

**Land adjacent to the Spar Supermarket,
Boscombe Road, Amesbury, Wiltshire
(NGR SU 1653 4100)**

(Planning ref. S2002/81)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief during groundworks for a housing development on land adjacent to the Spar Supermarket, Boscombe Road, Amesbury (SU 1653 4100) was undertaken by AC archaeology during June and July 2004. The site lies in an area where extensive evidence for Romano-British and prehistoric settlement, funerary and agricultural features and deposits has been previously identified. During the present work a large number of Romano-British features were recorded, including pits and possible ditches or gullies, which are types that were found extensively immediately to the north during investigations at Butterfield Down. Artefacts recovered from the Spar site include Romano-British pottery, vessel glass tile and stone. Evidence for earlier activity was restricted to a small quantity of prehistoric worked flint.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with the construction of new houses on land adjacent to the Spar supermarket, Boscombe Road, Amesbury, Wiltshire (NGR SU 1653 4100). The work was undertaken by AC archaeology during June and July 2004 and was commissioned by the site owner Mr R. Jones.
- 1.2 The watching brief was required by Salisbury District Council as a condition of planning permission for the development (ref. S2002/81), as advised by the Archaeology Service, Wiltshire County Council.
- 1.3 The site is located on the south side of Boscombe Road on the eastern fringes of the town. It lies on generally level ground at around 112mOD and the underlying solid geology consists of Upper Chalk.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The site lies in an area containing extensive evidence for archaeological activity of most periods. Probably the most relevant to the present site is evidence relating to Romano-British settlement and funerary activity identified during previous archaeological investigations immediately to the north and south (Wiltshire SMR refs. Amesbury 303, 305, 331, 333, 560). In addition, there have been two Bronze Age ring ditches and burials excavated to the west of the site (SMR ref. 164, 688). Archaeological evaluation to the south of the site has also revealed medieval and post-medieval pottery (SMR refs. 464, 546).

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2003), submitted to and approved by the Archaeology Service, Wiltshire County Council prior to commencement on site.
- 3.2** Groundworks initially comprised the removal of vegetation and a shallow depth of topsoil (between 50 and 150mm) by a small mechanical excavator. Natural subsoil was not exposed during this stage. The ground level was subsequently reduced on the site by mechanical excavator to the contractor's formation level. In only two areas (Areas 1 and 2 on Fig. 2) was natural chalk exposed thus revealing archaeological features all of which were examined in plan. In the central and NW areas (Areas 3 and 4) further ground reduction was not undertaken and the excavation of footings and service trenches was monitored comprehensively.
- 3.3** All artefacts and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records. A colour transparency and monochrome print photographic record was taken. The archive has been prepared using the site code AC 795.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

A brown slightly clay silt topsoil (context 10), with an average depth of 300mm directly overlay natural chalk (context 11) wherever this was exposed. Displaced finds recovered during the initial site clearance were retained as context 10. All features are shown in plan on Fig. 2 and detailed sections are included on Figs. 3 and 4. Most archaeological features contained varying quantities of Romano-British artefacts. Feature F31 was the only one which contained no finds.

4.2 Area 1

This area comprised the southern building footprint. Six archaeological features were recorded within this area, as well as a small number of naturally formed deposits (tree throws).

Feature F12 was an elongated possible pit that was not fully exposed in plan. It had moderately sloping sides and a flat base (Fig. 3a) and measured 1.95m + in length, 1.35m in width and had a depth of 250mm. It was filled with context 13, a greyish-brown calcareous clay silt.

Feature F14 was a possible small quarry pit or ditch terminal that continued beyond the northern limits of this area. The feature had an exposed width of c. 4m, depth varying between 300 and 550mm and it had an irregular profile (Fig. 3b). The fill was composed of a greyish-brown calcareous silty loam (context 15) containing a distinct layer of flint nodules towards the base.

Feature F17 was a probable circular pit not fully exposed in plan. It had a probable diameter of c. 2.5m and depth of 300mm, the profile showing as moderately sloping onto a flat base (Fig. 3c). The fill (context 16) was composed of a greyish-brown calcareous clay silt.

Feature F18 was an approximate oval-shaped probable pit. The pit measured 2.7m in length, by 1.4m in width and had a depth varying between 200 and 450mm. The profile was generally moderately sloping and flat bottomed, although a steeper more rounded profile was recorded in the deeper southern portion (Figs. 3d & 3e). The pit was filled with a greyish-brown clay silt (context 19).

Immediately to the NW of F18 was a near-circular pit (feature F20) with a diameter of 1.4m. This feature had a depth of 200mm, with a shallow and rounded profile (Fig. 3d). It was filled with a greyish-brown clay silt (context 21). The stratigraphic relationship between F18 and F20 could not be established.

Feature F22 was located immediately to the SW of and was cut by F18, which was clearly the later feature. It was sub-circular in plan with a length of 2.3m and width of 1.8m. The depth of the feature was a maximum of 400mm and the profile comprised moderately sloping edges onto a flattish base (Fig. 3e). A single fill was present (context 23) composed of a greyish-brown calcareous clay.

This area also contained three natural tree throws (see Fig. 2). These were briefly investigated and no archaeological finds were present. All these deposits contained distinct light stony fills and irregular profiles.

4.3 Area 2

This area comprised the eastern portion of the northern building footprint. Two Romano-British features (F27 & F29) were present, as well as a natural tree throw and two modern post-holes. These two latter features each contained the remnants of wooden posts.

Feature F27 was a possible circular pit in plan that continued beyond the stripped area to the south. It had a diameter of 1.2m and depth of 180mm with a shallow, rounded profile (Fig. 4a). It was filled with a pale brown clay silt (context 28).

Feature F29 was located immediately to the west of F27. This was irregular in plan and it is likely to be more than one feature. It continued beyond the stripped area to the south and had an exposed length of 3.6m, maximum width of 2.8m and depth of 320mm. The profile was generally steep sloping onto a flat base, although a more rounded scoop was present at its northern end. A single fill was identified (context 30), composed of a dark brown calcareous clay silt.

4.4 Area 3

Area 3 was the western side of the northern building footprint. Natural chalk was not exposed across this area and the only feature present (F24) was revealed in the southern footings trench.

Feature F24 was oval in plan with dimensions of 4.6m length and 2m+ width, continuing beyond the trench limits to the south. The excavated profile showed as moderately sloping onto a flat base (Fig. 4b). Two fills were present, with the lower fill (context 26) composed of a pale brown calcareous clay silt, and the upper fill (context 25) a dark brown calcareous clay silt.

4.5 Area 4

This area comprised the central portion of the site. Natural chalk was not exposed in this area, but a short trench was excavated at the northern end revealing in section two large probable pits (F31 and F33), both sealed by the same greyish-brown clay silt buried soil layer (context 32) which had a maximum thickness of 100mm.

Feature F31, not visible in plan, had a width of 3.1m+, depth of 400mm and had a steep northern edge and flat base (Fig. 4c). It was filled with a pale brown clay silt (context 35).

Feature F33 had an exposed width of 1.50m, depth of 300mm and had a rounded profile (Fig. 4c). It was filled with a calcareous pale brown clay silt.

5. FINDS

5.1 Introduction

A moderate finds assemblage was recovered during the watching brief and consists mainly of pottery and animal bone with smaller quantities of ceramic building material, flint, glass, clay pipe, worked stone and metalwork. The bulk of the pottery is late Romano-British in date.

All finds recovered have been cleaned and quantified by material type within each context. The finds have been scanned to provide broad details of their nature, condition and potential date range and are briefly discussed by material type below. Finds totals are given in Appendix 1.

5.2 Metalwork

The metalwork comprises two copper alloy and 14 iron objects and all have been X-radiographed. The copper alloy consists of one AD 4th century coin from feature F17 and one modern strip from topsoil layer 10. The coin recovered is House of Constantine (Obverse Constantinopolis; Reverse Victory on prow with sceptre and shield) with a date AD330-335.

The ironwork consists of one cleat, 12 nails and one unidentified object. The nails are all structural types and include the principal Types 1 and 2 as identified by Manning (1985, fig. 32). Five of the nails, the cleat and the unidentified object were all recovered from feature F18. The remaining nails were found in features F14, F20 and layer 32.

5.3 Pottery

Most of the pottery is Romano-British in date, with only a single possible prehistoric sherd and one post-medieval earthenware present. The bulk of the fabrics and vessel forms are broadly late Romano-British in date (AD 3rd to 4th century). The possible prehistoric sherd is a plain body piece in a fine sandy fabric. It was recovered from feature F29.

Imported wares

Imported wares are represented by five samian sherds comprising three plain body sherds, one small decorated sherd and one bead rimmed plate/bowl (Drag. 18/31). This latter form may be dated broadly as early to mid 2nd century (Webster 1996).

British finewares

British finewares recovered include colour-coated wares from the industries of the New Forest, Oxfordshire and possibly North Wiltshire regions. Few vessel forms were identified as most sherds are small and abraded. Those recorded include three beakers, one flagon rim, one necked bowl and four mortaria sherds. The bulk of the sherds are late Roman in date (AD 3rd/4th century), although the possible North Wiltshire kilns such as Purton, west of Swindon, were producing fine oxidised wares during the AD 2nd century (Anderson 1978).

Coarsewares

Coarsewares are the predominate fabrics identified and include mainly non-diagnostic body sherds. Coarsewares of known source include small quantities of Black Burnished ware from the Wareham/Poole Harbour area and Savernake type grog-tempered wares. Vessel forms recorded in Black Burnished ware include mainly AD 3rd/4th century plain rimmed dishes, drop flanged bowls and jars with everted rims. Savernake wares were produced near Mildenhall, south of Marlborough and may be dated broadly from the AD 1st century continuing well into the 2nd century (Timby 2001). Other kilns in North Wiltshire, such as Whitwell, ^{Wiltshire kiln?} are recorded as producing similar pottery as late as the AD 3rd/4th century (Anderson 1979). Vessel forms present include thick walled sherds derived from large storage jars and two curved rimmed jars.

The largest group of coarsewares recovered consists of fairly non-distinctive sandy wares including both greywares and moderately coarse oxidised wares. The sherds, the bulk of which are small body fragments, were derived from a variety of utilitarian vessel forms including storage jars, jars with curved rims, flanged bowls and one bowl with a moulded rim (Fulford 1975, type 8). These forms range in date from the AD 2nd to 4th century. A variety of sources for the greywares is likely, including the New Forest and the kilns west of Swindon, which were producing greywares between the AD 2nd to 4th centuries (Rogers and Rodham 1991).

One body sherd in a moderately fine shell tempered fabric was recovered from feature F20. Shell tempered fabrics in the area are commonly dated to the AD 4th/5th century.

Distribution

Due to the mixed nature of the pottery recovered from the pits (early fabrics occurring alongside later wares, it was difficult to attribute the features to specific phases. A number of features may be dated to the AD 3rd/4th century on the presence of later fabrics and characteristically later forms. These features comprise F20 (which contained the shell tempered sherd), F27, F29, F33 and F24.

Table 1: Summary quantification of pottery fabrics

Fabric	No	Wt	% of assemblage by weight
?Prehistoric Sandy	1	7	<1
Samian	5	29	<1
Colour Coated wares	78	577	10.5
Fine oxidised wares	6	20	<1
Grog tempered	32	973	18
Black Burnished	66	825	15.3
Grey	219	2,305	42.7
Coarse oxidised	32	645	12
Shelly	1	12	<1
Glazed earthenwares	1	7	<1
	441	5,400	

5.4 Ceramic building material

A total of 29 fragments (768g) of ceramic building material (tile and brick fragments) was recovered from four pits and topsoil layer 10. On the basis of surviving dimensions and fabric types, the bulk of the fragments are Romano-British in date, although a small

number from topsoil layer 10 probably date to the post-medieval period. These later tile fragments are in a hard, moderately fine sandy fabric. The Romano-British fragments consist mainly of small undiagnostic tile fragments in a moderately soft, poorly wedged fabric often with grog fragments and iron oxide. Diagnostic pieces comprise one keyed flue tile and one brick fragment, both recovered from feature F14.

5.5 Worked flint

Only nine pieces of worked flint were recovered from the watching brief. These are all chalk derived flints showing little or no patination. This small assemblage includes two flake cores, one trimming flake from flint walling and five waste flakes. There is only one retouched piece which comprises a composite tool on a glossy black flake. There is neat, regular shallow retouch on the proximal end (the scraping edge) and shallow closely spaced retouch on the distal end (the cutting edge). The flints are not diagnostic to a particular period but a later prehistoric date is likely for most pieces. The trimming flake is likely to be Romano-British or later.

5.6 Worked stone

The worked stone comprises two architectural pieces and three possible quern stone fragments. The architectural fragments, consisting of one fragment with a curved smoothed surface and one with flat surfaces, were found respectively in features F14 and F20. Both fragments are in a moderately fine sandstone. The possible quern stone fragments each have at least one smoothed surface. Two of the fragments are in a moderately coarse grained sandstone and one is in greensand. The fragments were found in features F14 and layer 32.

5.7 Animal bone

The animal bone recovered consists of 314 fragments weighing 3631g, just under half of which was recovered from features F14 (138 fragments). Other bone concentrations were found in features F18, F22 and layer 32. The remaining fragments were dispersed in smaller quantities in a number of pits. Bone preservation of the bone is moderately good, although many of the bones are fragmentary and age, biometric and butchery information cannot be identified. A small range of domestic animals was identified and these include cattle, sheep/goat and pig.

5.8 Shell

A total of 29 oyster shell fragments weighing 866 grams was recovered and consists of both left and right valves. The fragments were concentrated in features F12, F14 and F18.

5.9 Other finds

Other finds comprise five fragments of *opus signinum* (Roman concrete) found in feature F18 and two fragments of vessel glass. The vessel glass is dark green and consists of two conjoining fragments of a suspension loop from a late Roman handled flask.

6. DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The watching brief has established that the Romano-British settlement and industrial activity previously recorded immediately to the north at Butterfield Down (Rawlings and Fitzpatrick 1996) clearly continues into the present site. As was the case at Butterfield Down, archaeological features at the Spar site seem mainly to date to the second half of the Romano-British period, with only limited evidence for earlier activity recorded in the form of small quantities of pottery and prehistoric worked flint. Features identified comprised mainly pits and perhaps parts of short gullies or ditches, types which were again extensive at Butterfield Down.
- 6.2 Some of the finds recovered from the Spar site indicate a high quality Romano-British building in close proximity. These finds include the *opus signinum* and the ceramic tile (including a fragment of flue tile from a heating system). Artefacts indicating a building of this type were also found at Butterfield Down, but no evidence for a structure of this type was found on that site. Some of the finds recovered from Butterfield Down (eg. the figurines, spoons and coins) suggest that a possible Romano-British temple might be nearby (Rawlings and Fitzpatrick 1996, 40)

7. REFERENCES

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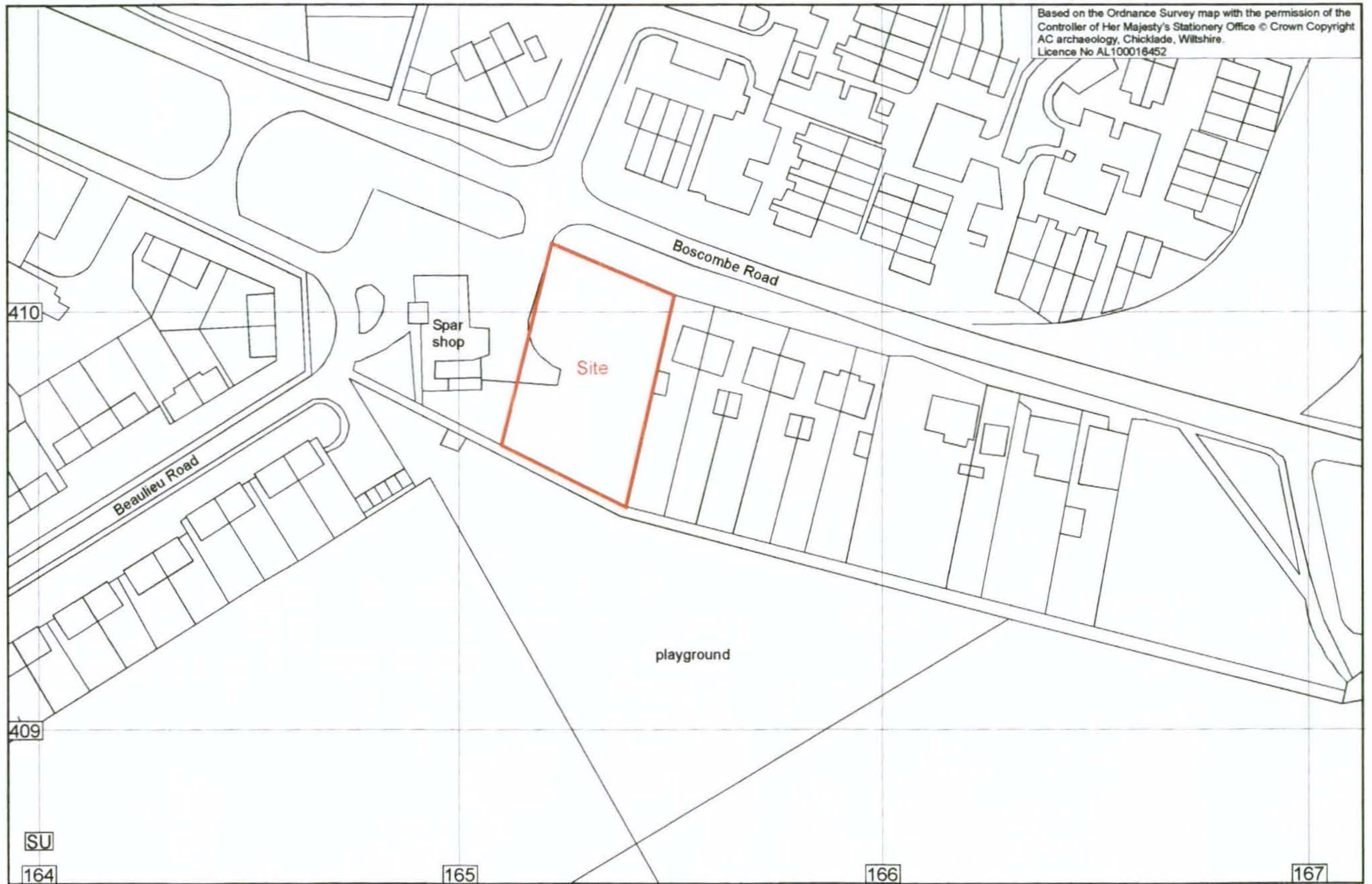


Fig. 1: Site Location

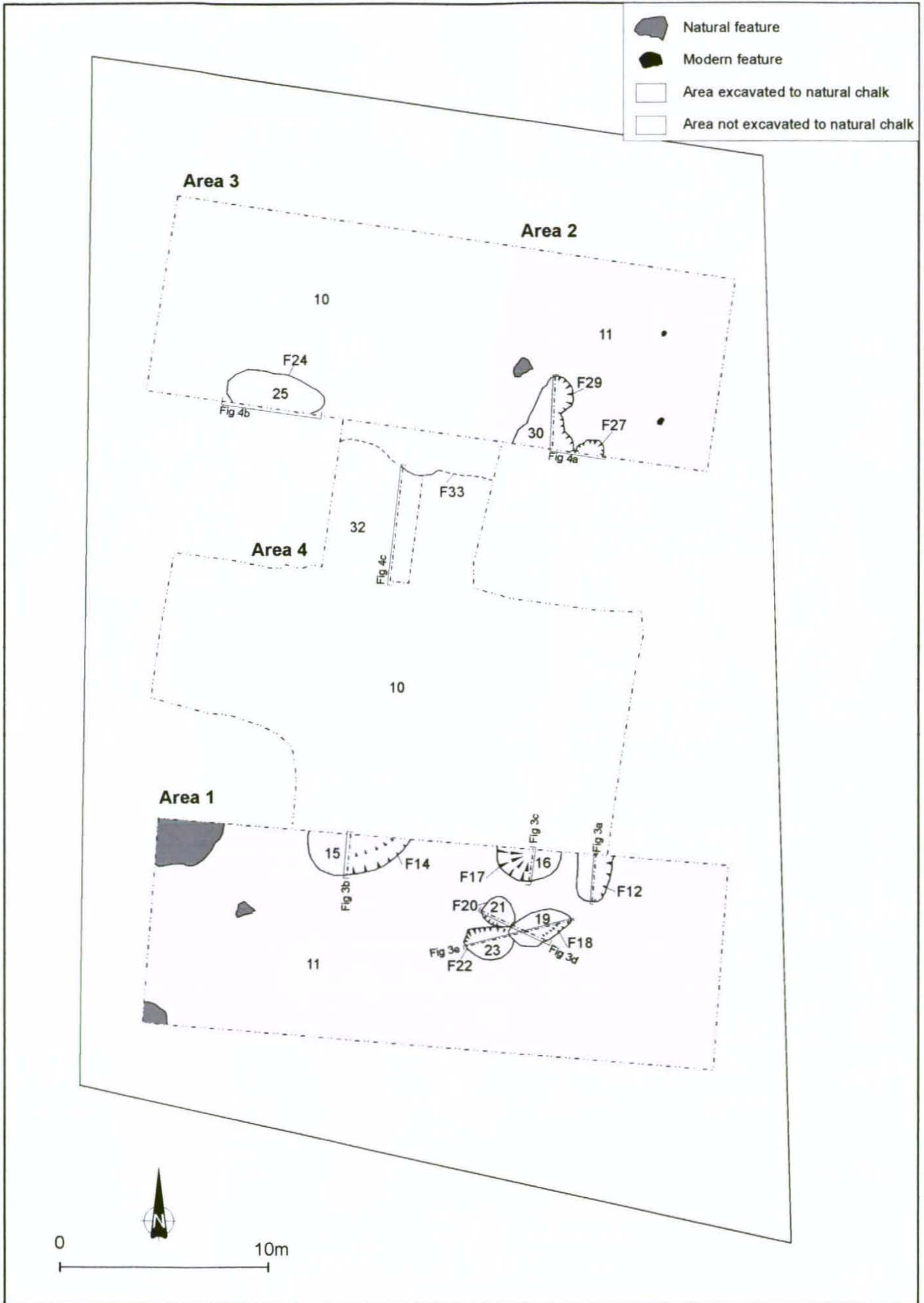


Fig. 2: Detailed plan of site

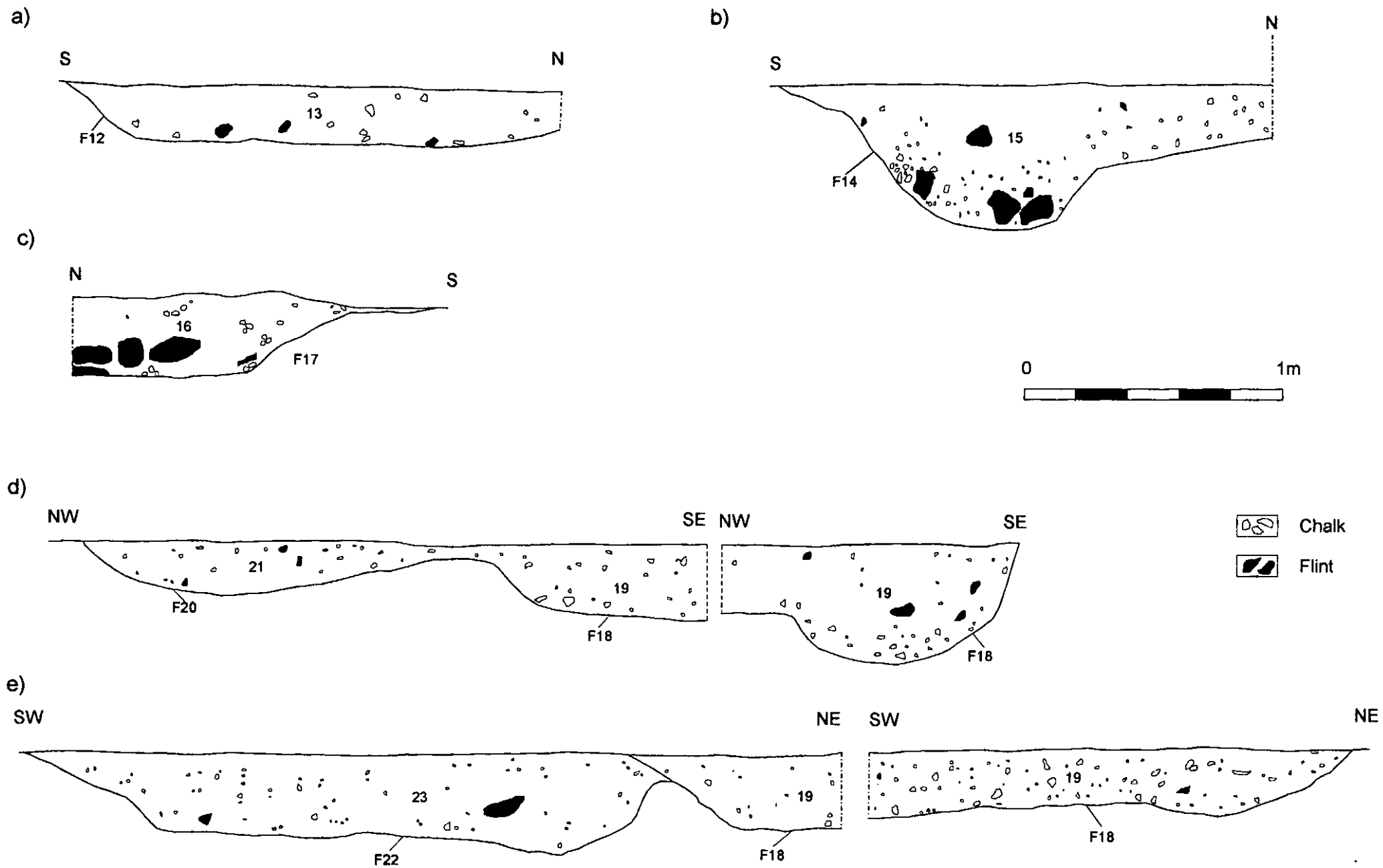
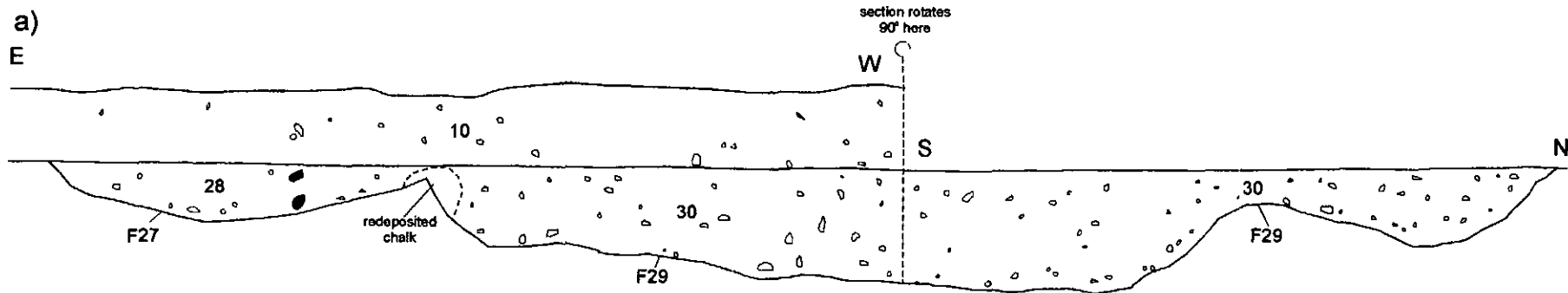
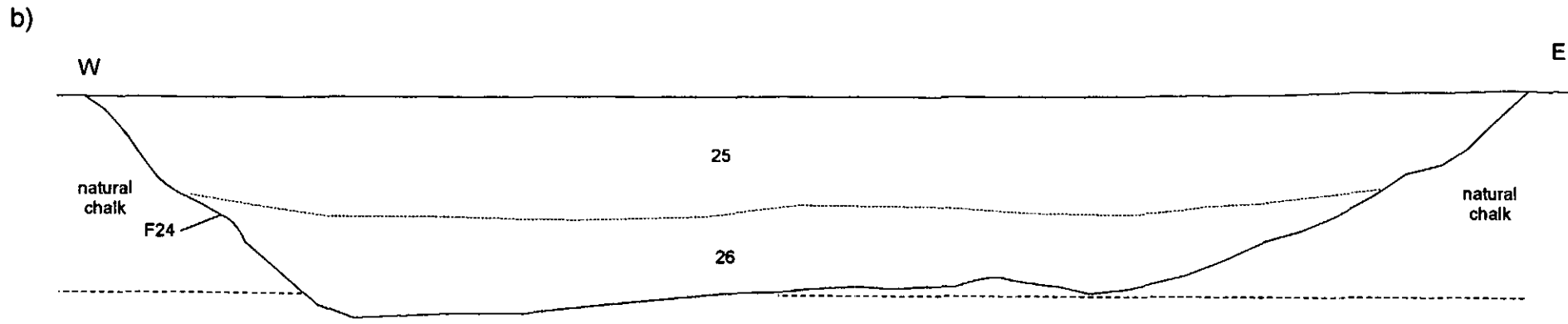


Fig. 3: Sections of Area 1 features

Area 2



Area 3



Area 4

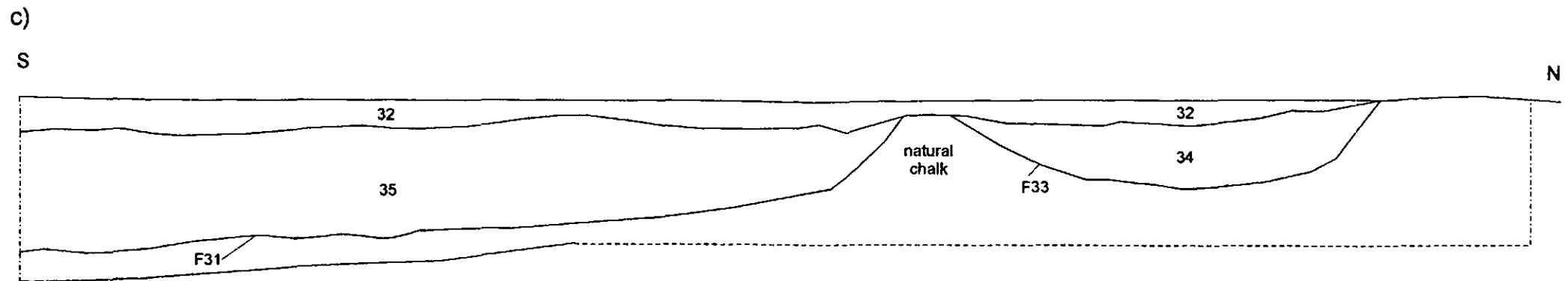


Fig. 4: Sections of features, Areas 2, 3 and 4

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY FINDS TOTALS (WEIGHT IS IN GRAMS)

Context	Feature	Animal Bone		CBM		Glass		Opus Signinum		Pottery		Shell		Worked Flint		Burnt Flint		Worked Stone		Copper alloy		Iron	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
10	Topsoil			13	222					21	126			2	18	1	4			1	6		
13	PIT F12	8	61	1	12					26	240	3	155	1	4								
15	PIT F14	138	2112	9	469					79	947	15	374	3	75	1	11	3	2325			2	5
16	PIT F17					2	13													1	3		
19	PIT F18	74	772	1	7			5	176	84	1305	8	286	1	2							7	168
21	PIT F20	17	63							19	203	1	2	2	41			1	338			1	4
23	PIT F22	40	180	5	58					35	390	1	27										
25	UPPER FILL PIT F24	1	4							3	11												
26	LOWER FILL PIT F24	6	135							35	607												
28	PIT F27	5	10							3	18					1	55						
30	PIT F29	2	8							5	55												
32	LAYER	21	256							120	1318	1	22					1	68			4	27
34	PIT F33	2	30							11	180												
	Total	314	3631	29	768	2	13	5	176	441	5400	29	866	9	140	3	70	5	2731	2	9	14	204