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An Archaeological Excavation At Land Off Stinting Lane, Shirebrook, Derbyshire

2000

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An Archaeological Excavation At Land Off Stinting Lane, Shirebrook, Derbyshire

2000

by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation at Stinting Lane, Shirebrook was carried out in February 1998. It was followed by an excavation in July 1998. Haslam Homes sponsored both stages of work which were carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit ahead of residential development. Prior to these projects no below-ground archaeological investigations had been conducted within the proposed development site or in its immediate environs. However, the County Sites and Monuments Record did contain two entries for the recovery of prehistoric flint artefacts from land surrounding the site. The evaluation comprised a study of available cartographic evidence, geophysical survey of three areas and the excavation of four trial trenches. Archaeological features, which potentially dated to the prehistoric period, were identified in Trench 3 only. A larger area was opened up around Trench 3 during the excavation stage and this identified a small, prehistoric enclosure, with associated pits and post-holes. Despite 100% sieving of the feature fills, artefacts were scarce and only a small assemblage of flints was recovered. No chronologically-diagnostic flint artefacts were identified and no charred plant remains or molluscs were recovered from the environmental samples. The lack of precise dating makes it impossible to place this settlement site within any specific prehistoric period, and it is hoped that future archaeological investigations within the immediate environs might help to shed light upon the remains at Stinting Lane, Shirebrook.

2.0 The Site, its Location and Archaeological Background (Figure 1)

The evaluation site consisted of approximately four hectares of rough pasture, and included one field immediately to the west of Stinting Lane, along with a narrow strip of land in the adjacent field (centred on NGR SK 5182 6710). The soils of the area comprised shallow, well-drained calcareous fine loamy soils, over limestone (SSEW 1983).

The site was located within an area of known archaeological significance. The County Sites and Monuments Record contained reference to the recovery of a small quantity of prehistoric flint waste flakes and the survival of associated burnt material from land to the south of the site (SMR 12534 and 12535 respectively) which suggested some prehistoric activity, such as encampments or settlements, within the immediate environs of the site (Barrett 1997).

3.0 Archaeological Evaluation (Figures 1 and 2)

Cartographic sources suggested that the site had served as an uncultivated field since at least 1748. By 1841, the field had been sub-divided into three parcels of land, but no other change was mapped up to 1921.

The whole of the site was scanned by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford (GSB Prospection 1998), and three areas were selected for detailed gradiometry (Figure 1). This detailed survey located several anomalies of possible archaeological interest, which were subsequently transected by a total of four trial-trenches. Archaeological remains, which potentially dated to the prehistoric period, were recorded in Trench 3 only (Figure 2). Of the four features recorded, two corresponded with anomalies recorded by geophysical survey. The features comprised a linear gully (F302.06), a scoop with a possible post-hole at its base (F301) and two shallow pits (F300 and F303) which, together, were thought to represent the remains of a settlement. All of the features were shallow, had weathered profiles, and were sealed by a layer of alluvium (3001). A struck flint flake, which was recovered from one of the pits (F300), probably dated the fill of that feature to the prehistoric period. The similarity of all four of the features in terms of form, fill and preservation, suggested that they were contemporary.

Geophysical survey suggested that the anomaly corresponding with the gully (F302.06) continued northeast and slightly southwest beyond Trench 3 (GSB 1998), and that other associated anomalies lay to the west and southwest of Trench 3. More extensive survival was also suggested by the recovery of prehistoric waste flakes and associated burnt material from the immediate vicinity of the site (SMR 12534 and SMR 12535).

4.0 Archaeological Excavation (Figures 1 and 2)

Further archaeological mitigation fieldwork took the form of an open-area excavation (20m x 20m) which included the evaluation Trench 3. It aimed to define the spatial limits of the activity recorded by the evaluation and to recover datable artefacts which would allow the site to be placed within its chronological framework. A total of 21 features was identified. As in the evaluation, they were all shallow features with heavily-weathered profiles.

A northwest-southeast aligned gully (F316) and a roughly circular pit (F317) represented the earliest activity. Both features were cut by an east-west-aligned gully (F315) which formed the northern boundary of a small enclosure. Gullies F322 and F302 formed the eastern and southern boundaries. All three had gently-sloping sides and rounded bases. The continuation west of the northern gully (F315) contrasted with the butt end of the southern gully (F302). It suggests that the entrance to this enclosure lay outside the excavation area.

Within the enclosure itself, nine circular and oval-shaped pits were recorded (F300, F305, F306, F308-F312 and F314). Three possible post-holes (F301, F304 and F313) may have represented the remains of a temporary wooden structure, measuring 10m x 5m. The post-holes are joined by a dashed line on Figure 2. A horse-shoe-shaped feature (F307), two pits

(F303 and F318) and a possible post-hole (F320) were recorded immediately to the south of the enclosure.

All of the features were filled with a homogenous brown silty sand-clay. This was equivalent to a layer of alluvium (3001) which extended over the eastern two-thirds of the excavation area and which increased in depth from west to east.

5.0 The Flint *by Lynne Bevan*

A total of eleven humanly-struck flakes was recovered, four of which came from the same pit (F309.02, 3023). All of the flakes were white in colour, the result of re-cortication, but in some cases the original translucent light grey colour was visible at points of breakage. When present, remnant pebble cortex indicated that the flint had been collected from a secondary source, probably local river gravels. Daryl Garton has suggested the nearest source for flint found during excavations at nearby Bolsover 'as glacial sands and gravels some 10km to the south-east, with the gravels of the Trent some 35km to the east' (Garton 1995, 96). The struck flint from Shirebrook, which is approximately seven kilometres nearer to the proposed sources, might share a common origin.

While the presence of the flakes attests to prehistoric activity in the area of the site, and the four flakes from Feature 309.02 appear to have resulted from a single knapping episode, in the absence of chronologically-diagnostic material, this activity cannot be dated to any specific prehistoric period.

Table 1: Quantification of the Flint Assemblage

Context	Feature	Quantity	Feature Type
3000	-	2 flint flakes	Topsoil
3008	*F300*	*1 struck flint*	*Pit*
3014	F304	1 flint flake	Pit
3021	F302.01	2 burnt flint flakes	Enclosure Gully
3023	F309.02	4 flint flakes	Pit
3037	F302.05	1 flint flake	Enclosure Gully

Italics - evaluation context and feature.

6.0 Charred Plant Remains *by Andy Hammon*

A total of eight 20 litre samples from pits and gullies was selected for assessment in order to determine if charred plant remains:

- were present.
- would provide any information regarding human activity, in particular cultivation or other agricultural activities.
- would provide information on the surrounding environment.

Samples were taken from sealed deposits at the excavator's discretion. Only three of the samples were associated with flint artefacts. The samples were processed using water flotation. The flots (the material which floats on the water's surface) were collected on a 500 micron sieve and the heavy residues were washed over a 1mm sieve/mesh. Both fractions were air-dried at room temperature and bagged when fully dry. The flots and heavy residues were scanned by eye. It was not necessary to use a low-powered binocular microscope, as the samples were devoid of anything except modern root material. A small number of non-identifiable flecks of charcoal was noted, but no charred plant remains or molluscs were present. Table 2 summarises the results of this analysis.

Table 2: Archaeobotanical Results

Feature	Context	Context Type	Sample Volume	Comments
F304	*3014*	*Pit*	*20l*	*Modern root, occasional charcoal flecks <3mm.*
F305	3013	Pit	20l	Modern root.
F306	3012	Pit	20l	Modern root.
F309.02	*3023*	*Pit*	*20l*	*Modern root, occasional charcoal flecks <3mm.*
F307.01	3015	Gully	20l	Modern root.
F310	3019	Pit	20l	Modern root.
F302.01	*3021*	*Enclosure Gully*	*20l*	*Modern root.*
F318	3041	Pit	20l	Modern root.

Italics - flint recovered from fill

7.0 Discussion

The interior of the enclosure was characterised by a number of post-holes which may represent the remains of former structures. Despite on-site sieving of all the excavated feature fills, no datable artefacts were recovered, and the function of the associated pits and of the enclosure itself remains unclear. The enclosure is in an isolated location, at some distance from a water supply, perhaps suggesting that it served not as a settlement, but as a 'stopping-off' point. The depth of colluvium which sealed the archaeological remains suggests that the enclosure was part of an increasingly de-wooded landscape.

The spatial limit of this small enclosure was not fully-established within the confines of the excavation area. The butt end of gully F302 is likely to be mirrored by one for the northern enclosure limit, represented by gully F315. The westward continuation of F315 suggests that the enclosure entrance is located just beyond the excavation area. This more extensive distribution of archaeological features is supported by the geophysical survey results and also by the recovery of prehistoric flakes and associated burnt material from the immediate vicinity of the site (SMR 12534 and SMR 12535).

The absence of any chronologically-diagnostic flint artefacts and of any material suitable for radiocarbon dating, means that the small enclosure excavated at Stinting Lane cannot be

attributed to a specific prehistoric period. This, in turn, precludes any attempt to link the results with those from a number of sites in the surrounding geographical area, such as Knight's earthwork excavation at Allendale Avenue, Shirebrook (Knight unpublished), Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust's more recent desk-top assessment of William Wood Farm, Warsop (TPAT 1997) and Jones' work at Bolsover Castle (1995). Although it seems likely that the enclosure was used by a mobile population, similar to a model put forward for the Neolithic period (Thomas 1991, Barrett 1994), the lack of dating prevents any contribution to this framework or to that outlined by Barnatt in his recent paper (Barnatt 1999).

As has already been discussed in this journal, there is a lack of published flintwork assemblages from the Midlands (Garton and Beswick 1983) and to date, with the exception of the Elmton and Blackwell surveys (Knight *et al.* 1998, Garton and Kennett 1998 respectively), there have been no programmes of fieldwalking or landscape survey within the immediate locality of the prehistoric enclosure at Stinting Lane and, with the exception of the investigations at Allendale Avenue, Shirebrook (Knight unpublished) and at Sherwood Lodge, Bolsover (Jones 1995), no other evaluation or excavation.

It is hoped that future archaeological fieldwork within Shirebrook will enable the site to be placed within its chronological and regional context, allowing one of the original aims of the excavation mitigation work to be achieved. The land to the west of the site is under rough pasture and as such is unlikely to become available for investigation before development proposals. However, fields to the south of the site were under plough at the time of evaluation and excavation. The Sites and Monuments Record suggests a wider distribution of activity around the site, and in view of the paucity of artefactual evidence from the enclosure itself, the surrounding area might benefit from a systematic fieldwalking programme, such as that carried out on similar loam soils in the White Peak of Derbyshire which yielded major artefact scatters (Garton and Beswick 1983).

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9.0 Acknowledgments

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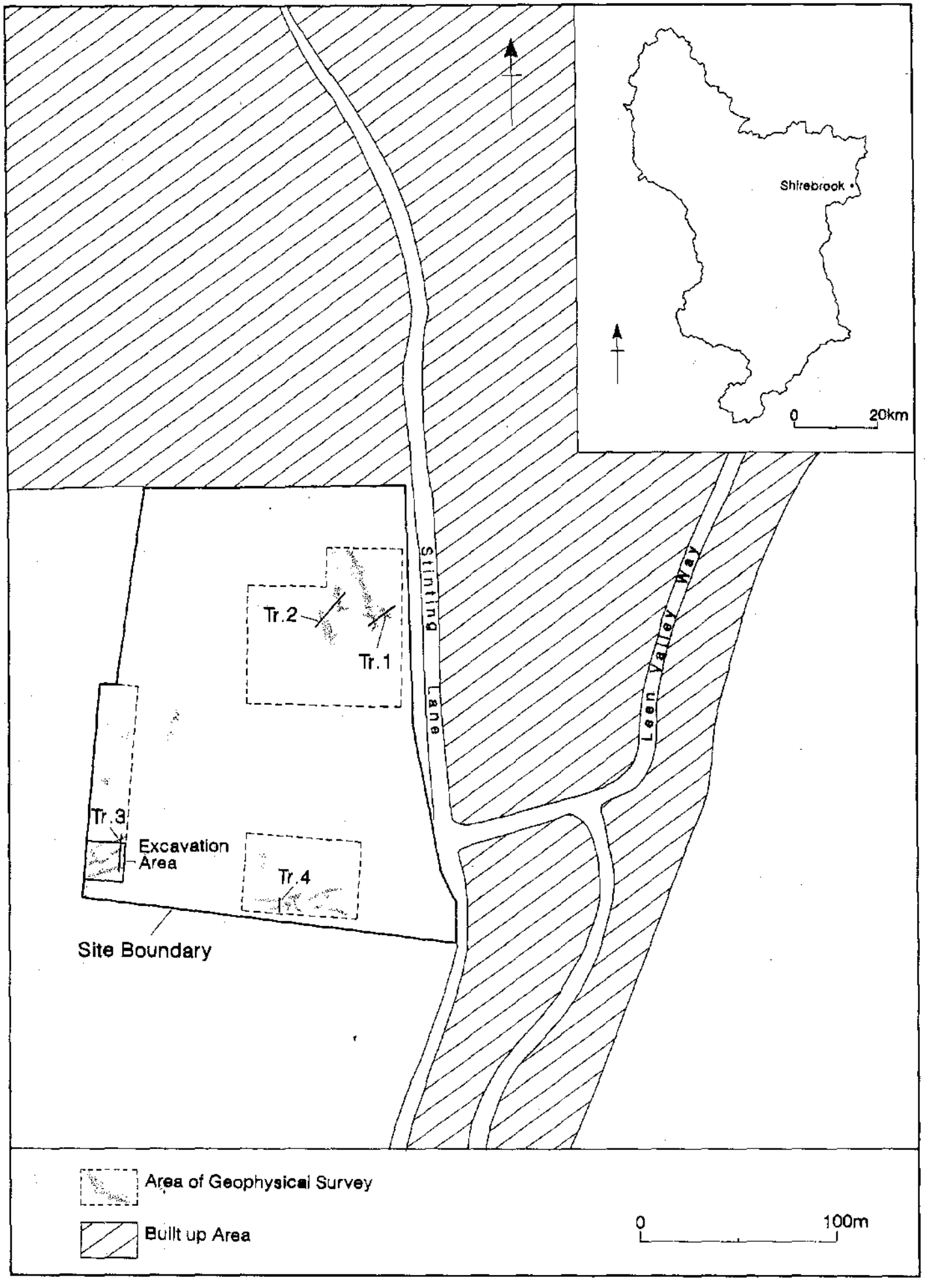
Shirebrook
0
20km
Stinting Lane
Leen Valley Way
Tr.2
Tr.1
Tr.3
Excavation Area
Tr.4
Site Boundary
Area of Geophysical Survey
Built up Area
0
100m

Figure 1

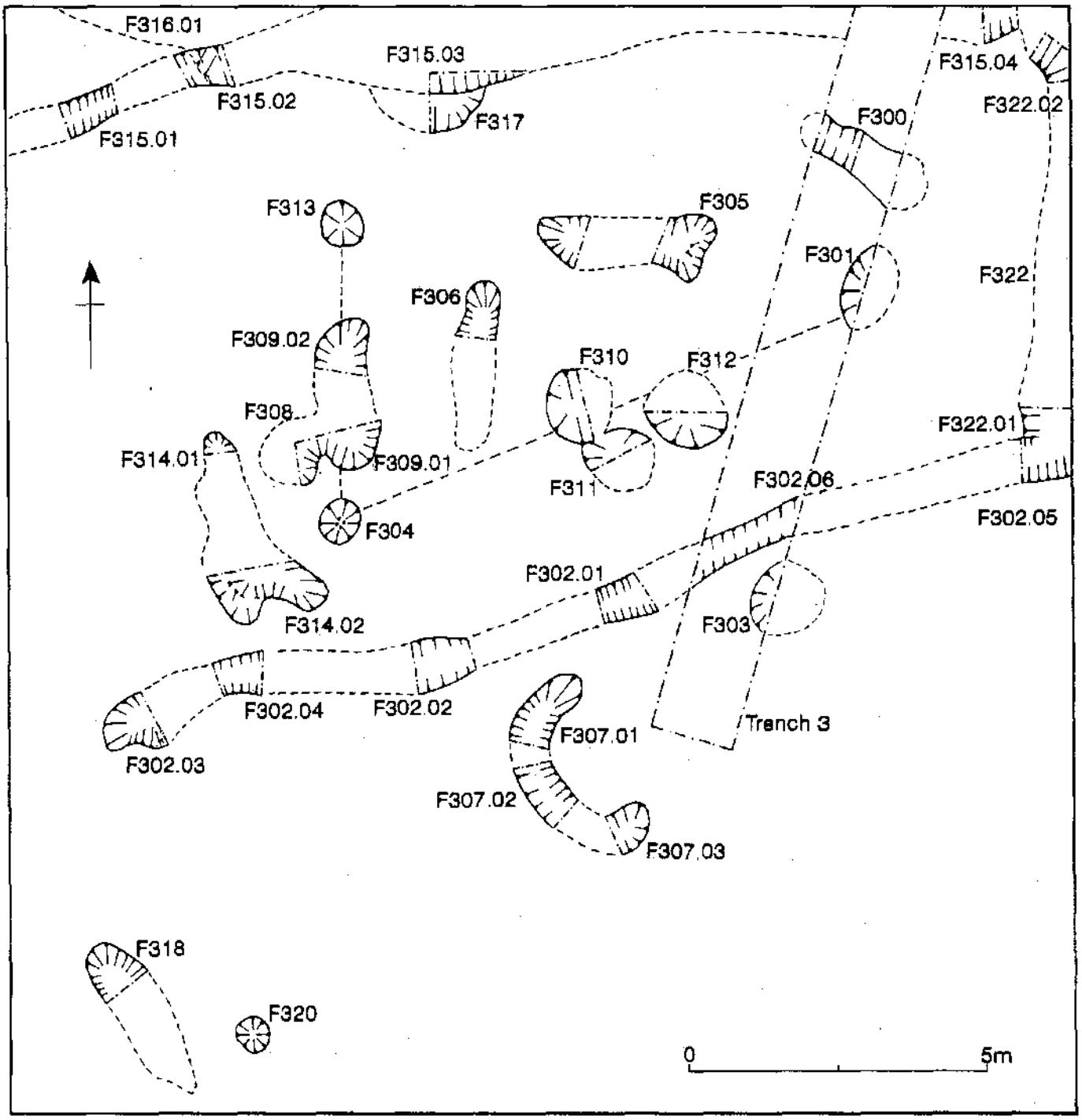
F316.01
F315.03
F315.04
F315.02
F317
F322.02
F315.01
F300
F313
F305
F301
F322
F306
F309.02
F310
F312
F308
F322.01
F314.01
F309.01
F311
F302.06
F304
F302.05
F302.01
F314.02
F303
F302.04
F302.02
Trench 3
F307.01
F302.03
F307.02
F307.03
F318
F320
0
5m

Figure 2