

**Burpham: Excavation in 1978**

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## BURPHAM 1978 (TQ010521) Full Report

### The Site

The excavation site (fig. 1) is close to the edge of the Way terrace on sloping ground that drops steeply into the alluvial flood plain of the river Wey on its eastern bank. The underlying geology is varied - the high ground is Higher Terrace River Gravel, while the sloping ground changes from London Clay to alluvium with scattered patches of gravel. Sand and clay extraction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is responsible for the present undulating appearance of the terrain although recent attempts have been made to level and redistribute the spoil heaps from these workings. It was during quarrying operations in c1897 that a number of Roman burials accompanied by pottery including a 2nd century Samian bowl were discovered (Whimster 1931, 245).

### Historical background

The place-name, Burpham, can be interpreted as 'settlement by the fort' (ham by the burh) or 'meadow by the fort' (hamm by the burh), implying in both cases the existence of an early stronghold in the area (Ekwall 1951, 73 and Gover *et al*, 1934, 162). The earliest recorded reference to Burpham appears in the Domesday Survey (1086) where it is described as a small agricultural settlement rated at £8 (Morris 1975, 18).

It may be significant that although the manor of Burpham was contained within the parish of Worplesdon which possessed twice as much land and the parish church, Burpham receives first place in the Domesday record. The area under investigation was known as 'Hilly Field' on the Tithe Map (1838) and appears to have remained arable

land until late in the 19th century when the sand and clay extraction mentioned above was begun. The workings are now disused and under pasture.

### 3. The Excavation

In view of the place-name evidence and the Roman material found it was considered advisable to undertake some form of archaeological investigation before the construction of the Burpham-Ladymead Diversion which forms part of the London - Portsmouth Trunk Road (A3). Because aerial coverage of the area provided only negative evidence, and geophysical surveying by A.J. Clark together with fieldwork by the Guildford Group of the Surrey Archaeological Society produced inconclusive results it was decided to open a series of exploratory trenches by machine (JCB digger/loader) along the course of the projected A3 (fig. 2). Between 14 March and 21 April 1978 five machine trenches (MT 1-5) were excavated to a width of approximately 1m well into the natural subsoil and on the basis of finds from MT 2 and MT 5, two trial trenches were opened (TT 1 measuring approximately 8 x 7m and T.T. 2 measuring approximately 4 x 7m). No evidence of Romano-British occupation was recovered but the discovery of prehistoric pottery from MT 2, TT 1 and TT 2 pointed to the existence of a hitherto unsuspected Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlement within the area. An apparently undisturbed prehistoric feature was identified in TT 2 and suggested that it would be worthwhile to excavate a larger area, and accordingly between 7 June and 25 July three further machine trenches (MT 6, MT 7 and MT 8) at a width of approximately 1.30m were opened by Hymac and the topsoil was stripped from Area 1 (approximately 18 x 12m) before examination by hand. A small area (Area 2) measuring 4 x 7m was excavated abutting MT 6.

### 3.1 Results

It is only necessary to give a brief summary of the results of excavation in Areas 1, 2 and Machine Trench 8 because a full description of the contexts and finds recorded in those areas can be found in Catalogue of Contexts (3.1.1) while the vertical stratigraphy of the contexts themselves is summarised in a Harris Matrix (Fig. 4)

Initial clearance of MT 2 produced a small quantity of prehistoric pottery together with some fragments of burnt daub suggesting the existence of some form of settlement in the immediate area. However, excavation of MT 4, 6, 7 and 8 and TT 1 and Area 2 indicated that these and other finds had been carried down the steep hillside through a natural process of hill-wash.

The only archaeological material which could possibly be considered as stratified was discovered in Area 1 (fig. 3). A number of very irregular hollows intruded into the natural subsoil which alternated between clay and alluvium with gravel and three of these features (26, 28 and 29) had been affected or perhaps even caused by slumping of the clay subsoil that sloped steeply in this part of the site.

Between the end of the first season on 21 April and the beginning of the next season on 7 June, the eastern edge of TT 2 had moved forwards by almost 0.70m due largely to the weight of the large spoil heap to the east of the trench. It is probable that this was the cause of the three hollows (26, 28 and 29) slumping forwards and at the same time assuming an elongated slope.

Apart from 43, a very shallow feature which is probably natural, the remaining features in Area 1 appear to be man made in origin although they may also have been affected by downward movement of the clay subsoil due to natural erosion and weathering. The earliest

feature is a large hollow (6/42) which produced some charcoal and fragments of bone and had been cut by several other features (8, 15, 17, 19 and 48). Five other hollows (8, 25/36, 39, 41 and 48) also contained occupational debris including bone, charcoal flecks and prehistoric pottery while two features (19 and 44) could have served as stake or post holes. The ultimate fill of the hollows was fairly uniform and was probably the result of a natural process of infilling with material washed down the hillside. Although the layer (7/30) sealing the features contained some fragments of post medieval brick as well as prehistoric pottery the hollows themselves produced exclusively prehistoric material. The dateable finds are Late Bronze/Early Iron Age and suggest a prehistoric origin for the features in Area 1 with the possible exception of the three features (26, 28 and 29) discussed above. Because of the irregularities in shape and profile of the hollows, it is unlikely that they were designed for any practical or domestic function despite the limited evidence of occupation (see above) nor are they acceptable as clearance hollows. Although a series of closely spaced clearance hollows would have an irregular appearance (cf. Bradley and Ellison 1975, 48-50), the process of clearance would normally be part of one operation and the hollows left would then be back filled so that the cleared land could then be utilised. At Burpham, however, the hollows belong to more than one phase of activity and the infilling of the features was a gradual process. The most and possibly the only plausible explanation of the hollows is that they are the result of clay quarrying in the prehistoric period.

3.1.1. Catalogue of Contexts

Group : Area 1 (see fig. 5)

P = Prehistoric  
 M = Medieval  
 PM = Post medieval

Context	Description	Plan	Section	Finds		
				Pottery	Bone	Other
1	Turf line					
2	Topsoil - brown soil with small stones and chalk fragments.			P ; M		PM tile
24	Fill of 26 - brown soil	3	5			
26	Shallow irregular hollow	6,11, 14	5			
23	Fill of 28 - brown stoney soil	3	7			
28	Irregular hollow with a series of irregular depressions in bottom	6,11, 14	7			
31	Fill of 25/36 - grey to brown clayey soil	3	A,B, D	P		
25/36	Elongated feature with irregular depressions in bottom	3,6,8 9,11, 14	A,B, D			
27	Fill of 29 - brown to grey clayey soil		7	P		
29	Shallow elongated irregular hollow	6,11, 14	7			
21	Ultimate fill of 8 - brown to grey soil	3	4,6	P		
9	Primary fill of 8 - grey clayey soil	1	4,6	P	Not identifiable	
8	Subrectangular feature with irregular profile	2,3,4 6,9, 11,14	4,6			
7/30	Brown to grey soil with flecks of charcoal	3,4 8	1,4, 10. A,B, C,D	P		PM brick
35/37	Dark grey to brown sandy soil - some clay - apart from overlying 34/38 makes up the fill of 39.	6,7	1,4, 10. A,B, C,D.	P		

## Catalogue of Contexts

Group : Area 1

Context	Description	Plan	Section	Finds		
				Pottery	Bone	Other
18	Fill of 17 - brown to grey soil		2			
17	Shallow, oval pit - irregular profile	2, 14	2			
20	Fill of 19 - brown soil with stones and flecks of charcoal	2, 14	3			
19	Posthole? - no trace of postpipe or postpacking	2,	3			
10	Ultimate fill of 48 - brown to grey sandy soil		1, 4	P		
13	Brown clayey soil - primary fill of 48		1, 4			
48	Irregular hollow	2,9, 11,14	1,			
39	Irregular hollow with a number of irregular depressions in bottom	9,11	A,D	P		
34/38	Primary fill of 41 - also spreads outside 41 and composes fill of 43 and 44 - consists of dark grey to black sandy soil	6,7	4,8 10 A,B, C,D	P		
41	Large, irregular hollow	9,10, 11,12 14	A,B, C,D			
44	Posthole? - triangular feature- no trace of postpipe or post packing	9,11 14	8			
16	Fill of 15 - brown to grey soil			P		
15	Shallow, irregular depression	2,14				
22	Grey sandy soil	4	4			
12	Dark grey to black soil with charcoal flecks		1			
11	Primary fill of 6/42 - grey soil with charcoal and stones	1,2	1,4		2 fragments. Ox	
6/42	Irregular hollow - elongated	2,9, 11,14	1,4			
43	Shallow, irregular depression - probably natural.	9,11, 14				

Catalogue of Contexts

Group : Area 2 and MT6 (fig. 6)

Context	Description	Plan	Section	Finds		
				Pottery	Bone	Other
58	Turf line		O,P			
57	Topsoil - brown soil with small stones and chalk fragments		O,P			
59	Fill of 60 - flints	13	P			
60	Post-medieval field drain	13	P			
45	Hillwash - Brown soil with stones and some charcoal flecks		O,P	P, M		PM brick
46	Hillwash - Brown to grey clayey soil		O,P	P		PM brick
47	Natural depression - irregular in profile and shape	13, 14	9			

Catalogue of Contexts

Group : Machine Trench 8 (fig. 7)

Context	Description	Plan	Section	Finds		
				Pottery	Bone	Other
50	Turf line		11			
51	Topsoil - brown soil with stones and chalk fragments		11			
52	Hillwash - brown sandy soil		11			
53	Hillwash - dark grey to brown sandy soil		11			
54	Hillwash - fine sandy gravelly soil		11			
55	Hillwash - gravelly soil		11			
56	Slumped natural clay subsoil		11			

#### 4. The Finds

A detailed discussion of the finds can be found in 4.1 and only some general points need be made here. Apart from some fragments of baked clay objects and a minute quantity of bone the remaining finds consisted almost entirely of prehistoric pottery. Although some of the sherds are unstratified, the bulk of the prehistoric pottery appears to be part of a roughly contemporary assemblage. On grounds of fabric, decoration and typology the group as a whole could comfortably fit into a Late Bronze/Early Iron Age context, but it is difficult to date the pottery any more closely in view of the scarcity of identifiable pottery types, the lack of easily dateable associated artefacts and material suitable for C14 dating.

#### 4.1 Finds Report

##### 4.1.1. Baked Clay

Three fragments of baked clay objects were discovered (not illustrated). Two of the fragments, both from Area 1 35, had indications of a single perforation suggesting that they may have formed part of two separate loomweights. The third fragment, from Area 1 34, was an amorphous lump of baked clay and could not be identified as having any particular function.

##### 4.1.2. The Prehistoric Pottery (fig. 8)

Many of the 209 sherds of prehistoric pottery recovered from the excavation were small and abraded. Most of the pottery had been made in a fairly hard fabric tempered with medium (2-4mm) and fine (1mm or less) flint grits, while some of the coarser examples contained large flint grits (5-7mm). Several sherds in a finer almost gritless fabric were found with traces of light burnishing. Grog inclusions were also detected in a number of vessels.

The pottery had been handmade while two sherds (9 and 10) showed the splayed effect that results from the application of bases as separate clay slabs (Longley 1981). Both bases were also heavily gritted with flint where the pot had been left to dry on crushed flint. Examples have been found of this technique in a Late Bronze Age context at Runnymede Bridge (Longley 1981) and in an Early Iron Age context at Weybridge (Hanworth and Tomalin 1977, 24). Only three vessels (6, 7 and 8) were decorated. The technique used was finger-tipping, a method of decoration originating in the Middle Bronze Age and in common use during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Barrett 1975, 107).

Because of the small size of most of the sherds it was only possible to identify three distinct forms:

Form 1 (fig. 1.) Carinated bowl with concave neck.

Form 2 (fig. 2.) Convex sided bowl with plain rim.

(fig. 3.) Convex sided bowl with slightly developed rim.

Form 3 (figs. 5 and 6) Shouldered jar.

Form 1

This form is discussed by Longley at Runnymede Bridge where it occurs in a late 9th or early 8th century context (Longley 1981). It develops from a jar or bowl form with a taller profile and narrower mouth originating in a Late Urnfield context on the continent. The type found at Burpham is also paralleled in an Early Iron Age context at Weybridge (Hanworth and Tomalin 1977, fig. 17, 102).

Form 2

Convex sided bowls are discussed by Barrett (Barrett 1975, 103-4). Such bowls are a very basic type dating from the 11th or 10th century and continuing to be found in 8th or 7th century contexts. Convex sided bowls with developed rims can also occur in a Late Bronze Age context (Longley 1981, Type 7b).

Form 3

The identification of this form is based on two vessels with incomplete shoulders and must therefore be regarded as hypothetical. Decorated and Undecorated shouldered jars occur widely and are commonly found in both Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age assemblages; including Runnymede Bridge (Longley 1981), Staple Howe (Brewster 1967), and Weybridge (Hanworth and Tomalin 1977).

Dating

Although some of the sherds are unstratified, the bulk of the pottery appears to belong to a roughly contemporary assemblage which could comfortably fit into a Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age context. Closer dating is difficult because of the scarcity of identifiable pottery types, the lack of easily dateable associated artefacts and material suitable for C14 dating.

The Prehistoric Pottery

1. Carinated bowl with concave neck and flattened rim; medium flint grits; outer surface abraded rough grey - traces of original smoother dark grey/brown finish; inner surface abraded smooth dark grey/brown; core grey. Area 1 30.
2. Plain rounded rim; medium flint grits; outer surface uneven dark grey/brown; inner surface uneven dark grey; core brown/grey. Area 1 39.

3. Slightly developed rim; medium flint grits with some small grog inclusions; outer surface rough dark grey/brown; inner surface rough dark grey; core dark grey. Area 1 35.
4. Everted rim; medium flint grits; outer and inner surfaces uneven brown/grey; core grey. Area 1 34.
5. Squared rim; large flint grits; outer and inner surfaces rough orange/brown; core grey. Area 1 38.
6. Body sherd; medium flint grits; outer surface uneven brown/grey; inner surface rough dark grey; core grey/orange; finger-tipping on shoulder. Area 1 38.
7. Body sherd; large flint grits; outer surface rough grey/orange; inner surface rough dark grey; core grey; finger-tipping on body. Area 1 38.
8. Body sherd; large flint grits; outer surface rough orange; inner surface abraded rough orange/grey; core grey; finger-tipping on body. Area 1 38.
9. Splayed base; large flint grits; outer surface abraded rough red/orange; inner surface rough orange - abraded; core dark grey; crushed grit on underside. Area 1 34.
10. Slightly splayed base; large flint grits; outer surface rough orange; inner surface rough dark grey; core grey; crushed grit on underside. Area 1 35.
11. Base; medium flint grits with some grog inclusions; outer surface abraded smooth/uneven orange/brown; inner surface uneven dark grey/brown; core grey. Area 1 35.
12. Base; medium flint grey grits with some grog inclusions; outer surface abraded uneven dark grey; inner surface abraded uneven dark grey/brown; core grey/orange. Area 1 35.

4.1.3 The Bones by Geraldine Done

Area	Context	Details
Area 1	9	5 small fragments (not identifiable)
Area 1	11	2 fragments of ruminant molar, probably ox

5. Conclusions

It seems likely that some form of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlement existed on the brow or top of the high ground and that material from that settlement has been washed down the hillside by the natural process of weathering and soil drift, accelerated at various periods by plough action. The existence of such a hilltop settlement perhaps with a defensive earthwork might explain the place-name evidence and is so far the only explanation that can be offered. In view of the extensive quarrying carried out in the late 19th and early 20th centuries most of any existing settlement would have been destroyed together with any traces of later occupation. Because of the lack of exact recording of the quarrying operations and subsequent attempts at levelling the uneven ground it was only possible to appreciate the extent of these workings after excavation.

Upon the basis of finds from Area 1 a much earlier phase of clay quarrying has been suggested outside the postulated hill top settlement and such an activity in a Late Bronze/Early Iron Age context is not implausible since clay has always been an important raw material which was used for a variety of purposes by prehistoric man.

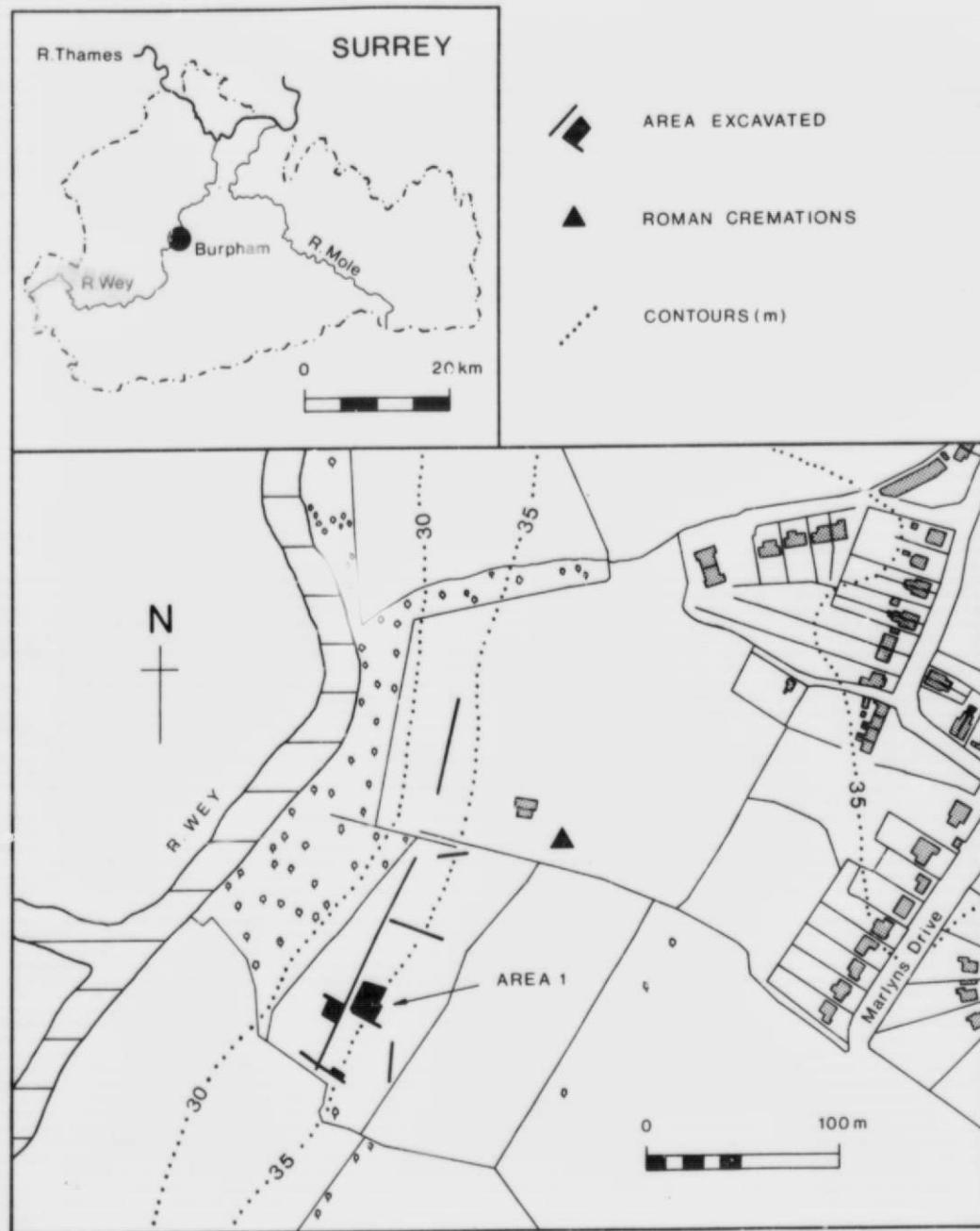


FIG. 1

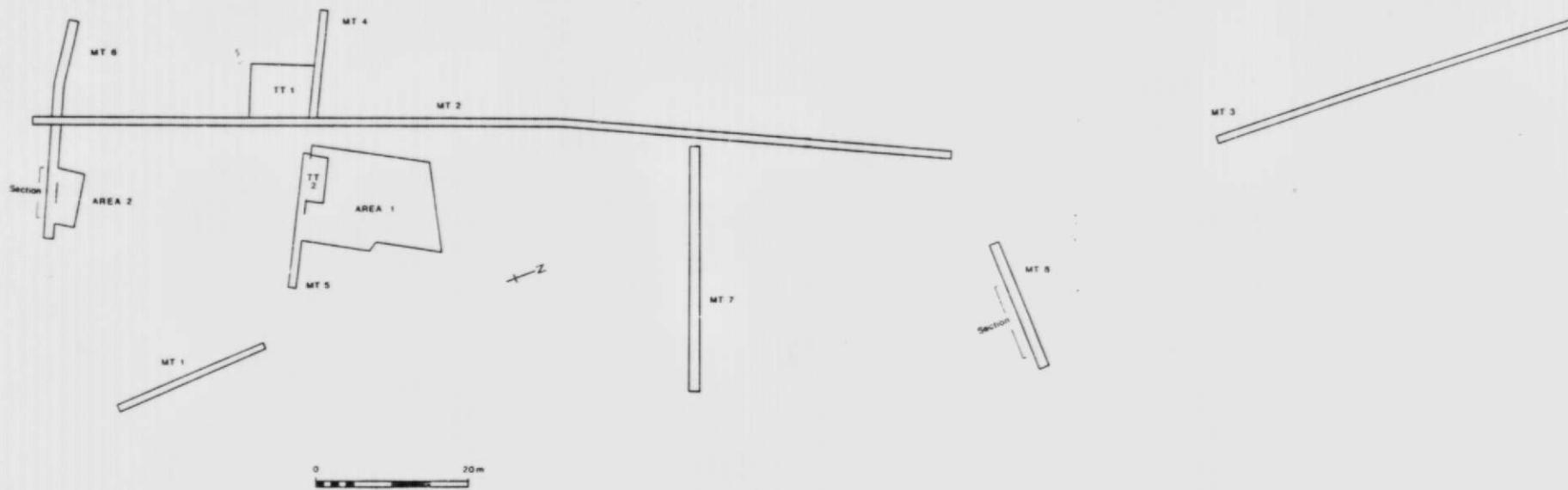


FIG. 2

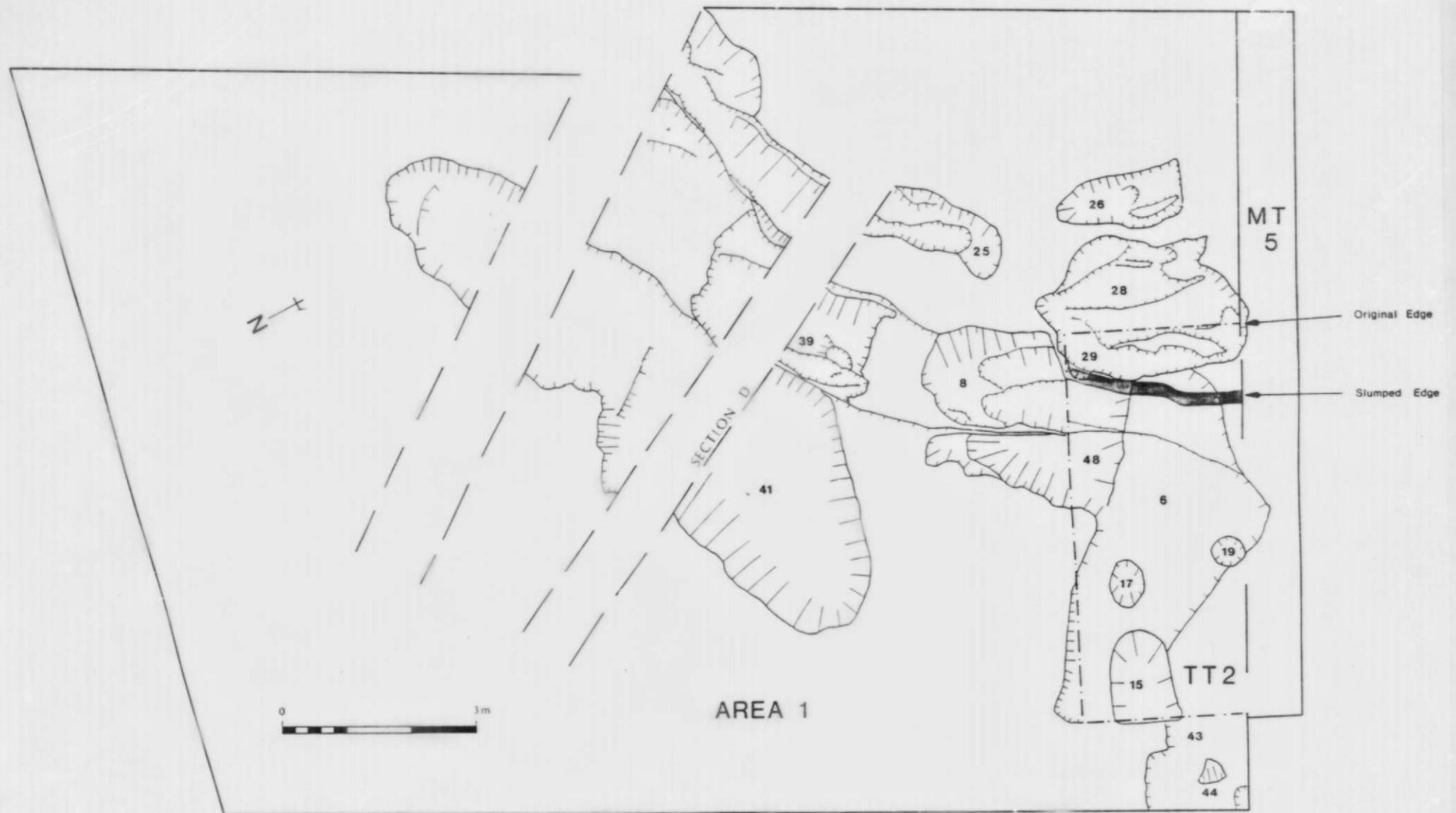


FIG. 3



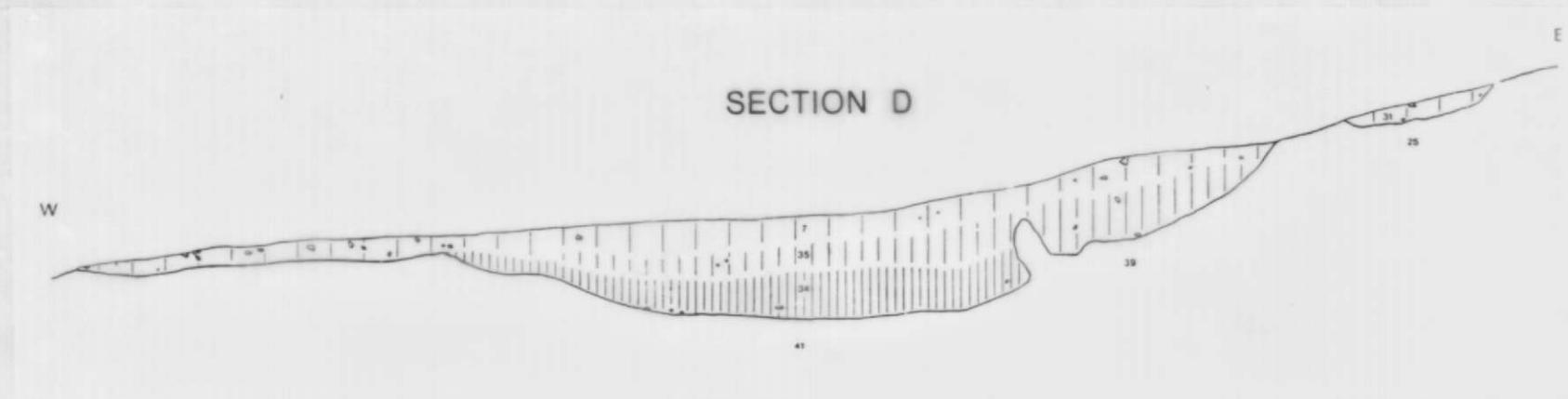


FIG. 5

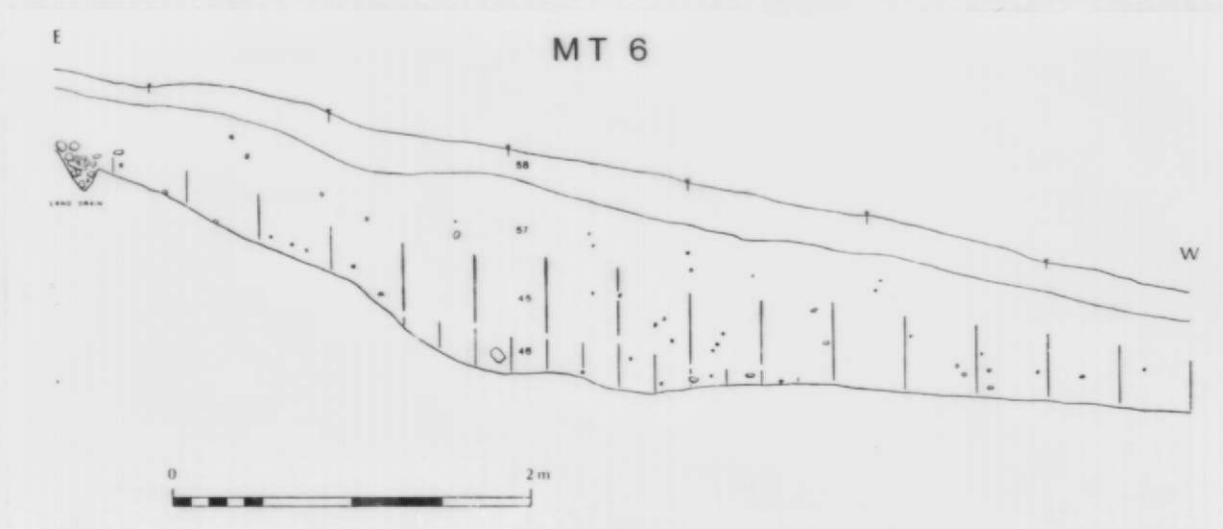


FIG. 6

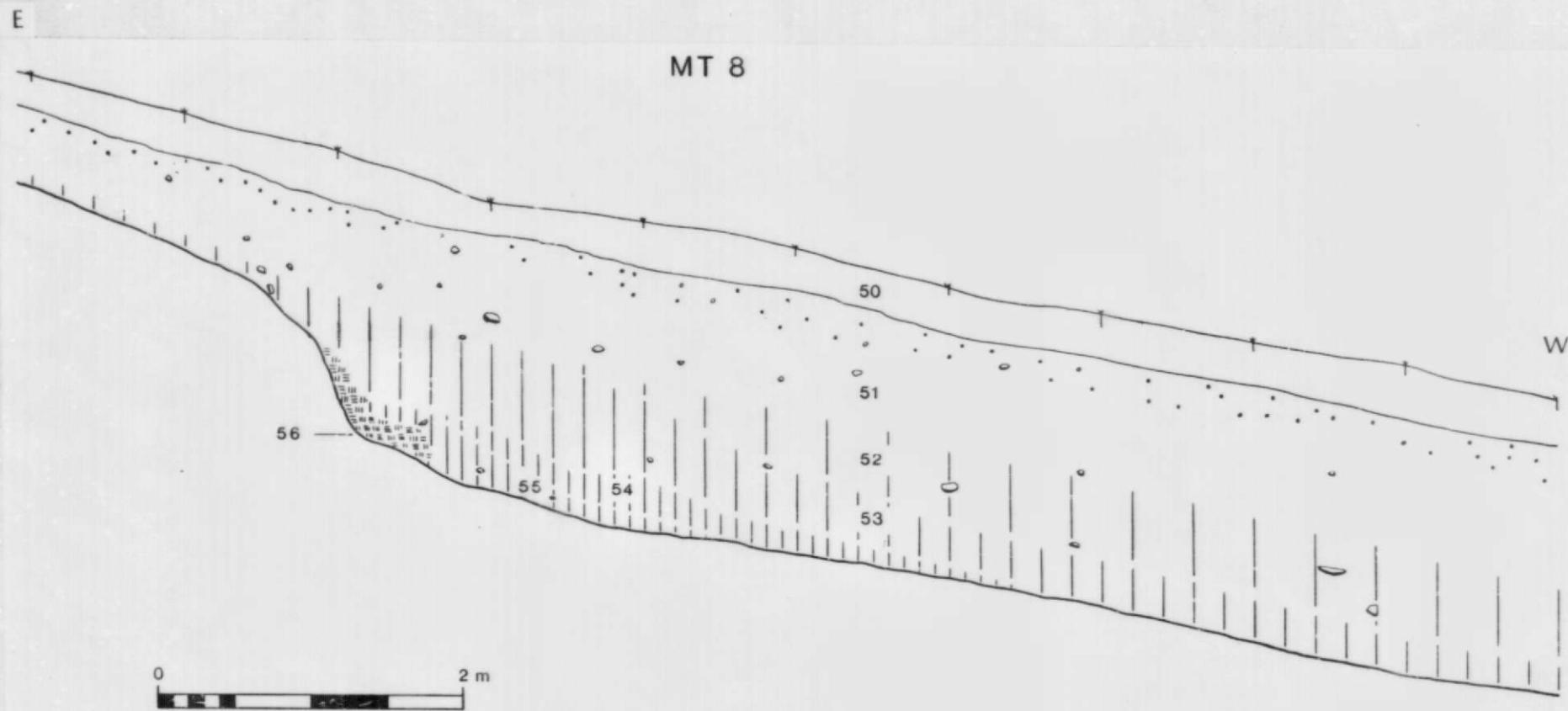


FIG. 7

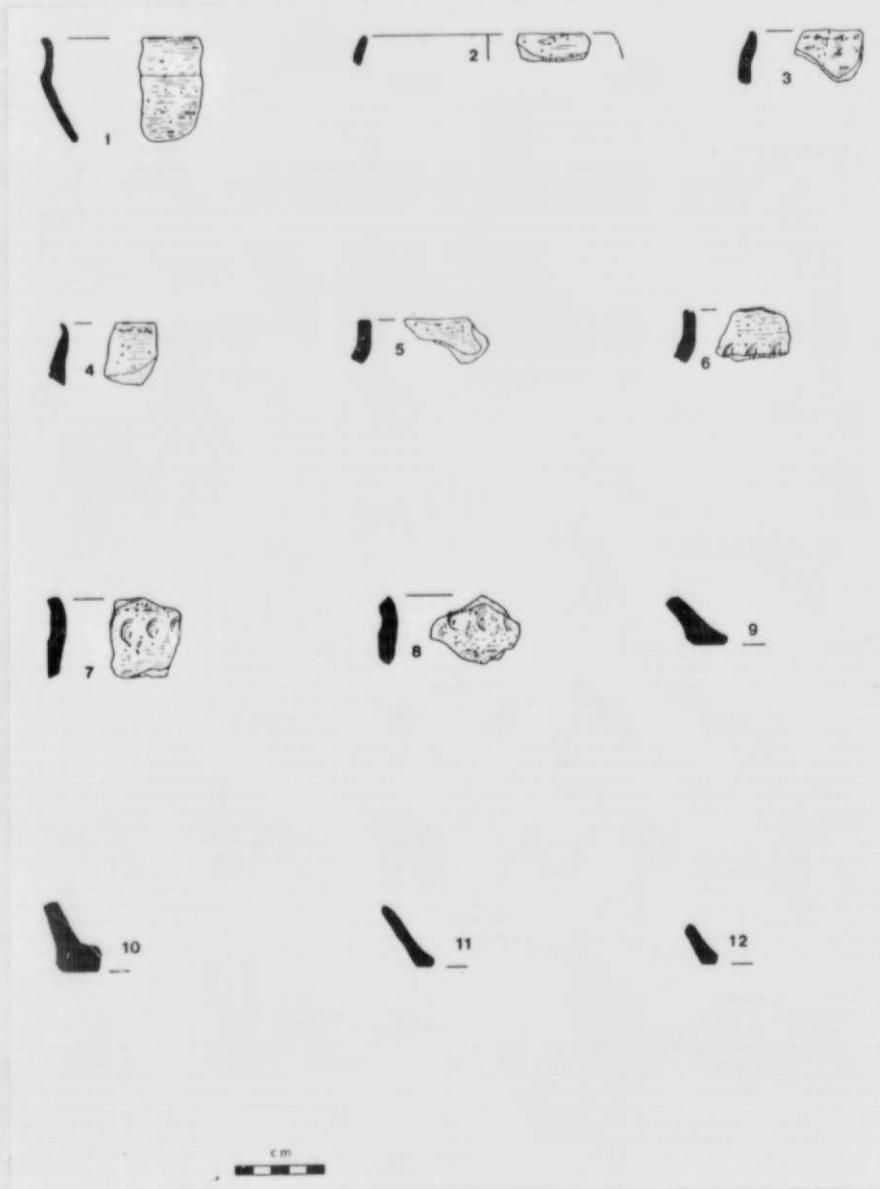


FIG. 8