

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**Tesco, Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet,  
Somerset  
Archaeological Investigations  
October 1996-March 1997**

**Post-fieldwork summary, assessment  
and research design**

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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**Tesco, Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, Somerset**  
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**Post-fieldwork summary, assessment and research design**

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

The following report summarises the results of excavations undertaken in 1996 and a subsequent watching brief during construction works in 1997 on the site of a Tesco supermarket development at the Mendip Business Park, Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, by a team from the Field Archaeology Unit of the University of Birmingham under the joint direction of Peter Leach and Peter Ellis, and commissioned by Tesco plc. This is followed by an assessment of the quantity and quality of finds and archive material obtained as a result, and an updated project design with proposals for a fuller analysis of that data within the framework of an academically justified research agenda.

These works had been preceded in 1990 by trial trenching and geophysical prospection of the site (Leach et al 1990), and the results from those assessments informed decisions on the layout of the development and mitigation strategies for the archaeology (BUFAU 1996). The two areas excavated correspond with those subject to the maximum development impact, but represent localities where the least archaeological damage was anticipated (Fig. 2). The area to the west forming the present frontage on Fosse Lane and the central area, where archaeological remains were known to be dense, have been protected from intrusive development and will now be scheduled as part of the existing Ancient Monument SM 22803.

Roman remains at Fosse Lane had first been recorded in the 19th century, but it was not until extensive archaeological work in 1990 that the character of Roman occupation was understood. The evidence from excavation, trial trenching and geophysical survey since then has revealed a Romano-British small town set out on either side of the Fosse Way, currently marked by Fosse Lane (Fig. 1). The town, equidistant between the Roman towns of Bath and Ilchester and on the frontier between the pre-Roman Iron Age tribal territories of the Durotriges and the Belgae, developed between the first and fourth centuries AD. as part of a provincial infrastructure in response to the wider, Roman economy's need for industrial and agricultural resources, and as a local focus for its administrative and fiscal policies. Immediately south of the 1996 development, excavation in 1990 had revealed houses, roads, boundary walls and burial plots laid out over an extensive zone to the rear of what was assumed to be much denser occupation along the Fosse Way itself (Fig. 2; Leach 1991 and forthcoming). The evaluation of 1990 on the Mendip Business Park site had revealed the presence of nine stone-founded buildings, a road, and compounds defined by walls and ditches, while geophysical survey had pinpointed locations of more intense activity, some perhaps industrial in origin.

In accordance with the archaeological brief, the latest excavations were focused upon two linked areas as determined by the proposed development, set to the north and south, and where the 1990 results suggested a lower density of remains. Conversely, these were the areas within which major disturbance or destruction of the archaeology was expected. The main areas were designated Areas A and B, linked by a narrower strip to the east (Fig. 2). In the

event much of the archaeology of Area A remains intact, the modern building level having been raised, while in Area B only the western third has suffered total destruction.

## METHOD

Topsoil and subsoil was stripped by a 360 degree mechanical excavator, exposing the upper archaeological horizons. Some areas of heavy rubble were also partly removed by machine to allow earlier layers to be sampled. In Area A a post-Roman flood deposit was removed which exposed late Roman levels in places. These were left *in situ* while machine excavation of the colluvium continued. In retrospect it was seen that the lower levels were a separate flood deposit from the later Roman period, whose removal allowed earlier Roman sealed deposits to be examined over a large area. Sections were cut by machine across the road and a primary boundary ditch in Area A.

The area cleared of topsoil was then divided into a 10m grid based on the OS grid. It was apparent relatively early, following the start of hand cleaning, that a larger area of archaeology was available for excavation and recording than could be undertaken given the available resources. In Area B it was decided therefore to totally clean alternating 10m transects and distinct features in the intervening uncleaned transects. In the event about two thirds of the Area B surfaces were carefully trowelled, while in area A surface definition cleaning was almost fully achieved. Excavation of the exposed features was then undertaken in an attempt to sample as wide a range as possible of the different types revealed. All ditches were sectioned in at least one place, many of the building walls were sectioned as well as most floor surfaces. Hard standings were not dismantled. The road in Area A was sectioned at three points, one, as noted above, by machine. Finds from overall surface definition cleaning were collected by 5m square, identified within the site grid. Other finds were collected and recorded by stratigraphic units identified on the site. Extensive environmental sampling was undertaken from ditches, pits, layers sealed under colluvium and from the colluvial deposits themselves.

The watching brief was undertaken from the beginning of January to the middle of March 1997. An archaeologist was present on a daily basis initially, and thereafter in accordance with the development programme and the resources allocated. The foundation trenches of the supermarket and ancillary structures were thoroughly recorded. Outside Area B, the opportunity was taken to record archaeology revealed by topsoil stripping of two areas to the north and north-west, and in its southward extension by 5m. to the foot of the railway embankment. Major service trenches across both sites were recorded, with the exception of an east-west trench cut across the south part of Area A. The cutting of small-scale internal service and drainage trenches within the supermarket footprint were not monitored.

The underlying natural surface comprised Lias limestone bedrock, bedded almost horizontally and fractured towards the surface. In the south-west corner of Area B this was located directly beneath the topsoil and subsoil, but in most areas it lay beneath a blanket of buff-orange natural clay up to 0.4m deep.

## RESULTS

### Introduction

The excavation results emphasised remains of the later levels of Romano-British settlement, dating to the 3rd and 4th century or later. Arising from the excavations of 1990 (Leach, forthcoming), evidence, particularly from burials, suggested settlement continuity or a reuse of areas to the rear of the Fosse Way frontage in the post-Roman period up to the 7th or 8th century. In 1996, the discovery of similar burials may reinforce this hypothesis. Nevertheless, it was also possible to excavate substantial portions of earlier Roman levels, notably some in Area A, which had been later abandoned as a result of flooding and only partly reoccupied.

Further analysis should allow the dating of occupation sequences to be refined, and thus the following periodisation of events and their interpretation should be seen very much as an interim statement. A correlation between the sequences discerned separately in Areas A and B as suggested here, cannot be directly demonstrated, and could to be altered as post-excavation study bears fruit. It should also be possible to correlate the final phasing with that proposed for the 1990 excavation (*ibid*).

The excavated areas were found to have been divided in the Roman period into plots marked by banks, ditches and, later, walls. These are described here as compounds and have been numbered from C1 to C9 on the figures. Subdivisions and alterations within the compounds retain the original compound number with a distinguishing letter, Compound 7 for example appearing in the different forms C7A to C7D through the lifetime of the settlement.

Apart from a handful of portable finds comprising prehistoric pottery fragments and flint artefacts located in later layers, there was no evidence of pre-Roman activity recorded.

### Period 1: Later First - Early Second century AD (Fig 3)

A large ditch, F134, sectioned in Area A, was also recorded in Area B as F347, running on the same north-south alignment. The ditch was cut parallel with the line of the Fosse Way and 120m east of it, representing both a boundary and a watercourse. In Area A, it was 3m wide and had been cut into the limestone bedrock to a depth of 1m. Further south, in Area B, the bottom of the ditch was not seen although its minimum recorded depth was 0.6m, principally cut into the natural clay but also penetrating rock. The record of its width in two further sightings of 4.8m to the south and 6m to the north was only tentative and may have included a later ditch directly to its east which was also sectioned in the excavation.

Within a zone defined by, and to the west of this ditch were a number of lesser boundary ditches and lengths of bank. In Area A these comprised two ditches, F155 and F152, running parallel to each other, the latter also associated with the remains of a bank of orange clay, F148. To the west was a shallow cut, F160, on the same alignment, where the limestone bedrock lay just beneath the surface. The evidence would suggest that the boundary represented by F152 was marked principally by its associated bank, and a similar suggestion is proposed for F155. These banks first defined Compounds 1 -3, with Compound 4 to the east of F134. In view of later developments in Period 2 when a road was constructed here, it is possible that F155 and F152 defined an earlier trackway.

In Area B, two long boundaries running east-west were recorded, marked by orange clay banks, F210 and F356. Another ditch and bank, F304 and F305, ran north-south. It was suspected but not confirmed that F210 and F356 were also accompanied by ditches. These boundaries first defined Compounds 5-8 with Compound 9 to the east of F347. The evidence for activities within these compounds was sparse, although parts of some appear to have remained as open spaces throughout the life of the settlement.

It would thus appear that at an early stage in the history of the Fosse Lane settlement, separate compounds, presumably relating to properties fronting onto the Fosse Way, were defined by boundary banks accompanied by ditches. The full extent of the whole arrangement was presumably defined to the rear by the large ditch F134/F347. However, within Area B there was a change in its orientation. The layout of F304/F305 can best be understood in the context of the 1990 excavation results, with whose boundary alignments it conforms more closely. Clearly a major change in the land allotment process occurred south of the line of F210. One explanation would be that F210 marks the northern limit of a specific phase of development, with F304 marking the beginning of another zone of compounds further north. Within the northern block the layout appears less uniform, and while land allocation might initially have been more regular on the street frontage, the rear compounds may not always have conformed with an overall plan. The northern pair of boundaries, F152 and F155, run at a slight angle to the Fosse Way, an alignment not replicated exactly by F210 and F356 to the south.

One feature of particular note was a small pit, F242, in Compound 7 set against its northern boundary F210. This contained a small drum-shaped lead container with a funnel-shaped aperture above, the funnel apparently set with its mouth at the contemporary ground surface level and protected by a setting of stones. Within the lead container were cremated human bones. This seems to have been deliberately positioned against the boundary bank with its funnel placed to receive libations. Was this perhaps a foundation burial and focus of subsequent ritual marking the ownership and use of the enclosure?. The relatively sparse dating evidence suggests a provisional allocation of these features to the later 1st or early 2nd century, although the cremation burial could belong in Period 2

### Period 2: Second century (Fig 3)

A road, F101, was laid out across the earlier ditches F152 and F155 in Area A, running at right angles to the Fosse Way. Although these ditches were superseded, the large north-south boundary ditch F134 continued in use. The earliest metalled road surface was well defined by two shallow side drainage ditches, F 141 and F 142. A north-south running boundary ditch and bank, F156, now divided Compound 3 into 3A and 3B, while Compound 1 was redefined.

To the north and south of the road spreads of burnt material, F161 in Compound 1 and F133 in compound 3B, included charred plant remains and substantial quantities of pottery. To the north west, traces of what may have been a timber-framed building (Structure 3) fronting onto the north side of the street included at least one setting of wall pad stones F106

In Area B the two boundaries, F210 and F304 were retained. A suspected original access in the north-east corner of compound 7 was later marked by a cobbled track. Two pits,

F211 and F243, of irregular semi-circular shape were set with their straight sides abutting the boundary bank. Both were revetted on their north sides against the bank by roughly coursed drystone walling. At a later date Compound 7 was subdivided into Compounds 7A, 7B and 7C by two ditches, F300, and F246 accompanied by a drystone wall F215, the former apparently running in to the pit F243.

In Period 2 there is evidence for some subdivision of the original elongated Period 1 plots by the addition of north-south boundaries. The road in Area A presumably led to fields to the east of the town (Compound 4), possibly via a bridge across the ditch F134, their intersection lying, unfortunately, just outside the excavated area. In Area B, communication between Compounds 6,7 and 8 is suggested at the north end of boundary F304. From their character and position in Compounds 7A and B, the pits F211 and F243 may have been used for watering livestock; F243 at least was connected to the drainage system.

### Period 3: Late second - early third century (Fig 5)

In Area A the road F 101 was re-metalled, and widened to overrun the northern roadside ditch. Drystone boundary walls were constructed along the north and south sides of the road. To the north, two sections, F 115 and F 119, set on a slightly different alignment, suggest the location of an entranceway or side access onto the road, although no track surface had survived here. On the south side, a flanking wall, F 102, followed the road eastwards as far as the Period 2 ditch F 156. This latter was infilled and replaced by a drystone wall (F104), which appeared to form a right angle with F 102; although the area of their junction was destroyed by a modern disturbance. A further section of boundary wall (F 103), abutted on to F 104, continuing the line of F102 eastward, though slightly offset to the south. Compounds 3A and 3B were thus retained.

North of the road in Compound 1, and abutting its roadside wall, were the stone footings of a rectilinear building, Structure 1, laid out over the Period 2 areas of burning. The building measured 5.8m by at least 10.4m internally, its outer walls marked by large stones set on the original clay ground surface. A 2.8m wide entranceway to the west, with a gatepost socket sited on its north side, may have been matched by another entrance lying just outside the excavated area on the east, indicated by partly exposed worn threshold stones. Its walls were irregularly set with rounded corners, suggesting stone bases for a timber structure. Within the building, elements of an internal wall marked by uprights and a shallow trench were noted to the north. The southern room was floored with large flagstones and blocks in its southern half and it is possible that the flooring marked a third small room. A pot had been set within a pit, F 117, in the north-west corner of the north room. Outside to the east a stone culvert, F120, had been built as one with the wall of this building. To the west of Structure 1 was the stone cobbling of an open yard, F112, with varying surfaces suggestive of different uses. Within this, a rectangular area marked by larger stones and distinctive pitching may have marked a covered annex to the building. A line of stones, F155, possibly a separate wall, ran northward from the road for a short distance. Further to the west were traces of another roadside building, Structure 3, probably of similar construction to Structure 1, although only a small portion, including the base of a north-south wall F106, was seen

South of the road, its flanking wall F103 was lost to the east, but 10m to the east of its surviving end a north-south running wall, F128 suggested another enclosure or yard area

within Compound 3B, just a few metres west of the still functioning Period 1 drainage ditch boundary, F134. The east side of this smaller enclosure was marked by wall footings F128 and F129, their slightly differing alignments suggesting an entrance from the east which was also marked by stone paths, F 131 and F132. Its south side was marked by a right-angled turn in F129 which was only traced westward for a few metres. Within this yard a spread of larger stone rubble associated with the path F 131 sealed Period 2 deposits. Further south a contemporary section of wall foundation, F111, flanked the west side of the ditch F134.

In Area B a stone reverted wall, F229 was added to the east side of the boundary bank F304. At its north end F229 respected the suggested Period 2 entranceway from the north-east, turning slightly east before petering out. At its south end the footings for a stone building, Structure 8, were set to the east of the wall in Compound 8, sharing F229 as its west wall. The building measured 5.8m across by at least 9m long internally. The southern 4m of Structure 8 were recorded in the watching brief but the presence of any internal divisions could not be determined and a south wall had been removed by later activity. Within the centre of the ground floor room of the building, a small greyware pot had been set with its mouth at the level of the mortar floor of the room, sealed beneath two flat stones. The remains of a stone wall, F282, was traced eastward for 7m from the north-east corner of Structure 8, possibly one side of an associated yard.

The primary boundary bank F210 separating compounds 6 and 7 was now replaced by a drystone wall F244, although only surviving in a disturbed and fragmentary condition. This was set with a ditch F258 on its north side. Both features may alternatively have originated in Period 2, while the ditch F258 is likely to have been a redefinition of that presumed to have accompanied the original Period 1 boundary bank (F210).

#### Period 4: Third century (Fig 6)

The end of Period 3 was marked by flooding. In Area A this deposited a band of clay which sealed Structure 1 and the yard to its west, Structure 3, as well as the walled enclosure to the south of the road in Compound 3B. The deposition of flood colluvium seems likely to have been associated with the abandonment of the Period 1 ditch, F134. This had eventually become choked with silt layers, within which bands of charcoal suggested washed in or deliberately deposited material from Period 2 and 3 activity.

The equivalent ditch, F347, in Area B went out of use at the same time. Its grey silt fills were only seen in the watching brief and no other record was obtained by hand excavation here. Rather than recutting this ditch it was replaced by a second, F230, 3.4m wide and 1m deep, set 2m to its east.

The earlier dividing ditch to the west, F300 (Fig. 5), may now have gone out of use, reuniting Compounds 7A and 7B as 7D. At the north-east corner of the compound the Period 2 opening was now marked by a section of road metalling, F266, flanked by two stone-lined drains, F262 and F280, and seen to be turning northwards at the limit of the excavated area. Drain F280 was not excavated but its pitched stone footing was seen to follow the curve of the road, continuing west to follow the line of the existing main compound boundary ditch F258. To the south, the more massive drain, F262, had a stone base with coursed stone side walls capped by large limestone blocks. Their size suggests that traffic was intended to cross



them while using the road to pass between the compounds here. The drain may have run water from a pit to the west, F285, which was not excavated. To the east of trackway F266 were three large squared blocks of Douling stone, F267, suggesting the base wall line of a timber building, perhaps a barn set above ground level. Similar large padstones were also noted 3m to the north in the watching brief. The building, if such it was, would have fronted onto the trackway. To the north-west of the road in Compound 6, were pitched stone surfaces and extensive floors, F321, suggesting the site of another building. In the east part of Compound 7D, a large oval well (F225) was retained by a drystone coursed steining.

In Compound 8, a stone-built kiln or oven, F250, was recorded, surrounded by an area of burning. To its east was a spread of stone floors and features which was further developed in Period 5. This primary phase was only partly revealed but comprised floors marked by large squared blocks, some burnt, as well as another oven, F269. In 1990 a lead-riveted amphora base was found here beneath Period 5 levels in evaluation trench D. Evidence of flooding was limited to a thinner deposition of silts in this compound, probably occurring when the ditch F347 went out of use, but doubtless much alleviated by the parallel replacement F230 immediately to the east. The roadside drains of F266 were replicated elsewhere in the Area B compounds by occasional lines of pitched stone, representing what must have been a major drainage system of stone culverts, though largely truncated by later ploughing. There were indications along the south side of Compound 6 that culverts had also run there, and the whole area may have had long-term, periodic drainage problems.

In Compound 9, beyond the main replacement boundary ditch F230, a stone wall foundation, F270, with a stone hearth setting, F271, on its west side, marked the edge of a widespread pitched surface incorporating some reused quernstone fragments, F372, to the east. Further north, two east-west running ditches, F348 and F349, may mark an enclosure subsequently occupied by Structure 9.

The road F101 in Area A was again relaid, in part sealing flood deposit layers. It did not, however, maintain its easterly direction beyond the point where an entry was suggested in Period 3, just east of the former Structure 1. Turning to the north, the new road layers overlay boundary wall F 115 and the walls of Structure 1 (Fig. 5). Period 4 flooding, marked by the abandonment of the watercourse F 134, was thus followed by reclamation and a redefinition of the road. The definition of Compounds 3A and B appears to have been maintained in this period, their boundaries still marked by the stone walls F102, F103 and F104.

#### Period 5: Fourth century (Fig. 7)

The settlement appears to have reached its maximum density in the later Roman period with domestic buildings and areas of industrial activity now appearing within the earlier enclosures. In Area A, a two-roomed stone building, Structure 4, 14m long by 5.8m wide externally, was built in Compound 4. Its south room measured 7 x 4.8m internally and was divided by a stone wall from a north room which lay partly outside the excavated area. There was a doorway at the west end of the partition wall. Outside the building to its west was a stone culvert, F 168, draining to the north. To the east of Structure 4, two walls which met at a right angle possibly marked part of another stone building, Structure 10.

To the south of road F101 a rectangular stone platform or floor, F113, measuring 14.4 by 7m, represented Structure 2 and was constructed over the flood deposits of Period 4 in Compound 3B. It was built of pitched Lias stone with a surface layer of crushed yellow Doulling stone surviving in places. Part of its north side was revetted by edge-set blocks on a line which was continued to the west, although here an additional section of floor ran to the north. Two possible entrances situated midway on the east and west sides were not opposed. The floor character changed to the south where there were areas of differently set pitching. On the west side was a stone with a hollowed-out spherical depression, perhaps the setting for an upright. A stone-sided culvert, F130, drained water away from the south end of the building, to the east. This end of F 113 was poorly defined and merged with or was overlain by an extensive spread of rubble, perhaps representing the site of buildings or yard areas (structure 5?) beyond unexcavated buildings further to the south. From here another stone culvert, F127, similar to F130, again carried water to the east.

West of F113 Compounds 3A and B appeared to have been subdivided by stone boundary walls. In Compound 3B, F123 abutted F113 and was traced for 8m to the west, while in Compound 3A a line of stone, F105, ran parallel to and 4m from the still existing roadside wall F102, butting against the earlier wall F104 to the east .

In Area B, three further stone-footed buildings were recorded of which the most important seemed to be Structure 6. This was partially recorded in the excavation, and more extensively in the watching brief, having first been seen in trial trenching in 1990. It had at least 5 rooms, one of which had a mortar floor later replaced by a gravel floor. There was evidence of painted wall plaster, stone roof tiles and one fragment of a small column base. The building measured 22 by 10m. At its south end, a west room was structurally later than the east part. One room was fully recorded and measured 4.6 by 3.8m internally. Walls were of coursed stone with offsets set on pitched stone and rubble footings. The building was laid out across the line of the Period 1 boundary, F356, between compounds 5 and 6 (Fig. 3). Fourthcentury coins were found on the floor surfaces and, more importantly for dating purposes, beneath the floors.

West of Structure 6 in Compound 6 (formerly Compounds 5 and 6), two wellbuilt walls of another building were recorded, F337 and F338, and further west a possible wall-robbing trench, F339, may have marked yet another building. A sunken area, F335, with a stone floor and sides of vertically set stone was also found in this locality. This resembled ovens found elsewhere though lacking evidence of burning and may have been a corn dryer.

In Compound 7, three pits were dug, possibly as stone quarries. One (F301) cut the Period 2 boundary F300 and was filled with dark soil, while the other two (F251 and F256) were both filled with destruction rubble, mortar, burnt material and building stone. Coins and other dating evidence from the latter pits suggested a date in the second half of the 4th century. Structure 7 was built across them. The building measured at least 10m long by 5.4m wide and had two rooms, one with a domestic hearth, measuring 4.2 x 2.8m internally. The building was plough-damaged but was set on deep pitched stone foundations across the earlier pits. To its east was a small walled enclosure across which ran a stone culvert.

Structure 9 in Compound 9 was a two-roomed building measuring 11.8 by 6.4m externally. A small room, 5.4 by 2.2m internally lay to the south of a larger room measuring 7.8 by 5m.

This had a 3m wide entrance to the west, the remains of a cobbled floor and a bench against its west wall. The horizontally-coursed Lias slabs of the north and south walls were set on pitched footings packed in clay, while the internal wall was set on shallower pitched footings which had been mortared in place. A possible culvert ran along its south side. An extensive pitched stone surface was found to the west of the building. The evidence suggested a byre in the large room to the north and a storage chamber to the south, although domestic accommodation is possible both there and on an upper floor. The building was laid out across the Period 4 ditch F349. Fourth-century coins were found on the floor surfaces within the building and over the cobbled yard area to the west.

The compounds within which these buildings stood appear to have been redefined. The boundary wall between compounds 7 and 8 was rebuilt in stone using large squared blocks, F247. The base of these lay above the uppermost surviving level of Roman archaeology suggesting that by Period 5 the ground level within the enclosures had risen over the lifetime of the settlement and had been subsequently truncated. A platform of Lias stone blocks, F265, was built on the west side of the boundary at its junction with F215, although the latter was by now redundant. Between compounds 8 and 9, the Period 4 drainage ditch, F230, having now in turn silted up, had been replaced by a shallower ditch to its east, F236.

In Compound 8, two stone platforms or floors similar to F113 in Area A were recorded, comprising large rectangular areas of closely packed stone. To the north F268 was 6.8 by 4.4m with its south side irregular. In line with it to the south were four substantial post settings (F238-F241) marked by large pitched stones set into the Period 4 colluvium. Postsettings and stone floor may have together formed the base of a single, rectangular, timber-framed building, Structure 11, with its southern end raised above ground level. To the west were two similar post-settings, F227 and F237, and near the north-west corner of the compound was a large clay and rubble filled pit, F226. Further south a second and larger stone platform or floor, F228, comprised closely packed Lias with an upper layer of crushed yellow Douling stone. This measured at least 14.2m by 6.2m, sealing the Period 4 Kiln F250, although its full extent to the south was not seen. The platform appears to mark the site of another rectangular, timber-framed building, Structure 12.

In the area to the east of this floor were several features set within an extensive spread of large, horizontally-laid stone slabs and blocks. These included a large circular setting, F274, and a hearth or oven, F249, together with stone floors and edge-settings of stone. Further east was a band of worn stone rubble (F272) running north-south above the infield ditch F347, apparently marking a trackway. This was crossed by a stone culvert, F273, possibly draining east from the building platform F268. A complete quern upper-stone and several broken fragments, had been incorporated in the track surface. Further east a kiln or oven, F263, with a shallow ash pit to its north, had been sited over the infilled Period 4 ditch F230.

Within Compound 7, a number of pits and postholes, seen only in plan and not excavated, may belong to this period. West of the boundary F247 a group of postholes, F284, marked a small rectangular structure, within which were several broken pottery vessels set partly into the ground. Beyond, an uncleaned spread of stone rubble, some pitched, may have marked the site of another building platform.

#### Period 6: Late Fourth - Seventh century and later? (Fig. 8)

In Area A two shallow graves, F 122 and F 150, were cut into the Period 5 stone floor F113. In F122 was a north-south aligned adult burial placed with its head to the south and a coin in its mouth. the adult burial within F 150 was aligned east-west with its head to the west.

The earlier road, F 101, was cut by a number of drainage ditches running along its length. To the west two ditches (F146 -7) were joined to the east by a third, F145. Another ditch of similar character, F149, was cut across the stone platform F113 to the south. All ditches were filled with a uniform dark silty soil.

In Area B a group of three burials were set close together within Compound 7. All three were adult inhumations set in shallow graves laid out north-south and had their heads to the south. Grave F235 cut grave F255, with grave F248 to their east. Close to the building Structure 6, an infant burial within a shallow grave (F259), lay alongside a roughly rectangular area of stone debris (2074) representing either a later annexe to Structure 6 or the remains of a separate building built partly out of reused Structure 6 material. Further west, a small, isolated grave, F208, aligned north-south, contained a well-dressed stone coffin with a separate stone slab lid. Within were the remains of a young infant with its head to the south. This burial may alternatively belong to Period 5. One other isolated adult inhumation (2077), almost destroyed by later activity, lay much further to the east close to the track F272 of the preceding period.

Two drainage gullies, F223 and F224, were cut across the later Roman levels further east in Area B, the gullies joining to form one ditch. Cutting both Structure 8 and the long-retained boundary F234, and thus post-dating them, their fills of dark soil contained much pottery and numerous coins and small finds. This suggests that they were cut through, and then filled from formerly more extensive deposits deriving from earlier occupation of the Romano-British settlement in this locality. While the main ditch line may simply have defined a field or other enclosure to the east, the area further south between the two ditches could have been the locus of some associated occupation.

The southern end of the Period 5 track F272 had been cut by linear features, F285. These were not excavated, but in plan resembled the ditches cutting the road surface of F 101 in Area A.

Further evidence of the former existence of a deeper and more extensive layer of Roman stratigraphy came from plough marks cut into the uppermost surviving stone course of the boundary wall F247. These lay up to 0.4m above adjacent surviving levels of overall Roman archaeology. Other clues were provided by the position of the coffin lid of F208 found at the same level as the remaining Roman horizons, or the survival of the wall footings and interiors of Structure 6 at a higher level than their contemporary surroundings.

#### Period 7: Post-medieval - modern

A small number of more recent features were recorded. The 19th-century railway embankment was accompanied to the north by a deep ditch (recorded only in the watching brief). Also in this area, a rock cut pit, at least 2m deep and filled with dark soil, was not

bottomed but may have been a well or quarry associated with railway construction. Another larger rubble-filled disturbance to the east, about 10m in diameter, may have destroyed other Period 6 burials in the vicinity of F235, F248 and F255. The two pits contained post-medieval pottery.

## DISCUSSION

### *Early occupation*

Whether or not there had been prehistoric use of this site could not be determined, but the initial phase of Roman occupation saw the cutting of a defining rear boundary ditch (F134), which also acted as a watercourse, over 100m to the east of the Fosse Way and parallel to it. This might indicate that an overall authority with some resources was involved in the foundation and early layout of the Fosse Lane settlement. Within this zone it is suggested that Area B reveals the junction between two blocks of development north and south, on slightly different but predominantly east-west alignments (Fig 2). The primacy of the northern set might be implied by its closer relationship to the Fosse Way and eastern boundary ditch alignments, and if development of the town southward from a core area near the river crossing were assumed. The change in compound and building alignments, which are seen to continue across much of the area excavated further south in 1990 could thus represent a slightly later expansion of the settlement in that direction. Equally, however, this developmental sequence could be reversed, and it must be recognised that the greatest density of activity, and thus perhaps the original settlement core, lay mainly to the south of Area B. What may be another general change of alignments with similar implications can be seen, though less clearly, in the southern part of the area excavated in 1990. Within the defining framework of the Fosse Way and ditch F134 boundaries, early land allotment may have grown to some extent organically. However, the significance of primary boundaries may be marked not only by their retention over a long period, but perhaps also by the burial and ritual associated with the cremation F242 in Compound 7.

### *Function of compounds*

An agricultural function for some of the compounds as settlement infields is likely. In some areas stock would have been kept at certain times of year, some perhaps in transit to be marketed elsewhere or utilised following slaughter. Dunging of the compounds may also have encouraged periodic market garden type cultivation. The occurrence of suspected water holes in Compound 7 adds weight to these suggestions and emphasises the potential importance of livestock. There was also significant evidence of other activities. Two areas of burning recorded in Area A could signify crop processing in Period 2. Later, Compound 8 in Area B saw an emphasis upon industrial activity, with a number of kiln or oven features and a concentration of quern fragments recorded in Periods 4 and 5. Some may have been corn dryers, while adjacent stone floors and post settings may denote the sites of barn-like structures. Such evidence is witness to the use of these compounds to the rear of the Fosse Way frontage sites for storage and processing of agricultural produce from the town's hinterland.

In the later Roman period, the functions of certain compounds changed. The position of Structure 6, laid out across two compounds, illustrates one such change of use as the setting

for domestic buildings. Some compounds may thus have become private gardens or yards, subordinate to a dwelling. The 1990 excavation suggested that some new compounds were laid out across earlier arrangements and that certain more important buildings and their environs may have become more self-sufficient and independent units within the settlement.

### *Buildings*

Most of the buildings in stone were apparently provided at a relatively late date in the area excavated, a pattern seen elsewhere in the settlement as a whole. One of the earliest, Structure 1, seems to have been largely of timber and used for agricultural purposes, perhaps a store and work premises alongside the road. The other buildings are spread widely and seem to be associated each with a single compound, or, in the case of Structure 6, to straddle two. Structure 6 was the highest quality building excavated, with a suite of rooms, carefully-laid floors and some evidence of plastered walls. Structures 7 and 8 may also have been primarily domestic, although their interiors were poorly preserved and they may have shared this function with small-scale agricultural or industrial processing activities. Structures 9 and 4 are somewhat similar and may have been used in a similar fashion to rural peasant dwellings, with part of the building a byre used for animals. These types of shared arrangement were probably common throughout the settlement, and for stone buildings in particular, rooms on an upper storey should be envisaged.

The rectangular platforms of well-laid stone rubble settings, notably F113 in Compound 3F, and F228 and F268 in Compound 8, are of similar form and size to the stone buildings, and almost certainly represent the main internal floor area of rectangular timber-framed buildings (Structures 2, 11 and 12). The large potholes to the south of F268 may indicate its southward continuation as a granary raised above ground level. It is possible that the lack of definition at the south end of F113 marks a similar above ground section. The semicircle of stone walling, F274 in Compound 8, was found within an area of ovens and kilns and may have defined part of an industrial structure, although other functions, such as a dovecote, are possible.

Together, the building evidence indicates a progressive growth in population and settlement expansion, particularly during the 4th century, with perhaps a lower emphasis on agriculture in favour of more diversified activities.

### *Tracks*

In Area A a major side street was constructed in Period 2 and then maintained throughout the Roman period. This differed from those found in 1990 in the quality of its construction, the regularity of its layout and its maintenance over a long period of time. In its resemblance to streets from more developed Roman towns such as a layout at right-angles to the Fosse Way, its regularity, drainage and surfacing, it could be seen as a proto-urban feature, although some of its character and development must be attributed to the relatively low-lying and often wet ground conditions in this part of the site. In the later Roman period, the road turned to the north about 100m east of the Fosse Way. This must indicate a change in the status of land further to the east and that the road was consequently diverted. The track F266 in Area B was locally well defined and drained in the small area examined. It seems, however, merely to have been a point of access between several compounds. The site of the infilled early drainage

ditch F347 in Area B may later have been used as a trackway or yard area within Compound 8, and was crossed by a carefully laid system of culverts.

#### *Flooding and contraction of the settlement*

In some areas of the settlement there was evidence for a breakdown in the water management system and even some abandonment of earlier occupied zones. This was most apparent over much of Area A, where extensive flood deposits seal Structure 1 and parts of the road. These deposits suggest increased run off, probably from roofs, streets and other impervious surfaces within the expanding earlier settlement, combined with a consequent infill of the major drainage watercourse F134. The failure to adequately react to this problem may indicate a decline in the management of the town and perhaps settlement contraction late in the 2nd or early 3rd centuries. This is paralleled by evidence from the 1990 excavation zone of alterations which included some building abandonment and new drainage arrangements there in the mid Roman period. Whatever the extent or explanation of this apparent decline, many of these temporarily flooded areas were reclaimed for use by the 4th century in the course of renewed expansion.

#### *Burial and post-Roman evidence*

Fewer inhumations were found in these excavations than in those of 1990 and there was no indication of a Christian context. The density of burial was also much lower, although it might be argued that some burials had been lost through plough damage, as for instance the shallow graves in Area A, or through post-medieval quarrying? near burials in Area B. The cremation burial in its lead box in Compound 7 is probably the earliest, possible of the late 1st or 2nd century, while the infant burial in a stone coffin in Compound 6 could be from the late Roman period. Radiocarbon dates from inhumations recovered in 1990 gave a 5th to 8th century burial range, thus raising the likelihood of settlement continuing into this period. The similar character of those recovered in 1996 and in some instances their insertion into presumably redundant structures of earlier periods suggests a similar context for these smaller groups of burials. The presence of such burials implies a considerable retraction of the Romano-British settlement from its 4th century floruit, but the possibility, nevertheless, of some continuity here into the early medieval period, focused perhaps on the Fosse Way frontage. Further clues to such activity may lie in the Period 6 ditches of Area B, and those which cut through the latest road surfaces in Areas A and B.

#### *The 1996 excavation in its setting*

Recent work in the small Roman town at Shepton Mallet, particularly the extensive excavations of 1990 to the south, allows the 1996/7 results to be seen in a wider context. At both sites the layout of bank and ditch boundaries and well constructed trackways mark the earlier phases, suggesting the possibility of cohesive planning in the provision of properties and compounds, as well as access, to the rear of the Fosse Way road frontages. Stone buildings, Structures 8 in 1996 and 7 in 1990, first appear in the 2nd century. The comparable Structures 1,3 (1996) and 10 (1990) are also of this period, probably timber-framed buildings on stone sills. The appearance of such structures, along with new drystone-wall boundaries, may indicate the commencement of a process of property subdivision and possibly a degree of

independence for newly emerging establishments within a zone of settlement beginning to develop behind the main road frontage.

Despite signs of retrenchment in the mid-Roman period, this trend was set to continue during the subsequent phase of later 3rd and 4th century expansion. While there are differences of detail between the two areas (1990 and 1996-7) in this later period, the picture of increasing structural complexity and density of cultural material must be seen within a common framework. Although of different plan, Structure 6 (1996) was comparable in size and perhaps status to Building 9 (1990) further south. Structures 4 and 9 represent examples of a basic and commonly found two-cell stone building type, apparently more abundant in this area, although paralleled by Buildings 1 and 8 found in 1990. Other substantial timber-framed structures represented by rectangular platforms of pitched stone or cobble spreads were recognised in both areas, although the occurrence and form of the many lesser structures which must also have been present were often more difficult to recognise. The trackways excavated in both areas give little hint of a pre-planned layout, evolving rather as required to serve the needs of the occupants as these back areas developed. The more substantial character of the road F101 found in Area A may best be explained by its location primarily upon clay rather than a bedrock base available more often for the streets and tracks found in 1990. This street may, nevertheless, have been of higher status, perhaps part of a route which linked the settlement with farms and villages in the countryside to the east.

Primarily late and post-Roman burial evidence was recovered from the two site, although the numbers and grouping of graves found in 1990 were not matched in 1996. Similarly, there appeared to be no burials of higher status, except perhaps for the child's coffin found in Compound 6. Once again, the location and occurrence of most human burial signifies one of the last recorded activities on the settlement site during the period of its decline and eventual abandonment, probably by the end of the 7th century.

## ASSESSMENT

### Stratigraphic, structural and material data

Given the scale of the area to be affected by development, and the constraints of time, resources, working conditions, etc., it was necessary to adopt approaches to the recording and recovery of archaeological data which combined maximum, non-intensive coverage overall with an acceptable minimum of intensive, locally detailed excavation sampling (BUFAU 1996, Section 5).

The former, as outlined in the Methodology section (above), resulted in vertical photographic records of all hand-cleared areas, some large-scale drawn plans, and the collection of surface-recovered finds material, all within the framework of a 5m square module based upon a survey grid for the whole site. Accompanying this, more intensive sampling resulted in database sets of written, photographic and scaled drawn records based upon the principles of stratigraphic archaeological recording, associated, where recovered, with assemblages of artefactual and environmental material. A quantitative summary of all this archive is provided in Tables 1 and 2 below.



Table 1: Site records

	Site A	Site B	Watching brief	Totals
Contexts	86	110	47	243
Features	168	87	75	330
Drawings	24	26	17	67
Photo. Films	colour print	colour slide	mono	Totals
(all sites)	58	24	13	95

Table 2: Finds

Roman pottery	20,254 sherds
Brick/tile, fired clay	12
Worked stone	25
Worked bone	6
Flint	36
Mortar/plaster	14
Copper alloy objs	74
Iron objs. + nails etc	40 + 320 nails
Coins	305
Lead + silver	35
Glass	83
Human burials	9
Animal bone	47kg (700 countable frags.)
Environmental samples	38

Numerous archaeological features and contexts had survived below modern ground levels, despite the effects of post-Roman land use, which in addition to levelling all former upstanding elements, had variably truncated structures and deposits, particularly belonging to the later phases of the settlement. This was most noticeable in Area B, where the upper levels were frequently missing or severely disturbed. Overall, the emphasis in survival and visibility remained, nevertheless, with remains of the later periods, partly because of an increase in the intensity of occupation, particularly in the 4th century. The remains of earlier periods were, however, locally well preserved and exposed, assisted in places by formations of colluvium which overwhelmed certain areas for a time and resulted in some good and well stratified structural sequences.

Artefactual preservation was generally good in neutral or slightly calcareous environments, particularly where underlying natural deposits of clay or colluvium were most extensive. The presence of the natural Lias limestone and its common utilisation in man-made structures frequently enhanced the visibility and durability of the latter, while at the same time creating stony environments in which artefacts were more subject of abrasion and damage. No waterlogged conditions favourable for the preservation of organic remains were encountered, although bone generally survived well, and carbonised organic remains were widely available for sampling.

Overall, a comprehensive structural sequence was obtained through selective and targeted excavation sampling across the site, supported by a good range of artefact and ecofactual data. In the context of the less intensive but more spatially extensive records of the site, combined with data from previous explorations, it is possible to provide a relatively detailed

chronological interpretation of this area of the Fosse Lane settlement and its wider significance.

POTTERY by Annette Hancocks and Jo Mills

BRICK/TILE & FIRED CLAY by Annette Hancocks

WORKED STONE by Fiona Roe

WORKED BONE by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

FLINT by Lynne Bevan

COPPER ALLOY OBJECTS by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

IRON OBJECTS by Lynne Bevan

BROOCHES by Donald Mackreth

COINS by Stephen Minnitt

LEAD & SILVER OBJECTS by Lynne Bevan and Roger Tomlin

GLASS by Birgitta Hoffman

HUMAN BURIALS by Stephanie Pinter-Bellows

ANIMAL BONE by Andrew Hammon and Umberto Albarella

ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES by Vanessa Straker

## POST EXCAVATION ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION

### Aims and Objectives

A prerequisite of the mitigation strategy for the archaeology of this site, as outlined in the design brief, is a scheme for the analysis and presentation of the data reviewed above in a form appropriate to its academic value (BUFAU 1996, 5.3). The following scheme is proposed outlining the final stage of the project, which will lead to the publication of an academic style report.

From the commencement of this project the Fosse Lane Romano-British settlement has been the central theme and context within which almost all the archaeological discoveries and remains from the site may be studied and understood. A particular contribution of these excavations has been to build upon an already extensive and detailed knowledge of certain parts and to explore further particular themes or questions thrown up by previous investigations. Fosse Lane is now one of the best explored Roman small towns in Britain,

although many questions still remain as to its origin and development, economy and status, or indeed its ultimate fate. In these latest investigations emphasis has been put upon obtaining better environmental data as a contribution to enhancing functional interpretations of individual structures or areas within the settlement, as well as a wider understanding of its economy or local environmental impact. In addition, greater insight has been gained into the planning and development of the settlement, and its fluctuating fortunes over several centuries of its existence.

#### Publication Synopsis

### **Fosse Lane Romano-British Settlement 1996-7 Further excavations at the Tesco site, Shepton Mallet, Somerset**

By Peter Ellis and Peter Leach

with contributions by

Umberto Albarella, Lynne Bevan, Andrew Hammon, Annette Hancocks, Birgitta Hoffman, Donald Mackreth, Jo Mills, Stephen Minnitt, Stephanie Pinter-Bellows, Fiona Roe, Vanessa Straker, Roger Tomlin and Claire Williams

Summary

Acknowledgements

Introduction: the site and its setting, background to excavations, objectives and methodology.

Site Narrative: an illustrated interpretative account of the principal structural elements discovered and their character, in chronological order.

Specialist Finds Reports:

The pottery by Annette Hancocks and Jo Mills

The brick, tile and fired clay by Annette Hancocks

The worked stone by Fiona Roe

The flint by Lynne Bevan

The copper alloy and worked bone objects by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

The iron objects by Lynne Bevan

The lead and silver objects by Lynne Bevan and Roger Tomlin

The coins by Stephen Minnitt

The glass by Birgitta Hoffman

The human burials by Stephanie Pinter-Bellows

The animal bone by Umberto Albarella

Charred plant remains by Vanessa Straker

Discussion

References

(Estimated total: 50,000 words, 30 figures, 20 plates)

## Method

### Stratigraphic and structural evidence

A detailed re-examination of the written, graphic and photographic records made during the field project will be undertaken to refine the summary of site sequence and morphology provided in this document. This will form the basis of the main narrative text, illustrated by prepared figures and photographs drawn from the site archive.

### Finds

In conformity with the publication of material from the excavations within the Fosse Lane settlement in 1990, the finds evidence will be presented in thematic sections which emphasise functional over material categorisation (Leach, forthcoming), the relatively full presentation in that volume and the inevitable similarity between the assemblages from both sites enables considerable economies in presentation. Thus the emphasis in the projected work will be upon the publication of well stratified finds groups or material complementary to that previously discovered, rather than full catalogues other than within the site archive. A selection of items will be illustrated to accompany the reports.

The following themes are identified, and material evidence reported upon by a range of appropriate specialist contributors will be presented as follows.

#### PREHISTORIC

Flint by Lynne Bevan

Pottery by Lynne Bevan

#### VESSELS AND CONTAINERS

Pottery by Annette Hancocks and Jo Mills

Glass by Birgitta Hoffman

Metal by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

Stone by Fiona Roe

#### PERSONAL OBJECTS

Brooches by Donald Mackreth

Glass beads, etc. by Birgitta Hoffman

Rings, bracelets, pins and pendants by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

Dress fittings by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

Toilet instruments by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

#### COINS

Roman and later coins by Stephen Minnitt

#### BUILDING MATERIALS, FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Stone by Fiona Roe

Fired clay, brick and tile by Annette Hancocks

Window glass by Birgitta Hoffman  
Keys, door fittings, etc. by Lynne Bevan  
Nails, studs and other fittings, by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams

#### DOMESTIC EQUIPMENT, TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTS

Querns and whetstones by Fiona Roe  
Spindle whorls by Annette Hancocks and Fiona Roe  
Styli by Lynne Bevan and Claire Williams  
Knives and cleavers by Lynne Bevan  
Craft tools and agricultural equipment by Lynne Bevan

#### FUNERARY AND RITUAL

Stone coffin by Fiona Roe

#### HUMAN REMAINS

The Human Skeletons by Stephanie Pinter-Bellows

#### ANIMAL REMAINS

The Animal Bone by Andrew Hammon and Umberto Albarella

#### PLANT REMAINS

Charred plant macrofossils by Vanessa Straker

Discussion and review

This section will consider the overall significance of the site, integrating both finds and structural data within an interpretative account. Emphasis will be placed upon previous discoveries and the importance of this site and its material relative to those and the Fosse Lane settlement as a whole, within the wider context of research into Roman Britain.

#### Bibliography

A consolidated bibliography will include references from all sections of the published report.

#### Publication

It is proposed that an edited version of the full report be submitted to British Archaeological Reports (Oxford) for inclusion in their British Series of excavation monographs.

#### Research and Finds Archive

The preparation of the research archive will be an ongoing task throughout the post excavation project. On completion the archives will be indexed, checked and cross referenced, before arrangements are finalised for their deposition with the Somerset County Museum or Record Office, as appropriate.

## Timetable

A projected commencement date for the post excavation programme of October 1st 1997 will aim for its completion to draft publication stage by the end of 1998.

## References

BUFAU 1996 *Design Brief for Archaeological Investigations at Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, Somerset* Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, commissioned by Tesco Ltd, 2/96.

Leach, P., 1991 *Shepton Mallet, Romano-Britons and Early Christians in Somerset* Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit and Showerings Ltd. 1991

Leach, P., forthcoming *Fosse Lane, Excavation of a Romano-British Roadside Settlement at Shepton Mallet, Somerset 1990* The Roman Society, Monograph Series

Leach, P., et al *An Archaeological Assessment of the Mendip Business Park, Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet 1990* (BUFAU Report 132).

P. Ellis and P. Leach, BUFAU, 2/98

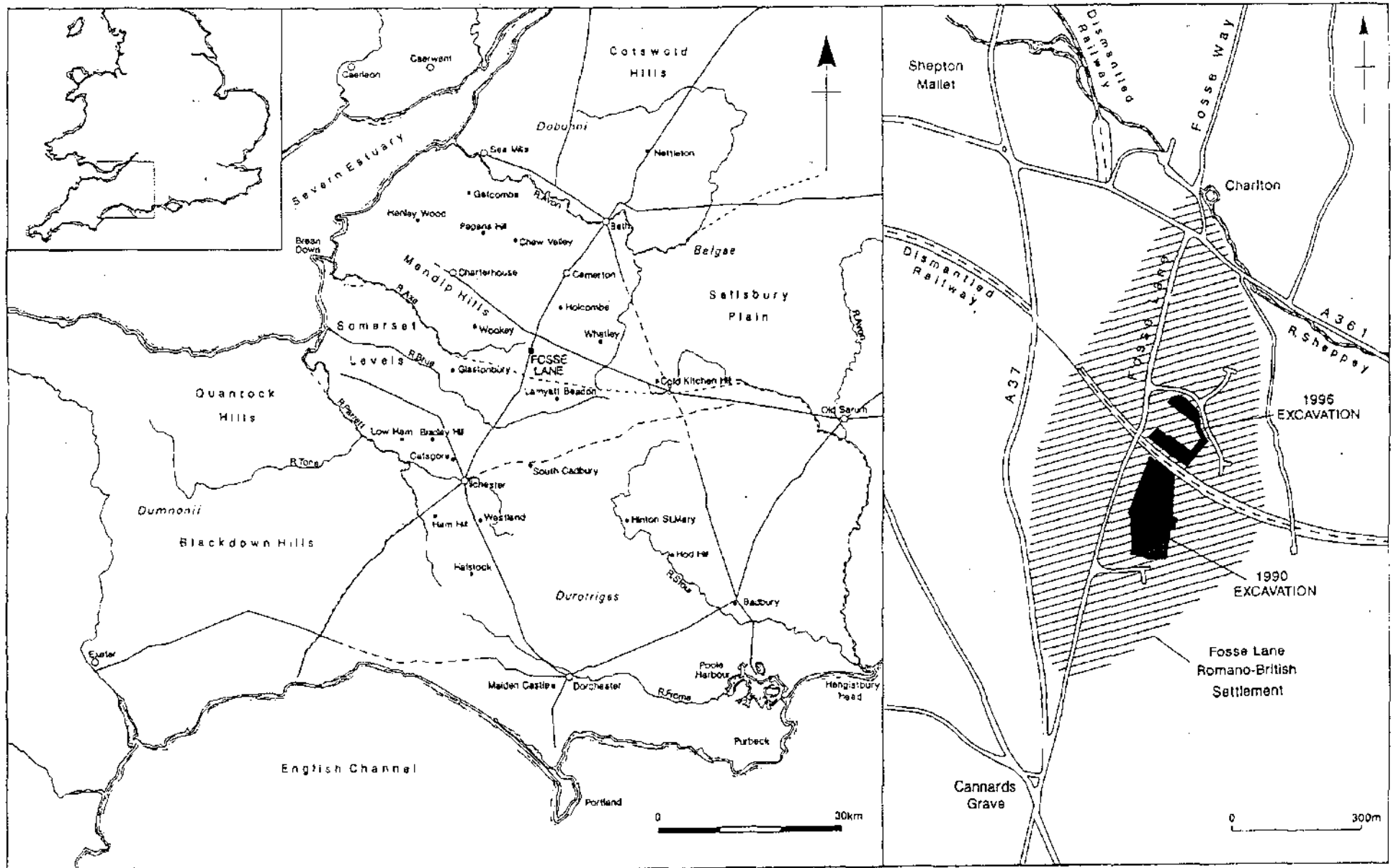


Fig.1

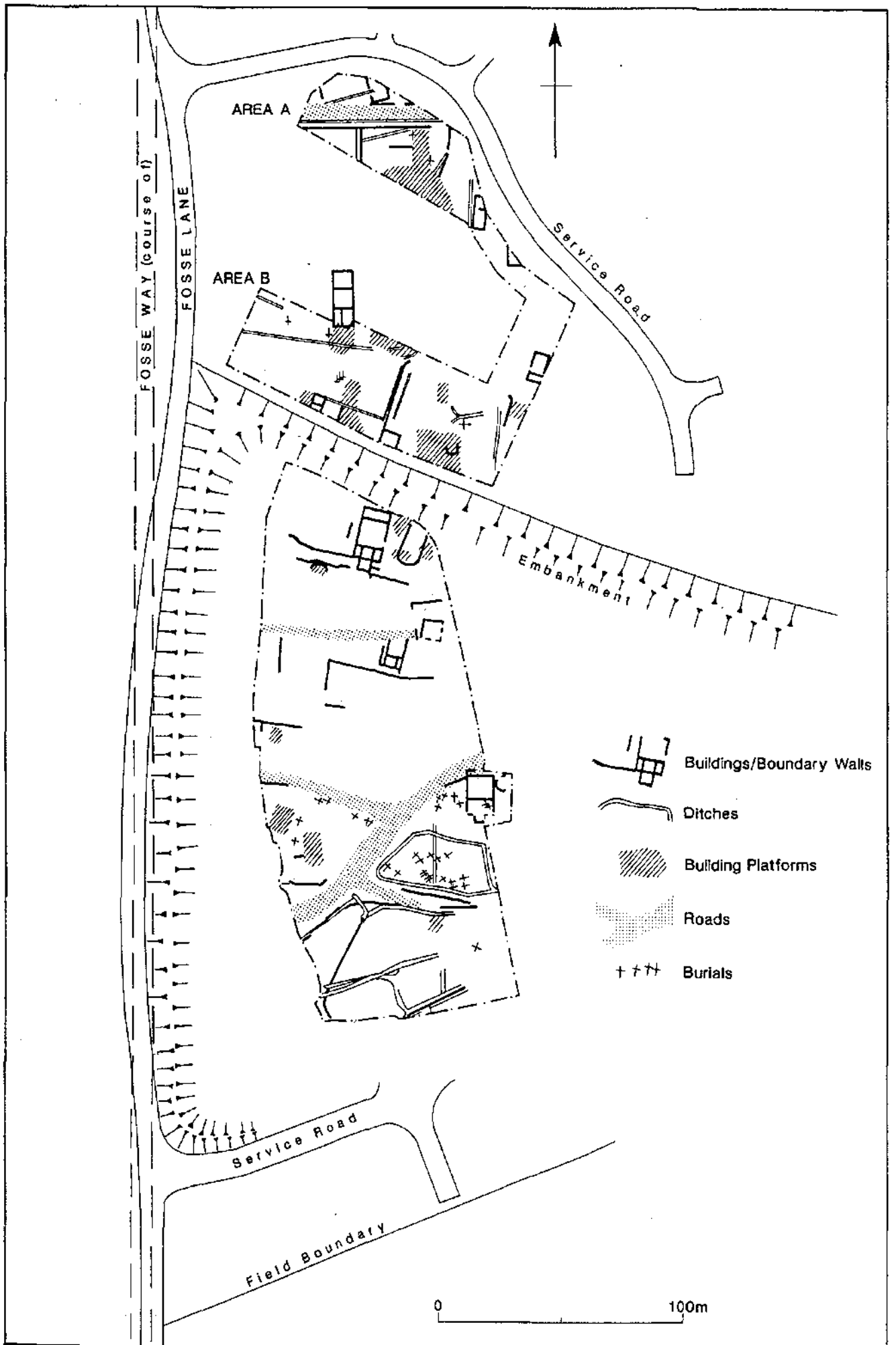


Fig.2



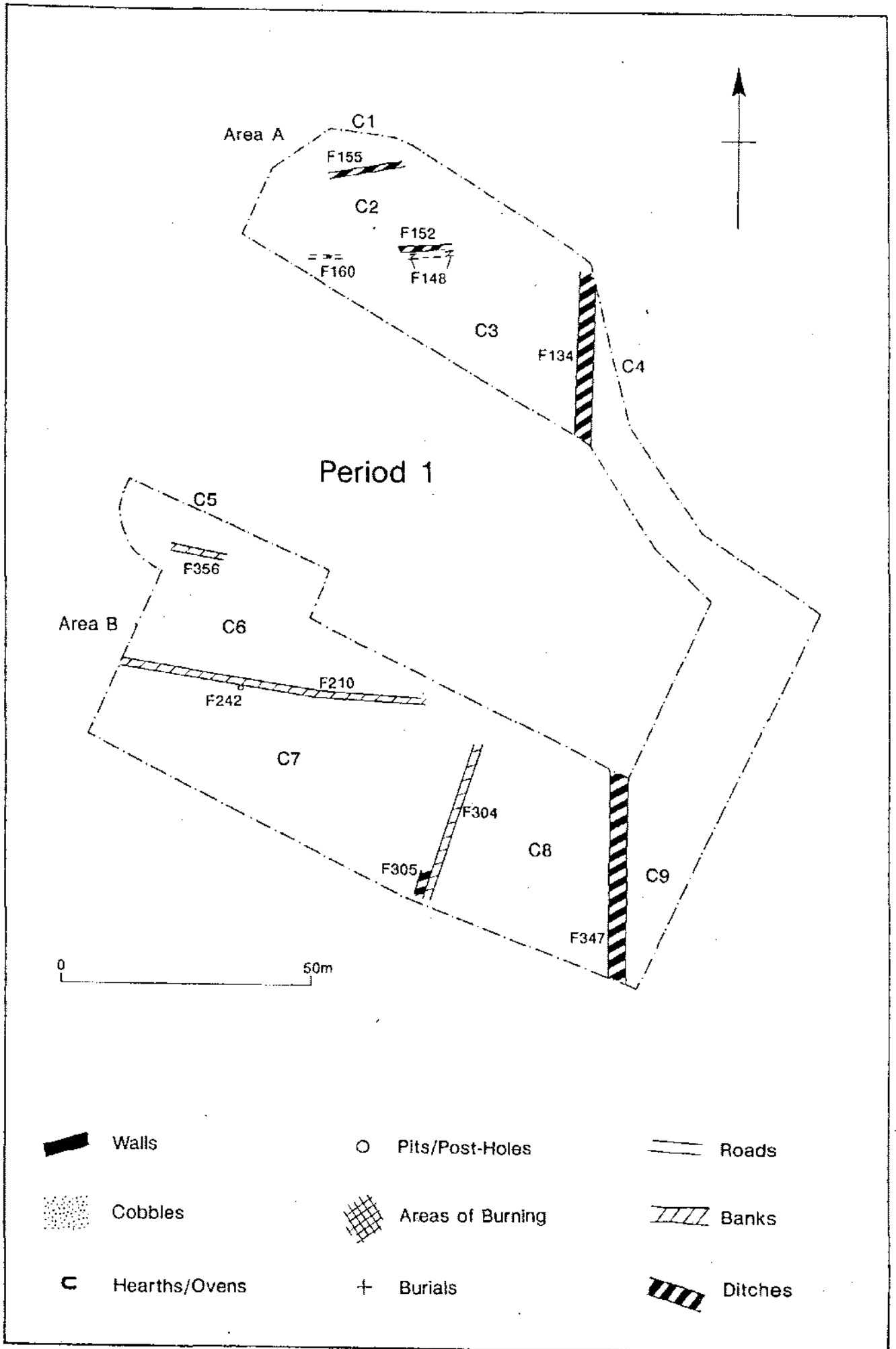


Fig.3.

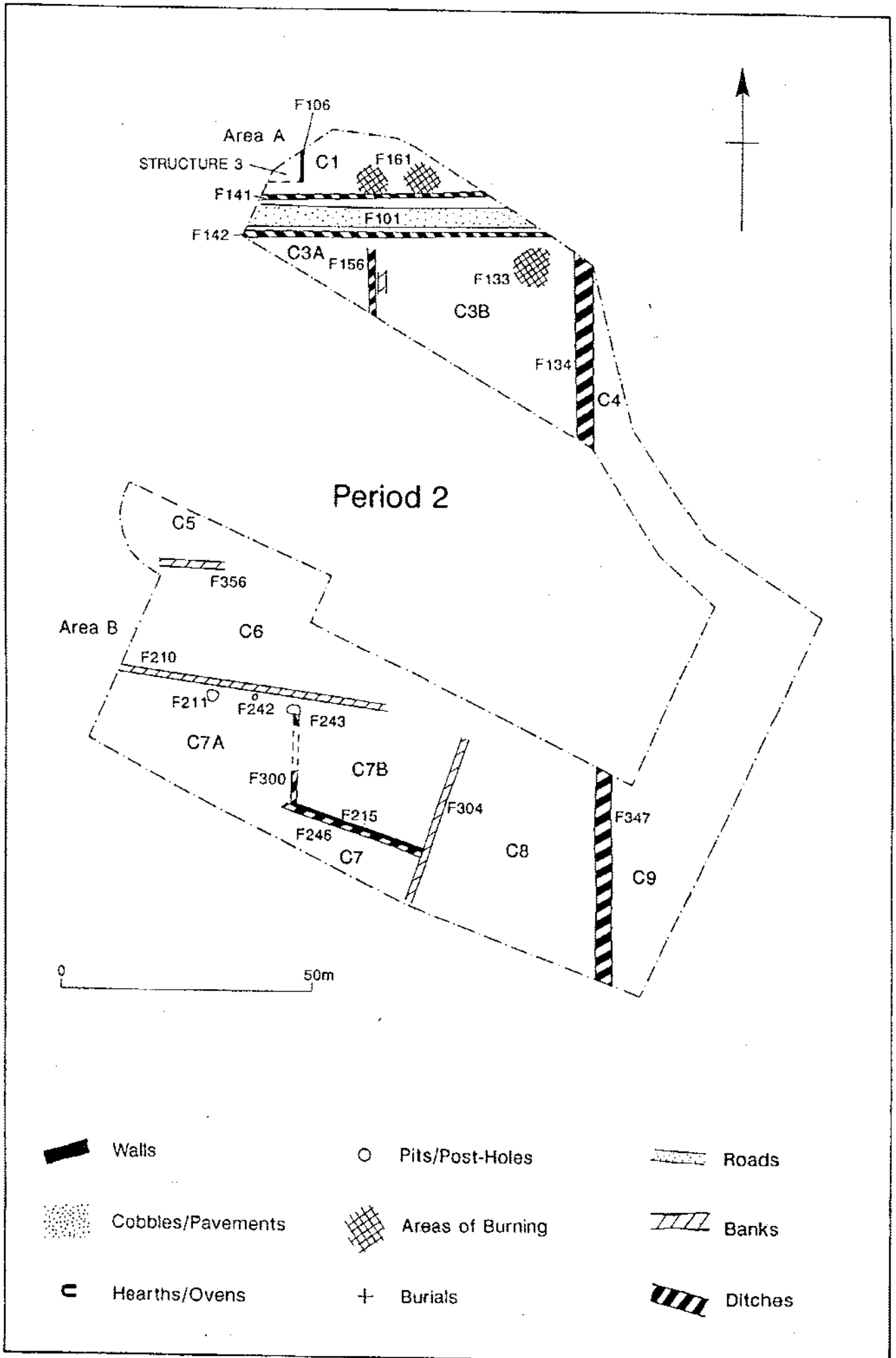


Fig.4

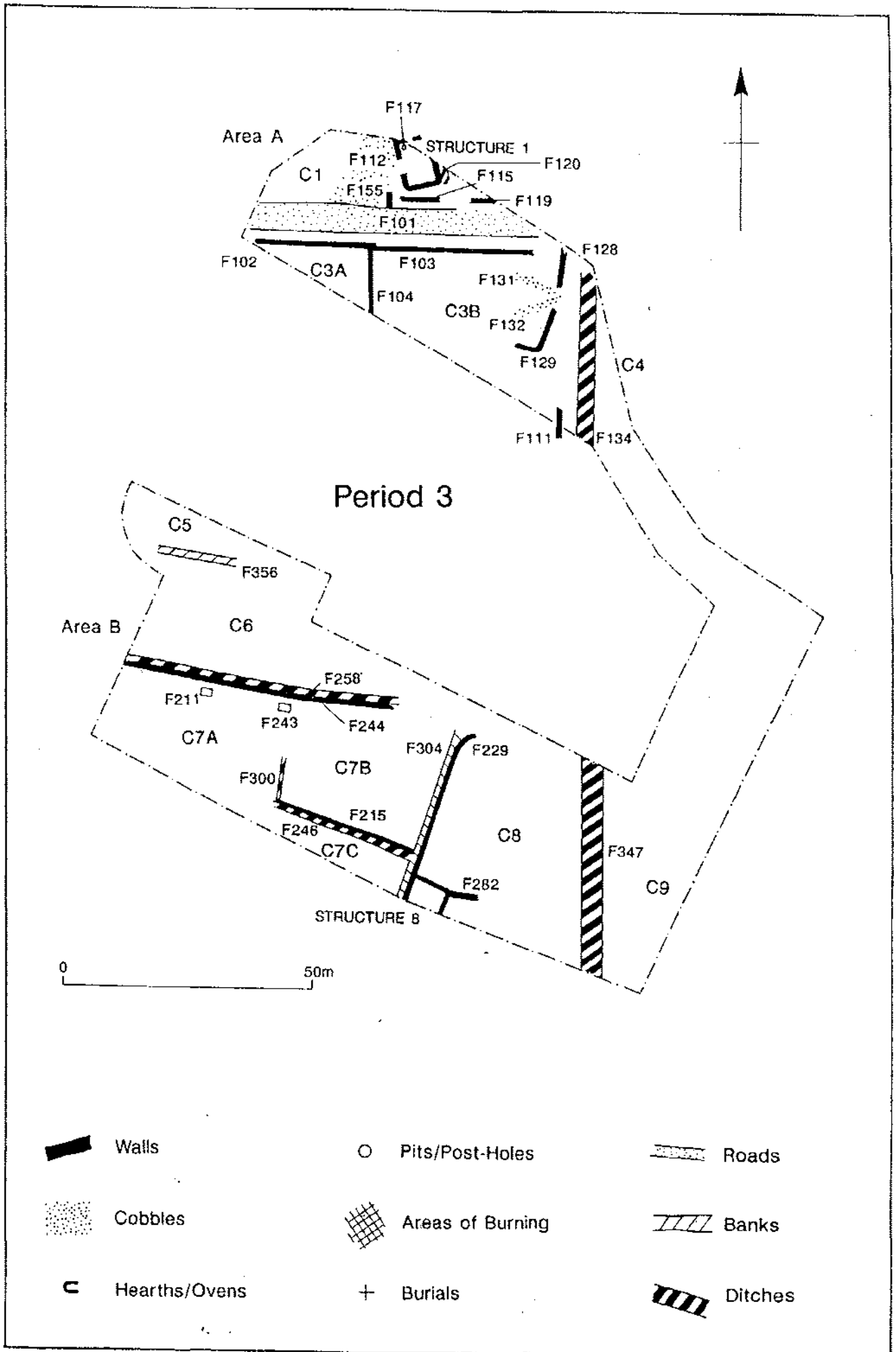


Fig.5

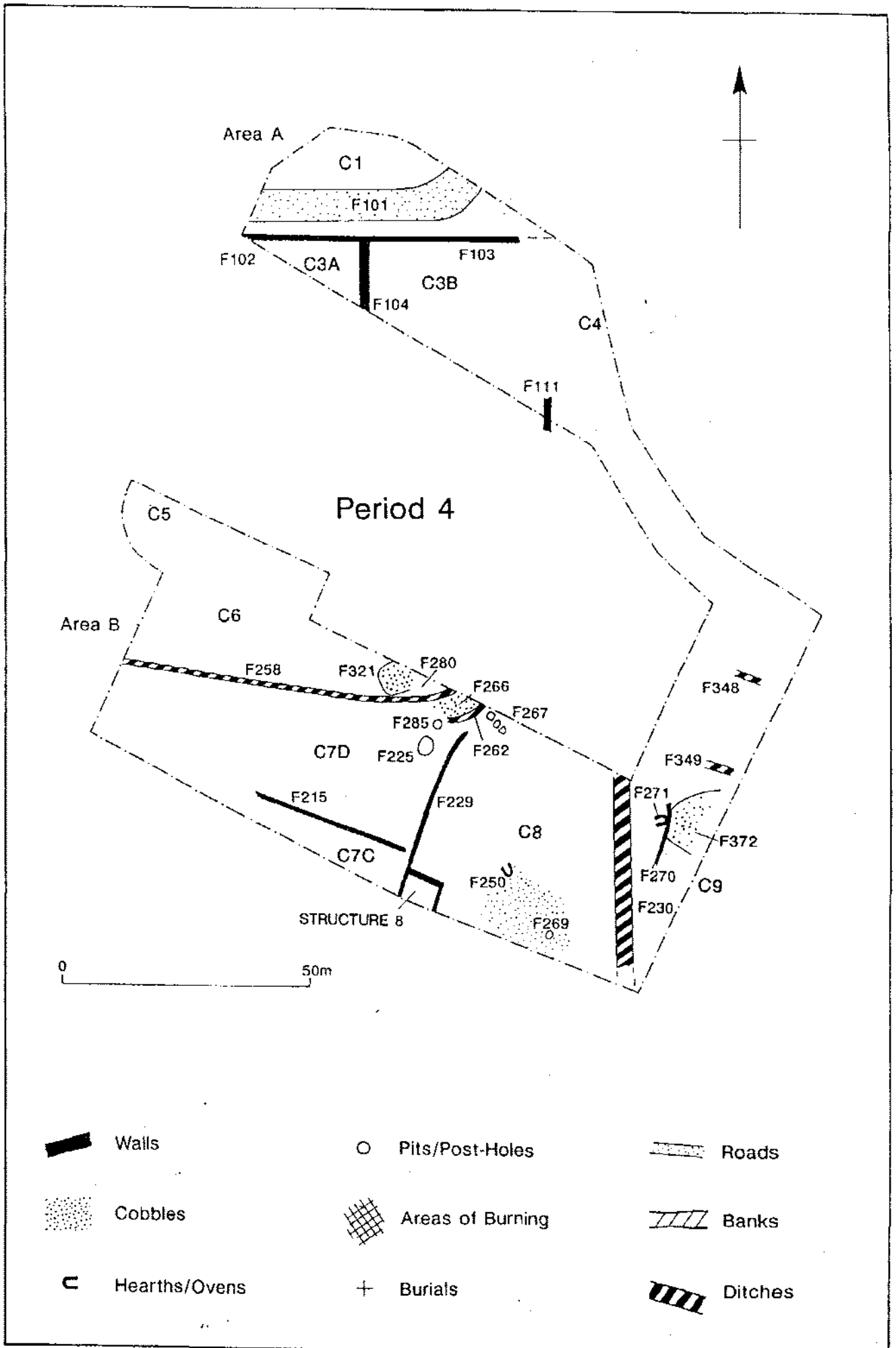


Fig. 6.

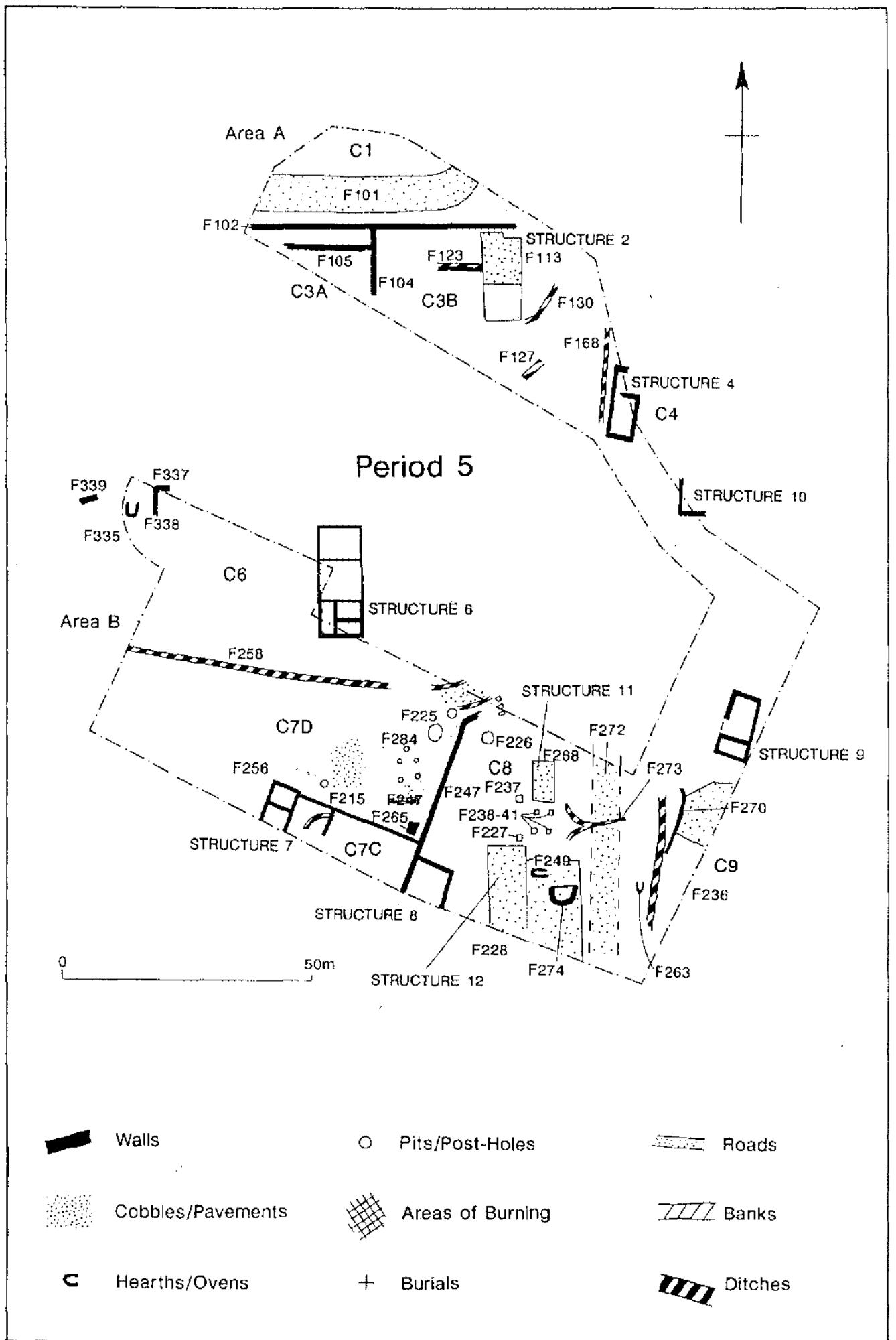


Fig.7

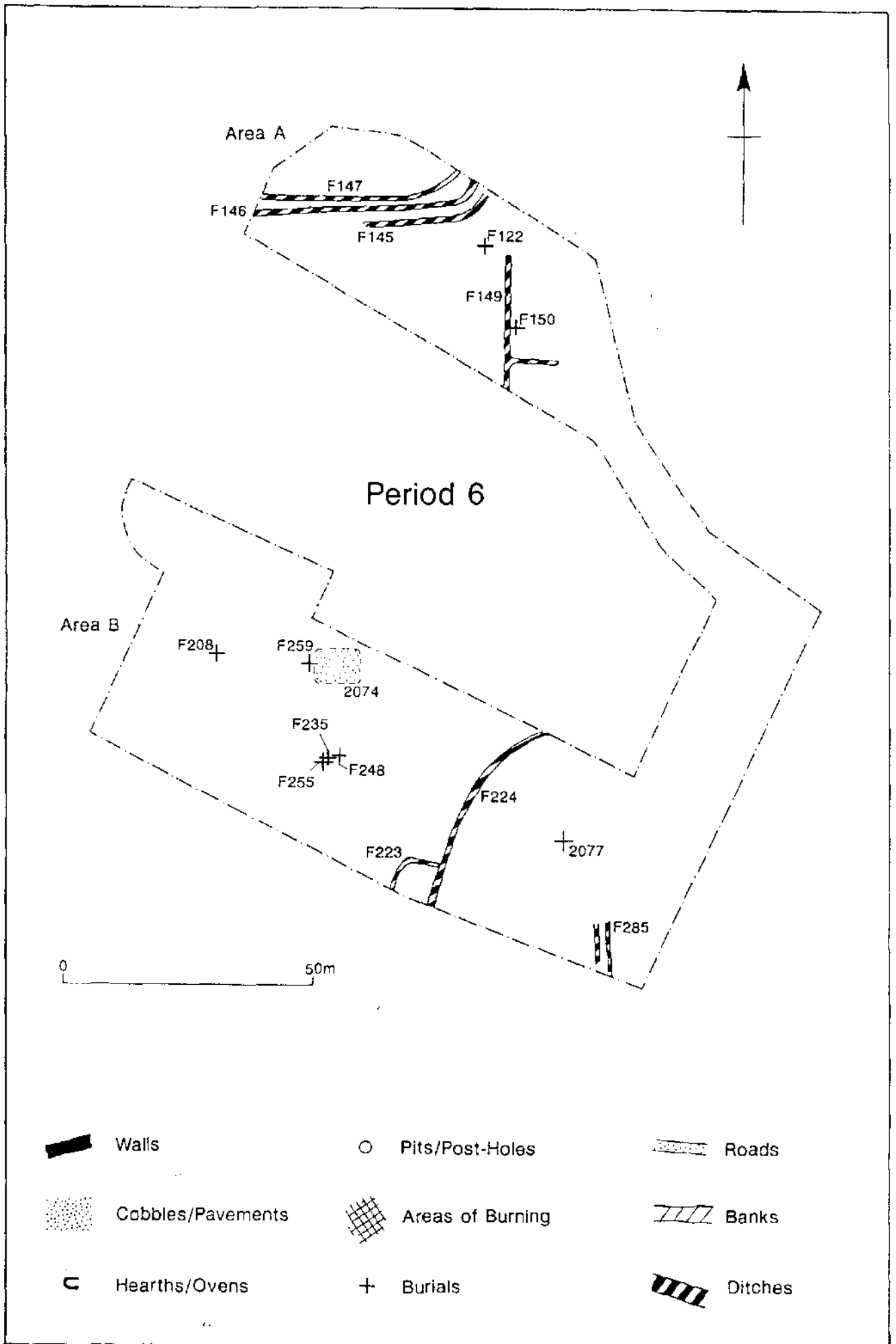


Fig.8