

**An Archaeological Assessment
of the Mendip Business Park,
Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, 1990**

By
Peter Leach
with Catharine Mould and Shaun Richardson

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1. Introduction

An archaeological assessment of land scheduled for industrial development at Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet was commissioned by Wayopen Estates Limited in August 1990. This was undertaken as a two stage exercise by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford and Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), and involved an initial geophysical survey, the results of which were subsequently verified and amplified by means of trial excavation.

The site (N.G.R. ST632 427), until 1990 comprising fields of permanent pasture adjacent and to the east of Fosse Lane, Charlton, lay within an area formerly occupied by an extensive Romano-British settlement on the Roman Fosse Way, east of Shepton Mallet in Somerset (Figure 1). The archaeological potential of the Mendip Business Park (MBP) site was highlighted by large-scale excavations and discoveries on the adjacent development site to the south in the summer of 1990. In view of this, and discoveries made in the course of preliminary service works on the site, the developer commissioned a more specific assessment to determine the precise nature of any archaeological remains, and thus to enable the formulation of a development strategy which will maximise preservation of this important archaeological resource.

2. Previous Discoveries

In recent years a small collection of metalwork finds has been recovered from the fields comprising the development area, and has been kindly made available for inspection and recording by the finders, Mr Steve Search and Mr Colin Knowles. This collection comprises some ornaments, fittings and coins of bronze and silver alloy, primarily of Roman date, along with a few of medieval or later type.

In the spring of 1990 an assessment designed principally to explore the archaeological potential of the site now occupied by the Showerings' warehouse, to the south of the former railway embankment (Figure 2), also involved the excavation of a single test trench in the south west corner of the MBP site (Ferris and Leach 1990). Nothing conclusive could be drawn from this, but observations of contemporary earthmoving operations associated with other areas of the site were more informative. Roman pottery and traces of archaeological features were seen towards the south eastern boundary of the site. Further north, towards Meadow View and Frog Lane, traces of stone building foundations were noted and a small collection of medieval pottery recovered.

From May until August 1990, large-scale excavations were undertaken by BUFAU on the Showerings' warehouse site immediately to the south (Buteux 1990). Results here suggested that the Roman settlement alongside the Fosse Way probably extended northwards into the area of the MBP site. During the course of these excavations, contractor's works affecting the MBP site were observed, though not systematically recorded. Archaeological deposits and finds of Roman date were seen in places during the excavation of service trenches, the realignment of Fosse Lane, and the provision of service roads for the MBP site.

3. Geophysical Survey

The first stage of the formal assessment of the MBP site involved geophysical survey, employing both a magnetometer and a resistance meter to examine those parts of the site where least recent ground disturbance had occurred. Two substantial areas were investigated, north and south of the main site access road (Figure 2).

These surveys were undertaken by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford on behalf of BUFAU, and a detailed report with specification of the methods and instrumentation used, and the results achieved, has been presented separately (Geophysical Surveys Report 90/51).

Figure 2 presents in simplified form the results obtained from the application of both survey techniques. In Areas A and B sets of magnetic anomalies are depicted indicative of infilled linear disturbances within the underlying limestone bedrock, and more localised areas of disturbance or deposit. From their form and regularity a man-made origin was strongly suspected for these anomalies. The data obtained from resistivity survey within more restricted portions of survey Areas A and B were less clear, although further anomalies of suspected human origin were identified. In Area A stone spreads or building remains appear to lie in the northern half, while in Area B at least two significant anomalies appear to represent similar remains.

4. Trial Excavation

To clarify and amplify the results obtained and presented from the geophysical survey, trial trenching was employed to open transects across the areas surveyed. This was undertaken by a BUFAU field team in October 1990, the trenches being devised and laid out to test a sample of the recorded geophysical anomalies and therefore to assess their reliability as a whole. In addition, it was hoped that further evidence could be obtained by the extension of trial excavation beyond the limits of geophysical prospection. An irregular grid of (with one exception) 2m wide trenches was laid out to cover both areas examined in the geophysical survey; eight trenches (A-H) south of the service road and five (J-N) to the north (Figure 3). Turf and topsoil were removed mechanically, generally to a depth not exceeding 0.30m, although in some trenches a deeper overburden was excavated. The trenches were then cleaned manually to define archaeological features and deposits more clearly at the subsoil horizon. Such features and deposits were recorded by means of photography, measured drawing and pro-forma written record sheets. Artefacts and other finds recovered during this process

were recorded individually and plotted in three dimensions using a Sokkisha Set 3 'Total Station' electronic distance measurer. Only such excavation was undertaken as was necessary to establish the broad character of the features and deposits uncovered, otherwise archaeological deposits and finds were left *in situ*. In one or two instances, notably in Trenches II and N, ground water severely hampered full cleaning and examination of the sub-surface archaeology. The results and discoveries recorded in each trench are summarised briefly below, followed by an interpretation and discussion of their significance.

4.1. Trench A

In contrast to the remainder, this 100m long trench, aligned approximately N-S, was cut to a width of almost 4m in order to provide an opportunity to observe the archaeological deposits in both plan and section. It was located just beyond geophysical survey Area B to the east, and closest to the original Fosse Way road frontage to the west, linking with the earlier evaluation Trench F cut in February 1990 (Ferris and Leach 1990, Figure 2). Ground disturbance affecting this area prior to carrying out the geophysical survey prevented the extension of this survey up to the road frontage. For the same reason Trench A could not have been located any further to the west.

Commencing at the north end, segments of two well-defined Roman cobbled streets, aligned approximately E-W, were revealed adjacent to each other, the more northerly (F26, c.2m wide) possibly pre-dating a much wider road surface to the south. The latter (F24, c.5m wide) was bounded to the south by a substantial drystone wall foundation (F23), tumble from which lay to either side. Although not excavated further, this wall appeared to be set within the fill of an earlier ditch on a similar E-W alignment. Areas of well-worn cobbles (F22) south of the wall gradually gave way to a horizon of stony soil with some occupation debris (Figure 4i).

Continuing southwards some 30m, the probable remains of a Roman building (Structure III) were encountered, comprising areas of stone cobbles, rubble and a set of insubstantial stone-

wall foundations, potentially defining three sides of a room c.6m wide, which continued to the east beyond the trench. From here a series of less coherent features and deposits were recorded, including occupation soil and rubble, pits or ditches, and another insubstantial structure comprising two parallel and shallow drystone wall alignments c.3m apart (Structure II). A little over 10m of further occupation soil and increasing quantities of stone rubble to the south separated Structures II and I. The latter survived as three mortared wall foundations defining part of a room c.4m wide and continuing eastwards beyond the trench. The south wall of this Roman building was separated by a further 5m of rubble and rough cobbling from an E-W aligned drystone boundary wall. Further south was a c.2m wide ditch, also aligned E-W, cut down into the underlying bedrock. The final c.15m of trench to the south was sparse in readily identifiable features, although a thin spread of Romano-British occupation deposits with some finds extended to the site of the earlier evaluation Trench F (Ferris and Leach 1990, Figure 2).

4.2. Trench B

This trench, 2m wide and over 130m long, was the second in a series of N-S cuts across the southern half of the site (Figure 3). Some 8m from the north end the sequence of two adjacent Roman street surfaces, respectively 3m and 5m wide, and similar to those recorded in Trench A, was repeated. A ditch bounded the narrower street on its north side and a possible second ditch separated it from its broader neighbour to the south. A recent electricity cable insertion had destroyed much of the narrow street and its foundations at this point. A 5m wide area of stony clay soil with scattered angular stone rubble separated the northern margin of the broad cobbled street from an ?unmortared stone wall. Southwards from this wall only a sparse distribution of archaeological finds or features was apparent for over 50m, the weathered bedrock being exposed in many places. Prehistoric pottery of Iron Age type was, however, recovered from this sector. Thereafter, the remains of another large Roman building were encountered (Structure IV). These comprised the foundations

of the west end of a suite of rooms belonging to a building on a N-S axis, which continued to the east (Figure 4ii). To the north an E-W drystone boundary wall (F41), ?set within a ditch, bounded a cobbled yard or path alongside the foundations of the north wall of the building (F39). Wall foundations of pitched Lias limestone blocks (F38 and F35) defined the N-S aligned wall to Structure IV from a corner with the north wall. To the south the mortared stone footings of an E-W aligned cross wall (F33) defined the southern edge of a room c.8.5m across. Traces of a slighter cross wall (F36) at one point suggest a later subdivision into smaller rooms c.5m and 3m across. Another room to the south (c. 6m across) was defined in this trench by the mortared stone wall foundations F30, F31/F32 and F33. South of the south end wall, tumble from the latter sealed another E-W aligned ditch (F51), while a further boundary wall (F29) lay some 5m beyond on a similar alignment.

From this boundary wall southwards a much sparser distribution of features and deposits was recorded, and weathered bedrock was revealed in the final 10m or so of the trench at c.0.50m below the modern turf. The most significant feature here was a N-S aligned human burial with the head to the south and iron coffin nails in the grave fill. This inhumation was not excavated further than was necessary to establish its status. Part of a large stone-filled pit lay just to the north, apparently of post-medieval date.

4.3. Trenches C and G

The third trench on a N-S axis, 2m wide and 120m long, was cut parallel and to the east of Trenches A and B (Figure 3). Four other trenches (D-G) were linked to it at approximately right-angles, on E-W alignments; the shortest, Trench G, measured 25 x 2m. Several structural complexes were identified along their lengths, although none revealed clear building alignments in the available exposures.

At the north end of Trench C a Romano-British structure complex extending over at least 25m was revealed (Structure V). This comprised a series of cobbled surfaces and more angular rubble spreads, intersected by, or overlying, cut

features (otherwise unexcavated), representing pits or ditches. The stone settings and areas of well-laid cobbling in places suggested the former locations of one or more buildings, whose form and alignment were not clear. To the north, cobbling continued for an unknown distance, sealed beneath a clay silt. The street alignments seen in Trenches A and B may well continue here but were not reached by the Trench C layout. To the south the cobbled surfaces ended abruptly and had also been cut into by a grave on a N-S alignment. Only enough of its fill was removed to establish the presence of iron coffin nails and that the head lay to the south.

The extent of Structure V eastwards was traced for a further 4m along Trench G before the cobbled surfaces were interrupted by a broad N-S boundary ditch, over 4m wide. This was not emptied. A further 3m of similar cobbling with some larger rubble beyond the ditch to the east may mark the furthest extent here of Structure V. The western edge of what is identified as a separate structure of Romano-British date was exposed a further 6m to the east, where settings of cobbles and some larger rubble also incorporated the foundations of a N-S aligned wall. This complex (Structure VI) continues north, south and east beyond the bounds of Trench G.

From the grave marking the southern end of Structure V, the foundations of a drystone wall, on a slightly divergent N-S axis to that of the trench, links that structure complex with another of very similar character and date (Structure VII) to the south. Here, spreads, and in some instances sequences, of cobbling, rubble and stone settings, including at least one E-W aligned wall foundation, occupy an area exceeding 35m along Trench C. The extent of this complex westwards is unknown, but to the east it extended up to 9m along Trench F, interrupted at one point by a 2m-wide ditch on a N-S axis. This arrangement mirrored that recorded in Trench G to the north, where the east margin of Structure V was cut in a similar position by a N-S ditch, possibly an extension north of the same feature seen in Trench F.

In Trench C the southern limit of Structure VII appeared to be marked by a broad ditch, up

to 4m wide, just north of the junction with Trench E. Within the latter trench, this ditch, orientated approximately SE-NW, appeared to join with another at a rough right-angle, crossing Trench E on a NE-SW alignment. This feature could not be clearly traced further to the south in Trench C, which should have intersected it again on the continuation of its SW alignment. An extensive spread of dark stony soil with Romano-British occupation debris may, however, mask any such continuation. Further south again, a third structural complex (Structure VIII) was exposed over the final c.10m of Trench C. This was traced more extensively in the adjacent Trench D, and is discussed in the section following.

4.4. Trench D

This was the most southerly evaluation trench, located wholly outside the area of geophysical prospection (Area B) here (Figure 3). At the junction with Trench C an area of Romano-British occupation soil and debris, cobbling and at least one E-W wall alignment marks the commencement of Structure VIII. This complex was traced for at least 30m eastwards along Trench D. In character it closely resembles the complexes of Structures V and VII, areas of well-laid and worn cobbling alternating with more angular rubble, possible building settings, and gaps suggesting ditches or other smaller disturbances.

Continuing eastwards, archaeological features were more sparsely distributed, although at least one N-S aligned ditch with a corresponding wall foundation to the east was recorded. Between the latter and another, parallel, drystone wall foundation some 60m east of the commencement of Trench D, a deeper subsoil cover indicated the site of a post-Roman lynchet built up against the rear of that wall.

This lynchet is in fact still visible as a low earthwork and as a marked break of slope on a N-S axis across the field here (see also Trenches E and F, below). A zone of lynchet soil up to 20m in width may mask some earlier archaeological features here, since this deposit was not excavated. Beyond the former boundary wall a tumble of rubble to the east marks its collapse down the

slope. It was not possible to clean and record the remaining 40m of Trench D eastwards to its junction with Trench H because of the high level of the ground water. At the time of machine excavation, weathered bedrock was exposed extensively within 0.3m of the modern surface. A few finds and areas of potential archaeology were recorded or seen, but the distribution of remains appears to be sparse beyond the post-Roman lynchet.

4.5. Trenches E, F and H

North of Trench D and parallel with it, Trenches E and F, respectively 95 and 65m long E-W, create further links between Trench C and a more irregular cut (Trench H) to the east (Figure 3).

In Trench E a structure complex was intersected extending at least 30m east from a NE-SW boundary ditch close to the junction with Trench C. Spreads of rubble and cobbles, including what may have been a street running parallel and immediately east of the western boundary ditch (above), were generally similar in character to the remains identified as Structures V, VII, and VIII. At least two wall foundations aligned N-S were recorded, along with several post-holes, infilled ditches and the remains of two or more hearths or ovens. These remains, of Romano-British date, are identified collectively as Structure IX, but areas of cobbling and more intermittent rubble spreads incorporating further post-hole features extended at least another 20m to the east. Coherent building plans or arrangements could not be detected here. These remains could well be regarded as an integral part of this structure complex, the eastern bounds of which were obscured beneath a post-Roman lynchet. This feature was a continuation of that recorded in Trench D to the south, and still visible here as a marked break of slope.

Once again, a high level of ground water in the remaining 30m plus of trench to the junction with Trench H hampered the definition, and thus recording, of archaeological features or deposits. Considerable areas of weathered bedrock or apparently sterile subsoil were, however, observed following machine clearance, as well

as one or two potential features, including a linear N-S ditch alignment.

To the north again, and parallel with Trenches D and E, Trench F contained further spreads of cobbling and stone settings, some of which may denote another Romano-British structure complex. This is tentatively identified separately as Structure X, although coherent elements within it were even more difficult to identify than among the comparable structure complexes defined elsewhere. Although fully cleaned to its junction with Trench H, a subsequent rise in ground water levels inundated the eastern half of this trench before the full graphic record was completed. The western end of Trench F revealed the eastern boundary to Structure VII, which is considered more fully in the discussion of Trench C (above).

Finally, very little could be made of archaeological remains in Trench H, cut to link the eastern ends of Trenches D, E and F (Figure 3). Weathered bedrock was seen at both extremities of the trench within 0.30m of the modern surface, particularly to the south. In the central portion a dump of recent mixed clay and rubble, c.0.30m deep, had levelled up a shallow natural depression, and was only removed mechanically in a short segment at the junction with Trench E. Some finds of Roman date were recorded from the subsoil horizon beneath this clay dump and to either side, but no coherent archaeological features could be cleaned and recorded before the whole trench was inundated by the rising ground water.

4.6. Trench J

The most westerly of a second set of evaluation trenches located north of the access road, Trench J, aligned approximately N-S, lay just beyond the limit of the geophysical survey area here (Figure 3). Its line was crossed by a deeply rutted and heavily disturbed track used by heavy earthmoving vehicles, necessitating its division into two parts – north and south. Within the 16 x 2m trench to the south, mechanical removal of topsoil and subsequent cleaning to a maximum depth of 0.30m revealed Romano-British horizons of stone rubble and cobbles, increasing in size and density northwards. What may have been

the foundation of a west wall to a building continuing eastwards (Structure XI) appeared midway along this trench. At its northern extremity the base of an E-W aligned drystone boundary wall was associated with tumbled rubble to the south.

A c.10m wide zone of destruction caused by the passage of earthmoving vehicles, separated the northern 33 x 2m segment of Trench J from its southern part. Another section of drystone boundary wall foundations, aligned N-S, appeared within the south end of the trench, possibly linking with the E-W alignment at the end of the southern section. Further north, a deposit of almost sterile clay silt with a few stones was cut in places by a series of narrow, stone-lined linear features. Several alignments were apparent, although the general trend was E-W and more than one episode of cutting was represented. Several of these drainage features were associated with post-medieval pottery, glass and clay pipe fragments. The most northerly drainage cut penetrated a cobbled surface associated with Roman artefacts sealed beneath 0.10 - 0.15m of the clay silt. The cobbles continued north beyond the trench, as well as to the east and west.

4.7. Trenches K, L, M & N

A grid of trenches laid out over the geophysical survey Area A involved two N-S cuts, K and N, linked by the E-W cuts L and M (Figure 3). A thorough cleaning and recording of all the horizons exposed by machine excavation was hampered by the high ground water level here, the extent of which was exacerbated by periods of heavy rainfall during the course of the evaluation.

The most extensive archaeological features were recorded in Trench L, where cobbled surfaces and rubble spreads of Romano-British date occupied virtually its entire 40m plus length, and are identified collectively as Structure XII. The foundation course of a mortared stone wall aligned N-S was uncovered towards the west, while another drystone wall foundation followed almost exactly the E-W trench axis. The latter, at a higher level, was almost certainly of post-

Roman origin, lying just beneath the turf and crossing the southern ends of Trenches K and N to the west and east. The full character and extent of Structure XII was masked by a clay silt horizon almost identical to that encountered in Trench J. This deposit, never more than 0.20m thick, was mechanically removed over much of Trenches K, M and N.

In Trench N the spread of stone rubble and cobbles associated with Structure XII continued south and east beyond the trench, but thinned out northwards after c.5m. The remainder of this trench revealed no archaeological features, and weathered bedrock was encountered towards its junction with Trench M at c.0.40m below the modern surface.

In Trench M, to the north, the earliest detectable archaeological feature was a broad Roman ditch aligned almost E-W and crossing the trench at a very obtuse angle. Its clear definition was hampered by the ?post-Roman clay silt horizon above, which was not fully removed along the trench. The latest features were a pair of narrow cuts aligned approximately NW-SE towards the west end of Trench M. These were packed with pitched stone rubble, and are similar in character and stratigraphic position to those features identified as drains of post-medieval date in Trench J.

These post-medieval drainage features continued across the north end of Trench K. Further south another series, aligned approximately E-W, were recorded crossing the trench and cut into natural clay or alluvial silt. One of these ditches may have been the westwards continuation of the broad Romano-British ditch recorded in Trench M. At the junction with Trenches K and L another Romano-British ditch, aligned virtually N-S, was recorded crossing Trench K on a slightly divergent axis.

5. Finds

Throughout the evaluation trenches portable artefacts were collected and their positions recorded three-dimensionally. These comprised primarily pottery and tile fragments, stone implements, metal objects and fragments of lead, bronze and iron, coins, slag and some animal

bone. The recovery of metal objects was considerably enhanced by the use of a metal detector, both within the trenches and to scan the spoil from their excavation. The identity, date and associations of this material enhance the interpretation of the archaeological features recorded and of the site as a whole.

As might be expected, the principal concentrations of recorded finds come from the vicinity of the identified structures I – XII. The overall distribution of certain material categories has been achieved by computer generated plots, examples of which are enclosed with this report (Figure 5i-iv). A brief commentary on the finds, their character and potential significance is given here.

5.1. Ceramics

This was by far the largest category of material, amongst which pottery of Romano-British origin overwhelmingly dominated. Several hundred sherds of such pottery were recovered, much of it attributable as locally manufactured coarsewares or as Black Burnished Ware, originating in south east Dorset. Pottery coming from further afield, such as Oxfordshire, the Severn Valley or the New Forest, was also present in smaller quantities. Imported pottery from France and Spain comprised fragments of fine Samian Ware vessels and wine amphorae, some of which had been repaired with lead rivets.

These imports and some of the coarsewares were being manufactured in the 2nd century AD, although the finer wares may have remained in use for many years. Many of the Romano-British coarseware types are of the 3rd and 4th centuries, when the bulk of the pottery recovered appears to have been discarded. While the greatest concentrations of pottery were recorded in proximity to the recognised structures, a background scatter was present virtually throughout the trenches.

In Trench B a small assemblage of plain pre-Roman Iron Age pottery sherds was found in association with ditches and other features cut into the bedrock between Structure IV and the road-and-boundary complex to the north. At the

other end of the spectrum, pottery and clay-pipe fragments of 18th- and 19th-century date were occasionally encountered. This material was principally in the topsoil, but was also recorded in a handful of intrusive features, notably the drainage ditches in Trenches J, K and M, and from the lynchet surviving in Trenches D and E.

In addition, a very small proportion of ceramic material is recognisable as fired-clay daub from buildings, the furnishings of ovens or kilns, and pieces of brick or tile, most of it of Roman manufacture.

5.2. Ferrous metal and slag

Over 100 hand-made iron nails were recovered, almost all associated with the recorded structures and likely to be of Roman manufacture. A smaller group of iron objects comprised tools, fittings, cleats and fragmentary pieces, including door furniture from Structure VI and fragments of an iron vessel from near Structure I. A few pieces of slag and iron ore came from various locations across the evaluation trenches.

5.3. Non-ferrous metal

Objects of non-ferrous metals comprised some 30 fragments of copper alloy and over 20 pieces of lead. The recovery rate and distribution of such material was enhanced through use of a metal detector, although once again the greatest concentrations were associated with the recognised structure complexes, notably in Trenches C-F. Objects of copper alloy were for the most part identifiable as jewellery – pins, bracelets, rings and brooches; furnishings and fittings – buckles, straps, plates and studs; or implements such as spoons or toilet implements, the great majority in a fragmentary condition. This collection is supplemented by a small group of similar finds recovered from the site in previous years by metal detector users. Among this material a small head of Mars and what may be a furniture mount depicting a lion holding the head of a ram or stag within its jaws, are of particular note. Also within this collection are several buckles of medieval type, alleged to have been found in the vicinity of Frog Lane.

Of the lead fragments, the great majority could be identified as off-cuts or repair straps and rivets used to bind up broken pottery vessels, some of which were found still *in situ*. Other pieces were fashioned as weights, washers and in one instance as a 'leaf'. From the earlier metal detector collections the most significant object was a medieval lead ampula – a small flask of the type usually containing consecrated oil and carried by visitors to pilgrimage shrines.

Unless otherwise specified above, all the non-ferrous metalwork was of Romano-British type, one or two buttons of probable post-medieval date being the only other exceptions.

5.4. Coins

Nearly 200 coins were recovered in the course of the evaluation, well over half as finds located with a metal detector. As a supplement to this group a similar quantity have come from the MBP site as a whole in the course of previous metal detecting. From a cursory examination of both collections, almost all the identifiable coins are Roman, the majority copper alloy issues of the late 3rd and 4th centuries. A small group of silver coins (c.12) were issues of the 2nd and 3rd centuries; larger copper alloy coins of late 1st and 2nd century issue (over 20) were for the most part well worn and are often difficult to identify more closely.

Once again, their distribution in the evaluation reflects the location of structural remains quite closely. The use of a metal detector did, however, suggest that other areas which were not excavated in such detail (eg Trench M) may still contain archaeological remains. The earlier metal detector finds, particularly from areas east of the 1990 evaluation, seem to reinforce this suggestion.

5.5. Flint

The presence of worked flint on the site, either as tools, fragments thereof, or as waste material, denotes a much earlier phase of human activity. This material was widely distributed among finds of Roman date, with particular concentrations in Trenches A, C, E and G. Whether or not the

greater concentrations reflected contemporary archaeological features could not be established in this evaluation. Tools such as blades and scrapers among the 50 or so recorded pieces suggest a Neolithic or Early Bronze Age context, and their presence here may be compared with a similar collection of several hundred fragments obtained during the excavations on the Showering's site to the south.

5.6. Miscellaneous finds categories

In addition to the categories summarised above, further small groups of material were collected and are reviewed together here for convenience. Objects of stone were removed in one or two instances but were for the most part left *in situ*. These included stone roof tiles, of both limestone and sandstone, scattered across many of the structure complex areas; and millstones, one or two segments of which were seen. Mortar survived in association with some structures and one or two samples were collected.

Animal bone was widely distributed across the site, notably within ditch fills and among general occupation deposits. Its quality and survival in neutral or mildly calcareous soils is generally very good. With one or two exceptions, including fragments of bone artefacts, animal bone was not collected during the evaluation.

Several fragments of Roman vessel glass were also collected, and at least one bead.

6. Interpretation

The combination of geophysical instrument surveys with trial excavation transects has proved conclusively an extensive survival of archaeological remains of Romano-British type throughout the greater part of the Mendip Business Park area (Fig. 3).

The principal focus of activity located corresponds approximately with geophysical survey Area B, results from which had already suggested a considerable archaeological potential. The picture of a series of man-made enclosures bounded by stone walls and/or ditches, and containing a variety of buildings or activity

areas, is broadly confirmed by the transect trenches. The Fosse Way, beneath Fosse Lane to the west, was evidently the focus for this layout, although the frontage itself was not accessible for assessment. Properties and groups of buildings certainly extend well back from the main road frontage eastwards, potentially to the limits of the evaluation. Several portions of clearly defined, mortared stone buildings were identified, e.g. Structures I and IV; while elsewhere more extensive but often less obviously coherent areas of activity, which included building remains, were identified as structure complexes (V–X). In places, there was evidence of small-scale industrial processes, burials, streets and cobbled yards, together with a widespread distribution of domestic debris.

The correspondence of geophysical results with located archaeological features was not precise, although not necessarily contradictory. A major area of high resistance anomaly between Trenches B and C, for example (Fig. 3), almost certainly reflects Structure IV and its surroundings. Linear magnetic anomalies corresponded fairly well in several instances with ditch-type archaeological features, although it was not always possible to verify such identifications in circumstances of limited excavation. Some magnetic anomalies are almost certainly registering spreads of occupation debris or, perhaps, industrial features, which were widely distributed. Others, particularly those of linear type, sometimes occur at a slight displacement from the actual position of the archaeological feature which they are presumably reflecting.

It was unfortunate that the recording of sub-surface horizons in Trench H, and the eastern extremities of Trenches D and E, was incomplete. The general impression was of a fall-off in the density of surviving archaeology eastwards, although some continuation was demonstrated. The most intensively occupied area was, in fact, the area of highest ground within the Business Park site, bounded to the south by the old railway embankment, and elsewhere by the service road and Fosse Lane. Although evidently of much later origin, the lynchet to the east (Fig. 3), and its now obliterated northern continuation, may effectively define a division between two zones

of somewhat contrasting archaeological character. Unfortunately, too little is known of the more easterly zone for any clear interpretation, but on present evidence the principal focus of the Romano-British settlement lies within a western zone extending up to c.150m east of the Fosse Way. In the context of the more substantial archaeological excavations undertaken on the Showerings' warehouse site to the south (Fig. 2), it is clear that the area within the Mendip Business Park is an integral northern portion of the Romano-British roadside settlement first clearly identified there.

The eastern boundary of this archaeological settlement zone is to some extent defined by two contemporary side roads or streets aligned E–W, extending eastwards and presumably linking west with the Fosse Way. A change in the character of the natural subsoil was noted here, at the extremities of Trenches A and B, and more particularly in the northern set of evaluation trenches, J–N. Within a zone north from the street to the present site boundary, the subsoil horizon was characterised by thin deposits of clay silt which sealed the bedrock, and in their latest phase had masked the remains of archaeological features and deposits here. Archaeological evidence of broadly similar character to that encountered to the south was confirmed in trial trenching. Enclosures and structural remains of Romano-British date were recorded, some of which corresponded reasonably well with the geophysical anomalies. This area, particularly to the west, was more extensively disturbed than that to the south but sufficient was seen and recorded for the contrast between them to be evident.

Overall, the contrasting factors here seem to be the presence of a recent alluvial or colluvial silt, and a decrease in the density and complexity of the archaeological remains. In the Romano-British period this lower lying area may have been less favourable for settlement, being more poorly drained. The chronology and precise origin of the silt would require more research, but it may arise from progressive erosion and deposition from higher ground to the south. In a post-medieval context, attempts to remedy its relatively poor drainage involved the insertion of

land drains, some of which appear to have been located as magnetic anomalies in the southern half of survey Area A. The area of high resistance here is more difficult to account for, as nothing found in the transect trenches corresponded to it; conversely, Structure XII did not register at all, although it may lie mainly outside the survey area (Fig. 3).

While it can be demonstrated that the archaeology recorded in this evaluation relates overwhelmingly to a settlement of Romano-British date there is, nevertheless, evidence of a broader chronology. The scatter of flint implements and worked debris from the site is part of a much more extensive 'background noise' of such material recorded on virtually every other site in the vicinity which has so far been evaluated. Whether or not any other comprehensible evidence of Neolithic/Early Bronze Age settlement or other activity can be recovered beneath later remains, man's presence here at some time in the 3rd or 2nd millennium BC is surely to be concluded from the presence of this material. Pottery of pre-Roman Iron Age date was recovered in association with features in Trench B and, elsewhere, from more mixed contexts with Roman pottery. Its associations were insufficiently explored in this evaluation to make any detailed interpretation of the evidence possible, but the survival of prehistoric settlement remains here is strongly suspected. Attention must be drawn to similar evidence, as yet barely investigated, for Iron Age settlement remains on the Persimmon Homes site to the north, and, indeed, on a site more recently assessed close to Cannard's Grave to the south.

Of the Romano-British settlement itself, little detail of its development or duration can be made out from the results so far obtained, although it is evident that the site was occupied for several hundred years. Dateable finds range from coins, pottery and metalwork of the late 1st or early 2nd century AD through to the late 4th century. Whatever its origins, this roadside settlement, of which the Mendip Business Park site is a part, was almost certainly flourishing as one of the small market towns of Roman Britain from some time in the 2nd century until the end of the 4th century, if not beyond. This can be confirmed by

excavated evidence from the adjacent Showerings' site (Buteux 1990). Stratigraphic excavation of archaeological remains on the MBP site was beyond the brief for this evaluation, but both finds and, in places, evidence for a stratified sequence support an extended occupation.

In the post-Roman periods, evidence for the eventual fate of this settlement is lacking until the 18th and 19th centuries, when the fields here were probably enclosed and field drainage ditches were cut across the northern half of the site, prior to the building of the railway. One other aspect of settlement in this area should, however, be mentioned. Pottery and other finds of medieval date were recorded in the vicinity of Frog Lane to the east. Whether or not any contemporary remains encroach westwards onto parts of the MBP site not covered by this evaluation, a medieval hamlet probably developed along Frog Lane, an extension perhaps of Shepton Mallet's outlying township of Charlton. Its relationship or origin relative to the Roman settlement can only be a matter for speculation, but its existence suggests another chapter in the history of settlement in this area, which reaches from prehistoric times down to the present day.

7. Conclusions

Archaeological evidence for several periods of occupation is demonstrated on this site, the earliest relating to phases of prehistoric activity and settlement, the nature of which is at yet poorly understood. The remains of an extensive Romano-British settlement is the dominant theme here, this site representing a continuum in the context of something greater – namely a small Roman market town astride the Fosse Way. Though extensive, the remains themselves are very vulnerable. The majority lie at between 0.20 and 0.50m below the modern surface, as yet relatively undisturbed and intact within the surviving areas of the site. Little more than foundations and ground level arrangements of the Roman settlement will of course survive, but these and their associated artefacts represent, nevertheless, a considerable resource. A clearer idea of that resource and its potential has already been obtained by excavation on the adjacent site

to the south (Buteux 1990). What survives within the MBP site is without doubt an important complementary sample of those remains, whose continuing survival should now be made a high priority. While the full extent of Shepton Mallet's Roman settlement has still to be established, the indications are that the MBP site now contains the only surviving substantial sample of core settlement area on the east side of the Fosse Way, albeit damaged by provision of service roads, road frontage services and a realignment of Fosse Lane.

Three zones can be recognised, of which that towards the south west is, perhaps, most important (Fig. 3). Here, survive the remains of several buildings associated with (in all probability) at least two individual cemeteries, industrial and economic evidence, property layouts, streets and boundary features. Some potential for associating this with the Fosse Way and its frontage could still survive, although extensive damage will have occurred there. To the east, a less intensive zone of settlement and/or ancillary activities behind, associated with further land divisions, is strongly suspected – no less important for a clearer overall understanding of the settlement morphology. Northwards, a third zone appears to represent less intensive road frontage settlement, possibly the beginnings of a progression towards the northern bounds of the township as a whole. This diminution in the density of remains may persist within the Persimmon Homes site to the north, although facilities for an adequate assessment here are still wanting.

The question of the origins of the Roman settlement appears capable of some answer on this site; Iron Age remains have not so far been recognised on the Showerings' site to the south. At the other end of the chronological spectrum some evidence may still survive of post-Roman settlement history. The potential survival of any such evidence, or remains of earlier periods, within the most easterly part of the site (Fig. 3) is quite unknown, but cannot be discounted.

8. Recommendations

In conclusion, the recognition and verification of an important, multi-period archaeological site within the area of the Mendip Business Park, along with some appreciation of its morphology and chronology, prompts questions as to its future and proposals for its management.

- i) Given the extent of damage to archaeological resources in the Fosse Lane area as a whole, the preservation of what still survives on this site should be given the highest priority. Were the site to remain undeveloped, a regime of unploughed permanent pasture would serve this requirement best, backed up by appropriate statutory protection such as would be provided by the designation of the site as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- ii) In the circumstances of this evaluation industrial development is now a presumption for the site, services having already been provided and a planning consent obtained. Assuming that development proceeds, design solutions are needed which will reduce any further archaeological disturbance to an absolute minimum.
- iii) Excepting the most easterly areas, where evaluation was minimal, archaeological features and deposits of varying character and intensity must be anticipated throughout the northern and southern zones. Some flexibility in the Business Park layout could avoid the more sensitive areas – the location of surface vehicle parking, service areas or landscaping would assist here. A zone between archaeological Structures I (Trench A), IV (Trench B) and VII (Trench C) appears particularly vulnerable, but this may apply no less to the localities of the other identified structures.
- iv) Wherever new building is proposed, rafted foundations should be provided, preferably in conjunction with additional make-up to increase the depth of deposits sealing archaeological remains. Elsewhere, the

provision of a protective make-up above the present turfline should be considered as a prelude to other development layout works.

- v) Whatever the design layout adopted, removal of any topsoil will render archaeological remains more vulnerable to damage. It was observed during the evaluation that the tracks of heavy earth-moving plant had disturbed these remains in places through the depth of overlying turf and topsoil, particularly when ground conditions had been wet. The removal of surface vegetation by chemical means would thus be preferable to mechanical turf removal, wherever such removal is deemed necessary.
- vi) Wherever excavation works for the provision of services or structural foundations are unavoidable, the developer should remove surface vegetation and top soil and then permit an archaeological contractor to remove the archaeological deposits. Provision of services along the Fosse Lane road frontage and relating to the service roads already on the site will have destroyed virtually all archaeological remains in these zones; any further destruction can only be justified in the context of obtaining a full archaeological record wherever such works are still required.
- vii) The occurrence throughout much of the most easterly zone of the site (not evaluated) of made ground, should render recommendations iv and v inappropriate there. Recommendation vi should, nevertheless, still apply in this area.

9. Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mr. and Mrs. D.L. Dennet, Wayopen Estates, for sponsoring this evaluation, for provision of site accommodation and mechanical assistance, and for their unfailing interest and co-operation at all stages. Thanks are due to Mr. Colin Knowles and Mr. Steve Search for permission to examine their collections of metal detector finds. The project was directed by Peter Leach and thanks are due to all those who participated: to John Gater, Chris Gaffney, Vince Gaffney and David Shiel (Geophysical Surveys) for their surveys and report; to Dick Broomhead, Lucie Dingwall, Charles and Nancy Hollinrake, Catharine Mould, Shaun Richardson, Jon Sterenberg and Humphrey Woods who worked on the site; to Del Cook for his valued assistance with a metal detector, and to Dr David Ingram, Department of Geography, University of Birmingham, for assistance with the finds plotting. The report has been produced with the assistance of Simon Buteux, Mark Breedon, Ann Humphries and Liz Hooper.

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FOSSE LANE Shepton Mallet Archaeological Investigations 1990

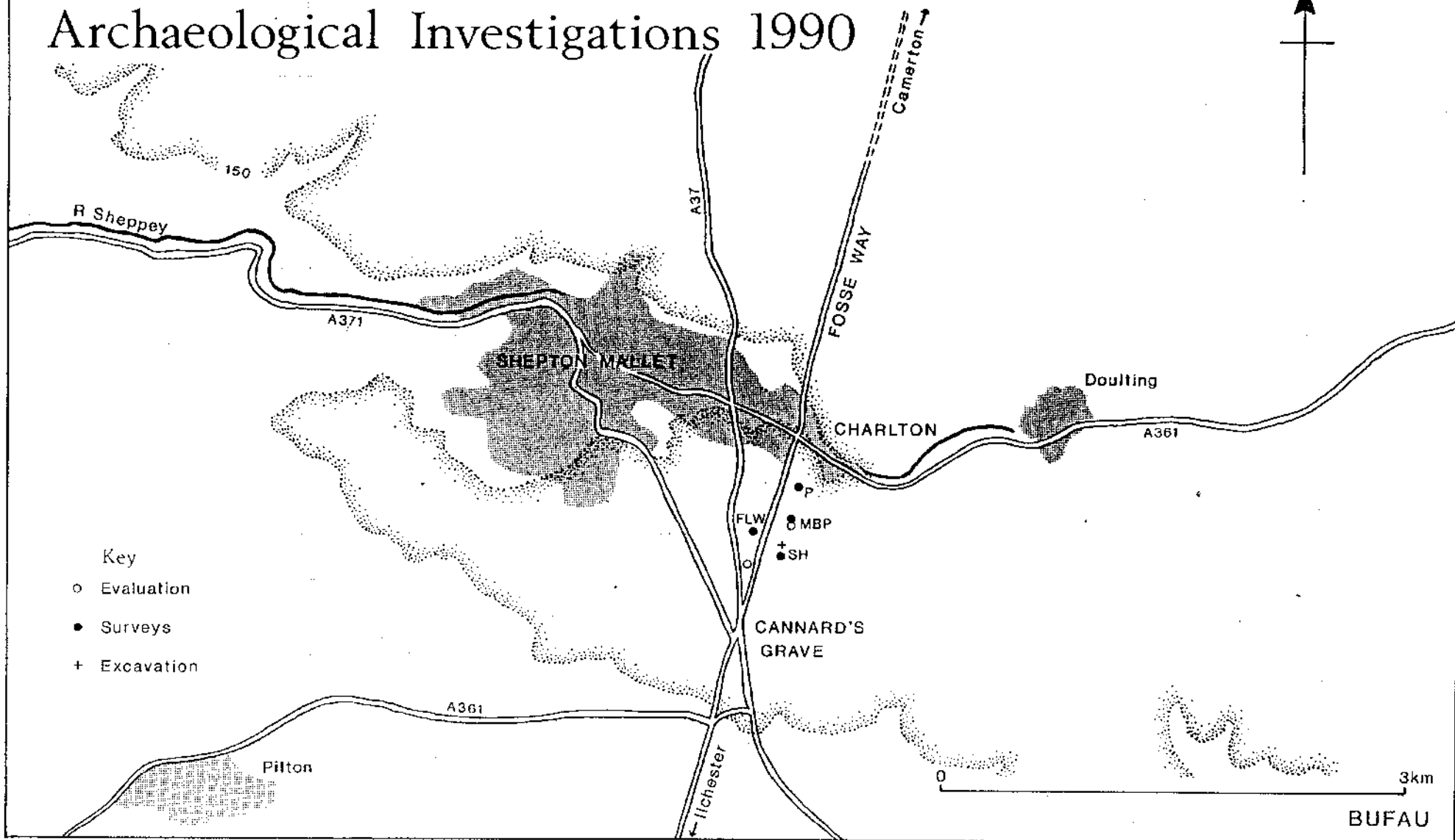


Fig. 1

FOSSE LANE – SHEPTON MALLET Excavations and Geophysical Surveys 1990

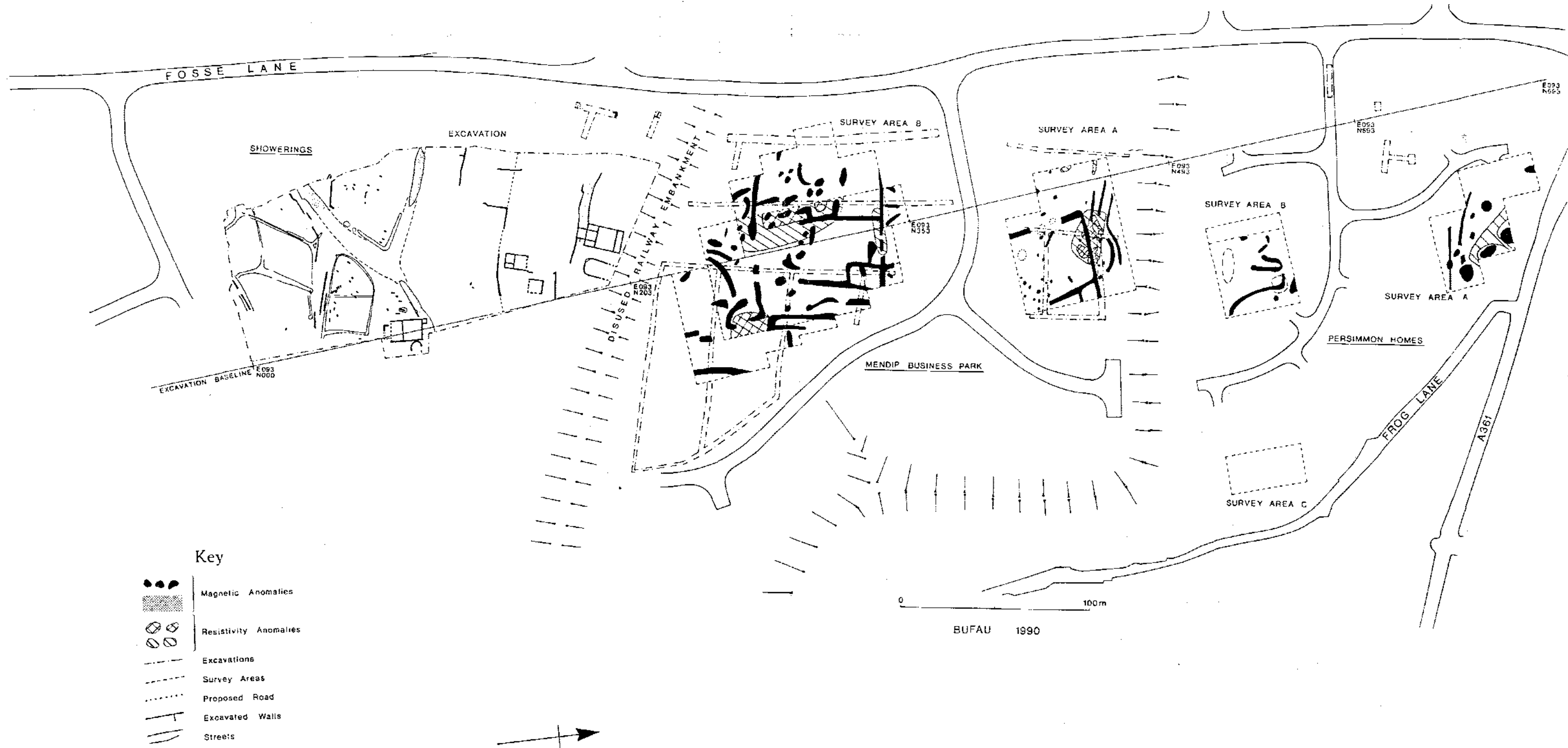


Fig. 2

MENDIP BUSINESS PARK Archaeological Evaluations

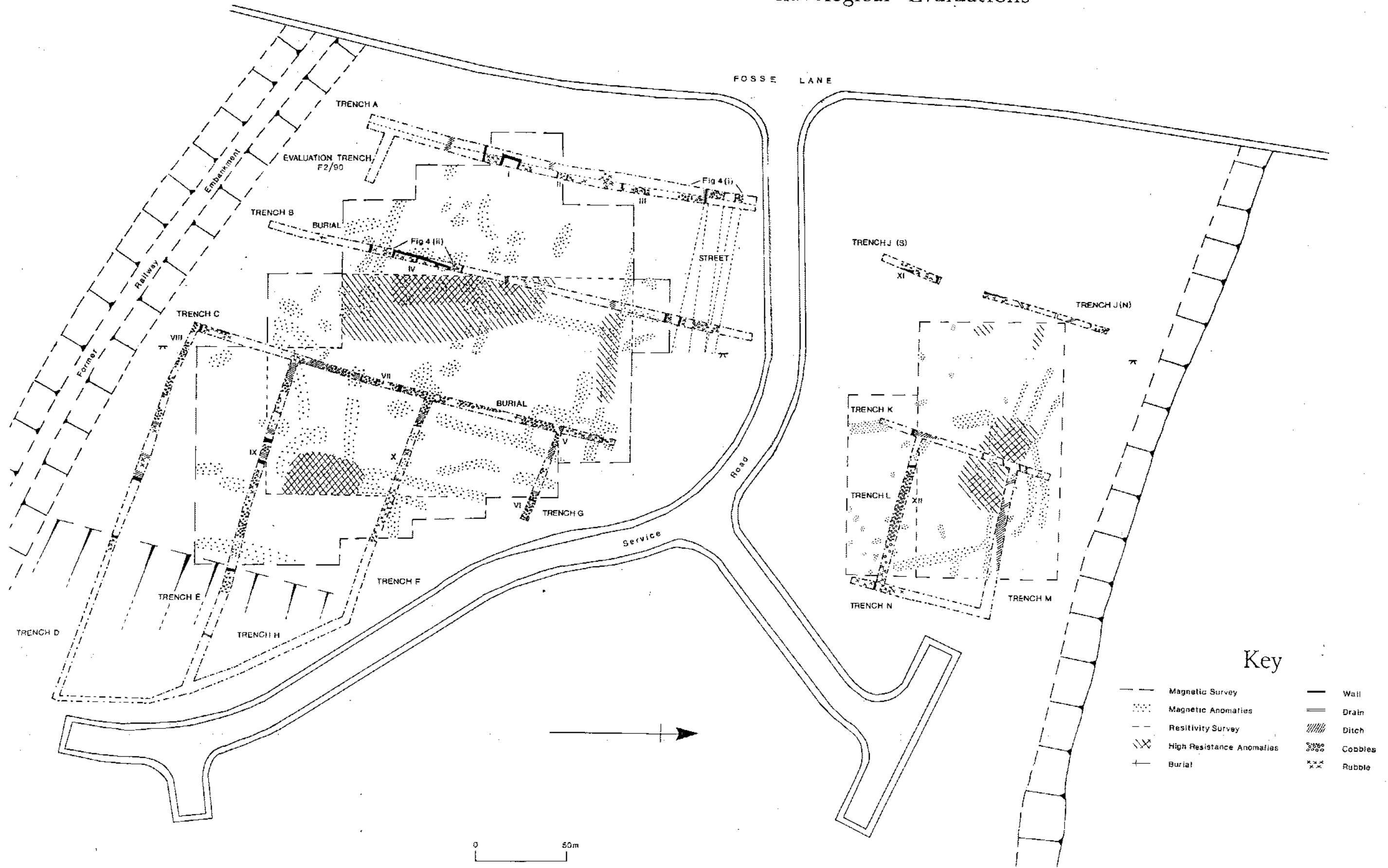
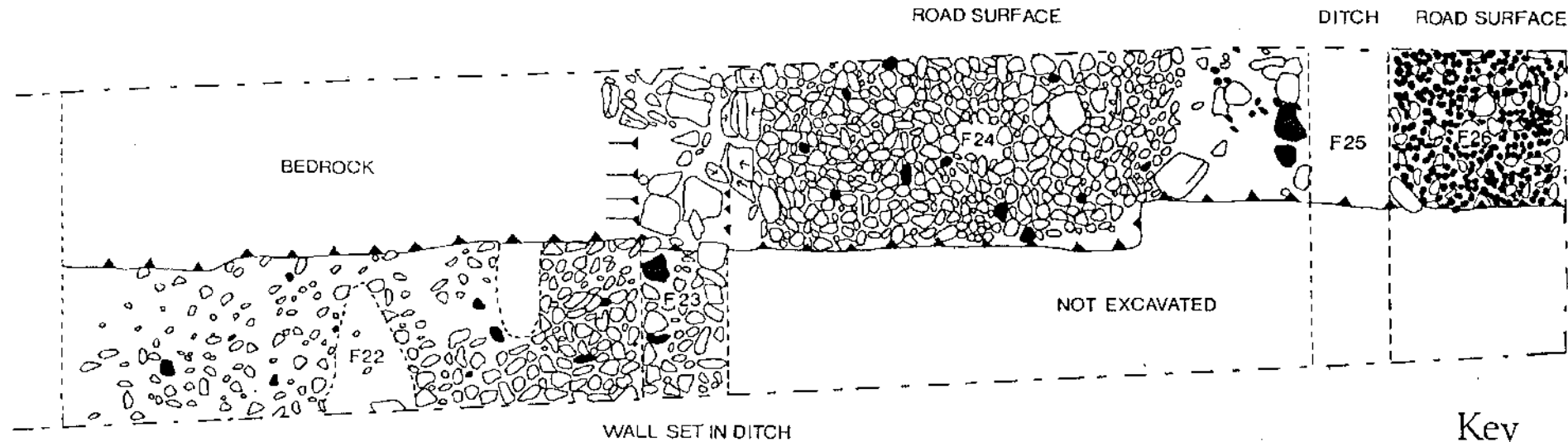


Fig. 3

Trench A: Road Surfaces



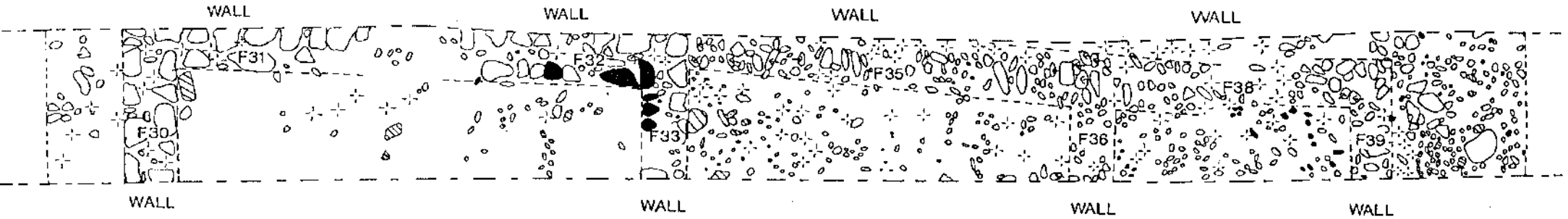
(i)



Key

- Feature Edge
- Yellow Sandstone
- Pennant Sandstone
- Bone
- + Yellow Mortar

Trench B: Structure IV



(ii)

Fig. 4

MENDIP BUSINESS PARK
1990

FINDS PLOT

FIGURE 5 (i - iii)

LEGEND

- POTTERY
- COINS
- FERROUS METALWORK
- NON-FERROUS METALWORK
- FLINT
- BONE, GLASS, SLAG, OTHER ORGANIC
WORKED STONE, MORTAR, DAUB

JESS PARK

1990

FINDS PLOT

1

3



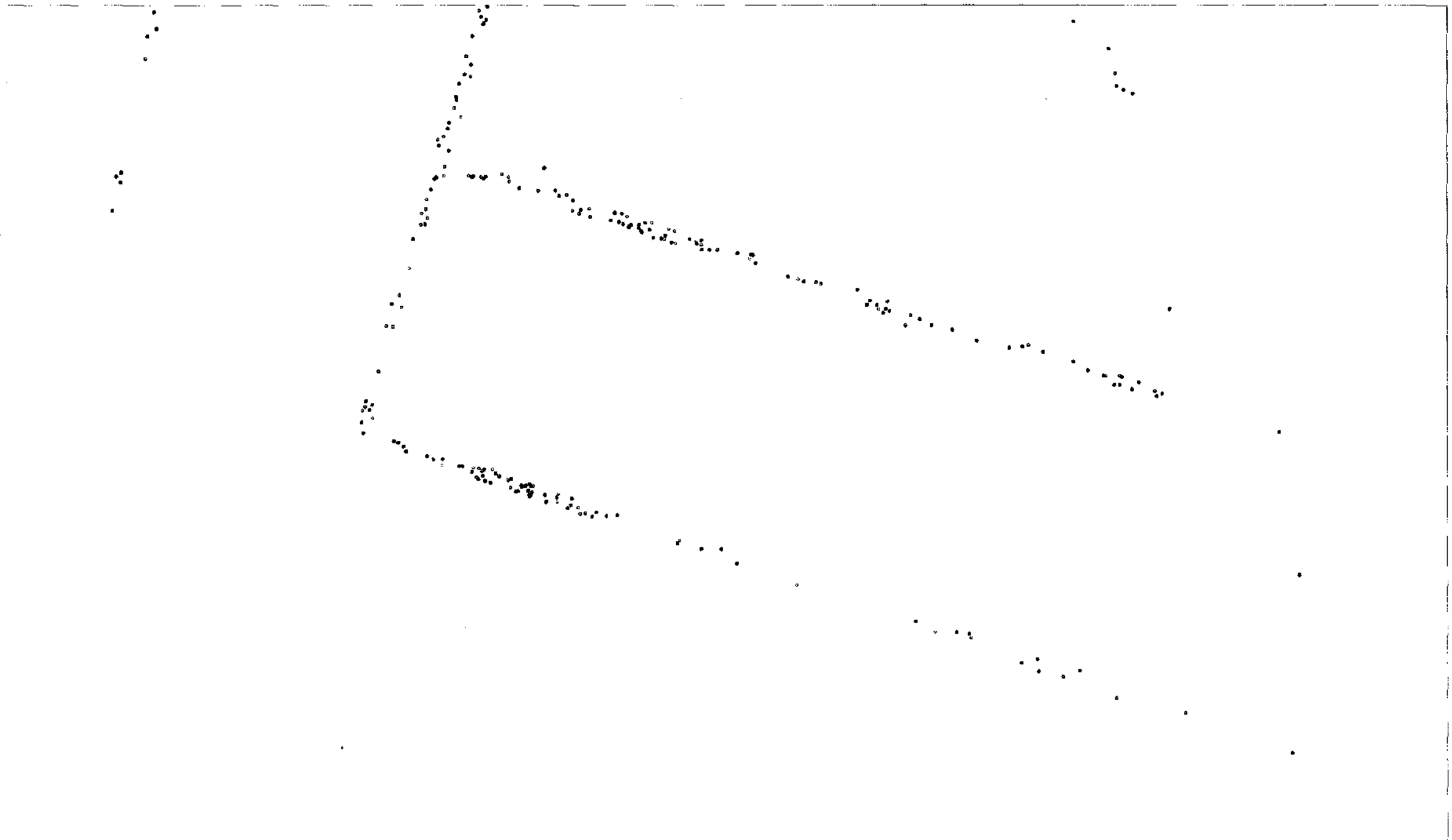
NESS PARK

1990

FINDS PLOT

1

1



NESS PARK 1990 FINDS PLOT

1 2

