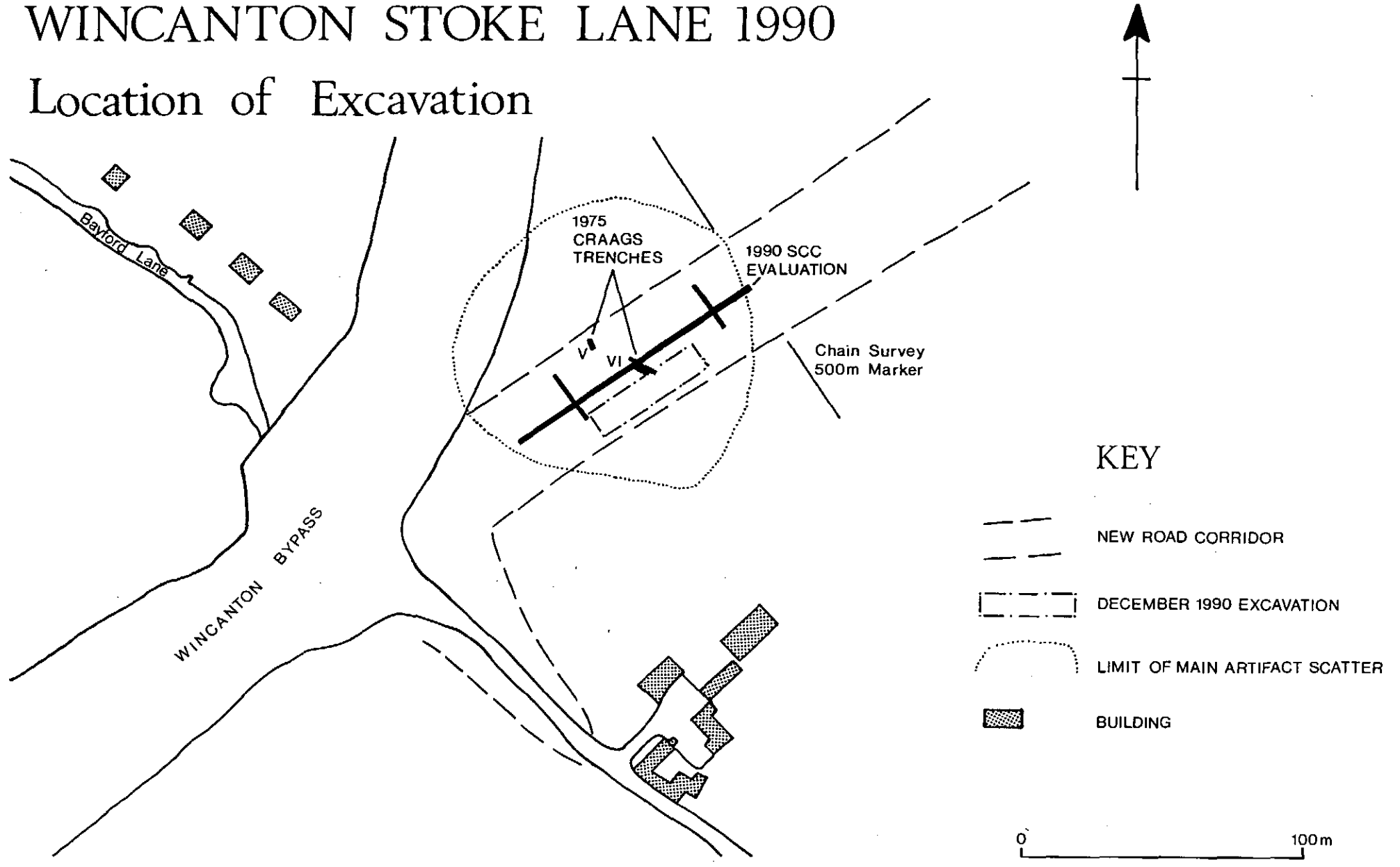
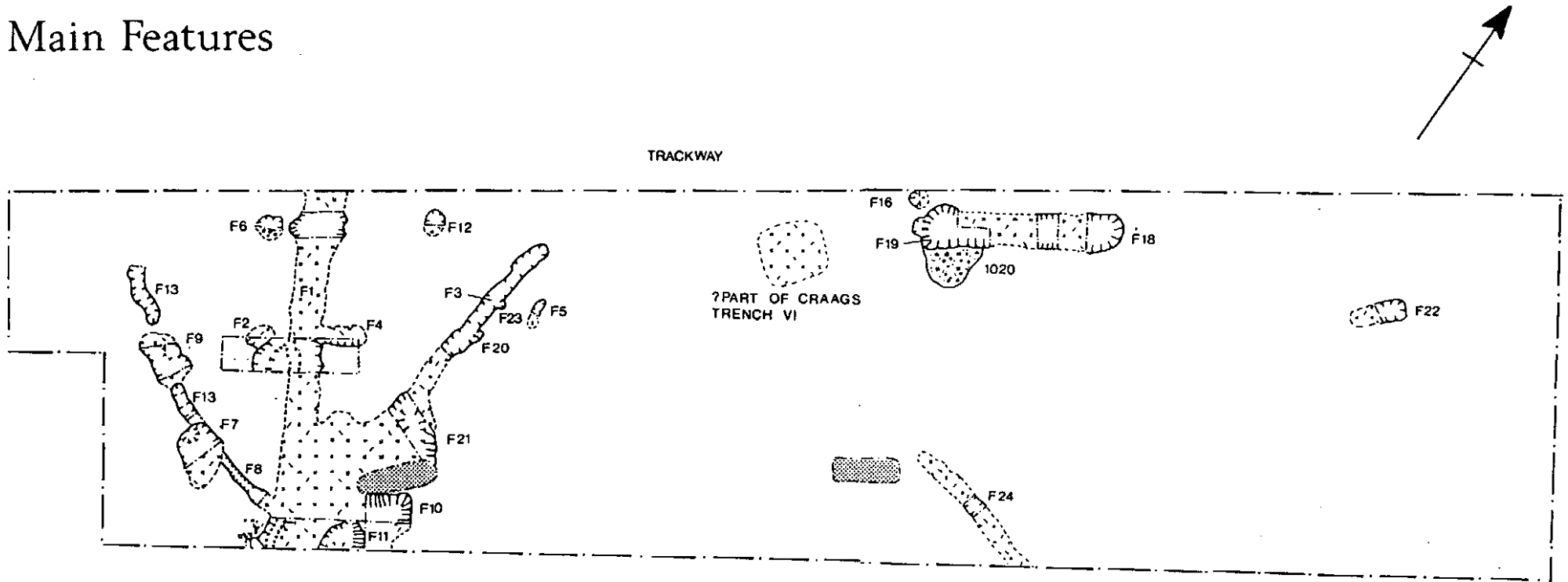


Figure 1

WINCANTON STOKE LANE 1990

Main Features



KEY




-  UNEXCAVATED SILT CLAY FILL
-  MACHINE TRENCHES
-  SANDY CLAY AND STONE SURFACE



Figure 2

WINCANTON BY-PASS - STOKE LANE EVALUATION 1990

In November 1990 Mr. Peter McCrone, archaeological field officer for Somerset County Council, undertook an archaeological evaluation at Stoke Trister Lane as part of the archaeological monitoring of the construction of the Wincanton to Zeals, A303, bypass. Two features, a gully and a shallow pit, were recorded.

Two large plastic bags marked 'Wincanton to Zeals bypass - Stoke Trister Lane - Archaeological Evaluation' contained the following bags of artefacts:

1 x bag containing:

- 4 x fragments of an animal jawbone;
- 1 x fragment of baked clay.

1 x bag marked: 4303 - pot from gully contained:

- 1 x animal tooth;
- 1 x brown Victorian factory ware.
- 7 x fragments of burnt clay/oven lining.
- 5 sherds of reduced ware, light grey core, darker grey margins, local BBW or greyware type. 1st to 4th century.
- 8 x base sherds and
- 9 x body sherds of oxidised fabric with reduced surface; very lightweight and with many voids. mid or late-Iron Age?

2 x large bags containing:

- 3 x rims and
- 30 x large and small sherds rough Black-Burnished ware. Simple bead rim, rim turned over on the inside; grey fabric with oxidized pink margins; some voids on surface. ?Local? BBW 1st century AD?

1 x bag containing:

- 1 x large base sherd and
- 23 body sherds of Black Burnished ware. Burnished surface, one oxidized margin, some sherds with occasional limestone temper. 1st to 4th century.

1 x bag containing:

- 3 x joining base sherds and
- 14 x large and small sherds of Black-Burnished ware. reduced surface with oxidized margins and patches; some limestone temper with small and medium sized limestone voids in fabric and surfaces. 1st to 4th century.

1 x bag containing:

100+ sherds of small and medium sized fragments of local Black-Burnished ware; mostly with oxidized pink surfaces and margins although some were normal Dorset BBW sherds.

The Black Burnished wares possibly form 1 or 2 large pots. Odd fragments of normal black burnished ware come from other vessels.

Somerset County Museum Accession Number: 74/1995.