

THE FINDERN CURSUS

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AERIAL photographs recently taken by Mr. J. Pickering of Hinckley showed numerous cropmarks on the boundary of the parishes of Findern and Willington. Two parallel ditches of a *cursus* running east-west are recorded for a length of 1600 ft., and within and around this are ten ring-ditches. The largest of these are probably the ditches of round barrows, though linear features, probably enclosures, suggest that the smaller ones to the north may be a settlement site. Three-quarters of a mile south-east in the parish of Twyford is Round Hill, a mound still standing some 15 ft. high. Aerial photographs show that it is encircled by so substantial a ditch as to suggest a henge monument, with a later barrow. These two complexes should be dated to the late Neolithic and Bronze Age, and a settlement site of this date has been discovered and partly excavated within the parish of Willington nearby.¹ There was evidently considerable activity on this part of the gravel terrace to the north of the Trent at this period.

In September 1969, trial excavations on the *cursus* site were carried out by the author for the Trent Valley Archaeological Research Committee.²

These were designed to provide a guide for more extensive excavations in the event of the destruction of the site by future gravel quarrying. A trench was dug by a mechanical excavator at right angles to the line of the *cursus* (fig. 1), 70 metres long, 1.25 metres wide and .65 metres deep (approximately) to the level of the natural gravel. The sides of the trench were cleaned, and those features which were dug below the surface of the natural gravel were excavated by hand. There were four features which appeared to be ancient, the two *cursus* ditches, 38 metres apart, a third ditch running east-west within them, and a possible pit at the north end of the trench.

The two *cursus* ditches were dissimilar in profile (fig. 2). The southern one was 1.60 metres wide, and was dug .7 metres below the surface of the gravel. It had a silting of sand and gravel at the bottom with pure sand above it. The colouring of the silt was a greyish buff, in contrast to

¹ Excavations were carried out by the author in 1970 and 1971 at N.G.R. (SK 287277).

² I should like to express my thanks to the owner and tenant of Potlock Farm, Messrs. R. Webb and B. Whittaker for permission to excavate, and to Misses M. Harman, T. Hume, F. Boland, Y. Steger and all others who assisted in the excavation.

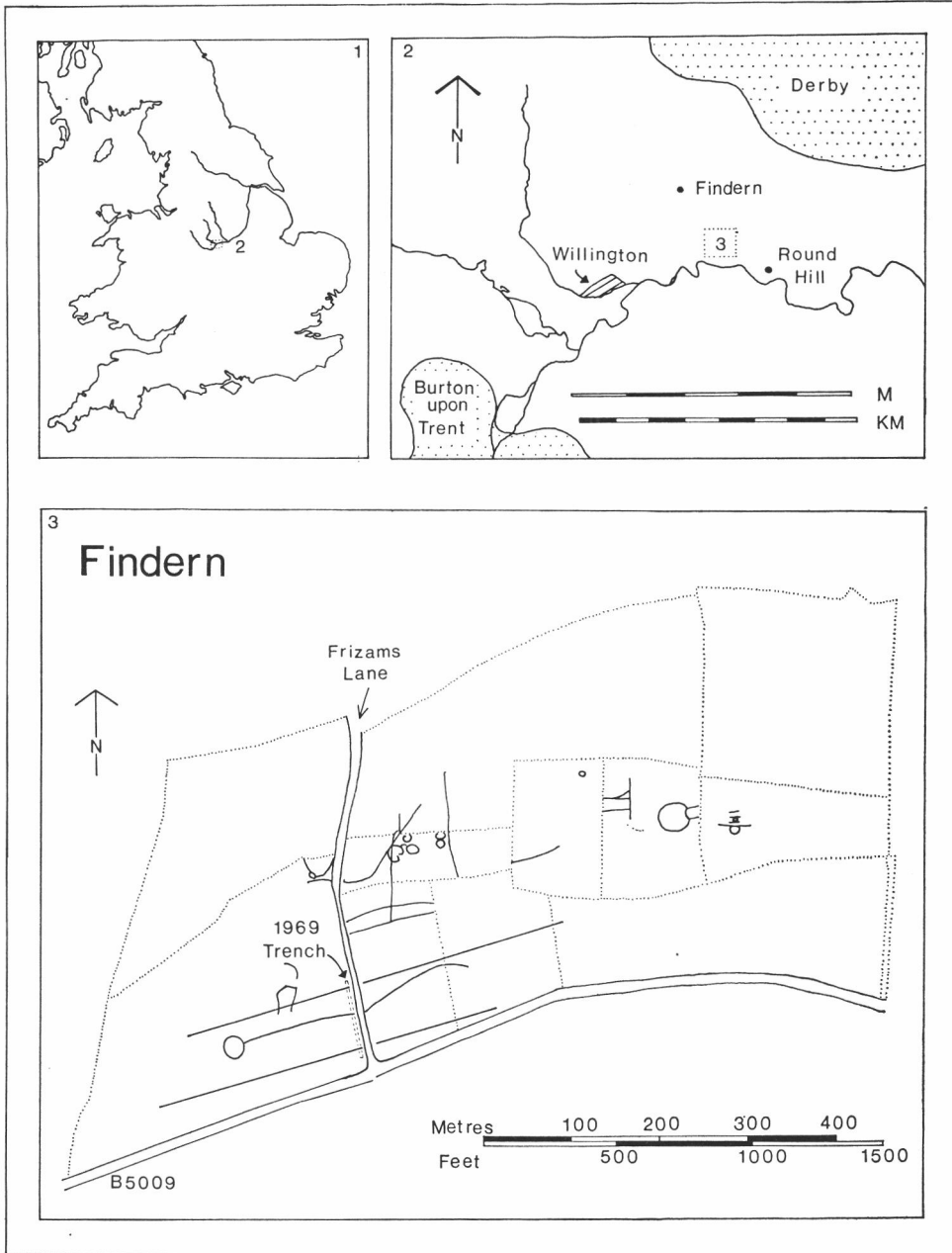
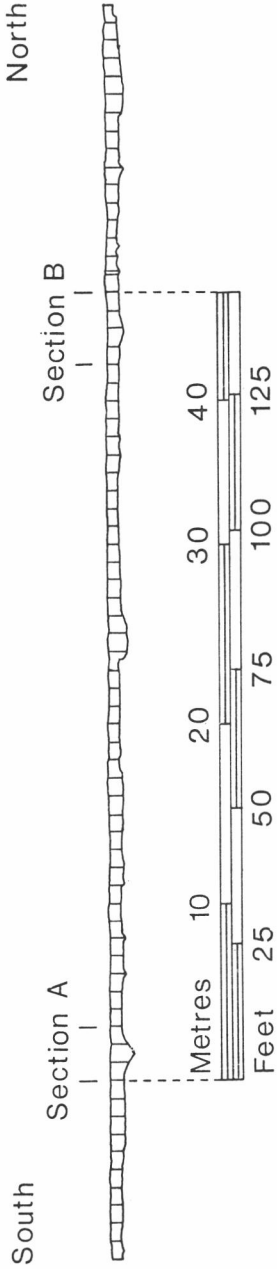


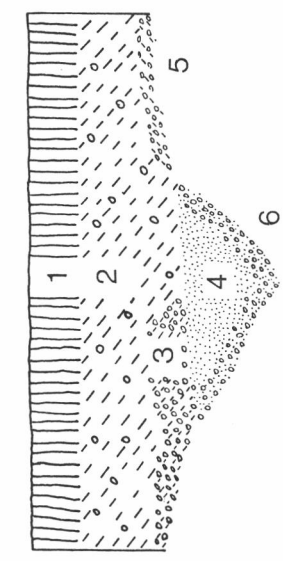
FIG. 1. Findern: location map and plan of crop-marks.

The Findern Cursus

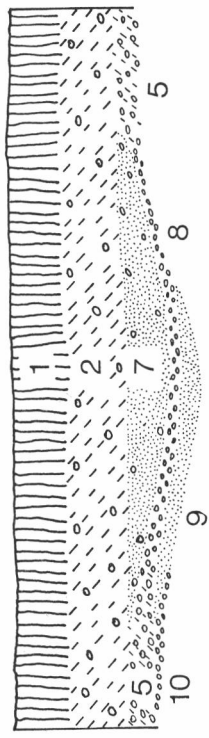
West side of 1969 trench



Section A



Section B



H.N. v.

FIG. 2. Findern: section through cursus.

the orange gravel forming the natural subsoil of the site. The ditch was V-shaped in section. The northern ditch was shallow with a more gently sloping profile. It was 2.7 metres wide, and .4 metres deeper than the gravel. It showed signs of recutting, with the lower silt of red and buff sand, belonging to the earlier phase. The recut ditch was filled with a thin layer of dirty gravel containing flecks of humus, beneath orange-yellow sand and pebbles. Both ditches appear to have silted naturally; a rapid process in the light sand and gravel, possibly hastened by flooding. There was no sign of accompanying banks on either side of the ditches, but such banks could have been completely eroded by ploughing during the last four millennia.

The ditch within the *cursus* was visible on the aerial photographs (fig. 1). Its profile was shallow, being 3.4 metres wide and dug .4 metres below the surface of the gravel. Its filling like the *cursus* ditches, was the result of natural silting, with buff-coloured gravel beneath orange and buff sand and pebbles.

To recover the plan of the pit in the northern end of the trench, an extension 2.9 metres long and 1.25 metres wide was dug. The pit was 2.7 metres long and 1.1 metres wide. The bottom was very uneven, appearing in section like three pits. The filling, however, was homogenous and consisted of a blue-grey loam with some iron panning. This was unlike any other soil encountered in the trench, and it was possibly a natural formation within the gravel.

None of the features within this trench produced any finds, nor were any found in field-walking the area covered by the photographs.