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Excavation of a Saxon Enclosure off Clay Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire, 2000-2001

by
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SUMMARY

An archaeological excavation at Clay Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL592 732) was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of John Living Partners for Budgens Stores Ltd. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) from November 2000 to January 2001, ahead of retail development. Soham was originally situated on a promontory overlooking the eastern shore of a large inland sea, Soham Mere. The town is centred around a large, open ecclesiastical enclosure believed to be of Middle-Late Saxon date. The excavation, located within the area of this enclosure, identified an Iron Age ditch which may have formed part of an enclosure. After a short hiatus in occupation a later enclosure, probably a stock enclosure, was created in the Late Saxon period. Following the establishment of a port at Soham c.1400 the town expanded quickly, with new burgage plots being laid out along Clay Street, which linked the High Street with the port. Numerous quarry pits and several wells excavated on the site attest to an intensive building programme during this period, when the church of St Andrew's was also extended. The ecclesiastical enclosure appears to have remained an open area at the heart of the town from the medieval period onwards, with later developments taking place around its periphery. The area of the site was laid out as formal gardens in the 18th century, which characterised the site at the time of the excavation.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the project

This report outlines the results of open area excavation on land to the rear of Clay Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire (centred on NGR TL 592 732, Figs 1 and 2), hereinafter referred to as the site. The work was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of John Living Partners for Budgens Stores Ltd (planning application number: E/97/0884/0), and was undertaken from November 2000 to January 2001. The site is situated to the south of the Parish Church of Saint Andrew, to the rear of buildings fronting onto Clay Street. The excavation was undertaken within an area of garden that had belonged to a detached house called 'The Beeches'. An area excavation followed evaluation of the site, which included a desk-based assessment (JSAC 1998) and a programme of trial trenching (JSAC 2000a).

Project Aims, Excavation and Recording Methods

The aims of the excavation were to preserve archaeological deposits by record, contributing towards an understanding of urban development on the site during the

Saxon and medieval and post-medieval periods. The site chronology and economy would then be characterised through study of the pottery and other artefacts.

Removal of topsoil was undertaken by a 360° excavator working under direct archaeological supervision. Due to the high water table sumps were excavated in areas which were devoid of archaeological deposits, and, similarly, berms were constructed in an attempt to contain water to prevent the constant flooding of the site. Following the initial site strip the site was cleaned both by hand and mechanically, using a mini-digger, and a base plan was produced. Sampling by hand excavation comprised not less than 50% of discrete features. A minimum of 25% of linear features was sampled to establish their date, form and function, and stratigraphic sequence.

All datable features were sampled for environmental analysis, principally for charred plant remains but also for smaller faunal remains. The high water table meant that the site was under water during the entire period of excavation. The pumping of features caused massive fluctuations in water levels, and therefore samples could not be taken for pollen analysis, as the risk of contamination by modern pollen transported by the water was high.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for context and features. The standard BUFAU recording system was used, a continuous number sequence for archaeological features (from F100) and for fills and layers (from 1000). Other numbers relating to cut features and fills that occur in the text relate to the evaluations undertaken by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC), the results of which have been conflated with the main text below, and the evaluation undertaken by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) on the adjacent site. The written records were supplemented by scale drawings (plans at 1:20, 1:50, and 1:100 and sections at 1:10, 1:20 and 1:50), and monochrome, colour print and colour slide photography. It is intended to deposit the paper and finds archive with the Cambridgeshire County Record Office.

Summary of Previous Archaeological Work

The site lies within an area known to be rich in historic remains. Artefacts dating to the Mesolithic period and earthworks from the Late Bronze Age (SMR 7077, 7098, 7101, 7102, 11019 and 11019a, JSAC 1998, 7 and Hatton 2000, 3), as well as lithic surface finds, have been recorded in the surrounding area. The Roman occupation of Soham is attested to by cropmarks to the south and south-east of the village, as well as by skeletons (SMR 6971) and Roman coins (SMR 7097) found to the east of the village, and pottery and fragments of human bone (SMR 7100) to the north-east (JSAC 1998, 7). An Anglo-Saxon cemetery is known to exist within the churchyard of Saint Andrew, immediately to the north of the site (SMR 7123a), and other inhumations of this period have been excavated in the vicinity (JSAC 1998, 7 and Hatton 2000, 4).

Trial trenching on land directly adjacent to the site of the proposed Budgens store, undertaken by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) in October 2000, identified four phases of occupation dating from the Bronze Age to the post-medieval period. Other excavations around the village have produced pottery dating to the Saxo-Norman period (Hatton 2000, 4).

Pottery from the evaluation undertaken on the site by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants in January 2000 (Blinkhorn in JSAC 2000a) indicated that there had been occupation on the site from the 10th Century onwards.

THE EXCAVATED SEQUENCE

The site comprised an area of flowerbeds and rough lawn, with a 1m-thick layer of topsoil sealing the archaeological deposits. Such a depth of topsoil is not so unusual in areas such as the fens where ground was sometimes made up and raised above the water table. However, the lack of stratigraphy within the topsoil horizon, the paucity of finds within the topsoil, the remains of brick floors preserved *in situ* *c.*1m below the current ground level, combined with a slight rise above the surrounding area, are odd. They suggest, in combination, that the original soil within Area A may have been stripped down and replaced with imported material.

In Area B there was a more normal depth of topsoil, *c.*0.3m thick, which deepened to *c.*1m in the area directly behind the buildings fronting Clay Street. There was evidence for much more disturbance in Area B and, consequently, fewer archaeological deposits survived. Those that were present were heavily truncated or late in date.

The natural subsoil, primarily clay with pockets of chalk and sand, was found to slope southwards towards the River Snail. The underlying geology comprises River Terrace and Chalky Drift (JSAC 1998, 7).

Results

Phasing
The following results are presented under period headings based on the dating of the pottery and the stratigraphic sequence on the site.

Phase 0	Iron Age
Phase 1	Late Saxon (late 9th – 11th Century)
Phase 2	Medieval (early 14th – late-15th Century)
Phase 3	Early Post-Medieval (16th – 17th Century)
Phase 4	Later Post-Medieval/Modern (18th – 20th Century)

Phase 0 Iron Age
A substantial ditch (F143/F150/715, Fig. 3), orientated on an east-west alignment, was excavated along the northern baulk of the site. It measured 1.5m in width and was 0.6m deep, with steep sloping sides and a flat base. The fill was a grey-brown clay-rich silt (1149, 1161, 716) that contained quantities of bone, occasional natural flint nodules, and a single sherd of Iron Age pottery. The ditch was cut by a Phase 1b Saxon ditch which also contained a single residual sherd of Iron Age pottery.

Discussion of Phase 0

The dating of the pot sherds to this period is significant, in that Iron Age material is not well represented in the archaeological record of the area (CCC 1996, 76). The flint assemblage is also of interest, as a group of ten items from a Phase 1b ditch appears to have been from a single episode of knapping (Bevan below), and there was a general spread of this material across the site. Prehistoric flint was also recovered from a ditch (41) in Trench 2 on the adjacent site (Hatton 2000, 7), the ditch being on a similar, skewed, east-west alignment to the one excavated here. A second, heavily-truncated, ditch (28) in Trench 3 of the adjacent excavation (Ibid. 9) may have been the continuation northwards of the ditch in Area A. No datable finds were recovered from the fill. However, the feature was cut by a later ditch containing pottery of 9th-12th-century date. If the two were contemporary, then they may have formed an earlier enclosure.

Phase 1 Late Saxon (late 9th – 11th Century)

Phase 1 activity appeared to be confined to Area A, with no Saxon artefacts being found along the line of the access road (Area B) immediately behind the Clay Street frontage (Fig. 3). Phase 1 has been sub-divided on the evidence of the stratigraphic sequence on the site. However, both Phase 1a and Phase 1b deposits contained pottery dating to the Late Saxon period (late 9th-11th century). It is possible, of course, that the pottery is intrusive in the Phase 1a features and that they may, in fact, be Iron Age (Phase 0) in date.

Phase 1a

Three pits were cut by Phase 1b features, two (F120 and F147) being cut by the terminals of an enclosure ditch. Pit F120 had a diameter of 1.9m and was 0.3m deep. It was filled with a dark brown-grey, clay-rich, silty sand (1127) and contained Thetford type pottery. Bone recovered from the pit included a fragment of the distal radius of a juvenile crane (Murray below). Pit F147 measured 2.5m in diameter and had two distinct fills, a redeposited, cream-yellow, chalky sand (1158) containing pockets of grey silt and Thetford Ware pottery, which was overlain by a grey-brown, charcoal-flecked, silty sand (1157) that contained charred barley seeds. The third, smaller pit (F129/1135) was situated on the southern lip of the Iron Age ditch. The diameter of the pit is unknown, due to heavy truncation from later pits. It survived to a maximum depth of 0.34m. There were no datable finds recovered from this feature.

Phase 1b

Two arms of an enclosure (F114/F116/F142/ F144.01/711), which had an overall diameter of *c.*19m, were observed cutting the earlier Iron Age ditch. The ditch had a bowl-shaped profile and rounded terminals (F121 and F144.02) at the entrance, which was located on the southern side of the enclosure. The ditch was *c.*1.2m wide and 0.5m deep, and was filled with a dark grey-brown silty clay (1119, 1121, 1128, 1148, 1153, 1169, 712) containing pockets of sand, natural flint nodules, animal bone, and sherds of St Neots and Thetford Ware pottery. Charred barley seeds, fish scales and mussel shell were also recovered from its fill.

Two contemporary ditches (F100/F132/704 and F122/F156) on a roughly north-south alignment were located to the east and west of the main enclosure. To the east, ditch F122 was orientated on a skewed northwest-southeast alignment. It measured 1.8m

wide, was 0.55m deep, and was filled by a dark grey clay silt (1125) with a clean matrix that contained animal bone and Thetford Ware pottery. The ditch had a rounded terminal at its northern end (F156, 1168) which also contained Thetford Wares, St Neots type pottery, and fragments of mussel shells. The second ditch (F100/F132/704), immediately to the west of the enclosure, appeared to follow the line of the enclosure ditch more closely than F122. The second ditch was again filled by a grey clay silt that had occasional charcoal flecks (1003, 1113, 1138, 705). The only find from the ditch was a bone skate that has a relatively broad date range (Bevan below). Two postholes (F109 and F111) cut into the inner lip of the ditch may also be of the same date.

Two small, very truncated, gullies (F103 and F119/F131) to the west of ditch F100/F132/704 may also have been contemporary with the enclosure, although no datable finds were recovered from their fills. The gullies had straight sides and flat bases and were heavily truncated by Phase 2 pits. Gully F103 was orientated north-south, and was c.1m wide, just 0.1m deep, and filled by a dark grey-brown clay-rich silty sand (1005). The second gully (F119/F131) was orientated east-west, measured 0.6m in width, and was 0.13m deep. It was filled by a grey clay-rich silt containing occasional charcoal flecks (1124/1137).

Two pits (F127 and F148) also appear to date to this period of occupation. Pit F127 cut the Iron Age ditch and a Phase 1a pit (F129). It was a shallow, bowl-shaped pit, with a slightly-irregular profile, measuring 1.28m in diameter and 0.38m in depth. It was filled with a grey clay-silt (1133) that contained some small stones. No datable material was recovered from this fill. A second small, shallow, oval pit (F148) containing St Neots Ware was located at the entrance to the enclosure. The pit had a diameter of 0.8m, was 0.2m deep, and filled with a soft grey-brown silty-sand (1159).

Discussion of Phase 1

Although no evidence for either grubenhäuser, or any other structures, was discovered on the site, the size of the pot sherds and the quantities in which it was found implies that there was settlement very near to the enclosure, if not actually in the enclosure itself. The absence of any internal features within the enclosure is suggestive of its use as a livestock enclosure or corral. However, the entrance seems particularly wide for this function, and would have required the addition of wattle gates or some other type of screen to prevent animals escaping. The eastern and western ditches may be two sections of a much larger enclosure encircling the smaller example. The two postholes situated on the inner lip of the ditch may be the remains of a fence or timber barricade, the outer enclosure appearing to have had an entrance to the east. Anglo-Saxon enclosures with internal palisades have been noted on other sites, such as West Stow, Suffolk.

Phase 2 Medieval (early 14th – late-15th Century)

There are two, characteristically-different elements of occupation in this period. The first is the development of properties along Clay Street, with boundary ditches being excavated to demarcate property divisions to the rear of these newly-established burgages. The second is the use of land beyond this backplot area of burgages fronting onto the High Street, as well as those along Clay Street, for the extraction of clay, sand and chalk, and the locating of wells.

Five gullies were excavated to the rear of the Clay Street frontage in Area B (Fig. 4). Four were orientated east-west, and one was on a north-south alignment. The earliest gully (F135) was on a north-south alignment and probably relates to the initial laying out of properties along the frontage. It was 0.7m wide and 0.6m deep, with a bowl-shaped profile, and filled by a soft grey sandy-silt (1141). It was bisected laterally by a later gully (F134), with steep sides and a flat base, measuring 0.62m in width and 0.22m in depth, and filled by a grey-brown silt (1140) that contained late 15th-century pottery.

To the south of F135 was the terminus of a third gully (F130), again on an east-west alignment. It was 0.5m wide and 0.4m deep and filled by a dark grey clay-rich silt (1136). Immediately to the south of this were two more gullies (F125 and F126). Gully F126 had a V-shaped profile, measured 0.5m wide by 0.3m deep, and was filled by a charcoal-rich silt (1132). This was later recut on the same alignment by a U-shaped gully (F125) which was 0.3m wide and 0.38m deep, and filled with a mottled brown and orange-grey clay-rich silt, containing small stones (1131).

Thirteen pits have been identified as dating to this period, and they appear to fall into two principal categories; possible rubbish pits and quarry pits. Those that may have been used as rubbish pits (F102, F106, F117, F133, F146, F152, F153, F154) were between 1.5 m and 2.6m in diameter. They were generally circular in plan and, where survival was good, they had steep-sided, bowl-shaped profiles. Otherwise they were shallow, with flat bases. They had single, dark grey-brown clay-rich silt fills with a generally clean matrix (1004, 1111, 1122, 1139, 1163, 1164, 1165). Only one pit (F146) had two distinct fills; the lower was black with pockets of sand that may have been fragments of degraded sandstone (1156). This layer contained charred barley seeds and a single unidentified cereal seed. The upper fill was dark grey-brown clay-rich silt (1155).

Only three pits produced datable finds however. All were fairly deep pits, surviving to a depth of between 0.6m and 1m. Pit F146 contained Bourne B pottery in its lower fill (1156) and Thetford, Medieval Ely, and Bourne B pottery in the upper fill (1155). A mixture of pottery dating to 1300-1450 and a single residual sherd of Thetford Ware were recovered from pit F152 (1163) and pottery of the same date was excavated from F153 (1164). A fourth pit (F102/1004) contained a single residual sherd of Thetford Ware, probably deriving from the gully that it was cut into.

Five probable quarry pits (F112, F118, F123, F128, F137) were excavated across the site. Two were sub-rectangular in plan and three were circular. The quarry pits were characterised by vertical sides and flat bottoms which probably developed as the excavators worked to a 'face' during extraction. One of the sub-rectangular pits (F137) had a slightly stepped profile, and measured 2m by 3.2m and was 1.4m deep. It was filled by a soft, light grey, charcoal-flecked, sandy silt (1143) and contained 14th-century pottery. Small fragments of bone and a single waterlogged seed of elder (*Sambucus nigra L.*) were noted in a sample from this pit (Ciaraldi below). A second sub-rectangular pit (F118), measured 4m by 2m, had straight sides, with a flat base, and was 1m deep. It was filled by very dark grey clay (1123).

The largest quarry pit (F123) measured 5.5m in diameter. The pit was not completely excavated for health and safety reasons. However, a sondage was excavated in one quadrant in order to find the base. The earliest deposit in the pit was a grey silty clay with a clean matrix (1175), overlain by a clean, very compact grey clay-rich silt (1146), the upper fill being a grey-brown fairly loose, organic, silt (1129). Another large pit (F112) had a diameter of c.3.5m and measured 0.65m deep. It had a single fill (1126) of mottled, grey-black clay-rich silty sand containing medieval pottery and a single intrusive sherd of 18th-century date. A third large pit (F128) survived to a depth of 0.72m and had a diameter of 2m. Fragments of oyster and mussel shells were recovered from the fill (1134).

Two possible wells were dug on the site during this period, but these were not fully excavated due to the high water table. Well F140 was c.1.5 in diameter and had been lined with a grey clay (1151) which had partially collapsed (1152) onto one of the upper fills. The cut for the well was slightly wider at the top, with vertical sides. The upper fill was a dark, mottled, clay silt (1150) that contained Bourne B type pottery. The second well (F157) was much bigger, with a diameter of c.4m. It may have originally been a quarry pit, which was then reused. Its function as a well is suggested by a fragment of stone lining (1170), constructed from irregularly-shaped sandstone blocks, which remained *in situ* along its southern edge. The earliest fill encountered during excavation was a friable orange, gravel rich sandy silt containing pockets of fine grey silt (1173). This was overlain by a dark grey clay-rich sandy silt (1172), which was wet and compact and contained large quantities of tile and bone, as well as fragments of sandstone which probably derived from the collapse of the lining wall. An oyster shell, which had a notch along the ventral edge of the valve, was also recovered from this fill. The short knife commonly used to prise open fresh oysters often causes the shell to be nicked in this manner (pers. comm. Murray) and may infer reuse of the well as a rubbish pit.

Discussion of Phase 2

The series of gullies in Area B was almost certainly associated with the expansion and contraction of the backplots of properties lining Clay Street. A plan of the centre of Soham, drawn in 1656 (Martin 2000, 12), depicts several structures along Clay Street, those on the northern side appearing to have very long backplot areas stretching into what was an open space within the centre of the town. The presence of an elder seed from one of the pits of this date also suggests an uncultivated, open space.

The rubbish pits were not situated in the backplot area of the properties along Clay Street, as rubbish pits commonly were. Rather, they were concentrated within the open space in the centre of the town. They were characterised by being relatively small and were often found cutting through earlier features. Thus they may have begun to be excavated as quarry pits, but when insufficient natural subsoil was found, due to the presence of the underlying Saxon deposits, they were abandoned and used for the disposal of rubbish. However, none of the fills really had the characteristics of middens and none was artefactually rich. It is perhaps more likely that the pits were simply abandoned, left open, and that pottery was washed into the pits from the topsoil where it was present due to the process of manuring.

The size and number of the quarry pits suggests a fairly intensive building programme being undertaken during this period. This may have been in response to the

establishment of a new port (constructed in the 1400s) on the shores of the Mere. Clay Street in particular would have become one of the major thoroughfares linking the town centre with the port. There was also a massive rebuilding of the church at the end of the Norman period when a new tower and a bay linking it to the church proper were constructed to replace the earlier Saxon tower (Martin 2000, 14). An alternative interpretation is that these features were carp ponds, but, although cypranide bones were recovered from the fills, the silts did not appear organic enough to have formed part of the composition of a pond. As well as raw materials such as sand and clay, this construction boom would have required a good water supply for the mixing of daub amongst other things. This may explain the possible reuse of one of the quarry pits as a well. The wall, which had been constructed around one edge of the pit, may have been to strengthen the edge of the pit and protect it from collapse, thus making it safer to draw water from the pit. Reuse may also be suggested by the sheer size of the well which, if had been excavated as a well specifically, was simply too large to have been domestic in character.

Phase 3 Early Post-Medieval (16th – 17th Century)
Pottery dated only one feature to this period of occupation, a circular pit (F155, Fig.5) which clipped the edge of the large Phase 2 well F157. It measured c.3.5m in diameter and 1.3m in depth. In the base of the feature was a dark grey-green cessy-silt (1167) which contained fragments of sandstone. Overlying this deposit was a very dark grey sandy-clay-silt (1166) which had abundant small stone inclusions and pockets of yellow sand where the edges had eroded and collapsed into the pit. This layer contained an abundance of pottery dating from the 15th to the 17th century. The remains of a juvenile pig were recovered from both contexts.

Discussion of Phase 3
The aforementioned mid-17th-century map shows that there was mainly occupation around the edges of the enclosure. The church and several smaller structures associated with it were also depicted on this map. Pit F155 may, once again, be interpreted as a quarry pit. There are references to new buildings being constructed in the vicinity, the 'Towne House' for example (Martin 2000, 14) which was built from wood and clay and appears just to the north of the church on an etching dating to 1700 (Martin 2000 13). The remains of the juvenile pig from this pit may be seen as further evidence of the area being undeveloped, apart from around the periphery, during this period. The absence of butchery marks on any of the bones and the fact that the bones were recovered from two fills of the pit make it likely that the pig fell into the pit, was trapped in the mud at the bottom, and drowned. However, the skeleton of the pig was not complete (Murray below), almost certainly due to bias in the recovery of the bones which was hampered by water levels and collapse of the sides of the pit. Pigs, then, it seems, were left to root in the fields and backplot areas of the properties during this period.

Phase 4 Later Post-Medieval/Modern (18th – 20th Century)
Evidence of occupation during these later periods was very scanty. However, three separate sub-phases were observed during the excavations.

Phase 4a 18th Century

The only feature that contained pottery solely of this date was a sub-circular posthole, F108 (Fig. 5). It was U-shaped in profile, 0.2m in depth, and 0.6m by 0.4m in diameter. It was filled with a charcoal-flecked dark grey sandy gravel-silt (1114). Located immediately to the rear of the Clay Street frontage was a well (F101) that may have been in use during this period (see 4b below), being backfilled at a later date.

Phase 4b 19th Century

Artefacts dating to this period were recovered from the topsoil (1000) and from tree boles across the site. A full record of the tree boles is available in the archive, but the results will not be reproduced here. Immediately behind structures fronting onto Clay Street was a large sub-square pit/disturbance (F124, Fig. 5), which was only partially revealed in plan within the area of excavation. The feature had vertical sides, with a flat base, and was c.1.8m deep. The earliest fill was a dark brown-black clay-rich silty-sand (1176). Overlying this was a very mixed brown silty-sand (1144) which contained glazed wares, and the upper fill was a mid-dark brown silty-sand (1130), containing quantities of brick and tile and late earthern and glazed wares. A well (F101) immediately to the west of the pit was backfilled during the 19th Century with dumps of metal, pottery, brick and tile, and wood (1001). A small pit (F105), cut into the top of a Phase 2 pit, also contained pottery of this date and a single sherd of medieval pottery. It had a bowl-shaped profile and was 0.8m in diameter. A layer of bricks (1009) was found in the base of the cut, which was then filled with a mottled dark grey silty-clay (1010).

Two fragments of a brick floor were uncovered in the north-eastern corner of the area of excavation. They were c.1m below the current ground level, and may relate to structures visible on the Ordnance Survey Map (25" Series) of 1925.

Phase 4c Modern

Modern features include field drains (F113/1118), which ran diagonally across the site (Fig. 5), and a dog burial (F158/1171). The pet burial may have been associated with a surface find of a small headstone inscribed with 'BROWNIE 28 Oct 1911'. A large dump of beer bottles and whelk shells was also excavated from an irregularly-shaped pit (F136/1142) in Area B.

Discussion of Phase 4

In later years the area was laid out as formal gardens, with paths, walled gardens, and ponds. This also involved a programme of tree planting. Evidence for there having been espalier fruit trees along the walls of the garden was still visible at the time of the excavation, and several trees within the development area carry Tree Preservation Orders and will be retained as part of the development. The First Edition OS Map (25" Series, 1886) depicts this formal layout, and also reveals that, by this period, the garden had encroached upon some of the medieval burgage plots aligning the High Street and probably Clay Street as well.

Unphased Features

Several features could not be phased. These were all small pits or postholes that had no stratigraphic relationship with any other features, did not produce any datable

finds, and which could not be related on the basis of morphology to other features excavated. They are F104, F115, F139, F141, and F145 (Fig. 5).

THE FINDS

The Pottery by Stephanie Rátkai

All the pottery was examined under x20 magnification, with the exception of the 18th and 19th-century factory-produced glazed wares. The fabrics of well known types such as Thetford Ware and St Neots Ware have not been described in this report. Likewise Sible-Hedingham type ware (Figs. 7.21-22), unglazed sandy micaceous ware and glazed red earthenwares have not been described. Of the remaining medieval pottery, most of the fabrics contained broadly similar ranges of inclusions, differences being marked by density or size of inclusion and/or final firing colour. The pottery was divided into fabric groups, following, where possible, Spoerry (1999) and Rátkai (2001a and 2001b). The pottery was quantified (Table 1) by sherd count and weight, minimum rim count and rim percentage (*eves*). Details of vessel form, decoration, glaze, sooting and wear were also noted.

	Sherd count	**Sherd weight (g)**	**Min. rim count**	**Rim % (*eves*)**
Fabric 1	81	983	12	104
Fabric 2	9	123	2	17
Fabric 3	1	55	1	17
Fabric 4	3	53	2	10
Fabric 5	3	22		
Fabric 6	1	20	1	6
Fabric 7	1	39		
Fabric 8	2	5		
Glazed red earthenware	14	531		
Micaceous sandy ware	1	2		
Prehistoric	2	17		
Sible-Hedingham type ware	6	36	2	16
St Neots Ware	18	322	3	80
Thetford Ware	42	712	8	193
Thetford Ware?	2	11		
Tin glazed earthenware	2	10		
Tudor Green	1	1	1	4
Total	**189**	**2942**	**32**	**447**

Table 1 Quantification of pottery fabrics (excluding later 18th and 19th-century factory-produced glazed wares)

Fabric Descriptions

Soham fabric 1

A generally sandy matrix, with moderate, rounded, ill-sorted quartz (0.1-1mm), sparse rounded limestone (or possibly chalk), rare degraded detrital flint, very rare ?glauconite (shiny rounded black opaque grains which can be scratched with a metal point, producing a brownish powder), and very rare ?chert. Surfaces and margins are generally pale brown or buff, with mid-dark grey cores. A small number of sherds is buff throughout, and one or two sherds have orange-brown surfaces and margins and a mid-grey core. The calcitic inclusions were not particularly visible on the sherd surfaces. Most of the sherds were undiagnostic but those that could be ascribed to vessel form were divided equally between bowls, cooking pot/jars and jugs (Figs. 7.11-13, 7.16-17, 7.20, 8.24-25). Only ten of the Phase 2 fabric 1 sherds were sooted.

Soham fabric 2

A second group of sherds had a broadly similar fabric to fabric 1 above, but they were finer and sandier. There was marked colour variation within this group, some sherds being oxidized buff/pale orange throughout, and others having red brown surfaces and blue-grey cores. Two particularly striking sherds had a cream external surface. One (Fig. 7.17) had a buff-pink body, the other an orange margin beneath the cream surface, the remainder of the sherd being buff. A third sherd (Fig. 7.18) had a buff fabric with orange margins and a pale pinkish-buff external surface. Most sherds were undiagnostic but one bowl and one cooking pot jar were represented (Figs. 7.17-18).

Soham fabric 3

A coarse gritty fabric, firing buff, with a light-mid-grey core. A coarser variant of Soham fabric 1. There was only one sherd from a jug or cistern (Fig. 7.14).

The above fabrics, macroscopically, closely resemble both Bourne B ware from Long Causeway, Ely (Rátkai in prep) and Bourne B type ware at Longstanton (Rátkai 2001a). However, recent work by Spoerry (forthcoming) has pointed out that 'the key features distinguishing sherds from these more northerly kilns (Bourne and Baston) from those made at Ely are mostly only recognisable through thin section'. A fourth group of pottery from Colne (Healey *et al.* 1998) also shares similarities with both Ely wares and those from Bourne and Baston. The geographic location of Soham favours Ely as the source for fabrics 1-3. However, some of the Soham sherds display a light colouration and have no grey core. This is atypical of Medieval Ely wares from Potters Lane (Spoerry forthcoming), but this variant could represent pots from a different production site but one still located within, or near, Ely.

Soham fabric 1 probably equates to Standard Medieval Ely Ware (MELS Spoerry forthcoming), since there were rather few calcitic inclusions within the fabric. Soham fabric 2 was made up of mainly undiagnostic sherds, but its most likely parallel is Late Medieval Ely Ware (LMELS Spoerry *op. cit.*). Soham fabric 3 is the equivalent of Coarse Medieval Ely Ware (MELCO Spoerry *idem*).

Soham fabric 4

Reduced grey surfaces, pale grey body. Moderate-abundant rounded and sub-rounded quartz (c 0.25mm), very rare plate-like ?shell, very rare rounded limestone, and very

rare worn flint. This fabric may also be a Medieval Ely type ware. Two vessel forms were identified, both bowls (Figs. 7.19 and 7.23).

Soham fabric 5
Sparse, sub-angular quartz (c 0.25mm or smaller), sparse, rounded limestone, ?ooliths and shell within a clean pasty matrix. Surface colour is variable from greyish-brown to pale orange, with a dark grey core. The margins are generally the same colour as the surfaces but are quite distinct within the sherd break. Only three sherds were present in this fabric; a base-angle sherd from a bowl with a lumpy brownish-olive internal glaze and external sooting, a jug sherd with a thin olive splashed glaze, and a jug sherd with external glossy olive glaze. The fabric is similar to Bourne A. The identification of Bourne A by both Blinkhorn in the evaluation assemblage and by Rátkai in the assessment is intriguing. The fabric appears very different from Soham fabrics 1-3 and may represent another variant of Medieval Ely ware, although it does not seem sandy enough for the fabrics described by Spoerry, and the clearly defined margins within the sherd break are not paralleled in Soham fabrics 1-3. Alternatively it is indeed from a different source, in this case possibly South Lincolnshire. If the latter is true, then it is not inconceivable that some (possibly only a very small proportion at most) of the putative Medieval Ely ware fabrics from Soham derive from Bourne.

Soham fabric 6
Inclusions were infrequent within this fabric, but consisted of sparse limestone (up to 3mm), sparse shell (up to 3mm), sparse fe inclusions (up to 3mm), rare granular red ?sandstone (c 0.25mm), rare sub-angular quartz (0.5-1mm) and rare organics. This fabric is clearly very different from the rest of the assemblage. A single, hand-formed vessel was represented (Fig. 8.26), a shallow, wide-mouthed dish with a bead rim.

Soham fabric 7
Sparse sub-angular quartz (<0.25mm), sparse rounded fe, sparse fossil limestone, and sparse ?organic voids. Pale orange-brown surfaces and margins, and a mid-grey core. Only one sherd was found in this fabric, a body sherd from a small globular or possibly baluster jug, with a thin, opaque poorly-fluxed pale olive glaze. There are at least two zones of light horizontal combing. The interior of the vessel was coated with a thick limescale which produced a strong reaction to hydrochloric acid.

Soham fabric 8 (Buff glazed ware)
Moderate-abundant, well-sorted sub-angular quartz (<0.25mm). Sparse calcitic inclusions (generally <0.25mm) are present in the matrix and reacted strongly with hydrochloric acid. One small sherd has an external olive glaze. The other sherd, also small, has an olive glaze mottled with copper flecks and an unglazed band of iron oxide or thin purplish-brown slip.

Discussion of the Pottery by Phase

Phase 0
The earliest pottery was represented by a flint-tempered sherd with stabbed decoration of Iron Age date (Fig. 6.01). The sherd was found in 1161, the fill of F150, a substantial ditch cut by a Phase 1b enclosure ditch. A second small flint-tempered

chip of pottery was found residually in 1003, the fill of the Phase 1b boundary ditch F100. The fabric of both these sherds was similar to a small group of sherds found in an Iron Age pit at Longstanton (Rátkai 2001a), where the settlement chronology seemed to mirror that at Soham, that is that Iron Age activity was followed by Late Saxon settlement.

Phase 1

The Phase 1 ditches and pits were associated with Late Saxon Thetford and St Neots Ware. Only Thetford Ware was found in Phase 1a, with St Neots Ware appearing in Phase 1b. Although only a small number of vessels was represented, substantial portions survived (Figs 7.01-07).

The Phase 1a pottery came from two pits (F120 and F147) which were cut by the terminals of the Phase 1b enclosure ditch F144. Two cooking pot/jars were represented (Figs. 6.01 and 6.02). Cooking pot (Fig. 6.01) joined with a larger part of the same vessel from the fill (1153) of the enclosure ditch F144.

More pottery was recovered from Phase 1b features; the enclosure ditch (F114/F116/F142/F144.01/711) and two other contemporary ditches (F122 and F100/F132/704). St Neots Ware was found only in F144 (1153), and consisted of two cooking pots/jars (Figs. 6.06 and 6.07). Thetford Ware forms consisted of cooking pots/jars, at least two of which were decorated with roller stamping (Fig. 6.03), and large storage jars with applied thumbed strips from F122 (handle Fig. 6.04) and F144. Other Thetford Ware forms occurred residually in Phase 2 pits, including handled jars/pitchers (Fig. 6.08) from F112 and a ?storage jar (Fig. 7.11) from F152. Another cooking pot/jar (Fig. 7.09) came from another Phase 2 pit (F146). Six St Neots cooking pot/jar sherds came from pit F148, and an inturned rim bowl was among the unstratified material. Although Thetford Ware sherds were found residually in a number of contexts, this was not true of the St Neots Ware, suggesting that St Neots Ware was never very plentiful in the Late Saxon period and that the focus for pottery supply was to the east or north, via Ely.

The late Saxon pottery consisted almost exclusively of Thetford Ware, with a small quantity of St Neots Ware. A similar preference for Thetford Ware over St Neots Ware was noted at Fordham (Rátkai this volume) but the reverse was true at Longstanton (Rátkai 2001a) and Bassingbourne (Rátkai 2001b). However, both the latter lie considerably further west than Soham and Fordham. The dominance of Thetford Ware may then simply represent an expected distribution pattern. However, Hall (2000) has noted that the earliest late Saxon fabric at Cottenham, again somewhat further west than Soham, was Thetford-type Ware and that St Neots Ware seems to appear subsequently. The appearance of St Neots Ware later in the late Saxon tradition outside of its core area has also been noted by Mellor (1994) in Oxfordshire. The limited evidence from Soham may be seen as confirming both Mellor's and Hall's observations.

Phase 2

None of the medieval pottery was very closely datable. Soham fabrics 1 and 3 appear to be Medieval Ely Ware which was in use throughout much of the medieval period. On typological grounds most of the pottery appears to date to the 14th-15th centuries, although the shallow dish in Soham fabric 6 (Fig. 8.25) must be earlier than this, so a

small amount of earlier medieval material is probably also present. The presence of Soham fabric 2, tentatively equated with Late Medieval Ely ware, confirms late medieval activity. In addition, the relative paucity of sooted medieval sherds (in contrast most of the Thetford Ware and St Neots Ware were sooted) tends to favour a later medieval date. Other fabrics such as glazed red earthenware also have a long currency, spanning the 16th-18th centuries. However, the absence of Cistercian Ware and blackware from the site suggests limited activity in the 16th and 17th centuries.

All the Phase 2 activity was located beyond the extent of burgage backplots. As such, this area was the least likely to produce abundant ceramic evidence and this was confirmed by a small total of 96 sherds from the fills of possible rubbish pits, quarry pits and boundary ditches. Of the eight rubbish pits, five (F102, F106, F146 (Figs. 7.09-13), F152 (Figs. 7.14-16) and F153 produced pottery, the largest group consisting of eighteen sherds from pit F146. Even allowing for the fact that the pits were only half sectioned, the finds yield was low.

The average sherd weight of the pottery from F146 was the highest at 16.3g. The other pits had average sherd weights of 9.7g and 13.5g and two pits (F102 and F105) contained single sherds only weighing 2g and 4g respectively. The pottery was mainly undiagnostic body sherds. Pit 152 contained form sherds from a bowl, a cooking pot/jar and a residual Thetford Ware cooking pot/jar (Figs 7.14-16).

Quarry pits F112, F118 (Fig. 7.17), F123, F128 and F137 contained pottery (22, 6, 6, 5 and 15 sherds respectively). The average sherd weight of the pottery was slightly greater than in the rubbish pits, the lowest being 10.3g, the highest 20.6g. Pit F112 contained a tin glazed earthenware sherd and pit F118 contained a glazed red earthenware sherd. These sherds could be intrusive, or the backfilling of these features should be dated to Phase 3.

Residual Thetford Ware in small quantities was found in both rubbish and quarry pit fills. Likewise the range of medieval pottery within the fills was broadly similar. This suggests that there was little chronological difference in the digging of any of the pits or at least that any such difference could not be demonstrated by the pit fills (the two possible exceptions being F112 and F118 above). The mix of medieval and Late Saxon pottery, combined with the fairly low average sherd weight and the paucity of pottery within the fills, suggests that fills derived from a general scatter of pottery in the soil or on the ground surface rather than from a deliberate act of rubbish deposition.

If there was little pottery within the pits, it was virtually non-existent within the property boundary features. A single gully (F134) produced one fabric 1 sherd and two tiny possible tile fragments. Clearly the property boundaries had maintained their importance throughout the medieval period and had been kept clear of rubbish. Likewise, the lack of pottery within the fills may also reflect the lack of a general ground scatter of pottery, since even with the best maintained ditches and gullies there is some slippage or slumping, bringing with it some artefactual or ecofactual detritus. Since rubbish does not seem to have collected in the backplots, it must have been removed from the site or disposed of in some other area.

Finally, the two Phase 2 wells F140 and F157 contained two sherds and one sherd respectively of fabric 1. Again the lack of pottery from them is surprising, but is in keeping with the apparently clean nature of the site.

Phase 3

One feature (pit F155) dated to this phase. It contained eighteen sherds of mainly medieval pottery (eg Fig. 7.23), of the sort found in the Phase 2 pits. The latest pottery was represented by a Tudor Green cup rim sherd and three glazed red earthenware sherds, one from an unglazed jug or cistern with a double thumb impression at the base-angle, one from a possible bowl with an internal tan glaze, and the third sherd with an internal tan glaze of unknown form. The fill is likely to date to the 16th century.

Phase 4

The pottery from this phase was not recorded in detail. Pit F108 contained a single sherd of creamware which probably dated to the late 18th century. The latest fill of pit F124 (1130) contained a residual Thetford Ware sherd, eight glazed red earthenware sherds of indeterminate form, a creamware sherd, and a small industrial slipware sherd of early-mid 19th-century date. The preceding layer (1144) contained a black ?basalt ware handle of probable early 19th-century date. Well F101 contained large sherds or complete vessels of 19th-century date, particularly stoneware jars and bottles.

Fabric	Phase 0	Phase 1a	Phase 1b	Phase 2	Phase 3
Prehistoric	1, 14g		1, 3g		
Thetford Ware		14, 159g	15, 403g	12, 145g	
Thetford Ware?				1, 4g	
St Neots Ware			17, 252g		
Fabric 1				2, 687g	11,114g
Fabric 2				7, 115g	
Fabric 3				1, 55g	
Fabric 4				3, 53	
Fabric 5					2, 13g
Fabric 7				1, 39g	
Fabric 8					1, 3g
Micaceous sandy ware				1, 2g	
Sible-Hedingham type ware				6, 35g	
Glazed red earthenware				1, 14g	3, 58g
Tudor Green					1, 1g
Tin glazed earthenware				1, 8g	
Total	**1, 14g**	**14, 159g**	**33, 658g**	**36, 1157g**	**18, 189g**

Table 2 Occurrence of pottery fabrics by phase (quantification by sherd count and sherd weight in grammes)

Illustrated Vessels

Phase 0, 1a and 1b pottery (Fig. 6)

01 Phase 0 Prehistoric sherd with stabbed decoration. 1161 (F150)

02 Phase 1a Thetford Ware cooking pot/jar, external soot. 1127 (F144) and 1153 (F120)

03 Phase 1a Thetford Ware cooking pot/jar, external soot. 1157 (F147)

04 Phase 1b Thetford Ware cooking pot/jar, unsooted, rectangular roller stamping on shoulder. 1121 (F116)
05 Phase 1b Thetford Ware handle. 1125 (F122)
06 Phase 1b Thetford Ware cooking pot/jar, external soot. 1153 (F144)
07 Phase 1b St Neots Ware cooking pot/jar, external soot. 1153 (F144)
08 Phase 1b St Neots Ware cooking pot jar, external soot on rim. 1153 (F144)

Phase 2 pottery (Fig. 7)
09 Phase 2 Thetford Ware handled jar or pitcher. 1126 (F112)
10 Phase 2 Thetford Ware rim. 1155 (F146)
11 Soham fabric 1, jug , unglazed. 1155 (F146)
12 Phase 2 Soham fabric 1, unglazed jug. 1156 (F146)
13 Phase 2, Soham fabric 1, bowl. 1156 (F146)
14 Phase 2, Soham fabric 3, jug or ?cistern. 1156 (F146)
15 Phase 2 Thetford Ware cooking pot/jar rim.1163 (F152)
16 Phase 2, Soham fabric 1, bowl. 1163 (F152)
17 Phase 2, Soham fabric 1, cooking pot/jar, surface cracking along rim. 1163 (F152)
18 Phase 2 Soham fabric 2, bowl. 1123 (F118)
19 Phase 2, Soham fabric 4, bowl, heavy external soot, some light internal soot. 1143 (F137)
20 Phase 2, Soham fabric 1, bowl. 1143 (F137)
21 Phase 2, Sible-Hedingham type ware jug, external dark green glaze. 1143 (F137)
22 Phase 2, Sible-Hedingham type ware jug, small external olive glaze spot. 1143 (F137)
23 Phase 2, Soham fabric 4, bowl. 1134

Phase 3 and unphased pottery (Fig. 8)
24 Phase 3, Soham fabric 1, cooking pot jar. 1166 (F155)
25 Cleaning layer, Soham fabric 1, cooking pot jar. 1002
26 Cleaning layer, Soham fabric 6, shallow dish, external soot. 1002

The Prehistoric Flint by Lynne Bevan

The small flint collection comprised 38 items of humanly-struck flint. With the exception of a small blade (F118/1123), two scrapers (1002, F137/1143), a core (F116/1121), two core fragments and a retouched flake (F137/1143), the collection consisted of unretouched flakes and chunks.

The flint was of a fairly good quality pebble flint from a secondary source, probably from local river gravels or boulder clay deposits. Most of the flint was dark grey, near-black and dark brown in colour, with a few totally white items resulting from re-cortication. With the exception of the blade, which might be of Later Mesolithic to Early Neolithic date, none of the material was chronologically-diagnostic. However, the fact that the core and core fragments were used for the production of broad flakes and the broad, squat shape of most of the flakes and chunks seem to indicate a later prehistoric date during the Later Neolithic to Bronze Age periods. This general date range is also probable for the scrapers.

Although the flint was redeposited on the site from its original contexts of deposition, and contemporaneity cannot be assumed, its general appearance in terms of colour and core reduction strategy suggests that it was all part of the same industry. The small collection of ten items (F116/1121) appears to belong to a single knapping episode (or a temporally close series of episodes) although refitting was not possible.

While this small collection attests to prehistoric activity involving flint knapping and, presumably, an accompanying settlement on the site at some time during later prehistory, this activity does not appear to have been of any great intensity or duration.

The Small Finds by Lynne Bevan

Brick/Tile	97
Clay Pipe	2
Iron Nails	5
Other Iron	4
Copper Alloy	1
Slag	3
Bottle Glass	7
Window Glass	4
Shell	429
Slate Tile	1

Table 3 Quantification of Small Finds

Other classes of finds recovered from the site are quantified in Table 3. All of the finds were of 19th-century or recent date and derived from post-medieval or modern contexts. Iron was poorly preserved on the site, precluding the identification of four corroded objects, and the copper alloy strip (F128) was neither identifiable nor datable. Three complete glass bottles were recovered - two beer bottles (F136/1142) and a light blue medicine bottle with dosage marks on the side (F101/1001), all of which were of late 19th to early 20th-century date. Two fragments of clay pipe were found, including a decorated bowl of 19th-century date (F101).

The Worked Bone by Lynne Bevan

Two items of worked bone were recovered from Trench 7 (705), a bone skate (Catalogue No. 1, Plate 1), and a highly polished bone of unknown function with slightly-hollowed ends (Catalogue No. 2, Plate 1).

The skate was made from a cattle metacarpal, the anterior face of which has been deliberately smoothed and flattened. Bone skates, usually made from horse leg-bones, were a long-lived artefact type, common during the Late Saxon and medieval periods (Margeson 1993, 218-219, Figs. 166-167). They were used either with the shoe resting directly on the surface or tied to the shoe via an attachment hole in the proximal end (ibid. 218, see MacGregor 1976 for full discussion of bone skates). Skates, made from both horse and cattle bones, have been recovered from a number of sites, including Fishergate and The Bedern in York, where they came from 10th-12th-

century deposits (MacGregor *et al.* 1999, 1985-1989, Fig. 942). This skate has neither the trimmed, pointed toe nor the heel perforation commonly observed among the York finds (ibid. 1987), although a heel perforation cannot be ruled out in this instance due to some damage at one end of the skate. In York such modifications were more usually conducted upon skates made from horse, rather than cattle, bones (*ibid.*1987).

Catalogue

1. Bone skate, made from a cattle metacarpal, with one smoothed side. There is some breakage at one end. Length: 185mm, width: 35mm-45mm, Thickness: 23mm. Trench 7, 705. Figure Plate 1.
2. Polished bone, with slightly hollowed ends. Length: 63mm, diameter: 6mm, depth of hollowed terminals: 5mm. Trench 7, 705. Plate 1.

THE ECOFACTUAL EVIDENCE

The Animal Bone by Emily Murray

Animal bones were recovered from a number of features across the site, *c.*17kgs of hand-collected bone in total. Bones dating to the Saxon period derived principally from ditch contexts, while all of the countable material was recovered from a pit dated to the post-medieval period. The distribution of countable elements by feature is given in Table 4.

Phase/Feature	Pit	Gully	Ditch	Well
Saxon	3	1	17	-
Medieval	5	2	-	13
16th/17th c.	21	-	-	-
18th c.	3	-	-	-
Total	**32**	**3**	**17**	**13**

Table 4 Animal bones. Number of countable elements by feature and phase

Methodology

The faunal assemblage was recorded using a modified version of a system devised by Davis (Davis 1992: Albarella & Davis 1994). This system considers a selection of anatomical elements as countable, while the presence of non-countable specimens of interest is noted. Mandibles are considered to be ageable where two or more teeth are present with recognisable wear stages. No attempt was made to differentiate postcranial sheep and goat bones. Unstratified material and material from modern contexts (1130 and 1171) was only given a cursory examination to determine whether anything unusual was present.

Results

CSS00	Countable Bones						Ageable Mandibles				Measurable Bones						Notes
Phase	C	S/G	P	Oth.*	Bi	Total	C	S/G	P	Total	C	S/G	P	Oth	Bi	Total	
Saxon	16	1	5	4	1	**27**	2	1	-	**3**	7	1	-	2	1	**11**	horse, dog, domestic fowl
medieval	9	1	7	3	-	**20**	1	-	-	**1**	3	2	-	3	-	**8**	horse & goat
16th/17th c.	2	2	16	1	-	**21**	-	-	2	**2**	-	1	2	1	-	**4**	cat
18th c.	2	1	-	-	-	**3**	2	-	-	**2**	2	1	-	-	-	**3**	-
Total	29	5	28	8	1	**71**	5	1	2	**8**	12	5	2	6	1	**26**	

Key C = cattle, S/G = sheep/goat, P = pig, oth. = other species (* listed in notes), Bi = bird

Table 5 Animal Bones. Number of countable elements, ageable mandibles, and measurable elements by phase

The bones were in a good state of preservation and represent the domestic species of cattle, sheep, goat (one horncore), pig, horse, dog, cat and domestic fowl. A Saxon pit (F120) also produced a juvenile distal radius of a large bird (non-countable), which compares best with the crane (*Grus grus*). This is a species that favours wetlands and suggests the exploitation of habitats, such as the Cambridge fens, by the resident Saxons. The fact that it is a juvenile specimen is of interest, as it implies the presence of breeding birds. The bone had also been cut, cranio-distally, on the distal diaphysis (Plate 2), which may have been caused by the dismemberment of the carcass and/or the removal of flesh or feathers.

A large number of juvenile pig bones, including ribs and vertebrae (non-countable), was recovered from a 16th/17th-century pit (F155). Both the unfused epiphyses and metaphyses of long bones and the unfused epiphyseal plates of vertebrae were recovered, suggesting that this was an undisturbed primary deposit of an immature pig (the third mandibular molar had not yet erupted). No evidence of butchery was noted. A number of bones showed signs of gnawing by both dog and cat, while a second phalanx of a pig had been partially digested.

The Charred Plant Remains by Marina Ciaraldi

Soil samples were taken from the main datable features, after consultation with the writer and according to the BUFAU guidelines (*On-site Guide to Environmental Sampling and Processing*, BUFAU, Procedure No.2.). The sampling strategy adopted also took into consideration the results and recommendations of the environmental assessment from the evaluation (Rackham in JSAC 2000a). The clayey nature of the soil and the presence of a high water table meant that the site was under water during the entire period of excavation. No samples could be taken for pollen analysis due to possible contamination by modern pollen transported in the water. Further to this, none of the deposits excavated presented a stratigraphic sequence suitable for pollen analysis.

Methodology

The samples were floated with a York flotation machine. The flots (light fraction) were recovered on a 0.5mm sieve and the residue (heavy fraction) on a 1mm mesh. Two pits (F146/1156 and F137/1143) were thought to have contained waterlogged samples. A sub-sample of 200 ml was taken from these samples and wet-sieved on a 300 micron sieve. The residue was sorted by eye, while the flots and the two waterlogged samples were scanned under a low-power stereomicroscope.

Results

The samples examined were all small and heavily contaminated by modern rootlets, and only a few charred remains were observed. These consisted almost exclusively of poorly-preserved barley grains. The grains have been counted and are recorded in Table 6. Small fragments of bones were observed in Sample 13 (F137/1143), and a few broken fish scales were present in Sample 15 (F144/1153). Almost all of the samples contained land snails. A single waterlogged seed of elder (*Sambucus nigra* L.) was recorded in the waterlogged samples.

No.	Feature/ Context	Preservation	Volume Processed	Type of context	Period	Volume of flot (ml.)	Notes
2	F116/ 1121	char	20	enclosure ditch	Late Saxon	5	Lots of modern rootlets. Several land snails. Barley (3)
5	F122/ 1125	char	26	ditch	Late Saxon	100	Lots of modern rootlets. Several land snails. No charred plant remains
12	F146/ 1156	wl	0.2	pit	Medieval	-	Sandy clay. No waterlogged organic remains. Cereal (1) and barley (2)
13	F137/ 1143	wl	0.2	pit	Medieval	-	Small frags. of bones and shells. Waterlogged Sambucus seed
14	F147/ 1157	char	15	pit	Saxon	20	Modern rootlets and some land snails. Barley (3)
15	F144/ 1153	char	24	enclosure ditch	Saxon	100	Modern rootlets. Some modern seeds (or WL?), fragments of fish scales. Some land snails. Barley (6)

Key: char = charred wl = waterlogged. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of seeds.

Table 6 Samples assessed for charred plant remains

DISCUSSION

On present evidence, the earliest material evidence for occupation on the site is the flint assemblage which indicates a broad later prehistoric date from the later Neolithic to the Bronze Age. It is believed that these early settlements were located on the shores of a large inland sea, Soham Mere. The earliest cut features on the site date to the Iron Age when a possible enclosure was laid out. This is unusual, in that evidence of Iron Age settlement in the area has generally been associated with Ely and Stuntney to the north. However, Iron Age artefacts have been found in the vicinity of the town and the Mere by both local farmers and metal detectorists (pers. comm. Martin). Iron Age settlement was probably situated on an unusual promontory, that

runs from Fordham north towards Ely (CCC 1996, 72), on the eastern shore of the Mere, following the inundation of the earlier settlements directly on the lake (pers. comm. Martin).

The modern and medieval town of Soham appears to have been laid out around a large enclosure, which may have been associated with the founding of a palace and cathedral by Luttingus c.900 AD (Martin 2000, 4). This ecclesiastical enclosure is visible today preserved by the modern street plan of the town, and may have been defined by a moat and wall (*ibid.*) although there is, as yet, no archaeological evidence to support this. The excavation was undertaken in what would have been the south-east corner of the ecclesiastical enclosure, and the ceramic evidence from the excavation appears to confirm that the principal phase of occupation was during the Late Saxon period. The pottery was excavated from a small sub-circular enclosure with rounded terminals, which may have been a stock enclosure. However, the presence of large fragments of pottery from the ditches reveals that there was some form of domestic occupation nearby. Two other ditches, either side of the enclosure, probably represent further divisions of the large ecclesiastical enclosure, perhaps into areas with specialised functions. With regard to function, there was tenuous evidence for a palisade or fence, contiguous with the lip of the western ditch. There are parallels for this type of settlement at Cowdery's Down, Hampshire (Millet 1983, 192), where the Saxon inhabitants lived within fenced enclosures. However, due to severe horizontal truncation of deposits across the whole site at Soham, there were not enough postholes present to be certain that this was part of the original scheme.

Unfortunately, due to the size of the area excavated, we cannot recreate spatial relationships within the ecclesiastical enclosure, and only further excavation could clarify the layout. The size of the excavation also prohibits comparison with other published Saxon settlements such as West Stow, Suffolk (West 1985, 54), and Fordham, Cambs (Mould this volume). However, the small enclosure excavated in Soham appears, on the surface, to be very different in character from either of the above sites where elongated enclosures and sunken-floored buildings were excavated. This may be explained by its location within the much larger ecclesiastical enclosure, implying that it had a more specific function than simply as a domestic settlement. Horizontal truncation has removed evidence of any internal features. Alternatively, there may not have been any, which is also significant in itself, perhaps implying that it was used as a coral for livestock. There then appears to have been a slight hiatus in occupation between the Late Saxon period and the medieval period, the ceramic evidence for which suggests more intensive occupation from 1300 onwards.

Large scale expansion does not appear to have occurred until the medieval period, when Soham's situation on the Mere became fully exploited. Following the establishment of a new port c.1400, the town expanded considerably, becoming an important trading port in the area. There are several references to sea-going vessels which navigated up the old course of the River Ouse, the Mere also having navigable links with the River Cam, and so with Cambridge (Martin 2000, 16). The establishment of the port may have been the catalyst for expansion along Clay Street which would have become one of the main thoroughfares linking the town and market with the new port.

Funded by the wealth flooding in through the new port, new streets, such as the High Street and New Street (later Dam Brook Lane), were laid out and occupied (pers. comm. Martin). This extensive building programme required large quantities of raw materials in an area in which local building materials were rare. The good gault (clay) was located closer to the Mere, to the west of the town, where brick kilns were later situated (*ibid*). However, presumably due to the sheer quantities needed, the land within the former ecclesiastical enclosure, although now defunct, was also exploited, with large numbers of quarry pits being dug across the site for the extraction of the underlying sand, clay and chalk. Large clunch pits are also known in the vicinity (*ibid*). Cambridgeshire Clunch is a relatively hard, gritty, grey-green form of chalk used locally in buildings, traditionally used as ashlar and other moulded stone work.

Evidence for the development of the agrarian economy provided by the excavation is fairly limited, due to the lack of material recovered from the site. However, it appears that the Saxon, medieval, and post-medieval communities took full advantage of the many natural resources around them, as well as raising domestic crops and beasts. Fishing and fowling were common practices in the Late Saxon and medieval periods (Hooke, 1998, 179) and evidence for both was present in the faunal assemblage. The presence of fish and eel bones (Rackham 2000) is not surprising, considering the proximity of the town to the Mere and Ely, 'eel district' (Gelling 1984, 37 and 279). Marine molluscs also formed part of the local inhabitants' diet from the Saxon to the post-medieval period. Mussel and oyster shells were noted, as well as a large dump of whelk shells. Fish that were being caught included herring and cyprinids (Rackham 2000). Herring were obviously being imported from outside the area, whilst cyprinids, in this case probably carp, are exclusively freshwater fish and were probably fished directly from the Mere or were being bred on site in ponds.

Evidence for fowling could also be identified in the faunal assemblage. The distal radius of a juvenile crane, recovered from a Saxon pit, revealed butchery marks. The crane is a rare species in England today and there are no current records of breeding birds outside East Anglia (Wingfield Gibbons *et al.* 1994, 442). However, both place name evidence and the identification of crane bones from archaeological sites, especially Saxon sites (pers. comm. Hamilton-Dyer) suggest that it formerly had a much wider distribution (Boisseau & Yalden 1998). The identification of this immature specimen from Soham is therefore an important addition to the body of information on the former distribution of this taxon (pers. comm. Murray).

As well as the natural habitat of the immediate Fenland and Mere there is evidence of the Saxon and medieval populations employing a mixed agrarian economy. The medieval field system surrounding the town has already been recognised as being of importance, as not only do examples of ridge and furrow still exist (a way of ploughing much more typical of the Midland style of farming rather than that associated with the Fenland landscape), but the fields were, unusually, never enclosed (CCC 1996, 80). Charred plant remains were not well preserved on the site, the only charred seed present in the assemblage being barley, with some wheat from the evaluation (Rackham 2000). The presence of barley has often been interpreted as evidence for beer production. Rackham also suggests that the fishscales noted in the assemblage could have been used as finings, for clearing the beer that was being brewed (*ibid*). Alternatively, the barley may have been used for animal fodder, and the occurrence of domestic cattle and horse bones, combined with the possibility of

the enclosure being a stock coral, may mean that the latter is more likely. Bones of domestic fowl, sheep, goat, and pig were also recovered, showing that the community was also using the more marginal areas of the promontory for grazing.

The pottery evidence reflects the importance of Soham on the north-south route between other Late Saxon ecclesiastical centres at Ely in the north and Thetford and Bury St Edmunds, to the south. Soham stands on the main route northwards to Ely, therefore traders passing through from counties in the north, east and south would all have had links with Soham en route (pers. comm. Martin). St Neots type pottery was also present on the site, revealing trade links with this area. Pottery could have been brought in by road, the main road from St Neots linking with the Ely road at Newmarket, but alternatively, the pottery may have been traded on from Cambridge and brought in by boat up the River Cam and across the Mere.

Soham Mere survived as an open expanse of water until it was drained in the 19th century. Its extent can, however, still be traced in modern field boundaries. Its influence upon the town is paramount throughout the town's history. Although the Mere is long gone the town retains many historic features, not least the large Late Saxon ecclesiastical enclosure which remains preserved at the heart of the town. Wade (2000, 26) observed that Middle and Late Saxon Christian centres may have been significant in the development of trade and craft production. In Soham it appears that the Late Saxon ecclesiastical enclosure provided an initial focus and, perhaps, a stimulus for settlement. There was almost certainly a small port on the Mere during this period (pers. comm. Martin), which developed more fully in the ensuing medieval period, leading to the development of the town as a significant trading centre in the area. The ecclesiastical centre was eventually overshadowed by its neighbour Ely. However, Soham maintained its importance as a centre of trade supplying and providing facilities for itself and its hinterland. The excavation reported on here has been the first large-scale piece of archaeological work in the town and has contributed significantly to towards elucidating the history, economy, social life and social networks of the area from the prehistoric period up to the present day.

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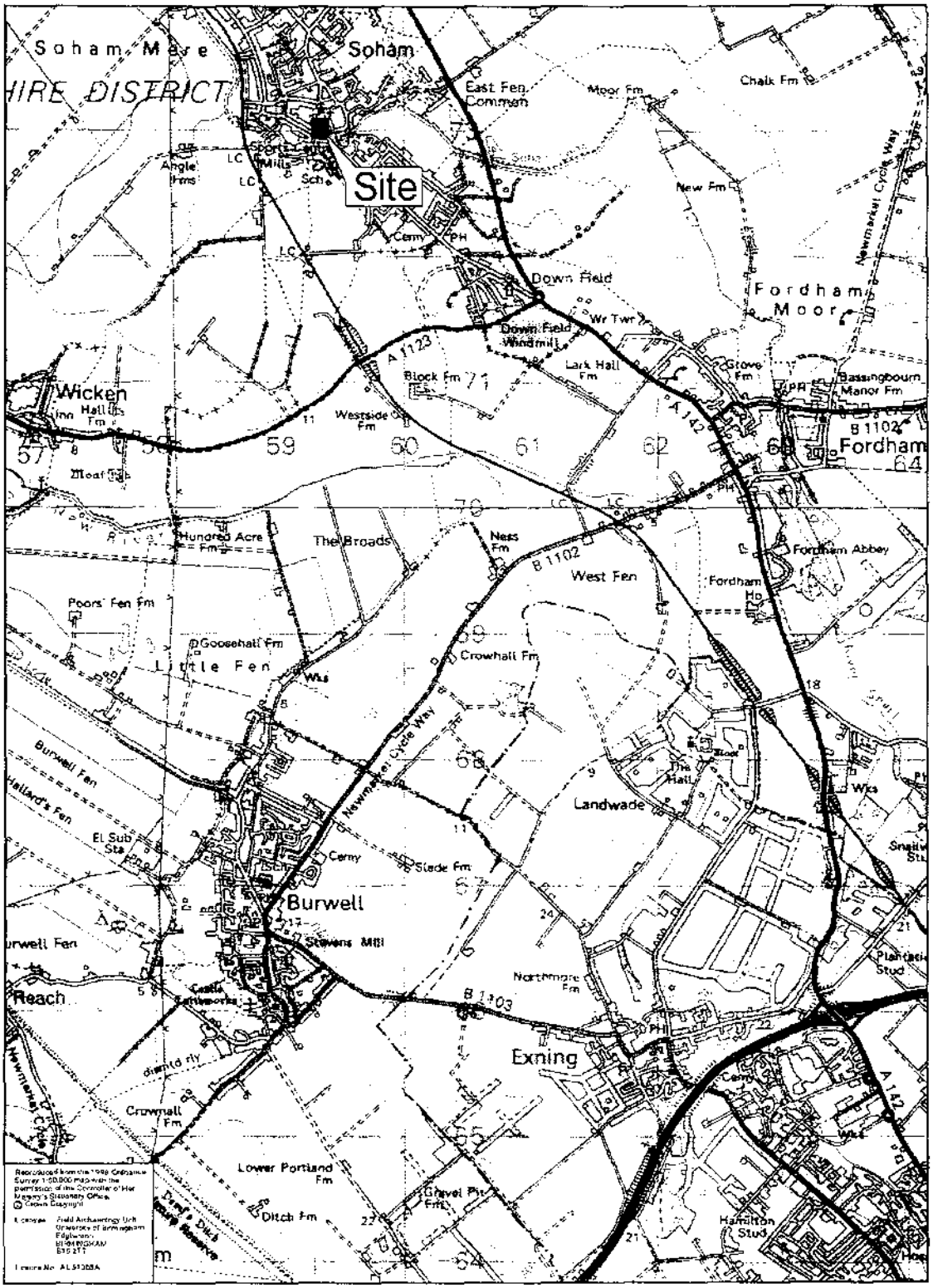
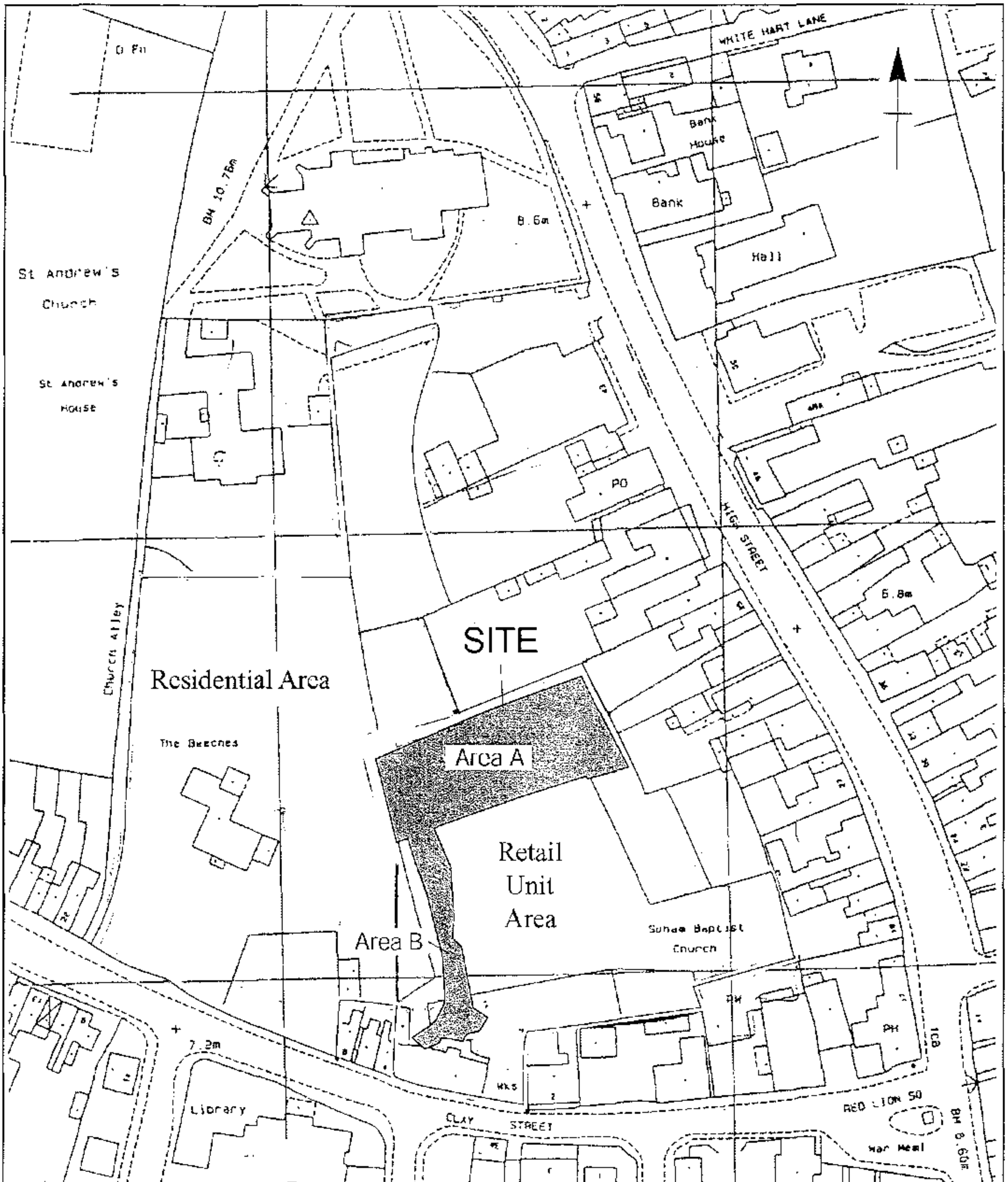

Soham Mere
Soham
East Fen Common
Moor Fm
Chalk Fm
Site
New Fm
Down Field
Fordham Moor
Down Field Windmill
Lark Hall Fm
Grove Fm
Bassingbourn Manor Fm
Wicken
Block Fm
Westside Fm
B 1102
Fordham
Hundred Acre Fm
The Broads
Ness Fm
Fordham Abbey
West Fen
Fordham Ho
Poors' Fen Fm
Goosehall Fm
Little Fen
Crowhall Fm
Burwell Fen
Landwade
El Sub Sta
Cemy
Slade Fm
Burwell
Stevens Mill
Reach
Northmore Fm
B 1103
Exning
Crowmall Fm
Lower Portland Fm
Ditch Fm
Gravel Pit Fm
Hamilton Stud
A 142

Fig.1



WHITE HART LANE
Bank House
Bank
Hall
St Andrew's Church
St Andrew's House
PO
HIGH STREET
SITE
Residential Area
Church Alley
The Beeches
Area A
Retail Unit Area
Area B
Library
CLAY STREET
RED LION SQ
War Meml

Fig.2

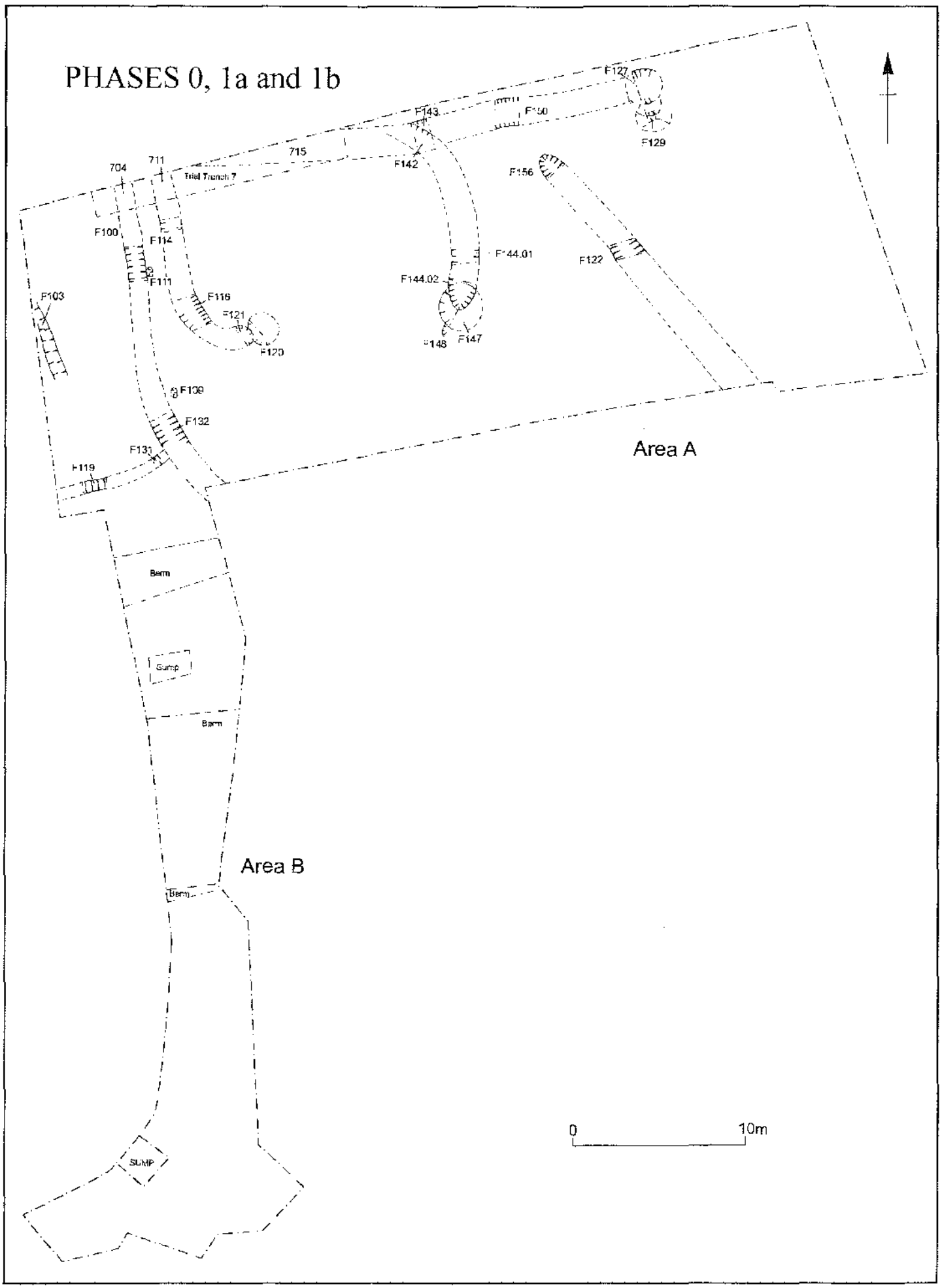

PHASES 0, 1a and 1b
704
711
715
Trial Trench 7
F100
F114
F111
F103
F116
F121
F120
F142
F143
F150
F127
F129
F156
F144.01
F144.02
F148
F147
F122
F139
F132
F131
F119
Area A
Berm
Sump
Berm
Area B
Berm
SUMP
0
10m

Fig.3

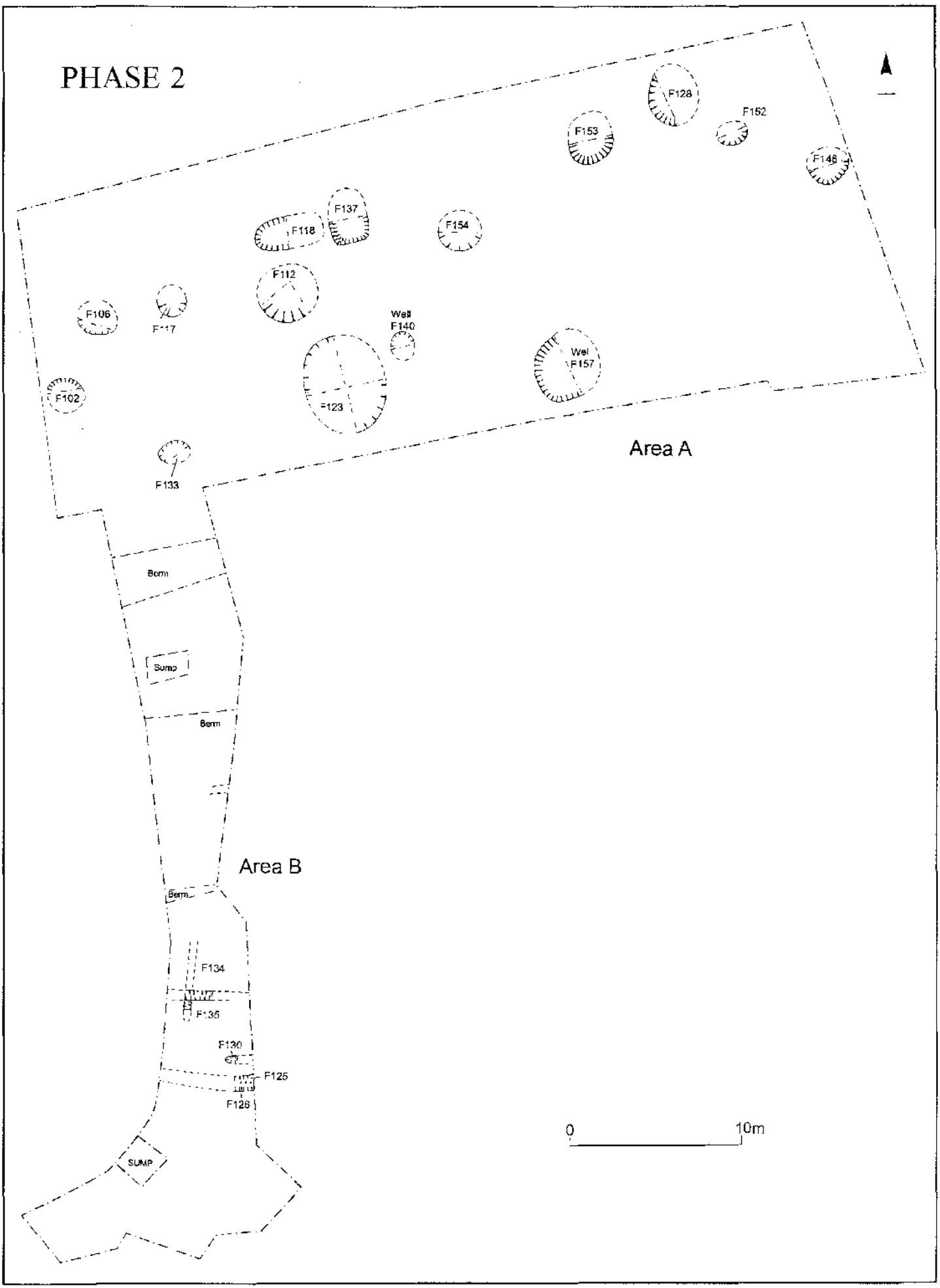

PHASE 2
F128
F152
F153
F148
F137
F118
F154
F112
F106
F117
Well
F140
Well
F157
F123
F102
F133
Area A
Berm
Sump
Berm
Area B
Berm
F134
F135
F130
F125
F126
SUMP
0
10m

Fig.4

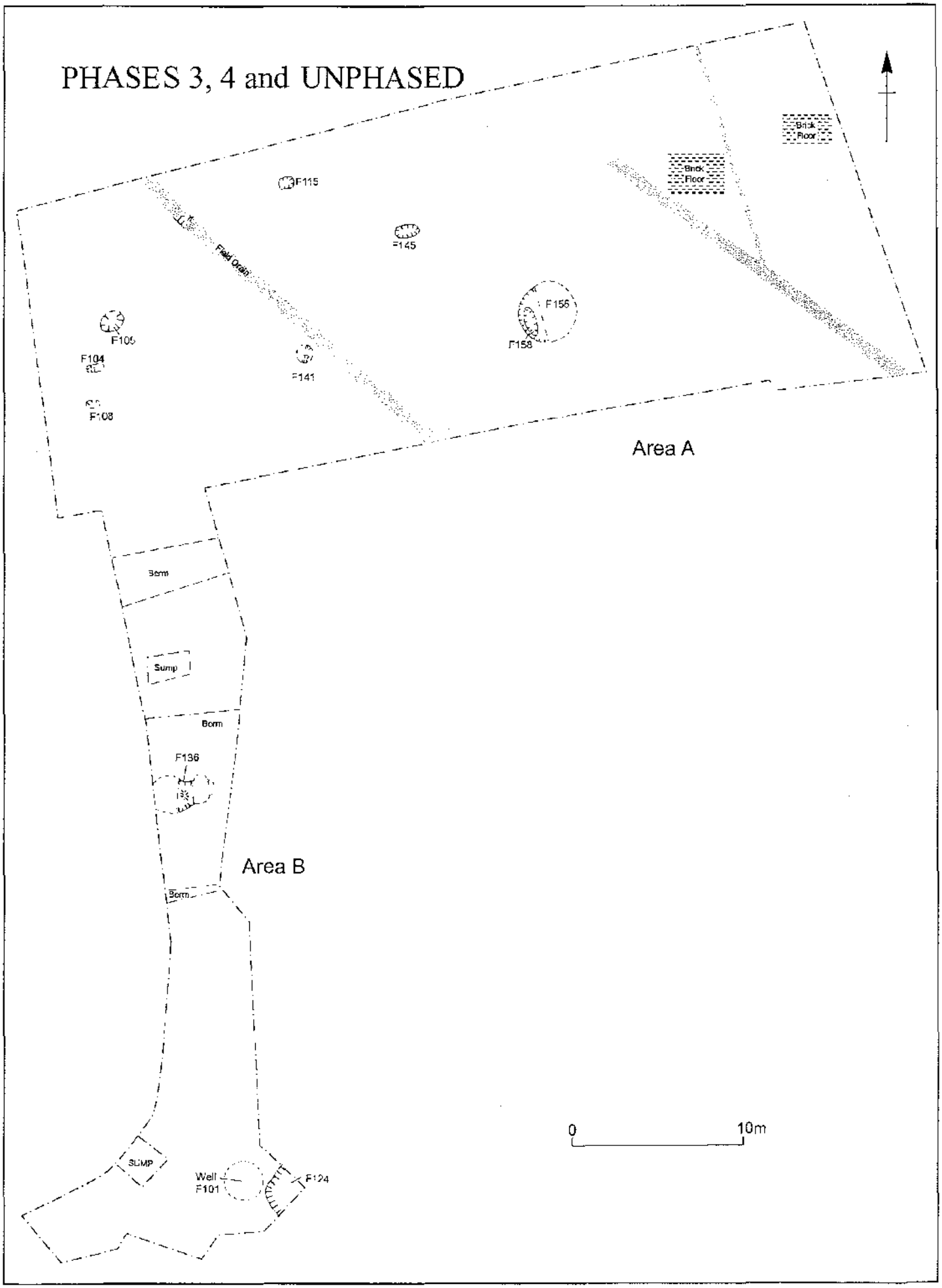

PHASES 3, 4 and UNPHASED
Brick Floor
Brick Floor
F115
F145
Field Drain
F155
F158
F105
F104
F141
F108
Area A
Berm
Sump
Berm
F136
Area B
Berm
SUMP
Well F101
F124
0
10m

Fig.5

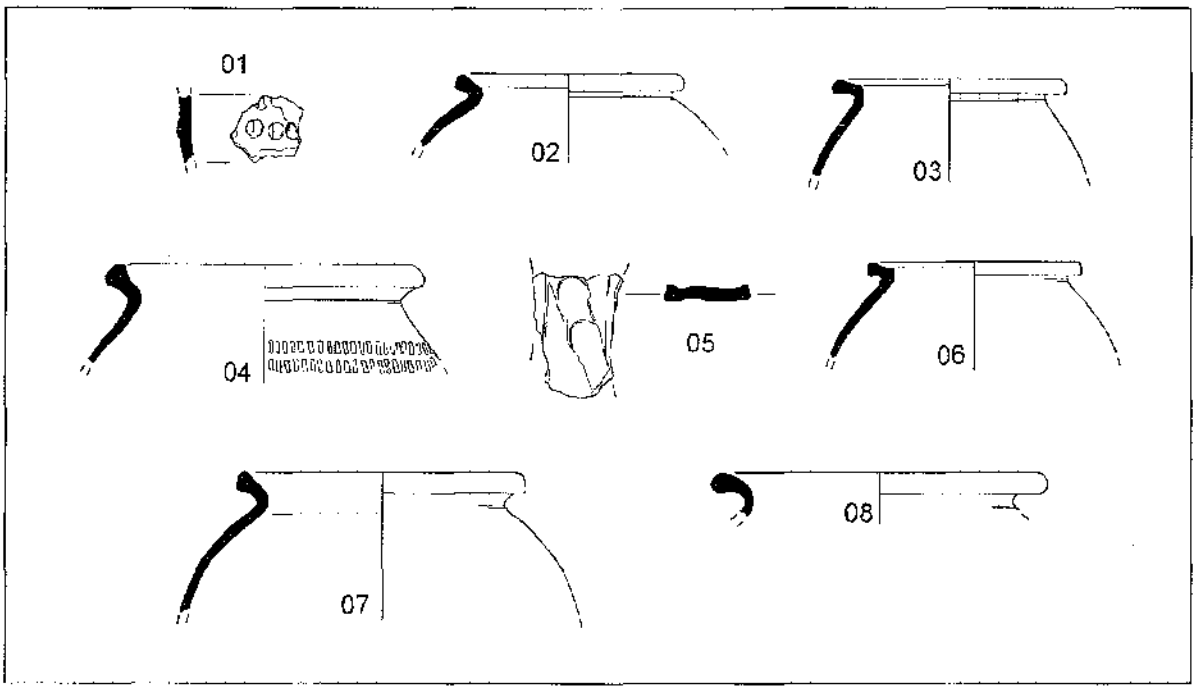


Fig.6 Phase 0, 1a and 1b pottery

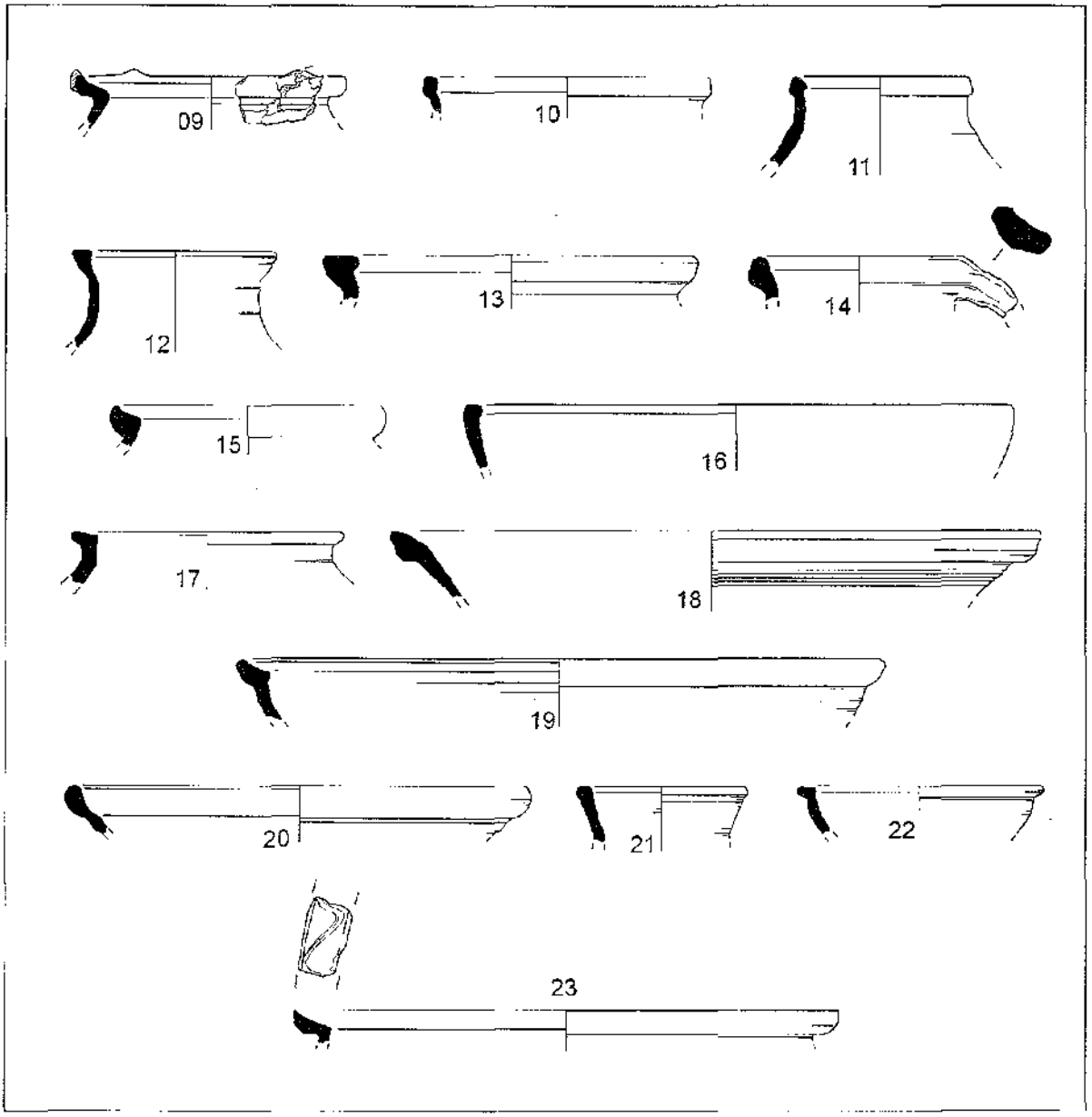


Fig.7 Phase 2 pottery

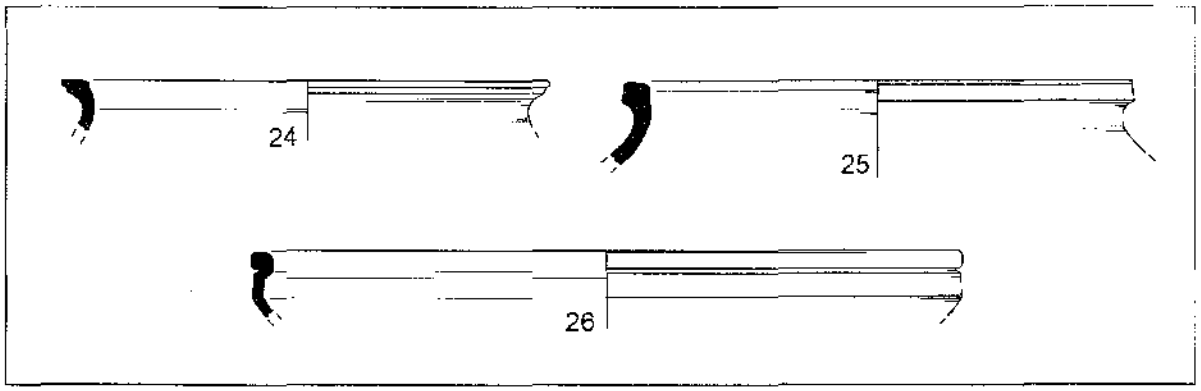


Fig.8 Phase 3 and unphased pottery