

HER: 15355-7

EVENT: 2058

SOURCE: 1596

FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THORPE LEA NURSERIES, NEAR EGHAM, IN 1992

A preliminary account and assessment of the discovery of widespread remains belonging to the Prehistoric and Roman Periods, with some recommendations and proposals for further work.

by G N Hayman

**SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

Descriptive Text

A barbed and tanged arrowhead of beaker type, together with prehistoric material from other periods (see SMR 1442 and 2094), found and retained by J Dean when trenching on the cemetery allotment, Farnham, in 1928

Source: (a) PPS5: 1939. 114 (W F Rankine). (b) 'Survey of the Prehistory of Farnham' 1939 67, 89, 90 (Maps) (W F Rankine) HAT 7.9.1962.

Date: 06/05/1983

Compiler Martin O'Connell

The area is still under allotments, but no further finds are known of. The present whereabouts of the 1928 discoveries is not known, Dean has not been traced and Rankine is now dead.

Source: A S Phillips F1 7.10.66 M O'Connell 8.5.1983

Date: 06/05/1983

Compiler Martin O'Connell

Thorpe Lea Nurseries, Near Egham
1992

Various phases

area 3a 1990 found numerous
features dated Mid/late I.A. → (4th AD.

ditch & shape of enclosure.

concentration of I.A. features
(trench 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ & 30)

& B.A. features also.

FURTHER EVALUATION WORK AT THORPE LEA NURSERIES, nr. EGHAM, SURREY, IN 1992.

TR 017 700

Introduction

In the late summer of 1989 Hall Aggregates Ltd. began to extract gravel from a c14.5 hectare site at Thorpe Lea Nurseries, near Egham, Surrey (fig 1). The site was believed to be of high archaeological potential because of the discovery of prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains during the construction of the M25 immediately to the west (fig 2, trenches A). Consequently, a scheme of archaeological evaluation was undertaken which indicated the location of a Bronze Age site (fig 2, B) and led to the discovery and excavation of part of an Iron Age and Roman site (fig 2, trenches 1,2 and 3a) in 1990. An interim account of this work has already been presented to English Heritage (Jones and Hayman, 1990) and may be referred to here, though it is not the intention of this report to repeat information already available.

A comprehensive evaluation of the gravel permission has not been possible until recently due to the presence of numerous upstanding buildings within the northern and eastern parts of the Phase 2 area (Jones and Hayman, 1990, fig 2) which now have mostly been removed. The evaluation of this area took place between 5th May and 5th June 1992 and was conducted by staff of the Surrey County Archaeological Unit funded by Hall Aggregates Ltd. to whom the Unit is most grateful. This report summarizes the recent evaluation and allows recommendations to be made for further archaeological work.

The 1992 Evaluation

The recent evaluation involved the removal by mechanical excavator of overburden material from the area (fig 2, 3b) adjacent to the 1990 excavation (fig 2, 3a) where further archaeological remains were already known to be present, and the examination by trial trenching (fig 2, trenches 18-35) of land to the north and east of this. Other trial trenches (10-17) appearing within this area and shown on fig 2 were excavated in 1990; 1990 trenches 4-9 have become incorporated within 3b.

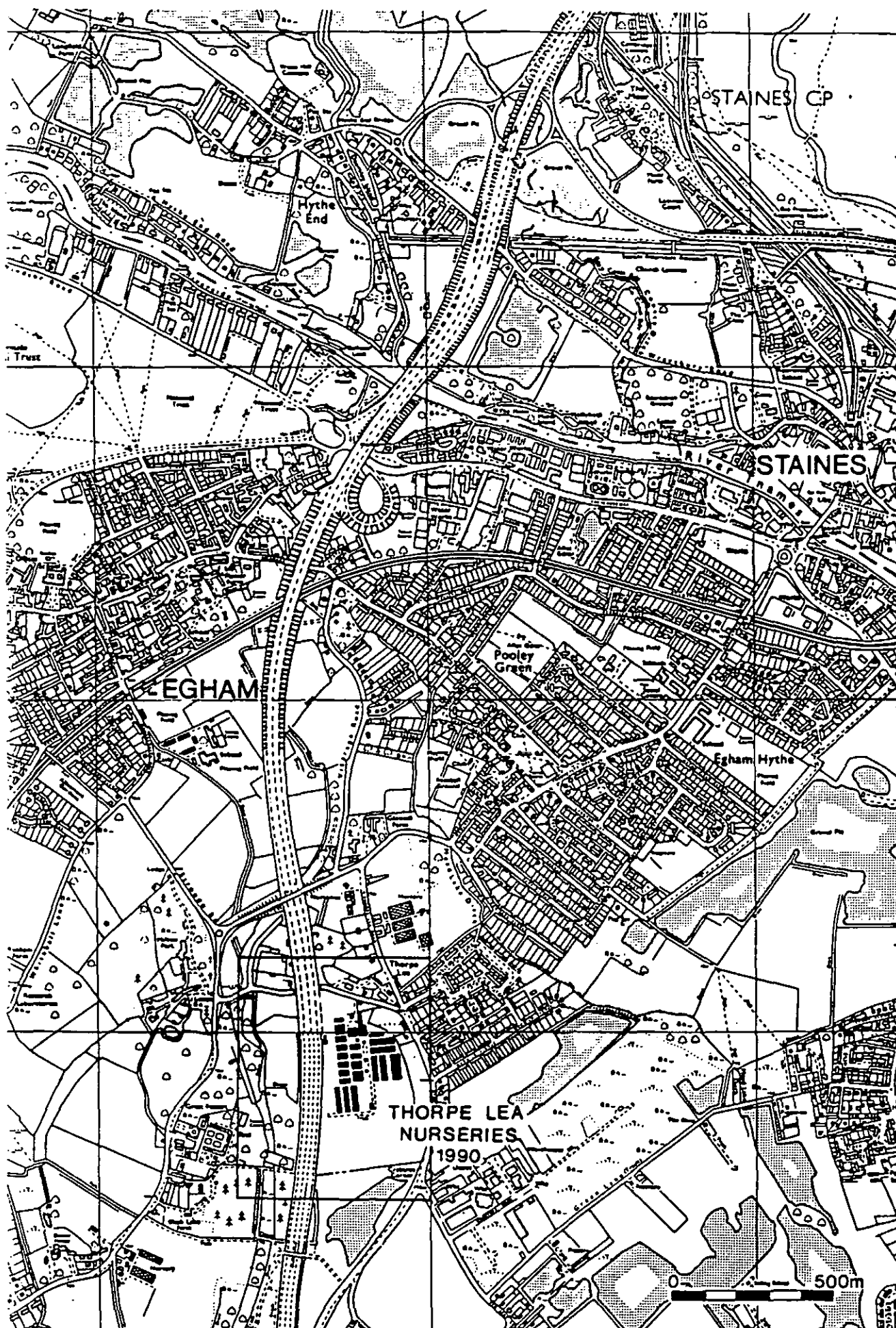


FIG 1 Location of Thorpe Lea Nurseries, showing the buildings as they existed in 1990. The outlined area is that of fig 2.

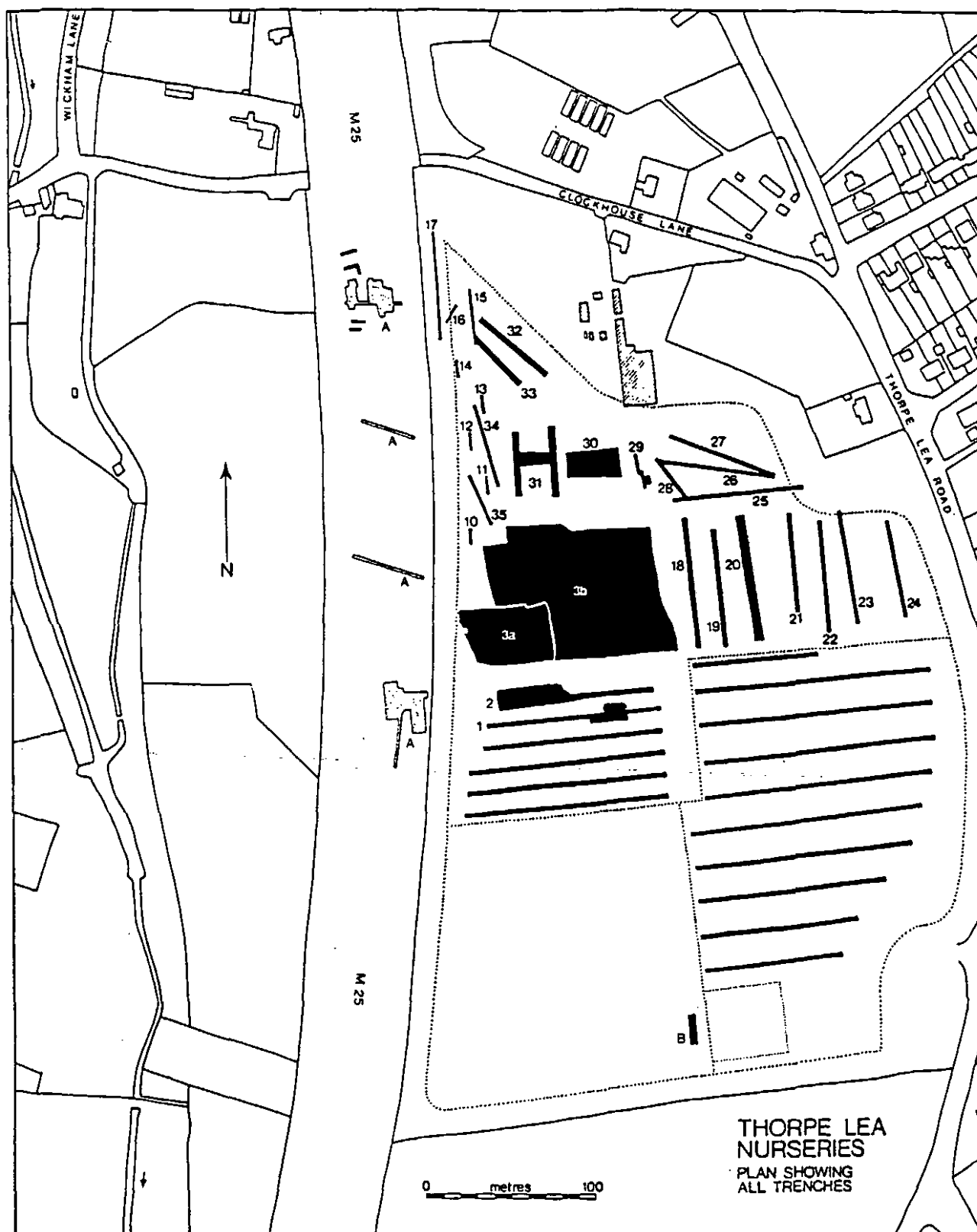


FIG 2 Plan showing all trenches excavated at Thorpe Lea Nurseries (except for those subsumed into area 3b). Trenches marked 'A' are those excavated along the line of the M25 in the early 1970s. The trench marked 'B' represents the area where Bronze Age evidence was recovered.

Area 3b

Much of the topsoil had already been stripped from this area by prior arrangement with the gravel company, which left between 15 and 30cms of subsoil to be excavated under careful archaeological supervision before features were revealed; a similar depth of topsoil was also removed around the extremities of this area to the north and east. Working from the south eastern corner of area 3a the removal of the 'brickearth' subsoil immediately began to reveal the features sealed beneath it. Although a small number of post holes and small pits were excavated at this stage there was little time for the formal examination of features, and the recovery of a plan of the soil marks revealed was considered the priority for this area. This was achieved by manual cleaning of the surface exposed by the mechanical excavator, and enabled finds to be recovered from the tops of many features thus allowing a certain amount of provisional spot-dating to be carried out. The numbers shown on fig 3 indicate features or locations within features from which surface material was collected (in a few cases numbers may have been issued for features from which no finds were recovered) while other features simply appear as soil marks; all features have been marked on the ground with white plastic tags.

The finds recovered from this operation mainly consist of pottery sherds of Iron Age and Roman date, but also include fragments of Roman brick and tile, a small number of iron objects and some struck flint. The Roman pottery consists of a range of material dating from the 1st to the 4th century AD, and in general the finds are consistent with those found in 1990. It would be pointless to attempt any phasing of this area based on these finds as the information they provide is limited and it is possible that such surface material could be misleading (perhaps as a result of contamination or, in the case of some of the larger features, secondary infilling). However, these finds do give an indication of the chronological range of features which may be expected from the site.

The overall site plan (fig 3) shows the majority of features to lie within a large enclosure bounded by a ditch, which appears to be continuous except for a wide opening on the northern side. Finds recovered from the surface of this ditch during

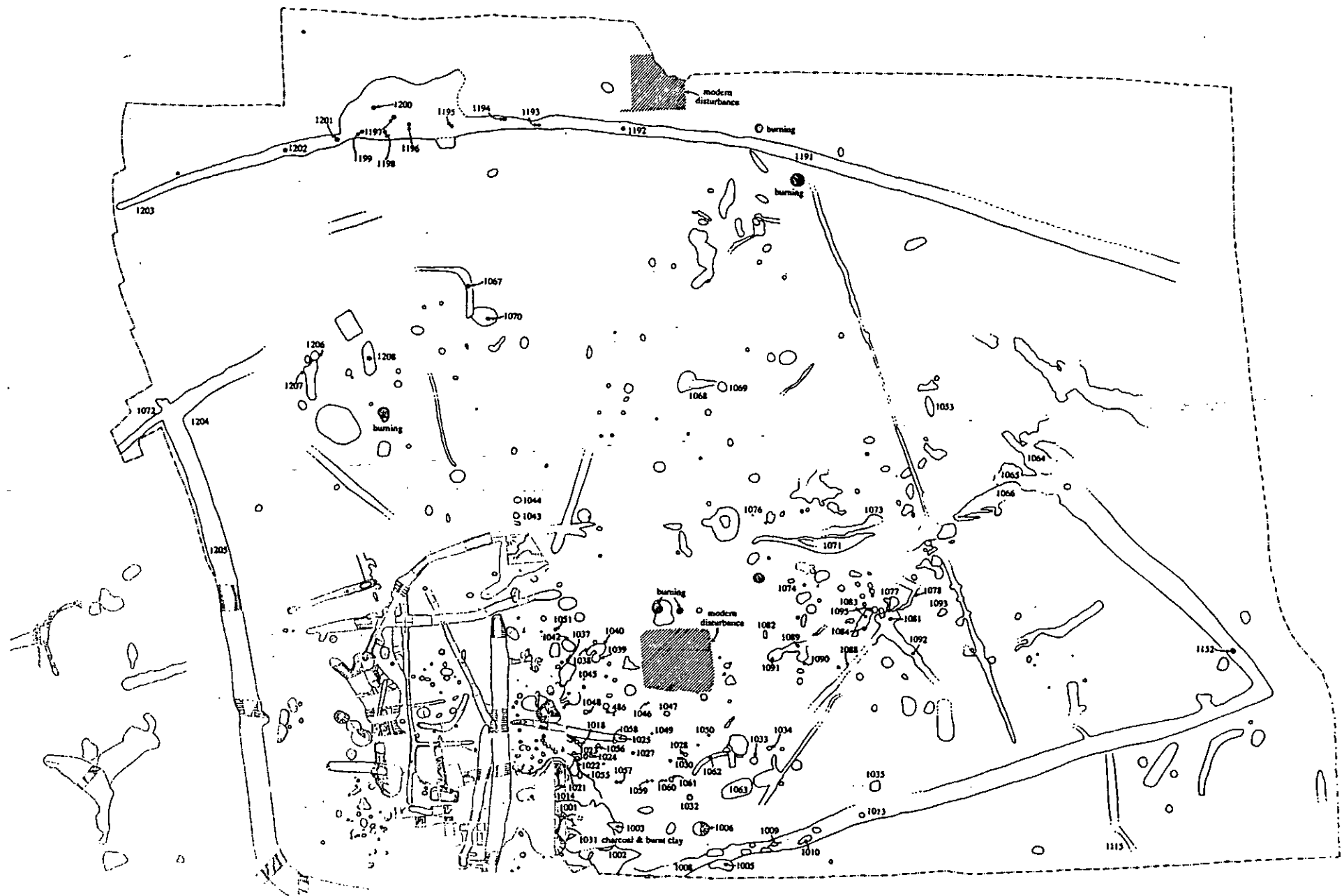


FIG 3 Area 3, showing the features excavated in 1991 in area 3b (bottom left), and the record of soil marks and recovery of surface finds in 1992.

the recent evaluation include pottery sherds of 4th century Roman date, but segments of this feature excavated in 1990 within area 3a showed that this material was only found in the upper fill and other finds from the primary and main fill layers indicated that the feature was of late Iron Age/Early Roman date. To the north of the wide opening left between the two ends of this ditch lies a second, gently curving, ditch which appears to flank the opening. It seems likely more that this feature was contemporary with at least one phase of occupation within the enclosure and may have formed a northern boundary to it allowing access to be gained via smaller openings to the east and west; trial trenches indicated limited land use in the Roman period to the north of this feature. Finds collected from the surface of this feature include pottery sherds of 4th century and earlier date; the 'true' date of the ditch has yet to be established.

The Trial Trenches

The trial trenches can be sub-divided into those containing few or no features of archaeological interest (18,19,21,22,23,24,31,32,33,34,35) and those which would appear to be of greater interest (20,25,26,27,28,29,30). It is worth noting that only three (24,32 and 35) out of all these trenches appeared to contain no features and important to remember that the dry weather conditions experienced during much of May made the accurate evaluation of many of the trial trenches difficult. In areas to the east and north east of 3b the features discovered were found to cut natural gravel which contained small and large pockets of natural brickearth - in the dry conditions there often appeared to be little difference between these brickearth patches and genuine features. Consequently further features may await discovery in areas which at present look to be of minor importance, and the high proportion of linear features discovered may to some extent reflect the fact that these were easier to spot. It was noticeable in trial trench 20 that many of the features discovered only became clear after a period of natural towards the end of the evaluation.

Individual trench plans have not been submitted for the majority of trial trenches as a brief description and reference to fig 4 which shows the major features discovered to date will suffice for these. Trial trenches 20 and 30 have been shown on figs 5 and 6 respectively.

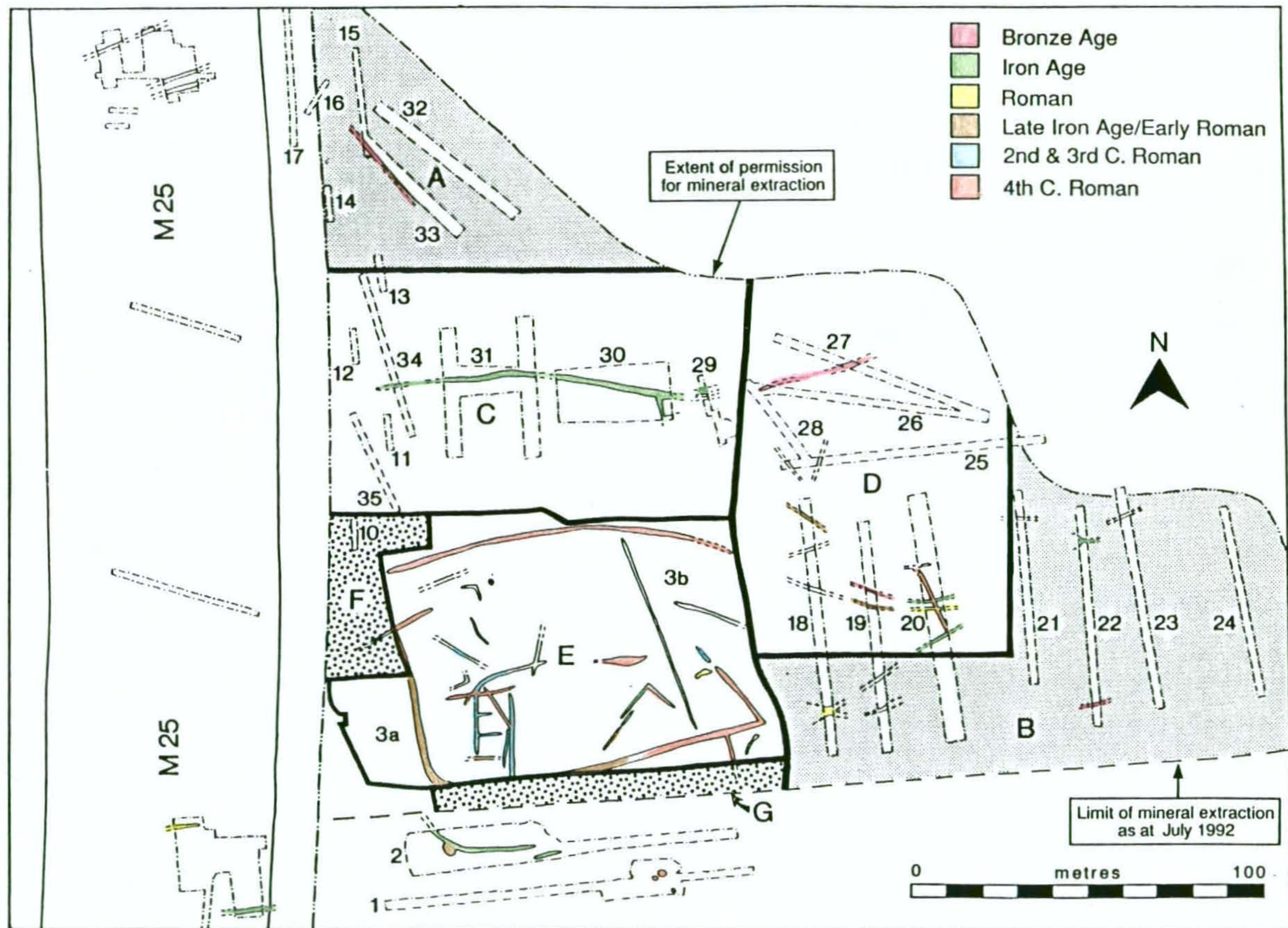


FIG 4 Provisional dating of the major features at Thorpe Lea Nurseries. In most cases the dating is based on the recovery of surface evidence, and should not be regarded as final. The lettered areas refer to the appendix.

Trenches 18,19,21,22,23,24,31,32,33,34 and 35

With the exception of trenches 24,32 and 35 which revealed no features these trenches revealed only linear features (ditches or gullies of Roman or prehistoric date) and one additional pit of Roman date in trench 31. Fig 4 gives some indication of the course and possible dates of these features, but some dates are misleading as in most cases insufficient finds were found to allow these to be suggested with any certainty - some ditches are clearly likely to be continuous between several trial trenches, but at present different segments of the same feature appear on plan to have different dates if viewed purely on the basis of the finds recovered.

Trenches 20,25,26,27,28,29,30

Trench 20 (fig 5) revealed a large number of features and was excavated in some detail. The majority of features discovered were of Iron Age date consisting of two ditches and a variety of pits and post holes, two ditches (1174 and 1128/1239) of Roman date and a pit (1225) possibly of Bronze Age date were also found. It is interesting to note that small quantities of slag and occasional small lumps of what appeared to be a mineral ore were found in some Iron Age contexts.

Considering the density of features found within the trench and the likelihood that the pits and post holes are associated with occupation, it is perhaps surprising that so few features were found in trenches 19 and 21 to the west and east. This may mean that the extent of the Iron Age land use around trench 20 is limited in area, though fairly intensive, or may be an indication that the information provided by some of the trenches which appeared to contain few features is misleading.

Trenches 25,26,27 and 28 revealed a variety of ditches, pits and post holes the majority of which were excavated. One of these features appeared to be of Roman date (trench 28) but the remainder, where dates could be given, were prehistoric. Most interesting was a large ditch which was first discovered in trench 27 and reached a rounded termination at the western end of trench 26. Segments of the ditch were excavated at each of these points showing it to be between 1.30-

THORPE LEA NURSERIES

Trial Trench 20

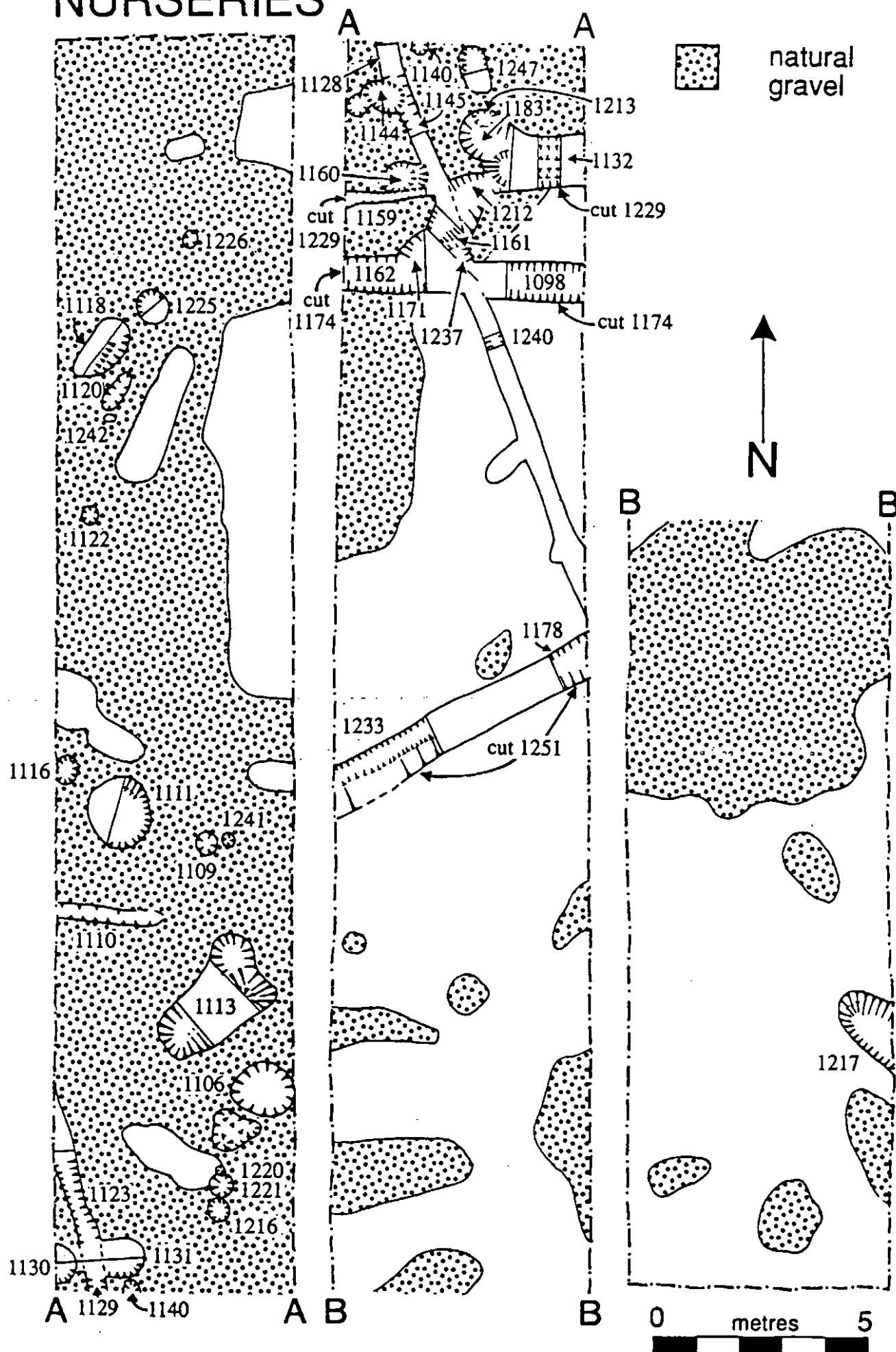


FIG 5 Archaeological features revealed in trench 20. Where 'natural gravel' is not indicated the subsoil is brickearth which was not always easily distinguished from the fill of cut features.

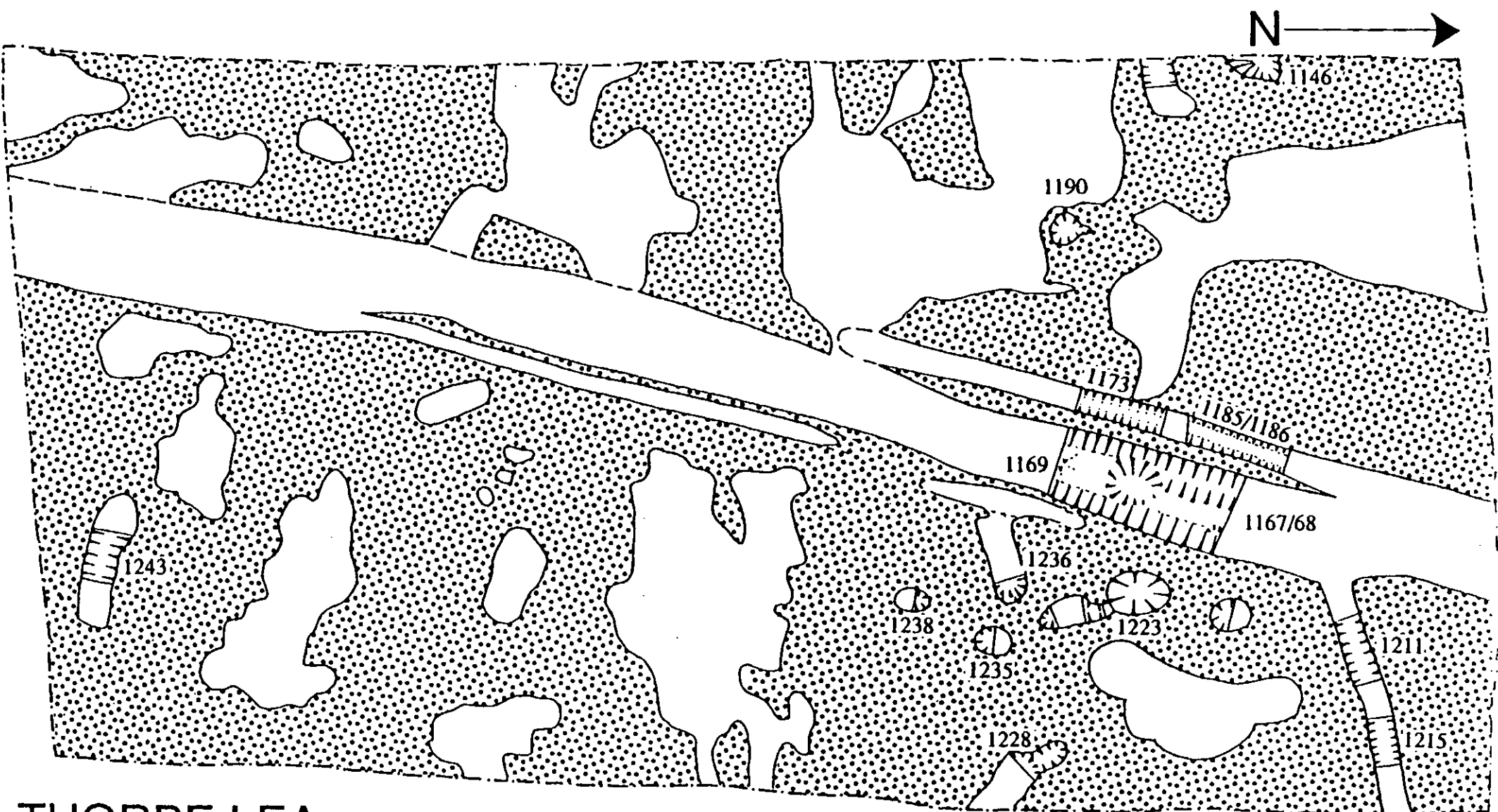
1.75m wide and between 0.65-0.75m deep with a pronounced 'V'-shaped profile. Frequent sherds of plain and decorated calcined flint gritted pottery (including a large rim sherd from a bucket urn) and pieces of struck flint were recovered from the fill of each segment. Examination of the pottery has shown it to be of Mid-Late Bronze Age date in unabraded condition. The struck flint collected from each segment was largely undiagnostic but included some material which is probably contemporary with the pottery, and also two arrowheads of Late Neolithic date - one from trench 26 and one from trench 27.

To the east of the ditch in trench 27 further features were found and these included two post holes and two small pits which were of Bronze Age date (the latter again containing quite frequent sherds of pottery), an Iron Age pit and some undated features. Little else was found in trenches 26 and 28 but in trench 25 a further Bronze Age pit was found along with two linear features of Iron Age date and some other features of uncertain origin.

Trenches 29 and 30 were opened up partly with the hope of finding a further stretch of ditch contemporary with the Bronze Age feature known to terminate in trench 26. Virtually the whole of the southern part of trench 29 was 'destroyed' by a number of very deep modern features, and a further modern feature was found to run along the eastern side of the northern part of this trench. This latter clearly cut two ditches which lay side-by-side and ran in an east-west direction across the trench. Both of these ditches were excavated, but each was physically smaller and of a different shape to the Bronze Age ditch and the few finds collected from each (mainly pottery sherds) were of Iron Age date confirming that there was no connection.

At some point between trench 29 and 30 these ditches appear to merge and they can be traced eastwards across trenches 30 (fig 6), 31 and 34, beyond which their course is unknown. Segments dug in trenches 30 and 31 showed two distinct base levels, one associated with each ditch, and it seems likely that one ditch cuts the other, though in the dry conditions and with the fills of each being so similar it was not possible to determine a relationship. The segment dug in trench 34 was narrower with just one base level which suggests either that one ditch does not

FIG 6 Archaeological features revealed in trench 30. Where 'natural gravel' is not indicated the subsoil is brickearth which was not always easily distinguished from the fill of cut features.



**THORPE LEA
NURSERIES**

0 metres 5



natural
gravel

Trial Trench 30

extend this far or sharply changes direction between 31 and 34, or that both ditches follow exactly the same course at this point and cannot be identified individually. Although these ditches have been provisionally dated as Iron Age, based on the majority of finds recovered, two sherds of Roman pottery belonging to the 1st-2nd century AD were recovered from the upper fill of the segment excavated in trench 30, so it is possible that one ditch may be Roman. A bronze brooch of 1st century BC/AD date was recovered from the lower fill of the same segment; this is the fourth fibula to be recovered from the site to date.

Other linear features and a number of small pits and/or post holes were also excavated in trench 30. Some of these remain of uncertain date though 1236 may be of Bronze Age or Iron Age date, 1243 may be of Roman date and 1173, 1185/6, 1146 and 1223 would appear to be of Iron Age date. Pit 1146 is of interest in passing because it contained part of a pyramidal baked clay loom weight along with several large sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Conclusions

The recent evaluation supports the findings of the 1990 excavation and provides additional information concerning areas to the north and east of this. The excavation of area 3a (fig 2) in 1990 revealed numerous features, dating from Mid/Late Iron Age to the 4th century AD, and trial trenches running northwards and eastwards from this area (Jones and Hayman, 1990, fig 2) revealed further features and established a need for more widespread evaluation/excavation. At the time it was thought that the broad length of ditch found to the west of the main concentration of features (Jones and Hayman, 1990, fig 3) might be part of an enclosure ditch, and the recent evaluation has shown this to be the case as the course of the ditch and shape of the enclosure is now known (figs 2 and 3). Within the enclosure a large number of features have been found which decrease in concentration away from the south western corner and have a comparable date range to those previously discovered; from the point of view of excavation this decrease will be beneficial as, hopefully, many of the problems of residuality encountered in 1990, which resulted from the high density of intercutting features, may be avoided.

Additional areas of archaeological interest have also been identified as a result of extensive trial trenching during the recent evaluation. In particular there is a concentration of Iron Age features in trench 20, further Iron Age features in trench 30, and Iron Age features with some most interesting Bronze Age features in trenches 25,26 and 27.

Importance and Potential

The importance and potential of the site has, to a large extent, already been summarized by the points made in an earlier report (Jones and Hayman, 1990); the majority of these points remain valid and need not be repeated again here. In addition the following should be considered:

- a) During the recent evaluation the site was visited by Patricia Wiltshire to assess its potential from an environmental point of view. Her opinion was that some features may yield useful environmental samples, particularly for pollen analysis. This would mainly apply to the larger features, and only to those which can be securely dated, but may provide important information about the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman occupation/land use of the area.

A large feature, believed to be a waterhole, was excavated in 1990 (Jones and Hayman, 1990, fig 2, trench D). This feature has since been removed by gravel extraction but a feature of similar dimensions appears as a soil mark within area 3b and has yet to be excavated. Should this feature turn out to be a second waterhole and should other features of this type be revealed by additional soil stripping, there may be some potential for the recovery of macro-fossil remains as well as pollen.

Patricia Wiltshire has agreed to co-ordinate the environmental requirements of further excavation, but would prefer to revisit the site once excavation is underway to get a better idea of its potential. There is also a possibility that some off-site sampling may be undertaken

along the course of a streambed on the western side of the M25, with the potential that environmental samples relevant to this site and others in the vicinity (eg the St. Ann's Hill hillfort 2.5km to the south east) may be obtained.

- b) Various features showing signs of possible in-situ burning have been exposed in area 3b (labelled accordingly on fig 3). These may be suitable for archaeomagnetic dating once excavation has begun.
- c) Small quantities of slag and mineral ore were discovered in Iron Age contexts in trial trench 20. There is a possibility that associated iron working areas may await discovery.
- d) The quantity and quality of the Bronze Age material recovered from trial trenches 25,26 and 27 suggests that an important contemporary site may be found in this area. This may provide a link with other Bronze Age features found to the south in area B (fig 2), and to the north west in trial trenches 15,16 and 33 and beneath the M25 (fig 2). The discovery of further Bronze Age remains provide further support for an earlier suggestion (Jones and Hayman, 1990, 4, (i)) that occupation within the gravel permission may have been largely continuous for much of the 1st millennium BC.
- e) The discovery of a large number of linear features outside the main enclosure in area 3a/3b (fig 4), including one which runs off its north western corner and one which may run off its southern side near the south eastern corner, is potentially very interesting. The further exposure and more precise dating of these features may allow field systems to be recognised which in all probability will be contemporary with the various phases of occupation present within and around this enclosure. Opportunities to examine land use patterns around occupation areas have not been frequently forthcoming in Surrey and the chance to do so here is an exciting

prospect.

Recommendations

- 1) There should be a thorough archaeological examination by excavation of area 3b so that, when combined with results from 1990, occupational phases within this area can be determined and understood.
- 2) It would be advantageous at this stage if provision could be made for the mechanical surface 'clearance' of the small area of ground lying between areas 3a/3b and the soil bund marking the western limit of the gravel permission. Features were discovered here in 1990 in the area adjacent to 3a, but there was insufficient time available for these to be investigated. Also, it would be useful to 'clean' the area adjacent to 3b to allow the course of the ditch running off the north western corner of the enclosure to be planned to the furthest extent possible, and to check that what appears to be a rounded termination at the western end of the ditch flanking the enclosure opening is indeed this rather than merely a break before the feature continues.

This area has already been stripped to the level of the natural geology but has weathered and become overgrown with weeds; 'cleaning' could be quickly and economically achieved by surface skimming using the ditching bucket of a mechanical excavator. Excavation could follow if necessary.

- 3) All sealing layers of stratigraphy should be mechanically stripped from those areas to the north and east of 3b which would appear to be of further archaeological interest as a result of recent trial trenching. This should be done at the earliest appropriate opportunity after the excavation of area 3b (not before or during this work) as prolonged exposure of freshly machined areas is detrimental to their excavation. Areas to the east of trial trench 22 and to the north of trench 31 may be excluded from this as the evidence available suggests that they are of low archaeological interest.

- 4) An appropriate excavation strategy should be determined for sites revealed after the completion of recommendation 3. This should take into account the financial resources available, and should include the mapping and sampling (by excavation) of field boundary features as well as a more detailed examination of any further occupational or industrial areas that are revealed.
- 5) An area measuring 15m x 10m survives adjacent to area B (fig 2) between areas of gravel quarrying. Covering soil layers should be mechanically removed from this area and any features exposed should be excavated. This may provide important information about Bronze Age occupation and provide a link with the other Bronze Age features that are known to be present within the gravel permission.
- 6) The area between trench 2 and area 3a/3b (fig 2) is at present used as a vehicle track by the gravel company. Provision should be made to allow the removal of this strip of land to be observed should the gravel company decide to quarry it at some future point in time. This area is believed to be of limited archaeological potential as far as excavation is concerned due to the presence of numerous deep tyre ruts (known to extend beneath the level of the surviving archaeological deposits) which have been unavoidably created by the heavy lorries using the track. However, it is possible that substantial features (the south western part of the large enclosure ditch for example) may survive beneath the level of damage and, after carefully supervised machining, it may be possible to obtain a plan of any such features even if further excavation cannot be undertaken.
- 7) Environmental sampling should take place where possible in each phase of excavation.
- 8) Provision should be made to ensure that the excavator has access to an appropriate supply of water as experience has shown that the site cannot be satisfactorily excavated after prolonged dry spells. Sufficient water pressure will be needed to enable sprinklers to be used in very dry conditions. The weather conditions experienced at the time of excavation may obviate

this requirement either partially or wholly, but allowance must be made for suitable plumbing to be laid on if it is needed.

Reference

- Jones, P & Hayman, GN, 1990, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Roman Settlement at Thorpe Lea Nurseries, nr. Egham, Surrey: An interim account of archaeological work in 1989/90. (A report previously supplied to English Heritage).

Graham N. Hayman
Field Officer
Surrey County Archaeological Unit

THORPE LEA NURSERIES, EGHAM
A preliminary costing for a full excavation

Thorpe Lea Nurseries

An archaeological evaluation of those areas of the Thorpe Lea Nurseries mineral extraction site where gravel extraction has still to take place was carried out in May and June 1992. As a result of this and after preliminary discussions with English Heritage and Hall Aggregates, the Surrey County Archaeological Unit put forward some costings for full excavation of the site. Since then English Heritage have indicated that the cost of this (£123,988) was far beyond the level of financial support (£45,000) which they were prepared to give (in principle).

The preliminary report on the evaluation has now been completed and as a result of this, and in the light of English Heritage's response it is now possible to put forward a more limited programme of excavation which should nevertheless enable a proper and coherent understanding of the site's development to be obtained. The proposals are briefly summarised below and by reference to the attached plan; full documentation (a MAP2 project design) can be prepared in due course.

The remaining part of the site is divided into a series of areas on the attached plan. The work proposed in each is as follows:

- Area A Excavation indicates that some landscape features are present but that evidence of ancient occupation is absent. Limited observation and recording during mineral extraction should be undertaken.
- Area B Proposed work is as for Area A, although the amount of recording during extraction may be greater, in view of the proximity of areas D and E.
- Area C Similar to A and B, but the area of trench 30 revealed a limited amount of evidence for occupation. There should be proper excavation of trench 30, supplemented by observation and recording during extraction.
- Area D This area revealed significant evidence for Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation at a number of places within the trial trenches. Careful machine stripping of the area followed by intensive sampling by hand excavation is proposed.
- Area E This is the area presently exposed, the south-west corner of which received detailed investigation in 1990. Careful review of the evidence from the recent stripping suggests that the area beyond the south-west corner has much less intensive evidence for occupation, and hence excavation will be less time-consuming than initially supposed.
- Area F This area was stripped of overburden some time ago but has never been recorded archaeologically. The upper levels of any features will already have been lost/damaged but in view of its proximity to Area E it is suggested that the surface is rapidly skimmed by machine and the surviving archaeology recorded.

- Area G This area has been in use as a haul road and the archæology will have been badly damaged by this. Nevertheless, it is in a potentially important position and larger and deeper (especially linear) features should survive. If mineral is to be extracted from underneath the haul road then machine stripping should be followed by salvage excavation and recording.
- Area H This is the small area reserved for investigation of the Bronze Age site some way to the south of areas A-G. It should be machine-stripped and properly excavated, as it may well form an important link in understanding what may have been two millenia of shifting settlement in the area.

COST CATEGORY	TASK	TEAM MEMBER	PERSON DAYS	£ COST
<i>A Direct Costs</i>				
1	Excavation			
(1) Salary	Project Co-ordination/ Management	RP	6	882
	Direction of Excavation	GH	90	8100
	Team of 8-10	AE	550	30800
	Finds advice and co-ordination (off-site)	PJ/SH	8	720
	Environmental Specialists etc		NOT COSTED	
	Conservation		NOT COSTED	
(2) Travel Costs		-	-	2835
(3a) Plant Hire (earthmoving) (14 days)				7000
(3b) Equipment Hire - Portakabins				1250
(3c) Equipment Hire - Other				300
(4) Consumables (Photo, Boxes, etc)				1215
(6) Misc site costs (a) - Water supply				500
	(b) - Polythene sheeting			250
	<i>TOTAL EXCAVATION DIRECT COSTS</i>			<i>53852</i>
2	Assessment			
(1) Salary	Artefact processing	AE	75	4200
	Pottery dating and assessment	PJ/SH	12	1080
	Other finds assessment	SH +	8	568
	Stratigraphic assessment/ reports	GH	12	1080
	Draughtsman	GP	8	568
	Environmental assessments		NOT COSTED	
	Project management/updating	RP	3	441
(2) Travel Costs				556
(3) Consumable items				238
	<i>TOTAL ASSESSMENT DIRECT COSTS</i>			<i>8731</i>
	<i>GRAND TOTAL DIRECT COSTS</i>			<i>62583</i>
<i>B Overheads</i>				
(1) Directing/admin staff allocated to project				6604
(2) Accommodation				3176
(3) Centralised administrative costs				3176
(4) Insurances			36	302
	<i>TOTAL OVERHEADS</i>			<i>13258</i>
	<i>GRAND TOTAL FOR PROJECT</i>			<i>75841</i>

NOTES

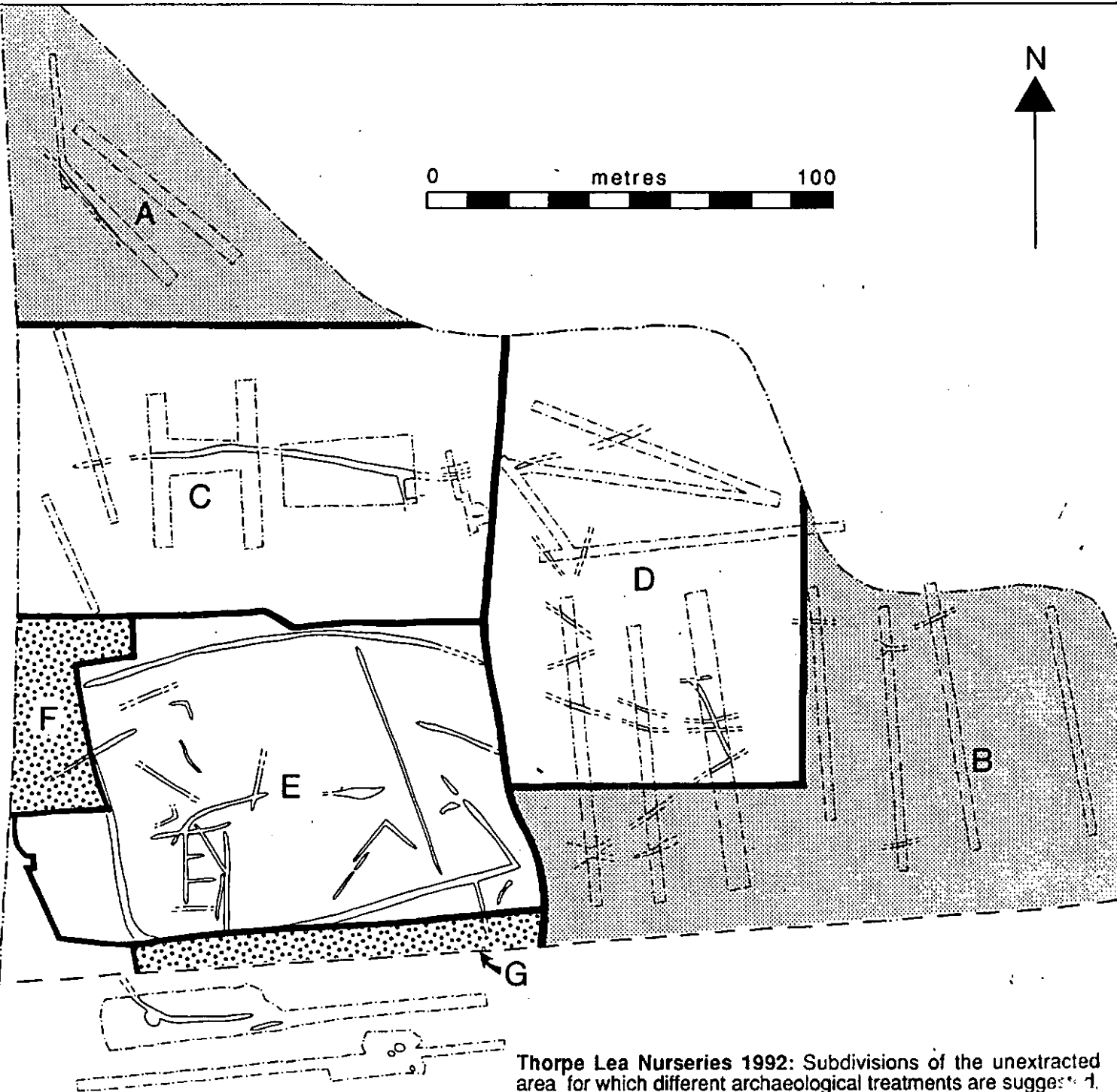
- (1) Costs are assessed on the basis of a five-month excavation. Salary costs and Overheads are accurate for 1992-3, but the other costs are educated guesses at present.
- (2) Staff-member abbreviations: RP = Rob Poulton, PJ = Phil Jones, GH = Graham Hayman, SH = Suzanne Huson, GP = Giles Pattison, AE = Archæological Excavators.

RP
7.8.92

M25

M25

0 metres 100



Thorpe Lea Nurseries 1992: Subdivisions of the unextracted area for which different archaeological treatments are suggested.