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Archaeological Evaluation at

Old Farm Road,

Mancetter, Warwickshire



Report 0413

March 2004

Archaeological Evaluation at Old Farm Road, Mancetter, Warwickshire

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Report 0413

March 2004

Warwickshire Museum Field Services

The Butts

Warwick

CV34 4SS

Summary

Archaeological evaluation at Old Farm Road, Mancetter, on the edge of the area occupied by the Roman fortress, was able to demonstrate that the proposed development site lies on the line of the Roman defences in the NW corner of the fortress. A sequence of two parallel ditches of 'military type', dating from the 1st century AD was found preserved beneath the floor slabs of 20th century houses. An oven type feature located outside the outer of the two ditches represents the first evidence of Roman activity outside the western boundary of the fortress. A small group of features found between the ditches included a pit of Early/Middle Bronze Age date, representing the first evidence for activity of this date in this part of Warwickshire.

1. Introduction

1.1 North Warwickshire Borough Council is planning to develop land at Old Farm Road, Mancetter for housing (Planning Ref. 1532/2003/DIP). The proposal site lies in an area of archaeological interest, immediately adjacent to and possibly including part of the defensive circuit of a Roman fortress. The proposed housing development would have the potential to seriously disturb significant archaeological deposits relating to the fort so it was therefore recommended by the County Planning Archaeologist that an evaluation would be required before any decision on the application is reached.

1.2 The Warwickshire Museum Archaeology Projects Group were commissioned to undertake such an evaluation and this report presents the results of that work carried out in March 2004. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under site code MO04.

2. Location

2.1 The development site lies at national grid reference SP 3177 9662 in the parish of Mancetter (Fig 1). The underlying geology is recorded by the British Geological Survey (1994) as Anker Sands and Gravels, although on-site inspection revealed a superficial pocket of glacially re-worked Mercia Mudstone with patches of mineralised siltstone.

3. Aims and Methods

3.1 The evaluation involved the examination of historical and early map evidence as well as aerial photographs, records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications.

3.2 The work undertaken also involved the excavation of two trial trenches. Their positions were largely determined by the location of the existing concrete floor slabs associated with former houses on the site. The trenches were designed to ascertain the date, nature and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits which might be present in the area.

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The Roman fortress at Mancetter (Sites and Monuments Record No. WA 3867) was constructed in the 1st century AD, as part of the Roman conquest and

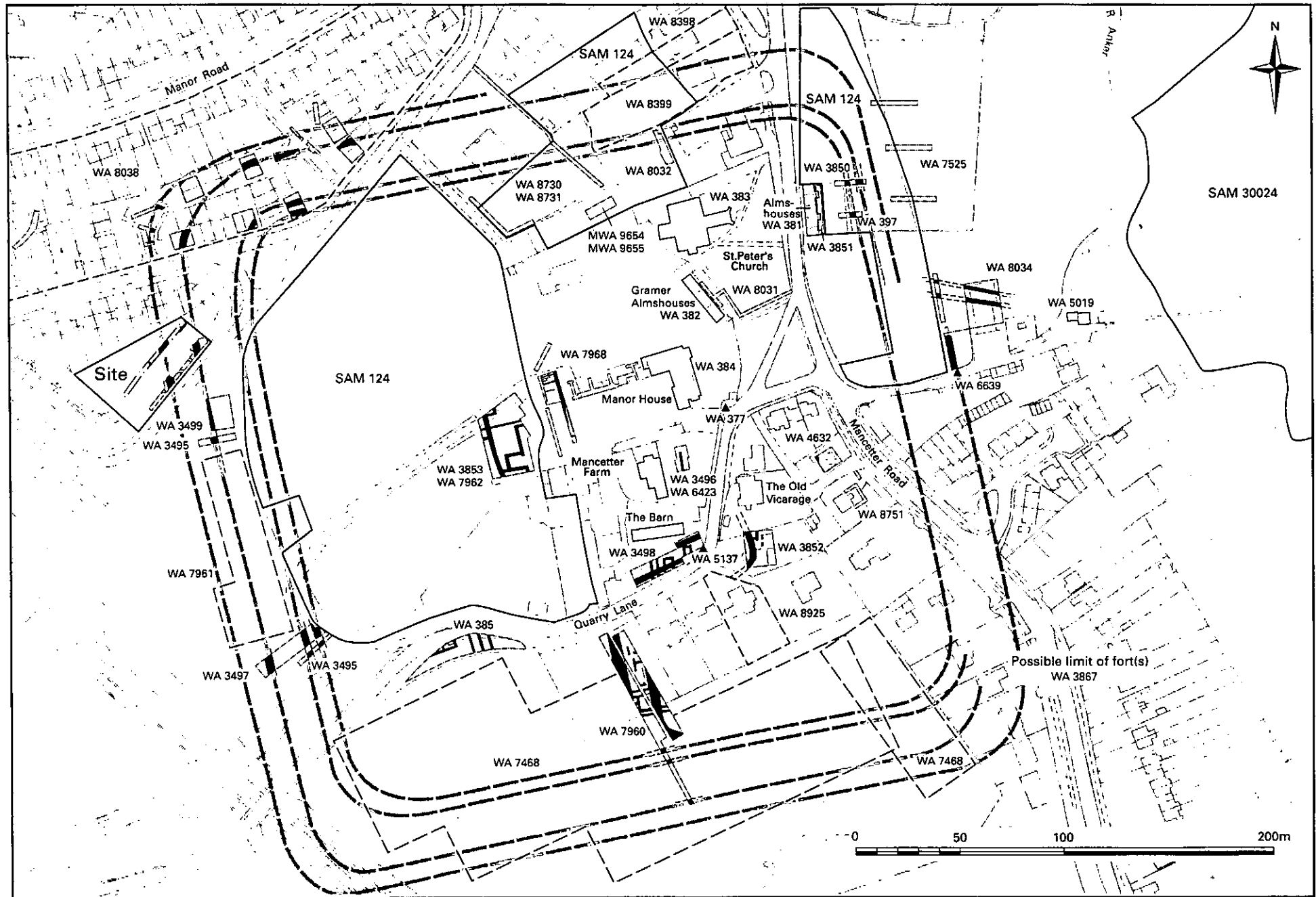


Fig 1: Mancetter village showing location of site and previous archaeological work

consolidation of this part of Britain. The importance of the site to studies of that period is reflected in the fact that substantial parts of the area are Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (Warwicks No 124). The fortress was approximately 300m across (355m between known outer ditches) and encompassed an area of some nine hectares (12.6 between known outer ditches). This suggests that although it was too large to be a standard fort of an auxiliary unit, it was only half the standard size of a full legionary fort – usually 16-20 hectares in area and would have been occupied by a legionary detachment or vexillation (Booth 1996).

4.2 The fortress is believed to have been occupied from the late AD 40s to c AD 60. It would probably have been replaced by a smaller auxiliary fort, that would have been occupied until the 80s. Later Roman activity in Mancetter gravitated towards Watling Street, to the west of the fort. Settlement was concentrated along the roadside and a pottery industry is known to have developed to the south, over a large area. An area to the east of the River Anker has also been Scheduled (Ancient Monument 30024) including the settlement, the pottery production area and a building complex with later Anglo-Saxon interments.

4.3 Excavations began in Mancetter village in 1955, when an earthwork behind the Almshouses on Mancetter Road was trenched (Oswald & Gathercole 1958; SMR WA 397), revealing 1st century bank and ditch defences of a Roman fort. A further section was cut in 1968 (Scott 1968, 13; 1973, 211-3; SMR WA 3850). The section coincided with the inner ditch of a three-ditch military system. The outer ditch was steep-sided whilst the inner one was shallow and may have contained a thorn barrier.

4.4 Other small-scale excavation in the central area during the 1970s by Scott uncovered part of a timber building with a rack for amphorae storage. The structural sequence suggested that at least two phases were represented in these excavations and slots and postholes indicated that a number of buildings were present (Scott 1981a; 1977, 38; 1978, 440-441; SMR WA 3496). Three pieces of legionary body armour, *lorica segmentata*, were also recovered. A rescue excavation also by Scott in Quarry Lane toward the SW corner of the fort in 1977, revealed several timber slots for a building, along with a latrine pit; the pottery from these excavations is thought to date from between AD 45-58 (Scott 1977, 40; 1981a, 5; SMR WA 385).

4.5 In 1978 (WA 3495), 1980 (WA 3497) and 1983 (WA 3499) excavations on the western defences revealed a series of three ditches. Pottery suggested that the ditches dated to c AD 50-65 (Scott 1981a, 5). In 1983 a 40m length of the outer ditch was emptied, yielding finds dating to c. AD 60; it is possible that the ditch was open for only a short amount of time (Scott 1983, 110, 2000, 5-6; SMR WA 3499).

4.6 Excavation south of 'The Barn' in 1980 and 1981, then belonging to Mancetter Farm, prior to landscaping work revealed evidence for structures, military-style ditches, a latrine and various finds such as a stone cauldron, bronze fittings, beads, pottery and raw pigment; the Samian pottery probably dates to c AD 45-65 (Scott 1981b, 88-90, 2000, 12-15; SMR WA 3498). Later work immediately north of 'The Barn' only recorded evidence for a 19th/20th century brick floor (SMR WA 8386; Warwickshire Museum 1998).

4.7 Limited salvage recording of foundation trenches took place at Mancetter Vicarage, on the east side of Quarry Lane, in 1981. A ditch was recorded in the sides of one of the trenches, along with foundation slots and pits; finds included an inscribed samian vessel and a coin dating to AD 73 (Scott 1984, 2000, 15; SMR WA 3852).

4.8 A large-scale excavation carried out in the centre of the fort (Scott 1983; SMR WA 3853), encountered the remains of a 1st century AD building, thought likely to be the

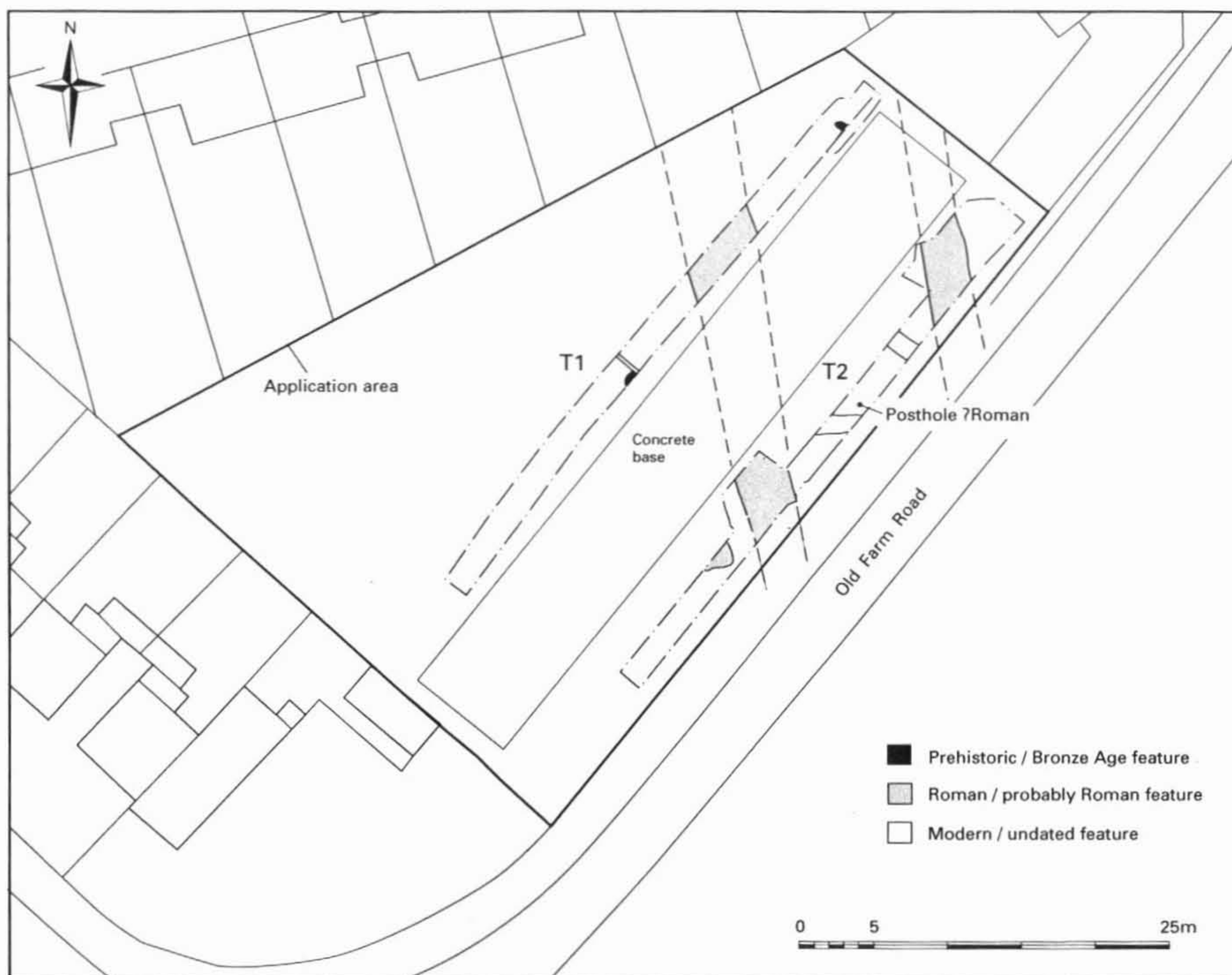


Fig 2: Detail of evaluation site showing principal features

headquarters building or commanding officer's house (Baddeley 1991, 211; Scott 2000, 6-12). An unfinished granary superseded this major building in a secondary phase.

4.9 In 1983 two timber slots and three pits were recorded to the rear of the Almshouses (SMR WA 381) on the east side of Mancetter Road (Booth 1983, 110; SMR WA 3851). Although no Roman finds were made, the nature of the features suggested that they belonged to the Roman period.

4.10 Excavations to the east of the vicarage in 1985 produced structural evidence in the form of timber-beam slots as well as evidence for a defensive ditch (Jones 1985, 69; SMR WA 4632). This ditch alignment may also have been identified during a later watching brief to the north (SMR WA 8031).

4.11 A single trench dug in the northern part of the fort in 1988 recorded the remains of a possible ditch of 1st century date (Scott 1988; SMR WA 8032). Other excavations in 1989 and 1990 in the southern part of the fort recorded a pit containing burnt barley and emmer wheat, which had been overlain by a timber structure with other similar structures nearby (SMR WA 7960). These had later been cut by a double line

of ditches aligned north-south with a corner turning east, which suggest that the fort had a rectangular shape. Further defences including an outer Punic ditch were recorded to the south and these were overlaid, upon being backfilled, by a track with cart ruts dated by a coin to the late 2nd /early 3rd century.

4.12 Excavations in Mill Lane in 1992 and 1994 revealed a pair of ditches aligned between the fort and the river, which along with other features demonstrate substantial extramural activity outside the confines of the fort (Scott 1994; SMR WA 8034).

4.13 Observations on development sites straddling the northern part of the forts defences in 1995 recorded an E/W ditch which although undated, seems likely to be part of the fort defensive sequence (Warwickshire Museum 1995a; SMR WA 8399). A single sherd of Romano-British pottery was observed on an adjacent site (Warwickshire Museum 1995b; SMR WA 8398).

4.14 In 1997 an evaluation in the grounds of Gramer House, north of the manor house, revealed the remains of two pits, a gully and a ditch of Romano-British date (SMR WA 7968; Warwickshire Museum 1997).

4.15 Evaluation and salvage recording undertaken in 1997 within the housing estate which covers the NW corner of the fort was able to demonstrate the former presence of at least four defensive ditches (SMR WA 8038; Wilson & Smith 1998).

4.16 Excavations within the grounds of Mancetter Manor in 2000 revealed the foundations of a timber building, possibly part of a barracks block and a probable latrine pit. A later series of three N/S aligned ditches may have been elements in a subsequent phase of fort (Thompson in prep).

4.17 Observations made during redevelopment within the fort area recorded a small amount of abraded Roman pottery in the northern part of the fort (Coutts 1999a; SMR WA 8730) and some residual Roman pottery on the west side (Coutts 1999b; SMR WA 8751). No clear evidence of Roman activity was recorded on Quarry Lane (WA 8925; Warwickshire Museum 2001). Three trenches excavated outside the NE corner of the fort also failed to find any significant archaeology despite falling within the likely alignment of the outer defences (Reeves 1994; SMR WA 7525).

4.18 Geophysical survey has been used in several areas in Mancetter in attempts to define the extent and position of the defences. The western defences were located using magnetometer survey in 1994 (SMR WA 7961). Later in 1995 a large area to the south was surveyed using a fluxgate gradiometer (SMR WA 7468). The results showed ditch-like anomalies confirming the southern line of the defences. The survey also covered part of the southern area of the interior of the fort and the results suggested that structures lie parallel to the defensive works, within the fort.

4.19 A hoard of sixteen coins dating to the middle of the 1st century was discovered in 1956 to the SE of the Manor House when a pipeline was being laid (SMR WA 377). A silver Dobunnic coin dating to the first half of the 1st century AD was recovered from a pit in an excavation to the south (Scott 1981b, 88; SMR WA 5137) and a Corieltauvian gold stater was found on the east side of the fort (SMR WA 6639).

4.20 There is little evidence for occupation in the vicinity of the fort after the 1st century AD until the medieval period, other than a trackway recorded in the southern part (SMR WA 7960, see above 4.11).

4.21 Medieval settlement remains have also been found in the vicinity, close to the sites of the medieval church and manor house. In 1981 a 1.5m thick layer of medieval occupation was revealed to the south of the manor house. The layer of reddish clay

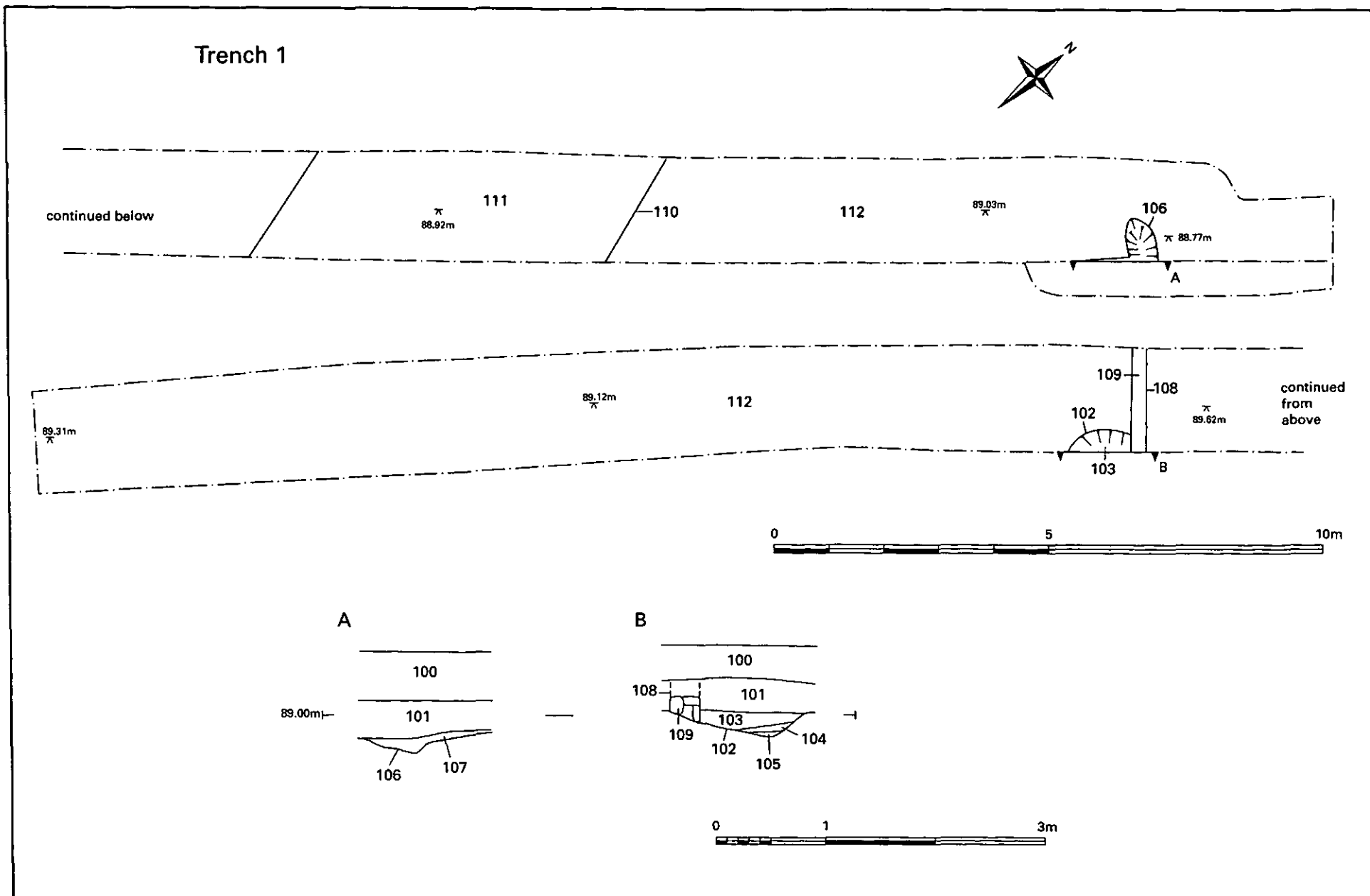


Fig 3: Detailed plan and sections of Trench 1

included much pottery, bone, charcoal and slag and was removed to reveal a complex sequence of medieval postholes and pits suggesting a timber building of 13th century date (Scott 1981a, 1-24; SMR WA 6423). A pebble surface was found overlying Roman remains during excavations to the south-west of the proposal site in 1983, above this was a 12th century storage pit, 2.5m in diameter, with sides supported by poles and wattle (Scott 1983, 110; SMR WA 7962).

4.22 The Church of St. Peter, to the east, dates back to the 12th century, although much of the fabric is 13th-15th century (SMR WA 383); the church is a Grade I Listed Building. Post-medieval pottery was recovered during observations within the northern part of the church (SMR WA 8731). Mancetter Manor House, which lies toward the centre of the fort, is a timber-framed building dating back to 1330 which still preserves much of its original structure although it is now extensively modernised (SMR WA 384). The manor house is a Grade II* Listed Building.

4.23 There are two Almshouses in Mancetter. Gramer Almshouses (SMR WA 382) lie immediately south of St Peter's Church and dates back to 1728. Across the road stands a second row of Almshouses, dating to 1822 (SMR WA 381). Both are Grade II Listed Buildings. Manor Farm House, north-west of the development site, is also a Grade II Listed Building.

4.24 The site of the present proposed development was open fields until the construction of the post-war housing estate (Ordnance Survey 1888; 1925; 1975).

5. Excavation of Trenches

Trench 1

5.1 Trench 1 was 45m long, aligned NE/SW, on the northern side of the existing concrete raft. It was stepped slightly sideways at the NE end to avoid a concrete drain which protruded from beneath the floor slab. Geological natural subsoil 112 was mottled red clay and reddish-brown sandy clay with occasional yellow sandy clay patches. The earliest feature within the trench was a small pit 106 that protruded from under the floor slab at the NE end of the trench. This feature yielded a large quantity of Early/Middle Bronze Age pottery in a matrix of yellowish-brown/red sandy clay and much charcoal (107; Fig 3, Section A, Fig 5). To the SW a large undated ditch 110 (filled with 111) aligned N/S remained unexcavated. Further to the south a small undated pit 102 0.90m wide by 0.22m deep contained three fills (105, 104, 103; Fig 3, Section B) in which heat-shattered quartzite pebbles predominated.

5.2 The features (above) were overlaid by a layer of clay loam 101 almost certainly representing a buried ploughsoil horizon. Regularly spaced undulations in the base of this horizon can be attributed to the former presence of medieval plough furrows. The buried soil was cut by a number of unrecorded modern features including drain 108 (filled with 109) which cut pit 102. It was succeeded by 0.30m of modern topsoil (100).

Trench 2

5.3 Trench 2 was 43m long and was aligned along the front of the floor slabs parallel to the street frontage. Geological natural 237 was red clay with patches of reddish-brown sand. At the NE end a large ditch aligned N/S was sectioned by machine. The ditch 202 was 3.15m wide with a sloping (inner) edge, a steep (outer) edge and a slightly rounded slot at its base 1.70m deep from the surface of the natural (Fig 4

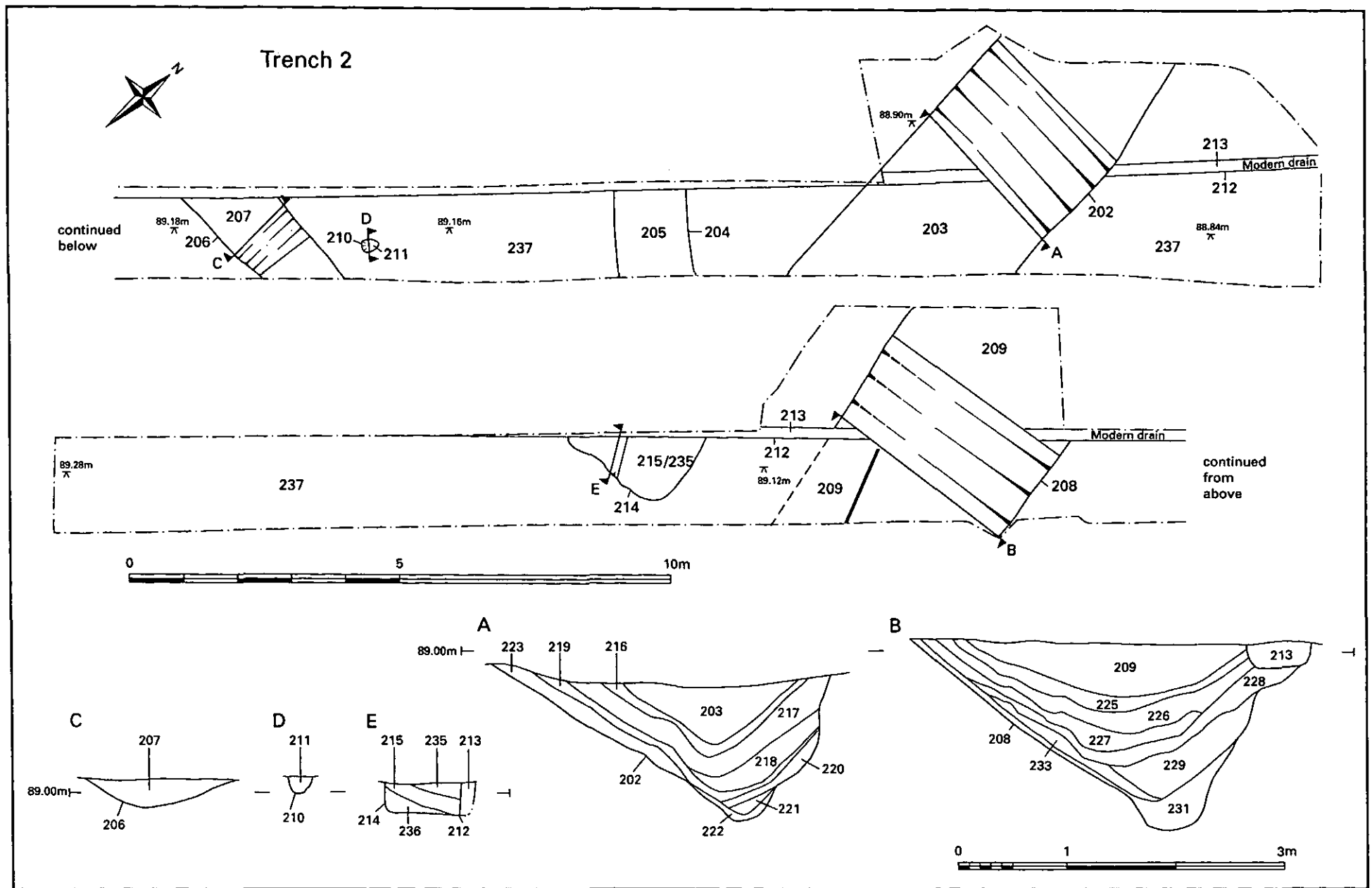


Fig 4: Detailed plan and sections of Trench 2



Fig 5: Excavating Middle Bronze Age pottery from pit 106



Fig 6: Ditch 202 during excavation of blackened lens 216

Section A; Fig 6). It was filled with a succession of clay loam fills divided by at least two lenses of blackened silts. A large quantity of early Roman pottery was recovered from the inner lens (216). Some 16m to the SW ditch 208 was aligned parallel to 202 and formed a continuation of ditch 110 in Trench 1. A section machine-excavated through this feature revealed it to be 3.70m wide by 1.40m deep with a similar profile, albeit slightly smaller than ditch 202 (Fig 4, Section B; Fig 7). This ditch was also filled with a succession of clay fills with dark lenses although no finds were recovered from them.

5.4 Undated gully 206 was aligned at right angles between ditches 202 and 208. It had shallow sloping sides 1.40m wide, a rounded base 0.23m deep. Adjacent posthole 210 was also undated although the single iron nail recovered from its fill strongly suggests that it was Roman or later (Fig 4, Section D). A further feature (214) examined on the SW (outer) side of ditch 208 may have formed part of an oven or kiln of Roman date (Fig 8). As the portion exposed within the trench was on a different alignment to the trench it was decided to excavate as little as possible to limit the possibility of damaging the structure. The small section excavated (Fig 4, Section E) was vertical sided, flat bottomed and filled with layers of reddish-brown to black sandy clay loam, charring and charcoal (236, 215, 235).

5.5 As in Trench 1 the features were overlaid by a buried ploughsoil (201). This was cut by a number of modern features associated with the former houses including service gully 204 and drainage trench 212, which also cut both ditches and the possible oven. The buried soil 210 was overlaid by topsoil layer 200.

5.6 Where the machine excavated sections were dug against the concrete floor slab it was possible to determine that the 0.40m thick slab lay on top of 0.30m of concrete foundation and thus directly on top of the level of the geological natural.

6. Finds

Bronze Age pottery by Dr Alex Gibson

6.1 Some 113 sherds (1310g by weight) were recovered from pit fill 107. A selection were sent to the writer for examination. Only one vessel appears to have been represented though more detailed analysis may modify this conclusion. Although the sherd size was generally small they were probably deposited as a few large pieces. Sufficient survived of the rim and a possible cordon or shoulder to suggest one of a series of urn forms of the Early/Middle Bronze Age. The rim was bevelled, c 300mm diameter, and decorated on the bevel with small oval impressions.

Similar impressions sparsely decorated the outer surface below the rim but did not seem to extend far below the rim area. The fabric contains grog inclusions.

6.2 The assessment suggests that the vessel represents either a late Collared Urn, or perhaps one of a series of Bucket/Barrel or Cordoned Urns of the early Bronze Age. It probably dates between 1800 and 1200 Cal BC.

Roman pottery by Dr Jeremy Evans

6.3 Some 63 sherds from six contexts were submitted for assessment. Five oxidised bodysherds and a Severn Valley ware bodysherd came from the lower blackened lens 219 within the inner defensive ditch in Trench 2. By far the majority, some 40 sherds, came from the upper blackened lens (216). These included: 18 amphora (Dressel 20) bodysherds, a whiteware amphora(?) handle, 12 black jar bodysherds



Fig 7: Section through ditch 208



Fig 8: View of oven/kiln 214 from the east

and base sherds and a jar rim with an everted, outcurving rim, two sandy oxidised bodysherds, two Class E oxidised bodysherds, four smooth, soapy, oxidised sherds, of which three are rimsherds all from a necked jar with outcurving, fairly vertical rim. The ultimate fill 203 produced three handmade reduced jar base sherds.

6.4 Two pieces of smoothed fired clay came from 209 the ultimate fill of the outer defensive ditch. Eleven sherds including three amphora (Dressel 20) bodysherds, a whiteware bodysherd, an oxidised jar rim, a greyware bodysherd, a buff bodysherd and a sandy greyware bodysherd came from the possible oven feature fill 215. A further two sherds, one was a Class E sherd cut square to form a counter and the other a Mancetter-Hartshill concave hammerhead mortarium were recovered from the buried plough soil 201.

6.5 The pottery from the cut features is generally consistent with previous dating evidence from the fort, with a date range within the 1st and early part of the 2nd century AD. The exception within the assemblage is the single sherd of Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium rim recovered from the buried ploughsoil which dates from after 220 AD.

7. Discussion

7.1 The evaluation suggests that the site lies in an area of considerable archaeological significance. Of particular interest is the Early/Middle Bronze Age pit 106 that contained pottery and charcoal. The urn is of a type often, but not exclusively, associated with cremation burial. However, the absence of any calcined bone in this instance seems likely to reflect a domestic deposit. In addition, pits full of heat-cracked pebbles like 102 are generally a prehistoric phenomenon, so although undated, its nearness to pit 106, increases the likelihood that pit 106 forms part of a wider activity area. The undated gully 206 may also belong to this phase. Domestic sites of this date are not known in Warwickshire, therefore even the possibility of one here represents an important addition to the settlement of the county.

7.2 The two large Roman ditches (202 & 208) that cross the site undoubtedly align with similar defensive features found both to the north (SMR WA 8038) and to the south (SMR WA 3499 & 3495). The dating evidence recovered from these ditches is consistent with the 1st century AD dating for the features. Of particular interest is the fact that we can now confirm the existence of an outer (fourth) ditch of similar form to that of the third.

7.3 Also of interest is the oven or kiln feature (214) in Trench 2. Its location outside the outermost ditch circuit demonstrates both that Roman activity extended further to the west and that associated features have escaped destruction by both medieval ploughing and modern construction. The undated posthole (210) may also relate to this activity.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: List of Contexts

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>	
1	100	Topsoil	Dark brown sandy clay loam	Modern	
	101	Buried soil	Reddish-brown sandy clay loam	Medieval/ post-medieval	
	102	Pit	Partially visible oval: 1.00m x 0.50m x 0.23m deep	?Prehistoric	
	103	Pit fill	Very dark grey clay loam with 50% heat cracked pebbles (HCP)	?Prehistoric	
	104	Pit fill	Strong brown clay with charcoal & few HCP	?Prehistoric	
	105	Pit fill	Dark grey clay with few HCP	?Prehistoric	
	106	Pit	Partially visible oval: 0.50m wide x 0.14m deep	Bronze Age	
	107	Pit fill	Reddish/yellowish-brown sandy clay, with pottery & charcoal	Bronze Age	
	108	Drain	0.27m wide x 0.38m deep	Modern	
	109	Drain fill	Stone chippings	Modern	
	110	Ditch	Unexcavated	Roman	
	111	Ditch fill	Reddish-brown silty clay	Roman	
112	Natural	Reddish-brown clay with silty patches	Geological		
2	200	Topsoil	Dark brown sandy clay loam	Modern	
	201	Buried soil	Reddish-brown sandy clay loam	Medieval	
	202	Ditch	Steep sloping inner side, shallow sloping outer side, rounded slot at base. 3.15m wide x 1.70m deep	Roman	
	203	Ditch fill (202)	Ultimate fill of 202. Greyish-brown clay loam	Roman	
	204	Gully	Service trench	Modern	
	205	Gully fill (204)	Black sandy loam with modern pottery	Modern	
	206	Gully	Sloping sides and rounded base. 1.40m wide x 0.23m deep	Undated	
	207	Gully fill (206)	Reddish-brown sandy clay	Undated	
	208	Ditch	Steep sloping inner side, sloping outer side with rounded slot at base. 3.70m wide x 1.72m deep	Roman	
	209	Ditch fill (208)	Ultimate fill of 208. Reddish-brown sandy clay loam	Roman	
	210	Posthole	Sub-circular with vertical sides and flat base. 0.22m wide x 0.15m deep	Roman later	or
	211	Posthole fill (208)	Brown sandy clay loam	Roman later	or
	212	Drain	Trench: 0.60m wide x 0.24m deep	Modern	
	213	Drain fill (212)	Ceramic drain	Modern	
	214	Oven/ki ln	Partially exposed bulb-shaped pit. 0.27m deep	Roman	
215	Oven fill (214)	Black sandy clay loam (charcoal) with brown mottles	Roman		

216	Ditch fill (202)	Grey silty clay loam with frequent charcoal (30%)	Roman
217	Ditch fill (202)	Reddish-brown clay loam	Roman
218	Ditch fill (202)	Reddish brown clay with pale brown sand	Roman
219	Ditch fill (202)	Grey silty clay with frequent charcoal	Roman
220	Ditch fill (202)	Reddish-brown sandy clay	Roman
221	Ditch fill (202)	Light grey silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks	Roman
222	Ditch fill (202)	Reddish-brown sandy clay basal fill	Roman
223	Ditch fill (202)	Pale brown sandy clay with patch of redeposited natural clay	Roman
224	Unused		
225	Ditch fill (208)	Reddish-brown sandy clay mixed with pale yellow sandy clay	Roman
226	Ditch fill (208)	Reddish-brown sandy clay mixed with pale yellow sandy clay	Roman
227	Ditch fill (208)	Reddish-brown sandy clay mixed with pale yellow sandy clay & black silt	Roman
228	Ditch fill (208)	Black silt with occasional pale yellow & reddish-brown mottles	Roman
229	Ditch fill (208)	Reddish-brown sandy clay with yellow, white and grey mottles	Roman
230	Geology	Yellowish-red sandy clay	Geological
231	Ditch fill (208)	Yellowish-red (glay) sandy clay	Roman
232	Geology	Yellowish-red sandy clay with glay mottle	Geological
233	Geology	Same as 232	Geological
234	Geology	Same as 232	Geological
235	Oven fill (214)	Brown sandy clay loam	Roman
236	Oven fill (214)	Brown/reddish brown, charred black, sandy clay loam	Roman
237	Geology	Red clay mixed with reddish brown sand	Geological

Appendix B: List of finds recovered

<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>No</i>
107	Pottery	Early/Middle Bronze Age	113
201	Pottery	A squared counter from the wall of a vessel probably of ware Class E, 1st century AD. 1 Mancetter-Hartshill concave hammerhead mortarium rim, AD 220+.	3
203	Pottery	Three handmade reduced jar base sherds, Iron Age-1st century AD.	3
203	Iron	Objects (uncertain)	2
209	Fired clay	Pottery Two pieces of fired clay(?).	2
211	Iron	Nail	1
215	Pottery	Three Dressel 20 bodysherds, 1st-3rd century. A whiteware bodysherd. An oxidised jar rim, perhaps 1st century. A greyware bodysherd. A buff bodysherd. A sandy greyware bodysherd.	11
216	Slag	Iron slag	1
216	Pottery	18 Dressel 20 bodysherds, 1st-3rd century. A whiteware amphora(?) handle. 12 black jar bodysherds and base sherds and a jar rim with an everted, outcurving rim, perhaps 1st-early 2nd century. Two sandy oxidised bodysherds. Two ware class E oxidised bodysherds, 1st century. Four smooth, soapy, oxidised sherds, three are rimsherds all from a necked jar with outcurving, fairly vertical rim, perhaps 1st-early 2nd century.	40
219	Pottery	Five oxidised bodysherds, 1st-2nd century? A Severn Valley ware(?) bodysherd, Roman.	6

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