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EXCAVATIONS ON THE A5 WEEFORD TO FAZELEY ROAD IMPROVEMENT SCHEME, STAFFORDSHIRE

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with contributions by Paul Booth

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SUMMARY

The A5 Weeford to Fazeley trunk road forms part of a strategic route from London to Holyhead and runs approximately parallel to Watling Street, the principal Roman road from London to the west Midlands and north Wales. The road improvement scheme comprised the upgrading of the A5 to a dual two-lane carriageway between its junction with the A38 at Weeford Island (SK 134049) and Bonehill Junction at Mile Oak (SK 171030), some 5 km to the east. This required the construction of a 5 km off-line section to the north of the existing road.

Following archaeological evaluation by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned to carry out further archaeological investigation at eight sites along the route and a scheme-wide watching brief during the earthworks programme (fig. 1). The results of the archaeological work revealed prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval remains. While scant evidence has survived of the earlier prehistoric periods, an Iron Age ring gully and associated features were identified at the eastern end of the route (Site 27). Roman enclosures were examined at the western end of the route at Site 8. The remains of field systems dating to the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods were also revealed during excavation, along with pits, postholes, tree-throw holes and other related features that contribute to an emerging picture of rural landscape use from the prehistoric period to the post-medieval period.

INTRODUCTION

Location and geology

The route passes through a gently undulating landscape with the exception of an area of relatively steep, south easterly sloping land between Hints Hill and south of Hints Quarry. There are two distinct solid geologies, which are divided by a sandstone promontory at Hints Hill. The western half lies on Kidderminster and Bromsgrove sandstones, while the eastern is principally on Mercia Mudstone. Superficial alluvium and glacial deposits overlie much of the area (Highways Agency 2002b, 5; Interserve JV 2004, 16).

Previous work

The impact of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley road improvement scheme on known and potential archaeological remains was evaluated by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) as part of a staged cultural heritage assessment undertaken (Highways Agency 2002a, 2002b). The assessment included a preliminary walkover survey and a desk-based assessment drawing on information from the Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record (Highways Agency 2002a, Volume 2, Part 2, Appendix 2.A).

An aerial photographic survey identified nine areas of archaeological interest, of which seven appeared to be directly affected by the proposed development (ibid., Appendix 2.13). A programme of fieldwalking was undertaken in 2001—2, although the artefacts recovered were few in number and no significant concentrations were recorded (Williams and Hancocks 2002; Highways Agency 2002b, Part 2.1 and Appendix A).

Approximately 65% of the preferred route was examined using geophysical techniques (Highways Agency 2002a, Volume 2, Part 2, Appendix 2.C). Three sites were identified as potentially containing features of archaeological significance; two of these had already been identified during the aerial photographic assessment.

A programme of trial trench evaluation was implemented by BUFAU in 2002, comprising 24 trenches (Trenches 1—24) and eight sample transects (Trenches 25—32) (Highways Agency 2002b, Part 2.2 and Appendix B). No archaeological remains or deposits were revealed in Trenches 25, 28—9 and 31—2.

The western end of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley route is coincident with part of the route of the M6 Toll, and the (provisional) results of recent archaeological work on that scheme are directly relevant to understanding the archaeology of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley (OWA 2003). Oxford Archaeology (OA) has also carried out a desk-based assessment and fieldwalking to the north-west of Tamworth in connection with the proposed West Coast Main Line modernisation programme (OA forthcoming).

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The results of the evaluation undertaken by BUFAU in 2002 informed the mitigation strategy, which defined different levels of archaeological examination dependent upon the perceived significance of the features that each area was thought to contain (Interserve 2004). These measures included the following:

Identified watching brief

Identified watching briefs were undertaken at Site 2, Site 16/17/18 (west) and Site 26/27. These involved the removal of the topsoil/subsoil to a depth of around 0.5 m below present ground level. Archaeological features were investigated and recorded with further

archaeological work undertaken where significant remains were encountered (Interserve 2004, 21—2).

Strip, map and sample

Site 8, Site 15, Site 16/17/18 (east) and Site 26 were investigated using a programme of strip, map and sample. At these sites, a base plan of archaeological features was produced after machine stripping. Up to 20 interventions per hectare were made in order to date and otherwise characterise any revealed remains, with provision made for further archaeological works if appropriate (ibid., 23).

Excavation

Site 27 was subject to excavation. The area was stripped to the Mercian mudstone/clay natural horizon, and a number of features identified during the evaluation were marked and mapped. The full extent of a ring gully feature was not clear after the initial machine clearance so further hand cleaning of the area was undertaken and a number of the original interventions were re-excavated in order to establish the plan of the original feature (OA 2003g, 1; Interserve 2004, 23—7).

Scheme-wide watching brief

The scheme-wide watching brief was carried out on all intrusive earthworks associated with the A5 construction - except an area of infilled quarrying at Hints Hill - where archaeological deposits might be revealed and had not been investigated within identified sites (OA 2004b, 1).

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The following offers a description of any significant features and finds that were encountered during the archaeological investigations. The sites are presented in order of their location from Site 2 at the western end of the route alongside the Weeford Island junction, to Site 26 some 5 km to the east (fig. 1).

Figure 1. Scheme-wide plan showing location of sites.

Site 2 (figs. 1 and 2)

Site 2 lies immediately to the north-east of the A5/A38 junction (Weeford Island) at NGR SK 134049 (fig. 1). The site covered an area of 0.65 ha and incorporated Trenches 1 and 2 of the BUFAU evaluation (fig. 2), neither of which was particularly prolific in terms of archaeological features or finds (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 1—2).

A series of ditches forming rectangular enclosures were identified during the watching brief (OA 2003a). These were mainly Roman in date, although there is evidence that ditch group 6026 had its origins in the late Iron Age, while others (e.g. 6041) may be of medieval construction. The site produced the only significant assemblage of Roman pottery from the project, a total of 314 sherds (5131 g).

Figure 2. Site 2.

Prehistoric and Roman

Ditch 6026 was aligned northeast-southwest and was examined in five sections: 6002, 6022, 6029, 6032 and 6039. It measured 70 m in length and between 1.8 m and 2 m in width; the depth ranged from 0.5 m to 0.15 m. The feature contained numerous rounded pebbles and cobbles, which may have been removed from the adjacent fields and deposited in the ditch. The small quantities of pottery that were recovered from the ditch were found to concentrate in the northern slots; a single sherd (4 g) of Roman pottery was recovered from 6032, while two sherds (7 g) came from 6029. The ditch, which probably formed part of a field or paddock boundary, lay at an oblique angle to Watling Street. In intervention 6002, it appeared to be cut by northwest-southeast aligned ditch 6006 (fig. 9, S. 6001); it is therefore possible that ditch 6026 belonged to an earlier, perhaps prehistoric, field system and was superseded by later ditched enclosures that respected the alignment of the Roman road.

Ditch 6006 was investigated in five interventions (6000, 6001, 6009, 6015 and 6027), four of which were positioned to clarify the relationship with ditches 6036, 6035 and 6026 (e.g. fig. 9, S. 6001). Approximately 47 m of the ditch was exposed in the stripped area. It measured 2 m wide and varied in depth from 0.52 m in the western section to 0.77 m in the east. A fairly substantial quantity of mid-late 2nd century pottery (159 sherds weighing 3822 g) was recovered from 6001 in the eastern part of the ditch and towards its intersection with 6026. Section 6027 also produced a reasonable quantity of pottery, a total of 26 sherds weighing 399 g, while sections 6000 and 6015 further to the west produced much smaller amounts. The eight fragments of cattle bone recovered from the fill may relate to nearby settlement activity although, given the generally poor survival of animal bone from the site, they may well be intrusive.

An approximately 20 m length of north-south aligned ditch 6035 was exposed. The ditch was examined in two interventions, 6017 and 6033, and was shown to intersect with ditch 6006 from the north. The feature measured 1.5 m in width and between 0.23 m and 0.3 m in depth. A single sherd (24 g) of pottery datable to the 1st or 2nd century was recovered from the silty sand fill of 6033. The exact relationship with ditch 6006 is unclear in section,

but it is most likely that the two ditches were broadly contemporary and formed one corner of a larger rectangular enclosure. The absence of later 2nd century pottery might, however, indicate that ditch 6035 was in use slightly earlier than the adjacent ditches.

A shallow ditch (feature 6036) ran approximately parallel to ditch 6035 and intersected with the western end of ditch 6006. Around 15 m of its length were exposed and it was examined in two interventions: 6011 and 6038. It measured 1.25 m in width and was between 0.08 m and 0.12 m deep. The single deposit of silty sand contained an abraded sherd of Roman pottery.

With features 6006 and 6035, this ditch probably formed part of a wider system of small, rectangular enclosures. East-west aligned ditch 6006 seems to represent the southernmost boundary of this system, as its north-south aligned companions all lie to the north. The concentration of ceramic material in the eastern interventions compared with the insignificant quantities recovered from the western interventions suggests that the farmstead associated with the field system lay to the east or north-east. The pottery from the fills provides a date in the mid-late 2nd century for the use of these boundaries, which may have superseded late Iron Age precursors (e.g. ditch 6026).

A shallow but expansive feature, possible tree-throw hole 6021, was located to the north of pit 6013 and within the boundary of ditches 6006 and 6035. It measured between 6 and 7 m in diameter and 0.52 m in depth (fig. 9, S. 6003). Its sizeable pottery assemblage, a total of 109 sherds (809 g) or approximately one third of the site assemblage, provides a probable date in the mid-late 2nd century for its infill. Three small fragments of abraded and undiagnostic ceramic building material were also recovered. The primary fill, a dark brown-black silty sand containing substantial quantities of charcoal, produced 57 pieces (321 g) of Roman pottery. The layer was overlain by a mid-brown silty sand containing a large piece of undressed sandstone, a single corroded iron nail and a further 52 sherds (488 g) of Roman pottery. Given its position, it is not unlikely that the tree - or group of trees - was removed prior to the construction of the boundary ditches. The stump and root bole may have been burnt *in situ* as the final stage of the tree clearance process.

A small, circular pit or posthole (feature 6013) lay *c* 1 m to the south-east of tree-throw hole 6021. Measuring 0.7 m in diameter, it was filled with a silty sand to a depth of 0.3 m and contained a single sherd (8 g) of Roman pottery.

Medieval

Ditch 6041 extended for 38 m across the exposed site on a northeast-southwest trajectory and was examined in two sections: 6042 and 6047. The ditch contained five sherds (102 g) of medieval pottery of 13th-14th century date, which indicates a medieval date for its

use. Its correspondence with the alignment of ditch 6026, however, means that a late prehistoric or Roman origin cannot be entirely discounted.

Weeford Island compound (figs. 1 and 3)

The site of the Weeford Island compound is located *c* 150 m to the south-east of the A5/A38 junction at NGR SK 413304 (figs. 1 and 3). An area at least 5 m beyond any features exposed during the watching brief was cleaned to establish the extent of the potential archaeological activity (OA 2003e).

Figure 3. Weeford Island Compound.

Roman

Ditch 218 was oriented roughly northeast-southwest, perpendicular to Watling Street, and was examined in five interventions: 208, 210, 212, 214 and 216. The ditch was 32 m long, varying in width from 0.56 m to 0.76 m and reaching depths of up to 0.28 m. A single sherd (2 g) of Roman pottery was recovered from intervention 210. The ditch shared the alignment of some of the ditches in Site 8, and probably functioned as a field or property boundary as part of a wider enclosure system.

Immediately to the east lay a shallow, crescent-shaped tree-throw hole (200), measuring 6 m in length, 2.6 m in width and 0.18 m in depth. Its silty sand deposit was composed of 15% charcoal, suggesting that - as in tree-throw hole 6021 on Site 2 - the stump and root were burnt *in situ*. Eight sherds (44 g) of Roman pottery, probably dating to the later 1st or 2nd centuries, were recovered from the tree-throw hole, along with a single sherd (42 g) of middle Iron Age pottery. Root holes 202 and 204, located directly to the south of tree-throw hole 200, both contained charcoal-rich deposits and were probably related to this episode of tree-clearance.

Tree-throw hole 206 was a shallow, ovoid feature located approximately 23 m from tree-throw hole 200. It measured 2.78 m in length, 1.2 m in width, and was filled with a dark brown-black silty sand containing seven sherds (121 g) of Roman pottery, probably dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries. Given the similarity of their fills and pottery content, this feature may belong to the same phase of tree-clearance as that represented by nearby tree-throw hole 200.

Site 8 (figs. 1 and 4)

Site 8 is located *c* 150 m to the north of Watling Street at NGR SK 139044 (figs. 1 and 4). The site was excavated in two parts, which were separated by the line of a field boundary. The total area (*c* 2 ha) incorporated Trenches 3—7, 9 and 24 of the BUFAU

evaluation, which contained a series of scattered postholes, stakeholes, pits and ditches but very few datable artefacts (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 2—13); Trenches 8 and 10 lay outside the excavated area. Following the evaluation, the area was stripped to reveal the extent of the features exposed in Trenches 6 and 24 (OA 2003b, 1).

The earliest evidence for activity comes from pit 1037, which was overlain by a buried soil horizon (deposit 1001) and contained an assemblage of Iron Age pottery. Most of the features probably date to the Iron Age, Roman, or post-medieval periods. Many of the ditches were aligned either parallel or perpendicular to Watling Street, which supports a Roman or post-Roman date for the majority.

Figure 4. Site 8.

Iron Age and Roman

A shallow, oval-shaped pit (feature 1037) was revealed in the eastern area of the site. The pit measured 0.28 m in width and 0.32 m in length (fig. 9, S. 1000). It was filled by a dark brown silty sand containing 38 sherds (525 g) of handmade, quartz-tempered Iron Age pottery, one piece of tile, one iron nail, a number of burnt stones and several pieces of modern burnt clay. The stratigraphic integrity of the pit is therefore in doubt, although the pottery itself forms a coherent assemblage. It is possible, particularly given its position below a buried soil layer (1001) containing a further six sherds (59 g) of the same fabric, that the pit has prehistoric origins. Given the mixed date of the finds, however, it seems that the fill has, at least in part, been more recently disturbed. Neighbouring pit 1039 is thought to be a modern fire pit, and indicates much later activity in the immediate area.

Ditch 1044 extended for *c* 60 m on a northeast-southwest trajectory across the site, perpendicular to the alignment of Watling Street. It was examined in three 1 m slots: 1007, 1018 and 1033. The ditch, without doubt a continuation of the unexcavated ditch F508 in BUFAU evaluation Trench 5, ranged in width from 0.44 m to 0.9 m, and in depth from 0.18 m to 0.2 m. It contained a single deposit of an orange-brown sand throughout, apparently cut by the darker fills of ditch 1045 (below), which supports an Iron Age or Roman date for the feature. No finds were recovered.

Ditch 1045, an east-west aligned linear feature, corresponds with ditch F600 in Trench 6 of the BUFAU evaluation. An additional 30 m of the ditch was exposed during the later stripping of the site and subsequently examined in three 1 m interventions: 1005, 1031 and 1035. Finds from the ditch include one sherd (3 g) of possibly Iron Age pottery from the fill of 1035, to which can be added another three pieces of Iron Age pottery and two pieces of Roman pottery retrieved in the evaluation. The feature probably formed part of a field boundary which, in light of the pottery evidence, probably dates to the Iron Age or Roman

period. Ditch 1045 appears to cut ditch 1044 and is therefore assumed to be later, although it is possible that both ditches were, at different stages, incorporated into the same field system.

Post-medieval

Ditch 1042 almost certainly functioned as a boundary ditch, probably (with ditch 1043) to enclose the post-medieval trackway to the north-west (group 1046). Ditches 1015 and 1029 seem to represent earlier versions. Although no diagnostic artefacts were recovered, the presence of coal within the ditch fills supports a post-medieval date. The four ditches are probably continuations of those exposed in Trench 3 (F300, F301, F302 and F303) and Trench 8 (F800, F803, F804 and F805/F810) during the BUFAU evaluation.

Site 15 (figs. 1 and 5)

Site 15 lies *c* 100 m to the north of Watling Street at NGR SK 146041 (figs. 1 and 5). The site, which focused on an area of cropmark features, covered approximately 2.15 ha and incorporated Trenches 11—13 and 15—16 of the BUFAU evaluation (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 13—19). The later topsoil stripping of the site revealed additional features, some of which (pit 2008, tree-throw hole 2010 and ditch 2012) were mitigated through excavation (OA 2003c).

Pit 2008 and some of the discrete features revealed in the BUFAU evaluation trenches may represent scattered, low-density prehistoric activity. The sherd of Iron Age pottery from ditch F1203 in Trench 12 (ibid., 15), even if residual, also indicates some prehistoric activity in the general area. A further single sherd of possibly Iron Age pottery was also recovered from the topsoil (2000). It is possible that some of the ditches and postholes also belong to the prehistoric period but, in the conspicuous absence of datable finds from these features, this remains unconfirmed and it is equally possible that these features are associated with later activity. North-south aligned ditch 2012, for example, is undated but appears to respect the alignment of existing boundaries, which may have their origins in the Roman or even the post-medieval period. Tree-throw hole 2010 contained numerous fragments of coal and is thought to be a modern feature.

Figure 5. Site 15.

Roman

Ditch 2012 was oriented northeast-southwest and ran across the length of the site (*c* 80 m) and was examined in three interventions: 2003, 2005 and 2007. The ditch runs perpendicular to Watling Street and may represent a field or property boundary. While the feature cannot be securely dated in the absence of informative stratigraphic relationships or

datable finds, the similarity of its fill to those of demonstrably Roman features on Site 8 (*c* 550 m to the west) provides slim evidence in favour of a Roman date.

Medieval

Pit 2008 consisted of a shallow, sub-circular scoop in the natural sand, measuring between 0.72 m and 0.84 m in diameter and containing fire-cracked stone, burnt flint and charcoal. A small sherd (1 g) of pottery, dated to the medieval period, was recovered from the fill. The feature has been interpreted as a fire pit and may be contemporaneous with the associated pottery although such a small sherd could easily be intrusive.

Site 16/17/18 (figs. 1 and 6)

Site 16/17/18 lies to the north of Watling Street at NGR SK 151038 (fig. 1). The site, which targeted an extensive cropmark complex, was investigated in two parts with a combined area of *c* 3.07 ha. The western area (0.67 ha), which incorporated Trenches 17—19 of the BUFAU evaluation, was examined as part of an identified watching brief (OA 2004a); the eastern area (2.4 ha) incorporated BUFAU Trenches 20—23 and was stripped down to the natural sandy-gravel horizons, mapped and sampled (fig. 6; OA 2003d).

No archaeological deposits or finds were present in evaluation Trenches 17 and 18 in the western area (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 19). Trench 19 was found to contain three pits (F1900, F1902 and F1905), two postholes (F1902 and F1904), and one ditch (F1906), none of which produced any dating evidence (ibid., 20). The features were re-examined in more detail during the watching brief and shown to be either modern or natural features.

Several pits and ditches were revealed in evaluation Trenches 20—23 and following the stripping of the eastern area (ibid., 21—23). These included ditch 7010 (F2301), ditch F2002 and pits F2000, F2001 and F2101. Other cuts noted in the evaluation (e.g. ditch F2100, pits F2200 and F2201) were confirmed as natural features. Dating evidence from Trench 20 includes three sherds (8 g) of later prehistoric pottery from pit F2000 and two sherds of unstratified Roman pottery.

Figure 6. Site 16/17/18 (eastern area).

Prehistoric

Pit F2000, located in the western half of Trench 20, was sub-circular in plan and contained three small sherds (8 g) of later prehistoric pottery; these cannot be closely dated.

Post-medieval

Ditch 7010 was originally identified in evaluation Trench 23 (F2301) and later re-investigated by means of three interventions: 7004, 7007 and 7008. The ditch extends on a northwest-southeast alignment parallel to Watling Street, about 250 m away, and is thought to have been part of a post-medieval field boundary. The exposed length of ditch measured *c* 125 m and varied in width from 0.90 m to 1.36 m with a depth of 0.25 m to 0.39 m. Two sherds (3 g) of glazed pottery, one piece of iron slag and several fragments of degraded animal bone were recovered from the fill of 7007, while a single piece of ceramic building material, probably roofing tile, came from the fill of 7004. These finds support a post-medieval date.

Site 27 (figs. 1 and 7)

Site 27 measures *c* 0.57 ha in area and lies approximately 250 m to north of Watling Street at NGR SK 169031 (figs. 1 and 7). The site was located in order to identify and further define any archaeological remains surviving in association with a circular ditched feature, group 5010 (OA 2003g). This feature, which was first revealed in Trench 27 of the BUFAU evaluation in 2002 (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 26—28), was a well-preserved ring gully or hut circle and can be dated to the Iron Age on pottery evidence. The small number of pits and postholes recorded within the evaluation trench were probably related to this circular enclosure, while the internal curvilinear features (5020, 5022, F2711, F2712 and F2716) possibly predate the ring gully within which they are located.

Figure 7. Site 27.

Iron Age

Ring gully 5010 (F2701, F2702, F2705, F2718 and F2724 in Trench 27) measured *c* 13 m in external diameter and was somewhat elongated along its north-south axis. The assumed entrance to the enclosure lay to the east and was *c* 5 m wide, with the northern terminus slightly extended to the east. The width of the ditch varied considerably and inconsistently along its circumference, from 0.52 m to 1.05 m. The depth was similarly variable, ranging from 0.24 m to 0.54 m. The base of the ditch appeared more rounded in the western sections (e.g. fig. 9, S. 5004), approaching a more V-shaped profile as it neared the termini to the east (e.g. fig. 9, S. 5000). With the exception of an additional sandy fill within cut 5017, the gully contained a single deposit throughout, comprising a tenacious mid-brown clay with charcoal flecking.

Finds from the ditch include one sherd (7 g) of pottery, probably Iron Age, from 5012. A further five sherds (17 g) of pottery were recovered from F2718 during the BUFAU

evaluation, along with two pieces (29 g) of fired clay from the northern terminus F2701. Numerous fragments of animal bone in varying states of preservation were also recovered from several interventions. Fragments identifiable to species include two sheep/goat bones, one pig bone and four cattle bones, one of which is a mandibular ramus displaying dismemberment cut marks. Most of the animal bone (by fragment count and weight) came from the north-eastern area of the ditch (interventions 5002 and 5017).

The fill of 5002 (fig. 9, S. 5000) contained an unusually high percentage of stones, some burnt, compared with the clean fills recorded in other interventions. Similar deposits of burnt stone were noted in the northern ditch segments (F2701 and F2705) during the BUFAU evaluation, and may be related to the clearance of a Bronze Age burnt mound (Highways Agency 2002, Appendix B, 27—8). Recent work in the area (e.g. on the M6 Toll) suggests that such deposits are not restricted to the Bronze Age, however, but occur on sites of various dates.

The ring gully has been interpreted as a house site with associated features and deposits of domestic refuse. The absence of internal postholes or other structural elements within the gully would argue against a particularly substantial hut-structure, while the possibility of significant truncation can be largely discounted in view of the survival of other, more ephemeral, features within the central area.

Pit 5008, which adjoined the outer western edge of the ring gully, is thought to have been a small pit or posthole (fig. 9, S. 5004). Its relationship with the fill of 5006 remains uncertain as the two deposits could not be distinguished during excavation and no finds were recovered. Northern ring gully segment F2705 was shown in the evaluation to be cut by feature F2706, a small oval-shaped pit containing some fire-cracked stone and charcoal (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 27).

Tree-throw hole 5020 (F2700 and F2723 in Trench 27) was cut by ring gully 5010 and is probably of tree-root origin. Along with quantities of charcoal and fire-cracked stones, two sherds (12 g) of Iron Age pottery were recovered during the BUFAU evaluation (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 31).

Tree-throw hole 5022 (F 2700 and F2723 in Trench 27) probably represents the terminal of tree-throw hole 5020, identified in the evaluation as part of a linear feature F2700. The fill contained fire-cracked stones and some charcoal; a few unidentifiable fragments of animal bone were retrieved during the BUFAU evaluation (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 33). Along with tree-throw hole 5020, this feature may belong to an episode of Iron Age tree-clearance anticipating the later construction of the ring gully.

Feature F2719 was an oval-shaped pit, located less than 1 m from the northern terminal of 5020 (F2700), that was excavated during the evaluation. Its single fill contained burnt stone, charcoal and animal bone (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 26).

A horseshoe-shaped enclosure (F2711, F2712 and F2716 in Trench 27), excavated during the BUFAU evaluation, lay within ring gully 5010 with its open side to the east in approximate alignment with the entrance to the latter. The gully had a U-shaped profile and measured an average of 0.6 m in width and 0.2 m in depth (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 27). One sherd (10 g) of possibly Iron Age pottery, along with quantities of fire-cracked stone and charcoal, were recovered from one of the termini (F2716). The gully encircled two pits, F2713 and F2714, both of which contained deposits of burnt stone; pit F2713 also contained several fragments (4 g) of pottery, all from the same sherd and probably Iron Age in date (ibid., 31).

The BUFAU evaluation detected another section of ditch, F2798, aligned approximately northwest-southeast, lying to the south-east of the ring gully and terminating *c* 1 m from its southern edge. The ditch had been cut by two small postholes (F2707 and F2722), both of which contained high concentrations of charcoal. A small sub-oval pit (F2703) lay to the north of the pit and two shallow, sub-circular postholes (F2704 and F2721) lay to the south. Further to the south, and probably unrelated, were two circular postholes (F2715 and F2720) containing substantial quantities of fire-cracked stone (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 27). Pit 5013, located during excavation *c* 3 m to the north-west of ring gully 5010, was a shallow, sub-circular feature containing small quantities of fragmentary and unidentifiable bone.

Site 26 (figs. 1 and 8)

Site 26 covers an area of approximately 0.55 ha and is located *c* 100 m to the north of Watling Street at NGR SK 171030 (figs. 1 and 8). The area was stripped to the Mercian mudstone/clay natural horizon. A number of the features excavated during the evaluation were identified, marked and mapped (OA 2003f).

The site incorporates Trench 26 of the BUFAU evaluation (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix B, 24—25), an area that contained a pit of dubious prehistoric date (F2602). An abraded sherd of samian ware recovered during topsoil stripping may indicate a Roman presence. A re-cut ditch (F2600 and F2601) was tentatively dated to the post-medieval period on the presence of coal in its upper fills. A second ditch (8004), also dated to the post-medieval period on pottery evidence, was revealed during the identified watching brief at Site 26/27.

Other identified features included a scatter of small pits (F2602-3, F2605-9 and F2613-14) and an animal burrow (F2615). A number of these pits may result from tree clearance activity, perhaps associated with the construction of Watling Street or with the agricultural use of the landscape. The more ephemeral examples are now better understood to be the result of non-anthropogenic processes, such as tree-root action; one particularly strong

possibility is that the 'pits' are in fact the voids from stones pulled up by ploughing, and later filled with subsoil.

Figure 8. Site 26.

Figure 9. Section drawings.

Prehistoric

Pit F2602

A single sherd (18 g) of coarse quartz and clay pellet-tempered pottery was recovered from the upper fill of pit F2602. This was dated to the Neolithic in the evaluation report (ibid., 31), but in view of the similarity of the fabric to those of probable later prehistoric date from elsewhere in the region the Neolithic date should be treated with caution. An Iron Age date is most likely. Further evidence of prehistoric activity in the area is indicated by a single struck flint - a blade - which was recovered during the topsoil stripping of the site.

THE FINDS

FLINT

By Kate Cramp

A total of three struck flints was recovered during archaeological excavation along the route of the A5 road improvement scheme (Table 1); these came from Site 8, Site 26 and from one of the geotechnical test pits.

Table 1. Flint by type from the A5 Weeford to Fazeley road improvement scheme.

The flintwork is generally in poor condition with post-depositional edge damage showing on most pieces. The only datable piece is the thumbnail scraper, which was recovered from ploughsoil within test pit 5/154 (context 1541) during the geotechnical monitoring programme. This piece has been abruptly retouched on a secondary flake and can be dated with reasonable confidence to the Beaker period. The flake and blade are chronologically undiagnostic and, given their condition, have probably been redeposited.

Archaeological evaluation by BUFAU in 2002 was similarly unproductive in terms of flint. Two undiagnostic flakes were recovered from Field 10 and Field 15 during the fieldwalking programme (Highways Agency 2002b, Appendix A, 4); none was recovered during the evaluation (ibid., Appendix B).

POTTERY

By Paul Booth

INTRODUCTION

The post-evaluation phases of the project produced a relatively small amount of pottery ranging in date probably from the Iron Age to the post-medieval period (for a summary of quantities of pottery by site and period see Table 2). Only the prehistoric and Roman material is treated in any detail here. Some 13 sherds (78 g) of prehistoric pottery recovered by BUFAU in the evaluation phase of the project and referred to in the relevant reports were re-examined briefly for the purposes of the present report. The condition of the pottery was variable. Sherd sizes varied considerably and in many cases surfaces were poorly-preserved. This seems to have been generally a consequence of soil conditions rather than of extensive post-depositional abrasion of the material.

Table 2. Summary of pottery by site and period (sherd count/weight).

The pottery was recorded using the standard OA system for late prehistoric and Roman pottery, hut substituted fabric codes from the Warwickshire County Council system. In the absence of a unified recording system for Roman pottery from Staffordshire the latter adaptation was intended to provide a degree of compatibility with records from an adjacent area, particularly because north Warwickshire sources (especially the Mancetter-Hartshill industry) are important for the area, and also because it is proposed (for the same reasons) to use the Warwickshire codes in recording pottery from the closely adjacent M6 Toll sites, although this work has not yet commenced.

There were only two significant assemblages; a very small group of Iron Age pottery from Site 8 and a larger Roman group from Site 2. General characteristics of all the material are treated first, on a period by period basis, followed by brief site-based accounts. Quantification of the pottery was by sherd count, weight and REs (rim equivalents, based on the percentage of rim circumferences surviving), with an additional more subjective count of vessels based on individual rim sherds (sometimes more useful than REs in very small assemblages). Details of rim, base, handle, spout, decorative types and other characteristics were recorded as appropriate.

Prehistoric

Fabrics

Prehistoric hand made fabrics were defined in terms (usually) of their two most common inclusion types (identified by alphabetic codes) and a numeric indicator of fineness, on a scale from 1 (very fine) to 5 (very coarse). The definition of fabrics using this system does not necessarily serve to identify production sources, since these are unknown for prehistoric material within the region. Nor does it automatically follow that identically coded sherds were from the same (unknown) source, merely that their makers exploited very similar clay and tempering resources, indicating a uniformity of potting tradition. Nevertheless the restricted nature of the prehistoric material here strongly suggests that similar fabrics did derive from the same source, and that this was probably quite local. The inclusion types present, and their identifying letters, are as follows:

A	quartz sand
M	mica
N	none present
P	clay pellets
Q	large angular quartz
V	vegetable/organic (sometimes voids)
Z	indeterminate voids

In effect probably only three distinct fabrics were present across the whole project area. Two of these, AN3 and PA3 (coded P11 and P31 in the Warwickshire system) are paralleled at Coleshill (Booth forthcoming). Single sherds of these occurred at the Weeford Island Compound and at Site 27 respectively. A further 6 sherds (46 g) from the BUFAU evaluation of Site 27 were all in a fabric very similar to PA3 and two further fragments (2 g) came from the evaluation Trench 20. All the remaining prehistoric pottery, mostly from Site 8, may be considered to represent variants on a single theme. This fabric (typically recorded as QPA5) was characterised by large, angular quartz inclusions up to 5 mm, combined with clay pellets, quartz sand, large flakes of gold mica and occasional organic inclusions and/or voids. The subsidiary inclusions occur in almost any combination, and only some are evident in most sherds. Despite this variation, however, there is enough consistency in the principal characteristics to suggest that only one fabric is represented here. This fabric is not paralleled in the Warwickshire series. Further examples of this fabric were recovered from the BUFAU evaluations of Trench 20 (3 sherds, 8 g) and Trench 26 (1 sherd, 18 g). A Neolithic date was initially assigned to this sherd on the basis of its very coarse fabric and unusual thickness (21 mm), but in view of the other evidence from the area (see Site 8 below) an Iron Age date is considered likely.

None of the prehistoric pottery showed any evidence of surface treatment such as burnishing or other decoration. Three small rim sherds and four base sherds were present amongst the Site 8 material. None of these was particularly diagnostic, but the rims are consistent with simple, roughly barrel or bucket shaped jar forms. These general characteristics, and the associations seen in local sites (particularly on the M6 Toll) with very closely comparable material, indicate an Iron Age date. On the basis of the Coleshill parallels a middle to late Iron Age date is certain for fabrics AN3 and PA3.

Roman

Fabrics

The fabrics are placed in a number of major ware groups, defined on the basis of significant common characteristics. The ware groups can be combined to constitute two main classes of material, fine and specialist wares on the one hand, and on the other the rest of the coarse wares (c.f. Booth 1991). The fine and specialist ware groups present here (identified by the initial letter of the fabric code) are:

S samian ware
F fine wares - colour-coated, lead glazed, mica coated etc.
A amphorae
M mortaria

The remaining coarse ware groups are:

O 'Romanised' oxidised coarse wares
R 'Romanised' reduced coarse wares
B black-burnished ware
C calcareous (particularly shell) tempered wares

These classes contain hierarchically arranged subgroups, usually defined on the basis of common inclusion type, and individual fabrics/wares are then indicated at a third level of precision, both levels of subdivision being expressed by numeric codes. Thus R20 is a general code for sandy reduced coarse wares, while R21, for example, is a specific sandy reduced fabric typical of a kiln at Tiddington (not represented in this assemblage). In the present assemblage some fabric identification was at the intermediate level of precision.

Initial sorting of fabrics was done by eye, with subsequent use of a binocular microscope at x20 magnification to assist identification or define the inclusion types of individual sherds. Only summary fabric descriptions are given here (in Table 3), in the ware group sequence set out above, with cross-reference to the National Roman pottery fabric reference collection (Tomber

and Dore 1998) where appropriate. More complete descriptions are contained within the pottery archive.

Table 3. Summary of Roman pottery fabric descriptions.

The date ranges given in Table 3 represent the best estimate of the likely period of use of fabrics in this region, drawing on unpublished Warwickshire data as well as other information. These ranges do not necessarily indicate the chronology of the present sites, however.

The attribution of some of the fabrics should be treated with caution. While the table indicates known sources of particular fabrics, these were not necessarily exclusive. In addition to Mancetter-Hartshill, a major industry which lies roughly 20 km distant to the east, a number of individual pottery kilns are known in the area, the two closest of which, those at Sherifoot Lane (Sutton Coldfield) and at M6 Toll Site 15 (Shenstone) almost certainly supplied pottery to sites in the Weeford-Fazeley area. None of these sites is published, although the Mancetter-Hartshill material has been examined in some detail. It is likely that many of the sherds assigned here to the uncertain R20 category are from the Shenstone kiln (OWA 2003, 132—3), only 3 km distant, while the Sherifoot Lane kiln (Booth 1991, 2), some 6 km south of Weeford, produced fabrics comparable to O11, R11 and R18 (c.f. Booth forthcoming) and may therefore have been the source of some of the sherds in these fabrics from the present project, although this cannot be demonstrated at present.

The significance of the Mancetter-Hartshill industry in terms of the supply of specialist products like mortaria (fabric M22) is clear, however, although sherds of Mancetter-Hartshill white ware flagons, curiously, are totally absent. A single sherd was tentatively identified as fabric F34, from a relatively short lived phase of colour-coated ware production at Mancetter-Hartshill in the 2nd century. This industry may also have been the source of the Derbyshire type ware from the present project. A Derbyshire ware 'clone', often fired to a yellowish or off-white colour, was probably produced at Mancetter-Hartshill and appears very similar to the Weeford sherds. The area lies close to the southern limit of the distribution of true Derbyshire ware, although occasional examples are known in Warwickshire, as at Coleshill, some 15 km south of Weeford (Booth forthcoming).

Overall, the sources of pottery supplied to the area can be characterised as certainly or probably local, with the exception of the tiny quantities of imported samian ware and amphora, and the much more important exception of Dorset black-burnished ware, which formed a major component of the Weeford assemblages (see below).

Vessel types

Roman vessel types were recorded using a simple system of alphabetic codes defining major vessel classes (C jars; G tankards; H bowls; I uncertain bowls/dishes; J dishes; K mortaria) with further subdivision into typological subgroups and more precise definition of forms using detailed numeric rim description codes where necessary. Types are discussed further below in the context of Site 2.

THE SITE ASSEMBLAGES

Site 2

Fabrics

This was the only significant Roman pottery assemblage from the project, altbough it was small in absolute terms (see general discussion below). In addition to the Roman sherds there were five sherds (102 g, one a green glazed incised jug handle) in medieval sandy white wares, probably of south Staffordshire origin and datable to the 13th-14th centuries. The Roman assemblage had a relatively high mean sherd weight of 16.3 g. The range of fabrics was unremarkable (Table 4). Fine and specialist wares comprised only 3.8% of the total sherds from the site, and two thirds of these were derived from the Mancetter-Hartshill industry. The presence of a few substantial mortarium sherds (fabric M22) meant that these comprised 14.6% of the assemblage weight, an inflated figure.

Table 4. Site 2: pottery fabric quantification.

The importance of Mancetter-Hartshill for the supply of coarse wares is less certain (see above). A relatively high representation of the probable Mancetter-Hartshill product R23 was notable, and sherds in the probably very local fabric R20 were also quite common. In terms of sherd count, however, black-burnished ware (B11) was the most significant component of the assemblage (30.9%), although its representation by weight was less than half this figure, reflecting the tendency of cooking pots, in particular, to fragment very readily. Nevertheless, despite the fact that fabrics R20 and R44 were both more significant than B11 in terms of weight as a consequence of this characteristic, B11 was also the most important fabric in terms of rim count and RE measurements. Overall, therefore, its significance is clear.

Vessel types

The correlation of fabric with vessel types is summarised in Table 5, based on data for RE measurements. These figures, rather than those based on rim count, give the best impression of the character of the assemblage. The RE data are skewed only in respect of the

narrow mouthed jar (type CC) in fabric R18, of which an entire rim was present, tending to overemphasise slightly the importance of jars (which totalled 60.6% of vessels by rim count). An overall high representation of jars would be expected, however, although the comparable figure for the much larger assemblage at Coleshill is only 52.9% (but based on rim count rather than REs). The high levels of type CK ('cooking pot type') jars in the Site 2 assemblage reflect the popularity of specialist vessels of this type in fabrics B11 and R23.

Table 5. Site 2 vessel types by fabric, quantification by REs.

Apart from a single tankard and two mortaria the remaining vessels were all open bowls and dishes, including a very small samian ware upright rim fragment from a form such as Drag 30, 37, or 38. Even in a small assemblage the absence of flagons, beakers, cups and lids is notable and suggests an assemblage of quite limited range. The tankard is most likely a product of the Mancetter-Hartshill industry, where the form is well known. Alternatively it may have come from the Perry Barr kiln (Hughes 1959, e.g. fig. 3, nos 1 and 2) where tankards were also produced. This site has been considered an outlier of the potteries of the Severn Valley industry, on the basis of the presence of distinctive vessel forms such as the tankard, but the full repertoire of its products can be matched in the Mancetter-Hartshill industry and a link with central rather than west midlands pottery traditions seems more likely (Booth 1986, 31—2). No Severn Valley ware was identified at Site 2, although it does occur in the Wall area.

There was limited evidence for vessel use in the form of soot deposits on a number of sherds, particularly in fabrics R23 and B11, consistent with their use for vessels of cooking pot form, but sooting was also present on some bowl and dish forms (eg Nos 8 and 9). It is not clear if this relates to the use of these vessels or derives from the matrix in which they were eventually buried. The only other example of post-manufacture activity was in fabric R64, a jar shoulder sherd of which had a roughly incised graffito, reading VIII (No. 12). The context suggests a mid to late 2nd century date for this piece.

Context and chronology

The pottery derived from a limited number of contexts, mostly ditch fills and a large shallow pit (feature 6021), perhaps a tree-throw hole. This feature produced 109 sherds (809 g) of pottery - i.e. one third of the total sherds from the site - dated to the mid-late 2nd century. The bulk of the pottery came from component cuts (6000, 6001, 6015 and 6027) of ditch 6006, together comprising 63.7% of all sherds and 84% by weight of the total site assemblage, the majority of this material deriving from a single ditch fill, 6004. The pottery from these fills was very consistent in character, and joining sherds of one vessel (No. 7

below) occurred in distinct fills in two separate cuts. The plentiful black-burnished ware, consisting of cooking pot jars with acute angle lattice and in some cases a wavy burnished line under the rim, and smaller quantities of flat flanged bowls or dishes, provided a reasonable indication of date. This was supported by the other material as far as could be judged. For example the mortarium (No. 11) is paralleled at Mancetter (e.g. Hemsley *et al.* 1959, fig. 7, nos 43 and 44) in groups associated with stamped mortaria of Maurus and Sennius and dated after AD 160. These ditch fills, like the fills of feature 6021, can be assigned to the mid-late 2nd century AD.

None of the other features from the site produced groups large enough for it to be possible to determine if they are of different date from the well-dated later 2nd century features. Fill 6034 of ditch 6033 produced a single sherd of fabric C41. This is quite common in north Warwickshire at sites such as Coleshill and is dated to the 1st-2nd centuries AD. The absence of this fabric in the later 2nd century groups might just suggest that feature 6033 represents activity of a slightly earlier phase than the bulk of the pottery, but this can be no more than a very tentative suggestion.

Although the date range of many of the fabrics present extends well into the later part of the Roman period there is nothing in the larger and better dated groups to suggest activity beyond the end of the 2nd century or the early 3rd century at the latest. A single feature (ditch 6047) produced a small group (5 sherds, 102 g) of medieval pottery of 13th-14th century date.

Figure 10. Illustrated vessels.

Illustrated vessels (fig. 10)

Ditch 6006

1. Fabric R18. Type CC narrow mouthed jar with burnished shoulder, neck and upper rim. 6004.
2. Fabric B11. Type CK 'cooking pot' jar with burnish on shoulder and rim and acute angle burnished lattice. Sooted on exterior and on top of rim. 6004.
3. Fabric B11. Type CK 'cooking pot' jar with burnish on shoulder and rim and zigzag burnished line under rim. Some sooting on shoulder. 6004.
4. Fabric R23. Type CK 'cooking pot' jar with hollowed rim for lid-seating. Sooted on exterior and on top of rim. 6004.
5. Fabric R11. Type CM wide mouthed jar with slight cordon at base of neck. Horizontal burnished lines on body, neck and rim. 6004
6. Fabric O11. Type CM, similar form with vestigial cordon. Horizontal burnishing on body, neck and rim. 6004
7. Fabric O11. Type GA tankard with slightly thickened, everted rim and two-ribbed handle. Burnished overall except in handle and rim. 6004 and 6028.
8. Fabric R15. Type JA straight sided dish with flat topped rim. Horizontal burnished lines ion lower and upper body and interior. External sooting. 6004.
9. Fabric O11. Type JA straight sided dish with slightly expanded rim and footring base, loosely based on samian form Drag 18. Sooting on top of rim. 6004.

10. Fabric R20. Type JB curving sided dish with grooves on upper surface of rim and beneath flat base. Burnished overall on interior. 6004.
11. Fabric M22. Type KA mortarium with moderate bead and sharply hooked flange. Black angular trituration grits. 6004.
12. Fabric R64. Shoulder of jar with patchy burnishing and roughly drawn horizontal burnished line perhaps beneath a cordon. Post-firing graffito of long oblique strokes, ?reading VIII, probably a unit of measurement of the contents of the vessel. 6028.

Possible tree-throw hole 6021.
13. 4. Fabric R23. Type CK 'cooking pot' jar with straight angled everted rim. Sooted on exterior and on top of rim. 6020.

Site 8

The site produced 38 sherds (525 g) of hand made prehistoric pottery, entirely in variants of the quartz-tempered fabric QPA5 (see above). Six sherds (59 g) of this material came from context 1001, one sherd (3 g) from context 1036 and the remainder from 1038, the fill of pit 1037. This deposit also contained an iron nail and a fragment of coal, but despite this obvious contamination there is no question about the integrity of the pottery.

Three small rim sherds and four base sherds were present in the assemblage. Two of the rims were very simple, one upright and another slightly insloping. The third (No. 14 below) was slightly everted and expanded, particularly on the interior side of the top of the rim. The rims are broadly consistent with the simple, roughly harrel or bucket shaped jar forms characteristic of the area (c.f. e.g. Banks and Morris 1979, 45). Two joining base sherds had dense crushed quartz fragments (up to *c* 2 mm) on the underside, a characteristic sometimes noted on later prehistoric pottery in south-eastern England, particularly in late Bronze Age and early Iron Age contexts.

The assemblage is too small for precise dating to be possible. The coarse tempering and relatively thick walls of some of the sherds might be chronological indicators (and in southern England might be indicative of a middle Bronze Age date for the material, see also above), but this does not necessarily follow here. Some of the sherds from M6 Toll Site 13, for example, in an identical fabric, are thinner walled and burnished, with an appearance consistent with that of middle Iron Age material from Coleshill and other sites in Warwickshire. The same fabric is also present on M6 Toll Sites 14 and 15 (all three sites are in the Wall/Shenstone area) as well as slightly further south at Site 19, at Wishaw Hall Farm, Warwickshire, where it was a minority component of the small Iron Age assemblage. The latter site may have lain towards the limit of distribution of this fabric and a spatial factor may thus explain its absence from the rather larger Iron Age assemblage at Coleshill - i.e. that this site was supplied with pottery from more nearly local sources - but it is also possible that a chronological factor is at work, with the Coleshill material perhaps to be assigned to the later part of the middle Iron Age, while fabric QPA5 (etc.) may be mainly of early and earlier

middle Iron Age date. Independent dating evidence would be needed to test this hypothesis, however.

Illustrated vessel (fig. 10)

Pit 1037
14. Fabric QAP4. Slightly expanded outsloping rim, probably from jar form. Irregular/unoxidised firing. 1038, SF1016.

Weeford Island Compound

This site produced only one prehistoric and 17 Roman sherds (one medieval and two post-medieval sherds are not considered here), listed by fabric in Table 6.

Table 6. Weeford Island Compound: prehistoric and Roman pottery.

The fabric of the single prebistoric sherd (from topsoil) is comparable to one of the commonest fabrics recorded at Coleshill. Although there are no diagnostic features a middle Iron Age date is likely. This piece came from fill 201 of a tree-throw hole 200, along with Roman sherds. The Roman pottery occurs in the same fabrics as at Site 2, *c* 400 m to the north-east, with the exception of fabric O61, a coarse-tempered oxidised fabric of uncertain origin not present at Site 2. A single sherd of South Gaulish samian was the only imported piece. There were no rim sherds in the present assemblage, but body and two base sherds indicated that both 'cooking pot type' jars and bowls/dishes were present amongst the black-burnished ware. The lack of diagnostic pieces makes close dating of this assemblage very difficult, but it may be confined entirely to the later 1st to 2nd centuries.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The limited quantities of Iron Age pottery recovered at Site 8 and elsewhere are from ceramic traditions increasingly recognised in the region but still not well-dated or understood. General parallels can be drawn with sites in north Warwickshire, in the Wall/Shenstone area and also in the Tame Valley, particularly at Fisherwick (Banks and Morris 1979). Repeated reference has been made to Coleshill because this is one of the largest such assemblages known in the region. It is apparent from work on the M6 Toll, however, that there are significant differences between the numbers of artefacts recovered from sites (such as Coleshill) closer to the Avon valley and those a little further north. All the latter sites, including the M6 Toll sites in the Shenstone/Wall area already referred to, are characterised by very low levels of artefact recovery. This is precisely what is seen on the A5 sites, and is not just explained by the fact that these sites did not sample key areas of later prehistoric

settlement. The M6 Toll sites demonstrate that substantial settlements display the same characteristics.

Moreover, this pattern continues to prevail in the Roman period. The picture hinted at by the A5 material is again borne out by the larger sample from the M6 Toll sites in the area. Those sites in the immediate vicinity of Wall tended to produce rather larger quantities of pottery, presumably because they had very ready access to local markets, but significant settlements, such as that at Langley Mill Farm (M6 Toll Site 29), *c* 8 km south of Weeford and covering some 3 ha, only produced 552 sherds of Iron Age and Roman pottery (OWA 2003). In these terms the relative quantitative 'wealth' of the Site 2 assemblage may be explained by its proximity to Watling Street. This factor may also explain characteristics of the assemblage such as the strikingly high proportion of black-burnished ware, for which a restricted and often road-based distribution network is likely (Allen and Fulford 1996). The black-burnished ware figure (31% of sherds, 15% weight) for Site 2 contrasts for example with those for Rocester (12.8% of sherds, 7.7% of weight; Bevan 2000, 16) and for Coleshill, where black-burnished ware totalled 9.6% of sherds. One characteristic of the Coleshill assemblage, however, was an emphasis on late 2nd-early 3rd century forms in the black-burnished ware repertoire. If this was a particular peak period in black-burnished ware supply to the region, for whatever reason, it is possible that the importance of the ware at Site 2 was exaggerated as a consequence of the apparent coincidence of occupation there with the peak.

With the exception of black-burnished ware, pottery supply was drawn almost entirely from sources within a 20 km radius of the area, the most distant of these, the major Mancetter-Hartshill industry, being readily accessible along Watling Street. The full significance of the more local kilns remains to be established, but if the sherds assigned to fabric R20 were all from the Shenstone kiln, as seems likely, this provided almost a fifth of the Site 2 assemblage.

Imported pottery was very rare at Site 2 and elsewhere, making only a minimal contribution to the fine and specialist ware component of the assemblage. The latter figure, at 3.8% of Site 2 sherds, is very much at the bottom end of the range seen in a sample of Warwickshire sites studied previously (Booth 1991). Superficially the comparisons are with low status rural settlements in the Avon valley, such as Wasperton. The rather different location of the present sites means that this comparison should not perhaps be pressed too far in the absence of data from closer at hand, but the interpretation of site character suggested by this approach is at least consistent with other indications of lack of diversity in the assemblage (see above) in suggesting that the Site 2 assemblage derived from a settlement of quite low status.

ANIMAL BONE

By Emma-Jayne Evans

A total of 126 fragments of bone (336 g) were recovered from the site. The fresh breaks were refitted, reducing the total fragment count to twenty eight, fifteen of which could be identified to species (Table 7). These identifiable fragments all came from the Iron Age ring gully 5010 on Site 27 and Roman ditch 6006 on Site 2.

Table 7. Total number of bones identifiable to species.

The majority of the cattle remains (eight pieces) comprise fragmented molars, along with a mandibular ramus with dismemberment cut marks, a humerus, 1st phalanx and a metatarsal. The sheep/goat remains comprise a molar and a mandible which has been aged at 10—20 months, and the single identifiable pig bone is a mandible aged as adult (Halstead 1985; Grant 1982). While the cattle metatarsal has carnivore gnawing on the proximal articulation, no pathologies, evidence of burning or articulations were noted. No further information is available from this small sample of animal bones.

DISCUSSION

Prior to the M6 Toll works (OWA 2003) and the fieldwork undertaken directly in relation to the A5 Weeford to Fazeley improvement, archaeological knowledge of the immediate area was confined almost entirely to a few stray finds and documentary and aerial photographic evidence. This may be due, in large part, to one particular archaeological characteristic of the region: that is, a generally low-level incidence of artefactual material for most periods, including the normally finds-rich Roman period.

The dearth of artefactual evidence from the A5 excavations is consistent with this more widely-observed picture and is suggestive of a long-established regional tradition marked by an impoverished material culture. With this in mind, the assemblages from the A5 represent an important addition to the archaeological resource of the area and, while their ability to date and characterise individual sites may be inhibited, their contribution to the characterisation of a more general regional trend is of particular interpretative value.

Earlier prehistoric

There is little archaeological trace of earlier prehistoric settlement along the route of the road scheme. In particular, any Mesolithic flint scatters that may have been identified in fieldwalking or excavation were not encountered, while a single sherd (18 g) of pottery from a pit in evaluation Trench 26 (Site 26), originally considered to be Neolithic in date (Highways Agency 2002b, 31), has since been re-dated as Iron Age (see above, section 4.2.5).

Bronze Age

This near total absence of evidence continues into the Bronze Age period. Well-defined cropmark features in aerial photographs are scarce and potentially misleading. A feature at Shenstone to the west of the A5, for example, identified on the basis of aerial photographs as a ring ditch, proved on excavation to be an Iron Age settlement enclosure (M6 Toll Site 16, OWA 2003, 17). Similar features to the north of the A5 may also be prone to misinterpretation (Highways Agency, Volume 2, Part 2, Appendix 2B).

Evidence from the A5 itself is limited to a single thumbnail scraper from one of the geotechnical testpits (5/154). A sherd (4 g) of pottery from a ditch in evaluation Trench 12 (Site 15) is now thought more likely to date to the Iron Age than earlier. Three additional sherds (8 g) of pottery from Trench 20 (Site 16/17/18), broadly attributed to the later prehistoric, are not closely datable but again seem more likely to belong to the Iron Age given the similarity of their fabric to that of sherds from pit 1037 in Site 8.

The deposits of burnt flint and stone on Site 27, perhaps the scattered remnants of a burnt mound, may also belong to the Bronze Age. Burnt mound features are widely known in the region (e.g. Barfield and Hodder 1989) and, while their function is uncertain, probably relate to nearby settlement. No other concentrations of burnt stone were identified on the route, however, and the A5 does not pass through the type of streamside location usually favoured for these deposits. Furthermore, it has been shown that such features are not confined to the Bronze Age, with similar deposits reported from a range of contexts in sites of various date in the region (e.g. the M6 Toll). The A5 example may, therefore, be more convincingly associated with the Iron Age activity on Site 27.

Iron Age

The evidence from the route indicates an expansion of settlement and related activity in the Iron Age. Settlement was usually in small units, occupying both enclosed and (less commonly) open sites. The pattern of Iron Age settlement locally is best understood from work in the Tame Valley at Fisherwick, only 5 km north of the eastern end of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley route (OA 2004a, 5; Smith 1979). The region also contains a thin scatter of hillforts.

Evidence from aerial photography is slight, but includes a small rectilinear feature to the north of the route (part of AP 06) and a further possible example in site AP 07 (Highways Agency, Volume 2, Part 2, Appendix 2B). Both of these enclosures incorporate pit alignments, which have long been recognised as a distinctive feature of the archaeology of the area east of Wall (e.g. Whitehouse 1964; Gould 1972). There remains little precision in their dating in the region (c.f. Hingley 1996, 12), although a recently-excavated example from Wishaw Hall Farm, some 8 km to the south, is dated to the middle Iron Age but its alignment

was perpetuated in the late Iron Age and Roman period by ditches (OWA 2003, 20). While it seems unlikely that the construction of these features persisted beyond the Iron Age, the continuity of landscape patterning is clear.

The most coherent and confidently dated Iron Age features were identified at Site 27, at the eastern end of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley route. The circular ditched feature (group 5010), first revealed in Trench 27 of the BUFAU evaluation, probably relates to domestic settlement and is associated with a small number of pits and postholes. The principal penannular ditch has an approximately east-facing opening, consistent with a common orientation for roundhouses, and could have enclosed and provided drainage for a structure at least 10 m in diameter. In character and dimensions it is closely comparable to gullies excavated within an enclosed Iron Age settlement at Langley Mill, Sutton Coldfield (OWA 2003, 24). The absence of structural features has been noted above, but any building within the gully could have been of mass wall construction that left no surface traces. Finds include several sherds of pottery and two pieces of fired clay that may derive from a wattle-and-daub superstructure. A single spelt grain from the evaluation provides the only economic species indicator from the period, while the fragments of animal bone from the penannular ditch, which include cattle, sheep/goat and pig, may represent the remains of a fairly typical Iron Age diet.

Further west along the route, the evidence is more disparate and consists of linear ditches and discrete pits and postholes with little apparent patterning. It is likely that these scattered features are at some distance from the main areas of settlement. Some, such as Ditch 6026 on Site 2, may represent the remains of prehistoric field systems. Several undated features may also have had Iron Age origins but cannot be confidently dated either stratigraphically or through their material associations.

Roman

The most visible feature in the Roman landscape is Watling Street, which was in origin a strategic military road and the principal route from London to the west Midlands and north Wales. The line of Roman Watling Street is followed by the present route of the A5 and lies between *c* 100 m and *c* 400 m to the south of the proposed route, where it traversed a rural landscape organised into fields and smallholdings by means of ditched enclosures, such as those revealed on Site 2.

The pottery evidence suggests a date in the 2nd century AD for the use of these enclosure ditches, although some may have superseded late Iron Age precursors (e.g. ditch 6026). At Site 2 the pottery indicates infilling of at least some features by the late 2nd century. The absence of any obviously later finds suggests a contraction in settlement from this time, with no clear indication of activity through the later Roman period.

The features examined seem to have been some distance from the foci of settlement, the proximity of which is implied by occasional large deposits of pottery such as that from feature 6021 in Site 2. Only here, at the western end of the A5, is it likely that the excavated enclosures lay close to such a focus, which may have lain just to the north or north-east of the excavated area. Well-defined ditched enclosures lay to the north and south of the western half of the project area (e.g. Gould 1972, Sites E, F and G), but in the absence of excavation their chronology is unknown. Site E, however, is aligned directly upon Watling Street and must be Roman (or later) in date. Sites F and G are both over 0.5 km north of the new road line and therefore the significance of their alignments is unclear, although Site F is perpendicular to the alignment of Watling Street. The relationship of Site G to a possible pit alignment might indicate an Iron Age date for this site. The function of these sites is equally unclear, but all could have been farmstead enclosures.

The occurrence of ditch alignments approximately perpendicular to the line of Watling Street has been noted at several sites (Sites 2, 8 and 15), although the fact that some later boundaries also followed this alignment means that each instance must be assessed carefully. These alignments may suggest that a programme of land division post-dated the establishment of the road and superseded hitherto prevailing Iron Age boundaries, but the evidence is insufficient to allow this suggestion to be demonstrated with confidence. Even if this was the case, the new layout was not necessarily imposed as a single operation, nor did it involve rigid planning, as slight variations in the alignments on these three sites indicate. At Shenstone, *c* 2 km west of Site 2, a system of major boundaries and enclosures (M6 Toll Site 15, OWA 2003, 18) was laid out with no relation either to the line of Watling Street or to an adjacent double ditched enclosure perhaps containing a modest villa, the latter, on current evidence, being the Roman rural settlement of highest status in the immediate area (Hodgkinson and Chatwin 1944; Gould 1972, Site A).

The principal nucleated centre during the period was Wall, some 4 km to the west of the western end of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley section. Here, at least, occupation extended through much of the Roman period. The development of Wall initially as a military base and then as a local centre may have encouraged an expansion of agricultural production in its hinterland, as can be seen quite clearly in the construction of a large timber aisled building some 3 km west of the town and only some 300 m from the line of Watling Street, probably in the early 2nd century (M6 Toll Site 34, OWA 2003, 26-7). The limited chronological evidence suggests that this site had a date range comparable to that of A5 Weeford to Fazeley Site 2, with little if any evidence for activity beyond the early 3rd century. Both sites also demonstrate the fact that although Watling Street probably provided an important route for the movement of pottery to and from Wall and beyond, and the over-representation of BB1 at Site 2 at the western end of the A5 may reflect this, the economic impact of the development

of Wall on the occupants of the excavated smallholdings may have been less than would be expected.

In general, the artefactual traces of Roman activity on the A5 route are slight, a characteristic of even the more substantial settlement sites in the area. The multiple enclosure site on the M6 Toll Site 29 at Langley Mill Farm, for example, produced only 530 sherds of Roman pottery compared with the 314 sherds from Site 8 (OWA 2003, 31). Environmental evidence is similarly limited, with the slightly acidic soils of the area inhibiting the preservation of animal bone. Few non-intrusive charred plant remains were recovered, resulting in a shortage of evidence on which to base economic and environmental reconstructions. If taken at face value, however, the evidence from M6 Toll Site 34 might imply an increased emphasis on arable production, though whether or not this was at the expense of pasture is unknown.

Several tree-throw holes dated to the Roman period suggest a once-wooded environment, which may have been cleared for agricultural purposes or (less likely) in advance of road building. There is evidence to suggest that the tree boles were burnt *in situ*, although it is uncertain whether this occurred by anthropogenic or natural means.

Medieval and post-medieval

A total absence of evidence characterises the Anglo-Saxon period, after which the medieval and post-medieval periods see a continuation of the agricultural use of the landscape encountered in the Roman period. Features include ditches, pits and trackways, several of which produced small quantities of pottery that may have been dispersed through processes such as manuring. The ditches are characteristically aligned with reference to the position of Watling Street, indicating the ongoing influence of this Roman feature over the organisation of the landscape.

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CAPTION LIST

Tables

Figures

Table 1. Flint by type from the A5 Weeford to Fazeley road improvement scheme.

CATEGORY	Test pit 5/154	Site 8 1001	Site 26 4000	Total
FLAKE		1		1
BLADE			1	1
THUMBNAIL SCRAPER	1			1
TOTAL	1	1	1	3

Table 2. Summary of pottery by site and period (sherd count/weight).

		Ceramic period				
SITE	Contexts	Prehistoric	Roman	Medieval	Post-medieval	Total
SWWB Weeford Island	200s	1/42	17/176	1/10	2/12	21/240
SITE 2	6000s		314/5131	5/102		319/5233
SITE 8	1000s	38/525			1/10	39/535
SITE 15	2000s	1/4		1/1		2/5
SITE 16/17/18	7000s				2/3	2/3
SITE 26	4000s				1/4	1/4
SITE 27	5000s	1/7				1/7
SITE 26/27	8000s				40/437	40/437
TOTAL		41/578	331/5307	7/113	46/466	425/6464

Table 3. Summary of Roman pottery fabric descriptions.

CODE	Summary description	National fabric ref coll. code	Approximate date range
S10	South Gaulish samian ware	incl LGF SA	45-100
S20	Central Gaulish samian ware	incl LEZ SA 2	100-200
F34	?Mancetter-Hartshill oxidised colour-coated ware		?2C
A11	South Spanish Dressel 20 amphorae	BAT AM 1 & BAT AM 2	1C-3C
M22	Mancetter-Hartshill white mortarium	MAH WH	early 2C-late 4C
O11	Mancetter-Hartshill fine sandy oxidised fabric		?mid 1C-3C
O14	?Mancetter-Hartshill coarse sandy oxidised fabric		?late 1C-3C
O60	Oxidised coarse tempered fabrics		?2C
O61	Red buff coarse ?grog-tempered		?2C
R11	Mancetter-Hartshill fine sandy reduced fabric		mid 1-4C
R15	?Mancetter-Hartshill sandy reduced fabric		1-2C
R18	Mancetter-Hartshill black-surfaced fine sandy fabric		?late 1-3C
R19	?Mancetter-Hartshill black-surfaced coarse sandy fabric		?late 1-3C
R20	Moderately sandy reduced fabrics		late 1-4C
R23	Derbyshire type ware	cf DER CO	2-4C
R44	Fine reduced fabric with iron and ?limestone inclusions		2-4C
R64	Moderately sandy reduced fabric with sparse organic inclusions		late 1-3C
B11	Black-burnished ware (BB1)	incl CLI BB2 & COO BB2	120-370
C41	Red-brown vesicular (?shell-tempered) fabric		1-2C

Table 4. Site 2: pottery fabric quantification.

FABRIC	Sherd count	% Sherds	Weight (g)	% Weight	Rim count	% Rims	RE	% RE
S10	1	0.3	5	0.1				
S20	2	0.6	6	0.1	1	3.0	0.02	0.4
F34	1	0.3	6	0.1				
A11	1	0.3	21	0.4				
M22	7	2.2	748	14.6	2	6.1	0.18	3.4
O11	21	6.7	357	7.0	5	15.2	0.66	12.4
O14	1	0.3	6	0.1				
O60	3	1.0	23	0.4				
R11	20	6.4	250	4.9	2	6.1	0.44	8.3
R15	4	1.3	52	1.0	1	3.0	0.13	2.4
R18	28	8.9	83	1.6	2	6.1	1.05	19.7
R19	6	1.9	81	1.6				
R20	58	18.5	960	18.7	5	15.2	0.66	12.4
R23	32	10.2	350	6.8	5	15.2	0.80	15.0
R44	6	1.9	869	16.9				
R64	25	8.0	497	9.7				
B11	97	30.9	793	15.5	10	30.3	1.38	25.9
C41	1	0.3	24	0.5				
TOTAL	314		5131		33		5.32	

Table 5. Site 2 vessel types by fabric, quantification by REs.

	Fabric										
TYPE	S20	M22	O11	R11	R15	R18	R20	R23	B11	Total	%
C JARS											
CC						1.00				1.00	18.8
CK								0.80	1.29	2.09	39.3
CM			0.08	0.21			0.27			0.56	10.5
C TOTAL			0.08	0.44		1.00	0.44	0.80	1.29	4.05	76.1
G TANKARDS											
GA TOTAL			0.22							0.22	4.1
H BOWLS											
H TOTAL	0.02		0.08							0.10	1.9
I BOWLS/DISHES											
IA			0.04						0.09	0.13	2.4
I TOTAL			0.04			0.05	0.07		0.09	0.25	4.7
J DISHES											
JA			0.24		0.13					0.37	7.0
JB							0.15			0.15	2.8
J TOTAL			0.24		0.13		0.15			0.52	9.8
K MORTARIA											
KA TOTAL		0.18								0.18	3.4
TOTAL	0.02	0.18	0.66	0.44	0.13	1.05	0.66	0.80	1.38	5.32	
%	0.4	3.4	12.4	8.3	2.4	19.7	12.4	15.0	25.9		

Note: some vessel class totals include data for vessels not assigned to subtypes and may therefore exceed the sum of the subtypes listed above the totals

Table 6. Weeford Island Compound: prehistoric and Roman pottery.

FABRIC	No. sherds	Weight (g)
P11	1	42
S10	1	10
O14	1	1
O61	3	104
R20	5	21
R64	1	15
B11	6	25
TOTAL	18	218

Table 7: Total number of bones identifiable to species.

CUT	Deposit	Cattle	Sheep/goat	Pig	Unidentified	Total
5002	5003	4	1		6	11
5011	5012		1			1
5013	5014				1	1
5017	5018				6	6
5017	5019			1		1
6001	6004	3				3
6015	6016	3				3
6027	6028	2				2
TOTAL		12	2	1	13	28

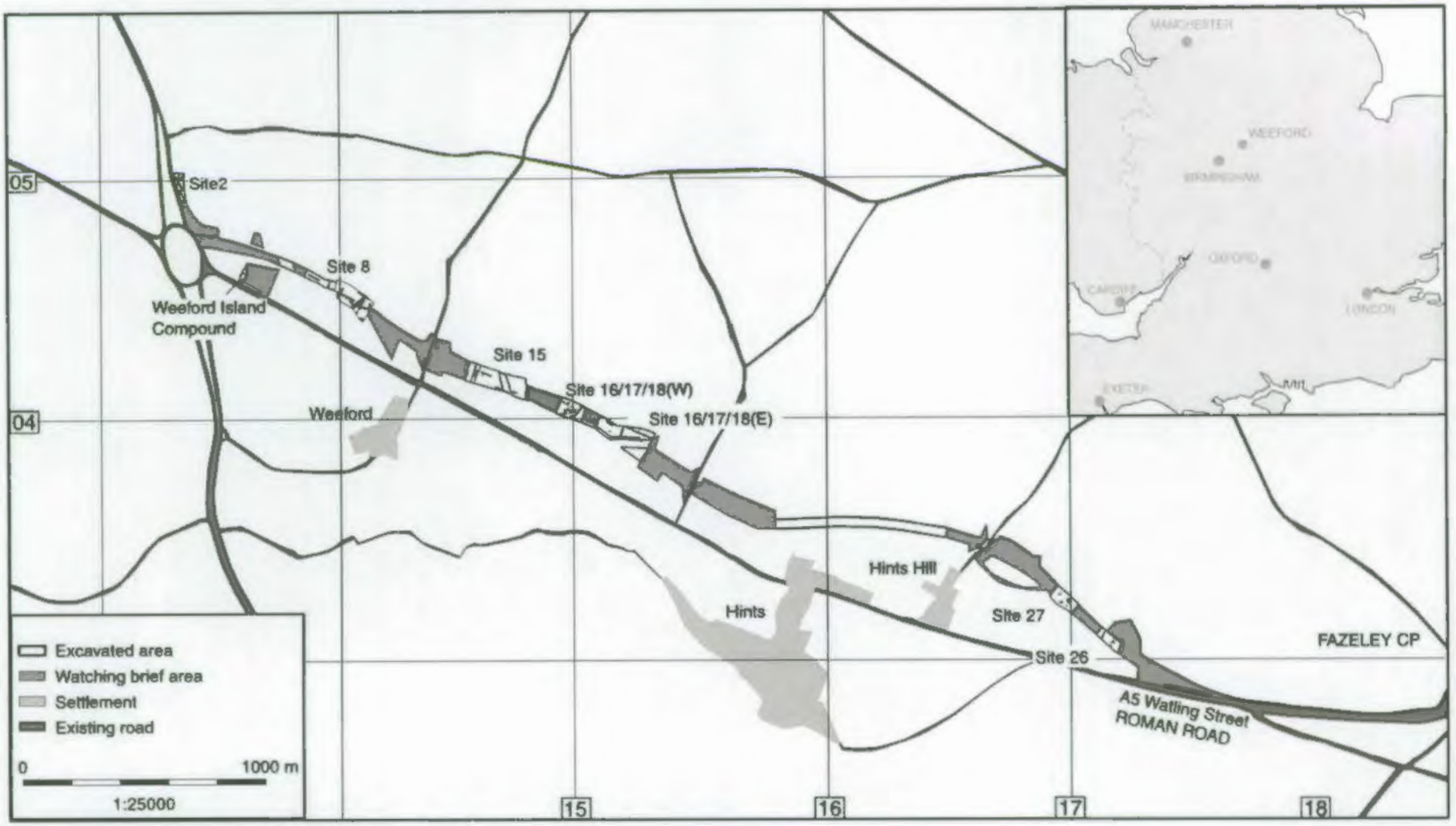

Figure 1: Scheme-wide plan showing location of sites.

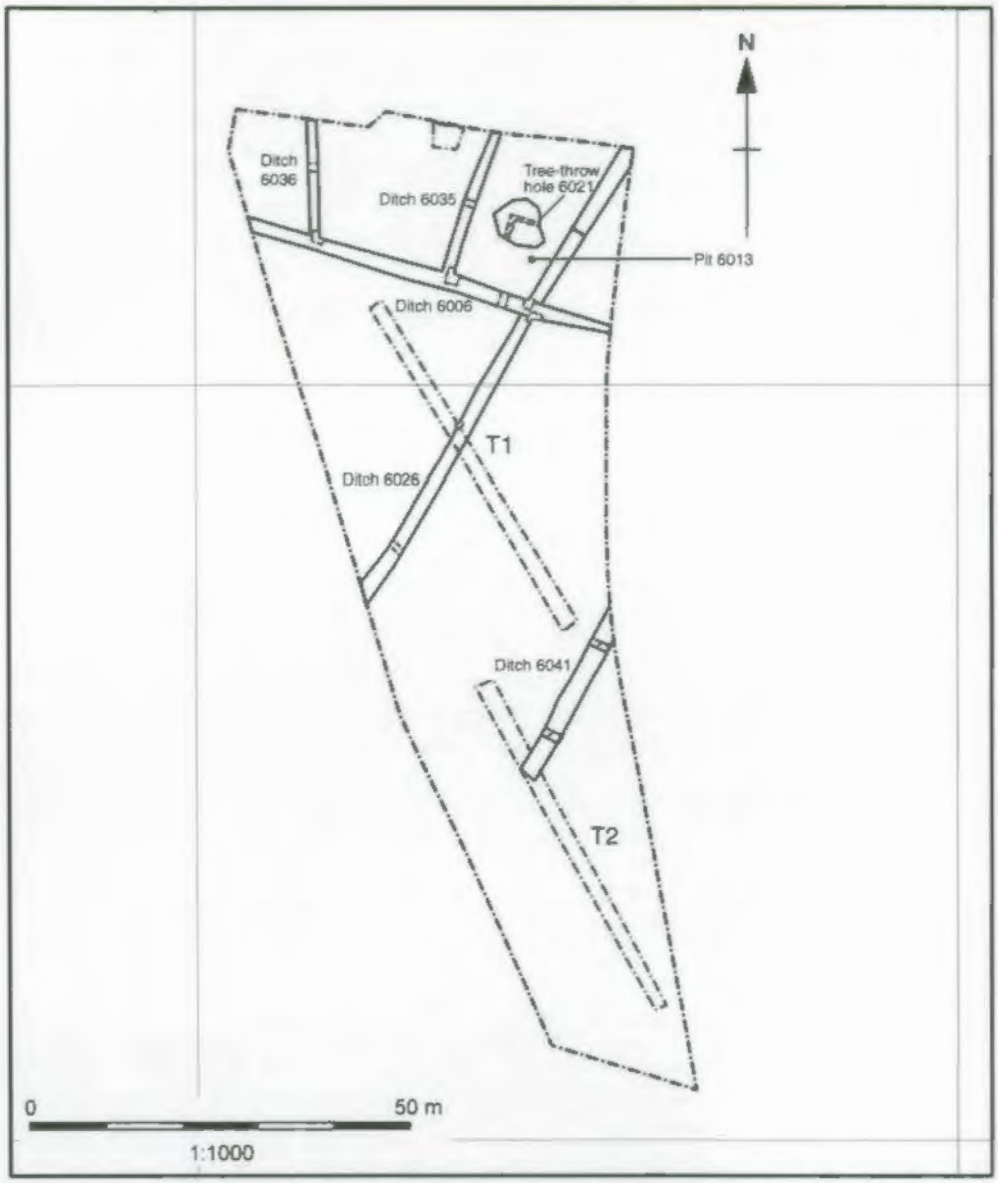

Figure 2. Site 2.

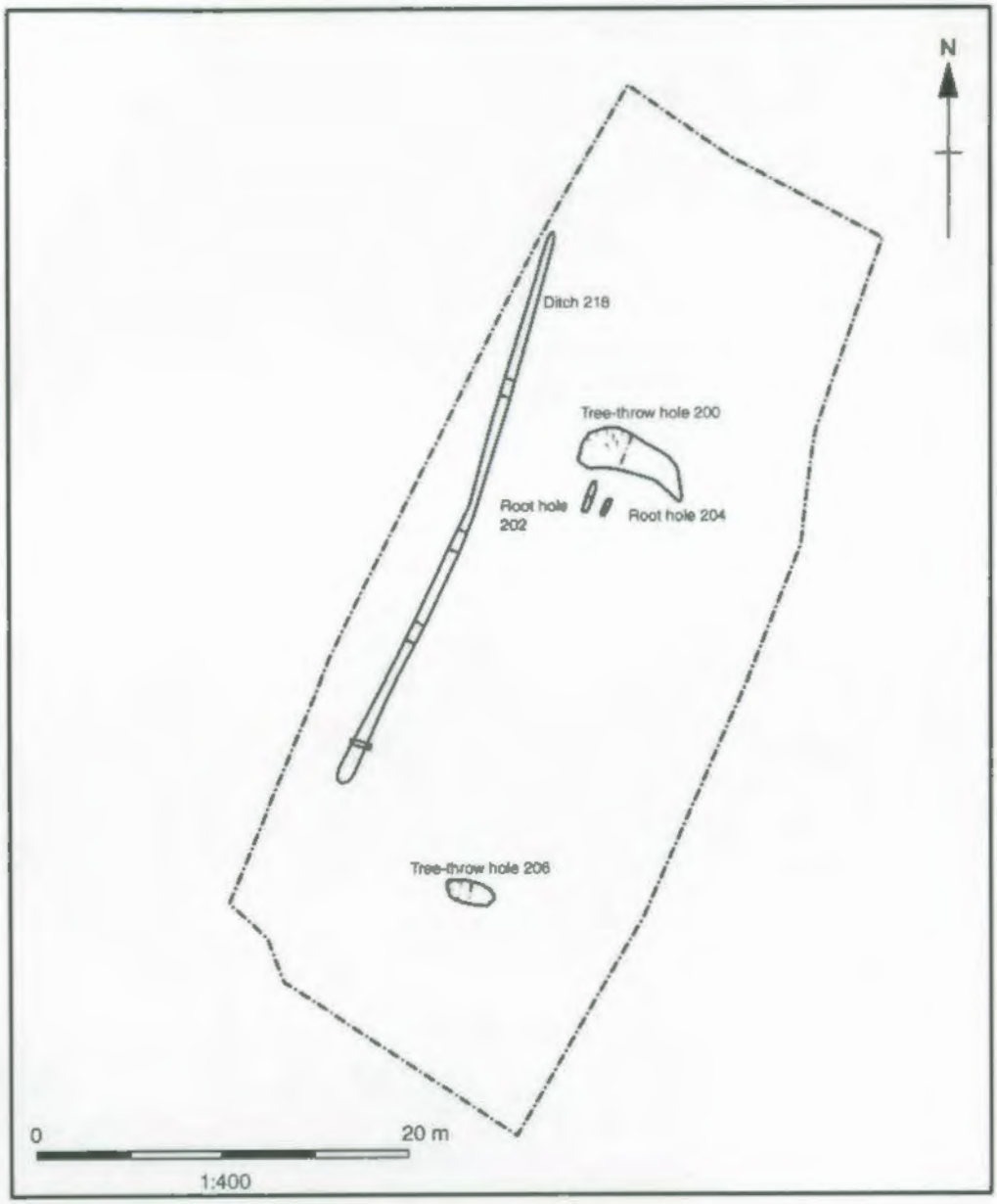

Figure 3: Weeford Island compound.

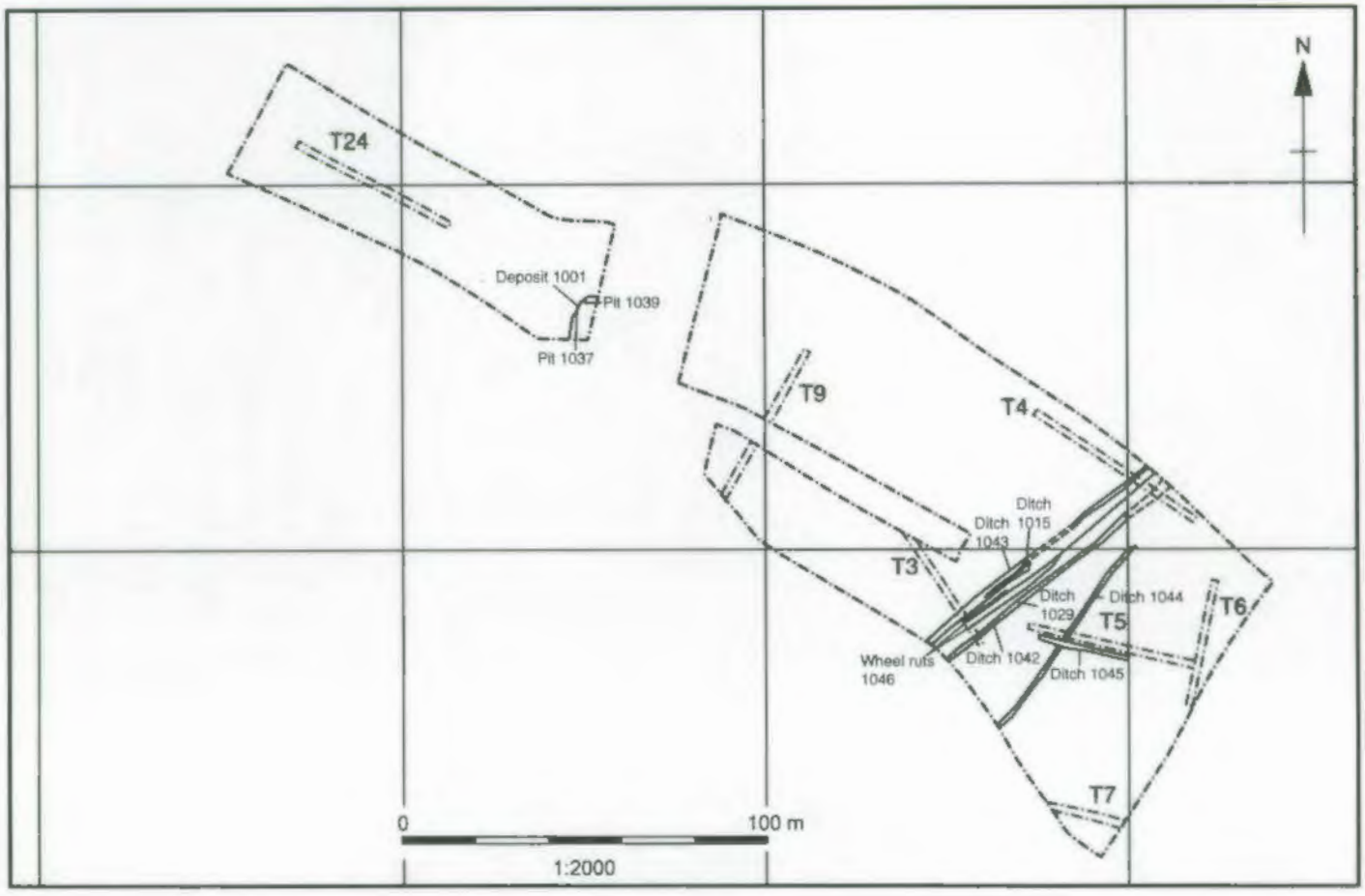

Figure 4: Site 8.

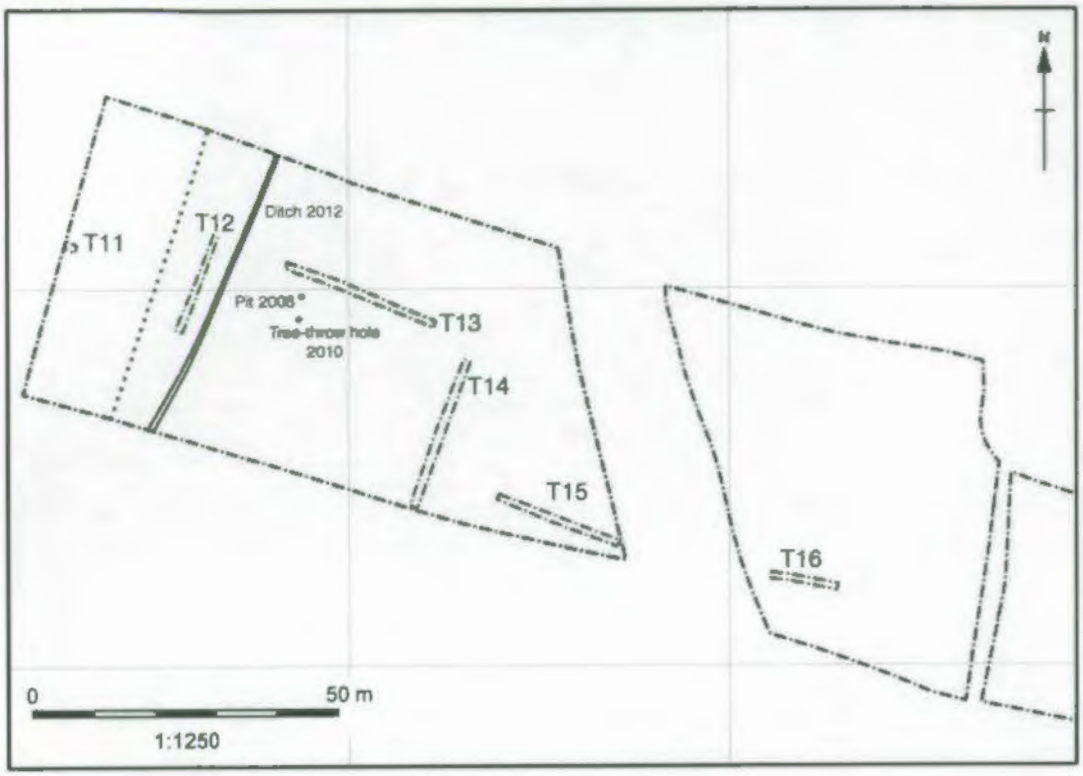

Figure 5: Site 15.

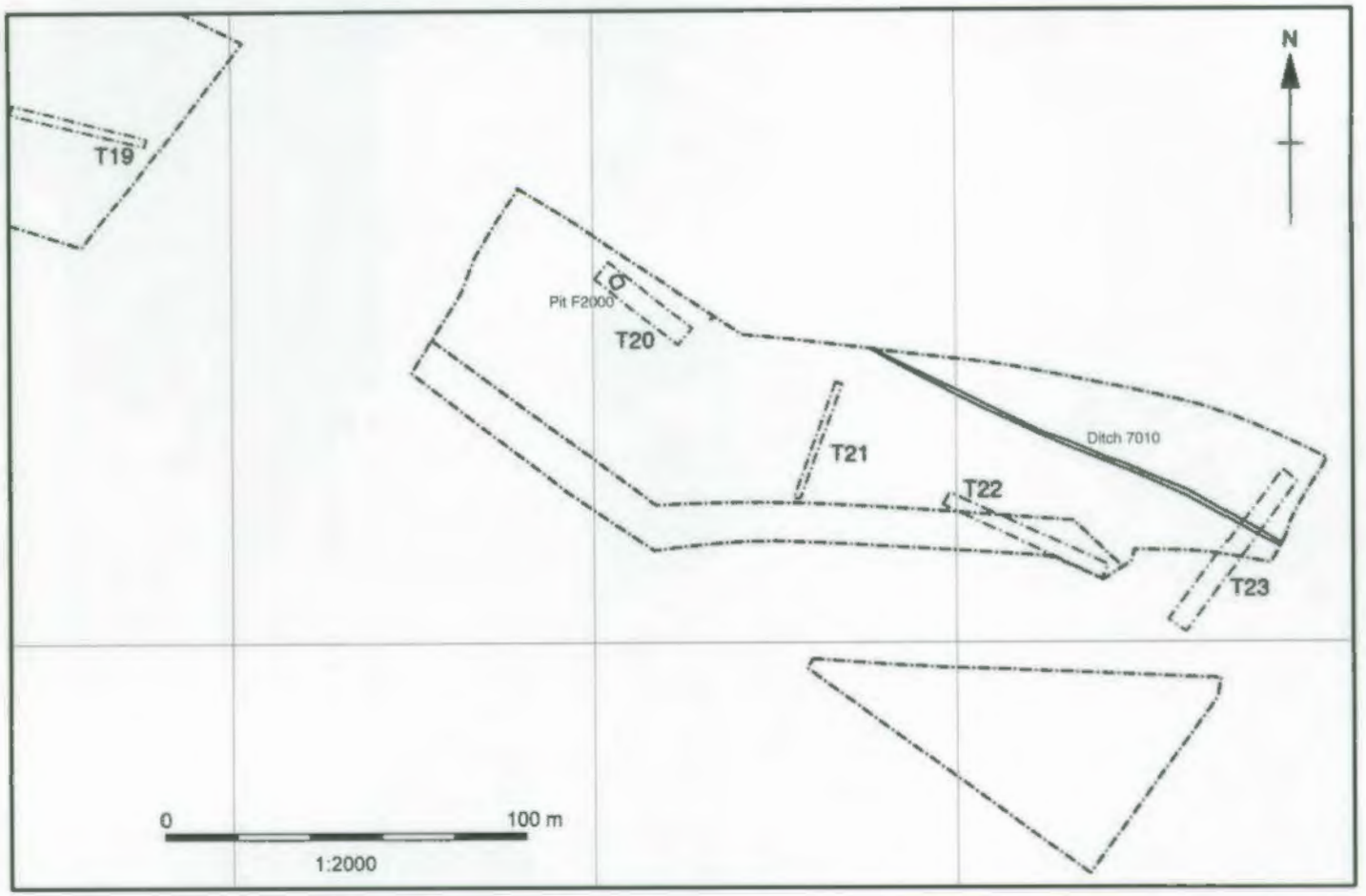

Figure 6: Site 16/17/18 (eastern area).

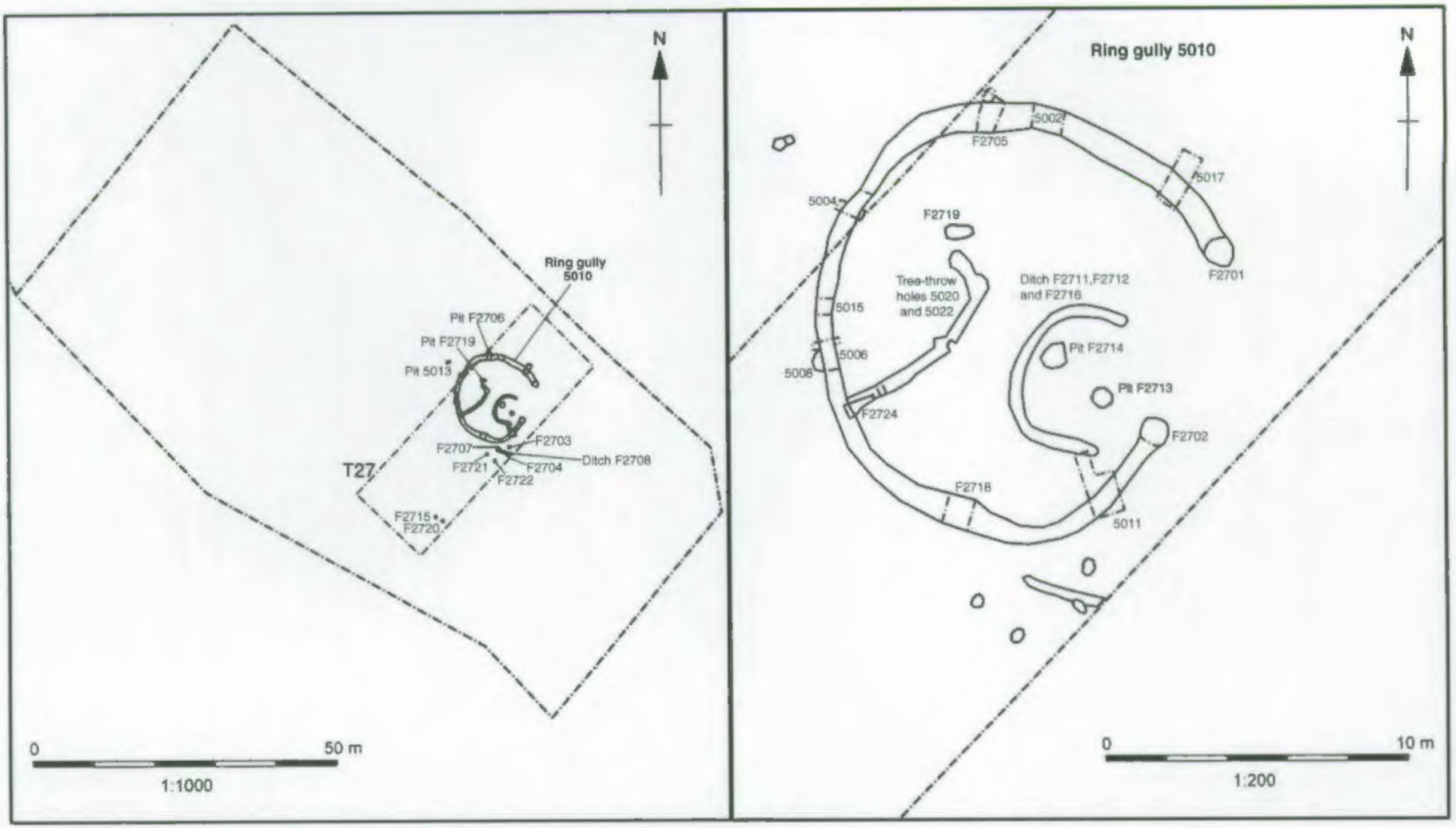

Figure 7: Site 27.

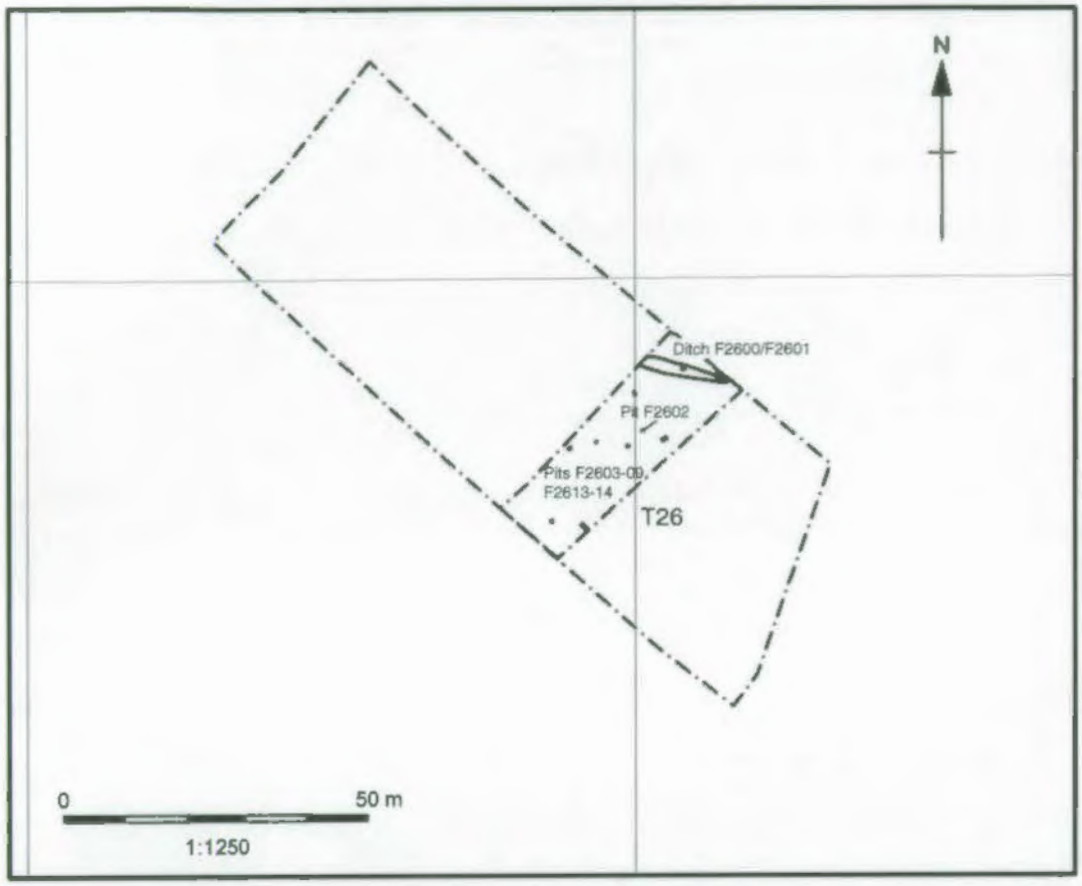

Figure 8: Site 26.

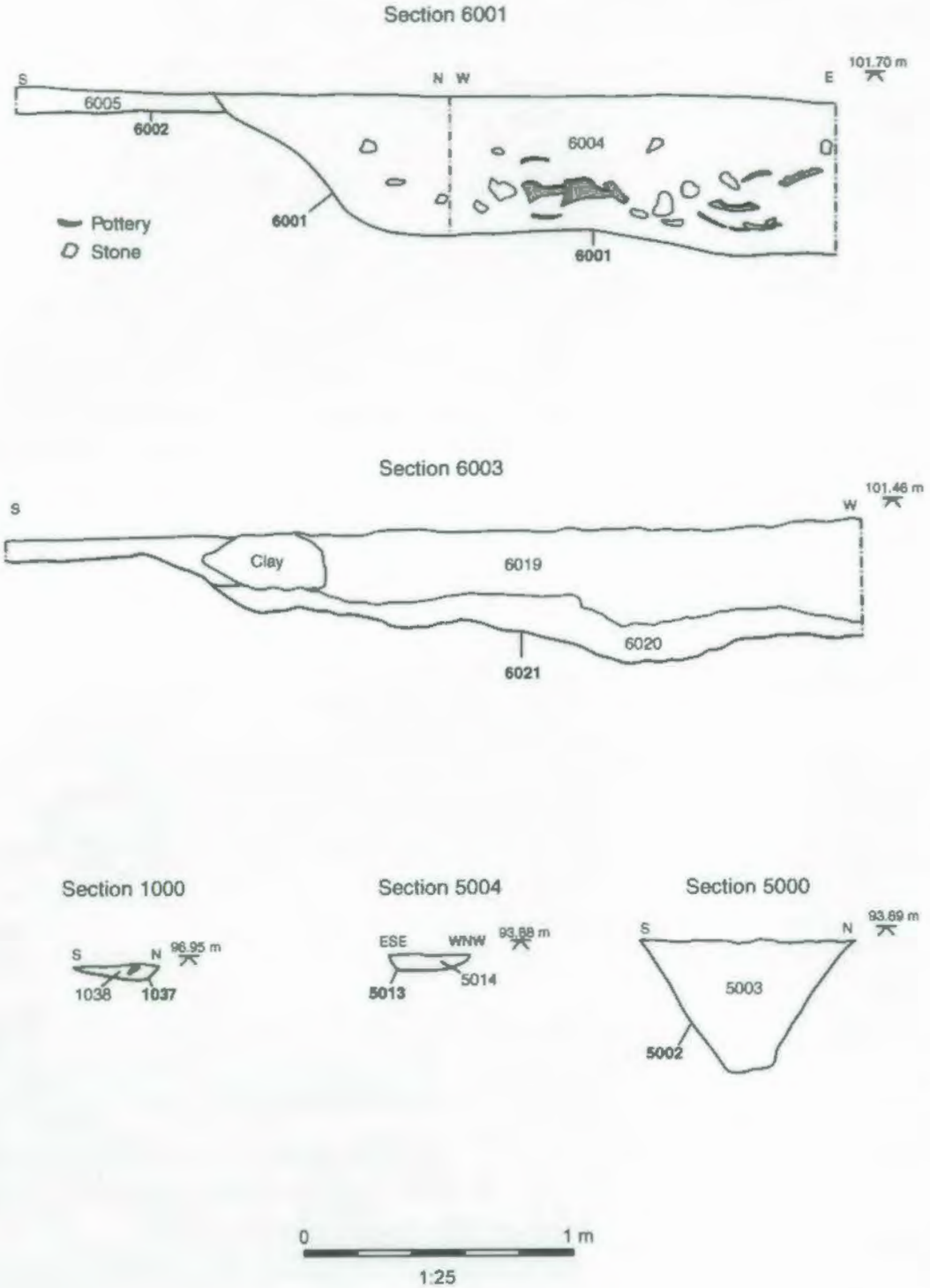

Figure 9: Section drawings.

Figure 10: Illustrated vessels.

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