

## THE LAUNDITCH AND ITS SETTING

### Excavations at the Launditch, Beeston with Bittering, and Iron Age features and finds from its vicinity

by Trevor Ashwin and Myk Flitcroft with a contribution by Sarah Percival

#### SUMMARY

Excavations and watching briefs carried out since 1978 in advance of gravel extraction in the parishes of Longham and Beeston with Bittering have produced many prehistoric finds. Neolithic and Bronze Age material from these works has been published elsewhere (Wymer and Healy 1996, Ashwin 1998); this report concentrates on evidence for Iron Age activity.

Excavations on the line of the Launditch itself took place at the point where it intersected with the alignment of an east-to-west Roman road following present-day Salter's Lane to the east. They showed that the ditch was uninterrupted and that the fully-infilled feature had been sealed by a gravel road foundation. This deposit was not dated conclusively: while it may have been of Romano-British date it could be more recent since a road following the Roman alignment is prominent on a series of historic maps. Further excavations immediately to the east of the Launditch, however, revealed a parallel fence or palisade located approximately 25m distant. Individual component post-holes produced Iron Age pottery, while the fence/palisade seems to have been associated with two four-post structures of characteristically Iron Age type. These discoveries are important in the light of recent suggestions that the Launditch and other linear earthworks of west Norfolk were constructed in the Iron Age, rather than (as previously supposed) in the sub-Roman period (Davies 1996).

Rescue excavation and watching briefs maintained on large-scale quarrying in the area further to the east of the Launditch recorded a scatter of features indicating episodes of activity at various times in the mid-later 1st millennium BC. These included isolated pits and pit groups, a single four-post structure and a small square-ditched enclosure. A solitary pit had also been cut into a natural mound which may have been used for ritual or ceremonial purposes during the 3rd millennium BC. An important and varied assemblage of Iron Age pottery was retrieved. No evidence for subsequent activity or occupation was recorded.

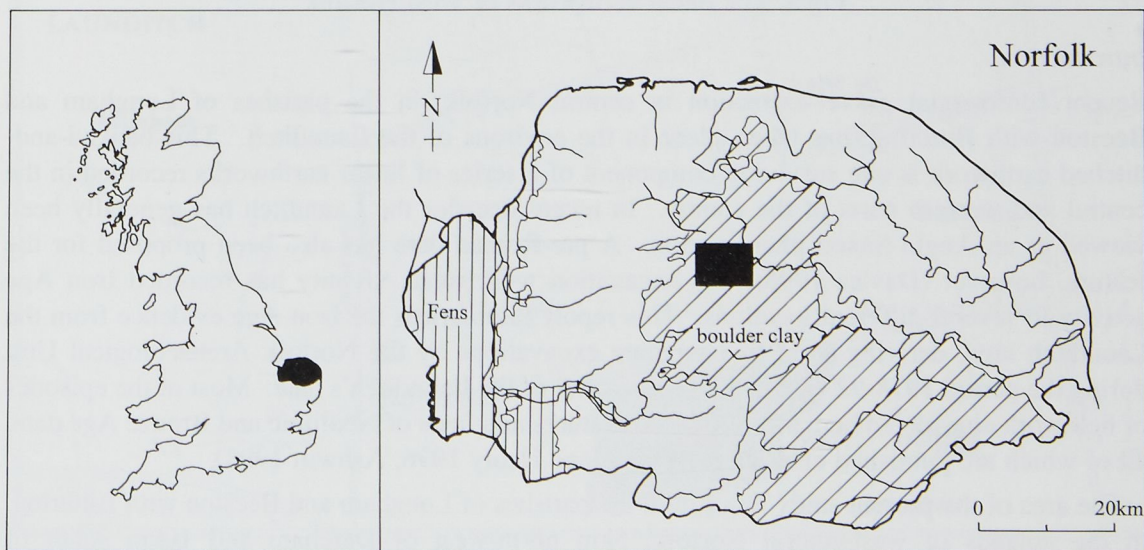


Fig.1 Map of Norfolk, showing location of Fig. 3



## Introduction

(Figs 1-5)

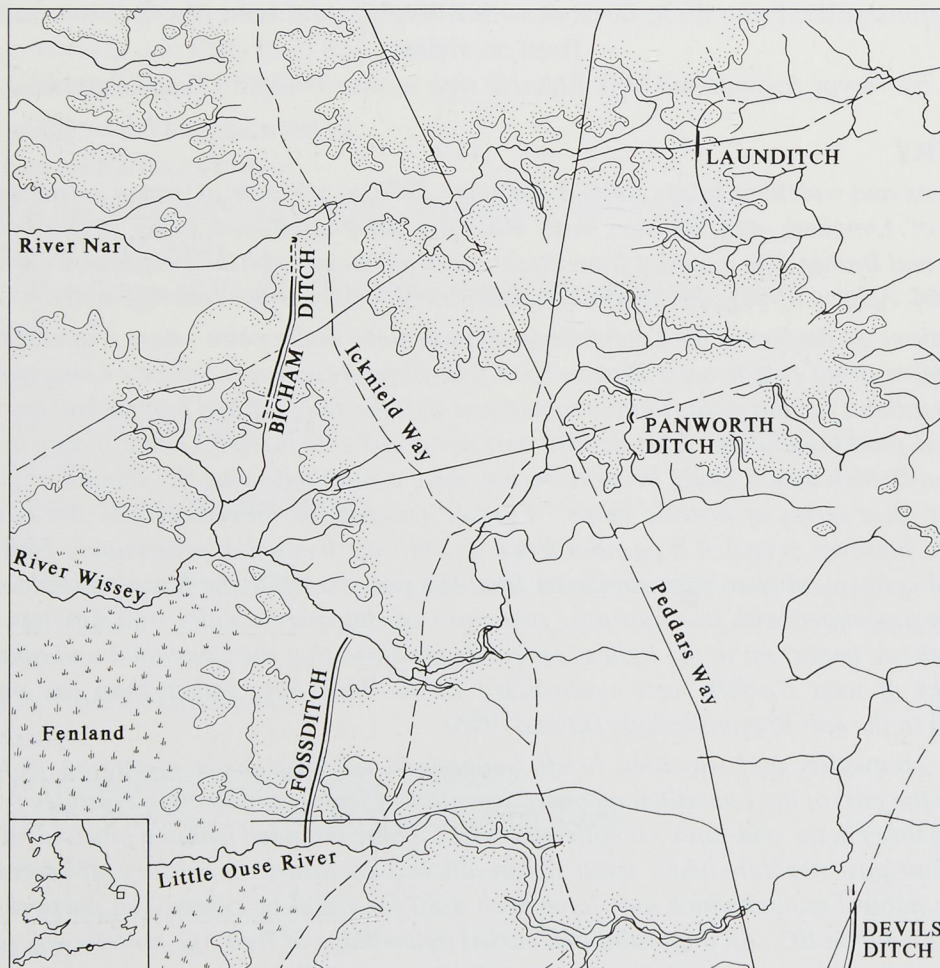


Fig.2 The linear earthworks of West Norfolk

### *Introduction*

Recent commercial gravel-extraction in central Norfolk, in the parishes of Longham and Beeston with Bittering, has taken place in the environs of the Launditch. This banked-and-ditched earthwork is one surviving component of a series of linear earthworks recorded in the central and western parts of the county. In recent decades the Launditch has generally been viewed as an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. A pre-Roman date has also been proposed for the feature, however (Davies 1996), and excavation work in its vicinity has recorded Iron Age activity in several different locations. This report summarises the Iron Age evidence from the Launditch area, deriving from five separate excavations by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit during the period 1978-92, and debates the matter of the Launditch's date. Most of the episodes of fieldwork considered here also produced features and finds of Neolithic and Bronze Age date, all of which are published elsewhere (Wymer and Healy 1996, Ashwin 1998).

The area of the present study lies within the parishes of Longham and Beeston with Bittering, in the uplands of west-central Norfolk, 5km north-west of Dereham and 10km south of Fakenham. Lying mostly at an elevation in excess of 30m OD it is situated on the central Norfolk



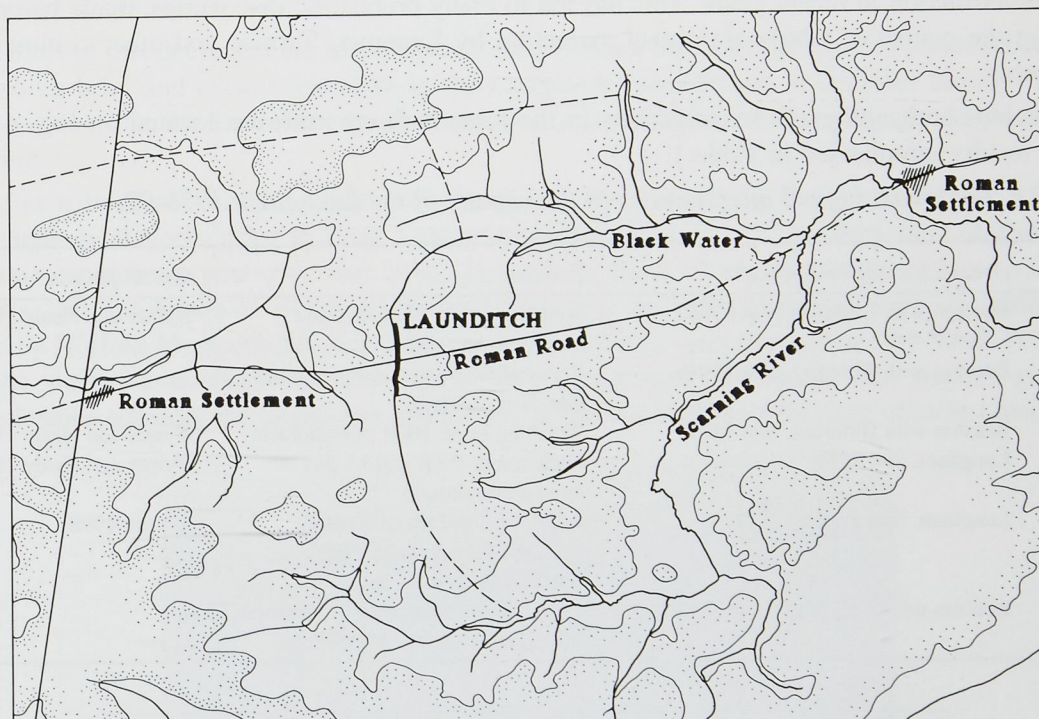


Fig.3 The Launditch and its setting

watershed, an upland zone which separates the drainage systems of the east-flowing Rivers Yare and Wensum from those of the Nar and Wissey which discharge westwards into the Wash.

The various sites lie on a low, eastward-protruding gravel spur at an elevation of c. 60m OD. While the central till plateau of 'High Norfolk' is dominated by heavy Boulder Clays, localised surface deposits of sand and gravel outwash do occur within it. Longham and Bittering lie within one such inclusion in the area to the north and north-west of Dereham which has seen extensive

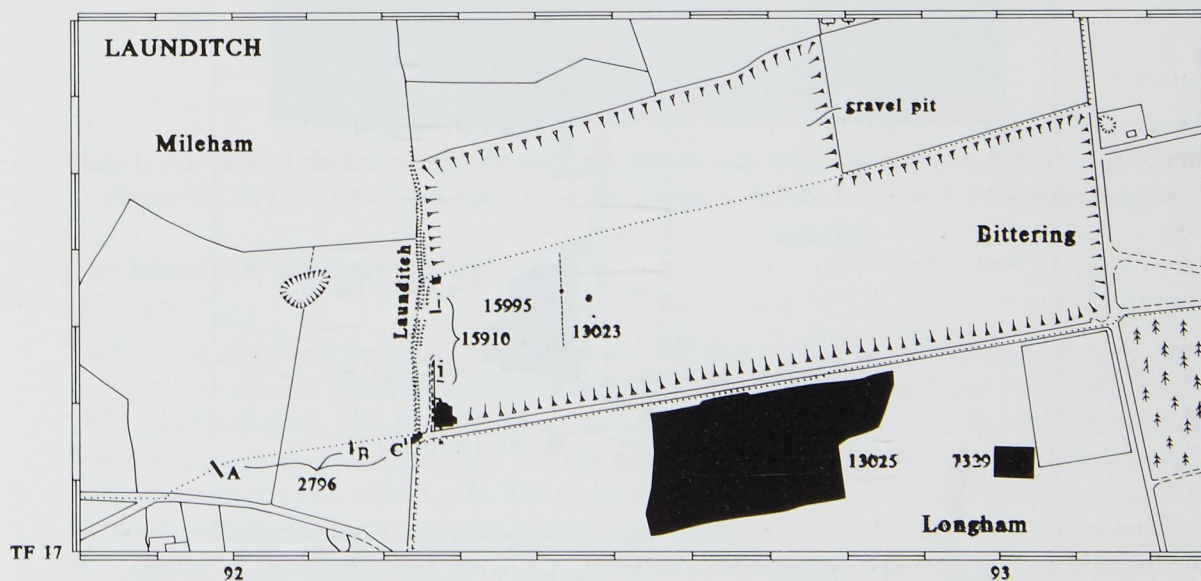


Fig.4 Excavations and watching briefs in the vicinity of the Launditch, 1978-92



gravel-extraction in recent years. This has led to many prehistoric discoveries, made before or during the course of wholesale gravel extraction by Ennemix, Tarmac and other commercial concerns.

Previous archaeological investigations in the Launditch environs are located on Fig. 4 and their results summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Archaeological interventions in the vicinity of the Launditch, 1978-92

<i>date</i>	<i>civil parish, SMR reference</i>	<i>summary</i>	<i>Neo/BA finds published</i>
1978	Beeston with Bittering, Site 13023	Watching brief: BKR, BA and IA pits and artefacts	Wymer and Healy 1996
1980	Beeston with Bittering, Site 15910	Excavation: IA pits and post-holes, incl. N-S 'palisade'	
1980	Beeston with Bittering, Site 15995	Watching brief: BKR pits/artefacts	Wymer and Healy 1996
1985	Longham, Site 7239	Excavation: BKR and IA pits cut into natural mound	Wymer and Healy 1996
1990	Longham, Site 13025	Watching Brief and excavation: NEO, BKR, BA and IA pits etc., small IA enclosure	Ashwin 1998
1992	Beeston with Bittering, Sites 2796, 7235	Excavation: cutting into the Launditch at its junction with Salter's Lane	

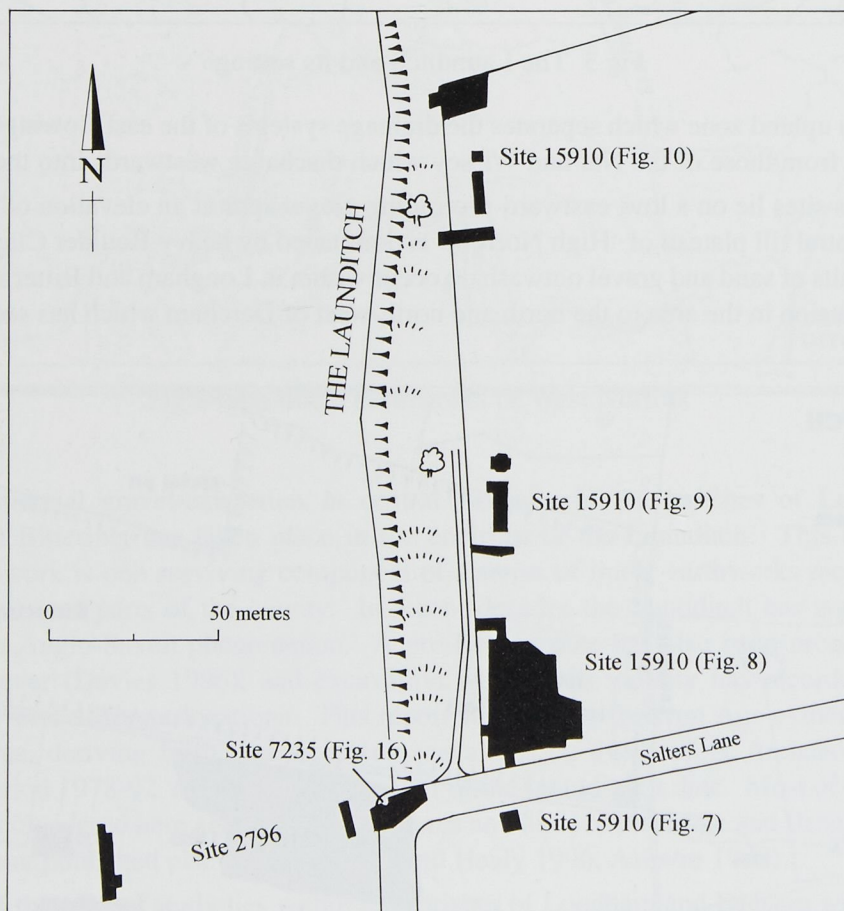


Fig.5 Excavations and watching briefs in the vicinity of the Launditch: detail showing location of excavation areas at Sites 2796, 7235 and 15910



*Structure of the report*

The aims of this document are to summarise the evidence for Iron Age activity collected during watching brief and excavation work in the Launditch vicinity, and to consider closely recent suggestions that the Launditch itself originated as a prehistoric rather than an Anglo-Saxon feature.

After a brief account of previous research into the Launditch, the results of the various archaeological works listed in Table 1 are described in the order in which they were undertaken. These accounts are generally very brief, particularly those of the watching-brief and salvage works, and full details of all features and artefacts may be found in the site archives which are held by Norfolk Museums Service. They are followed by a synthetic account by Sarah Percival of the various assemblages of Iron Age pottery which were recovered. The paper's general conclusions consider the likely date and context of the Launditch in the light of recent research.



Plate 1 Air view of the Launditch, showing the intersection with Salter's Lane, looking south-east.  
*Photo: TF 9217/V/AYX7 (26 April 1984) by Derek A. Edwards, Norfolk Museums Service*

### **The Launditch: previous research**

(Figs 2-5)

Linear earthworks are dominant features in several parts of the East Anglian landscape, with well-known series of dykes recorded in Cambridgeshire (Fleam Ditch, Brent Ditch and Devil's Dyke) and in Suffolk (the Black Ditches) as well as in Norfolk. In central and west Norfolk, five major linear earthworks appear to form two discontinuous 'bands' aligned approximately north-to-south (Davies 1996, fig.9). The more westerly of these two broad alignments is marked by the Fossditch and the Bichamditch, both east-facing, banked-and-ditched features crossing the interfluvial areas separating the rivers Little Ouse, Wissey and Nar. The Panworth Ditch and the Launditch, further to the east, both faced westwards and were sited across elevated parts of



the central Norfolk watershed. In the south of the county the Devil's Ditch at Garboldisham is a similar feature.

All four ditches were described and discussed by Peter Wade-Martins (1974), who suggested that they dated to the post-Roman period. John Davies, however (1996), has proposed more recently that they formed a previously-unrecognised example of an Iron Age entrenchment system of a kind recorded in other parts of Britain. Well-known examples have been recorded adjacent to areas of intensive Iron Age occupation elsewhere in southern England, notably near Chichester, Colchester, Verulamium and Bagendon (Darvill 1987, 127; Davies 1996, 75-7). Excavation, research and air-photograph analysis continues to identify possible examples in the English Midlands, however (*eg.* The Hobditch, nr. Henley-in-Arden, Warks: Cracknell and Hingley 1995). The true geographical distribution of these features may not yet be fully appreciated, especially since many examples may be lost or completely obscured.

The course of the Launditch has been described in detail by Wade-Martins (1974). It may be traced over a distance of *c.* 6km across the high clay plateau of central Norfolk and comprised a single bank-and-ditch, with the ditch facing west. Much of the earthwork has been destroyed, although the northern and southern parts of its route may both be inferred from the evidence of field boundaries, antiquarian observations and crop-marks. The Launditch appears to run in an arc between the headwaters of two small east-flowing rivers, thereby defining an area of land extending eastwards towards their confluences. Only a short length of the dyke remains visible today, surviving as a shallow ditch on either side of the point at which it intersects with the line of an east-to-west Roman road, Salter's Lane. This road, traceable intermittently from the Roman small town of Brampton in the east of the county to the Fen Causeway at Denver in west Norfolk, would have been one of Roman Norfolk's most important routeways. A length of the associated bank survives in woodland immediately to the north of the road intersection; to the south of Salter's Lane it has been destroyed.

The bank-and-ditch appears to have been constructed most substantially in the area to either side of the intersection with the Roman road line and was apparently a relatively small-scale feature elsewhere. A series of post-medieval maps depict a road following the Roman alignment both to the east and west of the Launditch. A map of Longham of *c.* 1595 represents Salter's Lane and shows it continuing west of the Launditch; a map of Longham manor (*c.* 1700-25) shows Salter's Lane, the line of the Launditch and the beginning of the road's western continuation. Faden's 1797 map of Norfolk shows this area as Longham Common. It depicts Salter's Lane continuing across the Launditch and following the present parish boundary down to the Litcham road. On the Beeston and Longham enclosure award maps of 1814 it is shown just west of the Launditch as Heath Lane; on the corresponding map for Mileham (also 1814) this lane is shown continuing from the Launditch westward to the Beeston road junction.

Prior to 1992 the Launditch itself had seen one previous excavation, having been sectioned by J.M. Lewis for the Ministry of Works in 1954 in advance of the removal of some of the surviving parts of the bank (Lewis 1957). Lewis excavated trenches across the earthworks in the vicinity of the Roman road intersection and to the north. He recorded sections across the bank and ditch and attempted to determine the relationship between the roadline and the dyke. His excavations showed that the ditch had originally been around 7m wide and 2m deep with steeply-sloping sides and a flat base; the excavated ditch material had been used to build the adjacent bank. A smaller, earlier ditch was also observed running along the outer (*ie.* western) edge of the main ditch. During investigations at the junction between the Roman road and the Launditch the ditch was seen to continue without interruption, with an 'early road' overlying its siltings (Lewis 1957, 423). This was interpreted as a relatively modern feature, the excavator concluding that



the Launditch had probably (although not certainly) removed all traces of the Roman road itself. The only finds from the 1954 excavation came from this trench, five very small sherds of pottery being found 1ft 6ins – 2ft above the ditch bottom. These sherds were dated by Lewis to the 7th-9th century, but were later reclassified by Wade-Martins (1974, 31) as medieval pieces probably dating to the 14th century.

### Excavations at Bittering Quarry, 1978 (Sites 13023 and 15995)

(Figs 4 and 6)

Watching brief and salvage excavation operations were undertaken in response to gravel-quarrying to the north of Salter's Lane, a large area to the east of the Launditch being stripped of topsoil in a series of operations by Tarmac (Wymer and Healy 1996).

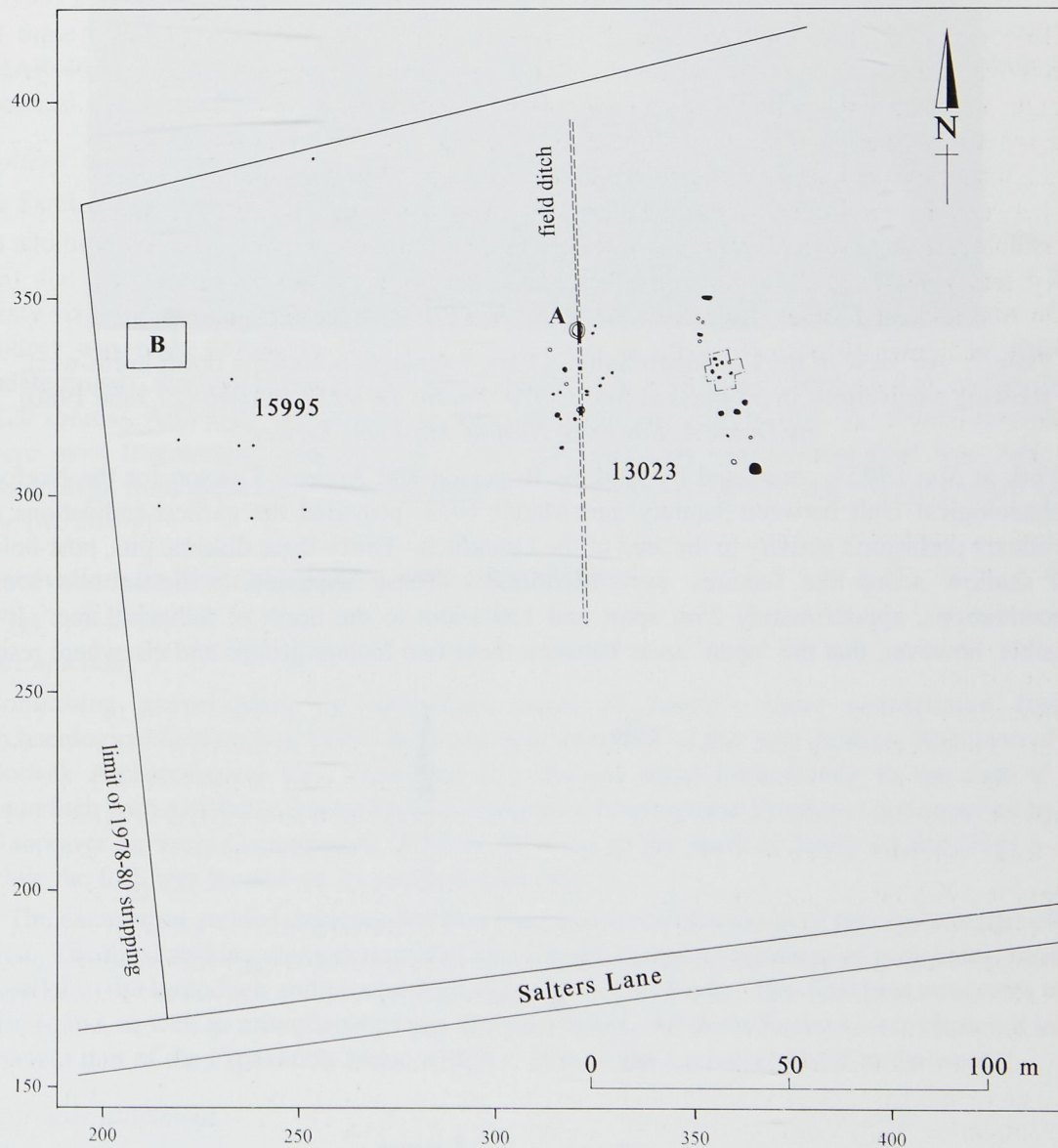


Fig.6 Bittering Site 13023 (1978): Iron Age features (black) located during watching brief. Location of features at Site 15995 shown schematically. Features published in Wymer and Healy 1996: A (ring-gully 48); B (area of Beaker pits 1-9/11)





Plate 2. Air view of the Launditch/Salter's Lane intersection, looking north-north-west, showing excavations in progress at Site 15910. *Photo: TF 9217/F/APA6 (27 June 1980) by Derek A. Edwards, Norfolk Museums Service*

Work at *Site 13023*, conducted by Andrew Rogerson and Andrew Lawson for the Norfolk Archaeological Unit between January and March 1978, provided the earliest indications of significant prehistoric activity in the area of the Launditch. Thirty-three discrete pits, post-holes and shallow scoop-like features were identified. These appeared to lie in two loose concentrations, approximately 25m apart and 120-160m to the north of Salter's Lane. It is possible, however, that the 'open' areas between these two feature groups and elsewhere result

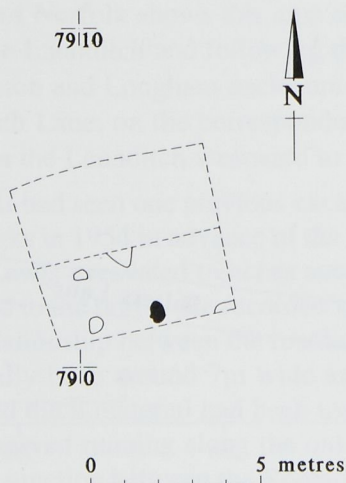


Fig.7 Bittering Site 15910 (1980): Iron Age features excavated to the south of Salter's Lane. For location see Fig. 5 (Features containing IA pottery – black)



from poor conditions for observation during the watching brief, or lack of monitoring opportunities, rather than a real absence of evidence.

The westernmost of the two feature groups was bisected by a north-to-south ditch; this was probably a field boundary of relatively recent date. At least two pits, along with a small sub-circular 'ring-gully', contained sherds of Beaker and coarse Bronze Age pottery. These are fully described by Wymer and Healy, and are probably of Neolithic or Bronze Age date (Wymer and Healy 1996, 36-40). Twenty-four other features containing Iron Age pottery, however, indicated occupation here in the 1st millennium BC as well. Most of these were unremarkable subcircular or ovate cuts, usually varying between 0.15m and 0.4m in depth, although a single large shaft-like pit on the south-eastern edge of the group was excavated to a depth of 2.75m.

Salvage excavation later in 1980 during topsoil removal in the area further to the west (*Site 15995*) led to the discovery of several more pits (Wymer and Healy 1996, 40-1). While some of these contained Beaker pottery, associated with radiocarbon dates of 2130-1690 cal. BC (HAR-4636, 3540±70 BP) and 2460-1970 cal. BC (HAR-4637, 3790±80 BP), no Iron Age material was found.

### *Pottery*

by Sarah Percival

In addition to the Neolithic and Bronze Age material from the site (Wymer and Healy 1996, 40-53), the watching brief at Site 13023 also produced 1482 Iron Age sherds weighing 8.5kg. Sixty-six per cent of all sherds (909) were retrieved from pit-like features. The remainder of the pottery was from post-holes (150 sherds), the fills of the north-to-south ditch (13 sherds), indeterminate shallow features (188 sherds) and from unstratified cleaning and surface finds (220 sherds). Although 79% of pottery was collected from feature fills, the sherds themselves were most fragmentary and abraded. This collection, the largest individual Iron Age site assemblage from these interventions, appears to have been relatively 'late' in typological terms (below, 248-9).

### **Excavations at Bittering Quarry, 1980 (Site 15910)**

(Figs 4, 5, 7-10)

#### *Introduction*

Continuing gravel-quarrying operations north of Salter's Lane necessitated further archaeological fieldwork in 1980. Between April and June of that year Andrew Rogerson of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit excavated five discrete areas immediately to the east of the Launditch with assistance from a Special Temporary Employment Program team supplied by the Manpower Services Commission. Four of these lay to the north of Salter's Lane (Figs 8-10), while the fifth was located on its southern side (Fig.7).

The excavation yielded evidence for Iron Age activity across much of the western part of the area. The most striking element recorded was a north-to-south alignment of post-holes, running parallel to the Launditch and around 20m to the east of its bank. Two four-post structures were also found, as well as miscellaneous pits and post-holes. All these features were clustered in the western part of the excavation areas, within c. 30m of the Launditch itself to the west.

#### *Post-hole alignment*

(Figs 7-10)

This feature could be traced over a distance of at least 110m, and probably extended further to both north and south. A total of 94 recorded post-holes clearly formed part of the feature. No



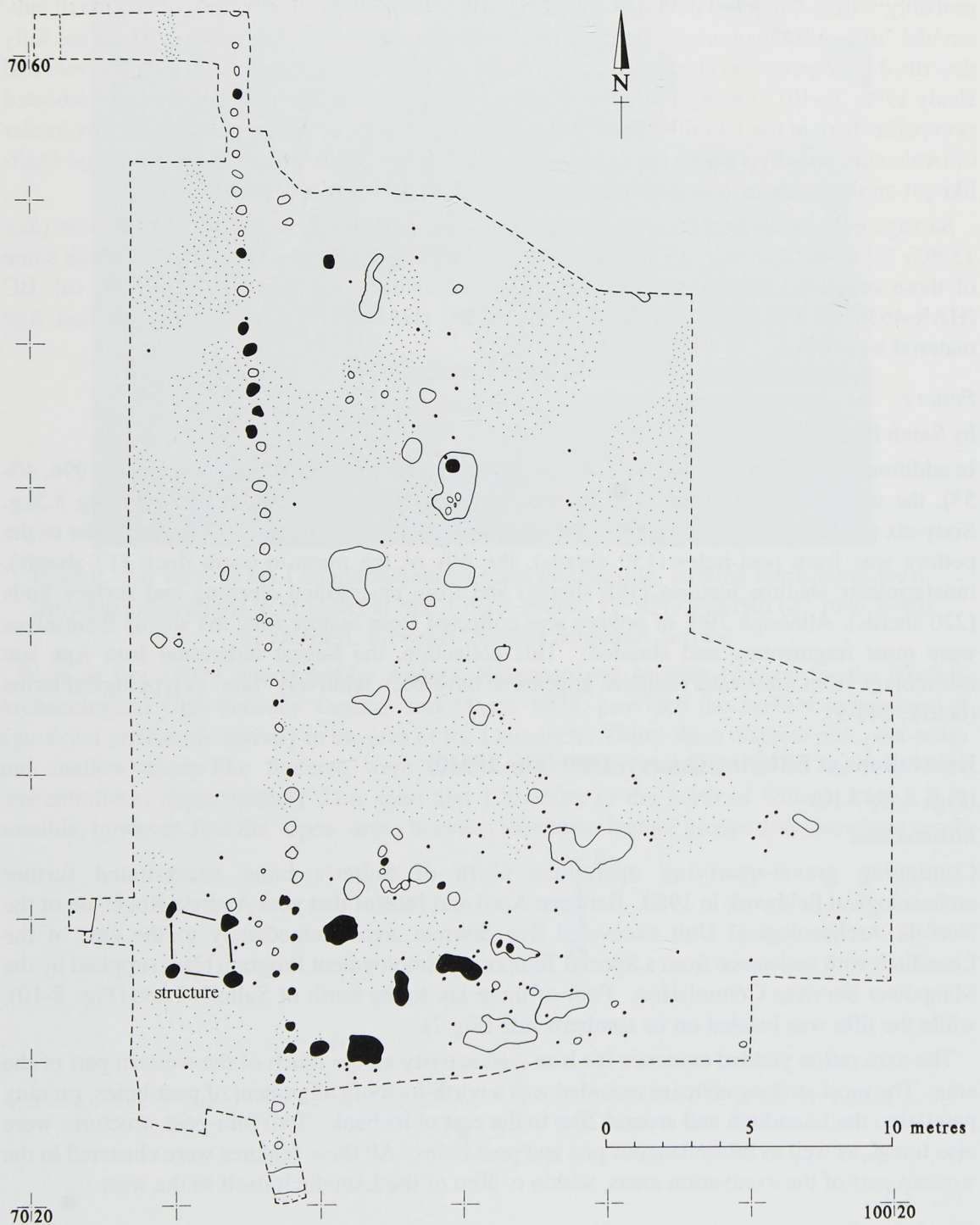


Fig. 8 Bittering Site 15910 (1980): Iron Age features excavated to the north of Salter's Lane.  
 (Features containing IA pottery – black; natural hollows/subsoil patches – stippled;  
 unstratified IA sherd findspots indicated).



evidence for any break or terminus was found within the excavation areas. It appeared to form a boundary or fence line. Its shared alignment with the Launditch only *c.* 25m further to the west implies that the two features were in some way related. Twenty of the post-holes excavated to the north of Salter's Lane produced sherds of Iron Age pottery (below, 248). No other datable artefacts were collected.

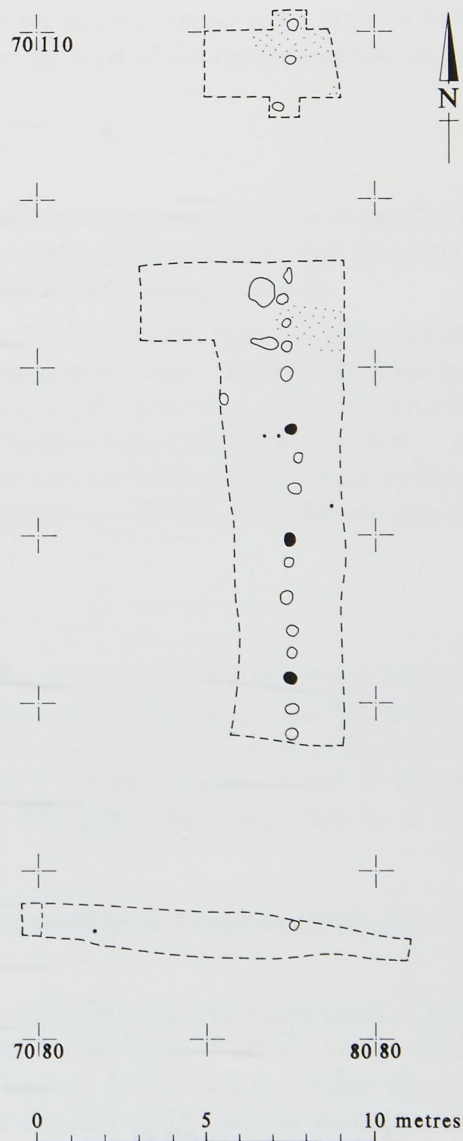


Fig. 9 Bittering Site 15910 (1980): Iron Age features excavated to the north of Salter's Lane.

#### *Four-post structures*

(Figs 7 and 8)

A group of four post-holes excavated in the area between the post-hole line and the Launditch itself was interpreted as the remains of a four-post structure, of a type often found on later prehistoric sites (Fig. 8). This was slightly trapezoidal in plan and measuring *c.* 2.5m x 2.5m. It shared the rough orientation of the post-hole line, its eastern side lying *c.* 2m to the west of



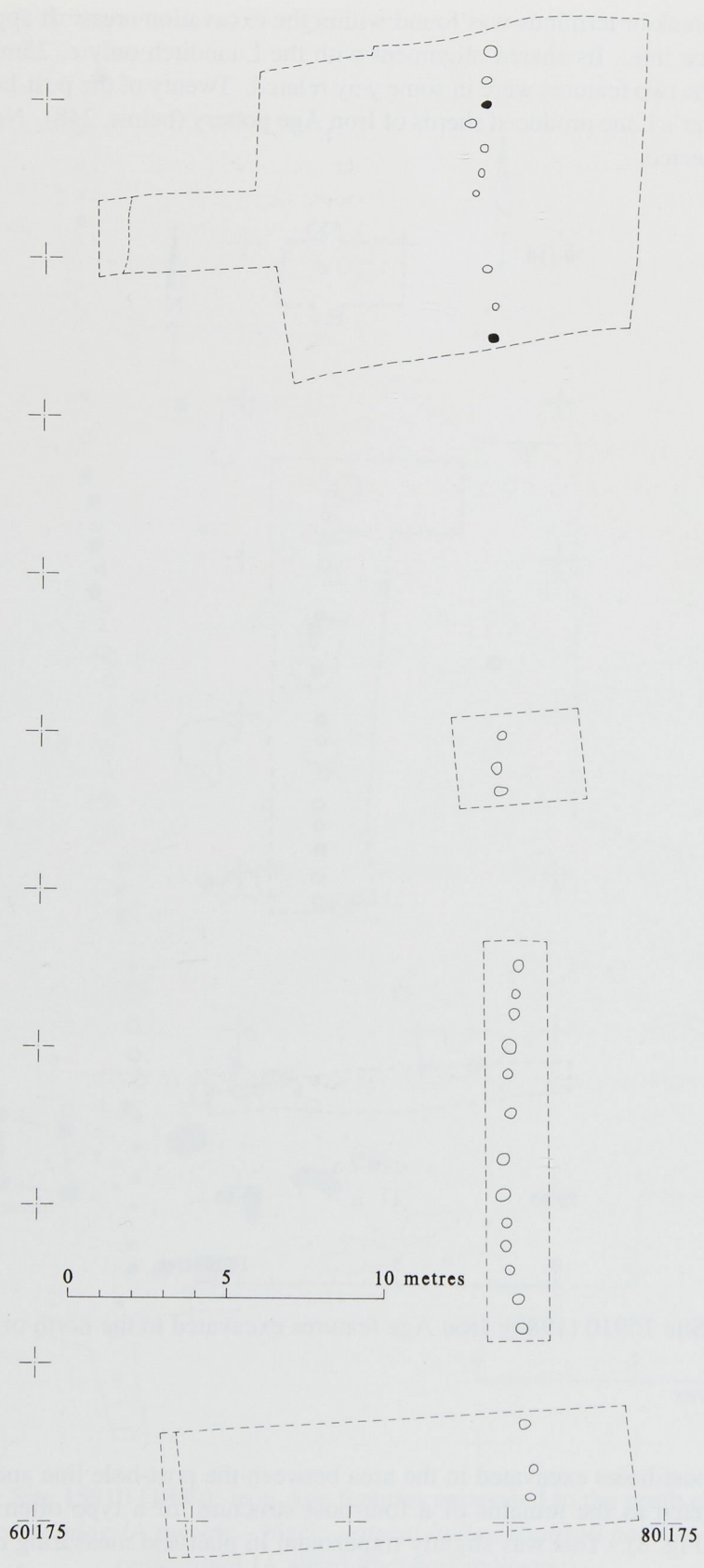


Fig. 10 Bittering Site 15910 (1980): Iron Age features excavated to the north of Salter's Lane.



the palisade. Six further small post-holes were located between the putative structure and the post-hole line. Iron Age sherds were recovered from all of the post-holes of the structure, although not in any quantity.

A group of post-holes encountered in the single small trench excavated to the south of Salter's Lane (Fig. 7) might represent another four-post structure, somewhat irregular in plan and measuring roughly 2m square. This interpretation remains uncertain, especially given the small size of the trench itself. Like the larger example to the north of Salter's Lane, however, it would also have lain immediately to the west of the (predicted) line of the 'fence'.

#### *Other pits and post-holes*

(Fig.8)

A small number of additional features were recorded in the area to the west of the post-hole line. These included a shallow pit and a small post-hole both lying 9m to the north of the four-post structure. None of these contained any dating evidence.

To the east of the post-hole line two further loose groupings of features were identified. At the southern end of the main excavation area, opposite the four-post structure, a collection of thirteen post-holes and a single pit were excavated. No obvious structural layout could be discerned, and only four of the post-holes produced any pottery. Somewhat to the north of this group lay five further pits and ten post-holes, two of which produced pottery. Unstratified finds of Iron Age sherds were dispersed across this more easterly area (Fig. 8).

#### *Pottery*

by Sarah Percival

A total of 359 sherds (1220g) was recovered from excavations immediately to the east of the Launditch. While most of these were unstratified finds, 100 sherds were recovered from the fills of post-holes; one other sherd came from a fill of an infilled ditch flanking Salter's Lane. Two individual post-holes produced assemblages of 29 and 35 sherds respectively, but no larger feature groups were found. The assemblage may well be of relatively early Iron Age date (below, 248).

#### **The 'Longham mound': excavations at Longham, 1985 (Site 7239)**

(Figs 11 and 12)

The expansion of gravel-quarrying into the area to the south of Salter's Lane in 1985 threatened the destruction of a low mound (Site 7239) at TF 9312 1713 which was thought most likely to be a mutilated Bronze Age barrow. Excavation to confirm this was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit in June and July 1985, with the assistance of a small Manpower Services Commission team, under the direction of John Wymer (Fig.11). At the same time a large area immediately to the north-east of the mound was stripped of topsoil in advance of quarrying; this revealed a small number of isolated prehistoric features (Fig.12).

The circumstances and results of the excavation, including details of the Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery and lithic finds, have been recounted in detail elsewhere (Wymer and Healy 1996). Although the mound was demonstrably of natural origin, it had seen the careful 'burial' of two Beakers. Charcoal from a pit which cut one of these deposits produced a radiocarbon age-range of 2550-2060 cal. BC (HAR-8520; 3870±70 BC). An Iron Age pit had also been cut into the mound, while four more were recorded in the adjacent area of topsoil-stripping to the north-east.



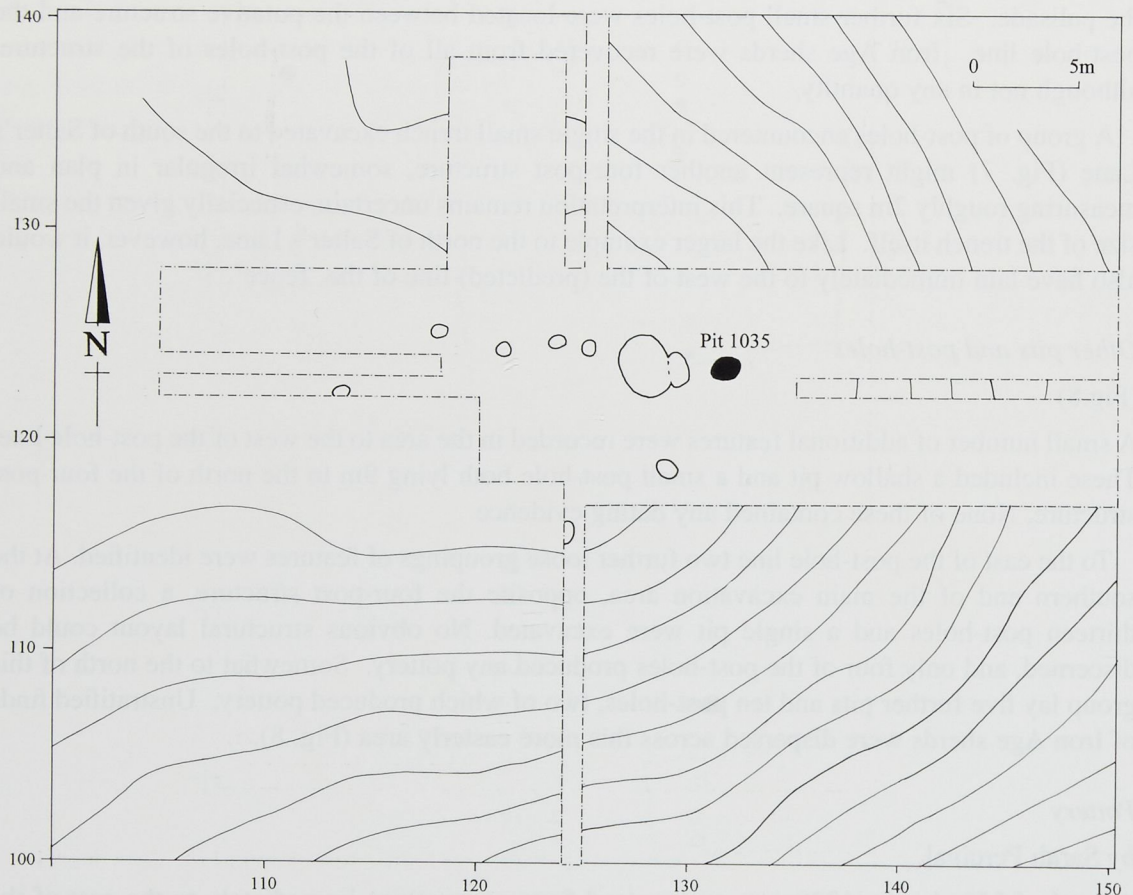


Fig.11 Longham Site 7239 (1985): Iron Age features excavated into the mound

*Iron Age pits within the mound*

(Fig.11)

Pit 1035 produced evidence for Iron Age flint-working, in the form of 34 flint cores that had been struck from large cobbles. Seventy flakes were also found, along with three lumps of iron slag and 21 small sherds of Iron Age pottery. Details of the flint assemblage may be found in Wymer and Healy 1996, 40-45. Further slight scatters of Iron Age material was recovered from the surface of the mound, but no other features were identified.

*?Iron Age pits to the north-east of the mound*

(Fig.12)

Four pits producing Iron Age material (1127, 1128, 1129, 1134) had all been severely truncated by ploughing and machining. These unremarkable features are fully described in Wymer and Healy 1996 (36-7, figs 24 and 25).

*Pottery*

by Sarah Percival

The Iron Age pottery was generally in poor condition, perhaps due in some areas to the impact of the contractors' earth-moving machinery. Six hundred and thirty-six sherds (3.41kg) were



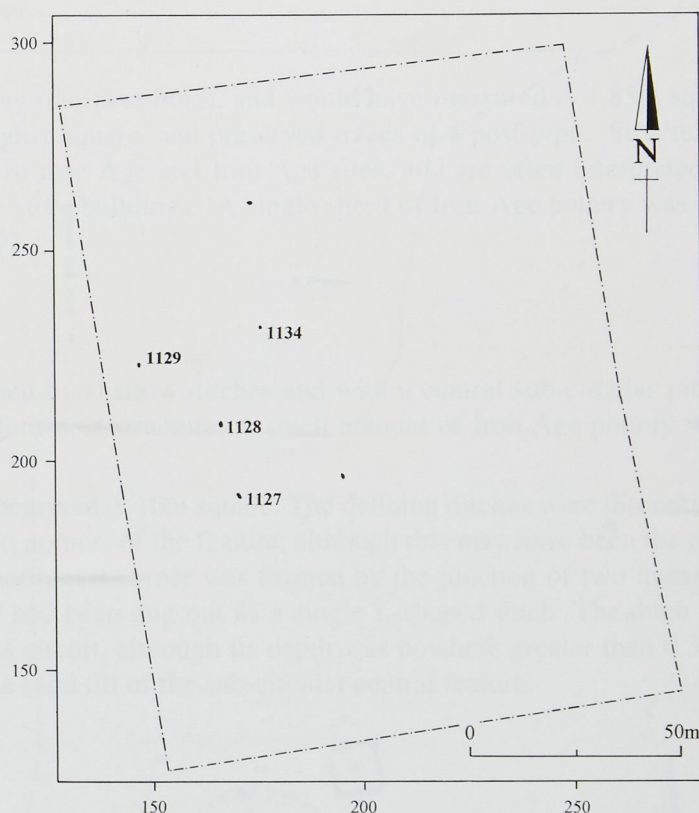


Fig.12 Longham Site 7239 (1985): Iron Age features (numbered) located during topsoil-stripping north-east of the mound

recovered from five pits and other (unstratified) contexts. The assemblage may date to the earlier Iron Age (below, 248).

Material recovered from pits constituted 73% (464 sherds) of the total sherd quantity. Another 120 sherds were recovered from concentrations in the natural subsoil which appeared to represent material disturbed from pits. This relationship is demonstrated by the presence of joining sherds in pit 1129 and in nearby topsoil concentration 1131.

#### Excavations at Ennemix Quarry, Longham, 1990 (Site 13025)

(Figs 13-15)

During 1990 a watching brief and excavation was carried out in advance of more quarrying to the south of Salter's Lane. A total area of c.4ha (10 acres) was investigated, under the direction of Heather Wallis of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit.

The majority of finds and features from this excavation were of Neolithic and Bronze Age date, scattered groups of pits being recorded. These results are published in Ashwin 1998, where the circumstances of the excavation are also described in detail.

Fig.13 shows all excavated features, with those of probable Iron Age date highlighted in black. Three groups of features were thus dated, either on the basis of ceramic finds or by clear spatial association with dated Iron Age contexts. They included a four-post structure, a square enclosure, and a small group of pits.



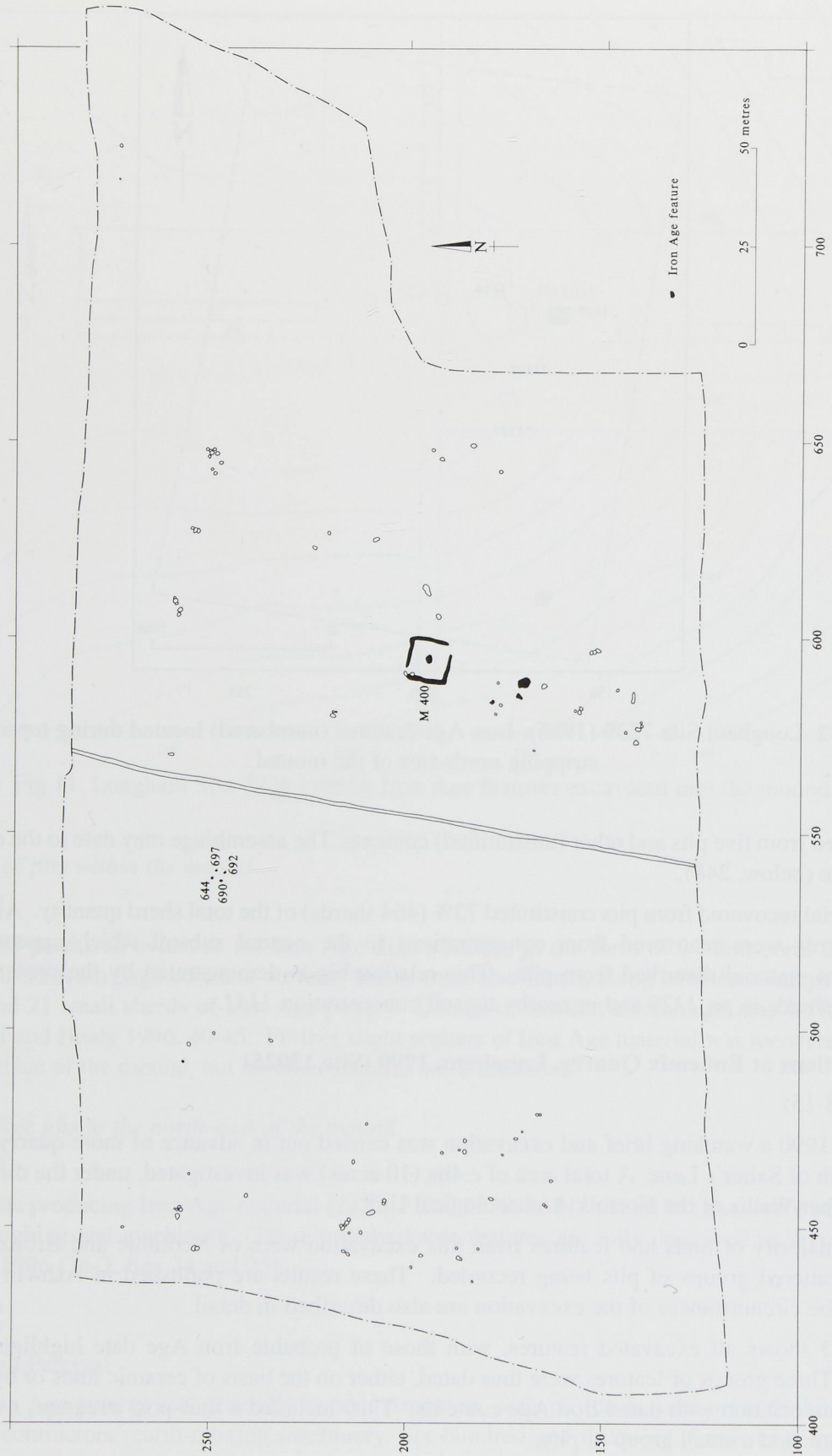


Fig.13 Longham Site 13025 (1990): Iron Age features (black)



*Four-Post Structure*

(Fig.14)

This was defined by four post-holes, and would have measured *c.* 1.85m square in plan. Each post-hole was roughly square, and preserved traces of a post-pipe. Structures of this kind are common on later Bronze Age and Iron Age sites, and are often interpreted as the remains of raised granaries or store buildings. A single sherd of Iron Age pottery was recovered from the fill of post-hole 692.

*Square Enclosure*

(Fig.15)

This feature, defined by shallow ditches and with a central sub-circular pit, lay *c.* 60m to the south-east of the four-post structure. A small amount of Iron Age pottery was recovered from the ditch fills.

The enclosure measured *c.* 10m square. The defining ditches were discontinuous in the south-east and north-west corners of the feature, although this may have been the result of differential truncation. The north-east corner was formed by the junction of two linear ditches, while the south-west corner had been dug out as a single L-shaped ditch. The ditch was deepest in the northern part of its circuit, although its depth was nowhere greater than 0.35m. No finds were recovered from the sand fill of the sub-circular central feature.

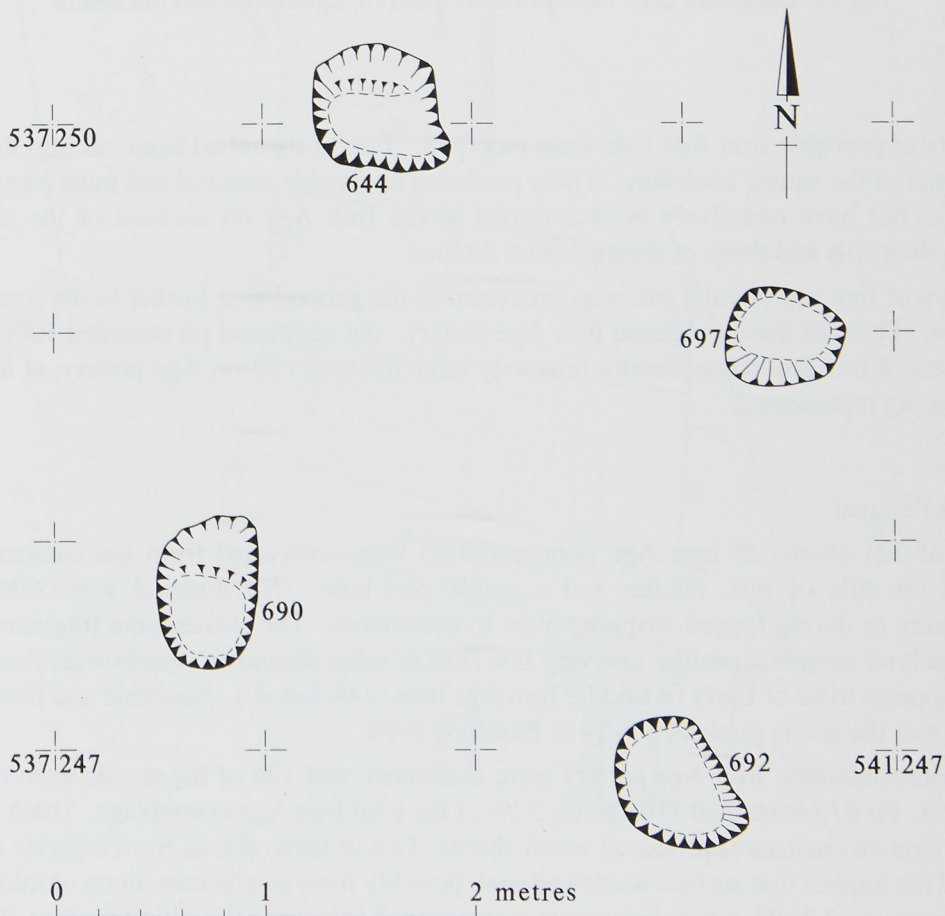


Fig.14 Longham Site 13025 (1990): plan of four-post structure



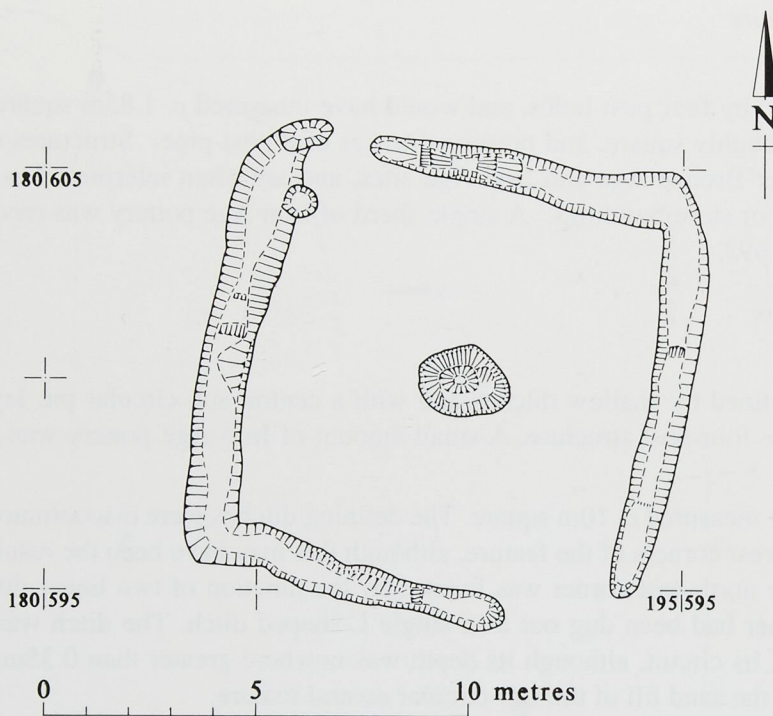


Fig.15 Longham Site 13025 (1990): plan of square-ditched enclosure

#### *Pits*

(Fig.13)

Eight pits of probable Iron Age date were recorded. Two of them had been cut into the north-west corner of the square enclosure. These produced no datable material and must post-date the enclosure, but have tentatively been assigned to the Iron Age on account of the similarity between their fills and those of the enclosure ditches.

A group of five sub-circular pits was excavated in the general area further to the south of the enclosure. Three of these produced Iron Age pottery. An additional pit recorded 100m further to the west of this group contained a relatively large quantity of Iron Age pottery, at least four vessels being represented.

#### *Pottery*

by Sarah Percival

A total of 221 sherds of Iron Age pottery (931g) were excavated from ten contexts; these included the fills of pits, ditches and a single post-hole. No material was collected by fieldwalking or during topsoil-stripping prior to excavation. The sherds were fragmentary and often small; no complete profiles and very few rims or other diagnostic sherds were found. The pottery appears to be of Early or Middle Iron Age date (248, below). Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery from the site is published fully in Bamford 1998.

Four pits containing Iron Age pottery were excavated, and 196 of the sherds were retrieved from them. Pit 615 contained 116 sherds, 52% of the total Iron Age assemblage. Ditch fills 612 and 683 (square enclosure) produced seven sherds. Two of these sherds from separate contexts joined. This implies that surface waste material, possibly from an adjacent dump or midden that no longer survived, had become incorporated in the ditch fill during the silting process. Residual



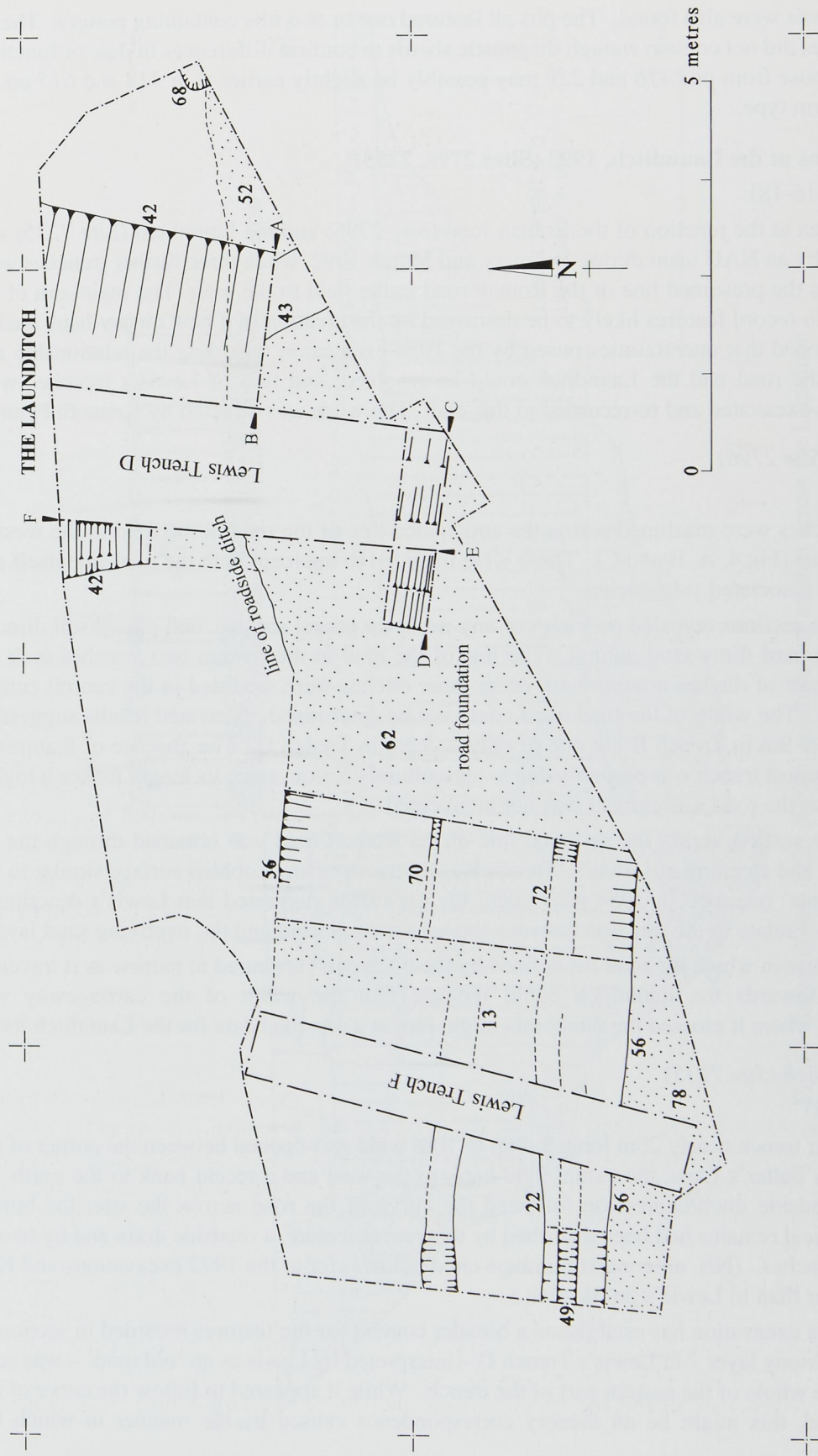


Fig.16 Bittering Site 7235 (1992): excavations at the Launditch, showing location of J.M.Lewis's Trenches D and F.



Beaker sherds were also found. The pits all featured one or two fills containing pottery. The pit assemblages did not contain enough diagnostic sherds to confirm differences in date or function, although those from pits 418 and 259 may possibly be slightly earlier than 313 and 615 on the basis of form type.

### **Excavations at the Launditch, 1992 (Sites 2796, 7235)**

(Figs 4, 5, 16-18)

A small area at the junction of the Roman road (Site 2796) and the Launditch (Site 7235) was excavated by an NAU team during February and March 1992, while three further trenches were sited across the presumed line of the Roman road in the field to the west. The main aim of the work was to record features likely to be destroyed by the creation of a new quarry haul-road. It was also hoped that uncertainties raised by the 1954 excavation regarding the relationship and dating of the road and the Launditch could be resolved, and two of Lewis's trenches were partially re-excavated and re-recorded to this end. The work was directed by Kenneth Penn.

#### *The road (Site 2796)*

(Fig.4)

Three trenches were machined across the anticipated line of the road in the field to the west of Salter's Lane (Fig.4, A, B and C). These were intended to intercept both the road-line itself and that of any associated side-ditches.

The three sections revealed no traces of any made-up gravel surface, and ploughsoil directly overlay the hard flinty sand natural. The line of the road in the eastern two trenches took the form of a pair of ditches around 0.4m deep; three ditches were recorded in the central cutting (Trench B). The width of the road itself could not be determined, excavated results suggesting a width of *c.* 9m in Trench B but one of only *c.* 5.5m in Trench C. The absence of features in the westernmost trench was probably due to agricultural erosion, since its length makes it highly unlikely that the road's alignment was not intercepted.

A further section across the assumed line of the Roman road was obtained through the re-excavation and cleaning of Lewis's 'Trench F'. No traces of any cobbled surface similar to the 'packed flints' recorded in 1954 were seen; the excavator suggested that Lewis's description might in fact relate to the junction between the hard natural sand and the overlying sand layers.

The manner in which the road (as defined by the ditch pair) appeared to narrow as it travelled eastwards towards the Launditch could indicate that the width of the carriageway was constricted where it crossed the ditch; this might hint at a *pre*-road date for the Launditch itself.

#### *The Launditch (Site 7235)*

(Figs 16-18)

A triangular trench nearly 20m long and up to 10m wide was opened between the corner of the present-day Salter's Lane, the extant field-bank to the west and a recent bank to the north. A modern roadside ditch/depression followed the curve of the road across the site; the buried archaeological remains had been disturbed by this recent feature, a roadside drain and by two of Lewis's trenches. (NB. all context numbers cited below refer to the 1992 excavations and Figs 16-18 rather than to Lewis's publication.)

Open area excavation has established a broader context for the features recorded in section in 1954. The stony layer 7 in Lewis's Trench D – interpreted by Lewis as an 'old road' – was seen to cover the whole of the eastern part of the trench. While it appeared to follow the curve of the present road, this might be an illusory correspondence caused by the manner in which the



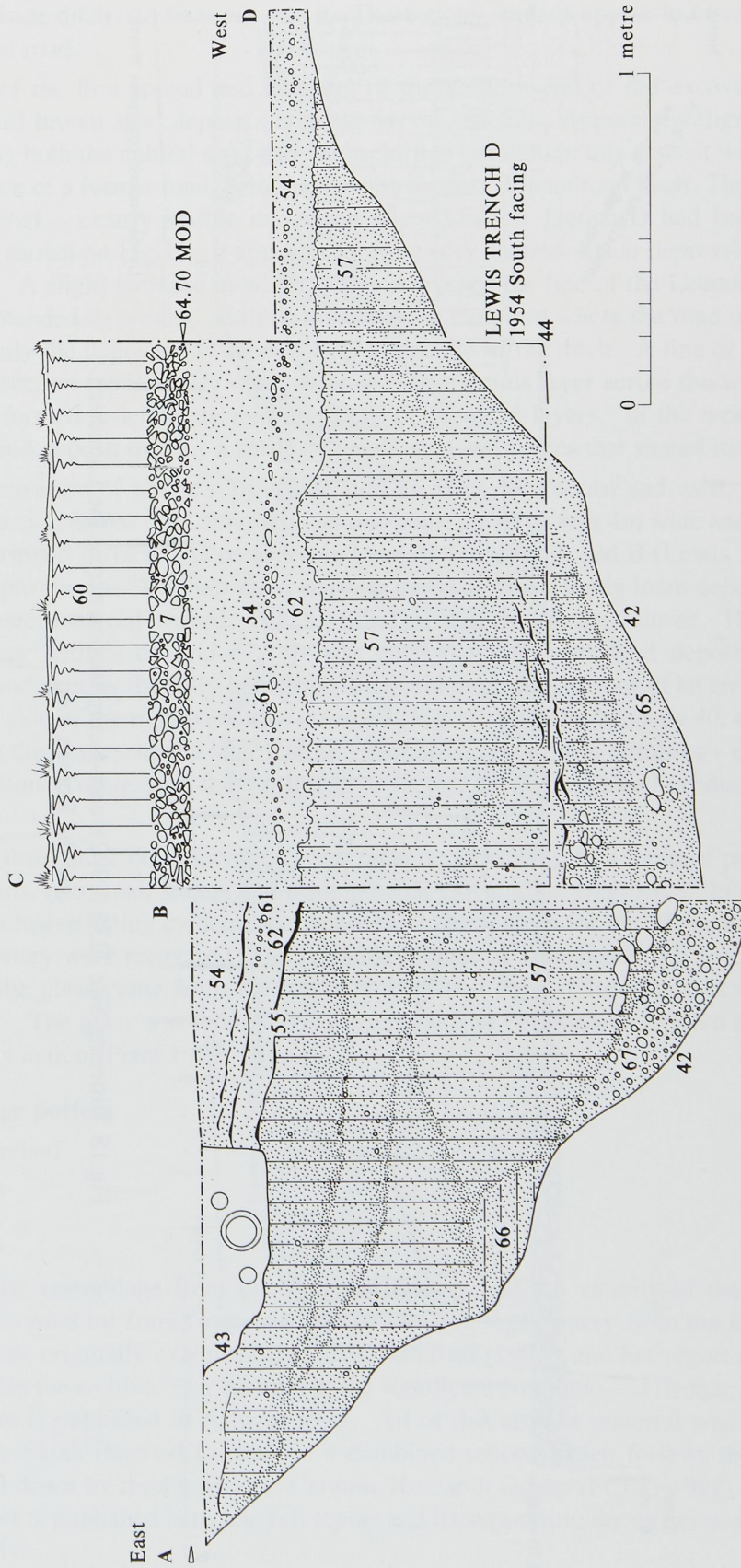


Fig.17 Bittering Site 7235 (1992): south-facing section across the Launditch and the Roman road



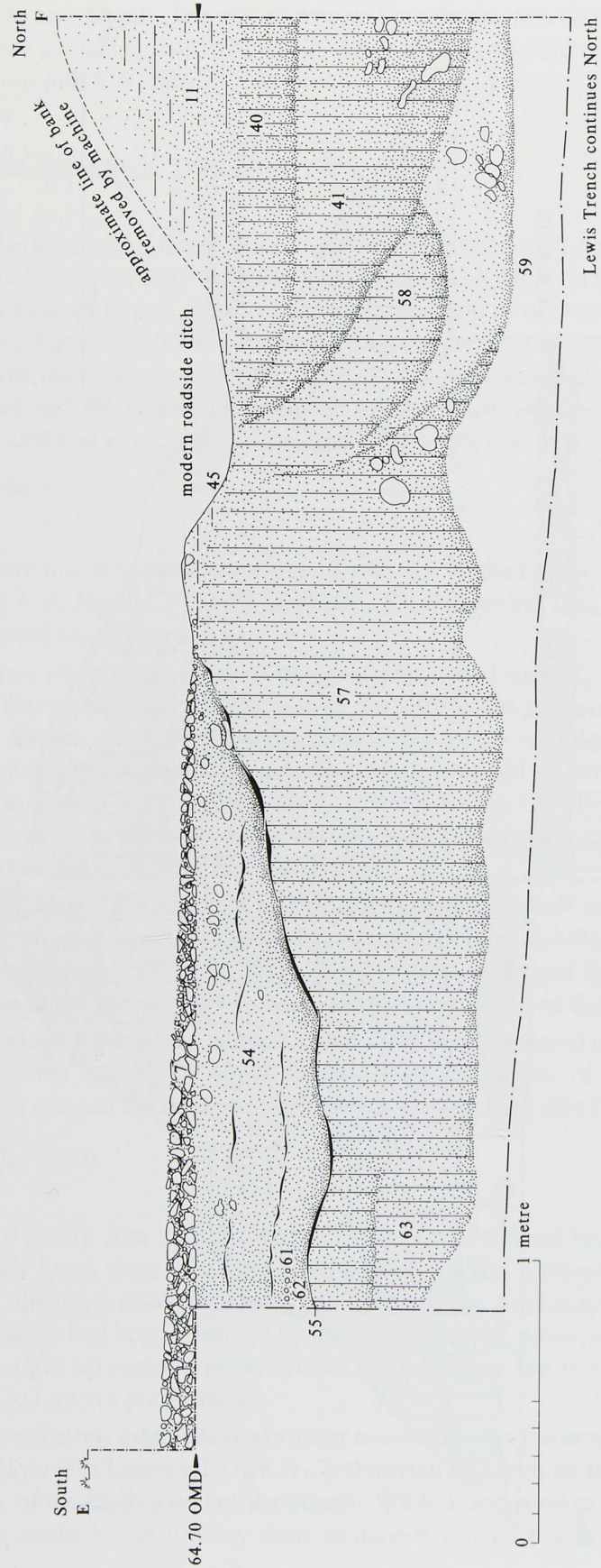


Fig.18 Bittering Site 7235 (1992): east-facing section across the Launditch and the Roman road



modern roadside ditch had been cut into it. These stony spreads appear to be earlier metallings of the present road.

Removal of the flint spread and cleaning of the western end of the excavation revealed a truncated hard brown sand deposit (contexts 54, 61 and 62). Apparently aligned east to west and overlying both the natural sand and the backfilled Launditch, this deposit was interpreted as the foundation of a former road, perhaps the east-to-west Roman road itself. The planned extent of this material – clearly visible in section when Lewis's Trench D had been emptied and cleaned – is shown on Fig.16. It appeared to fill a very shallow linear depression resembling a hollow way. A slight increase in width where it crossed the line of the Launditch itself might have been intended to provide additional stability at the point where the road overlay the ditch silts. Certainly the deposit was deepest over the centre of the ditch. A line of stones recorded in the 1954 section (context 61) was visible as a continuous layer across the whole profile and might have formed a deliberate reinforcement of the sand layers. In the western part of the trench the sand deposit overlay a series of small, shallow gullies that shared its alignment.

The re-excavation of Lewis's Trench D, and its extension to east and west, provided a new composite section across the Launditch. At this point the ditch was 4m wide and extended 1.5m below the stripped surface. As recorded in Lewis's Trenches A and B (Lewis 1957, figs 2 and 3) its lower profile was 'V'-shaped. A uniform series of thick sandy loam deposits, containing lenses of stonier material towards its base, filled most of the ditch's volume. These overlay the sandy primary siltings 65 and 67. It was clear that the hard sand deposit 54/61/62 was continuous and overlay the fully-backfilled ditch, although suggestions of an area of disturbance on the north side of the road were also recorded (Fig.18: filled by deposits 40, 41 and 58). It is possible that this represented a later feature – perhaps a pit or ditch-terminus – cut into the main ditch. It is conceivable, too, that an intrusive feature of this kind had produced Lewis's five 'late' sherds.

The finds from the 1992 excavation were meagre, consisting of a lump of possible smithing slag, two flints, two small sherds and three post-medieval glass fragments. In themselves they offer no conclusive dating evidence either for the Launditch or for the 'Roman road'. The slag, flints and pottery were recovered from roadside ditches in Trenches B and C to the west of the Launditch; the glass came from the top of a disturbed deposit forming part of the east-west sandy 'road'. The glass was thought by the excavator to be intrusive modern material brought down by root action (Penn 1992, 12).

### **The Iron Age pottery**

by Sarah Percival

(Figs 19-24)

#### *Introduction*

The Iron Age assemblage from the Bittering Quarry and the vicinity of the Launditch was originally recorded by Tony Gregory (1988). The Iron Age pottery from the Ennemix Quarry, Longham, was originally examined by Helen Bamford (1991), and her report and pottery data are included in the archive. Her account of the significant Neolithic and Bronze Age assemblage from this site is published in Ashwin 1998. All of this archive material was collated and re-appraised by Sarah Percival to produce a combined report, which follows the guidelines for analysis laid down by the Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group (PCRG 1992). A summary of the full report is published here; the full report and its supporting documentation are held in the project archive.



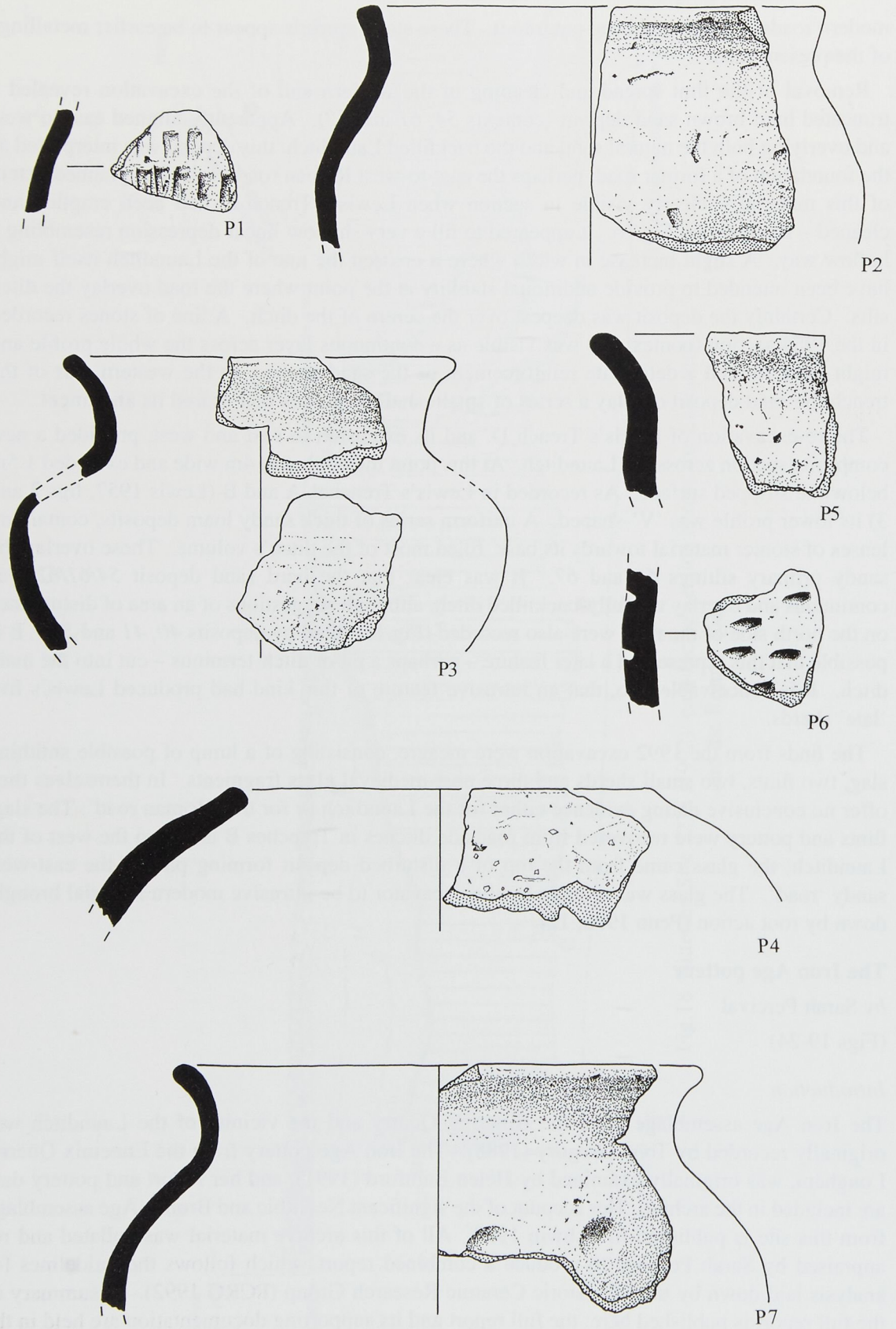


Fig. 19 Iron Age Pottery (P1-P7)



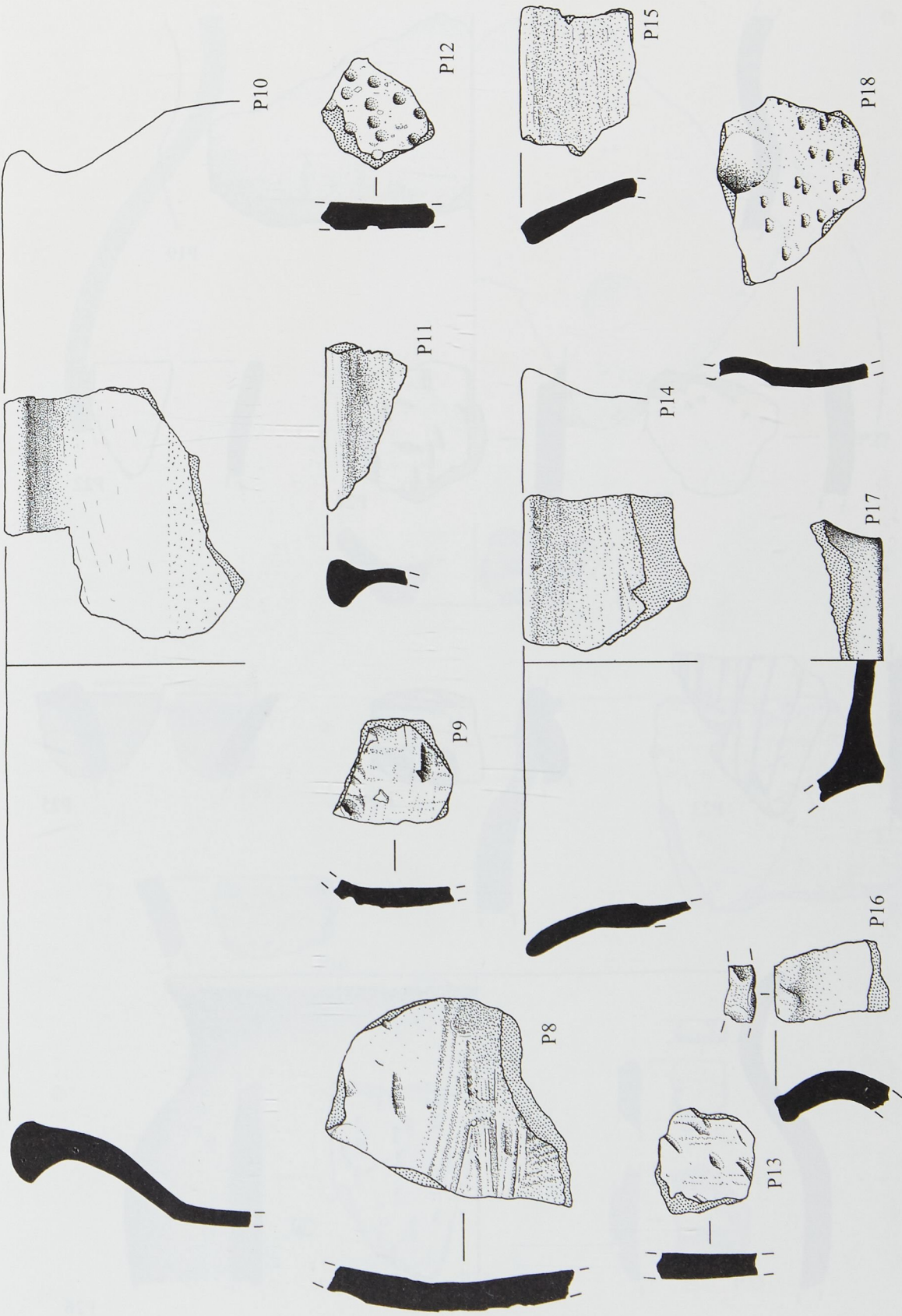


Fig. 20 Iron Age Pottery (P8-P18)



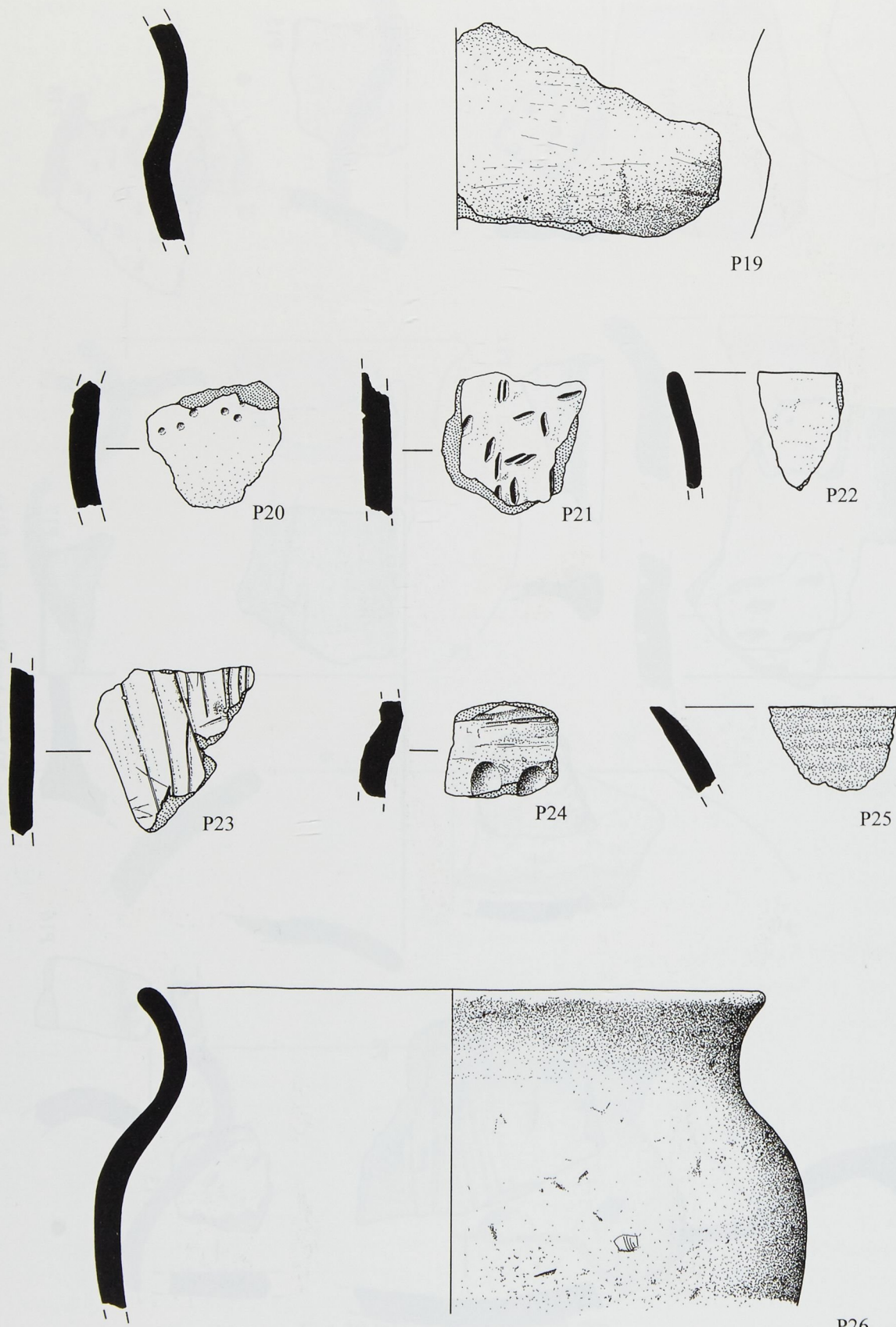


Fig. 21 Iron Age Pottery (P19-P26)

P26



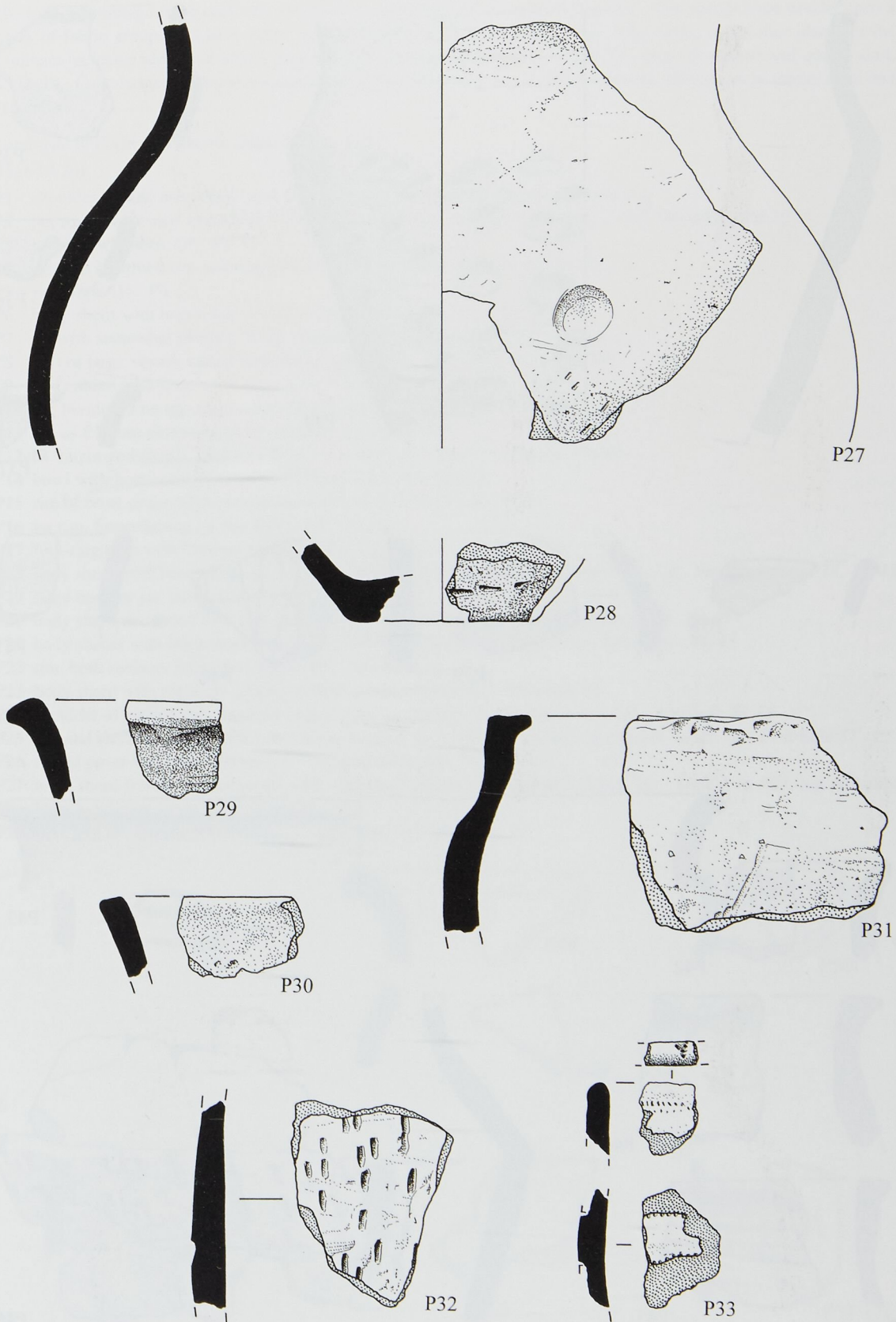


Fig. 22 Iron Age Pottery (P27-P33)



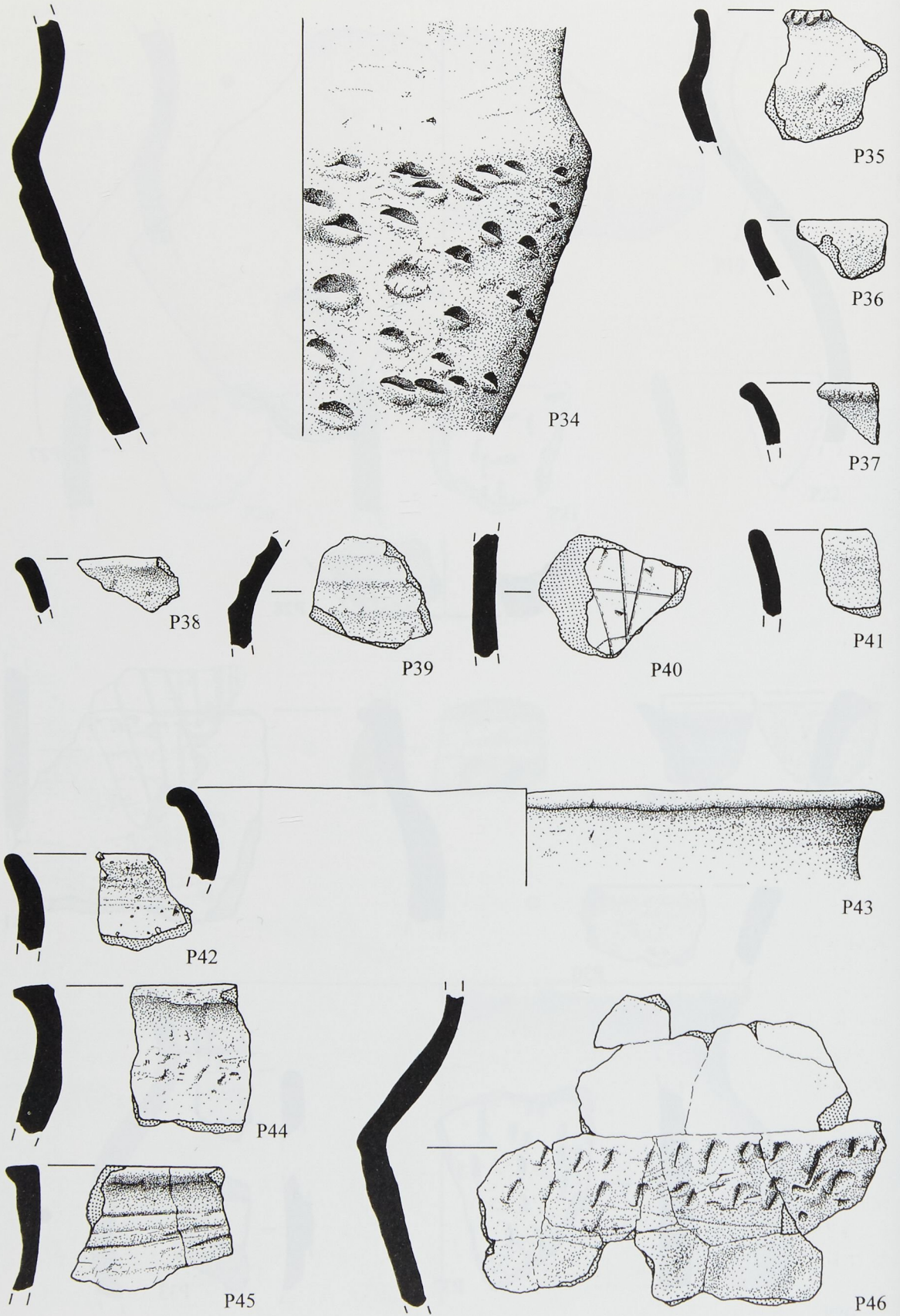


Fig. 23 Iron Age Pottery (P34-P46)



The total assemblage from each site was studied, including all unstratified material. The sherds were divided into a series of fabric groups and each fabric was assigned a code letter and number. The fabric code-letter identifies the dominant inclusion identified within the fabric (D - indeterminate void; F - flint; G - grog; Q - quartz and quartz sand; S - shell). Calculations of vessel numbers represented have been based on conspicuous differences in fabric, form and decoration.

*Catalogue of illustrated sherds: Bittering Site 13023*

(Figs 19-24)

- P1** shoulder of ?jar, horizontal rows of rectangular impressions, fabric Q7. Hollow 8  
**P2** jar, roughly-faceted smoothing or faint burnish above shoulder and on top of rim, fabric Q7. Pit 10  
**P3** jar or bowl, fabric Q8. Pit 10  
**P4** jar with in-turned rim and roughened, lightly-scored surface, fabric Q8. Pit 13  
**P5** jar, fabric Q6. Pit 13  
**P6** body sherd with impressed or stabbed tear-drop motif, fabric Q6. Pit 13  
**P7** jar with somewhat globular body, dimpling on shoulder, fabric Q8. Hollow 17  
**P8** part of large vessel, varied impression and scoring, fabric Q7. Post-hole 19  
**P9** body sherd with impressed decoration, fabric Q7. Post-hole 19  
**P10** jar, burnished on top and exterior of rim and on neck, fabric Q8. Pit 42  
**P11** jar, as P13 but almost certainly separate vessel. Pit 42  
**P12-13** impressed sherds, probably from three different vessels, fabric Q8. Pit 42  
**P14** bowl with horizontal external burnishing, fabric Q8. Pit 43  
**P15** rim of bowl or jar, high burnish on both surfaces, fabric Q8. Pit 43  
**P16** jar rim, fingertipping on top, fabric Q7. Pit 43  
**P17** foot-ring base with external burnish, fabric Q8. Pit 43  
**P18** body sherd from round-bodied vessel with dimpled and impressed ornament, fabric Q8. Very similar to P38. Pit 43  
**P19** large bowl or jar, fabric Q7. Pit 43  
**P20** body sherd decorated with circular impressions, exterior finely burnished, fabric Q8. Pit 43  
**P21** body sherds with impressed ornament, probably all from different vessels, fabric Q7. Pit 43  
**P22** rim, both surfaces burnished, fabric Q8. Post-hole 46  
**P23** body sherd with regularly spaced vertical scoring, fabric Q7. Post-hole 46  
**P24** shoulder of jar or bowl, fingertip impressions on exterior of shoulder, fabric Q7. Post-hole 50  
**P25** rim and shoulder of s-profile jar or bowl, burnish on interior of rim and on exterior, fabric Q8. Post-hole 51  
**P26** rim of jar or bowl, burnish on both surfaces, fabric Q8. Pit 57 or 58  
**P27** body sherd from globular vessel with dimpled or impressed ornament, fabric Q7. Similar to P23, but probably from a different vessel. Pit 57 or 58  
**P28** base and lower wall of impressed vessel, fabric Q7. Pit 57 or 58

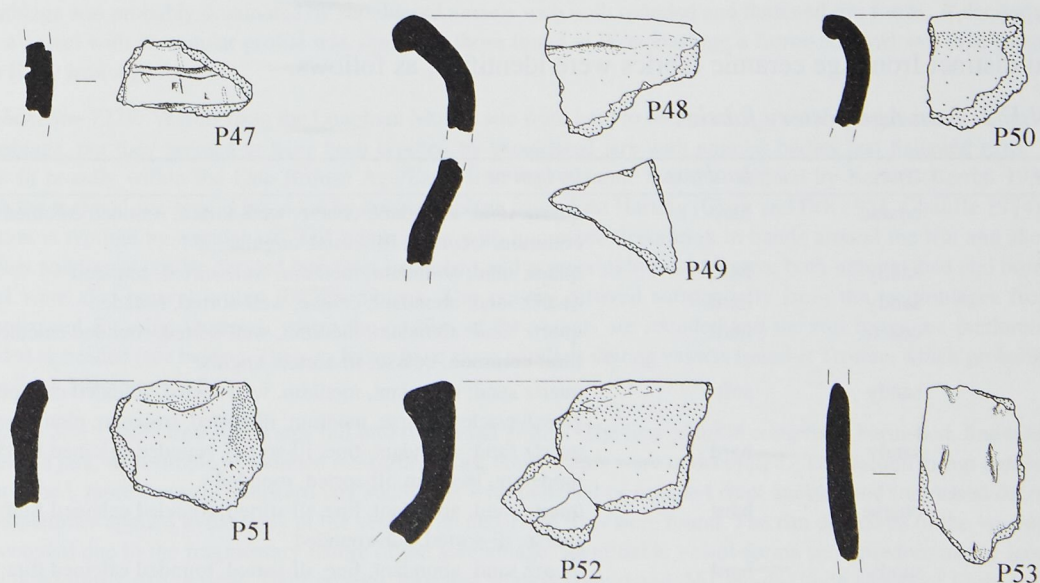


Fig. 24 Iron Age Pottery (P47-P53)



- P29** rim of jar, burnish on interior and top of rim, fabric Q8. Pit 60  
**P30** rim of jar or bowl, internal and external burnish, fabric Q8. Pit 60  
**P31** rim of jar, slightly smoothed above shoulder but roughened below, fabric Q6. Pit 60  
**P32** body sherds with impressed ornament, fabric Q7. Probably from two separate vessels. Pit 60  
**P33** rim and body of jar with horizontal comb-stamped decoration, fabric Q7. Pit 100  
**P34** shouldered jar, impressed fingernail cordons below shoulder, fabric Q7. Pit 109

*Catalogue of illustrated sherds: Bittering Site 15910*

(Fig.23)

- P35** rim of jar, angled shoulder and fingertip decoration to outer rim, fabric Q7. Context 8  
**P36** rim of ?bowl, rounded, exterior burnished, fabric Q7. Context 8  
**P37** rim of ?bowl, out-turned, slightly flattened, exterior burnished, fabric Q7. Context 8  
**P38** rim sherd, simple, rounded, fabric Q7. Context 8  
**P39** body sherd from furrowed bowl, fabric Q7. Context 345  
**P40** body sherd decorated with scored lines, fabric Q7. Context 401  
**P41** rim sherd, simple, rounded, fabric Q7. Context 401  
**P42** rim sherd, simple, out-turned, fabric Q6. Context 401

*Catalogue of illustrated sherds: Longham Site 7239*

(Fig.23)

- P43** rim of fine, unburnished bowl or jar, fabric Q7. Pit 1127  
**P44** jar or bowl with t-section rim, fabric Q7. Pit 1128  
**P45** jar or bowl with t-section rim, fabric Q7. Pit 1129  
**P46** body sherds of carinated jar or bowl bearing two rows of fingernail impressions, light burnish below carination, fabric Q7. Pit 1129

*Catalogue of illustrated sherds: Longham Site 13025*

(Fig.24)

- P47** body sherd decorated with narrow horizontal grooves, fabric Q1. Unstrat/cleaning  
**P48, P49** rim and neck sherds, exterior burnished or wet-hand finished, fabric Q2. Almost certainly from one vessel. Pit 259  
**P50** rim sherd, exterior slightly burnished, fabric Q1. Pit 313  
**P51** rim of small irregular bowl, fabric Q2. Three other sherds not illus. Pit 418  
**P52** rim, expanded and squared profile, burnished, fabric Q1. Pit 615  
**P53** six sherds and fragments (one illus.) bearing fingernail-impressions, fabric Q3. Pit 615

*Fabrics*

Eight distinct Iron Age ceramic fabrics were identified, as follows.

TABLE 2: *Iron Age pottery fabrics*

<i>fabric</i>	<i>type</i>	<i>hardness</i>	<i>inclusions</i>
Q1	coarse	hard	quartz sand: abundant, coarse, well-sorted, rounded calcined flint: common, v.coarse, ill-sorted, angular
Q2	sandy	hard	quartz sand: abundant, medium, well-sorted, rounded
Q3	sandy	hard	quartz sand: abundant, coarse, well-sorted, rounded
Q4	coarse	hard	quartz sand: abundant, medium, well-sorted, rounded calcined flint: common, coarse, ill-sorted, angular
Q5	sandy	soft	quartz sand: abundant, medium, well-sorted, rounded chopped grass/vesicles: sparse, medium, ill-sorted, irregular, elongated
Q6	sandy	hard	quartz sand: abundant, fine, ill-sorted, rounded calcined flint: moderate, medium, ill-sorted, rounded
Q7	coarse	hard	quartz sand: abundant, fine, ill-sorted, rounded calcined flint: sparse, ill-sorted, sub-rounded
Q8	sandy	hard	quartz sand: abundant, fine, ill-sorted, rounded calcined flint: sparse, fine, ill-sorted, sub-rounded



*Bittering Site 13023:* all the fabrics found at Bittering Pit contained quartz sand and flint. The dominant fabric was Q7, which contained quartz sand and sparse quantities of calcined flint and represented 67% (995 sherds) of the assemblage. Q7 was the coarsest of the fabrics; occurring only in jar forms it featured the widest range of decorative techniques (see below). Fabric Q6 and Q8 were finer. Q6 occurred in jar forms but was restricted to scored or striated decoration. Q8 was fine and is often burnished with some impressed decoration in the form of dimples.

*Bittering Site 15910:* Three quartz sand and flint fabrics were recorded. Of these, fabric Q7 was the most common, representing 54% of the assemblage (662g). The fabric contributed most of the decorated sherds, these being equally divided between impressed, scored and finger-tipped forms. The medium-coarse fabric Q6 represented 40% of the assemblage (488g). A small quantity of sherds in this fabric were also decorated but only fingernail-impressed techniques were used. The fine, burnished fabric Q8 only made up 6% of the assemblage. No decorated sherds of this fabric were found.

*Longham Site 7239:* The assemblage was divided into a range of quartz sand and flint-gritted fabrics similar to those found at Bittering Site 13023 (see below). The dominant fabric, Q7, contained quartz sand and sparse quantities of calcined flint, and represents 72% of the sherds (456g). Fabric Q6 and Q8 were finer and sandier. Q8 was fine and is often burnished.

*Longham Site 13025:* Iron Age fabrics were predominantly quartz-sand gritted, though calcined flint and vegetable temper were also present. Exclusively sand-gritted fabrics Q2 and Q3 represented 26% of the assemblage (57 sherds), whilst flint and sand fabrics Q1 and Q4 accounted for 27% (58 sherds). Vegetable temper and sand are found in fabric Q5, which is represented by a single vessel, and makes up 34% (76 sherds) of the assemblage. The assemblage contained very similar quantities of finer to coarser wares (Table 2). The finer wares were sandy and thin-walled, often with smoothed or burnished surfaces. These included all but one of the rim sherds and accounted for approximately 40% of the identifiable vessels overall; only in the group from pit 418 were the coarser flint-tempered wares predominant. This range and balance of fabrics is similar to that seen in a large assemblage of Early/Middle Iron Age date recently excavated at Valley Belt, Trowse (Percival forthcoming).

### Forms

*Bittering Site 13023:* Identifiable vessel forms were limited to jars and bowls. In contrast to the typologically 'earlier' assemblages from the other sites, however, the jars had rounded or sinuous profiles and rounded or slightly flattened rims. No forms with angular profiles characteristic of the Early Iron Age Harling material (Clark and Fell 1953) were found. The shouldered jars typical of Middle Iron Age assemblages were also rare. While the bases are mostly simple, one example of a foot-ring is illustrated (P17). This style may be indicative of the 3rd century BC, examples of this date being found at Little Waltham periods II and III (Drury 1978, fig.37).

*Bittering Site 15910:* Most sherds were very fragmentary, and no full profiles could be reconstructed. However the assemblage was probably dominated by shouldered vessels with both rounded and flattened rim forms. A decorated rim from a vessel with an angular profile was similar to those found at West Harling; a furrowed bowl was also suggestive of an Early Iron Age date.

*Longham Site 7239:* Vessels from the Longham Mound site were hard to reconstruct given the fragmentary nature of the assemblage, but they seemed to have been typified by shouldered jars with angular bodies and flattened rims. These forms fit broadly within the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ceramic tradition defined by Barrett (Barrett 1980), of which the regional site-type is provided by the assemblage from West Harling (Clark and Fell 1953, Cunliffe 1974). This tradition is typified by angular jars and bowls often with impressed decoration in bands around the rim and shoulder. The jars and bowls can be divided into finer burnished and coarser unburnished forms; both unburnished and burnished vessel were also present within the assemblage. The pottery differed substantially from the assemblages from the Ennemix and Bittering Quarries, where the profiles of the vessels are rounded and the rim forms are predominantly rounded or beaded (see below). The rim-forms have close parallels among vessels found at Trowse, which probably date to the 7th - 5th centuries BC.

*Longham Site 13025:* Iron Age forms fell into two broad groups. The first of these comprised burnished, fine-tempered bowls and jars, with simple or rounded out-turned rims; these sherds were undecorated. The second group consisted of unburnished, more coarsely tempered jars and bowls with flattened or rounded rims. Incised and impressed decoration was sometimes applied to the body of the vessels; no decorated rims were found. The rim diameters of the vessels were not recorded due to the fragmentary nature of the assemblage. Identifiable vessel-forms were predominantly jars, with some bowl forms also present. Their profiles appeared slightly shouldered. No angular body sherds of Early Iron Age Harling type were found, although P50 may be the rim from a tripartite jar of that type. Shouldered jars, typical of



Middle Iron Age assemblages, were also rare. Bases were mostly simple; this style is indicative of the 3rd century BC and examples of this date were found at Little Waltham Periods II and III (Drury 1978, fig.37).

### *Surface treatment*

*Bittering Site 13023:* Within this group, apparently the 'latest' collection from the Longham/Bittering excavations, 9.6% of the total assemblage weight comprised decorated sherds. Both impressed and incised techniques were employed. Impressed sherds predominated, representing 8.5% of the assemblage, whilst only 1.1% of sherds were incised or scored. Fingertip impressions were rare and impressed decoration was more usually carried out using a tool to produce stabbed random patterns to the body of the vessel (P1, P6). Large rounded dimples, similar to those found at Wandlebury (Hill forthcoming) and Spong Hill (Gregory 1995) were also present (P7). No decorated rims were found.

*Bittering Site 15910:* Although this assemblage also included impressed, fingernailed and scored sherds, all kinds of surface-treatment were rare. Two examples of fingertip-impressed rim sherds were found (P35); these suggest an Early Iron Age date for the assemblage. Scored wares are rare in Norfolk, although they are very common in Lincolnshire to the north; the style had a long currency, first appearing in the 6th century BC and continuing in use until the Roman period (Elsdon 1993). A small ridged sherd may be from a furrowed bowl dating from the 7th century BC onwards (E. Morris *pers. comm.*).

*Longham Site 7239:* Decorative techniques within this apparently 'early' assemblage were limited to rough jabs, possible fingertip-impressions and incised striations or scoring. The fingertipping tended to emphasise the angular shoulder of the vessel, possible to assist with carrying. The striations were applied to the neck and possibly the whole body of the vessel and may have served a similar purpose. Forty-five percent (1.54kg) of the sherds were decorated, but this included a high number from a single vessel which constituted 900g of the total assemblage weight.

*Longham Site 13025:* The most common form of surface treatment here was burnishing; this was found on 40% of the vessels, all in finer fabrics. Again both incised and impressed decorative techniques were represented. Incised decoration took the form of narrow horizontal grooves and diagonal striations, and occurred only on coarse ware vessels. Impressed decoration took the form of fingernail-impressions, combed corrugations and cuneiform stamps. Decoration was applied randomly and confined to the body of the vessel; no decorated rims were found.

### *Discussion*

The different site assemblages are considered here in their suggested chronological sequence.

#### *1. ?Early Iron Age: Longham Site 7239, Bittering Site 15910*

The assemblage from the Longham Mound and its environs (Site 7239) appears to date to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition, a period defined by Barrett's 'decorated' phase (Barrett 1980). It may date to the 6th to 5th centuries BC and perhaps represents occupation in the area of the periglacial mound. The presence of Early Iron Age decorative styles (fingertipping on the rims and shoulders of vessels, random scoring) in the group from Bittering Site 15910, along with angular profiles, may indicate a date centring in the 7th and 6th centuries BC.

#### *2: ?Middle Iron Age: Longham Site 13025*

By contrast, this pottery appears to be of Middle Iron Age type, maybe ranging in date from the 6th-3rd centuries BC. The vessels are consistent with domestic cooking and storage activity. Most of these sherds came from pits, with one pit containing over 50% of the total assemblage. This pattern is common on many Iron Age sites and is often suggestive of deliberate deposition within specially-chosen contexts, the choice of which may be influenced by spacial and ritual considerations (Hill 1989, 1994). No sherds displaying angular 'situlate' forms or linear-impressed decoration on rims or shoulders were present, confirming that the assemblage is probably not of the later Bronze Age/Early Iron Age tradition typified by that from West Harling (Clark and Fell 1953); the presence of a possible tripartite vessel rim was not conclusive, as the sherd is too small for identification to be secure. As far as can be ascertained, the Longham vessels are slightly angular shouldered jars and bowls with rounded everted rims. Similar forms are found in within the phase I assemblage from Fison Way, Thetford dating to the 4th - 2nd centuries BC (Gregory 1992 fig.140; 24, 28) and from Valley Belt, Trowse (Percival forthcoming). A slightly later date may, however, be suggested for the fingernail/cuneiform stamp decorated sherds. Strong parallels for this form of decoration were found at Spong Hill, Norfolk (Gregory 1995, fig 105; 14, 26) and Bittering Site 13023, both assemblages probably dating to the later Iron Age.

#### *3: ?Middle-Late Iron Age: Bittering Site 13023*

This may include the latest of the Iron Age pottery from these excavations, perhaps dating to the 3rd - 1st centuries BC. Two distinctive elements characterise this assemblage. The first is the extensive use of impressed decoration. This



compares well with the later Iron Age pottery from the fills of ditch 1239 at Spong Hill, Norfolk (Gregory 1995, 92) where impressed decoration is also the most common decorative style present. Of particular interest is the use of lenticular impressed ornament and impressed dimples (*ibid.*, fig.106). The use of random impressions placed all over the body of the vessels contrasts strongly with decorative motifs found within many assemblages of Early Iron Age date such as that from West Harling (Clark and Fell 1953), which more commonly take the form of linear bands of fingertipping on the rim and shoulders. Although the high percentage of impressed ornament at Bittering and Spong may be the result of a chronological trend, it may also be attributed to localised pottery traditions. An inkling of this may be seen in the pottery from Ken Hill, Snettisham around the findspot of the mid-1st century BC treasure of torcs and scrap metal. Unpublished material from this site in Norwich Castle Museum includes a comparable jar, although it must be emphasised that the date of the treasure cannot be 'transferred' with any certainty to the pottery.

The second distinctive element within this assemblage was the presence of simple, rounded rim forms and sinuous vessel profiles. These vessels were sometimes decorated with dimpled ornament to the body. Few parallels for this have been recorded from Norfolk to date. The vessel compares well with form F12 from Little Waltham, Essex (Drury 1978, fig.53), though these latter sherds were undecorated. This Essex example has been dated to the third quarter of the 1st century BC. The Iron Age site at Thetford Castle provides one or two parallels in form, particularly for the distinctive jars with thickened rims (Davies and Gregory 1992, fig.11).

The evidence from nearby Spong Hill suggests that the introduction of Roman potting traditions to this region was quite abrupt, with no obviously 'transitional' forms occurring. In this context the material from this site could be of relatively late Iron Age date. The assemblage might therefore be attributed, on the basis of form and decorative technique, to the later 1st century BC.

## Discussion

### *Origins and date of the Launditch*

Since the publication of Wade-Martins 1974, the Launditch has been regarded as part of a system of West Norfolk linear earthworks of Post-Roman date, perhaps dating to the 5th-7th centuries AD. When the results of the many nearby excavations are taken into account, however, a case for an Iron Age date may also be made.

### Excavations at the intersection of the Launditch and Salter's Lane

If the Launditch is indeed a prehistoric feature, the most likely sequence of events at the Launditch/Salter's Lane intersection may be summarised as follows:

1. Excavation of narrow gully to the west of the line of the main ditch (seen in Lewis's Trenches A, E)
  2. Excavation of main ditch and creation of bank
  3. Infilling of the ditch (apparently naturally)
  4. Construction of the sandy road foundation
  5. Use of road line from ?Roman period until 19th century
  6. Road diversion: 19th-century road with sharp corner
- (Construction of the post-hole line to the east of the Launditch at Bittering Site 15910 perhaps associated with 1 and 2)

Lewis (1957, 425) pointed out that the Launditch (OE *Lawendich*) clearly predates the Norman conquest, giving its name to the Hundred of Launditch. The siting of the Hundred court at this point adds weight to the suggestion that the line of the Roman highway remained significant during the later Saxon period. From the point of view of dating, a key stratigraphic relationship is that between the 'Roman road' and the Launditch and its siltings. The results of the 1992 excavations showed no sign of any break or causeway in the line of the Launditch ditch where it intersected with the line of the road. Instead the compact sandy layer interpreted as a road deposit had been laid down upon the ditch-siltings.

Although certainly suggestive of a pre-Roman Launditch, this evidence must be treated with caution. While the road followed the alignment of the Roman one, Wade-Martins warned that 'any road surface found along this line should not necessarily be taken as Roman' and the sand



deposit examined by Lewis and Penn cannot be dated conclusively. An excellent series of maps dating to the 16th - 19th centuries, held in the Norfolk Record Office and at the Holkham Estate Office, show a route continuing westwards along the Roman alignment from the present corner of Salter's Lane AD (Wade-Martins 1974, 28-31), and a medieval or post-medieval date for the layers cannot be ruled out. The fact that this road line has been perpetuated as the parish boundary between Longham and Mileham, however, might suggest that it continued in use during the Anglo-Saxon period, rather than being disrupted or 'closed' by the excavation of a deep ditch at this time.

Lewis's five post-Roman sherds from the Launditch siltings must also be considered. Although their abraded condition and extremely small size certainly makes it possible that they were intrusive, the fact that they were found in the ditch's lower siltings does not assist in dating the feature either to the Iron Age or to the Anglo-Saxon period. It is unfortunate that no stratified finds have ever been collected from within or beneath the bank itself.

#### Excavations east of the Launditch (Bittering Site 15910)

An Iron Age date for the post-hole line lying parallel to the Launditch seems clear. Although no large collections of pottery were made from any individual features, all of the sherds which were found were Iron Age. The presence of two four-post structures, of a type very common on sites of the 1st millennium BC (below, p00), offers further support. One of these was located only 2m to the west of the post-hole line and shared its alignment, suggesting that the two features were related in some manner.

There was no direct evidence for the function of the post-hole line itself. The close spacing of the post-holes suggested a solidly-built fence or palisade, however, possibly a secondary line of defence constructed *c.* 25m behind the bank of the Launditch proper.

#### Conclusions

The evidence suggesting a prehistoric origin for the Launditch is not conclusive. Ambiguities include the difficulty of certainly identifying the compact sand layer with the Roman road itself, and the recovery of Lewis's five 'late' sherds from the Launditch silting. The fact that the Launditch appears most substantial in the immediate vicinity of the road-intersection could also be taken as evidence that the earthwork had been built in order to control traffic using a pre-existing highway (Wade-Martins 1974, 31).

No truly decisive new evidence has emerged from the excavations conducted since the publication of Wade-Martins's paper. Cumulatively, however, the results have strengthened the case for a pre-Roman date. Especially significant factors are the absence of a causeway or opening in the Launditch through which the Roman road would have passed (although it conceivable either that the road was temporarily interrupted, or that it crossed the ditch on some kind of bridge), and the discovery of the parallel Iron Age fence or palisade at Bittering Site 15910.

A prehistoric Launditch might have been well-situated for controlling west-to-east movement across the central Norfolk watershed even *before* the construction of the Roman road. Although pre-Roman evidence is generally sparse on the Boulder Clay plateau of central Norfolk, there is an unusual concentration of sites of all prehistoric periods recorded in this particular area (Ashwin 1998); these coincide with localised and superficial sandy deposits, the so-called Hungry Hill Gravels (Wymer and Healy 1996). An east-to-west band of this material (clearly visible in the distribution of Neolithic/Bronze Age barrows and ring-ditches; Ashwin 1996a, fig.5) crosses the watershed hereabouts. This could well have been both a focus of population and a natural routeway since early prehistoric times.



Davies 1996 proposed not only that the Launditch dated to the Iron Age, rather than the Anglo-Saxon period, but that all of the other West Norfolk linear earthworks described in Wade-Martins 1974 did so too (Davies 1996, fig.9). Davies draws attention to the many Early and Middle Iron Age sites known from West Norfolk and the Thetford area. Citing as parallels Iron Age linear earthwork systems recorded elsewhere in southern England, he has suggested that a north-to-south 'corridor' of relatively intense Iron Age occupation may be discerned in the west Norfolk uplands and the Breckland. This would have been partially delimited to the east by the Launditch and the Panworth Ditch and to the west by the Bichamditch and the Fossditch (Fig.2). Evidence in favour of this thesis includes the possible pre-Roman date of the Launditch, the similarities between the Launditch and the Panworth Ditch, and the possible association of the northern terminus of the Bichamditch with the Iron Age 'hillfort' at Narborough (Davies *et al.* 1992). Iron Age sherds have also been recovered from the vicinity of the 'Black Ditches' at Cavenham, Suffolk, which appear to continue the Bichamditch-Fossditch alignment observed further to the north.

This radical alternative to Wade-Martins's interpretation cannot yet be accepted unreservedly. In particular it is challenged by the retrieval of Anglo-Saxon pottery from the fills of the Fossditch (Clarke 1955), although Wade-Martins was right to argue that only material sealed within or under the banks themselves can really be relied upon as dating evidence for these features (Wade-Martins 1974, 36). Davies's research does, however, offer an intriguing alternative context within which the Launditch must also be viewed.

Even if the Launditch was not built to control or obstruct the Roman road, it might still have been used for this purpose in the Anglo-Saxon period. Wade-Martins (1974, 31) observed that the Launditch was not necessarily constructed in a single operation, and – like the Panworth Ditch – appears to have been a more substantial earthwork in the area of its intersection with the Roman road line than elsewhere. The apparent narrowing of the 'Roman' road as it approached the Launditch from the west, suggesting that it was constricted at this point, has already been remarked upon. It is conceivable that the *pre-existing* Launditch and Panworth Ditch earthworks were maintained and utilised in the manner postulated by Wade-Martins. It is even possible that they were augmented and reinforced in the areas where they intersected with the Roman roads to make them more suitable for this purpose.

#### *Iron Age activity east of the Launditch*

##### General

Sarah Percival's pottery analysis suggests a date-range of several hundred years for the Iron Age occupation evidence, with Early and Early/Middle Iron Age material from the Longham Mound and the vicinity of the Launditch itself contrasting with Middle and Late Iron Age styles from Longham Site 13025 and Bittering Site 13023. It cannot be proved that any two of the sites were occupied simultaneously, and it is likely that all of them represent quite brief periods of activity.

Doubtless many relatively shallow post-holes and other features have been lost to plough erosion and (in the areas of the salvage works) contractors' machining. This may have biased much of the recorded evidence in favour of pits at the expense of structures. This could well have been aggravated by the fact that some of the excavation and watching brief areas were initially stripped of overburden by quarrying concerns without close archaeological oversight. The lack of environmental sampling, which might have yielded dietary or environmental information in the form of plant remains, was also disappointing. Despite all of these constraints on interpretation, however, several points of interest are worthy of discussion.



### Pits

Although pits dominate many Iron Age site landscapes, and are often the principal source of the artefacts and environmental evidence needed to reconstruct prehistoric ways of life and environments, it is often impossible for archaeologists to decide why they were originally excavated. In this respect the pit groups at Bittering Site 13023 and Longham Site 13025 are typical of sites in Norfolk (Redgate Hill, Hunstanton: Wymer 1986, London Road, Thetford: Davies 1993, Park Farm, Silfield: Ashwin 1996b) and elsewhere (West Stow, Suffolk: West 1990). They could well have fulfilled a variety of industrial, storage and other functions, especially if any were lined with wicker, hide or other organic material which has left no surviving trace.

At the Longham mound (Site 7235) the artefact assemblage from pit 1035 was of especial interest due to the occurrence of worked flint – numerous crude flint cores and shatter pieces and 70 flakes – along with iron slag and Iron Age pottery. With a few notable exceptions (Martingell 1988, Gardiner 1993) the evidence for flint-working persisting into the Iron Age has received little attention in print to date. The contents of the Longham pit indicates the rough utilisation of flint, probably in connection with iron smelting, at some time during the Iron Age. This may be placed alongside evidence for somewhat more systematic knapping and retouch found at the Middle Iron Age site excavated by the NAU at Park Farm, Silfield (Robins 1996), as well as the results of a number of field surveys which have yielded lithics and Iron Age pottery in association (P. Robins, K. Penn, *pers. comm.*).

### Structures

Iron Age post-built roundhouses have been excavated at a number of Norfolk sites, notably Micklemoor Hill, West Harling (Clark and Fell 1953) and Harford Farm, Caistor St Edmund (Norwich Southern Bypass: Ashwin and Bates forthcoming). None was seen at any of the sites considered here, however, nor were any arcs of post-holes which might have represented damaged or truncated examples identified.

Small four-post structures of the kind excavated at Bittering Site 15910 (two) and at Longham Site 13025 are very characteristic of sites of the 1st millennium BC; examples of similar scale have been excavated in Norfolk on the line of the Norwich Southern Bypass (Ashwin and Bates forthcoming) and at Park Farm, Silfield (Ashwin 1996b). Despite their national ubiquity, there has been much debate about their interpretation (Ellison and Drewett 1971). They are most often viewed as raised granaries or similar storage structures for perishable goods (Cunliffe 1984, 87ff). It is possible, however, that no single reconstruction can be applied to them all – drawing on ethnographic parallels, Ellison and Drewett suggested a range of alternative interpretations, including 'watchtowers' and platforms for the exposure of human corpses.

Recent work in Norfolk has illustrated this possible variety of functions. At Park Farm and at Longham Site 13025 'four-posters' appear as discrete structures, occurring either singly or in small groups. However excavations on the Norwich Southern Bypass at Trowse, and at Redgate Hill, Hunstanton (Healy, Cleal and Kinnes 1993, fig.9; possibly pre-Iron Age) have produced examples of four-post structures which may have been associated with fenced or other boundaries, possibly as gateway or entrance structures. The structure excavated immediately alongside the fence-line at Bittering Site 15190 is very interesting since it provides another possible example of such a relationship. If it was not an entrance structure associated with the north-to-south fence, it could instead have been a 'watchtower' of the kind envisaged by Ellison and Drewett, forming part of a network of defences immediately behind the Launditch (*cf.* Grimthorpe, N.Yorks: Ellison and Drewett 1971, fig.1; Staple Howe, N.Yorks: Brewster 1963,



48-53, Ellison and Drewett *op. cit.*, 186-8). Work in Norfolk has also produced an intriguing *late Neolithic* feature of this kind; this was located immediately behind the inner bank of the bivallate 'C'-shaped enclosure excavated at Broome Heath, Ditchingham (Wainwright 1972, fig.6), and might have dated to the early 2nd millennium BC.

#### The square-ditched enclosure

Enclosure 400 at Longham Site 13025 was a shallow and isolated feature, heavily eroded by ploughing and possibly by mechanical topsoiling too, and no direct evidence of its function was recorded. When enclosures of this type are recorded by air photography they sometimes resemble Iron Age square barrows of the 'Arras' type well-known from East Yorkshire (Stead 1991). Excavation has yet to reveal authentic Arras-type square barrow cemeteries south of the Humber, and Iron Age features of this kind have proved difficult to interpret on the few occasions when they have been found in East Anglia (*eg.* Maxey, Cambs: Pryor and French 1985, fig.44).

Despite the apparent emptiness of the central pit, it is conceivable that enclosure 400 is a further example of a type of later Iron Age 'barrow' recorded on the line of the Norwich Southern Bypass at Harford Farm and Trowse (Ashwin and Bates forthcoming for full discussion). With one very much smaller exception, these latter enclosures varied between 7m and 18m in external dimensions. Although all had been severely damaged by the plough, the filling-sequence of the deeper ditches indicated the former presence of an internal earthwork, perhaps a small bank or rampart rather than a mound. One example at Harford Farm was surrounded by an interrupted palisade or fence, the plan of the monument resembling that of a Romano-Celtic shrine or temple. The Longham enclosure shared the general proportions and polar alignment of the Norwich Southern Bypass examples, many of which also had similar localised shallow areas in the ditch corners. This identification remains speculative, however, in the absence of any other positive evidence.

#### General conclusions

The Iron Age in southern and eastern England saw a steady increase in population, a growing intensity of human settlement, and major reorganisation both in the agricultural economy and in the subdivision of land (Champion 1994). Bradley (1984) and others have emphasised the possible significance of population pressure and territorial competition on a local level during the Early and Middle Iron Age. These pressures would have made it more important than ever before for communities to establish their title to land and to maintain territorial boundaries.

In his study of the adjacent central Norfolk parish of Fransham, immediately to the south-east (1995), Andrew Rogerson has suggested that the Launditch formed the western boundary of a compact Iron Age territorial unit. This would have extended eastwards some 7km from the watershed, and would have been largely bounded to the north, south and east by the Blackwater and Scarning Rivers. Despite its location on the Boulder Clay plateau, much of this area features surface deposits of sand and gravel (above, 218-220). These free-draining soils could well have been valued as high-quality agricultural land, certainly when compared with the clays which dominate the parishes immediately to the south and west, and defended by its inhabitants accordingly.

Excavations in the period since Wade-Martins's 1974 publication have not provided definitive stratigraphic or artefactual proof for the hypothesis that the Launditch originated in the Iron Age rather than the Anglo-Saxon period. The weight of contextual evidence in its favour, however – notably the coincidental alignment of the Iron Age fence at Site 15910 and the absence of an interruption in the ditch at its intersection with the Roman road-line – has strengthened.



Certainly the possible significance of the Launditch and the Panworth Ditch must be taken into account by archaeologists seeking to interpret the Icenian Iron Age in the future. It is regrettable that opportunities to recover dating evidence stratified beneath the Launditch and Panworth Ditch banks are most unlikely to emerge in the future.

The military significance of the Launditch is hard to evaluate. Wade-Martins has pointed out how the West Norfolk linear earthworks would probably have been more effective as a defence against mobile forces and cavalry than against 'sustained and co-ordinated infantry attacks' (1974, 36). The fence or palisade excavated at Bittering Site 15910 could well have formed an effective second line of defence behind the ditch-and-bank itself. Yet an Iron Age feature of this kind was not necessarily simply a defensive one. A number of recent publications (Bowden and McOmish 1987, Hill 1994) have suggested that enclosure ditches and other boundary features were often highly significant to Iron Age societies in ritual or symbolic as well as in practical terms. Viewed in this context the Launditch could well have been as important for its visibility and its symbolic presence as for any military attributes.

Iron Age features and finds have frequently coincided with those of the Neolithic and Bronze Age in the various excavation areas considered here. A tendency for prehistoric communities to occupy and re-occupy the same favourable locations over thousands of years has been noted elsewhere in East Anglia (*eg.* eastern Suffolk: Martin 1993). This sequence is striking in the context of the Boulder Clay plateau, however, as it has often been assumed that this landscape region saw relatively little pre-Iron Age occupation (Ashwin 1996a). Despite its elevated position and distance from running water, the localised area of lighter soil in the vicinity of the Launditch might have been more favourable to prehistoric settlement than many surrounding areas nearby; the possibility that it coincided with a natural east-to-west routeway across the plateau has already been discussed. The lack of modern excavation work on the claylands of 'High Norfolk' is an obstacle to future research into prehistoric ways of life in the area. This is emphasised by the fact that the area excavations at Bittering and Longham would never have taken place at all were it not for the presence of commercially viable deposits of sand and gravel.

The results of Rogerson's field-survey programme in the neighbouring parish of Fransham, immediately to the south-west, illustrate the extent to which Iron Age communities may have utilised heavy clay soils. Intensive fieldwalking here identified six concentrations of Iron Age sherds thought likely to indicate occupation 'sites', showing that Iron Age settlement remains may indeed be found on the Norfolk Boulder Clay if they are sought with sufficient diligence. The number of isolated sherds or small groups also found suggested that many other 'sites' were not identified during the fieldwork (Rogerson 1995, 50), but more detailed information concerning Iron Age activity or previous occupation at these locations could only be gained by excavation. With regard to the works discussed in this report it is especially unfortunate that no systematic fieldwalking was possible at any of the Longham and Bittering sites, as this would have allowed direct comparisons to be drawn between the excavation results at Sites 13023, 13025 and 15910 and the surface evidence from Fransham.

The best-known examples of Iron Age entrenchment systems in Southern England lie close to areas of intensive settlement and *oppida* (above, 222). At least one highly significant focus of Iron Age activity is known further to the south on the mid-Norfolk plateau at Ashill/Saham Toney (Bates 1995; Davies 1996, 80); intriguingly, this lies in the area around the Panworth Ditch. Despite the palimpsest Iron Age landscape revealed by the Longham and Bittering excavations no such site or group of sites has yet been found by amateur archaeologists or by metal-detector users in the Launditch's immediate environs. Yet significant Iron Age sites may await discovery in the area, even if they are not necessarily of *oppidum*-like proportions. For



example, metal-detecting at a site c. 2km to the north-west of the Launditch/Salter's Lane junction has produced three Iron Age coins – one of them Trinovantian – and an Iron Age/Romano-British vessel mount in addition to large quantities of Romano-British material (Site 30999: A. Rogerson, *pers. comm.*). There is every likelihood that future research in East Anglia and beyond will reveal new examples of possible Iron Age linear earthwork systems, and provide more information about the range of different local and regional settings within which they occurred.

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